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THE TARANTULA • ACT I

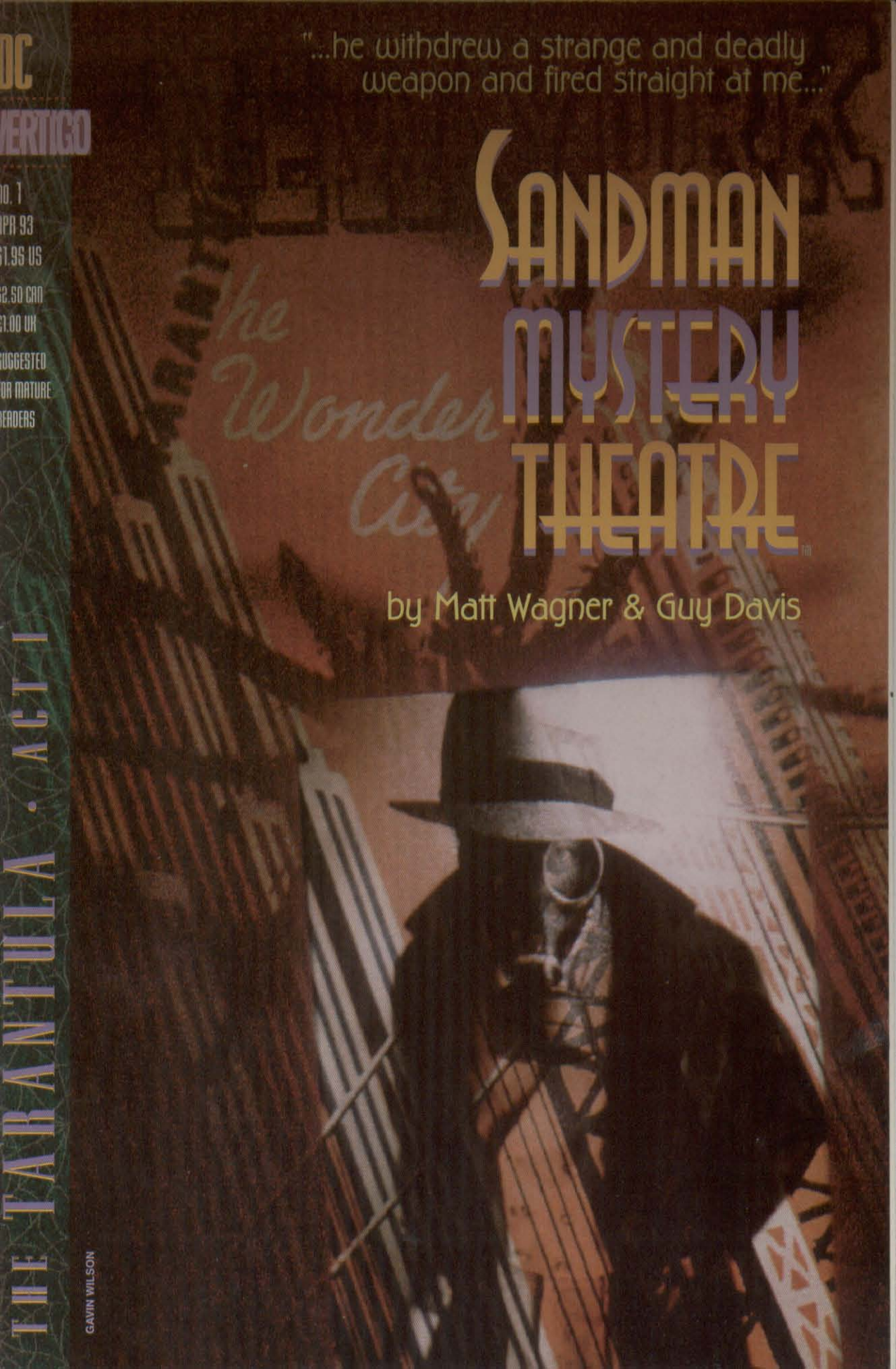
"...he withdrew a strange and deadly
weapon and fired straight at me..."

SANDMAN MYSTERY THEATRE

by Matt Wagner & Guy Davis

GAVIN WILSON

*The
Wonder
City*





FIRST, THERE IS THE WOMAN. SOFT...



