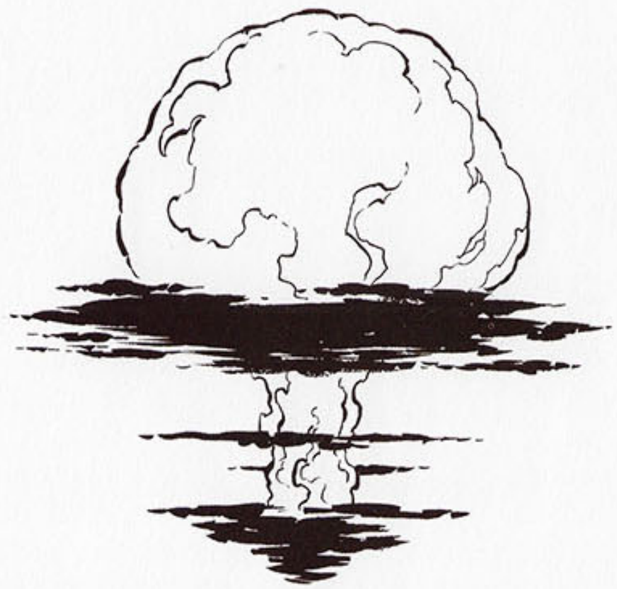
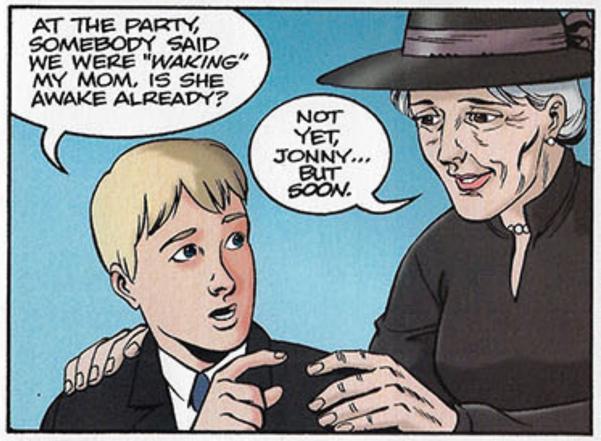
PART ONE



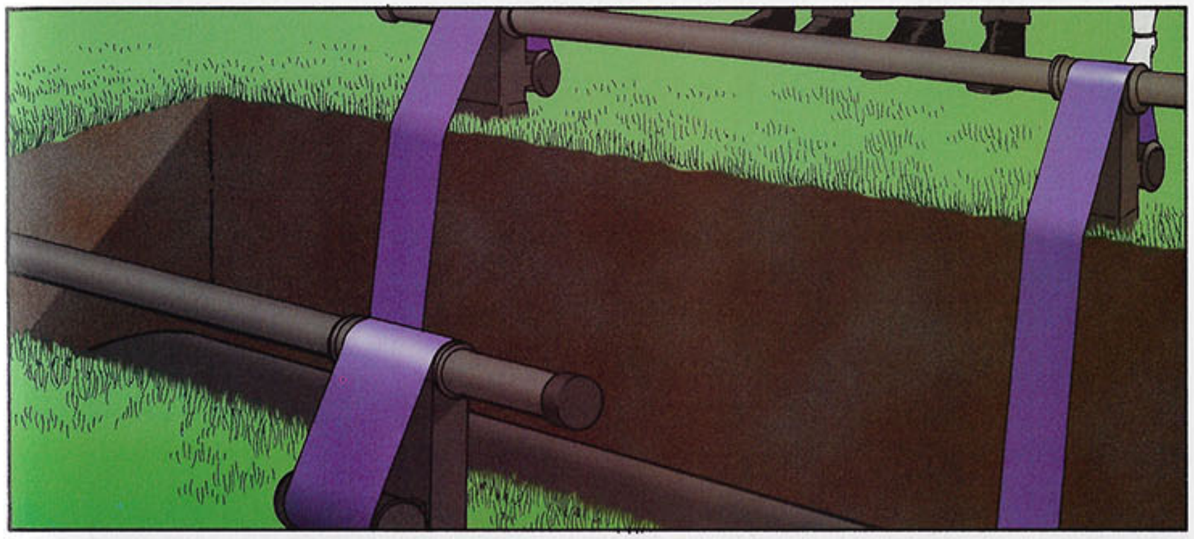
I'd seen a sunrise or two at Claire's grave. I'm sure my son Johnny had, too.

Now the long years of waiting and wondering were over. Today was *the* day...for us both.

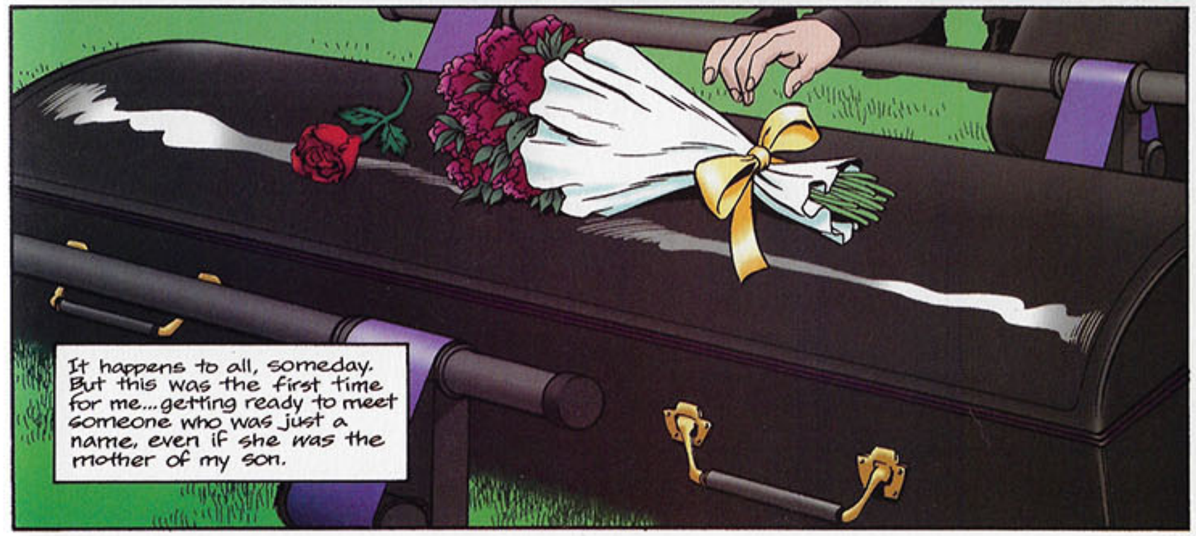
GOOD MORNING, FATHER.
THE LONG-AWAITED MORNING...
YES, THIS IS THE BEST PART OF MY JOB, MISTER TAYLOR.
GRAMMA?
YES, DEAR?


