

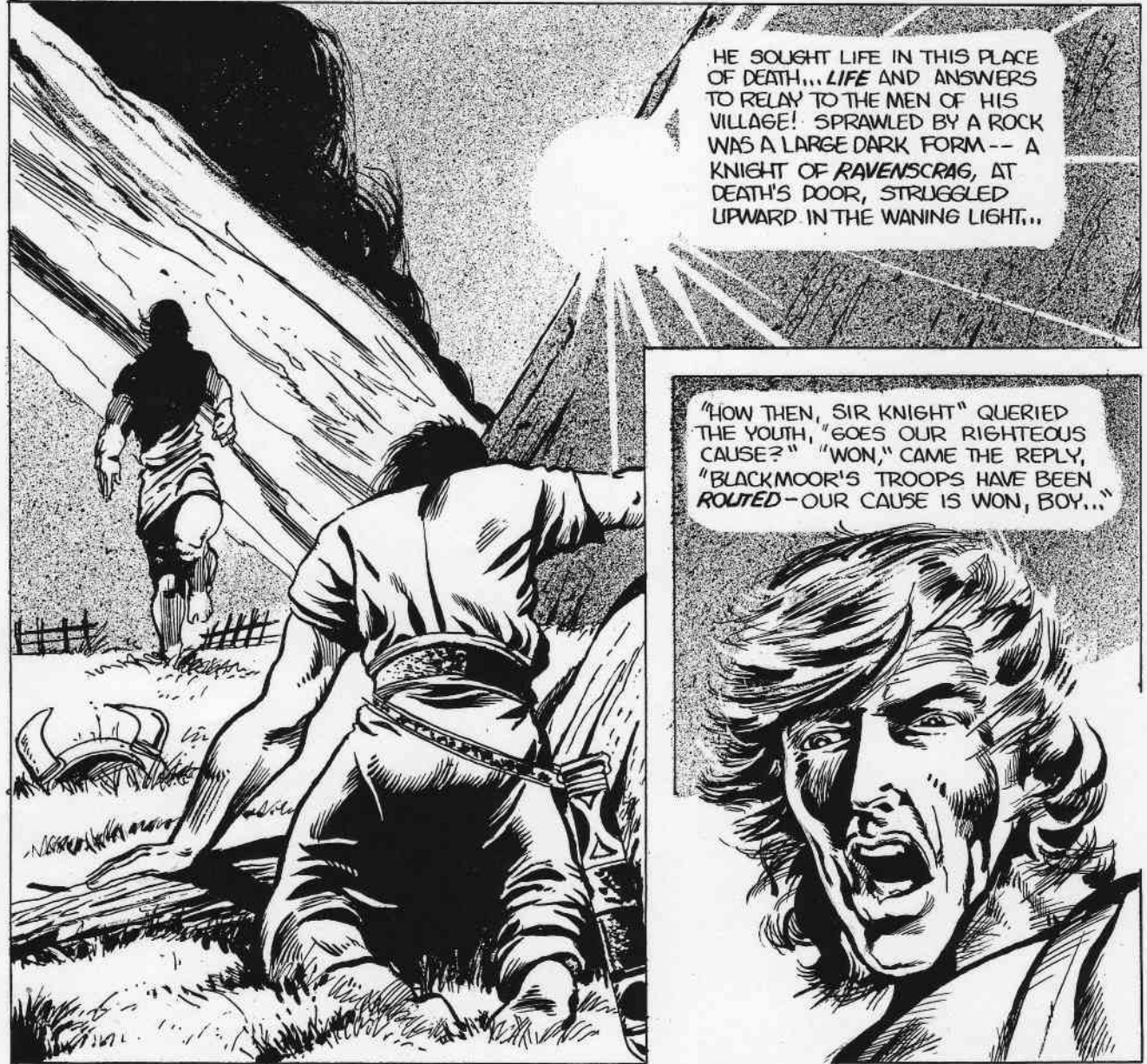


100020 Line Plot

the **MASQUE** PART THE FIRST "A STRANGER at TWILIGHT!"
 ART AND STORY: DAVE SIM



THE BATTLE WAS DONE AS A SLIM FIGURE SLIPPED BETWEEN THE FLAMING HUTS OF THE *SHEMARIAN* FARMING VILLAGE...

