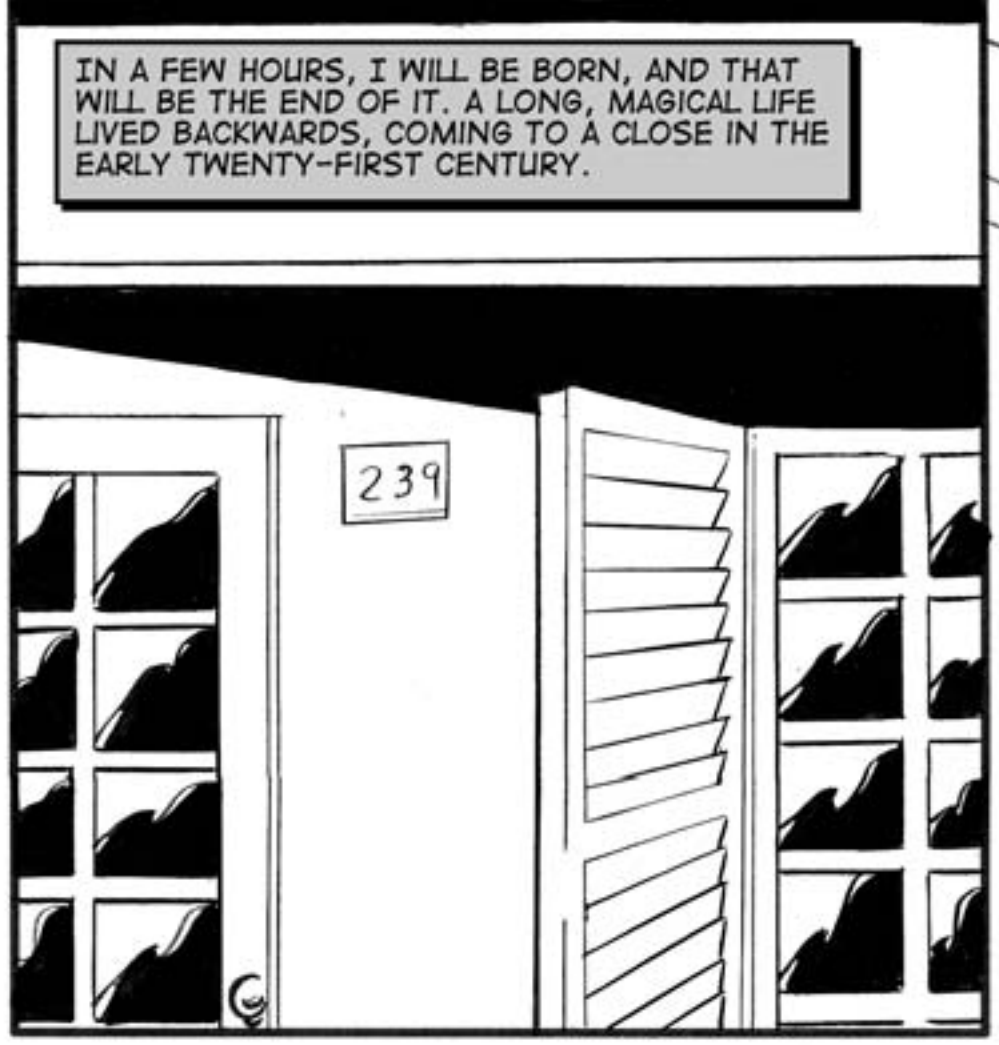




NEW ORLEANS.



