

BOOK III

BRITANNIA™

IN THE YEAR 60 A.D., THE ROMAN EMPIRE, UNDER THE RULE OF NERO, STRETCHES FROM JUDEA IN THE SOUTH TO A WILD NORTHERN COUNTRY CALLED BRITANNIA. A MYSTERIOUS GROUP OF WOMEN CALLED THE VESTAL VIRGINS - PRIESTESSES TO THE GODDESS VESTA - WIELD TREMENDOUS SPIRITUAL POWER - MORE THAN ANY MAN IN THIS WORLD.



THE VESTALS SEND A CENTURION, ANTONIUS AXIA, TO THE WILDS OF ETRUSCA TO RESCUE ONE OF THEIR OWN, WHO HAS BEEN KIDNAPPED BY DEMON-WORSHIPPING CULTISTS. EVEN THOUGH AXIA WAS SUCCESSFUL, THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE MONSTER LEFT HIS MIND CRACKED.

THE VESTALS REHABILITATE ANTONIUS, PERFORMING SACRED RITUALS AND ALLOWING HIM TO READ THEIR CODEX — WRITINGS THAT OFFER REASONS FOR WHY MEN DO WHAT THEY DO. CAUSE, EFFECT, AND MOTIVE, CENTURIES BEFORE MODERN PSYCHOLOGY.

EMPEROR NERO, HEARING OF ANTONIUS' ABILITIES, SENDS HIM TO BRITANNIA TO SOLVE A DARK MYSTERY: SOMEONE - OR SOMETHING - IS KILLING ROMAN SOLDIERS. MANY OF THE LEGIONAIRES BELIEVE A DEMON HUNTS THEM. AS AXIA TRACES THE CLUES TO A FOREST, HE IS AMBUSHED...

