

Stan Lee
PRESENTS:

THE SINISTER SCARECROW!

THE DEAD OF
NIGHT:

ON A NIGHT SUCH AS
THIS, MOST CITY-
DWELLERS HIDE
IN THE SHELTER
OF THEIR HOMES,
AFRAID TO RESPOND
TO THE SLIGHTEST
OUTSIDE SOUND,
AFRAID TO GET
INVOLVED --

-- AFRAID OF
THEMSELVES.

YET THERE ARE THOSE
WHO DO NOT FLEE FROM
EVIL -- BUT RUSH
TOWARDS IT, LIKE
MOTHS TO A CANDLE
FLAME.

THE SCARECROW
WAITS...
FOR THEM!

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SO THE FAITHFUL GUARD NOW JOINS HIS EMPLOYER... IN DEATH.



OKAY--
LET'S GET
DOWN TO
WORK!

YEAH, AS SOON
AS THAT SCARECROW
PAINTING IS IN OUR
HANDS...



...THE CULT OF
KALUMAI WILL RULE
THE WORLD ONCE
MORE!

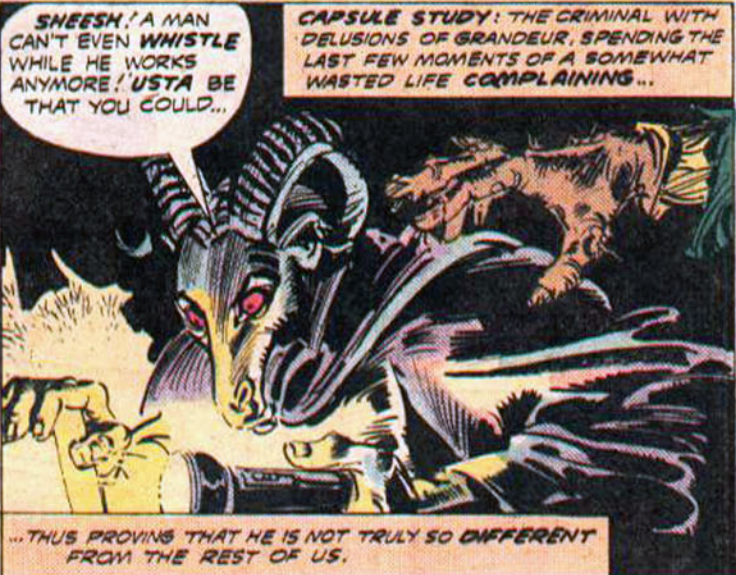


Y'KNOW, I AIN'T
NEVER SEEN SO MANY
PAINTINGS IN MY
WHOLE--



SHADDUP,
WILLYA! JUST
KEEP
LOOKIN'!

SHEESH! A MAN
CAN'T EVEN WHISTLE
WHILE HE WORKS
ANYMORE! USTA BE
THAT YOU COULD...



CAPSULE STUDY: THE CRIMINAL WITH DELUSIONS OF GRANDEUR, SPENDING THE LAST FEW MOMENTS OF A SOMEWHAT WASTED LIFE COMPLAINING...

BENEATH A VENEER OF SOPHISTICATED CALLOUSNESS OR INFANTILE HUMOR, THERE OFTEN LURKS A FEARFUL CHILD.

...THUS PROVING THAT HE IS NOT TRULY SO DIFFERENT FROM THE REST OF US.

EXCEPT THAT HIS
TIME HAS COME--
NOW!



HE SPINS IN HIS LAST FEW MOMENTS, THIS MOUSE OF A MAN. HE SPINS TO SEE HIS PERSONAL INCARNATION OF DEATH-- THAT WHICH PREVIOUSLY TOUCHED HIS TATTERED EXISTENCE ONLY AS SOME NEBULOUS ABSTRACTION--



--BUT NOW HAS COME FORTH TO TOUCH HIM PHYSICALLY...

...AND ITS TOUCH IS
DEATHLY COLD!

... THE
SCARECROW...



IF THE DEAD MAN HAD LIVED, PERHAPS HE WOULD HAVE WARNED HIS PARTNER...



WHAT?

... BUT KNOWING THE NATURE OF THAT DEAD MAN...

... IT'S DOUBTFUL!



SO IT'S HALLOWE'EN TIME, EH, JOKER. GUESS I'LL JUST HAVE TO REMOVE YOUR MASK... THE HARD WAY!

STEEL-JACKETED PROJECTILES PIERCE CLOTH... AND IF THERE IS ANY EARTHLY FLESH HIDDEN BENEATH...

... NOTHING SHOWS TO PROVE IT. NO BLOOD SPRAYS FORTH FROM GAPING WOUNDS. ONLY PUFFS OF DUST AND A FEW STRAY WISPS OF STRAW STAND WITNESS TO THE FACT THAT BULLETS HAVE VISITED THE SCARECROW'S FORM.



