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A T A L E O F T H E U N - M E N

CHAPTER TWO: THE COVENANT OF FREAKS

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DC Comics: A division of Warner Bros. — A Time Warner Entertainment Company

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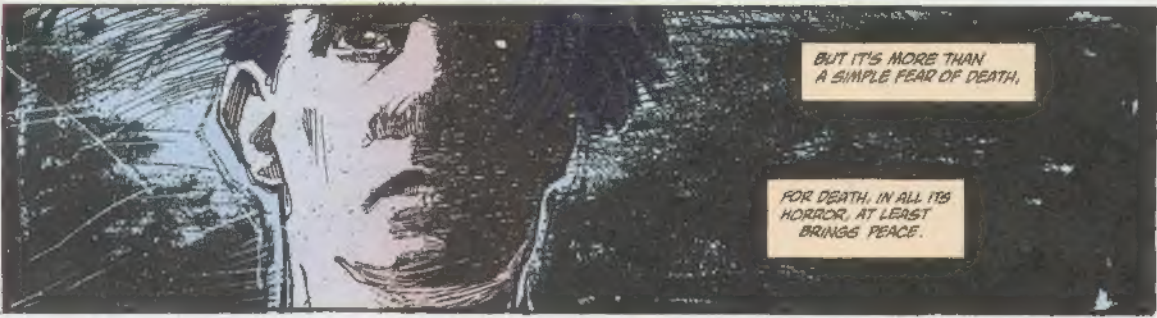


THERE IS A TERROR THAT LURKS
DEEP IN MY SOUL. I CAN FEEL IT
WITH EVERY BEAT OF MY HEART.

A RESTLESS FEAR THAT SOME
DAY MY SOUL WILL CEASE TO
EXIST, ALONG WITH MY BODY
AND MIND.



IT'S A TERROR
NOT PACIFIED BY
RELIGION, NOT
COMFORTED BY
PHILOSOPHY,
OR FAITH.



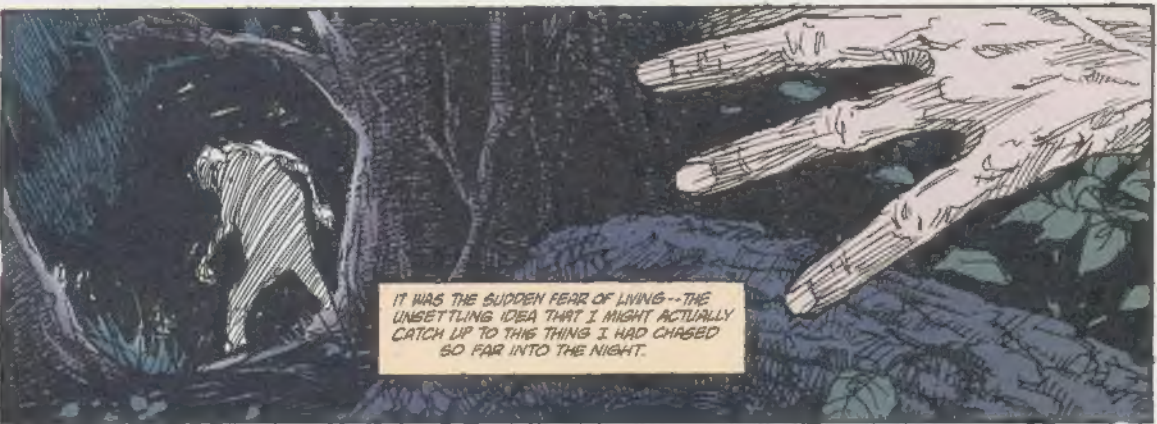
BUT IT'S MORE THAN
A SIMPLE FEAR OF DEATH,

FOR DEATH, IN ALL ITS
HORROR, AT LEAST
BRINGS PEACE.



NO, THIS TERROR IS
ROOTED IN THE LOSS
OF CONTROL--OF MY
MIND, MY BODY,
AND MY SOUL.

AND AS I CHASED AFTER THIS
THING IN THE SWAMP, I REALIZED
THAT VERY TERROR HAD SEIZED
CONTROL OF MY HEART. BUT IT
WASN'T THE FEAR OF DYING
THAT MADE MY HEART ROUNO.



IT WAS THE SUDDEN FEAR OF LIVING--THE
UNSETTLING IDEA THAT I MIGHT ACTUALLY
CATCH UP TO THIS THING I HAD CHASED
SO FAR INTO THE NIGHT.

I FOLLOWED IT THROUGH THE SWAMP FOR WHAT MUST HAVE BEEN HOURS. EACH TIME I WAS CERTAIN IT HAD LOST ME, THE VOICE WOULD ENTER MY HEAD AGAIN--THE VOICE I'D FIRST HEARD BACK AT THE BASE.

DAMIEN. COME TO ME, DAMIEN. I'M HERE.

I BEGAN TO DOUBT MY SANITY.

A MAN WHO RUNS THROUGH A SWAMP AT NIGHT BECAUSE A PHANTOM VOICE SAYS, "HEY, FOLLOW ME..." WELL, THAT'S USUALLY THE TYPE OF MAN YOU SEE FIGHTING WITH THE AIR ON CITY STREET CORNERS, OR LICKING SPOTS FROM THE WINDOWS OF THE SUBWAY.

I HAD NEVER RIDDEN A SUBWAY, AND YET I'D HEARD OF THESE MEN. I WONDERED IF THEY WOULD SOON HEAR OF ME.

DAMIEN. WE'RE ALMOST THERE. FOLLOW ME.

BUT EACH TIME I DOUBTED MYSELF, THE VOICE RETURNED, STRONGER THAN EVER, AND THE AMESHAPEN FIGURE I THOUGHT I'D LOST WOULD REAPPEAR.

I HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO FOLLOW. I'D NEVER FIND MY WAY BACK THROUGH THIS OVERGROWN WASTELAND.

SO I FOLLOWED. DEAD ON MY FEET, DEAD TO THE WORLD. DEAD LIKE THE ROTTING WOOD AROUND ME. AND WHEN I STOPPED, I COULDN'T THINK OF A MORE APPROPRIATE PLACE TO REST.

IT'S ALL RIGHT, DAMIEN. WE ARE HERE, NOW. WE CAN STOP RUNNING.

THE SUN PEEKED OVER THE HORIZON
IN THE EAST JUST ABOUT THE TIME I
THOUGHT I'D LOST TOUCH WITH ANY-
THING RESEMBLING REALITY.

THE THING I'D CHASED ALL NIGHT NOW STOOD BEFORE
ME. THE GRAVES ALL AROUND SEEMED COLDER, LONELIER
THAN ANY OTHER GRAVES I'D SEEN BEFORE.

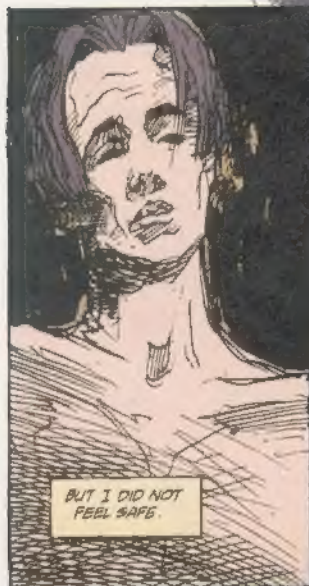
I'D NEVER WITNESSED A SUNRISE
IN A CEMETERY BEFORE. IT FILLED ME
WITH A KIND OF DEPRESSED OPTIMISM.

I FELT LIKE
"ALICE IN
ZOMBIELAND."



DON'T BE
AFRAID, DAMIEN,
YOU ARE SAFE
HERE.

EVERYONE
IS SAFE
AMONG
THE DEAD.