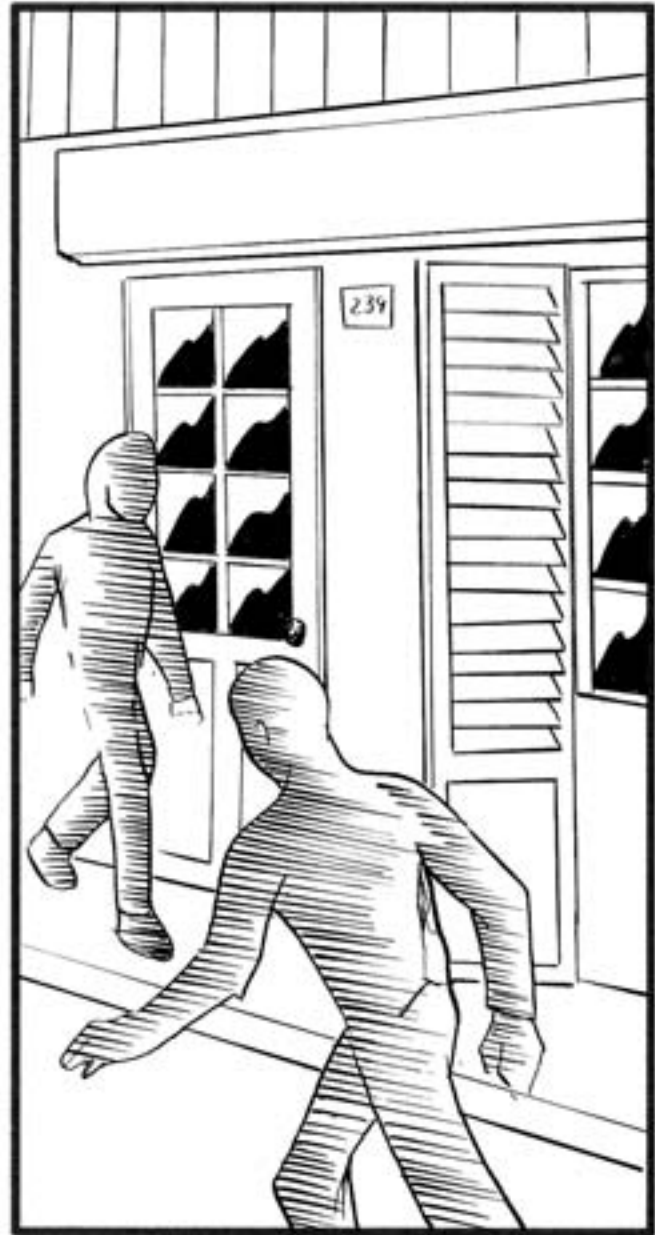
...THROUGH THE YEARS.




IN A FEW HOURS, I WILL BE BORN, AND THAT WILL BE THE END OF IT. A LONG, MAGICAL LIFE LIVED BACKWARDS, COMING TO A CLOSE IN THE EARLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY.




MY NAME... I HAVE USED SO MANY, BUT NOW I AM UNABLE EVEN TO CRAWL WHEN I AM CALLED. ONCE, THOUGH, I BORE A FAMOUS NAME.




MERLIN.




THE WHEN AND HOW OF MY BIRTH I COULD NOT SAY, ONLY THAT I CAME INTO THIS WORLD AN OLD MAN, SOME TIME BEFORE THE ERA OF ARTHUR AND HIS KNIGHTS.



BEN JONSON AND I WOULD WEAVE BAWDY TALES FOR ANY WHO WOULD LISTEN OF MY MOTHER BEING RIPPED IN TWO AS I CLAWED MY WAY INTO THE WORLD, WITH MY FATHER PERISHING MINUTES LATER FROM HORROR AT THE SPECTACLE.



I CAN'T SERIOUSLY ENTERTAIN THE IDEA THAT THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED, BUT IT WAS AN AMUSING THOUGHT. AND BEN WAS A GOOD SORT.



I WOULD TRY THE JOKE IN LATER CENTURIES, BUT MEN EITHER FAILED TO SEE THE HUMOR OR SIMPLY COULDN'T FOLLOW THE STORY THAT BORE IT.

WHOEVER MY TRUE PARENTS MAY HAVE BEEN, MY "MOTHER" NOW IS MORGAINE LEFEY. GROWN CORPULENT AND FLACCID WITH SWEETS AND TIME, SHE WATCHES OVER ME IN HONOR OF OUR SHARED HISTORY.



THAT WE MIGHT STILL BE ENEMIES SEEMS ABSURD TO US NOW. SHE RECOUNTS THE STORIES OF OUR BATTLES AND STRATAGEMS OF CAMELOT THE WAY ANOTHER PARENT MAY ADMINISTER A BEDTIME STORY.



THE TALES, OF COURSE, ARE FROM HER UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE, AND I SUSPECT SHE REVELS IN THE FACT THAT I CANNOT ARGUE MY SIDE OF THE CASE.



HER BODY SMELLS OF SUGAR SWEAT AND SOUR MILK, AN UNPLEASANT MIXTURE THAT HAS BECOME VERY COMFORTING TO ME IN MY DOTAGE.



MUCH AS A MAN'S BODY SEEMS TO AGE MORE QUICKLY ONCE HE REACHES A CERTAIN AGE, AND STILL MORE RAPIDLY AFTER THAT, MY PROCESS TOOK A SIMILAR PROGRESSION.

