

The Wolfriders Return — In All-New Excitement!

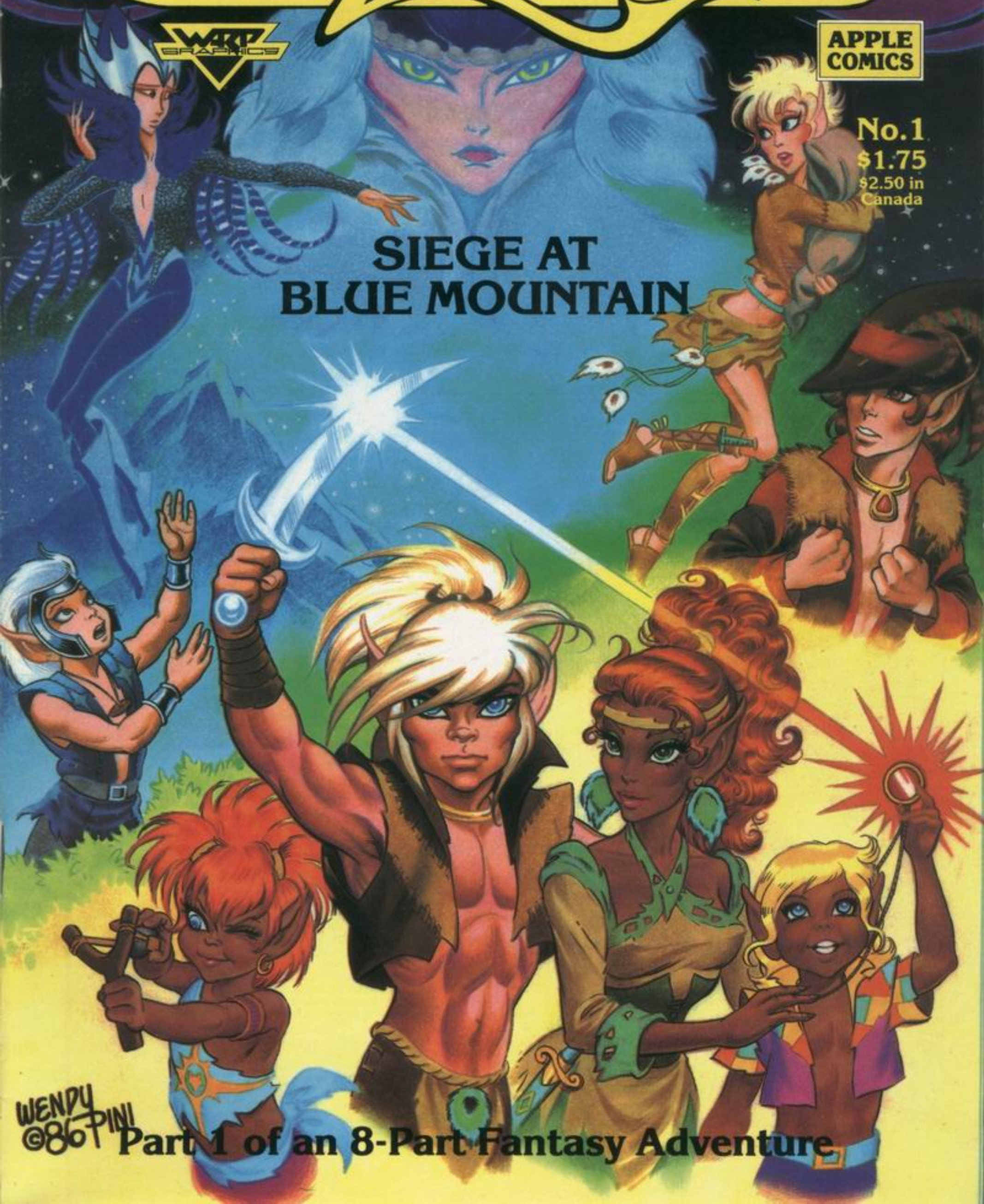
ELFQUEST

WOLFRIDERS
GRAPHICS

APPLE
COMICS

No. 1
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SIEGE AT BLUE MOUNTAIN



WENDY
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Part 1 of an 8-Part Fantasy Adventure

SIEGE AT BLUE MOUNTAIN

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PART
1

INKS
JOE STATON

LETTERER
JANICE CHIANG

DUNG-HEADED, PUFFED UP, FROST
BITTEN SUN-SUCKER! FROZEN STAG
CHIP! BLACK-FACED, AIR WALKING--

UH...EH...K-KAHVI?

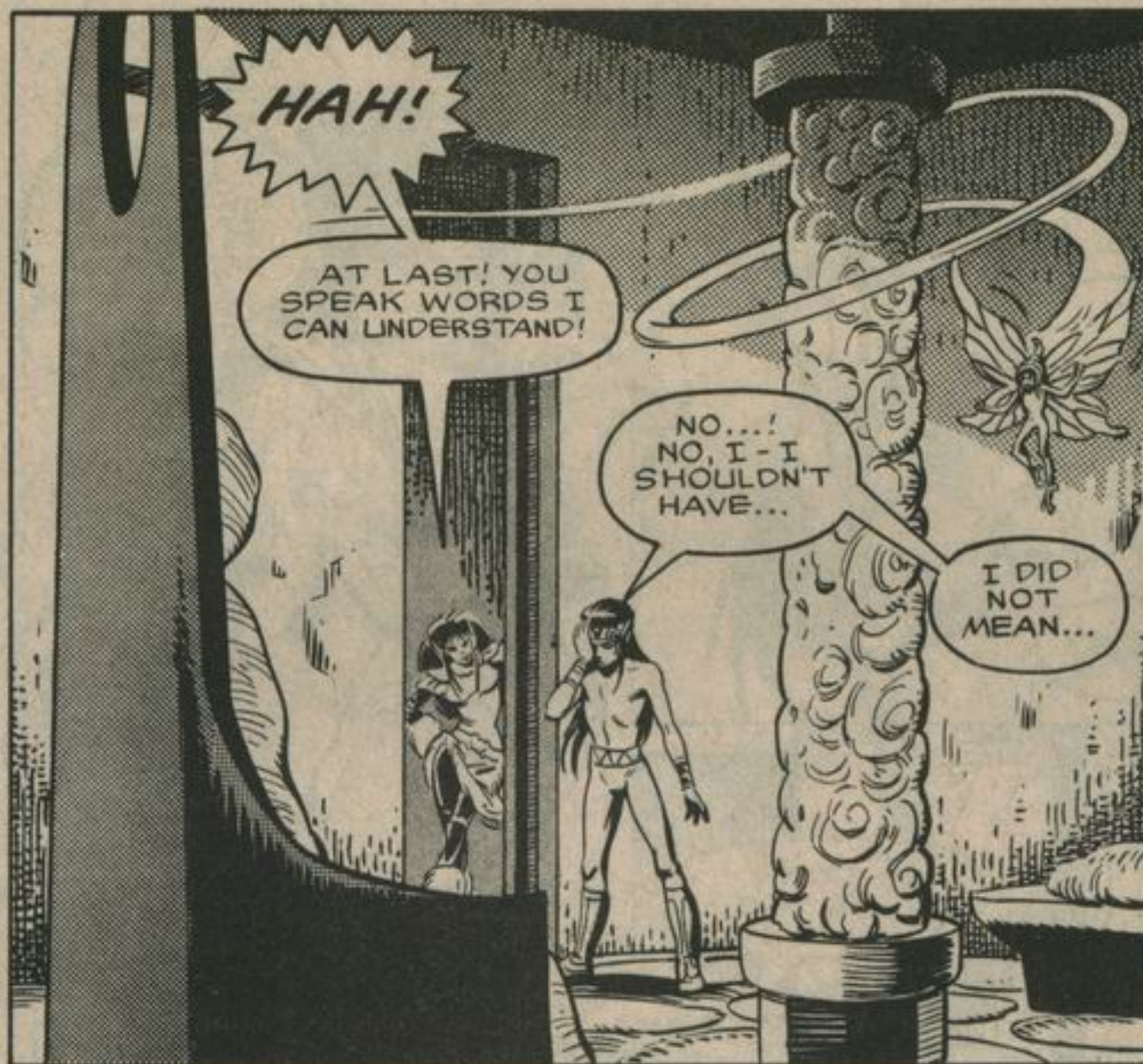
HE SHOULD
FALL THROUGH
THIN ICE!

HE SHOULD
FRY IN
BEAR FAT!

JUST WHO IN THE SHADOW OF THE
GREAT ICE WALL DOES HE THINK HE IS?!







TSK! COME OUT OF THERE, BLACK-HAIR! IT'S MAKING YOU CRAZY! YOU DON'T MEAN HALF WHAT YOU SAY LATELY--





OH! YOU UH--

--YOU MIGHT AS WELL LEAVE THAT TOO!

FINE!



TAKE A LOOK, ROCK-SHAPER!

THIS IS WHAT HE'LL BE IF HE STAYS IN THERE MUCH LONGER--

--COLD MEAT! THE SCROLL OF COLORS... SOME WAR PRIZE! WHAT GOOD IS IT--

--IF IT MELTS ELF BRAINS TO SLUSH?



UP...DOWN... SIDE TO SIDE...

...BACK AND FORTH... THEN AND NOW...

SHE SAYS THEY MEAN NO MORE THAN DEATH DOES.



THAT TIME IS JUST THINGS AND ROOM TO PUT THEM IN.

UNCHOOSE THINGS AND YOU UNCHOOSE TIME.

BUT THE HIGH ONES CHOSE THEIR BODIES, BROWNSKIN!

EATING, SLEEPING, LOVING, HURTING--LIFE! THEY CHOSE IT. WHY? BECAUSE IT'S GOOD!

THEY KNEW!

AND YOU MUST NOT FORGET.



OH, TIMMAIN! YOU GAVE THE WOLFRIDERS A SPECK OF SAND PICKED FROM A MEASURELESS MOUNTAIN OF KNOWLEDGE.

YOU'VE GIVEN ME BUT FEW GRAINS MORE!



AS HE HAS DONE REPEATEDLY IN THE FEW DAYS SINCE THE ELVES WON THEIR BATTLE FOR THE PALACE OF THE HIGH ONES, **RAYEK** TURNS THE SCROLL OF COLORS, RELIVING THE HISTORY OF HIS ANCESTORS.

THE SWIRLING HUES TELL OF AN IMMORTAL RACE OF SHAPE-CHANGERS WHO, HAVING OUTLIVED THEIR OWN HOMEWORLD--

-- VISITED IN DIFFERENT GUISES MANY OTHER WORLDS... EVEN TAKING THE SHAPE OF LEGEND.

WE WERE CREATURES OF FIRE, THEN, **TIMMAIN**, THE FIRE THAT CHANGES ALL.

HOW MAY I RECLAIM THAT POWER FOR OUR RACE? WE ARE WEAKENED, MADE SMALL BY THIS WORLD OF TWO MOONS! IT WAS A MISTAKE--!



--FOR THE HIGH ONES, SEEKING OTHERS OF THEIR KIND, TO ADOPT THE FORMS OF HUMAN FANCY. AND IT WAS A **FATAL MISTAKE**--

-- FOR THEM TO BRING THE BETRAYING **TROLLS** ALONG. THE HIGH ONES WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN TRAPPED HERE IN THE WRONG PLACE AND TIME. BUT FOR--

-- THOSE **CURSED, STINKING PETS!** WHY DIDN'T YOU LEAVE THEM BEHIND, **TIMMAIN--**

-- WHEN WE ABANDONED OUR SPENT STAR, CHILD?

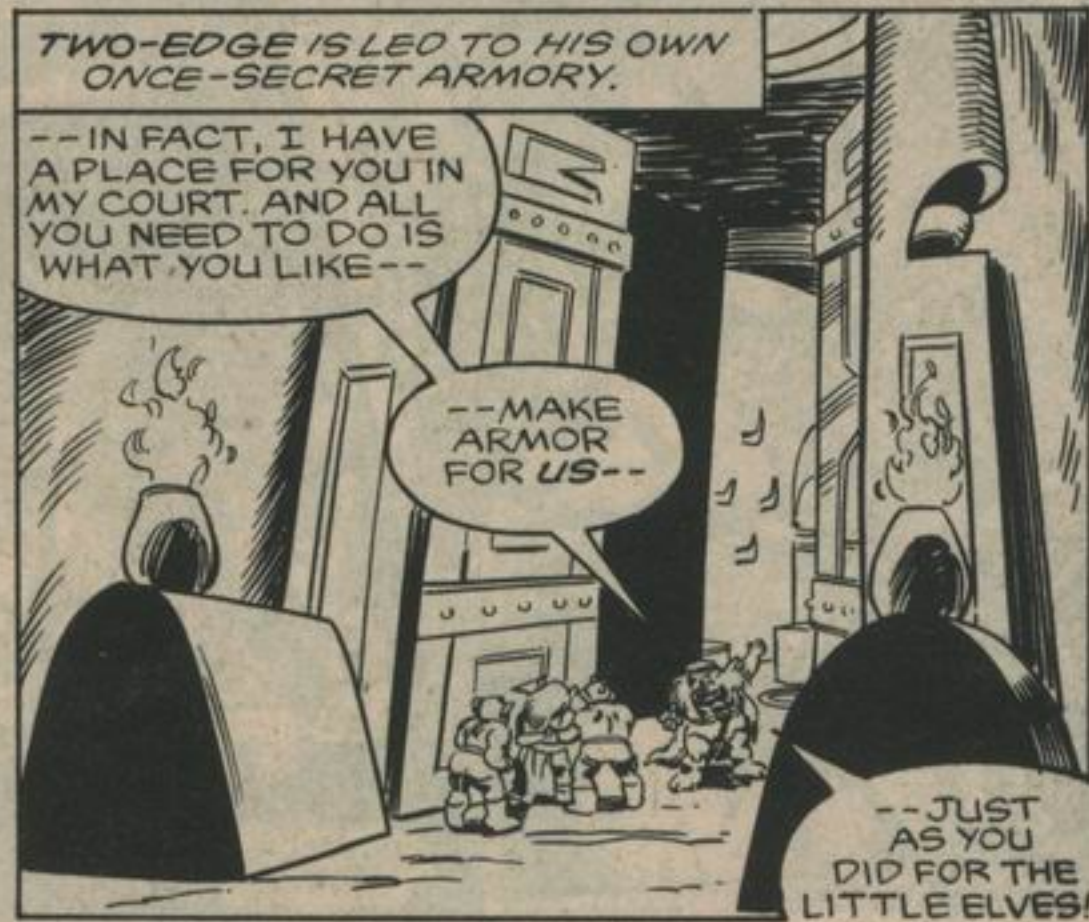
THE TROLLS WERE THE LAST BEINGS BESIDE OURSELVES TO SURVIVE-- THEY AND THE WINGED PRESERVERS.

WITHOUT US THEY'D HAVE PERISHED.

"BETTER THAT," **RAYEK** *INSOLENTLY RESPONDS*, "THAN TO HAVE FOUND MINDS OF THEIR OWN. THE TROLLS TOOK THEIR FREEDOM, BUT AT WHAT COST-- TO **US!**"

WELL, FRIEND **TWO-EDGE--**

YOU PLAYED YOUR GAME, HERE IN THE FROZEN MOUNTAIN, BUT NOW IT'S DONE!





SOON... I THINK YOU'LL FIND YOUR TRICKS AND TALENTS LESS WARMING--

--THAN FURS AND A WELL-TENDED FIRE, MASTER SMITH. BUT I'LL GIVE YOU ONE LAST CHANCE.

BRING ME *EKUAR*, THE ROCK-SHAPER--

--AND I'LL TAKE YOU BACK UNDER MY CLOAK. I DOUBT THE GO BACKS WOULD DO AS MUCH, EXCEPT TO SMOKE YOU IN STRIPS--

--AND LIVE OFF YOU 'TIL THAW-TIME!

STILL SILENT, TWO-EDGE HOBBLER AWAY UP THE MOUNTAIN SIDE.

THAT'S THAT. HE'LL BE STIFF AS AN ICICLE BY TOMORROW.

THE ONLY THING OF VALUE IN THE PALACE IS THAT ROCK SHAPER.

ANYONE WHO'S LIVED AS LONG AS TWO-EDGE--

WE'LL PAY THE PALACE A VISIT OURSELVES, EH? YOU KNOW, *KING PICKY*, IT WAS A LUCKY DAY--

MENTION THE PIT AGAIN--

I WANT HIM.

--DOESN'T JUST CURL UP AND DIE. WE'LL SEE IF HIS SENSIBLE TROLL HALF WINS HIM TO OUR USE. IF NOT...

--WHEN OLD *GUTTLEKRAW* CAUGHT YOU FOR A MINE PIT SLAVE!

AND YOU'LL SEE IT FOR YOURSELF-- PERMANENTLY!

THE RHYMES,
THE COMFORTING
RHYMES HAVE
FLOWN.

THERE
ARE NO
MORE
WORDS--

-- TO CALM THE
FURY OF THE
STORM WITHIN
HIS DIVIDED
BRAIN.

A DAY PASSES...

THEN ANOTHER...

EACH CRACKING,
THROBBING
STEP--

-- CARRIES HIM
NEARER TO THE
MOUNTAIN'S CREST!

AND ALL THE WHILE,
MEMORIES SWIRL ABOUT
HIM LIKE FLAKE-
SPECKLED WIND.



SOMETIME
LATER...

THE CASTLE FLEW
ONCE, *EKUAR*, ABOVE
THE LAND--

--FROM ONE
TIME TO ANOTHER,
FROM ONE STAR
TO ANOTHER!

"MUNCH"
THERE
IS A WAY
TO MAKE
IT FLY
AGAIN...

... BUT I NEED POWER!

-- THE SORT OF MAGIC THAT
MOST ELVES NO LONGER EVEN
DREAM OF USING!



WHY,
BROWNSKIN?

"ULP"
WHAT?

WHY MAKE THE
CASTLE FLY?



BECAUSE IT IS
NOT IMPOSSIBLE!







RAYEK IGNORES THE JIBES, FOR A SUDDEN INSPIRATION STIRS HIM.





NOW... GIVE IT BACK TO ME--
MY MIND! M-MY SELF! FOR PITY,
END YOUR GAME!

I AM
YOUR SON!!



SOB... SOB



SOB

IF EVER WE WISHED REVENGE
ON TWO EDGE, THAT WISH WAS
GRANTED LONG AGO. HE HAS
BEEN A PRISONER SINCE
CHILDHOOD--



--AS I
WAS. I
CAN
TELL--

HE TAKES
ME FOR
WINNOWILL, THAT BLACK
HAired PAIN-GIVER
LEETAH FOUGHT--

--IN BLUE MOUNTAIN... WHERE
THE GLIDERS DWELL. LEETAH
SAID THEY THINK OF THEM
SELVES AS HIGH ONES... AND
THAT THEIR POWERS ALMOST
BEAR THEM OUT!



UH
HUM...

WHAT CAN HIS
CRUEL MOTHER
HAVE DONE TO HIM,
BROWNSKIN? IF SHE
WERE HERE, GENTLE
LEETAH WOULD NOT
HESITATE TO
HEAL HIM!

WELL, SHE'S
GONE, "DOOR",
WITH THE WOLF-
RIDERS TO THE
FORBIDDEN
GROVE--



"AND THAT LEAVES US TO
SOLVE THIS UNWELCOMED
RIDDLE OURSELVES... PERHAPS
TO OUR ADVANTAGE!"

THE RIDDLE WAITS, GROWS
MORE PROFOUND THROUGH
THREE TURNS OF THE
SEASONS.

THOSE WHO WILL HELP TO
SOLVE IT KNOW NOTHING,
YET, OF THE ROLES THEY
WILL PLAY.









IF IT WERE YOUR SON SO FAR AWAY IN THE DESERT, YOU'D BE WILD TO KNOW HOW HE FARED!

I WON'T BE PUT OFF THIS TIME, SON OF BEARCLAW!

SUNTOP HAS TO "GO OUT"! HE HAS TO REACH SORROW'S END--!

--AND YOU KNOW WHY HE DOESN'T DARE!



SHE NEVER SLEEPS! WOULD YOU TRADE SUNTOP'S LIFE JUST FOR NEWS OF DART?!



... THEN WE MUST REMOVE THE DANGER! WE MUST DESTROY WINNOWILL ONCE AND FOR ALL!

CALL COUNCIL-- NOW! I INSIST!



AS CHIEF OF THE WOLFRIDERS, CUTTER BALKS AT GIVING IN TO HIS FIERCE-TEMPERED ELDER.

BUT AS A FATHER...

STRONGBOW'S SENDING WASN'T OPEN. I JUST HEARD YOUR ANSWERS.

SHOULD I "GO OUT" TO SAVAH NOW?

MAY I, PLEASE?

NOT YET, CUB. SORRY. I CAN ONLY GUESS--

--HOW HARD IT IS TO HAVE A GREAT GIFT AND BE TOLD YOU MUSTN'T USE IT.

HE SENDS THE CALL, AWARE
OF A SUBTLE BRUSHING--THE
FINGERTIPS OF CHANGE.

CLEARBROOK....!

TREESTUMP....!

STRONGBOW....!

MOONSHADE....!

DEWSHINE....!

SCOUTER....!

SKOT....!

PIKE....!

KRIM....!

SKYWISE....!

EMBER....!

LEETAH....!

NIGHTFALL....!

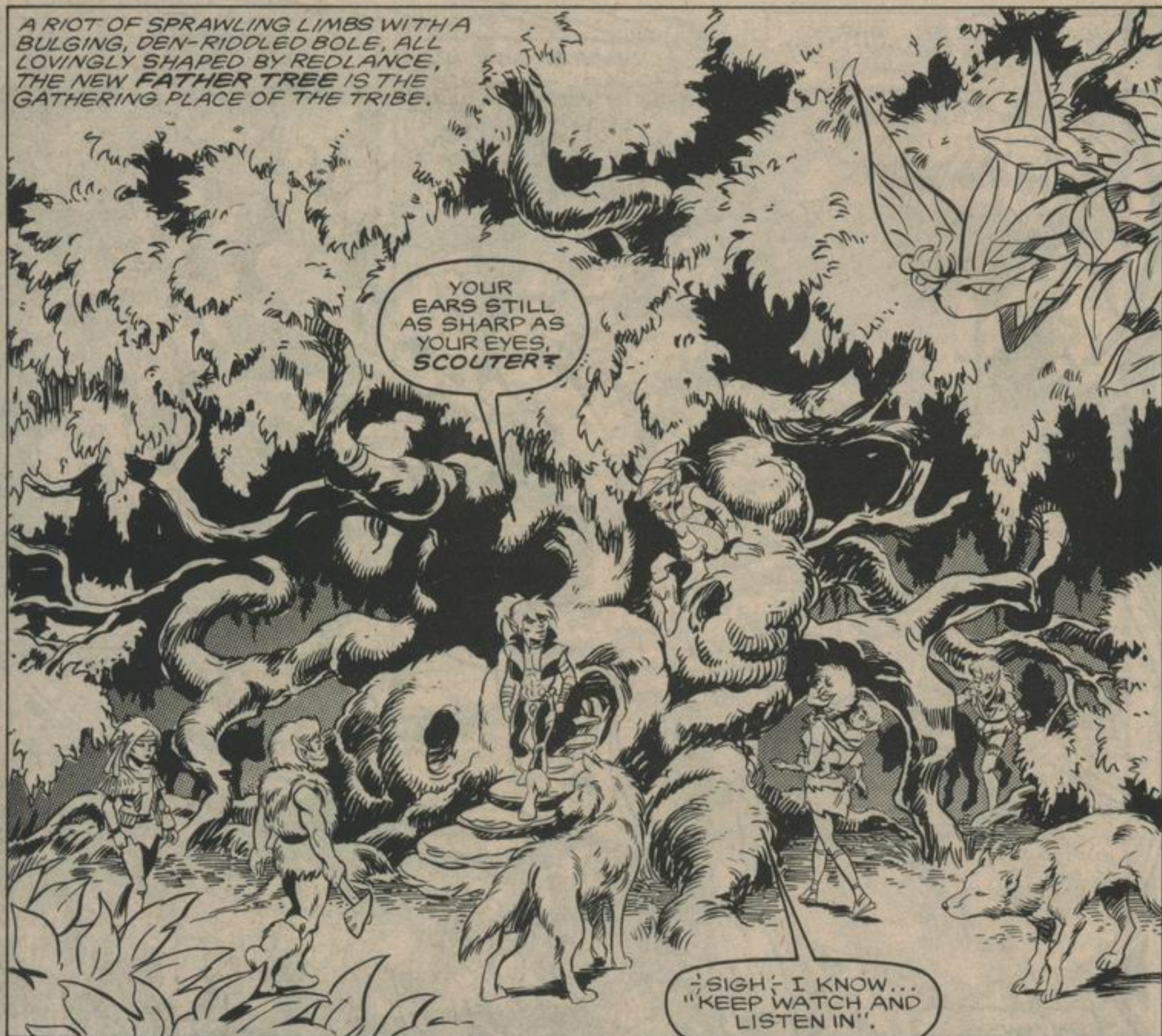
ANOTHER
MOCK
HUNT?

NO! A
COUNCIL!

REDLANCE....!

WHY, I
WONDER?

A RIOT OF SPRAWLING LIMBS WITH A BULGING, DEN-RIDDLED BOLE, ALL LOVINGLY SHAPED BY REDLANCE, THE NEW FATHER TREE IS THE GATHERING PLACE OF THE TRIBE.



WOA, WINDKIN! YOU'LL BUMP YOUR HEAD ON A BRANCH--LIKE LAST TIME! STAY DOWN!

KKHHGG!



SOON...

WELL... WE'RE ALL HERE, AND YET NOT ALL. WE HAVE BLOOD KIN IN THE SUN VILLAGE. WOODLOCK AND RAINSONG--

--HAD ANOTHER CUB ON THE WAY WHEN WE LEFT THEM.



AND THEY'VE PROBABLY HAD **FOUR MORE** SINCE!

THAT'S JUST IT!

NOW **THAT'S** RECOGNITION!

SO WHAT?

WE'VE KNOWN NOTHING OF THEM--

--OR OF OUR SON, **DART**, FOR THE THREE TURNS OF THE SEASONS!

SAID!

NOW LET SOME-ONE SAY WHY!

ME! I'LL SAY! BECAUSE OL' "**WINNOW-WICKED**" MIGHT, UM, TRY HER OLD, DIRTY TRICKS AGAIN IF, UM, **SAVAH--**

THE MOTHER OF MEMORY, WHO WOULD **ALSO** BE IN DANGER--

--AND **SUNTOP** "WENT OUT" TO FIND EACH OTHER.

HEY!

I WAS GOING TO SAY THAT!

NEXT TIME, **EMBER!**

WHAT'S ALL THIS "WENT OUT" SLUSH? I STILL CAN'T GET IT!

WE ELVES HAVE SPIRITS INSIDE US THAT WE CAN SEND OUT TO TALK TO OTHER SPIRITS FAR AWAY!

IF HE REMEMBERS **YESTERDAY**, HE'S DOING WELL!

A GO-BACK EVER CLEVER? **NEVER!**

LISTEN TO **SUNTOP!**

DON'T YOU REMEMBER THE SCROLL OF COLORS, **SKOT?**

ESPECIALLY YOU, **STRONGBOW!** YOU WANT TO BE RID OF **WINNOWILL--?**

"--WELL, YOU CAN'T DO IT BY DESTROYING HER BODY--SHE'S AN *ELF*! KILL HER, AND HER SPIRIT WILL LIVE ON--"

"--FREE TO DO WHATEVER HARM SHE LIKES--TO *ANY* OF US--"

"--FOREVER!"

IT IS SO!
WINNOWILL'S
WEB OF POWER
MUST BE CUT WHILE
SHE *LIVES*, ONE
THREAD AT
A TIME!

THEN, PERHAPS, WE MIGHT
EVEN BECOME FRIENDS
WITH THE GLIDERS--

--AND USE THEIR
GIANT BIRDS TO
VISIT THE SUN FOLK,
OR THE GO-BACKS,
OR OTHER TRIBES
WE DON'T YET
KNOW!

IT IS TIME TO STOP
LIVING AFRAID...BUT
WHICH THREAD TO CUT
FIRST? HMMM...

AH!

THE *HOANG G'TAY SHO*
WORSHIP *WINNOWILL*!
IF WE CONVINCE THOSE
HUMANS THAT THEY MUST
NOT SERVE HER--

WELL, *NONNA'S* ONE OF THE
HOANG G'TAY SHO, ISN'T
SHE? SHE'LL HELP US
TALK TO HER KIND.

--I KNOW THAT
LOOK...! *NONNA*
AND *ADAR*, YES?

IT WORKED
ONCE BEFORE!

SORT
OF...

AS DAWN APPROACHES AND THE COUNCIL ENDS, A
TINY FEAR CLUTCHES AT LEETAH'S STOMACH.

HER LIFEMATE CHATS OF DOING A THING SHE STILL FINDS HARD TO IMAGINE--ASKING AID OF THE FIVE-FINGERED ONES!

I'LL LEAVE BEFORE DARK. THE SOONER I START, THE SOONER WE'LL KNOW IF THE PLAN IS GOOD.

YES, BUT...

...HE IS CUTTER, KINSEEKER, BLOOD OF TEN CHIEFS--

--AND FINDER OF THE PALACE OF THE HIGH ONES. THE QUICK DECISION QUICKLY ACTED UPON IS HIS WAY.

AND SO...

ALONE. NOT WISE.

I DON'T WORRY.

HE GETS ALONG WITH HUMANS JUST LIKE BEARCLAW DID WITH TROLLS!

IT'S A KNACK.

SCOUTER AND DEWSHINE SHARE SKY-WISE'S CONFIDENCE, HAVING SEEN CUTTER AWAY ON HIS MISSION, THE YOUNG PARENTS ENJOY THE EVENING.

OOF!

SO STRONG!

SOON HE'LL LIFT YOU IN THE AIR WITH HIM!

GIGGLE WATCH!

WINDKIN! COME!

...! HE EVEN ANSWERS A SEND NOW!

WHY WON'T HE EVER MIND ME THAT WELL?

HE LIKES ME--

"--BECAUSE I BROUGHT HIM CLOSE TO THE SKY EVERY DAY."

"EVEN ON THE DAY HE POPPED OUT!" ADDS SCOUTER.

NO WONDER.

JUST THEN...

AYO OAH-YOH!

SCOUTER!
THERE'S A-A
SMUDGE OF
LIGHT IN
THE SKY!

I JUST
SPOTTED
IT!

COME
TELL ME
WHAT YOU
SEE!

RIGHT
BEHIND
YOU!

LOOKS LIKE
IT'S STANDING
STILL TO ME...

EH...?

HUNH! I'LL
BE! IT HAS
A TAIL!

A STAR WITH
A TAIL... STRAIGHT
OUT BEHIND, LIKE A
RUNNING WOLF!

I BET IT'S
GOING SOME-
WHERE IN
A HURRY!

UH OH!

OUT THERE!
ONE OF THE
CHOSEN
EIGHT!

HEADED
THIS WAY?

LOOKS LIKE.
AND... I THINK I
KNOW THE RIDER--!

--IT'S AROREE!

LEADER IN CUTTER'S ABSENCE, TREESTUMP RECEIVES SCOUTER'S SILENT WARNING--

-- AND SENDS AN ORDER WHICH GAINS AN INSTANT PRACTICED RESPONSE...

GLIDER! THIS WAY. SLOW. MAYBE HUNTING.

DEN-HIDE!

WHISPER-SWIFT, THE WOLFRIDERS SWARM THROUGH THE HOLLOW OF THE FATHER TREE!

AND...

IT'S NOTHING, DEWSHINE! AROREE WON'T LAND-- HER HAWK'S TOO BIG. ALL SHE'LL SEE FROM THE SKY IS LEAVES!

IF WINNOWILL EVER LEARNS--

-- THAT THIS IS OUR NEW HOLT--

-- SHE'LL BE AFTER SUNTOP IN AN INSTANT! AND WINDKIN TOO! SHE COULDN'T RESIST!



WEBS!
PERHAPS...?



COCOONS!
AT LAST!

K-K-RSSH!

DON'T
MAKE A
SOUND--

--OR MY TRIBE
WILL ATTACK!
YOU KNOW WHAT
THAT MEANS...

I'VE BROKEN
THE "DEN-HIDE".
IT'S WRONG, BUT--

--AROREE,
YOU ABANDONED
US TO THE TROLLS!

WHY?

WHY HAVE YOU
COME HERE NOW?

-- THAT YOU WERE
HERE IN THESE WOODS.
BELIEVE ME! SHE SENT
ME TO FIND THE LOST
PRESERVERS!

I HAVE
SEARCHED
FOR DAYS!

...WINNOWILL!
SHE'S DONE
SOMETHING
TO YOU!

OH,
SKYWISE,
I DID NOT
KNOW--

BEHIND HER THOUGHTS
HE SENSES IT...

COME ON!
THEY'LL WANT
TO KILL ME
FOR THIS--

☆ "-- BUT IF I GET MY WAY, YOU'LL NEVER HAVE TO RETURN TO BLUE MOUNTAIN AGAIN!"

I KNOW I'VE ACTED AGAINST THE PACK, BUT WITH GOOD REASON, TREESTUMP!

WE'LL HAVE TO FIND ANOTHER PLACE TO LIVE NOW--

-- A PLACE NO ONE CAN DISCOVER, OR BETRAY! TELL ME YOUR "GOOD REASON"--

-- FOR LOSING US THE NEW HOLT, STARGAZER.

PLEASE!

I DO NOT WANT TO GO BACK TO BLUE MOUNTAIN... TO HER!

SHE IS INSIDE OUR MINDS-- ALWAYS! WORSE THAN WHEN LORD VOLL LIVED! SHE FEEDS ON MORE THAN OUR DREAMS!

THEY ALL SLEEP-- ALL BUT THE CHOSEN EIGHT WHO KEEP WATCH--

-- AND TYLOAK! SHE NEVER LETS HIM REST. HIS TORTURE GOES ON AND ON!

"SHE KEEPS HIM CHAINED TO THE THRONE--"

-- NEVER TO FLY AGAIN!

OH, HIGH ONES...!



ELFDUEST

SIEGE AT BLUE MOUNTAIN



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Part 2 of an 8-Part Fantasy Adventure

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PART
2

INKS
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MY CUB!
SHE STOLE
MY CUB!

AROREE!
DON'T DO THIS!
COME BACK!

STOP
HER!



-- WHY KILL ME FOR THIS ONE?

AAAA!
AWAAH!

OOWW! D-DON'T UNDERSTAND!

THE WOLFRIDERS CAN ALWAYS BEAR MORE CHILDREN --

OBEY ME, PRESERVERS!
FOLLOW ME!

SHOUTING IN VAIN, AROREE GLIDES BEHIND THE COVER OF HER GIANT MOUNT'S OUTSPREAD WINGS.

AAK!
COUGH

SPOOT!

NO!

NO!

NO GO WITH BAD FLYHIGH~THING!

LOOK OUT! SHE'S DIVING AT US LIKE WE'RE FISH IN A LAKE!!

SKREEAAW!







THERE IS A SUBTLE LIST TO THE GIANT HAWK'S FLIGHT, ALMOST AS THOUGH HE BEARS THE EXTRA WEIGHT OF PREY IN HIS GREAT TALONS. BUT AROREE CHOOSES TO IGNORE IT.

THE TOPMOST CRAGS OF BLUE MOUNTAIN'S AERIE LOOM BEFORE HER--

--AND HER MIND IS OCCUPIED--

--LIKE HER ARMS, WITH A WRIGGLING, SQUEALING BUNDLE.

DON'T SCREAM
DON'T SCREAM
DON'T SCREAM!

THINK...!
WHAT DO I
HAVE WITH
ME? ONLY
WINDKIN'S
TETHER--

--AND--

--MY
KNIFE!

CAUTIOUSLY PULLING
HERSELF UP TO PEER
ACROSS THE LEDGE,
DEWSHINE SEES THAT
NOT ONLY SHE HAS
NEED OF STEALTH.

SHH! YOU
TROUBLESOME
LITTLE
CREATURE!
HUSH!

AAA!
AAH!
AAA!

IF I ATTACK
NOW, SHE MIGHT
HURT HIM!

I AM FORTUNATE.
"SHE" HAS NOT
POSTED ANY OF
THE *EIGHT* HERE
TONIGHT!

YOU ARE
MY SECRET
FOR NOW,
TINY
FLOATER--

COME!
MUST I
GAG
YOU?

NO!

WINDKIN,
PRECIOUS
CUBLING,
STOP YOUR
HOWLS!
I'M HERE!

NNNH?
MUH...!

THE YOUNG
MOTHER'S
SENDING HAS
ITS EFFECT,
DESIRED--

--AND--

--OTHERWISE!

AROREE
ACTS SO
STRANGELY--
SO MUCH
ALONE!

I DON'T
KNOW
WHY--

-- BUT I *BELIEVE* WHAT
SHE TOLD US IN THE HOLT JUST
BEFORE SHE TOOK WINDKIN!



YET IF ALL SHE ^{POOF} TRULY WANTS--

IS TO **ESCAPE** THIS CURSED PLACE--

TYLOAK!
WINDKIN'S SIRE
BY RECOGNITION!

IS THIS
SOME PLAN
OF HIS?

NO...IT
CAN'T BE!
HE DOESN'T
EVEN KNOW
ABOUT THE
FORBIDDEN
GROVE.

AND WHILE
DEWSHINE
LIES LOW,
ANXIOUSLY
WAITING
UNTIL ALL
IS CLEAR...

WHAT
IS IT?

^{POOF}WHIMPER^{POOF}

THE SILENT
CHASE GOES
ON UNTIL...

^{POOF}YAWN^{POOF}

AROREE JUST
FLEW THROUGH
THOSE DOORS.

THANK
THE **HIGH**
ONES THAT
GLIDER DIDN'T
NOTICE HER.

I CANNOT
FEED YOU!
I-I--

^{POOF}GASP^{POOF}

SHE
KNOWS!
SHE IS
CALLING!

--DO NOT KNOW *HOW* TO
CARE FOR YOU! IF ONLY--

-- THEN WHY DID
SHE COME BACK
HERE? WHAT DOES
SHE MEAN TO DO
WITH MY CUB?

DEWSHINE
SHUDDERS AT
A SUDDEN
THOUGHT...

ALMOST RELUCTANTLY, AROREE
MUFFLES THE CHILD IN A
BLANKET.

