There's no escape from... The House of Secrets
“Almost Human”

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Script: Jack Oleck
Art: Franc Reyes
Colors: ?
Letters: ?
Editor: Joe Orlando
Cover Art to ‘House of Secrets’ #129: Luis Dominguez
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The One You Read As A Kid

Yes, it’s that comic. I was probably seven when I read this originally. I still remember those bee guys! Another comic from the cheapie bins that cost one whole dollar. Gold!

From what I can gather about Franc Reyes (another Filipino artist of the 70’s), he did art chores for DC and Marvel between 1975 to 1982 and created his own comic, “The Fantastic World Of... Arik Khan”. Later, he went to work in animation and landed a gig with Disney. His jungle-scapes in “Almost Human” are very impressive and he has that ‘Filipino inking-style’, reminiscent of Alex Nino.

I’ve written before of Jack Oleck.

Again, I’m amazed that one person can be responsible for so many comic scripts. There’s no big surprises here, but it is interesting to see the female ‘antagonist’. Oleck pulls a nice hook with Martha Kenyon appearing as the enlightened, humanitarian scholar who strives to protect the bee people only to have her dark, underlying goals bubble to the surface at the point of no return.

Warning: The following content contains mild graphic content.

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FASCINATING CREATURES, BEES—DON'T YOU THINK THEY LIVE IN AN ORGANIZED SOCIETY THEY OBEY CERTAIN LAWS —

--IN SOME WAYS THEY'RE JUST LIKE US.

"OF COURSE, THERE IS ONE BIG DIFFERENCE. BEES FEEL NOTHING, HAVE NO EMOTIONS, BUT MAYBE THAT'S JUST AS WELL. EMOTIONS CAN BE DANGEROUS.

"HAD MARTHA KENNY REMEMBERED THAT, THIS STORY MIGHT NEVER HAVE HAPPENED, BUT WHY DON'T I TELL YOU ABOUT IT?"

IT HAPPENED BECAUSE MARTHA KENNY MADE IT HAPPEN, WHO ELSE BUT A WOMAN OBSESSED WOULD HAVE SACRIFICED HER OWN KIND TO SAVE THE LIVES OF MONSTROSITIES — EVEN IF THOSE MONSTROSITIES WERE...

ALMOST HUMAN

LYLE—THE TREES LOOK UP IN THE TREES! THE BEE PEOPLE AREN'T JUST A LEGEND! WE'VE FOUND THEM! NOW, MAYBE WE CAN LEARN THE SECRET! WE...

MAYBE, UNLESS THEY STING US ALL TO DEATH FIRST."

FRANC REYES ARTIST
JACK OLECK WRITER
JOE ORLANDO EDITOR
Grayson, no! My husband and I hired you to guide us, not to kill people!

All right, they're going anyway. They probably never heard guns before. But... people? You call those those things people?

Pow!

Yes, we think they evolved from bees! Maybe they aren't human! The way we are, but they aren't insects either! We want to learn from them.

The dank, steaming jungles of the Amazon, death creatures that could not be—those were the beginnings, those and a woman who from the first behaved strangely...

So that's what you're after: the secret of royal jelly. I've heard of it. Bees manufacture it and feed it to their young.

Martha, stop it! You haven't been yourself ever since we started the expedition. You're hysterical! Stop it. I'll explain to Grayson.

Yes, and with it they can produce any kind of individual they want! Workers, soldiers—even a queen fifty times their own size.

We're entomologists! Scientists! If we can learn how royal jelly works, think what it will mean: sickness and old age might be wiped out—

I see, I didn't understand, but now that I see, all right, Mrs. Kenyon. It's worth a try, anyway.
Later that day...

Grayson, how—how much further? We're exhausted.

Quiet. I hear something like buzzing—

Good Lord! It doesn't look like any village I've ever seen—

It looks like a cluster of giant beehives! Those bee people in the fields—They must be workers, and the others are soldiers!

Like, we were right. They did evolve from bees. If we can just communicate with them—

They've spotted us! Let's get out of here—

No! You mustn't harm them. We have to make friends with them.

Martha! Have you gone mad altogether? They're trying to kill us! Come on!
MORE PEOPLE DIED THAT DAY, BECAUSE MARTHA KENYON WAS OBSESSED. BUT—

IT'S ALL RIGHT. WE CAN SLOW DOWN NOW. THEY'RE NOT FOLLOWING US. WE'RE SAFE.

SAFE! YOU FOOLS! WE SHOULD HAVE STAYED! WE SHOULD HAVE TRIED TO TALK TO THEM!

TALK! YOU HAVE GONE MAD! MARTHA, WHAT IS IT? WHAT ARE YOU REALLY AFTER? IT'S NOT JUST THE SECRET OF ROYAL JELLY, IS IT?

YES, IT IS, BUT—LYLIE, I JUST REALIZED SOMETHING. THAT VILLAGE—it was just a FOOD GATHERING DEPOT! THERE WERE NO YOUNG, NO FEMALES! THEY MUST HAVE A REAL HIVE SOMEWHERE!

