

BLOODSTONE™



30
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image

#1
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GOT AN UNEXPECTED CALL FROM OUR SOURCE UP AT CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE A WHILE BACK, ROOM. LOOKS LIKE THERE'S A PROBLEM DEVELOPING WITH ONE OF G.A.T.E.* INTERNATIONAL'S ARMED FACILITIES.

DETAILS WERE SKETCHY, BUT WITH ALL THE FIRE POWER AT G.A.T.E.'S DISPOSAL, ANY LITTLE SLIP-UP COULD POSE A SERIOUS THREAT TO NATIONAL SECURITY IF IT'S NOT TAKEN CARE OF IN A HURRY.

BASE IS LOCATED OUT IN THE MIDDLE OF ARIZONA; CI SHOULD BE PATCHING THE COORDINATES THROUGH TO YOU ANY MINUTE NOW. YOU PICKIN' ANYTHING UP?

I'M PROCESSING THE INFORMATION AS WE SPEAK, CABBOT.

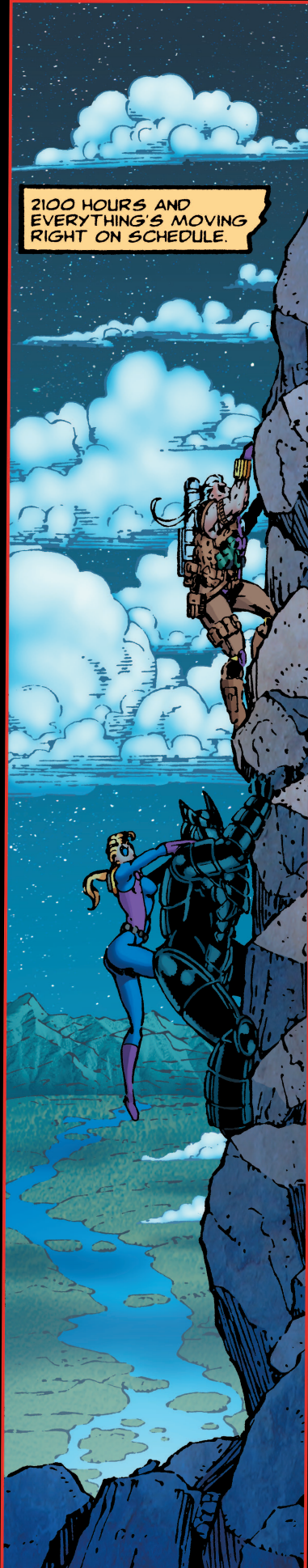
BASED ON WHAT I HAVE SO FAR, IT SHOULDN'T TAKE MORE THAN AN HOUR TO CHARGE MY CELLS FOR LONG DISTANCE TRANSPORT--

GOOD. I'LL GET THE REST OF THE TEAM TOGETHER--WE'LL BE MOVING FIVE BODIES THIS TIME, ROOM.

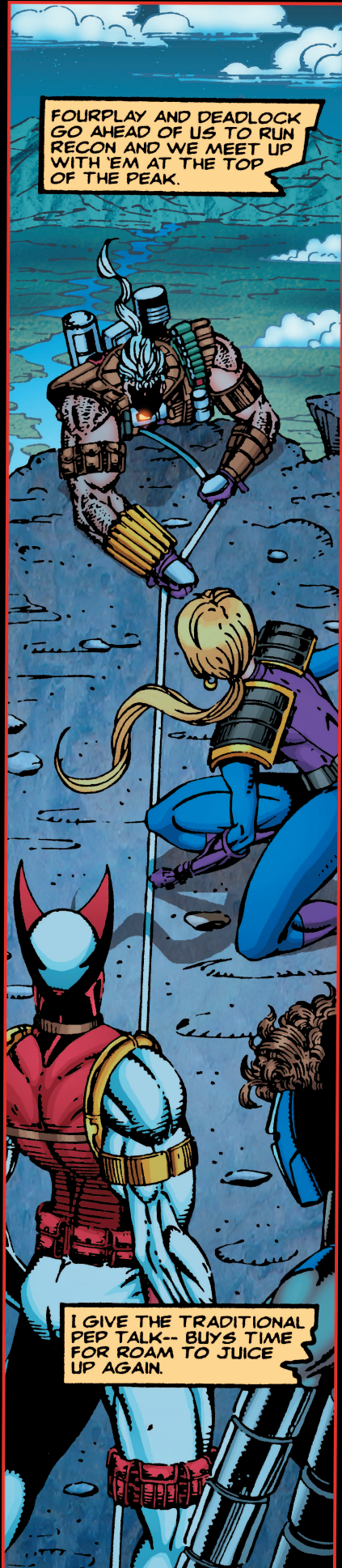
LATER ON TONIGHT OUR FINE FRIEND AT G.A.T.E. WON'T KNOW WHAT HIT HIM--

*GENETIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL ENGINEERING

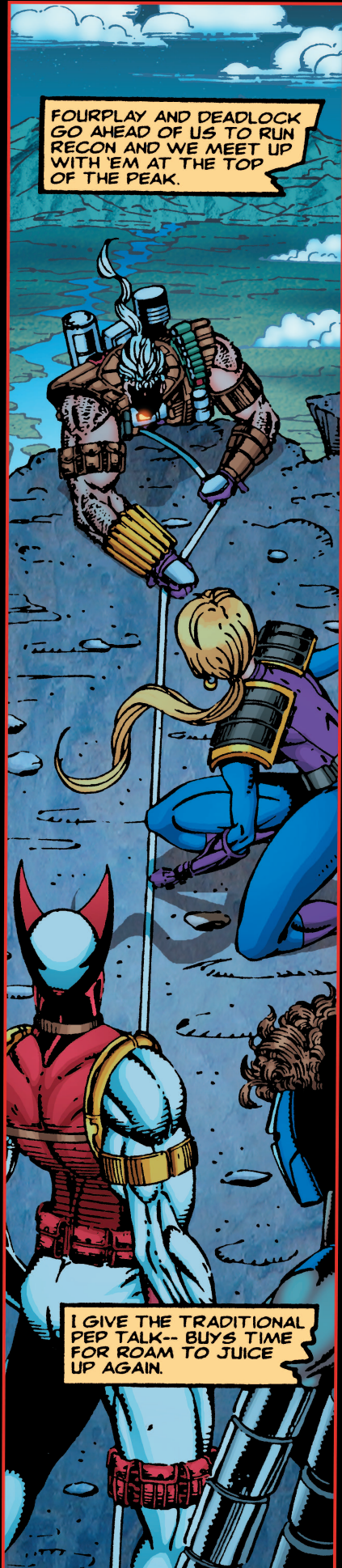
...AND I GUARANTEE HE'LL WISH HE NEVER HAD THE PLEASURE O' TANGLIN' WITH BLOODSTRIKE!



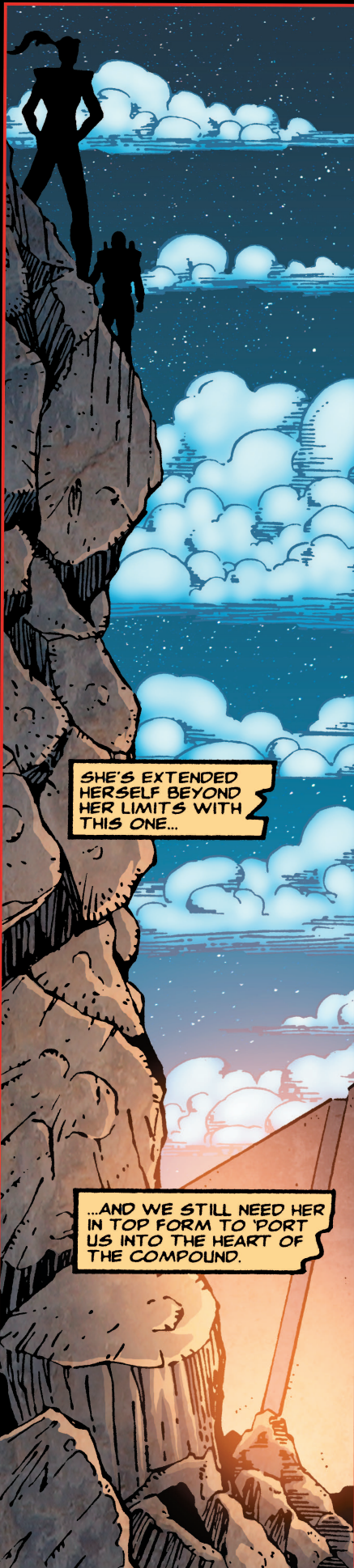
2100 HOURS AND
EVERYTHING'S MOVING
RIGHT ON SCHEDULE.



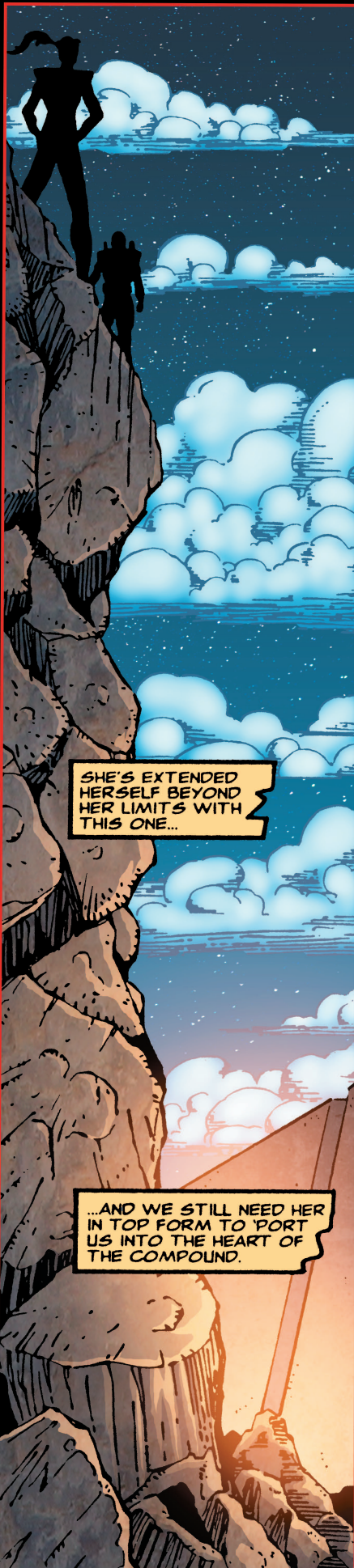
FOURPLAY AND DEADLOCK
GO AHEAD OF US TO RUN
RECON AND WE MEET UP
WITH 'EM AT THE TOP
OF THE PEAK.



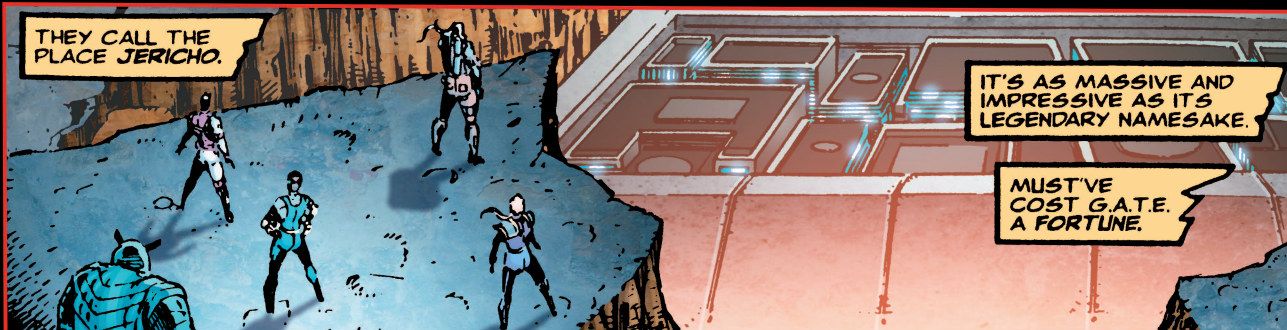
I GIVE THE TRADITIONAL
PEP TALK-- BUYS TIME
FOR ROAM TO JUICE
UP AGAIN.



