

PEOPLE OF THE

DARK

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Art: ALEX NINO
Freely adapted from
the story by
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I CAME TO
DAGON'S CAVE
TO
**KILL RICHARD
BRENT!**

THE APPROACH TO
DAGON'S CAVE IS
ALWAYS **DARK**, FOR
THE MIGHTY BRANCHES
AND THICK LEAVES
SHUT OUT THE SUN...
AND NOW, THE
SOMBRENESS OF
MY OWN SOUL
MADE THE SHADOWS
SEEM **EVEN**
MORE OMINOUS
AND GLOOMY THAN
WAS **NATURAL**.

NOT FAR AWAY, I HEARD
THE SLOW WASH OF THE
WAVES AGAINST THE
TALL CLIFFS... BUT THE
SEA ITSELF WAS OUT
OF SIGHT, MASKED BY
THE DENSE OAK FOREST.

EMERGING INTO A NARROW
GLADE, I SAW THE **MOUTH**
OF THE ANCIENT CAVERN
BEFORE ME. I **PAUSED**.

THE MAN I HATED MOST, THEN, HAD NOT COME **BEFORE** ME! I WAS IN TIME TO
CARRY OUT MY GRIM INTENT.

FOR A MOMENT, MY RESOLUTION FALTERED; THEN, LIKE A CRIMSON WAVE, THERE SURGED OVER ME THE FRAGRANCE OF **ELEANOR RAND** -- A VISION OF WAVY **GOLDEN HAIR** AND DEEP GRAY **EYES**, CHANGING AND MYSTIC AS THE SEA.

THEN I REMEMBERED
WHY I HAD COME.



I CLENCHED MY
FISTS TILL THE
KNUCKLES
SHOWED WHITE...



... AND AUTOMATICALLY
TOUCHED THE WICKED
SNUB-NOSED **REVOLVER**
AT MY SIDE.

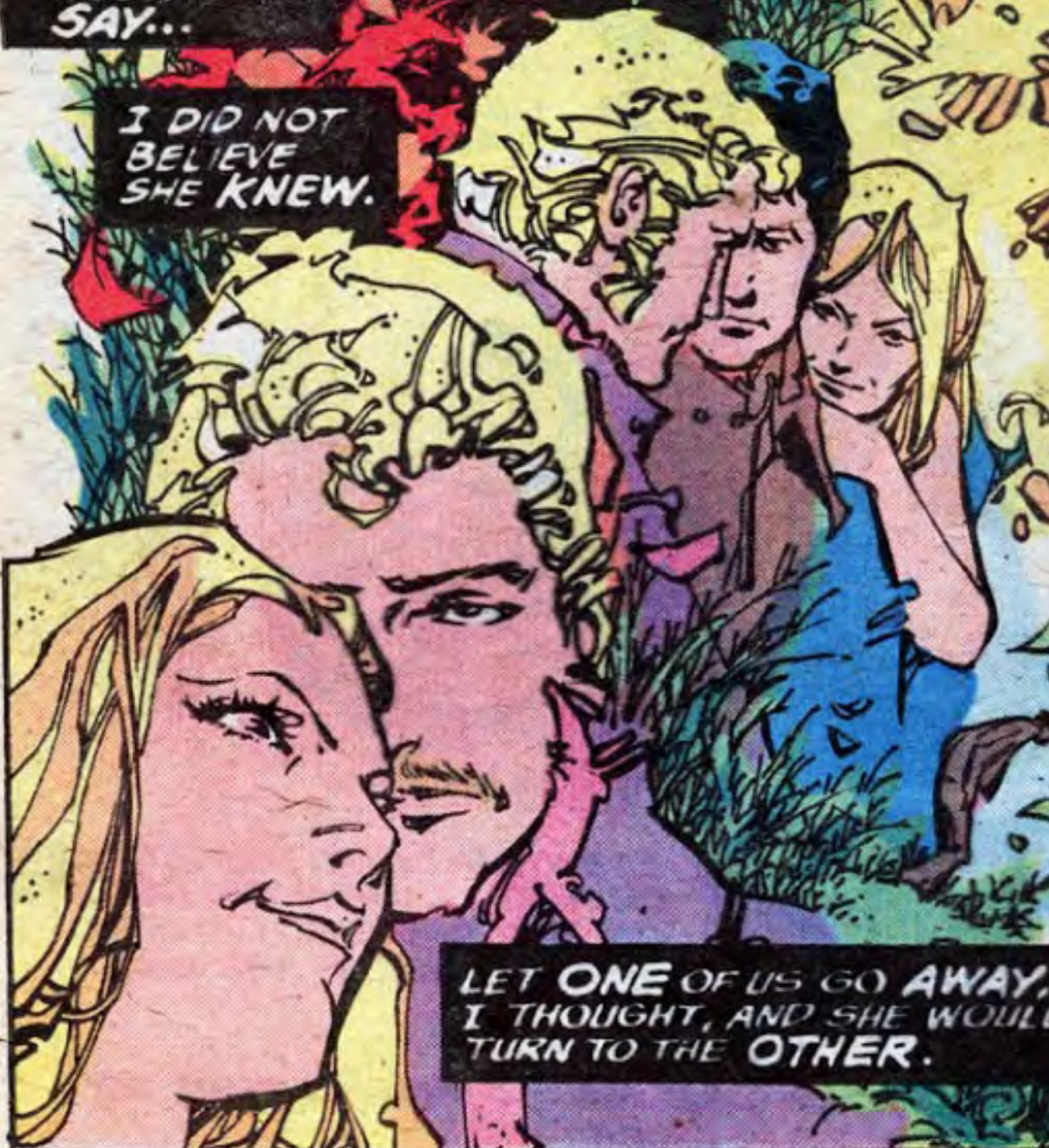


IF NOT FOR **RICHARD BRENT**, I FELT CERTAIN
I WOULD ALREADY HAVE **WON** THIS WOMAN,
DESIRE FOR WHOM MADE MY WAKING HOURS
A **TORMENT**, AND MY SLEEP A **TORTURE**.



WHOM DID SHE
LOVE? SHE
WOULD NOT
SAY...

I DID NOT
BELIEVE
SHE **KNEW**.



LET ONE OF US GO AWAY,
I THOUGHT, AND SHE WOULD
TURN TO THE **OTHER**.

BY CHANCE,
I HAD HEARD
MY BLOND
ENGLISH
RIVAL REMARK
THAT HE
INTENDED
COMING TO
LONELY
DAGON'S
CAVE
ON AN IDLE
EXPLORING
OUTING --
ALONE.

AND SO I,
JIM O'BRIEN,
HAD DECIDED
TO **SIMPLIFY**
MATTERS
FOR **ELEANOR**
--AND FOR
MYSELF.



I AM NOT, BY NATURE, **CRIMINAL**-- BUT I WAS BORN AND RAISED HERE ON THE **SCOTTISH BORDER**, AND IT IS A **HARD** COUNTRY.

UNDER OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES, I WOULD HAVE BEEN GLAD TO CALL **RICHARD BRENT FRIEND**. BUT I LOVED **ELEANOR RAND**...

SO...
HE
MUST
DIE!

AS I DREW NEAR THE CAVE, I RECALLED ITS EERIE **LEGENDS**-- THE TALES OF THE **LITTLE PEOPLE**... THE **PEOPLE OF THE DARK**.

THE LITTLE PEOPLE: I WONDERED DIMLY IF THE ANTHROPOLOGISTS WERE CORRECT IN THEIR THEORY THAT THIS **ABORIGINAL RACE** HAD VANISHED EONS AGO BEFORE THE **ARYAN INVADERS**-- TO FORM THE BASE OF ALL LEGENDS OF **DWARVES AND ELVES**-- OF **TROLLS AND WITCHES**.

IT WAS SAID THAT THE **LAST** OF THEM STILL DWELT IN THE **LOST CHASMS** BENEATH THE HILLS-- LOATHSOME **SURVIVALS** OF AN OUTWORN AGE.

SHRUGGING OFF A FEELING OF **UNEASINESS**, I PASSED THRU THE OUTER CAVERN INTO THE **BLACKNESS** BEYOND...

