

THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH

The
"Red Death"
had long
devastated
the country.

No pestilence
had ever been
so fatal, or so hideous.
Blood was its
avatar and its
seal—the redness
and the horror
of blood.



There were sharp pains, and
sudden dizziness, and then
profuse bleeding at the pores,
with dissolution. The scarlet
stains upon the body and
especially upon the face of the
victim shut him out from the aid
and from the sympathy of his
fellow-men.



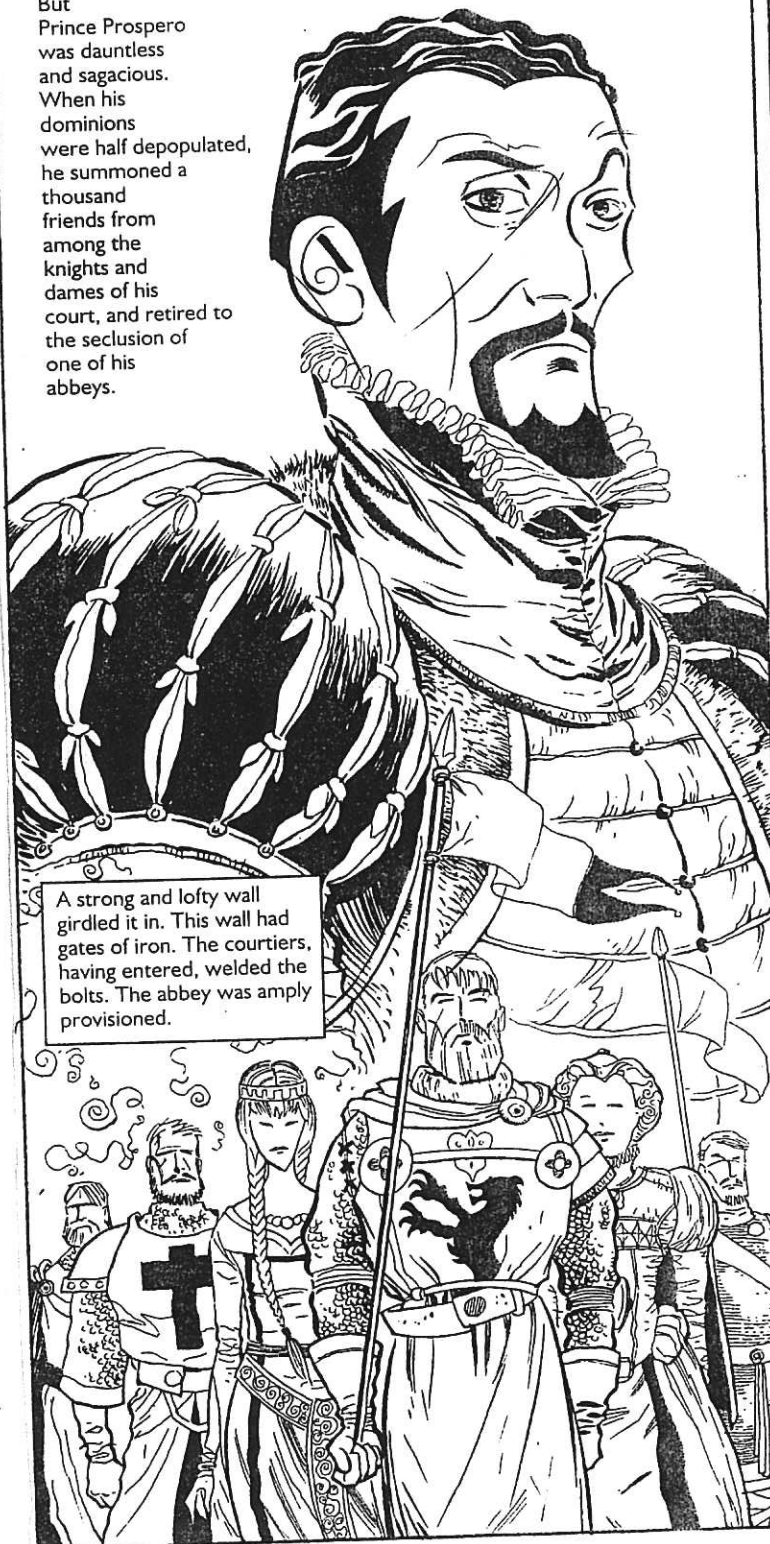
And the whole seizure,
progress and termination of
the disease were the
incidents of half an hour.

the Masque of the Red Death

by Edgar Allan Poe adapted by Stanley W. Shaw

But Prince Prospero was dauntless and sagacious. When his dominions were half depopulated, he summoned a thousand friends from among the knights and dames of his court, and retired to the seclusion of one of his abbeys.

