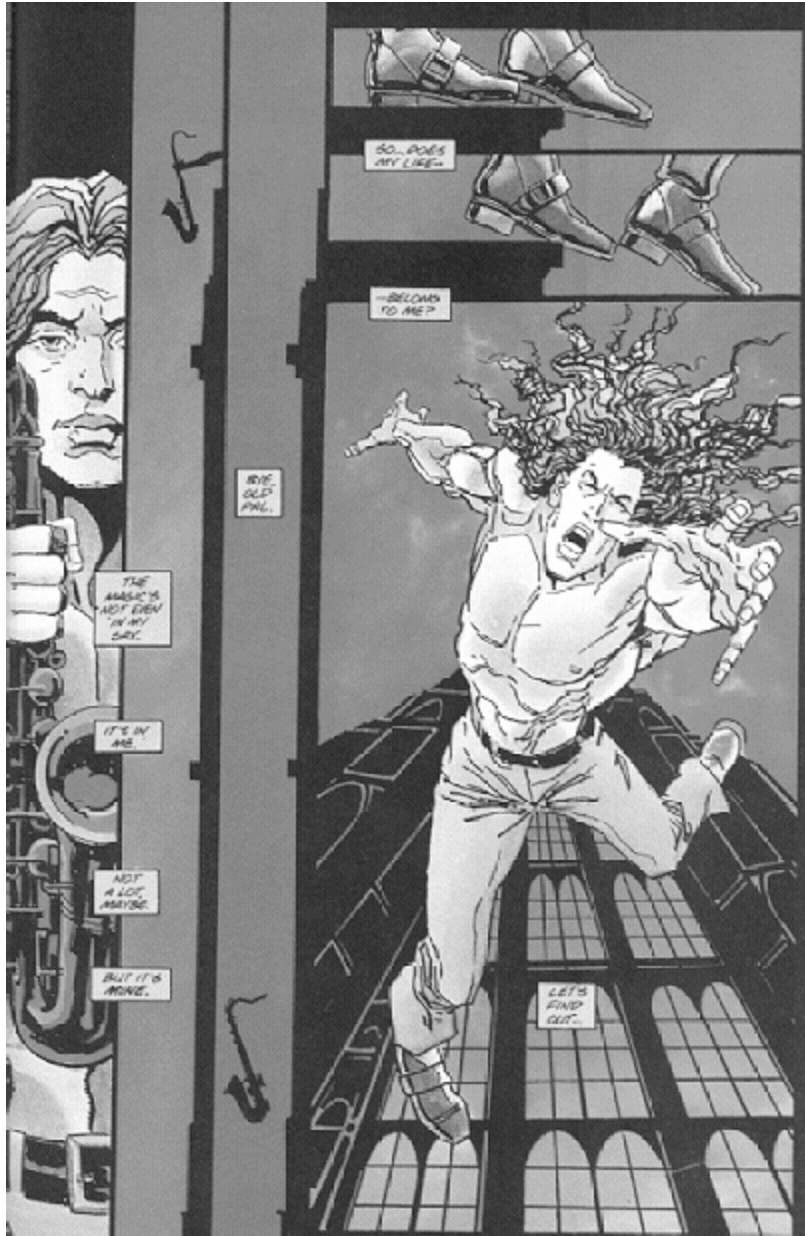


NOTE: This is where the book starts- here are the last three pages to Shadowman #43.







VALIANT: 1999 And Beyond
A story set in the Original Valiant Universe
By Joe Petrilak



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PRELUDE

It is late and he has been up for days, meditating, planning.
Finally the plan comes to form

VALIANT: 1999 And Beyond

A story set in the Original VALIANT Universe

Written By

By Joe Petrilak

With Introduction by

Jim Shooter

Additional writing credit

Bob Hall, Maurice Fontenot, Keith Giffen, Bob Layton
and Jim Shooter

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Reprinted Valiant art

David Lapham, Jim Calafiore, Bernard Chang and Mike Leeke

Edited by

Anthony Koch

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Introduction

Weaving a Universe

By Jim Shooter

Russ Manning's Leeja was a bimbo. "Stay here, where it's safe," Magnus would say, but no, she'd impetuously follow him into danger, get herself seized as a hostage, then lie fetchingly on the floor as Magnus-to-the-rescue smashed the Evil Robot of the month. I think that most other writers restarting the series immediately would have given Leeja a big gun and made her a tough, modern kind of gal—Magnus's capable (superior?) partner in robot fighting. No way, thought I. My plan was to be absolutely faithful to what Manning had established, build upon it, deepen it and develop it. Leeja was clearly established as an insouciant, irresponsible, childlike... well, *bimbo*. She *would* evolve, grow and develop into a woman (sans gun), but it would all take place live, on panel. For me, a lot of it's about the journey...

A key point of inspiration for the VALIANT (note: all caps, always) *Magnus Robot Fighter* series was the thought: *what would happen if Magnus was too late to rescue Leeja once and she got hurt really badly?* It flowed from there. Add in Magnus's own journey from tool of the establishment to Champion of Life (did anyone else ever wonder why I-A, a sentient robot, wanted so badly for Magnus to kill all other sentient robots?) and there's the basis for a weave.

Then came *Solar, Man of the Atom*. Bob had once seen some movie that involved a character who'd had a second chance to live part of his life over again. He thought that was cool, and suggested that we should do the same thing with Solar. I hate time paradox stories, but I thought about it. Being the resident science and technology head (theoretical technology, not applied—I couldn't even type back then) I found a way to do a time travel story using acceleration supplied by a black hole—nothing like Bob's movie, by the way—that fit with cutting edge theory. Not long into it, duh, I realized that if time travel was involved, I could link *Solar* and *Magnus*. I'd wanted to do that from the moment I'd first thought of using the Gold Key characters, but suddenly, I knew just how.

A new weave...! A Universal Weave.

Solar became the foundation of the VALIANT Universe even though it came second. The tapestry had a unifying element.

Incorporating a book set in the future allowed me to devise a weave that in a fascinating way (I hoped) progressed toward a manifest destiny. I'd taken my first steps with such a time-spanning saga with the "Adult Legion" stories back in the mid-sixties. The Adult Legion stories laid down a manifest destiny, with mileposts along the way, which to some extent, to this day, has been respected in *Legion of Super-Heroes* continuity.

The VALIANT Universe was a much larger undertaking. It was possible only because I wrote most of the stories myself. I also worked closely with the few other writers, usually doing the bulk of the plotting for them and/or rewriting what they wrote when they blew it. (The exceptions are Michelinie, who mostly did okay, and Stern, who did a magnificent job. With those two, who are more capable than most at working within a continuity, I was able to take a more normal editor's role.)

I have a pretty good memory for story. I remember plots, scenes, bits, and even dialogue amazingly well. That's key to making a tight weave. I made mistakes, sure, but I was almost always able to write my way out of continuity problems (which I was usually quick to recognize) in a way that made it look like I had planned it that way all along. For instance, I remember realizing too late that I hadn't established a logical way to get Shadowman into the Lost Land for Unity. Answer: N'Dour, the dropout Geomancer trainee. Perfect. He got Shadowman in, and, conveniently, the tale of his dropping out explained why Buck McHenry had been so desperate for a successor that he essentially kidnapped Geoff.

By the end of Unity, and with the plotting of *RAI #0* (co-plotted with David Lapham), we had built a coherent present, established a manifest destiny and mapped the road between them. We had set a number of pre-ordained points to be reached en route, and had some plans made for how to develop the Universal weave toward them.

One coming up quickly would have been the pre-ordained death of Shadowman in 1999. I had no specific plan, but I trusted in my ability, and the abilities of my crew and kibitzers, to bring about the expected in a totally unexpected way. I knew we could accomplish any goal in fresh and surprising fashion—while always, always strengthening the weave.

I knew for sure one cornerstone point of Shadowman's death. He would die, and that would end the series. Period. For the first time in comics history, a successful series would have been cancelled due to the death of the character. It would have been revolutionary.

What other comic book company would even contemplate killing a popular, moneymaking title irrevocably over a story point? None, in my experience. But I believed that a successful book isn't a lucky accident that you have to milk as long as it lasts. I believed that demonstrating our dedication to the integrity of the VALIANT Universe, and demonstrating that you dare not look away, was worth more than a single successful title. I believed that if we created the involvement with the readers, created the *gestalt* by putting the weave above all else, then *more* successful titles and all else would come.

If you weave it, they will come.

VALIANT was all about breaking cliches and rules. In the early sixties, I saw for the first time, in Marvel Comics, a hero wash his costume, get a cold, need money, etc. Over the years, those things and other Marvel innovations became the new cliches. None, new or old were safe from me. In VALIANT comics, for the first time in comics history, a villain (Rock) planned to kill a hero (Torque) and succeeded, with no mano a mano, and no complications for false drama's sake. Knifed him in the back. Dead. And, by the way, when his friends found the body, no one

picked it up, displayed it in an awkward, cartoony pose for the camera and shrieked "NO-O-O!" No one crushed bricks in his or her hands and swore vengeance by all that's holy. Or did any of that comic book crap that no one would actually do. They were upset. Sad. And, oh, by the way again, we showed the entire Episcopalian funeral service. For the first time in comics, the burial scene didn't start on the line "... ashes to ashes..."

For the first time in comics, two heroes (Solar and Gilad) met in a situation in which each had plenty of reason to suspect the other's motives and they sorted it out in conversation! No gratuitous battle leading up to them working together! And, they introduce themselves by their real names! Solar never called himself "Solar," unless he was goofing on someone.

Go through the first sixty or so VALIANT comics and you will find that in every instance, when the opportunity to do the cliché presented itself, we did the unexpected. At each of those points, guess what Marvel DC or Image would have done. Pretty predictable, isn't it?

The above may seem like a long digression, but it illustrates this point: we would have *never* done the cliché thing, the expected, as we followed our roadmap toward our manifest destiny. We would have unfolded it with courage and integrity. God, would that have been fun.

Sadly, I don't remember as many of the particulars I had planned as Joe would like. Someday, perhaps, he can help me sort through the several boxes of notes still in my possession—every scrap of paper I ever scrawled on while at VALIANT—and maybe we can piece some things together.

That brings us to Joe's reweaving of the VALIANT Universe, which became rather frayed after my departure, apparently. Good work, Joe. You did a great job. You made it work again. You didn't resort to cliché fixes. I'm glad someone still cares enough about the Universe to repair and maintain it.

Loved that Universe.

For Seaborn

Just because he would have had it that way.



CHAPTER ONE

(NOTE: This book starts where Shadowman #43 left off)

New Orleans, Louisiana October 1996 3:45 am

Who am I?

Jack? or Shadowman?

Both?

Neither?

Why am I?

If Darque doesn't exist-- why do I exist?

To be a hero?

"Dawn, Max. Time to take off the mask."

"Don't do it! I'll..."

"You'll be the only Shadowman left? Sorry 'bout that."

The magic's not even in my sax. It's in me.

Not a lot, maybe

But it's mine.

Bye old pal.

So... does my life--

--Belong to me?

Let's find out...

Funny what runs through your head in a time like this...

Time.

I seem to have all the time in the world right now, or at least until I hit the pavement. I can think back to how it all began... how it all really began: just me...and my sax.

I would stay up all night playing until my father had to start taking it away from me after 10 o'clock and put me to bed... I always played best at night, even when I was a kid. I was content for a while stuffing socks and t-shirts into my sax to muffle the sound, then I had to sit there on my bed just fingering the notes and having a grand performance in my head... 'the silent symphony'...each night it would change a bit, perhaps get a little bit better, a little sweeter, but it was always a grand performance. The audience loved it. Loved me. I took a bow.

I took to the streets. I always admired the street bums: I don't know why. Perhaps it was their freedom, their ability to go wherever they wanted and do whatever they wanted to... maybe it was that they didn't have to go to school or stuff socks into their saxophones just to play. I never realized the down side to living on the street until much later... but I was always fascinated by it...even now to a certain extent... And so the cemetery ended up my home at night. No one to bother there, that was for sure. And the audience was sure dressed for the occasion. 'Another excellent performance by Jack Boniface ladies and gentlemen!!! Thank you-thank you!'...

*I never really gave it any thought... it was always natural for me... to play at night, that is. Was it force of habit that grew with me as I grew older? Or was it more? My past 4 years have certainly been interesting, that's for sure. I don't know a damn thing about voodoo and there I end up, knee deep in it, the physical incarnation of it, the protector of it... and all along not having a clue why. I still don't. **Why** was I Shadowman? **What** does it mean to be Shadowman?*

"Perhaps I could be of some assistance, Mister Boniface."

"What? Who?!" Jack opens his eyes not to see himself falling to his death, but standing alone in a dark place unable to make anything out at all.

"Yes, please. I need to know."

"Then come with me and learn what you should have been told a long time ago."

The figure steps out of the dark, like an actor who steps out from the darkness into a bright spotlight and he's suddenly just... **there** right beside Jack. He is a distinguished middle-aged man somewhat resembling Jack, but older and perhaps wiser.

"Who are you?" asks Jack.

"I am every man and I am no man. I am a shadow. I am a man."

"Thanks for that enlightening information," replies Jack. "You can keep your secrets; I don't care anymore."

"If you are truly lost, then walk with me, Jack Boniface."

Together they walk through nothingness for a while. The stranger stops and faces Jack. "Jack, you want to know the answers that have been tearing at you for the past year or so; I am here to answer them for you."

The stranger continues "I am the spirit of Shadowman, the spiritual manifestation that you have become. Eventually you would come to this point in your life and it is now."

"Are you my subconscious?" asks Jack, now realizing he's not falling to his death anymore and imagining this conversation: it's really happening. "Is this a dream? Is this my life flashing before my eyes? Are we really...wherever we are??"

"This is as real as your powers of the Shadowman. This is no dream."

Jack speaks "...so... you're a ghost or something?"

"If that pleases you. Let me explain.

"I have existed for thousands of years on this Earth...longer. I am a Grand Bois; a Rada Loa—one of the primal forces of nature. My role has been one of protecting the Earth and its people from the evil ways some men follow, and the evil spirits that guide them. It's all about balance, Jack, and evil exists to a certain extent because I exist. I bring balance to a chaotic world."

"How do I fit in this picture?" asks Jack.

"You don't, technically. The powers of a Shadowman are not those for any man to possess, yet you do, as did Maxim St. James a while ago. Perhaps Nettie got a bit too overanxious—they all do. And I am sure it was the evil forces of the world that let this come to pass. My bet would be Sousson-Pannan: one of the truly evil ones that struck the initial deal that allowed my essence to be transferred to a human... to do such a thing would indeed put Sousson-Pannan, the evil forces, at a disadvantage on Earth, but the greater picture is that the forces of nature would be off balance with my essence tied in human form."

"So I am talking to THE Shadowman then, right?" asks Jack.

"Yes. Who else did you think you were talking to— yourself perhaps? Or an old friend?"

"Then where are we now?" asks Jack

"We are nowhere right now. Where we go is your decision.

"Please let me continue. You have been searching for these answers within yourself and I am finally here to tell you."

"Go on."

"I was there at creation as part of the balance of nature. I can come to this Earth if I am properly called upon and possess the living if it is the right time, and I am by nature benevolent, but it is only for a short period of time. Yet in these two cases with Maxim and yourself, the possession was more...permanent; Nettie ceremoniously tied me to you. This is beyond her, or any other mortal's abilities, yet it has happened."

"I thought it was Nettie who put the Shadowman essence into me; that's what she told me."

"She chanted the right spells and gathered the right herbs at the right time of night to bring me to you—the rest was the work of someone else, and Nettie never realized the true reason I came to you and we became Shadowman. She thought it was to bring a great protector into this world, but she didn't grasp the greater battle taking a turn for the worse.

"My acting through a man empowered to be a Shadowman is an impressive sight indeed, and the dark would truly belong to that man with a fearful evil Rada Loa in hiding, but it would be more like planning for a greater evil to unfold than helping fight to it by having me here."

"So...what's next?"

"Right now I am truly freed from the spell. I am my own essence again. And you are truly free from yours, for the first time in your life..."

"You always had the essence of my spirit in your blood and the night has been calling you since you were a child... and you always answered. To use a phrase perhaps you could relate to, you are the equivalent of a Geomancer to the spirit world by birth. Your initial form of expression, your musical instrument, was your vent for a long time... it is no wonder you are the best sax player in all of New Orleans. You were the perfect candidate to become a Shadowman and it is no surprise that Nettie chose you... the magic was not in your sax or in your mask... the magic was **you**. So it was relatively simple to get my spirit to possess you; I just didn't realize it would be more than a one night stand..."

"You can go back to your life. I will place you wherever and whenever you wish, or you can return to the advancing pavement if that is your desire. I have my work ahead of me and I am losing ground fast."

"How is that?" asks Jack.

"Sousson-Pannan has been keeping himself busy creating your nemesis to create balance to some extent on Earth, or perhaps to play out a staged act with mankind in the balance—I am not sure. You know him as Master Darque. With his knowledge and power, he cannot be killed by any man at this point. Once the Darque Energies took hold on Earth, Sousson-Pannan returned to where it is we come from, to watch and reap the rewards. And that time of reckoning is soon upon us."

"Yes, I know all about that. You're talking about the events of 1999, right?"

"Yes. In 1999, Shadowman gives up his life to rid humanity of the Darque power. You die. Or so it was written; that is not certain anymore and that is why we are here now. What *is* certain is that the Darque Power is growing totally on its own at this point and he is about to break through and have a revelation that will spell the end of life on planet Earth."

"And that's where I fit in."

"According to some, yes. You die in the process of ridding the world of Master Darque. And that is still your decision, as it always has been. Just because something is written does not mean it will always come to pass, but more times than not it does and there is always a greater good involved. In your case, the greater good is all humanity and the future on planet Earth."

"So I can either die in 1999, or watch Master Darque destroy the Earth in 1999. Lovely... is there a 'door number three'?"

"Sadly, those are the options. Should I come to Earth as a physical manifestation of myself, I could destroy the Darque Power, but at the cost of once again throwing the delicate balance of nature off and leaving another door open for Sousson-Pannan to walk in and create chaos for all nature."

Jack stops walking and faces the stranger. "It sounds like I have a job to do, then."

"See—you are a true Shadowman... you have now taken the last step and stopped relying on a mask to empower you. The power is in you, Jack; the power *is* you."

"What will happen to me, then? After I die?"

"There are infinite possibilities out there, Jack, and humanity is just one small piece in the overall picture of nature. Some would say living is nothing more than a test and how well you score dictates how far you can truly go. There is a much bigger picture at hand than you think, Jack, and it involves a lot more than who will live and who will die. But you will figure this out on your own."

Jack stops for a second, thinks about all the heroic acts he has done, all the times he jumped in headfirst for the greater good, all the things that are better in this world because he made it so. "You helped sort out my problems for me and gave me a renewed sense of being, of importance. I would like the chance to do something great again."

"Will you be needing your mask?"

"Not anymore- the world knows I am Shadowman: so be it. Jack Boniface *is* Shadowman."

Somewhere Else

1292 England. Timearc T minus 5 minutes.

Boy- -he had NO sense of humor he thinks as he is headed to the gallows pole. All I asked him was 'boxers or briefs?'

"Eh- -move on with ye ya foul-mouthed bastard and we'll soon see the last of ye," the guard barked out as he pushed Ivar onward. The crowd jeered and taunted the shackled Ivar as he was headed towards another death.

Timearc T minus 3 minutes.

Hmmm... shot, stabbed, drowned, electrocuted, burned, lasered and almost decapitated... No- - I don't think I was ever hanged. This should prove interesting. But I'm sure this is nothing compared to what my dear Gilad gets himself into... with his self-righteousness. I don't blame Gilly... if they want to hang you high for cracking a joke to the King, then this world's a bit too stuck up for me.

"Move it ya bastard!" barks out the guard as he cracks Ivar on the head, causing a nasty cut. "Ow!"

Timearc T minus 2 minutes

Old Farmer Josh has not had good luck recently. Bad storms and the full moon have destroyed his fine crops for this year. *Better than begging for money* he thinks as he carries into the town square what is left of his year's work. "Rotten fruit!! Get yer rotten fruit here! Only one shilling per handful!"

Oh lovely—rotting fruit, thinks Ivar, At least now I know where the heck they get the stuff from! The crowd gathers around for today's show... *Actually, the crowd is ALWAYS gathered around for the show...they don't have MTV. Not for another 700-some-odd years. At least they didn't invent the guillotine yet- now THAT was a show... Man- - what people will do without TV... and gum, no gum either.*

"Any last words, you limey bastard, before we hang ye?" The guard cracks a smile and shows his 12 remaining brownish-green teeth. *And toothbrushes...* Ivar thinks. He then pauses a second and asks "Can't...can't we all just get along?"

"Enough outta ye—what do you want on your tombstone?"

Timearc T minus 11 seconds

Ivar pauses for a moment before answering, "Pepperoni and Mushrooms."

WHOOM!

The timearc opens, everyone drops to the ground. "The Lord is coming!" "No—'tis the devil's work for sure!" *There's my ticket*, thinks Ivar as he yells out, "Hasta la vista, baby!"

And there goes Ivar, the youngest immortal, once again on his quest to get back to Nefertiti in the Nile.

The Egyptians used toothbrushes, how could a great invention like that get lost for 2500 years??? And gum—you gotta have gum.

The timearc opens on the other side and Ivar braces for impact. He has ended up in the most unlikely of places when he has timearced in the past. Timearcing is an inexact science. Well, it actually *is* an exact science, but when you don't know how the heck the timearc device works you just pray your next jump doesn't land you in a sewer. And you make sure you hold your breath, just in case.

This time he is lucky. He lands on a smooth metal floor. Looking around, he soon realizes he's time arced into a spaceship, and then he realizes he floating. *I'm in space.*

Looking around, he tries to get his bearings on where he is. He sees a very dirty and old sign on one of the walls. *NASA?? Where am I?* "Shhh....you'll kill us all! Now be quiet- this is our only chance!" a frightened passenger barks out. Ivar takes a moment to orient himself and looks out the window.

I'm in a spaceship; I'm in space... can't be too far away... all these people... they're not astronauts, they're just regular people... and they're not even dressed for the occasion. Could this be the 41st century? No—they're still using solid fuel, as he hears the roar of the thrusters on full throttle.

The ship has some 40 or so people: men, women and children huddled together with an almost ungodly look of fear on their faces. The ship looks to be a good 40 years old with various cracks and hasty repairs and a layer of dirt and dust on everything. The air is dry and stale. *Looks like a de-commissioned NASA space shuttle that was*

hastily sent into orbit. But why? He looks to the front of the spaceship, which resembles a 747... a cockpit with a pilot, co-pilot and navigator, all civilians. *Probably retired air force, definitely not NASA. Is this a stolen ship?* "Where are we going??"