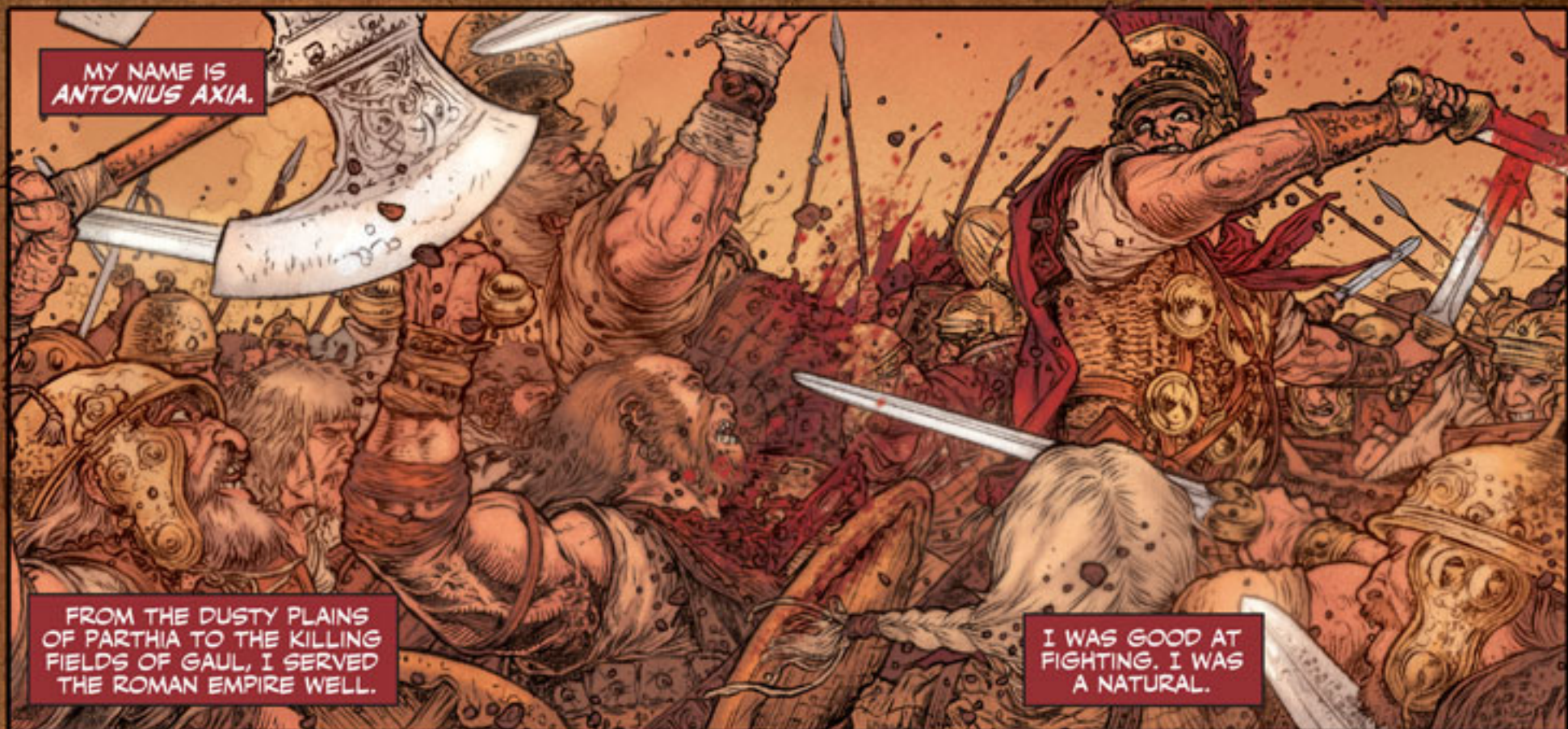


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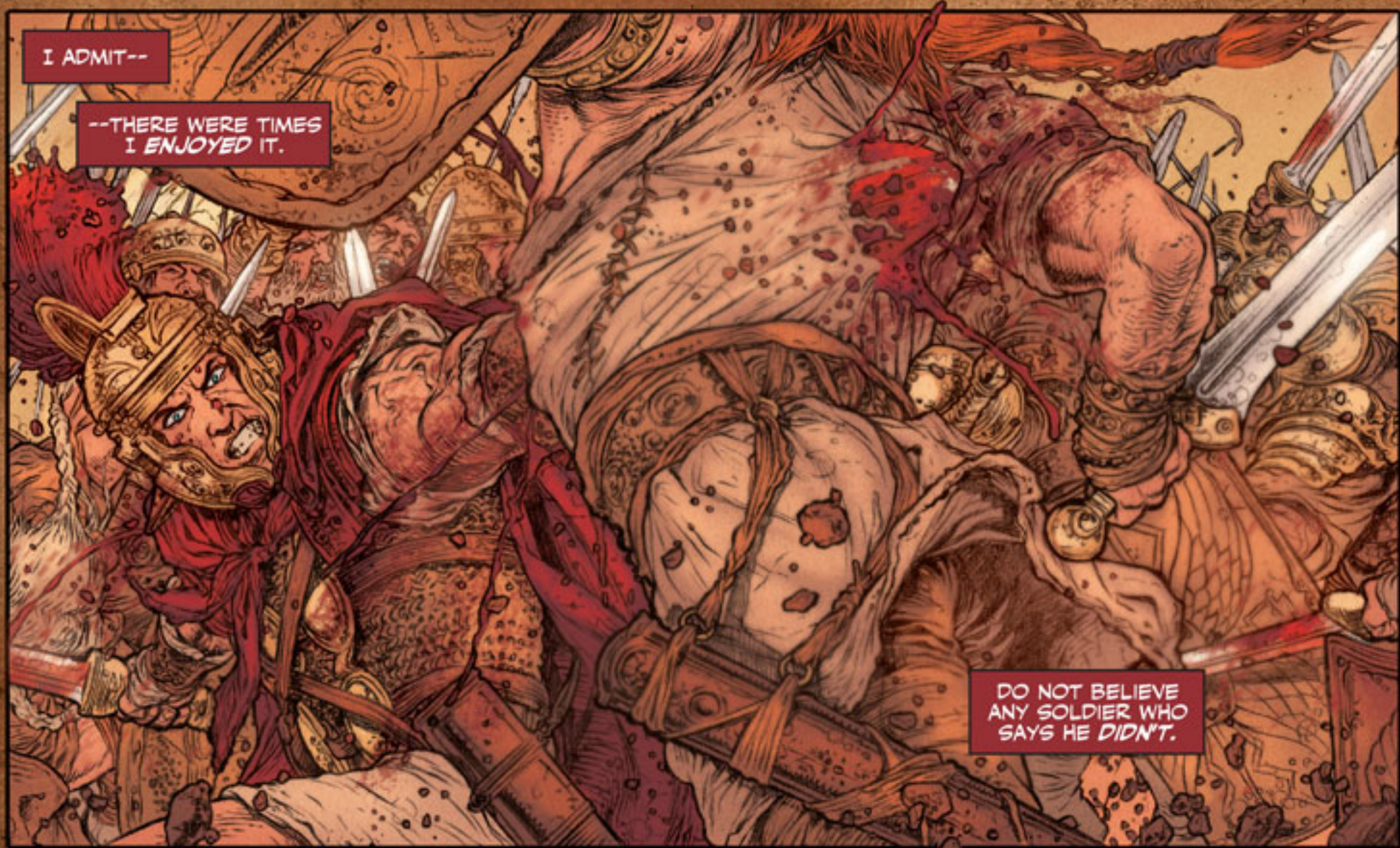
COVERS BY: CARY NORD | ADAM GORHAM WITH ANDREW DALHOUSE | JUAN JOSÉ RYP WITH ANDREW DALHOUSE | KHARI EVANS WITH ULISES ARREOLA | DAVE JOHNSON



