

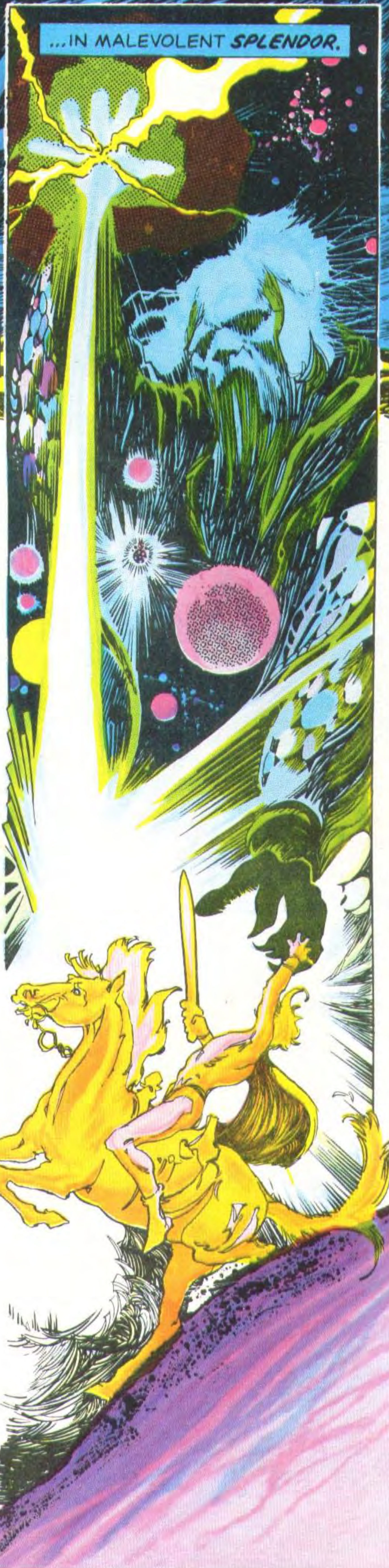
ALIEN WINGS BEAT *FORBODINGLY* UPON VIOLENT WINDS *THIS* NIGHT.



HEAVEN AND EARTH TREMBLE...



...AS GODS AWAKEN...



...IN MALEVOLENT *SPLENDOR*.

# DAX *the* DAMNED

LONG HAVE I KNOWN MY LIFE IS *CURSED* BY THE GODS. DAX IS NO MORE THAN A TORMENTED PLAYTHING. SOMETHING TO BE PROVOKED, USED. *DAMNED* AM I BY NATURE OF MY LIFE. A WARRIOR BEARS HIS SWORD ONLY WHERE THE GODS STEER HIS PATH. *I* AM A *WARRIOR*. NOTHING MORE THAN A *PAWN* UPON SOME SUPERNATURAL BOARD, IN A TIMELESS GAME OF...

# CHESS



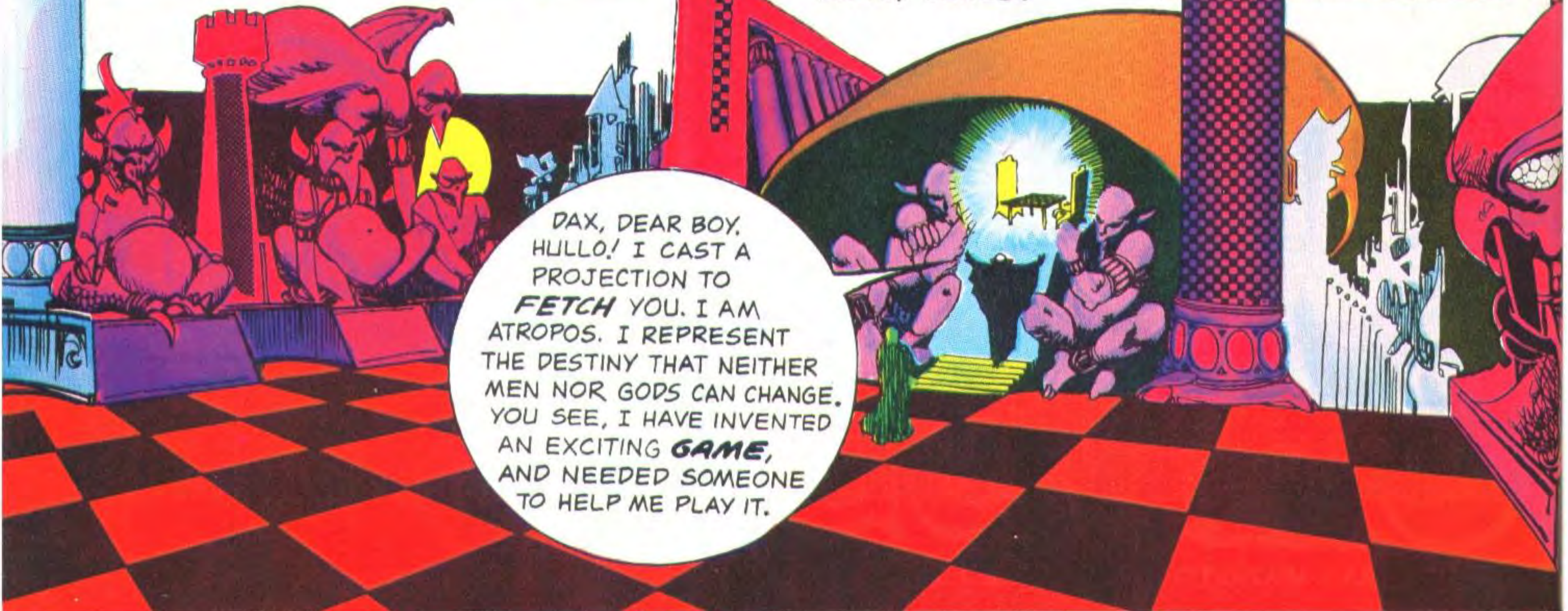
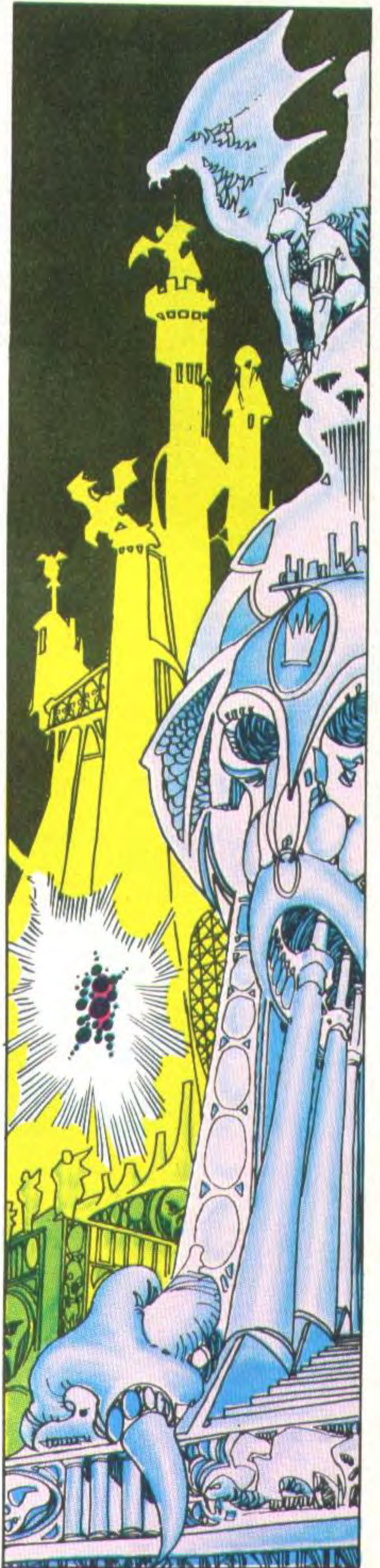
AN IDLE GOD, FILLED WITH TORMENT, BENT LOW ACROSS THE EARTH AND FOUND HIS **PAWN**. AND DAX WAS DRAWN THROUGH THE **NETHER**.



