

**THE DREAD
COBRA QUEEN
RETURNS.
SHE SLITHERS
AND STRIKES
FROM THE HEART
OF THE
AMAZON JUNGLE.
HER PREY:
VAMPIRELLA
AND
ADAM VAN HELSING.**

**PLUS
EIGHT
ALL-TIME
GREAT
HORROR
CLASSICS.**

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**WEREWOLVES, MUMMIES, DEMONS,
GHOSTS, WIZARDS, GHOULS,
HEROES, SPACEMEN, & MONSTERS!**

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by rich corben



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VAMPIRELLA

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HERE'S A JOLTIN'
JUNGLE OPUS TO MAKE
YOUR BLOOD BOIL AND
COIL... A LITTLE DERANGED
DITTY I CALL...

COBRA QUEEN

JAICE PACKSTON'S FACE WAS BURIED
BENEATH A LAYER OF SWEAT AFTER
ANOTHER FULL DAY UNDER THE HOT SUN
OF INDIA. BUT HE, AND HIS COMPANIONS,
THE DISTINGUISHED SIR REGINALD OF
LONDON, AND THE SOUTHERN PHYSICIAN,
DR. JAMES LONGLEY, MOVED ONWARD...
ONWARD...

BLIMEY, JACOB!
WE'VE BEEN TREKING
THROUGH THIS INFERNAL
JUNGLE FOR DAYS, NOW!
AND STILL NOTHING
IN SIGHT!

SIR REGINALD'S
RIGHT, I RECKON.'
I MEAN, WE BEEN
JUST MARCHIN' ALONG
HERE, CHOPPIN' OUR
WAY THROUGH ALL
THIS HERE FOLIAGE
AND EVERTHING, AND
STILL WE AIN'T COME
ACROSS WHAT WE
BEEN LOOKIN' FOR!
DON'T YOU THINK
WE OUGHTA BE
TURNIN' BACK?

NO! I'M NOT
TAKING ONE STEP
BACK TOWARD
CIVILIZATION UNTIL I FIND
WHAT I SET OUT TO
FIND! THAT **ANCIENT MAP**
IS GOING TO LEAD US
RIGHT TO THE LOST
**TEMPLE OF THE
COBRA...**

...AND THE
LEGENDARY
**COBRA
QUEEN!**

BUT, JACOB!
WE'VE BEEN
FOLLOWING THAT MAP
TO THE LETTER! IF
THERE WERE ANY RUINS OR
ANYTHING IN THIS AREA,
WE'D HAVE FOUND THEM
BY NOW!

THEY'RE AROUND
HERE... SOMEWHERE!
I JUST KNOW IT! I CAN
FEEL IT! DIDN'T THE FACT
THAT THE NATIVES WOULDN'T
GO WITH US TIP YOU OFF
THAT WE WERE ON THE
TRACK OF SOMETHING
THEY FEARED? WELL,
I'M GOIN' ON!



YOU TWO CAN TURN BACK IF YOU WANT! OR STAY HERE COUNTING YOUR FINGERS AND TOES!

WAIT, JACOB! WE'RE NOT GOING TO DESERT YOU! NOT AFTER ALL WE THREE HAVE GONE THROUGH TO GET THIS FAR! WAIT!!!



YEAH, COME ON, NOW! DON'T HOLD THIS AGIN' US! I AIN'T ONE TO TURN JACK RABBIT AN' HIGHTAIL IT!

THAT GOES FOR ME AS WELL!

GOOD! I HOPED I COULD--



GOOD LORD! STAY BACK, BOTH OF YOU!



IT'S THE BIGGEST CAT I EVER SAW! A REGULAR MONSTER!

NOW DON'T MOVE! I THINK I CAN GET A COUPLE OF SLUGS RIGHT INTO HIS BRAIN IF WE DON'T EXCITE HIM! QUIET, NOW...

RRRGGGRRRRWWWWW



OK, YOU'RE IN MY SIGHTS! NOW TO...

BUT THEN, AS UNEXPECTEDLY AS IT HAD APPEARED...

GREAT GLORY! IT JUST STOPPED! LIKE IT SMELLED SOMETHIN' MORE THAN YOUR GUN!

YE GODS! DID YOU SEE THAT? I DIDN'T EVEN HAVE TO SHOOT!



WE'RE ON THE
RIGHT TRACK! THE
LEGENDS TALK OF
A GIGANTIC
COBRA!

A HUGE SNAKE
THAT ISN'T REALLY
A SNAKE AT ALL...
BUT A... **WOMAN!**

W-WHAT? WHAT'S
THAT YOU'RE
TRYING TO SAY?
YOU MEAN...

AS OLD AS THE TEMPLE
ITSELF, WHICH SPANS
CENTURIES OF
UNFATHOMABLE BEAUTY!
BUT EQUALLY EVIL,
EXISTING FOR ONLY
ONE PURPOSE...

...TO TRANSFORM
HERSELF INTO THE
GIANT SNAKE ... MUCH
IN THE FASHION OF THE
EUROPEAN **WEREWOLF**...
AND TO INFLECT HER
OWN PEOPLE WITH
HER VENOM ...

YOU HEARD ME!
**A WOMAN!! THE COBRA
QUEEN, RULER OF THE LOST
TEMPLE OF THE COBRA!**

... TO POISON
THEIR BLOOD AND
THEIR WILL, TURNING
THEM INTO HELPLESS
SLAVES... INTO
MINDLESS, WALKING
ZOMBIES!





NO MORE WORDS ARE SPOKEN...
EVEN AS THE SUN AGAIN BEATS
DOWN OVER A QUIET BURIAL...
AND...

PACKSTON MUST
BE TAKIN' THIS PURTY
HARD! HE AIN'T SAID A
SINGLE THING ALL
MORNIN'." WELL, SIR
REGINALD WAS ONE OF
THE BEST FELLARS
AROUND."



THEN... PACKSTON AND DR.
LONGLEY HALT, THEIR EYES
BULGING AT THE AWESOME
DISPLAY OF...

BUT THEIR
EYES... LIKE YOU
TOLD US ABOUT...
ZOMBIES!

AMAZONS!
LOOK AT THEM...
MAGNIFICENT AND
THEIR LOIN-CLOTHS...
COBRA SKINS!

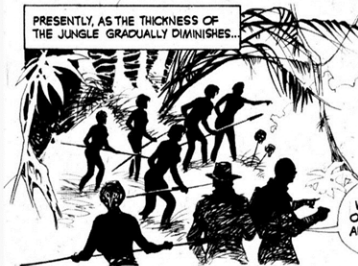


I KNOW! BUT
DON'T FIGHT THEM!
LET THEM TAKE US
WHERE THEY WANT
TO! IF THEY
WANTED TO KILL
US THEY WOULD
HAVE ALREADY
DONE IT!



RECKON YOU'RE
RIGHT! IFFEN WE
TRIED TO FIGHT NOW,
WE'D BE **SPEARED**
TA DEATH! AND I
DON'T HANKER FER
THAT KINDA
MISBEHAVIN'!

PRESENTLY, AS THE THICKNESS OF
THE JUNGLE GRADUALLY DIMINISHES...



THERE IT IS, LONGLEY!
WHAT I'VE HEARD **WHISPERS**
OF... **DREAMED** OF FINDING...
ALL MY LIFE! THE **TEMPLE**
OF THE COBRA!





IT LIES IN THE JUNGLE, SOMEWHERE NEAR THE ASSAM-BURMA BORDER, GLEAMING LIKE SOME TIME-ENCRUSTED JEWEL AGAINST THE BLOOD-RED SUNSET... THE **TEMPLE**. **HER** TEMPLE, AND TO THE TEMPLE NOW COMES ONE FROM ANOTHER WORLD, THE WORLD OF DRAKULON...

VAMPIRELLA



SHE HAS COME TO DO **BATTLE** IN THIS TEMPLE, TO **CONFRONT** THE ONE WHO DWELLS HERE, TO TURN HER HAND AGAINST...

SHE WHO WAITS!



AND FOR **VAMPIRELLA**, SUCH A BATTLE, SUCH A CONFRONTATION, MAY MEAN THE **END** OF HER VERY EXISTENCE!

BUT HOW DID IT **BEGIN?** LOOK **HERE**, TO THE CITY OF IMPHAL,
UNDER THE DEEP MANTLE OF A NIGHT NOW PASSED...



...WHERE **THIS** MAN, FOR WHOM THE
DARKNESS IS BUT A **CONTINUATION**
OF HIS WAKING DAYS...



...MOVES TO **STRIKE!**



CONRAD VAN
HELSING...!

WHAT
ARE YOU
DOING?!

WHY **SHOULDN'T**
I TURN ON YOU,
VAMPIRESS? HAVEN'T
YOU TURNED ON MY
SON?

A-ADAM...?
I DON'T KNOW
WHAT Y--



VAMPI...! VAN
HELSING...! I
HEARD THE NOISE...
ALMOST DROPPED MY
NIGHTCAP!

WITH BRANDY SCARCE
IN THESE REGIONS... ONE
CAN'T BE TOO CAREFUL.

A GREAT PITY
YOUR ASSISTANT
DOESN'T SHARE
YOUR PARTICULAR
THIRST, MR.
PENDRAGON.

AND IN HIS HOTEL SUITE... CONRAD DOES!

THERE! LOOK
AT THE WOUND I
CAN ONLY FEEL!
LOOK AT THE
TRANCE HE'S IN...

B-BUT I
DIDN'T DO THIS...
I COULDN'T!

THEN TELL ME
IT'S NOT A
VAMPIRE'S
WORK!

CONRAD, I WON'T
BE ACCUSED LIKE
THIS! IF SOMETHING'S
HAPPENED TO ADAM
SHOW ME!

NO?! HAVEN'T
CERTAIN INGREDIENTS
IN THE SERUM THAT
CONTROLS YOUR
BLOODLUST RECENTLY
BECOME SCARCE...?

HASN'T
ADAM
BEEN
SEARCHING
THE JUNGLE OF
THIS AREA TO LOCATE
A NEW SUPPLY...?

ISN'T THAT WHY
YOU AND PENDRAGON
DROPPED YOUR
MAGIC TOUR TO
RUSH HERE TO
MEET HIM?

ONLY TO
FIND HE'D
FAILED...!
AND UNABLE
TO RESTRAIN
YOUR
MONSTROUS
NATURE... YOU
ATTACKED
HIM!

NO! ADAM WIRED HE WAS
SUCCESSFUL... THAT'S WHY
WE CAME! THERE'S SOME
OTHER REASON FOR ALL
THIS!

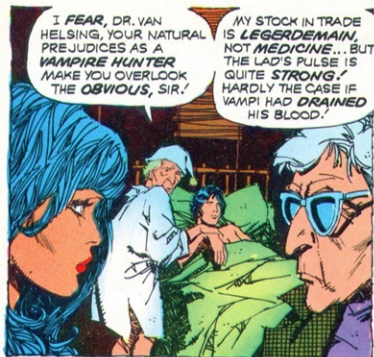
THE DOOR WAS LOCKED
FROM INSIDE WHEN I
ARRIVED AND FOUND HIM.
VAMPIRELLA... BUT THE
WINDOW WAS OPEN!

ONLY A BAT COULD
ENTER THAT WAY!

AND SHOULD I
IGNORE MY OWN
PSYCHIC VISION THAT
DREW ME HERE FROM
ACROSS THE GLOBE?

THE VISION
THAT SHOWED
ADAM...

...MENACED
BY A WOMAN NOT
OF HUMAN KEN?!



I **FEAR**, DR. VAN HELSING, YOUR NATURAL PREJUDICES AS A **VAMPIRE HUNTER** MAKE YOU OVERLOOK THE **OBVIOUS**, SIR!

MY STOCK IN TRADE IS **LEGERDEMAIN**, NOT **MEDICINE**... BUT THE LAD'S PULSE IS QUITE **STRONG**! HARDLY THE CASE IF **VAMPI** HAD **DRAINED** HIS BLOOD.



B-BUT... THE **WOUNDS**...! THE **TRANCE**... THE LOCKED ROOM **ENTERED**...! WHAT ELSE BUT A **VAMPIRE** COULD DO IT?

IT ENTERS IN **SILENCE**. EARLIER CONRAD'S SUDDEN ARRIVAL HAD FRIGHTENED IT AWAY. BUT THE MISTRESS HAS ORDERED IT TO **RETURN**, TO **FINISH** WHAT WAS BEGUN...

SO IT SLITHERS FOR THE ROOM'S DEEPEST SHADOW AND **HIDES**, UNTIL...



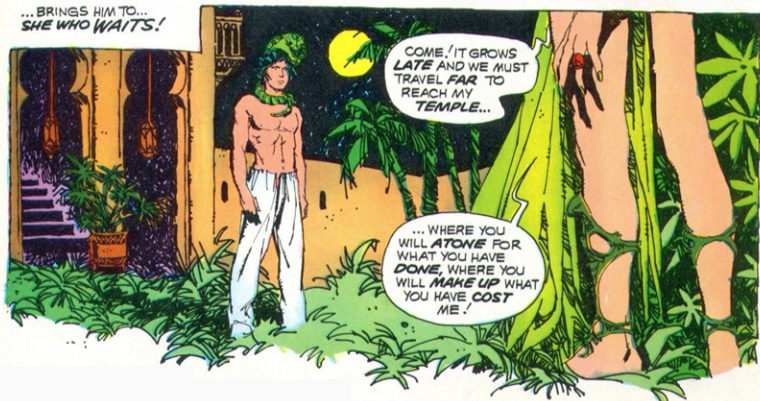
PENDY'S **RIGHT**, DR. VAN HELSING... AT LEAST LET'S GET A **PHYSICIAN'S** OPINION.

AGREED. THOUGH MY PSYCHIC POWERS **SCREAM** THAT THIS IS **BEYOND** NATURAL EXPLANATION!

AND WHEN ALL IS DARK AND QUIET, IT **MOVES**... TO THE **BED** OF ADAM VAN HELSING, TO HIS VERY **BODY**, AND...



... BRINGS HIM TO... SHE WHO **WAITS**!



COME! IT GROWS **LATE** AND WE MUST TRAVEL **FAR** TO REACH MY **TEMPLE**...

... WHERE YOU WILL **ATONE** FOR WHAT YOU HAVE **DONE**, WHERE YOU WILL **MAKE UP** WHAT YOU HAVE **COST** ME!



WE'RE SORRY
TO AWAKEN
YOU, BUT--

A HOTEL DOCTOR'S LOT,
MEMSAHIB! FROM YOUR
DESCRIPTION, YOUR
FRIEND'S WOUND SOUNDS
LIKE COBRA BITE...

...IN WHICH CASE, HE
SHOULD NOT BE IN A
TRANCE, BUT DEAD!
STILL, I--



ADAM...! ADAM! I CAN
FEEL IT... WE'RE TOO LATE!
HE'S BEEN TAKEN...!

THUS, THE DAYS THAT FOLLOW FIND VAMPI,
PENDRAGON, AND CONRAD VAN HELSING
MOVING THROUGH JUNGLE DENSE AND
VERDANT...

ACCORDING
TO THIS MAP FROM
ADAM'S ROOM... WE'RE
INTO THE SAME AREA
HE EXPLORED.

THIS IS THE WAY
THEY BROUGHT
HIM... THE PSYCHIC
EMANATIONS
COULDN'T BE
STRONGER!



SOMETHING ELSE IS QUITE
STRONG... THAT SMELL! IT'S
ENOUGH TO DRIVE A MAN
TO DRIN--

PENDY!
CONRAD!
THERE'S A
BODY
AHEAD...

