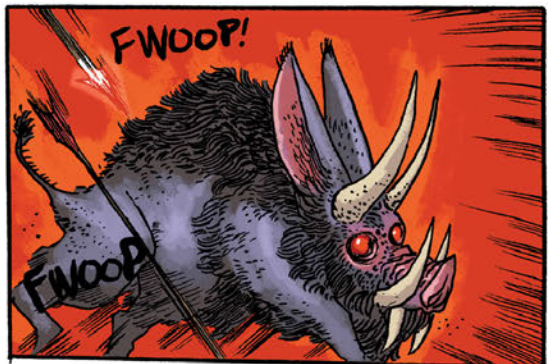


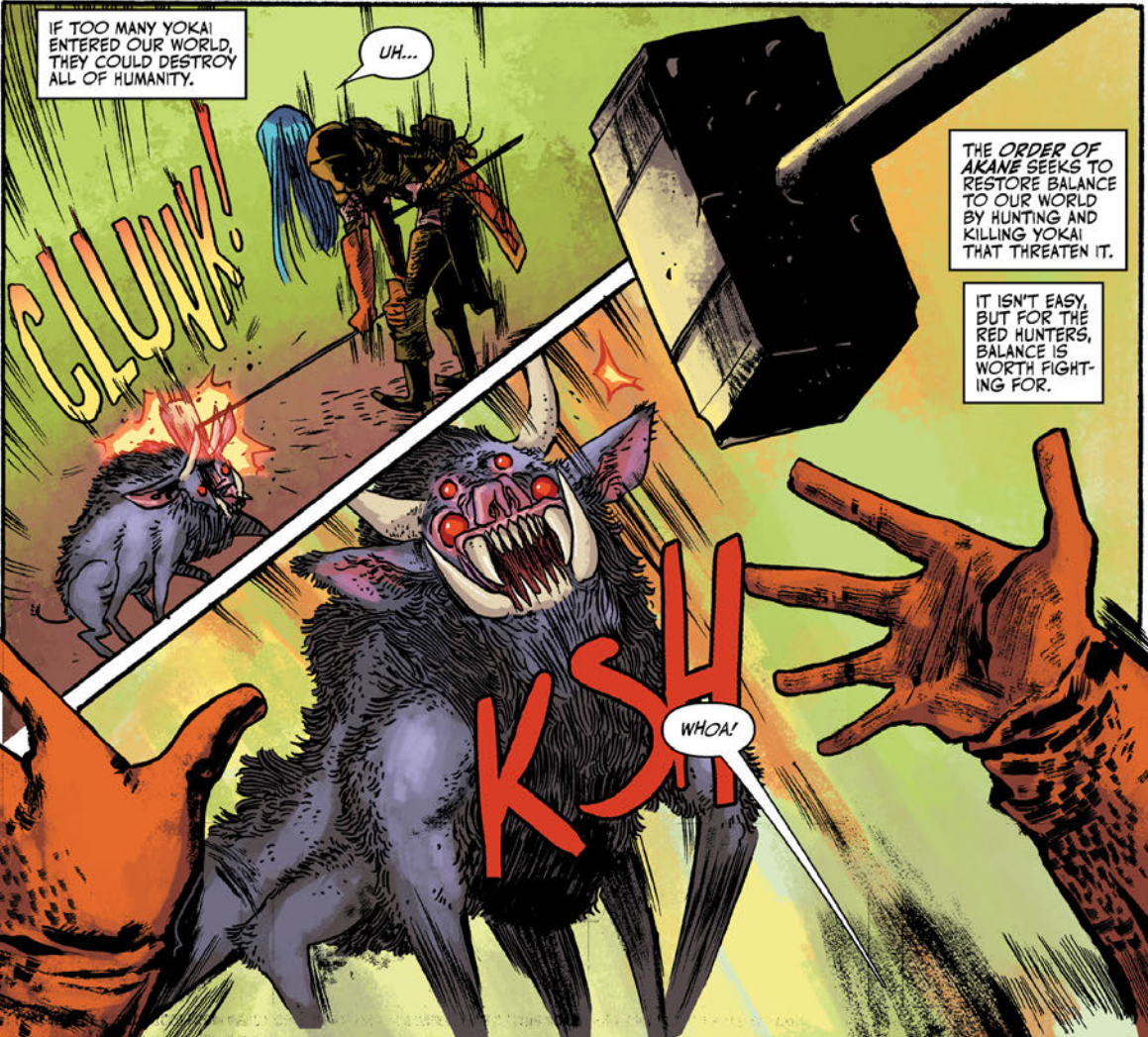
THERE IS MORE THAN ONE PATH FOR THOSE WHO SEEK BALANCE.

FOR THE RED HUNTERS OF THE ORDER OF AKANE, BALANCE IS SOMETHING TO BE PURSUED.



HERE ON MY HOME OF YOMI ISLAND, YOKAI DEMONS SPILL INTO OUR WORLD, CORRUPTING EVERYTHING THEY TOUCH.

I'VE GOT HIM, MITSUO!



IF TOO MANY YOKAI ENTERED OUR WORLD, THEY COULD DESTROY ALL OF HUMANITY.

UH...

