

WARREN
MAGAZINE

THIS ISSUE: EXTERMINATOR! EXORCIST! POOTER and the MAGICMAN!



EERIE
#71

JAN 1976

EERIE

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POC

OUT OF A LAND OF MAGIC AND DREAMS...



...COMES THE
MYSTERIOUS
GOBLIN!

ALSO: HUNTER II...THE LAST SURVIVOR OF MUTANT'S ALAMO!



HAPPY HALLOWEEN,
KIDDIES. YOU MIGHT THINK
OLE JACK HERE'S EMPTY
HEADED. NOT SO.

THOSE BLAZING
EYES SHOW A HEAD
CHOCK FULL OF COUSIN
EERIE'S VISION'S
OF TERROR.

A FAIR TRADE,
ACTUALLY. HE GETS
EXCITEMENT. AND I
GET A PIE.

AND LUCKY
OLE JACK DIDN'T
EVEN HAVE TO
REMOVE THE
SEEDS!



OUR COVER
Goblin! A misfit demon. Trapped between fantasy and reality. And belonging to neither. Goblin. The frightened and the terrorized. Cover painting by Sanjulian

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EERIE

CONTENTS

ISSUE NO. 71
JANUARY 1976

4

DEAR COUSIN EERIE

"Driven by his own personal desire for vengeance, Demian Hunter left the woman he came to love... to pursue a phantom of hatred. And there," writes Donna Mosley, "this tragic, vengeful hero was even less successful!"

5

GOBLIN

Salem burst into this world through the cabinet of an old grandfather clock. A small, hideous demon trapped accidentally in reality, frightened and frightening, seeking desperately to escape. And having the very devil of a time managing it!

13

HUNTER II: TIME

The goblin forces poured from the Eastern Mountains. To expand their territory. To take captives. Between one walled hamlet and the marauding goblin army stood two lone, reluctant heroes. Exterminator robot. And Karas/Hunter II!

23

IRVING AND THE DEVILPIE

The sheriff killed Invincible Irving with a shotgun blast through the heart. But Irving didn't die. He went to a land of shadows where he acquired a demon, a life of wealth and leisure, and a special, private hell!

29

POOTER and the MAGICMAN

Smithpooter was a magician. And, as such, he was a failure. His tricks didn't work. The fat lady ate his rabbit. He was scorned. Abused. Fired. Until the fatal day he made a deal with the demonic S. Pavlov-Freud!

37

EL CID: DEMON TREASURE

The cache was guarded by a demon. So said the legends. But it was an old treasure... and even demons die. So, reasoned Aledo, it was guarded by reputation alone. And, to his regret, he decided to test his theory!

47

MORDECAI MOONDOG

Seven spirits possessed the house. Seven portraits hung on the wall. Sigfried. Pieter. Ivar. Rold. Ilona. Tomas. Who was the 7th ghost? What secret linked them to this desolate manse? What madness did they share?

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OBLEN



MARIETTA WELDON-BENCHFIELD DRESSED FOR THE EVENING MEAL IN HER BEDCHAMBERS. NOTHING IN HER GENTLE WORLD WAS OUT OF ORDER.



EXCEPT SOMETHING THAT DISTANTLY TROUBLED HER. IT WASN'T A LARGE THING, IT WAS... OH! THE ANTIQUE CLOCK HAD CEASED TICKING. ITS SOOTHING SOUND WAS ABSENT.



PERHAPS SHE HAD FORGOTTEN TO WIND THE LOVELY CLOCK. SHE OPENED THE DOOR TO ADJUST THE CLOCK'S WEIGHTS...

AH. POOR OLD DEAR, I HAVEN'T BEEN GIVING YOU ENOUGH ATTENTION, HAVE I?



...WHEN SUDDENLY...!

EEEEEEEEEE
AACHHHH!



ROOOGGEERRR!
AEEEEEE!

STOP!
PLEASE!
COME
BACK
HERE!



MPHH
HMA...
PHHHHM

I MEAN
YOU NO HARM!
QUIET! YOU'LL
HAVE THE KING'S
ARMY ON ME!
STOP
SCREAMING!



MRS WELDON BENCHFIELD WAS PERHAPS THE FIRST PERSON TO HAVE SEEN THE LITTLE CREATURE. BUT SHE NEVER SPOKE OF THE MEETING.

FOR WITH HIS MAGIC THE GOBLIN SIMPLY ERASED HER MOUTH FROM THE WOMAN'S FACE.





NO... PLEASE...
DON'T HURT...
WHAT?



WHAT? WHAT IS
THIS PLACE? WHO
ARE--!

HEY NOW, DON'T BE AFRAID. YOU'RE
SAFE NOW. IN MY HOUSE. YOU'VE
BEEN SHOT. YOU BE STILL AND
I'LL CARE FOR YOU...



SEE? I DON'T KNOW
WHO OR... WHAT YOU
ARE, BUT YOU WERE
HURT.

HURT?
YES. HIS
MAGIC WAS
VERY
EXPLOSIVE.



H-HEY!
THE BULLET
HOLE'S GONE!
H-HOW YOU DO
THAT?

I'VE
ALWAYS
BEEN ABLE TO
HEAL MYSELF.
NOTHING TO
IT, REALLY.



WELL, IT SEEMS I HAVE
A FRIEND IN YOU. MY
NAME IS SALEM. I'M... I'M
NOT OF YOUR WORLD. I'M
RATHER LOST AND I'M
TRYING TO GET HOME. IF
THERE WERE TIME, I'D
EXPLAIN...



YOU DON'T HAVE
TO EXPLAIN. IF YOU'RE
LOST, THEN WE'LL GO
TO FATHER POOLEN.
HE'LL HELP YOU FIND
YOUR WAY HOME.

WELL... PERHAPS.
BUT IT TAKED A
SPECIAL DOOR TO
OPEN BACK TO MY
WORLD. A VERY
SPECIAL DOOR.



NO ONE'S
AROUND, SALEM.
QUICKLY... LET'S
GO IN!

I DON'T
BELIEVE I
SHOULD BE
DOING THIS.
PERHAPS I'D
BEST GO.

GHH.
COME.







HULLO? ANYONE?
CAN ANYONE HELP?



HELP?
YES, LITTLE
MAN. HOW
MAY I
HELP?

THE GIRL.
SHE'S
HURT.



GIVE HER TO ME,
MY STRANGE LITTLE
FRIEND. I WILL **TEND**
HER. BUT IN RETURN,
YOU WILL **ANSWER**
MY CURIOSITIES.

JUST
HELP
HER,
PLEASE.



IT ISN'T YOUR
FRIEND'S
WOUNDS THAT
TROUBLE ME.
IT IS **YOU** THAT
PUZZLES ME.

FIRST CLEAN
SANDAGES, THEN
TO THE STUDY
FOR BRANDY
AND TALK,
EH?

AS
YOU
WISH.



THUS WHEN I WENT
TO RETURN HOME, THE
DOORS I HAD LONG
USED TRAVELING
BETWEEN WORLDS
WERE GONE. I
KNOW NOT
WHY.

SO, LITTLE
GOBLIN, YOU ARE
LOST. I MYSELF,
BELIEVE YOUR
TALE. THIS VERY
HOUSE IS BUILT ON
STRANGE PROPERTIES.
THREE CARPENTERS
VANISHED DURING
ITS CONSTRUCTION.
COME TO THE **CELLAR**
WITH ME, MY GOBLIN
FRIEND.



ONCE I EVEN
WATCHED MY OWN
MOTHER WALK
ACROSS THE
CELLAR FLOOR AND
DISAPPEAR!

I SEARCHED FOR HER
FOR DAYS. AND
FOR DAYS I HEARD
HER WAILS AND PITEOUS
MOANING.



BUT SHE WAS
GONE. FINALLY HER
WHIMPERING DIED
AWAY. ALSO, SHE WAS
NO LONGER A PART OF
THIS WORLD. SEE
THESE CHALK MARKS?
HERE THERE WAS
"THE OPENING."



THESE LINES
BOUND THE LENGTH
AND BREADTH OF THE
"DOOR." I COULD CAST
MY HAND THROUGH
THE PORTHOLE AND
WATCH IT **DISAPPEAR**.
THE HOLE HAS GROWN
SMALLER NOW. SEE?
IT'S **SOLID**.



BUT LOOK. SEE HERE. A SMALL PORTHOLE IS STILL HERE. IT **MUST** HAVE BEEN ONE OF THE **DOORS** LEADING TO THE MAGIC WORLD.

A **DOOR!**
PRaise!



GO NOW, LITTLE GOBLIN, TAKE THE CHANCE. GO THROUGH THE PORTHOLE AND FIND YOURSELF ONCE MORE.

I **MUST** TAKE THE GIRL WITH ME. ONLY THE MAGIC THERE CAN HEAL HER AGAIN.



I'M AFRAID IT'S ONLY LARGE ENOUGH FOR YOU.

I'LL TAKE CARE OF HER FOR YOU. I HAVE NO **MAGIC**. BUT PERHAPS I HAVE LOVE.

GO NOW, GOBLIN, BEFORE THE HOLE SEALS ITSELF COMPLETELY.

THUS THE LITTLE CREATURE TOOK HIS LEAVE OF A WORLD ALIEN TO HIM. HE CRAWLED THROUGH A REND IN TIME ... AND WAS **GONE**.



REMEMBER ME, SALEM. GOOD BYE. GODSPEED.

LUCK OL' FELLOW.



HOME! HOME!
AFTER ALL THESE YEA--



AFTER ALL THOSE YEARS OF WANDERING **LOST** ON EARTH, AFTER THE PASSAGEWAY DOORS WERE CLOSED, THE GOBLIN CAME **HOME**.



THEY HEARD THE TERRIBLE, **HEARTBREAKING** SCREAMS FOR SEVERAL DAYS. THEN THE PITIFUL WAILS FADED AWAY. A LITTLE GOBLIN NAMED SALEM HAD **JOINED** HIS WORLD...



... A WORLD WHICH **NO LONGER** EXISTED... A WORLD THAT PASSED INTO **LEGEND**... A WORLD WHERE THERE WAS **NO LONGER ANY MAGIC**.



PERHAPS HE **DID** FIND JUST A **TOUCH** OF **MAGIC** LEFT OVER THERE. BECAUSE **SOMEHOW** HE SENT IT BACK TO THE GIRL WHO CARED FOR HIM.

SHE WAS VERY LOVELY ALL HER LIFE AND SHE NEVER FORGOT THE LITTLE GOBLIN WHO WAS **LOST** AND **DOOMED**... IN TWO WORLDS.

EARTH **SPINS**. AND EACH REVOLUTION BRINGS IT CLOSER TO **DEATH**. YET, **DEATH** CAN BE **PREVENTED**. THE WHITE COUNCIL MUST WIELD A MIGHTY SPELL TO **HALT** EARTH'S **ROTATION**...TO THROW EARTH INTO A DIMENSION THAT HOLDS NO THREAT OF **DOOM**.

TIME *in* EXPANSION

YAUST, THE SORCERER, WOULD BAR THIS **MAGICK**. FOR HIS **DELIGHT** IS EARTH'S DESTRUCTION. HE WOULD KEEP HIS GOBLIN DOMAIN **ALIVE** BY **SORCERY**. AND, WHEN THE REST OF THE WORLD HAD **PERISHED**, **YAUST** ALONE WOULD **RULE!**

THREE **PEOPLE** OPPOSE **YAUST'S PLAN** FOR WORLD DOMINATION. A **BOY**. A **GIRL**. AND A **ROBOT**. ON A MISSION TO **SLAY** THE DEADLIEST **GOBLIN** ON EARTH!

HUNTER II



THE FOG **LIFTED** AND A GRIM **FORTRESS** ROSE BEFORE THE WEARY TRAVELERS...FESTOONED WITH EVEN GRIMMER **ORNAMENTS**. **SPEARED**, **CRUCIFIED**, **GUTTED** **HUMAN BODIES**.



GOBLINS.

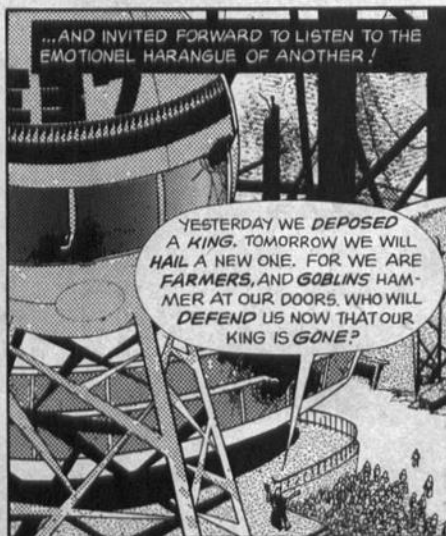
BLOODY
ANIMALS ARE
EVERYWHERE.



OPEN! WE CLAIM THE
RIGHT OF **ASYLUM!**



MAYBE...
THEY'RE ALL
DEAD!





MONARCHS COME AND GO. THE LAND REMAINS. WILL THE GOBLINS TILL OUR FIELDS WHEN WE ARE GONE?



MANY OF YOU REBELLED AGAINST OUR KING'S AMBITION. YOU CALLED HIM WARLORD!

NOW, AT OUR BIDDING, HE IS GONE. IS THAT WARLORD AMBITION?



HE HAD DANCED AT YOUR WEDDINGS. BURIED YOUR DEAD. HE HAS WEPT WITH YOU!



YET A MORE COMPASSIONATE KING WOULD HAVE HELD HIS THRONE...



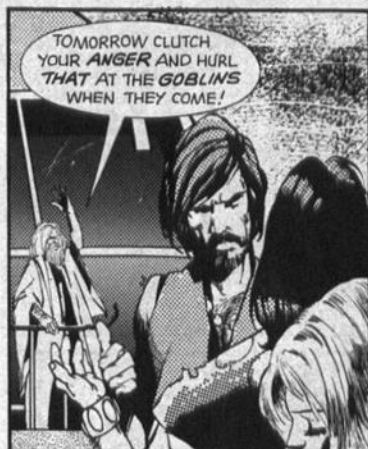
...AND SAVED HIS PEOPLE FROM THE CARNAGE GOBLINS WREAKED HERE YESTERDAY!

