MARVEL

DC

JLA AVENGERS

BUSIEK • PÉREZ

3 OF 4

JLA/AVENGERS 3 OF 4

BUSIEK • PEREZ WITH SMITH

MARVEL COMICS • DC COMICS

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JLA/Avengers

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A Dangerous Game, A Desperate Gambit...

A powerful and dangerous hunter stalks reality.

Krona, immortal scientist and renegade, seeks to learn the truth of all creation. His investigations, however, tear apart the fabric of universes, destroying them. Cast out of his home reality, he wanders the multiverse, leaving destruction in his path.

In one universe, he encounters the Grandmaster, a cosmic game-player with enough power to check him, if only temporarily. The Grandmaster tells Krona he knows of a being that lived through the creation of his universe and knows what came before -- Galactus, devourer of worlds. Krona agrees to play a game. If he wins, Galactus's knowledge will be his -- even if his quest destroys the Grandmaster's universe. If he loses, he will leave in peace.

The Grandmaster, working with Metron of the New Gods, manipulates the champions of two worlds -- the Avengers, from his own reality, and the JLA, from Krona's reality -- into a race to recover twelve items of cosmic power. Krona swaps champions, however, so the Avengers fight for him, while the JLA fight for the Grandmaster.

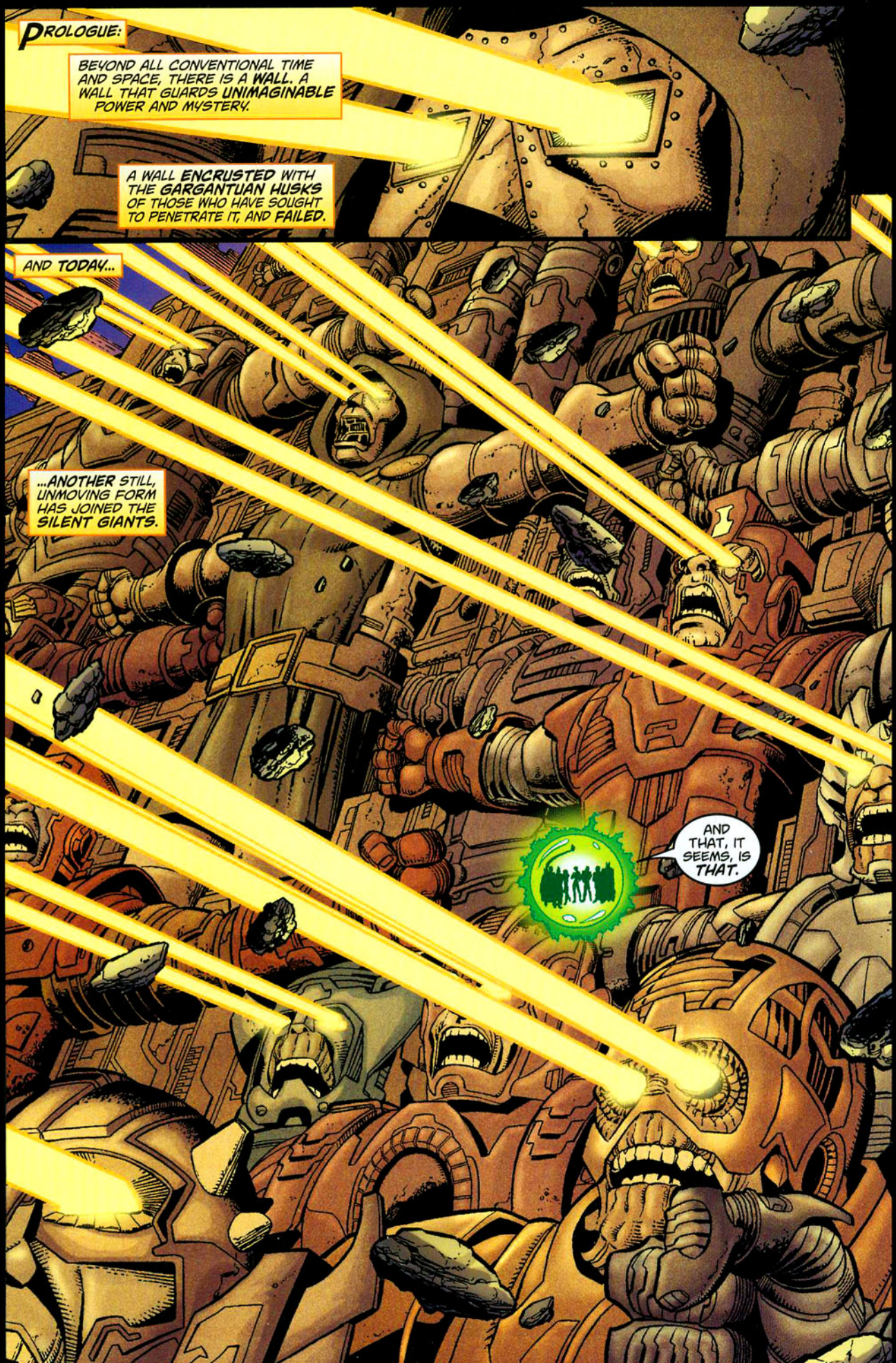
During the competition, each team sees the other's world, and members -- notably Superman and Captain America -- react badly. Superman sees the Avengers' world as a sorry shambles where the heroes don't try hard enough. Captain America sees the JLA's world as a totalitarian state where super-humans rule.

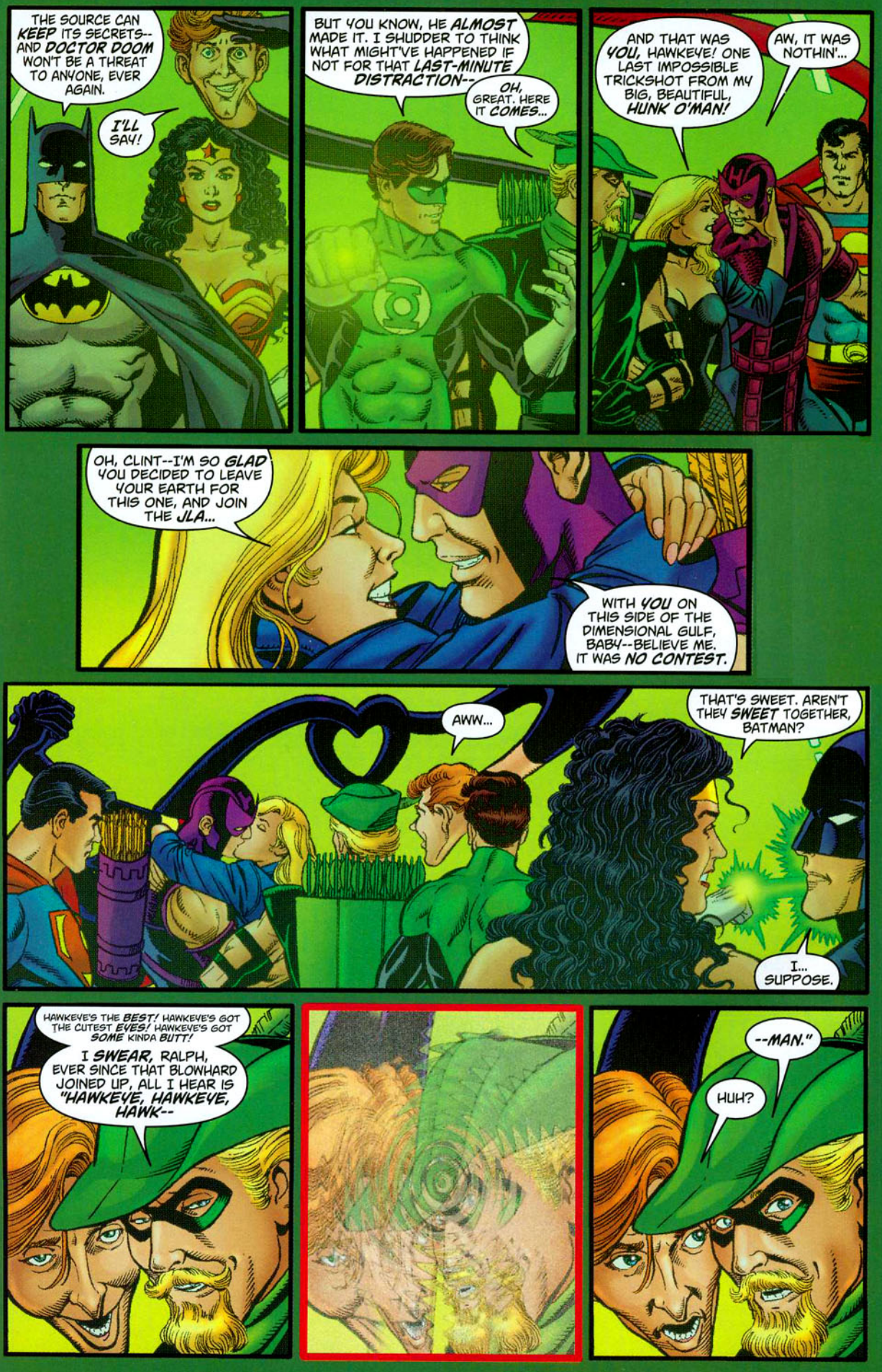
In addition, Batman convinces Captain America to break away from the competition and seek the truth behind it. They discover the existence of the game, and the stakes.

Between them, they arrange for the JLA to win, safeguarding the Avengers' universe. But Krona lashes out, attacking the Grandmaster, summoning Galactus and beginning to wrest his secrets from him.

It's then that the Grandmaster reveals his true purpose -- the game was just a feint, to assemble the items of power under Krona's nose. Tapping into them, he unleashes their power . . . and everything changes...