AT THE PARTY, SOMEBODY SAID WE WERE "WAKING" MY MOM. IS SHE AWAKE ALREADY?
NOT YET, JONNY... BUT SOON.

C'MON, DAD...
MOM'S WAITING FOR US!



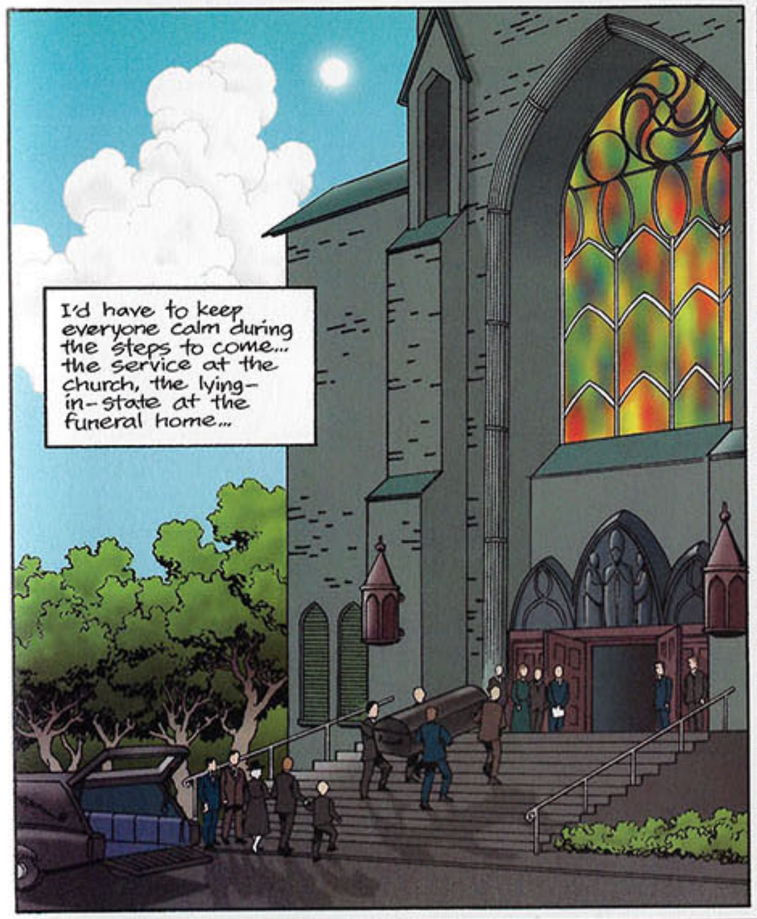
FROM MOTHER OF EARTH TO MOTHER OF FLESH...

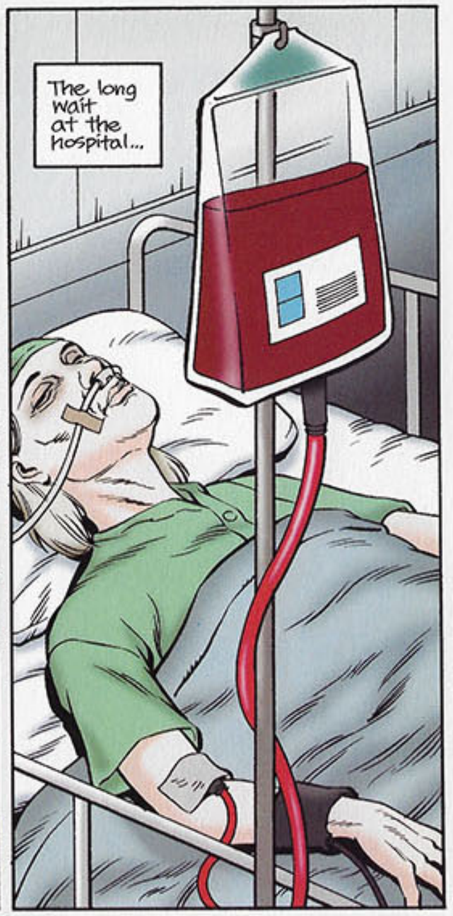

It happens to all, someday. But this was the first time for me... getting ready to meet someone who was just a name, even if she was the mother of my son.

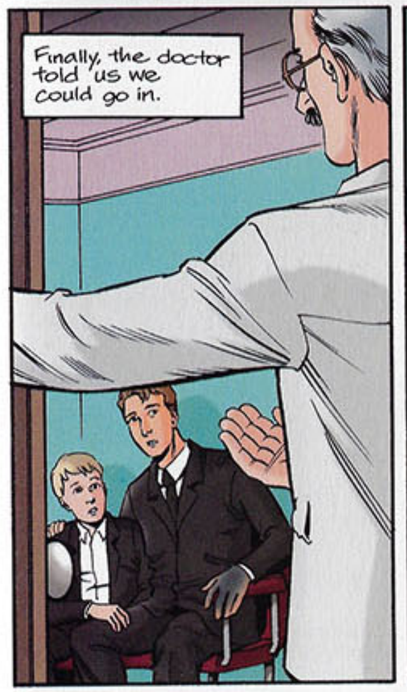
She would be *Claire*-- beloved wife and mother... but to me, just a woman I'd seen in photographs.

I wonder... will she like me?

BONE FROM ASHES... FLESH FROM DUST...







It was a good time to be alive. The days of catastrophe were only a memory.

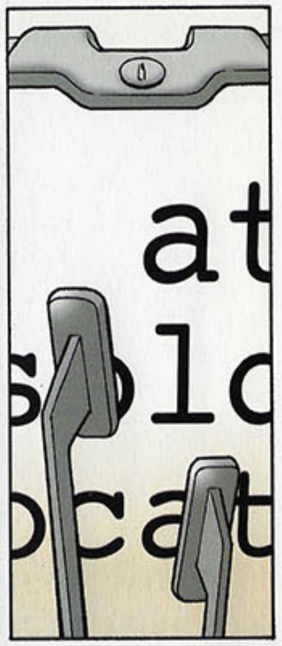
In a matter of forty years, the human population had dropped from eleven billion to less than six.

The water in the pipes, in the lakes and rivers, was rarely poisonous now. Blindness and skin cancer weren't as commonplace as they had once been.

For reasons not entirely clear, what had once been a rather tenuous layer of ozone around the planet was now growing thick, and many scientists viewed this as a good sign for the future, though I wasn't exactly sure why.