GRAYSON! YOU WOULD KNOW WHERE THEY COULD BUILD A GIANT HIVE? THEY'D NEED SOME KIND OF HIDING PLACE. PERHAPS A CAVE. IF WE CAN FIND IT—

THOSE ARE SOME CAVES A DAY'S MARCH NORTH OF HERE! BUT I'VE GOT A BETTER IDEA! IF YOU WANT TO TALK TO THOSE THINGS—STAY HERE AND MAKE CAMP. I'LL BE BACK!

IN HER FRUSTRATION, MARTHA KENYON ALMOST WEPT. THE FORCE THAT DRIVE HER WAS EVEN GREATER THAN HER HORROR. BUT THE HORROR HAD ONLY BEGUN...

KEEP DOWN! I HEAR SOMETHING! ONE OF THEM IS COMING!

THE REAL HORROR WAS TO BEGIN LATER...

OH, NO—MADMAN! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?

YOU SAID YOU WANTED TO TALK TO ONE OF THEM. GO AHEAD. BUT IT WONT DO ANY GOOD. I DONT THINK THEY CAN TALK.

HOW CAN HE TALK? LOOK AT HIM—HE'S TERRIFIED, AND IF THE REST OF THE COLONY FINDS OUT—YOU FOOL! OH, YOU STUPID, BRUTAL FOOL!

YOU MEANT WELL, BUT MARTHA SAINT HERSELF, MAYBE I CAN TALK TO THE BEE-MAN.

CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE FOLLOWING
LYLE KENYON TRIED, BUT... MARTHA? I'M AFRAID GRAYSON WAS RIGHT I'VE BEEN TRYING TO TALK TO THE BEE MAN BUT... MARTHA? ARE YOU ASLEEP?

ASLEEP? MARTHA KENYON WAS AWAKE AND RAGING. BUT SHE PRETENDED AND SHE DID NOT ANSWER. AFTERWARD...
PLEASE TRUST ME! GO BACK TO YOUR PEOPLE. TELL THEM I'M A FRIEND. I ONLY WANT TO LEARN FROM THEM.

MRS. KENYON WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

HE'S GETTING AWAY! AND IF HE DOES THE WHOLE COLONY WILL COME SWARMING DOWN ON US! ARGH-ARGH-

NO! DON'T SHOOT!

HE'S DEAD! BUT WHY? THIS WHOLE THING, IT'S A NIGHTMARE. NO KNOWLEDGE IS WORTH A MAN'S LIFE?

I'LL TELL YOU WHY IT'S WORTH IT.

LYLE, LOOK AT ME IN A FEW YEARS. I'LL BE OLD! UGLY! BUT THE RIGHT DOSAGE OF ROYAL JELLY CAN MAKE ME YOUNG AGAIN.

SO THAT'S IT! THAT'S WHY YOU PUSHED ME INTO THIS EXPEDITION. YOU'RE INSANE! YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW THAT IT WOULD WORK--

BUT THERE'S A CHANCE THAT IT WILL. LYLE, HELP ME--

I'LL HELP YOU, MARTHA. BUT NOT THE WAY YOU'D LIKE. YOU NEED A DOCTOR--A PSYCHIATRIST. WE'RE GOING BACK TO CIVILIZATION. AND THIS TIME, IF THOSE THINGS TRY TO STOP US--I'LL USE THIS.
Martha Kenyon pleaded to no avail, but she still clung to her dream. And so, just before dawn...

No one saw when she gathered up every cartridge in the can...

Who would have dreamed the lengths to which she would go in her madness? Certainly not Lyle Kenyon...

Lyle Kenyon led his trembling porters away from that place of death... back to the river that was the jungle’s only highway and there...

The bee people! They’re all around us! Shoot! Shoot!

Our rifles! They’re not firing! They’re empty! They...


MARTHA! THEY'RE TAKING MARTHA! UMPH!

AH-HH!

BLOOD, TURMOIL--ONLY THE JUNGLE SAW THE REST THEY THERE WAS ONLY THE SILENCE, UNTIL...

MARTHA-- THEY TOOK MARTHA GOT TO GET DOWNSTREAM AND HELP--

CAPTAIN, LOOK! THERE IN THE DUGOUT A WHITE MAN--

I SEE HIM!

CAPTAIN, SHE IS ALIVE, I KNOW IT IF THEY'D WANTED TO KILL HER THEY COULD HAVE BUT THEY DIDN'T PLEASE WILL YOU HELP ME?

FOR WEEKS OLIE KENYON'S LIFE HUNG BY A THREAD, BUT ONE DAY...

