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THEN, AS IF ON PURPOSE THEY BEGAN TO DETACH THEMSELVES AND FLOAT LAZILY DOWN.

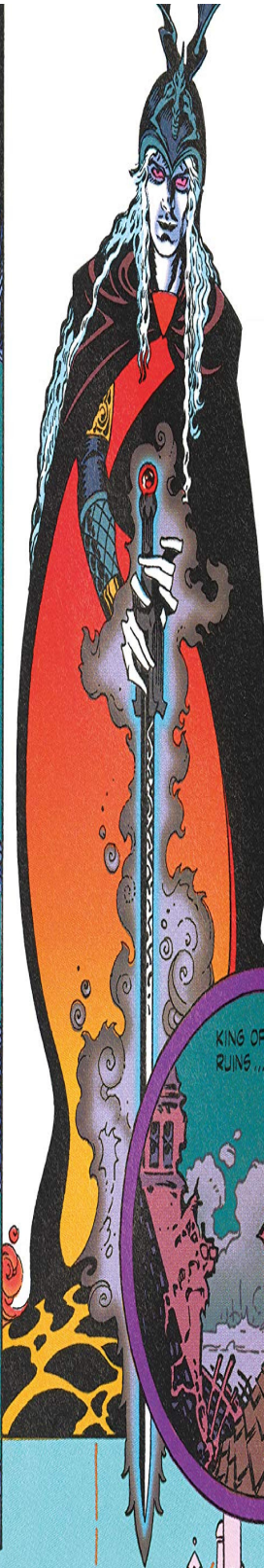


AND HE CLIMBERED UP THE REMAINING STEPS, FIGHTING OFF THE LEAVES WHICH SWARMED LIKE LOCUSTS AROUND HIM.



PROLOGUE

THERE CAME A TIME WHEN THERE WAS GREAT MOVEMENT UPON THE EARTH AND ABOVE IT, WHEN THE DESTINY OF MEN AND GODS WAS HAMMERED OUT UPON THE FORGE OF FATE, WHEN MONSTROUS WARS WERE BREWED AND MIGHTY DEEDS WERE DESIGNED.

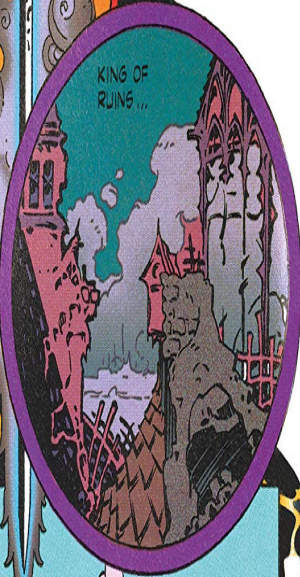


AND THERE ROSE UP IN THIS TIME, WHICH WAS CALLED THE AGE OF THE YOUNG KINGDOMS, HEROES.

GREATEST OF THESE HEROES WAS A DOOM-DRIVEN ADVENTURER WHO BORE A CROONING RUNEBLADE THAT HE LOATHED.

HIS NAME WAS **ELRIC** OF MELNIBONÉ ...

KING OF RUINS ...



LORD OF A SCATTERED RACE THAT HAD ONCE RULED THE WORLD.

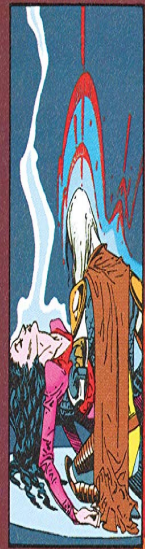


ELRIC, BORDERER ...