... IT'S BEEN
DECAPITATED!

I SENSE SOMETHING
MORE, VAMPIRELLA...
SOMETHING INVOLVING
ADAM... PERHAPS DURING
HIS FIRST
EXPLORATION...



... I SEE HIM IN BATTLE... WITH A CREATURE
HUGE, FANTASTIC... A CREATURE WHOSE FANGS
ARE ABOUT TO SINK HOME... UNTIL ADAM
SWINGS HIS MACHETE...





ADAM BEHEADS A MAMMOTH SNAKE... AND WE FIND A MAN IN ITS PLACE?! THANK BAACHUS, I CAME WELL-ARMED...

...WITH BRANDY!

IN MY PURSUIT OF MATTERS OCCULT, I'VE HEARD HINTS OF... A CULT OF COBRA WORSHIPPERS...!

...WHOSE QUEEN IS SAID TO TRANSFORM HERSELF INTO A GIANT COBRA AT WILL! SOMEWHAT LIKE THE WEREWOLF LEGENDS...

IF ADAM'S IN HER HANDS... EVERY MOMENT COUNTS! SHE'S NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN TRANSFORM...

I'M FLYING AHEAD! FOLLOW AS BEST YOU CAN!

AND VAMPI'S FEARS AS SHE TAKES BAT-WINGED FLIGHT... ARE WELL-BASED!



YOU KILLED MY MATE, HANDSOME ONE... THE ONLY MAN I EVER FOUND WHO WAS LIKE ME... *

...KING COBRA TO THE COBRA QUEEN!

AT FIRST I MEANT ONLY TO FOLLOW YOU BACK TO THE CITY AND SLAY YOU... BUT YOU ARE HANDSOME, AND I DO HAVE NEEDS BEYOND VENGEANCE.



SO, INSTEAD, YOU WILL FEEL THE FANGS OF THE TEMPLE'S SACRED COBRAS...!

THEY WHO FEAST ON HUMAN BLOOD... AND DISCHARGE THE VENOM OF TRANSFORMATION!

WHEN THEY ARE DONE, YOU SHALL BE MAN NO MORE, YOU SHALL REPLACE HIM WHO I LOVED AS...

...KING COBRA!

* SEE "THE COBRA QUEEN" THIS ISSUE.

SUCH WAS THE **BEGINNING**, AND WHAT **FOLLOWED**. NOW, WITH THE APPEARANCE OF VAMPIRELLA ON THE TEMPLE STEPS BEFORE THE COBRA QUEEN'S **AMAZON SLAVES**...



...IT IS TIME FOR THE **END!**

THE COMBAT IS LONG AND DEADLY. THRUSTING **SPEARS** VERSUS OTHER-WORDLY **FIGHTING SKILLS**. THE ZOMBIE-LIKE WARRIORESSES GIVE **GROUND**... UNTIL ONE CAN SLIP **BEHIND** THE GIRL FROM **DRAKULON!**



KRAK!



YOUR ADVICE CONCERNING **DISTANCE** AND **ELEVATION** WAS MOST HELPFUL **PENDRAGON**...

HAD WE BEEN **CLOSER**, OF COURSE, I COULD HAVE DONE IT **ENTIRELY** BY **SOUND**.

O-O-F...
COURSE...



ON INTO THE **TEMPLE**, **VAMPIRELLA**... WE'RE **RIGHT BEHIND!**

BUT IN THE TEMPLE WAITS... THE **COBRA QUEEN!**



CONTINUE **LOWERING** THE MAN... A **FALL** MUST NOT **CRIPPLE** HE WHO WILL BE MY **MATE**

THE **FEMALE** I SHALL **HANDLE!**

WHAT **FOLLOWS** IS **VIOLENT** AND **TERRIBLE**...

IT BUYS THE NEEDED **TIME** FOR PENDRAGON AND CONRAD TO REACH THE ROPE...



V-VAN HELMSING...!
JOIN ME
QUICKLY...!

BUT VAMPIRELLA IS LEFT IN THE COILS OF A
SUPERIOR FOE!

THEN, AS THE GLEAMING
FANGS DIPTO STRIKE...



VAMPIRELLA!
TAKE
BAT-FORM...!

AND AS A BAT FLIES
FREE... A QUEEN
DIES IN FLAME.

PENDY, I DON'T THINK UNTIL
TODAY I REALIZED HOW MUCH
YOU CARED FOR ME...
SACRIFICING YOUR ENTIRE
SUPPLY OF BRANDY TO
START THAT FIRE!

I MERELY
FOLLOWED AN OLD
HOME REMEDY,
MY DEAR... USING
LIQUOR TO TREAT
SNAKE BITE!

OF COURSE,
IT'S NOT OFTEN
APPLIED BEFORE
THE FACT!

THE IMPORTANT
THING IS YOUNG ADAM
IS SAFE AND SOUND...!
SO WHAT IF I CAN
NEVER FACE CREPES
SUZETTE AGAIN!

PITY THE POOR
PROTAGONIST OF THIS
STORY, DAVID WINTERS,
CAUGHT IN THE FILMY
WEBBING OF LIFE...
UNKNOWN OF THE
MANY LIVES OF
WOMEN...



DAVID WINTERS HAS PLAYED
THIS SCENE BEFORE. ONLY
THE BIT PLAYERS CHANGE THE
CHOREOGRAPHY, THE BIT PLAYER
THIS TIME IS HARRIET STONE.



PLAY IT COLD, PLAY IT HARD,
RE-ENACT THAT FIRM, STIFF
WALK, ONLY THE FAINT CHILL
OF THE NIGHT AUTUMN AIR
SUGGESTS THIS ISN'T THE
SAME EPISODE STAGED
THREE MONTHS BEFORE
TO A WARM JULY EVENING.



THE TORN SOBBINGS, THE
MASCARA BLEED TEARS
HAVE BEEN MIRRORED ON
OTHER YOUNG FACES. IT IS
HARDLY NOTICEABLE THAT
OTHER LUNGS RIP OUT
THESE SOBS, THAT NEW
EYES SPILL THESE TEARS.



JUST FAINT TREMORS ABOUT THE
FINGERS BETRAY ANY EMOTION TO
THE ABRUPT TERMINATION OF THE
RELATIONSHIP, A TYPICAL REACTION.



IT DOESN'T GET ANY MORE DIFFICULT, JUST THE FAMILIAR NAGGING DREAD OF THE
PARTING SCENE. NO SWEET SORROW HERE, BABY!



"SONG OF A SAD-EYED SORCERESS"

THE LAST THOUGHT FADES TO NEW
STIMULI. WINTERS SEES ONLY THE
SWEEP OF HER BACK, THE GRACEFUL
FALL OF HER HAIR, AND YET SOMETHING
CATCHES IN HIS THROAT AND A STRANGE
SCENT CATCHES AT HIS NOSTRILS.



WHO..... WHO
ARE YOU?



YOU WISH TO KNOW WHO I AM,
DAVID WINTERS?

I AM **NAHEMAH!** AND BEFORE
THIS NIGHT IS THROUGH YOU WILL
KNOW ME LIKE YOU HAVE KNOWN
NO OTHER WOMAN!

THAT I CAN PROMISE YOU, DAVID
WINTERS!



HARRIET STONE HAD ONLY BEEN WORKING FOR KELLY AND LISSON, INC. FOR LITTLE OVER A WEEK WHEN DAVID WINTERS HAD FIRST WALKED INTO HER LIFE, DELIVERING ONE OF THOSE SMUG, ARTIFICIAL SMILES, SHE ASSUMED, THAT HE USUALLY DELIVERED IN EXECUTIVE SUITES. AND SHE HAD BEEN ALSO AWARE THAT HE WAS NOT ONLY ON THE MAKE IN A BUSINESS SENSE, HIS ENTIRE LIFE STYLE WAS ONE CONTINUOUS "MAKE-IT" DRIVE.



THAT HAD BEEN HER FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH DAVID WINTERS. IN FACT, IT HAD BEEN HER FIRST ACTUAL ENCOUNTER WITH ANYBODY IN NEW YORK CITY SINCE HER ARRIVAL. SHE HAD LOOKED INTO THE DUSTY MIRROR EACH MORNING, ASSURING HERSELF THAT SHE HAD NO STARS IN HER EYES, THAT SHE WAS TOUGH AND SELF-RELIANT; BUT AS THE NIGHT CITY SOUNDS DRIFTED UP INTO HER TENEMENT ROOM THE RETURN LOOK WAS NOT AS FIRM, AND - DESPITE THE NEAR RELIGIOUS LECTURES SHE HAD PREACHED SILENTLY TO HERSELF - DAVID WINTERS BECAME THE FIRST RECOGNIZABLE FACE.

THE STING OF THE AUTUMN WIND SHARPENS ON HIS CHEEKS AS HE STEPS FORWARD. A DIM VOICE PLEADS WITH HIM. NOT TO TAKE THE STEP, BUT HIS MOVEMENTS ARE NOT OF HIS OWN VOLITION.



I... I HAVE SEEN YOU BEFORE.

YOU HAVE SEEN MY FACE MIRRORED IN OTHER FACES. I AM ALL THOSE FACES COMBINED, WITH THE SPECIFICS OF EACH.



I DON'T UNDERSTAND. YOU SAY YOUR NAME IS NAHEMAH.

AH, BUT HAVE YOU NEVER HEARD MY NAME BEFORE, DAVID?



WAIT A MINUTE!!! I JUST DON'T GRAB THIS!! HOW DO YOU KNOW MY NAME?

BUT I KNOW ALL ABOUT YOU, DAVID, FOR I HAVE BEEN WITH YOU AT YOUR WEAKEST MOMENTS.



YOU HAVE MORE QUESTIONS. THEY BURN YOUR MIND. I SENSE THEM AND YOU WONDER HOW I SENSE THEM. YOU DESIRE TO TOUCH MY FLESH AND HAVE MY FLESH BURN YOU AS YOUR QUESTIONS DO. SO FOLLOW ME, DAVID WINTERS, FOLLOW ME, FOR THIS IS NO MORE THAN AN INNOCENT PARK WHERE LOVERS HAVE SPENT SPRING MOMENTS IN LOVELY POLITICS. POLITICS WHICH YOU THOUGHT YOU WERE A MASTER DEMAGOGUE OF... TILL NOW!!!



THE SAME DIM VOICE THROWS OUT THE WARNING AGAIN, BUT DAVID WINTERS KNOWS IT IS A LOST CAUSE. THAT HE WILL FOLLOW THE FLOWING APPARITION, THAT THE DECISION HAS BEEN DETERMINED IN A PART OF HIM THAT HE HAS NEVER VISITED BEFORE.

THE WEEKS HAD PASSED -- LONE, SOLITARY WEEKS, SPLINTERED WITH BRIEF MOMENTS OF HUMAN CONTACT DURING OFFICE HOURS; AND HARRIET STONE HAD REALIZED THAT SHE HAD NEVER BEEN IN THE MIDST OF SO MANY PEOPLE, NOR HAD SHE EVER BEEN SO ALONE.

SHE HAD KNOWN DAVID WINTERS GAME; SHE HAD KNOWN HE WAS TRYING TO SCORE ALL THROUGH THOSE UNCTUOUS MONOLOGUES THAT HE DELIVERED, YET, FINALLY, TO COMPENSATE FOR THE HOSTILITY AND ALONENESS, SHE YIELDED, ONE MEETING LEADING TO ANOTHER, BOTH OF THEM PLAYING THE USUAL MALE-FEMALE POLITICS....

YES, I THINK YOU WOULD. STAY HERE WHILE I FIX US A DRINK IN THE KITCHEN. HAVE A LOOK AROUND.

JUST DON'T GET ANY WEIRD IDEAS, DAVID.

WHO ME? WOULD I DO ANYTHING LIKE THAT?

BEYOND THAT THESE CO-WORKERS OF HERS GOT ALL THE BREAKS AND BENEFITS WHICH ADDED TO HER LAMENT.

....UNTIL THAT NIGHT SHE HAD INVITED HIM TO HER APARTMENT.

QUITE A PAD YOU'VE GOT HERE, AND LISTEN, I'M SORRY ABOUT THE COME-ON THE PAST FEW WEEKS. GUESS IT'S THE PRESSURE, YOU KNOW?

LISTEN, HARRIET, YOU'VE GOT THE MOST SUSPICIOUS MIND THAT...

WHAT IN THE HELL IS THAT?

OH, I SEE YOU'VE DISCOVERED MY ATHAME.

CHANGE OF TACT, DAVID?

YOU'RE WHAT?

ATHAME! DON'T YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THE OCCULT ARTS? IT'S A CONSECRATION KNIFE. WITCHES WOULD USE THOSE TO INVOKE DEMONS BY DRAWING A MAGIC CIRCLE WITH IT. IT'S ONE OF MY MOST PRIZED POSSESSIONS.

HARRIET STONE HAD LISTENED TO WINTERS REPLY, STILL AWARE AS TO HIS NATURE, SHE HAD REMAINED STOIC, UNATTAINABLE THROUGH-OUT HIS SOPHISTICATED RAP. PLEASED THAT ANOTHER PERSON SHARED THE ROOM FOR THE MOMENT; AND SHE HAD ALSO BEEN AWARE THAT HER PASSION FOR THE OCCULT WAS A FACET OF HER WINTERS HAD NEVER SUSPECTED.....

....AND THROUGHOUT THAT EVENING HE COULD NEVER REALLY FORGET THE BLADE OF ATHAME RESTING UNDER THE FLOOR-LAMP.

TWO SECTIONS OF WINTER'S MIND BATTLE FOR DOMINANCE. ONE SECTION IS FILLED WITH THE FLEEING SPECTRE BEFORE HIM, BUT THE OTHER SECTION IS GRIPPING AT SOME THIN EDGE OF NORMALITY.

WHO IS THIS CREATURE WHO BECKONS AND SWAYS BEFORE HIM, ENTICING HIM ONWARD WITH EVERY FLUID MOVEMENT, EACH SUPPLE CURVE DEMANDING OBEDIENCE? IS HE FALLING PREY TO SOME PSYCHOTIC FEAR OF WOMEN THAT HE HAS HELD IN CHECK DURING HIS ENTIRE LIFE?

BUT THAT IS FOOLISHNESS. YET, IF IT IS FOOLISHNESS, THEN WHY CAN'T HE STOP HIS FEET FROM MOVING OUT ONTO THAT BRIDGE? WHY IS THE DESIRE TO POSSESS BURNING SO FERVENTLY IN HIS VEINS? AND NAHEMAH, SHE IS LIKE SOME SYMBOLIC LIFE - FORM WHOSE CREATION AND PURPOSE HAS BEEN LOST IN THE PASSAGE OF TIME. WHY IS THAT?



FOLLOW ME, DAVID WINTERS, FOR OUR MEETING IS PREORDAINED.

I SENSE THE FEAR THAT CUTS YOUR HEART! IT MINGLES WITH YOUR DESIRE FOR ME! BUT FIRST YOU MUST COME TO ME.



CROSS THE BRIDGE, MY SWEET, AND THEN YOU CAN HAVE ME. JUST A FEW SHORT STEPS; IGNORE THE DISTANT SOUND OF THE RUSHING WATER FAR BELOW.

HAS THIS SCENE PLAYED BEFORE DAVID? DO YOU PERCEIVE ITS ORIGINS? EVEN THROUGH YOUR FEAR, THE THOUGHT TANTALYZES YOU! BUT THE PARTS HAVE BEEN SWITCHED. YOU DO REALIZE THAT, DON'T YOU? YOU PLAY THE ROLE YOU ONCE METED OUT!



