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DC COMICS

NO. 1 OF 4
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MATURE READERS

THE SANDMAN
PRESENTS

PETREFA

MIKE CAREY
STEVE LEIALOHA



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JOURNEYMAN
LITHAR
UNDER
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THE
SANDMAN
PRESENTS™

PETREFAX

*travels
in
malegrise*

PART ONE

PETREFAX
JOURNEYMAN OF
LITHARGE
UNDERTAKER
FUNERALS
EMBALM

314 21 34

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THE SANDMAN PRESENTS

PETREFAX



"My dear Master Klapproth,
It is said that a journeyman undertaker's
road is fraught with many perils.

Perils of the flesh, of the
spirit, and of the heart...

And, in Malegrise, I appear to
have stepped in them all..."




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IT WAS APRIL. WINTER HAD FINALLY OPENED ITS STONY FIST, AND MY WANDERINGS HAD TAKEN ME INTO THE LAND OF MALEGRISE, MALEGRISE, WHERE EVERY CHILD BORN ALIVE IS A SORCERER, WHERE THERE IS A PARLIAMENT OF SORCERERS CALLED THE LIST AND A COURT OF SORCERERS CALLED THE CONSISTORY,

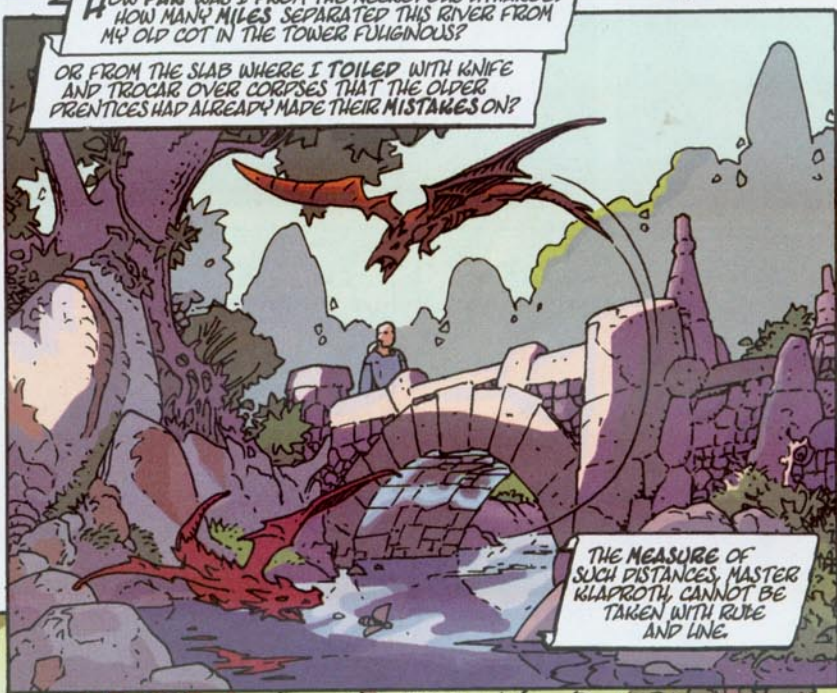
AND WHERE DEMONS, KOBOIDS AND FAIRIES LIVE IN THE CITIES OF MEN.

HOW FAR WAS I FROM THE NECROPOLIS LITHARGE? HOW MANY MILES SEPARATED THIS RIVER FROM MY OLD COT IN THE TOWER FULGINOUS?

OR FROM THE SLAB WHERE I TOILED WITH KNIFE AND TROCAR OVER CORPSES THAT THE OLDER PRENTICES HAD ALREADY MADE THEIR MISTAKES ON?



I HAD CHOSEN TO LEAVE YOU AND TO TRAVEL THE WORLDS. I HAD SEVEN-LEAGUE BOOTS UNTIL I CAME TO THE CROSSROADS, WHERE A TRIFLING PROBLEM TRIPPED THE HEELS OF MY GOOD SPIRITS.




THE MEASURE OF SUCH DISTANCES, MASTER KLAPROTH, CANNOT BE TAKEN WITH RULE AND LINE.


EVEN IN A LAND OF HIGH MAGICS, A MAN NEEDS DIRECTIONS TO FIND HIS WAY.




EXCUSE ME, SIR, WHICH TURNING LEADS TO THE TOWN OF SORTARI?



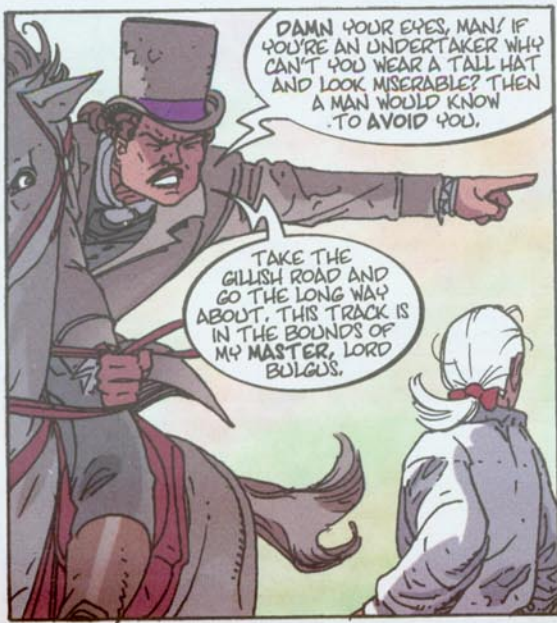
WHAT'S THAT? TO SORTARI, IS IT? WHAT'S YOUR BUSINESS IN SORTARI?



I THOUGHT I MIGHT FIND WORK THERE. IT'S A TOWN OF TEN THOUSAND SOULS, OR SO I'VE HEARD, AND MOST OF THEM MUST STILL ATTACH TO BODIES.



I'M A JOURNEYMAN, SIR, AND MY PROFESSION IS THE UNDERTAKING OF THE DEAD.



