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THE DRAGON STIRRED AS A COOL WIND DRIFTED IN ON THE BREEZE.

IT SENSED A DISTURBANCE -- AN AFTERTASTE OF SWEET HUMAN BREATH, AND THE SOUND OF MUFFLED VOICES COMING FROM THE FOREST.

OUTSIDE, ONE OF THE LOCAL BOYS HAD JUST THROWN A STONE AT THE DRAGON'S LAIR.

THE FOLLOWING MOMENT SEEMED LIKE AN ETERNITY. THE BOYS WATCHED, BREATHLESS, AS THE STONE CLATTERED TO THE GROUND.


AN ECHO, THEN SILENCE. THE DRAGON REMAINED IN HIS CAVE.

ENCOURAGED BY THIS MINOR SUCCESS, ALL OF THE BOYS BEGAN TO THROW STONES.

STAN LEE
Presents:
**FIRST
CONTACT**


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BUT SOME OF THEM
BEGAN TO WORRY.
WHAT IF THE DRAGON
WERE WOKEN? WHAT
IF IT BECAME ANGRY?

THE OLD MAN LOOKED AT
HIS BOYS AND LAUGHED.
"I'LL TELL YOU THIS," HE
SAID. "THE ONLY WAY TO
EARN TREASURE IS TO
SOMETIMES GRASP A
DRAGON BY THE TAIL."




THE BOYS WERE MOMENTARILY OVERCOME BY A
FRENZIED DESIRE. THE THOUGHT OF HARD GOLD
AGAINST THEIR PALMS MADE THEM FORGET THEIR FEAR.


A HAIL OF
STONES
RAINED
DOWN ON
THE CAVE.



NOW A SIGH EMERGED FROM WITHIN.
THE BOYS THOUGHT THEY COULD HEAR
THE DRAGON STRETCHING HIS WINGS.



A SUDDEN THOUGHT OCCURRED
TO THEM: WHAT IF THE DRAGON
CAME TO DEVOUR THEM ALL?



THE OLD MAN JUST SMILED AT HIS
BOYS. "LET IT COME," HE SAID.
"LET IT COME OUT HERE AND TRY."



THEY'VE DONE WHAT?

THE HUMANS NAHREES... THE OUTSIDERS...
...THEY'VE ATTACKED AT THE PERIMETER. EVERYONE'S GOING CRAZY. THEY CALLED TONAJA UP TO THE ARMORY --



WHAT FOR, DINU?

KING BLACK BOLT... ALL OF THE ROYAL FAMILY...

...THEY'RE PREPARING TO GO OUTSIDE AND FACE THE HUMANS!



THEY'RE TAKING AN ESCORT OF FLYERS WITH THEM!



INSANITY. THAT'S WHAT IT IS. SHEER INSANITY! I WON'T STAND FOR IT!



BY RANDAC, WHAT IN THE NAME OF EVOLUTION DO THE STUPID CREATURES THINK THEY'RE DOING?

GETTING OUR ATTENTION, COUSIN GORGON.



AND I THINK THEY'RE MAKING RATHER A GOOD JOB OF IT. DON'T YOU?



BUT TO WHAT
END, LADY MEDUSA?
THE OUTER PALISADE IS
FED BY A TRILLION VOLTS
AT EACH INTERSECTION. THEIR
PRIMITIVE CANNON SHELLS
ARE EVAPORATED BEFORE
THEY EVEN MAKE
CONTACT.



IT WOULD BE LIKE FLEAS
ATTACKING AN ELEPHANT.
POINTLESS AT WORST.
IRRITATING AT
BEST --
->LHM-<



S-SOME-
THING HAS
OCCURRED TO
ME ABOUT THE
TIMING OF
THIS ATTACK.
MAJESTY.
I...I THINK
THE HUMANS MAY
HAVE DISCOVERED
A WEAKNESS.

NIGHT,
MISTER
SIXBY.

Mm.



STAY
THERE.



HAVE WE
MET?

NO, MISTER SIXBY. I AM
ORDERED HERE BY MY SUPERIOR,
COLONEL YURI STALYENKO,
TO DELIVER SOMETHING OF
UTMOST IMPORTANCE
TO YOU.



STALYENKO.
HUH? THAT'S A NAME
I HAVEN'T HEARD IN A
LONG TIME.