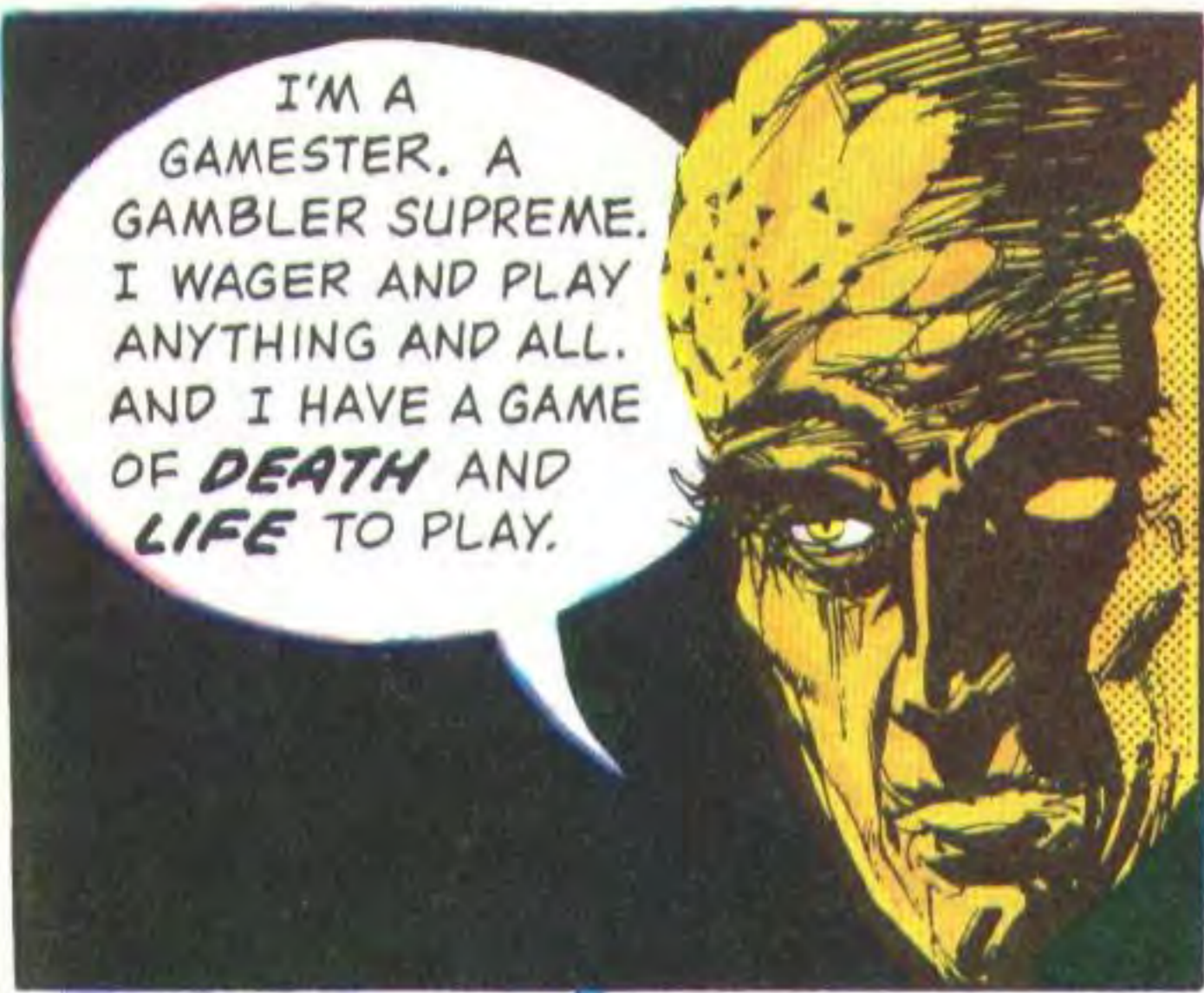
FALLING BEYOND ENDLESSNESS, MY STRAINED EYES SAW **THAT** WHICH WAS NEITHER PROPHET NOR SEER, NOR DREAMER NOR **MADMAN** HAS **DARED** TO BEHOLD.