... BUT INDISTINCT. LIKE WORDS WRITTEN IN DARKNESS OR THE SMELL OF A RIPENING PEACH.



FOR SOON SHE IS ECLIPSED--BY HIM.



THE MAN IN BLACK.



BURNING, IMMOBILE. BOUND TO THE CENTER OF MY DREAMSCAPE.

AND THEN COMES THE GAS, WITH ROW UPON ROW OF SOLDIERS...



... RECEIVING THEMSELVES AS IMMUNE.



MEN DIE, GAGGING ON THE FOAM OF THEIR OWN BOILING STOMACHS.



AND THEN THE GAS BEGINS TO CONGEAL.



WEB-LIKE STRANDS OF DEATH...



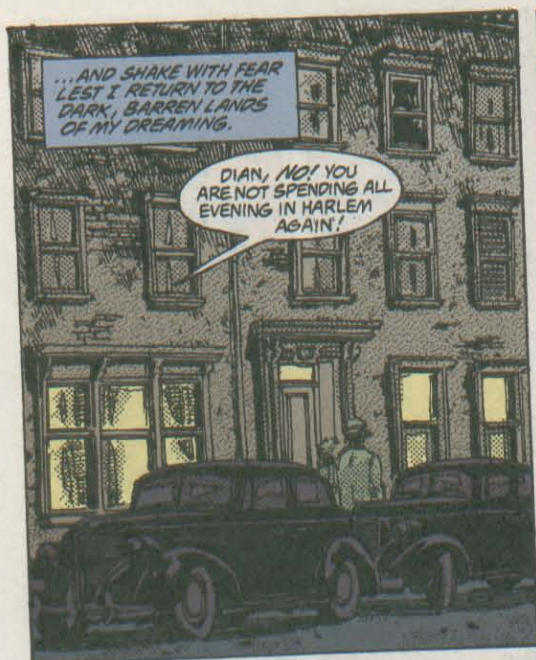
... ATTACH THEMSELVES ON THE EDGE OF MY DREAM.



THERE TO ENSURE INNOCENCE AND HOPE.



AS ALWAYS, I AWAKE...



... AND SHAKE WITH FEAR
LEST I RETURN TO THE
DARK, BARREN LANDS
OF MY DREAMING.

DIAN, NO! YOU
ARE NOT SPENDING ALL
EVENING IN HARLEM
AGAIN!



YOU GIRLS. UNESCORTED, AT
THOSE... CLUBS.

DADDY...



SHOULDN'T THAT BE, "YOU WOMEN"?
THE YOUNGEST OF US IS TWENTY-
FIVE?



BUT THE DISTRICT
ATTORNEY'S DAUGHTER
SHOULDN'T BE SEEN...

DOING WHAT? HAVING
FUN? DADDY, DARLING, TRY
TO LEAVE YOUR EIGHTEENTH-
AMENDMENT-MORALS IN
THE PAST. THIS IS 1938,
AFTER ALL. NOW, WHERE'S
MY BAG?



IN MY
STUDY.

ER, I MEAN...
WAIT JUST A MOMENT!
THIS DISCUSSION IS
NOT OVER! DIAN...



... I AM
SPEAKING
TO YOU!

THERE.
NO,
DADDY...



... YOU ARE
SPEAKING
AT ME.

LOOK, I KNOW IT'S
NOT YOUR FUND-RAISER
SORT OF CROWD, BUT
THE NIGHT CLUBS ARE
FINE, JUST FINE.

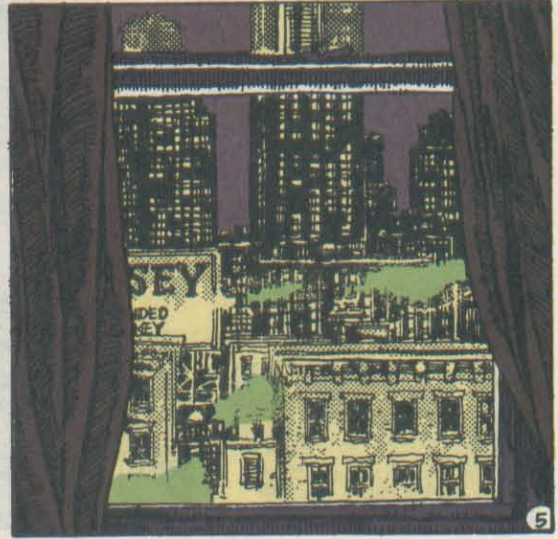


CLIC-

DON'T
WORRY
SO.