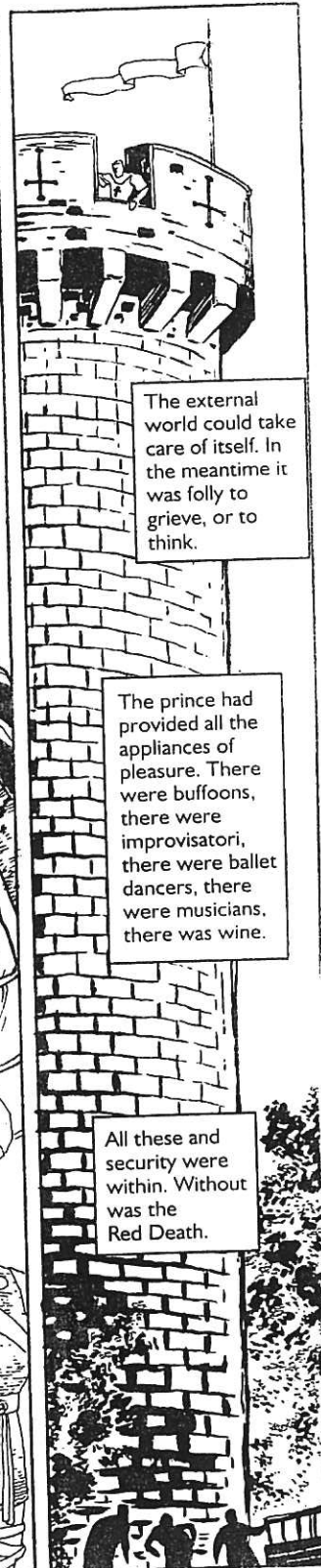
A strong and lofty wall girdled it in. This wall had gates of iron. The courtiers, having entered, welded the bolts. The abbey was amply provisioned.



The external world could take care of itself. In the meantime it was folly to grieve, or to think.

The prince had provided all the appliances of pleasure. There were buffoons, there were improvisatori, there were ballet dancers, there were musicians, there was wine.

All these and security were within. Without was the Red Death.

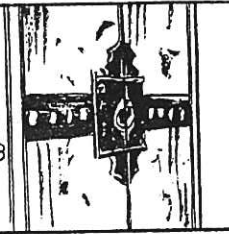


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Toward the close of the fifth month of his seclusion, while the pestilence raged, the Prince entertained his friends at a masked ball of the most unusual magnificence.

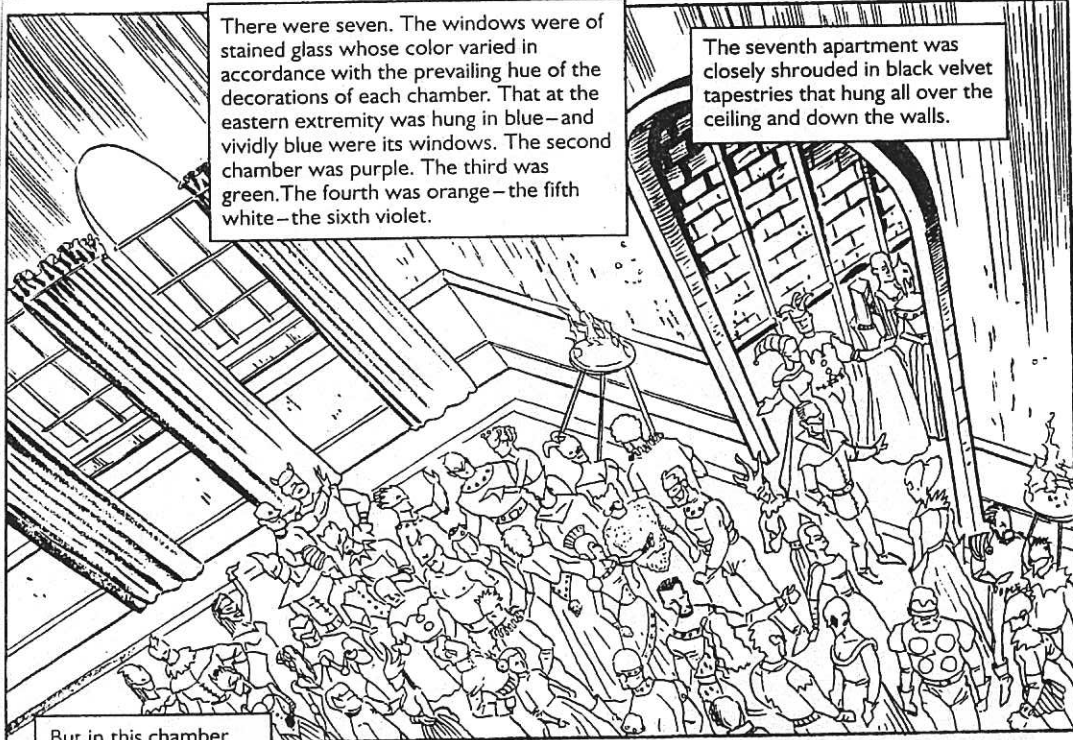


But let me tell of the rooms in which it was held.