HARRIET STONE HAD PLAYED THE GAME, FOLLOWING THE PRESCRIBED FORMULA, INCLUDING ALL THE TENTATIVE MOVES AND DOUBLE ENTENDRES.

SHE HAD PLAYED THE GAME AND PLAYED IT WELL, TRYING TO REMAIN AWARE OF THE FACT THAT THAT WAS ALL IT WAS... A GAME.

IT HAD BEEN THE COMMON NEED, THE ONE TRAIT THAT LINKED THEM, WHICH HAD FINALLY COMPLETED THE CHARADE.



SHE HAD HEARD HERSELF UTTERING WORDS THAT WERE SCHOOL-GIRL TEXT, WORDS SHE HAD KNOWN BETTY FRIEDMAN WOULD FROWN UPON; AND SHE FELT ALTERNATE SENSATIONS. A MINGLING OF NEED WITH A FEELING OF FAILURE.

HONEY, YOU'RE REALLY FINE, YOU KNOW THAT?

DAVID, I'M..... I'M NOT SO SURE!



THE SOFT, MELLOW SOUNDS OF FRANK SINATRA CROONING LOST LOVE IN THE BACKGROUND HAD ADDED THE FINAL TOUCH TO THE SCENE. SHE HAD WONDERED HOW MANY SUCH SCENES HAD BEEN PRESIDED OVER, VOCALLY, BY THE KING.

LISTEN, WE BOTH NEED IT, RIGHT? YOU KNOW YOU REALLY WANT THIS.

AND SHE HAD STILL KNOWN THAT IT WAS ONLY A GAME, BUT THERE WAS ONE SLIGHT CHANGE. SHE HAD BEEN WISHING THAT PART OF IT COULD BE... REAL.

NO ONE'S GOIN' TO HURT YOU, HONEY. THAT'S NO JIVE.

RIGHT NOW, I WANT YOU, BABY!

I JUST DON'T WANT TO BE HURT, THAT'S ALL.

YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN DAVID, I JUST WANT SOME PART OF ME LEFT, SOME PART OF ME THAT'S MINE ALONE.



THE WIND LIFTS, CARRYING NAHEMAH'S CARRESSING VOICE TO HIM, THE WORDS A CHANTING MOCKERY AS THE GAPING CHASM BELOW GRIPS AT THE CENTER OF WINTER'S STOMACH

HOW MANY SONGS HAVE YOU LISTENED TO, YET NEVER HEARD THE LYRICS?

YET, THERE IS A POWER GREATER THAN THAT OF THE YAWNING ABYSS; AND IT IS MIRRORED IN NAHEMAH'S EYES, A KINDLING SPARK THAT DISRUPTS THE NIGHT AIR AND SEARS HIS FLESH, SOME BASIC PART OF HIM FIGHTS TO RETAIN HIS IDENTITY.

WHAT WHISPERED HOPES ENFLAMED ON YOUR COVENANT WASHED TO DYING EMBERS?

WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?.....SERMONETTES?

THAT'S ONE DAMNED THING I DON'T NEED, SISTER! YOU BROADS ARE ALL ALIKE!

BUT YOU..... YOU'RE THE FREAKIEST WITCH I'VE EVER SEEN!

WINTER'S HEART LURCHES CRAZILY IN HIS CHEST, SLAMMING HIS BLOOD FIERCELY TO HIS HEAD. HIS HANDS GRASP AT AIR, AND HIS BODY SWAYS WITH THE BREEZE, WAVERING, THE DARKNESS PATIENTLY AWAITING HIS ARRIVAL WHILE NAHEMAH STANDS ALOOF AND UNATTAINABLE.

NOT WITCH, DAVID!

HAVEN'T YOU REALIZED YET WHAT I AM? DON'T YOU REALIZE WHAT I REPRESENT?

OR ARE YOU NOT AWARE SUCH BEINGS AS I EXIST ON THE PERIPHERAL EDGES OF YOUR WORLD.... OR PERHAPS SUCH KNOWLEDGE WOULD SHATTER YOUR FRAGILE PHILOSOPHY, DEAR SWEET DAVID!

HARRIET HAD SEEN THE MECHANISMS AT WORK. SHE HAD KNOWN WHAT FUNCTIONS EACH MOVEMENT WINTERS SUPPLIED MEANT. YET, SHE HAD IGNORED THEM, DESIRING INSTEAD A TIME OF RELIANCE TO SELF-RELIANCE. SHE DESERVED THAT MUCH, SHE HAD SOOTHED HERSELF, AWARE THERE WOULD COME A TIME WHEN SHE WOULD HAVE TO PAY FOR THAT CONVENIENCE.



WHY DO YOU HAVE TO USE PEOPLE?

GET IT THROUGH YOUR THICK SKULL, BABY.... I COULDN'T HAVE USED YOU IF YOU HADN'T WANTED TO BE USED!

YOU COULDN'T WAIT TO BE USED! YOU KNOW WHAT IT IS, YOU LIVE IN YOUR PRECIOUS FAIRY TALE WORLD WITH YOUR GUIDING STARS AND THAT SILLY SORCERESS' BLADE!

AND YOU KEEP NURTURING THAT SALVING DELUSION THAT EVERY-ONE'S GOT IT BETTER THAN YOU SO THAT YOU DON'T HAVE TO FRET ABOUT BEING BELOW STANDARD!!!



THAT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH USING PEOPLE!

THEY'RE A NICE COMMODITY! BUT I PAID FOR IT AND I KNEW THE MERCHANDISE I WAS BUYIN'! SO DON'T GO GET RIGHTEOUS!

I HATE YOU!

WE'LL SEE YA AROUND, BABY, HUH?

JUST A FAIRY TALE WORLD, HUH, MR. KNOW-IT-ALL?



WELL, I'LL SHOW YOU JUST HOW MUCH A FAIRY TALE WORLD IT IS.

I'M GIVING YOU JUST ONE MORE CHANCE, YOU CONCEITED BEAST, AND THEN I'LL SHOW YOU JUST HOW MUCH FANTASY IT IS.

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT THE ATHAME CAN DO, WHAT POWER IT HOLDS.

THE BLADE THAT INSCRIBES THE MAGIC CIRCLE THAT WILL ALLOW ME TO CONTACT THE DAUGHTERS OF HEKATE.....

... WHICH WILL CALL FORTH THE MOST DAMNING OF SUCCUBAE INTO MY BODY, WAITING TO BE UNLEASHED, WAITING FOR..... VENGEANCE!

WINTERS HOVERS AT THE BRINK WITH DEATH AND LIFE WAITING ON THE SIDES. HE HAS NEVER BEEN THIS CLOSE TO DEATH BEFORE AND YET THERE IS STILL A CURIOUS SENSATION THAT IT IS HAPPENING TO SOMEONE ELSE.



A TENTATIVE STEP. THE FEAR STILL CLUTCHING AT HIS INSIDES, AND HIS BALANCE IS RESTORED.



THE TERROR SUBSIDES IN HIS BREAST AS HE CONTINUES ACROSS THE TERMITE AND WEATHER-EATEN BRIDGE.



NAHEMAH'S UNEARTHLY BEAUTY RESUMES ITS HOLD. HE HAS NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE HER BEFORE, YET AT THE SAME TIME HE HAS KNOWN SEPARATE PARTS OF HER.

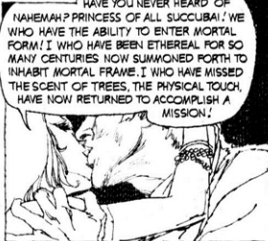
HER BREATH IS WARM AND EXOTIC. HER SCENT FILLS HIS NOSTRILS. HER TOUCH IS ELECTRIC, AND THESE ARE EMOTIONS HE CANNOT COMPREHEND.

HE WANTS TO RUN; HE WANTS TO CONQUER HER. FOR ONE FIERCE MOMENT, AS HE GRIPS THE UNEARTHLY BEAUTY TO HIM, HE REGAINS HIS FORMER CONFIDENCE AND CLUTCHES HER BRUTALLY.



DO YOU KNOW OF THE EMPUSAE? ANCIENT AND LOVING FEMALE DEMONS SUMMONED FORTH WITH THE ATHAME BLADE!

YOU DESIRE TO KNOW MANY WOMEN. NOW KNOW THE ULTIMATE WOMAN!



HAVE YOU NEVER HEARD OF NAHEMAH? PRINCESS OF ALL SUCCUBAI! WE WHO HAVE THE ABILITY TO ENTER MORTAL FORM! I WHO HAVE BEEN ETHEREAL FOR SO MANY CENTURIES NOW SUMMONED FORTH TO INHABIT MORTAL FRAME. I WHO HAVE MISSED THE SCENT OF TREES, THE PHYSICAL TOUCH, HAVE NOW RETURNED TO ACCOMPLISH A MISSION!

HIS COMMAND IS SHORT-LIVED, FOLLOWED WITH A LAUGHTER THAT WHIPS ON THE COLD NIGHT WIND AND TEARS AT HIS EARS.

WITH THE POWER TO TURN YOUR LUST...



SATIN FLESH TURNS TO SCALEY COILS BENEATH HIS FINGERS. SOFT WARMTH BLENDS TO SERPENTINE CHILL.

..... TO REVULSION!



THE CHANGE SHREDS WINTER'S SANITY, HIS ENTIRE BEING RIPPED OPEN AND EXPOSED WITH A MIND THAT SEEKS DESPERATELY TO COMPREHEND WHAT CANNOT BE COMPREHENDED.



OH, SACRED DAUGHTER
OF HECATE, PRINCESS OF
THE SUCCUBAI....



COME FORTH INTO
THIS WORLD OF
PLASTIC....



COME FORTH INTO THIS
WORLD OF OVER-POPULATION
WHERE LONELINESS AND
ALIENATION ARE DEEPER
THAN EVER.



AND FEEL THE
HURT OF YOUR FLESH AND
BLOOD SISTERS AS YOU
ENTER MY BEING, FEEL THAT
HURT AND SEEK
JUSTIFICATION.



I AM
HERE, HARRIET
STONE.

I CAN SENSE
IT, MY MIND IS
ONE WITH YOURS.
THEY MINGLE.



YOU MUST RELAX
AND LET ME TAKE
POSSESSION. ALL READY
I BEGIN TO REALIZE THE
SENSATIONS I HAVE
MISSED SO MANY YEARS.
THROUGH YOUR FINGERS
I NOW HAVE TOUCH.
BUT SOON IT WILL BE
MY TOUCH.

NOT YET, HE
MUST HAVE ONE
MORE CHANCE. IF HE
DOES NOT RELENT,
THEN I WILL LET YOU
TAKE FULL POSSESSION.
BUT YOU WILL NOT
LIKE THIS WORLD.



YOU SAY IT IS IMPERSONAL..
BUT THERE ARE SO MANY
OF YOU.

YES, BUT IT IS
THAT WAY, AND CRUEL.
I SOMETIMES WONDER
HOW ANYONE CAN
WANT TO LIVE IN THIS
JUNGLE, THIS SOOT
AND GRIME.



BUT NOW YOU
ARE WITHIN ME, SISTER,
AND I FEEL A ONENESS
WITH YOU !



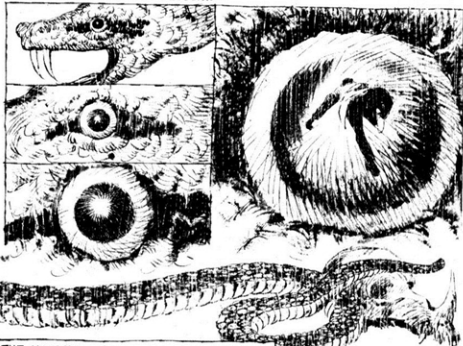
NAHEMAH EXULTS IN THE PANIC SHE CAUSES. SIBILANT HISSES SPLIT THE AIR IN SERPENTINE LAUGHTER.

SHE IS ALIVE ONCE MORE. EVEN THE
ESSENCE OF FOULED AIR TINGLES AT
HER NOSTRILS... AND HE KNOWS
A FEAR BORN OF THE
ANCIENTS!



COLD, REPTILIAN EYES WATCH WITH A GLINT OF AMUSEMENT AS THE BROKEN MALE
FIGURE HURTLIES AWAY CARELESSLY...

AND THEN SHE RELEASES HIM, BONES
SNAPPED ALONG WITH SPIRIT.



AND FALLS OVER THE EDGE OF EARTH,
COLLIDING HARD AGAINST THE GROUND AND
THEN FALLING OUTWARD, SPINNING, INTO
THE RUSH OF AIR, HURTLING TOWARD HIS
DEATH.

THE MALE HUMAN'S SCREAMS FADE QUICKLY.
THE ONLY TESTIMONY TO THE EVENTS IS THE
BROKEN AND MANGLED BODY ON THE ROCKS
BELOW. THE RIVER WATER DOES NOT CEASE.





IT WAS ALL
SO HORRIBLE.....

I SHOULDN'T HAVE
DONE IT, NAHEMAH!
WHY DID YOU LET ME
DO IT?

YOU ALWAYS COMPLAIN,
HARRIET STONE! YOU BASK
IN YOUR SELF-MADE
REALITY OF MISERY AND
SELF-PITY!

SELF-PITY! NO!
YOU'RE WRONG!
I WAS JUSTIFIED!

BUT I WAS USED!
I DID NOT MAKE THAT
UP!

MANY OF YOUR
RACE JUSTIFY THEIR
UNspoken, NEARLY
UNALTERABLE RULE.
THAT THEY ARE
DETERMINED TO SEEK
THEIR OWN BRAND
OF HELL!

AGREED. IN *THIS*
INSTANCE, BUT IT IS
NOT THE MOMENTARY
SELF-PITY THAT IS DESPICABLE.
IT IS THOSE WHO MAKE A LIFE-
STYLE OF CURSING OTHERS
FOR THEIR FAILURES!

YOU WHO ARE NEVER
CONTENT, WHO ARE CONSUMED
BY JEALOUSY AND VIEW OTHERS
AS BEING THE CHOSEN ONES!
**WASTING YOUR LIVES ON
HELLISH NIGHTMARES!!!**

GIVE ME
BACK MY BODY,
NAHEMAH!!

I AM AFRAID THAT IS
IMPOSSIBLE. IF YOU HAD
BEEN UNABLE TO TOUCH
ANYTHING FOR CENTURIES,
YOU WOULD KNOW WHAT I
MEAN! NOW I CAN TASTE, I CAN
FEEL! THERE ARE OTHER MEN
OUT THERE OF DIFFERENT
CALIBERS THAN THIS ONE I
JUST SLEW! I WILL KNOW
SOME OF THEM. THEY WILL
COME TO ME!

IF I ALLOWED YOU BACK,
YOU WOULD CONTINUE TO
DREAM DREAMS OF DESPAIR.
YOU WOULD NOT ENJOY
THESE SENSATIONS... **YOU
WOULD CONTINUE TO
WAIL YOUR SAD-EYE
SYMPHONY: VERSES
RHYMED TO CONSOLE
ONLY YOURSELF!**

BUT BELIEVE ME
HARRIET, I SHALL ENJOY
EACH PERCEPTION.

I REALLY
SHALL!!!

JUST A LITTLE LESSON
TAKEN OUT OF THE ARCHIVES,
FIEND READERS, SO
REMEMBER, THE NEXT TIME
YOU'RE OUT ON THE STREETS
SEEKING TO USE SOMEONE,
IT JUST MIGHT BE SOMEONE
THAT WILL USE YOU! SWEET
FANTASIES!!!