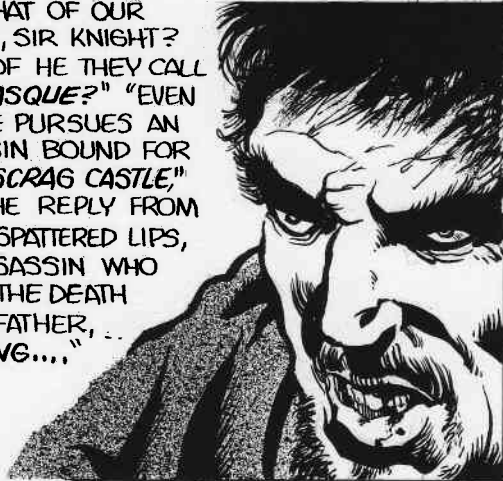


HE SOUGHT LIFE IN THIS PLACE OF DEATH... *LIFE* AND ANSWERS TO RELAY TO THE MEN OF HIS VILLAGE! SPRAWLED BY A ROCK WAS A LARGE DARK FORM -- A KNIGHT OF *RAVENSCRAG*, AT DEATH'S DOOR, STRUGGLED UPWARD IN THE WANING LIGHT...

"HOW THEN, SIR KNIGHT" QUERIED THE YOUTH, "GOES OUR RIGHTEOUS CAUSE?" "WON," CAME THE REPLY, "BLACKMOOR'S TROOPS HAVE BEEN *ROUTED* - OUR CAUSE IS WON, BOY..."



"AND WHAT OF OUR PRINCE, SIR KNIGHT? WHAT OF HE THEY CALL THE *MASQUE*?" "EVEN NOW HE PURSUES AN ASSASSIN BOUND FOR *RAVENS CRAG CASTLE*," CAME THE REPLY FROM BLOOD-SPATTERED LIPS, "AN ASSASSIN WHO SEEKS THE DEATH OF HIS FATHER, ... THE *KING*..."



THE SHIFTING BLACK FORM DARTED AWAY FROM THE PURSUING HORSE AND RIDER, BLACK HOOVES CLAWED LOOSENED STONES FROM PLACE! *THE MASQUE* SWORE TO HIMSELF HE WOULD CHASE THE BLACK FORM...



...TO THE VERY GATES OF HELL, IF NECESSARY...!



FEW COULD BEST THE MASKED PRINCE IN HORSEMANSHIP, BUT... SEEMINGLY WITHOUT EFFORT...THE DARK FIGURE WAS DOING JUST THAT! DRIVING HIS MOUNT THROUGH A SHALLOW STREAM, *THE MASQUE'S* QUARRY MADE FOR THE CONCEALMENT OF THE SURROUNDING WOODS



