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*The* **FACTS** *in the* **CASE** *of the* **DEPARTURE**  
of

# MISS FINCH™

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THE FACTS  
IN THE CASE OF  
THE DEPARTURE OF  
❁ MISS FINCH ❁

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TO BEGIN AT THE END: I ARRANGED THE THIN SLICE OF PICKLED GINGER, PINK AND TRANSLUCENT, ON TOP OF THE PALE YELLOWTAIL FLESH.

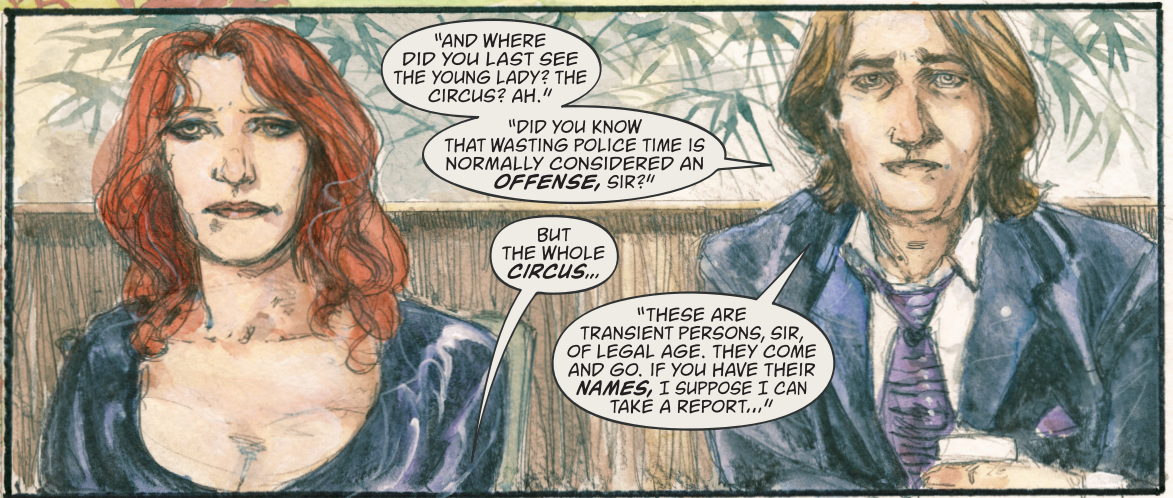
I THINK WE OUGHT TO GO TO THE POLICE.

AND TELL THEM WHAT, EXACTLY?



I DIPPED THE WHOLE ARRANGEMENT--GINGER, FISH AND VINEGARED RICE-- INTO THE SOY SAUCE, FLESH-SIDE DOWN.

WELL, WE COULD FILE A MISSING PERSONS REPORT, OR SOMETHING. I DON'T KNOW.

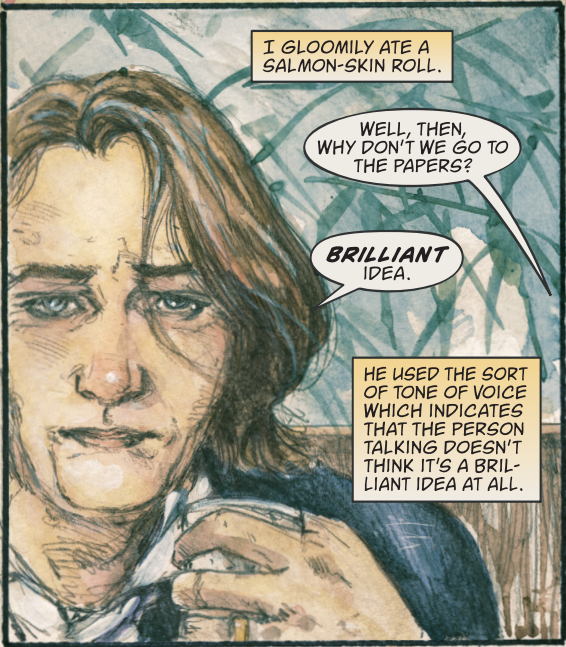


"AND WHERE DID YOU LAST SEE THE YOUNG LADY? THE CIRCUS? AH."

"DID YOU KNOW THAT WASTING POLICE TIME IS NORMALLY CONSIDERED AN OFFENSE, SIR?"

BUT THE WHOLE CIRCUS...

"THESE ARE TRANSIENT PERSONS, SIR, OF LEGAL AGE. THEY COME AND GO. IF YOU HAVE THEIR NAMES, I SUPPOSE I CAN TAKE A REPORT..."



I GLOOMILY ATE A SALMON-SKIN ROLL.

WELL, THEN, WHY DON'T WE GO TO THE PAPERS?

BRILLIANT IDEA.

HE USED THE SORT OF TONE OF VOICE WHICH INDICATES THAT THE PERSON TALKING DOESN'T THINK IT'S A BRILLIANT IDEA AT ALL.



JONATHAN'S RIGHT. THEY WON'T LISTEN TO US.

WHY WOULDN'T THEY? WE'RE RELIABLE. HONEST CITIZENS. ALL THAT.

YOU'RE A FANTASY WRITER. YOU MAKE UP STUFF FOR A LIVING. NO ONE'S GOING TO BELIEVE YOU.



BUT YOU TWO SAW IT ALL AS WELL. YOU'D BACK ME UP.

JONATHAN'S GOT A NEW SERIES ON CULT HORROR MOVIES COMING OUT IN THE AUTUMN. THEY'LL SAY HE'S JUST TRYING TO GET CHEAP PUBLICITY FOR THE SHOW. AND I'VE GOT ANOTHER BOOK COMING OUT. SAME THING.



I SIPPED MY GREEN TEA.

SO YOU'RE SAYING THAT WE CAN'T TELL ANYONE?



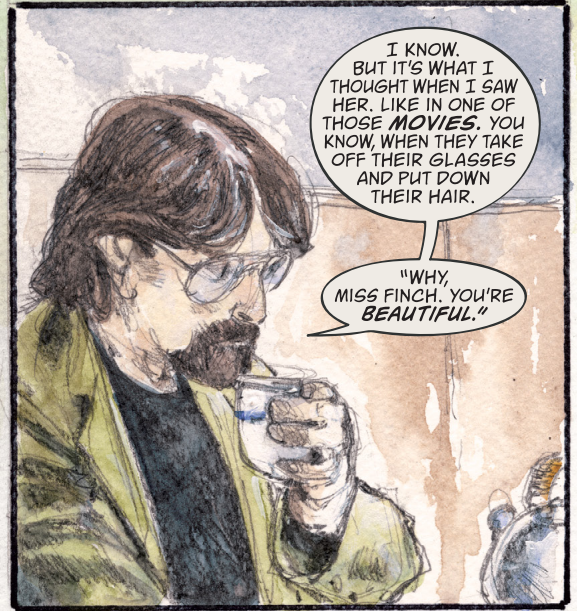
NO, WE CAN TELL ANYONE WE WANT.

IT'S MAKING THEM BELIEVE US THAT'S PROBLEMATIC. OR, IF YOU ASK ME, IMPOSSIBLE.



YOU MAY BE RIGHT. AND MISS FINCH IS PROBABLY MUCH HAPPIER WHEREVER SHE IS RIGHT NOW THAN SHE WOULD BE HERE.

HER NAME ISN'T MISS FINCH.



I KNOW. BUT IT'S WHAT I THOUGHT WHEN I SAW HER. LIKE IN ONE OF THOSE MOVIES, YOU KNOW, WHEN THEY TAKE OFF THEIR GLASSES AND PUT DOWN THEIR HAIR.

"WHY, MISS FINCH, YOU'RE BEAUTIFUL."



SHE CERTAINLY WAS THAT.

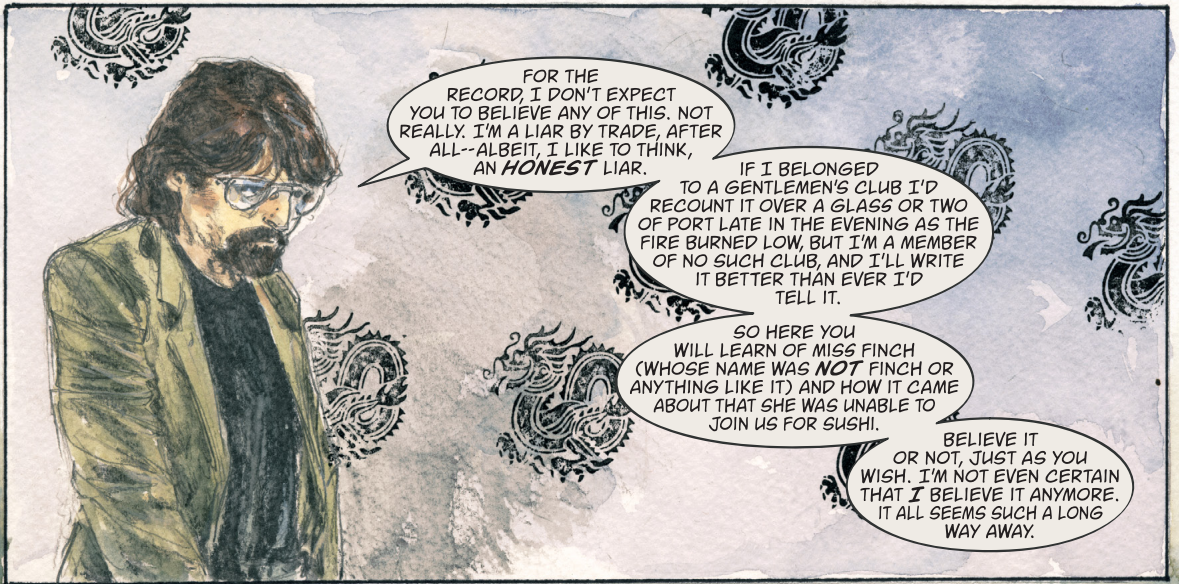
IN THE END, ANYWAY.

HE SHIVERED AT THE MEMORY.



THERE.

SO NOW YOU KNOW: THAT'S HOW IT ALL ENDED, AND HOW THE THREE OF US LEFT IT, SEVERAL YEARS AGO. ALL THAT REMAINS IS THE BEGINNING--AND THE DETAILS.

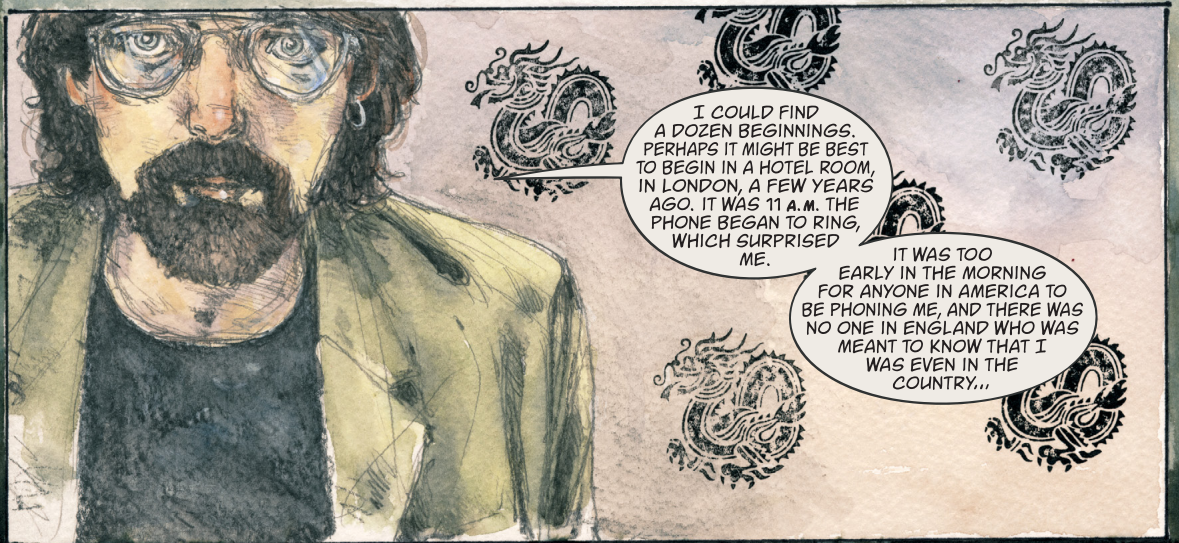


FOR THE RECORD, I DON'T EXPECT YOU TO BELIEVE ANY OF THIS. NOT REALLY. I'M A LIAR BY TRADE, AFTER ALL--ALBEIT, I LIKE TO THINK, AN *HONEST* LIAR.

IF I BELONGED TO A GENTLEMEN'S CLUB I'D RECOUNT IT OVER A GLASS OR TWO OF PORT LATE IN THE EVENING AS THE FIRE BURNED LOW, BUT I'M A MEMBER OF NO SUCH CLUB, AND I'LL WRITE IT BETTER THAN EVER I'D TELL IT.

SO HERE YOU WILL LEARN OF MISS FINCH (WHOSE NAME WAS *NOT* FINCH OR ANYTHING LIKE IT) AND HOW IT CAME ABOUT THAT SHE WAS UNABLE TO JOIN US FOR SUSHI.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, JUST AS YOU WISH. I'M NOT EVEN CERTAIN THAT I BELIEVE IT ANYMORE. IT ALL SEEMS SUCH A LONG WAY AWAY.



I COULD FIND A DOZEN BEGINNINGS. PERHAPS IT MIGHT BE BEST TO BEGIN IN A HOTEL ROOM, IN LONDON, A FEW YEARS AGO. IT WAS 11 A.M. THE PHONE BEGAN TO RING, WHICH SURPRISED ME.

IT WAS TOO EARLY IN THE MORNING FOR ANYONE IN AMERICA TO BE PHONING ME, AND THERE WAS NO ONE IN ENGLAND WHO WAS MEANT TO KNOW THAT I WAS EVEN IN THE COUNTRY..