I SPENT MANY CENTURIES AS AN AGED WIZARD, WHILE MY ENTIRE YOUTH WAS USED UP IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.



MY BODY WAS YOUNG IN 1969, BUT I HAD THE WISDOM OF YEARS BEHIND ME. I KNEW BETTER, THEN, TO EVER BECOME A MEMBER OF THE COUNTERCULTURE THAT WAS SO ACTIVE IN THE LATE SIXTIES, BUT I DID FIND IT USEFUL AND ENTERTAINING TO MIX WITH THEIR NUMBER.

AT ONE OF THEIR FESTIVALS OR PROTESTS (INDEED, THE TWO WERE INTERCHANGEABLE), I BECAME ACQUAINTED WITH AN IMPOSSIBLY THIN YOUNG WOMAN, HER COMPLEXION THE SAME DULL BLONDE AS HER HAIR. IMPOSSIBLE TO FOCUS, HER EYES COULD NEVER MEET MINE, BUT SHE WAS ALWAYS LAUGHING.



AND SAD, AS WELL.



WE KISSED UNDER AN ORANGE AND BROWN TENT AS DAVID CROSBY MADE LOVE TO HIS GUITAR ON A TAR-BLACK STAGE, FAR IN THE DISTANCE.

IF THE HIPPIES WERE RIDICULOUS IN THEIR REBELLION, THEY WERE NOT MORE SO THAN THAT WHICH THEY REBELLED AGAINST.

# WAR DECLARED!

MY FAITH IN KINGS AND OTHER RULERS HAD LONG SINCE BEEN SHAKEN.



I WAS A YOUNG MAN WHEN I ADVISED ARTHUR, ALTHOUGH THIS WAS ONE OF THE LAST CASES IN WHICH I DID SO OPENLY. FORTUNATELY SO, AS THE WORLD GREW LESS KIND TO MAGICIANS AFTER THE FALL OF CAMELOT.



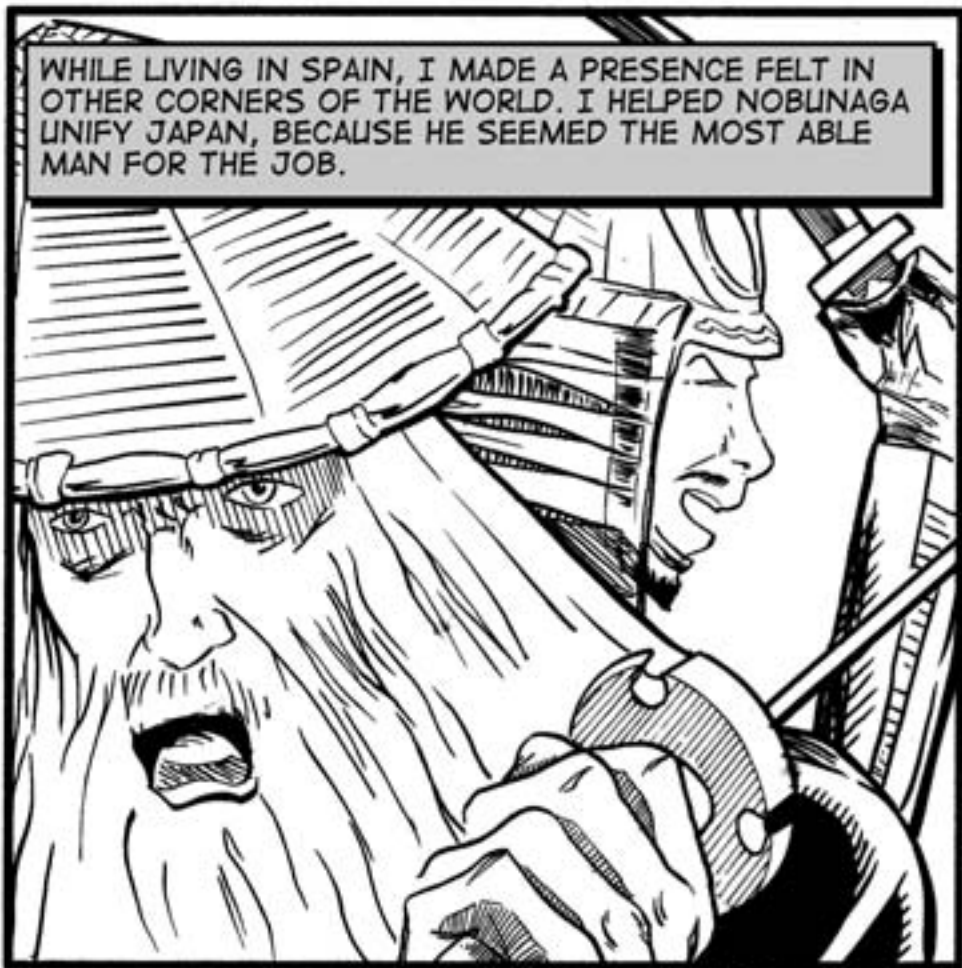
I FOUGHT IN SEVERAL OF THE CRUSADES, THOUGH NOT ALWAYS UNDER THE SAME FLAG.



