

# PROLOGUE

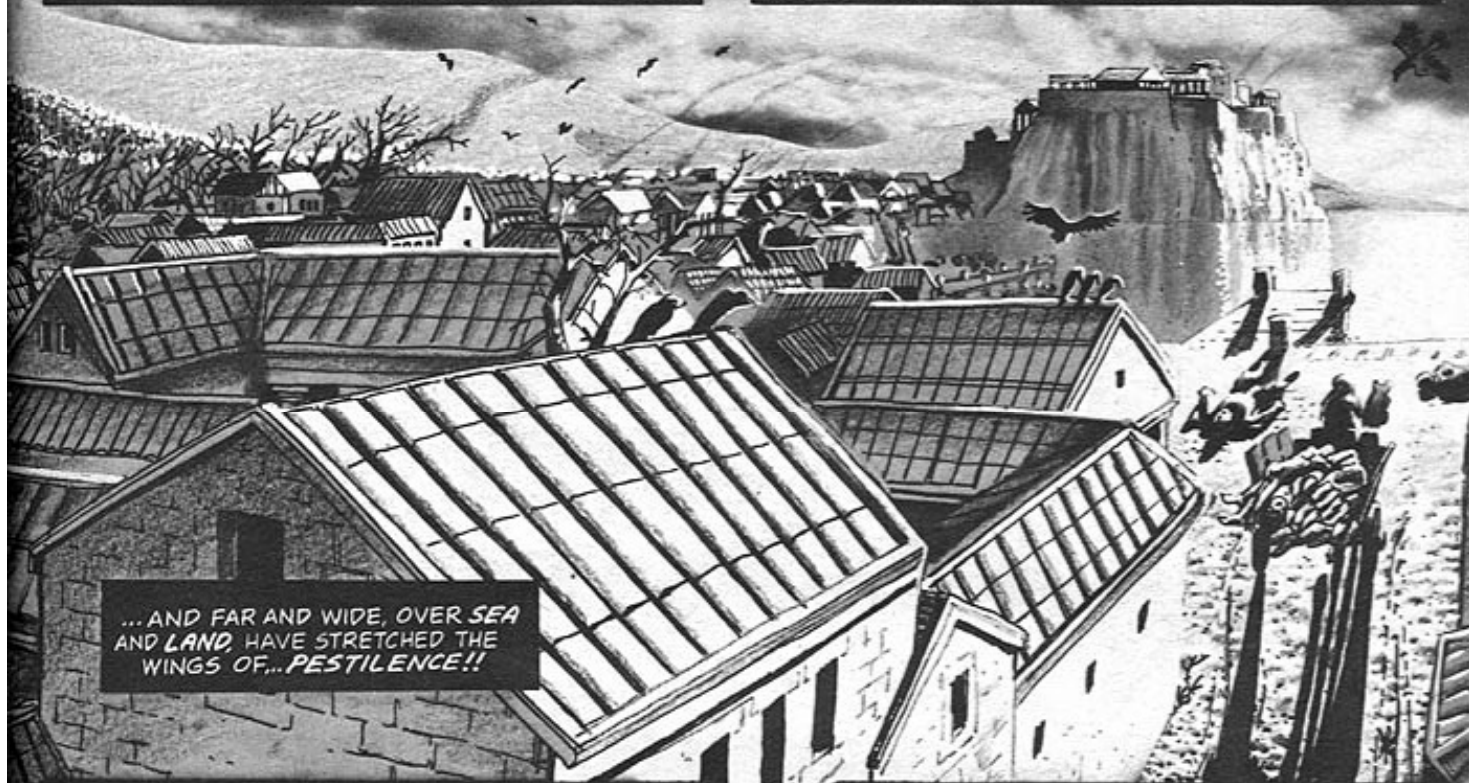
I AM OINOS, A GREEK... AND PROUD  
CAPTAIN OF THE PALACE GUARD!



HOW  
STANDS THE  
NORTHERN  
GATE, OINOS?

ALL IS  
SECURE, GENERAL,  
AS IS THE EASTERN  
GATE, ALSO!