SIGH
...SOONER
THAN I
EXPECTED.

IN MOMENTS...

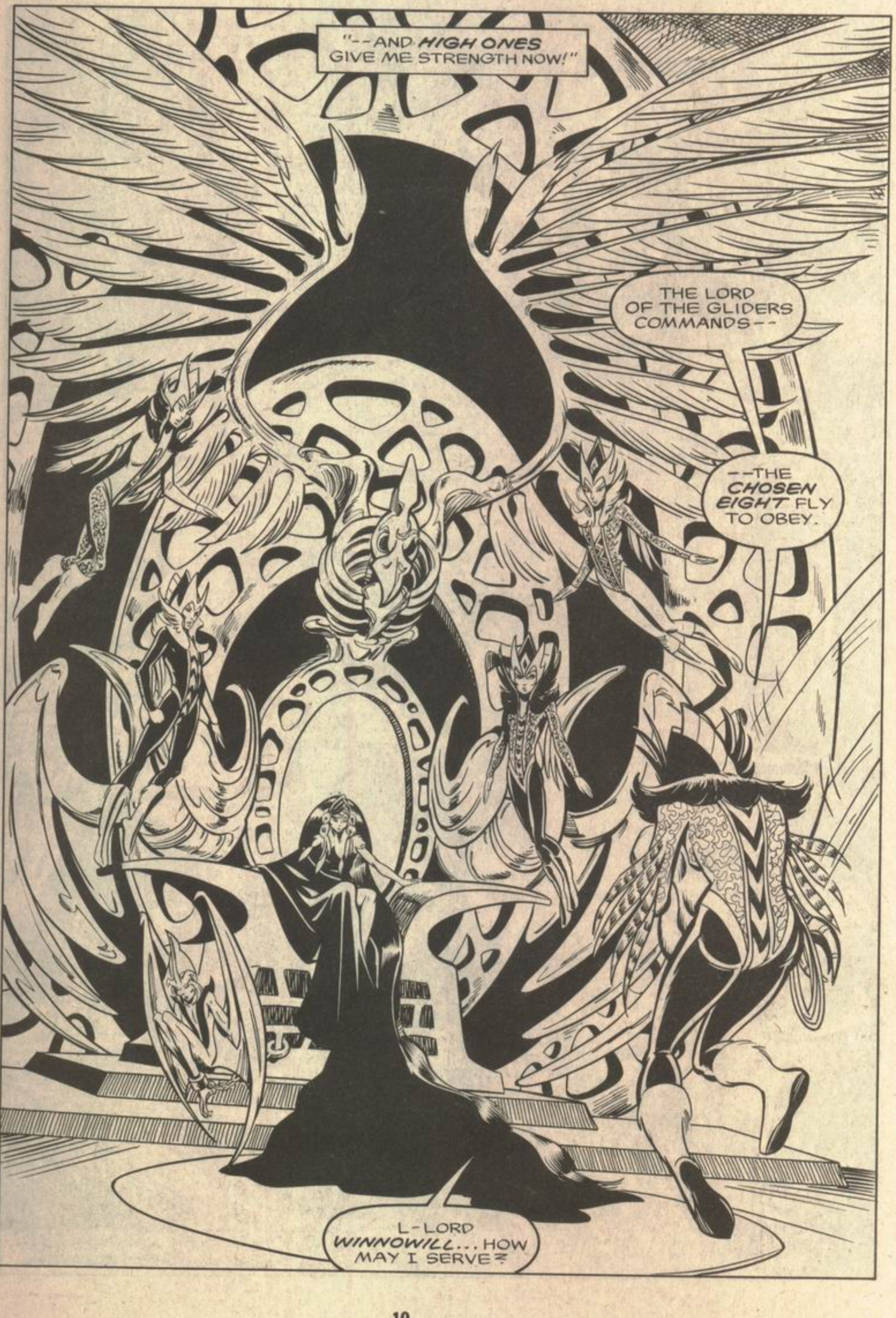
AH! THERE
THEY--

OH
NO!

WINDKIN
CAN'T COME TO
MY SEND-CALL!
I'VE GOT TO KEEP
FOLLOWING--

-- WAIT
'TIL SHE
UNWRAPS
HIM!

SOON...
I KNOW
THIS PLACE!
IT'S THE
ENTRANCE TO
LORD VOLL'S
THRONE
ROOM!
"BUT THAT SAD, KINDLY ELDER IS
DEAD," THINKS DEWSHINE--



"-- AND *HIGH ONES*
GIVE ME STRENGTH NOW!"

THE LORD
OF THE GLIDERS
COMMANDS--

--THE
CHOSEN
EIGHT FLY
TO OBEY.

L-LORD
WINNOWILL... HOW
MAY I SERVE?





SET ME *DOWN*!

SO... YOU WISH TO LEAVE THE *EIGHT*, *AROREE*?

Y-YES, LORD. BUT I COULD NOT ASK YOU TO GRANT ME FREEDOM IF IT MEANT LEAVING *YOU* WITH ONLY SEVEN!



SOMETHING IS... *WRONG* WITH ME! I-I CANNOT LIVE HERE IN BLUE MOUNTAIN ANY LONGER!

WA-AAH
AAA-A!

YOU NEEDN'T EXPLAIN. AND YOU NEEDN'T SAY *WHOSE* LITTER OF ONE THIS IS.



IT IS OBVIOUS--

--IS IT NOT, *TYLOAK*?



JUST THEN...

WINDKIN!
COME!

BD-D-D-T
GIGGLE

WHA--?

NO!

LREE!

AS THE CHILD FLIES ARROW STRAIGHT TO HIS MOTHER, *TYLOAK* STRAINS AGAINST HIS HEAVY CHAIN.

DEWSHINE'S SOUL NAME SINGS IN HIS MIND LIKE A BIRD REVIVED AFTER THE LONG WHITE-COLD.

HIGH ONES! I'D GIVE THE PALACE AND ALL TO BE ABLE TO FLY, BUT--

--EVEN THEN, **SHE** COULD STOP ME!

OH, PLEASE DON'T LET **HER** REMEMBER...!

HOLD ON TIGHT TO ME, MY LITTLE TREE FROG! I'LL TELL **SCOUTER** AND ALL THE OTHER WOLFRIDERS HOW BRAVE YOU ARE!

THE DETERMINED YOUNG HUNTRESS WEAVES A PERPLEXING TRAIL FOR HER CASUAL, OVERCONFIDENT PURSUERS.

AT LAST... A GLIMMER OF STARLIGHT...!

ANOTHER DOOR TO THE AERIE!

I'VE FOUND IT!

WE'RE ALMOST OUTSIDE!



BUT...

WE'VE HAD ENOUGH
SPORT, DON'T YOU
THINK, TYLOAK?

DO NOT
DO THIS, I
BEG YOU!

THAT NAME
IS ALL SHE
IS! IT IS HER
LIFE! USE IT
AGAINST
HER AND--



-- YOU CANNOT
HELP BUT
DESTROY
HER!

ALL
FORMS
OF
POWER--

-- SHOULD
BE AT THE
DISPOSAL
OF THE
POWERFUL.



SO!

LREE...!!

COME TO ME...!!



TIMMORN'S
BLOOD!!

LREE!!



-- NO, TREESTUMP!

WE MISSED
SKYWISE
WHEN THE
MOONS
WERE
HIGH...

THEY'VE
HURT HER!
I KNOW
IT!!

WE CAN'T
WAIT FOR
CUTTER...
WE'VE
GOT TO--

NOW
THAT
THEY'VE
SET--

"-- SURELY HE IS CLOSE
ON **CUTTER'S** TRAIL!"

FOR ONCE I'M GLAD
MY CHIEF-FRIEND
DOESN'T GET SIDE-
TRACKED BY CURIOSITY.

HE'S
FOLLOWING THE
RIVER--

--OUGHT TO
SPOT HIM
ANY TIME NOW.
...**TROLL DUNG!**
WHAT WILL
HE SAY?

SKYWISE TURNS
THE NIGHT'S
EVENTS OVER
AND OVER IN
HIS MIND.

AROREE
AND I
LOCK-
SENT!

I **KNOW** SHE
DIDN'T HAVE IT ALL
PLANNED! WHY--?



MOMENTS
LATER...

POOR OLD FRIEND!
YOU WERE RUNNING YOUR
PAWS OFF FOR ME,
WEREN'T YOU?



BUT... TWO DAYS LATER, THE WOLFRIDERS' YOUNG CHIEF ARRIVES AT DEATH-WATER FALLS, AS YET UNAWARE OF DEWSHINE'S FLIGHT.



PANT PANT!
YOU STILL
WITH ME,
WARFROST?

WE'RE
ALMOST TO
THE TOP.



HOWEVER NEAR
THE HUMAN'S HUTS,
HOWEVER VITAL
THE MISSION--

--PRIORITIES--



--ARE PRIORITIES.

AND SO, SOMEWHAT LATER THAN PLANNED...



WELL... OLBAR
THE MOUNTAIN-TALL
IS STILL THEIR CHIEF.
THAT'S HIS LAUGHTER
COMING FROM THE
BIGGEST HUT.

SOUNDS LIKE
HE'S HAVING A
FINE TIME WHILE
EVERYBODY ELSE
SLEEPS.

WHURF!

STAY THERE, WARFROST.
I'LL KNOCK YOUR TEETH OUT
IF YOU GIVE ME AWAY.

HAVING ESTABLISHED
DOMINANCE IN HIS OWN
MIND, IF NOT IN THE
WOLF'S, CUTTER SNEAKS
TOWARD A PARTICULAR
DWELLING.



PUCKERNUTS!

THEY'VE GOT
A NEAR-WOLF
GUARDING
THEIR DOOR!



AS SILENTLY AS
"CHILD MOON" SLIPS
PAST "MOTHER
MOON" IN THE SKY--

-- CUTTER
AVOIDS THE
WATCHDOG--



--AND FINDS...

JUST BIG
ENOUGH--



--FOR ME
TO SQUEEZE
THROUGH.

SNIFF
SNIFF

THIS
IS THEIR
HUT--

--BUT THAT'S
NOT THEM!

WHERE--?

THE FERAL FOREST-DWELLER'S KEEN NOSTRILS LEAD HIM
STRAIGHT TO THE TWO HE SEEKS. BUT BEFORE WAKING NONNA
AND ADAR, CUTTER TAKES IN HIS SURROUNDINGS.



HUNH! THEY'VE DONE
WELL SINCE **SKYWISE**
AND I LAST SAW
THEM.

THEY HAVE SO
MUCH **STUFF**--
ALMOST MORE
THAN THEIR HUT
CAN HOLD!

AND THREE
CUBS, TOO.
FAST WORK!



THE PLACE
SMELLS OF
NONNA'S
PAINTS.

SHE'S PUT
HER **SYMBOLS**
ALL OVER THE
WALLS.

WELL...

LET'S SEE
IF THEY
REMEMBER
ME.







<OH, FINE!>

<DO I DREAM?! MY LITTLE BIRD SPIRIT!!> CHOKE</>

<MY EYES SEE WITH JOY, NONNA... ADAR. THIS VILLAGE HAS TREATED YOU WELL.>

<AND YOU HAVE BEEN VERY BUSY!>



<CHUCKLE< YOU TEASE ME! THEY ARE TOO GROWN UP FOR ME TO HAVE BORNE THEM IN THREE SNOWS!!>

<WE TOOK THEM IN WHEN--EH?>

A SUDDEN RACKET AT THE DOOR--



--SENDS CUTTER LEAPING INTO THE SHADOWS.



HAAYEEAH!

<WAKE UP, SYMBOL MAKER!>

<GET YOUR POTS READY--!>

<MIX YOUR COLORS! CHANT, SWEAT OR WHATEVER YOU MUST DO!>

<I WANT YOU TO PAINT GRAYSHA, HERE, WITH-->

<-- BIG BELLY PICTURES!> HAR HAR HAR!



<THE MOONS ARE RIGHT FOR THE MAKING OF ANOTHER SON!>



<WELL? MUST I WAIT 'TIL SUNUP?>

<UH...>

<NO, MY CHIEF, BUT-->

HEH
HEH
HEH...

<AIEEE!
SPIRITS!>

<SO THIS
IS HOW
OLBAR THE
MOUNTAIN
TALL-->

--MAKES
USE OF HIS
SYMBOL
MAKER!>

<WELL, BY MY GRAND-
MOTHER'S DROOPING DUGS!!
"BIRD-BONES"!>

UFF!

<OOHHH...! PLEASE,
OLBAR! DO NOT
TREAT THE HONORED
ONE SO!>

<WHY
NOT?>

<Y-YOU ARE A SACRED
BEING! MY FORMER
TRIBE FOLK, THE HOAN
G'TAY SHO HAVE ALWAYS
WORSHIPPED BIRD
SPIRITS!>

<I
DON'T
MIND!>

YOUR TRIBE
HAS BEEN
TRICKED BY
BY AN EVIL
ONE-->

<--WHO KEEPS
THEM AS
PLAYTHINGS!
THAT'S WHY I'VE
COME!>

<NONNA AND ADAR, YOU MUST GO WITH ME TO SAVE THE HOAN G'TAY SHO!>

<YES! THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT REALLY GOES ON INSIDE BLUE MOUNTAIN!>

WE...?

<"PERHAPS YOU'VE SEEN HER FACE," INTONES THE ELF. "BEAUTIFUL... WHITE... LIKE A MASK MADE OF EGGSHELL, GLEAMING IN THE TUNNEL WHERE SHE STANDS TO RECEIVE HER HUMAN OFFERINGS!">

<"SHE'S CALLED--">

<"--WINNOWILL.">

<"THOSE OF THE HOAN G'TAY SHO WHO ENTER THE MOUNTAIN TO SERVE HER THINK THEY'LL GAIN SOME SPECIAL BLESSING OF THE "BIRD SPIRITS.">

<"BUT IN FACT, THEY BECOME WINNOWILL'S TOYS--PETS!">

<AND WHEN THEIR TIME FINALLY COMES, THEIR DEATHS, TOO, SERVE ONLY TO ENTERTAIN HER!>

<I-I HAVE SEEN THE DARK-ROBED SPIRIT YOU SPEAK OF, BUT-->

<BELIEVE ME, HUMANS!>

<WINNOWILL HAS TURNED AGAINST EVEN HER OWN KIND!>

<BELIEVE YOU? NOW WAIT JUST A MOMENT!>

<YOU'RE NOT TALKING MY SYMBOL MAKER INTO SOME MAD-HEADED TREK TO BLUE MOUNTAIN!>

< I REMEMBER YOU WELL! YOU'RE NO SPIRIT! YOU'RE A **TRICKSTER**! IF I SAY **NO**, THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT! >

< I CAN CALL THE ANGER OF THE **FORBIDDEN GROVE** DOWN ON YOU! >

HAH!

< YOU WERE THERE ONCE, THE WINGED SPIRITS SCARED YOU, DIDN'T THEY? >

HAH!

< SO BRAVE? >

< LET'S JUST SEE... >

HELLO, BIGHTHING!

HELLO, BIG~THING!

GAAH!

< TA-TAKE IT AWAY!! >

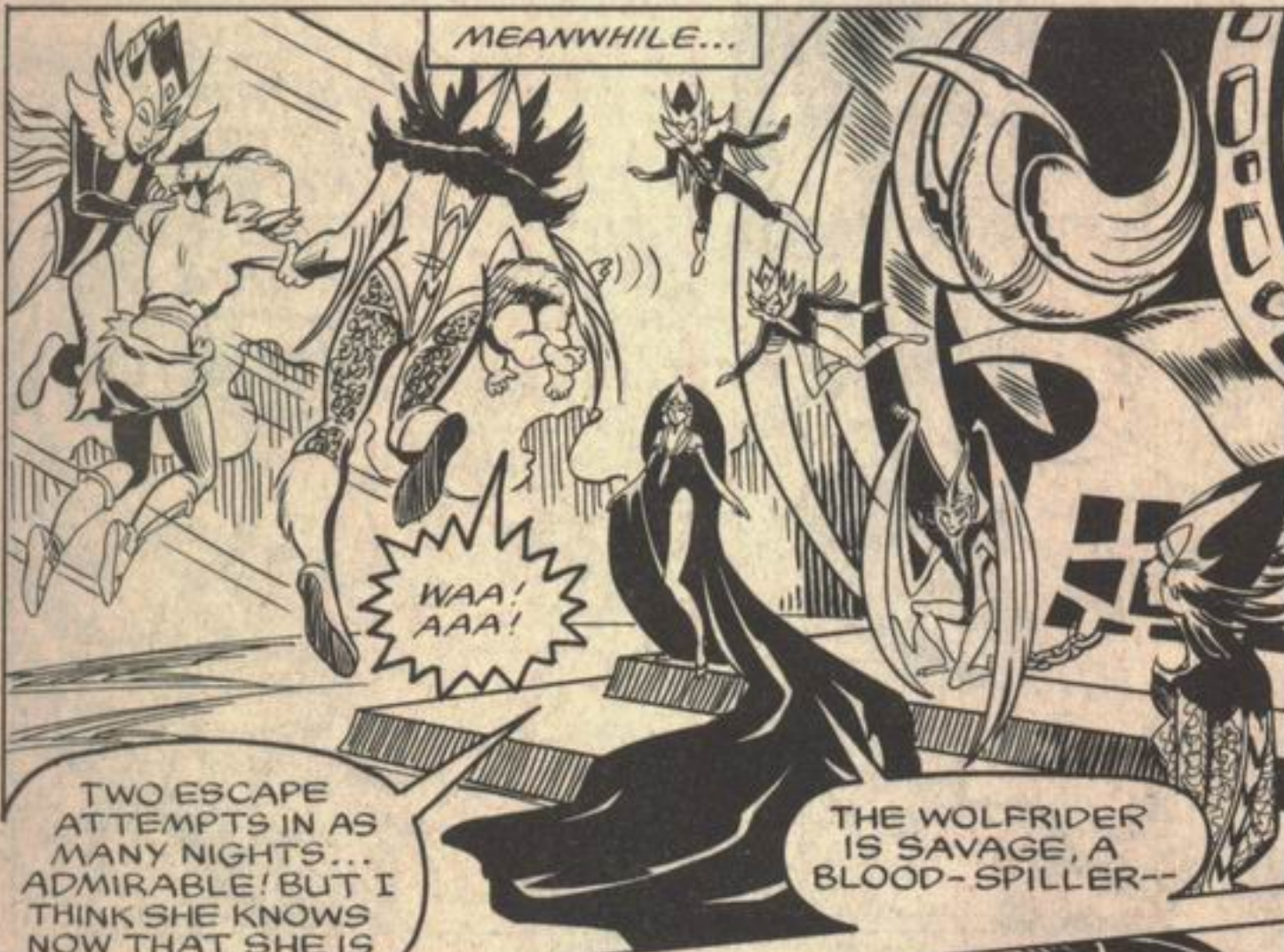
< EVIL SPIRIT! DON'T LET IT TRAP ME IN ITS WEB! >

**YARK!
YARK!**

HEE HEE! BIGHTHING RUN RUN FROM BERRYBUZZ!

< THERE ARE MANY MORE WHERE **THIS** ONE COMES FROM, OLBAR! BEWARE! > Δ





MEANWHILE...

WAA!
AAA!

TWO ESCAPE
ATTEMPTS IN AS
MANY NIGHTS...
ADMIRABLE! BUT I
THINK SHE KNOWS
NOW THAT SHE IS
MINE.

THE WOLFRIDER
IS SAVAGE, A
BLOOD-SPILLER--

"--YET THE USE OF--
APPROPRIATE-- FORCE,
NO MORE, NO LESS,
RENDERS HER DOCILE.
SUCH IS MY COMPASSION
FOR THE MISBEGOTTEN
OF OUR RACE."



DON'T...

PLEASE
DON'T TAKE
MY CUB
FROM ME...

--DISTASTEFUL AS
IT IS TO TOUCH MINDS
WITH YOU, I MUST THANK
YOU FOR REVEALING
THE PRESERVERS'
WHEREABOUTS--

--AND
YOUR TRIBE'S.



OF COURSE NOT.
IT WANTS FEEDING AND,
OBVIOUSLY, CLEANING.

THE
ONE WHO
WHELPED
IT CAN
BEST DO
THAT.

BY THE WAY--



NO!

THIS IS
NOT MY
DOING--
IS IT...?
HOW CAN
IT BE?

DEWSHINE
IS TO BLAME!
SHE SHOULD
NOT HAVE
CHASED ME
HERE!

MUST LEAVE--NOW! I
HAVE DONE MY DUTY
BY WINNOWILL.

SHE HAS
HER
EIGHTH.

AND I
HAVE A
CLEANER
WORLD
WAITING--
--OUTSIDE.

SLOWLY, AROREE GLIDES THROUGH BROODING, BAROQUE
HALLWAYS WHOSE SINUOUS TWISTS AND TURNS SHE HAS
KNOWN, IT SEEMS, FOR LONGER THAN SHE HAS LIVED.

AT LAST, SHE REACHES
THE CHAMBER OF THE
GREAT EGG.

FAREWELL, MY
SLEEPING PEOPLE.
MAY AT LEAST
SOME OF YOUR
DREAMS BE YOURS--
NOT *HERS*!

HER LAST LOOK TAKEN, THE
HEAVY-HEARTED GLIDER
RETURNS TO THE AERIE.

SHE WILL SUMMON
LITTLETRILL, HER
MAGNIFICENT MOUNT--

--AND, PLUNGING THROUGH THE OPEN
SKY, SHE WILL FIND RELEASE FROM
PRESSING, HONEST GUILT.

!GASP!
KUREEL!

YOU DO
NOT TRULY
INTEND TO
SUNDER THE
EIGHT.
DO YOU,
AROREE?

YOUR
RIGHT TO
BEAR A
TALON
WHIP--



--IS A LIFE-LONG HONOR, AND **WE** LIVE FOREVER!

COME...

GIVE ME YOUR HAND!



FOOL! BECAUSE YOU ONCE PLAYED PLEASURE-GAMES WITH A STAR-GAZING WOLFRIDER--

--BECAUSE YOU ONCE SAW THE SKY THROUGH HIS EYES--

YOU'VE THOUGHT OF NOTHING ELSE SINCE.

LEARN! YOUR ONLY LOYALTY IS TO WINNOWILL!



SHE IS A BETTER LORD THAN **VOLL** WAS OR EVER COULD BE!

SHE DEFINES OUR PURPOSE HERE. SHE IS PURE! INSPIRED!

AND SHE KNOWS ALL ELVES WITH **TAINTED BLOOD--**



"--MUST DIE!"





AS EASILY AS SLICING WARM FLESH, SHE HAS CUT ALL BONDS WITH THE ONLY LIFE SHE HAS KNOWN.

IF SHE SURVIVES, ALL POSSIBILITIES ARE OPEN TO HER.



BUT WHAT OF THOSE SHE HAS INADVERTENTLY BETRAYED?

SKY-WISE...

FORGIVE ME?

NEXT DAY... THE VALLEY OF ENDLESS SLEEP...

CUTTER IS QUIET, WATCHFUL. THOUGH HE HELPED ADAR BUILD THE RAFT, HE HAS NEVER TRAVELED BY WATER BEFORE.

I KNOW WE'LL MAKE BETTER TIME THAN ON FOOT, BUT...



<PARDON, HONORED ONE, DO YOU HAVE A NAME?>



<HUH?>

<YES.>

<I'M CALLED-->



HE MUST HEAR SOMETHING WE CANNOT!



ONLY ONE OTHER THAN LEETAH, FREELY USES CUTTER'S SOUL NAME--

--A BROTHER IN ALL BUT BLOOD!





(HEY! WHERE DO YOU---?)

(DON'T WAIT FOR ME! I'LL CATCH UP!)

SPLASH!



SHORTLY, NEAR THE RIVER BANK...

HOO! YOU LOOK LIKE YOU'VE BEEN GONE OVER BY A BEAR!

WORSE...



I FOUND NONNA AND ADAR. WE'RE LETTING THE RIVER TAKE US TO THE BLUE MOUNTAIN. COME ON--

NO!



I'VE HAD ENOUGH OF HUMANS!

THE MEMORIES ARE ALL TOO FRESH--TOO HUMILIATING FOR THE PROUD STARGAZER TO RECOUNT. INSTEAD, HE BREATHES A NAME...

IT'S MY DOING, TAM. I BROUGHT HER IN. I THOUGHT... SHE'D STAY. BUT SHE FLEW OFF... WITH WINDKIN! AND DEWSHINE'S GONE AFTER THEM!



"AROREE... SHE CAME INTO THE HOLT!"

WHAT?!

TO BE CONTINUED...

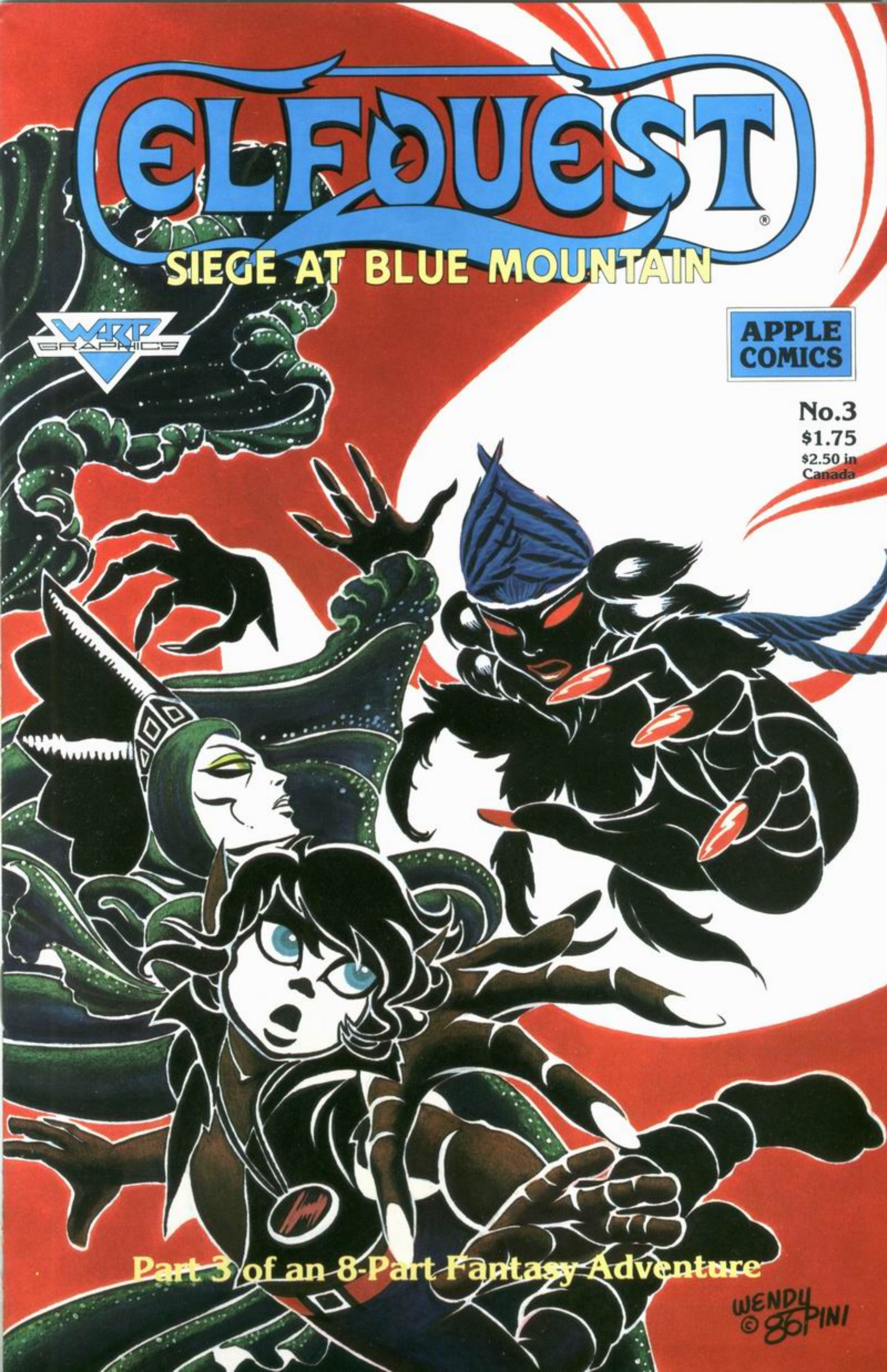
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SIEGE AT BLUE MOUNTAIN



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SIEGE AT BLUE MOUNTAIN

ARTIST / WRITER
WENDY PINI

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RICHARD PINI

PART
3

INKS
JOE STATON

LETTERER
JANICE CHIANG

SIMPLY, WITHOUT EXCUSES OR SHIFTING OF BLAME, SKYWISE TELLS CUTTER WHAT HAPPENED THREE NIGHTS AGO WITHIN THE FORBIDDEN GROVE.

AROREE SAID
SHE WAS HUNTING
PRESERVERS, NOT OUR
TRIBE. SHE'D BEEN HURT--
INSIDE HER MIND--
BY WINNOWILL.
I FELT IT, AND--

-- I
WANTED TO
HELP.

THE YOUNG WOLFRIDER
CHIEF LISTENS... VERY
QUIETLY.

AROREE SEEMED TO WANT THAT HELP MORE THAN ANYTHING--

-- BUT ONE LOOK AT LITTLE WINDKIN AND... HER EYES JUST WENT MAD! SHE SNATCHED THE CUB AND FLEW OFF!

AND DEWSHINE...?

YOU KNOW YOUR COUSIN! SHE MADE ONE OF THOSE JUMPS THAT ALWAYS SCARE US TO DEATH--

--AND CAUGHT HOLD OF AROREE'S GIANT HAWK. YOU CAN GUESS WHERE THEY WERE HEADING.

BLUE MOUNTAIN.

AN UNEXPECTED, GENTLE TOUCH AND THE SOUND OF HIS SOFTLY SPOKEN SOUL NAME TELL SKYWISE THAT HE IS ALREADY FORGIVEN.

FAHR... NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOU CARE, YOU CAN'T CHANGE AROREE. SHE'S A BACKSTAB--

NO!

MAYBE I'M MAD TOO, BUT I KNOW SHE MEANT NO HARM!



THAT MORNING, IN
THE FORBIDDEN GROVE...

POOR SCOUTER...!

THE LONGER WE HAVE
TO WAIT FOR FATHER
TO COME BACK, THE
MORE I WORRY, TOO!

I KNOW. THERE ARE TEARS BEHIND
HIS EYES ALL THE TIME NOW. HE WANTS SO
MUCH TO GO RESCUE DEWSHINE--

--AND
WINDKIN! Δ

WE'RE ALL
IN DANGER.

WINNOWILL CAN
STEAL SECRETS
FROM ANYONE!
SHE'LL FIND
OUT WHERE
WE LIVE!

÷GASP÷

DEWSHINE
WON'T BE
ABLE TO
FIGHT HER!

THEN WE BETTER
DO SOMETHING BESIDES
SIT, SIT, SIT!

SUNTOP,
I'M TELLING
YOU--

-- YOU HAVE
TO "GO OUT"
AND GET
SAVAH'S
ADVICE--

-- YOU
JUST HAVE
TO!

THE YOUNG MYSTIC DOES NOT
ANSWER HIS TWIN SISTER. INSIDE
HIM HIS FONDEST DESIRE WAGES
EVEN BATTLE WITH THE OBEDIENCE
HE OWES HIS ELDERS.

BUT EVEN THOUGH
I HOPE I WON'T EVER
HAVE TO TAKE FATHER'S
PLACE, I CAN STILL ACT
LIKE A CHIEF!

YOU DO
WHAT I SAY
AND I'LL
TAKE THE
BLAME!

B-BUT
EMBER...

I KNOW...
MOTHER AND
FATHER SAID
"NO"!

GO ON!
DO IT
NOW!

TEMPTED PAST ENDURANCE,
SUNTOP PREPARES TO ENTER A
PROFOUND TRANCE--



--A
FORBIDDEN
STATE WHICH
WILL LEAVE
HIM UTTERLY
VULNERABLE TO WINNOWILL'S
PROWLING, PREYING SPIRIT!

BUT FIRST HE MUST EMPTY HIS MIND
OF ALL MEMORIES... DREAMS... EVEN
THE "NOW" OF WOLF-THOUGHT.

AN IMAGE COMES TO HIM--
TIMMAIN, THE HIGH ONE...

TIMMAIN, WHO ENLIGHTENED
THE WOLFRIDERS THROUGH
HIS VOICE, AND CONFIRMED
FOR HIM THE RIGHTNESS OF
HIS CHOSEN SPIRITUAL PATH.

THE HIGH ONE'S
FEATURES MELT,
RESHAPE INTO THE
DARK-SKINNED
DIGNITY OF SAVAHA'S.

WISE SAVAHA, MOTHER
OF MEMORY... BELOVED
SAVAHA, MENTOR AND
TEACHER IN HIS DESERT
BOUND BIRTH-HOME, THE
SUN VILLAGE.

HER REGARD
FOR HIM, HER
EXPECTATIONS...
SO HIGH!

BRIEFLY, A
DISTRACTION--
AMBITION--
A DREAMED-OF
MATURITY IN
WHICH HIS
GIFTS REACH
FULL POTENTIAL.
THE LAD
DISCIPLINES HIS
MIND AND...

AT LAST HIS SPIRIT
FLOATS FREE! HE
CALLS...

SAVAHA?

SAVAHA...!

IT'S
ME!

SAVAHA AAA



THREE FLOODS-AND-FLOWERINGS
HAVE-PASSED--THE SUN VILLAGE
HAS WITNESSED THE RISE OF A
CROSSBREED OF WOLF AND JACKAL--

--AND A NEW BREED
OF WOLFRIDERS!

WOODLOCK MUSES AS HE
OBSERVES THE DEMONSTRATION...

YAH! YAH! YAH!
WHAT WOULD
STRONGBOW
THINK--



"--OF HIS GROWN UP BOY-CLUB NOW?"

THAK!

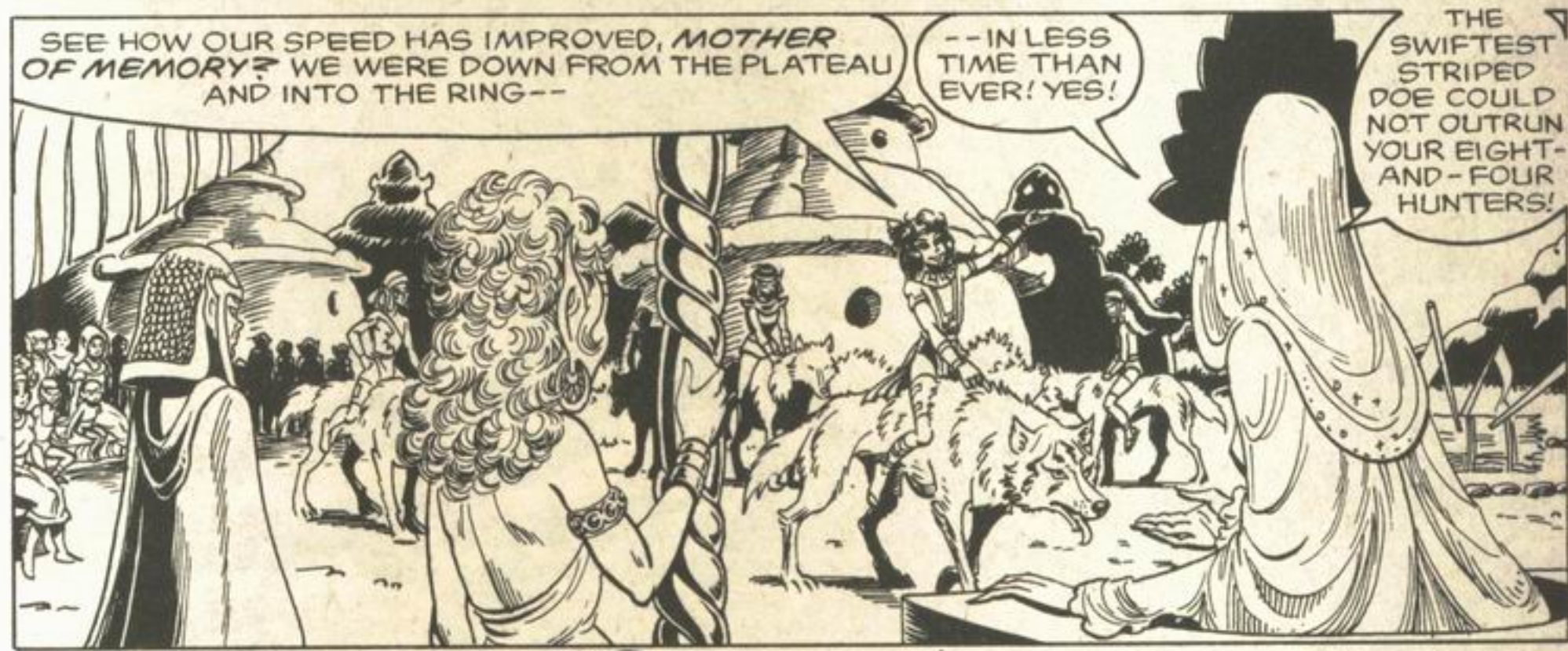
"LIKE SIRE, LIKE PUP--"



"--EXCEPT," WOODLOCK CHUCKLES TO HIMSELF--

HOO HAH

"--FOR THE NOISE!"



SEE HOW OUR SPEED HAS IMPROVED, MOTHER OF MEMORY? WE WERE DOWN FROM THE PLATEAU AND INTO THE RING--

--IN LESS TIME THAN EVER! YES!

THE SWIFTEST STRIPED DOE COULD NOT OUTRUN YOUR EIGHT-AND-FOUR HUNTERS!



SAVAH SMILES, REMINDED OF ANOTHER BOLD, PROUD YOUNGLING--HER WANDERER...

