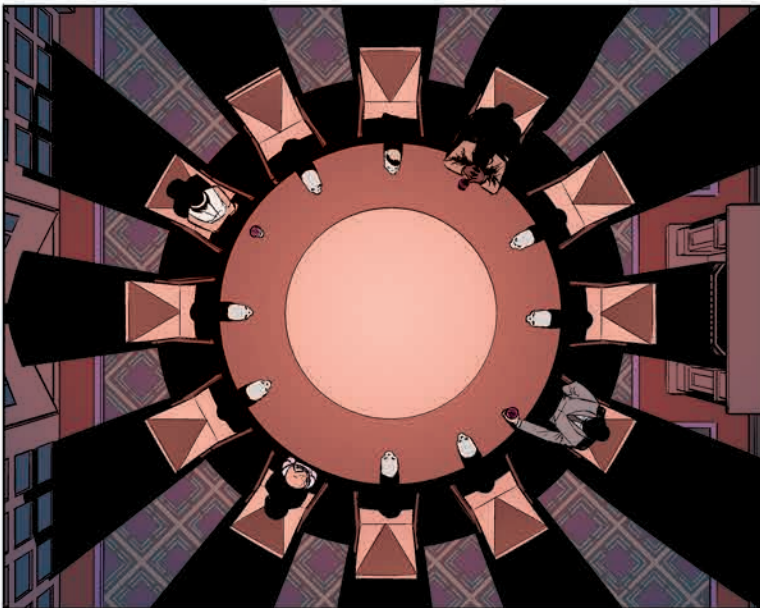
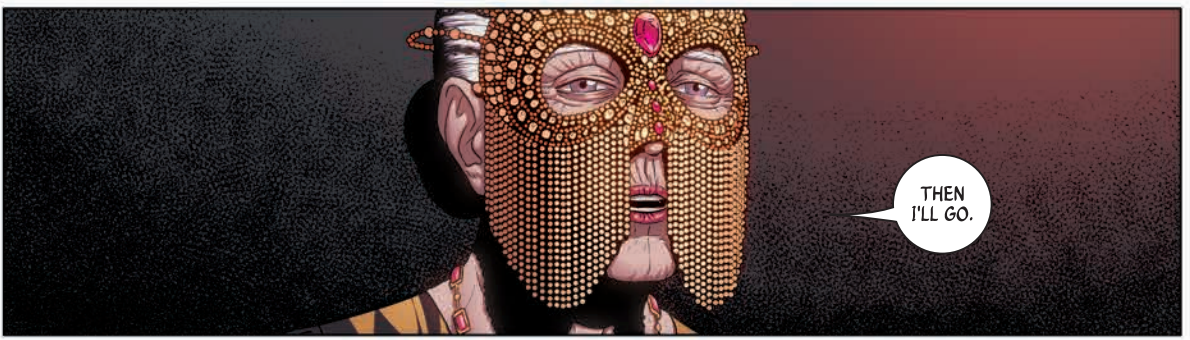
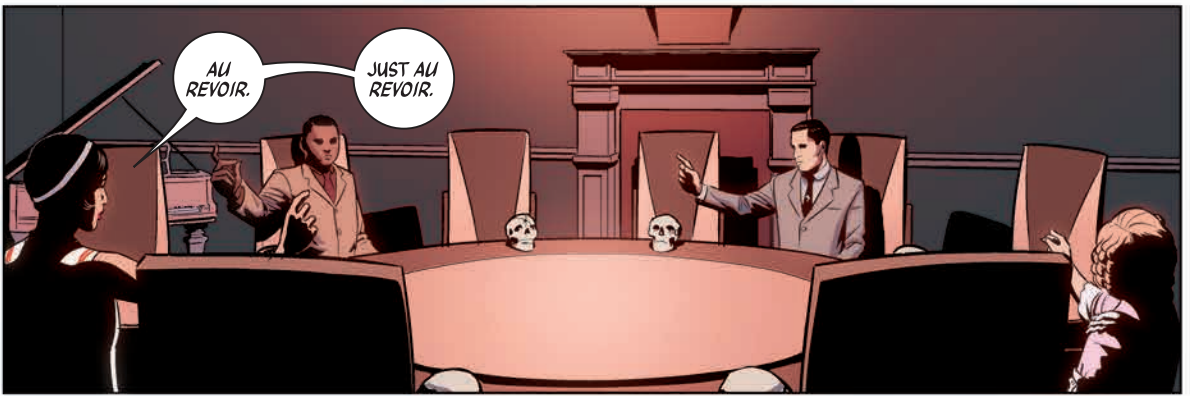