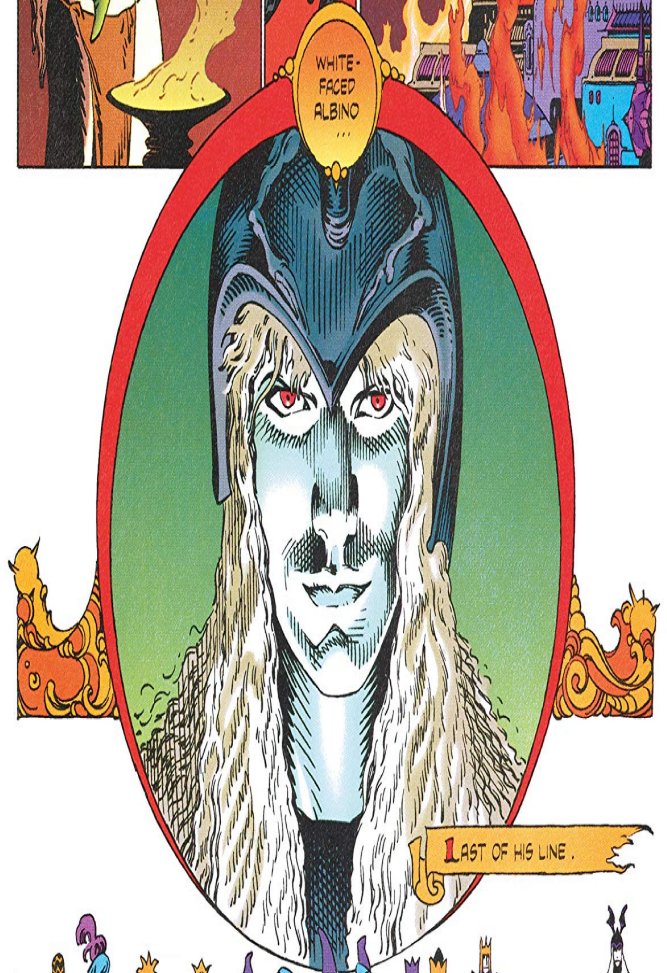
AND SWORDSMAN ...

SLAYER OF KIN ...



DESPOILER OF HIS HOMETOWN ...

WHITE-FACED ALBINO ...



LAST OF HIS LINE.





I HAD BEST PAY MY RESPECTS TO QUEEN YISHANA, ON ACCOUNT OF OUR OLD BOND. BUT I DO NOT WANT HER TO KNOW OF MY WIFE'S DISAPPEARANCE...

OTHERWISE SHE MAY TRY TO HINDER ME. WE SHALL JUST SAY THAT I HAVE COME TO AID HER OUT OF FRIENDSHIP.

GOOD MORNING, WOLF. HAVE YOU FORSAKEN YOUR WIFE FOR SUBTLER PLEASURES?

NO.

I'M DISAPPOINTED.

AYE, THESE ARE STANDARD MILITARY TACTICS. AND WHAT OF THE ENEMY?

WE HAVE MORE NUMBERS - BUT THEY HAVE DEVIL RIDERS AND HUNTING TIGERS...

...THERE ARE ALSO SOME BEASTS THEY KEEP IN CAGES...

...BUT WE CANNOT GUESS WHAT THEY ARE SINCE THE CAGES ARE COVERED...

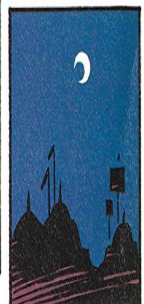
I HEARD THE MEN OF MYRRHN ARE FLYING HITHER. THE IMPORT MUST BE GREAT FOR THEM TO LEAVE THEIR BYRIES.

IF WE LOSE THIS BATTLE, CHAOS COULD EASILY ENGLUF THE EARTH AND RULE OVER IT.

EVERY ORACLE FROM HERE TO SHAZAR SAYS THE SAME THING, THAT JAGREEN LERN IS BUT THE TOOL OF LESS NATURAL MASTERS, THAT HE IS AIDED BY THE LORDS OF CHAOS.

WE ARE NOT ONLY FIGHTING FOR OUR LANDS, ELCIC, WE ARE FIGHTING FOR THE HUMAN RACE.

THEN LET US HOPE WE WIN.



I SEE YOU ARE PREPARING FOR MORE THAN A SKIRMISH. WHAT FORCES HAVE YOU AND WHAT ARE YOUR CHANCES OF WINNING?

THERE ARE MY OWN WHITE LEOPARDS - THEY ARE TRAINED TO KILL AND KILLING IS ALL THEY KNOW. THERE ARE MY OTHER TROOPS, INFANTRY AND CAVALRY FROM SHAZAR, AND A THOUSAND FOOT SOLDIERS, AND TWO HUNDRED MOUNTED MEN FROM TARKESH. IN ALL, PERHAPS SIX THOUSAND WARRIORS.

SERFS AND GLAVES WILL MEET THE INITIAL ONSLAUGHT, OF COURSE, AND WILL DIE IN THE EARLY PART OF THE BATTLE.