THEN, WITH A SPEED BEYOND THE GRACE OF A RUDOLPH NUREYEV, IF NOT QUITE THE BEAUTY...



WAIT! GET BACK!

... A COMPLETELY UNHARMED SCARECROW RUSHES FORWARD...

... A NIGHTMARE STEALING FORTH UPON THE LAND OF THE LIVING...



... TO CARRY HOME A VICTIM TO THE LAND OF THE DEAD!



CRACK!

ENTER: THE SCARECROW

THE SCARECROW REARS BACK HIS MISSHAPEN HEAD AND LAUGHS THE LAUGH OF A MADMAN... HIS HUGE Gaping MOUTH PAYING TESTAMENT TO THE INHUMAN NATURE OF THE CREATURE.

THE MERCILESS MANIACAL ROAR OF THIS BEING WHO WOULD OTHERWISE BE ONLY A SYMBOL OF TRICK-OR-TREATING, HAYRIDES, AND PUMPKIN PIES... WOULD TERRIFY THE TWO DEAD MEN AT HIS FEET... IF THEY COULD HEAR IT.

HE SEEMS TO ENJOY THESE DEATHS... TO REVEL IN THEM... TO BATHE IN THE WAVES OF PAIN WHICH THE DYING MEN SEND FORTH FROM THE DEPTHS OF THEIR SOULS.



ANY SANE MAN WOULD LOOK SILENTLY ON THIS SCENE, UNABLE TO LAUGH... AND WONDER, PERHAPS... "WHAT'S THE JOKE?"

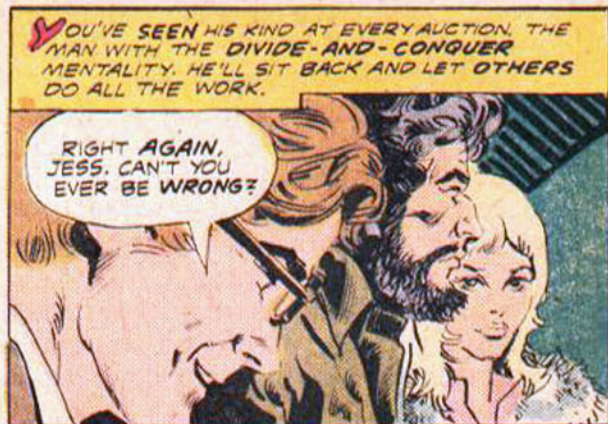
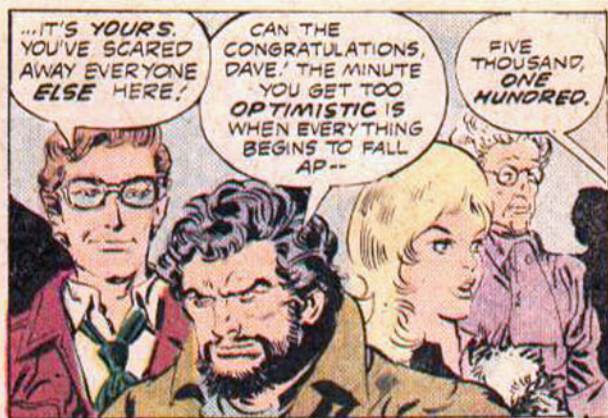
WRITTEN BY
SCOTT EDELMAN

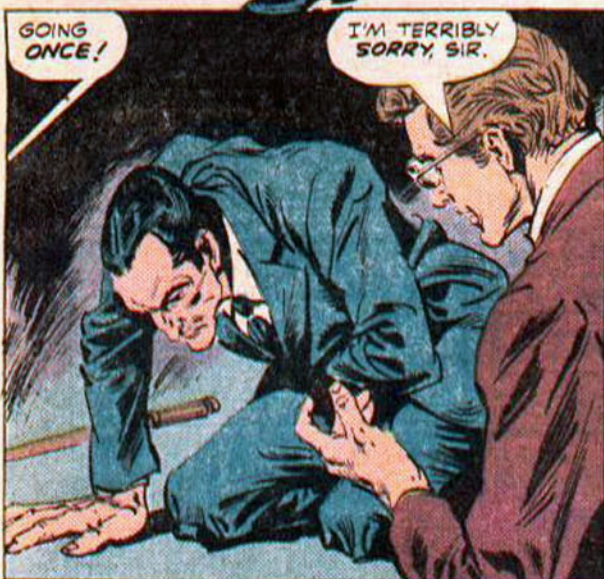
DRAWN BY
RICO RIVAL

COLORS BY
GLYNIS WEIN

LETTERED BY
MARCUS

EDITED BY
LEN WEIN







I REMEMBER THAT TIME JUST BEFORE I LEFT HOME, WHEN YOU--

WAIT!