DAMN YOUR EYES, MAN! IF YOU'RE AN UNDERTAKER WHY CAN'T YOU WEAR A TALL HAT AND LOOK MISERABLE? THEN A MAN WOULD KNOW TO AVOID YOU.

TAKE THE GILLISH ROAD AND GO THE LONG WAY ABOUT. THIS TRACK IS IN THE BOUNDS OF MY MASTER, LORD BULGUS.



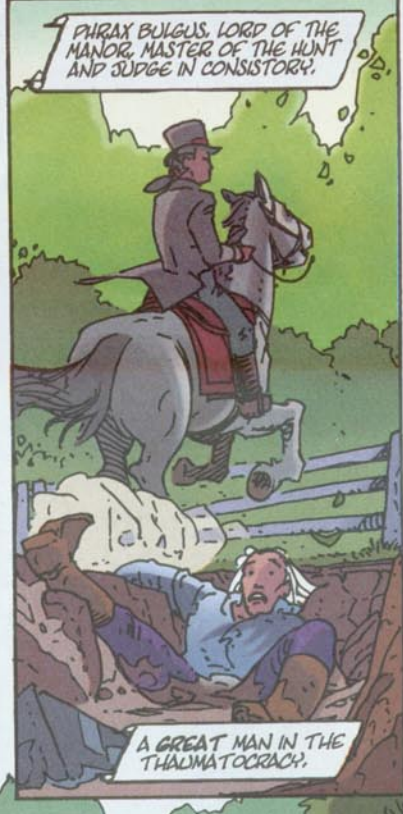
THEN WHY ARE THERE MILESTONES ON IT? SURELY IT'S A PUBLIC ROAD.

DIDN'T YOU HEAR ME, CULLY? I SAID LORD BULGUS OWNS THIS TRACT -- FROM HERE TO VEI, ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ROAD.



BUT THE DITCH, NOW -- THAT'S PUBLIC.

YOU MAY SIT IN THERE AS LONG AS YOU LIKE.



PHRAX BULGUS, LORD OF THE MANOR, MASTER OF THE HUNT AND JUDGE IN CONSISTORY.

A GREAT MAN IN THE THALMATOCRACY.



IT'S TRUE THAT ALL WHO LIVE IN THIS LAND HAVE SOME TOUCH OF THE ART OF MAGIC. BUT THE GREAT MAGES STAND AS TALL AS ANYWHERE.

AND, ON THE SUNNIEST DAY, AS THE PROVERB RUNS...

CRASH

...THEY CAST THE LONGEST SHADOWS.

I TELL YOU I WILL NOT!
I WILL NOT MARRY HIM! I WILL NOT SEE HIM SEND HIM AWAY!

WELL, GO TO IT, BUT A FATHER'S WILL OUTWEIGHS A DAUGHTER'S WILL NOT, WHEN ALL'S SAID.

YOU! YOU HAVE ENTERED INTO THIS CONTRACT ON MY BEHALF -- SETTLED ON ME AS THE PRICE OF YOUR SOCIAL CLIMBING.

LORD BULGUS IS A GOOD MATCH.

LORD BULGUS IS A MURDERER! I HAVE SEEN HIM IN MY DREAMS!

NOW, DEAREST -- IF HIS BROTHER'S DEATH WERE NOT NATURAL, THE CONSISTORY WOULD NOT HAVE GRANTED HIM THE SUCCESSION.

AYE, VERY NATURAL FOR LORD MALACHI AND HIS SON BOTH TO BURN, AND THE HOUSE STAND UNTOUCHED BY FLAME.

NATURE HAS SELDOM HAD TO WORK SO HARD TO BESTOW A TITLE!

AND WHY DO I NEED TO BE MARRIED IN ANY CASE? LET ME BE PRENTICED. I'M SKILLED IN MAGIC.

I CAN DO SUMMONINGS AND WARDS -- AND BESECHINGS TOO.

ANYONE MAY DREAM TRUE ONCE IN A YEAR, AND ANYONE MAY WORK HEDGE-MAGIC WITHOUT TRAINING IT'S NOTHING.

YOU'RE A GIRL, CALCINIA, NO WIZARD IS GOING TO TAKE YOU IN NOR NO COLLEGE IS GOING TO CERTIFICATE YOU, MAKE YOUR PEACE WITH IT.

THERE NOW! YOU MUSTN'T CRY, MY DEAREST. I'M SURE IT WILL ALL COME OUT FOR THE BEST.

AYE, TO BE SURE, THANK YOU, MOTHER.



LORD BULGUS! CALCINIA IS JUST... IS JUST COMBING HER HAIR OUT.

OR AS IT MIGHT BE, PUTTING IT UP. MEDDLING WITH IT SOMEWAYS, AT ALL EVENTS.

NO MATTER, MELDRED, I WAS JUST ADMIRING THESE OILS.



THIS ONE IS A MALODORO, ISN'T IT? A FAMILY PORTRAIT?

AAH... NO.

I BOUGHT THEM IN A JOB LOT FROM A DEALER IN ASCANDALUS. IT WERE A BANKRUPTCY. I'VE MORE IN THE STABLES IF YOU'D LIKE SOME.



I HAD FORGOTTEN THAT YOUR ORIGINS WERE IN COMMERCE. PERHAPS ON SOME OTHER OCCASION.

INDEED, INDEED, YOU'VE NOT COME TO ADMIRE WORKS OF ART, HAVE YOU, MILORD?

'TIS A WORK OF NATURE YOU'D RATHER BE LAYING YOUR EYES ON.



WELL IF YOUR DAUGHTER WOULD RECEIVE MY COMPLIMENTS I SHOULD INDEED ENJOY SOME CONVERSE WITH HER.


OH AYE, SHE'LL RECEIVE WHATEVER COMPLIMENTS YOU CARE TO PAY. YOU KNOW WHAT WOMEN...

WHAT WAS THAT? DO YOU HEAR A HORSE?




