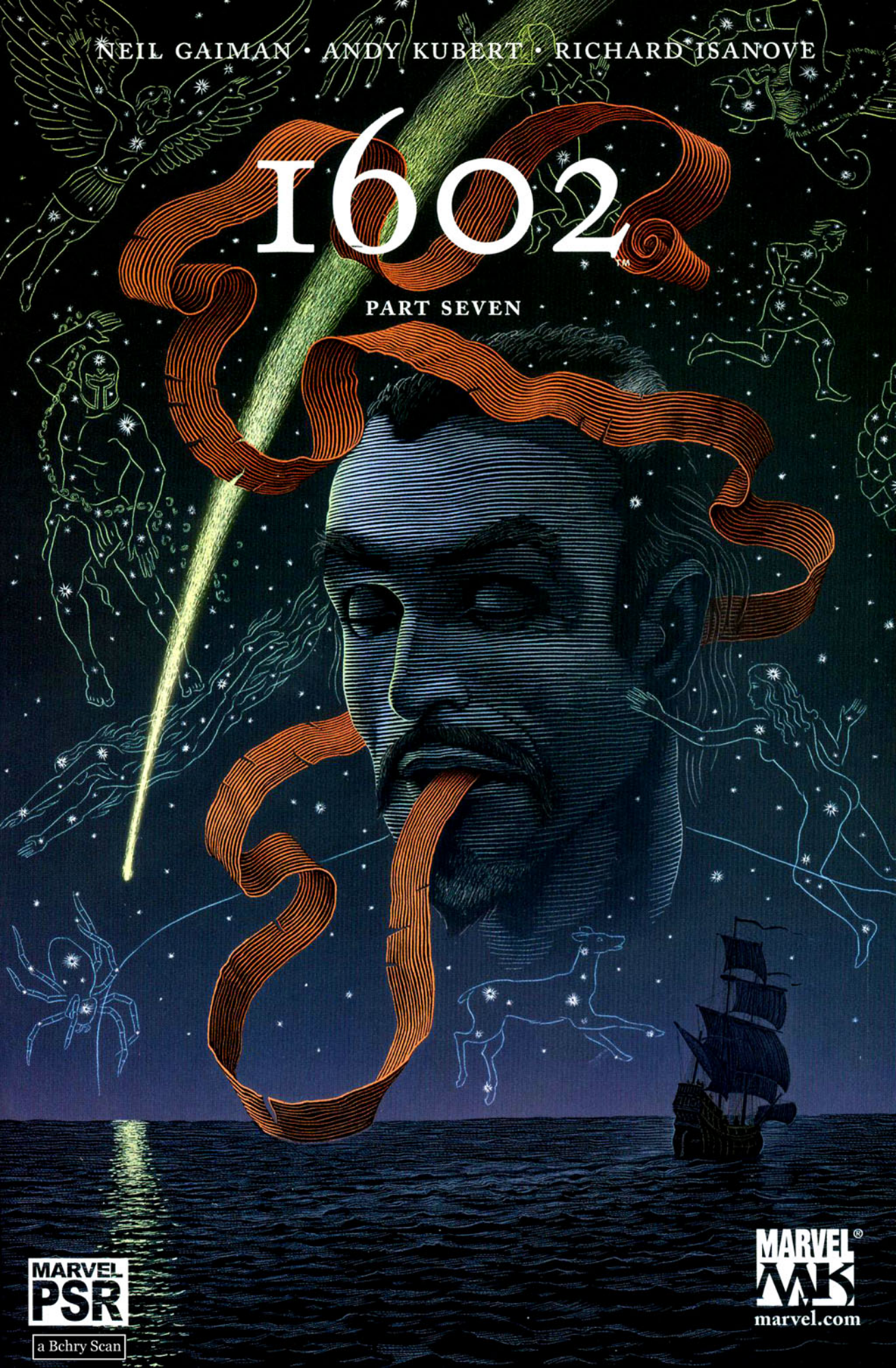


NEIL GAIMAN · ANDY KUBERT · RICHARD ISANOVE

1602

PART SEVEN



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1602 *Part Seven*

*In Which Many Patterns May Be
Discerned, By Those With Eyes
To See Them*

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I know *such* things.

I know such things that my mind seems likely to explode and fragment and dissolve.

I walked on the moon with a Watcher, and, at the last, he gave me one final vision. A vision of *everything*.

I know that Fury and the Witchbreed have freed the four from the Fantastick from the castle of Otto Von Doom--now no longer the handsome.

I know that the Witchbreed ship is crossing the Mediterranean, and that one of their number is dying. I know that the treasure of the Templars was a stick, which is the hammer of the Thunder God, brought long since to Jerusalem by a Viking pilgrimage.

I know that the Grand Inquisitor is tied to a stake in DomDaniel, and that if he dies, so will the world.