MY DESCENT SLOWED AND GENTLY TOUCHED I THE FLINT. AND **LO!** DAX WAS WITHIN THE HALLS OF THE MOST **HOLY**, SURELY.



DAX, DEAR BOY, HULLO! I CAST A PROJECTION TO **FETCH** YOU. I AM ATROPOS. I REPRESENT THE DESTINY THAT NEITHER MEN NOR GODS CAN CHANGE. YOU SEE, I HAVE INVENTED AN EXCITING **GAME**, AND NEEDED SOMEONE TO HELP ME PLAY IT.



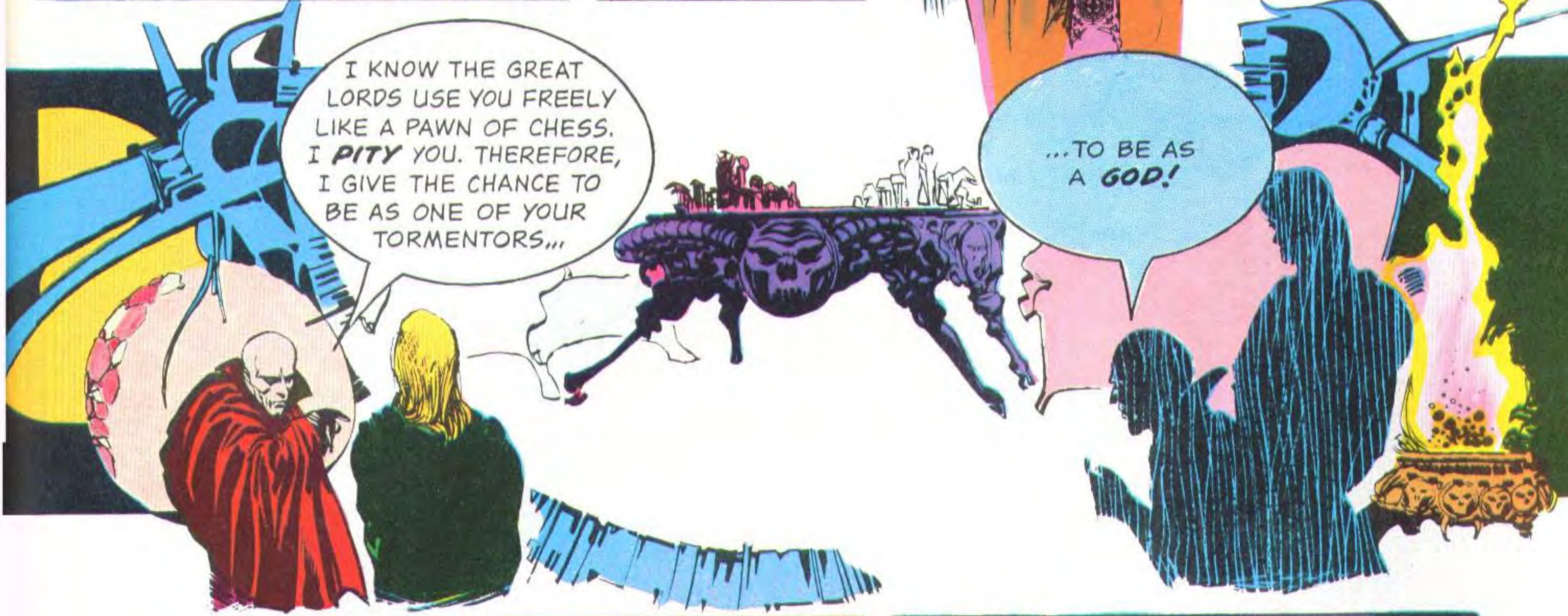
I'M A GAMESTER. A GAMBLER SUPREME. I WAGER AND PLAY ANYTHING AND ALL. AND I HAVE A GAME OF **DEATH** AND **LIFE** TO PLAY.



I'M NO GAMESTER, LORD. ONLY A **SWORDMAN**. A WARRIOR. I PLAY **NOT**. WHY CHOOSE **ME**?



I CHOOSE **YOU** BECAUSE YOU ARE **ALREADY** MARKED BY THE GODS FOR **TORMENT**. I'M A LESSER LORD HERE, AND MAY ONLY USE THOSE ALREADY **DAMED**.