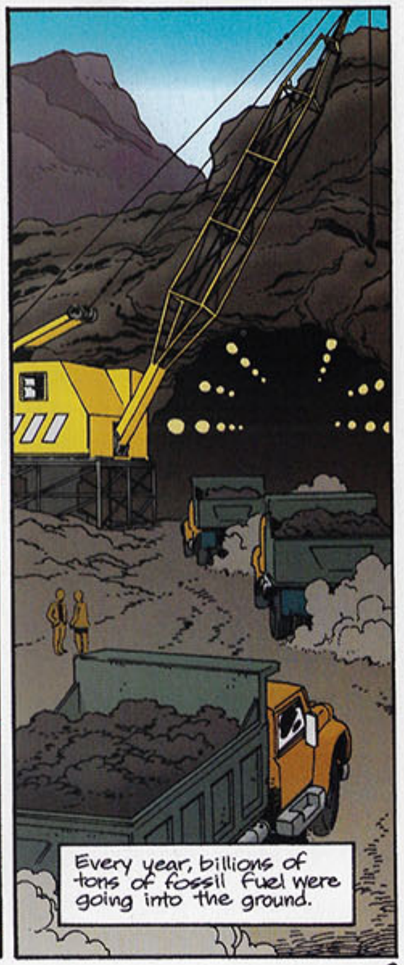
At the newspaper, we'd recently gotten rid of our computer system, to everyone's relief.

I think we all felt more valuable relying on our own brains and muscles.



Every year, the planet was growing greener. Scientists said this explained why the air was getting cleaner. Or partly explained it.

Of course, factories were running day and night, and that helped.



Every year, billions of tons of fossil fuel were going into the ground.

And every year, our son got a little more entertaining.

OH, THIS ONE'S JUST *PRICELESS*.

ARE YOU MY CLUMSY LITTLE BEAR? GO AND TELL YOUR MOMMY GRANDMA'S HERE.

'KAY GRAMMA, I GET HER!

HE GAINED ANOTHER TOOTH YESTERDAY, AND CLAIRE SWEARS HE'S GONE DOWN TWO CLOTHING SIZES IN THE LAST MONTH!

Oh, I KNOW. EVERYTHING HAPPENS SO QUICKLY AT THIS AGE. YOU CAN'T GET IT OFF FILM FAST ENOUGH.

YOU'VE NOT SEEN *HALF* THE PHOTOS I HAVE OF CLAIRE. THERE ARE SOME BUSY, BUSY YEARS COMING UP.

HERE THEY COME!

SAY CHEESE!

KLIK

The days became fresher. The ecology movement revived in anticipation of the energy crisis.

Millions rushed to see *STAR WARS* count down its final days in the public eye.

STAR WARS

Ford was in, Carter was out.

And as Johnny grew closer to his mother... I was reminded of the void that still hung over me.

YOU KNOW I DON'T LIKE TO NAG, BUT...HAVE YOU *LOOKED*, ADAM? HAVE YOU...PUT YOURSELF OUT THERE?

I'VE LOOKED, HELEN. I'VE LOOKED, AND I'VE PUT MYSELF OUT THERE.

THERE'S *NO ONE*.

NO ONE HAS *NO ONE*, ADAM. EVEN IF THEY DON'T HAVE A MOTHER, THEY HAVE *SOMEONE*. EVEN ORPHANS HAVE FOSTER PARENTS.

WELL, *I* DON'T.

AT THE VERY LEAST, YOUR MOTHER WILL TURN UP. SHE'LL *HAVE* TO, WON'T SHE? NO ONE *EVER* LEFT THIS WORLD WITHOUT A MOTHER.

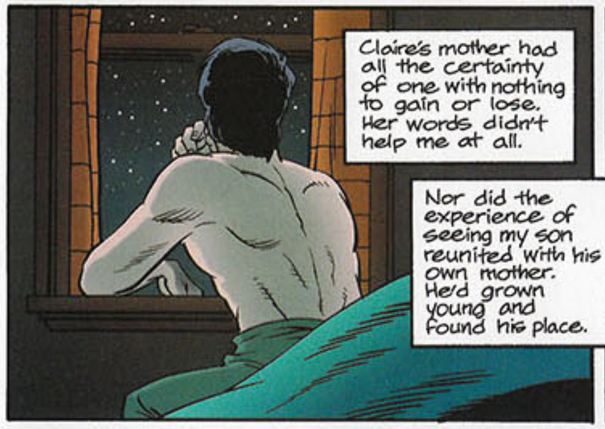
I *DO* KNOW THAT, HELEN. I MAY BE *IGNORANT*, BUT I'M NOT *STUPID*.

NOW, NOW...

HELEN, SOME PEOPLE DON'T GET TO THEIR MOTHER UNTIL SHE'S... UNTIL THE *LAST MOMENT*. A *LOT* OF PEOPLE. YOU KNOW THAT.

BUT YOU'RE NOT ONE OF THEM.

I CAN FEEL THAT IN MY BONES.


Claire's mother had all the certainty of one with nothing to gain or lose. Her words didn't help me at all.
Nor did the experience of seeing my son reunited with his own mother. He'd grown young and found his place.

All I could do was try to change the things that were still under my control.

Without Johnny, we didn't need all the space in that house...
KITCHEN
BOOKS
...so Claire and I found a nice apartment.

I'd long ago given back my job at the paper, so we had to do without a formal honeymoon.

Nevertheless, our final day of marriage was beautiful. All of our friends helped us to celebrate the love we'd shared.
...AND DO YOU, CLAIRE, RELEASE THIS MAN FROM HIS VOWS OF MATRIMONY...

Then began our days of closure.
WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR HAND? DO YOU MIND IF I ASK?
NOTHING HAPPENED TO IT...

...OR AT LEAST NOTHING THAT I KNOW OF. IT'S JUST A BIRTHMARK.
A BIRTHMARK?
DOES IT BOTHER YOU?
NO, NOT AT ALL. I THINK IT'S SORT OF SEXY.

Parts of it were difficult... but inevitable.
BUT THIS MAN HAS NO BACKGROUND! NO FAMILY!
OH, MOTHER, PLEASE DON'T START!

AND I DON'T LIKE THE FACT THAT HE SEEMS SO MUCH OLDER THAN YOU!
THIS DISCUSSION IS POINTLESS. WE LOVE EACH OTHER, AND THAT'S THAT!

I'M SORRY. I DIDN'T KNOW SHE'D BE LIKE THIS.
I CAN'T BLAME HER.
I'VE ALWAYS BEEN THE ODD MAN OUT.

She was right. It all came to an end just a few days later.
HOW LONG HAVE YOU KNOWN DOUG AND HARRY?
NEVER MIND. I'M JUST GLAD WE CAN BE TOGETHER A LITTLE WHILE LONGER.
Oh, I'VE KNOWN THEM FOREVER. AND YOU?

PLEASED TO MEET YOU.
HOW DO YOU DO. I'M CLAIRE CRANE.

I'M ADAM TAYLOR.
ADAM, SAY HELLO TO CLAIRE. SHE'S JUST BACK FROM SCHOOL.

That was the last time I ever saw her.

My own life had become an impenetrable mystery. I knew what Claire's future was. It was the future we all face.

All but *me*.