SHE'S EXTENDED
HERSELF BEYOND
HER LIMITS WITH
THIS ONE...



...AND WE STILL NEED HER
IN TOP FORM TO PORT
US INTO THE HEART OF
THE COMPOUND.



THEY CALL THE PLACE JERICO.

IT'S AS MASSIVE AND IMPRESSIVE AS ITS LEGENDARY NAMESAKE.

MUST'VE COST G.A.T.E. A FORTUNE.



SHAME FOR THEM IT'S ABOUT TO COME TO AN END.

WHATEVER THE PROBLEM IS HERE, SOMEBODY HIGH UP MUST REALLY WANT TO TRASH THESE GUYS...

...OTHERWISE, WE WOULDN'T BE HERE.



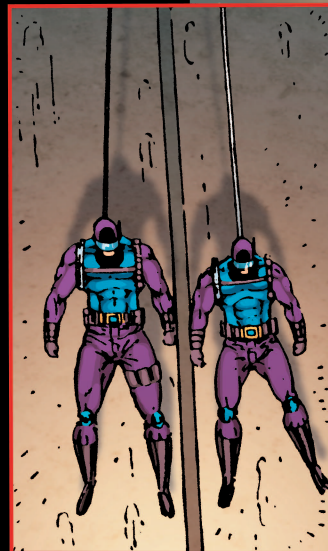
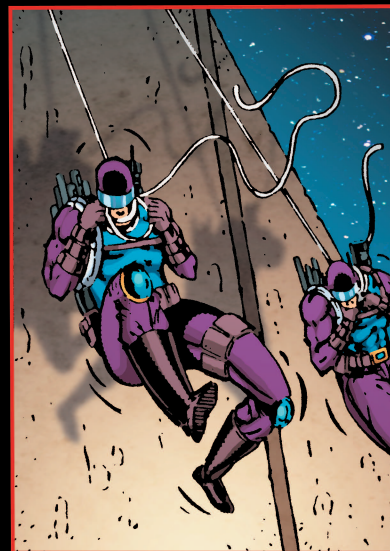
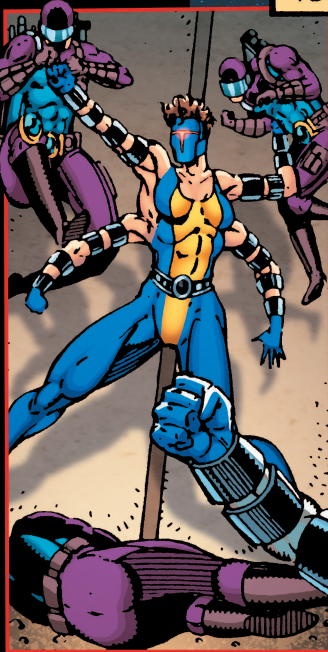
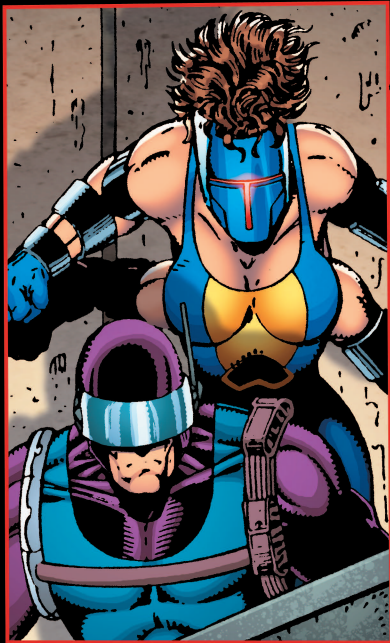
ROAM TELLS ME SHE'S WARMED UP AND READY TO GO, SO WE MOVE OUT.



FROM HERE ON IN, WE'VE GOT ONE OBJECTIVE-- MAKE SURE JERICO COMES A TUMBLIN' DOWN!

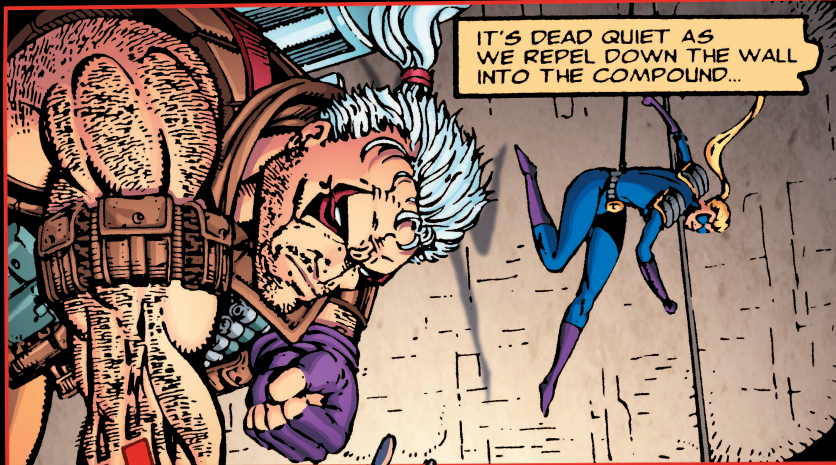


ONCE WE'RE ON THE GROUND,
EVERYTHING MOVES ALONG
PRETTY MUCH ACCORDING
TO PLAN.

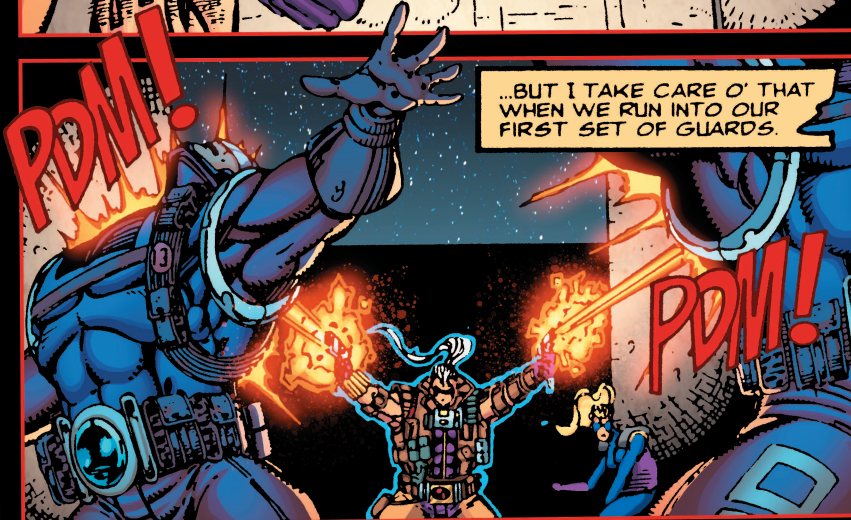


DEADLOCK AND FOURPLAY
CREATE A DISTURBANCE
OUTSIDE THE MAIN GATE...

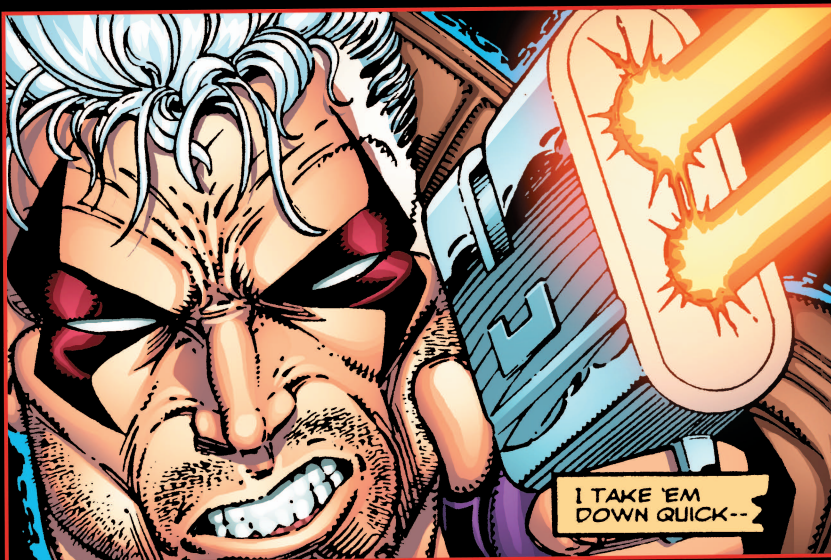
...WHILE ME AND TAG
TAKE THE PARTY INSIDE.



IT'S DEAD QUIET AS
WE REPEL DOWN THE WALL
INTO THE COMPOUND...

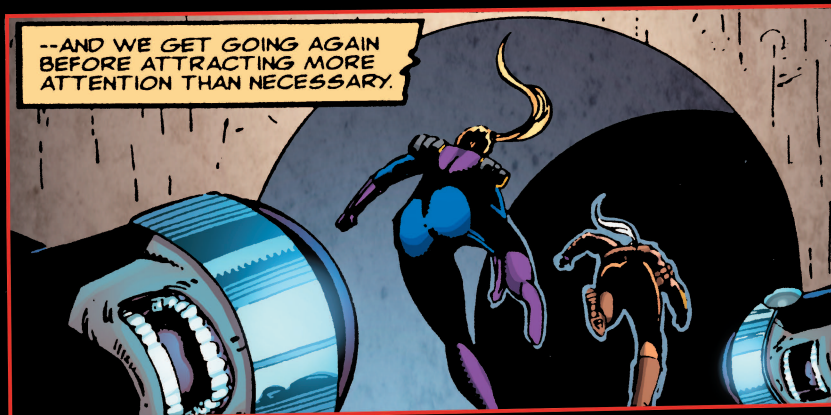


...BUT I TAKE CARE O' THAT
WHEN WE RUN INTO OUR
FIRST SET OF GUARDS.



I TAKE 'EM
DOWN QUICK--

--AND WE GET GOING AGAIN
BEFORE ATTRACTING MORE
ATTENTION THAN NECESSARY.



