

T H E E N D TM

T H E E N D [©]

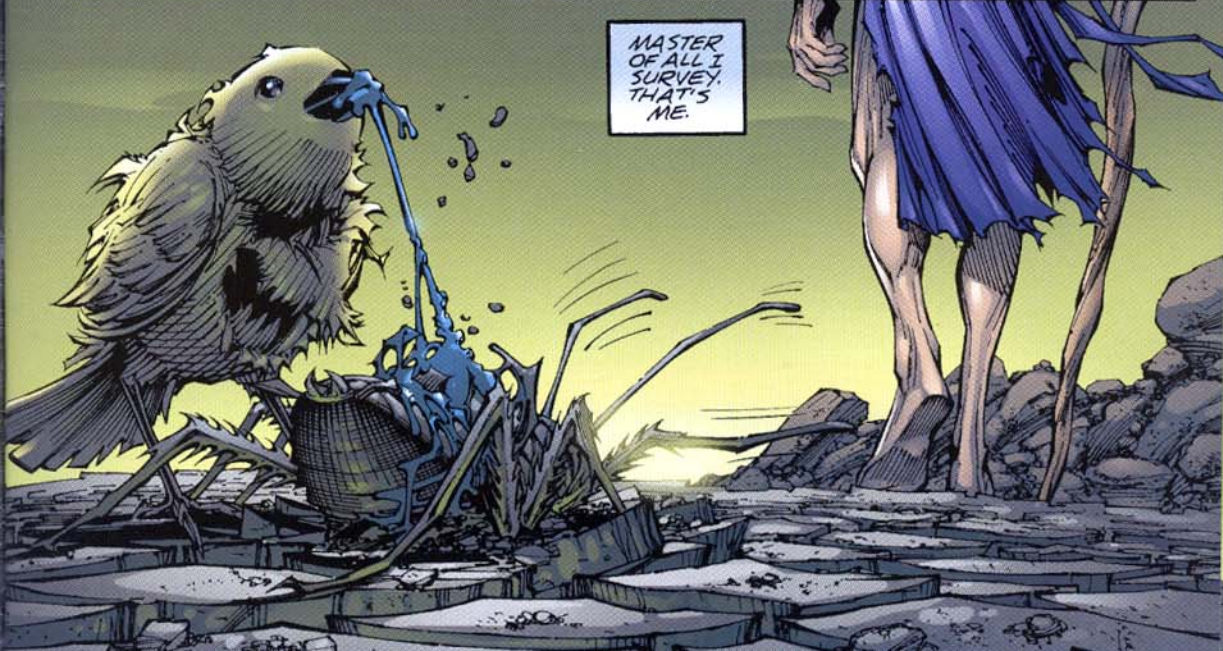


PETER DAVID

DALE KEOWN



GOT'CHA.




MASTER OF ALL I SURVEY, THAT'S ME.



SO QUIET.

I NEVER
GET USED
TO THAT.




ALL THE SOUNDS
I TOOK FOR
GRANTED...

...CARS HONKING
...BACON SIZZLING
ON A GRIDDLE...
CHILDREN
CRYING...

...NAILS ON A
CHALKBOARD
...A PHONE
RINGING...

...OTHER
VOICES...



...I'VE FORGOTTEN
WHAT THEY ALL
SOUND LIKE. I
THINK I KNOW, BUT
I'M NOT SURE.

BUT THEY'RE ALMOST
LIKE GHOSTS...PHANTOM
REMINERS OF A LIFE
LONG GONE.

SOMETIMES IT'S HARD FOR
ME TO BELIEVE THERE
EVEN WAS A LIFE BEFORE
THE EXISTENCE I NOW KNOW.

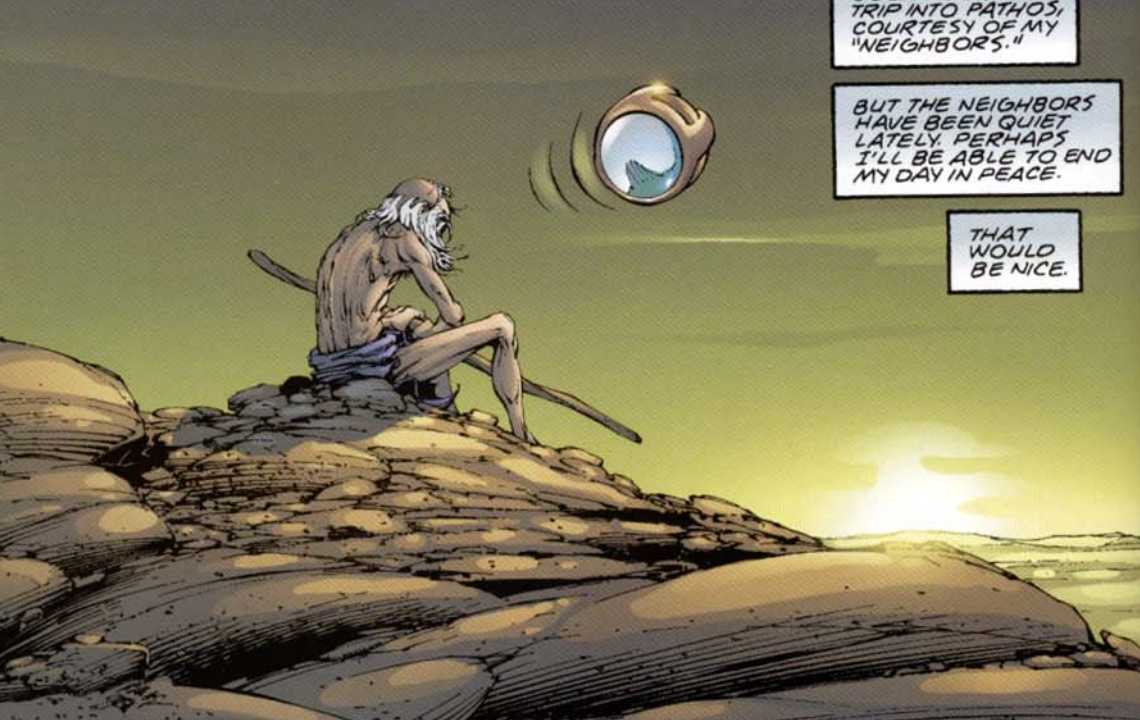
THAT ANY OF IT
WAS REAL.

BECAUSE THE ONLY REALITY
I KNOW IS THIS: THE DAILY
TEDIUM, THE ENDLESS
JOURNEY ACROSS AN
UNCHANGING TABLEAU...

...WITH THE
OCCASIONAL SIDE
TRIP INTO PATHOS,
COURTESY OF MY
"NEIGHBORS."

BUT THE NEIGHBORS
HAVE BEEN QUIET
LATELY. PERHAPS
I'LL BE ABLE TO END
MY DAY IN PEACE.

THAT
WOULD
BE NICE.



EVERY SO OFTEN,
I SPEAK MY NAME
ALoud...

BRUCE...

...JUST TO SEE
WHAT IT SOUNDS
LIKE.

IF I'M REALLY
AMBITIOUS... I'LL
EVEN SAY A FEW
SENTENCES, JUST
TO GIVE THE
VIDBOT SOMETHING
DIFFERENT TO
RECORD.

THE SKY
GLOWED
GREEN
TODAY AT
SUNSET.



IT DOES THAT OFTEN
THESE DAYS, I CAN SIT
AND WATCH IT FOR
HOURS, BECAUSE
WHEN IT VANISHES
AND DARKNESS
FALLS UPON ME, IT'S
STILL EMBEDDED IN
MY MIND.

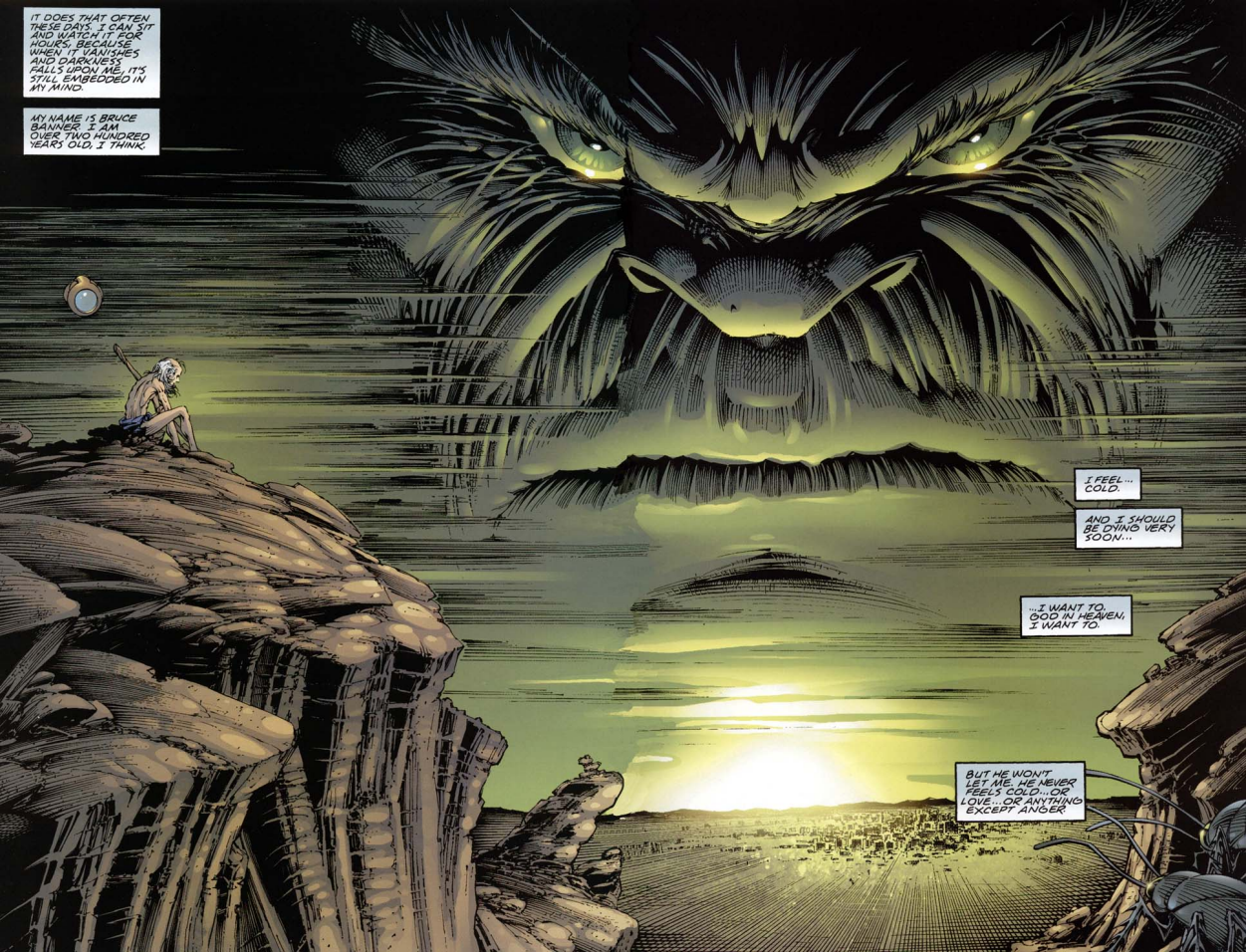
MY NAME IS BRUCE
BANNER. I AM
OVER TWO HUNDRED
YEARS OLD, I THINK.

I FEEL ...
COLD.

AND I SHOULD
BE DYING VERY
SOON...

...I WANT TO.
GOD IN HEAVEN,
I WANT TO.

BUT HE WON'T
LET ME. HE NEVER
FEELS COLD...OR
LOVE...OR ANYTHING
EXCEPT ANGER.



BANNER ... PUNY
BANNER ... STILL FEEL
HIM, RATTLING AROUND
IN HULK'S HEAD. WAS
OUT FOR A WHILE ...
DOING STUPID, PUNY,
HUMAN THINGS.



WHY WON'T BANNER LEAVE HULK ALONE?
WHY DOES BANNER STILL STAY WITH HULK,
NO MATTER WHAT?

DOESN'T BANNER KNOW
THAT HULK HATES HIM ...
MORE THAN ANYONE?