She would pass into adolescence, into childhood, then into infancy, and one day, inevitably, she would be united with her mother, as our son John had been united with her.

I knew what Claire's future was... but I didn't know my *own*.

Claire's mother told me no one ever left this world without a mother. Of course, she was right. What other way could it be?

We rise up into life from the Earth and sink into nothingness in our mothers' womb. No other way is possible. No other way is even *thinkable*.

But what about *me*?

I watched my friends finish college and go to high school. I saw them divest themselves of all the knowledge and information they'd used as adults. It would be of *no* use to them as children.

I watched them go from Chess to Checkers to Old Maid. I watched them go from baseball bats to rattles. I watched them being carried off to the hospital in their mothers' arms...

...while I went on exactly as before.

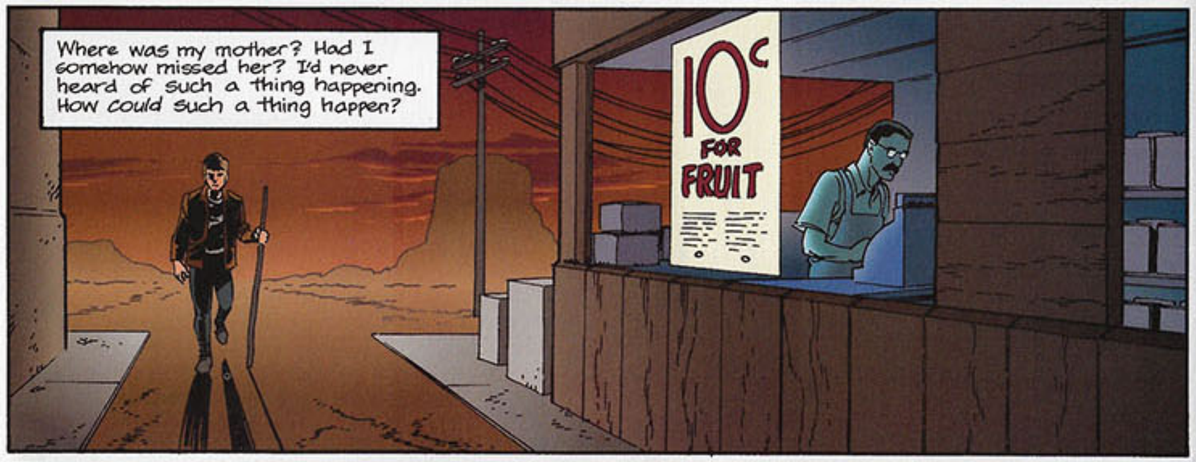
TRANQUILLITY BASE HERE-- THE EAGLE HAS LAUNCHED.

I listened as Neil Armstrong erased the last human footprint from the moon.

Up there were some guys lonelier than *me*.

But *they* had a place to come back to.

I still had no idea where I belonged.


Where was my mother? Had I somehow missed her? I'd never heard of such a thing happening. How could such a thing happen?
10c FOR FRUIT

People I'd known for years didn't want me around any more. I could understand that.

I didn't fit in.
I wasn't going with the flow.

Wasn't going anywhere.

... OUR TOP STORY, Dr. MARTIN LUTHER KING EMERGED TO LIFE TODAY AFTER AN ASSASSIN'S BULLET LEFT HIS BODY AND...
WHERE AM I?

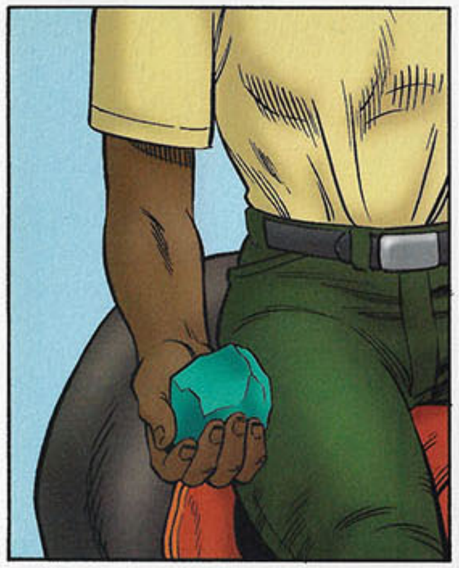
TAOS PUEBLO. PICKED YOU UP LAST NIGHT. YOU WERE PRETTY DRUNK, MAN.

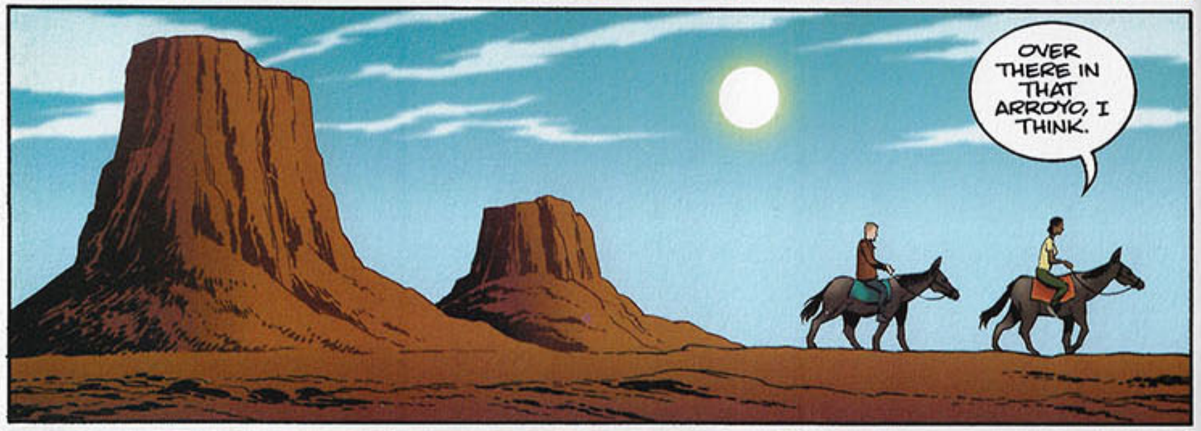
WHY DID YOU DO THAT?
YOU RATHER SLEEP IN A JAIL CELL?
NO, NOT AT ALL. Uh... THANKS.

THEY SAY THE UNIVERSE IS COLLAPSING IN ON ITSELF. CONTRACTING.
THAT'S RIGHT.
BIG CRUNCH COMING. HOW LONG YOU FIGURE WE GOT BEFORE THE END?

ABOUT FIFTEEN BILLION YEARS.
THEN I GUESS WE GOT TIME FOR BREAK-FAST.

The boy's name was Cecil. He lived with his mother, Maria. I felt oddly at home, like I belonged with them.
I could feel it like a foregone conclusion that they wanted me to stay.