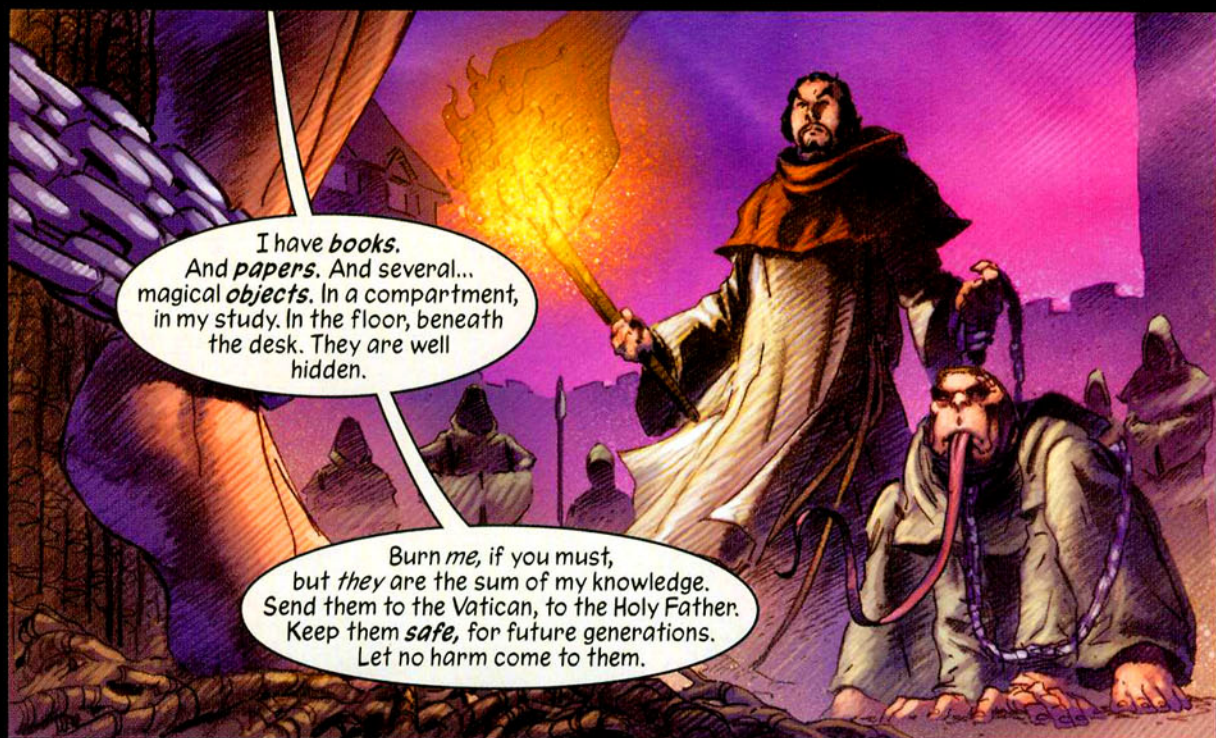
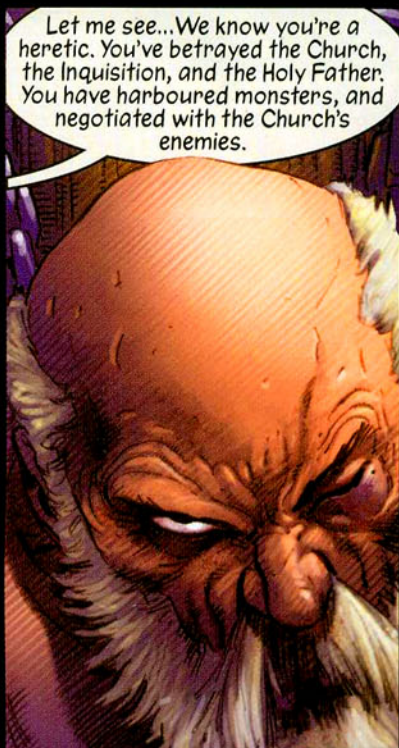
I know that James of Scotland, soon to be crowned King of England, is wondering whether to have me beheaded, or hung, drawn and quartered. He will elect to have me beheaded.

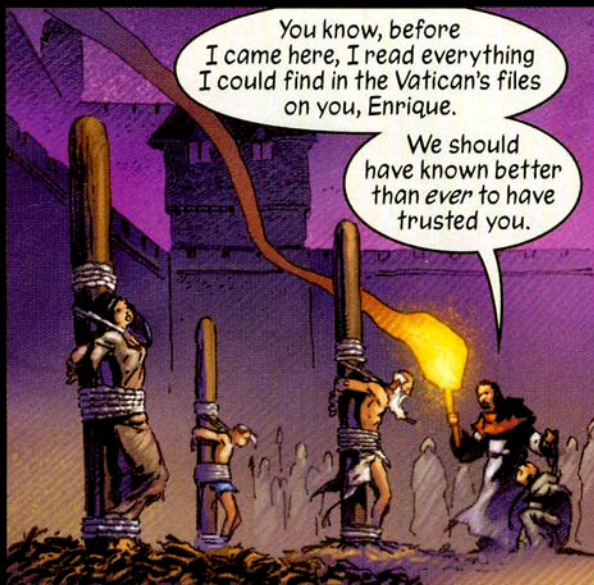
I know that everything is out of time and out of joint since the Forerunner arrived here fifteen years ago. I am not certain what the Forerunner is. Perhaps it, too, is Virginia.

I know that the world has months at the most, before the darkness comes and spreads across everything there ever was, or is, or will be, rendering it down to pure nothingness. No heavens or hells, no worlds between.

I know such things.

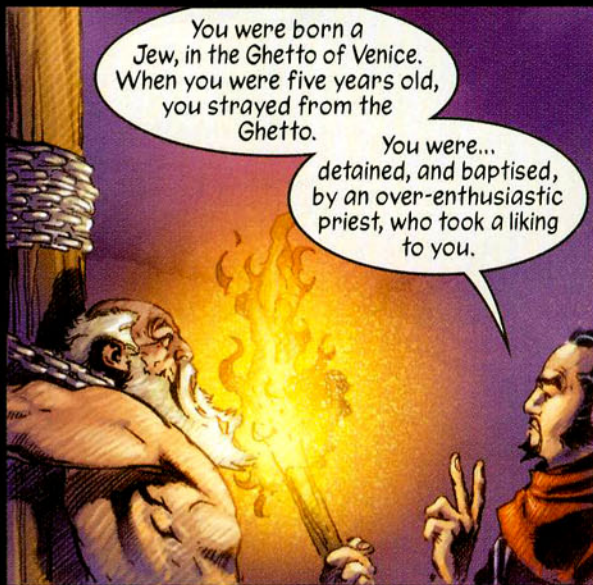
And I *cannot* speak of them. While I live, my lips are sealed.





You know, before I came here, I read everything I could find in the Vatican's files on you, Enrique.

We should have known better than *ever* to have trusted you.

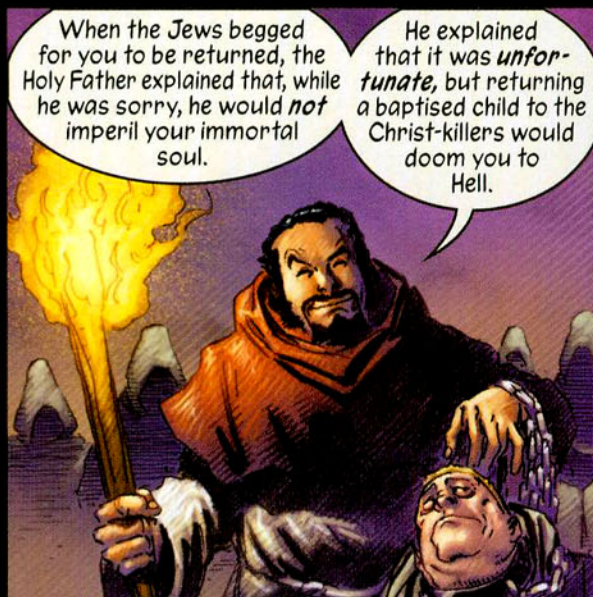


You were born a Jew, in the Ghetto of Venice. When you were five years old, you strayed from the Ghetto.

You were... detained, and baptised, by an over-enthusiastic priest, who took a liking to you.

