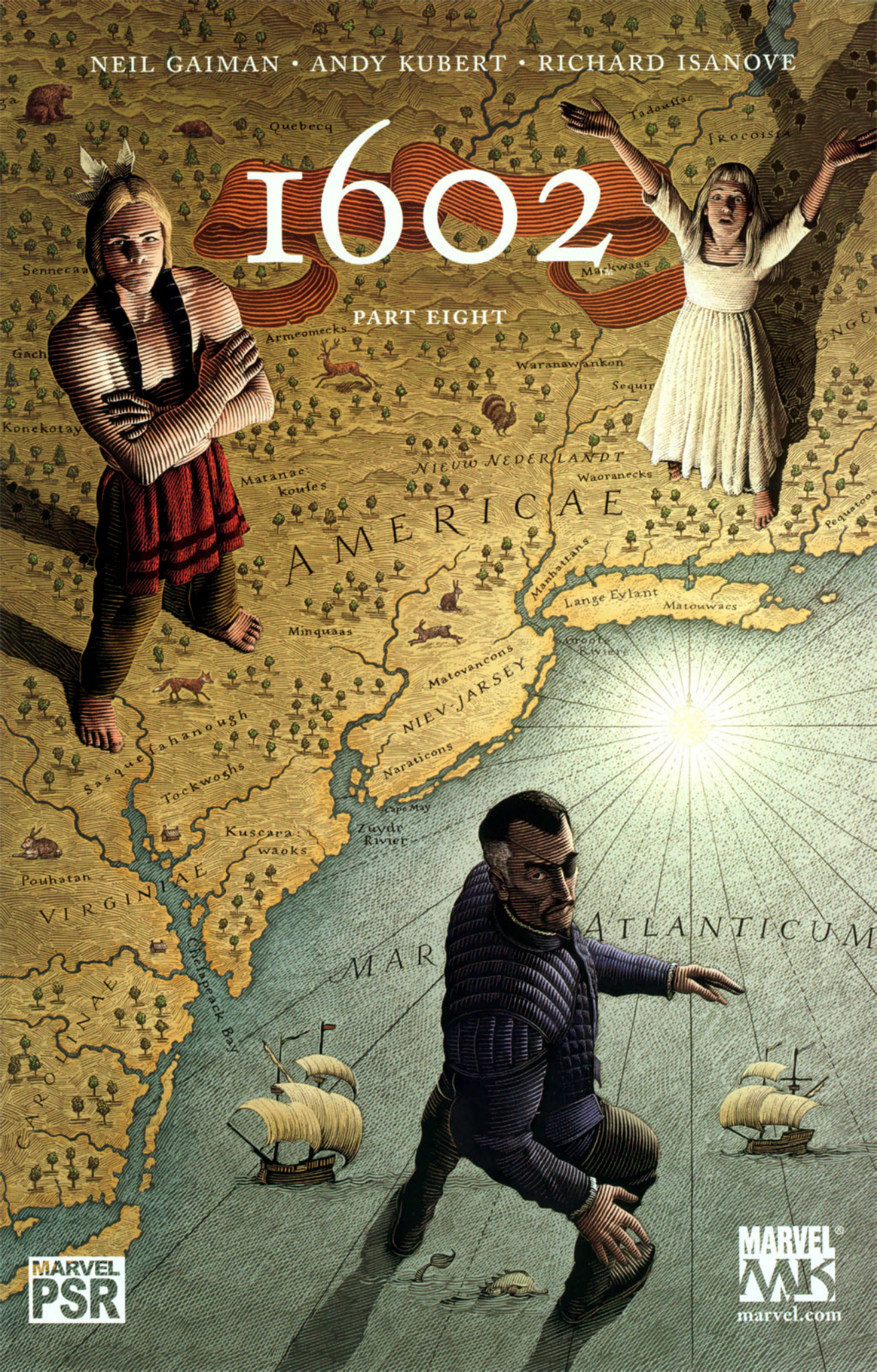


NEIL GAIMAN • ANDY KUBERT • RICHARD ISANOVE

1602

PART EIGHT



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1602 *Part Eight* *In Which We Discover the Way of the World*

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On board the *Virginia Maid*, sailing to Roanoke.

Rojhaz speaks:

My name...

I was born... will be born... maybe I *won't* be born... in the year 1920. Over three hundred years from now. My name was Steven Rogers.

Is. Steve. Rogers.

I'm sorry. So much of this is like a dream...

"There's a war coming, we called it World War Two, it started when I was about twenty, and I was given a... a serum. A *physic*, yes?"

"Stuff to make me big, and strong, and fast.

"And it *did*."

"I was a fighting machine, and a good one, and more than that."

I saved lives.

I... I couldn't save everyone.

Then, end of the war, I lost a couple of decades. After they thawed me out. I was... I was a hero. I remember some of it. A lot of it's kind of mixed up...

"I fought for *America*. My country.

"I protected America. Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

"*Democracy*. Not something you people have seen much of yet. But it's worth fighting for..."

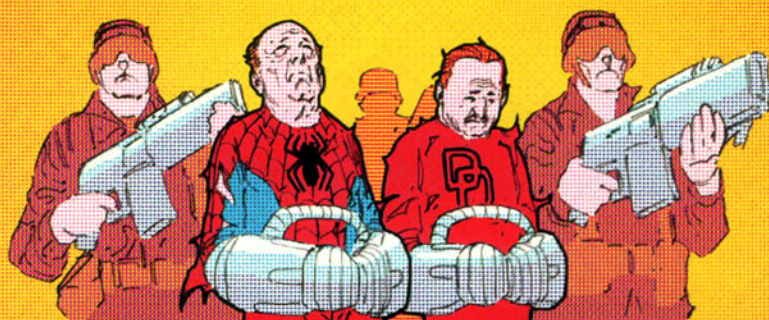
That's what I do.

Will do...

Did...

I didn't age. I'd tell people that it was enjoying my work that kept me young, but I guess it was the serum.

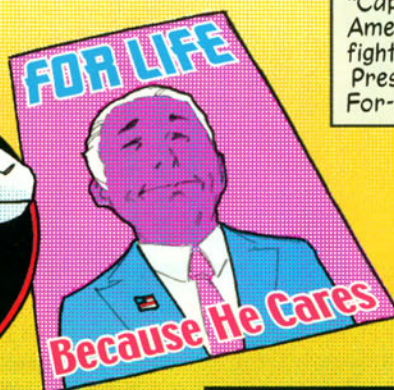
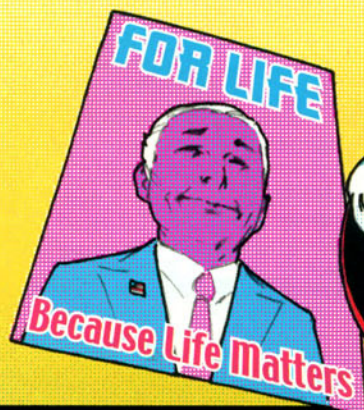
Decades passed. I just kept going, and going...