TARANTULA

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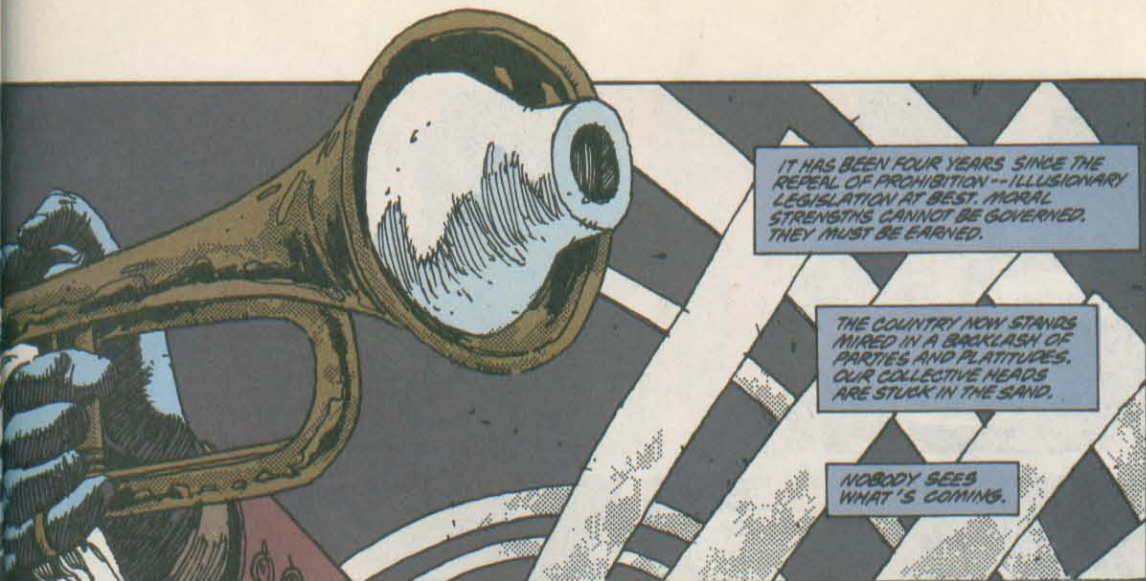
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IT HAS BEEN FOUR YEARS SINCE THE REPEAL OF PROHIBITION--ILLUSIONARY LEGISLATION AT BEST. MORAL STRENGTHS CANNOT BE GOVERNED. THEY MUST BE EARNED.

THE COUNTRY NOW STANDS Mired IN A BACKLASH OF PARTIES AND PLATITUDES. OUR COLLECTIVE HEADS ARE STUCK IN THE SAND.

NOBODY SEES WHAT'S COMING.



I SUPPOSE NOT. SOME CROWD TONIGHT, YES?

MMM, THE STARS DO LIKE TO SHINE IN HARLEM.

THERE'S BERT LAHR AND TALLULAH BANKHEAD. THEY'RE IN THAT SHOW...



I PREFER THE OFF-THE-FLOOR CROWD MYSELF.

OH! AND THERE'S WILLIAM POWELL!



I SEE MEYER LANSKY BACK THERE, AND I THINK THAT'S BUGSY SIEGEL.



OH, YOU ARE A WICKED ONE, VAN DER MEER.

IRRESISTIBLE, MY DEAR BELMONT. THE WORD IS IRRESISTIBLE.





(GROOOAN)

THERE'S JUST SO MUCH... SUNLIGHT DURING THE DAY.

JESUS, WHY IS IT SO DIFFICULT TO FIND A CAB AT THIS HOUR?

IT'S ONLY SIX, NU--NOT LIKE IT'S REGULAR BUSINESS HOURS... ;LRP?