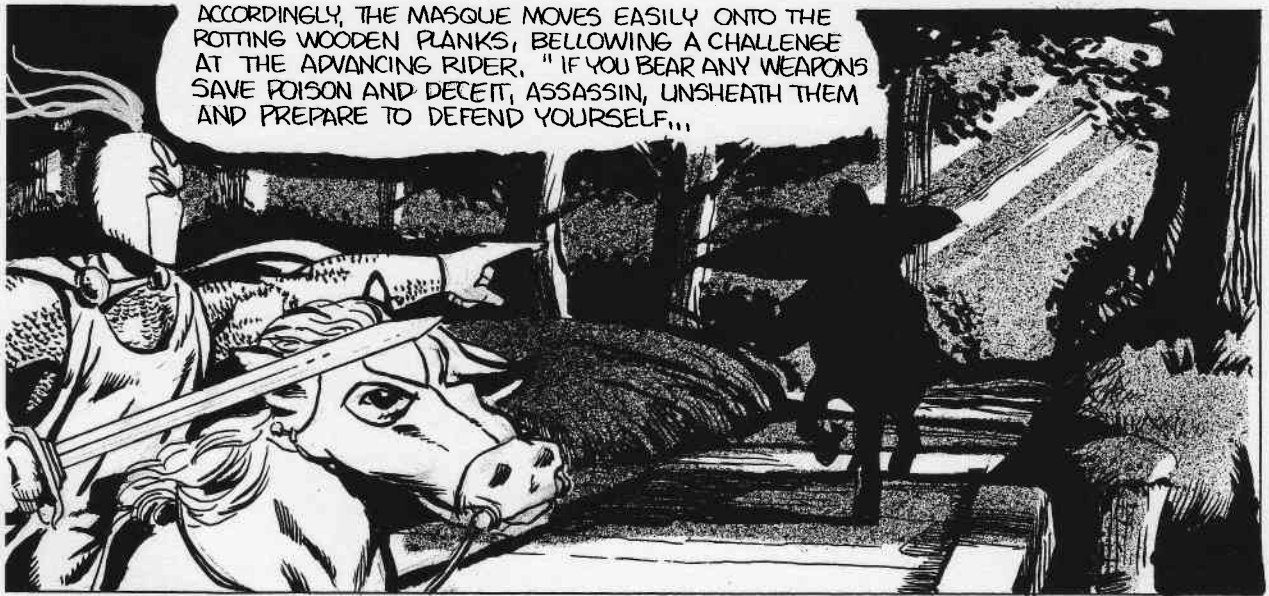
"HE SEEKS THE ROAD TO *RAVENS CRAG*," THOUGHT *THE MASQUE* TO HIMSELF! HAVING PLAYED IN THESE VERY WOODS AS A CHILD, *THE MASQUE* DECIDES HE WILL ADD HIS KNOWLEDGE OF THE TERRAIN TO HIS HORSEMANSHIP IN THE HOPES OF TIPPING THE SCALES OF THE CHASE IN HIS FAVOUR...



DECIDING UPON A SUITABLE LOCATION FOR BATTLE, HE TURNS OFF THE TRAIL, URSING HIS MOUNT WITH SOFT COMMANDS THROUGH TWISTING AND NARROW PATHWAYS, THE SETTING SUN WINKING AT HIM THROUGH THE SURROUNDING BRANCHES AND LEAVES



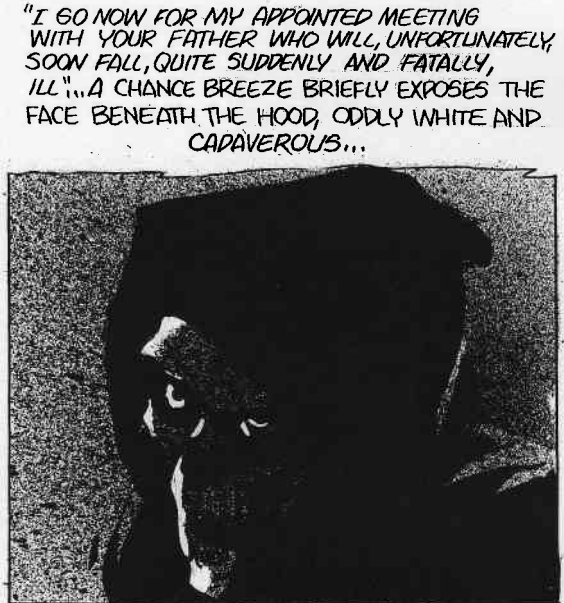
ARRIVING AT HIS DESTINATION, *THE MASQUE* WAS ASTOUNDED TO FIND HIS OPPONENT ALREADY MAKING HASTE TOWARD THE FOOT-BRIDGE, THOUGH THE DISTANCE HE HAD COVERED WAS EASILY TWICE THAT OF *THE MASQUE*! ... AN ASSASSIN RANKED SOMEWHAT LOWER THAN A SNAKE IN THE ESTIMATION OF THE PRINCE OF *RAVENS CRAG* AND SO HE PREPARED TO MAKE SHORT WORK OF THE MYSTERIOUS FIGURE...