Wait a minute... he thinks, *I have never arced into space before! I have always arced somewhere on Earth, even in the 41st century. How could this happen now?* "Where the heck am I!?" He yells out in confusion. "Oh, you poor soul—you must be one of the unlucky ones... and look at that cut on your head! You must have hurt yourself in the rush," says a kindly older woman as she applies a dirty rag to his forehead to stop the bleeding. "We don't have any doctors on board. There may not be any doctors left anywhere for that matter."

"What's going on here? Why are we in a spaceship?" asks a now-completely confused Ivar. "Oh, you're not feeling well—you must have passed out. We are one of the fourteen spacecrafts that made it off Earth...before..." she stops and trembles, "before...well, look for yourself." A confused Ivar looks out the window and wonders, *WHERE IS THE EARTH!??* The moon is close by—but *THE EARTH IS GONE!*

"What the hell is going on here!??".

"Attention! EVERYBODY to the escape pods and grab whatever you can. We're entering the moon's orbit...be prepared—" >squark<

What?!?

"Spider Aliens, my dear. Now hurry." A totally confused Ivar sits down for a moment to gather himself, thinking, *What the hell is going on? I know of Spider Aliens—nasty bugs—I thought Solar took care of them back in... what time am I in?*

Ivar looks at his tachyon compass. August 15, 2028! *Wait a minute—I've been to the 41st century and I KNOW there is a future! So this is not possible,* as Ivar scrambles to look out one of the cracked windows in the spacecraft and sees: no earth, nothing but rubble... large pieces of twisted metal, pieces of skyscrapers and all kinds of flotsam... *this is what's left of the Earth, that's for sure. WHAM!*

"What the heck was that?!" he shouts as the spacecraft gets hit from behind, causing everyone to slide forward, moans coming from the many wounded. He looks out the window again only to see, among other free-floating earth, a red Mustang, floating through space, probably caught in the current of this spacecraft, its long-dead driver still strapped in, not a lovely sight. *It... hit us from behind!* he thinks as he hears one of the sick cry out, "Whiplash!"

THE EARTH HAS BEEN DESTROYED! THIS IS NOT POSSIBLE!

CHAPTER TWO

Ivar always thought that time, undisturbed, was an already laid out course; that for him to have been to the 41st century and beyond that there has to be a history leading up to that... *yet how can it be that here in the 21st century THERE IS NO EARTH!* And soon there will be no spaceship, either, as he sees squadrons of Spider Alien ships approaching from the many moon bases. "Hold on, everyone!" yells out the pilot, before the speaker system shorts out. Ivar can't do a damn thing but watch as the Spider Aliens on the moon open fire.

ZZZZZAKT! BOOM! Direct hit!

Ivar scrambles to look out the window only to see the moon—which looks a lot more like Spider Alien Central—they have populated the whole moon with bases and canals throughout, resembling Earth in the 31st century before the milespires were built.

Had to take at least 100 years to get THAT organized on the moon... there have to be at least a million Spider Aliens down there! Where is Aric? And Solar? Something like this could not be possible, yet here I am watching it! There is no time to think about that now as the spider aliens are taking pot shots at the fleeing Earth crafts, including this one. "Ducks in a barrel" he mutters as he scrambles to find a spacesuit. *This ship's got seconds before it blows apart—I gotta get protected!*

Luckily, he finds an ancient suit with a "20 years of NASA" logo on it- *Geez- this thing's gotta be 100 years old! And it smells awful!* A quick inspection shows it is in wearable condition, however, with many badly made repairs throughout. The visor itself is cracked, held on with what appears to be... *Scotch tape???* *Oh well- what choice do I have?* The other people on board all ran into an escape pod, 40 some odd people in a pod designed for eight, certainly no room for Ivar. But they're not detaching from this ship...they must be stuck. *I gotta help them escape and get off this rustbucket.*

"Pilot! I need help here! Pilot?!" Ivar looks to the front only to see the whole crew...dead, strapped into their chairs. *That last shot must have taken them out.* In horror Ivar sees Spider Alien ships start ramming the soldered and Krazy-glued spaceship as they continue firing from the moon's many bases. *We're going down and I can't do a damn thing. At least I can put this suit on. And where's my time arc device?!* Ivar panics a second only to find it in his coat pocket. He quickly ties it to one of the loose kevlar threads on the suit. *I'll be needing this very soon!*

WHAM! The spaceship blows into a million little pieces. All of the people on board... dead. That kindly old lady and everyone else on board is now little more than a floating target for their lasers as the vengeful Spider Aliens are now taking whatever

fun is left from their little game. Hastily, he looks at the display on his time arc device for the next arc... *What if there is no next arc? I am outside the Earth... what if this is really it for me and mankind? The Earth... is gone and I may very well be the last human alive. I don't see how this is possible, but here I am.*

Ivar looks at his tachyon compass which reads 1 hour, 11 minutes to go. *THANK GOD! This suit, however old and smelly it is, has become my best friend. That and this time arc device. But... it's getting a little... hard to breathe... Oh wonderful- now I'm running out of oxygen! I am free floating in space, I am the last human alive, Spider Aliens are taking pot shots at me, and now I have no more air! Add asphyxiation to the list... How much time until the next time arc?? 1 hour, 10 minutes and no oxygen. This is not my day!*

At least I have a moment to think, I've been running non-stop since the 1200's. Did the Spider Aliens blow up the Earth? And where was Solar to stop them? And didn't he stop them back in nineteen ninety-something...I'm... feeling- - I gotta stay awake....no...oxygen... ...

...

Ivar passes out for a moment. His mind floods back to the Harbinger Wars where it was human vs. metahuman with Stancheck and Harada at the center of it all... he relives his capture so long ago then thinks about The Chaos Effect... Yet all of these thing pale in comparison to this. Whatever went down here already happened and the Earth itself is gone! His mind floods back to Nefertiti, his true love in the Nile in ancient Egypt and that is a good memory. But not being here. *No air in here...hard to... breathe...*

Huh? as he realizes where he is again. A quick look at his compass. *23 minutes to go.* Ivar takes his last deep breath filling his lungs to their utmost capacity with the CO₂-enriched air to get whatever little oxygen may be left... *Gotta time arc to the past... the answer's there... what if I arc further into the future?? THEN what do I do?? How...can...*

...

SZZZZAKT! tsssss... The laser cleanly cuts through Ivar's leg; he barely notices. Luckily the opening is letting out all the CO₂ as he depressurizes; however, he has nothing to breathe but dead space.

Imagine being tossed into the sea with chains tied to your legs and your arms tied behind your back... you automatically take a deep breath as you submerge, hoping beyond hope that something will save you, yet you watch in absolute panic as all you do is sink like lead... into the sea. Do you scream out, giving up your last breath? Do you give up and take in a lungful of dirty water and embrace death? Or do you

hold that last breath as long as you possibly can? And how far down do you sink before you hit bottom? And what do you do if you do manage to hit bottom with 80 pounds of chains tied to your legs? When what? Do you lose hope? Scream? And you're running out of oxygen. What do you...

Blackness.

Timearc T minus 12 minutes.

...do? Or if your head is cut off... what is that like? Aram once told me that you can still see and hear if your head was cleanly cut off... I don't know if he made that up, with Aram you never know... oh- I miss my Queen of the Nile. I lov...

Timearc minus 4 minutes.

A sharp pain brings Ivar back to space. He opens his eyes for the first time in what must have been hundreds of years. He sees a trail of blood coming out of his suit, forming perfectly circular globs of immortal blood...drifting away... He takes a deep breath only to feel his lungs cling to each other, devoid of all oxygen. *I should be dead any second now... how much time is left? 2 minutes and 12 seconds... think I'll count down....two...seven...*

...This could really be it for me... I wish this would stop...

...

WHOOM! The timearc opens and Ivar floats into it, drawn in like a rag doll on a shore... dragged in its undercurrent. He is near death and bleeding badly; his lungs are empty and he has not had oxygen to his brain in well over 15 minutes; but he is Ivar—one of the three immortal brothers.

CHAPTER THREE

Interlude

August 1996, The Mansion of Master Darque

In the grand ballroom stands Maxim St. James, Shadowman. Nearby is his newfound love, Sandria Darque.

"He's... gone and I couldn't save him! I am the only Shadowman!" cries out Maxim St. James.

"No my love, he is not. I can still feel him...somewhere," replies Sandria Darque.

Maxim spins around and shouts out, "Why are you so interested in Jack... and why are you so interested in me!? Is it the man or the mask?!!"

"Perhaps it's a little bit of both," she replies as she cracks a smile.

"Don't speak to me in riddles! I saw Jack fall to his death, only to disappear in a fog. He's gone and that much is sure. And I know your brother is not around, but I can feel he's close. Is that why you invited me over? Are you lonely? Do you really care about me? What the hell is going on?"

"Calm down, my love," replies Sandria as she wraps her arms around Maxim and leads him to a chair. "This whole 'Shadowman affair' is a long drawn-out play I started some 100 years ago... I created the Shadowman, you know..."

Maxim quickly jumps from the chair and points at Sandra. "That's not true and you know it! Nettie did it to me and Jack, not you!"

"Who do you think was pulling her strings from afar? Did you really think that Nettie could call the powers of Shadowman and tie them to a human form? Look—you've been a Shadowman for over 100 years... you never gave this any thought or asked Nettie for the truth?"

"I was content with what I was, with what I had become. I had the desire to act and the ability to do it, being Shadowman ain't all that bad; you gotta take the good and the bad."

"Exactly. Let me tell you a story. It's a story about balance and how the world depends on balance to exist. Just in the same way something must die so that other things may live. This world depends on balance. Please be seated."

Maxim reluctantly sits down again and Sandria speaks.

"From the very start, my brother was relentless in his pursuit for the acquisition of power through any means. And he finally learned all the magicks he needed to know from Anton Quigley back in 1895... you remember that, right? You were there. Part of it was Anton, but the greater part was my brother; Anton had the spells but not the means to make them take form. For that he needed my brother.

"And when Anton told Darque he wanted me to be his whore in exchange for knowledge of the arcane arts he agreed and I went along with it... knowing that very soon Darque would exact his revenge on him. This he did and became very powerful, but there had to be a tradeoff...some balance... and it was originally me. I was supposed to become his nemesis, his opposite needed to balance nature. You simply can't have one without the other. So I was originally picked to be the one to 'cancel him out' as you would say in 1999. But I knew what was involved and I knew what my fate would be."

Sandria pauses.

"This drove me crazy... my own brother and I would be locked forever together, as opposites, until 1999, when we would both die.

"So I broke the spell. I goaded Anton into killing me before Darque came to full power. By doing this, I could not become his nemesis... you see, Darque had not fully come to power yet; he was just newly learned in the magicks, and I did not yet embrace my role as his enemy. I was the chosen one, but I was supposed to die by my brother's hand, as he was to die by mine, when the time was right: 1999 in this case.

"Dying before all these things came to pass, I passed on the mantle and transferred the power into Nettie to charge a man to become a Shadowman.

"My gamble was to have my brother come to me before my spirit was gone and bring me back using his newfound abilities...I remember him rushing to me saying, 'Sister...you know that if you die...I must follow. I cannot let that happen. I am sorry...'. I barely spoke out, 'So am I' before I was reborn by Master Darque's magick ... I was truly sorry for forcing his hand and I think he may have known what I was doing as an afterthought, but it didn't matter—that didn't change the fact that I went on to become his best friend and lover for all these years.

"And I have been with him ever since, knowing that one day it would come down to Master Darque against a Shadowman. I knew Darque had many small battles to win to finally be powerful enough to achieve ultimate goal. My brother wants only one thing...this pursuit for the past century has only been a long and winding road to that goal, and he is close. Jack was the one who assigned it a date. I did my magicks for a glimpse into the future and 1999 is indeed that date... these are dark times, my love.

So that is how you came to be: I secretly empowered Nettie with the ability to make this a reality. She succeeded and you exist as a result of it."

"And Jack?" asks Maxim.

Sandria pauses for a moment. "Jack took a more hands-on approach. I seduced him into taking me to his apartment one night and as he slept I called the spirits again to make a new Shadowman. And Jack never knew. Neither did you, until now."

"So you created Shadowman...to kill your brother."

"Well, perhaps...but that was not my intention. Perhaps Darque knew it too. Perhaps that's why he brought me back from the dead to be with him so long ago: because he could not exist without me, even though I was no longer the chosen one. I could not commit to becoming his destroyer, so I passed that along to someone else."

"Me."

"Yes. For the past hundred years this whole affair of Master Darque and his quest for more power is nothing more than a long and drawn out battle of Master Darque against himself. The way for Darque to win is by defeating his Shadowman... then he would be nearly unstoppable on this earth. It is a gamble Darque knew full well when he cast his first spell. He knew it would one day come down to this, and that time is about to pass."

"Where is Boniface now?" asks Maxim.

"I do not know, but I know he is still among the living. The battle of 1999 must happen as it was predicted... were Jack dead now I would know immediately.

"My brother will return to us shortly. I think it best that you not be here when he returns."

"What will happen in 1999? You said you looked into the future; what is the outcome?"

"Right now there are two outcomes, both of which are devastating. The events from now until that time will dictate what that outcome will be. Every second matters: my brother is growing stronger and very soon will step again into this world, this time even more powerful than ever. Jack is here and will be there when the time comes. But you are no longer in this picture, Maxim. This has grown far beyond your abilities, even as a Shadowman. Right now it's between my brother and Jack."

"Whose side are you on, anyway?"

"I love my brother dearly, but I created the means of his destruction. I feel torn about this, as I have for so long." Sandria pauses for a moment. "I... feel my part is to

bear witness to these events and my purpose is to see that they come to pass. Either way, I would feel both happy and sad, so I am at a loss."

"Will I see you again?" asks Maxim.

"Probably not," Sandria replies, drawing close to Maxim. "Not in person. But I'll be watching you," as she gives him a kiss.

They look at each other for a moment, then Maxim turns and walks out.

"Take care," says Maxim St. James as he walks out of Darque's Mansion. "Pretty cold night. I'd like to go home."

End Interlude

New York City 2002 AD

WHOOM!

"Hey Tony—ya know...you see a lot of strange things in New York City, but a man falling from the sky with a NASA spacesuit? Well that one tops the list."

"Shut up Freddie and drive. And put on your sirens."

"Which hospital?"

"Boniface General, of course—they're only four blocks away. Now drive!"

April 19th, 2002 2:37pm.

Ivar fades into consciousness for a moment to hear a room full of people working frantically.

"Lucky to be alive, I tells ya... look- he's coming to!"

"Sir, you have been hurt badly. Can you please tell me your name?" asks one of the many doctors attending to Ivar.

"I am...Ivar. Ivar Anni Padda. Where am I?"

"The best care in New York City: Boniface General Hospital, of course. Now you must rest—you took a very bad fall."

"New York! My brother Gilad lives here."

"That is good, Ivar. We'll find him for you, now rest."

April 21, 2002 7:16pm

Ivar finally wakes up in a clean hospital room with all kinds of tubes running in and out of him. It is a private room with a large window overlooking New York City. Looking down, he sees he has been stripped bare and wrapped up in bandages like a Christmas present. His movement pulls out the respirator that's helping him breathe, causing a loud beeping that signals the nurse to come.

I must be in the past... in the LAST past, from where I was last time. Where was I? 2028, where am I now? He looks over to see the folded up newspaper that reads April 21, 2002. Am I dreaming this??

Why am I even in a hospital? The timearc is supposed to heal my injuries... man, what a beating I took there.

Ivar looks out the window.

Twenty six years and this is all...gone. But that is not possible. Could it be a Nuclear War? I have to talk to Gilly. The nurse rushes in, followed by the doctor.

"I see you're feeling much better," says the doctor as he checks Ivar's pulse.

"What happened to me, Doc?" asks Ivar.

"You had a major concussion from your—your fall. Just how you got to fall a good 100 feet in the middle of the Great Lawn in Central Park, I don't know."

"What's the date?" asks Ivar.

"That wound on your forehead has healed by now, but you seem to be exhibiting amnesia. Nurse! Schedule a CAT scan on this patient, stat! It's the twenty-first of April, 2002. You told the ambulance driver your name was Ivar Anni Padda. Is this true? Are you related to Gilad Anni Padda?"

"Gil is my brother. Can you find him for me? Why am I all wrapped up like a mummy?"

"Your leg has a nasty wound, although it's healing quite well. X-rays revealed extensive cellular damage to your lungs from asphyxiation. We also removed several slugs dating back to the Civil War from your back. You show all the signs of a man who fell from a plane, and those markings on your... spacesuit led me nowhere. NASA never heard of you. Do you mind filling in some details for me? Like what you are?"

"Not now, Doc, I need facts first. Do you have my...TV remote control?"

"Yes, your... device is with your clothes in the closet. We had your clothes cleaned for you. And NASA officials have already been here to get their suit back. They'll be back; they want to talk to you. Now do you mind telling me what that device is? Because I have a state of the art satellite dish at home and I've never seen something like that before. I know it's not a remote control."

"My brother will fill you in on all the details. Did you find him?" asks Ivar.

"Well, we found a 'Gilad Anni Padda' ... in the city files. He died in 1999. I'm sorry."

"Gilly? Died? That's not possible!"

"I am afraid so. His body was never found. He was involved with a government action, top secret stuff. But he died a hero."

Ivar pauses.

I need time to think. I need to get out of here. Well, I'm a patient with amnesia, all I gotta do is play the part, thinks Ivar. "Doc, I'm really feeling dizzy, I need to rest."

"Very well, Mr. Anni Padda, but I will be back—for answers. In the meantime, there are two guards outside your door, in case 'the little green men' come back for you. And I still want to know how you're going to pay for this medical bill. You do have insurance, don't you, Mr. Anni Padda?"

"My..." says Ivar, who gets cut off by the doctor. "Yes, I know, your 'brother' Gilly will take care of it. Now rest."

Talk about weird! My first break in over a week: a hospital. But the sheets are clean and dry, I'm getting time to heal my wounds and they finally got those slugs out of my back. They were REALLY starting to itch!

Now let me see: this is 2002; the earth gets destroyed in 2028, yet I have been to 4002. I just don't understand. I have not been a timewalker for too long, not nearly as long as Gilly or Aram have been around. I've travelled across time, not through it. I'm maybe 110 years old by normal standards and I have only seen something weird like this once before, in 1996.

I remember arcing into 1996 for perhaps my third or fourth time and everything was a little different... that last time. Like everything shifted a little bit. Well, what could happen in 2028 that would cause the earth to get blown to bits? Did I cause it? Because if I am the only timewalker, then I alone would have the ability to change time, but I never thought that was possible without my direct actions. But if it was, I could have done something as simple as step on some future president's grandfather's toes in the distant past which would cause a domino effect that would give us a totally different future. One thing is certain: this is my first time in this

2002 and this is not my world.

What if there was another timewalker? It's possible if a future Ivar lost the chronometer or better yet, got back to Nefertiti and buried it in a tomb. What if that archeologist-guy found the time arc with King Tut in the 1920's? What a stuck-up brat that Tut was! What if he's the other timewalker? Nah—too improbable.

What if that shift I felt in 1996 was the Earth shifting its rotation somehow? I know Solar did a number on—what were they called again?—oh yes, penguins, back in '92 in the North Pole. No, that would cause one reality to unfold at that point in time. I am in different reality now. Who could I go to that could check out the Earth's rotation??? Aric, the X-O Manowar! He could zip into space and check things out for me. And he has Orb's resources at his disposal, and his home in Ulster County is not too far away by car, if I had one. Plus, he owes me, big-time.

First things first: I gotta get out of here! I don't think the guards would fall for 'Look! Your shoes are untied!' Maybe I can do like the Marx brothers and walk out dressed up like a doctor. No I gotta stop joking around here. There is something seriously wrong with reality!

About 20 minutes later.

EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!!!

"DOCTOR!! DOCTOR!! The patient's heart stopped beating!"

"Quick nurse, prepare 100 grams of adrenaline and CLEAR!" "CLEAR!"...everything goes black.

Later that night.

Ironic, thinks the hospital attendant, I am working the graveyard shift in a morgue.

Zzzzzzip! "Easy as pie!" says Ivar as he cracks a smile. *Well, they fell for the old 'stop your heart for a couple of hours' trick. Houdini—I owe you one for that! And thanks to my brother Aram for introuducing me to him... I never did get to see Aram do that 'watch me crap a bunny' trick, though. And this is sweet—no one is looking for a dead man. Now I'll do my best Marx brothers impression and hot foot it out of here.*

Ivar tiptoes over to the metal file cabinet, opens up the cabinet marked ANNI-PADDA and retrieves his clothes and compass.

Now who do I go to first? Gil? No... he's missing or maybe even really dead, at least in this timeline. Aric is my best bet. His resources can help me get to the bottom of this.

April 21, 2002 10:55 pm
Ulster County, Upstate New York.

"Thanks again for the ride," says an appreciative Ivar to the limo driver. "No problem and thanks for the autographs, Mr. Ford! I am honored!"

Ha! Now I owe Harrison a favor for borrowing his identity, and whoever I stole that limo ride from: probably one of those rich snobs, anyway!

I'd like to see that rich guy standing on the corner wondering where his limo went—well Aram was right: if you're gonna steal something, do it with style.

"Thanks again for the ride!" says Ivar.

Well, here I am at Aric's estate. Well, might as well just walk up and ring the bell.

Ding-dong

"Can I help you?" the middle-aged, well-dressed man asks Ivar.

"Yes. I am here to see Aric Dacia and I'm in a rush."

"Who? There is no Aric Dacia here—you have the wrong house".

"Wait—I *know* this is Aric's place. You know? The big guy with long blond hair? The Village People reject?"

Ivar is cut off. "This is my house. I have lived here for the past 8 years. I certainly do *not* have any 'Village People' living here. Sorry. Good night"

SLAM!

Whoa! I guess Aric doesn't live here.

Ivar looks around only to realize that this is not Aric's house. *It kinda looks like his house, but this ain't it. Aric for sure as heck does not drive a Yugo! I've been here before and I know this is the spot, but this is not Aric's house.*

Maybe this is tied to that whole 1996 experience I had. First I noticed everything was a bit different, now I can't find Aric, and Gilad is apparently gone, or maybe just in hiding. But it's not Gil's style to hide from anything. I have to be in another reality for all of this to be!

