



ZAC THOMPSON · DALIBOR TALAJIĆ

#5

RELENT



AFTERSHOCK
ADVANCES

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"I WAS LOST SOMEWHERE IN MIDDLE AGE, LIVING IN AN OLD FARMHOUSE ON PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND. THE BLACK OF THE UNIVERSE HAD INSTALLED ITSELF IN MY WITHERING MIND.

"THE STING OF THE BLADE MADE IT REAL. I WAS NOTHING BUT AN ALCOHOLIC. A FAILURE OF A MAN COVERED IN DUST, LEFT DREAMING.

"I HAD NO NAME FOR IT.

"IT DIDN'T MATTER. I HAD NOTHING, I WAS NO ONE, AND MEN OFTEN GROW RICH RUNNING TOWARD UNRECOGNIZED THINGS.

"I BLINDLY HOPED THAT THIS WOULD CHANGE THE COURSE OF MY STORY.

"THAT IT WOULD GIVE ME MEANING.

"THE OBJECT MADE THE AIR SEEM HOTTER.

"TIME SLOWED. SOUNDS WERE AMPLIFIED.

"I DON'T REGRET MUCH IN MY LIFE.

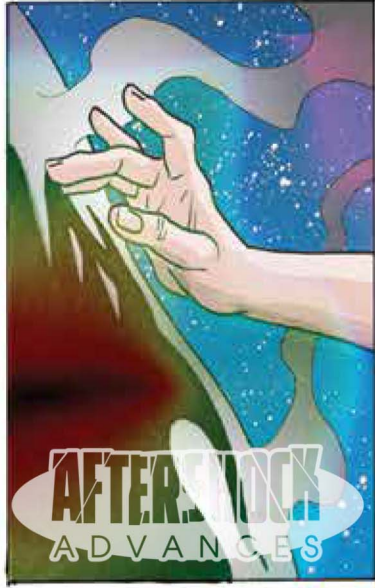
"BUT I SHOULD HAVE NEVER TOUCHED THE RELAY."



"IT WAS AN ERROR IN JUDGMENT.



"I HARDLY RECOGNIZED MYSELF THAT NIGHT.



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"SUDDENLY, I'M OUTSIDE MY OWN BODY.



"I LOOKED AT MYSELF AND SAW A MAN WHO WENT WRONG.



"REALITY REWROTE ITSELF IN AN INSTANT.



"I FELT KNOWLEDGE COURSE THROUGH MY VEINS, AND I KNEW...



"...I WAS DEAD.



"MY PARANOIA, MY FEAR, MY PROBLEMS..."



"...I HAD GIVEN THEM TO THE UNIVERSE.



"IT MADE NO NOISE AS IT BURST FORTH FROM THE GROUND.



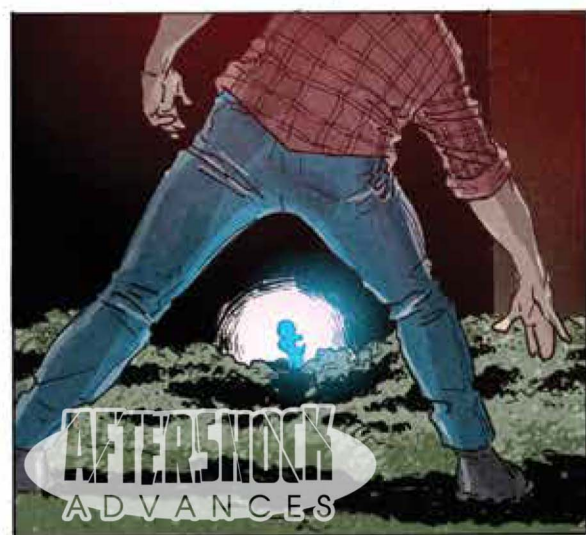
"EVERYTHING IN ITS WAKE WAS EATEN ALIVE.



"AND NOTHING REMAINED BUT THE BLACK.



"OR SO I THOUGHT."





"I TRIED TO HELP IT."



"AND IN A MOMENT..."



"...IT TOOK EVERYTHING FROM ME."