I WANT THAT PAINTING, MR. DUNCAN... AND ONE WAY OR ANOTHER I'M GOING TO HAVE IT.

IF YOU REALLY WANTED IT, YOU WOULD HAVE KEPT BIDDING AGAINST ME.



JESS HAS WANTED THIS PAINTING ALL HIS LIFE, AND HE'S NOT ABOUT TO GIVE IT UP NOW. SURELY YOU MUST UNDERSTAND THAT FEELING OF FULFILLMENT?

I CAN'T BE SWAYED BY HOMILIES, MISS. WE SHALL MEET AGAIN.



I PROMISE YOU...WE SHALL MEET AGAIN.

AND IF ANY OF THE TRIO HAS ABSORBED THE THREAT INHERENT IN THE WORDS OF GREGOR ROVIK...



...THEY LEAVE IT BEHIND IN THE PARKING LOT. THERE IS NO PLACE FOR MALICE IN THE SOHO LOFT OF JESS DUNCAN.

I'VE WANTED THIS FOR A LONG TIME, DAVE. YOU NEVER KNEW BACK THEN, 'CAUSE YOU'D ALREADY LEFT HOME. YOU WERE ON YOUR OWN UNICORN HUNT, I GUESS. SEEMS I'VE FOUND MY UNICORN FIRST.

WE CAN'T ALL BE WINNERS, JESS. AT LEAST NOT WHEN YOU'RE AROUND!



Y'KNOW--ER--IT'S FUNNY, I'VE BEEN GETTING WEIRD VIBES FROM THIS CANVAS ALL AFTERNOON. THINK IT HAS ANYTHING TO DO WITH ITS SUPPOSED MYSTICAL PROPERTIES?

WHAT PROPERTIES, JESS? YOU'VE BEEN EVADING MY QUESTIONS FOR MONTHS... EVER SINCE YOU FIRST TOLD ME ABOUT THE PAINTING'S EXISTENCE.



YOU KNOW MORE THAN YOU LET ON, DAVE. I'VE GOT THE GUT FEELING YOU'RE WORKING ON A FEATURE ARTICLE FOR THAT MAGAZINE OF YOURS!

IT SHOWS, HUH? YEAH--SO FAR I'VE FOUND THAT THE FIRST RECORDED OWNER OF THE PAINTING WAS A RELIGIOUS HERETIC! HE'D EVEN FALLEN OUT WITH THE MORE ORTHODOX HERESIES--SUCH AS THE CULT OF KALLIMAI.

THEY WERE BELIEVED TO HAVE HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE PAINTING CENTURIES EARLIER, BUT EXACTLY WHAT HAS BEEN LOST TO HISTORY.



WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE CULT, DAVE?

WELL--

THAT MUCH I KNOW! IT DIED OUT MANY YEARS AGO. HARMONY, AS FAR AS I CAN TELL, THIS PAINTING IS ALL THAT REMAINS.

JESS DUNCAN WOULD HAVE MADE AN EXCELLENT PLAYRIGHT...

HE HAS A MARVELOUS SENSE OF IRONY... AND TIMING!

THE EFFECT IS ASTOUNDING... AS A CULT THOUGHT DEAD FOR CENTURIES, EVEN BY MOST OF ITS ADHERENTS, COMES CRASHING THROUGH THE THICK OAKEN DOORS OF JESS DUNCAN'S STUDIO LOFT-- THE KALUMAI LIVE!



JESS?

HER WORDS SEEM TO ASK, "IS THIS ANOTHER OF YOUR CHILDISH JOSES?"

SADLY, IT IS NOT.

SOON OUR LORD SHALL WALK THE EARTH ONCE MORE! TAKE THE PAINTING!



NO! YOU CAN'T DO THIS!

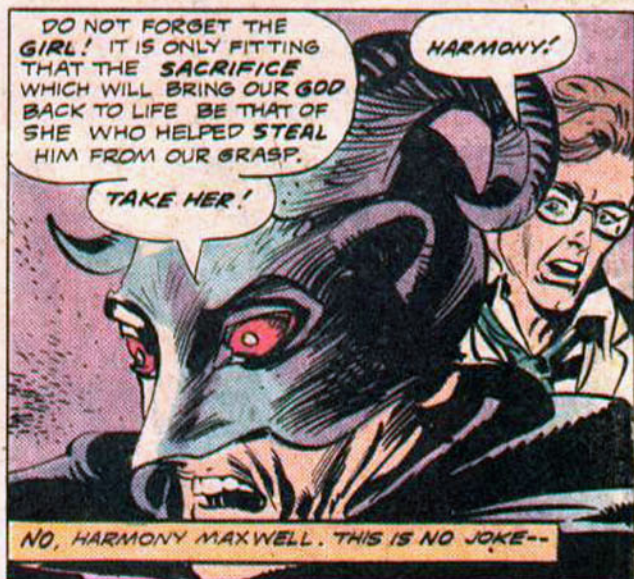


JESS!