NOW WHAT?! I am totally lost, dead broke, and stuck in Upstate New York. Well, I

gotta get back to find Gil. I know where his place is, at least. So it's the train for me. The train ride is long and slow. Ivar falls himself fast asleep thinking about the events of the past few days. He finds himself left with only one place to go in the hopes a man who was declared dead is not dead. He has no freaking idea what is going on and 2028 is approaching at 3600 seconds per hour with no idea how to stop it, let alone change it, if that's possible at all. He sleeps.



CHAPTER FOUR

April 22, 2002 10am

Midtown Manhattan, The Park Palace, 14th floor, apartment 1401

"Hello? Hello??"

The door is ajar. He enters.

Empty.

"Where the *heck* is Gilly!?"

His whole apartment is empty down to the bare walls. *Where could his stuff have gone? The Salvation Army? Did the military take it? The doctor did mention a government action; maybe they know. Which way to Area 51?? Maybe a museum took his stuff. God knows he has enough to open a museum. I know Gil got into that whole 'Let's preserve our civilization because bleak times are ahead' thing, too much Geomancer, if you ask me. But this is another dead end. "What now?" Ivar asks aloud.*

April 22, 1999 10:27 am, Central Park

Ivar sits on a park bench and ponders. What now? I need information. I need facts. If something is wrong with this timeline, then I am the only one who knows it. And I'm the only one who knows we're on a collision course with 2028 with a bang. I need a database.

The Internet! Of course! Let me find a computer and check some history files. I don't have much to go on- I've been to 1995 and 1996 in the past and now 2002 and I know it all goes up in smoke in 2028—something's not right here. At some point in time things get bad and that leads up to... well, I have to change history if such a thing is possible. Of course it is: I have been to Magnus' future and to this future. And somehow time has changed somewhere along the line. I have to find out where and how and the Internet is my best bet.

12:18 pm 42nd Street Library, New York City

"Excuse me. I would like to use one of the computers to search the spiderweb."

"Do you mean the 'net? Do you have a library card?" asks the clerk, giving Ivar a quick lookover.

"Ya know, I do!" as he pulls out his raptor-skinned wallet and pulls out a crisp white

library card and hands it to the clerk. "Here ya go!"

The clerk takes a look at the card, then at Ivar "...signed by Thomas Dewey?? Are you serious?"

"Do I look serious??"

"This way, sir."

Ivar sits down in front of one of the many computers. *Search field: 'History files... Recent global history: 1996 to present.'*

I have nowhere to start. Time is not my expertise and this timeline is certainly not. I couldn't tell what is right and wrong with this time anyway! Maybe the event that changes time hasn't even happened yet. And Gilad gone? That makes no sense at all! He told me how he met himself during Unity, so he can't be gone now. And where is Aric? Where is Orb? What event could happen that could change time itself?

4:24 pm

After many long hours of searching, he finally gets the scrap of information he needs.

The screen reads:

Louisiana Times. January 17, 2000. "Mayor Jack Boniface to host Mardi Gras this year as Grand Master."

Not the same Jack Boniface...!

Ivar reads on:

"...and 'Shadowman' himself, Mayor Jack Boniface, will host the festivities this year..."

What? Shadowman? Jack Boniface? He is not supposed to be alive in 2000! He died in 1999 defeating Master Darque in the swamps of New Orleans and dissolving all necromantic energy on Earth. I remember that event: Gilad was part of it. Doctor Mirage was there too—he got his life back in the end when Gilad pulled him out of the necromantic pool. This is something I know! I remember it all. And—waitaminnit! I was in Boniface General Hospital! Not 'Jack' Boniface Hospital? Can this be? I think I'm on to something. Let me think a second.

Master Darque was obsessed with power. Shadowman got more and more powerful as time went on—I mean, Jack even took on X-O back in '95—and Jack kept preventing Master Darque from consolidating his power until August, 1999. What a party that was! It wasn't until Master Darque took a bus full of pre-schoolers

the night before and started sending them home one at a time, as zombies, that Jack had enough. Sure enough, just like in the cheesy westerns, Jack and Darque had a showdown in the swamplands. I remember it clearly because Gil told me all about it back then. Doctor Mirage asked Gil for help in case things went badly and this is what initially started their long relationship together. And I clearly remember Gilad was one of the pallbearers for poor Hwen's funeral years later, but in 1999 things went badly and in the end Jack released all his energies at Darque and...well, they won't forget that light show in New Orleans for some time! When the smoke cleared, Mirage was solid again, Gilad was bruised, Darque was dead, and I got wind of it after the fact. Three days later we buried Jack. The world was saved and Darque was stopped.

But in this reality, Gilad is MIA, Jack is still alive in 2002, and I have no freaking idea how this happened. Maybe this was the point where time splits? Could very well be!

But that was the other past. Is this making sense? Yes, it is. Jack is still alive in this time- - and mayor no less. Lemmie search 'Shadowman' on the net...

Shadowman- Jack Boniface.

Shadowman was elected mayor of New Orleans after defeating Master Darque and saving a bus full of children. Content that the Darque power was gone, Shadowman retired, and Jack Boniface became mayor. A short time later, Boniface opened up the night club 'The Shadowman's Mask', in the French quarter section of New Orleans where he lives to this day and picks up his sax on occasion in benefit of worthy charities. His acts of philanthropy for children all over the world inspired hospitals to be named after him, orphanages were established in his name, and then opened a chain of 'Darque's Burgers' restaurants, the second most popular fast food chain in America, and a very profitable line of 'Shadow-man' comic books based on his life...

Other links... Shadowman charities, Shadow-man comics, Shadowman Chicken in herb sauce... 'watch out for the shadow, man'...

Let me close this browser. I gotta figure this out!

Well, it's not possible that the fight in 1999 changed on its own since it's history; I mean, I was there and I saw the aftermath. Therefore, time must have altered itself between 1996 and 1999. Shadowman must have found out he was supposed to die fighting Master Darque to rid the world of the Darque Power and he found a way to prevent himself from dying! That's gotta be it!

As sad as it is to say, Shadowman had to die in that titanic battle for 'real' history to unfold as it must. If it didn't, then there would be a different history, maybe even this one, and in the distant future, Solar would have nowhere to put baby Magnus in 3975 and I know Magnus grows up and one day helps turn the tide for the heroes in the epic Unity struggle of 1992. A million other differences over time would amount to an entirely different world and in this case, they amount to the destruction of Earth like I saw!

In short, this could be the end of everything, and I can't stop it! This would be just like

the Unity struggle Gil told me all about, except the Earth's heroes would lose and all reality disappears!

That must be the answer! Shadowman lives on and changes history enough to put us here! I have to find out how Jack knew he was supposed to die and stop him! I gotta find out as much as I can about Boniface and Shadowman. Good thing I'm in a library. I better do it the old-fashioned way and see if there are any books on the subject. There's no printer here anyway, and I might need some reading material for the ride ahead. Lemme check out this system and find Shadowman books.

Shadow-blues, Shadow-lime mist, Shadow-man. Ah- here it is: Shadowman... My Life Story, by Jack Boniface. Wouldn't ya know it? He wrote a book! Sweet! Just what I needed! This will probably tell me where everything went wrong. Lemme see as he opens the book and reads.

"Chapter 1: Lydia and how it started...Chapter 2: Unity."

Lemme see if this is what I need, as he flips through it.

Yes, this will do. It even covers Unity, that 'end of the world' thing Aram told me about. But there's no mention of all night bars here.

Ivar reads more...

So THAT's how he became Shadowman!

Minutes later

"This book is due back in 10 days, Mister Padum..."

"Addi-Panna. Thanks for your help." Back to Central Park... I have some reading to do.

*As Ivar hits the street, he starts thinking again *Killing Boniface* now, as difficult as it is to say about a friend, would accomplish nothing. And arcing to 1999 and aiding Master Darque... well, that would not be a good idea, either. Should Master Darque win unopposed, a destroyed Earth would very well be the outcome anyway. I could change history again and become Shadowman myself, just as he did in 1991, playing out his actions from the book, but that would be too hard to do and too risky to leave to chance and this time is already screwed up enough as it is. Besides, if I had his job, I'd have to die in 1999!*

Any way you look at it, I would have to change time in some way. What is the easiest and least risky way of changing things back to normal?

Of course! I would have to prevent Jack from learning he is going to die in 1999! But how did Jack learn he was going to die? The answer is as plain as book in his hands:

Chapter 3: 'How I Knew I Would Die in 1999.'

Let's check the tachyon comapss. Next time arc is in 2 days and 7 hours I got everything I need from this book... might as well hang out in my favorite spot in New York.

Washington Square Park

"Hey man, got a light?" the old man asks.

"You're *Jimi Hendrix!*"

"Yeah, baby. Now do you got a light?"

Ivar thinks, *This ought to be fun...*

CHAPTER FIVE

Interlude
August 1, 1999 11:54 pm New Orleans



A fog rolled into town that night. Actually a fog usually rolls out every night, but tonight it was different. And out of the fog walks Jack Boniface, Shadowman.

Craig Sisson '99

Home. And with a fresh start, a clean conscience and a clear purpose: to stop Master Darque. What's the date?? Gotta find a newspaper or something, I'm sure as hell not about to walk up to someone and ask "Excuse me, what year are we in?" I kinda know what the date is. If that wasn't a bad dream I just had, I should know where I am.

Jack picks up a newspaper from a trash bin which reads August 1, 1999. Just like I figured. Has to be any moment now. Well, where to? Should I go home? No, my home is long gone. There are probably other people in my apartment by now. Should I go to Nettie? Why? Riddles inside riddles. I am through with her. And yet she always makes me come back to her; she always has the answers I need. No- I'm not going to her, either. I think I will lay low for a while... hit the swamplands. There's plenty of places there to go and disappear for a while.

Jack starts walking out of town, thinking, So this is it: the big showdown. 1999. Right smack dab in the middle of it. Shouldn't there be some sort of suspenseful background music playing now like in the movies? I wonder what 2000 will be like? For me, all I can do is wonder, because I have one reason to live now: to stop the menace known as Master Darque. I'm sure he's here. Should I track him down? No, he will make himself known to me; besides, I can feel his presence. He must have gotten a lot stronger and that's okay—so have !! Better lay low...the whole world knows I'm Shado..., I mean Jack Boniface. What's the difference? I am me.

End Interlude

New Orleans Swamplands, April 4, 1992 6:13 pm

A soaking wet Ivar hides in the swamps in the bayou. Good thing I have this book with me. All I have to do is flip to Chapter 3 and follow Jack's lead. Boy, I hope Jack didn't make this stuff up! Swamplands and voodoo: sounds like a two-bit carry story. Well here they come. Better stay out of eyesight.

Ivar hears Shadowman, Nettie, and Mister N'Dour speaking as they draw close in their boat "When do I get to hear what this job is?" Jack asks Mr. N'Dour.

"Forgive me for delaying, Mister Boniface, but what I have to tell you sounds so fantastic, I was afraid you wouldn't come if I told you up front."

Hey! thinks Ivar, *This is straight from the book. Wait: let me guess what he'll say next:*

"He started teaching me the quiet little voices of everything..."

Ivar listens. "You go on in there, Mister Boniface, you'll see. Here's your carnival face. Don't want no demons to find you later." *That's my cue- get ready with a deep breath.... and...*

"One more time," Jack says to Nettie.

Here we go—gotta stay at least 5 feet behind Jack, can't lose him. Too bad my tachyon compass is useless in Unity... I mean, I'm totally leaving Earth on this hunch. If I'm wrong, I could be stuck in Unity until the end! Swim! Swim!



Ivar comes out of the well only to hear lasers and bombs and fleeing people all over. *This ain't Kansas, I'm in the middle of a war zone!* he thinks as he shakes off his soaking wet clothes and looks around. Flying pterodactyls, robots, bits and pieces of all times and chaos. *So this is Unity. I'd better hide somewhere and come up with a plan. I know Jack's every move; I've got it all here in Chapter three. I just need time to gather myself. Besides, I could follow Jack I'll end up fighting dinos with him only*

to end up fried to a crisp when he touches Solar. Or I could catch up to him later. I know he's already met Elya by now, when he saves her from falling rubble. But she hasn't said anything yet about his future.

Ivar quickly takes shelter in one of the many destroyed buildings and pulls out Jack's yet-to-be written autobiography. *Let me read this part again.*

"...and that was the worst move in my life, that's for sure. In my self-righteousness, I charged in and attacked Solar, of all people! The guy who wins Unity for everyone! Jumping at a white-hot Solar may not have been the smartest thing I ever did, but it was the powers of the Shadowman calling me to act. That was the most painful moment of my life. And all I could think as I was burning to medium well was, 'Where was Elya?' I mean, I just met her a few minutes ago, but she had class. I didn't know at the time that we would meet again."

Ivar reads on. "Next thing I know, there I am in a bed. 60 days have passed and in walks Elya. I look at my body only to find me healed! And where's my long hair? Wow! I don't know what voodoo they used on me, but it worked. But looking around and seeing all this technology, I figure it wasn't spells that healed me, it was this future technology. So in she walks..."

"'Good morning, Jack. The med-techs say you're well enough to talk for a while,' says Elya as she draws near. 'I heard them say I've been unconscious for two months... it's all a nightmare to me, but I remember you—you're Elya, right?' 'Yes.' In all my life I never met someone as beautiful as her. We quickly became lovers and that's when I knew I would die in 1999. Elya told me. On day 157, it was time for me to spring back into action, the Earth's heroes needed me. Besides, I was guest at Pierce's palace for too long, so I..."

"Dammit!" shouts Ivar, "he goes from day 60 to day 157 like it was ten seconds! *When does she tell him?!*" *Well, at least I know it's not until at least day 60... so I have a whole 60 days here with nothing to do and I HAVE to stay out of everyone's way or else I'll screw up UNITY!*

If I make a wrong move here in Unity, I could throw off all creation! If I do so little as take one wrong step, it could set into motion a chain of events that would lead to the end of everything!

But this, ironically, is the safest way to save the Earth if I'm right. Well, it's not all that bad. I mean, according to Gilly, I could ask Solar to take me to Ancient Egypt five minutes after I left Queen Nefertiti on the Nile—he said Solar had free bus passes for everyone at the very end of Unity just like he did once in Stonehenge, but that was

another story. I screwed up the first time Solar gave out bus passes, I better not screw up this time! I gotta stop Elya from spilling the beans!

So this is really a big hunch for me. Worst case scenario: I hide out in the Lost Land, then go back to my queen. I give up being the Timewalker and know I get at least 3,000 years before the end of everything. Boy, that really puts a bittersweet spin on a bad situation! And if I'm wrong, I can't arc out of here and the Earth will be blown up in this screwed up timeline! I hope for everyone's sake that I'm right.

But my job is simple: I gotta talk to Elya and prevent her from telling Jack about his demise in 1999, then hang out until the end and hop a ride home. Why didn't I think of this before??

Lemme see. Elya was one of Erica's solders, in the pterodrome patrol. So she's obviously from the 41st century if she knows Erica, probably one of her people. I could dress up like one of Erica's troops. Nah, that wouldn't work. They'd see through it in a second. All I gotta do is get into Erica's complex and talk to Elya sometime between now and day 60. Plenty of time. Hope she'll go along with it! I mean, what if she says no? What if it slips out and she tells him anyway?? What if she tells him I was here from his future? Geez! All of this possible-timeline stuff is giving me a headache! They meet in Unity day 60, then Jack goes back into action on day 157, so they're together for 97 days!!! Geez! I gotta go underground for a while and hang out, then I'll figure out how to get in later. My best bet is to get away from this technology and into the forests. Yeah that's it! Leaves and berries! Sleep under the blanket of stars called the sky!!

The Next Morning

Leaves and berries, MY ASS! There aren't any 'Earth-like' fruits anywhere! I mean, I could eat anything, or nothing, and get along fine, but I'm getting hungry. I could even eat poison berries. They'll fill me up, but they'll just give me a sick stomach. Maybe I'll trap an animal. I only ate dino burgers once before, and it wasn't by choice then, either. But I gotta do something. Let's see what I have: I can build a tent from sticks, the climate's pretty nice here. I can trap some sort of creature for food, then use the skin to fortify the tent. Plenty of flint here. Actually it reminds me of when I was a kid with Gil and Aram! I should be fine; I just have to stay out of time's way.

Unity Day 10, 5:13 am

I don't think I'll ever get used to this... I have god-knows-whats howling in the forest and laser fire in the complex. Sorta like a bad Ed Wood movie. But this is not too bad; it reminds me of the time I spent back in the Jurassic Period. Too bad I don't have any ketchup, but these lizard-like dinos are a healthy meal. I Just gotta lay low, then get back into Erica's complex. I'm actually enjoying myself here in the wilderness... this is pretty-OW!!!

An arrow strikes Ivar and embeds itself deeply into his leg. "Dammit!"

Suddenly, in a flash, Ivar is not alone, as the bravest Kiowa-Apache that ever lived jumps down from a ledge and speaks in broken English. "No move, white man, I kill you with next arrow with poison. Stay down."

3
Holy- - it's Turok! But look at him--this is before everything! I mean, he's using his own bow and just started to learn English! Geez! Talk about cool!



But this arrow in my leg is not cool, dammit- let me pull it out... "No move, white skin. This last warning," as Turok quickly draws another arrow and takes dead aim at Ivar. "Okay, big fella; you win. Me-no-move," as he half-chuckles to himself.

Turok does not lower his sight from Ivar. He looks him over, then glances over to the crudely made tent and spears lying around, never letting Ivar out of his eyesight. "You not one of the Spirit Mother's enemies, I see. You know the ways of my people with your stick-house and tools. You weapons no good, but you know my ways." "I am Ivar, I am a friend," as Ivar holds his hand up in peace. "Let us make fire-light and sit." Turok pauses a second, then says "You my friend, you no attack me. I bring peace to you. Let us sit and make fire."

Geez thinks Ivar, me Tonto, you Long John Silver! Hi-yo! I can't laugh, Turok could kill me in a second, or at least make my stay here pretty miserable. I've gotta play the 'we-come-in-peace' thing like when aliens landed back in 3130.

Turok lowers his arrow and carefully puts it back in the quiver, then quickly pulls out a dry flintrock, grabs a few sticks lying around and starts up a fire.

"Sun wake up soon, I no have long," says Turok.

I remember now: Turok met up with Aram here, but not yet, I can see. Turok must have just came out of the forest to see this complex. He must think I'm with Erica, but luckily my tribal background saved me, or at least stalled him.

But I gotta be careful! I am probably the first person from modern times Turok has met. I can't show I'm a dork, or he'll just start flinging arrows at Aram when they meet! Now I know how Custer felt...

Turok now has the fire started. He sits down with legs crossed and speaks "I am Turok, son of Stone. I must give thanks to sun for coming up soon. Who you from?" asks Turok.

"I am Ivar and I am lost here... like you. I want to get back home. I am scared of many strange noises and weapons over there" as Ivar points to Erica's complex, "so I stay here until sky-god come to save me.." says Ivar as he thinks *The old 'sun-god' trick. I guess Turok worships a sun god. Everyone has a sun god, even people in 20th century Florida!*

"Fix wound in leg, Eye-var. Sorry I hurt you. Can't be too careful in these times." *Thanks- I get permission to pull the arrow in my leg! Ugggh- POP! Not too bad, at least it was a clean cut. Ought to heal within the hour,* thinks Ivar as he quickly ties

off the wound.

"You need no fear of Spirit Mother if you not her enemy. And you one of my kind. So you no enemy of Spirit Mother," says Turok. "Come with me now, give thanks to the sun now and then come with me to speak to Spirit Mother."

Well, thinks Ivar, that's one way into her complex. I didn't know that Turok knew Erica. I thought he was fresh out of his time, but he's still green behind the ears a bit and could use an English lesson or two. No, this is not right. Am I crazy? Having me and Turok meet Erica together? That could REALLY screw things up! I gotta lose Turok fast; this is too risky.

Think fast... Okay- -he called Erica 'Spirit Mother', so he's gotta think she's a god or something. And they've obviously met already, so I have to come up with a reason why I have to stay here and get rid of Turok. Here goes

"Me must wait here for my son to come back. Him looking for meat for us to eat."

"Hmmm", says Turok, "your son must be brave like you and strong of heart. I understand this his time to be a man and kill his first honker by himself and bring back meat. I leave in peace then, Eye-var."

"Yes Turok, I give much respect to you and wish you many buffalo in your house."

"Hmmm." says Turok as he pauses for a second and raises one eyebrow, then jumps into action and races towards the breaking dawn. *Boy, thinks Ivar, that was an interesting way to start the morning!*

Unity: Day 15

Carefully I stepped...

I have had it with this dino meat! I need a steak! And gum—I gotta get some gum! And ketchup! I could stay here for the next 45 days all alone and drive myself crazy. And I'm starting to talk like Turok 'Me hungry. Me want eat honker meat' HA! Perhaps my best bet would be to go back to civilization anyway. There are thousands of people there anyway from all times; I guess I could fit in there somewhere. I need a decent meal. Just gotta stay away from the Solar and everyone else.

Unity: Day 15, 5:36 pm Outside Mothergod's Complex

I gotta tiptoe around here and be real careful to stay out of sight and not start any fights. I know the 'robs here have instructions to kill anyone not with Pierce. More importantly, I don't want to change the flow of Unity! I gotta be reeeeeal careful not to make any trouble. This could work out well. I could technically just walk into Erica's complex saying I was one of her people. I can pass myself off as a person from the 41st century; I just hope they don't use a retinal scan or anything else for ID. Nah, from what I've seen, they're pretty disorganized. I need a shower and a meal. Then I gotta meet up with Elya then get the heck out of here. Just gotta stay out of everyone's way.

Suddenly, Ivar hears this real loud, husky voice yelling, "Hey, Ivar! About time you showed up!" *D'oh!*

"Aram! please—no! This is not the time!!!"

"It's the perfect time, brother" says Aram. "I got a ton of ptero-doo dropped on me last week and I'm just about fed up. And there are no bars *anywhere!* I need a drink."

"And a shower," adds Ivar.

"Oh yeah, and that too."

"Aram—please! I can't disrupt time and space and alter its course! Not in Unity!"

"Yeah >burrp< time, space, booze, broads.... whatever. Let's get hammered."

"Yes, my brother, let's get a drink."

On the way to the Speakeasy, below the Unity complex

Aram continues, "So's like I was saying: that seemed like the only way I could escape them guards. It worked. Now all I gotta do is get the kid back."

Archer! thinks Ivar. *I remember- - "Archer and Armstrong"! Archer goes on to form the Archies! This is once again before all of this has taken place. They must have just met as a team if my brother is calling him "kid" Here I am again: dead in the middle of continuity's way. I'm really beginning to think I am the cause for the Earth in 2028. I gotta lose Aram.*

"Aram, I have to leave now. I can't be involved with you at this time, I..."