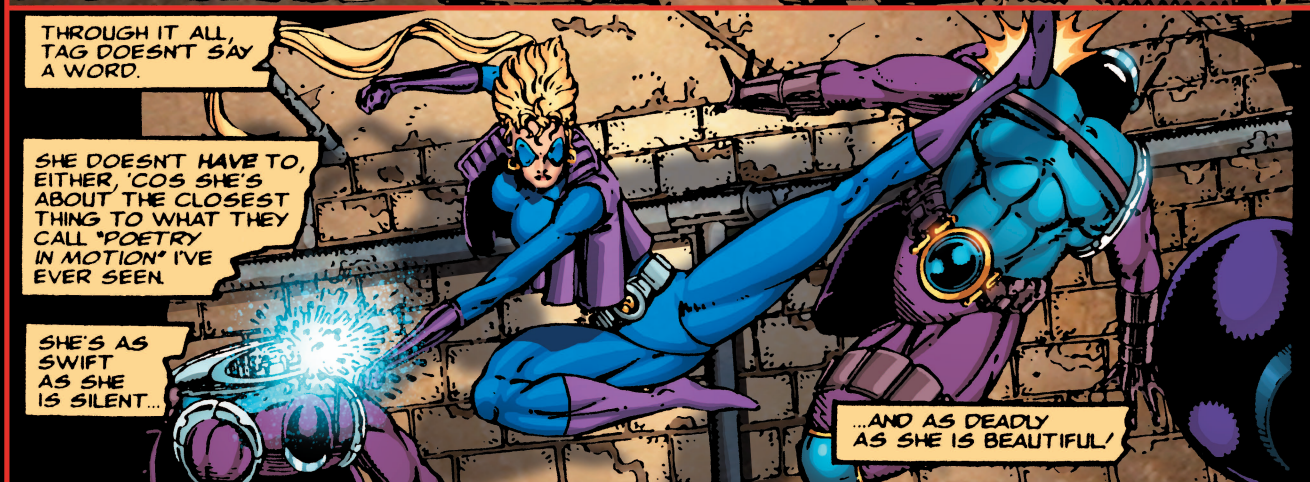


MIDWAY THROUGH THE TUNNEL, WE RUN HEAD-ON INTO A SECOND BAND OF GRUNTS--MAKIN' IT PRETTY CLEAR THE FOLKS IN CHARGE ARE ONTO US.

NOT THAT IT MATTERS IN THE FINAL WASH OR ANYTHING--

OR SO WE THINK.

--'COS THESE MOOKS ARE HISTORY WHETHER THEY KNEW WE WERE COMIN' OR NOT.

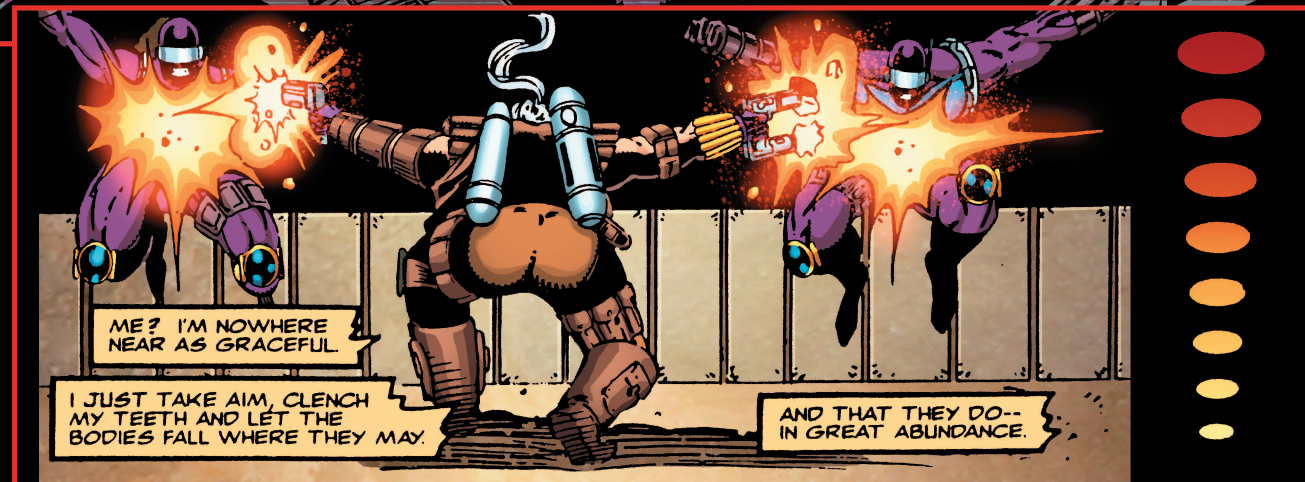


THROUGH IT ALL, TAG DOESN'T SAY A WORD.

SHE DOESN'T HAVE TO, EITHER, 'COS SHE'S ABOUT THE CLOSEST THING TO WHAT THEY CALL "POETRY IN MOTION" I'VE EVER SEEN.

SHE'S AS SWIFT AS SHE IS SILENT...

...AND AS DEADLY AS SHE IS BEAUTIFUL!

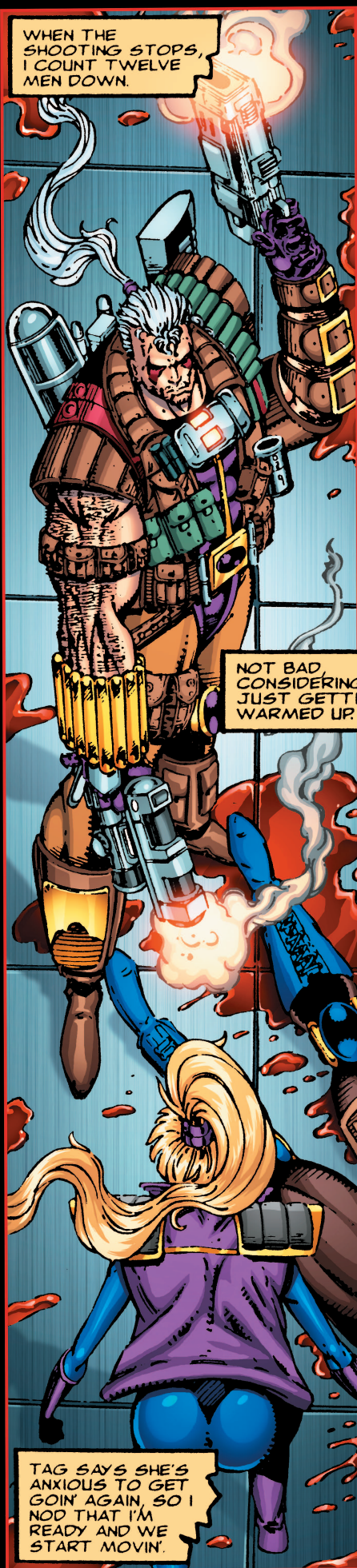


ME? I'M NOWHERE NEAR AS GRACEFUL.

I JUST TAKE AIM, CLENCH MY TEETH AND LET THE BODIES FALL WHERE THEY MAY.

AND THAT THEY DO-- IN GREAT ABUNDANCE.





WHEN THE SHOOTING STOPS, I COUNT TWELVE MEN DOWN.

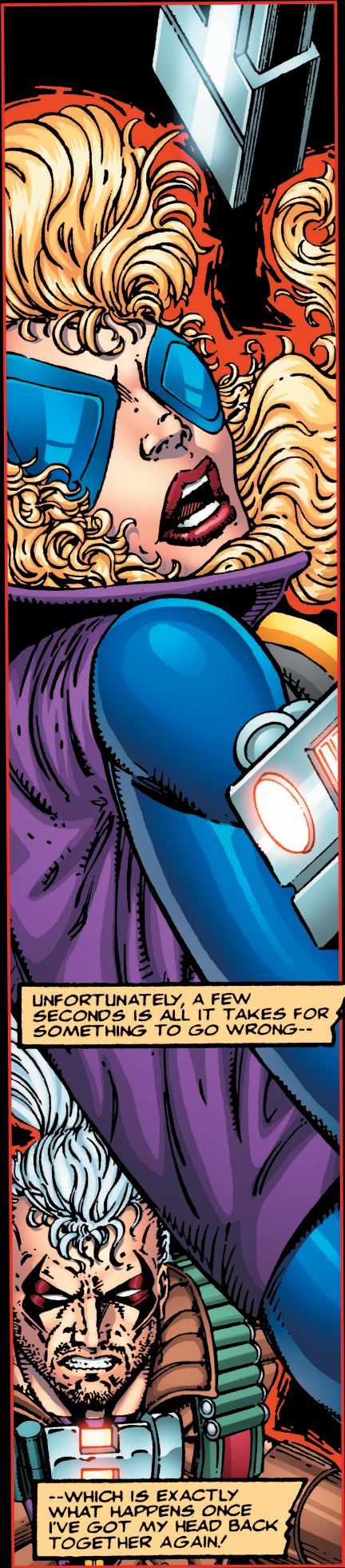
NOT BAD CONSIDERING I'M JUST GETTIN' WARMED UP.

TAG SAYS SHE'S ANXIOUS TO GET GOIN' AGAIN, SO I NOD THAT I'M READY AND WE START MOVIN'.

ALL OF A SUDDEN, THOUGH, I GET THIS WEIRD FEELING-- LIKE I'M DOIN' SOMETHING I'VE DONE BEFORE--AND I FREEZE UP.

STUPID FLASHBACKS ALWAYS HITTIN' ME AT THE WORST TIMES-- REMINDIN' ME OF THINGS I DID BACK WHEN I WAS STILL ALIVE.

IT TAKES ME A FEW SECONDS, BUT I RIDE THE WORST OF IT OUT.



UNFORTUNATELY, A FEW SECONDS IS ALL IT TAKES FOR SOMETHING TO GO WRONG--

--WHICH IS EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENS ONCE I'VE GOT MY HEAD BACK TOGETHER AGAIN!



GOOD EVENING,
MY FRIENDS.

I AM
COMMANDER
CORBEN...AND
YOU--

--WHOEVER YOU
MAY BE--HAVE MADE THE
UNFORTUNATE MISTAKE OF
TRESPASSING ON A G.A.T.E.
INSTALLATION.

ORDINARILY, I WOULD ASK YOU TO
DROP YOUR WEAPONS AND TAKE YOU
INTO CUSTODY FOR QUESTIONING...

...THE CIRCUMSTANCES BEING WHAT
THEY ARE, HOWEVER, I'M AFRAID I'LL
HAVE TO FOREGO ANY SUCH
DECORUM IN FAVOR OF SIMPLY
DISPOSING OF YOU...IMMEDIATELY.
GUARDS..?



CORBEN LAUGHS LONG AND
HARD AS HIS HENCHMEN
TAKE AIM ON ME AND TAG.

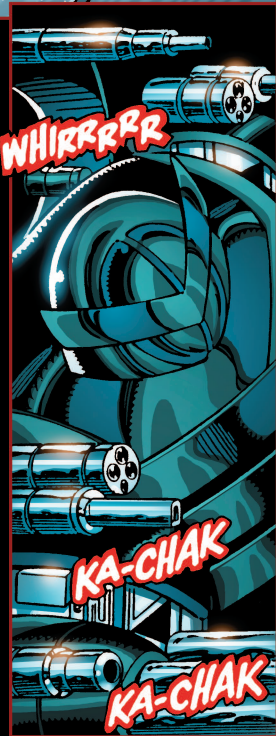
THERE'S SOMETHING LIKE HALF
A DOZEN OF 'EM AND IT'S ENOUGH
TO MAKE ME LAUGH. SIX GUARDS
OR SIX HUNDRED -- IT DON'T MAKE
A DAMN BIT OF DIFFERENCE WHEN
YOU'RE SHOOTING AT A DEAD MAN.

I'M JUST ABOUT READY TO LET
'EM IN ON THAT LITTLE PIECE O'
INFORMATION WHEN PRACTICALLY
OUT OF NOWHERE--

--THE CAVALRY
ARRIVES.

SHOGUN LOOKS LIKE AN
ANGEL OF DESTRUCTION
AS HE CRASHES DOWN
THROUGH THE SKYLIGHT
AND, JUDGING BY THE
WAY CORBEN AND HIS
GOONS REACT, I'M NOT
THE ONLY ONE MAKING
THAT COMPARISON.





THAT'S THE GREAT THING ABOUT A GUY LIKE SHOOGUN. NOT ONLY IS HE THE SIZE OF A TANK, BUT HE'S BUILT LIKE ONE, TOO.