DO NOT FORGET THE GIRL! IT IS ONLY FITTING THAT THE SACRIFICE WHICH WILL BRING OUR GOD BACK TO LIFE BE THAT OF SHE WHO HELPED STEAL HIM FROM OUR GRASP.

HARMONY!

TAKE HER!



NO, HARMONY MAXWELL. THIS IS NO JOKE--

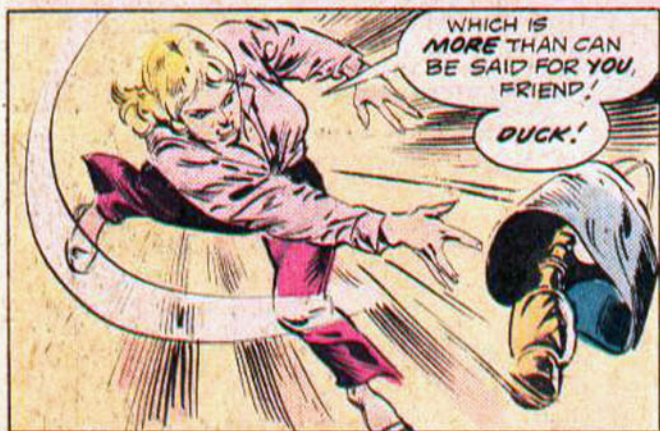
NOT EVEN A VERY GOOD ONE-LINER.



HARMONY,
WATCH
OUT!



DON'T WORRY,
DAVE. I CAN TAKE
CARE OF MYSELF!

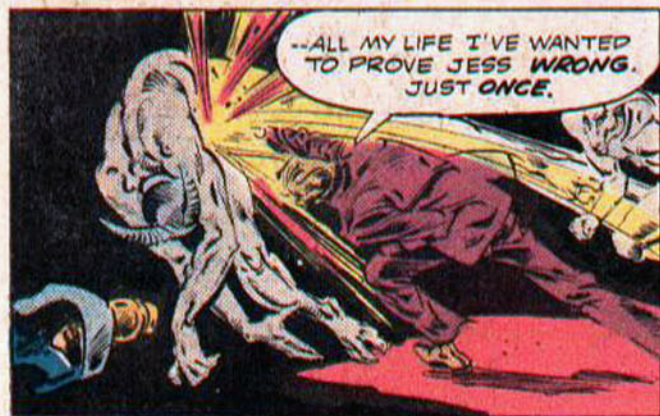


WHICH IS
MORE THAN CAN
BE SAID FOR YOU,
FRIEND!

DUCK!



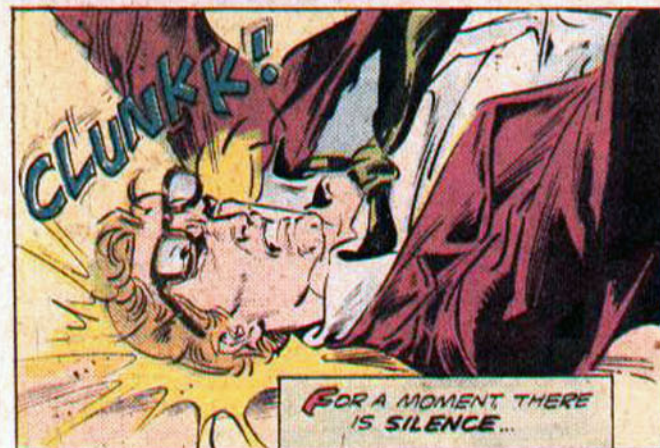
Y'KNOW,
HARMONY--



--ALL MY LIFE I'VE WANTED
TO PROVE JESS WRONG.
JUST ONCE.

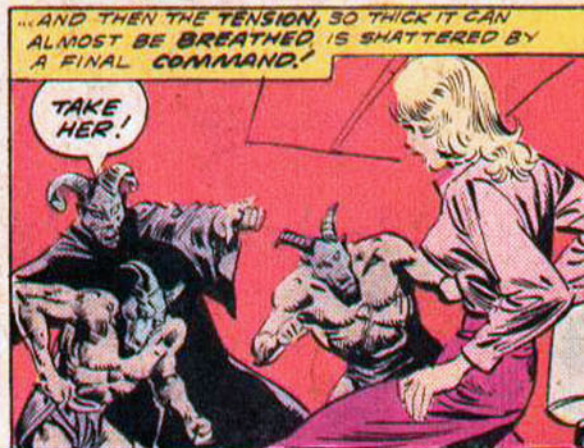


WOULDN'T YA
KNOW I'D HAVE
SUCH CRUMMY
TIM-- NGGG!