"WOTTA NIGHT!
WOTTA CROWD!
WOTTA MOB!"

C'MON, DIAN.
HERE'S ANOTHER TAXI.

WELL, THIS BOAT IS FULL. LADIES..



950 FIFTH AVENUE, DRIVER.

I MUST SAY I'M SURPRISED TO BE RIDING HOME WITH YOU, CATH. YOU HAD SO MUCH... COMPANIONSHIP ALL EVENING.



TRUTH TO TELL, I'M ACTUALLY RATHER SPOKEN FOR THESE DAYS.

YOU? THE SOCIAL BUTTERFLY? WHO IS HE?



MMMM... LET'S JUST CALL HIM ONE OF THE OFF-THE-FLOOR CROWD.

; GASP: YOU'RE JOKING! GOD FORBID, IF YOUR FATHER EVER DISCOVERS...



OH, BY THAT POINT IT'LL BE OVER. I'M NOT FOOLING MYSELF ABOUT THE PERMANENCY OF THIS BUT, FOR NOW--IT'S A GRAND TIME.

AND FOR RIGHT NOW, THE SUN'S UP AND ITS BED-TIME. BE SEEING YOU SOON, DIAN.



SLEEP WELL, OH WICKED ONE.



IT HAS BEEN LITTLE OVER A YEAR SINCE MY RETURN TO NEW YORK. WHAT HAD BEEN THE GREATEST CITY ON EARTH IS NOW A FACADE OF CORRUPTION AND DENIAL. FASHIONABLE FUND-RAISERS ABOUND WHILE POVERTY ENDURES AND THE THREAT OF WAR LINGERS STAGNANT IN THE AIR.

STILL, I HAD AGREED TO ATTEND AN EVENT BENEFITING THE LIBRARY. THE CAUSE WAS RIGHT EVEN IF THE ATTITUDE WAS WRONG.

ATTITUDE! THAT'S WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE WORLD TODAY! EVERYBODY SEARCHING FOR AN ENEMY. I TELL YOU, BELMONT...



...IF I WAS STILL ON THE BENCH, I--

HAD YOUR HEAD IN THE CLOUDS ALL DAMNED EVENING.

AND HAS. HERE I AM, DADDY... AS PROMISED.



MMM, YES, YOUR HONOR. I, UMM...

WHAT'S WITH YOU, LARRY?



OH, SORRY YOUR HONOR. I'M LOOKING FOR MY DAUGHTER. SHE'S SUPPOSED TO--



AHHH... LOVELY AS EVER AND IN PLENTY OF TIME.

NO MATTER WHAT YOUR OLD MAN MIGHT SAY.

HA-HA. WHY, JUDGE SCHAFER, YOU KNOW DADDY...

