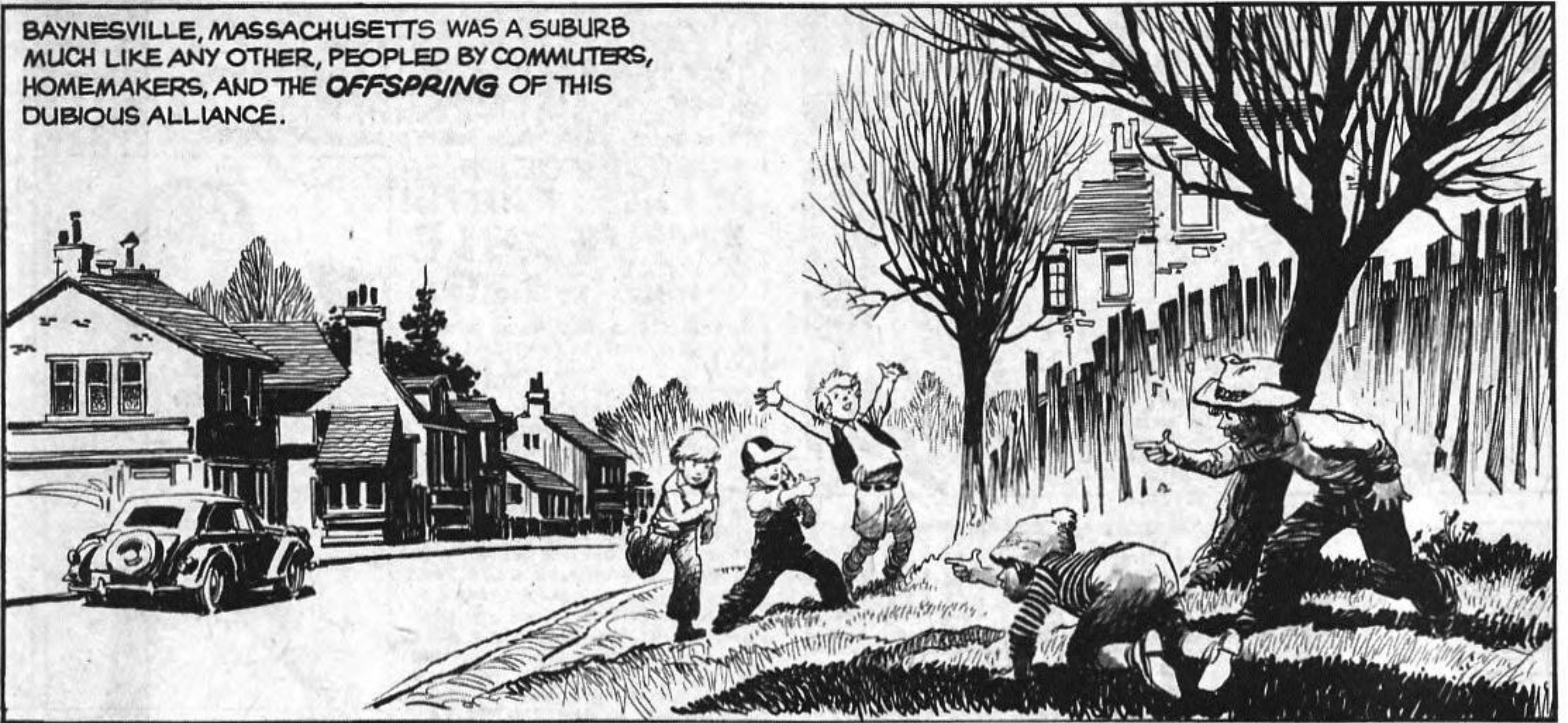


PROLOGUE

BAYNESVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS WAS A SUBURB MUCH LIKE ANY OTHER, PEOPLED BY COMMUTERS, HOMEMAKERS, AND THE **OFFSPRING** OF THIS DUBIOUS ALLIANCE.



KATIE BIRKIN OFTEN SAT BEFORE THE BAY WINDOW AND WATCHED THE CHILDREN SCURRY THROUGH THE YARD, IN THEIR RESPECTIVE ROLES AS COPS, ROBBERS, COWBOYS, INDIANS, HEROES, VILLAINS.



BUT THAT WAS TWELVE YEARS AGO. SOON **HE** WOULD BE EXPERIMENTING IN MUCH THE SAME WAY. BUT SHE HOPED IT WOULDN'T BE **TOO** SOON.

MOST OF ALL SHE ENVIED **TOMMY**, HER SON. SHE WAS ONLY **SIXTEEN** WHEN SHE BORE HIM, THE PRODUCT OF RATHER INDISCREET **EXPERIMENTATION** AFTER THE **JUNIOR PROM**.



WITH A WEARIED SIGH, SHE WISHED THAT **SHE** COULD FEEL AS **ALIVE** AS THEY.