CLUNKK!

FOR A MOMENT THERE
IS SILENCE...



...AND THEN THE TENSION, SO THICK IT CAN
ALMOST BE BREATHED, IS SHATTERED BY
A FINAL COMMAND!

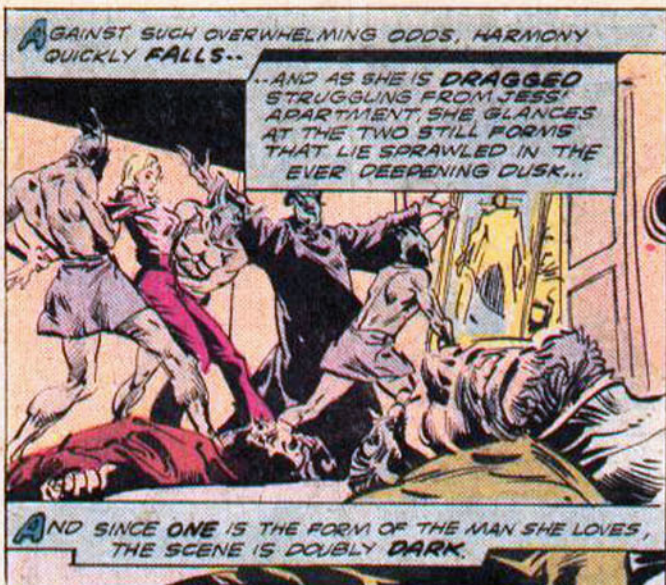
TAKE
HER!



ER-- CAN I GET ANY OF YOU GUYS SOMETHING TO EAT?

I DIDN'T THINK SO.

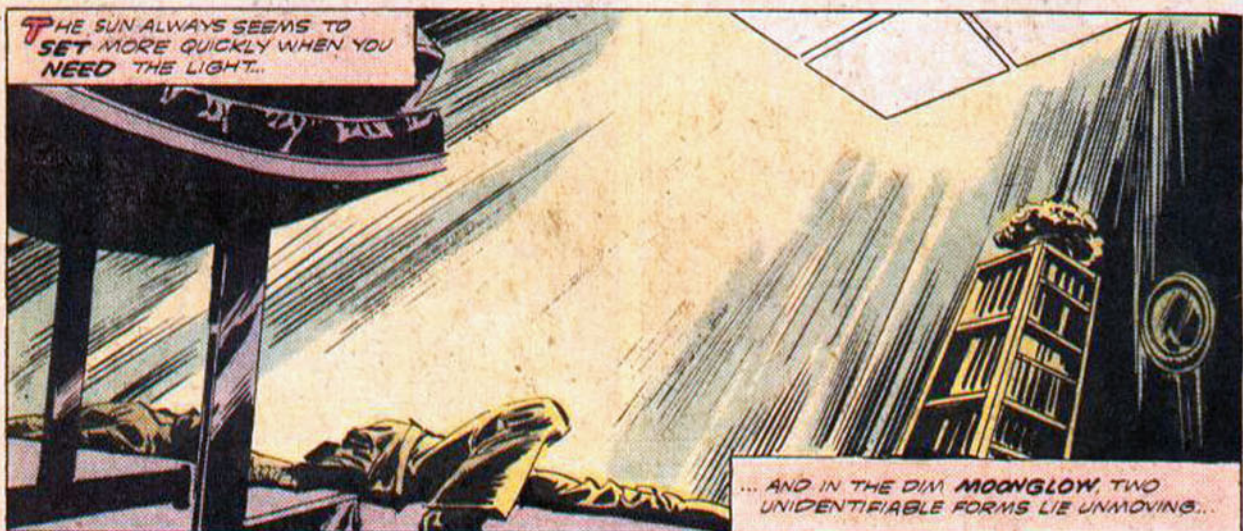
THIS TIME, HARMONY MAXWELL CANNOT BUY HER WAY OUT WITH HUMOR.



AGAINST SUCH OVERWHELMING ODDS, HARMONY QUICKLY FALLS--

...AND AS SHE IS DRAGGED STRUGGLING FROM JESS' APARTMENT, SHE GLANCES AT THE TWO STILL FORMS THAT LIE SPRAWLED IN THE EVER DEEPENING DUSK...

AND SINCE ONE IS THE FORM OF THE MAN SHE LOVES, THE SCENE IS DOUBLY DARK.



THE SUN ALWAYS SEEMS TO SET MORE QUICKLY WHEN YOU NEED THE LIGHT...

