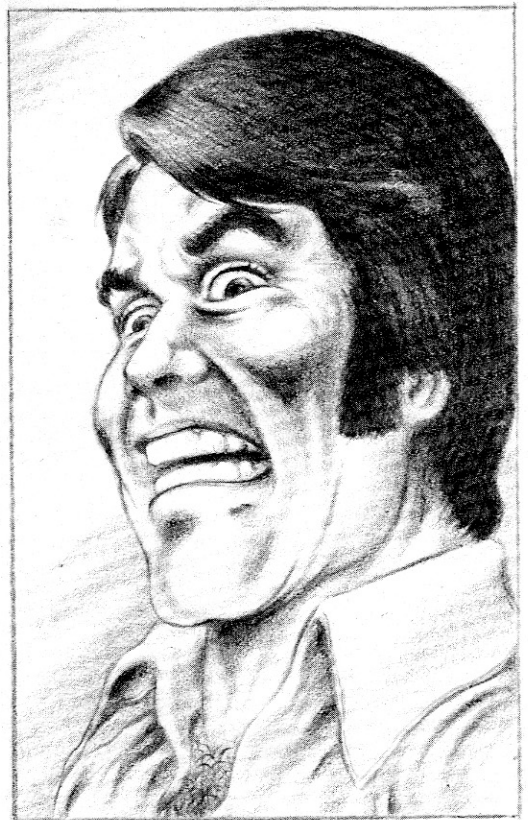




SHE WENT OVER THE EDGE TWO HUNDRED FEET TO THE BOTTOM. THERE WAS A WRENCH INSIDE ME AT WHAT I SAW! I DON'T DIG THAT EERIE, SUPER-NATURAL CRAP, BUT I WAS TRANSFIXED! THE LAST SIGHT I HAD OF HER FACE SHOWED ME NOT NOT **FEAR**, BUT **SATISFACTION!**



I SWEAR IT! AND SOMETHING—**SOMETHING**— WAS CLUTCHED IN HER HANDS, BLACK AND SHAPELESS AND **WRITHING**. ALTHOUGH SHE HAD BEEN HOLDING NOTHING AN INSTANT BEFORE! WHAT WAS IT? THAT "WRENCH" INSIDE ME—AND THE EMPTY FEELING THERE NOW—CRIED OUT! **WHAT WAS IT?**

END

COMES THE GRAY DAWN!


STORY: MARV WOLFMAN

ARTWORK: RICH
BUCKLER




"WOEFUL MORNING
YOU CRY, BLEAKNESS
TO MY SOUL."

"MY LIFE LOVE AND I
ARE GONE, AND
AGAIN WILL COME THE
SCAVENGERS IN THEIR
DUSK BORNE RAIDING
PARTY..."



"WHY DID YOU GO,
MY LIFE-LOVE?
ONCE WE WERE TWO..."




"...AND NOW I AM
ALONE. ONCE WE
HAD HAPPINESS
TOGETHER, AND
NOW ONLY
DISPAIR."



"WE
WERE
EACH
ALONE..."

"...THE TWO OF
US SO DIFFERENT...
CAUGHT HERE
AND FORCED TO
REMAIN APART..."



"... FROM
OTHERS OF
OUR KINDS,
BUT WE
FOUND
EACH
OTHER."

"HOW DIFFERENT WE
FIRST WERE, AND HOW
MUCH THE SAME WE
SOON BECAME."

"BUT THE SCAVENGER'S
CAME AND RIPPED A
HOLE IN OUR HAPPINESS!"



"THEY LEFT US ALONE, MY LIFE-LOVE AND I--"

"OH, HOW I TRIED TO STOP THEM, BUT THEY WERE MANY, AND I WAS WEAK."

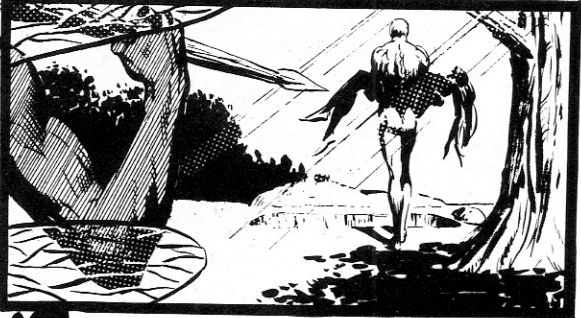
"THEY CAME AND MY LIFE LOVE FELL, AND FEARS CAME RAINING FROM EILLET'S."

"ALONE FOR ME TO BURY HER."



"OH, THE SUN WAS SO STRONG THAT DAY, BUT I WORKED UNTIL I NEARLY DROPPED."

"AND I FOUGHT LIKE ONE WHO WAS MAD, AND I DREW BLOOD ON THIS PANET SO ALIEN TO MY OWN!"



"STRANDED HERE, I LOVED AND LOST,"



"BUT I HAD MY REVENGE AND KILLED THEM ALL THOSE SCAVENGERS OF HELL. I FOUGHT AND THOUGHT I WON, BUT ONE OTHER REMAINED--"

"...FOR THEY CAME TO FIGHT ONCE MORE, BUT THIS TIME I FOUGHT AS IF I WERE A KING."

"BUT STILL MY LIFE-LOVE COULD NOT REST IN PEACE,"

"--AND SLIT ME THROUGH MY LIFE COVERING."

"WE ARE NO LONGER, MY LIFE-LOVE AND I, BUT PART OF US REMAINS ALIVE...FREE TO ROAM THE WILDS,"



"BUT I DID NOT CRY OUT FOR MY LOVE WAS BEFORE ME."



"...TILL IT, TOO, SHALL FIND, ITS LOVE,"



"AND UNTIL IT FORGETS THE SORROW OF ITS BIRTH,"

HOME

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IT WAS LIKE NOTHING ELSE. TWO MEN GOING HOME AFTER 75,000 YEARS; BACK TO THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE HUMAN RACE. AND ON EARTH THEY WATCHED AND LISTENED. . .

THE NERVE LINK ENABLED THOSE BACK ON EARTH TO SEE AND TO HEAR WITH THE EYES AND EARS OF THE EXPLORERS. WE HAD KNOWN FOR A LONG TIME THAT SIRIUS WAS THE ORIGIN PLACE OF THE HUMAN RACE. WE HAD LEARNED ABOUT THE SEEDERS FROM RELICS FOUND IN THE SOLAR SYSTEM.

AND AT LEAST THREE-QUARTERS OF IT MUST HAVE BEEN SHEARED AWAY BY THE EXPLOSION.



MOTHER . . .

THAT'S GODDAM BIG.



WE HAD KNOWN THAT THE STAR COMPANION TO **SIRIUS** HAD RELATIVELY EARLY IN THE LIFE OF THE GALAXY PASSED **CHANDRASEKHAR'S LIMIT** AND BLOWN INTO A TYPE II SUPERNOVA COMPLETELY VAPORIZING THE ENTIRE SYSTEM. WE SUPPOSE THEY HAD FORSEEN THIS AND SEEDED THE NEARBY STARS. IT WASN'T UNTIL WE DISCOVERED THE PRINCIPLE OF THE **REACTION MULTIPLE** FROM A RELIC SHIP IN THE RINGS OF **SATURN** THAT WE COULD REACH OUT TO **SIRIUS** AND RETURN HOME.



THINK OF IT, TWO SUNRISSES AND TWO SUNSETS, TWO SHADOWS-AND THE ECLIPSING OF TWO SUNS.

