



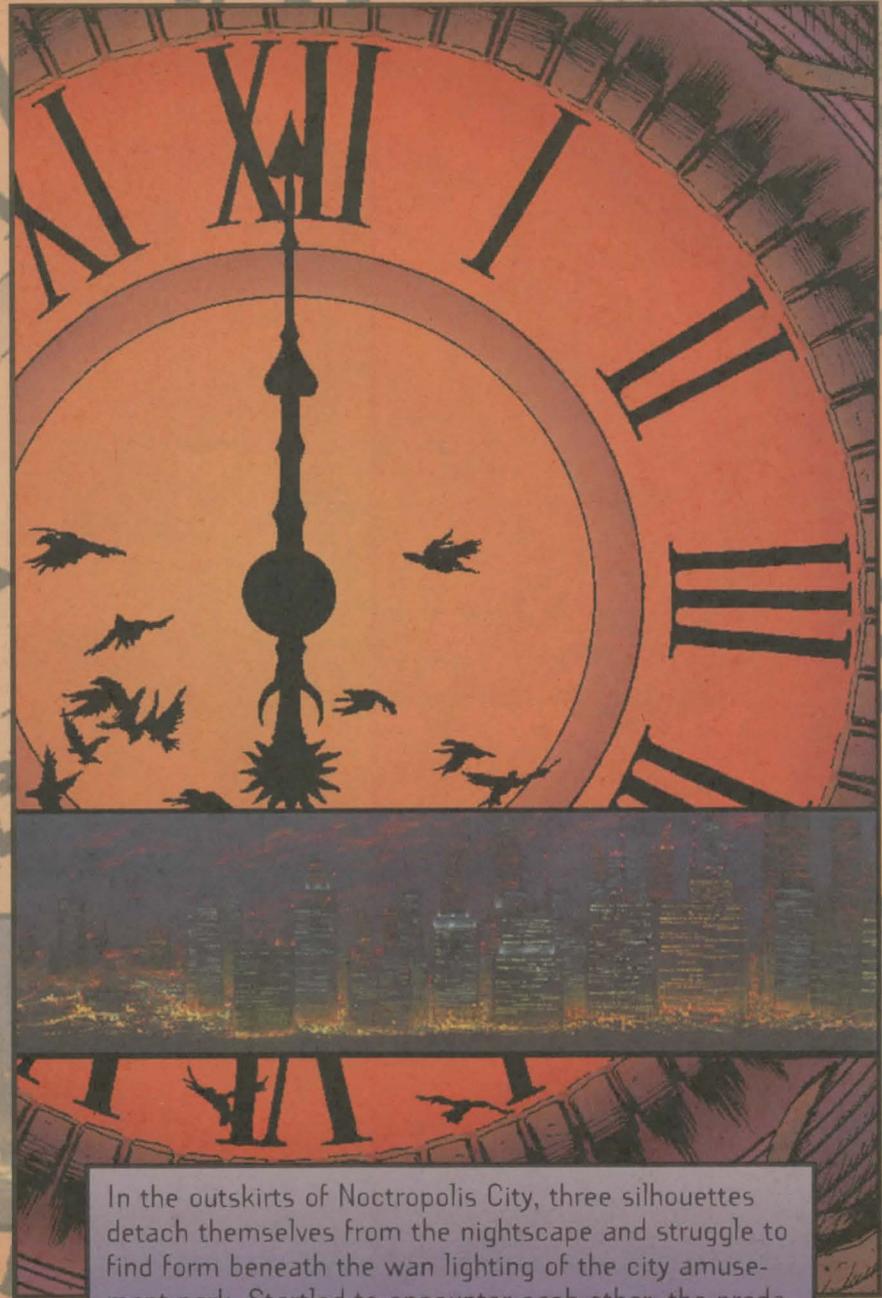
CYGNUS
COMICS



DARKSHEER™

CRUSADES IN THE CITY OF THE NIGHT

A sadistic magician...
A ruthless gunslinger...
A wanton cannibal...
Each summoned from darkness by the stroke of midnight.



In the outskirts of Noctropolis City, three silhouettes detach themselves from the nightscape and struggle to find form beneath the wan lighting of the city amusement park. Startled to encounter each other, the predators pause just long enough to demand answers....