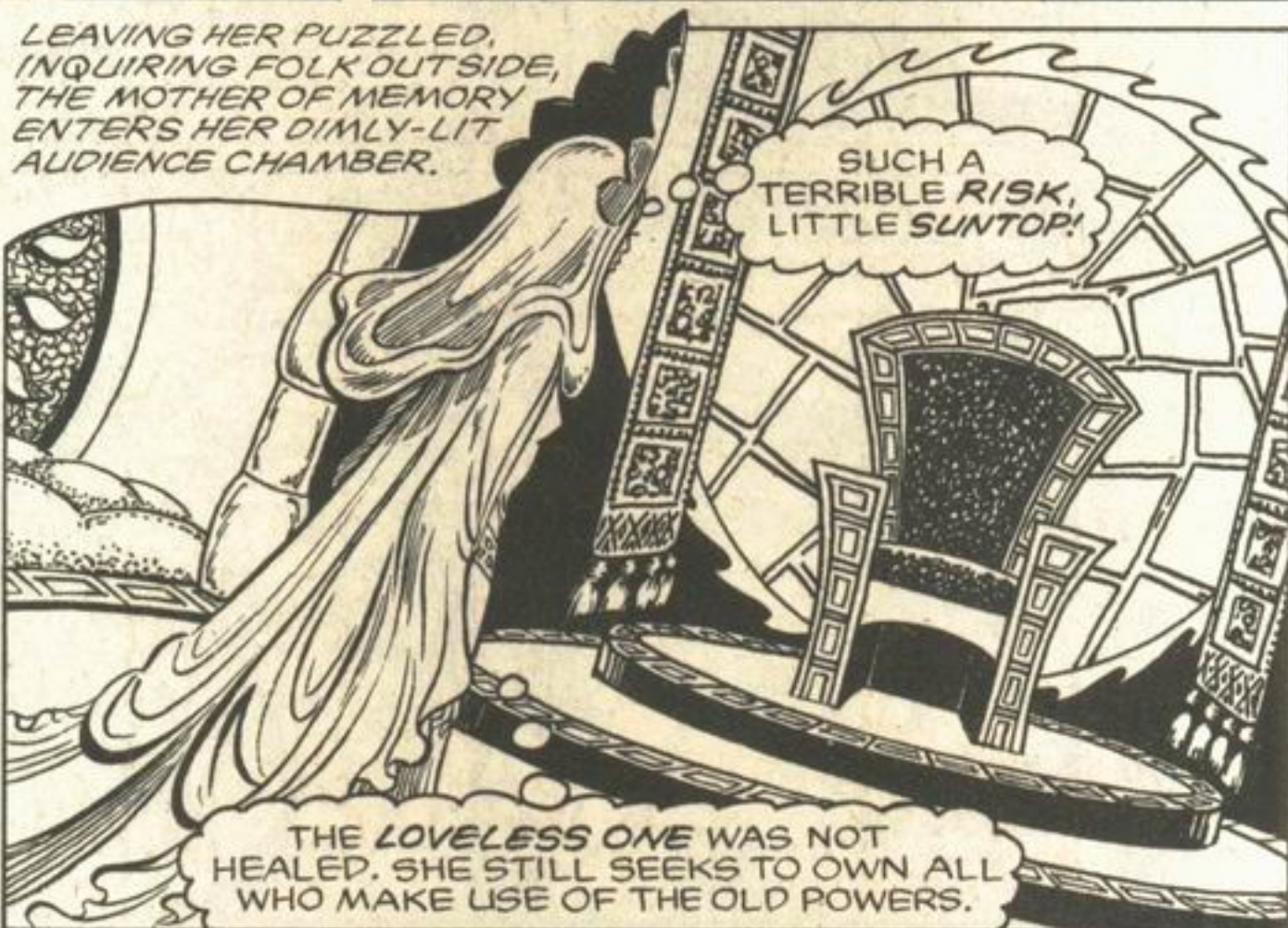
...RAYEK.

YOU'VE TURNED MEEK GARDENERS INTO WOLFRIDERS, DART. WE ARE ALL MOST IMPRESSED.



I, TOO! I'M ALMOST IMPRESSED! HE COULD STAND A BATH, THOUGH, RIGHT, SHEN SHEN?

GIGGLE! NEWSTAR! YOU'RE TOO WICKED!



IN THE MIDST OF
TIMELESSNESS--

SUNTOP...!
CHILD...!

-- URGENCY!

SAVAH...!
HELP...!

...COMING!

YOU FOUND
ME! OH!
THANK YOU!
THANK--

--QUICKLY, DEAR
ONE! YOU KNOW
THE DANGER!

TOUCH ME!
THEN GO!

MEANWHILE, IN THE CHAMBER OF THE GREAT EGG...

EARLIER, WINNOWILL
STOOD BESIDE HER THRONE,
TORMENTING THE CAPTIVE
DEWSHINE--AT THE SAME TIME
SLYLY NOTING AROREE'S
SURREPTITIOUS DEPARTURE.

BUT NOW...

...SPINELESS
DESERTER!
KUREEL WILL DEAL
WITH HER. I MUST
ATTEND TO A SMALL
MATTER OF
DELAYED--

--VENGEANCE!

CONTEMPLATING THE SHAPED STONE
SYMBOLS ON THE MULTI-LAYERED
SHELL OF THE FLOATING EGG,
WINNOWILL SINKS TO HER
KNEES. SHE LABORS TO
CLEAR HER MIND OF
FURIOUS, TRANCE-IMPEDING
DREAMS.

VOLL, ONCE
LORD, ONCE
LOVEMATE--
FIRST-BORN
OF THE HIGH
ONES...

THEY SEDUCED
HIM... KILLED
HIM, THE WOLF-
BLOODED ONES...

WHEN SHE LAY BROKEN
BY HER OWN CHOICE,
VOLL IGNORED HER
FEEBLE SENDINGS AND
FLEW TO HIS DEATH!

OH, HAD HE ONLY GIVEN
HER TIME--TRUSTED HER
TO DO HER WILL WITH THE
GLIDERS--SHE'D HAVE
GIVEN HIM FAR MORE THAN
THE PALACE--HOME OF
HIS DREAMS!

NOT MIND'S QUIET, BUT COLD
PURPOSEFUL HATRED THRUSTS HER
AT LAST THROUGH THE BLACK
CURTAIN.

CURSED WOLFRIDERS!
I CAN HURT THEM--

--AND I SHALL!"

AS TWO SPIRIT-HANDS JOYFULLY CLASP...

SUNTOP! YOU HAVE SEEN
THE LOST DWELLING OF THE
HIGH ONES!!

YESSSS! HE HAS
BEEN TO THE BEGINNING
OF OUR TIME!

BUT HIS
TIME AS A
WOLFRIDER--

--IS DONE!
COME, BOY!

S-SAVAH...?!

INNOCENT!
SHE HASN'T THE
STRENGTH TO
PROTECT YOU!

I DO!!

GO BACK,
SUNTOP! YOUR
TOUCH HAS
TOLD ME ALL!

BUT--!

AAARR!
I SHALL
TAKE YOU
LATER--

SISTER, YOUR
VISION CAN ONLY BE
REALIZED THROUGH
LOVE, NOT POWER!

YOU ARE
NOT
WHOLLY
WRONG--

-- BUT YOU
MUST HEAL
YOURSELF!

--YOU DULL,
SUN-WIZENED
OLD LIZARD!
THE CHILD I
WANT NOW!

EH...? D-DO NOT TRY--

--TO CONFUSE ME!

WITHERED
FOOL! I
KNOW LOVE!

IT IS
DESPAIR!

BUT THE
CHILD... HE IS
MY LINK--

OOHHH..!

--TO THE
MIND AND
SOUL OF A
HIGH ONE!
THROUGH HER
TRUST IN HIM--

--I SHALL
LURE HER
TO ME! THEY
SHALL BOTH
BE MINE!

SUDDENLY...

WINNOWILL..!

WINNOWILL--!

WHAT..?!

WHO DARES..?

--SAVE
ME, MY
LORD!

AROREE
HAS CUT
ME OPEN!
I BLEED
TO DEATH!

SO! YOUR
SUBJECTS
SHED EACH
OTHERS'
BLOOD--

--WHILE YOU TRY TO
COLLECT US, "LORD!"

PERHAPS EVEN YOUR
OWN ENTRANCED BODY
IS NOT SAFE IN THEIR
KEEPING!

LIES! TRICKS!





JUST WHAT WERE YOU UP TO, CUB?

YOU "WENT OUT", DIDN'T YOU, DESPITE CUTTER'S ORDERS!



PLEASE, **STRONGBOW**! SEND YOUR SCOLDING AT ME!

IT WAS MY IDEA. I TOLD **SUNTOP** TO "GO OUT"--



--AND ASK **SAVAH** WHAT TO DO ABOUT **WINNOWILL**!

PUNISHMENT THERE MUST BE, BUT **STRONGBOW** IS GLAD THAT IT WILL NOT BE HIS TO DECIDE. HAVING LISTENED TO ALL THAT BEFELL **SUNTOP** IN THE SPIRIT REALM, THE ARCHER CANNOT HELP BUT ASK ABOUT--



--**DART**? I-I'M NOT SURE...

BUT **SAVAH** GAVE ME THE FEELING THAT EVERYTHING'S FINE IN THE SUN VILLAGE.



SUNTOP? I-I FELT...

!?!? WHAT HAS HAPPENED?

TELL HER, CUBS. I'M HEADING FOR THE TREES!

THAT'S GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME! WE'RE IN IT UP TO OUR HACKLES NOW, CUBS, BUT I GUESS IT'S BEST WE KNOW THE BLACK SNAKE'S INTENTIONS.



SHE'D HAVE COME CALLING ON US SOONER OR LATER ANYWAY.



COWARD!

SHORTLY...

~ HARUMPH! ~
ALL RIGHT... THIS
MUCH **SUNTOP** COULD
GATHER BEFORE
SAVAH SAVED HIS
DISOBEDIENT LITTLE
TAIL FOR HIM...

AROREE
STOLE **WINDKIN**
FOR HER OWN
REASONS--
THAT'S THE ONLY
CRIME THE **BLACK**
SNAKE **ISN'T**
GUILTY OF.

WINNOWILL WANTS
SUNTOP, **TIMMAIN**--
IN FACT ANY ELF GOOD
AT MAGIC--UNDER HER
CONTROL! THE REST OF
US SHE WANTS
BELLY UP!

SHE'S BOUND
TO SEND THE
GIANT BIRDS
AGAINST US.

AND HER
HUMANS?

WHO
KNOWS?

WELL,
DO WE
FIGHT?

LET'S SAY WE DON'T
RUN! DEFENDING OUR
HOLT **ISN'T** MAKING
WAR. SURELY **CUTTER**
WOULD
AGREE.

BUT **DEWSHINE**... IF WE
FIGHT, WHAT OF **HER**?

AND IN SORROW'S END...

CHILDREN OF
MY CHILDREN'S
CHILDREN, I HAVE
LEARNED THIS DAY
WHAT BECAME OF
CUTTER, HIS
WOLFRIDERS AND
HIS QUEST.

~ AAH! ~

AFTER
RELEASING MY
SPIRIT FROM
WINNOWILL'S
CLUTCHES, THEY
FLEW FROM
BLUE
MOUNTAIN ~ GASP ~
TO THE
VERY PORTAL
OF THE **HIGH ONES**
LOST PALACE!

MORE!

IN TIME! FOR
NOW, KNOW THAT
ONCE AGAIN THE
LOVELESS ONE
THREATENS THE
WOLFRIDERS--IN
THEIR NEW
FOREST HOLT.

HER
SICKNESS
WILL BRING
GRIEF TO
MANY!

MOTHER... FATHER... SO
FAR AWAY! IS THERE SOME WAY
I CAN HELP THEM?

IN THE GREEN, GROWING
PLACE, DAYLIGHT IS
MEANT FOR SLUMBER,
THE NIGHT--FOR
ENJOYMENT...

NORMALLY.

TWO DAYS
SINCE **SUNTOP**
"WENT OUT"--

--AND STILL
NO SIGN OF
CUTTER OR
SKYWISE!

I WON'T
WAIT MUCH
LONGER!

--KNOW YOUR
SOUL NAME!
BUT I... DON'T!
WILL THAT PART
OF YOU ALWAYS
BE CLOSED
TO ME?

NO MATTER! YOU
LIVE--THAT MUCH I FEEL!
MY SIRE AND A SISTER I NEVER
MET ARE DEAD. BUT
YOU LIVE--

--AND SOMEHOW
I'LL FIND--?

AYOOOAH!

"--SKYWISE!"

"AT LAST!"



LOVEMATE...
ARE YOU WELL?
AND LITTLE
"BUMPER",
TOO?

IT HURTS
SO MUCH--

--THAT TWO
WHO WON'T--
CAN'T--LOVE
YOU--



RAGGED, EXHAUSTED, THE STARGAZER AND HIS WOLF TEAR THROUGH DELICATE PRESERVER WEBBING AS THEY CHARGE TOWARD THE FATHER TREE.



IMMEDIATELY ROCKED BY A BOMBARDMENT OF ANXIOUS SENDINGS--

--SKYWISE DOES HIS LEVEL BEST TO ANSWER EVERYONE AT ONCE!



--YES, I FOUND CUTTER--

--I'M FINE--

--HE'S FINE--

--BLUE MOUNTAIN--

--RAFTING WITH THE HUMANS RIGHT NOW--

--YES! BY RAFT--

--I DON'T KNOW HOW SOON--

--YES, THE PLAN TO TURN THE HUMANS AGAINST THE GLIDERS IS STILL ON--

--BUT LISTEN TO THIS--



--WINNOWILL SURELY HAS MORE USE FOR PRESERVERS THAN FOR DEWSHINE AND HER CUB!

WE'LL OFFER A TRADE!

AYE, THERE'S AN IDEA!

BUT IS THAT FAIR? THE WINGED ONES THINK, AND IN A MANNER, FEEL. SHE HAS THE POWER TO HARM THEM!



TRUE... BUT I DOUBT SHE'LL GET THE CHANCE! THE PRESERVERS KNOW ALL ABOUT HER! BESIDES, REMEMBER HOW MUCH TROUBLE JUST ONE OF THEM GAVE HER?

"JUST ONE!"

SIGH! LITTLE PETALWING, WITH A WILL AS STRONG AS ITS SHELL--

"--AND PERSISTENCE TO MATCH! EVEN RAYEK COULD LEARN TO LIKE SUCH DEVOTION!"



GET AWAY FROM ME YOU, DOUBLE-CURSED SPY!

IF I WANT TO TRACK BEAR I'LL TRACK BEAR!

SHARPDARK HIGHTRING SAY NO NO NO! IS COME GET YOU LIKE ALWAYS!

PETALWING AGREE!

KAHVI! HAVE YOU NO SENSE AT ALL? THE CHILD--



--COULD GET DROPPED TODAY! WHY THE FLAP? IT'S HARDLY MY FIRST.

BUT IT MAY BE MINE!



YOU'VE DENIED YOUR TRUE ELF NATURE FOR SO LONG THAT NOT EVEN TIMMAIN CAN OPEN YOUR SOUL TO REVEAL THE FATHER'S NAME.

SO WHAT IF YOU TURN OUT TO BE THE BUCK, BLACK-HAIR?

THE YOUNG COME THROUGH US--THEY DON'T BELONG TO US!

I WAITED THROUGH MANY CYCLES OF THE GREATER MOON UNTIL TWO-EDGE WAS WELL ENOUGH TO TRAVEL.



HE WAS GOING TO SHOW ME ALL THE SECRETS OF BLUE MOUNTAIN--

--AND YOU'D HAVE BEEN THERE AND BACK LONG AGO BUT FOR ME, EH? TSK



I CANNOT TRUST YOU. YOU ARE RECKLESS! ONLY WHEN THE BABE IS SAFELY IN THIS WORLD WILL I GO!

WHILE A POTENTIAL SIRE GRAPPLES WITH HIS CONFLICTING CONCERNS, A SIRE INDEED, WHO NEVER EXPECTED TO SEE OR KNOW HIS SON, STRIVES TO FEEL NOTHING AT ALL.



AAAAAAA

WINNOWILL IS TAKING HER TIME AT HEALING KUREEL...

...NO DOUBT ON PURPOSE.

IT SEEMS HE INTERRUPTED SOME IMPORTANT BUSINESS--



--WITH HIS PETTY PLEAS FOR HIS LIFE.



HE'LL BE WONDROUS WHEN HE'S GROWN, DON'T YOU THINK...? SCOUTER... CALLS HIM "BUMPER"...

-- BECAUSE HE HASN'T QUITE GOT THE KNACK OF DIRECTION YET...

YOU'RE STILL REPELLED BY WHAT YOU SEE INSIDE ME!

IT IS--



--DIFFICULT!

I GUESS I'M LUCKIER. YOU'RE ALMOST A *HIGH ONE*.



I GAVE MUCH TO BE ABLE TO FLY.

MY FOLK WILL FIND A WAY TO SAVE US BOTH, TYLDAK.

BEAR UP.

BUT... IF THEY FAIL... PROMISE ME YOU WILL FIND YOUR *KNIFE*... AND FREE ME FOREVER.



FLYING AND LIVING ARE THE SAME.

IF I CANNOT DO THE ONE...



HOWEVER... HOPELESSNESS ILL REFLECTS THE SPIRIT OF THE INTREPID THREESOME WHO ARRIVE SOMETIME LATER TO SCALE THE MOUNTAIN SIDE.

I WISH CUTTER HAD ALREADY COME AND TALKED TO THE HOAN G'TAY SHO.

IF THEY SEE US, WHO KNOWS WHAT THEY'LL DO!

SO DON'T GET SEEN!



SOON...

THERE! THE TUNNEL WHERE THE HUMANS OFFER SACRIFICES!

CALL!

WINNOWILL....!



REMEMBER ME? I PUT AN ARROW IN YOU ONCE!

BUT NOW I'VE COME TO **TRADE** WITH YOU!

HEAR ME!

PRESERVERS! FOR THE RETURN OF MY **KIN--** YOUR PRISONERS!

THE MOST POWERFUL SENDER OF ALL THE WOLFRIDERS, **STRONGBOW** FEARLESSLY COMMANDS THE "BLACK SNAKE'S" ATTENTION. NOT SHE, BUT ONE OF HER MINIONS FINALLY RESPONDS.



WITH MADDENING, LEISURELY GRACE THE GIGANTIC HAWK CIRCLES BLUE MOUNTAIN'S PEAK ONCE... TWICE... SLOWLY DRIFTING LOWER...



LOOK! PRAISE **TIMMAIN--**

--THAT GLIDER HAS **DEWSHINE** WITH HIM!

WOLF-BLOODED CURS, MY LORD MUST HAVE **PROOF** THAT YOU INDEED POSSESS THAT WHICH YOU OFFER.



SCOUTER... BELOVED... JUST TO SEE YOU ONCE MORE...!

AS HER SENDING PIERCES HIS HEART, **SCOUTER** SHARES ALL THAT SHE HAS SUFFERED--



BUT WHEN ALL IS SAID, THE
DECISION RESTS--

--IN ONLY ONE SMALL
PAIR OF HANDS...



FORGIVE...!
LOVEMATE...
UNDERSTAND!...
CAN'T LEAVE
WINDKIN...
TO HER!



AND MORE...!
SOMETHING
ELSE THAT
IS MINE IS
TRAPPED
HERE!

MUSTN'T SEND
TO YOU... DANGER...
SHE'LL FIND ME!



WATCH
OUT!!

GO TO HER,
PRESERVERS! STAY
WITH HER!

IS IT GAMES YOU WISH,
GROUNDLINGS? THESE
CLAWS WILL LAY YOU
OPEN--



--LIKE
GUTTED
SLOTHS!



YOU
DREAM,
OWL
PELLET!



FILTH! YOU'VE
BLINDED HIM!!

SHREEE!

SKREEE!

I'LL FEED
YOUR FOUL
BLOOD TO
HIS YOUNG!



TWUNNG!

SSSHAAAKS!

WINNOWILL'S
MESSENGER
DIVES FOR THE
KILL--



--TOO
ENRAGED
TO NOTICE--

--AROREE!
SHE'S COME
TO HELP HIM
FINISH US!

BUT...

ONE CHANCE!
GRAB HOLD,
WOLFRIDERS!
I CANNOT
SLOW DOWN!

NO TIME TO QUESTION...

NO TIME TO THINK!

YAAAH!!

AROREE! YOU
IRREDEEMABLE
TURN-TAIL!!

MY ARMS! HIGH
ONES... IT HURTS!

THE AGONIZING
FLIGHT SEEMS TO LAST MUCH
LONGER THAN IT ACTUALLY DOES.

COME UP BEHIND
ME, MY SWEET ONE.
REEVOL IS LOSING
GROUND.

HIS
MOUNT IS
WOUNDED.
HE WILL
HAVE TO
TURN BACK
VERY
SOON.

SHE'S
SWOOPING
DOWN!
JUMP!

WE'LL HIDE
IN THE
THICKET!

BUT...

SKYWISE!
SHE STILL
HAS HIM!

ULP!
UH...
UHUH!



BUT
WHETHER
HE NOW
EMBRACES
SANITY--

--OR
ANOTHER
FORM OF
BLUE
MOUNTAIN'S
MADNESS--

--HE
DOES
NOT
KNOW!

SKYWISE LOOKS BACK AND NOTES WITH
RELIEF THAT AROREE IS RIGHT.

MEANWHILE...

THE NOISY AERIAL ACTIVITY HAS
HARDLY GONE UNNOTICED BY THE
CAVE DWELLING HOANG'TAY SHO.

< MY PEOPLE, WE ARE THE FAVORED OF
THOSE WHO DWELL ON HIGH. WHEN THE
BIRD SPIRITS GIVE US SIGNS THAT WE
OURSELVES CANNOT FATHOM, WE CALL
UPON THEM TO MAKE THEIR WISHES
CLEAR TO US! >



THE HUMAN'S SHRILL
PIPES CRY OUT--



--AND IN HER
QUARTERS,
DEEP IN THE
BOWELS OF
BLUE
MOUNTAIN,
WINNOWILL
FEELS THE
VIBRATION
OF THOSE
INSISTENT
NOTES.

SHE SIGHS, HER
SENSES RELIEVED.
SHE HAS BEEN
LISTENING TO THE
INFANT CRY HIMSELF
OUT LONG ENOUGH.

IT WILL BE
INTERESTING TO
DISCOVER WHETHER
THE BEASTLY
ELEMENTS--

--CAN
BE REMOVED
FROM HIS
BLOOD.

AS HE IS,
HE IS USELESS...
PERISHABLE.



BUT I SHALL
DEAL WITH
THAT--

--LATER.

A SINGLE
TOUCH...
AND THE
CRYING
STOPS--

ZZZ...

--WITHOUT
THE INCON-
VENIENCE OF
COMFORTING.

THESE, WHO ONCE LOVED HER, HAVE SEEN TOO MUCH--
DISAPPROVED ONCE TOO OFTEN...



THE HUMANS SHE GOES TO NOW HAVE NEVER LIVED WITH THE "BIRD SPIRITS". HENCE THEY BELIEVE ONLY IN THE PERFECTION THEY IMAGINE



DOOR, OPEN!

A THREAD OF TWILIGHT...



L-LOOK...! A SPIRIT COMES!

SHE HAS NOT STEPPED SO FAR--



--OUTSIDE THE TUNNEL SINCE--



NO!

NO REMEMBERING!



<OOOHHH... SO BEAUTIFUL...!>

<GASP!>

<LIKE THE MOON...!>

<STARS!>

AHH...

<SHH!>

<SHE HOLDS A CHILD!!>

<FAITHFUL ONES...! GIFT GIVERS...!>

<BEWARE THE EVIL DEMONS WHO COME TO DESTROY YOUR LOVE OF THE BIRD SPIRITS-->

-- WHO COME TO DESTROY THE BIRD SPIRITS' CHILDREN AND MAKE BLUE MOUNTAIN AS A WOMAN BARREN!>

<YOU HAVE SEEN THEM, YOU KNOW THESE FALSE ONES!>

<THEY ARE SMALL... AND THEY DO NOT RIDE BIRDS!>





<WOLVES! THEY RIDE FANGED WOLVES! WE REMEMBER! THREE SNOWS PAST WE SAW THEM GO INTO THE MOUNTAIN!>

<AND THREE SNOWS PAST, WE SAW THEM DRIVEN OUT! THEY SHALL NOT CLIMB UP AGAIN!>

<SO IT IS!>

<SO IT IS!>

<SO IT IS!>

<SO IT WAS.>

<SO IT WAS.>



<SEE, MY PEOPLE! WE HAVE WONDERED AT THE COMING OF THE LONG-TAILED STAR!>

<IT IS THE TORCH OF BATTLE AS THE SHAMAN FORTOLD!>



<SOON...BY WATER...>

<ONE WITH TWO FACES WILL COME AND SPEAK THE TRUTH FROM A THIRD MOUTH!>

<SOON...>

<LISTEN! ANOTHER VISION!>



<AND THE LIE WHICH IS THE TRUTH SHALL BRING MORE PAIN THAN THE TRUTH WHICH IS A LIE!>

<SO IT IS!>

<DEMONS LIE!>

<FALSE SPIRITS!>



<WE ARE FAVORED OF THOSE WHO DWELL ON HIGH!>

<WE CANNOT BE TRICKED!>

<THE FALSE SPIRITS WILL NOT PASS HERE!>

<WE WILL KILL THEM!>

AND...



<BLUE MOUNTAIN... WE'RE ALMOST THERE. I EXPECT YOUR FOLK WILL BE GLAD TO SEE YOU AGAIN, NONNA.>



<NOT FOR ME, BUT FOR YOU WILL THEY SING PRAISES, HONORED ONE-->

<"--AFTER ALL, NEVER BEFORE HAS A SPIRIT GRACED THE CIRCLE OF OUR SACRED FIRE!">



TO BE CONTINUED...

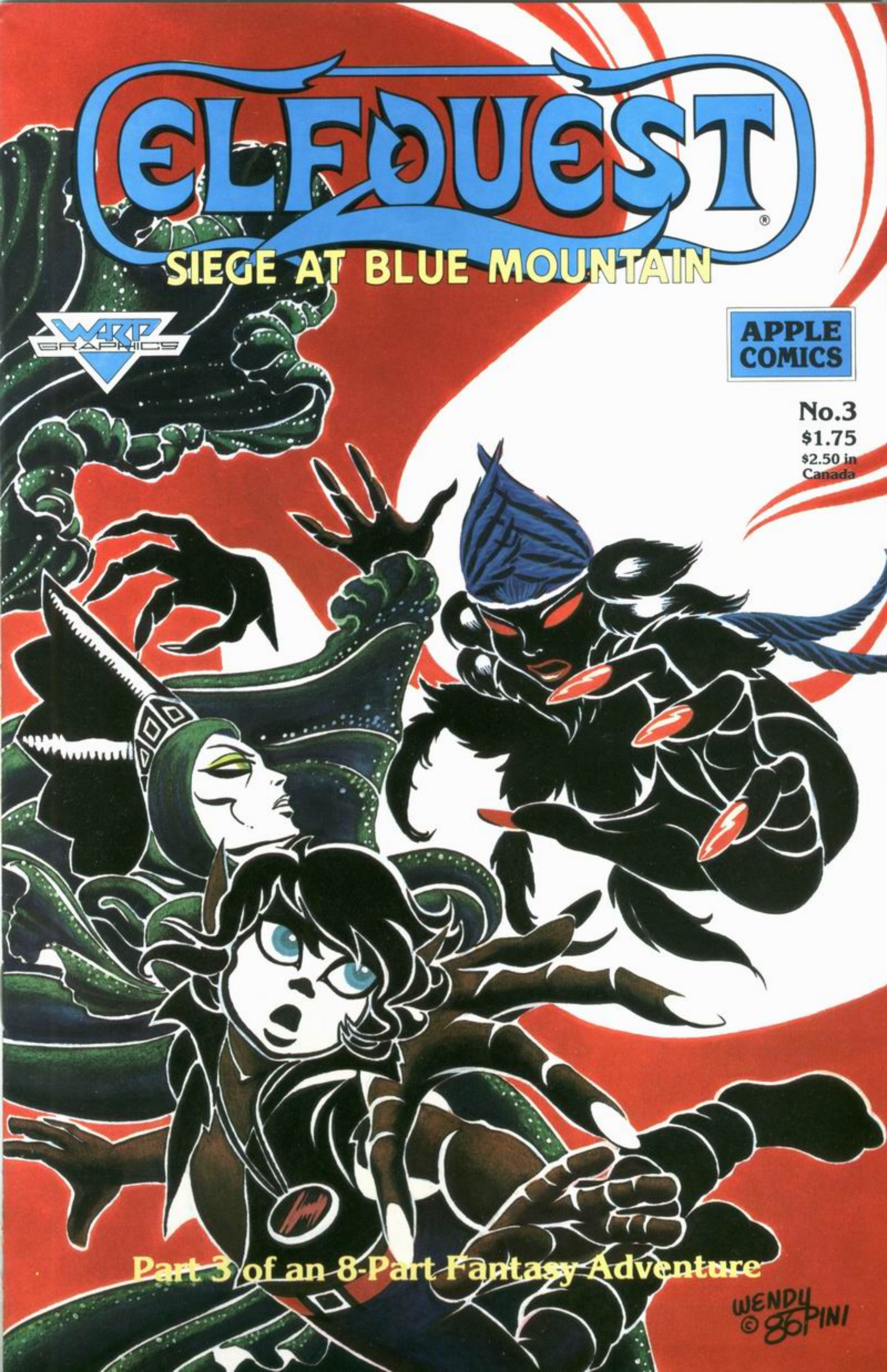
ELFDUEST

SIEGE AT BLUE MOUNTAIN



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SIEGE AT BLUE MOUNTAIN

ARTIST / WRITER
WENDY PINI

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RICHARD PINI

PART
3

INKS
JOE STATON

LETTERER
JANICE CHIANG

SIMPLY, WITHOUT EXCUSES OR SHIFTING OF BLAME, SKYWISE TELLS CUTTER WHAT HAPPENED THREE NIGHTS AGO WITHIN THE FORBIDDEN GROVE.

AROREE SAID
SHE WAS HUNTING
PRESERVERS, NOT OUR
TRIBE. SHE'D BEEN HURT--
INSIDE HER MIND--
BY WINNOWILL.
I FELT IT, AND--

-- I
WANTED TO
HELP.

THE YOUNG WOLFRIDER
CHIEF LISTENS... VERY
QUIETLY.

AROREE SEEMED TO WANT THAT HELP MORE THAN ANYTHING--

-- BUT ONE LOOK AT LITTLE WINDKIN AND... HER EYES JUST WENT MAD! SHE SNATCHED THE CUB AND FLEW OFF!

AND DEWSHINE...?

YOU KNOW YOUR COUSIN! SHE MADE ONE OF THOSE JUMPS THAT ALWAYS SCARE US TO DEATH--

-- AND CAUGHT HOLD OF AROREE'S GIANT HAWK. YOU CAN GUESS WHERE THEY WERE HEADING.

BLUE MOUNTAIN.

AN UNEXPECTED, GENTLE TOUCH AND THE SOUND OF HIS SOFTLY SPOKEN SOUL NAME TELL SKYWISE THAT HE IS ALREADY FORGIVEN.

FAHR... NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOU CARE, YOU CAN'T CHANGE AROREE. SHE'S A BACKSTAB--

NO!

MAYBE I'M MAD TOO, BUT I KNOW SHE MEANT NO HARM!



WELL... MEANT OR NOT, THE HARM'S BEEN DONE.

WE HAVE TO PLAN. MY HUMAN FRIENDS, *VONNA* AND *ADAR*, HAVE AGREED TO HELP US DETHRONE *WINNOWILL*.

IF *DEWSHINE* AND *WINDKIN* ARE PRISONERS INSIDE *BLUE MOUNTAIN*--

-- THEN THE SOONER WE CAUSE *WINNOWILL* TROUBLE *OUTSIDE*, THE BETTER!



A DISTRACTION...? *GOOD!* MEANTIME, I'LL LEAD A WOLFRIDER RESCUE PARTY! WE'LL HACK OUR WAY--

-- THROUGH STONE AND FLESH TO SAVE OUR KIN!



ON *CUTTER'S JAW*... A SILENT REMINDER...

WAR?



...NO.

YOU'RE RIGHT.

NEVER AGAIN!



BUT HOW--?

YATTA-YATTA-YAK! WE GO HOMETREES SOON, HIGHTHINGS?

SHUT UP, *BERRYBUZZ*!

WE'RE TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO FREE OUR FRIENDS! WE--



-- WAIT! A *TRADE!* WE DO HAVE SOMETHING TO BARTER--

HEE HEE!

-- SOMETHING *WINNOWILL* WANTS VERY MUCH!

THAT MORNING, IN
THE FORBIDDEN GROVE...

POOR SCOUTER...!

THE LONGER WE HAVE
TO WAIT FOR FATHER
TO COME BACK, THE
MORE I WORRY, TOO!

I KNOW. THERE ARE TEARS BEHIND
HIS EYES ALL THE TIME NOW. HE WANTS SO
MUCH TO GO RESCUE DEWSHINE--

--AND
WINDKIN!!

WE'RE ALL
IN DANGER.

WINNOWILL CAN
STEAL SECRETS
FROM ANYONE!
SHE'LL FIND
OUT WHERE
WE LIVE!

~GASP~

DEWSHINE
WON'T BE
ABLE TO
FIGHT HER!

THEN WE BETTER
DO SOMETHING BESIDES
SIT, SIT, SIT!

SUNTOP,
I'M TELLING
YOU--

-- YOU HAVE
TO "GO OUT"
AND GET
SAVAH'S
ADVICE--

-- YOU
JUST HAVE
TO!

THE YOUNG MYSTIC DOES NOT
ANSWER HIS TWIN SISTER. INSIDE
HIM HIS FONDEST DESIRE WAGES
EVEN BATTLE WITH THE OBEDIENCE
HE OWES HIS ELDERS.

BUT EVEN THOUGH
I HOPE I WON'T EVER
HAVE TO TAKE FATHER'S
PLACE, I CAN STILL ACT
LIKE A CHIEF!

YOU DO
WHAT I SAY
AND I'LL
TAKE THE
BLAME!

B-BUT
EMBER...

I KNOW...
MOTHER AND
FATHER SAID
"NO"!

GO ON!
DO IT
NOW!

TEMPTED PAST ENDURANCE,
SUNTOP PREPARES TO ENTER A
PROFOUND TRANCE--



--A
FORBIDDEN
STATE WHICH
WILL LEAVE
HIM UTTERLY
VULNERABLE TO WINNOWILL'S
PROWLING, PREYING SPIRIT!

BUT FIRST HE MUST EMPTY HIS MIND
OF ALL MEMORIES... DREAMS... EVEN
THE "NOW" OF WOLF-THOUGHT.

AN IMAGE COMES TO HIM--
TIMMAIN, THE HIGH ONE...

TIMMAIN, WHO ENLIGHTENED
THE WOLFRIDERS THROUGH
HIS VOICE, AND CONFIRMED
FOR HIM THE RIGHTNESS OF
HIS CHOSEN SPIRITUAL PATH.

THE HIGH ONE'S
FEATURES MELT,
RESHAPE INTO THE
DARK-SKINNED
DIGNITY OF SAVAH'S.

WISE SAVAH, MOTHER
OF MEMORY... BELOVED
SAVAH, MENTOR AND
TEACHER IN HIS DESERT
BOUND BIRTH-HOME, THE
SUN VILLAGE.

HER REGARD
FOR HIM, HER
EXPECTATIONS...
SO HIGH!

BRIEFLY, A
DISTRACTION--
AMBITION--
A DREAMED-OF
MATURITY IN
WHICH HIS
GIFTS REACH
FULL POTENTIAL.
THE LAD
DISCIPLINES HIS
MIND AND...

AT LAST HIS SPIRIT
FLOATS FREE! HE
CALLS...

SAVAH?

SAVAH...!

IT'S
ME!

SAVAHAAA



THREE FLOODS-AND-FLOWERINGS
HAVE PASSED--THE SUN VILLAGE
HAS WITNESSED THE RISE OF A
CROSSBREED OF WOLF AND JACKAL--

--AND A NEW BREED
OF WOLFRIDERS!

WOODLOCK MUSES AS HE
OBSERVES THE DEMONSTRATION...

YAH! YAH! YAH!
WHAT WOULD
STRONGBOW
THINK--



"--OF HIS GROWN UP BOY-CLUB NOW?"

THAK!

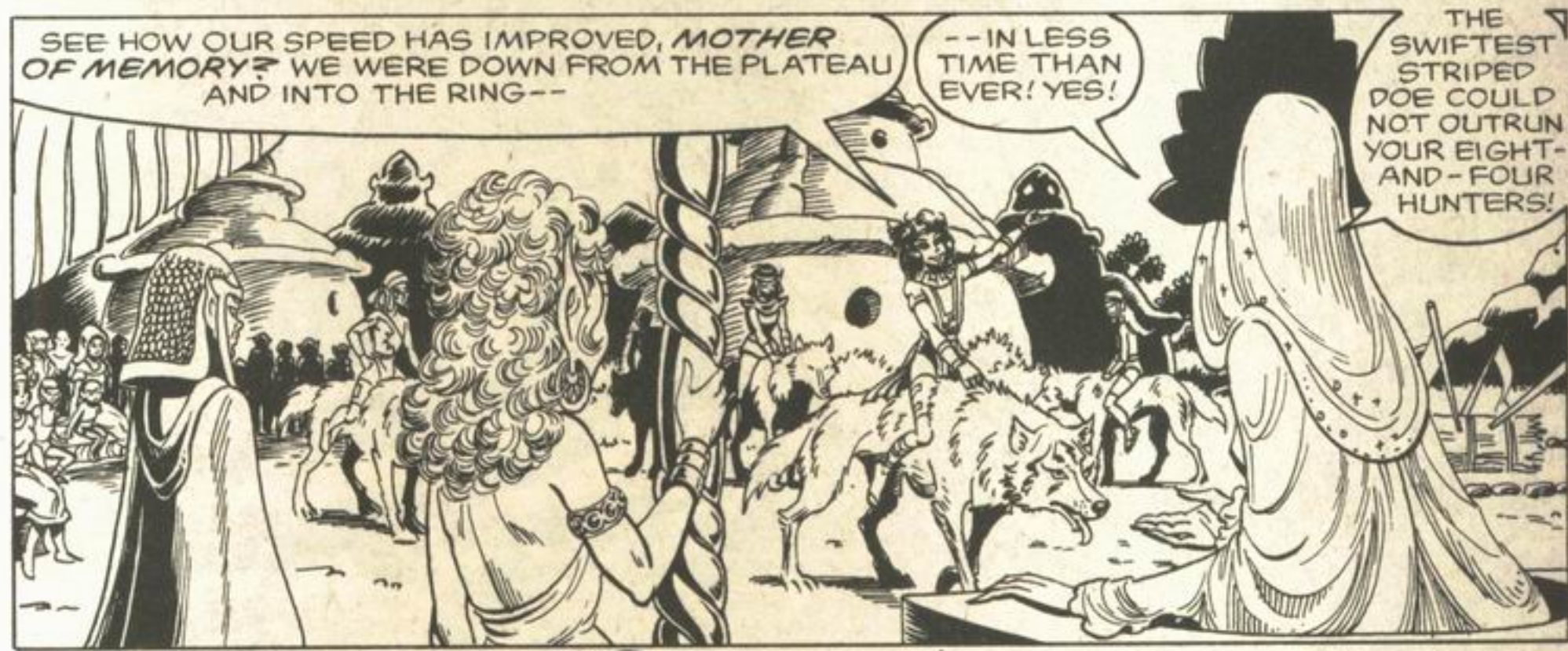
"LIKE SIRE, LIKE PUP--"



"--EXCEPT," WOODLOCK CHUCKLES TO HIMSELF--

HOO HAH

"--FOR THE NOISE!"



