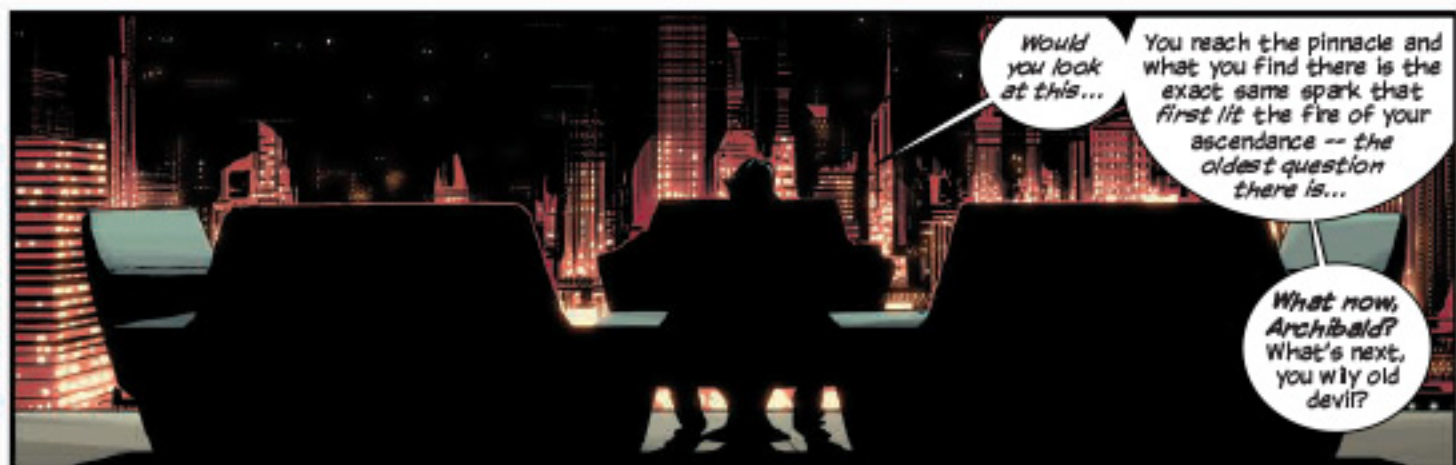


The Black Towers.



Would you look at this...

You reach the pinnacle and what you find there is the exact same spark that first lit the fire of your ascendance -- the oldest question there is...

What now, Archibald? What's next, you wily old devil?



Something gained, something earned...

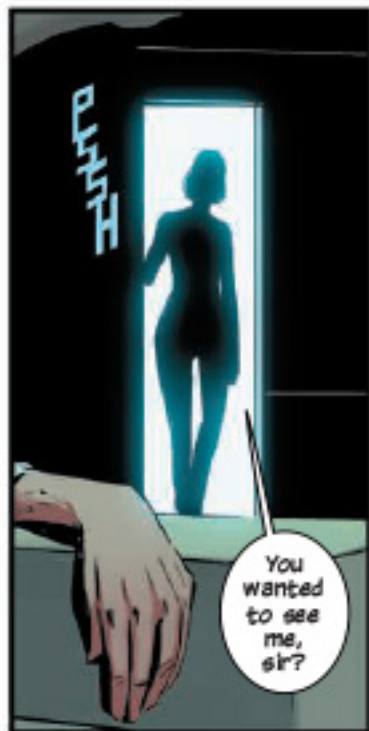
Perhaps revenge on those who've espurned?

Well, yes... I am a petty, vain man who both *keeps* and *settles* scores, but what we have here is a conundrum.

You see, today a man sits... *king of the mountain*. He looks down at the base of it, and what does he see?

All his *enemies* with their eyes so fixed on others of like station and kind that they've stopped looking up at the peak.

I'm not sure the move to make isn't just *enjoying the view*.



Yes, Constance. I most certainly did.

Chief of Staff -- my old position, your new one -- is a pivotal job to our Confederacy. It's your responsibility to give counsel to the President.

So tell me how the boots fit.

Perfectly.

You know, your mother -- my dear sister -- wanted me to name one of your two brothers to the position.

She was beyond a bit flummoxed that I passed over a Governor and a Senator for an academic who just so happened to be her sweet baby girl.

Do you know why I did that?



Because my brothers are idiots, Uncle.

Now, now, dear. The dumb are like kindling for the fire.

So if it's a fire you want, any idiot will suffice...



You see, we all have our uses.



Now. Why are you here?



I'm a mathematician by trade, and if I had to distill it down to a point it would be *this*:

Game theory
For as long as I've watched you it's been very clear that you're a brilliant instinctual creature. You're also clearly self-conscious, and aware of your shortcomings.

What you lack, is the means to methodically plan for a high number of variables. You're not so great at asymmetry, uncle.

You don't need kindling because you don't want to start fires. You want to play *chess*...and play it for *blood*.



And how goes your first assignment?



We're increasing our imports in the agreed upon categories, and we've begun executing our short and long-term financial plays.

More importantly, our Resurrection weapon systems are coming online. It goes well, sir.



All right, then...

But one last thing before you go, Constance...

Yes, sir?

Uncle's fine for family get togethers, but in the Towers appearances must be maintained. Understand?



Of course, uncle.
I'll do my best.



Tricky planning that'sss her game...

Can your trussesst, ssshe maintain?

Armp.
I believe in God, good cigars, and strong liquor...

Who are these fools that still believe in people?