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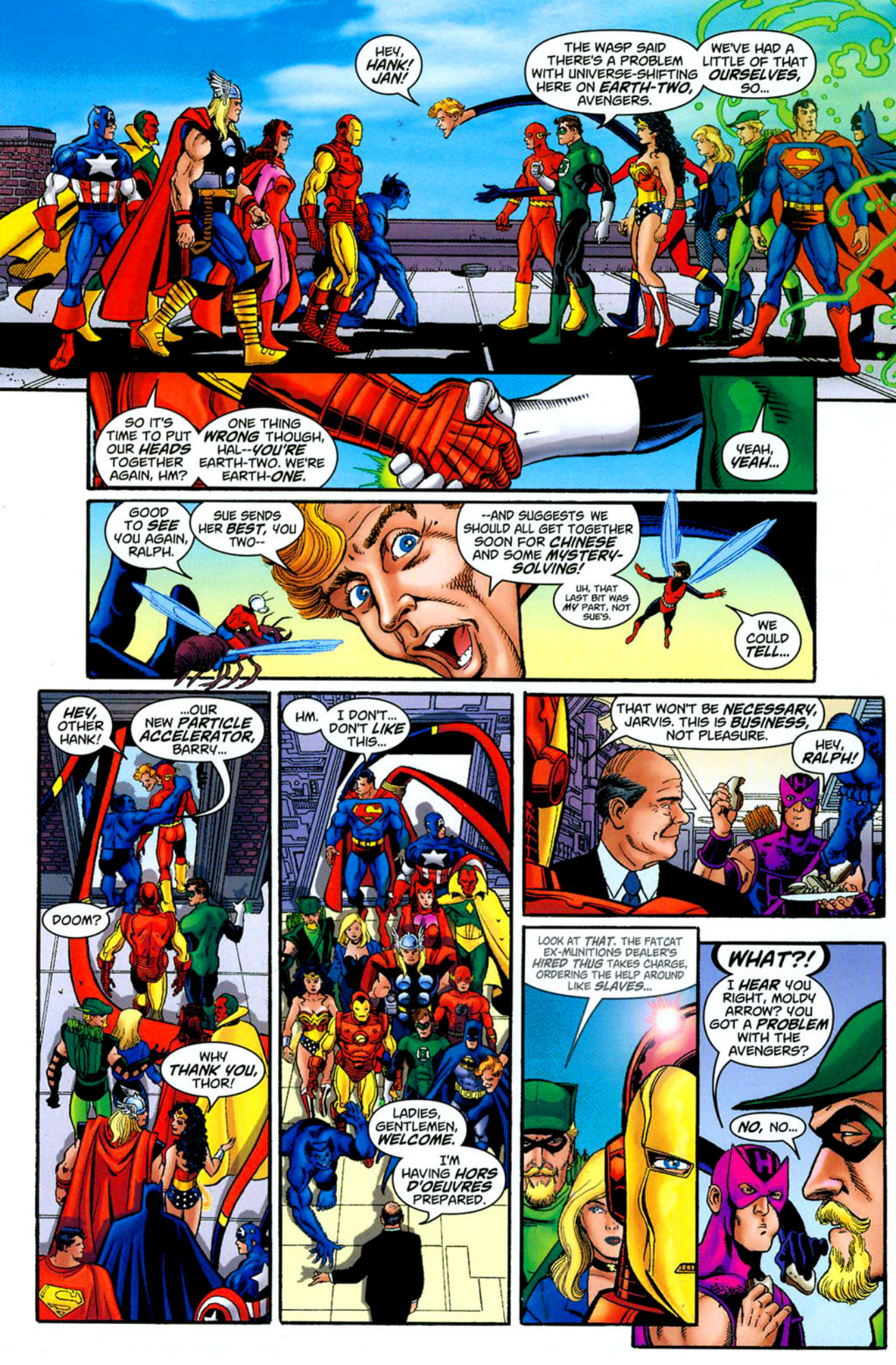

PROLOGUE:
BEYOND ALL CONVENTIONAL TIME AND SPACE, THERE IS A WALL. A WALL THAT GUARDS UNIMAGINABLE POWER AND MYSTERY.
A WALL ENCRUSTED WITH THE GARGANTUAN HUSKS OF THOSE WHO HAVE SOUGHT TO PENETRATE IT, AND FAILED.
AND TODAY...
...ANOTHER STILL, UNMOVING FORM HAS JOINED THE SILENT GIANTS.
AND THAT, IT SEEMS, IS THAT.


THE SOURCE CAN KEEP ITS SECRETS--AND DOCTOR DOOM WON'T BE A THREAT TO ANYONE, EVER AGAIN.
I'LL SAY!
BUT YOU KNOW, HE ALMOST MADE IT. I SHUDDER TO THINK WHAT MIGHT'VE HAPPENED IF NOT FOR THAT LAST-MINUTE DISTRACTION--
OH, GREAT. HERE IT COMES...
AND THAT WAS YOU, HAWKEYE! ONE LAST IMPOSSIBLE TRICKSHOT FROM MY BIG, BEAUTIFUL, HUNK O'MAN!
AW, IT WAS NOTHIN'...
OH, CLINT--I'M SO GLAD YOU DECIDED TO LEAVE YOUR EARTH FOR THIS ONE, AND JOIN THE JLA...
WITH YOU ON THIS SIDE OF THE DIMENSIONAL GULF, BABY--BELIEVE ME. IT WAS NO CONTEST.
AWW...
THAT'S SWEET. AREN'T THEY SWEET TOGETHER, BATMAN?
I... SUPPOSE.
HAWKEYE'S THE BEST! HAWKEYE'S GOT THE CUTEST EYES! HAWKEYE'S GOT SOME KINDA BUTT!
I SWEAR, RALPH, EVER SINCE THAT BLOWHARD JOINED UP, ALL I HEAR IS "HAWKEYE, HAWKEYE, HAWK--
--MAN."
HUH?


HM?
GREEN ARROW, WHAT...?
HAWKMAN ISN'T EVEN HERE, OLLIE.
WHAT? NO, WHAT I MEANT TO SAY WAS--
I WAS--I THOUGHT--
HONEY?
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT, G.A. AFTER THAT ONE-IN-A-MILLION SHOT, YOU'RE ENTITLED TO ZONE OUT, IF YOU WANT.
BUT WE'D BETTER HEAD BACK.
YOU GOT IT, BARRY. BACK TO THE JLA SATELLITE--AND THE INTERDIMENSIONAL COMMUNICATOR.
AFTER ALL, DR. DOOM'S NOT FROM OUR UNIVERSE...
...SO WE'VE GOT SOME FRIENDS TO FILL IN...
PROLOGUE ENDS.
And once upon a time...

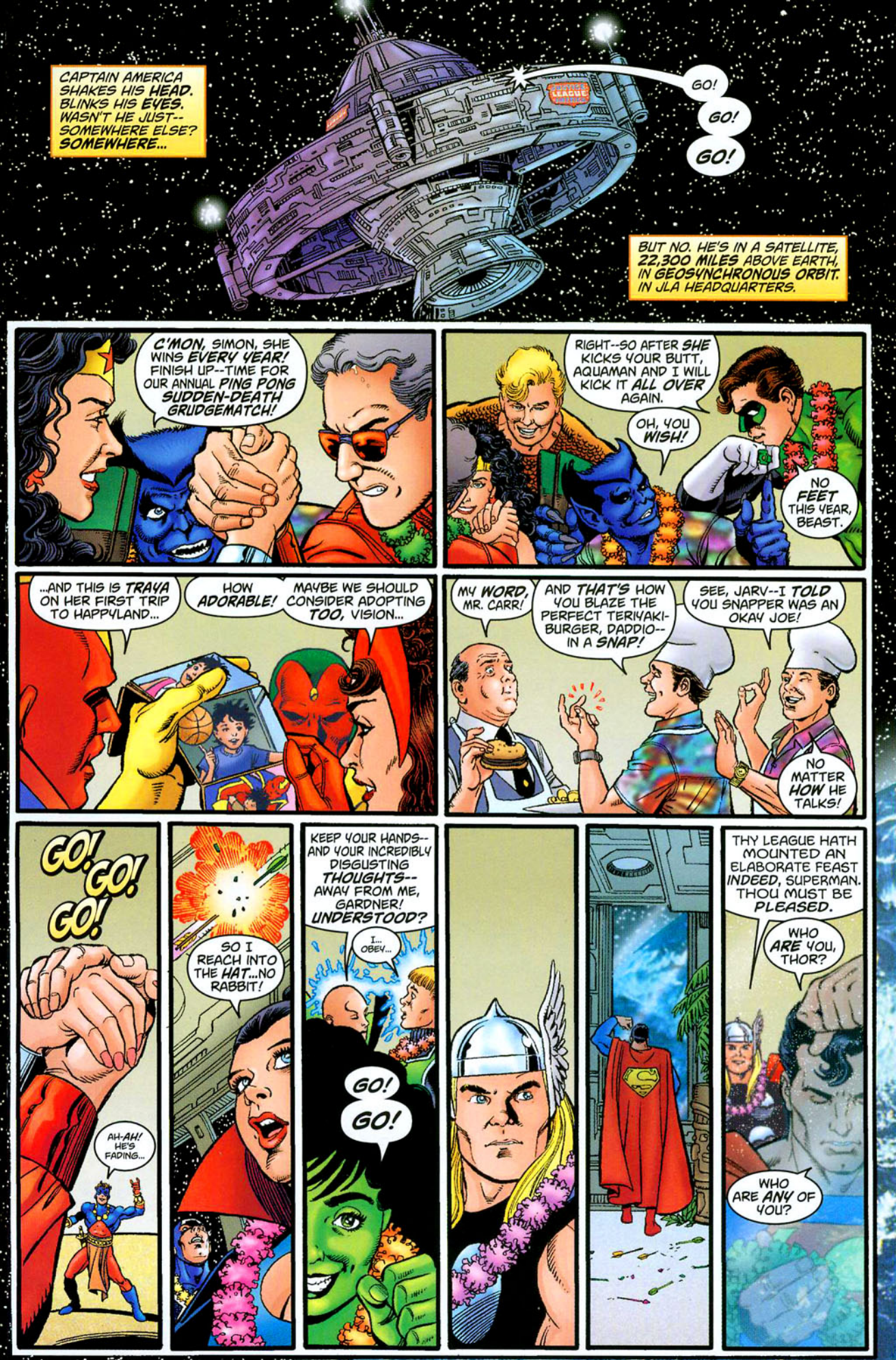

...there were two Universes.
BOOK THREE:
STRANGE ADVENTURES
THE TEAM-UP OF THE MILLENNIUM
STARRING:
THE WORLD'S GREATEST SUPER HEROES:
JLA
AND EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES:
THE AVENGERS


AND WITHIN ONE OF THOSE UNIVERSES: THE ARTIFICIAL, FLOATING ISLAND KNOWN AS HYDROBASE, HOME TO THIS EARTH'S GREATEST PROTECTORS...
WELL, THAT'S THAT.
BRAINIAC WON'T BE TRYING TO ENSLAVE US AS HIS FOOTSOLDIERS AGAIN ANY TIME SOON, I'D BET.
AND I ASK YOU, IRON MAN--
-- IS THAT EXCEDRIN HEADACHE NUMBER GOOGOLPLEX, OR WHAT?
IT'S JUST HIS SHIP, BEAST.
STILL...
I DON'T LIKE THIS.
EH? WE HAVE WON A MOST MIGHTY VICTORY, CAPTAIN AMERICA. HOW COULD--
IT'S NOT THAT, THOR.
IT'S NOT THE BATTLE, NOT THE OUTCOME--
--IT'S SOMETHING I CAN'T DESCRIBE, SOMETHING THAT JUST FEELS WRONG.
SOMETHING OUT OF KILTER...
WELL, WHATEVER'S GOING ON, CAP, IT'S OBVIOUSLY INTERDIMENSIONAL TROUBLE.
SO I'VE TAKEN THE LIBERTY OF PUTTING IN A CALL TO OUR OLD FRIENDS--
--IN THE JUSTICE LEAGUE!


HEY, HANK! JAN!
THE WASP SAID THERE'S A PROBLEM WITH UNIVERSE-SHIFTING HERE ON EARTH-TWO, AVENGERS.
WE'VE HAD A LITTLE OF THAT OURSELVES, SO...
SO IT'S TIME TO PUT OUR HEADS TOGETHER AGAIN, HM?
ONE THING WRONG THOUGH, HAL--YOU'RE EARTH-TWO. WE'RE EARTH-ONE.
YEAH, YEAH...
GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN, RALPH.
SUE SENDS HER BEST, YOU TWO--
--AND SUGGESTS WE SHOULD ALL GET TOGETHER SOON FOR CHINESE AND SOME MYSTERY-SOLVING!
UH, THAT LAST BIT WAS MY PART, NOT SUE'S.
WE COULD TELL...
HEY, OTHER HANK!
...OUR NEW PARTICLE ACCELERATOR, BARRY...
DOOM?
WHY THANK YOU, THOR!
HM.
I DON'T... DON'T LIKE THIS...
LADIES, GENTLEMEN, WELCOME.
I'M HAVING HORS D'OEUVRES PREPARED.
THAT WON'T BE NECESSARY, JARVIS. THIS IS BUSINESS, NOT PLEASURE.
HEY, RALPH!
LOOK AT THAT. THE FATCAT EX-MUNITIONS DEALER'S HIRED THUG TAKES CHARGE, ORDERING THE HELP AROUND LIKE SLAVES...
WHAT?!
I HEAR YOU RIGHT, MOLDY ARROW? YOU GOT A PROBLEM WITH THE AVENGERS?
NO, NO...