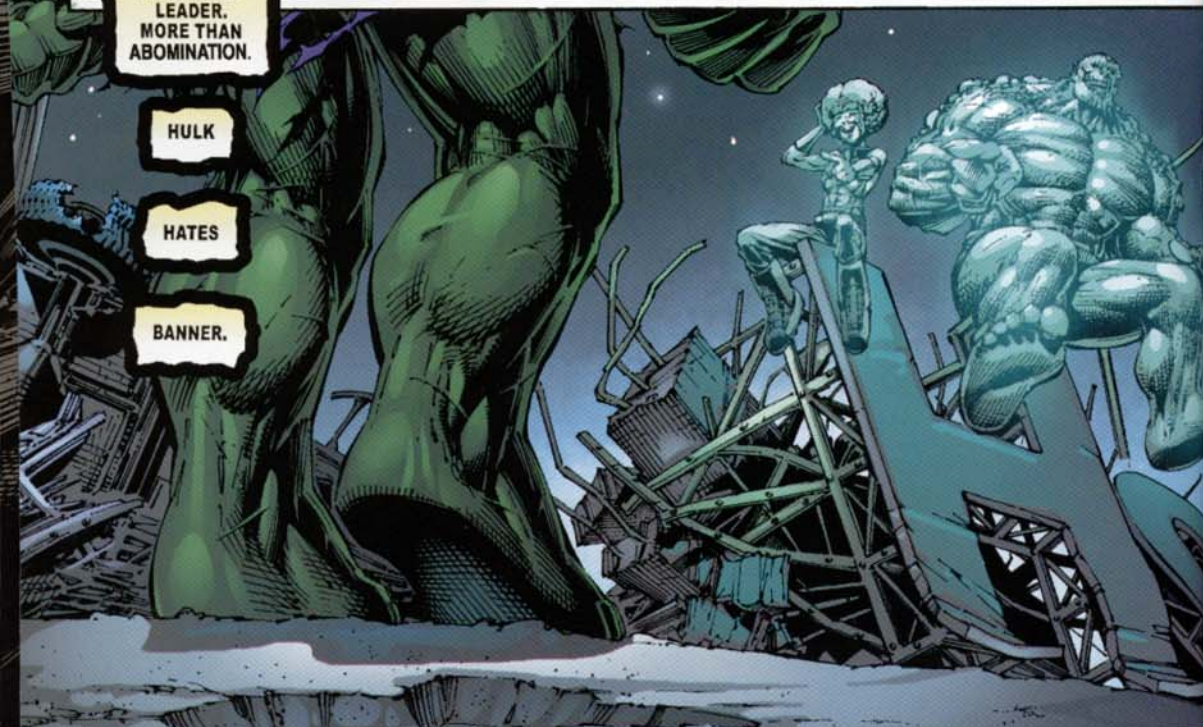


MORE THAN
LEADER.
MORE THAN
ABOMINATION.

HULK

HATES

BANNER.





AND HULK HATES LITTLE FLOATING THING. HULK WOULD SMASH IT IF HULK COULD CATCH IT.



AND BUGS.



HULK HATES BUGS.



BUT BANNER MOST OF ALL.

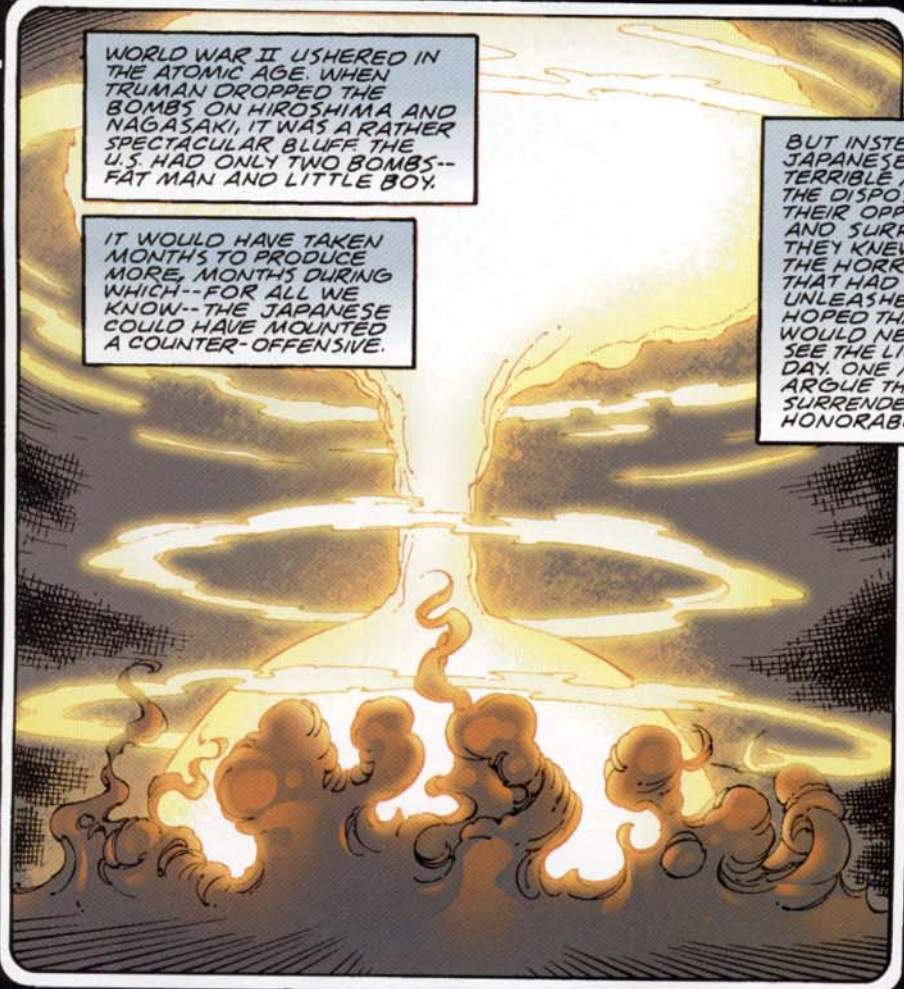


THEY CALLED WORLD WAR I THE BIG ONE, THE WAR TO END ALL WARS. THE IRONY OF THAT WAS, OF COURSE, THAT THEY HAD NO IDEA WHAT WAS AWAITING THEM.

WORLD WAR II USHERED IN THE ATOMIC AGE. WHEN TRUMAN DROPPED THE BOMBS ON HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI, IT WAS A RATHER SPECTACULAR BLUFF. THE U.S. HAD ONLY TWO BOMBS-- FAT MAN AND LITTLE BOY.

IT WOULD HAVE TAKEN MONTHS TO PRODUCE MORE, MONTHS DURING WHICH-- FOR ALL WE KNOW-- THE JAPANESE COULD HAVE MOUNTED A COUNTER-OFFENSIVE.

BUT INSTEAD, THE JAPANESE SAW THE TERRIBLE MIGHT AT THE DISPOSAL OF THEIR OPPONENTS AND SURRENDERED. THEY KNEW, I SUSPECT, THE HORRIBLE THING THAT HAD BEEN UNLEASHED, AND HOPED THAT IT WOULD NEVER AGAIN SEE THE LIGHT OF DAY. ONE MIGHT ARGUE THAT THEIR SURRENDER WAS HONORABLE.



THERE IS NO HONOR LEFT IN THE WORLD.



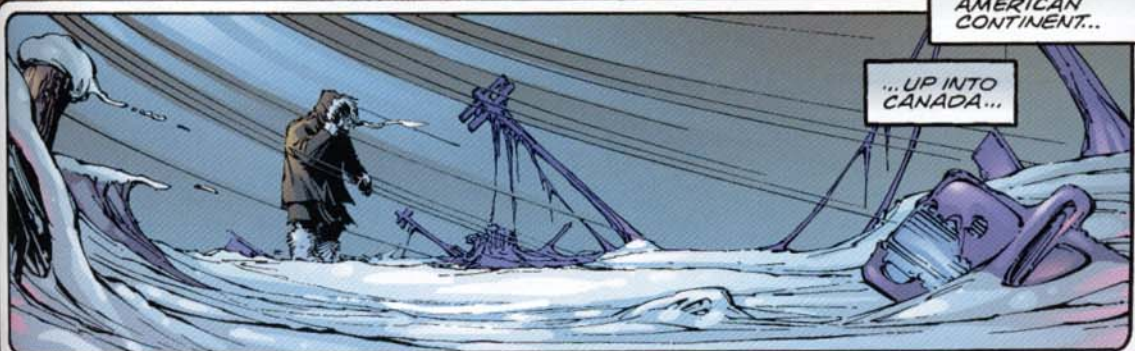
THERE IS NO WORLD.

I HAVEN'T TRAVELLED THE ENTIRE WORLD, YOU UNDERSTAND, JUST MY PART OF IT, ENOUGH TO SATISFY ME.



I'VE TRAVELLED THE LENGTH AND BREADTH OF THE UNITED STATES, EXPLORED THE ENTIRE NORTH AMERICAN CONTINENT...

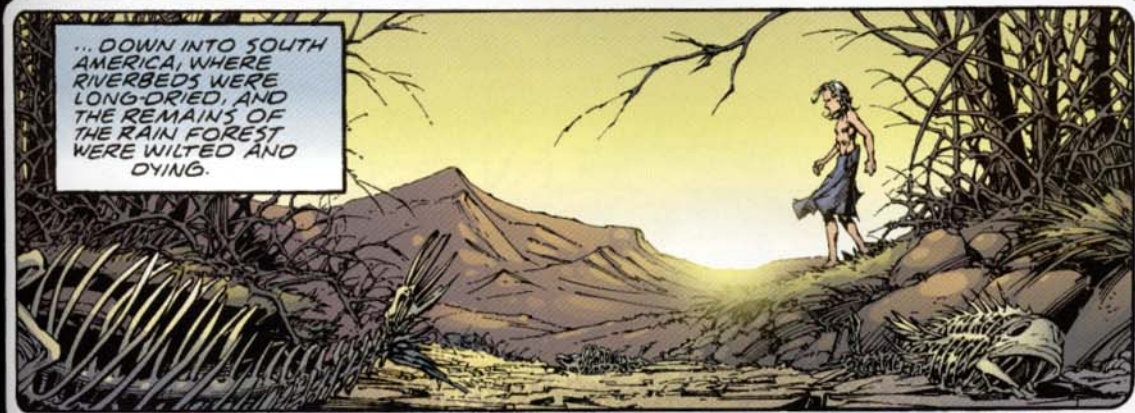
...UP INTO CANADA...




...DOWN INTO MEXICO, PAST LEVELLED MOUNTAINS AND DESTROYED MONUMENTS...




...DOWN INTO SOUTH AMERICA, WHERE RIVERBEDS WERE LONG-DRIED, AND THE REMAINS OF THE RAIN FOREST WERE WILTED AND DYING.





I LIVED IN VEGAS FOR A TIME...OR, MORE ACCURATELY, THE HULK DID, POSING UNDER THE GUISE OF "MR. FIXIT," HE OPERATED AS A LEG-BREAKER AT A CASINO.

FOR A TIME, IT SEEMED THAT MY LIFE WAS FILLED WITH NOTHING BUT CHANGE.

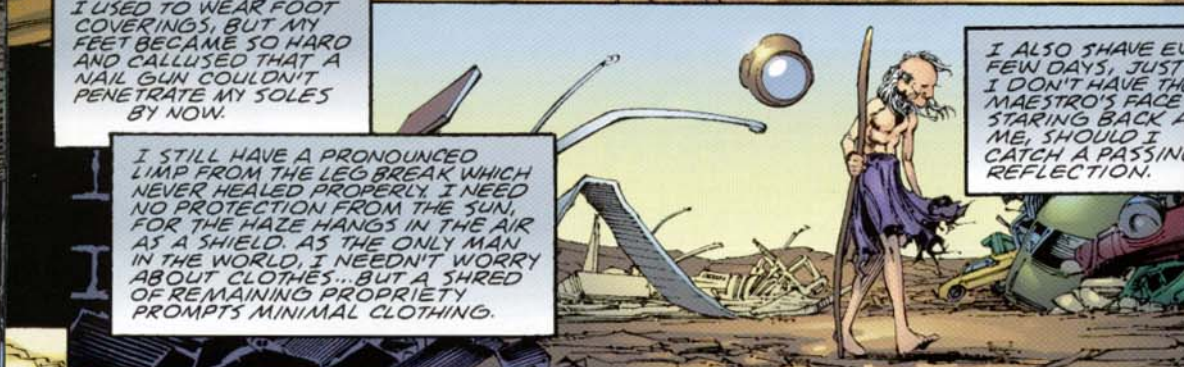


YET THE MORE I CHANGED, THE MORE I STAYED THE SAME.

NOW...NOW NOTHING CHANGES.

I USED TO WEAR FOOT COVERINGS, BUT MY FEET BECAME SO HARD AND CALLUSED THAT A NAIL GUN COULDN'T PENETRATE MY SOLES BY NOW.


I STILL HAVE A PRONOUNCED LIMP FROM THE LEG BREAK WHICH NEVER HEALED PROPERLY. I NEED NO PROTECTION FROM THE SUN, FOR THE HAZE HANGS IN THE AIR AS A SHIELD. AS THE ONLY MAN IN THE WORLD, I NEEDN'T WORRY ABOUT CLOTHES...BUT A SHRED OF REMAINING PROPRIETY PROMPTS MINIMAL CLOTHING.