THIS PAST YEAR HAS BEEN A  
TIME OF PRISTINE TERROR...  
FOR MANY PRODIGES AND  
SIGNS HAVE TAKEN PLACE...



... AND FAR AND WIDE, OVER SEA  
AND LAND, HAVE STRETCHED THE  
WINGS OF... PESTILENCE!!

THE CAUSE FOR ALL THIS HORROR... ACCORDING, AT  
LEAST, TO THE ROYAL SEER... WAS THE MERGING OF  
MIGHTY JUPITER WITH RED-WINGED SATURN!



AS YOU CAN  
EASILY SEE, MY DEAR  
CAPTAIN, THE SKIES, FOR  
THE NEXT SEVERAL  
MONTHS, CURSE  
US ALL!

THE PECULIAR SPIRIT OF THE STARS, IF I  
MISTAKE NOT GREATLY, MADE ITSELF MANIFEST  
NOT ONLY IN THE PHYSICAL ORB OF THE EARTH...



... BUT IN THE SOULS,  
IMAGINATIONS AND DEEDS  
OF MEN EVERYWHERE!

# SHADOW

OVER SOME *FLASKS* OF RED CHAIN WINE,  
WITHIN THE WALLS OF *NOBLE* HOLD, IN A  
DIM CITY CALLED *PTOLEMAIS*... WE SAT  
AT NIGHT, A *COMPANY* OF SEVEN!



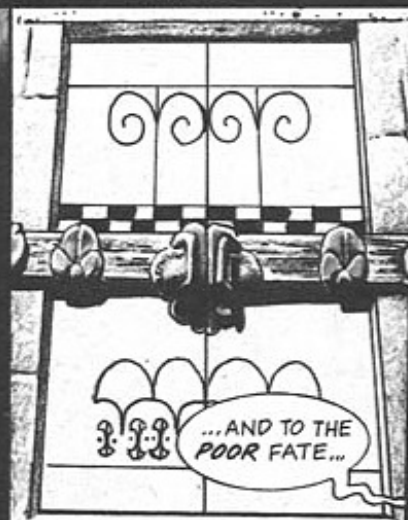
A *TOAST!*  
LET US DRINK  
DEEPLY TO *ZOILUS*...  
AND TO THE *POOR*  
*FATE* WHICH  
AWAITS US  
ALL!

AYE!  
LET US *TOAST*  
*SPEARMAN*  
*ZOILUS*...

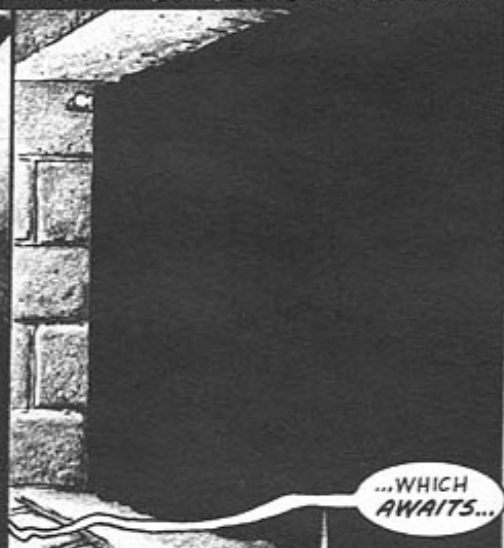
AND TO OUR CHAMBER THERE  
WAS NO *ENTRANCE*... SAVE BY  
A *LOFTY* DOOR OF *BRASS*...  
WHICH WAS *FASTENED* FROM  
WITHIN!

*BLACK* DRAPERIES, LIKEWISE, IN THE  
*GLOOMY* ROOM, SHUT OUT FROM OUR  
VIEW THE *MOON*, THE *LURID* STARS,  
AND THE *PEOPLELESS* STREETS...

... BUT THE *BROODING* AND THE  
SENSATION OF *EVIL*, COULD  
NOT BE SO EASILY *EXCLUDED!*



... AND TO THE  
*POOR* FATE ...



... WHICH  
AWAITS ...



... US  
ALL!!

FOR THERE WAS YET ANOTHER *TENANT* OF OUR CHAMBER, IN THE PERSON OF YOUNG *ZOILUS*, A FELLOW *WARRIOR*...

