



Keep Bcrrr

phase 1

EDITOR
Sal Quartuccio

**ASSOCIATE
EDITOR**
Doug Foley

PUBLISHER
John Carbonaro

**ASSOCIATE
PUBLISHER**
Jim Ciccolella

... EVEN I LIKE TO REST ONCE
IN A WHILE ...
GOOD LUCK, FELLA'S!



Copyright © 1971 Marvel Comics Group

PHASE ONE

Phase, an educational, illustrated story book, is published once in a blue moon from — Phase, 4314 Clarendon Road, Brooklyn, New York 11203.

The exorbitant price is 5 dollars per copy.

Entire contents Copyright © 1971 John Carbonaro. Reproduction or use in any manner of any material without written permission is prohibited.

Dealers: Please inquire for discounts on quantity orders.

COVER

This embodiment of elegance is the titanic effort of chivalrous Kenny Barr and his mystical magical time traveling machine to illustrate a first-hand account of King Arthur and *Phasers Assembled* battling the brutish beasties of Beelzebub at the Gory Gates of Hell!

Reports have been flowing in that the limb-ripping Ken Barr was last seen in the murky depths of his native land, Scotland, wrestling with the Loch Ness Monster!

Well, Ken, best of luck in whatever endeavors you *are* undertaking and special thanks to you for doing this panoramic painting especially for *Phase One*.

CONTENTS

Sword of Dragonus	5
story: Chuck Robinson * art: Frank Brunner	
Impact	13
story and art: Ernie Colon	
Coming of the Piranhas	16
story: Denny O'Neil * art: Steve Skeates	
Duel	21
story: Gerry Conway * art: Gray Morrow	
Soul Food	28
story: Phil Seuling * art: Chris Notarile	
Comes the Grey Dawn	31
story: Marv Wolfman * art: Rich Buckler	
Home	33
story and art: Jeff Jones	
Veteran	37
story: Kathy Barr * art: Ken Barr	
Hero	41
story and art: Bil Maher	
Sally's Song	51
story and art: Mike Kaluta	
Getting the Point	53
story and art: Kenneth Smith	
Comic Book Freak	63
story and art: Tom Sutton	
Yesterday's Rain	65
story and art: Steve Fritz	
Dragon Slayer	71
story: Len Wein * art: Tony De Zuniga	
A View from Without	73
story and art: Neal Adams	

ILLUSTRATIONS

Dan Adkins: 73
Murphy Anderson: 40
Billy Graham: 62, 82
Ken Kelly: 69
Dan Recchia: 60, 61
Syd Shores: 2
Bill Stillwell: 15, 70
Berni Wrightson: 4

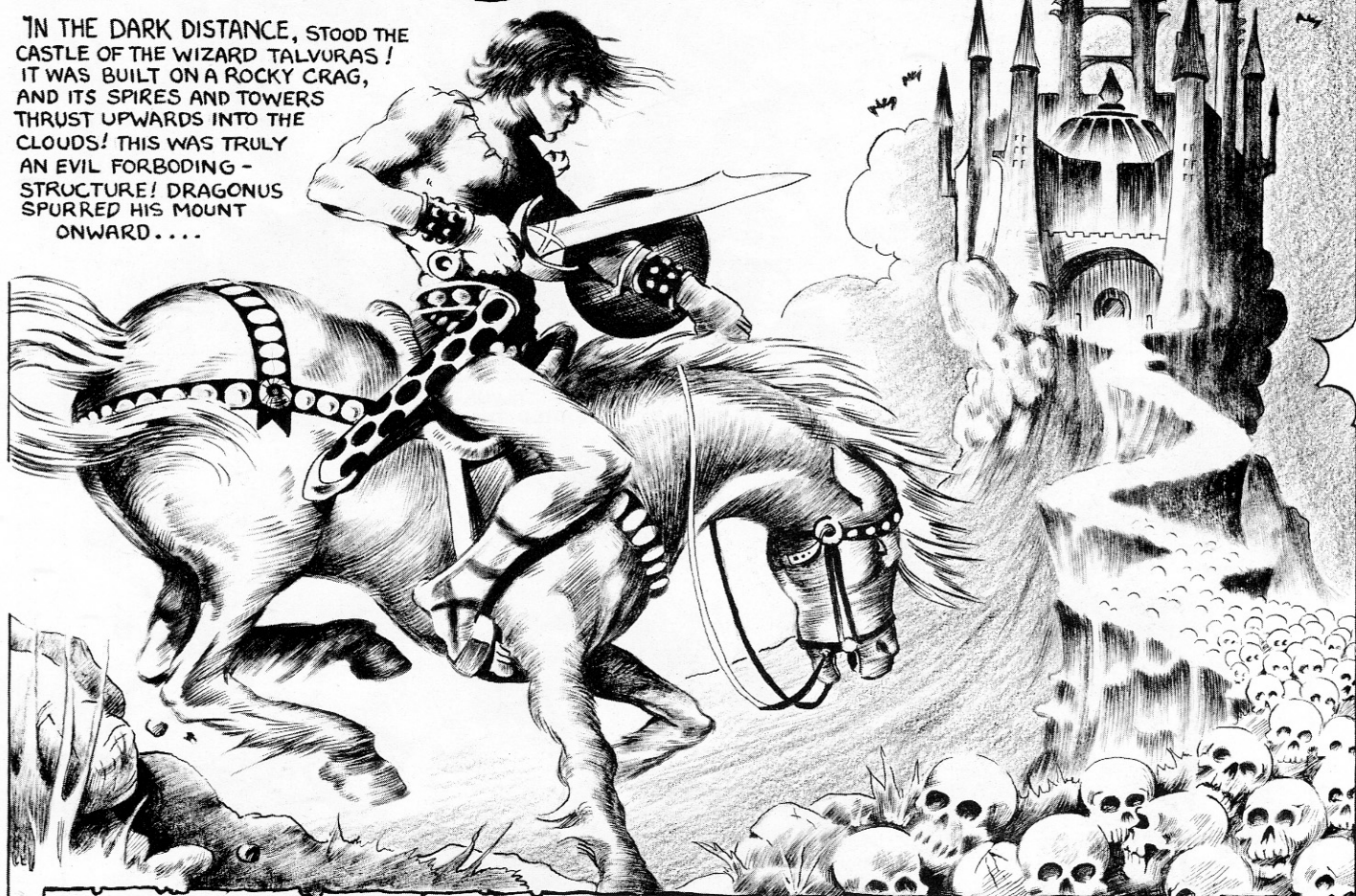


ON WITH THE SHOW!..



SWORD OF DRAGONUS

IN THE DARK DISTANCE, STOOD THE CASTLE OF THE WIZARD TALVURAS! IT WAS BUILT ON A ROCKY CRAG, AND ITS SPIRES AND TOWERS THRUST UPWARDS INTO THE CLOUDS! THIS WAS TRULY AN EVIL FORBODING-STRUCTURE! DRAGONUS SPURRED HIS MOUNT ONWARD....



A FEW DAYS EARLIER, DRAGONUS HAD BEEN IN THE CHAMBER OF BALTHUS, THE ALBINO PRINCE OF ONE OF THE STYGIAN COLONIES! THE PALE ONE, IT SEEMED HAD DESIRED A BEAUTIFUL CREATURE NAMED ZAREEN FOR HIS BRIDE! BALTHUS RELATED TO DRAGONUS HOW HE HAD SENT HIS MINIONS TO ABDUCT THIS MAIDEN.....



