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FRED PERRY

# GOLD DIGGER



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# GO TRINAGENT

THIS... IS  
NEGATIVE  
INFINITY...

A WORKING  
MODEL OF TIME  
AND SPACE.

OF  
REALITY.

And I...

**I AM DREADWING...**

...ONCE A HUMBLE  
IRON DRAGON...

...ONCE A SLAVE  
OF CIV-ALPHA...  
THE FIRST EMPIRE  
ON EARTH...

...AND...

...FUTURE  
MASTER OF  
EXISTENCE!

HOWEVER...

...MY DESTINY  
WAS NOT  
ALWAYS  
SO CERTAIN.

FOOLISHLY...

...I ONCE  
BELIEVED ALL  
THE POWER I  
COULD EVER  
WANT...

...POWER FOR  
CONQUEST...  
FREEDOM...  
REVENGE...

...EXISTED  
IN THE PALM  
OF MY HAND.

THE  
TIME-  
RAFT...



BEFORE I ACQUIRED  
THE TIME-RAFT, I  
WAS CONSIDERED A  
MINOR POWER...

...A HENCHMAN  
TO THE OTHER,  
MORE POWERFUL  
DRAGONS.

HOWEVER, WITH  
ITS MAGIC, I WAS  
A LEGENDARY  
FORCE.

FEARED...  
RESPECTED...

Until...

...UNTIL I BEGAN TO  
FEAR FOR THE SAFETY  
OF MY TREASURE.

IN MY PARANOIA, I  
ATTEMPTED TO HIDE  
THE TIME-RAFT'S  
PRESENCE FROM  
MY FOES...

...BY ORDERING  
ITS ENIGMATIC  
POWER SOURCE  
TO SLEEP...

...WITHOUT KNOWING  
HOW TO AWAKEN IT...

MY ENEMIES  
AND FORMER  
VICTIMS  
LOOMED.

I hid...

MY ALLIES  
VANISHED.

MY POWER...  
GONE.

...DEEP WITHIN MY  
LAIR FOR CENTURY  
AFTER CENTURY.

Start...  
Start, curse  
you...

I THOUGHT I COULD FALL  
NO FURTHER FROM MY  
ONCE-LOFTY HEIGHT...

I... was so  
very wrong.

I FELL.

I FELL FOR AN  
ETERNITY  
THROUGH  
TIME, ALONG  
WITH THE  
CHARRED  
REMAINS OF  
MY TREASURE.

MY FLESH  
RIPPED FROM  
MY BONES, I  
SUFFERED AN  
ENDLESS  
AGONY.

I WAS  
HUMILIATED  
AND BEATEN AS  
NEVER BEFORE...

...BY A HUMAN  
WORM...

SHE... **KNEW**... OF THE  
TIME-RAFT I HAD SO  
CAREFULLY HIDDEN.

IT... CALLED...  
TO HER.

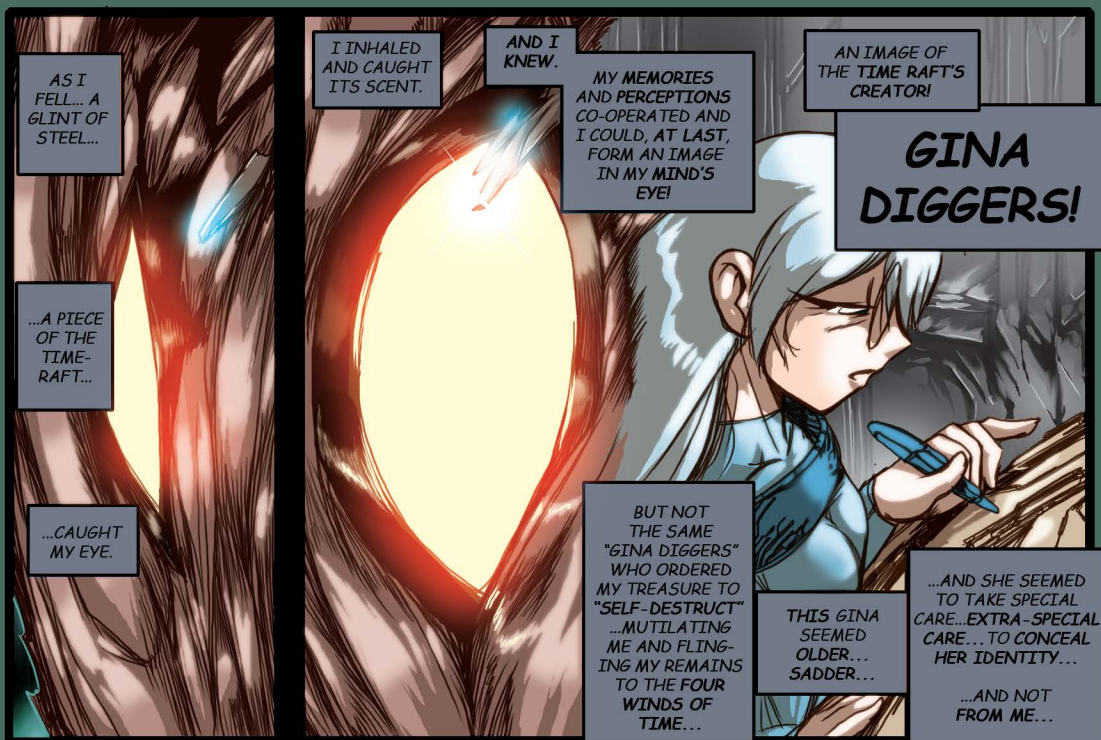
AND SHE  
CAME.

I ATTEMPTED TO USE  
HER TO RECONSTITUTE  
MY "BROKEN" TREASURE...

IT NEVER  
OCCURRED TO ME  
TO WONDER **WHY**  
THE TIME-RAFT  
CALLED **HER**...  
OBEYED **HER**...

...UNTIL **NOW**.





AS I  
FELL... A  
GLINT OF  
STEEL...

...A PIECE  
OF THE  
TIME-  
RAFT...

...CAUGHT  
MY EYE.

I INHALED  
AND CAUGHT  
ITS SCENT.

AND I  
KNEW.

MY MEMORIES  
AND PERCEPTIONS  
CO-OPERATED AND  
I COULD, AT LAST,  
FORM AN IMAGE  
IN MY MIND'S  
EYE!

AN IMAGE OF  
THE TIME RAFT'S  
CREATOR!

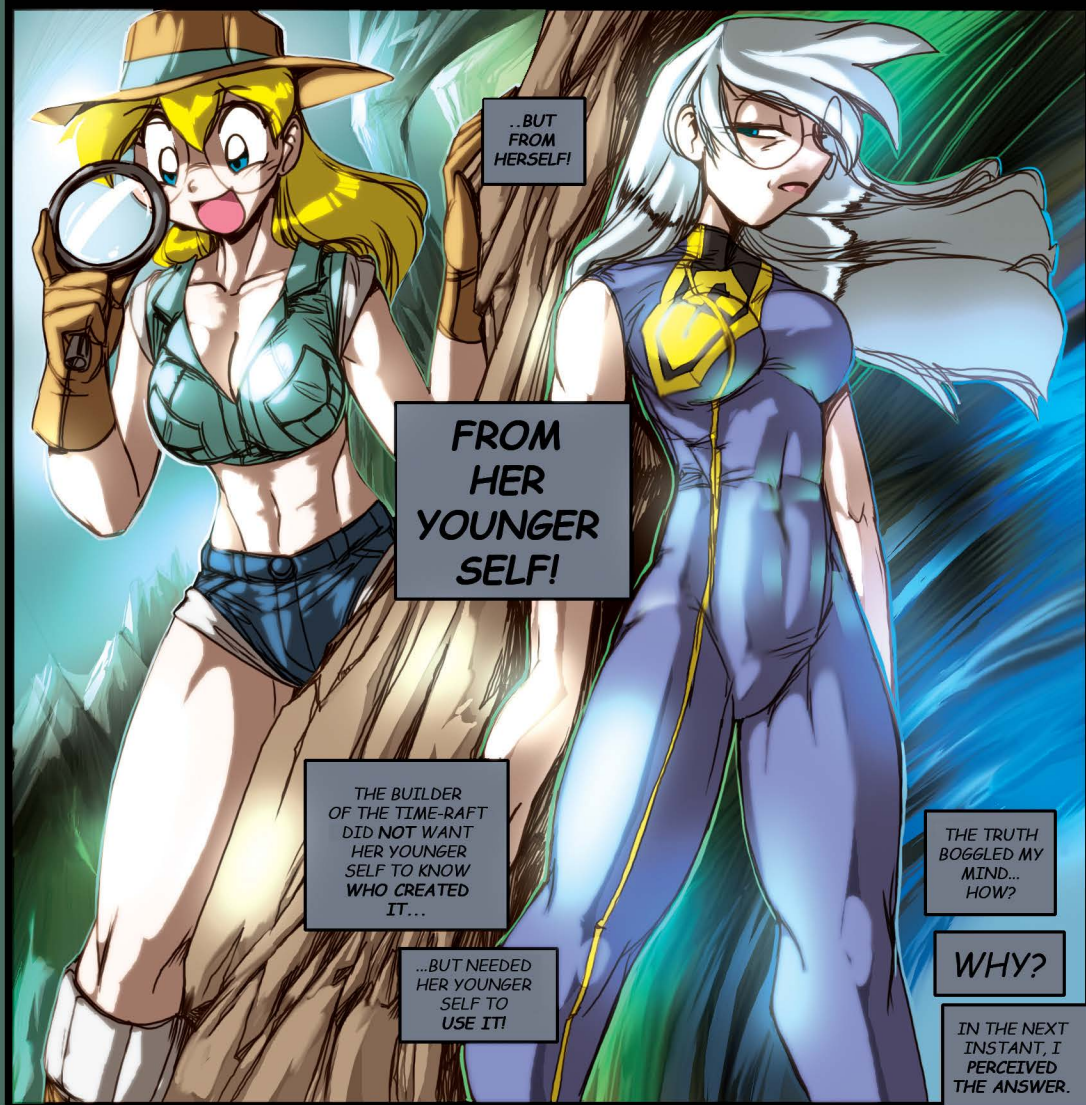
**GINA  
DIGGERS!**

BUT NOT  
THE SAME  
"GINA DIGGERS"  
WHO ORDERED  
MY TREASURE TO  
"SELF-DESTRUCT"  
...MUTILATING  
ME AND FLING-  
ING MY REMAINS  
TO THE FOUR  
WINDS OF  
TIME...

