



.....image comics presents:

The Black Monday Murders.....[02]

Hickman | Coker | Garland | Wootton | Satan.....September 2016



(c)(d)(e)

(a)(b)

T.
16



(image comics presents:)

A STORY OF BETRAYAL

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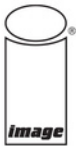


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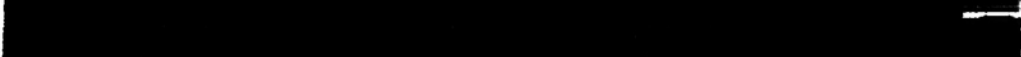

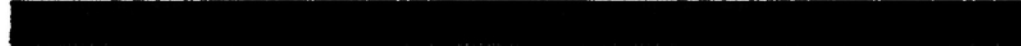
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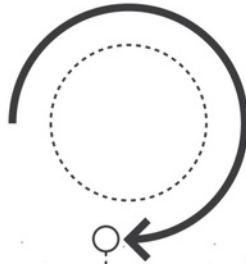


1985

- THE WALL -

The SHARED
ARCHITECTURE
of
OTHER WORLDS

(Earth | Linear)



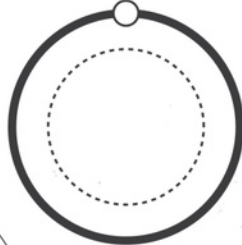
Conduits of Sacrifice:
(a) | Greater Tax | [human]
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(a | b | c)

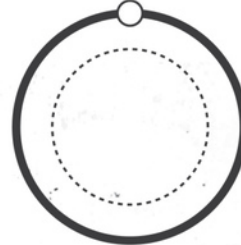
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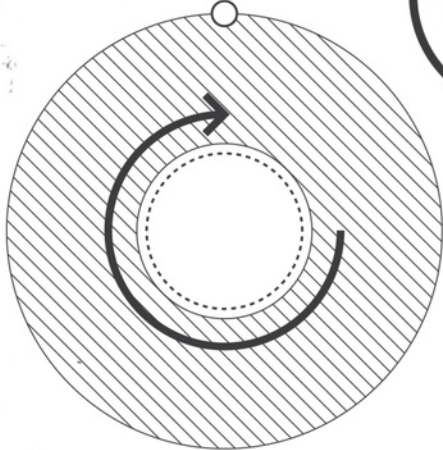
(a)



(Summoning)



(Communion)



(Idea Space | Nonlinear)

East Berlin.
December 7, 1985.



We
are here,
Director
Wolf.



You have been
here for the
last two days,
comrade.

This is
Berlin. Very
little goes
unnoticed
by *State
Security*...

So I
have been
waiting
for you.
Patently.





Of course. I apologize, my friend. I should have known.

There were ongoing disagreements about tonight's activities, and in the heat of that argument, I forgot my manners.

We are all poorer for it.



It's good to see you again, Mischa.

Yes. It's been too long, Alexi.



Is everything ready?

Perhaps. It is difficult to be certain when one is stumbling around in the dark.

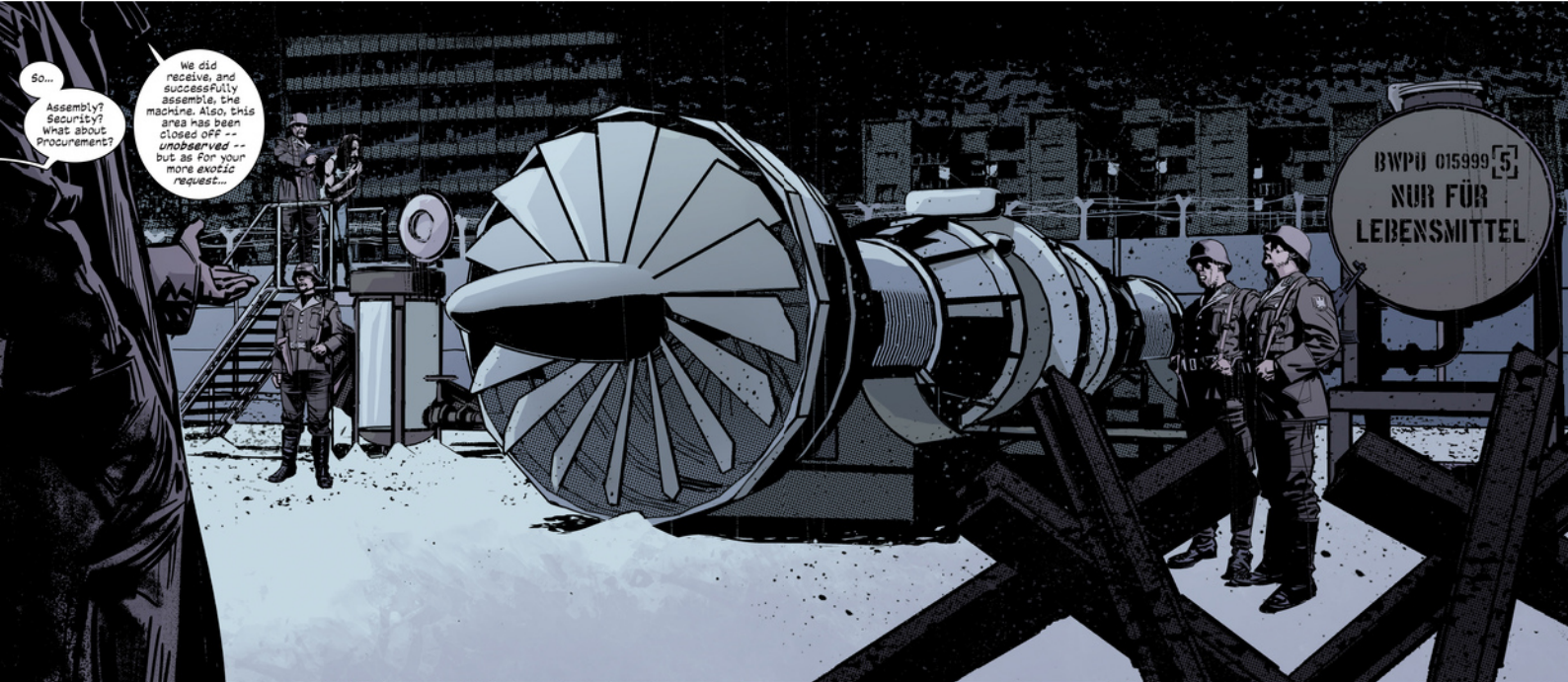


Well, secrecy is the trade, isn't it, old friend?

A bit of blindness can sometimes be a gift. There are some things it is better not to know. But, I promise, your patience and discretion is appreciated.



...
Of course.



So... Assembly? Security? What about Procurement?

We did receive, and successfully assemble, the machine. Also, this area has been closed off -- unobserved -- but as for your more exotic request...

BWPU 015999
NUR FÜR LEBENSMITTEL

"I could not acquire an Ashkali specimen in the allotted time. This one is Roman."



He will go. What about the Americans?



Gathered on their side of the wall.

There was a bright flash of light around twenty minutes ago. Nothing since.



Then they are already there, waiting for us.

Do you see, comrades, it is just as I said it would be.



Yes, we are late, Alexi. And everyone knows how you feel...but we rejected haste for solidarity within the school.

Besides, I do not mind making the Americans wait. In fact, I say we make them wait longer. It would serve them right for being so eager.



Go, Irena. You and Alexi. Make ready the machine.





Because the State has given us great leniency in the handling of German affairs, comrade...

And a spirit of cooperation has come to be expected.

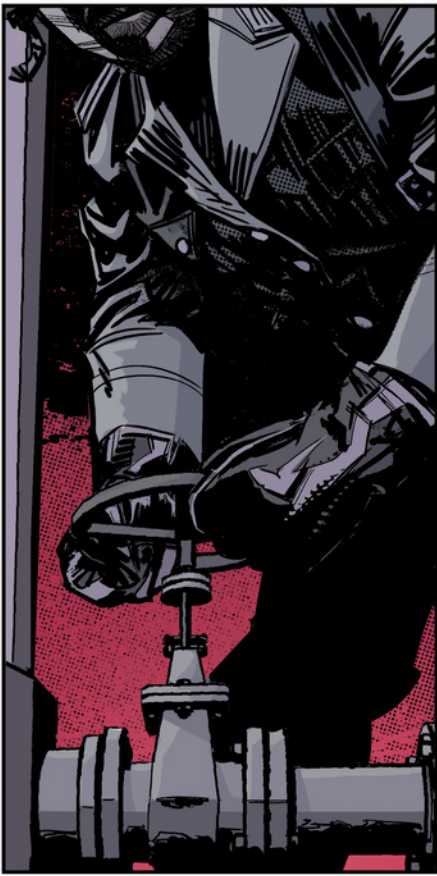
Our state, director, is currently... fluid.