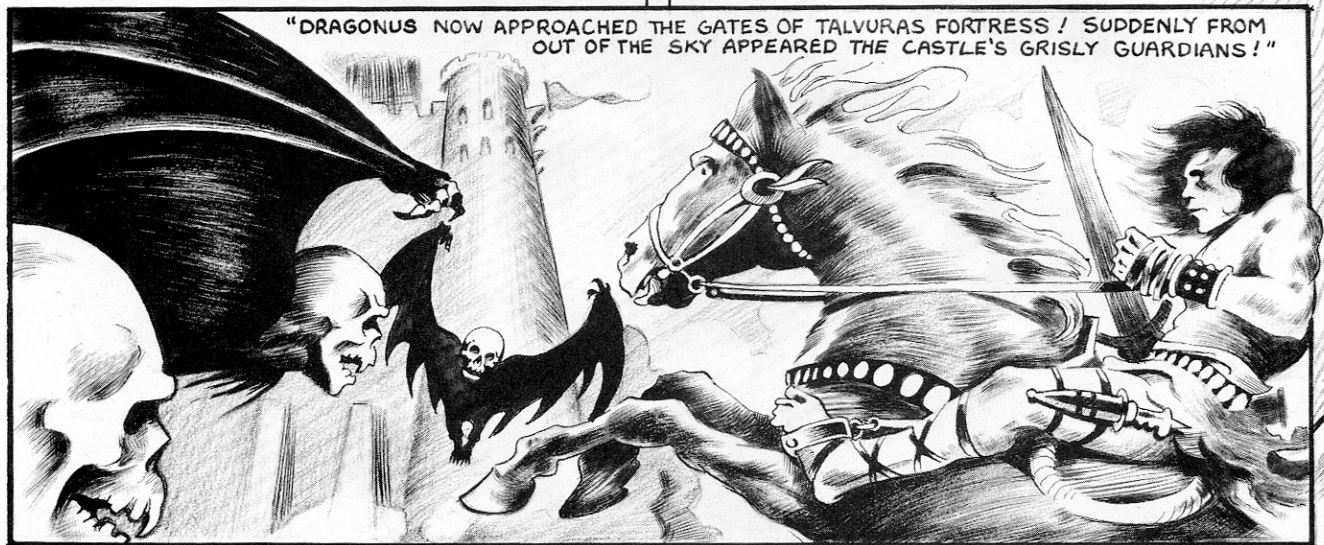
BRUNNER '70

© COPYRIGHT 1970 BY FRANK BRUNNER

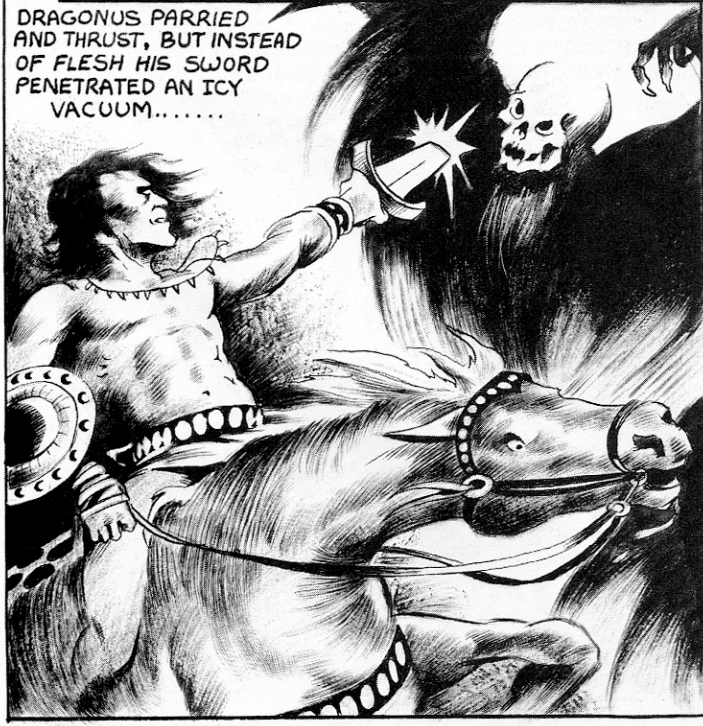
... "ONLY TO BE THWARTED! THE MAGICIAN TALVURAS HAD EYES FOR THE GIRL ALSO!, AND HAD HER SPIRITED AWAY FROM THE VERY CLUTCHES OF THE ALBINO'S SERVITORS!".....NOW BALTHUS WOULD ENLIST DRAGONUS TO GET HER BACK! IF DRAGONUS COULD RETRIEVE HER AND KILL TALVURAS IN THE PROCESS, HE WOULD BE REWARDED ANY OF THE ALBINO'S - COUNTLESS TREASURES!



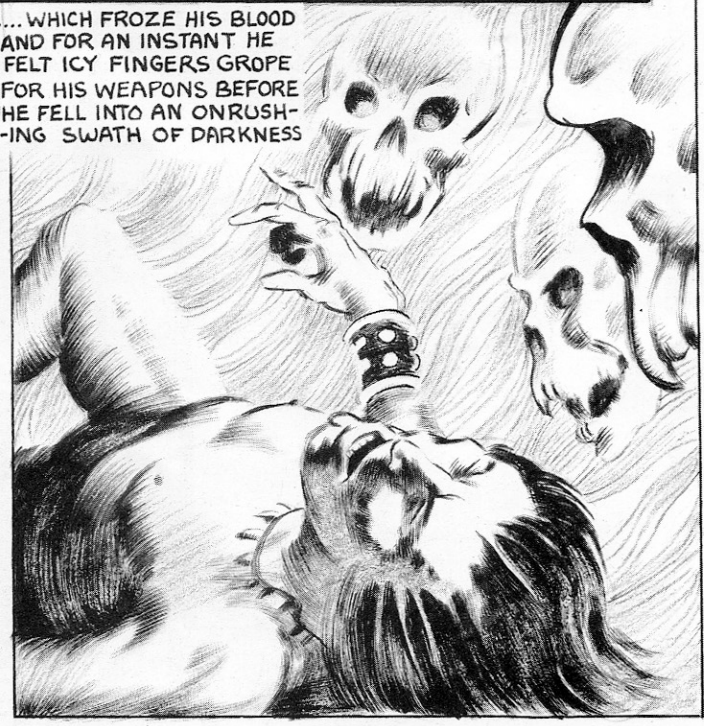
"DRAGONUS NOW APPROACHED THE GATES OF TALVURAS FORTRESS! SUDDENLY FROM OUT OF THE SKY APPEARED THE CASTLE'S GRISLY GUARDIANS!"



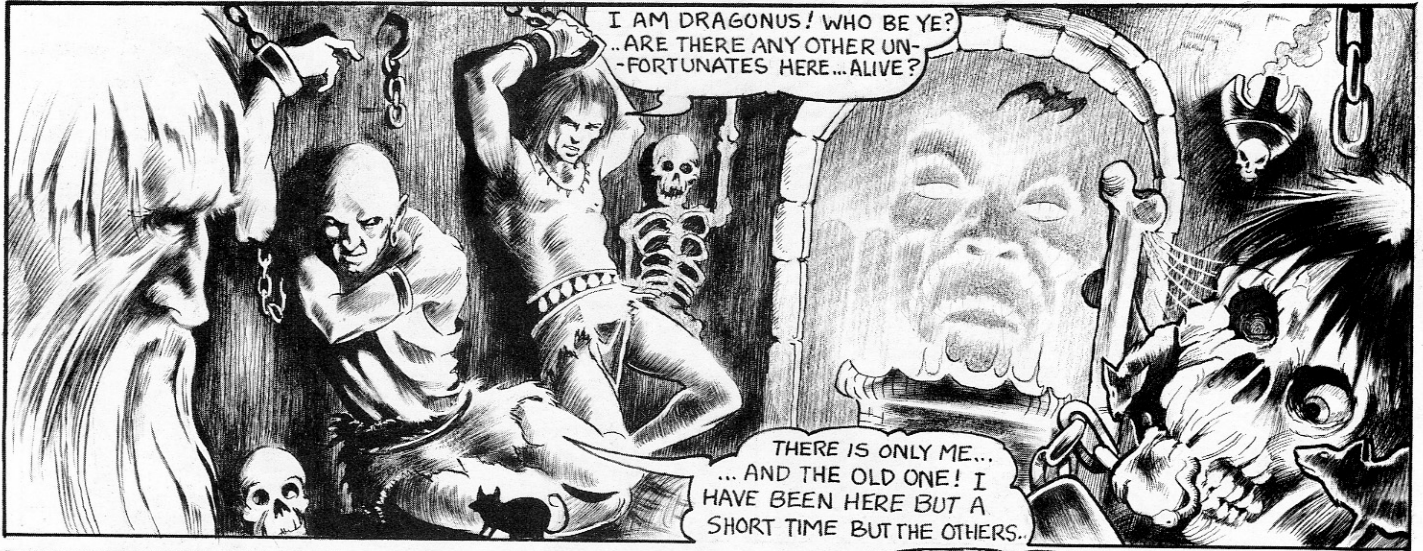
DRAGONUS PARRIED AND THRUST, BUT INSTEAD OF FLESH HIS SWORD PENETRATED AN ICY VACUUM.....



.... WHICH FROZE HIS BLOOD AND FOR AN INSTANT HE FELT ICY FINGERS GROPE FOR HIS WEAPONS BEFORE HE FELL INTO AN ONRUSHING SWATH OF DARKNESS

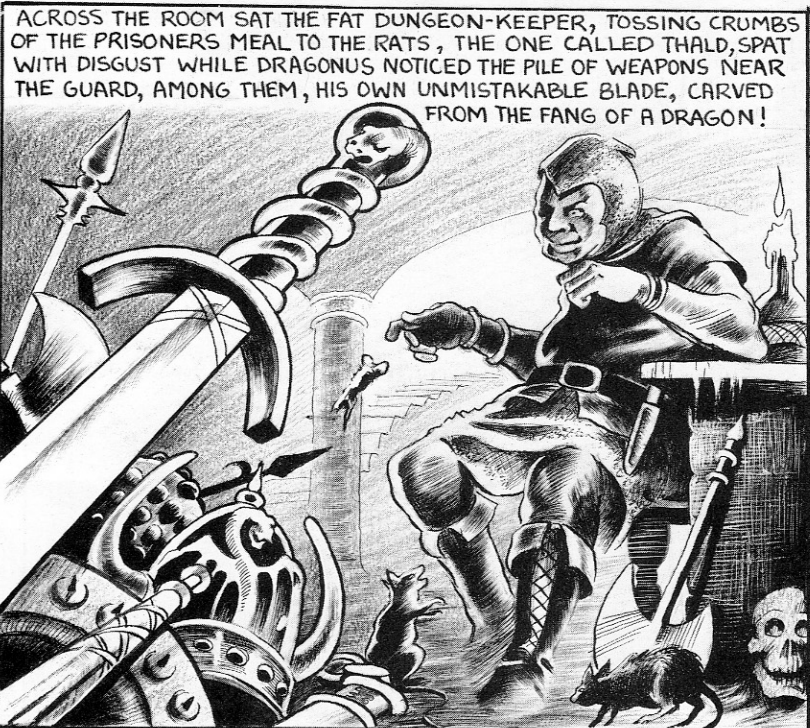


DAZEDLY, THE WARRIOR AWOKE, THE STENCH OF ROTTING FLESH ASSAILED HIS NOSTRILS, AND THE SIGHT OF HALF DECAYED BODIES HANGING IN SHACKLES OFFENDED HIS EYES! THIS WAS THE DUNGEON OF TALVURAS !!