TOMMY, AT THAT MOMENT, GAVE NO THOUGHT TO GROWING UP. HE WAS CONTENT TO **LAUGH** AND **RUN** AND **HIDE** AND **PLAY DEAD** IN THE UNSEASONABLY WARM JANUARY SUNSHINE.



THEN, OF A SUDDEN, IT ALL **STOPPED**. A SILENT **TRUCE** WAS DECLARED IN THE UNENDING WAR BETWEEN THE GOOD GUYS AND THE BAD GUYS, AND THE VERBAL FUSILADE WAS **STILLED**.



ALL EYES TURNED TOWARD THE LIMBER FIGURE THAT SPURTED COMICALLY UP THE WALK, BUT NO ONE LAUGHED.

NO ONE, THAT IS, EXCEPT **TOMMY**, WHO CHORTLED MERRILY AT THIS REFUGEE FROM SLEEPY HOLLOW.



BUT HE STOPPED **ABRUPTLY** WHEN THE MAN TURNED AN ICE-BLUE **GAZE** UPON HIM, BECAUSE HE **KNEW**.

HE DIDN'T KNOW *HOW* HE KNEW. HE JUST *KNEW*.

THE OTHER KIDS *DIDN'T* KNOW. BUT THEY FOLLOWED ANYWAY, BECAUSE THE STRANGER HAD THEM IN SOME KIND OF *SPELL*. AND THEY *WANTED* TO FOLLOW.

THEY *ALL* KNEW THERE WAS SOMETHING VERY *SPECIAL* ABOUT THIS MAN... ONLY *TOMMY* KNEW JUST *HOW* SPECIAL.

BOTH THE *PARENTS* AND THE *CHILDREN* OF BAYNESVILLE WOULD LONG REMEMBER THE DAY *THE JANUARY MAN* CAME TO TOWN.



THE JANUARY MAN

I OFFER YOU THE MOST WONDROUS *ODYSSEY* OF YOUR YOUNG LIVES! IF YOU ARE NOT *AFRAID*, FOLLOW ME TO A LAND OF *AWE* AND *MYSTERY*... WHERE ALL IS AS IT IS SIMPLY BECAUSE IT *IS*!



US... AFRAID?

AH, I FORGOT HOW *FEARLESS* LITTLE BOYS ARE. VERY WELL. IF YOU ARE ALL *WITH ME*, I SHALL TAKE YOU TO...



... THE LAND OF THE *SEASONS*!

BAYNESVILLE *DISAPPEARED*, OR PERHAPS BAYNESVILLE *DIDN'T* DISAPPEAR AND THE *BOYS DID*.

WHATEVER THE CASE, THEIR HOMES AND FAMILIES WERE SUPPLANTED BY A GAILY-COLORED *WONDERLAND*, CONJURED BY A *SNAP* OF THE JANUARY MAN'S FINGERS.



TOMMY DIDN'T SAY *ANYTHING* BECAUSE HE *KNEW*. LITTLE MIKE BEGAN TO *WIMPER*, BUT HIS BROTHER DAVY *SILENCED* HIM. ONLY *SANDY* DARED SPEAK.

I WAS A *FAILURE*. EVERYTHING I ATTEMPTED TURNED *WRONG*. I PRAYED THAT ONCE... *JUST ONCE* IN MY LIFE... I COULD DO SOMETHING *PERFECT!*

A *MORTAL* CHOSEN TO BE THE *KEEPER* OF THE MONTH OF JANUARY. THERE ARE GUARDIANS FOR *EVERY* MONTH OF THE YEAR AND IT IS THEIR DUTY TO SEE THAT THE BALANCE OF *MAN* AND *NATURE* IS MAINTAINED. IF NOT, THEY MUST ANSWER TO *FATHER TIME* HIMSELF!

A GUARDIAN MAY SERVE ONLY *ONE MONTH*. FOR THAT PERIOD HE IS AS *DIVINE* AS FATHER TIME HIMSELF. WHEN THE MONTH *ENDS*, HE MUST NAME A *SUCCESSOR* WHO WILL ASSUME HIS DUTIES *NEXT YEAR*.

ARE YOU A *MAGICIAN?*

THE GUARDIAN OF JANUARY HEARD THAT PRAYER.

SO YOU SEE, I WAS CHOSEN TO BE A SERVANT OF TIME. I WAS GIVEN A CHANCE TO BECOME... *PERFECT*. I AM THE *NEW* GUARDIAN OF JANUARY!

OF SORTS. ONCE I WAS A BOY LIKE *YOURSELF*... HAPPY AND BRAVE. BUT AS I GREW INTO A *MAN*, THESE QUALITIES WENT THE WAY OF ALL *INNOCENCE*.

WHO'S THE GUARDIAN OF JANUARY?



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOUR DUTIES ARE *FINISHED?*

I CHOOSE MY SUCCESSOR... AND I *DIE*.



AREN'T YOU **AFRAID** TO DIE?

KNOWING THAT I HAD ATTAINED **PERFECTION** IN MY LIFE, I COULD DIE **CONTENT**.

BUT WHAT HAPPENED? WHY **CAN'T** YOU?