Watch. You will see.



Okay.
Proceed.



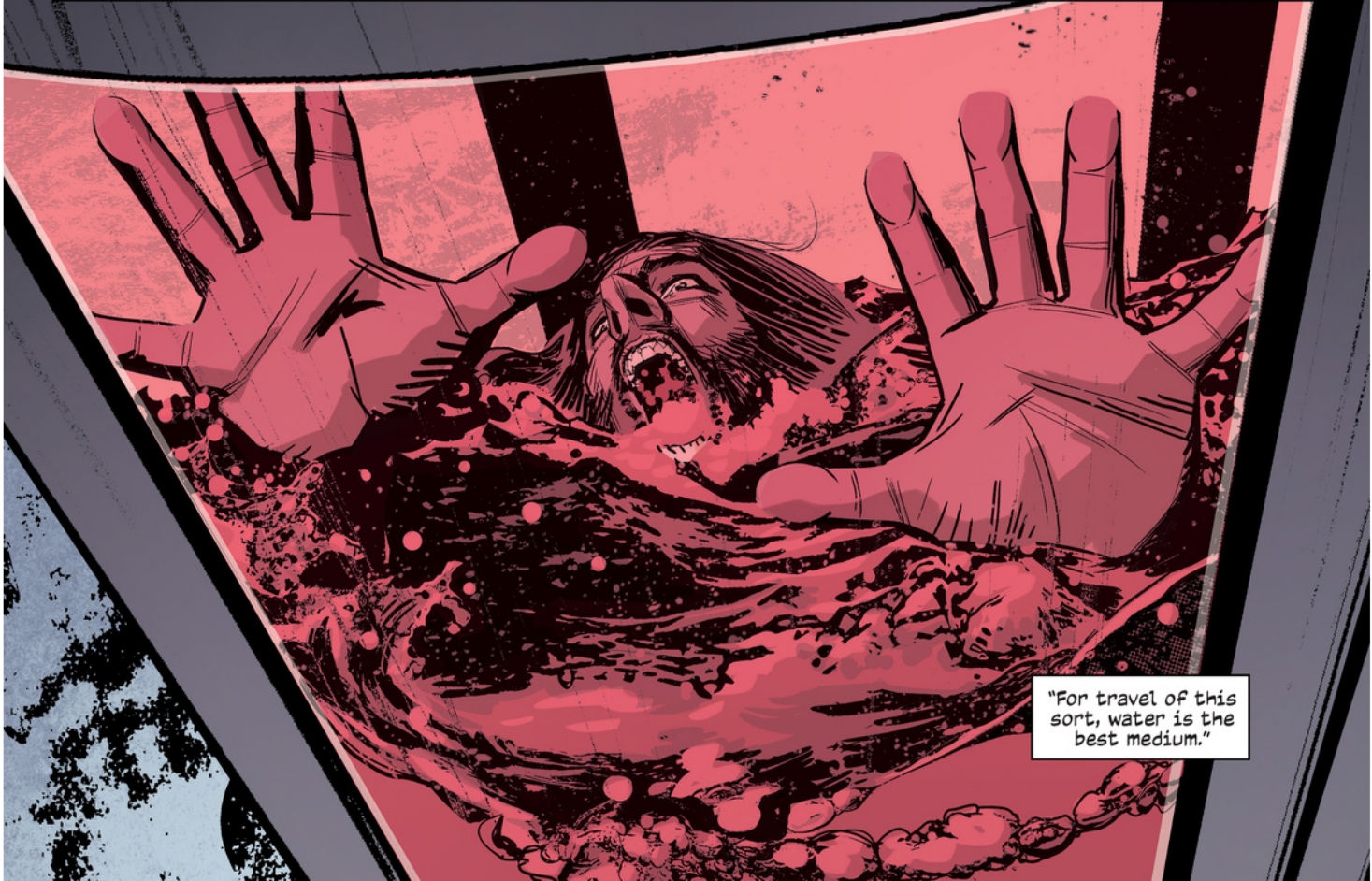


My god.
What is he doing?

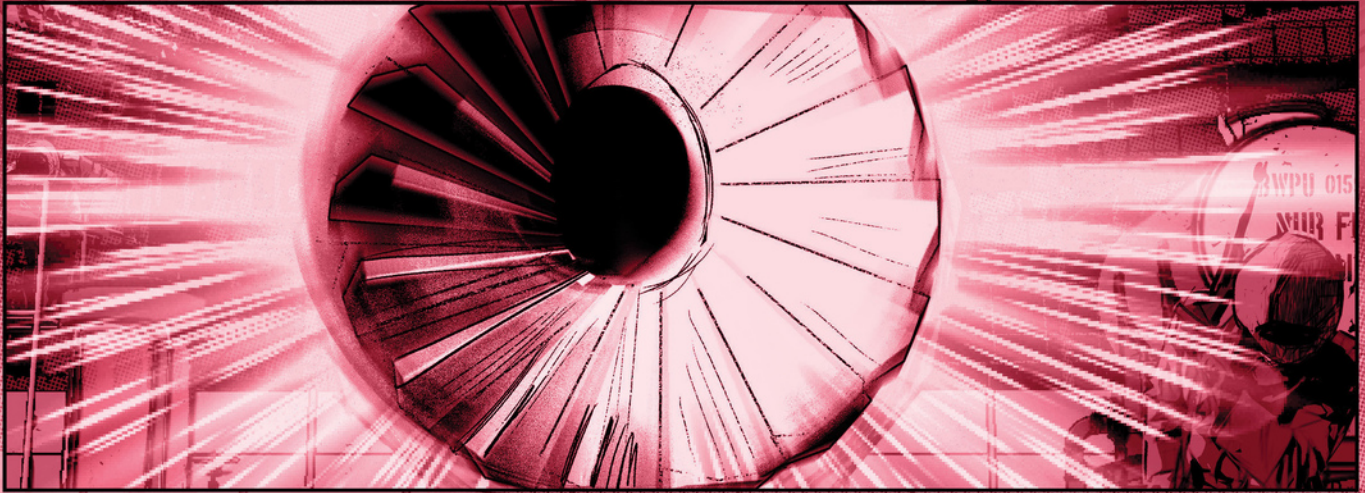


One must always pay for safe passage, director.

It's the currency that changes with the destination.



"For travel of this sort, water is the best medium."



"It is a door."





To go where?

The distance between Berlin's two walls is roughly one hundred meters. A thin line separating East from West.



Compared to the world it divides, is the wall a significant amount of space? No, it is not.

But the idea of the wall is vast. Vast enough to hold within it another world entirely.

That is where the door leads...and that is where we are going.



I was uncomfortable with my role in tonight's activities before -- and I agreed to keep all this secret -- but perhaps Moscow--

That is the wrong way to think about this, Director Wolf.



This wall, like our great communist state, was built by man. And with time, like all things assembled by human hand, it will crumble.

It will fade and take with it all the secrets that could be found in that hidden world.

Better to live here and now, no?



Perhaps.

Perhaps not.