LONG NIGHTS OF INTENSE INVESTIGATION AND SEARCHING FINALLY BARE FRUIT AS TWO PRIESTS OF THE VILLAGE OF ALBA LULIA IN TRANSYLVANIA CLOSE IN UPON ONE OF THE UNDEAD, TRAPPING HIM WITHIN THE RUINS OF AN ANCIENT BUILDING.



THERE, MONSIGNOR... IN THE DOORWAY... THE VAMPIRE THAT HAS TERRORIZED OUR VILLAGE.

OUR QUEST IS SUCCESSFUL. THE MONSTER IS TRAPPED. WITH THE LORD'S HELP FAILURE IS IMPOSSIBLE.

AURALEON



HE'S TRYING TO ESCAPE. HURRY! WE MUST NOT LOSE HIM THIS TIME.

DON'T WORRY, IT SHALL BE HIS FINAL ESCAPE ATTEMPT. FOLLOW HIM.

THE ANCIENT STONE FLOOR RESOUNDS LOUDLY TO THE VAMPIRE'S POUNDING FEET. FOOTPRINTS IN DUST UNDISTURBED FOR YEARS LEAVE A CLEAR TRAIL...



THE CRY OF THE DHAMPIR

...WHICH LEADS, INEVITABLY, TO A HIGH CEILINGED ROOM WITH THE ONLY DOOR BLOCKED BY THE PRIESTS.



SPAWN OF SATAN! YOUR SOUL, DAMNED FOR ALL ETERNITY, WILL SOON GROVEL FOREVER IN THE FIERY PITS OF HELL.

THE BEGINNINGS OF ANOTHER TYPICAL VAMPIRE EPIC, YOU SAY... WHERE YOU KNOW BEFOREHAND EACH MOVE OF THE CHARACTERS ...AND THE END COMES DEEP IN SOME ANCIENT CATACOMB WHERE THE DOCTOR ROUNDS THE CLICHÉ-RIDDEN STAKE DEEP INTO THE VAMPIRE'S BLOATED HEART. NO... NOT THIS TIME. A BREATH OF FETID AIR DIRECT FROM LEFT FIELD WILL SOON OVERTHROW ALL THE CLICHES AND CARRY WITH IT THE UNEXPECTED CRY OF THE DHAMPIR.



ART BY AURALEON / STORY BY JOHN JACOBSON

YOU TALK TOO MUCH, MAN OF GOD. DO YOU REALLY THINK YOUR TRACKING SKILL FOUND ME?



A QUICK JERK OF THE BELL ROPE RELEASES A CUNNINGLY PREPARED TRAP DOOR IN THE FLOOR, SENDING THE STARTLED PRIESTS FALLING INTO THE CELLAR...



AN IRONIC END FOR VAMPIRE KILLERS... IS IT NOT?

COULD IT BE THAT I WANTED YOU TO FIND ME?



DON'T WASTE YOUR EFFORT, BYRON. I AM ALREADY ONE OF THE UNDEAD... AS YOU WILL KNOW.



YOU SAW WHAT HAPPENED? YOU CAN'T BE ALLOWED TO LIVE... AND SO TELL OTHERS.



DAEGGA! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE... SO FAR FROM YOUR ... HOME?

WHILE IN THE FORM OF A BAT I WITNESSED YOUR FLIGHT FROM THE PRIESTS. I SAW YOU TRAPPED IN THIS BUILDING AND ENTERED IN HOPES OF PROVIDING SOME HELP. I HAVE NO LOVE FOR WOULD-BE VAMPIRE KILLERS, BUT BEFORE I COULD COME TO YOUR RESCUE YOU SPRANG YOUR LITTLE TRAP DOOR AND SENT THEM TO AN ALLEGED HEAVENLY REWARD.

AND A CLEVER TRAP IT WAS, TOO. THOSE PRIESTS WERE MAKING MY SURVIVAL INCREASINGLY PERILOUS. I RIGGED THIS TRAP LAST NIGHT AND ALLOWED THEM TO FOLLOW ME TONIGHT. BUT... AGAIN... WHY ARE YOU HERE?



THE ANSWER IS DRAMATICALLY PROVIDED AS DAEGGA LEADS BYRON TO ANOTHER ROOM OF THE ANCIENT BUILDING.

IF YOU HAD GIVEN THIS BUILDING A GOOD GOING OVER BEFORE PREPARING YOUR TRAP, YOU WOULDN'T ASK THAT QUESTION. LOOK THERE.



A COFFIN? WHOSE? IT'S NOT ONE OF MINE. YOURS THEN?

NO...NOT MINE. THE OWNER IS STILL IN THE COFFIN... COMPLETELY DESTROYED... ANNIHILATED... RETURNED TO THE FINEST ASH. HE WAS DESTROYED SO SUDDENLY THAT HE DIDN'T EVEN HAVE TIME TO RESIST. LOOK AT HOW UNRUFFLED THE CLOTHING IS.

BUT WHAT KILLED HIM? I SEE NOTHING OF DANGER TO US HERE.

YES, I'VE HEARD STORIES... FILTERED THROUGH GOSSIPY OLD WOMEN, BUT I PAID THEM NO HEED.

A VAMPIRE BY THE NAME OF VLADIMIR CAME TO ME A FEW MONTHS AGO WITH A THEORY THAT THE DEATHS WERE NOT RANDOM, BUT CAUSED BY ONE AGENCY. SEARCHING FOR INFORMATION, HE CAME TO THIS VILLAGE. WHEN I CAUGHT UP TO HIM HE HAD ALREADY BEEN DESTROYED. THIS IS WHAT REMAINS OF HIM.

YOU KNOW WELL OF THE HIGH NUMBER OF VAMPIRE DEATHS DURING THE PAST FEW YEARS, BYRON.

WAGER ANYTHING? EVEN YOUR EXISTENCE?

THIS...THING... PLACES US IN DANGER ANYWAY. WILL YOU COME WITH ME... TO THE CIRCUS... IF ONLY TO HAVE A LOOK AROUND?

IT WOULD BE MY PLEASURE, FAIR VAMPIRA. IT WILL BE AN INTERESTING CHANGE FOR ME. TOO LONG HAVE I CONSORTED ONLY WITH CREATURES OF THE NIGHT, CUT OFF FROM ALL HUMAN FRIVOLITY. THE LAUGHTER OF RED BLOODED CHILDREN SHALL DO MY SOUL GOOD.

DAEGGA UNBOLTS THE SHUTTER TO THE WINDOW. IT SWINGS OPEN, GIVING AN UNRESTRICTED VIEW OF THE VALLEY IN WHICH IS LOCATED THE VILLAGE. SOUNDS OF MUSIC AND GAIETY FLOAT UP FROM BELOW.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT DESTROYED HIM?

THERE IS A CIRCUS AT THE EDGE OF TOWN... THE SAME CIRCUS WAS AT EACH VILLAGE IN WHICH A VAMPIRE WAS DESTROYED. IT IS MORE THAN COINCIDENCE. I'LL WAGER ANYTHING THAT OUR ENEMY IS THERE.

SOON, AT THE CIRCUS, BYRON AND DAEGGA ARE SURROUNDED BY THE UNFAMILIAR SIGHTS OF HAPPY CROWDS OF PEOPLE OUT FOR A NIGHT'S FUN.

THE ANSWER IS HERE. BUT HOW CAN WE FIND IT AMONG THESE HIDEOUSLY NOISY CROWDS OF PEOPLE.

WE NEED PRIVACY. ONLY IN SOLITUDE CAN WE USE OUR POWERS SAFELY.

LAUGH NOW, IF YOU MUST. I ONLY PRAY THAT YOU, AND NOT SOMETHING... ELSE... WILL HAVE THE LAST LAUGH.

TRYPHENIA:
GYPSY FORTUNE
TELLER: SEE WHAT
THE FUTURE
HOLDS FOR YOU:
YOUR DESTINY
IN THE
TEA LEAVES

THE GYPSY... HER TENT WOULD BE DARK AND QUIET. THERE WOULD BE NO INTERRUPTION AS WE... PUT HER TO THE QUESTION.



THE FUTURE HOLDS MUCH FOR YOU, DEAR. LOVE AND SUCCESS WILL COME YOUR WAY.

SOMEBODY IS ALREADY IN THERE WITH HER.

INSIDE THE TENT.

LOVE? WILL IT BE THE BOY I AM SEEING NOW?

I MUST SEARCH DEEPER INTO THE SWELLING MISTS INSIDE THE BALL... PEER CLOSER INTO THE MYSTIC WORLD.

NOT FOR LONG, DAEGGA. THE GIRL WILL BE LEAVING SOON... VERY SOON.

THE MISTS HIDE FROM ME THE ONE WHO WILL SEEK YOU OUT, BUT...



... BUT... WHERE ARE YOU GOING, GIRL? I HAVEN'T FINISHED YET.



I... AH... BUT...

... BUT MY MONEY... YOU HAVEN'T PAID ME... AHH.



BEWILDERED BY THE STRANGE TURN OF EVENTS, THE OLD GYPSY BADES DAEGGA BE SEATED AT THE TABLE. TENSION HANGS HEAVILY IN THE CONFINED WAGON.



AH. WHAT IS IT YOU WISH TO KNOW OR LEARN?

MADAM, CAN I HAVE MY FORTUNE TOLD?

DAEGGA DOES NOT SPEAK, HER WILL ARCS THE SPACE BETWEEN THEM AND ENTERS THE GYPSY'S MIND ON A BEAM OF POTENT MENTAL ENERGY...



...PROBING WITH GENTLE YET FORCEFULL WISPS OF POWER AMONG THE CLUTTERED MEMORIES OF A NOMADIC LIFE.



WHAT...WHAT ARE YOU DOING? YOU... INSIDE ME... A PART OF ME... HOW?

SLOWLY THE RANDOM PARTS OF AN ANCIENT MEMORY ARE JOINED TOGETHER.



IT WAS ALL SO LONG AGO... IT WAS YESTERDAY, HE IS GROWN NOW... BUT THAT CAN'T BE ... HE IS NOT YET BORN...

I AM EXPECTING OUR FIRST CHILD, BUT THE COMING OF NIGHT BRINGS NO THOUGHTS OF PLEASURE, BUT ONLY VISIONS OF TERROR...



...NOT TERROR OF THE UNBORN, BUT TERROR...



... OF THE UNDEAD!!!



HIS MOUTH... HIS TEETH... SO LONG... SHARP... BUT I CAN DO NOTHING... HE HAS BEEN HERE BEFORE... AND EACH TIME I FALL MORE UNDER HIS POWER...



WAIT... WHAT IS THE MATTER... WHY IS HE TURNING AWAY?



IT IS MY HUSBAND!

DON'T WORRY. IT'S ALL
RIGHT. THE EVIL IS DESTROYED.
YOU ARE SAFE.

PLEASE STAND ASIDE
... QUICKLY. THIS
OPPORTUNITY... SO
RARE... CANNOT BE
LIGHTLY DISMISSED.

YOUR HELP IN
THIS MATTER HAS BEEN
MOST WELCOME. BUT
WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO
MY WIFE, IF I MAY
ASK?

WE ARE CREATING
A WEAPON FOR THE
LORD'S BATTLE AGAINST
THE FORCES OF
DARKNESS.

YOU, YOUNG LADY, ARE
RARE... A PREGNANT WOMAN WHO
HAS BEEN VISITED BY A VAMPIRE AND
SURVIVED. ADDING TO THE VAMPIRIC
RESIDUE IN YOUR BLOOD THE POWER
OF GOD ADMINISTERED BY
THESE RITES WILL INSURE...

WHAT DO
YOU MEAN? I DON'T
UNDERSTAND.

...THAT YOUR
OFFSPRING WILL HAVE
THE SUPERNATURAL
POWER TO DESTROY
VAMPIRES AT A TOUCH.

YOUR FAMILY WILL
BECOME BLESSED IN THAT
A MEMBER WILL BE IN THE
FOREFRONT OF THE LORD'S
BATTLE AGAINST THE
FORCES OF SATAN... HE
WILL BE A... DHAMPIR.

WHAT I HAD HEARD PRAYED ON MY MIND FOR
THE REST OF THE NIGHT. I TOSSED AND
TURNED AND WAS UNABLE TO GET ANY
SLEEP. HOW UNBELIEVABLE THAT I WAS TO
BE AN INSTRUMENT OF GOD.

WE ARE
HONORED AND
THANKFUL, FATHER.

THE ROOM IS OPPRESSIVE. THE
VAMPIRE HAS BEEN DESTROYED...
BUT AN AURA OF EVIL STILL CLINGS
TO THIS WAGON...

...HOVERING OVER ME... WAITING
FOR A MOMENT OF WEAKNESS...



PRETTY WORDS,
GYPSY WOMAN, BUT
I AM NOT YET
DESTROYED.



BUT I AM TOO WELL
PROTECTED. YOU SHALL
NEVER GET BY THIS.



AAAAHHH!!!!

YOU TOOK ME
BY SURPRISE,
VAMPIRA. BUT THE
FORCES OF EVIL
CANNOT LONG KEEP
THE FORCES OF
GOOD AT BAY.



DESPERATION LENDS STRENGTH
TO DAEGGA AS SHE FLINGS A
HEAVY PAIR OF BOOTS AT THE
ADVANCING WOMAN.

WHA...!

THAT WILL
BE TAKEN CARE
OF SHORTLY,
HELLSPAWN!

I KNOW ALL
I NEED TO KNOW
...AND YOU KNOW
TOO MUCH.

AHHH, MY
HEAD! HELP ME,
SOMEONE!!!



...TAKEN CARE
OF... YES, BY
ME!!!



HELP ME!!!
HEL.....!!!

AS DAEGGA KNEELS BY THE DEAD WOMAN AND SATISFIES HER UNHOLY THIRST THE REAR DOOR OPENS.

A MOMENT'S GLANCE INTO THE HATE-FILLED EYES OF THE YOUNG MAN SHOWS DAEGGA THAT SHE IS CONFRONTED BY THE...



MOTHER!!!

...DHAMPIR!!!



MONSTER!!!
THIS OLD WOMAN
NEVER HURT
YOU.

GIVE
CHASE. DESTROY
HER BEFORE SHE
ESCAPES.



SHE BROUGHT
YOU INTO THIS
WORLD DIDN'T
SHE?



I MUST EXTINGUISH
THE FIRE FIRST BEFORE
IT SPREADS. THEN I'LL
HUNT HER DOWN. AND
SHE WILL NOT ESCAPE
MY VENGEANCE.

DAEGGA RUNS THROUGH THE
TWISTING ALLYS OF THE CIRCUS,
BLIND TO EVERYTHING BUT THE
THOUGHT OF ESCAPE. UNTIL...



AHHH! BYRON!
THE MONSTER
IS...

DON'T WASTE
TIME WITH TALK. I KNOW
EVERYTHING. I
ESTABLISHED A MENTAL
LINK WITH YOU. WE MUST
LEAVE AS QUICKLY AS
POSSIBLE.

THEIR ESCAPE IS INTERRUPTED WHEN A MAN STUMBLES
FROM THE SHADOWS AND...

VAMPIRE!
THERE'S A VAMPIRE
LOOSE IN THE CIRCUS
GROUNDS. THIS
GIRL IS DEAD... ALL
HER BLOOD
DRAINED.



THAT GIRL...
THE ONE YOU
LURED OUT OF
THE GYPSY'S
WAGON.