SEE HOW OUR SPEED HAS IMPROVED, MOTHER OF MEMORY? WE WERE DOWN FROM THE PLATEAU AND INTO THE RING--

--IN LESS TIME THAN EVER! YES!

THE SWIFTEST STRIPED DOE COULD NOT OUTRUN YOUR EIGHT-AND-FOUR HUNTERS!



SAVAH SMILES, REMINDED OF ANOTHER BOLD, PROUD YOUNGLING--HER WANDERER...

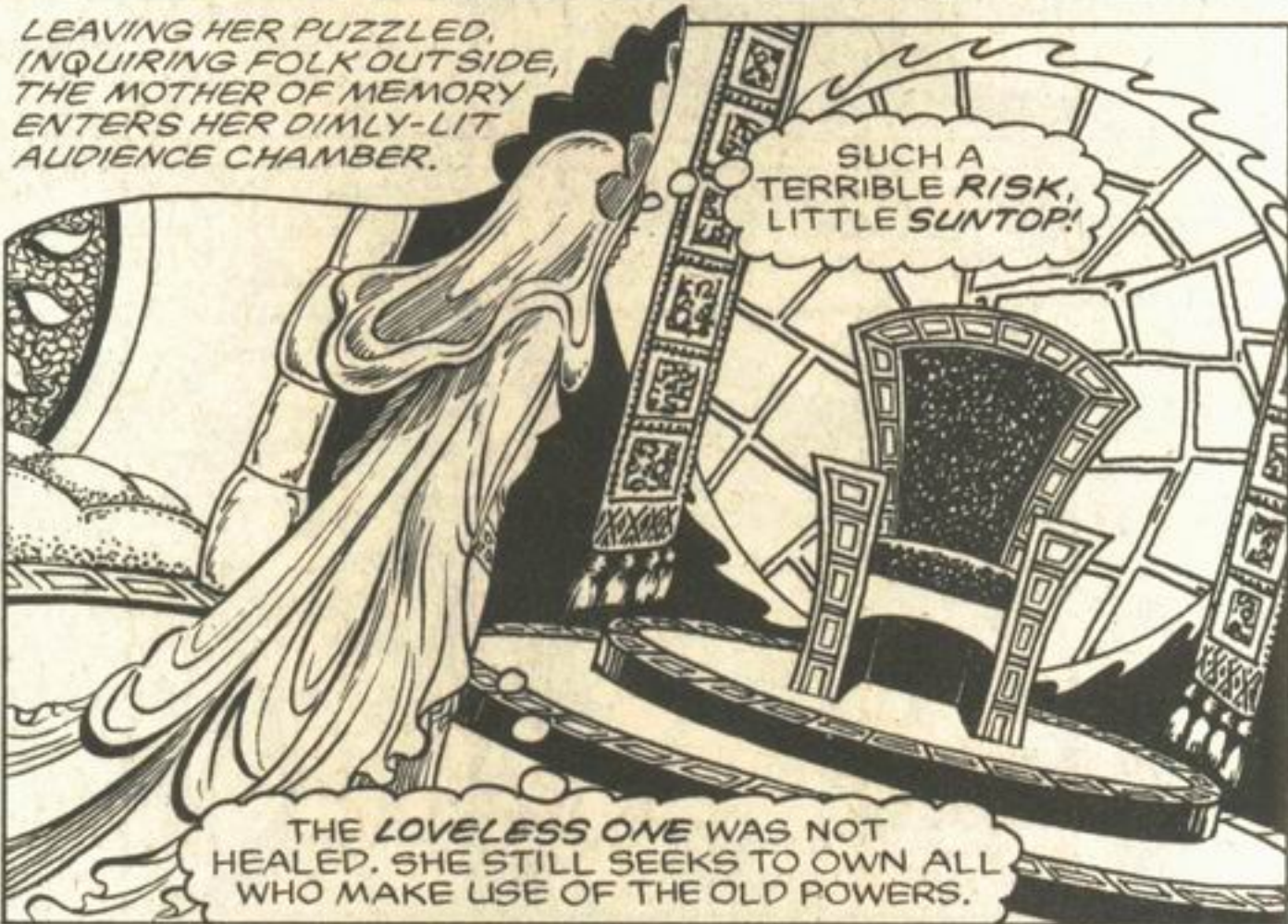
...RAYEK.

YOU'VE TURNED MEEK GARDENERS INTO WOLFRIDERS, DART. WE ARE ALL MOST IMPRESSED.



I, TOO! I'M ALMOST IMPRESSED! HE COULD STAND A BATH, THOUGH, RIGHT, SHEN SHEN?

GIGGLE! NEWSTAR! YOU'RE TOO WICKED!



IN THE MIDST OF
TIMELESSNESS--

SUNTOP...!
CHILD...!

-- URGENCY!

SAVAH...!
HELP...!

...COMING!

YOU FOUND
ME! OH!
THANK YOU!
THANK--

--QUICKLY, DEAR
ONE! YOU KNOW
THE DANGER!

TOUCH ME!
THEN GO!

MEANWHILE, IN THE CHAMBER OF THE GREAT EGG...

EARLIER, WINNOWILL
STOOD BESIDE HER THRONE,
TORMENTING THE CAPTIVE
DEWSHINE--AT THE SAME TIME
SLYLY NOTING AROREE'S
SURREPTITIOUS DEPARTURE.

BUT NOW...

...SPINELESS
DESERTER!
KUREEL WILL DEAL
WITH HER. I MUST
ATTEND TO A SMALL
MATTER OF
DELAYED--

--VENGEANCE!

CONTEMPLATING THE SHAPED STONE
SYMBOLS ON THE MULTI-LAYERED
SHELL OF THE FLOATING EGG,
WINNOWILL SINKS TO HER
KNEES. SHE LABORS TO
CLEAR HER MIND OF
FURIOUS, TRANCE-IMPEDING
DREAMS.

VOLL, ONCE
LORD, ONCE
LOVEMATE--
FIRST-BORN
OF THE HIGH
ONES...

THEY SEDUCED
HIM... KILLED
HIM, THE WOLF-
BLOODED ONES...

WHEN SHE LAY BROKEN
BY HER OWN CHOICE,
VOLL IGNORED HER
FEEBLE SENDINGS AND
FLEW TO HIS DEATH!

OH, HAD HE ONLY GIVEN
HER TIME-- TRUSTED HER
TO DO HER WILL WITH THE
GLIDERS-- SHE'D HAVE
GIVEN HIM FAR MORE THAN
THE PALACE-- HOME OF
HIS DREAMS!

NOT MIND'S QUIET, BUT COLD
PURPOSEFUL HATRED THRUSTS HER
AT LAST THROUGH THE BLACK
CURTAIN.

CURSED WOLFRIDERS!
I CAN HURT THEM--

--AND I SHALL!"

AS TWO SPIRIT-HANDS JOYFULLY CLASP...

SUNTOP! YOU HAVE SEEN
THE LOST DWELLING OF THE
HIGH ONES!!

YESSSS! HE HAS
BEEN TO THE BEGINNING
OF OUR TIME!

BUT HIS
TIME AS A
WOLFRIDER--

--IS DONE!
COME, BOY!

S-SAVAH...?!

INNOCENT!
SHE HASN'T THE
STRENGTH TO
PROTECT YOU!

I DO!!

GO BACK,
SUNTOP! YOUR
TOUCH HAS
TOLD ME ALL!

BUT--!

AAARR!
I SHALL
TAKE YOU
LATER--

SISTER, YOUR
VISION CAN ONLY BE
REALIZED THROUGH
LOVE, NOT POWER!

YOU ARE
NOT
WHOLLY
WRONG--

-- BUT YOU
MUST HEAL
YOURSELF!

--YOU DULL,
SUN-WIZENED
OLD LIZARD!
THE CHILD I
WANT NOW!

EH...? D-DO NOT TRY--

--TO CONFUSE ME!

WITHERED
FOOL! I
KNOW LOVE!

IT IS
DESPAIR!

BUT THE
CHILD... HE IS
MY LINK--

OOHHH..!

--TO THE
MIND AND
SOUL OF A
HIGH ONE!
THROUGH HER
TRUST IN HIM--

--I SHALL
LURE HER
TO ME! THEY
SHALL BOTH
BE MINE!

SUDDENLY...

WINNOWILL..!

WINNOWILL--!

WHAT..?!

WHO DARES..?

--SAVE
ME, MY
LORD!

AROREE
HAS CUT
ME OPEN!
I BLEED
TO DEATH!

SO! YOUR
SUBJECTS
SHED EACH
OTHERS'
BLOOD--

--WHILE YOU TRY TO
COLLECT US, "LORD!"

PERHAPS EVEN YOUR
OWN ENTRANCED BODY
IS NOT SAFE IN THEIR
KEEPING!

LIES! TRICKS!





PUNISHMENT THERE MUST BE, BUT STRONGBOW IS GLAD THAT IT WILL NOT BE HIS TO DECIDE. HAVING LISTENED TO ALL THAT BEFELL SUNTOP IN THE SPIRIT REALM, THE ARCHER CANNOT HELP BUT ASK ABOUT--



SHORTLY...

~ HARUMPH! ~
ALL RIGHT... THIS
MUCH **SUNTOP** COULD
GATHER BEFORE
SAVAH SAVED HIS
DISOBEDIENT LITTLE
TAIL FOR HIM...

AROREE
STOLE **WINDKIN**
FOR HER OWN
REASONS--
THAT'S THE ONLY
CRIME THE **BLACK**
SNAKE **ISN'T**
GUILTY OF.

WINNOWILL WANTS
SUNTOP, **TIMMAIN**--
IN FACT ANY ELF GOOD
AT MAGIC--UNDER HER
CONTROL! THE REST OF
US SHE WANTS
BELLY UP!

SHE'S BOUND
TO SEND THE
GIANT BIRDS
AGAINST US.

AND HER
HUMANS?

WHO
KNOWS?

WELL,
DO WE
FIGHT?

LET'S SAY WE DON'T
RUN! DEFENDING OUR
HOLT **ISN'T** MAKING
WAR. SURELY **CUTTER**
WOULD
AGREE.

BUT **DEWSHINE**... IF WE
FIGHT, WHAT OF **HER**?

AND IN SORROW'S END...

CHILDREN OF
MY CHILDREN'S
CHILDREN, I HAVE
LEARNED THIS DAY
WHAT BECAME OF
CUTTER, HIS
WOLFRIDERS AND
HIS QUEST.

~ AAH! ~

AFTER
RELEASING MY
SPIRIT FROM
WINNOWILL'S
CLUTCHES, THEY
FLEW FROM
BLUE
MOUNTAIN ~ GASP ~
TO THE
VERY PORTAL
OF THE **HIGH ONES**
LOST PALACE!

MORE!

IN TIME! FOR
NOW, KNOW THAT
ONCE AGAIN THE
LOVELESS ONE
THREATENS THE
WOLFRIDERS--IN
THEIR NEW
FOREST HOLT.

HER
SICKNESS
WILL BRING
GRIEF TO
MANY!

MOTHER... FATHER... SO
FAR AWAY! IS THERE SOME WAY
I CAN HELP THEM?

IN THE GREEN, GROWING
PLACE, DAYLIGHT IS
MEANT FOR SLUMBER,
THE NIGHT--FOR
ENJOYMENT...

NORMALLY.

TWO DAYS
SINCE **SUNTOP**
"WENT OUT"--

--AND STILL
NO SIGN OF
CUTTER OR
SKYWISE!

I WON'T
WAIT MUCH
LONGER!

--KNOW YOUR
SOUL NAME!
BUT I... DON'T!
WILL THAT PART
OF YOU ALWAYS
BE CLOSED
TO ME?

NO MATTER! YOU
LIVE--THAT MUCH I FEEL!
MY SIRE AND A SISTER I NEVER
MET ARE DEAD. BUT
YOU LIVE--

--AND SOMEHOW
I'LL FIND--?

AYOOOAH!

"--SKYWISE!"

"AT LAST!"



LOVEMATE...
ARE YOU WELL?
AND LITTLE
"**BUMPER**",
TOO?

IT HURTS
SO MUCH--

--THAT TWO
WHO WON'T--
CAN'T--LOVE
YOU--



RAGGED, EXHAUSTED, THE STARGAZER AND HIS WOLF TEAR THROUGH DELICATE PRESERVER WEBBING AS THEY CHARGE TOWARD THE FATHER TREE.



IMMEDIATELY ROCKED BY A BOMBARDMENT OF ANXIOUS SENDINGS--

--SKYWISE DOES HIS LEVEL BEST TO ANSWER EVERYONE AT ONCE!



--YES, I FOUND CUTTER--

--I'M FINE--

--HE'S FINE--

--BLUE MOUNTAIN--

--RAFTING WITH THE HUMANS RIGHT NOW--

--YES! BY RAFT--

--I DON'T KNOW HOW SOON--

--YES, THE PLAN TO TURN THE HUMANS AGAINST THE GLIDERS IS STILL ON--

--BUT LISTEN TO THIS--



--WINNOWILL SURELY HAS MORE USE FOR PRESERVERS THAN FOR DEWSHINE AND HER CUB!

WE'LL OFFER A TRADE!

AYE, THERE'S AN IDEA!

BUT IS THAT FAIR? THE WINGED ONES THINK, AND IN A MANNER, FEEL. SHE HAS THE POWER TO HARM THEM!



TRUE... BUT I DOUBT SHE'LL GET THE CHANCE! THE PRESERVERS KNOW ALL ABOUT HER! BESIDES, REMEMBER HOW MUCH TROUBLE JUST ONE OF THEM GAVE HER?

"JUST ONE!"

SIGH! LITTLE PETALWING, WITH A WILL AS STRONG AS ITS SHELL--

"--AND PERSISTENCE TO MATCH! EVEN RAYEK COULD LEARN TO LIKE SUCH DEVOTION!"



GET AWAY FROM ME YOU, DOUBLE-CURSED SPY!

IF I WANT TO TRACK BEAR I'LL TRACK BEAR!

SHARPDARK HIGHTRING SAY NO NO NO! IS COME GET YOU LIKE ALWAYS!

PETALWING AGREE!

KAHVI! HAVE YOU NO SENSE AT ALL? THE CHILD--



--COULD GET DROPPED TODAY! WHY THE FLAP? IT'S HARDLY MY FIRST.

BUT IT MAY BE MINE!

YOU'VE DENIED YOUR TRUE ELF NATURE FOR SO LONG THAT NOT EVEN TIMMAIN CAN OPEN YOUR SOUL TO REVEAL THE FATHER'S NAME.

SO WHAT IF YOU TURN OUT TO BE THE BLICK, BLACK-HAIR?



THE YOUNG COME THROUGH US--THEY DON'T BELONG TO US!

I WAITED THROUGH MANY CYCLES OF THE GREATER MOON UNTIL TWO-EDGE WAS WELL ENOUGH TO TRAVEL.



HE WAS GOING TO SHOW ME ALL THE SECRETS OF BLUE MOUNTAIN--

--AND YOU'D HAVE BEEN THERE AND BACK LONG AGO BUT FOR ME, EH? TSK



I CANNOT TRUST YOU, YOU ARE RECKLESS! ONLY WHEN THE BABE IS SAFELY IN THIS WORLD WILL I GO!

WHILE A POTENTIAL SIRE GRAPPLES WITH HIS CONFLICTING CONCERNS, A SIRE INDEED, WHO NEVER EXPECTED TO SEE OR KNOW HIS SON, STRIVES TO FEEL NOTHING AT ALL.



AAAAAAA

WINNOWILL IS TAKING HER TIME AT HEALING KUREEL...

...NO DOUBT ON PURPOSE.

IT SEEMS HE INTERRUPTED SOME IMPORTANT BUSINESS--



--WITH HIS PETTY PLEAS FOR HIS LIFE.



HE'LL BE WONDROUS WHEN HE'S GROWN, DON'T YOU THINK...? SCOUTER... CALLS HIM "BUMPER"...

-- BECAUSE HE HASN'T QUITE GOT THE KNACK OF DIRECTION YET...

YOU'RE STILL REPELLED BY WHAT YOU SEE INSIDE ME!

IT IS--



--DIFFICULT!

I GUESS I'M LUCKIER. YOU'RE ALMOST A *HIGH ONE*.



I GAVE MUCH TO BE ABLE TO FLY.

MY FOLK WILL FIND A WAY TO SAVE US BOTH, TYLDAK.

BEAR UP.

BUT... IF THEY FAIL... PROMISE ME YOU WILL FIND YOUR *KNIFE*... AND FREE ME FOREVER.



FLYING AND LIVING ARE THE SAME.

IF I CANNOT DO THE ONE...



HOWEVER... HOPELESSNESS ILL REFLECTS THE SPIRIT OF THE INTREPID THREESOME WHO ARRIVE SOMETIME LATER TO SCALE THE MOUNTAIN SIDE.

I WISH CUTTER HAD ALREADY COME AND TALKED TO THE HOAN G'TAY SHO.

IF THEY SEE US, WHO KNOWS WHAT THEY'LL DO!

SO DON'T GET SEEN!



THE MOST POWERFUL SENDER OF ALL THE WOLFRIDERS, **STRONGBOW** FEARLESSLY COMMANDS THE "BLACK SNAKE'S" ATTENTION. NOT SHE, BUT ONE OF HER MINIONS FINALLY RESPONDS.



AS HER SENDING PIERCES HIS HEART, **SCOUTER** SHARES ALL THAT SHE HAS SUFFERED--



BUT WHEN ALL IS SAID, THE
DECISION RESTS--

--IN ONLY ONE SMALL
PAIR OF HANDS...



IS IT GAMES YOU WISH,
GROUNDLINGS? THESE
CLAWS WILL LAY YOU
OPEN--



--LIKE
GUTTED
SLOTHS!



YOU
DREAM,
OWL
PELLET!



FILTH! YOU'VE
BLINDED HIM!!

SHREEE!

SKREEE!

I'LL FEED
YOUR FOUL
BLOOD TO
HIS YOUNG!



SSSHAAAKS!

TWU
NN
G!

WINNOWILL'S
MESSENGER
DIVES FOR THE
KILL--



--TOO
ENRAGED
TO NOTICE--

--AROREE!
SHE'S COME
TO HELP HIM
FINISH US!

BUT...

ONE CHANCE!
GRAB HOLD,
WOLFRIDERS!
I CANNOT
SLOW DOWN!

NO TIME TO QUESTION...

NO TIME TO THINK!

YAAAH!!

AROREE! YOU
IRREDEEMABLE
TURN-TAIL!!

MY ARMS! HIGH
ONES... IT HURTS!

THE AGONIZING
FLIGHT SEEMS TO LAST MUCH
LONGER THAN IT ACTUALLY DOES.

COME UP BEHIND
ME, MY SWEET ONE.
REEVOL IS LOSING
GROUND.

HIS
MOUNT IS
WOUNDED.
HE WILL
HAVE TO
TURN BACK
VERY
SOON.

SHE'S
SWOOPING
DOWN!
JUMP!

WE'LL HIDE
IN THE
THICKET!

BUT...

SKYWISE!
SHE STILL
HAS HIM!

ULP!
UH...
UHUH!



BUT
WHETHER
HE NOW
EMBRACES
SANITY--

--OR
ANOTHER
FORM OF
BLUE
MOUNTAIN'S
MADNESS--

--HE
DOES
NOT
KNOW!

SKYWISE LOOKS BACK AND NOTES WITH
RELIEF THAT AROREE IS RIGHT.

MEANWHILE...

THE NOISY AERIAL ACTIVITY HAS
HARDLY GONE UNNOTICED BY THE
CAVE DWELLING HOANG'TAY SHO.

< MY PEOPLE, WE ARE THE FAVORED OF
THOSE WHO DWELL ON HIGH. WHEN THE
BIRD SPIRITS GIVE US SIGNS THAT WE
OURSELVES CANNOT FATHOM, WE CALL
UPON THEM TO MAKE THEIR WISHES
CLEAR TO US! >



THE HUMAN'S SHRILL
PIPES CRY OUT--



--AND IN HER
QUARTERS,
DEEP IN THE
BOWELS OF
BLUE
MOUNTAIN,
WINNOWILL
FEELS THE
VIBRATION
OF THOSE
INSISTENT
NOTES.

SHE SIGHS, HER
SENSES RELIEVED.
SHE HAS BEEN
LISTENING TO THE
INFANT CRY HIMSELF
OUT LONG ENOUGH.

IT WILL BE
INTERESTING TO
DISCOVER WHETHER
THE BEASTLY
ELEMENTS--

--CAN
BE REMOVED
FROM HIS
BLOOD.

AS HE IS,
HE IS USELESS...
PERISHABLE.



BUT I SHALL
DEAL WITH
THAT--

--LATER.

A SINGLE
TOUCH...
AND THE
CRYING
STOPS--

ZZZ...

--WITHOUT
THE INCON-
VENIENCE OF
COMFORTING.

THESE, WHO ONCE LOVED HER, HAVE SEEN TOO MUCH--
DISAPPROVED ONCE TOO OFTEN...



THE HUMANS SHE GOES TO NOW HAVE NEVER LIVED WITH THE "BIRD SPIRITS". HENCE THEY BELIEVE ONLY IN THE PERFECTION THEY IMAGINE



DOOR, OPEN!

A THREAD OF TWILIGHT...



L-LOOK...! A SPIRIT COMES!

SHE HAS NOT STEPPED SO FAR--



--OUTSIDE THE TUNNEL SINCE--



NO!

NO REMEMBERING!



<OOOHHH... SO BEAUTIFUL...!>

<GASP!>

<LIKE THE MOON...!>

<STARS!>

AHH...

<SHH!>

<SHE HOLDS A CHILD!!>

<FAITHFUL ONES...! GIFT GIVERS...!>

<BEWARE THE EVIL DEMONS WHO COME TO DESTROY YOUR LOVE OF THE BIRD SPIRITS-->

-- WHO COME TO DESTROY THE BIRD SPIRITS' CHILDREN AND MAKE BLUE MOUNTAIN AS A WOMAN BARREN!>

<YOU HAVE SEEN THEM, YOU KNOW THESE FALSE ONES!>

<THEY ARE SMALL... AND THEY DO NOT RIDE BIRDS!>





<WOLVES! THEY RIDE FANGED WOLVES! WE REMEMBER! THREE SNOWS PAST WE SAW THEM GO INTO THE MOUNTAIN!>

<AND THREE SNOWS PAST, WE SAW THEM DRIVEN OUT! THEY SHALL NOT CLIMB UP AGAIN!>

<SO IT IS!>

<SO IT IS!>

<SO IT IS!>

<SO IT WAS.>

<SO IT WAS.>



<SEE, MY PEOPLE! WE HAVE WONDERED AT THE COMING OF THE LONG-TAILED STAR!>

<IT IS THE TORCH OF BATTLE AS THE SHAMAN FORTOLD!>



<SOON...BY WATER...>

<ONE WITH TWO FACES WILL COME AND SPEAK THE TRUTH FROM A THIRD MOUTH!>

<SOON...>

<LISTEN! ANOTHER VISION!>



<AND THE LIE WHICH IS THE TRUTH SHALL BRING MORE PAIN THAN THE TRUTH WHICH IS A LIE!>

<SO IT IS!>

<DEMONS LIE!>

<FALSE SPIRITS!>



<WE ARE FAVORED OF THOSE WHO DWELL ON HIGH!>

<WE CANNOT BE TRICKED!>

<THE FALSE SPIRITS WILL NOT PASS HERE!>

<WE WILL KILL THEM!>

AND...



< BLUE MOUNTAIN... WE'RE ALMOST THERE. I EXPECT YOUR FOLK WILL BE GLAD TO SEE YOU AGAIN, NONNA. >



< NOT FOR ME, BUT FOR YOU WILL THEY SING PRAISES, HONORED ONE-- >

< " --AFTER ALL, NEVER BEFORE HAS A SPIRIT GRACED THE CIRCLE OF OUR SACRED FIRE!" >



TO BE CONTINUED...

ELFQUEST

SIEGE AT BLUE MOUNTAIN



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Part 4 of an 8-Part Fantasy Adventure



SIEGE AT BLUE MOUNTAIN

ARTIST / WRITER
WENDY PINI

CO-PLOT / EDITOR
RICHARD PINI

PART
4

INKS
JOE STATON

LETTERER
JANICE CHIANG

AS THE LOW-ANGLED SUN EASES ITS WAY TOWARD AFTERNOON, THE CASTLE'S METAL DOME, LEFT INCOMPLETE BY ITS TROLL BUILDERS, CASTS A SWELLING SHADOW OVER THE GO-BACKS' NEW LODGE.

HERE COMES RAYEK.

AGAIN.

UH HUH.

SAME AS YESTERDAY AND THE DAY BEFORE.

REMEMBER WHAT I TOLD YOU. I'LL HANDLE HIM. IF HE RAISES A STINK, JUST KEEP QUIET!

THIS ISSUE IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF OUR FRIEND **JOHN GAUG** WHO LOVED BEING AN ANIMATOR. THE MAGIC WAS IN HIM, HEAD, HAND AND HEART.



WELL, HELLO,
BLACK-HAIR. ♪



KAHVI... TELL ME!



SHE CAME
AT DAWN...
DIDN'T LIVE
TO SEE
NOON.

PALE...
BLUE-
EYED.

SHE WASN'T YOURS.



HIGH ONES! FIRST YOUR OTHER
CHILD, VAYA, AND NOW...

I- IS
THERE
ANYTHING
I... ?

YEP! STOP
FUSSING
LIKE A FOOL,
AIR-WALKER.
YOU'LL
EMBARRASS
US BOTH!



A FOOL?! YES! I AM *THAT*,
FOR EXPECTING *SOME* MOTHERLY
GRIEF-- SOME SORROW FOR A LOST
NEWBORN THAT MIGHT EASILY
HAVE BEEN *OURS*!

WELL, SHE
WASN'T--



-- WHICH MEANS YOU CAN GO TO BLUE
MOUNTAIN, NOW, AS YOU PLANNED.

NOT SOON ENOUGH! I AM
THROUGH WITH YOU!

IT
DISGUSTS
ME THAT
WE EVER
TOUCHED!

SIGH-- TOUCH AND GO,
BLACK-HAIR. BUT I'VE GOT
WHAT I WANT!

IT IS THE BITTERNESS OF
THE MOUNTAIN WINDS--
ISN'T IT, "AIR-WALKER"?--
THAT BRINGS ON THE
STINGING TEARS.

GO-BACKS...
UNCARING!

IGNORANT!
CONTEMPTUOUS
OF MAGIC...!

SO PROUD--

-- THAT THEY
HAVE NO NEED
OF HEALERS!

NO...
NEED...

A LITTLE
GIRL IT
WAS...

HE FEELS ABOUT
FOR HER SPIRIT.

IT IS NOT HERE YET.

THE CRUMBLING HALLS OF THE FIRSTCOMERS' ONCE-
BURIED PALACE ARE AS TIDY AS A MAIMED ROCK
SHAPER AND AN ADDLED HALF-TROLL HAVE BEEN
ABLE TO MAKE THEM.

A FRIENDSHIP,
SO UNLIKELY THAT
IT HAD TO FORM--

HAH! CATCH
ME NOW,
MASTER
SMITH!

-- HAS QUIETED
THE CLASHING OF
TWO-EDGE'S
FRACTURED THOUGHTS.



EH?! **BROWNSKIN!**
BACK SO SOON?
WHAT'S THE NEWS?
DO WE HAVE A
LITTLE BROWNSKIN
YET?



NO.

NOR
EVER
WILL!

AFTER TWO YEARS'
WAIT, THE CRUEL
DISAPPOINTMENT
LEAVES EVEN THE
EFFUSIVE **EKUAR**
SPEECHLESS.



BUT...
LET IT
GO!

I LEAVE FOR
BLUE MOUNTAIN
TODAY!

SNIFF N-NO
REASON
NOT TO, I
SUPPOSE.



THAT MEANS YOU, TOO, HALF-ELF!
I HOLD YOU TO YOUR PROMISE TO
SHOW ME THE SECRET INS AND OUTS
OF YOUR MOTHER'S DOMAIN!

SECRETS...
YES....!

BUT
I...
STAY.

YOU WILL BE MASTER
OF THE PALACE WHILE I AM
GONE, **EKUAR**. BUT YOU MUST
BE ESPECIALLY WATCHFUL--



-- AND NEVER FORGET THAT THE
TROLLS ORIGINALLY SENT **TWO-EDGE**
HERE TO STEAL YOU AWAY! WITH ME
GONE AND **ONLY** THE GO-BACK
GUARDS TO PROTECT YOU--

HUH?

NICE TALK,
BLACK-HAIR!

DUNG!

IF THEY
HAVEN'T TRIED
ANYTHING
ELSE IN
THREE THAWS,
THOSE SLUG-LAZY
TROLLS WON'T START NOW!



ENOUGH!!

YOU READY-MOULTHED FEMALES--

--ALL TAKE AFTER YOUR BRUTE-BRAINED CHIEF!

IF YOU FAIL TO PROTECT THE ROCK SHAPER, I SWEAR ON THE LIVING HIGH ONE'S SOUL--



-- I WILL RETURN AND WIPE YOUR DEGENERATE TRIBE FROM THE FACE OF THIS WORLD!!

THERE ARE TIMES--



-- WHEN THREATS MUST BE BELIEVED.

LATER, OUTFITTED FOR THE LONG JOURNEY, RAYEK STANDS BEFORE TIMMAIN IN THE ROOM OF THE SCROLL.



THE TIME HAS COME FOR ME TO BRING THE GLIDERS, MOST POWERFUL OF YOUR SURVIVING CHILDREN--

-- HERE TO THE PALACE, HIGH ONE. I KNOW I CAN PERSUADE THEM--

-- TO GIVE THEIR MAGIC TO MY CAUSE. THE PALACE WILL FLY AGAIN...!

AT OTHER TIMES HE HAS BEEN WARMLY RECEIVED.

BUT THE ROOM IS ICE COLD, AND TIMMAIN-- STRANGELY SILENT. HER EXPECTED FAREWELL DOES NOT COME TO ENFOLD AND UPLIFT HIS HEART. HE SENSES--

-- DISAPPROVAL...?



HOWEVER...

SMILE, MY FRIEND. REMEMBER, ALL THE SPIRITS OF OUR DEAD WITHIN THE PALACE WILL RALLY TO LEND YOU STRENGTH-- IF YOU NEED IT.

AND I AM SURE TIMMAIN WILL RECEIVE YOUR SENDINGS.

WELL! ER... ON YOUR WAY AT LAST! HEH. BUT... OH--



-- LET ME BE A LITTLE SORRY FOR YOU...? SNIFF-- THERE IS NO BABY BROWNSKIN! WHAT'S ALL THIS SCRAMBLING FOR--



-- WITHOUT THE BABIES?



FINALLY, NEAR THE DEER PENS...

THIS ONE'S OUR BEST, BUT THEN, YOU GAVE US THE BEST OF WARS, CRAZY-BRAIN! IT'S A FAIR EXCHANGE.



READY, HALF ELF?

READY TOO?

HMPH!

I HAVE AN EYE ON YOU. NO TRICKS!

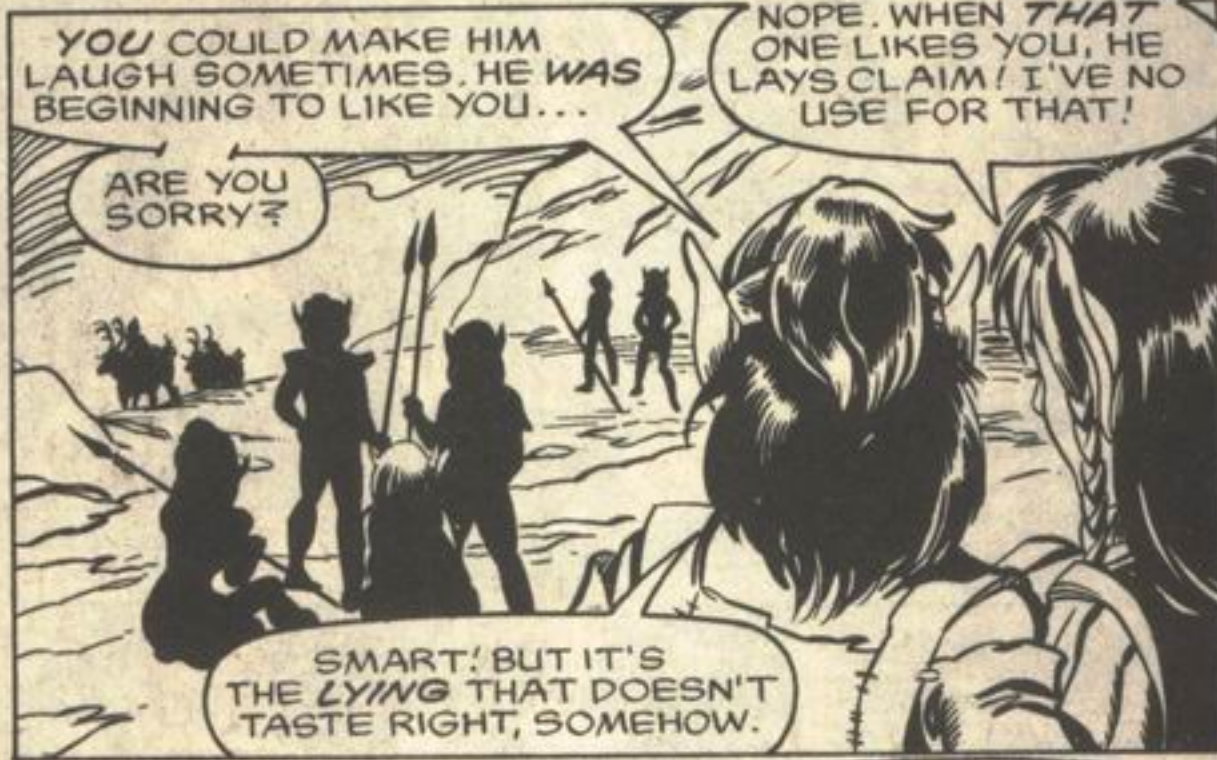
SO THE TRAVELERS DEPART.



IS HE OFF, URDA?

BRRR! WITHOUT SO MUCH AS A SALUTE.

ELF'S ICED OVER, THAT'S CERTAIN!



YOU COULD MAKE HIM LAUGH SOMETIMES. HE WAS BEGINNING TO LIKE YOU...

ARE YOU SORRY?

NOPE. WHEN THAT ONE LIKES YOU, HE LAYS CLAIM! I'VE NO USE FOR THAT!

SMART! BUT IT'S THE LYING THAT DOESN'T TASTE RIGHT, SOMEHOW.



HAD TO.

I WANTED HIS BLOOD RUNNING NEW IN OUR TRIBE--HIS FAWN, REARED MY WAY! THAT LEAVES RAYEK OUT!

HE'S THE SAME STUFF AS THE WOLF CHIEF, CUTTER, MEANT TO DO GREAT THINGS-- BUT LIKELY TO STUMBLE TRYING TO MANAGE TOO MUCH.



HE'D BE IN OUR WAY AND WE'D BE IN HIS, IF BLACK-HAIR KNEW.

GUESS SO. BUT IT'LL BE HARD--

-- TO KEEP A BROWN SKINNED YELLOW-EYED GIRL A SECRET FOR VERY LONG.

WAITING...

SIX DAYS...

WAITING...

TREESTUMP DOESN'T EVEN NOTICE THAT HIS TROLL-FORGED SWORD--

--PASSED BEYOND RAZOR SHARPNESS A WHILE AGO.

KA-SHIK! KA-SHIK!

HE WAITS FOR HIS YOUNG CHIEF, CUTTER TO RETURN. HE WAITS--

--FOR THE GLIDERS TO SWOOP DOWN ON THE HOLT.

HE WAITS FOR NEWS-- ANY NEWS--OF HIS CAPTIVE DAUGHTER AND GRANDCHILD--

--WHILE THE BLADE GROWS SHARPER THAN AN ICE CRYSTAL IN HIS HANDS.

SUDDENLY...

WHA--?! A SENDING! NOT QUITE WITHIN RANGE!

HE SHIVERS AT WHAT HE SEES.

A GIANT HAWK!

STRONGBOW GUESSED THEY'D ATTACK. HAS IT BEGUN?

ON A HUNCH, THE ELDEST WOLFRIDER CLIMBS TO THE TREETOPS.

THIS TIME TREESTUMP DOES NOT ORDER A "DEN-HIDE." THIS TIME THE WOLFRIDERS PREPARE FOR A BATTLE THEY'D WELCOME.

IF THE GIANT BIRDS TRY TO DESTROY OUR TREES, THEY'LL FIND HARD, SHARPENED LIMBS TO WOUND THEIR BELLIES!

AND SHARPER SPEAR POINTS FOR THEIR RIDERS!

BUT...



THE TRADE
ALMOST
WORKED--

--"PRESERVERS FOR
DEWSHINE ONLY,"
THE GLIDERS SAID--

--BUT DEWSHINE
WENT BACK INTO
THE MOUNTAIN
FOR WINDKIN!



WE COULDN'T
REACH HER!
SORRY!



AROREE DUMPED
STRONGBOW AND SCOUTER
SOMEWHERE BETWEEN HERE AND...

CURSE IT!
OUT OF RANGE
AGAIN!



AROREE, IF
I'M NOT YOUR
PRISONER, THEN
YOU'VE GOT TO
LET ME GO.