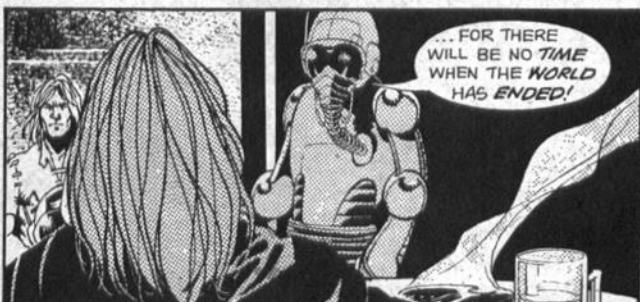
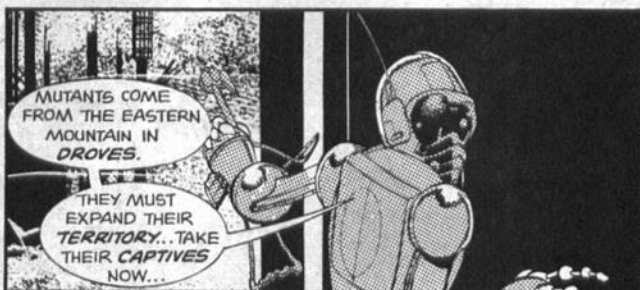
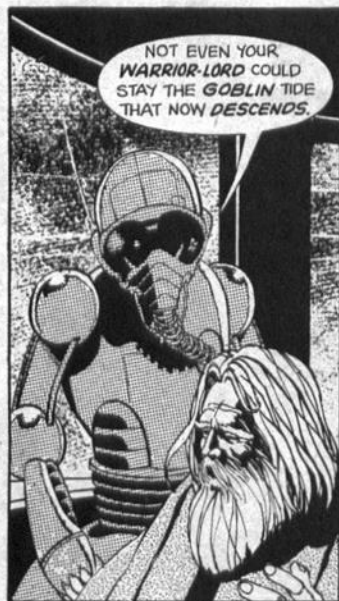
PEASANTS SLAUGHTERED IN THEIR FIELDS AND HUNG OUTSIDE THE FORT... LIKE SO MUCH CARRION!



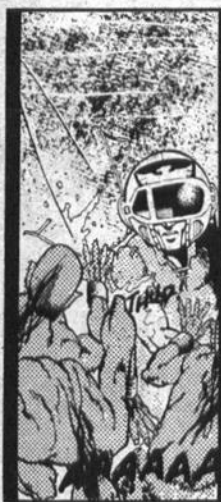
NOW THE LAST OF THE KING'S RETAINERS RIDE OUT...

...AND THERE ARE THOSE OF YOU WHO MUTTER ANGRILY THAT IT IS FOR THE BEST!













I'M **SORRY**, KARAS.
I LET YOU **DOWN**. I
SHOULD HAVE STEERED
YOU **CLEAR** OF THIS
DAMNED PLACE.

WE'LL **NEVER**
GET TO **YALUST**
NOW. WE **TRIED**.
WE **FAILED**!



LET'S MAKE
THESE **DOGS**
WORK FOR
THEIR
SUPPER!

WEOEOE

WAIT!
SOMEONE'S
BLOWING
WARHORNS!



**RALLY TO
ME! LET US
SING OUR
BLOODSONG!
HYAAAHH!**

THE **KING** IS
RETURNED!



THE TRAP WAS
SPRUNG! THE **WAR-
LORD** HAD THE
GOBLINS WHERE
HE'D WANTED
THEM. THEY WERE
SURROUNDED,
AND THEY COULD
NOT ESCAPE.



"THE **TIME** OF **MAN**, AND **MAN'S**
DEEDS HAVE ALL BUT RUN ITS
COURSE!"

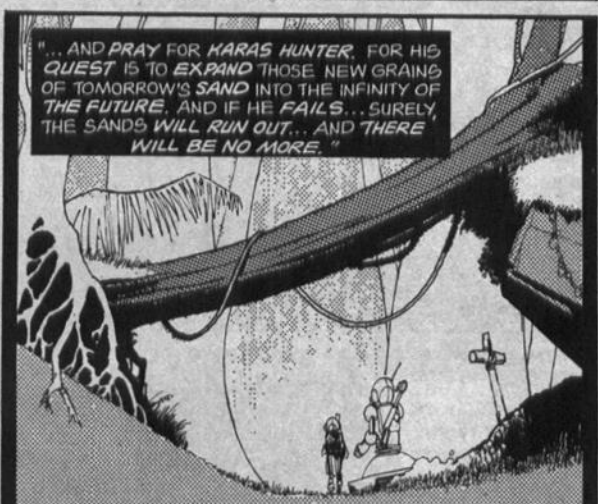


"THE **PAST** IS THE **ONLY** REALITY LEFT US.
THERE IS **NO** PRESENT, FOR EVEN AS THE
PRESENT **TRANSPIRES**, IT BECOMES
THE **PAST**!"



"THERE IS NO **FUTURE**. FOR IT HAS
NOT YET COME. THE **PAST** IS
EXPANDING DAILY. HOURLY,
MINUTE BY MINUTE, SECOND BY
SECOND."

"**TIME WITHIN THE HOURGLASS IS DRAINING SWIFTLY, THE SAND IN THE BOTTOM IS THE PAST, IT IS NEARLY FULL... THE SAND OF THE FUTURE IS BUT A FEW GRAINS...**"



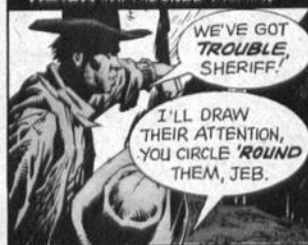
INVINCIBLE IRVING MCCOY WAS ALREADY A LEGEND THE NIGHT HE SLITHERED INTO FEATHERBED, ARIZONA. AN ACCOMPLISHED **GUN-MAN** OF SOME NOTORIETY, HIS EXPLOITS HAD BEEN EXAGGERATED INTO UTTER **LIES** BY THE SAME NICKEL NOVELISTS WHOSE WRITINGS MADE **HEROES** OF SO MANY RUSTLERS, THIEVES AND GUNGLINGERS.

AT THE **HEIGHT** OF HIS FAME, IRVING HAD HIS OWN **PULP MAGAZINE** AND A FOLLOWING OF IDOLATERS WHO BELIEVED THE OUTLAW TO BE THE **ROBIN HOOD** OF THE WEST.

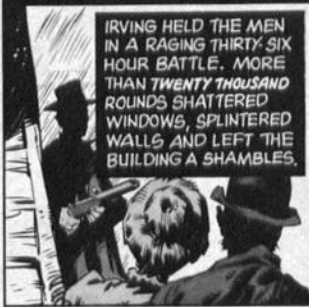


AFTER THE SANSAPARILLA BANK JOB, THE NICKEL NOVELISTS DUBBED HIM **INVINCIBLE IRVING**, THE MAN WHO COULD NOT BE **KILLED**. HE ADDED TO THE MYTH BY STATING THAT NO **CELL** COULD CONFINED HIM FOR LONG, EITHER.

HIS BOAST PROVED PROPHETIC. IRVING **ESCAPED** JAIL SHORTLY AFTER HIS CAPTURE, AND WAS **NEVER** IMPRISONED AGAIN.



IRVING GOT HIS NICKNAME **AND** REPUTATION THE NIGHT HE LOOTED THE SANSAPARILLA SPRINGS BANK. A PATROLLING MARSHAL SAW IRVING'S LIGHT IN THE **VAULT** AND QUICKLY ASSEMBLED EIGHTEEN RESERVE **DEPUTIES**. THEY ENCIRCLED THE BANK AND TRIED TO **BLAST** IRVING OUT.



IRVING'S EXPLOITS GREW MORE AND MORE **FANTASTIC** AS WELL-MEANING PULP WRITERS SOUGHT HIGHER SALES FIGURES. THE OUTLAW BECAME AN OVERNIGHT **HERO**, AND A **LEGEND** IN HIS OWN TIME.



BY THE TIME IRVING WAS FORCED TO SURRENDER, HE HAD SUSTAINED NOT A SINGLE SCRATCH.



HE HAD LAIN FLAT ON THE BANK'S CONCRETE **FLOOR**, WHICH HAD BEEN DUG EIGHT INCHES INTO THE GROUND. EVERY BULLET FIRED BY THE LAWMEN WHIZZED NEATLY **OVER** IRVING'S HEAD.

IRVING READ **EVERY** WORD THAT WAS WRITTEN ABOUT HIM, AND BEGAN, ALONG WITH MANY OTHERS, TO **BELIEVE** THAT HE TRULY WAS INVINCIBLE...THE MAN WHO COULD NOT **DIE**.



WHICH PROBABLY EXPLAINS HIS PUZZLEMENT WHEN HE WAS **SHOT-GUNNED** TO DEATH AFTER KILLING A SEVENTY-FIVE YEAR OLD MAN.

BLAST HIM, JEB!
HE JUST **GUNNED** DOWN OLD UNCLE BEN!

IRVING and the BO-BLAM! DEVILPIE

THE SAGA OF INVINCIBLE IRVING MIGHT WELL HAVE ENDED THE NIGHT HE DIED. BUT LEGENDS TEND TO **LIVE ON**. AND SO IT WAS WITH IRVING.

ONE MOMENT HE WAS LYING FACE DOWN IN A MUD-SPLATTERED ALLEY. THE NEXT HE WAS... HE DID NOT **KNOW** WHERE!

MY GOD! WHAT IS THIS PLACE? IT LOOKS LIKE... LIKE A NIGHTMARE WORLD.

WHERE HAVE ALL THE **PEOPLE** GONE? AND HOW IN HEAVEN'S NAME DID I **GET** HERE?

I... I WAS **SHOT**... BLEEDING... **DYING**. NOW I DON'T EVEN HAVE A **WOUND**.

YET MY SHIRT'S TORN OPEN... LIKE I'D CAUGHT A BLAST FROM A **SHOTGUN**!

FRIGHTENED, AS ANY MAN WOULD BE, IRVING BEGAN TO **RUN**... TO **SCREAM** IN UTTER HORROR.

THIS IS **INSANE**! THERE'S NO **SUBSTANCE** TO THIS PLACE... ONLY GASES... SHAPES... COLORS... THAT **DISSIPATE** AS QUICKLY AS THEY FORM!

HE RAN... STUMBLED... **FELL** BEFORE GIBBERING APPARITIONS... **HIDEOUS SPIRITS** WHO ATTEMPTED TO QUELL THE SHRIEKING MAN'S **FEAR**...

NO! NO! NOW I **KNOW**! I'M **DEAD**... AND THIS IS **HELL**!

YOU'VE BEEN LISTENING TO **FOOLISHNESS** HANDED DOWN FOR GENERATIONS!

THERE IS NO **HELL**, IRVING!

...WELL-MEANING SPIRITS WHO COULD NOT ALLOW A MAN... EVEN A MAN AS TOTALLY **EVIL** AS INVINCIBLE IRVING... TO BE SO **FRIGHTENED** BY WHAT HE FAILED TO COMPREHEND. HURRIEDLY, THE SPIRIT ALTERED HIS SHAPE INTO ONE IRVING WOULD NOT **FEAR**.

THIS IS SIMPLY A DWELLING PLACE OF **SOULS**... AN **ASTRAL** WORLD. HERE THE SPIRITS OF MEN REST PEACEFULLY BETWEEN INCARNATIONS.

AND NOW **YOUR** SOUL HAS COME TO STAY WITH US AWHILE, IRVING. IT HAS COMPLETED ITS UNION WITH THE MATERIAL STATE... ALBEIT SOMEWHAT **ABRUPTLY**.

MY NAME IS **DEVILPIE**!

I AM BUT ONE OF THE MANY BEINGS HERE, IRVING... A **HELPER**... A **DEMON** IF YOU WILL, TO **GUIDE** YOU.

THERE IS NO **CONDEMNATION** HERE. IF YOU WISH TO LEAVE, YOU **MAY**. UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES YOU **DESIRE**.

YOU CAN SEND ME **BACK**? MAKE ME **LIVE** AGAIN?

BUT I DON'T WANT TO **BE** HERE. I'M **INVINCIBLE**. I CAN'T **DIE**! WHO ARE YOU TO **CONDEMN** ME HERE?

I CAN SHOW YOU THE **WAY** AND OFFER YOU HELP IN OBTAINING WHAT YOU **DESIRE**.

IF THAT'S **SO**... THEN GET ME **OUT** OF HERE... AND GRANT ME A LIFE OF **LEISURE**!



AS YOU **WISH**, IRVING. BEFORE YOU IS THE **TUNNEL OF LIFE**. FOLLOW IT. IT LEADS TO WHATEVER YOU **DESIRE!**

ONCE THERE, **CALL** UPON ME AND I WILL ASSIST YOU IN OBTAINING YOUR ASPIRATIONS... **LEISURE AND WEALTH.**

THAT'S IT?

THAT'S IT, IRVING! **HAPPY LIFE.**

IRVING WAS INCREDULOUS. DISBELIEVING. HE WALKED THE DARKENED TUNNEL FEARFULLY, EXPECTING AT ANY MOMENT TO BE JUMPED BY **SATAN** AND THE HORDE OF MINIONS WHO POPULATE THE NON-EXISTENT **HELL** IN WHICH HE SO STRONGLY BELIEVED.



S-SUNLIGHT! AIR! AND SOLID GROUND TO WALK ON! THEN THAT DEMON, DEVILPIE, WAS **RIGHT!** I'M BACK IN THE **REAL** WORLD WHERE I BELONG!



AND **THIS** IS HORSEGLUE, NEVADA, WHERE **MISS PEACHES LEPRUDE**, THE PRETTIEST, RICHEST, MOST **ELIGIBLE** SINGLE GIRL IN ALL THE WEST RESIDES.

I **READ** ABOUT HER IN MY LATEST INVINCIBLE IRVING NICKEL NOVEL.

NOW I'M GONNA FIND ME A WAY TO MEET AND **MARRY** THAT WOMAN... AND LIVE THE LIFE OF LEISURE DEVILPIE PROMISED.

SO IRVING SOUGHT OUT THE DESIRABLE **MISS LEPRUDE**. HE FOUND HER IN THE SMALL TOWN'S MOST FASHIONABLE BOUTIQUE, AND WAITED **HOURS** FOR A CHANCE TO MEET HER.

EXASPERATED BY HIS LACK OF OPPORTUNITY, HE FINALLY ASKED THE DEMON SPIRIT, **DEVILPIE**, FOR ASSISTANCE.



TO HIS HORROR, THE CREATURE **MATERIALIZED** IN THE **NOTHINGNESS** BESIDE HIM.

DEVILPIE! HOW'D YOU DO THAT?

NO PROBLEM TO IT. I'LL JUST PLAY THE **BAD** GUY. YOU PLAY THE **GOOD** GUY... FOR A **CHANGE**.

TRADE SECRET, IRV. SO **THAT'S** THE RICH YOUNG WOMAN YOU WANT TO CORRAL.

LOOKING HIS ROLE FOR ALL THE WORLD, THE DEMON **SPRANG** AT THE WOMAN, ACTING THE DRUNKEN LECHER.

HE HADN'T HELD A **WOMAN** IN HIS ARMS SINCE HIS LAST INCARNATION. HE LOOKED FORWARD TO THE EXPERIENCE... RIGHT UP TO THE TIME HE PLACED HIS ARMS AROUND HER AND GOT A **LOOK** AT HER FACE.