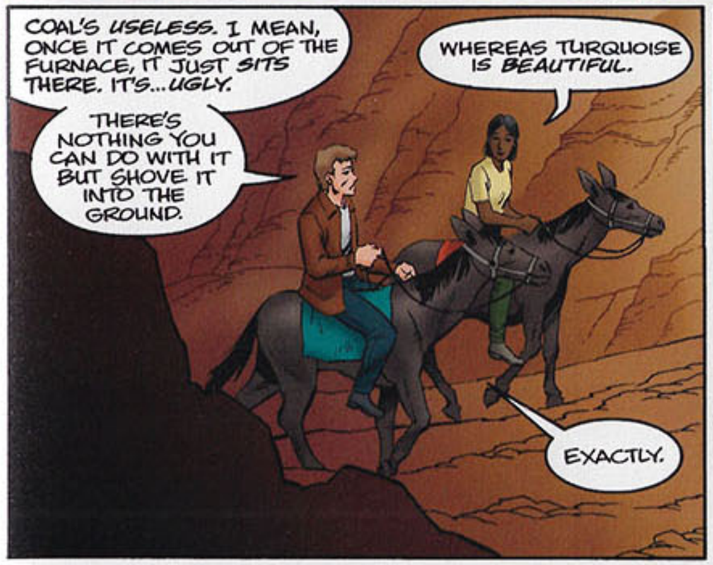



OVER THERE IN THAT ARROYO, I THINK.

HERE WE ARE.

NICE WORK. YOU'RE AN ARTIST. BUT I'M NOT SURE I UNDERSTAND WHY YOU DO IT.
WHY I DO WHAT?
WHY YOU PUT THE TURQUOISE IN THE GROUND.

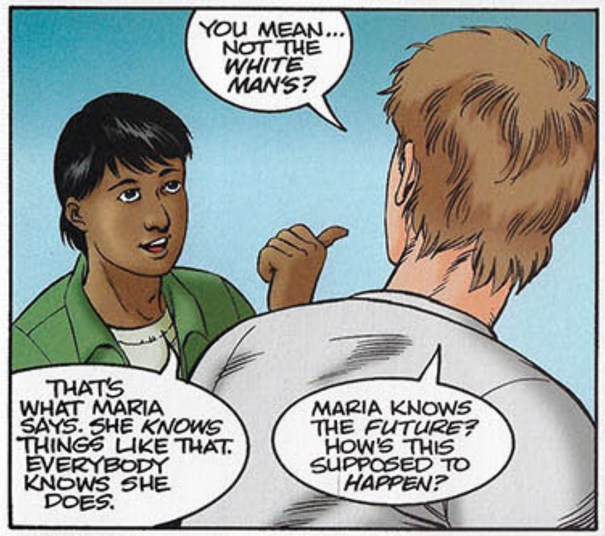
YOU PEOPLE PUT COAL IN THE GROUND.
TRUE, BUT THAT'S DIFFERENT.
WHY?


COAL'S USELESS. I MEAN, ONCE IT COMES OUT OF THE FURNACE, IT JUST SITS THERE. IT'S...UGLY.
THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO WITH IT BUT SHOVE IT INTO THE GROUND.
WHEREAS TURQUOISE IS BEAUTIFUL.
EXACTLY.

THAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN YOUR PEOPLE AND MINE, ADAM.
YOU GIVE THE EARTH YOUR TRASH...

WE GIVE IT OUR TREASURES.

SOMEDAY ALL THIS WILL BE OURS.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN? OURS WHOSE?
OURS. NOT YOURS.


YOU MEAN... NOT THE WHITE MAN'S?
THAT'S WHAT MARIA SAYS. SHE KNOWS THINGS LIKE THAT. EVERYBODY KNOWS SHE DOES.
MARIA KNOWS THE FUTURE? HOW'S THIS SUPPOSED TO HAPPEN?

I DON'T KNOW. MAYBE WE DRIVE YOU OUT. MAYBE YOU JUST LEAVE.
WHY WOULD WE DO THAT? IT DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE.
DOES IT?

WHY DO YOU TELL HIM THINGS LIKE THAT? IS IT ME? YOU WANT HIM TO SEE ME AS AN OUTSIDER?
IT'S NOTHING TO DO WITH YOU. I HAVE TO THINK ABOUT CECIL'S FATHER.

WELL, WHO IS HE?

I'M WAITING FOR HIM.
BUT I'VE GOT TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE.

I KNOW WHO YOUR MOTHER IS.
SHE'S A LONG WAY FROM HERE.
A LONG WAY.
WHAT?

HER NAME WOULDN'T HELP YOU, ADAM, BELIEVE ME.
YOU WON'T FIND HER IN THE PHONE BOOK. YOU'LL KNOW HER WHEN YOU SEE HER.

WHO IS SHE? WHAT'S HER NAME?

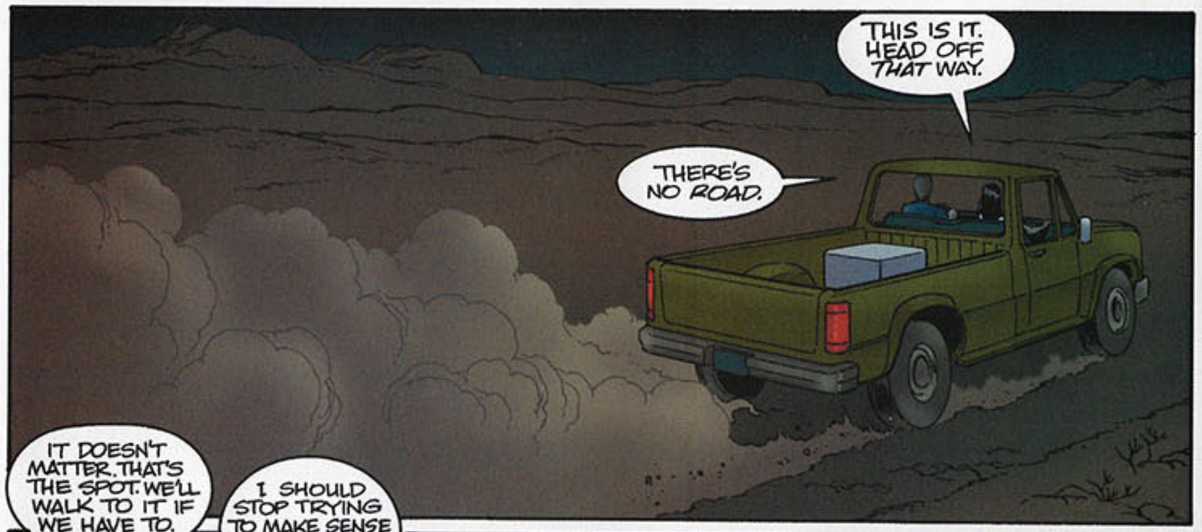
LOOK, IF YOU KNOW SOMETHING, WHY WON'T YOU JUST TELL ME?
THAT'S WHAT I'M TRYING TO TELL YOU. YOU KNOW HER. YOU'VE SEEN HER. BUT YOU HAVEN'T RECOGNIZED HER.