MY NAME IS ANTONIUS AXIA.

FROM THE DUSTY PLAINS OF PARTHIA TO THE KILLING FIELDS OF GAUL, I SERVED THE ROMAN EMPIRE WELL.

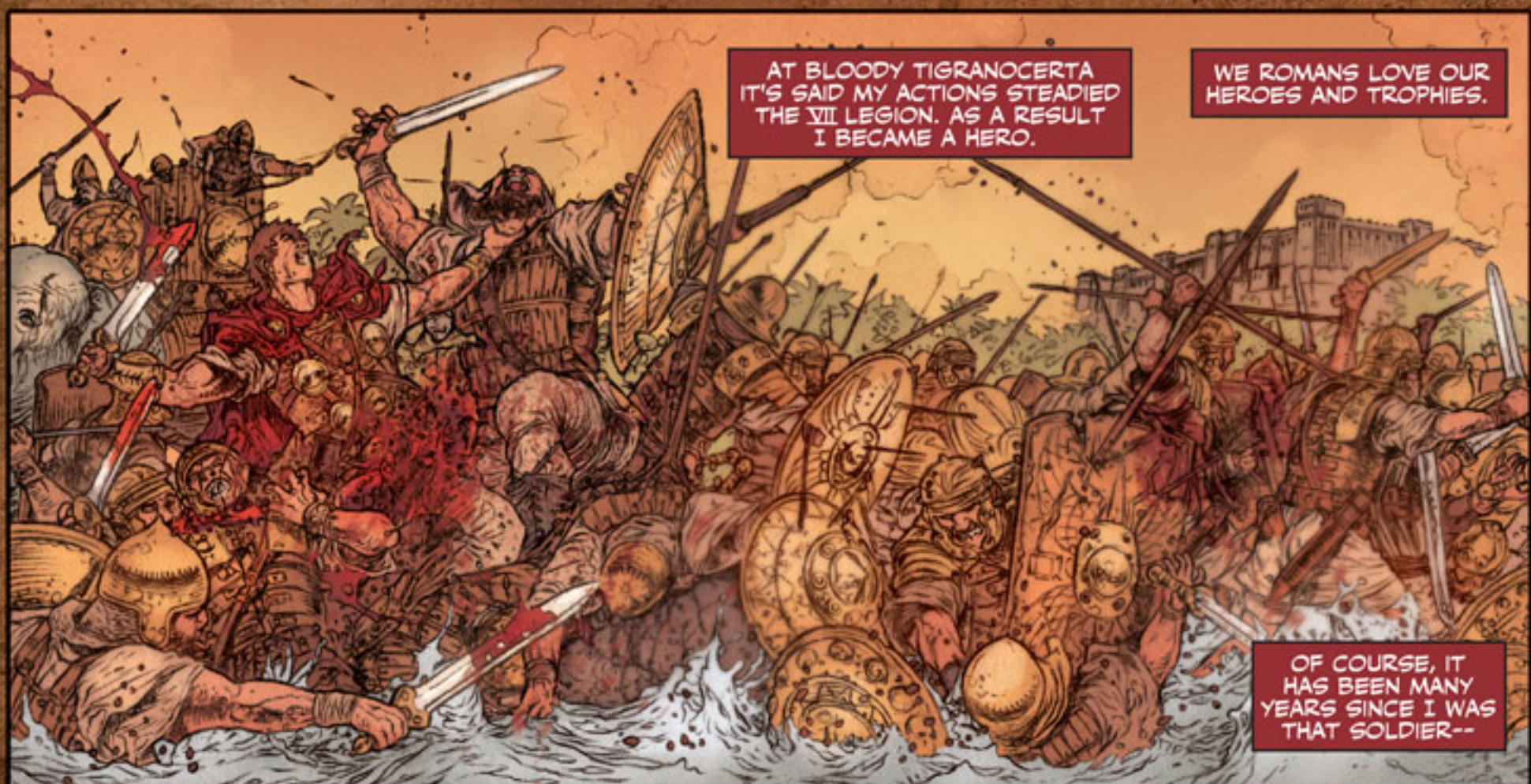
I WAS GOOD AT FIGHTING. I WAS A NATURAL.