...SO YOU HAVE LOWER STANDARDS THAN THE JLA, SO WHAT?
YEAH, NOBODY'S PERFECT. THE LEAGUE LET A CRUMMY ARCHER LIKE YOU IN...
WHAT?!
YOU THINK YOU'RE A BETTER ARCHER THAN ME?
ANY TIME, ANY PLACE, ANY HOW, FEATHERHEAD.
OH, NOT THIS AGAIN.
CARE TO PUT ANY MONEY...
YOU'RE ON!
GUYS...
SOMETHING WRONG, STEVE? YOU SEEM DISTANT.
I DON'T...
...I DON'T KNOW.
I'D THINK THESE CROSS-UNIVERSE TEAM-UPS WOULD BE OLD HAT FOR YOU--YOU'VE DONE THEM ALL THE WAY BACK TO THE JSA AND THE INVADERS--
HAVE I?
I DON'T...
NO.
NO, THIS IS WRONG. THIS SHOULDN'T BE HAPPENING. WE SHOULDN'T BE AT HYDROBASE, SHOULDN'T BE MEETING WITH--
CAP? STEVE?
ARE YOU...
...ALL RIGHT, CAP?


WE SHOULDN'T BE AT HYDROBA--
HM? JAN?
UH, WE'RE NOT AT HYDROBASE, CAP, DON'T YOU REMEMBER?
OUR ANNUAL GET-TOGETHER WITH THE JLA IS AT THEIR SATELLITE THIS YEAR...
...AND RALPH AND I DECIDED WE SHOULD HAVE A LUAU THEME!
NO SWEAT, BLINDEYE!
MATCH THAT, BEARDO!
TELL 'IM, RICKSTER!


CAPTAIN AMERICA SHAKES HIS HEAD. BLINKS HIS EYES. WASN'T HE JUST-- SOMEWHERE ELSE? SOMEWHERE...
GO!
GO!
GO!
BUT NO. HE'S IN A SATELLITE, 22,300 MILES ABOVE EARTH, IN GEOSYNCHRONOUS ORBIT. IN JLA HEADQUARTERS.
C'MON, SIMON, SHE WINS EVERY YEAR! FINISH UP--TIME FOR OUR ANNUAL PING PONG SUDDEN-DEATH GRUDGEMATCH!
RIGHT--SO AFTER SHE KICKS YOUR BUTT, AQUAMAN AND I WILL KICK IT ALL OVER AGAIN.
OH, YOU WISH!
NO FEET THIS YEAR, BEAST.
...AND THIS IS TRAYA ON HER FIRST TRIP TO HAPPYLAND...
HOW ADORABLE!
MAYBE WE SHOULD CONSIDER ADOPTING TOO, VISION...
MY WORD, MR. CARR!
AND THAT'S HOW YOU BLAZE THE PERFECT TERIYAKI-BURGER, DADDIO-- IN A SNAP!
SEE, JARV--I TOLD YOU SNAPPER WAS AN OKAY JOE!
NO MATTER HOW HE TALKS!
GO! GO! GO!
AH-AH! HE'S FADING...
SO I REACH INTO THE HAT...NO RABBIT!
KEEP YOUR HANDS-- AND YOUR INCREDIBLY DISGUSTING THOUGHTS-- AWAY FROM ME, GARDNER! UNDERSTOOD?
I... OBEY...
GO! GO!
THY LEAGUE HATH MOUNTED AN ELABORATE FEAST INDEED, SUPERMAN. THOU MUST BE PLEASED.
WHO ARE YOU, THOR?
WHO ARE ANY OF YOU?

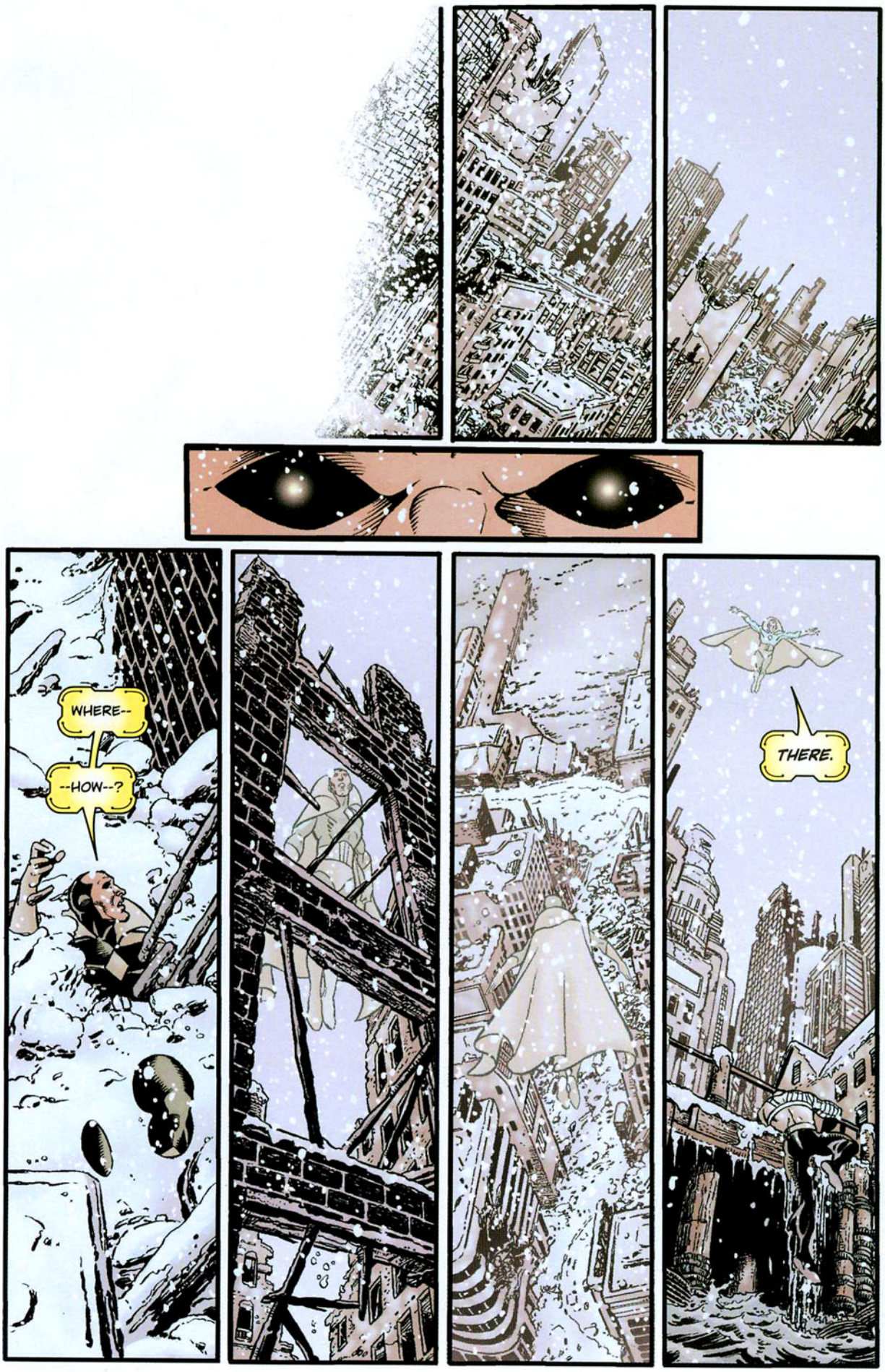

I BEG THY PARDON?
YOU'RE LIKE BLACK HOLES--I CAN FEEL GRAVITY WARPING AROUND YOU, THE AIR IONIZING, LIKE A STORM'S COMING--
I THINK--I REMEMBER BEATING YOU, JUST BARELY--AND THEN--
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
EXCUSE ME, SUPERMAN?
I WAS INVITED HERE, JUST AS WE ALL W--
GREAT HRONMEER, WHAT--?!
DON'T YOU FEEL IT? DON'T YOU SEE?
REALITY KEEPS CHANGING! IT JUST CHANGED AGAIN, I THINK! WE WERE IN SPACE--!
IT'S WRONG! IT'S ALL WRONG!
CAP, SETTLE DOWN, WE'RE ALL FRIENDS HERE...
GET AWAY FROM ME, GREEN LANTERN! YOU'RE NOT MY FRIEND--NONE OF YOU ARE--
LANTERN? FLASH?
THOSE--THOSE WERE THE RIGHT ONES--THE REAL ONES--
BUT WHY DO I KNOW THAT? HOW COULD--


GREAT KRYPTON.
DOES HE FEEL IT TOO?
WHAT?!
CAP, TAKE A BREATH. I WANT YOU TO BREATHE SLOWLY.
I WANT YOU TO THINK BACK.
BUT--
CCP
THE LEAGUE ARE OUR FRIENDS. OLD FRIENDS. WE'VE BEEN DOING THIS FOR YEARS...
REMEMBER WHEN AMAZO AND ULTRON-4 BANDED TOGETHER?
"THEY TRAPPED BOTH TEAMS IN THEIR HEADQUARTERS--
"--AND WE HAD TO SWAP WORLDS TO ESCAPE, AND TRACK THEM DOWN?


"REMEMBER WHEN THE GRIM REAPER AND THE KEY HAD THE SERPENT CROWN?
"WHEN THEY KIDNAPPED MANTIS AND ZATANNA--
"--TRIED TO USE THEM AS SOME SORT OF KEY TO CELESTIAL POWER?
"REMEMBER KANG AND THE LORD OF TIME?
"BATTLING EACH OTHER? THE QUEST FOR THE CHRONAL EGG?"
"I...REMEMBER FIGHTING... A QUEST..."

