

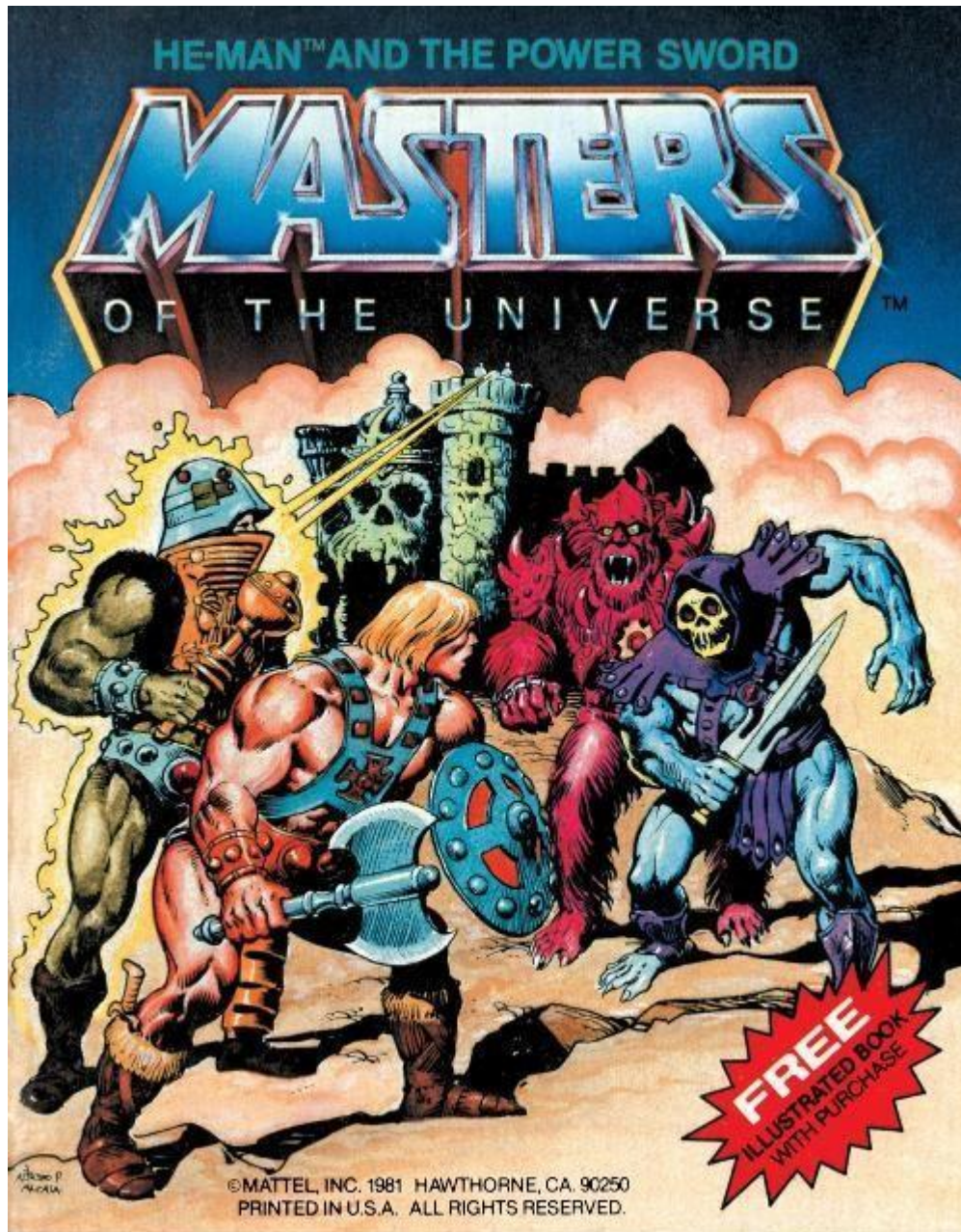
“HE-MAN AND THE POWER SWORD”

Expanded story by **Matthew C. Kayser**

Original story by **Don Glut**

With art by **Alfredo Alcala**

(With a brief nod to “The Tale of Teela!” by **Gary Cohn**)



The morning sun had yet to fully crest the horizon as He-Man made his way to the river to gather the day's water for his village. A strong branch rode across his broad shoulders, each end supporting a large leather satchel, nearly half his size. Once filled, most men would be hard pressed to carry even one of these satchels without assistance, but He-Man was not most men. He was the most powerful man of his tribe. Kneeling at the river's edge, he filled each pouch independently. When he'd finished, he placed his hands in the running water and splashed it onto his face and bare chest. He took a moment to enjoy its soothing coolness, which was in stark contrast to the humidity of the jungle, already present this early morning. His people did not know how to craft armor and the jungle heat was too much for thick clothes, so he was comfortable wearing nothing but a simple loincloth. Wetting his long blonde hair, He-Man watched the droplets fall and rejoin the clear waters below, savoring the sounds of the wild around him. The chirping cries of birds and humming of insects was a constant here; a cacophonous symphony of life forever permeating the place he was raised and called home. A flash of light in the distance caught his eye and he quickly raised his head to look eastward for its origins. Mere moments after the flash, it was followed by a thunderous noise, alarming him. He wasn't alone, as all manner of birds left their tree perches in fear, flying away as fast as their wings could carry them. Even the insects fell silent, if only momentarily.

He-Man sighed. He knew that his tribe was unique in that it was safely hidden within the thick Eternian Vine Jungle, its people not having known war or true evil for generations. Despite this, he grew ever more concerned that that would soon change and that evil would find its way to his peaceful people sooner rather than later. Even now, the violence was so near that he could smell the smoke rising in its wake, carried on the wind from the nearby explosion. Due to regular trade with the nomadic Man-At-Arms, He-Man's people were not completely ignorant of the world. Through the trader's stories, they were well aware of the evil forces that raged all around them, working to enslave or destroy the people who lived outside of their safe haven. Such stories were the very reason his people continued their isolation. The strife of their fellow Eternians simply wasn't their concern. Until now, his tribe had been content in their solitude, living a peaceful existence without a care for the outside world or the people who called it home but, since his childhood, He-Man had always felt uncomfortable living this way. All life was sacred to him, and he felt shame in ignoring the plights of his fellow Eternians, whether they were members of his tribe or not. Now he had finally grown into a man with the strength and standing within his tribe to do something about it.

He felt that the time was coming when his people would no longer be able to hide. At the very least, perhaps he could prolong that time somehow, likely by sacrificing his own safety. Silently, with little internal debate or doubt, he came to a decision and steeled himself for his tribe's reaction to it. He feared that they would think him a fool, but his mind had been made up and, surprisingly, it had been the easiest decision he'd ever had to

make because his heart told him that it was the right one and, thus far, it had always guided him wisely. Lifting the heavy satchels of water onto his chiseled shoulders once again, the man began his journey back home and to those who awaited him there. He would do anything to protect them, and protect them he must. He suspected that this would be the last time he would make this familiar trip to the river, for a larger purpose awaited him. It called to him as a siren would and, like a sailor on the sea of Rakash, He-Man felt he had to answer.