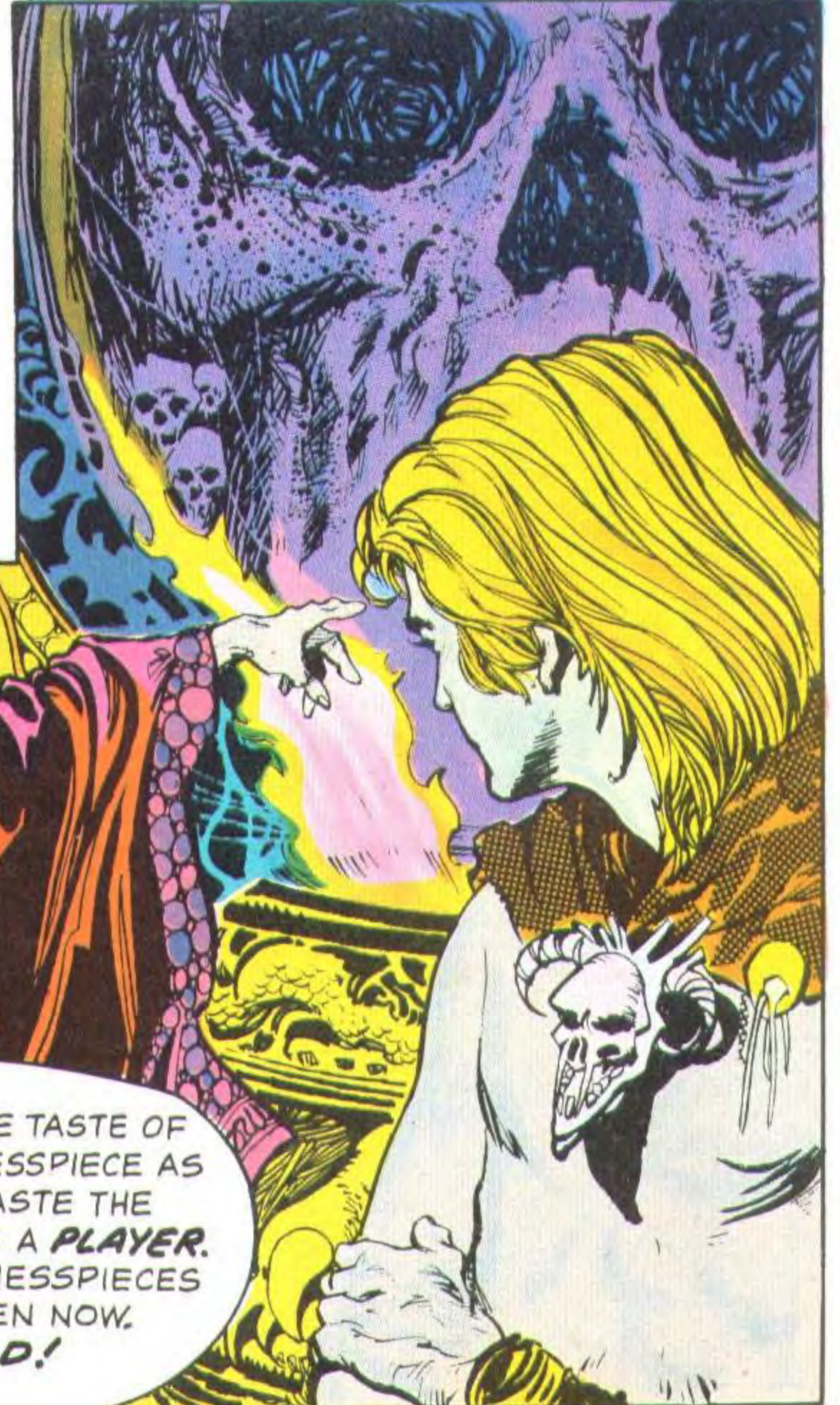
I KNOW THE GREAT LORDS USE YOU FREELY LIKE A PAWN OF CHESS. I **PITY** YOU. THEREFORE, I GIVE THE CHANCE TO BE AS ONE OF YOUR **TORMENTORS**...

...TO BE AS A **GOD!**

IN **THIS** GAME DAX WILL HOLD THE VERY POWER OF LIFE... AND DEATH IN HIS **HAND**.



NEVER BEFORE HAD I REFUSED A **CHALLENGE**. BUT NOW...