THIS GINA  
SEEMED  
OLDER...  
SADDER...

...AND SHE SEEMED  
TO TAKE SPECIAL  
CARE...EXTRA-SPECIAL  
CARE...TO CONCEAL  
HER IDENTITY...

...AND NOT  
FROM ME...



...BUT  
FROM  
HERSELF!

**FROM  
HER  
YOUNGER  
SELF!**

THE BUILDER  
OF THE TIME-RAFT  
DID NOT WANT  
HER YOUNGER  
SELF TO KNOW  
WHO CREATED  
IT...

...BUT NEEDED  
HER YOUNGER  
SELF TO  
USE IT!

THE TRUTH  
BOGGLED MY  
MIND...  
HOW?

**WHY?**

IN THE NEXT  
INSTANT, I  
PERCEIVED  
THE ANSWER.



...THOUGH, AT THE  
TIME... I DID NOT  
HAVE THE WISDOM  
TO UNDERSTAND...

IT BEGAN  
WITH AN  
EXPLOSION  
OF LIGHT.

BRIEFLY,  
CHRONOSPACE  
WAS FILLED  
WITH THE  
GLARE OF  
A MILLION  
STARS...

...AND ITS  
VERY FABRIC  
SHOOK AND  
BUFFETED ME  
FURIOUSLY!

MY EYES...  
STILL FUNCTIONAL...  
STILL MAGICAL...  
ADJUSTED AS  
THE GLARE  
EBBED...

...TO REVEAL WHAT  
SEEMED TO BE A  
GREAT, RUINED  
FORTRESS...

...FALLING  
ALONGSIDE  
ME AND  
GAINING  
SPEED.

ON ITS  
SURFACE,  
I SAW...

A battle...

POWERFUL  
HUMANOIDS  
ENGAGED IN  
A LIFE-OR-  
DEATH  
STRUGGLE!

THEIR FURY  
AND INTENSITY  
WERE SO GREAT...

...SOMETHING  
FAR MORE  
IMPORTANT  
THAN THEIR  
OWN LIVES  
WAS SURELY  
AT STAKE...

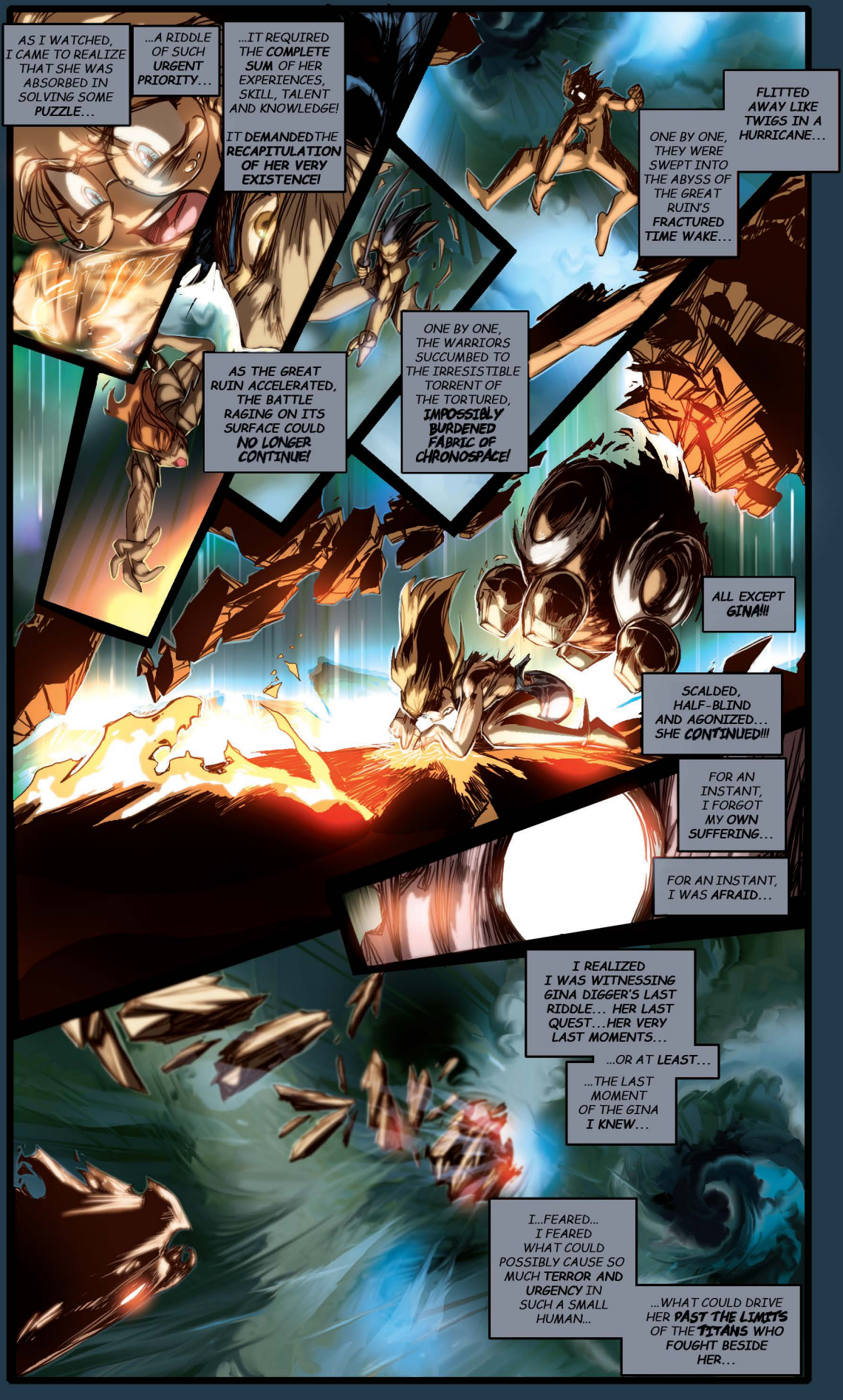
AND THEN...  
I SAW HER.

SLIGHTLY  
OLDER...

...DESPERATELY  
TINKERING WITH  
SOME "UNKNOWN"  
DEVICE...

...OBLIVIOUS  
TO ALL ELSE...  
FOCUSED AS  
IF EVERYTHING  
COUNTED ON  
HER SUCCESS!





AS I WATCHED,  
I CAME TO REALIZE  
THAT SHE WAS  
ABSORBED IN  
SOLVING SOME  
PUZZLE...

...A RIDDLE  
OF SUCH  
URGENT  
PRIORITY...

...IT REQUIRED  
THE COMPLETE  
SUM OF HER  
EXPERIENCES,  
SKILL, TALENT  
AND KNOWLEDGE!

IT DEMANDED THE  
RECAPITULATION  
OF HER VERY  
EXISTENCE!

FLITTED  
AWAY LIKE  
TWIGS IN A  
HURRICANE...

ONE BY ONE,  
THEY WERE  
SWEEPED INTO  
THE ABYSS OF  
THE GREAT  
RUIN'S  
FRACTURED  
TIME WAKE...

ONE BY ONE,  
THE WARRIORS  
SUCCUMBED TO  
THE IRRESISTIBLE  
TORRENT OF  
THE TORTURED,  
**IMPOSSIBLY**  
**BURDENED**  
**FABRIC OF**  
**CHRONOSPACE!**

AS THE GREAT  
RUIN ACCELERATED,  
THE BATTLE  
RAGING ON ITS  
SURFACE COULD  
NO LONGER  
CONTINUE!

ALL EXCEPT  
**GINA!!!**

SCALDED,  
HALF-BLIND  
AND AGONIZED...  
SHE **CONTINUED!!!**

FOR AN  
INSTANT,  
I FORGOT  
MY OWN  
SUFFERING...

FOR AN INSTANT,  
I WAS AFRAID...

I REALIZED  
I WAS WITNESSING  
GINA DIGGER'S LAST  
RIDDLE... HER LAST  
QUEST... HER VERY  
LAST MOMENTS...

...OR AT LEAST...

...THE LAST  
MOMENT  
OF THE GINA  
I KNEW...