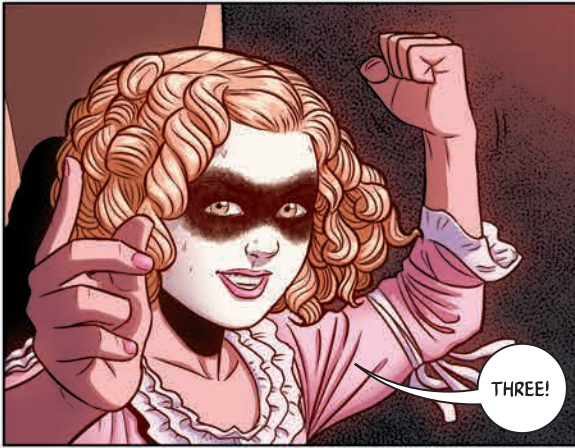
AND ONCE
AGAIN, WE
RETURN
TO THIS.

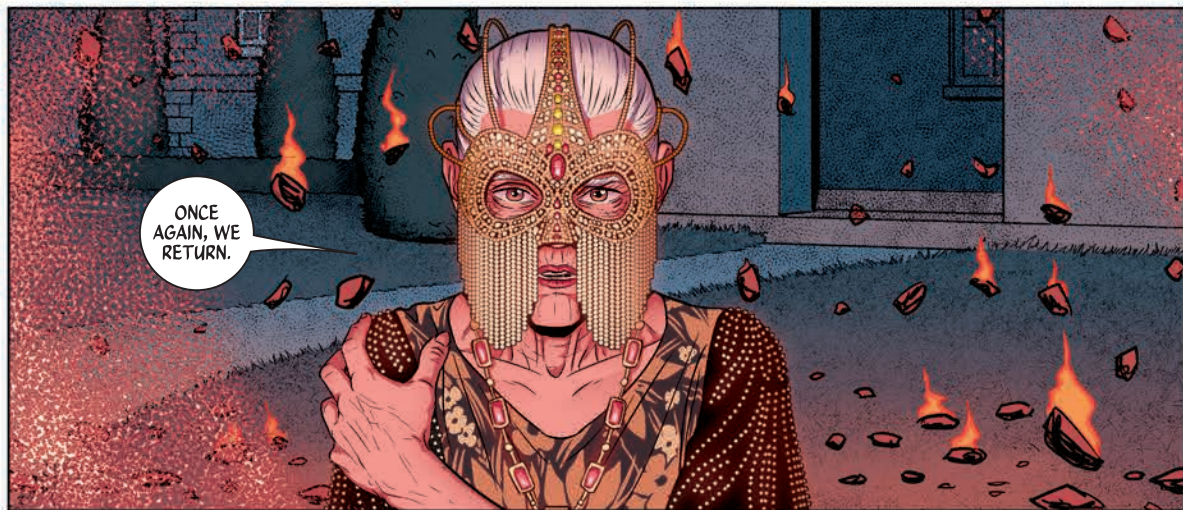














BROCKLEY,
SOUTH LONDON.



1

It's not that I'm afraid my parents wouldn't approve.

I'm afraid they *would*.



I want this to be all mine.



2

Amaterasu's only been around for a couple of weeks.

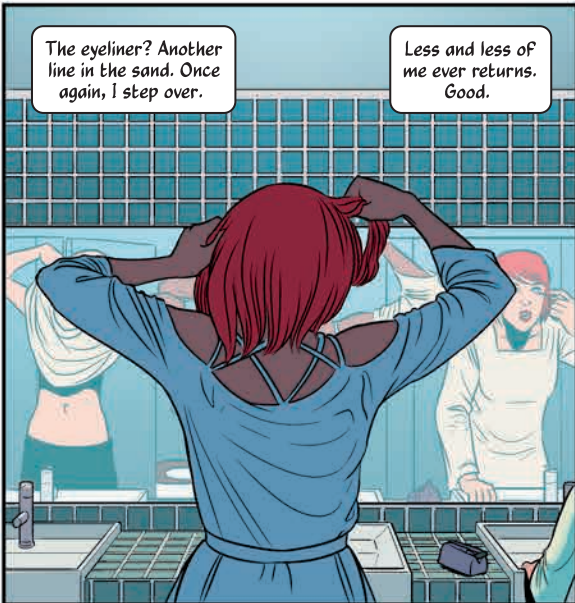
How many of these girls have even *seen* her?