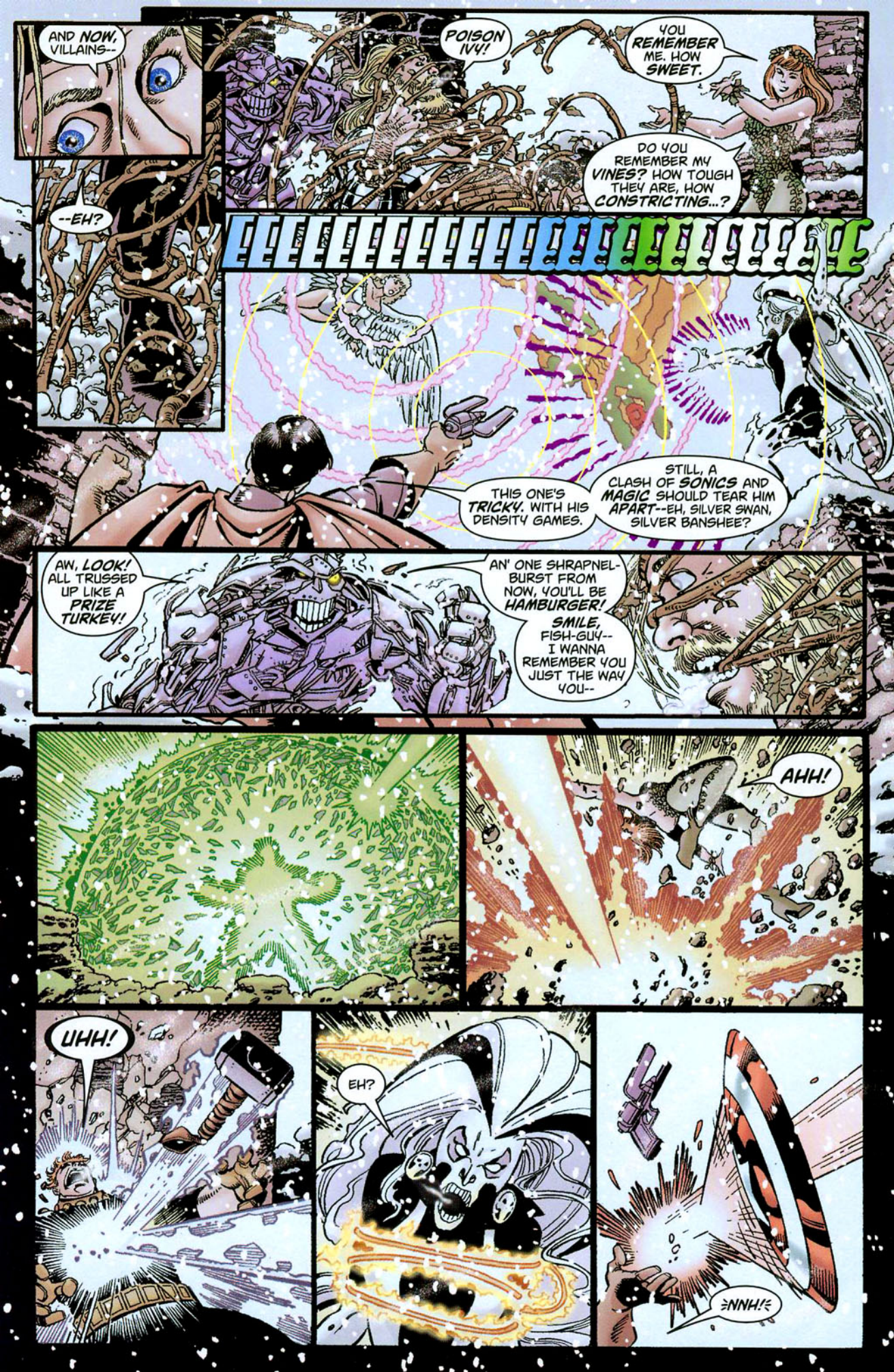

BELOW, IN THE AVENGERS' COMM-ROOM.
WHATEVER'S GOING ON, IT'S NOT THE MASTERS OF EVIL.
WARNING!
THEY'RE STILL SECURE IN THE DIMENSIONAL VOID.
AND MOST OF OUR OTHER NOTEWORTHY ENEMIES ARE ACCOUNTED FOR....
BREEEeet BREEEeet BREEEeet BREEEeet B
HM?
IRON MAN! BATMAN! GET UP HERE-- NOW!
WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S GOING--
CAP--
IT'S YOU! YOU'RE THE WORST OF THEM! BENDING REALITY, FOULING THE AIR--
YOU'RE THE ONE!
ME?!
KAL...
ADMIT IT, "CAPTAIN AMERICA!" DROP YOUR PHONY, SANCTIMONIOUS POSE AND TELL US THE TRUTH--
--OR I'LL SHAKE IT OUT OF YOU!
HUH? WHAT'S WITH THEM?
CAN'T WE ALL JUST GET ALONG?
OH BOY...
COME ON, THEN! DO YOUR WORST! YOU'RE JUST ONE MORE OVER-MUSCLED HIGH-AND-MIGHTY PRETTY BOY!
I'VE BEATEN DOZENS LIKE YOU IN MY TIME!
?

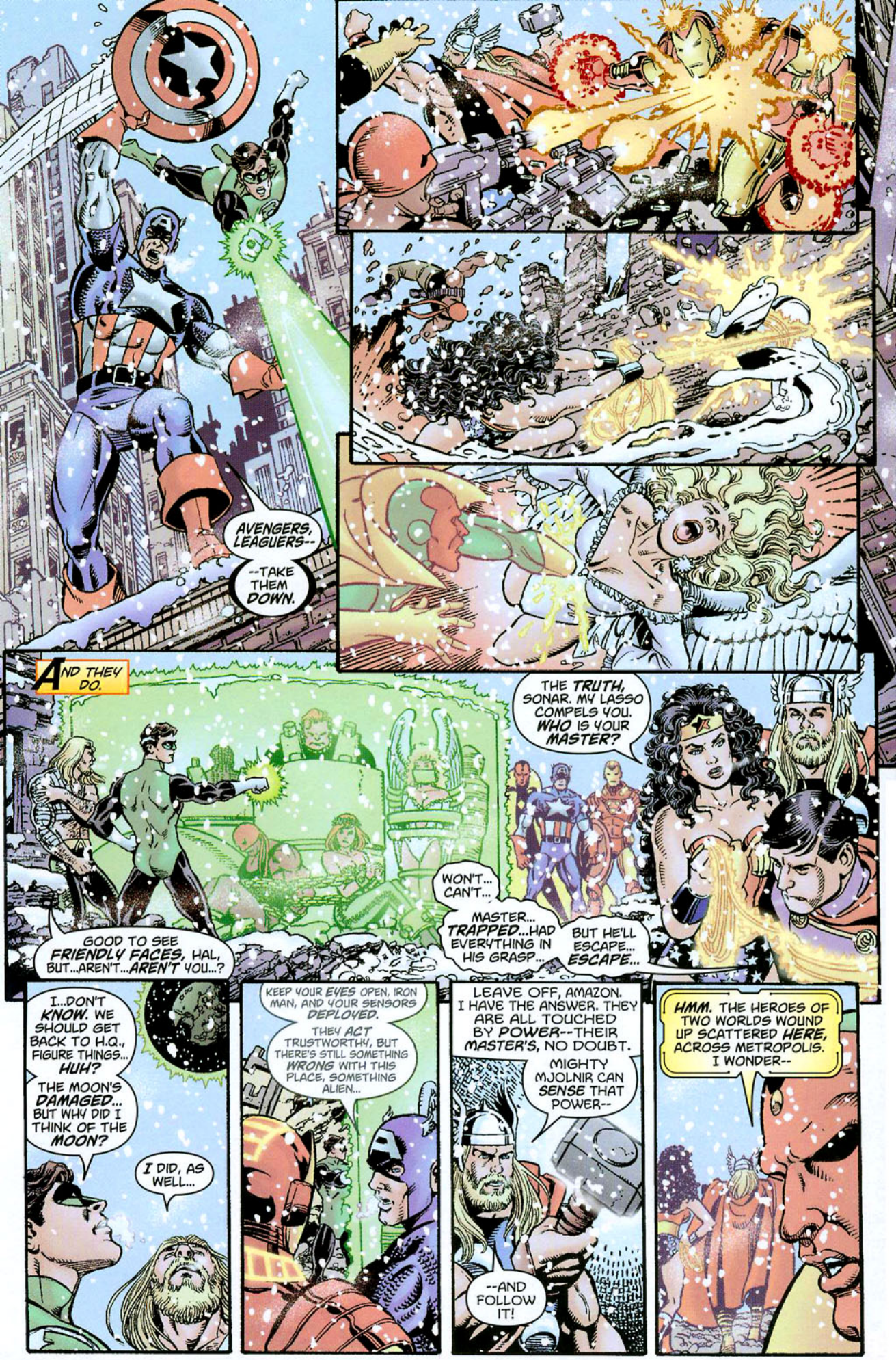

AND WITH AN IRRATIONAL SNARL, A VIOLENT HEAVE OF TWO PAIRS OF SHOULDERS, THEY SHRUG OFF THOSE RESTRAINING THEM--
I'LL--
YOU--
OH, GOD.
AND THEY COME TOGETHER IN A SOUNDLESS IMPACT-- A CLAP OF SILENCE THAT OVERWHELMS THE SENSES--
--BLINDING, DEAFENING, NUMBING--
AND THEN EVERYTHING--
--GOES--


WHERE--
--HOW--?
THERE.


AQUAMAN.
YOU! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE, AVENGER? TO THE REST OF THE JLA? TO THE WORLD?!
CONTROL YOURSELF. SEA KING. I AM NOT YOUR ENEMY. HOWEVER, IF YOU ASSAULT ME, I WILL TAKE STEPS TO--
--DEFEND MYSELF--
DAMN YOU, TELL ME!
TELL ME, OR I'LL--
WAIT. MY HAND.
SHOULD I...HAVE TWO HANDS?
I REMEMBER... I REMEMBER A BATTLE. OR...WAS IT A PARTY?
MY MEMORY IS SIMILARLY CLOUDED, I REGRET TO SAY.
BUT PERHAPS, SINCE WE DO NOT KNOW OUR CIRCUMSTANCES, WE SHOULD REFRAIN FROM KILLING ONE ANOTHER UNTIL WE KNOW MORE.
...
POINT TAKEN. VERY WELL, LET'S FIND OUT WHERE WE ARE...
...AND THEN MAYBE WE CAN FIGURE OUT WHY.
BE AWARE-- THERE ARE PEOPLE WATCHING US. I CAN INCREASE MY AUDIO SENSITIVITY--
--AND HEAR THEM IN THE RUINED BUILDINGS, THEIR BREATH FAST AND SHALLOW.
AT A GUESS, THEY ARE TERRIFIED.
OF US? OR THE STATE OF THE WORLD? NEVER MIND. WE CAN'T ANSWER THAT UNTIL WE KNOW...
...AH.
THAT ANSWERS THAT, AT LEAST. THIS IS METROPOLIS. MY WORLD.
THEN-- HOW DID THIS HAPPEN? WHY?
AQUAMAN...


...TAKE COVER!
THIS AIN'T YOUR WORLD, HEROES! NOT NO MORE!
THE MASTER SAID YOU'D TURN UP--
--AN' THE MASTER SAID YOU GOTTA DIE!
I HAVE INCREASED MY DENSITY TO SHIELD YOU FROM THEIR ATTACKS.
BUT WE ARE BADLY OUTNUMBERED. LOGIC WOULD SUGGEST WE RETREAT, BUT--
RUN?
DO AS YOU LIKE, VISION-- BUT THE KING OF ATLANTIS DOES NOT RUN!
THESE MISCREANTS HAVE A MASTER--
UHH!
--AND I WANT THAT MASTER'S NAME!
PRECISELY WHAT I WAS LEADING UP TO, AQUAMAN.
HEY!