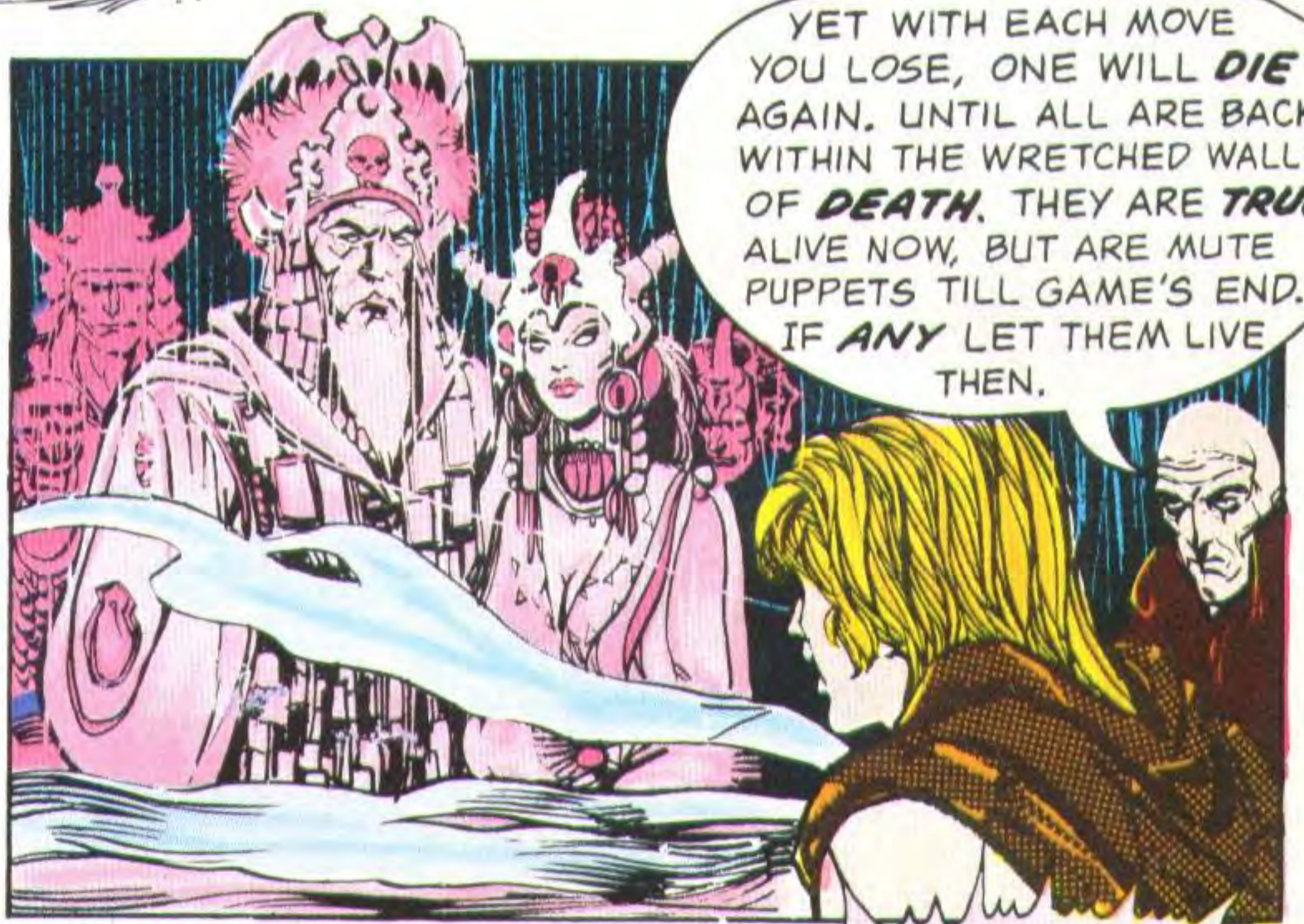


YOU **KNOW** THE TASTE OF BEING BUT A CHESSPIECE AS **BITTER**. NOW TASTE THE LUXURY OF BEING A **PLAYER**. A **GOD!** YOUR CHESSPIECES ASSEMBLE EVEN NOW. **BEHOLD!**

MY HEART LEAPED WHEN MY EYES WITNESSED THE WHITE FIGURES MATERIALIZE BEFORE ME. MY **FATHER. BROTHER.** KINSMEN AND FRIENDS I LOVED WELL. I LOVED THEM ALL STILL, EVEN IN **DEATH!** MY **CHESSMEN.**



YOU MAY HAVE EACH ONE BACK IN LIFE IF YOU **WIN** MY GAME.



YET WITH EACH MOVE YOU LOSE, ONE WILL **DIE** AGAIN. UNTIL ALL ARE BACK WITHIN THE WRETCHED WALLS OF **DEATH.** THEY ARE **TRULY** ALIVE NOW, BUT ARE MUTE PUPPETS TILL GAME'S END. IF **ANY** LET THEM LIVE THEN.



AND LOOK, DAX! THE BLACKS! **MY** FIGURE PIECES! **THEY** ARE AT **MY** COMMAND! I BELIEVE WE ARE READY. LET US BEGIN.



IN THE EYE OF LEERING DESTINY, WE SAT TO **PLAY.**

#SEBASTIAN HAROTO



WHAT SPORT COULD I HAVE BEEN? A CHESSPIECE IN MY HAND RATHER THAN A SWORD. A SINGLE MOVE. A MORTAL COMBAT.

WITH EACH MOVE UPON THE BOARD, THE LIVING CHESSMEN EMULATE. I LIFTED MY FIGURE. RONIUS, A COUSIN SLAIN, STIRRED TO LIFE. ATROPOS COUNTERED. A DEMON RUSHED AT RONIUS.