C'MON, BABE... HOW'S ABOUT A LITTLE **NOOKIE?**



THIS IS THE GIRL IRVING WANTS?

HOPE THAT BOY KNOWS WHAT HE'S DOING!

EEEE! UNHAND ME, YOU VILE, SMELLING **BEAST!**



OUR HERO WASTED NO TIME LEAPING AT THE "**MASHER**," SWINGING WITH HIS BEST HOLIDAY HAYMAKER.

IT WAS A MOST IMPRESSIVE SPECTACLE... ESPECIALLY FROM THE DEMON'S ADVANTAGEOUS **AERIAL** VIEWPOINT.

RELEASE THAT **BEAUTEOUS** CREATURE, YOU **CAD!**

BEAUTEOUS CREATURE? I'M GLAD MY EYES AIN'T AS **BAD** AS HIS!

DEVILPIE SCURRIED INTO THE DARK NESS, LEAVING NATURE AND INVINCIBLE IRVING'S PLOT TO TAKE THEIR INEVITABLE COURSE.

OH, SUH! YOU HAVE SAVED ME FROM A FATE WORSE THAN ETERNAL DAMNATION. THAH'S NO TELLIN' WHAT THAT... THAT BRUTE MIGHT HAVE ENFORCED UPON ME.

GLAD TO BE OF ASSISTANCE, MISS...MISS-?

THE GRATEFUL WOMAN LOOKED INTO THE EYES OF HER SAVIOR AND, BY THE LIGHT OF A NEARBY LAMP IRVING PLAINLY SAW THE FACE OF MISS PEACHES LEPRUDE FOR THE FIRST TIME.

NEVER HAD INVINCIBLE IRVING LOOKED SO DEFEATED.

MAH NAME'S PEACHES LEPRUDE, SUH! AH'M FOREVAH IN YOAH DEBT.

NOT THE PEACHES LEPRUDE, OF WHOM I HAVE READ SO MUCH.

THE VERY SAME, SUH!

I KNEW IT! YOU NEVER CAN BELIEVE THOSE DAMNED LYING MAGAZINES.

SUH?

I...I ONLY MEANT THAT YOU ARE FAR MORE...UH... BEAUTIFUL... FAR MORE EXCITING THAN I ENVISIONED.

WHY, SUH... IT'S SO NICE OF YOU TO SAY SO. MOST PEOPLE THINK THOSE NOVELS ARE A FARCE, BUT I KNOW THAT TO BE OTHERWISE.

PLEASE ALLOW ME TO GRANT YOU A SMALL TOKEN OF MY APPRECIATION FOAH YOAH MOST HELPFUL ASSISTANCE.

OH...IT'S NOT NECESSARY... R-REALY, MA'AM!

BUT IT IS, SUH! IT MOST DEFINITELY IS!

POOR IRVING, HE HAD READ SO MANY TWISTED LIES OF HIS OWN EXPLOITS, THAT HE HAD ACTUALLY COME TO BELIEVE THEM.

HE ACCEPTED EVERY WORD OF THE INVINCIBLE IRVING NOVELS AS GOSPEL...

UH... UHMMM...

...AND IT JOLTED HIM SEVERELY TO FIND PEACHES LEPRUDE'S BEAUTY SLIGHTLY MORE THAN EXAGGERATED IN THE ACCOUNTS HE HAD READ ABOUT HER.

HE WONDERED HOW MUCH MORE OF PEACHES' STORIES WERE LIES... AND IF BEING AN OUTLAW WASN'T EASIER THAN WHAT HE WAS ENDURING NOW.

DELICATELY, IRVING PRODDED THE GIRL FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT HERSELF.

TO HIS WONDERMENT, HE FOUND THAT ALL ELSE IN THE ACCOUNTS WERE TRUE. SHE WAS INDEED THE RICHEST WOMAN IN NEVADA, AND SHE WAS MOST ELIGIBLE AND ANXIOUS FOR MARRIAGE.

IN THE WEEKS THAT FOLLOWED, IRVING SPENT EVERY DAYLIGHT HOUR WITH PEACHES LEPRUDE.

HIS EVENINGS HE SPENT ALONE... WONDERING IF HE SHOULD'NT GO BACK TO ROBBING BANKS.

DAMN! DAMN! WHAT HAVE I DONE NOW? GONE AND ASKED THAT GIRL TO MARRY ME! I'LL BE TRAPPED FOR LIFE... WITH NOTHING MORE TO SHOW THAN A COUPLE OF MILLION!

TOMORROW I'VE GOTTA GO ASK HER DADDY FOR HER HAND.

ENCOUNTERING PEACHES' STERN-FACED FATHER WAS, FOR IRVING, A MORE HARROWING EXPERIENCE THAN THE ORDEAL THAT HAD EARNED HIM HIS REPUTATION. HE DID HIS BEST TO CONVINCE THE OLD MAN OF HIS **UNWORTHINESS** FOR THE GIRL'S HAND...!

REALLY, SIR... I'VE NO JOB, NO PROSPECTS, NO SKILLS AND IT WOULD ONLY EMBARRASS YOUR FAMILY IF SHE WERE TO MARRY SOMEONE SO TOTALLY **BENEATH** HER SOCIAL STATUS.

YEAH HONESTY IS **REFRESHING**, MAH BOY... A TRAIT NOT FOUND IN MEN SEEKING SOLELY AFTAH **WEALTH**.

WHILE ALL YOU SAY IS NO DOUBT **TRUE**, MAH DAUGHTER **DOES** LOVE YOU... AND AH THINK YOU WILL MAKE HER A **FINE** HUSBAND.

YO'ALL HAVE MAH **BLESSINGS**.

THUS, THE BOND WAS SEALED. YET IRVING WAS TORN BETWEEN A **DESIRE** FOR A LIFE OF COMFORT AND RICHES AND A REVULSION FOR PEACHES' HAUNTING **FACE**. IRVING'S INDECISIVENESS LASTED JUST LONG ENOUGH FOR THE GIRL TO GET HIM TO THE **ALTAR**.

WITH THE MATRIMONIAL CEREMONY, IRVING OBTAINED **ALL** HE HAD EXPRESSED A DESIRE FOR WHEN IN THE SPIRITUAL WORLD.

OH, WHAT HAVE I DONE **NOW**? I'VE GOT **MONEY**... MORE THAN I'LL EVER NEED. BUT I'VE ALSO GOT TO WAKE UP TO MISS PEACHES HERE EVERY MORNING FOR THE REST OF MY DAYS...

...UNLESS... UNLESS SOMETHING WERE TO **HAPPEN** TO HER!

THE MONTHS SLIPPED BY, AND IRVING BECAME MORE ACCUSTOMED TO THE GOOD LIFE. YET HIS **HATRED** ALSO GREW FOR THE FACE WHICH **HAUNTED** HIS EVERY WAKING HOUR.

I CAN'T TAKE IT ANY LONGER! SHE'S GOT TO **DIE**!

I CAN'T JUST COME OUT AND **SHOOT** HER! I'D BE THE FIRST ONE PEOPLE WOULD **SUSPECT**!

NO, IT'S GOT TO BE MUCH MORE **SUBTLE**... MORE **NATURAL**!

THE MORE HE THOUGHT ABOUT IT, THE CLOSER HE CAME TO MARRING HIS NEW LIFE WITH **MURDER**.

PERHAPS IF I SUMMONED UP THAT **DEMON** CREATURE... **DEVILPIE**.

NO... HE'D NEVER HELP ME DO AWAY WITH THE VERY WOMAN HE HOOKED ME UP WITH.

HE MIGHT EVEN TURN **AGAINST** ME... TAKE ME BACK TO THAT... **PLACE**.

NO, THIS IS SOMETHING I'LL HAVE TO DO **MYSELF**.

A FALL FROM THE TOP OF THE STAIRS **MIGHT** BREAK HER NECK...

...THEN AGAIN, IT MIGHT **NOT**.

IRVING GREW MORE BOLD WITH EACH SUCCESSIVE IDEA...!

WHAT IF A **TINY BLACK WIDOW** WERE TO SLIP INTO HER BED...?

THE **POISON** FROM ONE OF THOSE THINGS COULD KILL A **GRIZZLY**.

BUT WHAT IF IT GETS **ME**, TOO? SPIDERS ARE **OUT**!

BUT **POISON**? OF COURSE!

IRVING WASTED NO TIME LOCATING THE FASTEST, MOST UNDETECTABLE POISON AVAILABLE. HE SET THE TIME...THE DATE AND WAS READY TO BECOME THE **RICHEST** WIDOWER IN THE WORLD.



TONIGHT IS THE **LAST** NIGHT YOU SHARE MY BED, SWEET PEACHES...

...FOR YOUR BREAK-FAST WILL HOLD A VERY SPECIAL **TREAT!**

THAT VERY NIGHT IRVING HEARD **FOOTSTEPS** IN HIS STUDY. HE WHIRLED AROUND AND WAS SURPRISED TO SEE...



DEVILPIE!
HOW DID YOU GET IN HERE?

TRADE SECRET, MY SON. WHAT'S THIS I HEAR? YOU'RE PLANNING TO **DO IN** THE MISSUS?

THE SPIRIT CAUGHT IRVING BY **SURPRISE**... BUT IT DIDN'T CATCH HIM **UNPREPARED**.

YOU'RE NOT GOING TO **STOP** ME, DEVILPIE. SPIRIT, DEMON OR WHATEVER YOU ARE, IN THE MATERIAL WORLD YOU'RE **FLESH AND BLOOD**. YOU CAN BE **KILLED**.

BOAM!

BAM!

MY GOOD FRIEND, I HAVE NO **INTENTION** OF ST--!

BUT BEFORE THE DEMON COULD FINISH HIS SENTENCE, INVINCIBLE IRVING EMBEDDED TWO **BULLETS** IN HIS SKULL!

IRVING BARELY HAD TIME TO GRAB HIS HAT AS HE FLED HIS ELEGANT MANSION.



I...I'VE GOT TO LEAVE IT **ALL**...THE MONEY...THE COMFORT...EVERY THING.

INTO THE WOODS, THE FRIGHTENED MAN RAN...TIL UTTER **EXHAUSTION** OVERPOWERED HIM!

HE HALTED ONLY LONG ENOUGH TO CATCH HIS BREATH BEFORE **RUNNING** SOME MORE.

NOW, IRVING, WAS THAT **NICE?** I MEAN...**GEE**... IF YOU WANTED TO PRACTICE YOUR MARKSMANSHIP, YOU COULD HAVE FOUND A LESS **FRAGILE** TARGET!

NO! NO! IT'S IMPOSSIBLE! YOU SHOULD BE **DEAD!**

S- STAY AWAY FROM ME, CREATURE!



D- DON'T HURT ME! **NOOOO!**

INVINCIBLE IRVING HURRIEDLY **SLAMMED** THE STUDY DOOR, SHUTTING THE BLEEDING DEMON BEING **INSIDE** BEFORE HE COULD TELL IRVING HE MEANT NO HARM. HE SIMPLY WANTED TO ARRANGE A CLEANER, MORE HUMANE WAY OF **ELIMINATING** THE UNWANTED **PEACHES**.

BUT IRVING **NEVER** LEARNED THAT!



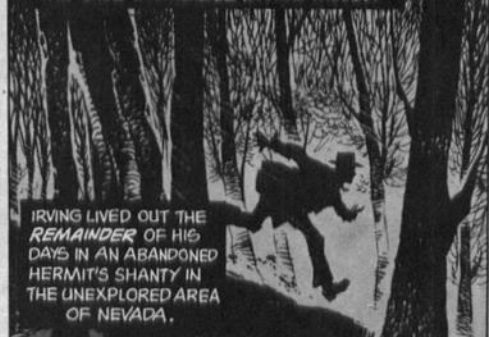
HAVE TO GET **AWAY! RUN!** THAT DEMON'LL TAKE ME BACK TO THAT WEIRD PLACE FOR THIS.

GOTTA GO WHERE HE'LL NEVER **FIND** ME!

IT'S SAID THAT NO HUMAN BEING EVER **AGAIN** SET EYES ON INVINCIBLE IRVING MCCOY...

AFTER A TIME, HIS WIFE STOPPED YEARNING FOR HIM... THE PUBLISHERS OF INVINCIBLE IRVING'S NICKEL NOVELS CEASED PUBLICATION...

...AND SOON THE WORLD SIMPLY **FORGOT** THE ONCE **INVINCIBLE IRVING MCCOY!**



IRVING LIVED OUT THE **REMAINDER** OF HIS DAYS IN AN ABANDONED HERMIT'S SHANTY IN THE UNEXPLORED AREA OF NEVADA.

'TIL THE DAY HE DIED, IRVING WAS **CONVINCED** THAT, HERE, DEVILPIE WOULD NOT FIND HIM.

BUT THE DEMON-CREATURE KNEW WHERE IRVING WAS **ALL ALONG**.



THE ANCIENT IRVING WAS ON HIS DEATHBED WHEN **DEVILPIE** FINALLY APPEARED. BEARING NO MALICE, NO ILL WILL, **DEVILPIE** HAD COME SIMPLY TO HELP AN OLD FRIEND MAKE HIS JOURNEY TO THE SPIRIT WORLD!

BY THE SPRING OF 1878, IT WAS MY MISFORTUNE TO HAVE ENDURED A CAREER RIDDLED WITH SET-BACKS SO SEVERE THAT I FOUND IT NECESSARY TO PARTAKE OF ALCOHOL FOR CONSOLATION.

ONCE, I HAD DELUSIONS OF MAKING THE NAME BERTRAND SMITHPOOTER, ILLUSIONIST, THE MOST NOTED IN ALL BRITAIN... OF PERFORMING WITHIN GREAT MUSIC HALLS BEFORE SOCIETY'S FINEST... OF FINDING MYSELF GIVEN AUDIENCE IN BUCKINGHAM PALACE BEFORE THE ROYAL FAMILY.

MY DREAMS, HOWEVER, WERE THOSE OF NAIVE YOUTH. COLD REALITY RELEGATED MAGICMEN, NOT TO THE GREAT PERFORMING HALLS, BUT TO THE PUBS OF LONDON'S SLEAZIER NIGHT DISTRICTS.

EVEN SO, THE PATRONAGE THEREIN WAS MORE APPRECIATIVE OF A LADY OF MINIMAL TALENT AND MAXIMUM ENDOWMENT THAN OF AN ILLUSIONIST OF SOME STATURE.



BRAVO!

BRAVO!

ENCORE!



GOR! WHAT APPENED TO TH' BLOOMIN' RABBIT?

Boooo!

Boo!

Hissss!

KILL TH' BUM!

PBS! POOTER! THE BLOODY THING'S DEAD!

I HAD ENJOYED EMPLOYMENT AT THE RED COCK GRILL FOR MORE THAN A WEEK BEFORE MISFORTUNE THUNDERED UPON ME. EACH NIGHT, MY ASSISTANT, LISETTE AND I DUTIFULLY FOLLOWED THE PERFORMANCE OF PARISIAN DANCE QUEEN, BOOM BOOM BEECHEAU.