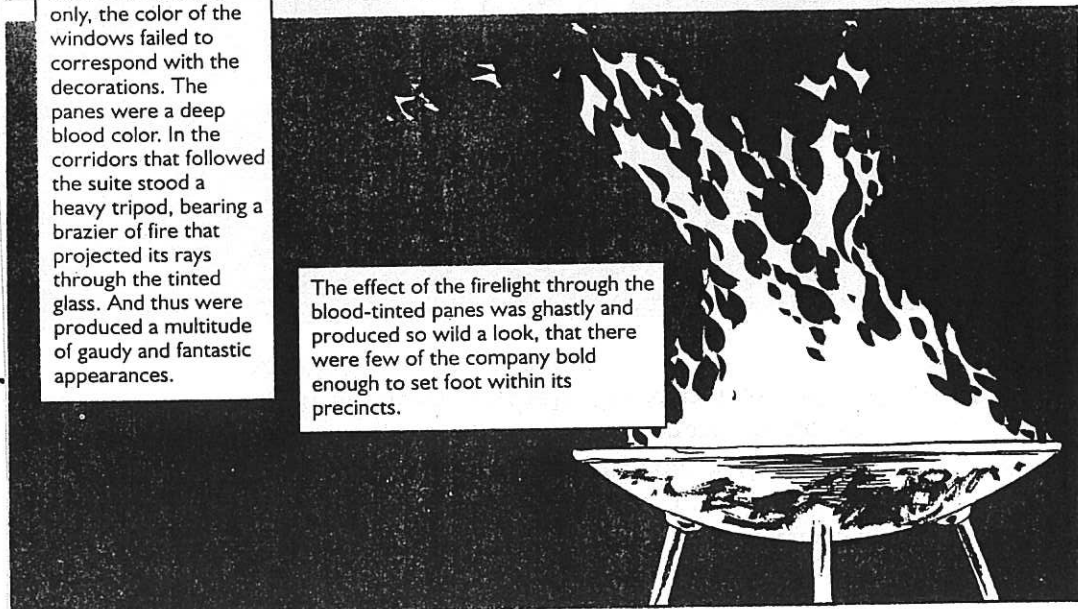
There were seven. The windows were of stained glass whose color varied in accordance with the prevailing hue of the decorations of each chamber. That at the eastern extremity was hung in blue—and vividly blue were its windows. The second chamber was purple. The third was green. The fourth was orange—the fifth white—the sixth violet.

The seventh apartment was closely shrouded in black velvet tapestries that hung all over the ceiling and down the walls.

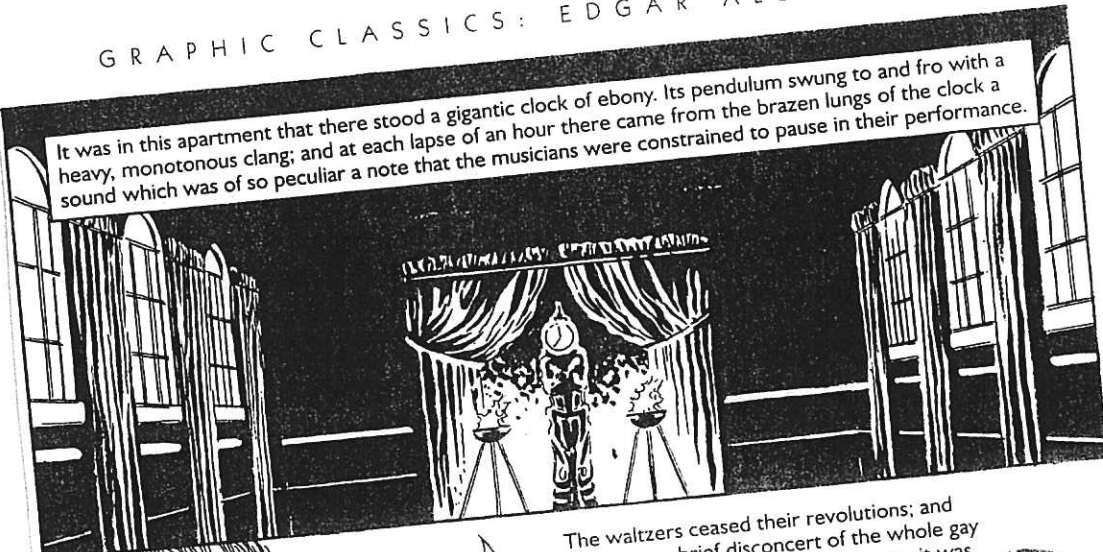


But in this chamber only, the color of the windows failed to correspond with the decorations. The panes were a deep blood color. In the corridors that followed the suite stood a heavy tripod, bearing a brazier of fire that projected its rays through the tinted glass. And thus were produced a multitude of gaudy and fantastic appearances.

The effect of the firelight through the blood-tinted panes was ghastly and produced so wild a look, that there were few of the company bold enough to set foot within its precincts.



It was in this apartment that there stood a gigantic clock of ebony. Its pendulum swung to and fro with a heavy, monotonous clang; and at each lapse of an hour there came from the brazen lungs of the clock a sound which was of so peculiar a note that the musicians were constrained to pause in their performance.



The waltzers ceased their revolutions; and there was a brief disconcert of the whole gay company; and, while the chimes rang, it was observed that even the giddiest grew pale.