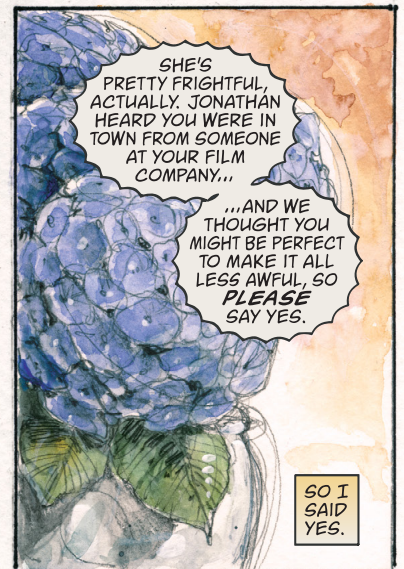
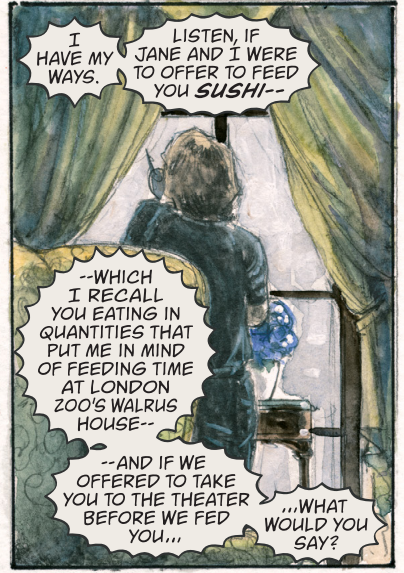


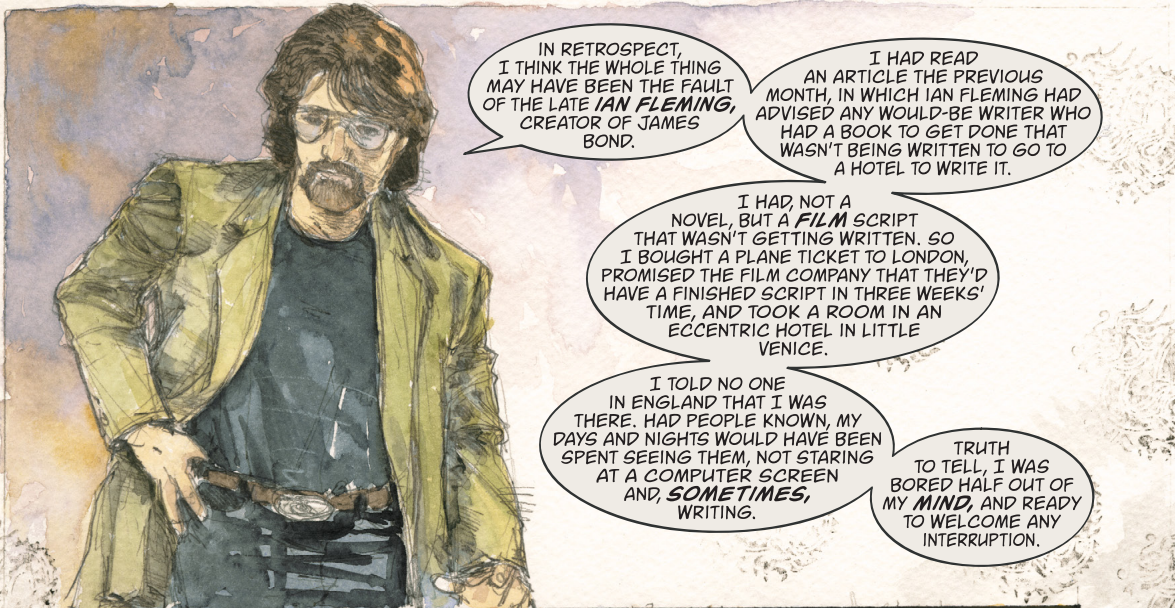
HELLO?

HI. THIS IS HIRAM P. MUZZLEDEXTER OF COLOSSAL PICTURES. WE'RE WORKING ON A FILM THAT'S A REMAKE OF *RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK*, BUT INSTEAD OF NAZIS IT HAS WOMEN WITH *ENORMOUS KNOCKERS* IN IT.

WE'VE HEARD THAT YOU WERE ASTONISHINGLY *WELL-SUPPLIED* IN THE TROUSER DEPARTMENT AND MIGHT BE WILLING TO TAKE ON THE PART OF OUR MALE LEAD, MINNESOTA JONES...

THE FAMILIAR VOICE WAS ADOPTING AN AMERICAN ACCENT OF MONUMENTALLY *UNCONVINCING* PROPORTIONS.





IN RETROSPECT, I THINK THE WHOLE THING MAY HAVE BEEN THE FAULT OF THE LATE **IAN FLEMING**, CREATOR OF JAMES BOND.

I HAD READ AN ARTICLE THE PREVIOUS MONTH, IN WHICH IAN FLEMING HAD ADVISED ANY WOULD-BE WRITER WHO HAD A BOOK TO GET DONE THAT WASN'T BEING WRITTEN TO GO TO A HOTEL TO WRITE IT.

I HAD, NOT A NOVEL, BUT A **FILM** SCRIPT THAT WASN'T GETTING WRITTEN. SO I BOUGHT A PLANE TICKET TO LONDON, PROMISED THE FILM COMPANY THAT THEY'D HAVE A FINISHED SCRIPT IN THREE WEEKS' TIME, AND TOOK A ROOM IN AN ECCENTRIC HOTEL IN LITTLE VENICE.

I TOLD NO ONE IN ENGLAND THAT I WAS THERE. HAD PEOPLE KNOWN, MY DAYS AND NIGHTS WOULD HAVE BEEN SPENT SEEING THEM, NOT STARING AT A COMPUTER SCREEN AND, **SOMETIMES**, WRITING.

TRUTH TO TELL, I WAS BORED HALF OUT OF MY **MIND**, AND READY TO WELCOME ANY INTERRUPTION.

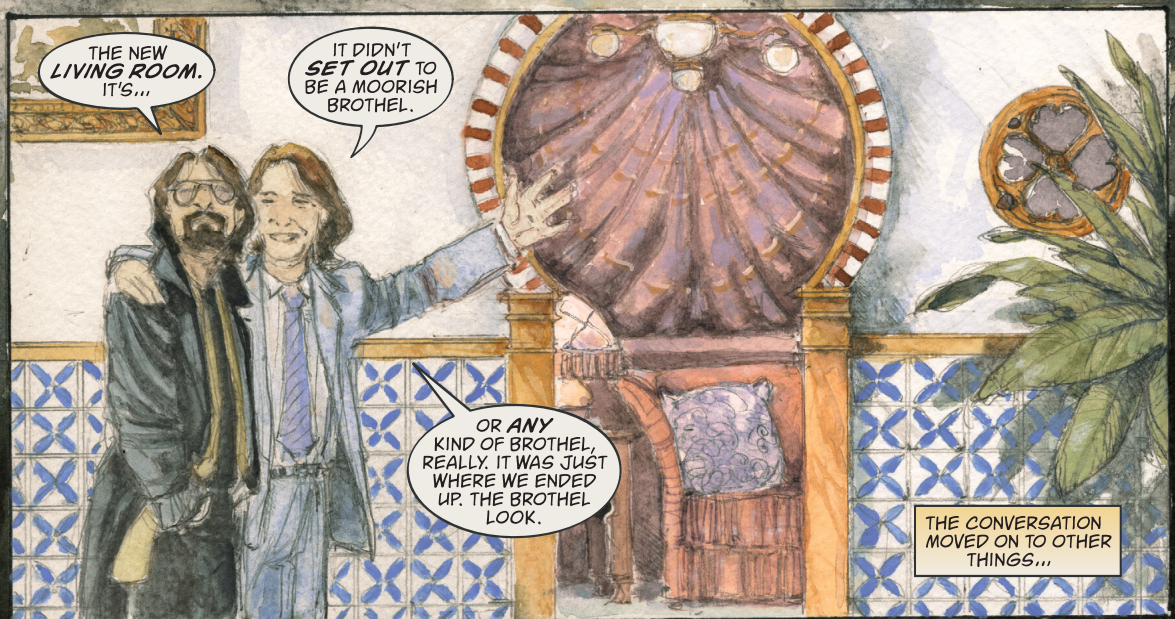


EARLY THE NEXT EVENING, MORE OR LESS IN HAMPSTEAD...

HELLO!

THE SHOW WE WERE GOING TO TAKE YOU TO HAS BEEN CANCELLED. BUT WE CAN GO TO SOMETHING ELSE, IF THAT'S OKAY WITH YOU. COME IN!

JONATHAN HAD ORIGINALLY BECOME FAMOUS HOSTING AN EVENING TALK SHOW, AND HAD SINCE PARLAYED HIS GONZO CHARM INTO A VARIETY OF FIELDS. HE'S THE SAME PERSON WHETHER THE CAMERA IS ON OR **OFF**, WHICH IS NOT ALWAYS TRUE OF TELEVISION FOLK.



THE NEW **LIVING ROOM**. IT'S...

IT DIDN'T **SET OUT** TO BE A MOORISH BROTHEL.

OR **ANY** KIND OF BROTHEL, REALLY. IT WAS JUST WHERE WE ENDED UP. THE BROTHEL LOOK.

THE CONVERSATION MOVED ON TO OTHER THINGS...



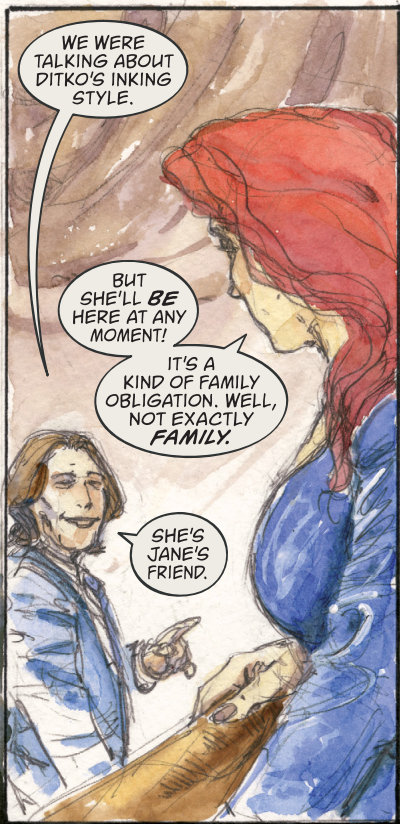
HAS HE TOLD YOU ABOUT MISS FINCH?

JANE IS, BY PROFESSION, A JOURNALIST, BUT HAD BECOME A BEST-SELLING AUTHOR ALMOST BY ACCIDENT.



WHO?

SHE'D WRITTEN A COMPANION VOLUME TO ACCOMPANY A TELEVISION SERIES ABOUT TWO PARANORMAL INVESTIGATORS, WHICH HAD RISEN TO THE TOP OF THE BESTSELLER LISTS AND STAYED THERE.



WE WERE TALKING ABOUT DITKO'S INKING STYLE.

BUT SHE'LL BE HERE AT ANY MOMENT!

IT'S A KIND OF FAMILY OBLIGATION. WELL, NOT EXACTLY FAMILY.

SHE'S JANE'S FRIEND.



SHE'S NOT MY FRIEND!

BUT I COULDN'T EXACTLY SAY NO, COULD I? AND SHE'S ONLY IN THE COUNTRY FOR A COUPLE OF DAYS.



WHAT THE OBLIGATION WAS, I WAS NEVER TO LEARN, FOR THE DOORBELL RANG, AND I FOUND MYSELF BEING INTRODUCED TO MISS FINCH. WHICH, AS I HAVE MENTIONED, WAS NOT HER NAME.



SO.

WE'RE GOING TO THE THEATER, THEN?

WELL, YES AND NO.



I MEAN, YES, WE ARE STILL GOING OUT, BUT WE'RE NOT GOING TO BE ABLE TO SEE THE ROMANS IN BRITAIN.

GOOD. IN POOR TASTE ANYWAY. WHY ANYONE WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT NONSENSE WOULD MAKE A MUSICAL I DO NOT KNOW.



SO WE'RE GOING TO A CIRCUS. AND THEN WE'RE GOING TO EAT SUSHI.

I DO NOT APPROVE OF CIRCUSES.

THERE AREN'T ANY ANIMALS IN THIS CIRCUS.

GOOD.

I WAS BEGINNING TO UNDERSTAND WHY JANE AND JONATHAN HAD WANTED ME ALONG.



THE RAIN WAS PATTING DOWN AS WE LEFT THE HOUSE. WE SQUEEZED INTO THE SPORTSCAR AND HEADED OUT INTO LONDON.



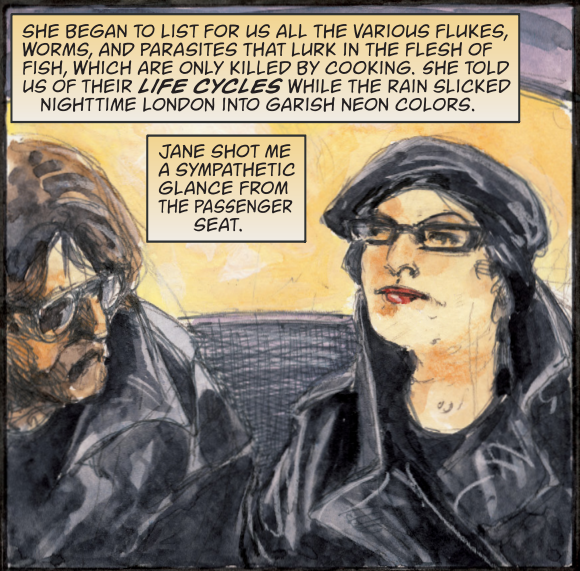
JANE TOLD MISS FINCH THAT I WAS A WRITER, AND TOLD ME THAT MISS FINCH WAS A BIOLOGIST.

BIOGEOLOGIST, ACTUALLY. WERE YOU SERIOUS ABOUT EATING SUSHI, JONATHAN?



ER, YES. WHY? DON'T YOU LIKE SUSHI?

OH, I'LL EAT MY FOOD COOKED.



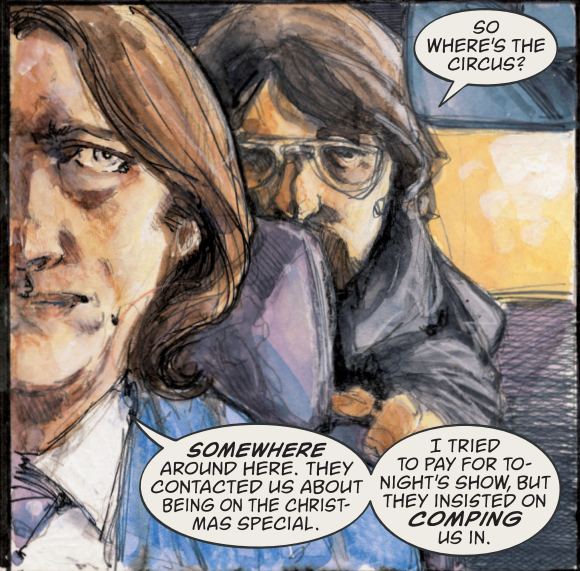
SHE BEGAN TO LIST FOR US ALL THE VARIOUS FLUKES, WORMS, AND PARASITES THAT LURK IN THE FLESH OF FISH, WHICH ARE ONLY KILLED BY COOKING. SHE TOLD US OF THEIR *LIFE CYCLES* WHILE THE RAIN SLICKED NIGHTTIME LONDON INTO GARISH NEON COLORS.