“You know that I would prefer to stay, wise elders.” Seated within the largest thatched hut of his village, He-Man argued his case to the leaders of his tribe. “But you also know that my mission is a noble one, and that I must accomplish it for the good of not just this tribe, but for all of Eternia.”

A brief silence followed before one of them spoke. “You have always cared too much for the outside world, He-Man,” Sha-Man, the eldest of the tribe, said scoldingly. “Even as a boy, you often wandered too far from the safety of the village.”

“And yet,” the wise woman Shar-Ell interjected, “He-Man is not wrong. The peaceful lands we call home are shrinking beneath our feet and have been for some time. Our ancestors were nomadic people and tales were woven for generations of their journeys far and wide across Eternia. The arrival of the one called Skeletor after the Great Wars changed this. Now we fear to venture beyond the outskirts of this village. We already feel that the evil that infests Eternia will soon be upon us. Do we simply ignore it?” she challenged.

“So, your solution is to allow our greatest warrior to leave us here at the precipice of danger?” Talok-Son, the youngest of the elders, countered. “Without him, what hope do we have?”

“There are many fine warriors among the tribe, noble Talok-Son,” He-Man said. “I would also argue that my leaving could help to keep the darkness at bay. We know that evil forces, led by Skeletor, seek to control the legendary Castle Grayskull, a place of wonders. If we are to know lasting peace, I must go out and battle those forces. I must protect Grayskull in order to protect all of us.”

Talok-Son went to reply, but Shar-Ell raised her hand for silence, which the others granted. “You have pleaded your case, He-Man. Now it is time for us to decide. Please await our decision outside.”

He-Man nodded and rose, leaving the hut with a sigh. He felt this mission to be his

true purpose and had already chosen to leave regardless of their decision. He hoped that it wouldn't come to that. He respected the elders, but in the end, the decision was his and his alone. He waited for some time, the often-raised voices coming from within the hut muffled just enough that he couldn't make out what they were saying. Eventually, the voices quieted, and the elders joined him outside.

"You have our blessing, He-Man," Sha-Man said. "Go, protect the castle. In doing so, you protect your people. Farewell, and may the Goddess protect you."

"Farewell, wise ones." He-Man replied. "May she protect you as well." Preparing to leave, he grabbed his spear. One of only a few possessions he called his own, he'd previously only used it to fish, but now it served a much greater purpose. Leaving his hut, he was met by his childhood friend Ara-Lee. She'd grown into a beautiful woman, her raven hair falling to nearly her waist.

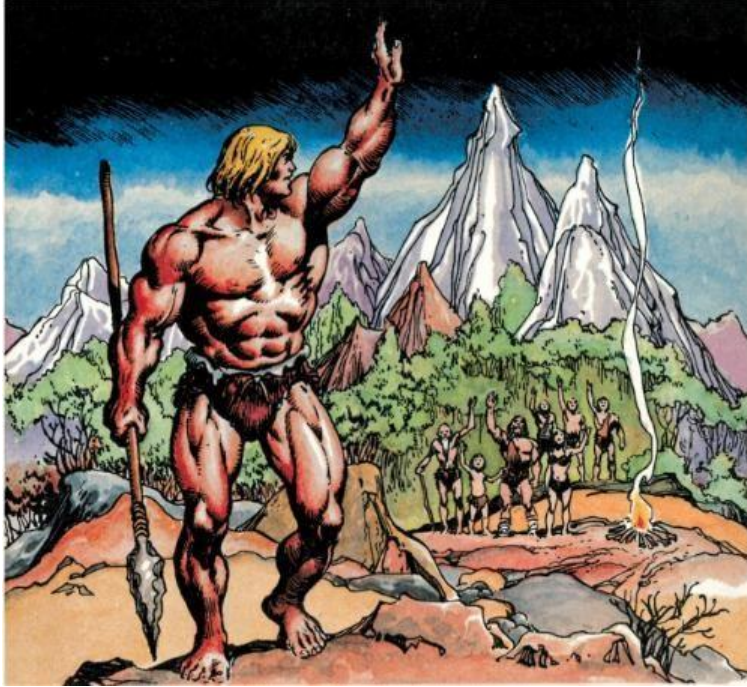
"You're just leaving then?" she asked.

He nodded solemnly. "I must."

"Will you ever come back?" There was a look of sadness in her eyes that broke his heart.

"If the Goddess is with me, I will defeat Skeletor and his warriors and peace will come to Eternia. When that day comes, I promise that my heart will rejoice upon returning to you. And the others," he added hastily. "Until then, I cannot risk revealing the tribe's location. For the time being, I must make a new home elsewhere."

"Then take this memory with you, to speed you on to victory." Ara-Lee pulled his face toward hers and kissed him for a long moment before pulling away, her face flushed. Her eyes filled with tears, and he moved to wipe them away, but she waved his hand off. "These are not tears purely of sadness, He-Man, but of pride. You are the bravest man I have ever known. I will pray to the Goddess every day to protect you so that you may return to us, and to me." She turned and joined the crowd that had begun to gather as word quickly spread about his mission. It was unusual for anyone to leave the tribe. Some of the younger ones, He-Man included, had never seen such a thing in their lifetime.



Fearing that his heart would force him to stay if he remained even a moment longer, He-Man turned and, with a final wave to his tribe, made his way out of the jungle. Glancing behind him, he saw his fellow villagers waving back at him, broad smiles upon their faces, man, woman, and child alike. Ara-Lee stood at the front of the line, cheering. He could feel his people's pride in him, and it began to power his footsteps, his bare feet barely feeling the thick underbrush beneath them, for he now felt as if he were walking on clouds. Thank the Goddess that

the elders had given him their blessing. Leaving was difficult for He-Man, leaving Ara-Lee most of all, but he'd made an oath to protect Eternia from the forces of evil. Now, all he had to do was fulfill it.



Beyond Man-At-Arm's stories, the outside world had long been a mystery to He-Man's tribe. It had been generations since his people had ventured beyond the Vine Jungle. One legend that persisted through those long years was that of the mysterious Castle Grayskull. Fantastic tales of the castle had been told to his people's children for so long that it had become an important part of their lore, despite no living member having seen it with their own eyes. He-Man was determined to be the first, but before he could do that he had to find where it was located. All he knew was what he'd been told by the elders since he was a boy, that the sun rose over Castle Grayskull. This meant he was headed east. His birthplace left behind in the distant mists, the adventurer had spent days travelling on foot and now found himself amongst craggy cliffs and quake-torn valleys far beyond anything he knew. He wondered how many years it had been since one of his tribe had set foot here. There was little to no vegetation, and it was, as far as he could tell, completely lifeless. Had it always been this barren, or had it once been something more? Was this wasteland natural or was it the cost of the Great Wars that had once raged across the planet? Coming from a home so rich with life, He-Man had difficulty understanding how empty this place was. His curiosity begged the question, "was the

whole world outside of the jungle like this?”