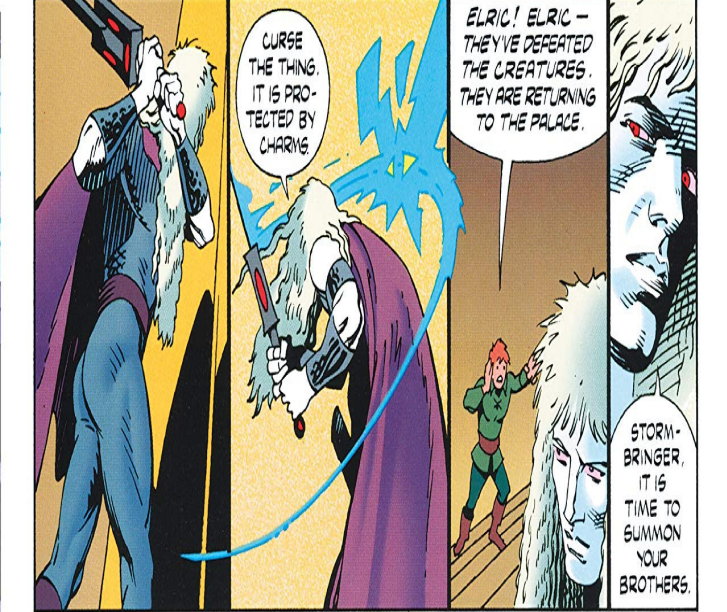
MORTAL WEAPONS CAN- NOT HARM YOU! BUT THESE ARE BEASTS OF YOUR OWN PLANE - SAMPLE THEIR FEROCITY!



SLAM



ELRIC SAW ARIOCH SHOUT, RAVE AND THEN HIS BODY SEEMED TO SPLIT APART AND RISE IN A NEW LESS-RECOGNIZ- ABLE SHAPE AS THE BEASTS ATTACKED.



CURSE THE THING. IT IS PRO- TECTED BY CHARMS

ELRIC! ELRIC - THEY'VE DEFEATED THE CREATURES. THEY ARE RETURNING TO THE PALACE.

STORM- BRINGER, IT IS TIME TO SUMMON YOUR BROTHERS.



SURELY THOSE CREATURES WILL NOT DE- FEAT THE ARIS- TOCRACY OF HELL.

I DO NOT EXPECT THEM TO, BUT IF I FINISH JAGREEN LERN, AT LEAST IT COULD PUT AN END TO HIS CON- QUESTS AND DEMON SUMMONING.

YOUR ALLIES WERE NOT SO STRONG AS YOU BE- LIEVED, JA- GREEN LERN.

No...

WHY, YOU FOOLISH LATE- COMER, DID YOU THINK YOUR KNOW- LEDGE MATCHED THAT OF A MELNIBONEAN!

DUKES! DUKES! DO NOT DESERT ME NOW!



ELRIC BEGAN TO CHANT THE MIND- TORTURING THROAT- TORTURING RUNE THAT SEPIRIZ HAD TAUGHT HIM. STORMBRINGER MOANED A COUNTERPOINT CHORUS TO THE DIRGE AS THE BATTLE- WORN DUKES ASSUMED DIFFERENT SHAPES AND BEGAN TO RISE MENACINGLY TOWARDS ELRIC.

