

DOCTOR DOOM, MASTER OF MENACE!

THOUGH SOME CALL IT **MAGIC!**

THE NIGHT IS **COLD**-- THE WINDS **STRONG**-- YET STILL THE FIGURE STANDS UPON HIS CASTLE'S RAIN-WASHED **RAMPART**... HIS HEAD BUT SLIGHTLY **COCKED**-- AS THOUGH HE **LISTENS** TO THE WAIL OF THE **MIDNIGHT STORM**...

EVERYWHERE, I HEAR **HER** CRY. EVEN NOW, HER VOICE STILL **HAUNTS** ME.

AM I **NEVER** TO BE FREE? MUST I **ALWAYS** BEAR THIS MOST BITTER OF **CROSSES**?

YEA, IT IS **SO**-- FOR MINE IS **HONOR'S LOT**--

-- FOR MINE IS THE NAME-- **DOOM!**

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BEHIND HIM, THERE IS THE **SOFT SCUFFLING** OF APPROACHING FOOTSTEPS, THE GRATING **COUGH** OF ANCIENT **LUNGS**... AND THEN, FROM THE DARKNESS, A **VOICE**--



MASTER!

PLEASE FORGIVE ME... BUT IT IS TIME.

AS I KNOW, BORIS... AS I KNOW.



THE ATMOSPHERE IS STRANGE THIS EVE, WITHIN THE CASTLE-- AN AIR OF FEAR FILLS CORRIDORS AND CHAMBERS ALIKE...

A LURKING, ALMOST STRANGLED FEAR...

ALL HAS BEEN PREPARED, MASTER.

AS YOU COMMANDED-- IT IS DONE.

ENOUGH, OLD ONE...

THERE MUST BE SILENCE, VON DOOM HAS NEED TO THINK.

LANTERN'S GLOW LIGHTING THE PASSAGE BEFORE THEM, THEY PASS FROM HALL TO HALL... ENTERING FINALLY A DAMP-WALLED STAIRWELL, WHERE THE AIR IS CLAMMY, AND SHADOWS ARE KING...



NEVER HAVE I SEEN EVEN HIM LIKE THIS... SO RESERVED...

...SO COLD.

UPON THE MOSS-COATED STEPS, THEIR FEET MAKE NO SOUND, ONLY THE RUSTLE OF THE TALL MAN'S CLOAK CAN BE HEARD-- IF THERE WERE OTHERS TO HEAR...

YET-- I KNOW IT TO BE A PERFORMANCE-- FOR DOES NOT HIS HEART THROB MOST PAINFULLY--?



...FILLED AS IT IS-- WITH LOVE--



LOVE... FOR ONE LONG DEAD.

FOR A TIMELESS MOMENT, THE OLD MAN *HESITATES* BEFORE A LOOMING OAKEN DOOR. THEN, WITH SPEED *GREAT* FOR ONE SO AGED, HE THROWS THE DUNGEON DOOR *OPEN...*

QUICKLY, BORIS. WE MUST KEEP-- OUR *APPOINTMENTS.*

ALREADY... THE HOUR DRAWS PRESSINGLY *NEAR.*

YES, MASTER.

SINCE HE WAS A CHILD, I'VE BEEN WITH HIM-- AND ALWAYS HIS VOICE HAS BEEN *CALM--*

YET NOW IT *TREMbles* WITH TENSION-- OR IS IT *FEAR?*

HOW MANY TIMES HAS HE *TRIED--* AND *FAILED?*

HOW MANY TIMES *MORE--* BEFORE *HIS* SOUL, IN TURN, IS *FORFEIT?*

FORFEIT... LIKE THE SOUL OF HIS *GYPSY WITCH MOTHER--*

--A WOMAN *DOOMED--* AND SENT TO *HADES!*

EVERYWHERE... HER *FACE--*

HER EYES *BEGGING* ME...!

ENOUGH!

YOUR DUTY HERE IS *DONE.*

LEAVE ME, BORIS-- AND BAR THE DOOR *BEHIND* YOU--

--THAT THE FORCES *EVOKED* HERE--

--REMAIN HERE-- THOUGH THEIR *INCANTOR* MAY BE-- *DEAD.*

YES, MASTER.