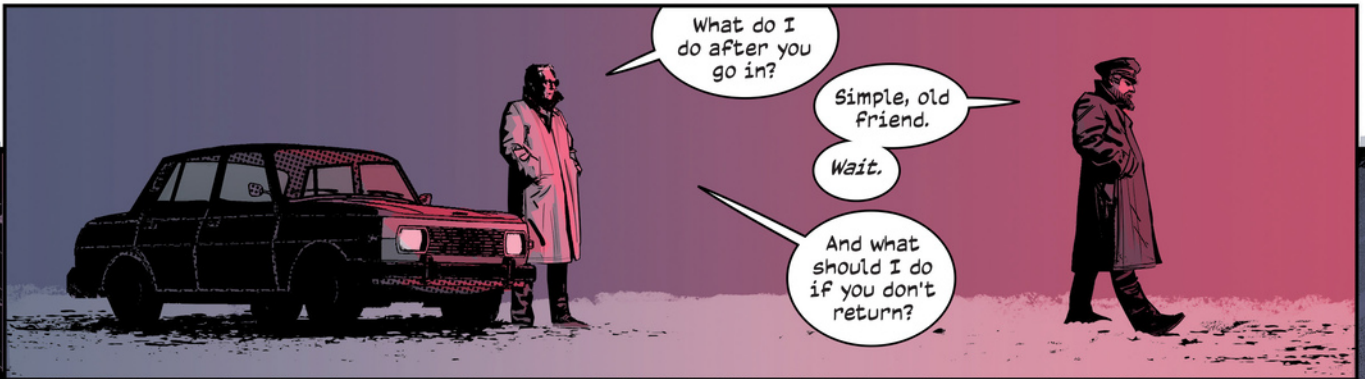
Let me say it a different way.

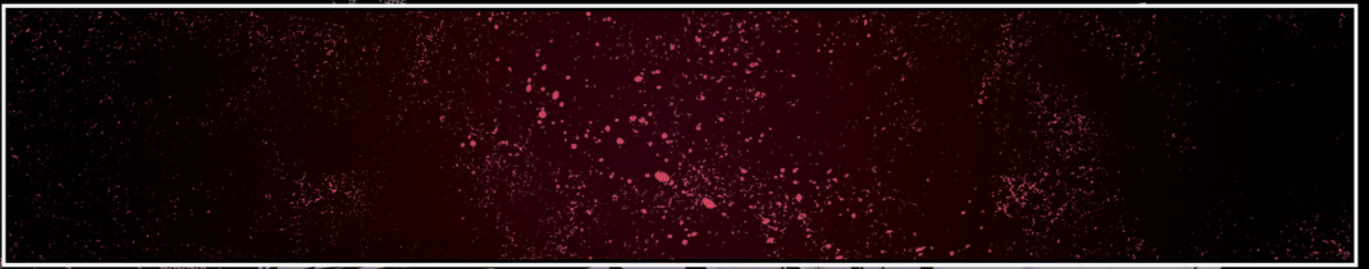
See me, Director Wolf...

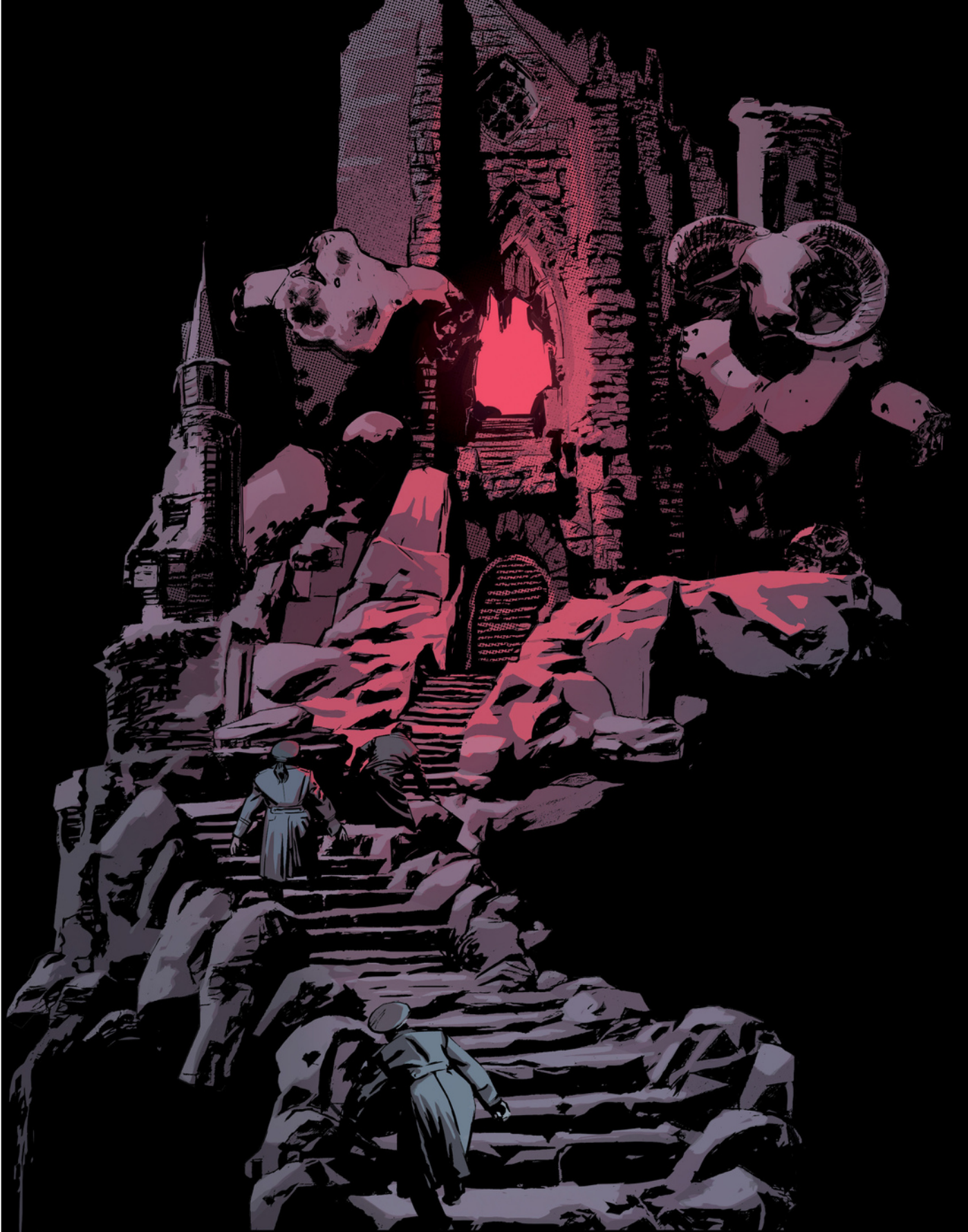


I am here. I am now.

And you will do as we have ordered.







You're late.

Couldn't be helped...

We had to use a Romani as a conduit. They are viscous little animals.

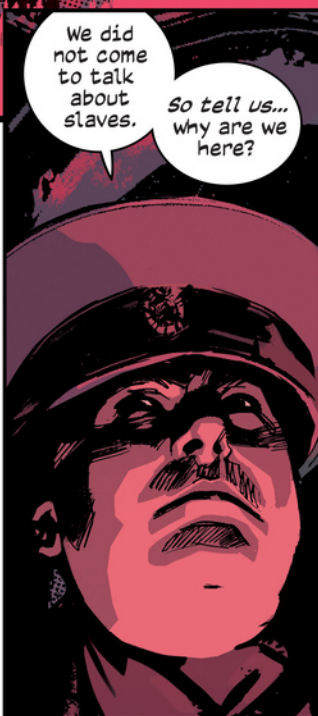
Well, some friendly advice from the Western School, my friend:

If you Russians treated your people a bit better, you might find them more eager to please.



We did not come to talk about slaves.

So tell us... why are we here?



Well, you were summoned...and look how you came running.



Careful, child. A pampered life has not prepared you for the likes of us. Best not wake the bear...

Just answer the question.



There's going to be a sizable correction in the pool.



How large?



The market's going to crash.



Good news, comrades...





This is the one we've been waiting for.

(e)

12



2016

- RENEW THE WHEEL -

(a)

(image comics presents:)

(b,c,d)

THE BLACK MONDAY
MURDERS

CHAPTER TWO....

(a,b,c,d)

Caina-Kankrin
Investment Bank.

November 1st.
8:06 a.m.

They're
ready.

But *just* you,
Ms. Rothschild.
Your friend
has to wait
out here.

Is that
going to be
a problem?

It's
fine, Abby.
Nothing's
going to
happen
today.



Good morning, Beatrix. Alexi.

Marco.

Thank you for coming, Grigoria. It's good to see you. It's been *far too long.*



And look at you -- *looking well.* Healthy even. That's quite a feat for someone just out of the jungle. I have to know, dear, what's your secret?



Clean living.



Nonsense. There's no such thing.



I've heard the rumors about Blackpool, Ria. Someone with your family tree should be a bit more careful...

You Rothschilds and your history with slaves. Sure. Their blood'll make you strong, but it also makes you common...