TOPHAT...A DANGEROUS MIX OF MISCHIEF AND MAGIC.

DESPERADO...A HARDENED GUN-MAN WITH A QUICK TEMPER AND LIGHTNING DRAW.

WIDOWMARK...A NYMPHOMANIAC THAT DEVOURS HER MATES.

TOPHAT? WIDOWMARK! WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU TWO DOIN' HERE?

DARKSHEER...VIGILANTE. SENTINEL. THE EYES OF THE NIGHT.

YOU LADIES BETTER TALK FAST, 'CAUSE I GOT OTHER BUSINESS HERE, AND MY FINGER'S JUST ITCHIN' FOR THE TRIGGER!

STAY OUT OF MY WAY GUNSLINGER! I WAS INVITED!

INDEED, MY DEAR. IT WOULD SEEM THAT OUR MEETING IS NOT SO CIRCUMSTANTIAL AFTER ALL.

I RECEIVED ONE OF DARKSHEER'S PRETTY INVITATIONS AS WELL.

THAT STINKIN' WEASEL SENT ME ONE TOO...THIS WHOLE DAMN THING STINKS LIKE A SET-UP!

THREE AGAINST ONE... LADY, I LIKE THEM ODDS.

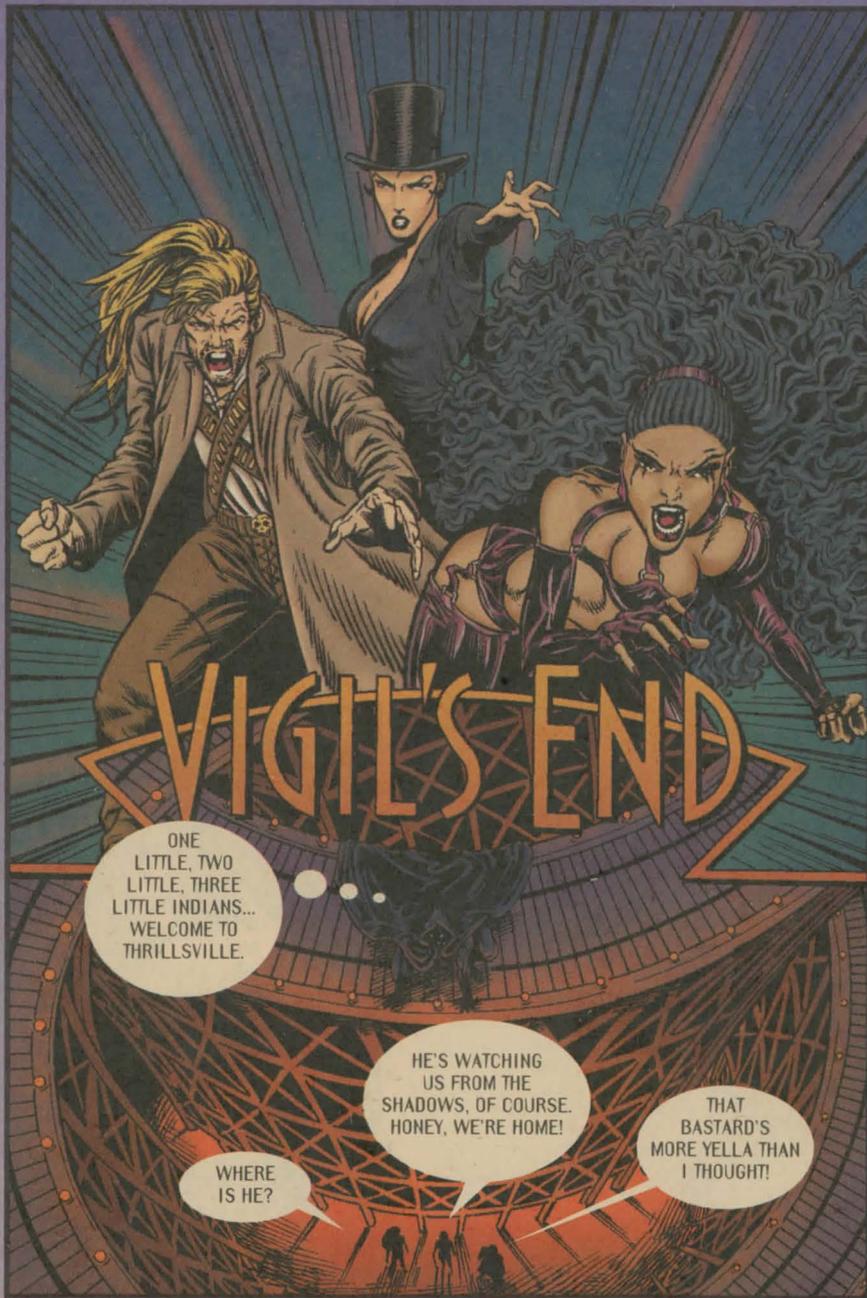
THAT'S VERY POSSIBLE, DESPERADO. LATELY, DARKSHEER'S BEEN QUITE INTENT UPON ELIMINATING HIS ENEMIES, AND I DARE SAY WE THREE ARE THE LAST LEFT. BUT CONSIDER THE GORGEOUS POSSIBILITIES IF THE THREE OF US ELECTED TO JOIN AGAINST HIM!

