

# BLUE HAND MOJO

HARD TIMES ROAD

JOHN JENNINGS



A HALF-DEAD JOHNSON ADVENTURE



# BLUE HAND MOJO HARD TIMES ROAD

*story and art by*

**JOHN JENNINGS**

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## INTRODUCTION

It goes without saying—or at least it should go without saying—that I loved *Blue Hand Mojo*. The fact that I'm writing the introduction for this graphic novel should say all that needs to be said. No one writes an intro for a book they didn't like. You know what this part is about—it's a combination of singing the praises of the work and the creative talent responsible, with the hope that my words will lend some greater level of legitimacy to both. Honestly, I wouldn't be offended if you stopped reading the intro right now and skipped right to *Blue Hand Mojo*. Seriously ... you can come back and read this after you've read the book. I say this because I've already read *Blue Hand Mojo*, and I can't help but feel this introduction is standing between you and greatness. Still, I was asked to write something, and to be a part of this work, in even such a minor capacity, is a great honor.

I went into *Blue Hand Mojo* not fully knowing what to expect. I've known John Jennings for several years and am familiar with his work as an artist, a writer, a college professor, and a champion of diversity and representation in pop culture. John and I have been on numerous panels together. In my office, his art hangs on the walls, and books that he has contributed to sit on the shelves. But all of this familiarity with the man and his work did not prepare me for *Blue Hand Mojo*, because, if I'm going to be truly honest, *Blue Hand Mojo* is John Jennings taking it to some next level shit.

Sometimes, when I'm reading a comic book or graphic novel, I feel a sting. It may be the sting of single yellow jacket or the concentrated attack of an entire swarm, but it is real. And I feel it. The sting is awe. The sting is envy. The sting is jealousy. The sting is that feeling I get when I've read something really good, and I'm upset that I didn't come up with the idea myself. It is my bruised ego and my fragile self-esteem getting together for a little conference and coming to the conclusion that I just don't work hard enough. But then I stop—gathering up all that jealousy and envy and awe, pushing it aside for the inevitable moment when I must own up to what is really gnawing at me. I'm talking about that moment when I really examine what I've just read, and I say to myself, "*You could not have done it this good.*"

*Blue Hand Mojo* was a roller coaster ride that started with awe. John Jennings is an incredible artist and a gifted writer—there's no way you can't be in awe of his work. Awe soon gave way to envy, but I was able to reconcile that feeling—after all, John does the art, and the artist who can also write is the envy of every writer who can't draw. But then it started to dawn on me that for all of John's art that I've seen, and for all his writing that I have read, *Blue Hand Mojo* was a completely different beast.

Deeply rooted in history and Southern folklore, with a pulp novel sensibility and a healthy dose of hoodoo, *Blue Hand Mojo* defies easy classification. It merges familiar genres in a new and refreshing way, drawing from a deep well of culture and sensibility that is missing from most comics. As much as this is a book about crime and the supernatural, it is also a book steeped in the Black experience in America. And that is something we just don't get enough of in comics.

People talk about the importance of diversity and representation in comics, but it is mostly talk; and too often that which passes for diversity and representation is merely superficial window dressing. That's not the case with *Blue Hand Mojo*. John Jennings has crafted a graphic novel that puts on the page what is missing from so many other comics—heart and soul. There is life in these pages, and death—and you can feel it resonating in a way that conjures feelings of awe, and envy and even a twinge of jealousy because not every writer or artist can do what John has done.

After I finished reading *Blue Hand Mojo*, the feelings of jealousy started to fade, and I slowly came to peace with the knowledge that I could not have done it this good. And then a new feeling came over me—one that I don't feel nearly as often as I'd like to when reading comics. To put it quite simply, I felt inspired to be a better writer.

**David F. Walker**

Portland, OR

2016





## CHAPTER 1

### A SHARK IN THE DARK

My body and *what's left* of my soul live in *Chicago, Illinois*. The year is *1931*. It's fall and *the Hawk* is already starting to claim victims with its cold breath.



I'm laid up in my *main squeeze's* joint.

It's *Saturday* morning, and I can still feel *Flapjack Martin* and *the Mason's* homespun blues deep in my bones from last night's cuttin' up.

My spirit is *restless* as I enter into a dream.



It's *restless* because of what comes *next*.

You see, I have a real *love/hate* relationship with the dream world, but I think it goes one way. It only seems to *hate* me.

I dream each and every night. The *nightmares* come at me hard, vivid, and full of anger and dread. However, when you make a living playing *the wheel*, dreams get you *paid* and mine always pay off.

So, there's the *love*. There's the *hate*.





This particular morning I was dealing with a bonafide doozy.

*I can't breathe.* I taste the the salt of my own *blood* and tears.

I'm hanging by my neck from a huge old tree in the middle of a white man's pasture.

*As usual,* I dream of my family hanging alongside me. I dream of the twisted and dark *past.*

I dream of them so much it's sadly become a common expectation and even a *desire.*

However, this dream took two turns into Worsetown, USA. Even by my standards, it was fucking *awful.*

My usual dose of *guilt* is administered by my ghostly family staring at me through accusingly loving eyes.



I *pray* for *death* to spare me the sight. My rope breaks, leaving them there to just...*hang.*

Their *eyes* bug out in their twisted faces as they die.

I can't do anything but *scream.*

They, in turn, *explode* into hot and spiteful blood that *punishes* me for my *worthless* life.





Then the **blood** comes down  
**harder**. It pours down like punches  
from the sky. The storm of blood  
makes the ground beneath the  
**tree** into a swamp of mud and  
**hateful redness**.



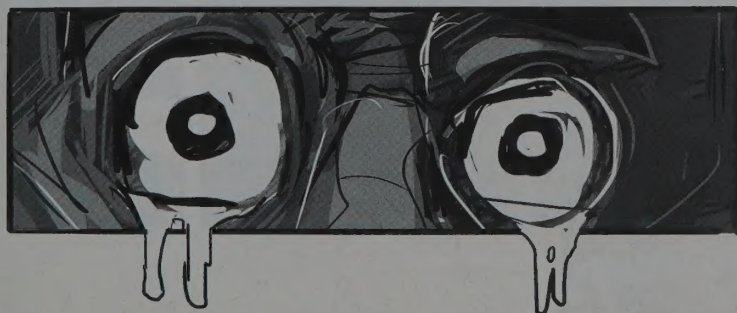
Then I **sink** into the abyss.

I **choke** like I should have in that  
fucking tree some **ten years** ago.



I am **thankful**. That **is**...until I under-  
stand that I will survive this. This is  
just a dream. My rage **shatters** me.

A **wolf** howls in the distance. Licking  
the blood from its **greedy lips**.

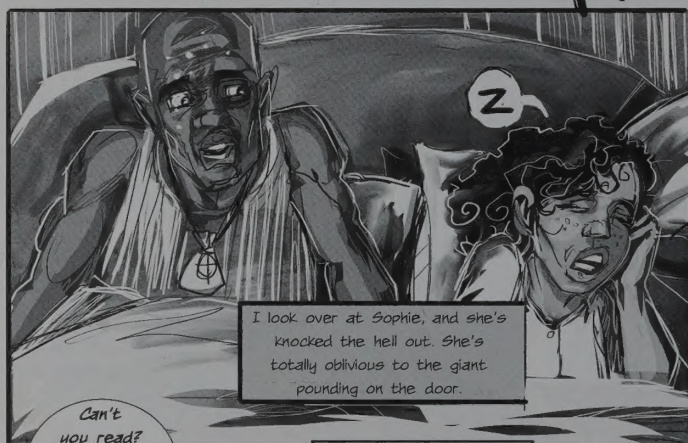


A one-eyed **teddy bear** floats over  
to me and **knocks** on my head like  
it's filled with some great secret.

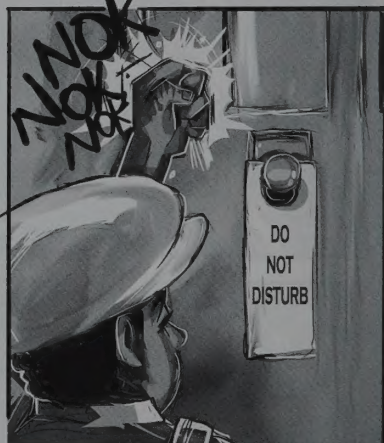
That's when I wake up...all  
maladjusted and **empty**.



Not / No



I look over at Sophie, and she's knocked the hell out. She's totally oblivious to the giant pounding on the door.



Can't you read?  
Signs says:  
**DO. NOT. DISTURB.**

The boy reminds me so much of my own lost son. Lord, am I still dreaming?

Don't I look Disturbed?



Um...



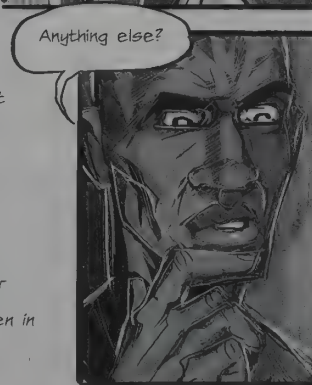
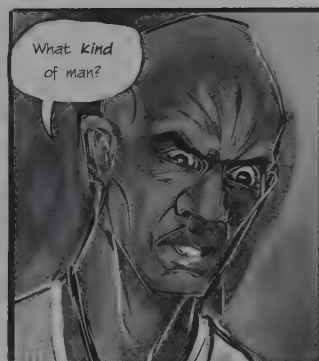
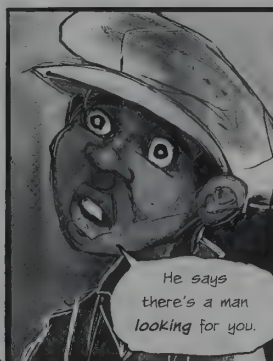
Yassuh,  
You do...and no, I  
can't read, suh.



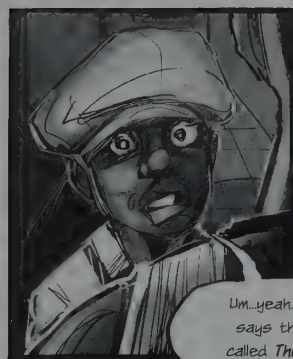
The hell you want, boy?

Um...

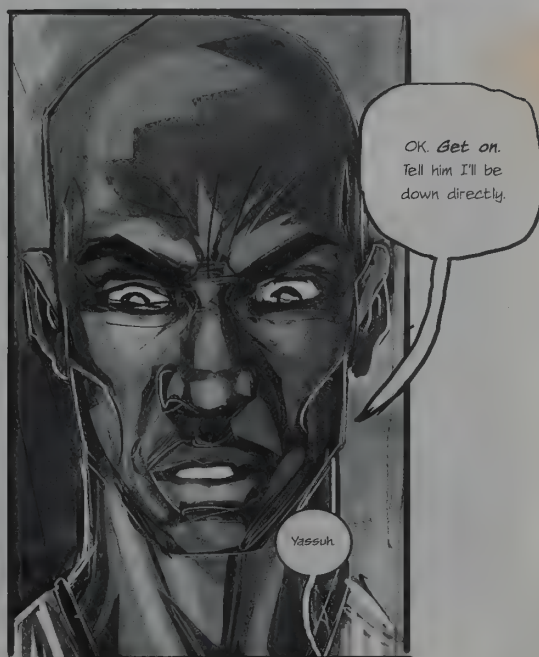


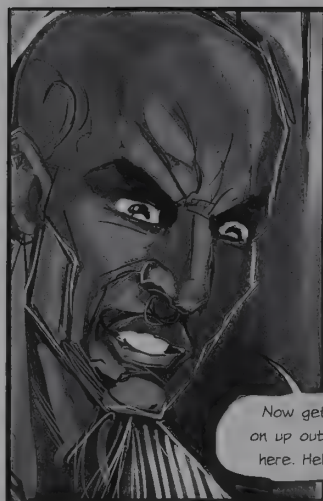
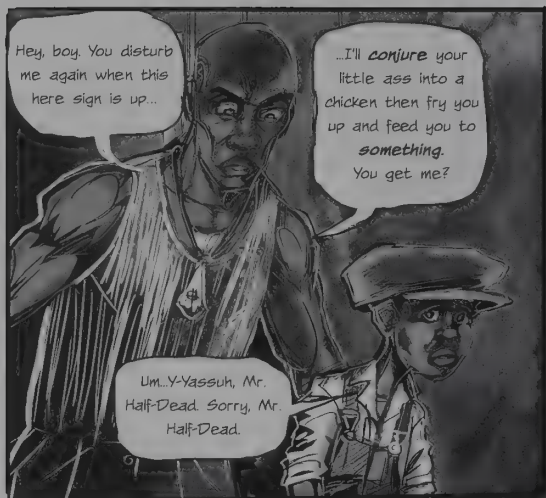


I have to admit, that  
piqued my interest.  
Ain't too many  
white folks that  
would set foot in  
Bronzeville, the darker  
part of Chicago, not even in  
broad-assed daylight.



Now, there's a  
handle I hadn't  
heard in a  
long damn while  
and far too soon  
to boot.



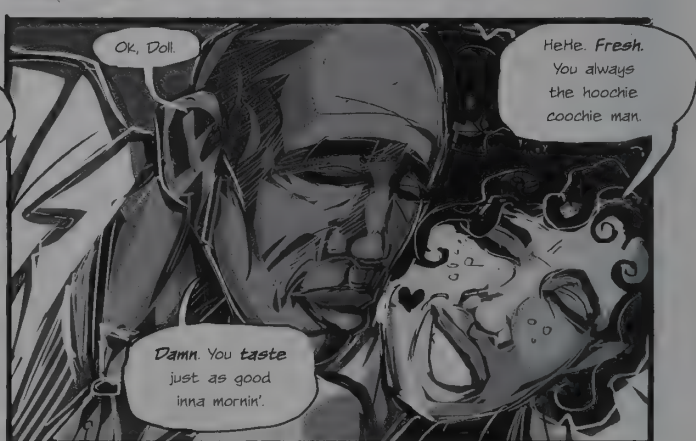
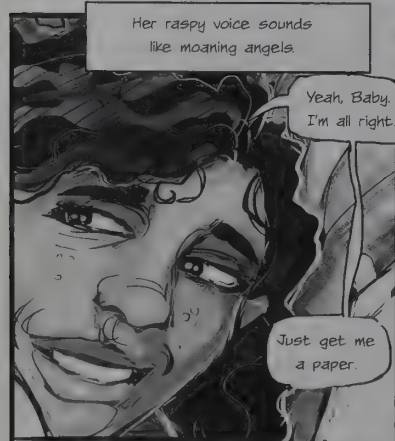


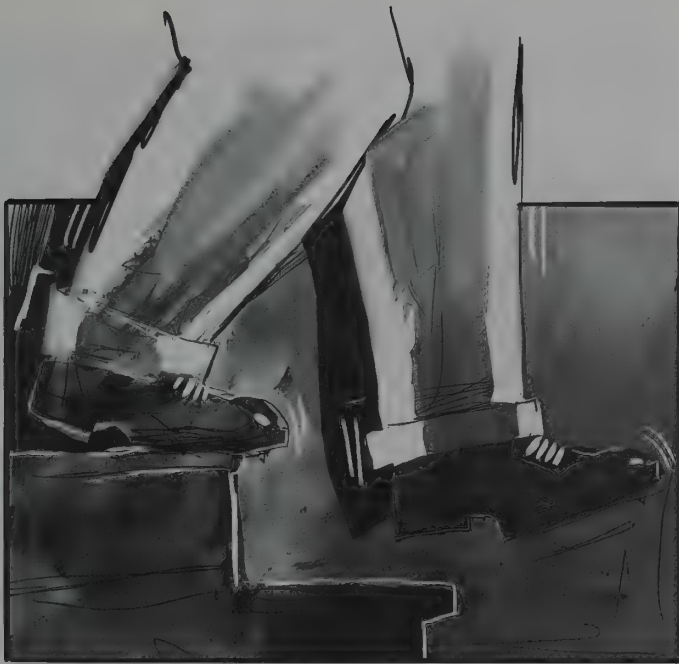
I get moving and start putting on some clothes.

My arm hurts from where Sophie took some blood last night.

It's part of our arrangement, you see. She makes me my tonic that I need to stay real. I give her some of my blood for her passing potion.

A conjure man's blood, especially one that regularly speaks to the Devil himself, is some powerful *mojo shit*.





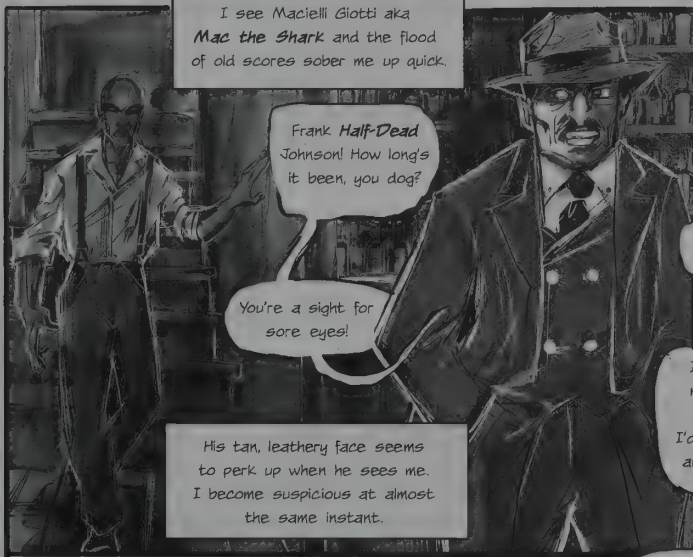
I make my way down the stairs.

The hooch, sex, and blood loss  
make the way a rocky one at best.

My body works way different than  
most these days but I still gotta  
lay off the booze.

When the Devil's got you on the  
hunt for wayward souls and  
escaped demons you gotta  
stay sharp... or else.

Still though, I likes my liquor.



I see Macielli Giotti aka  
**Mac the Shark** and the flood  
of old scores sober me up quick.

Frank **Half-Dead**  
Johnson! How long's  
it been, you dog?

You're a sight for  
sore eyes!

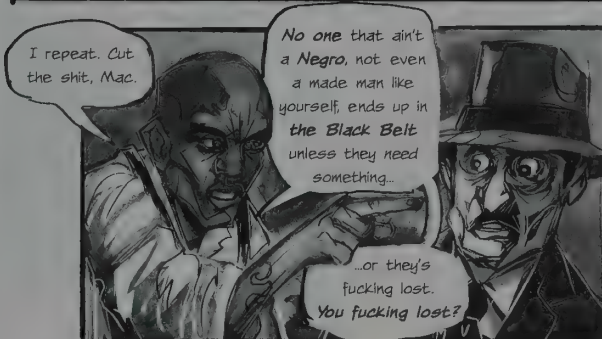
His tan, leathery face seems  
to perk up when he sees me.  
I become suspicious at almost  
the same instant.



Cut the  
shit, Mac!  
What you  
here for?

Don't be  
like that, Frank!

I was in the  
neighborhood  
and thought  
I'd check in with  
an old partner.



I repeat. Cut  
the shit, Mac.

No one that ain't  
a **Negro**, not even  
a made man like  
yourself, ends up in  
the **Black Belt**  
unless they need  
something...

...or they's  
fucking lost.  
**You fucking lost?**



No...no, Frank...  
I'm **not** lost.



Well, I'm **starving**  
for some beans  
so spill 'em.

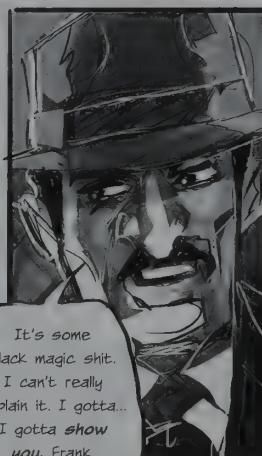
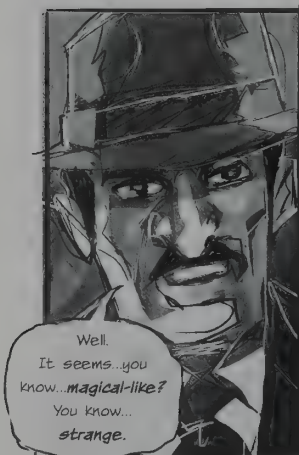
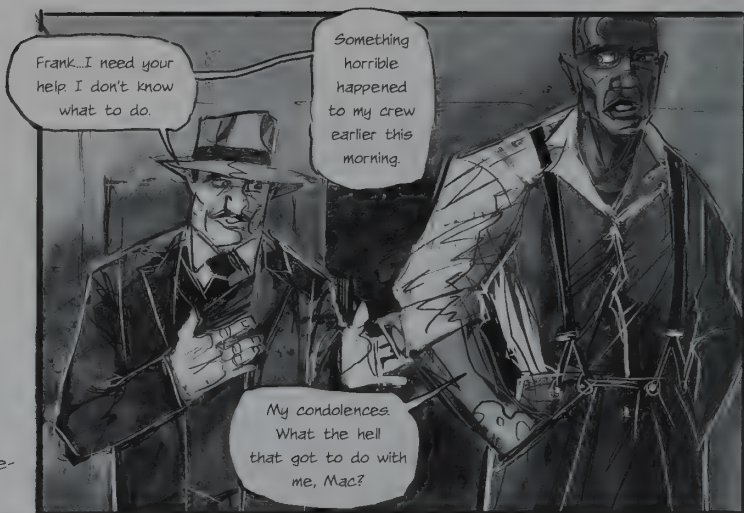


## CHAPTER 2

### OLD SCORES

I hate to be rude to an old friend.  
My mamma taught me better.

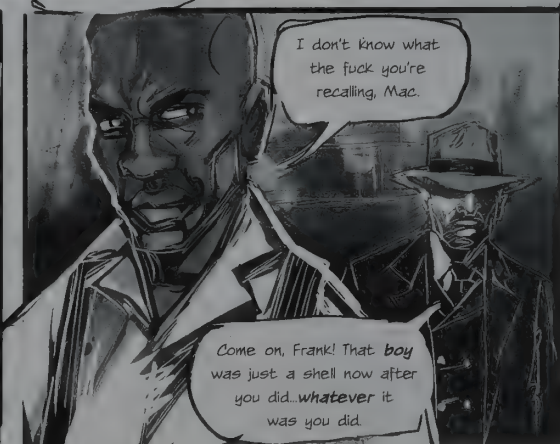
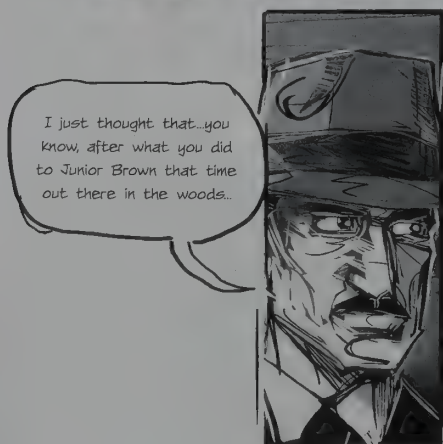
However, when one of Capone's  
own is standing in one of  
the top policy wheels on the  
South Side, let's just say I get a bit  
anxious. By "anxious," I mean,  
"looking-over-my shoulder-sleeping-with-one-  
eye-open" suspicious.

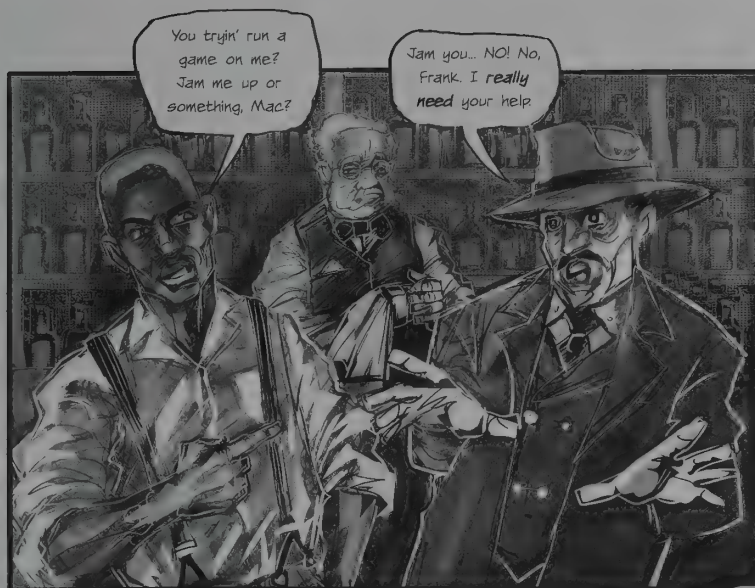


The Shark ain't the kinda man that *scares* easily.

Honestly, when we used to run hooch together for Capone, he had nerves of steel. Earned the name *the Shark* because he was always after the next score.

I was tempted just by the fact that he was about to piss himself in fear right here in Sophie's bar.





You tryin' run a game on me? Jam me up or something, Mac?

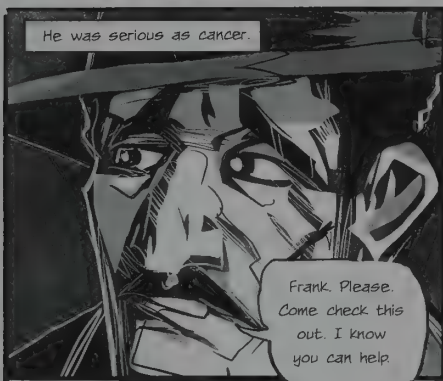
Jam you... NO! No, Frank. I *really* need your help

I look at Mac, and I see only a shadow of who he was. I see a man afraid for his life. I see an opportunity. The Shark becomes the mark.



Sure you ain't.

He wasn't.



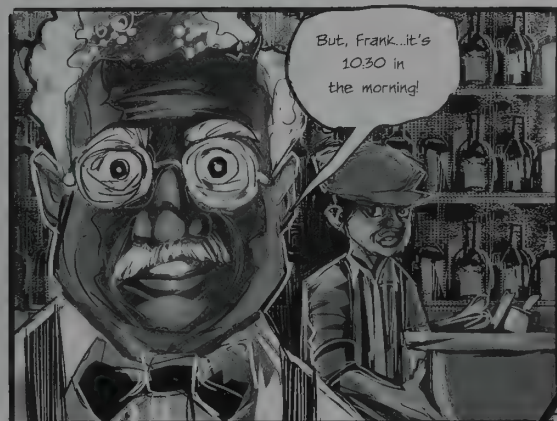
He was serious as cancer.

Frank. Please. Come check this out. I know you can help.

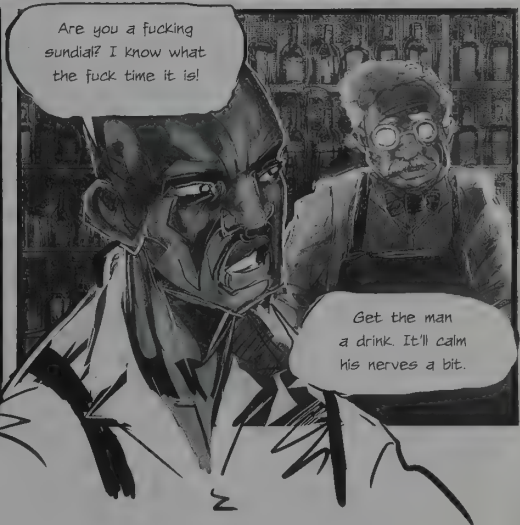


OK. OK.  
I'll go check it out. Telly, get him a drink on me.

Thanks, Frank. I mean it.