EVEN AT **GODHOOD...** I WAS A **FAILURE**.

AT THAT MOMENT IN **BAYNESVILLE**, KATIE BIRKIN WAS CALLING TOMMY'S NAME, AS SHE HAD BEEN FOR THE LAST **HALF HOUR** SINCE SHE FIRST **DISCOVERED** THAT HE WAS NO LONGER PLAYING IN THE FRONT YARD.



NOR IN **ANYONE ELSE'S** FRONT YARD.

CONCERN GAVE WAY TO **PANIC** WHEN SHE REALIZED THAT... THERE WERE **NO** CHILDREN IN BAYNESVILLE THIS NIGHT.

IT'S **INSANE!** WHO COULD'VE KIDNAPPED A WHOLE **TOWN** FULL OF LITTLE BOYS?



ODD, SHE THOUGHT, THE LAUGHTER AND PLAYFUL SQUEALING OF THE KIDS HAD BECOME SUCH A **FAMILIAR** SOUND, SHE WAS HARDLY EVER **AWARE** OF IT, BUT THE **SILENCE** THAT PERVADED WHEN THE VOICES WERE STILLED WAS **DEAFENING**.

THE SEARCH EXTENDED WELL INTO THE NIGHT, BUT THE **OUTCOME** WAS THE SAME. **POLICE** WERE NOTIFIED, BUT THE CLAIM THAT A TOWNFUL OF BOYS HAD **VANISHED** WAS MET WITH UNDERSTANDABLE **SKEPTICISM**.



THERE WAS NOTHING ELSE TO DO BUT **WAIT**.

IN THE LAND OF THE SEASONS, CHILDREN GIGGLED AND COOED AT THE AWESOME BEAUTY OF THIS MYSTICAL KINGDOM. NONE OF THEM GAVE EVEN A PASSING THOUGHT TO BAYNESVILLE. NOT EVEN TOMMY, WHO *KNEW*.



YOU'RE THE REASON WE HAD SUCH A *WARM WINTER* THIS YEAR, AREN'T YOU? NO SNOW OR NOTHIN'!

I AM *PART* OF THE REASON. YOU... ALL OF YOU, AND KIDS JUST *LIKE* YOU THROUGHOUT THE *WORLD*... ARE THE *OTHER PART*.

YOUR *COLLECTIVE WILLS* HAVE *UPSET* THAT DELICATE BALANCE OF NATURE AND TIME!



BUT *HOW*?

THE *SUMMER* GUARDIANS ARE PERHAPS THE MOST *POWERFUL* KEEPERS OF ALL. WHEN THE TIME CAME FOR THEM TO *DIE* AND YIELD TO *AUTUMN*, THEY *REBELLED*.

WHY? BECAUSE KIDS LIKE YOU *WANTED* THEM TO GO ON LIVING. YOU LOVED THE WARMTH AND THE SUNSHINE AND THE STAYING OUT LATE SO MUCH, YOU PRAYED IT WOULD NEVER END.

YOU GAVE THEM THE STRENGTH TO *DEFY* THE NATURAL ORDER. THE *AUTUMN* KEEPERS TRIED TO OVERCOME THEM, BUT FAILED. I TOO COULD NOT FIGHT THE *COLLECTIVE WILL* POWER OF THE KIDS AND THE *SUMMER* GUARDIANS.

IF THEY ARE NOT *STOPPED*, YOU WILL NEVER SEE THE SEASONS *AGAIN*!

BUT WHAT CAN WE DO?

YOU ARE THE ONES WHO WISHED THEM *LIFE*... YOU ARE THE ONLY ONES WHO CAN WISH IT *AWAY*! YOU MUST ALL *CONFRONT* THE *SUMMER* GUARDIANS... AND TELL THEM YOU *WANT* THE *WINTER* TO COME!

WHY SHOULD WE? WHAT GOOD IS *WINTER* ANYWAY? IT ONLY BRINGS SNOW AND COLD, AND MAKES US STAY IN THE HOUSE AND DRESS IN LOTS OF *CLOTHES*.

WHY? BECAUSE IT IS THE WAY OF *NATURE*, AND IF YOU *DEFY* NATURE FOR *TOO* LONG IT WILL *TURN* ON YOU! DON'T YOU SEE THE *DESTRUCTION*--?