ALL RIGHT, WE FIGHT TOGETHER. BUT NO MATTER WHO BRINGS HIM DOWN, I GET DARKSHEER'S BODY.

OH, WIDOWMARK, HOW DELICIOUSLY MORBID! OF COURSE YOU MAY CLAIM YOUR TROPHY. TELL ME, DON'T YOU BOTH JUST ADORE THE INVITATIONS? I SIMPLY LOVE DARKSHEER'S FLAIR FOR THE DRAMATIC!

YEAH, WHATEVER, TOPHAT. DARK BOY MUST BE WAITIN' INSIDE FOR US....

THEN LET'S GET GOING...I WANT TO FEED!



ONE
LITTLE, TWO
LITTLE, THREE
LITTLE INDIANS...
WELCOME TO
THRILLSVILLE.

HE'S WATCHING
US FROM THE
SHADOWS, OF COURSE.
HONEY, WE'RE HOME!

THAT
BASTARD'S
MORE YELLA THAN
I THOUGHT!

WHERE
IS HE?

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YOU-HOO,
DARKSHEER! COME
OUT, COME OUT
WHEREVER YOU
ARE!

SHUDDUP
TOPHAT! NO REASON
THE WHOLE DAMN
WORLD'S GOTTA KNOW
WE'RE COMIN'!

THIS
IS BULL-DIP! HIDE 'N
SEEK IS A SISSY-BOY KID-
GAME! A MAN OUGHTA DO HIS
FIGHTIN' OUT IN THE
OPEN, I TELL YA.

I KNOW
HE'S HERE...
I CAN SMELL
HIM!

OH,
HE'S HERE, LUSCIOUS,
AND HE'S CLOSER THAN YOU
KNOW. I DO BELIEVE I'VE
FOUND OUR SLIPPERY
PREY.

SHOW ME A
TARGET, TOPHAT! I'M
GONNA DOUBLE THAT
SCUM'S WEIGHT
WITH HOT LEAD!

CERTAINLY,
DESPERADO. BUT IT IS
PERHAPS MORE
ACCURATE TO SAY THAT
HE HAS FOUND
US!



SHOWTIME
KIDDIES...
GERONIMO!

WHAT THE
HELL...?

HOO-HOO!
BOGEY AT TWELVE
O'CLOCK HIGH!

IT'S A
FREAKIN'
AMBUSH!



UNHHH...
TOUCHDOWN!

YOU TWO
STAY BACK!
HE'S MINE!



I'M GOING TO
EAT YOU UP
LITTLE BOY!

BE CAREFUL
WIDOWMARK, THIS TIME
YOU MAY BITE OFF MORE
THAN YOU CAN CHEW!



HOLY
%&!\$! NOOOOOO!

DARKNESS ENVELOPS WIDOWMARK

DAMN...WRAPPED
HER UP SLICK AS SNOT
AND DISAPPEARED
FASTER 'N SANTY
CLAUS!

HELP ME!
OH MY G-MMMRPH...

