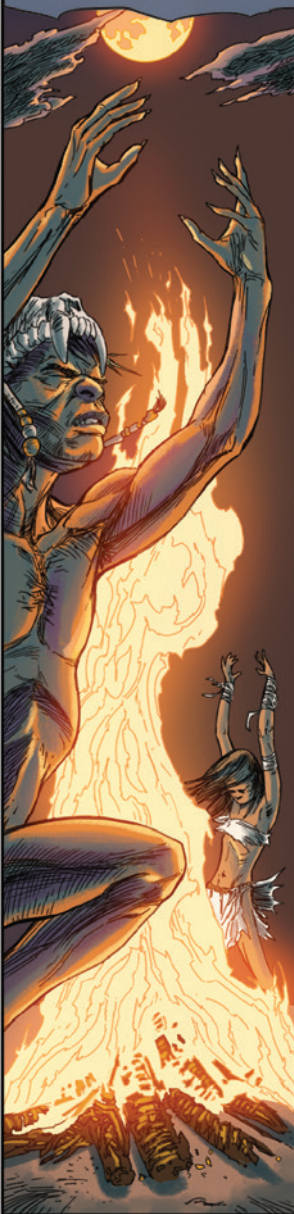


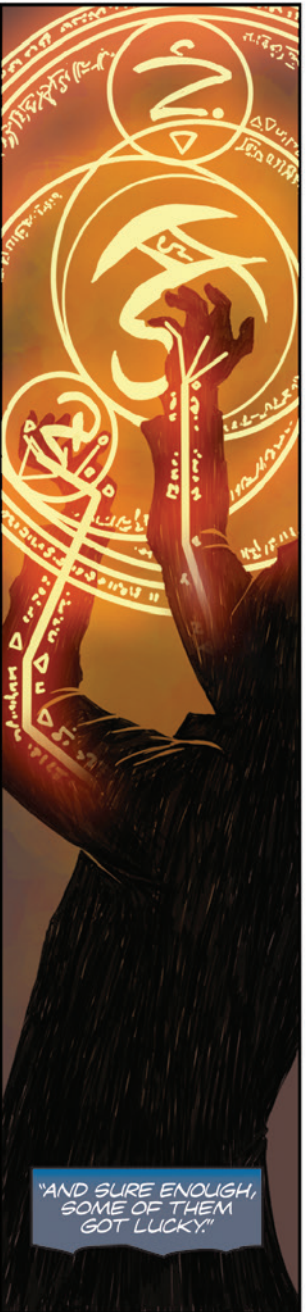
"SINCE THE BEGINNING, MANKIND HAS ALWAYS SOUGHT A CONNECTION WITH THE HIGHER WORLD.



"OUR ANCESTORS USED DRUGS, POISONS, POTIONS...



"...BLOOD SACRIFICES, AND RITES EVEN MORE BARBAROUS.



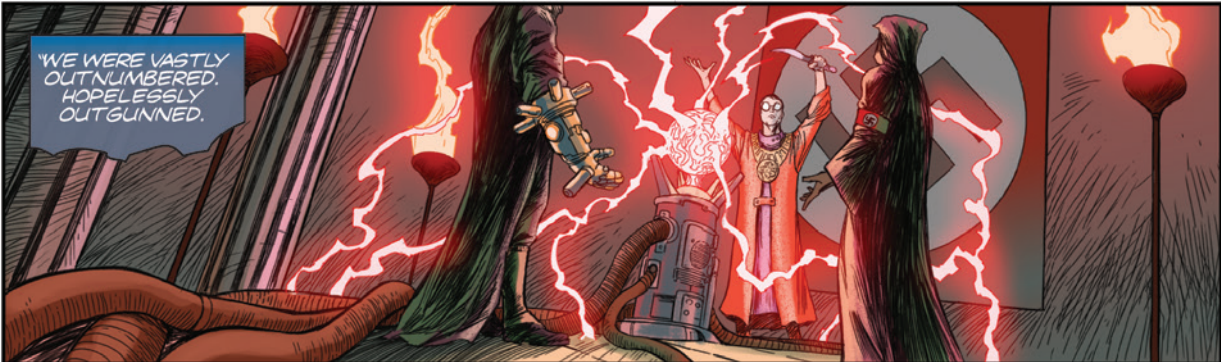
"AND SURE ENOUGH, SOME OF THEM GOT LUCKY!"