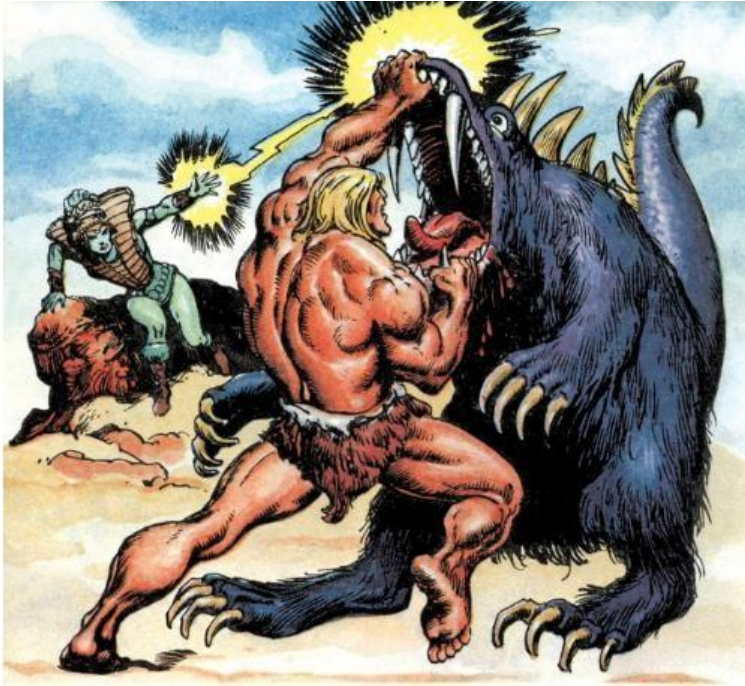
Easing his way along a narrow ledge, He-Man looked to the ground below, but felt no fear. He'd climbed trees taller than this cliff as a youth in the jungle. Still, with no vines or branches to grasp, he knew he must be careful, for one wrong step could send him tumbling off the precipice. As he pressed onward, the ledge narrowed even further, and he had to rake his back across the cliff's stone wall to keep from sliding down. He wondered how far Castle Grayskull was from here and whether it was in just as desolate a location. What kind of power did it hold, and why was that fiend Skeletor after it? His pondering was cut short when he heard a cry for help coming from below. Perhaps this place was not as lifeless as he'd initially thought. Turning a corner, he raised his gaze once more and looked outward into the valley beyond. It was there that he saw that his courage and jungle-bred strength were already needed.



A woman clad in a majestic green snake headdress was being attacked by a ferocious beast, the likes of which He-Man had never seen before. Covered in fur, the animal walked on four legs, powerful paws driving it toward its prey. As he watched it stand on its hind legs in preparation for an attack, He-Man's instincts told him that this mysterious woman needed his help. He tossed his prized spear at the creature, but the beast knocked it aside with ease, cleaving it in two with its razor-like talons.

Still, He-Man's actions had diverted its attention away from its original target and towards him. In a blur of movement, He-Man leapt from the cliffside and onto his shaggy foe, digging his fingers into its hide in an attempt to wrestle it to the ground.

Despite He-Man's strength, the creature flung him away with its massive paw. Unwilling to give up, the man rushed at it once again. Driving his shoulder forcefully into the beast's belly, it huffed out a hot breath that made He-Man wince at the stench of rotting meat. Reaching upward, the warrior held its crushing jaws open with all of his might. It was at that moment that He-Man realized that he was not fighting the creature alone. Glancing to the left, he saw the woman he'd intended to save gesture with her hands, unleashing a bolt of magical energy upon their common enemy.



She is a sorceress! he thought. The beast staggered but did not fall. Using its shift in weight to his advantage, He-Man pressed on and threw the creature to the ground with his mighty strength. Sensing that it was outnumbered, the animal fled, much to He-Man's relief. He wasn't sure he could have survived a second attack. The stranger now standing before him appeared relieved as well. "Your strength... your courage..." the Sorceress paused, fighting to regain her breath after their mutual struggle against the beastly creature.

"What is your name, warrior?" she finally asked.

"I am called He-Man by my people," he answered.

"And may I call you 'friend,' He-Man?" Her green eyes took him in and she appeared wary of him, despite his courageous actions. He suspected that one didn't find too many friends in a hostile place like this.

"Of course," he answered with a smile, hoping to assure her that he was well-intentioned. "What is this place? I've never seen anything like it. Where I am from, there is much life."

She walked toward him, indicating the barren lands that surrounded them; a tan sea made up of rock, cliffs, and dirt. "This is the Wasteland," she replied. "Legends say that once, long ago, this was a fertile land too, full of life, with tall trees and roaring rivers. Now all that remains is the devastation left behind after the Great Wars ravaged this world long ago; a reminder to those who would wage war of what the penalty of their actions can be. Too few heed it, I fear."

He-Man sighed. "You've confirmed my suspicions, Sorceress, but it saddens me to hear the truth. To see it like this, devoid of power, relegated to dust blowing away on the winds..." he trailed off, contemplating the loss of the paradise she'd described, a place that sounded not unlike the Vine Jungle in which he'd grown up. To see it reduced to this

saddened him.

A wry smile crossed her lips. "Do not mourn it too soon, my new friend. There is still power here. It is simply hidden. Come with me and I will show you." Reaching out a delicate hand, she motioned for him to follow and, after a moment's hesitation, he did so. The aura that surrounded the Sorceress was unlike anything else He-Man had encountered in his life. It wasn't the same kind of power he wielded; that of muscle, dense bone, and a fighter's instinct; but it was power, nonetheless. In fact, he suspected that she was much stronger than he was. Magic was mysterious to him, although he'd heard tales of it. His people warned against trusting anyone who dared to use it, that they were all evil in their souls for putting their faith in the arcane. Was he wrong to trust this woman? To follow her Goddess knows where, as he was currently? He shook away the thought. He-Man was determined to help all Eternians in need, magic wielder or no. He took his oath seriously. Besides, who was he to judge someone he'd only just met?

Walking ahead of him, He-Man saw that the Sorceress moved much more elegantly over the craggy rocks in her boots than he managed to on his bare feet. Though calloused and strong, they were used to vegetation and water, not the sharp edges of stone. She looked back at him and took notice of his discomfort. "We are almost there, He-Man, do not worry. Once we reach my home, you will be free to rest for as long as you like."

"You live here? In this place?" he asked incredulously.

"Someone must," she answered, "to guard the secrets it holds."

"Is that what you do here? Guard its secrets?" She nodded silently in response as they crested a rocky hill and his eyes took in their destination for the first time: a medium-sized cave opening, receding into the stone-covered hill ahead. He was unsure if it was a natural opening or something carved out intentionally by magics or devices of man. He suspected the answer was lost to time, for it appeared ancient indeed.

"We are here," she said when they arrived at the entrance. "Follow me inside the Cave of Power, He-Man. You are most welcome here."

Once again, he felt a twinge of unease in the pit of his stomach, but he pushed forward nonetheless, following the Sorceress into the darkness of the cave she called home. With a wave of her hand, several torches sprang to life along the walls, their fire illuminating a rather modest home within. The cave was littered with furniture unlike any he'd seen, presumably from another era, along with rugs and blankets, all likely preserved by the arid dryness of their environment. "We can rest here, my new friend, and speak," the Sorceress said, indicating a soft blanket made of an animal pelt which she seated herself upon. He noticed that it was not unlike the fur of the beast they'd just encountered

and he couldn't help but wonder if she'd needed his help at all with their foe, and if that were the case, why had she allowed him to think so? Was this all a trap? Once again, his mysterious host gave him a wry smile.