IT WOULD SEEM
THAT WIDOWMARK GOT
IN OVER HER HEAD. I'D NO
IDEA HE COULD USE HIS
CLOAK LIKE THAT....

I GUESS WE OUGHTA
GO FIND 'EM. WE CAN COVER
MORE GROUND IF WE SPLIT
UP. WATCH YOUR BACK,
LADY.



OUCH!
MY HAIR...!

QUIET WITCH, OR
I'LL PULL IT ALL OUT!
I'M TAKING YOU DOWN,
WIDOWMARK. IF YOU
COOPERATE, I MAY LET
YOU LIVE.

HAH, FOUND YA
WEASEL! MUCH AS I'D
LIKE TO SEE WHAT HE'D DO
TA WIDOWMARK, NOW'S
THE PERFECT TIME TA
CALL HIM OUT....

LET THE LADY GO,
DUNG-LICKER! YOU N' I GOT
BUSINESS TA TEND TO!

WHA...?
OOOOPH!

GETTING
AWAY!
WIDOWMARK'S
GETTING
AWAY...

...LET HER GO...
CONCENTRATE! DON'T GIVE
DESPERADO THE TIME HE
NEEDS.

I'M
GOING TO
NAIL YOU JUST
LIKE THIS FOR
EVERY STRAND OF
HAIR I LOST!

IME TO DIE, RAT-MEAT!
MAKE YER MOVE!



I'M HIT! NEVER MIND
- KEEP FOCUSED! THE
GRENADE HAS GOT TO
HIT CLOSE....

DAMN,
HURTS LIKE A
MOTHER! LET IT
BLEED.

OH,
S%!&! I'M
BLIND AS A
FRIGGIN' BAT!
WHAT THE HELL'S
HE PUT IN THOSE
DAMNED
RENADES?!

CAN'T
LET HIM
CIRCLE 'ROUND
ON ME!

YER TRICKS DON'T
MAKE NO DIFFERENCE! SO
COME 'N GET ME YA FREAKIN'
DEVIL, 'CAUSE I'M GONNA
BLOW YA TO HELL!

HE'S
COMPLETELY
DISORIENTED. FIRING
BLIND. NOW...TAKE
HIM OUT NOW!

WHERE
THE HELL ARE
YOU NIGHTBREED?
WHEN I FIND YOU,
I'M GONNA—
UNNNGH!!!



...AND THEN THERE WERE TWO.

TOUGH LUCK, GUNSLINGER. CAN'T SAY I'LL MISS YOU.

...PAY! HE'S GOING TO PAY BIG! WITH HIS HEART, AND HIS BLOOD, AND HIS FEAR...OH, HIS FEAR! HE'S GOING TO PAY....

WIDOWMARK!

DESPERADO...?!

HE GOT WHAT HE DESERVED.

YOU...!



I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU REACHED THE TOP BEFORE ME, BUT I'M NOT IMPRESSED.

I'M SURPRISED YOU HAVEN'T LEARNED THAT THE TAPESTRY OF NIGHT IS WOVEN WITH SURPRISES, WIDOWMARK. BUT, IF YOU UNDERESTIMATE IT, THE DARKNESS WILL SWALLOW YOU WHOLE.

VERY POETIC!

I'M GLAD YOU LIKE IT, BUT IT'S NOT POETRY. IT'S A FUNDAMENTAL MAXIM THAT—

I DON'T GIVE A RAT'S ASS ABOUT YOUR MAXIMS! I LIVE BY MY OWN RULES AND I'VE WAITED A LONG TIME FOR YOUR HEAD. I NEVER EAT THE HEAD, YOU KNOW. I KEEP IT IN A SAFE PLACE....

IT'S PAYBACK TIME!

CHAK CHAK CHAK





HELLO HANDSOME, BUY A GIRL A DRINK?

...SO WEAK. IT'S THE VENOM... NOT SURE I CAN MAKE IT. STOP IT! STAY ALERT! I'M TWO DOWN WITH ONE TO GO... WONDER WHERE SHE IS...

TOPHAT...!

CORRECT! YOU WIN THE PRIZE, BABY FACE!

YOU MAY BE DARKNESS INCARNATE, DEARY, BUT YOU BLEED JUST LIKE ANY MISERABLE STOOGIE.