MOST OF ALL, MASTER, THIS IS A LAND OF CONTRADICTIONS. SO MUCH LUXURY, AND SO MUCH POVERTY. SO MUCH WEALTH, AND SO MUCH WASTE. FOR EVERY MALEGRIAN HAS THE SEEDS OF POWER, YET ONLY ONE IN A HUNDRED IS WATERED.

THOUGH, AS IN EVERY GARDEN A FEW SEEDLINGS MUST NOW AND THEN GROW WILD.



YOU REMEMBER, MASTER, THE BOY THEY FOUND ON CALAMON WHO HAD BEEN RAISED BY WILD DOGS, AND HOW HE HAD NO SPEECH BUT SNARLS AND YELPS.

IN JUST SUCH A STATE IS THE CHILD WHO HAS BEEN BORN TO AN ART BUT GIVEN NO TRAINING IN IT. THEIR INNATE TALENT IS JUST ENOUGH TO MAKE THEM FEEL MORE KEENLY WHAT THEY HAVE MISSED.

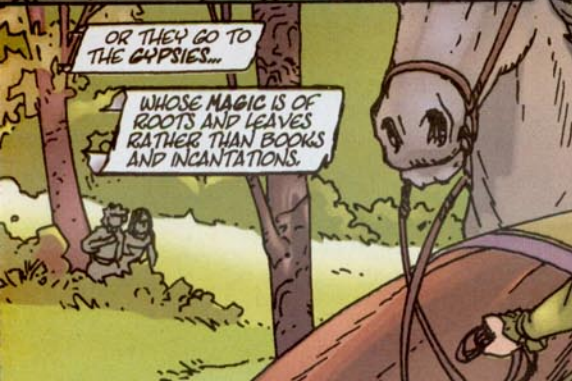


SO IT IS HERE WITH THE SONS OF THE POOR, AND WITH GIRL CHILDREN OF WHATEVER CLASS.

THEY MAKE SMALL CHARMS AND DREAM VAST, ACHING DREAMS.

OR THEY GO TO THE GYPSIES...

WHOSE MAGIC IS OF ROOTS AND LEAVES RATHER THAN BOOKS AND INCANTATIONS.



YOUR PARDON, ARE YOU THE ONE THEY CALL THE DRABENCH? THE WITCH?

MAHAP, MOSTLY THEY CALL ME ISMIR, AS THAT'S MY NAME. SOMETIMES THEY PUT A MADAM IN FRONT OF IT.

I NEED A POTION. I CAN PAY FOR IT IN GOLD.

OH, IN GOLD! AND AREN'T YOU AFRAID, LADY, TO COME AMONG THE ROMA WITH A FULL PURSE AND NO MENFOLK TO PROTECT YOU?

SHOULD I BE AFRAID?

NOT OF US. THERE'S NOT A MAN HERE WILL TOUCH OR TAKE FROM YOU, WHATEVER YOU MAY HAVE HEARD OF THE ROMANIP' CHAL. BUT MAHAP YOU'VE GOT OTHER THINGS TO FRIGHTEN YOU.

TIE YOUR HORSE TO THAT TREE AND SIT DOWN HERE.



THERE ARE MAGICS THAT WILL SEPARATE THE SOUL FROM THE BODY AND LET IT FLY ABROAD LIKE A BIRD.

AYE, THERE ARE.

ONE OF YOUR GORGIO SORCERERS WOULD DO IT WITH WORDS OF POWER -- A DRABENGI WITH LEAVES AND ROOTS. IT'S NO GREAT LABOR.



I WANT TO BUY SUCH A MAGIC. I'M SKILLED IN THE ART MYSELF, BUT UNTUTORED. MY FATHER WOULD NOT SCHOOL ME BECAUSE I'M A WOMAN.



A WOMAN, ARE YOU? CRY YOU MERCY, I TOOK YOU FOR A GIRL.

LISTEN TO ME. THE SOUL MAGICS ARE DANGEROUS... IF YOUR SPIRIT COME NOT AGAIN INTO YOUR BODY, YOU ARE MULE -- WALKING DEAD.

FIND SOME OTHER TOY.



MADAM, I DO NOT PLAY. I'LL PAY YOU TEN GOLD PIECES IF YOU'LL MIX ME SUCH A POTION.

I CAME HERE TO MAKE A GOOD DEATH, AND WHEN I'M GONE MY SON RAVEN WILL BURN ALL THAT WAS MINE.

I DON'T NEED YOUR GOLD.



BUT EVERYTHING IS TIED TO EVERYTHING.

THE WAXED CLOTH WILL HOLD IN THE LIQUID IF YOU RIDE SLOWLY AND DON'T TIP IT TOO MUCH. AND LADY...

ONE SIP WILL DO.

FOR WHICH REASON I HAVE SEEN FIT TO SUE FOR THE FULL AMOUNT, AND TO RETAIN BOTH THE HORSES AND THEIR TACK UNTIL SUCH TIME AS...

UNTIL SUCH TIME...

LORD BULGUS?

HMM? OH, YOUR PARDON, BAL CYPHYRO, I WAS REFLECTING ON A CONDRUM.

THAT CALCINIA SMITH, SPRUNG FROM THE UNION OF A DOLT AND A TRULL, SHOULD BE SO PERFECT BOTH IN HER PERSON AND IN HER UNDERSTANDING, IS IT NOT STRANGE?

I CANNOT SAY.

AMONG MY KIND THERE ARE NO DIFFERENCES OF SEX AND SO NO PROMPTINGS OF DESIRE.

MY LORD...

YOU KNOW THAT I AM BOUND IN SERVICE TO YOU, AS I HAVE BEEN TO THE LORDS BULGUS FOR THREE HUNDRED YEARS.

WITH YOUR MARRIAGE AT HAND, MIGHT THIS BE A CONVENIENT TIME TO DISCUSS THE TERMINATION OF MY CONTRACT?