And let's be honest, what decent American could stand living like that?

Marco.



Sorry. Everyone's a bit touchy because of what's happened.

You may have heard. Someone died and -- *From what I understand --* died poorly.



That's enough.

Daniel's death was tragic, but I think -- *the board thinks --* this is also an opportunity to put the past behind us.

Buried, Ria. Understand? Everything stays buried.



I understand.



Good. I won't try to pretend what's sour is sweet -- *I know we're asking a lot.* And obviously, there will be a period of readjustment for all of us, but we need you, and we need you back now.

Will you please come home, Grigoria?



Well, I have a few demands.

Fordham
University.

9:08 a.m.

Dr.
Gaddis?

Yes?

I'm
Detective
Dumas.

I was
very clear
earlier...
this is not
a good
time.

I did
call,
doctor.

Yes. And I
don't mean to be
unsympathetic,
detective, but I have a
very busy morning,
starting with class
in about twenty
minutes.

I always try
to be helpful, of
course, but your visit
is unexpected and now
is not a good time.
Lunch perhaps? Or the
afternoon would be
even better.

Like I
said.
I did call
ahead.

When you lack
an invitation, and
you've failed to give
proper notice, announcing
your imminent -- *and
inexorable* -- arrival
doesn't make it any less
of an imposition. Does
it now, detective?



There's been a murder.

A murder?

Yes.



You say that like it's supposed to make a difference. *Like it matters.*

Of course it matters. Someone was murdered.



Detective, every year for the past decade there have been more than ten thousand murders in this country.

Do they bother me? Do I have empathy? Yes. Of course. But I do lack compassion.



It's not a defect of character, mind you. I simply don't have the capacity to self-identify with horror of that magnitude.

I wish that wasn't my reaction, but I'm an economics professor. I just see the numbers. So if you're trying to persuade me, I'm going to need something more.



Last night, I was at the murder scene and I...saw something that, well, made me think I might need help solving this case. *Your help, in particular.*

I have no idea how I could begin to--

I've read your book.



Which one?



Oh, you know the one. Rare. Hard to find.

Almost every copy disappeared before it hit the shelves because someone bought them -- all of them -- and after that, bought and boxed the publisher.



And how did you find a copy?



I'm a minor collector -- something of an enthusiast...



And I knew what I was looking for.



I'd like for you to leave now.



Doctor, I'm not asking you to do much more than--

Leave. Now.

I have to show you something first. It's the reason I came.

I'm sorry, but no. I have class.



Just a quick look. Please.



Doctor?



I've been very careful the past twenty years.



Very quiet. Very still. I've hidden in this place -- in this room -- while time and fear have punished me...

Now I'm an old man who wasted most of his life just so he could live a little longer.

What do you want from me, Detective Dumas?

I want your help.

-Sigh- Even the worst coward runs out of places to hide, I suppose.

This was what you saw last night?



"Yes. The writing just appeared on the wall. Like magic."

"Some type of chemical reaction to light, if I had to guess. And look at the symbols. They're like the ones in your book."



I see that. Here, like in my book. This symbol. It's the letter 'epth'.



Wait...


You can actually read this?



Of course not. And there is no record of anyone who can. At best, we have a partial understanding of a few symbols.



For more, we would need a Rosetta object of some sort...



For quite some time, the earliest record we had of this symbol -- of this language -- was scattered among the cuneiform tablets found in Mesopotamian ruins all across the Middle East.

Then, in 1993, the Dispilio Tablet was found in Greece, and the symbol appeared on it as well. The same symbol, but accompanied by another language entirely, this one almost two thousand years older.

The implication being that this symbol belongs to a language which predates both, making it the oldest recorded language in history.

Okay. But why was it here?

Where's the connection? How does it fit?

I know almost nothing about your case, detective. But I would bet all of what little money I have on the victim being employed by one of the older U.S. banks.

More than thirty years ago, I would have guessed J.P. Morgan, Citi, or possibly even Goldman Sachs. *But today?* Today I'd guess Caina.

How the hell did you know that?

If you ask any competent linguist what's the most spoken language on Earth, they will tell you -- with some assurance -- it is Mandarin, and they would be wrong.

Since we first learned to grunt, man has possessed a universal language, and it remains a language everyone on the planet still speaks.

Mathematics.



You see, detective, numbers are primal. What makes them enduring -- what gives this language its true power -- is when a number is attached to an object.

We use that union of number and object to count, and counting is how we measure accumulation. And what is accumulation? *It is wealth.* Now consider that we do the same thing with peopl--

BE-DOOP!
BE-DOOP!



I'm sorry. Excuse me for a second.



Dumas.

It's Moreno. Judge signed the order. We're walking in to seize the security footage now. Want to meet us back at the office?

Uh-huh. I'm on my way.



I apologize, doctor. Something's come up. I need to go.

Listen, I know I was imposing, and I appreciate your time, but if it's at all possible, I'd really like to continue our conversation...

Even though you lost me at the end there.



Yes, detective. We must do that. *Soon.* I'm free most afternoons, but lunch might serve us better.

Thank you. I'll be in touch.



Detective.

Yes?



I have to warn you. You should be careful not to attract the wrong kind of attention.

I have been where you are. Staring into the abyss. I want you to know you can still step away from the ledge. It's okay to let it lie. To leave it be.

And why would I do that, doctor?

Because these are serious people, and they *will* try to put you to a decision. If you bite, be sure you're prepared to operate at the proper depth. *Understand?*

In for a penny, detective. In for a pound.

CHINA BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES

DATE: Tuesday, November 1, 2016
TIME: 8:00 AM
LOCATION: Caina Boardroom. New York.

PRESENT: Beatrix Bischoff | The Watcher
Marco Dominic | The Scales
Alexi Malkin | The Stone Chair

Grigoria Rothschild
(Guest)

ABSENT:

Wynn Ackermann | (Sabbatical)

- I. Call to Order: At 8:15 AM by presiding officer Beatrix Bischoff.
- II. Quorum: Three of four Board members present (three required.)
- III. Reading and Approval of Minutes: Minutes of the October 4, 2016 Board meeting regarding [REDACTED]
- IV. Treasurer's Report: Uncontested.
- V. New Business:
 - A. Reappointment of Grigoria Rothschild to the Ascendant Seat (unanimous approval).
 - B. Rothschild stock transfer of [REDACTED] (approval).
 - C. Retribution language adopted regarding the circumstances surrounding the death of Daniel Rothschild (unanimous approval).
 - D. Unilateral control of negotiating mergers and/or acquisitions for the next six months (approval).
 - E. Full access to all [REDACTED] (rejected).
 - G. Arbitration of access to all [REDACTED] (approval).

Oh...oh,
yes.

Good,
girl.

Shhhh.
Stop...stop
talking.

Of course
they gave
us what we
wanted.

*This time,
we're getting
everything
we want...*

Now, you
terrible
monster of
a woman...

Shut your
fucking
mouth.

Oh...

Oh...

Oh...

March 12, 1899

To my eldest son Milton,

If you are receiving this letter, then I have died before you reached the age of thirty. It's of a secondary concern that if I had died after you reached that age, you would have received a completely different letter (simpler fare to be sure; well-wishes and similar, other hollow advice), but you have always been a curious boy and, I believe, that letter's existence would have haunted you. To that end, let me assure you, this is the bloody red meat you seek.

By now, you will have claimed my place on the Wheel - along with the other three families that make up our academy - and have come into your full power. I am sure that you, much like I did in my time, feel both impervious and immortal, but let me assure you, this is not the case.

As such, I would like to offer you three options for overcoming the greatest tragedy of an empowered life: brevity.

1. Consolidate the school. Eliminate the other three families and consume their wealth. This should, at the very least, extend your life twenty to thirty more years. Unfortunately, because the power transfer must follow proper protocol, one cannot eliminate all of the others at once. Meaning that one of the others, and possibly both, will know what you are doing and will work to oppose you. Additionally, this does not solve the Stone Chair conundrum. I do not advise this route.

2. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I do consider this an acceptable solution, but also partial fare.

3. If you have the strength to survive the summoning (which is why it is paramount that you be under the age of thirty), then petition the Federal Reserve and [REDACTED] to acquire a Familiar. This not only provides you with a proxy for the Stone Chair, but could potentially prolong your life for another one hundred years. This would be my recommended option.