"The dark times came slowly, but they came. The other heroes aged and died, or they left for... other places..."

"Most of the rest were hunted down and killed."

And, eventually, I had to face facts. That America wasn't *my* America any longer. So I joined the underground. The fight to restore the country that I had sworn to protect...



"Captain America fighting the President-For-Life."

"It was the right thing to do. But the odds were all on his side."

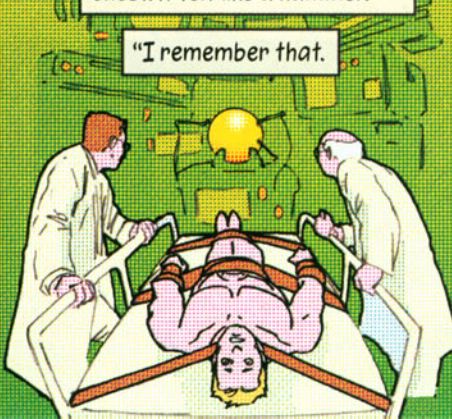
I was betrayed. They said they were going to get rid of me. They didn't even want my ashes left behind, as any kind of memorial, to inspire others.



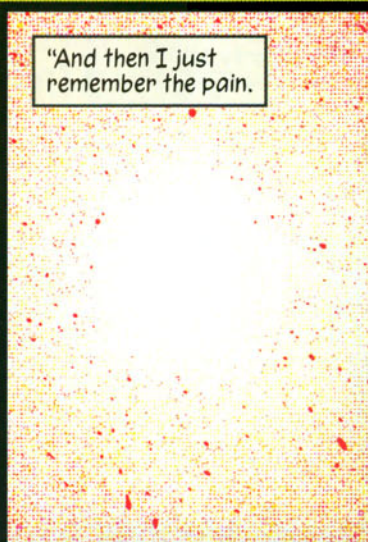
"I remember the equipment. I was strapped down."

"Before they turned it on, they shot me. In the head, not the chest. It felt like a hammer."

"I remember that."



"And then I just remember the pain."





"After that, things got kind of foggy, for a long time."



"I wasn't certain where I was, or who I was. I couldn't understand the words. Or the people. I told them my name..."

"They thought I was from another tribe... I guess, in a way, they were right."

"They let me stay. They fed me..."



"Nothing mattered. And then the white people came across the great water, and I found them starving, and I fed them."

"And then there was *Virginia*..."



"She was a baby then. But I knew what she was. What she represented. What she *meant*. My America..."

"I knew I had to protect her. To guard her. To fight for her, if I had to."

"I wasn't going to let *her* die."



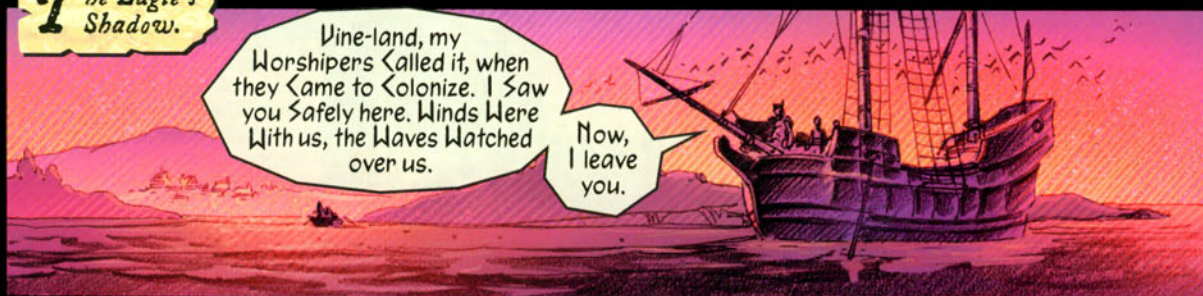
"I failed before."

"I wasn't going to fail again."

The Eagle's Shadow.

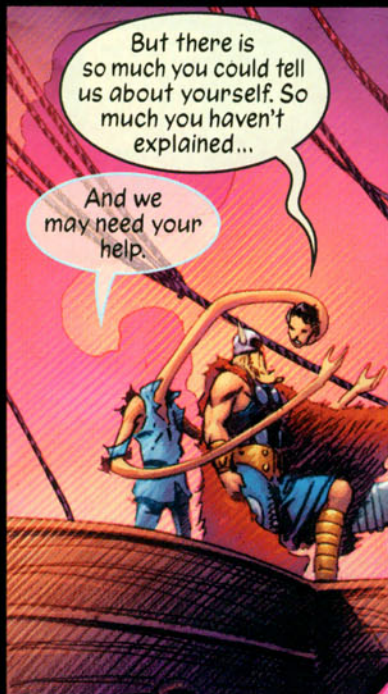
Vine-land, my
Worshippers Called it, when
they Came to Colonize. I Saw
you Safely here. Winds Were
With us, the Waves Watched
over us.

Now,
I leave
you.



But there is
so much you could tell
us about yourself. So
much you haven't
explained...

And we
may need your
help.



Cover
your
eyes.



Pilgrims brought the
staff to Jerusalem from
the Northlands, when the
days of the old gods
were done.

200 years
later, Hugh de Payns
discovered it beneath
the temple.

We were
charged to keep it
safe, and a mighty
secret...



For if there were other
gods...if gods walked
among us like men...

The Church
teaches there are but
saints and demons... If
there was a Thor...



It could bring
down the Church. Is
that what you're
saying?



I summoned him. I
saw through his eyes. I
thought his thoughts...
We were two knights
riding one horse...

I have
summoned the
winds and ridden
the storm. And I
gloried in it.

Jesu
forgive me. I am
damned.



"I scarce can credit all that you tell me, Fury. The Queen dead, James now King. And you tell me that your ship is filled with monsters...?"

"Aye, good Ananias. But some of the most monstrous on the outside are, on the inside, no more monstrous than the best of us. And perhaps the reverse is also true."

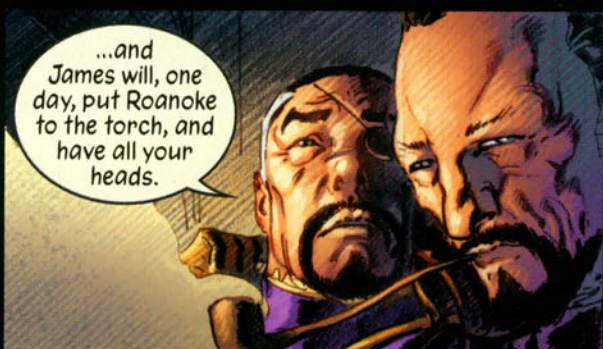


Well, we are far from Britain here...and I have heard nothing but good of you, Fury. Are you asking for our help?

After fifteen years in this continent, we still have little to offer, but we have provisions, and tobacco.

We shall welcome you as brother colonists, if you wish to stay.