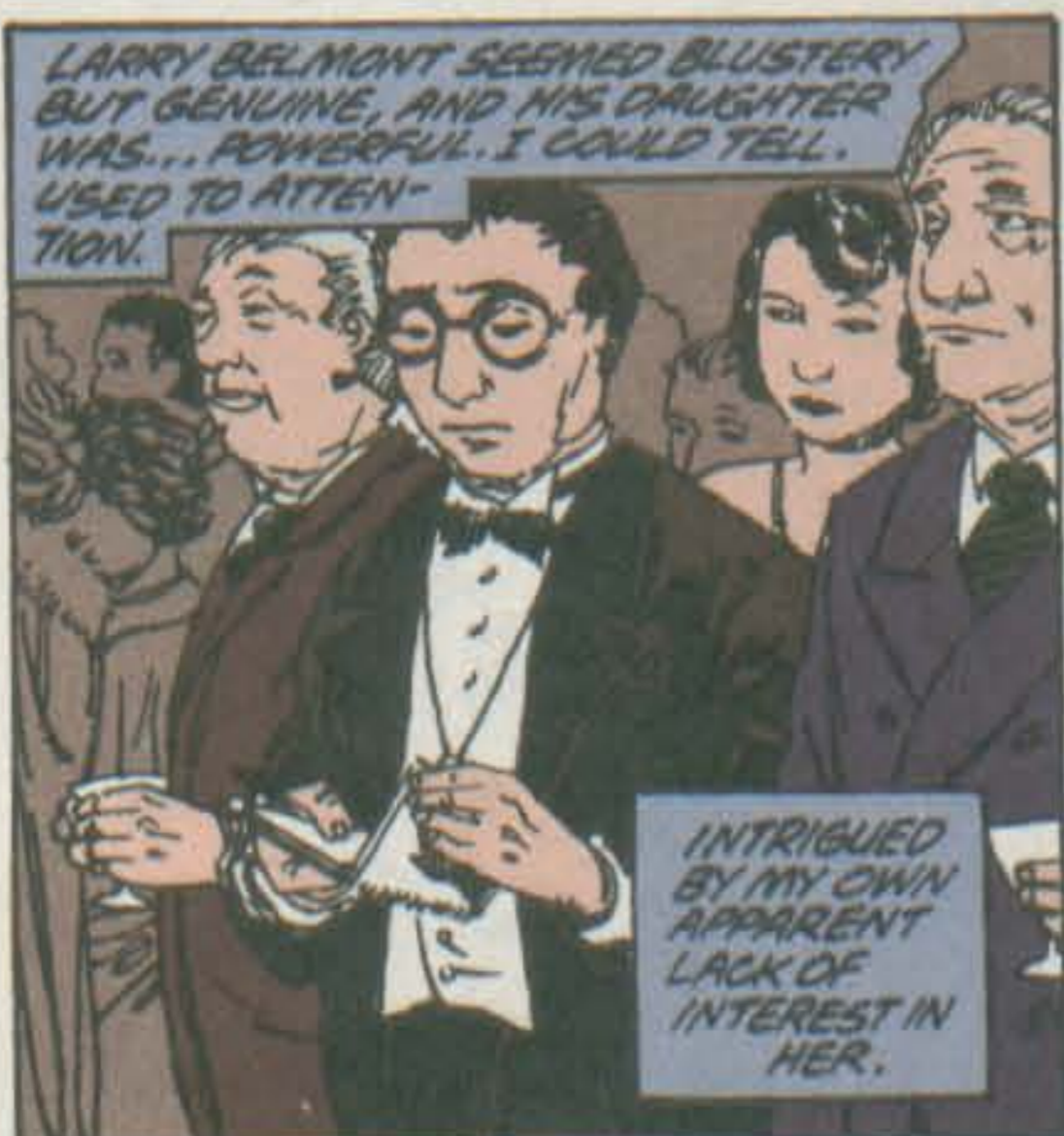
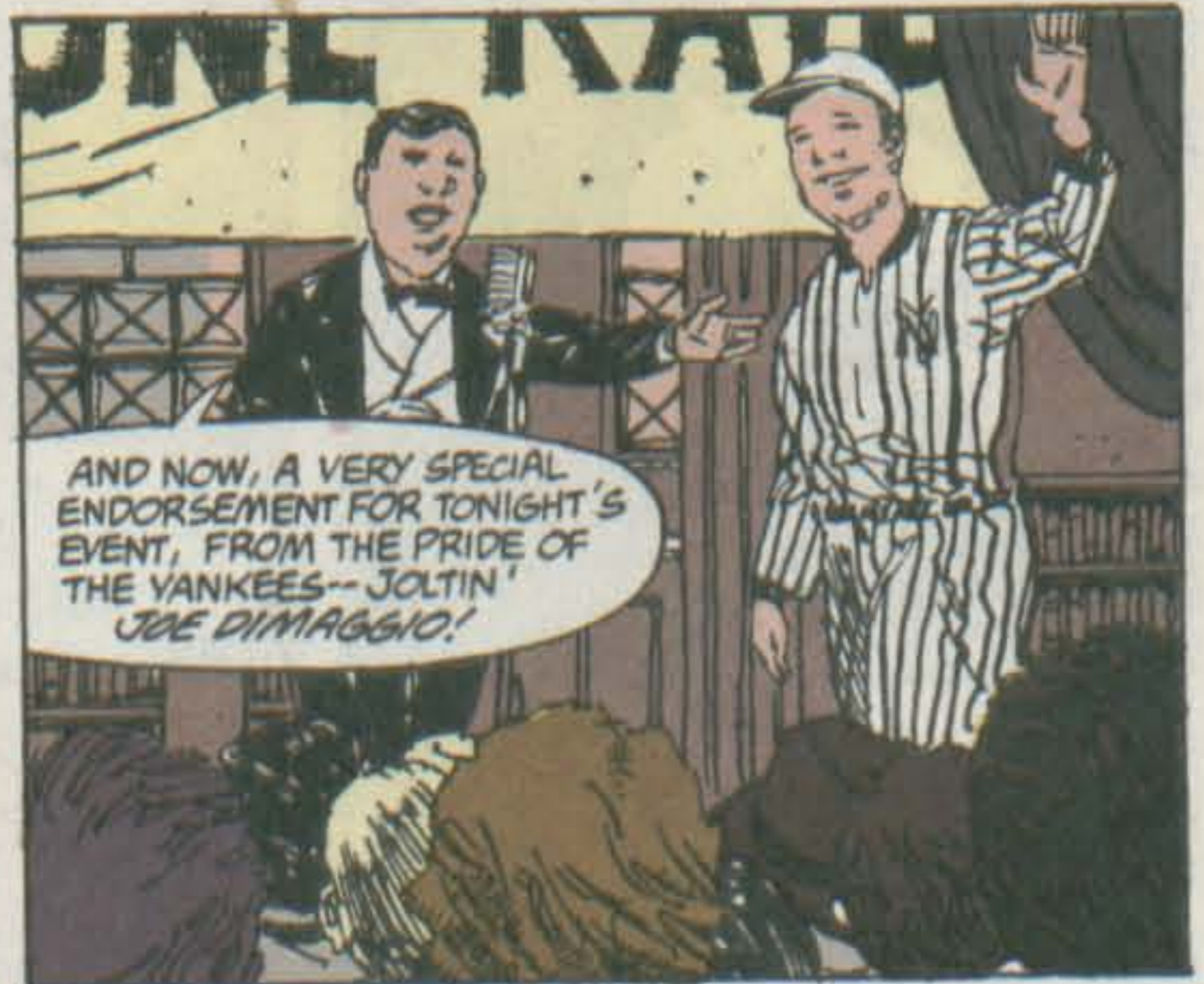