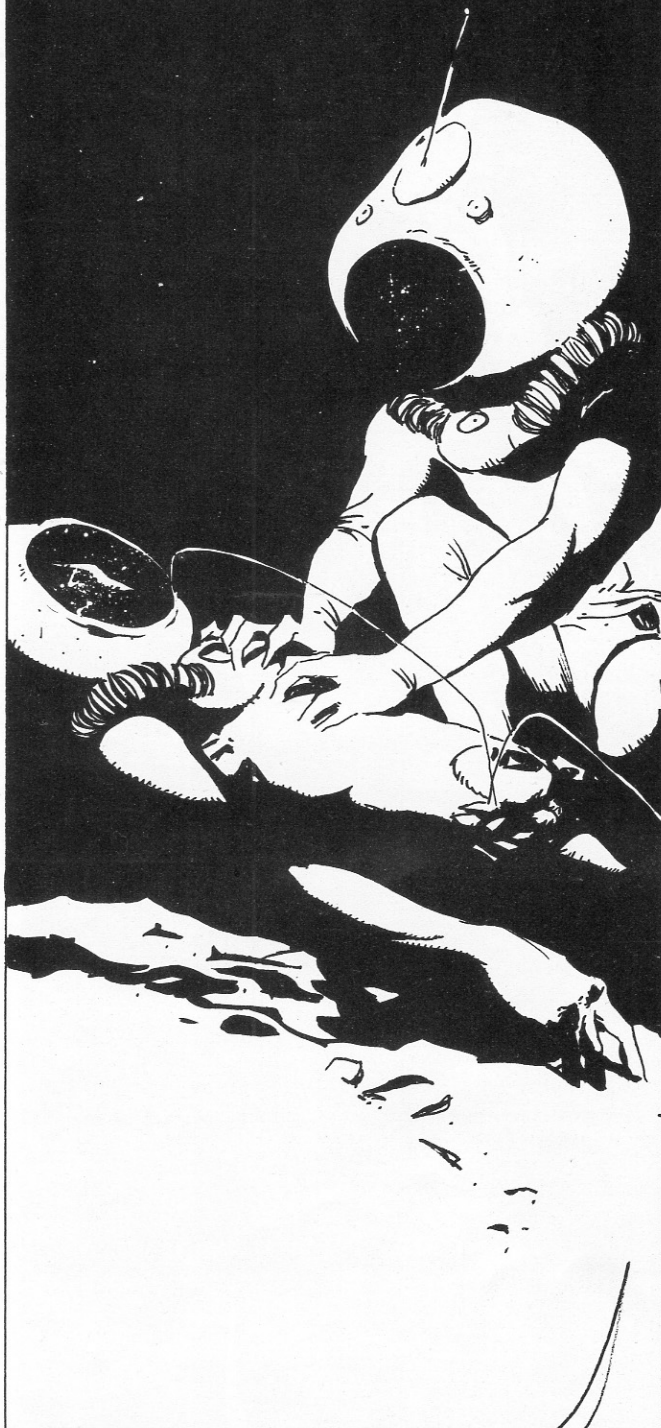
THIS WAS NOT AN EXPEDITION TO DISCOVER ANYTHING. IT WAS JUST AN EXPEDITION THAT HAD TO BE MADE. SO IT WAS. AND SOMETHING HAD TO BE LEFT BEHIND. SO IT WAS. A TRANSMITTER TO LISTEN, AND TO TRANSMIT. BUT GOD ONLY KNOWS WHAT FOR. IT JUST HAD TO BE DONE.

AND THEN RELATIVE MOTION AND COINCIDENCE PLAYED AN UNLUCKY MOVE AND A TINY METEOR RIPPED THROUGH THE TRANSMITTER AND THE LEG OF A SUIT.

I...UH...



THE TRANSMITTER . . . SMASHED.
I . . . I . . .



NEVER MIND THAT. I'VE GOT TO GET YOU
BACK TO THE SHIP.

NO, THERE'S NO TIME. THE TEAR IS TOO
LARGE FOR THE AUTO SEAL TO HANDLE.
MY AIR IS ALMOST GONE . . . LEG FROZEN.
PROP . . . PROP ME SO I FACE THE RISING
SUNS . . . I WILL . . . BE THE . . . NEW
TRANSMITTER. . . .



ICICLES CREEP LIKE SPLINTERS UP THE
WARM FLESH —FREEZING. THE AIR: GONE.
HIS BODY PRESERVED NOW FOREVER. HIS
UNSEEING EYES STILL ORGANIC CAMERAS —
AND HIS EARS PERFECT MICROPHONES.



ON THE SINGLE PIECE OF DEBRIS LEFT
CIRCLING THE FIRST PLANET THERE IS A
PIECE OF EQUIPMENT, A VERY SOPHISTICATED
MACHINE WITH NO MOVING PARTS, LISTENING,
STARING ICILY TOWARD THE PLANET AND
THE DOUBLE STAR OF HOME WHICH RISES
ONCE AGAIN FOR MAN .



IT'S GOING TO BE A LONG TRIP HOME.



VETERAN

"**IT'S OVER- I'M HEADING HOME!** AFTER THE HELL OF 'NAM, IT'LL BE SWEET HEAVEN. GOD-NO MORE NIGHTS IN A STINKING RICE PADDY WAITING TO GET YOUR HEAD BLOWN OFF! IT'S A **HOPELESS** WAR, BUT AT LEAST I HELPED A FEW GUYS LIVE THROUGH IT..."



ILLUSTRATED BY
KEN BARR
STORY BY
KATHY BARR

"**PINNED DOWN!** THOSE DAMN ROCKETS LIT US UP LIKE SPOT-LIGHTS. MY BUDDIES... DYING... AND WE COULDN'T EVEN GET THEM OUT... AND SNIPERS... PICKING US OFF LIKE PIGEONS!"

"THOSE POOR SLOBS SCARED OUT OF THEIR MINDS- BUT THE CHOPPER COULDN'T HOLD ANY MORE..."

"JESUS- IT WAS TOUGH TRYING TO GET TO THE RIVER. WE HAD TO GET RID OF THE SNIPERS FIRST AND A LOTTA GUYS WERE BADLY HURT. I FIGURED WE COULD HIDE ALONG THE BANK TILL IT WAS LIGHT ENOUGH TO SEE. WE COULD FOLLOW THE RIVER TILL WE HIT OUR LINES..."



HEAD FOR COVER!
WE CAN'T DO ANYMORE NOW!
WE'LL HAVE TO MAKE IT THROUGH TILL MORNING!



"I WAS **SCARED**—
BUT AT LEAST I
WASN'T HURT LIKE
MOST OF THE GUYS.
WITH THE LIEUTENANT
DEAD, I FIGURED I'D
HAFTA DO WHAT I
COULD TO GET US
OUT OF THERE..."

DAWN—BRINGS A HORRIBLE REVELATION...

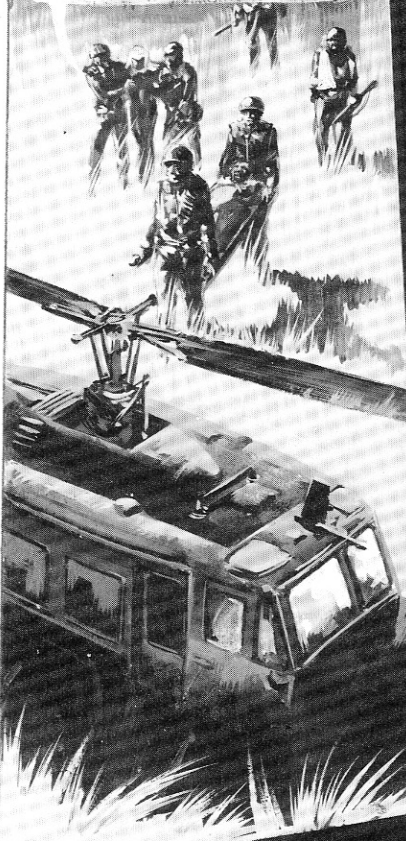
"THEY WERE ONLY A FEW—THEY MUST'VE
LOST SOME MEN. IF I COULD SLIP OUT
THERE BEFORE IT GETS TOO LIGHT, I
COULD LOB A GRENADE ON DECK..."