JANE SHOT ME A SYMPATHETIC GLANCE FROM THE PASSENGER SEAT.



WE CROSSED THE THAMES AT LONDON BRIDGE WHILE MISS FINCH LECTURED US ABOUT BLINDNESS, MADNESS, AND LIVER FAILURE...

...AND SHE WAS JUST ELABORATING ON THE SYMPTOMS OF ELEPHANTIASIS AS PROUDLY AS IF SHE HAD INVENTED THEM *HERSELF*, WHEN WE PULLED UP IN A SMALL BACK STREET IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF SOUTHWARK CATHEDRAL.



SO WHERE'S THE CIRCUS?

SOMEWHERE AROUND HERE. THEY CONTACTED US ABOUT BEING ON THE CHRISTMAS SPECIAL.

I TRIED TO PAY FOR TONIGHT'S SHOW, BUT THEY INSISTED ON *COMPING* US IN.



I'M SURE IT WILL BE FUN.

MMPH.

JONATHAN, IS THAT...?



A MAN RAN DOWN THE PAVEMENT TOWARD US.

THERE YOU ARE! I'VE BEEN KEEPING AN EYE OUT FOR YOU!



YOU'RE LATE. IT'LL BE STARTING IN A MOMENT.

THE RAIN SPLASHED ON HIS BALD HEAD AND RAN DOWN HIS FACE, TURNING HIS FESTER ADDAMS MAKE-UP INTO STREAKS OF WHITE AND BROWN.



IN HERE.



IS THIS YOUR PARTY? FOUR PEOPLE? YES? YOU'RE ON THE GUEST LIST.

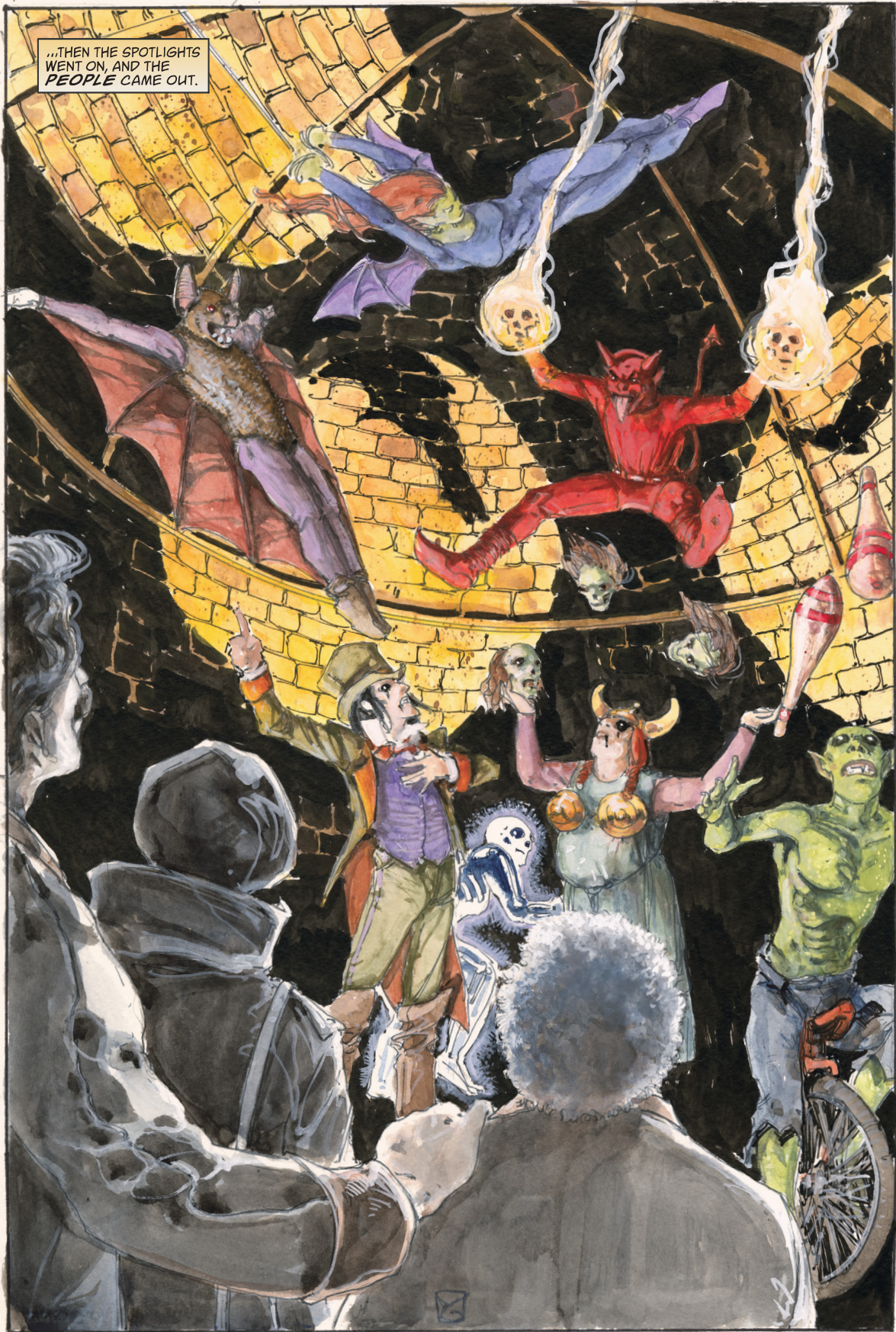


THERE WERE ABOUT FIFTY PEOPLE IN THERE ALREADY, DRIPPING AND STEAMING. A SMALL STOCKY WOMAN GLOWERED FIERCELY AT THE TALL VAMPIRESS.

THIS'D BETTER BE GOOD!



...THEN THE SPOTLIGHTS  
WENT ON, AND THE  
PEOPLE CAME OUT.

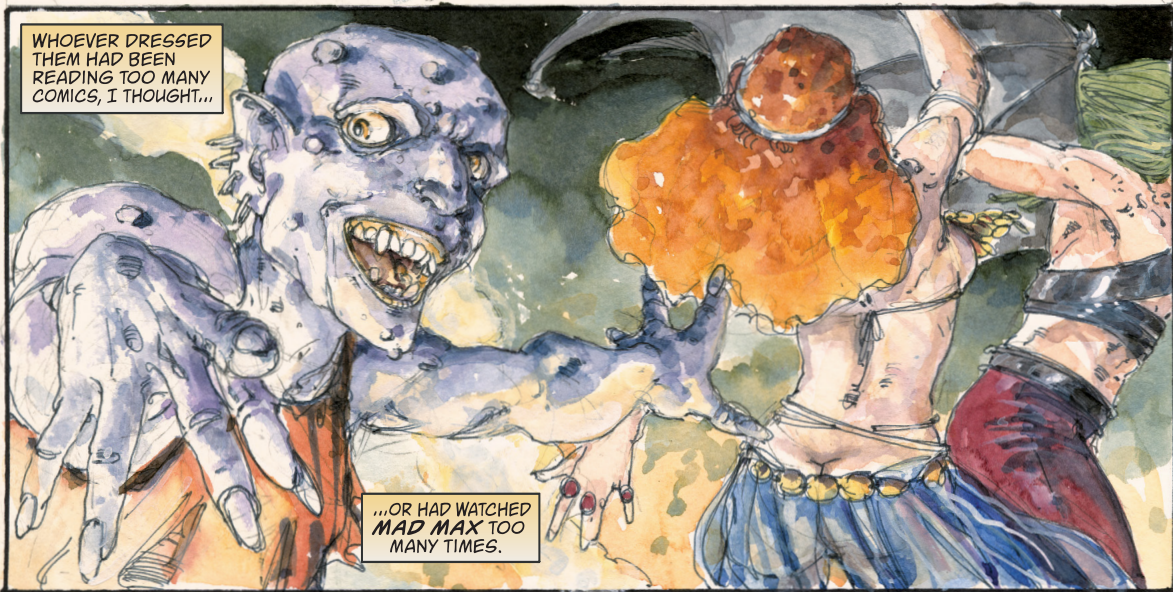


THEY RAN AND THEY  
LAUGHED AND THEY  
SWUNG AND THEY  
CACKLED.



WHOEVER DRESSED  
THEM HAD BEEN  
READING TOO MANY  
COMICS, I THOUGHT...

...OR HAD WATCHED  
MAD MAX TOO  
MANY TIMES.



THERE WERE PUNKS AND NUNS AND  
VAMPIRES AND MONSTERS AND  
STRIPPERS AND THE LIVING DEAD.



THEY DANCED AND CAPERED AROUND US WHILE THE RING-MASTER—IDENTIFIABLE BY HIS TOP HAT—SANG ALICE COOPER'S SONG, "WELCOME TO MY NIGHTMARE," AND SANG IT VERY BADLY.



I KNOW ALICE COOPER, AND YOU, SIR, ARE NO ALICE COOPER.

IT'S PRETTY NAFF.

SHHH!



WELCOME, WELCOME, ONE AND ALL, TO THE THEATER OF NIGHT'S DREAMING.

FAN OF YOURS.

I THINK IT'S A ROCKY HORROR SHOW LINE.





TONIGHT YOU WILL ALL BE WITNESSES TO MONSTERS **UNDREAMED** OF, FREAKS AND CREATURES OF THE NIGHT, TO DISPLAYS OF ABILITY TO MAKE YOU SHRIEK WITH **FEAR--AND LAUGH** WITH JOY.

WE SHALL TRAVEL FROM ROOM TO ROOM--AND IN **EACH** OF THESE SUBTERRANEAN CAVERNS ANOTHER **NIGHT-MARE**, ANOTHER **DELIGHT**, ANOTHER DISPLAY OF **WONDER** AWAITS YOU!



**PLEASE--** FOR YOUR OWN SAFETY-- I MUST REITERATE THIS!--**DO NOT** LEAVE THE SPECTATING AREA MARKED OUT FOR YOU IN EACH ROOM-- ON PAIN OF **DOOM**, **BODILY INJURY**, AND THE **LOSS** OF YOUR **IMMORTAL SOUL!**

ALSO, I MUST STRESS THAT THE USE OF FLASH PHOTOGRAPHY OR OF ANY RECORDING DEVICES IS STRICTLY FORBIDDEN.



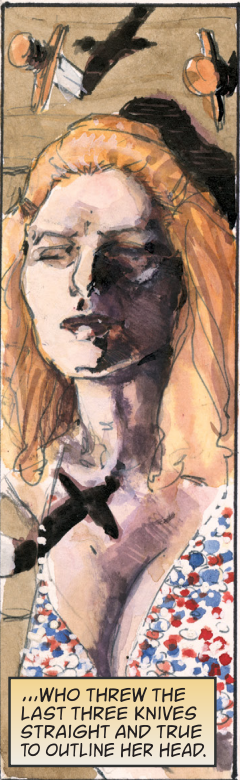
**THIS WAY.**

NO SEATS, THEN.

# The First Room

A SMILING BLONDE WOMAN WEARING A SPANGLED BIKINI, WITH **NEEDLE TRACKS** DOWN HER ARMS, WAS CHAINED BY A HUNCHBACK AND UNCLE FESTER TO A LARGE WHEEL.

A MAN IN A RED CARDINAL'S COSTUME THREW KNIVES AT THE WOMAN, OUTLINING HER BODY. THEN THE HUNCHBACK **BLIND-FOLDED** THE CARDINAL...



...WHO THREW THE LAST THREE KNIVES STRAIGHT AND TRUE TO OUTLINE HER HEAD.



THE WOMAN WAS UNTIED. THEY TOOK A BOW. WE CLAPPED.




THEN THE CARDINAL TOOK A TRICK KNIFE FROM HIS BELT AND PRETENDED TO CUT THE WOMAN'S **THROAT** WITH IT.

A FEW MEMBERS OF THE AUDIENCE GASPED, AND ONE EXCITABLE GIRL GAVE A SMALL SCREAM, WHILE HER FRIENDS GIGGLED.



THE CARDINAL AND THE SPANGLED WOMAN TOOK THEIR FINAL BOW. THE LIGHTS WENT DOWN. WE FOLLOWED THE FLASHLIGHTS DOWN A BRICK-LINED CORRIDOR.

## The Second Room




THE SMELL OF DAMP WAS WORSE IN HERE; IT SMELLED MUSTY AND FORGOTTEN. I COULD HEAR SOMEWHERE THE DRIP OF RAIN. THE RINGMASTER INTRODUCED **THE CREATURE.**

...STITCHED TOGETHER IN THE LABORATORIES OF THE NIGHT, THE CREATURE IS CAPABLE OF **ASTONISHING** FEATS OF STRENGTH!



...AND HE HELD BACK A DUNE BUGGY (DRIVEN BY THE VAMPIRE WOMAN) AT **FULL THROTTLE.**

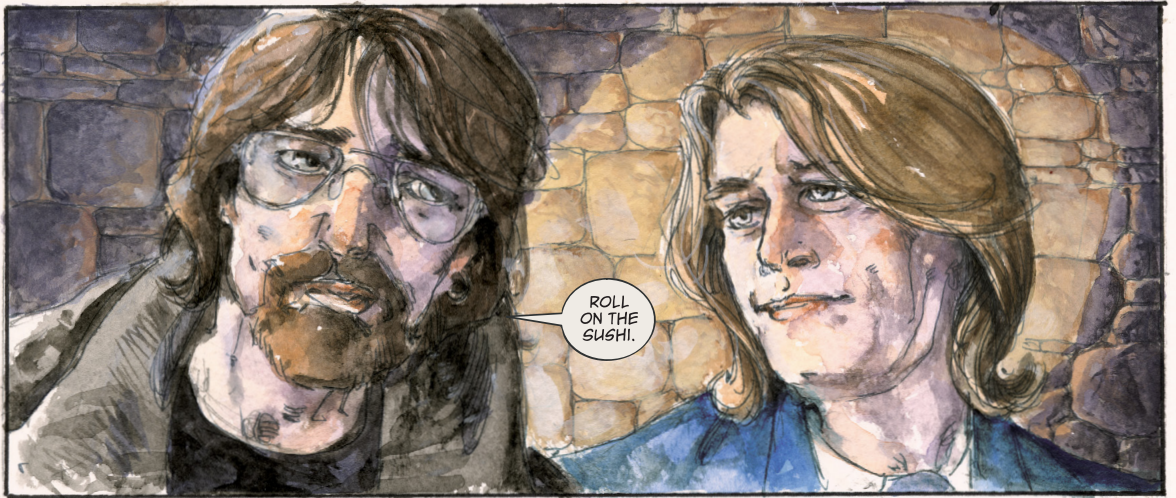


THE **MAKE-UP** WAS LESS THAN CONVINCING, BUT THE CREATURE LIFTED A STONE BLOCK WITH FAT UNCLE FESTER SITTING ON IT...