AS ALWAYS... I DO AS YOU *COMMAND.*

DESPITE HIMSELF, THE OLD MAN MOVES *QUICKLY..* GLAD TO BE QUIT OF THE FOUL-SMELLING *DUNGEON.*

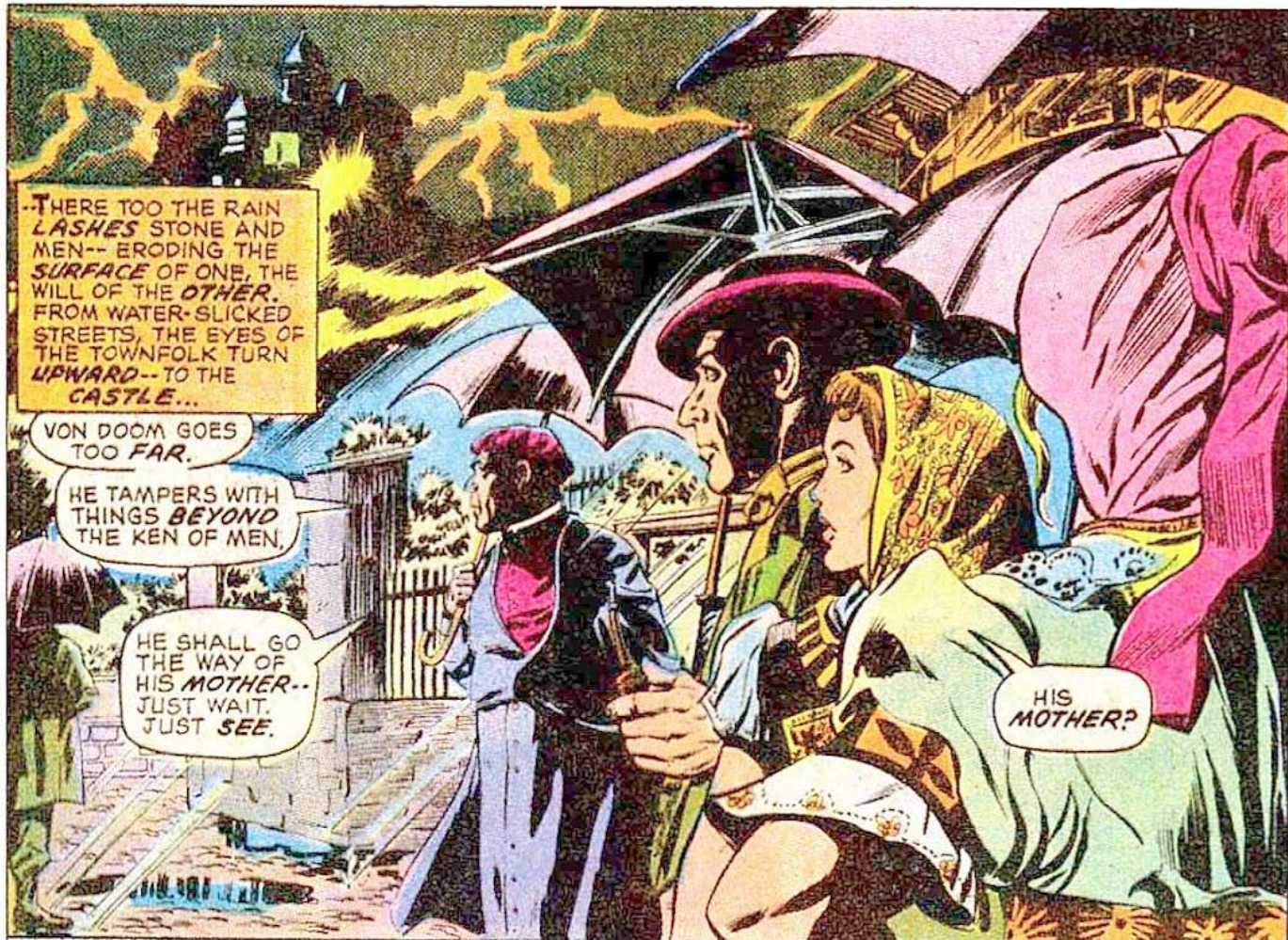
... BUT, ONCE *WITHOUT,* HIS THOUGHTS *RETURN* TO THE MAN *WITHIN...*

I PRAY THIS TIME HE *SUCCEEDS--*

FOR... EACH DAY SPENT IN BATTLE WITH SUCH AS *THEY--*

-- IS ANOTHER DAY *BOUND* TO THE *HELLWHEEL.*

AND OF THE WORLD *OUTSIDE--*



--THERE TOO THE RAIN LASHES STONE AND MEN-- ERODING THE SURFACE OF ONE, THE WILL OF THE OTHER. FROM WATER-SLICKED STREETS, THE EYES OF THE TOWNFOLK TURN UPWARD-- TO THE CASTLE...

VON DOOM GOES TOO FAR.

HE TAMPERS WITH THINGS BEYOND THE KEN OF MEN.

HE SHALL GO THE WAY OF HIS MOTHER-- JUST WAIT. JUST SEE.

HIS MOTHER?



AYE, KRISTIN... HIS MOTHER WAS A WITCH--

AND SOME THERE ARE WHO SAY... SHE DIED UNCONFESS--

AND SO,-- WAS ETERNALLY DAMNED.

HOW TERRIBLE.

BUT, PRAY, MOTHER-- WHAT DOES OUR SOVEREIGN DO ON THE NIGHT?



IT'S TRUE... YOU'VE BEEN ABROAD. YOU WOULDN'T KNOW...

EACH YEAR, ON THE NIGHT OF MIDSUMMER'S EVE, HE USES HIS MOTHER'S SPELLS--!

GOD KNOWS HIS PURPOSE--!

HE CALLS UP DEMONS-- AND WORSE--



-- AND IN THE DARKNESS OF A FILTHY DUNGEON...