"THERE THEY WERE—JUST WAITING FOR
US. IF ANYBODY BREATHED HARD,
WE'D ALL BE DEAD. IT WAS GETTING
LIGHTER EVERY MINUTE. THEN I NOT-
ICED SOMETHING..."

OKAY,
BABY. DO
YOUR JOB.
JUST GIVE
ME TIME
TO SCRAM!

AAAAGHH!

WE SAW THE EXPLOSION-
FIGURED YOU GUYS WERE
AROUND HERE SOMEWHERE.
WE'LL DO WHAT WE CAN
FOR YOUR FRIEND. HE'S
HURT PRETTY BAD, THOUGH.



WE'RE
PROUD OF
YOU,
SON.

THERE'S
A MEDAL IN THIS
FOR YOU M'BOY

WE'LL
PULL YOU
THROUGH
SON

CLAY'S
FALLS!

YOU'RE
HOME,
HERO!

ROCKE

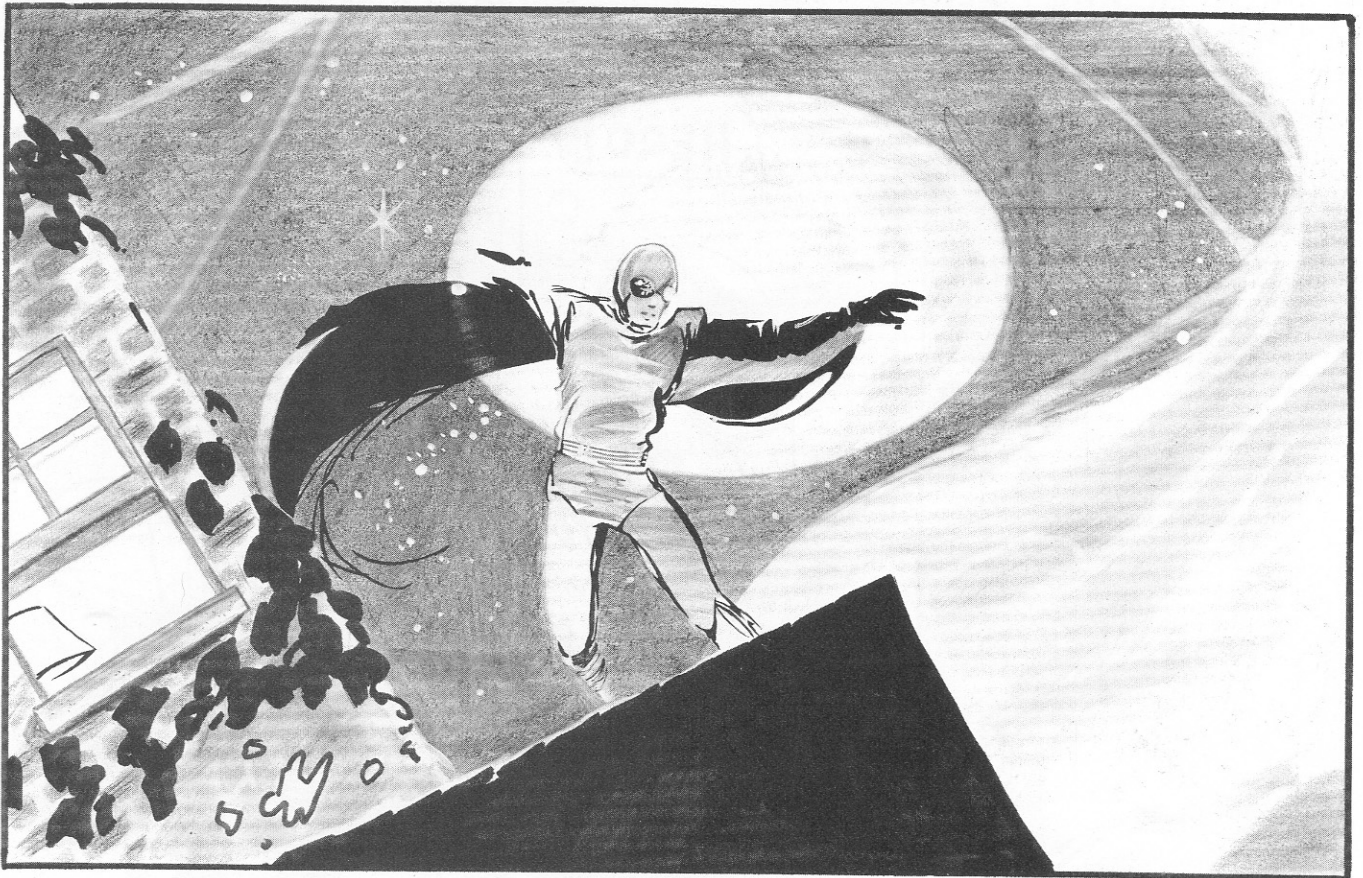
... SURE
GREAT TO
BE BACK...



ROCKET JETS THUNDERING AT MAXIMUM THRUST, **JOR-VAL** STRIVES TO RESCUE THE BEAUTIFUL PRINCESS **LUR-NA**... BUT UP FROM THEIR CRAGGY STRONGHOLD STREAMS A MURDEROUS HORDE OF THE BARBARIC **DERNAL** — SEEKING TO DASH HIS HOPES OF ESCAPE TO DISMAL FAILURE...

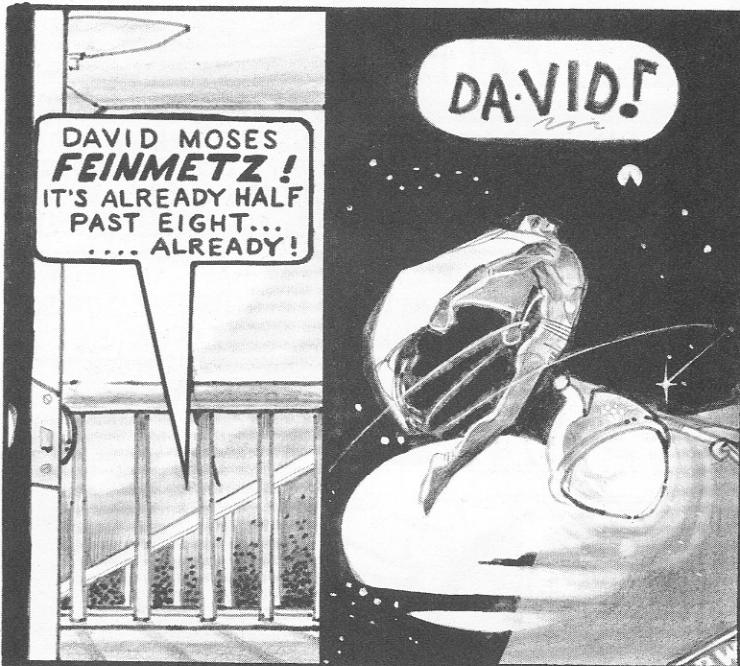


MURPHY
ANDERSON
'71



bil maher.

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O.K.! O.K! I'M UP! LISTEN! MY FEET ARE WALKING AROUND! I'M GETTING INTO MY COSTUME NOW! HEY! WHAT TIME DID YOU SAY?

"HEY," I SAID HALF PAST!

HALF PAST WHAT?

HALF PAST *EIGHT* IS WHAT! OY GEVALT!

HO-LEY! *THAT* LATE? I GOTTA HURRY OR I'LL MISS ALL THE *ACTION!*

STEP
STEP

I WONDER WHY I ALWAYS FEEL NERVOUS WHEN I GO TO OPEN THIS PANEL? IT'S A GOOD HIDING PLACE, REALLY. NOT THAT I NEED ONE SINCE I LET MOM IN ON MY ACTIVITIES AS

HERO!