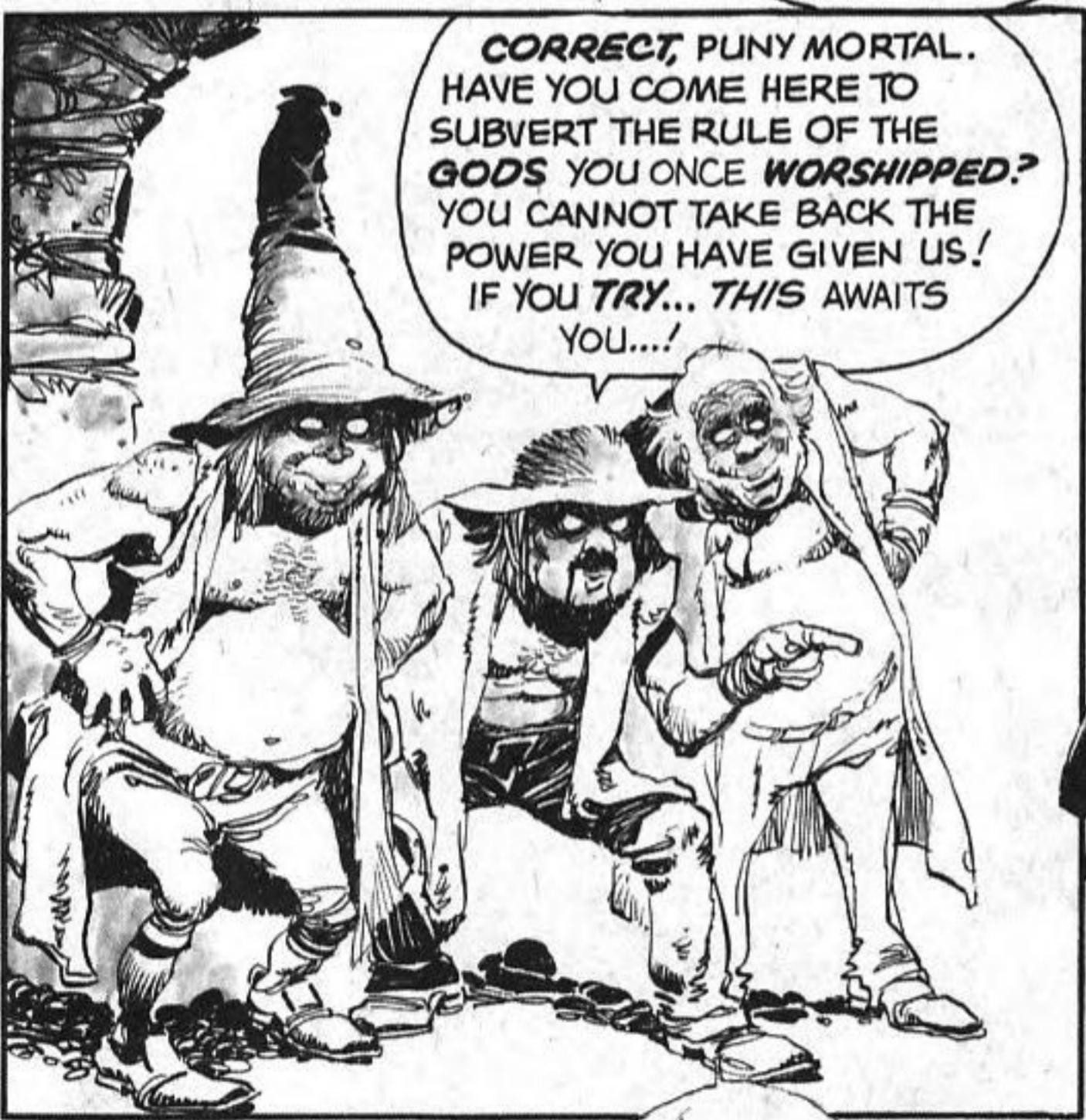
ALL RIGHT. WE'LL HELP YOU. WHERE DO WE FIND THE SUMMER GUARDIANS?

IN THAT MANSION YONDER. GO QUICKLY! WITH YOUR HELP, I MAY ACHIEVE PERFECTION YET!