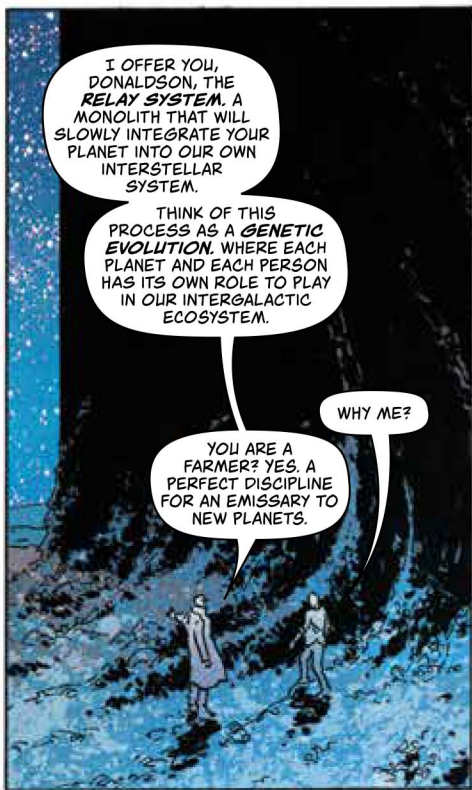


HELLO, HANK.

WHO... WHAT... ARE YOU?

AHH, OF COURSE. HUMAN INTELLECT IS STILL IN ITS INFANCY. UNDERSTANDABLE THAT YOU MAY NOT RECOGNIZE MY RACE.

I'M BOZIDAR, OF THE INDRIX.



I OFFER YOU, DONALDSON, THE RELAY SYSTEM. A MONOLITH THAT WILL SLOWLY INTEGRATE YOUR PLANET INTO OUR OWN INTERSTELLAR SYSTEM.

THINK OF THIS PROCESS AS A GENETIC EVOLUTION. WHERE EACH PLANET AND EACH PERSON HAS ITS OWN ROLE TO PLAY IN OUR INTERGALACTIC ECOSYSTEM.

WHY ME?

YOU ARE A FARMER? YES. A PERFECT DISCIPLINE FOR AN EMISSARY TO NEW PLANETS.



TAKE THIS SEED. PLANT IT INSIDE ANY FOREIGN SOIL AND OUR SOCIETY WILL GROW. THIS IS YOUR CROP.



THIS IS YOUR TOOL. USE IT TO HARVEST EARTH, WATER AND FLESH FROM EACH PLANET.

WE NEED TO CATALOGUE THE KNOWN WORLD IN THE ALMANAC. IT IS THE CENTRAL TOWER FROM WHICH THE UNIVERSE GROWS EVER OUTWARD.

DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

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I... THINK SO.

PERFECTION. THERE WAS NO RECOURSE FOR REFUSAL.

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THIS IS YOUR RELAY. IT WILL ALWAYS BE PART OF YOU.

AS A GIFT, I WILL SHAPE YOU A VESSEL.