"Nonsense, brother! When was the last time we had a drink together? When??? Had to have been at least 500 years and I'm thirsty."

"And filthy," adds Ivar.

"Yeah, whatever. The Speakeasy is right down here. I heard the guards talking about it. I need a beer or whatever they serve up here."

*At least I can leave after he gets smashed. It shouldn't be too hard to do get **him** loaded, that's for sure!*

The Speakeasy

"It sure feels nice to get a good steam shower," says Ivar.

"Yeah, now let's get some broads and brews," replies Aram.

"Aram," says Ivar, "I really can't stay with you. I have a very important mission. I am trying to change time to prevent the Earth from getting blown to bits in the future...I gotta get going..."

"You mean you don't have time to share with me?? Come with me, brother, and tell me about this end of the world thing. That reminds me: where is my satchel? Anyway, let's get some!"

Ivar sighs. "Very well..."

As they enter the speakeasy, Aram is right at home, just as he's been in every speakeasy, bar and tavern for the past 4,000 years. Ivar thinks to himself *Well, there is food here and they certainly have a good selection of beverages from the past 4,000 years. I can't complain too much; look at Aram over there...* as he listens.

"...Sounds like that witch has her broom stick up her butt, Necatrina. Hey, maybe I could fix her up with my brother Gilly. They might hit it off!

"Hey Ivar, come over here! Let's get Gil hitched to this Pierce broad!"

"Ut!" says one of the locals, "careful—careful who you're bringing to this place, Mister Buh-wi-ni, is it?"

"No 'Mister' ", replies Aram, "just Bunny-Wunny."

"If Mothergod find out about Speakeasy, she toast us all—skammers, customers, bims, even the slug!"

"Who?" asks Aram.

"The slug... Albert!"

"Nah, don't worry about him, he's my brother," says Aram, pointing to Ivar. "Me and him go waaaay back..."

"I gotta get out of here," says Ivar.

Aram calls out to his brother, "Hm. I think opportunity is drumming on the door. Hey Ivar! Come over here! I got a plan! Ivar??"

Gone. Glad to get out of that mess. Now where do I go? To Pierce's complex? Now's as good a time as any.

Erica Pierce's Complex, front door entrance

"Ho! Guard! Take me to Elya! I have top secret business with her pertaining to Mothergod!"

"And who are you? You look like goph level slime to me," replies the guard.

I could kick both these guards' asses and bust my way in, and this is probably the way Gilad or Aram would handle this situation, but let's try it my way.

"Let me in now. This is business of the utmost importance. It deals with a new aerial weapon the enemy is developing."

"Should we let him pass, Tony?"

"I don't care Freddie, I want some bims."

The guards pause for a moment, then turn to Ivar and say "You may pass."
SWEET! I never thought it would be that easy to walk right on in. But then, who would want to walk in on Pierce anyway?? Now to find Elya.

Unity Day 16: The Complex of Mothergod, Med-Center Massive Reconstruction Unit

The place is surprisingly clean, but not sterile. The doctors look nothing like doctors, more like regular people. Looks like your typical 41st century hospital: after all, there's no need for sterility when you have technology. *There's no security here. Why would you need security in a medical area within Mothergod's own complex? There's a doctor or technician or someone who BELONGS here.*

"Excuse me, sir," says Ivar.

"Yes? Can I help you?"

"Yes. I was in battle with a 'John Doe' you have here. You should have him in here, probably in reconstructive isolation."

"Yes, we don't get too many cases like this. Normally we'd just vaporize the poor soul, but your friend helped Mothergod and he's a hero. You're with him?" asks the technician.

"No, I know of him. I know of his actions and I would like to visit him."

"Are you in aerial?" asks the now-overquestioning doctor.

"Yes, I was with Elya..."

"Of course, she is with him now. you may enter. He's to your left and down the hall."

Ivar enters the room where he sees Jack suspended in liquid isolation in a holding tank. The lights are dark and the room is quiet. He sees Elya sitting down in front of him, watching Jack. Ivar enters and speaks to her.

"Excuse me. You're Elya, right?" asks Ivar.

Elya turns around and replies, "Yes, I am. Are you with aerial? Are we under attack??"

"No, I'm a good friend of our friend here," says Ivar, pointing to Jack in the holding

tank.

"You know him! Who is he? Why did he do that?? Tell me!" says Elya, springing to her feet.

"I'll tell you everything if you can keep a real big secret."

This is the biggest question mark in the whole equation: can Elya keep a secret? She is in with Erica, she is one of her people. She was raised with her and probably worships her. Chances are she's honored to fight for her. This will be tough.

"Can you keep a secret?" asks Ivar as he stands by Elya, both of them looking at Jack.

"Yes I can. I figured it out already though: he's Erica's lover. That's why he did what he did. That's it, right?"

"No, not at all." replies Ivar. "He is just a man from the 20th century called Jack Boniface. He was a musician and a hero known as Shadowman. He is a very important part of all reality and that is why I am here."

"But you talk of him like it's the past tense, but he's here and he'll make it, right?" as a tear swells in Elya's eye.

"Yes, he will. And he will go on to great things. One day in his near future he will save all mankind. But he needs your help and so do I to make all that happen."

"But that's what Mothergod is doing now, saving all reality. How does Jack fit into this picture?"

"I am from his future and your past. We are in the Lost Land where time and space do not apply, and all times can coexist as one. That's why he and you are both here. But you know this already. What you don't know is the danger involved with this..."

"Yes" interrupts Elya, "I know this from Mothergod. She is going to make all times one."

"That may be so," says a reassuring Ivar as he pauses for a moment to think *This isn't going the right way. Stay cool! I didn't blow it yet! I don't know who Elya is more loyal to: Jack or Erica. I better not tell her too much, better make the story fit her background, tell her partially what she wants to hear.*

Ivar takes a deep breath and speaks. "I am talking about the reality that exists after this crisis ends. That is where Jack goes on to save the world. In his future, Jack will die in 1999 to rid the world of a horrible menace known as Master Darque. Darque threatens life for everyone on Earth in 1999; even Erica is afraid of him. But not Jack. I'm sure that's why this room is dark. Jack thrives on the dark- - it calls out the best in him. It is this power from the night that makes him rise up and conquer Master Darque in 1999 saving reality once again."

Elya looks away from Jack for a moment to Ivar "I knew there was much more to this man than meets the eye."

"Yes, there is. In my time, we all know of Jack as the hero he is. He saves us all."

"So where do I fit in this picture?" asks Elya.

"You are his great love beyond all others. You are the one who nurses him back to health in Unity and you go on to a great future with him. But there is one problem and that's why I am here. You are from the 41st century with the knowledge of Jack's future; you alone threaten everything by telling Jack of 1999. If he knows what will happen, time itself will skew, Master Darque will win the battle, and there will not be a 41st century at all. So life on Earth itself is in your hands. I came from the second reality that still could be, a world enslaved by Master Darque, a world where Mothergod herself is destroyed—a world where you do not exist. But I have seen where everything goes wrong and *right now* is the point in time and your decision *right now* will affect life for everyone!"

Elya is taken back for a moment. "Oh my! What should I do?"

"Love him, stay with him, nurse him back to health and keep him close. Whatever you do, do not tell him of 1999. Know that this secret between us will secure life for billions of souls starting with his well into the future."

Elya stands up and puts her hand on the holding tank, "I will. I promise."

"Then I thank you. All reality thanks you. Take care, Elya."

Ivar pauses a moment to see Elya's eyes look out the window to the battle on the horizon, then slowly returns her gaze to the man in the isolation tank, transfixed to this...hero.

My job here is done thinks Ivar, and he leaves.

Outside Erica Pierce's Complex

Whew! Man, talk about 'four score and seven years ago...' That was a speech that should be remembered throughout the ages! I just hope she's up to it! Now I need a drink!

Some time later...

Unity Day 37, Far away from the Unity Conflict

So, this is the Lost Land. I guess I have some free time on my hands until the end of Unity, a good time to do some exploring—I know this place collapses in the end, so I might as well see what's out there. This is pretty cool—one day I'm in a South American jungle circa 19th century, the next minute I'm in a medieval country setting. This is like timearcing without the arc. Speaking of that, let's see how the device is holding up.

Ivar pulls out his tachyon compass and isn't surprised to see all blinking 888888's on the console. *It's not working, but it's on. That's a good sign. What's over that hill?*

Unity Day 49, Unexplored areas of the Lost Land

"This... this cannot be! Is that.... a pyramid?!?!" Ivar runs down the sandy hill as quickly as he can, falling down and sliding to the bottom. The fall does not matter; he is immortal.

"This is ancient Egypt! And those- those are ancient Egyptians over there!"

Ivar has traveled throughout time for several lifetimes in search for his lost love. He could never figure out how to get back to Queen Nefertiti in ancient Egypt, yet he never stopped searching for her throughout time. It is truly ironic that all this time Queen Nefertiti was not on Earth at all, rather she was in The Lost Land... searching for him! That would explain why he could never find her. It was a short jog to where the many servants were throughout the local area.

"You there! Where is the Queen?" he asks one of the servants, slipping into ancient Egyptian dialect easily.

"She is there, in her chambers. I am not allowed to go there," he replies.

"Then you take me there now, I am Ivar Anni Padda."

"Ivar?" asks the servant. "The Timewalker? We have been looking for you. Osiris be praised I have found you!"

A short time later, Ivar reunites with his love.

"My Queen!"

"Ivar! It has been so long!"

CHAPTER SIX

Unity, Day 158

The caravan is comprised of some 150 servants whose entire lives and even afterlives are spent in dedication to Queen Nefertiti and her husband, Ivar. Today they are going for a walk through the Lost Land's ancient Egypt when suddenly they hear:

Rrrrrrrumbllllleeeeeee

"Uh-oh! This sounds like it's it!" says Ivar as he stops the royal caravan. "And it's not an Earthquake."

A loud BO-O-O-O-M! echoes throughout the Lost Land! Ivar is thrown to the ground.

*There goes the reactor! I can see the mushroom cloud even from this distance!
Here's our ticket home! Gotta get to Nereftiti!*

"My Queen, the time has come! Remember what we planned: all you have to do is think of home and you will automatically be returned there. And I will be by your side."

"And you will not leave me again, my love?" she replies. "I am scared. Hold me."

"I swear on the Sphinx that we will never be apart again. Just take hold and together we will spend eternity together my love."

"I love you, Ivar."

"And I love you."

"Hold on to me, my queen; here comes an aftershock!"

WHOOM!

Home...home... the Nile... I gotta get back to the Nile! thinks Ivar.

BO-O-O-M!

I hope everything is now right. I hope I make it back to MY reality. The Nile, the Nile...

50 year old pyramids fly apart like a deck of cards.

B-O-O-M!

"Aftershocks! Hold On!"

"Elya, it's all up to you and Jack in 1999..."

August 14, 1999

"SHIIT!!!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

July 19, 1999

Jack Boniface hasn't been seen in more than 3 years now. Some say he died in 1996, others know differently. Meanwhile, the Darque power is rising...

Two hours later on Bourbon Street in New Orleans

A pissed off Ivar paces down the street "Shit!!! I am back in... where am I? 1999. Mid July. I lost my queen *again!* There is no excuse for it this time! At least I know she is back in this reality and not in the Lost Land... I can still get her back again. 1999, I *had* to think of 1999!"

Well at least since I'm here, I might as well make sure everything goes as planned. I hope Elya kept her end of the bargain. I guess I gotta be here just in case... maybe this was Solar's plan all along, or maybe this is where I had to be in normal time.

I still don't know which reality I'm in and I don't know how it's going to go down with Darque and Shadowman...and I don't think I have any way of finding out... I had better keep an eye out and try to be there when the showdown goes down just in case... I wonder if I can go back and try again if things here don't work out... No I can't! I changed Unity! I'd have to go back to Unity and stop myself from telling Elya about... geez, now even I'm getting confused! Better get a hotel room and stay here a while. I need a shower too...

Interlude

The Temple Of Ladakh September 6, 1993 During the Chaos Effect

"This temple is on holy ground, Master Darque! We'll die to the last man before we allow you to violate it, you albino devil!" "I seek the crypt of Tashi Khatun, scribe of the book of the Geomancer, monk. If I must destroy you all to reach it-- SO BE IT!"

Sticks and arrows and rocks are meaningless to a man possessed with a mission as Master Darque casually waves his hand and watches the monks die in the monastery. The brave but futile battle is over quickly as Master Darque kills the last of the monks of Ladakh and finally obtains the mortal remains of Tashi Khatun. "From your ancient bones, I will grind out the secrets of the earth. From your dust, I will create a potion that will yield the secret of Geomancy to me."

That battle was seemingly lost for Master Darque when Doctor Mirage stepped in and absconded with the remains, but a small piece of information was gained by Darque...Khanit: the first Geomancer.



The Earth was already ancient when beast and man first trod upon it...Eons had already passed before men first fed from the Earth, thrived upon the Earth, polluted the Earth...Then did everything in their power to wipe themselves off the Earth. For this reason, the Earth created the Geomancer. A protector of the Earth, who would defend it against the threat of humanity...and, if possible, save man from himself. The Earth chose Khanit as its first Geomancer. Khanit could not only communicate with the Earth, but had a limited control of the Earth's elements. The first seer of the Earth was also said to be immortal. For decades, he served the Earth well. But eventually this power corrupted Khanit, and he used his gift for personal gains. He knew this had angered the Earth, so he formed alliances with necromantic wizards, in hope of keeping his power. Meanwhile, the Earth chose Khanit's son, the noble Valurr, to wear the mantle of Geomancer. His first real test was to defeat his father. Valurr was nowhere near as dominating as his father...but he'd used his quickness and wits to avoid being obliterated. It almost worked, but Khanit was too strong. Yet Valurr had more than proven his worth to the Earth... so it lent a hand stripping Khanit of his powers. Valurr took on the mantle of Geomancer, but the Earth denied him of immortality and the control of the elements.

And so the legacy of the Geomancers was born and lives on to this day, but few speak of Khanit, the first and most powerful Geomancer of them all. Master Darque has become one those who now know the secret of the Geomancers... and how to become the master of nature and the elements.

Therefore it was not a difficult task to assemble the proper vestments and potions and say the magick words and chants, at the right time and place and bring once again to force the powers of the first Geomancer...

End Interlude.

August 21, 1999 4:11 PM A restaurant in New Orleans

"Can I help you?" asks the waitress. "The usual" replies Ivar with a smile. "I've gotten used to New Orleans... it grows on you, it has a life of its own."

According to Chapter five of Jack's '2002 biography', I still have a good month until 'it' hits the fan... let's see what's going on... Darque is nowhere to be found, Dr. Mirage and Gil aren't here yet, that's a good sign... looks like I might be in the right reality, I hope.

But I still think my chat with Elya did the trick... I really hope I didn't start ANOTHER reality with my meddling, I like my timeline the way it was...all I gotta do is hang low and keep an eye out and be ready for whatever happens next... the book doesn't mention much about Darque, might be why I haven't seen him... but I remember Darque getting more and brazen, starting to take people right off the street and sucking up their necromantic energies... it wasn't until that school bus of kids that Jack started playing for keeps, but that was in September...maybe he's gone for good- - that would suck- - then we'd have a Jack Boniface past 1999 and we'd start countdown: Earth all over again... maybe this is the point where time splits... dammit- I still am not any closer to the answer, I'm trying my best...

"Here's your special, Ivar," the waitress says as she brings him his meal. He replies, "Thanks, sweetie," flashing her a smile.

This has to be the sequence of events that alters time and starts off that other unsavory reality...I just hope I'm on the right track. Better go home.

Later

Ivar walks out of the shower and turns on the TV in his hotel room in horror to see "...continued disappearances are coming in all over the New Orleans as over 27 people have been reported missing in the past 5 hours... wait- this just in... a busload of children has apparently disappeared, last seen on Thorn Avenue over 3 hours ago, the bus and all the children simply vanished. Concerned parents have assembled at..."click. " **OH NO**- - it is coming to pass! Darque is starting it all over again! But now...?"

The Swamplands

Jack stumbles upon an abandoned shack. *Never figured the swamps would be this good... my own little bungalow complete with an overflowing outhouse, a front door that let's crocks in at night and snakes, a lot of snakes. But this gives me time to get ready...and some time to myself. There's a chair in front of that TV, the TV probably works- -most folks here just tap off the city's power for electricity... I see it's plugged in... the owners of this house are probably in some croc's stomach too! But this is better than me crawling back to Nettie. I wonder if this TV works?*

Jack sits down and turns on the TV only to see '...disappeared, last seen on Thorn Avenue over 3 hours ago...' "Dammit- - this time *Darque has gone too far!*" His chest starts to glow with energy, apparently an extension of Jack's being, responding to the news as he bolts up from his chair, breaking it into neat little pieces in the process. "This is it! I have had it! Gotta find Nettie to tell me where he is because this is it! The time has come to stop Darque for good! It has begun!"

Nettie's Apartment, New Orleans August 21, 1999 6:17 pm

Jack is thinking while he approaches Nettie's apartment complex *I know Darque knows I am here: I can sense him as well as he can sense me, but Darque has not presented a clear opportunity for me to get at him. It's not like in the past where he always welcomed another chance to fight me... and now this. I know this is Darque's work—I can feel him now more than I ever have before. This is it—the events are unfolding that will lead to my death...no—I can't think like that. Not anymore. I gotta find Nettie, I haven't seen her in over three years. She'll know what's going on and where Darque is hiding... she always has me coming back to her for one reason or another... this time I'll get the info I need from her, and set things right my way... the way they should be.*

Nettie's apartment.



"Nettie? Nettie? Where are you?" *It's unlike her to take off like that- - neighbors haven't seen her for days. What's in there?* as he peers into her bedroom and sees a neatly wrapped package on the middle of the bed, wrapped in leather or some kind of skin.

What's this?? Sure ain't UPS... Better open it, Nettie wouldn't mind, I think. Might tell me where she is. Or might be her 'Victoria's Secret' shipment- HA! Just hope it's not another mask- -I won't be needing that; I need information! Where is Nettie? Where is Darque?

Of all the horrors Jack has seen in his days, this is by far the worst: Nettie, or at least her head. With Darque's tattoos all over. Her face looks calm despite the markings, scratches and bruises throughout. "AAAH!" Jack stumbles back... a neatly folded letter falls out. It's written in blood.

Dear Jack Boniface:

You are cordially invited to meet me at my mansion this evening to discuss the simplest way for you to relinquish your hold on your Shadowman persona and become my undead slave. I know you Jack, I know you more than I have known any other enemy in my days-

I 'll be waiting-

D

Jack reels back and screams out, "Aaah! *DARQUE!!!*"

Master Darque killed Nettie just to get at me! But this time you will lose Darque because this is it! "Master Darque dies tonight! I swear it!!!"



The Mansion of Master Darque. August 21, 1999 9:19 pm

A possessed Jack breathes heavily. He has run, jumped, and climbed all the way to Master Darque's Mansion on overdrive... it's a relatively short distance, but the night was calling him in full glory.

*Gotta kill Darque! Can't let this go on another **second!** Gotta Kill! Gotta Kill!* Shadowman jumps over the twelve foot high spiked gate like it was a fire hydrant. *Zombies! Where are the zombies?? No zombies! Where are the zombies?* The front doors are wide open. Fog is slowly rolling into the house, soft music is coming from inside. Jack Boniface runs straight into the house without a moment's hesitation. And there he is.



"DARQUE!"

A ceremoniously robed Master Darque responds "Jack..." as he cracks a big smile.

Jack howls out, "Die, you son of a bitch!! For everything you have done, for everything you are- -*DIE!*" as he jumps full force at Darque, paying no attention to anything at all but Darque's evil smile.

Darque sees him coming head first and when he is close enough, Master Darque waves his arm and simply brushes him off with his right hand with a devastating force: his powers are too strong and he simply has gone too far at this point, even for a true Shadowman. A deafening BOOM rings out with the release of Darque's Necromantic energy as Jack is tossed across the room head first to crash into a marble column.

In the distance, Ivar gets his answer.

BOOOOOOM!

Ivar runs to the scene. *Darque's Mansion... it's been deserted for days, now here's the lightshow. Here goes... Strange, we're a month ahead of schedule according to the book. Is this a new reality?*

Ivar is free to walk in, the outside gates are swinging open and shut wildly. He runs up to the front doors and walks in, almost expecting to see Dr. Mirage and brother Gil teamed up with Jack collectively kicking the crap out of Darque, but instead, all he sees is Jack on the ground, bleeding badly, trying to fight the invisible constraints Darque is using to hold him back as he draws close... smiling all the way, and Ivar is unable at this point to do anything but watch.

"Now, Jack, are you ready to become my slave forever?" asks Darque with a big grin on his face. "Gggrrrr!!!" Jack growls, unable to move, held in place by Darque's evil powers.

"So glad you could make it this lovely evening. I always like my main course...kicking. Care for an apertif?" as Darque claps his hands, calling out the zombie headless Nettie zombie carrying a silver tray of champagne. She drops the six or so champagne glasses neatly placed on it as she tries her best to walk, despite having two broken legs and no head.

"Oh no..." cries out Jack, as his voice drops.

"Now Jack, you have been a very naughty boy. And now it's time to pay up for being so bad. Are you ready to spend your eternity in hell? Are you ready to give me your powers? Are you ready to fulfill my destiny?" as he cracks a smile.

This does it for Jack; he is beyond words at this point. Totally possessed by the Shadowman energy and driving on 300% adrenaline, his whole body starts glowing in blue energy. He can only make a low growling sound, fighting to break the invisible constraints holding him back while fighting to keep his humanity in what has become his great showdown with Darque. Finally, Jack screams out, his chest explodes, breaking through with the Shadowman's energies at full force... this is not Jack Boniface anymore. It is just a Force.

"Rot in Hell, Darque!!" As the Shadowman pours out his soul at Darque unmercifully, Master Darque can't help but fall back and defend himself.

"This is it, Darque, and you're going *down!*" howls Jack.

Darque tries his best to hold back the forces of a Shadowman, but in the end he cannot and he collapses to the ground defeated.

"Is he dead? Was it that easy?" asks Jack.

Suddenly, Master Darque floats upright, cracks a smile, and speaks. "That was quite impressive, my boy. Come to me, my child!" laughs out Darque, who was playing possum all along to get Jack to release his true Shadowman energies, and all his life essence in the process. "Give it to me now! Give it ALL to me!"

Ivar realizes he can't do a single thing but hide. And it's too late to find help; this war has escalated too far out of his league.