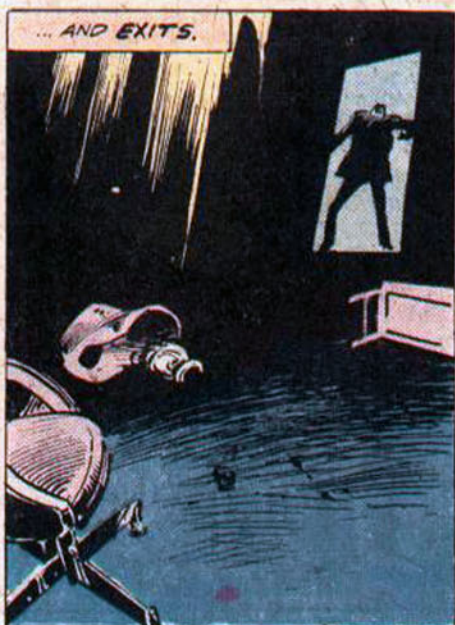
... AND IN THE DIM MOONGLOW, TWO UNIDENTIFIABLE FORMS LIE UNMOVING...



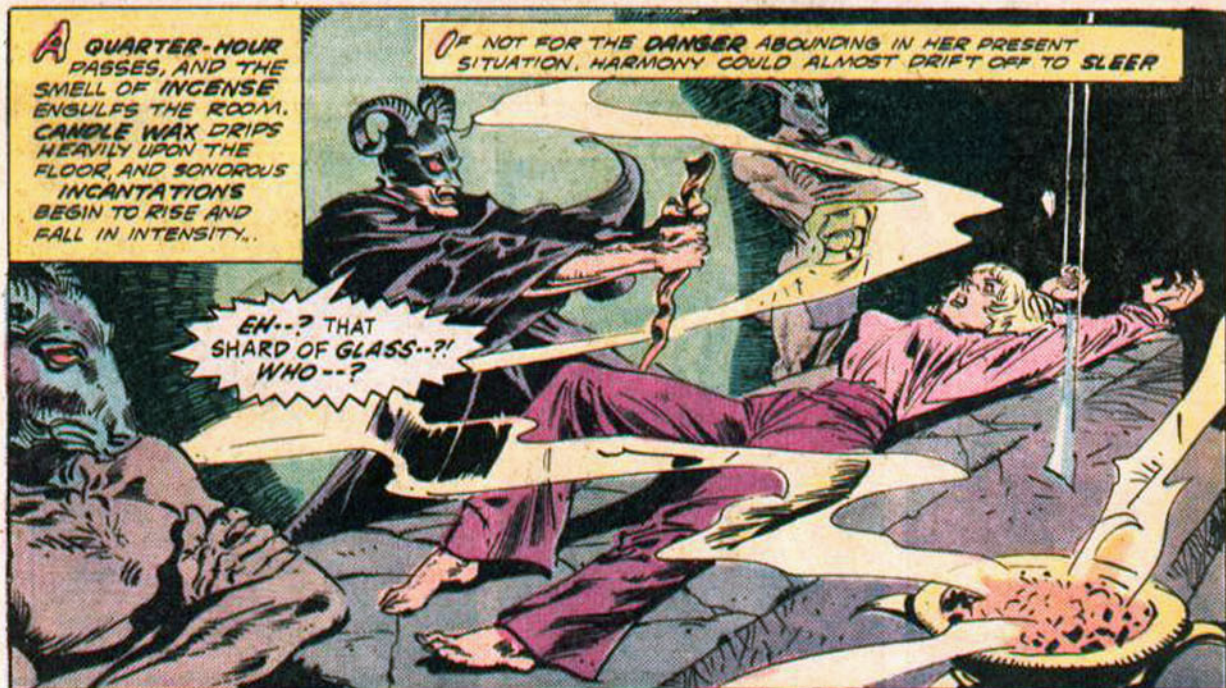
...UNTIL ONE WRENCHES ITSELF PAINFULLY TO ITS FEET...



...SHAMBLES ANKWARDLY ACROSS THE ROOM...



... AND EXITS.

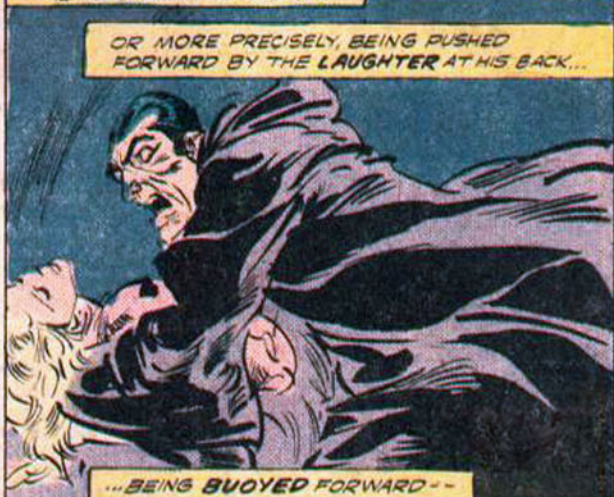


GREGOR ROVIK KNOWS WHEN HE IS BEATEN. HIS UNHOLY GOD WILL NOT HELP HIM WITHOUT THE PRESCRIBED DROP OF SACRIFICIAL BLOOD.