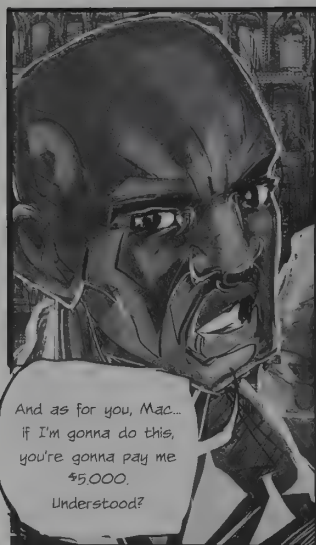
But, Frank...it's 1030 in the morning!



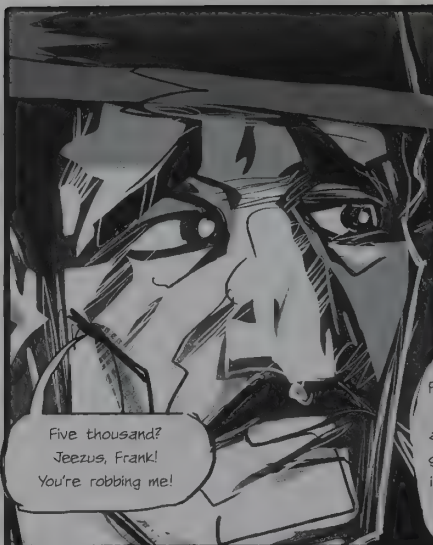
Are you a fucking sundia? I know what the fuck time it is!

Get the man a drink. It'll calm his nerves a bit.

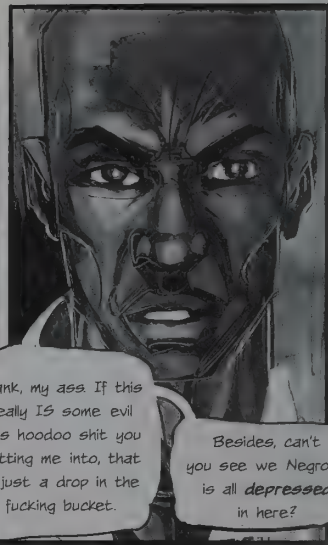




And as for you, Mac...  
if I'm gonna do this,  
you're gonna pay me  
\$5000.  
Understood?



Five thousand?  
Jeezus, Frank!  
You're robbing me!

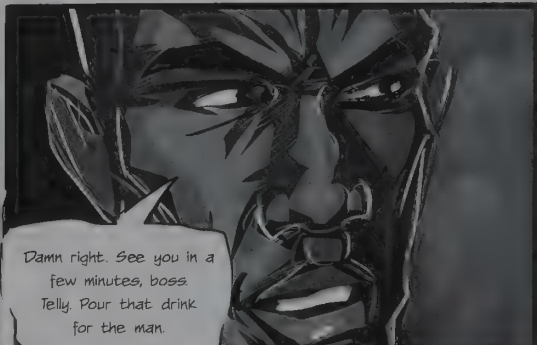


Frank, my ass. If this  
really IS some evil  
ass hoodoo shit you  
getting me into, that  
is just a drop in the  
fucking bucket.

Besides, can't  
you see we Negroes  
is all **depressed**  
in here?



Hurr. OK. OK.  
Five thousand.



Damn right. See you in a  
few minutes, boss.  
Telly. Pour that drink  
for the man.

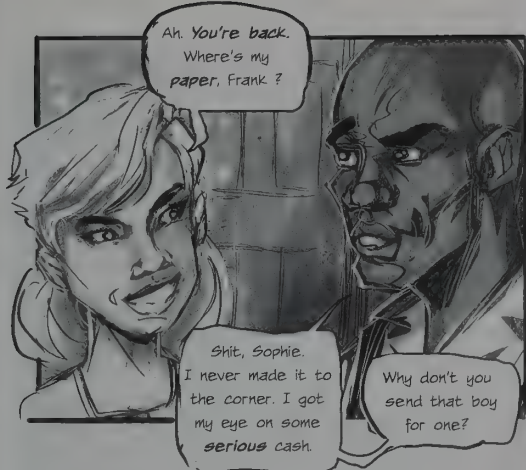
*I make my way back upstairs kind of  
pleased with myself and my haggling skills,  
at first. Then a cold shiver goes from my  
ass to the base of my thick skull. He  
barely bat an eye at a five-grand  
price tag. Shit. I shoulda demanded  
more money.*

*I come into the room just as  
Sophie is making her change.  
She's in mid-swallow  
of her passing potion.  
I watch the woman I know slip from the  
high yella brunette beauty to a blonde,  
blue-eyed white girl.*



*She does it because of this nice job she  
does downtown. Pays good money, even in  
these hard times..but only if you got  
the right complexion.*

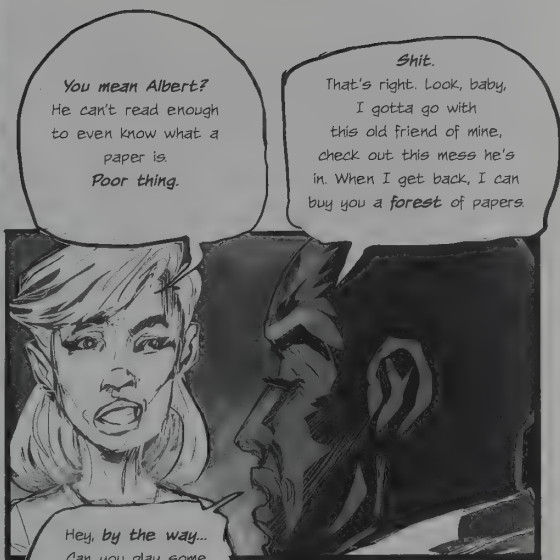




Ah. You're back.  
Where's my  
paper, Frank?

Shit, Sophie.  
I never made it to  
the corner. I got  
my eye on some  
serious cash.

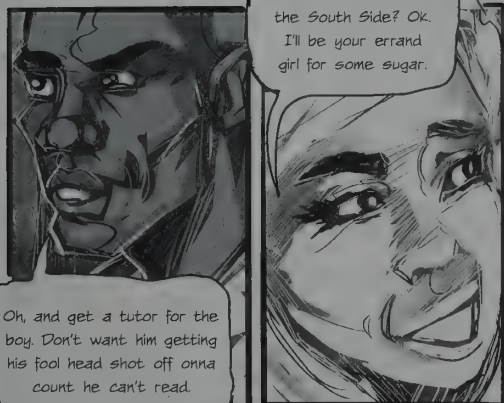
Why don't you  
send that boy  
for one?



You mean Albert?  
He can't read enough  
to even know what a  
paper is.  
*Poor thing.*

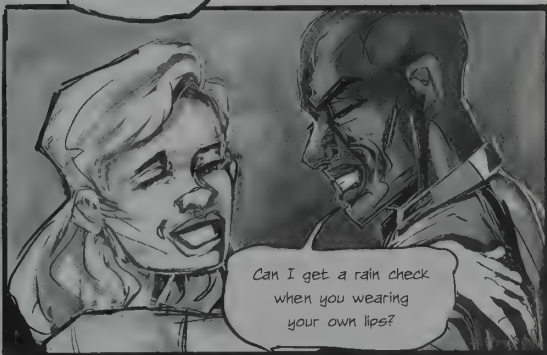
Shit.  
That's right. Look, baby,  
I gotta go with  
this old friend of mine,  
check out this mess he's  
in. When I get back, I can  
buy you a *forest* of papers.

Hey, by the way...  
Can you play some  
numbers for me? I had  
a dream. I can write  
'em down for you.

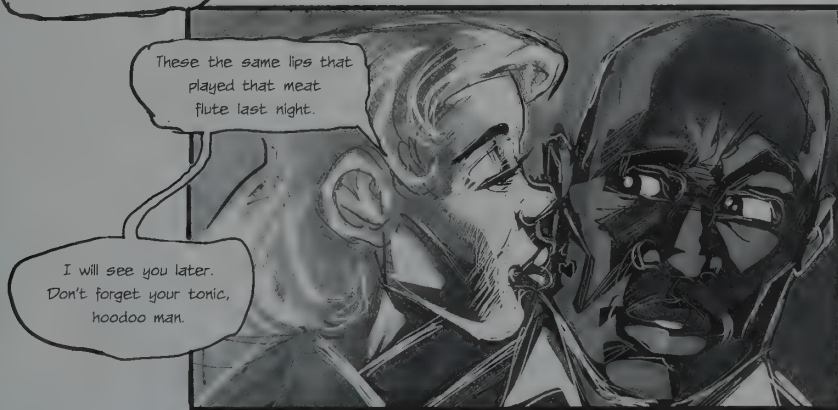


Ain't you just the  
sweetest smart ass on  
the South Side? Ok.  
I'll be your errand  
girl for some sugar.

Oh, and get a tutor for the  
boy. Don't want him getting  
his fool head shot off onna  
count he can't read.



Can I get a rain check  
when you wearing  
your own lips?

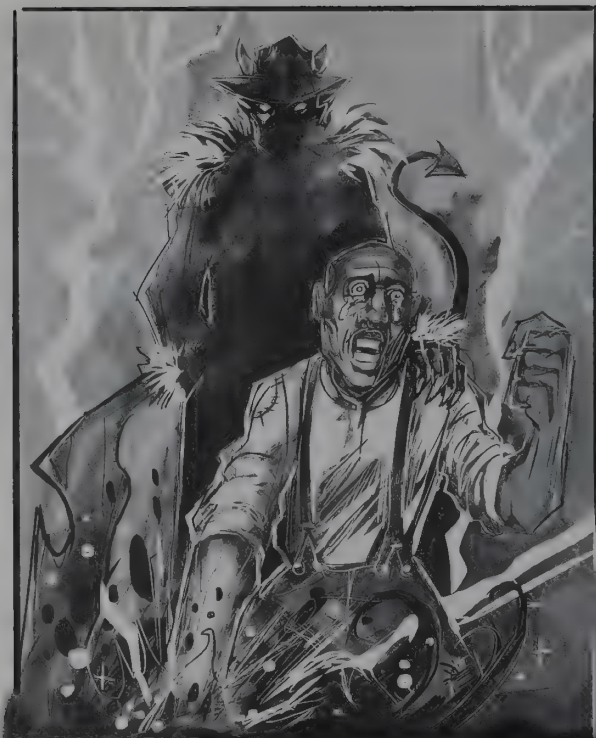


These the same lips that  
played that meat  
flute last night.

I will see you later.  
Don't forget your tonic,  
hoodoo man.

Sophie is as sweet as  
honey and loves me more  
than I think she even  
knows. She's a right  
strong rootworker, too.  
The tonic must be made by  
the hands of a lover. So-  
phie's good at both roles.

She's been a hell of a  
comfort to me, for sure. I  
think I may love her some,  
too. Who's to say? But her  
kiss makes my mojo hand  
twitch. That's *HER* hand.  
The Noir's hand and she  
gets mighty jealous. That's  
never good.



*Oh, yes. My tonic. My saving grace.*

*Years ago, when I made that crossroad deal with Brother Scratch, I reached into the Noir, pulled power right outta her. Now part of me belongs to her, too.*

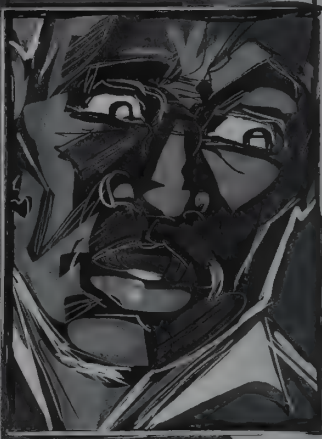
*My blue hand is what gives me my mojo. When I use my magic a little too much, the blue starts to creep up my arm, changing me into a Noir Lock.*

*If I ever get to be fully covered in blue, I will have to stay inside the Noir and become a story like everything else there.*

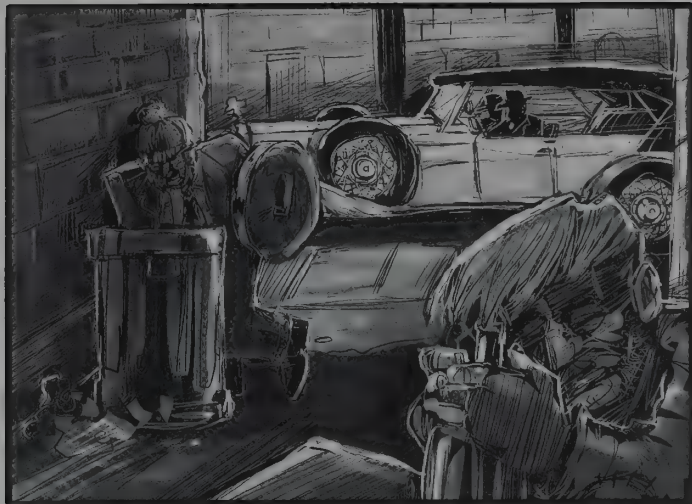


*The bad part of it is I love her as much as she loves me. The Noir is where all black magic and creativity begin and end. I belong inside of her, but I can't lose my humanity AND my soul. Also, I can't ever let her know she's right.*

*I'm complicated like that.*







## CHAPTER 3

### A MUDDY MASSACRE

I jot down the gig numbers for Sophie, grab my flask of tonic, and get dressed for business.

Mac and me take his ride back to the place where whatever scared the shit out of him happened.

We don't talk much outside of some idle chatter about current events. At first he seems in good spirits. I know it's just a front.



I have to admit. It is good to see him. It reminds me of our times running white lightning and mash for Capone. Those were the days.

His mood gets darker as we get closer to our destination.

He gets distant and cold, and I can't help but feel it. The car becomes a tomb on wheels. Mac just stares out at the road as we leave the city limits.



We park at an old warehouse that the mob has "redistributed" for their uses. God only knows what darkness this place has seen.

I guess I will know it soon myself.

We go into the double doors, and the damp smell hits me full in the face. Death lives here, and it's taking visitors.



The Shark's voice starts to tremble as the grey light of the morning gives way to the shadows of the rotting corpse of a building.

I feel the weight of the spirits in this place. I don't want to tell Mac, but I know that some serious conjuring went down here. The shadows speak dark secrets to my bones.

The black magic in this place makes my gris-gris bag warm around my neck.

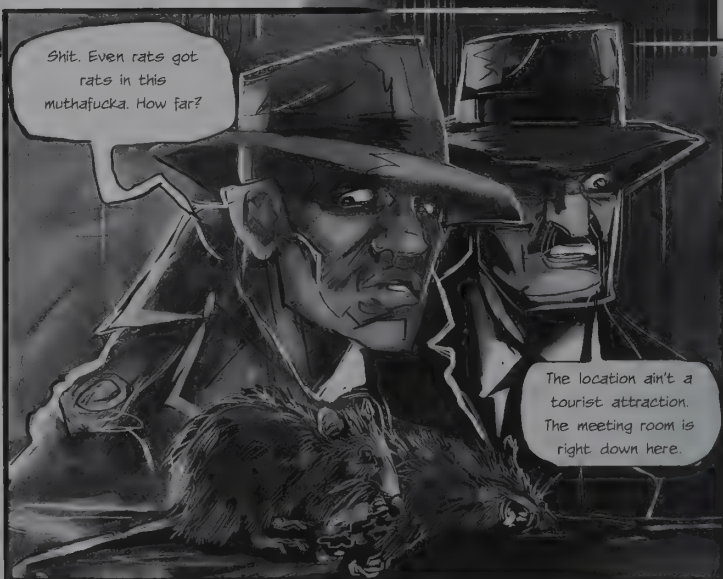
I feel a knot in my stomach the size of a fist. I shouldn't be here.

Um, Frank. Maybe I can stay outside by the car. You know, stay outta your way?

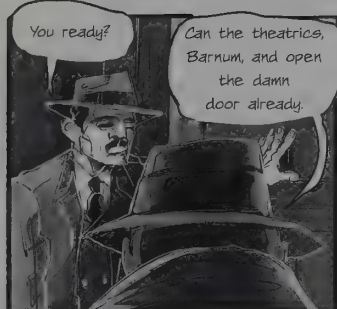
You're a funny guy, Mac. Bring your scary ass on.

Frank, you just don't get it. This is worst shit I've ever seen.

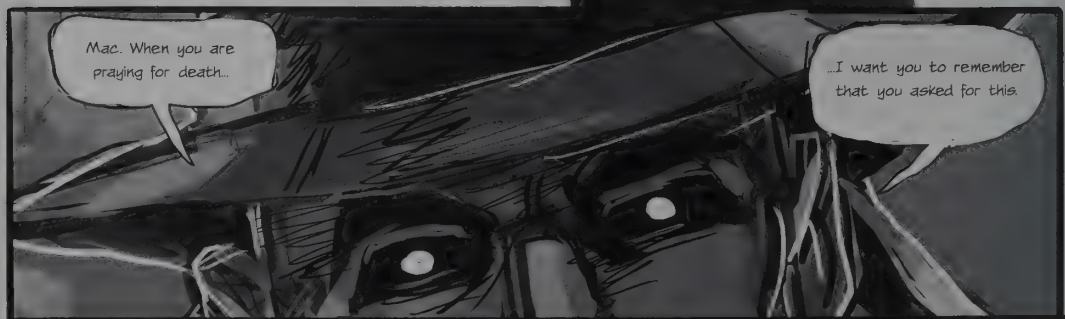
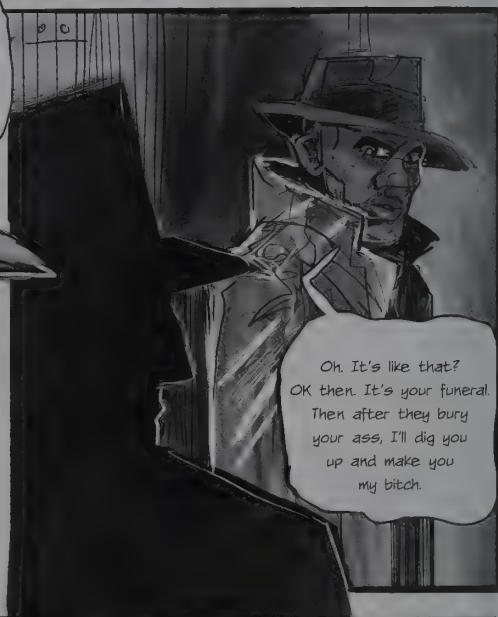
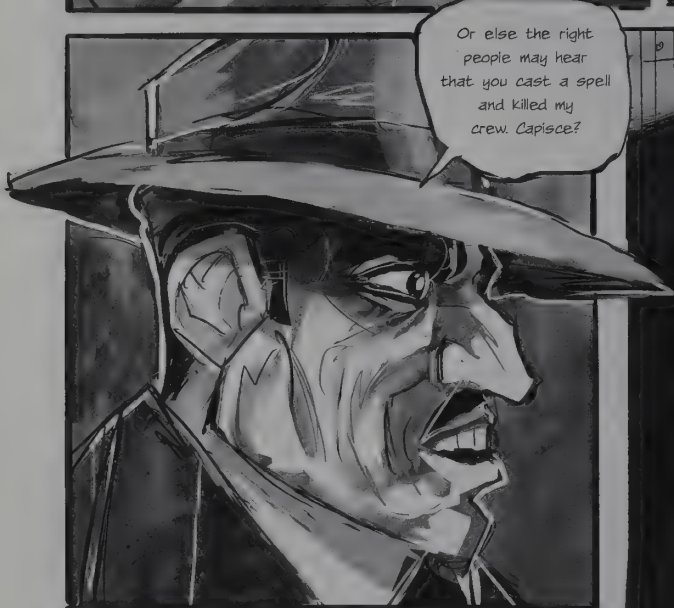
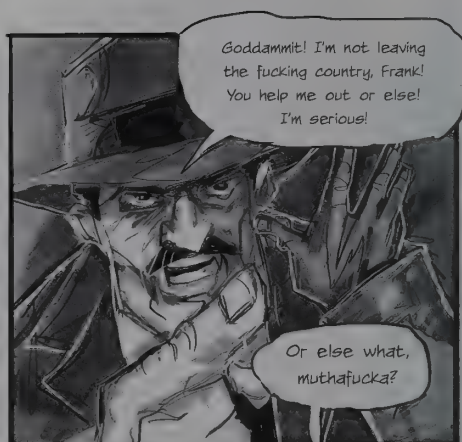
Twenty bucks say you think the same damn thing.



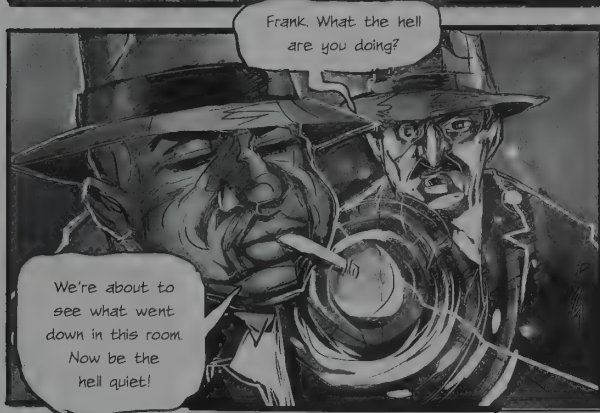
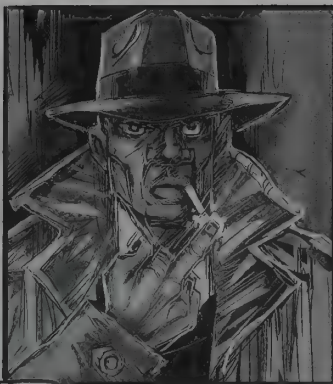
He does what I ask, and I instantly want the door closed again.









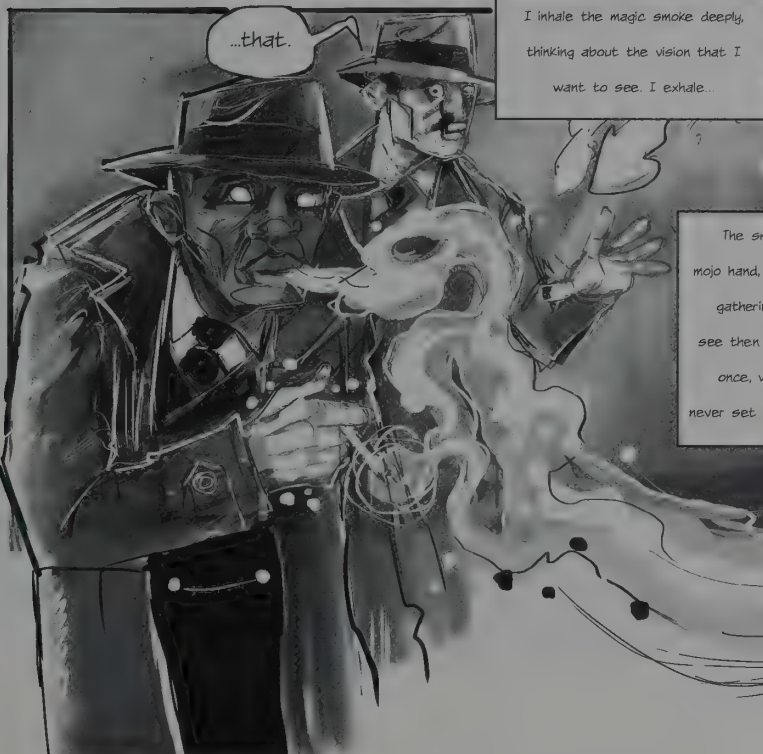


Frank. What the hell  
are you doing?

We're about to  
see what went  
down in this room.  
Now be the  
hell quiet!



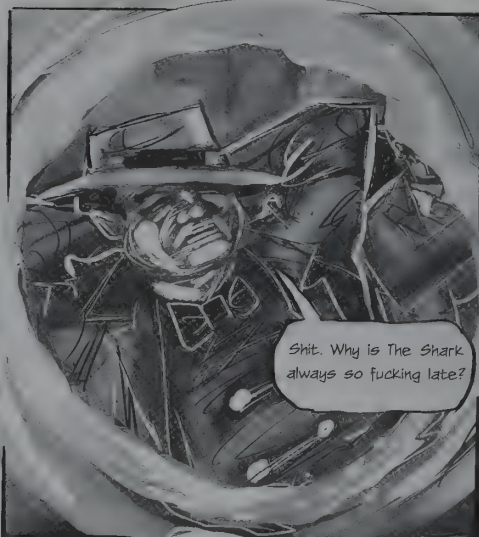
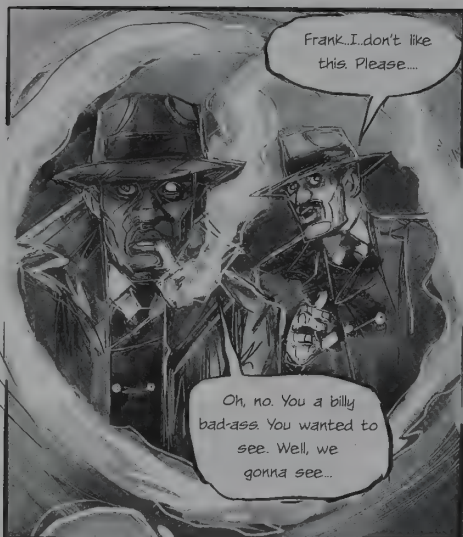
What the fuck  
do you mean by...



...that.

I inhale the magic smoke deeply,  
thinking about the vision that I  
want to see. I exhale...

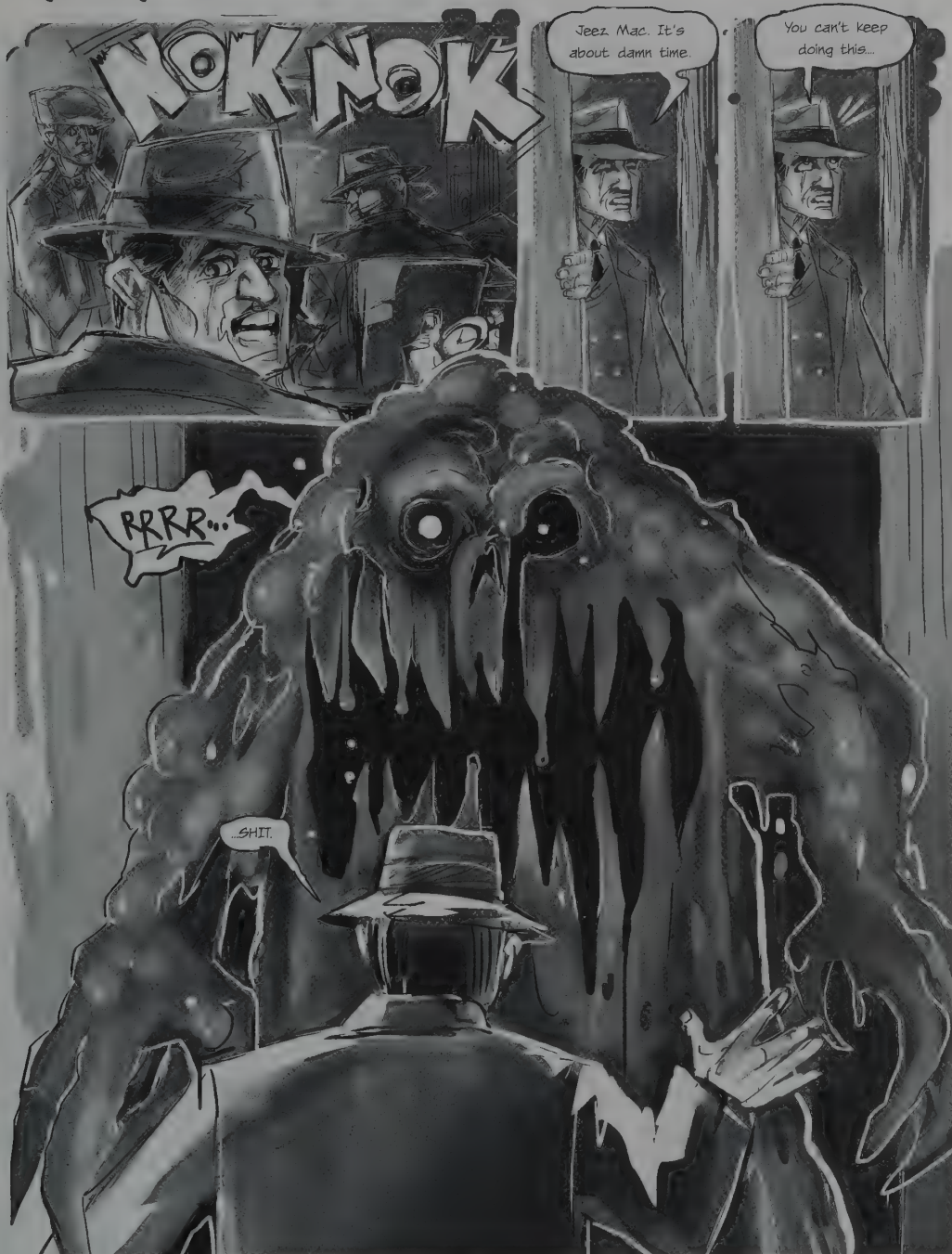
The smoke, powered by my  
mojo hand, swirls around the room...  
gathering the tale for us to  
see then it shows us, and, all at  
once, we both wish we had  
never set foot in that fucking room.