I WAS HANGED AS A WITCH SEVERAL CENTURIES LATER, ALTHOUGH THIS FAILED TO HAVE THE DESIRED EFFECT. IT DID ALLOW ME, HOWEVER, TO BEGIN A NEW LIFE OUTSIDE OF ENGLAND.



REGRETTABLY, I CHOSE TO BEGIN THIS NEW EXISTENCE IN SPAIN.



WHILE LIVING IN SPAIN, I MADE A PRESENCE FELT IN OTHER CORNERS OF THE WORLD. I HELPED NOBUNAGA UNIFY JAPAN, BECAUSE HE SEEMED THE MOST ABLE MAN FOR THE JOB.



I SAILED TO THE AMERICAS WITH LEIF ERICKSON, AND LATER WITH COLUMBUS.



I CAN'T SAY FOR CERTAIN WHEN I DECIDED TO MAKE AMERICA, THAT IS, THE UNITED STATES, MY HOME. NOR CAN I SAY PRECISELY WHY I DID SO. IT SEEMED LIKE AN INTERESTING PROJECT, THIS COUNTRY, AND PERHAPS IT WAS CURIOSITY AS TO HOW IT WOULD ALL WORK OUT.



I DID NOT SETTLE PERMANENTLY ONTO THIS CONTINENT UNTIL SOMETIME AFTER THE CIVIL WAR, AN AFFAIR OF WHICH I WANTED NO PART.

AT THAT TIME AMERICA HAD EXISTED AS A COUNTRY FOR LESS THAN ONE HUNDRED YEARS, AND I MYSELF WAS GUILTY OF THE BRUTAL AND HUBRISTIC CRIME OF OWNING MEN AT THAT AGE; BUT THE WORLD WAS YOUNGER THEN, HAD NOT YET HAD THE GALL TO PROCLAIM ITSELF "ENLIGHTENED."



IT MAY SEEM STRANGE, THEN, THAT I CHOSE FOR MY HOME A CITY THAT WAS ONLY BEGINNING TO RECOVER FROM THE WAR, DEVASTATION WROUGHT BY FINDING ITSELF ON THE LOSING SIDE.



BUT THIS WAS A NEW BEGINNING FOR THE CITY, AND IT HAD BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE I'D WITNESSED ANYTHING FROM THE BEGINNING.

ALSO, THE CULTURE OF THE PLACE APPEALED TO ME. I HAD BEEN BOTH FRENCH AND SPANISH MORE RECENTLY THAT I'D BEEN BRITISH, SO NEW ORLEANS MADE ME FEEL AT HOME.