HUSSY! HER TALENT LIES TOTALLY WITHIN HER BRASSIERE!

HER CAREER WILL SAG WITH HER BUSTLINE, MY DEAR. COME, OUR CURTAIN CALLS!

POOTER and the MAGICMAN

BEFORE MY FINAL PERFORMANCE, I HAD DOWNED MY USUAL PINT OF BELLYBLITZ ALE, AND FAILED TO OBSERVE THE SPECTRE OF DEATH LOOMING DARKLY OVER MY MAGICIAN'S TABORET.

AND NOW, GENTLEMEN... LET ME ASSURE YOU THERE IS NOTHING IN MY HAT.

THUS, I WILL COMMENCE TO WITHDRAW ONE OF NATURE'S LONGER-EARED, FUZZY-TAILED VEGETARIANS.



IT WAS, I AM SAD TO SAY, NOT MY FINEST PERFORMANCE. HOWEVER, I HAVE ENDURED MORE SERIOUS EMBARRASMENTS IN VARIOUS STAGES OF MY CAREER.

HOW WAS I TO KNOW LABELLE THE SINGING FAT WOMAN WAS GONNA EAT THE DAMNED RABBIT?

RIGHT! AND 'OW WERE YOU TO KNOW THE COALS TRULY WERE RED 'OT THE NIGHT YOU 'AD ME DO THAT BED O' FIRE TRICK...



...OR THAT THE SWORDS YOU SHOVED DOWN MY THROAT IN THAT SABRE-EATING GIG WERE RAZOR SHARP!

POOTER... YOU ARE A DRUNKEN IDIOT!

ALAS, POOR LISETTE QUIT MY EMPLOY THAT NIGHT. YET, IT MATTERED FOR NAUGHT SINCE THE GOOD PROPRIETIER OF THE RED COCK TERMINATED MY ENGAGEMENT AS WELL.

I, OF COURSE, RETREATED TO A SOMEWHAT COZIER IF MORE DISMAL SECTION OF THE CITY WHERE I SPENT WHAT WAS LEFT OF MY MEAGRE WEEK'S WAGES ON A PINT OF BELLYBLITZ' FINEST, AND THE COMPANY OF TWO LOVELIES OF NOTABLE ATTRIBUTES.



WITHIN THE HOUR, BOTH MY BOTTLE AND MY PERSONAGE WERE THOROUGHLY SPENT, AND I STAGGERED FROM THE YOUNG LADIES' ESTABLISHMENT IN A LAUNGD BUT EXTREMELY PLEASANT STUPOR.

WHAT NOW, POOTER OLD BOY? YOU CAN'T GO BACK TO YOUR APARTMENTS. THE OLD BIDDY OF A LANDLADY WILL BE UPON YOU FOR HER BACK RENT, AND YOU WITHOUT A QUID.



IT STRIKES ME THERE'S SHELTER TO BE HAD IN THE PEACEFULNESS OF THIS CONVENIENT CEMETERY, HOWEVER.

IF NOTHING ELSE, I CAN EXPLAIN MY WOES TO THE SPIRITS OF THE DEARLY PASSED.



I DROPPED DOWN BENEATH THE TOMBSTONE OF ONE SIGMUND PAYLOV-FREUD, AND, FOR LACK OF ANY-ONE BETTER TO CONVERSE WITH, BEGAN RELATING MY TROUBLES TO THE FACELESS OLD GENTLEMAN WHO LAY IN THE GROUND BELOW ME.

GOR! WHAT A DISMAL FUTURE! NO BOOKINGS. NO WAGES. NO PROSPECTS FOR REPLENISHMENT OF MY DEPLETED ALE SUPPLY.

A FAILURE IS WHAT I AM. AND A DRUNKARD TO BOOT!



I HAD VOICED BUT SEVERAL SELF-DEBASING COMPLAINTS WHEN A SHIMMERING LIGHT APPEARED BEFORE ME. THE LIGHT GAVE WAY, AND FROM NOWHERE, AN ODD-LOOKING GENTLEMAN SPRANG FORTH AND STOOD LOOKING DOWN UPON ME.

YOU NEEDN'T CHASTISE YOURSELF SO, MY GOOD MAN. OFT' TIMES WE CANNOT CONTROL THE HANDS WE ARE DEALT IN THE STACKED DECK OF LIFE.

W-WHO ARE YOU?





I, SIR, AM YOUR HUMBLE SERVANT, SIGMUND PAVLOV-FREUD, LATE OF THIS WORLD. I TAKE IT YOU HAVE BEEN SPEAKING TO ME THESE PAST FEW MOMENTS!

THAT IS MY GRAVE YOU ARE RESTING UPON!

UHR... PLEASED TO MEET YOUR ACQUAINTANCE... OR WHATEVER IT IS I'M SPEAKING AT, MR. PAVLOV-FREUD.

USUALLY WHEN FEELING THIS SOGGY, I ADDRESS MYSELF TO THE ELEPHANTS THAT FLUTTER ABOUT MY HEAD. THIS IS MY FIRST EXPERIENCE AT CONVERSING WITH A SPECTRE.



THEN CONSIDER THIS YOUR LUCKY DAY, MY GOOD FRIEND. FOR I BELIEVE THIS SPECTRE CAN BE OF ASSISTANCE TO YOU.

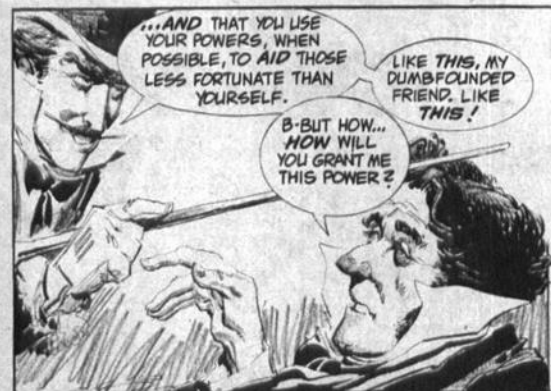
YOU SEE, IN LIFE, I MYSELF WAS A BIT OF AN ILLUSIONIST. IT WAS A PLEASURABLE HOBBY, YET I ASPIRED TO GREATER HEIGHTS, HEIGHTS I NEVER REALIZED... UNTIL MY DEMISE.

IN DEATH I FOUND MY GOD-GIVEN SPIRITUAL ATTRIBUTES INCREASED MY MAGICAL ABILITIES A HUNDRED FOLD.

WHY, SIR, IN MY PRESENT FORM NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE. I CAN SOAR THROUGH THE HEAVENS OR MALT THE EARTH FROM SPINNING 'ROUND THE SUN.

IT IS AN EXTREMELY PLEASANT STATE BROUGHT ABOUT BY DEATH. ALAS, HOWEVER, IT IS FORBIDDEN FOR A SPIRIT TO MEDDLE IN AFFAIRS OF THE MATERIAL WORLD. SO I MUST CONTENT MYSELF WITH SPIRITUAL PLAY.

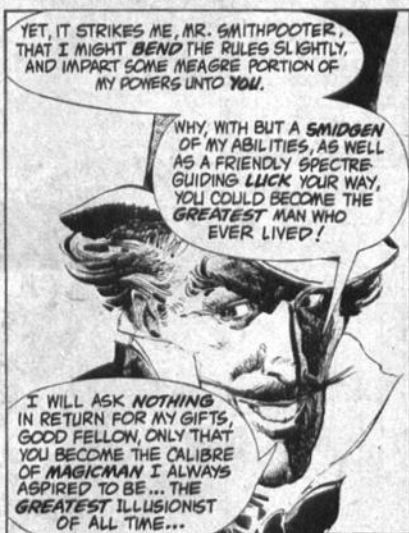
IT'S WITHIN MY POWER TO BRING WEALTH TO THE POOREST MAN OR STRIP THE MOST ELEGANT OF THEIR FINEST ACQUISITIONS.



...AND THAT YOU USE YOUR POWERS, WHEN POSSIBLE, TO AID THOSE LESS FORTUNATE THAN YOURSELF.

LIKE THIS, MY DUMBFOUNDED FRIEND, LIKE THIS!

B-BUT HOW... HOW WILL YOU GRANT ME THIS POWER?



YET, IT STRIKES ME, MR. SMITHPOOTER, THAT I MIGHT BEND THE RULES SLIGHTLY, AND IMPART SOME MEAGRE PORTION OF MY POWERS UNTO YOU.

WHY, WITH BUT A SMIDGEN OF MY ABILITIES, AS WELL AS A FRIENDLY SPECTRE-GUIDING LUCK YOUR WAY, YOU COULD BECOME THE GREATEST MAN WHO EVER LIVED!

I WILL ASK NOTHING IN RETURN FOR MY GIFTS, GOOD FELLOW, ONLY THAT YOU BECOME THE CALIBRE OF MAGICMAN I ALWAYS ASPIRED TO BE... THE GREATEST ILLUSIONIST OF ALL TIME...



AND WITH THREE SHARP RAPS ON MY SKULL, THE SPECTRE OF SIGMUND PAVLOV-FREUD WITHERED INTO THE NOTHINGNESS FROM WHENCE IT CAME.

THAT'S IT! I'M SWEARING OFF! WHEN THE BOOZE MAKES YOU SEE GHOSTS WHO PUT LUMPS ON YOUR HEAD, THE END IS NEAR!

BY THE TIME I REACHED MY APARTMENTS, I HAD CONVINCED MYSELF THAT MY CONVERSATIONS WITH MR. PAVLOV-FREUD WERE MERELY FIGMENTS OF AN ALE-SOAKED IMAGINATION.

YET, I QUESTIONED THAT CONVICTION, WHEN, UPON ENTERING MY CHAMBERS, I ENCOUNTERED A MOST STUNNING VISION OF LOVE-LINESS DRESSED IN A SILKEN GOWN AND SMELLING OF THE SWEETEST LILAC WATER THIS SIDE OF MADAME LOOSEDRAWER'S BOUDOIR.

MY INITIAL THOUGHT WAS THAT THE HAND OF S. PAVLOV-FREUD WAS GUIDING MY LUCK TOWARDS THE BETTER. BUT THEN I RECOGNIZED THE BEAUTIFUL VISION... AS MY LANDLADY!

OH, HOW I HAVE YEARNED FOR YOUR RETURN, DEAR MR. SMITHPOOTER.

MY ARMS HAVE ACHED OF LONELINESS WITHOUT YOU.

MY GOOD MRS. TIGHTHIGH! WHAT WOULD YOUR DEAR DEPARTED HUSBAND THINK?

IT OCCURRED TO ME ONLY THIS AFTERNOON THAT I HAVE TREATED YOU SHABBILY, MR. SMITHPOOTER. I WISH NOW TO MAKE AMENDS!

MY SISTER, PENELOPE, AND I WILL, FROM THIS POINT FORWARD SEE TO YOUR EVERY NEED.

DEAR, DEAR, MR. SMITHPOOTER!

BY THE WAY, MY LOVE... THIS CAME IN THE MIDDAY POST.

I WAS MOST ASSUREDLY PUZZLED BY THE STRANGE BEHAVIOR OF THE WOMAN WHO, HERETOFORE, HAD SPOKEN ONLY WORDS OF CURT ADMONITION TO ME, AND WHOM I HAD ALWAYS CONSIDERED A HATCHET-FACED OLD MAID.

YET, THE MYSTERY CLEARED ABRUPTLY WHEN I LOOKED UPON THE PAPER HELD BEFORE ME.

IT WAS AN INHERITANCE DOCUMENT FROM THE ROYAL COURTS.

WILL YOU LOOK AT THIS! I HAVE INHERITED THE ENTIRE ESTATE OF ONE MR. MICHAEL ANTHONY RICHMOTHER!

BESIDES A FOUR THOUSAND ACRE ESTATE ADJOINING THE ROYAL FAMILY'S WINTER RETREAT, HE HAS LEFT ME MORE THAN A HALF-MILLION POUNDS...

...AND THE DEED TO THE GOLDEN GOOSE THEATRE... THE MOST ELITE MUSIC HALL IN ALL OF ENGLAND!

AH, MY LADIES, IT IS ALL SO PLAIN TO ME NOW. WHILE I AM MYSTIFIED WHY A GENTLEMAN OF MR. RICHMOTHER'S STATURE FREQUENTED THE BOURBON BOTTLE PUB, I AM NO LONGER AT A LOSS TO EXPLAIN YOUR ACTIONS.

PERHAPS I TOO, WOULD BEHAVE IN A SIMILAR FASHION TO AN AQUIRANCE OF THE NEWLY RICH.

YET IT MATTERS NOT!

ALTHOUGH MR. RICHMOTHER AND I HAD NEVER MET, THE NOTICE STATED THAT THE GENTLEMAN WAS IN THE AUDIENCE THE NIGHT I LEVITATED POOR LISETTE THROUGH THE CEILING OF THE BOURBON BOTTLE PUB.

THE MAN WAS APPARENTLY STRUCK ON THE HEAD BY A LARGE PIECE OF FALLING PLASTER, AND LINGERED NEAR DEATH FOR MANY WEEKS. IN HIS LAST MOMENTS OF CONSCIOUSNESS, HE WAS STILL SO AMUSED BY MY ACT THAT HE DECREED ME SOLE HEIR TO HIS FORTUNES, BEFORE ROLLING OFF INTO DEATH IN AN UNCONTROLLABLE FIT OF LAUGHTER.

FOR THE MONEY DOES NOT CONCERN ME... AS LONG AS I LIVE IN UNSURPASSED COMFORT FOR THE REMAINDER OF MY DAYS.

AND YOU, GENTLE WOMEN, FOR LACK OF ANYONE MORE WORTHY, SHALL SHARE IN MY FAME.

TO BED WITH US NOW! WE MUST SEE HOW WE PERFORM TOGETHER!

I AM INTERESTED SOLELY IN THE GREAT MUSIC HALL. NOW THAT IT IS MINE, I SHALL HAVE THE STAGE OF WHICH I HAVE ALWAYS DREAMED. I SHALL BE A STAR!

THUS, I UNDERTOOK OWNERSHIP OF THE GOLDEN GOOSE THEATRE, LONDON'S SHOWPLACE OF STARS. I CONTINUED TO ENGAGE THE TALENTS OF THE FINEST ENTERTAINERS IN ALL BRITAIN... MADAME AVERY AND HER SINGING PELICANS, MIMI LEWART AND THE ACROBATIC FROG-JUGGLERS, AND THE EVER-POPULAR DANCING ROVER BOYS, BOWSER, FIDO AND SPIKE. AT THE HEAD OF EACH STELLAR LINEUP WAS... MYSELF, THE MAGNIFICENTLY MAGICAL SMITHPOOTER, WITH, OF COURSE, THE WONDROUS TIGHTHUSH SISTERS!