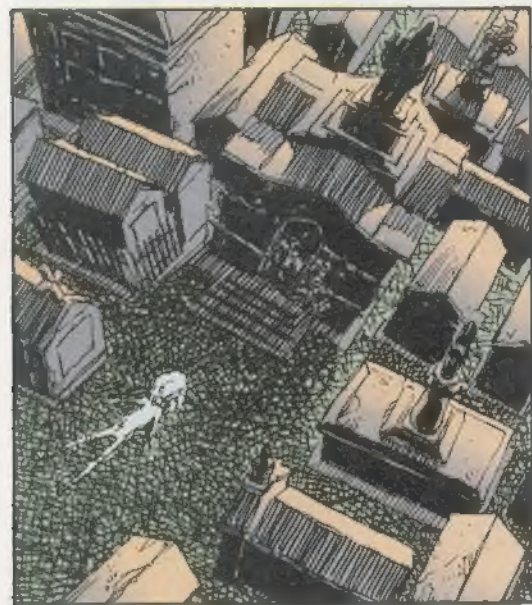


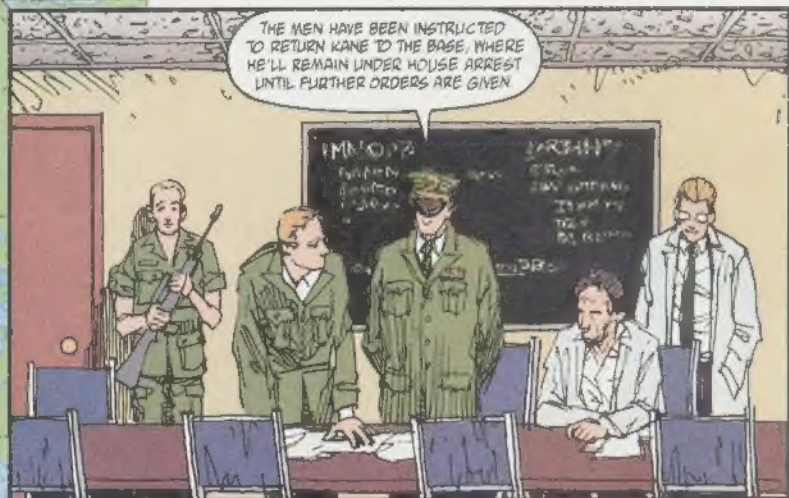
I DIDN'T FEEL ANYTHING,
EXCEPT MAYBE ...

BUT I DID NOT
FEEL SAFE.



... DEAD.





DAMIEN. OPEN
YOUR EYES. IT
IS SAFE, NOW.

THE VOICE WAS IN MY HEAD
AGAIN, BUT AS I OPENED MY
EYES I REALIZED THAT IT
SPOKE IN PERFECT SYNC
WITH THE PAIR OF RANCID
LIPS BEFORE ME.

WAKE UP, DAMIEN,
I HAVE MUCH TO TELL
YOU, AND WE HAVE
LITTLE TIME TO WASTE.

THE FACE I AWOKE TO
WAS STRAIGHT OUT OF
A HORROR MOVIE. THE
FACE OF A MONSTER.
THE FACE OF EVERYTHING
UGLY.

WHO ARE
YOU?
WHERE
AM I?

MY NAME IS
CRASSUS, AND
THIS IS MY HOME.
NOT MUCH TO SPEAK
OF, REALLY, BUT THEN
I'VE ALWAYS BEEN
A...MAN OF MODEST
MEANS.

I'VE BEEN
WAITING FOR YOU
FOR A VERY LONG
TIME, DAMIEN. DON'T
BE FRIGHTENED.
I WANT TO
HELP YOU.

YOU'RE ONE OF
THOSE... THINGS.
THE THINGS I SAW
IN THE TANKS BACK
AT THE BASE.

YES, I
GUESS I AM
ONE OF THOSE
THINGS.

AND I WANT TO HELP YOU
KEEP FROM BECOMING
ONE AS WELL.

FROM WHAT I COULD GATHER, CRASSUS, LIKE THE CREATURES I SAW AT THE BASE, WAS CREATED BY A MAN NAMED ARCANÉ.



WHEN THE OTHERS WERE CAPTURED, CRASSUS HAD SOMEHOW ESCAPED.

I WATCHED HIM FOR A VERY LONG TIME. HE WAS PLAYING WITH AN OLD PAIR OF DICE, ROLLING THEM AGAIN AND AGAIN FOR NO APPARENT REASON.



THERE WAS A SADNESS IN HIS EYES THAT EVERY SO OFTEN MADE ME FORGET JUST HOW UGLY HE WAS.



I FELT LIKE I'D BECOME ENTAILED IN A BIG, SLOW NIGHT-MARE... ONLY...

I WASN'T AFRAID.



WHATEVER THIS THING WAS SITTING OPPOSITE ME, I KNEW IT MEANT ME NO HARM. MORE THAN THAT, I FELT I COULD TRUST IT. I WAS NEVER VERY GOOD AT TRUSTING.

BUT THIS WAS DIFFERENT. THIS WAS A TRUST BORN OF NECESSITY.



AN UNAVOIDABLE KINSHIP THAT BONDS THOSE WHO'VE SUFFERED AT THE HANDS OF OTHERS.

THEY SAY THAT THE EYES ARE THE WINDOWS TO THE SOUL.

BUT WHEN I LOOKED CRASSUS IN THE EYES, ALL I SAW WAS AN EMPTY SPACE OBSCURED BY MISERY AND ANGER. A SOUL WHOSE WINDOWS HAD LONG SINCE BEEN BOARDED UP.



AND ALTHOUGH I TOOK COMFORT IN THIS NEWFOUND TRUST...



IT WAS IN THOSE EYES THAT I CAUGHT A GLIMPSE OF MY FUTURE, AND MY PAST.



I WAS SUDDENLY VERY MUCH AFRAID.



THEY CAME LOOKING FOR ME
AROUND NOON. THE SUN WAS
HIGH AND HOT, AND THE
SWAMP SMELLED AS THOUGH
PART OF THE EARTH HAD DIED
AND WAS ROTTING IN THE HEAT

THE VOICES OUTSIDE SOUNDED
CONFUSED AND ANXIOUS TO
LEAVE

THEY MAY WELL HAVE
BEEN THE VOICES OF
THE DEAD

WHEN IT'S DARK WE'LL MAKE
OUR WAY TO THE SHIPYARDS IN
NEW ORLEANS. I HAVE A SMALL
BOAT THAT WILL GET US THERE

WHERE
ARE WE
GOING?

YOU DON'T NEED TO
KNOW THAT YET

WELL, I
WANT TO KNOW
ANYWAY

TRUST ME HERE
EAT AS MUCH OF
THIS AS YOU CAN
IT'S HIGH IN
PROTEIN

BLECHHH!!!
WHAT IS THIS?!

MOSTLY LICHEN, AND OTHER
ASSORTED INDIGENOUS DELICACIES
QUITE TASTY, DON'T YOU THINK?

WHAT'S THIS
ONE? IT TASTES
LIKE SHIT!

IT SHOULD. IT'S
ALLIGATOR DUNG
CHOCK FULL OF
VITAMINS, YOU
KNOW. PURE
HEALTH FOOD

YOU HAVE SOMETHING
AGAINST RECYCLING,
DAMIEN?