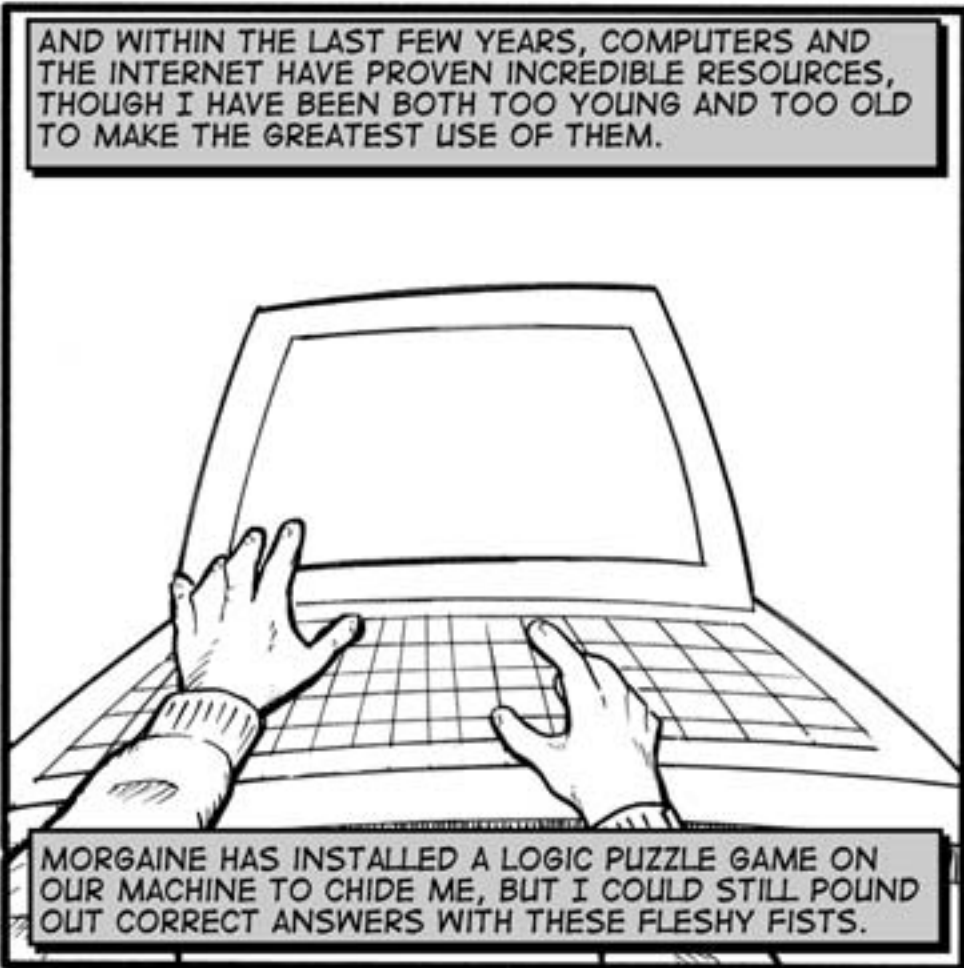
BUT THERE WOULD BE OTHER WARS. IN LESS THAN ONE HUNDRED YEARS AFTER THE WAR BETWEEN THE STATES, THERE OCCURRED TWO NEW CALAMITIES MORE DISASTROUS THAN ANY I HAVE SEEN IN MY LONG LIFE.

THOUGH NOT THE MOST BRUTAL CONFLICTS IN HISTORY, TECHNOLOGY HAD PROVIDED THE ABILITY TO KILL MORE PEOPLE AT A GREATER DISTANCE THAN HAD EVER BEEN POSSIBLE.



AMAZING, THEN, THAT SO MUCH GOOD TOOK PLACE IN THOSE SAME HUNDRED YEARS, AND AFTER. A WOMAN COULD NOW EXPECT HER CHILDREN TO SURVIVE INFANCY, WHICH HAD BEEN FAR FROM A SURE PROSPECT A SHORT TIME PRIOR.

AUTOMOBILES ALLOWED GREATER FREEDOM TO TRAVEL, EXPANDING THE WORLD OF INDIVIDUALS WHO BEFORE MIGHT NEVER HAVE LEFT THEIR HOMETOWNS. PLANES, LIKEWISE.



AND WITHIN THE LAST FEW YEARS, COMPUTERS AND THE INTERNET HAVE PROVEN INCREDIBLE RESOURCES, THOUGH I HAVE BEEN BOTH TOO YOUNG AND TOO OLD TO MAKE THE GREATEST USE OF THEM.

MORGAINE HAS INSTALLED A LOGIC PUZZLE GAME ON OUR MACHINE TO CHIDE ME, BUT I COULD STILL POUND OUT CORRECT ANSWERS WITH THESE FLESHY FISTS.



SO HERE I AM, ABOUT TO EXPERIENCE THE SECOND OF TWO GREAT MYSTERIES OF MY UNUSUAL EXISTENCE.



IF I AM FATED TO BE BORN AGAIN, I SHOULD LIKE TO TAKE NOTES ON THE SITUATION. I SUSPECT, THOUGH, THAT I WILL BE RATHER ENGAGED IN THE BUSINESS ITSELF.



I'VE HAD A GOOD TIME OF THINGS, ANYWAY, AND A GOOD LONG RUN. IF THERE ARE THINGS I CAN NEVER LEARN, THEY MIGHT AS WELL BE ABOUT ME.

I'M NOT THAT INTERESTING, ANYWAY.



# "RENEWAL"

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