THE VAST PORTION OF LONDON'S SOCIALLY ELITE PAID HANDSOMELY FOR THE ENTERTAINMENT AFFORDED THEM BY MY THEATRE. AND I WAS NEVER A DISAPPOINTMENT TO THEM... OR MYSELF!

...THE GREAT SMITHPOOTER WILL UNDERTAKE THE MOST DANGEROUS OF ALL ILLUSIONS.

I WILL THRUST A HALF DOZEN SABRES INTO THE BODY OF MY LOVELY ASSISTANT, PENELOPE.

WHILE GERTRUDE WILL ENDURE THE BITTER TEETH OF MY TORTUROUS SAW.

THUS!
THUS! THUS!
AND THUS!
THE RAZOR SHARP BLADES OF MY SWORDS PASS THROUGH THE BOX AND THE BEAUTEOUS BODY OF PENELOPE!

WHILE SWEET GERTRUDE BECOMES HALF HER SIZE AND QUITE BE-SIDE HERSELF WITH BUT A FEW PASSES OF A PALTRY CARPENTER'S TOOL.

SMILE, MY DEAR - I SHALL CONJURE A BAND-AID FOR YOU WHEN HERE CONCLUDED.



WALLAH! PENELOPE EMERGES UN-SCRATCHED AND AS LOVELY AS EVER...





I MUST SAY THAT I IMPRESSED MYSELF AS WELL AS MY VAST AUDIENCE WITH MY INCREDIBLE PERFORMANCES OF EACH SUCCESSIVE EVENINGS. IT APPEARED THAT ALL I EVER PREVIOUSLY NEEDED WAS TO BUILD WITHIN MYSELF A WELL OF CONFIDENCE...AND SUCCESS COULD BE DRAWN FROM THAT WELL LIKE WATER.



I HAD HAD THE MAKINGS OF AN EXTRAORDINARY ILLUSIONIST ALL ALONG. IT TOOK ONLY THE GOOD FORTUNE OF INHERITING A DEAD MAN'S GOOD FORTUNE TO BRING IT OUT IN ME.

AFTER EACH PERFORMANCE, I TOASTED MY SUCCESS WITH MELODIC SONG, EXQUISITE LIQUOR, AND MY CLOSEST COMPANIONS, THE SISTERS TIGHTHIGH.



I ENDEAVORED TO ENJOY MY NEWLY ACQUIRED LIFE-STYLE TO THE FULLEST, RARELY LOOKING RETROSPECTIVELY TO MY DISMAL BEGINNINGS, OR RECOLLECTING THE TOO-MANY YEARS OF TOO MUCH DRINK AND TOO LITTLE LUCK.

I PUT OUT OF MIND MY QUESTIONABLE MEETING WITH THE SPECTRE OF MR. SIGMUND PAVLOV-FREUD ON THAT DREARY NIGHT SO LONG AGO. NOT ONLY DID I FORGET HIS WORDS ENDOWING ME WITH SUPPOSED MAGICAL ATTRIBUTES...BUT I WENT TO GREAT LENGTHS TO IGNORE HIS REQUEST THAT I LOOK FAVORABLY AFTER THE LESS FORTUNATE.

AFTER ALL, I NEEDED S. PAVLOV-FREUD'S GUIDANCE NO LONGER. I WAS A SELF-MADE SUCCESS... WITH ONLY SLIGHT HELP FROM MR. RICHMOTHER'S ENDOWMENT.



ON THE NUMEROUS OCCASIONS I WAS ACCOSTED BY GRUBBY STREETBEGGARS IN SEARCH OF AN EASY HANDOUT, A FANCIFUL THOUGHT PLAYED ACROSS MY MIND... THAT WITH BUT A WAVE OF MY HAND, I COULD CREATE FOR EACH OF THEM A CARRIAGE FULL OF STERLING NOTES TO INSURE THEIR COMFORT FOR LIFE.



I KNOW NOT WHENCE SUCH GLIMMERING SPECTRES OF MADNESS AROSE. BUT I PUT THEM QUICKLY OUT OF MY HEAD AS ABRUPTLY AS THEY FORMED.



MY SUCCESS CONTINUED FOR MORE THAN A YEAR, MY FAME SPREADING FAR BEYOND LONDON'S MEAGRE BOUNDARIES, SPILLING OVER INTO THE VAST WORLD BEYOND. I HAD INDEED REALIZED MY GOAL OF BECOMING THE WORLD'S MOST NOTED ILLUSIONIST, AND MY CONFIDENCE, MY RICHES AND MY EGO ALL SWELLED PROPORTIONATELY.

THIS IT WAS ON THE VERY EVENING THAT I FELT MOST IMPRESSED WITH MYSELF THAT OCCURRED MY DOWNFALL.



ALLOW ME TO WISH YOU SUCCESS IN YOUR PERFORMANCE TONIGHT, MR. SMITHPOTTER.

MY DEAR JEEVES, HAVE YOU EVER KNOWN ME TO GIVE AN UNSUCCESSFUL PERFORMANCE?

I HAD TAKEN IT UPON MYSELF OF LATE TO WALK TO THE THEATRE, THRILLING WHAT FEW NIGHT PEOPLE I MIGHT ENCOUNTER WITH A BRIEF GLIMPSE OF MY VISAGE.

IT WAS ON THIS FINAL NIGHT THAT I WAS STOPPED SHORT JUST OUTSIDE MY THEATRE, BY A WAIF BARELY INTO HER FOURTEENTH YEAR.

PLEASE, SIR... CAN YOU SPARE A PENCE FOR MY LITTLE BROTHER? HE'S DEATHLY ILL AND IN NEED OF MEDICINAL CARE!

AND WHAT, PRAY TELL, YOUNG WOMAN, HAVE YOU DONE TO MERIT MY MONEY?



BEGONE, SCURVY WENCH! I NEED NOT YOUR DUBIOUS PLEASURES...OR THE DISEASE I SHALL SURELY INCUR UPON CULMINATION OF YOUR PROMISES.



I... I CAN PLEASE YOU, SIR. I'LL DO ANYTHING YOU ASK OF ME.

I CAN BRING YOU PLEASURE FOR JUST A FEW BOB...

...THAT MY BROTHER MIGHT LIVE YET ANOTHER DAY!

I HAD GRUMBLED MY INSULTS AT THE GIRL AND HASTILY CLAMORED TO THE STAGE ENTRANCE WHEN I CAUGHT SIGHT OF A FAMILIAR LOOKING MAN LURKING IN THE CHILL NIGHT SHADOWS.



LIKE A DARK DESCENDING CLOUD, THE VISAGE THRUST GLOOMY MEMORIES UPON ME OF A DARKSOME NIGHT IN A LONELY CEMETERY.

FOR A BRIEF SECOND I FELT BLOOD RUSH FROM MY HEAD AND CONFIDENCE DRIFT SLOWLY AWAY FROM ME...

...BUT I HAD A PERFORMANCE TO DELIVER THAT EVENING, AND A CROWD OF FAITHFUL ADMIRERS AWAITING ME.



A BIG SMILE FOR THE FOLKS PLEASE, PENELOPE. AHHA.

MY HANDS WAVERED BRIEFLY IN THE COURSE OF SEVERAL MINOR TRICKS, AS THEY HAD NOT IN MORE THAN A YEAR. YET, I COVERED MY MISTAKES ADMIRABLY IF I SO SAY, AND THRUST INTO MY FINALE WITH UNUSUAL VIGOR AND CONFIDENCE.

THE GIRLS WERE PAINFULLY COURTEOUS THAT NIGHT, NO DOUBT SENSING SOMETHING AMISS IN MY TIMING. THEY RETAINED STIFF THOUGH SOMEWHAT QUIVERING FEAR-FRAUGHT SMILES FOR THE SAKE OF OUR ATTENDING PATRONS. THEY REMAINED TRUE TROOPERS IN EVERY SENSE OF THE WORD.

I DID NOT REALIZE HOW PROFESSIONAL THE SISTERS TRULY WERE UNTIL I CONCLUDED SAWING GERTRUDE IN TWO AND STEPPED TO PENELOPE'S SABRE-ENCRUSTED CASE TO REMOVE THE DEADLY SWORDPOINTS!



HER SOFT FLESH HAD BEEN PUNCTURED A HALF-DOZEN TIMES WHERE MY BLADES HAD ENTERED THE CONTAINER. THE GIRL WAS DEAD.



FEARFUL FOR GERTRUDE'S LIFE AS WELL, I FRANTICALLY TORE AWAY THE SIDES OF THE CASKET-LIKE BOX IN WHICH SHE LAY... ONLY TO DISCOVER MY WORST FEARS REALIZED.



ON NEARING THE CABINET MY FOOT GLIDED THROUGH A WET, STICKY SUBSTANCE ON THE STAGE FLOOR.

LOOKING DOWN, I WAS HORRIFIED TO SEE A RICH, DEEP RED OOZE SLIPPING FROM THE CRACKS OF THE CABINET'S DOOR.

I LOOKED TO PENELOPE'S FACE. HER EYES WERE GLAZED AND STARING DEEPLY THROUGH ME, WHILE HER THEATRICAL SMILE STILL LAY PLASTERED TO HER FACE.

INSTINCTIVELY, AND WITH MUCH CONCERN, I PULLED THE FIRST SABRE FROM THE POOR GIRL'S BOX. THE TIP WAS COATED WITH A THICK FILM OF MY BEAUTIFUL ASSISTANT'S BLOOD.



GERTRUDE HAD BEEN SEVERED COMPLETELY IN TWO. AND LIKE THE POLISHED PERFORMER SHE HAD BECOME, NEVER UTTERED A WORD DURING HER TORTUROUS DEMISE.



I FEAR THAT MY OWN PERFORMANCE WAS NOT AS COMMENDABLE AS THAT OF MY ASSISTANTS THAT NIGHT. I AM TOLD THAT I WENT HORRIBLY AND IRREVERSI-BLY INSANE BEFORE A VAST AUDIENCE OF THE SOCIALLY ELITE.

THE OCCURRENCES OF THAT HORRIBLE EVENING RUINED THE MAGNIFICENT SMITHDODDER FOR LIFE. MY VAST ESTATE AND UNLIMITED WEALTH HAVE BEEN CONFISCATED BY THE ROYAL COURTS, AND I HAVE NEVER AGAIN ATTEMPTED TO PERFORM A SINGLE FEAT OF MAGIC.

I SIT WITHIN MY DARK PADDED CELL CHANTING OVER AND OVER THE NAME OF THE ONLY CREATURE WHO CAN ALTER THE STREAM OF MISFORTUNES WHICH HAVE BEFALLEN ME.

BUT I FEAR THAT MY PITIABLE PLEAS WILL NEVER EVEN BE HEARD... BY THE OFFENDED SPIRIT OF MR. S. PAVLOV-FREUD.

ALEDO WAS A THIEF. IF SUCH THINGS CAN BE DEFINED THIS WAY, MY FRIEND ALEDO, WAS AN EXCELLENT THIEF.

EL CID

THE DEMON'S TREASURE

THIS THIEF HAD HIS DARK WAYS AND MEANS OF SENSING WHERE FABLED TREASURES LAY. THUS, THIS DISMAL JOURNEY WAS TO BE ALEDO'S GREATEST ADVENTURE TO FIND THE TREASURE OF A DEMON.

MANY DAYS AND NIGHTS OF PERILOUS TREK HAD BROUGHT THE NIGHT SHADE THIEF UNTO FORGOTTEN REALMS... UNTO A MOUNTAIN OF MYSTERY AND SIMPERING TERROR, ALEDO CAME AT LAST TO THE CAVE WHEREIN HORROR DWELT.



FOR ONE THOUSAND YEARS THE DEMON'S TREASURE HAD BEEN GUARDED BY SOME MANNER OF EVIL WRAITH, PERHAPS... THE DEMON HIMSELF.



BUT EVEN DEMONS DIE EVENTUALLY. THOUGHT WILEY ALEDO, THUS THE TREASURE LIES GUARDED BY BUT MYTHS AND LEGENDS. AND THIEVES WERE NOT GIVEN TO SUPERSTITIONS.



MADNESS INDEED. THE MADNESS OF A LEGEND COMING TO LIFE!



ALTHOUGH WRETCHED ALEDO WAS A **POOR** EXAMPLE OF
DECENCY HE WAS VALUED **COUSIN** AND **CONSORT** AND **SPY**
FOR KING ALPHONSO. MANY TIMES HAD LOWLY ALEDO
SAVED THE DAY AT SPANISH COURT BY HIS WANDERING
EYES AND EAR, WE CALLED ALEDO, NOT THIEF, BUT
FRIEND. AGAIN THE KING **NEEDED** HIS **SERVICES**.
I WENT TO BRING HIM BACK, EL CID THUS **JOURNEYED**
INTO THE LANDS OF **MADNESS**!



EVEN AS MY SQUIRE AND I LOOKED UPON A **DREAD CASTLE** IN THE DISTANCE, VIOLENT WINDS BEGAN TO BLOW!

THE EARTH SEEMED TO **UPHEAVE** AND THE SKY ABOVE US WAS **PARTED!** AND BEHOLD! A **HOST OF TERROR** FELL FROM THE NETHER UPON US! GHASTLY VISAGES OF **MONSTROUS WARRIORS** AND REPTILIAN STEED BORE DIRECTLY UPON CID.

I TURNED TO MY SQUIRE! HE WAS **GONE!** I WAS **ALONE!**

WHETHER THE EARTH HAD SENT HIS BODY INTO A CREVICE OR HIS **NERVE** HAD FALTERED, I FACED THE **FROTHING KNIGHTS OF HELL ALONE**, GRIPPED I MY SWORD AND GAVE THEM **VOICE OF MY BATTLECRY!**

AND THUS FELL AMONGST THEM, THOUGH THESE VISIONS BE BUT WRAITHS, THEY **BLED** AND **VOMITED** RUPTURED INTESTINES AS MY SWORD SANG A **FUNERAL DIRGE**.

WHIRLING, WRITHING, BILE-SPEWING TITANS SQUIRMED LIKE OZZING **SALTED SNAILS** AT THE BAY OF CID'S BLOOD-SLICKENED WRATH! THEY WERE **LOATHE** TO STAY TO BRAVE THE **FIGHT!**

THUS AS QUICKLY AS IT HAD
BEGUN, IT WAS **ENDED**.
PILES OF FESTERING, PUTRE-
SCENT POURING GOBLINS LAY
QUIVERING BENEATH MY
MOUNT'S HOOVES.

DESCENDING FROM THAT
UNHOLY PILE OF NEW **SLAIN**
DEAD I CONTINUED ON
MY SEARCH FOR A THIEF.



ALTHOUGH I HAD NOW FOLLOWED
THE FOLLY STREWN TRACKS OF
WRETCHED ALEDO BUT ONE HUNDRED
MILES, I WONDERED IF TRULY I WAS
YET IN SPAIN OR... IN THE LANDS
BEYOND THE WINDOWS OF **SANITY**
EVEN THE COUNTRYSIDE TOOK SHAPE
OF **HELL INCARNATE**.