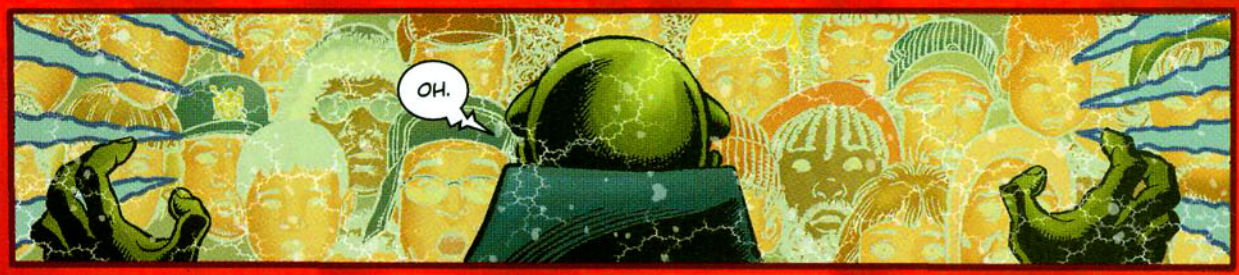

AND NOW, VILLAINS--
--EH?
POISON IVY!
YOU REMEMBER ME. HOW SWEET.
DO YOU REMEMBER MY VINES? HOW TOUGH THEY ARE, HOW CONSTRICTING...?
EEEE


AVENGERS, LEAGUERS--
--TAKE THEM DOWN.
AND THEY DO.
GOOD TO SEE FRIENDLY FACES, HAL, BUT...AREN'T...AREN'T YOU...?
WON'T... CAN'T...
MASTER... TRAPPED...HAD EVERYTHING IN HIS GRASP...
BUT HE'LL ESCAPE... ESCAPE...
THE TRUTH, SONAR. MY LASSO COMPELS YOU. WHO IS YOUR MASTER?
I...DON'T KNOW. WE SHOULD GET BACK TO H.Q., FIGURE THINGS... HUH?
THE MOON'S DAMAGED... BUT WHY DID I THINK OF THE MOON?
I DID, AS WELL...
KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN, IRON MAN, AND YOUR SENSORS DEPLOYED.
THEY ACT TRUSTWORTHY, BUT THERE'S STILL SOMETHING WRONG WITH THIS PLACE, SOMETHING ALIEN...
LEAVE OFF, AMAZON. I HAVE THE ANSWER. THEY ARE ALL TOUCHED BY POWER--THEIR MASTER'S, NO DOUBT.
MIGHTY MJOLNIR CAN SENSE THAT POWER--
--AND FOLLOW IT!
HMM. THE HEROES OF TWO WORLDS WOUND UP SCATTERED HERE, ACROSS METROPOLIS. I WONDER--


"--IS THE SAME TRUE AT HOME, ON THE AVENGERS' EARTH?"
MOVE, MOVE! WITH THESE EARTHQUAKES, IF THIS FIRE ISN'T OUT IN MINUTES--!
THERE'S A FIELD CLINIC TWO BLOCKS SOUTH, BATMAN! THEY CAN TAKE CARE OF--
I SAW IT, GOLIATH. I'LL GET HER THERE.
GOOD. THEN ONE MORE TRIP SHOULD DO IT.
ON IT, SUPERMAN!
ONLY ONE MORE SET OF EVACUEES IN THIS BLOCK!
WE'LL BE CLEAR IN THREE SECONDS! TWO!
CAN'T UNDERSTAND IT-- WHY AM I SUDDENLY SO SLOW?!
I APPRECIATE... THAT THIS IS DELICATE WORK, SCARLET WITCH. BUT...IF YOU COULD BE...A LITTLE FASTER?
DOING MY BEST, MARTIAN MANHUNTER!


MY APOLOGIES. I HAVE A...PROBLEM WITH FIRE.
IT DIDN'T SHOW, J'ONN. AND WE GOT EVERYONE OUT. THAT'S WHAT COUNTS.
MY--MY LEGS--
HMP. SOMETHING STRANGE WITH THE AIR PRESSURE-- SUNLIGHT FEELS GREASY, ACIDIC-- PEOPLE'S HEARTBEATS ARE TOO FAST--
DAILY BUGLE
SUPERMAN!
YOU WANT SOMETHING, WASP?
UH...JUST THAT THERE'S GOT TO BE SOMEONE BEHIND THIS. THE QUAKES, THE FIRES-- MANHATTAN'S BUILT ON BEDROCK.
IF YOU'LL JOIN THE REST OF US...
FINE. WE'RE IN THE AVENGERS' WORLD. OUR MEMORIES ARE HAZY. BARRY IS THE FLASH, WHICH SEEMS ODD, BUT I'M NOT SURE WHY.
YOU AVENGERS MAY HAVE SIMILAR CONCERNS.
WHAT NEXT?
SUPERMAN, THERE'S NO NEED TO BE SO--
AVENGERS-- HELP US!
THIS DEVASTATION-- IT'S BEEN DAYS!
WHAT CAUSED IT?
WHEN WILL YOU FIX IT?
WORRIED ABOUT MY SISTER-- CAN'T CALL THROUGH TO KEYSTONE--
MARTIAN MANHUNTER--
FLASH--
SUPERMAN! YOU I RECOGNIZE, AT LEAST!
I AM FROM QURAC! I DRIVE A CAB HERE MANY YEARS!
THESE PEOPLE SAY MY HOMELAND DON'T EXIST, CALL ME CRAZY! TELL THEM!
WH--?
HMM. IF THERE'S NO QURAC IN YOUR WORLD, THEN SOME OF THESE PEOPLE ARE FROM MY WORLD. THEY'RE CROSSING OVER.
IF WE FIND THE EPICENTER OF THE QUAKES, WE MIGHT FIND THE MAN BEHIND THEM.
I'D DO A SPEED-SWEEP OF THE CITY, BUT MY POWERS SEEM TO BE FADING. I'LL REST FOR A MINUTE, SEE IF IT HELPS.
HEY, LOOK--
IT'S SNOWING. THAT'LL HELP WITH THE FIRES...


NO! NO, NOT THE SNOW! NOT THE SNOW!
WH--?
YOU DON'T KNOW-- DON'T KNOW WHAT THE SNOW DOES!
LEAGUERS! AVENGERS! THE SKY!
IT'S STARTING!
THE SNOW-- IT BRINGS THE GHOSTS BACK! THE GHOSTS--
THE AIR GOES ELECTRIC.
THE WIND PICKS UP.
IT'S SUDDENLY COLDER, DARKER, AND THERE'S A MURMURING--A MURMURING THAT BUILDS, UNTIL--
HELP US!
PLEASE-- HELP US!
WH-WHAT--?!
THE GHOSTS! THE GHOSTS!
I-IT'S SUPERMAN! BUT HE'S ALL--
PLEASE-- PLEASE!
YOU'RE HEROES! YOU GOTTA-- GOTTA--
NO!
WHAT--
BUT--
DON'T LET THEM TAKE ME! DON'T--DON'T LET--
THIS IS MADNESS! THESE PEOPLE--THEY'LL INJURE THEMSELVES!
J'ONN--REACH OUT MENTALLY! SEE IF ANY OF THESE "GHOSTS" UNDERSTAND WHAT'S GOING ON HERE!
VERY WELL.
I...FEEL THEIR MINDS, BUT THEY ARE THIN...AS IF FAR AWAY, OR...OR...


OH.


WHAT IS IT? WHAT DO YOU KNOW?
QUICKLY, J'ONN! THE STORM'S PICKING UP, AND--
BUT BEFORE HE CAN ANSWER--




FLASH! MAN, AM I GLAD TO SEE YOU! YOU GUYS CAN FIX EVERYTHING, RIGHT?
SURE, LIVED HERE ALL MY LIFE! MAN, I WAS SCARED-- THE GHOSTS COME, PEOPLE VANISH--I THOUGHT I WAS A GONER!
YOU...KNOW ME? YOU'RE FROM METROPOLIS?
BUT HERE I AM, SAFE AND SOUND. SNOW'S GONE, THOUGH--
BUT--THIS ISN'T--


WIND'S DYING DOWN.
TEMPERATURE'S COMING BACK UP.
THOSE GHOSTS-- THEY SEEMED SO REAL, SO SCARED--


J'ONN? WHAT DID YOU--
J'ONN?
HE'S... GONE?


METROPOLIS.
THE AIR GOES ELECTRIC.
THE WIND PICKS UP.

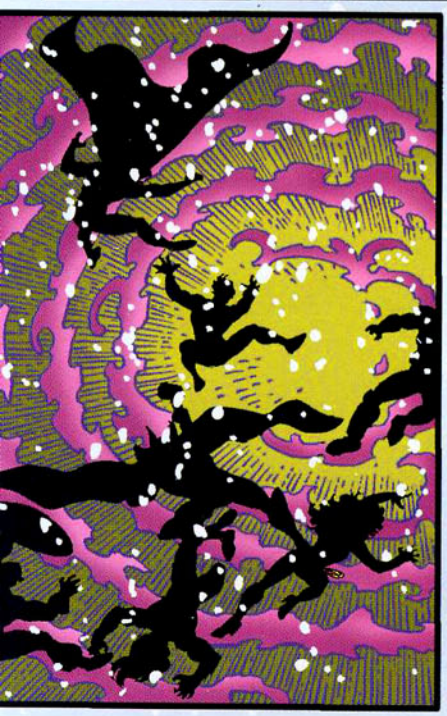

I DON'T LIKE THE LOOK OF THAT SKY...
THE SIGNAL DOTH COME FROM THIS DIRECTION, MY COMRADES.
BUT THIS STORM--I HAVE QUELLED ITS FULL FURY, RENDERING IT NAUGHT BUT GENTLE SNOW. STILL, THERE DOTH BE SOMETHING MORE--SOMETHING UNNATURAL, HOSTILE...
VISION! DOST THOU SEE ANYTHING?


THERE IS SOMETHING AHEAD--
--BUT I CAN'T QUITE--CAN'T--


WHAT?!
THE PEOPLE IN THE BUILDINGS AROUND US--THEY JUST VANISHED! I CAN'T HEAR THEM ANYMORE--ANY OF THEM!


IT'S GETTING HOTTER--WARMING UP FAST, AS IF WE'RE NEAR A FIRE--
AND THAT SOUND--WHAT'S THAT SOUND?


WATCH THYSELVES, ALL OF YOU! AN ENERGY-SURGE--




HUH? THE PEOPLE--THEY'RE BACK! AND WITH THEM...
THE MARTIAN MANHUNTER?
WHY... WHY IS IT SO SNOWY?