I...FEARED...  
I FEARED  
WHAT COULD  
POSSIBLY CAUSE SO  
MUCH TERROR AND  
URGENCY IN  
SUCH A SMALL  
HUMAN...

...WHAT COULD DRIVE  
HER **PAST THE LIMITS**  
OF THE **TITANS** WHO  
FOUGHT BESIDE  
HER...





I PEERED.

I STRAINED WITH ALL MY MIGHT... ALL MY MAGIC... TO PERCEIVE WHAT COULD POSSIBLY LAY IN THE PATH OF THIS MONOLITHIC RUIN... THIS IMPOSSIBLE PROJECTILE!



MY VERY SOUL TREMBLED AS I BEGAN TO TAKE COGNIZANCE OF GINA'S TARGET.

I STARED WITH UNBLINKING EYES AS THE SOULLESS, LIFELESS INFINITUM SPREAD FORTH FROM THE BEGINNING OF TIME.

FROM DEEP WITHIN MY BEING, A WHISPER... AN INKLING... TOLD ME EXACTLY WHAT I WAS SEEING...

...A DEAD UNIVERSE... THE PHANTOM MASS OF THE PREVIOUS COSMOS... RETURNING!

IT WOULD CONSUME THE CHRONOVERSE... REALITY... EVERYTHING... AND ONLY A LOWLY, INSIGNIFICANT, LITTLE, HUMAN GERM STOOD IN ITS WAY!

THE WHISPER CAME AGAIN... CLEARER... LOUDER...

THE INCREASED CLARITY ALLOWED ME TO RECOGNIZE THE ENTITY WHO'D CAREFULLY PLACED ME HERE... AND ALLOWED ME THIS APOCALYPTIC GLIMPSE...

I DON'T EXPECT YOU TO FORGIVE ME, DREADWING... BUT... I NEEDED YOU HERE...

...I NEEDED YOU TO SEE THIS... DOOM.

...Gina.

SHORTLY, YOU WILL BE PULLED FROM CHRONOSPACE.

I HAVE SEEN TO THAT.

AND WORRY NOT ABOUT YOUR PHYSICAL CONDITION.

YOUR RESCUER WILL USE HIS OWN BODY TO PRESERVE YOU.

HE HAS NO CHOICE.

DO NOT TELL THE PARTNER I'VE ASSIGNED YOU OF WHAT YOU HAVE SEEN. HE WILL NOT UNDERSTAND.

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A NEW FORM AND NEW ABILITIES.

YOU WILL USE YOUR HATRED, YOUR FEAR OF ME. BOTH OF YOU.

YOU WILL FINISH THE TASK I SET FOR YOU...



...YOU WILL DO WHATEVER IT TAKES...

...YOU HAVE NO CHOICE.



A pawn...

...taken... moved and placed across some cosmic chessboard...

All along... I was her pawn...



AS "ANCIENT GINA" FORE-  
TOLD...I WAS  
PULLED FROM  
CHRONOSPACE...

...TO A MOMENT  
OF TIME MILLIONS  
OF YEARS BEFORE  
I WAS BORN...

...TO THE  
MOMENT  
OF MY  
REBIRTH!

MY RESCUER  
WAS ALSO  
"PLACED" IN  
THIS ERA.

ALFRED  
STEINER  
PEACHBODY...  
HE TOO WAS  
GINA'S  
ENEMY.

HE TOO WAS "ANCIENT  
GINA'S"  
PAWN.

BUT PEACHBODY'S  
HATRED... HIS  
FEAR... SURPASSED  
EVEN MY OWN...

HE USED A  
STRANGE  
TECHNIQUE  
IN ORDER  
TO GAIN  
MY DRACONIC  
ABILITIES...  
MY MAGIC.

HE USED  
"FUSION"...

...AND WE  
WERE **ONE**.

PEACHBODY'S  
ANGER AND  
RAGE COMBINED  
WITH MY OWN.

OUR DRACONIC  
BLOOD BOILED  
WITH BLINDING  
FURY!

GINA!

FOR A TIME,  
THE THOUGHT  
OF HER HUMILIATION  
AND DEATH WAS  
**ALL-CONSUMING!**

OUR MEMORIES  
WERE CLOUDED.  
OUR JUDGMENT  
IMPAIRED!

ALL THAT  
MATTERED  
WAS  
REVENGE!

ACROSS THE  
GULF OF TIME  
AND SPACE,  
"ANCIENT  
GINA" SAT  
BACK AND  
SMILED...

WE MOVED  
JUST AS  
SHE WISHED  
US TO.

PEACHBODY AND  
I WERE TRAPPED.  
WE NOW SHARED  
THE LIMITS OF  
HIS CONTINUUM,  
HIS CHRONOSPACE  
CONTINUITY.

A "TIMEWARP"  
PREVENTED OUR  
MOVEMENT  
THROUGH  
CHRONOSPACE.

TO REACH GINA  
NOW, WE WOULD  
HAVE TO CREATE  
A NEW PATH!

WE SET TO WORK  
ON CONSTRUCTING  
A MAGICAL, META-  
PHYSICAL MAP OR  
MODEL OF REALITY...

...DESIGNED SOLELY FOR  
AUGMENTATION OF BASIC  
**TIME/SPACE-DISTORTION  
MAGIC**, A SIMPLE "HASTE"  
SPELL CAST ON OUR ICONS  
IN THE MODEL WOULD  
LET US HOP FORWARD A  
MILLENNIA!

THUS  
WE SET TO  
WORK ON A  
PROJECT THAT  
WOULD TAKE  
MILLIONS OF  
YEARS...

DRIVEN AND  
BLINDED BY  
INDEFATIGABLE  
FURY...

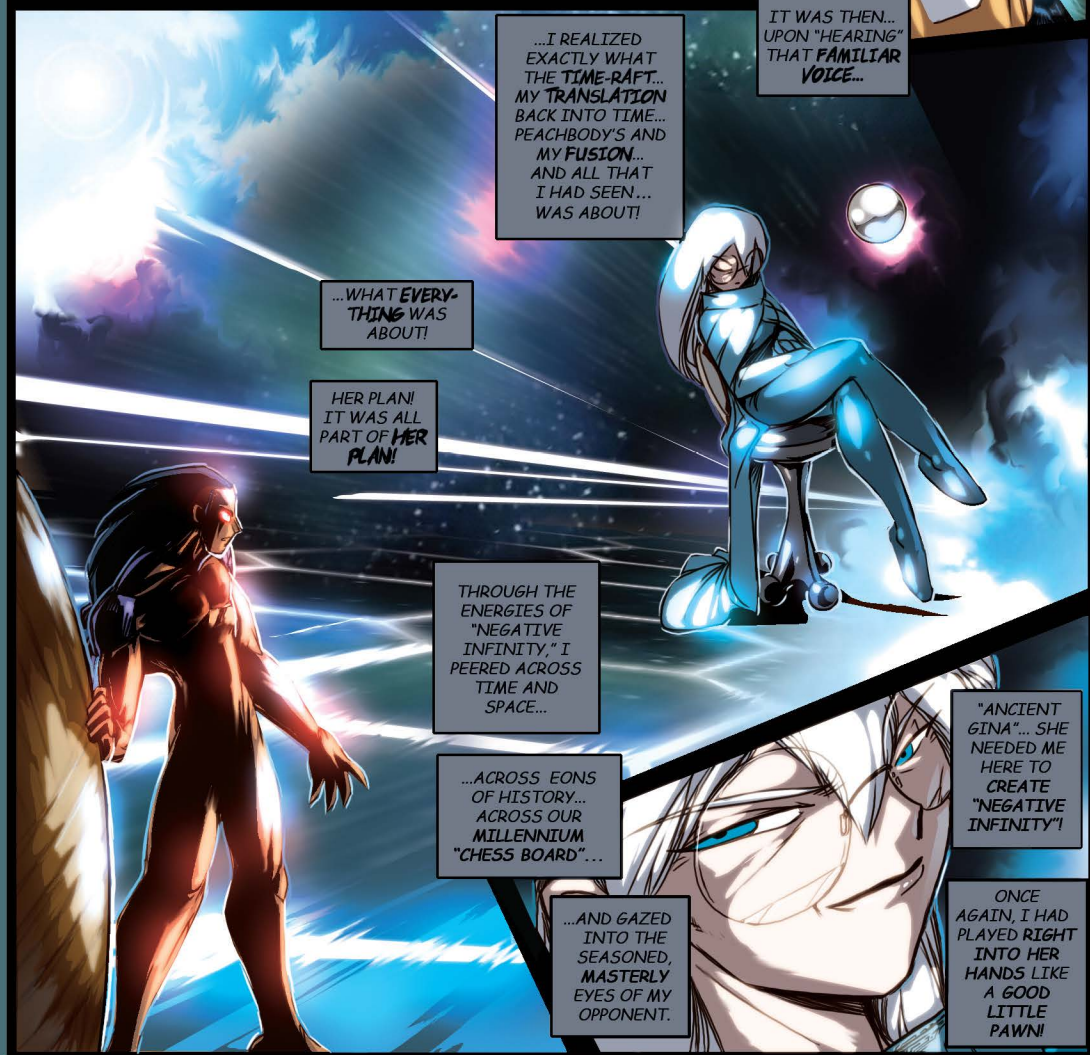
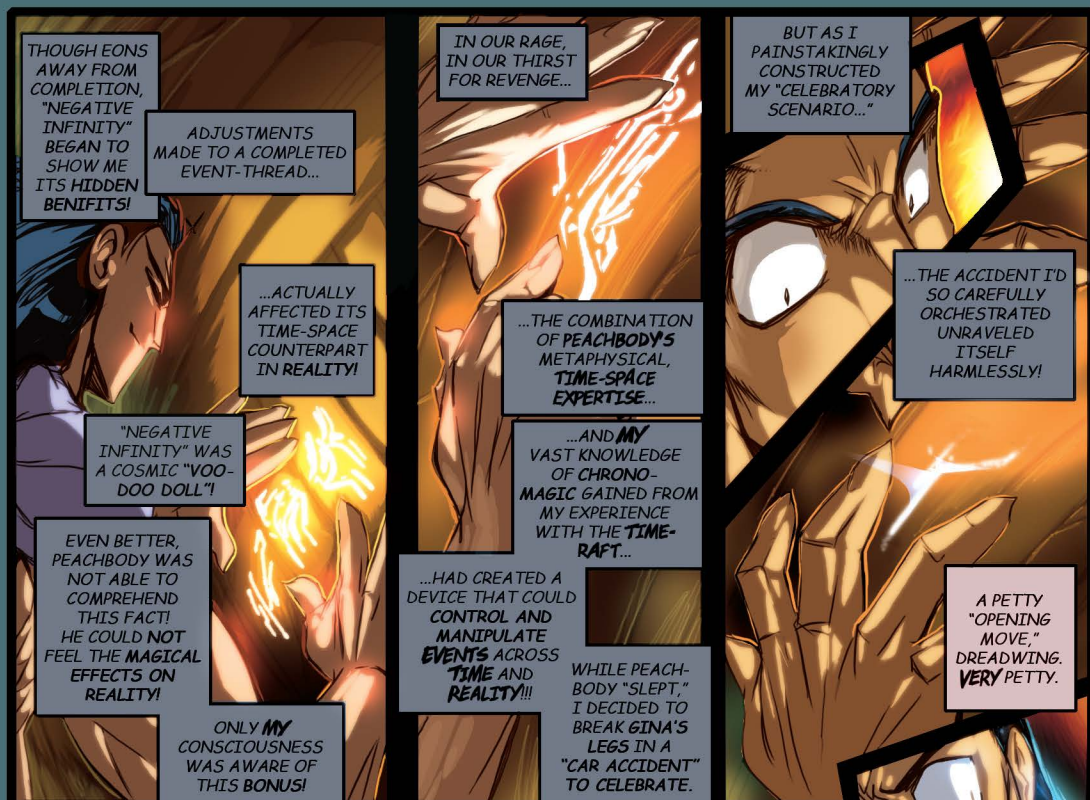
...WE CRAFTED  
THE INSTRUMENT  
OF OUR REVENGE...