HE LAY AT FULL LENGTH, *ENSHROUDED* FROM FOOT TO NECK...AND WAS THE REASON FOR OUR *MAD GATHERING* TOGETHER!

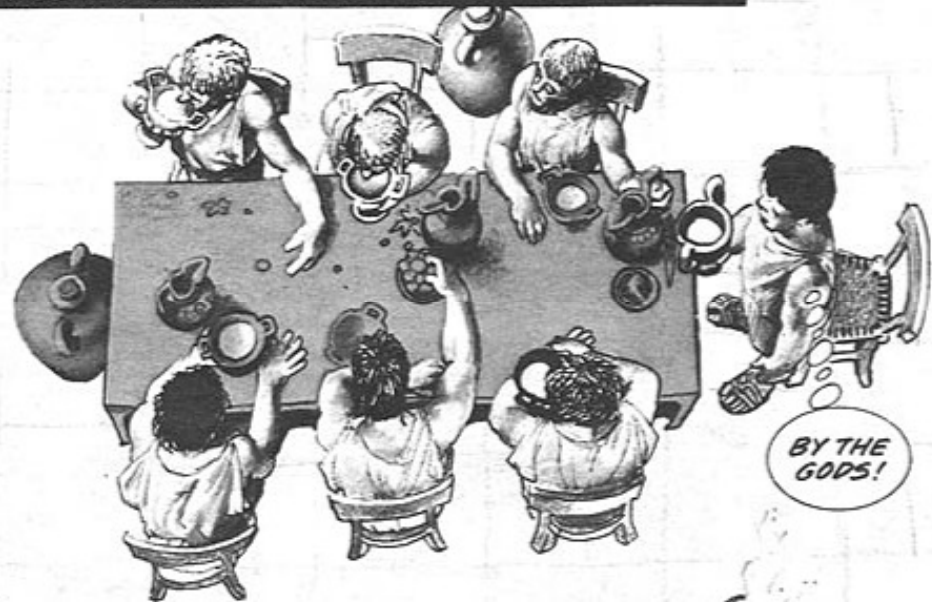
...WHO WAS *STONE-COLD DEAD!*



HA! HAH! HA!  
I HOPE *ZOILUS* APPRECIATES THIS *LITTLE PARTY* HELD IN HIS HONOR!



ALAS! *ZOILUS* BORE NO PORTION OF OUR *MIRTH*...SAVE THAT HIS *COUNTENANCE*, DISTORTED BY THE *PLAGUE*, SEEMED TO MAKE HIS EYES *SPARKLE* AND BURN WITH *MYSTERIOUS FIRES!*



BY THE GODS!

BUT ALTHOUGH I, *OINOS*, FELT THE GAZE OF THE *DEPARTED* UPON ME... STILL I FORCED MYSELF NOT TO PERCEIVE THE *BITTERNESS* OF MY *DEAD COMRADE'S* *EXPRESSION!*

AND STARING DOWN AT MY OWN REFLECTION IN THE *GOBLET* I HELD, I SANG WITH A *LOUD* AND *SONOROUS* VOICE ABOUT *LIFE* AND THE *STILL-LIVING!*



THE GAZE OF *ZOILUS* IS MORE *MAGNETIC* IN *DEATH* THAN IN *LIFE!*



MUST *AVERT* MY EYES... LEST I AGAIN *CLASH* WITH HIS *UNSEEING* *GLANCE!*

THERE WERE *THINGS* AROUND AND ABOUT US  
OF WHICH I CAN RENDER NO *DISTINCT* ACCOUNT...