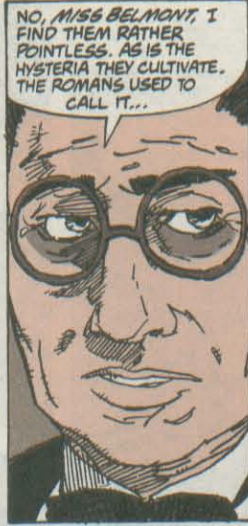
... HE WON'T BE SATISFIED UNTIL I'M EITHER ENROLLED OR EMPLOYED. OR MARRIED.

DIAN! I WANT YOU TO GET YOUR LAW DEGREE, YOU KNOW THAT--



OH, BELMONT! SORRY TO INTERRUPT, BUT HERE'S SOMEONE TO WHOM YOU SHOULD BE RE-INTRODUCED.





MY FATHER ALWAYS REFERRED TO THOMAS SCHAFER AS FOOLISHLY GARING, RETIRING FROM THE BENCH -- THE ONLY SELF-CONCERNED ACT OF HIS RECENT YEARS -- HE NOW INTENSELY REGRETS.

I CALL HIM NOT A FOOL, BUT RATHER A DREAMER, A MAN WHO ENVISIONS SOMETHING BETTER -- OR WHO DREAMS SOMETHING WORSE.

OFFER YOU A LIFT HOME, THOMAS?

CERTAINLY, M' BOY!



I'M GLAD YOU CAME OUT TONIGHT, WESLEY. IT DOES YOU NO GOOD BEING SO HOLED UP IN THE REMNANTS OF YOUR FATHER'S AFFAIRS.

SOMEBODY'S GOT TO LOOK OUT FOR THE BUSINESS NOW.

HMMPH -- WOULD THAT EVERYONE HAD SUCH A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY.

SUCH AS...?

WELL, THE GODDAMN POLICE FOR A START! I JUST OVERHEARD THEY'VE GOT SOME MYSTERIOUS KIDNAPPER ON THEIR HANDS.