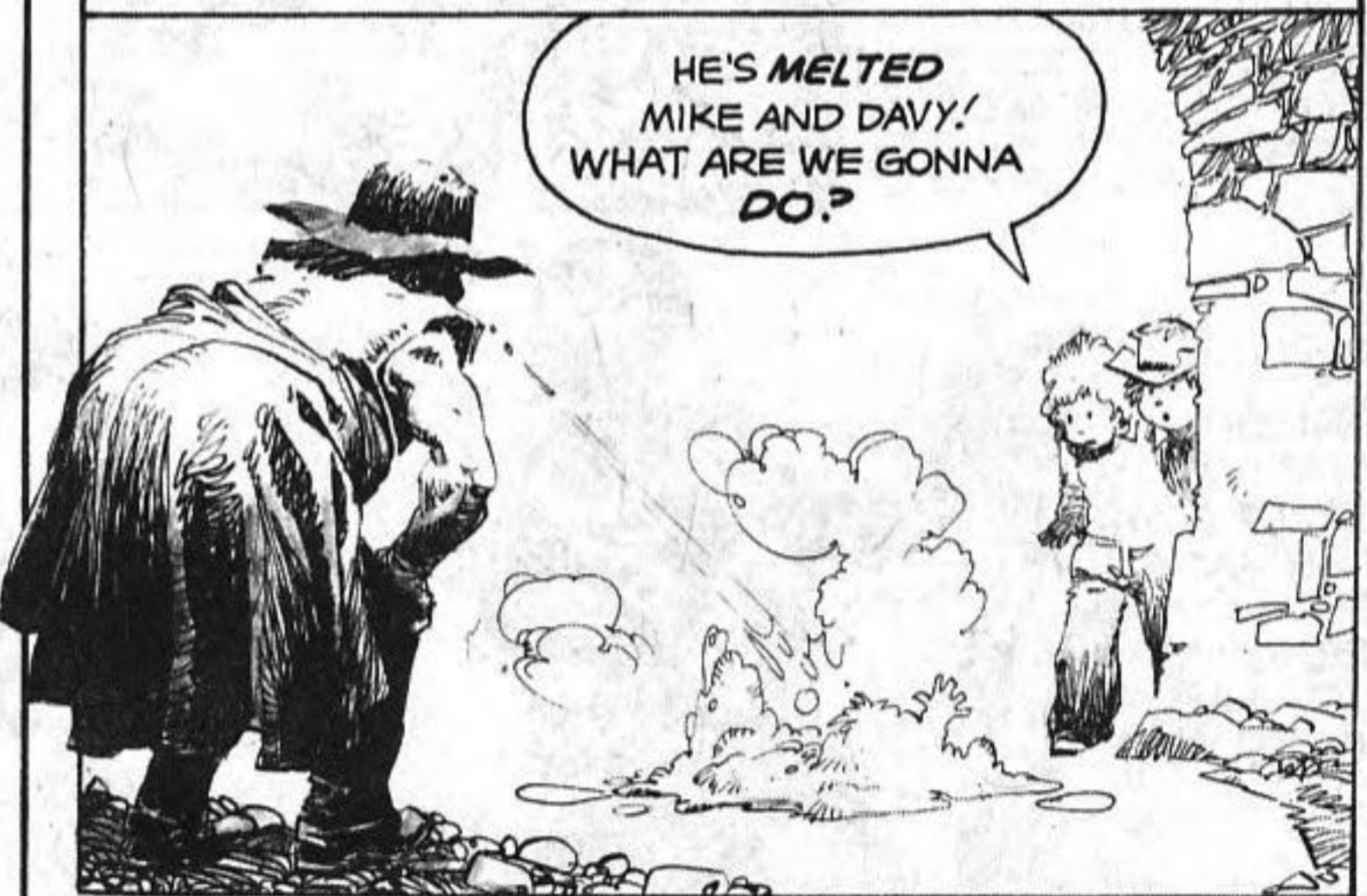
SO THEY SAID GOODBYE TO THE JANUARY MAN AND WENT TO THE HOUSE OF HIS ENEMIES. TOMMY DID ALL THE TALKING BECAUSE HE *KNEW*, AND UNDERSTOOD BETTER THAN ANY OF THEM, THE *IMPORTANCE* OF THEIR TASK.

YOU'RE NOT OUR FRIENDS ANYMORE, SUMMER PEOPLE. YOU DON'T CARE IF WE'RE HURT AS LONG AS YOU CONTINUE LIVING...!

