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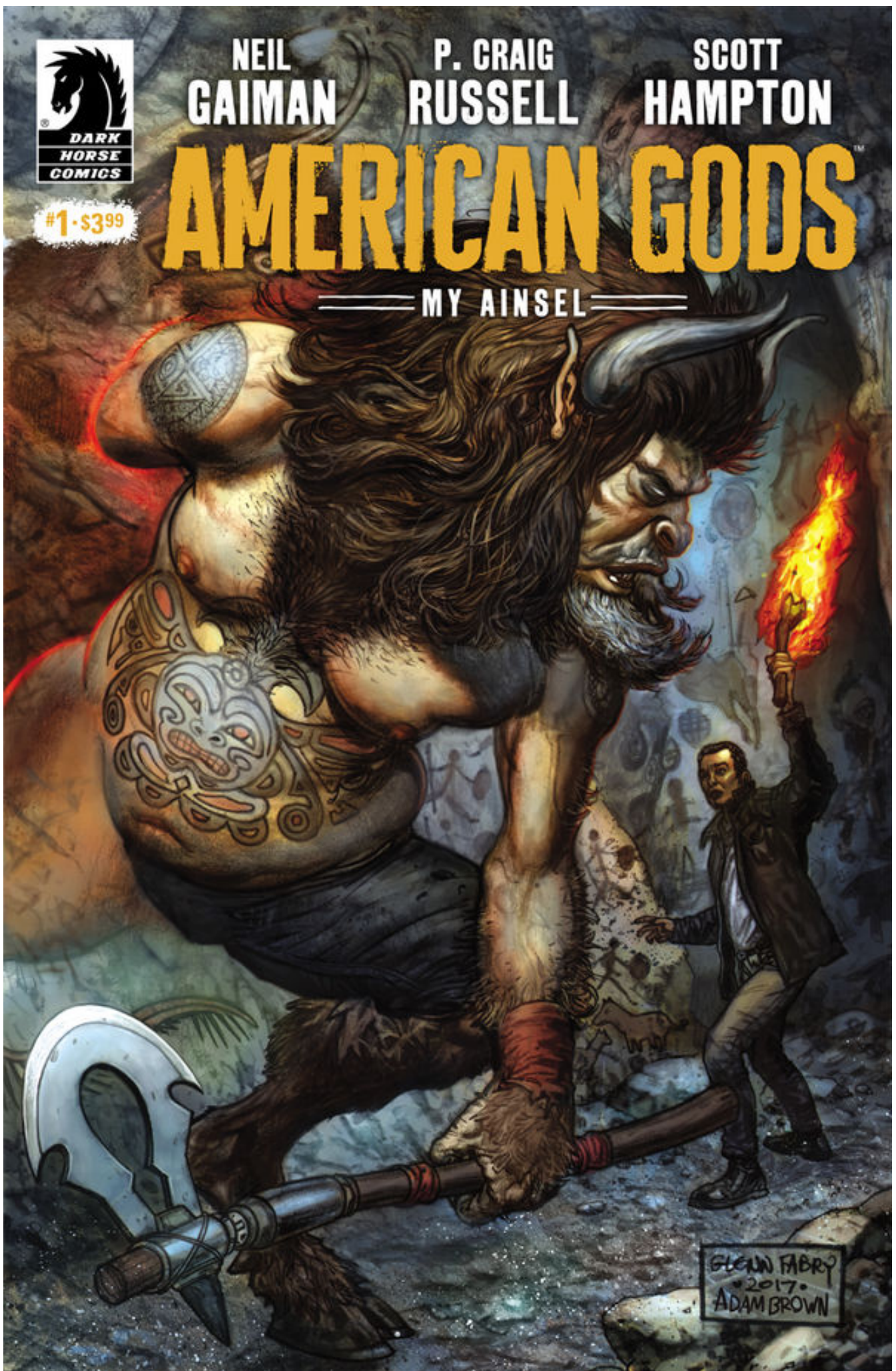
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# AMERICAN GODS™

— MY AINSEL —



GLENN FABRY  
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ADAM BROWN



WELCOME TO  
*Wisconsin*

SO WHO WERE THE BUNCH THAT GRABBED ME IN THE PARKING LOT? MISTER WOOD AND MISTER STONE? WHO WERE THEY?

I THINK THAT THEY THINK THEY'RE THE WHITE HATS.

JUST SPOOKS. MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION.

OF COURSE THEY DO.

WEDNESDAY HAD ANNOUNCED THAT THEY WERE NOT TO TAKE FREEWAYS BECAUSE HE DIDN'T KNOW WHOSE SIDE THE FREEWAYS WERE ON, SO SHADOW WAS STICKING TO BACK ROADS. HE DIDN'T MIND. HE WASN'T EVEN SURE WEDNESDAY WAS CRAZY.