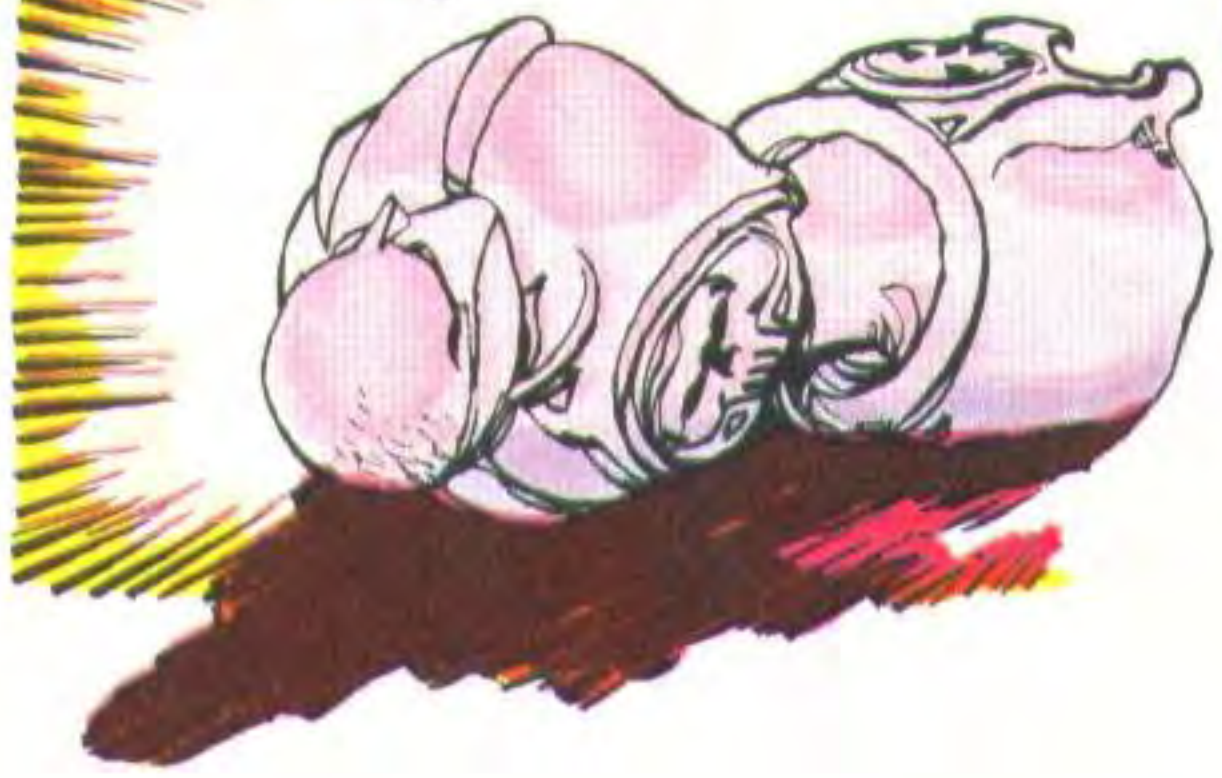
A MOVE! WRONG!...



RONIUS DIED. SCREAMING.



FORFEIT ONE PIECE, DAX. ONE LIFE.



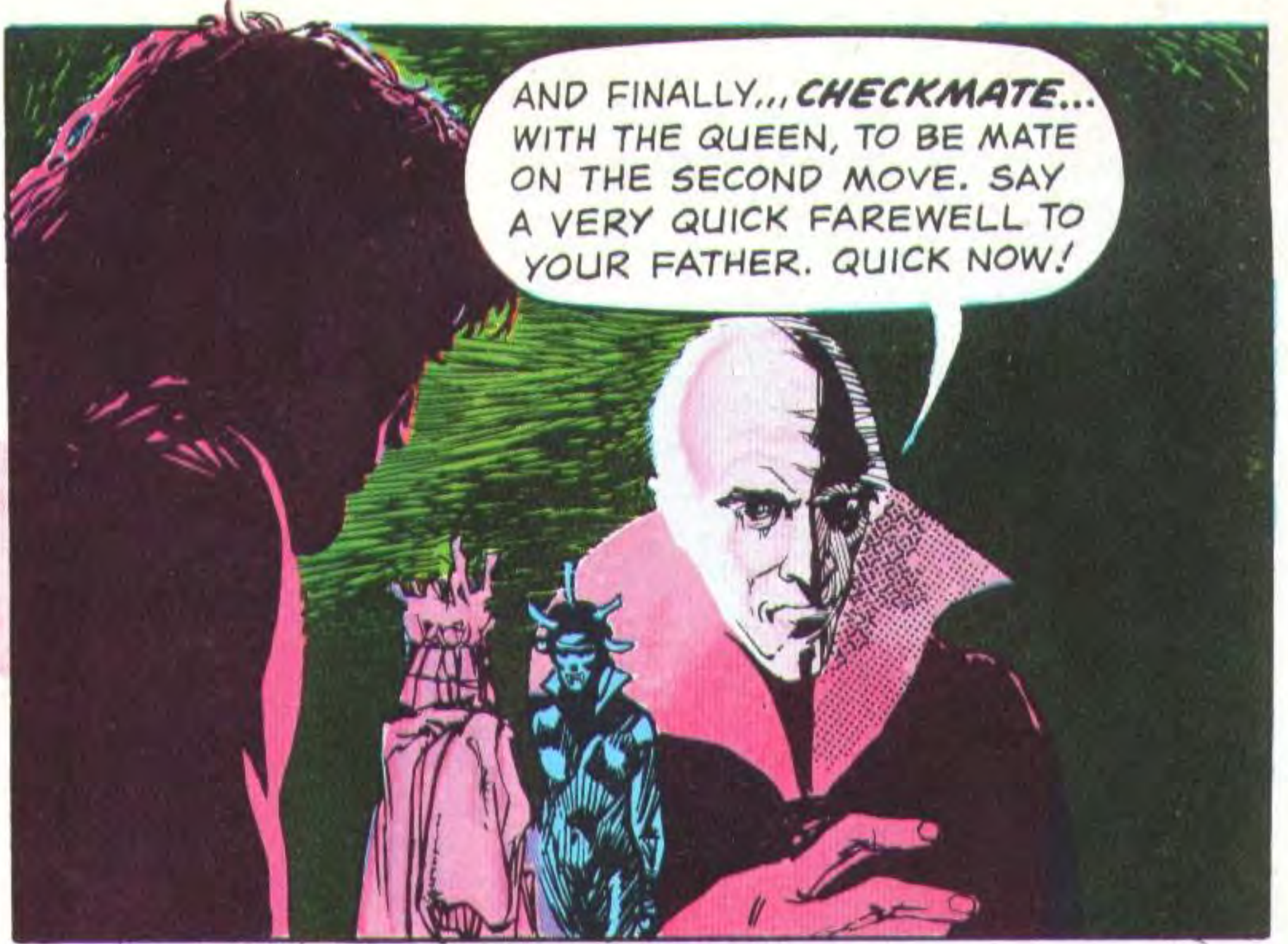
WHUMP!