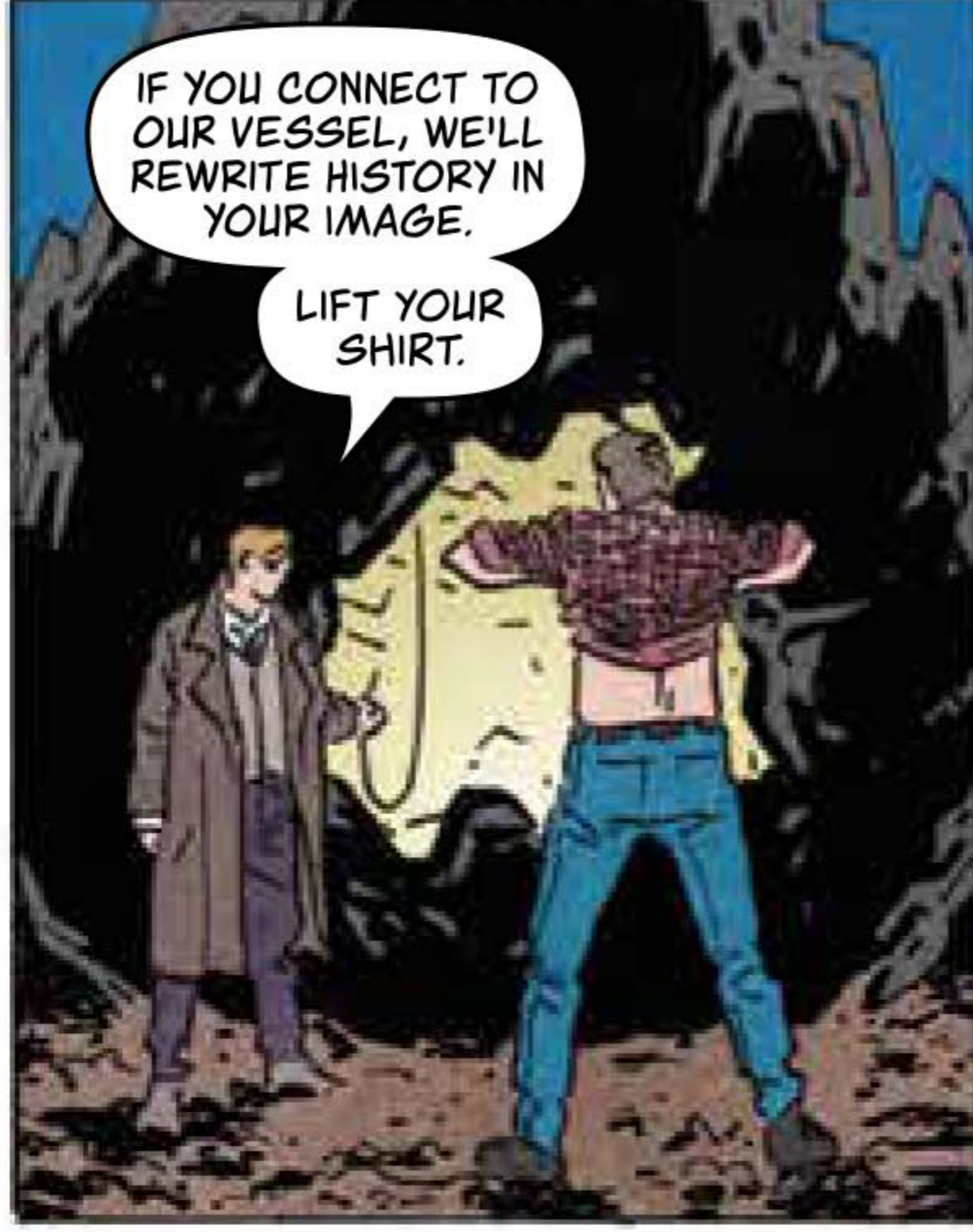


BECOME ONE WITH THE ALMANAC. LEAVE THIS PLANET, SPREAD OUR MESSAGE.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?



YOU ARE OUR FIRST EMISSARY. AS WE USE THE RELAY TO REGULATE, CONTROL AND CATALOGUE INTERPLANETARY CULTURE YOUR IMAGE WILL BE RESHAPED INTO A GOD.



IF YOU CONNECT TO OUR VESSEL, WE'LL REWRITE HISTORY IN YOUR IMAGE.

LIFT YOUR SHIRT.



WHERE... WHERE THE [REDACTED] IS THAT GOING?

WE ARE NOW ONE.



BUILD NEW CIVILIZATIONS HOWEVER YOU CAN.

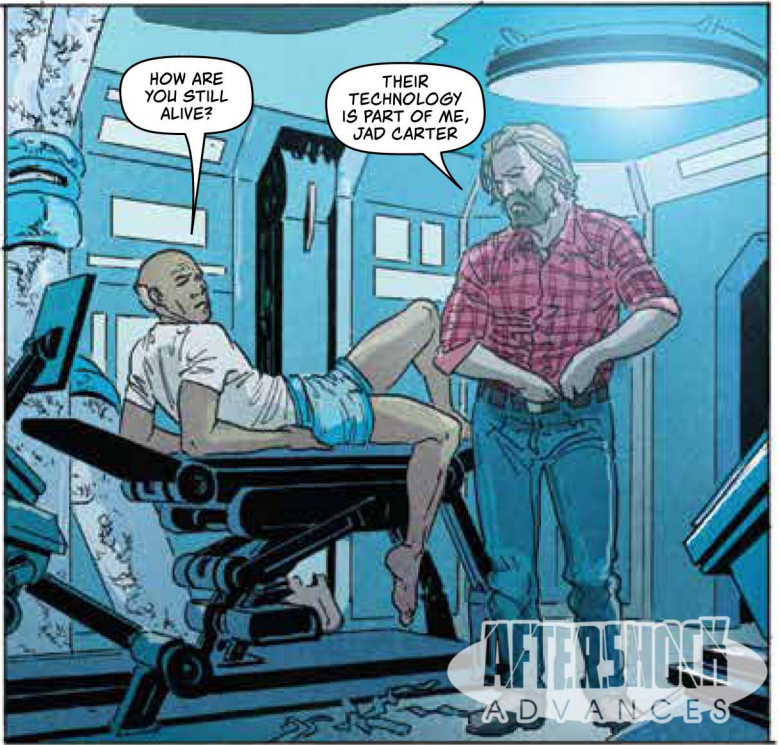
SOW OUR CROP.