But when the echoes had ceased, a light laughter at once pervaded the assembly, and the musicians looked at each other and smiled as if at their own nervousness and folly.



Then, after the lapse of sixty minutes, there came yet another chiming of the clock, and the same disconcert.

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In spite of these things, it was a gay and magnificent revel. There were much glare and glitter and piquancy and phantasm.



There were much of the beautiful, much of the wanton,



much of the bizarre, something of the terrible,



and not a little of that which might have excited disgust.



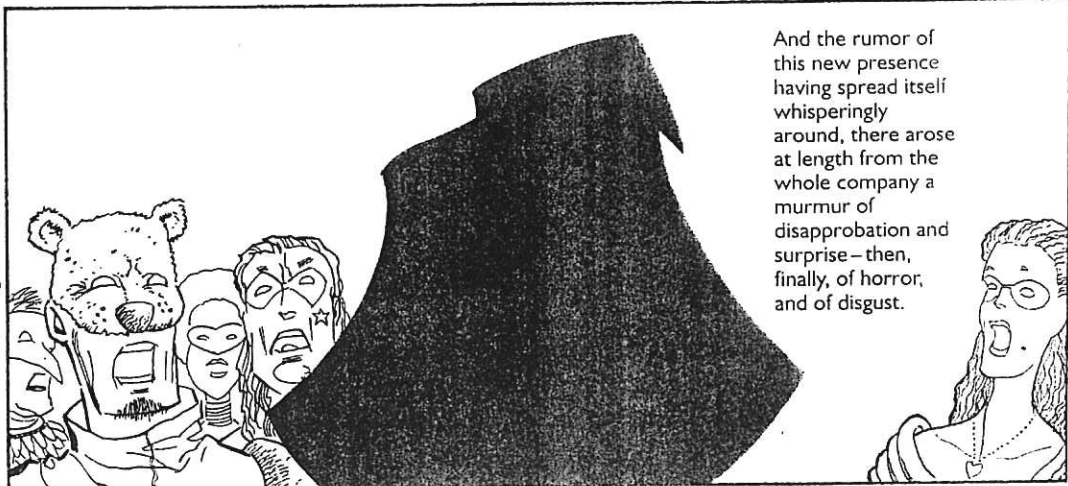
Excepting the black seventh chamber, the apartments were crowded, and in them beat feverishly the heart of life. And the revel went whirlingly on,



until there commenced the sounding of midnight upon the clock.

Then the music ceased; the evolutions of the waltzers were quieted; and there was an uneasy cessation of all things as before. But now there were twelve strokes to be sounded by the clock; and thus it happened, perhaps, that more of thought crept into the meditations of the revellers.

And thus, too, it happened, perhaps, that before the last echoes of the last chime had sunk into silence, there were many who had become aware of the presence of a masked figure which had arrested no attention before.



And the rumor of this new presence having spread itself whisperingly around, there arose at length from the whole company a murmur of disapprobation and surprise—then, finally, of horror, and of disgust.

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In an assembly of phantasms such as I have painted, it may well be supposed that no ordinary appearance could have excited such sensation. In truth the masquerade license of the night was nearly unlimited; but the figure in question had gone beyond the bounds of even the prince's indefinite decorum.



The figure was tall and gaunt, and shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the grave. The mask was made to resemble the countenance of a stiffened corpse. And yet all this might have been endured by the mad revellers. But the mummer had gone so far as to assume the type of the Red Death. His vesture was dabbled in blood—and his broad brow was besprinkled with the scarlet horror.

When the eyes of Prince Prospero fell upon this spectral image, his brow reddened with rage.