WHAT DID YOU
EXPECT ME TO DO
WITH HER. I COULDN'T
LET HER GO. NOW
COULD IT IF WE PLAY
THINGS RIGHT, THIS MAY
WORK TO OUR
ADVANTAGE...

...WITH EVERYONE RUNNING TO SEE WHAT THE COMMOTION IS WE'LL HAVE A CLEAR ROUTE OF ESCAPE.

MUST YOU LEAVE THE CIRCUS SO SOON, VAMPIRES. IT REALLY IS THE HIGH SPOT OF VILLAGE SOCIAL LIFE FOR THE YEAR.

AHHH!
BYRON!!!

I KNOW.
IT'S THE
DHAMPIR.

YOU REALLY MUST LET ME
SHOW YOU AROUND. HERE...
TAKE MY HAND.

OUT OF HER MIND WITH FEAR, DAEGGA GRIPS BYRON AS TIGHTLY AS SHE CAN, PREVENTING HIM FROM TAKING ANY ACTION AGAINST THE DHAMPIR.

YOU'VE COMPLETELY LOST
CONTROL, DAEGGA. I HAVE
NO CHOICE. ALL IS LOST
FOR ME, UNLESS...

DO
SOMETHING,
BYRON. HE'LL
KILL ME...
US...

GET A HOLD OF
YOURSELF, DAEGGA.
I CAN'T DO ANYTHING
UNTIL YOU RELEASE ME
FROM YOUR
STRANGLEHOLD.

INTO THE
WOODS. CATCH
AND DESTROY
HIM
QUICKLY.

...I SACRIFICE
YOU!!!

A STRONG LEAP CARRIES BYRON
OVER THE STONE WALL INTO THE
DARKNESS OF THE WOODS
BOARDERING THE CIRCUS.

WHICH
WAY DID
THE OTHER
ONE GO?

'TIS A PITY, DAEGGA DEAR,
BUT YOU LOST YOUR HEAD AT
THE MOMENT YOU NEEDED IT
MOST. BUT YOU GAVE ME THE
EXTRA FEW SECONDS I NEED
TO COMPLETE MY ESCAPE.

BYRON!!!
NO!!!

NO...NOT IN THE WOODS
...ABOVE THE WOODS.



I'M SAFE FOR THE
MOMENT. THE DHAMPIR,
CAN'T REACH ME WHILE
I'M IN THE FORM OF
A BAT.

BUT THE DHAMPIR, A SUPERNATURAL
BEING WITH THE BLOOD OF VAMPIRES
FLOWING IN HIS VEINS, HAS RESOURCES
TO DRAW UPON THAT BYRON COULD
NEVER GUESS.

THE SUDDEN, MID-AIR ATTACK CATCHES BYRON
COMPLETELY BY SURPRISE.



A SATANIC MIRACLE THROWS BYRON
CLEAR OF THE IMPACT BEFORE THE
DHAMPIR'S TALONS CAN SINK INTO HIS
BODY.



TWISTING AND TURNING IN THE SKY
ABOVE THE CIRCUS, BYRON RAPIDLY
TIRES. EACH SWIPE OF THE DEADLY
TALONS COMES CLOSER...



...UNTIL.

YOU ...
DHAMPIR ... ALSO
THE GREAT BIRD
THAT ATTACKED
ME?



YES. HALF OF MY
HERITAGE IS VAMPIRE AND
I HAVE MANY OF YOUR
POWERS... WHICH MAKES
ME UNBEATABLE.

BUT ENOUGH
TALK. I AM DELAYING
MY HOLY MISSION...
THE DESTRUCTION OF
ALL VAMPIRES.



WAIT... SPARE ME ...
I CAN BE OF USE TO YOU...
INFORMATION ON OTHER
VAMPIRES ... IF YOU LET
ME LIVE.

IT'S ALWAYS INTERESTING TO HEAR WHAT THE VAMPIRES WILL OFFER ME IN EXCHANGE FOR THEIR LIVES...AS I ADVANCE FOR THE FINAL...

...KILL!!!

BLAME!

ANOTHER VAMPIRE WHO WON'T BE BOTHERING GOD-FEARING FOLK AGAIN.

YOU'VE LUCKY, YOUNG MAN. IN ANOTHER SECOND YOU'D HAVE BEEN DONE IN.

THE SILVER BULLET DID ITS JOB WELL.

OUR VILLAGE HAS BEEN BOTHERED LATELY BY A VAMPIRE. WE Banded TOGETHER IN SECRET TO PREPARE WEAPONS AGAINST THIS CREATURE. WHEN THE ALARM WAS GIVEN TONIGHT WE WERE READY TO GO INTO ACTION.

SILVER BULLET? WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH SILVER BULLETS AT THE CIRCUS?

WE SAW HIM FROM AFAR CHANGING INTO HUMAN FORM FROM A GREAT WHITE DEVIL BIRD. ONLY THOSE IN LEAGUE WITH THE DEVIL HAVE SUCH POWERS.

SLOWLY THE CROWD DISPERSES. THE HOUR IS LATE AND THE VILLAGERS BEGIN RETURNING TO THEIR HOMES.

HA! HA! HA! YES DHAMPIR...YOU DID HAVE MANY OF MY POWERS... AND ALSO ONE OF MY WEAKNESSES... SILVER WAS AS DEADLY TO YOU AS IT IS TO ME.

A SLIGHT SOUND... BYRON SPINS AROUND.

YOU! THE DHAMPIR'S GIRLFRIEND. I WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT YOU'D HAVE ENOUGH SENSE TO GET OF THE AREA.

AN INCREDIBLE ACT...YOU ACTUALLY HAD HIM DESTROYED. YOUR KIND WILL SING SONGS OF THIS FOR MANY CENTURIES TO COME.

YOU WON'T LIVE
TO HEAR ANY OF
THEM.

NOR YOU,
VAMPIRE!

BYRON FEELS A DEEPENING CHILL...THIS IS
NOT THE TYPICAL SCREAMING, WHIMPERING
VAMPIRE VICTIM. SHE IS TOO SELF
CONFIDENT.. TOO COMPOSED.

THERE IS ONE FACT
YOU FAILED TO LEARN ABOUT
THE GYPSY WOMAN. NINE
MONTHS AFTER THE VAMPIRE
VISITED HER, SHE GAVE
BIRTH...

... TO
TWINS!!!

YOU WERE
LUCKY THIS
EVENING...VERY
LUCKY. BUT YOUR
LUCK HAS JUST
BEEN EXHAUSTED.

I AM NOT HIS LOVER...
I AM HIS TWIN SISTER...
AND A DHAMPIR LIKE
HE WAS.

IT'S ALMOST
ENOUGH TO MAKE A
GOOD VAMPIRE KILLER
HANG UP HIS STAKE
AND RETIRE.

OUTSIDE THE BEDROOM OF ARTHUR TOLTOR, AGING INVESTIGATOR OF SUPERNATURAL PHENOMENA, TWO FIGURES CONVERSE IN LOW TONES. THEY ARE TOLTOR'S DAUGHTER, MARILYN, AND HER HUSBAND, HENTON. WENTWORTH, THE WENTWORTHS SPEAK QUIETLY SO AS NOT TO BE OVERHEARD BY THE PATRIARCH LYING QUIETLY IN HIS BED, READING...

ARTHUR TOLTOR HAD SPENT HIS WHOLE LIFE INVESTIGATING REPORTS OF THE BIZARRE OR SUPERNATURAL. YET LATELY HIS KEEN MIND SEEMED TO WEARY UNDER THE BURDEN OF HIS ADVANCING YEARS.

THE ONCE BRILLIANT PSYCHIC INVESTIGATOR HAD BECOME OBSESSED AND THERE WAS NO WAY OF TURNING BACK THE CLOCK. HE HAD ACCUSED MARILYN'S CHILD OF BEING A DEMON SUBSTITUTE FOR HER REAL CHILD AND NO ONE BELIEVED HIM. HOW COULD THEY? HOW COULD ANYONE? HE CLAIMED THAT THE SUBSTITUTE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATH OF HIS WIFE, JOYCE WHO HAD DIED SHORTLY AFTER MARILYN'S LITTLE GIRL WAS BORN.

EVER WONDER WHY EVERYBODY BUT YOU IS SO OUT-OF-STEP? MEET ARTIE TOLTOR. HE TRIED TO TELL THEM BUT NOBODY LISTENED. WHO'D WANT TO BELIEVE THEIR LITTLE BABY IS REALLY A...


HOW ARE YOU TODAY, FATHER?

DO YOU MEAN AM I STILL SENILE AND RAVING?


NOW ARTHUR, WOULD WE THINK SUCH A THING?

YOU WOULD IF YOU THOUGHT YOU COULD PROFIT FROM IT.

DEMON CHILD




SO YOU KNOW ABOUT ME. WELL, IT'S NOT GOING TO HELP YOU, YOU SENILE OLD FOOL. I'M GOING TO HAVE YOU PUT AWAY. MARILYN AND I ARE GOING TO START ENJOYING LIFE FOR ONCE BY ENJOYING ALL YOUR LOVELY MONEY.




JOYCE KNEW AND THEY KILLED HER FOR IT. DO YOU REMEMBER HOW PRETTY SHE WAS? SHE WAS ALWAYS THERE WHEN I NEEDED HER, NEVER AFRAID. NOW SHE'S GONE. I REMEMBER THAT DARK DAY IT ALL BEGAN.


AND HE WENT INTO REVERIE, RELIVING THE PAST...



I'M AFRAID, ARTHUR. THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT THE BOOK THAT SCARES ME. IT REEKS OF UNSPEAKABLE EVIL. PERHAPS WE SHOULD BURN IT WHILE WE ARE STILL ABLE.



IF ONLY I HAD LISTENED TO HER FEARS SHE MIGHT STILL BE ALIVE. IT WAS IN THAT BOOK THAT WE FIRST READ OF THE CHANGELING... HOW THE LORDS OF DARKNESS STEAL HUMAN INFANTS AND LEAVE DEMONS IN THEIR PLACE.



HENTON'S PLAN WAS SIMPLE, GET THE OLD MAN TO RANT ABOUT HIS PET OBSESSION-- LITTLE MARY. ONCE WORKED UP, HENTON COULD BRING IN WITNESSES, AND HAVE TOLTOR PUT AWAY. NO QUESTION THAT THE OLD MAN WAS IRRATIONAL... JUST GET HIM WORKED UP AND HE WOULD DO THE REST.

I'LL IGNORE THAT REMARK, ARTHUR. MARILYN AND I HAVE COME TO TRY AND CONVINCE YOU FOR THE LAST TIME THAT JOYCE DIED A NATURAL DEATH. SURELY YOU MUST REALIZE JUST HOW STRANGE YOUR STORY SOUNDS.

THE HELL YOU HAVE! ALL YOU CARE ABOUT IS SEEING ME PUT AWAY SO YOU CAN GET CONTROL OF THE ESTATE. YOU'RE SO DAMN BUSY TRYING TO COMMIT ME THAT YOU CAN'T SEE THE DANGER YOU'RE IN.

IT ALL STARTED WHEN JOYCE AND I FOUND THE BOOK... OH, IF ONLY WE HADN'T...

ARTHUR, IS IT WHAT WE THOUGHT IT WAS?

YES, AFTER ALL THESE YEARS OF INVESTIGATING SUPERFICIAL MANIFESTATIONS OF THE SUPERNATURAL, WE HAVE AT LAST UNEARTHED THE GENUINE ARTICLE.



HENTON COULD ALMOST FEEL VICTORY IN HIS GRASP TOLLER WAS RAVING NOW, ALMOST AT THE DROP OF A HAT. NOW ALL HE HAD TO DO WAS GET SOMEONE TO WITNESS THE OLD MAN'S FRIGHTENING MENTAL DETERIORATION.

ARTHUR, MARILYN IS RIGHT. TAKE IT EASY.

FOR ONCE WE AGREE, I'D SOONER TRUST A SNAKE.

VERY WELL, ARTHUR. I'M CURIOUS THOUGH, YOU SPOKE OF A BOOK. YOU AND JOYCE FOUND, JUST WHAT ABOUT THIS PRICELESS AND TERRIFYING TREASURE?

DON'T PATRONIZE ME, YOU YOUNG FOOL. DO YOU THINK I'M BLIND TO WHAT'S GOING ON BEHIND MY BACK?

MORE BED TIME STORIES, HENTON? ITS CALLED SIMPLY **THE BOOK OF THE ANCIENTS**. IT WAS WRITTEN IN THE DIM BEGINNING WHEN MAN'S AWARENESS OF THE FORCES OF EVIL THAT BUFFT US FROM CRADLE TO TOMB WAS JUST TAKING SHAPE. THE BOOK REVEALED THE SECRETS OF THE AGES AND WAS PASSED DOWN THROUGH TIME TO WARN MAN OF THE DANGER.

JOYCE AND I FIRST CAME ON THE BOOK WHILE INVESTIGATING A MAN WHO DABBLED IN THE OCCULT. HE HAD TRIED TO USE THE SECRETS OF THE BOOK TO GAIN POWER. UNFORTUNATELY, THE FORCES WERE FAR TOO POWERFUL TO BE CONTROLLED. THEY DESTROYED HIM.

IT WAS IN THAT BOOK THAT WE FIRST LEARNED OF THE PLOT.

PLOT? WHAT PLOT?

THE LORDS OF DARKNESS... GRIM AND TERRIBLE DEITIES THAT WAIT ON THE EDGE OF TIME AND SPACE... CREATURES CAPABLE OF INCREDIBLE EVIL AND INSATIABLE LUSTS.

LORDS OF DARKNESS... WHY I'VE NEVER HEARD OF ANY SUCH BEINGS OR GODS. SOUNDS LIKE HOBGOBLINS TO ME!

WHY YOU SMIRKING JACKAL! I'M TRYING TO TELL YOU OF A DANGER THAT CONCERNS NOT ONLY YOU AND YOUR DAUGHTER, BUT ALL OF MANKIND AS WELL! HOBGOBLINS, YOU'RE A FOOL, HENTON! A VERITABLE FOOL!



WORE, HENTON?
HOW AN OLD MAN RAVES,
EH? THE BOOK TELLS HOW
AGES AGO MAN
WORSHIPPED TERRIBLE
DEITIES. HE SURRENDERED
COMPLETELY TO THEIR
POWER AND COMMITTED
FOUL ACTS TO WIN FAVOR
IN THEIR EYES.

GOOS THAT WERE
AT THE SAME TIME
SUPREMELY POWERFUL AND
COMPLETELY CORRUPT. FIENDS
THAT REVELED IN EVERY FOUL
AND VILE ACT MAN COULD
DEVISE. THOSE THAT PRAYED
TO THEM DIED IN STRANGE AND
HORRIBLE DEATHS AND WITH
EACH NEW DEATH THE LORDS
OF DARKNESS GREW IN
POWER.

FINALLY, AFTER
YEARS OF SUFFERING,
MAN REALIZED THE
UNPARALLELED EVIL OF
HIS GODS. IT WAS THEN
HE TORE DOWN THEIR
FILTHY ALTARS AND
BANISHED THEM FROM
EARTH WITH
POWERFUL SPELLS.



IN TIME THERE WERE
OTHER RELIGIONS AND MORE
BENEVOLENT GODS TO PRAY TO.
SOON ALL THE OLD FEARS
WERE FORGOTTEN AND THE
MEMORY OF THE DARK ONES
FADED FROM MEMORY, BUT THE
ANCIENT SPELLS OF PROTECTION
WERE FORGOTTEN TOO. THUS...
THE DANGER THAT THE DARK
ONES WOULD RETURN
ANEW.