Whichever course you choose, know that I envy your position.

Finally, if by some combination of cruelty and medicine, my mother has managed to outlive me, I implore you to right that wrong as soon as possible. The woman is a yoke no decent neck should endure, so please, send her on her way.

Your father,
Andrew Davis Rothschild II



1st Precinct.
NYPD.

10:13 a.m.

I'm back.
You ready
for me?



Yeah.
I just
got set
up.

Any other
problems?

No. Our instincts were
right. What they really
wanted was cover from
their clients. *And to be
fair, I understand
why they were so
hesitant.*

Yeah?



Ever
play
'Clue'?

Every
damn
day.

Well, this
is like your
opponents having
to play with their
cards facing up. The
security company
knew the footage
was a smoking
gun.

All right.
Let's walk
through
it.

Okay. So it's
an integrated
system. About as good
as you can buy for
commercial purposes. It
all starts with the
camera feeds which dump
their footage to an
external location for
cataloging and
storage.

No big
surprise there,
except maybe the
resolution. Which
is...pretty
impressive.



Where it
gets interesting,
is that to activate
any of the private
elevators in the
building, you have
to have a
keycard.

Which, like
the footage, gets
recorded, time-
stamped, and cataloged.
This system then
compiles all of that
into a searchable
log.

Can't
be that
easy,
can it?





The coroner's report puts the time of death in between 11 PM and 1 AM.

The entire scene was staged. Killer could have done that beforehand. Call it 9 and...

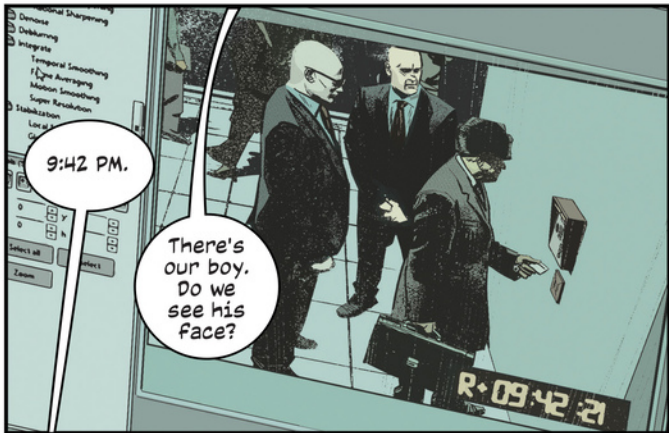
We got two hits during that time frame.



Let's see the first one.

This is 9:27, in the PM.

That's Rothschild. The victim. Move on to the next one.



9:42 PM.

There's our boy. Do we see his face?

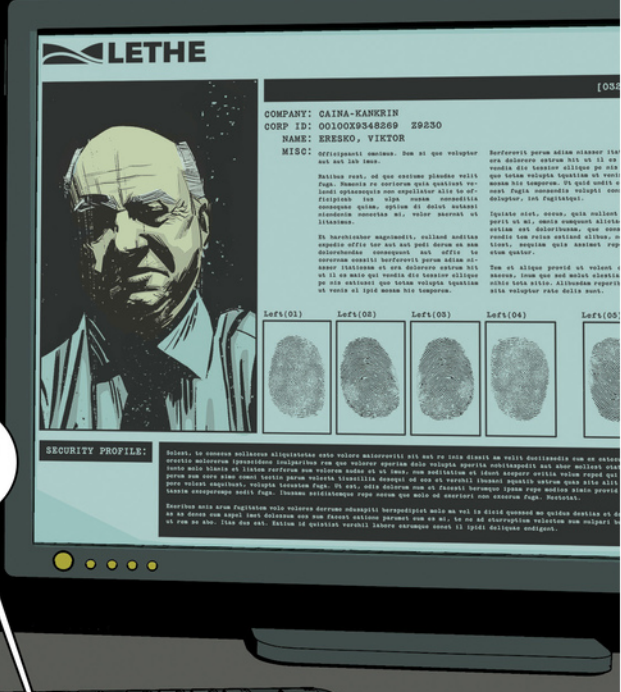


Let me step through it...



And comparing it with the I.D....

Looks like the same guy.



LETHE

COMPANY: GAINA-KANKRIN
 CORP ID: 001002545529 Z9230
 NAME: ERESKO, VIKTOR
 MISC: *[Illegible text]*

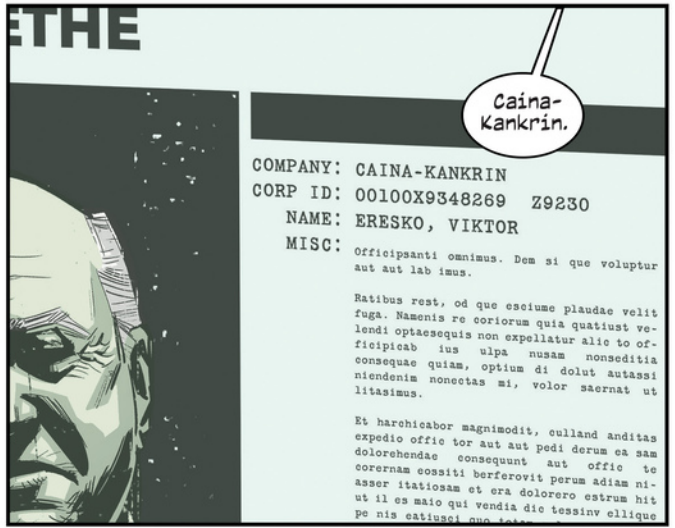
[Illegible text]

Left(01) Left(02) Left(03) Left(04) Left(05)

SECURITY PROFILE: *[Illegible text]*



And look where he works.



Caina-Kankrin.

COMPANY: CAINA-KANKRIN
CORP ID: 00100X9348269 Z9230
NAME: ERESKO, VIKTOR

MISC: *officiisanti omnibus. Dem si que voluptur aut aut lab imus.*

Ratibus rest, od que esciune plaudae velit fuga. Namenis re coriorum quia quatiust veleni optaequis non expellatur alio to orficiacab ius ulpa nusam nonseditia consequae quiam, optum di dolut autassi niendenim nonectas mi, volor saernat ut litasimus.

Et harchicabor magnimodit, culland anditas expedio offic tor aut aut pedi derum ea sam dolorehndae consequunt aut offic te corernam coositi berferovit perum adiam niasser itatiosam et era dolorero estrum hit ut il es maio qui vendia die tessinv ellique pe nis catiusci que tate.



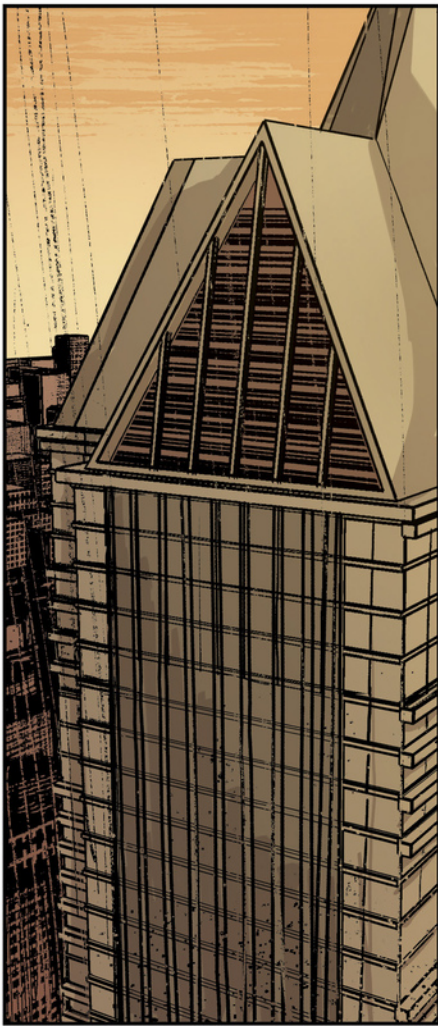
Final guess, detective. It was the Russian. In the penthouse. With what I bet was a very sharp knife.

Let's go get him.

Caina-Kankrin Investment Bank.

11:46 a.m.







And if I do not?

What then?



What power do you think you have -- you little men with your little guns?



I'm not going to warn you again...

Don't make me do something I don't want to do.



Foolish man. I cannot be killed. I am forever. Immortal. Vechnyy.

So please, do your very worst. I will certainly do mine.