I ALSO SHAVE EVERY FEW DAYS, JUST SO I DON'T HAVE THE MAESTRO'S FACE STARING BACK AT ME, SHOULD I CATCH A PASSING REFLECTION.

THERE'S STILL TRACES OF RADIATION IN THE AIR, BUT IT NEVER BOTHERS ME PARTICULARLY. MY MOLECULAR STRUCTURE, EVEN IN ITS HUMAN FORM, IS JUST A SPONGE FOR IT NOW. HAS BEEN FOR YEARS. MY POOR BODY MAY BE HEIR TO THE OTHER FRAILTIES OF HUMANITY, BUT FROM RADS, AT LEAST, I REMAIN IMMUNE.

I WOULD HAVE DIED LONG AGO OF STARVATION, WERE IT NOT FOR HIS ABILITY TO INGEST VIRTUALLY ANYTHING AND TURN IT INTO PURE ENERGY. NOT SINCE THE SHARK HAS THERE BEEN SUCH A PERFECT ENGINE OF SURVIVAL.




I AM THE WEAK PISTON IN THAT ENGINE.




I TREMBLE A GOOD DEAL THESE DAYS. MIGHT BE PARKINSONS. MIGHT JUST BE NERVES.

AND THEN... SUDDENLY...



...THE REST OF ME IS SHAKING. NOT JUST THE HANDS, BUT MY LEGS... AND EVEN THE GROUND. THAT'S WHEN I REALIZE...




THEY'RE AFTER ME. I ALWAYS KNOW WHEN THEY ARE, BECAUSE THE GROUND TREMBLES BENEATH THEIR FEET AS THEY APPROACH, MOVING IN A MASS LIKE A BLACK, UNDULATING CARPET.

AND THE HULK ISN'T COMING.

INSTEAD HE HIDES SOMEWHERE WITHIN ME, REVELLING IN MY WEAKNESS. PERHAPS HE WANTS TO HEAR ME BEG. I DON'T WANT TO BEG.

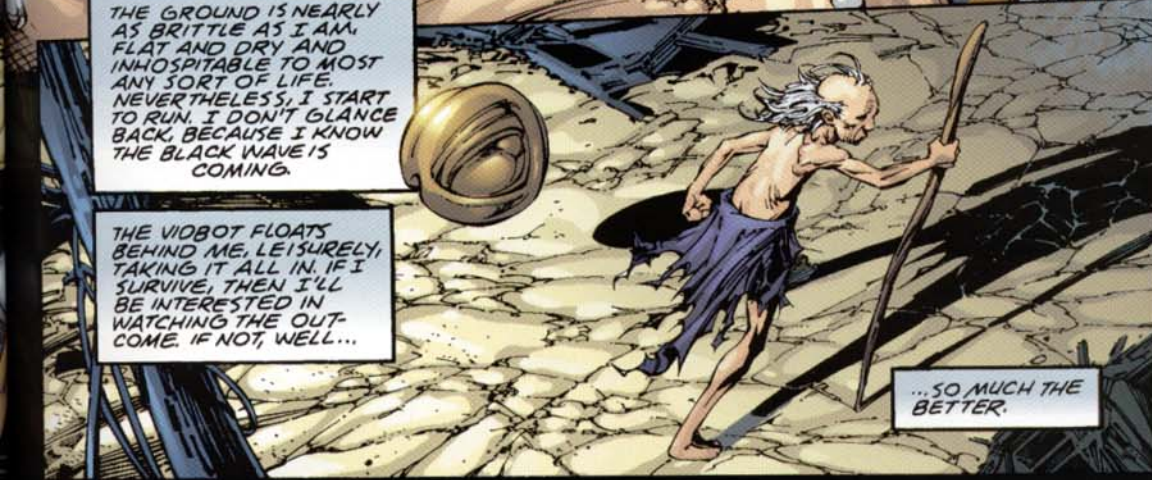
I WANT TO DIE.

BUT I FIGHT TO LIVE, OUT OF OLD HABIT.




THE GROUND IS NEARLY AS BRITTLE AS I AM, FLAT AND DRY AND INHOSPITABLE TO MOST ANY SORT OF LIFE. NEVERTHELESS, I START TO RUN. I DON'T GLANCE BACK, BECAUSE I KNOW THE BLACK WAVE IS COMING.

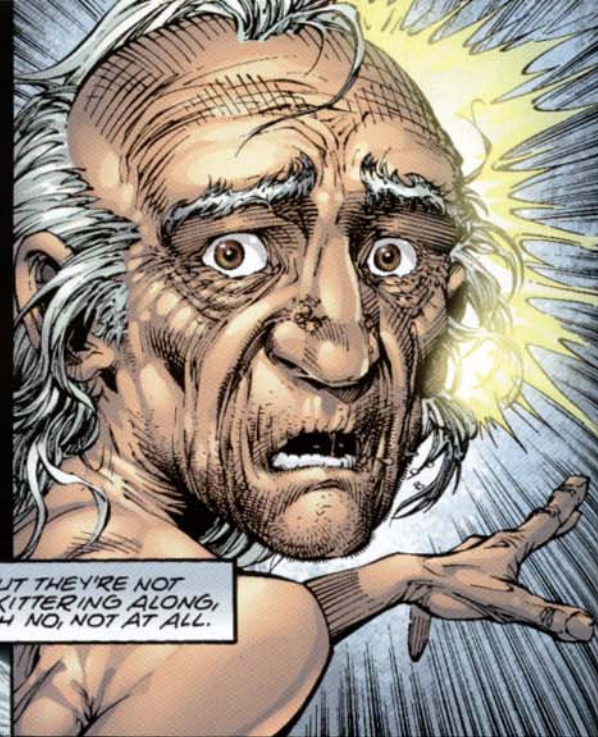
THE VIROBOT FLOATS BEHIND ME, LEISURELY, TAKING IT ALL IN. IF I SURVIVE, THEN I'LL BE INTERESTED IN WATCHING THE OUTCOME. IF NOT, WELL...



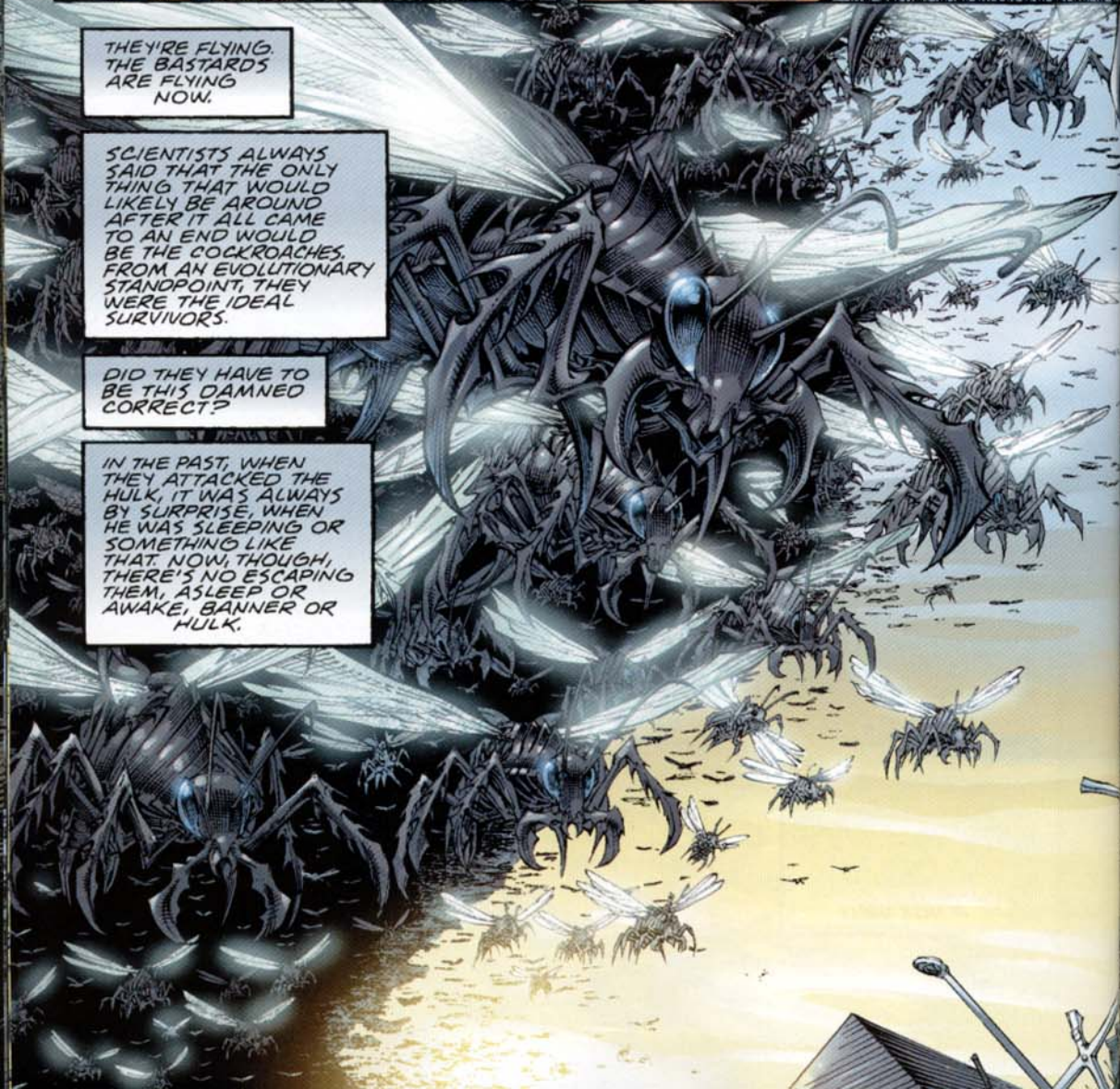
...SO MUCH THE BETTER.



THEN I HEAR SOMETHING, LIKE
A RUSTLING OF PLASTIC
WINGS CLICKING AGAINST
HOLLOW BODIES. NOW I DO
GLANCE BACK, AND I SEE
THEM COMING.



BUT THEY'RE NOT
SKITTERING ALONG,
OH NO, NOT AT ALL.




THEY'RE FLYING.
THE BASTARDS
ARE FLYING
NOW.


SCIENTISTS ALWAYS
SAID THAT THE ONLY
THING THAT WOULD
LIKELY BE AROUND
AFTER IT ALL CAME
TO AN END WOULD
BE THE COCKROACHES.
FROM AN EVOLUTIONARY
STANPOINT, THEY
WERE THE IDEAL
SURVIVORS.

DID THEY HAVE TO
BE THIS DAMNED
CORRECT?

IN THE PAST, WHEN
THEY ATTACKED THE
HULK, IT WAS ALWAYS
BY SURPRISE, WHEN
HE WAS SLEEPING OR
SOMETHING LIKE
THAT. NOW, THOUGH,
THERE'S NO ESCAPING
THEM, ASLEEP OR
AWAKE, BANNER OR
HULK.



THEY SWARM TOWARDS ME. HOW LUDICROUS I MUST APPEAR, RUNNING FASTER AND FASTER, ACROSS THE SCORCHED PLAIN. MY SKINNY ARMS PUMPING, MY FEET "THWAP-THWAPPING" ON THE PARCHED GROUND.




THEN I FEEL SOMETHING GO IN MY CALF. A MUSCLE SPASM, BUT AT MY AGE, THAT'S ALL IT TAKES.




I GO DOWN HARD...


...AND I CAN PRACTICALLY HEAR THE BRITTLE SNAPPING OF THE BONES. I ROLL ON THE GROUND, BUT I DON'T FEEL THE AGONY THAT MUST BE THERE. MAYBE I'M IN SHOCK.



"GET UP!" MY MIND SCREAMS, AND IT'S NOT MY VOICE DOING SO, BUT HIS.