THE LORDS OF DARKNESS WERE NOT DESTROYED, ONLY FORCED TO LEAVE EARTH. THEY WAITED PATIENTLY TILL THE INCANTATIONS WERE FORGOTTEN, THE BOOK OF THE ANCIENTS HAS THOSE SPELLS AND NOW I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO KNOWS THEM. IT IS ONLY MY KNOWING THOSE SPELLS THAT HOLDS BACK THE DARK LORDS FROM POURING BACK INTO OUR WORLD. ONLY I CAN STOP THEM, BUT I CAN'T LAST MUCH LONGER.

IT WAS GOING BETTER THAN HENTON HAD HOPED. THE OLD MAN WAS CONSUMED WITH DELUSIONS OF PERSECUTION AND GRANDEUR, WITH FIENDISH GLEE. HENTON PUSHED. HE WANTED STILL MORE.

WHAT ARE THEY PLOTTING, ARTHUR?

WHAT'S THE USE? YOU DON'T BELIEVE A WORD I'VE SAID. THE IRONY OF IT ALL IS THAT YOUR STUPIDITY AND CUPIDITY WILL DOOM ALL OF MANKIND.

THEN YOU HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE BY TELLING ME WHAT YOU KNOW.

THEY'VE NEVER FORGIVEN MAN FOR ABANDONING THEM. THEY HAVE WAITED FOR COUNTLESS YEARS TO RETURN TO EARTH AND WITH THE USE OF THE DARK POWERS, MOLD IT INTO A LIVING HELL TO SUIT THEIR PERVERSE PLEASURES.

A SMALL FIGURE LISTENED TO EVERY WORD THE ADULTS SPOKE BEHIND THE BEDROOM DOOR. SHE LISTENED CLOSELY AND WAITED.

BUT HOW, ARTHUR? HOW ARE THEY GOING TO DO IT, ARTHUR?

ARE YOU SO BLIND, HENTON? HAVEN'T YOU FIGURED IT OUT YET?

I'M AFRAID I HAVEN'T. NOT JUST YET, ANYWAY.

WITH SURPRISING STRENGTH, TOLTOR GRIPPED HENTON'S THIN ARM.

FIRST THEY MUST BE RID OF ANY THAT KNOW THEM. THAT IS WHY JOYCE WAS MURDERED AND WHY I AM NEXT! ONCE WE ARE GONE THEY WILL CULTIVATE THEIR SINISTER CULT AGAIN AND RETURN FAR MORE POWERFUL THAN EVER. FOR BOTH PARTS OF THIS MASTER PLAN, THEY NEED THE SERVICE OF THE CHANGELINGS.

NOT AGAIN PLEASE...NOT AGAIN, FATHER.

SURELY YOU CAN'T EXPECT US TO BELIEVE THAT OUR OWN LITTLE MARY IS A...A...A

A DEVIL.

THAT'S ABSURD ARTHUR. MARY IS JUST A NORMAL LITTLE GIRL AND NOTHING MORE.

SHE IS NOT JUST A NORMAL CHILD. SHE IS NOT YOUR REAL DAUGHTER AND SHE IS NOT MY GRANDCHILD!!! WHAT'S MORE THAT THING ISN'T EVEN HUMAN. SHE'S A CHANGELING, A DEMON LEFT IN EXCHANGE FOR THE REAL MARY. PLEASE SEE THAT BEFORE THEY TAKE ME! PLEASE!

THE FIGURE IN THE HALL OPENS THE DOOR TO BETTER HEAR THE WORDS SPOKEN IN HER DEFENSE. SHE KNOWS THAT NO ONE WILL BELIEVE THE OLD MAN, NO ONE AT ALL.

THE CHANGELING WAS LEFT WITH YOU FOR A TWO-FOLD PURPOSE. ONE TO SLAY THE ONLY PEOPLE WHO KNEW A WAY TO PREVENT THE RETURN OF THE DARK ONES, JOYCE AND MYSELF. THE OTHER WAS TO TWIST YOUR EVIL TO SUIT THEIR NEEDS. THEY WILL NEED PEOPLE LIKE YOU-- GRASPING, SELF-CENTERED, UNSCRUPULOUS, AND AVARICIOUS, TO SPREAD THEIR EVIL TEACHINGS TO THE REST OF THE WORLD.

SUPPOSE FOR ONE MINUTE THAT I BELIEVE YOU, WHICH OF COURSE I DON'T, GIVE ME ONE GOOD REASON WHY OUR CHILD WAS TAKEN BY YOUR HOBGOBLINS?

WHY SHOULD GODS NEED ANY REASONS TO DO AS THEY PLEASE? THEY ACT WITHOUT SECOND THOUGHT. BUT THIS TIME I'M ALMOST SURE THERE WAS A REASON FOR SELECTING YOUR BABY.

THANKS FOR THE KIND WORDS. NOW HERE'S SOME FOR YOU. YOU'RE CRAZY, ARTHUR, IF THERE WERE THINGS LIKE THAT, THEY WOULD HAVE TAKEN OVER LONG AGO.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW OF THE WORKINGS OF SUPERNATURAL BEINGS? THEY HAD TO WAIT TILL THE TIME WAS RIGHT. TILL MAN HAD FORGOTTEN ALL THE PROTECTIVE SPELLS AND THE WORLD WAS CORRUPTED BY ITS OWN STRANGLING SOPHISTICATION.



FATHER, PLEASE DON'T TALK THAT WAY ABOUT HENTON.

WHY? ARE YOU AFRAID OF THE TRUTH? OUR WORLD IS BEING TORN APART... BY WARS, CORRUPTION, HATRED, AND THE SUFFERING OF MANY. WHAT TIME IS BETTER SUITED FOR THE RETURN OF THE DARK GODS?

ARTHUR TOLTOR KNOWS HE IS FIGHTING A LOSING BATTLE. WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF OTHERS HE KNOWS THAT HE IS NO MATCH FOR THE POWER OF THE LORDS OF DARKNESS.



MOMMY, WHAT IS A CHANGING?

THAT'S CHANGELING, DARLING. IT'S REALLY NOTHING, JUST A STORY TO FRIGHTEN LITTLE GIRLS WHO HAVE BEEN BAD.

HOBGOBLINS, MARY

HEAR THAT, HELLSPAWN? YOU'VE FOOLED THEM ALL.

FATHER, YOU'RE SCARING MARY.

MOMMY?

NO ONE BELIEVES MY STORY! NOW YOU CAN KILL ME JUST LIKE YOU DID MY WIFE. YOU KNEW THAT NO ONE WOULD BELIEVE THAT WE'D BOTH GONE SENILE, SO YOU MURDERED HER AND LET ME LIVE TO SEE IF ANYONE WOULD BELIEVE MY STORY.





THEN THE DOOR OPENED JUST FAR ENOUGH TO LET A SMALL HEAD LOOK BACK INTO THE ROOM. THE ANGELIC FACE THAT SPOKE OF EVIL AND TRIUMPH. THE GLOATING SMILE TOLD ARTHUR TOLTOR THAT HE WAS NOT SENILE, NOT AT ALL.

POOR ROSEMARY! DO YOU SUPPOSE SHE HAD TWINS?



THE CASTLE STANDS IN THE MIDST OF TOWERING TREES, ITS TURRETS THRUSTING FORTH FROM THE FOLIAGE. IT BELONGS TO ANOTHER AGE. IT REFLECTS A STRANGE COMBINATION OF EARLY HOLLYWOOD GOTHIC AND A NOBLE EUROPEAN HERITAGE.

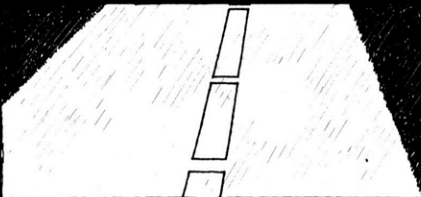
BUT THIS IS NOT TRANSYLVANIA, AND THE CASTLE STANDS NOT FAR FROM THE GREY POLLUTION-STAINED SKIES OF NEW YORK CITY. IT IS A RELIC, AND AS SUCH, IT STANDS ANONYMOUSLY AMONGST THE BIRCH AND PINE. PERHAPS WAITING TO CARRY ON A TRADITION.

THIS IS GREYSTONE CASTLE, AND IT IS VERY MUCH A TWENTIETH-CENTURY REALITY. IT STANDS ALONE AND SEEMINGLY DISCARDED. THERE ARE MORE IMPORTANT AFFAIRS IN THE WORLD TODAY THAN MONUMENTS TO DAYS LONG FORGOTTEN. YET, THERE IS AN ECHO HERE OF DISTANT HORRORS.



THE VAMPIRESS STALKS THE CASTLE THIS NIGHT

AND ON NIGHTS WHEN THE ELEMENTS OF NATURE TURN CHAOTIC, THE ECHO IS MAGNIFIED, AND STILLNESS BECOMES, MORE THAN EVER, A SYMBOL OF ITS PATIENCE. THERE IS AN ODD FEELING THAT PERVADES THE AREA AND DEFINES THE NATURE OF THAT WAITING AS ANTICIPATION. THERE IS NEW PREY ABOUT.



THE WET MACADAM WHISTLES HOLLOWLY UNDER THE TIRE TREADS....

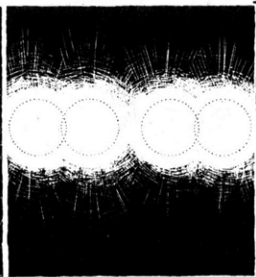


WINDSHIELD WIPERS, SWEEPING MONOTONOUSLY BACK AND FORTH, PROVIDE AN ALMOST HYPNOTIC ACCOMPANIMENT.

THE TWO PEOPLE DRIVE IN SILENCE. STATIC FROM THE RADIO BLENDS IN UNNOTICED WITH THE OTHER SOUNDS.



DONALD CARPENTER AND SANDRALEE DEVENS ARE AWARE OF THE ISOLATION ABOUT THEM.



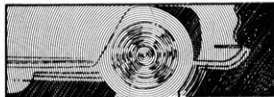
DAMN IT!!! THIS ROAD SEEMS TO GO ON FOREVER! JUST TREES AND MORE TREES!



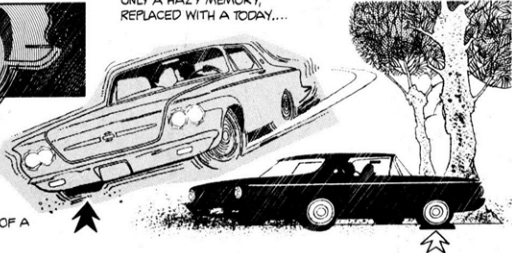
WHAT DOES IT MATTER? WE HAVEN'T ANY REAL PLACE TO GO.

FORGET HOW THAT NIGHT SEEMS ONLY A HAZY MEMORY, REPLACED WITH A TODAY....

...HEAVY AND GREY AS THE NIGHT SKY.



FORGET THE LOST DESPAIR IN HER VOICE, DONALD CARPENTER. STOP COMPARING THAT MELANCHOLY NOTE WITH THAT HUSKY, SENSUAL VOICE WHICH WAS ONE PART OF A DISTANT NIGHT.

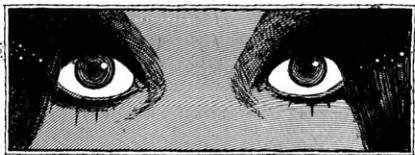


THEIR WORDS ARE HARSH IN THE QUIET AS THEY DISCUSS THEIR FLIGHT. THEY ARE BOTH SEVENTEEN. THEY ARE BOTH FRIGHTENED AS THEY BEGIN TO REALIZE THE REAL PRICE WHICH MUST BE PAID FOR ONE HUMAN BEING'S RELATIONSHIP WITH ANOTHER.

THEY ARE NOT ONLY AWARE OF EACH OTHER, BUT ALSO OF THE FACT THAT THEY HAVE FLED THEIR HOMES, AND THAT SANDRALEE DEVENS CARRIES WITHIN HER THEIR UNBORN CHILD. THE LAST REMAINING FACT LEAVES THEM COLD. THEY CAN NEVER RETURN TO WHERE THEY BEGAN.



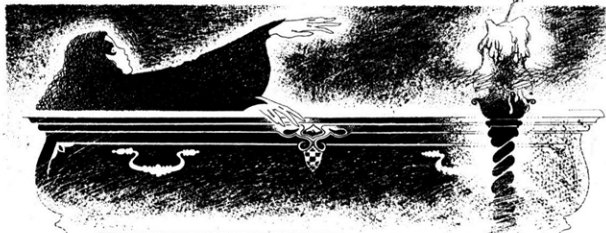
THERE IS ONE OTHER CREATURE STIRRING THIS NIGHT.



HER NAME IS CHRISTINA GREYSTONE.



NOW SHE AWAKENS TO ANOTHER NIGHT OF SEEKING NOCTURNAL PREY.



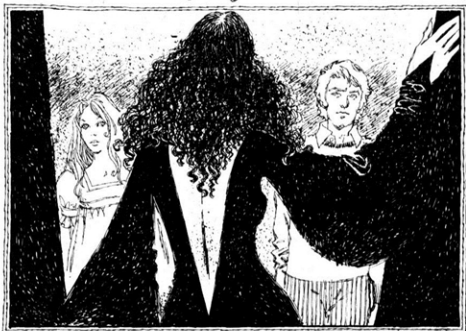
LITHE, SEDUCTIVE, IN THE FAINT MOONLIGHT, SHE APPEARS MUCH AS SHE DID WHEN LIFE PULSED THROUGH HER VEINS.



SHE MOVES TO ONE OF THE ANCIENT WINDOWS, BARELY REMEMBERING HER PAST, CONCERNED ONLY WITH THE PRESENT, AND THE PRESENT REVEALS TWO FRAIL DARK FORMS MOVING THROUGH THE TREES TOWARD HER DOMAIN.



DONALD CARPENTER IS STILL THINKING OF THAT NIGHT. IT IS STRIPPED OF ITS ROMANTICISM NOW, ALL THAT IS LEFT IS THE UNBORN REALITY, AS THEY WALK TO THE CASTLE, AS HE HEARS HIS OWN VOICE IN THE STILLNESS, EVEN AS HE MARVELS AT THE IMMENSITY OF STONE BEFORE THEM, HE FEELS A MIXTURE OF EMOTIONS: UNCERTAINTY, MOMENTS OF HOSTILITY SPRING FORTH FROM A SENSE OF OPPRESSION, AND A FIERCELY PROTECTIVE SENSATION TOWARD THIS GIRL-WOMAN WHO WALKS HESITANTLY BESIDE HIM.



THE VAMPRESS CAN BARELY CONTROL HERSELF. SANDY'S SLENDER WHITE THROAT HYPNOTIZES HER, TEMPTING HER TO FORGET CAUTION. YET, CAUTION DOES NOT DESERT HER, AND COMES TO HER WITH THE CUNNING OF THE ANIMAL. SHE MANAGES TO KEEP HER VOICE FROM TREMBLING.



NOW SANDRALEE DEVENS IS WALKING THROUGH THE DIMLY LIT ROOM. PERHAPS, IF HER PAST WERE NOT SO VIVIDLY WITH HER AS SHE GAZES ABOUT, SHE WOULD HAVE BEEN AWARE OF THE FORBIDDING ATMOSPHERE OF GREYSTONE CASTLE. BUT THE PAST /S/ WITH HER AND DULLS HER SENSES. SHE REMEMBERS HER FATHER'S FACE, HEARS AGAIN HIS WORDS OF THE EVENING BEFORE WHEN SHE AND TOMMY TOLD HER PARENTS ABOUT THE BABY...