WHAT **DO** YE
HERE IN THESE
LANDS UNCLEAN,
SOLDIER? HAVE
YE COME TO **LOSE**
THY **SOUL** TO THE
VERY **EVIL**
AROUND YOU?

OR HAVE YE
LOST YOUR
WAY... OR
COME TO **ROB**?

NEITHER.
I SEEK
A THIEF!



THEN I **WELCOME** YOU
TO THE **LAND** OF THIEVES,
MURDERERS, WHORES,
MAGICIANS AND ALL THINGS
REBUKED BY GOD...
CURSE HIS NAME!

THIS THIEF, ALEDO...
HE IS A PART TIME **SPY**
IN BEHALF OF THE KING'S
ARMIES. WE **NEED** HIS
HELP. BUT ALEDO HAS
COME THIS WAY ON A
PERSONAL JOURNEY.





TO ROB THE
FABLED TREASURES
OF THE ANCIENT, EH?

YES... SINCE WE SPEAK IN
POINTED TERMS, ALEDO WAS
DRUNK THE NIGHT HE BEGAN HIS
TRAVELS. HE SAID HE SOUGHT THE...
UMMM... THE **DEMON'S TREASURE**
OR SOME SUCH **MYTHICAL TROVE**.



I SUSPECT IF I **FIND** THE
DEMON'S TREASURE, I WILL
FIND THERE MY **THIEF**.

THEN... BE PREPARED TO
DARE THE **UNKNOWN**. FOR
TO STAY FOR LONG IN REGIONS
THUS CURSED PROVOKES A
MIND TO INESCAPABLE
MADNESS!



FOR NOTHING IS AS IT **SEEMS** HERE!
THIS IS THE PLACE OF **DEMENTIA**, A
HAUNTED WORLD OF HALF WROUGHT
WRAITHS AND SHADES OF BLOOD
BLACK NIGHT!

FIND THY THIEF THEN
SOLDIER! AND BE **GONE!**

FOR HERE A
KINDLY **OLD**
BEGGAR MAN
MIGHT TRULY BE...

...A WIZARD
KING!

THUS THE BEGGAR MAN WAS *GONE*, AND I LEFT ALONE TO FIND THE DEMON AND MY THIEF.



BUT... THERE WAS *INDEED*, THARRYING TO BE DONE.



ODD CIRCUMSTANCES WERE COMMONPLACE TO SOLDIERS.



SWEETNESS THERE WAS *LITTLE* OF IN THE WORLD, THUS, WHERE 'TIS *FOUND*, THERE IS IT TAKEN, AS *SWEETLY* AS GIVEN.



I REALIZED THE WINSOME GIRL WAS *PUT* THERE BY SOME HAND TO *KEEP* ME FROM MY *TASK*. IT GAVE ME *SUBTLE PLEASURE* TO TAKE THE BAIT, EAT IT AND SWIM AWAY FROM THE UNKNOWN FISHER. SECRETLY I WAS *RELIEVED* SHE HAD NOT TURNED INTO A SERPENT AS EVEN I *PENETRATED* HER WARMTH.



WAIT, MY LOVER SOLDIER... WHERE WOULDST THOU BE *GOING*? *STAY WITH ME*... STAY WITH ME AND I SHALL MAKE THEE AN OBJECT OF *PASSION'S ADORATION*.

WHAT WE HAVE SHARED IS SWEET IN MY MEMORY NOW. I WILL KEEP IT SO. I HAVE *ROADS TO TRAVEL*.



TO FIND THE *DEMON'S TREASURE*? IT IS ONLY A PLACE OF *LEGEND*, NOT REAL, BUT... IT IS SAID THAT THE TREASURE IS OWNED BY THE *WIZARD OF CASTLE DEL ILIBRE*. A *FEAR-SOME* AND *FELL* PLACE.

SOON, I FOUND A TINY HAMLET WHEREIN PEOPLE SEEMINGLY *NORMAL* DWELT. I TOLD THEM I WAS THE *CID* AND THEY GAVE ME DUE RESPECT AND *INFORMATION*.



DISREGARDING THE FEW *WHISPERED* WARNINGS, I HURRIED ON AND SOON CAME UNTO THE CASTLE OF THE WIZARD. THE *SAME* I HAD SEEN WHEN I LOST MY SQUIRE.

HOARFROST CHILLED MY COURAGE AT BUT THE SIGHT.

A *SHIELD OF CHALLENGE* HUNG BEFORE THE FORTRESS...! I *SILENTLY* PASSED IT BY.

NO NEED OF ANNOUNCING MY APPROACH.

SO STILL THE AIR, HOT, UNBREATHABLE. A *STENCH!* AS IF I BREATHE THE EXHALED AIR OF SOME GREAT BEAST!

A *PROPHETIC* ANALOGY FOR SOMETHING HUGE NOW MOVED IN THE MIST...!

QUIET! HOLD, HORSE! HOLD! WHAT GRIPS YOU?

NEEEEEEEEEEE

THE SOUND OF MY HORSE'S PANICKED NICKERING PROVE *THE THING FORTH* FROM THE FOGS! 'T WAS *THIS ONE* WHO'S EXHALATIONS I BREATHE IN!


WAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
DRAGON! SLEEPING *FITFULLY* UPON A BED OF BONES OF THOSE WHO HAD CLANGORED THE *CHALLENGE SHIELD!*




THE FELL BEAST WAS CAUGHT UNAWARES AND HAD JUST GROGGILY ROLLED TO ITS FEET TO TAKE FLIGHT UPON LEATHERN WINGS.

THIS ONE WOULD NOT KEEP ME FROM THE CASTLE! BEFORE THE LUMBERING MONSTER COULD STRIKE OUT, I DID!

NOW! FIND HOME, MY SWORD! AND DIE GREAT WORM!




THE WRITHING COILS OF THE BEAST AT LAST WERE STILL.



I ENTERED THE MAD CASTLE. A YAWNING MAW Gaping TO WELCOME EL CID. STANDING BENEATH IRON GATED TEETH WAS...

...THE BEGGAR KING!

AND YOU MUST SURELY REALIZE THAT THE DEMON GUARDS THE TREASURE WHICH BELONGS TO ME.



I WOULD THAT YE HAD LET ME PUT UP MY WATCHDOG RATHER THAN YOU KILLING HIM, SIR KNIGHT. BUT... A BRAVE DEED FINDS REWARDS.




I AM SORRY BUT I FEAR YOUR DOG HAD TOO FIERCE A BITE.


VERY MUCH. YOU MUST GIVE ME GARDENING TIPS.

SO, YOU FIND I AM NO BEGGAR MAN. I AM THE WIZARD OF THE CASTLE DEL ILIBRE!

WELL, COME AND WE'LL TALK. DO YOU ENJOY MY GARDEN?



SO, I NOW BELIEVE YOU ARE TRULY THE CID. IT IS GOOD TO HAVE YOU ENTER UNTO MY HOME AND I BELIEVE THAT YOU ARE NOT OUT TO PILFER MY TREASURE.



ONLY TO BRING HOME MY SPY. I WILL RETURN EVERY LAST SPECK OF GOLD HE HAS STOLEN I ASSURE YOU.





STRUGGLE THOUGH I MUST
AGAINST THESE UNRULY **MIND-
WRAITHS**, I WAS NOT TRULY
AFEARED... FOR I KNEW THAT
SOON THEY WOULD **DISPERSE**.
WHILE THE DEMON-LORD'S
DEATH VISIONS WOULD BE
HIS **LAST!** AGAIN A PROPHECY
FROM **EL CID**.

ILL THOUGH HE FELT, THE
WIZARD **SMILED** AS HE
GAZED UPON THE RICHLY
WOVEN **CARPET** UNDER
HIS FEET, FOR **EL CID** HAS
WALKED **UNSUSPECTING...**



...UPON A CARPET WOVEN, WARP AND WOOF, OF **HUMAN
SOULS**... SOULS OF THOSE WHO HAD COME TO STEAL
THE **DEMON'S TREASURE** AND HAD FALLEN UNDER
THE DEMON'S **SPELL**. FROM THIS CARPET THE
SORCERER DREW HIS **POWER**.



A SUDDEN SPASM OF
PAIN WRACKED THE
WIZARD...



...AND HE FELL, **DYING!**

AND FALLING, WATCHED THE CARPET
WRITHE BENEATH HIM, AND SAW
THE **SOULS** OF THOSE **IMPRISONED**
THERE **REACH OUT...**



...EAGER TO **SNATCH** HIS **SOUL**...



...AND CARRY IT TO
DARKEST **HELL!**

REMEMBER THAT **MOVIE** OF A COUPLE YEARS AGO? THE ONE WHERE A **DEMON** INVADDED THE BODY OF A LITTLE GIRL? IT TORE HER UP PRETTY BAD, MADE HER **THROW** GROWN MEN OUT WINDOWS, **FLOAT** AROUND THE ROOM AND SPIT **GREEN SLIME** ON EVEN GREENER ACTORS.

IT WAS CALLED **THE EXORCIST**.

BEFORE THAT MOTION PICTURE, NO ONE REALLY KNEW WHAT AN **EXORCIST** WAS.

MORDECAI MOONDOG

SINCE THE MOVIE'S RELEASE, HOWEVER, THERE HAS BEEN A **RASH OF DEMONIC POSSESSIONS**. ALMOST ALL CAUSED BY MOVIE-GOERS' OVERACTIVE IMAGINATIONS.

I, MYSELF, HAVE CAPITALIZED ON THE **EXORCISM** CRAZE. I REALIZE FROM IT A HEALTHIER LIVELIHOOD THAN I COULD EARN AS A SOUTHERN BAPTIST MINISTER IN SAY TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA.

BEFORE THE MOTION PICTURE THE WORLD WAS SANER. **FEW** BELIEVED IN **DEVILS, DEMONS** AND **DRAGONS**. I HAD LITTLE DIRECTION IN LIFE, AND EVEN **LESS** PURPOSE.

IT HAS ALLOWED ME TO DIVERT OTHERWISE **USELESS** NATURAL TALENT TOWARDS A **MONETARILY** REWARDING END.

I AM, FOR A **PRICE**, YOUR HUMBLE SERVANT, **MORDECAI MOONDOG, EXORCIST!**

NICE NIGHT FOR A **HAUNTING**, ISN'T IT?

MR. MOONDOG, I PRESUME?

A LOT OF JOHNNY-COME-LATELY **EXORCISTS** HAVE ARRIVED ON THE SCENE. WELL-MEANING **PRIESTS** HARBORING HOPELESS DELUSIONS OF **SAINTHOOD**. OUT-AND-OUT PITCH-TENT **JIGABOOS**. PRANCING THROUGH MOTIONS OF GOD-FEARSOME **FAITH HEALING**.

I RECEIVED YOUR LETTER, MR. VON DAEMON, AND CAME AS QUICKLY AS I COULD.

I'VE A CERTAIN SKEPTICISM OF YOUR CLAIM TO A MANSE OCCUPIED BY SEVEN DEMONIC SPIRITS, HOWEVER

IT'S RARE THAT TWO OR MORE ENTITIES HAUNT A DWELLING SIMULTANEOUSLY, YET--!

YET, YOU CAME, MR. MOONDOG.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE HERE, YOU WILL BELIEVE, JUST AS I NOW BELIEVE, THIS CASTLE IS POSSESSED... AND BY PRECISELY THE NUMBER OF SOULS INDICATED!

YOU SEE, MR. MOONDOG, IT HAS BEEN MY FAMILY'S CASTLE FOR CENTURIES. I CAME UPON IT ONLY RECENTLY, WHEN A DISTANT COUSIN, THE LAST TRUE VON DAEMON PASSED ON.

SINCE LIVING HERE, I HAVE BEEN TROUBLED BY THE UNEASINESS WHICH PREVAILS WITHIN THESE WALLS.

THE CASTLE IS EMPTY, SAVE FOR MYSELF. YET AT PRECISELY SUNDOWN EACH NIGHT, FOOTFALLS MAY BE HEARD THROUGHOUT THE MANY ROOMS.

HIDEOUS SCREAMS AND GROANS OF PURE TERROR CONCLUDE IN A CRESCENDO OF RATTLING CHAINS, FLYING FURNITURE AND SLAMMING DOORS.

I HAVE DISCOVERED SEVERAL VOLUMES OF FAMILY HISTORY WHICH ATTEMPT TO EXPLAIN THE HAUNTINGS... CHRONICLES OF THE INSANITY BY WHICH MY ANCESTORS LIVED.

EACH EXHIBITED A PASSION FOR THE MACABRE.

I FEAR, MR. MOONDOG THAT THE MANSE ITSELF MAY HAVE BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ODD BEHAVIOR THAT HAS TAKEN PLACE WITHIN ITS WALLS.

IF IT IS NOT EXORCISED IMMEDIATELY, I HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE THAT I, TOO, WILL EMBRACE THE MORBID IDIOSYNCRASIES OF MY FOREBEARS.

IF YOU CAN TELL ME A LITTLE OF YOUR ANCESTRY, WE MIGHT GET TO THE ROOT OF YOUR TROUBLES, MR. VON DAEMON.

THE TURBULENCE SEEMS TO HAVE BEGUN WITH LORD SIGFRID VON DAEMON.

HE AND TWELVE OTHER MEMBERS OF A SATANIC COVEN USED THE SECLUDED MOOR SURROUNDING THIS CASTLE FOR DEVIL WORSHIP

AFTER ONE BRIEF, VIOLENT RITE, LORD SIGFRID REPORTEDLY ACQUIRED THE ABILITY TO TRANSFORM HIS TWISTED SOUL INTO THE SHAPE OF A HIDEOUS DEMON.

WHILE IN THIS GNOME-LIKE FORM, SIGFRID DISPLAYED INCREDIBLY FEARSOME POWERS. HE LITERALLY DISSOLVED HIS COVEN SO THAT HIS NEWFOUND POWERS MIGHT REMAIN HIS SECRET ALONE.

THE ELIMINATION OF HIS COVEN WAS ONLY SIGFRID FIRST ACT OF VIOLENCE.

AFTER THAT, THE NEARBY VILLAGE WAS PLAGUED WITH A SERIES OF KIDNAPPINGS. ALL THE VICTIMS, YOUNG, BEAUTIFUL WOMEN.

THE FIRST ABDUCTED GIRL WAS HELGA GOEHRING. THE DEMON LEAPED THROUGH HER SECOND-STORY BEDROOM WINDOW, AND CARRIED THE SCREAMING GIRL INTO THE NIGHT.

AT THIS UNHOLY ALTAR, HE INDULGED IN UNSPEAKABLE DEPRAVITIES, THEN HE SACRIFICED HER TO HIS GOD OF DARKNESS.