... HE BATTLES THEM... 'TIL THE EARLY HOURS-- OF THE NEXT DAY'S DAWN.

AYE... AND A MAD FIGHT IT IS.

A THOROUGHLY MAD FIGHT.

AND WHOSE DEMONS ARE THESE SHADOW-CLOAKED MONSTROSITIES? THE DEMONS OF A MAN POSSESSED-- A MAN BURNING WITH UNFOCUSED INTERNAL FIRE? AND ARE THEY EVEN REAL AS YET-- OR ARE THEY BUT A VISION-- OF THE AGONIES YET TO COME?

WITHIN THAT MUSTY DUNGEON, THE AIR IS ALIVE WITH CHURNING SMOKE-- AND OTHER THINGS--!

BEELZEBUB... SATAN... WHATEVER THY NAME MAY BE-- I CALL YOU UP FROM YOUR PIT BELOW-- I COMMAND YOU TO COME...TO ME!

THE SPELL IS OLD... OLD. ONCE ITS WORDS WERE INSCRIBED ON ANCIENT PARCHMENT-- THEY SEEM STRANGE WHEN SPOKEN ON THIS TALL MAN'S LIPS...

STRANGE... AND POTENT!

BEWARE, VON DOOM-- THERE IS STILL A CHANCE TO SAVE YOUR SOUL--

AYE... TURN BACK, FORGET THIS MADNESS--

FORGET IT... LEST IT DESTROY YOU! BEWARE! BEWARE!

I AM WARY ENOUGH!

I DO... WHAT NEEDS BE DONE.

I DO THIS-- BECAUSE I AM DOOM!

A TALL MAN... A STRONG ONE-- YET... HIS VOICE DOES SLIGHTLY QUAVER-- THOUGH ONLY FOR A MOMENT...

ONLY FOR THE BRIEFEST OF MOMENTS.



AND THEN-- ANOTHER VOICE...

ONCE MORE YOU CALL US, VICTOR VON DOOM--

-- AND ONCE MORE-- YOU SHALL FAIL.