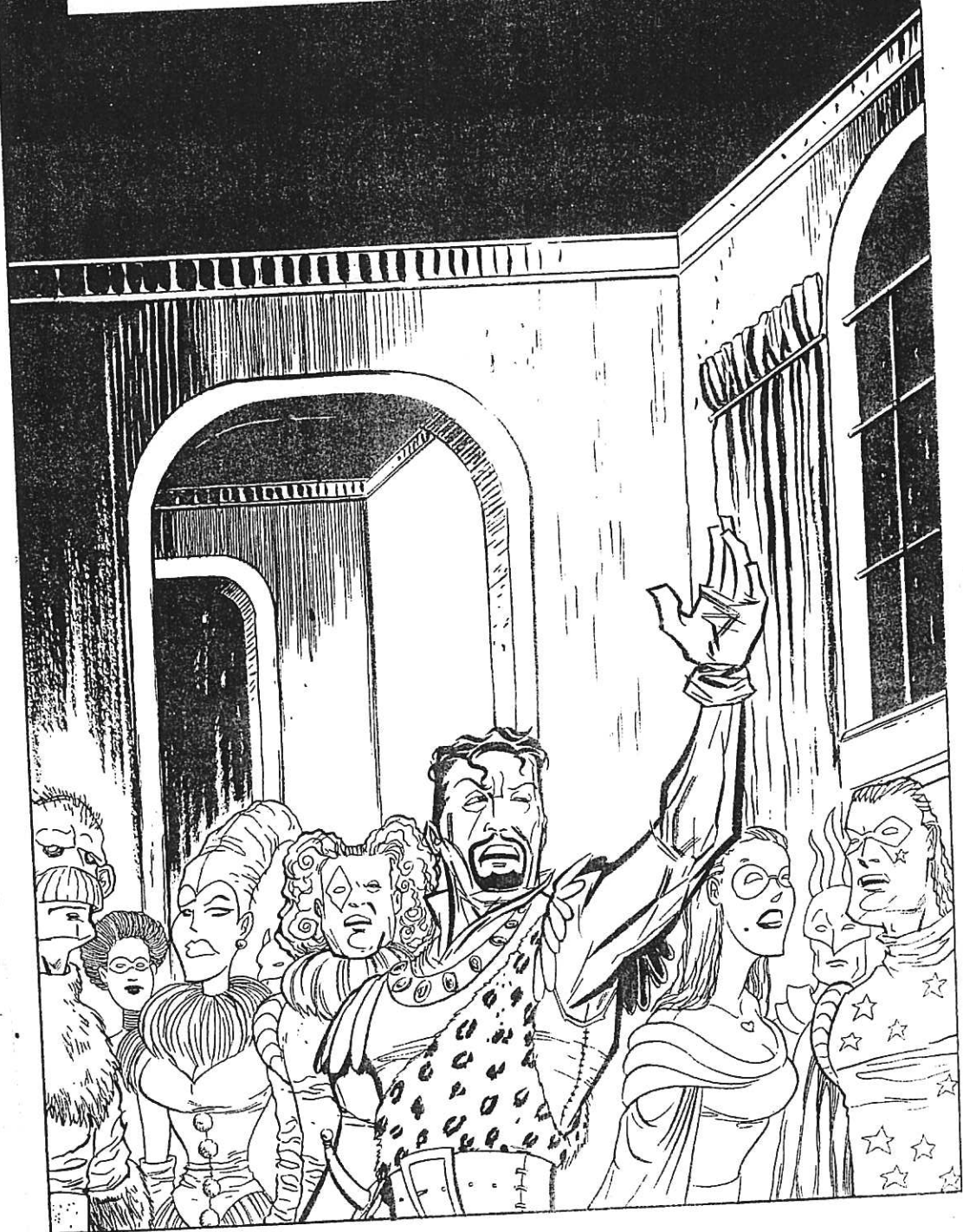
THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH

Who dares
insult us with this
blasphemous
mockery?

Seize him and
unmask him - that we may
know whom we have to hang
at sunrise, from the
battlements!