THAT WAS FOUR HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

STILL HAVE THE SCAR.



HOW ARE YOU STILL ALIVE?

THEIR TECHNOLOGY IS PART OF ME, JAD CARTER

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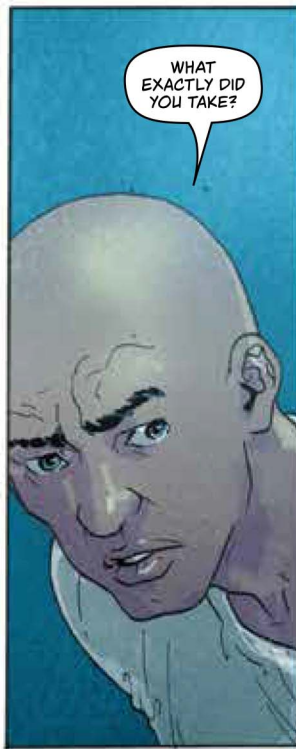


THAT'S THE PRICE I PAID THE RELAY RECONFIGURED MY GENETIC INFORMATION. IT PREVENTS ME FROM AGING.



I DON'T UNDERSTAND...I MET YOU...ANOTHER YOU.

THE RELAY HARVESTS ALL GENETIC DATA FROM HOST PLANETS AND I'VE LEARNT HOW TO LEVERAGE IT. I CAN MAKE ANY LIVING THING WITH TECHNOLOGY I STOLE FROM THE INDRIX.