The ring tells us **everything** we want to know...  
or everything **we thought** we wanted to know.  
To this day I wish I hadn't seen **any** of it.

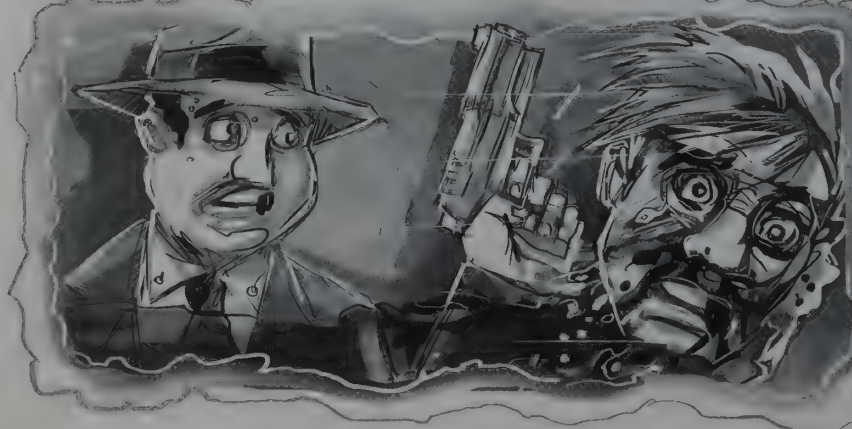
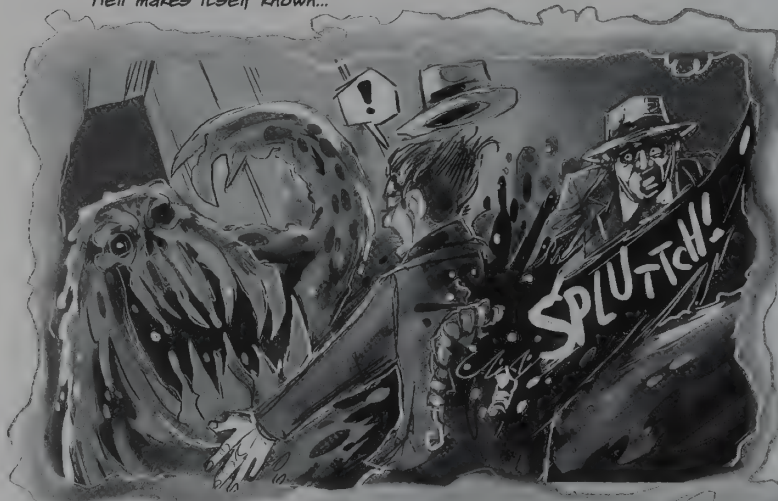


But that's nothing compared to actually being there...  
I guarantee you that.



Time stops. Just enough of a moment  
to see a glimpse of your life flash...

...then the devil laughs somewhere and  
Hell makes itself known...

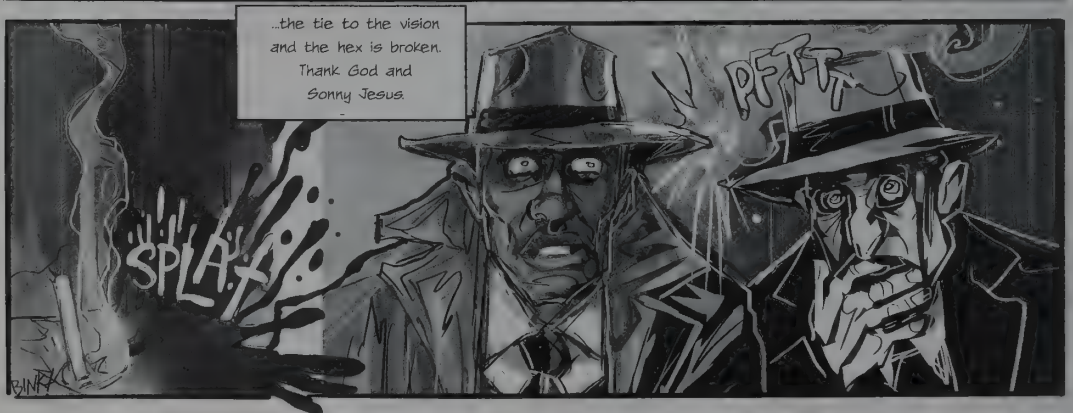
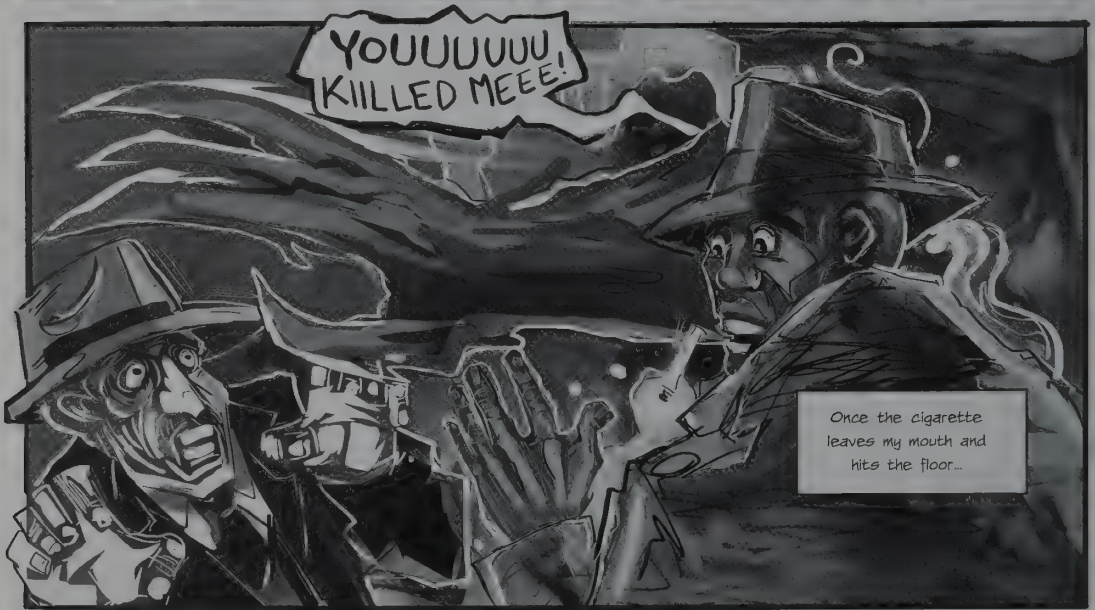




One by one, each man was reduced to  
just the stink of fear and shit...

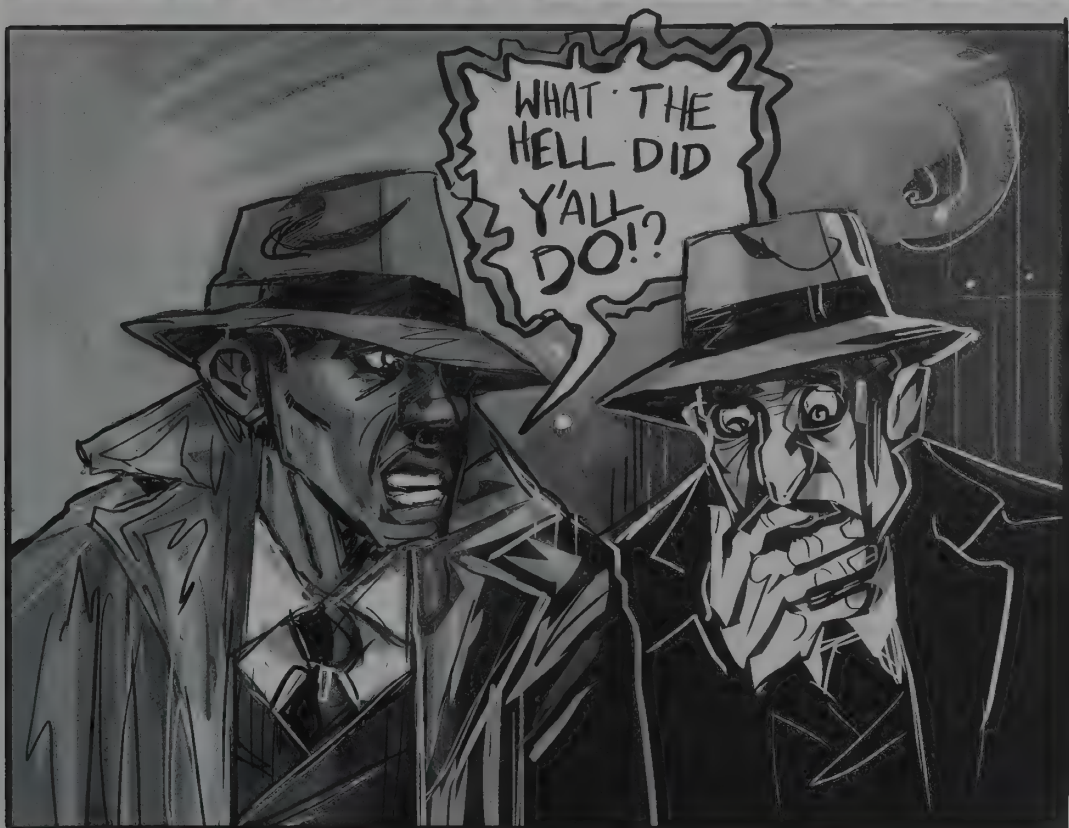


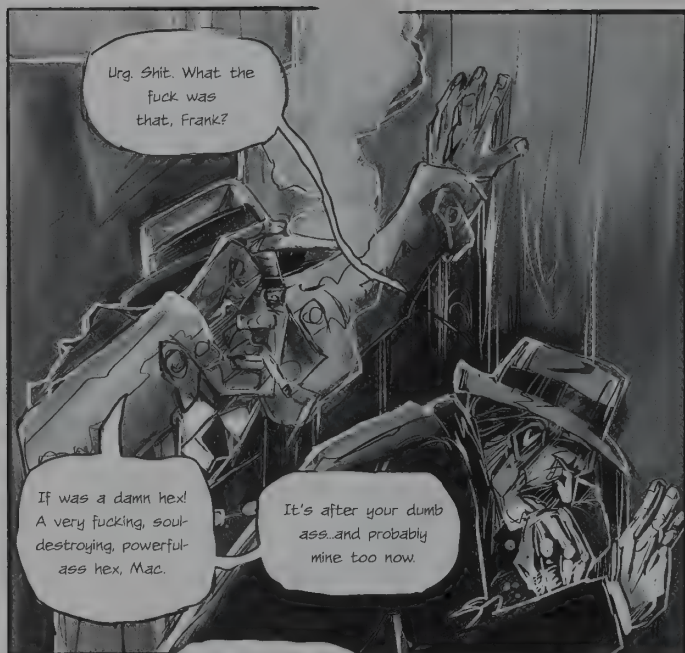
...and mercy was busy  
that day.





*We both strain to keep down the last  
thing we ate...*



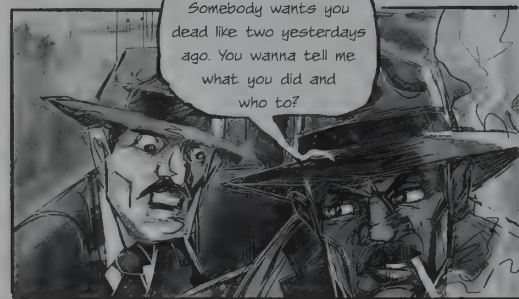


Urg. Shit. What the fuck was that, Frank?

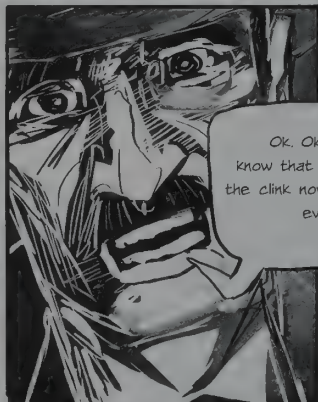
If was a damn hex! A very fucking, soul-destroying, powerful-ass hex, Mac.

It's after your dumb ass...and probably mine too now.

I ask you again. Somebody wants you dead like two yesterdays ago. You wanna tell me what you did and who to?



I'm waiting, Shark.



Ok. Ok. Well, you know that the boss is in the clink now, right? For tax evasion?

## CHAPTER 4

### WHAT THE HELL THEY DID

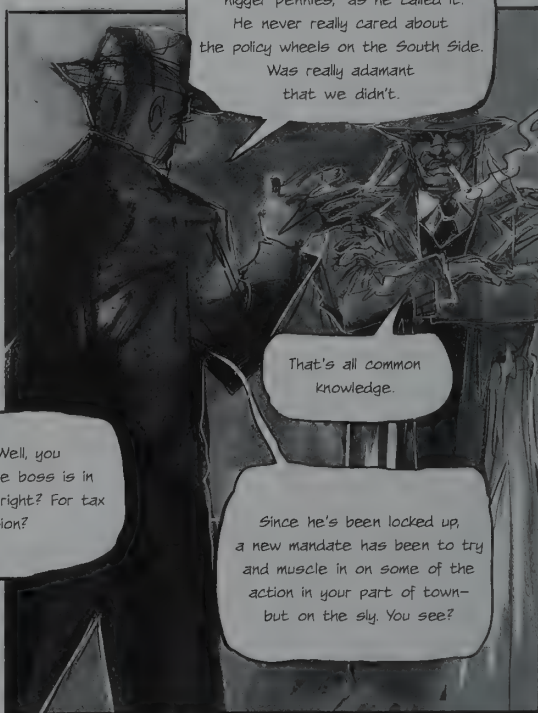
We both can't wait to get out of that room for some clean air. The light doesn't help much.

I light up another square while Mac loses his lunch all over the ground. I can't blame him. What we saw wasn't meant for human eyes.

I've never seen so much pain and rage in a thing in my life. It's hell-bent on revenge.

The darkest thing there is.

Also...he didn't mess with "nigger pennies," as he called it. He never really cared about the policy wheels on the South Side. Was really adamant that we didn't.

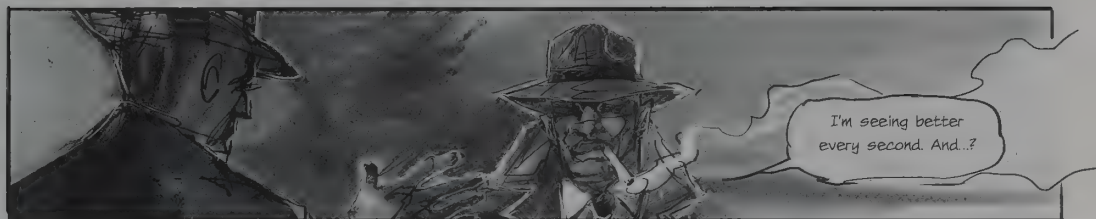


That's all common knowledge.

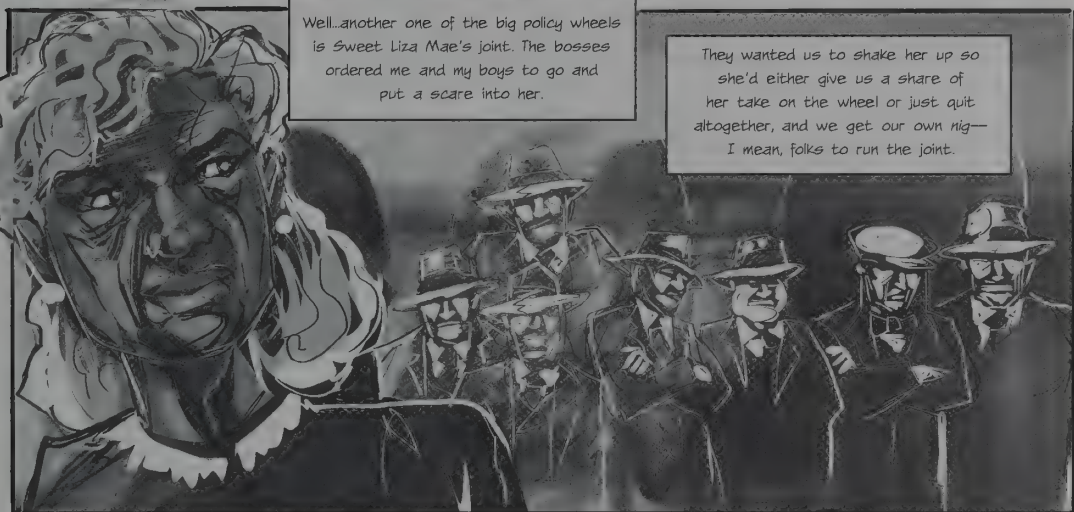
Since he's been locked up, a new mandate has been to try and muscle in on some of the action in your part of town—but on the sly. You see?



The Shark rambles on, and I get more and more worried about the end of this mess.

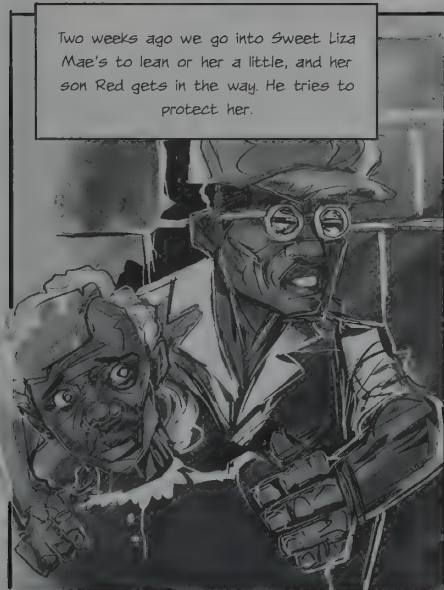


I'm seeing better every second And..?

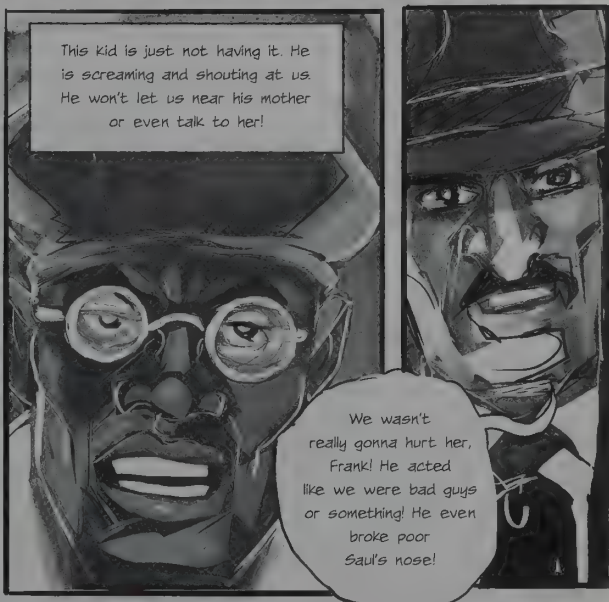


Well...another one of the big policy wheels is Sweet Liza Mae's joint. The bosses ordered me and my boys to go and put a scare into her.

They wanted us to shake her up so she'd either give us a share of her take on the wheel or just quit altogether, and we get our own nig—I mean, folks to run the joint.

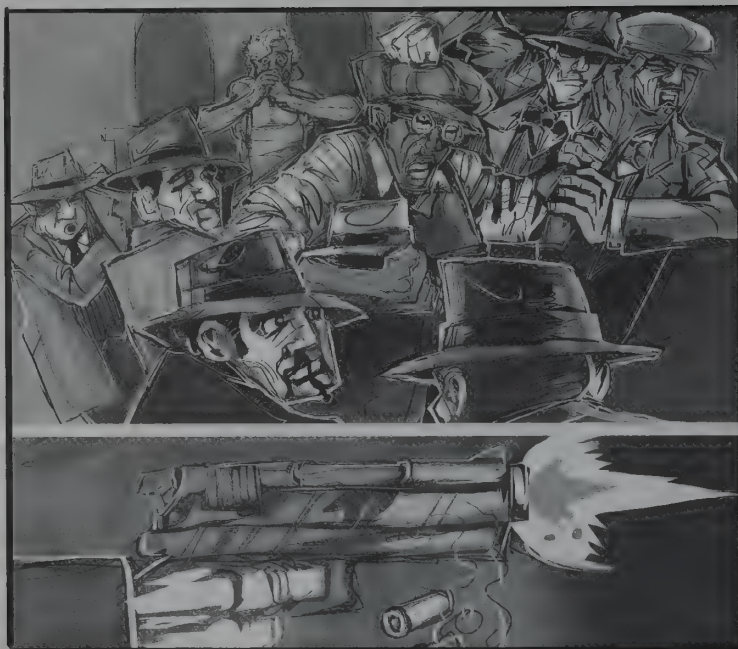


Two weeks ago we go into Sweet Liza Mae's to lean on her a little, and her son Red gets in the way. He tries to protect her.



This kid is just not having it. He is screaming and shouting at us. He won't let us near his mother or even talk to her!

We wasn't really gonna hurt her, Frank! He acted like we were bad guys or something! He even broke poor Saul's nose!



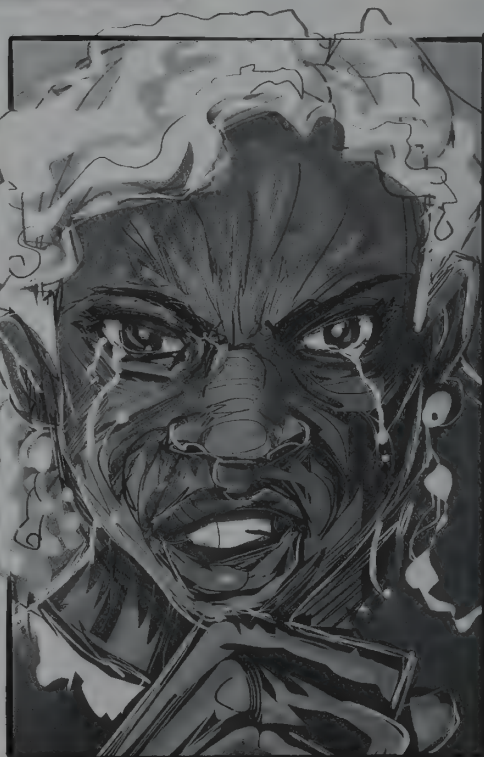
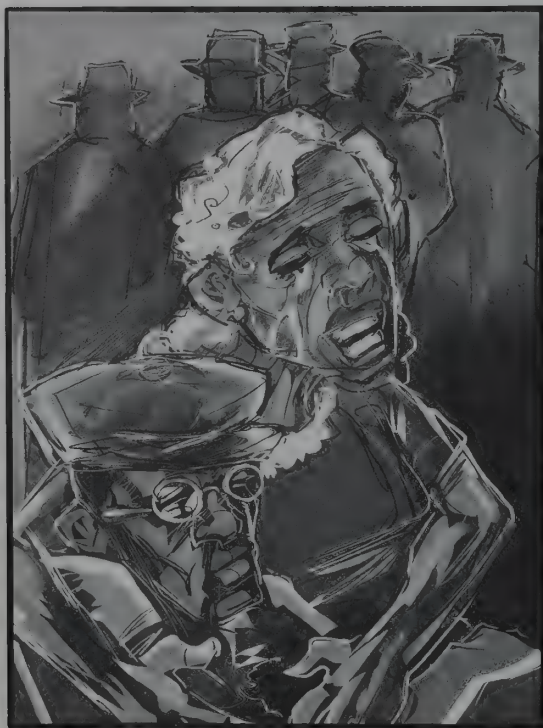
He got really physical, and he ended up rushing us. Before you know it, Carmine pulled his piece and plugged the kid. It wasn't supposed to go down like that! He shouldn't have rushed us like that! I think he was slow or something, you know?

We had no choice, Frank.


The kid..Red..he died right there in his mother's arms. I never heard wailing like that. Never.

Then. Then, all of a sudden, she stopped and stared at us with this..look. She didn't say a word. She just..looked right through us like we weren't there.


We got outta there quick. We didn't even look back. I think we were all in shock. It all went to hell so fast, Frank! Right to Hell.





A black and white comic panel showing two men in fedoras. The man on the left is speaking, and the man on the right is listening with a cigarette in his mouth.


Frank. You believe me, right?

A black and white comic panel showing two men in fedoras. The man on the left is speaking, and the man on the right is listening with a cigarette in his mouth.

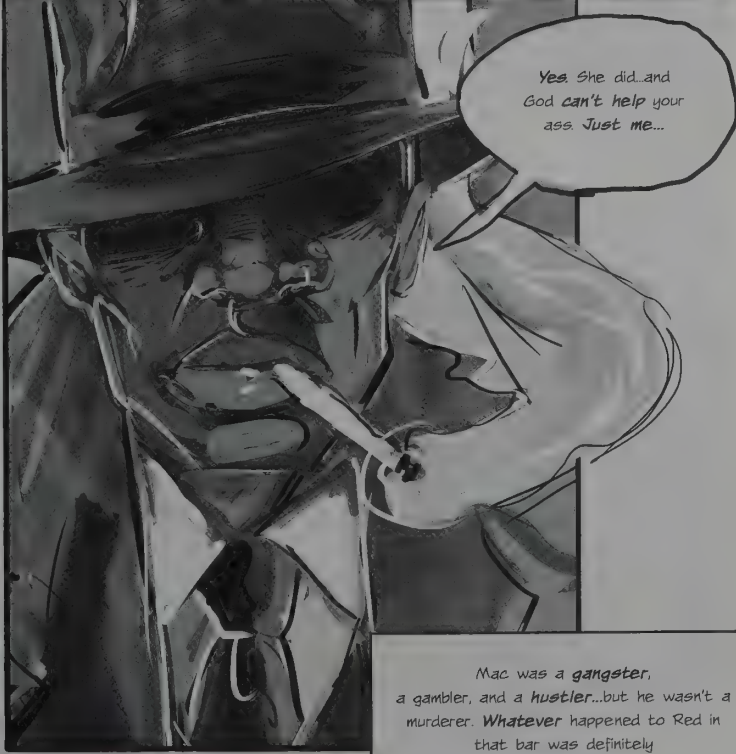
Frank. You believe we didn't mean it right, Frank?

A black and white comic panel showing two men in fedoras. The man on the left is speaking, and the man on the right is listening with a cigarette in his mouth.

God Damn.

A black and white comic panel showing a man in a fedora speaking. He is looking down and has a cigarette in his mouth.