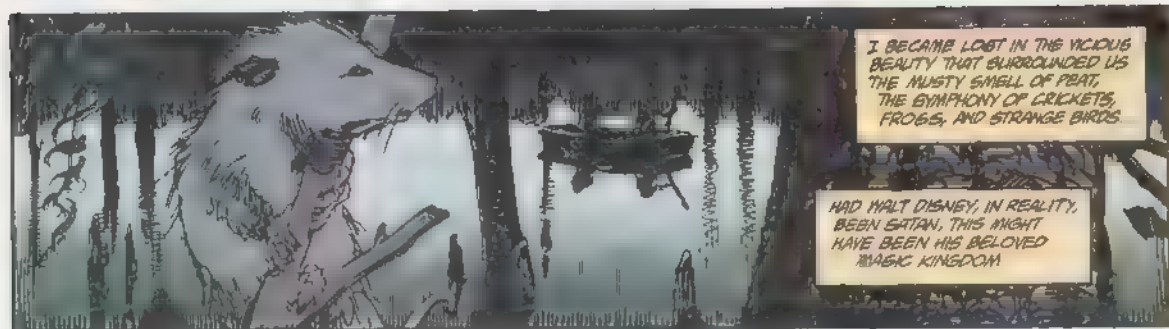
THAT NIGHT WE SET OUT
IN A SMALL PIROGUE
CRASSUS HAD STOLEN
FROM SOME POACHERS

INSIDE WERE A PAIR OF PANTS,
A MUSTY OLD SHIRT AND SOME
SHOES THAT DIDN'T FIT



WE DRIFTED THROUGH THE BAYOU--
A CORRUPT VERSION OF THE OWL AND
THE PUSSYCAT THE MOON WAS
BRIGHT, LIKE A LITTLE SUN,

AND THE WOODS
WERE ALIVE WITH
THINGS THAT BITE

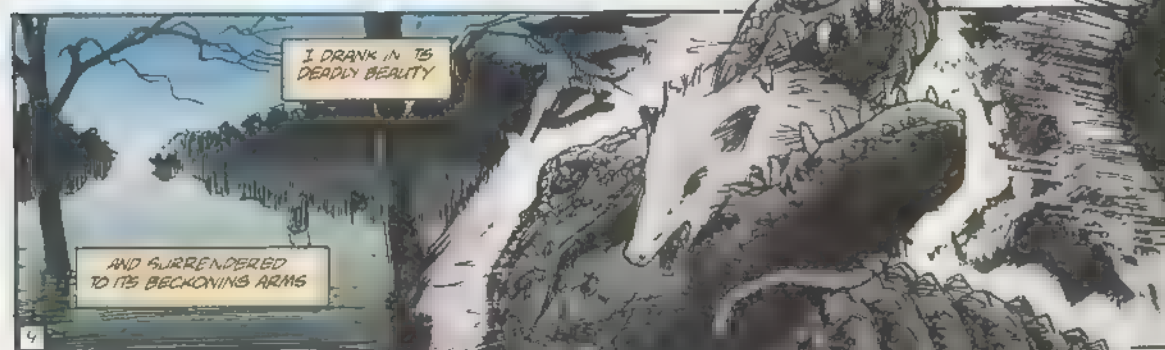


I BECAME LOST IN THE VICIOUS
BEAUTY THAT SURROUNDED US
THE MUSTY SMELL OF PEAT,
THE SYMPHONY OF CRICKETS,
FROGS, AND STRANGE BIRDS

HAD WALT DISNEY, IN REALITY,
BEEN SATAN, THIS NIGHT
HAVE BEEN HIS BELOVED
MAGIC KINGDOM

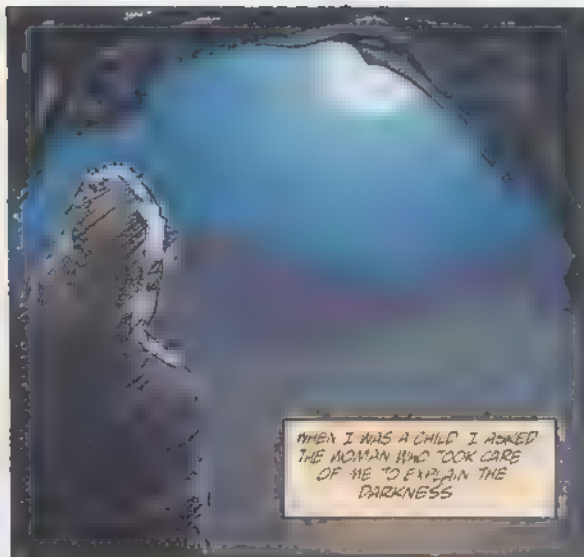
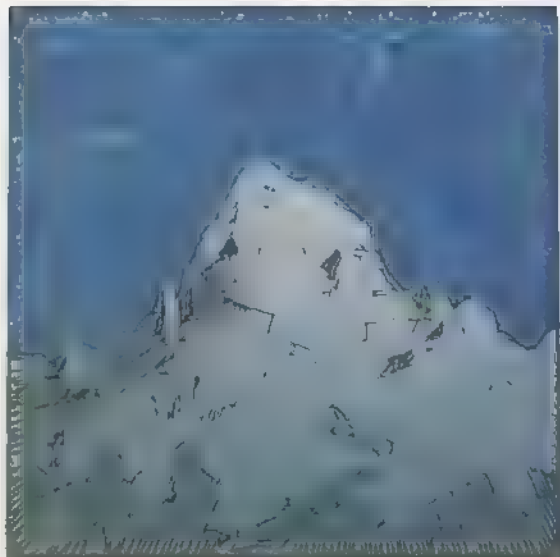


IT WAS A PLACE THAT SEEMED TO
EXIST INDEPENDENTLY OF GOD

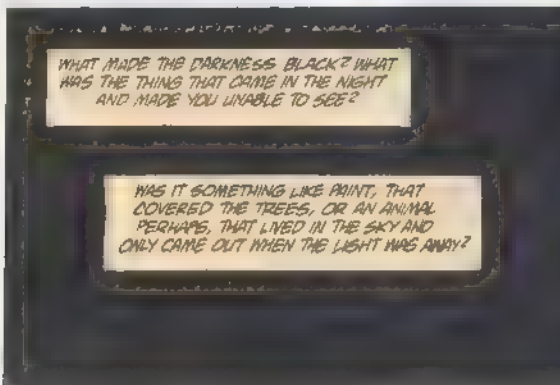


I DRANK IN ITS
DEADLY BEAUTY

AND SURRENDERED
TO ITS BECKONING ARMS

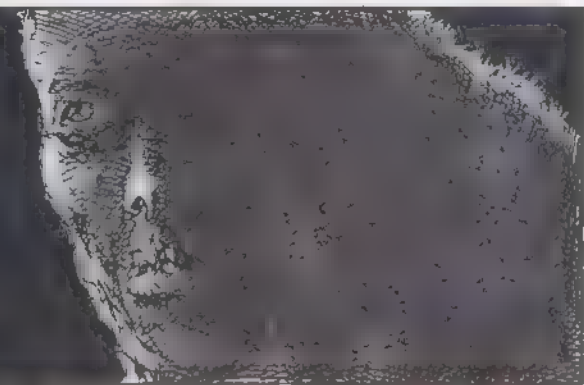


WHEN I WAS A CHILD I ASKED
THE WOMAN WHO TOOK CARE
OF ME TO EXPLAIN THE
DARKNESS

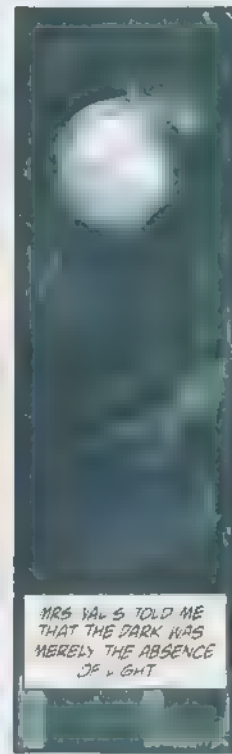


WHAT MADE THE DARKNESS BLACK? WHAT
WAS THE THING THAT CAME IN THE NIGHT
AND MADE YOU UNABLE TO SEE?

WAS IT SOMETHING LIKE PAINT, THAT
COVERED THE TREES, OR AN ANIMAL
PERHAPS, THAT LIVED IN THE SKY AND
ONLY CAME OUT WHEN THE LIGHT WAS AWAY?

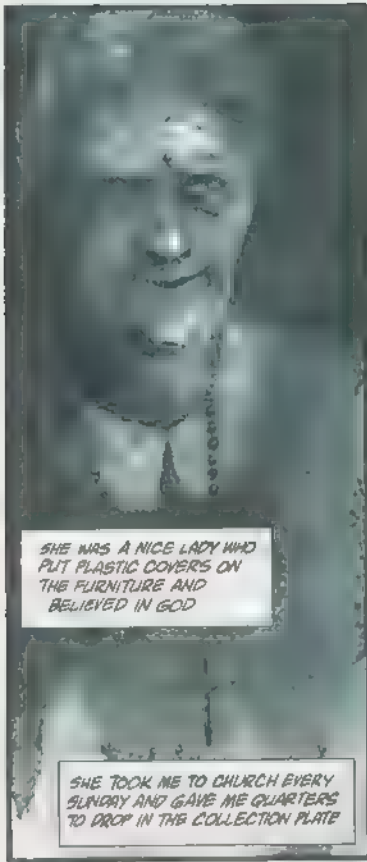


"WHAT IS THE DARK?" I
ASKED HER "WHO MADE
IT, AND WHY?"