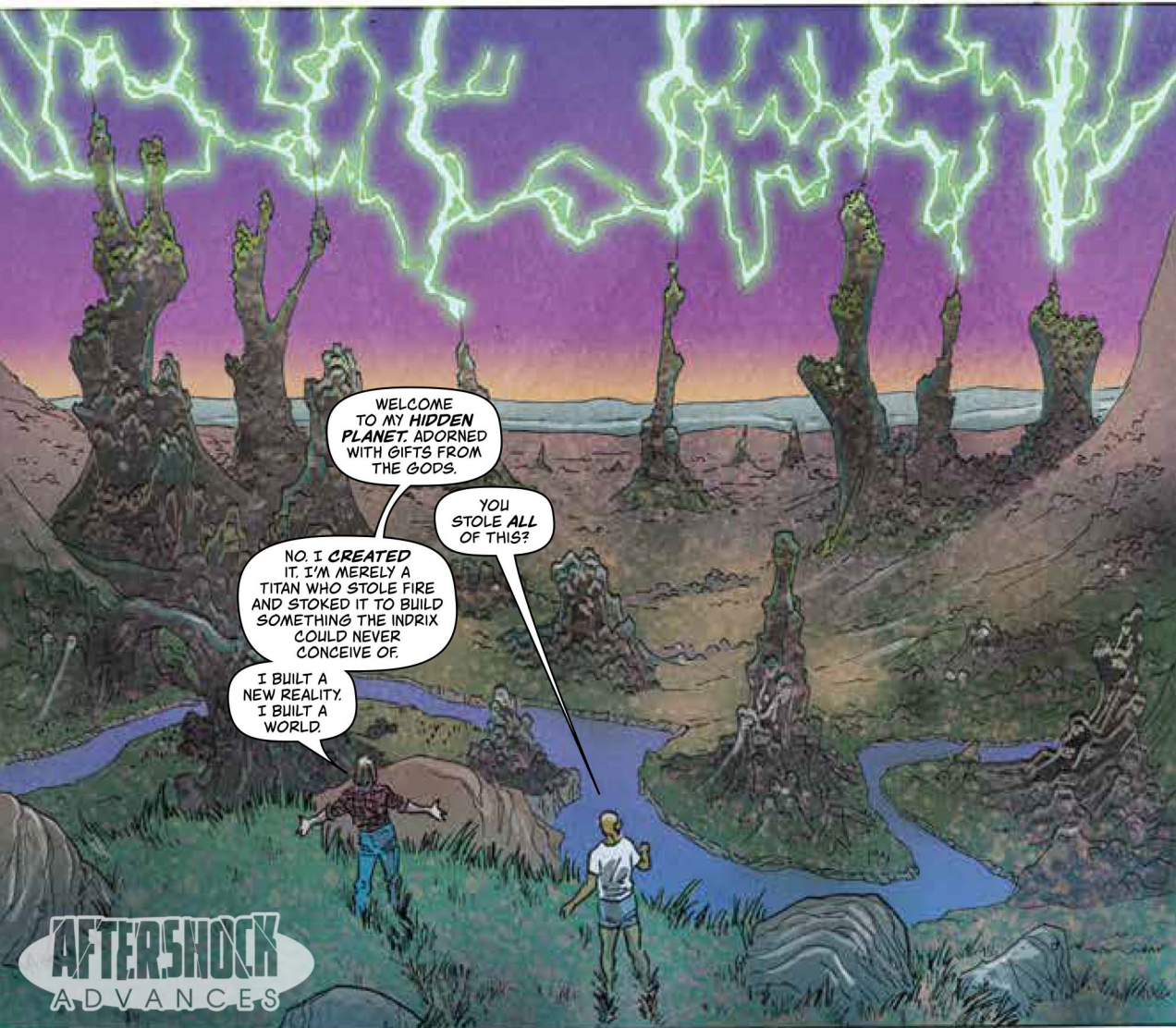


WHAT EXACTLY DID YOU TAKE?



IT'S MUCH EASIER IF I SHOW YOU.

COME WITH ME.





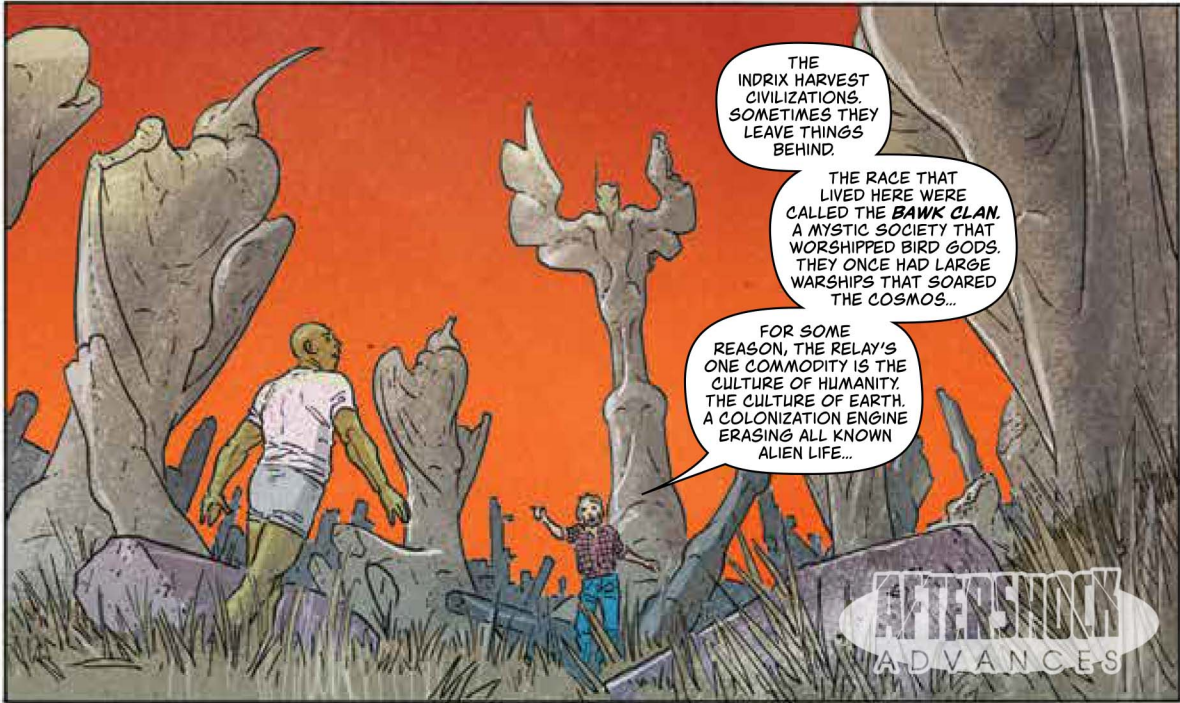
I THOUGHT YOU SAID THEY CHOSE YOU AS AN EMISSARY.