Yet here we are.

3



The eyeliner? Another line in the sand. Once again, I step over.

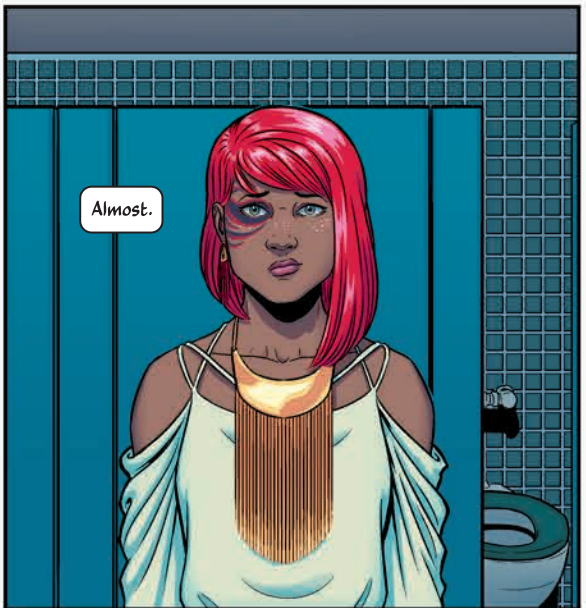
Less and less of me ever returns. Good.



The stranger in the mirror looks back. I wish I was her.

She looks like a god.

4



Almost.

She's just
seventeen.

No one
believes it.

She's not
seventeen.

She's
immortal.





I don't understand
a word she's saying.
Nobody does.

All we know
is that it means
everything.

She's been doing this
for an hour, and it's
been *all climax*.

Every second is
the best of my
life so far.

She's better than Baal.
Better than Sakhmet.
Better even than Inanna.

(She's certainly
better than
fucking Tara.)

It's not
a mass.

It's what
masses aspire
to be.

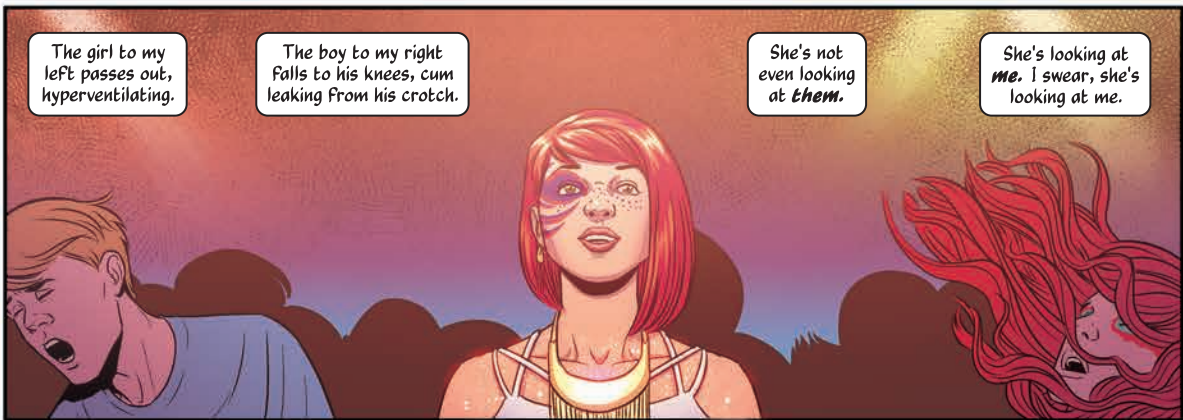
(It's what orgasms
aspire to be.)

(Mine,
anyway.)

Her eyes scan the front row
like the sun rising and setting.

Oh god.

Oh god.



The girl to my left passes out, hyperventilating.

The boy to my right falls to his knees, cum leaking from his crotch.