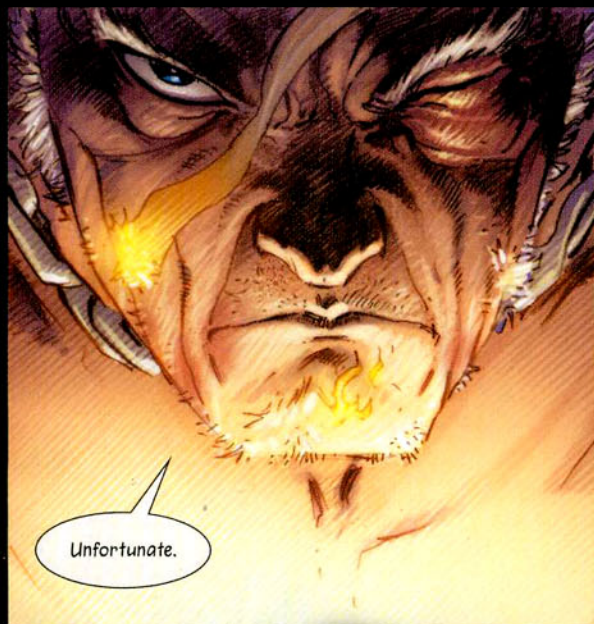


You must have been a pretty child, for a Jew.

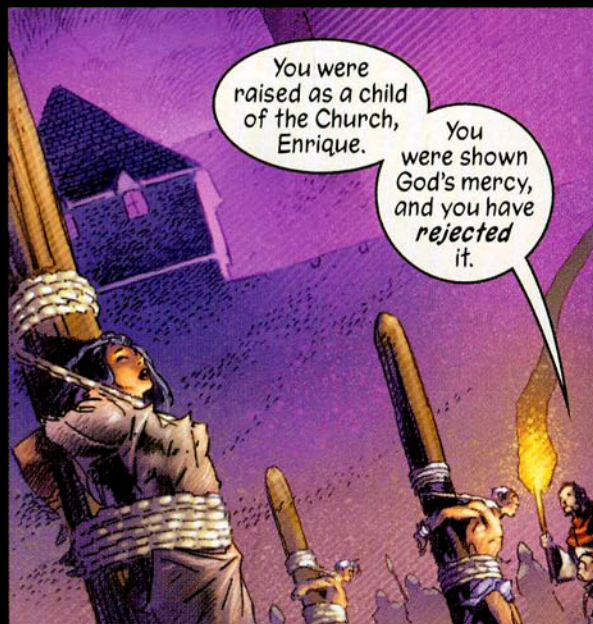


When the Jews begged for you to be returned, the Holy Father explained that, while he was sorry, he would *not* imperil your immortal soul.

He explained that it was *unfortunate*, but returning a baptised child to the Christ-killers would doom you to Hell.

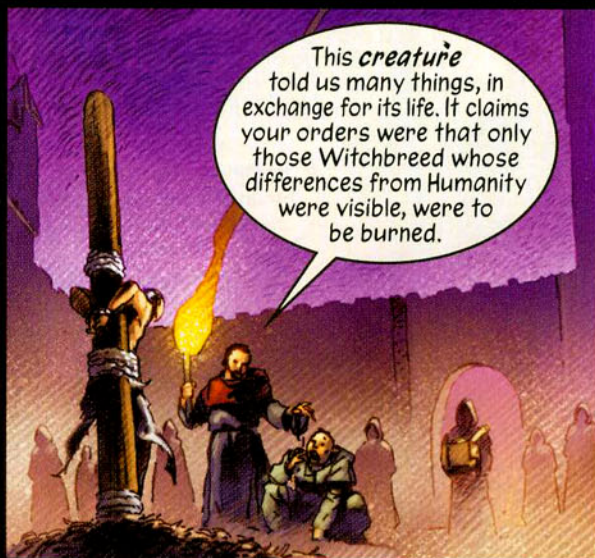


Unfortunate.



You were raised as a child of the Church, Enrique.

You were shown God's mercy, and you have *rejected* it.



This *creature* told us many things, in exchange for its life. It claims your orders were that only those Witchbreed whose differences from Humanity were visible, were to be burned.



Those who could pass for human were to be sent to you unharmed. That was how you found these Gypsy creatures.

But what did you do with the *others*, Enrique? Where are they hidden?



So *these* are the things you want saved from the fire? Ah. They look precious...would it hurt you very much to watch them burn, Enrique?



Yes.



Please... do not...



And what is *this*?
A helmet...

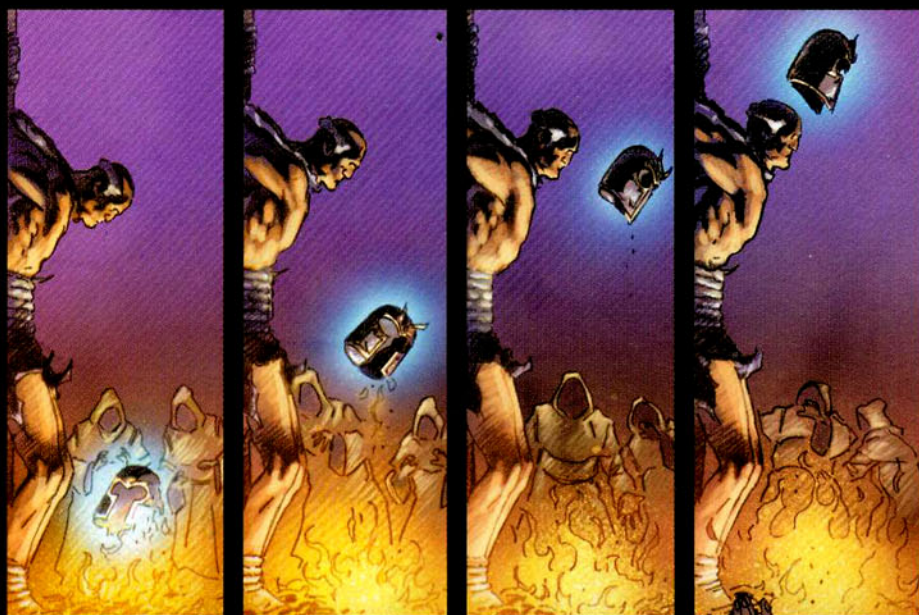


It was a gift, many years ago, from ...a friend. It means a lot to me.