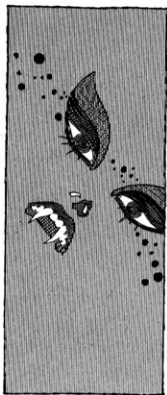


WELL,
WHAT'RE YOU
GONNA DO?

YOU'D BETTER
REMEMBER THAT
YOU'RE GOING
TO HAVE THAT BABY
FOR MORE THAN A
DAY. THE NOVELTY
MIGHT WEAR
OFF.

AND YOU'D
BETTER CONSIDER
THE CHANCES YOU'RE
GIVING HIM. IT'S A
TOUGH WORLD OUT
THERE, AND YOU'RE
STARTING HIM OFF
BEHIND THE
EIGHT BALL!

CHRISTINA GREYSTONE FEELS THE FAMILIAR SURGING IN HER VEINS. CARTILAGE STRETCHES AND AN ODD BIOLOGICAL REACTION BEGINS.





IN MOMENTS NOW, THE FAMILIAR SENSATION WILL OCCUR. CHRISTINA'S STRONG, THIN HANDS WILL HOLD THE YOUNG GIRL HELPLESS AS HER TEETH DIP INTO THE GIRL'S NECK, SEEKING THE JUGULAR VEIN.



FEAR BECOMES CERTAINTY. DOES IT REALLY MATTER SO MUCH, SANDRA DEVENS? DOES THE FUTURE HOLD SO MUCH PROMISE?

WHY STRUGGLE? WHY STRUGGLE FOR A LIFE SO DOUBTFUL?

HOW MUCH CAN IT HURT? IT WILL BE NO MORE THAN A MOMENT OF SEARING PAIN.

WHAT DIFFERENCE CAN IT MAKE?



THE SCENT OF THE FEMALE VAMPIRESS IS STRONG IN HER NOSTRILS AND SWEEPS ASIDE THE SELF-PITY. YES, IT IS WORTH LIVING. THERE IS STILL PROMISE. AND SHE IS NO LONGER SURE WHETHER SHE HAS THE RIGHT TO THE DECISION OF LIFE OR DEATH NOW THAT IT IS NOT ONLY HER LIFE THAT IS THREATENED.



REMEMBER AND STRUGGLE FOR LIFE, FIGHT TO RETAIN THAT LIFE, AND GROW STRONG IN THAT FIGHT, FOR TWO LIVES, NOT ONE ARE DEPENDENT UPON THE OUTCOME.



REMEMBER THE VAMPIRE'S WEAKNESS. CROSSES! THE SYMBOL OF GOOD AS OPPOSED TO THE SYMBOL OF EVIL. BUT YOU HAVEN'T ANY SUCH CROSS, DO YOU? OR DO YOU?



DOES IT MATTER WHAT SIZE THE SYMBOL OR IS IT THE SYMBOL ITSELF WHICH IS IMPORTANT?

DOES IT MATTER OF WHAT THE SYMBOL IS MADE, POLISHED SILVER OR GOLD-PLATED BRONZE, OR IS IT THE FORM THAT IS IMPORTANT?



THE VAMPIRESS' SHRIEKS ECHO OFF THE DOMED CEILINGS IN REPLY, AND SANDRALEE DEVENS FORGETS ABOUT THE MIRACLE TAKING PLACE WITHIN HER AND WITNESSES A TRANSFORMATION THAT DEFIES ANYTHING IN HER EXPERIENCE.





DONALD CARPENTER WATCHES THAT TRANSFORMATION IN REVERSE. THE FRAGILE REALITY OF HIS MIND CAN BARELY ACCEPT THE FLUID CHANGE FROM FEMALE TO NOCTURNAL CREATURE.



A HUMOROUS THOUGHT FLITS THROUGH HIS MIND. THE TRANSFORMATION SHOULD HAVE JUMPED FROM ONE FORM TO THE OTHER AS THEY DO IN ALL THOSE SECOND-RATE DRACULA FILMS.

VIOLENT SOUNDS ECHO OFF THE SILENT WALLS: THE BEATING WINGS AGAINST THE AIR, THE DULL IMPACT OF STUMBLING FLESH, THE HIGH-PITCHED SHRILL OF THE ATTACKING SHE-CREATURE.

THERE ISN'T TIME TO WONDER HOW THIS CAN BE HAPPENING. RAZOR TEETH SHRED FLESH AND THE PAIN STIMULATES ACTION.



HE LASHES OUT, STRIKING, SOBBING. BRIEF IMAGES OF SANDRA-LEE SOMEHOW APPEARING IN THE CONFUSION.

SOMEHOW, HE MANAGES TO GRIP THE VICIOUS FORM. HIS FINGERS ARE WET WITH BLOOD, YET HE HOLDS ONTO THE STRUGGLING, SUDDENLY FEARFUL BEING IN HIS HANDS.



IN TERROR, HE REACHES OUT FOR ANYTHING WHICH MIGHT AID HIM IN DEFEATING THIS CREATURE.



HE IS NOT EVEN AWARE OF WHAT HIS REACHING FINGERS GRASP.

THE WOODEN HANDLE OF THE FLAG-STAFF SLAMS SAVAGELY DOWN ONTO THE PULSING CHEST BELOW. OVER AND OVER, HE FEELS HIMSELF SLAMMING THAT POINT OF WOOD DOWN...



OVER AND OVER, HE HEARS THE DULL THUD OF IMPACT AND THE CREATURES ANSWERING CRIES. BLOOD, LIKE SOME GEYSER SPATTERS OVER HIM.

PERHAPS IT IS ONLY A TEMPORARY INSANITY THAT HAS HELD HIM. HE STAGGERS AWAY, NOT WANTING TO WITNESS HIS OWN SAVAGERY. THE SIGHT WILL STAY WITH HIM, HE KNOWS, LURKING JUST BEHIND HIS CLOSED EYE-LIDS.



WHAT WAS SHE?

SHE MUST HAVE BEEN SOMETHING OUT OF THE NIGHT. I SAW HER CHANGE INTO...

I SAW IT TOO. WHAT DO WE DO NOW? WHERE DO WE GO?



BACK OUT THERE... INTO THE DARK.



NO ONE'LL EVER BELIEVE US IF WE TELL THEM ABOUT THIS. WE COULD NEVER CONVINCE THEM.




SHHH...DON'T WORRY. WE'LL THINK OF SOMETHING.

I KNOW... I KNOW.

I'M SCARED.

The end



HIDE AND SEEK IN THE
CITY OF THE DEAD? TAG
AMONG THE AZTEC TOMBS? OR A
GAME FAR MORE GRAVE FOR OUR
TWO FUGITIVES FACING A GHOSTLY
PROCESSION OF THE...

BLOOD BROTHERS!

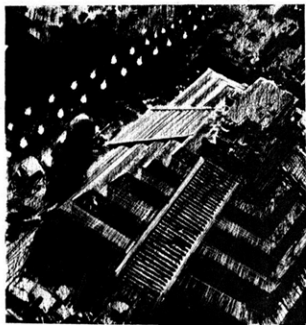
GOVERNMENT
TROOPS? WE ARE
DEADMEN MIGUEL!

NO YOU FOOL--
THEY ARE ONLY
MONKS!

WE CAN ESCAPE BEFORE
THEY RETURN!

HMMM...
WHY DO THE HOLY
MEN HIDE LIKE
HEATHEN THIEVES?

WE SHALL
FOLLOW THEM,
SANCHO!





MY WOMAN'S VILLAGE IS CLOSE-- WE WILL BE SAFE... COME...

LOOK--A STONE PATHWAY, CLEARED OF VINES!

THE ANSWER COMES, WITH THE SOFT SOUND OF SANDALS ON STONE, SICKENING SOUNDS...



WHAT THE... TRAIL LEADS TO...

A SOLID STONE MOUNTAIN? DID THE BROTHERS VANISH INTO THE NIGHT ITSELF?!

CAUTIOUSLY THE TWO WOULD-BE REVOLUTIONARIES FIND THEMSELVES IN A DARK TANGLE OF STRANGLING VINES.

MIGUEL, WHAT IS HAPPENING?

PLEASE LET US GO!

QUIET, SANCHO!

ONLY SATAN'S WORK IS DONE AT NIGHT! BUT WHY?!



WHAT IN...?

YAAAAHHHH!!!

A YOUNG MONK RUNS OUT INTO THE CLEARING AS IF PURSUED BY DEATH ITSELF!



DIOS MIO!



DEMONS! YOU WILL NOT TAKE ME! I WILL KILL YOU ALL!

UNHHH!!!



YOU WILL **NOT**
BE KILLING ANYONE,
MY FRIEND--LEAST
OF ALL, POOR
SANCHO!

HE IS
DEAD!

AND MY RIBS
BLEED! WHY DID
YOU WAIT SO LONG
TO STOP HIM?



I AM GOING--
NOW! IF YOU WISH
TO JOIN ME--
COME!

I WILL BE
WITH YOU IN A
MOMENT, SANCHO--
THIS MONK'S
WEAPON INTERESTS
ME!

POCKETING THE STRANGE WEAPON, MIGUEL
FOLLOWS HIS WOUNDED LIEUTENANT TO A
SMALL, SLEEPING VILLAGE...



SO MY HUSBAND,
YOU AND EL LEADER
BLEW **ANOTHER**
REVOLUTION!

SHUT UP
CONSUELA!

OUCH! EASY
WOMAN!



YOU LAUGH,
WOMAN-- BUT SOON
I SHALL **DEFEAT** OUR
OPPRESSORS WITH
THEIR OWN WEAPON--
GOLD!



GOLD?!



SI, WITH PESOS
WE BUY GUNS,
BULLETS...

THIS FOOL'S
GOLD HE PROMISES
WILL PUT YOU BEFORE
A FIRING SQUAD!



WHAT DO YOU
WANT WITH THE
BROTHERS OF
DOOM?!

JUST
ANSWER HIM,
WOMAN!

BEFORE THE WHITE MEN FROM THE SEA
CAME TO PLUNDER OUR LAND FATHER
ESTEBAN CAME--NOT FOR GOLD--
BUT FOR KNOWLEDGE...

AND SOON THAT KNOWLEDGE BECAME
CORRUPT.



WOMAN, YOU SEEM
TO KNOW SO MUCH--WHO
ARE THE HOODED MONKS
WHO PROWL THE JUNGLES
AT NIGHT?

BEWARE MIGUEL!
FATHER ESTEBAN
FOUNDED THEIR
ORDER!

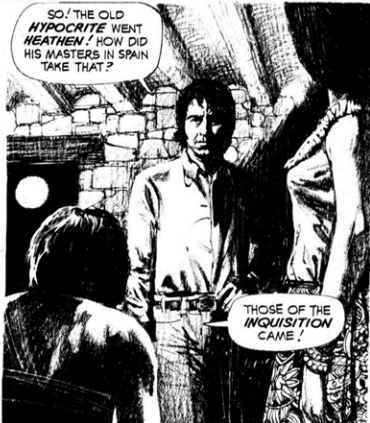
MANY YEARS GONE, FATHERS
OF MY BLOOD SAT IN COUNSEL
WITH THE GREAT MONTEZUMA...



OUR PRIESTS REVEALED
THE LIFE-GIVING
RITUALS OF THE
FEATHERED SERPENT
GOD, QUETZALCOATL TO
FATHER ESTEBAN...

AND HE USED THESE
SECRETS TO BRING
DEATH TO MY PEOPLE!

FATHER ESTEBAN BUILT A MAD MONUMENT TO HIMSELF--
USING MY PEOPLE'S SWEAT AND BLOOD! MANY DIED
AS THE TEMPLE NEARED COMPLETION...
HE CREATED THE **BROTHERS OF DOOM!**
THEY PREACHED THE OLD WORDS OF THE **VANISHED**
ONES!



SO! THE OLD
HYPOCRITE WENT
HEATHEN! HOW DID
HIS MASTERS IN SPAIN
TAKE THAT?

THOSE OF THE
INQUISITION
CAME!

THEY WERE **EVIL** MEN... BUT
SOON THEY **VANISHED** IN THE
NIGHT!

THE BROTHERS **SEALED**
THE DOORS TO THEIR TEMPLE...
AND FROM THAT TIME ON, THEY
SPOKE WITH NO ONE!



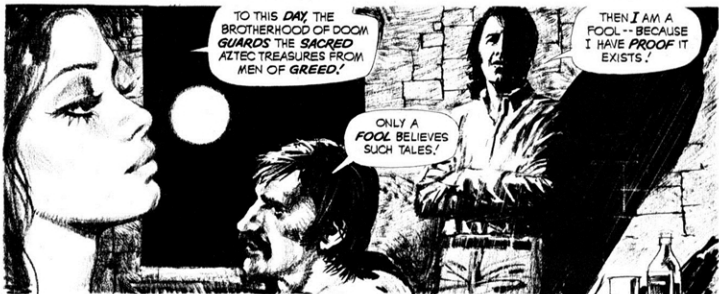
FATHER ESTEBAN DIED, AND HIS PEOPLE **MOURNED** HIM AS THEY
WOULD A GOD...



TO THIS **DAY**, THE
BROTHERHOOD OF DOOM
GUARDS THE **SACRED**
AZTEC TREASURES FROM
MEN OF **GREED!**

ONLY A
FOOL BELIEVES
SUCH TALES!

THEN I AM A
FOOL -- BECAUSE
I HAVE **PROOF** IT
EXISTS!





THIS EBON
KNIFE!!!

ONCE SWARTHY SKINNED
CRAFTSMEN HEWED THE
BLACK VOLCANIC GLASS
FOR AN EDGE KEEN
ENOUGH TO REND *HUMAN*
FLESH!
FOR THIS DIVINE BLADE,
THIS KNIFE OF OBSIDIAN,
FIT ONLY FOR AN
OBSCENE RITE, THEY
FASHIONED A HILT IN THE
IMAGE OF A SQUAT,
DEFORMED DEMI-GOD,
WHO LAUGHS ETERNALLY..
PERHAPS AT THE VERY
MORTALS WHO CAST HIS
UGLY LIKENESS IN
PRECIOUS, *MOLTEN*
GOLD!



MIGUEL! WHAT
EVIL HAVE YOU
DONE?

STRANGE
WEAPONS FOR
YOUR INNOCENT
MONKS!

BUT AN *ANTIQUE*
WE CAN TRADE FOR
A *GUN!*



STÚPIDO!
THAT IS WHY I,
MIGUEL, SHALL BE
EL PRESIDENTE! NOT
ONE GUN SHALL WE
HAVE-- BUT *MANY!*



DID THE AZTECS HAVE ONLY
ONE SUCH GOLDEN KNIFE?
NO! AND WE SHALL FIND
MORE *GOLD* SUCH AS THIS!

SOON I SHALL BE
RICH-- WITH OUR
PRETTY CONSUELA'S
HELP!

NO!
THE OLD GODS
WILL *PUNISH...*



SLAP!

YOU WILL TELL ME
ALL I MUST KNOW TO
FIND THIS *GOLD!*
NOW!

UUUHH!

CONSUELA SPEAKS, HESITATINGLY AT FIRST, REVEALING ALL SHE KNOWS OF THE BROTHERHOOD, AND SO -- THE NEXT MORNING, A "NEW" MIGUEL STANDS BEFORE THE DREADED **GATES OF DOOM**.