BUT LUCK WASN'T GOING TO GET US THROUGH THE WAR.

A large, multi-colored dragon with a swastika on its chest breathes fire into a war-torn landscape. In the foreground, the turret of a tank is visible. In the background, soldiers are seen in a trench.

"THEY WERE WINNING, YOU SEE."

A ritual is taking place in a dark room. A figure in a red robe stands before a large swastika, surrounded by lightning bolts. Other figures in dark robes are present, one holding a mechanical device.

"WE WERE VASTLY OUTNUMBERED. HOPELESSLY OUTGUNNED."

Three men are in a room. On the left, a man in a purple robe. In the center, an older man with a long white beard in a blue uniform. On the right, a man in a dark suit.

"THE WAR DIDN'T NEED ANOTHER SHAMAN, BLINDLY GRASPING AT SHADOWS."

A close-up of a man's face. He has a cigarette in his mouth and a serious, intense expression.

"IT NEEDED A SCIENTIST."

A man in a lab coat and goggles stands in a laboratory. In the background, a figure is suspended in a glowing blue circular field of energy.

"WE BEGAN EXPERIMENTING."

"THERE WERE... MANY FAILURES."



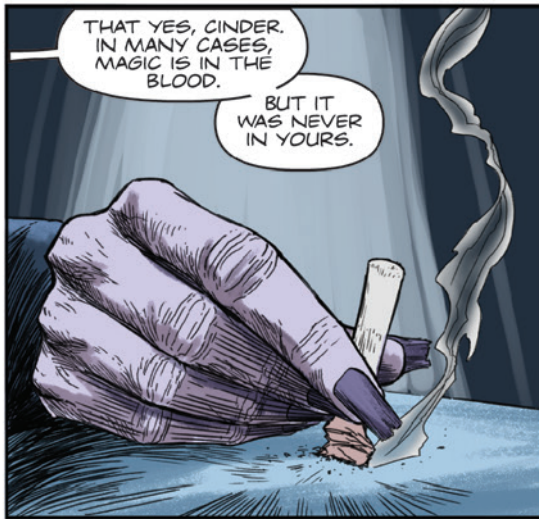
"BUT AT LAST, WE HAD OUR FIRST NEW MAGUS."



"WE HAD CYRUS."

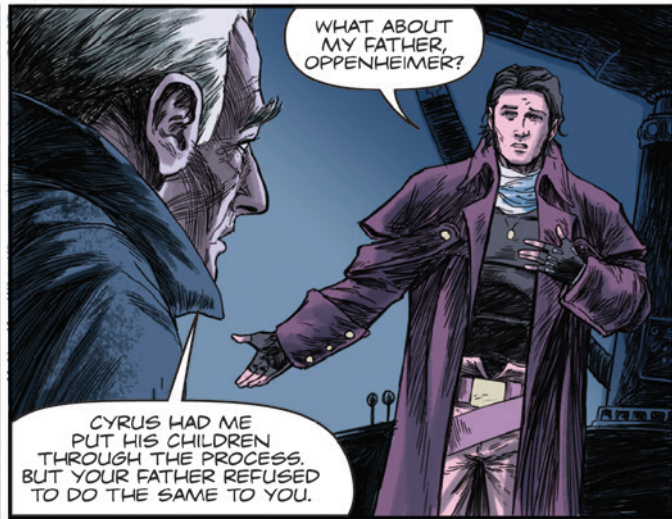


YOU'RE... YOU'RE SAYING...



THAT YES, CINDER. IN MANY CASES, MAGIC IS IN THE BLOOD.