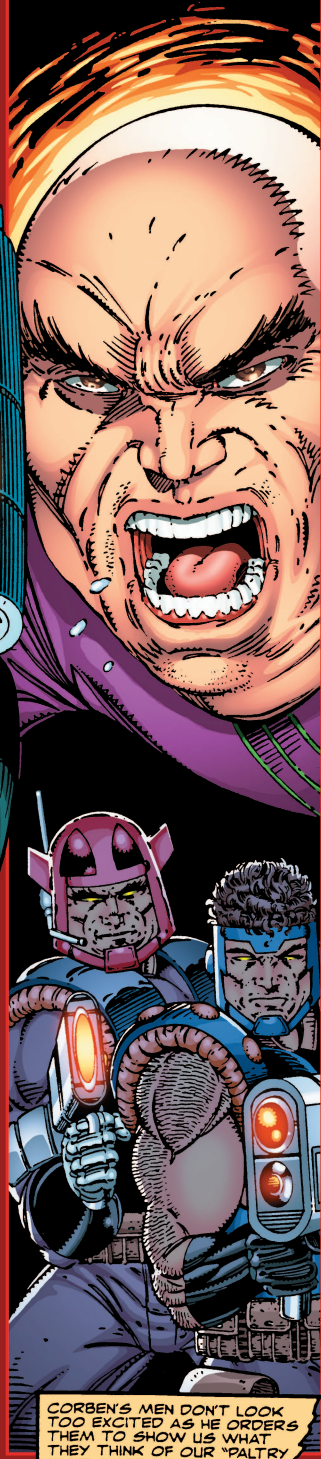
ONCE HE'S GOT ALL HIS WEAPONS SYSTEMS UP AND RUNNING, THAT ANGEL O' DESTRUCTION COMPARISON STARTS SOUNDIN' MORE AND MORE LIKE THE TRUTH...

AM I TO PRESUME THIS IS SUPPOSED TO INTIMIDATE ME?!!

YOU CAN SAVE YOUR PARLOR TRICKS FOR SOMEONE WHO GIVES A DAMN, OKAY?! GUARDS--!

...ESPECIALLY IF YOU'RE ON THE RECEIVIN' END OF ONE OF THE LARGEST MOBILE ARSENALS EVER CREATED!

CORBEN'S MEN DON'T LOOK TOO EXCITED AS HE ORDERS THEM TO SHOW US WHAT THEY THINK OF OUR "PALTRY DISPLAY OF POWER"...



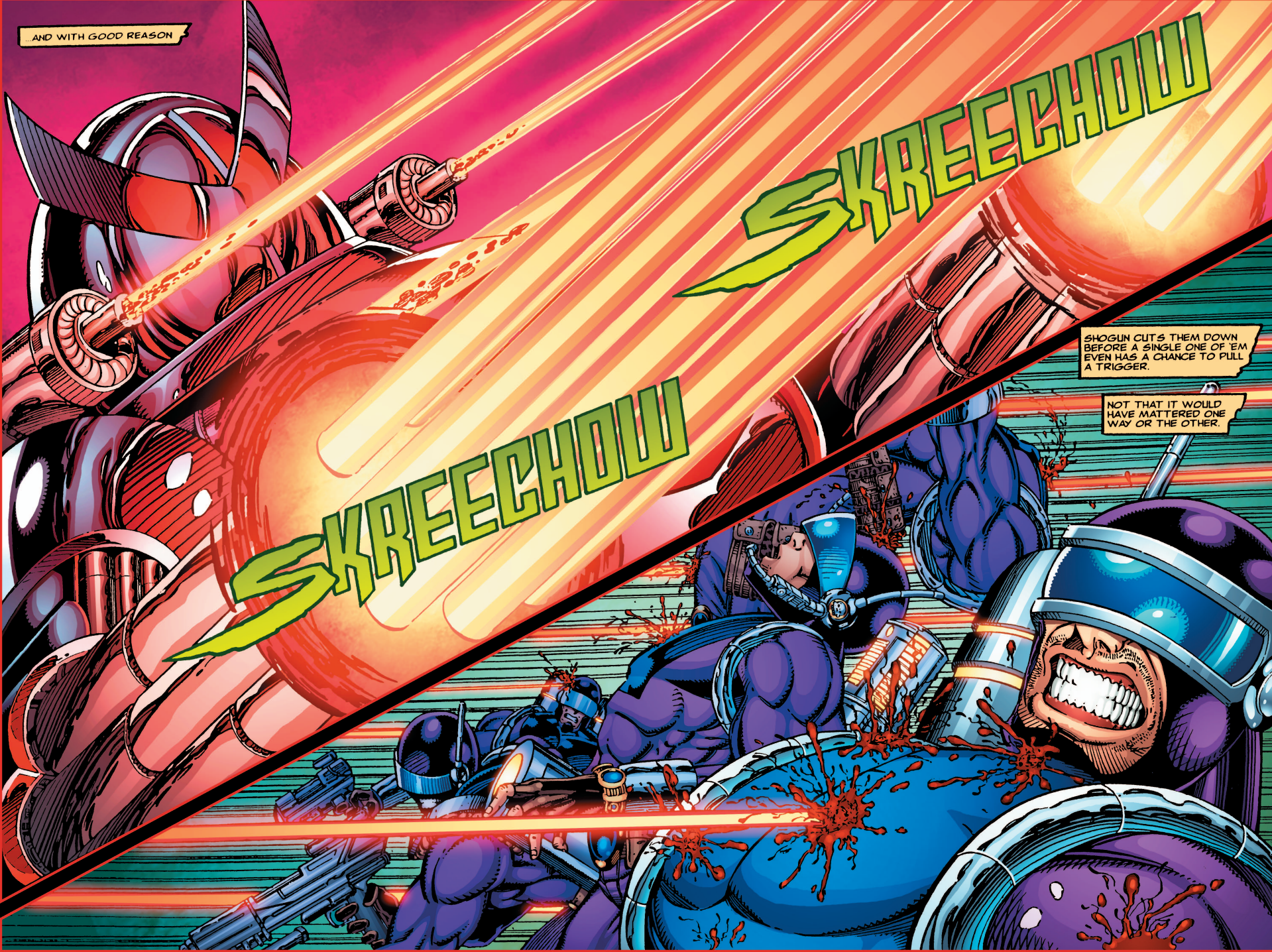
...AND WITH GOOD REASON

SKREECHOW

SKREECHOW

SHOGUN CUTS THEM DOWN
BEFORE A SINGLE ONE OF 'EM
EVEN HAS A CHANCE TO PULL
A TRIGGER.

NOT THAT IT WOULD
HAVE MATTERED ONE
WAY OR THE OTHER.

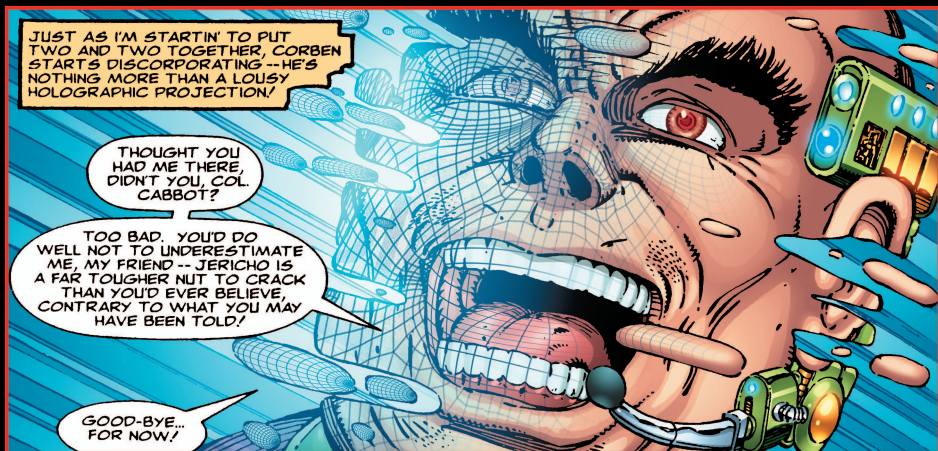




SHOGUN'S POLISHING THE LAST OF 'EM OFF WHEN I REALIZE SOMETHING'S UP WITH CORBEN.



HE'S BEEN HIT TOO MANY TIMES TO BE STANDIN', BUT THERE HE IS-- LAUGHIN' LOUD N' CLEAR LIKE SOME KINDA CRAZED HYENA.

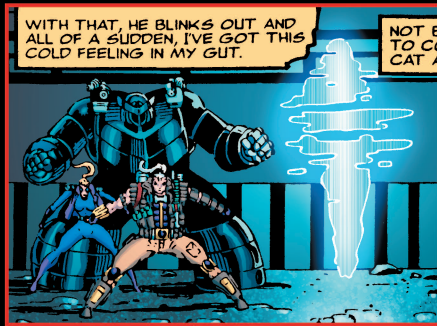


JUST AS I'M STARTIN' TO PUT TWO AND TWO TOGETHER, CORBEN STARTS DISCORPORATING--HE'S NOTHING MORE THAN A LOUSY HOLOGRAPHIC PROJECTION!

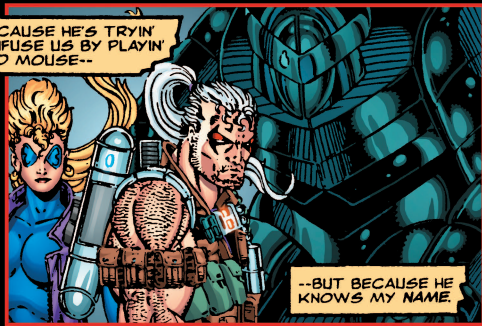
THOUGHT YOU HAD ME THERE DIDN'T YOU, COL. CABBOT?

TOO BAD, YOU'D DO WELL NOT TO UNDERESTIMATE ME, MY FRIEND-- JERICHO IS A FAR TOUGHER NUT TO CRACK THAN YOU'D EVER BELIEVE, CONTRARY TO WHAT YOU MAY HAVE BEEN TOLD!

GOOD-BYE... FOR NOW!



WITH THAT, HE BLINKS OUT AND ALL OF A SUDDEN, I'VE GOT THIS COLD FEELING IN MY GUT.



NOT BECAUSE HE'S TRYIN' TO CONFUSE US BY PLAYIN' CAT AND MOUSE--

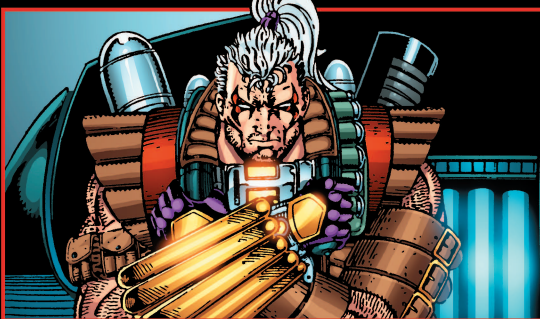
--BUT BECAUSE HE KNOWS MY NAME



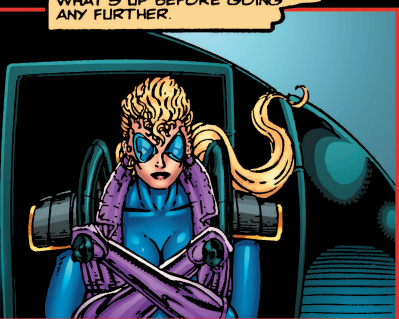
THERE AIN'T A REASON
IN THE WORLD WHY
CORBEN SHOULD KNOW
FACT NUMBER ONE
ABOUT ME--LET ALONE
MY NAME AND RANK--
AND THAT BOTHERS ME.