I WATCHED YOU TAKE OUT DESPERADO AND WIDOWMARK... YOU WERE MARVY! BUT I CAN'T IMAGINE WHY YOU'RE WORKING SO HARD TO REMOVE THE COMPETITION. WE NEED EACH OTHER...

...LIKE DIFFERENT SIDES OF THE SAME COIN, SWEET CHEEKS, WE DEFINE OUR OPPOSITE! MMMMM, YUMMY... TASTES JUST LIKE CHICKEN!



STAY CONSCIOUS... JUST STAY AWAKE...!

NOW FOR SOME REAL FUN!

YEE-HAW, RIDE'M COWBOY! I REALLY DON'T THINK YOU'RE INTO THIS, DEAR. I WONDER IF IT WOULD HELP IF I SHOVED ANOTHER COIN IN YOUR SLOT!

AND TO THINK YOU WANTED TO STAY IN TONIGHT! OH, YOU SILLY BOY!

WELL I'M SURE WE COULD HAVE MORE FUN, BUT IT IS A SCHOOL NIGHT... SO, I'LL JUST MURDER YOU NOW!!

SHADOWLAIR, LOCATED DEEP UNDERGROUND, THE REFORMED TEMPLE IS A REMNANT OF AN ERA PASSED. ONCE THE HALLOWED SHRINE OF AN ELITE SECRET ORDER OF INTELLIGENTSIA, THE TEMPLE NOW SERVES A SINGLE MAN AS THE BASTION OF MIDNIGHT... THE REFUGE OF SHADOW... THE SANCTUARY OF DARKSHEER.

BACK OFF, TOPHAT!

TOPHAT'S OUT FOR THE COUNT. I FOUND DESPERADO AND I ASSUME THAT MOUND OF HAIR AND BLOOD IS WHAT'S LEFT OF WIDOWMARK. YOU SURE AS HELL WERE THOROUGH... ARE YOU O.K.?

I'M FINE! YOU'VE GOT A LOT OF NERVE, STILETTO, BUTTING IN WHERE YOU DON'T BELONG!

I'M YOUR PARTNER! I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOUR PROBLEM IS LATELY. YOU'RE OBVIOUSLY ON SOME EGO TRIP, TAKING OUT ALL THE SLEAZE BAGS SINGLE-HANDEDLY, BUT IF I HADN'T SHOWN, TOPHAT WOULD'VE FINISHED YOU OFF, HERO!

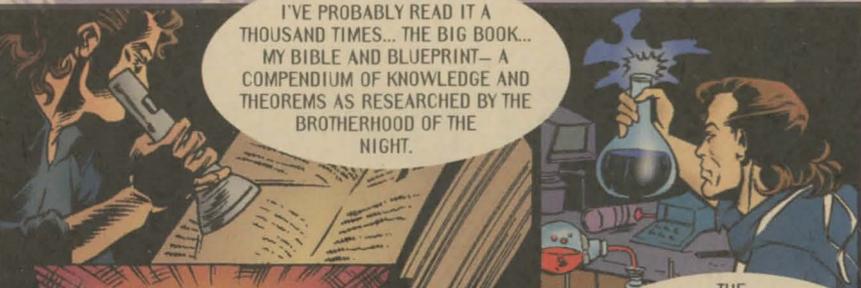
YOU'RE FULL OF CRAP, WOMAN! I HAD EVERYTHING UNDER CONTROL... JUST DROP IT BECAUSE THIS DISCUSSION IS OVER!

TAKE TOPHAT TO THE POLICE, AND DON'T FORGET ABOUT THE OTHER BODIES. I'M GOING TO SHADOWLAIR.

LIQUIDARK... SO COLD IT BURNS! IT'S ALWAYS LIKE THAT WHEN I'M INJURED. HOW MANY TIMES HAVE I DONE THIS? BAPTIZED IN THE ICY WETNESS OF DISTILLED DARKNESS... IT WORKS EVERY TIME... SAVES MY SKIN.

REMEMBERING... HOW IT ALL STARTED. I WAS JUST A PUNK ORPHAN. FATHER DESMOND... WHAT A SALESMAN! HE HAD US ALL JUMPING TO BECOME WARDS... TO HELP CLEAN UP THE STREETS OF NOCTROPOLIS. THE BIRTH OF A VIGILANTE....