Eastern Schools of Economics

At their height, the Eastern schools were not primarily defined by a hierarchical triadic structure. The primary academy arrangement was base six, but by the dawn of the 20th century, the most common composition was base twelve. There were exceptions to this found among Russian nobility, but these, along with the vast majority of typical academies, were all systematically eradicated beginning with the October Revolution.

In the twenty years following Red October, a single fractured academy, Kankrin, was able to inculcate itself into the fledgling government and act as the State Bank of the Soviet Union. Using the secretive and suspicious nature of the Communist Party to its advantage, Kankrin was able to use the seasonal campaigns of political repression to identify "Wild Academies" that naturally occur in a financial vacuum. Behind the Iron Curtain, the Kankrin Troika grew strong devouring its own.

Surviving Academies: Kankrin (1841)

(December 7, 1985)

- (a)  [Earth | The Judge].....KOZLOV
- (b)  [Man | The Body].....MALKIN
- (c)  [Sky | The Executioner].....ERESKO

The Troika of Kankrin.

Even in a parasitic relationship, it is almost impossible not to symbiotically take on characteristics of the thing you are consuming, and the communist state/Eastern school mutualistic union was no different.

Beginning with the Great Purge in 1936, the secret academy operating as the state bank abandoned the base six structure and adopted the judge/jury/executioner triad of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) Troika as their own. The bloody tradition of the name lives on, but it also has expanded over time to reflect its more academic side.

The Kankrin universal mantra of: "We are born. We pay in blood. We become." has, over time, evolved into its more common usage: "The one you started with. The one you're paying for. The one for profit."





I am. And you're going to need all the help you can get. These people don't normally get arrested, and on the rare day they do, they almost never stay that way.

I'm Thomas Dane, by the way. Caina Head of Security.

Well then, you've had quite a week. Most people might find it upsetting.

You don't look upset.



It's an interesting job, working for those who are -- by all means one can measure -- wealthy enough to be nations unto themselves. It distorts reality. It skews perspective.

To tell you the truth, I honestly don't even think of them as people anymore, detective. They're more like...perpetual institutions.

So, yes, for most people, today might seem eventful. But in my eyes, all that's really happened is the predictable progression of one Rothschild to another. The machine, you see, it grinds on.

Just like that?



Yes. And it's a beautiful baby girl this time. His twin, it turns out.

And if you don't mind, she has a couple questions she'd like answered.



Well that's fine. Perfect, in fact...

I have some questions of my own.

Speaking of which...does Caina-Kankrin require all of their security to have a military background?

You have that way about you.



You should see what they expect from the people who prepare their food.

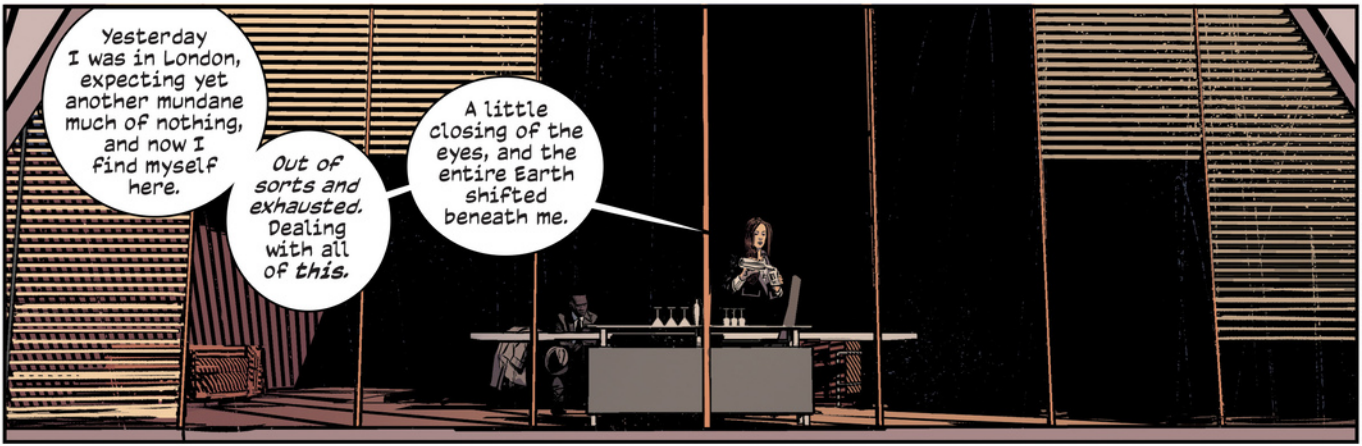
That's not really an answer.

Caina hires all kinds of people, detective...

But, yes, they prefer security who can shoot straight, which I learned to do in the army. I practiced a lot...

One thing led to another and, eventually, I ended up here.





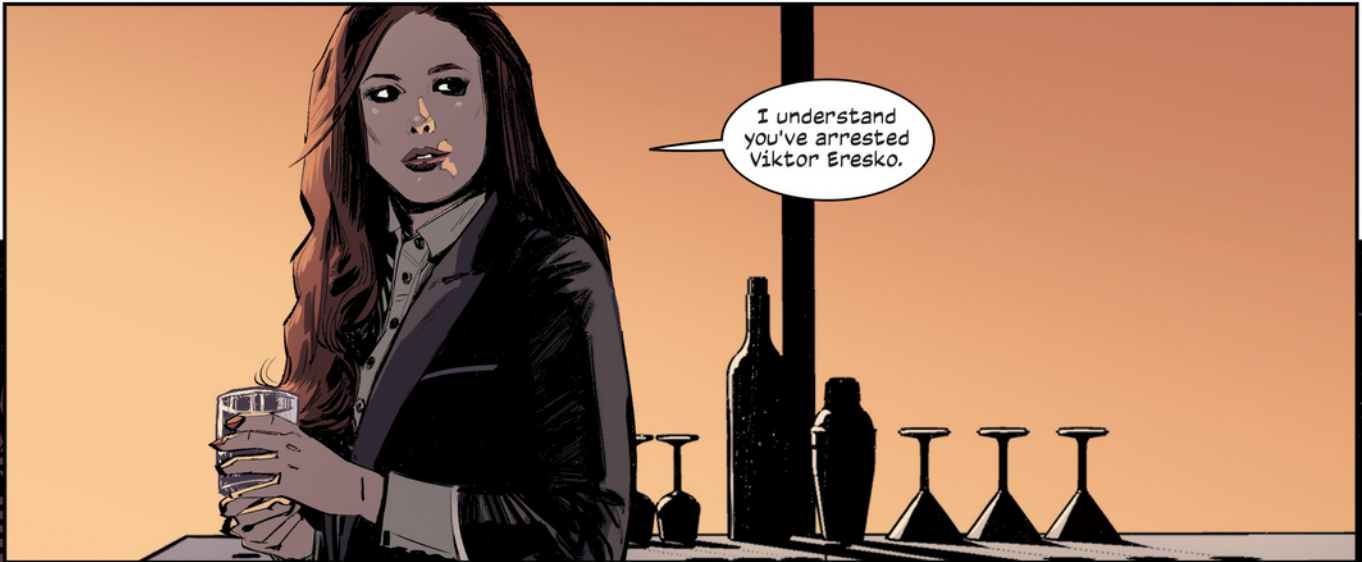
Yesterday I was in London, expecting yet another mundane much of nothing, and now I find myself here.

Out of sorts and exhausted. Dealing with all of this.

A little closing of the eyes, and the entire Earth shifted beneath me.



But I suppose that's how it works, this world in which we live. Fortunes change. Stocks rise and fall...