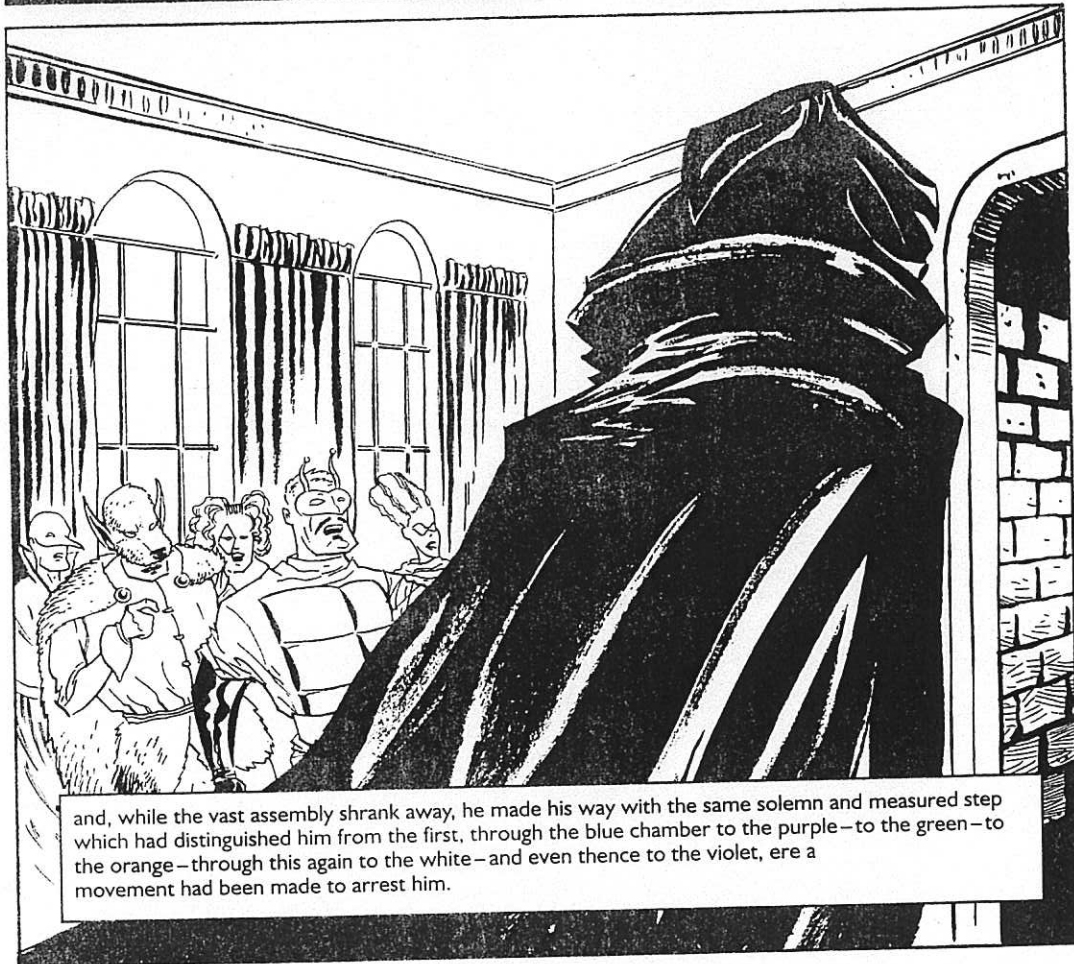


It was in the eastern or blue chamber in which stood the Prince Prospero as he uttered these words. They rang throughout the seven rooms loudly and clearly—for the music had become hushed at the waving of his hand.



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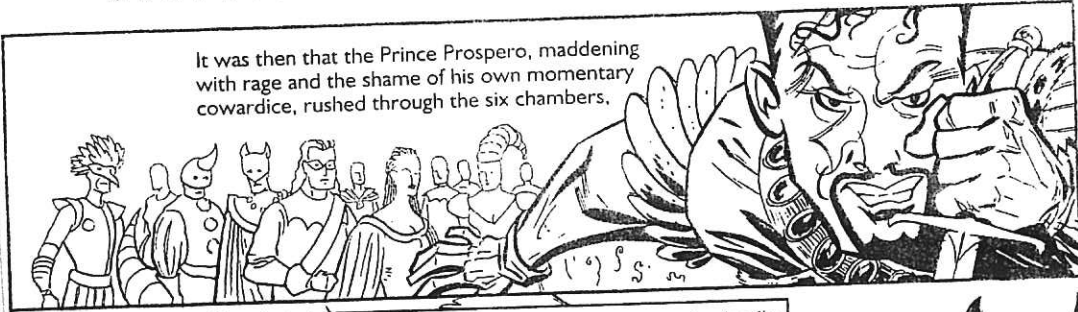
As the prince spoke, the intruder was near at hand, and with deliberate and stately step, he made closer approach to the speaker. None put forth hand to seize him; unimpeded, he passed within a yard of the prince;



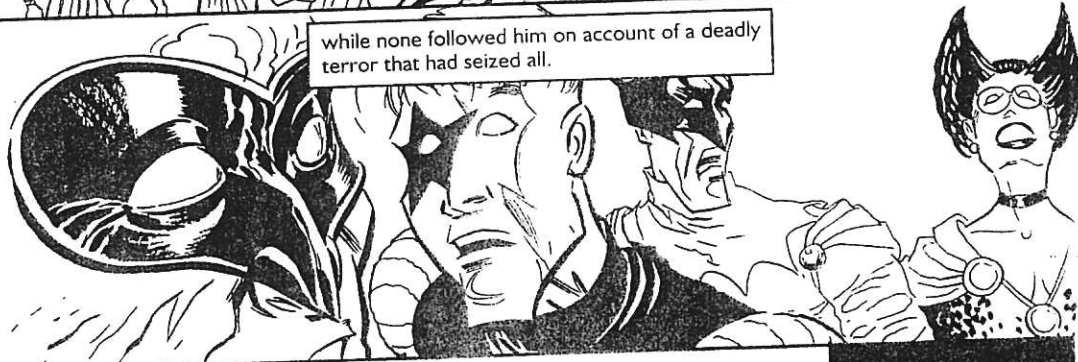
and, while the vast assembly shrank away, he made his way with the same solemn and measured step which had distinguished him from the first, through the blue chamber to the purple—to the green—to the orange—through this again to the white—and even thence to the violet, ere a movement had been made to arrest him.

GRAPHIC CLASSICS: EDGAR ALLAN POE

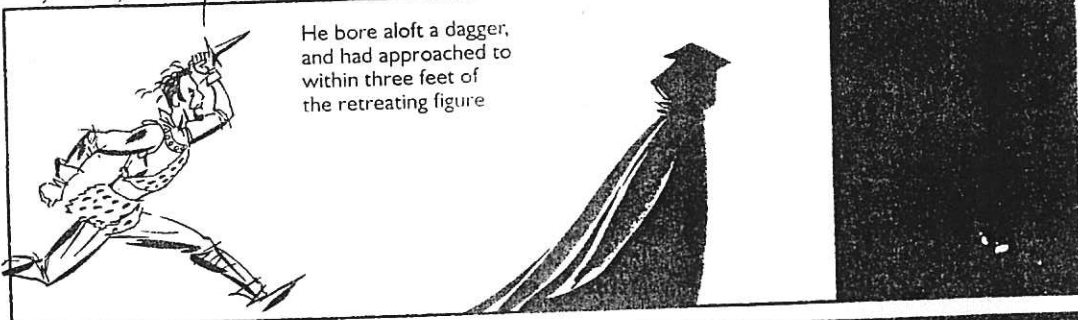
It was then that the Prince Prospero, maddening with rage and the shame of his own momentary cowardice, rushed through the six chambers,



while none followed him on account of a deadly terror that had seized all.