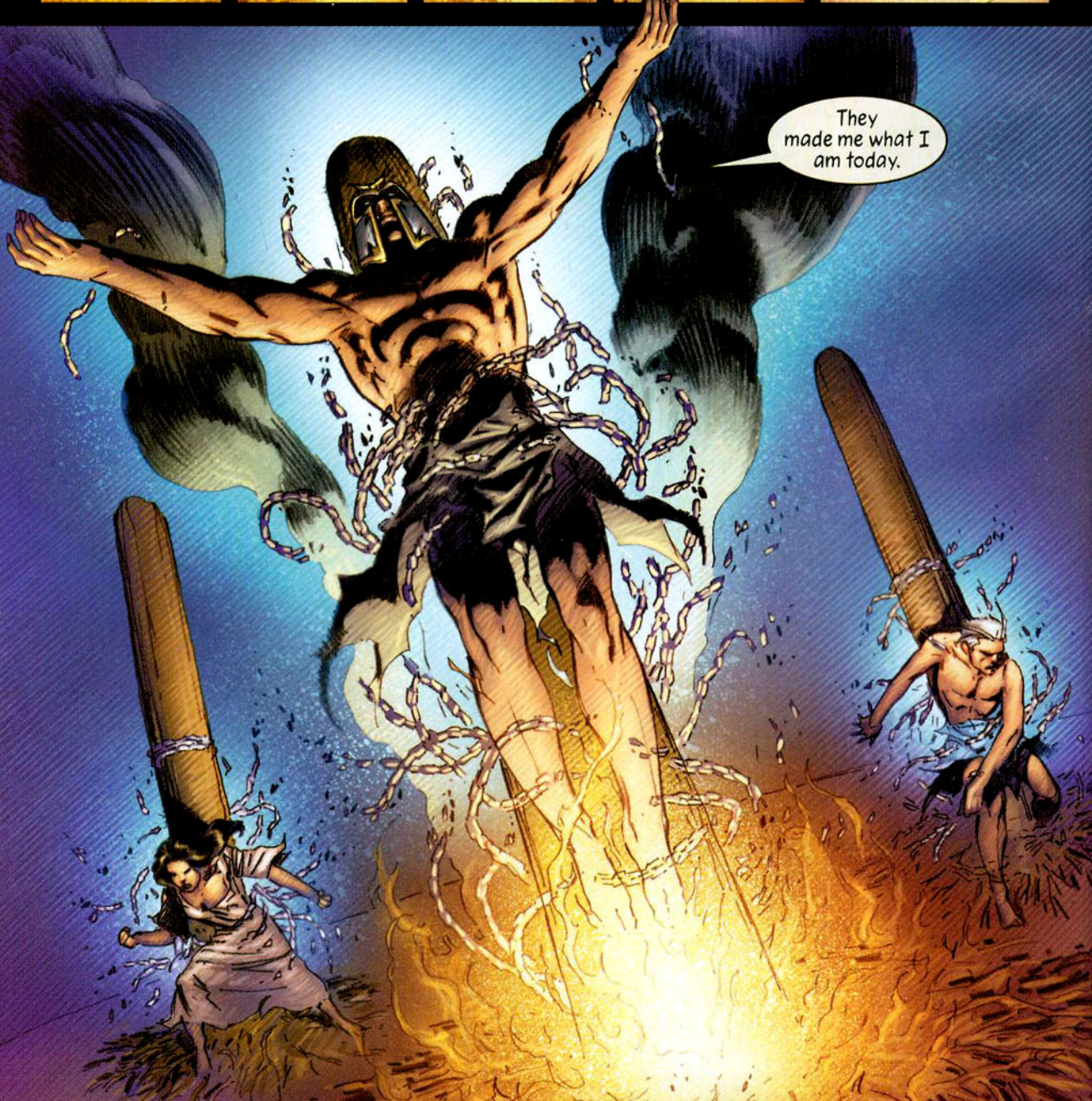
Then you may watch it burn, as you burn.



I was taught all I needed to know about your kind, when I was a weeping child, pleading to be allowed back to my family and my people...



They were *hard* lessons,
but I shall never forget
them. After all...



They
made me what I
am today.



Without your help, they would never have got this far, Toad.

No, thire.

Treachery. It's such a *nasty* word, isn't it?



Nathty. Yeth. Thire.

But Mathter, they thaid they'd kill me...what elthe could I do?



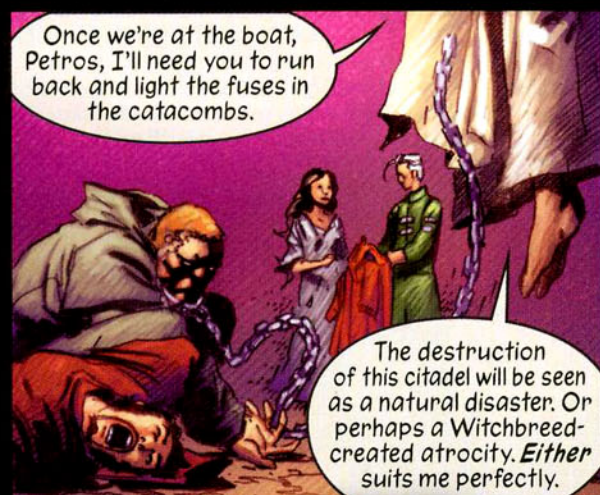
Shhh.



Thank you, Petros. Most thoughtful.

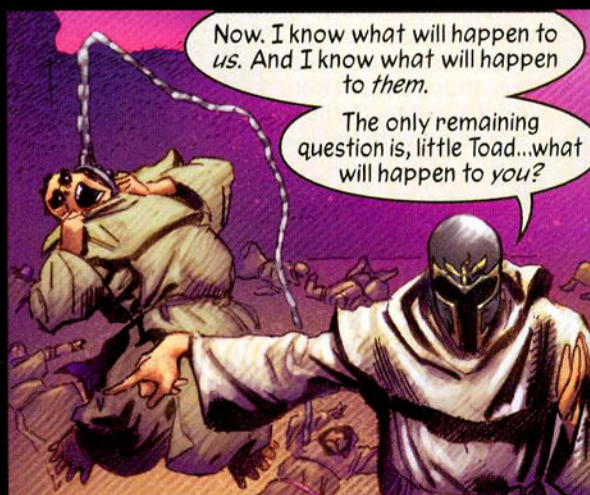
Now, you and Wanda must gather up your possessions, my dears. This stage of our lives is over.

Perhaps this is how the *butterfly* feels, when it crawls out from its chrysalis shell and contemplates the waiting world...



Once we're at the boat, Petros, I'll need you to run back and light the fuses in the catacombs.

The destruction of this citadel will be seen as a natural disaster. Or perhaps a Witchbreed-created atrocity. *Either* suits me perfectly.



Now. I know what will happen to us. And I know what will happen to them.

The only remaining question is, little Toad...what will happen to you?

The Eagle's Shadow.



We've a *ship*, of sorts, and we've a *crew*, of sorts, for all you're the scurviest, strangest crew I've ever clapped eyes upon.

What I be sayin' is, cheer up, m' proud boys.

And you're the strangest captain the ocean's ever seen, Benjamin.

Quiet, whelp.

Have any of you dogs ever crewed a ship?



Aye. *I* have. My uncle was Sir Francis Drake. I sailed as his cabin boy, when I was young. And Scotius can sail, too.

Aye, I can sail--but to *where*?

Back to England, to throw ourselves upon James's mercy?

To Spain, to be burned as a monster?