... ANXIETY

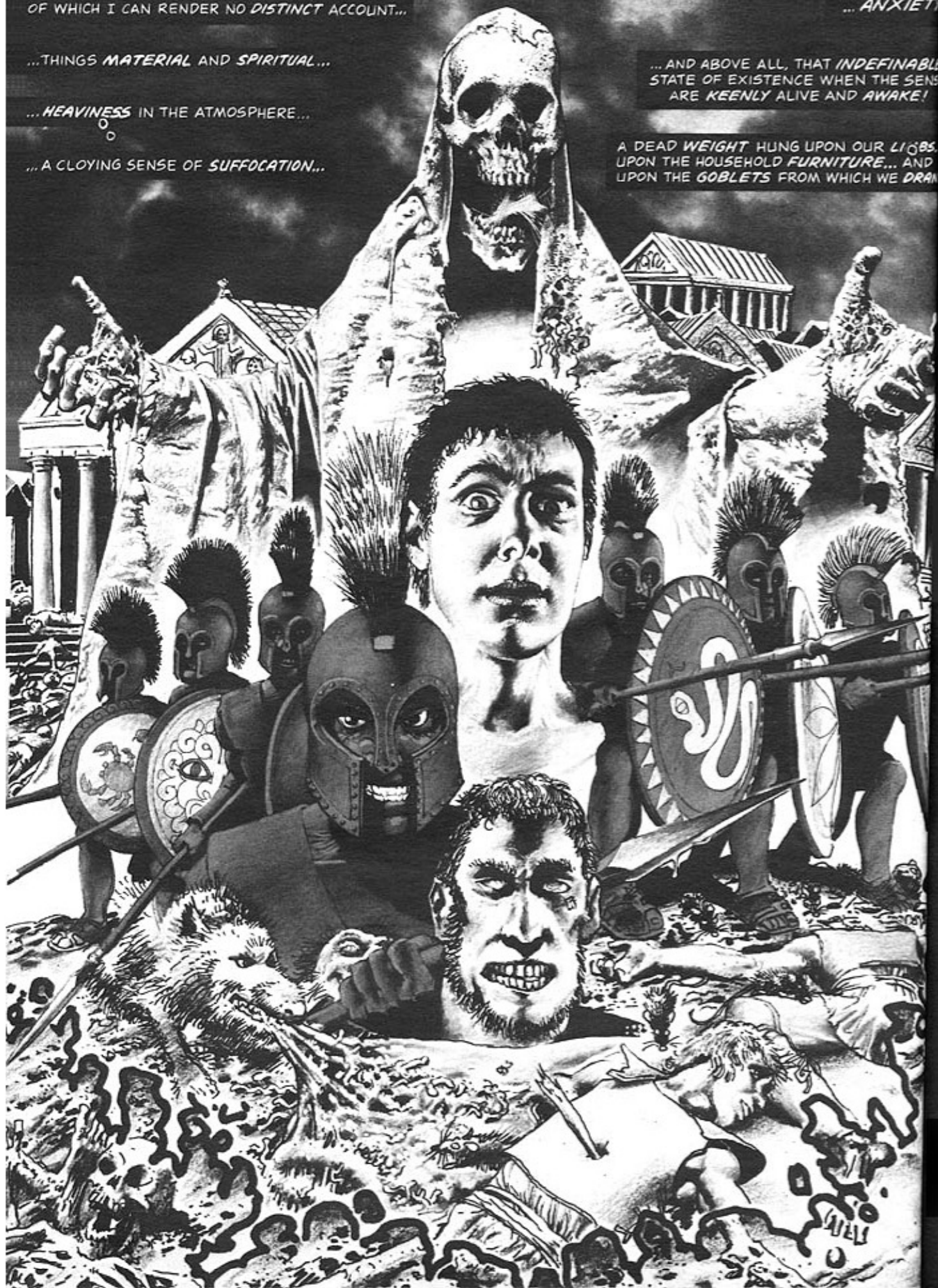
...THINGS *MATERIAL* AND *SPIRITUAL*...

... AND ABOVE ALL, THAT *INDEFINABLE*  
STATE OF EXISTENCE WHEN THE SENSES  
ARE *KEENLY* ALIVE AND *AWAKE!*

... *HEAVINESS* IN THE ATMOSPHERE...

A DEAD *WEIGHT* HUNG UPON OUR *LIMBS*,  
UPON THE *HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE*... AND  
UPON THE *GOBLET* FROM WHICH WE *DRAW*

... A *CLOYING* SENSE OF *SUFFOCATION*...



ALL THINGS WERE  
*DEPRESSED*...  
AND BORNE DOWN  
THEREBY!