MM... WELL...
I DOUBT THAT
WILL BE THE ONLY
NAME RE-EMERGING
INTO YOUR
CONSCIOUSNESS.
REMEMBER THE
WORD "ATTILAN" --
YOU'LL BE HEARING
A LOT OF IT
SOON.

THESE
ARE INTERESTING
TIMES, MISTER
BIXBY --

" IN A SHRINKING WORLD SUCH AS THIS,
GOOD ENEMIES ARE HARD TO COME BY.
BUT NOT FOR LONG, I THINK.
IN A FEW SHORT
HOURS, A METAPHORICAL
BOMB IS GOING TO GO
OFF ON ATLANTIS.



AND THE
DUST WILL HARDLY
HAVE SETTLED BEFORE
THE MEDIA SCRUTINY
AND SPECULATION
OVERWHELMS US ALL.



WHAT
BOMB? WHAT'S
HAPPENED WITH
ATTILAN?



WE HAVE
DECLARED WAR
ON THEM.



ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR TINY
MINDS? YOU DECLARE WAR
ON THIRD WORLD ISLAND
NATIONS, NOT ON LIVING
GODS --

NEVERTHELESS,
WE HAVE MADE THE FIRST
MOVE AND BELIEVE ME, WE
WILL BE THE VICTORS.



IT'S ALL
ABOUT DRAWING
THEM OUT. THEY
WILL BE COMING,
BE ASSURED
OF THAT.

AND
WHEN THEY
DO, YOU ARE
TO MAKE SURE
THEY RECEIVE
THIS.



WHAT IS IT?

HIDDEN WITHIN THIS STATUE IS A SUBSONIC EMITTER, GIVEN TO US BY A...CONTACT WITHIN THE CITY. IT WILL ATTACK THE INTEGRITY OF ATTILAN'S INNER DEFENSIVE MECHANISM -- THE SURROUNDING NEGATIVE SPACE BARRIER.



HOWEVER, THE DEVICE WILL NOT WORK IF **TELEPORTED**. COLONEL STALYENKO EXPECTS YOU TO PLACE IT UNDER THE DOME BY MORE **CONVENTIONAL** MEANS...HE HAS A VERY HIGH OPINION OF YOU.

YOU WILL FIND HIS REQUEST CLARIFIED ON THIS COMPUTER DISK. IT ALSO CONTAINS TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS ON INHUMAN DEFENSIVE CAPABILITIES.



A TROJAN HORSE. HOW VERY THEATRICAL OF YOU, YURL.



COLONEL STALYENKO WISHES TO EXPRESS HIS **GRATITUDE** FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE. HE RELISHES THE OPPORTUNITY TO FINALLY WORK TOGETHER AGAINST A COMMON FOE.

REST ASSURED, THOUGH HE DOES NOT MAKE THIS MOVE LIGHTLY. THESE INHUMANS... THEY ARE MOST FORMIDABLE --



EVERYTHING HAS A WEAKNESS. DAMN FREAKS MAY BE ABLE TO FLY BACKWARDS INTO THE SUN, BUT THEY DON'T KNOW **SQUAT** ABOUT SICK AND TWISTED.

TELL HIM I'LL LOOK INTO IT.



WAIT... THAT'S IT? YOU DIDN'T EVEN TELL ME YOUR NAME.



WHO ARE YOU?



I'M THE BLACK WIDOW.

"I'LL TELL YOU THIS," SAID THE OLD MAN, "DRAGONS DON'T LIKE NAUGHTY LITTLE BOYS."



"WHEN THE BEAST COMES OUT OF ITS LAIR TO DO BATTLE WITH YOU -- AND IT WILL COME -- THE SKY WILL BE AWASH WITH SMOKE AND FLAME."




"WHEN FIRST YOU SMELL ITS CHARCOAL BREATH," SAID THE OLD MAN, "TAKE HEART. IMAGINE YOURSELVES AS KNIGHTS IN SHINING ARMOR."


"YOUR VERY HUMANITY MUST BE THE SWORD THAT PIERCES THE DRAGON'S SCALY HIDE..."




"...YOUR FAITH MUST BE YOUR SHIELD."



WHEN YOU LOOK INTO ITS BLACK EYES, YOU WILL SEE THE FACE OF THE DEVIL HIMSELF -- UNFATHOMABLE AND MALICIOUS TO THE CORE.



THE DRAGON WILL BREATHE FIRE AT YOU, AND TRY TO SCARE YOU. IT WILL FLY ABOVE YOUR HEADS AND FLAP AT YOU WITH ITS RUSTED WINGS.