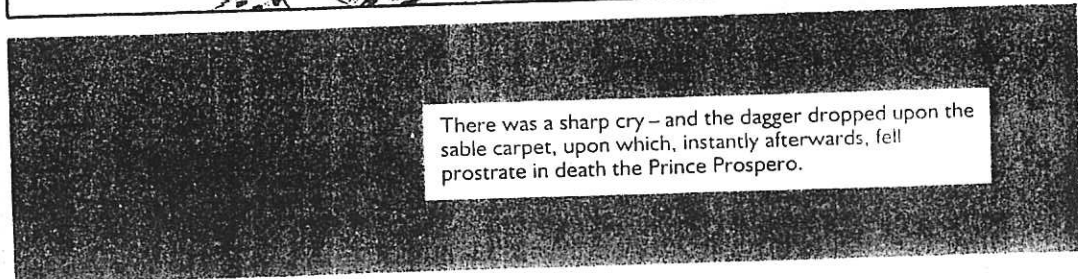
He bore aloft a dagger, and had approached to within three feet of the retreating figure



when the latter, having attained the extremity of the velvet apartment, turned and confronted his pursuer.

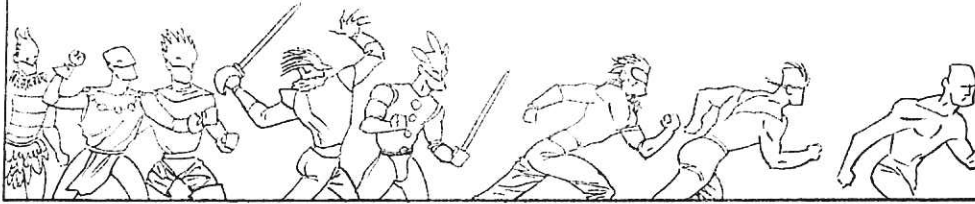


There was a sharp cry – and the dagger dropped upon the sable carpet, upon which, instantly afterwards, fell prostrate in death the Prince Prospero.

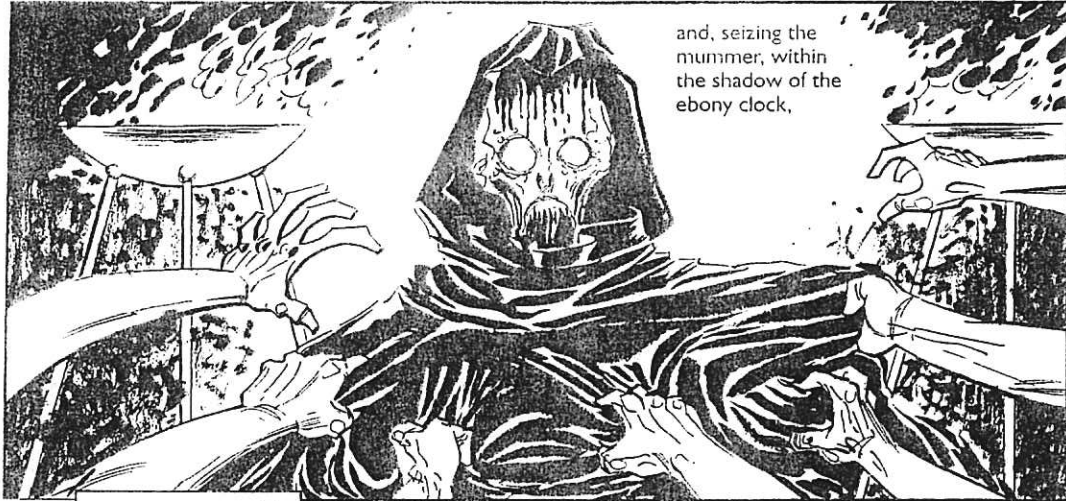


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Summoning the wild courage of despair, a throng of the revellers
threw themselves into the black apartment,