"NEGATIVE  
INFINITY."

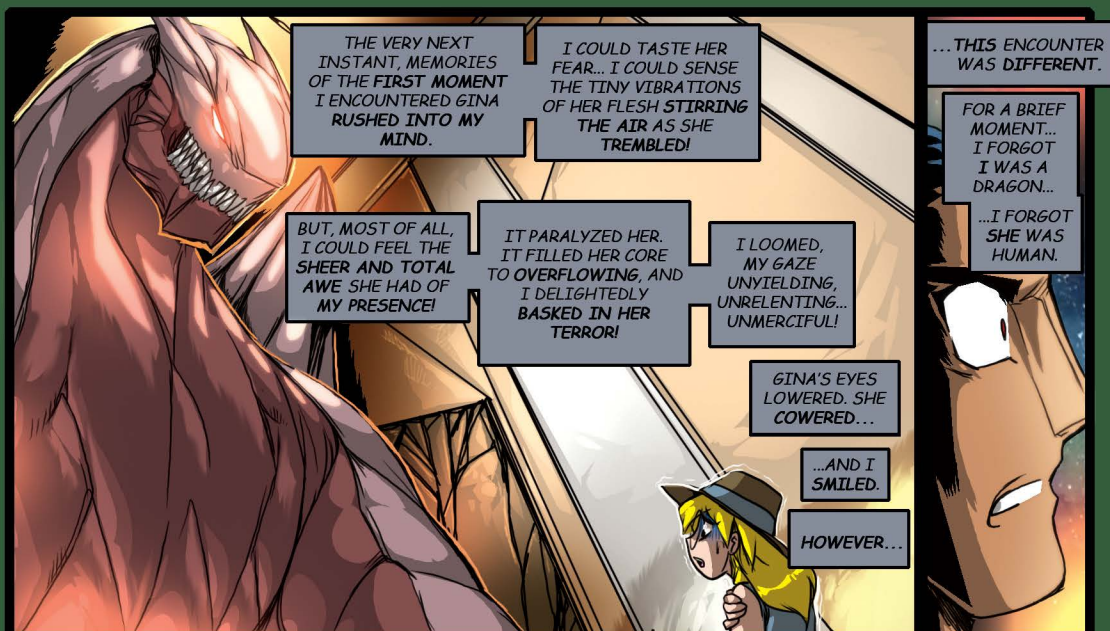
BUT,  
AFTER EONS  
OF CEASELESS  
TOIL... OUR  
PROJECT REACHED  
**MATURITY**, AND  
OUR ANGER  
EBBED...

**I**  
BEGAN TO  
COMPREHEND  
THE **MAJESTY**  
OF THE MASTER-  
PIECE WE HAD  
CREATED!









THE VERY NEXT INSTANT, MEMORIES OF THE **FIRST** MOMENT I ENCOUNTERED GINA RUSHED INTO MY MIND.

I COULD TASTE HER FEAR... I COULD SENSE THE TINY VIBRATIONS OF HER FLESH STIRRING THE AIR AS SHE TREMBLED!

...THIS ENCOUNTER WAS DIFFERENT.

FOR A BRIEF MOMENT... I FORGOT I WAS A DRAGON...

...I FORGOT SHE WAS HUMAN.

BUT, MOST OF ALL, I COULD FEEL THE SHEER AND TOTAL AWE SHE HAD OF MY PRESENCE!

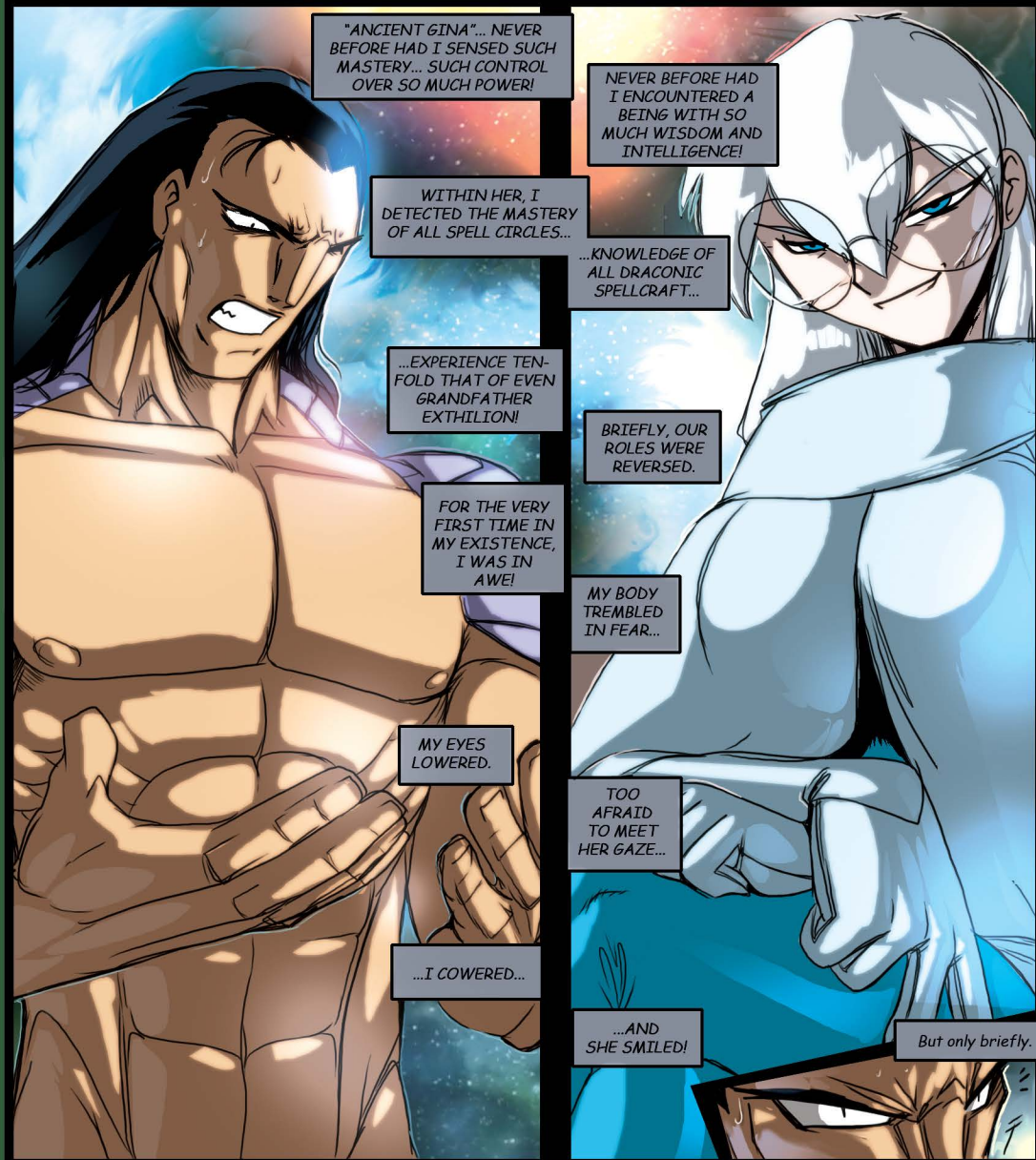
IT PARALYZED HER. IT FILLED HER CORE TO OVERFLOWING, AND I DELIGHTEDLY BASKED IN HER TERROR!