MRS VAL'S TOLD ME
THAT THE DARK WAS
MERELY THE ABSENCE
OF LIGHT





SHE WAS A NICE LADY WHO
PUT PLASTIC COVERS ON
THE FURNITURE AND
BELIEVED IN GOD

SHE TOOK ME TO CHURCH EVERY
SUNDAY AND GAVE ME QUARTERS
TO DROP IN THE COLLECTION PLATE

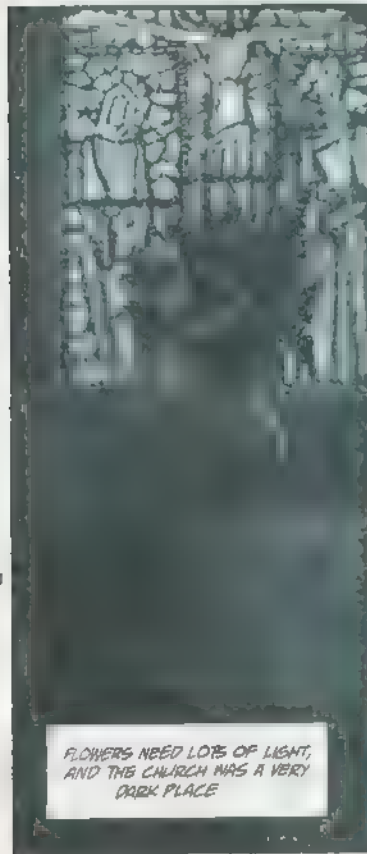


I THOUGHT IT STRANGE THAT GOD
NEEDED HANDOUTS WHEN, SUPPOS-
EDLY, HE MADE THE WHOLE
UNIVERSE WHAT DID HE WANT TO
BUY?

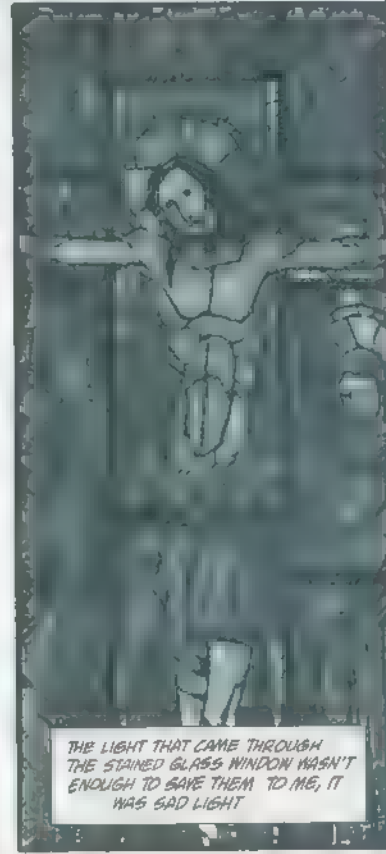


MRS. VALIS SAID THE MONEY WAS TO
BUY FLOWERS FOR THE CHURCH.
FLOWERS ARE A SYMBOL OF LIFE,"
SHE SAID. "A SIGN OF ALL THE
BEAUTIFUL THINGS GOD HAS
GIVEN US."

BUT EVERY TIME I
LOOKED AT THE
FLOWERS, THEY
SEEMED TO BE
WAITING TO DIE



FLOWERS NEED LOTS OF LIGHT,
AND THE CHURCH WAS A VERY
DARK PLACE



THE LIGHT THAT CAME THROUGH
THE STAINED GLASS WINDOW WASN'T
ENOUGH TO SAVE THEM. TO ME, IT
WAS SAD LIGHT



LIGHT THAT HAD LOST ITS
HEALING SPIRIT WHEN IT
FILTERED THROUGH THE
GLOOMY RED AND
BLUE PICTURES

MRS VALLS DIED WHEN I WAS
TWELVE, AND I WAS PLACED
IN THE CARE OF MISS STAFFORD



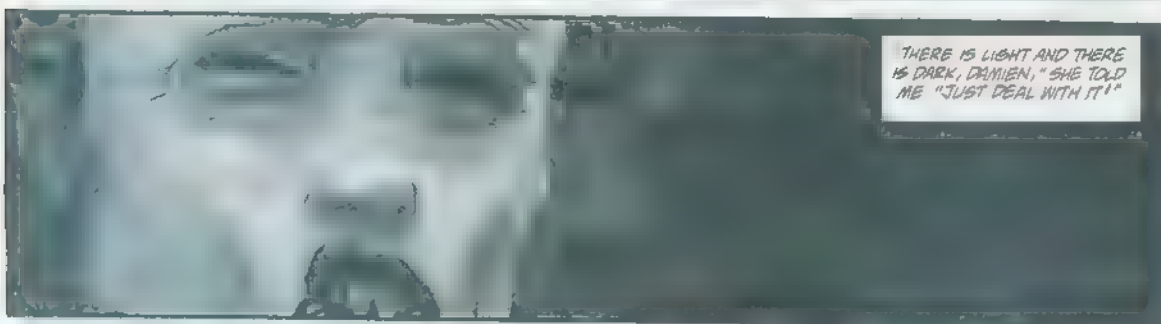
I ASKED HER ABOUT "THE
PARK" AS WELL, BUT SHE
SAID SHE DIDN'T KNOW



I DON'T KNOW IF MISS
STAFFORD BELIEVED
IN GOD OR NOT, BUT
SHE NEVER WENT TO
CHURCH, AND SHE
REMOVED THE PLASTIC
COVERS FROM
THE FURNITURE



THERE IS LIGHT AND THERE
IS DARK, DAMIEN," SHE TOLD
ME "JUST DEAL WITH IT!"



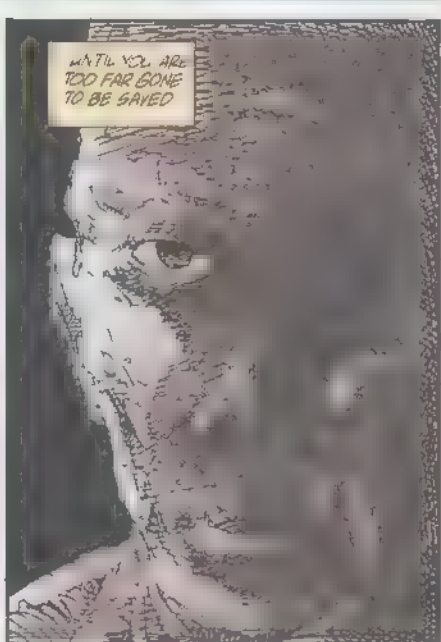
I'VE SINCE COME TO KNOW THAT
THERE ARE MANY KINDS OF DARKNESS,
EACH WITH A SECRET LIFE OF ITS OWN



THEY FUNCTION
LIKE WHIRLPOOLS,
DRAWING YOU INTO
THEIR CENTER



UNTIL YOU ARE
TOO FAR GONE
TO BE SAVED





CRASSUS HAD BEEN CREATED
IN A DARKNESS ALL HIS OWN
BUT IT WAS A DARKNESS HE
ACCEPTED, IF FOR NO OTHER
REASON THAN THERE WAS
LITTLE HE COULD DO ABOUT IT

WE WERE ON OUR WAY TO FIND HIS
CREATOR, THE MAN CALLED ARCANE
HE LIVED SOMEWHERE IN ROMANIA
WHERE CRASSUS HAD BEEN BORN



CRASSUS HAD MADE THE TRIP BEFORE,
AND HE CLAIMED THIS MAN ARCANÉ
KNEW MORE ABOUT WHAT WAS HAPPENING
TO ME THAN ANYBODY WOULD EVER KNOW