FOR HIS *PIÈCE DE RÉSISTANCE* HE BLEW UP A HOT-WATER BOTTLE, THEN **POPPED** IT.



ROLL ON THE SUSHI.



MAY I POINT OUT THAT, IN ADDITION TO THE DANGER OF PARASITES, *BLUEFIN TUNA*, *SWORDFISH*, AND *CHILEAN SEABASS* ARE ALL BEING OVERFISHED AND MIGHT SOON BE EXTINCT?

# The Third Room...



...WENT UP A LONG WAY INTO THE DARKNESS. THE ORIGINAL CEILING HAD BEEN REMOVED AT SOME TIME IN THE PAST, AND THE **NEW** CEILING WAS THE ROOF OF AN EMPTY WAREHOUSE FAR ABOVE US.

THE ROOM **BUZZED** AT THE CORNERS WITH THE BLUE-PURPLE OF ULTRA-VIOLET LIGHT.



TEETH AND SHIRTS AND FLECKS OF LINT BEGAN TO GLOW IN THE DARKNESS.



A LOW, THROBBING MUSIC BEGAN. WE LOOKED UP...

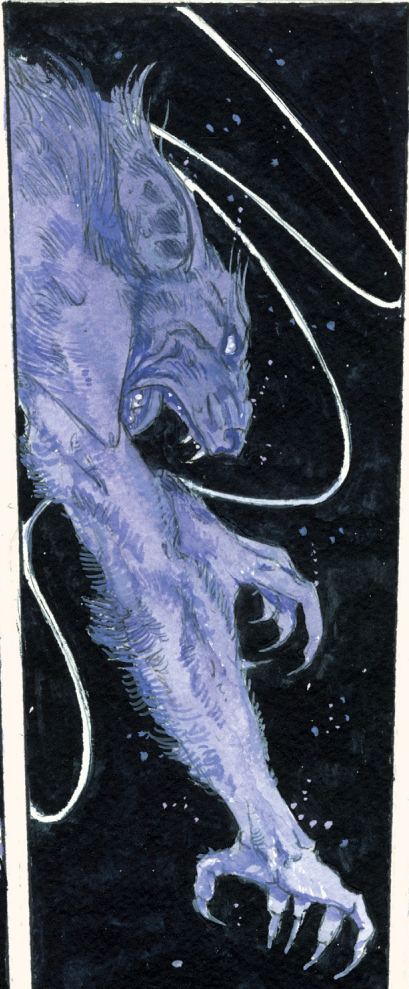


THEIR COSTUMES FLOURESCED, AND THEY **GLOWED** LIKE OLD DREAMS HIGH ABOVE US, SWINGING BACK AND FORTH IN TIME TO THE MUSIC ON UNSEEN TRAPEZES.

THEN, AS ONE, THEY **LET GO** AND TUMBLED **TOWARD US!**



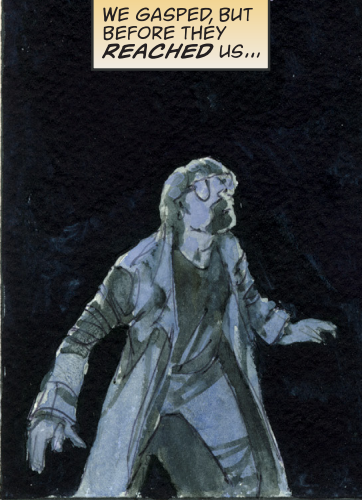
WE GASPED, BUT BEFORE THEY REACHED US...



...THEY BOUNCED ON THE AIR AND **ROSE UP** AGAIN, LIKE YO-YOS, AND CLIMBED BACK ON THEIR TRAPEZES, ATTACHED TO THE ROOF BY RUBBER CORDS.



THEY BOUNCED AND DOVE AND **SWAM** THROUGH THE AIR ABOVE US WHILE WE CLAPPED AND GASPED AND WATCHED THEM IN HAPPY SILENCE.



# The Fourth Room



AND NOW I NEED TWO VICTIMS...AH, VOLUNTEERS FROM THE AUDIENCE UPON WHOM TO DEMONSTRATE MY HYPNOTIC POWERS!



YOU, MADAME... AND YOU, SIR. YES, YOU.



HE MADE A COUPLE OF PASSES IN THE AIR...



...AND REJECTED THE WOMAN.



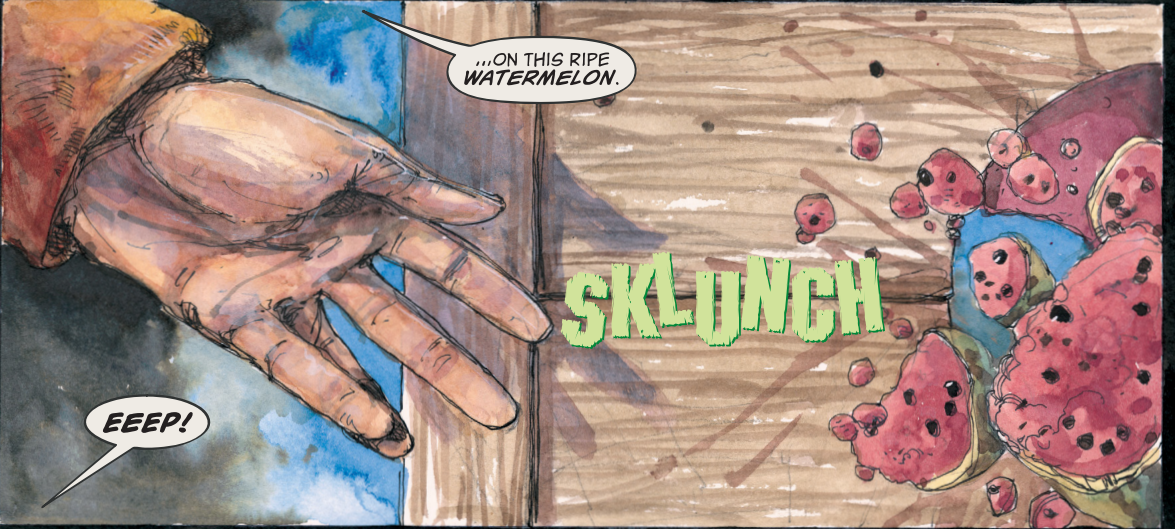
WILL YOU PLEASE STEP UP ONTO THAT BOX, SIR.

IT'S A SETUP. HE'S A PLANT.



A GUILLOTINE WAS WHEELED ON.

I WILL NOW DEMONSTRATE THE RAZOR *SHARPNESS* OF THE BLADE...



...ON THIS RIPE WATERMELON.

EEEP!

SKLUNCH



AND NOW, SIR, YOU WILL OBEY MY ORDER TO PLACE YOUR ARM *UNDER* THE BLADE!

SKU

NCH



EESH!



THEN THE MAN PICKED HIS HAND OUT OF THE BASKET WHILE THE BENNY HILL SHOW MUSIC PLAYED...



...AND CHASED THE RINGMASTER WITH IT.



ARTIFICIAL HAND.

I SAW IT COMING.

=MMPH<

I THINK IT'S ALL IN VERY QUESTIONABLE TASTE.

# The Fifth Room

ALL THE LIGHTS WENT ON. A YOUNG MAN WAS SELLING BEER AND ORANGE JUICE AND BOTTLES OF WATER.



JONATHAN WENT TO USE THE TOILETS...



...WHILE JANE WENT TO GET THE DRINKS.



WHICH LEFT ME TO MAKE AWKWARD CONVERSATION WITH MISS FINCH.

SO, I UNDERSTAND YOU'VE NOT BEEN BACK IN ENGLAND LONG.



I'VE BEEN IN KOMODO STUDYING THE DRAGONS. DO YOU KNOW WHY THEY GREW SO BIG?

ER...

THERE WERE PYGMY ELEPHANTS?

THERE ARE EQUATIONS, YOU SEE...

OH, YES. IT'S BASIC ISLAND BIOGEOLOGY--ANIMALS WILL NATURALLY TEND TOWARD EITHER GIGANTISM OR PYGMYISM.



THEY ADAPTED TO PREY UPON THE PYGMY ELEPHANTS.

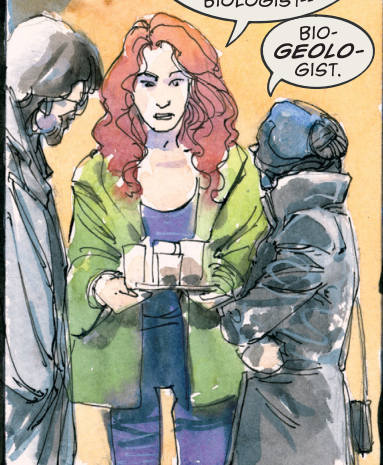


THIS WAS MUCH MORE FUN THAN BEING LECTURED ON SUSHI FLUKES. AS MISS FINCH TALKED HER FACE BECAME MORE ANIMATED, AND I FOUND MYSELF WARMING TO HER AS SHE EXPLAINED WHY AND HOW SOME ANIMALS GREW WHILE OTHERS SHRANK.

JANE HAD OUR DRINKS.

TELL ME... I'VE BEEN READING A LOT OF CRYPTO-ZOOLOGICAL JOURNALS FOR THE NEXT GUIDES TO THE UNEXPLAINED I'M DOING. AS A BIOLOGIST--

BIO-GEOLOGIST.





YES. WHAT DO YOU THINK THE CHANCES ARE OF PREHISTORIC ANIMALS BEING ALIVE TODAY, IN SECRET, UNKNOWN TO SCIENCE?



IT'S *VERY* UNLIKELY.



THERE IS, AT ANY RATE, NO "LOST WORLD" OFF ON SOME ISLAND, FILLED WITH MAMMOTHS AND SMILODONS AND AEPYORNIS--

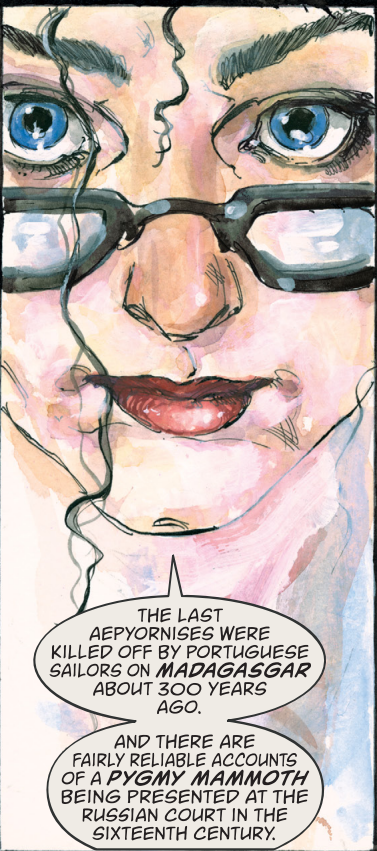


SOUNDS A BIT RUDE. A WHAT?

AEPYORNIS. A GIANT FLIGHTLESS PREHISTORIC BIRD.

I KNEW THAT REALLY.

ALTHOUGH, OF COURSE, THEY'RE *NOT* PREHISTORIC.



THE LAST AEPYORNISES WERE KILLED OFF BY PORTUGUESE SAILORS ON MADAGASGAR ABOUT 300 YEARS AGO.

AND THERE ARE FAIRLY RELIABLE ACCOUNTS OF A PYGMY MAMMOTH BEING PRESENTED AT THE RUSSIAN COURT IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.



A BAND OF SOMETHING WHICH, FROM THE DESCRIPTIONS WE HAVE, WERE ALMOST DEFINITELY SOME KIND OF SABER-TOOTH--THE SMILODONS-- WERE BROUGHT IN FROM NORTH AFRICA BY VESPASIAN TO DIE IN THE ROMAN CIRCUS.

SO THESE THINGS AREN'T ALL PREHISTORIC. OFTEN THEY'RE HISTORIC.

I WONDER WHAT THE POINT OF THE SABER-TEETH WOULD BE. YOU'D THINK THEY'D GET IN THE WAY.

NONSENSE. SMILODON WAS A MOST EFFICIENT HUNTER. MUST HAVE BEEN-- THE SABER-TEETH ARE REPEATED A **NUMBER** OF TIMES IN THE FOSSIL RECORD.

I WISH WITH ALL MY HEART THAT THERE **WERE** SOME LEFT TODAY. BUT THERE AREN'T.

WE KNOW THE WORLD TOO WELL.



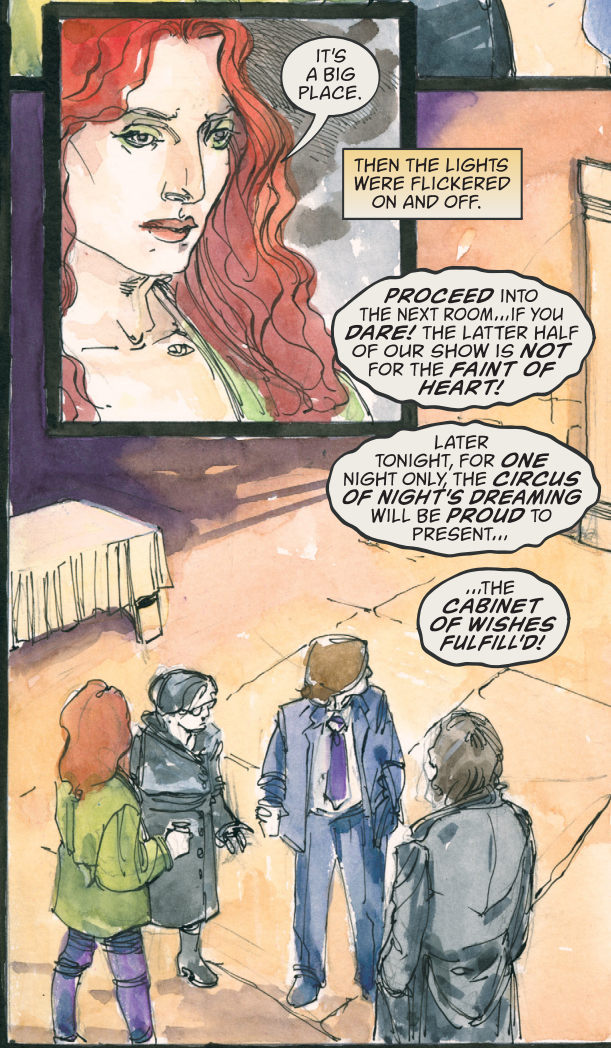
IT'S A BIG PLACE.