HE FLEES... AND HE IS SHORN OF ALL RATIONALIZATIONS.

HE IS NOT "ADVANCING IN ANOTHER DIRECTION." HE IS RUNNING AWAY.



OR MORE PRECISELY, BEING PUSHED FORWARD BY THE LAUGHTER AT HIS BACK...

...BEING BUOYED FORWARD--

-- BY STARK, UNRELENTING FEAR!



STAY BACK!

STAY BACK OR I SWEAR... THE WOMAN DIES!

LET ME BY OR I'LL SLAY HER!

AND HER BLOOD WILL BE ON YOUR HANDS!

UNFORTUNATELY SOME THINGS YOU DO NOT NEED COURAGE TO CONFRONT...

... BECAUSE NO MATTER WHICH WAY YOU TURN...



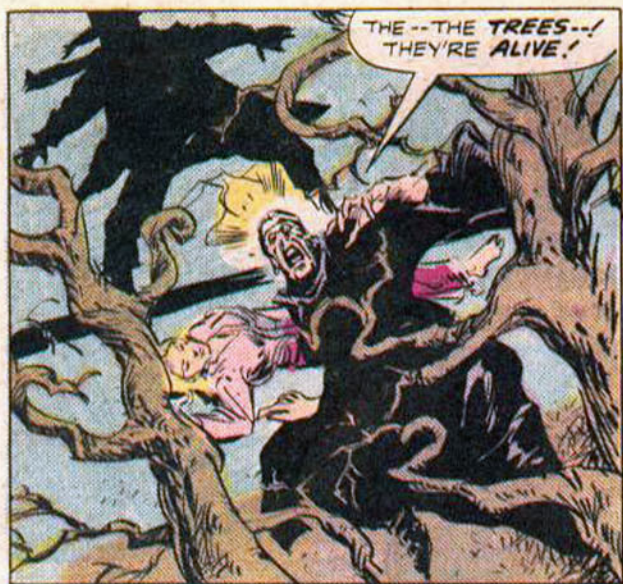
HUH?

...THEY'LL CONFRONT YOU!



NOOOOOO!

YES, GREGOR ROVIK KNOWS WHEN HE IS BEATEN, AND IF HE WERE A BRAVER MAN, HE MIGHT CONFRONT THAT KNOWLEDGE.



THE--THE TREES!--/ THEY'RE ALIVE!



SCARECROW!
HELP MEEEEEEE!

THREE DAYS FROM NOW, THE POLICE WILL FIND THE BODY OF GREGOR ROVIK. EVERY BONE WILL BE BROKEN. NOT ONE MUSCLE WILL BE UNTORN! NOT ONE ORGAN UNRUPTURED.



THE POLICE WILL, OF COURSE, BE BAFFLED THEY WILL CLASSIFY THE DEATH AS UNEXPLAINED.

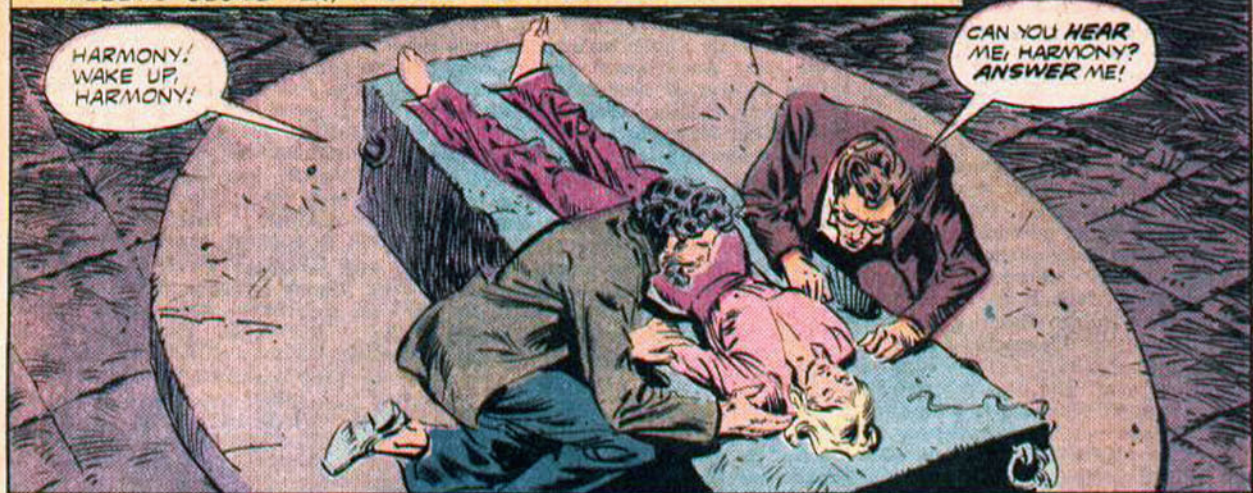


A SHAME THEY WILL NOT KNOW ENOUGH TO CLASSIFY IT UNDER ITS PROPER HEADING.