THE WHOLE THING SEEMED
INSANE I FELT LIKE KNUCKLE-
BERRY FINN STEALING OFF
IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT TO "LIGHT
OUT FOR THE TERRITORIES"

BUT WHATEVER
EXCITEMENT I
FELT WAS QUICKLY
REPLACED BY FEAR I
WAS RUNNING FOR MY
LIFE AND I HAD NO IDEA
WHERE I WAS HEADED

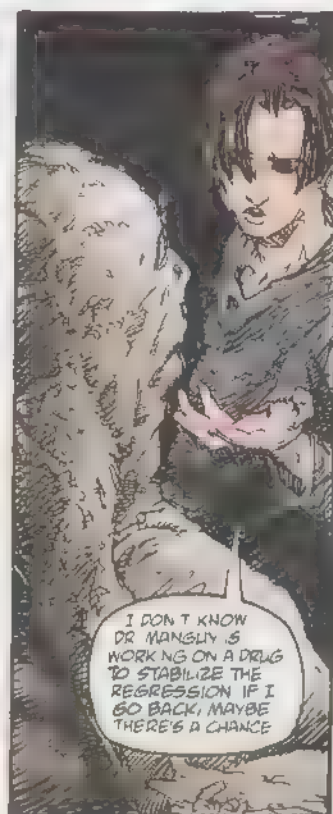
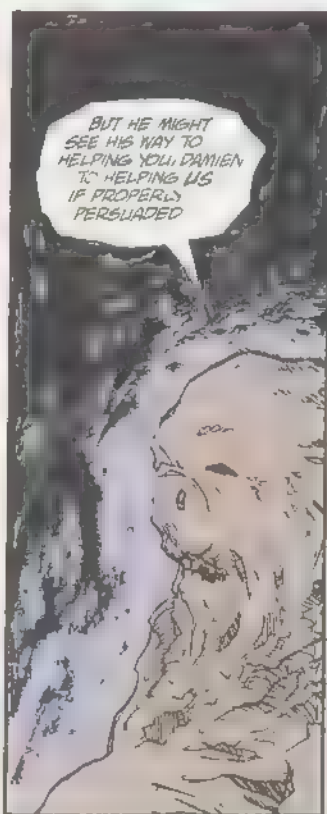
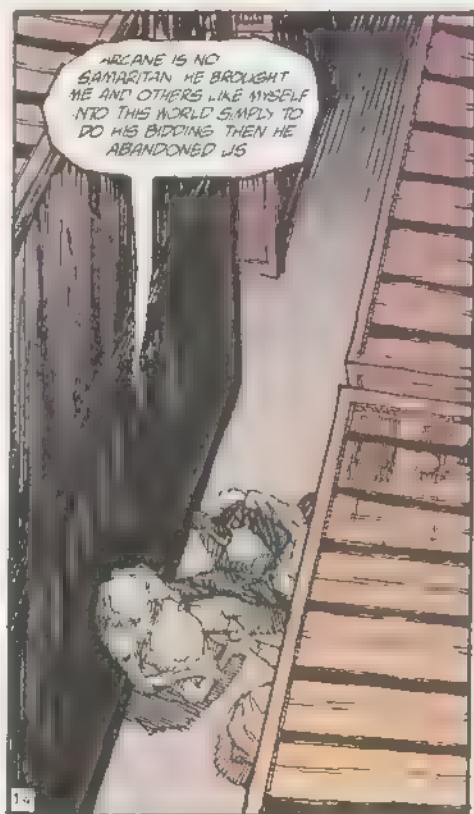
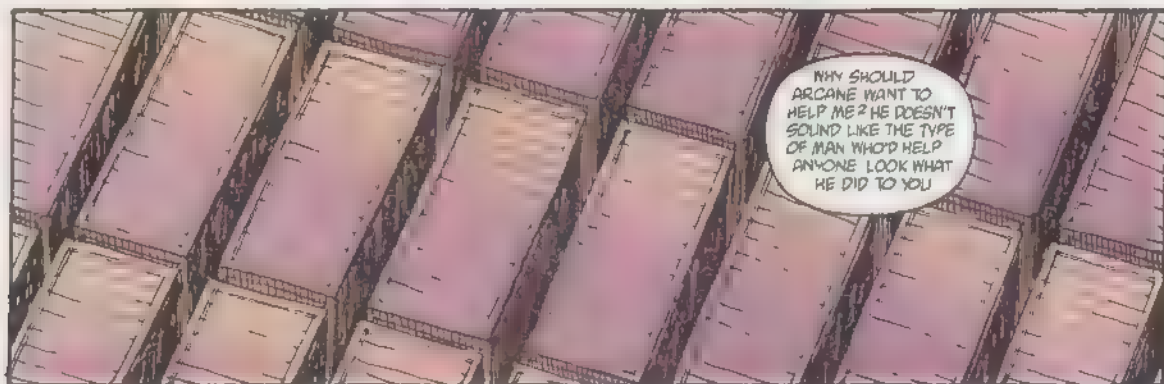


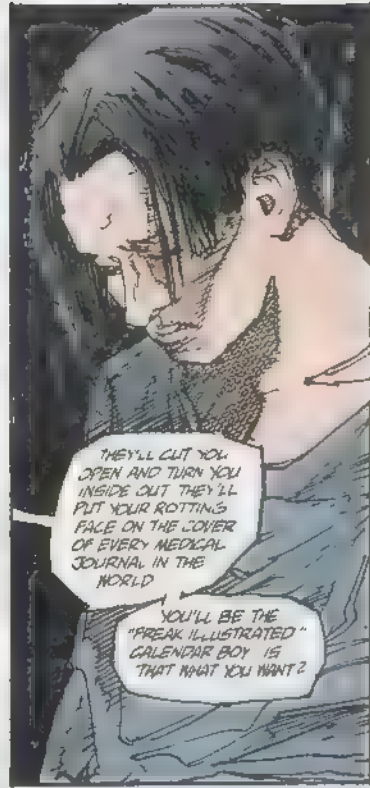
WE WERE GOING TO ROMANIA
AND I HONESTLY COULDN'T
THINK OF ANY REASON NOT
TO IT MADE NO SENSE TO ME

BUT THEN NOTHING ABOUT
THE LAST FORTY EIGHT
HOURS HAD MADE MUCH
SENSE EITHER



AND MY BRAIN EXPLODED
WITH A CONFUSION THAT
HAD SEEMED ORDERLY
BY COMPARISON







I DON'T WANT TO HIDE
IN SHAMPS AND SLEEP
IN GRAVEYARDS I DON'T
WANT TO LOOK LIKE
YOU



NO, DAMIEN, AND NEITHER
DO I, BUT YOU MUST
UNDERSTAND, YOU WERE
NEVER NORMAL TO START
WITH THEY MADE YOU, AND
YOU CAN'T CHANGE
THAT FACT