"No!" Screams out Jack, "No—you can't win! Not this time! Not again! For the sake of all humanity, *die!!!*" as Jack resorts to attacking Darque physically, by jumping and going straight for his throat.

"Too late, boy..." as Master Darque waves a finger and Jack is suspended in midair. "Your powers are leaving you—all spent and all mine now. Now I have the powers of the Shadowman! Now get ready for me to show you my full power and consume your soul!"

With a deafening **WHOOM!** Master Darque flings his hands up into the air in full power and becomes a being of pure necromantic energy. Jack is the unfortunate pool for that energy, and Master Darque lets out a deep, bellowing, echoing laugh as he watches all the energies of the Shadowman get sucked into his being, throwing all nature off balance for one moment. Jack Boniface the Shadowman, now only Jack at this point, is the hapless soul caught in the undercurrent.

All Jack can do is murmur "not...supposed to...d..."

"No!" screams out Ivar. "Darque *must* die!".

Ivar sees his one chance at making everything right fall to pieces. He sees the future, he sees 2028, he sees the end of mankind and he realizes this is his chance... humanity's only chance... to stop Darque.

All the planning. All the risking. And with the very Earth in the balance, Ivar watches his one way ticket back shot to hell.

Ivar steps out and says "No! I have to stop it!"

But Master Darque had known all along of Ivar's presence and was waiting for this moment... Master Darque has been waiting the past 100 years for this moment.

"It's about time you showed yourself, Ivar Anni Padda." says Darque with a smile, "My reality was waiting for you to come". Master Darque drops the charred corpse of Jack Boniface and turns his attention to Ivar, who suddenly can't move. He, too, has fallen prey.

"Your compass is the key, you foolish immortal. A god with my knowledge of this Earth, coupled with your device, can stop you from ever existing and remake the world in one effort! Ha ha ha ha ha ha! Now die, immortal... and give me your soul!"

Ivar's worst fear has come to pass. And it's not dying—he has died many times before— it's his fear of screwing up time. It's pretty obvious at this point that this is not his reality anymore: Darque is way too powerful; Jack is dead; Gil and Mirage and nowhere to be seen; and he is about to lose his only ticket out of here and his life to boot.

Ivar looks over to see Jack Boniface in a smoldering pile...a charred corpse as his body is burned to a crisp—he can see Jack all but dead... trying to mouth some words, but nothing comes out of his mouth but dust.

Finally, Jack stops moving.

Jack Boniface is dead.

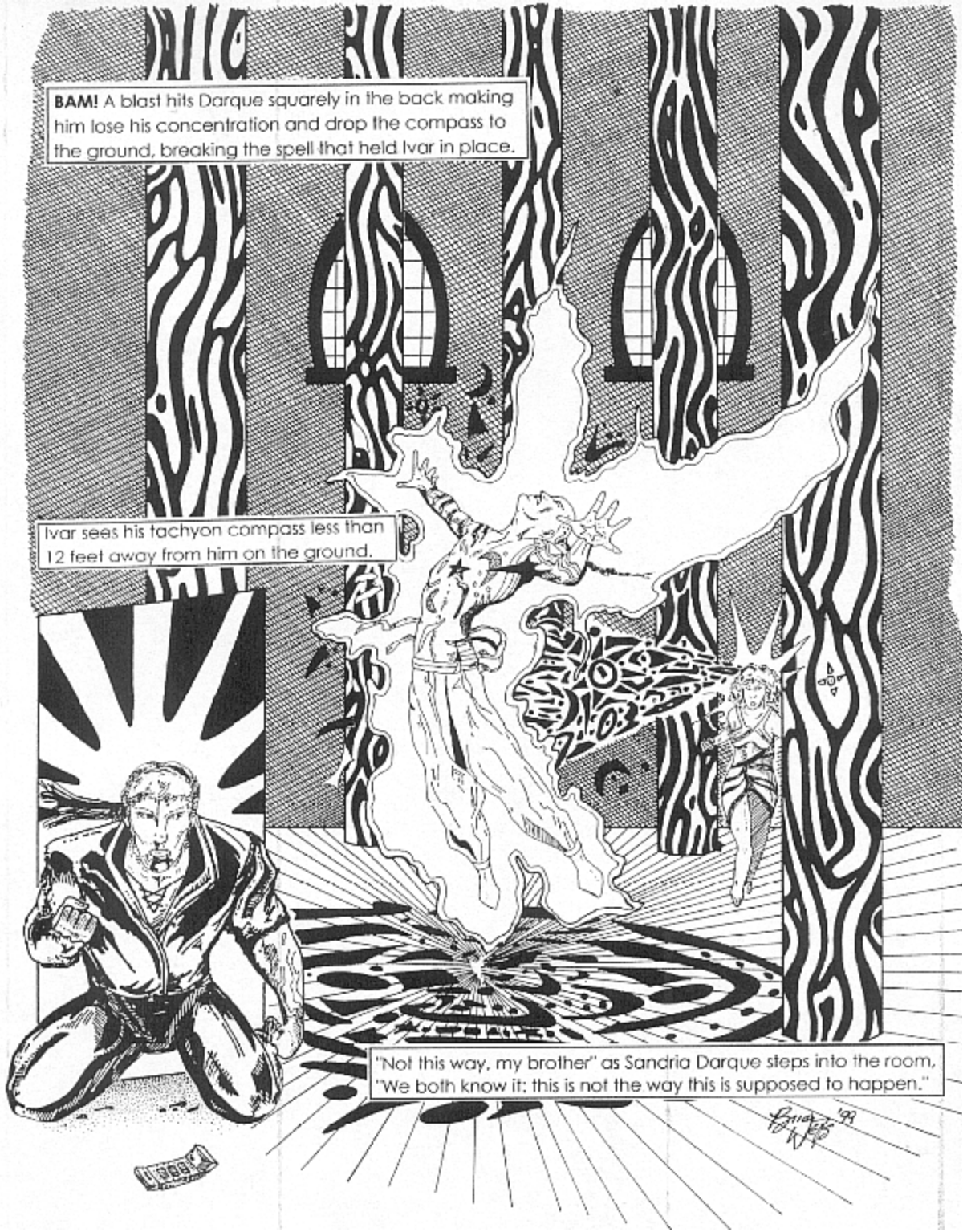
Ivar screams out, "Nooooo!" as a tear wells in his eye. Master Darque speaks, "Now let's see that device you so thoughtfully delivered to me, Immortal!" as the Darque power tugs at the tachyon compass out of Ivar's breast pocket. Ivar tries his best to hold on to it, with both hands, but the Darque power is too strong. Then, it suddenly flies across the room right into Master Darque's hands.

"Finally... the means I need to recreate this world... in my image!"

BAM! A blast hits Darque squarely in the back making him lose his concentration and drop the compass to the ground, breaking the spell that held Ivar in place.

Ivar sees his tachyon compass less than 12 feet away from him on the ground.

"Not this way, my brother" as Sandria Darque steps into the room, "We both know it; this is not the way this is supposed to happen."



"Who cares?" replies Darque. It achieves the same results! And victory is within my grasp. Now step aside, Sandria."

"No. I would rather fight you than let you recreate all reality. You have gotten too powerful, Darque. Remaking this world was never our intention."

"Well, 'our intention' was never my intention... now *back!*" as Darque throws both arms at Sandria, sending a beam of solid energy at her, throwing her back some 20 feet.

Darque speaks: "Now, let's get started! Destination laid out, time to open the time arc..." as he ceremoniously throws both arms into the air.

"Lose something, Darque?" Ivar asks, holding up the compass in his hands.

"That does not matter, you foolish immortal—the timearc will open on my command... I command the Earth itself!!!"

WHOOM! The timearc opens.

Ivar thinks, *This is it... everything has been lost... gotta go back again...my only chance...* "Please!" cries out Ivar as he crawls into the arc with the compass in hand.

"Wait for me, Immortal!" cries out Darque as he steps into the arc, only to be pulled back into the chamber by Sandria. "Damn you, Immortal, you can still ruin my plans!" as he shoots an energy bolt into the timearc! The energy hits Ivar on the right hand, causing him to drop it within the timearc!

"It's gone!" cries out Ivar as he is thrown through time and space. The last sounds he hears as the arc closes behind him are Darque saying to his sister, "Sandria... you've been a naughty girl..."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Place: Unknown

Ivar is lucky: he lands in a big pile of dead leaves. *Everything is lost: Jack is dead; Master Darque won in 1999; and I am permanently stuck here. It's a miracle I'm alive, wherever I am. Where am I? A jungle? Has to be South America for sure as Ivar stands up to take a look around.*

Why would Darque want to timearc to South America? Why not just take a jet?

BOOM

What was that?

BOOM

Sounds like underground explosives or something. I'd better- -

BOOM

- -climb up and see...

BOOM

Ivar climbs a tree only to see...

"A brontosaurus! And pterodactyls flying above! We're in 60 million BC!"

FREAKING lovely! I'm stuck in 60 million BC. No other people, just me and dinos here! Well, it makes sense. Where else would Master Darque want to go to start everything over again than to where it all started? And my timearc- - it's gone! I'm stuck here! 60 million bc! That's a real long time, even for an immortal. Guess I have the next ten million or so years to sort this out.

Time: The Next Day

Ivar has been running over the events that have unfolded before his eyes and realizes that whatever future there is in the 1999 he left behind. *So that's how it all came to pass: Master Darque must have set his plan into effect in 2028 and somehow destroyed the Earth, but how? I have no way of knowing any of this...this sucks!*

I won't see another man for millions of years and my Nefertiti is lost forever. I screwed up time, watched Jack die and barely made it out myself! And I can't get out of here! Even if I could, for what? It's all gonna end in 2028 and I already tried and I can't stop it!

I would rather die than spend the next 60 million years stuck here. I have truly lost everything. Let me just get it over with. Maybe if I'm lucky I'll end up a fossil in a museum. I mean, can't be too hard to die. I could let one of those Tyrannosaurus Rex dinos eat me whole. Nah, I wouldn't want to go out that way.

I'd prefer a quick death. Like getting pancaked by a 100-ton Bronto. That ought to do it. If it doesn't, that would REALLY suck.

This time dying's gonna be the hard part.

The Mansion of Master Darque. August 22, 1999 12:17 AM

A nervous Sandria lies awake in bed thinking.

I HAD to act. That is not how these events should have passed; I of all people should know. Darque hasn't figured out what to do with me yet, he can't kill me, wouldn't kill his sister and lover, but he's holding me here with his powers unable to leave this room. For the first time in over a century, I don't know what's going to happen next.

Suddenly, the door quietly opens and in walks Master Darque.

"Please, brother, don't be mad at me. This is not what we planned for the past 100 years."

"Perhaps you were right, my love, but the moment was upon me and the opportunity was clear and you stopped me."

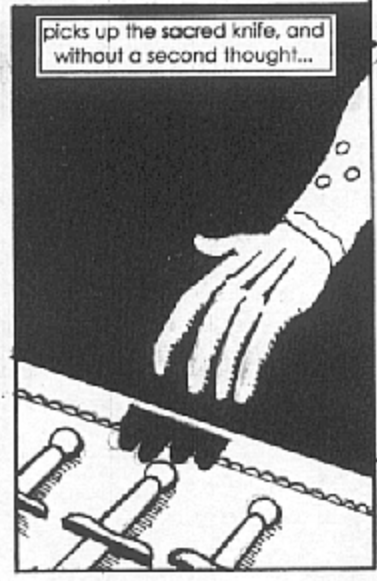
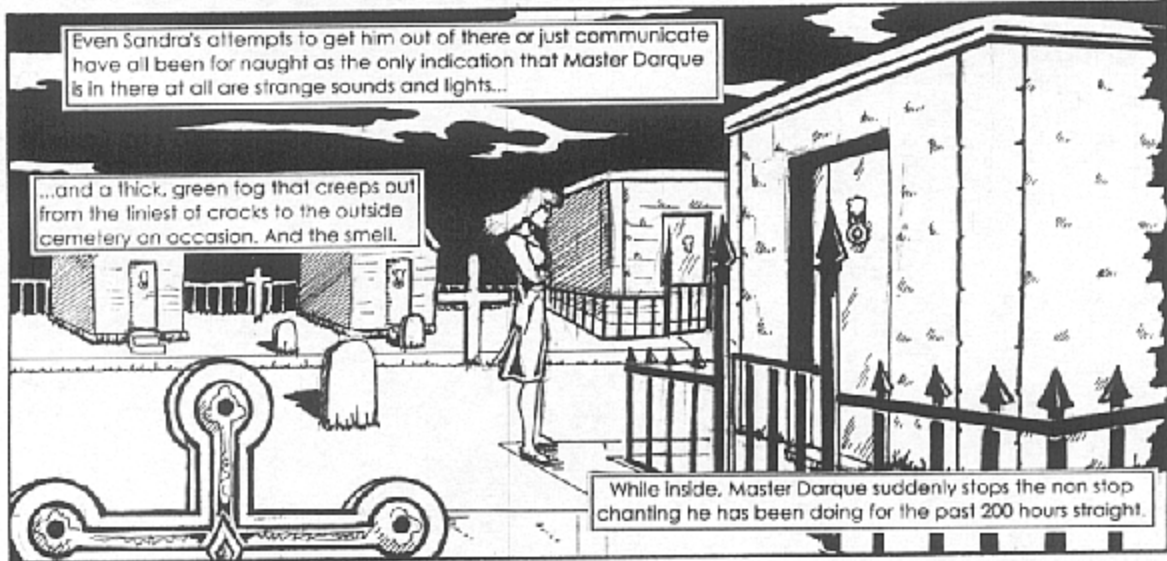
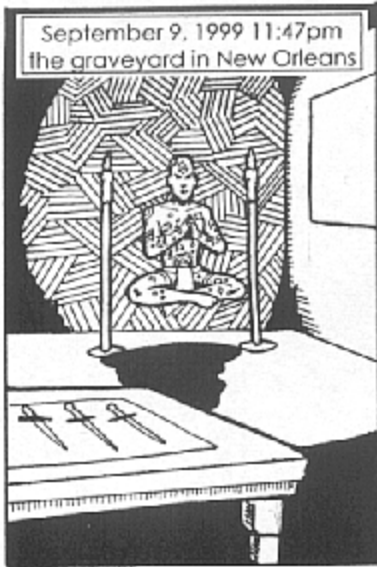
"Only because I love you," replied Sandria, "I want **us** to be together. **We** came to power together and it was your love and magicks that brought me back to you. Above all else that has happened to us this last century, the only thing we have both had is each other. I am here for a reason: to be with you. I'm lonely. Please make love to me."

Darque pauses a second. "Well," replies Darque, "this night was quite productive for me: Jack is dead and I am now more powerful than I have ever been. Perhaps you were right, Sandria. I have a bigger idea, and all the components I need are right over there," pointing to Jack's burned body across the hall.

"So come here, my love" says Darque, "let's love each other again. Tomorrow it all begins anew."

August 27, 1999

It is late and he has been up for days, meditating, planning. Finally the plan comes to form.



"The spells have been prepared, O great one.

"I mix the blood of a Geomancer together with the dust of a Shadowman and the blood from my black heart.

"Let the spell take form."

While Sandria watches the sealed tomb from the outside, she has the time to wonder:

There is only one thing Master Darque could be doing in there all this time and this may be the time for it. I feel the Darque power, too, perhaps almost as strong as my love. This may be the fruition of our plans at long last.

But even Sandria can't help but feel a bit fearful of these strange events now unfolding. Whether her fear is for what's going on inside the tomb, fear of Darque himself, or the uncertain future that lies ahead remains to be seen.

While inside the tomb

The ancient voice at first cracks. It sounds dusty and raspy, like a person who has been asleep for a very long time.

"Whooooo calls upon Khanit the Great?" as the spirit's question echoes throughout the blood-stained walls of the tomb where Buck McHenry rests.

"I, Darque, Master of Necromantic energies. I summon you to bestow upon me your abilities so that your will may be done again."

"The earth has spoken of you... You have many things ahead of you, many obstacles to face...but your ultimate goal is now within reach... Steel yourself and be ready to finally receive my gift."

Meanwhile, in Florida

Doctor Mirage loves watching Carmen sleep. He plays games, imagining what dreams she is having, weaving elaborate stories about them together, forever in each other's arms again, until suddenly he screams out "Aaaah! Darque! He's at it again!"

"Huh? What, Hwen?!" as Carmen wakes up alarmed.

Doctor Mirage hasn't felt this kind of pain in a long time. The shock has sent him flying through the bedroom walls from the sudden shock, up through the walls, through the upper floor and into the attic. He sinks back down towards Carmen in bed, with her calling out to him.

"Hwen! What happened?!" asks Carmen as he phases through the wall back into the bedroom.

"Master Darque... he's pulling all necromantic energies to himself! I can feel myself fading!"

"Hold tight, my love! Stay HERE!" screams out Carmen.

It takes a mighty effort for Doctor Mirage to keep his ghostlike body in form, but he eventually regains control.

"It's Okay now. I feel better. Carmen, something is going on with Master Darque. I gotta find Gil."

"Gilad? I'll page him."

This must be really important, thinks Carmen, for Hwen to cry out for help. I hope this isn't serious, but I'd better call Gil up just in case.

And in space

Solar notices something unusual. *Interesting. An abnormal disbursement of energies. I can feel it coming from the Earth, even this far away. I'd better go check it out; this could be serious.*

While back in the tomb.

Never has he felt such pain. But he refuses to cry out like a stuck pig; that is simply beneath him. Instead, he draws it all in. "Yesssssssss...TRUE power! Absolute control of Necromantic Power! I am one with the elements now!"

Minutes later, Master Darque walks out of the tomb covered with blood and full of renewed purpose, half-smirking to himself at finally getting the power he has spent the last 100 years searching for.

Sandria has long since left the scene.

Master Darque's Mansion, New Orleans September 9th, 1999 3:53 am

My beloved Master Darque has succeeded where so many have come before and failed thinks Sandria as she lies restless in her bed. True control of Necromantic Energy and absolute control over the elements. The 'anti-Mother Earth' if you will. There is nothing he cannot do on this ball of mud known as Earth; Darque is ready at long last.

I still don't know whose side I'm on. I love my brother dearly, but, Jack... this is not how things should have happened, yet they did. Wait! It may not be too late for me to bring Jack back to life- - a Shadowman is not truly dead if someone special can bring him back, someone like me.

After all, it was I who created Jack Boniface, the Shadowman, in 1991; I should be able to do it again.

Suddenly, across the hallway, Sandria hears Darque calling, "Sandria my dear... come to me, please."

He's back! This is my chance! She gets up, quickly puts on a nightgown and walks over to the door that swings open on its own, no doubt at the request of Master Darque.

"Yes, my love?" She replies nervously. Master Darque stands without saying a word.

She speaks softly "I see you were successful, my Master. I feel your power and need your love to make us one once again."

"Exactly my thoughts, my love" replies Darque.

Master Darque ceremoniously starts chanting words that have not been spoken on the Earth in over eight thousand years, while an anxious Sandria disrobes and starts to gently float above the marble floor, entranced by the chanting, bathed in green energies.

"Now, my love, you have your part to play in this act for me...time for you to once again be dead for me. I need back that which I gave you so long ago, my love."

"No, my love: please let...me..." the dark energies angrily envelop Sandria, grabbing her, muffling her cries, and drawing her into Darque's essence. A scant moment later and she becomes a memory.

"My sister is gone and my power is once again mine. Delicious. Now on to serious business."

September 10, 1999 7:02 pm; Sundown

Master Darque is so full of necromantic energy at this point that he simply walks into a the heart of the cemetery and the Earth itself pulls up all the coffins, with all the dead rising in immediate service to him.

"Privacy," he mutters and over 300 of the dead drag their rotted bodies to guard the most unholy of all mausoleums. As he enters, the doors slam shut behind him.

This will take my full necromantic energy. Until now I could conceal my powers from those aware of me, like a card player keeping his royal flush secret by holding a straight face; but I am now trying to breach reality itself to learn the ultimate answers.

At this point, I actually welcome Solar and Doctor Mirage- - I welcome their energies.

"Let it begin."

Ancient evil words are chanted and slowly the energies start to manifest themselves in a way never before seen on Earth or anywhere else.

The tomb starts to crumble from the outside, then crack... and with its century of service to the dead all but a memory, the tomb explodes with a deafening roar from the release of these unspeakable energies.

These energies now expand, engrossing well over half the cemetery, turning trees, tombstones, and earth alike into rubble.

He rises some 20 feet into the air in traditional stance, legs crossed and arms raised to the skies, apparently held aloft by mighty, invisible hands.

And at the very heart of it: Master Darque at his fullest power.

He takes the spell to dangerous levels, chanting again and again, pulling the very life from the newly reborn dead, circling about back into himself, leaving the dead to pile up like rubbish along with everything else within 600 feet of ground zero.

He then redirects the energy back into the spell.

And at the very heart of the spell are two words.

Concentrating, lowering his defenses and offering his enemies perhaps the clearest shot at destroying him ever.

Darque weaves every bit of his evil essence into the spell.

And at the heart of the spell are 2 words:

"Erica Pierce."

And suddenly, Master Darque is no longer in New Orleans.

CHAPTER NINE

I wish upon a star

That daddy won't come

And call me those names

And hurt me

Then teach me a lesson 'cause I cried.

But it never goes away.

I wish upon a star

That daddy won't come

Erica Pierce.

Wha-who? Daddy?

No- I am not your father- - I am your salvation.

Where am I?

You are outside reality, placed there by the beast known as Solar.

*Yes, I remember... I have to get out in time for the reactor to go off and have Unity...
I have to...*

Erica.

What?

That was seven years ago.

What?

That was seven years ago. You lost, and Solar's reality went on. You have been here, reliving the same nightmare for nearly a decade, without a second thought from Solar.

This cannot- - how could this happen?? This is a trick!

I assure you, this is no trick. You are outside reality, if you open your senses you'll see for yourself.

Erica pauses for a moment, focuses and concentrates, then reality, or unreality sets in.

"AAAAAAAGGGGGGGHHHHHH! SOLAR!!! You did this to me!!! Do you think you can just discard me like the Earth you destroyed and move on?!! My hatred for you lives on!!! I swear on all creation: I will destroy you!!!"

Master Darque speaks, "Erica Pierce. I am here to offer you redemption and revenge. And I offer to set things right, the way things should REALLY be."

I WANT REVENGE!

Wanting revenge for something that has already passed is fruitless. I offer you a way to make things right. Right for all times. Right for you. Right for all reality.

This is impossible!!! I planned Unity for TWO THOUSAND YEARS! Failure was not an option!

Erica, I am here to help you. And I am here to destroy that devil Phil Seleski for what he did to you.