THOUGH IT WAS **DARK** WITHIN, I COULD STILL
MAKE OUT THE VAGUE, HALF-DEFACED
OUTLINES OF **MYSTERIOUS ETCHINGS**
ON THE STONE WALLS.

THE **LITTLE PEOPLE**
HAD MADE THEM, IT
WAS SAID.

THOUGH I HAD
NEVER SEEN THEM
BEFORE, I **SHUDDERED**,
WITH A STRANGE,
ALIEN SENSE OF
FAMILIARITY.

TORCH IN HAND,
I PASSED DOWN
THE **STEPS**
THAT YAWNED
BEFORE ME...

... **TINY STEPS**,
TOO **SMALL** FOR
NORMAL HUMAN
FEET, YET CARVED
INTO **LIVING**
STONE...

... THEIR **EDGES**
GREATLY WORN
AWAY, AS IF BY
LINGUESSSED
MILLENNIA
OF... USE.

AHEAD OF ME,
I KNEW FROM
FORMER
DESCRIPTIONS,
WOULD BE THE
FLOOR OF
THE CAVERN.

IT WAS
THERE I
WOULD WAIT
TO **KILL**
RICHARD
BRENT.

AND THEN,
AS I STARTED
THE **FINAL**
PHASE OF
MY TORTUOUS
DESCENT...

...MY FOOT **SUDDENLY SLIPPED!**

INSTINCTIVELY SOMEHOW, EVEN
AS I FELL, I KNEW --

I KNEW!

-- WHAT WAS COMING.

IT WAS ALL OF A
PART WITH THAT
STRANGE FEELING
OF **FAMILIARITY**--
YET I COULD NOT
CATCH MYSELF!

I FELL
HEADLONG
DOWN THE
STEPS AND
STRUCK
THE
STONE FLOOR--

-- WITH A **CRASH**
THAT BLOTTED OUT
MY **SENSES.**

SLOWLY, CONSCIOUSNESS
RETURNED TO ME WITH A
THROBBING OF MY HEAD...



...AND A SENSATION OF UTTER **BEWILDERMENT**.

WHERE I WAS...

WHO I WAS...

... I DID NOT **KNOW**.

I NOTED MY STRANGE **CLOTHES**, OR **LACK** OF THEM, RATHER...

MY EYES WANDERED OVER MY MASSIVE NAKED **LIMBS** AND POWERFUL **TORSO**; I FELT THE **EMPTY SCABBARD** SWINGING FROM MY LOINCLOTH.

RUNNING MY HAND DAZEDLY THRU MY SQUARE-CUT **BLACK MANE**, I FOUND MY FOREHEAD CAKED WITH **DRIED BLOOD**.

I HAD RECEIVED A **BLOW**, THEN, OR HAD TAKEN A **FALL**; BUT SO COMPLETELY HAD MY **WITS** BEEN KNOCKED OUT OF ME THAT--

THEN, I SAW AN **OBJECT** LYING AT MY FEET: A **HEAVY IRON SWORD**, WHOSE BROAD BLADE WAS **DARKLY STAINED**

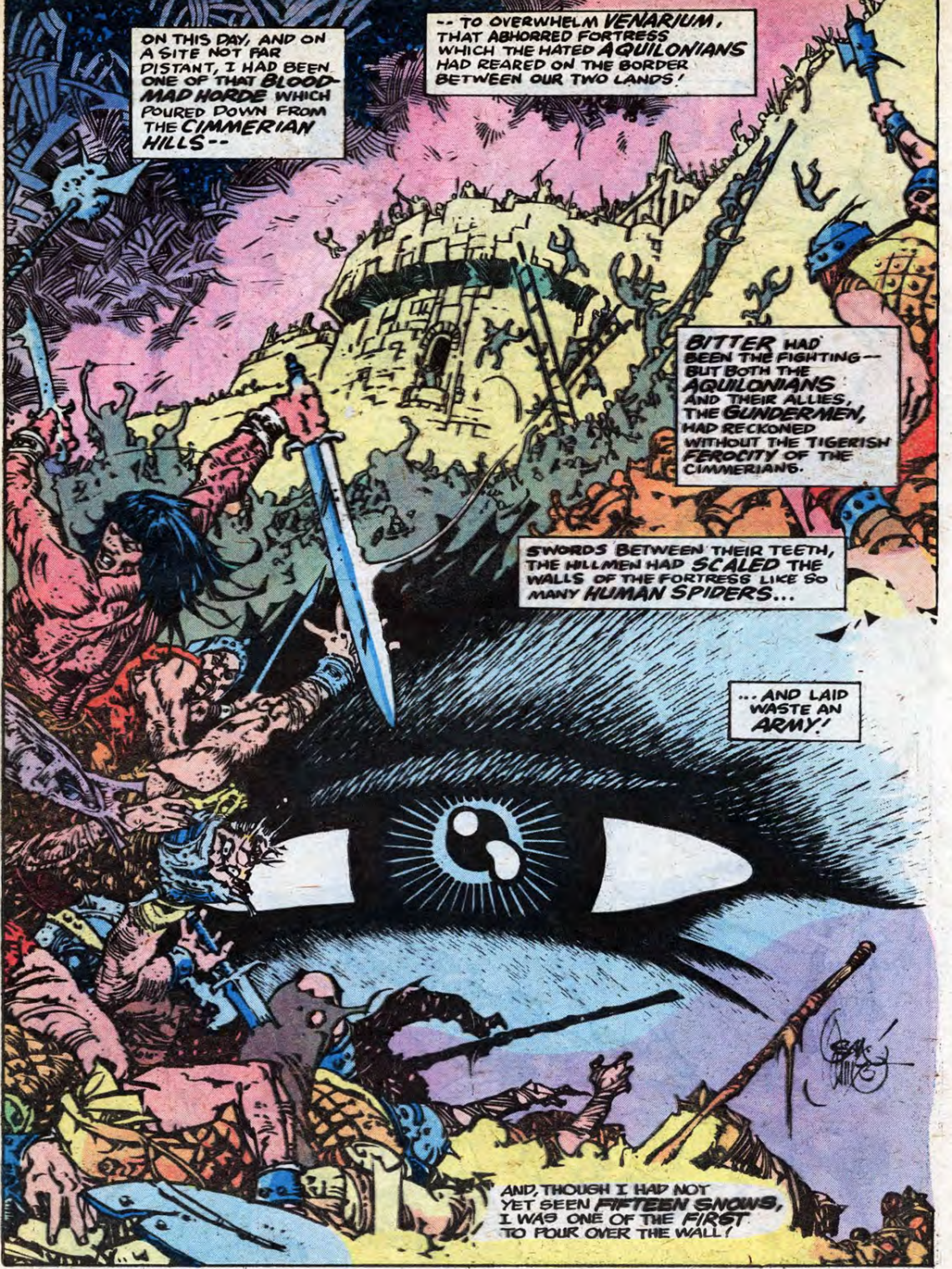
AND SUDDENLY--
I REMEMBERED--!

I WAS **CONAN**.
A **CIMMERIAN**.

YES! AS MY FINGERS FITTED INSTINCTIVELY ABOUT THE SWORD-HILT WITH THE FAMILIARITY OF LONG USAGE, I REMEMBERED-- AND LAUGHED, TO THINK THAT A FALL ON THE HEAD SHOULD HAVE RENDERED ME SO DAFT EVEN FOR A MOMENT.

ME-- CONAN, THE CIMMERIAN-- CONAN OF THE REAVERS!





ON THIS DAY, AND ON
A SITE NOT FAR
DISTANT, I HAD BEEN
ONE OF THAT **BLOOD-
MAD HORDE** WHICH
POURED DOWN FROM
THE **CIMMERIAN
HILLS**--

-- TO OVERWHELM **VENARIUM**,
THAT ABHORRED FORTRESS
WHICH THE HATED **AQUILONIANS**
HAD REARED ON THE BORDER
BETWEEN OUR TWO LANDS!

BITTER HAD
BEEN THE FIGHTING--
BUT BOTH THE
AQUILONIANS
AND THEIR ALLIES,
THE **GUNDERMEN**,
HAD RECKONED
WITHOUT THE **TIGERISH
FEROCITY** OF THE
CIMMERIANS.