YOUR ONLY
MISTAKE WAS NOT
DYING WHEN YOU
HAD THE CHANCE



THE PAIN,
JESUS, CRASSUS,
IT'S EATING ME ALIVE
FROM THE INSIDE
OUT



YOU ARE BEING
REBORN, DAMIEN. EVERY
HOUR, EVERY MINUTE AND
BIRTH IS ALWAYS
PAINFUL

THOSE MORONS
BACK AT THE BASE
DON'T UNDERSTAND
THEY THINK YOU'RE
DYING

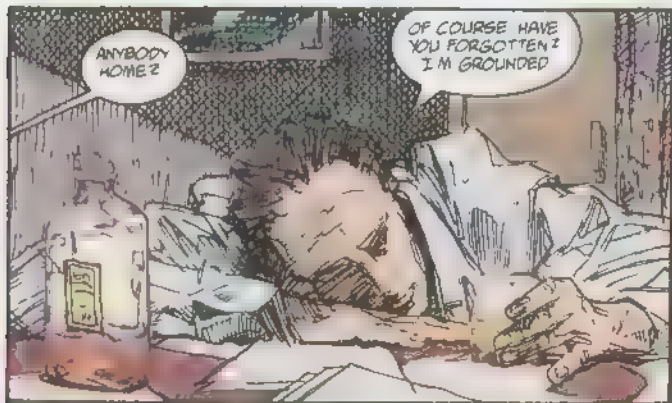
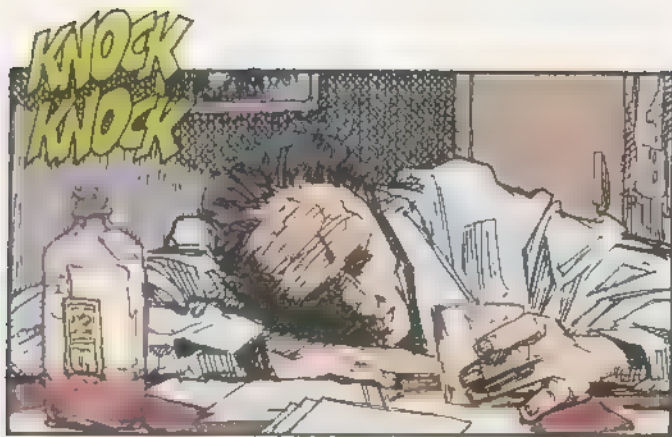
I AM DYING, DAMMIT
MANGU, UNDERSTANDS HE
CAN SAVE ME I ONLY RAN
BECAUSE I WAS AFRAID NOW
I'M PETRIFIED I WANT TO GO
BACK, CRASSUS PLEASE
I WANT TO GO BACK



IT'S TOO
LATE FOR
THAT WE
MUST FIND
ARCANE WE
MUST HELP
EACH OTHER

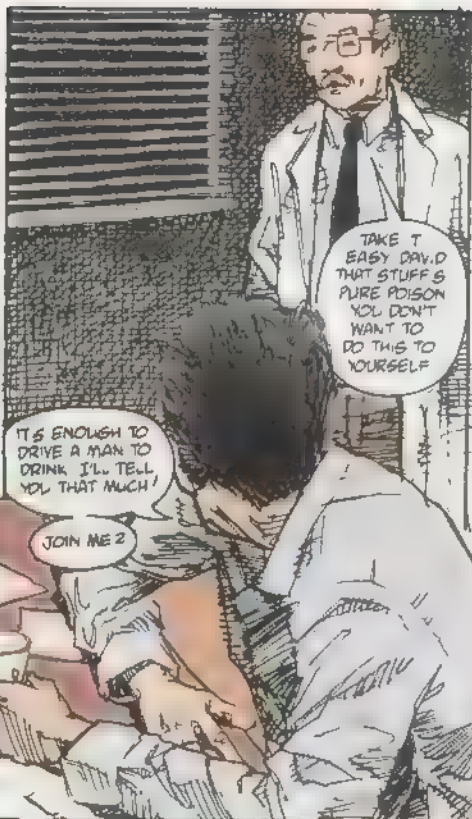


TRUST ME
MY FRIEND
TRUST ME



ANYBODY HOME?

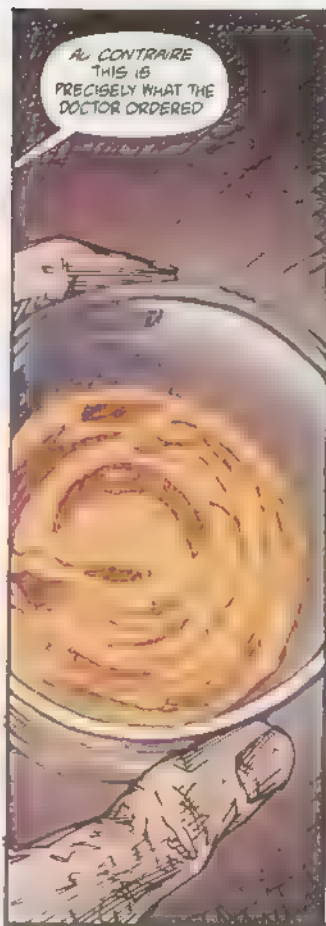
OF COURSE HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN? I'M GROUNDED



TAKE IT EASY DAVID THAT STUFF'S PURE POISON YOU DON'T WANT TO DO THIS TO YOURSELF

IT'S ENOUGH TO DRIVE A MAN TO DRINK I'LL TELL YOU THAT MUCH!

JOIN ME?



AL CONTRAIRE THIS IS PRECISELY WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED



YOU KNOW MUTH, WE TAKE IT FOR GRANTED THAT WHEN WE LOOK IN THE MIRROR WE'LL LOOK EXACTLY LIKE WE DID THE LAST TIME AN EXTRA WRINKLE HERE AND THERE, BUT BASICALLY THE SAME

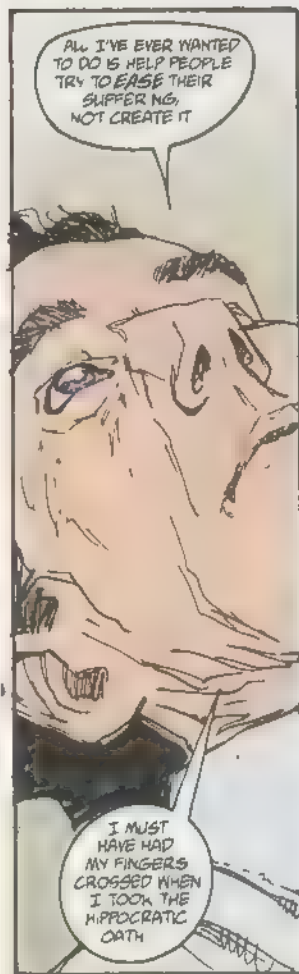
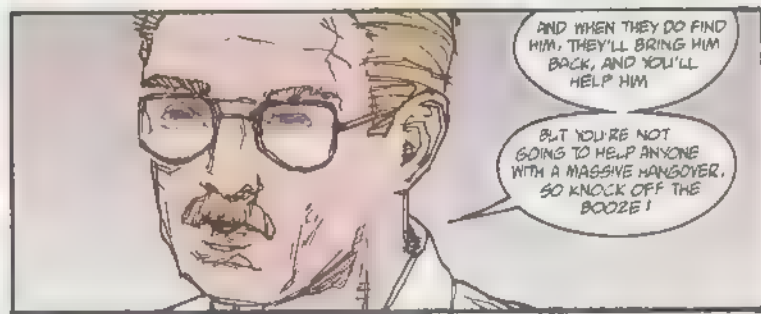
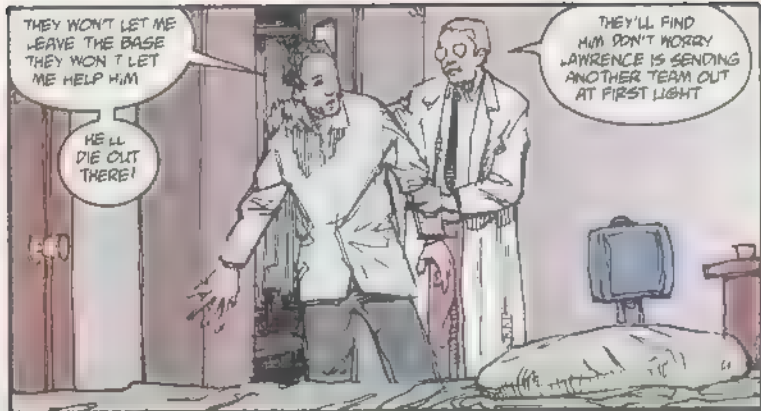
I ONLY HOPE THAT THERE ARE NO MIRRORS IN DAMIEN'S FUTURE

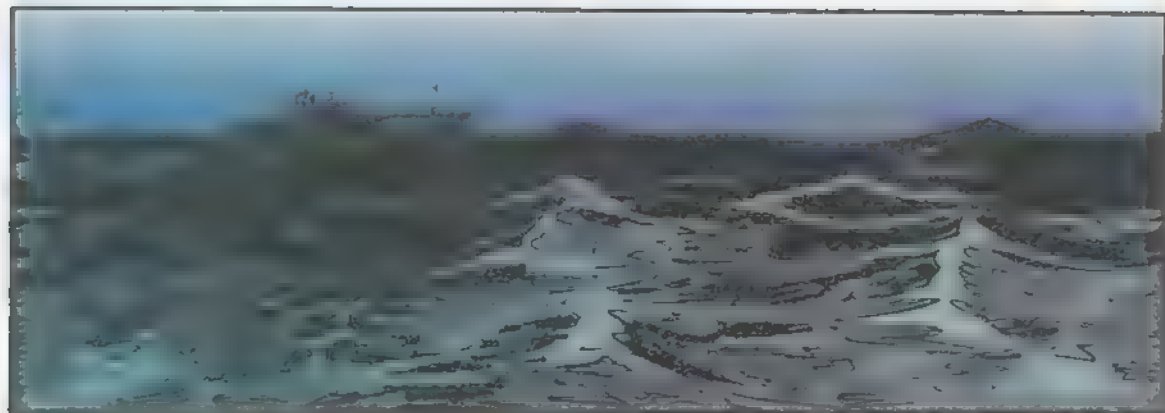


IS IT POSSIBLE TO AVOID MIRRORS MUTH? TO LIVE A LIFETIME WITHOUT EVER SEEING YOUR REFLECTION?