THE CREATURE WILL SNAP AND SNARL, AND MAGICK YOU WITH ILLUSIONS UNFATHOMABLE...



...BUT YOUR GAZE WILL NEVER WAVER, BECAUSE YOU ARE TRUE OF HEART, AND PURE OF MIND AND SPIRIT.





WHY DONT WE JUST WIPE THEM FROM THE FACE OF THE EARTH?



WE ARE YOUR GENERALS, YOUR ADVISORS, AND YOUR FRIENDS, BLACK BOLT. AND YET YOU REFUSE TO INCLUDE US IN DECISIONS THAT CONCERN US ALL

WELL. UNLIKE YOU, COUSIN, I CANNOT CHOOSE TO REMAIN SILENT ON THIS MATTER. SOMETIMES, I WONDER IF YOUR ENIGMATIC DEMEANOR IS A FUNCTION NOT OF YOUR GENETIC CONDITION, BUT OF YOUR CHOOSING.



IN THE NAME OF EVOLUTION, COUSIN, WHY DO WE NOT DEMOLISH THESE PITIFUL HUMAN CREATURES?



WHY WONT YOU TELL US ...?

WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON AROUND HERE?

GENTLEMEN, THIS IS THE WRONG DAMN TIME FOR A BUNCH OF PORTUGUESE MERCENARIES TO BE GOIN' WACKO ON ME.

I GOT ENOUGH PROBLEMS ALREADY. AN' IN CASE ANYONE FORGOT, WE GOT A COUNTRY TRUN OVER HERE.

UH, MISTER PRESIDENT... WE'RE BEING TOLD BY THE PRESS OFFICE THAT NEWS OF THE INCURSION HAS BEEN SUPPRESSED. IT LOOKS FROM OUR END AS THOUGH ANY DAMAGE HAS BEEN CONTAINED --

IS THAT SO? THEN MAYBE YOU BETTER TUNE YOUR SOFT BEHIND TO CHANNEL SIX, GENERAL...

...ATILAN IS THE PURPORTED HOME OF SOME FOUR THOUSAND INHUMANS --

-- A RACE OF GENETICALLY UNSTABLE BEINGS, EACH ENDOWED WITH A UNIQUE, METAHUMAN-LIKE ABILITY.

THIS AFTERNOON, UNDER A BARRAGE OF CANNON FIRE, ATILAN FINALLY BROKE ITS AGE-OLD SILENCE, ISSUING A STATEMENT DENOUNCING THE ATTACK.

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN LIVING MEMORY, AN INHUMAN ENVOY IS BEING SENT TO ADDRESS THE UNITED NATIONS.

DURING A PRELIMINARY OPEN-FLOOR DISCUSSION TODAY, THE PORTUGUESE GOVERNMENT ATTEMPTED TO SIGNIFICANTLY DISTANCE ITSELF FROM THE ACTIONS OF ANY PORTUGUESE NATIONALS IN THE ATTACKING MERCENARY FORCE.



AT THE SAME TIME ACCUSATIONS WERE MADE CONCERNING REPEATED HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS WITHIN THE MYSTERIOUS CITY.