ALWAYS FEELS GOOD TO GET BACK INTO MY WORK CLOTHES! I NEVER KNEW WHY SPIDERMAN AND ALL THOSE GUYS WEAR FLASHY COSTUMES WITH INSIGNIAS AND THINGS UNTIL I GAINED *MY* POWERS. WHEN YOU HAVE TO PROTECT YOUR TRUE IDENTITY LIKE WE DO, AN OUTFIT LIKE THIS MAKES YOU A DIFFERENT PERSON.....



YOU BE SURE TO SAY HELLO TO MR. AND MRS. MENDELSON FOR ME AND TELL HER WE'LL BE GLAD TO HAVE THE BRIDGE CLUB HERE THIS WEEK....

I CAN'T, MA! IT'S WENDELL'S PARTY! THEY WON'T BE HOME!

DAVID, DO YOU WANT ONE OF THESE NICE TRICK-OR-TREAT BAGS? LISTEN, I DON'T CARE WHAT WENDELL AND HIS GUESTS DO, BUT IF THEY START DRINKING, YOU COME HOME.

ACTUALLY, WE'RE GONNA HAVE AN ORGY, MOM. WE'RE ALL GETTING DRESSED UP SO UNDRRESSING WILL BE MORE FUN, SEE...





THERE'S SOMETHING MAGIC ABOUT HALLOWEEN, THAT TRYING SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS BECOMES A CERTAIN GRATITUDE IN YOUNG HEARTS WHEN, FOR A TIME, THEY GET TO BE ZORRO, OR TARZAN, OR BATGIRL, AND WE GET TO WATCH. AND WE GET TO REMEMBER OURSELVES. SOMETIMES IT SEEMS TOO BAD WE NEED AN EXCUSE LIKE OCTOBER THIRTY-FIRST TO BECOME OUR OWN **HEROES.**



NEIGHBORHOOD KIDS RUN GAILY DOOR TO DOOR, NOT NOTICING A STARK, SILENT FIGURE IN WHITE. AND WHY WOULD THEY? HIS COSTUME IS NOT SO OUT OF THE ORDINARY...
THIS NIGHT!

WOW! I'M GLAD I DIDN'T USE THOSE TIGHTS! IT MUST BE FREEZING OUT TONIGHT! I WONDER IF I'LL RUN INTO ANYONE I KNOW? HAH! I'LL BET ANY AMOUNT QUARTUCCIO IS GOING OUT AS A HOBO!

YET NONE OF THEM UNDERSTAND THE PERIL THAT HE AND INDEED ALL HUMANKIND MUST FACE TONIGHT IN THE SLITHERY FORM OF THE INVADERS....



DANGER!



ENVELOPING ME! SECONDS BEFORE I BLACK OUT! GOT TO WORK INTO THE WEAKEST SPOT AND PUSH...

VNAM!

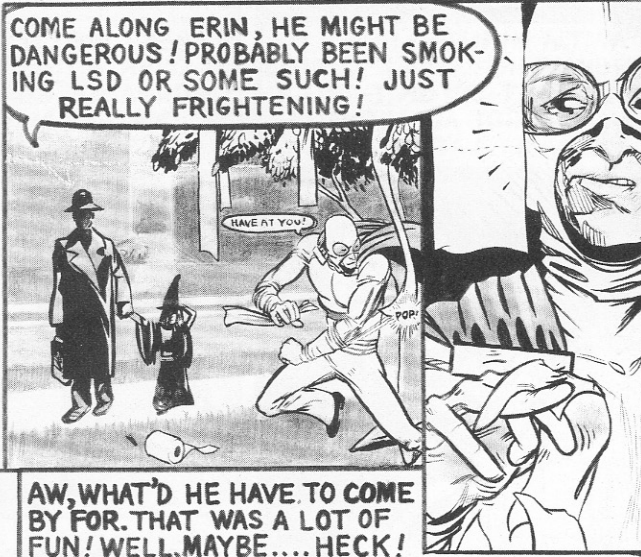
MAGNIFICENT!

WE'VE FOUND EARTH'S CHAMPION.





SO, YOU WANT TO PLAY ROUGH, EH, CHUM?



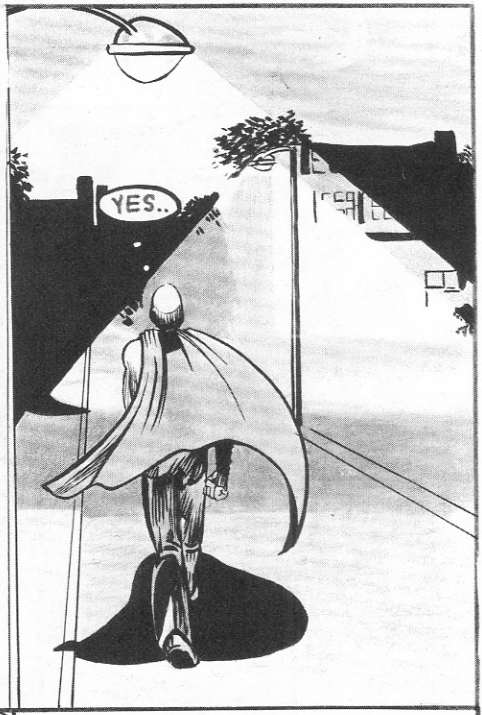
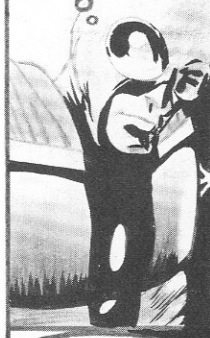
COME ALONG ERIN, HE MIGHT BE DANGEROUS! PROBABLY BEEN SMOKING LSD OR SOME SUCH! JUST REALLY FRIGHTENING!



DRIED-UP OL' ...

AW, WHAT'D HE HAVE TO COME BY FOR. THAT WAS A LOT OF FUN! WELL, MAYBE.... HECK! I'M ONLY 16. I'M IN NO TEARING HURRY TO GET SENILE. AM I GOING TO LET SOME OLD PRUNE UPSET ME?

WHAT A GRUN-ION. I SUPPOSE HE'S NEVER MESS'D AROUND AT ALL!



YES..

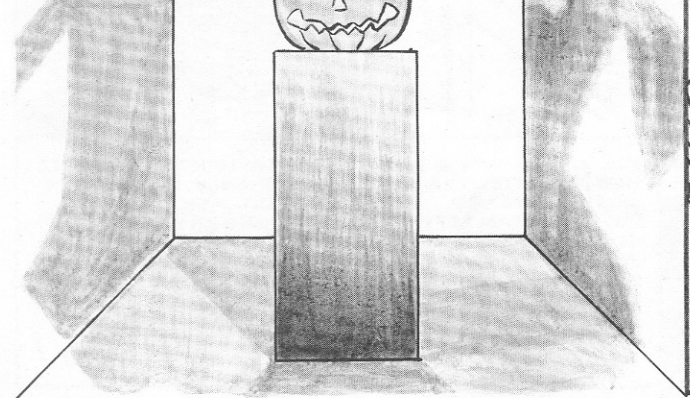
WHOOOPS!



HEY! I MUST HAVE WALKED INTO SOMEBODY'S GARAGE! DAVE FEINMETZ! ETERNAL BOY BRAIN-TRUST! WAKE UP!