"This is not a trick, He-Man," she said, as if reading his thoughts. *Had she read them?* he wondered silently. "While it is true that I may have lured you to my aid under false pretenses," she continued, "I assure you that my intentions are pure." Cautiously, he sat across from her, taking in the sight of her unique armored snake headdress and appearance. Her green eyes were striking, reflecting the torchlight in a way that made him wonder if it was a trick of the light at all, or if they in fact contained their own magical fire. Considering it, he remained unsure and, despite his great courage, He-Man felt afraid. Afraid in his very bones. While he couldn't deny that the magic-wielder was beautiful, being this close to her unsettled him.

"I understand your hesitation," she said, "but do not be frightened. I'm overjoyed to meet you. I have longed to bring someone like you into my home for many years now. To feel the joy of another's company in this lonely place."

Was she...? He-Man felt himself blush at the thought.

"Back home," he began, flustered, "there is a woman: Ara-Lee."

The Sorceress's soft laughter cut him short. It wasn't the response he'd expected. "Romance is not my intention," she replied. "I am beyond such things. What I mean is that I could sense the innate goodness within you as soon as you entered the Wasteland. It's a rare commodity here. Then, I tested it, and you, in battle. You moved to save me without a moment's hesitation, thinking nothing of your own safety, and you fought bravely. That is what I have been seeking: a heroic warrior to help me fight the forces of evil."

"That is the very reason why I have left my home behind," He-Man said, finding himself sitting straighter as he spoke. "To fight evil and try to keep it at bay before it ravages even more of this world."

"Then our meeting was not merely coincidence," the Sorceress replied, "but providence. It has to be the will of the Goddess, herself. You must be the legendary hero who is to inherit the treasures I have guarded all of these years, just as I'd hoped." Rising from her seated position, the Sorceress grasped one of the torches in her hand and beckoned him to follow. "Come. We must travel further into the cave."

He-Man stood and followed her once again, this time downward and deeper into the tunnels. Twisting turns led them to a cache of weapons and armor that he could never have fathomed prior to seeing them for himself. Vehicles years beyond any technology he'd previously seen were scattered throughout the cave system and he felt his eyes



widen each time he saw a new one.

“These artifacts were made centuries before the Great Wars by Eternia’s scientists,” she said. “Few of the wonders they created remain, and many of them are here.”

“Scientists? Is that something like a sorcerer?” He-Man asked. He’d never heard the term before.

“They were men and women who possessed great knowledge,” she explained. “They were not masters of magic, but of steel and energy and mechanics.”

“They must have been gods,” he remarked in awe.

“Gods would not have destroyed themselves,” she said, a sadness creeping into her voice. “Still, their legacy lives on. These weapons, armors, and vehicles, they are yours now, He-Man. A gift from the past, and from me, now yours to use in your battle against the evil forces of this world.”

“I don’t know what to say.”

“Say ‘yes,’” she said with a slight grin. “Now go forth and do great things with them. They will add to your already great strength. Use them wisely, especially in the defense of Castle Grayskull.”

“You know of Grayskull?” he asked excitedly as he put on the fur boots she had chosen for him, along with the golden belt and bracers that lay nearby. Lastly, he pulled on a gray power harness, its center marked with a red cross. When he clicked its latch into place, he could feel the power of it coursing through him, adding to his own.

“I do,” she answered. “Soon, you will too. Now, take the battle axe with you and climb aboard this vehicle,” she said, indicating the one nearest to him. “It is called the Sky Sled and it will ease your journey.” He did as she said, and the vehicle thrummed to life beneath him. Feeling its controls in his hands, somehow he knew how to use it, as if it were second nature to him. “All of these items will respond to your touch in the same way. You truly are the one destined to be their master. Now, you must go. Be safe, He-Man.”

“Will I ever see you again?”

“If the Goddess wills it, and I suspect that she does. I feel our meeting today was simply the beginning of a great friendship.”

“As do I,” he said, smiling broadly. “Thank you for everything.”

“You are welcome. Until we meet again, He-Man.”



Riding atop the strange vehicle the Sorceress had called the Sky Sled, which was a combination battering ram, catapult and space-warp device, He-Man set off once again on his mission, leaving the enigmatic snake-helmed Sorceress and her cave behind. A particular valley he'd discovered along his journey, full of trees and streams filled with life, struck his fancy. He was still miles from the castle, its location given to him by the Sorceress as he left the Cave of Power, but this place looked like it would make a good home. Inspired by the

Sorceress's cave, and wearing the power harness that his new benefactor had given him, He-Man approached a hill and struck its thick rock, carving out his own dwelling using no tools other than the strength of his fists. He knew it would take time, but despite his newfound power, he was beginning to tire from his journey and longed for a place to sleep in peace.



Even as He-Man constructed his dwelling, miles away, trouble was brewing. Evil eyes gazed upon Tee-La, the warrior-goddess, as she watered her unicorn, Charger. The blonde warrior stood near her steed, unaware of her unwanted admirers lurking nearby. Clad in white and gold armor, the beautiful Tee-La would appeal to almost anyone.

More often than not, this would prove to be unfortunate for her. In the battle-torn world of Eternia, the less attention one brought to oneself, the better. Mostly, what Tee-La wanted out of life was to continue her fight training, to eat and drink, spend time with those precious few she called friends, and to otherwise be left alone. Too few heeded her wishes and many men and a few women had been outclassed and outfought by her for failing to do so. Sadly, more would surely follow.



“There is none on Eternia as beautiful as she,” grunted the large, ape-like creature known as Beast Man, lord of the animals, spying on her from behind a thick tree. “I begin to wonder if she truly is a goddess, as they say.” Beast Man stood nearly seven feet tall and was covered in long red fur. He wore armor fashioned from leather that was spiked with the horns of his various prey. The massive creature’s eyes hinted at a level of intelligence that his animalistic appearance would make few suspect, but his own cunning paled in comparison to that of his master.

Skeletor knelt beside Beast Man, and he too gazed intently upon Tee-La, still standing near her steed. “Soon, she will be more than that, my minion. Soon she will be my bride!” Clad in purple leather armor, Skeletor’s pale blue skin and yellow-green skulled visage, emerging from the darkness of a hood which enveloped it, gave away his otherworldly nature. There was no other like him in all of Eternia.

“Your bride?” Beast Man asked.

“Aye,” said Skeletor. “My reasons are my own and are too complicated for your simple brain to understand.” Beast Man grunted with annoyance but otherwise remained silent. He knew better than to anger his master. Shortly, Skeletor stirred and began to rise. “We will strike now, Beast Man, and take her.”

Upon his master’s command, the red brute attacked the unsuspecting Tee-La, but he was met with a vicious swing of her sword, which he only narrowly avoided. Her reaction was faster than any prey he’d ever encountered. “You may claim to be a

goddess,” exclaimed Beast Man, “but you fight like a demon!” As he spoke, he ducked yet another swing of her steel sword, which glinted in the light of the afternoon sun.