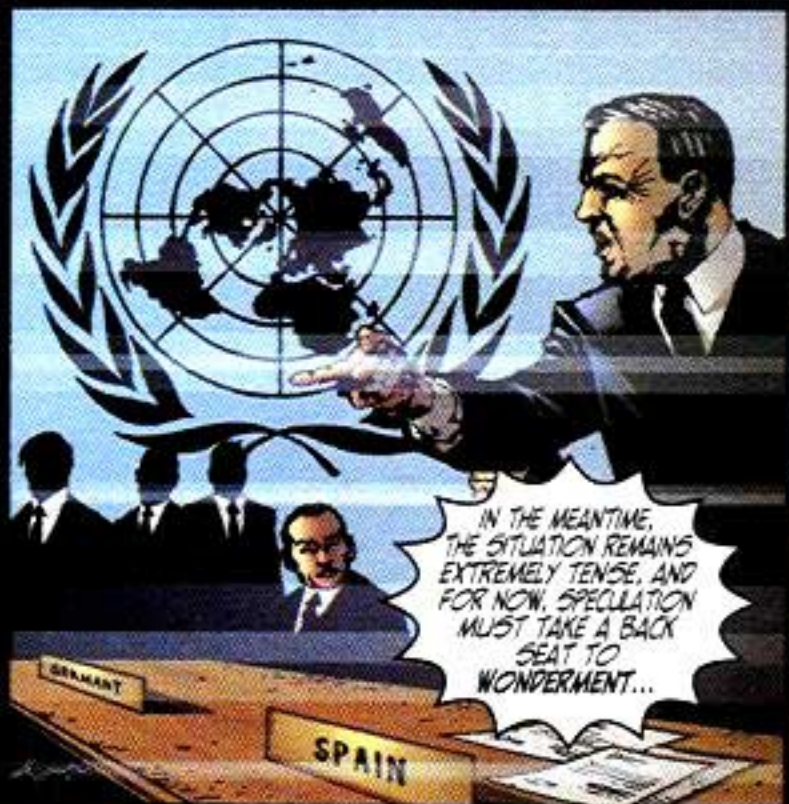
THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS HAS CALLED FOR A SPECIAL ASSEMBLY, BRINGING INTO QUESTION THE ROLE OF ANY MERCENARY FORCE SENT TO PROTECT BUSINESS INTERESTS ON FOREIGN SOIL.

AT THIS EARLY STAGE, SPECIFIC INFORMATION ON THE ATTACKING FORCE IS LIMITED.



THIS MAN --- COLONEL EDSON JARZINHO -- IS SAID TO COMMAND THE NEARLY TWELVE HUNDRED MEN ON ATLANTIAN SHORES. LITTLE INFORMATION ON THIS EX-POLITICAL PRISONER IS AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC.

A SPOKESMAN FOR LEXINGTON MINING CORPORATION -- PROSPECTING FOR VIBRANIUM IN THE REGION -- INSISTS THAT JARZINHO'S MERCENARIES HAVE ACTED OUTSIDE THE BOUNDARIES OF THEIR ORDERS.



IN THE MEANTIME, THE SITUATION REMAINS EXTREMELY TENSE, AND FOR NOW, SPECULATION MUST TAKE A BACK SEAT TO WONDERMENT...

...AS WE AWAIT THE AMBASSADOR OF AN ALIEN NATION, AND FIRST CONTACT.







I. UH... ON BEHALF OF ALL NATIONS OF EARTH, MENDICUS, I WELCOME YOU TO THIS SPECIAL ASSEMBLY OF OUR UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL.

IT IS OUR FONDEST WISH THAT ANY DIALOGUE WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF YOUR GREAT NATION WILL BE THE FIRST OF MANY TO COME --



THIS DIALOGUE IS **IRRELEVANT**, AND THE CIRCUMSTANCES MOST UNWELCOME TO US. A GRAVE SITUATION HAS DEVELOPED ON ATLANTIS -- ONE WHICH MUST BE RESOLVED **IMMEDIATELY**.



THE HUMAN SOLDIERS ATTACKING OUR PERIMETER STRUCTURES ARE GREATLY ENDANGERED BY THEIR OWN ACTIONS. WE SEEK ASSURANCE OF THEIR **IMMEDIATE REMOVAL**.

WHILE WE WISH HUMANS NO HARM, THESE MEN MUST BE PROTECTED...

...OR THEY WILL SUFFER THE **CONSEQUENCES** OF THEIR ACTIONS.



WE UNDERSTAND YOUR CONCERNS. BUT THERE ARE **PROTOCOLS** --

HUMAN PROTOCOLS DO NOT CONCERN US. YOU CLAIM TO SPEAK FOR ALL NATIONS. THEREFORE THE DECISION IN THIS MATTER IS **YOURS**.



YOU WILL ACT IN ACCORD WITH OUR REQUEST, AND REMOVE YOUR KIND FROM ATLANTIS' BORDER.

WE EXPECT YOUR DECISION BY SUNSET.



DON'T BE AFRAID OF THE STORM, MY DEAR. IT CAN'T HARM YOU IF YOU'RE NOT AFRAID.

OH, THAT'S A VERY SPECIAL THUNDER YOU HEAR, WOZ - IT'S THE NOISE OF HUMAN AMBITION. IT HAS THE POWER TO MOVE MOUNTAINS, WHEN USED CORRECTLY.

"YOU HAVE TO PROMISE ME YOU'LL BE BRAVE, BECAUSE VERY SOON, WE'RE GOING TO BE LEAVING HERE, YOU AND I."