I FEAR NOT, I PLAN TO WITHDRAW A LITTLE FROM MY AFFAIRS THE BETTER TO ENJOY MY NEW WIFE, I SHALL NEED YOU MORE THAN EVER.

YOUR SUMMONING WAS IN UNASSAILABLE FORM AND STANDS AS LONG AS THERE'S A LORD BULGUS TO ENFORCE IT.

IT'S A PITY SHE HATES ME, I SHOULD HAVE PREFERRED WINNING HER TO BUYING HER.

GOODNIGHT, BAL CYPHYRO.

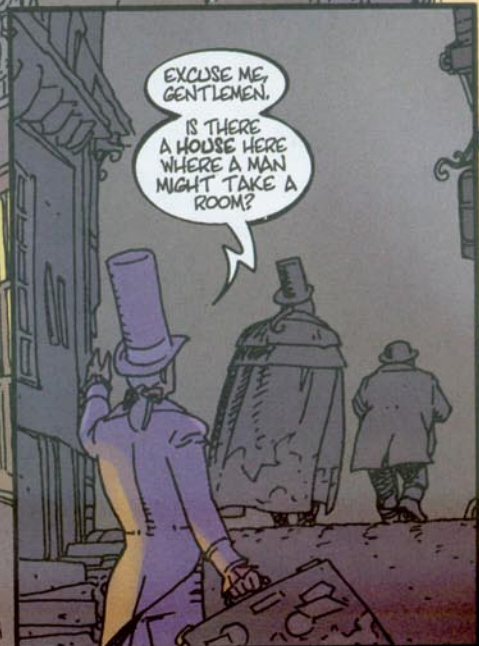
GOODNIGHT, MY LORD.



IT IS COMMONPLACE THAT THOSE WHO SEE A PLACE WITH FRESH EYES SEE IT MOST CLEARLY. I BELIEVE THIS TO BE FALSE.

OUR OWN NECROPOLIS, GIVEN OVER TO THE TENDING OF THE DEAD, OFTEN SEEMS A NARROW PLACE TO THEM AS KNOW NOT ITS RICHNESS AND DIVERSITY.

SO WAS I RECEIVED IN SORTARI, FOR I SAW IT FIRST AS A PLEASANT AND A PEACEFUL TOWN.



EXCUSE ME, GENTLEMEN.

IS THERE A HOUSE HERE WHERE A MAN MIGHT TAKE A ROOM?



YOU COULD TRY MRS. WARLOW IN SPIT STREET. A WOMAN OF GOOD REPUTATION, I BELIEVE.

EXCEPT FOR HER COOKING, WHICH DEPENDS HEAVILY ON SWEET AND OFFAL. IF I WERE YOU I SHOULD ASK AT THE LAST SWEET KISS.

AAH! TH... THANK YOU!



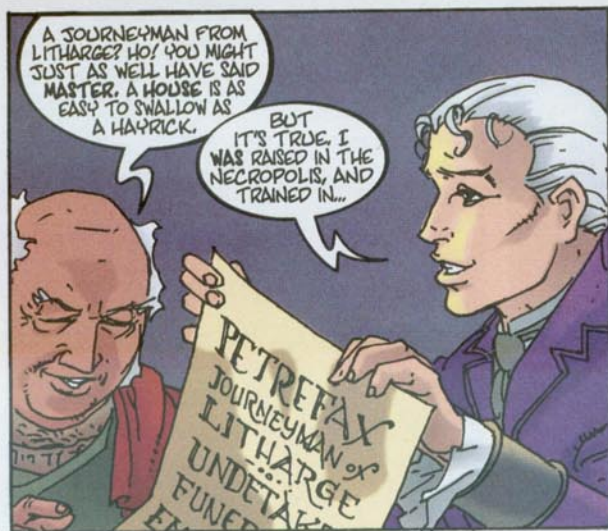
DID I MENTION THE DEMONS? THEY LIVE HERE IN ABUNDANCE, SOME IN THEIR OWN SHAPES AND SOME IN BORROWED FORMS THAT MOCK THE BODIES OF MEN.

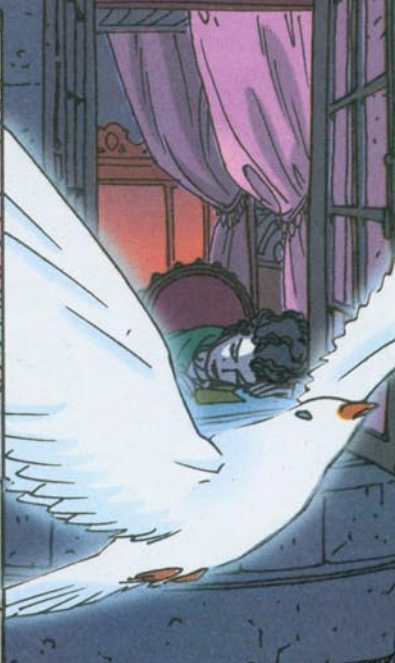
I HAVE NOT YET GROWN USED TO THEM. YOU WILL FORGIVE ME IF I SAY THAT IN THIS RESPECT MY UPBRINGING IN OUR NECROPOLIS WAS... A LITTLE PAROCHIAL.



THE LAST SWEET KISS WAS A SMOKE-FILLED HOLE WITH TOO MANY BODIES AND TOO FEW WINDOWS, FREQUENTED MAINLY BY WHORES AND THEIR CLIENTS. I THOUGHT OF A BURIAL MOUND.