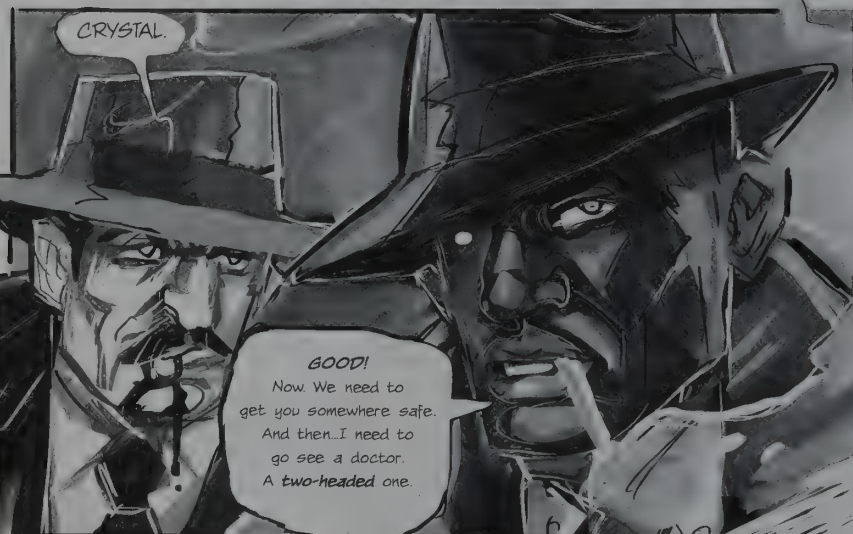
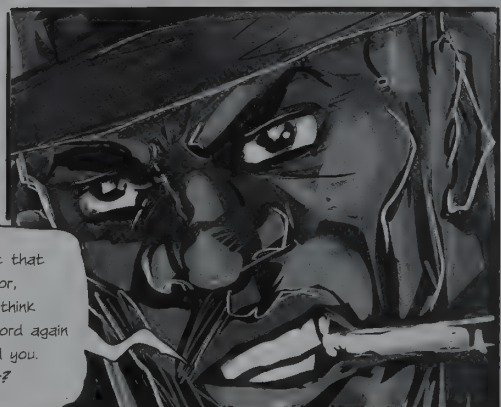
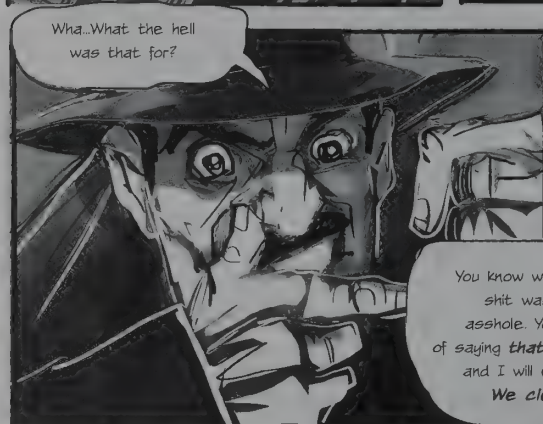
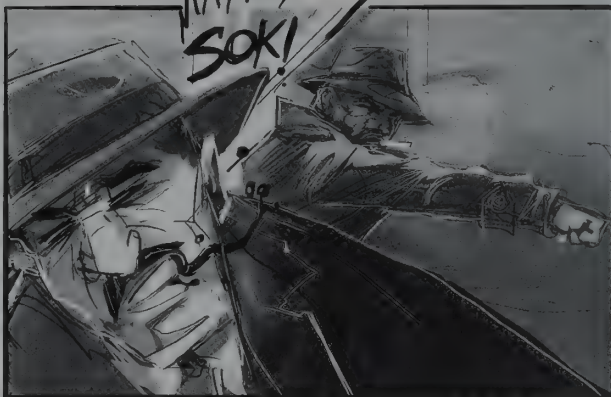
She did this, right?  
She put this thing on me and my boys?  
GOD HELP ME.

A large black and white comic panel showing a man in a fedora speaking. He is looking down and has a cigarette in his mouth.

Yes. She did...and God can't help your ass. Just me...

Mac was a gangster, a gambler, and a hustler...but he wasn't a murderer. Whatever happened to Red in that bar was definitely an accident.

HOWEVER...



We head *back* to the city...and  
the hell we just saw *goes*  
*back* with us.



INTERLUDE :  
A SAFEHOUSE  
SOMEWHERE IN CHICAGO

THAT NIGHT IN THE  
WOODS THAT  
FRANK "FORGOT"

Goddamit!  
If Frank says to not touch  
that circle of dust or  
whatever the fuck, then you  
don't touch it or let  
**ANYTHING**  
touch it!

AM I MAKING  
MYSELF  
CLEAR?! DON'T  
TOUCH THE  
FUCKING DUST  
CIRCLE!

But, boss, it's *spooky*.  
That voodoo nigger  
just said some weird  
shit, sprinkled this cricle,  
and ordered us *not* to  
touch it!

Plus, it *smells* funny. Me and  
the boys are just spooked out  
by it. Everything about that  
darkie is *off*. You know?

Let me tell you. That  
"*spooky*" nigger, as you  
'call him... is my friend, and  
he's done things you  
couldn't imagine.

I mean...  
Who the hell is he  
to be ordering white  
folks around? No  
*disrespect*, boss.

Capone had us on a run down in *Southern Illinois* picking up some hooch...

It was me, Frank, Scarface Floyd, and Junior Brown. Junior was the little brother of George "Big Boy" Brown, the policy hustler. Capone had forged an alliance with him on some action, and Big Boy wanted his brother to learn the ropes. We didn't want him there. It didn't matter.

Let's just say, there's bad and then there's the shit that went down that night.

Our suppliers were late, and we were getting antsy.

'Bout time you crackers showed up. We was about head back up to the city. That our 'shine?

No, boy. This here's our 'shine right up 'til we get paid. I can't believe Capone done stooped to dealing with spooks!

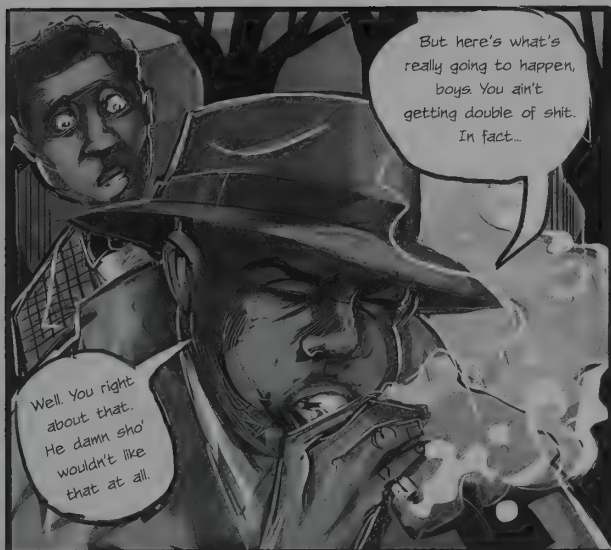
In fact, me an' my boys have been conferring over the past few dealings, and we feel that this shipment *should* be double what we usually get.

We ain't stupid. Just 'cos we live in the woods don't mean we don't hear about how he lives. How he has all the power. The money. The women.

It's *about* time we got some of that too. It's about time we become a lot more like *partners* than suppliers. Don't you think? It's only fair, right?

Either *that* or the well runs dry, boys. You either cough up double or roll yo' asses back to that ugly bastard empty-handed. I know he ain't gonna like that, is he?



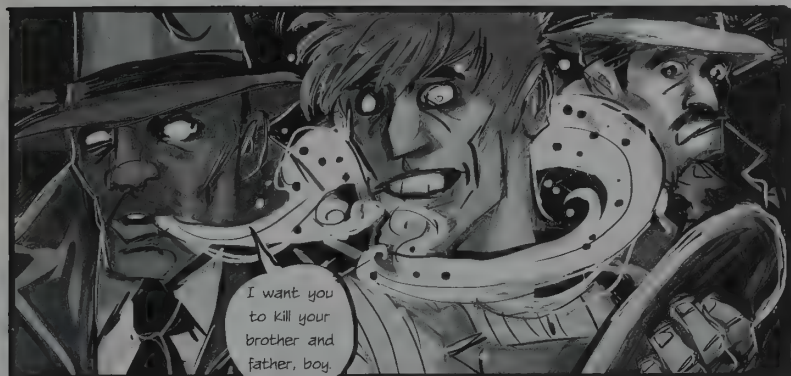


I don't know what Frank did. It was...well, it was magic for lack of a better more saner word. He put a whammy on those rednecks. He took a puff of his cigarette and closed his eyes like he was concentrating...

He turned them into his lap dogs...right there in front of themselves. I never seen anything like it. I've heard of mesmerism and whatever the fuck. But this, this was something frightening...something dark.



Frank just laughed and said "I know you do, boy. I know you do." His eyes were all stange and white, and I could see sparks around him like fireflies. He just smiled because he knew what was coming next.



You see, these good ole boys had been disrespecting Capone for a while now. He didn't like that. So, we were supposed to come back with the shipment and their heads. Junior Brown didn't know that. Turns out, Junior Brown didn't know shit from nothing and more's the pity.



KILL THEM? YES!  
I WANT TO KILL THEM  
FOR YOU, MASTER!  
KILL THEM DEAD!  
DEAD! DEAD!

The youngest and strongest had brought a bat to a magic fight. He looked at his brother and father like they were strangers. He looked at them like he hated the flesh they were in and everything under it. He growled, took aim, and started to beat them into the ground with that bat. He laughed as he did it.

Frank told the boy's father and brother to be still and to be quiet.

They did just that. Even when pieces of skull and muck exploded from them. Even when bones became bloody powder.

They said not one word.



SWEET  
LORD  
JEEZUS!

The boy beat them to a pulp. He swung that bat over and over, and Junior just looked on in terror.

The sound of wet life seeping out of those bodies...I can still hear it sometimes. Some things you just shouldn't see.

I could tell that something shifted in Junior Brown. In spite of himself, he died with those rednecks that night in the woods.





WHA?

...daddy...

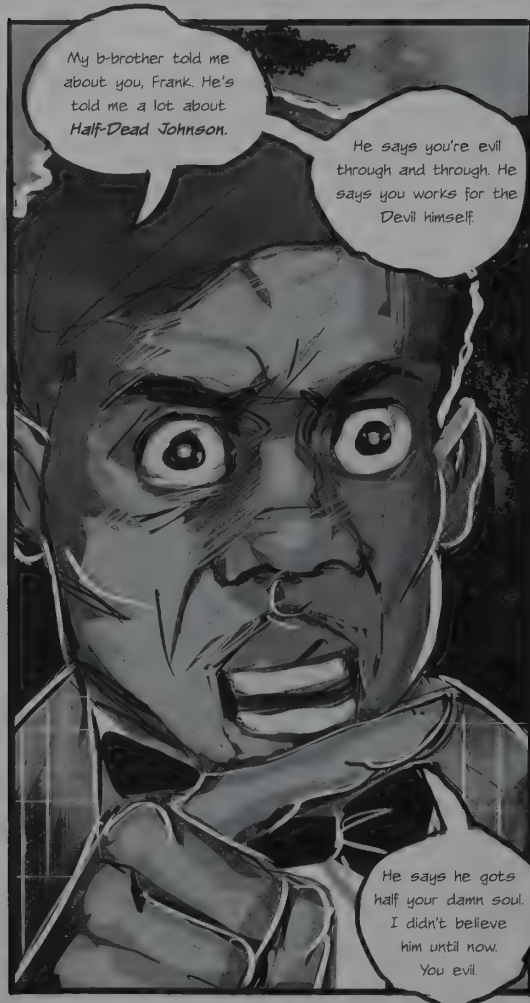
Have you lost  
your damn mind? What  
have you done?! Capone  
is gonna kill us now! You  
done killed us, Frank!  
YOU CRAZY!

Frank released the boy  
from his spell. He seemed  
like a little child wak-  
ing from a nightmare.  
He looked like a rabbit  
caught in a snare. He  
was unmade in that mo-  
ment and started to cry.

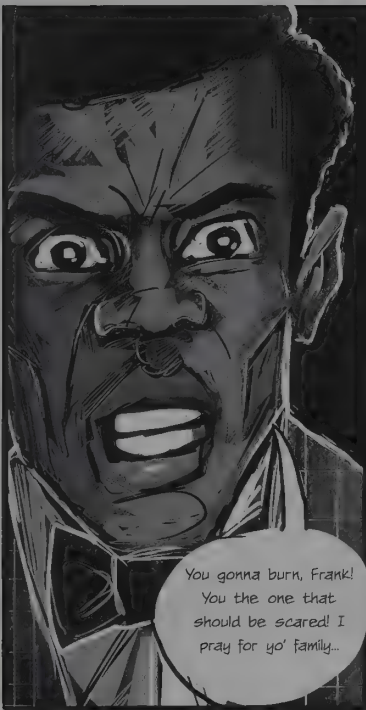
Junior lost it and start-  
ed yelling at Frank like  
he was his daddy...

You done gone  
too far! Killing white  
folks like that?!

KID BACK  
DOWN BEFORE  
IT'S TOO  
LATE.







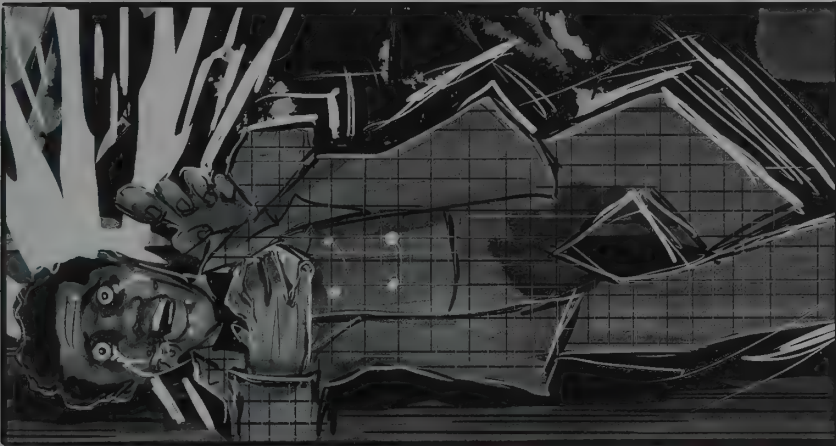
You gonna burn, Frank!  
You the one that  
should be scared! I  
pray for yo' family...



My family? The fuck you  
know about my family,  
muthafucka? Didn't I  
tell you to shut the  
fuck up? Didn't I!



YOU GONE  
LEARN TODAY!



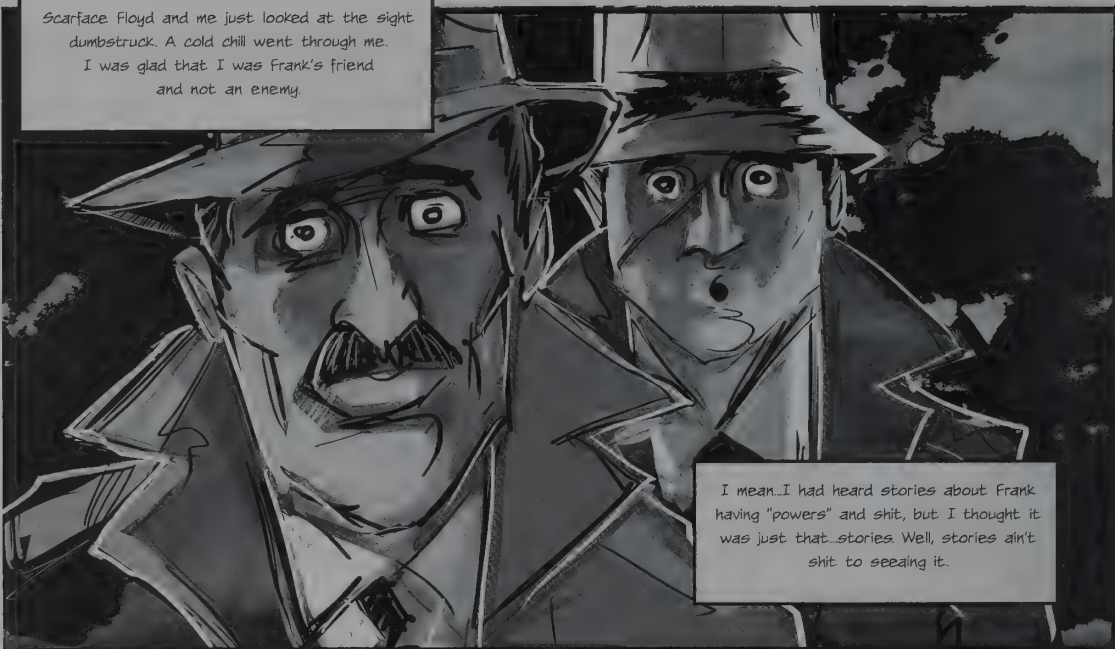
Frank lost his cool then.  
No one, but no one  
mentions his family. Junior  
didn't know that shit  
either.

Hot light flew from  
Frank's blue hand and  
hit Junior square in the  
puss. He went down  
screaming, pissing, and  
shitting himself. He lost  
his mind in an instant.  
He never found it again.  
He died in the looney bin  
from what I hear.

*Damn shame.*

Scarface Floyd and me just looked at the sight dumbstruck. A cold chill went through me.

I was glad that I was Frank's friend  
and not an enemy.



I mean I had heard stories about Frank having "powers" and shit, but I thought it was just that...stories. Well, stories ain't shit to seeing it.

After that, we finished the job...

Scarface put the youngest out of his misery with a well-placed shot to the head. It was a mercy.

Then we loaded up the hooch and headed back north to Chicago.

SO...when I say  
"DON'T TOUCH  
THAT DUST  
CIRCLE."

I REALLY MEAN THAT  
SHIT FROM THE  
BOTTOM OF MY SOUL.

....  
Now get me several  
drinks, dammit.



END OF INTERLUDE



## CHAPTER 6

### THE CONJURE MAN LIES

I put the Shark up in one of his safe houses up North and put a goofer dust circle of protection around him. If that circle gets broken he will just how unsafe that house can get.

I go back to the South Side on the El to see Papa John Gooden. He's the local root doctor.



His place is called  
*The Gooden Plenty.*

*Stupid fucking name.*

I hate his ass. He's an underhanded,  
double-dealing, arrogant, snake.

He also has the absolute best roots, herbs, and  
conjuring supplies around. He gets the freshest  
ingredients directly from the source. So, a lot of  
times, I have to deal with him. The bastard Papa  
John hates my ass too.

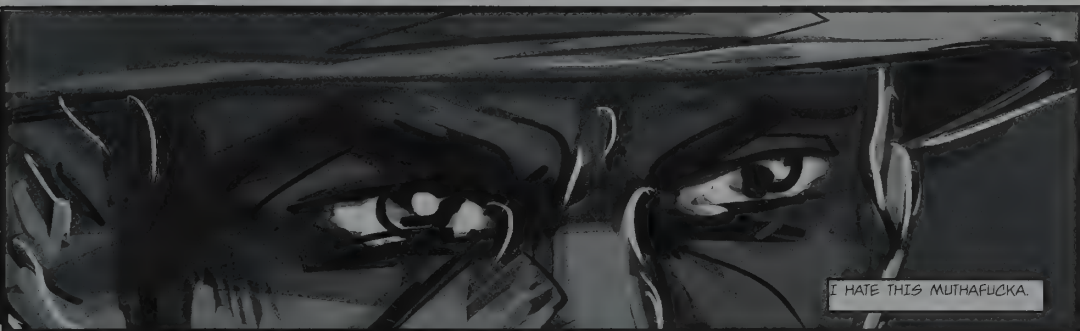
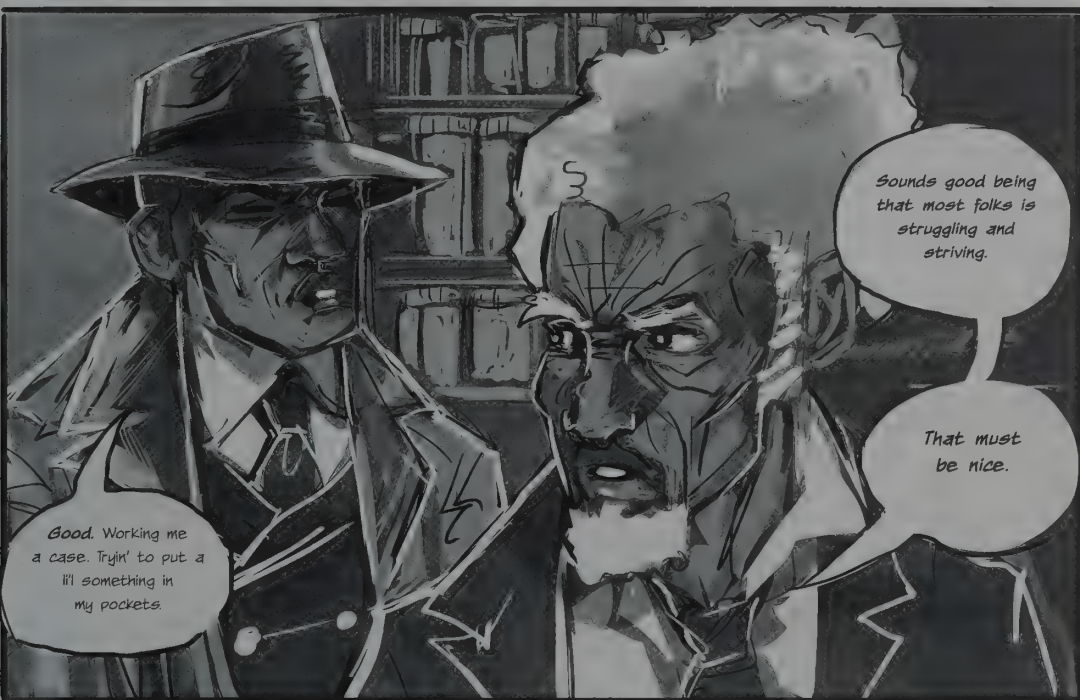
Because he knows who the best  
two-headed doctor in town is.

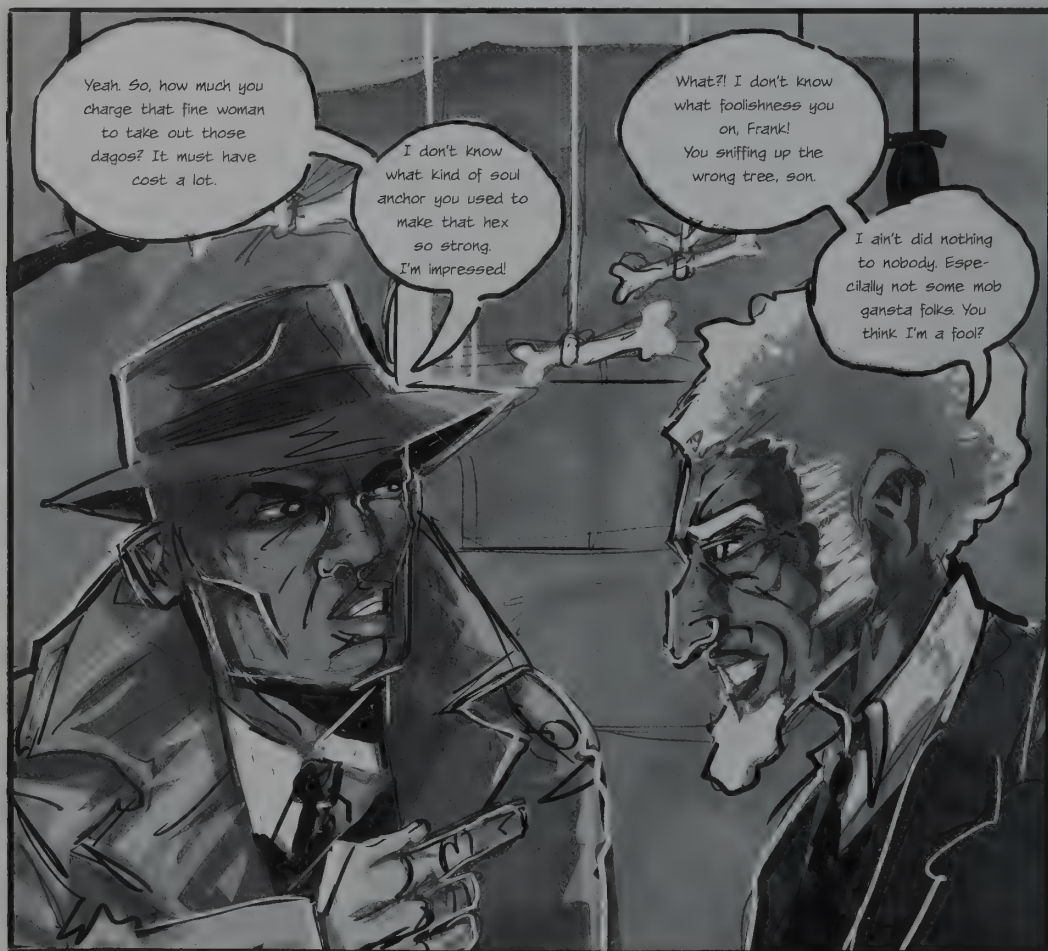
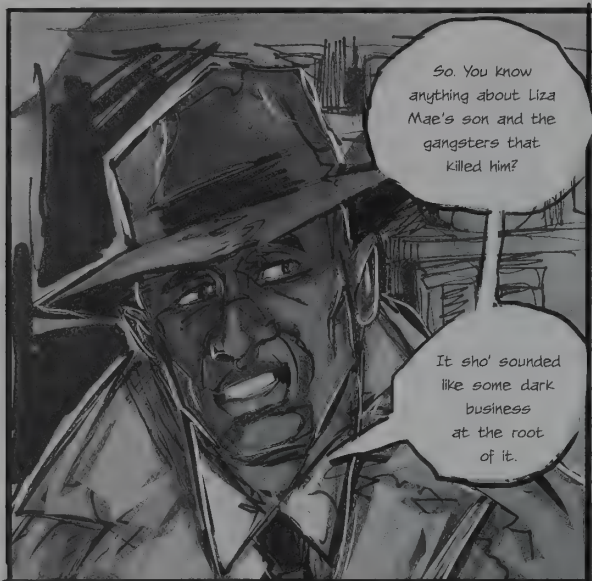
*Damn right.*

Usually, we try to stay outta each other's way. He keeps to his buisness, and I keep to mine. However, this was five grand we are talking about here. Oh. Also, the control of a young man's soul. Let's try not to forget that.