I AM DRAGONUS! WHO BE YE?
..ARE THERE ANY OTHER UN-
-FORTUNATES HERE...ALIVE?

THERE IS ONLY ME...
... AND THE OLD ONE! I
HAVE BEEN HERE BUT A
SHORT TIME BUT THE OTHERS.



ACROSS THE ROOM SAT THE FAT DUNGEON-KEEPER, TOSSING CRUMBS OF THE PRISONERS MEAL TO THE RATS, THE ONE CALLED THALD, SPAT WITH DISGUST WHILE DRAGONUS NOTICED THE PILE OF WEAPONS NEAR THE GUARD, AMONG THEM, HIS OWN UNMISTAKABLE BLADE, CARVED FROM THE FANG OF A DRAGON!



FEAR NOT! I AM ON
A MISSION, AS SOON
AS TALVURAS' SENDS FOR
ME FOR QUESTIONING...

SEND FOR YOU? YOU FOOL !!
ONCE YOU ARE HERE!... YOU
ARE ONE OF THE DEAD !!!...
TALVURAS QUESTIONS NO ONE!



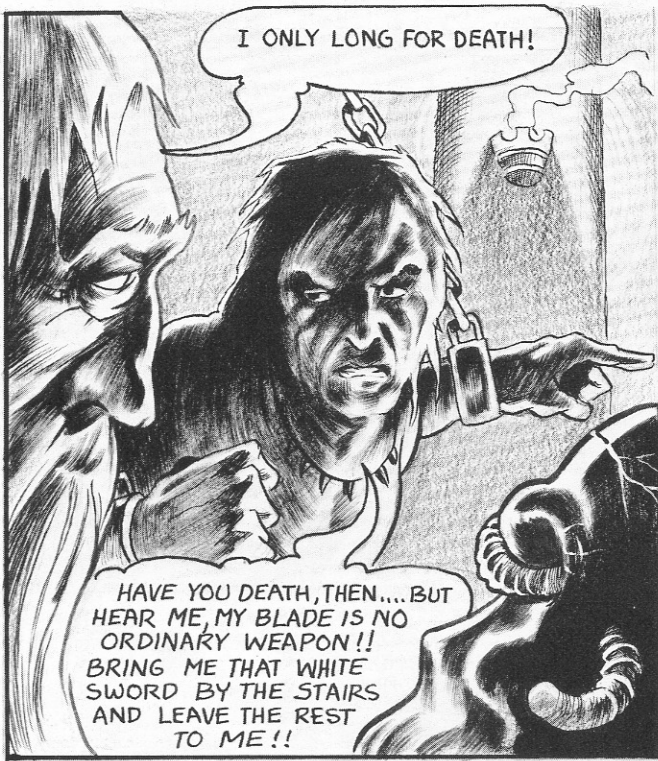
YOU ARE MERE WARRIORS!, AND WILL
ROT AND DIE !! LIKE ALL OUR FRIENDS
HERE! BUT I... I AM A SORCERER AND
WILL NOT AGE, I WILL STAY HERE FOR ALL
ETERNITY!, UNLESS TALVURAS GRANTS
ME VIOLENT DEATH!



YOU SAY YOU ARE A
SORCERER! CAN YOU
MUSTER UP ENOUGH WILL
TO FETCH MY SWORD?

IT IS USELESS, LONG AGO I TRIED TO
DESTROY TALVURAS! THAT IS WHY I AM
HERE, HE HAS REMOVED ALL MY POWERS
AND IT WOULD STRAIN ME GREATLY TO
LIFT AN OBJECT WITH WHAT LITTLE WILL
IS LEFT ME!

...BESIDES NO MERE
SWORD WILL CUT THESE
CHAINS! I HAVE TRIED IT!!



IN BUT A MOMENT, THE MIRACULOUS BLADE WAS IN THE OLD ONE'S GRASP, MUCH TO THE JAILKEEPERS SHOCK!



.... THE BLADE SLASHED THROUGH THALD'S CHAIN WITH A SINGLE EFFORTLESS STROKE! AND IN A SURGE OF GALVANIZED ACTION, THALD WAS UPON THE - FAT KEEPER!



HIS PLUMP FEATURES BLUDGEONED INTO A BLOODY PULP!, THE OBESE GUARD CRASHED TO THE FLOOR SCREAMING! THE HUGE RATS, DRAWN BY THE SCENT OF BLOOD SWARMED OVER THEIR FEEDER GREEDILY SAVORING THE LAST MEAL HE WOULD EVER OFFER THEM!!



DRAGONUS WAS ARMED ONCE MORE WITH HIS IN-DESTRUCTIBLE SHIELD OF DRAGON SCALES, AND HIS INVINCIBLE DRAGON BLADE! THALD HAD UNCOVERED A WAR AXE! BUT THE OLD ONE WAS ARMED ONLY WITH HIS MEAGER POWERS OF SORCERY LEFT HIM!, AND AN IRON RESOLVE THAT ANY FATE WAS BETTER THAN SPENDING ETERNITY IN HELL !!



FOOLS INDEED NOT TO EXPECT A TRAP! FROM THE TAPESTRY ARCHWAY TO THE SIDE OF THE CHAMBER, LUMBERED THE MOST FEARED OF ALL TALVURAS' DEMONS.... ..THE SOUL EATER!!



THEIR OWN FOOT FALLS ECHOING BEHIND THEM, THE TRIO CAME TO A CURTAINED ARCHWAY! DRAGONUS PARTED THE CURTAINS AND SWORE AS THEY FOUND THEMSELVES IN THE PRESENCE OF THE WICKED ONE!



THE DEMON HAD LOCKED ITS FANGS ON THE AGED EN-
CHANTER, AND ONLY ONE HOPE FOR HIM REMAINED
AND THAT WAS A MORE MERCIFUL DEATH!



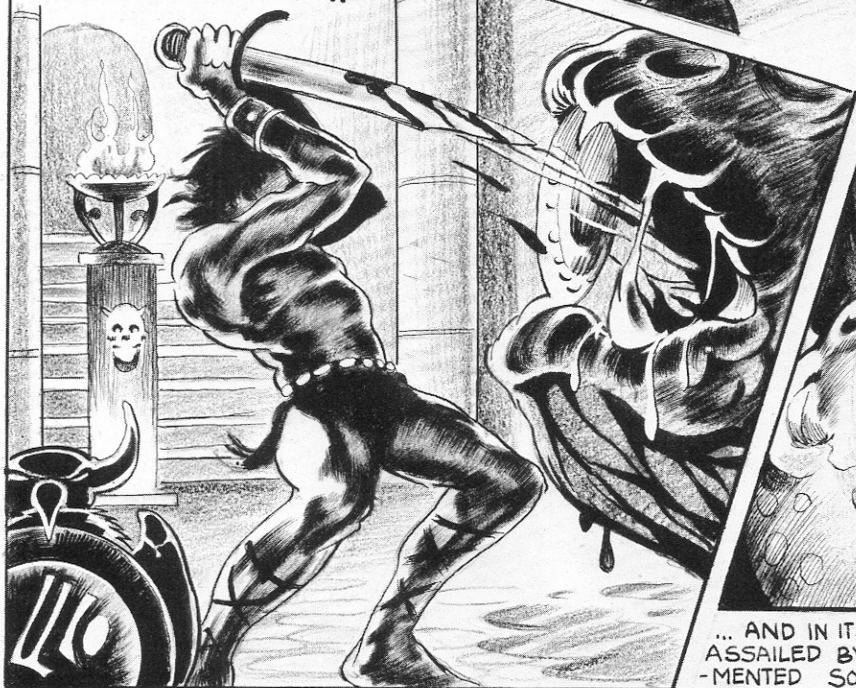
ROBBED OF ITS PREY,
THE BEAST TURNED ON
DRAGONUS!, FEARLESSLY
THE DRAGON WARRIOR
SURGED FOWARD!



...THE MONSTER IS TAKEN ABACK
BY DRAGONUS' SUDDEN
ONSLAUGHT! AND IN
THAT BRIEF -
MOMENT!....



WEDGING THE THING'S
MOUTH OPEN WITH HIS SHIELD,
THE WARRIOR SLASHED
AND STABBED INTO THE
DEPTHS OF THE MONSTEROUS
MAW, AGAIN AND AGAIN!!



... AND IN ITS DEATH-THROES, DRAGONUS' EARS WERE
ASSAILED BY THE DEMON WAILS OF A THOUSAND TOR-
MENTED SOULS SET FREE AT LONG LAST!.....

SHOCK AND FEAR HAD ETCHED ACROSS THE FEATURES OF TAL-VURAS, AS HE BEGAN A FORBIDDEN DEATH-CHANT THAT WOULD SUMMON HIS MASTER! NEVER HAD A MORTAL FOE SO DEFIED HIM, HE WAS PREPARED TO PAY ANY PRICE FOR HIS TWISTED ALL CONSUMING REVENGE!... FLAMES BELCHED FROM THE PIT, SMOKE BILLOWED UPWARDS AND THE DARK DEMON ROSE FROM THE DEEP!