YET, WE *LAUGHED* AND WERE *MERRY* IN  
OUR OWN WAY, WHICH WAS *HYSTERICAL*...!



A *CRAZED MOOD* HAD  
FALLEN UPON US ALL...!

WE *SANG* AND DRANK *DEEPLY*  
... ALTHOUGH THE *SHINING RED*  
WINE REMINDED US OF *BLOOD*!



BUT IT  
FEELS SO  
*INTOXICATINGLY*  
GOOD...NONE SEEKS  
A SINGLE REASON  
NOT TO *REVEL*!

AGAIN,  
FELLOW *SPEAR-*  
MEN! *ANOTHER*  
TOAST TO OUR  
CAPTAIN...  
*OINOS!*

AND *LO!* FROM BEHIND THOSE *RAVEN-*  
*BLACK* CURTAINS, THERE CAME FORTH  
A *DARK* AND UNDEFINED *SHADOW*...

BUT GRADUALLY THE  
*SONGS CEASED! HALTED!*  
AND THEIR *ECHOES*,  
ROLLING AFAR TOWARDS  
THE *SABLE* DRAPERIES  
OF THE CHAMBER, BECAME  
*UNDISTINGUISHABLE*...  
AND *FADED AWAY*...



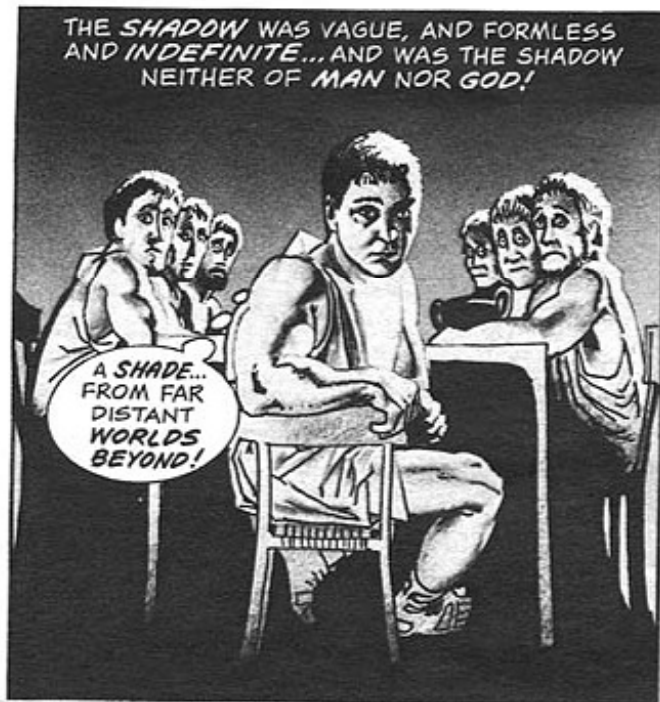
... A **SHADOW** SUCH AS THE BRIGHT MOON, WHILE YET LOW IN **HEAVEN**, MIGHT FASHION FROM THE **FIGURE** OF A MAN!



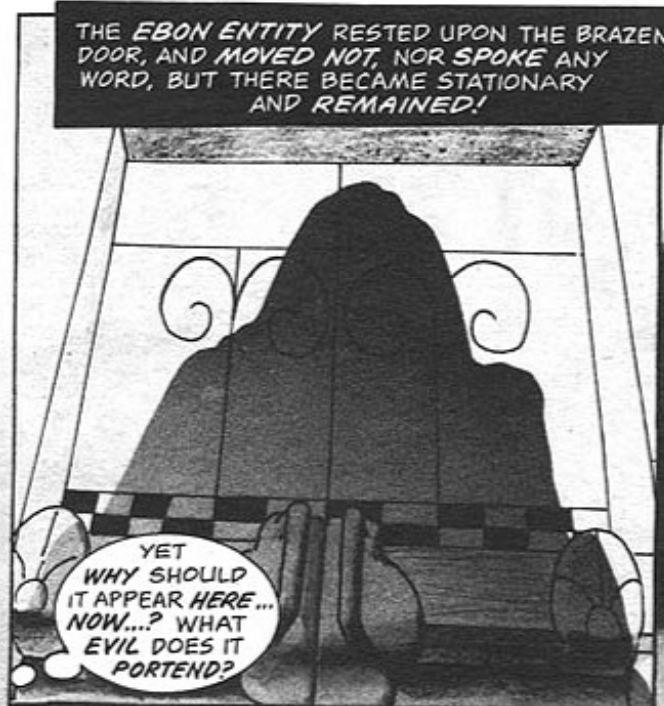
AFTER **QUIVERING** BY THE DRAPERIES, IT AT LENGTH **RESTED** IN FULL VIEW UPON THE SURFACE OF THE **DOOR OF BRASS!**