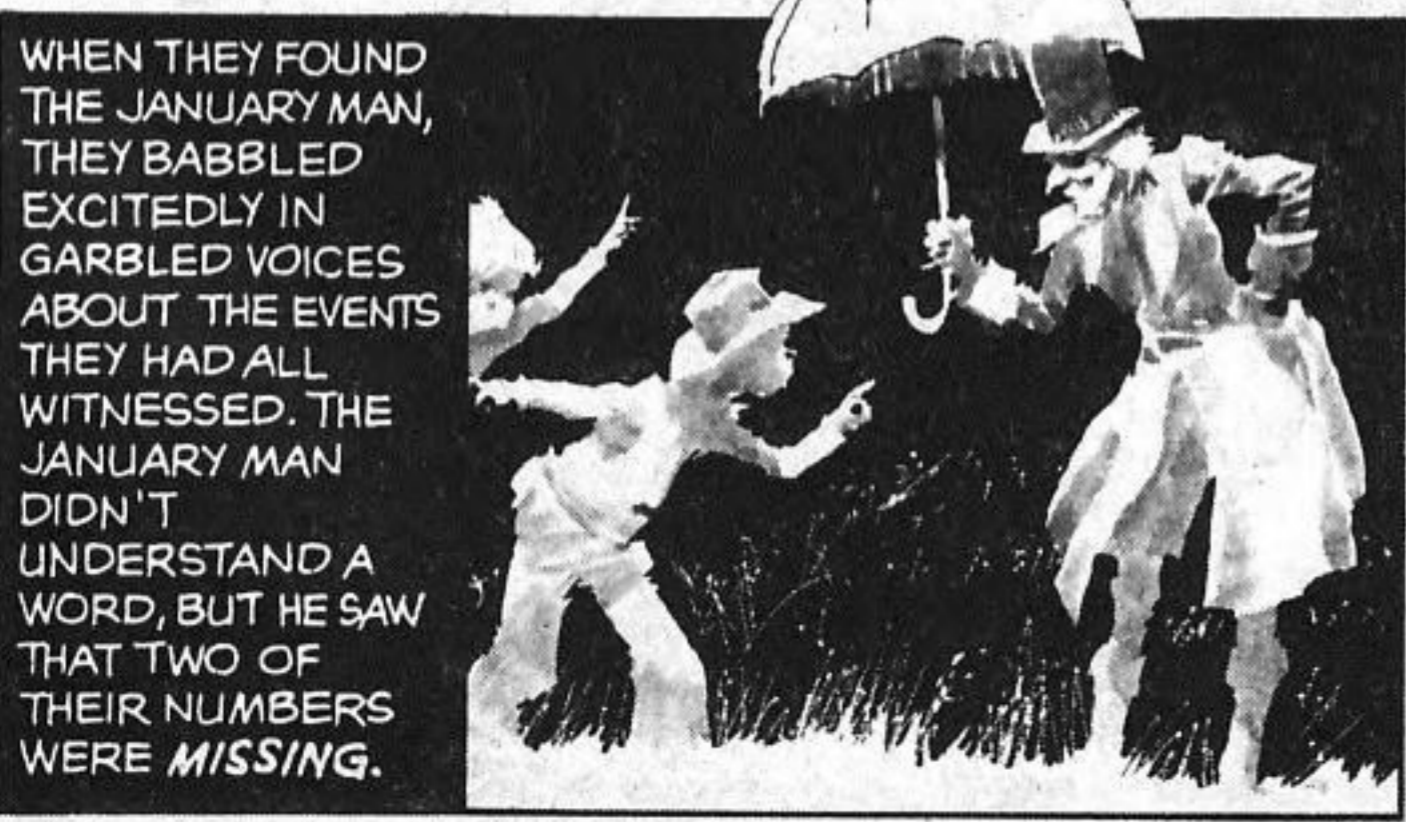


CORRECT, PUNY MORTAL. HAVE YOU COME HERE TO SUBVERT THE RULE OF THE GODS YOU ONCE WORSHIPPED? YOU CANNOT TAKE BACK THE POWER YOU HAVE GIVEN US! IF YOU TRY... THIS AWAITS YOU...!

THEY ALL SAW IT, BUT ONLY TOMMY BELIEVED BECAUSE HE *KNEW*, AND SANDY BECAUSE HE WAS *LEARNING FAST*. THE OTHERS JUST RAN LIKE HELL.



HE'S MELTED MIKE AND DAVY! WHAT ARE WE GONNA DO?



WHEN THEY FOUND THE JANUARY MAN, THEY BABBLERD EXCITEDLY IN GARBLED VOICES ABOUT THE EVENTS THEY HAD ALL WITNESSED. THE JANUARY MAN DIDN'T UNDERSTAND A WORD, BUT HE SAW THAT TWO OF THEIR NUMBERS WERE *MISSING*.

IS THERE ANYTHING WE CAN DO TO BRING MIKE AND DAVY BACK? I MEAN, HOW ARE WE GONNA TELL THEIR MOM AND DAD?

THERE IS *ONE* THING THAT CAN SAVE THEM... YOU MUST BRING ME EVERY *ITEM* ON THIS LIST. FIND IT WHEREVER YOU CAN.