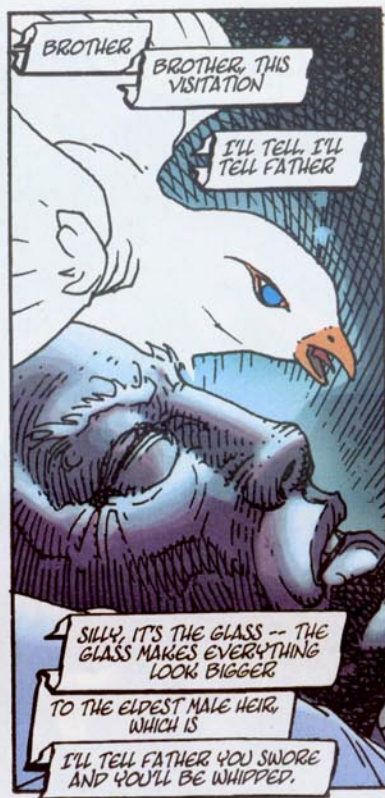
OF COURSE, THE MIND REACHES FOR THE SIMILES IT FINDS MOST READY TO HAND.







DREAM, LORD BULGUS.
 DREAM OF YOUR BROTHER, MALACHI, AND YOUR NEPHEW, SONATHAN.



BROTHER
 BROTHER, THIS VISITATION
 I'LL TELL, I'LL TELL FATHER
 SILLY, IT'S THE GLASS -- THE GLASS MAKES EVERYTHING LOOK BIGGER
 TO THE ELDEST MALE HEIR, WHICH IS
 I'LL TELL FATHER YOU SWORE AND YOU'LL BE WHIPPED.



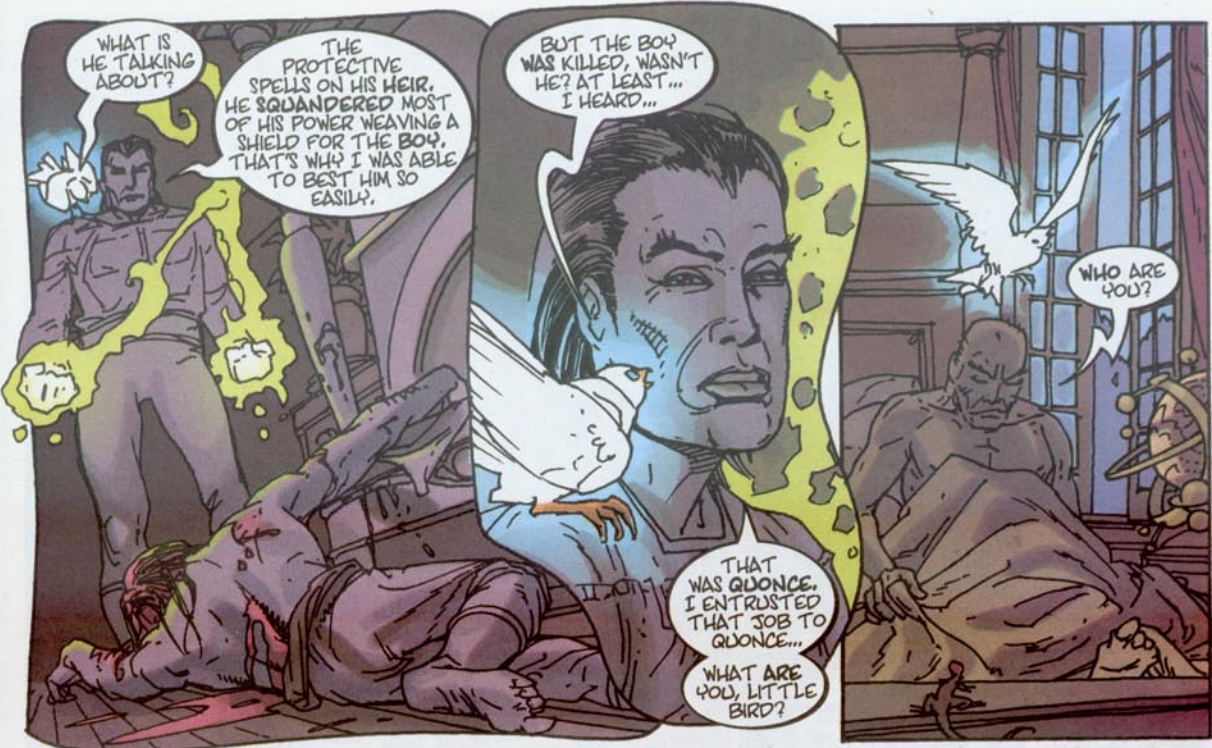
BROTHER PHRAX, THIS VISITATION IS NEITHER WELCOME NOR CONVENIENT. IF YOU WANT TO CHALLENGE THE WILL, SPEAK TO BAL OPHPHRO, I'LL SEE YOU IN THE MORNING.



NO, THAT YOU WILL NOT.



RECREANT! YOU... WON'T... INHERIT. THERE IS STILL SONATHAN... AND YOU CAN'T... TOUCH HIM.



WHAT IS HE TALKING ABOUT?

THE PROTECTIVE SPELLS ON HIS HEIR. HE SQUANDERED MOST OF HIS POWER WEAVING A SHIELD FOR THE BOY. THAT'S WHY I WAS ABLE TO BEST HIM SO EASILY.

BUT THE BOY WAS KILLED, WASN'T HE? AT LEAST... I HEARD...

WHO ARE YOU?

THAT WAS QUONCE. I ENTRUSTED THAT JOB TO QUONCE...

WHAT ARE YOU, LITTLE BIRD?



BETTER TO HAVE COME AS A RAVEN, PERHAPS.



YOU MIGHT HAVE MADE A MORE DIFFICULT TARGET.



BUT THE CARRIAGE ITSELF COST A HUNDRED GUINEAS, OF COURSE, EVEN WITHOUT THE EQUIPAGE.

AYE, YOU MIGHT JUST AS WELL CHUCK YOUR MONEY DOWN A WELL.

THIS TOKAY IS EXCELLENT, MELDRED. WHAT VINTAGE IS IT?



THE '26. TOLLY CAN BRING US UP A COUPLE MORE...

ALICE!

... A MAN SCARCE EVER GETS TO FINISH A SENTENCE IN THIS HOUSE.



MELDRED, THAT'S ALICE! WHAT'S HAPPENED?