“My body flows with the power of my ancestors,” Tee-La said, “many of them champions in their own right. You are a fool to challenge me alone, creature!”

“He is not alone,” Skeletor said as he stepped out from his hiding spot. Her faithful unicorn galloped toward the fiend, its single twisted horn aimed at his chest, but Skeletor withdrew his energy-blade and used his magic to freeze the steed in place. “But now you are,” he finished.

“Charger!” she cried as she rushed toward Skeletor, her weapon held high above her

head, ready to strike. The demon skillfully dodged the blow and turned his energy-blade toward her, blasting her unconscious with a powerful spell. She collapsed to the ground in a heap, defeated for one of the first times in her life.

The two villains approached where she lay and looked upon her still form. Beast Man, still shaken by her speed and skill with a sword, was impressed and still slightly afraid. Skeletor simply opened his bone jaw in a mock-smile. “Carry her to Castle Grayskull,” he commanded, “but be careful with her. I don’t want my bride-to-be damaged. I need her to be at full power.”

Being accustomed to swinging and hanging from trees for hours at a time, Beast Man cradled the blond warrior in his arms with little effort as he and Skeletor began their journey to the fabled Castle Grayskull. He didn’t know his master’s reasons for needing the woman, but the hirsute servant knew that it wasn’t his place to question Skeletor’s commands. Over the hills and valleys they marched. From time to time, Tee-La would begin to stir, and Skeletor would have to use the magic of his energy blade to subdue her once more. She possessed a great strength that Beast Man couldn’t help but admire. Only a warrior of immense caliber would be able to withstand one of Skeletor’s spells, much less several. Perhaps she truly was a goddess. Upon her next awakening and subsequent blast of Skeletor’s magic, the brute decided that she was, indeed.

Night fell as they neared the castle. The ancient structure stood gloomy and foreboding in the moonlight, as if it had a presence of its own, and it made Beast Man's fur stand on end. The castle predated anything known to written history, its original architects and occupants long since lost to the sands of time. Its primary feature an asymmetrical skull, the castle appeared as if it were fashioned from the head of an ancient being, a titan from the dawn of creation, perhaps. The structure seemed to welcome the night, seeming most at home in the darkness that now surrounded them, the light of the moon reflecting off of its stone face, which still glistened from a recent rainfall. At each side was a tall parapet, the rightmost housing a powerful laser cannon. Beast Man shuddered. Although the castle had no eyes within its empty sockets, he felt as if it were staring at him, through him, measuring his every step as they approached with the woman Tee-La in tow. "It appears to be made for you, Skeletor," he remarked, mostly to fill the empty silence that he felt pressing down on him.

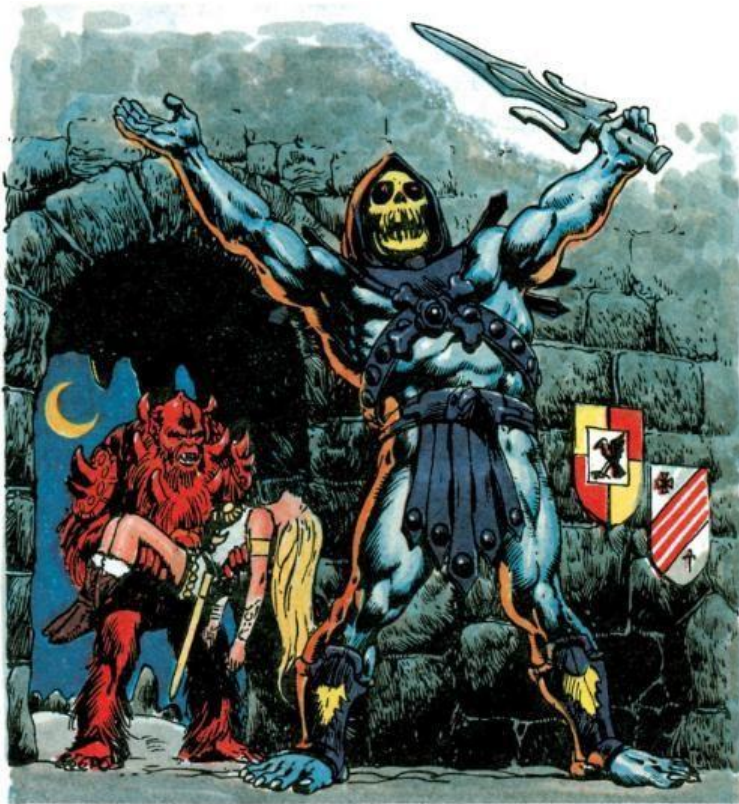


"Indeed it does," Skeletor replied. "And so it shall be mine." The demon sorcerer approached the castle and, feeling no fear, placed his cold hand upon the massive wooden jawbridge door. "Now and forever." Calling out to the shadows, Skeletor summoned two of his other servants to him, and both the winged Stratos and aquatic Mer-Man emerged from the darkness to join Beast Man in witnessing their master's ultimate victory as he finally conquered the ancient castle.

Without warning, the castle itself spoke in an eerie voice, bringing all of Beast Man's fears regarding it to vivid life. "Go back!" it cried in a raspy croak. "The secrets and treasures of Grayskull are for no one to possess! Go away!" It took all of Beast Man's courage to not drop Tee-La and flee in terror. Skeletor's laugh forced the henchman to stand his ground, for the lord of the jungle was more afraid of his master than anything this crumbling structure could throw at him. Still, he felt his fur ripple anxiously as the skull-faced sorcerer defied the warning.

The nomadic Man-At-Arms, hidden to the villains, watched powerlessly from afar as Skeletor forced open the castle's Jaw-Bridge with his otherworldly might. Skeletor told

Stratos and Mer-Man to wait outside as he beckoned Beast Man to follow him.



Entering the grim castle, Skeletor and Beast Man failed to notice the warrior who had been watching them departing through the shadows in his heavily armed chariot. Once inside, Skeletor laughed a second time, raising his hands mockingly as he shouted into the empty hallways, "I defy you, Spirit of the Castle! Your many secrets shall be mine! I hold half of the mystic Power Sword! I shall soon possess the other half which is hidden within your walls! Then I will have full power and none of your deadly traps will stop me!"

Beast Man grunted with confusion. "I'm sorry for asking, Master, but we're already inside the castle. Why do you need a second sword?"

Skeletor scoffed in frustration. "While my half of the fabled Power Sword is powerful in its own right, I can command only a portion of its true power without uniting it with its sister, hidden somewhere within these walls." He glanced at the ancient books scattered throughout the main hall and dismissed them with a wave of his hand. "Beyond that, without the united sword, this castle has little knowledge to offer me that I do not already possess. In the years I've been trapped on this planet, I have had plenty of time to study its history. When I join both halves of the Power Sword together, the magic fires created by ancient scientists and sorcerers, hidden deep in the recesses of this place, will blaze again! Most importantly, it will be mine alone to command!"

"I understand," Beast Man said.