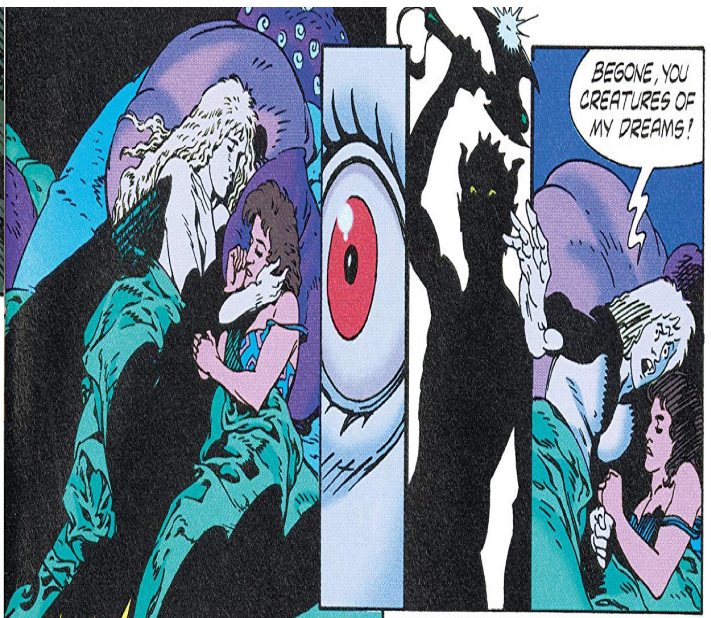




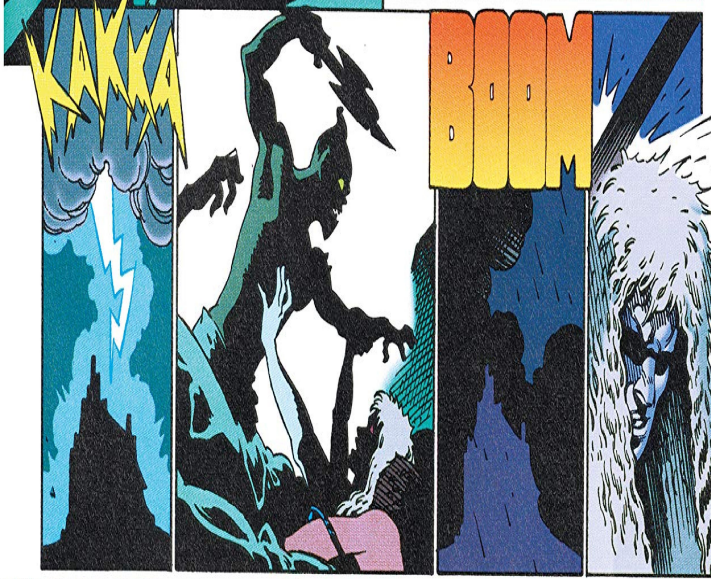
CHAOS HAS AIDED US IN THIS MATTER. THIS STORM IS OF THEIR DOING.



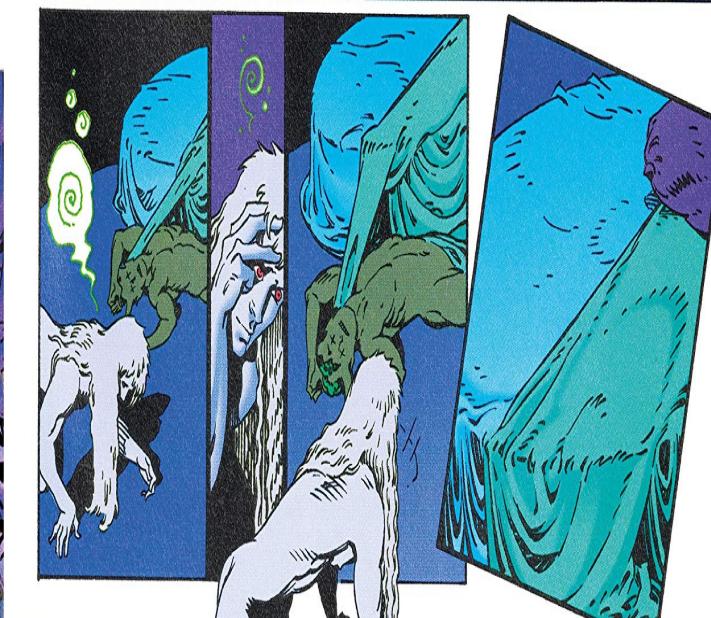
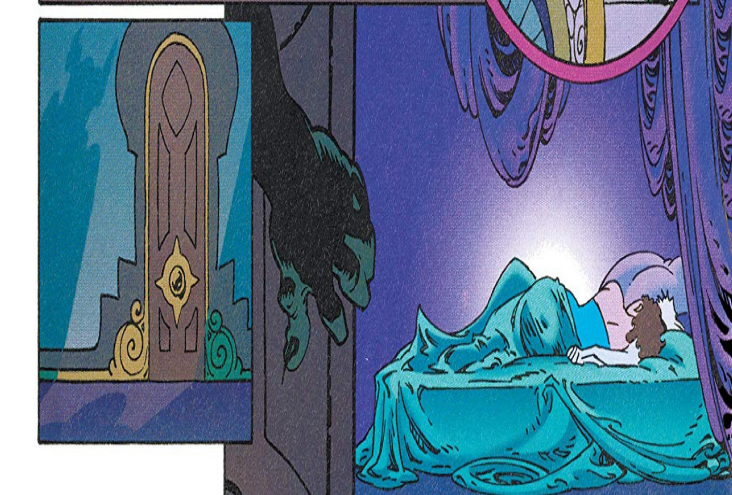
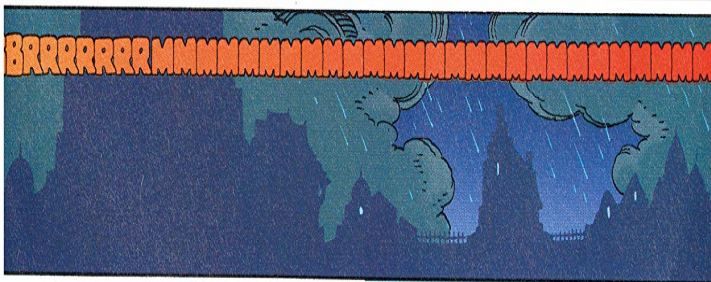
THE LORDS OF CHAOS ARE GOOD TO THEIR SERVANTS.