BUT IT WAS NEVER IN YOURS.



WHAT ABOUT MY FATHER, OPPENHEIMER?

CYRUS HAD ME PUT HIS CHILDREN THROUGH THE PROCESS, BUT YOUR FATHER REFUSED TO DO THE SAME TO YOU.



BESIDES, I HAD TO STOP. IT WAS TOO MUCH.

THERE WAS... AN INCIDENT. A GIRL...

YOU SHOULD BE GRATEFUL.





GRATEFUL FOR WHAT?

LEAVING ME CRIPPLED, WHEN I COULD HAVE BEEN RUNNING--HELL FLYING THIS WHOLE TIME?

THEY WERE CONCERNED ABOUT YOUR SAFETY, AND RIGHTLY SO.



LEAVING ME DEFENSELESS IN A SOCIETY WHERE PEOPLE CAN CALL LIGHTNING OUT OF THIN AIR IS SAFETY? [REDACTED]

THEY WERE TOO SCARED TO DO WHAT THEY HAD TO.

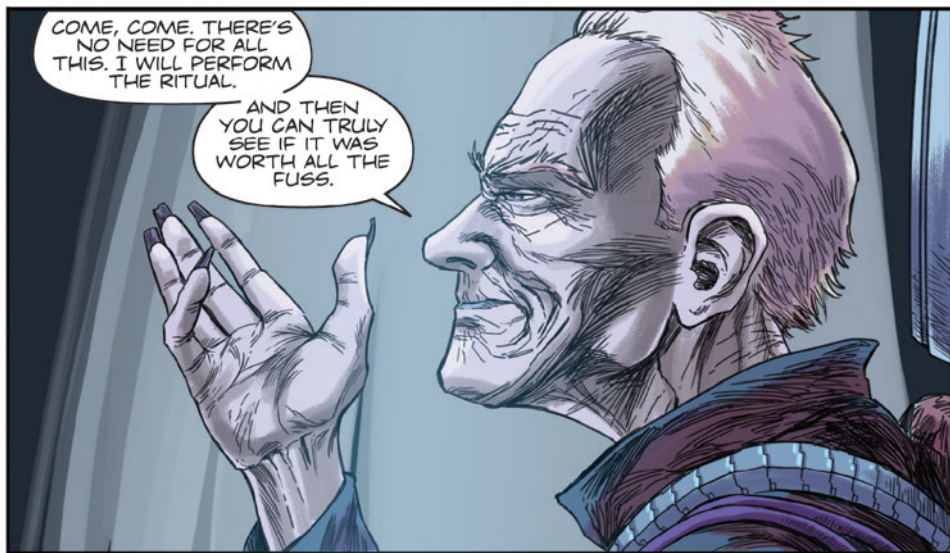
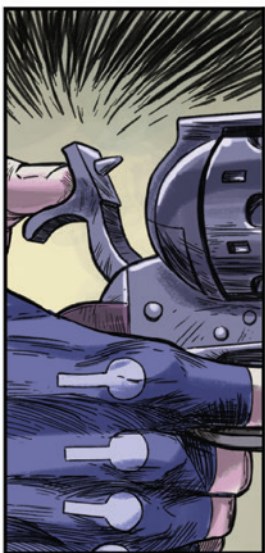


WELL I'M NOT. YOU'RE GOING TO DO IT. NOW.