BA-KOON

AND WHEN WE DO, LITTLE WOZ AND MAXIMUS THE MAD ARE GOING TO BE HEADING RIGHT INTO THE HEART OF THE STORM...



YOU MUSTN'T
BE AFRAID OF THE
HUMANS. NOZ, YOU'LL
LIKE THE LITTLE APES.
I THINK -- EVEN IF
THEY ARE A BIT
TOXIC.

BESIDES,
THEY MORE THAN
MAKE UP
FOR IT WITH SLY
INTELLECT.



DON'T YOU SEE WHAT
THEY'RE DOING? DON'T YOU
SEE WHY THEY'RE ATTACKING
THE OUTER PALISADE IN
THE MIDDLE OF A
STORM?

BECAUSE THE CURRENT
MUST BE TURNED DOWN,
TO PROTECT AGAINST
ELECTRICAL SURGES. A
LIGHTNING STRIKE WOULD
OVERLOAD THE
SYSTEM!

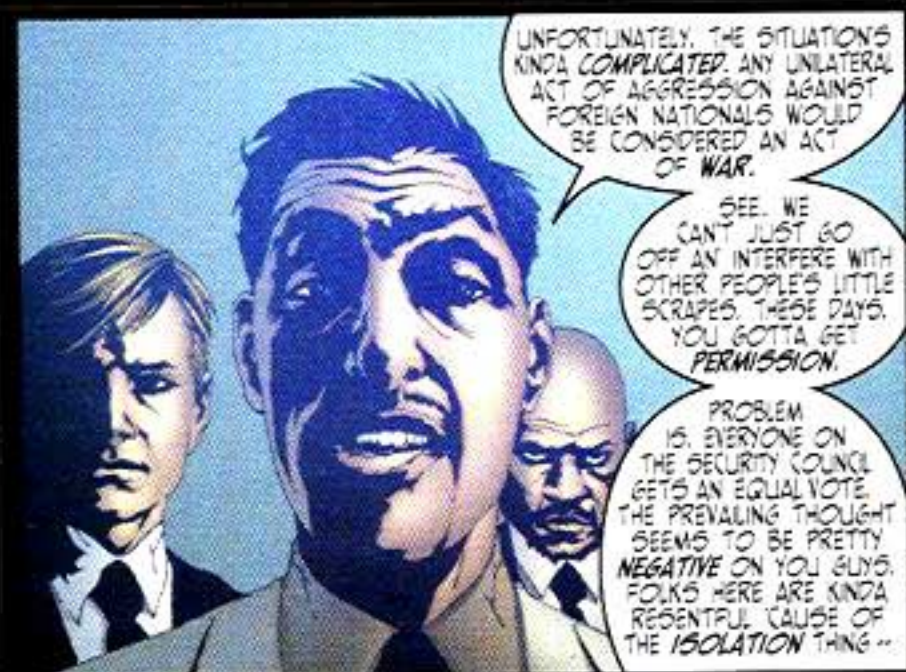


THAT'S THE
CRACK IN THE
WALL...



AMBASSADOR MENDICUS, I HAVE BEEN ASKED BY MY GOVERNMENT TO EXTEND A HAND OF FRIENDSHIP TO THE PEOPLE OF ATLAN.

IN THESE DARK TIMES YOU CAN BE ASSURED OF FULL SUPPORT BY THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.



UNFORTUNATELY, THE SITUATION'S KINDA COMPLICATED. ANY UNILATERAL ACT OF AGGRESSION AGAINST FOREIGN NATIONALS WOULD BE CONSIDERED AN ACT OF WAR.

SEE, WE CAN'T JUST GO OFF AN INTERFERE WITH OTHER PEOPLE'S LITTLE SCRAPES, THESE DAYS. YOU GOTTA GET PERMISSION.

PROBLEM IS, EVERYONE ON THE SECURITY COUNCIL GETS AN EQUAL VOTE, THE PREVAILING THOUGHT SEEMS TO BE PRETTY NEGATIVE ON YOU GUYS. FOLKS HERE ARE KINDA RESENTFUL 'CAUSE OF THE ISOLATION THING --



FORGIVE ME, AMBASSADOR MINTYRE, BUT YOUR WORDING IS... DIFFICULT TO INTERPRET.



ARE YOU SAYING YOU WILL NOT HELP US, EVEN THOUGH YOU SUPPORT US?