CALLS HIMSELF THE TARANTULA, CAN-YOU-BELIEVE-IT?!

AND THEY'VE BEEN EXPECTING SOMETHING LIKE THIS!

HOW SO?

SEVERAL KNOWN FELONS HAVE RECENTLY BEEN FOUND UNCONSCIOUS AT THE VERY SCENE OF THEIR CRIMES -- FOR NO APPARENT REASON!

SOMETHING STRANGE IS GOING ON OUT THERE AND THEY KNEW IT.

CLACK

OH, I'M SORRY TO GET SO MAUDLIN, WES. THE WORLD'S A MESS, BUT IF I'M GOING TO BITCH ABOUT 'IT SO...

I NEVER SHOULD HAVE RETIRED. THANKS FOR THE RIDE, M'BOY.

YOU CAN'T SOLVE ALL OF THE WORLD'S PROBLEMS, TOM. AT LEAST, BE GLAD FOR THOSE YOU CAN.

AND, PLEASANT DREAMS.



MY FATHER'S INTERESTS WERE MANY AND HIS HOLDINGS, EVEN GREATER. OIL, STEEL, FOREIGN AUTO MARKETS-- IT SEEMED THAT EVERY VENTURE HE ATTEMPTED TURNED OUT IN HIS FAVOR.

BUT HIS PROSPERITY WAS INSULAR-- MEANT TO PROTECT HIM FROM WHAT HE HAD SEEN IN THE GREAT WAR. SADLY, HE NEVER REALLY LEARNED...

NIGHTMARES ARE QUITE INESCAPABLE.

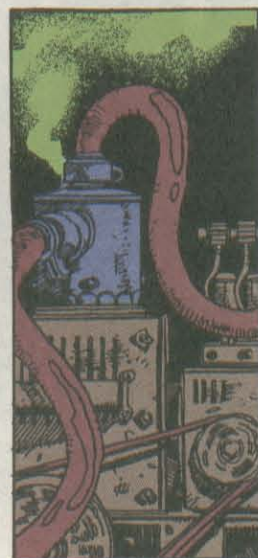
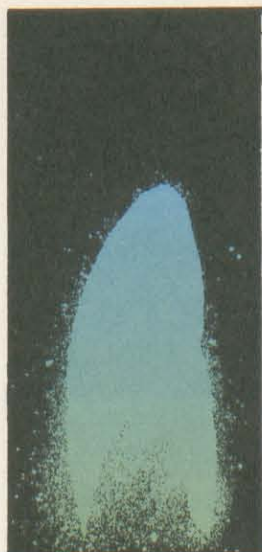
GOODNIGHT, MR. WESLEY DODDS.

AND PLEASANT DREAMS.

CLACK









GENTLEMEN,
GENTLEMEN!
WELCOME,
WELCOME!

I HOPE YOUR FLIGHT FROM
THE COAST WAS, EH...
ENDURABLE? YES?
HA! HA! HA!

SO, WELCOME
TO THE GOLDMAN
ESTATES. HA! HA!
HA!



ALBERT GOLDMAN, THIS IS
LENNY GREEN AND
MOSES BERMAN.

AHHH, MR.
BERMAN... A
PLEASURE! YOUR
FLIGHT WAS
SMOOTH?

THEY DON'T LET YOU
SMOKE CIGARS IN PLANES
NO MORE! ONLY CIGARETTES.
WHAT THE HELL'S THE
WORLD COMIN' TO, I
ASK YOU?



WITH GOD'S WILL... TO US, MY
FRIEND. TO US. THAT'S WHAT
WE'RE HERE TO DISC--

ALBERT,
DARLING?



AREN'T YOU
GOING TO
INTRODUCE
ME TO YOUR...
FRIENDS.

AHHH, CELIA! GENTLEMEN,
MY LOVELY DAUGHTER...
CELIA.



BUT WHERE ARE YOU...?

OUT. I'M
SPENDING THE
NIGHT IN TOWN.



NO NEED TO WAIT UP OR
WORRY, DARLING. I'LL
BE JUST FINE.

BOYS...



EVENING,
MISS.









CARE FOR A COCKTAIL, WESLEY?

NO THANK YOU. I DON'T LIKE TO DRINK.