I SHOULD
BE STANDING
AT CUTTER'S
SIDE WHEN HE
TALKS TO THE
HUMANS!

YOU LOVE
HIM. HE'LL
NEVER WANT
FOR YOUR
LOYALTY!

BUT I HAVE DEFIED
MY LORD, KILLED ONE
OF THE EIGHT! I
HAVE NOTHING--



--NO FRIEND BUT YOU!
I CANNOT BEAR THE
FEAR! WITHOUT YOU, I
AM ALONE!

HER
HEART...
BEATING
LIKE A
HUMMER'S
WINGS...

HIGH ONES!
WHAT SHOULD
I DO?



RELIEVED, AND YET MORE ANXIOUS THAN EVER, TREESTUMP GIVES THE STAR-GAZER'S MESSAGE TO THOSE IT AFFECTS MOST.

MOONSHADE!

CLEARBROOK!

YOUR MENFOLK ARE WELL. FAILED IN THEIR TASK... BUT THEY'RE WELL!

WE'RE BACK WHERE WE STARTED... NO WORSE AND... NO BETTER!

ALL WE HAVE GOING FOR US NOW IS CUTTER'S PLAN TO STIR UP THE HUMANS!



WHY?! 'CHOKE' - WHY WOULDN'T SHE ESCAPE WHEN SHE HAD THE CHANCE?! I DON'T UNDERSTAND!

YOU KNOW YOU DO! SHE COULDN'T DESERT WINDKIN.

Y-YES! BUT TIMMORN'S BLOOD! YOU AND I'VE LOST LIFEMATES! ARE WE BOTH TO LOSE DAUGHTERS TOO?

WAITING...

WAITING...

SKYWISE'S NEWS, PASSED
THROUGHOUT THE TRIBE,
HAS GIVEN CUTTER'S
FAMILY LITTLE
REASSURANCE.

IT'S ANOTHER
BAD DREAM,
MOTHER.

S-SAVAH!
TIMMAIN...!

OHH...
NO!

NO...!

THE HEALER
KNOWS WELL
WHAT TO DO,
BUT...

... SHE'LL
CATCH YOU...
SHE... SHE...

SIGH

UNFORTUNATELY,
THE TRANQUILITY
LEETAH CREATES
CANNOT LAST.

THE CURSED
VISIONS ALWAYS
RETURN--

-- TO PLAGUE
ALL WHO HAVE
EVER LOCKED
WILLS WITH
THE "BLACK
SNAKE"!

THESE VISIONS
SHE, HERSELF,
STILL SEES--
MIND-WOUNDS FROM
THE ONE HEALING
SHE REGRETS--

-- THAT SHE COULD
NOT ACCOMPLISH!



HER OWN HANDS,
LEETAH KNOWS,
WOULD HAVE WON
HAD THE BATTLE
NOT BEEN WRENCHED
FROM THEM.

BUT SHE HAS FEARED TO
ERASE THE RESULTING
DREAMS ENTIRELY--

--UNTIL SHE
GRASPS THEIR
FULL MEANING...

ARE THEY PUNISHMENTS, OR--

--PUZZLES? AND WOULD
THE SOLUTIONS REVEAL
THE WAY TO WINNOWILL'S
UNDOING?

OR ARE THE NIGHT-
MARES WARNINGS--

--FORESHADOWINGS OF THE PRICE THAT MUST BE PAID FOR FULL USE OF THE OLD POWERS?

HOW SIMPLE--IF WE WERE NOT WHAT WE ARE.

SINCE THE WAR FOR THE PALACE, LEETAH HAS WRESTLED WITH HERSELF...

WERE WE LIKE HUMANS, OUR MAGIC WOULD BE ASLEEP--WE'D HAVE NO POWERS ABLE TO BE ABUSED!

AND NO ABILITY TO REACH SHORE IN ONE PRODIGIOUS HOP!

THE FEAT, AS NATURAL TO CUTTER AS BREATHING, IS NOT CALCULATED TO IMPRESS.

BUT...

!GASP!-

!WHEW!-

IT'S LUCKY EVERY MOVE I MAKE SEEMS TO CONVINCE THEM MORE THAN EVER THAT I'M A "BIRD SPIRIT"!

BUT IF WE CONVINCE NONNA'S TRIBE THAT THE GLIDERS HAVE TRICKED THEM ALL ALONG, WHAT WILL KEEP THEM FROM DOUBTING ME TOO?

HMM... THAT COULD BE DANGEROUS!

IT'S WINNOWILL ALONE THAT WE MUST TURN THE HUMANS AGAINST.

THE HOAN G'TAY SHO MUST BELIEVE IN ME TOO--MORE THAN IN THE GLIDERS!

IF THEY LOSE FAITH IN ALL "SPIRITS" THEN I'M AS GOOD AS COOKED--AND SO ARE NONNA AND ADAR!

SUDDENLY... AS IF TO UNDERSCORE CUTTER'S THOUGHTS...

RUMMA
TUMMA
TUM-TUM
TUM TUM

<DRUMS
CALLING
FOR--
GAMES?>

<NO! THEY PROMISE
BATTLE! REAL
FIGHTING! WHY? IN
ALL MY SNOWS LIVING
WITH THEM, I NEVER
SAW MY PEOPLE
SPILL ANOTHER
TRIBE'S BLOOD!>

<IT IS BEST YOU WAIT HERE,
HONORED ONE, UNTIL WE HAVE
PREPARED THE HOANG'TAY
SHO FOR YOUR COMING.>

SHOULD I
PRETEND I
KNOW WHAT
THE DRUMS
MEAN?

NO. NO NEED. JUST STAY QUIET
AND LOOK WISE. WISH I DIDN'T
HAVE TO KEEP PLAYACTING FOR
THESE GOOD TALL ONES.

BUT I WISH
EVEN MORE THAT
I KNEW WHAT THE
HOANG'TAY SHO
ARE SO WORKED
UP ABOUT.

RUM TUM!
RUM TUM!

DRUMMING LIKE THAT IS
NEVER A GOOD SIGN--FROM
ANY HUMAN CAMP!

SOON...

FOR FOURTEEN TURNS OF THE
SEASONS, NONNA HAS DWELLED
WITH HER MATE IN THE WOODS
BEYOND "SUN-GOES-UP"--BEYOND
THE VALLEY OF ENDLESS SLEEP.

BUT BEFORE
ADAR CAME
AND TOOK HER
AWAY TO LIVE
WITH HIS FAR-
OFF TRIBE--

--NONNA WAS SYMBOL
MAKER TO "THE FAVORED
OF THOSE WHO DWELL
ON HIGH"--

--AND THEY REMEMBER HER!

THE WAR DANCE
CEASES...THE
DRUMS FALL SILENT.
AS HER BIRTH-TRIBE
GATHERS AROUND
HER IN GREETING,
NONNA SEES
YOUNG FACES THAT
ARE NEW TO HER,
WHILE SOME--

--BUT NOT
ALL THE
OLD ONES
ARE GONE.

<MAY YOU
SEE MANY
MORE
SNOWS,
KOHANN-
CHIEF.>

<AS MANY
AT LEAST AS
YOU HAVE BEEN
AWAY FROM US,
NONNA.>

<WE HAD ALL BUT LOST
HOPE OF SEEING YOU AGAIN.>

THE SIGHTS, SCENTS AND SOUNDS OF
CHILDHOOD MEMORY MINGLE STRANGELY
WITH IMPRESSIONS OF THE MOMENT AS
NONNA PRESENTS THE GIFTS SHE HAS
BROUGHT TO MEMBERS
OF HER FAMILY.

<MY
FATHER...>

<MAY WE ALWAYS
BE CLOSE, THOUGH
WE DWELL APART.>

<TROUBLE...
ANGER IN THE
AIR...WHY?>

SHORTLY, WHEN
FORMAL
GREETINGS
ARE DONE...

<I-I BEG LEAVE
TO SPEAK--AND TO
HAVE THE HOAN
G'TAY SHO HEAR
ME AS THEY
ONCE DID-->

<-- WHEN I
WAS THEIR
SYMBOL
MAKER,
PAINTER OF
DREAMS.>

<ALTHOUGH I NOW
LIVE FAR FROM BLUE
MOUNTAIN, THE SPIRITS
HAVE SOUGHT ME OUT
AND THEY...>

<... THEY HAVE...
ASKED ME... TO...>

!GASP!

<THAT BURNING SHAPE--
IT FRIGHTENS ME!>

<WHAT?! WHAT
ARE YOU DOING?!>



<WE PREPARE, SYMBOL MAKER, FOR BATTLE WITH DEMONS!>

<THE BIRD SPIRITS HAVE SUMMONED US TO THEIR DEFENSE! WE ARE TO DESTROY THE FALSE ONES!>

<IS THAT WHY YOU HAVE COME, NONNA-- TO USE YOUR PICTURE-MAGIC AGAINST THE DEMONS?>



<DEMONS...? FALSE ONES...? WHAT DO YOU MEAN? THERE IS ONLY ONE EVIL SPIRIT AND I HAVE COME-->

<--TO WARN YOU OF HER GREAT DECEPTION!>

<THE HONORED ONES THEMSELVES WISH TO CAST HER FROM THEIR MIDST!>



<IF YOU SPEAK OF THE DARK-ROBED MOTHER-- THE BIRD SPIRIT WITH STARS FOR EYES AND A BABY AT HER BREAST, THEN THE FALSE SPIRITS HAVE MISLED YOU!>

<MISLED...? HOW CAN THAT BE? MY GENTLE LITTLE MESSENGER WOULD NOT LIE TO ME-->

<--BUT A DEMON IN DISGUISE WOULD!>



<ONLY THE DISGUISE IS IMPERFECT! DID YOU NOT KNOW? DEMONS ARE SMALL. THE EVIL THEY DO SHRIVELS THEM TO LOWLY SIZE!>

<AND THE NOBLE BIRDS WILL NOT CARRY THEM TO THE CLOUDS-- THEY MUST RIDE WOLVES!>

<AH! I SEE IT DAWNS ON YOU! YOU HAVE BEEN USED, SYMBOL-MAKER! TRICKED!>



<THE DARK-ROBED ONE TOLD US TO BEWARE OF AN ATTACK BY WOLF-RIDING DEMONS--AND WE ARE SWORN TO KILL THEM ON SIGHT!>



AT THAT SAME MOMENT,
WITHIN BLUE MOUNTAIN...

HERE! SHE
WENT THROUGH
THIS PASSAGE-
WAY!

IT LEADS TO
TENSPAN'S HALL.
QUICKLY! WE MUST
CATCH HER BEFORE
SHE GOES FARTHER!



BUT...

NOW
WHAT?!

I'LL NOT
FOLLOW TO
FIND OUT!



IN THE NEXT INSTANT, REEVOL'S
ANSWER BURSTS FROM THE TUNNEL,
WRITHING IN "WRAPSTUFF".

KAFF
SPUTTER

GAG
P-PRESERVERS!

THEY WILL
COUGH OBEY
NONE BUT THE
WOLFRIDER
CALLED
DEWSHINE!



COUGH COUGH - SHE
IS TOO WELL GUARDED!
WE SHALL NEVER
REACH HER!

WE MUST-- ELSE
THE DISGRACE OF THE
EIGHT IS COMPLETE!



AND IN A NOOK ABOVE
THE POLISHED FLOOR OF
TENSPAN'S HALL...

PANT
PANT

THANK
YOU, LITTLE
FRIENDS!

MY SORE
LEG MAKES IT
HARD TO KEEP
CLIMBING
PANT --- NEED
TO REST!

NASTY BAD FLYHIGH-
THINGS GO WAY FOR
AWHILE. SUNNYGOLD
HIGHTHING MOSTLY SAFE.



MEANWHILE...

SEVERAL TORTUOUSLY INTERCONNECTED HALLS AWAY, THE OBJECT OF DEWSHINE'S HATE REBUKES HER SEVEN FRUSTRATED GUARDS.

--SHAMEFUL! CLUMSY!

WAS AROREE SO VITAL TO YOUR NUMBER THAT YOU ARE INEPT WITHOUT HER?

NO OTHER EARS THAN THOSE OF WINDKIN AND THE EIGHT HEAR THE "BLACK SNAKE'S" CONTEMPTUOUS WORDS.

THE GREAT EGG, EVER SO SLOWLY, CONTINUES TO TURN. AROUND IT, THE SLEEPING GLIDERS CONTINUE TO DRIFT IN THEIR SILENT ORBITS.

LEAVE OFF YOUR SEARCH FOR THE SHE-DOG.

IF I SENSE HER NEAR, I SHALL STOP HER! GO OUTSIDE! TAKE WEAPONS TO THE HUMANS-- METAL WEAPONS FOR KILLING WOLFRIDERS!

EAGER TO REGAIN THEIR LORD'S GOOD GRACES, THE GUARDS HASTEN AWAY, LEAVING--

--A VERY HUNGRY CHILD...!

SO HUNGRY... HE NO LONGER SHRINKS FROM MY TOUCH.

GOOD! IT IS TIME TO BEGIN!

AT ONCE, WARM, MAGICALLY-PRODUCED MILK FLOWS. WINDKIN'S WILL TO SURVIVE IS STRONGER THAN HIS NATURAL FEAR.

HE DOES NOT FEEL THE SUBTLE INTRUSION, THE SOFTLY SINISTER TOUCH THAT MEDDLES WITH THE VERY STUFF OF HIS BEING.

AND SO THE CHANGE BEGINS...

OUTSIDE, THE WORDS OF THE HOAN G'TAY SHO GROW MORE HEATED THAN THE CEREMONIAL FIRE...

<NONNA LIES!>

<FOOL! THE BIRD SPIRITS HAVE ALWAYS TALKED TO HER! SHE SPEAKS FOR THEM NOW! THE BLACK-ROBED ONE IS THE LIAR!>

<SO IT IS!>

<NO!>

<STOP! PLEASE STOP SHOUTING AT EACH OTHER!>

BUT THE SYMBOL-MAKER'S PLEA ONLY ROUSES MORE VIOLENT CONFLICT.

<WAIT! LISTEN! I KNOW NONNA'S MESSENGER! HE IS A GOOD SPIRIT!>

<A DEMON, MASKED!>

NO! ADAR IS RIGHT!

<BE QUIET, OLD MADMAN!>

WHY MUST THIS DIVIDE YOU? YOU KNOW THE SPIRITS! I KNOW THEM! I HAVE EVER TRIED, WITH MY POOR PAINTS, TO WORSHIP THEIR BEAUTY! WE KNOW THEM BY THEIR EYES, THEIR HANDS, THEIR GRACE!>

<BUT ONLY THEY CAN KNOW WHICH ONE OF THEIR OWN KIND IS EVIL-- AND THIS THEY HAVE TOLD ME!>

AAIEEE!

SHUT YOUR MOUTH, WOMAN!

<WE HEAR ONLY THE VOICE THAT COMES FROM BLUE MOUNTAIN!>

<YOU LIE TO SET YOURSELVES ABOVE US! I DO NOT BELIEVE ANY SPIRIT EVER CAME TO YOU!>



<THE DARK-ROBED ONE IS AN ENEMY TO
HER FELLOW SPIRITS! YOU MUST NOT FEED
HER POWER WITH YOUR WORSHIP!>

<SHE IS AN
ENEMY TO YOU,
MAKING SLAVES
OF ALL WHO OFFER
THEMSELVES UP
TO HER!>

<ALL THAT YOU HAVE
BELIEVED OF HER 'TIL NOW-->

<--IS UNTRUE!>

<"AND THE LIE WHICH IS
THE TRUTH SHALL BRING
MORE PAIN THAN THE
TRUTH WHICH IS A LIE...!">

<EXPLAIN,
SHAMAN!
WE ARE
LOST!>

<WHOSE
WORDS
ARE WE TO
BELIEVE?>

<I BELIEVE
IN BLOOD!>

<DEMON'S
BLOOD!!>

KRAK!

WHISSSS!

KLUNK!

IMPRESSED, THE MAN HASTILY
GATHERS UP HIS DEFTLY-
DEFLECTED SPEAR.

THE HUMANS
DO NOT KNOW
WHAT TO THINK--

--AND
NEITHER
DOES
CUTTER
WHEN...

<LOOK!
MORE!>

WELL DONE, MY CHIEF!

SCOUTER...! AND CLEARBROOK!

SENDING'S EASIER THAN SHOUTING... BUT BE CAREFUL!

AYE! CUTTER! LOCK-SEND!

THINKING THEY MIGHT NEED HELP, I WENT TO MEET SCOUTER AND STRONGBOW AS THEY RODE BACK TO THE HOLT. BRISTLEBRUSH AND BRIERSTING HAD FOUND THEM.

STRONGBOW REJOINED THE WOLFRIDERS, BUT AS YOU CAN SEE, WE'RE HERE TO BE WITH YOU!

I'M GLAD! WINNOWILL GOT TO THESE HUMANS BEFORE NONNA, ADAR AND I ARRIVED.

SHE'S ALMOST CONVINCED THEM THAT WOLFRIDERS ARE MEAT TO BE WASTED!

PLEASE, FOR DEWSHINE, TRY ONCE MORE!

YES! MAKE THE HUMANS SEE WINNOWILL FOR WHAT SHE IS!

CUTTER DRAWS BREATH TO APPEAL TO THE HOAN G'TAY SHO ONE FINAL TIME --

-- WHEN SUDDENLY...

ABOVE! LOOK!

SPEARS!

FALLING LIKE HAIL!

AIE!

HA HA HA!

USE THEM, DEAR PETS!

USE THEM, WELL!

CLEARBROOK! SCOUTER! DOWN OFF THE PATH!

TAKE SHELTER! HURRY!



<YOU BROUGHT US A LONG WAY TO GET US KILLED, SPIRIT!>

<THEY'RE NOT AIMING, HUMAN--LOOK!>



<WHA--? THE BIRD SPIRITS FLY BACK INTO THEIR TUNNEL!>

<IT IS OVER!>

WHY? WHY DID THEY ATTACK US?

SOB



<ATTACK...?! BAH!>

<CAN YOU NOT SEE THIS IS THE RICHEST GIFT THEY HAVE EVER GIVEN US?>



<SEE HOW THE SPEAR POINTS GLEAM LIKE THE MOON! THEY ARE MADE OF STUFF SHARPER AND HARDER THAN FLINT! ONLY SPIRITS CAN MAKE SUCH WEAPONS--AND WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN THEM FOR A REASON!>

<YES! TO MAKE US EQUAL TO THE DEMONS WE MUST BATTLE! MAGIC WEAPONS-->



<--TO BE TURNED ON THE FALSE ONES AND THEIR ALLIES!>

<NO!>

CLIMB, NONNA!!



WARFROST ALWAYS BOLTS WHEN THERE'S TROUBLE. HE'S NOT LIKE OLD NIGHTRUNNER.

THE HUMANS ARE STILL DIVIDED--FIGHTING AMONG THEMSELVES!

BUT IT'S CLEAR WHAT THIS BUNCH WANTS!

AS THE HUMANS WHO HAVE SIDED WITH WINNOWILL TRY TO SURROUND THEM ON THE MOUNTAIN PATH, THE ELVES CREATE A FENCE OF FLASHING BRIGHT-METAL AROUND THEMSELVES, NONNA AND ADAR.



NO WAY TO JUMP ASIDE!

THEY'RE DRIVING US HIGHER!

SUDDENLY...

THE TUNNEL!

IT'S STILL OPEN!

HE MAKES A QUICK, MAD DECISION--

--THE ONLY ONE POSSIBLE!

RUN! RUN! FOR THE TUNNEL!



<NONNA...! ADAR...! GO INSIDE THE MOUNTAIN!>



<QUICKLY! BEFORE DOOR CLOSES THE ENTRANCE!>

<LOOK! TH-THE ROCK IS... MOVING!>

<DON'T STOP, HUMANS!>

GASP!



LAST TO SQUEEZE THROUGH THE SHRINKING APERTURE, CUTTER FEELS A SPEAR POINT JAB HIS BOOT.

OW!! JUST IN TIME!

BLUE MOUNTAIN...



I NEVER THOUGHT WE'D SEE THIS SNAKE PIT AGAIN!

WHEN THIS IS ALL OVER, IF I STILL LIVE, I'M GOING TO HANG SKYWISE UP BY HIS BARS FOR GETTING US INTO THIS!





YOU ARE A
PLEASURE-
GIVER, MY
LITTLE LOVE.



YOU KNOW
ME BETTER
THAN I KNOW
MYSELF!

IF YOU DID
KNOW YOUR-
SELF YOU'D
UNDERSTAND--



-- HOW WRONG IT
WAS TO STEAL
DEWSHINE'S CUB!

BUT--

--I HAVE
KNOWN ONLY
THE LAW--



--OF THE EIGHT.
ANYTHING TO
SERVE THEIR LORD.

HMPH! WINNOWILL!



DEAD OR
ALIVE SHE'S A
PAIN IN THE
TAIL!



IF IT WERE
SAFE TO KILL
HER, I'D LIKE
TO--



--TO....!



MORE....!

SOMETIME LATER...



~ SIGH ~ JOINING WITH
YOU IS LIKE DREAM-
BERRY WINE--

TOO MUCH
DOESN'T FEEL LIKE
ENOUGH. YOU'RE
SO HUNGRY!

BUT EVEN THIS
CAN'T FEED YOU
LIKE THE SCROLL
OF COLORS
COULD!

SCROLL...
OF
COLORS?

THE SMALL QUESTION SETS SKYWISE TO RECOUNTING IN VIVID DETAIL THE STORY OF THE WOLFRIDERS' FIRST WAR-- THE BATTLE FOR THE PALACE OF THE HIGH ONES. LATER, AS THE TWO ELVES SOAR ABOVE THE CLOUDS, SKYWISE SPEAKS MOST REVERENTLY OF THE WONDERFUL SCROLL-- THE MAGICAL CONTAINER OF ALL ELFIN HISTORY.

IT'S LIKE THE GLIDER'S GREAT STONE EGG-- ONLY BETTER, AROREE! ONCE YOU SEE IT, YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE-- WHO WE ALL ARE-- AND WHERE WE CAME FROM!

AFTER THAT, NOTHING CAN SCARE YOU!

YES...! I WANT TO SEE IT, SKYWISE! I WANT TO GO TO THE PALACE!

THE STARGAZER FEELS A SUDDEN TWINGE AS HE REALIZES--

--I-I'M SENDING HER AWAY! FOR HER SAKE! I DON'T HAVE TO. SHE'D DO ANYTHING I SAY. BUT...

HHOOOOWWWWWW

HEY!

DOWN THERE! STARJUMPER!

THE COUPLE PARTS AS NEAR TO BLUE MOUNTAIN AS AROREE DARES FLY.

FARE WELL, LITTLE LOVE!

REMEMBER-- GO THE WAY YOU WENT ONCE BEFORE--

-- BUT FLY OVER THE FROZEN MOUNTAINS THIS TIME! IT'S SAFE!

THE CASTLE WILL CALL YOU! GOOD LUCK!

THE WAY AROREE WENT ONCE BEFORE--

-- IS THAT SAME PATH, REVERSED, ON WHICH PETALWING NOW GUIDES RAYEK TO BLUE MOUNTAIN.

TWO-EDGE KNOWS MANY ROUTES TO THE PLACE--BUT HE IS COMFORTABLE RIDING WITH HIS SULLEN, BROODING COMPANION. THE SILENCE IS RESTFUL.

AND YET, THOUGH THE HALF-ELF UNDERSTANDS THE PLEASURE TO BE HAD IN NURSING OLD WOUNDS AND GRIEVANCES--

--RAYEK'S PARTICULAR CROW-TO-PLUCK BEWILDERS TWO-EDGE NO END.

KAHVI KEPT SOMETHING FROM ME!

THERE IS MORE TO THE CHILD'S DEATH THAN SHE TOLD.

NO ONE WANTS HIS OWN YOUNG!

WHY DOES HE GRIEVE OVER SUCH GOOD FORTUNE? HE MUST BE ...MAD...!

SORROWING FOR OTHERS IS A WASTE.

DEAD CHILDREN WISH TO BE FORGOTTEN--

-- AS THE LIVE ONES ARE!

EH?!

SKREEAAAWWW!

NO!!

SHE HAS NOT FORGOTTEN!

I AM FOUND!

THE CELL!

THE GAMES! RATS! SPIDERS! PAIN! PAIN!!

TWO-EDGE!

EEYAAH!

TO BE CONTINUED...

ELFDUEST

SIEGE AT BLUE MOUNTAIN



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ARTIST / WRITER
WENDY PINI

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PART
5

INKS
JOE STATON

GUEST LETTERER
CLEM ROBINS

STRAINING AGAINST THE WIND AS HER WINGED MOUNT SUDDENLY DIVES TOWARD THE GROUND, AROREE DOES NOT ATTEMPT TO REGAIN HER NORTHWARD COURSE.

SHE KNOWS THE MOODS OF THE GIGANTIC BIRD OF PREY SHE RIDES.

THERE ARE LIMITS TO THE CONTROL HER BOND WITH HIM GIVES HER--PARTICULARLY WHEN HE IS VERY HUNGRY.

SHE HAS FLOWN HIM FAR AND FAST ON HER PILGRIMAGE TO THE PALACE OF THE HIGH ONES.

NOW IT IS TIME FOR HIM TO FEED.

LITTLETRILL....!
WHAT HAVE YOU SPOTTED DOWN THERE?

AANWKK!



CAN'T MAKE OUT WHAT IT IS. SOMETHING... RUNNING!

OH, WELL! HAVE YOUR WAY THEN, MY HATCHLING! I AM WITH YOU FOR THE RIDE!



SKAAAWWW!
SKREEEE!

PANT
PANT
PANT



PANT
PANT



PANT
WHIMPER



EEYAAAAH!

WHOOOSH!



UH
OH!



TWO-EDGE!



AAAHHH!

YAHAAA!

AAWWW!
BETTER SAVE
HIGH-DIG-DIG!

SOB

HOLD,
PRESERVER!
... DOESN'T THAT
GREAT HAWK
BELONG TO---

--A
GLIDER!?

OH, THE *HIGH*
ONES ARE WITH
ME TODAY!

HELLO, PRETTY
FLYHIGHTHING!

DISCREETLY,
RAYEK HOVERS AS TALL
AROREE DISMOUNTS WITH A NATIVE
LIGHTNESS THAT HE, DESPITE YEARS OF PRACTICE,
HAS YET TO APPROACH. HIS ADMIRATION OF HER IS
TINGED WITH ENVY.

PETALWING!

RAWK!
RAWK!

THE CLAWS!
HE CRUSHES ME!!

HEEELLP!







NEED?! ALL WHO ANSWER HER NEEDS ARE CONSUMED! ALL WHO DENY HER NEEDS ARE CONDEMNED! GAMES! ONLY GAMES KEEP HER OFF BALANCE--AND ONLY WHEN THE RULES ARE YOURS, NOT HERS!

FOOL!

YOU DO NOT KNOW HOW TO PLAY!



I AM **NOT** HER TORMENTED SON. UNLIKE YOU, I HAVE NO CLINGING SHADOWS FROM THE PAST TO DARKEN MY VIEW OF WINNOWILL AS SHE IS.

THE MORE I HEAR, THE MORE I GATHER THAT SHE HAS LONG BEEN MISUNDERSTOOD--JUST AS I WAS IN THE SUN VILLAGE!

A BESTIAL SNARL, THEN FROTHING SPITTLE ERUPT FROM BETWEEN TWO-EDGE'S CLENCHED TEETH. WITH TEARS OF FRUSTRATION AND IMAGINED BETRAYAL, THE HALF-ELF TURNS AND STUMBLES DOWN THE ROCKY SLOPE.



WHAT DID YOU MEAN...HER SON?

LIES!! THE FUN WE WERE TO HAVE--TRICKS WE WERE TO PLAY--

LIES!!

YOU MEANT TO COZY UP TO HER AT EVERY TURN! LYING ELF! ELF! ELF!! SHOULD'VE KNOWN, BUT YOU'LL SEE! HAHA! YOU'LL LEARN!

SIGH: GONE RAVING AGAIN. BUT FORTUNATELY YOU ARE HERE!

I UNDERSTAND NONE OF THIS!

I MUST GO!



OH, YOU'LL FIND MUCH MORE THAN THAT PLAIN-SPOKEN WOLFRIDER COULD TELL YOU, MAIDEN!



IT IS... SO HARD TO--





I HAVE A
FEELING THE MOONS
WILL RISE AND SET
MANY TIMES--

--BEFORE CUTTER
COMES DOWN FROM THE
MOUNTAIN! IT'S A HARDER
PLACE TO LEAVE THAN TO
ENTER--AND GETTING
IN IS HARD ENOUGH!

THOSE CURSED
CARRION BIRDS WILL
SHRED ANYONE WHO
TRIES TO CLIMB UP
TO THE AERIE.

GRRRR...

SCOUTER...
CLEARBROOK...
DEWSHINE...LITTLE
WINDKIN... AND
CUTTER, MY SOUL'S
BROTHER--

--ALL INSIDE
THAT DUNG-
HILL! YOU
WOLVES SAY
THEY LIVE...

BUT ARE
THEY HIDING...?
FIGHTING...?
CAPTURED...?

"IF ONLY I COULD KNOW!"
SKYWISE GROWLS, REMEMBERING
HOW HE FOUND HIS TRIBEMATES'
MOUNTS PROWLING IN THE TALL
SHRUBBERY AT THE FOOT OF THE
MOUNTAIN.



IT WAS AGONY TO RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO SEND,
BUT SKYWISE DARED NOT RISK HIS MENTAL CALL
BEING DETECTED BY WINNOWILL--FOR THEN
SHE WOULD KNOW--

--IF SHE DID NOT ALREADY, THAT MORE
WOLFRIDERS HAD SECRETLY ENTERED
HER STRONGHOLD.



SO SKYWISE WAITED, LISTENING
TO THE QUARRELS OF THE DIVIDED
HOAN G'TAY SHO. SOME OF THEM,
IT SEEMED, HAD BELIEVED CUTTER
AND NONNA'S WARNING ABOUT
WINNOWILL--WHILE OTHERS--

--HAD DEFINITELY
NOT BELIEVED!

RUM TUM!
RUM TUM!
RUMMA-TUMMA TUM!

THERE GO THE
DRUMS AGAIN...SIGH!
ANGRY HUMANS ARE
ALL WE NEED NOW!

COME ON,
STARJUMPER. BACK
TO THE HOLT. WE'LL TELL
THE OTHERS WHAT'S
HAPPENED--



"--AND HOPE THAT, UNTIL WE CAN ALL COME AND HELP, CUTTER WILL SOMEHOW KEEP THINGS IN HAND."



PSSST!



IT'S SAFE. COME ON.

{NONNA, THIS PLACE IS NOTHING LIKE YOUR TRIBE SAID IT WAS!}

{THE OLD SONGS AND STORIES YOU TAUGHT ME--}

{--DO NOT TELL OF THINGS AS THEY ARE! OH, ADAR, MY HEART HURTS!}

{WHERE IS THE MUSIC? WHERE ARE THE CLOUDS LINING SOFT NESTS MADE OF SUNLIGHT?}

{HUSH, HUMANS! THE EIGHT HAVE HUNTERS' EARS!}



IT HAS NOT BEEN DIFFICULT FOR CUTTER AND HIS ODDLY ASSORTED BAND TO SLIP UNDISCOVERED DOWN THE DARK, ECHOING PASSAGES WITHIN BLUE MOUNTAIN. ALTHOUGH CONSTANTLY ON THE ALERT FOR A SURPRISE ATTACK, THEY HAVE SEEN NO MOVEMENT, HEARD NO SOUND SAVE THE SETTLING OF ANCIENT ROCK AND THE MINDLESS DRIP OF SEEPING WATER.

NOW AND THEN A FAINT, FAMILIAR SCENT TEASES...

DEWSHINE CAME THIS WAY-- BUT WHEN? HER TRAIL CROSSES AND RECROSSES ITSELF!

POOR HUMANS. THEY'RE SCARED-- AND DISAPPOINTED.

AND WHY NOT? WONDERFUL AS IT IS, THE PALACE OF THE HIGH ONES WASN'T AS MY MIND PICTURED IT, EITHER. ARE ALL LEGENDS JUST WIND?

RUMBLING BELLIES ACHE FOR FOOD THAT HAS PROVED, SO FAR, UNOBTAINABLE. BUT AS FOR DRINK...

CUTTER, CLEARBROOK AND SCOUTER REMEMBER FROM THREE YEARS PAST A FATEFUL WOLFRIDER COUNCIL HELD IN A PLACE WHERE FRESH WATER FLOWED.

MEMORY AND NEED GUIDE THE SEARCH PARTY TO THAT RESTFUL GROTTO NOW.

<HUNH! HERE IS A WONDER!>

<A-A SACRED SPRING!>

HERE, TOO, DEWSHINE'S SCENT LINGERS. HERE, TOO, SHE SLAKED HER THIRST AND THEN RAN ON--IN PURSUIT? OR PURSUED?

SHORTLY...

THOUGH SHE HAS UNDERSTOOD PRECIOUS LITTLE OF CUTTER'S EXPLANATIONS, NONNA KNOWS THAT AN INFANT "SPIRIT" HAS BEEN ABDUCTED--

--AND THAT SCOUTER IS THE FATHER.

<I KNOW, LITTLE SPIRIT. I MISS MY CHILDREN, TOO!>

HUH?!



D-DON'T! PLEASE! PITY IS NO GOOD! HAVE TO--



SUPPENLY THE YOUNG WOLFRIDER STANDS AND TILTS BACK HIS HEAD...

NO!

BEFORE THE HIGH ONES' COMING THERE WERE WOLVES... AND BEFORE "SENDING" THERE WAS--

--HOWLING--COMMUNICATION PERFECT IN ITS SIMPLICITY!



BEAKS AND CLAWS! WHAT--?

AH, IT IS JUST THE SHE-DOG WAITING FOR HER WHELP.

RIGHT.

PAY IT NO MIND.

THE MERE CHANGE OF PITCH OR COLORATION OF TONE--

--SPEAKS VOLUMES TO THE RIGHT EARS!

SCOUTER! HERE!

ONE HOWL! IT'S ALL I NEED. I KNOW WHERE HE IS. JUST HAVE TO GET PAST... THEM!

TO THE STORM AND THE RAIN WITH THE CATERWAULING WOLFRIDER!

YES! I AM TIRED OF CHASING HER!



LOVEMATE, YOU TOOK SUCH A RISK! YOU COULDN'T BE SURE THEY'D MISTAKE YOUR HOWL FOR MINE. BUT IT WORKED!

ACROSS THE CEILING AND...

DID IT! EAT WELL, GLIDERS--



--AND PRAISE ALL THE SOULS THE PALACE HOLDS!

THOP!



LATER...

AND THEY SAY BEARCLAW WAS A GAMBLER!

PLEASE, BELOVED... COME!

(COME!)



FINALLY...

PSST!

OH!

WHO WILL IT BE...? DEWSHINE, THE EIGHT OR... WINNOWILL?



HEE HEE

EEHEE

HEE



SMALL WHIMPERING SOUNDS--

--LIKE THE SQUEALS OF WOLF PUPS, HAPPY TO SEE THEIR PARENTS RETURN FROM THE HUNT, ARE ALL THE REUNITED LOVERS ALLOW THEMSELVES.



OH, MY CUBS...

YOUR LITTLE RIBS...! THEY STARVED YOU!

WE'LL MAKE THEM PAY!



THE SWEET, ELFIN LANGUAGE IS BEYOND NONNA AND ADAR'S KEN, BUT THE TEARS ARE ALL TOO EASILY UNDERSTOOD

(ADAR--)

<--WHERE IS THEIR BABY?>



W-WINDKIN...?

SHE HAS HIM... ALWAYS! ...CARRIES HIM ABOUT LIKE A DOLL!

I THINK SHE'S DOWN BELOW IN HER DEN, NOW... I'M AFRAID SOB I-I'M AFRAID--

--SHE'LL CHANGE OUR CUB!



<WHY DO YOU LOOK AT ME, SPIRIT?>

<WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THIS PLACE, ADAR?>

<IT IS FOUL! AND SO ARE THE SPIRITS WHO MADE IT!>

<THERE ARE HUMAN SLAVES HERE, REMEMBER?>

<WANT TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT...?>



QUICKLY, WHEN THEY HAVE LEARNED THE WHEREABOUTS OF THE EIGHT FROM DEWSHINE...

<ALL THIS DARK--ALL THIS SICKNESS BECAUSE OF THIS--THIS BLACK-ROBED ONE?>

<WHY DO WE NOT KILL HER?>

UH...

<KILLING SPIRITS IS VERY BAD MAGIC FOR HUMANS-- BELIEVE ME!>

<IT IS AS I SAID: WE MUST BREAK HER POWER!>

"(AND TO DO THAT,)" CUTTER WHISPERS IN THE DIFFICULT HUMAN TONGUE, "(WE MUST FIRST GET RID OF HER WARRIORS!)"



<THERE THEY ARE...ALL TOGETHER... FEEDING!>

<GOOD! I'LL-->

HEE HEE!

<--PUT AWAY THAT SPEAR! WE MUST TRICK THEM --CATCH THEM OFF GUARD, THEN SNARE THEM IN OUR LITTLE WINGED FRIENDS' WEBS!>

CUTTER EXPLAINS HIS FULL PLAN TO A SKEPTICAL ADAR.



<HMM...YOU KNOW, SPIRIT, YOUR FIRST IDEA, TO TALK TO NONNA'S TRIBE-->

<--DID NOT GO SO WELL. ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THIS?>



<I AM SURE I CAN TRUST YOU TO DO YOUR BEST! NOT EVEN SPIRITS ARE PERFECT. ASK YOUR CHIEF, OLBAR, SOMETIME. HE'LL TELL YOU.>

<AND ADAR... MY NAME IS--> CUTTER. <CAN YOU SAY IT?>

GRFL PLTZ!

SHORTLY...



WHAT IS THIS?!

ONE OF OUR LORD'S PETS HAS GOT- TEN OUT OF ITS CAGE!

NONSENSE! SHE WOULD NEVER PERMIT IT! SHE HAS SENT HIM TO US.

OF COURSE! WINNOWILL HAS REALIZED THAT SHE HAS BEEN NEGLECTING US OF LATE.

HEH-HEH! THOSE WHO SERVE MUST SOMETIMES BE SERVED!

THE LITTLE SPIRIT WITH THE TONGUE-TANGLING NAME SAID THIS SOUR JUICE WILL MAKE THESE BIRD-RIDERS DROWSY.