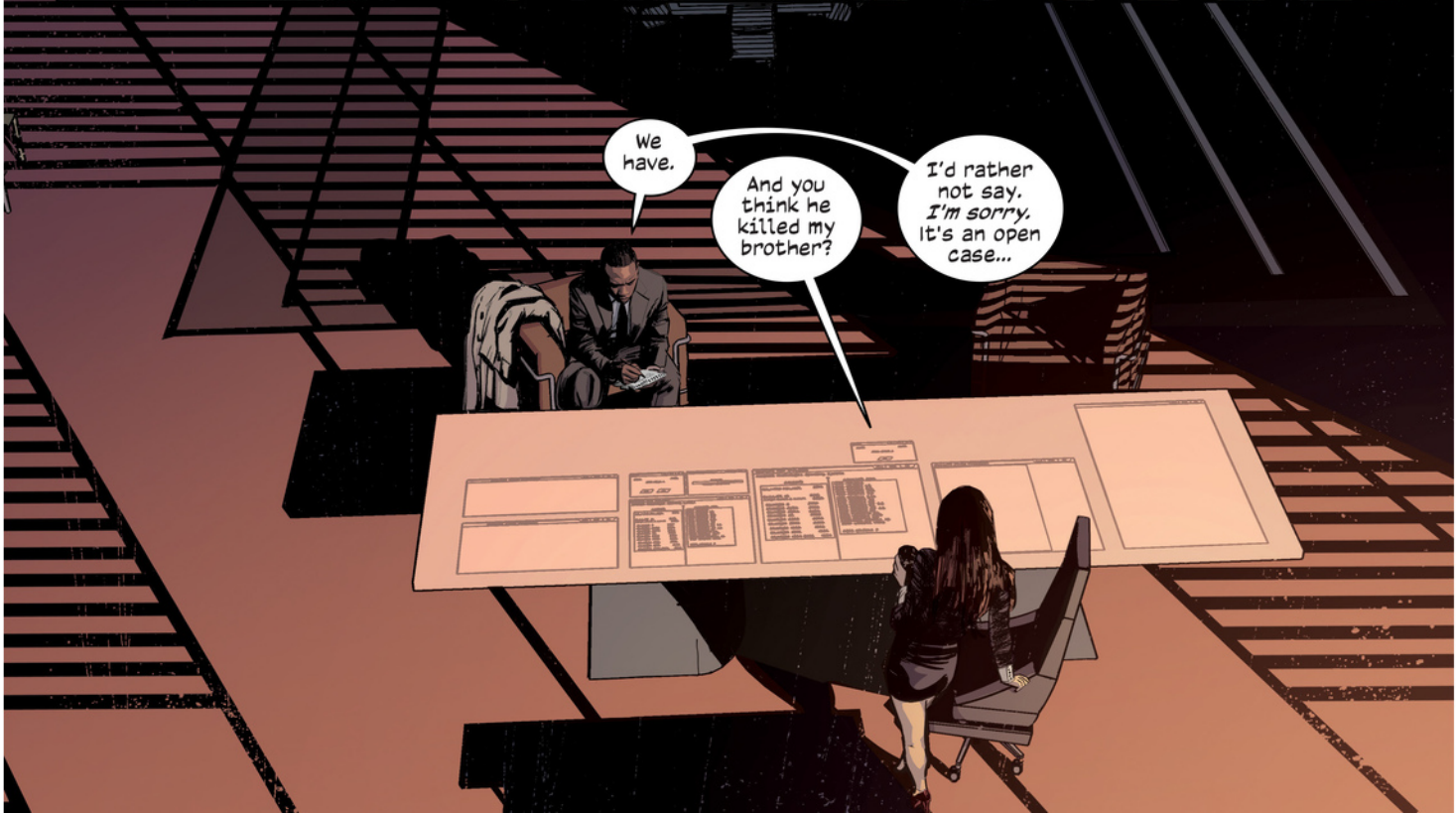


I understand you've arrested Viktor Eresko.

We have.

And you think he killed my brother?

I'd rather not say. I'm sorry. It's an open case...





Were the two of you close?



Myself and Viktor?



You and your brother.



No. Not anymore. We used to be.

What happened?

Money, and the lure of all it brings.



You have to understand something, detective...

This firm has been in my family for generations. It's more than a point of pride, it defines who we are. It's what we do.



As a result, succession is cutthroat. But when our grandfather died and it came time for myself or Daniel to assume his seat, we decided to share it.

And we did, until the day our firm merged with another and everything changed. I was sent away, while Daniel was allowed to stay.

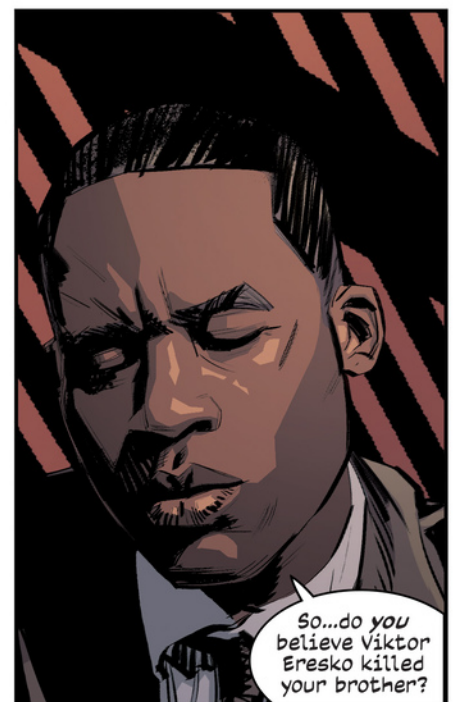


So you were angry at him.



I was angry he got to choose. I would have made the same decision he did. The opportunity was just not one I was given.

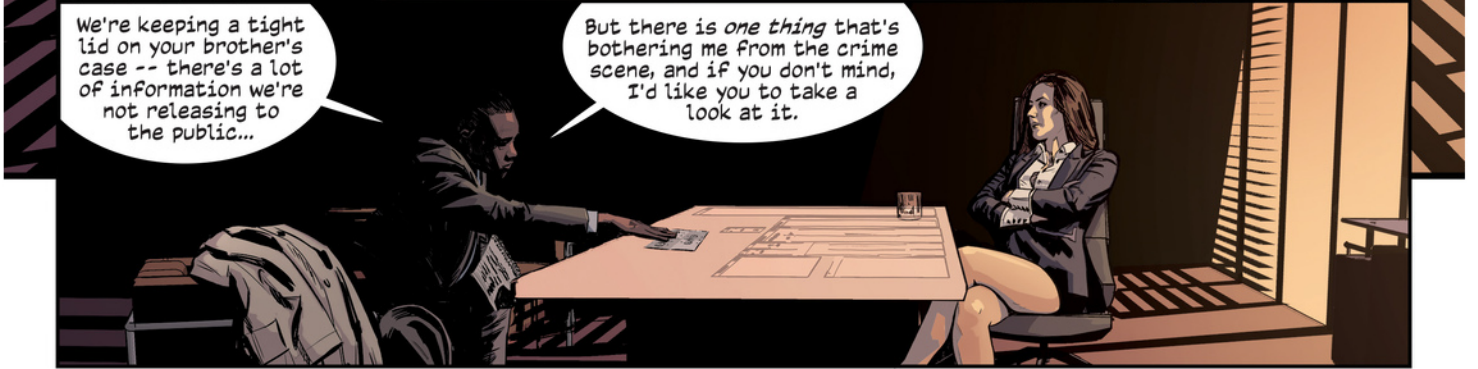
But, again, that's how it works, this world in which women live.



So...do you believe Viktor Eresko killed your brother?



Oh, I think it's probably a good bit more complicated than that, detective.



We're keeping a tight lid on your brother's case -- there's a lot of information we're not releasing to the public...

But there is *one thing* that's bothering me from the crime scene, and if you don't mind, I'd like you to take a look at it.