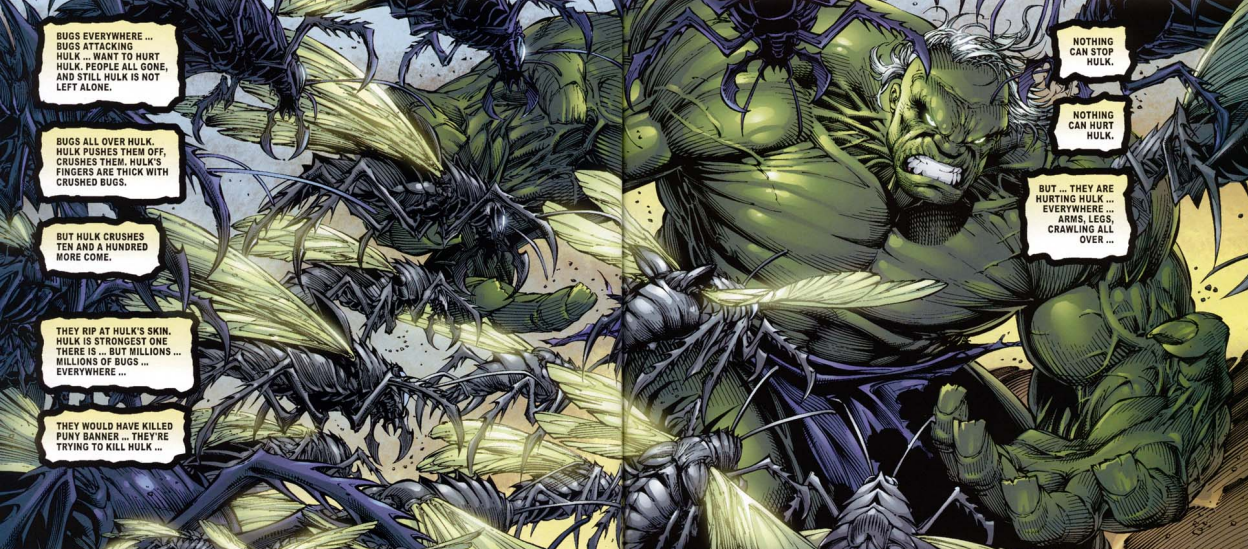


MY BREATH IS RAGGED IN MY CHEST. I DON'T KNOW WHETHER IT'S IN MY IMAGINATION OR WHETHER THEY'RE REALLY MAKING SOME SORT OF SWARMING NOISE, LIKE LOCUSTS AND CHITTERING AND, OH, GOD THEY'VE ALMOST CAUGHT UP WITH ME, THEY'RE COMING, AND...



...AND I CAN FEEL THE CHANGE. HE'S COMING, AND I'M GOING TO LIVE.

DAMN HIM. DAMN HIM TO HELL.



BUGS EVERYWHERE ...
BUGS ATTACKING
HULK ... WANT TO HURT
HULK, PEOPLE ALL GONE,
AND STILL HULK IS NOT
LEFT ALONE.

BUGS ALL OVER HULK.
HULK PUSHES THEM OFF,
CRUSHES THEM, HULK'S
FINGERS ARE THICK WITH
CRUSHED BUGS.

BUT HULK CRUSHES
TEN AND A HUNDRED
MORE COME.

THEY RIP AT HULK'S SKIN.
HULK IS STRONGEST ONE
THERE IS ... BUT MILLIONS ...
MILLIONS OF BUGS ...
EVERYWHERE ...

THEY WOULD HAVE KILLED
PUNKY BANNER ... THEY'RE
TRYING TO KILL HULK ...

NOTHING
CAN STOP
HULK.

NOTHING
CAN HURT
HULK.

BUT ... THEY ARE
HURTING HULK ...
EVERYWHERE ...
ARMS, LEGS,
CRAWLING ALL
OVER ...




WHY
WON'T
THEY
LEAVE
HULK
ALONE?




WHY
WON'T
THEY
LEAVE
HULK
ALONE?



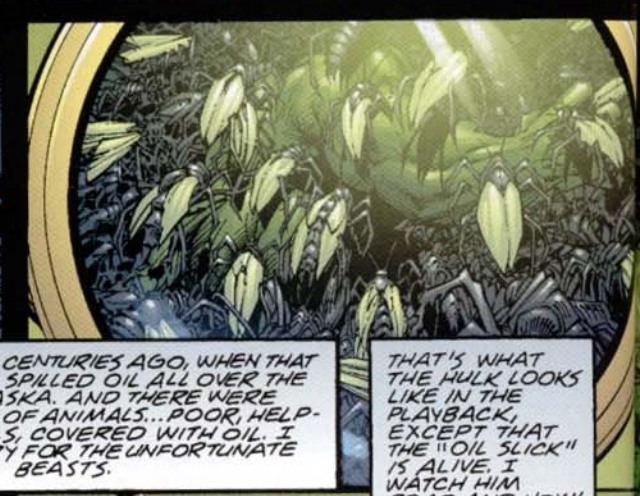
HOLY MOTHER OF GOD.




I WATCH THE PLAYBACK ON THE VIDBOT AND STILL CAN'T QUITE BELIEVE IT. LORD KNOWS I'VE SEEN IT BEFORE... BUT IT STILL STAGGERS CREDIBILITY.



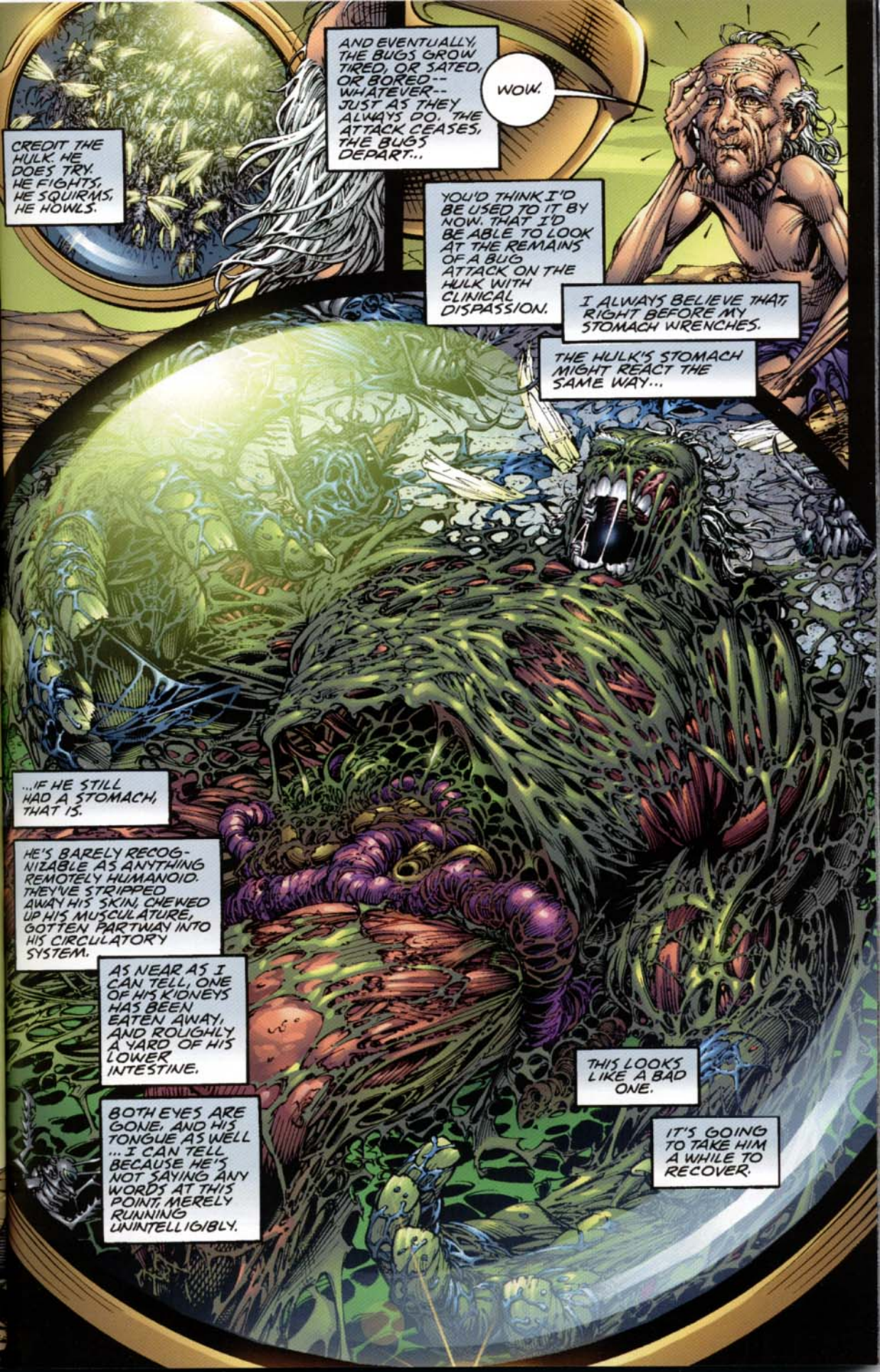
I REMEMBER CENTURIES AGO, WHEN THAT SUPERTANKER SPILLED OIL ALL OVER THE COAST OF ALASKA. AND THERE WERE PICTURES OF... OF ANIMALS... POOR, HELPLESS ANIMALS, COVERED WITH OIL. I FELT SO SORRY FOR THE UNFORTUNATE BEASTS.



THAT'S WHAT THE HULK LOOKS LIKE IN THE PLAYBACK, EXCEPT THAT THE "OIL SLICK" IS ALIVE. I WATCH HIM ROAR AND HOWL AND SHOUT THINGS IN ALMOST INARTICULATE FURY, WATCH AS HE'S CONSUMED BY THEM.



GIVEN ANY SINGLE FOE, OR EVEN ANY GROUP OF FOES, AND THE HULK WAS ALWAYS ABLE TO TRIUMPH. BUT TRYING TO BEAT BACK A BUG ATTACK IS LIKE TRYING TO FIGHT THE SURF FOR ALL THE GOOD IT DOES YOU TO BATTLE IT, YOU MIGHT AS WELL NOT TRY AT ALL.



AND EVENTUALLY, THE BUGS GROW TIRED, OR SATIATED, OR BORED-- WHATEVER-- JUST AS THEY ALWAYS DO. THE ATTACK CEASES, THE BUGS DEPART...

WOW.



YOU'D THINK I'D BE USED TO IT BY NOW. THAT I'D BE ABLE TO LOOK AT THE REMAINS OF A BUG ATTACK ON THE HULK WITH CLINICAL DISPASSION.

I ALWAYS BELIEVE THAT, RIGHT BEFORE MY STOMACH WRENCHES.

THE HULK'S STOMACH MIGHT REACT THE SAME WAY...

CREDIT THE HULK. HE DOES TRY, HE FIGHTS, HE SQUIRMS, HE HOWLS.

...IF HE STILL HAD A STOMACH, THAT IS.

HE'S BARELY RECOGNIZABLE AS ANYTHING REMOTELY HUMANOID. THEY'VE STRIPPED AWAY HIS SKIN, CHEWED UP HIS MUSCULATURE, GOTTEN PARTWAY INTO HIS CIRCULATORY SYSTEM.

AS NEAR AS I CAN TELL, ONE OF HIS KIDNEYS HAS BEEN EATEN AWAY, AND ROUGHLY A YARD OF HIS LOWER INTESTINE.

BOTH EYES ARE GONE, AND HIS TONGUE AS WELL ... I CAN TELL BECAUSE HE'S NOT SAYING ANY WORDS AT THIS POINT, MERELY RUNNING UNINTELLIGIBLY.

THIS LOOKS LIKE A BAD ONE.

IT'S GOING TO TAKE HIM A WHILE TO RECOVER.



AT LEAST THE BUGS HAVE NO TASTE FOR INANIMATE MATTER, SUCH AS CLOTHING, OR I'D ALWAYS NEED TO FIND NEW OUTFITS AFTER AN ATTACK. SO...VIDBOT... GIVE ME A REAL-TIME-ELAPSE COUNT, PLEASE, ON MY MARK....

SCIENCE... THE ART OF DISCOVERY, THE THRILL OF OBSERVING AN AMAZING PROCESS, AND THEN REPORTING YOUR FINDINGS TO YOUR PEERS, ACCEPTING THEIR ACCOLADES.

...AAAND... MARK.

EXCEPT THE ONLY PEERS I EVER HAD WORE GAUDY, SKIN-TIGHT COSTUMES, AND MOST OF THEM WOULDN'T HAVE UNDERSTOOD EVEN THE SIMPLEST OF FORMULAE THAT I COULD HAVE SHARED WITH THEM. OH, SURE, THERE WERE EXCEPTIONS, LIKE TONY AND REED...

... BUT MOST OF THEM WOULDN'T HAVE KNOWN AN ACCOLADE FROM A GATORADE. ANYWAY... THEY'RE LONG GONE NOW.