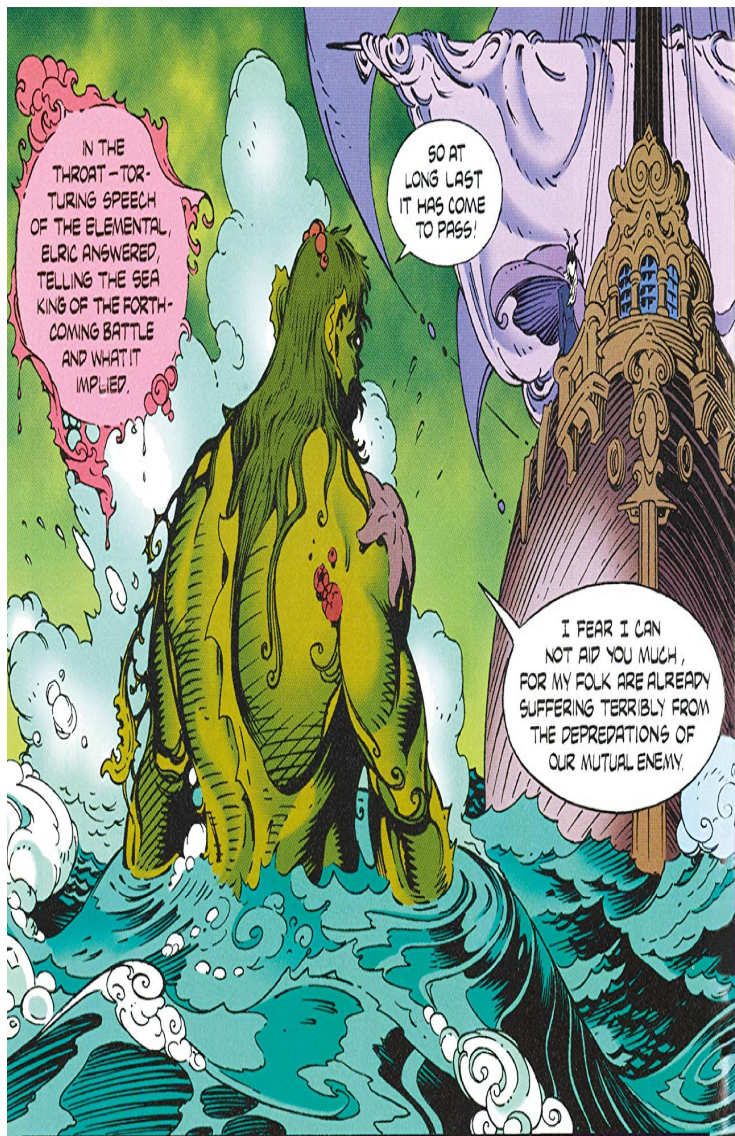


BEGONE, YOU CREATURES OF MY DREAMS!



SEE - ALREADY THE GUARDS FALL IN MAGIC SLUMBER AND OUR ENTRANCE MADE SIMPLE.