THEN THE LIGHTS WERE FLICKERED ON AND OFF.

**PROCEED** INTO THE NEXT ROOM...IF YOU **DARE!** THE LATTER HALF OF OUR SHOW IS **NOT** FOR THE **FAINT OF HEART!**

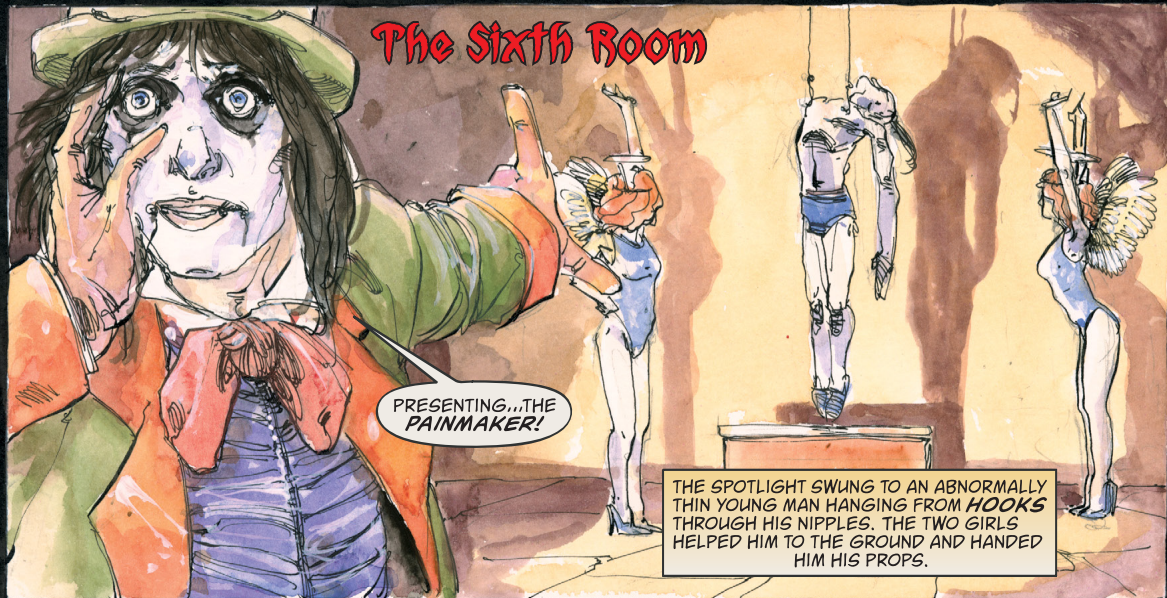
LATER TONIGHT, FOR **ONE** NIGHT ONLY, THE **CIRCUS OF NIGHT'S DREAMING** WILL BE **PROUD** TO PRESENT...

...THE **CABINET OF WISHES** FULFILL'D!



WE THREW AWAY OUR PLASTIC GLASSES AND SHUFFLED INTO...

# The Sixth Room



PRESENTING...THE PAINMAKER!

THE SPOTLIGHT SWUNG TO AN ABNORMALLY THIN YOUNG MAN HANGING FROM **HOOKS** THROUGH HIS NIPPLES. THE TWO GIRLS HELPED HIM TO THE GROUND AND HANDED HIM HIS PROPS.



WASN'T HE ON THE SHOW, YEARS AGO?

YEAH. REALLY NICE GUY. HE LIT A FIREWORK HELD IN HIS **TEETH**.



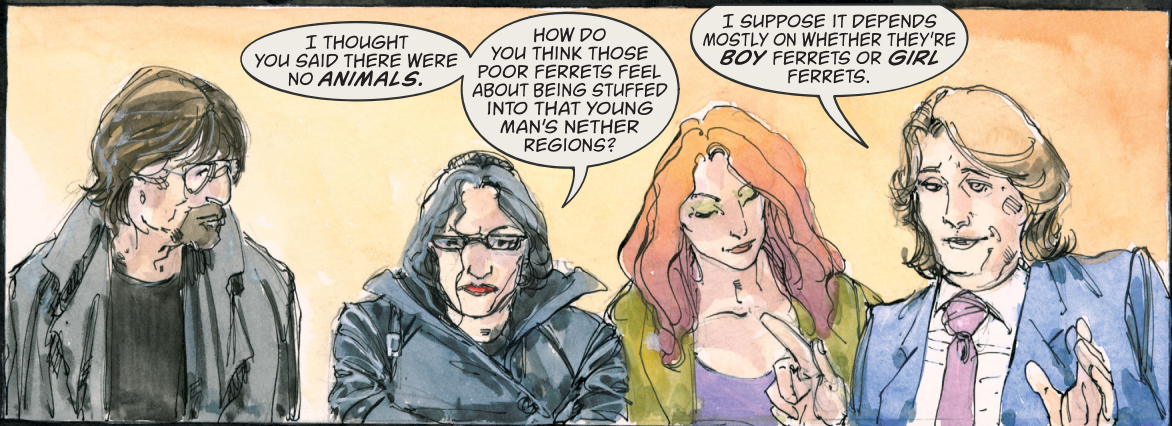
HE LIFTED WEIGHTS WITH A **PIERCING** THROUGH HIS TONGUE...



...PUT SEVERAL **FERRETS** INTO HIS BATHING TRUNKS...



...AND, FOR HIS FINAL TRICK, ALLOWED THE TALLER GIRL TO USE HIS STOMACH AS A **DARTBOARD** FOR ACCURATELY THROWN HYPODERMIC NEEDLES.



I THOUGHT YOU SAID THERE WERE NO **ANIMALS**.

HOW DO YOU THINK THOSE POOR **FERRETS** FEEL ABOUT BEING STUFFED INTO THAT YOUNG MAN'S NETHER REGIONS?

I SUPPOSE IT DEPENDS MOSTLY ON WHETHER THEY'RE **BOY FERRETS** OR **GIRL FERRETS**.

# The Seventh Room...



...CONTAINED A ROCK-AND-ROLL COMEDY ACT, WITH SOME CLUMSY SLAPSTICK.


A NUN'S BREASTS WERE REVEALED..



...AND THE HUNCHBACK LOST HIS TROUSERS.



## The Eighth Room...



...WAS DARK. WE WAITED IN THE DARKNESS FOR SOMETHING TO HAPPEN. I WANTED TO SIT DOWN. MY LEGS ACHED. I WAS TIRED AND COLD, AND I'D HAD ENOUGH.

THEN SOMEONE STARTED TO SHINE A LIGHT AT US. WE BLINKED AND SQUINTED AND COVERED OUR EYES.



TONIGHT...

AN ODD VOICE, CRACKED AND DUSTY. NOT THE RINGMASTER, I WAS *SURE* OF THAT.

TONIGHT ONE OF YOU WILL GET A *WISH*.

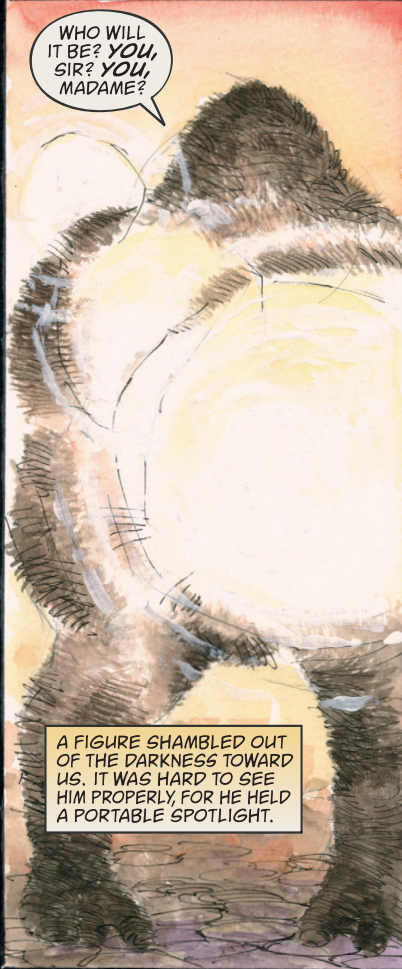
ONE OF YOU WILL GAIN *ALL* THAT YOU DESIRE, IN THE *CABINET OF WISHES FULFILL'D*.

WHO SHALL IT *BE*?




OOH. AT A GUESS, ANOTHER *PLANT* IN THE AUDIENCE.

SHUSH.



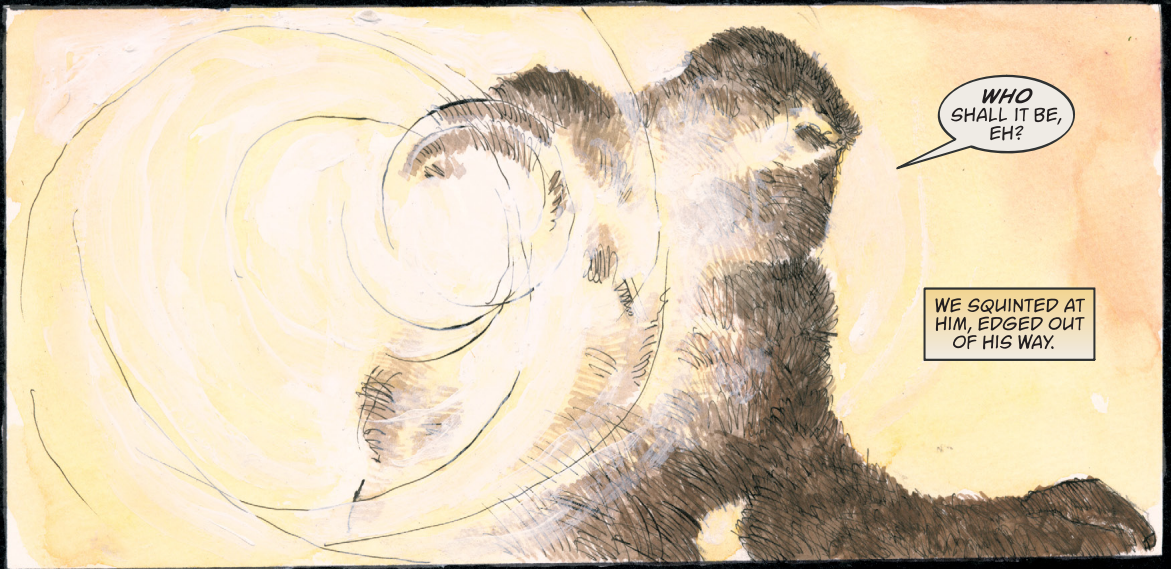
WHO WILL IT *BE*? *YOU*, SIR? *YOU*, MADAME?

A FIGURE SHAMBLED OUT OF THE DARKNESS TOWARD US. IT WAS HARD TO SEE HIM PROPERLY, FOR HE HELD A PORTABLE SPOTLIGHT.



I WONDERED IF HE WERE WEARING SOME KIND OF *APE* COSTUME, FOR HIS OUTLINE SEEMED INHUMAN, AND HE MOVED AS *GORILLAS* MOVE.

PERHAPS IT WAS THE MAN WHO HAD PLAYED "THE CREATURE."



WHO SHALL IT BE, EH?

WE SQUINTED AT HIM, EDGED OUT OF HIS WAY.



THEN HE POUNCED.



AHA! I THINK WE HAVE OUR VOLUNTEER!

I...I REALLY DON'T THINK SO!



BUT SHE WAS DRAGGED AWAY FROM US, TOO NERVOUS, TOO POLITE, FUNDAMENTALLY TOO ENGLISH TO MAKE A SCENE.

SHE WAS  
PULLED INTO  
THE DARKNESS...

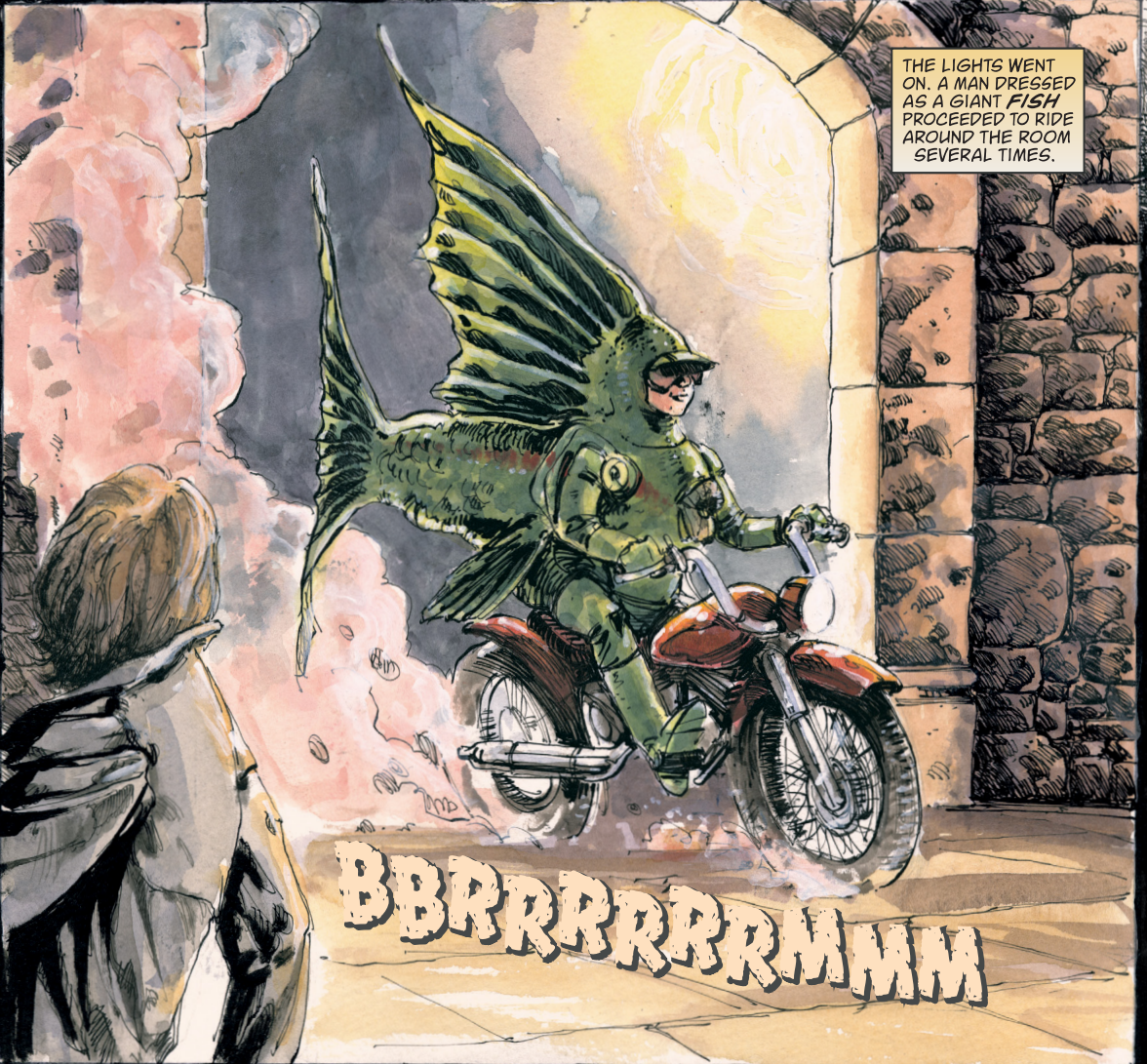


...AND WAS  
GONE TO US.