THEY SEEM TO LIKE IT WELL ENOUGH!



SO, HUMAN...HAS OUR LORD WHISPERED HER SECRETS TO YOU? WHAT OF THE EGG? WHEN WILL SHE AWAKEN THE SLEEPERS?

UUHH...



HMMM...A QUIET ONE! HE KNOWS NOT EVEN ONE OF OUR WORDS.

STRANGE...



DESPITE HIS VAGUE MISTRUST, KUREEL EATS AND DRINKS AS ZESTFULLY AS THE REST OF HIS COMPANIONS UNTIL...

GOOD FOR ADAR! THEY'RE STUFFED FULL AND MUZZY WITH WINE!

FLYHIGHTHINGS WOBBLE-WOBBLE?!



THE TINY PRESERVERS KNOW WHAT IS WANTED OF THEM--AND AT CUTTER'S SIGN--

--THEY GLEEFULLY HURL THEMSELVES INTO THEIR TASK!



OUT OF WAY, BIGTHING!

MY EYES!

AAH!

PRESERVERS! BLINDING ME!



MY LORD! MY LORD, HELP US!! IT IS THE WOLF RIDER!

MY ARMS! THEY WILL WRAP US UP & UNH; MAKE US SLEEP!

SHE HAS SET HER PRESERVERS ON US! COME! DESTROY THEM!

NNG!

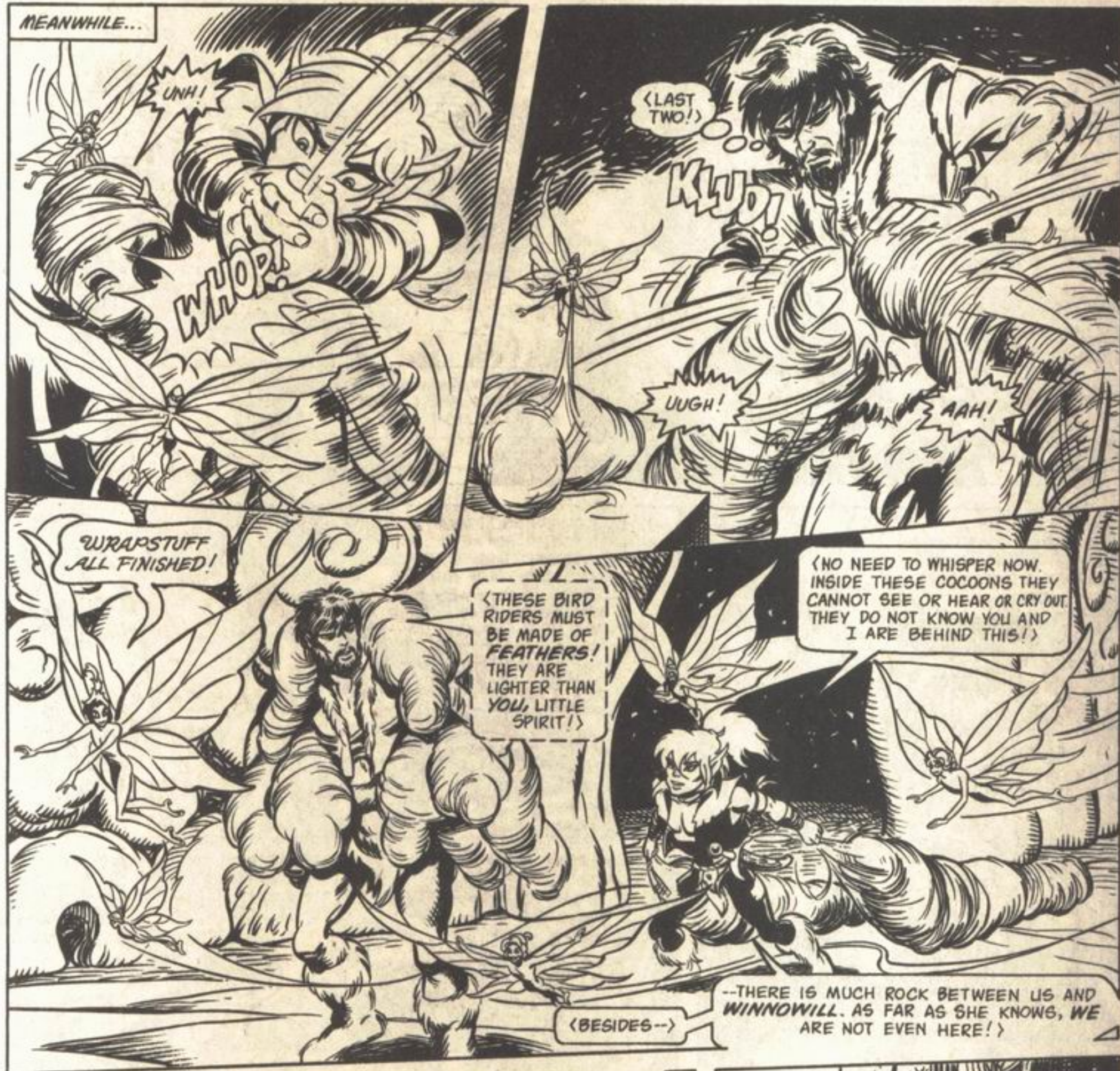
SPOOT!

HEE
HEE
HEE

HEE
HEE



MEANWHILE...



A SHORT WHILE LATER ADAR STUFFS THE LAST OF THE COCOONS INTO ONE OF SEVEN SEPARATE HIDING PLACES THAT HE AND CUTTER HAVE CHOSEN.

⟨BUT THE BLACK-ROBED ONE STILL HAS THE BABY SPIRIT! SHE MAY HARM IT IF WE TRY TO DO THIS TO HER.⟩

⟨MAYBE. BUT I HAVE FOUGHT HER BEFORE. I THINK SHE WOULD RATHER KILL ME--⟩

⟨--THAN HURT THE CHILD. IF I CAN KEEP HER BUSY--⟩

⟨--THEN MY THREE WARRIORS MIGHT HAVE A CHANCE TO GRAB THE BABY AND RUN. IT WON'T BE EASY. BUT WINNOWILL CAN BE CAUGHT BY SURPRISE!⟩

THE SURPRISE WOULD, IN FACT, BE CUTTER'S, WERE HE PRIVY TO THE ONE-SIDED CONVERSATION TAKING PLACE IN HIS GREAT ENEMY'S CHAMBER.



WINNOWILL
SHAKES HER
SHINING MANE
UNTIL WINDKIN'S
FACE APPEARS
AS HIS OWN
AGAIN.

IT WAS AN
ERROR!

A GRAVE
ERROR! I
CONFESS IT!

THAT IS WHAT COMES OF
GOING *OUTSIDE* TO FIND
WHAT HAS LAIN *WITHIN*
ALL THE WHILE.

IT WAS THERE IN THE
EGG--THERE FOR ALL
TO SEE IF THEY HAD
THE MINDS TO LOOK!

"BUT NO ONE
GAZED AS
LONG AS I
DID--FROM THE
CREATION OF
THE VERY
FIRST SHELL."

"THE GLIDERS HAD
THEIR OWN CONCERNS
BUILDING...SHAPING
BLUE MOUNTAIN."

"THEY WERE ALL SO SAFE--JUST
AS VOLL WANTED--THAT THEY NO
LONGER NEEDED THEIR HEALER."

"A GIFT CAN FESTER, YOU KNOW,
TURN IN UPON ITSELF, WHEN NO
ONE ELSE HAS USE FOR IT."

"BUT I DID NOT LET
THAT HAPPEN TO ME!
I EXPLORED--

--MEDITATED
UPON THE EGG--"

"--UNTIL I SAW THE MONUMENTAL JOKE
WE HAD PLAYED ON OURSELVES--

I SHOWED THEM HOW TO GROW--"

--BUT THEY
REFUSED ME...! I
SHOWED THEM HOW
TERRIBLE IT COULD BE
NOT TO GROW! AND
THEY PREFERRED
THAT!

MUMBLE!

AH!
HEAR
...?

GASP!
FEEL?

RRRUUUU

RRRRRUUMMBLLERRRRUUMMBBLERRR...

SIGH
AT LAST!



RRRRRUUMMBLLERRRRUUMMBBLERRR...



"NOW WE WILL GROW,"
MURMURS WINNOWILL--



THE WOLVES ANNOUNCE THE COMING OF BLOOD WHICH THEY HAVE SMELLED BEFORE. THE WOLFRIDERS, WITH SENSES ONLY SLIGHTLY MORE KEEN, ALLOW RAYEK TO APPROACH THE FATHER TREE IN THE HEART OF THE GROVE.

HEY, BROWNSKIN! HOW FARE THE GO-BACKS? THEY KILLED ANY TROLLS LATELY? HOW MANY LITTLE BEAR-STABBERS ARE ON THE WAY--OR FAWNED ALREADY?

RAYEK CASTS A WITHERING GLANCE AT KRIM, THE GO-BACK TURNED FOREST-DWELLER. BUT HIS FEATURES SOFTEN AT THE SIGHT OF THE ONLY FACE THAT INTERESTS HIM--THE ONLY EYES THAT MEET HIS WITH LOVE AND FELLOW-FEELING.

LEETAH...

MY FRIEND! MY EYES SEE WITH JOY!

SOFTPRETTY HIGH-THING! HELLO! HELLO!

GIGGLE! PETALWING! YOU'RE HERE TOO!

SUCH A *SHORT* WHILE IT HAS BEEN SINCE WE LAST TOUCHED! IF ONLY THE TIME OF THIS MEETING WERE HAPPIER!

HAVING LEARNED ENOUGH FROM SKYWISE, THROUGH AROREE, TO HAVE FORMED HIS OWN ARCH OPINION OF RECENT EVENTS, RAYEK SMILES.

EET!

I SEE SOFT LIVING HAS MADE YOU WOLFRIDERS LOSE YOUR NERVE, ELSE WHY HAVE YOU NOT CONFRONTED WINNOWILL OPENLY? YOU HAVE ALREADY PROVED THAT SHE CAN BE BEATEN!

SMART WORDS AT LAST--AND IT TOOK A MUCKING MAGIC-USER TO SPEAK 'EM OUT!



SMART WORDS BORN OF--
FORGIVE ME--IGNORANCE!

IN OUR LAST
ENCOUNTER WITH
WINNOWILL
WE PROVED
NOTHING!

SHE
DEFEATED
HERSELF!

AYE! KILLING
HER WOULD BE
THE EASY
PART!

--BUT THEN YOU'D HAVE HER RAGING SOUL
TO DEAL WITH IN THE CASTLE, BLACK-HAIR--

"--AFTER
SHE GOT
THROUGH
WITH US!"

THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY
TO TEACH YOU WHAT WE
ARE UP AGAINST,
DEAR FRIEND.

SUNTOP,
STRONGBOW
AND I--

--MUST
SHOW
YOU!



NOW!



UUHHH...!



H-HIGH
ONES! ENOUGH--!
ENOUGH!!



B-BY THE SPIRITS OF ALL WHO
DIED SINCE THE CASTLE FELL...!
SHE MIGHT HAVE BEEN MORE
THAN TIMMAIN...!

AAH! MY
HEAD STILL
POUNDS! TO HAVE SUCH
GIFTS...AND YET LET THEM
SLOWLY STARVE...FEEDING
ONLY ON BITTERNESS...
AND PAIN...!



I--I AM SORRY--

--NO! THIS HAS ONLY STRENGTHENED MY RESOLVE!

BUT YOU DO SEE, NOW?

SO LONG AS WINNOWILL HOLDS LITTLE WINDKIN BEFORE HER AS A SHIELD, NO ONE DARES STRIKE AT HER DIRECTLY!



THAT IS THE THINKING OF YOUR CHIEF, CUTTER-- ONE WHO BELIEVES THAT TO STRIKE, ONE MUST USE A SWORD!

ONE WHO, FOR ALL HIS EXPERIENCE, STILL UNDERVALUES THE POWER TO WHICH HE IS LIFEMATED! ONE WHOSE MIGHTIEST WEAPON HE STILL KEEPS SHEATHED!

LEETAH IS YOUR FIGHTING STRENGTH!

YOUR WINNING IS IN HER HANDS!



NO, RAVEK! IT IS NOT SO SIMPLE AS THAT!

AYE! CUTTER'S WAY IS THE WISER!

YOU STILL DON'T GET IT, BLACK-HAIR! WINNOWILL MEANS US TO DIE--ALL OF US WHO AREN'T "CLEAN" IN HER SIGHT! SHE HAS MY DAUGHTER'S SOUL NAME, CURSE HER! IF WE STUPIDLY CHARGE INTO BLUE MOUNTAIN--

--DEWSHINE'S DEATH WILL BE BUT THE FIRST OF MANY! AND MOMENTS AGO YOU HAD A TASTE OF HOW IT CAN BE DONE!

WE HAVE TO GO SLOW, AS CUTTER SAID... CHIP AWAY AT THE BLACK SNAKE'S POWER BIT BY BIT--

WOLFRIDERS, YOU GIVE WINNOWILL TOO MUCH CREDIT! LET THOSE OF US WHO KNOW HOW TO BATTLE HER ON HER OWN GROUND DO THE WORK FOR YOU!



COME WITH ME--YOU AND SUNTOP! OUR POWERS COMBINED WILL STUN THE MIND OF BLUE MOUNTAIN'S SUFFERING LORD. THEN YOU MAY HEAL HER--AND WE WILL TAKE HER, WITH ALL THE OTHER GLIDERS, TO THE PALACE!

TH--THIS IS WHY YOU CAME TO US? TO FISH FOR MORE POWER...?

WHY NOT--?

--WE ALL STAND TO GAIN BY IT!

JUST THEN...



SKYWISE'S CRY
BRINGS THE WOLFPACK'S
LEADER LOPING UP TO
GREET HIM.



AFTER A
FEW QUICK
HUGS AND
HEARTY
LICKINGS--

--THE STARGAZER ONCE AGAIN ACTS
AS TIDINGS-BEARER TO HIS
APPREHENSIVE TRIBE FOLK.



CUTTER DID MANAGE TO STIR
UP THE HUMANS, THOUGH NOT ALL OF
THEM DOUBT THE "BIRD SPIRITS."
SOME HAVE BURRS UNDER THEIR TAILS NOW!



AND NOW HE HAS
GOTTEN HIMSELF
AND TWO MORE OF
YOU TRAPPED! GOOD
LEADERSHIP INDEED!



YOU...!

YOU ALWAYS TURN UP WITH A SNARL AND A GLARE AND A MOUTH FULL OF WRONG-TAILED SCRUB ABOUT YOUR OLD RIVAL! IT STILL STINGS, DOESN'T IT, RAYEK?

BEING MASTER OF THE PALACE HASN'T CHANGED YOU MUCH AT ALL!



AT LEAST I AM MASTER OF SOMETHING, SKYWISE. YOU HAVE NOT EVEN MASTERED YOURSELF!

WAS IT NOT YOUR CARELESS RUTTING AFTER THE DULL-WITTED AROREE THAT PLACED YOUR TRIBE IN ITS PRESENT DIFFICULTY?

ANTS TAKE YOUR EYES!



THE VERY OBJECTS OF SKYWISE'S OATH NOW BLAZE WITH AMBER FIRE--A FIRE WHICH FREEZES, RATHER THAN BURNS.

C-CAN'T MOVE...!



THE WOLVES WATCH WITH INTEREST, ABIDING BY THE AGE-OLD LAW OF THE "STARE-DOWN." THEY DO NOT INTERFERE.

SKYWISE'S FIST TREMBLES IN MID-SWING, BUT THE BLOW CANNOT BE DELIVERED!

IMPATIENTLY, TREESTUMP INTERVENES.

BACK OFF, BOTH OF YOU! ALL THAT MATTERS IS THE TRUTH!

AND THE TRUTH IS, IT'S NOT WINNOWILL'S STRENGTH GETTING EATEN UP LITTLE BY LITTLE--IT'S OURS!



THERE'S BEEN TOO MUCH RUNNING ALONE--OUTSIDE THE PACK--HERE!



"--MUST HAVE A REASON!
SOMETHING IS DRAWING US
ALL TO THE CENTER OF THE
STORM. BUT WHAT IS THE
STORM? WHAT IS IT?"



TO BE CONTINUED...

ELFDUEST

SIEGE AT BLUE MOUNTAIN

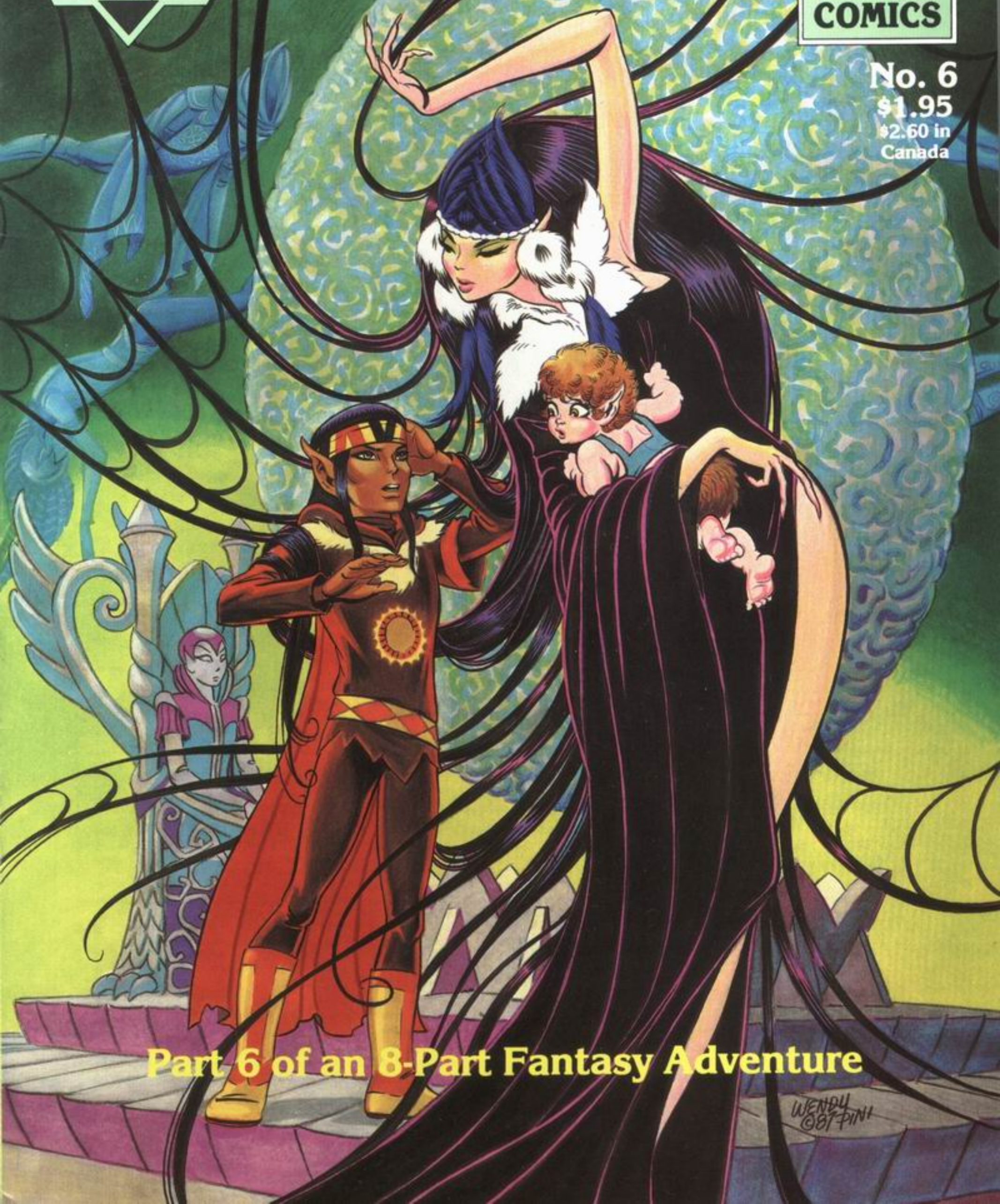


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SIEGE AT BLUE MOUNTAIN

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6

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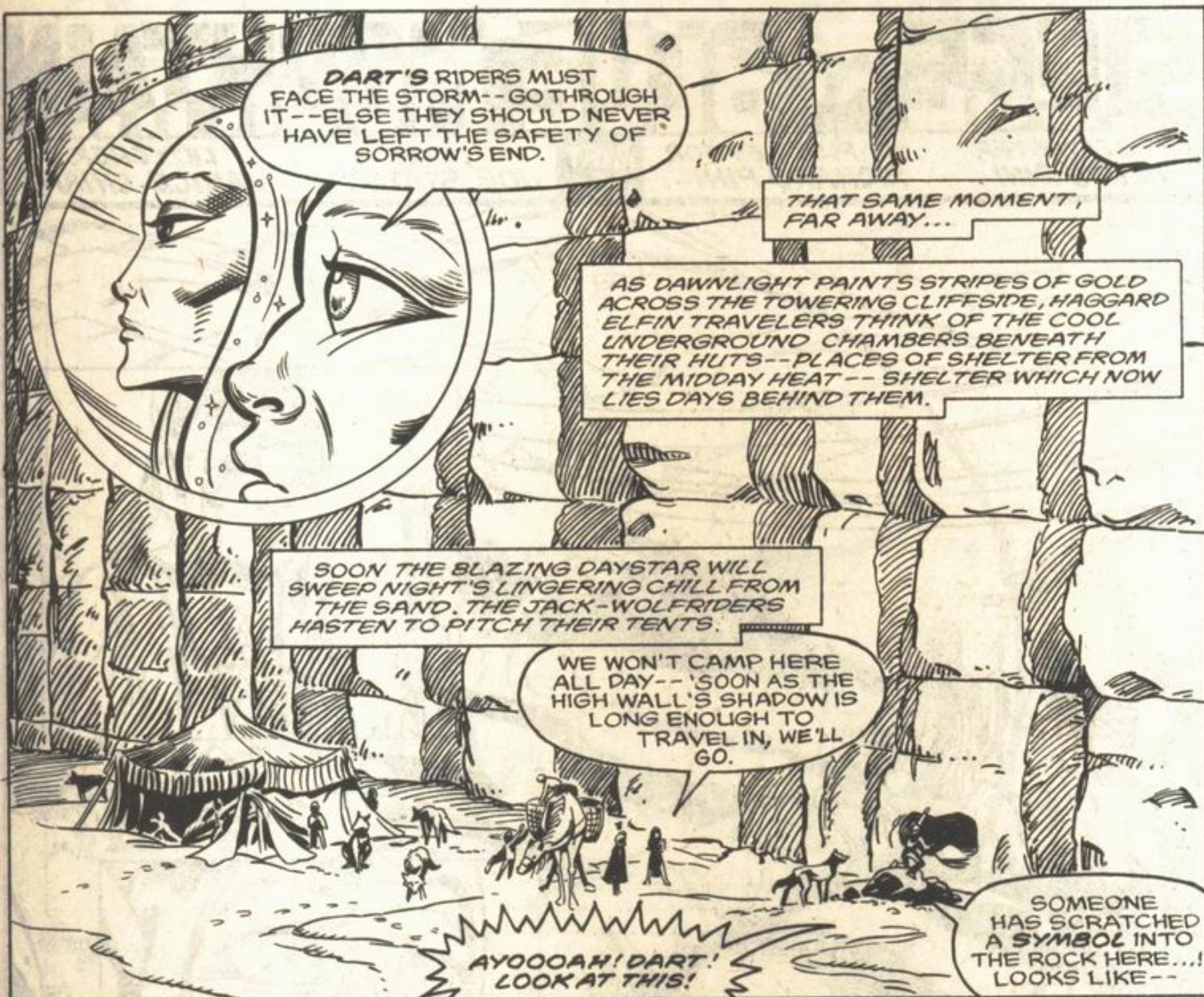
WELCOME, **SAVAH**. TAKE CARE.
THE WIND RISES WITH THE SUN.

MY FOOTING IS
FIRM. BESIDES, THERE
IS NO REST FOR ME
BELOW.

I WILL STAND
WITH YOU, **SUN
TOUCHER**--

-- AND FEEL THE WIND.
DO **THEY** FEEL IT, TOO?
IS IT HARSH OR GENTLE
ON THEIR YOUNG FACES?

THEY MUST
TAKE IT AS IT
COMES, MOTHER
OF MEMORY.



DART'S RIDERS MUST
FACE THE STORM--GO THROUGH
IT--ELSE THEY SHOULD NEVER
HAVE LEFT THE SAFETY OF
SORROW'S END.

THAT SAME MOMENT,
FAR AWAY...

AS DAWNLIGHT PAINTS STRIPES OF GOLD
ACROSS THE TOWERING CLIFFSIDE, HAGGARD
ELFIN TRAVELERS THINK OF THE COOL
UNDERGROUND CHAMBERS BENEATH
THEIR HUTS--PLACES OF SHELTER FROM
THE MIDDAY HEAT--SHELTER WHICH NOW
LIES DAYS BEHIND THEM.

SOON THE BLAZING DAYSTAR WILL
SWEEP NIGHT'S LINGERING CHILL FROM
THE SAND. THE JACK-WOLFRIDERS
HASTEN TO PITCH THEIR TENTS.

WE WON'T CAMP HERE
ALL DAY--'SOON AS THE
HIGH WALL'S SHADOW IS
LONG ENOUGH TO
TRAVEL IN, WE'LL
GO.

AYOOOAH! DART!
LOOK AT THIS!

SOMEONE
HAS SCRATCHED
A **SYMBOL** INTO
THE ROCK HERE...!
LOOKS LIKE--



--THREE BEADS AND
THREE CLAWS...

RAYEK! HE ALWAYS
WORE THEM AROUND HIS
NECK, REMEMBER?

I THINK I DO!
HE LEFT THE SUN
VILLAGE WHEN
NEWSTAR AND I
WERE JUST SMALL
CUBS, DIDN'T HE?

HEY! WHAT'S
THIS UNDER
THE SAND...?



BITS OF
BONE!

HOW DID THEY
GET THERE?

AND WHO
MARKED THE
CAVE WITH A
SYMBOL, AS
IF IT WERE
A-A **BURIAL**
PLACE!?

DART SHUDDERS, STARING AT CHALKY FRAGMENTS RESTING IN HIS PALM.

IT HAD TO BE THE WOLFRIDERS, NEWSTAR!

SAVAN HAS GIVEN US THE SAME DIRECTIONS SHE GAVE SUNTOP THREE YEARS AGO. HE GUIDED MY PARENTS AND THE OTHERS THIS WAY LOOKING FOR CUTTER. BUT MAYBE THEY FOUND--

--ULP! RAYEK, TOO!

TIRED... HUNGRY... SCARED... TOO HOT... TOO COLD... THAT'S ALL I REMEMBER OF THE FIRST TIME I CROSSED THE DESERT.

AND EVEN THOUGH *THIS* TIME WE HAVE SUPPLIES, IT'S ALMOST LIKE BEFORE... ESPECIALLY THE "SCARED" PART!

STILL... I KNOW CUTTER WASN'T MUCH OLDER THAN I WHEN HE LED THE WOLFRIDERS TO SORROW'S END.

I CAN BE LIKE HIM--AND LIKE MY PARENTS, TOO!

THE WOLF-RIDERS NEED HELP AND I WON'T STOP 'TIL I BRING IT TO THEM!

THAT EVENING...

COME, LEETAH! BRIERSTING WILL CARRY YOU AND SUNTOP! WE CAN GET THERE BEFORE SUNRISE! HURRY!

WE GOING BIG BLUE ROCKS! GET FLYHIGHBABY!



SOB SOB

-- BUT-BUT I TOOK THE BLAME!

I MADE **SUNTOP** "GO OUT" AND-AND I KNOW IT WAS WRONG!

SNIFF PLEASE LET ME GO WITH YOU, PLEEZE!

OH, CUBLING! YOU ARE NOT BEING PUNISHED! THIS TIME SOMETHING GOOD CAME OF YOUR DISOBEDIENCE. WE KNOW, BECAUSE **SUNTOP** TOUCHED HER SPIRIT, THAT **WINNOWILL** IS STRAINING HER POWERS.



THROUGH THAT WEAKNESS I CAN REACH HER... **HEAL** HER! MY PRECIOUS ONE, I WOULD RATHER HAVE **SUNTOP** STAY HERE WITH YOU.

BUT WE NEED HIS GIFTS.

IT IS TIME FOR HIM TO USE THEM.



AND...

SNIFF WHEN WILL IT BE MY TIME, **REDLANCE**? ARE ONLY MAGIC-USERS USEFUL?

BEFORE MY POWERS AWOKED, CUB, I CRIED THOSE QUESTIONS MANY TIMES.

SO WHAT'S THE BIG WHOOP? DON'T TELL ME THAT **KANVI** NEVER WENT OFF AND LEFT YOU TO GUARD THE GO-BACKS' LODGE!

THAT WAS **KANVI**!

SHE KNEW US INSIDE OUT! IT JUST CHIPS THE POINTS OFF MY RACK THE WAY WE GET **BABIED** AROUND HERE!



PUCKERNUTS! I WANTED TO GO **BEAT** THOSE FLEA-FEAST GLIDERS!

DON'T THINK OF FIGHTING AS FUN YOU MIGHT BE MISSING, **EMBER**. ESPECIALLY NOT **MAGIC** FIGHTING.



SUNTOP IS SAFER GUARDED BY **RAYEK**, **STRONGBOW** AND **LEETAH** THAN HE WOULD BE IF HE'D STAYED HERE--

-- WHERE **WINNOWILL** COULD STEAL HIS SPIRIT.

I... GUESS SO.



"--NOTHING WITH FIVE FINGERS!"

<MANY OF THEM WOULD WANT TO STOP US IF THEY KNEW WHAT WE... WE... SHOULD NOT HAVE LIED TO THEM, FATHER.>

<STOP! THERE ARE TRACKS HERE!>

<I HAVE TOLD YOU, GEOKI, KOHANN-CHIEF APPROVED THIS SECRET WAR-WALK.>

<AND YOU ARE HONORED, AT YOUR AGE, TO BE PART OF IT-->

<OUR TRIBE THINKS WE ARE OUT HUNTING.>

"--FOR WE WILL FIND THE WOLF DEMONS' LAIR AND BRING THEIR HEADS TO THE BLACK ROBED MOTHER!"

<THE GRASS IS TRAMPLED. WAS IT THE WOLF-EYED ONES, CHIAD G'CHO?>

<NO! THESE MARKS WERE MADE BY A BEAST-->

--THAT HAS BUT ONE TOE TO EACH FOOT!

<ONE TOE?!

SUDDENLY...

GASP!
<DOWN!>



〈STOP, STRANGE ONES!
COME NO CLOSER! WE
HAVE STRONG MAGIC—
WEAPONS GIVEN TO US
BY THE BIRD SPIRITS!〉

〈YOUR WAY OF SAYING OUR
WORDS IS HARD TO UNDER-
STAND. WE MEAN NO HARM.〉

TO MAKE HIMSELF
CLEARER, THE
SPEAKER BEGINS TO
SIGN AS HE TALKS.
THE OTHER MAN
IS INCAPABLE OF
SIGNING.



〈WE SEARCH FOR AN EVIL
SPIRIT WITH HAIR LIKE FROST—
AND WHEN WE FIND IT—〉



〈--WE
WILL
KILL
IT!〉

〈WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOTARA,
THE MASTER SPIRIT. WE COME
FROM THE FLATLANDS BEYOND
THE DARK WOODS TO THE EAST.
WE HAVE BEEN WANDERERS, BUT
NOW WE ARE SEEKERS.〉



〈AH! THE FOUR-FINGERED
ONES! THE WOLF-EYED ONES!
WE HUNT THEM, TOO!〉



〈WE WERE ABLE TO NET THE DEMON BECAUSE
HIS WOLF WAS LAME AND COULD NOT OUTFRAN
OUR PONY. BUT HE ESCAPED AND CUT OFF
BRUGA'S FINGERS.〉

〈IF YOU WILL HAVE US,
WE WILL JOIN YOU, FOR
IT SEEMS WE ALL WANT
THE SAME THING.〉

AND SO, WITH THE BARRIER OF ACCENT AND DIALECT BREACHED, THE MEN UNITE IN PURSUIT OF THEIR COMMON QUARRY.

ONLY THE BOY, GEOMI, SHOWS NO ENTHUSIASM AS THE HUNT RESUMES.



NOW ALL IS MOVEMENT AND PURPOSE IN THE NORMALLY PEACEFUL VALLEY OF ENDLESS SLEEP--



--AS THREE DETERMINED GROUPS, TWO ELFIN--AND ONE HUMAN--HURRY TOWARD THEIR GOALS.

LATER THAT NIGHT...

NOW THAT WE ARE SO NEAR BLUE MOUNTAIN, I FEEL--



--I FEAR--I WAS TOO HASTY. LEETAH SHOULD NOT HAVE TO CROSS WILLS WITH THAT SICK PAIN-GIVER, AGAIN--

--AND NEITHER SHOULD HER LITTLE SON.

I KNOW WINNOWILL. SHE WILL LOSE ALL INTEREST IN HER CAPTIVES--

--IF I GIVE HER SOMETHING NEW TO FEED ON--





"--APPROVAL! THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH HER DESIRES--"



"-- ONLY WITH HER METHODS. WHEN SHE KNOWS SHE IS NO LONGER ALONE --"



"-- HER PAIN WILL END."

WHY THAT PUFFED-UP DESERT RAT! HE'S TAKEN OFF ON HIS OWN!

BUT I-I THOUGHT THE PLAN WAS SET.

OH, RAYEK! HE MISLED US!

SMALL LOSS!

WE STILL HAVE ALL THE STRENGTH WE NEED!



SOON...

THE GREAT HAWKS ARE LETTING ME PASS. THEY TAKE ME FOR A GLIDER.

PUH! WHAT A STENCH OF DROPPINGS.

A STAIRWAY!

NOW, WHY IN YUREX'S NAME WOULD THE GLIDERS HAVE NEED OF STAIRS?





OOOOHHH...

WHO KNOWS? RAYEK AND WINNOWILL... HUH! NOW THERE'S A MEETING THAT WILL RATTLE THIS MOUNTAIN EVEN MORE THAN IT'S SHAKING NOW!



DEWSHINE!

IT-IT'S OVER...! SHE STOPPED!

AN OPEN SENDING! RAYEK IS HERE!

YES! DO YOU THINK HE'S COME TO HELP US?

...RRRUMMRRRRRUUMMMBLERRRUUM...



WHAT'S HAPPENING, BELOVED, DO YOU KNOW?

TYLDAX SAID...SOME-THING ABOUT...THE EGG! CUTTER, MY CUB! MY CUB!



YES, LITTLE COUSIN. WINNOWILL'S SCENT IS FRESH HERE. I THINK SHE CAME UP JUST A SHORT WHILE AGO.

SNIFF
SNIFF

I...CAN'T TELL IF SHE HAD WINDKIN WITH HER...



...SOMETHING'S STRANGE!

< I DO NOT UNDERSTAND ALL THIS SPIRIT CHATTER! >

< WHEN DO WE FREE THE SLAVES YOU SAY ARE DOWN THERE? >

< RIGHT NOW, ADAR! >



WE'LL SEE IF WINNOWILL LEFT WINDKIN BELOW IN HER DEN. MEANTIME, YOU TRACK HER, CLEARBROOK.

AND FIND OUT WHAT RAYEK'S UP TO-- BUT DO NOTHING 'TIL WE JOIN YOU!

AYE, CUTTER!

CUTTER'S CURIOSITY IS NOTHING COMPARED TO THE LORD OF BLUE MOUNTAIN'S...

WHAT OF THIS NEW INTRUDER, RAYEK? AMBITION, POWER AND *NEED* ARE ALL IN HIS SENDING.

HIS WILL ENJOYS LUSTY HEALTH. BUT THERE IS SOMETHING HE WANTS--

--FROM ME!

"SUCH A NATURE I HAVE DEALT WITH BEFORE."

"IN ELF, HUMAN OR TROLL, WHERE *NEED* IS PRESENT, CONTROL IS SIMPLE."

"LEARN WHAT HE
WANTS MOST AND
GIVE IT TO HIM."



"THEN CREATE
ANOTHER NEED AND
FULFILL *THAT!*"



"AND SO ON..."



"...AND SO ON..."

"THERE IS BEAUTY
IN NEED, IT IS *LIFE*
TO A HEALER."

"BUT IN GREED WAITS
BETRAYAL AND MANY
FORMS OF DEATH."

THIS RAYEK
AND HIS
ESTIMABLE
POWERS--







<NONNA! LOOK!>

<OH...! CRUEL--
CRUEL TO DO!>



NAN...NAN IROEEN
SEENDAL THERI... ? UH...
HUM... ? COUGH ?



!GASP! SO
STRANGE TO
HEAR HUMANS
SPEAK OUR
WORDS!

<KAKUK...! IS
IT YOU?>

THE SKELETAL PRISONER
BLINKS TWICE, BARELY
COMPREHENDING HIS
NATIVE LANGUAGE...



THEN...

<WH-
WHERE
IS
SHE?>



IN RESPONSE,
ADAR
TURNS...

<DO NOT WORRY
ABOUT THAT
BLACK CROW!>

<SHE WILL
NOT
HARM YOU-->



<--EVER
AGAIN!!>

SLOWLY, DAZED AND INCREDULOUS, THE CAPTIVES EMERGE.