Seleski! YES! I want Seleski! I want to see him DIE!

Then let us convene somewhere more...appropriate once you're ready. I have a proposition for you that will make us both very happy.

Who are you again? Did Solar make you, like me made me?

I am Master Darque. I promise to tell you everything you want to know. Now, please focus-this will take a great deal of energy and a wish.

The Mansion of Master Darque, New Orleans. September 24th, 1999 6:11 am

Suddenly, Master Darque and Erica Pierce appear inside Darque's inner sanctum.

Master Darque speaks, "I lost 2 weeks with you in that wormhole. Do you see how time dilates outside reality, Erica? Erica?"

"So I am back in Solar's world. After all the planning I did. I am a failure," says Erica Pierce as she raises her hands to cover her face.

A reassuring Master Darque takes her hand and responds, "That may be, but here is your chance to make everything right for all times."

Their eyes meet for a moment and there is silence.

"I am listening, Darque."

"MASTER Darque my dear. Please be seated."

Pierce takes a seat and Darque speaks: "Necromantic energy is the key for both of us. Necromantic energy is the energy that is normally released when things die. It is readily available in nature, as it has been since creation. Just like the Yin and Yang, all living things need necromantic energy, the "death spark" to create that thing which becomes life. And when that thing dies, it releases a lifetime's worth of energy which pools back into nature and converts to necromantic energy. I have been collecting this energy for quite some time now. I recently unleashed the powers of nature itself by becoming its master and received its abundant flow of necromantic energy, which allowed me to create a break in reality that allowed me to free you. Do you know of necromantic energy?"

"Yes, I know of necromantic energy" replied Erica coldly, "I am empowered."

"Yes. This energy is abundant, as it has been since creation. This free flowing energy is so abundant that it radiates from the Earth into space, both ultimately creating that 'death spark' on other worlds, and beckoning other races to our planet, like the Spider Aliens. The Earth may unintentionally be the father of a million other races as a result. This might also explain why Spider Aliens look so humanoid."

"Spider whos?"

Spider Aliens, or 'Tk-Tha-tnung' in their own language. We wouldn't collectively call ourselves 'water bags of loose flesh', we are human. Solar branded them as 'Spider Aliens' because he thought they looked funny and sentenced them all to die. They existed on this world until Solar uncreated them in the far future, forcing time to unfold in this universe slightly differently, changing a few things along the way. But they don't exist anymore; Solar disliked their benevolent nature and good will and massacred them all. The Earth whispered this to me, another injustice done by the demon Solar."

"That BASTARD!"

"The one thing I could not figure out was where this necromantic energy came from originally. Was it part of nature? If so, why does it exist only on our planet? The only thing I can figure is that the necromantic energies of the first dying world created the death spark that created this world and empowered Solar as we know him. I have been collecting this natural energy for some time and tapping into the natural pool on Earth. And this is the key for both of us."

"Hold on Darque- -" Pierce cuts in, "Seleski was empowered by the nuclear energies of the reaction at the Muskogee Power plant meltdown on the first world, the real world. That is where he became empowered. It was his 'wish machine' that made this horrible reality possible in the first place."

"Agreed. At least initially. Does the power of one meltdown and its released powers have enough energy to remake a world? I don't think so. Having...acquired these newfound abilities recently, I was able to make the Earth give up its very secrets, and Seleski's reactor was in fact nothing more than a 'dream machine', a means for him to become empowered... initially. The subsequent sun he absorbed- -"

"Hold on- - so THAT'S where he went when he disappeared and came back so powerful! He created a black hole and..."

"Yes," added Darque. "He became powerful, but the point is: it was not until he destroyed the Earth by becoming a black hole himself and he absorbed all the necromantic energies from the past 9 billion years that he was finally able to say, 'I wish this would stop', and it was so: the necromantic energies empowered him to god-status and gave him the ability to make his dreams come true."

"So THAT'S why he was so much more powerful than me! And that's why I needed 2,000 years and my machine to make true what he could simply call upon!"

"Yes, that, and the other difference between you and he: He absorbed the other 2 Seleski/Solar personas when this reality was remade and became one empowered Solar; you simply killed your double. So the chips were stacked against you from day one: it's Solar's world and you're just a small part of it. Accept it and move on."

"So it's pointless then, Darque," replied Pierce.

"MASTER Darque. No- - it's not pointless at all. This is the main point: necromantic energy created Solar, so necromantic energy can empower you to recreate reality, and necromantic energy can kill Solar. You just need enough of it: say 9 billion years' worth, give or take."

"So you're saying I have to wait nine billion years and become the siphon you have been for the past however many years for necromantic energy to flow to me to become as powerful as Solar," replies Erica as her arms fold, perhaps thinking about blinking Master Darque out of existence for a moment.

"Technically, yes. But there is an easy way and a hard way to do this, and this is at the heart of my proposition to you, Erica Pierce."

"I'm listening, Master Darque."

"Right now I am empowered, more powerful than I have even been before. My petty enemies are no threat to me anymore as I focus my attention on my true enemy: Solar and his meddling in my affairs and this very reality. Like you, I wish for a better world- - *my world*. Together, it could be *your world, our world*. And Solar? He's in the way. But I am not powerful enough. I roughly have the same powers Solar had in the real world after the meltdown, before this pale version of reality was created. I need more power, a lot more. I need your power."

Erica Pierce bolts up from the chair and points at Darque. "Now wait a minute here, mister Darque. You expect me to give you my power?? You've got to be kidding! I could erase you particle by particle right now. You'd be a smear running from here to Jupiter within a heartbeat should the mood come upon me!"

Master Darque takes hold of her hand. "Darling, you have the power, but not the capacity, to grasp what is at hand here and that was your initial failing. I offer you your reality. I offer you redemption...now. I offer you revenge...now. You empower me with your abilities and I will draw Solar out. And when the moment is right, I will unleash all my energy back at the Earth, totally destroying the sham of a reality it is in the process.

"Then I will draw in all the necromantic energies of a dead planet with 9 billion souls and direct it at Solar. It will end with Solar gone for good and more than enough energy left over for you to recreate the Earth, the REAL Earth. All I ask in return for this new utopia is for you to funnel the abundant necromantic energy into my being. Call it my retirement plan; I wish to sit back and watch and delight in the failings of man and ultimately receive the necromantic energy of the Earth's souls from day one through eternity."

"Interesting, Master Darque. So you want me to become god in my own world and you...?"

"The devil. Delicious. And this can be as real as reality is, you only have to agree. Do you agree?"

"YES!"

"From here, Erica, it's all in the planning. Are you ready?"

"Ready to kill Solar?? I have been ready for two millennia."

"Then stand back as I summon a portal to take us behind the curtain of reality. After that, it all comes down to drawing out Solar."

WHOOM!

CHAPTER TEN

60 million BC, minus 1 day

These damn Brontosaurus! They must migrate like elephant in Africa- I can't find one anywhere, or any other dino for that matter! I knew killing myself wouldn't be easy. This is stupid, me stuck here with nowhere to go and a whole lot of time on my hands! If I had one wish, it would be to go back to 1999 and kill Master Darque with my bare hands!

I gotta find somewhere to sit and think this out.

Ivar continues to walk amidst the jungles until he comes to a mountain range separating the land. *Maybe I'm in Disneyworld or Jurassic Park or something! There! The first positive thought in days! Might as well climb to see what there is to see. I can always jump off the top and see what happens- - great, now I'm resorting to bad "death jokes."*

Maybe I could start a race of people. Yeah right- - "the little people... of Stonehenge!" This is stupid- - anything CLOSE to resembling man is right now on all fours eating bananas in a tree up above. Boy, wouldn't THAT suck? Me accidentally killing the first proto-human and wiping out all humanity in the process!

Ivar climbs to the top of the mountain only to see

"Lovely...MORE Dinos!" What was I expecting, Las Vegas? But wait- they're not moving! They're frozen in place. Hmmm, maybe they're standing up and sleeping. I know cows do that. Is that how dinosaurs sleep? Look! Over there- a bronto asleep with his left foot in the air! If ever there was a chance to lie down and go with dignity, this is it. He'll wake up and I'll become prehistoric roadkill.

Ivar climbs down the mountain and cautiously approaches the Brontosaurus.

Gotta...be...real...quiet... "AW- WHO AM I KIDDING?! This thing is 100 feet high! I could be shooting off rockets and it wouldn't even notice!"

Lemme see, thinks Ivar, as he lies down underneath the mighty dino's foot, 'here lies Ivar, friend to us all.' Nah. 'Here lies Ivar, the Timewalker' No way- - I wouldn't want to be known as the Timewalker who ran out of time! 'Here lies Ivar, and why not?' Yeah, that'll work! Now if I could only find someone to make me a tombstone...

Some time later.

"WAKE UP YOU STUPID DINOSAUR!" Dammit- I've been lying here for hours! I've planned my will four times; I even have my own eulogy prepared. Now all I need is this stupid dino to finish the job! "HEY!!! WAKE UP!!!"



Suddenly, Ivar hears a voice from faraway:

"Look! There he is! Ivar Anni Padda? Is that you?"

Great, now I'm hallucinating too!

"IVARI!"

What?! Who...? thinks Ivar as he spins around to see where that voice is coming from.

"It's Geoff McHenry, the Geomancer! And Archer! And Armstrong! They figured a way to rescue me!"

"Oh- - Sh... that's Archer! Obidiah Archer! And he's young! So that means Armstrong is not far behind! They figured a way to rescue me!!"

"Archer!" cries out Ivar as Archer draws close.

"At your service," replied Archer as he bows humbly to Ivar.

"Hey kid! Don't forget about me here, too!" yells out Aram from the top of the hill as he trips and falls down the steep hill face first, falling to the bottom.

"I told you guys he would be here," says Geoff McHenry, Geomancer.

Ivar speaks "How did you guys get to this time to rescue me? That's what you're here for, right?" asks Ivar as they are all now together.

Geoff replies "All times are here, Ivar. You're in the Lost Land."

"Holy- - so THAT was Darque's plan!" replies Ivar, "I'm not in 60 million BC? Whew!"

"Yeah, brother," replies Aram, "but you're stuck in the Lost Land, like us >burp<"

"Master Darque?" asks Geoff, "I knew this would come to pass, that we would finally get our ticket back to Earth."

Ivar replies, "Waitaminute- - you're stuck here too?? I don't have my tachyon compass anymore, Aram. I thought you were sent here to get me. What's going on??"

"Mister Ivar? Gentlemen?" speaks Archer, "Perhaps we could go somewhere less...out in the open now," as he sees a flock of pteros overhead.

"Watch out!" cries Aram, "incoming bird shit! I was hit by one of them pteros, stinks like hell."

"We know," say Archer and Ivar in unison.

"Okay, kid: you got the rear; I'll take the lead. Load that crossbow of yours just in case. Everyone run!"

The group go into the nearby cave. Inside are supplies and food and blankets and a fire ready to be started.

Geoff speaks first:

"We were drawn to this Lost Land by Dr. Eclipse in the last moments of Chaos at the command of Master Darque."

"I remember" says Ivar, "I just didn't realize you were THAT Geoff."

"Yes, I know" replied Geoff, "All times are as one here. We have been here for years mostly trying to keep alive and searching for an exit back to our time."

"Where are we?" asks Ivar.

"In the Lost Land, but outside are dino-robs, evil machinations created by Dr. Noel. In 4001, Dr. Noel found a doorway to the Lost Land and set up shop here, complete with 41st century technology and dino-robs in case they had any trouble and needed enforcers. He wanted a better place, and this was it. But the locals wouldn't have it and it started off a war that sent Magnus here for the first time into the Lost Land.

In the end, Noel tried escaping back to his time in the Brontosaurus you were... relaxing under, but Magnus pulled the plug and left him here. He eventually escaped and made it back to the 41st century through this cave, but left all this technology behind."

"So," asks Ivar, "this is a way back to Earth?"

"Yes," replies Geoff. "At least the 41st century Earth, if that is where you want to go."

Archer was meditating; Aram was sleeping close to the fire.

Ivar speaks "Geoff, I don't think there is a 41st century Earth."

"WHAT?!!" replies Geoff.

"The Earth I left was in 1999... I was lucky to escape alive, Darque had just killed Shadowman and I was next. The future of the Earth I left ends in 2028 when it gets destroyed. I know; I was there."

Geoff replies "Well, time is absolute here, but reality on Earth is not." Geoff pauses a second. "Perhaps we could find a way to alter Unity, if we dared, to change its outcome if there is no Earth to go back to.."

"I tried that already," replied Ivar. "I was here, during Unity. I changed some stuff and I thought the outcome would bring the correct future back into play, but I think I failed. There is no future to go home to."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Mansion of Master Darque, New Orleans. September 24th, 1999 6:47 am

"From here, Erica, it's all in the planning. Are you ready?"

"Ready to kill Solar?? I have been ready for two millennia."

"Then stand back as I summon a portal to take us behind the curtain of reality, then it all comes down to drawing out Solar."

WHOOM!

Outside Space And Time

"I hate this stinking place!" cries out Erica.

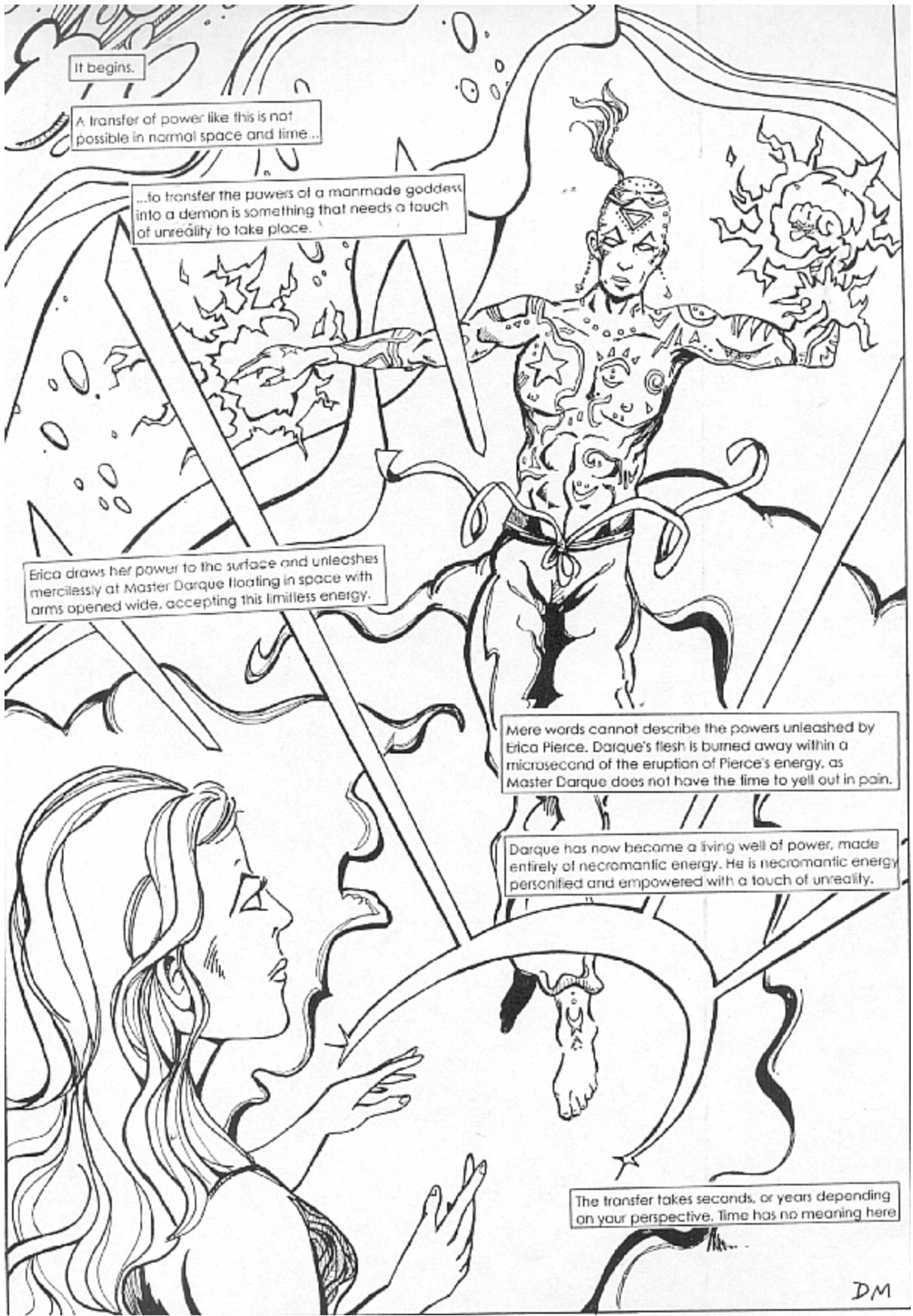
"Please, are you ready?" asks Master Darque.

"If this kills Solar, then I have BEEN ready!"

"Then please start," says Darque.

"But wait- -" says Erica "If this is a trick, I will find a way to destroy you, I swear it."

"Erica Pierce, you have my word: this is not a trick; this is a reality in its conception."



It begins.

A transfer of power like this is not possible in normal space and time...

...to transfer the powers of a manmade goddess into a demon is something that needs a touch of unreality to take place.

Erica draws her power to the surface and unleashes mercilessly at Master Darque floating in space with arms opened wide, accepting this limitless energy.

Mere words cannot describe the powers unleashed by Erica Pierce. Darque's flesh is burned away within a microsecond of the eruption of Pierce's energy, as Master Darque does not have the time to yell out in pain.

Darque has now become a living well of power, made entirely of necromantic energy. He is necromantic energy personified and empowered with a touch of unreality.

The transfer takes seconds, or years depending on your perspective. Time has no meaning here

DM

When it is done, very little is left of Erica, just a burned out shell of a person drifting in unreality.

"Now you sit tight and I swear I will be back and it will begin anew," says Master Darque as he mentally opens a portal back to reality.

August 14, 2028 4:37pm

New Orleans

SHHWHOOM! The portal opens in the mansion of Master Darque and out steps a living god bathing the grand ballroom in light. Darque's house has been kept in immaculate condition; his many undead servants have seen to that over the years. The marble column has even been replaced. The outside garden has grown into a jungle, though, and the outside gates are rusted shut. *Undead servants- can't live with 'em, can't kill 'em* ponders Darque.

What is the date? Bah! it does not matter, for this world will die now! All my petty spells and magicks from the past are NOTHING compared to the awesome, raw power now at my control. I am no longer of flesh and blood; I have become a god!

Meanwhile, 217 miles above Earth's Orbit

Solar stands. He has been standing for the past 29 years, not moving or blinking, just watching the Earth from the orbiting space station he built back in 1999, waiting.

Solar was through with mankind and the Earth way back in 1996, but he sensed the energy buildup some 29 years ago in 1999 and knew that sooner or later this would happen. And it is now.

For the first time in nearly 3 decades, Solar moves. *There. There it is* as he feels that powerful, unearthly power that called him back so long ago. And the source is...*Master Darque! But it is not. He has become empowered! He must be stopped now! This is bad, as bad as can be. Darque has become too powerful, and there aren't too many places he could have been for the past 30 years. I know something BIG is about to happen.*

Can't let Darque stay this empowered. Someone with those powers and his itinerary only spells trouble, and like it or not, this is MY Earth!

Solar floats through the walls of the space station and towards Earth.

Meanwhile, Master Darque senses Solar and patiently waits.

Ah! I have his attention! I see he is coming. It won't be long now. I have to execute

this carefully. Solar is still too powerful for me, so I must do this right, so he won't even see it coming. Soon it will all be over. He must have been waiting all this time for me. I knew he was on to me. Feh, it does not matter, or will not matter soon. The fool: to stand around for 30 years, waiting to die.

There. America. Louisiana, Solar says to himself as he enters the Earth's atmosphere.

Master Darque sits down in his antique 14th century Carpathian chair and waits patiently. Then, Solar floats into the room.

"Darque!" calls out Solar. "We have to talk!"

"We have nothing to talk about, you idiot!" replies Darque, "Did you miss me? Did you wait up for me? How long did you wait, Seleski?" as Darque stands.

"Look, I have nothing against you personally, Darque, but you have gotten too powerful. You must be stopped now before you screw things up more than they already are for this Earth."

"Ah, **this** Earth," replies Darque. "This Earth **is** the problem; specifically, it is in my way. The time has come to start changing things around here," as Darque summons his Geomantic abilities to cause chaos throughout the planet!

And it begins!

Pompeii: After 2,000 years, Mount Vesuvius erupts!

Washington State: Mount St. Helena erupts!

"Damn you, Darque- you'll kill everyone! You're killing millions right now! Stop this madness!"

California collapses into the Pacific Sea!

Japan is GONE!

"Time to pay the price for your mistake, Solar!"

The ice caps at the North Pole erupt!

People all over the world are dying as the planet is ripped apart. This is the end of everything! Families scramble to their basements in fear, holding each other as their houses collapse upon them.

Over 600 million drown in Japan; 100 million on the West Coast, USA!

Over 2,000 volcanos have erupted in the past 5 minutes!

Australia breaks into four parts and sinks into the sea, killing over 60 million people as the angry Earth erupts in full fury at itself.

This is the end.

And at the heart of it is Master Darque drawing in all the necromantic power.

"This has to stop **now!**" screams out Solar as he lashes out at Darque with his full power! Darque merely absorbs the energy.

"Too late, you pathetic would-be god. You're too late. All you can do is watch!"

The carnage continues worldwide as millions more die horribly. Cultists are praying for His return, survivalists are killing everyone within range, and realists are running to their spacecrafts:

This is the end.

Solar thinks, *This could really be it! I have to stop him. He has the power to destroy the Earth and very soon he will!*

The sea level rises 200 feet causing tidal waves that wipe out the eastern seaboard and kill millions!

Master Darque rises into the air, and the necromantic energies flowing into him follow. As does Solar.

I'm not about to watch as he destroys everything- - I must act now! as Solar lunges towards Darque.

"Caught in a web, Solar?" as Darque turns his attention to Solar momentarily. Solar is suddenly frozen still, unable to move.

Darque speaks, "I can't suck up your power, Seleski, but I have something special planned for you. Just give me a few more minutes. Relax and enjoy the show!"

North America explodes!

South America is gone!

Africa is gone!

Then the entire Earth starts to shake. Perhaps it's the biggest earthquake of all. Perhaps Mother Earth is giving up the fight. Over 7 billion dead...

Then...

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The entire planet Earth explodes!

11 billion dead! Master Darque quickly absorbs all the necromantic energy of their lives, and the energy of the Earth itself that has been stored for the past nine billion years and, for a moment, Master Darque shines brighter than the sun.