I ADMIT--

--THERE WERE TIMES I ENJOYED IT.

DO NOT BELIEVE ANY SOLDIER WHO SAYS HE DIDN'T.



AT BLOODY TIGRANOCERTA IT'S SAID MY ACTIONS STEADIED THE VII LEGION. AS A RESULT I BECAME A HERO.

WE ROMANS LOVE OUR HEROES AND TROPHIES.

OF COURSE, IT HAS BEEN MANY YEARS SINCE I WAS THAT SOLDIER--

--BUT--IT SEEMS--
YOU NEVER QUITE
LOSE THAT INSTINCT.

AAGGH!

UGH!



YOU...GHN!...
YOU SHOULD HAVE STAYED
IN ROME, DETECTIONER,
INSTEAD OF STICKING YOUR
NOSE WHERE IT
DOESN'T BELONG.

Y-YOU THINK
I...UGH!...I WANTED
TO SWAP THE CAPITAL
OF THE WORLD
FOR THIS FREEZING
DUNGHEAP?

I COME ON THE
AUTHORITY OF NERO...
TO FIND OUT WHAT'S
HAPPENING TO HIS
LEGIONAIRES.



TO HELL WITH HIS
LEGIONAIRES!

GAFF!

UGH!



TO HELL
WITH NERO!
AND MOST
OF ALL--



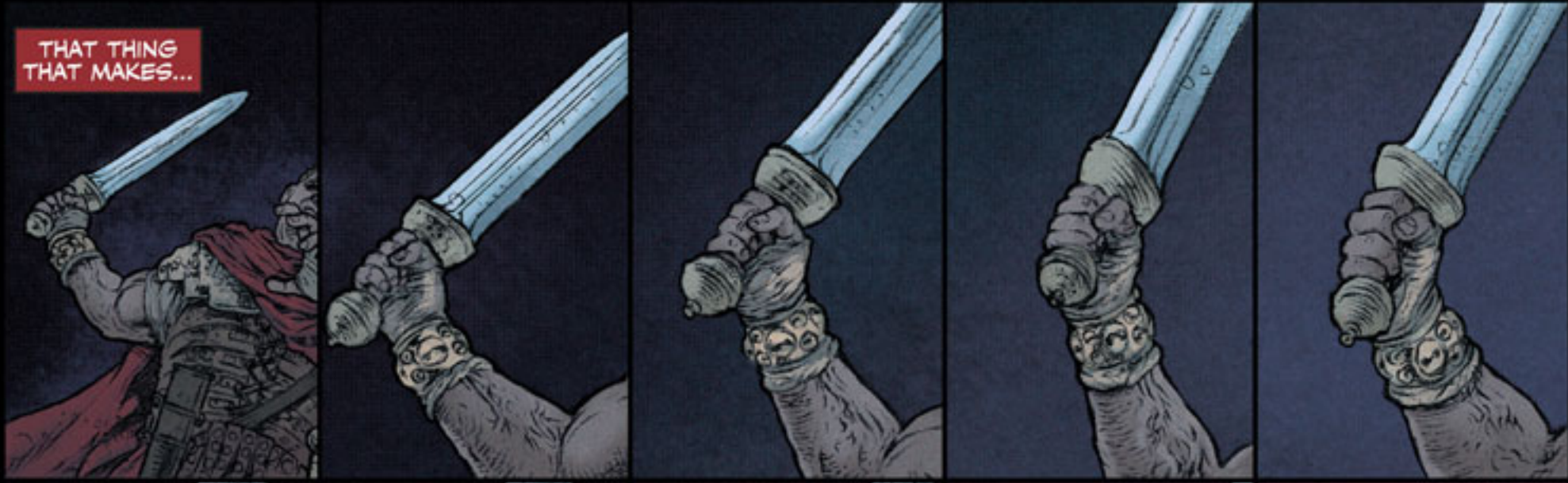
TO
HELL WITH YOU,
DETECTIONER!