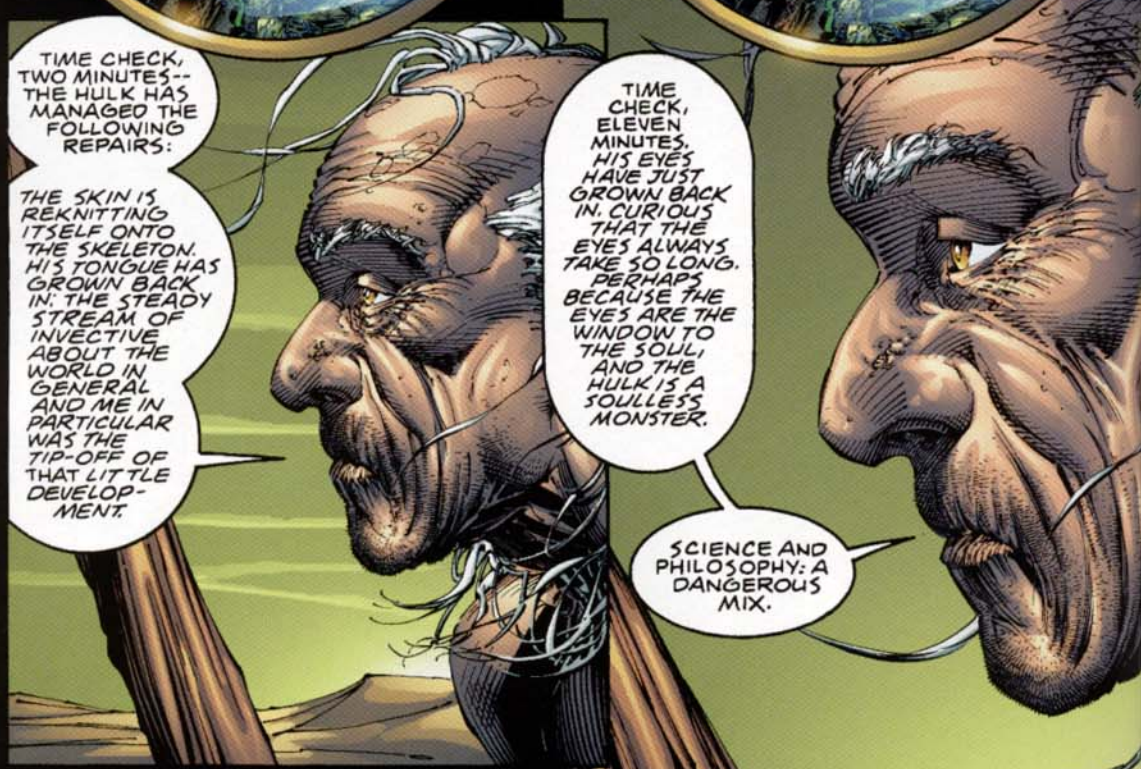



TIME CHECK, TWO MINUTES-- THE HULK HAS MANAGED THE FOLLOWING REPAIRS:

THE SKIN IS REKNITTING ITSELF ONTO THE SKELETON. HIS TONGUE HAS GROWN BACK IN; THE STEADY STREAM OF INVECTIVE ABOUT THE WORLD IN GENERAL AND ME IN PARTICULAR WAS THE TIP-OFF OF THAT LITTLE DEVELOPMENT.

TIME CHECK, ELEVEN MINUTES. HIS EYES HAVE JUST GROWN BACK IN. CURIOUS THAT THE EYES ALWAYS TAKE SO LONG. PERHAPS BECAUSE THE EYES ARE THE WINDOW TO THE SOUL, AND THE HULK IS A SOULLESS MONSTER.

SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY: A DANGEROUS MIX.





SEVENTEEN MINUTES. JUST BEFORE THE LINING OF HIS BELLY WAS RESTORED...

...I SAW HIS INTESTINES REINSERTING THEMSELVES. HIS HEALING PROCESS IS ALMOST LIKE WATCHING A FILM OF A DIS-EMBOWELING BEING RUN BACKWARDS.

00:17:00




CALL IT EIGHTEEN MINUTES. HE'S FULLY HEALED.

00:17:50



AND HE'S NOT IN A GOOD MOOD.




HE SNARLS SOMETHING THAT I CAN'T QUITE MAKE OUT, AND THEN HE LEAPS FOR IT, JUST AS HE HAS DONE SO MANY TIMES IN THE PAST, BUT THE DEVICE IS ELEGANT IN ITS SIMPLICITY...



...CAPABLE OF DETECTING ANY MOTION COMING ITS WAY AND KEEPING A DISTANCE OF TEN FEET BETWEEN ITSELF AND HARM.

SOLAR POWERED, IT WOULD TAKE NOTHING LESS THAN THE DESTRUCTION OF THE ENTIRE WORLD TO PUT AN END TO THE VIROBOT.

AND FOR ALL I KNOW, EVEN ARMA-GEDDON MIGHT NOT BE ENOUGH TO FINISH THE HULK.




HULK HATES STUPID
FLOATING GLOBE.

HULK HATES
PUNY BANNER.




HULK HATES
STUPID BUGS,
AND HULK
HATES HOW
MUCH IT
HURTS WHEN
HULK'S BODY
REGROWS.


HULK
HATES
WORLD.



BUT ... AT LEAST HULK'S ENEMIES ARE
GONE. STUPID MEN. STUPID WOMEN.
ALWAYS TRYING TO HURT HULK.



AND STUPID BOY ... RICK ... IS GONE.
AND BETTY. BETTY IS GONE.
HER FATHER ... THE SHOUTING MAN ...
IS GONE. ALL GONE. ALL, ALL GONE.
AND HULK IS STILL HERE.



HULK HAD LAST LAUGH.
AND HULK WILL KEEP LAUGHING.
BECAUSE HULK IS STRONGEST
ONE THERE IS.



I'LL BE DAMNED.

IT'S STILL HERE.

WHEN THE GOVERNMENT PROPOSED THE "COSTUMED ADVENTURERS MEMORIAL PARK," AFTER ALL THE CASUALTIES DURING THE HELL ON EARTH WAR, I NEVER THOUGHT IT WOULD ACTUALLY HAPPEN... MUCH LESS LAST. BUT IT DID.

THEY'RE ALL LAID TO REST HERE... THOSE WHO FELL DURING HELL ON EARTH, AND THEN THOSE IN THE OUTER WORLD WAR... EVEN THOSE WHO JUST WENT FROM OLD AGE, ALL HERE.


ALL GONE.

AND NONE OF THEM LIVED TO SEE... AFTER EVERYTHING THEY WENT THROUGH TO PROTECT HUMANITY FROM ALIEN ENEMIES, FROM EVIL FORCES WHO WANTED TO ENSLAVE OR ELIMINATE MANKIND...

...NONE OF THEM LIVED TO SEE MANKIND FALL BENEATH THE ONE ENEMY HUMANS WERE HELPLESS BEFORE:

OTHER HUMANS.

BUT... HE SAW. NOT ONLY THAT...



BUT HE DERIVED
A SORT OF GRIM
SATISFACTION
FROM IT AS IF
SOMEHOW
SEEING MAN-
KIND DESTROYING
ITSELF WAS SOME
SORT OF
VALIDATION OF
THE OPINION
HE HELD FOR
HIS LONG

THE HULK DIDN'T
CARE THAT
THE INITIAL
BOMBINGS WERE
THE RESULT OF
TERRORISTS
ACTING OUTSIDE
GOVERNMENT
MANDATES.

HE DIDN'T CARE
THAT NO ONE
WANTED WAR...
BUT THAT
RETRIBUTION
WAS THE ONLY
POSSIBLE
RESPONSE.

HE DIDN'T
CARE THAT
IT ALL SPILLED
OUT OF CONTROL.

HE DIDN'T CARE
ABOUT MILLIONS
UPON MILLIONS
OF INNOCENT
PEOPLE DYING.

HE DIDN'T CARE
THAT THE
REMAINING
HEROES, THE
DESERVED OF
MANKIND, DIED
IN THOSE BLASTS.
JUST AS DID
THEIR VILLAINOUS
OPPOSITES,
BECAUSE NUCLEAR
HOLOCAUST
DOESN'T CARE
ABOUT GOOD
GUYS AND BAD
GUYS.

HE CARED ABOUT
TWO THINGS, AND
TWO THINGS ONLY.

ABOUT
BEING THE
STRONGEST
ONE THERE
IS.

AND BEING
LEFT ALONE.

IT NEVER STRUCK THE HULK AS UNUSUAL THAT OTHERS DIED OF OLD AGE WHILE HE KEPT GOING. SOMEHOW, TO HIM, IT SEEMED... "RIGHT."

IT WAS HIS HEALING ABILITY, OF COURSE, WHICH REPAIRED DAMAGE TO HIS BODY AT AN ACCELERATED RATE... AND TO MINE, ALBEIT SOMEWHAT MORE SLOWLY AND FAR LESS EFFICIENTLY,


AND ALL THE RADIATION BEING RELEASED FROM THE LAST WORLD WAR, WHY... IT MADE HIM ALL THE STRONGER. HE DIDN'T CARE ABOUT THAT EITHER, THOUGH.

THE NOISE OF THE EXPLOSIONS, HOWEVER, AND THE CRIES OF THE DEAD...


...AND THE DYING...

...THESE THINGS BOTHERED HIM.

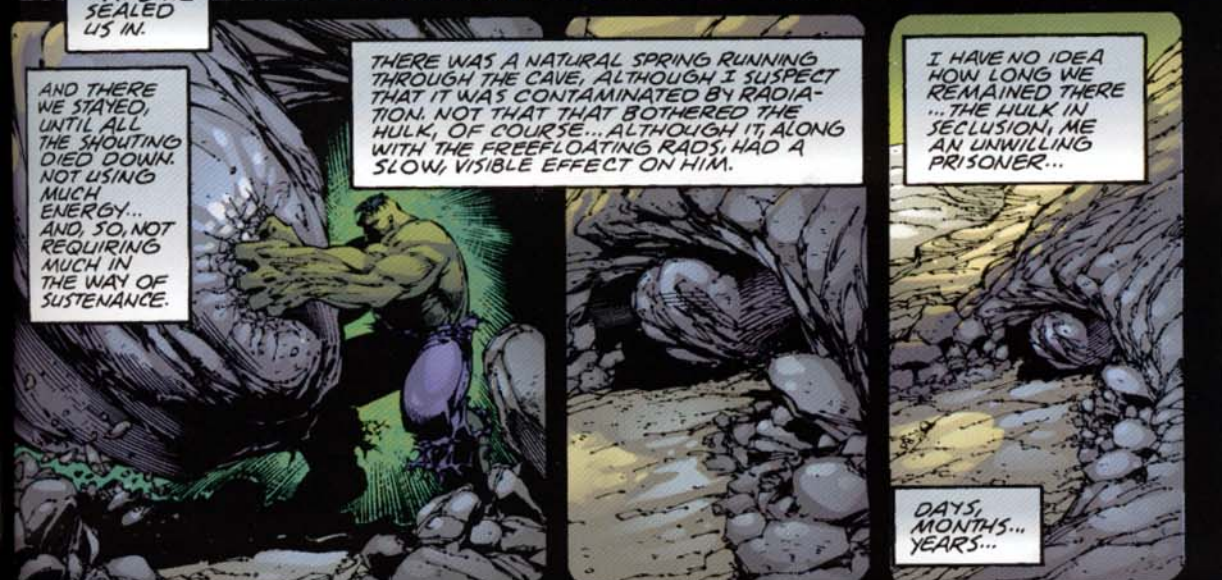




WHETHER THEY
OFFENDED HIS
SENSE OF ORDER,
OR JABBED AT
HIS CONSCIENCE,
OR JUST SERVED
AS AN ANNOYANCE
... I REALLY
COULDN'T SAY.



ALL I KNOW IS THAT HE
WANTED TO DISTANCE
HIMSELF FROM IT SO,
AS HE HAD SO MANY
TIMES BEFORE, HE
RETURNED TO NEW
MEXICO--TO THE
PLACE OF HIS BIRTH
--TO THE GAMMA
CAVE...



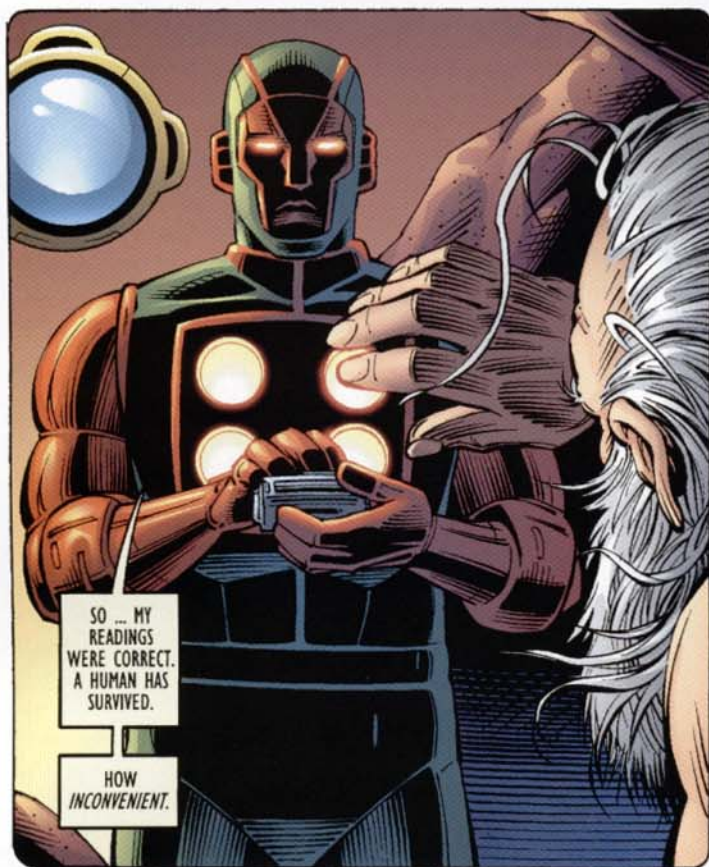
... AND HE
SEALED
US IN.