"Hardly," Skeletor muttered, heading deeper into the castle. His underling, still carrying the unconscious Tee-La, quickly followed, afraid to be left behind. "Once I lived in another dimension, populated with others of my kind, but when Eternia's Great Wars opened a 'hole' in the dimensional wall, I was thrown into this world. With the complete Power Sword, and the power it will give me, I shall reopen that hole and bring my people

here. Under my command, they will conquer this world in my name and I will rule for all eternity!"



A long silence followed as the evil duo travelled deeper into the castle, which Beast Man noticed appeared to be much larger on the inside than its outside would have one believe. Eventually, they appeared to have reached their destination. Indicating a stone slab on the far wall, Skeletor spoke once more. "Place her there and make sure she's secured," he said. As Beast Man followed his master's command, Skeletor explained his obsession with the warrior.

"Twenty years ago, I created Tee-La by making a duplicate of the

Sorceress herself. The Sorceress's bloodline is laced with powerful magic, which I have distilled into the perfect being you see before you. With Tee-La as my bride, standing at my side, that power will finally be mine to command! With the combined magics of the Sorceress and Castle Grayskull, nothing will stop me!" Upon strapping Tee-La to the slab as ordered, Beast Man rejoined Skeletor, who was searching amid a pile of ancient scrolls. "Is she secure?"

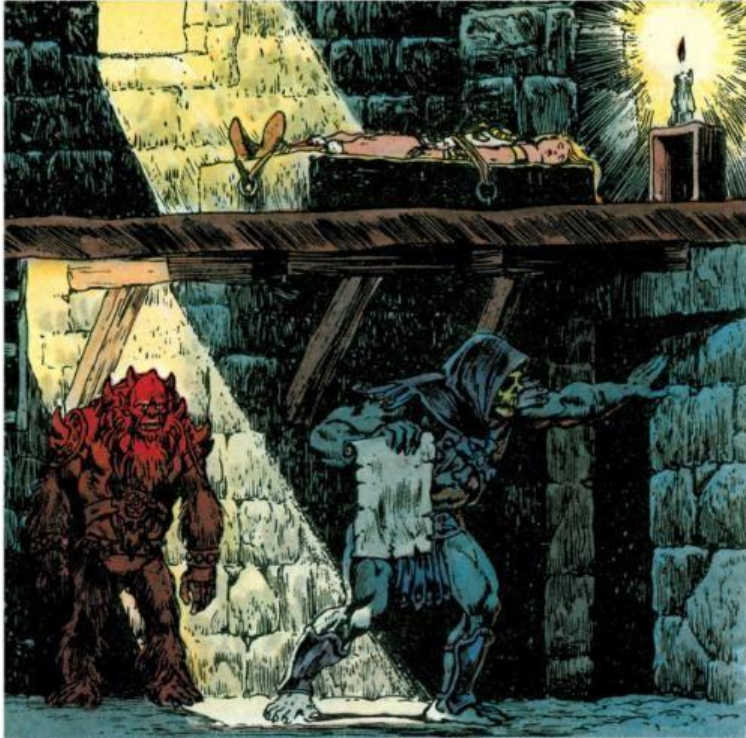
"She is."

"Then help me find the scroll of Eternos."

"How will I recognize it?"

"You'll know it when you see it, I assure you. Use your heightened senses. It may be elsewhere in the castle. Go. I will keep watch over my future bride."

Beast Man did as commanded and searched throughout the castle, eventually sniffing out one particular scroll that bore a smell unlike any of the others. Unrolling it carefully with his clawed fingers, he saw that it was a map, its unique smell likely due to the fact that it appeared to have been drawn in blood. The scroll contained many strange symbols that Beast Man could not understand, but he felt perhaps Skeletor would. Having a level of assurance that this was the item his master sought, he returned to him and the

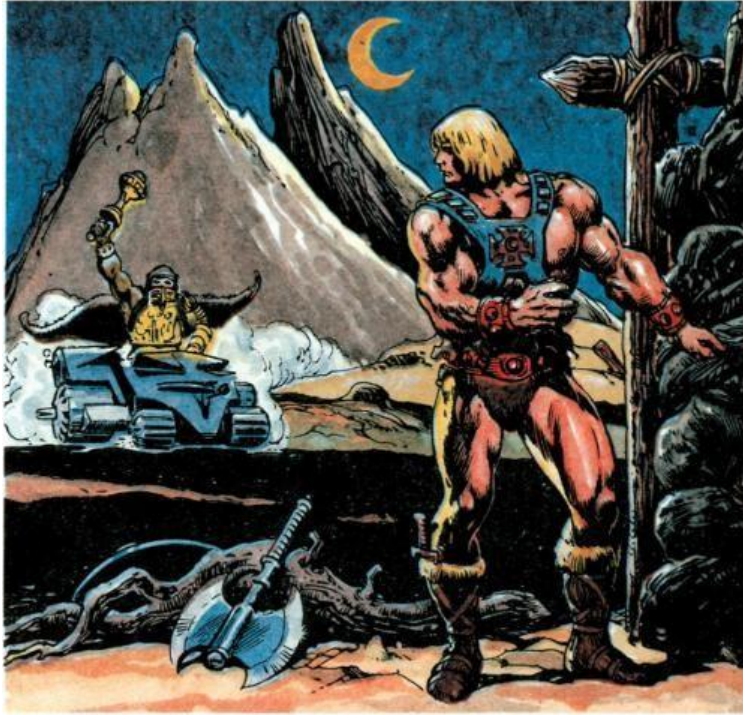


captive Tee-La down below. When he arrived, he gave the map to Skeletor who opened his skeletal jaw in a mock smile upon seeing it.

“They show a way to a fiery sword!” Skeletor shouted. “This way!” Following the map, he led Beast Man to a secret passage. “Finally, we are only moments away from my ultimate victory!”



Miles away from Castle Grayskull, He-Man was finishing his new dwelling when he saw a familiar battle chariot approaching. “What brings the wandering Man-At-Arms to my humble house?” he asked. Although He-Man’s tribe had little dealings with outsiders, Man-At-Arms was known to him as a long-time trader. The armored warrior would make the dangerous trek through the Vine Jungle in order to acquire furs from He-Man’s village. He didn’t particularly need them, but in trade he was allowed to remove from the jungle items that satisfied his own unique interests. While Man-At-Arms’s people were masters of weapons, the man himself had a fascination with all things regarding the Great Wars, in particular the mysterious technology the ancient ones had left behind afterward. Within the Vine Jungle, Man-At-Arms had scavenged and repaired numerous weapons and armors from the time before. Few ventured that deeply into the jungle, therefore its thick foliage held many secrets of the past, simply waiting to be found. The most impressive of the items Man-At-Arms had taken from that area consisted of a hodgepodge of armor and technology which he’d forged into a unique set that he called his own and he wore it proudly.



lands.”

“Ho, He-Man!” Man-At-Arms said as he dismounted his vehicle. “I picked you up on my battle chariot’s scanners! You live here now?”

“Aye,” said He-Man. “I’ve just settled.”

“Jungles get too hot for you?” Man-At-Arms asked.

“No,” he replied with a laugh. “I was called to a higher purpose: to fight the evil that roams these

“If that is your purpose, then it must be the will of the Goddess that I’ve found you. I need your help. I was searching the grounds surrounding Castle Grayskull for treasure and witnessed Skeletor and his minion Beast Man forcing their way into the castle!”