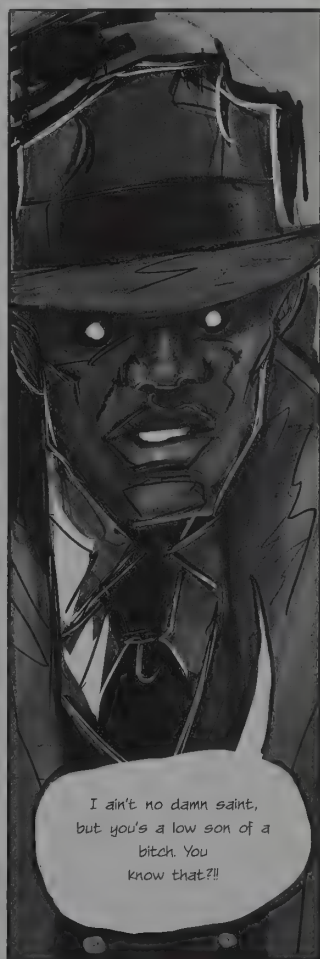
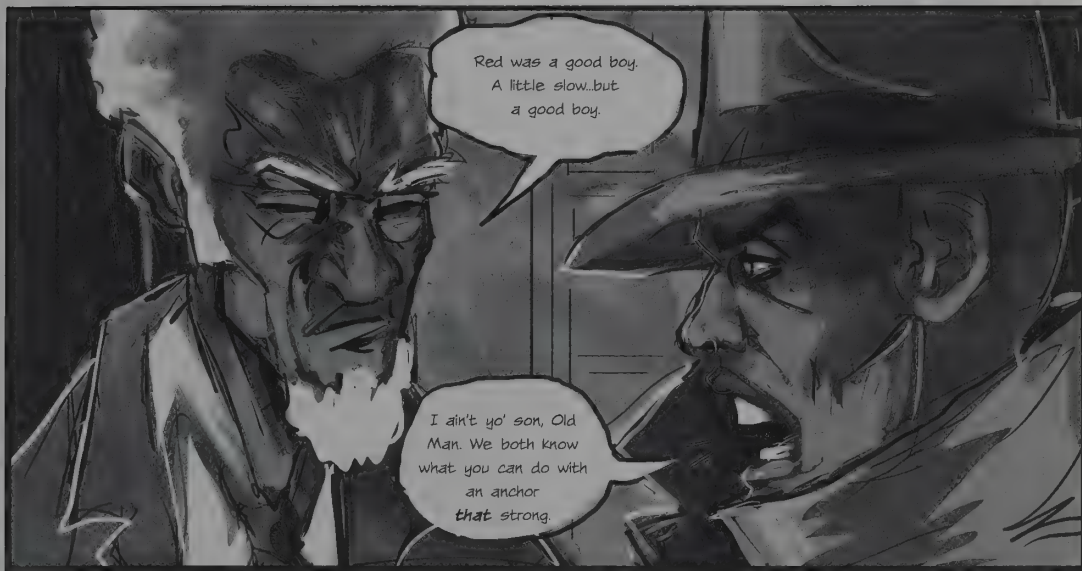













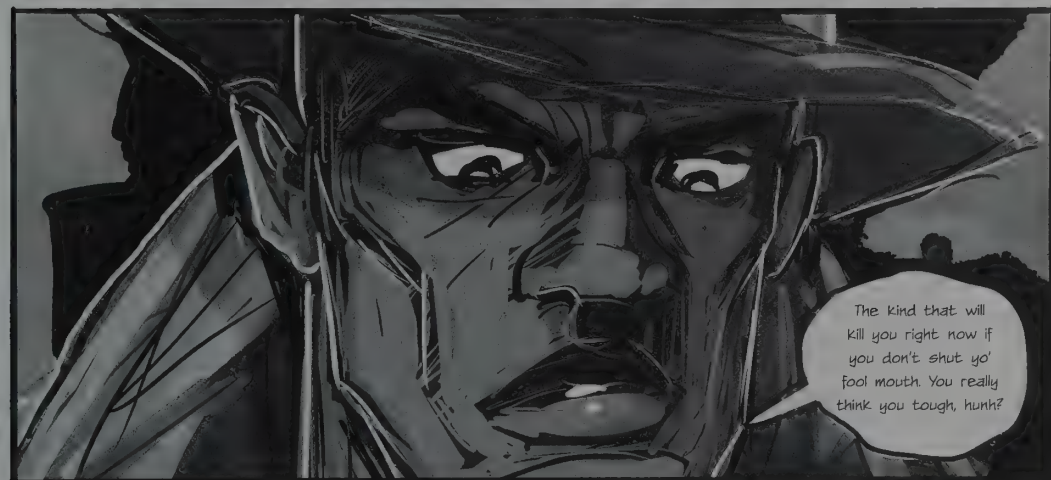
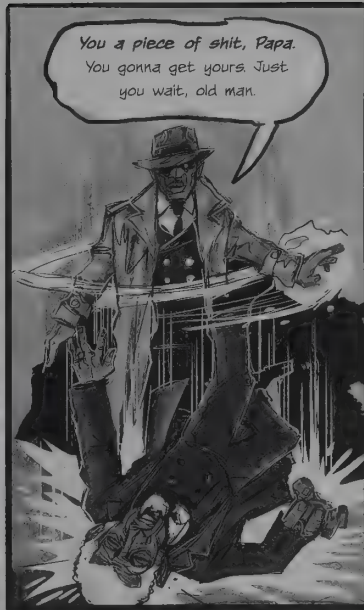
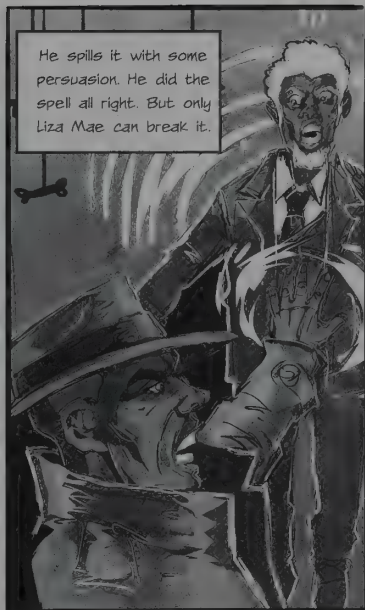


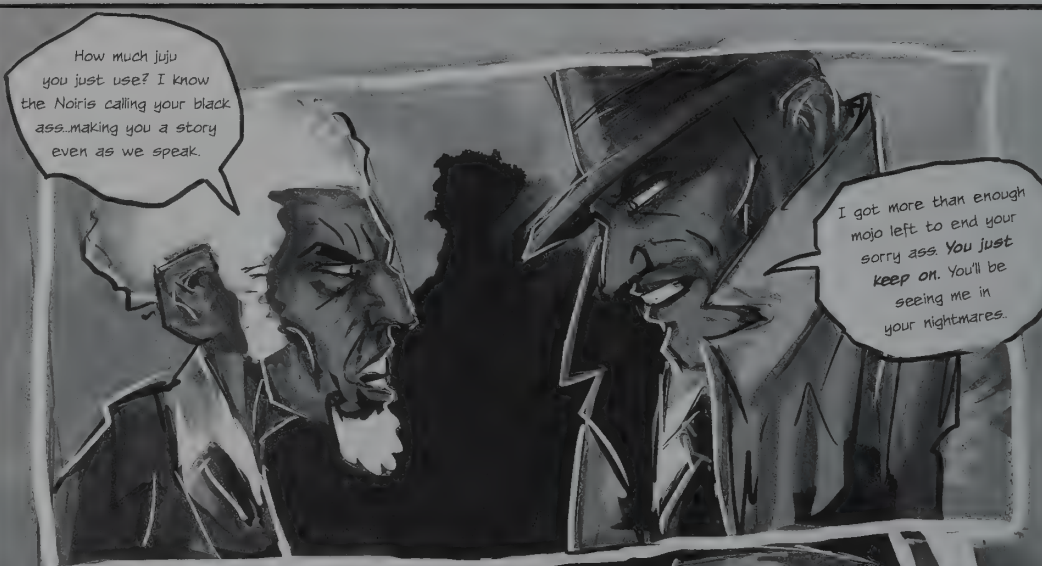
Man! You's a lying rat. I  
know the roots you used!  
I know the hex you cast  
too! It's got you written  
all over this shit.

I knew you wouldn't fess up  
I just had to see for myself!  
You 'bout to  
break that spell.

Put me down,  
niggah. I ain't  
yo' play pretty!

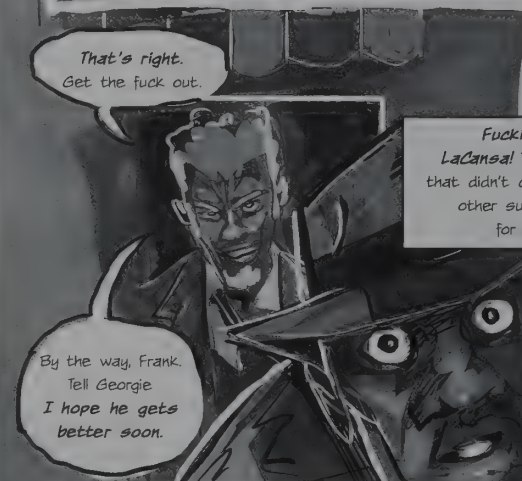






How much juju  
you just use? I know  
the Noirs calling your black  
ass..making you a story  
even as we speak.

I got more than enough  
mojo left to end your  
sorry ass. You just  
keep on. You'll be  
seeing me in  
your nightmares.



That's right.  
Get the fuck out.

Fucking Georgie  
LaCansa! The sick goombah  
that didn't come that day. The  
other survivor! Fuck me  
for forgetting!

By the way, Frank.  
Tell Georgie  
I hope he gets  
better soon.




You son  
of a bitch.



HAHAHAHA!

There's no way I can get there by train in time.  
I will have to go a *secret* way and  
travel the *Strange Root* system that con-  
nects all the world together as one...





I have to go through **THE NOIR**...The living space where all Black Imagination lives and breeds.

The night that Scratch made me reach down deep into the red dirt of that crossroads, I reached deep into her. **She's owned that part of me** ever since. She wants my **everything**, though. She wants me to be a story and live inside her forever. **I ain't ready...not yet.**

Frank, my love! It's been so long! Are you ready to join the others in my darkness? Your story would be legendary! Your pain, so epic.

It hurts when I am this close to her. Her love and power is...  
**pure intoxication.**

Don't you want to be with me? I know you do. Your hand talks to me often and tells me of your longings.

I want to be with you, of course! I really do, but I can't right now!

Right now, I have to get to the **Northside**. There's a man in trouble. I have to try and **help him**.

The power of my **mojo** and all my spells come from her strange and dark womb. She is the secret that black women pass from one to another in the **shadows**.

I can feel the **mojo** start to crawl down my hand to my arm...to my heart...  
**I fight back the tears**



Frank. You know you don't  
care about that man. You  
want the money. I know your  
heart. My love.

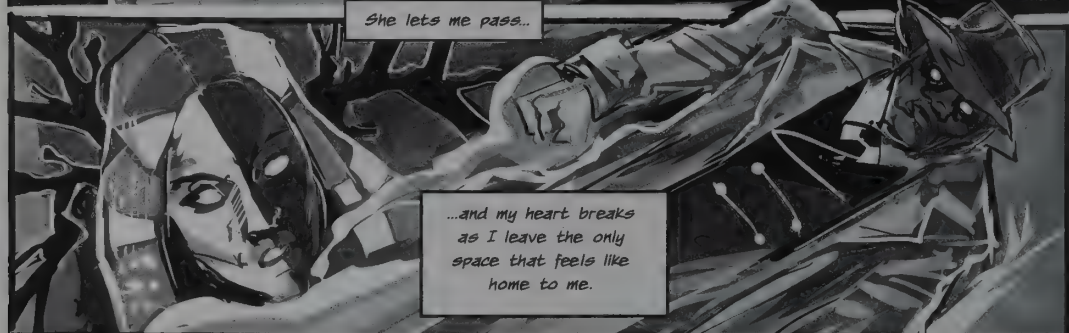
you won't need  
anything inside of me.  
Frank. Just imagine the  
worries. Nothing but  
your story.

My Love. I  
can't let this  
boy's soul be  
enslaved by  
Papa John!



I hope that she listens.  
I don't have the will to  
fight her this close...with  
her full power and glory...

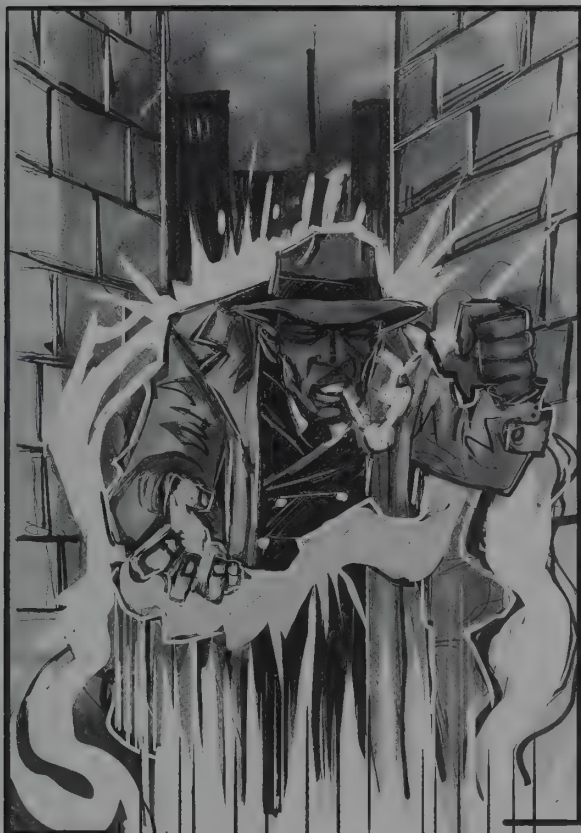
...please, my love...  
let me pass through you.  
One day...we will be one.



She lets me pass...

...and my heart breaks  
as I leave the only  
space that feels like  
home to me.



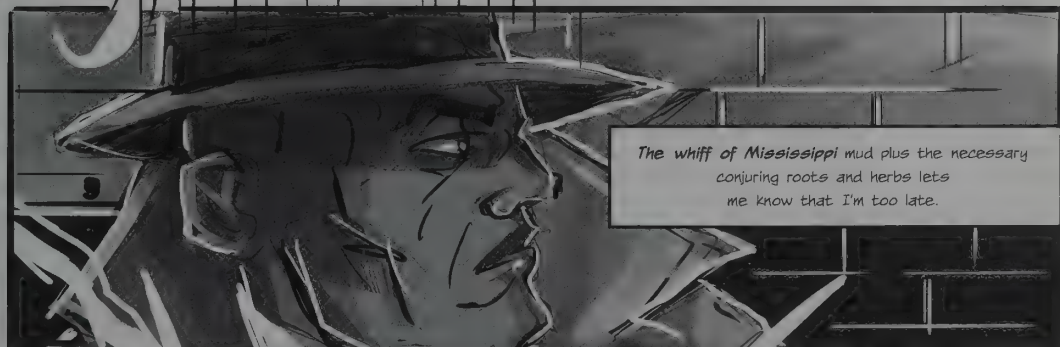


## CHAPTER 7

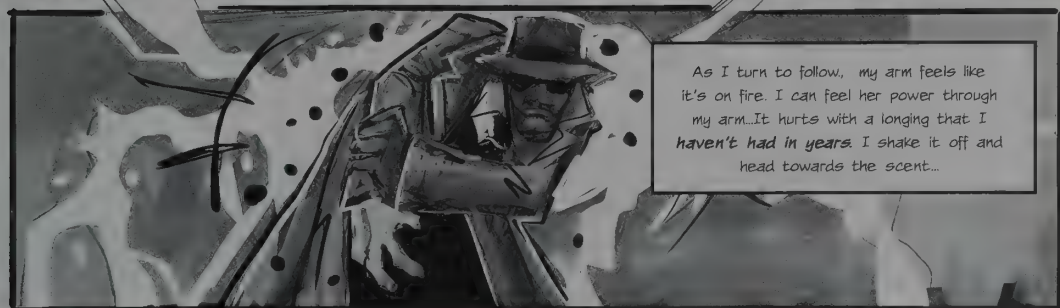
### A SOMBER MERCY

I enter back into this world pretty close to my intended stop. I choose a nearby alleyway, so I won't alert the good white folks in this neighborhood to my arrival. I wonder which part of me would scare them the most. That I a hoodoo man, or that I'm a black hoodoo man?

After all, I am still a strange spook in the wrong part of town.



The whiff of Mississippi mud plus the necessary conjuring roots and herbs lets me know that I'm too late.



As I turn to follow, my arm feels like it's on fire. I can feel her power through my arm. It hurts with a longing that I haven't had in years. I shake it off and head towards the scent...

...and the trail of mud that  
this thing can't help but  
leave behind.


Maybe it missed them? May-  
be they weren't at home?



WHAT THE HELL  
WAS THAT ?!

I'm a fool...





...and I soon find out how  
much of one.

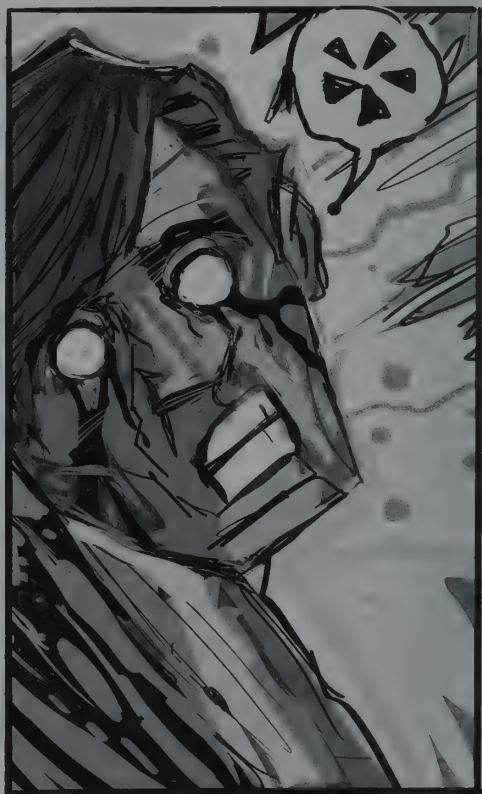
I add one more thing to  
sights I wish I  
could unsee.

AAAHRAA!!

George!  
Hold on, baby!  
Hold on!



He knows he's already dead, and there's no coming back from what that thing did to him. Its hold was too strong on the man. The only thing I could do was put him out of his misery. So, that's what I do...



There was no way she was letting go. There was no way she could save him. She was the Queen of Lost Causes and I admired her for that title for all of a split second.





*LOOK AT THESE FOOLS!*

They stand there dumbfounded by what they thought was impossible.

Mabel and her kids try to figure out which they are more afraid of a crazed mud monster or the black man who just killed their loved one.

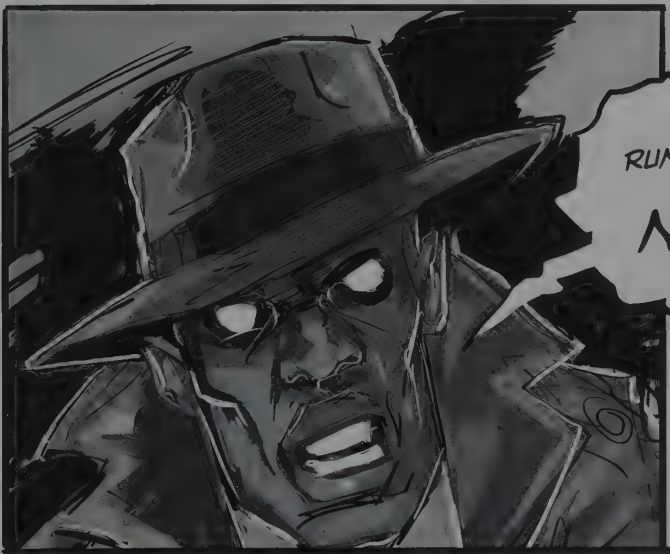


*Black. White. The shit's all a sham. Nothing more than an illusion.*

This whole family's about to die because of their fear of dark skin.

*Uncle Sam is the best conjure man of them all.*

Damn right.



I use a little mojo to get them moving.

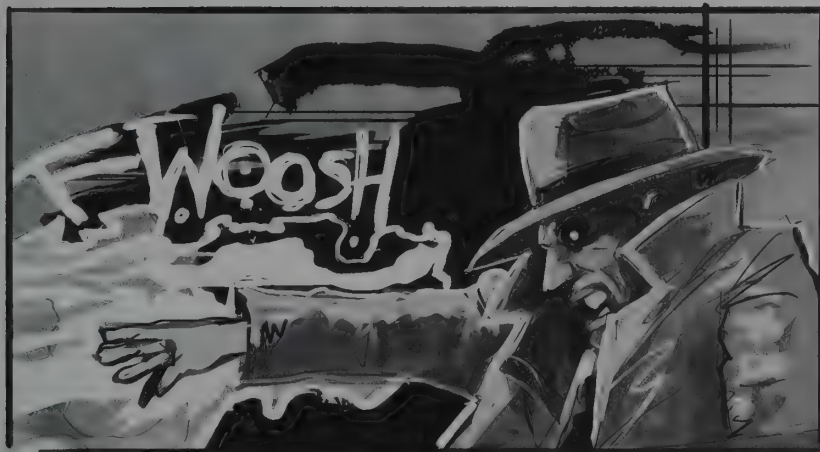
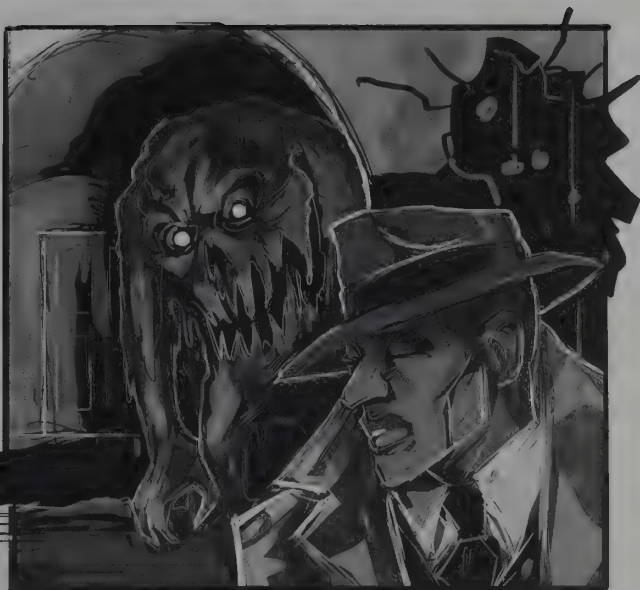


They join me behind a wall. The monster blocks the way out while they wonder...

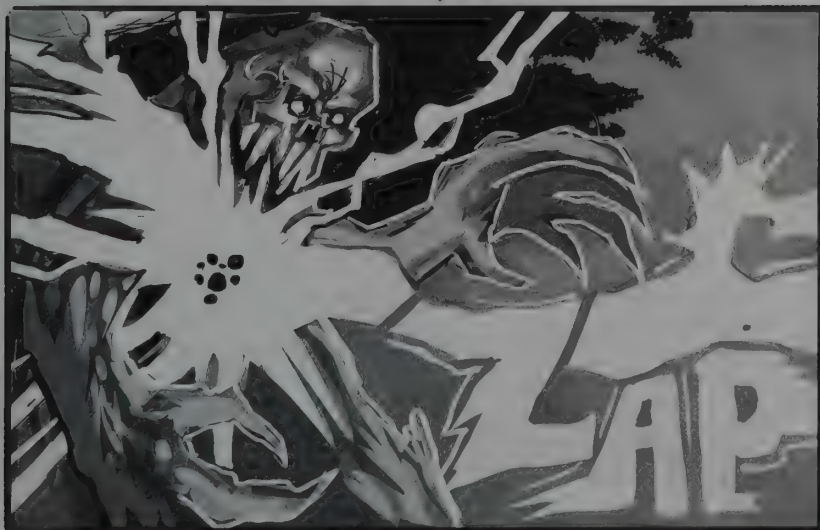




The thing sees us, and is about to make its move. I can feel the mojo hand talking to me...it wants me to use it. I have no choice but to do so. I know that it drags me closer to Her...to The Noir.



The only thing I could think of was that we were all going to die with our lungs filled with mud and stinkin' river water.



Well. At least I wouldn't have to worry about shipping my body home to buried in my native soil.

I give it all that I have in one big-ass all-or-be-damned hex. I give it all.

I just piss the  
damn thing off. It  
gets ready to pounce..

RRRR

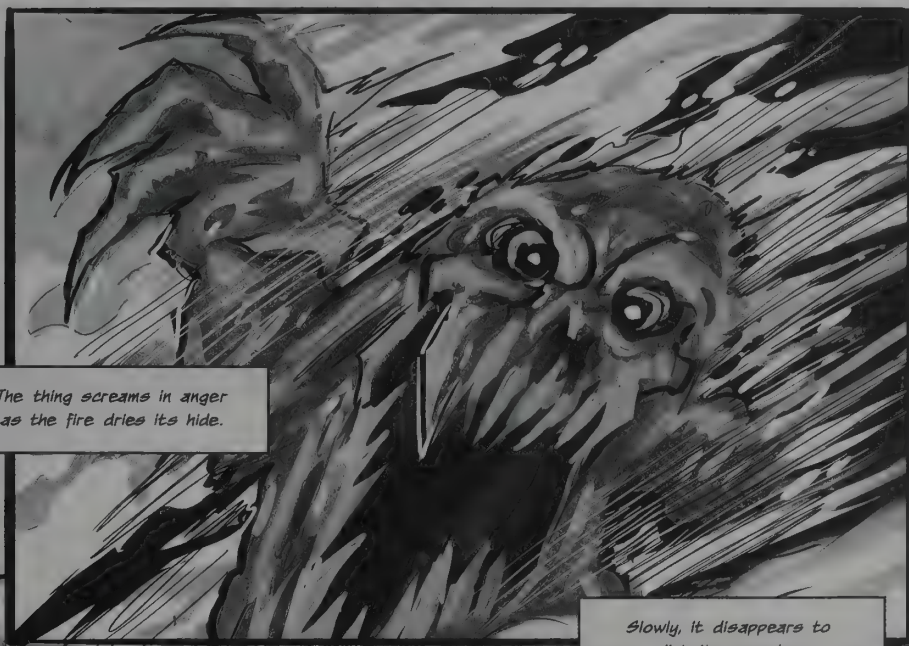
I get one more crazy idea.  
Something I've never  
tried before...

I pray in my humblest of  
voices, and I take a  
deep breath...



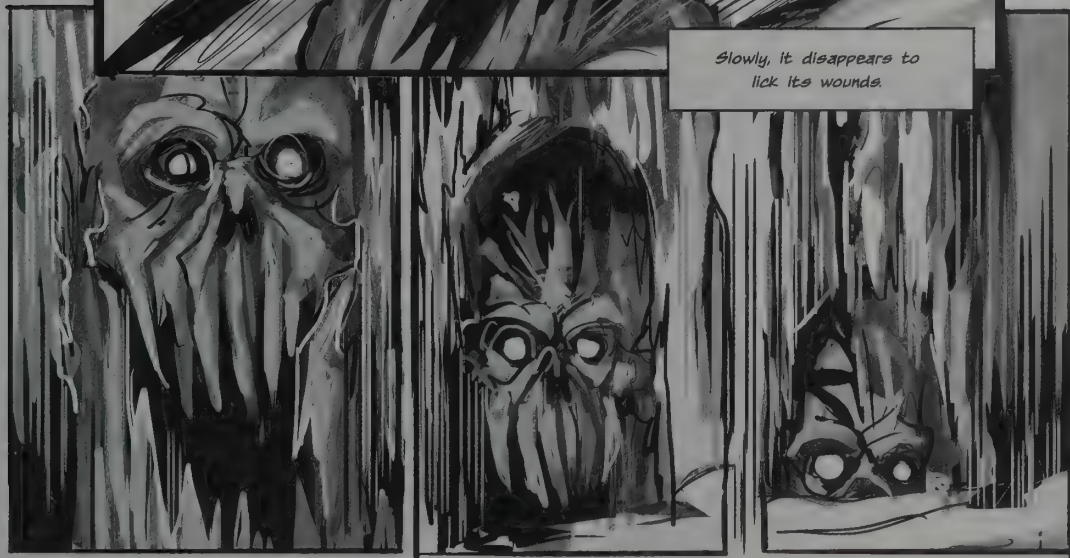


...and the spirit of The Great  
Chicago Fire erupts from my mouth. My lungs  
burn with the heat of the  
souls lost that day.

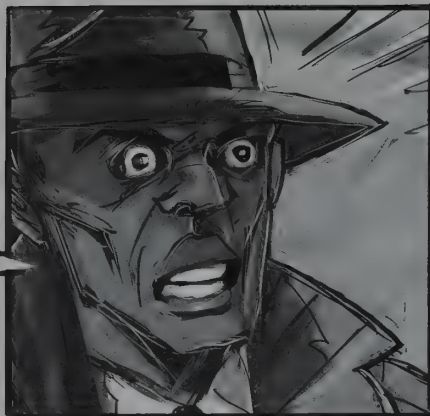


The thing screams in anger  
as the fire dries its hide.