She's not even looking at **them**.

She's looking at **me**. I swear, she's looking at me.

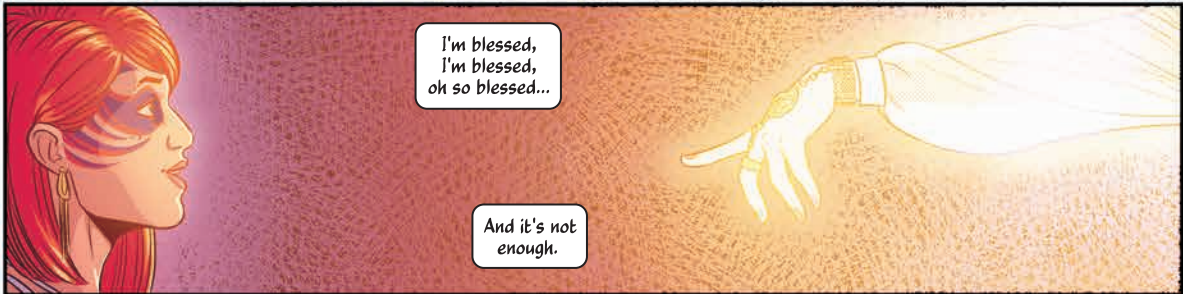


She smiles.

At me.



Infinity passes.



I'm blessed, I'm blessed, oh so blessed...

And it's not enough.



A moment of hubris.

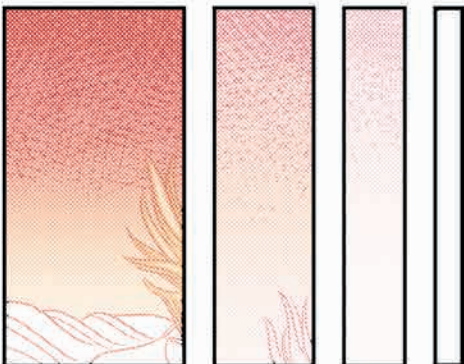
"I want everything you have."