THAT'S RIDICULOUS.
IT'S TRUE. YOU'LL KNOW IT'S TRUE WHEN IT HAPPENS.
WILL YOU BE STRAIGHT WITH ME?! I DON'T APPRECIATE BEING JERKED AROUND LIKE THIS!

YOU HAVE TO FIND HER, ADAM. FINDING HER MEANS... KNOWING HER. MEANS RECOGNIZING HER.
I HAVE SOMETHING THAT BELONGS TO HER. SOMETHING SHE GAVE ME.

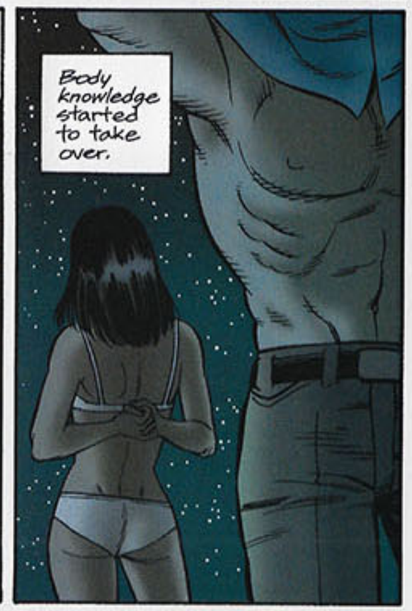
WHAT IS IT?
IT'S A TOKEN.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
IT'S LIKE...YOU KNOW, YOU'RE GOING TO MEET SOMEONE YOU'VE NEVER SEEN, AND THIS PERSON SAYS, "I'LL BE CARRYING A COPY OF HAMLET." THAT'S HOW YOU'LL KNOW ME."
THIS IS HOW I'LL KNOW HER?
YES. YOU'LL GET IT SOME-DAY... AND THAT WILL BE THE DAY.
YOU EXPECT ME TO BELIEVE MY MOTHER GAVE THIS TO YOU?
I'VE ALWAYS HAD IT. NOW IT'S YOURS.
YOU'VE ALWAYS HAD IT? WHAT THE HELL DOES THAT MEAN?
I MEAN... IT WAS IN MY HAND WHEN THEY TOOK ME OUT OF THE GROUND.
CHRIST! I'M LOSING MY MIND!!

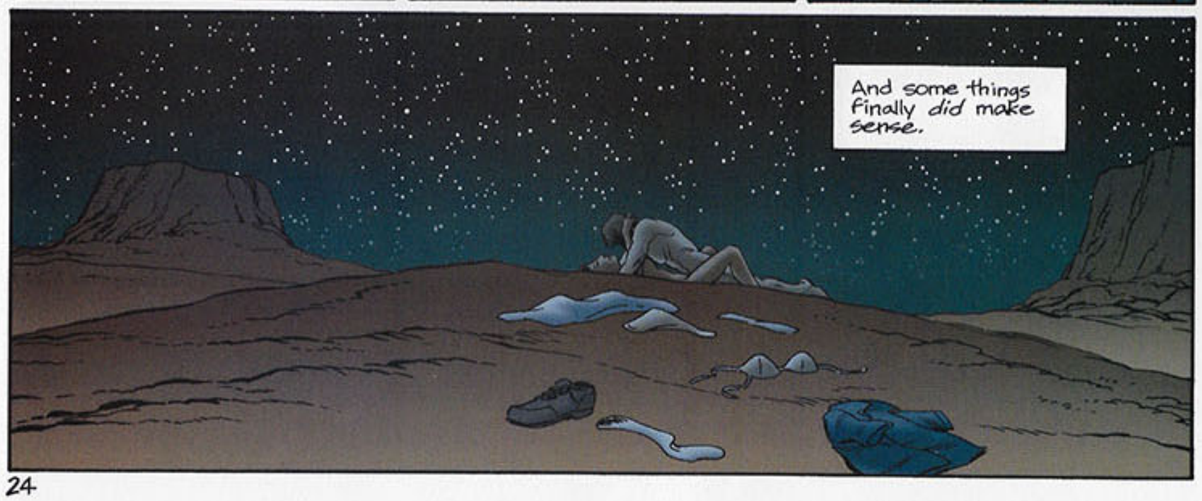
Twenty years.
Twenty years went by, and I learned nothing more about my mother. I spent the time mostly with Cecil, helping him leave behind his adulthood and unite with Maria.
For a while, it seemed almost normal.
But when it was down to just the two of us... normal went out the window.
WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE.
WHY ARE YOU PACKING MY STUFF? WHAT'S GOING ON?
THERE'S SOMEWHERE WE'VE GOT TO BE.
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
IT'S...IT'S TODAY, ADAM. WE'VE GOT TO GO.
WHERE?
THERE...
FOR CHRIST'S SAKE, MARIA!
ADAM, I'VE TRUSTED YOU FOR TWENTY YEARS.
NOW TRUST ME FOR TWENTY HOURS. PLEASE!
WHY CAN'T YOU JUST TELL ME WHERE WE'RE GOING, INSTEAD OF ACTING LIKE A CRAZY WOMAN?
OKAY, WHAT'S OUT THERE? TELL ME THAT, AND WE'LL BE EVEN.
I DON'T KNOW, EXACTLY...
...IT'S OUT IN THE DESERT SOMEWHERE. SOUTH OF ALBUQUERQUE.
IT'S...
IT'S CECIL'S FATHER.
Oh...YEAH...WELL, IT WOULD HAVE TO BE, WOULDN'T IT? IT'S BEEN...NINE MONTHS.
WE'VE GOT TO GO.
ALL RIGHT. WE'LL GO. TAKE IT EASY...


THIS IS IT. HEAD OFF THAT WAY.
THERE'S NO ROAD.

IT DOESN'T MATTER. THAT'S THE SPOT. WE'LL WALK TO IT IF WE HAVE TO.
I SHOULD STOP TRYING TO MAKE SENSE OF THIS, SHOULDN'T I?
THAT WOULD HELP, YES.

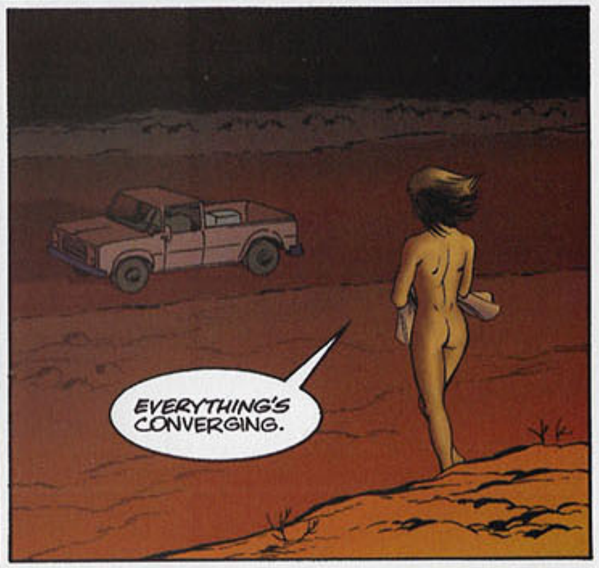
As we walked, I could feel the change. I started to tingle. I was getting warmer, and not just from the weather.