AS LONG AS I'M ALLOWED THE BATTLE--

THAT IS THE WAY OF DOOM!

-- I CHOOSE TO FIGHT IT.



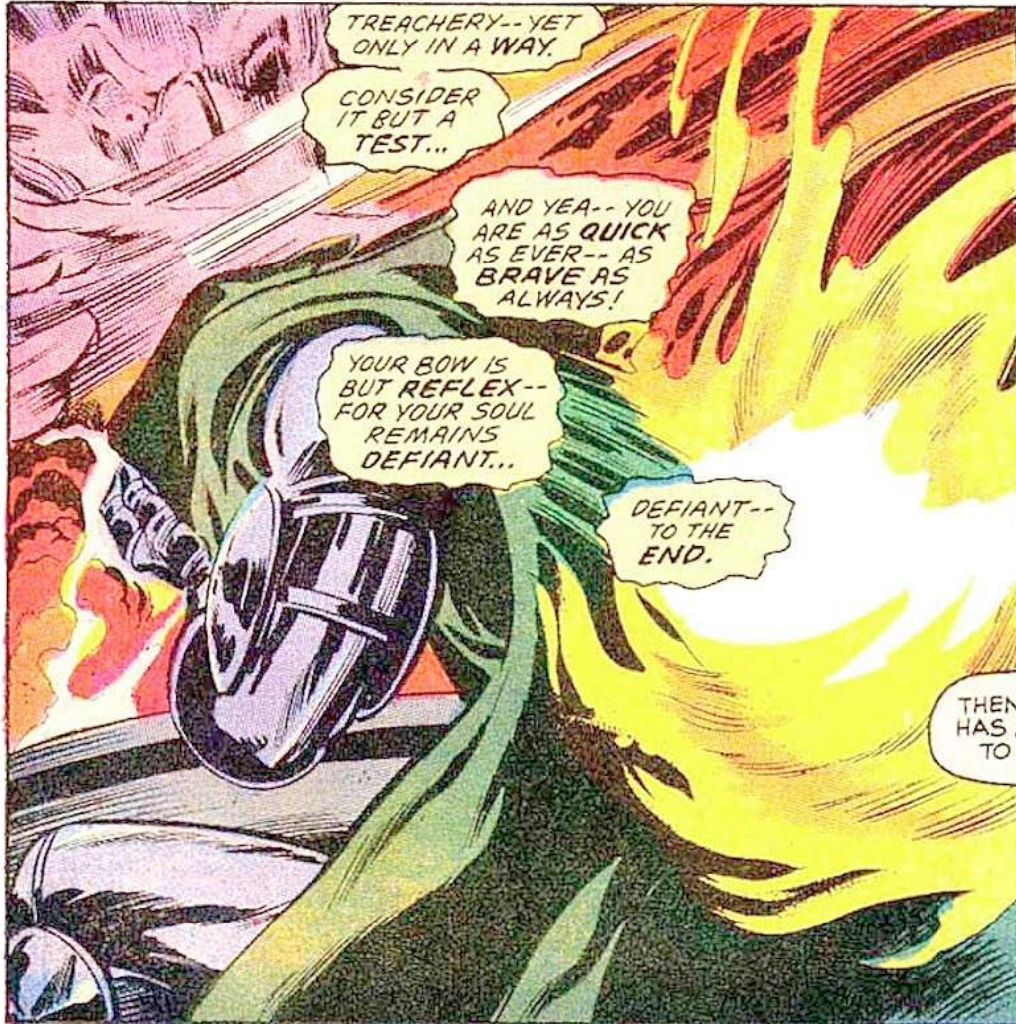
AYE, MORTAL--

'TIS MOST DEFINITELY--

TREACHERY? SO EARLY IN THIS GAME?



-- THE WAY OF DOOM!



TREACHERY-- YET ONLY IN A WAY.

CONSIDER IT BUT A TEST...

AND YEA-- YOU ARE AS QUICK AS EVER-- AS BRAVE AS ALWAYS!