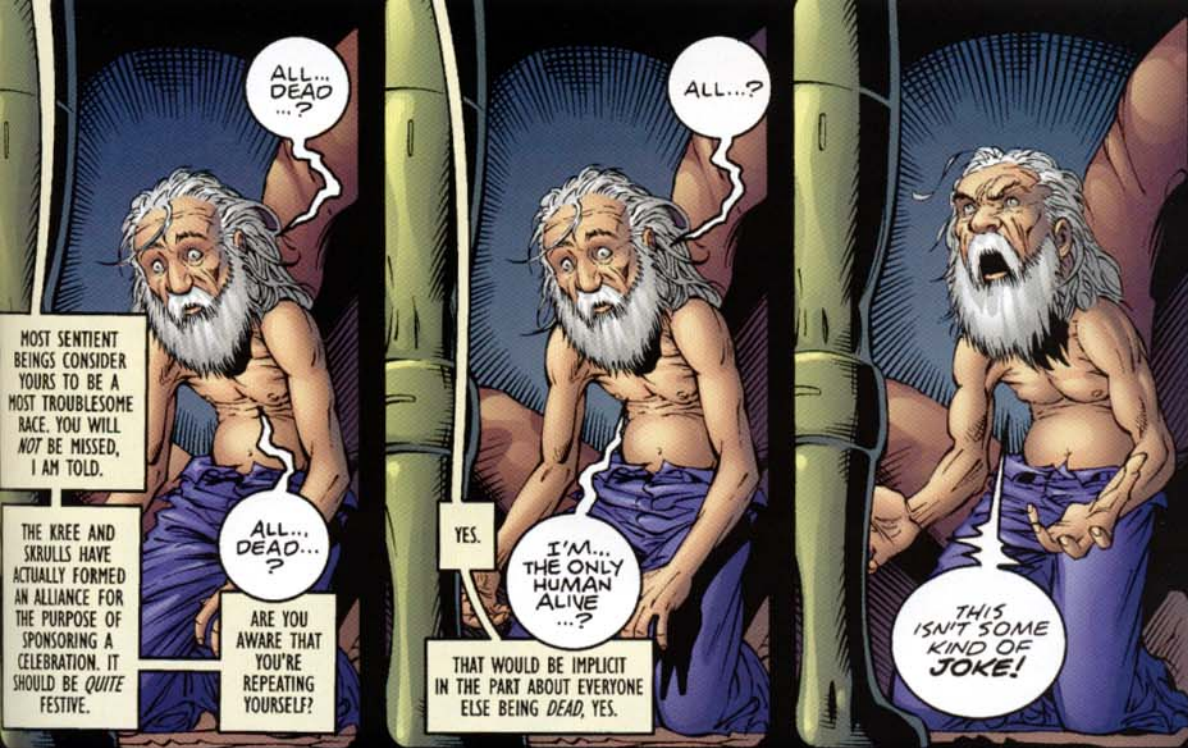
AND THERE
WE STAYED,
UNTIL ALL
THE SHOUTING
DIED DOWN.
NOT USING
MUCH
ENERGY...
AND, SO, NOT
REQUIRING
MUCH IN
THE WAY OF
SUSTENANCE.

THERE WAS A NATURAL SPRING RUNNING
THROUGH THE CAVE, ALTHOUGH I SUSPECT
THAT IT WAS CONTAMINATED BY RADIATION,
NOT THAT THAT BOTHERED THE
HULK, OF COURSE... ALTHOUGH IT, ALONG
WITH THE FREEFLOATING RADS, HAD A
SLOW, VISIBLE EFFECT ON HIM.

I HAVE NO IDEA
HOW LONG WE
REMAINED THERE
... THE HULK IN
SECLUSION, ME
AN UNWILLING
PRISONER...

DAYS,
MONTHS...
YEARS...







SO...ARE...
ARE YOU
GOING TO
KILL ME...
TO MAKE
SURE...?

DO YOU WANT
ME TO? DO YOU
WISH TO DIE?

NO...!



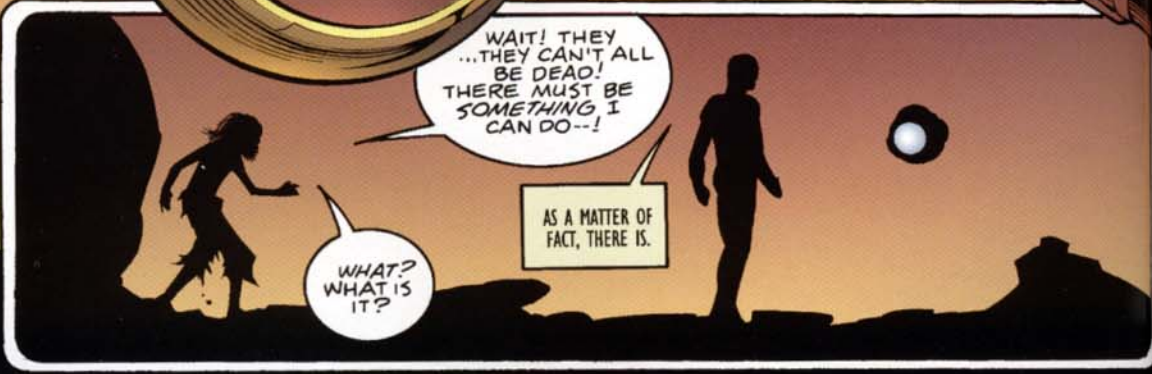
YOU'LL CHANGE
YOUR
MIND.



BUT YOUR DESIRES ON THAT SCORE ARE
IRRELEVANT. FOR GENOCIDE IS OUTSIDE
MY FUNCTION. I MERELY RECORD.

HOWEVER, MY CONTINUED PRESENCE IS
NOT NECESSARY AS OF THIS POINT.
INDEED, IT MIGHT AFFECT THE EVENTS
FROM HERE ON, AND THAT WOULD BE
INAPPROPRIATE.

SO INSTEAD, I WILL BE LEAVING THIS
VIDBOT. IT WILL RECORD ON MY BEHALF.
WHEN IT REGISTERS YOUR DEMISE, I
WILL RETRIEVE IT.



WAIT! THEY
...THEY CAN'T ALL
BE DEAD!
THERE MUST BE
SOMETHING I
CAN DO--!

WHAT?
WHAT IS
IT?

AS A MATTER OF
FACT, THERE IS.



IF YOU SHOULD HAPPEN TO ADDRESS THE VIDBOT...

-I'M SORRY, HAD--

PLEASE ENUNCIATE.

YOUR SPECIES HAS--

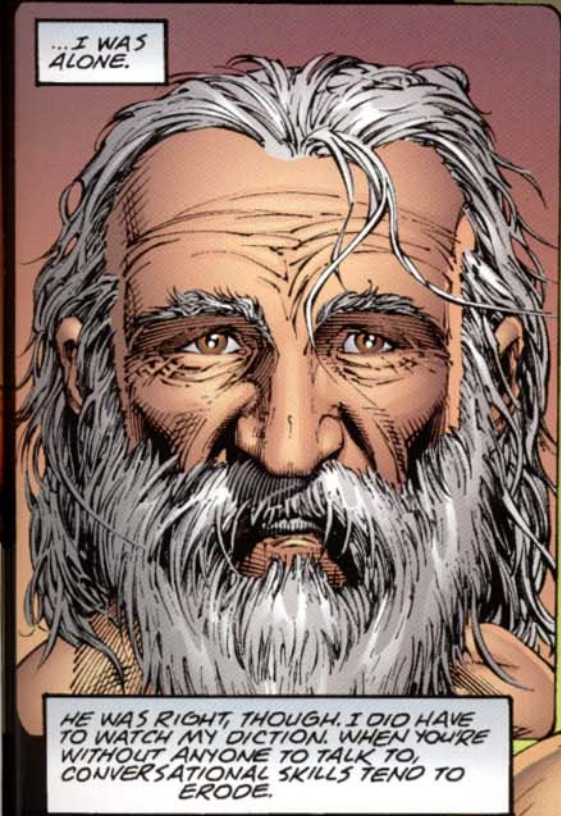
-A TENDENCY TO MUMBLE.



FAREWELL.

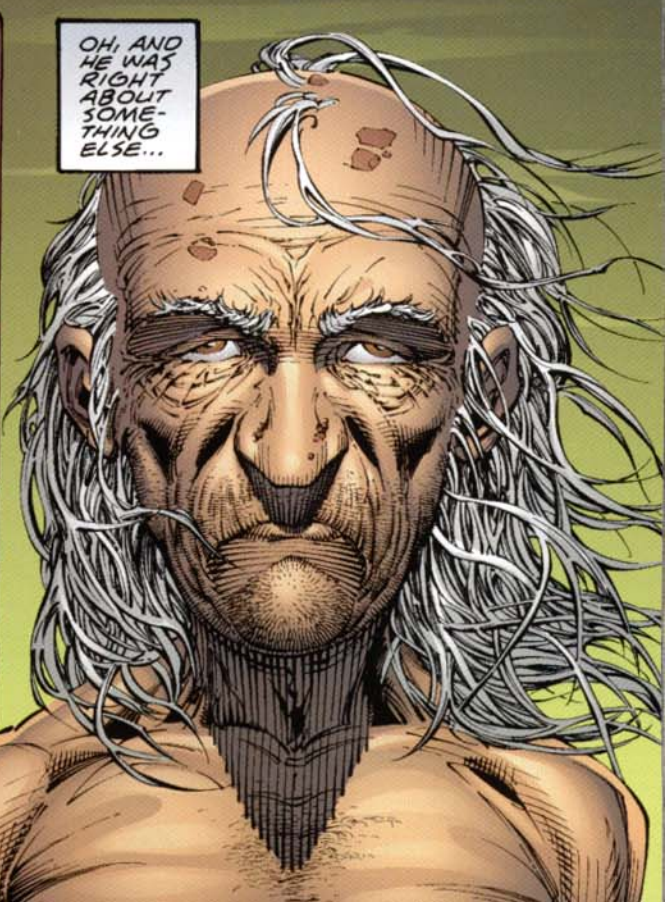


AND JUST LIKE THAT...



...I WAS ALONE.


HE WAS RIGHT, THOUGH. I DID HAVE TO WATCH MY DICTION. WHEN YOU'RE WITHOUT ANYONE TO TALK TO, CONVERSATIONAL SKILLS TEND TO ERODE.



OH, AND HE WAS RIGHT ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE...



I CHANGED
MY MIND.




I DON'T KNOW
WHAT POSSESSED
ME. IT WAS A
WASTE OF TIME.


I SHOULD HAVE
KNOWN. I SHOULD
HAVE KNOWN HE'D
STOP IT. I TRIED
TO DO IT WITHOUT
WARNING HIM. NOT
THINK ABOUT IT,
JUST DO IT.

I HATE
HIM.


HATE PUNY
BANNER.
TRIED TO
KILL
HIMSELF.



STUPID BANNER.
HE THINKS HE CAN
KILL HULK.



HE THINKS
HE CAN GET
AWAY. BUT
HULK WILL
GO ON
FOREVER.



HULK IS
STRONGEST
ONE THERE
IS.



WHO...WHO IS SHE?

SHE...SHE'S BEAUTIFUL.



STANDING AT THE FAR END OF A PLATEAU, SHE'S... SHE'S BREATHTAKING. LOOK AT HER...

SHE'S NAKED, CLOTHED IN FLOWING BROWN HAIR. SHE LOOKS HAPPY TO SEE ME... MY GOD...


I CAN'T REMEMBER THE LAST TIME I LOOKED AT ANYONE WHO WAS HAPPY TO SEE ME, MUCH LESS A BEAUTIFUL, NAKED WOMAN...






SHE'S NOT APPROACHING ME. IT ...IT COULD BE A TRAP OF SOME SORT...