Slowly, it disappears to  
lick its wounds.



Well, I'll  
be damned!  
That shit  
worked!

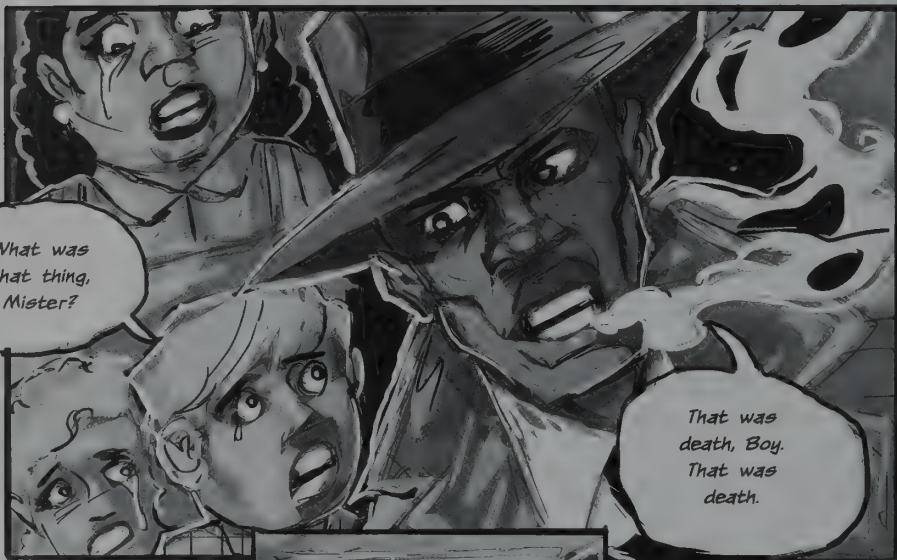


I stand there  
dumbstruck that my gamble  
paid off. My body feels  
like it's been ridden by  
the universe.  
The angry burning ghosts  
will haunt my dreams tonight.

But,

we're alive,  
and they ain't.

What was  
that thing,  
Mister?



That was  
death, Boy.  
That was  
death.

What the  
hell am I  
supposed to  
do now?

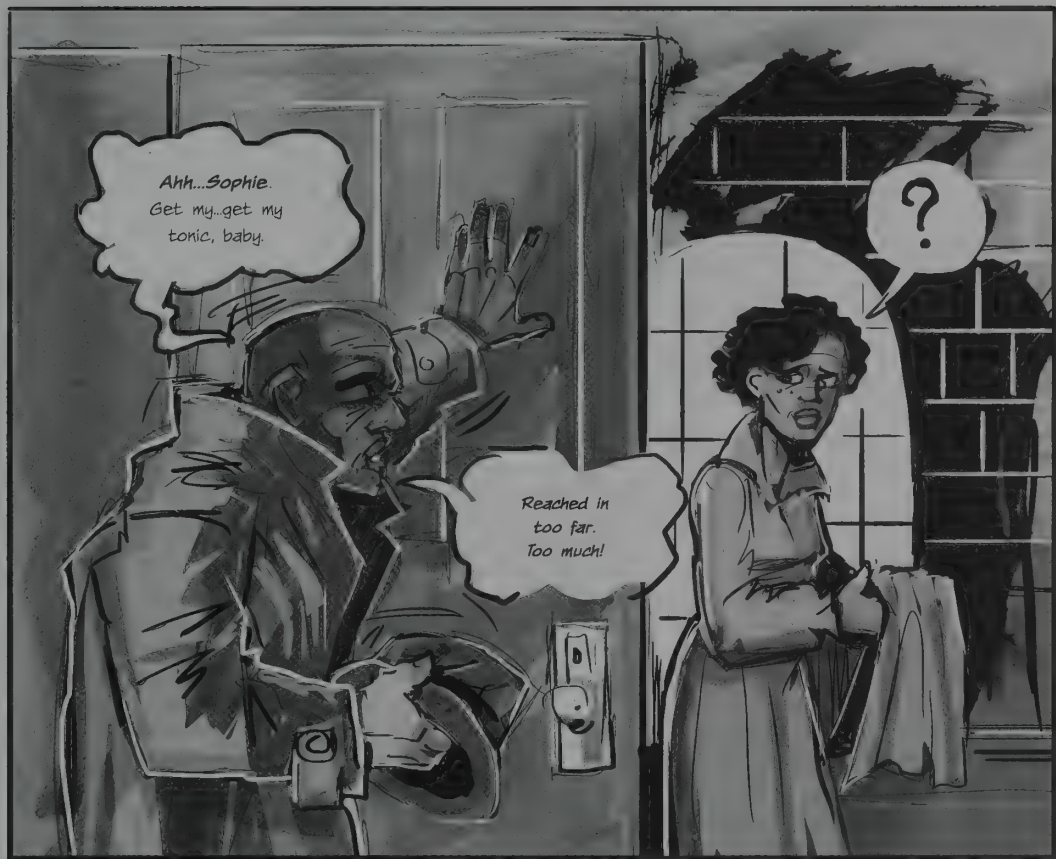


Thank the  
God you pray  
to and go  
pick a coffin.

What's left of Georgie  
lies crumpled on the  
floor like a twisted-up doll.

Closed casket for sure.

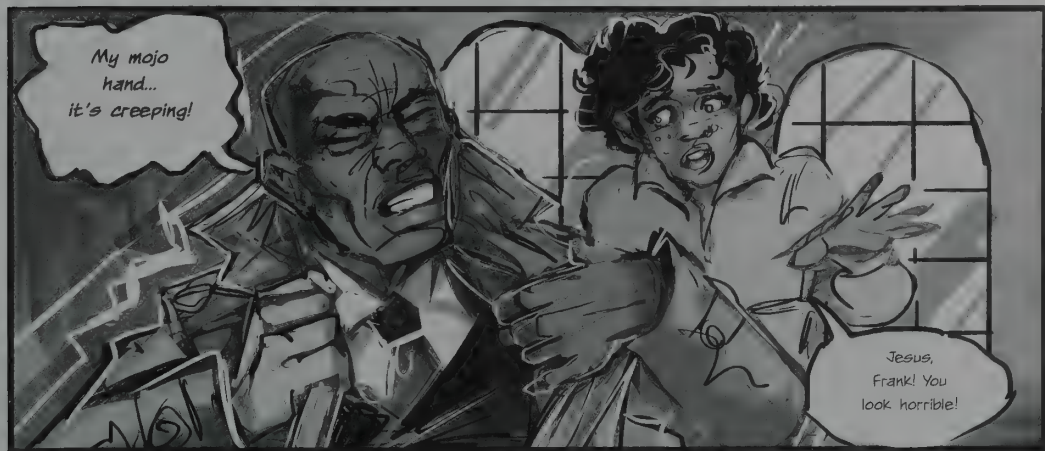


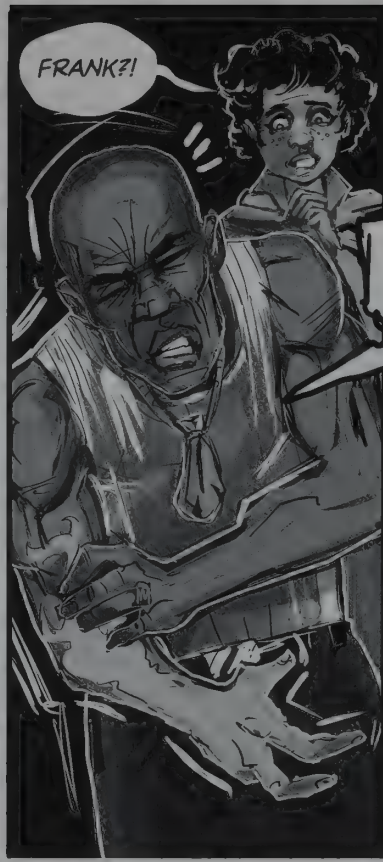


I take the El back to  
*Sophie's Place*. It was too risky to  
travel the roots again. I can feel *the*  
*Noir* in my head.

She's near.

The curse of the *Noir Lock* is on my tail. The  
curse of *losing yourself* to the story that she  
says you are. Forever. Locked in that one story.  
No escape.





AARRG

It's never been this bad before. The blue hand, the hand that touched the dark marches up my arm. It wants everything I have. Everything I am. The pain shakes my very soul.

I guzzle the tonic Sophie made for me. It burns as the arm tries to fight against it. The inevitable and the stubbornness of being human collide in my very core. I ain't ready, and I mean that shit!

Gottdammit!  
NOT. YET.



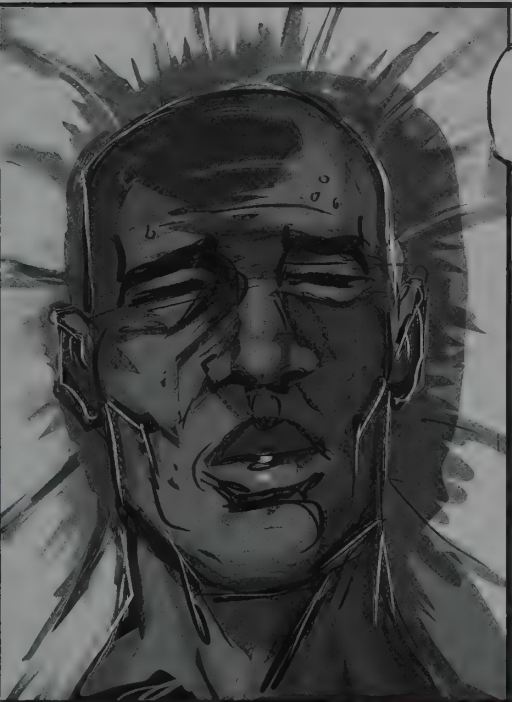
Oh, my God! I've never seen it do this before!

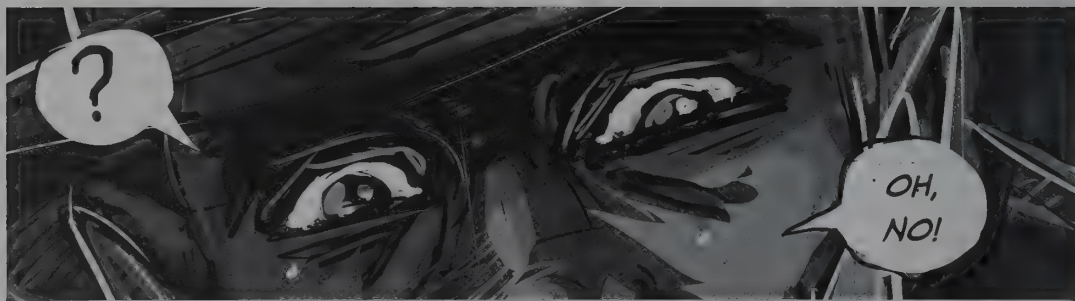




My sweet *Sophie*. She saved my black ass once again. We have a really sweet deal. The tonic has to be made by the hands of someone who cares for you. Can't make it yourself. *Them's the rules.*

She makes it for me and in return she takes a little of my blood for her *passing* potion. A conjure man's blood and little rootwork, and she can look as *white as snow*. Damn high price to pay for a dig.







Ten years ago, I made a deal with this  
two-faced muthafucka.

I've been getting  
the souls for  
you, Scratch. You  
know I have!

My eternal soul for the power to  
avenge my family.

What have you done  
for me lately, Frank?

I'm on the case!  
I know you need the  
souls for the song.

Exactly! Each soul  
equals a special  
note for my Low Down  
Devil Blues.

Yes! And I've been  
travelling and collecting  
them for you!

I need those  
souls to keep  
me company at  
the end!

Been paying for that  
shit every day since

Been putting  
them on the  
sheets like  
you want.

Believe me  
he's a lost  
cause. You know  
I know.

Stop fucking  
around with the  
Shark.

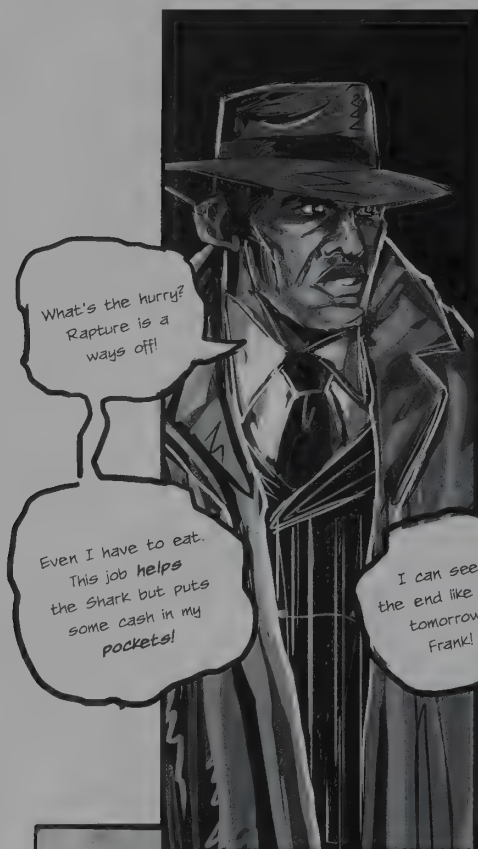
What's  
going on?  
Why you  
here?

Wanted to  
give you some  
incentive.



I managed to work a different deal.  
He kept half my soul in return  
for my help finding the right souls.

Souls that resonate with the right tone for  
his ultimate blues song for the end times...



What's the hurry?  
Rapture is a  
ways off!

Even I have to eat.  
This job helps  
the shark but puts  
some cash in my  
pockets!

I can see  
the end like it's  
tomorrow,  
Frank!

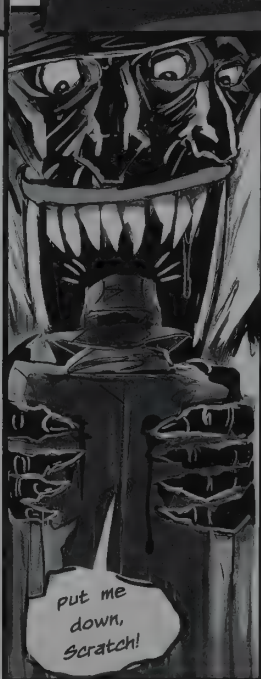


I'm doomed  
to be alone  
with just myself  
for company!

I know, but  
it's not right  
now. There's  
time!



Is there now?  
Let me retort...

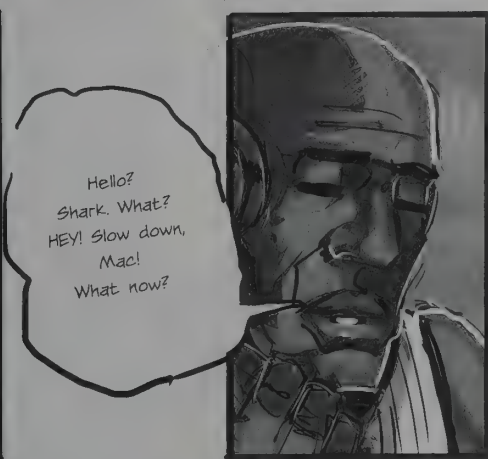
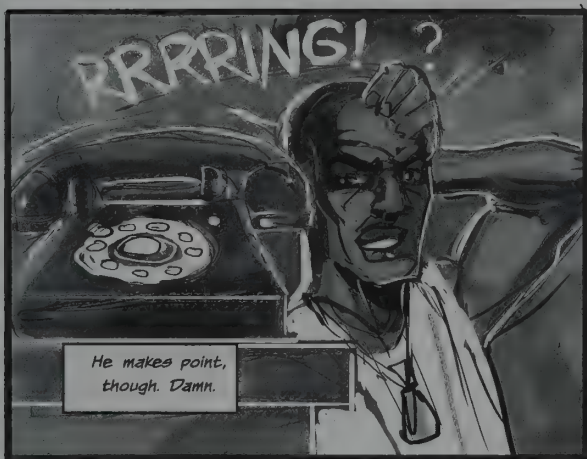
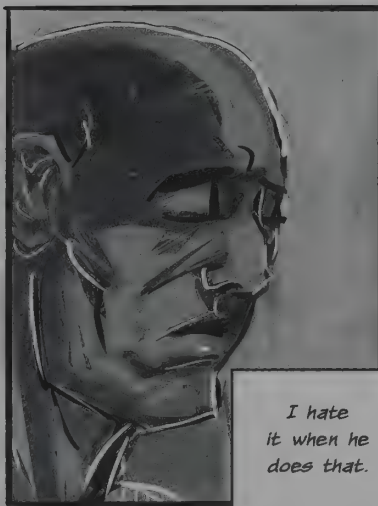
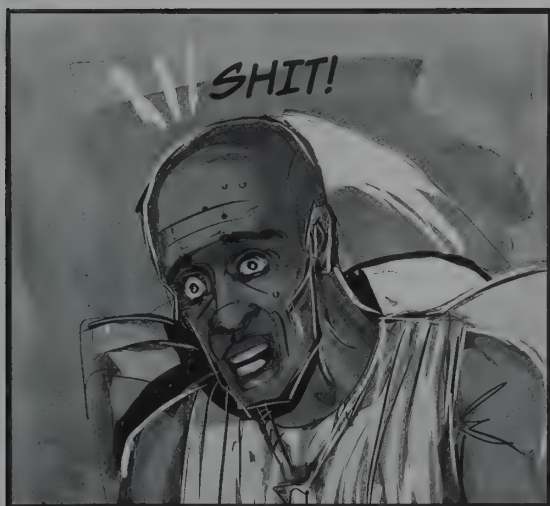


put me  
down,  
Scratch!



RIP!



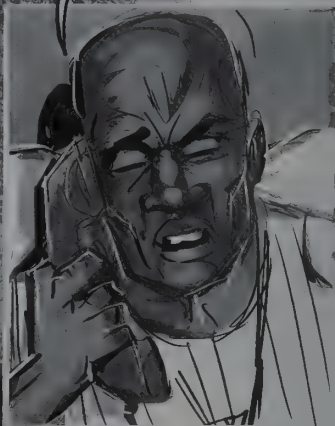
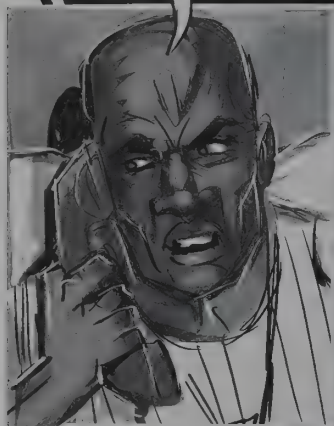


I KNOW!  
I was there!  
What?

NO.  
They were  
all right.. Yeah.

Frank. Am I gonna  
die? Is this thing  
gonna kill me?

No.  
I promise.  
I won't let it.



I lie to the Shark like an absent  
father. I don't know if I can save him  
from something like this. But he's my  
friend, and we all lie to our friends.  
Right?

I can feel my mojo is back in my  
control. I get up, so I can pay a  
visit to the only person who can  
stop this shit.

I hear Scratch laughing  
somewhere with both faces.





## CHAPTER 8

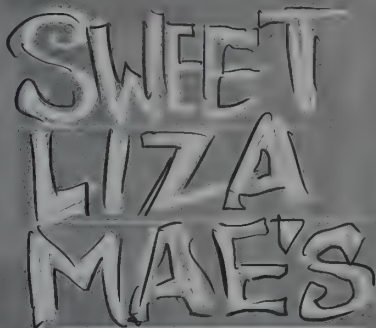
### A MOTHER SCORNE

Sweet Liza Mae's was like stepping into a jook joint in the heart of the Bible Belt. Everything about it echoed home. The food. The liquor. *The blues*. It was all there if you wanted it. Every weekend you could find your connection to the pain you left behind and remind yourself that *you were a whole human thing*.

I had built my own *remorseful* Sunday mornings there many a Saturday night. It felt strange and *even wrong* be there conducting my business in broad daylight for all to see. *Secrecy is the mortar that holds a jook joint together*.

However, five thousand dollars is lot of damn money, and playing the wheel only gets you so far in this not-so-*Great Depression*.

Especially if you depressed and have a deep tan.



# SWEET LIZA MAE'S



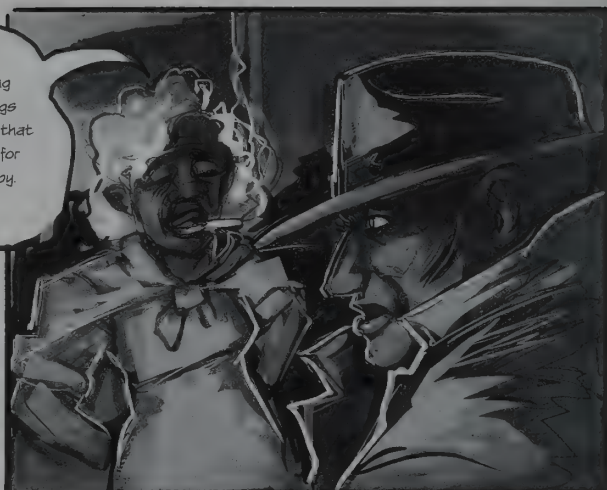
Hey, Frank.

Liza Mae. You  
doing alright?  
I came by to...  
pay my  
respects.

Liza Mae was a lovely old lady. You could tell that she'd had her share of things. I remember how she'd carry on those weekend nights, laughing, singing, and cussing with the best of them. Now she seemed hollowed out like some old stump in the middle of a lonely thicket.

I entered the joint, which now seemed to have the air of a crypt. Death was in the corner.

I'm making it. All things considered, that is. Thanks for stopping by.

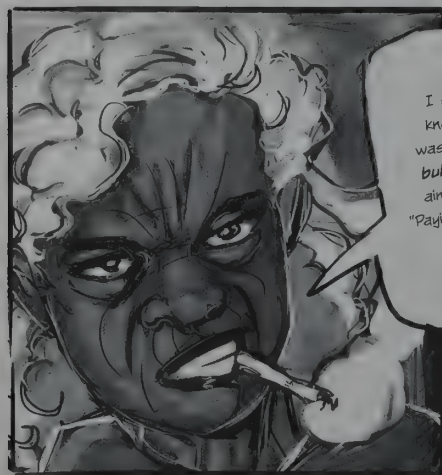


What? The hell you talking about, Frank?

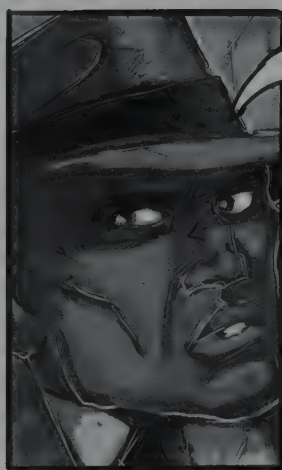
The least I could do. Especially since you done gone and made a deal with a snake.



I shoulda known you was on some bullshit. This ain't like you. "Paying respects" and shit.



Miss Liza. I've seen what it does. I know what you've done. I could feel the pain and anger coming off that thing like sparks off the tracks.

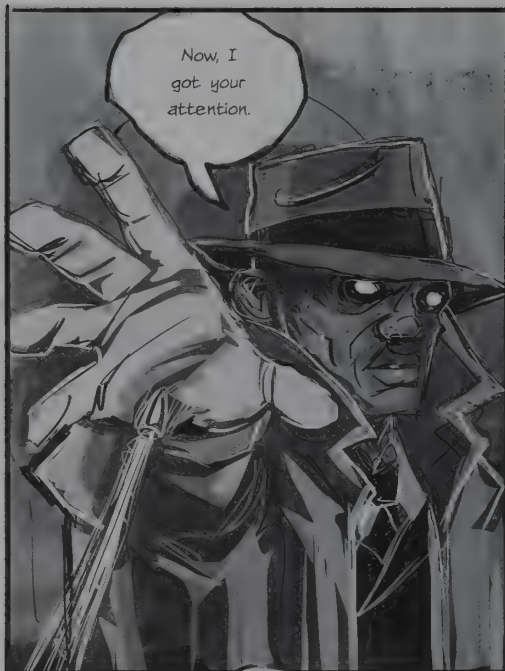




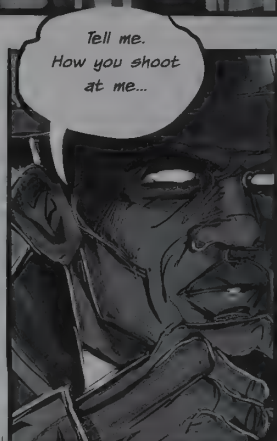
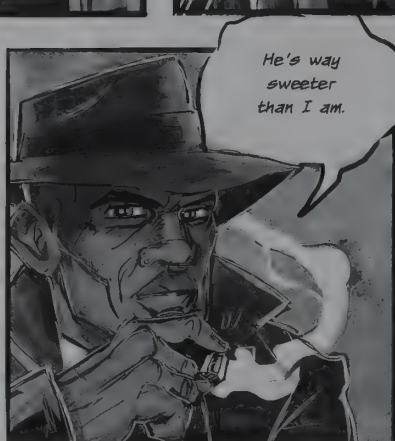
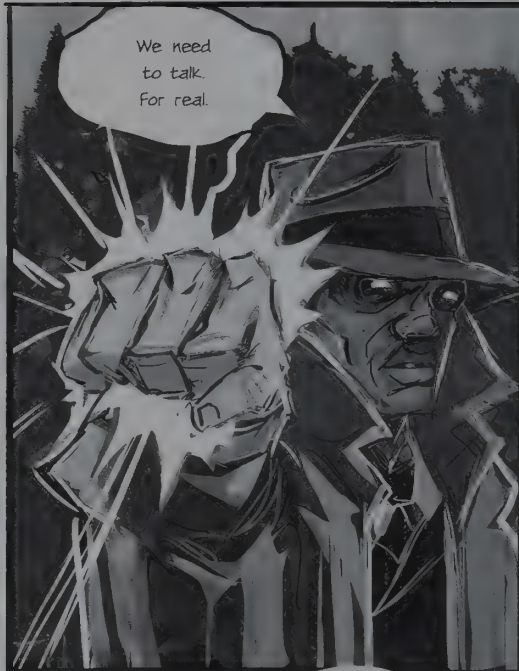


Time slows. I see my life. *I see the crossroads.* I see my wife's face.  
I see my baby girl's braided hair. *A wolf howls in the distance.*  
I feel the weight of my newborn son in my arms. I close my heart...

...and I open my hand.



Then I close it too.





GLUGG!

I need for you to  
stop what  
you're doing,  
Miss Liza.

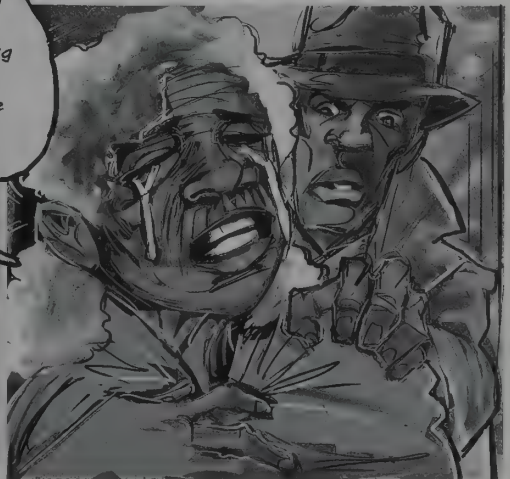
Hell no!  
They took  
my boy! They  
gots  
to pay!

That hex almost  
killed a man's family.  
You want that  
on you?

What?  
I-I didn't  
know it was  
going to  
do that. It  
just hurt  
so bad.

I never been  
so low...so angry.  
I hated  
life itself.

My boy. My  
only boy.  
The only thing  
I had that  
reminded me  
of my Lee!