FOR A SECOND I THINK WE'VE BEEN
SET UP BUT AFTER A FEW MINUTES,
I DECIDE THAT'S TOO EASY. THIS
ONE'S MORE COMPLICATED THAN
THAT, I CAN FEEL IT.

WHATEVER THE CASE, THOUGH, I
FIGURE WE'D BETTER FIND THE
OTHERS AND LET 'EM KNOW
WHAT'S UP BEFORE GOING
ANY FURTHER.

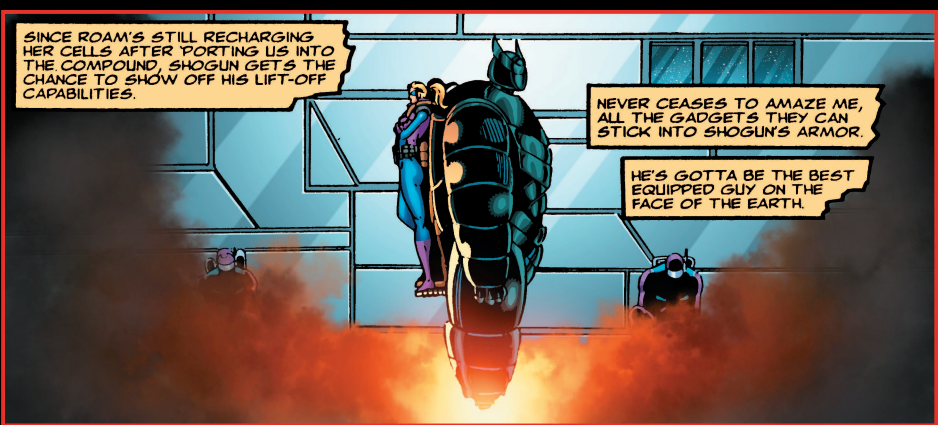


SINCE ROAM'S STILL RECHARGING
HER CELLS AFTER PORTING US INTO
THE COMPOUND, SHOGUN GETS THE
CHANCE TO SHOW OFF HIS LIFT-OFF
CAPABILITIES.

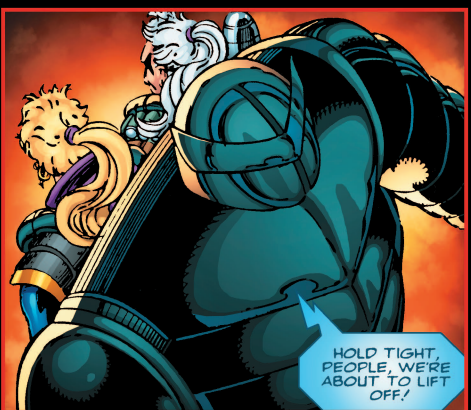


NEVER CEASES TO AMAZE ME,
ALL THE GADGETS THEY CAN
STICK INTO SHOGUN'S ARMOR.

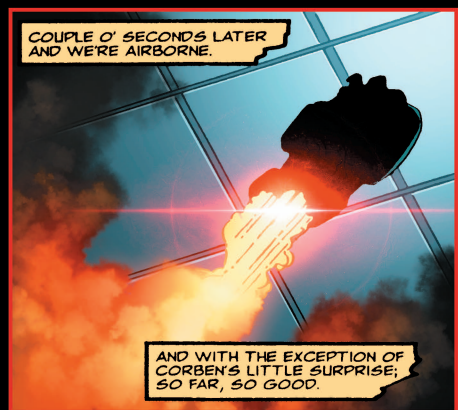
HE'S GOTTA BE THE BEST
EQUIPPED GUY ON THE
FACE OF THE EARTH.



COUPLE O' SECONDS LATER
AND WE'RE AIRBORNE.



HOLD TIGHT,
PEOPLE, WE'RE
ABOUT TO LIFT
OFF!



AND WITH THE EXCEPTION OF
CORBEN'S LITTLE SURPRISE;
SO FAR, SO GOOD.

I JUST HOPE THINGS ARE
GOING AS SMOOTHLY FOR
DEADLOCK AND FOURPLAY.....

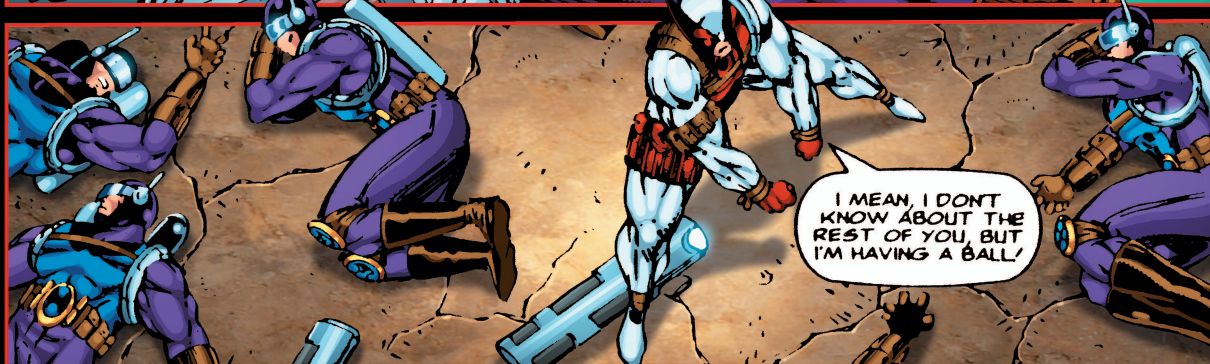
C'MON,
FOURPLAY, GET
A MOVE ON!

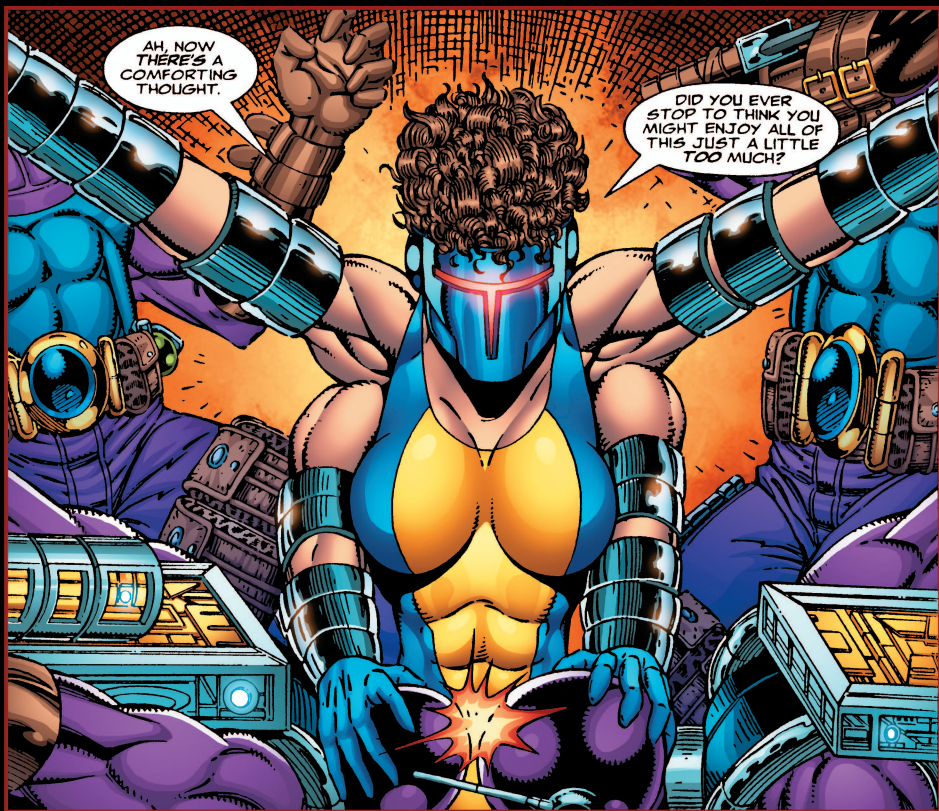
I MIGHT AS
WELL BE TAKIN' THESE
MITTS DOWN ALL
ON MY LONESOME!

I MEAN, WE
HAVEN'T GOT
ALL NIGHT--

--RIGHT,
BUDDY?

UNNCH!





"--AND THAT SOMETHING'S
CALLED SHOGUN!"

WROOOM

SHOGUN BRINGS US DOWN IN
THE MIDDLE OF WHAT LOOKS
LIKE THE STAGING AREA FOR
A SMALL WAR AND I CAN SEE
DEADLOCK AND FOURPLAY HAVE
MORE THAN TAKEN CARE OF
THEMSELVES IN OUR ABSENCE.

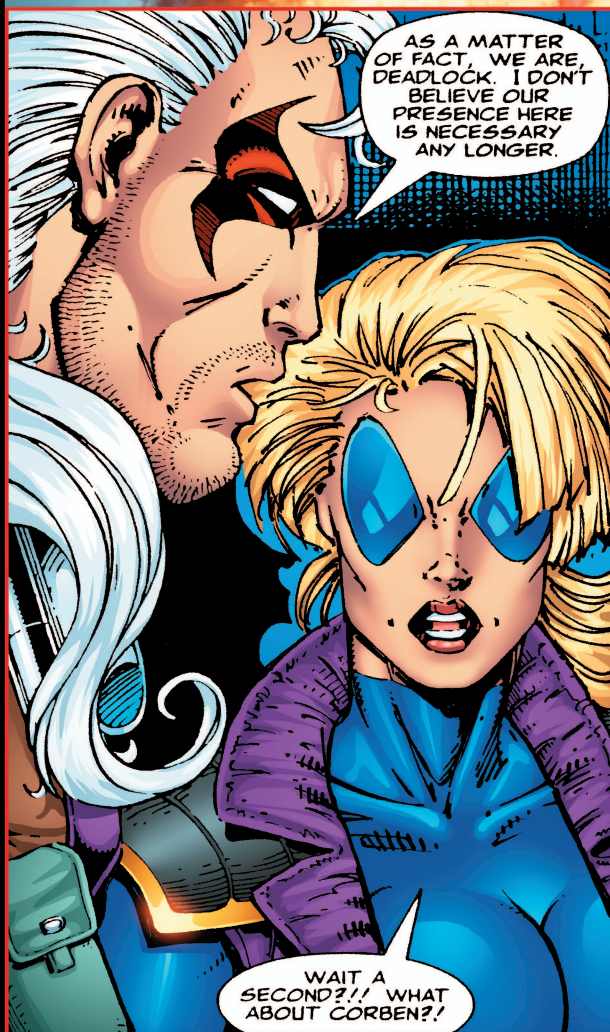
THEN AGAIN, THERE'S NOT MUCH
THAT COULD STAND UP TO EITHER
ONE OF 'EM, LET ALONE THE TWO
OF THEM TOGETHER.

BOTH OF 'EM LOOK
PRETTY ANXIOUS
TO HEAR WHAT'S
GOIN' DOWN INSIDE--

--BUT AFTER HAVING TIME
TO THINK ON THE WAY OVER--

--I DON'T THINK ANYONE'S GONNA BE TOO THRILLED WITH WHAT I PLAN TO DO NEXT.

HEY, THAT WAS QUICK! WE AIN'T OUTTA HERE ALREADY, ARE WE?



WHAT ABOUT HIM? NEAR AS I CAN TELL, HE'S JUST DOING HIS JOB HERE. HOW HE KNOWS WHO I AM, I HAVE NO IDEA, BUT I DO KNOW THIS--

--WHOEVER PAID FOR US TO TAKE ON THIS MISSION DEFINITELY HAD ANOTHER MOTIVE THAN PROTECTING OUR NATIONAL SECURITY INTERESTS ...AND AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, THAT'S REASON ENOUGH FOR US TO GET THE HELL OUTTA THIS PLACE!