I LOOMED, MY GAZE UNYIELDING, UNRELENTING... UNMERCIFUL!

GINA'S EYES LOWERED. SHE COWERED...

...AND I SMILED.

HOWEVER...



"ANCIENT GINA"... NEVER BEFORE HAD I SENSED SUCH MASTERY... SUCH CONTROL OVER SO MUCH POWER!

NEVER BEFORE HAD I ENCOUNTERED A BEING WITH SO MUCH WISDOM AND INTELLIGENCE!

WITHIN HER, I DETECTED THE MASTERY OF ALL SPELL CIRCLES...

...KNOWLEDGE OF ALL DRACONIC SPELLCRAFT...

...EXPERIENCE TEN-FOLD THAT OF EVEN GRANDFATHER EXTHILION!

BRIEFLY, OUR ROLES WERE REVERSED.

FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME IN MY EXISTENCE, I WAS IN AWE!

MY BODY TREMBLED IN FEAR...

MY EYES LOWERED.

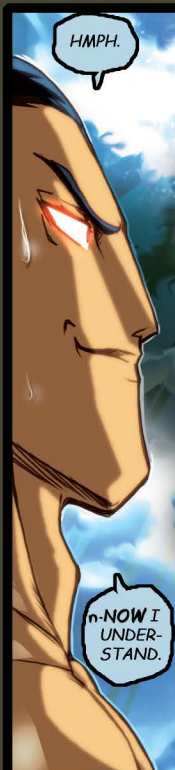
TOO AFRAID TO MEET HER GAZE...

...I COWERED...

...AND SHE SMILED!

But only briefly.





HMPH.

"NOW I UNDERSTAND."



"NEGATIVE INFINITY"...



"...POSITIVE INFINITY!"

!!!

TWO HALVES OF THE SAME IMPOSSIBLE DEVICE!

OPPOSITE! EQUAL!

ONE WITHOUT THE OTHER IS USELESS!



THAT'S WHY YOU FORCED ME HERE...

...WHY YOU TRICKED ME INTO HELPING BUILD THIS... "INFINITY ENGINE!"

YOU **ALSO** PLAN TO HAVE YOUR YOUNGER SELF "DISCOVER" AND USE THE "INFINITY ENGINE" TO DESTROY THAT VACANT COSMOS... THAT "DOOM!"

BUT THE NATURE OF THIS DEVICE DEMANDS THAT ONLY **ONE** OF US MAY COMMAND IT AT ANY GIVEN "TIME."

BEFORE I CAN USE "NEGATIVE INFINITY" AGAIN, I HAVE TO WAIT FOR **YOU** TO FINISH **YOUR** TURN!

"CHESS!"



THIS IS SIMPLY A COSMIC GAME OF CHESS!

A GAME BETWEEN **US** FOR CONTROL...

...CONTROL OF THE "INFINITY ENGINE"...

...CONTROL OF REALITY!



AND WHILE **YOUR** GOAL IS THE RESCUE OF OUR UNIVERSE....

...MY GOAL ISN'T SO GENEROUS.

"DOOM'S" REFERENCE POINT TO **REAL TIME** IS ON MY THIRTY-THIRD BIRTHDAY, DREADWING.

MIDNIGHT.



LOCAL, GLOBAL AND UNIVERSAL REFERENCE CONTINUA SIMPLY "DON'T KNOW" WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THAT MOMENT.

ON THAT NIGHT, **EVERYTHING ENDS**... **OR**...EVERY LAST CLOCK IN EXISTENCE SIMPLY **LOSES A SECOND**.





THE INVADING  
UNIVERSE HAD TO  
BE CANCELED OUT  
BY ITS "META-  
PHYSICAL  
OPPOSITE."

THE "INFINITY  
ENGINE" HAD TO BE  
PROPERLY CALIBRATED  
FROM THE MOMENT  
IT ENTERED CHRONO-  
SPACE, AND THE  
ONLY ONE WHO  
COULD DO IT RIGHT  
WAS ME... THE  
"YOUNG ME."

I NEEDED THE  
PROPER TOOLS...  
A GALACTIC  
"SET OF WRENCHES":  
THE BETA-ENGINE...

...AND A "WORK  
BENCH" TOUGH  
ENOUGH TO  
SUPPORT A  
UNIVERSE:  
THE DYNASTY'S  
FORTRESS  
SHIP.

GETTING  
EACH OF THOSE  
"TOOLS" WAS A  
HERCULEAN TASK  
IN ITS OWN  
RIGHT...BUT IT ALL  
CAME DOWN  
TO ME.

THE CALIBRATION  
REQUIRED SOLVING  
A SEVEN-HUNDRED-  
QUANTUM-FORMULA,  
FUZZY-MATRIX,  
MORPHING "PUZZLE" IN  
TWENTY MINUTES...

NO COMPUTER COULD  
POSSIBLY DO IT. THE  
AMOUNT OF EXPERIENCE,  
KNOWLEDGE, AND  
IMAGINATION  
NEEDED TO MAKE ALL  
THOSE MATHEMATICAL  
LEAPS OF FAITH  
**CANNOT BE  
CODED!**

ONLY THE  
YOUNG ME COULD  
DO IT. I MAY HAVE  
EXPERIENCE, BUT  
I'M NOT AS SHARP  
AS I USED TO BE.



AND I DON'T KNOW  
WHAT HAPPENED AFTER  
THE MOMENT OF  
TRUTH, DREAD-  
WING...

I DON'T  
KNOW WHETHER  
I FAILED OR  
SUCCEEDED.

I WAS THROWN  
FREE OF **THIS REALITY**  
INTO THE **PREVIOUS**  
**DYING COSMOS**...THE  
COSMOS THAT IS  
NOW TRYING TO  
**RETURN!**

MY PATH LED  
ME THERE  
AND BACK  
AGAIN!

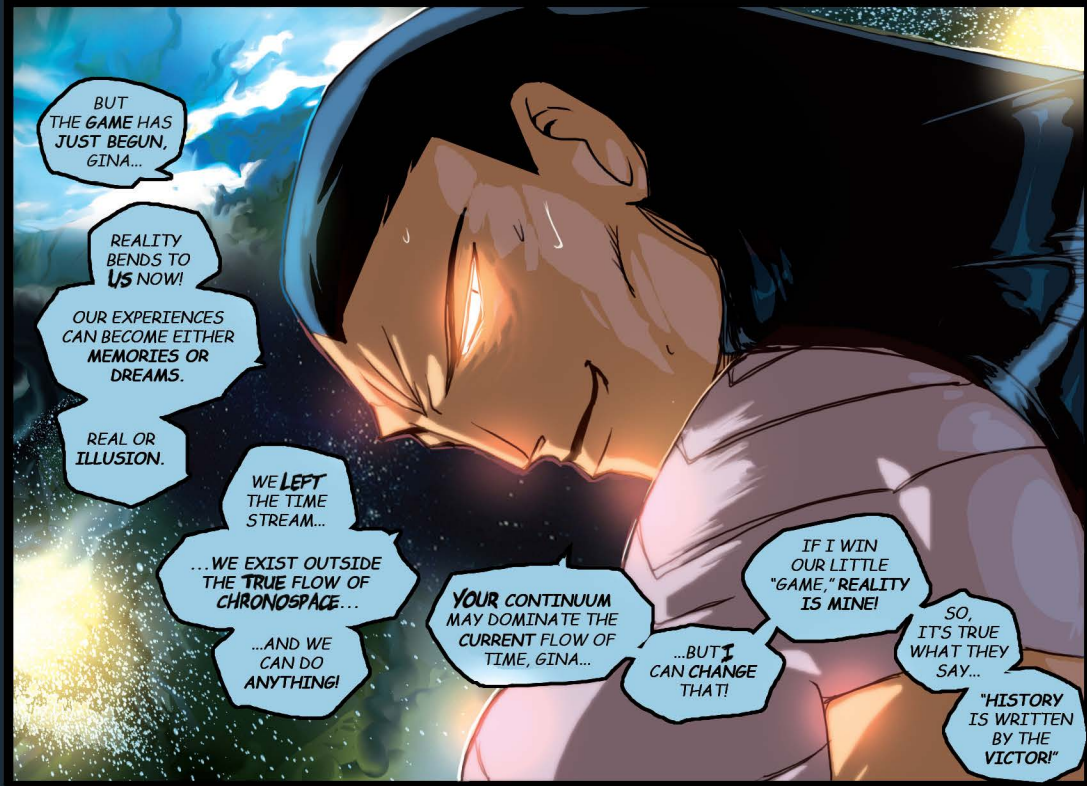
I CAME BACK  
FOR **THIS!**

I WAITED  
AN ETERNITY  
FOR THIS!