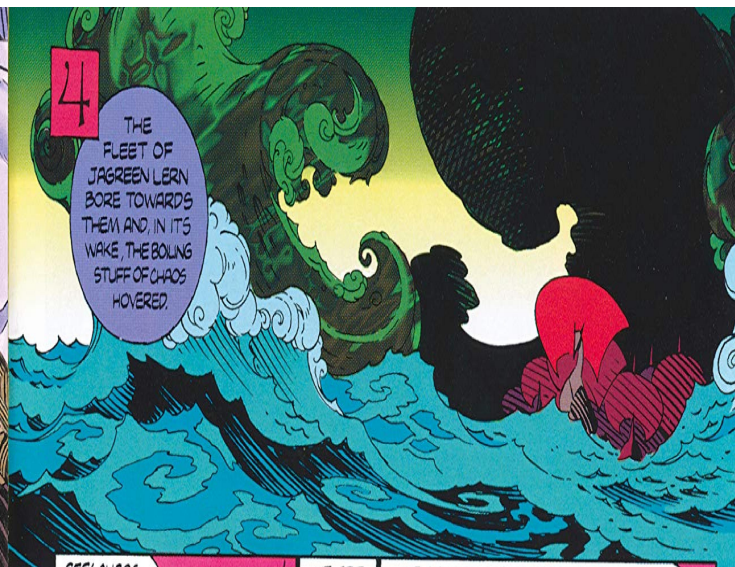




IN THE THROAT-TORTURING SPEECH OF THE ELEMENTAL, ELRIC ANSWERED, TELLING THE SEA KING OF THE FORTH-COMING BATTLE AND WHAT IT IMPLIED.

SO AT LONG LAST IT HAS COME TO PASS!

I FEAR I CAN NOT AID YOU MUCH, FOR MY FOLK ARE ALREADY SUFFERING TERRIBLY FROM THE DEPREDACTIONS OF OUR MUTUAL ENEMY.



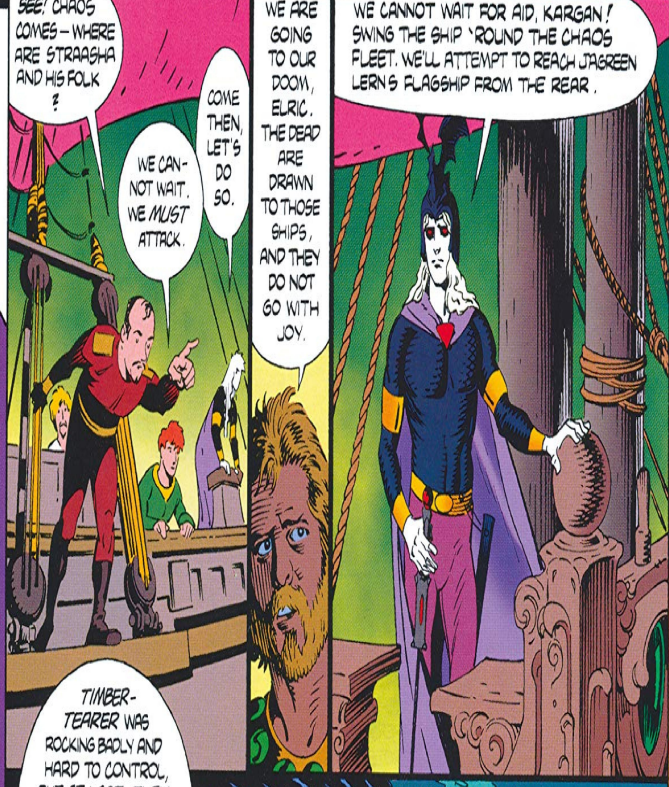
THE FLEET OF JAGREEN LERN BORE TOWARDS THEM AND, IN ITS WAKE, THE BOILING STUFF OF CHAOS HOVERED.



WE SHALL ATTEMPT TO AID YOU IF WE CAN.

THAT'S ALL I CAN PROMISE. UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN...

...FAREWELL.



SEE! CHAOS COMES - WHERE ARE STRAASHA AND HIS FOLK?