I DON'T KNOW! PERHAPS THERE'S A MOUSE IN THE MUSIC ROOM.



MY MISTRESS! OH, MY MISTRESS! HELP HER! IN THE GODS' NAME, HELP HER!

CALM YOURSELF, ALICE. WHERE IS SHE? WHERE IS MY DAUGHTER?

IN HER ROOM! SHE'S SICK! OH, SHE'S SICK, SHE'S SICK!



I WARRANT SHE'S ONLY FAINTED. DOGMA, LOVE, STAY WITH OUR GUESTS.

SPARE ME, MELDRED, I WILL NOT.



CALCINIA? ARE YOU WELL?

LOOK UP, CALCINIA.



DEAREST, WILL YOU NOT LOOK UP?



EVENING, TOLLY.

EVENING, ANGELE, TANKARD OF STOUT, WESSEL AND DRAW IT FAST. I'M TAKING THE POST COACH TO VEI IN TEN MINUTES.



LOOKS LIKE RAIN OUT THERE, AND THAT'S THE LAST POST TODAY. YOU'LL BE OBLIGED TO SPEND THE NIGHT IN VEI.

NO, I'LL BE RIDING BACK IN THE HEARSE TONIGHT--

-- IF I CAN FIND AN UNDERTAKER WHO'LL TAKE SIX GUINEAS FOR THE JOB.

IN THE HEARSE, YOU SAY? A DEATH IN THE FAMILY, IS IT, TOLLY?



AYE, IT IS, MY MASTER'S ELDEST DAUGHTER, CALCINIA.

SHE DIED THIS EVENING, JUST BEFORE SUPPER -- AND WITH MASTER ABOUT TO HAVE HER BANNS READ, TOO.



ABOUT TO BE MARRIED. THAT'S A GREAT SADNESS, THEN.

AYE, JUST CHOKED AND DIED, ALICE SAYS. THERE ONE MOMENT, GONE THE NEXT.

YOU JUST NEVER KNOW, DO YOU? IN THE MIDST OF LIFE...

IN THE MIDST OF LIFE YOU CAN JUST CHOKE AND DIE.

I WAS TORN AT THAT POINT BETWEEN TWO FEELINGS: THAT MY OWN SELF-RESPECT WOULD NOT LET ME DRUM UP TRADE IN AN ALEHOUSE...
... AND THAT THE UNIVERSE WAS PUSHING THE COMMISSION UPON ME WHETHER I WOULD OR NO.



EXCUSE ME, SIR. IT MAY BE THAT I CAN SAVE YOU A JOURNEY.

MY NAME IS PETREFAX. I'M AN UNDERTAKER.

PETREFAX
JOURNEYMAN OF
LITHARGE
UNDERTAKER
FUNERAL
EMBALM



TRAINED IN THE NECROPOLIS LITHARGE?

YES SIR, AND FULLY VERSED AND PRACTICED IN EVERY BRANCH OF THE FUNERARY ART.

THEN WHY ARE YOU WANDERING THE ROADS LIKE A TINKER?



I'M A JOURNEYMAN, MR. SMITH, BUT I OFFER A FULL AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICE.



FOR THE SIX GUINEAS STIPULATED I WILL BUILD FOR YOUR DAUGHTER A CASKET OF FINEST ROSEWOOD -- THE INTERIOR OF SAMITE VELVET, THE FURNITURE OF POLISHED BRASS...

WELL PERHAPS WE COULD CUT BACK ON THE VELVET AND SAY FIVE GUINEAS AND SOME ODD SHILLINGS.



WHAT DO YOU THINK DOGMA, MY LOVE?

I'M BEYOND THOUGHT. I LEAVE IT IN YOUR HANDS. TELL HIM HE MUST OFFICIATE, AND EMBALM HER TOO.



CAN YOU SPEAK THE DIMITTIS, AND THE PROCESSIO? I'M NOT HIRING YOU AS A CARPENTER, AFTER ALL.

YES, I CAN OFFICIATE.

AND THE... PREPARATION? THE... LAYING OUT?

OF COURSE, MR. SMITH, THAT'S UNDERSTOOD.



VERY WELL, MASTER PETERFAX, YOU'RE ENGAGED. I'LL SHOW YOU TO MY DAUGHTER'S ROOM.

THANK YOU, SIR, MRS. SMITH, GODS' BYE YOU.



SHE'S VERY BEAUTIFUL, AND HER FACE BESPEAKS AN HONEST, OPEN NATURE, YOU MUST HAVE LOVED HER VERY MUCH.

AYE, THAT WE DID.

IF YOU NEED TO LIFT HER, CALL FOR TOLEMEN OR BEDGER, THEY'RE DULL AS POSTS BUT VERY WILLING.

THANK YOU, ALL I NEED IS SOME HOT WATER.

THEY SAY THAT ASSASSINS HAVE A MYSTERIOUS AFFINITY WITH THE MEN AND WOMEN THEY MURDER.

THAT HAS ALWAYS STRUCK ME AS UNLIKELY, BUT CERTAINLY I FEEL A GREAT CLOSENESS TO THE CLIENT IN THE WASHING AND THE LAYING OUT, NOT FROM SENTIMENTALITY, BUT FROM THE INTIMACY OF THE ACT.

LIKE LOVER WITH LEMAN, OR PARENT WITH CHILD.



FOR US, THERE IS NO LOSS INVOLVED, BUT STILL...

SOUL LOOKS FOR SOUL AND FINDS AN EMPTY HOUSE. IT IS A MOMENT THAT PROMPTS THE MOST INTENSE EMOTION.



HHHKKAAAH!!!





HIKIKK
CAN'T...CAN'T
CATCH MY
BREATH!

HELP
ME! FOR
THE GODS'
SAKE HELP ME!
I CAN'T
BREATHE!



LIE BACK,
YOU'VE HAD A...
A NARCOLEPSY OF
SOME KIND, YOU
WERE TAKEN
FOR DEAD.