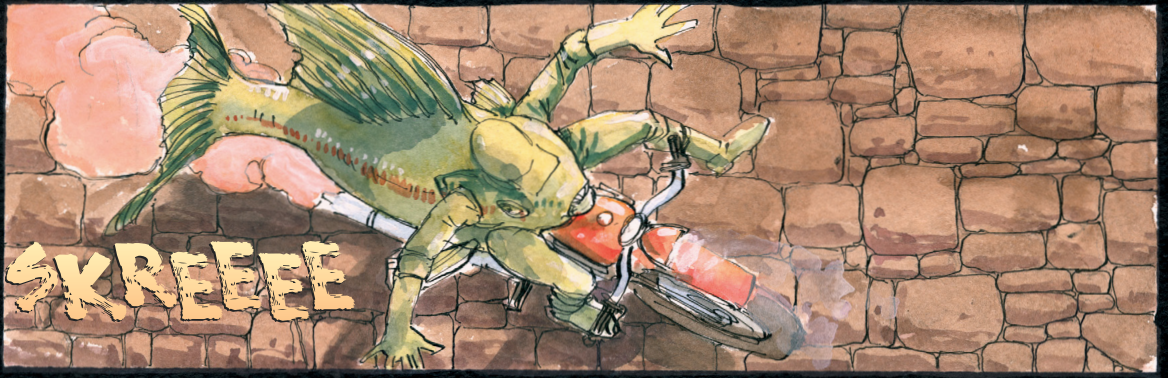


BLOODY  
HELL. I DON'T  
THINK SHE'S GOING  
TO LET US FORGET  
THIS IN A HURRY.

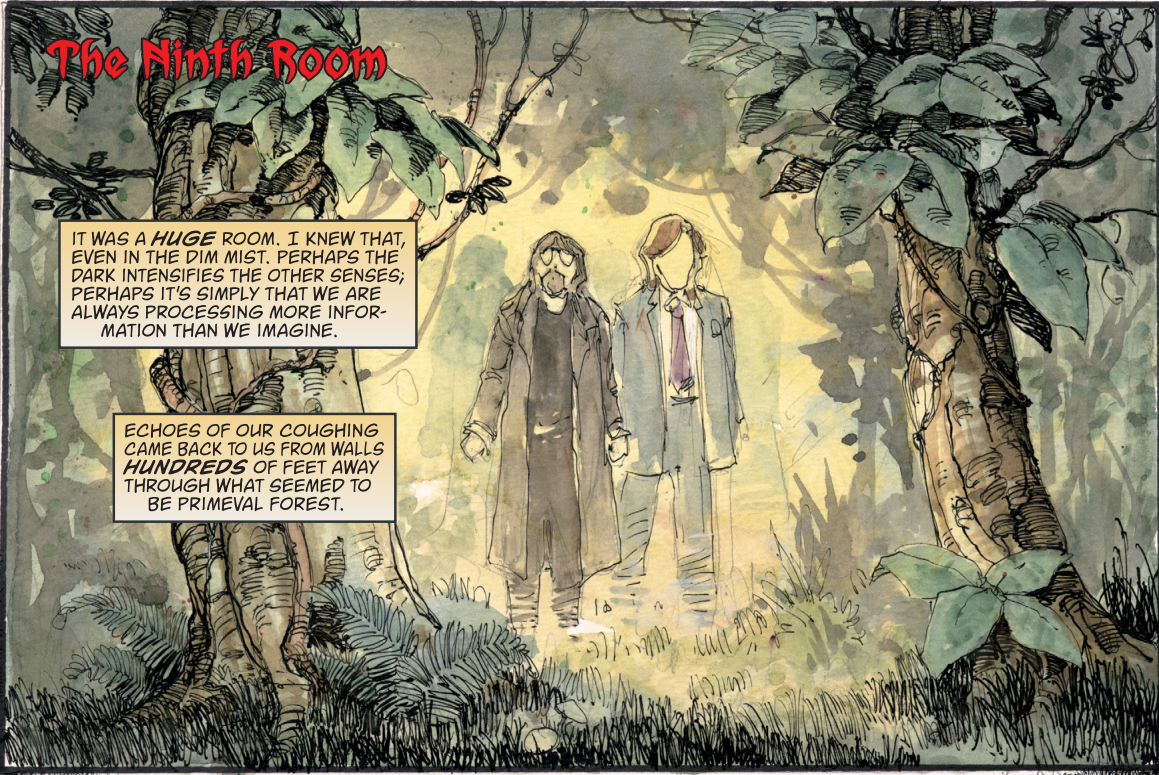
THE LIGHTS WENT  
ON. A MAN DRESSED  
AS A GIANT *FISH*  
PROCEEDED TO RIDE  
AROUND THE ROOM  
SEVERAL TIMES.








## The Ninth Room



IT WAS A **HUGE** ROOM. I KNEW THAT, EVEN IN THE DIM MIST. PERHAPS THE DARK INTENSIFIES THE OTHER SENSES; PERHAPS IT'S SIMPLY THAT WE ARE ALWAYS PROCESSING MORE INFORMATION THAN WE IMAGINE.

ECHOES OF OUR COUGHING CAME BACK TO US FROM WALLS **HUNDREDS** OF FEET AWAY THROUGH WHAT SEEMED TO BE PRIMEVAL FOREST.



AND THEN I BECAME CONVINCED, WITH A CERTAINTY BORDERING ON MADNESS, THAT THERE WERE GREAT **BEASTS** IN THE ROOM...

...AND THAT THEY WERE WATCHING US **HUNGRILY**.



SLOWLY THE MIST CLEARED, AND WE SAW MISS FINCH.

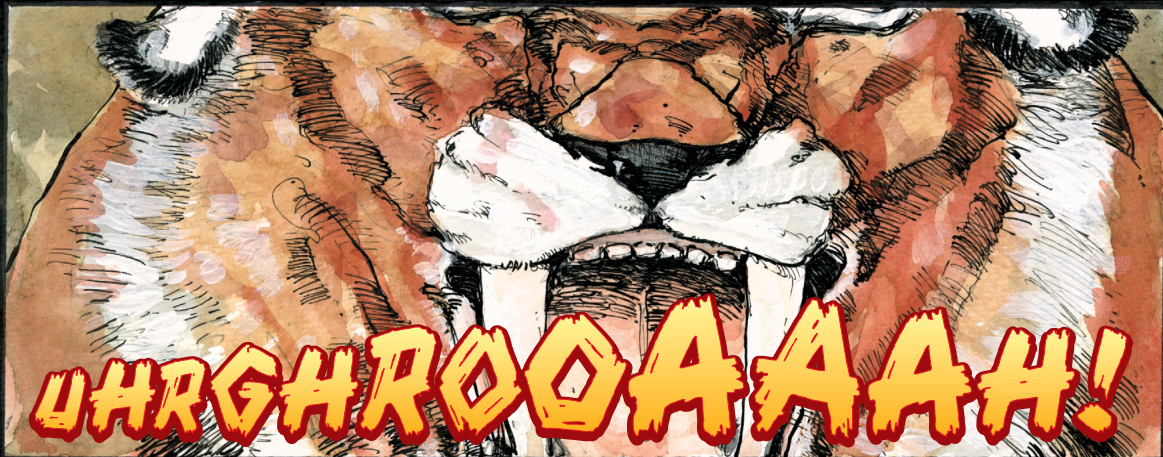


I WONDER TO THIS DAY WHERE THEY GOT THE **COSTUME**. WHAT LITTLE THERE WAS OF IT FITTED HER PERFECTLY.

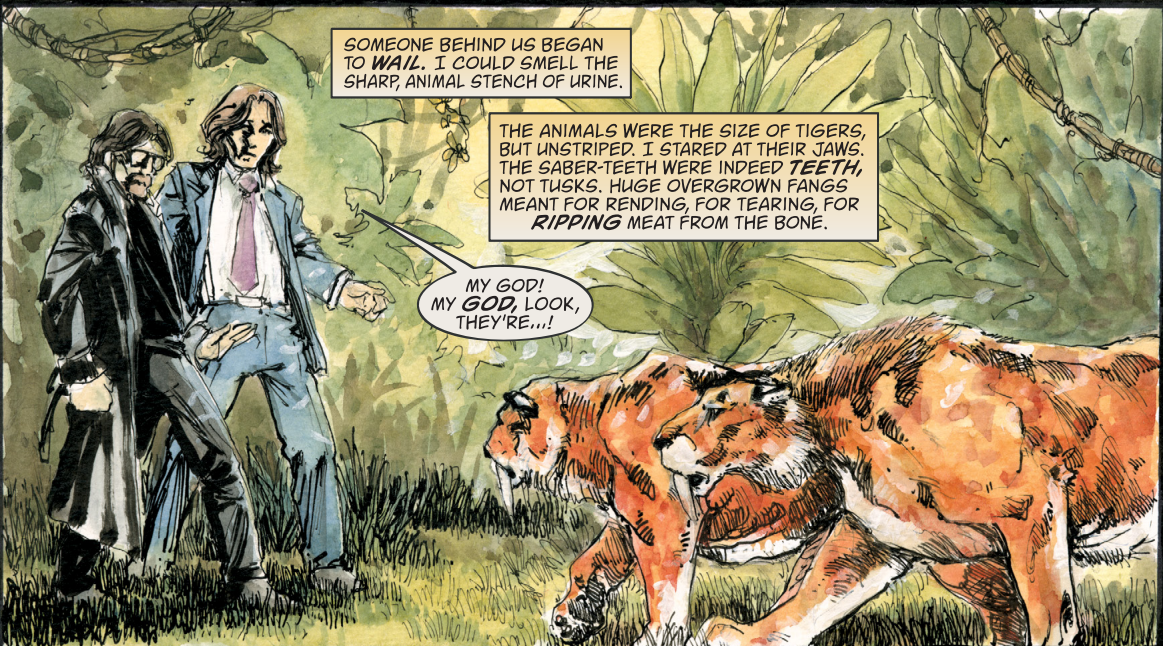
SHE STARED AT US WITHOUT EMOTION.



THEN THE **GREAT CATS** PADDED INTO THE CLEARING NEXT TO HER.



**UHRGHRROOAAAHH!**



SOMEONE BEHIND US BEGAN TO *WAIL*. I COULD SMELL THE SHARP, ANIMAL STENCH OF URINE.

THE ANIMALS WERE THE SIZE OF TIGERS, BUT UNSTRIPED. I STARED AT THEIR JAWS. THE SABER-TEETH WERE INDEED *TEETH*, NOT TUSKS. HUGE OVERGROWN FANGS MEANT FOR RENDING, FOR TEARING, FOR *RIPPING* MEAT FROM THE BONE.

MY GOD!  
MY *GOD*, LOOK,  
THEY'RE...!!



YES, JUST AS SHE DESCRIBED THEM. THE *SMILODONS*.

THE GREAT CATS PADDED AROUND US, *CIRCLING*, SLOWLY.

WE CLOSED RANKS, EACH OF US REMEMBERING IN OUR GUTS WHAT IT WAS LIKE IN THE OLD TIMES, WHEN WE HID IN OUR CAVES AS THE NIGHT CAME AND THE BEASTS WERE ON THE PROWL. REMEMBERING WHEN WE WERE PREY.



THE SMILODONS, IF THAT WAS WHAT THEY WERE, SEEMED UNEASY, WARY. MISS FINCH SAID NOTHING. SHE JUST STARED AT HER ANIMALS.



THE STOCKY WOMAN RAISED HER UMBRELLA AND WAVED IT AT ONE OF THE GREAT CATS.

KEEP BACK, YOU UGLY BRUTE!





**UHRGHRH**



SHE WENT PALE, BUT MADE NO MOVE TO RUN.



THEN IT *SPRANG*--



--BATTING HER TO THE GROUND WITH ONE HUGE VELVET PAW!



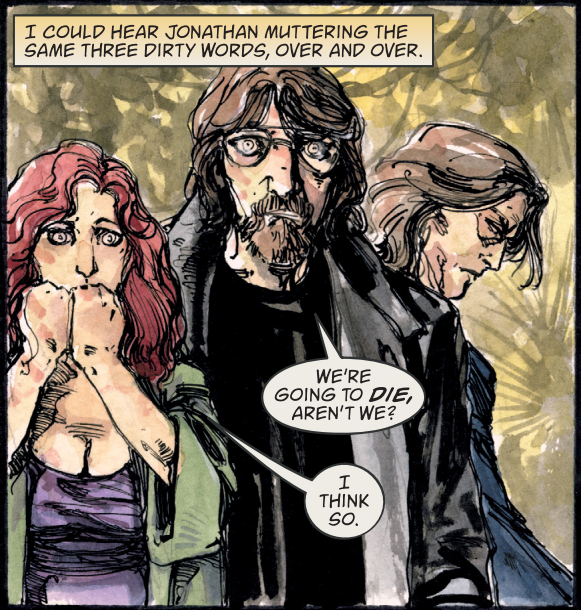
IT STOOD OVER HER, TRIUMPHANTLY, AND ROARED SO DEEPLY THAT I COULD FEEL IT IN THE PIT OF MY STOMACH.