SWORDS BETWEEN THEIR TEETH,
THE **HILLMEN** HAD **SCALED** THE
WALLS OF THE FORTRESS LIKE SO
MANY **HUMAN SPIDERS**...

... AND LAID
WASTE AN
ARMY!

AND, THOUGH I HAD NOT
YET SEEN **FIFTEEN SNOWS**,
I WAS ONE OF THE **FIRST**
TO POUR OVER THE WALL!

BUT MY OWN
ACTIONS WERE
AS SWIFT AS
HIS OWN...

...MY
BRAWN
FAR
GREATER!

IN THAT INSTANT, I
COULD HAVE DRAWN
MY OWN SWORD AND
PUT AN **END** TO THE
GUNDERMAN'S LIFE...
YET SOMETHING
PREVENTED ME.

INSTEAD, I GRASPED
A STOUT **FAGOT**
THAT LAY AT HAND...

...AND THE HARD-
DRAWN FANTING OF
COMBAT...

THEN SOUNDED THE
CLANGOR OF **STRIFE**...

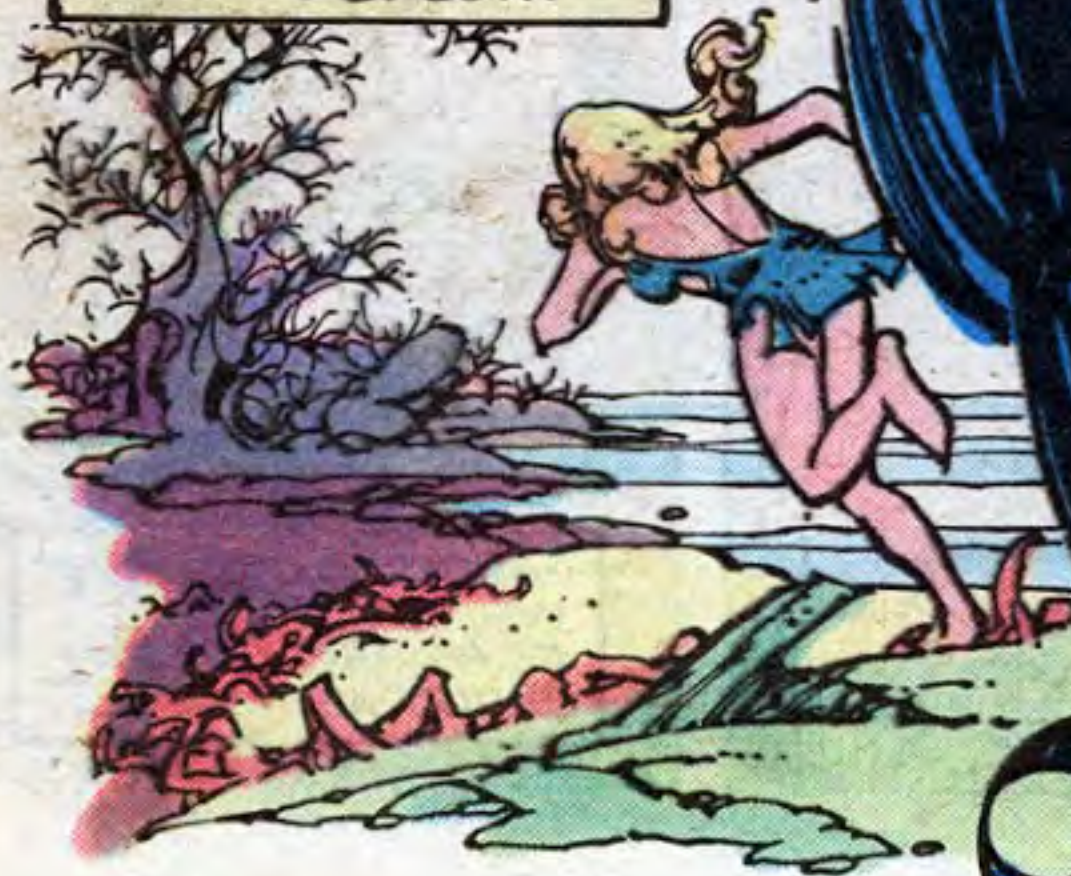


...TILL THE
GUNDERMAN **FELL**
BEFORE ME...



**STUNNED, YET
NOT DEAD.**

NEXT, OUT OF THE
CORNER OF MY EYE,
I SAW AGAIN THE
GIRL, RACING PAST
THE HACKED, HALF-
HUMAN **CORPSES**
AT CITY'S EDGE...



...TOWARD THE
CLEAN, DARK
FOREST
BEYOND!





STOP,
GIRL! I WON'T
HARM
YOU!



IN ANY EVENT, THE
GIRL STILL **RAN ON**...



THIS WAS **TRUE**, I GUESS,
IN ITS WAY -- BUT I SPEAK
NOW AS **JIM O'BRIEN**, AND
NOT AS **CONAN OF THE
REAVERS**.



...A FLYING WISP OF **WHITE**...



TOWARD THE Gaping
MAW OF THE **CAVERN**
BEYOND...

...A CAVERN OF WHICH, IN THAT
LONG-AGO DAY AND AGE, I,
CONAN, KNEW **NOTHING**!



YET, I WAS GAINING
RAPIDLY ON HER--

--WHEN **SUDDENLY**--



GAERIC!
YOU
AGAIN!?

BY **CROM**,
MAN-- DON'T
YOU KNOW
ENOUGH TO
STAY
DOWN?

I SPARED
YOU **ONCE**,
BUT --

DO ME **NO
FAVORS**,
DOG--



--AS I
SHALL
DO YOU
NONE!

**NO
QUARTER**,
THEN?

**NO
QUARTER!**



BUT THEN, HIS
FACE PALED--
AND NOT FROM
FEAR OF MY
SLICING
BLADE--



**TAMERA--
NO!**
NOT IN
THERE!

BETTER A **CLEAN DEATH**! IN
MITRA'S NAME, GIRL, RUN
INTO THE **FOREST**, AND
SAVE YOURSELF!

I'LL NOT
LEAVE YOU, GAERIC!
THE CAVE IS OUR
ONE CHANCE!



THEN--
WE GO
TOGETHER!

AND, SPRINGING AWAY FROM
ME, HE LEAPED INTO THE
CAVERN **AFTER HER!**

BUT I WAS
YOUNG,
AND
HEADSTRONG;
THIS WAS MY
FIRST SACK,
AND I WAS
NOT TO BE SO
EASILY
ROBBED OF
THE
PRIZES OF
WAR.



WITH A
MADDENED
YELL THAT
INVOKED ALL
MY GRIM
CIMMERIAN
GODS, I
CHARGED
RECKLESSLY
AFTER
THEM!

A QUICK
GLANCE
SHOWED
A WHITE
FORM
VANISHING
THRU A
DOORWAY
IN THE
BACK
WALL.



I RACED
ACROSS
THE
CAVERN...



...TO COME
TO A
SUDDEN
HALT,
AS AN
AXE
LICKED
OUT OF
THE
GLOOM...



...AND WHISTLED PAST MY HEAD!

I WAS NEAR FROTHING WITH
FURY AT THE THOUGHT OF THE
GIRL, BARRED FROM ME BY
THE TENACIOUS GUNDERMAN...



WHEN ABRUPTLY,
A TERRIBLE
SCREAM
ECHOED FROM
THE DARKNESS
YONDER!



TAMERA!

FORGETFUL OF ME AND
MY SWORD, GAERIC
WHIRLED...

...AND RACED
OFF
SHRIEKING
HER
NAME!

FROM FAR AWAY,
AS IF FROM THE
BOWELS OF THE
EARTH, I SEEMED
TO HEAR HER
ANSWERING
CRY...

...MINGLED WITH A STRANGE, SIBILANT CLAMOR
THAT ELECTRIFIED ME WITH NAMELESS BUT
INSTINCTIVE HORROR!

THEN
SILENCE
FELL, SAVE
FOR GAERIC'S
FRENZIED
RECEDING
CRIES.

RECOVERING
MYSELF, I
RACED
AFTER HIM...

...CUTTING DOWN
MY RIVAL FROM
BEHIND WAS
LESS IN MY MIND...

...THAN
DISCOVERING
WHAT VILE
THING HAD THE
FAIR TAMERA
IN ITS CLUTCHES!