OH LORD OF FLIES,
- GOD OF THE DEPTHS
.....I BESEECH
YOU!!...

WITH MORE COURAGE THAN WITS, THALD AIMED A TERRIFIC BLOW AT THE DEMON'S HEAVING CHEST AS IT TURNED!!



BUT TO THALD'S DISMAY
THE MADDENING HEAT GEN-
ERATED BY THE FIERY GOD
CAUSED HIS AXE TO BUCKLE
AND MELT BEFORE IT COULD
STRIKE.... AND THE
WARRIOR WAS METED
A SULTRY FATE!



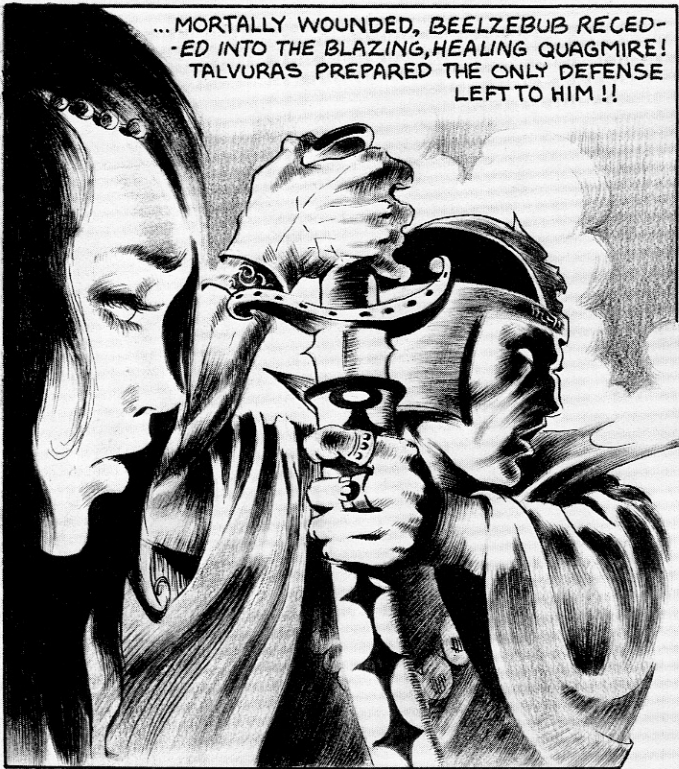
DODGING A FLAMING ARM, DRAGONUS
MOVED WITH CAT-LIKE QUICKNESS!,
SPURRED ON BY THE
SUDDEN LOSS OF HIS
COMPANIONS!



DRAGONUS CHARGED TO THE
VERY EDGE OF THE PIT, HIS
MIGHTY-THEWED ARM PRO-
PELLED THE BLADE WHICH
COULD WITHSTAND THE
VERY FIRES OF HELL, INTO
THE HEART OF THE DARK
DEMON!!.....



...MORTALLY WOUNDED, BEELZEBUB RECED-
ED INTO THE BLAZING, HEALING QUAGMIRE!
TALVURAS PREPARED THE ONLY DEFENSE
LEFT TO HIM !!



ARMED WITH AN UNFAMILIAR WEAPON!, TALVURAS CRINGED
LIKE A TRAPPED REPTILE!...

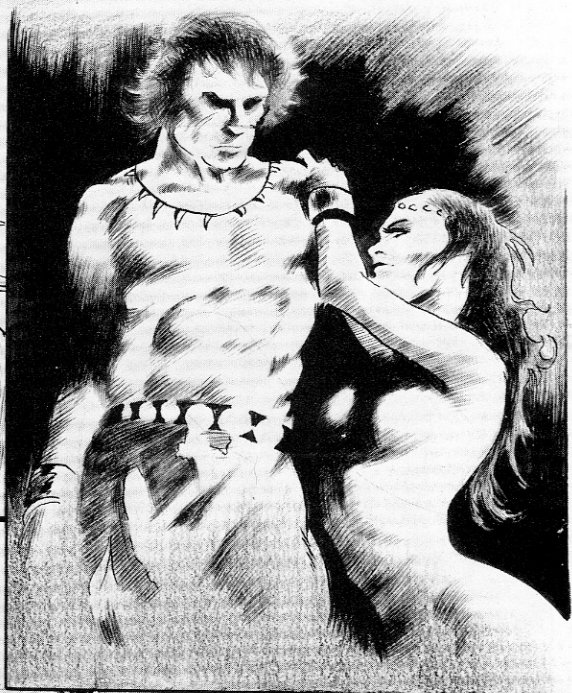


PREPARE TO DIE,
SORCEROUS DOG!

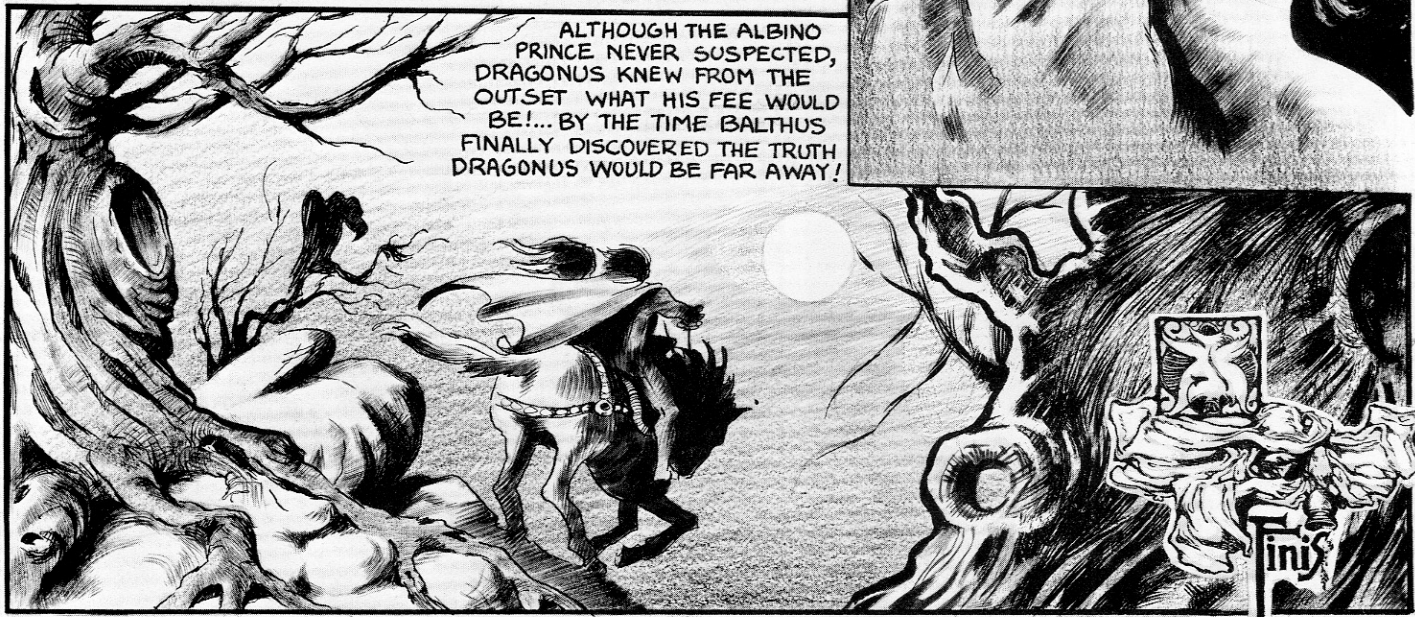
WARDING OFF A FEEBLE ATTEMPT AT SWORDPLAY, DRAGONUS METED
OUT THE WIZARDS OWN BRAND
OF JUSTICE!.....



.....AND CLAIMED HIS REWARD !!



ALTHOUGH THE ALBINO
PRINCE NEVER SUSPECTED,
DRAGONUS KNEW FROM THE
OUTSET WHAT HIS FEE WOULD
BE!... BY THE TIME BALTHUS
FINALLY DISCOVERED THE TRUTH
DRAGONUS WOULD BE FAR AWAY!

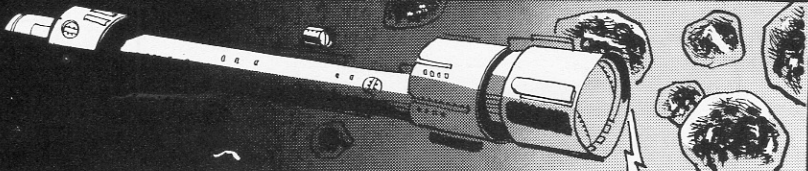


IMPACT

AH-ROGER, MISSION CONTROL... FINAL STAGE OPERATIVE, RETURNING NOW INTO THE INTREPID!

METEOR ENCOUNTER HEAVIER...

AH-THIS IS MISSION CONTROL... WELL DONE, INTREPID! BRING 'ER HOME, DANNY!



S-SOMETHING'S WRONG, CONTROL- METEORITE PATTERN VERY HEAVY AND THEY...THEY-

DANNY, THIS IS MITCH- WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S GOING ON?



THE METEORS! THEY'RE GIGANTIC! HOW CAN THEY... DWARF THE INTREPID?!