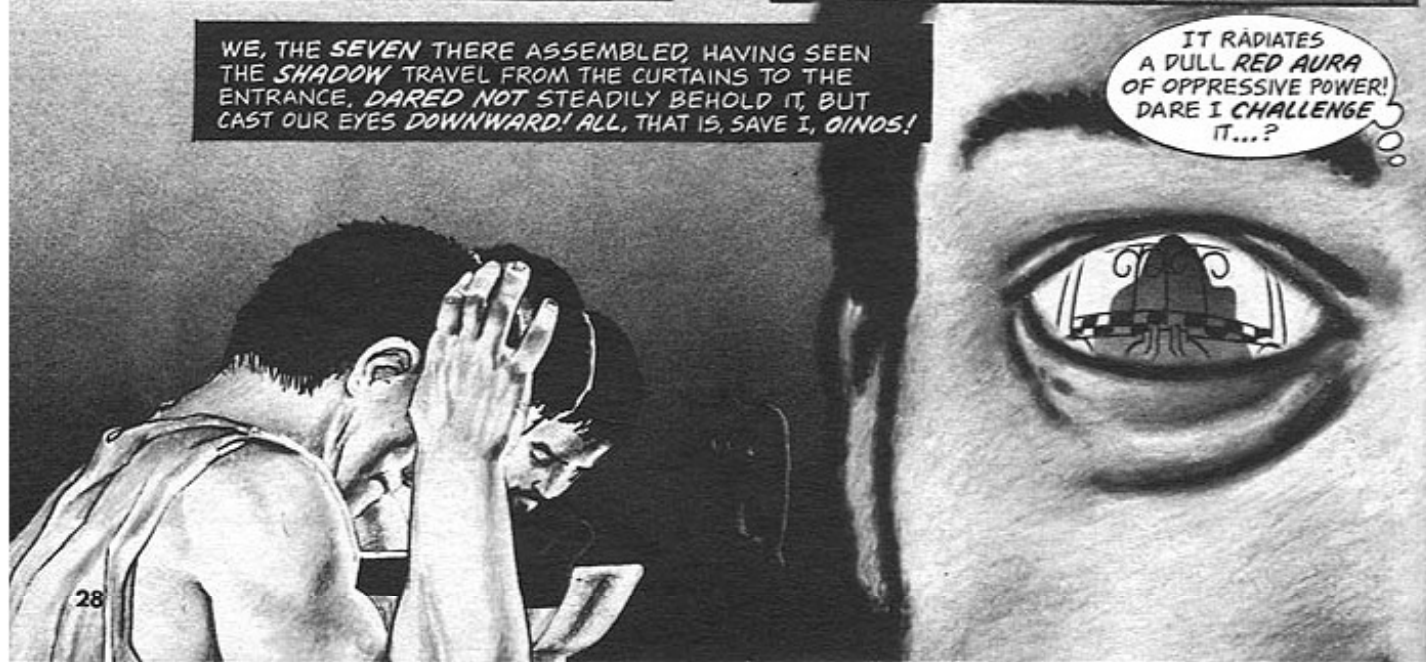
THE **SHADOW** WAS VAGUE, AND FORMLESS AND INDEFINITE... AND WAS THE **SHADOW** NEITHER OF **MAN** NOR **GOD!**



THE **EBON ENTITY** RESTED UPON THE **BRAZEN** **DOOR**, AND **MOVED NOT**, NOR **SPOKE** ANY **WORD**, BUT THERE BECAME **STATIONARY** AND **REMAINED!**



WE, THE **SEVEN** THERE ASSEMBLED, HAVING SEEN THE **SHADOW** TRAVEL FROM THE CURTAINS TO THE **ENTRANCE**, **DARED NOT** STEADILY BEHOLD IT, BUT **CAST** OUR **EYES** **DOWNWARD!** ALL, THAT IS, **SAVE** I, **GINOS!**



THEN I, CAPTAIN OF MY MEN, SPEAKING SOME LOW WORDS, DEMANDED OF THE SHADOW ITS CELESTIAL ORIGIN!