AS I RAN ALONG, I
NOTED ABSENTLY
THE SIDES OF THE
TUNNEL.

AHEAD OF ME, THE
TUNNEL OPENED
INTO A WIDER
CHAMBER...

AND TO
GIVE ME MY
DUE,
RED-HANDED
REAPER
THOUGH
I WAS...

THEY WERE
SCRAWLED WITH
MONSTROUS
PICTURES
OF GNARLED,
HALF-HUMAN
WARRIORS.

THIS, THEN, MUST
BE THE CAVERN
OF THE
CHILDREN OF
THE NIGHT,
TALES OF WHICH
HAD REACHED EVEN
THE BROODING
HILLS OF MY
BIRTH.

AD
RRRR
CEE
HH

AND SUDDENLY, THERE SOUNDED
A SHORT, FIERCE SHOUT-- THE
CRASH OF A HARD-DRIVEN BLOW--
MIXED WITH A GIRL'S HYSTERICAL
SCREAMS AND A MEDLEY OF
SERPENTLIKE HISSING THAT
MADE MY HAIR BRISTLE!

AT THAT INSTANT, I **SHOT** OUT OF THE TUNNEL...

...REALIZING **TOO LATE** THAT THE CAVERN FLOOR LAY SEVERAL FEET **BELOW** THE LEVEL OF THE TUNNEL!

MY FLYING FEET **MISSED** THE TINY, AGE-OLD STEPS...

...AND I **CRASHED** HARD ON THE SOLID STONE FLOOR!

NOW:

I STOOD IN THE SEMIDARKNESS, RUBBING MY ACHING HEAD-- AND ALL THIS CAME **BACK** TO ME.

I STARED FEARSOMELY ACROSS THE VAST CHAMBER AT THAT BLACK CRYPTIC **CORRIDOR** INTO WHICH TAMERA AND HER LOVER HAD DISAPPEARED... AND OVER WHICH **SILENCE** LAY LIKE A FALL.

WHAT WAITED **BEYOND**, I DID NOT **KNOW**... AND DARED NOT **THINK**.

BUT I WAS **CONAN, THE CIMMERIAN**... AND I WAS **YOUNG AND HOT-BLOODED**. AND I WOULD NOT BE **DENIED**!

I WALKED SOFTLY
INTO THE
CORRIDOR, MY
BROAD SWORD
AT THE READY.



THE **DARKNESS**
CLOSED AROUND ME
AS I ADVANCED.

THEN, OF A
SUDDEN--
SOMETHING
HISSED
BESIDE ME
LIKE A VIPER--



HSSSSSSSS



--AND A
BLADE OF
SOME SORT
SLASHED
FIERCELY
AT MY
THIGH!

I **STRUCK**
BACK
SAVAGELY--



--FELT MY **BLIND**
STROKE CRUNCH
HOME-- AND
SOMETHING FELL
AT MY FEET AND
DIED!



I COULD NOT
SEE WHAT IT
WAS, AND DID
NOT CARE TO.

THE **HISSING**
TONGUE OF THE
THING HAD
RESEMBLED NO
HUMAN
LANGUAGE.

NOW, IN THE
BLACKNESS
AHEAD OF ME,
I HEARD THE
SOUND
REPEATED...



...MINGLED
WITH
HORRIBLE
SLITHERINGS,
AS IF
NUMBERS OF
REPTILIAN
CREATURES
WERE
APPROACHING.

THE
DWARFISH
STEPS
AHEAD
MADE THE
WAY
DIFFICULT...



...AND I
SEEMED
TO BE
DESCENDING
INTO THE
VERY
BOWELS OF
THE EARTH.

BUT I DARED
NOT **TURN**
BACK... FOR
I WAS IN
LOVE, IN MY
BARBARIAN
WAY.

THEN, AT
LAST, I
GLIMPSED
A FAINT
EERIE
LIGHT.



I WENT ON...

...AND CAME TO
A SPOT WHERE
THE SHAFT
OPENED INTO
ANOTHER
GREAT
VAULTED
CHAMBER

I
ENTERED
IT...



... AND I SHRANK BACK, AGHAST!

AT THE FAR END OF THE CHAMBER
STOOD A GRIM, BLACK ALTAR
WHICH GLOWED DULLY IN THE
SHADOWY CAVERN, AS IF SMEARED
ALL OVER WITH PHOSPHORUS.

... WHILE, TOWERING
OVER THE ALTAR, A
PILE OF HUMAN
SKULLS HEAPED
HIGH BEFORE IT,
LOOMED A HIDEOUS
MONSTROSITY
CURVED FROM OUT OF
THE VERY ROCK-- AN
OBSCENE TRAVESTY
OF ALL THE GODS
WHICH I, CONAN, KNEW.

ON THE ALTAR
ITSELF,
BOUND WITH
RAWHIDE
THONGS, LAY
GAERIC--
AND
TAMERA.

AND, BEFORE
THE FAINTLY
GLOWING
ALTAR
SQUATTED
HORROR--
ONE OF THE
PEOPLE
OF THE
DARK--!

I MOVED QUIETLY
AS THE STALKING
HILL-PANTHER--
YET, UNCANNILY,
THE THING
HEARD ME...

IT TURNED AND GLARED
AT ME-- A STUNTED
CREATURE WHICH AT FIRST
GLANCE SEEMED
NEARLY HUMAN--

YET ITS MOTTLED SKIN
WAS YELLOW AND SCALY,
LIKE THE HIDE OF A
SERPENT, FROM YEARS
OF SKULKING IN UNRELIEVED
BLACKNESS...

... AND IT HISSED
AS IT TURNED, A
SIBILANT
WHISPER WHICH
FROZE MY
BARBARIAN
BLOOD!

EVEN AS I MADE
READY TO
CHARGE,
THERE WAS
A REPELLANT
SCUFFLING
OF TALONED
FEET
BELOW ME--



--AND MORE
OF HIS
ABHORRENT
KIND
BURST
FORTH
INTO THE
CHAMBER!



UNABLE TO
GO BACK
EVEN IF I
HAD
WISHED TO,
I **LEAPED**
FORWARD--



--EVADING
THE CREATURE'S
HURLED
SPEAR--

--AND AN
ABORIGINE
SHRIEKED
AS MY
HEAVY
SWORD
SPLIT HIS
REPTILIAN
HEART!

SO-- THEY COULD DO SOMETHING
BESIDES **HISS**, THEN! THAT MADE
THEM SLIGHTLY LESS FRIGHTENING
TO THE SUPERSTITIOUS **BARBARIAN**
THAT I WAS.



I'LL
FREE YOU,
GUNDERMAN--
IF ONLY TO DIE
LIKE A **MAN**,
AND NOT A
SACRIFICIAL
ANIMAL!

PERHAPS--
WE NEED
NOT DIE AT
ALL,
CIMMERIAN...



THERE IS A SHAFT
OF **DAYLIGHT**
YONDER-- PERHAPS
A PATH TO
ESCAPE! AND,
TOGETHER--

FAIR ENOUGH!

**GRAB YOUR
WEAPON
THEN,
GAERIC--**

--AND
WE'LL HARRY
THESE HORDES
TO **HELL!**

USED TO LONG CENTURIES
OF HUMAN CAPTIVES
CRINGING BEFORE
THEM, THE CREATURES
HESITATED BEFORE MY
FLAILING SWORD...

BUT THEN, OUR CRIES OF **HOPE** TURNED
TO CURSES OF BITTER **DISAPPOINTMENT...**



DAMN!
THERE'S DAYLIGHT,
AYE-- BUT FAR
ABOVE US, OUT
OF REACH!

**NO,
CIMMERIAN!**
LITTLE USE
TO BE HUNTED
LIKE **RATS**
TO OUR
DOOM.

IF THERE
IS **NO
ESCAPE,**
THEN LET US
AT LEAST
MEET OUR
FATES LIKE
MEN!



SAVE THE
GIRL THEN,
IF YOU
CAN!

I'LL MAKE
MY STAND
HERE--
WHERE I CAN
SEE NEARLY AS
WELL AS **THEY!**
GO!!