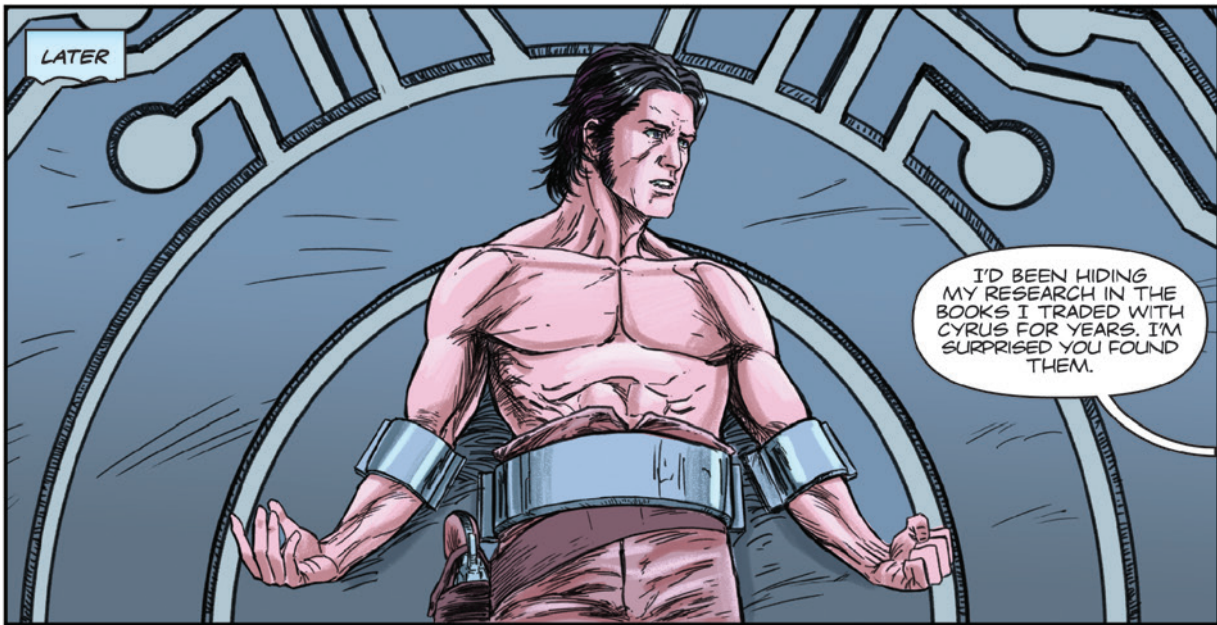
HEY, WAIT A MINUTE... THAT WHOLE BUSINESS WITH SHOVING A GUN IN HIS FACE--THAT WAS JUST--

THAT WAS ALWAYS THE PLAN, BLACKTOOTH. IF HE'S NOT GOING TO--



COME, COME. THERE'S NO NEED FOR ALL THIS. I WILL PERFORM THE RITUAL.

AND THEN YOU CAN TRULY SEE IF IT WAS WORTH ALL THE FUSS.



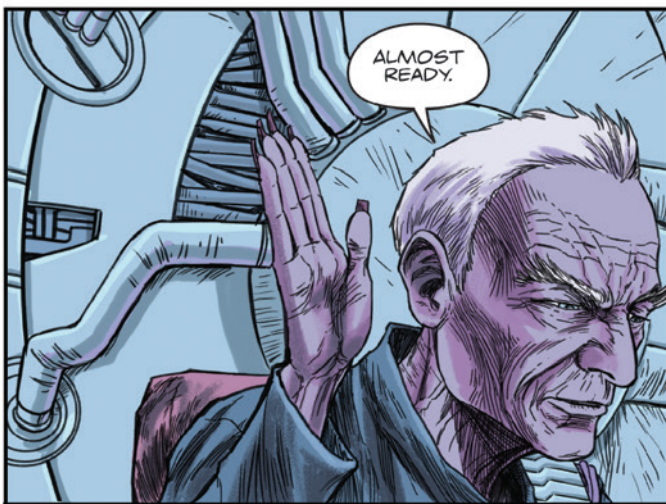
LATER

I'D BEEN HIDING MY RESEARCH IN THE BOOKS I TRADED WITH CYRUS FOR YEARS. I'M SURPRISED YOU FOUND THEM.



I FOUND ONE... HE'D SOLD OR TRADED ALL THE REST BY THEN. DIDN'T KNOW WHAT HE HAD.

HE KEPT GOOD RECORDS, THOUGH. HIS LEDGER HAD EVERY--



ALMOST READY.



THIS DOESN'T LOOK SAFE.



IT'S NOT.