...I DARE!!



WHERE ARE YOU FROM, BLACK ONE... AND WHY SEEK YOU TO DARKEN OUR DOORWAY WITH YOUR MIDNIGHT FRAME?

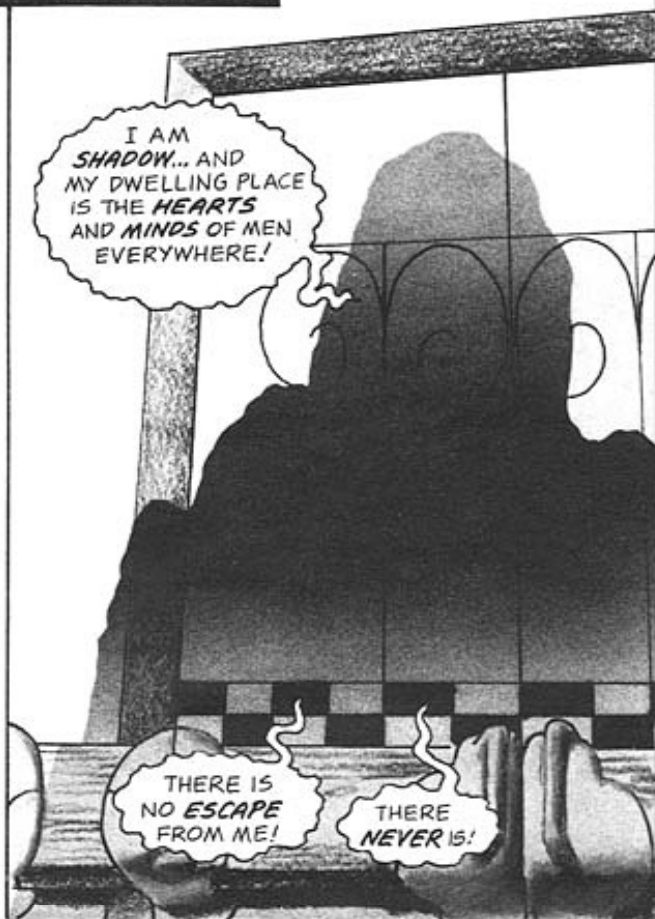
SUDDENLY WE, THE SEVEN, STARTED FROM OUR SEATS IN HORROR...

...AND STOOD THUS TREMBLING AND SHUDDERING, AND AGHAST...



AND THE SHADOW ANSWERED!

I AM SHADOW... AND MY DWELLING PLACE IS THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF MEN EVERYWHERE!



THERE IS NO ESCAPE FROM ME!

THERE NEVER IS!



...FOR THE TONES IN THE VOICE OF THE SHADOW WERE NOT THE TONES OF ANY ONE BEING, BUT A MULTIPLE OF VOICES... REMEMBERED AND FAMILIAR ACCENTS OF HUNDREDS OF DEPARTED FRIENDS!