YEARS LATER, POKING AROUND SUBTERRAINIA... STUMBLED ACROSS THE BROTHERHOOD'S TEMPLE. MAN, I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT I'D FOUND! TOOK IT SLOW... WORKED IN SECRET....



I'VE PROBABLY READ IT A THOUSAND TIMES... THE BIG BOOK... MY BIBLE AND BLUEPRINT— A COMPENDIUM OF KNOWLEDGE AND THEOREMS AS RESEARCHED BY THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE NIGHT.



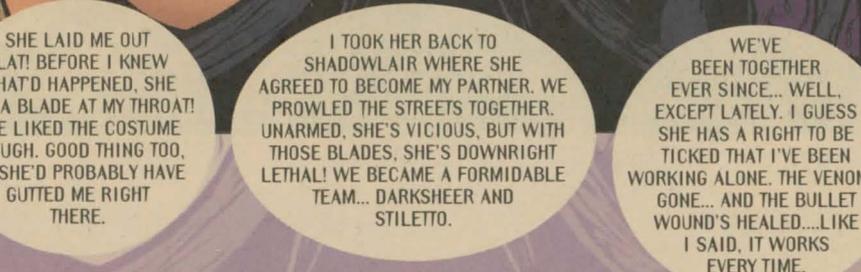
THE BOOK TAUGHT ME HOW TO DISTILL LIQUIDARK. I PUT WHAT I LEARNED TO GOOD USE... SPENT COUNTLESS HOURS IN THAT DAMN LAB... UNTIL I FOUND A WAY TO BIND THE LIQUIDARK TO FABRIC AND BODY ARMOR.



THE NOCTROGLYPH... IT TOOK WEEKS JUST TO FIGURE OUT WHAT THE HELL IT WAS, LET ALONE HOW TO WORK IT! POWERFUL... SAVED MY BUTT MORE THAN A FEW TIMES....



THOUGHT I WAS READY... GONE AND FORGED MYSELF INTO ONE BAD-ASS HERO! THEN I MET HER IN A BLIND ALLEY ONE NIGHT... THOUGHT SHE WAS SOME PUNK THIEF... STILETTO....



SHE LAID ME OUT FLAT! BEFORE I KNEW WHAT'D HAPPENED, SHE HAD A BLADE AT MY THROAT! SHE LIKED THE COSTUME THOUGH. GOOD THING TOO, OR SHE'D PROBABLY HAVE GUTTED ME RIGHT THERE.



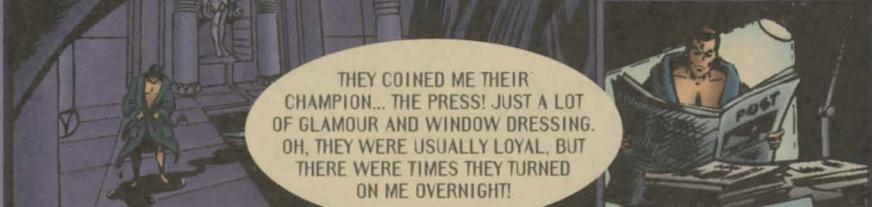
I TOOK HER BACK TO SHADOWLAIR WHERE SHE AGREED TO BECOME MY PARTNER. WE PROWLLED THE STREETS TOGETHER. UNARMED, SHE'S VICIOUS, BUT WITH THOSE BLADES, SHE'S DOWNRIGHT LETHAL! WE BECAME A FORMIDABLE TEAM... DARKSHEER AND STILETTO.



WE'VE BEEN TOGETHER EVER SINCE... WELL, EXCEPT LATELY. I GUESS SHE HAS A RIGHT TO BE TICKED THAT I'VE BEEN WORKING ALONE. THE VENOM'S GONE... AND THE BULLET WOUND'S HEALED... LIKE I SAID, IT WORKS EVERY TIME.



I'M STILL NOT SURE I'M DOING THE RIGHT THING... THIS CITY HAS COUNTED ON ME TO ALWAYS BE THERE... LURKING IN THE EVER-PRESENT SHADOWS.