“Is that possible?”

“For someone of Skeletor’s might, apparently so. Worse still, they’ve captured the fair-haired warrior Tee-La, and have taken her inside with them!”

He-Man felt a steely determination rising within him. “I don’t know this Tee-La, but if she is in need of help, then I will surely give it to her.” He quickly gathered his Power Harness and battle axe for the journey.

“If Skeletor controls the castle, he might use its secrets to control Eternia,” Man-At-Arms said coldly, “and I shudder to think what fate he has planned for the warrior-goddess. If we fight side-by-side,” he offered, “we could more easily defeat Skeletor and his henchman.”

“You would be a worthy partner,” said He-Man, climbing aboard his Sky Sled, “but if the threat is as great as you say, I have no time to waste getting to Castle Grayskull by wheels. Meet me there as soon as you can.”



Before Man-At-Arms could say another word, He-Man deftly programmed in the coordinates to Castle Grayskull's, given to him by the Sorceress, and activated the Sky Sled's space-warp device. Mere moments later, before Man-At-Arms's very eyes, He-Man and the ancient vehicle vanished into thin air.



Meanwhile, back at Castle Grayskull, Skeletor and Beast Man had reached the end of the secret passageway and found a rusty metal door. "This must be it," Skeletor hissed.

"Now, Eternia will be mine!" Upon touching the door, the room grew cold, prickling even his chilly skin.



"Curse you, vile creatures!" the Spirit of the Castle bellowed. "You are not welcome here!" Suddenly, the spirit released dozens of the castle's ghostly demons upon them. Skeletor and his underling quickly defended themselves, and Beast Man was shocked to see his claws and fangs merely passing through the specters, which remained unharmed. Skeletor's energy blade however, half of the mystic Power Sword,

quickly blasted them to nothingness.

“Again, I defeat you, Spirit of the Castle!” Skeletor rasped. “Now, to seize your greatest treasure! Open it,” he commanded, yet not even the brute strength of the animalistic Beast Man could break open the door. Skeletor growled in anger and frustration.



“Must I do everything myself? Stand back, you ape!” Skeletor ordered as he proceeded to cut through the ancient door with his energy blade as if it were melting butter. Even as the door gave way, a commotion could be heard coming from outside the castle. “Go and see what it is,” Skeletor growled and Beast Man loped down the dark corridor to find out.

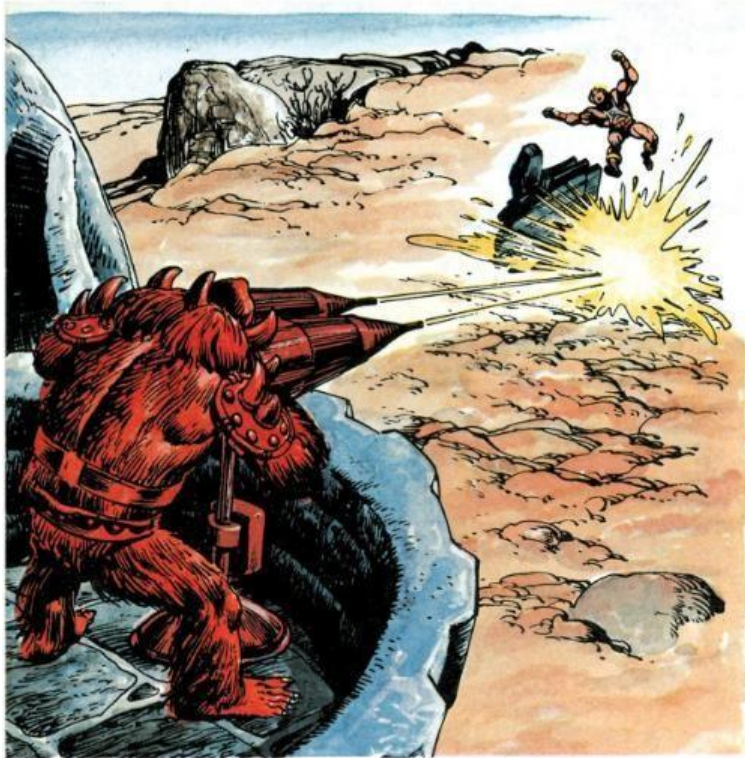
Climbing an old and rickety wooden ladder to the top of the castle’s armed parapet, Beast Man finally saw what was causing all of the noise: a warrior unknown to him, having already defeated Mer-Man and Stratos, was using his vehicle like a battering ram, trying to gain entry into the castle. “Interloper!” snarled Beast Man as he reached the castle’s laser-cannon and fired a deadly bolt towards his new foe.



To Beast Man's dismay, the warrior was protected by his force fielded garment and easily absorbed the blast.

"Is that the best you can do, you brainless gorilla?" He-Man taunted. "If so, I have nothing to worry about!"

"We'll see who's brainless," Beast Man muttered as he lowered the cannon and took aim at a new target: not He-Man himself, but the vehicle which he rode upon. The villain was betting that it wasn't protected by the same force as its rider, and he was right!



As He-Man rolled out of the overturned vehicle, he saw that his Power Armor was now damaged and switched off.

"Now to finish you off!" Beast Man said with a snarl, taking aim at his now seemingly helpless foe. "Let's see if your precious armor can handle a second blast!"



Having now sliced through the door that had been keeping him from his prize, Skeletor grinned as he made his way further down the hidden passageway until he finally came upon a darkened room. Lit from the torchlight trailing in behind him, he caught a glance of a shiny object resting upon a pedestal. It was the other half of the Power Sword, its mystical energies calling to him, pulling him into the darkness ahead. He grasped the broken blade within his clawed hands, then eagerly placed the two halves of the ancient object together. Immediately, he could

feel the unbelievable energies of the sword come to life as its blade burst into green fire! “The restored Power Sword! With this, along with my soon-to-be bride, Tee-La, I am invincible! There is nothing I cannot do! Nothing!” Weapon in hand, he turned and made his way back out of the tunnel, thirsty for battle.



Before Beast Man could make good on his threat against He-Man, his attack was interrupted by the timely appearance of Man-At-Arms, roaring in on his own amazing vehicle. Gripping the controls in his gloved hands, Man-At-Arms fired his Battle Chariot’s flame-throwing weapon and shouted to his friend, “I’ll keep him occupied, He-Man! You get Skeletor!”



The blast nearly obliterated Beast Man, but the cunning brute fled the castle's parapet just in time, running to rejoin his master in the castle below.

Nodding his thanks, He-Man turned back toward Castle Grayskull. Reaching the closed Jaw-Bridge, like Skeletor before him, he pulled with all of his mighty strength, taxing his natural power to its limit. Finally, he pulled down the creaking Jaw-Bridge and readied his dual-bladed axe for the battle that was sure to come. "Now to help Tee-La and stop the evil Skeletor!" Throwing off his damaged forcefield

costume, He-Man felt as if he was being guided through the castle by some unknown force, and he wondered if perhaps the castle itself was helping him. Sensing that Skeletor was below him, he hurried toward an elevator which was operated with a rudimentary rope and pulley system. Taking the large rope in his hands, he worked the elevator and it carried him downward until he reached the nether regions of Castle Grayskull itself.