YOUR BOW IS BUT REFLEX-- FOR YOUR SOUL REMAINS DEFIANT...

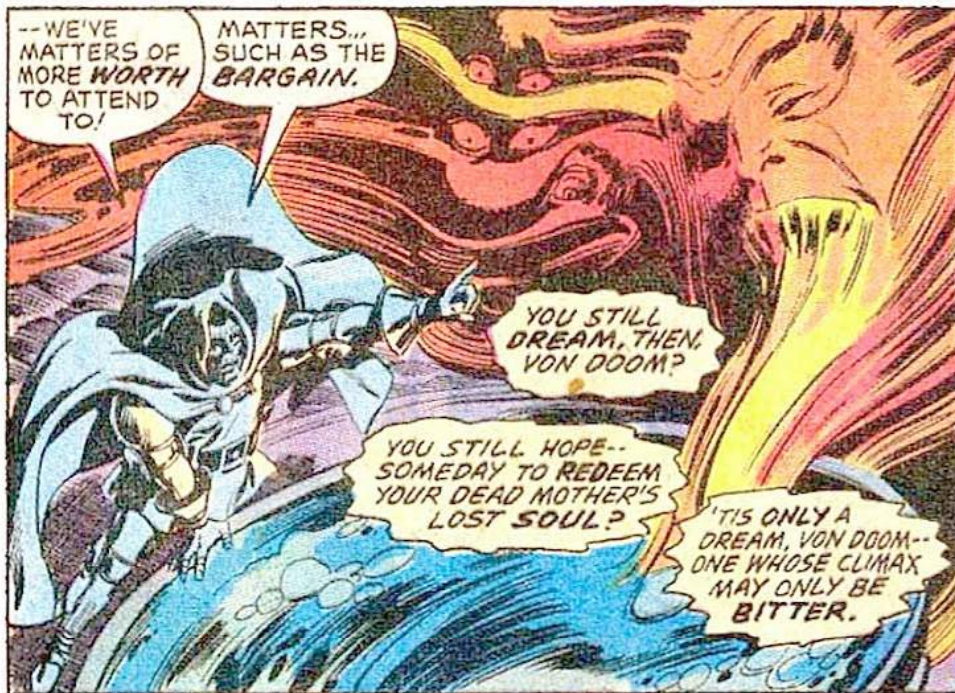
DEFIANT-- TO THE END.



IF THAT END IS AS MUCH AN ILLUSION AS YOUR FIREBALL--

THEN DOOM HAS LITTLE TO FEAR.

FINISH THESE GAMES.



--WE'VE MATTERS OF MORE WORTH TO ATTEND TO!

MATTERS... SUCH AS THE BARGAIN.

YOU STILL DREAM, THEN, VON DOOM?

YOU STILL HOPE-- SOMEDAY TO REDEEM YOUR DEAD MOTHER'S LOST SOUL?

'TIS ONLY A DREAM, VON DOOM-- ONE WHOSE CLIMAX MAY ONLY BE BITTER.



SAVE ME YOUR LECTURES, DARK ONE.

MY MOTIVES ARE MY OWN.

THE BARGAIN SPECIFIES COMBAT-- WITH A CREATURE OF YOUR MAKING--

-- IN THE PLACE-- OF YOUR CHOICE.



THEN THE PLACE I CHOOSE-- IS THIS--

AND THE TIME I CHOOSE... IS NOW--

AND THE CREATURE SHALL BE CALLED--



--KAGROK-- THE KILLER!

NEITHER FLESH NOR BLOOD SHALL FILL HIS FRAME--

ONLY THE STRENGTH-- OF AGELESS STONE.

WIN 'GAINST KAGROK-- AND YOUR MOTHER GOES FREE...

A STENCH LIKE NO OTHER ERUPTS IN THE ROOM-- AND LIKE A SMUDGE OF CHARCOAL ON A WINDOWPANE, THE AIR BEFORE THE TALL CLOAKED MAN DARKENS-- DEEPENS-- BECOMES RICH IN ITS FILLING BLACKNESS...