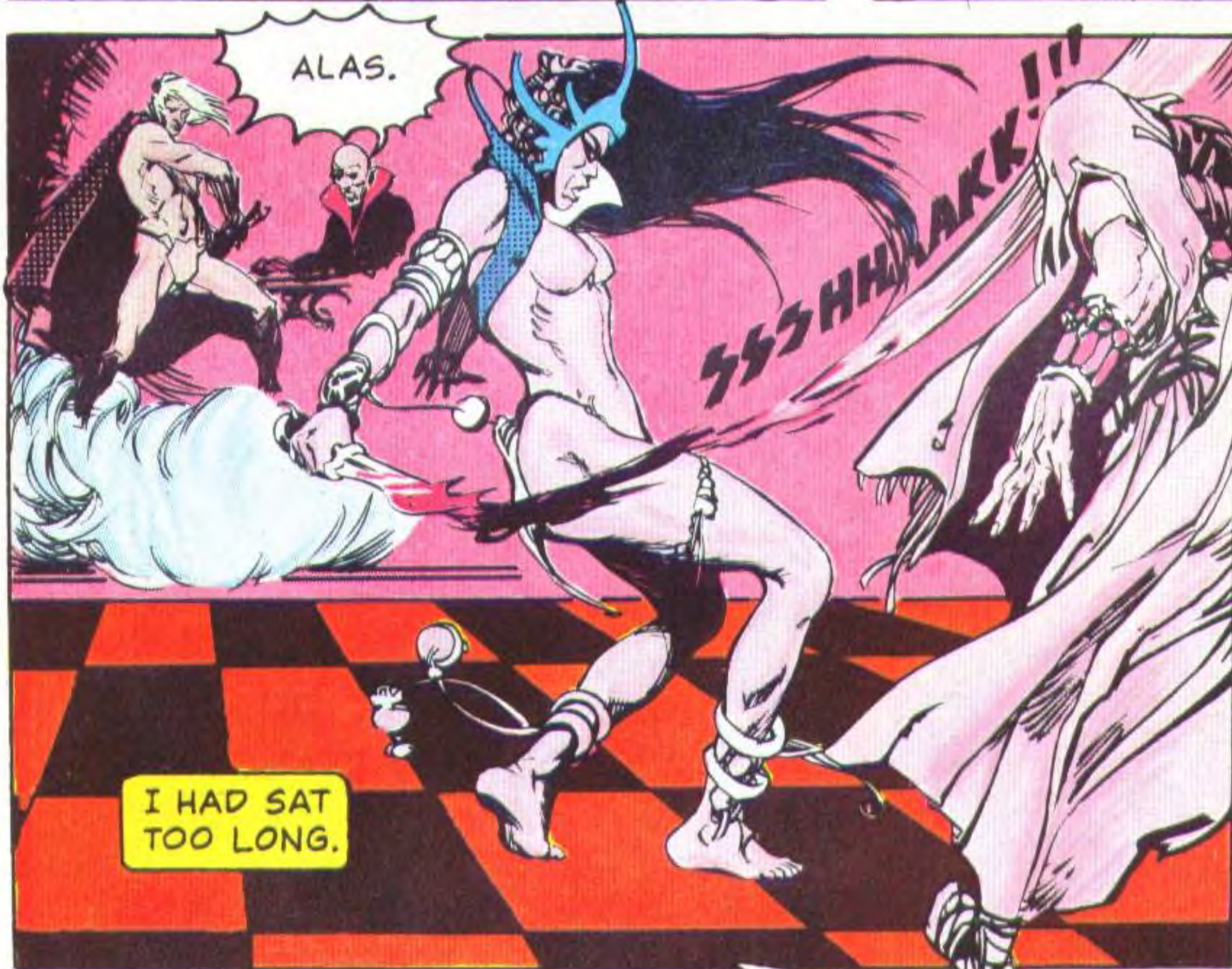
THERE WAS BUT ONE WHITE PIECE LEFT. MY **FATHER**. MY SWORD TREMBLED TOWARD MY HAND.



AND FINALLY... **CHECKMATE...** WITH THE QUEEN, TO BE MATE ON THE SECOND MOVE. SAY A VERY QUICK FAREWELL TO YOUR FATHER. QUICK NOW!



ALAS.



NOT **HIM!** NOT MY **FATHER!** GET BACK FROM HIM, FILTH!



I HAD SAT TOO LONG.

I RUSHED TO THE CRUMPLED LORD. YET MY FINGERS HAD NO NEED TO FEEL FOR A PULSE. HE HAD BEEN RETURNED TO MY MEMORIES.



PUT DOWN YOUR SWORD. IT HAS NO POWER HERE!