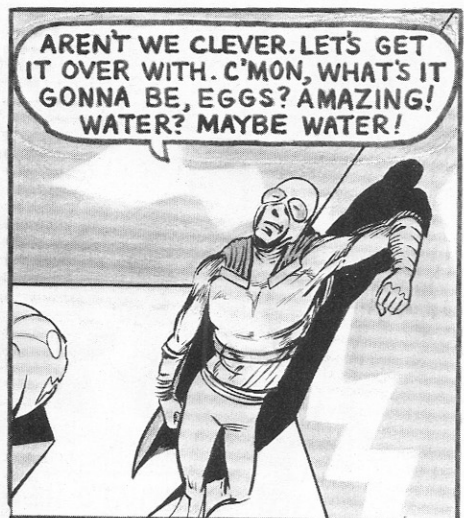


I'D BETTER.... WHO... HELLO! SO WHO COPPED THE DOOR?





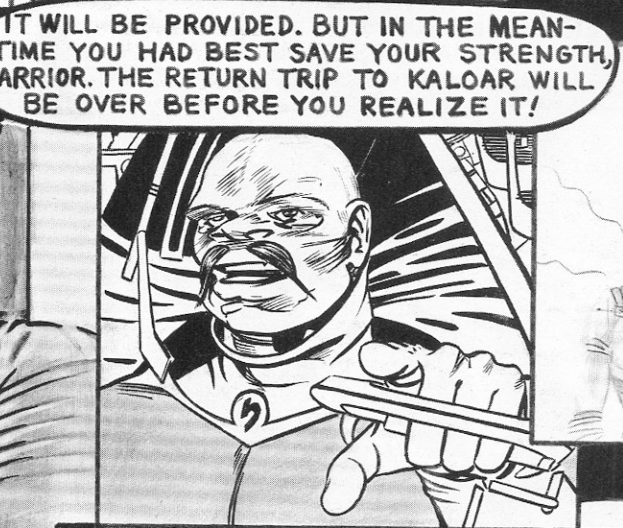
HEY!
NOW! THIS WHOLE THING'S
A BIG SET-UP. OK, GANG, I
HAVEN'T GOT ALL NIGHT. I'M
PROBABLY LATE ALREADY.



AREN'T WE CLEVER. LET'S GET
IT OVER WITH. C'MON, WHAT'S IT
GONNA BE, EGGS? AMAZING!
WATER? MAYBE WATER!



WATER?



IT WILL BE PROVIDED. BUT IN THE MEAN-TIME YOU HAD BEST SAVE YOUR STRENGTH, WARRIOR. THE RETURN TRIP TO KALOAR WILL BE OVER BEFORE YOU REALIZE IT!



what?

YOU ARE GOING TO DEFEND YOUR PLANET'S HONOR AGAINST OUR FINEST. WE WITNESSED YOUR BATTLE WITH THE MANY-LEGGED CREATURE, AND WHEN YOU VAPORIZED IT! YES, THIS WILL PROVE A FINE SPECTACLE. OF COURSE, THOUGH, YOU MUST LOSE!



NO DOUBT. I'VE NEVER
FOUGHT ANYTHING TOUGHER
THAN TOILET PAPER! ARE
YOU SURE THIS WON'T HURT
MY AMATEUR STANDING?



MAGNIFICENT! HA HA HA HA...



YOU MIGHT LEARN A LESSON FROM DAVID MOSES FEINMETZ. HOW IMPOLITE IT IS TO BE LATE, IF ONLY BY A COUPLE OF LIGHT YEARS. YOU MAY WELL ASK, HOW DID THE KALORAN "SEE" DAVE'S IMAGINARY BATTLE? HOW IS HE GOING TO FIGHT AN ALIEN GLADIATOR, WHEN HIS MOM MAKES HIM WEAR WATERWINGS SO HE'S SAFE DUNKING FOR APPLES? HOW AM I GOING TO PULL THIS CRAZINESS INTO A FINISHED STORY? WELL, YOU'LL KNOW AS SOON AS DAVE DOES, SO I SUGGEST YOU KEEP YOUR EYES ON OUR **HERO!**

NOW WAIT JUST A MINUTE...THIS IS CRAZY! YOU CAN'T TELL ME THAT I'M BEING KIDNAPPED BY A MINDREADING MARTIAN!



... BUT THIS IS ALL TOO REAL! T'BE A DREAM! COULD SOMEONE OR SOMETHING HAVE SEEN MY IMAGINARY FUN AND THOUGHT I WAS A SUPER-HERO?



WHAT AM I SAYING! ALL THAT PROVES I MUST BE DREAMING!.. MAY AS WELL JUST ENJOY IT ALL 'TILL I WAKE UP!..HOPE I'M NOT SLEEPING THROUGH WENDELL'S PARTY!



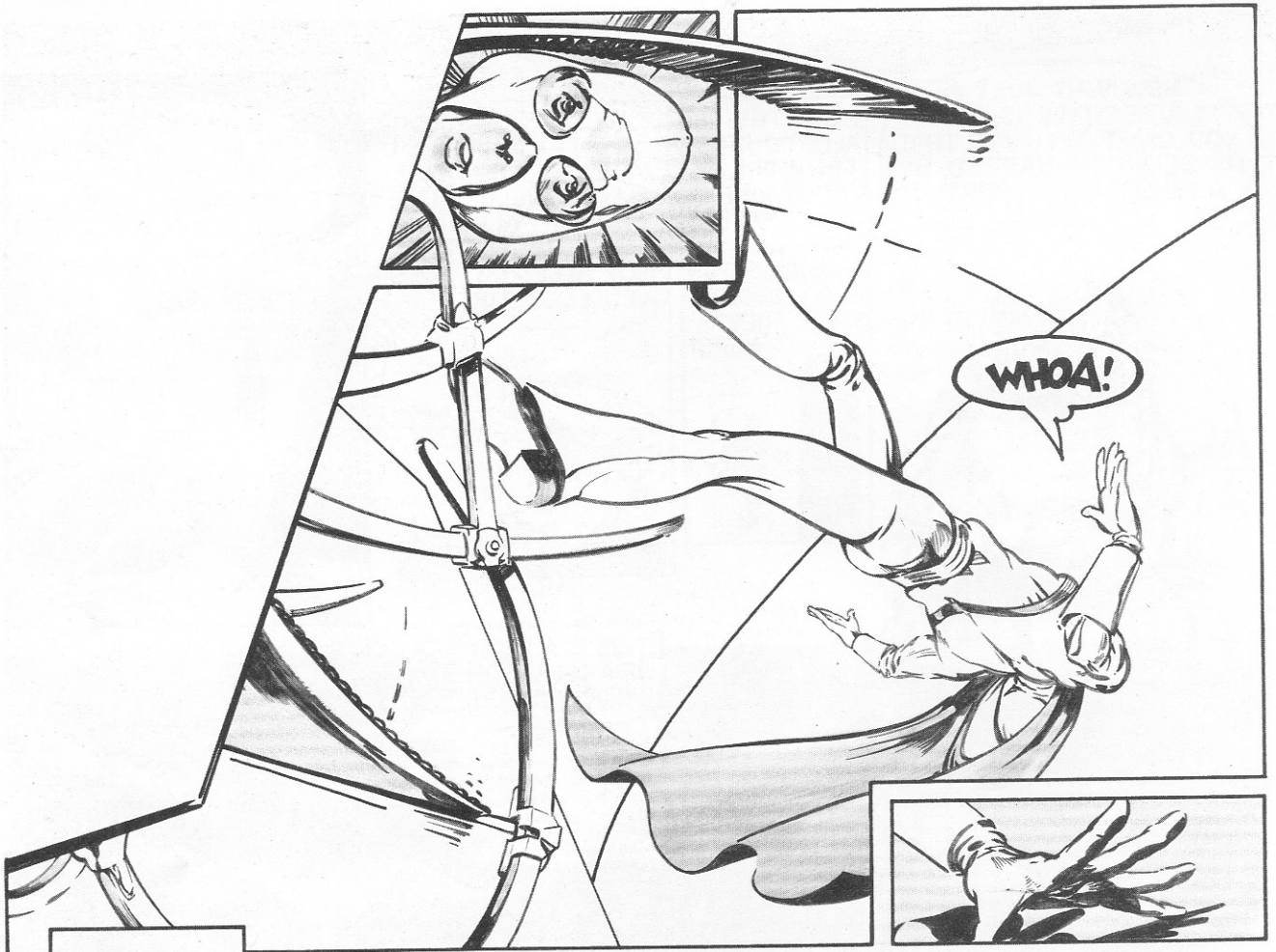
WHEEW! AM I GLAD I GOT MYSELF TOGETHER THERE!! I'D HAVE SWORN I WAS AWAKE AND WALKING DOWN MY STREET!