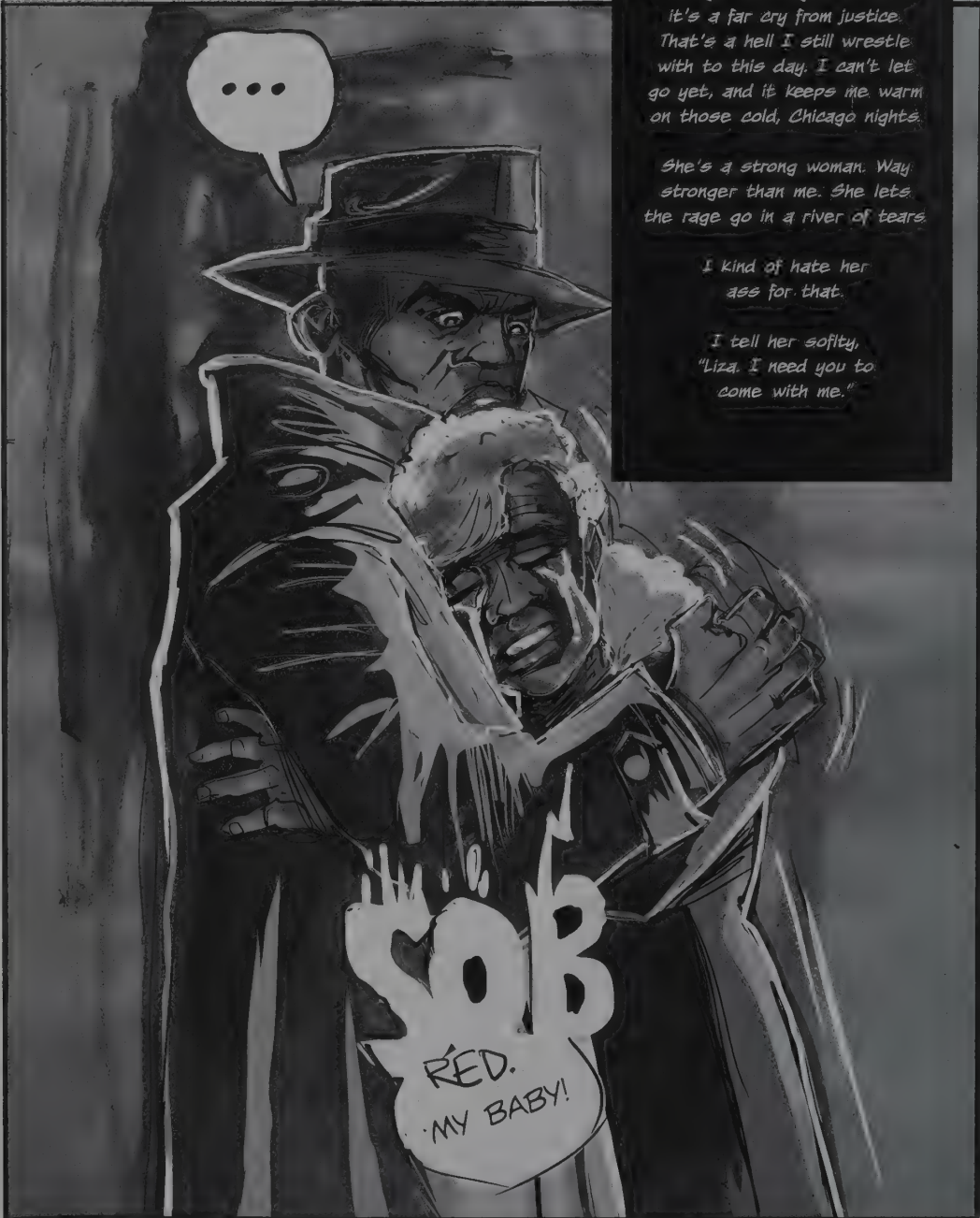
She cries in my arms, and I  
feel like shit for robbing her of  
something I know I would  
have wanted myself.

Still, I know how empty  
revenge leaves you and that  
it's a far cry from justice.  
That's a hell I still wrestle  
with to this day. I can't let  
go yet, and it keeps me warm  
on those cold, Chicago nights.

She's a strong woman. Way  
stronger than me. She lets  
the rage go in a river of tears.

I kind of hate her  
ass for that.

I tell her softly,  
"Liza. I need you to  
come with me."



SOB  
RED.  
MY BABY!



## CHAPTER 9

### THE FINE MESS

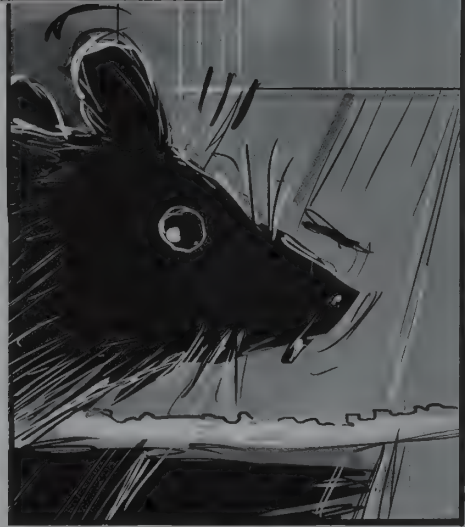
Hoodoo is a type of science. It takes years of study and dedication to master it. Some never do. Papa John is a master. He's one of the most gifted conjure men I know.

Which is probably why he hates me so much. He worked all his life, and I just made a stupid deal with The Devil. Still, fuck him. I paid in full. Shit. I'm still paying.

While I comfort Miss Liza, his crafty, crooked ass, was figuring out how to break my circle. He had some help from one of his family members.



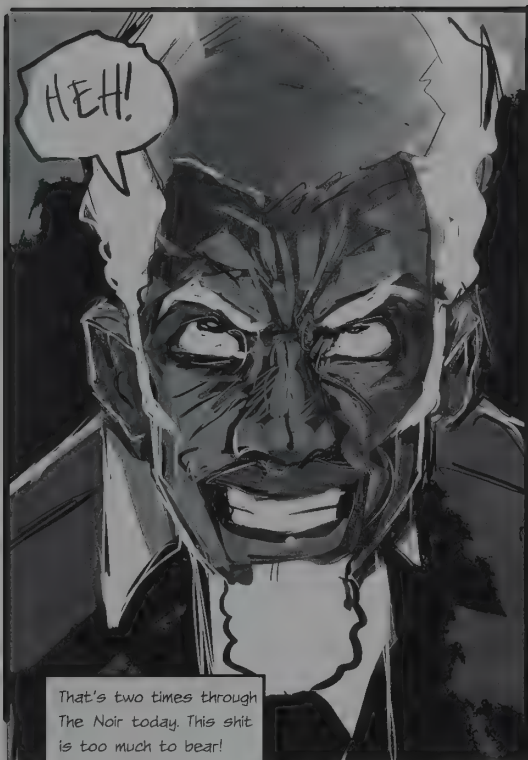
Yeah. That's right.  
A rat.



Very, very clever.

May the circle be  
unbroken, my ass.

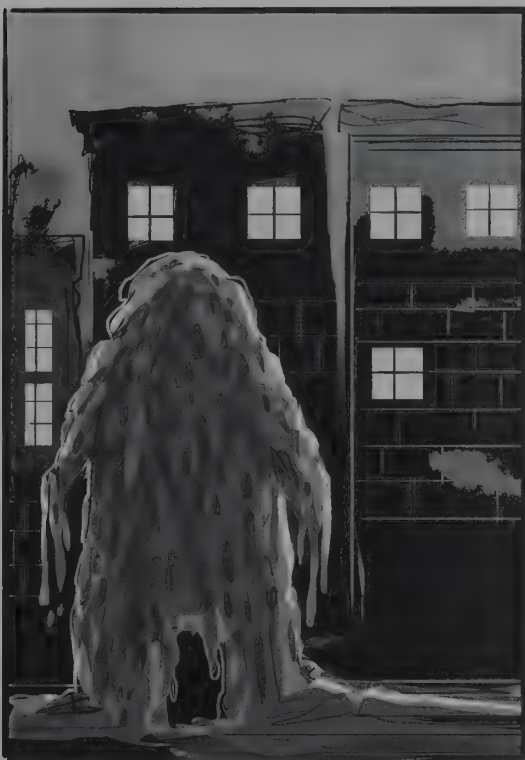




That's two times through The Noir today. This shit is too much to bear!

We arrive inside the safe house at the bottom of the steps.

I don't mention to Liza Mae what she now owes The Noir for safe passage through. It wouldn't sit well with her. Besides, we got shit to do, and I need her ready.



YOU OK,  
MISS LIZA?

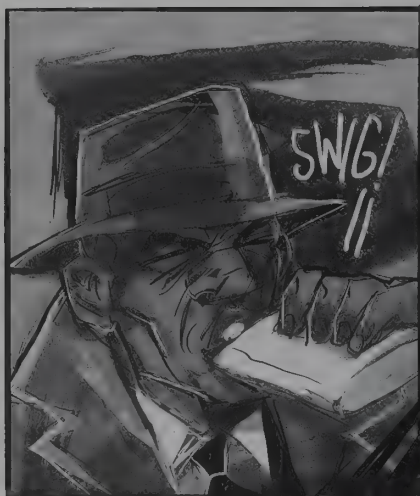
Ready to  
break  
her own  
heart.

YEAH.  
THINK SO?

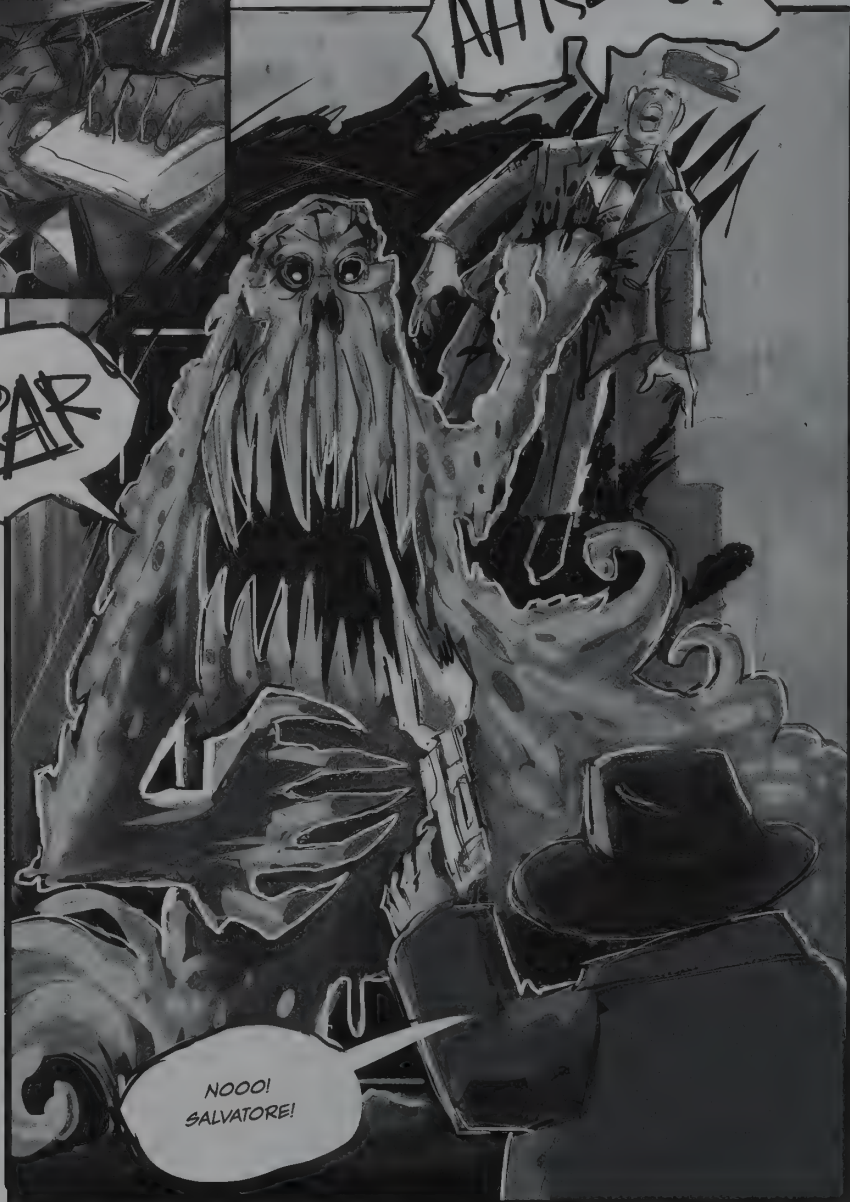
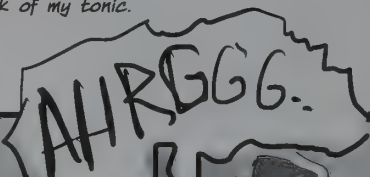


FRANK?  
THAT  
SOUND?

Is that  
my Red...  
making that  
sound?

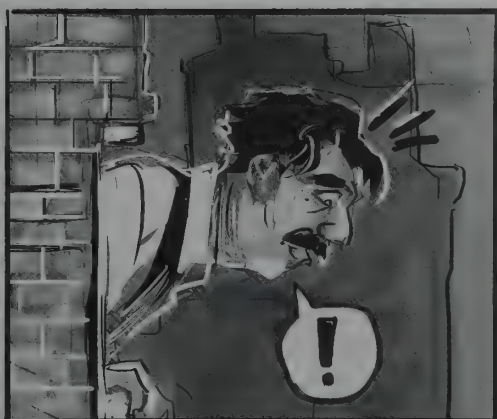
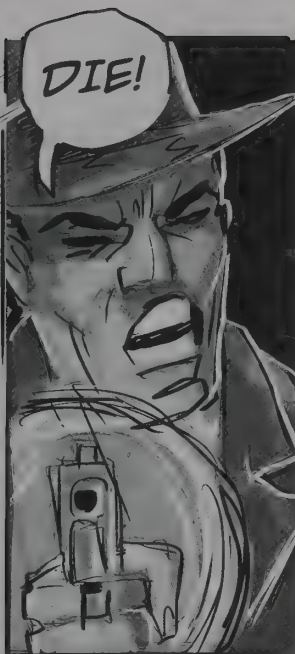
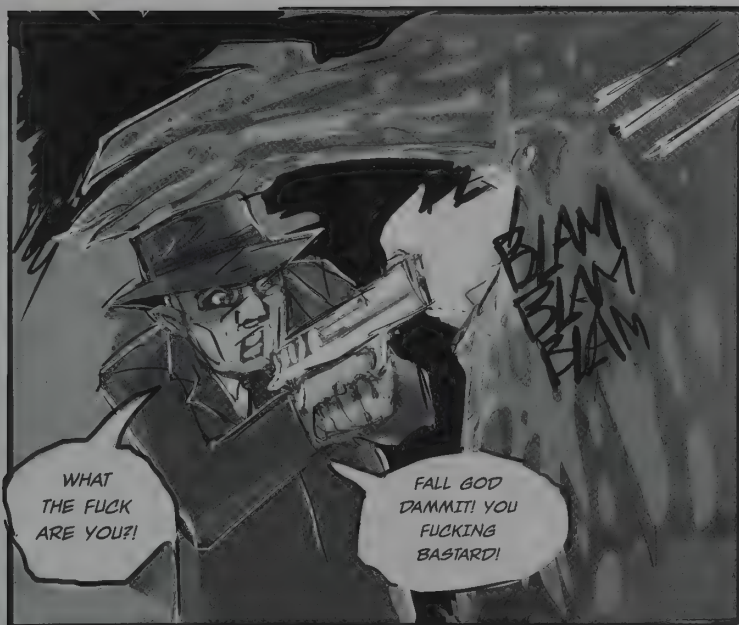


I knew this could go down hill real fast.  
I took a big drink of my tonic.



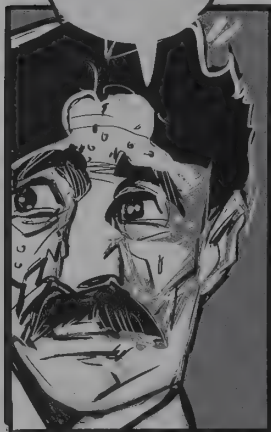
The sounds upstairs chill us to the bone. We are both almost knocked off our feet by the scent of rich, wet Mississippi mud. The smell mixed with blood, sweat the cordite from gunfire. My gut tightens as we head up the stairs.



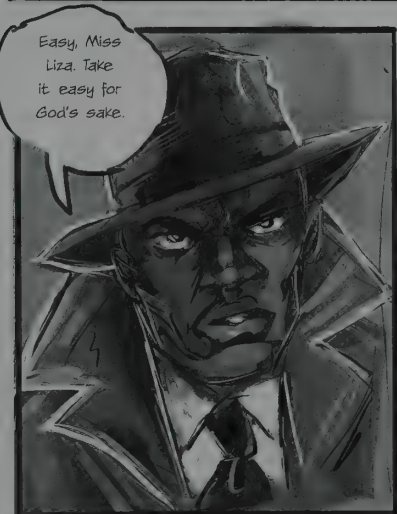
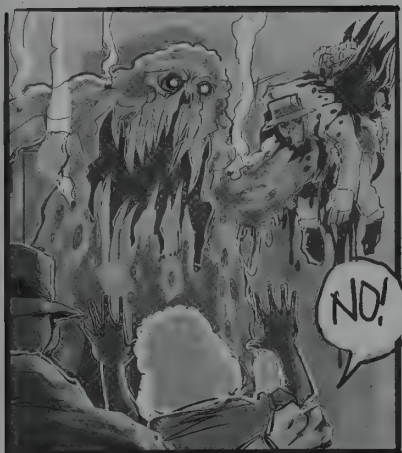


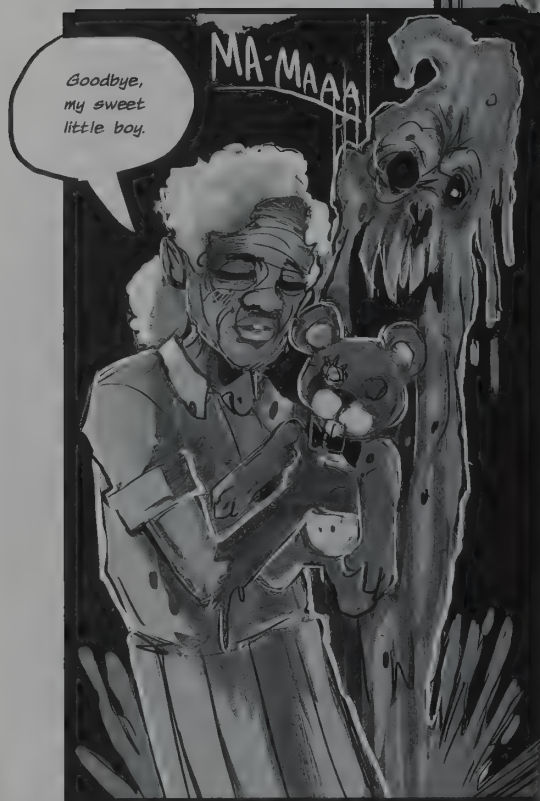
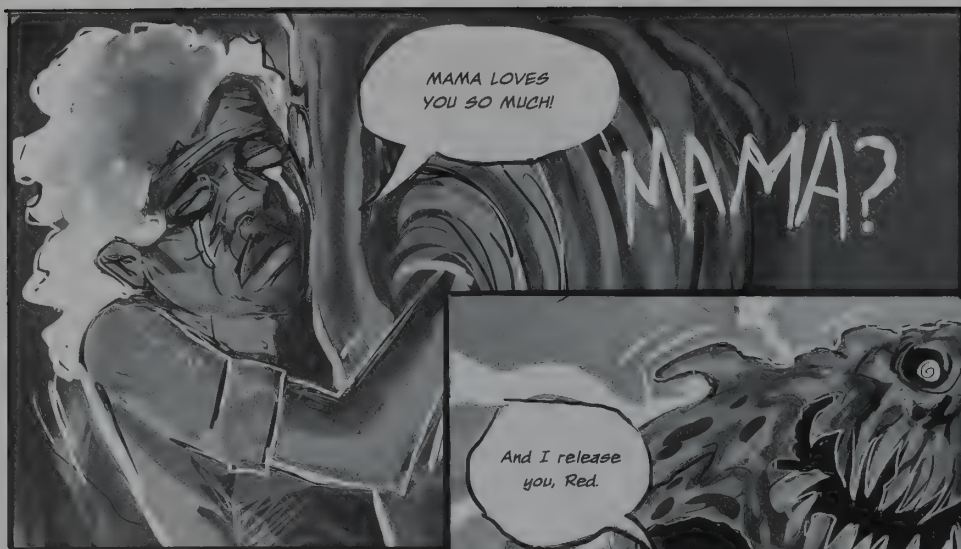
I CAN'T  
BELIEVE  
THIS SHIT.

So, while all hell was breaking loose in the other room, Mac the Shark thought it was a good idea to jump out of a fucking window to save his ass. He's a gambling man so I guess he figured out the odds as he fell...



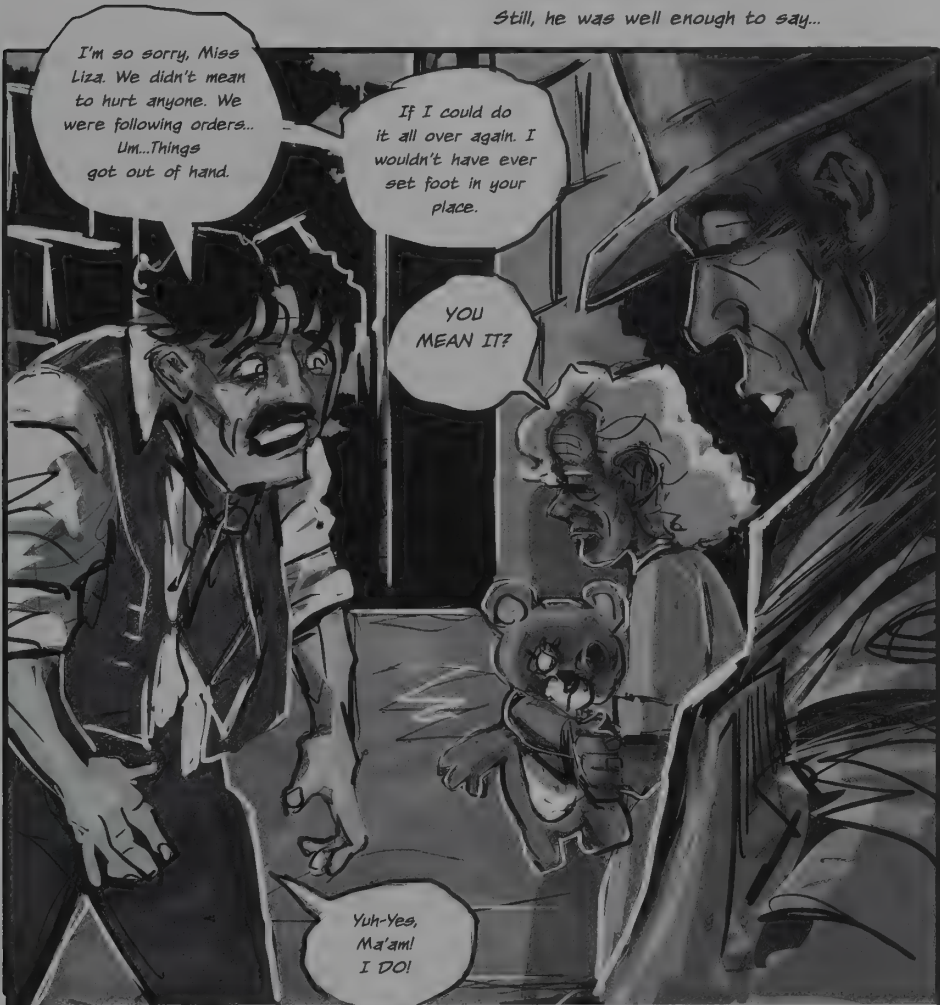


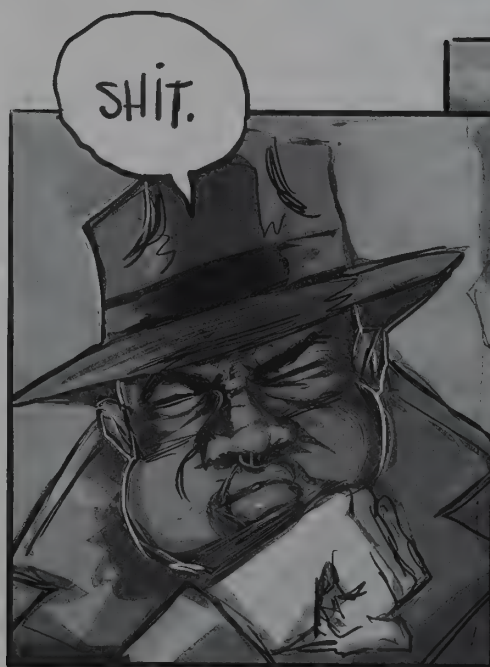
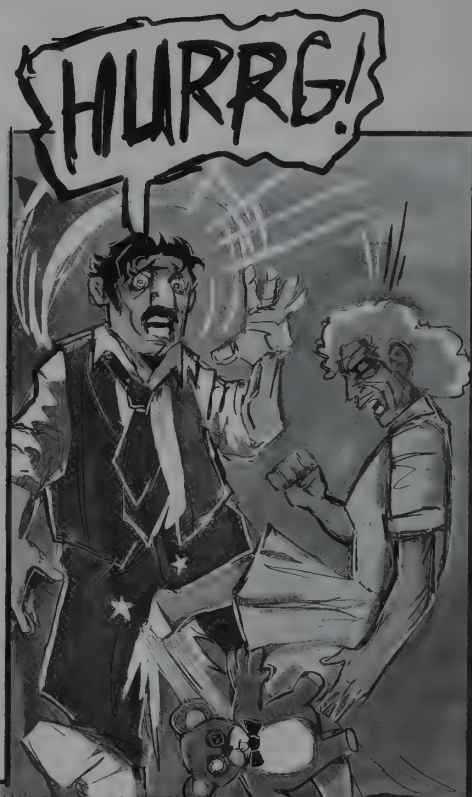
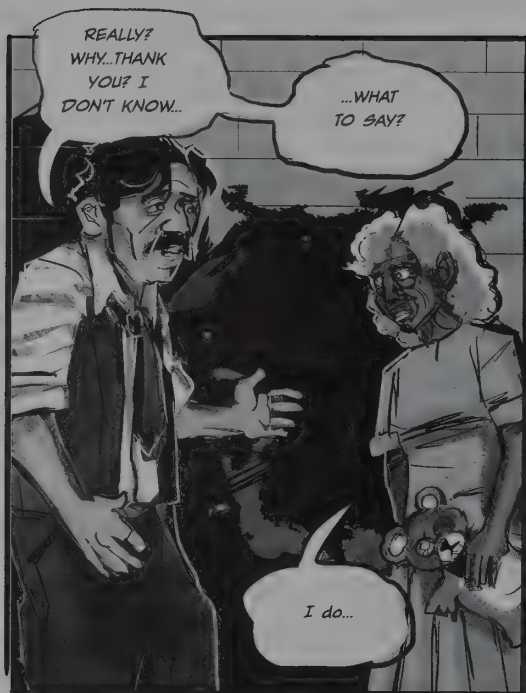




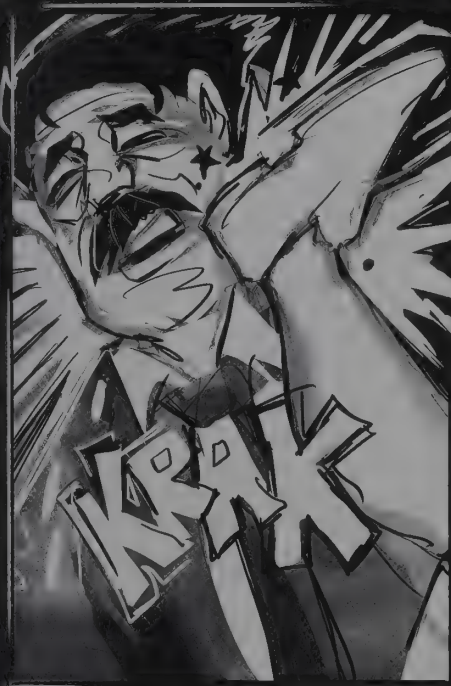


We find The Shark's ass trying to hobble off down the alley way to safety. He's a big damn mess when we come up to him. His ankle was damn near broke in two. Still, he was well enough to say...