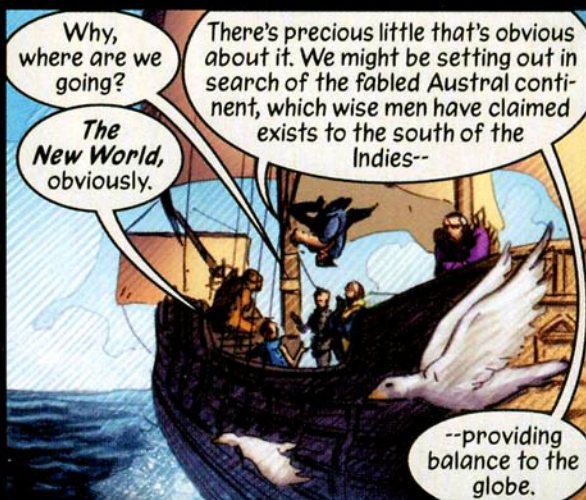
We're not going home? But... I've *dreamed* of England. For years I've dreamed of England's meadows, and her hills.

And we shall return to England one day, sweet Susan. But not yet.



Well, then, we'll need *supplies*. Food, and fresh water, enough for a six-week's voyage, if the *winds* be with us.

↑ The Wild Winds and the Cold Currents Shall See us Safe and Speedily to Shore. So Speaks Thor of the Thunders.



Why, where are we going?

The New World, obviously.

There's precious little that's obvious about it. We might be setting out in search of the fabled Austral continent, which wise men have claimed exists to the south of the Indies--

--providing balance to the globe.



They do *say* that the Americas are home to thunder lizards, and huge leatherwings, and dragonish monsters.

Aye. There do be *such* monstrosities there, Robert. And daggermouth lions, and hairy oliphaunts and *more*.



We were lucky to cross America with our *lives* last time, Reed.

We won't need to cross it this *time*, Johnnie. The center of the strange weather is, by my calculations, on the eastern shores of the continent. Probably near the colony at Roanoke.



And what do we do when we get there?

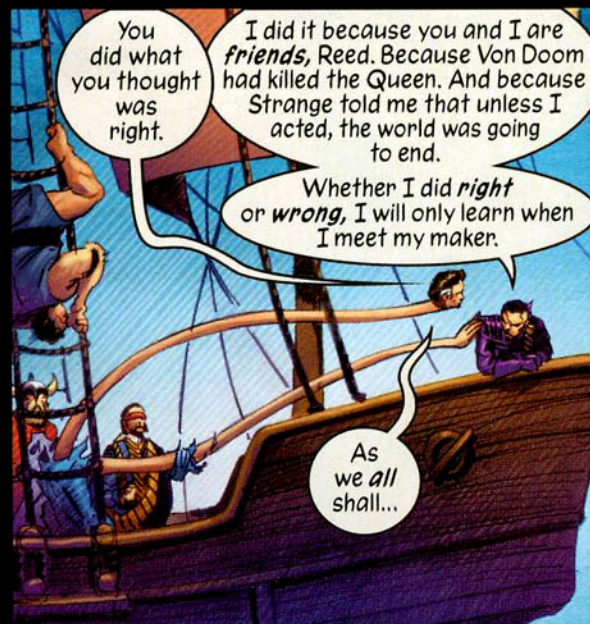
Save the world, of course. Or die trying.

What say *you*, Nicholas? You have said nothing.



Do as you will. I have *betrayed* my country. James will already have taken my house and lands. He'll imprison and kill all the people who worked for me.

Whatever I do, my life is *over*.

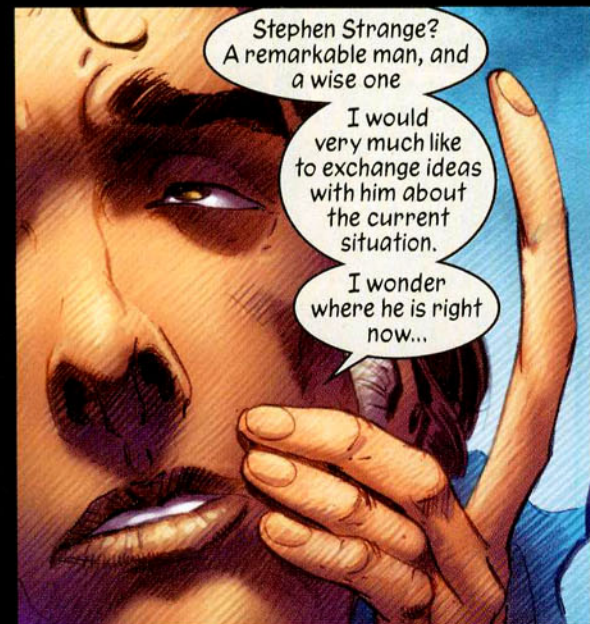


You did what you thought was right.

I did it because you and I are *friends*, Reed. Because Von Doom had killed the Queen. And because Strange told me that unless I acted, the world was going to end.

Whether I did *right* or *wrong*, I will only learn when I meet my maker.

As we *all* shall...



Stephen Strange? A remarkable man, and a wise one

I would very much like to exchange ideas with him about the current situation.

I wonder where he is right now...

Hampton Court.

Let me put this as bluntly as possible, lassie. The treasury is in no position to support your father's colony.

I've got two countries already to worry about. I'm *not* spending money across the ocean.

So you want me to go back, and tell my father there is to be no help from England?

You're no' to talk to His Majesty like that, girl.

Let her be, David. She amuses me.

Actually, I think that you and your wild man make an excellent addition to the court. I'm in no hurry to send you home.

But we have to go *back*--

No. You have to do what I tell you.

Perhaps we should find you a good Scottish wife, to tame you, eh, big man?

Is that all for the day, David?

A petition for stay of execution, from Mistress Clea Strange. She claims her husband is no magician, but a natural philosopher, and withal will burn his books and break his wand if you merely release him into her care. Also, he is extremely ill.

What shall I say?

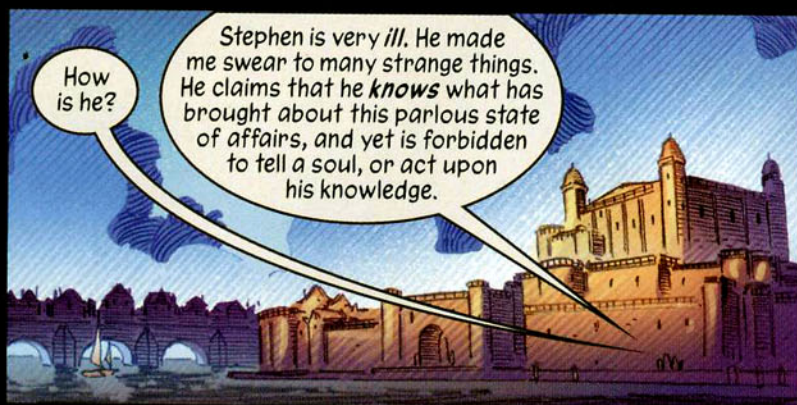
Tell her he's *not* going to be executed because he's a magician.