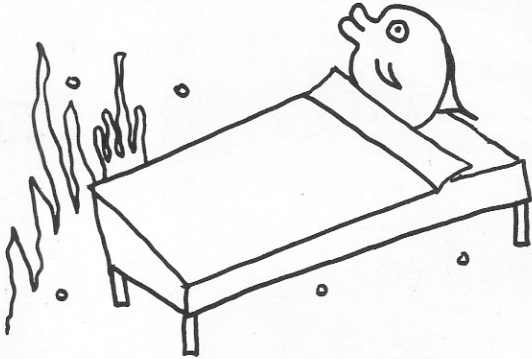




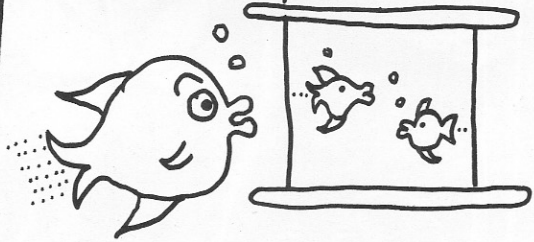
Stillwell

PROLOGUE:

As I awoke one morning from uneasy dreams, I found myself transformed in my bed into a gigantic fish



I ran...that is, I SWAM to my window and discovered that the entire CAMPUS of the university where I am a student had become a huge AQUARIUM. I was somewhat chagrined, believe you me...



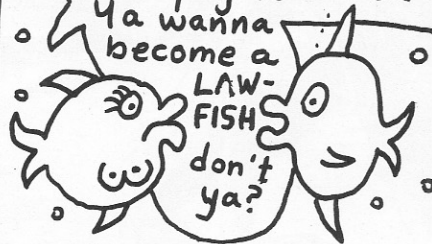
My room-mate had become a GRABFISH--

Lemme borra yer scale polish, will ya chum?--
Got me a wet date!
Gonna lay some EGGS
(glurble glurble)



Swimming outside, I met my GIRLFRIEND! She had become a NAGFISH!

Lissen sweetie, FORGET about studying seaweed arrangement!



Though her soft, undulating dorsal excited me as always, I finned away in HORROR!



THE COMING OF THE PIRANAS

by Denny
and
Steve

Nearby, I
came upon
a CHE FISH
addressing a school
of loyal
followers--

All power to
the SWIMMERS!

Let's burndown
the establishment!

Right on!

BURN--in an
AQUARIUM?

We'll
fake
it!

A couple of JockFish
were looking on
nictitatingly--

You an' me
gonna rip us
some of them
Red GILLS

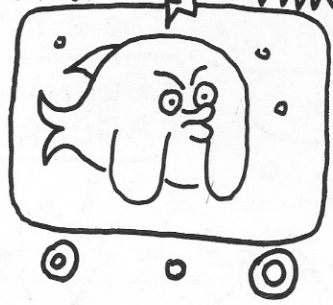
Yea... them's
our bait!

Within moments, the water
was in TURMOIL as the
dissident schools clashed!



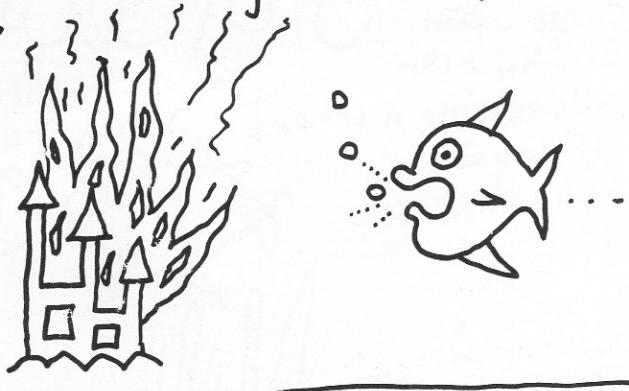
Within MINUTES, a blowfish was spouting on the tube...

These fish just move from one Aquarium to another and terrorize the schools! They're worse than the brownfins! They're the worst type we harbor!



That immediately sliced EVERYFISH'S file!

Paddling back, I discovered that you CAN burn things down underwater... (Amazing, I call it!)

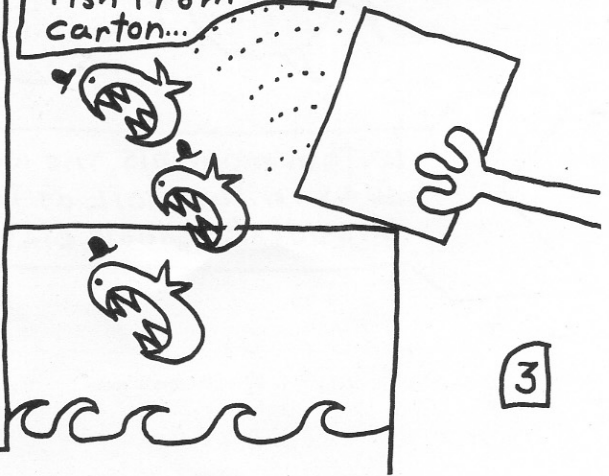
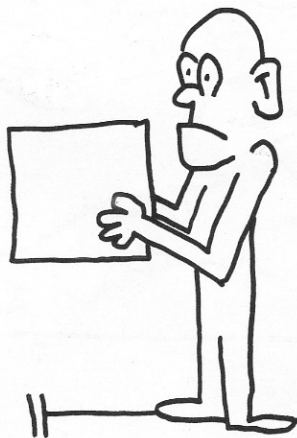
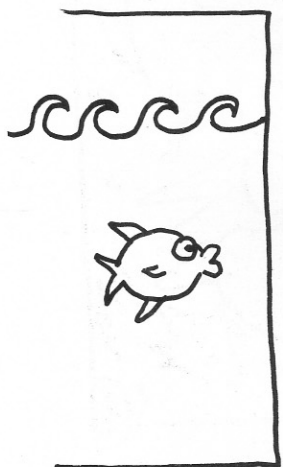


Well, I'll ADMIT it! I'm a CHICKEN fish. I swam the hell OUT of there, to the far glass wall...

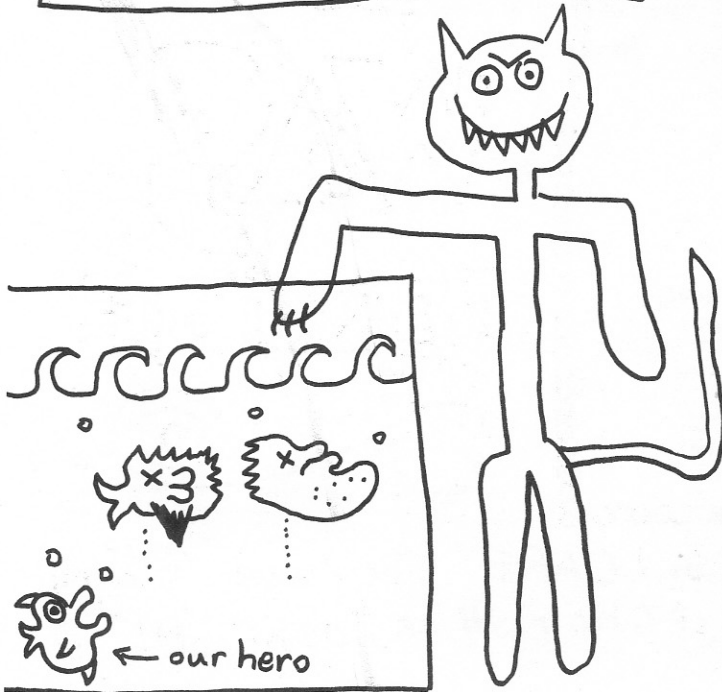


... and saw one of the KEEPERS with a cardboard carton in his chubby hands!

Glancing up an instant later, I observed him dumping a lot of very ODD fish from the carton...



Bloated and putrefying,
The bodies floated to the
surface, where a grinning
cat waited....



There was only one
thing to do! I
went to the
PIRANA
ACADEMY.....



...got my
teeth fanged

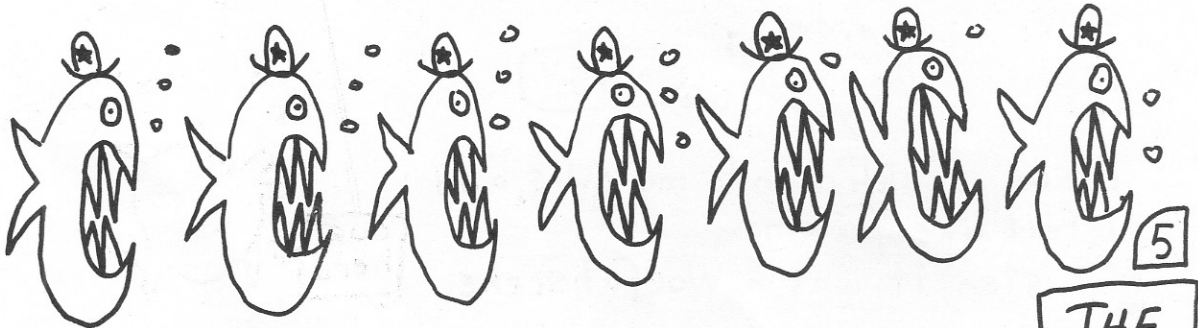


...got
outfitted



...and now I'm as mean and vicious as the REST.