TO MAKE SURE  
I SUCCEEDED!

HEED THIS  
COMMAND.

DO **NOT**  
GET IN MY  
WAY.



BUT  
THE GAME HAS  
JUST BEGUN,  
GINA...

REALITY  
BENDS TO  
**US NOW!**

OUR EXPERIENCES  
CAN BECOME EITHER  
MEMORIES OR  
DREAMS.

REAL OR  
ILLUSION.

WE **LEFT**  
THE TIME  
STREAM...

...WE EXIST OUTSIDE  
THE **TRUE FLOW** OF  
CHRONOSPACE...

...AND WE  
CAN DO  
ANYTHING!

**YOUR CONTINUUM**  
MAY DOMINATE THE  
CURRENT FLOW OF  
TIME, GINA...

...BUT **I**  
CAN CHANGE  
THAT!

IF I WIN  
OUR LITTLE  
"GAME," REALITY  
IS MINE!

SO,  
IT'S TRUE  
WHAT THEY  
SAY...

"HISTORY  
IS WRITTEN  
BY THE  
VICTORY!"



IN THE VERY  
NEXT INSTANT,  
MY EMBOLDENED  
BLOOD RAN  
ICE COLD...

HER GLARE...

... "ANCIENT GINA'S"  
EYES BORED THROUGH  
MY SOUL LIKE A  
LANCE OF ICE...

SHE ROSE...  
AND I COULD  
FEEL THE ETHER  
OF HER AURA BEGIN  
TO STIR FROM  
ITS SILENT,  
PATIENT  
REPOSE...

IT GATHERED...  
LIKE A COLOSSAL,  
FULLY SPREAD  
SHEET OF CLOTH  
SLOWLY BEING  
PULLED UP FROM  
THE FLOOR.

SUDDENLY, HER  
AURA BILLOWED AS  
SOME HURRICANE  
FORCE TOOK  
HOLD...

SHE...

...SHE WAS  
CASTING  
A SPELL?

MY MIND  
RACED!

HOW COULD ANY SPELL  
REACH ME? OUR RELATIVE  
POSITIONS IN TIME AND  
SPACE COULDN'T POSSIBLY  
BE BRIDGED BY ANY  
SPELLCRAFT!

BUT THEN, I REMEMBERED!

THE TIME-  
RAFT GAVE ME  
ACCESS TO "CHRONO-  
MAGIC"... A SPELL  
CIRCLE LOST TO  
EVEN ANCIENT  
DRAGONS!

AND IT WAS  
"ANCIENT GINA"  
WHO'D BUILT THE  
TIME-RAFT!!!

SUDDENLY, I WAS  
HORRIFIED!

IF SHE COULD BUILD THE  
TIME-RAFT, THEN I WAS  
SURELY WITHIN THE  
REACH OF HER MAGIC!

I WAS DEFINITELY  
WITHIN THE REACH  
OF HER WRATH!

ACROSS THE  
GULF OF TIME,  
I COULD SENSE  
HER SPELL'S  
RELEASE!

ACROSS  
EONS...

...ACROSS  
EXISTENCE!

I FELT  
"ANCIENT  
GINA"  
CAST!

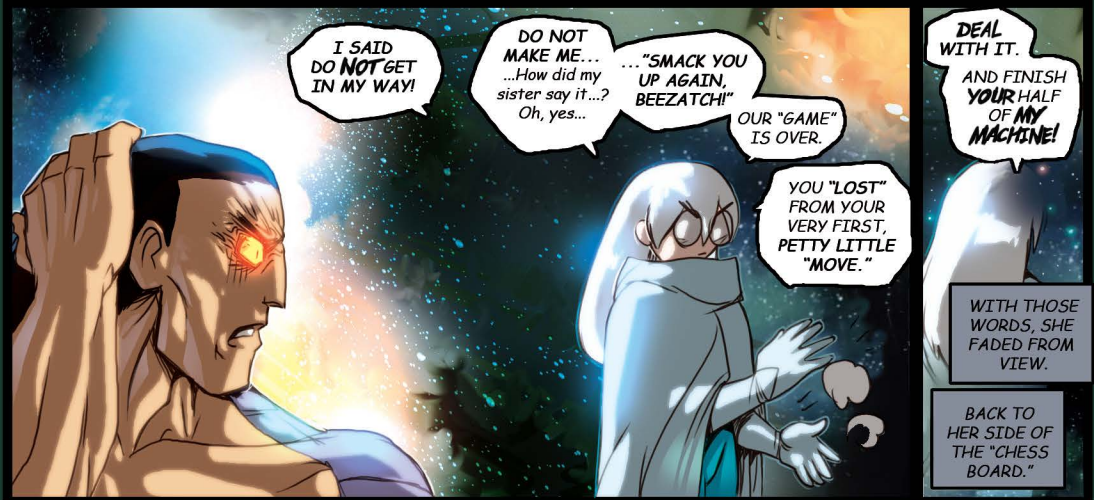
SHE...

SHE WAS  
GOING TO  
DESTROY  
ME...

CRUSH ME  
LIKE AN  
INSECT!!!

...SHE...









AS THE LINK  
BETWEEN MYSELF  
AND "ANCIENT GINA"  
DISSOLVED...

...MY BODY SHOOK  
VIOLENTLY AS  
BLINDING, SEETHING  
RAGE WELLED UP  
FROM DEEP WITHIN  
MY VERY BEING...

HOW DARE  
SHE.



I WANTED TO  
DESTROY...

...I WANTED TO  
TEAR EVERYTHING  
APART!

I WANTED  
TO KILL!

HOW  
DARE  
SHE!!!



I WANTED  
REVENGE!!!

**I CRAVED  
REVENGE!!!**

"ANCIENT  
GINA..."

IF SHE WANTED  
"NEGATIVE INFINITY"  
FINISHED, I WOULD  
DENY HER!

I'D DESTROY IT!!!  
DAMN HER "PLANS!"  
DAMN THE COSMOS!  
I WANTED  
**REVENGE!**



However...



hmmm...

HM-HM-HM!

Almost.

YOU ALMOST  
SUCCEEDED...  
"ANCIENT  
GINA!"

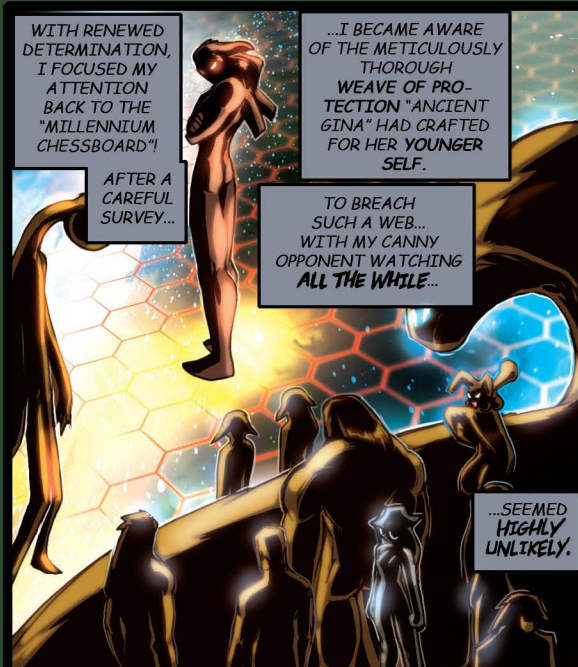
"NEGATIVE  
INFINITY"  
ALREADY  
EXISTS  
SOMEWHERE  
IN TIME,  
AND THAT'S  
ALL YOU  
NEED FOR THE  
"INFINITY  
ENGINE!"

YOU WANTED  
ME ANGRY!

YOU WANTED  
ME TO DESTROY  
MY END OF THE  
CHESSBOARD!

hmhmhm....  
AHAHAHAH!  
Almost!





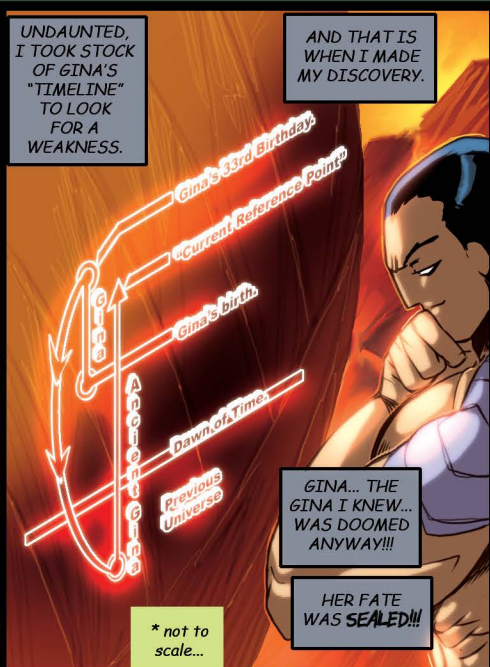
WITH RENEUED DETERMINATION, I FOCUSED MY ATTENTION BACK TO THE "MILLENNIUM CHESSBOARD!"