THIS IS A HECK OF A DREAM! THIS WINDOW IS COLD!



I KNEW I SHOULD'A MAILED MY CHRISTMAS CARDS EARLY THIS YEAR!



GOOD DAY, **HERO!** AND WELCOME,
TO THE **PEOPLE'S GRUDORIAL ARENA!**
IN A FEW MOMENTS YOU WILL TAKE
PART IN THE **SPECTACLE OF**
KALOAN SUPREMACY!

HOW'S OUR VISITOR DOING?

HE'S BEEN MARCHING AROUND IN THERE FOR YAHNS NOW. I'M BETTING HE DOESNT EVEN MAKE THE MAIN EVENT...

SAY, I'M WARNING YOU, YOU CANT DO THIS TO ME, I'M A U.S. CITIZEN AN AMERICAN!

WHY MUST I WEAR THESE CURST EQUI-LIZERS? LET MY OPPONENT DO HIS WORST! I WILL CRUSH HIM WITH OR WITHOUT THESE YOKES TO BIND ME !!...

ALL IS PREPARED IN THE ARENA, WORLDMASTER...





I AM **KRAELIS**,
WORLDMASTER OF
KALOAR! **MY** POWER
HAS BROUGHT YOU
HERE TO BATTLE FOR
THE HONOR OF EARTH...

YOUR FOREARMS BEAR A
DEVICE TO ENSURE YOU A
FAIR CHANCE, BUT I WON'T
OFFER FALSE HOPE, FOR...

...YOUR OPPONENT
MENCAENAN IS A
WORTHY ONE...

.. AND YOU
MAY POSSESS
THE POWER TO
FREE YOURSELF!

... AND I WAIT
NO MORE!



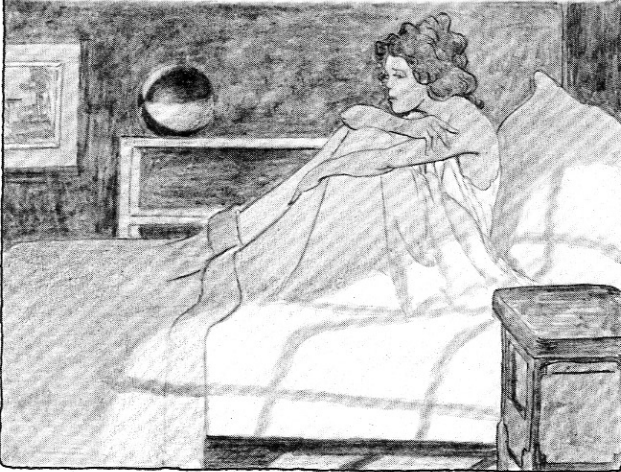
AS NIGHT FALLS!

"AS NIGHT FALLS" IS A COLLECTION OF SONG-CYCLES INCLUDING: 'THE DREAM-SPINNER', 'WHISPERS', AND THE CLASSIC 'MOONRISE'

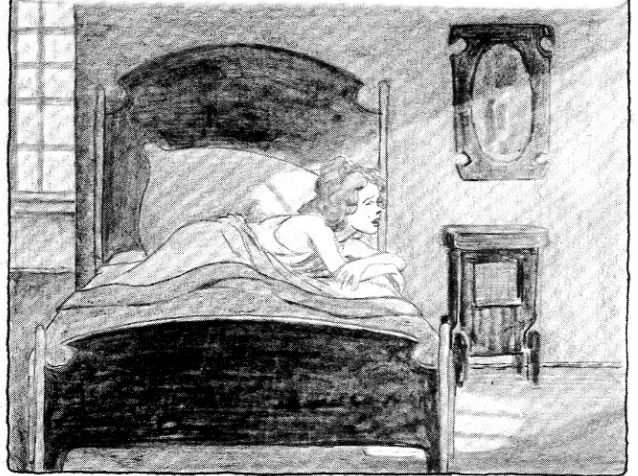
HERE WE PRESENT A SELECTION FROM 'MOONRISE' THE FIFTH SONG IN THE CYCLE: SALLY'S SONG

©1971 BY MW KALLITA

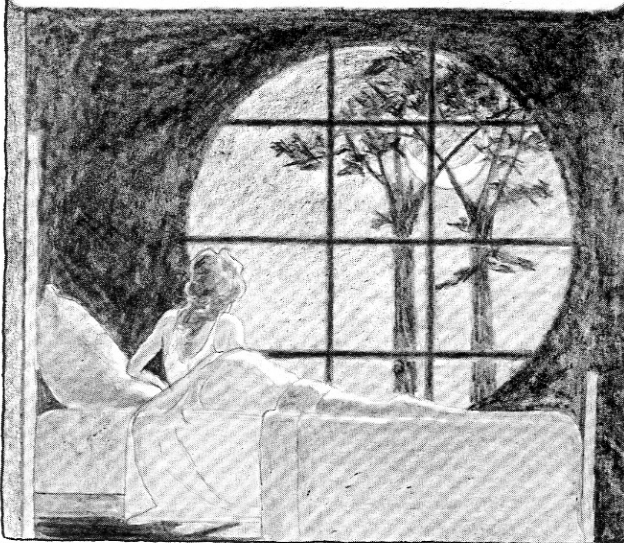
'T WAS JUST BY CHANCE THAT SUMMER'S NIGHT
IN BED AWAKE I LAY,
BY EVERY RIGHT I SHOULD HAVE SLEPT
I'D HAD A BUSY DAY.



BUT JUST BY CHANCE I LAY AWAKE
INSIDE MY TINY ROOM,
AND GAZING THROUGH THE TREES
OUTSIDE
I SPIED THE CRECENT MOON...



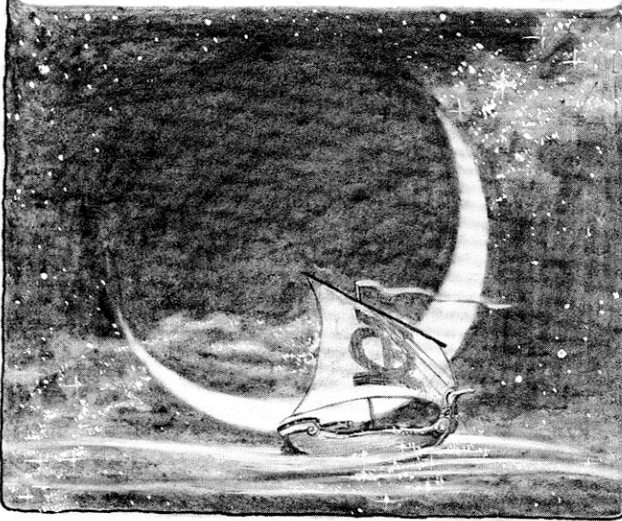
FROM LYING ON MY BED I SPIED
MID-SUMMER'S CRECENT MOON.