YES, IT'S BEEN
YEARS SINCE I WAS
A LEGIONNAIRE.

BUT THAT THING WITH
TIME STILL HAPPENS.

THAT THING
THAT MAKES...



...EVERYTHING...



...SO
VERY...



...VERY...



...SLOW.

NO!!



EXCEPT YOUR
OWN SWORD.

SSSSSHLLL

AAAAGHHHH





AAAGHH!

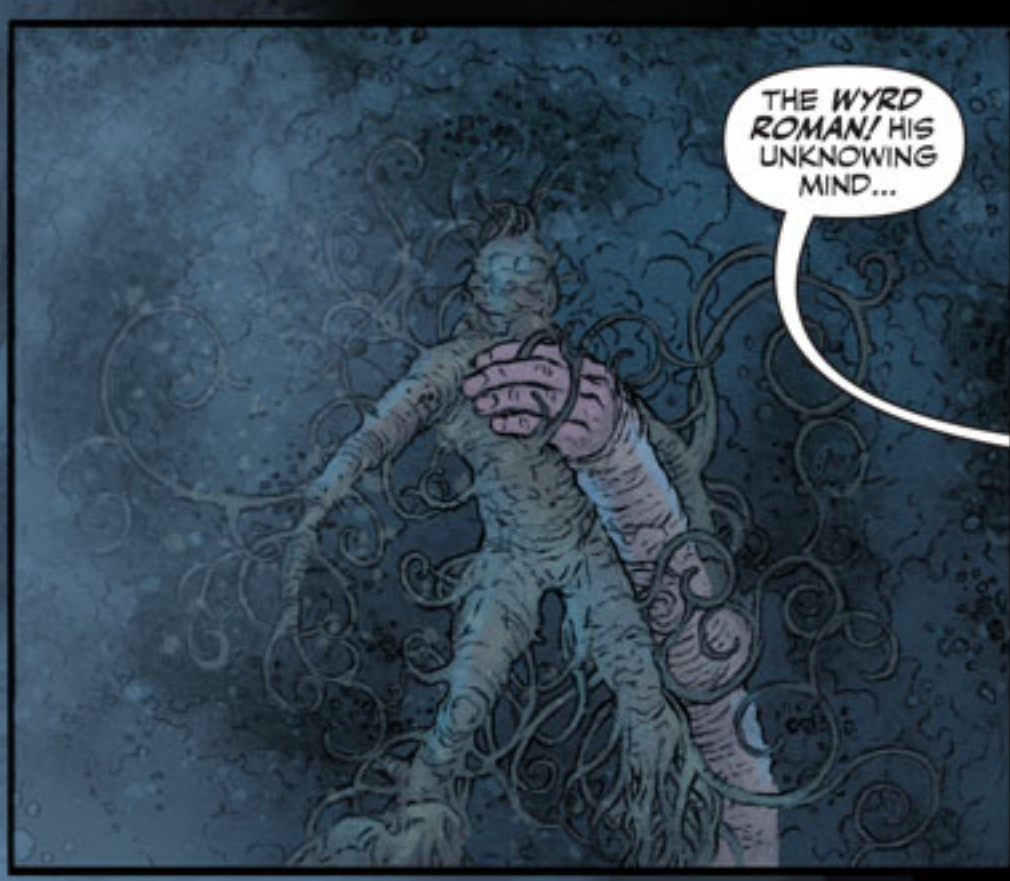
...BLOOD!
I...UGHHH...
I TASTE
BLOOD!



AWAKEN
DEMONS
ALL--



TAKE
THIS ROOT
OF MANDRAKE,
HEAR BODMALL'S
HEARTFELT,
EARTHBOUND
CALL--



THE WYRD
ROMAN! HIS
UNKNOWING
MIND...



'TIS
BODMALL...
IT SEEKS TO
FIND!



WHEN THEY DISCOVER THIS, THEY'LL PUT ME TO DEATH. MINE WILL BE AN UNMARKED GRAVE IN A FOREIGN LAND.

I'LL NEVER SEE MY SON AGAIN.

THEN I REMEMBER--



I REMEMBER MY INVESTIGATIONS BACK AT THE CAMP. THE FUNERARY HOUSE.

THE SWORD WOUNDS ON THOSE SOLDIERS, SUPPOSEDLY KILLED BY A DEVIL.



THE SOLDIERS OF THIS BORDER CAMP ARE SCARED.