AFTER A CAREFUL SURVEY...

...I BECAME AWARE OF THE METICULOUSLY THOROUGH WEAVE OF PROTECTION "ANCIENT GINA" HAD CRAFTED FOR HER YOUNGER SELF.

TO BREACH SUCH A WEB... WITH MY CANNY OPPONENT WATCHING **ALL THE WHILE...**

...SEEMED **HIGHLY UNLIKELY.**



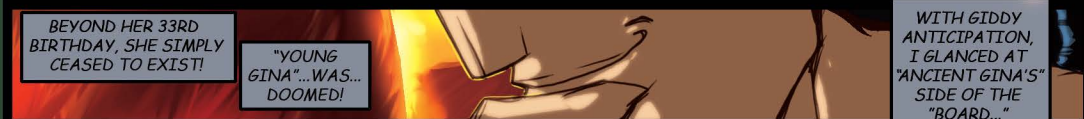
UNDAUNTED, I TOOK STOCK OF GINA'S "TIMELINE" TO LOOK FOR A WEAKNESS.

AND THAT IS WHEN I MADE MY DISCOVERY.

\* not to scale...

GINA... THE GINA I KNEW... WAS DOOMED ANYWAY!!!

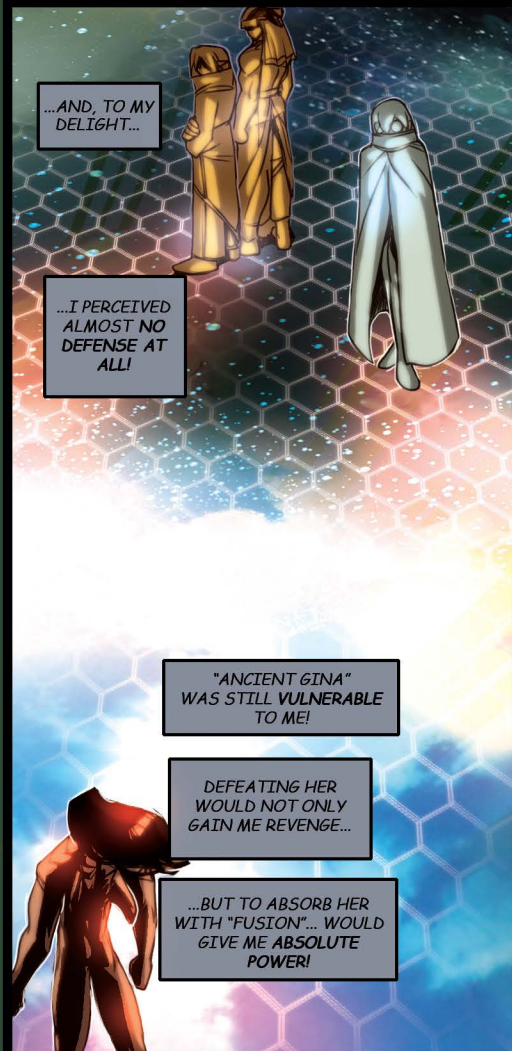
HER FATE WAS **SEALED!!!**



BEYOND HER 33RD BIRTHDAY, SHE SIMPLY CEASED TO EXIST!

"YOUNG GINA"... WAS... DOOMED!

WITH GIDDY ANTICIPATION, I GLANCED AT "ANCIENT GINA'S" SIDE OF THE "BOARD..."



...AND, TO MY DELIGHT...

...I PERCEIVED ALMOST NO DEFENSE AT ALL!

"ANCIENT GINA" WAS STILL VULNERABLE TO ME!

DEFEATING HER WOULD NOT ONLY GAIN ME REVENGE...

...BUT TO ABSORB HER WITH "FUSION"... WOULD GIVE ME ABSOLUTE POWER!



SHE WAS MY **TRUE** ENEMY IN ANY CASE!

SHE WAS THE ONE WHO ENGINEERED MY PAIN AND SUFFERING!

SHE WAS THE ONE WHO USED ME FOR HER GOALS...

IT HAD ALWAYS BEEN **JUST BETWEEN US!!!**

Gina...

I NEVER DREAMED OUR FIRST MEETING IN MY TINY LAIR... WRESTLING OVER THE "TIME-RAFT"... WOULD COME RIGHT DOWN TO THE BONE BETWEEN JUST YOU AND ME...

...FULL CIRCLE TO A STRUGGLE FOR THE FATE OF THE COSMOS!





BUT.....

...I'D BEST NOT INVOLVE PEACHBODY...

...YES...

...DOGS DO NOT KNOW HOW TO PLAY CHESS.



WHAT WAS THAT ABOUT CHESS?

OH... AWAKE I SEE...

...HOW WAS YOUR NAP?

YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT CHESS AGAIN, AREN'T YOU... THINKING ABOUT OUR GAME!

WELL, I'M READY FOR YOU, PUNK! LETS DO THIS!

ALFRED, HOW MANY TIMES MUST I TELL YOU? "SMACK TALK" AND CHESS DONT MIX!

SO YOU SAY! BUT MY SIX COLLEGIATE CHESS TOURNAMENT VICTORIES SAY DIFFERENT!

BRING IT, MEAT! BxN/7!

BOOYAKAH!!!

R/QB3-K3.

check and mate.



F%\$#@!!!!

... J  
idiot.

WHAT WAS THAT?

NOTHING... I WAS JUST THINKING...

"...WOULDN'T THIS BE A NICE SPOT... FOR A LAIR?"



GINA... SOMETIMES... YOU'RE A BIT SCARY.

"SMACK YOU UP AGAIN, BEEZATCH?"

IT WORKED, DIDN'T IT, SUBTRACTO?

DREADWING WILL COMPLETE "NEGATIVE INFINITY" AND UNLOCK ALL ITS SECRETS...

...JUST AS I NEEDED HIM TO.

IF ALL GOES WELL...

...I'll finally... FINALLY... get to taste my thirty-third birthday cake.



I'VE BEEN DYING FOR A PIECE EVER SINCE TIFF, BRI' AND I LEFT TO "JACK" THAT FORTRESS IN QUASI-SPA--

ANCIENT ONE...

THE TOURNAMENT OF ARMS HAS CONCLUDED...

...AND I HAVE LOCATED GINA DIGGERS, AS YOU REQUESTED...

THANKS, ECKO...

I'VE BEEN WAITING A LONG TIME...

...TO MEET...

...me.

END: GID TANGENT...



Jade-Realm...  
present day.

ARE WE  
EVEN THERE  
YET?

I'D SAY WE HAVE  
AT LEAST **THREE  
MORE DAYS** UNTIL  
WE REACH **THE  
OBSERVATORY  
OF JADE-REALM**  
TO VISIT OUR  
FRIENDS AGAIN,  
BRIANNA.

PERSONALLY,  
I'LL BE SAD  
TO SEE OUR  
LITTLE FIELD  
TRIP END.

EVERY STEP  
BRINGS A NEW  
**CURIOSITY**  
INTO VIEW!  
**FASCINATING!**

ESPECIALLY  
THOSE **STRANGE  
MARKERS** ALONG  
THE ROAD!

THEY'RE CALLED  
**"GUIDEPOSTS,"**  
GINA.

THE SHADOW  
ELVES BUILT  
THEM **FIVE  
HUNDRED  
YEARS AGO.**

THEY CREATE  
A ZONE OF SAFETY  
ALONG THIS  
ROAD.

MONSTERS IN  
THIS REGION  
ARE PARTICULARLY  
DEADLY, BUT  
ROADS PROTECTED  
BY GUIDEPOSTS  
ALLOW SMALL  
CARAVANS  
LIKE **THAT ONE**  
TO TRAVEL IN  
RELATIVE  
SAFETY.

SO THAT'S  
WHY I HAVEN'T  
BEEN GETTIN'  
**NO TARGET  
PRACTICE** ON  
THIS TRIP!

**FASCINATING,**  
SEANCE! HOW DO  
THEY WORK?

THOSE TRAVELLING  
ALONG THE ROAD ARE  
COMPLETELY MASKED  
FROM **ANY CREATURE'S  
PERCEPTION.**

**ADDITIONALLY,**  
THE GUIDEPOSTS--

**GINA!!  
BRIANNA!!!**







g-GRANDMA?

GRAMMY!!!

OH, I MUST HAVE DONE **SOMETHING** RIGHT FOR **SOME-ONE** UP THERE...

FIRST I CATCH AN **IVORY BOG-THRESHER** TAKING A NAP...

AND NOW A CHANCE MEETING WITH **TWO** OF MY LITTLE **GRAND-BABIES!**

OOO, I'M **SO BLESSED** TODAY!



HUGGIES!

OhOHh!

WHAT'S IN THE BAG, GRANDMA? WHAT'S IN THE BAG?

OHhH, JUST A LITTLE **IVORY**.

WAIT... YOU MEAN THOSE ARE T-TEETH?

BRUNHILDA?

ARE THOSE **FRIENDS** OF YOURS?



IF YOU'D LIKE, YOU CAN INVITE THEM FOR SUPPER AND TO SHARE A TENT...

...BUT...

...HEHEH...

...YOU HAVE TO PROMISE TO COOK YOUR **SPECIALTY** FOR ALL OF US TONIGHT.