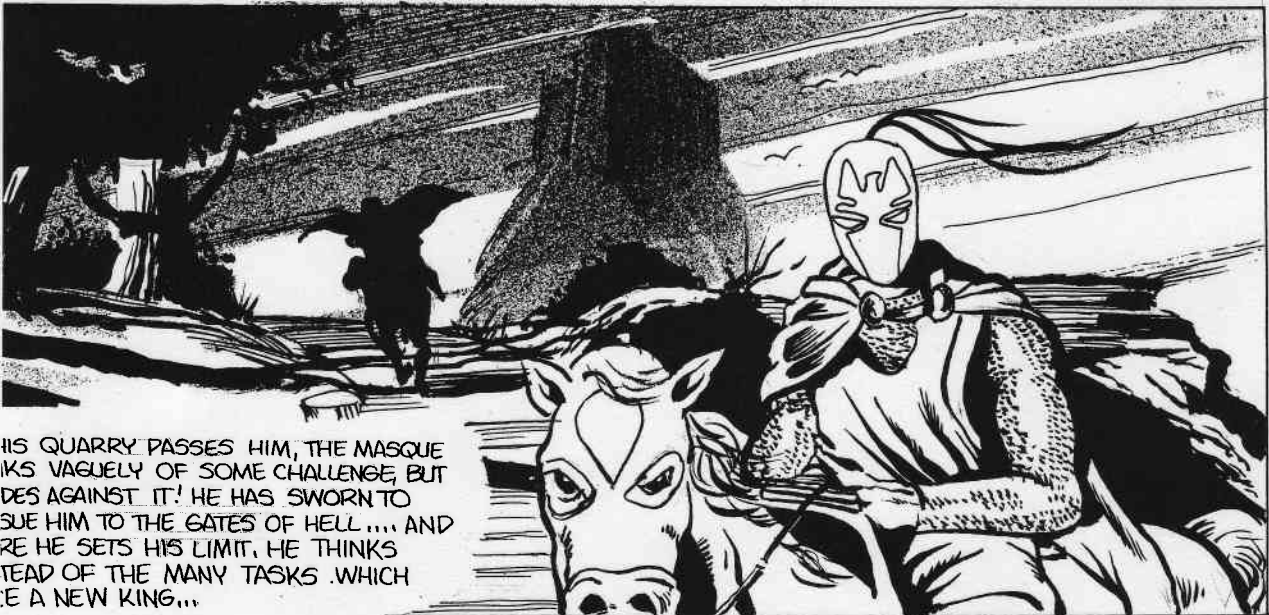
ACCORDINGLY, THE MASQUE MOVES EASILY ONTO THE ROTTING WOODEN PLANKS, BELLOWING A CHALLENGE AT THE ADVANCING RIDER. "IF YOU BEAR ANY WEAPONS SAVE POISON AND DECEIT, ASSASSIN, UNSHEATH THEM AND PREPARE TO DEFEND YOURSELF..."



AS IF BY MAGIC, A TALL, CURVED SCYTHE APPEARS IN THE FIGURE'S GRASP. "THE TIME HAS NOT YET COME FOR US TO MEET, MY PRINCE, BUT ONE DAY I WILL BE HONOURED TO MEET YOUR CHALLENGE..."



"I GO NOW FOR MY APPOINTED MEETING WITH YOUR FATHER WHO WILL, UNFORTUNATELY, SOON FALL, QUITE SUDDENLY AND FATALLY, ILL"... A CHANCE BREEZE BRIEFLY EXPOSES THE FACE BENEATH THE HOOD, ODDLY WHITE AND CADAVEROUS..."



HIS QUARRY PASSES HIM, THE MASQUE WINKS VAGUELY OF SOME CHALLENGE, BUT RESISTED AGAINST IT! HE HAS SWORN TO BRING HIM TO THE GATES OF HELL AND THERE HE SETS HIS LIMIT. HE THINKS OF THE MANY TASKS WHICH ARE AHEAD OF HIM...

NEXT: RETURN OF THE STRANGER