THE STOCKY WOMAN SEEMED TO HAVE PASSED OUT, WHICH WAS, I FELT, A *MERCY*. WITH LUCK SHE WOULD NOT KNOW WHEN THE BLADE-LIKE FANGS TORE AT HER OLD FLESH LIKE TWIN DAGGERS.

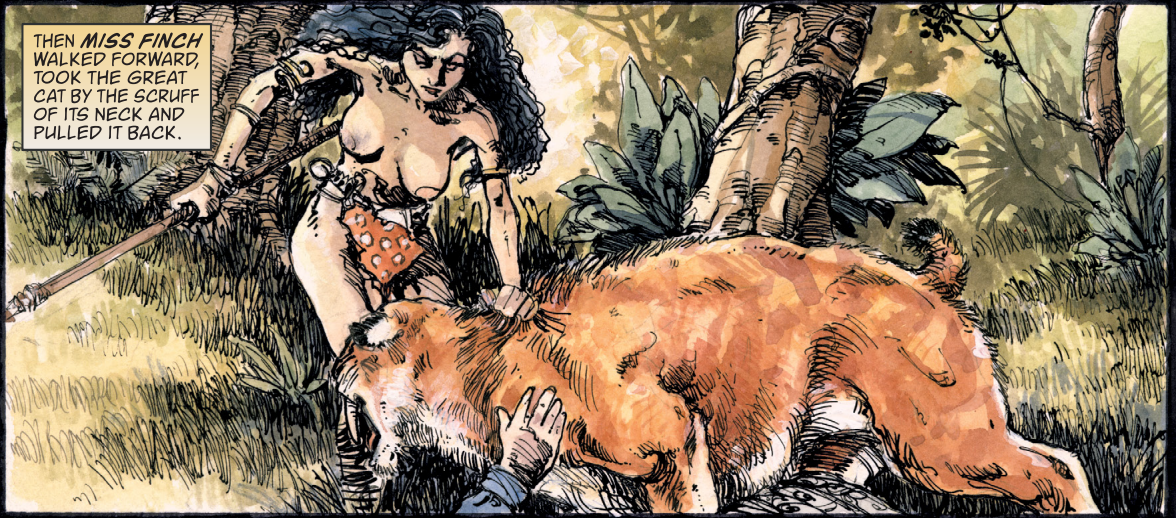
I LOOKED AROUND FOR SOME WAY *OUT*, BUT THE OTHER TIGER WAS PROWLING AROUND US, KEEPING US HERDED LIKE FRIGHTENED SHEEP.



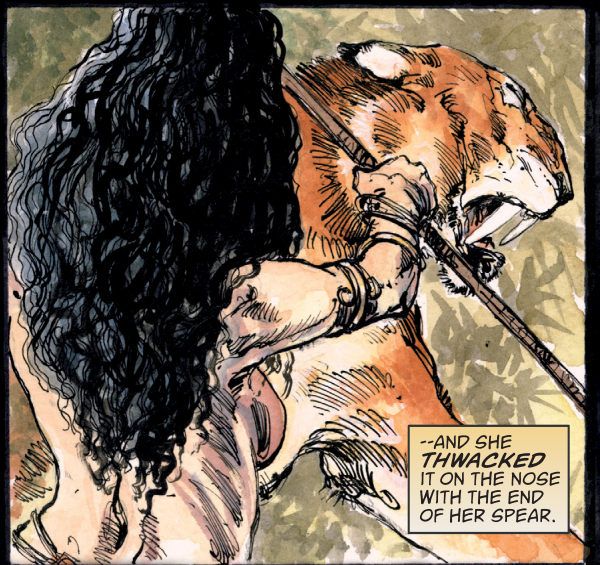
I COULD HEAR JONATHAN MUTTERING THE SAME THREE DIRTY WORDS, OVER AND OVER.



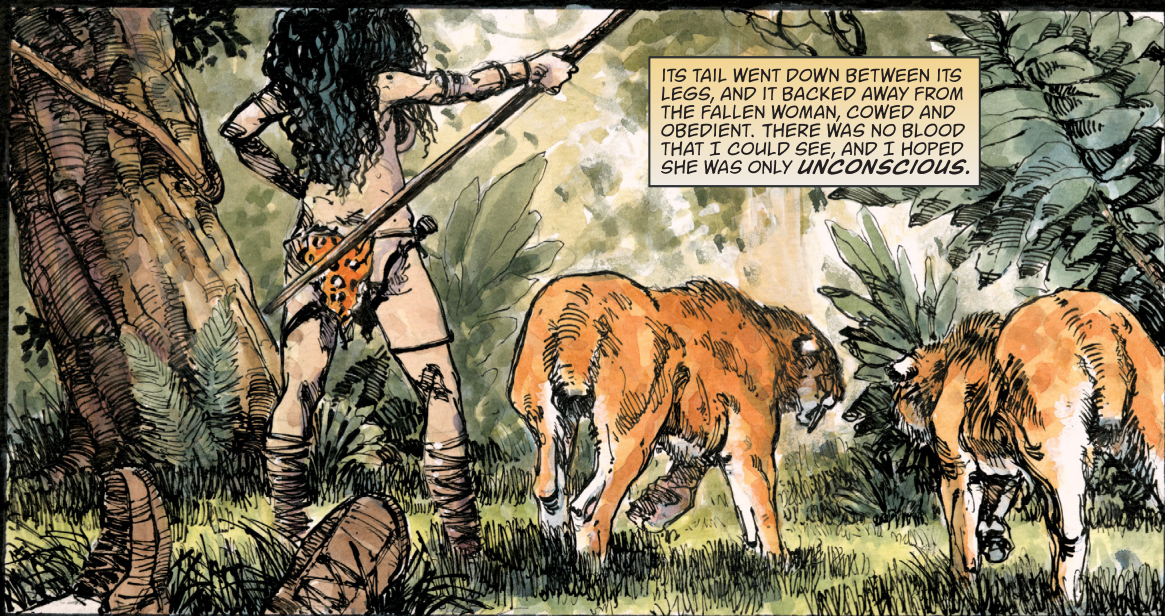
THEN *MISS FINCH* WALKED FORWARD, TOOK THE GREAT CAT BY THE SCRUFF OF ITS NECK AND PULLED IT BACK.



IT RESISTED--



--AND SHE *THWACKED* IT ON THE NOSE WITH THE END OF HER SPEAR.

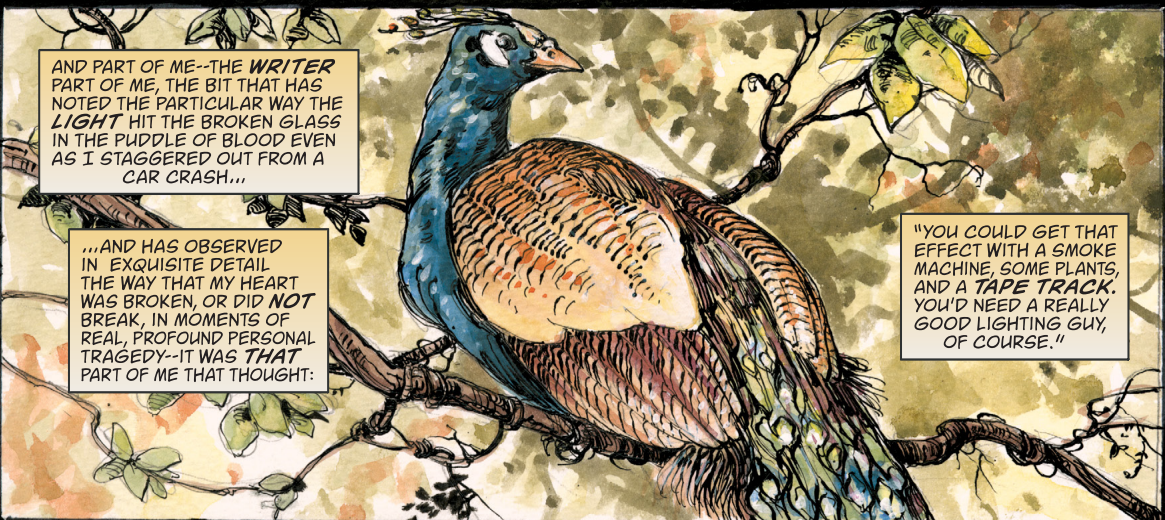


ITS TAIL WENT DOWN BETWEEN ITS LEGS, AND IT BACKED AWAY FROM THE FALLEN WOMAN, COWED AND OBEIDENT. THERE WAS NO BLOOD THAT I COULD SEE, AND I HOPED SHE WAS ONLY **UNCONSCIOUS**.



IN THE BACK OF THE HUGE CELLAR ROOM LIGHT WAS SLOWLY COMING UP. IT SEEMED AS IF DAWN WERE BREAKING.

I COULD HEAR, AS IF FROM A GREAT WAY OFF, THE CHIRP OF CRICKETS AND THE CALLS OF STRANGE BIRDS AWAKING TO GREET THE DAY.



AND PART OF ME--THE **WRITER** PART OF ME, THE BIT THAT HAS NOTED THE PARTICULAR WAY THE **LIGHT** HIT THE BROKEN GLASS IN THE PUDDLE OF BLOOD EVEN AS I STAGGERED OUT FROM A CAR CRASH...

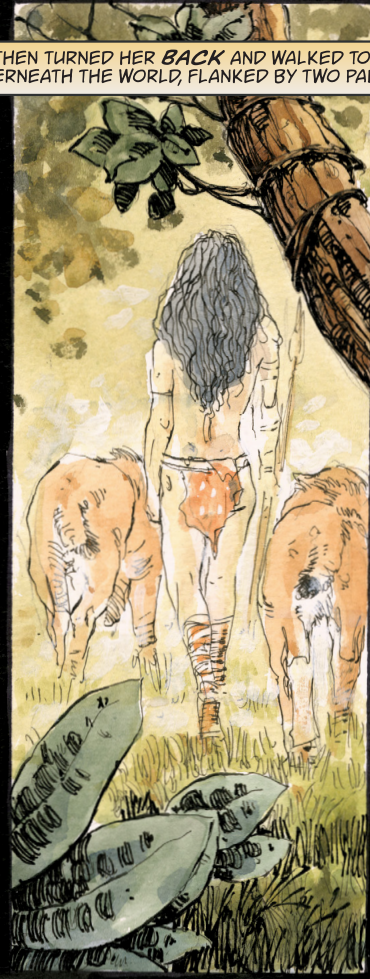
...AND HAS OBSERVED IN EXQUISITE DETAIL THE WAY THAT MY HEART WAS BROKEN, OR DID **NOT** BREAK, IN MOMENTS OF REAL, PROFOUND PERSONAL TRAGEDY--IT WAS **THAT** PART OF ME THAT THOUGHT:

"YOU COULD GET THAT EFFECT WITH A SMOKE MACHINE, SOME PLANTS, AND A **TAPE TRACK**. YOU'D NEED A REALLY GOOD LIGHTING GUY, OF COURSE."

MISS FINCH GAVE US ONE LAST LONG, THOUGHTFUL LOOK, AS IF MAKING UP HER MIND...



...AND THEN TURNED HER **BACK** AND WALKED TOWARD THE DAWN AND THE **JUNGLE** UNDERNEATH THE WORLD, FLANKED BY TWO PADDING SABER-TOOTHED TIGERS.

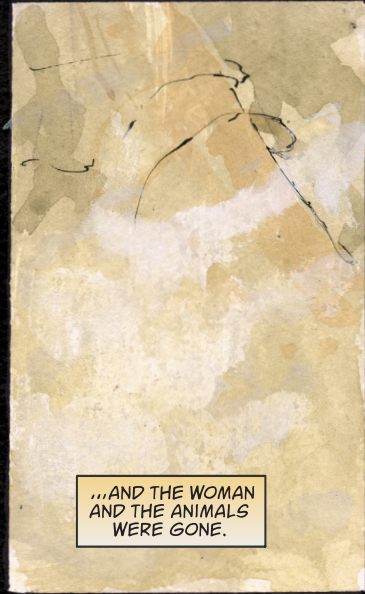




A BIRD SCREECHED  
AND CHATTERED.



THE MISTS  
SHIFTED...



...AND THE WOMAN  
AND THE ANIMALS  
WERE GONE.



THE STOCKY WOMAN  
OPENED HER EYES.  
HER SON HELPED  
HER TO HER FEET.

AND WHEN WE  
KNEW THAT SHE  
WASN'T HURT...



...FOR SHE PICKED  
UP HER UMBRELLA,  
BRANDISHED IT, AND  
SMILED AT US...



...WHY THEN, WE  
ALL BEGAN TO  
APPLAUD.



NO ONE CAME TO GET US.

HMM...



KREBBBKK



I COULD NOT SEE UNCLE FESTER OR THE VAMPIRE WOMAN ANYWHERE.

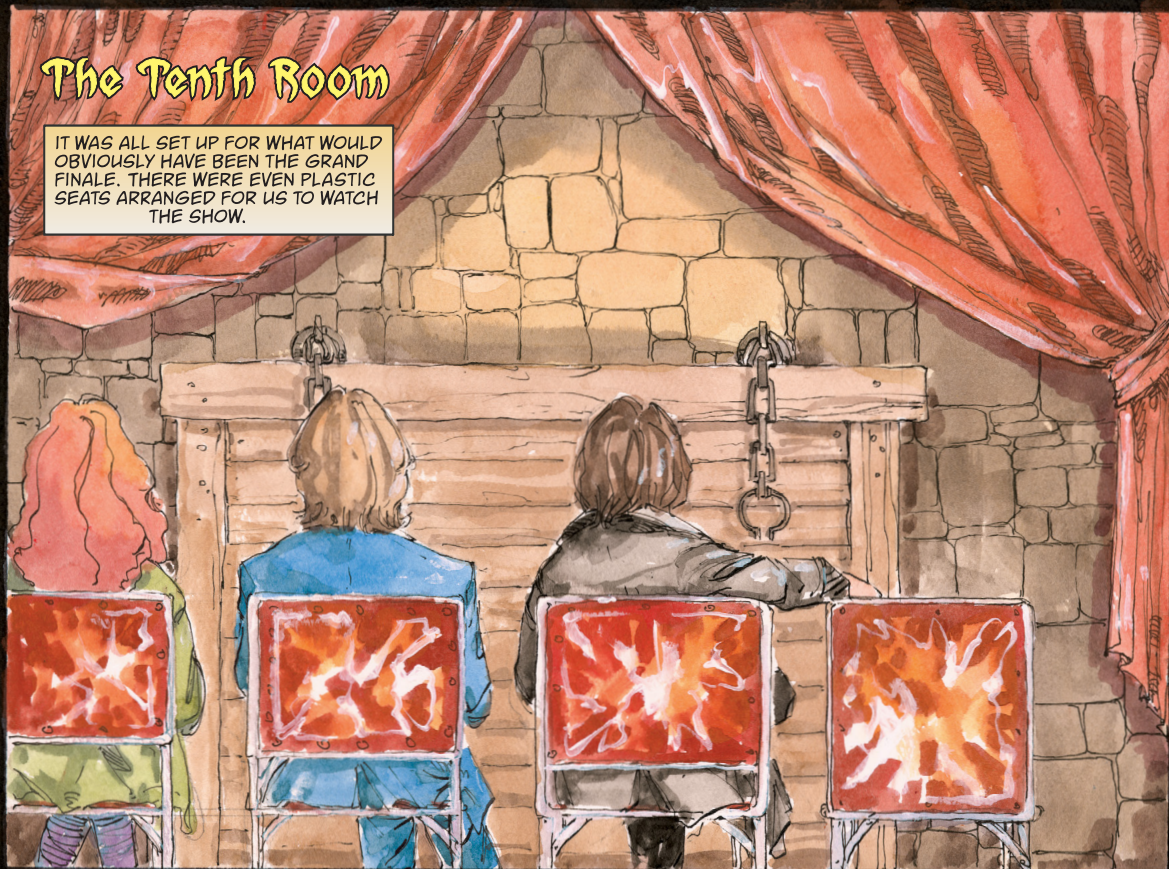
SHALL WE...?