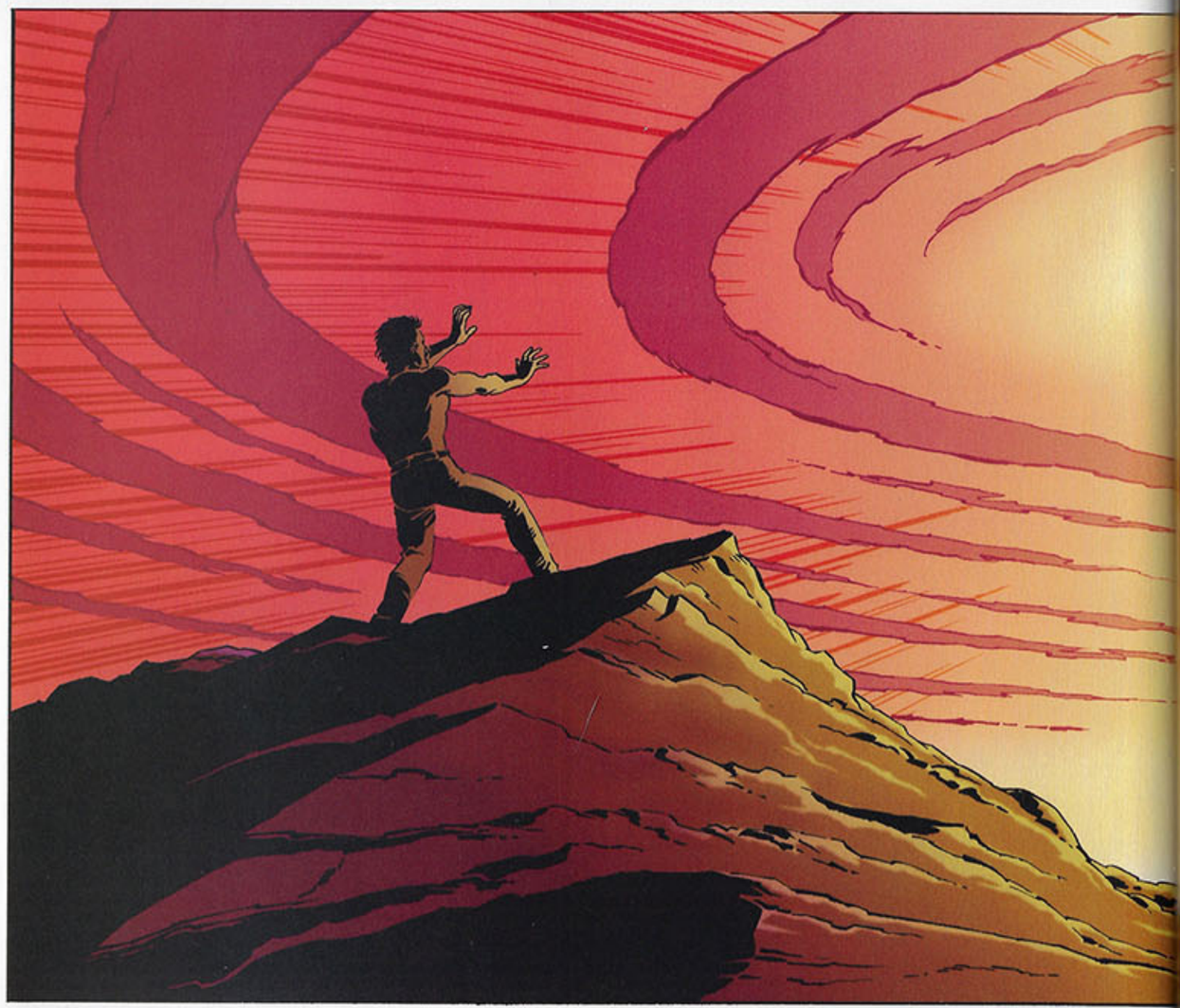

Body knowledge started to take over.