CARRYIN' OUT OTHER PEOPLE'S SECRET AGENDAS MAY COME WITH THE TERRITORY IN THIS OUTFIT, BUT YOU GOTTA DRAW THE LINE SOMEWHERE, PEOPLE, AND I'M DRAWIN' IT HERE!



YES, IT'S
ME AGAIN.

AND I HAVE TO **COMMEND**
YOU--YOU CAME **SO CLOSE**
TO DISCOVERING THE **TRUE**
REASON BEHIND YOUR
DEPLOYMENT TO JERICO...

...SO CLOSE, IN FACT,
THAT IT MAKES EXPLAINING
WHY I MUST NOW DESTROY
YOU THAT MUCH EASIER!

YOU SEE, YOU COULDN'T HAVE
BEEN MORE CORRECT WHEN YOU
SUSPECTED A HIDDEN AGENDA
SURROUNDING YOUR MISSION
HERE. LIKewise, YOU WERE DEAD
ON IN ASSUMING I WAS MERELY
DOING MY JOB WHEN I ATTACKED
YOU DURING OUR INITIAL
CONFRONTATION.

AFTER ALL, COLONEL, YOU
WERE CLEARLY THE AGGRESSOR
AND IT IS, IN FACT, MY DUTY
TO PROTECT THIS INSTALLATION
FROM ALL FORMS OF
AGGRESSION--A DUTY I HAVE
TAKEN PRIDE IN PERFORMING--
AND PERFORMING WELL--FOR
THE DURATION OF JERICO'S
EXISTENCE!

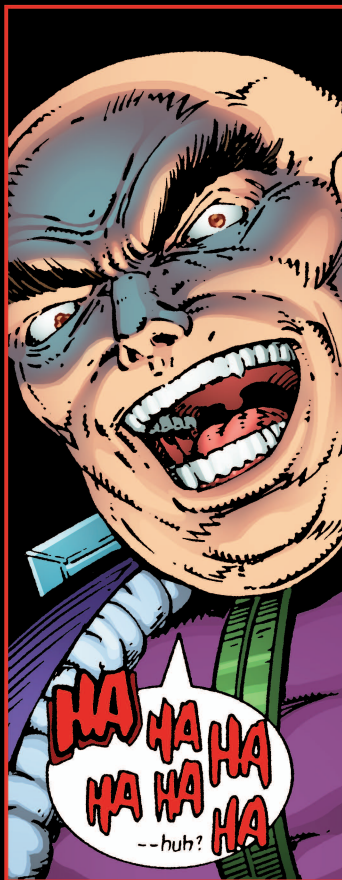
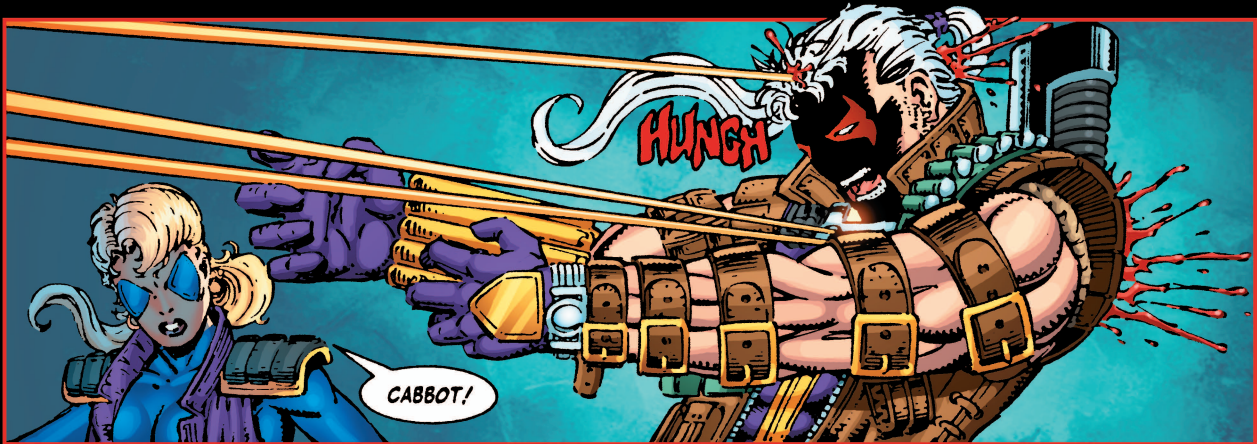
BUT NOT NOW. NO,
THAT'S WHERE OUR
SECRET AGENDA CAME
IN. YOU SEE, IT WAS I
WHO REQUESTED YOUR
PRESENCE
HERE, COLONEL.

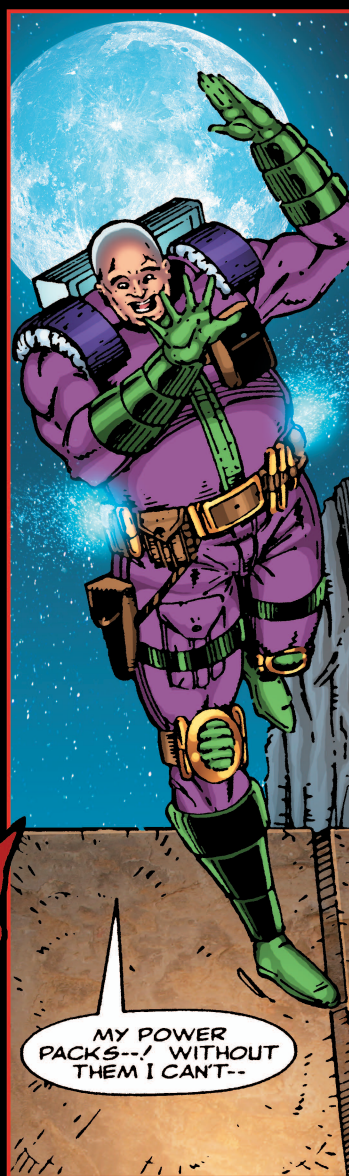
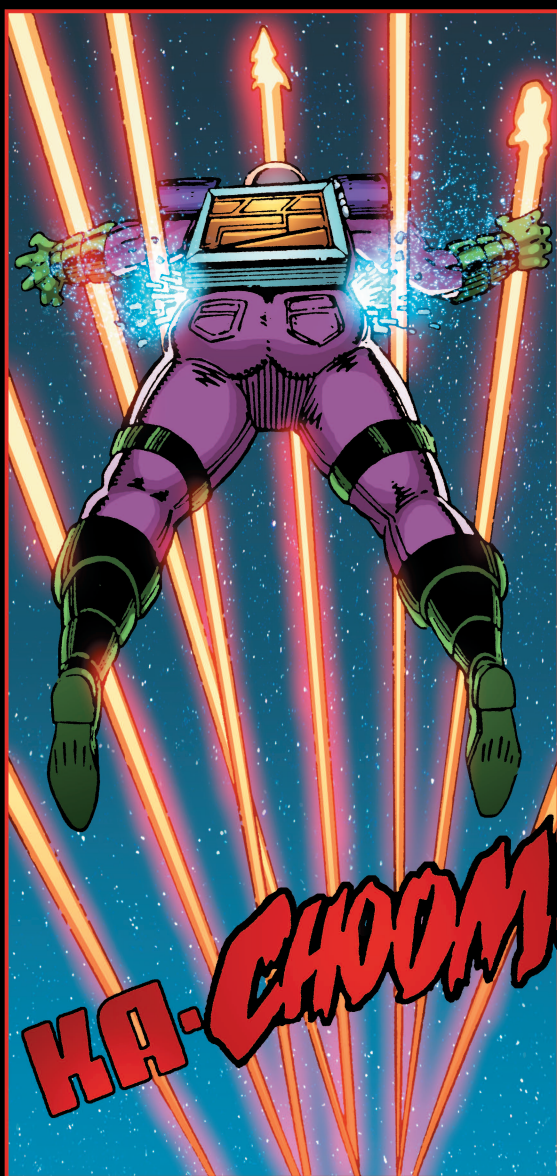
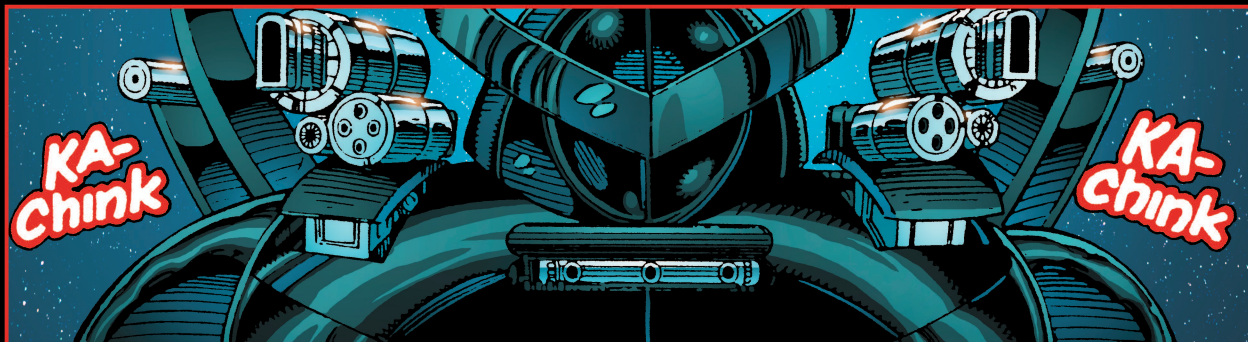
I KNEW IF I COULD
STAVE OFF AN ATTACK
BY YOUR STRIKEFORCE
THERE WAS NO WAY
THEY COULD EVER LET
ME GO. THEY WOULD
BE LOSING FAR TOO
GREAT AN ASSET--!

YOU HIRED
US TO--THAT'S
INSANE!

A JOB WELL DONE ISN'T
ALWAYS REPAID IN KIND,
HOWEVER. IN MY CASE, IN
FACT, IT WAS QUITE
THE OPPOSITE!

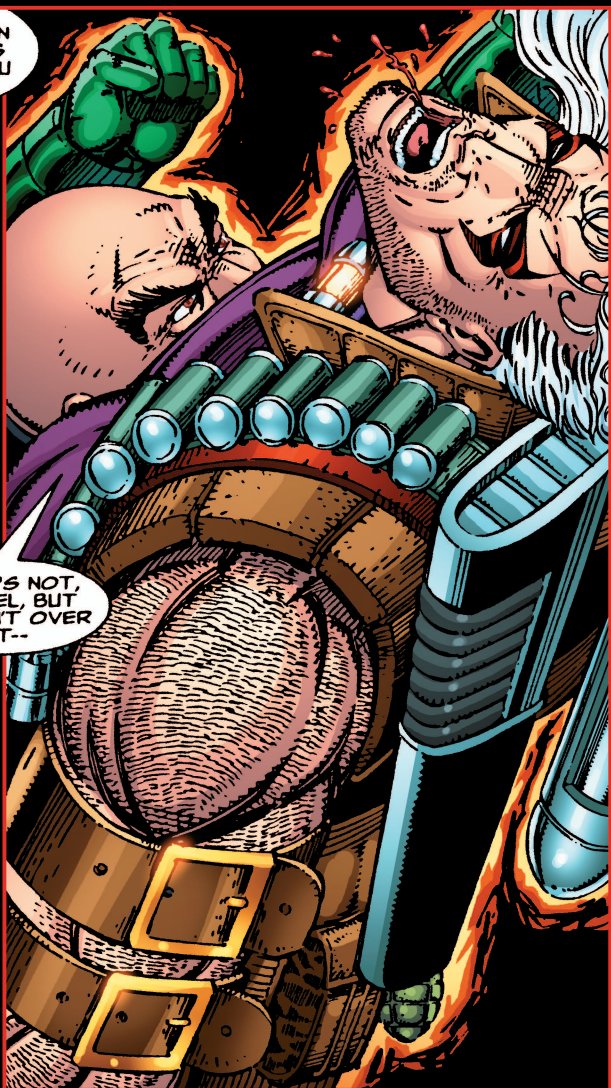
THE HIGHER UPS
HERE AT G.A.T.E. WERE CONVINCED
BY SOME UNKNOWN FACTION THAT I
WAS SLACKING OFF IN MY DUTIES--
THAT I WAS PAST MY PRIME! I WAS
GOING TO BE LET GO, DAMN THEM!