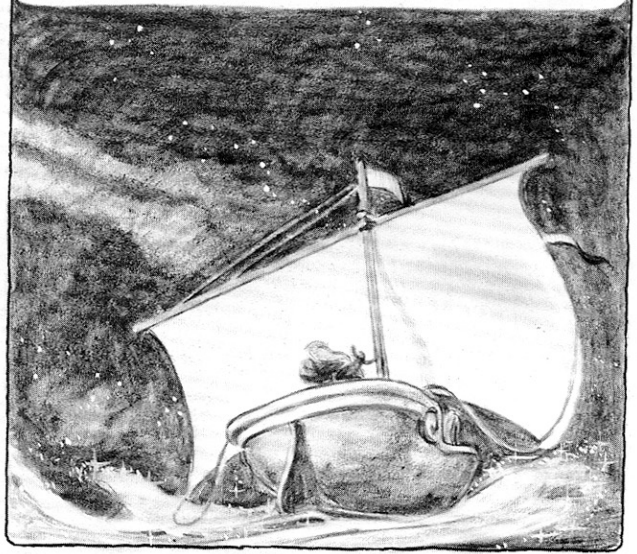
SO VERY SOFTLY THEN I ROSE
AND CREPT UP TO THE SILL,
I THOUGHT TO LOOK UPON THE MOON,
'TILL I HAD SEEN MY FILL.



THEN SUDDENLY BUT SILENTLY
ACROSS THAT HORNED MOON,
A SHIP WITH BRIGHTLY BELLED SAILS
DROVE THROUGH THE ASTRAL SPUME...



AN ELVIN SHIP WITH PAINTED SAILS
SPANNED THAT STAR-SHOT WOMB,



AND THERE I SAW UPON THE DECK
A MAN BOTH LEAN AND TALL,
THE SPINNER IN HIS PURPLE CLOAK
WAS SPINNING DREAMS FOR ALL.



THE NEXT I KNEW THE MORNING
CAME,
I RAISED MY SLEEPY HEAD,
AND LOOKED AROUND IN
WONDERMENT
THE SUN WAS ROSY RED...



FOR ALL I COULD REMEMBER THEN
I'D NEVER LEFT MY BED.



GOING TO THE POINT

A subtle Philosophical sword & sorcery story
 by Kenneth Smith
KENNETH SMITH 10 APRIL 1971

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“...My brothers – all of you who frequent this homogenized turf, hot under the fires of hell – I want you to know how little there was that I could do. I was not toying around with morality – I am as a demon ought to be, unmindful of good and indifferent to being evil. So it was not that. I was merely cultivating the vices that are proper to a demon, I was slothful and indolent and given to great lapses out of our subreality and *into*...something quite different. Call it a dream. But this dream seemed to be formed of those quaint and parochial values we mock as human. This dream was a *story*, and although the figures in it acted mostly out of malice, yet they still wanted some redemption. It was a *lesson*, this story, and it dreamed me, it carried me along, without my willing it. It shaped itself, it had a point, and yet – O forgive me, do not judge me as undemonic – the morality it taught was not human *or* demonic. The more I dreamed, however, the more futile seemed my demonic duties: the more I saw into human souls in this dream, the more *obtuse* I realized they were, and what then was the point of wasting torture and damnation on creatures who always *missed* the point and mistook the keenest torment for mere accident or bad fortune? Forgive me for my arrogance – but I began to feel, through this dream, that men had a *power* over demons that we could not understand. Something too deep, too black for our arts. Something...that as I slept...would exert itself upon me...”



Kenneth Smith
OCTOBER 1970

...Malthrusar ran his blade through the pool of rainwater. Blood had turned it muddy and milky with a rusty swirl that spread before his knifing sword. *God damn them*, he intoned, clenching his teeth against the bitter morning coldness that seemed to bite into his shoulder at the very spot where his blood throbbled out. *Cutthroats, vicious scumsucking pirates, I wish I had you alive to kill all over again.* He cursed the cruel fate that frustrated man with only one life in which to pay for his crimes; he cursed the pernicious irony of an existence that gave those who had the most to atone for, the least worthy lives to do it with. *Life is a cheat, nothing really balances out.*

At the edge of the city, behind ruins frosted with lichen and ice, these brigands had waited to ambush him and the pack-horses which bore his gear. The animals had fled uncontrolled and disappeared as Malthrusar went down from a cross-cutting slash of swords, and now the materials and food that were to have been his grubstake were lost. There was no point in returning to the city to beg for more — he had begged for months just to get these. How could he go back? How could he go on? He had nothing to fuel him now but bitter fury, a slow-burning desperation and a godlike vengeance against men and all their petty, destructive works — nothing that they ever got or did could be half as important as what they interfered with.

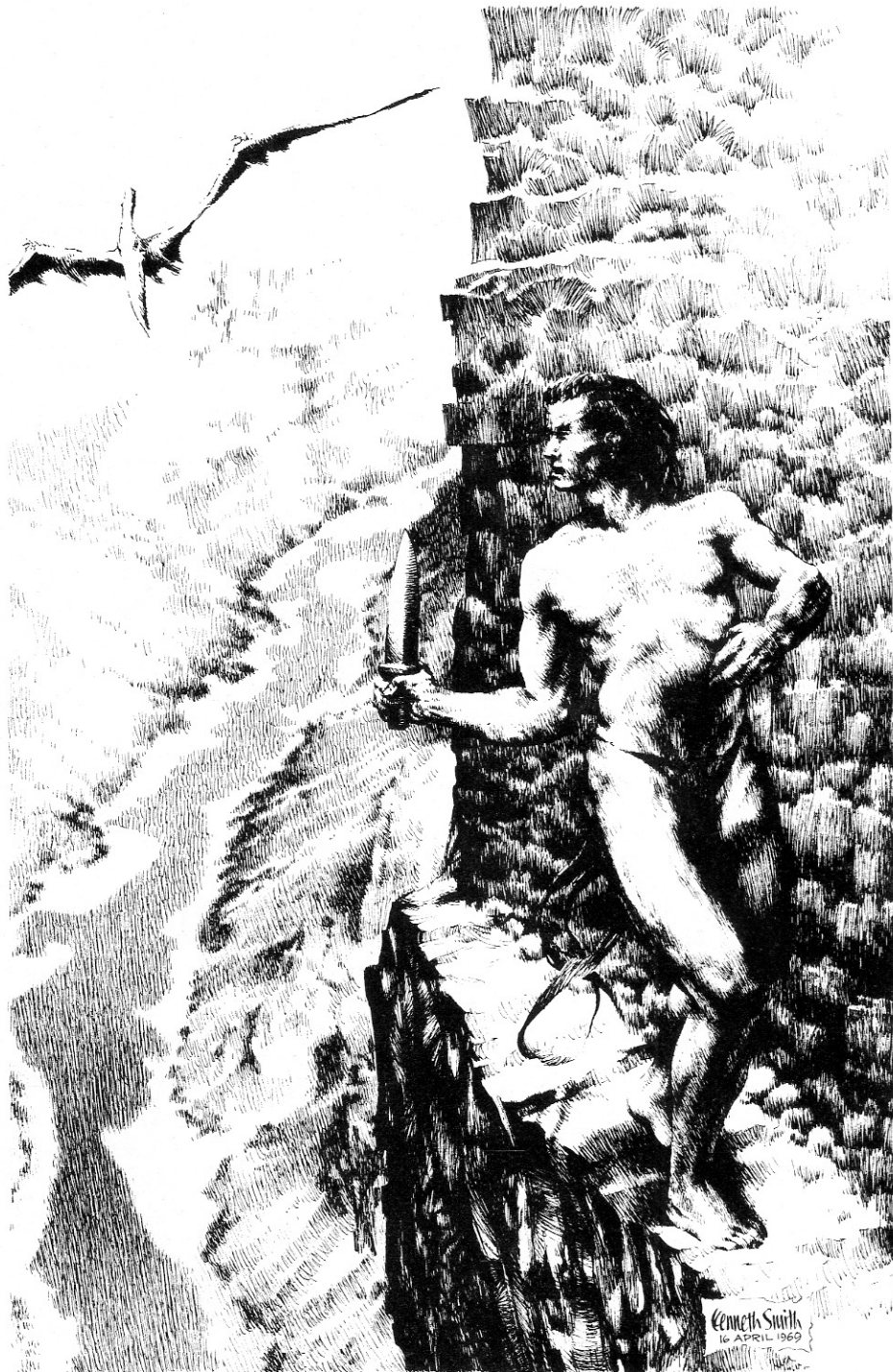
I'm not going back. If I find what I thought I would find, I'm keeping it. I'm staying there and living like a king or a god. Nobody believed me, but I saw the smoke one cold morning, the long, thin, constant smoke of machinery or a forge or a city, arising from the northwest plateau. It has to be the remains of the Founders' first city, the great engines and the metal skin of the ship they came here in. Someone else is using them; and if their heads are attached to their bodies by necks, then I and my little blade will do, we don't need the gear anyway. By afternoon he was scaling the cliff.