RICH... WITH THE APPEARANCE OF PURE, PERSONIFIED EVIL.



-- BUT LOSE THIS TIME--

-- AND 'TIS YOUR LIFE WILL BE FORFEITED.

UNNH!

HIS MOTIONS-- BLURRED, MOVED TOO QUICKLY-- EVEN TO SEE.

MUST RECOVER.



--AND STRIKE!

ALL YEAR I HAVE BEEN TRAINING-- BUILDING FOR THIS MOMENT.

I MUST WIN-- I MUST!

LIKE A FLURRY OF BLOWN FOREST GREENERY, THE CAPED MAN MOVES-- PITCHING FORWARD INTO THE MAN-DEMON-- METAL-ARMORED FIST MEETING WIND-ERODED STONE.



MEETING--AND BEING REPELLED!

HAVEN'T CAUGHT MY BALANCE--

CATCHING ME OFF-GUARD!

BUT DOOM WILL BE CAUGHT NO MORE.



COME FORWARD, MY FRIEND--

COME FORWARD-- TO DOOM.

STAY, KAGROK-- LET THE MORTAL COME TO YOU.

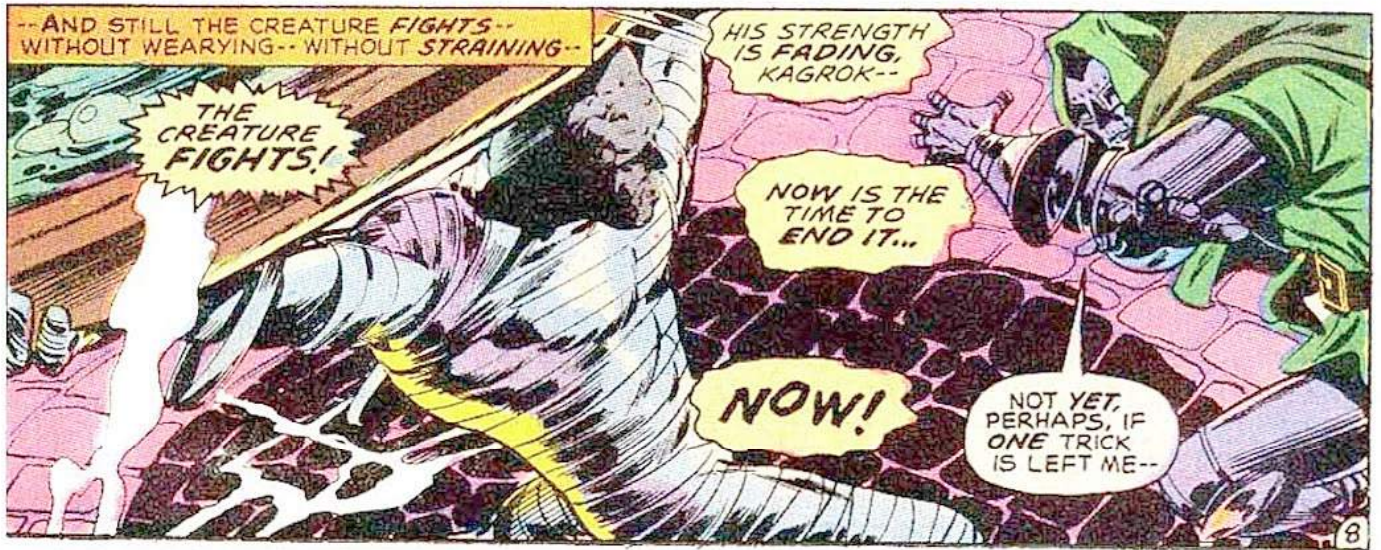


IF THAT IS WHAT I MUST DO--

THEN I DO-- WHAT I MUST!

KRRRANG!