IF I DO MY WORK WELL, THEIR FEVERED IMAGINATIONS WILL DO THE REST.

THEY'LL SEE THIS AS DEVIL'S WORK.



I'M NO DEVIL, BUT NEITHER DO I FEEL QUITE HUMAN. TO MUTILATE THE DEAD, IT'S UN-ROMAN.

BUT DEVILS ARE SO MUCH EASIER TO BELIEVE IN THAN GODS...

ANTONIUS...
AXIA...

I WISH I STILL BELIEVED IN THE GODS, SO I COULD MAKE THE PRAYERS OF PURIFICATION.



NOW... FINALLY... YOU SHALL BE MINE.

YOU, ORKUS!

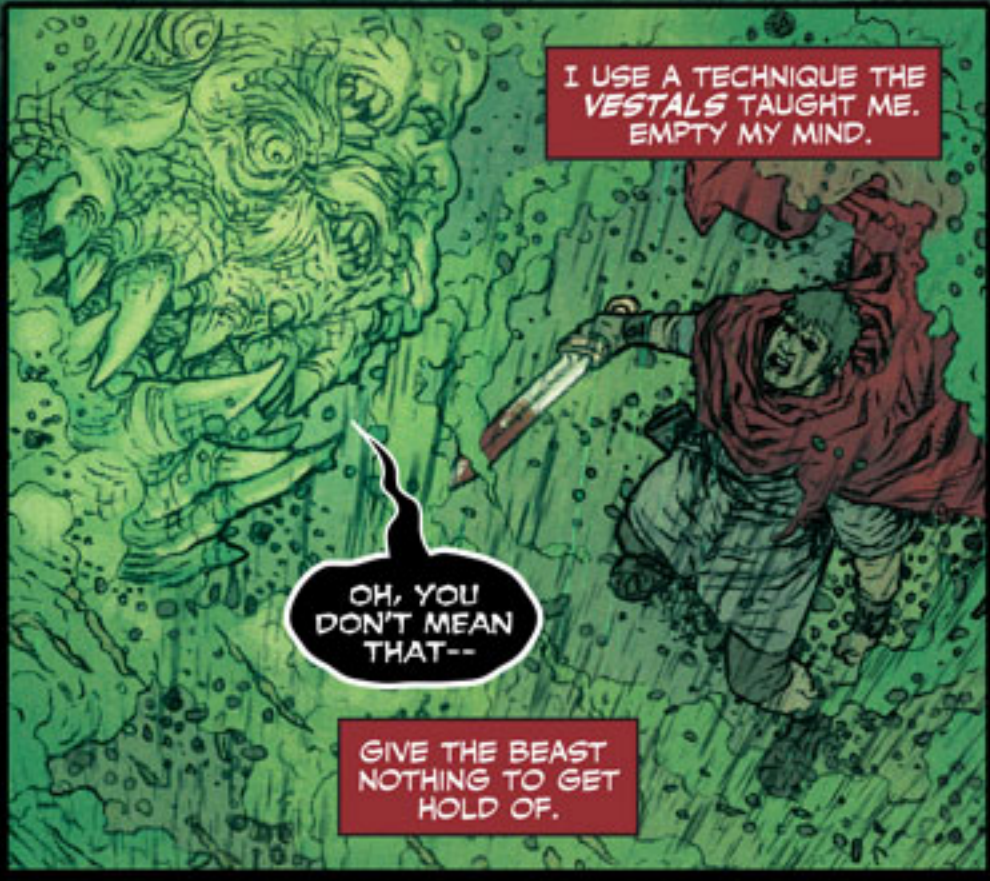
THE D-DEMON... WHO T-TRIED TO TORTURE ME... WITH VISIONS OF MY DEAD WIFE!

YES, I RECOGNIZE IT.



THE STENCH OF PUTRID WASTE. DIGGING INTO MY MIND.

I...AM A RATIONAL MAN. I...I REFUSE TO ACCEPT YOU. YOU ARE SHADOW... YOU ARE... NOTHING.



I USE A TECHNIQUE THE VESTALS TAUGHT ME. EMPTY MY MIND.

OH, YOU DON'T MEAN THAT--

GIVE THE BEAST NOTHING TO GET HOLD OF.



I TRY TO KEEP HIS PRYING MIND OUT.

BUT HE'S INSIDE ME. CONTROLLING ME. FORCING ME TO GO BACK, TO REMEMBER. DARK DAYS...

DAYS OF PAIN, DESPAIR...