HOW STRANGE.



WELL, PERSONALLY, I DON'T LIKE TO SUPPORT THE PRACTICE BUT... IT AS A LEGAL FACT OF LIFE NOW, AFTER ALL.

MUCH TO THE DISMAY OF THE MOB, WHAT WILL MEN LIKE ALBERT GOLDMAN DO WITHOUT ILLEGAL BOOZE?



WHY--?! HOW DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT EX-BOOTLEGGER?!



FATHER HAD SOME DEALINGS WITH HIM BEFORE THE WAR. IS HE LEGIT NOW?

WELLLL, THAT TYPE ALWAYS SEEM TO HAVE THEIR HANDS IN SOMETHING DIRTY.



OH! YOU'LL EXCUSE ME FOR A MOMENT?

CERTAINLY, SIR.



SO, UH... DIAN, HOW DO YOU SPEND YOUR DAYS AND NIGHTS IN MANHATTAN?

MAINLY IDLE. BUT YOU SEEM TO KEEP QUITE BUSY, MR. DODDS.



WES.

REGRETFULLY SO. REALLY, I HAVE LITTLE DESIRE TO INVOLVE MYSELF IN THE BUSINESS WORLD.

BUT MY FATHER LEFT NO ONE IN CHARGE WHEN HE DIED.



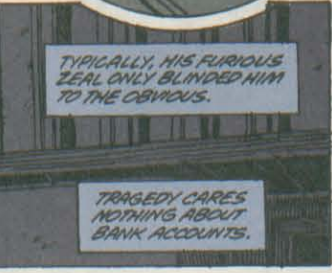
MMM, THAT'S TOO BAD.

WHAT'S THAT YOU'RE FOLDING?



ORIGAMI.

IT'S A JAPANESE CRAFT. I SPENT MUCH OF MY YOUTH IN THE ORIENT.







EVENIN', JUDGE.

HI, PASCAL. WHY ALL THE PRESS? I THOUGHT THIS WAS "MUSH"?

AHH, COULDN'T KEEP 'EM BOTH QUIET. SOMEBODY SQUEALED AND NOW IT'S A GODDAMN ZOO OUT DERE!



DIAN! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?!

JUDGE SCHAFER! THANK GOD YOU'RE HERE! I WAS AT HOME WHEN FATHER HEARD AND I ASSISTED ON COMING ALONG.



HE'S IN THERE NOW WITH THE COMMISSIONER AND SEVERAL FEDS!

I WAS ALL ALONE HERE 'TIL YOU SHOWED UP.



YES, AND YOU UH...SEEM TO BE QUITE THE CENTER OF ATTENTION.



I KNOW.

WELL, THE POLICE ARE A FRATERNITY. I DON'T THINK THEY'RE USED TO SEEING MANY WOMEN AT THIS PRECIN--



YHI!

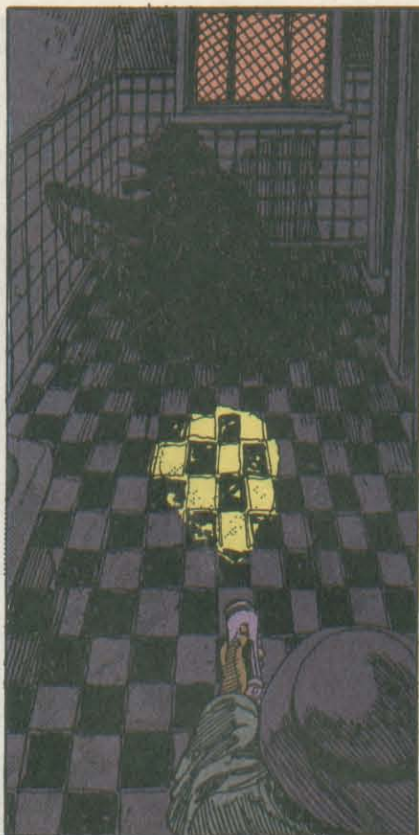
OH! I'M SO SORRY, MISS. HERE, LET ME...



NO! NO, THAT'S FINE...



I CAN MANAGE BY MYSELF, THANK YOU.





TO • BE • CONTINUED