I'm going to kill him because he's a traitor.



Mistress Clea? Can we *talk* to you?

Of course you may, Virginia. But let us walk together first.



How is he?

Stephen is very *ill*. He made me swear to many strange things. He claims that he *knows* what has brought about this parlous state of affairs, and yet is forbidden to tell a soul, or act upon his knowledge.



I have been talking to Rohzhaz. We think we can rescue him.

Child, you cannot free a man from the Tower...

I made a *plan*. Rohzhaz says it would work. When I get angry or scared, sometimes I change into things...



...but what if I *made* it happen?

I could turn myself into a *great cat*, and Rohzhaz could ride me into the Tower. Together we could free Stephen, and Peter, and escape...



I *forbid* it.

But--

If Stephen were rescued by supernatural means, then James would murder *every* suspected witch, magician, cunning-man and wise-woman in Britain.



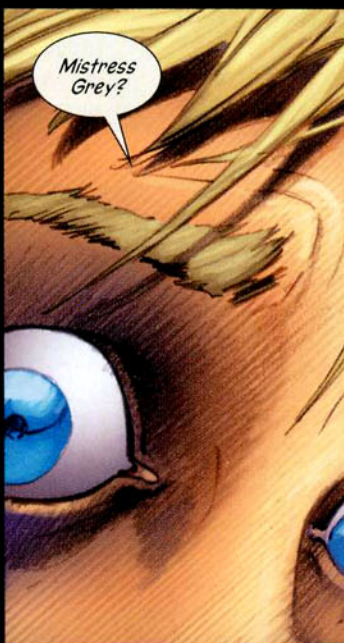
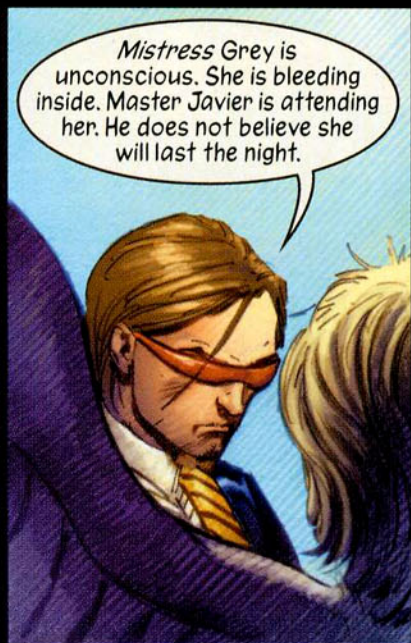
The King's fears must be allowed to die away, not be fanned into hatred and war.

We can't just let it happen...

Perhaps King James will be *merciful*.



He won't.







The Tower of London.

I see you've made a friend already, Peter.



They say when the Bruce was escaping from the English, he destroyed a spider's web. From inside the hole he watched that spider spin herself another.

And he resolved to be like her, and to keep on fighting forever.

The web across the hole-mouth saved his life, when the English came by.



You're to come down to the yard. The King says there's something he very much wants you to see.

Think of it as a chance to stretch your legs and get a little air.



Look at the sky. It never looked like that at night when *I* was a boy. Writhing and sparkling in the dark, like to a hundred comets.

Do not look at it. It's evil.



What's that? I heard something moving.



Aye, Harry. Something moved. Tis *I*—I am thy father's *ghost*, come to see thee *repent* of thy whore-mongering ways, for I spied thee yestere'en down *Grospec*--

A pox on you!

I could swear I heard something moving.



Hello, Stephen.

Clea? My love. At last. It seemed like I have waited here for you for a hundred years...



It happened but this morning, love. And James watched it, and smiled, and sipped his wine, and belched, and when it was done he said that he was a *merciful* man, for you were not hung, drawn and quartered first.



I wanted to kill him. If you had not made me swear your oath, I would have torn out his throat before he harmed a hair on your head.

I would have bathed all of them in their own blood before ever they spilled a single drop of yours.



And instead I stood by and watched as they murdered you.

You did right, my love.



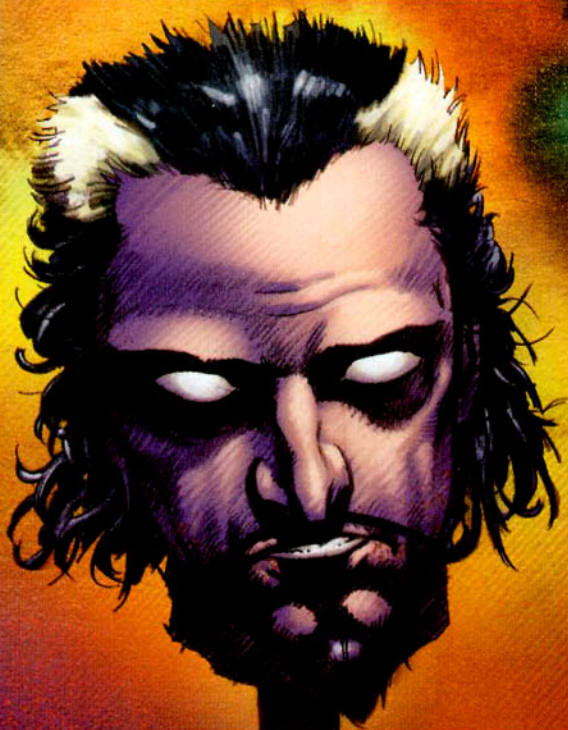


You made me swear. And I swore, Stephen, as I swore I would be yours when you freed me, far beyond the veils of this world.

But it hurt me more than anything has ever hurt me.

And I would follow you into the darkness, now. I do not wish to stay.

Clea. There is but little time before the darkness takes me... There was a...compulsion placed upon my lips--that I could not speak of what I learned, while I lived.



The Forerunner came here from the future. Its arrival made other things happen: things that should not have happened for hundreds of years happened because the Forerunner was here.



As a stone, dropped into a pond, creates ripples that spread, so the Forerunner's presence cast its influence into the past and the future.

The Forerunner is the first. We all follow it...even you. Even me.

You must send the Forerunner back.

When I was a Queen, far from here...



...my people said the dead would speak only in riddles, Stephen.

I am speaking as clearly as I can. It came here from another time. The machine that brought it has already been destroyed.



It must be returned, by the same gate it came through...

You must take it back to America.