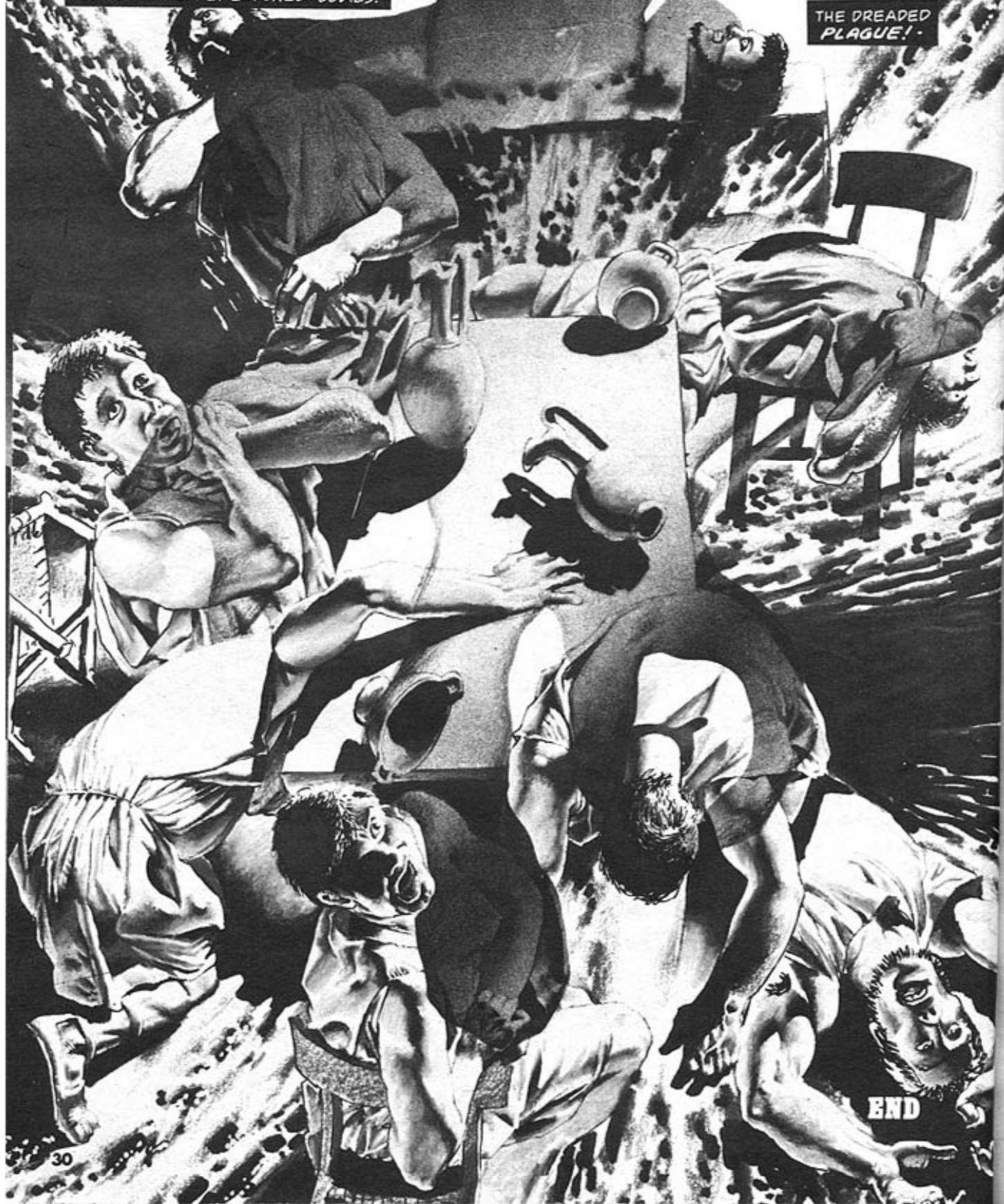
I AND MY COMPANIONS MADE READY TO FLEE...  
FOR WE KNEW THE SHADOW TO BE...**DEATH!!**

BUT, IT WAS ALREADY FAR TOO LATE! MY  
FRIENDS-IN-BATTLE GRABBED AND CLUTCHED  
AT THEIR THROATS ALL ABOUT ME... AND  
TOPPLED LIKE FELLEED TREES!

THE SHADOW DROPPED UPON US...  
GATHERING UP ALL OUR SOULS  
FROM OUR POX-SPLOTCHED BODIES!

UNKNOWINGLY,  
WE HAD COME  
TO BID FAREWELL  
TO PLAGUE-  
RIDDEN ZOILLUS...  
AND WE ALL HAD  
CAUGHT THE  
DREAD  
CONTAGION  
FROM HIM!!

THE DREADED  
PLAGUE! -



**END**