THIS IS
MY ROOM,
BUT AM I
HERE? THE
COLD...

I
CANNOT
THINK, HELP
ME.



MY HAND CLOSED
AROUND HER WRIST,
AND THERE IT WAS,
NOT A NARCOLEPSY,
NOT A SEIZURE.

THE SILENCE OF
HER PULSE CRIED
OUT THE TRUTH.

AND MY FACE
BETRAYED ME
JUST AS SURELY.



I'M DEAD,
THEN.

N...NO,
NO, THAT'S
ABSURD. HOW
CAN YOU
BE...?

I AM
DEAD, AND
YOU ARE MY
UNDERTAKER.
HAH.



HE HAS TORN AWAY PART OF
MY SOUL, AND THERE IS NOT
ENOUGH LEFT TO MAKE MY
HEART MOVE. I AM
UNDONE.

BUT YOUR
FAMILY IS WEALTHY.
HOWEVER THIS...
THING HAS
HAPPENED, THERE
ARE MAGES
WHO COULD...

NO!
GODS,
NO!



YOU MUST
SAY NOTHING
TO THEM, IF WORD
OF MY DEATH IS
ALREADY GIVEN OUT...
AND THEN I AM
SEEN ALIVE...

LORD BULGUS
WILL KNOW IT WAS
I WHO SPIED INTO
HIS DREAMS. HE WILL
DESTROY ME
UTTERLY.

SHE TOLD ME THEN OF WHAT SHE HAD DONE, OF PHRAX BULGUS'S CRIME, AND OF HIS TERRIBLE RAGE.

AND THEN SHE STOPPED.

I... I CAN HARDLY MOVE MY HAND. I FEEL AS IF I'M TURNING INTO A STATUE.

IT IS A GREAT EFFORT... EVEN TO TALK.

I TOLD HER THE TRUTH BECAUSE THE TRUTH IS THE EASIEST LIE. I DID NOT WANT TO SPEAK JUST THEN OF THE HORSE TRIALS THAT SORELY AWAITED HER.

IT IS THE RIGOR.

THE POISONS YOUR BODY CAN'T PURGE ARE COLLECTING IN YOUR JOINTS AS A VISCOUS MASS THAT STIFFENS AND LOCKS THE MUSCLES.

IF YOUR MODESTY PERMITS... WE ARE TAUGHT TO EASE THE STIFFNESS BY MASSAGING THE LIMBS UNTIL THE MASS REGAINS ITS FLUID STATE.

YOU LAID ME OUT AND WASHED ME. I THINK MY MODESTY HAS LITTLE TO DO HERE.

AAH, YES.

YES, THAT DOES EASE IT. THE STIFFNESS IS SOMEWHAT LESS.

MASTER PETREFAX... I AM SORELY IN NEED OF A FRIEND.

I MUST FIND THIS QUONCE WHO LORD BULGUS NAMED IN HIS DREAM.

HELP YOU? HOW? MISS SMITH, I AM NO LORD OR LAWYER. I AM ONLY AN UNDERTAKER.

IF I CAN PROVE HIS GUILT, I CAN ARRAIGN HIM AT THE CONSISTORY COURT AND MAKE HIM GIVE ME BACK THE OTHER HALF OF MY SOUL. WILL YOU HELP ME?

AND I AM A CORPSE. FORGIVE MY PRESUMPTION, BUT IS NOT THE PROPER CARE AND DISPOSAL OF THE DEAD WITHIN YOUR EXPERTISE?

KNOWING YOU, MASTER, I BELIEVE YOU WOULD HAVE SEEN A WAY THROUGH THIS QUAGMIRE THAT DID NOT BETRAY EITHER THE CLIENT OR YOUR CRAFT.

I SAW NO SUCH PATH.

BUT IT IS POSSIBLE THAT I WAS NOT LOOKING AS HARD AS I MIGHT.

THE TWO DAYS THAT FOLLOWED WERE AMONG THE STRANGEST OF MY LIFE. THE COACHMAN, BEDGER, TOOK ME IN THE SMITHS' CARRIAGE TO THE TIMBER YARDS, WHERE I BOUGHT THE WOOD FOR CALCINIA'S CASKET.

THERE IS A ROOM BEHIND THE STABLES WHICH USED TO BE A FORGE. MELDRED SMITH ORDERED IT CLEARED FOR ME AND I BUILT THE CASKET THERE.

FORTUNATELY HARD AND EXACTING WORK DRIVES AWAY REFLECTION.

HE WATCHED ME AS I WORKED AND CLOSELY QUESTIONED ME. "WHY DO YOU USE A DOVETAIL JOINT RATHER THAN A MITER?"

"BECAUSE IT IS STRONGER THAN A MITER AND INVISIBLE TO EITHER FACE."

"AND WHY DO YOU NARROW THE GROOVE ON THE FEMININE SIDE BY HALF A DEGREE?"

"SO THE BEAMS WILL CLASP EACH OTHER WITHOUT NAIL OR GLUE."

FOR HIM TOO, I FELT, THIS WAS AN ANTIDOTE TO TOO MUCH THOUGHT.

THROUGHOUT THIS TIME CALCINIA WAS DISPLAYED IN STATE TO THE LOCAL GENTRY.

THEY ADMIRER MY SKILL, SWEARING THAT SHE LOOKED AS IF SHE WOULD AT ANY MOMENT STAND UP, RUB HER EYES AND GO DOWN TO BREAKFAST.

FORTUNATELY, THE RIGOR WAS AT ITS HEIGHT, OTHERWISE I BELIEVE SHE MIGHT HAVE DONE SO.

BY THE END OF THE SECOND DAY THE COFFIN WAS COMPLETE AND MELDRED PRONOUNCED HIMSELF WELL PLEASED.

DECEIT DOES NOT COME EASILY TO ME: HIS SIX GUINEAS SAT IN MY POCKET AS UNDIGESTED FOOD MIGHT SIT IN MY STOMACH.