I SEEK **SANCTUARY** FROM MY SINS, ALLOW ME BUT A WORD WITH YOUR **SUPERIOR!**

HE IS ADMITTED TO THE TEMPLE AND LED THROUGH CORRIDORS RICH WITH ANCIENT ARTIFACTS...



BUT FATHER JOAQUIN I BEG OF YOU...

YOU ARE TOO **WORLDLY** MY SON! AND OUR ORDER IS ONLY OPEN UPON THE **DEATH** OF A BROTHER! YOU MAY **NOT** JOIN US.



A DEATH? WAIT--THE MAN I **KILLED**...

I HAD A **VISION**, OF A YOUNG MONK, WHOSE WHITE HOOD COVERED A **DEATH'S HEAD**! SURELY IT IS A SIGN?



YES, THERE HAS BEEN SUCH AN... ACCIDENT...

PERHAPS THE **ONE WHO KNOWS ALL** HAS CHOSEN YOU AS A REPLACEMENT!

... DEEP WITHIN THE **MOLDERING** MONASTERY, WAS A **MUSEUM**, WHERE THE **VICTORIOUS** BROTHERHOOD PRESERVED ITS TROPHIES OF A VANQUISHED **PAGANISM!**

ON THIS ALTAR THEY PLACED THE BLEEDING, STILL-BEATING HEARTS OF THE SACRIFICIAL VICTIMS --

AS AN OFFERING TO OUR **GODS!**



GOOD LORD!!

ONLY **WORTHLESS** CURIOS OF WOOD AND STONE!

YET THE **GOLD MUST** BE HERE... SOMEPLACE!



THINK WELL MY SON, BEFORE JOINING US... **FATHER ESTEBAN** COMMANDED THAT ONCE A MAN ENTER THE **BROTHERHOOD OF DOOM** HE SHALL NOT LEAVE US **ALIVE!**

NEVER HAD A MAN WILLINGLY **PLEADED**
FOR A MORE **PAINFUL** LIFE...



...NEVER HAD A MAN TOILED AS HARD
FOR A REWARD THAT SEEMINGLY
NEVER WOULD COME



... UNHHH... THE **GOLD!**
I **WILL** FIND THE **GOLD!**... NO
MATTER HOW LONG IT TAKES...
NO MATTER WHAT
I MUST DO!

AT EVENING PRAYERS...



SOON THEY
SHALL **KNEEL** BEFORE
ME... AND **BEG** FOR
MERCY!

YET HIS DAYS OF FALSE
PIETY GO UNREWARDED;
WITH THE WAXING OF THE
MOON, HE HEARS THE
SOFT SHUFFLE OF
SANDALS...



STILL THEY DO NOT
ENTRUST ME WITH THE
SECRET OF THEIR
MIDNIGHT **RITUALS!**

I CAN WAIT
NO LONGER!



FUTILE UNTIL THE EVE OF THE MOON'S FULLNESS...

WITH DAYBREAK, MIGUEL INTENSIFIES
HIS EFFORTS TO APPEAR A MARTYR
TO THEIR GOD!



... **GOLD!**
IT MUST BE **MINE!**
IT MUST...!

MY SON, YOUR
DEVOTION HAS EARNED
ITS **REWARD**-- TONIGHT
ALL THE **MYSTERIES** OF
OUR ORDER SHALL BE
REVEALED TO YOU!



AT LAST!

THAT NIGHT...

I AM A FOOL! OF
COURSE THE TREASURE
IS NOT IN THE MONASTERY.
-- IT IS *HERE* IN THE CITY
OF THE DEAD ONES!

THE PUZZLING
PROCESSION
FOLLOWS THE
ANCIENT JUNGLE
PATHWAY TO...

HERE A THOUSAND
AZTECS ONCE WORSHIPED
THE BLOOD THIRSTING GOD,
QUETZALCOTL.

ALMOST A NATURAL
CATHEDRAL, IS IT
NOT?

HERE I WILL
TRAIN MY
GUERRILLA
FORCES!

A CAVE,
CONCEALED BY A
BALANCED STONE SLAB.
THAT IS HOW THEY
VANISHED SO EASILY!

OVER 400
YEARS AGO, FATHER
ESTEBAN WAS TAKEN
BENEATH THIS ALTAR
BY THE HIGH
PRIESTS...

HE VOWED
ETERNAL PROTECTION
FOR THEIR TRUST...

SLOWLY MIGUEL SHUFFLES THROUGH THE MAZE OF CAVES-- FINALLY ENTERING THE DUSTY HALL OF ROYAL MUMMIES

KINGS WITH GOLDEN DEATH MASKS!

AND THE CLEVER INQUISITIONERS WHO TRIED TO CONDEMN ESTEBAN TO THE FLAMES. THEY DIED SLOWLY... HORRIBLY!!

AND THIS IS THE CHAMBER OF OFFERINGS!

BREAST PLATES OF GOLD! JADE! AND A THOUSAND GEMS!

WEALTH, POWER! YOU FOOLS... ENOUGH TO RULE THE WORLD!

I HAVE COME TO LEAD YOU!

POWER IS IN THE WAYS OF THE OLD ONES!

AS FOR YOU, MORTAL-- YOU ARE TO REPLACE THE BROTHER YOU CALLOUSLY KILLED...

A BROTHER DESTINED TO FEED THE GODS!

POOR MIGUEL... BEFORE WE CUT OUT TO MY NEXT PALPITATING PLOT, THE BROTHERHOOD SEEMS TO HAVE A VACANCY--ANY VOLUNTEERS? REMEMBER, THE ONLY PREREQUISITE FOR THE JOB IS A LOT OF HEART!

AARRGGGII!!



A MILLION CORPSE-EYES FASTEN UPON HIM. A WIND BLOWS UP, MOCKING HIM WITH MIDNIGHT CHILL. UNNUMBERED TOMBSTONES FACE HIM ACCUSINGLY. THIS IS A PLACE OF DEATH. WHAT RIGHT HAS HE TO BE HERE?



NEVER FELT SO ALONE. IT BEGINS NOW.

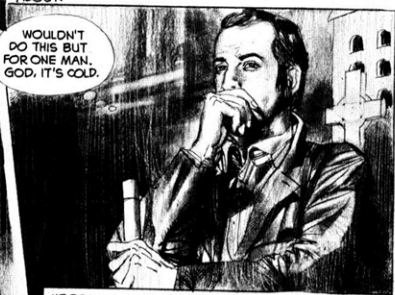
HE SENSES THE HORROR BEFORE SEEING IT, PASSING UNDER A GROUP OF GHOST-TREES. A SLAVERING, UNHOLY STALKER OF THE NIGHT.



...BY THE ALMIGHTY....!

PULLING THE COLLAR OF HIS COAT TIGHTER, TRASK INFILTRATES THE UNMOVING SEA OF ANCIENT DEATH, GLANCING CAUTIOUSLY ABOUT.

WOULDN'T DO THIS BUT FOR ONE MAN. GOD, IT'S COLD.



HE RECOGNIZES THE DISTORTED FEATURES OF GREY ARKHAM...SORCERER! AND THE BEAST READIES TO SPRING...



GRR-OWWW!

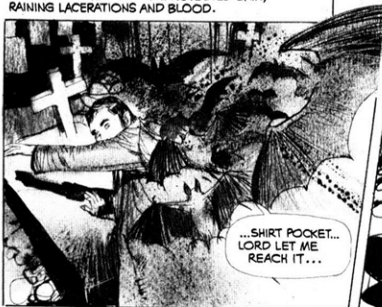
POW! POW! POW!

ANOTHER LEGEND
DISPROVED. YOU CAN
SLAY A WEREWOLF WITH
ORDINARY BULLETS. AT
LEAST ONE IN THE
IMAGE OF ITS CREATOR.
WHAT OTHER DEMONS
DID ARKHAM LEAVE
TO GUARD HIS
GRAVE?

ANCESTRAL FEARS OF THE DEAD HAUNT HIM,
SHRIEKING FROM GHOUL DARKNESS IGNORED BY THE
SCANT MOONLIGHT. HE GRIMLY AWAITS THE NEW
TERRORS HE IS SURE WILL COME.



HE GOES DOWN, HUDDLES AGAINST A TOMBSTONE.
FANGS VICIOUSLY BITE AND TEAR AT HIS COAT. CLAWS
RAKE ACROSS HAIR AND UNPROTECTED SKIN,
RAINING LACERATIONS AND BLOOD.



THE HORDE CONVERGES
QUICKLY TO BITE, SLASH...
ATTACK!



HE RIPS THE POCKET OPEN. THE LIGHTER FLARES
INTO LIFE AND TRASK THRUSTS IT AT THE NEAREST
VAMPIRE.



HE WRAPS COAT-TATTERS ROUND A BRANCH AND IGNITES IT. THE DEMONS BURN, AND SCREAM, AND FLY AWAY.



DAMN YOU!
DAMN YOU! GET
AWAY FROM
ME!

THE GHASTLY SCENE BRINGS HIM NEAR MADNESS.
TO COUNTER IT, HIS MIND DRIFTS BACK. A DAY AGO...

AS LONG AS ARKHAM'S
BODY REMAINS IN THE
CEMETERY **UNDISTURBED**,
OUR BURIAL PLACE IS
ACCURSED! NONE WHO LAY
THERE SHALL KNOW REST.
AND HIS POWER MAY WELL
EXTEND BEYOND THE
GRAVE!



... SACRILEGE! FOR
THE BODY OF GREY ARKHAM...
WARLOCK AND MURDERER...
TO BE BURIED IN THE TOWN
CEMETERY BY MISGUIDED
FOLLOWERS.

FATHER,
I'M JUST GLAD
HE *IS* BURIED. THAT
OLD MAN HELD AN
EVIL SPELL OVER
THIS TOWN.

WE ALL KNOW HE
HELD BLOODY, UNHOLY
RITUALS AT THAT OLD
HOUSE. MANY
PEOPLE "DISAPPEARED".
BUT DID THE SHERIFF DO
ANYTHING? HAH! SCARED
LIKE ALL THE REST.

YOU A MAN OF
THE CLOTH, MEAN
SOMEONE SHOULD
REMOVE OR DESTROY
IT? WHY SHOULD
ANYONE TRY TO TACKLE
SUCH A JOB?

THEY DO NOT NOTICE THE
WOMAN UNTIL SHE IS AMONG
THEM, SPEAKING IN A VOICE
HARSH AS THE BITING AUTUMN
WIND.



YOU KNOW
WHY, DON'T
YOU, JOSEPH
TRASK?

YOU KNOW
WHY.

HE STUMBLES IN DEATH-DARKNESS, TRYING TO RECALL THE DIRECTION OF HIS GOAL. STOPPING TO WIPE BLOOD FROM HIS EYES, HE SPIES IT AT LAST.



I KNOW WHY...
WHY, GOOD LORD...
THERE IT...

...SORCERER...
RITUALIST... SACRIFICIAL
MURDERER... DYING
FROM SOMETHING AS
MORTAL AS A HEART
ATTACK.

GOD GIVE
ME THE STRENGTH
TO DIG HIM UP.

FIERCELY, WITHOUT CEASING, HE **DIGS!**
HOURS FLOOD BY, UNTIL HE STOPS
TEN FEET DEEP!



WHY BURIED
SO DEEP, ARKHAM?
WANT TO BE CLOSER
TO HELL? GOT TO
OPEN THE COFFIN
NOW...

NO. NOT
WHEN I'M THIS
CLOSE.

ANOTHER JOINS THE FIRST. LOW THROATED
SNARLING ACCOMPANIES THEIR LEAP.



NO! NOOOO!!



FLAMING RED EYES MEET TRASK'S AS HE
GLANCES UP. THE RAT IS LARGE AND CAKED
WITH FILTH.

HE EMPTIES THE REVOLVER, USING THE SHOVEL AS A SHIELD FOR FACE AND THROAT, FOR WHICH THE PACK REPEATEDLY SPRINGS.



THE DIGGING INSTRUMENT BECOMES A SCYTHE, A PENDULUM OF HURLING BLOODY DEATH. SECTIONS OF GRAVE-WALL CRUMBLE UNDER THE FEROCIOUS ONSLAUGHT.



THE FOUL RODENTS ARE **EVERYWHERE**. TRASK PLUNGES THE TOOL DOWNWARDS... **SMASHES** THROUGH THE COFFIN LID OF BLACK LOCUST WOOD.



...AND THE RATS FLEE!



THE CORPSE LEERS UP AT HIM. ONLY A FEW DAYS BURIED, ITS OWN GODLESS EVIL HAS REDUCED IT TO A DECAYED, SICKENING HEAP, OOZING MAGGOTS AND WORMS AND STENCH.



HE IS REVULSED, CLOSE TO VOMITING, BLEEDING HEAVILY, STUNNED FROM SHOCK. YET HE STRUGGLES. PULLS THE VILE CADAVER FROM OUT THE GRAVE.

WON'T BE...
BEATEN NOW...
WON'T.

GAAA!

WON'T BE BEATEN...
FIGHT YOU...TILL
I DIE!

RREEEE!

THE POWER OF THE BEYOND, THE DAMNED, IT WORKS AGAIN NOW, MALIGNANTLY, UNSEEN...

ARKHAM UPRIGHTS HIMSELF ON BONY PUTRESCENT LEGS... MOVES TOWARD HIS PAIN-AGONISED VICTIM. INSANE SKELETAL LAUGHTER RISES FROM NOWHERE.

AA-HAH! HAH!
HAAH!

BLOOD FROM HIS CHEST SOAKS HIS SHIRT; RUNS DOWN HIS CLOTHES... HE IS HALF-DEAD. BUT HE RISES AND STRIKES! WEAKENED, ROTTEN BONE AND CARTILAGE PARTS UNDER HIS VIOLENT, DESPERATE BLOWS...

...UNTIL THE CORE OF EVIL, ARKHAM'S
UNDYING BRAIN, IS MASHED TO PULP!



CORPSE IS...
DESTROYED... CURSE
... LIFTED! NOW...
JUST ONE MORE
GOAL ... TO...
REACH.

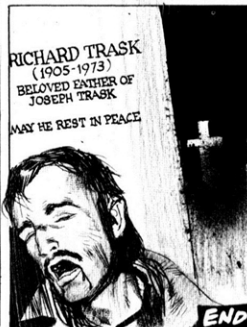
MINUTES ONLY REMAIN TO HIM. DEATH TEARS AND PULLS WITH MERCILESS FINGERS AT HIS WEARY, MUTILATED BODY, BUT
FIERCE DETERMINATION MAKES HIM CLAW THE GROUND AND CRAWL... CRAWL... UNTIL HIS GOAL IS ATTAINED.



YOU CAN...
REST IN PEACE
AGAIN. I DID IT FOR
YOU. I DIDN'T
FORGET... I
DIDN'T...



...NOW YOU
CAN REST...
REST IN PEACE
FOREVER...
DAD!



RICHARD TRASK
(1905-1973)
BELOVED FATHER OF
JOSEPH TRASK
MAY HE REST IN PEACE

END



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THE DARK BEAUTY LED THEM TO AN ANCIENT
MONASTERY...AND A FABULOUS TREASURE.
BUT WITHIN ITS WALLS LURKED...THE MONKS OF DEATH.

BLOOD BROTHERS

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark corset and a necklace, is crouching in a dark, gothic setting. Behind her is a large, detailed skull. In the foreground, there are smaller skulls and bones. The background is dark and atmospheric, with a greenish glow on the right side.

ONLY ONE
OF EIGHT
EXCITING
STORIES
AWAITING
YOU IN
THIS ISSUE.