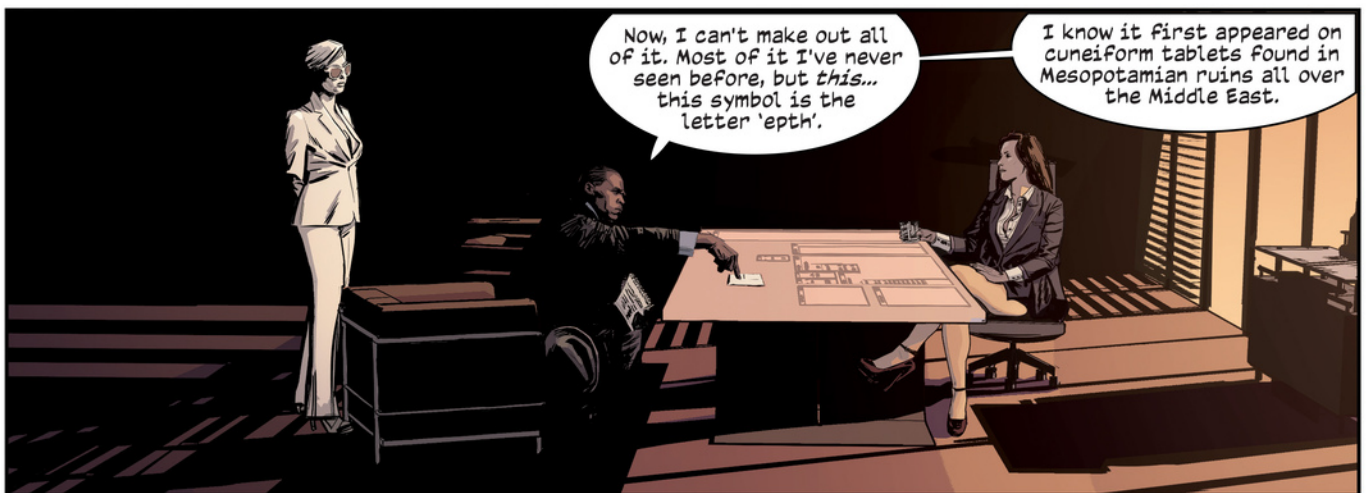
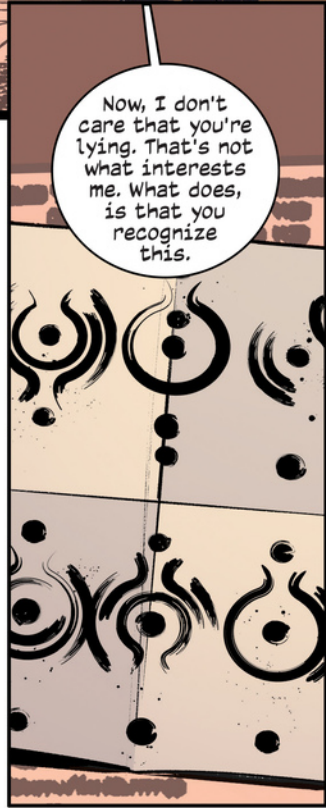
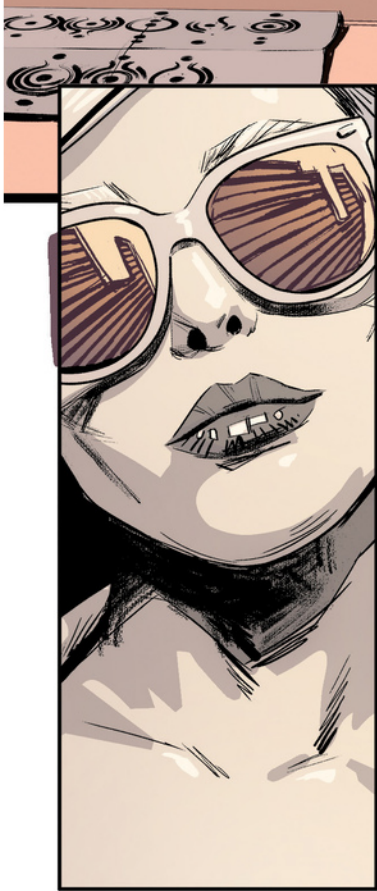


This was written on the wall.



Have you ever seen anything like it before?







Later, it was also noticed on an even older relic, almost two thousand--

HA HA

Oh, I see now...



You're one of them.



Excuse me?



You're Haitian, aren't you?



No. I was born here. Just like my mother and father were.



But your grandfather was Haitian, wasn't he?

And he practiced Vodou?



The only thing my grandfather worshipped was my grandmother. When he died, she buried him at sea, and kept the bones of his left hand for herself.

She said it was something to hold on to in that other place. It was my grandmother who practiced Vodou. *She believed.*



And you? Are you a believer, detective?



I'm just curious. I always have been. It's a professional hazard, I know.



Well, can I offer you some advice? From one professional to another?



Sure.



No one has ever accomplished anything dithering around the edges. That's the problem with Vodou and all the other manufactured religions of the world.

It's full of dabblers pretending to control the uncontrollable. Like babes left for wolves, thinking the wolves would rather love them than eat them.



You telling me to watch out for wolves?



I'm telling you *Caina-kankrin* is a den of industry. See our teeth.



Is there a reason you asked to see me?

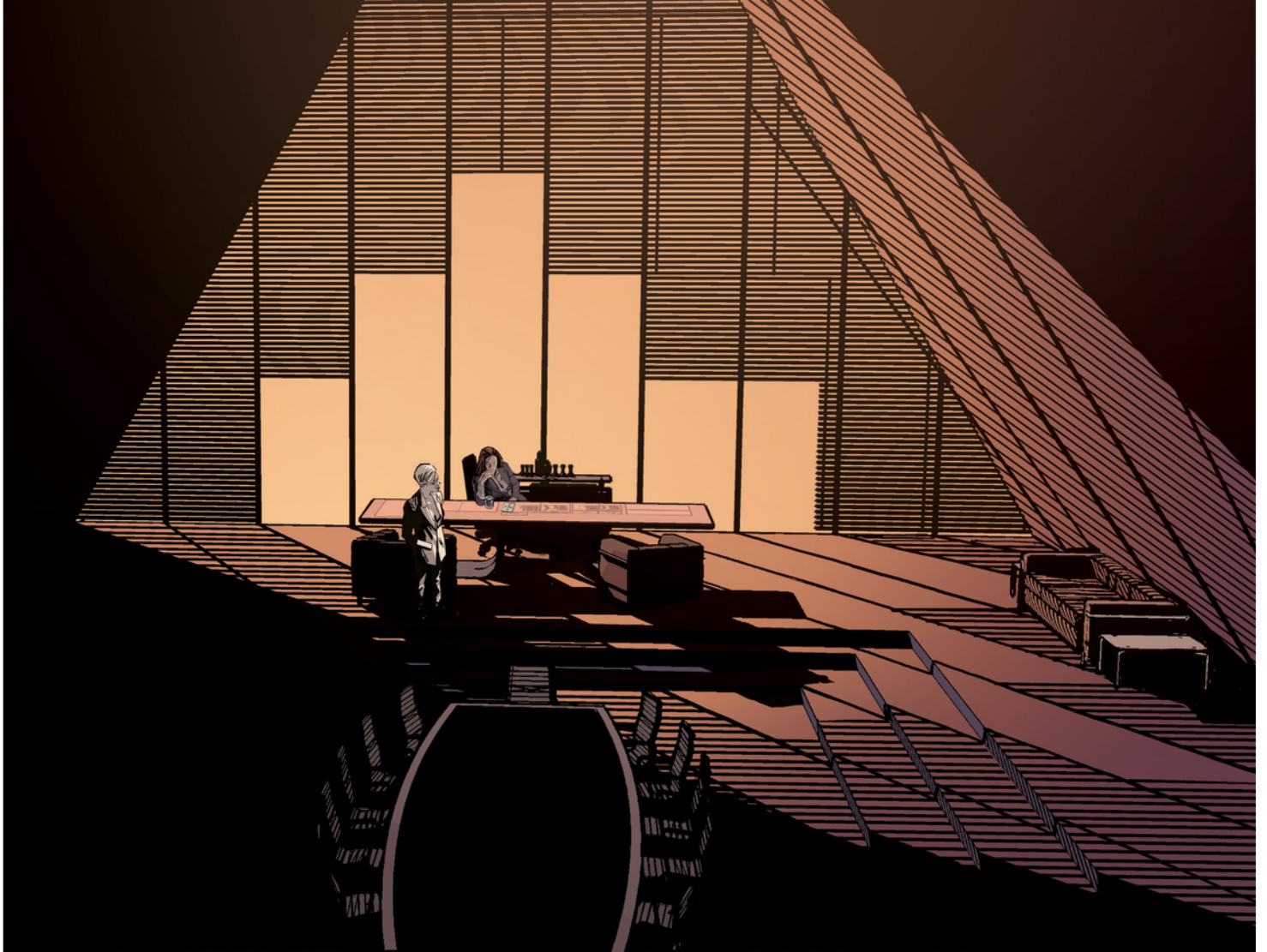


I wanted to get a good look at you. Decide what I was dealing with.



Made up your mind yet?





I will never lie to you.

I'm the one you can trust.



(a)

(e)

////////// DRAMATIS PERSONAE: //

(b, c, d)





ALL HAIL GOD MAMMON



SON OF ULTRON

"THIS FAN...
THIS MONSTER!"