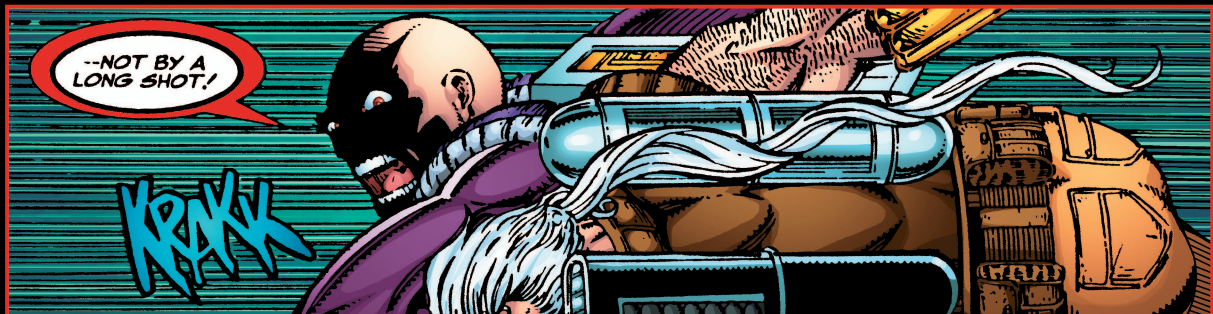




GUESS YOUR PLAN WASN'T QUITE AS FLAWLESS AS YOU THOUGHT, HUH?



PERHAPS NOT, COLONEL, BUT THIS ISN'T OVER YET--



--NOT BY A LONG SHOT!

KRAK



YOU'RE RIGHT... IT ISN'T.

MAKE YOUR MOVE, CORBEN.



FOR A SECOND, HE JUST STANDS THERE GLOWING OVER ME AND, LIKE I SAID BEFORE--

--A SECOND'S ALL IT TAKES FOR SOMETHING TO GO WRONG.

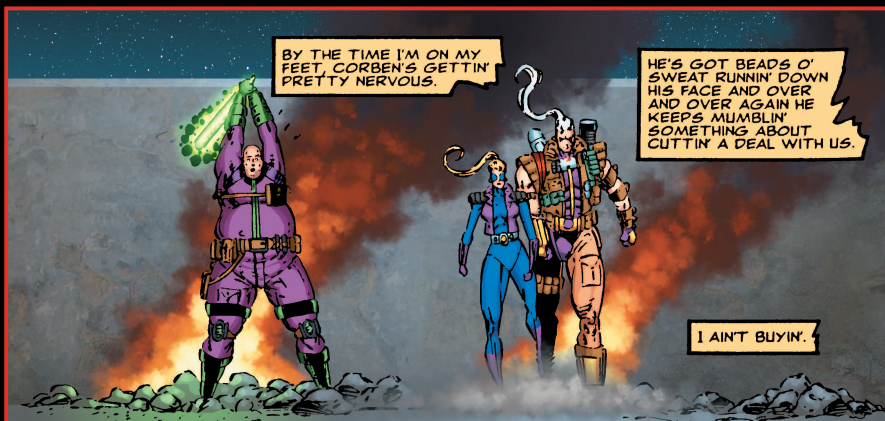
THERE'S A REASON WHY THE GIRL'S CALLED TAG--



--ANYTHING SHE TOUCHES FREEZES IN PLACE, JUST LIKE IN THE GAME.

AND THIS TIME, CORBEN'S IT.

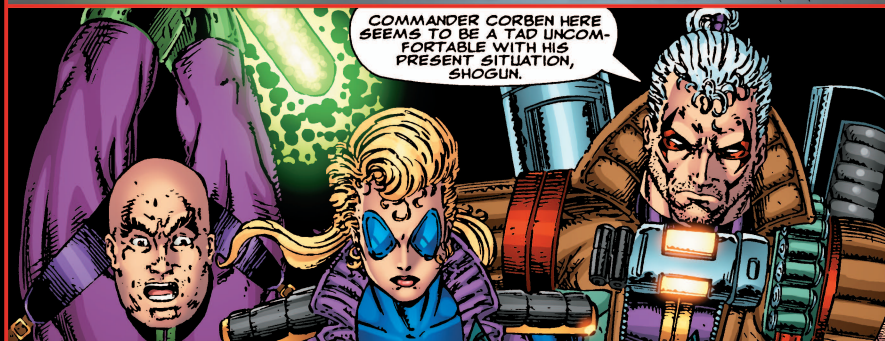
WHA--?!



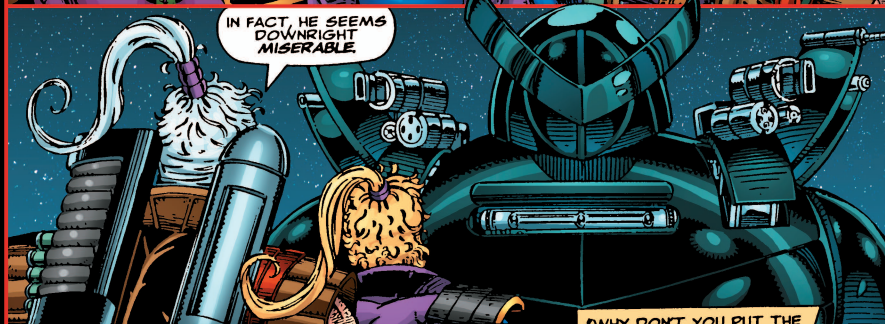
BY THE TIME I'M ON MY FEET, CORBEN'S GETTIN' PRETTY NERVOUS.

HE'S GOT BEADS O' SWEAT RUNNIN' DOWN HIS FACE AND OVER AND OVER AGAIN HE KEEPS MUMBLIN' SOMETHING ABOUT CUTTIN' A DEAL WITH US.

I AIN'T BUYIN'.

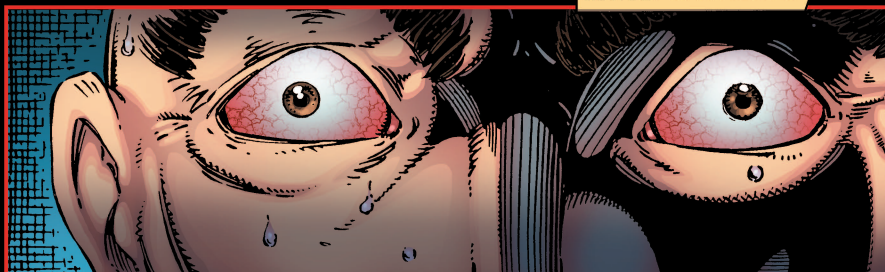


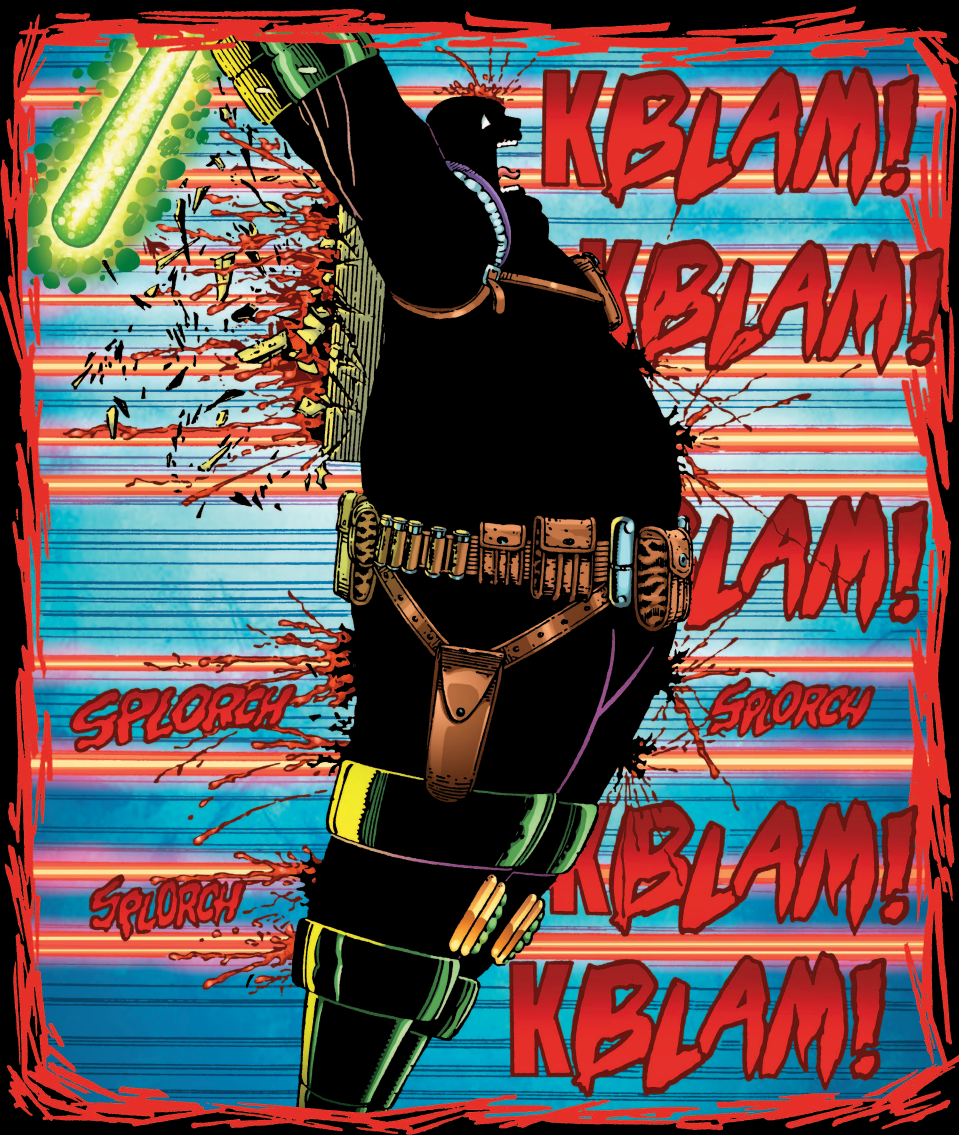
COMMANDER CORBEN HERE SEEMS TO BE A TAD UNCOMFORTABLE WITH HIS PRESENT SITUATION, SHOGUN.