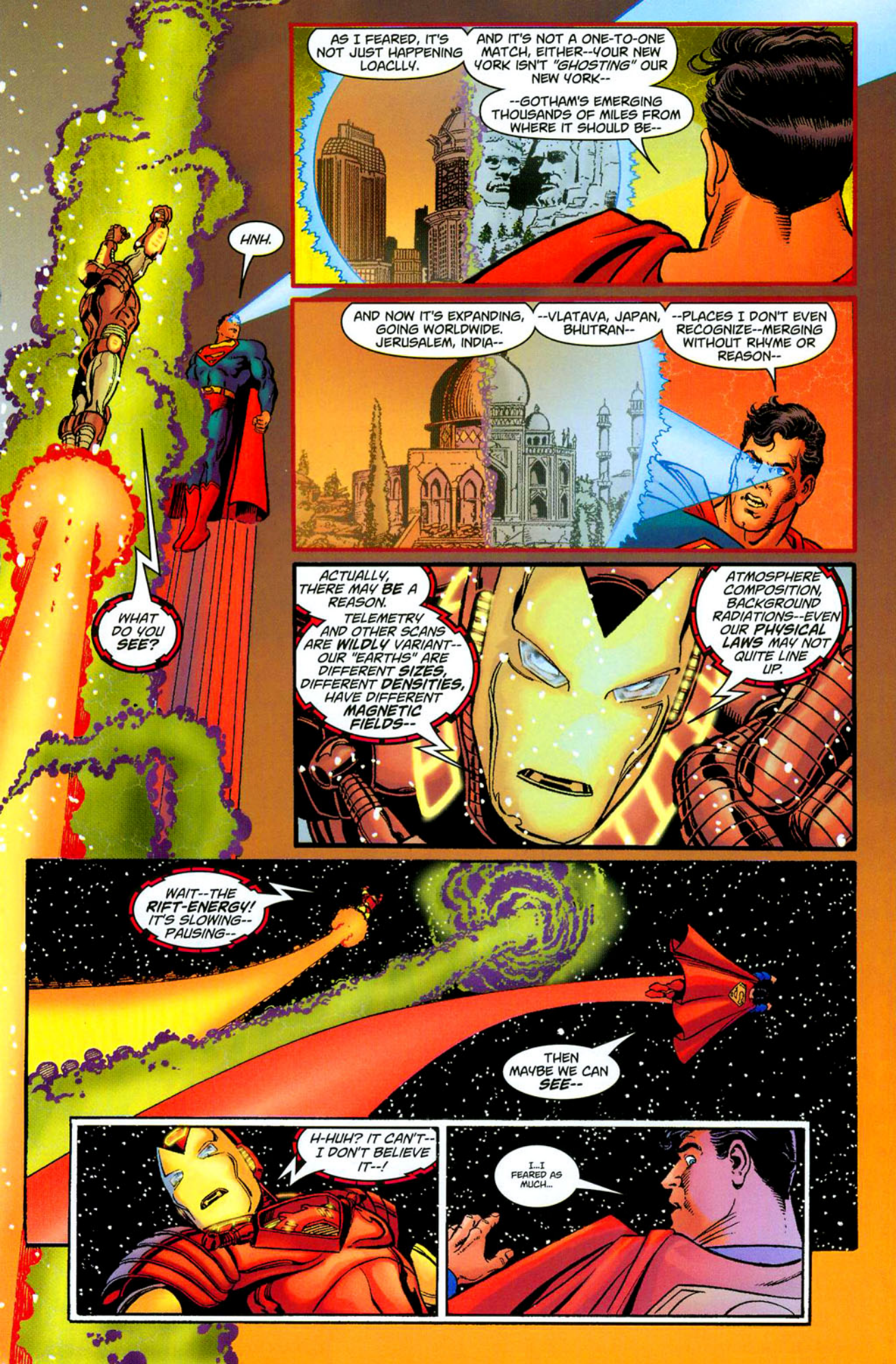

YES, IRON MAN.
AND I BELIEVE I KNOW SOMETHING OF WHAT IS HAPPENING... THOUGH I STILL DO NOT KNOW WHY.


SUPERMAN? FLASH? SCARLET WITCH? CAN YOU HEAR ME?
WE HEAR YOU, J'ONN. WHERE ARE YOU?
METROPOLIS.
IT IS THE STORMS THAT ARE CAUSING PEOPLE TO SWITCH WORLDS-- CASTING THEM FROM ONE TO ANOTHER RANDOMLY.
BUT YOU MUST FOLLOW WHERE I LEAD. SWIFTLY.
HEY, I SAW THAT GUY! HE WAS A GHOST--TRIED TA DO SOMETHING TO MY BRAIN--
--RIGHT BEFORE IT GOT ALL HOT LIKE THIS!
LET'S GO, EVERYONE.
THE STORMS ARE INCREASING IN FREQUENCY. AND IN VIOLENCE. THERE MAY NOT BE MUCH TIME LEFT.
THEIR EFFECT IS INCREASING AS WELL--
WOW.
THAT DOESN'T LOOK GOOD. IF THE STORMS DID THIS...
HEY, LOOK!
THE DAILY PLANET-- BUT THIS IS NEW YORK. THERE'S NO METROPOLIS IN THIS WORLD, SO THERE SHOULDN'T BE A PLANET.
AND THIS...
SPORTS
...THIS MAKES NO SENSE!
DAILY PLANET
A Great Metropolitan Newspaper
SPIDER-MAN SPEAK
An Interview by Clark Kent


THEY MOVE ON, ROUND A CORNER, AND--
WHAT? THE OTHERS!
WE'VE FOUND THE RIFT! SOMEHOW, WE'RE LOOKING FROM WORLD TO WORLD! AND THAT FACE--THAT MUST BE THE MAN BEHIND IT!
BUT WHO--?
THE ENERGY SEETHES AND RIPPLES BEFORE THEM, THE FACE SEEMING TO GAZE AT THEM BALEFULLY, MOCKINGLY.
AND THEY FEEL A BUZZING IN THEIR HEADS--
HE'S ONE OF YOURS, THEN, LANTERN!
I KNEW THIS WAS YOUR WORLD'S DOING! YOU STRUT LIKE PEACOCKS, EXPECT TO BE WORSHIPPED, AND ALL THE TIME--
HOLD IT RIGHT THERE, CAPTAIN. YOU HAVE NO BUSINESS CRITICIZING A BETTER MAN THAN YOU'LL EVER BE--WHEN YOU AND YOUR BAND OF FAILURES LET YOUR WORLD SINK TO SUCH A SORRY--
FAILURES?!
NO.
NO, WE ARE NOT GOING TO DO THIS AGAIN.
WE CAN'T FIGHT, SUPERMAN--NOT AGAINST EACH OTHER. WE HAVE TWO WORLDS DEPENDING ON US. ON ALL OF US!


BUT--
NOW THEY'RE GHOSTLY-- INSUBSTANTIAL--
--A BUZZING THAT ALMOST SOUNDS LIKE LAUGHTER--
KRONA?!
KRONA IS THE MASTER? BUT--HE'S DEAD! HE'S BEEN DEAD FOR--
NO, HAL-- I THINK...THINK I REMEMBER...
HAH!
SHE'S RIGHT, CAP. WE HAVE TO WORK TOGETHER. FIND THE ANSWER, FIND WHAT HAPPENED AND FIX IT--
--OR EVERYTHING WE CARE ABOUT WILL DIE.
I... YES. I'M SORRY.
KRONA... I REMEMBER, LIKE AQUAMAN... BEING SOMEWHERE ELSE...A VAST JUNGLE...
WHAT SONAR SAID...HIS MASTER HAD IT ALL IN HIS GRASP...BUT WAS TRAPPED?
WE...WE FOUGHT. ASSEMBLED ITEMS OF POWER. IT WAS A GAME... THE GRANDMASTER'S GAME.
KRONA LOST... WE SAW TO THAT. BUT HE WOULDN'T ABIDE BY THE RULES. HE SUMMONED GALACTUS... ATTACKED HIM.
THE GRANDMASTER...DID SOMETHING...
HM?
WH--?
THE GROUND--!


THE CRACKED PAVEMENT CONVULSES BENEATH THEM-- THE AIR GOES HOT, THEN COLD--
--AND THE RIFT ERUPTS UPWARD WITH A DEAFENING ROAR--A ROAR OF RAGE, OF YEARNING--
WHAT IN--?
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, SCARLET WITCH?
OH! YOU'RE BACK! BUT--
THAT FACE-- IT'S CAUSING THIS SOMEHOW! LOOK AT THE SKY!
THE STORM--IT'S STARTING AGAIN!
AND THE GROUND SHAKES-- STRONGER THAN E'ER BEFORE!
OH, NO.
I THINK--
--I THINK I KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING!
FOLLOW HIM, IRON MAN!
AND STAY RADIO-LINKED-- I WANT TO KNOW ANYTHING YOU FIND OUT, THE MINUTE YOU DO!
YOU GOT IT, CAP!


AS I FEARED, IT'S NOT JUST HAPPENING LOACLLY.
AND IT'S NOT A ONE-TO-ONE MATCH, EITHER--YOUR NEW YORK ISN'T "GHOSTING" OUR NEW YORK--
--GOTHAM'S EMERGING THOUSANDS OF MILES FROM WHERE IT SHOULD BE--
HNH.
AND NOW IT'S EXPANDING, GOING WORLDWIDE. JERUSALEM, INDIA--
--VLATAVA, JAPAN, BHUTRAN--
--PLACES I DON'T EVEN RECOGNIZE--MERGING WITHOUT RHYME OR REASON--
WHAT DO YOU SEE?
ACTUALLY, THERE MAY BE A REASON.
TELEMETRY AND OTHER SCANS ARE WILDLY VARIANT--OUR "EARTHS" ARE DIFFERENT SIZES, DIFFERENT DENSITIES, HAVE DIFFERENT MAGNETIC FIELDS--
ATMOSPHERE COMPOSITION, BACKGROUND RADIATIONS--EVEN OUR PHYSICAL LAWS MAY NOT QUITE LINE UP.
WAIT--THE RIFT-ENERGY! IT'S SLOWING--PAUSING--
THEN MAYBE WE CAN SEE--
H-HUH? IT CAN'T--I DON'T BELIEVE IT--!
I...I FEARED AS MUCH...

IT--IT'S NOT EVEN POSSIBLE! I CAN'T BE SEEING THIS!