mappe mit
Drei Kreise
Abgaben der
Königliche
Kasse



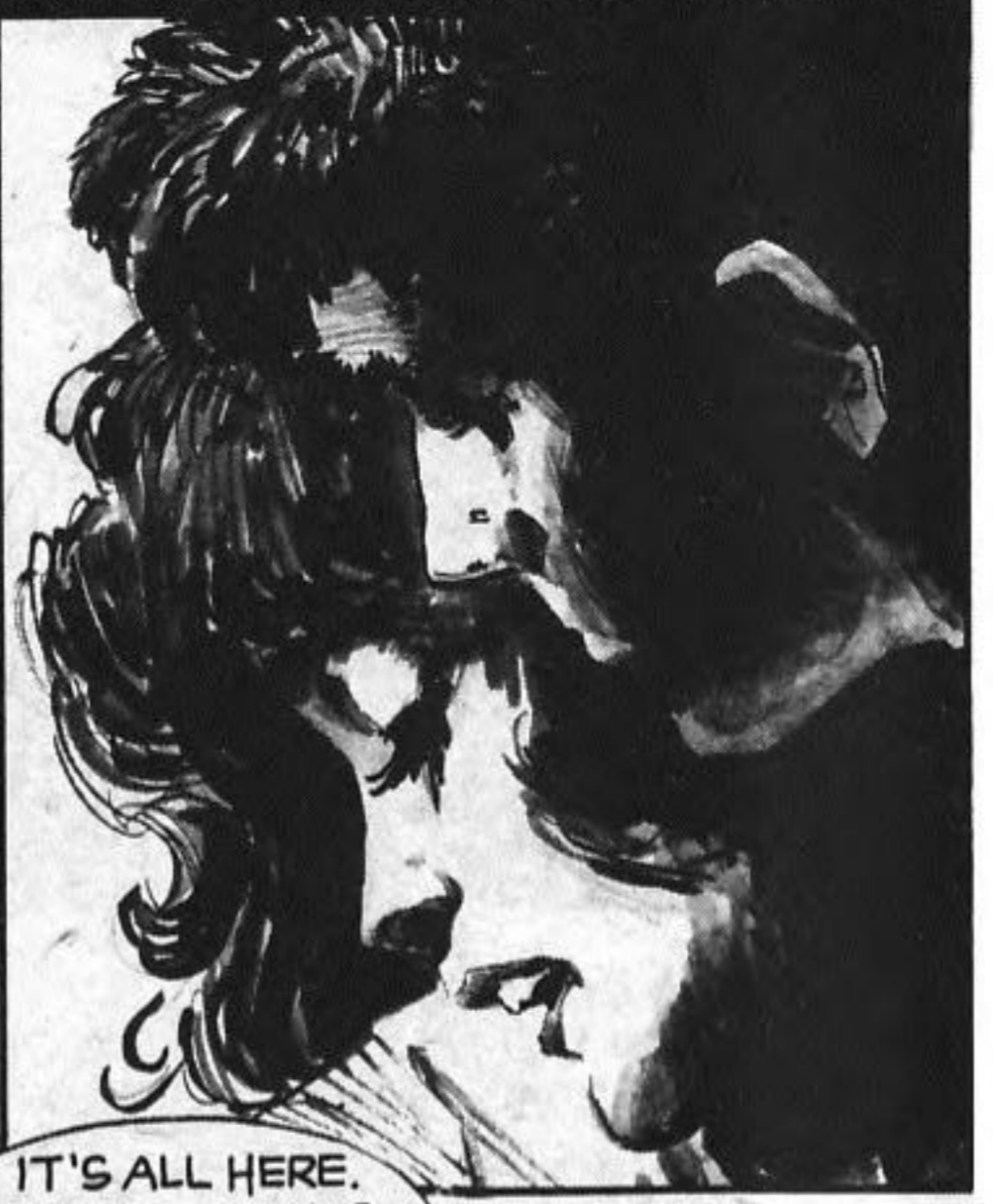
MEANWHILE, IN BAYNESVILLE, KATIE BIRKIN MAINTAINED AN ALL-NIGHT VIGIL, REFLECTING OVER **TWELVE YEARS** OF A CHILD'S LIFE, AND CURSING WHATEVER GOD OR FATE WAS ABUSING HER MOTHERHOOD SO CRUELLY.

SHE FELT **CHEATED**, BETRAYED. IF TOMMY WERE **DEAD**, SHE COULD LEARN TO **LIVE** WITH THAT. IF HE WERE **KIDNAPPED**, SHE WOULD DO WHATEVER WAS REQUIRED FOR HIS **RETURN**.

BUT **NEITHER** OF THESE SEEMED TO BE THE CASE.



AND HOW DOES A WOMAN **ACCEPT** THE FACT THAT THE CHILD SHE CARRIED AND RAISED FOR TWELVE YEARS SIMPLY DOESN'T **EXIST** ANYMORE? NO ANSWER CAME FORTH FROM THE SILENT DARKNESS.



IT'S ALL HERE. SNAKES... SNAILS... AND PUPPY DOG TAILS.

IN THE LAND OF THE SEASONS, THE **OBJECT** OF KATIE BIRKIN'S TORMENT WAS **HAPPY**. HAPPY BECAUSE HE FOUND **EVERYTHING** THE JANUARY MAN NEEDED TO REVIVE LITTLE MIKE AND DAVY.



YOU HAVE FORGOTTEN NOTHING?

IT'S ALL HERE. SNAKES... SNAILS... AND PUPPY DOG TAILS.



INDEED, THAT'S WHAT LITTLE BOYS ARE MADE OF. AND FROM THESE ITEMS, WE SHALL BRING FORTH...



...MIKE AND DAVY!

YOU DID IT... THEY'RE HERE!

"OF COURSE," SAID THE JANUARY MAN. "BUT UNLESS WE FIND A WAY TO DEAL WITH THE SUMMER GUARDIANS, IT WILL MAKE LITTLE **DIFFERENCE**. WE SHALL **ALL DIE**."