Solar is still unable to move. *This is it. I just hope he loses his concentration for a - -*
"The Earth is Gone! Everyone is dead!"

It takes quite a while for Master Darque to suck up every last drop of energy from what was the Earth. But at last it finally ends.

"Phil... here is your reward for your foolishness."



Master Darque opens a portal to unreality and draws out Erica Pierce. "Now I will keep my end of the bargain as we agreed, right Pierce? Revenge."

"Revenge," replies Pierce.

This is the end of the Valiant Universe

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Lost Land

Geoff travels deep into the cavern close to the gateway to the 41st century and picks up a rock. He holds it for a few seconds, then drops it and reels in horror "AAAAH!"

Archer immediately springs into action, crossbow in hand, running to Geoff's aid. "I'm fine, Archer. It's what this rock told me. Let's go back to the front of the cave; I have some horrible news!"

Ivar and Aram are waiting for them to return. "You are right, Ivar. There is no 41st century on the other end of the portal. The Earth is gone!"

"Gone?" asks Aram. "So we're stuck here?"

"Much worse than that, Aram," replies Geoff. "There is no 41st century for the heroes of Unity to return to! And if the Earth was destroyed in 2028 as Ivar says, there never was a 41st century! This is bad!"

Ivar speaks "Hold on- - this might not be **that** bad. If there never was a 41st century, then there never was a Dr. Noel, right?"

"Normally, yes" replies Geoff.

"But the machines are still there, right? I mean, if there never was a 41st century, then that big bronto outside would have never been there in the first place, right?"

"Yes. But we are in the Lost Land. Normal logic does not apply here..."

"In a twisted way, it does. If the 41st century never existed, then these robot dinos wouldn't, either, but they do. So at some point in relative time there was a future... but not now. So it's simple: we just need a way to get back to the Earth BEFORE 2028 and stop Darque, right? I mean, I just can't accept the alternative and give up. We gotta do something!"

"Sounds good to me, brother," replies Aram. "Hey- - I don't want to see the Earth destroyed. I'd miss wine, and my art collection, and my..."

Archer cuts in, "What Mr. Armstrong is trying to say, sir, is that we would like to help in any way possible to stop this from happening."

Ivar speaks, "I already ran this through my mind in the time I have been here. If I had my tachyon compass and could go to any one place, there is only one place I

would want to go back to: 1999 where I would stop Darque myself!"

"Tell me more about what happened to you," Geoff commands.

"Well, I was at one point in 2002 AD and I realized that Jack Boniface was still alive. He was supposed to die in 1999 while stopping Darque, that I know, I was there before, er, after the fact. But when that event took place, it was September, 1999, and Gil and Doctor Mirage and Shadowman together stopped Darque, at the cost of Jack's life.

"Then I went back in time to 1999 and watched as the events unfolded in **August** 1999- -, not September- - and Gilad and Mirage were nowhere to be seen. Darque won and I ended up here, almost like it was a different world. Time changed somewhere along the road, maybe more than once, that is, for the reality you and I came from- - the same reality that had a 41st century- - it wasn't that same time. I 'fixed' time in 1991 when I came here to Unity and changed it a little bit, but that didn't do it- - it only made it worse. Instead of Shadowman wiping out Darque and going on to a long and healthy life, he died in 1999 and Master Darque won. And the new earth is gone! We have to stop this!"

"Agreed," replies Geoff. "We have to find a way back to the late 1990s and change reality itself!"

"And beer!" yells out Aram.

...

"Well," says Geoff, "there is only one way for us to get out of the Lost Land. This plan of yours could technically work, especially since I left the Earth in 1996 and haven't been back. My being there would change time; I just have to change the events of 1999 and stop Darque no matter what!"

"Yeah!" said Aram, "we gotta find what's-his-face- - **Magnus!** He can take us back!"

"**No!**" says Geoff. "The last thing we want to do is disrupt the flow of Unity, and Solar, who I'm sure you're referring to, was the biggest part of it. Our only way out of there is to find an exit, like this one, that takes us back to the 1990s."

"Agreed," says Ivar. "Let's go."

The team headed out that day with a renewed purpose and clear objective: to restore time so there is a future, and set the sequence of events into motion that would lead to the correct future. And it wasn't easy to do either; the Lost Land is quite large. And considering they had to stay away from a good part of it, they were

left with weeks of searching jungles, traveling across deserts and even traversing oceans until they finally found it.

Unity: Day 79

Archer climbs to the top of the hill for the 100th time scouting for signs of 1990's Earth in the Lost Land. This time he gets lucky. "It's here! I found it!" cries out Archer to everyone else.

"What makes you say that?" responds Armstrong.

"Archer may be right," adds Geoff. "Look: we are in a land resembling 1990's Earth. Bits and pieces of all times are here so it would make sense that some part of the late 20th century would be here, as well as a way to and from here. Now we just need to find the exit."

It was a short distance to where this part of the Lost Land begins, a small town in America resembling 1990's earth. "Where is everyone?" asked Ivar. "Lord knows how long this land has been here. The people from this time have probably moved on to other parts of the Lost Land, as in other places we've seen here. We just need to find the portal back to Earth. Now spread out everyone, and yell if you find it!"

The team spreads out with each member looking for something out of the ordinary. Geoff walks off erratically, perhaps following echoes of long gone voices. Ivar starts a perimeter search, starting at one point, and searching every building in this small town door by door. Archer climbs to the top of one of the buildings and scouts. Aram inspects the bars for exits from the Lost Land.

Some time later, an intoxicated Armstrong stumbles out of a bar onto the street and yells out, "Here it is, folks!" Everyone quickly assembles.

"Where, sir?" asks Archer.

"Over there >burrp<" replies Aram as he stumbles back to the bar. Everyone follows.

"You're drunk!" says Ivar.

"That may be, but look- -" as Aram points to a phone booth in the back of the bar, "that's where the empties go and don't come back."

"Let me see this," says Geoff as he cautiously approaches the phone booth and places a hand on the outer glass, careful not to get sucked into it. "Yes...Yes.. Guys- - this is it! This will take us back to our time."

"You knew about the gateway and you stayed here all this time getting loaded??" asks Ivar.

"Hey, little brother, I needed a drink. All of this searching made me thirsty and besides, I had nowhere to put the empties."

"Well, at least he found it," added Geoff. "Are we ready?"

"All aboard!" yells out Aram as he jumps head first into the phone booth only to disappear!

"I guess he was right," says Ivar.

"Everyone ready?" says Geoff.

Archer, Ivar and Geoff step into the booth and are gone.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Charlotte, North Carolina September 10, 1996 11:17pm

Archer, Ivar, and Geoff step out of the booth and back to Earth. "Careful guys," says Aram, pointing to the 40 plus empty beer cans on the ground. "Don't trip. I need more beer..."

In the days and months that followed, Geoff was relentless in his crusade to recruit help against the Darque power. He knew it was coming soon and needed every hero he could find. The Harbinger renegades were reassembled in late 1998 at the request of Gilad, who was the first to rally to the cause. Doctor Mirage quickly followed suit as did Bloodshot and the Secret Weapons team. Magnus, who was on extended stay in 20th century Earth, joined the team as well. Ninjak was the last to join, as Geoff worked non-stop to assemble the mightiest arsenal against Master Darque.

New York City July 15, 1999 6:13 am. Gilad's apartment

"Gil, still no word on Aric, the X-O Manowar?" asks Geoff as he was thinking through the plan for the 1,000th time in his head.

"Geoff, I don't know how long you were lost in the Lost Land but I told you, there is no 'Aric XO' here. And there never was. The only Aric I ever knew was a very long time ago in history, the one from Unity."

"Yes! That one!" said Geoff.

"That Aric is not from this time, he is from the past. The only other hero from Unity who is out of their time and with us is Magnus, from the 41st century."

"And Shadowman?" asks Geoff.

"Shadowman has not been seen for nearly three years. Everyone found out he was Jack Boneface or something and he went into hiding or disappeared. And let me answer your next question before you ask me again: no, I have not seen Solar, either. Not for over three years."

"Gil- - I gotta step out for a moment and catch up with Ivar, okay? Just keep in touch with the Harbingers in case we have to spring into action, and keep Bloodshot's internal beeper number handy just in case."

"Yes, Geoff, I know."

Midtown Manhattan 7:11 am

Geoff thinks *Here's his house. I still don't know how he can afford this stuff.* "Ivar?" calls out Geoff.

"Yeah, I'm coming down- - hold on." Three minutes later they walk to Central Park.

"Ivar, I don't know how much of being a Geomancer is paranoia, but we have to talk about the future again."

"I figured that," replied Ivar, "Let's talk." They sit at a park bench.

"It starts in August or September, that's for sure. The starting point in both worlds was when a schoolbus full of kids disappeared in New Orleans. Originally, Gilad and Dr. Mirage traveled to New Orleans because of the abnormal flow of energies Mirage noticed for the past few days. That was a signal for him to investigate, and Gil came along in case of trouble. Darque has been in hiding for quite some time up until then. They catch up to Shadowman and together they battle Darque. Then, the second time around it starts in August, and it's Jack against Darque and Jack loses. But this time it'll be everyone against Darque, another version."

"Are you scared?" asks Geoff.

"I'm scared of the future and what it could turn out to be, that's for sure. Remember: I've been through this ordeal twice already and both times it was a disaster. I just hope everything turns out right this time, because I don't know if it's possible to do this again. And with my time arc device gone, I'm stuck here."

"I think it's time we moved out operation down south and get ready" says Geoff.

"Agreed. I will call Magnus who is already there and tell him we're on our way. You contact the Harbingers, and tell Gil it's time."

New Orleans, July 24, 1999

The team assembles in the Hotel Royale in New Orleans. Gilad's MI-5 Platinum credit card covers the bill and they set up operations, taking over the entire 28 room hotel.

"Now all we have to do is wait," says Gilad.

August 21, 1999 7:01pm

Ivar walks out of the shower and turns on the TV in his hotel room in horror to see "...continued disappearances are coming in all over the New Orleans as over 27 people have been reported missing in the past 5 hours. Wait- this just in... a busload of children has apparently disappeared, last seen on Thorn Avenue over 3 hours ago, the bus and all the children simply vanished. Concerned parents have assembled at..."click.

"OH NO- it is coming to pass again! Darque is starting it all over again! Geoff! Get everyone together! It's time!!!"

8:37pm The Hotel Royale

In attendance are Ivar, Gilad, Aram, Archer, Magnus, Geoff, Pete Stanchek, Charlene Du Pre, Faith Herbert, Bloodshot and his Secret Weapons, Doctor Mirage and Ninjak.

Geoff steps forward and speaks: "This is the time we have all been preparing for: Master Darque is ready for his showdown with Shadowman, wherever he is. We're going to need a team effort here, folks. Bloodshot, your team's job is to distract Darque so everyone else can get at him. Mirage, your job will be to control the flow of Necromantic energy within the room if you can. You're also our backup plan if we fail. Gil and Aram, you're there to see that everything goes smoothly and to keep Darque on his toes. Magnus- - with your Harbinger abilities, you can take Darque on hand to hand- - do your best. Pete- - your team is the second assault. Ninjak- - you stick with Bloodshot. Everyone else, be prepared to act. This is the toughest fight you've ever had and the stakes have never been higher. Ivar?"

"Thank you, Geoff. I have been here before, and I have seen Darque win this battle. You already know what fate awaits planet Earth if we don't succeed now. There is no turning back. Any questions?"

There is silence within the room.

"Then let's go."

The team of 16 heroes fly out of the hotel under Pete's power, and head straight for Master Darque's mansion.

The Mansion of Master Darque. August 21, 1999 9:19 pm

A possessed Jack breathes heavily. He has run, jumped, and climbed all the way to Master Darque's Mansion on overdrive... it's a relatively short distance, but the night was calling him in full glory.

*Gotta kill Darque! Can't let this go on another **second!** Gotta Kill! Gotta Kill!*

Shadowman jumps over the twelve foot high spiked gate like it was a fire hydrant. *Zombies! Where are the zombies?? No zombies! Where are the zombies?* The front doors are wide open. Fog is slowly rolling into the house, soft music is coming from inside. Jack Boniface runs straight into the house without a moment's hesitation.

"Look!" shouts out Ninjak from up high. "There is Shadowman! Just like predicted!"
"Yes," replies Bloodshot. "I'm ready and it looks like this party is about to get started...
Lock and load everyone!"

"Here we go folks," says Pete.

While inside

"*DARQUE!*" screams out Shadowman.

A ceremoniously robed Master Darque responds "Jack..." as he cracks a big smile.

Jack howls out, "*Die*, you son of a bitch!! For everything you have done, for everything you are—*DIE!*" as he jumps full force at Darque paying no attention to anything at all but Darque's evil smile. Darque sees him coming head first and when he is close enough, Master Darque waves his arm and simply brushes him off with his right hand with a devastating force: his powers are too strong and he simply has gone too far at this point, even for a true Shadowman. A deafening BOOM rings out with the release of Darque's Necromantic energy as Jack is tossed across the room head first to crash into a marble column.

The team land on Darque's front lawn. "There they are- - inside! Everyone spread out!"

Moments later

"Now, Jack, are you ready to become my slave forever?" asks Darque with a big grin on his face. "Ggggrrrr!!!" Jack growls, unable to move, held in place by Darque's evil powers.

"So glad you could make it this lovely evening. I always like my main course...kicking. Care for an apertif?" as Darque claps his hands, calling out the zombie headless Nettie zombie carrying a silver tray of champagne. She drops the six or so champagne glasses neatly placed on it as she tries her best to walk, despite having two broken legs and no head.

"Oh no..." cries out Jack as his voice drops.

"Now Jack, you have been a very naughty boy. And now it's time to pay up for

being so bad. Are you ready to spend your eternity in hell? Are you ready to give me your powers? Are you ready to fulfill my destiny?" as he cracks a smile.

"No!" Screams out Jack, "No- -you can't win! Not this time! Not again! For the sake of all humanity, *die!!!*" as Jack resorts to attacking Darque physically, by jumping and going straight for his throat.

"Too late, boy..." as Master Darque waves a finger and Jack is suspended in midair. "Your powers are leaving you—all spent and all mine now. Now I have the powers of the Shadowman! Now get ready for me to show you my full power and consume your soul!

Darque has this battle won again as a helpless Jack once again is caught.

Suddenly...

SHHHHHA-BOOM The Napalm hits Master Darque and all the windows shatter, throwing him off guard for a moment allowing Jack to break free of his grasp.

"This is one tough cookie!" yells out Bloodshot as he drops his missile launcher and resorts to his 9mm as he jumps through the broken stained glass windows, doing his best to distract Darque.

"Remember, this is a team effort" replies Geoff McHenry, Geomancer, from outside. Magnus and the Secret Weapons team rush in as another distraction.

"You must be stopped, Darque... now!" calls out Doctor Mirage as he comes forth to face his enemy.

"Ah! So the play's afoot!" replies Darque. "So be it!"

Magnus runs in and lands several robot-smashing punches which apparently don't have any effect on Darque.

Flamingo quickly runs in and yells out to Darque. "Take this sugah," Magnus quickly jumps out of harm's way as she unleashes quite an impressive fireball at Darque that, combined with Bloodshot's bullets and Ninjak's throwing stars, causes Darque to fall back. Flamingo quickly grabs Jack and drags him outside.

"Hai-Ya!" screams out Archer as he lunges forward, but Darque simply looks at Archer and the Earth swallows him alive.

Darque is quite taken by surprise, he didn't expect such a turnout.

"Darque!" calls out Dr. Mirage, "payback's a bitch!" as his eyes go aglow and he starts absorbing Master Darque's necromantic energy.

"Aaaagghh! Damn you, Mirage! I am not so easily dispatched!" screams out Darque as he waves his arm and the marble columns collapse, causing the entire building to quickly follow.

Everyone scrambles to get outside. Some make it, others don't. Darque doesn't.

Outside.

Silence.

Then...

BOOM! Master Darque explodes from the ruins of the mansion and approaches through the air at the team.

"This is yours, I presume?" as Darque flings a badly beaten and near death Sonar, member of Secret Weapons, at the heroes.

"Now!" yells out Geoff.

Pete Stanchek attacks with a full psionic blast. He has only done this once before.

"AAAaah!" screams out Darque as he is caught in the blast and falls to the ground.

"What's going on?" asks Jack Boniface as he comes to and realizes he's outside.

"Now you hold tight, sugah" replies Flamingo. "We're here to help you stop that bad man Darque."

"Yesss! Darque! DARQUE!!!" says the Shadowman.

Bloodshot reloads, knowing that the bullets are reaching their mark, but they're quite useless. But he has his job to do. Most of his team didn't make it out of the building in time, but he can't be worried about that right now.

"Now!" screams out Geoff as Sting hits Darque again with a psionic blast, causing him to fall to the ground... dead.

"Is it over?" asks Gilad.

"Not quite you fools!" comes the voice as Darque rises... but it's not Darque, his dead body is still on the ground. Instead, it's The Darque Power: Necromantic Energy defined; evil Mother Nature defined; Darque's true essence; his bare soul, defined, and more powerful than he ever has been.

"Now...DIE!" as the Darque essence lashes out at everyone at once, causing everyone standing to take cover as his raw energy is unleashed at all the heroes.

Mirage tries his best to redirect the energy to himself, but they still take a pounding.

"Darque!... come to me!" cries out Mirage, who has been waiting for this moment to arrive.

"Yesssss...necromantic power! You are first, Mirage!"

The two square off as Mirage floats up in the air to meet with Darque. Pete's psionic blasts don't work anymore on this necromantic energy being and all everyone can do is watch.

Jack scrambles to his feet. "Mirage isn't enough to stop Darque, I have to stop Darque!"

Up in the air, Mirage once again starts sucking the very essence of Master Darque into himself, weakening Darque in the process. But as Mirage is doing this, he is becoming solid again! This is truly a bittersweet moment as Mirage starts falling some 100 feet back to the ground as his powers are fading!

Gilad runs and catches- -CATCHES- - the weary Doctor Mirage. "You've done your part, soldier, now rest" as Gil carries him to safety.

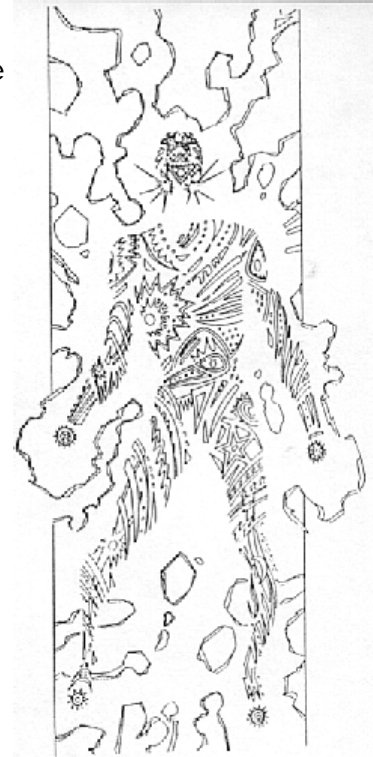
The Darque Essence returns to the ground. "Hey- - Pinky!" yells Aram as he punches Darque in the face. But this is not Darque, it is his pure energy and Aram severely burns his hand as his arm goes right through this energy being. Aram falls to the ground in pain.

The Darque Essence speaks. "Geoff? Come here, Geoff. Time to pass the mantle of Geomancer to me! I need your power!" as he tosses aside Ivar, who was protecting Geoff.

"NO!" screams out Gilad, as he runs at the Darque Essence. "You wait your turn, immortal!" and he throws Gilad back to land on Ivar, knocking both out with a bang.

"Drop the boy, Darque, and face me" calls out Jack Boniface.

Darque turns to see Jack squared off and ready to attack.





Without a moments hesitation, Jack unleashes the full powers of the Shadowman at a smiling Darque.

But Darque only takes this energy in and says "Yesssss, THIS is what I have wanted for so long! Come- let me kill you and fulfill my destiny!"

Jack growls out "RrrrrrrDarque...DIIIIIIIEEEEE!" as he jumps at the Darque Essence, his body bathed in blue energies and at the same time the Darque Essence turns and leaps at Jack. When the two collide in midair, there is a deafening **BOOM** and a twisting green/blue ribbon of energy is unleashed in all directions! "Everyone- - take cover!" screams out Faith, as everyone falls back.

Both Shadowman and Darque have merged into one being, screaming out "Nooo! Yessss!" Then, in unison, "**This is my DESTINY!**"

BOOM!

With another explosion the Jack/Darque essence explodes with pure energy flying all about and finally getting drawn into the air, up into the sky to disappear.

Geoff speaks. "Master Darque has been stopped. All necromantic energy is gone."

"I'm...I'm solid again!" cries out Hwen Mirage.

"Yes, and this time it's permanent." replies Geoff.

"Then where is Jack?" asks Ivar.

"Jack has fulfilled his destiny as it was predicted so long ago. Shadowman gave up his life to rid humanity of the Darque Power, and he succeeded. It's over."

Then, from the sky an object appears like a star then quickly gets larger as it approaches.

It is Solar, Man Of The Atom!

A silence falls upon everyone assembled. Archer manages to dig himself out as does the Secret Weapons team. Magnus dusts off his clothes and looks up. Everyone stands together and they all face Solar.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Solar speaks.

"I... appreciate the efforts you all have taken to try to restore this timeline. Your actions over the past several minutes have restored this timeline as it should be and that allowed me to make all times right again."

"Well, where the hell were you all this time?" asks Bloodshot.

"Allow me to explain." In a flash everyone is gone, only to reappear inside Solar's space station above Earth, seconds later.

"I built this space station many years ago for a few reasons. First, I was through with life on Earth and set out to explore the universe when I noticed a strange anomaly which I traced back to here. That is why I initially stuck around. Then, in September, I felt the consolidation of power Darque was in the process of gathering and I observed from here.

"I built this station as my refuge, a place I could call my own. And I built it so we could meet here now.

"I split personas a few years ago with the darker, more aggressive part of my nature going into deep space in an effort to eliminate the spider aliens, nasty aliens who thrive on flesh and worship above all else flora. That aspect of my being went on to be called the Destroyer. About a thousand years later, the Destroyer succeeds in finding the spider alien's homeworld and destroyed the entire planet, wiping nearly all of them into extinction.



"Some time later, the Psi-Lords dealt with the remaining outlaw Spider Aliens by converting their carnivorous appetite into vegetarian, that which they worshipped, and imprisoned them permanently. The last Spider Alien died from starvation in 4067. I am sure many of you have run into spider aliens in your travels."

The team collectively nods.