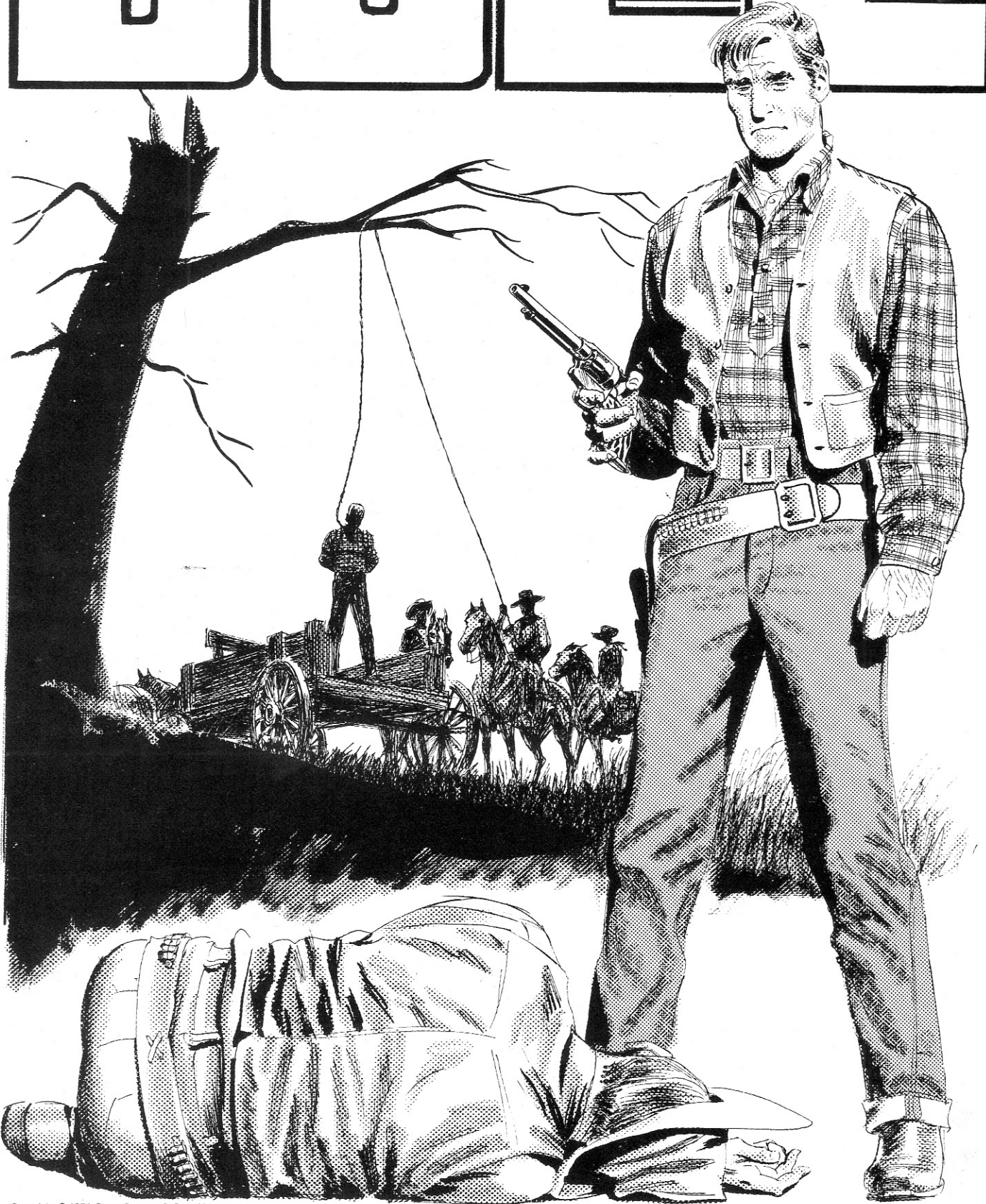
Listen, it's not exactly a HAPPY Aquarium -- but
it's sure as shit a SAFE one!



THE
END

DOUGLASS

STORY ~
GERARD
CONWAY
ART ~
GRAY
MORROW



Dawn was still a few minutes away; to the east, the sky seemed stained, running with cloud streams of purple and gold. There was a faint hint of moisture in the July air, and as the morning lengthened, that hint became a full threat: it would rain before noon. Jud smiled at that thought, smiled out through the bars of his dusty cell back of the saloon. Rain would turn the dirt streets of the town to mud, making the funeral planned for later in the day a miserable chore. *His* funeral, Jud reminded himself. It still seemed unreal, as though the trial and the judge's sentence had been given to someone else—not to him, not to Jud Kurri. Nervously, he ran the palm of his hand over the three-day stubble he'd accumulated in the court; somehow it slammed him back into the reality of the scene, feeling that beard. It was real, it was part of him. It was something he'd soon never feel again.

Behind him, the cell door grated, squealed open on rusted hinges. The bulky form of the balding deputy moved sluggishly into the cell, a meaty hand clutching at the worn Colt at his side. Spitting out a wad of spittle, the deputy eyed Jud, who hadn't turned from the window, hadn't moved a muscle. The deputy spat again, hacking roughly, and said, "Get that ass movin', Kurri. Folks ain't gonna wait all day for you to get yourself ready. Come on, boy," he said huskily, and drew the Colt, and waved it

in a gesture towards the door. The sheriff stood outside, the shotgun cradled in the crook of his arm, his soft blue eyes watching Kurri like a rattler staring down a range-hare. "Move, Jud," he said softly. Kurri turned to look at him, smiling easily.

"Sure, Sheriff. Can't keep the hangman waiting, can we now?" He shrugged, straightened his shoulders, walked past the deputy slowly, tucking the tail of his plaid work-shirt in, snugging it down and pulling his belt tight as he passed into the saloon.

The bartender looked away when Jud glanced at him.

"Still spikin' em, Jake?" Jud asked, grinning. The fat man grunted something, continued to swab out the shot glass he was holding. Jud paused by the bar, leaned over it. "Did a real fine job on that last one, boy," he said, "a real fine job on settin' me up, didn't you?" The fat man said nothing. Suddenly Jud's hand lashed out, slapping the shot glass away from the bar rag, clutching up a handful of the bartender's shirt. "*Didn't you?*"

The shotgun barrel rammed Jud's side and the sheriff's hand clamped on his shoulder, drawing him back.

"Now, Jud—that was all settled at the

trial."

"Bullshit," Jud said, tugging away. "Bullshit, Sheriff."

"There ain't no more time for talkin' none," the deputy snarled, palming Jud's back, sending him towards the door. "You's gonna hang, so shut up and get those legs walking. Sorry, Sheriff," he added, dipping his head at the older man. "He just gets me all-fired mad, what with all that crazy talk'a his. Accusin' me and Ted, why that's not rightly good at all."

"Shut up, Frank," said the sheriff tiredly. "Let's go, Kurri. Let's get it over with."

"Sure, Sheriff. Sure. Real fine day for it, isn't it?" Jud eased the swinging doors open, stood for a moment in the grayish sunlight, looking down the length of the street, towards the town square, the crowd of people, and the tall, twisted tree with the hangman's noose dangling loosely from a low branch, waiting for something to tighten its knot. "A real, real fine day."

* * *

The old man in the black suit couldn't meet his eyes; he just sat in a corner of Jud's cell, reading quietly from the prayer book set between his knees, pausing now and then to study a word he couldn't quite make out in the fading sunlight. Tomorrow I'm dead, Jud thought, and nobody believes me, and nobody cares. He watched the priest sullenly, determined not to speak. He set on his bunk at the other end of the cell, his legs drawn up and his arms crossed over his knees, chin on forearms, watching the priest, watching the old man read.

"You don't really give a whoppin' shit, do you, Father?"

The priest looked up, blinking. A ray of red from the sunset touched his glasses, split and prisms.

"Son?"

"You don't really give one wet shit what happens to me tomorrow. You don't care if what they say is even true. You just sit there with your head buried like a goddamned schoolgirl, and—" Jud broke off, made a pushing motion away from his chest with his hands. They were handcuffed.



...odd INDEED, with their gleaming teeth



and their expression of cold-blooded MALICE

IT WAS TERRIBLE

Those new fish simply didn't CARE! They were hungry for ANY sort of flesh, be it CHE FISH OR JOCKFISH!



Blood wash[ed] into my gills, and I felt like puking... Listen, it was a Woeful scene...



... woeful...

"Forget it, old man. Just keep readin' if it makes you happy." He closed his eyes, set his forehead on his arms, tried to drift off into the darkness.

"If you have something to say, son, please feel free to say it."

"Why bother? Trial's over. Nothing matters now."

"If it will give you peace, it matters."

Jud looked up, studied the old man. The shadows in the room had deepened quickly in the past few moments, but he could still make out the priest, his glasses glinting softly, his body hunched over slightly. He was staring at Jud, and that stare made Kurri feel uneasy, as though the meal he'd just eaten was backing up through the valves and passages of his stomach. Kurri swore to himself, shook his head.

"Ain't nothing'll give me peace but that coil of hemp, Father, and that's just gonna have to wait till tomorrow."

The priest must have noticed the tone, for he got to his feet, closing his book carefully, slipping it into the nook of his arm. He sighed, finally went to the cell door and called for the sheriff, not bothering to compound the futility of his visit with a half-hearted last blessing.

For a long time after the echo of the

closing cell door had silenced itself in his mind, Jud sat with his arms crossed over his legs, his head tucked down, his body straining with a tension that, as yet, had found no release.