GO TO BED DAVID THIS WON'T HELP ANYTHING

TO NEVER KNOW WHY PEOPLE CRINGE AND TURN AWAY AS THEY WALK BY?

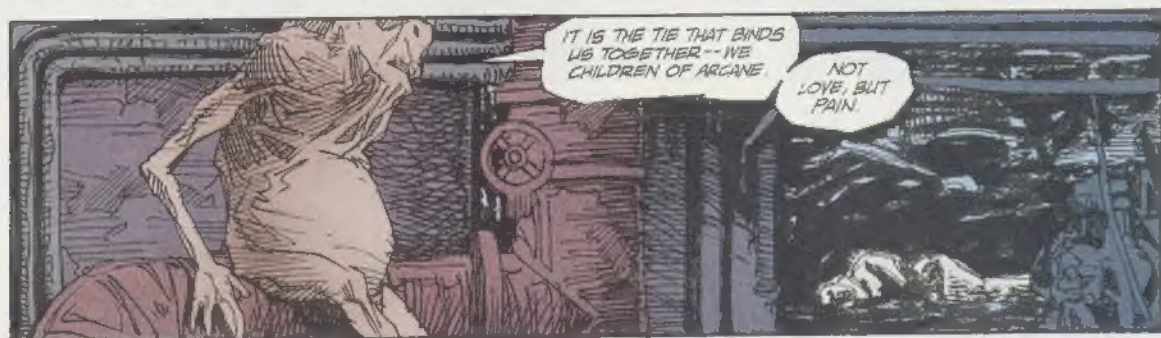
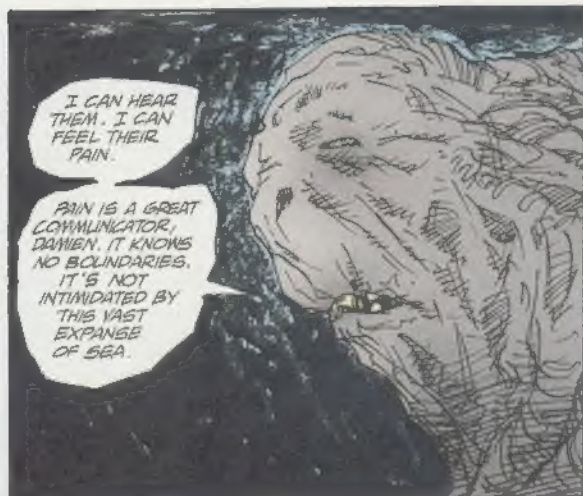




DON'T WORRY,
DANNEN YOU'RE
ONE OF US, NOW



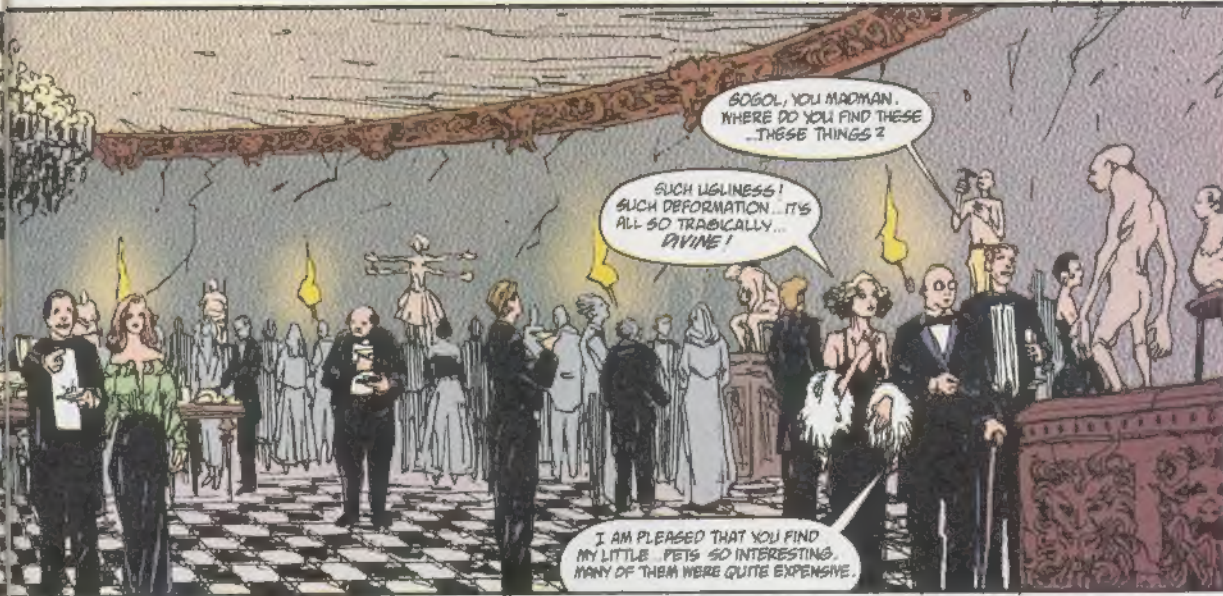
AND WE TAKE
CARE OF OUR
OWN





MORE CHAMPAGNE?

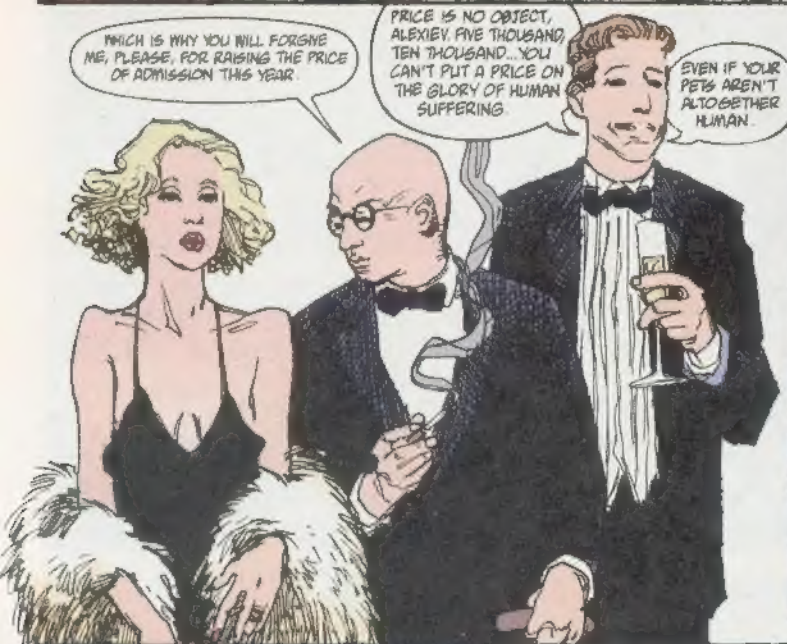
MORE CAVIAR?



GOSOL, YOU MADMAN. WHERE DO YOU FIND THESE... THESE THINGS?

SUCH UGLINESS! SUCH DEFORMATION... IT'S ALL SO TRAGICALLY... DIVINE!