<KAKUK, DO YOU REMEMBER ME?
I AM NONNA! I WAS A CHILD-->

<N-NONNA...>

--WHEN THE BIRD
SPIRITS RECEIVED
YOU, YOU WERE SO
HAPPY...SO PROUD!!>

<AND THIS
IS HOW THEY
BLESSED YOU!!>

<OH, SUN AND
MOONS! THE
BIRD SPIRITS
ARE EVIL!!>

<WE HAVE
WORSHIPPED EVIL
SPIRITS ALL THIS
WHILE!!>

<NONNA... THIS IS
WINNOWILL'S DOING--
NO ONE ELSE'S. SHE IS
NOT A "BIRD SPIRIT."
NEITHER AM I, OR ANY
OF MY KIND! BECAUSE OF
OUR LOOKS AND WHAT
WE CAN DO-->

<--HUMANS
HUNT
US OR
MAKE US
GODS.>

SOB

<YOU! CH-CHILD
SPIRITS! YOU
CAME HERE ONCE
BEFORE! TRIED...
WARN US ABOUT
THE MISTRESS!!>

<WE CANNOT HARM
CHILDREN OF THE
BIRD SPIRITS!!>

<WHY
DID SHE
COMMAND
US TO?
WHY?>

<YOU'RE RIGHT!
WINNOWILL'S
CRAZY!!>

<SHE CARES NOTHING
FOR YOU! YOU'RE JUST
HER PETS! HER SLAVES!!>

<BUT THERE IS NO
PEACE FOR US EITHER
WAY. WE CANNOT GO
ON TRICKING YOU! IT
IS WRONG AND I
AM... SORRY.>

<WE DID NOT BELIEVE... THEN.>

MANY OF THE
HOANG'TAY
SHO DO NOT
BELIEVE US
EITHER. BUT
NOW YOU CAN
TELL THEM
WHAT YOU
HAVE LIVED
THROUGH.>

<YOU CAN
TELL THEM
THE TRUTH
ABOUT BLUE
MOUNTAIN.>

<I...
WILL!
BUT-->

<--I FEAR IT WILL
DESTROY THEM!!>

"AND THE LIE
WHICH IS THE
TRUTH SHALL
BRING MORE
PAIN--"

"--THAN
THE TRUTH
WHICH IS
A LIE!"

<WHAT NOW?
HOW DO WE
GET OUT OF
HERE?>

<WE CAME IN THROUGH
A DOOR MADE OF MOVING
ROCK. CAN YOU MAKE THE
ROCKS OPEN AGAIN,
LITTLE SPIRIT?>

<YOU STILL
HAVE FAITH?>

<I STILL
LOVE.>



AT THAT MOMENT IN
THE FORBIDDEN
GROVE...

SCOUTER, DEWSHINE, TAKE
THE HUMANS TO THE AERIE.
THEY'LL HAVE TO CLIMB DOWN
THE MOUNTAIN FROM THERE...
SOMEHOW. HELP THEM.

BUT--

DON'T WORRY. WITH
CLEARBROOK'S AID
AND RAYEK'S, IF HE'S
STILL A FRIEND, I'LL
GET WINDKIN!

THEN...
YOU
STILL
PLAN
TO DO--



--WHAT I DID ONCE
BEFORE: LOCK MINDS
WITH THE BLACK SNAKE--
MAKE HER FORGET
EVERYTHING BUT HER
NEED TO KILL ME!

NO MATTER
WHAT
HAPPENS--

--YOUR
CUB
WILL BE
BACK IN
YOUR ARMS,
DEWSHINE,
SOON!



HUMANS!

THEY'RE
COMING THIS
WAY, UP FROM
THE WINDING
RIVER!

ARE THEY THE
HOAN G'TAY SHO?

DO THEY
COME IN
PEACE...?

THE INNOCENT HOPE
IN REDLANCE'S
SENDING SOON
FADES, FOR--

--AS THE WAR PARTY APPROACHES THE HOLT, THE ELVES SENSE THE HUMANS' HOSTILE INTENT.

< HEAR THE HOWLING OF THE WOLVES! >

< HAH! THEY ARE WITH THEIR DEMON RIDERS IN THE WOOD OF DREAMS! >

< REMEMBER, THE EVIL ONES' SIZE MEANS NOTHING. LIKE ANTS, THEY ARE MUCH STRONGER THAN THEY LOOK. >

< BUT WE CAN CRUSH THEM, EVEN SO! >

DON'T LOOK SO WORRIED, REDLANCE. THIS'LL BE FUN! ALL OUR TRICKS AND TRAPS ARE READY AND THE PRESERVERS ARE FULL OF SPIT!

GRRUFF!

HOW MANY ARE THERE, BELOVED?

TWICE OUR NUMBER, PLUS TWO WHO RIDE A NOHUMP.

NOHUMP?

LATER!

WHY SEND? WHAT'S TO FEAR? IF THOSE ARE HUMANS, THEIR ARMS AND LEGS AREN'T HALF AS BIG AROUND AS A TROLL'S! LET THEM HEAR US LAUGH!

HUSH, SKOT!

LEGENDS OF THE MYSTERIOUS GROVE'S WINGED PROTECTORS, AND OTHER HAZARDS, REACHED THE HOANG G'TAY SHO GENERATIONS AGO. NOW, THE MEN CREEP STEALTHILY TOWARD THE PLACE, NOT KNOWING WHAT TO EXPECT.

THEY HAVE BEEN RAISED TO REVERE AND OBEY THE GLIDERS, WHOSE EXISTENCE IS A MATTER OF FACT, NOT FAITH. THE WARRIORS TAKE HEART IN THE BELIEF THAT THEY DO THE WILL OF THE BIRD SPIRITS.

BIG THINGS BREAK UP IN BITTY BUNCHES!

IS GOOD! IS EASY PUT WRAPSTUFF 'ROUND TWOS AND THREES!

<OW! THORNS!>

<THEY SURROUND THE WOOD! THERE IS NO WAY THROUGH!>

<DID YOU THINK THE DEMONS WOULD MAKE US WELCOME?>

<SHOW THEM! USE YOUR MAGIC SPEARS!>

GRRAAH!

CHOKK!

EH?

HAH HA
HA HA
HA HA!

YAAAAH!





BUT...

<THE GREAT
TORCH IN THE SKY
STILL BLAZES.
IT HAS TOLD US
WHAT TO DO ALL
ALONG!>



KLICK
KLICK

<MY FATHER, DO
NOT DO THIS!>

<I CANNOT--
I WILL NEVER
BELIEVE-->



<--THAT
THE LITTLE
SPIRITS ARE
EVIL!>

<YOU THINK BECAUSE
THEY PLAY WITH US-->



<-- THAT THEY
DO NOT
FEAR US?>

<WATCH, GEOKI,
WATCH WHAT
HAPPENS-->



<--WHEN FIRE
TEARS THEM WITH
ITS HOT TEETH!>

OOOOOH!



BAD BIG-
THING!
BAD BIG-
THING!

GO WAY!
GO WAY!



THE GAME IS OVER. NOW THE PRESERVERS
FIGHT FOR THE GROVE'S VERY EXISTENCE!

<GAG! CHIAD G'CHO...
IT'S YOURS!>



<DONE!>

NO
NO
NO!

SSSSSS!



HIGH ONES!

CRACKLE

NO!



TEN YEARS AGO, REDLANCE WAS HELPLESS TO PREVENT THE BURNING OF ANOTHER HOLT--HIS BIRTHPLACE.

BUT TEN YEARS AGO HIS TREE SHAPING POWERS HAD NOT YET BLOSSOMED!

HE HUGS THE ROUGH TRUNK IN A LOVER'S EMBRACE--



--AND WITH THAT LOVE, MAGIC FLOWS!



FROM ROOTS TO LEAF TIPS MOISTURE OOZES, FORMING A THICK FILM OVER THE BARK!



AT SUCH A TABLE, HUNGRY FLAMES CANNOT DINE!



UNFORTUNATELY, THE FIRE, TOO, HAS ITS DEFENDERS--



--AND REDLANCE WILL NOT ABANDON THE TREE EVEN THOUGH HE MUST STAND WITHIN THE HUMAN'S SIGHT!



CURSED TORCHES! THEY'LL BURN US OUT! FIRE'S THE ONE THING STRONGER THAN WE ARE!



NO! I WON'T LET IT HAPPEN AGAIN!

WE'RE STAYING HERE!

THE WOLVES AND PRESERVERS AGREE! THE TORCH IS OUT! THE HUMANS WILL HAVE NO CHANCE TO STRIKE UP ANOTHER!

WE'RE STAYING!!

AND NOW COME HOWLS FROM THE SOUTH, STRANGE HOWLS, GETTING LOUDER AS THEY DRAW CLOSER!

BUT THE SENDING IS NOT STRANGE! GROWING CLEARER AS IT COMES WITHIN RANGE, IT IS WONDERFULLY, CRAZILY--



--FAMILIAR!

WOLFRIDERS! WE'RE COMING!

AAAYOOOAH!



RRROOOOWW!

OWWOOWWOOW!



GREAT
SUN!
HUMANS!

DON'T BE
AFRAID!

SURROUND
THEM!!



DART! BY
BY THE HIGH
ONES AND
ALL THEIR
CHILDREN!

DART!!

AAYOOAH!

UNH!
NOT SO HARD,
EMBER!



LOOK
AT YOU! BROWN
AND BEAUTIFUL AS
LEETAH-- AND
TALLER THAN
YOUR FATHER!

SIGH! IF
STRONGBOW
AND
MOONSHADE
WERE HERE...



AND WHEN DART HAS LEARNED ALL...

--NOT A MAIDEN, TALL AND GOLDEN AS A SUNFLOWER!

WE CAME BECAUSE OF **SUNTOP** AND WHAT **SAVAN** LEARNED FROM HIM.

WHILE THE HUMANS LOOK ON, SOME WITH LOATHING, MOST WITH FEAR, THE ELVES COMMUNICATE THROUGH SENDING ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE **WINDKIN** WAS STOLEN.



AMONG THE GLUM FACES IN THE CAPTIVE WAR PARTY, **DART** SEES ONE WHOSE SMILE HE GENTLY RETURNS...



DART HAS COME BACK TO THE GREEN GROWING PLACE WHERE HE SPENT HIS EARLIEST YEARS.



DART GAZES AT THE DISTANT MOONLIT PEAK OF **BLUE MOUNTAIN** AND **WONDERS...** WILL HE BE ANY HELP AT ALL?

TO BE CONTINUED...

ELFDUEST

SIEGE AT BLUE MOUNTAIN



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Part 7 of an 8-Part Fantasy Adventure

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PART
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INKS
JOE STATON

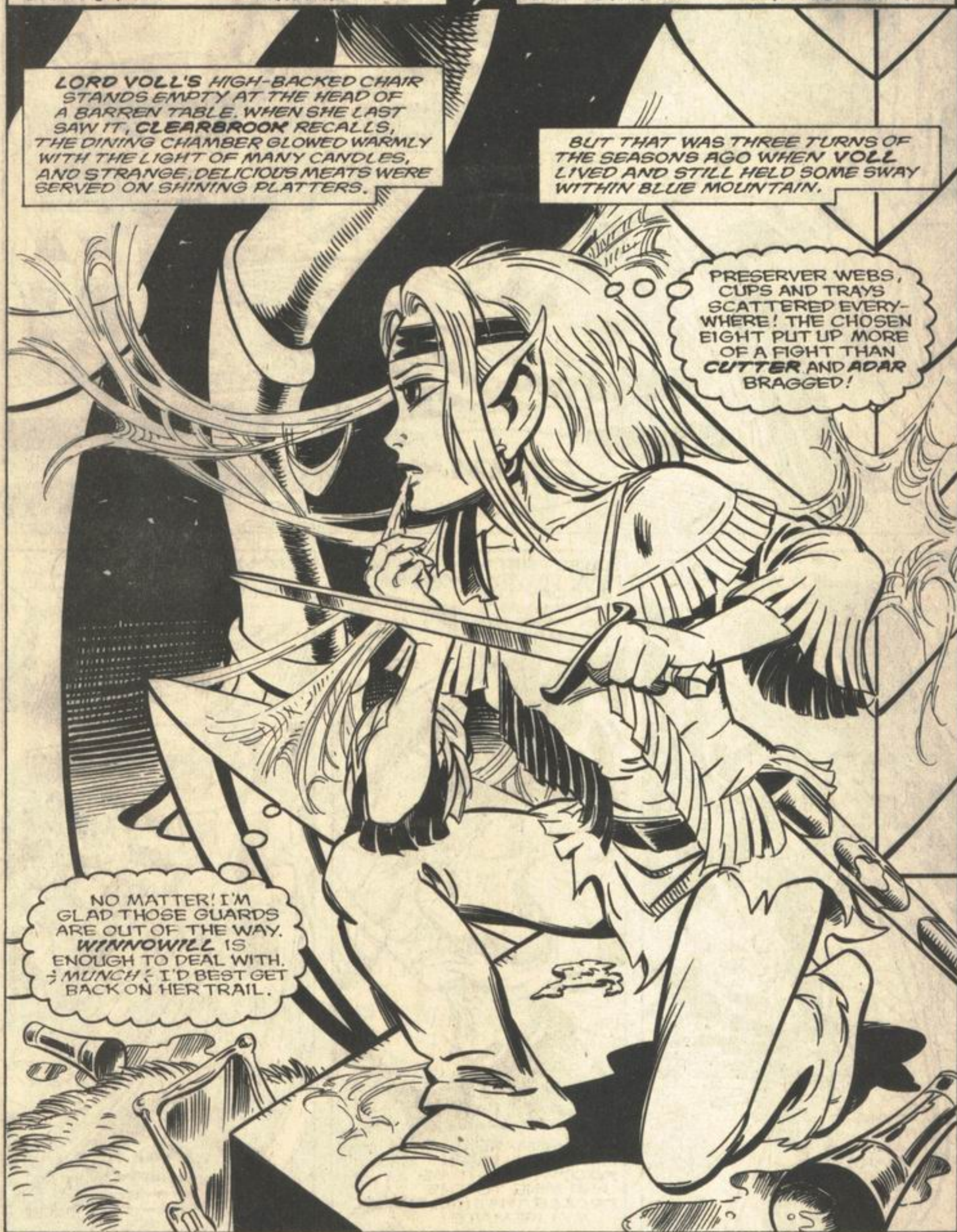
LETTERER
JANICE CHIANG

LORD VOLL'S HIGH-BACKED CHAIR STANDS EMPTY AT THE HEAD OF A BARREN TABLE. WHEN SHE LAST SAW IT, CLEARBROOK RECALLS, THE DINING CHAMBER GLOWED WARMLY WITH THE LIGHT OF MANY CANDLES, AND STRANGE, DELICIOUS MEATS WERE SERVED ON SHINING PLATTERS.

BUT THAT WAS THREE TURNS OF THE SEASONS AGO WHEN VOLL LIVED AND STILL HELD SOME SWAY WITHIN BLUE MOUNTAIN.

PRESERVER WEBS, CUPS AND TRAYS SCATTERED EVERYWHERE! THE CHOSEN EIGHT PUT UP MORE OF A FIGHT THAN CUTTER AND ADAR BRAGGED!

NO MATTER! I'M GLAD THOSE GUARDS ARE OUT OF THE WAY. WINNOWILL IS ENOUGH TO DEAL WITH. *MUNCH* I'D BEST GET BACK ON HER TRAIL.



CLEARBROOK DELAYS BUT A MOMENT LONGER TO TUCK A FEW MORSELS INSIDE HER BELT POUCH. THEN SHE IS OFF DOWN ANOTHER DARK HALLWAY--

--FOLLOWING WINNOWILL'S DELICATE-BUT-RECENT SCENT TO THE THRONE ROOM, WHERE...

TYLDAK!

OOHHH...
Y-YOU HAVE A WEAPON...? GOOD!
USE IT!
I AM SICK... AND WEARY.

YOU'RE FAINT WITH HUNGER. HERE. EAT. BY TIMMORN'S BLOOD! THE BLACK SNAKE CAN MAKE ME PITY ANYONE--
--HUMANS... GLIDERS... EVEN YOU, WHO LEFT ME AND MINE TO THE TROLLS THAT KILLED MY LIFEMATE!

UUNNNH! STUPID! WHAT MADE ME THINK I COULD BUDGE YOUR CHAIN!?
TELL ME WHERE IS WINNOWILL NOW?
IN THE CHAMBER OF THE GREAT EGG--
--WITH THE STRANGER, RAYEK!



I THINK HE
MEANT TO TAKE
MY...THE INFANT
AWAY FROM
HER--

--BUT SHE
WORKED HER
OLDEST AND
BEST TRICKS
ON HIM.

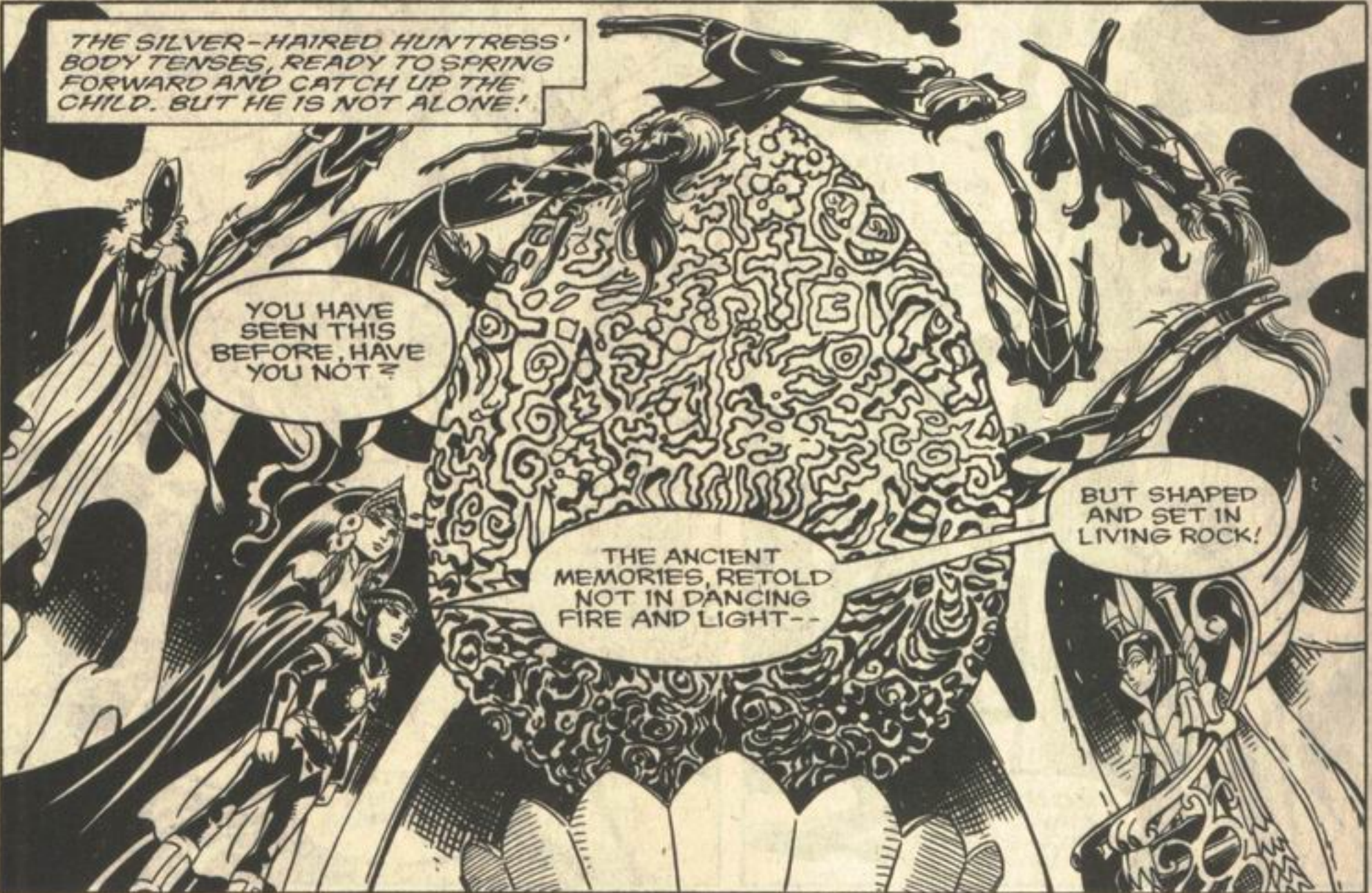
AND NOW, LIKE
THE REST OF US,
RAYEK IS HERS.

UNABLE TO DO ANYTHING MORE
FOR TYLDAR, AND PRICKED BY
HIS WORDS, CLEARBROOK
DASHES OFF--



-- TO THE CHAMBER
OF THE EGG...

AT LAST!
WINDKIN!
ASLEEP! AND
I'D BET NOT
NATURALLY!



THE SILVER-HAIRED HUNTRESS'
BODY TENSES, READY TO SPRING
FORWARD AND CATCH UP THE
CHILD. BUT HE IS NOT ALONE!

YOU HAVE
SEEN THIS
BEFORE, HAVE
YOU NOT?

THE ANCIENT
MEMORIES, RETOLD
NOT IN DANCING
FIRE AND LIGHT--

BUT SHAPED
AND SET IN
LIVING ROCK!





NO! YOUR PEOPLE'S
HEARTS ARE NOT
IN IT!

AND NEITHER IS
THEIR FULL POWER,
YOU *KNOW* THAT!

THEY
CANNOT
RESIST THE
TWO OF US.

RAYEK...

NOW THAT
YOU ARE
WITH ME--

--NO MORE WAITING--

-- THERE WILL BE NO MORE WITHHOLDING--



--AND, ONCE
WE ARE FREE
OF THIS TWICE-
CURSED WORLD,
NO MORE
MISTAKES!

UNDER M--*OUR*
GUIDANCE THERE WILL
NEVER BE ANOTHER
SUCH "ACCIDENT" AS
THAT WHICH EXILED THE
FIRST COMERS HERE,
WEAK AND ALL BUT
DEFENSELESS.

BUT... THE
PALACE--!

-- IS NECESSARY!
IT IS PART OF THE
POWER WE NEED.
WE WILL TAKE IT
WITH US--

--BUT THE
JOURNEY
BEGINS WITH
THE EGG!

CLEARBROOK
STRUGGLES
TO HOLD DOWN
THE SLIGHT
NOURISHMENT
SHE TOOK A
SHORT WHILE
AGO.

SHE HAS NEVER
DREAMED OF, MUCH
LESS WITNESSED,
SUCH A VIOLATION--
SUCH CALLOUS
MANIPULATION OF
ANOTHER'S NEEDS
AND WEAKNESSES.









HELLO!
HELLO!

OH!

BERRYBUZZ!
TELL US WHAT'S
HAPPENED!
WINDKIN...
CUTTER...
DEWSHINE...!
TALK!

WHEN ONE ASKS A PRESERVER TO
TALK, ONE DOES SO ADVISEDLY!

...THEN BIG BLUE
ROCKS GO SHAKY-
SHAKE AND WE
LET LOOSE
BIGTHINGS FROM
CAGE...

...AND WE PUT
WRAPSTUFF 'ROUND
BAD FLYTHINGS, THEN
PUT BAD FLYTHINGS
IN HIDEY-HOLES...

...AND SHARP DARK HIGHTHING
COME, THEN SHINY SWORD
HIGHTHING SAY GO BY SELF,
FIGHT BAD LONGSOFT-HAIR
HIGHTHING GET
FLYHIGHTHBBY BACK...



...AND
LOOKSEE!
LOOKSEE!
MANY BIG-
THINGS
GUARD
DOOR!

HUNH!
I BET THEY'D
SOONER FEED
US TO THE GIANT
BIRDS THAN BOW
AND SCRAPE AS
THEY ONCE DID
FOR CUTTER,
EH,
STRONGBOW?

BUT WE HAVE
TO GET IN--



-- BEFORE
CUTTER FACES
WINNOWILL!
I'D RATHER
SLASH MY WAY
THROUGH EIGHT
EIGHTS OF
HUMANS THAN LET
HER EVEN
BREATHE
ON HIM!

SHH... SKYWISE, THERE IS
ANOTHER DOOR, REMEMBER?
IN WINNOWILL'S
PRIVATE CHAMBERS.



SUNTOP
CAN FIND
IT FOR US.

LEETAH'S CALM ASSURANCE COOLS
THE STARGAZER'S TEMPER.

IF ANYONE HAS A
RIGHT TO WORRY ABOUT
CUTTER, IT'S LEETAH.
SHE DOESN'T BLAME ME
FOR CAUSING THIS
MESS--

--SO I'D BEST
STOP BLAMING
MYSELF, AND DO
WHATEVER I
CAN WITHOUT
BARKING.

WITH PAINSTAKING SLOWNESS, THE ELFIN
BAND PICKS ITS WAY AROUND THE BASE OF
BLUE MOUNTAIN. SUNTOP'S SPECIAL SENSE-
HIS "MAGIC FEELING"-IS OPEN TO RECEIVE
ANY TINGLING HINT OF DOOR THE ROCK-
SHAPER'S PRESENCE.



OTHER SENSES, LUPINE ONES, ARE ALREADY DISTRACTED BY SOMETHING UNSEEN.

THE WOLVES... THEY KEEP LOOKING OFF TOWARD THE HOLT!

BUT BEFORE STRONGBOW CAN WHISPER HIS CONCERN TO HIS COMPANIONS...

GOLDEN DESERT CHILD, YOU SEEK A WAY I'M LIKE MICE YOU SQUEAK--

--BECAUSE YOU CANNOT FIND YOUR HOLE!

OH, NO...!

GRRRR...

AND THESE ARE FINDERS OF THE SCROLL!

HAHAHAHA!

WHAT?! THE WINNERS OF THE PALACE--

--LOST? MOTHER HAS YOU TURNED AND TOSSED!

WITHOUT EXPRESSION, WITHOUT SO MUCH AS THE BLINK OF AN EYE, STRONGBOW DRAWS AND AIMS.

WAIT.

THIS OLD ENEMY DESERVES A SPECIAL REVENGE--

--ONE THAT I HAVE IN MIND FOR HIS MOTHER AS WELL, IF I EVER GET MY HANDS ON HER...





LEETAH...?

SIGH!
CLOSE...! A
MOMENT
MORE--

--AND THE
MADNESS
WOULD
HAVE LEFT
HIM.



YOU CALLED
THAT MONSTER
"SON"! HOW
COULD YOU?!

IT... WAS
WHAT
HE SEEMED
TO NEED
MOST!



TREESTUMP AND THE OTHERS
CATCH UP WITH SKYWISE AND
SUNTOP...

HURRY!
COME LOOK!
WE LOST
TWO-
EDGE--

BUT SEE
WHAT WE
FOUND!



A SECRET DOOR,
HIDDEN BY THE
BUSHES! WE'VE
SEEN ITS LIKE
BEFORE, EH?

TWO-EDGE'S SCENT IS
STRONG THROUGH HERE!

AND THE OTHER
"DOOR" ELF IS NEAR!
HE JUST OPENED
AT THE END OF
THIS TUNNEL!

WELL, YOU WON'T
BE NEEDING THAT BOW
OF YOURS, STRONGBOW.



"BERRYBUZZ
SAID THE ONLY ONE
IN THE MOUNTAIN
LEFT FOR US TO
DEAL WITH IS
WINNOWILL--"

"--AND, OF ALL CURSED
THINGS, IT'S UP TO US
KEEP HER ALIVE!"

RRRR
RUM...

RRRR
RUM...
MMBLE...
RRRR
RUM...

MEANWHILE...

IF ALL THIS THUNDER HAS TO DO WITH THE EGG, AS DEWSHINE SAID--

RRRUMMBLERUMMBLE

-- THEN THAT'S WHERE I'LL FIND CLEARBROOK, MAYBE WINDKIN... RAYEK... AND SURELY--

--WINNOWILL!

HIGH ONES! I'D RATHER HAVE SKYWISE PULL ANOTHER SPEAR OUT OF ME--

-- THAN FEEL THE BLACK SNAKE'S POISON AGAIN!

LOCKING MINDS WITH HER IS LIKE GETTING BIT BY A FOAMING LONGTOOTH!

DUNG! I'D LOVE TO KILL HER, IF I DIDN'T KNOW THAT SPIRITS SURVIVE... IF I HADN'T FELT THEM ALL ALIVE IN THE PALACE... I'D DO IT!

BUT IT'S WORTH A LITTLE PAIN--

--AND A FEW MORE BAD DREAMS TO GET THE CUB BACK!

BUSYHEARD HIGH-THING!

HELLO! HELLO!

PETALWING! YOU CAME WITH RAYEK!



BAD LONGSOFT-HAIR HIGHTHING TELL PETALWING "GO WAY". SHARP-DARK HIGHTHING SAY SO, TOO! PHOO!



PETALWING GLAD SEE SOFT-PRETTY HIGH-THINGS AGAIN!



LEETAH?
YOU'VE SEEN
LEETAH,
TOO?

CAME
WITH ME IS
HERE!

SO THAT'S
WHAT'S BEEN
GNAWING AT ME!

AND SKYWISE...? TREESTUMP...?



ALL OUTSIDE!
WE GO GET
FLYHIGHBABY
NOW!

YES!

--HOW
SHE WITHHELD
HERSELF, PORTIONED
OUT HER HEALER'S
POWER TO COMPLETELY
GRATIFY THE
SENSES--

THE TIME
YOU SPENT
WITH
LEETAH...
YOU SEE NOW
HOW MUCH
LESS THAN
FULFILLING
IT WAS--



--PERHAPS,
MISGUIDEDLY,
TO PROTECT
YOU.
PERHAPS...
HERSELF!



I MAKE NO SUCH
JUDGEMENTS UPON
YOUR STRENGTH,
FEAR NO LOSS OF
SELF IN PLEASING
YOU.

THE HUNGER
YOU HAVE KNOWN
ALL YOUR LIFE--



IS BUT THE
LONELINESS OF
THE **SUN** SHINING
AMONG LESSER
LIGHTS.



YOU HAVE ALWAYS
YEARNED TO TAKE
THE NEXT STEP
AND SCORNE ALL
ELVES CONTENT
WITH THEMSELVES
AS THEY ARE.

WHAT IF YOU
COULD TAKE
THAT STEP?



WHAT IF THIS
BODY, BURNED
BROWN BY THE
SUN--

-- THIS SLIGHT, SWEET
FRAME THAT I HAVE
COME TO KNOW-- COULD,
IN STATURE, BE
WORTHY OF THE GREAT
SPIRIT IT HOUSES?

TO BE AS A **HIGH ONE**,
WOULD THAT NOT SATISFY
THE LONGING WHICH PAINS
YOU MOST? THINK, MY SOUL'S
BROTHER, WHAT IT WOULD
MEAN TO BE **WHOLE**--

-- TO HAVE A
BODY OF
YOUR OWN
ENVISIONING--

-- SHAPED FIRST
BY ME... THEN,
IN TIME
RESHAPED AS
OFTEN AS YOU
WISHED BY YOUR
WILL ALONE!

IT WOULD MEAN **REBIRTH**,
NOT JUST FOR ME, BUT FOR
ALL OUR KIND: **WOLFRIDERS**,
SUN FOLK, **GO-BACKS**, EVEN
ELVES YET TO BE DISCOVERED!
THE BEINGS OF **FIRE** WE
ONCE WERE-- WE CAN BE
AGAIN!

AND THE
FEW OF US
WHO KNOW
THE OLD
POWERS--

-- WILL GRIEVE
NO MORE! EVEN
YOU, A CONFUSION
OF PLEASURE AND
PAIN, **TIMMAIN'S**
EQUAL CONFINED
TOO LONG IN
A DARKNESS WHICH
HAS **UNHINGED**
YOU--

-- WILL BE
WHOLE! ALL
THE WRONG
YOU'VE DONE
WILL BE
REMEMBERED
ONLY AS A
LESSON WELL-
LEARNED.

mmm...

-- AND WHO
HAVE
GRIEVED
AT BEING
CRIPPLED
IN THEIR
USE--

THE PREY
IS DOWN!

THEN GO,
HIGH ONE--
THAT--SHALL--
BE--

"-- AND MOVE THE GLIDERS WITH YOUR STRENGTH OF PURPOSE WHICH IS GREATER, EVEN, THAN MINE!"



WATCHING WITH HORRIFIED FASCINATION, CLEARBROOK STARTS AS CUTTER APPROACHES AT A WOLF-SOFT RUN.

THEY NOD A QUICK GREETING. THEIR EYES SPEAK.



THEY KNOW THEIR CHANCE TO SNATCH THE CUB IS NOW--

--OR NEVER!



BUT...

GASP!

WHA--?!



CRREEEAK!



THE SHAPING FORCE THAT SURGES THROUGH EVERY NOOK AND CRANNY OF BLUE MOUNTAIN IS LESS POTENT NEAR WINNOWILL'S PRIVATE QUARTERS.



SUNTOP IS ABLE TO SENSE THE SECOND "DOOR'S" LOCATION - ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL AT THE TUNNEL'S END.

HE HAS ALREADY PERFORMED FOR ONE HE KNOWS...



OPEN!
OPEN!
NOW!!

BUT THIS NEW COMMAND IS SENT BY AN INTRUDER -- A STRONG ONE --

DOOR, OPEN!
DOOR, OPEN!



STRONGBOW "LOCK-SENDS", HOPING THAT WINNOWILL IS TOO BUSY ELSEWHERE TO PIERCE HIS MENTAL SHIELD.

DOOR, OPEN!

DOOR, OPEN!

HIS RECEPTIVITY MUDDLED BY THE GREAT UPHEAVAL, DOOR SHIFTS ON HIS SEAT.

-- TOO STRONG TO RESIST!



YES! OBEY ME! OPEN AND STAY OPEN!



HE DID IT! LEETAH, SUNTOP--

--GO!



BUT...

OH!

LOOK OUT!!

IT'S CLOSING AGAIN!







LIKE A WAVE
BREAKING ON THE
SHORE OF A
STORM-STIRRED
LAKE, THE
ROCK ARCHES
OVER SKYWISE--

THIS TIME THERE
IS NO APPEAL!
THE KNOWLEDGE
OF HIS FUNCTION
NOT ENTIRELY
SHAKEN FROM
HIM--



--DOOR WILL
NOT OPEN AGAIN!



TREESTUMP AND THE
ARCHER BARELY MANAGE
TO SQUEEZE PAST ONE
RISING LUMP OF TUNNEL
FLOOR, ONLY TO FIND--



?!!
--ANOTHER!
AND IT'S STILL
A WAYS TO THE
OUTSIDE!

AFTER SEVERAL
MORE NARROW
SQUEAKS...



WATCH
IT!

YOU'LL GET
YOURSELF
SQUASHED AND
WE'LL NEVER
GET DOOR
OPEN AGAIN!

TREESTUMP WINCES
GLADLY AT THE LIGHT
WHICH STREAMS THROUGH
THE TUNNEL ENTRANCE.

BUT FRAMED IN THAT
DOORWAY STANDS A
RIGID SILHOUETTE--

OBEY
CURSE
YOU!



STRONGBOW,
LOOK!

COME ON! WE
CAN'T HELP
SKYWISE--



--IF WE GET
TRAPPED, TOO!



--MOONSHADE...?
ARE YOU--?

WELL,
STRIKE
ME WITH
SKYFIRE!



SUDDENLY... **TUMBLE KRIKRAK!**





INSIDE THE AERIE DEWSHINE,
SCOUTER, AND THE HUMANS
CLING TO WHATEVER SHIFTING
SUPPORT THEY CAN FIND!



THERE WILL BE NO
CLIMBING DOWN UNDER
THESE CONDITIONS!



AND IN THE
CHAMBER OF
THE EGG...

SOON...!



WINNOWILL!



OH...

IT IS YOU,
LITTLE
CHIEFTAIN.



GIVE ME THE CUB.

YOU REMEMBER MY SENDING--

--DO YOU NOT WOLFLING?

HE IS NO LONGER YOURS.

STRANGE... YOUR SENDING WAS A **SHOCK** THE FIRST TIME I FELT IT. NOW IT SEEMS QUITE TAME.

I CAN AFFORD A SLIGHT DISTRACTION NOW, WITH **RAYEK** HELPING TO KEEP THE GLIDERS' ATTENTION ON THEIR TASK.

CUTTER SHIVERS, MAKING NO SOUND.

THE CUB, **CLEARBROOK**...QUICK!!



BUT, FAR BELOW, HIS PAIN IS FELT, AND HIS SILENT CRY IS HEARD BY ONE WHOSE SOUL IS LINKED WITH HIS!

OH, TAM!

SUNTOP, DO NOT SEND TO **SKYWISE**! THERE IS STILL A CHANCE WE CAN TAKE **WINNOWILL** BY SURPRISE!



LEETAN IS FORCED TO MAKE A HEARTBREAKING DECISION!

MOTHER, WE CAN'T LEAVE HIM LIKE THAT!

AND WE CANNOT STOP **WINNOWILL** UNLESS I TOUCH HER!

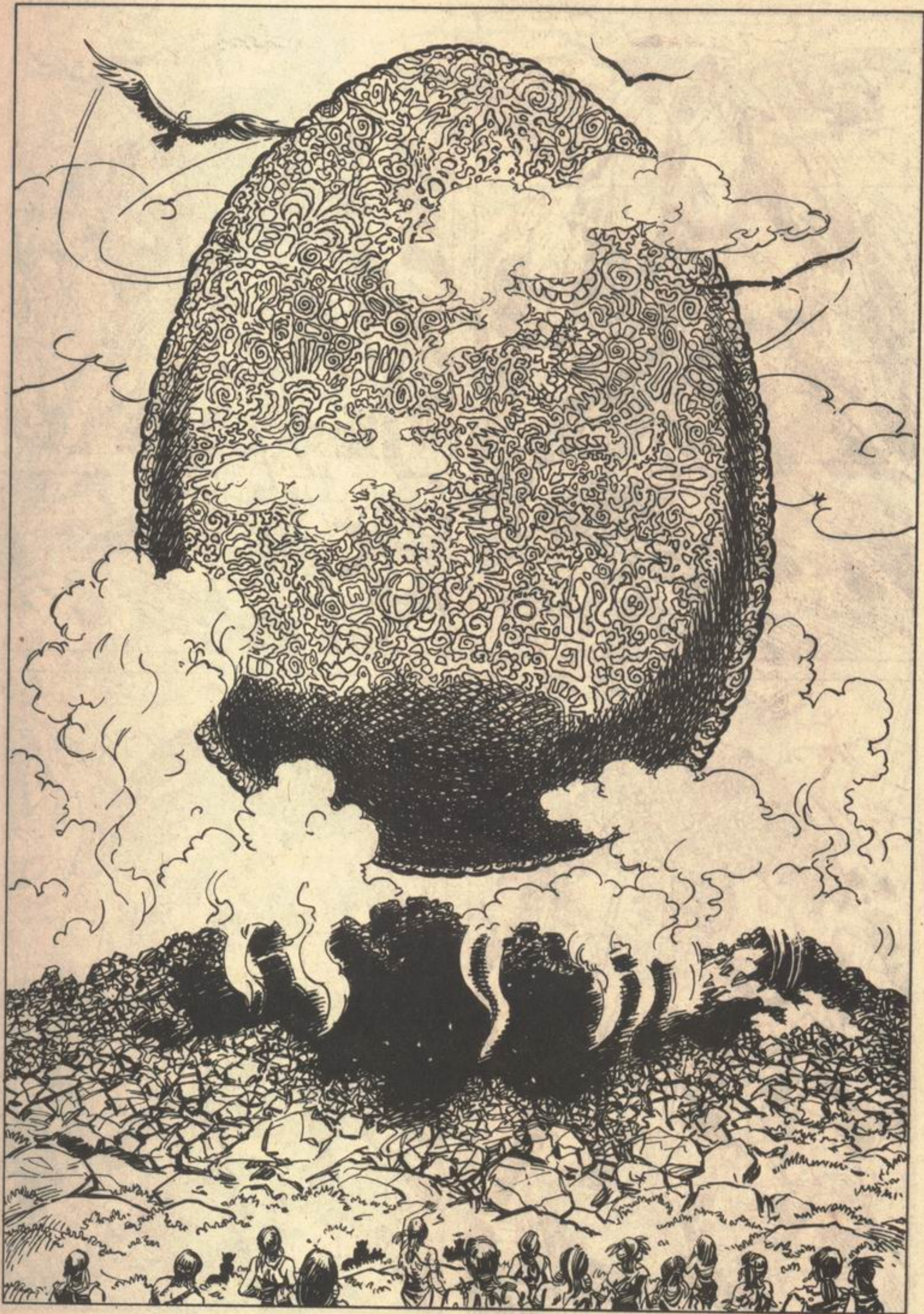


IN THE BLACKNESS OF THE STONE POCKET WHICH ENCLOSES HIM, THE **STARGAZER** CAN ONLY GUESS AT WHAT IS HAPPENING.