SHORTLY AFTER, SIGFRID ERECTED THIS CASTLE. A MONUMENT TO THOSE PITIABLE SOULS HE HAD BETRAYED... WHO HAD SO IGNORANTLY HELPED HIM ATTAIN DEMONKIND.

SEVEN
MORE GIRLS
DISAPPEARED

ENRAGED VILLAGERS,
LED BY A **BISHOP HUMMLER**,
FOLLOWED THE DEMON'S
TRAIL. IT LED TO THIS
CASTLE.

THE BISHOP, A
STRONG, RELIGIOUS
MAN, HAD **DESTROYED**
THE DEMON. YET, THE
BATTLE **BROKE** HIM.

HE **DIED** LATER
THAT NIGHT, AFTER
CONFESSING HIS **UNEASE**. HE FEARED
THE **SPIRIT** OF LORD
SIGFRID MIGHT YET
LINGER WITHIN
THE CASTLE.

AND IT MAY
HAVE WELL
BEEN **SO**.

FOR IN TRUTH,
ONE OF THE GIRLS
LORD SIGFRID ABDUCTED,
HAD **NOT** BEEN
SLAIN.

THE MAN-DEMON
HAD EMBRACED HER AS
HIS **MATE**. SHE WAS
WITH **CHILD** WHEN THE
BISHOP STORMED THE
CASTLE... LURKING IN
THE DUNGEON WHILE
SIGFRID WAS
DESTROYED.

SHE HID THERE FOR
MONTHS AFTERWARDS,
FEARING THE VILLAGERS
WOULD RETURN AND **KILL**
HER FOR THE VILE
CREATURE SHE HAD
BECOME.

ALONE IN THAT RANK,
MUSTY CELLAR, THE GIRL
BORE A **SON**, THE
SECOND LORD OF VON
DAEMON CASTLE...

THE BISHOP
BURST IN. HE
FOUND THE DEMON-
LORD HUNCHED OVER
HIS LATEST VICTIM.
A FIERCE **BATTLE**
ENSUED... AND THE
BISHOP **SLEW**
HIM ON THIS
VERY SPOT.

THE DEMON'S
DEATH-STAINS
REMAIN TO THIS
DAY.

... **PIETER**
VON DAEMON.

THE **DEMON**
SEED FROM
LORD SIGFRID
PASSED **STRANGE**
TRAITS ONTO THE
SON... TRAITS WHICH
LAY DORMANT IN
HIS EARLY YEARS.

THE FRIGHTENED
GIRL RAISED THE
BOY IN THE **DUNGEON**
AND SLOWLY SHE
WENT **INSANE**.

HIS
STORY
IS MORE
PITIABLE
THAN HIS
FATHER'S.

PIETER GREW
UP KNOWING **NO**
HUMAN VOICE
BUT THAT OF
HIS OWN MAD
MOTHER.

THERE IS NO
TELLING WHAT
DEPRAVITIES
OCCURRED BETWEEN
MOTHER AND SON
IN THE SEVENTEEN
YEARS THEY SPENT
ALONE HERE.

WHEN HIS MOTHER
DIED, PIETER WAS
FORCED TO EITHER
LEAVE THESE WALLS
OR DIE FROM LACK
OF FOOD. HERE HIS
TALE **TRULY** BEGINS.

DESPITE HIS FORMATIVE ENVIRONMENT
PIETER GREW INTO A STRAIGHT, **HANDSOME**
MAN. HE LEFT THESE QUARTERS WITH
ONLY TWO UNUSUAL TASTES.

FIRST... AN UNLIMITED DESIRE FOR
FEMALE COMPANIONSHIP. AND **SECOND**
AN INSATIABLE HUNGER FOR FRESH,
WARM, MAMMALIAN **BLOOD**.

ONE CAN ONLY SPECULATE HOW
THE YOUTH CAME BY **EITHER**
LUST. HIS MOTHER, NO DOUBT
HAD SHOWN HIM THE PLEASURES
OF **LOVE**. WHILE THE **DEMON**
SEED OF HIS FATHER SURELY
ACCOUNTED FOR HIS PECULIAR
NUTRITIONAL NEEDS.

WITH THE DEATH OF HIS MOTHER PIETER TIMIDLY **CREPT** FROM THESE PASSAGES.

WHILE MIRACULOUSLY HANDSOME, THE YOUTH WAS **PALE-SKINNED** AND **HYGIENICALLY** RETARDED. AN OLD VILLAGER FOUND HIM FORAGING FOR THE SMALL GAME WHOSE BLOOD HE SO DESPERATELY **NEEDED**.

HE TOOK PIETER INTO HIS HOME, AND CARED FOR HIM AS HIS OWN SON.

PIETER WAS WITH THE OLD MAN'S FAMILY ONLY A SHORT TIME, WHEN THE FIRST LOCAL FARM ANIMALS WERE FOUND HANGING BY THEIR HINDQUARTERS, THEIR THROATS CUT, AND **DRAINED OF BLOOD**.

THEN, A GIRL FROM THE VILLAGE WAS DISCOVERED HANGING FROM A SECLUDED TREE. **SHE**, HOWEVER, HAD BEEN PHYSICALLY **MOLESTED** BEFORE SHE WAS SLAUGHTERED.

THE OLD MAN, WORRIED AFTER HIS OWN DAUGHTER DISAPPEARED, HE WAS WALKING NEAR THE **CASTLE VON DAEMON** WHEN HE HEARD HER PITIFUL SCREAMS. HE FOUND HER **HANGING** BY HER FEET IN THE DUNGEON.

PIETER WAS KNEELING BESIDE HER NUDE BODY, ABOUT TO SLIT HER THROAT WITH A RAZOR SHARP **AXE BLADE**.

THE BOY TRIED TO FLEE, BUT THE OLD MAN **SLEW** PIETER WITH HIS OWN AXE.

ONLY AFTER HE CUT HIS DAUGHTER DOWN DID HE NOTICE THE BLOOD-DRAINED BODIES OF FOUR **OTHER** GIRLS.

WHEN QUESTIONED, THE DAUGHTER TEARFULLY ADMITTED GOING TO THE MANSE WITH **PIETER**.

SHE MADE LOVE TO HIM BEFORE HE SPANG UPON HER WITH A FAR **DIFFERENT** HUNGER IN HIS EYES.

THE GIRL WAS IN HER THIRD MONTH OF **PREGNANCY** WHEN HER FATHER SENT HER AWAY TO A **CONVENT**.

THE **CHILD** SHE BORE WAS **IVAR**, THE **THIRD** VON DAEMON TO BE CURSED BY THIS CASTLE.

IVAR WAS A VERY DIFFERENT VON DAEMON. HE REMAINED WITH HIS MOTHER AT THE CONVENT UNTIL HE WAS **FOUR**...

...WHEN HE WAS TAKEN UNDER TUTELAGE BY THE NOTED SURGEON, **DR. HANTZ CONREID**.

ABNORMALITIES IN THE BOY'S PERSONALITY DID NOT MANIFEST THEMSELVES IN HIS EARLY LIFE. HE SEEMED QUITE **NORMAL**.

HE GREW INTO AN EXCELLENT **SCHOLAR**, ATTENDED THE FINEST UNIVERSITIES, AND AT THE SIDE OF HIS GUARDIAN, BECAME THE MOST BRILLIANT **SURGEON** IN EUROPE.

IVAR MARRIED **DR. CONREID'S** DAUGHTER, WHOM HE LOVED DEARLY. **TOGETHER**, THE THREE RETIRED FOR STUDIES TO THE SECLUSION OF IVAR'S FAMILY **MANSE**.

IVAR WATCHED DR. CONREID AND HIS OWN WIFE GROW **OLDER**, WHILE HE REMAINED A VIGOROUS **YOUNG MAN**. AFTER ALL, HIS GRANDFATHER'S DEMON BLOOD FLOWED IN HIS VEINS. IVAR CONCLUDED, AFTER EXTENSIVE TESTS, THAT HE WAS **IMMORTAL**.

HIS OWN **FATHER**, NO DOUBT, HAD THE SAME INHERENT ADVANTAGE, BUT WAS SLAIN TOO EARLY IN LIFE TO HAVE **NOTICED** IT.

IVAR, WITH THE AID OF DR. CONREID, TRIED DESPERATELY TO **DUPLICATE** THOSE ELEMENTS OF HIS BLOOD WHICH **RETARDED** AGING. THEIR WORK WAS TO **NO AVAIL**.

YET IVAR PERSISTED IN TRYING TO PASS HIS IMMORTALITY ON TO OTHERS. THEN VILLAGERS BROUGHT HIM AN **OLD MAN**...WHOSE **LEGS** HAD BEEN **MANGLED** IN A CARRIAGE ACCIDENT.

IVAR HIT UPON THE IDEA OF **EXCHANGING** HIS PERFECT LEGS FOR THOSE OF THE MANGLED **OLD PEASANT**.

THE LIMBS CONTAINING IVAR'S **IMMORTALITY FACTOR** MIGHT INDEED **PASS** THE RESISTANCE TO AGE ON TO THE OLD MAN.

DR. CONREID OPERATED IMMEDIATELY. WHEN HE WAS FINISHED, THE OLD MAN WALKED AWAY WITH HEALTHY, **VIGOROUS** LIMBS.

AND IVAR SUSPECTED THAT HIS OWN SUPERIOR SYSTEM WOULD **MEND** THE CRIPPLED LEGS THAT WERE TO BE GRAFTED ONTO HIS **BODY**.

AND IVAR WAS CONFINED TO A WHEELCHAIR WITH THE LEGS OF A **CRIPPLED** OLD MAN.

NO ONE **KNEW** IF THE OPERATION GRANTED THE OLD MAN IMMORTALITY. FOR SOON AFTER, HE WAS MURDERED BY A YOUNG FELLOW HE HAD BEATEN IN A FOOTRACE.

THE TWISTED LIMBS OF IVAR **NEVER** MENDED. HE WAS CONFINED TO A WHEELCHAIR AND NEVER AGAIN LEFT HIS CASTLE.

UNDAUNTED, HE **CONTINUED** HIS EXPERIMENTS. DR. CONREID GRAFTED **MORE** OF HIS BODY PARTS ONTO AILING PATIENTS.

THE OLD SURGEON **REPLACED** IVAR'S ARMS, KIDNEYS, LUNGS, HEART, AN EYE AND AN EAR.

THE PITIFUL, IMMORTAL **IVAR** WAS REDUCED TO A JIGSAWED COLLECTION OF **SCAR TISSUE**.

AND TO MAKE MATTERS **WORSE**, HIS REPLACED ORGANS WERE **AGING**. ONLY THOSE ORIGINALLY HIS **OWN** STAYED YOUTHFUL... IMMORTAL.

WHEN **DR. CONREID** DIED, NO MORE TRANSPLANTS COULD BE MADE. BUT THEN THERE WAS HARDLY ANYTHING LEFT FOR IVAR TO **GIVE**.

THEY **DID** SO.

THE BODY HAD **DIED**... YET IVAR'S HEAD, ALL THAT REMAINED HIS **OWN**, WAS UNDENIABLY **IMMORTAL**.

THEN IVAR WAS THE **LAST** VON DAEMON?

NOT SO, MY FRIEND.

EARLY IN THEIR MARRIAGE, **IVAR'S** WIFE BORE HIM A SON **AND** A DAUGHTER.

WHEN IVAR'S WIFE DIED, HE WAS LEFT **ALONE** IN THE CASTLE, A TOTALLY **USELESS** BODY, OF TWISTED, DISEASED, LIFELESS LIMBS.

IT WAS **MONTHS** LATER WHEN TWO HUNTERS HEARD **MOANS** EMANATING FROM THE MANSE, THEY DISCOVERED IVAR'S PARTIALLY **DE-COMPOSED** BODY SPRAWLED IN HIS WHEELCHAIR.

ATOP THE BODY, WAS IVAR'S STILL YOUTHFUL, HANDSOME, **LIVING** HEAD... PITIABLY **BEGGING** THE HUNTERS TO END HIS MISERY WITH A **BULLET** IN THE **BRAIN**.

THE FIRST BORN OF THE TWO CHILDREN WAS **ROALD**.

BECAUSE OF CERTAIN PECULIARITIES, THE CHILDREN WERE SENT TO A SPECIAL HOME AT AN EARLY AGE.

THE FAMILY BLOOD FLOWED STRONGLY IN ROALD'S VEINS. LIKE HIS GREAT GRANDFATHER, HE COULD **WILL** HIMSELF INTO THE SHAPE OF A SMALL DEMON CREATURE... WITH SOME **DIFFERENCES**.

A THIN LAYER OF MATTED **FUR** WOULD COVER ROALD'S BODY AS IT SHRANK IN SIZE.

WHEN THE TRANSFORMATION WAS COMPLETE, HE LOOKED MORE **ANIMAL** THAN HUMAN. HE HAD AN ANIMAL'S TASTE FOR RAW, DEAD **MEAT**, AS WELL...

...PREFERABLY **HUMAN MEAT**!

ROALD'S PARENTS PAID EXTRAVAGANT FEES TO THE SPECIAL SCHOOL THAT RAISED THEIR CHILDREN. IT WAS A SCHOOL OF TWO. **ROALD** AND HIS **SISTER** WERE THE ONLY WARDS.

THE SCHOOL CATERED TO THE CHILDREN'S **NEEDS** AND TAUGHT THEM WELL TO **MASK** ANY "PECULIARITIES."

BECAUSE OF HIS EDUCATION, ROALD WAS ABLE TO LIVE MOST OF HIS EARLY LIFE UNDETECTED FOR WHAT HE WAS... A **FLESH-EATING DEMON**.

ROALD AND HIS SISTER HAD GROWN INTO ADULTHOOD WHEN THEY HEARD OF THEIR FATHER'S DEATH. IT WAS THEN THAT THEY RETURNED TO THE FAMILY MANSE.

ONCE WITHIN CASTLE VON DAEMON, ROALD COULD NOT CONTROL HIS URGE FOR **LONG**. HE RESIDED HERE FOR THREE SHORT YEARS WHEN **IT** AND ITS VIEW OF THIS VILLAGE **CEMETERY** PROVED HIS **UNDOING**.

ROALD'S HUNGER BECAME AN **OBSESSION**. AT NIGHT, HE WOULD **TRANSFORM** HIMSELF INTO THE SMALL, IMMENSELY POWERFUL DEVIL-BEING. HE'D **LEAP** FROM THE CASTLE TURRETS ONTO ONE OF THESE INVITING **GRAVES**...

...AND, **CLAWING** AT THE DIRT WITH HIS BARE HANDS, WOULD UNEARTH A CASKET... AND BEGIN TO **CHEW** ON WHATEVER APPETIZING MORSEL IT PRESENTED.



IT CONTINUED FOR YEARS. HIS SISTER, **UNABLE** OR **UNWILLING** TO HALT ROALD'S ACTIONS.