NO POWER BUT TO **SLAY**. TO KILL. AND KILLING IS THE **ONLY** THING TANGIBLE HERE. THE ONLY CAUSE WORTH PURSUING. YET I NEEDED NOT TO HAVE TRAVELED TO HEAVEN TO KILL. I AM NO GAMESTER. I AM A **KILLER**.

LET HIM LIVE!

THIS IS THE DIFFERENCE IN GODS AND MEN! I **UNDERSTAND!** GODS LIVE TO **KILL**... MEN KILL TO **LIVE**.

**BRACOO!**

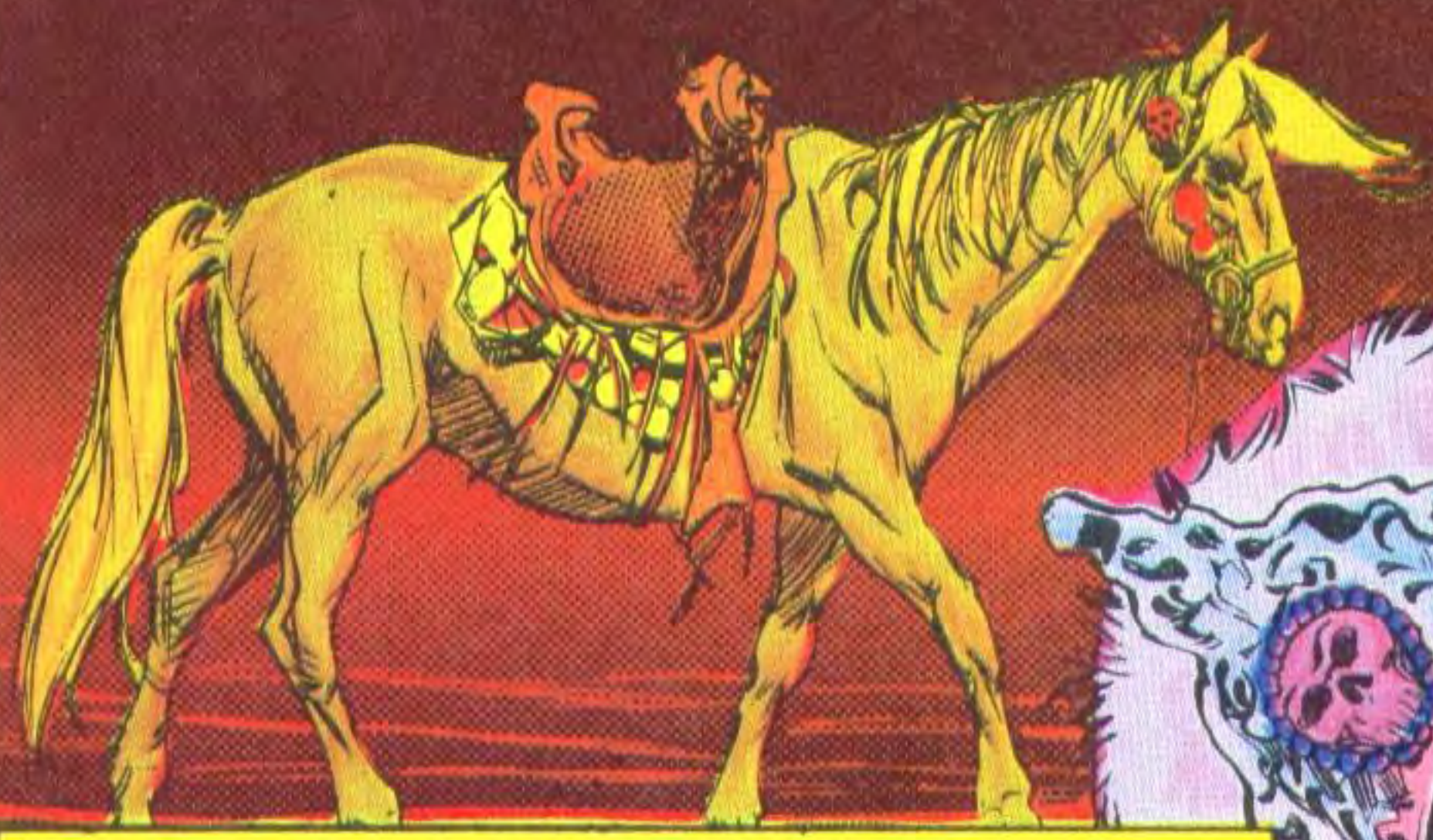
FOOLISHLY **SIMPLE**. THANK YOU DAX! NOW **BEGONE!**

**IMMMNNNN!!!**



AND THE GAMESTER GOD THREW THE FISH **BACK** INTO THE POND. FOR THERE WERE **OTHER** FISHERS WAITING TO NET IT. A FEVERISH DREAM HAD IT ALL BEEN.

AND DREAM IT **MIGHT** HAVE BEEN. BUT CRUELLY THEY WOULD NOT EVEN GIVE ME THE HOPE IT **WAS** A DREAM. FOR I WAS SENT ALONG A GRIM **REMINDER** OF A BITTER GAME OF CHESS.



"TIS ALL A CHEQUER-BOARD OF NIGHTS AND DAYS WHERE DESTINY WITH MEN FOR PIECES PLAYS: HITHER AND THITHER MOVES, AND MATES AND SLAYS, AND ONE BY ONE IN THE CLOSET LAYS."  
RUBAIYAT OF OMAR KHAYAM