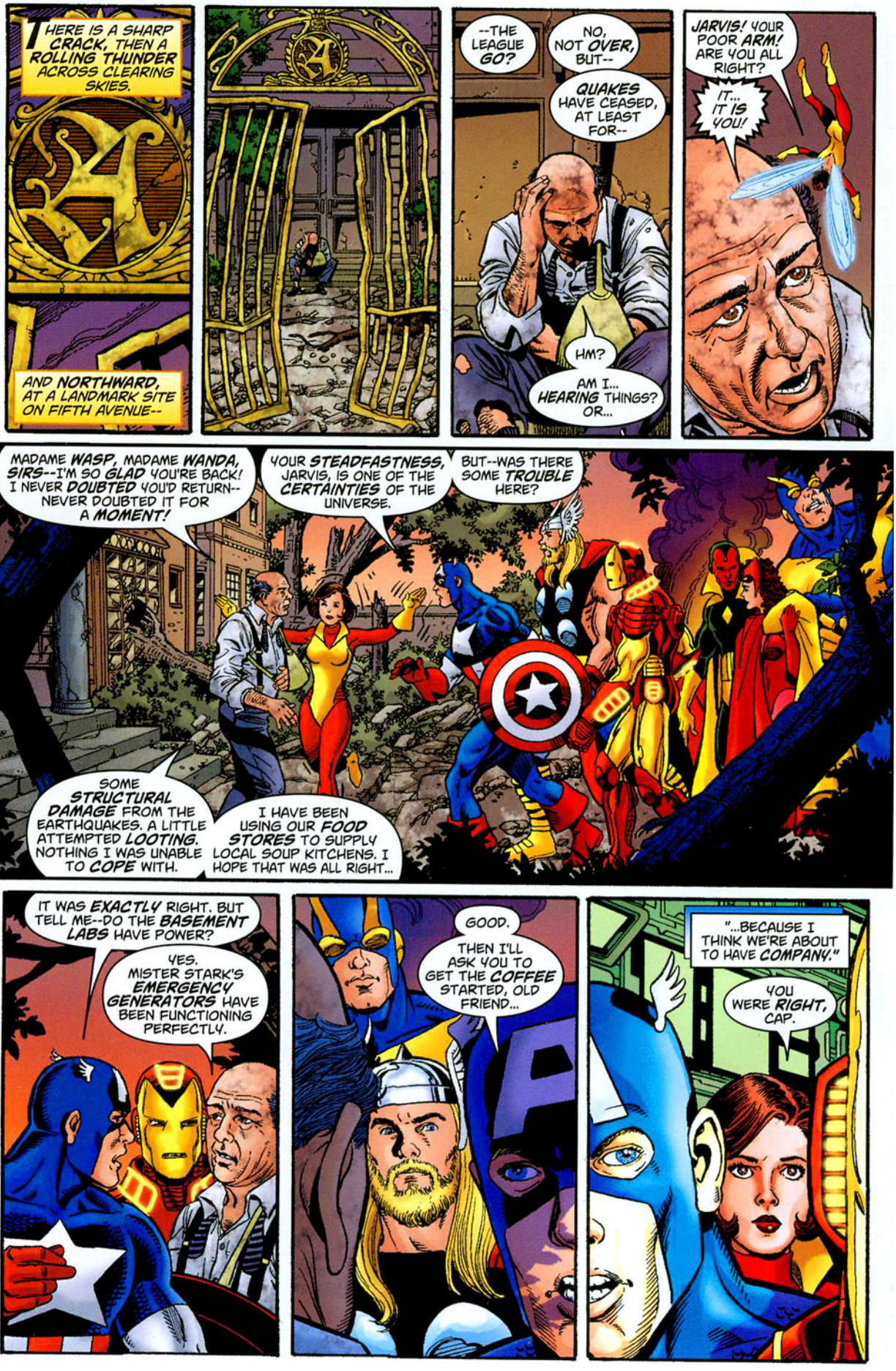
I JUST CAN'T!

YOU'RE NOT--NOT LITERALLY. IT'S OUR *MINDS*...TRYING TO *COMPREHEND*, TO PROCESS WHAT WE'RE WITNESSING IN A WAY WE CAN *GRASP*.

BUT IT'S REAL--EVEN SO, IT'S *REAL*--


THE WORLDS ARE MERGING-- BEING FORCED TOGETHER! BUT THEIR NATURES-- THEY'RE TOO DIFFERENT--
AND THE MORE THEY COME TOGETHER--
--THE MORE THEY TEAR EACH OTHER APART!
THE FACE-- KRONA LOOKS ALMOST-- JUBILANT--!
DON'T KNOW WHY--OR HOW-- HE'S DOING THIS--
--BUT MAYBE-- I CAN DISRUPT THE PROCESS-- KEEP THE WORLDS APART--
THE BUZZ HAD FADED TO LAUGHTER ONCE MORE--BUT RISES AGAIN, IN A SHRIEK OF PAIN--
YOU HURT HIM, WANDA!
CAN YOU DO IT, SCARLET WITCH? ARE YOU--
I... NUDGED HIM A LITTLE... I THINK.. BUT...
HE'S TOO... POWERFUL... TOO STRONG... PUSHING... PUSHING ME...
JUST HANG TIGHT, LADY--YOU'RE NOT ALONE IN THIS!
YOU'VE OPENED THE DOOR A CRACK--
--SO ALL WE NEED--
--IS ENOUGH WILLPOWER!
MAN, HE IS STRONG, ISN'T HE?


CHAOS MAGIC AND EMERALD ENERGY LANCE HEAVENWARD--THE BUZZ BECOMES AN ANGRY HOWL--
--AND GREEN LANTERN AND THE SCARLET WITCH FIND A FORCE IN THEIR MINDS--ASSAILING THEM, OVERPOWERING THEM--
THEY REACH OUT--
--TAPPING THEIR TEAMMATES WILLS--
--THEIR POWER--
--THEIR SOULS!
THEY GIVE WILLINGLY--EVERYTHING THEY HAVE--
--UNTIL--


THERE IS A SHARP CRACK, THEN A ROLLING THUNDER ACROSS CLEARING SKIES.
AND NORTHWARD, AT A LANDMARK SITE ON FIFTH AVENUE--
--THE LEAGUE GO?
NO, NOT OVER, BUT--
QUAKES HAVE CEASED, AT LEAST FOR--
HM?
AM I... HEARING THINGS? OR...
JARVIS! YOUR POOR ARM! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
IT... IT IS YOU!
MADAME WASP, MADAME WANDA, SIRS--I'M SO GLAD YOU'RE BACK! I NEVER DOUBTED YOU'D RETURN--NEVER DOUBTED IT FOR A MOMENT!
YOUR STEADFASTNESS, JARVIS, IS ONE OF THE CERTAINTIES OF THE UNIVERSE.
BUT--WAS THERE SOME TROUBLE HERE?
SOME STRUCTURAL DAMAGE FROM THE EARTHQUAKES. A LITTLE ATTEMPTED LOOTING. NOTHING I WAS UNABLE TO COPE WITH.
I HAVE BEEN USING OUR FOOD STORES TO SUPPLY LOCAL SOUP KITCHENS. I HOPE THAT WAS ALL RIGHT...
IT WAS EXACTLY RIGHT. BUT TELL ME--DO THE BASEMENT LABS HAVE POWER?
YES. MISTER STARK'S EMERGENCY GENERATORS HAVE BEEN FUNCTIONING PERFECTLY.
GOOD.
THEN I'LL ASK YOU TO GET THE COFFEE STARTED, OLD FRIEND...
"...BECAUSE I THINK WE'RE ABOUT TO HAVE COMPANY."
YOU WERE RIGHT, CAP.


I THOUGHT SO.
WHEN THE RIFT'S POWER WAS DISRUPTED, EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE WAS JOLTED BACK TO THEIR HOME UNIVERSE.
ONCE THEY REACHED THEIR SATELLITE AND THEIR TELEPORTERS...
JUSTICE LEAGUE, WE HAVE A RESPITE. WE'VE DELAYED KRONA, IF HE'S TRULY OUR FOE. BUT I DOUBT VERY STRONGLY THAT WE'VE DEFEATED HIM.
A SAFE BET, CAPTAIN.
BUT AT LEAST WE KNOW WHAT WE'RE UP AGAINST NOW.
LET'S GET STARTED.
--ROUNDED UP EVERYONE I CAN TO HELP OUT. TOO MANY DEAD--WAAAAY TOO MANY DEAD--
--BUT WE'LL GET THE SURVIVORS OUT.
YOU GUYS DEAL WITH THE BIG PICTURE.
IS THAT... HAWKEYE? HIS APPEARANCE...
YES. THE WORLDS MAY BE STABLE FOR NOW, BUT TIME AND SPACE STILL SEEM ASKEW.
HAWKGIRL, FIRESTORM...THEY ARE OF DIFFERENT ERAS...
AND WE'RE NOT IMMUNE EITHER. LOOK AT WONDER WOMAN--SHE'S CHANGED TOO, AND NONE OF YOU SEEM TO HAVE NOTICED.
PLUS, THE EFFECTS ARE MORE FAR-REACHING THAN WE'D THOUGHT. FLASH?
CHECK OUT THESE DEEPSPACE SCANS, FOLKS--DOUBLE STARS FORMING EVERYWHERE, NEW STARS IN PLACES THAT WERE THOUGHT EMPTY--
--GRAVITIC DISTORTIONS, AS IF SPACE ITSELF IS WARPING--
IT'LL BE STARTING AGAIN HERE, AND SOON.


THE KEY TO ALL THIS IS THE GRANDMASTER. HE DID THIS TO OUR UNIVERSES--WHATEVER "THIS" IS. I'M REMEMBERING--HE FOUGHT KRONA...
HE USED THE ARTIFACTS WE ASSEMBLED... BUT WHAT DID HE...
ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT.
WE HAVE TO FIND THE GRANDMASTER. ASK HIM OURSELVES.
YOU'RE RIGHT.
OKAY, HOW DO WE DO THAT? SUGGESTIONS...?
WE GO BACK TO THE SAVAGE LAND. SEE IF WE CAN SCAN THE ENERGY-RESIDUE THERE, ISOLATE HIS POWER-SIGNATURE.
IF WE CAN TRACK HIM...
...I CAN OPEN A PORTAL...
SOUND PLANS, PALADINS OF TWO WORLDS...BUT TIME IS AGAINST YOU. IF YOU ARE TO REACH YOUR GOAL...
HUH?
WHO--?
...I MUST GUIDE YOU MYSELF.
THE PHANTOM STRANGER?! SKULKING LIKE A THIEF, INTRUDING WHEREVER YOU PLEASE--WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
AND WHERE SHOULD I BE, AQUAMAN? WORLDS ARE IN PERIL...
...AND I AM A MEMBER OF THE JUSTICE LEAGUE, AM I NOT?
WHATE'ER THOU MIGHT BE, DARK ONE, THOU'RT NOT AN AVENGER! SO EXPLAIN THYSELF, AND SWIFTLY, ERE I--
DON'T, THOR. I'LL VOUCH FOR HIM.
THE STRANGER MAY BE MYSTERIOUS... BUT HE'S BEEN HELPFUL IN OUR PAST DEALINGS.
ALL RIGHT. WE'RE LISTENING.


BUT NOT HEARING, CAPTAIN AMERICA. EVEN NOW, THE SANDS OF TIME RUN SWIFTLY.
JUST FOLLOW ME. IF YOU WOULD FOLLOW...
...A STRANGER.
THAT DOORWAY--BUT--THE MAIN REFRIGERATION UNIT IS BEHIND--
IT'S OKAY, JARVIS.
LET'S GO.
OH DEAR. OH DEAR...
WHAT IS THIS PLACE? WHERE ARE WE?
STAY ON THE PATH, DOCTOR PYM.
SHOULD YOU STRAY FROM IT, YOU WILL NEVER FIND YOUR WAY BACK...
...NOR WILL ANY WHO KNOW YOU EVER SEE YOUR FACE AGAIN.

THIS IS--

MY SENSORS--HAYWIRE--

TRUST ME, IRON MAN--

--THOSE OF US WHO HAVE TO RELY ON *BIOLOGICAL* SENSES AREN'T ANY BETTER OFF.

I *WONDER*, BARRY.

IF REALITY'S CHANGING *AROUND* US, HOW DO WE KNOW *ANYTHING*? ARE WE EVEN *HERE*? ARE WE WHO WE'RE *SUPPOSED* TO BE?

SORRY, HAL--BUT THAT'S *WAY* TOO METAPHYSICAL FOR AN *IOWA BOY* LIKE ME. LET'S JUST DO THE *JOB*--

--AND GO HOME TO OUR *LOVED ONES*.

AND *NOW*, JUSTICE LEAGUE, AVENGERS--

NOW, *NOTHING*, STRANGER!

IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO TELL US WHERE WE'RE *GOING*, WHAT WE'RE DOING--OR NOBODY GOES A *STEP FURTHER!*

DO AS YOU *WISH*, BATMAN.

IN ANY EVENT...