THEY COINED ME THEIR CHAMPION... THE PRESS! JUST A LOT OF GLAMOUR AND WINDOW DRESSING. OH, THEY WERE USUALLY LOYAL, BUT THERE WERE TIMES THEY TURNED ON ME OVERNIGHT!



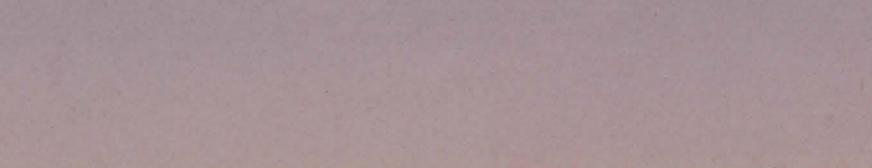
MAYOR SAVED FROM BLAST BY DARKSHEER



THE INSPIRER



DARKSHEER PUTS END TO TERROR



SENTINEL

SEX N

I'VE WORKED HARD TO BECOME WHAT I AM, BUT I'M SO DAMN TIRED! FIGHTING OFF EVERY CRACKPOT AND PSYCHO THAT WANTS TO USE NOCTROPOLIS AS THEIR PERSONAL PLAYGROUND...

...I DESERVE MORE!

NOCTROPOLIS CITY HALL

AHH DARKSHEER, WE WERE JUST DISCUSSING YOU... YOUR RECENT CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE CITY'S MORE NOTORIOUS ENEMIES HAS BEEN MOST IMPRESSIVE! WELL DONE!

THANK-YOU MR. MAYOR, YOU'LL BE PLEASED TO KNOW THAT TOPHAT IS IN CUSTODY AND THAT DESPERADO AND WIDOWMARK WON'T TROUBLE THE CITIZENS OF NOCTROPOLIS EVER AGAIN.

EXCELLENT! ACCORDING TO OUR LISTS, THAT ACCOUNTS FOR EVERY CRIMINAL MASTERMIND TO DATE. YOU'VE CERTAINLY EARNED A REST!

ACTUALLY MR MAYOR, THAT'S WHY I CAME TO SEE YOU... I HAVE DECIDED TO RETIRE. AS A COURTESY, I THOUGHT YOU SHOULD KNOW BEFORE ANY PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT.

I DON'T GIVE A DAMN ABOUT YOUR POPULARITY RATING! AND, AS YOU MENTIONED BEFORE, NOCTROPOLIS' BOGEY MEN ARE EITHER DEAD, OR IN LOCK-UP... MY DECISION IS NOT NEGOTIABLE.

R-RETIRE? BUT YOU CAN'T! WE'RE JUST NOT CAPABLE OF DEALING WITH THE MISCREANTS THAT PLAGUE THE CITY... FOR THE LOVE OF GOD, THINK OF MY PUBLIC IMAGE! THERE'S AN ELECTION COMING....

WELL, DARKSHEER, WHAT DO YOU THINK?

I SUPPOSE THAT WOULD BE ALL RIGHT....

MR. MAYOR, I PROPOSE THAT WE THROW DARKSHEER A HERO'S PARADE! AFTERWARD, YOU COULD GIVE HIM THE KEY TO THE CITY AT A TELEVISED CEREMONY! IT WOULD BE GREAT PUBLICITY.

THE NOCTROPOLIS CITY CATHEDRAL

I HATE COMING HERE. THE CONFESSIONAL ALWAYS MAKES ME FEEL SO... GUILTY. I HATE COMING HERE.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT ELSE TO DO... WHO TO TALK TO. I WONDER IF FATHER DESMOND EVEN KNOWS YET.

FORGIVE ME FATHER, FOR I HAVE SINNED....

STILETTO, HAVE YOU SEEN THE PAPER? IT READS "DARKSHEER TO RETIRE!" NOW, WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?

I HAD TO READ IT IN THE PAPER, TOO. THAT SON OF A-- HE DOESN'T GIVE A DAMN ABOUT THINGS...ABOUT ME! HE'S JUST GOING TO THROW IT ALL AWAY WITHOUT LOOKING BACK.

I WISH I KNEW, FATHER. IT'S NOT THE SAME BETWEEN US LATELY... WE HARDLY EVEN SPEAK ANYMORE.