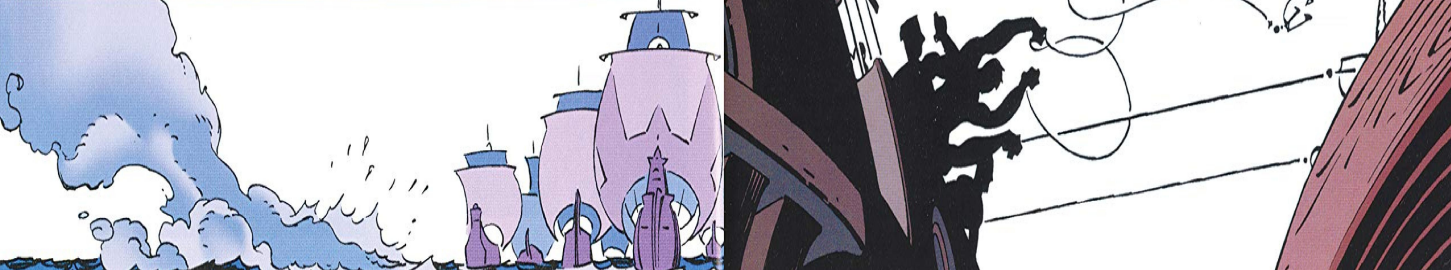
WE CANNOT WAIT. WE MUST ATTACK.

COME THEN, LET'S DO SO.

WE ARE GOING TO OUR DOOM, ELRIC. THE DEAD ARE DRAWN TO THOSE SHIPS, AND THEY DO NOT GO WITH JOY.

WE CANNOT WAIT FOR AID, KARGAN! SINCE THE SHIP 'ROUND THE CHAOS FLEET. WE'LL ATTEMPT TO REACH JAGREEN LERN'S FLAGSHIP FROM THE REAR.

TIMBER-TEARER WAS ROCKING BADLY AND HARD TO CONTROL, BUT AT LAST, THEY WERE AROUND THE HELL FLEET AND BEARING DOWN ON JAGREEN LERN'S VESSEL FROM THE REAR.



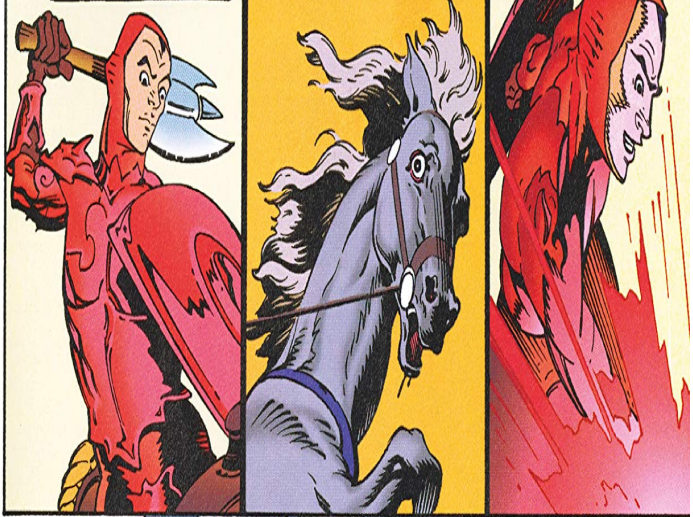
SLIDING ALONGSIDE THE FLAGSHIP, THEY FLUNG OUT GRAPPLING IRONS, DRAGGING THEM TOWARDS THE THEOCRAT'S VESSEL.

THE ARCHERS' ARROWS SPREAD A RATTLING BLACK CLOUD ABOVE THEM...

AS ELRIC LED THE FIRST WAVE OF INFANTRY DOWN THE HILL TO MEET THE VAN OF THE ENEMY ARMY.

NOW THE SOUND OF WAR-SHOUTS SMASHED THROUGH THE STILL DAWN AS THE OPPOSING ARMIES CLASHED.

THE THEOCRAT'S FLAME-RED BUCKLER TURNED AWAY STORMBRINGER'S SWING-PROVING THE SHIELD TO BE TREATED AGAINST BORGEROUS WEAPONS. STORM-BRINGER TURNED SCREAMING ITS ANGER.



I WAS TOLD YOU'D BE HERE WHITEFACE.

JAG-REEN LERN!

I KNOW YOU ELRIC, AND I KNOW YOUR DOOM.

TOO MANY MEN APPEAR TO KNOW MY DESTINY BETTER THAN I.

PERHAPS IF I SLAY YOU, THEOCRAT, I MAY FORCE THE SECRET FROM YOU BEFORE YOU DIE?

OH, NO! THAT IS NOT MY MASTERS' PLAN AT ALL.

WELL, MAYHAP TIS MINE!

SADLY, YOUR LIFE IS NOT MINE TO TAKE, WHITEFACE. THAT IS FOR OTHER POWERS. IF YOU LIVE AND WE ARE THE VICTORS - I WILL SEEK YOU OUT, PERHAPS.