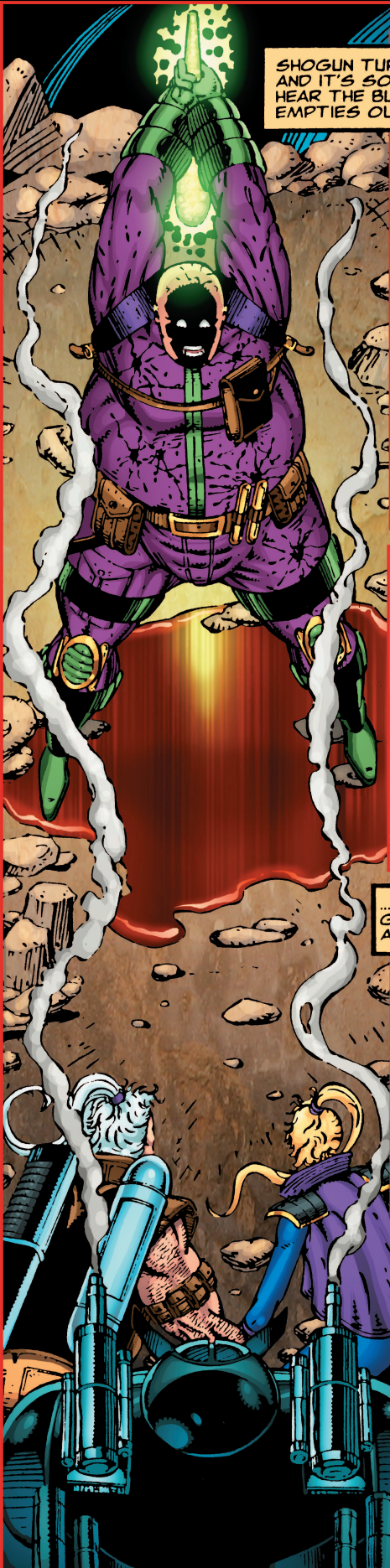


IN FACT, HE SEEMS DOWNRIGHT MISERABLE.

"WHY DON'T YOU PUT THE MAN OUT OF HIS MISERY."

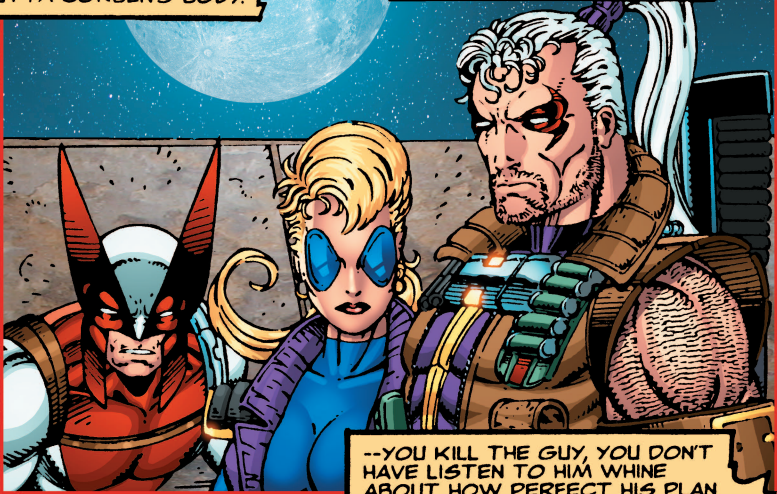






SHOGUN TURNS OFF THE HEAT AND IT'S SO QUIET YOU CAN HEAR THE BLOOD DRIPPIN' WHILE IT EMPTIES OUTTA CORBEN'S BODY.

SILENCE LIKE THAT ALWAYS REMINDS ME OF ONE O' THIS JOB'S PRIME BENEFITS--



--YOU KILL THE GUY, YOU DON'T HAVE LISTEN TO HIM WHINE ABOUT HOW PERFECT HIS PLAN WAS WHILE YOU'RE HAULIN' HIM OFF.



SO THERE HE STANDS, LOOKIN' COLD AND LIFELESS AND WITH HIS EYES STILL OPEN. ALL IN ALL, IT'S A PRETTY PATHETIC SIGHT...

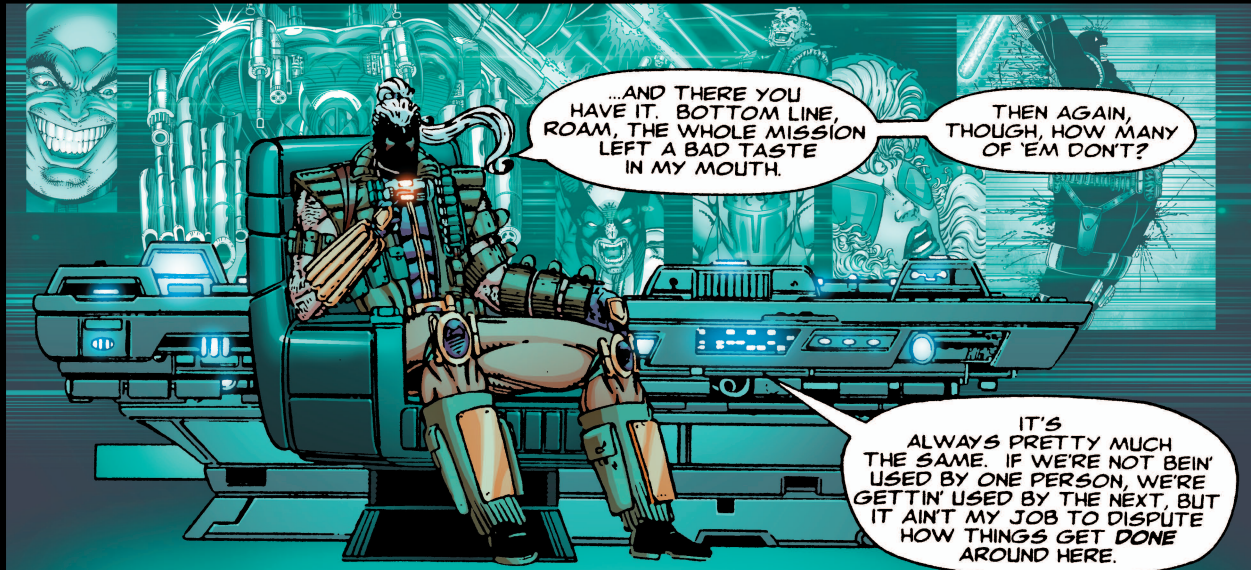
...BUT THAT'S WHAT YOU GET WHEN YOU WANNA JERK AROUND WITH BLOODSTRIKE.



ROAM--

"--GET US OUT OF HERE."





...AND THERE YOU HAVE IT. BOTTOM LINE, ROAM, THE WHOLE MISSION LEFT A BAD TASTE IN MY MOUTH.

THEN AGAIN, THOUGH, HOW MANY OF 'EM DON'T?

IT'S ALWAYS PRETTY MUCH THE SAME. IF WE'RE NOT BEIN' USED BY ONE PERSON, WE'RE GETTIN' USED BY THE NEXT, BUT IT AIN'T MY JOB TO DISPUTE HOW THINGS GET DONE AROUND HERE.

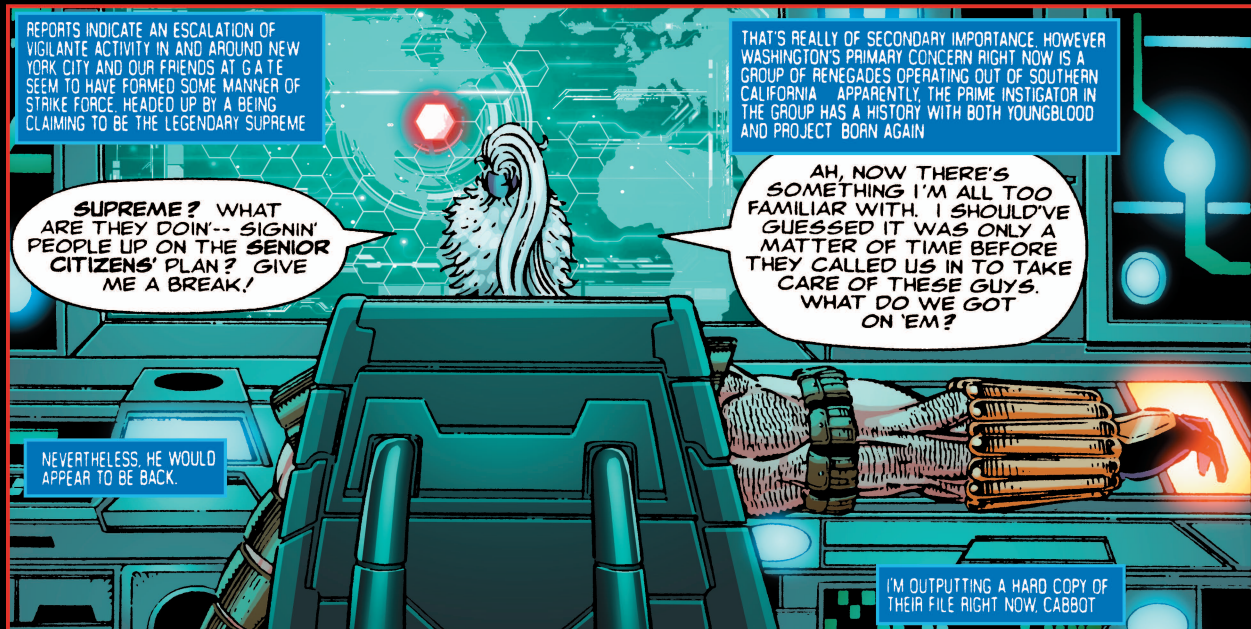


ANYWAY, I GUESS IT'S ABOUT TIME WE GOT BACK TO BUSINESS--WHAT HAVE THEY GOT LINED UP FOR US NEXT?

QUITE A BIT ACTUALLY.

ROAM

I RECEIVED A REPORT FROM WASHINGTON EARLY THIS MORNING OUTLINING SEVERAL POTENTIAL CRISIS SITUATIONS REVOLVING AROUND A NUMBER OF ROGUE SUPER-HUMANS



REPORTS INDICATE AN ESCALATION OF VIGILANTE ACTIVITY IN AND AROUND NEW YORK CITY AND OUR FRIENDS AT GATE SEEM TO HAVE FORMED SOME MANNER OF STRIKE FORCE, HEADED UP BY A BEING CLAIMING TO BE THE LEGENDARY SUPREME

SUPREME? WHAT ARE THEY DOIN'-- SIGNIN' PEOPLE UP ON THE SENIOR CITIZENS' PLAN? GIVE ME A BREAK!

NEVERTHELESS, HE WOULD APPEAR TO BE BACK.

THAT'S REALLY OF SECONDARY IMPORTANCE, HOWEVER WASHINGTON'S PRIMARY CONCERN RIGHT NOW IS A GROUP OF RENEGADES OPERATING OUT OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA. APPARENTLY, THE PRIME INSTIGATOR IN THE GROUP HAS A HISTORY WITH BOTH YOUNGBLOOD AND PROJECT BORN AGAIN

AH, NOW THERE'S SOMETHING I'M ALL TOO FAMILIAR WITH. I SHOULD'VE GUESSED IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THEY CALLED US IN TO TAKE CARE OF THESE GUYS. WHAT DO WE GOT ON 'EM?

I'M OUTPUTTING A HARD COPY OF THEIR FILE RIGHT NOW, CABBOT

"IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME COMING, BATTLESTONE, BUT IT LOOKS WE'RE FINALLY GONNA GET THE CHANCE TO SETTLE OUR DIFFERENCES ONCE AND FOR ALL--BROTHER TO BROTHER!"



TO BE CONTINUED IN
BRIGADE #1!