WHAT DO YOU GIRLS THINK, **ANYONE** HUNGRY FOR SWEET ROOT COBBLER?

Die! What's off?

Big time!





WELL, AS IT  
TURNS OUT,  
GRANDMA'S  
FRIENDS ARE  
ACTUALLY  
"AMAZON  
TRADERS."

THEY'RE  
TOUCHIN'  
BASE WITH  
CONTACTS  
ALONG THEIR  
TRADE ROUTE  
AND ASKED  
GRANDMA TO  
HELP KEEP A  
LOOKOUT  
THROUGH SOME  
OF THE MORE  
DANGEROUS  
AREAS.

YEAH,  
RIGHT.

I KNOW THE  
REAL REASON  
THEY ASKED  
GRANDMA TO  
TRAVEL WITH  
THEM.

JUST LIKE  
GINA AND  
ME...

...THEY CAN'T  
GET ENOUGH  
OF THIS  
COBBLER,  
EITHER!

IT TASTES  
LIKE CARROT-  
PINAPPLE PIE...  
BUT GOOD.

ALL GINA CAN  
TALK ABOUT IS  
HOW NUTRITIOUS  
IT IS... HEH.  
WHILE SHE TALKED,  
I YOINKED AN  
EXTRA HELPING!



THE BEST PART OF  
THE EVENING THOUGH,  
WAS WHEN GRANDMA  
TOLD ONE OF HER  
**ADVENTURE  
STORIES!**

IT'S  
LIKE SHE  
LEARNED  
FROM MARK  
TWAIN  
HIMSELF!

AND SHE  
USES THAT  
CLOAK AND  
CANE LIKE  
A CHAMP!



I REALLY  
DON'T SEE  
HOW GENN  
CAN JUST  
SLEEP  
THROUGH  
THIS.

WELL... THEN  
AGAIN, SHE  
DOES LOOK  
PRETTY  
DAMN COZY!

AND... I  
AM GETTIN'  
A BIT SLEEPY  
MYSELF.

MAYBE GENN  
DOES HAVE  
THE RIGHT  
IDEA...



YEAH...

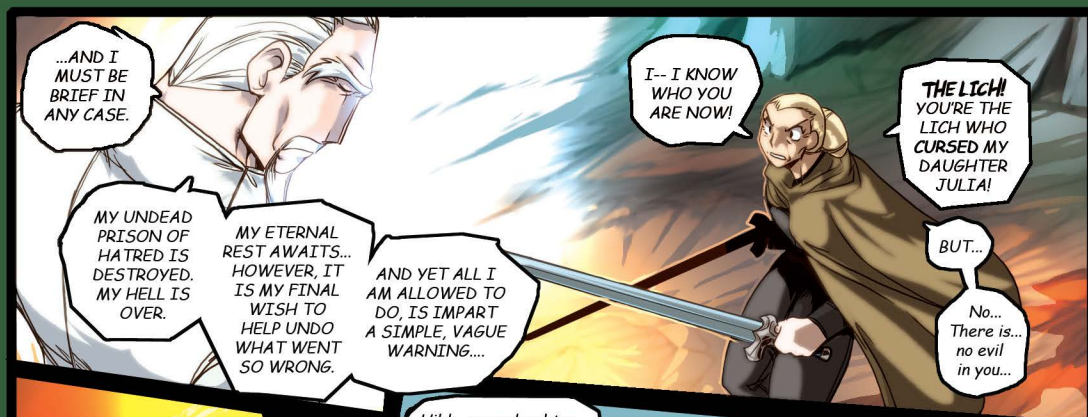
I'M GONNA  
GET SOME  
SHUTEYE  
TOO...

...RIGHT  
AFTER THIS  
STORY.









...AND I MUST BE BRIEF IN ANY CASE.

MY UNDEAD PRISON OF HATRED IS DESTROYED. MY HELL IS OVER.

MY ETERNAL REST AWAITS... HOWEVER, IT IS MY FINAL WISH TO HELP UNDO WHAT WENT SO WRONG.

AND YET ALL I AM ALLOWED TO DO, IS IMPART A SIMPLE, VAGUE WARNING....

I-- I KNOW WHO YOU ARE NOW!

**THE LICH!**  
YOU'RE THE LICH WHO CURSED MY DAUGHTER JULIA!

BUT...

No... There is... no evil in you...

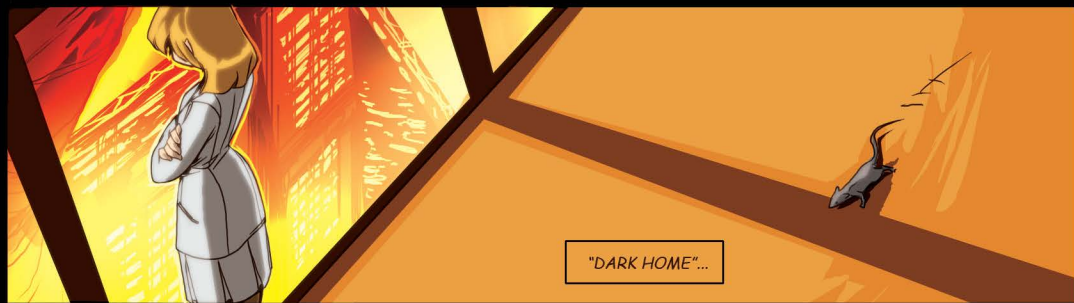
Hilda...your daughter Julia and her husband Theodore...my son... are in incredible peril.

I have seen what most likely will become their FINAL FATE.

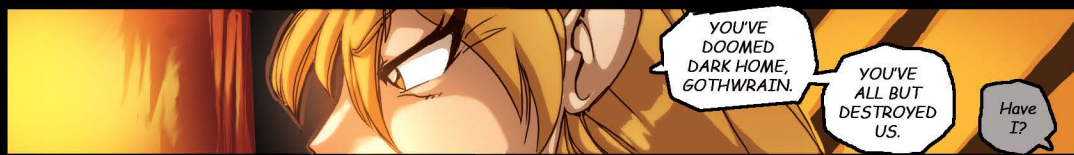
Hilda...

"...only YOU can save them..."

EARTH-REALM...



"DARK HOME"...

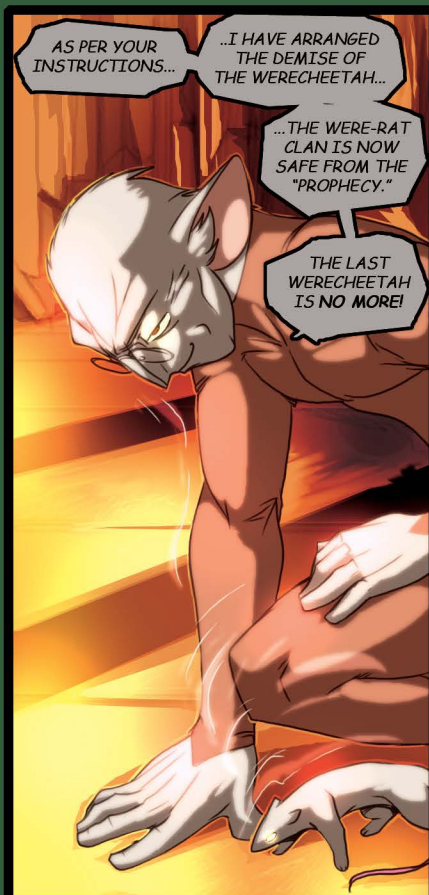


YOU'VE DOOMED DARK HOME, GOTHWRAIN.

YOU'VE ALL BUT DESTROYED US.

Have I?





AS PER YOUR INSTRUCTIONS...

...I HAVE ARRANGED THE DEMISE OF THE WERECHETAH...

...THE WERE-RAT CLAN IS NOW SAFE FROM THE "PROPHECY."

THE LAST WERECHETAH IS NO MORE!



BUT DID I NOT SPECIFY THE FAMILY AND FRIENDS OF THE WERECAT WERE TO BE KEPT FROM KNOWING OF THE WERE-RAT CLAN'S INVOLVEMENT?

THEY ARE MORE DEADLY TO US THAN THE WERECAT EVER WAS!



AND NOW MY SPIES SAY THEY ARE SEARCHING NEAR THE LOCATION OF THE "BLACK GATE"!

THEY WANT TO TAKE REVENGE AGAINST US!

YOU'VE DESTROYED OUR CLAN, GOTHWRAIN!

I BEG TO DIFFER, MISTRESS...

...THEY ARE MERELY COMING FOR ME.



BRITANNY'S FAMILY AND FRIENDS...

...BELIEVE SHE CAN STILL BE RESCUED.

THEY WILL COME TO ME, EXPECTING RESOLUTION.

THEY WANT A FIGHT, AND I WILL GIVE IT TO THEM...

...AND I WILL DIE... TAKING THEM ALL WITH ME...

...THUS SAVING OUR CLAN.



...Y-You're sacrificing... yourself--NO!

NO! W-W-E'LL SEAL THE BLACK GATE!

THEY WON'T FIND US! WE'LL FIND ANOTHER SOLUTION!

FORGIVE ME, MISTRESS!



BUT I HAVE ALREADY DEPLOYED...

...THOSE WHO WILL SAP THE STRENGTH OF OUR PURSUERS...

...AND BRING THEM BEFORE ME.





NEXT: "THE BLACK GATE" PART 1...