But if you help us, you will be colluding with the enemies of England...



...and James will, one day, put Roanoke to the torch, and have all your heads.



It might look better if we consider this colony *captured* by monsters, traitors and Witchbreed Rogues.

Better still--I hereby declare the village of Roanoke and this continent independent of the English Crown, and I declare myself governor. Over your protests, of course.



But Fury--

Ananias, James has Virginia. If he hears you've aided his enemies, he'll kill her, too.



Good people of Roanoke. It pains me to tell you this, but our poor colony has been *captured* by monsters and rebels...

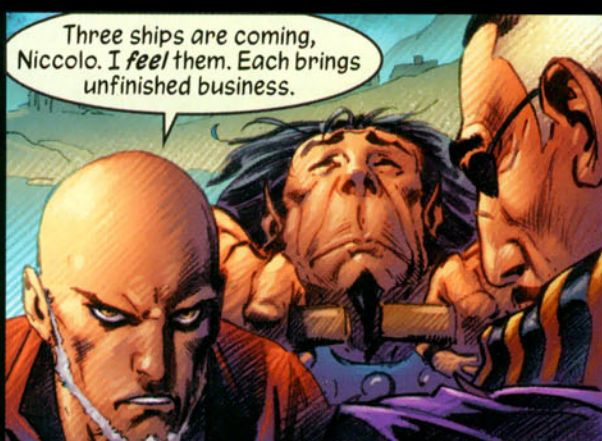
As they come ashore, treat them with respect, and with goodwill...



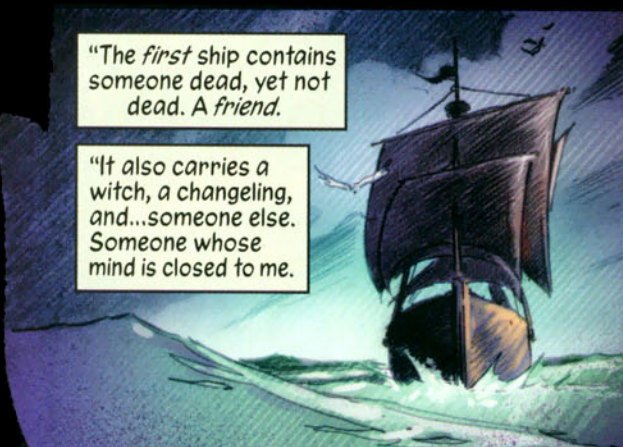
It's a good little village, Carlos. You'll like it. Master Ananias has given us a cottage, and the village hall, for lodgings.

Now, what did you want to tell me?

Only this.



Three ships are coming, Niccolo. I *feel* them. Each brings unfinished business.



"The first ship contains someone dead, yet not dead. A friend.

"It also carries a witch, a changeling, and...someone else. Someone whose mind is closed to me.



"Another ship contains James's agents. They are coming to *kill* you, Niccolo."

"Good. That's what I would have done if I were James. Sensible."



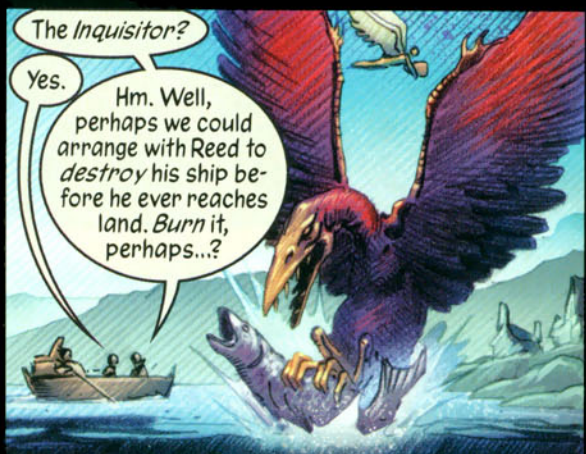
One of them is the boy, Peter.

That sly old fox. Well, let us see where this takes us.

And the third ship?



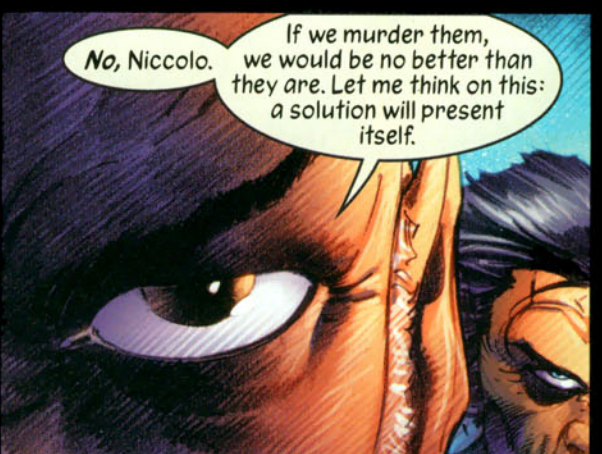
"More unfinished business. *Mine*. An enemy who was once, long ago, a friend."



The Inquisitor?

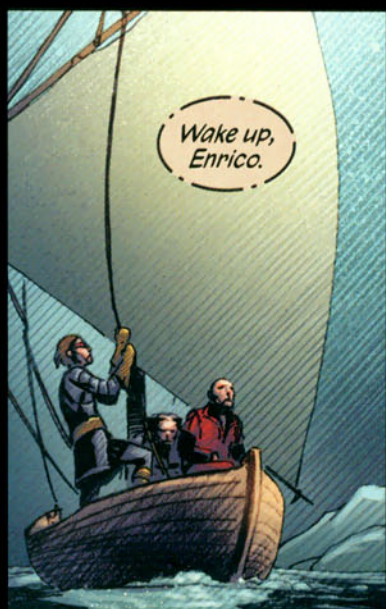
Yes.

Hm. Well, perhaps we could arrange with Reed to *destroy* his ship before he ever reaches land. *Burn* it, perhaps...?

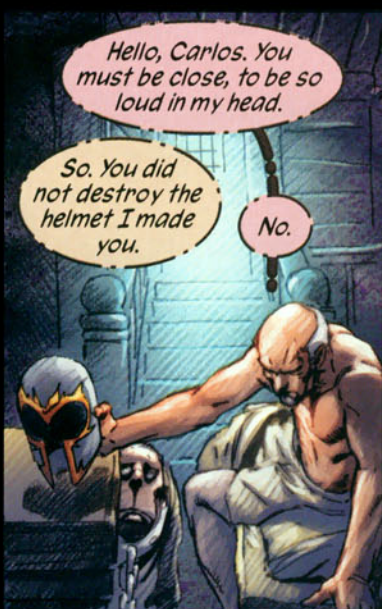


No, Niccolo.

If we murder them, we would be no better than they are. Let me think on this: a solution will present itself.