NO...NO, IT'S NOT... AND EVEN IF IT IS... WHY SHOULD I GIVE A DAMN AT THIS LATE DATE?




EVERY STEP I TAKE TOWARDS HER, HER BEAUTY SEEMS TO GROW AND BLOSSOM AND BECOME MORE PURE, MORE LUSCIOUS, LIKE AN OVERRIPE FRUIT BEGGING TO BE DEVOURD.

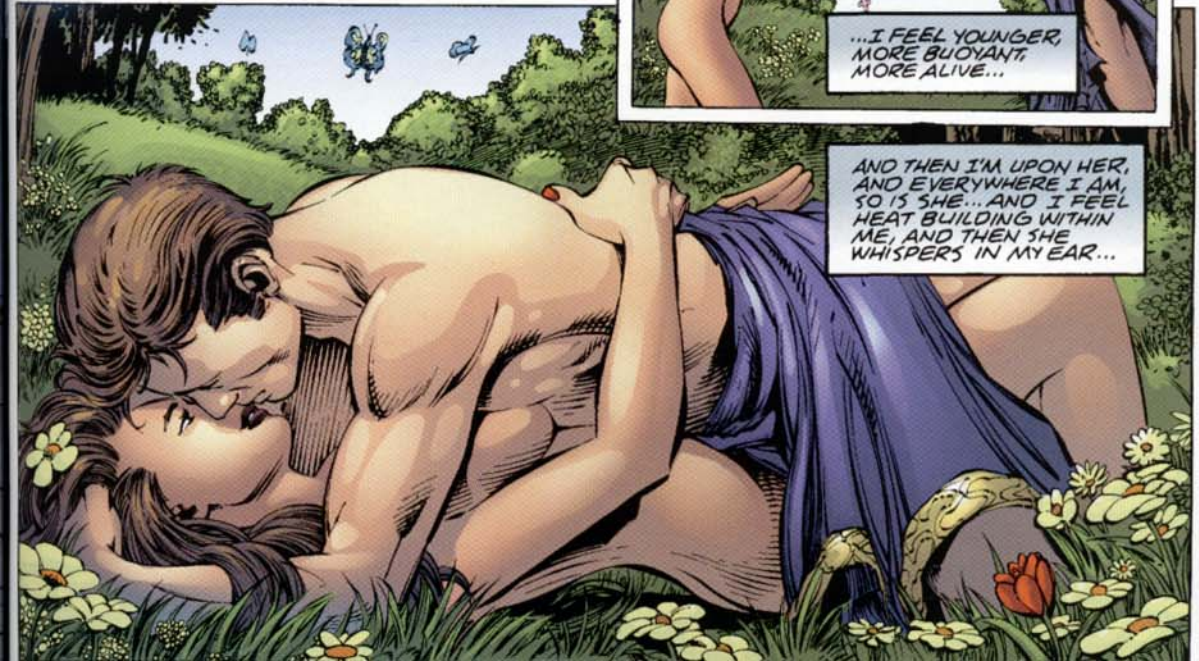
MY DECRETIT STATE, MY APPEARANCE, NONE OF IT SEEMS TO BOTHER HER. SHE WANTS ME, SHE NEEDS ME.



PURE, GREEN GRASS IS BLOOMING BENEATH HER FEET, AND THE HORIZON IS NOW THE PUREST BLUE. AND AS I DRAW CLOSER AND CLOSER...



...I FEEL YOUNGER, MORE BUOYANT, MORE ALIVE...



AND THEN I'M UPON HER, AND EVERYWHERE I AM, SO IS SHE... AND I FEEL HEAT BUILDING WITHIN ME, AND THEN SHE WHISPERS IN MY EAR...




WE WILL REPOPULATE THE WORLD. WE WILL BE ADAM AND EVE. NO... EVEN BETTER...

...WE'LL BE GODS. GODS.



GODS!!!



THE WOMAN... GONE. THE GREEN GRASS... GONE. THE BLUE SKY ALL VANISHING INTO THE TWILIGHT MIST OF UNREALITY...

... BUT THE HEAT IS STILL HERE. I FEEL IT. THE HEAT... IN MY CHEST...


...DULL, CONSTRICTING, LIKE A VISE.

LIKE FIRE.


FIRE... GODS...

...OF COURSE, OF COURSE... I UNDERSTAND NOW...

...I'VE BEEN BLIND. HOW COULD I HAVE BEEN SO BLIND...?




BANNER ... WHAT IS PUNY BANNER DOING? BANNER IS TRYING TO HURT HULK. SOMETHING IS GOING ON WITH BANNER ...



NEVER SHOULD HAVE ... KEPT PUNY BANNER AROUND ... DON'T KNOW WHY ... WHY HULK DID ... STUPID ... HULK IS STRONGEST, BUT NOT SMARTEST ...



HULK NEVER NEEDED TO BE SMART ... SMART IS PUNY BANNER, WEAK BANNER ... DON'T WANT TO BE SMART LIKE BANNER ... DON'T WANT TO BE ANYTHING LIKE BANNER ... HULK WON'T LET HIM HURT HULK ANYMORE ...



WHY DID HULK LET HIM STAY? HULK MUST CRUSH HIM ... LIKE BUG ... MUST ...

I'VE BEEN FEELING PAIN ON AND OFF FOR TWO DAYS... DIDN'T THINK ANYTHING OF IT... BUT NOW... NOW IT'S GROWING.

PERHAPS THE HULK'S BODY CAN GO ON FOREVER... BUT THIS ONE CAN'T.


THE GRIP OF FIRE ACROSS MY CHEST, AND I'VE REALIZED IT... IT ALL MAKES SENSE NOW...

IN GREEK MYTHOLOGY... PROMETHEUS, THE LEGENDARY TITAN, CREATED MANKIND FROM THE CLAY...

BUT PROMETHEUS FELT THAT ZEUS... KING OF THE GODS... HURLER OF LIGHTNING BOLTS... TREATED HIS CREATION BADLY. SO, TO MAKE UP FOR IT...


...PROMETHEUS INTRODUCED HUMANITY TO FIRE. FIRE, FROM WHICH FLOWED MAN'S TECHNOLOGY AND SCIENTIFIC ADVANCEMENT.

FURIOUS OVER THE TITAN'S ACTIONS, THE GODS PUNISHED MANKIND BY UNLEASHING THE EVILS OF PANDORA'S BOX. AS FOR PROMETHEUS...



...THEY CHAINED HIM TO
A MOUNTAIN PEAK IN
THE CAUCASUS...

...THERE TO BE ENDLESSLY DEVoured
BY CARRION-EATERS, HIS INNARDS
PLUCKED OUT, HIS FLESH TORN AWAY.
PROMETHEUS, LEFT TO WRITHE IN
AGONY AS THEY CONSUMED HIM BIT
BY BIT...



BANNER ... THINKING
TOO MUCH ... PUNY
BANNER ... MUST STOP
HIM ...

... AND WHATEVER WAS EATEN
WOULD ALWAYS GROW BACK,
HIS BODY WOULD HEAL ITSELF,
GOOD AS NEW, SO THAT THE
PROCESS COULD BEGIN ALL
OVER AGAIN.

AND THE
HULK...

...THE HULK WAS...
IS... THE LIVING
SYMBOL OF THE
ATOMIC AGE.

THE ATOMIC AGE
FRANKENSTEIN,
THEY CALLED HIM.
THE ATOMIC AGE
JEKYLL AND HYDE.

THE ATOMIC AGE,
WHICH BROUGHT
FIRE AND A
TERRIBLE,
TERRIBLE
KNOWLEDGE TO
MANKIND. A
KNOWLEDGE
FOR WHICH THE
FINAL, TERRIBLE
PRICE WAS...

...OBLIVION.

WHEN THE HULK
FIRST STRODE THE
EARTH... GOD IN
HEAVEN... THERE
WERE GIANTS IN
THOSE DAYS...



THOR AND HERCULES AND GIANT-MAN AND CAPTAIN AMERICA AND THE FANTASTIC FOUR AND SPIDER-MAN AND ALL OF THEM, ON AND ON.

MORE THAN MORTAL...THEY WERE, EACH IN THEIR WAY, TITANS. SOME OF THEM, LIKE THE X-MEN, EVEN OWED THEIR EXISTENCE...ON A GENETIC LEVEL...TO RADIATION.

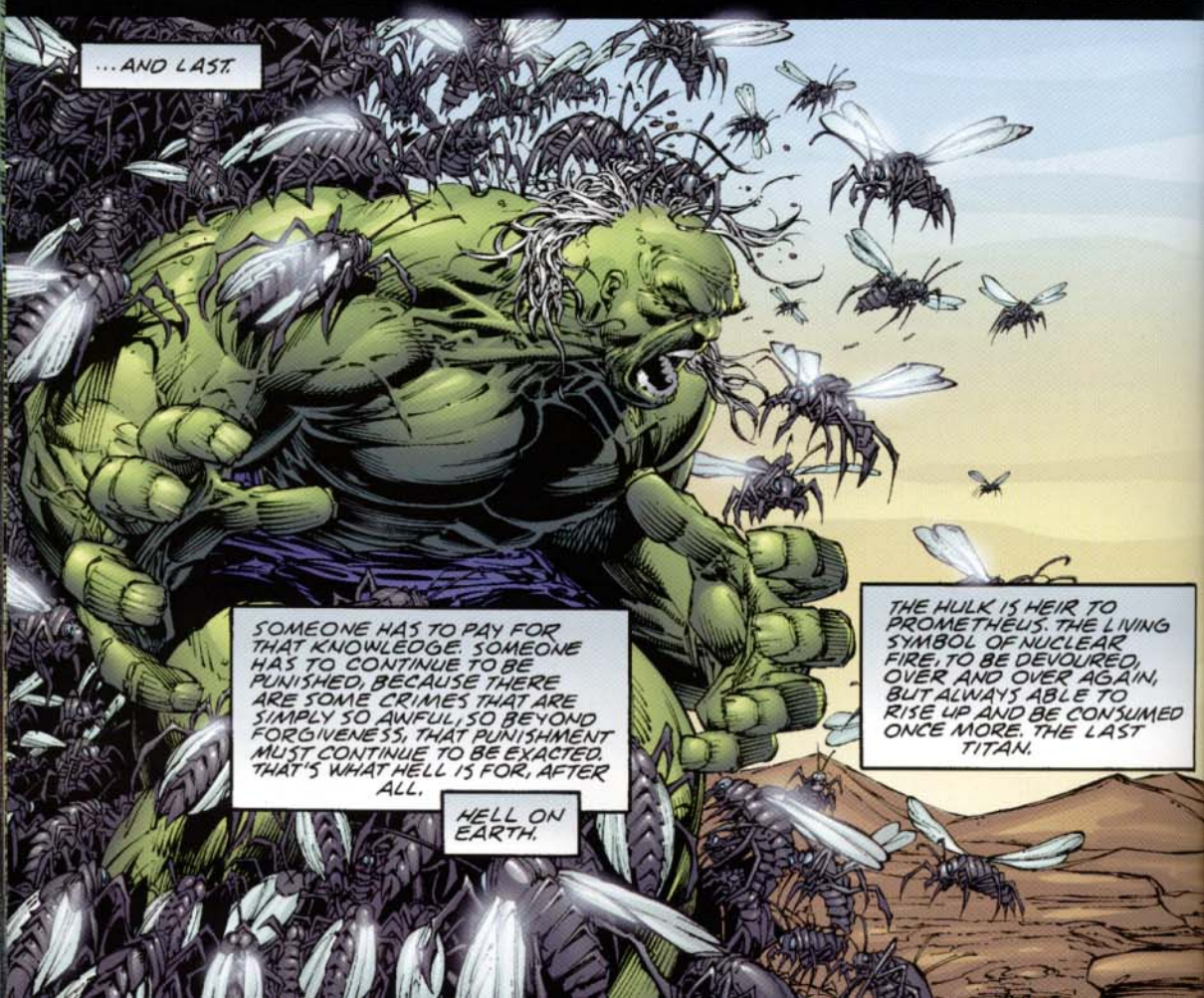
SHUT UP, BANNER. STOP YOUR PUNY TALKING. STOP MAKING CHEST HURT. WHAT IS ... WHAT IS BANNER'S PLAN? YES ... BANNER IS TRYING TO HURT HULK, DESTROY HULK, ONE FINAL TIME. BUT HULK WILL STOP HIM.



BUT THEY'RE ALL GONE NOW. GONE, ALONG WITH MANKIND. GONE, BECAUSE OF THE GHASTLY KNOWLEDGE THAT CAME FROM THE CREATION OF THE ATOMIC BOMB.



BUT THE HULK WAS SPAWNED IN THE HEART OF A NUCLEAR BLAST. THAT MADE HIM FIRST. FIRST AMONG THE TITANS. FIRST...