Once there, he found the skull-faced demon waiting for him, mystical sword in hand. He-Man attacked with his battle axe but, with a simple wave of the united Power Sword, Skeletor brought to life many objects and weapons throughout the castle and commanded them to attack his foe! Without his Power Harness to protect him, He-Man fought off the barrage of weapons as best he could, but he grunted as his hand was struck, causing him to drop his axe to the castle floor.

Animated by the Power Sword, the multitude of objects continued to attack.

“This is only the beginning,” Skeletor boasted with a raspy laugh. “Nothing can stop me now!”

Skeletor’s moment of triumph was abruptly ended when a beautiful woman in a snake headdress appeared before them, glowing green, much like the energies of the Power Sword itself. He-Man was shocked to see that it was the Sorceress!

“You have abused the Power Sword, Skeletor!” she said. “And so I will take it from you!” She began to make magical gestures with her hands and Skeletor felt the ancient weapon being wrenched from his grasp. “You forced your way into this castle with one half of the sword, but you will leave with neither!” Before Skeletor’s very eyes, the legendary weapon split into two halves once more before disappearing into the ether.



Immediately, the many objects that were attacking He-Man clattered to the floor, no longer being controlled by the evil sorcerer. A moment later, the Sorceress vanished from sight, leaving He-Man to deal with the intruder alone. He-Man clenched his fists and moved toward his enemy, but Skeletor wasn’t looking for a hand-to-hand battle with this powerful stranger. Having lost his most powerful weapon, the villain grabbed a discarded sword and fled to the roof of the castle, where his servant Beast Man and Man-At-Arms were already engaged in mortal combat. Sensing better

odds with Beast Man nearby, Skeletor quickly joined the fray.



Back in the depths of Castle Grayskull, He-Man rushed to where Tee-La lay, but Skeletor’s spell had worn off and the awakening warrior, channeling the strength of her powerful ancestors, tore free of her bonds before he managed to reach her. Neither fighter

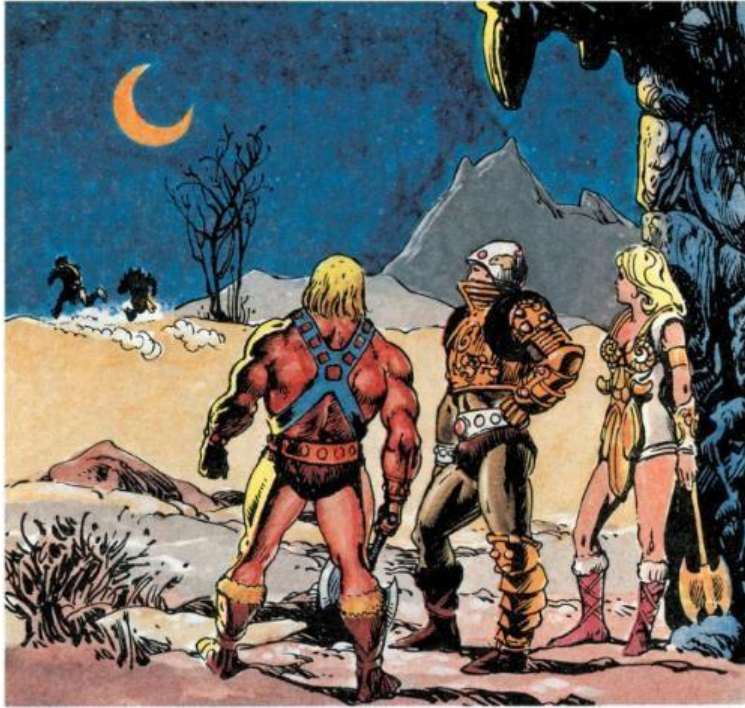
had laid eyes on the other before this day, but He-Man felt instantly that they would be great allies for years to come after this ordeal. A simple smile and nod from Tee-La told him that she felt the same. As she picked up one of the axes scattered along the floor, He-Man recovered his Power Harness, put it on once again, and the two warriors rushed up the castle's elevator after Skeletor. They soon found themselves hotly engaged in the rooftop battle alongside their mutual friend Man-At-Arms.



Lunging for Skeletor, He-Man was intercepted by the creature's fur-covered lackey, Beast Man, who knocked him aside with a massive, clawed hand. He rolled along the wooden planks of the ancient tower floor until he came to a hard stop against the stone wall. Glancing up, he saw both Tee-La and Man-At-Arms engaging with Skeletor, who was doing his best to hold both heroic warriors at bay. He-Man stood up and, once he'd regained his footing, attacked Beast Man directly. This time he quickly circled behind the villain and shot his arms low, grabbing his

opponent by the waist. He-Man lifted Beast Man high over his head and slammed him down to the floor of the castle's parapet, the villain landing with a grunt. Nearby, Teela and Man-At-Arms tangled with Skeletor. Man-At-Arms had the creature's sword arm pinned, and Teela readied her axe to strike a fatal blow. "Have mercy!" the villains pleaded, and the battle swiftly ended.

Together, He-Man, Man-At-Arms and Tee-La watched their foes exit the castle and flee toward the horizon. Then, seeing an apparition appear at the base of the castle, they climbed down from the roof to the exterior below.



It was the Sorceress, waiting for them below with the two Power Sword halves. "You arrived just in the nick of time," He-Man said.

"I've been watching you all along, warriors. Castle Grayskull needs defenders and you have fought well. Thank you. Now, observe what I am about to show you." Uniting the two swords once more, she drove the mystical weapon deep into the very stone of the castle next to the entrance before removing it and pulling the halves apart once more. "From now on," she said, "only the combined halves of the Power

Sword, inserted into this enchanted lock, will open the castle's Jaw-Bridge. And, to keep this castle from falling into evil hands again, I shall hide both halves in secret places." With that, she vanished in a green cloud, exiting as mysteriously as she appeared.

Feeling a rumble all around them, the three allies heard the castle speak to them in an eerie whisper. "You truly are the 'Masters of the Universe,' who are destined to protect my secrets from evil forces. You should have at least some small reward." That reward came in the form of a unicorn, galloping over the hill toward his mistress.

"Charger!" Tee-La cried with joy as she embraced her friend and steed.

"A wonderful reward, indeed," said Man-At-Arms. The three began to make their way away from the castle and were silent for several minutes before Man-At-Arms spoke again. "Do you think this is the last of those two, or the Power Sword?" he asked.

"I doubt it," He-Man answered, but as he looked up toward the rising sun, it seemed to be a good omen for Eternia and the Masters of the Universe. He felt in his soul that the darkness and strife consuming Eternia would end one day, allowing the light of goodness to shine once more. Perhaps He-Man would be able to return home to Ara-Lee and the Vine Jungle he called home someday, but so long as Skeletor's evil plagued this world, he would fight against it. Along with Man-At-Arms and Tee-La, he made a silent vow that even more warriors would join his cause. He-Man was determined to be the example of a hero that others could and would follow. He would be the light.

THE END