IT WAS NIGHT AND STORMING WHEN ROALD LEAPED FROM THE CASTLE WALLS, FOR THE **FINAL** TIME, AND BEGAN **TEARING** AT AN OLD VILLAGER'S GRAVE.

THE CASKET CONTAINED, TO ROALD'S HORROR, A **TOTALLY DECOMPOSED** CORPSE... WITH **HANDS** AS PERFECTLY **PRESERVED**... AS YOUNG AND POWERFUL... AS THOSE OF A TWENTY YEAR OLD.

SUDDENLY, THE HANDS **RIPPED** LOOSE FROM THE ROTTED CORPSE, AND **SPRANG** FOR POOR ROALD'S THROAT.

THE HANDS, OF COURSE, WERE ROALD'S **FATHER'S**... IVAR'S HANDS, GRAFTED ONTO A VILLAGER WHO HAD **SEVERED** HIS OWN.

THE STRONG FINGERS DID NOT RELEASE THEIR GRIP UNTIL **LIFE** HAD BEEN TOTALLY **STRANGLING** FROM THE FLESH-EATING DEMON.

THE HANDS THEN **SCAMPERED** INTO THE WOODS, THE MUSCULAR FINGERS RACING IN A MAD PARODY OF HUMAN LEGS.

IVAR'S MINDLESS HANDS COULD NOT REALIZE WHO THEY WERE **KILLING**. THEY SIMPLY **GRABBED** AT MOVEMENT AND CLUNG DESPERATELY TILL ALL MOTION **STOPPED**.



ILONA **BURIED** ROALD IN THE VERY CASKET HE HAD UNEARTHED. SHE CONCEALED HIS HIGHLY UNUSUAL DEMISE, FOR SHE HERSELF WAS GIFTED WITH VON DAEMON BLOOD, AND HAD MUCH TO **HIDE**.

THE HANDS WERE **IMMORTAL**... AND PROBABLY, ALONG WITH MANY OTHER PARTS OF IVAR'S BODY, **CREEPING** ABOUT SOMEWHERE IN THE WORLD TODAY.

AND WHAT OF ROALD'S **SISTER**?

IMMORTALITY WAS ILONA'S. YET SHE DID NOT HAVE HER BROTHER'S ABILITY TO **CHANGE** SHAPE.

AND BECAUSE OF THAT, SHE **ENVIED** HIM.

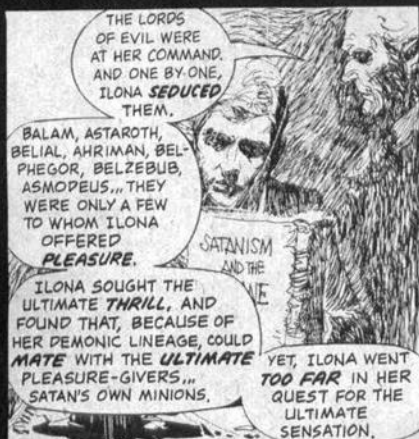


OUT OF **JEALOUSY** SHE TURNED, IN EARLY CHILDHOOD, TO **WITCHCRAFT** AND **DEMONOLOGY**.

SHE HOPED, THROUGH THE **OCCULT**, TO ATTAIN EVEN **GREATER** POWERS THAN ROALD.

ILONA STUDIED EVERY WORK AVAILABLE ON THE **SATANIC** ARTS. IT WAS **SHE** WHO CREATED THIS EXTENSIVE **LIBRARY**.

AFTER HER BROTHER'S DEATH, ILONA DESERTED HER ORIGINAL LUST FOR **POWER** AND BEGAN **CONJURING** THE **DEMONIC** HIERARCHY THOSE DEMONS WHOSE POWERS **RULE** THE DARKNESS OF **HELL**.



THE LORDS OF EVIL WERE AT HER COMMAND. AND ONE BY ONE, ILONA SEDUCED THEM.

BALAM, ASTAROTH, BELIAL, AHRIMAN, BELPHEGOR, BELZEBUB, ASMODEUS... THEY WERE ONLY A FEW TO WHOM ILONA OFFERED PLEASURE.

ILONA SOUGHT THE ULTIMATE THRILL, AND FOUND THAT, BECAUSE OF HER DEMONIC LINEAGE, COULD MATE WITH THE ULTIMATE PLEASURE-GIVERS... SATAN'S OWN MINIONS.

SATANISM AND THE

YET, ILONA WENT TOO FAR IN HER QUEST FOR THE ULTIMATE SENSATION.



ONE EVIL NIGHT, SHE SUCCEEDED IN CONJURING SATAN HIMSELF!

SHE ENTICED THE DEVIL WITH HER SUPPLE BODY. TEASED HIM.

FINALLY, EVEN SATAN COULD NOT REFUSE THE TEMPTATION OF ILONA'S ALLURING BODY. IN A FRENZY OF PASSION HE LEAPED AT HER.

THEIRS WAS THE MOST PASSIONATE AND DEPRAVED ACT OF LOVE EVER TO OCCUR IN OR OUT OF HELL.

IT MUST HAVE BEEN, FOR WHEN SATAN EXPLODED IN ECSTASY, NOTHING REMAINED OF ILONA SAVE FOR BLOODY DRIPPINGS ON A GORE-SPATTERED WALL.



SATAN RETURNED TO HELL WITH A WICKED GRIN. THE MASTER TRICKSTER HAD BEEN CLEVERLY BAITING ILONA ALL ALONG. HE TOOK HER SOUL WITH HIM TO HELL THAT NIGHT.

ILONA HAD FOUND THE ULTIMATE PLEASURE. AND IT COST HER HER LIFE.

BUT YEARS BEFORE, ILONA HAD BORNE A SON. TAMAS... THE LAST TRUE VON DAEMON.

HE WAS FATHERED BY ONE OF ILONA'S DEMON LOVERS?

NO, TAMAS WAS BORN BEFORE HER HELLISH INDISCRETIONS. WHEN HE WAS CONCEIVED ILONA LIVED ALONE HERE... EXCEPT FOR HER BROTHER, ROALD.

THE BOY WAS EIGHT YEARS OF AGE WHEN HE DISCOVERED HIS MOTHER'S GORY REMAINS.



HE FOUND IT IN A YOUNG VILLAGE GIRL, VELMA HEGEL.

SHE HUGGED THE HYSTERICAL BOY TO HER BOSOM, QUELLED HIS FEARS, QUIETED HIS SCREAMS...

LIKE A TRULY FRIGHTENED CHILD, HE RAN, SCREAMING FROM THE CASTLE... LOOKING ANYWHERE FOR HELP.

... AND WHEN HE TOLD WHAT HAD HAPPENED, CAME WITH HIM TO THE CASTLE TO SEE FOR HERSELF, THE HORROR OF WHICH THE BOY SPOKE.

TAMAS BROUGHT VELMA TO HIS MOTHER'S BED-CHAMBERS... SHOWED HER THE GORE-SPATTERED WALL...

... AND, AS THE GIRL STOOD TRANSFIXED IN HORROR, TAMAS SMASHED HER ACROSS THE SKULL WITH A METAL LANTERN.

THE BOY DRAGGED VELMA TO HIS "PLAYROOM," WHERE FOR THE NEXT FEW DAYS, HE SUBMITTED HER TO TORMENTS OF RACK, IRON MAIDEN AND EVER-POPULAR PENDELM.

TAMAS, POOR CHILD, UNORTHODOX THOUGH HIS UPBRINGING WAS, HAD NEVER BEFORE HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO "EXPERIMENT" WITH A LIVE HUMAN BEING.

VELMA WAS THE BOY'S FIRST, AND TAMAS REVELLED IN HER SCREAMS AS HE METICULOUSLY PUT HER THROUGH THE TORMENTS OF HIS OWN LITTLE HELL.

IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE VELMA WAS MISSED. THE VILLAGERS, SUPERSTITIOUS AND WARY FROM THE ENCOUNTERS WITH THE VON DAEMON'S, KNEW **EXACTLY** WHERE TO LOOK FOR HER.

AN ANGRY MOB BURST INTO THE CASTLE. THEY FOUND VELMA **STRIPPED** AND **CHAINED** TO A CELLAR WALL. TOMAS, LIKE THE HIDEOUSLY TWISTED DEMON DWARF THAT HE WAS, WAS CARVING OBSCENITIES ON HER SOFT SKIN WITH A WHITE-HOT **BRANDING IRON**.

IN UNISON, THE MEN **ATTACKED**, BUT THE BOY WAS A TRUE VON DAEMON. HE FOUGHT **FURIOUSLY**, WITH THE STRENGTH OF A **DOZEN** MEN.

HE WAS FINALLY **KNOCKED UNCONSCIOUS** WITH HIS OWN **BRANDING IRON**.

THE MEN **NAILED** TOMAS UPSIDE DOWN TO A MAKESHIFT **CROSS**... THEN MOUNTED THE **CROSS** TO THE TALLEST TURRET OF THIS CASTLE... FOR ALL THE VILLAGE TO SEE.

THE BOY'S FINAL WORDS WERE A BITTER **CURSE**. HE PROMISED TO **RETURN** AND PLAGUE THE CASTLE AS A DISEMBODIED **SPECTRE**.

SO EACH OF THE SIX VON DAEMONS DIED **WITHIN** THIS VERY CASTLE. YET YOU SAID THERE WERE **SEVEN** SPIRITS WHICH HAUNT THE HOUSE.



DON'T TELL ME YOU ARE THE MISSING SPECTRE, MR. VON DAEMON?

DON'T BE **ABSRUD**, MY FRIEND.

THESE ARE THE FINAL ENTITIES...

...IMPRISONED AS ONE, WITHIN THIS MIRROR, THE SOULS OF SIGFRID VON DAEMON'S ORIGINAL **WITCH COVEN**...TRAPPED THERE CENTURIES AGO BY THE DEMON LORD HIMSELF!



BEWARE OF SPIRIT! **INCREDIBLE!**



SO THERE YOU HAVE IT, MR. MOONDOG... THE **HISTORY** OF CASTLE VON DAEMON.

THERE IS ONLY **ONE** THING MORE I MUST **SHOW** YOU.

THE FAMILY CHRONICLES CLAIM THAT THE DEMONS WHICH POSSESS THIS CASTLE **DWELL** WITHIN THE VERY **PORTRAITS** YOU HAVE SEEN.

BUT THIS IS ONE LEGEND I CAN PROVE **FALSE**.



FOR HOW CAN SIX RESTLESS DEMONIC SOULS DWELL ON **CANVAS** WHEN I HAVE **SEEN** THEM WITH MY OWN EYES...

...IN THIS
VERY
ROOM.

SO! THE ELUSIVE DEMONS
APPEAR! I AM MOST IM-
PRESSED, MR. VON DAEMON.
IT DOES INDEED MAKE ONE
SUSPECT THAT SEVEN SOULS
POSSESS YOUR MANSE.

BUT I'M NOT
BUYING THE ACT,
SIGFRID.

N-NO... THESE
ARE **GHOSTS...**
THE SPIRITS OF
MY ANCESTORS

BUNK! YOU'VE
CREATED AN
ILLUSION FOR ME,
SIGFRID. THERE ARE
NO MORE SEVEN SOULS
POSSESSING THIS
CASTLE THAN MY
NAME IS
MOONDOG.

IT IS SIGFRID VON
DAEMON, IS IT NOT? THE
DEMON-CREATURE WHO
Sired THIS ILL-
BEGOTTEN FAMILY.

THE TRAPPED
SOULS OF YOUR COVEN
WORKED ONE LAST
SPELL EVEN WHILE
IMPRISONED IN YOUR
MIRROR. THEY '**INSPIRED**'
YOUR DESCENDANTS TO
NAME THEIR OFFSPRING
AS THEY DID AS
SUBTLE **CLUE...** TO
THE **REAL** MENACE
WITHIN THIS
HOUSE.

THE IMPRISONED
SOULS **WARNED**
ME... **BEWARE**
OF SPIRIT!
BEWARE OF

SIGFRID,
PIETER
IVAR,
ROALD
ILONA,
TOMAS.

THEIR COLLECTIVE
INITIALS SPELL
SPIRIT, SIGFRID.
ONE SPIRIT,
NOT SEVEN.

YOURS!

NO, YOU DID NOT
FOOL ME, SIGFRID. JUST
AS I COULD NOT TRICK
YOU.

NATURAL ENEMIES
CAN **SMELL** EACH OTHER.
EVEN BEYOND **DEATH!**

SOMEHOW YOU
DISCOVERED MY
SECRET. YOU
LEARNED THAT
THE BISHOP WHO
SLEW YOU IN THIS
VERY MANSE, MORDECAI
HIMMALER, HAD BAR-
TERED HIS SOUL,
JUST AS YOU
SOLD **YOURS.**

ONLY THE GOOD
BISHOP OFFERED
HIMSELF TO **HEAVEN**
WHILE YOU EMBRACED
THE SATANIC LORDS
OF **HELL.**

THE BISHOP DIDN'T **DIE** THE NIGHT
HE SLEW YOU. IT WAS A **COVERUP...**
SO NO ONE WOULD SUSPECT THAT HE
TOO HAD BEEN GRANTED **IMMORTALITY!**

IT TOOK YOU CENTURIES TO FIGURE OUT...
CENTURIES MORE TO **TRACK** THE BISHOP
DOWN... CENTURIES IN WHICH YOUR POOR
BEFUDDLED **SPIRIT** ROAMED RESTLESSLY
IN THIS CASTLE, VOWING **VENGEANCE.**

AT LAST YOU FOUND ME... LURED ME
HERE... AND NOW, YOU FACE OLD BISHOP
HIMMLER HIMSELF, ALIAS **MORDECAI**
MOONDOG, EXORCIST.

BUT **THIS TIME,**
SIGFRID, IT'S NOT
EVEN A **CONTEST.**

FOR HOW CAN A MERE
SPIRIT EXPECT TO STAND
THE ASSAULT OF AN
ACCOMPLISHED **EXORCIST**
WITH **CENTURIES** OF
EXPERIENCE.

A SIMPLE WAVE OF MY HAND AND THE SPIRIT OF SIGFRID VON DAEMON WAS **NO MORE.** IT HAD DISSIPATED INTO GASEOUS NOTHINGNESS, RELEGATING HIS CONDEMNED SOUL TO THE ETERNAL FIRES OF **HELL.**

AS FOR ME, MORDECAI MOONDOG, I SIMPLY WENT ON TO MY NEXT ASSIGNMENT. A LITTLE OLD LADY IN OKFEPENKEE, GEORGIA WAS CLAIMING THAT THE SPIRIT OF THE **MARQUIS DE SADE** HAD TAKEN UP RESIDENCE IN HER **ATTIC.**

I DOUBTED IT, BUT I HAD LITTLE **ELSE** TO DO WITH
THE **TIME** MY IMMORTALITY GAVE ME.

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