... BARELY TIME
ENOUGH FOR US TO
FLEE ACROSS THE
NARROW **ROCK-BRIDGE**
WHICH SCANNED
A SICKENING **ABYSS--**
TOWARD THE **SHAFT**
OF **LIGHT** BEYOND.



AGREED! STAND BEHIND ME WITH THE GIRL-- AND WHEN I FALL, SLAY HER WITH YOUR OWN HAND, LEST THEY TAKE HER ALIVE AGAIN!

THEN SELL YOUR OWN LIFE AS HIGH AS YOU MAY, FOR THERE IS NONE TO AVENGE US.

WE WORSHIP DIFFERENT GODS, REAVER-- BUT ALL GODS LOVE BRAVE MEN.

MAYHAP WE SHALL MEET AGAIN-- BEYOND THE DARK!

HAIL AND FAREWELL, GUNDERMAN....!

THEN, I WHEELED-- AS A HIDEOUS HORDE SWEEP UP THE TUNNEL, A FLYING NIGHTMARE OF STREAMING SNAKY HAIR, FOAM-FLECKED LIPS, AND GLARING EYES.

THUNDERING MY WAR CRY, I STRUCK-- AND A HEAD SPUN, GRINNING ON AN ARCING FOUNTAIN OF BLOOD.

THEY RUSHED UPON ME LIKE A WAVE, AND THE FIGHTING MADNESS OF MY WARRIOR RACE WAS UPON ME. I FOUGHT AS A BEAST AT BAY FIGHTS, AND AT EVERY STROKE I CLOVE THRU FLESH AND BONE, AND BLOOD SPATTERED IN A CRIMSON RAIN.

THEN, AS
SHEER
WEIGHT
OF
NUMBERS
NEARLY
DROWNED
ME, A
FIERCE
YELL
CUT
THE DIN--

STAGGERING TO MY FEET, I
FOUGHT ON THEN BY THE
GUNDERMAN'S SIDE-- AND
WE TRAMPLED THE WRITHING
BODIES **BENEATH** US LIKE
OVERRIPE WHEAT!

YET, THE HISSING,
YOWLING HORDE
SEEMED
ENDLESS--
AND WE KNEW
OUR **DEATHS**
WERE
NEAR AT HAND--

--AND
GAERIC'S
AXE SANG
BEHIND ME!

--WHEN, **SUDDENLY--**

CROM TAKE
ME! THEY'RE
FLEEING INTO
A **SIDE-**
TUNNEL!

WE'VE
FRIGHTENED
THEM
OFF!

THEN--
WE'RE **SAFE!**
SAFE!

NOT LIKELY,
GIRL. THEY
MEAN TO
COME AT US
FROM SOME
OTHER--

MORRIGAN AND MACHA!
THERE'S A STAIRWAY OVER
THERE-- ONE WE COULD
NOT SEE BEFORE!

PERHAPS IT LEADS
UP TO THE SAFETY
YOU BEMOAN. AT
LEAST WE MUST TRY
IT-- AND SWIFTLY!

AYE. WE CAN'T
GO BACK, SO
THIS WAY
IT IS!

BUT
LISTEN--
THAT
SOUND--
LIKE THE
THUNDER
OF
RUSHING
WATER
SOMEWHERE
BELOW
US!

I DID NOT ANSWER--
FOR, JUST THEN, OVER
MY HEAD I SAW THE
CHILDREN OF THE
NIGHT.

THREE OF
THE DEVILS
HAD
SOMEHOW
GOTTEN
ABOVE US.

AN
UNDERGROUND
RIVER--
AND WE'RE
PASSING RIGHT
OVER IT!

--AND WITH A VOLCANIC
WRENCH, BROKE THE
FIRST HOBGOBLIN'S
NECK--

AS FRENZIED
NOW BY FURY
AS BY FEAR,
I CHARGED UP
THE STEEP
CAVERN-- AS
NO HUMAN
SAVE A
CIMMERIAN
COULD
HAVE DONE--

--EVEN AS I
DASHED
OUT THE
BRAINS OF
TWO OTHERS!

RISING PAINFULLY, I SAW THAT
TAMERA AND GAERIC WERE **NOT**
IN SIGHT.

I HAD BEEN
SOMEWHAT
BEHIND
THEM, AND
THEY HAD
RUN ON...

THEN, I **HALTED.**
AND SWORE
BENEATH
MY BREATH.

FOR, THE CORRIDOR **BRANCHED**
JUST AHEAD -- AND I KNEW NOT
WHICH WAY MY **COMPANIONS**
HAD TAKEN.

AT **BLIND VENTURE**
I TURNED INTO THE
RIGHT-HAND BRANCH
AND STAGGERED ON IN
SEMI-DARKNESS.

I WAS **WEAK** FROM
FATIGUE AND LOSS
OF BLOOD. ONLY THE
THOUGHT OF **TAMERA**
KEPT ME DOGGEDLY
ON MY **FEET.**

NOW, DISTINCTLY,
I HEARD THE
THE SOUND OF AN
UNSEEN
TORRENT.

TO MY DESPAIR,
THE TUNNEL LED
DOWN, RATHER
THAN UP -- AND
DROPS OF
MOISTURE
FELL
UPON MY HEAD.

I KNEW THEN THAT I WAS
PASSING **UNDER** THE
SUBTERRANEAN RIVER.

... KNOWING
NOTHING OF
THE **FIENDS**
WHICH HAD
ATTACKED
ME.

A DOZEN STEPS
FORWARD
I TOOK...

THEN, I BLUNDERED
INTO ANOTHER
UPWARD-TURNING
SHAFT, SCALING IT AS
QUICKLY AS MY
STIFFENING **WOUNDS**
WOULD ALLOW.

I HAD TAKEN
PUNISHMENT
ENOUGH TO **KILL**
JIM O'BRIEN...
BUT I WAS
CONAN THEN,
AND **YOUNG...**

AND EVEN IN MY
PAIN, I WAS
SURE... AS ALL
THE **YOUNG** ARE
EVER SURE.

UP I WENT--
AND **UP--**

--TILL SUDDENLY,
DAYLIGHT
BURST UPON ME--

AND, EYES SMARTING,
I STUMBLED
FORTH INTO THE
LIGHT--

--EVEN AS TWO FIGURES
EMERGED UPON ANOTHER
LEDGE, ACROSS THE
RAGING TORRENT WHICH
CASCADED DOWN ON ITS
WAY TO THE **ETERNAL SEA:**

GAERIC--
AND
TAMERA!

THEY HAD TAKEN THE
OTHER BRANCH, THEN--
AND HAD EMERGED SO
NEAR ME, YET SO FAR
DISTANT.

NOR HAD THEY
COME **UNSEEN**
TO THAT **JAGGED**
CLIFF'S
HIGH EDGE!

I COULD NOT HEAR
THE WORDS THEY
SPOKE TO EACH
OTHER, AS THEY
CROUCHED THERE
TOGETHER...

BUT I KNEW, AS DID
THEY, THAT THEY COULD
NEITHER GO FORWARD...
NOR GO BACK!

AND OUT OF THE CLEFT
BEHIND THEM NOW SWARMED
A LOATHSOME MOB, LIKE
FOUL REPTILES WRITHING UP
OUT OF DARKNESS,

YET, THEY WOULD NOT
BE LONG DENIED.

GRIPPING MY SWORD, I
WOULD HAVE CLIMBED TO
THEIR AID...