I AM PLEASED THAT YOU FIND MY LITTLE PETS SO INTERESTING. MANY OF THEM WERE QUITE EXPENSIVE.



WHICH IS WHY YOU WILL FORGIVE ME, PLEASE, FOR RAISING THE PRICE OF ADMISSION THIS YEAR.

PRICE IS NO OBJECT, ALEXIEV. FIVE THOUSAND, TEN THOUSAND... YOU CAN'T PUT A PRICE ON THE GLORY OF HUMAN SUFFERING.

EVEN IF YOUR PETS AREN'T ALTOGETHER HUMAN.



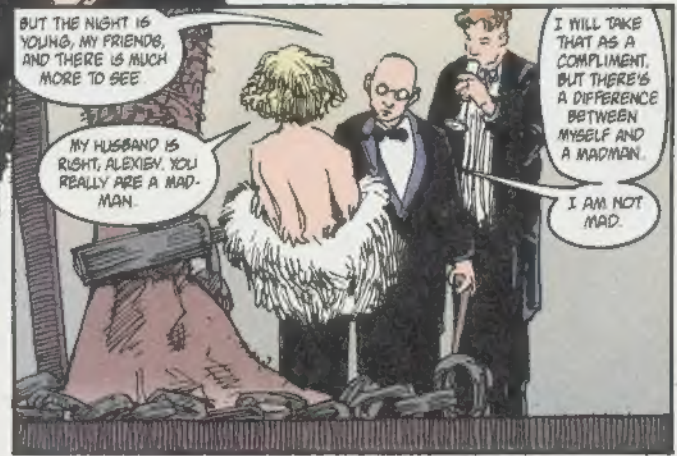
I FOUND THIS ONE IN NAPLES TWO YEARS AGO. HIS NAME IS ABEL.

SAY HELLO, ABEL.



HELLO.

A WITTY DEVIL, NO?

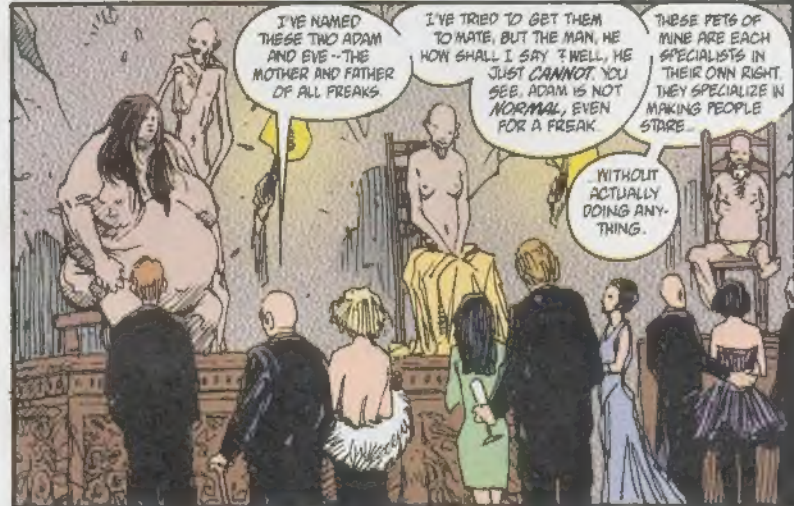


BUT THE NIGHT IS YOUNG, MY FRIENDS, AND THERE IS MUCH MORE TO SEE.

MY HUSBAND IS RIGHT, ALEXIEV. YOU REALLY ARE A MADMAN.

I WILL TAKE THAT AS A COMPLIMENT, BUT THERE'S A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MYSELF AND A MADMAN.

I AM NOT MAD.

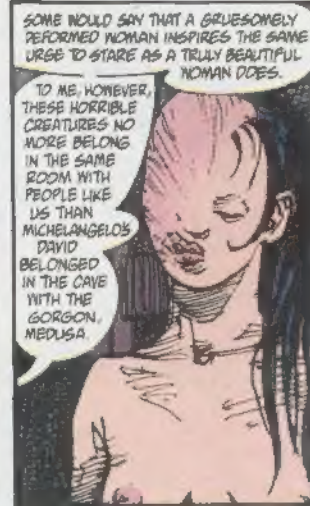


I'VE NAMED THESE TWO ADAM AND EVE - THE MOTHER AND FATHER OF ALL FREAKS.

I'VE TRIED TO GET THEM TO MATE, BUT THE MAN, HE JUST CANNOT YOU SEE. ADAM IS NOT NORMAL, EVEN FOR A FREAK.

THESE PETS OF MINE ARE EACH SPECIALISTS IN THEIR OWN RIGHT. THEY SPECIALIZE IN MAKING PEOPLE STARE...

WITHOUT ACTUALLY DOING ANYTHING.



SOME WOULD SAY THAT A GRUESOMELY PERFORMED WOMAN INSPIRES THE SAME URGE TO STARE AS A TRULY BEAUTIFUL WOMAN DOES.

TO ME, HOWEVER, THESE HORRIBLE CREATURES NO MORE BELONG IN THE SAME ROOM WITH PEOPLE LIKE US THAN MICHELANGELO'S DAVID BELONGED IN THE CAVE WITH THE GORGON, MEDUSA.



BUT THIS, MY FRIENDS, IS A LIVING MUSEUM OF UGLINESS, WHERE NATURE'S MONSTERS ARE JUDGED LIKE SINNERS OF ANOTHER SPECIES.

IT'S JUST LIKE ART.

EXACTLY.



THIS ONE IS A BIT OF A BORE. I'M AFRAID, AS HE SIMPLY DOES DISGUSTING THINGS. THERE'S NOTHING PHYSICALLY SPECIAL ABOUT HIM.

BUT THERE IS SOMETHING AESTHETICALLY SATISFYING IN WATCHING A MAN BITE THE HEAD OFF A LIVE BIRD, WHILE YOU DINE ON CAVIAR.

SPLENDID, GOSOL. YOU'VE DONE IT AGAIN!



IT'S ALL SO SPECIAL HERE, ALEXIEV. YOU'RE AN ARTIST, A GENIUS... A GOD!

YOU ARE TOO KIND.

A TOAST--TO OUR GOOD FRIEND, ALEXIEV GOGOL, A MAN OF ENDLESS VISION.



A GOD AMONG FREAKS!



I'LL KILL THAT MAN ONE DAY.



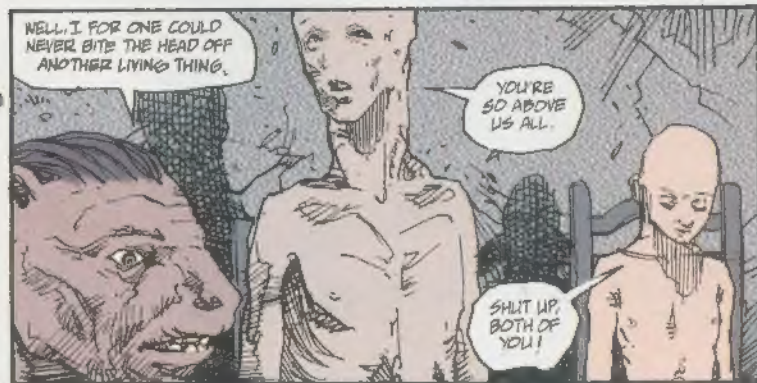
THAT'S WHAT YOU ALWAYS SAY, BRONTES, BUT YOU NEVER DO.

QUIET, MY BROTHERS. SOMEONE IS COMING.



LOOK AT THEM ALL, STARING AT THAT GEEK EATING CHICKEN HEADS. GOD, HE DISGUSTS ME!

AND WE PROBABLY DISGUST HIM, TOO.



WELL, I FOR ONE COULD NEVER BITE THE HEAD OFF ANOTHER LIVING THING.

YOU'RE SO ABOVE US ALL.

SHUT UP, BOTH OF YOU!



SOMEONE IS COMING--ONE OF OUR OWN. HE IS TRAVELING WITH ANOTHER. I CANNOT TELL WHO...

BUT THEY ARE COMING FOR US. I CAN FEEL THEM IN MY MIND.