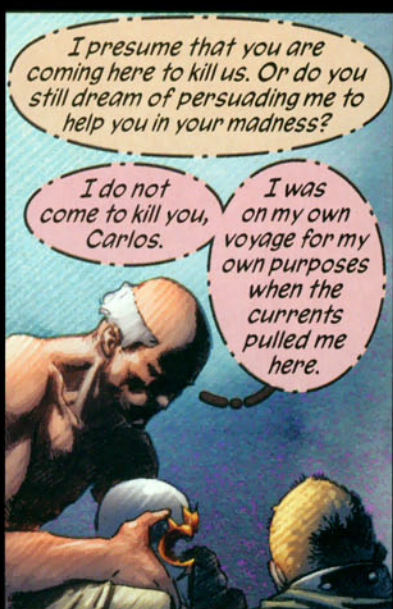
Wake up,
Enrico.



Hello, Carlos. You must be close, to be so loud in my head.

So. You did not destroy the helmet I made you.

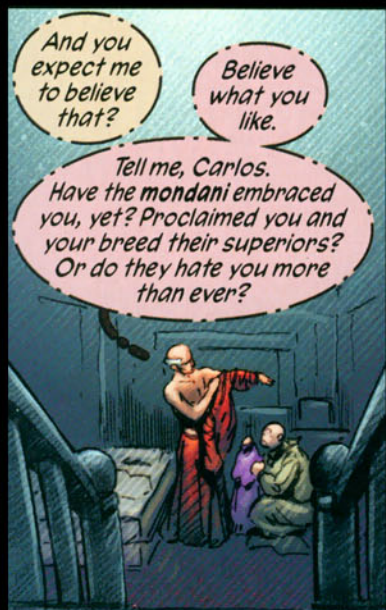
No.



I presume that you are coming here to kill us. Or do you still dream of persuading me to help you in your madness?

I do not come to kill you, Carlos.

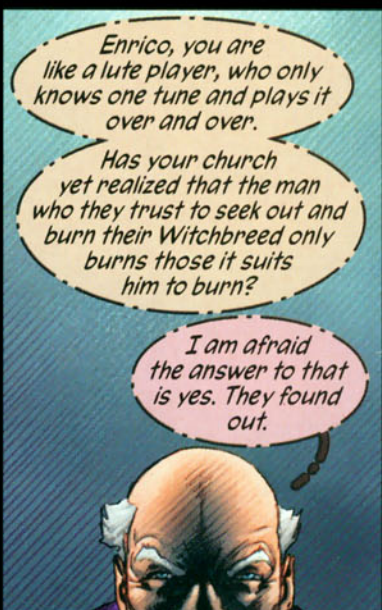
I was on my own voyage for my own purposes when the currents pulled me here.



And you expect me to believe that?

Believe what you like.

Tell me, Carlos. Have the *mondani* embraced you, yet? Proclaimed you and your breed their superiors? Or do they hate you more than ever?



Enrico, you are like a lute player, who only knows one tune and plays it over and over.

Has your church yet realized that the man who they trust to seek out and burn their Witchbreed only burns those it suits him to burn?

I am afraid the answer to that is yes. They found out.



Petros! Wake your sister. They're *trying* something. Javier and his damned breed. Get up on deck...

I am afraid it is too late for that, Enrico.

Cold. Too cold. Sleepy...

I could have killed you, Enrico. Do not forget that.

Never forget that.

Let me explain what you are looking for.

It is a simple Borssian phenomenon.

There will be a light coming from it, or it will be dark, drawing light into it. You follow me?

What will it look like?

I have no idea. Like a nothingness, perhaps?

And where should we look?

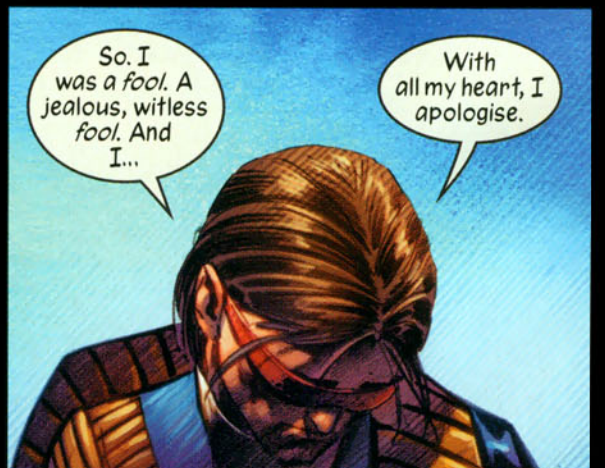
Where you will. I believe it should be within fifty miles of here.

So, what must we do when we find it?

You come back and tell me.

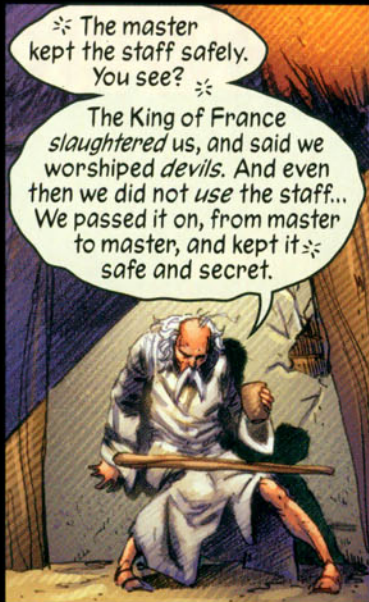
Right now, I have absolutely no idea.

Good luck.



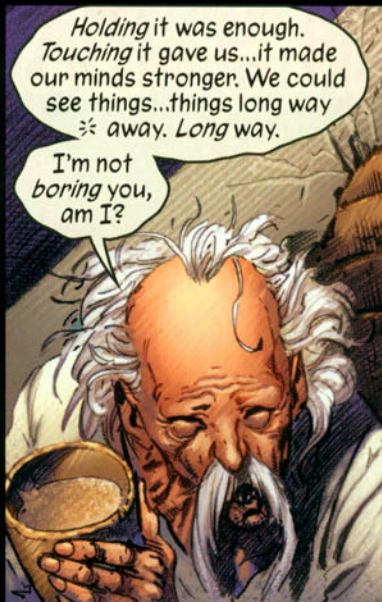






✧ The master kept the staff safely. You see? ✧

The King of France slaughtered us, and said we worshiped devils. And even then we did not use the staff... We passed it on, from master to master, and kept it safe and secret.



Holding it was enough. Touching it gave us...it made our minds stronger. We could see things...things long way away. Long way.

I'm not boring you, am I?



God...it hurts. In the morning, when I wake. Every joint hurts.

He does not hurt. Not him. In his mind I saw the other gods...

All of the sagas and legends and tales. They're all true...



This was the secret of the Templars. It was the secret that could have brought down Popes and Kings...

You shall have no gods but me, for I am a jealous god...

You... are sure I'm not boring you?



I am certain, Donal.

And you're still there?

I thought you'd gone.

I am still here, Donal.

No.



I'm not... drunk. It's just beer. A man can't get drunk on beer. Eh?

I did not say you were drunk.