THE RELAY IS A SYSTEMATIC ILLUSION. A *VIRUS* THAT EATS CULTURES AND PEOPLE ALIVE. I SAVED MYSELF FROM MY OWN HOPELESS DEPENDENCE. I DEFIED THEM, AND I'VE BEEN BUILDING THE ANTI RELAY ALLIANCE EVER SINCE.



DID YOU SEE INSIDE THE MONOLITH? I DID, IT'S HOLLOW.

YES, SEEING INSIDE WAS THE BEGINNING OF MY OWN REVELATION.



THE INDRIX HARVEST CIVILIZATIONS. SOMETIMES THEY LEAVE THINGS BEHIND.

THE RACE THAT LIVED HERE WERE CALLED THE *BARK CLAN*. A MYSTIC SOCIETY THAT WORSHIPPED BIRD GODS. THEY ONCE HAD LARGE WARSHIPS THAT SOARED THE COSMOS...

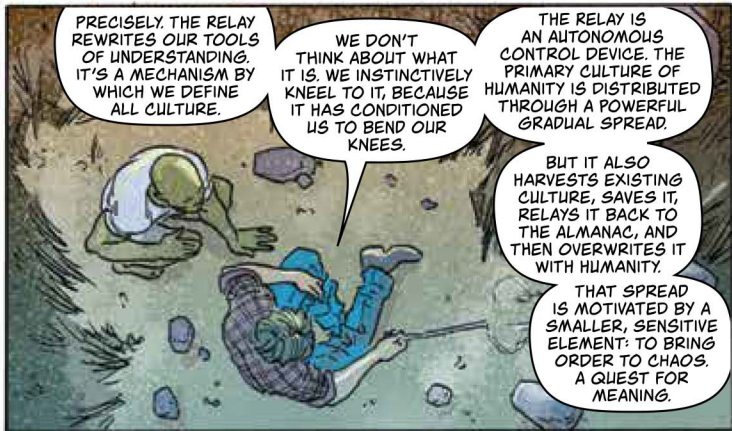
FOR SOME REASON, THE RELAY'S ONE COMMODITY IS THE CULTURE OF HUMANITY. THE CULTURE OF EARTH. A COLONIZATION ENGINE ERASING ALL KNOWN ALIEN LIFE...

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...AND DO YOU KNOW WHAT UNITES ALL HUMANS?

LANGUAGE. COMMUNICATION.



PRECISELY. THE RELAY REWRITES OUR TOOLS OF UNDERSTANDING. IT'S A MECHANISM BY WHICH WE DEFINE ALL CULTURE.

WE DON'T THINK ABOUT WHAT IT IS. WE INSTINCTIVELY KNEEL TO IT, BECAUSE IT HAS CONDITIONED US TO BEND OUR KNEES.

THE RELAY IS AN AUTONOMOUS CONTROL DEVICE. THE PRIMARY CULTURE OF HUMANITY IS DISTRIBUTED THROUGH A POWERFUL GRADUAL SPREAD.

BUT IT ALSO HARVESTS EXISTING CULTURE, SAVES IT, RELAYS IT BACK TO THE ALMANAC, AND THEN OVERWRITES IT WITH HUMANITY.

THAT SPREAD IS MOTIVATED BY A SMALLER, SENSITIVE ELEMENT: TO BRING ORDER TO CHAOS. A QUEST FOR MEANING.



LOOKING FOR YOUR WORLD.



YES. AN EMPTY MESSAGE. AN ECHO, DOOMED TO REPEAT.