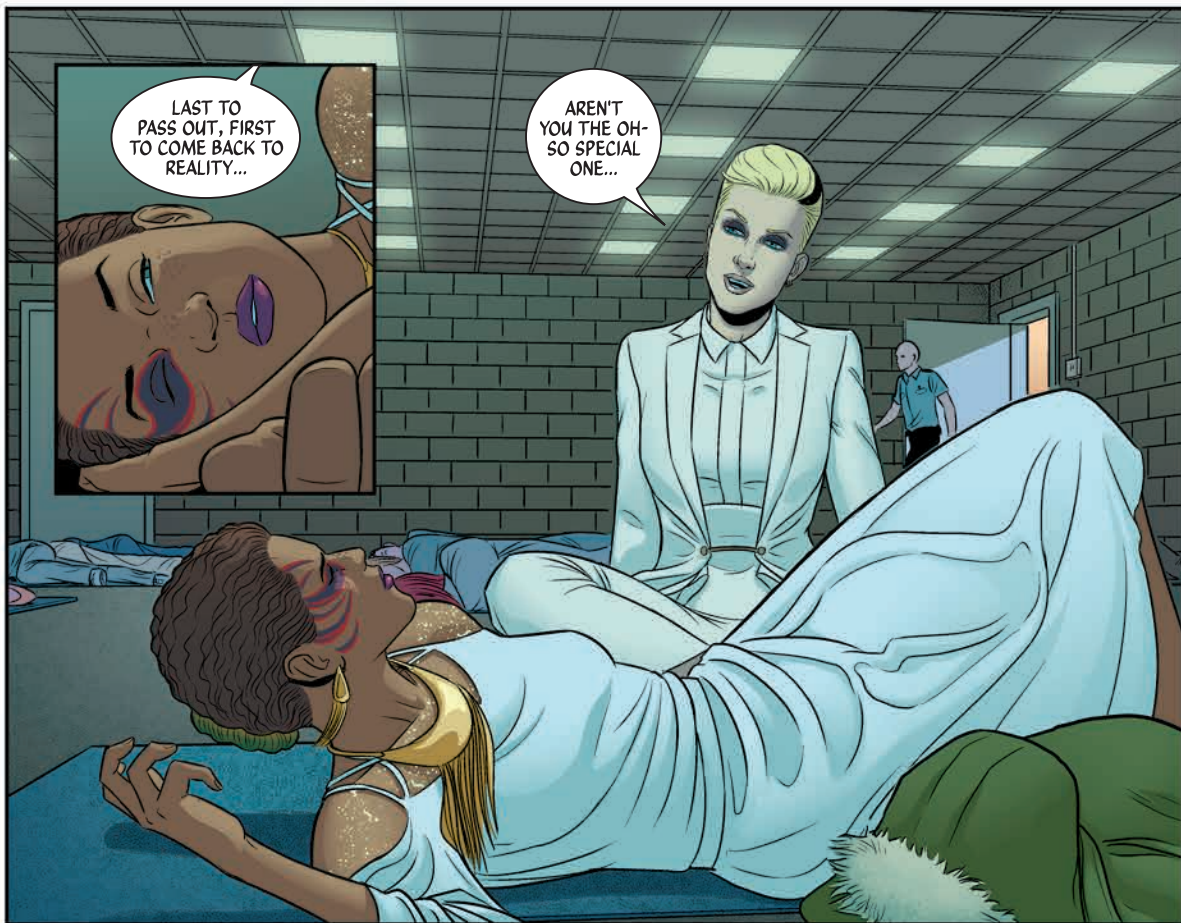


And then I'm gone.



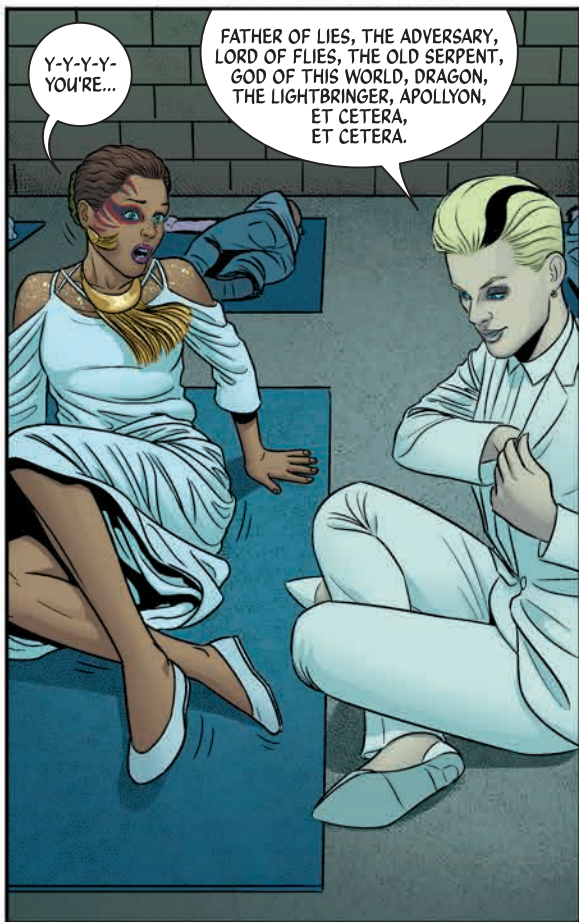
(Best gig ever, FYI.)





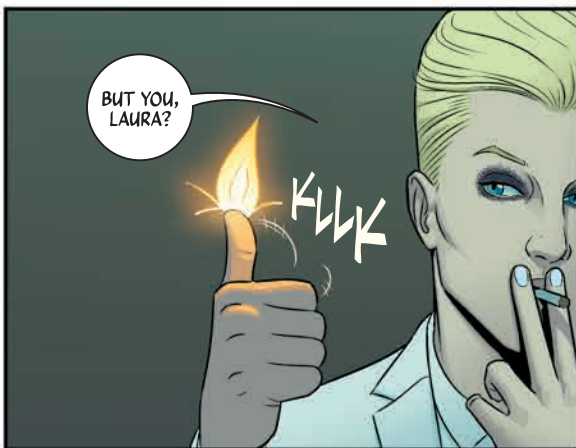
LAST TO PASS OUT, FIRST TO COME BACK TO REALITY...

AREN'T YOU THE OH-SO SPECIAL ONE...



Y-Y-Y-Y-YOU'RE...