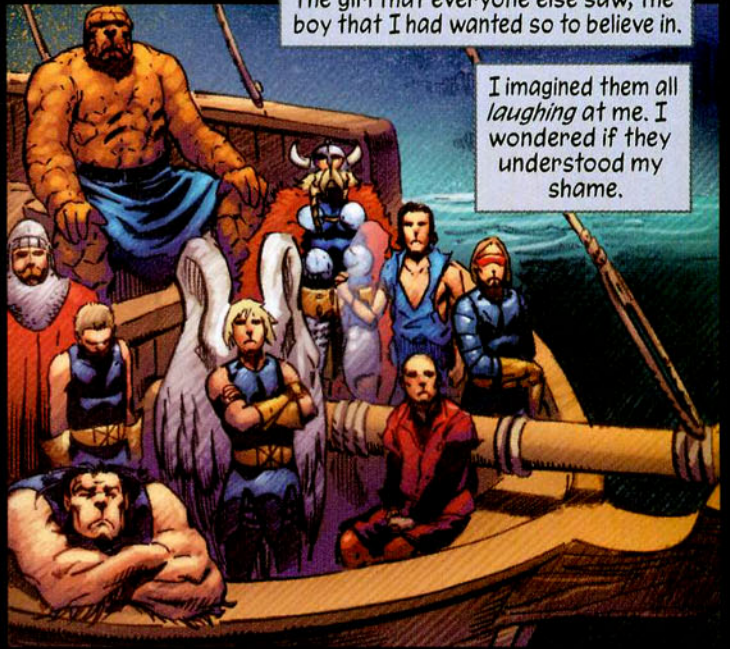
She had begged not to be cast into the ocean.

I was asked if I could be part of her funeral pyre, and I said *I could not*. I felt as if I had lost not one friend, but two.



The girl that everyone else saw, the boy that I had wanted so to believe in.

I imagined them all laughing at me. I wondered if they understood my shame.



In my place, John Storm took her corpse, and, burning, flew with her so high that we could barely see them.

Then he let her fall...



And while Master Javier muttered his God-be-with-yous, Somerisle took the rubies from his eyes, and he stared at the heavens.

There were tears on his cheeks, and I wondered how those eyes, which burn like suns, could cry.




She smoked and glowed. Then she erupted into light, burned so brightly I wanted to look away, but I did not look away. I *could not*.



I imagined something.
That in the light of the
dead girl burning,
something spread its
wings...

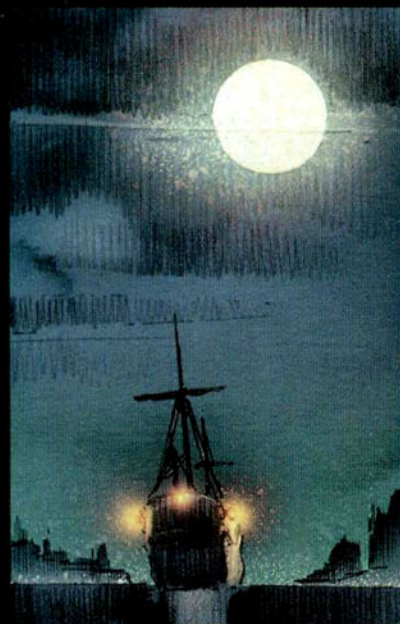
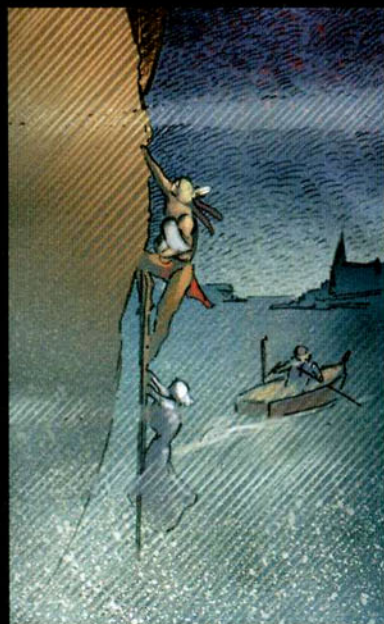
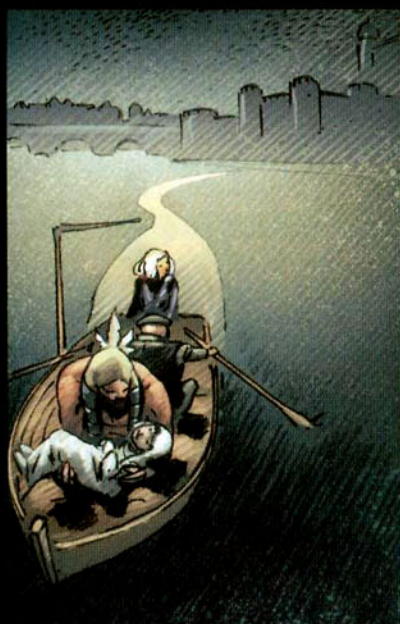
Something huge.
Something strange.
Something *beautiful*.

And
then...



And then there
was nothing left.

Nothing
but ashes.





What are you *thinking*, Reed?

I was thinking about fundamental particles, Susan.

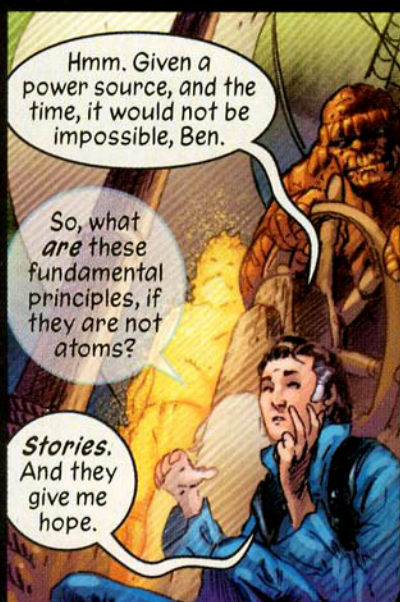
Ah yes. About atomies and suchlike...?

Not at all. Those I thought about while I was in Doom's cellars.



Were it not for the misery he caused you, my friends, I would owe him *thanks* for the time to think with no distractions. I was able to reduce many things to their fundamental principles, at least to my own satisfaction.

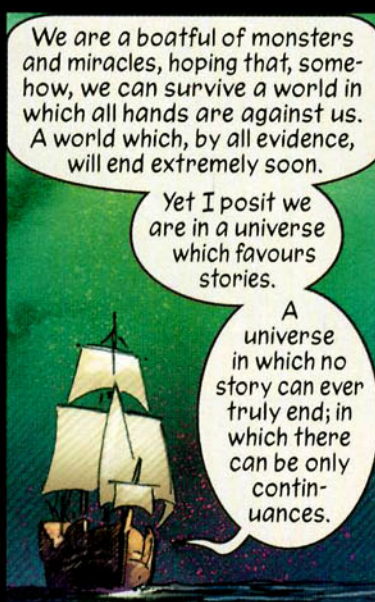
You discovered how to transmute lead into gold, then?



Hmm. Given a power source, and the time, it would not be impossible, Ben.