Damn! Ain't you a piece of work, Liza?

That make you feel any better?



NO.

She's right. We've got real good at losing shit. Truth is. The path that black folks have had to travel. The ground I pulled my fate from, and the dirt her boy's golem was made of.

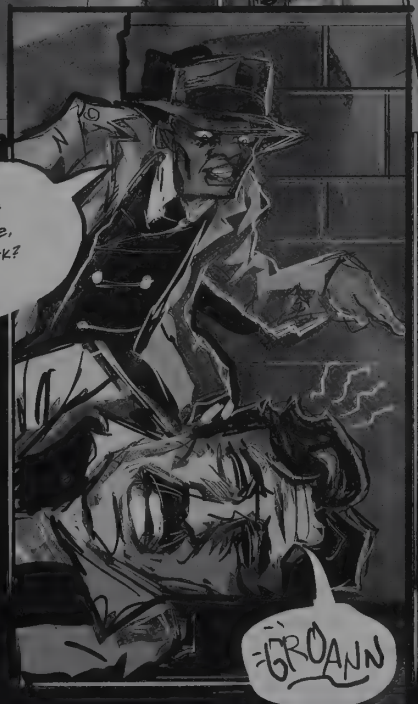
Nothing will for a while. I'm so tired of losing things, Frank. Tired.

I hope I don't see you for a bit. You scare me.

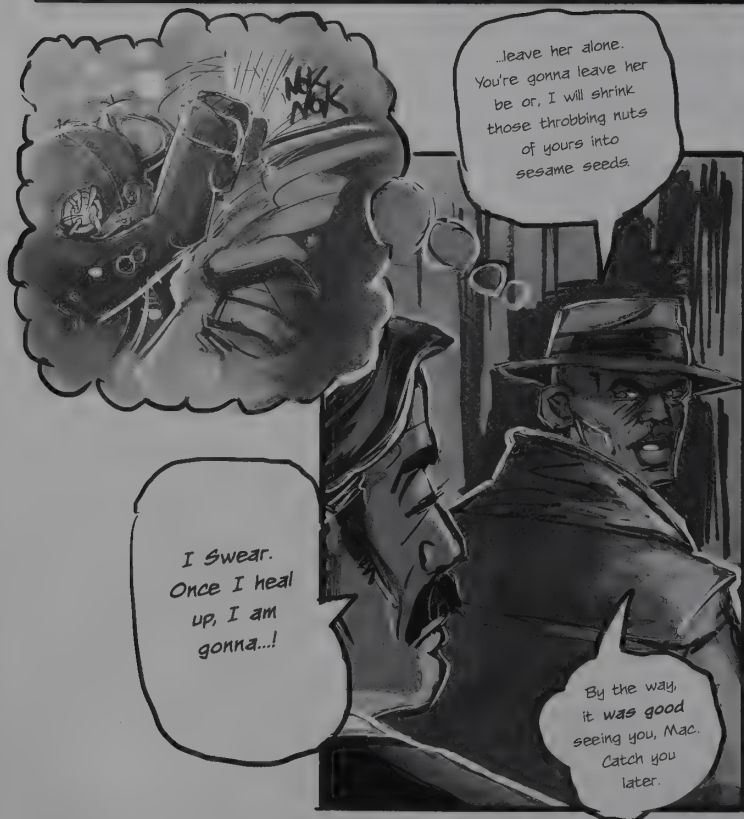
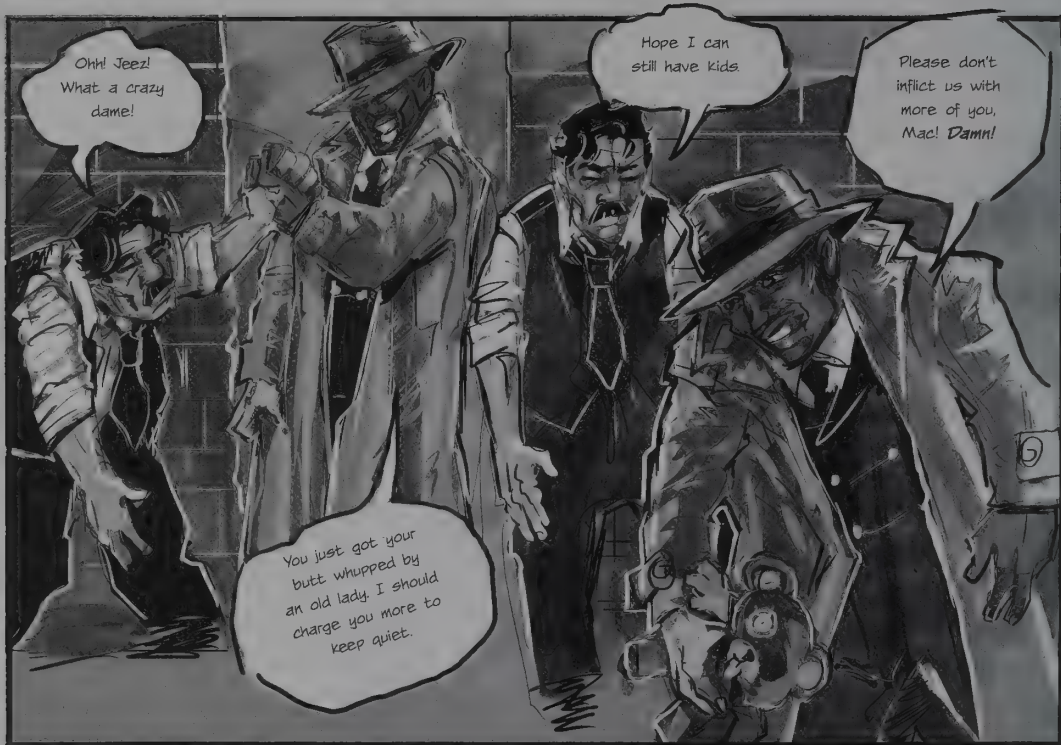


Yo' nuts OK there, Mr. Shark?

It all comes from the hard times road. We all just going back and forth on that muthafucka just hoping to not lose our way.



GROANN





# CHAPTER 10

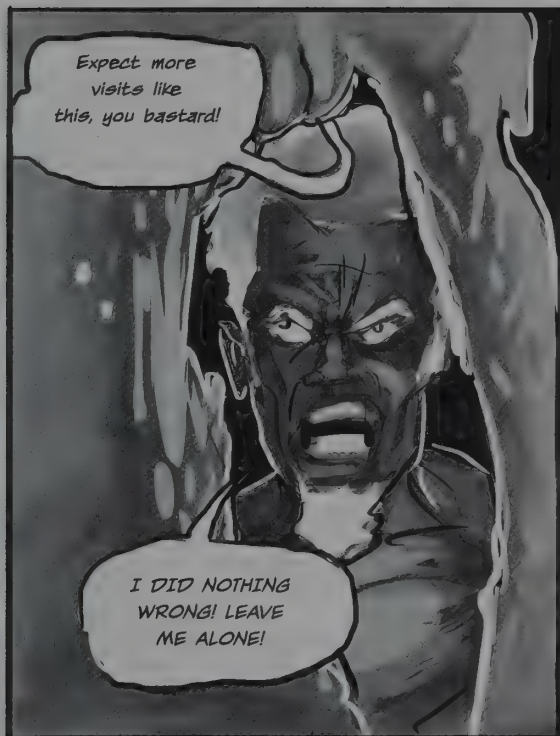
RED SAID...

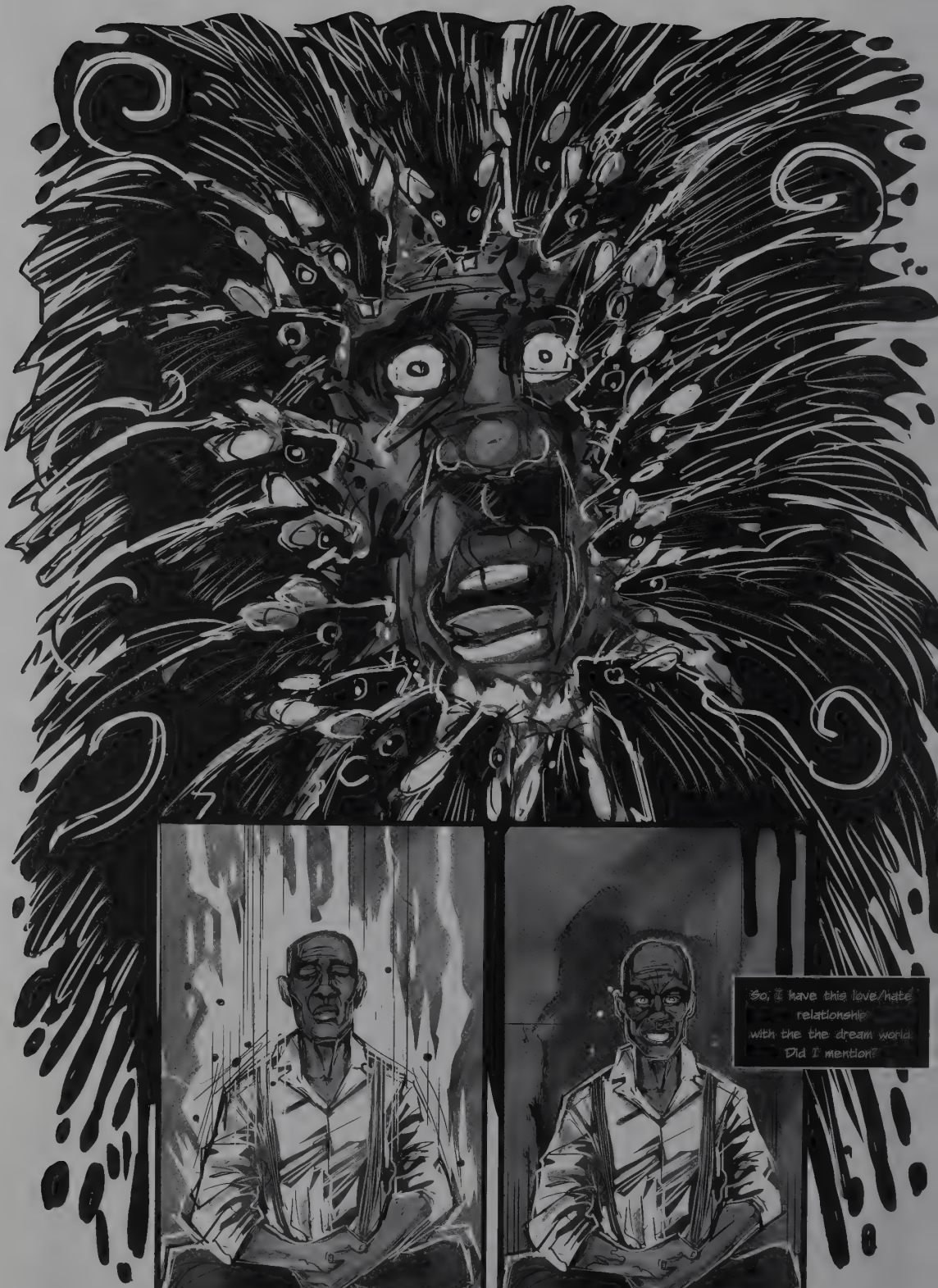
So, three months pass, and things get back to their normal self. Papa John thought I'd forgotten about his ass. I decided to pay him a visit as a reminder...











So, I have this love/hate  
relationship  
with the dream world.  
Did I mention?



Papa John had used the teddy bear that Red loved as a soul anchor for the hex. It literally held pieces of his soul. I managed to keep the lion's share of it while Mac was having his balls caressed so gently by Liza's foot.

So, with a lot of magic and a lot of sweat and blood...literally...I managed to give Liza a surprise.

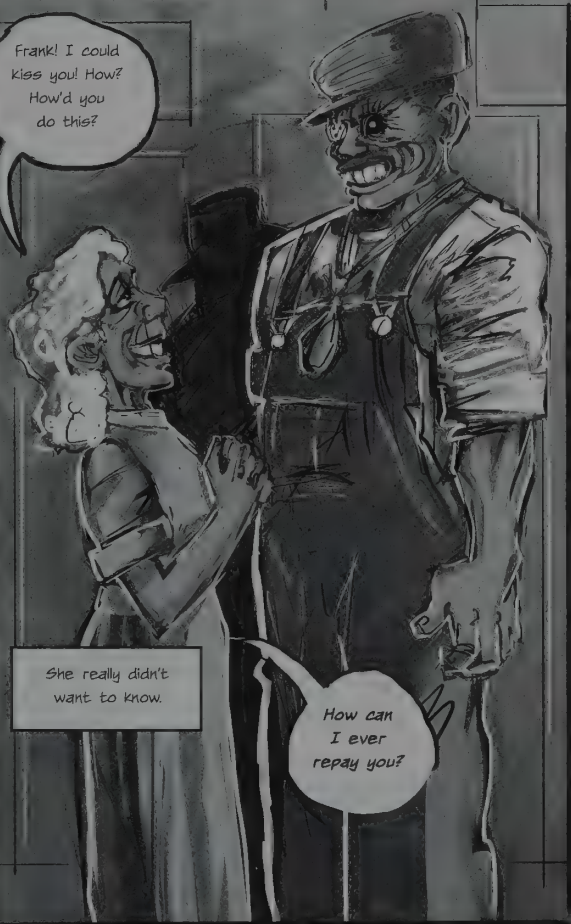
OH, MY  
GOD...  
RED?

HEY,  
MAMA!

SWEET  
LIZA  
MAE'S



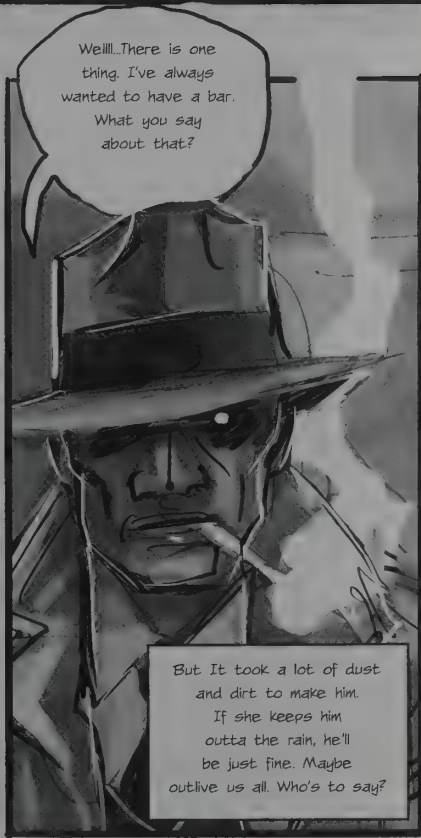
Frank! I could  
kiss you! How?  
How'd you  
do this?



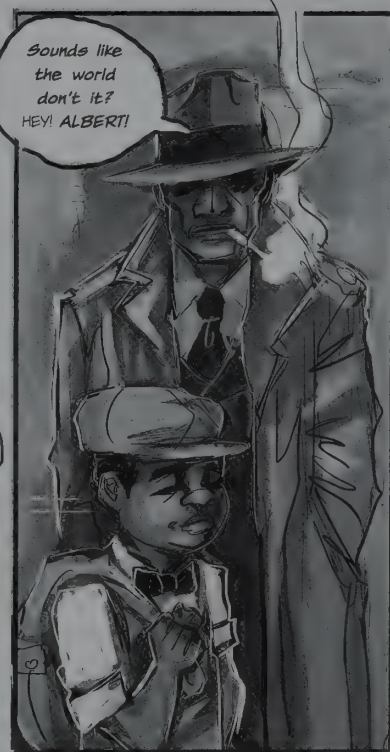
She really didn't  
want to know.

How can  
I ever  
repay you?

We'll...There is one  
thing. I've always  
wanted to have a bar.  
What you say  
about that?



But It took a lot of dust  
and dirt to make him.  
If she keeps him  
outta the rain, he'll  
be just fine. Maybe  
outlive us all. Who's to say?



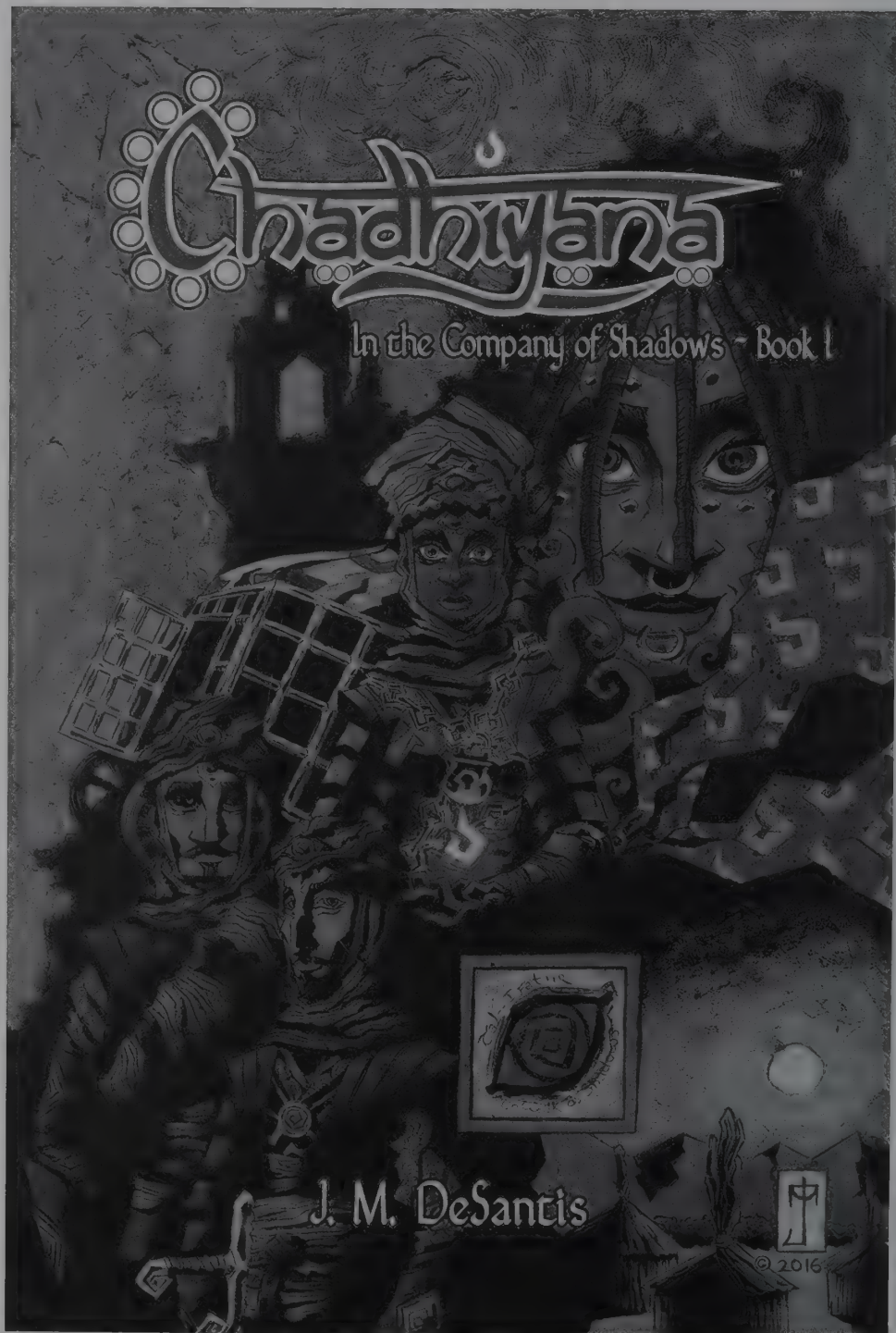


# BLUE HAND MOJO

pin-ups by John Jennings



COMING SUMMER 2017



*"This comic is wonderfully different [from] than anything I've picked up before—from the art and coloring, to the story itself."*

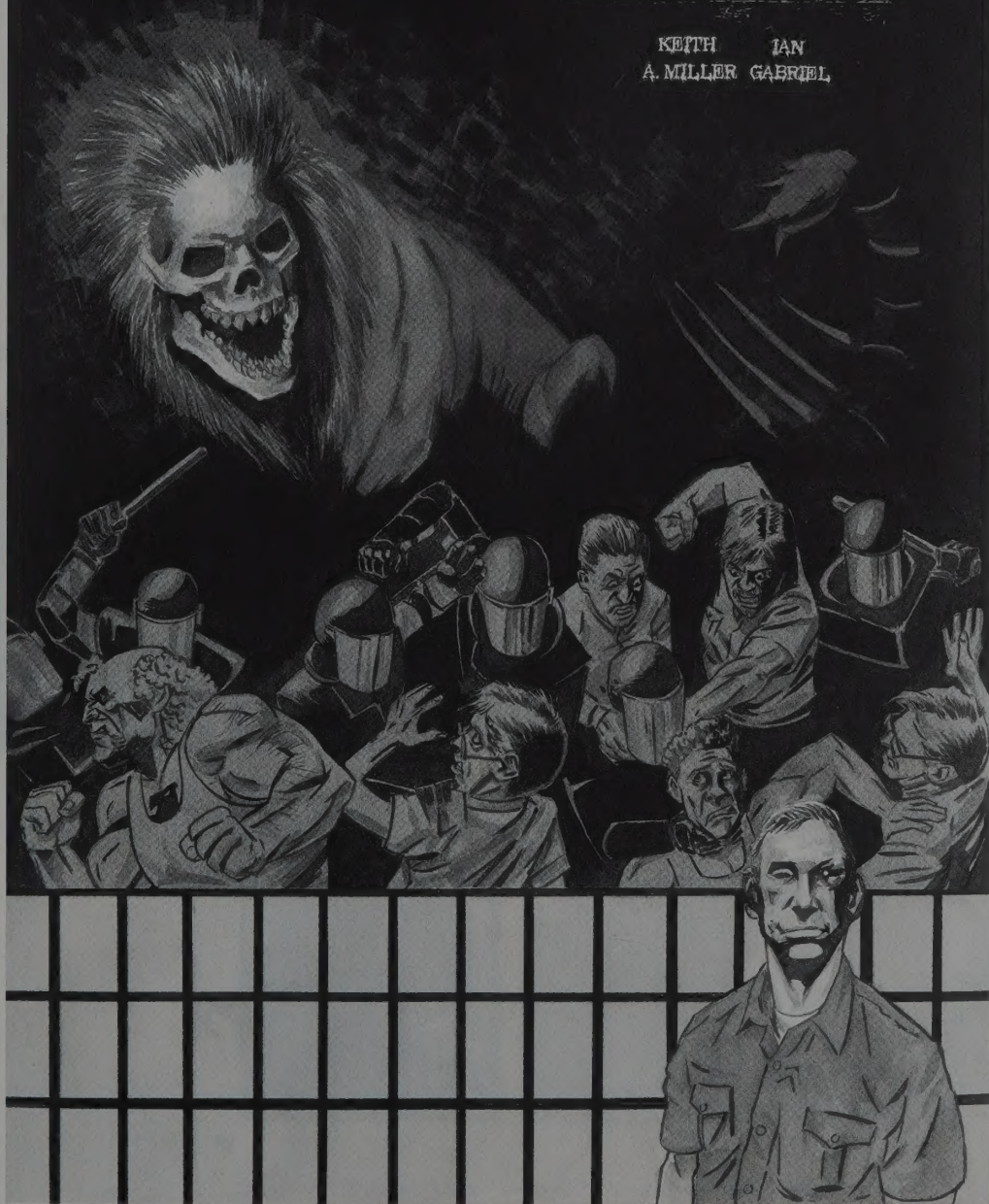
—Sequential Tart



COMING SUMMER 2017

# MANTICORE

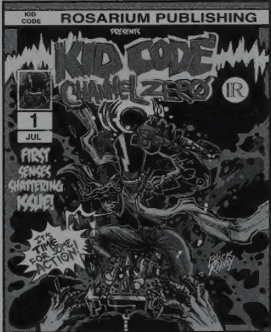
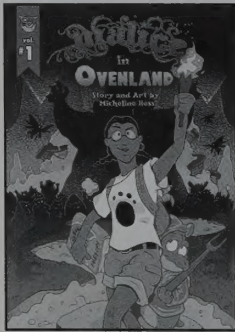
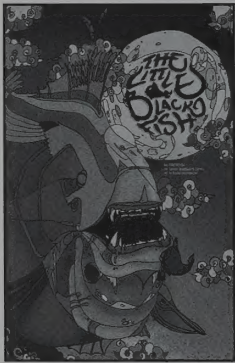
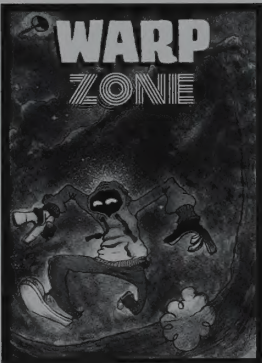
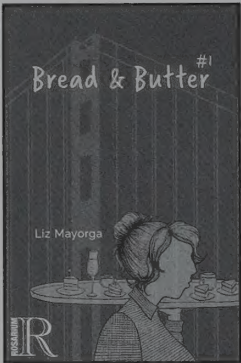
KEITH IAN  
A. MILLER GABRIEL



*"Manticore has so much to offer its readers and the creative team behind it of Keith Miller and Ian Gabriel, go really well together."*

—Graphic Policy

OTHER COMICS FROM ROSARIUM



Found on Amazon, ComiXology, and Peep Game Comix!





FROM EISNER AWARD WINNER  
JOHN JENNINGS

"Magic, murder, and Mississippi mud. *Blue Hand Mojo* is a comic book unlike anything you've been reading. Set in 1931 Chicago where the shadow of Al Capone still looms, Half-Dead Johnson has to solve a murder with the devil on his tail.

This is a book to watch."

— Justin Jordan, *The Legacy of Luther Strode*

"John Jennings has crafted a graphic novel that puts on the page what is missing from so many other comics—heart and soul."

— David Walker, *Power Man and Iron Fist*

"*Blue Hand Mojo* is a delicious, riveting blend of steamy noir and conjure-man hoodoo mayhem. Utterly brilliant."

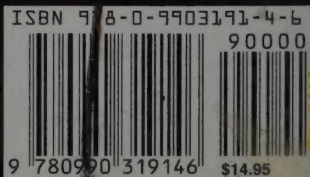
— Daniel José Older, *Shadowshaper*

1931. Bronzeville. Chicago.

The mage, Frank "Half-Dead" Johnson, is a marked man. Literally. A drunken decision fueled by tragedy has left him with half a soul, sorcerous powers, and two centuries to work off his debt to Scratch (aka The Devil) himself.

This graphic novel introduces the life and misadventures of this tragic conjure man. Watch as "Half-Dead" attempts to save his own soul, pay his debt, and help as many people as he can along the way. It's a hard-hitting Hoodoo Noir highball with just a splash of Southern Gothic. Smack-dab in the dark heart of the Windy City. Hold on tight! It's going to be a bumpy ride down *Hard Times Road*.

ROSARIUM  
R



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