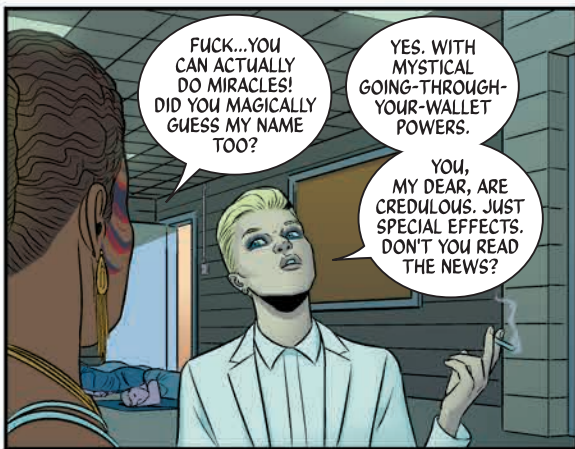
FATHER OF LIES, THE ADVERSARY, LORD OF FLIES, THE OLD SERPENT, GOD OF THIS WORLD, DRAGON, THE LIGHTBRINGER, APOLLYON, ET CETERA, ET CETERA.



BUT YOU, LAURA?



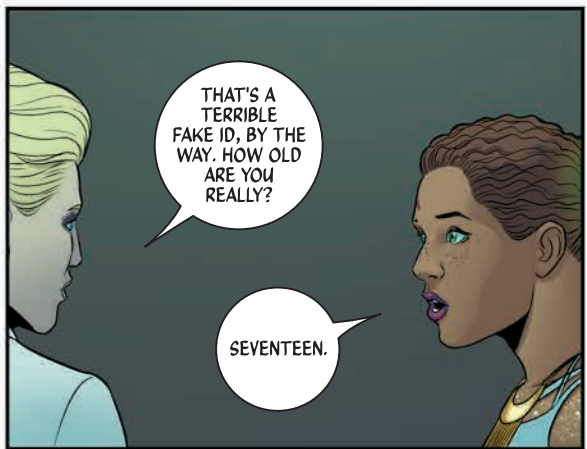
YOU CAN CALL ME LUCI.



FUCK...YOU CAN ACTUALLY DO MIRACLES! DID YOU MAGICALLY GUESS MY NAME TOO?

YES. WITH MYSTICAL GOING-THROUGH-YOUR-WALLET POWERS.

YOU, MY DEAR, ARE CREDULOUS. JUST SPECIAL EFFECTS. DON'T YOU READ THE NEWS?



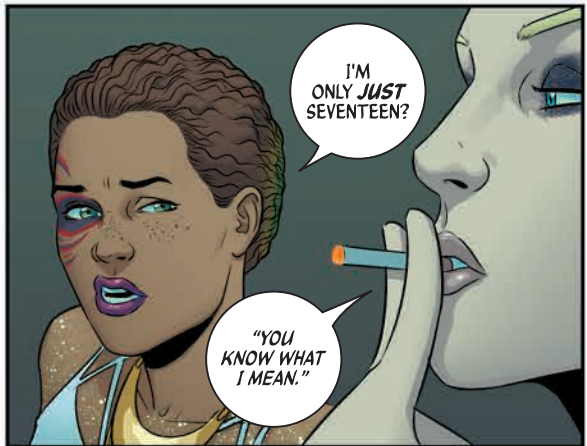
THAT'S A TERRIBLE FAKE ID, BY THE WAY. HOW OLD ARE YOU REALLY?

SEVENTEEN.



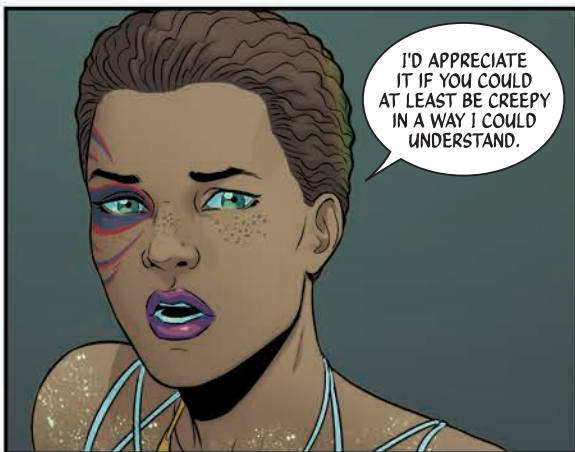
OH, THAT IS A SHAME.