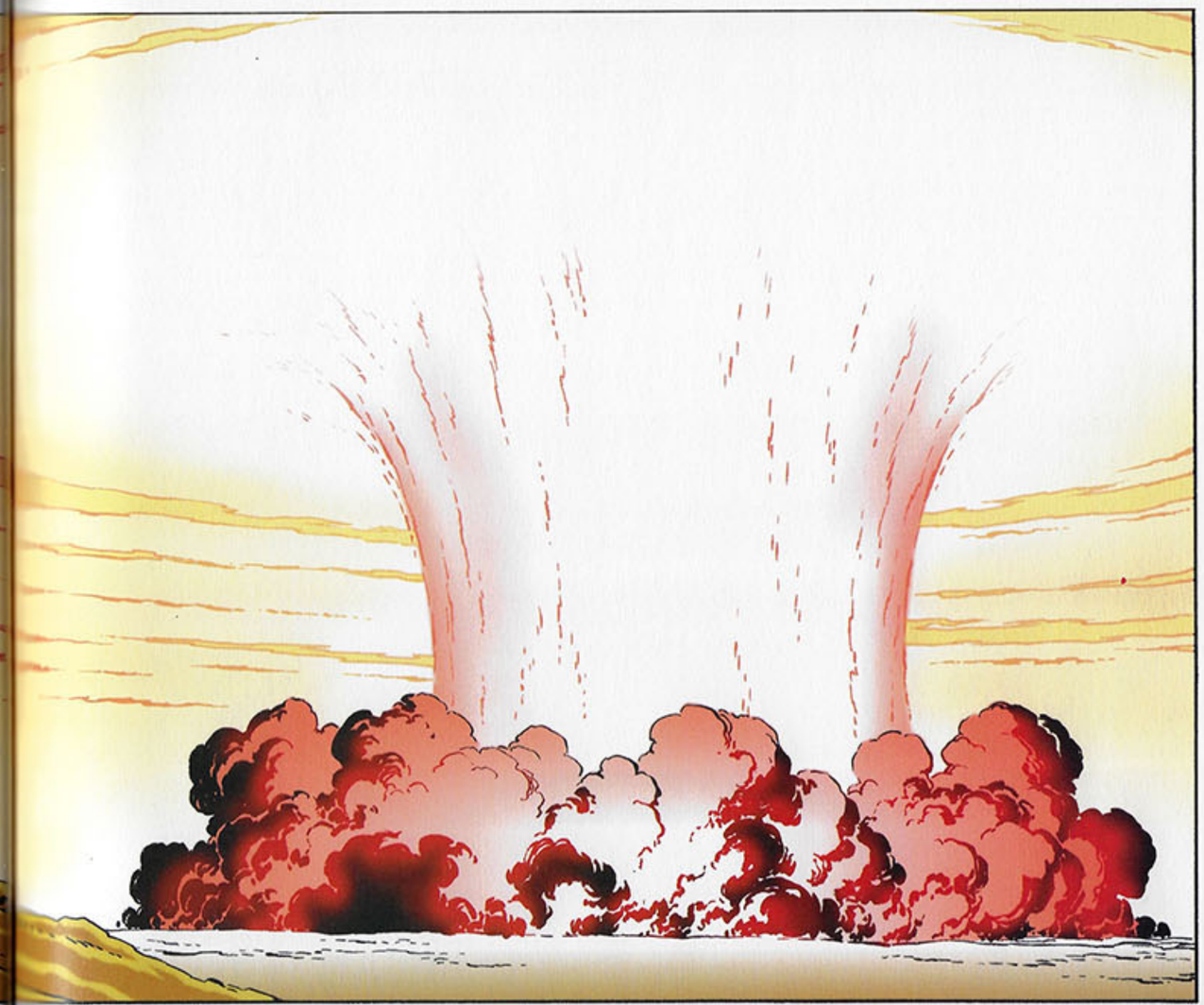

And some things finally did make sense.

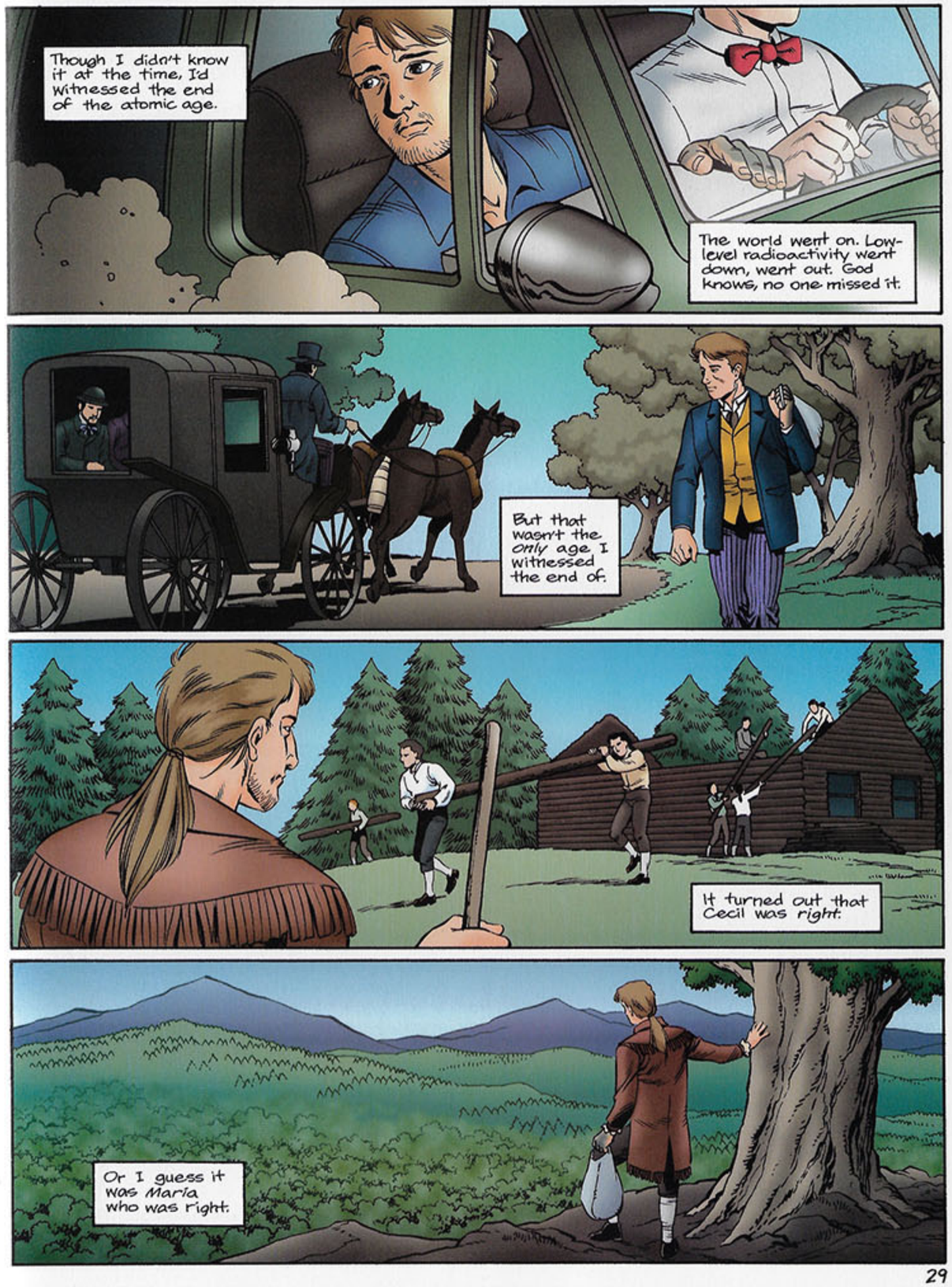
WHAT...?

COME ON! THE CLOUDS ARE CONVERGING OVER THAT RISE!
YES.


EVERYTHING'S CONVERGING.






Though I didn't know it at the time, I'd witnessed the end of the atomic age.
The world went on. Low-level radioactivity went down, went out. God knows, no one missed it.
But that wasn't the *only* age I witnessed the end of.
It turned out that Cecil was *right*.
Or I guess it was Maria who was right.

There came a day when we left the entire *continent.*

Half a world, and not a single white face in it *anywhere.*

I wanted to stay behind. In fact, I decided to stay behind, but everyone argued against it. Friends on *both* sides.

They said, "it's obvious that your destiny is not to be found here. It can't possibly be found here. You know that." And I *did* know it, of course.

My question was... *why?* Why were we leaving? Why had the millions of us left? I'd heard all the explanations, but none of them satisfied me.

Basically, they all boiled down to this: *the last few decades have been hard for us, and things will be easier in Europe.*

Of course things would be easier, but that wasn't why we were leaving. We'd *had* our turn on this continent. We'd done the things that perhaps only we could do.

We'd taken down the cities. We'd dismantled the factories. We'd put into the ground countless tons of useless trash, coal, oil, and uranium. The air was clean now. The water was sweet, every drop of it.

It was a goddamn *paradise.*

And now it was *their* turn. That's why we were leaving. Even if no one said it but me.

Maybe that's because no one but me had seen it all happen from the beginning.