THE ORDER OF AKANE SEEKS TO RESTORE BALANCE TO OUR WORLD BY HUNTING AND KILLING YOKAI THAT THREATEN IT.

IT ISN'T EASY, BUT FOR THE RED HUNTERS, BALANCE IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR.

WHOA!



MY PEOPLE, THE **AINU**, ARE AN ANCIENT PEOPLE — THE FIRST TO SETTLE NIPPON. THEY ARE SLOW TO CHANGE.

THEY BELIEVE THAT BALANCE IS SOMETHING TO BE BESTOWED. SOMETHING TO PRAY TO THE **KAMUY** FOR.

GATHER AROUND! THE IOMANTE CEREMONY IS ABOUT TO BEGIN!



YOU CAN GUESS WHICH PATH I'D PREFER TO FOLLOW.

AT LEAST PRETEND TO BE HAPPY DURING THE CEREMONY, **KANI**.

YOU COULD KILL A BEAR YOURSELF WITH THAT LOOK.



WHAT'S THE POINT? NO ONE WILL COME NEAR ENOUGH TO SEE ME PRETENDING.

YOU HAVE A POINT, MY IRON SPARROW.



WHY ARE WE EVEN HERE, FATHER?

THEY'LL NEVER ACCEPT US BECAUSE YOU AREN'T AINU, AND I WON'T LIVE BY THE OLD WAYS.



IT MAY FEEL LIKE WE DON'T BELONG HERE, KANI, BUT THE AINU ARE YOUR PEOPLE. YOUR MOTHER'S PEOPLE.

KEEPING THE TRADITIONS IS IMPORTANT FOR REASONS YOU MAY NOT UNDERSTAND UNTIL YOU'RE FAR OLDER.



I'M GRATEFUL THAT YOU DON'T ASK THAT I KEEP EVERY TRADITION.

I HAVE NO DESIRE TO LOOK LIKE I'M SMILING IF I DON'T FEEL LIKE SMILING.



I JUST WISH YOU HAD MADE THAT DECISION BEFORE YOUR TATTOOING HAD BEGUN... AND WITHOUT KICKING THE TATTOOIST.

NOW COME...THE CEREMONY IS ABOUT TO BEGIN.



THE IOMANTE IS OUR MOST SACRED CEREMONY.

WE MUST HELP THE SPIRIT OF THIS BEAR TO MOVE ON SO IT CAN BECOME A KAMUY.

THEN IT WILL WATCH OVER THIS VILLAGE, AND PROTECT US.



WE BESEECH YOU, KAMUY, GODS THAT SURROUND US...

TAKE THE SPIRIT OF THIS BEAR WITH--



SKREEE!

MITSUO, HURRY--THE VILLAGE!



OF COURSE, THE THING ABOUT BALANCE IS...IT'S PRECARIOUS.

AND YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT MIGHT DISRUPT IT.

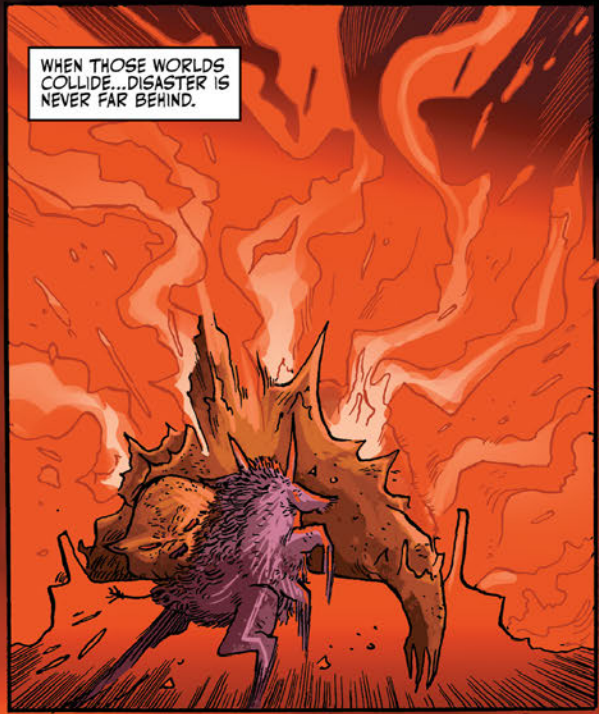
NO, THE CEREMONY!

DEMON, TURN BA--



AAAH!

THE WORLDS OF THE  
AINU AND THE ORDER  
OF AKANE COEXIST  
*TENUOUSLY* ON YOMI  
ISLAND... AND THEY  
WORK BEST WHEN  
THEY'RE KEPT APART.



WHEN THOSE WORLDS  
COLLIDE...DISASTER IS  
NEVER FAR BEHIND.



GRAAAAARRR!

THE AINU THINK THE  
YOKAI ARE SPIRIT GODS  
-- KAMUY. AND THEY CAN  
AFFORD TO THINK THAT  
AS LONG AS THE RED  
HUNTERS KEEP KILLING  
THE DANGEROUS ONES.

BUT WHEN A DEMON  
ATTACKS, IT DOESN'T  
MATTER WHETHER IT'S  
A YOKAI OR A KAMUY.  
IT'S DEADLY.

LIKE THE  
WOLF YOKAI  
THAT KILLED  
MY MOTHER.