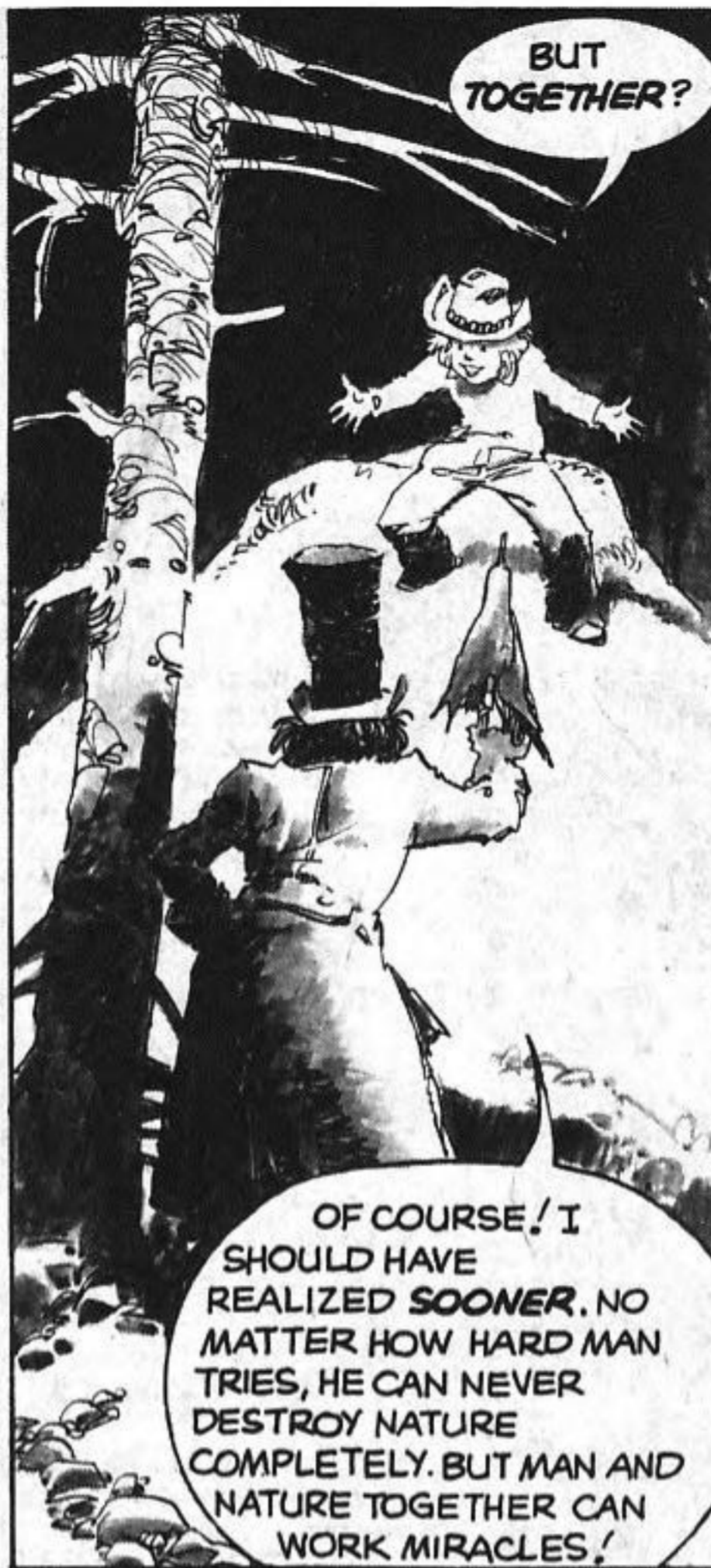
AND THEN, IN THIS LAND OF A MILLION WONDERS, TOMMY-WHO-KNEW HAD AN IDEA THAT WAS CHILDISHLY SIMPLE...

...AND, PERHAPS FOR JUST THAT REASON... GOOD.

YOU TRIED TO TAKE ON THE SUMMER GUARDIANS ALONE... AND FAILED. WE TRIED TO TAKE ON THE SUMMER GUARDIANS ALONE... AND FAILED.



BUT TOGETHER?



OF COURSE! I SHOULD HAVE REALIZED SOONER. NO MATTER HOW HARD MAN TRIES, HE CAN NEVER DESTROY NATURE COMPLETELY. BUT MAN AND NATURE TOGETHER CAN WORK MIRACLES!

WITH THE WILL OF MANKID, AND THE POWER OF TIME COMBINED, WE SHALL WIN, MY FRIENDS... WE SHALL WIN!



IN BAYNESVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS ANOTHER UNPRECEDENTED EVENT OCCURRED. FOR THE SPAN OF AN HOUR, IT RAINED AND SNOWED AND HAILED AND THE SUN SHONE BRIGHT AND IT RAINED AGAIN.



FINALLY, IT SETTLED INTO A SNOWFALL THAT LASTED THE WHOLE OF THE DAY.

SOMEWHERE, THE JANUARY MAN SNAPPED HIS FINGERS, AND THE BOYS AND BAYNESVILLE WERE REUNITED.



FAMILIES BECAME FAMILIES ONCE MORE, AND THERE WERE QUESTIONS AND TEARS, AND A LOT OF EXPLANATIONS... NONE OF THEM TRUE.

AND WHILE WINTER RAGED VICTORIOUS WITHOUT, IT WAS WARM AND SAFE AND COMFORTABLE WITHIN.



IT WOULD REMAIN THAT WAY FOR A YEAR... UNTIL THE TIME CAME FOR TOMMY TO FULFILL HIS PROMISE TO THE JANUARY MAN. FLEETINGLY, HE WONDERED HOW IT WOULD FEEL TO BE... PERFECT.