EASY STILETTO, THERE MUST BE AN EXPLANATION.



DO YOU BELIEVE GOD'S REALLY THERE, FATHER? IS ALL THAT CRAP ABOUT HEARING PRAYERS AND GIVING BLESSINGS FOR REAL?

IF THERE IS A GOD, HE DOESN'T HEAR MY PRAYERS.

THERE, THERE, STILETTO. OF COURSE GOD HEARS YOUR PRAYERS. HE WANTS YOU TO BE HAPPY... BUT RIGHT NOW YOU MUST TALK TO DARKSHEER. HE NO LONGER TAKES MY COUNSEL.

YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, FATHER... I LOVE HIM! I LOVE HIM AND HE'S READY TO WALK OUT OF MY LIFE!

I KNOW YOUR FEELINGS... THAT'S WHY YOU HAVE TO BE THE ONE TO CONVINCE HIM THAT THIS DECISION TO RETIRE IS WRONG.

COME, I'LL WALK YOU OUT, STILETTO, I KNOW IN MY HEART THAT IF YOU CAN PERSUADE DARKSHEER TO STAY, THEN HE'LL RETURN YOUR AFFECTION. YOU WILL TRY, WON'T YOU?

I-I'LL TRY, FATHER....



WHAT THE HELL?!

YOU'D BETTER HAVE A DAMN GOOD REASON FOR DOING THAT, STILETTO!

I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT BE GETTING SOFT... THAT MIGHT EXPLAIN YOUR "RETIREMENT!" I APPRECIATE YOU TALKING WITH ME BEFORE PUBLICLY DISSOLVING OUR PARTNERSHIP.

DO YOU REALLY MEAN THAT?

LOOK, STILETTO, I'M SORRY. IF IT'S ANY CONSOLATION, THE HARDEST THING WILL BE LEAVING YOU....

LET ME SHOW YOU....

OH, YESSS...! WHAT IS IT? WHY ARE YOU STOPPING?!

THIS CAN'T WORK OUT, STILETTO... I'VE GOT A PARADE JUST HOURS FROM NOW. AFTER THAT I'M LEAVING TOWN.

I KNOW. BUT THERE'S SOMETHING YOU DON'T KNOW... SOMETHING I'VE NEVER TOLD YOU....

I... LOVE YOU! IF YOU WON'T CHANGE YOUR MIND ABOUT LEAVING, THEN PLEASE... LET ME COME WITH YOU.

I'M SORRY, STILETTO, BUT IT CAN'T BE LIKE THAT. I'VE MADE OTHER PLANS... GOALS THAT JUST DON'T ACCOMMODATE A RELATIONSHIP. SOMEDAY YOU'LL UNDERSTAND... GOOD-BYE.





ASSUAGED BY THE KNOWLEDGE THAT DARKSHEER HAS CLEANSED AWAY ALL VESTIGE OF ARCHVILLAINY, THE CITY OF NIGHT RELAXES ITS GUARD AND SLEEPS... PERCHANCE TO DREAM....



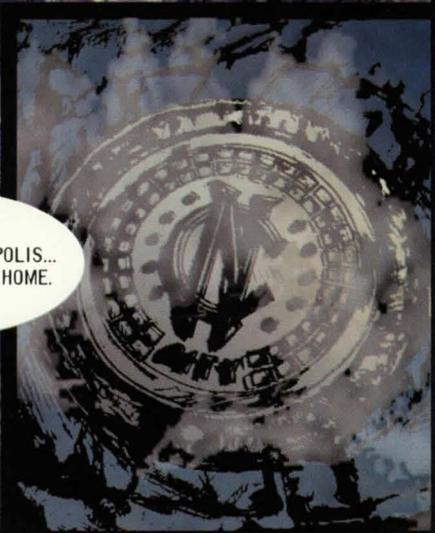
THE MOMENT OF TRUTH... DIDN'T THINK IT WOULD BE SO HARD.



STILL, I KNOW IT'S THE RIGHT CHOICE... I'VE GOT A BRIGHTER FUTURE OUT THERE.



TIME TO GO... FAREWELL NOCTROPOLIS... YOU'LL ALWAYS BE HOME.



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