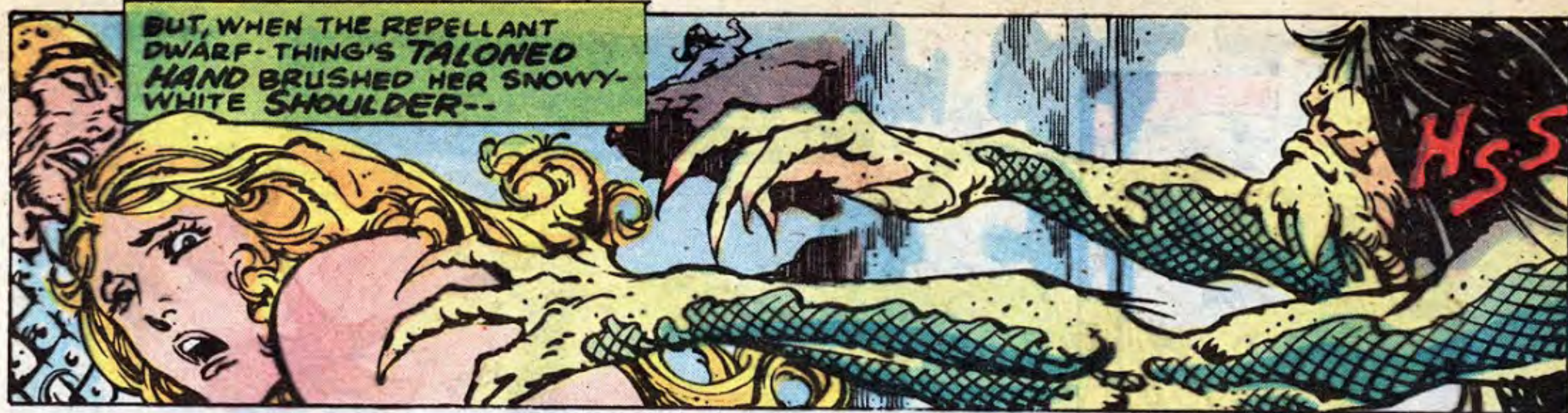
... ONE OF THE DARK DEVILS,
CREEPING SILENTLY FROM
OUT OF A SIDE-TUNNEL
ABOVE GAERIC AND TAMERA.

THEY DID NOT SEEM
TO SEE THE THING...

YET NOT EVEN
A SPIDER
COULD HAVE
SCALED THE
SHEER CLIFFS
BETWEEN US
IN TIME.

AND THEN,
I SAW IT...

...NOR COULD
THEY HEAR MY
ANGUISHED
CRY, A MERE
WHISPER AMID
THE ROAR OF
FALLING
WATER...!



BUT, WHEN THE REPELLANT
DWARF-THING'S TALONED
HAND BRUSHED HER SNOWY-
WHITE SHOULDER--

HSS



--I LET
FLY A
DESPERATE
STONE--



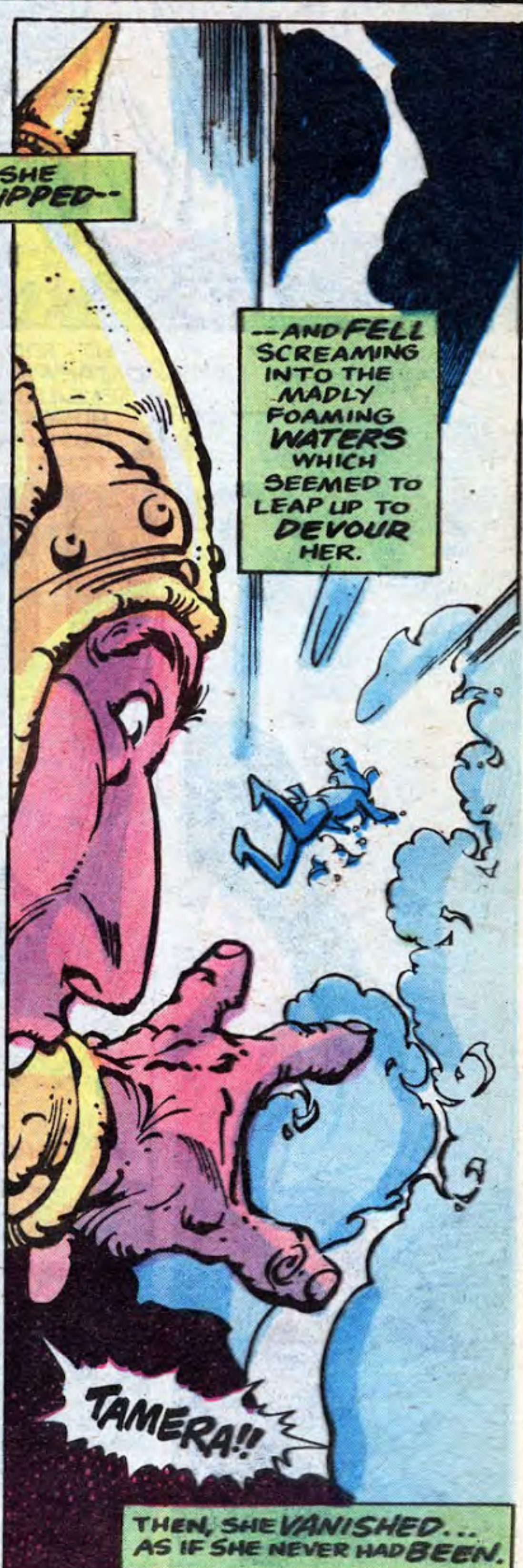
-- WHICH FLEW
TRUE TO ITS
MARK!

THE CREATURE
DROPPED TO
THE GROUND,
INSTANTLY
DEAD.



YET, AS THE
GIRL HAD
SPRUNG
AWAY--

-- SHE
SLIPPED--



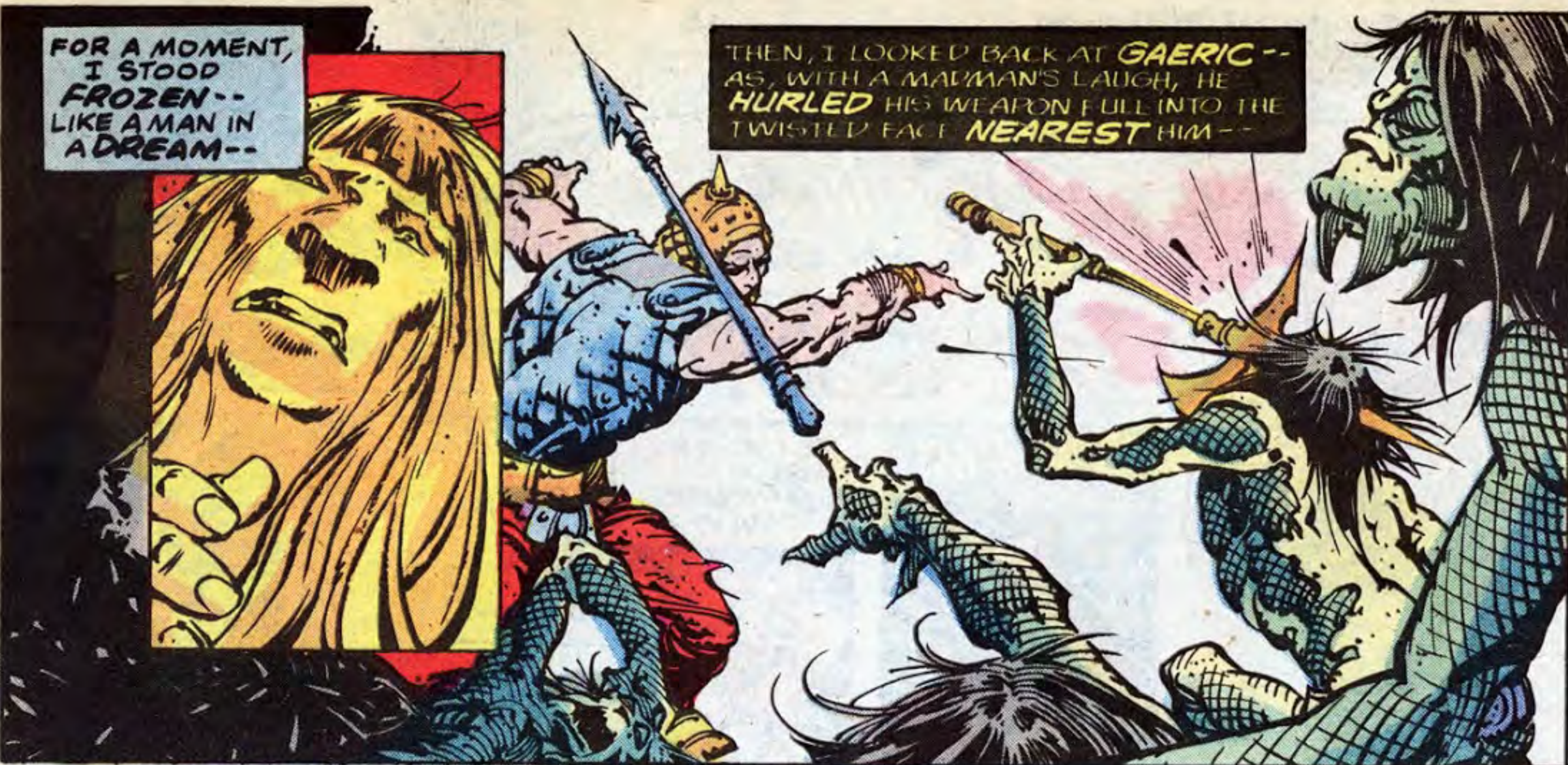
--AND FELL
SCREAMING
INTO THE
MADLY
FOAMING
WATERS
WHICH
SEEMED TO
LEAP UP TO
DEVOUR
HER.