The sound in the makeshift courtroom was deafening. Men were shouting, someone had started a fight in the rear of the room, and several women were crying out, their shrill voices adding a cut of hysteria to the general turmoil; Kurri sat with his hands pressed palm against ears, his eyes pressed tightly shut, his teeth clenched. He could feel the commotion, almost, vibrating up through the wood of the chair, up his butt and into his spine. It carried, almost echoing the rage within him. Kurri tried to calm himself, but found that he couldn't. He was breaking, all the fire that had been building these past two days drawing his gut as taut as a bowstring. His stomach churned, something went red just behind his eyes, and, scarcely aware he was moving, he suddenly threw himself backward, shrieking, kicking and slashing wildly with the cuffs still binding his hands. He felt something snap against the heel of his boot, something else go pulpy under his fist, someone grope for his collar, pulling at his shirt. Kurri slammed out blindly, screaming, tearing, kicking—until a shotgun stock took him across the back of the skull, flooring him. Before he lost consciousness, Kurri became vaguely aware of something wet running down the side of his face, dripping from a table



above him. It was beer. Something about beer in courtrooms nagged at him, faded, turned into a memory of a scene at the bar the courtroom had been the day before, faded again, dissolved, broke away into the emptiness of unconsciousness.

The shadows were moving around him again, breaking apart as shafts of moonlight filtered down through the roof and the slats of the attic. Kurri propped himself up with a hand, resting his weight on the back of the old wicker chair. One of the men in front of him went out of focus, the other crystallizing into a clear vision. It was the meaty one, the man called Frank; he was wavering, his right hand holding in the flow of blood running down the sleeve of his left arm. Kurri tried to cover both him and the other, felt himself stagger forward, steadied, blinking away the dust that'd gathered somehow in the corners of his eyes. His mouth tasted stale; he wondered where his drink had gone. It took a major effort to recollect, once more, that he'd left the bar half an hour before, was now standing in a low-ceilinged attic, facing off two men who'd befriended him on his return to the town. The closer one was moving his hand, Kurri could see, but he was moving it so *slowly*. Kurri tried to clear his head, brushing the back of his gun-hand across his forehead, letting the weight of the Colt draw it down over his eyes. Frank's partner was moving: he was going for his gun, as his friend Frank had done just the moment before. Kurri felt a weight drag at his side; then, as the bullet from Ted's gun tore through his vest and shirt, carving a slice from his side, the weight passed. He looked at his hand. His gun was firing, once, twice, a third time. Each shot echoed. There were many echoes. There was a scream, and the sound of a man falling. Jud wondered if *he* was the falling man, for suddenly his feet gave out, and he collapsed in a series of stumbling, jerking motions, feeling his knees strike the wood, then his elbows, and finally, painfully, his face. He blacked out. It was very cold.

* * *

His third drink. He felt it crawl up through his legs, up through the tensor muscles of his arms. It seemed to center in his stomach, just behind his belt. Jud un-notched the belt, readjusted it, glad with the full satisfaction of a man just well-fed. He smiled at the two men who'd settled themselves across from him. One had a tic that pulled his lower lip down



and away at random intervals; the other was steady-eyed, firm in a portly way. He'd introduced himself as Frank. Jud couldn't remember the other man's name.

"Just back, then?"

"Only an hour in, just over from the hotel."

"Sheet," said Frank's friend, scratching at the line of his jaw. "How much you make at it, all that time, hey? How much you figure you got?"

"Enough to keep me covered."

"Sheet," said the man with the tic, again. He shook his head, fingered his lip absently; the lip quivered and jumped, drawing down, jumping back. Jud watched it. He decided he didn't like the little man, or his friend, Frank. He was going to ask them to leave when the bartender came over and Frank ordered three more drinks.

"On me," he added, winking at Jud, grinning and reaching across to slap Kurri's shoulder. Jud shrugged, settled back in his chair to wait for the drink. One would be enough, out of politeness. He had to remember to be polite; there were a lot of things about associating with men again that he had to remember.

Three years. It'd been long, too long, and most of that time without another soul to talk to. Jud looked at the other two men again, this time less critically. He wanted to talk, after all, to brag a bit about the gold that he'd found. He supposed they weren't such bad customers, at that. Frank answered his slow smile with a reassuring spread of his own lips. "So tell me," Frank said good-naturedly, "all about how it is up there in the cold old north."

The sun was almost fully risen, now; it sat on the roofs of the small town, spreading out, turning from a brick red to a fiery gold. The storm clouds seemed to be drawing away, Jud saw, and this annoyed him slightly. He hitched at the belt of his pants, pulling them up again a bit, regretting once more that he hadn't resisted the urge to buy brand new store-clothes on his first day in town. Perhaps it all wouldn't have happened if he hadn't looked like such a duded-up hick. Perhaps. He brought his palm over his jaw again, feeling the growth of beard, letting it pull him back to the present. All those years in the wilderness, he'd never let himself go without a shave; he didn't know why, just a habit, he supposed. Yet three days in a cell had destroyed all those years. . . in more ways than just grooming. Jud blinked, looking up at the sky, deciding again that perhaps, just

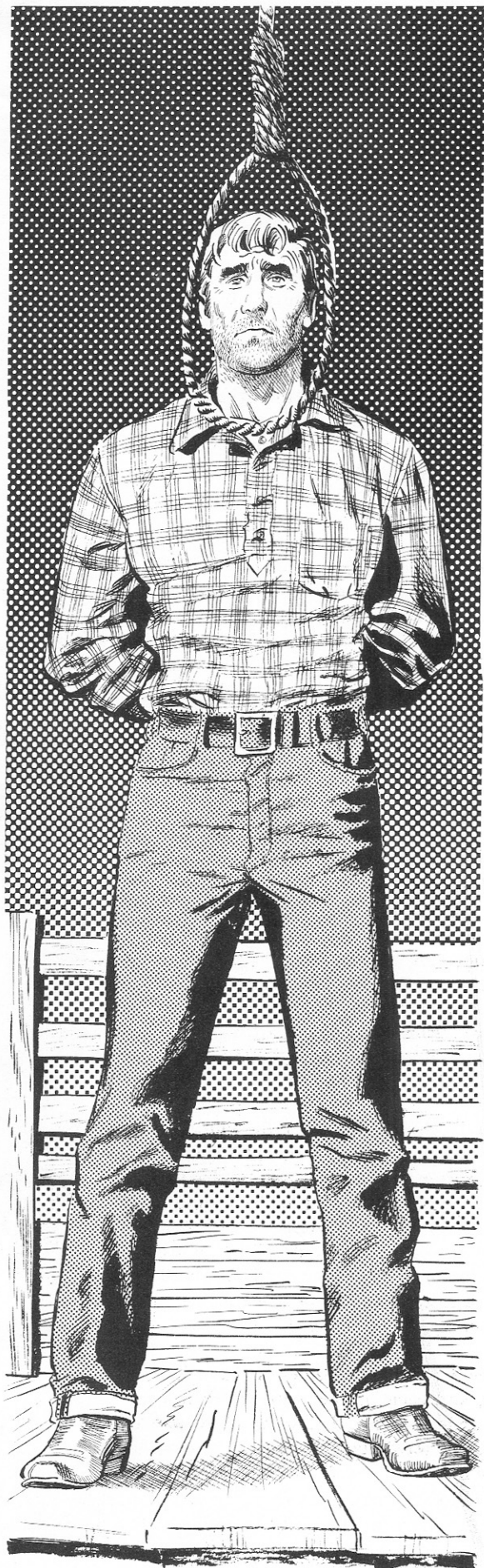
perhaps, there *would* be some rain.

There was a crowd gathered around the tree. Jud didn't recognize any of the faces. He wasn't particularly looking. He saw one set of familiar features, though; the pinched, drawn glare of Mrs. Leison, the wife of the man he'd killed. She made a movement towards him, but the young boy, a sullen-looking adolescent with straw-colored hair, held her back. Jud nodded at her, held up his manacled hands, gestured at the tree with a nod of his head. She looked away.

A thin man dressed in black that was somehow blacker than the clothes of the priest had been stood beside a farm wagon by the tree. He saw the sheriff's tall head over the heads of the rest of the crowd, moved quickly to the wagon's seat, clambering up with quick, spidery movements. Jud followed the sheriff's silent instructions, climbing up into the back of the wagon, standing straight, looking out over the crowd, looking but not looking. All he saw was the blur of the noose swinging a foot from his head. The deputy stayed by the foot of the tree, holding his Colt on Kurri while the sheriff got up beside him, unlocked the handcuffs, pulled Jud's hands around behind his back, did something that resulted in a muffled *click*. Jud felt a chill suddenly seed at the base of his spine, sending up stalks of ice through his back, buds sprouting at his shoulders and neck. He closed his eyes. He could feel the sheriff moving at his side, doing things with the noose, putting a hand on Jud's shoulder and guiding him over. Hemp touched Jud's cheek and it was pulled away. The noose settled over his shoulders, around his neck. Jud waited. The noose drew tight. He kept his eyes closed, sensed that the sheriff had left when the wagon floor moved up slightly against his feet. He felt completely dissociated from the world. He couldn't even get his hands up to feel the beard on his jaw, couldn't do even that. He waited, listening partly to the reading of the sentence, partly to the rustle of the tree's leaves overhead. The moisture was still in the air. Perhaps it would rain. Perhaps. . .