WE WISH ONLY FOR YOUR PEOPLE TO LEAVE. WE HAVE NEVER WISHED FOR CONTACT WITH YOU -- THAT IS WHY WE ARE ISOLATED FROM YOU.



WELL THEN, I GUESS YOU CAN INTERPRET THIS PRETTY EASILY.

Y'ALL ARE ON YOUR OWN FOR NOW.




THIS IS MOST UNUSUAL FOR US, AMBASSADOR. WHILE WE APPRECIATE THE SUPPORT OF YOUR... UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, IT IS NONETHELESS *CONDITIONAL*.

AS SEEMS TO BE THE CASE WITH EVERY HUMAN GOOD INTENTION.



UH, SURE THING, AND AS A SYMBOL OF OUR RESOLVE TO SUPPORT YOU IN DEFENSE OF YOUR TERRITORY, WE BROUGHT ALONG A LITTLE *GIFT* FOR YOU TO TAKE HOME TO ATTLAN.




THIS HERE STATUE REPRESENTS ONE OF OUR MOST POWERFUL LEADERS -- PRESIDENT ABRAHAM LINCOLN -- AFTER THE BATTLE OF BAXTER SPRINGS IN KANSAS.

THE, UH... THE GUY ON THE GROUND IS A MAJOR GENERAL SLOCUMB. SEE, HE'S JUST SUCCESSFULLY DEFENDED THE TOWN AGAINST THE REBELS...



AND WHAT DOES YOUR PRESIDENT LINCOLN SAY TO HIS YOUNG MAJOR GENERAL AMBASSADOR MCINTYRE?



WELL, HE'S, UH... HE'S GIVING HIM THE KEY TO THE CITY.



WE'LL I'LL GIVE THEM CREDIT FOR BEING *PERSISTENT*, KARNAK. BUT YOU STILL HAVE TO WONDER WHAT ON EARTH THEY'RE HOPING TO *ACHIEVE*?



YOU SHOULD BE VERY *PROUD* OF YOURSELF, BROTHER -- THE OUTER DEFENSE MECHANISM IS PERFORMING IN EXCESS OF EXPECTATIONS. I DRAW YOUR ATTENTION TO THIS SCHEMATIC:

"DO YOU SEE HOW THE PALISADE ABSORBS AND EVAPORATES EACH SHELL? THE HUMAN WEAPONRY IS CLEARLY OUTMATCHED BY OUR TECHNOLOGY."

HAAA! I ALMOST FEEL *SORRY* FOR THE POOR CREATURES. IF ONLY THEY UNDERSTOOD --

-- THE MORE AMMUNITION THEY WASTE AGAINST OUR WALL, THE *STRONGER* IT BECOMES.

BROTHER GORGON, SOMETHING HAS BEEN TROUBLING ME. UNTIL NOW, I HAD BEEN UNABLE TO PINPOINT THE EXACT NATURE OF MY CONCERN... BUT I THINK YOU MAY HAVE INADVERTENTLY FOUND IT FOR ME.



AS YOU KNOW, I HAVE BEEN CONCERNED THAT THE PALISADE WOULD NOT HOLD AGAINST SUCH AN ONSLAUGHT OF CANNON FIRE, EVEN THOUGH HUMAN WEAPONS ARE SEEMINGLY USELESS AGAINST IT.

AND SO THEY ARE! THEIR LITTLE TOY GUNS HAVE HAD NO EFFECT ON THE WALL WHATSOEVER.



NOT TRUE, BROTHER. REMEMBER: WE REDUCE THE CURRENT DURING A STORM, AND FOR GOOD REASON -- TO PROTECT AGAINST ELECTRICAL OVERLOAD.

I HAD THOUGHT THIS TO BE THE REASON WHY THE HUMANS CAME NOW. PERHAPS THEY THOUGHT THE WALL SUFFICIENTLY WEAKENED FOR A CONVENTIONAL ATTACK.



BUT IF, AS YOU SAY, THE WALL IS ACTUALLY GAINING IN STRENGTH, THEN THAT MAY ALSO BE ITS WEAKNESS --



BY EVOLUTION -- THEY'RE NOT TRYING TO BREAK IT DOWN. THEY'RE CHARGING IT UP!





BA-KOOM



BA-KOOM



THE BOYS YELPED WITH EXCITEMENT, AND RAN TOWARDS THEIR GLITTERING PRIZE...