TAMERA!!

THEN, SHE VANISHED...
AS IF SHE NEVER HAD BEEN.

FOR A MOMENT,
I STOOD
FROZEN--
LIKE A MAN IN
A DREAM--

THEN, I LOOKED BACK AT **GAERIC**--
AS, WITH A MADMAN'S LAUGH, HE
HURLED HIS WEAPON FULL INTO THE
TWISTED FACE **NEAREST** HIM--



--THEN TURNED AND
LEAPED TO HIS
DEATH!

HE, TOO,
DISAPPEARED
BENEATH THE
HUNGRY,
FROTHING
FOAM...

NONE OF HELL'S
CHILDREN HAD
SEEN **ME**--OR
EVEN THE DEADLY
STONE I
HAD THROWN--

--AND ONCE THE **PEOPLE OF**
THE DARK HAD LEFT THE
OPPOSITE LEDGE.



BUT THEN, WITHOUT
WARNING, THE
ROAR OF THE
RIVER FAR BELOW
BECAME LIKE A
DIM AND
DISTANT ECHO.

AND THE WILD
RIVER **SWEPT**
ON LIKE A BLIND,
INSATIATE
MONSTER
THUNDERING
ALONG THE
JUTTING CLIFFS.

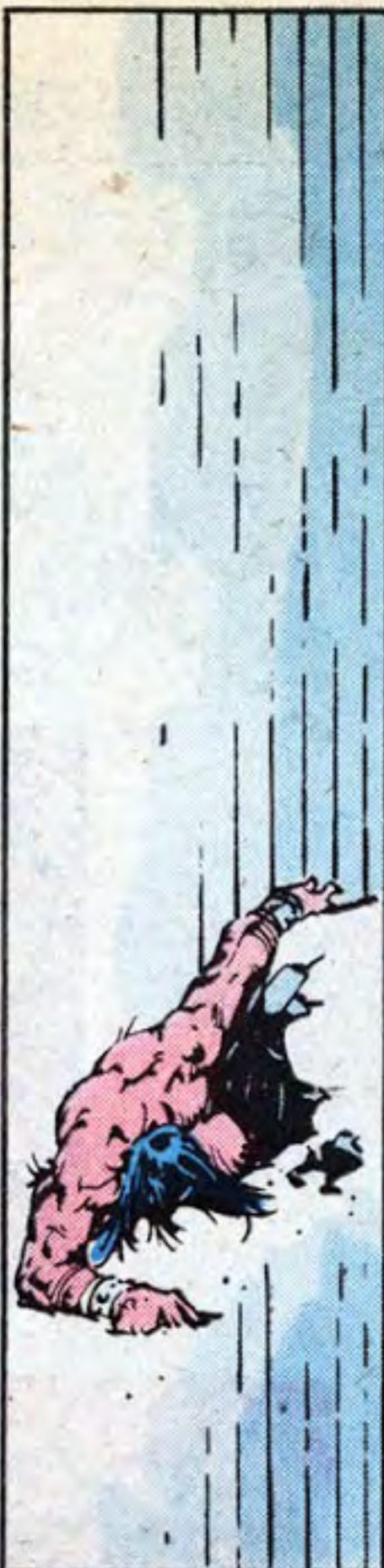
--SO I WAS
SAFE NOW,
AND COULD
DESCEND
WITH EASE,
ONCE I HAD
RESTED--

I **CLUTCHED** LAZELY AT MY
THROBBING, BLOOD-CAKED
HEAD--

THEN, I REELLED--



-- AND
FELL--!



AT LENGTH,
THE MISTS
FADED...



AND I STARED
ABOUT DIZZILY...



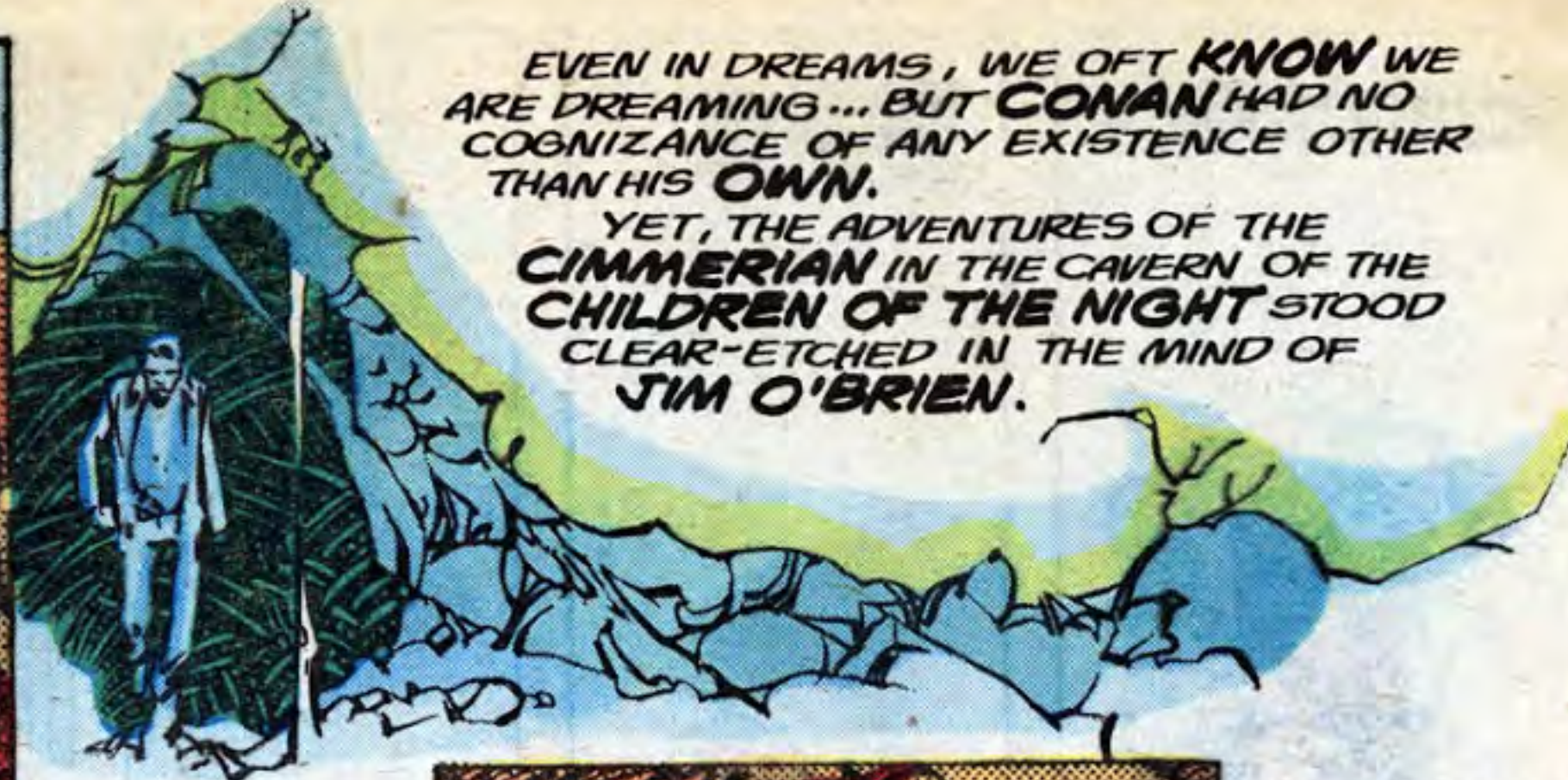
...ORIENTING
MYSELF WITH
SPACE
AND
TIME...!