... AND LAST.

SOMEONE HAS TO PAY FOR THAT KNOWLEDGE. SOMEONE HAS TO CONTINUE TO BE PUNISHED, BECAUSE THERE ARE SOME CRIMES THAT ARE SIMPLY SO AWFUL, SO BEYOND FORGIVENESS, THAT PUNISHMENT MUST CONTINUE TO BE EXACTED. THAT'S WHAT HELL IS FOR, AFTER ALL.

HELL ON EARTH.

THE HULK IS HEIR TO PROMETHEUS. THE LIVING SYMBOL OF NUCLEAR FIRE, TO BE DEVoured, OVER AND OVER AGAIN, BUT ALWAYS ABLE TO RISE UP AND BE CONSUMED ONCE MORE. THE LAST TITAN.

BUT PROMETHEUS...
WAS EVENTUALLY
SHOWN MERCY...
FREED...

AND NOW I... I'M
BEING GIVEN THAT
SAME CHANCE AT
MERCY...

...BECAUSE
MY BODY IS
FAILING.

AND IF HE
LETS ME GO...
IT'LL BE OVER...
THE SUFFERING
...OUR SUFFERING
...WILL FINALLY BE
OVER...

BANNER ...
TRYING TO
TRICK HULK ...
HULK WILL
CHANGE ...

HULK
WILL
COME
OUT ...
WILL
STOP ...

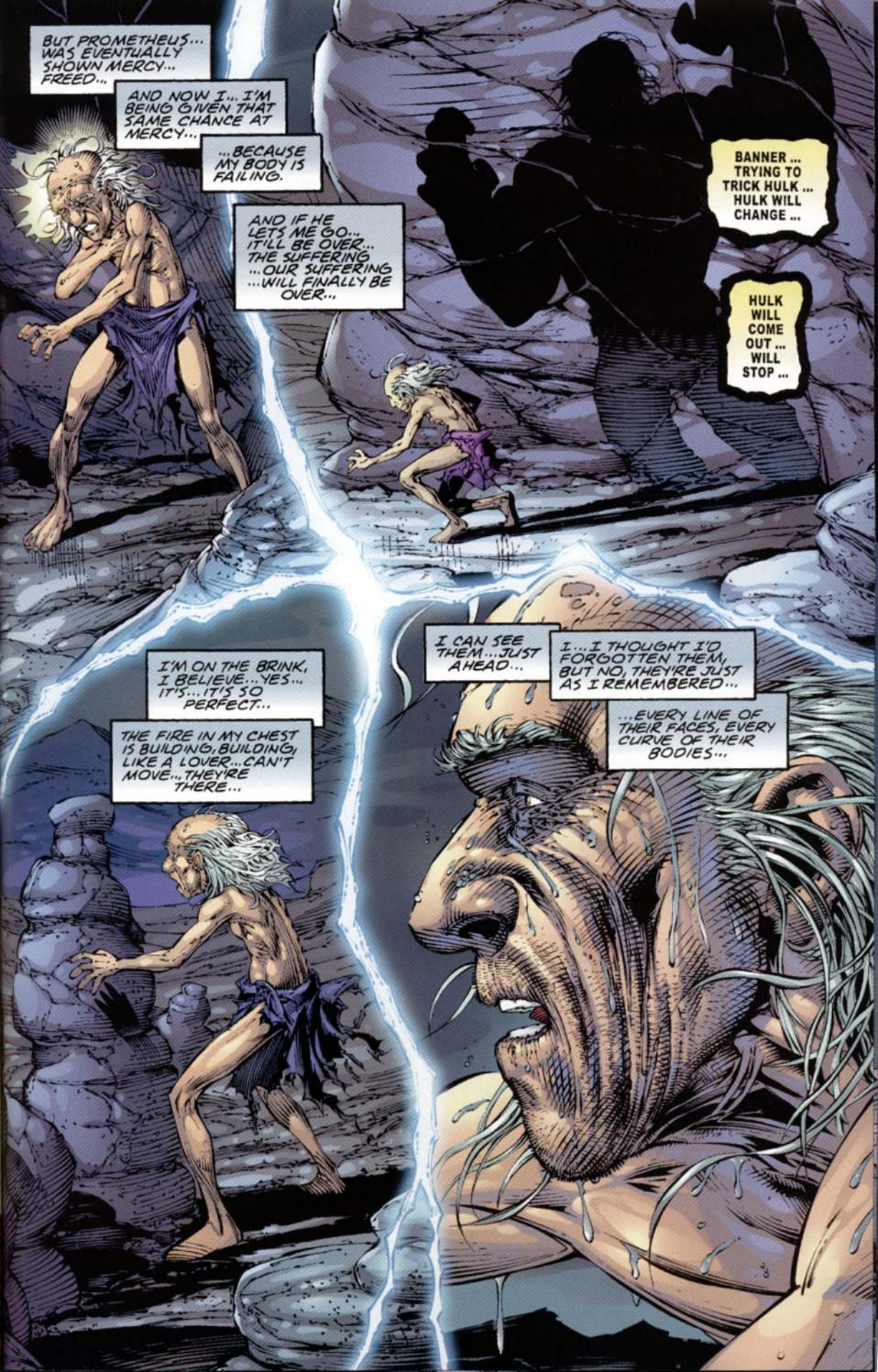
I'M ON THE BRINK,
I BELIEVE... YES...
IT'S... IT'S SO
PERFECT...

THE FIRE IN MY CHEST
IS BUILDING, BUILDING,
LIKE A LOVER... CAN'T
MOVE... THEY'RE
THERE...

I CAN SEE
THEM... JUST
AHEAD...

I... I THOUGHT I'D
FORGOTTEN THEM,
BUT NO, THEY'RE JUST
AS I REMEMBERED...

...EVERY LINE OF
THEIR FACES, EVERY
CURVE OF THEIR
BODIES...



BETTY, RICK, MARLO... MY
GOD, JIM WILSON... AND
...JARELLA, YOU'RE
THERE... AND...

... AND MOM...
I... I... NEVER
THOUGHT I'D
SEE YOU... ALL
OF YOU...

HULK... LET IT
GO... LET ME
GO... LOOK AT
THEM...

HULK SEES NOTHING ... NOTHING
EXCEPT STUPID TRICK BY PUNY BANNER
... HULK WILL COME OUT NOW ... STOP
PAIN IN CHEST ... STOP ...

HULK... DON'T... PLEASE
... I'M ALMOST THERE...
YOU CAN COME WITH ME
... IT WILL BE WONDERFUL
... ALL YOUR FRIENDS
WILL BE THERE, AND THERE
WILL BE PEACE... PLEASE...

HULK
DOESN'T
WANT
FRIENDS.

HULK...
GOD IN
HEAVEN,
LISTEN
TO ME...

NO! FOR YEARS ... FOREVER ...
HULK HAS LISTENED TO
BANNER, AND BANNER'S
FRIENDS, TALKING ABOUT HOW
HULK RUINED BANNER'S LIFE!

HULK MADE BANNER'S LIFE!
BANNER WAS NOTHING
BEFORE HULK ... NOTHING!


IT'LL BE DIFFERENT,
HULK! YOU'LL HAVE
PEACE... FRIENDS...

HULK DOESN'T WANT
FRIENDS, BECAUSE
FRIENDS WILL HURT HIM.
EVERYONE HURTS HULK.
EVERYONE
HURTS HULK.

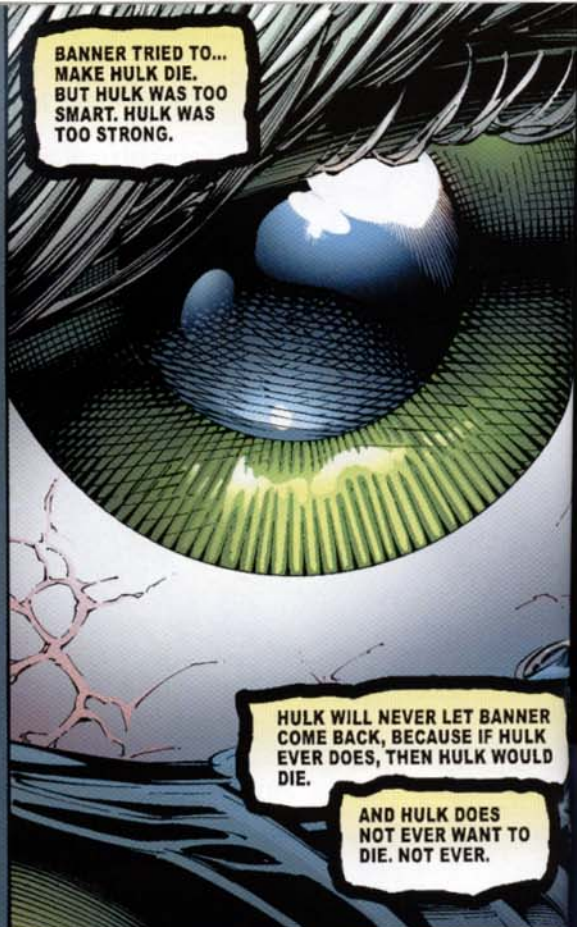
HULK, FOR ONCE...
SEE THE WORLD
WITHOUT ANGER!
SEE NOT WHAT IS,
BUT WHAT COULD
BE! SEE THE PLACE
WHERE WE CAN...
CAN...

... SEE... THIS
PLACE... PLACE
OF PEACE...
HULK... CHEST
... CAN'T THINK
... HULK... DON'T
DO IT... LET ME
GO... LET US
GO... PLEASE...

NO! HULK WON'T
LET IT HAPPEN!
HULK DOESN'T
WANT FRIENDS!
HULK DOESN'T
WANT TO BE
WITH ANYBODY
BECAUSE HULK
**JUST WANTS
TO BE LEFT
ALONE!**




BANNER ... IS
GONE NOW ...
GOT RID OF
HIM LAST
NIGHT...



BANNER TRIED TO...
MAKE HULK DIE.
BUT HULK WAS TOO
SMART. HULK WAS
TOO STRONG.

HULK WILL NEVER LET BANNER
COME BACK, BECAUSE IF HULK
EVER DOES, THEN HULK WOULD
DIE.

AND HULK DOES
NOT EVER WANT TO
DIE. NOT EVER.




BECAUSE THEN ... THEN EVERYONE WHO KEPT TRYING
TO KILL HULK ... WILL WIN. AND HULK CAN'T EVER LET
THEM WIN. EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE GONE ... HULK
MUST STILL WIN. HULK MUST NEVER LOSE.

HULK WILL EVEN
FIND WAY TO BEAT
BUGS SOME DAY.



AND HULK ... HULK
DOESN'T MISS
BANNER AT ALL.
HULK IS ... HAPPY
TO BE ALONE. YES.
HULK IS ... HAPPY.
HULK NEVER
NEEDED BANNER.
NEVER NEEDED ANY
OF THEM. BECAUSE
IF HULK NEEDED
SOMEONE ... THEN
HULK WOULD BE
WEAK. AND HULK
MUST ... MUST
NEVER BE WEAK.
NEVER.

BECAUSE HULK
IS ... HULK IS
STRONGEST ONE
THERE IS ...
HULK IS ...

A close-up illustration of the Hulk, depicted as a large, muscular green figure with a grey beard and hair. He is crouching on a rocky, uneven surface, looking down with a somber expression. His hands are clasped together in front of him. The background is a dark, solid color.

HULK IS ...
ONLY ONE ...
THERE IS ...

ONLY
ONE ...
THERE ...
IS ...

A wide-angle illustration showing the Hulk from a distance, perched on a jagged rock formation. The landscape below is a vast, desolate plain with rolling hills and a hazy, pinkish-purple sky. The overall tone is one of isolation and melancholy.

HULK
FEELS ...

... cold.

THE END™



THE END: THE CHRONICLES OF THE FINAL DAYS OF EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES AND VILLAINS. MARVEL COMICS AND THE CREATORS WHO DEFINED THE CHARACTERS TELL THE STORIES THAT WERE NEVER MEANT TO BE TOLD:

HEROES WILL DIE.

THE BATTLE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL WILL CONCLUDE.

THE MARVEL UNIVERSE WILL REACH...THE END.

PETER DAVID AND DALE KEOWN, CREATIVE TEAM ON SOME OF THE HULK'S MOST MEMORABLE TALES, REUNITE TO PRODUCE THIS SEARING VISION OF THE FUTURE IN WHICH BRUCE BANNER, THE INCREDIBLE HULK, IS THE LAST MAN ON EARTH.

IT'S THE HULK'S FINAL BATTLE, AS "THE LAST TITAN" WRESTLES HIS INNER-DEMONS IN ORDER TO DISCOVER HIS PLACE IN A DYING WORLD...IF ONLY HE CAN SURVIVE.

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