So, what *are* these fundamental principles, if they are not atoms?

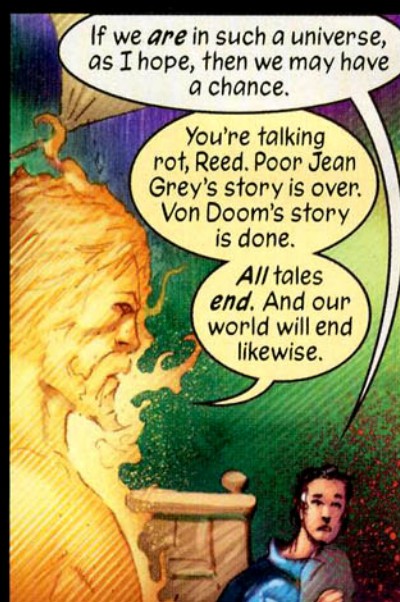
Stories. And they give me hope.



We are a boatful of monsters and miracles, hoping that, somehow, we can survive a world in which all hands are against us. A world which, by all evidence, will end extremely soon.

Yet I posit we are in a universe which favours stories.

A universe in which no story can ever truly end; in which there can be only continuances.



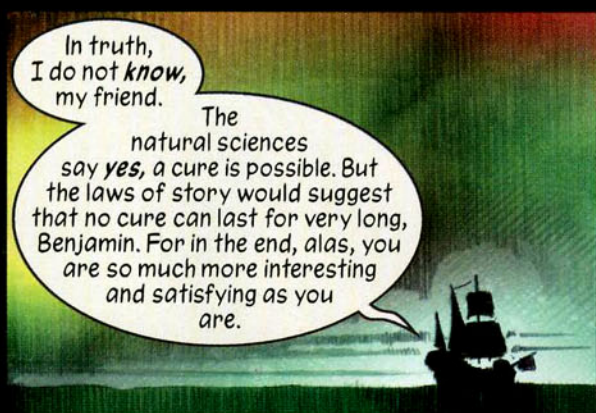
If we *are* in such a universe, as I hope, then we may have a chance.

You're talking rot, Reed. Poor Jean Grey's story is over. Von Doom's story is done.

All tales end. And our world will end likewise.



Reed--you spoke of transmutations. Can you restore to me my humanity? I have been a monster too long.



In truth, I do not *know*, my friend.

The natural sciences say *yes*, a cure is possible. But the laws of story would suggest that no cure can last for very long, Benjamin. For in the end, alas, you are so much more interesting and satisfying as you are.

In my dream
I can see
perfectly.

In my dream I am in a forest
of trees as tall as mountains,
swinging from tree to tree...I
am more free and more alive
than any man has ever been...

And then I wake,
to the clunking of
keys, and the
rattle of chains.

There's
a question. And if
I like the answer you
live. And if I don't,
you don't.

The
question is...
where is your
loyalty?

You
were
Fury's
boy.

Can you
still be loyal to
the crown of
England and
Scotland?

I'm no
traitor.

Ah, but
your master
was.

There are
too many traitors
in the wings.

Stephen Strange's wife has
vanished. So has the girl
from the colonies, and her
Indian. *Traitors. Traitors
all.*

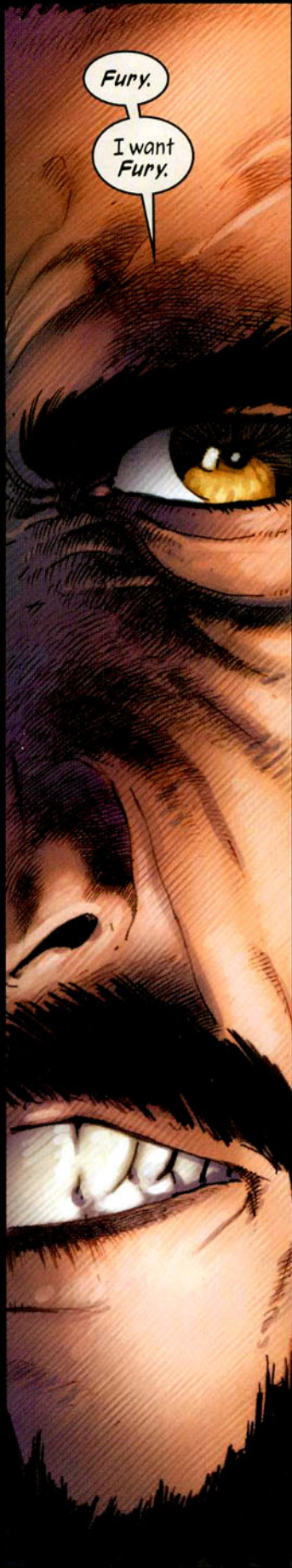
Someone stole
Strange's traitorous
head from off the top of
Temple Bar. It's all plots
and plans and treach-
eries, laddie.

If this goes on, soon
enough they'll be cutting
off the heads of kings. They
don't see it. A king is God's
anointed. They're fighting
God's will...

I prayed all
night. And then I
saw it.

You know
what I want
most of all,
boy?

No, Majesty.



Fury.

I want
Fury.



I want to see
him hung, drawn and
quartered.

I want him to confess his
sins and his crimes, and hear his
entrails crackle in the bonfire while
he still lives to scream his guilt, before
the executioner pulls out his heart
and ends his traitorous
life.



And if I can't have
that...I want to know
that he's *dead*. You
worked for Fury. You
know that monster as
well as any man. And
he'd trust you,
wouldn't he?



Yes. Perhaps.



You will work for
Banner, and for me, as
faithfully as you worked
for Fury and the Queen.
Won't you, Peter?

To learn
you'd died a traitor's
death...it would *break*
your Aunt and Uncle's
hearts...



Yes, Your
Majesty.

Good
lad.

Banner
will pick
out the men
he wants, and
the fastest
ship. You will
ride to South-
ampton, and
take ship
from there.



Where
are we
going?

There's
only one place
they can make
for.

The New
World, Peter. I
am sending you
to America.

"In mere weeks we'll be in the chill northern waters, my toad. These Basque fishermen have been whaling off the coast of Newfoundland for hundreds of years.

"They know how to keep secrets. Something you still have to learn."

Thecretth, Thire. Alwayth.

Grand Inquisitor--?

Wanda. I think that that title may be forgotten now. I am no longer an Inquisitor. The Inquisition served us well, but it was a tool.

Now, we are a brotherhood.

The Brotherhood of... Those who will inherit the Earth. Yes.

Are you looking forward to meeting the rest of our Brotherhood, Wanda?

Yes--sire... but that is what the sailors wanted to talk about.

The winds and the current. The sailors say that we are being carried South and West by them. We cannot break away...

Then we shall go where the winds will carry us, Wanda.

Our brothers and sisters will wait for us.