AND I, WHO HAD BEEN **CONAN THE REAVER**, WAS ONCE MORE **JIM O'BRIEN**.

HAD ALL THAT GROTESQUE INTERLUDE BEEN BUT A DREAM?



COULD A MERE NIGHTMARE APPEAR SO VIVID?



EVEN IN DREAMS, WE OFT **KNOW** WE ARE DREAMING... BUT **CONAN** HAD NO COGNIZANCE OF ANY EXISTENCE OTHER THAN HIS **OWN**.

YET, THE ADVENTURES OF THE **CIMMERIAN** IN THE CAVERN OF THE **CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT** STOOD CLEAR-ETCHED IN THE MIND OF **JIM O'BRIEN**.

LIKE A MAN IN A **TRANCE**, I WALKED ON, AND SEEMED TO **KNOW** JUST WHERE I WAS **GOING**



AT LAST, I TOOK AGAIN A CERTAIN **LEFT-HAND BRANCH...**



... AND SOON STRUCK THE **DANK LOWER LEVEL**, THOUGH NOW THERE WAS NO **RUSH OF WATER** OVERHEAD.

FINDING THE **SHAFT** BY WHICH **CONAN** HAD ASCENDED, I CLIMBED UPWARD...



AND INDEED I KNEW WELL THAT, WHATEVER **MIGHTY RIVER** HAD ROARED SEAWARD IN ANCIENT TIMES, THERE WAS NO SUCH BODY OF WATER IN THE HILLS TODAY.

ONCE, I COULD HAVE SWORN THAT **HIDEOUS YELLOW EYES** GLARED TERRIBLY AT ME FROM THE DARKNESS. I LAUGHED NERVOUSLY, BUT GRIPPED MY **REVOLVER**.



... THOUGH I, **JIM O'BRIEN**, WAS NOT NEARLY SO **SURE-FOOTED** AS WAS **CONAN THE CIMMERIAN** -- NO, NOR AS **TIGERISHLY POWERFUL** AND **QUICK**, EITHER.



FINALLY, I BREATHED AGAIN DEEPLY IN RELIEF AS THE **SUDDEN GLOW OF DAYLIGHT** FELL FULL UPON ME.

... AND I STOOD UPON A **LEDGE**, NOW WORN AWAY TO LITTLE MORE THAN A **BUMP** ON THE FACE OF THE CLIFF.



THE **GREAT RIVER**, WHICH ONCE HAD ROARED LIKE A **PRISONED MONSTER**, HAD **DWINDED AWAY** WITH THE **PASSING EONS...**



... TILL IT WAS NOW NO MORE THAN A **TINY STREAM**, TRICKLING SOUNDLESSLY AMONG THE **STONES** ON ITS WAY TO THE **SEA**.

HOW LONG I
STOOD
THERE, I DO
NOT KNOW.
THEN--

LORD,
ELEANOR--
I'M SO
HAPPY YOU
DECIDED
TO COME
WITH
ME.

YES,
RICHARD...

AND THEN,
I
REMEMBERED
WHY I HAD
COME TO THE
CAVERN:

TO KILL
RICHARD
BRENT.

YET HE WAS
NOT ALONE,
AS I HAD
IMAGINED.

...BUT IT
ALMOST
SEEMS I'VE
BEEN HERE
BEFORE...

...RUNNING
ENDLESSLY
THRU THOSE
DARK
CORRIDORS...

WAS
I
THERE?

THERE WAS NO
THUNDERING
RIVER NOW
BETWEEN THE
LEDGES, SO
I COULD
HEAR THEM
CLEARLY...

...AND WISHED
THAT I
COULD NOT.

YES--AND JIM,
TOO. BUT NONE
OF US WAS--WHO
WE ARE NOW. IT
WAS... VERY
STRANGE...

YET, SOMEHOW,
THE MEMORIES
HAVE MADE ME
REALIZE AT
LAST THAT IT'S
YOU I LOVE--
NOT
JIM!

ONLY
YOU,
RICHARD...

DARLING...

THEIR LIPS MET,
AS I CLENCHED
MY REVOLVER
TIGHTLY.

THEY HAD
DIED
TOGETHER
ONCE.

WOULD THEY
DO SO...
AGAIN...

...THIS TIME,
AT MY
HAND?

THEN, I HEARD TAMERA--
ELEANOR--SCREAM!
I SAW THEM BOTH
RECOIL...

...AS FROM THE
CLEFT BEHIND
THEM, A HORROR
CAME WRITHING!

RICHARD!
OH MY
GOD--!

GET
BACK,
BELOVED--!

BEFORE THE PEOPLE OF THE DARK
HAD DIED AS A RACE, THEY MUST HAVE
LOST ALL HUMAN SEMBLANCE--

AND I KNEW
INSTINCTIVELY
THAT IN ALL THE
WORLD, THIS
WAS THE ONLY ONE
OF ITS KIND--
A MONSTER
THAT HAD LIVED
ON, ALL TRACE
OF HUMANITY
VANISHED!

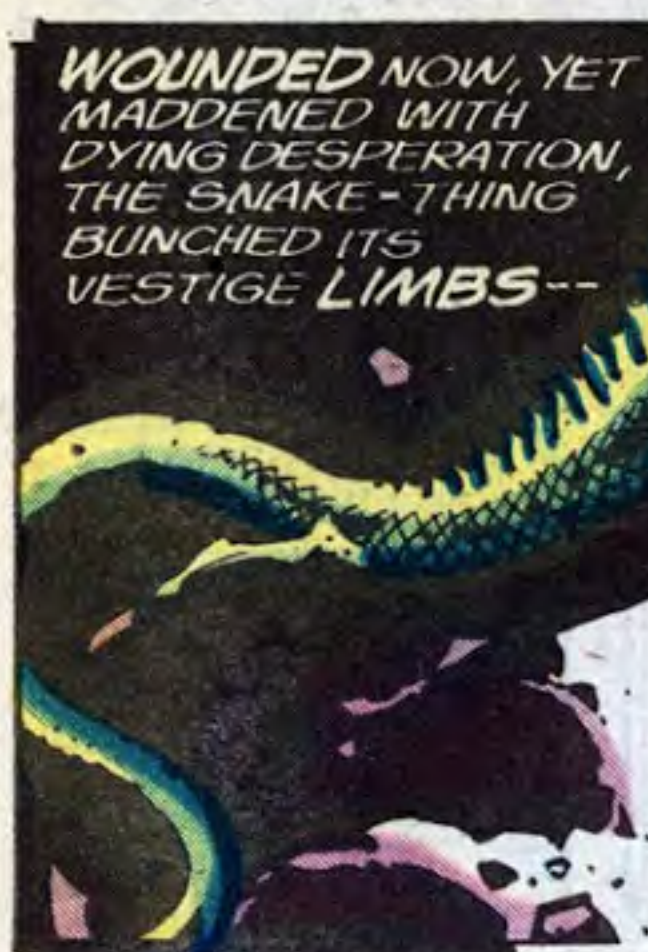
OVER HERE,
YOU SCALY
DEVIL!!



**OVER
HERE!!**

AS THE REPTILIAN
THING REARED
ABOVE THE COWERING
HUMANS, I LEAPED
FROM MY PLACE OF
HIDING--

--AND
FIRED!



WOUNDED NOW, YET
MADDENED WITH
DYING DESPERATION,
THE SNAKE-THING
BUNCHED ITS
VESTIGE LIMBS--

--AND HURLED ITSELF SAVAGELY ACROSS
THE NARROW SPACE THAT SEPARATED US!



I FIRED AGAIN-- AND
KNEW THAT I HAD STRUCK
IT A MORTAL WOUND--!

YET STILL, WITH A
HIDEOUSLY HUMAN
SCREAM, THE CREATURE
GRASPED ME, AND
WE TUMBLED
TOGETHER FROM THE
LEDGE--

-- TO PLUMMET
WILDLY TO THE
ROCKS FAR BELOW!



AND, AS I GASPED
MY DYING
BREATH, I GAVE
SILENT THANKS TO
THE GODS OF
EONS PAST--

--THAT A DEBT HAD AT LAST BEEN PAID.