Someone called out. The wagon jolted under his feet, somewhere a horse neighed, snorting; then there was air around him, a momentary sensation of falling—

And something broke.



He struck the ground, felt his ankle give, the cuffs on his hands opening as he instinctively jerked his arms forward. Unlocked. There was a tremendous pressure around his throat. He was strangling, he knew, but that was somehow unimportant: He stood up, staggered a step, opened his eyes. The deputy was gaping at him, paralyzed with his Colt half-back into his holster. Jud, as though in a dream, saw his hand go out, striking Frank across the mouth, the other hand taking the gun from the meaty paw, aiming it. Fire thundered from its mouth. Smoke puffed out from Frank's chest, puffed out again from his neck as he fell away.

Jud turned, sought out the rotund figure of the bartender on the fringe of the staring crowd. The bloated red face was puckering in shock, and another pucker appeared beside the mouth as Jud fired a third time. This pucker bent inward, turned black; before it was fully visible, the fat man was whirling, falling away. Jud brought the gun up, aware again of the strain at his throat, felt himself stumble on his bad ankle, the gun going off into the ground in front of him. He pitched forward as the sheriff stepped up, fired both barrels into Jud's back. Everything inside Kurri seemed to explode out his chest; he sprawled, rolled over onto his side, saw the sheriff's dust-caked boot, the line of his leg, the sad, gentle smile on the old man's face, the sky overhead, filled with dark clouds, a touch of blue, and the beginning drizzle of a morning's washing rain.

His last thought was of the unlocked cuffs and the carefully frayed rope, his last emotion a sense of gratitude, his last sight a puddle of water, the dirt around it turning slowly into a mass of stubborn, unyielding mud. A trickle of wetness from his mouth mingled with that mud, turning it a shade darker towards black, and quietly, Jud Kurri died.

There were three funerals that afternoon, and each of them was slow; slow, slow and miserable. The worst of all was Jud's. The wagon bogged twice on its way to the hill.





**Don't be Phased Out
BUY
PHASE TWO**

You don't wanna be like that gent there who didn't order Phase 1, so order *now* to reserve your copy!

Phase Two, the thrilling sequel to the unprecedented *Phase One*, is *now* in the works; if you think Phase 1 was a blockbuster all we can say is "Ya' ain't seen nothin yet!"

You'll be shocked at the sights and stories told by an old Scotsman on his way to the lagoon: Swords, *Women*, Blood, *Females*, Fights, *Dames*, Castles, *Broads*, Barbarians, and of course, that old stand-by - *NAKED GIRLS!*

SEE! - Barbarians flinging their swords at nude women (the dopes)!

SEE! - Cheetah in a delirium chasing Jane, and catching her!

SEE! - The Wolfman get a crewcut!

and finally, *see* the old scotsman at the lagoon, being gulped down by the Loch Ness Monster!

But seriously folks, in addition to our Phase 1 staff (most of which will be back to tantalize you again), we've got some really great surprises lined up.

Unfortunately, we can't reveal them at this time; *we ain't no squealers!*

But this much we will tell you:

Phase 2 will cost 4 dollars.

It'll be 56 big pages.

It'll have full color covers.

To make up for the cut in pages, Phase will present a 4-page story *painted* by Ken Barr and *printed in full color!*

And, as always, Phase will continue to use lavish production techniques at no extra cost.

So why not invest 4 bucks for a worthy cause, and you'll see what the people in the comic art business *really* like to do! What the hell! You've already invested 5 bucks.

**Make checks
or money orders
payable to:**

Phase
4314 Clarendon Road
Brooklyn, New York
11203

You'll be glad you did!

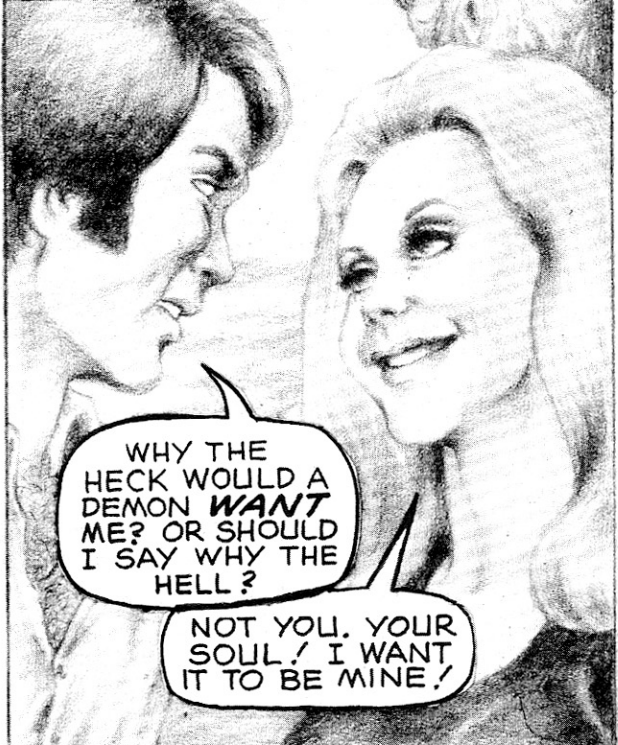
SOUL FOOD

CHRIS NOTARILE

I CALLED HER MY ANGEL, SHE GRINNED AND SAID, "NO, A DEVIL!" IT WAS A CONVERSATIONAL PIECE OF NONSENSE BETWEEN US IN THOSE SPRINGTIME MONTHS OF OUR ROMANCE -- WAS IT ONLY A YEAR AGO? "A DEMON," SHE SAID, "AND I'VE COME TO GET YOU!" IT WAS MY TURN TO GRIN.



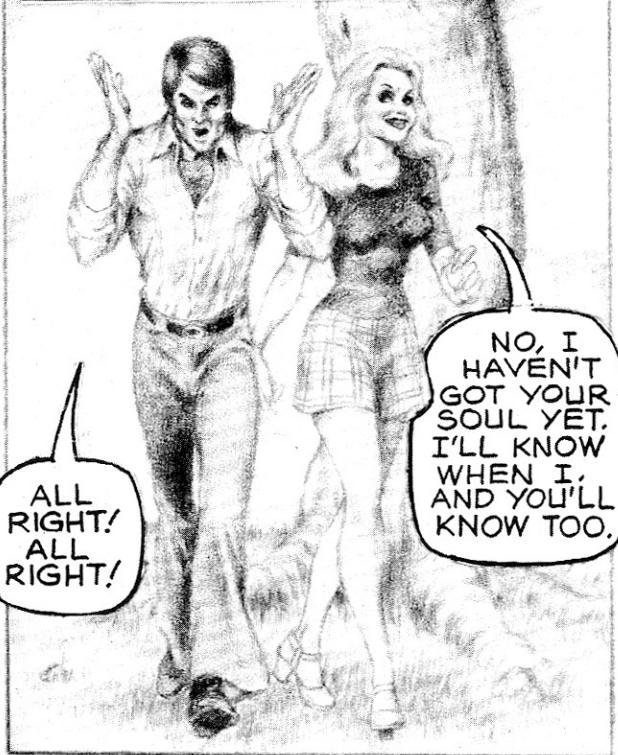
THE AIR WAS FRESH WITH NEW GREENERY AND MAY-TIME AND THE VERBAL GAMES WE PLAYED WERE FUN BECAUSE JUST BEING TOGETHER WAS FUN.



WHY THE HECK WOULD A DEMON WANT ME? OR SHOULD I SAY WHY THE HELL?

NOT YOU. YOUR SOUL! I WANT IT TO BE MINE!

SHE HAD IT, TOO. MY "SOUL" MY HEART, MY MIND -- I GAVE THEM WILLINGLY. SHE HAD THEM ALL. BUT SHE DIDN'T SEEM TO THINK SO.



ALL RIGHT!
ALL RIGHT!

NO, I HAVEN'T GOT YOUR SOUL YET. I'LL KNOW WHEN I, AND YOU'LL KNOW TOO.

I CAN'T TELL WHEN THE GAMES BEGAN TO BE BORING AND THEN IRRITATING. SOMEHOW AFTER THE CHARM DISAPPEARED AND I WONDERED HOW I'D BEEN SNARED. SHE DIDN'T AMUSE ME ANY MORE WITH HER "DEVIL" TALK.

HONEY, I'M HUNGRY!

WE ATE AN HOUR AGO!

I MEAN I WANT YOUR SOUL TO FEAST ON!

GO TO HELL!

MAYBE IT'S ME, MAYBE BEING FREE AND NOT TIED TO ANYONE MEANS TOO MUCH, BUT SOON I KNEW I HAD TO BE RID OF HER. I WOULD KILL HER...



WILL YOU CUT THAT CRAP? I DON'T WANT TO HEAR YOU!

"JUST AS GHOULS DEVOUR BODIES, SO DO THE FIENDS AND DEMONS OF HELL DEVOUR SOULS. THE FEAST TAKES ALL ETERNITY ONCE THE SOUL IS OBTAINED BY LEADING A MORTAL INTO DEEP EVIL."

I FOUND THE TIME, THE PLACE, AND THE COURAGE, ALL AT ONE TIME. WE WERE VACATIONING IN UPSTATE NEW YORK ON A PICNIC SPOT OVERLOOKING GRANITE-SIDED VALLEYS.

WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU! WILL YOU PLEASE OPEN YOUR MOUTH? I CAN'T **STAND** YOU ANY... UHH!

GO TO HELL!