...WE ARE *HERE*.

THE *GRANDMASTER!*

BUT--HE'S *WOUNDED*--SO STILL--!

IS HE--?

N-NO... CAPTAIN AMERICA... I LIVE. BUT... *BARELY*...

I HAVE MADE...A MOST GRIEVOUS... *ERROR*...

I DIDN'T... EXPECT KRONA... SO *RUTHLESS*. HE LEFT ME...FOR DEAD... ATTACKED GALACTUS. I CALLED ON... POWER OF *ARTIFACTS*...


"...USED IT...TO BIND UNIVERSES TOGETHER...
"...TRAPPED KRONA AT JUNCTURE POINT... BETWEEN THEM."
I GAMBLED...KRONA WOULD NOT...DESTROY UNIVERSES...IF HIS FATE... TIED TO THEM AS WELL.
BUT...UNIVERSES FUNDAMENTALLY INCOMPATIBLE... NATURES TOO... DIFFERENT...
SOME OF YOU...AFFECTED...SO STRONGLY ATTUNED TO YOUR TRUE REALITIES...
...SENSING CHANGES... MAKING YOU EDGY, UNEASY...
MEMORIES... FIGHTING TO SURFACE... STRAIN...CAUSED DISRUPTIONS...
BUT THE PROBLEM'S GETTING WORSE--
YES. UNIVERSES...OVERLOADING ONE ANOTHER. EACH...COMPLETE UNTO ITSELF...BUT FORCED TOGETHER... BUILDING TO DANGEROUS... CRITICAL MASS.
AND IT...IS KRONA...MAKING IT HAPPEN.
WORSE, KRONA IS... ACCELERATING... PROCESS.
HE STOLE... KNOWLEDGE FROM GALACTUS...KNOWS GALACTUS... SURVIVED BIG BANG...
HE PLANS TO...REPEAT PROCESS. HE WILL...BRING WORLDS TOGETHER, LET THEM...ANNIHILATE EACH OTHER, CAUSING NEW BIG BANG...
...ONE HE CAN EXPERIENCE, IF HE SURVIVES...LEARN ITS SECRETS.
UNFORTUNATELY, KRONA...ONLY TOO WILLING TO RISK ALL TO LEARN TRUTH... ALWAYS...HAS BEEN.
CAN'T YOU JUST-- SEPARATE THE UNIVERSES AGAIN?
YOU BROUGHT THEM TOGETHER, AFTER ALL.


I...AM SORRY. I TRIED...
BUT... TOO WOUNDED... TOO WEAK. POWER FADING...
HEY-- WHERE'D THE STRANGER GO?
KRONA...IS CENTER. KRONA... BOTH KEY AND LOCK...
IT IS KRONA... WHO KEEPS WORLDS BOUND TOGETHER...AND WHO ASSAYS THEIR... DESTRUCTION. KRONA... MUST BE FACED.
KRONA...MUST BE DEFEATED, AND PROPER ORDER... RESTORED.
WELL, OF COURSE WE'LL--
WAIT.
WAIT A MINUTE. WE'VE BEEN CHARGING AROUND BLIND FOR LONG ENOUGH. WE NEED TO KNOW MORE.
REALITY AS WE KNOW IT IS WRONG--I CAN FEEL IT. BUT WE DON'T KNOW WHAT'S RIGHT.
SO TELL US--
OUR TWO UNIVERSES, UNAFFECTED BY THIS BOND. WHAT ARE THEY REALLY LIKE? WHAT ARE WE SAVING?
JUST WHAT IS THE "PROPER ORDER" YOU WANT US TO RESTORE?
AHH.
WISE... WISE OF YOU... TO ASK.
HERE. I WILL...SHOW YOU. SHOW YOU TRUTH...
...AND YOU...SHALL DECIDE.
A LIGHT FLARES-- BEHIND THEIR EYES--

--AND THEIR MINDS ARE SUDDENLY FILLED--

--WITH A CASCADE OF IMAGES, SOUNDS, EVENTS--

IN THE SPAN OF A FEW HEARTBEATS, THEY WITNESS YEARS--

--OF TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY, GLORY AND PAIN--

THEY SEE EVIL THWARTED, SEE NATIONS FALL--

--SEE ENEMIES PROSPER, FRIENDS DIE--

--SEE HOPE DASHED, AND HOPE REBORN--

--SEE LOVE AND ANGER AND SACRIFICE AND TERROR--

AND STILL IT COMES, STILL IT COMES--


THEY SEE LOSS--
THE ISLAND!
THE SATELLITE--!


REBIRTH--
WHO--?
IS THAT--THE LEAGUE--?


FAILURE--
THAT'S--


FURY--
--ME?

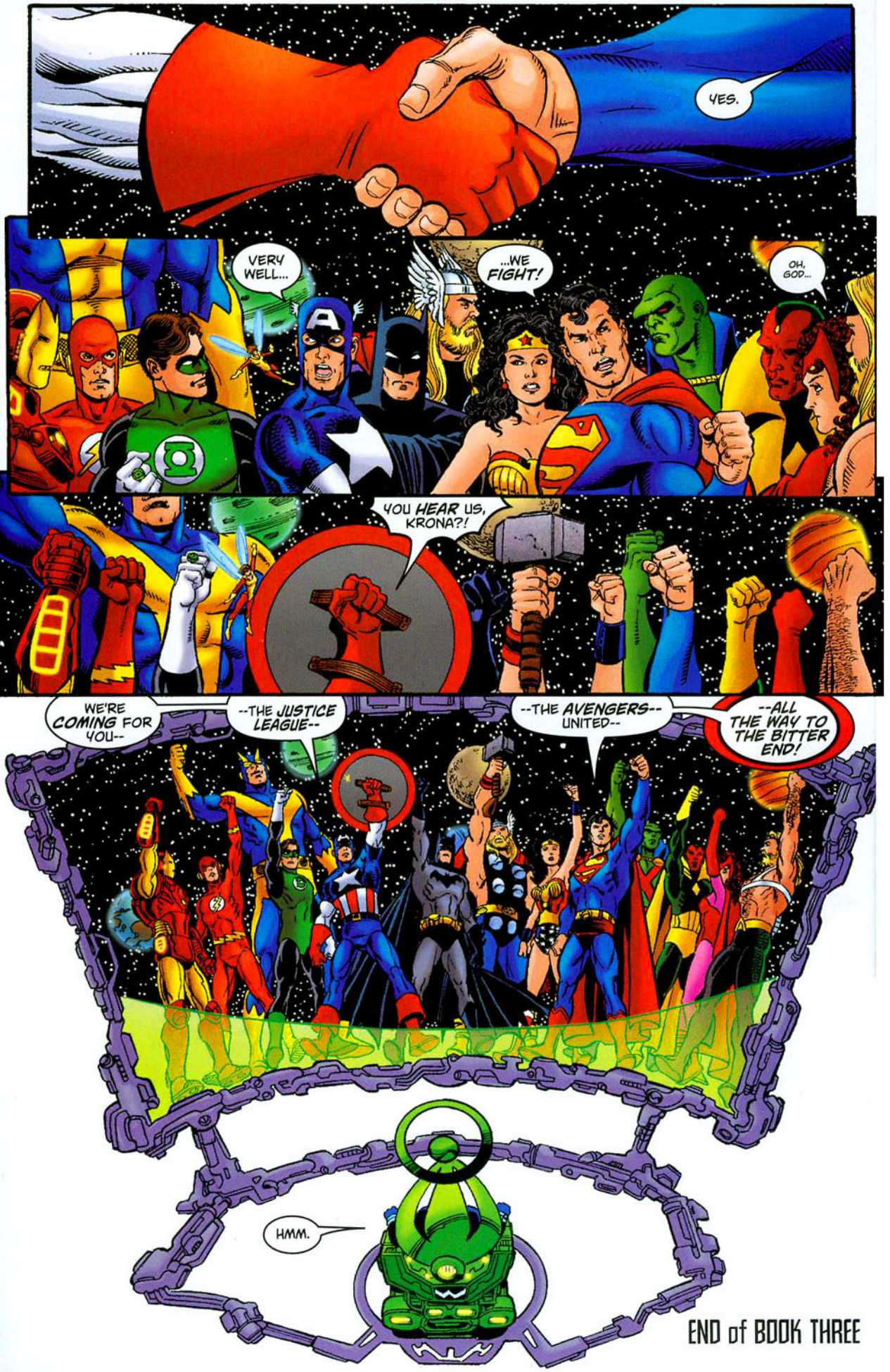

HORROR--
MY OWN PEOPLE...


HEARTBREAK--
OH, JAN...


TO THE AVENGE
MY HAND--
MY MIND--
MY GOD--
NO!
NO--
NO.
NO...
AND IN THE END--


--THEIR MINDS ARE OVER-WHELMED WITH DEATH--
--WITH BETRAYAL--
--WITH MADNESS--
AND EVEN THE IMAGES OF HOPE AND WARMTH AND LOVE--
--ARE SCANT COMFORT.
AND THAT'S-- THAT'S IT? THAT'S HOW IT WAS?
HOW IT REALLY WAS?
GRANDMASTER?
GRANDMASTER?
I DON'T THINK HE CAN ANSWER YOU, CAP.
SHOWING US THAT-- I THINK IT TOOK THE LAST OF HIS POWER.
HE'S GONE.


THEN--
WE DECIDE.
I THINK HE KNEW--IT WOULDN'T BE UP TO HIM ANY MORE. BUT THOSE WORLDS--WHAT WE SAW--
I THINK WE KNOW--WE WON'T ALL LIVE TO RETIRE. IF THAT'S WHAT IT TAKES--
WE DID LEAVE LEGACIES--BUT--BUT WHAT I DID--
LOOK, HAL, WE DON'T EVEN KNOW IF DEFEATING KRONA WILL FIX THINGS.
MAYBE THERE'S ANOTHER WAY.
OH, JAN--IF THERE IS--
I'D DO ANYTHING TO MAKE WHAT WE SAW--TO MAKE IT NOT HAPPEN. JUST A BAD DREAM, A NIGHTMARE--
I KNOW, HANK. I KNOW.
IF WE STABILIZE THE WORLDS THE WAY THEY ARE--SEPARATE THE UNIVERSES, REBUILD FROM THERE--
OH, GOD, YES!
I COULD TAKE DYING--MADNESS, DISFIGUREMENT, ANYTHING! BUT...BUT I SAW CHILDREN! I SAW OUR CHILDREN! AND I LOST THEM...
THERE MUST BE ANOTHER WAY! MUST BE...
I KNOW, WANDA, I KNOW. I SAW MYSELF GO MAD. MURDER FRIENDS.
BUT THERE ISN'T ANOTHER WAY. AND WE ALL KNOW IT.
THERE ARE MILLIONS, MAYBE BILLIONS, DEAD OR DYING IN THE WORLDS AS THEY ARE. CAN WE CHOOSE THEIR DEATHS, BECAUSE THEY'RE EASIER TO BEAR?
THE REALITY WE SAW--IT'S THE TRUTH. GOOD, BAD, LOVE, PAIN--IT'S REAL.
IT'S THE ONE WE'RE PLEDGED TO PROTECT. NOT... NOT TO PLAY GOD WITH.
THEN...
...ARE WE AGREED?



END of BOOK THREE



NEXT: THE BRAVE & THE BOLD

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