THE REALLY DANGEROUS PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT THEY ARE DOING WHATEVER THEY ARE DOING SOLELY AND ONLY BECAUSE IT IS WITHOUT QUESTION THE RIGHT THING TO DO.

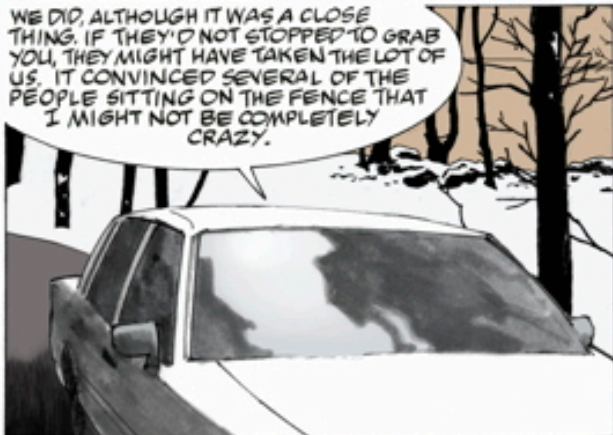
AND YOU?



I'M DOING WHAT I'M DOING BECAUSE I WANT TO. SO THAT'S DIFFERENT.



HOW DID YOU ALL GET AWAY? OR DID YOU ALL GET AWAY?



WE DID, ALTHOUGH IT WAS A CLOSE THING. IF THEY'D NOT STOPPED TO GRAB YOU, THEY MIGHT HAVE TAKEN THE LOT OF US. IT CONVINCED SEVERAL OF THE PEOPLE SITTING ON THE FENCE THAT I MIGHT NOT BE COMPLETELY CRAZY.



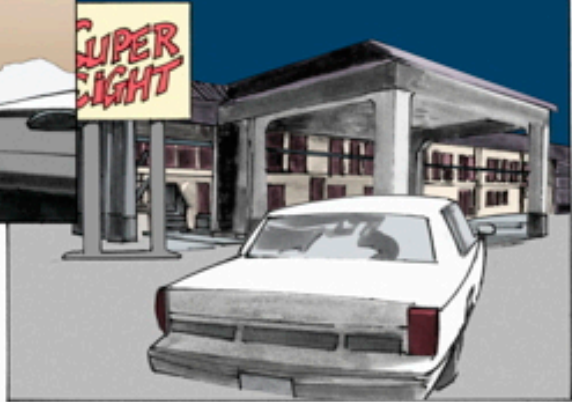
SO, HOW DID YOU GET OUT?

I DON'T PAY YOU TO ASK QUESTIONS. I'VE TOLD YOU BEFORE.



SHADOW SHRUGGED.

LA CROSSE, WISCONSIN.



CHRISTMAS DAY WAS SPENT ON THE ROAD, DRIVING NORTH AND EAST. THE FARMLAND BECAME PINE FOREST. THE TOWNS SEEMED TO COME FARTHER AND FARTHER APART.



SHADOW PICKED CHEERLESSLY AT HIS DRY TURKEY CHRISTMAS LUNCH WHILE WEDNESDAY BECAME POSITIVELY EXPANSIVE - TALKING, JOKING, AND WHENEVER SHE CAME CLOSE ENOUGH, FLIRTING WITH THE WAITRESS.

EXCUSE ME, M'DEAR, BUT MIGHT I TROUBLE YOU FOR ANOTHER CUP OF YOUR DELIGHTFUL HOT CHOCOLATE?

FESTIVE, YET CLASSY.

AND I TRUST YOU WON'T THINK ME TOO FORWARD IF I SAY WHAT A MIGHTY FETCHING AND BECOMING DRESS THAT IS.



HEE ...

FETCHING. SOME THINGS MAY CHANGE. PEOPLE, HOWEVER... PEOPLE STAY THE SAME.



SOME GRIFTS LAST FOREVER, OTHERS ARE SWALLOWED BY TIME AND THE WORLD. MY FAVORITE GRIFT OF ALL IS NO LONGER PRACTICAL. STILL, SOME ARE TIMELESS-- THE SPANISH PRISONER, THE PIGEON DROP, THE FIDDLE GAME ...



THE FIDDLE GAME?

AH THE FIDDLE GAME WAS A FINE AND WONDERFUL CON. IN ITS PUREST FORM IT IS A TWO-MAN GRIFT. IT TRADES ON CUPIDITY AND GREED, AS ALL GREAT GRIFTS DO.

YOU CAN ALWAYS CHEAT AN HONEST MAN, BUT IT TAKES MORE WORK.

SO ...