Not drunk. Damned. Damned to Hell and gone.

I'm not boring you?



Who is he?

A drunken old sot. From the ship.

Virginia. Guess what they are looking for. The ship monster-folk. Guess.

What?



That light, out on the marshes.

Oh. Have they found it yet?

Don't think so.

Why don't you tell them where it is?

Why should we?



Because it's important. Honestly. You are such... children.

Jus' because you've been to London, you think you know everything. Think you're queen of the world.



You
all know my
husband.

I can assure
you that this is not pleasant
for either of us. Now...you must
ask questions.



Hello Strange.
Good to see you, in...well,
obviously rather trying
circumstances.

Hello
Reed.

*I have died,
that others
may have their
chance at life.*

*Do not ignore
my words.*

Get
on with
it.



Is that a question, Nicholas?

A
question. Very
well.

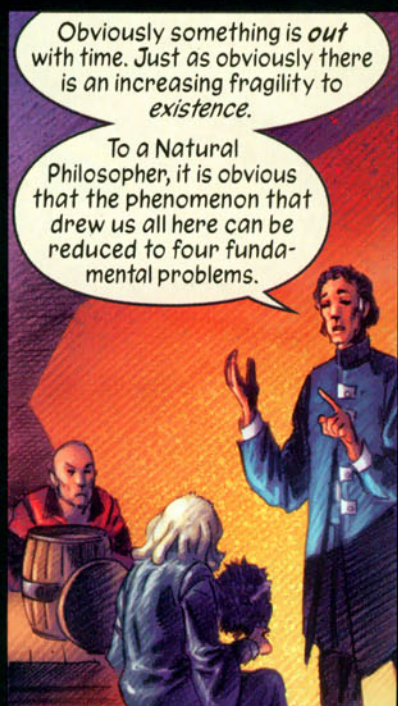
Tell us,
Doctor. What
say you: is the
**world truly
ending?**

*Something--
a person--from
the future came
here, fifteen
years ago.*



*This event damaged the
nature of time itself; and,
because time and space
are one, it will soon
destroy everything...*

Strange...
if I may
interrupt you
there?



Obviously something is **out**
with time. Just as obviously there
is an increasing fragility to
existence.

To a Natural
Philosopher, it is obvious
that the phenomenon that
drew us all here can be
reduced to four funda-
mental problems.



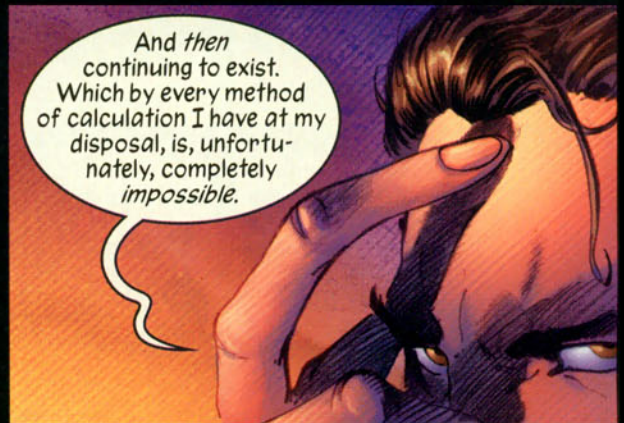
As I see it, our problems are, *firstly* locating the rip in the fabric of space and time. Not *that* difficult.



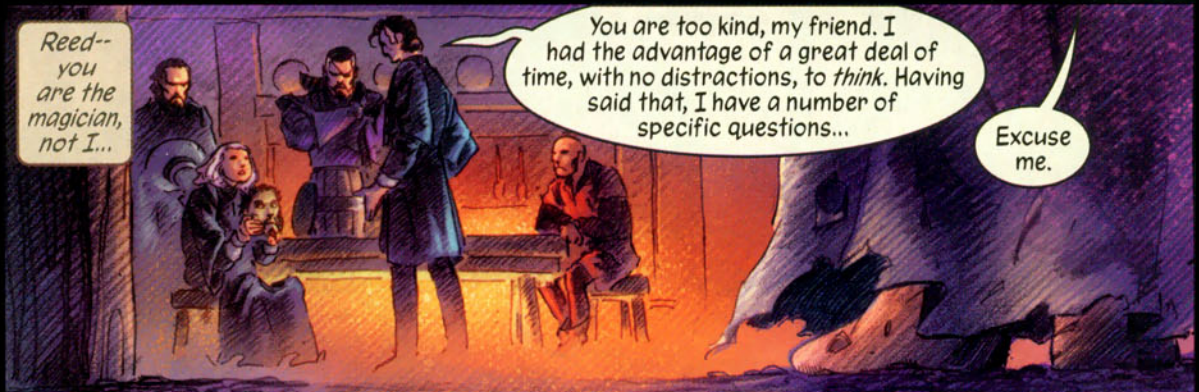
Then manipulating and opening it, while not permitting it to destroy everything. Deeply problematic, given the resources at our disposal.



Returning whatever came here to that future. *Extremely* difficult.



And *then* continuing to exist. Which by every method of calculation I have at my disposal, is, unfortunately, completely *impossible*.



Reed-- you are the magician, not I...

You are too kind, my friend. I had the advantage of a great deal of time, with no distractions, to *think*. Having said that, I have a number of specific questions...

Excuse me.



The thing you're looking for. I can show you where it is.

Fascinating. A Peredural distortion-- something I would have thought impossible from something so small.

Peredural, Ricardo?

Indeed. My own arrangement of Natural Philosophy uses the Knights of the Round Table to indicate that all disciplines are equal. Each knight describes a set of natural phenomena.



One divides them into categories, in order to think with them, but still, there is but one table, which is God's Creation.

Peredural--initially
I took this as the force that caused an object to fall toward the center of the Earth, but I suspect that it refers to the force that binds the universe together...



Lamorackian,
into which I have classified all studies of animals, reptiles, birds and such; *Borssian*, which has to do with particles, atomies and the like, things too small to be seen...

Galvanic, which is the pure force behind the lightnings, and so on...



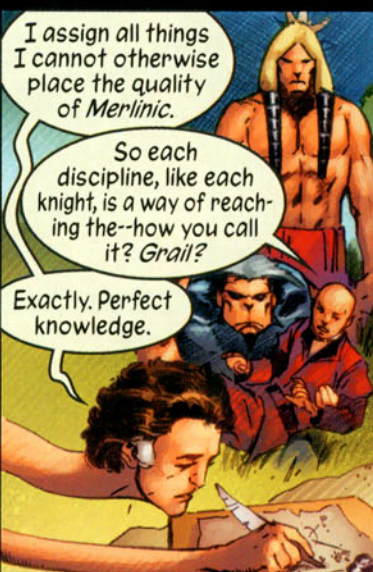
Ben! We'll need the rock wall built just *here*. A yard deep, two yards in height, a dozen yards along.



I assign all things I cannot otherwise place the quality of *Merlinic*.