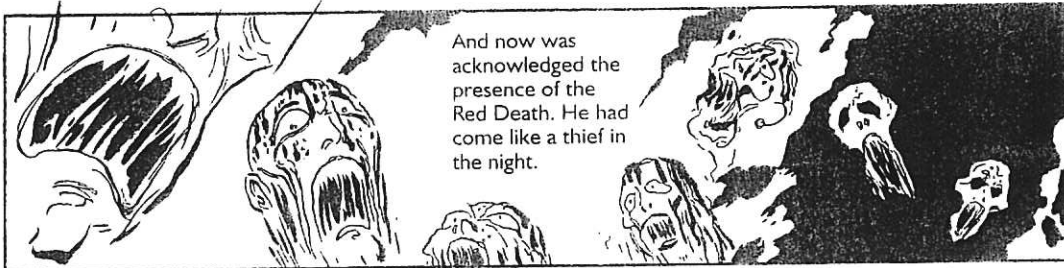


and, seizing the
mummer, within
the shadow of the
ebony clock,

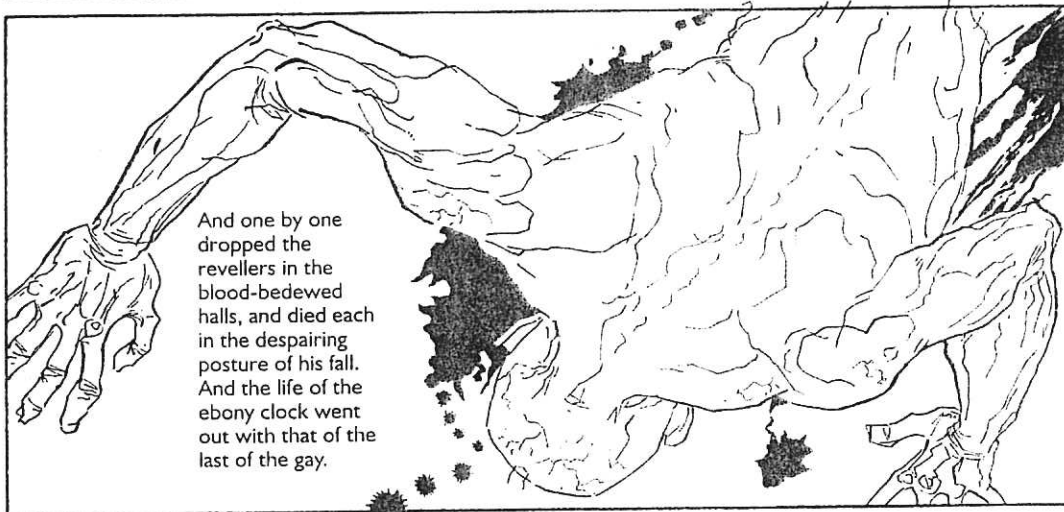


gasped in unutterable
horror at finding the
cerements and mask
which they handled
with so violent a
rudeness, untenanted
by any tangible form.

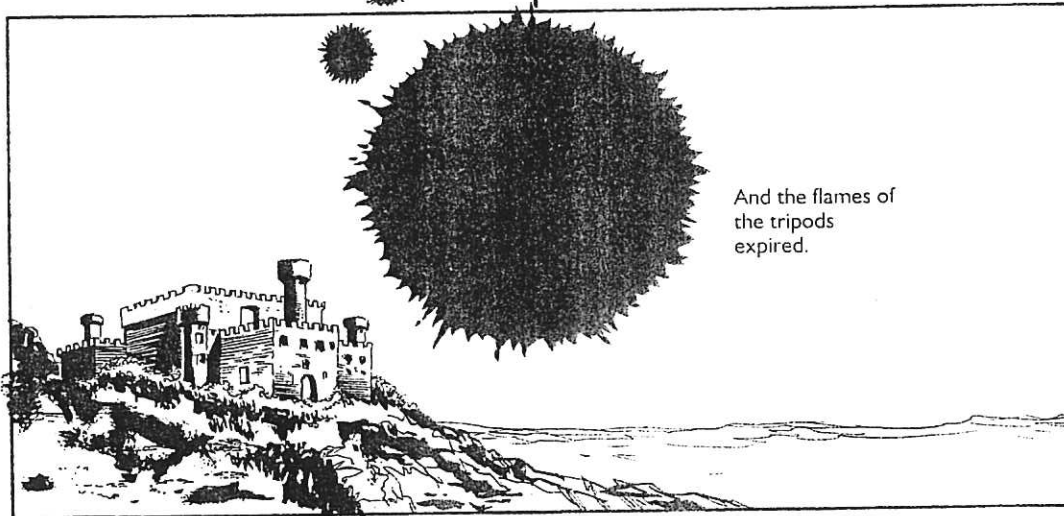




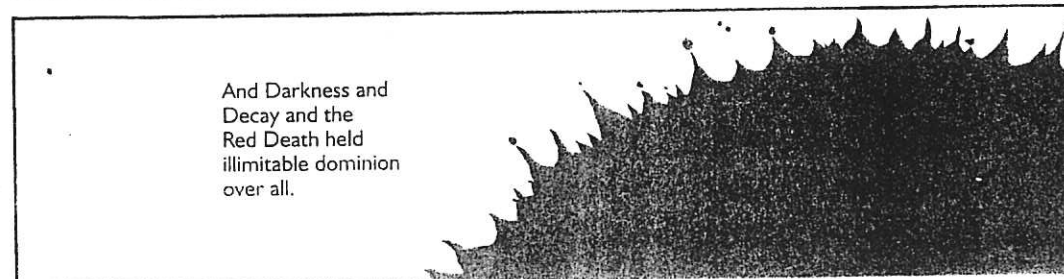
And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night.



And one by one dropped the revellers in the blood-bedewed halls, and died each in the despairing posture of his fall. And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay.



And the flames of the tripods expired.



And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all.