SO THE BEE PEOPLE ARE REAL, UNTIL NOW WE HEARD ONLY STORIES-- BUT, YOU UNDERSTAND, SENOR KENYON, EVEN IF YOUR WIFE STILL LIVES SHE WILL HAVE TO BE ARRESTED--

I KNOW, BUT I'VE STILL GOT TO FIND HER,

SII! IT IS A STRANGE STORY YOU TELL, SENOR, BUT IF YOUR WIFE IS IN THE HANDS OF THOSE THINGS, SI I WILL DO WHAT I CAN.
The Hive? Martha thought there must be a hive somewhere--where they raise their young and their queen. And Grayson said there were caves--

--and you think your wife may be there? Very well, Senor, we will look for this hive. I only hope for your sake that it exists.

Lyle Kenyon was almost beyond hope. Then, but there was still a chance, however slim...

There it is! Those are soldiers, guards--that must be where they've got Martha!

Where is she? Tell me, you devil! What have you done with her?

Senor Kenyon! No--

After them. We have no other choice now--

No! Get down! So long as they stay inside the cave we can't reach them!

We've got to get inside. There must be a way--
AND THERE IS... SMOKE, CAPTAIN. IT'S A CHANCE. SMOKE ACTS LIKE A DRUG ON BELS. IF SOME OF YOUR MEN CAN CIRCLE AND GET ABOVE THE CAVE --

EL? I UNDERSTAND? IT IS WORTH A TRY.

THE WIND IS DRIVING THE SMOKE DIRECTLY INTO THE CAVE! EVERY ONE OF THOSE THINGS MUST BE UNCONSCIOUS BY NOW! COME ON!

WHERE IS MARTHA? I DON'T SEE HER. WE'VE GOT TO FIND HER.

LYLE KENYON SEARCHED FRANTICALLY. BUT IT WAS NO USE. THERE WAS NO SIGN OF MARTHA KENYON. UNTIL...

SHE ISN'T HERE. WE'VE LOOKED EVERYWHERE, BUT IT SHE ISN'T HERE WHERE IS SHE?

PERHAPS SHE IS HERE, SENOR. LOOK!

THAT ONE CELL, IT IS EVEN LARGER THAN THE OTHERS. IT IS GIANTIC!

YOU THINK MARTHA MIGHT BE IN THERE? NO. NO, IT CAN'T BE.  

IT CAN'T BE!
ROYAL JELLY:
SHE WANTED
ROYAL JELLY.
SHE y-- THAT'S
FUNNY, THAT'S--
HA-HA-HA.

MADRE
DE DOG.
THE
BEE PEOPLE
DID THIS THING?
BUT WHY?
SEÑOR, WHY?

WHY? BUT
DON'T YOU SEE?
MARTHA SAID THEY
WERE ALMOST
HUMAN, AND SHE
WAS RIGHT. DEAR GOD,
SHE WAS
RIGHT.

SHE WANTED TO
BE YOUNG AGAIN.
BEAUTIFUL. SHE TRIED
TO MAKE FRIENDS WITH
THEM. A DOZEN MEN DIED
BECAUSE SHE TRIED TO
PROTECT THEM, AND
THE BEE PEOPLE WERE
JUST HUMAN ENOUGH TO
BE GRATEFUL.

THEY WANTED
TO SHOW THEIR
APPRECIATION, SO
THEY GAVE HER JUST
WHAT SHE WANTED--
ROYAL JELLY. THEY
MUST HAVE FED IT
TO HER IN ENORMOUS
QUANTITIES. NOW
DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

THEY GAVE
HER THE GREATEST
HONOR IT WAS IN
THEIR POWER TO
BESTOW. THEY
MADE HER
THEIR
QUEEN.

REVOLTING, EH?
BUT THEN, YOU CAN'T
REALLY BLAME THE
BEE PEOPLE, CAN YOU?
AFTER ALL, MARTHA
WAS KIND TO THEM,
NO MATTER WHAT
HER REASON.

ALL THEY
WANTED WAS TO
REPAY HER. WHAT
BETTER WAY TO
SHOW THEIR
GRATITUDE THAN
BY FEEDING
SWEETS TO
THE SWEET?

END
Afterword

Pretty cool, huh? Nice variety of shots and angles, averaging 5 to 6 per page. Beautifully put together story. The coloring of the sky is something you may not notice at first (it’s light-red/pink to brown on the close-ups), but it gives this piece an odd, alien feeling and provides a stark contrast to the jungle and characters. I love the color of this piece!

Speaking of coloring, as an adult, I get a kick out of this panel.

You can tell that the artist, Franc Reyes, was using the position of Queen Martha’s hands and shading to cover up the naughty bits. Yet the coloring was added to make her appear as though she were wearing a pink, body suit. I suppose the Code was still in effect here. Nice of the bee people to dress her up like that.

As an adult, I also wonder ‘what happens now?’ Would they rescue what’s left of Martha? Kill all the bee people? Take some royal jelly?

It’s another cool idea from comics, just thrown out there in 10 pages, left to die in the cheapie bins. Sort of sad really.

Again, don’t be afraid to lay out a few bucks for those DC mystery titles from the 70’s. Some of them are fantastic reads and a better value than what’s available today.

“Books are the bees which carry the quickening pollen from one to another mind.”

~ James Russell Lowell ~

Discussion:

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