They'll see, of course, breathed Malthrusar as he eased around a particularly narrow section of ledge. *Even the ones who came across when I asked for money, they too thought, "Well, Mal, it's always the same old story, isn't it? You were born a gambler, you'll die one, and just as other people had to pay for your little ventures, so too they'll have to pay for your big one, your life; somebody else will have to pay for your last mistake to*

get you buried, and you won't need an epitaph because the whole meaning of your life will get summed up just in the way you die." Malthrusar's face winced involuntarily into a grimace, a toothy bitter grin that said all that needed to be said: *no, this time is it, the payoff, the big time.*

The heavy slap of leather wings caught his mind just as he was turning back to reality. Another tairo! The last one had taken his longsword away in its gut, and this time he had nothing for defense but a hunting knife. By the time he could use it, the beast would be too close, too

close. He didn't have maneuvering space on the ledge, he couldn't dodge — the first swipe of those lizard talons would get him for supper. The wind peeled his eyelids. The sheer wall at his back gave no purchase to his sweating grasp at it. Loose strata of little fractured rocks came away under his clawing left hand, and in the tension and high wind the rocks fell on the ledge with a tiny, a remote and microscopic sound. Malthrusar hardly noticed, as the great wings circled in a predatory arc, that the dripping and scattering of little rocks was masking another sound altogether, the scuttling of chitin along naked rock and the almost noiseless





Kenneth Smith
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gesture of a power rifle being braced against the rock wall for kickback. Only the abrupt flash of white heat and the torn shriek of the great flying lizard turned Malthrusar's attention to his silent company on the ledge. The creature had to grab Malthrusar to hold him from falling, when an instant of shock and terror made the man's legs give way to the powerful winds that whipped around the two beings.

He was held by claws powerful enough to carry him if he should not follow. The inhuman creature gripping him in its pincers hurried single-mindedly and with unbelievable agility along the ledge a little way, and then bowed and disappeared with him into a fissure in the cliff's strata. Deep inside the plateau were fantastic ranges of machinery, factories and laboratories and throbbing power plants along the periphery, all feeding lines and equipment to a monster rocket at the center of the cavern. Malthrusar was borne to what seemed to be a control room.

A great head, crusted with eyes and instruments, turned to them as they entered and impatiently demanded, "Yes?"

Malthrusar was astounded to hear the language of his people's sacraments. Are *these* our gods, our Founders?

His captor thrust Malthrusar forward. "This creature was seen ascending the southern face of our plateau. Even though it is so close now to the time, I thought he should be brought to you for disposition."

"We do not have time to recondition him and put him to work with his fellow captives. Perhaps...no, dispose of him." He turned back to the screen where he seemed to be supervising the preparation of the rocket. As Malthrusar was being carried away, the creature called out to his guard. "Wait, Mnassungim! I have a little idea. Bring him here. . . . I see the expression on your face, human, and I know how to read it even though you do not know how to read mine. We have studied your people since we first brought them here. Our great ship crashed here fully a millennium before the generation-ship of your people passed close enough to this planet for us to attract it and force it to crash too. All your eons of civilization have been serving a purpose behind your back, you see: we made ourselves appear in dreams and hallucinations to your ancestors and sug-

gested great visions to them, inventions and values that we knew could have but one outcome — the construction of cities and energy-sources which, when the suitable time came, we could tap to bring our own massive engines into play once again. But let me make this point just a little more precisely, because there is scarcely any reason to play a joke on someone if you can't tell him about it: we follow the seismic indications of the power at the core of this planet, and we also follow the cycles of radiant energy generated by this system's sun, and we follow, as well, the comparatively trivial cycles of power-use within your people's cities. We know exactly when the most propitious conjunction of these cycles will occur, and then, using your people's energy-system as a conduit, we will arrange to have all these different forms of energy converted into a form which our ship can render kinetic. As you can imagine, the results will be cataclysmic for the conduit. But you have no reason to complain: that is, after all, what you were brought here for in the first place. Previously, of course, we would not have revealed any of this, but now it is too late for the revelation to make any difference. Until now, we have used the sanctions of your religious worship, instigated by ourselves, to make ourselves and our haven here sociologically invisible to you. Now, just for a little diversion in these last few hours of your people's existence, I wanted to tell you — to watch you, to see what you would try to do about it and how you would —" the creature seemed to laugh, "— live with the knowledge. Release him, Mnassungim."

"Now notice, my brothers," pleaded the demon as he interpreted the contents of his dream for them. "It is the first principle of these humans' religion that a being has the right to do as he likes with his own creations — their economy, religion, law and ethics all accept this notion of what is right. But in bringing the humans under their power and in causing the construction of their civilization, have not the aliens established themselves in the status of creators? Isn't the destruction of the lesser race right, even in its own eyes? Does a third party have the right to impose other standards, in spite of not being involved itself? I pose all these questions simply in order to make you feel the *viscous* state that good and evil have, in strictly *human* terms — the slippage, the plastic and malleable way that 'the right' appears to humans."

Malthrusar's mind and body were

never further apart. His feelings were the captive of an immediate physical fear as he tried to avoid losing his footage and being cast off the ledge by the wind; but in his mind, abstract thoughts caught his conscience and flung it this way and that. He was near to the ground now, but no closer to a decision as to what he should do: no one would believe him, in the first place, and certainly the aliens counted on that. But what should he do, in the light of that fact? They would disbelieve him *because* he was Malthrusar, most of them, and because he was known as one who exaggerates and is given to sensationalism. Well, the hell with them! was his first reaction. Let them go up in flames, it serves them right for being so goddamned *stupid*.

"I have to call your attention, again, to equivocal values that inform this decision of the man," said the demon. "Obviously there is no general theory of stupidity extant among his people. It is variously felt that stupidity is the result of nature and that it is the result of free will. In the first case, the man's decision would be just only in the sense that it would be naturally fitting, that is, whose who will suffer have themselves necessitated this outcome, albeit not willingly. In the second case, the same thing is true but there is an element of perversity which gives a different cast to the judgment — the sufferers, the stupid ones, do not *want*, in some sense, to avoid the results of their stupidity. Again, I say all these things to you, my jury, because I want to impress upon you the point that, among humans, 'getting the point' is not as simple or as direct as it may seem, because every issue appears to have at least *two* points and can be taken as the individual mind prefers." The little demon shifted from one foot to the other; it would not be long now.

Malthrusar's mind rambled on, following a logic of its own. But that *cannot* happen, he thought to himself: if the stupid are allowed to die *in* their stupidity and *because* of their stupidity, no one will ever know how right *he* was about the momentous discovery he had claimed he would make. It is better that they know, even if it deprives their last hours of any peace. Better that they should suffer and understand why than that they should simply suffer.

"*Note*," interjected the little demon, "that although the man has decided to make a decision in behalf of his fellows' good, he himself is motivated to make it