HE, TOO, SHARES **CUTTER'S** SOUL NAME. HE, TOO, FEELS HIS FRIEND'S PAIN—MORE THAN HIS OWN FEAR.







AS THE MOUNTAIN'S
THROES SUBSIDE...

YOUR SWORD...
IT REMAINS
SHEATHED! YOU
UNDERSTAND,
THEN, THAT I
MUST KEEP MY
BODY HOW
FORTUNATE FOR
YOU THAT I
PREFER TO DO
SO!

DO YOU KNOW WHAT
HAS JUST BEGUN,
LITTLE WOLF CHIEF?
A **REBIRTH**, AS RAYEK
CHARMINGLY PUT IT.

THE **EGG** IS NOW COMPLETE! TWO
MORE LAYERS OF SHELL HAVE BEEN
ADDED—EIGHT IN ALL. THE **EGG** WILL
BE THE **NEW CASTLE-SHIP**. IT WILL
TRAVEL TO THE FROZEN MOUNTAINS---

--AND ABSORB
THE PALACE
OF THE **HIGH
ONES**—ALONG
WITH ALL THE
ATTENDANT
SPIRITS BOUND
TO THE TIME
AND WORLD IN
WHICH IT EXISTS!

ALL LIVING, **PURE-BLOODED**
MAGIC USERS---ALL HEALERS
AND FLOATERS, FIRE-MAKERS
AND SHAPERS OF EVERY KIND---
WILL THEN BE CALLED
TO THE **EGG**!

WITH THAT MUCH POWER---

"-- WE WILL ESCAPE THIS
WORLD OF TWO MOONS!
WRAPPED IN PRESERVER
COCOONS, ALL BUT MYSELF
SHALL TRAVEL IN ENDLESS
SLEEP AMONG THE STARS."

"I SHALL MAKE
CERTAIN THAT FORMER
GRIEVOUS ERRORS ARE
NOT REPEATED."

"ONLY IN DREAMS WILL WE
VISIT OTHER WORLDS, TAKE
ON OTHER SHAPES,
EXPERIENCE THROUGH
OTHER SENSES. I SHALL
PERMIT NO PHYSICAL RISKS
TO BE TAKEN, NO QUESTS,
NO BATTLES, NO BLENDING
OF STRANGE BLOOD WITH
OUR OWN."

"BUT BEFORE WE LEAVE, THE EGG'S POWER
SHALL ERASE EVERY TRACE OF THE FIRST-
COMERS' GREAT BLUNDER!"

"WE WILL BEGIN AGAIN,
CLEAN AND WHOLE--"

"-- LIKE THE STARS,
SHINING, FOREVER
SAFE, UNCHANGING--"

"-- PERFECT!"

AAAAA!

TO BE CONTINUED...

ELFDUVEST

SIEGE AT BLUE MOUNTAIN

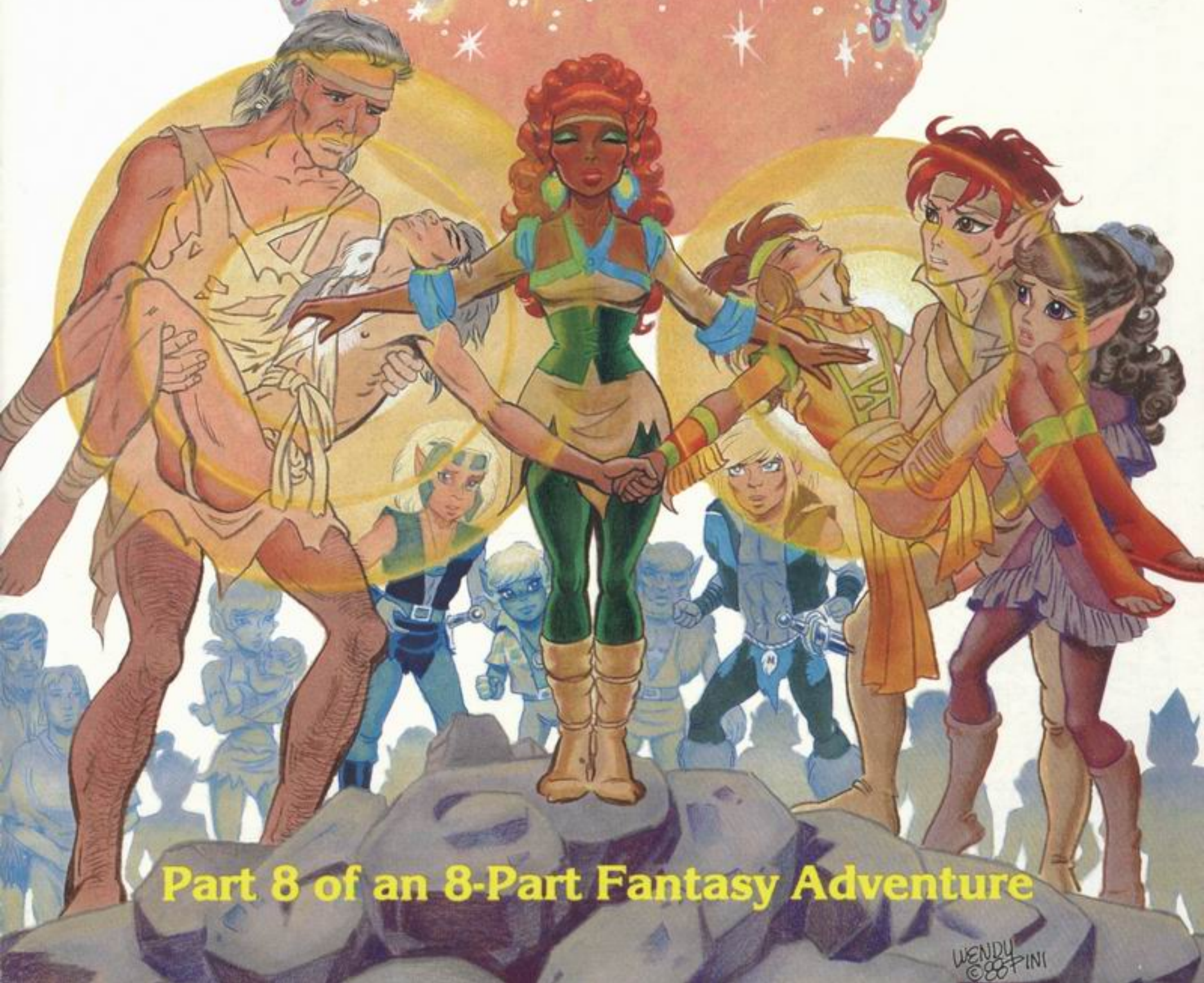


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Part 8 of an 8-Part Fantasy Adventure

WENDY
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SIEGE AT BLUE MOUNTAIN

ARTIST / WRITER
WENDY PINI

CO-PLOT / EDITOR
RICHARD PINI

PART
8

INKS
JOE STATON

LETTERER
JANICE CHIANG

EVERYONE KNOWS THE AIR IS ALWAYS THERE BETWEEN THE WORLD AND THE STAR-HOLDING SKY. AIR CANNOT BE DRAINED LIKE WATER... IT CANNOT BURN ITSELF OUT LIKE FIRE... NO, THE AIR IS ALWAYS THERE--



-- JUST AS A MOUNTAIN
THAT HAS STOOD FOR
TIME UNTOLD --

IS ALWAYS THERE. SACRED
MOUNTAINS DO NOT CHANGE
INTO STUPENDOUS EGGS--

-- AND AIR DOES
NOT ABANDON ITS
BREATH--

-- EXCEPT, IT SEEMS, ON THE WORLD OF
TWO MOONS WHERE BOTH EVENTS ARE
PERCEIVED AS --

-- MAGIC!

SPIRIT MAGIC!!
WE WILL DIE!!

WHILE THE TERRIFIED HUMANS COWER IN THE VAST SHADOW OF BLUE MOUNTAIN-THAT-WAS, SKYWISE FIGHTS FOR CONSCIOUSNESS IN HIS SEALED TOMB WITHIN THE EGG.



MY RIBS ACHES SO...

WHY?

...IS IT SOME NEW PAIN-SENDING FROM WINNOWILL? NO! SHE'S FIGHTING CUTTER NOW... DOESN'T KNOW I'M HERE.



MY ARM...!

WANT TO BREAK SILENCE... SEND FOR HELP!



CAN'T! LEETAH MUST GET TO CUTTER!

IF IT'S HIM OR ME, SHE HAS TO HELP HIM!

HE HAS TO WIN, HIGH ONES! HE HAS TO!

AT THE SAME TIME...

THE INFANT LIES WITHIN REACH. THE INNOCENT ONE HAS BECOME THE PRIZE IN THIS DUEL BETWEEN CHIEF AND LORD.

THROUGH A RED HAZE OF PAIN, CUTTER SENSES HIS TRIBEMATE CLEARBROOK, HAS FALLEN.



BEAST-BLOODED FOOL! YOU ARE THE ONLY ONE OF YOUR KIND WITH STRENGTH ENOUGH TO SLAY ME. BUT KNOWLEDGE INHIBITS YOU.

BECAUSE YOU DARE NOT DESTROY MY BODY, I AM FREE TO DESTROY YOURS-- BY DEGREES!

AND YOUR SPIRIT, WOLFRIDER, THAT TOO WILL I KILL!

YOU AND YOUR TRIBE ARE FINISHED!

W-WINDKIN...! OOOHH...!

THE FLOORS NO LONGER HEAVE AS THEY DID MOMENTS AGO. WAVERING WALLS AND COLUMNS SETTLE INTO THE LACY PATTERNS THAT HELP TELL THE GREAT EGG'S EON-SPANNING TALE.

BUT SUNTOP AND LEETAH, ARRIVING AT ITS CORE, CARE NOTHING FOR THIS TWISTED STONE RECORD OF ELFIN LORE.



THEY SEE ONLY THE UNEQUAL BATTLE RAGING SILENTLY IN THE CHAMBER BEFORE THEM.

WINNOWILL!

A HEALING IS NEEDED HERE, IT HAS BEEN NEEDED FOR A VERY LONG TIME!

GASP!

NOW THE HURTS WILL STOP!

THE DESERT-BORN HEALER RUSHES TO SHIELD HER LIFEMATE!

NO!!

LEESTAH... S-SUNTOP!

AND...

RAYEK...! COME DOWN!!

UUUNNNH...

WHA---?

NO!!

NOOOO!!

A HEALING!

NO MORE BAD DREAMS!

UNITED WITH ONE HEART, ONE MIND, AND ONE GOAL, THE ELFIN FAMILY DISCOVERS A KIND OF POWER THEY HAVE NOT USED BEFORE!

IT REACHES OUT TO THE GLIDERS, LOOSES RAYEK FROM HIS TRANCE--

AAAAAAAAAAAAH!!

-- AND THE BLACK SNAKE, WASHED WITH THE LIGHT OF THAT POWER, TWISTS AND COILS UPON HERSELF, BETRAYED BY HER OWN CAPACITY TO DEAL AGONY.

FOR TO CAUSE SUFFERING IS TO KNOW SUFFERING.

THE ULTIMATE HORROR IS EXPOSURE--THE TEARING OFF OF THE MASK.

IT BEGAN WITH FEAR... LORD VOLL'S FEAR THAT THE WAYS OF THE HIGH ONES WOULD BE LOST.

THE SOLUTION? NOT TO FIND THE PALACE, BUT TO RECREATE IT. **"YES, I AGREE!"**

-- UNTIL THE SELF-DISGUST BECAME UNBEARABLE.

THE LITTLE "ACCIDENTS" SHE CAUSED KEPT HER SANE--SANE AS A TICK WITH ITS HEAD BURIED IN WARM FLESH.

HER GIFTS FESTERED--

HIS NEEDS, HIS APPETITES, WERE BEAUTIFUL.

SHE HUNGERED FOR HIS NATURAL WILL-- FED ON IT--

--USURPED IT--

"FOR US, SLEEP AND THE STARS IS THE ANSWER!"

HIS ANSWER: **"NO."**

-- AND DESTROYED HIM WHEN HE CAME BACK TO HIMSELF, REMEMBERING HIS ORIGINAL MISSION.

**"I HATE YOU!
I AM A TROLL
FOREVER."**
THE BOY CRIED--

THE GLIDERS STOPPED DYING. STOPPED BIRTHING. **"THEY DO NOT NEED ME!"**

IN TIME, SHE DISCOVERED THE GREAT JEST-- THAT WORLDS DIE-- EVEN THE WORLD OF TWO MOONS.

REDEMPTION. SHE LEFT BLUE MOUNTAIN TO FIND THE TRUE PALACE-- FOR VOLL.

INSTEAD SHE FOUND A TROLL SENT BY GREYMUNG TO CAPTURE ROCK-SHAPERS.

-- AND CRIED. HE WOULD HAVE GONE UP AND CRIED HIS OUTRAGE TO VOLL.

PROTECT VOLL. PROTECT SELF. THAT WAS WHY THE CAGE--

-- AT FIRST, THEN THE GAMES BEGAN--

-- MOTHER AGAINST SON.

SHE COULD NOT BREAK HIM. BUT SHE COULD SPLIT HIS MIND IN TWO!

THE FIRST TOUCH OF
HEALING FORCES
HER TO
REMEMBER--

-- HER CHILD'S FACE
AT THE VERY MOMENT
SHE MADE HIM MAD!

RAYEK...! AS
YOU LOVE ME...
SAVE ME!

AGAIN...

ALMOST...

HE ALMOST
FALLS UNDER
HER SPELL...

BUT THE PITEOUS SOUND-MEMORY
OF YOUNG TWO-EDGE'S SOBS BLENDS
IN RAYEK'S MIND WITH THE WAILS OF
HIS OWN BABE--THE NEWBORN THAT
SOMEHOW HE KNOWS IS ALIVE!

RAYEK DRAWS BACK, REPULSED BY THE CHILD-HARMER.

DO I STILL
DREAM?
THE CRIES...!

SHE
TRICKED ME,
MOCKED ME...
EVEN IN
JOINING!

AAAAAA
AWAAAAA!

I UUNHH...
CUB!

SCOUTER'S CUB!



LIKE HUNTED GAME
BACKED TO THE EDGE
OF A CLIFF---

--WINNOWILL
LAUNCHES A LAST
FRENZIED ATTACK!

BUT SHE IS EXHAUSTED, AND
LEETAH'S MINISTRATIONS
HAVE BEGUN TO TAKE EFFECT.
THE BLACK SNAKE'S BITE IS
VENOMLESS.

THEY KNOW HER.

SHE CANNOT
FIGHT.

SHE CANNOT
HIDE.

STILL QUIET...! IS
GOOD! PETALWING
MAKE WRAPSTUFF!

AND...

I'LL CHASE YOU TO
THE END OF THE
WORLD, HALF-TROLL!
LET THE CUB GO!

HE UNDER-
STANDS HER
FURY. HE
WOULD LIKE
TO TELL HER
SO.

IT FEELS
SO GOOD---

-- TO KNOW EMOTIONS OTHER
THAN CONFUSION AND HATE. BUT
CLEARBROOK WOULD
NOT LIKELY
LISTEN.



HER HEART IS SET ON REVENGE.
HE KNOWS HOW THAT IS --

-- SO HE
RUNS--

-- THROUGH A MISSHAPEN OPENING WHICH
WAS ONCE THE ENTRANCE TO THE GLIDER
LORD'S THRONE ROOM.

THERE TWO-EDGE
FINDS ANOTHER OF HIS
MOTHER'S TOYS PUNISHED FOR
DEFIANCE-- LIKE HIMSELF--
ABANDONED.



YOU ARE
HIS FATHER.
TAKE HIM!

EH?



TAKE HIM!



WHAM!

TAKE HIM
WHERE HE'S
WANTED
MOST!

BAH...?
BABAH...?





EARLIER, BLUE MOUNTAIN'S CATACOMBED INTERIOR WRITHED AS IT SHAPED ITSELF INTO WINNOWILL'S ULTIMATE DREAM. BUT NOW THE COLOSSAL EGG BEGINS TO CRUMBLE FROM WITHIN! SCOUTER, DEWSHINE AND THEIR HUMAN CHARGES FEEL THE FLOOR OF THE AERIE GIVE WAY.

<IT IS OUR DEATH DAY!>

THE HUMAN IS RIGHT, BELOVED!

WE'LL FALL WITH THE MOUNTAIN, AND SO WILL--
=GASP!=

MUH!

MUH!

BABAH! MUUH!

OOOHH!

AM I DEAD NOW?! THIS IS SPIRIT-JOY!

NO...! THIS IS LIVING-JOY! THIS IS WINDKIN!

SOB!-
TIMMAIN KEEP YOU, TYLDAK!

ALTHOUGH THE WORDS OF THE BLESSING MEAN LITTLE TO HIM, DEWSHINE'S ELATION IS STRANGELY PLEASING TO THE WINGED ELF. HE WILL DO MORE!

AAW!

RAW! RAW!

FRIGHTENED OUT OF THEIR AVIAN WITS BY THE CATASTROPHIC CHANGE IN THEIR NESTING PLACE, THE GIANT HAWKS RALLY AROUND TYLDAK.

HE WHISTLES TO THEM, EASES THEIR CONFUSION--

--AND GIVES THEM SOMETHING FAMILIAR TO DO.



NONNA,
THE
SYMBOL
MAKER,
BREATHES
A PRAYER,
THEN
FAINTS
DEAD
AWAY!

IT IS ONE THING TO HONOR THE
GODS, BUT ANOTHER THING
ALTOGETHER TO FLY WITH THEM!

THE FIVE HUMANS CANNOT "SEND"
TO THEIR TRIBE FOLK BELOW, AS
SCOUTER SENDS TO HIS--

-- BUT HUMAN AND
ELFIN ARMS BOTH ARE
WAITING OUTSTRETCHED...

(KAKUK!)

GOT
YOU,
LAD!

AND SOON AFTERWARD,
THE ASTOUNDED HOAN
G'TAY SHO SEE TYLDAK
UP CLOSE FOR THE FIRST
TIME!

NOTHING--NEITHER FEAR FOR FRIENDS
STILL TRAPPED WITHIN THE EGG, NOR
THE WEIRD TANG OF LITTLE WINDKIN'S
SCENT--MARS THE ECSTASY OF THIS
REUNION. THE "NOW OF WOLF THOUGHT"
ADMITS ONLY HAPPINESS--

-- HOWEVER
SHORT-LIVED
IT MAY BE.

BE WELL,
WOLFRIDERS!

DEW-
SHINE!
CUB!

I MUST
RETURN TO
WINNOWNILL,
THAT SHE MAY
FEEL THE
POWER--

-- WAIT --!

-- OF THE
TALONS
SHE GAVE
ME!

HEEDLESS OF DEWSHINE'S PROTESTS THAT WINNOWILL MUST LIVE, TYLDAK SOARS BACK INTO THE EGG, WHERE...

SCOUTER... SENDING! HAH! THEY ESCAPED WITH THE CUB!

JUST IN TIME, TOO. THE WHOLE PLACE IS FALLING APART!

WHAT'S MAKING IT HAPPEN?

LEETAH! COME OUT OF IT!

UH-- WHA--?

YOU CAN'T HEAL WINNOWILL HERE! IT'S NOT SAFE!

WHERE ARE YOU, BROTHER? ANSWER ME!!

THE GLIDERS! IT IS WHAT THEY WANT. I HAVE BEEN PART OF THEM-- THEIR SORROW. I KNOW!

WE HAVE TO GET HER OUTSIDE!

OH... YES... YES! AND SKYWISE, TOO!

SKYWISE?!!

TAM...! YOUR SENDING'S OPEN! YOU... DID IT...!

YOU... WON!

NEED HELP...

TRAPPED...

CAN'T BREATHE! DON'T KNOW WHY...

HURTS... HURRY...

RAYEX'S THE ONLY FLYING ELF I TRUST. GO WITH HIM, BOTH OF YOU.

YOU'RE ALL HE CAN CARRY AT ONE TIME!

COME BACK FOR WINNOWILL QUICK AS YOU CAN, BLACK-HAIR! SHE HAS TO BE HEALED, EVEN IF SKYWISE AND I DON'T GET OUT!

CHOKE!

PETALWING HELP!

HIS BURDEN IS LIGHT DESPITE ITS SIZE, PELTED BY HAIL-STONE-HARD DEBRIS--



-- CUTTER DASHES, DEER-LIKE, THROUGH MUCH-CHANGED HALLS.



THIS LOOKS LIKE THE PIT THAT LED TO WINNOWILL'S QUARTERS THIS MORNING!

HOPE I'M RIGHT.

WAIT FOR ME, FAHR! DON'T DIE!



SUDDENLY...



TYLDAK! NO! NO TIME TO EXPLAIN!

NO NEED TO EXPLAIN! SHE IS MINE!



I WANT WHAT YOU CARRY!

STOP, WOLF-RIDER!



YOU FOOL! LET GO!!

DON'T IGNORE ME! YOU'VE GOT TO UNDERSTAND! SHE *MUSTN'T* BE KILLED!

SHE'S MORE TROUBLE DEAD THAN ALIVE!



TYLDAK!!



GONE.

HE CAN PURSUE.

OR HE CAN SAVE HIS FRIEND.





IT IS MADNESS! OF ALL THE WOLFRIDERS, ONLY STRONGBOW HAS THE STRENGTH OF WILL TO MAKE BLUE MOUNTAIN'S STONE-STILL "DOORS" RESPOND.





--OR I'LL OPEN YOU!!

AND YOU'LL BE AWAKE FOR IT--

--BELIEVE ME!

IN SENDING, THERE IS ONLY TRUTH.

THE SHEER BRUTALITY OF HIS TRUTH SURPRISES EVEN CUTTER.



HOWEVER--



GASP!

GASP!



--ONLY RESULTS MATTER!

SKYWISE!



COUGH! COUGH! --STARS! I'VE MISSED YOU....



WITH THE CHAMBER CRUMBLING AROUND THEIR EARS, THE TWO FRIENDS REMAIN LOCKED IN A GRATEFUL BEAR-HUG, THEN-- REALIZATION!

HAVE TO ESCAPE!

BUT SKYWISE IS WEAK!

AND DOOR'S LEGS ARE LIMP AS WATER WEEDS.



HE'S FORGOTTEN HOW TO WALK--

BUT HE'S NOT A MUSHROOM! HE WANTS TO LIVE-- LIKE ANYONE ELSE.

CUTTER GRABS DOOR BY THE SCRUFF OF THE NECK, HAULING HIM-- AND SKYWISE-- INTO THE DARK, SEALED TUNNEL.

PRODDED BY CUTTER'S SENDING, DOOR BEGINS TO REMOVE THE FROZEN WAVES OF ROCK WHICH OBSTRUCT THE PASSAGE.

CRREEAAK!

IT IS A RACE AGAINST
DESTRUCTION AS THE
TUNNEL CAVES IN
BEHIND THEM!

AFTER DAYS OF CONFINEMENT
IN THE OPPRESSIVE GLOOM OF
BLUE MOUNTAIN, CUTTER
BREATHES THE CLEAN, SUN-
WARMED WIND THANKFULLY.

WE'RE
OUT!

PRAISE THE
HIGH ONES!
IT'S ALMOST
OV--

--ER....!

AAH!

WORK FASTER,
DOOR!

I SEE
LIGHT!

HELP....!

THERE YOU
ARE,
WOLFRIDER!

THERE
WAS NO WAY
BACK IN!

COME! I
WILL LOWER
YOU BOTH TO
THE GROUND!

DOOR, TOO!
WE CAN'T
LEAVE HIM!

WHAT?!

NO! YOU
OAF! I-I
CANNOT! IT
IS TOO--

MMUUUUUUH!

UUPF!!

THERE'S MY LAD!
DON'T EVER GO
OFF ON YOUR
OWN AGAIN!

WE NEED A
CHIEF--AND I
DON'T LIKE THE
CHORE!

SMAT!

FLUMP!



MOTHER!!

NO...!

SHE... DIDN'T GET OUT! SHE...

SHATTERED, LIKE THEIR SACRED MOUNTAIN, LIKE ALL THEIR ANCIENT BELIEFS, THE HOANG G'TAY SHO BEAR THEIR LOSS QUIETLY. IT IS A LOSS TOO GREAT TO PROTEST.



THE DUST OF CATAclysm SWIRLS, A BROWN, SUN-VEILING CLOUD SO ENORMOUS THAT IT SEEMS TO MAKE A SOUND--

--A LOW THUNDEROUS GROAN.



THAT MOTHERS AND FATHERS BOTH CAN PERISH UNTIMELY IS NO DELIBERATE INJUSTICE ON LIFE'S PART. SCOUTER KNOWS THAT LIFE IS JUST LIFE.

SHE ISN'T DEAD... SHE ISN'T!

AND SO HE IS NOT QUITE ASTONISHED WHEN HIS SEND-CALL IS SWIFTLY ANSWERED.

MOTHER...? PLEASE!

I'M HERE CUB!



THIS, TOO, IS JUST LIFE.



H-HOW DID YOU--?

IT WAS TWO-EDGE...! HE CAN SEND NOW, DID YOU KNOW THAT...? LEETAH MUST HAVE WORKED ON HIM.

HE MADE THE FEMALE "DOOR" OPEN FOR ME...

SAVED ME...

AND HIMSELF?

I DON'T KNOW. I STABBED HIM... ONLY THEN DID HE SEND. I FELT... SAW... FORGAVE. BUT HE STAYED BEHIND.



FOR SOME, FORGIVENESS IS AS HARD TO FIND AS IS THE SUN BEHIND ITS DARK CURTAIN OF DUST.

< DEMONS! SOB! THEY MOCK US IN THEIR VICTORY. >

< THEY HAVE DESTROYED THE BLACK-ROBED MOTHER! DESTROYED THE BIRD SPIRITS' HOME! >

< AND THERE THEY STAND, GLARING WITH THEIR EVIL EYES! >

< MY FATHER... SNIFF! THEIR EYES ARE JUST VERY BIG! >

< I THINK... MAYBE... THEY ARE PEOPLE-- >

I WISH I HAD WORKED HARDER AT LEARNING THE TALL ONES' WORDS.

DART HAS WON THAT YOUNG HUMAN'S HEART.

RAYEK...?

SEEMS SO.

YES... I SHALL!

< --SPIRIT PEOPLE! >

< GEONI IS A FOOLISH BOY. IF THE DEMONS HAD NOT STOLEN OUR MAGIC SPEARS-- >

< --WE EEEAAGH!! >

CHUNK.

YOU FAILED, HUMAN!

I WILL SHOW YOU HOW TO KILL HOWLING DOGS!

UUUUNNH...

KUREEL!

HA HA HA HA HA!

THE INTENDED
PREY IS
SMALL AND
FOUR-
FINGERED.

BUT KUREEL IS A MINION
OF THE BLACK SNAKE; HIS
POISONOUS SOUL KNOWS
DELIGHT AS RANDOM
VICTIMS SCREAM AND
DIE!

A TERRIBLE
SHADOW FALLS
OVER GEOKI.
PETRIFIED, THE
BOY CANNOT
RUN.

I'LL TURN
THAT BIRD!

NO! THE
ANGLE IS WRONG!

WHIZZZ!

LITTLE
STINGING WORM!
WE'LL TEAR OFF
YOUR HEAD!

GET DOWN!

GEOKI!!

RAYEK!
WHY DON'T
YOU--?

AAAAA!

KUREEL IS
PLEASED.
CHILDREN OF
BOTH TRIBES
WILL DIE NOW,
IN PARTIAL
ATONEMENT
FOR HIS LORD
WINNOWILL'S
FALL--

--AND EVEN FOR
HIS PITIFUL FOLK,
THE GLIDERS,
WHO LIE CRUSHED
BENEATH THE
RUINS OF AN
OLD, OLD DREAM.

THOUGH THEY WOULD HAVE
TAKEN HIM DOWN WITH THEM,
HE WILL AVENGE THEM, TOO.



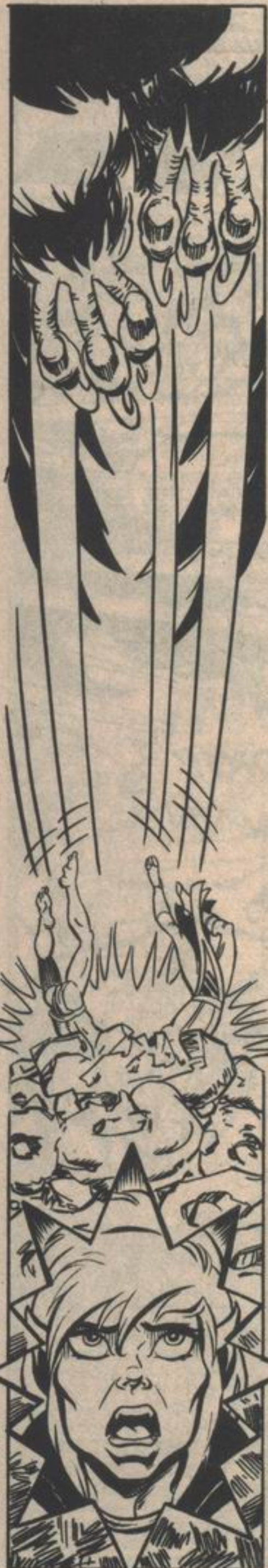
MAN KILLS MAN. IT IS
THE WAY OF HUMANS.

BUT WITHIN THE COLLECTIVE
MEMORY OF THE FOUR KNOWN
TRIBES, ELF HAS NEVER
KILLED ELF.

THE WORLD HAS CHANGED --



--AGAIN.





GEOKI'S FATHER RECOILS, TRYING TO PULL HIS SON AWAY AS LEETAH HESITANTLY PLACES HER PALM ON THE SHATTERED BREAST.



SO MUCH TIME GOES BY THAT THE GREAT GRAY DUSTCLOUD DISPERSES.



AND...



TAM... I AM LOST! I-I THINK I WILL NEVER BE MYSELF AGAIN!

THEN LOOK AT WHAT YOU KNOW, BELOVED--

HUMANS... ARE SO-- SO SET IN THEIR MOLD!



"--LOOK AT WHAT YOU'VE DONE!"



FOR THE FIRST TIME-- IN HOW MANY DAYS, HE DOES NOT KNOW-- CUTTER REALIZES THAT HIS BODY IS NOT TENDED TO FIGHT OR FLEE. HIS FAMILY IS SAFE. HIS TRIBE IS REUNITED WITH KIN AND FRIENDS FROM FAR AWAY. ONLY ONE THOUGHT TROUBLES HIS HARD-WON PEACE.

WINNOWILL...! IF TYLDAK KILLS HER, HER SPIRIT WILL BE ON US LIKE A PLAGUE!

AND ALL THIS WILL HAVE BEEN FOR NOTHING!

DON'T WORRY. TYLDAK WOULDN'T DO ANYTHING TO HURT US. I KNOW HIM. I TRUST HIM.



DEWSHINE WISHES SHE COULD BE AS CERTAIN OF HER OWN CUB'S NATURE. THE BRIGHT-EYED BABE SHE CHERISHES MORE THAN LIFE ITSELF HAS BEEN TAMPERED WITH.

THEY ARE ALL HERE... WITH ME! EVEN KUREEL REJOICES! I AM THEIR MOUNTAIN NOW...! I AM THEIR WAY TO THE HIGH ONES' HOME...!

THEIR POWER BELONGS TO THE PALACE!

GASP!

CLEARBROOK, LOOK AT HIS EYES, WILL YOU? HE'S MANY NUTS SHY OF A FULL POUCH!

A WOLF-LING NO MORE... WHAT IS HE?

HMMHMM... POOR GLIDERS! BURIED ALIVE!

YES... ALIVE!

RAYEK! WHAT--?

HE TELLS THE TRUTH! THE AIR IS FULL OF SOULS! BUT HE'S NOT FIT, AS HE IS, TO TRAVEL ALONE TO THE FROZEN MOUNTAINS.

THEN YOU AND I WILL TAKE HIM!



SOON...

<NONNA...ADAR...WE WILL REMEMBER YOU ALWAYS IN OUR HOWLS--THE FIRST HUMANS WE HAVE HONORED SO.>

<NONE OF US WILL FORGET WHAT WE HAVE SEEN TODAY.>

<I DO NOT KNOW WHY YOU HUMANS SET US SO HIGH ABOVE YOU. IT MAKES TOO MUCH FEELING... TOO MUCH HATE... TOO MUCH LOVE. LEETAH HAS PROVED THAT WE ARE MORE LIKE YOU THAN NOT.>

<BUT IT IS HARDER TO LOSE BELIEFS THAT MAKE YOU FEEL SAFE-->

<-- THAN IT IS TO LOSE A HOME! I KNOW!>

<TODAY, YOUR MAGIC-->

<BUT IF WORSHIP DISPLEASES YOU-->

<-- BROUGHT DOWN BLUE MOUNTAIN AND HEALED ONE OF OUR OWN! I BELIEVE WHAT I SEE.>

<-- THEN TAKE FRIENDSHIP!>

"< I WILL MAKE THE HOANG G'TAYSHO A SYMBOL -->"

"<-- THAT WILL SPEAK TO THEM OF THE HEALING MAGIC.>"

"<THEY WILL WALK IN THE WORLD KNOWING WHAT THEY KNOW: THAT SPIRITS CAN BE POWERFUL HELPERS WHO SOMETIMES NEED HELP TOO.>"

TWO NIGHTS LATER...

THE PRESERVERS ARE NOT HAPPY. FOR TWO LIGHTS AND TWO DARKS, THEIR PRECIOUS COCOONS HAVE BEEN TRIPPED OVER, DANCED ON, TANGLED AND TORN. SPLASHED DREAMBERRY JUICE DRIPS LIKE STICKY DEW FROM THE WINGED SPRITES' WEBS.

THE WOLVES, TOO, ARE NOT HAPPY. HACKLES ARE UP AND TAILS ARE BRISTLING OVER THE INTRUDING PACK FROM THE DESERT.

BUT NONE OF THAT DISTURBS **SUNTOP** AS HE COMMUNES SERENELY WITH **SAVAN**--AND THEN SHYLY, REVERENTLY OFFERS HIS SPIRIT-HAND TO **TIMMAIN**, HERSELF.

EMBER, MEANWHILE, IS IN HER GLORY, ELABORATING YET AGAIN THE TERRORS AND TRIUMPHS OF HER GREAT BATTLE WITH THE HUMANS.

BUT THE SONG OF CELEBRATION, UNION, AND REUNION HOLDS A PENSIVE NOTE FOR SOME.

AND FOR THE ONE WHO FOUGHT HARDEST TO PRESERVE "THE WAY"--YET, WITH AN ARROW, CHANGED HIS WORLD FOREVER--THERE IS NO SONG BUT SILENCE.

MY CUB...! I'LL NEVER KNOW HIM BY SCENT AGAIN! WHAT DID SHE DO TO HIM?

WHAT DOES IT MATTER? HE'S STILL OUR "BUMPER". AND WE ARE HIS ONLY PARENTS.

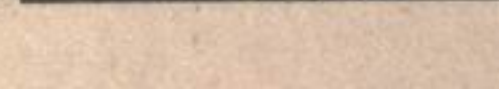
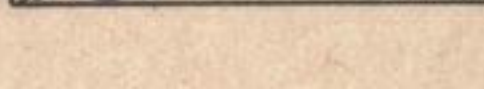
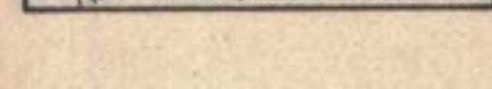
GIGGLE

BA-BAH!





"AND SOMETIMES..." THINKS THE STARGAZER, "BELIEVING THINGS WILL TURN OUT WELL IS THE ONLY THING WE CAN DO."



AND...

...STARS ARE SO BRIGHT. I CAN SEE THEM THROUGH THE LEAVES.

AND YOU KNOW... I LIKE 'EM RIGHT WHERE THEY ARE!

WHEN THEY WERE FREE, AT LAST, OF WINNOWILL'S CONTROL, THEY CHOSE TO EXIST ONLY IN SPIRIT.

I WOULDN'T! I LIKE HAVING SKIN.

STRANGE HOW SOME OF US WOULD DO ANYTHING TO REACH THEM.

WHAT IS FOR US, DOES NOT PASS BY US, BELOVED.

THE GLIDERS NEVER WISHED TO BE PART OF THIS WORLD.

THERE'S MY SKIN... AND THERE'S ME... AND WHEN I DIE YAWN... THERE'LL STILL BE ME...!

BUT I'LL LET THIS WORLD DECIDE WHEN...
ZZZZ



HOW EASY IT WOULD BE TO BECOME LIKE HER--



-- TO DENY OTHERS THEIR CHOICES EXCEPT AS THEY SUIT MY DESIRES!

THE ONLY DIFFERENCE IS LOVE. HIGH ONES... KEEP ME STRONG!

AND BE WITH MY SUFFERING SISTER--

"-- WHEREVER SHE MAY BE!"