LEGAL.



I'M ONLY *JUST* SEVENTEEN?

"YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN."



I'D APPRECIATE IT IF YOU COULD AT LEAST BE CREEPY IN A WAY I COULD UNDERSTAND.

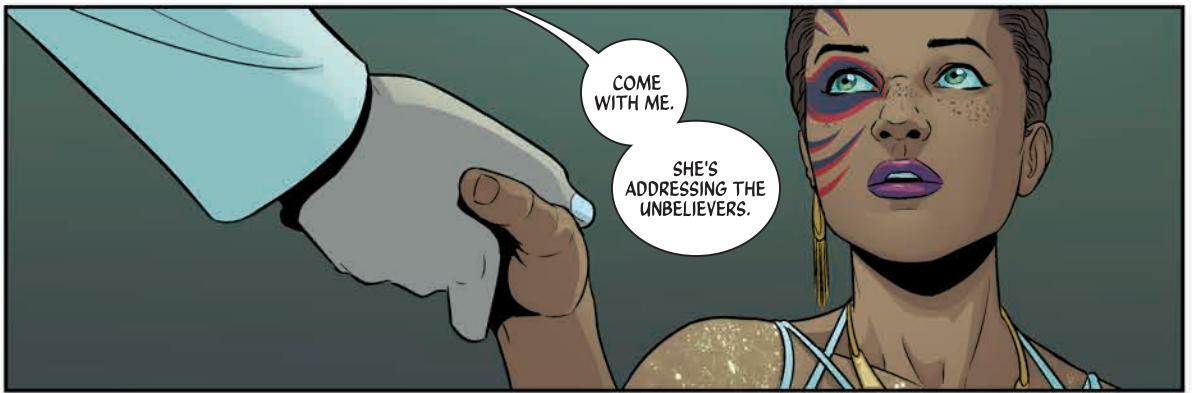


SORRY, I... LONG STORY. BROUGHT UP ON THE BEATLES. SHAMEFUL.

"THEY FUCK YOU UP, YOUR MUM AND DAD" AND ALL THAT.



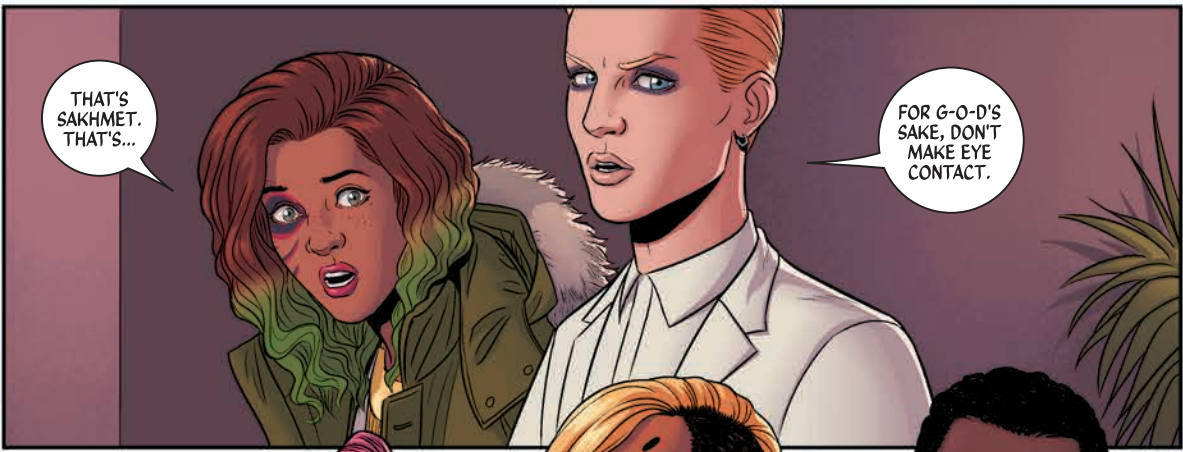
DO YOU WANT TO MEET AMATERASU?





BEFORE YOU TAKE A SEAT, PICK UP YOUR JAW, LAURA.