MOTION AND SOUND MINGLE-- SIGHT AND HEARING TORN BY THE CLASH OF CHAIN AGAINST UNYIELDING ROCK--



--AND STILL THE CREATURE FIGHTS-- WITHOUT WEARYING-- WITHOUT STRAINING--

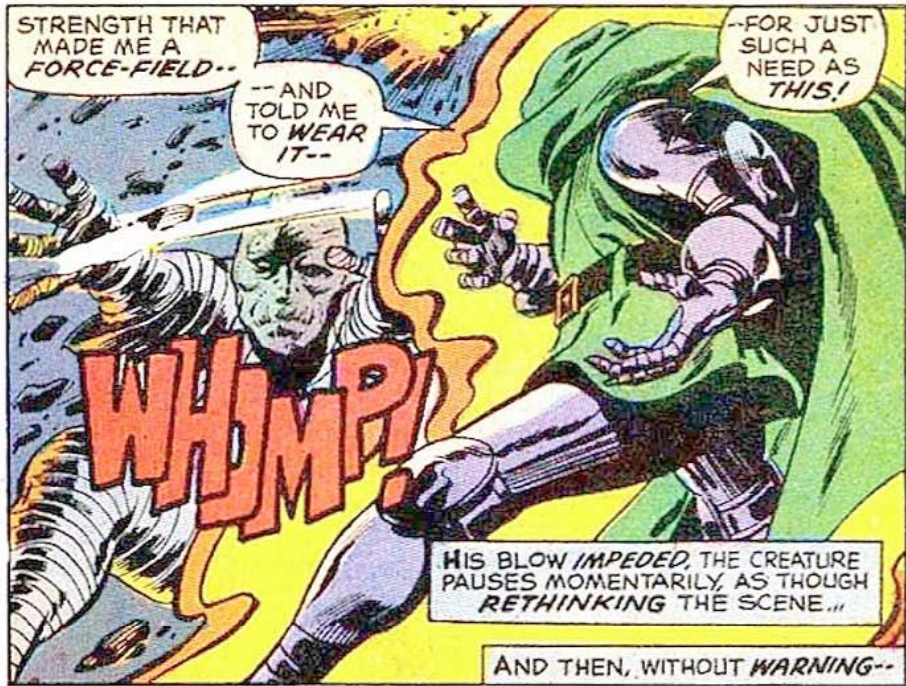
THE CREATURE FIGHTS!

HIS STRENGTH IS FADING, KAGROK--

NOW IS THE TIME TO END IT...

NOW!

NOT YET, PERHAPS, IF ONE TRICK IS LEFT ME--



IT TAKES A MOMENT FOR THE AIR TO CLEAR-- AND THEN, 'TIS ALL AS STILL AS THOUGH IT NEVER HAPPENED...

DRAWN, DRAINED, THE TALL MAN MOVES SLUGGISHLY TO THE LARGE OAK DOORS...

... AND AS SLUGGISHLY-- OPENS THEM.

BORIS...!

IT HAPPENED! AND ONCE AGAIN, I FOUGHT FOR HER, MORE I FAILED HER.

IT IS OVER, FOR NOW, IT IS OVER.

YES, MASTER.

HERE... REST ON MY SHOULDER.

WHAT?
DOOM NEEDS NO REST--
--FOR AN OLD MAN'S WEATHERED SHOULDER.

DOOM NEEDS NO ONE, DOOM WANTS NO ONE.

I ONLY WANT... TO BE ALONE.

YES... MASTER.

YET, FOR THE TALL ONE, THERE IS NO REST...

NO ESCAPE FROM HIS MIND'S HAUNTED MEMORY.

CYNTHIA VON DOOM MOTHER OF VICTOR

I TRIED...

I TRIED... YET PERHAPS NOT HARD ENOUGH.

I AM SORRY, MOTHER, PERHAPS NEXT YEAR.

PERHAPS NEXT YEAR... WHEN I'M STRONGER.

PERHAPS NEXT YEAR... WHEN I'M FRESH.

SOON, HIS FOOTSTEPS FADE INTO SILENCE, AND THE DUNGEON IS COLD AND DESERTED. ONCE MORE... DESERTED, SAVE FOR THE ECHO OF A BATTLE LOST... AND OF OTHERS, LORD, SO MANY OTHERS... YET TO BE.

NEXT: DEATHMASQUE!