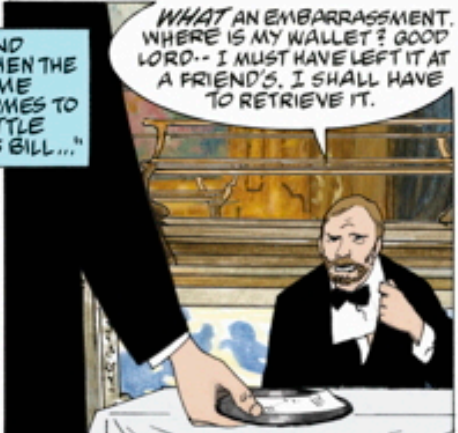




"WE ARE IN A HOTEL, OR A FINE RESTAURANT, AND DINING THERE. WE FIND A MAN-- SHABBY, BUT SHABBY-GENTEEL--NOT DOWN-AT-HEEL, BUT CERTAINLY DOWN ON HIS LUCK. WE SHALL CALL HIM ABRAHAM."

"AND WHEN THE TIME COMES TO SETTLE HIS BILL..."

WHAT AN EMBARRASSMENT. WHERE IS MY WALLET? GOOD LORD-- I MUST HAVE LEFT IT AT A FRIEND'S. I SHALL HAVE TO RETRIEVE IT.



BUT HERE, MINE HOST, TAKE THIS OLD FIDDLE OF MINE FOR SECURITY. IT'S OLD, AS YOU CAN SEE, BUT IT'S HOW I MAKE MY LIVING.



AH... THE HOT CHOCOLATE I BROUGHT TO ME BY MY CHRISTMAS ANGEL. TELL ME, MY DEAR, COULD I HAVE SOME MORE OF YOUR DELICIOUS BREAD WHEN YOU GET A MOMENT?



SO...

"THE OLD VIOLIN IS PLACED AWAY IN ITS CASE, AND OUR IMPECUNIOUS ABRAHAM SETS OFF IN SEARCH OF HIS WALLET. BUT A WELL-DRESSED GENTLEMAN, LET US CALL HIM BARRINGTON, HAS BEEN OBSERVING THIS EXCHANGE, AND NOW..."



FARDON ME, BUT COULD I, PERCHANCE, INSPECT THE VIOLIN?

CERTAINLY.



"THE WELL-DRESSED MAN EXAMINES THE VIOLIN REVERENTIALLY, LIKE A MAN WHO HAS BEEN PERMITTED INTO A HOLY SANCTUM."



WHY, THIS IS-- IT MUST BE...

NO, IT CANNOT BE--

BUT YES, THERE IT IS ... THE MAKER'S MARK.

MY LORD, THIS IS UNBELIEVABLE!



SO, THE VIOLIN IS RARE?



INDEED IT IS, AND WORTH IN EXCESS OF A HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS. I AM A DEALER IN SUCH THINGS, AND I WOULD PAY SEVENTY-FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS FOR SUCH AN EXQUISITE PIECE. I HAVE A MAN ON THE WEST COAST WHO WOULD BUY IT TOMORROW...



OH, BUT MY TRAIN.

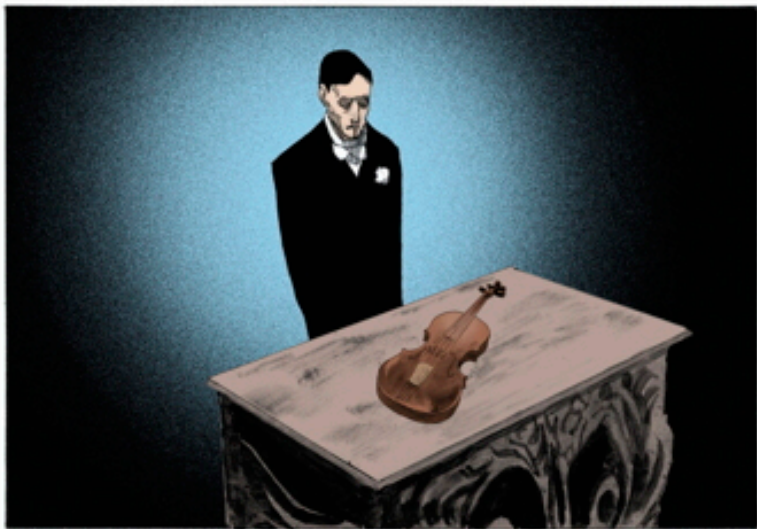


GOOD SIR, WHEN THE OWNER OF THIS INESTIMABLE INSTRUMENT SHOULD RETURN, PLEASE GIVE HIM MY CARD, FOR, ALAS, I MUST BE AWAY.



"AND WITH THAT, BARRINGTON LEAVES."

"HIS HOST EXAMINES THE VIOLIN, CURIOSITY MINGLING WITH CUPIDITY IN HIS VEINS, AND A PLAN BEGINS TO BUBBLE UP."



"BUT THE MINUTES GO BY, AND ABRAHAM DOES NOT RETURN."



"AND NOW IT IS LATE."

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