RETRIBUTION!

EPILOGUE: SUNRISE, AND HARMONY MAXWELL AWAKENS TO FIND HERSELF SPRAWLED ONCE MORE ON THE SACRIFICIAL ALTAR. GONE IS THE LEERING SARDONIC SCARECROW, PROTECTING HER FROM THE MINIONS OF KALUMAI. NOW THERE IS ONLY JESS DUNCAN AND DAVE MONROE KNEELING BESIDE HER, SHIELDING HER FROM THE COOL MORNING BREEZE.



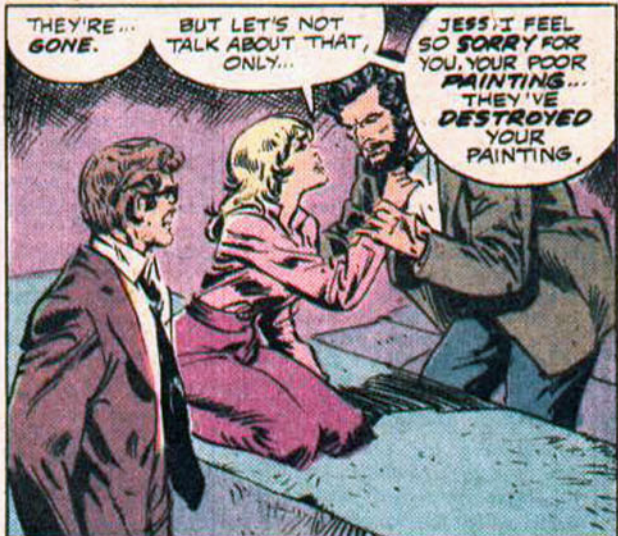
HARMONY!
WAKE UP,
HARMONY!

CAN YOU HEAR
ME, HARMONY?
ANSWER ME!



HEY-- HER EYES
ARE OPENING, JESS.
SHE'S OKAY!

WHAT HAPPENED?
WHERE ARE ALL THOSE
RAM'S-HEADED
DUDES?



THEY'RE...
GONE.

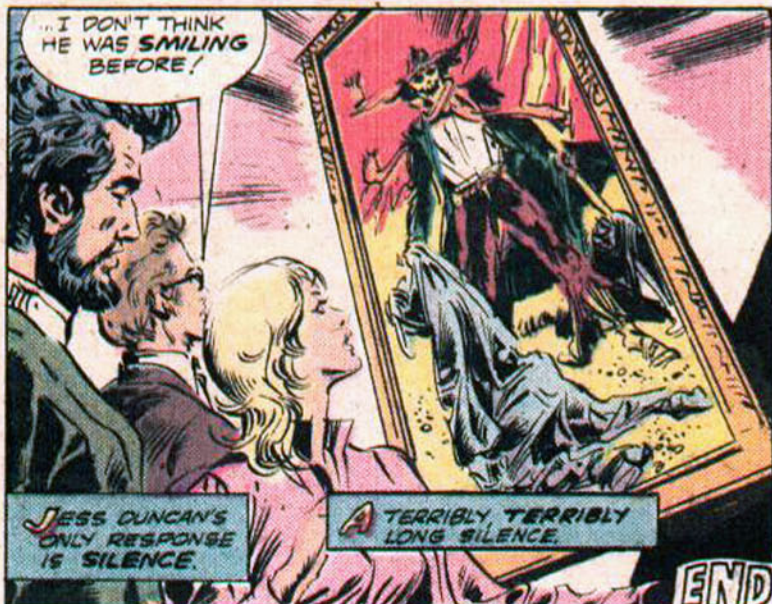
BUT LET'S NOT
TALK ABOUT THAT,
ONLY...

JESS; I FEEL
SO SORRY FOR
YOU, YOUR POOR
PAINTING...
THEY'VE
DESTROYED
YOUR
PAINTING,



MY PAINTING? YOU
MUST'VE BEEN DREAMING,
HARMONY. NO ONE'S DAMAGED
THE PAINTING. THERE'S
NOTHING WRONG WITH IT
AT ALL.

NOTHING?
I WOULDN'T BE
TOO SURE OF
THAT, JESS...



...I DON'T THINK
HE WAS SMILING
BEFORE!

JESS DUNCAN'S
ONLY RESPONSE
IS SILENCE.

A TERRIBLY TERRIBLY
LONG SILENCE.

END