SO, UNESCORTED, WE ALL WALKED ON INTO...

## The Tenth Room

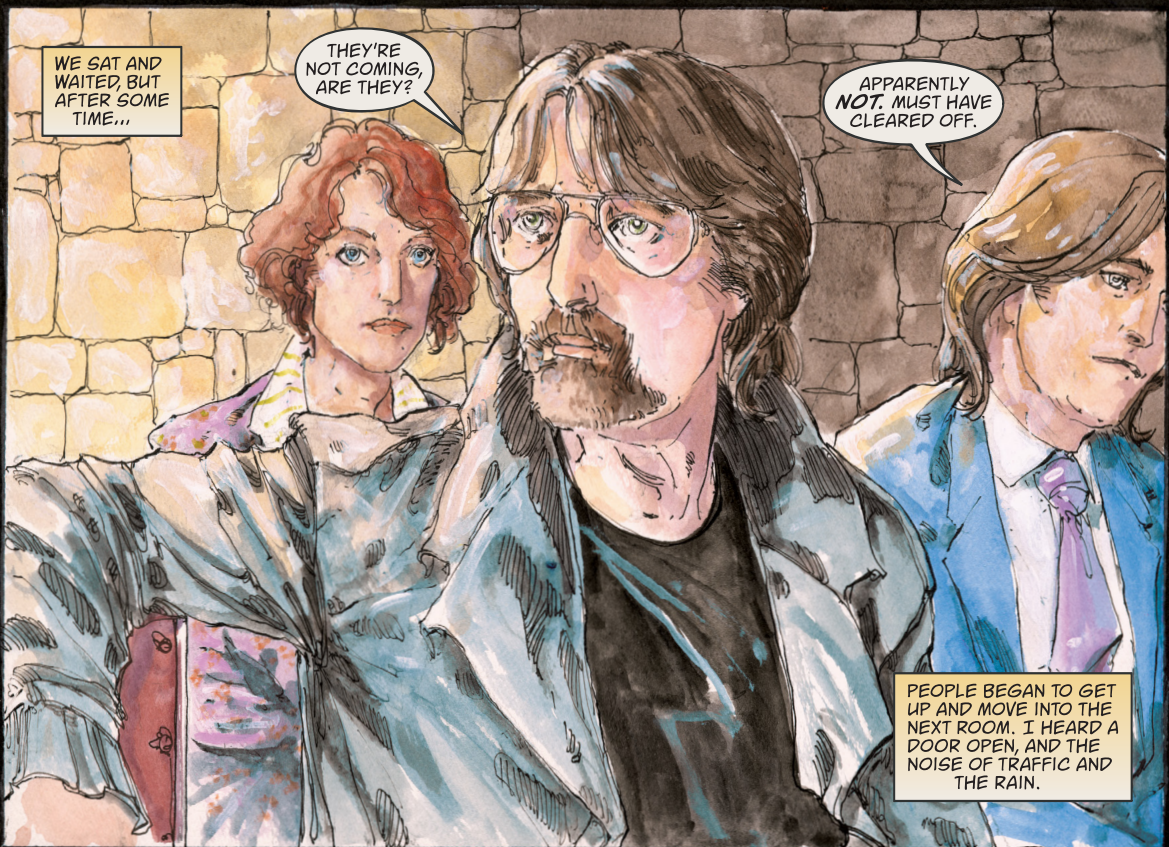
IT WAS ALL SET UP FOR WHAT WOULD OBVIOUSLY HAVE BEEN THE GRAND FINALE. THERE WERE EVEN PLASTIC SEATS ARRANGED FOR US TO WATCH THE SHOW.



WE SAT AND WAITED, BUT AFTER SOME TIME...

THEY'RE NOT COMING, ARE THEY?

APPARENTLY **NOT**. MUST HAVE CLEARED OFF.

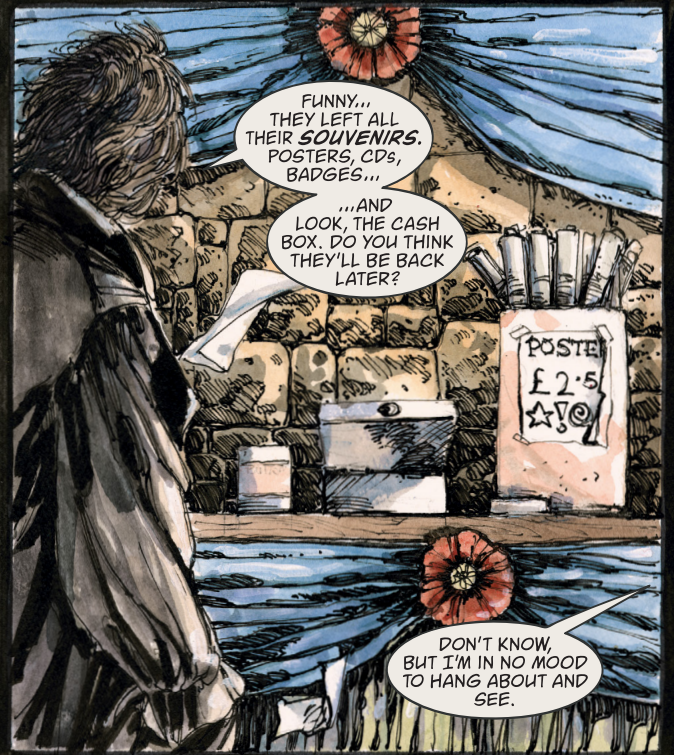


PEOPLE BEGAN TO GET UP AND MOVE INTO THE NEXT ROOM. I HEARD A DOOR OPEN, AND THE NOISE OF TRAFFIC AND THE RAIN.



SOUNDS LIKE THE WAY OUT IS THROUGH THERE.

RIGHT. LET'S GO, THEN.



FUNNY... THEY LEFT ALL THEIR SOUVENIRS. POSTERS, CDs, BADGES...

...AND LOOK, THE CASH BOX. DO YOU THINK THEY'LL BE BACK LATER?

DON'T KNOW, BUT I'M IN NO MOOD TO HANG ABOUT AND SEE.

ONE OF US SAID "SHOULD WE WAIT FOR HER?" I WISH I COULD SAY IT WAS ME.



THE OTHERS SHOOK THEIR HEADS, AND WE WALKED OUT INTO THE SODIUM YELLOW LIGHT OF THE STREET.



THE RAIN CONTINUED,  
NOW ACCOMPANIED  
BY A GUSTY WIND.  
JONATHAN WENT AHEAD  
TO UNLOCK THE CAR...



...THEN WE HURRIED  
AFTER HIM, ANXIOUS  
TO BE OUT OF THE  
WEATHER.



AS I SETTLED INTO  
THE NOW-ROOMY  
BACK SEAT...



...OVER THE RAIN AND THE NOISE OF THE CITY I THOUGHT I HEARD A **TIGER**, SOMEWHERE CLOSE BY, FOR THERE WAS A LOW ROAR THAT MADE THE WHOLE WORLD SHAKE.

BUT PERHAPS IT WAS ONLY THE PASSAGE OF A TRAIN.

End

❁ CREATOR BIOS ❁



Photo by Sophia Quach

**NEIL GAIMAN** is one of the most highly regarded writers of the modern comic book and a prolific creator of prose, poetry, film, journalism, comics, song lyrics, and drama. In 1987, he began his best-known work in comics, the best-selling and award-winning Vertigo series *The Sandman*. Before then, he collaborated with artist Dave McKean on two graphic novels, *Violent Cases* and *Signal to Noise*, both currently available from Dark Horse. Other works with McKean include the comics *Black Orchid* and *The Tragical Comedy or Comical Tragedy of Mr. Punch*, the illustrated children's books *The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish* and *The Wolves in the Walls*, and the film *MirrorMask*, which Gaiman wrote and McKean directed. As a novelist, Gaiman has penned three *New York Times* bestsellers: *American Gods*, *Coraline*, and *Anansi Boys*. In 2007, his novel *Stardust* was adapted into a major motion picture, and his script for *Beowulf*, co-written with Roger Avary, was directed by Robert Zemeckis. Collections of his short prose include *Smoke and Mirrors* and *Fragile Things*, and his other comics work includes *The Eternals* and *1602* for Marvel; *The Books of Magic*, *Death: The High Cost of Living*, and *Death: The Time of Your Life* for Vertigo; and *Harlequin Valentine*, *Murder Mysteries*, *The Last Temptation*, and *Creatures of the Night* for Dark Horse. He lives and works near Minneapolis.

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Photo by Fhionn

**MICHAEL ZULLI** began his comics career in 1986 as the artist of *The Puma Blues*, written by Stephen Murphy. Published first by Aardvark-Vanaheim and later by Mirage Studios, the series ran for twenty-three issues and was renowned for its experimental storytelling techniques and message of environmental responsibility. Zulli also plotted, wrote, co-wrote, and illustrated *Soul's Winter*, a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles trilogy for Mirage Studios, now available in a collected edition. Going on to illustrate a number of stories in Steve Bissette's horror anthology *Taboo*, Zulli saw his profile skyrocket after becoming one of the artists on Vertigo's best-selling and award-winning series *The Sandman*, written by Neil Gaiman. Frequent artistic collaborators, Zulli and Gaiman have completed several works together in addition to *The Sandman*, including *The Last Temptation*, a dark fable starring rock musician Alice Cooper, and *Creatures of the Night*, featuring two magical tales of humans and animals who are far from what they seem. Zulli was also the illustrator of J. Michael Straczynski's novella *Delicate Creatures*, published by Top Cow Productions. For the past few years he has been writing and illustrating a massive and deeply personal opus, *The Fracture of the Universal Boy*. He currently lives in Minnesota.

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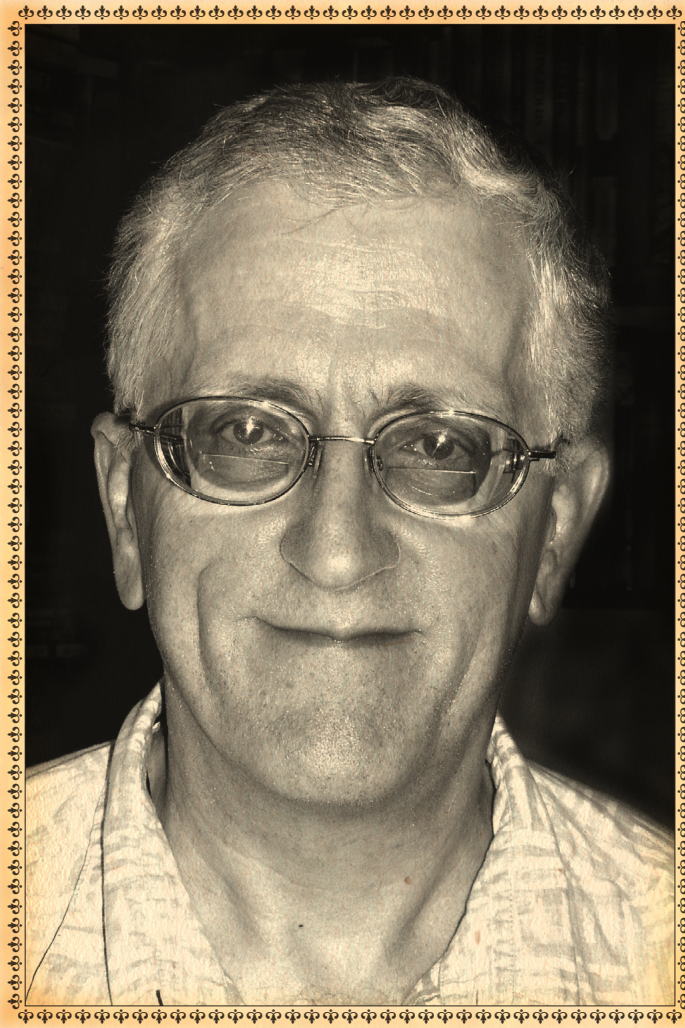


Photo by José Villarrubia

**TODD KLEIN** has established himself as one of the pre-eminent letterers of contemporary comics over the course of his thirty-year career. Beginning in the production department at DC Comics in 1977, he meticulously studied the work of letterers such as John Workman, John Costanza, and Gaspar Saladino, and was soon lettering and designing logos for many titles. During this time, Klein also wrote comics, including stories for *House of Mystery*, *Green Lantern*, and *The Omega Men*. In 1987, he became a full-time freelance letterer, shortly thereafter launching a long-running collaboration with writer Neil Gaiman on *The Sandman* from Vertigo. In addition to Gaiman, Klein has worked with writer Alan Moore for over a decade on numerous projects, including lettering and designing for the America's Best Comics line at Wildstorm. Author of the lettering section in *The DC Comics Guide to Coloring and Lettering Comics*, Klein's mastery has been recognized around the world, most notably with fourteen Eisner Awards and eight Harvey Awards. He continues to work voraciously from his home in New Jersey where he lives with his wife Ellen.

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