YOU'RE MY GUEST. DON'T EMBARRASS ME.



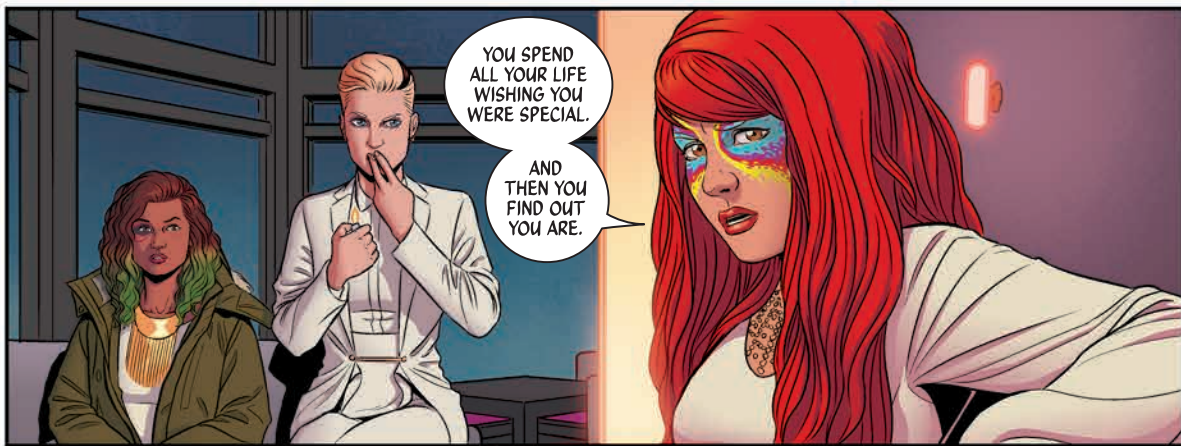
THAT'S SAKHMET. THAT'S...

FOR G-O-D'S SAKE, DON'T MAKE EYE CONTACT.



"NOT UNLESS YOU HAVE NO FURTHER USES PLANNED FOR YOUR PELVIS."





YOU SPEND ALL YOUR LIFE WISHING YOU WERE SPECIAL.

AND THEN YOU FIND OUT YOU ARE.



NOTHING IS WITHOUT A PRICE.



AND I NO LONGER FEEL LIKE "HAZEL". I'M AMATERASHU.

MY STORY MUST CONTINUE. MY STORY MUST END.



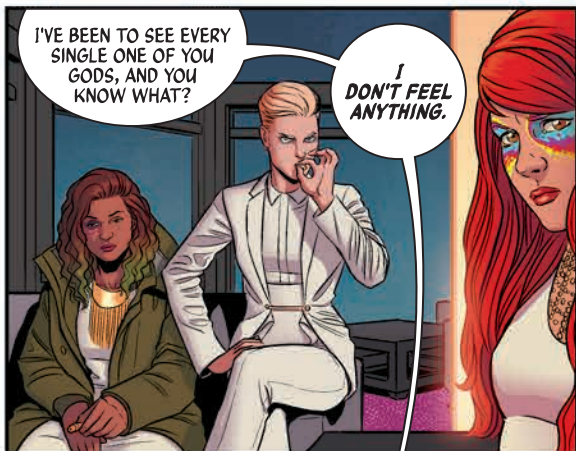
OKAY. TRY THIS. ONCE A CENTURY, WE GET "THE RECURRENCE." RATIONAL MINDS DISMISS IT AS CHARLATANRY. THE LAST TIME WAS IN THE 1920s, SO WE HAVE ACTUAL FOOTAGE...

ROOMFULS OF FLICKERING BLACK AND WHITE PEOPLE FREAKING OUT. NOTHING OF THE "MIRACLES", *OF COURSE...*



NOW, THERE'S A LONG HISTORY OF EVERYTHING FROM DRUGGING AUDIENCES TO GOOD OLD MASS HYSTERIA THAT EXPLAINS THE WHOLE THING.

THE LATTER SEEMS ESPECIALLY LIKELY...



I'VE BEEN TO SEE EVERY SINGLE ONE OF YOU GODS, AND YOU KNOW WHAT?

I DON'T FEEL ANYTHING.



AND THIS IS DIFFERENT TO NORMAL *HOW* EXACTLY?