So each discipline, like each knight, is a way of reaching the--how you call it? *Grail*?

Exactly. Perfect knowledge.

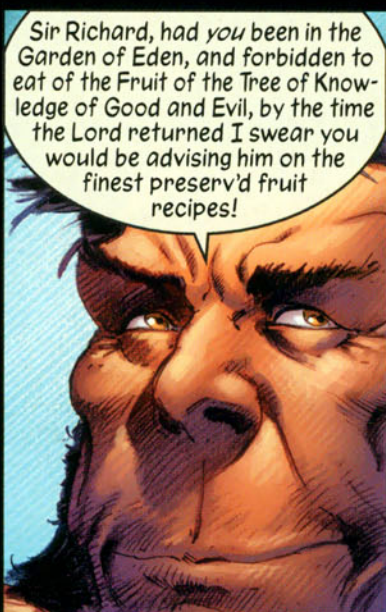


And do you not fear there are things God did not intend man to know?

Frankly, *no*. I just wish *Rojhaz* here were able to tell us more about the Sciences and Alchemies of his day.



Sir Richard, had you been in the Garden of Eden, and forbidden to eat of the Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, by the time the Lord returned I swear you would be advising him on the finest preserv'd fruit recipes!



Well, as I once told *Fury*... Where *is* *Fury*?

He said he was going to be gone for several days. Something about the third ship.



Ah. As I once told *Fury*, God gave us eyes to see, and hands to grasp, and minds to understand his creation.

And perhaps--with God's grace--to save it.



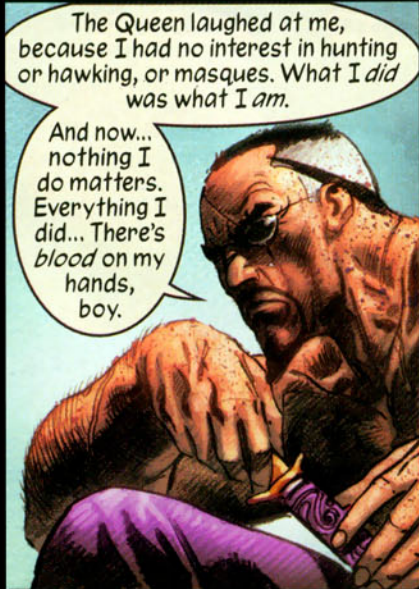




But I had skill on the battlefield, and it was noticed. I found warfare *easy*. Open warfare, and secret wars.

One day I looked about me, and I had a fine house, and beautiful gardens. One day I was knighted by the Queen...

James'll have given my house to one of his favourites by now.



The Queen laughed at me, because I had no interest in hunting or hawking, or masques. What I *did* was what I *am*.

And now... nothing I do matters. Everything I did... There's *blood* on my hands, boy.



Reed says that God made a thousand, thousand worlds, each like this one, only different.

I hope there's one of them in which I chose to walk another path. But I fear that in any universe my path will be marked with blood.



Reed seeks to save the world. I no longer care if it lives or dies.

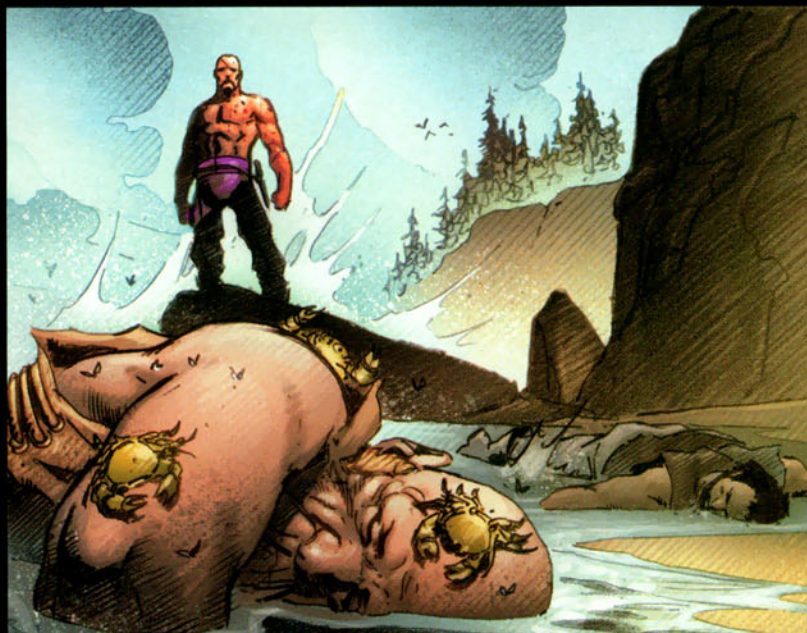
You want to *kill* me, boy? Well, go on. Slit my throat. Take my head back to James and he'll pay you handsomely--with a title, if not with cash.

I'll not fight. I'm done.



Boy?

Peter?



The coronation was a marvelous affair. James met many people, and made many promises.

He is the first man to rule over both England and Scotland. Given the English defeat of the Irish and the Spanish forces at Kinsale last Christmas, it is not inconceivable that he, or his son, might rule Ireland too.



One day...

Hello, Jimmy. I thought it was time I dropped by to have a word.

Who's there?

Just a devil in the dark, Jimmy.

I often think it must be a terrible thing to be a king. Always having to be afraid of a knife in the back.

Sure, and wouldn't a man be anything else, if he could?



You can't hide, if you're a king, Jimmy. Not if you want to stay King.



You should have kept Fury happy, Jimmy. You did not treat him well. I think that if I hear that anything has happened to Fury, I shall be back to discuss the matter, and I will not be pleased, Jimmy.

Not pleased at all.



Are you going to kill me?

Now, what sort of a devil would I be if I did that, on tonight of all nights?

But I could do.

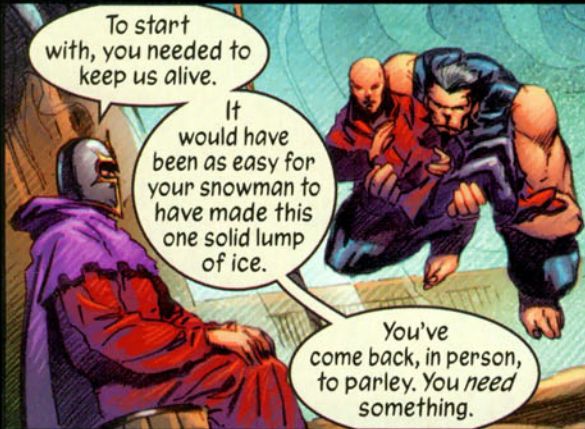


Any time I want. And you ought to remember that.

Better to be a beggar than a king, eh Jimmy?

And one other thing. Keep your sticky fingers off Ireland.







You cannot expect us to go along with this. It's madness.

Yes. He did.