"The Destroyer later set down upon the 41st century Earth only to find himself a stranger. He eventually ended up on Phobos, where he became the protector of

the people. This all took place around the time of the Malev War, a very long and drawn out war in the 41st century that cost nearly everything for the Earth's heroes. Magnus was key in winning that war and you were even part of the Malev War at one point, remember Ivar?"

"I remember being in the 41st century and helping Magnus slag a bunch of robots... but I didn't ask the whos or whys at the time."

"The Malevs, as they were referred to, were a race of self-aware robots with the spark of self-actuality given accidentally by me in 1993. They returned to Earth in 4001 AD with a vengeance. They made all freewill robots on Earth Malev, and for a time the Malevs had a chance of actually winning the war and consuming the Earth in the process. The stakes were high, but in the end, the Earth's heroes won. Or so they thought.



"When the Malev War ended, mankind set out to restore its society and rebuild. And to prevent the mistakes of the past from happening again, they outlawed all robots. They rebuilt their society by remaking it from the

rubble and its shattered milespires rose once again, this time by human hands. But what they didn't realize is that the Malev components were among the rubble and they were used to remake their world.



"The Malev essence once again rose: Malev-7, as it was called. This time it developed a hybrid virus that affected humans and took over their minds making all **humans** Malev. This grew secretly until finally, the Malevs won, ending human life on planet Earth... until the Destroyer stepped in.

"The Destroyer landed and erased the Malevs retroactively. They never happened. The Destroyer caused unseen havoc by doing this, because as the erasure of Malevs went retroactively into the past, history was rewriting itself around them not being there. In some cases, minor changes took place over time; in others, it was much more dramatic.

"Just like waking up and having a dream fade to become a forgotten memory, so were the Malevs. Some people who were...more aware of their surroundings, like Geomancers, knew something was amiss with their time, they just couldn't pinpoint it. This has been the cause of the uneasy burden all Geomancers have had on their shoulders.

"The Malevs became a fading memory as time rewrote itself into the past. And no one knew about it... unless you were a Timewalker."

"So that explains how Ivar could travel from one reality to another," says Geoff.

"Yes. I myself was not aware of this either until that retroactive ripple in time hit me in the future. I first realized what the Destroyer had done around 2300 AD.

"See, I have been separated from the Destroyer for some time now; he acts independently at this point and right now he is somewhere in deep space en route to his destiny. So it was not until I noticed reality getting a little...different that I started looking into it more, thinking there was a relation between Darque and this rewriting history unfolding before me, and I came back to this time because all signals were pointing here, or so I thought.

"But that was not the case.

"I watched this world getting more and more strange. I noticed many changes, both small and large, throughout Earth. And not only in this time, it was throughout all times. In some times, spider aliens existed; in others they did not, but in the same timeline! So I looked into it more.

"It turns out the Malevs and spider aliens made a deal early on to help each other.

"Somewhere along the line, the Malev-1 essence and early spider alien race met and exchanged their knowledge.

"Malev-1 had been traveling across space for quite some time after my first encounter with them in 1993 and that newfound sentient life had a lot to offer to the relatively primitive civilization known as the spider aliens. This is how the spider aliens could be so advanced in their technology, but primitive in their customs. Both races lived together and flourished, and in the end both had the same objective: planet Earth. Malev-2, as it was known at that point, wanted revenge and the spider alien race wanted meat. So the spider aliens, loaded with their new technology, came here.

"But when The Destroyer erased the Malevs retroactively, he inadvertantly erased the spider aliens and all history surrounding them too!

"The spider aliens are a very savage race and without the gift from the Malev

essence, they still remained on their homeworld, unable to explore space. Without the boon of Malev technology, the spider alien race developed on its own for the next 2,000 years concentrating on domestic affairs, like how many times over each faction could destroy the entire planet with their weapons. The spider alien race blew itself out of existence shortly thereafter, never to come to earth, so time skewed at that point.

"That is why Aric Dacia did not exist in this 20th century until now, the end result was he was never abducted in 408 ad and deposited here in the present."

Geoff speaks- - "I have a question here: if you initiated the Malev essence in 1993, and it traveled quite a ways through space and into the future to meet the spider aliens, then how could they pick up Aric in the 5th century? I know Aric should be here in this time; the Earth told me this should be. It's just that he isn't here!"

"That was one of the contradictions as a result of these altered timelines. I'll get to that part in a moment. And yes, he is here. He has been here all along."

"Then where is he?"

"I'm right here, where I have been all along, Geoff."

Everyone turns to see Aric standing there alongside them!

"What...? How???" asks everyone.

"That was a 'cosmic burp' that just deposited Aric here, as he's always been. Let me explain," says Solar.

"There was a retroactive ripple through time, unmaking spider aliens.

"I realized what was at hand and traveled at above-light speeds to watch as history rewrote itself in our world.

"Along the way, I also noticed a SECOND ripple in time in 1996 causing another reality to unfold around me! This one was totally self contained, racing backwards in time and CREATING history retroactively! To put it in layman's terms, it was like writing on a chalkboard, then rewriting again and again, but without erasing... I saw three pasts unfolding at once, all slightly different, all leading up to one point in the present!

"So I had a few problems to deal with: I had to find a way to stop the Destroyer's ripple in time and try to restore our reality as best as I could, and I had to stop the OTHER reality from creating itself retroactively.

"I don't know what caused the other reality to unfold, but I was not about to have ANOTHER universe to worry about! And that other reality was... a bit lumpy. It almost

seemed like this other reality was totally new, but rewritten from this one and had aspects of both therein; it wasn't a good base. So I started by fixing things there.

"I traveled into that 'new reality' and into that timeline's past at above-light speeds to see people get dug up from coffins, die, grow younger and get unborn, in that order. I watched history writing facts and making them up as it went along. This universe had nothing to base its reality on: it almost seemed like a dream. When I got to 408 ad, I saw Aric, the Visigoth warrior with the incredible XO armor at his disposal. It turns out that Aric had a hand in remaking that reality somehow, and history rewrote him as the greatest hero that ever lived, and he died in the fifth century!

"That point is where I stopped that new reality, then gave it a jump start. I made Day One of that other universe April 14, 408 AD. The Immortal Brothers and all events before 408 AD in actuality didn't physically happen; I just started things the same way they happened in this reality, and let continuity smooth itself over the lumps.

"From April 14, 408 AD onwards it was a new universe; A self-contained reality.

"Had that reality come full circle and create itself from day one, the big bang, which it was on a collision course to do anyway, there would have been no way to remake it or control the outcome. And since it was a 'lumpy universe' to begin with, there's no telling what could have happened from there; technically the big bang could have been rewritten, throwing **all** realities into Chaos! Interestingly, the result of that new reality was the same history as this reality from the dawn of time to 408 ad, then a split between both universes in 2 separate directions."

Solar pauses. "Time travel is difficult, and more difficult to explain in words."

"I think I understand" says Ninjak, "I have been studying tachyon particles for some time; I just never nailed one down."

"Yes" replies Solar. "Tachyon particles and other above-light speed objects follow their own set of rules."

"What did you do then?" asks Faith.

"With that new universe running on its own, I popped back into this reality where I left it in 408 AD. I had to stop The Destroyer's work of uncreating Malevs. Once again, I couldn't let it run its course because so much of this history would be altered by this ripple that the end result would be chaotic to the Earth's future.

The reality you were in before, Ivar, the one in which the Earth was destroyed in 2028, is what would have happened if I didn't act. The result would be time unfolding differently, and Master Darque succeeding in destroying the Earth. I was there to watch as he turned to me and smiled, then opened a hole into unreality, empowered Erica Pierce, and let her rip me apart, atom by atom, for a billion years.

In the end, she recreated the Earth: her earth. That was the end, my end.

"But since you, Ivar, traveled back to the Lost Land, you were able to change that history again and actually save me!"

"You're welcome, I guess," says Ivar, "I was just trying to set things right."

"Well, you changed history enough to allow me to fix it."

"So how did you fix it?" asks Magnus.

"I was still presented with the dilemma of stopping The Destroyer's work. I prevented the first spider alien invasion in 408, and went into deep space to catch up and redirect the advancing Malev spaceship heading towards Earth.

"My plan was to have the Malev essence and spider alien race meet in this reality thousands of years before they were supposed to. It was my best bet, and it wouldn't change much. I mean, if they first met earlier in time, they'd still have time to evolve and ultimately make it here in 408 AD to have basically the same history we all know... and I stuck around to see it all go down, correctly this time.

"So I met up with the Malev ship a galaxy away in around 4500 BC, gave it the spark of awareness, and redirected it at the spider alien homeworld, making sure it stayed on the same path. I stopped the Destroyer's retroactive elimination at that point and hoped for the best.

"It worked. The Malev essence met the spider alien race much earlier in about 119AD, evolved together, then set a course back for Earth some years later. They got here in 408AD in time to abduct Aric and bring him to 1992 in this timeline and that's the way this time unfolded."

"That is my reality," adds Aric.

Bloodshot cuts in, "Now **that** makes no sense. If Aric is **supposed** to be in this new reality anyway, and he is, thanks to your intervention in the past, and he wouldn't be otherwise, then how is it the 'same as it has always have been' as you say??"

Aric cuts in, "But I **have** been here all along! I was right alongside you in the battle with Darque! I attacked Darque while you and Geoff were planning, don't you remember? Is everyone crazy here?!!"

Solar speaks "Of course it doesn't make any sense for you or Aric, at least not in this history. Like I said, it worked and this history unfolded almost exactly the same way it was supposed to, straight into the 41st century and beyond. So it makes no sense to

you because I am taking to **this** Bloodshot and **this** Aric in this reality. You'd have to be in the other reality to see the difference. This reality is slightly different from 408 AD to the present, and that includes your existence! Time is not as linear as you'd like to think, and it generally doesn't follow a straight path... so these are just a couple of many anomalies in this timeline that will work themselves out over time.

"In short, time is now on a straight path with a definitive history and future. And since it is correct, it always has been that way! This reality is self contained, and I managed to keep it as one cohesive timeline without splitting it into another reality, but there are some small changes.

"One of them is how Shadowman got infected. Originally, it was a Spider Alien that does it, but history rewrote itself slightly and Sandria Darque did, instead. After all, that was the more logical history for time's sake, so time made it so. And your inconsistencies, Ivar? And Aric's sudden appearance to all of you when he's been here all along? They unfortunately go with the territory. Like I said, explaining timelines and alternate universes is very difficult.

"To try to sum it up in a simple statement: beginning 20 minutes ago, this reality has always been the correct one."

"So Aric is supposed to be in this reality?" asks Ninjak.

"Relatively, yes, but history is weaving right now to make Aric a part of this universe. As it is working on all of you to some extent from the moment I stepped back into this time."

"What?"

"You all exist in this corrected universe. The moment I popped into this universe again about 20 minutes ago- - I entered a slightly different universe. It is the same place for you all, as it has been since way back to even before your time, but for me it is slightly different.

"Ivar is the only person who was in 'The Destroyer's universe' and that will remain a memory for him, simply because he is a Timewalker: the wildcard in time's plan. But in reality, you were not there because from 3500 BC onward, 20 minutes ago that never happened.

"So with that explained as best as I could, I would like to thank everyone here for their efforts in setting everything back to the way it should have been. Pierce is now in another reality and I suspect she's happy, too. Darque is gone from this reality, as is Jack Boniface, and time has been restored."

"So what's the future?" asks Bloodshot...

It was then that they all turned their wary eyes towards the future and the other wars that loomed on the horizon.

Solar speaks "My only other concern now is the other reality, the 'second universe' at this point. Like I said, part of the reason I built this space station is so that you may all have access to it, so it is my gift to you all, should you ever need it. I am going off now back into the other reality's 1999 to see how THAT time is going along. I will return everyone to wherever they want now."

Pete steps forward. "I am happy to have been part of this effort... I apologize to you all for my actions in the past and am honored that you all gave me a second chance. I would like to go back to New York City and find Kris." In a flash, he is gone.

Next is Charlene, who responds, "I really don't have much of a place to call my own...there's no one waitin' up for me.. just drop me wherever, it doesn't matter."

"Excuse me, ma'am?" interrupts Archer. "I, too am a wandering soul, like you, with no real place to go. Perhaps I could walk with you a bit."

"Hey kid- you're not leaving me now, are you?" says Aram.

In a flash, Charlene, Archer, and Armstrong are gone.

Aric speaks: "I have no need of your magicks, Solar, I will find my way home," and he takes off.

Next is Magnus. Solar asks "Magnus, where would you like to go?"

Magnus thinks for a moment, then says: "Solar, I would like to meet with my parents... I was afraid to say anything for fear you'd say 'no' for time's sake and just send me back to where I 'belong', as you did at my birth at the end of Unity, and leave me to smash robots, protecting a society that deserves a good kick in the ass. With these recent events behind us, I would like the chance to meet my parents, and that place in time is where I want to be. I won't be distorting timelines by asking this favor, will I? This is what I want."

"Certainly, Magnus. Your place is in 1991, at the beginning. You have things to do with your family." Magnus smiles, and just like that, Magnus is gone.

Solar turns and speaks to Geoff: "Geoff, where would you like to go?"

"Wherever the Earth needs me the most," replies Geoff.

"Then go to your uncle Clay; the world needs a Geomancer again."

Bloodshot is next. "Solar, can you take me and the Secret Weapons team to Aruba? We certainly deserve it."

"You've got it," replies Solar.

"I belong in New York City, too, like Pete," says Faith Herbert: "I have important work ahead of me". And she is gone.

"And you, Ninjak?"

"MI-5's European headquarters."

Hwen Mirage is next. He is no longer Dr. Mirage the phantom man, he is just a regular man again. "Solar, could you please return me to Florida? I have a surprise for my Carmen."

Then there was Solar and Ivar.

Ivar speaks: "Solar, I still don't know how much I buy into your explanation- - redundant-multiple timelines and such. I did see with my own eyes the Earth destroyed and I know it was our actions that changed history; I just can't see this all coming into focus."

"Do you remember the spider aliens?" asks Solar.

"No, I mean yes: I ran into them twice, once in the 1980's and again on the lunar base in 2028."

"You will remember more as time goes on, Timewalker. The spider aliens have been one of your most hated enemies and will continue to be so into your future. Your far future.

"I was really gone for a time, and I will never forget what Pierce did to me for an eternity. But I was brought back, thanks to your actions, and for that I thank you again. Pierce is in her own reality now and I believe she is happy, wherever she is.

"Would you like me to create another tachyon compass for you, Timewalker?"

"No, I am retired as Ivar the Timewalker. You can just call me Ivar."

"I understand, Ivar."

And with a blink of his eye, Solar sends Ivar to his destination.

End.

POSTSCRIPT

I hope you have all seen my vision; I hope this becomes a part of VALIANT history. I want to start by saying that, because that is the reason I wrote this book in the first place.

I remember the end of the VH1 Universe in 1996 and all the unanswered questions at the time- so many fans asking what happened to their favorite heroes. Well... not so many fans, a few. A few, loyal, dedicated fans. And that is who I wrote this book for: you.

Then the new Universe came around sometime later, and things started again for “The VALIANT Heroes Universe.” Then things looked promising with the chance of seeing 1999 after all in the VALIANT world, a world where Alexander Darque opens a portal that starts it all, a VALIANT Universe where Bloodshot, X-O Manowar, Ivar and a fourth-yet-to-be-named horseman saddles up; a world where the Harbingers spell the end, and VH1 Solar dukes it out for keeps with VH2 Solar. Yes, Fabian laid all the pieces on the table, the tablecloth just got pulled out under him before dinnertime. The idea was shown in the “Solar vs. Solar Valiant Voyuer”, shown in Bloodshot #14, pages 17-18, and written in the “Darque Special”. The idea was to have the VH1 Universe square off against the VH2 Universe and end up with THE VALIANT Universe; one VALIANT Universe, from start to finish, and it would all fit.

Anyway.

That is where this book was born. What DID happen to everyone in the VH1 Universe? I started asking myself this when the VH2 Universe came to a close. Then I started reading certain VH1 books again and taking mental notes. Next thing you know there I was, in September 1998, typing out the first lines of this book.

My hope is that this book answers those questions. This book is called “VALIANT: 1999 And Beyond” for a reason; simply, you can’t tell the story about Shadowman in 1999 without covering everything else. And while you’re at it, construct a grand picture with 1999 tying into it, that explains EVERYTHING. And end the book with a clean page, questions answered.

One of the things that really stuck out in my head was the passage in Rai #0:

...Geoff was relentless in his crusade to recruit help against the Darque power...

Why?! Because let’s face it, Geoff is a whiny kid who gets everyone into trouble with his incessant crying and here he is at it again, only this time getting Jack killed in the process! If I was there I would want answers, and Geoff is where I’d look to! So this book explains why, and that was one of the major things I wanted to cover in this project. And other little annoying things that could easily be explained in a one-shot issue BUT NEVER WERE, like: How do Geoff, Archer and Armstrong get back from the Lost Land? Who became Geomancer after Clay retired? Why did Darque make

contact with Pierce in Secret Weapons #2? And the big things like: What happens after Magnus #64? Which Aric is the real Aric? What the HELL happens to Jack in Shadowman #43?!!

I tried my best to answer all unresolved questions at the end of the VH1 VALIANT Universe and more; like why Geoff is such a whiny little kid (page 103), how Archer met up with Flamingo as seen in Rai #0 (page 108), what Magnus does in the 20th century Earth (page 108), and leaves us with Solar headed back to the VH2 1999 (Revelations) and more.

So I hope this book answers these questions and someday becomes the final chapter of the VH1 VALIANT Universe.

No, I don't. I hope this book becomes the new Rai #0, bridging the gap between where a world was left hanging and where that same world will be picked up someday in the future.

As always, I got in over my head when I decided to write this book. Then I REALLY got in over my head when I had the press release on January 1, 1999 announcing its release in four short months! So the first person I have to thank is Anthony Koch for editing this book. He took a raw copy I gave him and returned a book about 3 pounds heavier, loaded down with red ink and well over 3,000 corrections ranging from missing periods, to where I subliminally wrote:

"Now!" screams out Geoff as Sting hits Harada again with a psionic blast, causing him to fall to the ground... dead....

on page 96. He managed to take a fan's first time attempt at writing something longer than 3 pages and turn it into what I consider a pretty damn good book!

(My favorite non-story comment he wrote would have to be: "...instead, all I get is, 'The book's being edited by Third World children. They don't understand English, but they'll work all day for a handful of rice. They're not at all important--after all, it's MY book.').

Then there's Jim Shooter. Jim Shooter has proven to me what a great man he is. And he has gone way, waaaaayyyy out of his way for me on this book. I guess it's just his way: to care; to help people, one at a time, which is exactly how VALIANT got to be so great: by telling great stories and getting readers, one at a time.

Finally, scraping the bottom of the barrel are the artists. Artists always end up on the bottom of the list by nature, they are the people who take an idea and give it form only to be steamrolled over when it's credit time. So I didn't want to make an exception! Each artist on this book took their personal time and effort to give me their best. And I am not easy to deal with, just ask Anthony. And they all did it out of love for VALIANT comics. And none of them got to see the book in progress, either: they did it just to be a part of something VALIANT and did it because they had faith in me. And my little mistake in all this was to forget to tell most of the artists that Jack didn't have the mask in this book.

Maybe you noticed; let's call that a "cosmic burp". So I thank them all for their work and faith in my ability to write a good VALIANT story, and I'm glad I gave them all a chance to "show us what they got." And thanks to Buzz for page 39. Turok is a departure from Vampirella, but he sure did great! Rai #0 said it best when they said:

...It was then that they all turned their wary eyes towards the future and the other wars that loomed on the horizon.

That's a good ending... for now.

That is the way I want to end this postscript, with the hopes that one day again we will all live to see the VALIANT Universe again in full glory.

Until then...

Joe

March 28, 1999

Writing Credits:

Direct passages and interpretations of specific events taken from VALIANT issues:

- Page 10: Taken from the last pages of Shadowman #43, VH1 VALIANT'S last issue.
Page 15: Jack dies in 1999 as dictated first in Rai #0.
Page 22: Taken from events in Shadowman #0.
Page 28: There are no penguins in the VALIANT Universe, Solar #2.
Page 32: Ivar was in the 41st century in Magnus #30.
Page 33: Jack took on X-O Manowar in X-O Manowar #42.
Page 34: Baby Magnus was deposited into the future in Unity #1.
Pages 38-42: Directly from Shadowman #4, with Ivar added.
Page 44: *"I can't show I'm a dork, or he'll just start flinging arrows at Aram when they meet! Now I know how Custer felt..."* Actually, Turok DID start flinging arrows at Aram in A&A #2. Maybe Turok **did** think Ivar was a dork.
Pages 46-48: Straight from Archer & Armstrong #1 with Ivar instead of Archer.
Page 49: Jack in Massive Reconstructive Unity from Shadowman #5.
Page 57: From Dr. Mirage #11
Page 58: First paragraph: directly from Geomancer #8
Page 68: "This time, dying's gonna be the hard part" from VH2 Bloodshot #9.
Page 70: Buck McHenry's tomb, as seen in Eternal Warrior #7.
Page 74: From Solar #13/Secret Weapons #2.
Page 77: "Hold on- - so THAT'S where he went when he disappeared and came back so powerful! He created a black hole and..." from Alpha & Omega Chapter 10.
Page 80: Setting from Magnus #12.
Page 81: "The last moments of Chaos..." from The Chaos Effect Omega.
Page 96: Narration from Rai #0.
Page 105: Space station, as seen in Rai #0.
Page 105: End of spider aliens in Psi-Lords #5.
Page 105: Destroyer blows up spider alien world in Solar #35.
Page 105: Destroyer goes to Phobos in Destroyer #0.
Page 106: Solar's first confrontation with Malevs from Solar #20.
Page 106: Malev-7 from Magnus #64.
Page 108: Second ripple is the VH2 Universe.
Page 112: "...wary eyes..." from Rai #0.

Art Credits:

Cover Art by Eric Kent

- Page 10: Dan Moler
Page 31: Mike Leeke, VALIANT ad, 1994.
Page 37: Craig Sisson
Page 39: David Lapham, from Shadowman #4
Page 43: Buzz
Page 57: Bernard Chang, Dr. Mirage #11
Pages 60-61: Anthony Koch
Page 65: Brian Wells
Page 69: Eric Kent
Page 80: Rick Burnett
Page 84: Dan Moler
Page 89: Eric Kent
Page 102: Secrets Of The Valiant Universe #2
Page 103: Johnny Gonzales
Page 105: Jim Calafiore, Psi-Lords 1
Page 106: Jim Calafiore, Rai #17
Page 106: Jim Calafiore, Magnus #41