TOLEMEN AND BEDGER CARRIED THE CASKET TO CALCINIA'S ROOM AND HELPED ME TO PLACE HER IN IT. THEY WATCHED AS I NAILED DOWN THE LID.

WHEN THEY WERE GONE I PULLED THE NAILS SO THAT CALCINIA COULD CLIMB OUT. SHE WOULD BE SAFEST HIDING IN HER OWN ROOM UNTIL THE FUNERAL WAS UNDER WAY, WHEN SHE MIGHT SAFELY SHIP AWAY.

UPON WHAT DID SHE BASE HER HOPE?

UPON A BARE NAME, TORN FROM PHRYX BULGUS'S UNGUARDED DREAMS. UPON THE MERCY OF THE CONSISTORY, KNOWN FOR THEIR CRUELTY AND CORRUPTION.

WE WOULD MEET LATER AT THE GYPSY CAMP.

AND MOST UNWISELY OF ALL UPON ME, TO PROTECT AND MEND HER AS HER OWN FLESH ATE ITSELF...

...AND PESTILENCE OPENED IN HER LIKE A FLOWER.



RIDE ON, BEDGER -- AND HOLD HIM TO A WALK, TOLEMEN, YOU'RE LEADING A CORTEGE, NOT CRYING THE NEWS, SO IT'S A SLOW PEAL.

YES, SIR.

YOU TOLD US ONCE, MASTER KLAPROTH, ABOUT THE INDIGENES OF THE NORTHERN MARSHES, WHOSE MANNER OF DISPOSING OF THEIR DEAD IS TO STAKE THE BODY TO A TREE SO THAT BEASTS DEVOUR IT AND INSECTS NEST IN IT.



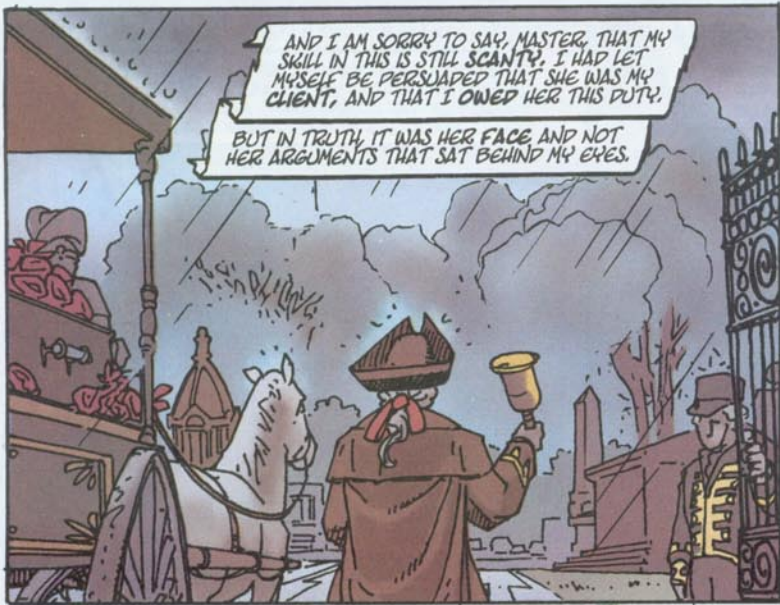
"IS IT MORE CIVILIZED TO HIDE THE DEAD IN A BOX THAN TO DISPLAY THEM?" YOU DEMANDED.

"IS IT A GREATER PROOF OF LOVE TO EMBALM THE ONE YOU'VE LOST THAN TO EAT THEM, SAY, OR TO DISSOLVE THEM WITH LIME?"

"YOUR STAY HERE WILL BE SHORT INDEED IF YOU CAN'T SEE PAST THE ACTION TO THE HEART THAT WISHED IT AND THE HAND THAT GUIDED IT."



IT WAS THE FIRST YEAR OF MY APPRENTICESHIP, AND MY DISGUST AT SUCH BARBARISM SHOWED ON MY FACE. YOU MADE ME STAND.



AND I AM SORRY TO SAY, MASTER, THAT MY SKILL IN THIS IS STILL SCANTY. I HAD LET MYSELF BE PERSUADED THAT SHE WAS MY CLIENT, AND THAT I OWED HER THIS DUTY.

BUT IN TRUTH, IT WAS HER FACE AND NOT HER ARGUMENTS THAT SAT BEHIND MY EYES.



AND THE SERVICE I WAS TO PERFORM? IT WAS A SMALL OBSTACLE BETWEEN ME AND HER, TO BE VAULTED OVER WITHOUT BREAKING STRIDE.

I BETRAYED MY OFFICE, I PROFANED OUR MYSTERY.

AND MY HEART SANG.





WHAT AILS YOU THERE, BEDGER?

NOTHIN', MASTER. THE NAILS IS DROVE IN RIGHT 'ARD, BUT THEY'M COMING, SURE.

AND HERE SHE IS, AS BIG...



...AS...
...LIFE?

WHAT?

WHAT IS THIS? WHAT IS THIS, MASTER PETREFAX? WHAT ARE WE LOOKING AT?



AND WHERE IS OUR DAUGHTER?

TAKE HIM! SEIZE HOLD OF HIM! MAKE HIM ANSWER!

BY THE GODS HE'LL ANSWER OR HE'LL HANG FOR IT!



GRAVEROBBER! MONSTER! DESPOILER OF SEPULCHERS!

IN THE FOREST, THEN. SOMEONE FETCH A ROPE.

HANG HIM!

NOT HERE! THIS IS HOLY GROUND.



AT WHICH POINT, MASTER KLAPROTH, IT WAS BORNE UPON ME THAT IT WOULD BE SOME TIME BEFORE THIS LETTER WAS COMPLETED.

AND THAT MY TRAVELS MIGHT BE CONSIDERABLY...

...EVEN INDEFINITELY...

...POSTPONED.

TO BE CONTINUED