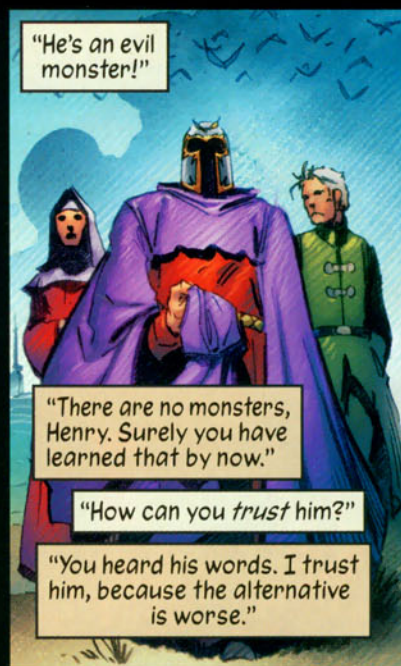
He killed our kind. He tried to kill me.



He burned those who, like yourself, could not pass for human.

What did he do with the others?

A few of them have stayed in his employ. As for the rest, nobody knows.



"He's an evil monster!"

"There are no monsters, Henry. Surely you have learned that by now."

"How can you trust him?"

"You heard his words. I trust him, because the alternative is worse."

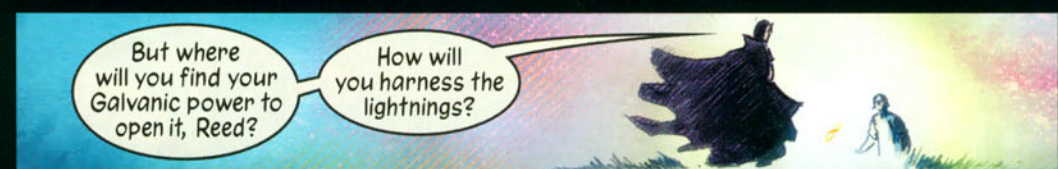


...there would have been a device to affect--to grasp--the temporal rip. A *key*, as it were, before the Galvanic energies forced it *open*.

The question is whether *you* could be our *key*. Can you move it, shape it, hold it?



It would appear so.

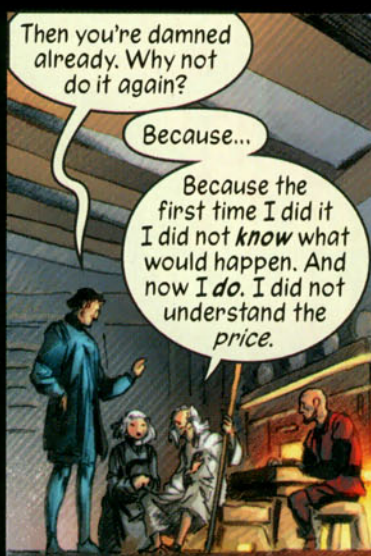


But where will you find your Galvanic power to open it, Reed?

How will you harness the lightnings?



I will not!
Though
God Himself
demanded it,
I will not!
You've
damned me
once...



Then you're damned
already. Why not
do it again?

Because...

Because the
first time I did it
I did not *know* what
would happen. And
now I *do*. I did not
understand the
price.



Your
soul?

The *price*
is I spend every
waking moment
remembering what
it was like to
be him.

Or
drinking
to try to
forget.



Do you think...do you think
if I were to become *him* again, that
I would ever let myself change back
into *this*?



Donal. Is he wiser
than you?

Is he wiser than
you?

Wh-
what?

Aye. His mind--
it's like a silver fish in
a clear brook. Every-
thing is simple for
him...

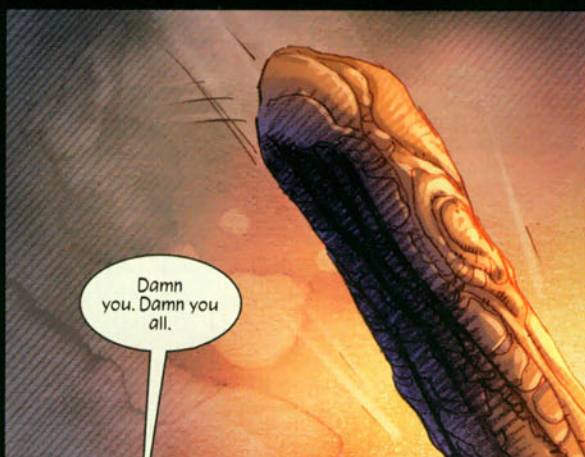


Then
why don't
you let *him*
decide?



You
were listening
to me, weren't
you?

I told
you I
was.



Damn
you. Damn you
all.





Now. We'll only bring those of us who are essential across the river to the marshes. I want everyone else to stay here in the village. Stay indoors.

There are...energies... that may be released in what we are going to do that will be dangerous...

Several of you will be with me. And Roj haz will need to be...



Roj haz?



Where in Hades is Roj haz?

I thought he was here. I cannot... I do not know.



Hey! Girl!

You!



Virginia. Do you know where Roj haz is?

Probably across the river. Where the Indians used to be.

Can you find him?

Not if he doesn't want to be found. He knows the countryside better than any of us.



We need him. Without him, your colony is dead. So is your father. And the world. We have to find him.

You promise not to hurt him?

I promise. In England's name, I swear.



I give you my word, Virginia. The word of a gentleman. Will you help me find him?







This is my country. They need me.

I can't leave them.

We don't have to make the same mistakes again. We're here at the birth of a nation...of a dream.

Nobody has to die.

We can work together to protect them. My people.

One girl, currently in the form of a hound, and a handful of settlers? Your people?

They're America. One day they'll be America. And I...I'll make them proud to be Americans.

If you don't return to your own time, there won't be *anything!*

Don't you understand?

I... I know you, Fury. I know *all* those people who have come to Roanoke.

I knew you all, a long time ago. I remember *Reed*, and *Sue* and *Javier*, and *all* of them. I...remember...

...you people...I've known you for a long time...

Look. You say you knew me--someone like me. In another time. In another world. Tell me--would that *other* Nicholas Fury *betray* you? Would he *lie* to you?

Think about it.

Rojhaz... come down, and we can talk about this.

I won't hurt you.

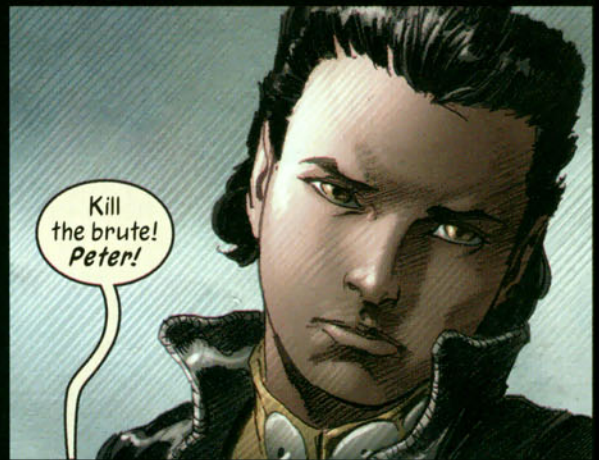
No closer.

I...

I'll come down.









Reed!
Can you--hear
me?

I brought
you--Rojhaz. Make
it--happen.

Whatever
you're--going to do--
do it *now*...



We can't
leave Fury out
there!

How *else* are we going
to get Rojhaz through the
gate? Carry him
ourselves?

But
it would
mean Fury's
death...



Were you not
listening? This is what
he wants.

Enrique.
Thor. You heard
him: *Make it
happen.*



It has
began.

Now, Sir
Thor, channel the
lightning.



Just--
a few--more--
steps--

Only--
a--few--more--
steps...

Cover
your
eyes!



Peter! Get
down!



THERE IS A NOISE THEN, SO LOUD
IT FILLS THE WORLD. THE SOUND
OF A UNIVERSE SCREAMING IN PAIN.
THE SOUND OF A WORLD DYING.

AND AFTER
THAT, SILENCE.

SO. IT IS
OVER.

I FEEL TIME
RECONFIGURE
ITSELF.

THE COLONY AT ROANOKE SIMPLY STARVES,
THEIR FIRST WINTER IN THE HARSH NEW
CONTINENT. A HANDFUL OF SURVIVORS ARE
RESCUED BY THE NATIVES.

VIRGINIA DARE WILL DIE IN THE FORM OF
A WHITE DEER, HER OWN NAME ON HER
LIPS AS SHE TRANSFORMS FOR THE FINAL
TIME, NEVER NOW TO BECOME QUEEN OF
ANYTHING...



TIME HEALS,
AND IS HEALED.

ALL WILL COME INTO EXISTENCE
IN ITS PROPER TIME. ONE SMALL
POSSIBILITY HAS ENDED, THAT
EVERYTHING ELSE MAY EXIST.

EVERYTHING I DID, I DID FOR
GOOD REASON. AND YET...

AND YET...

IF THIS IS RIGHT, WHY
DO I FEEL SO...EMPTY?





WHAT YOU
FEEL, UATU, IS
SHAME.

I DID...
I DID EVERYTHING
I WAS REQUIRED
TO DO.



YOU DID.
AND YOU DID
IT WELL.

STILL,
AS WE WATCH
THE ENTIRETY OF
CREATION FOR THE
REST OF TIME,
OUR SHAME
WILL ALWAYS
LINGER.

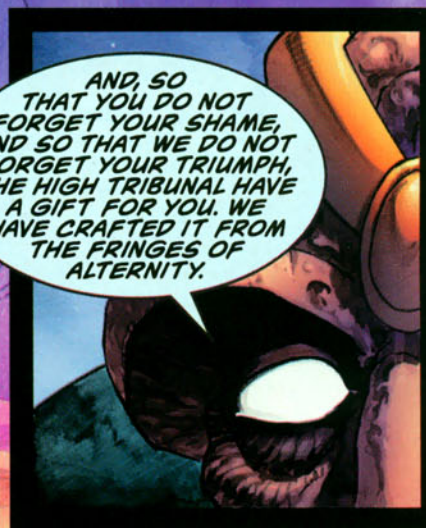
WE
MEDDLED,
FOR SELFISH
REASONS.

BUT IF I
HAD NOT INTERFERED...
THEY COULD NEVER HAVE
MENDED IT THEMSELVES.
COULD THEY?



WE WILL
NEVER KNOW,
IKOR'S CHILD.
WILL WE?

ALL IS
NOW WELL. THE
UNIVERSES CON-
TINUE. AS MUCH AS
WE ARE SHAMED
BY YOU, WE ARE
PROUD OF
YOU.



AND, SO
THAT YOU DO NOT
FORGET YOUR SHAME,
AND SO THAT WE DO NOT
FORGET YOUR TRIUMPH,
THE HIGH TRIBUNAL HAVE
A GIFT FOR YOU. WE
HAVE CRAFTED IT FROM
THE FRINGES OF
ALTERNITY.



IT IS
SMALL. KEEP IT
SAFELY.

IT IS...
BEAUTIFUL.



I...I SHALL
CARRY THIS IN
MY HEART.

IT IS
OOD. WATCH
WELL. WATCH
WISELY.



I PLACE THE HIGH
TRIBUNAL'S GIFT
INSIDE ME; A TINY
UNIVERSE...

AND, WITH MOUNTING FASCINATION...

...ONCE MORE...

...I BEGIN TO WATCH.

"So, we are still here.

"Nothing has changed..."

...It would seem the universe did not end.

Perhaps not. But if it *had* ended...if a whole new universe had come to take its place...

How would we ever know?

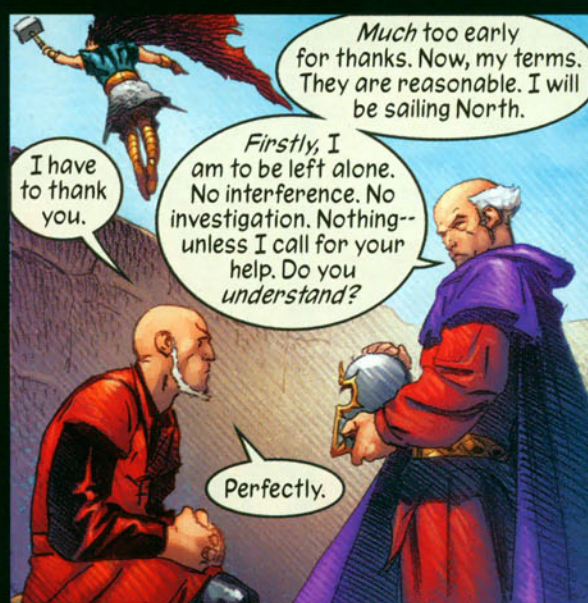
The philosophers can argue such questions until the end of time. It matters not.

Stephen is silent.

Take his head. Bury it with his body. Treat it with honour. He died that worlds might live.

It is, finally, time for me to go home.

Good-bye.





"My own suggestion, Javier, would be to declare the colony independent of England. Your people can guard the coast."

"James is a long way away; he lacks the coffers or the will to prosecute a war so far from home."



And will you be their King, Reed?

I do not believe that there will be any more call for Kings or for Queens.

I shall propose to Master Dare that we make the colony a place where people--people of all shapes and talents--can prosper...



Peter?

Virginia?

It is you! Did you see where Master Banner went? He was trying to protect me from the strange light...

I think I fell asleep.



I don't remember. I saw only the light. And then Fury and Roj haz were gone...

Banner will tell James that I stopped him killing Fury. I know he will. I am a dead man if I go home.

My Uncle, my Aunt...



We can get them out of England. Somehow. I know we can. And you can stay with us. Until then.

Stay with me and my father.

I think... I think I would like that...



OW!

That spider. It bit the back of my hand.



Well, it's not the end of the world. I'll put a poultice on it.

Come on, Peter. Let's go home.

FINIS