

TALES OF THE TMNT: FORGIVE OUR TRESPASSES

By Andrew Modeen

The year 2099. We see an aged but still spry Raphael living in the swampland of Louisiana's Bartholomew Bayou, alone, left to his own devices. We follow him a bit on his daily routine as he hunts a Heron bird (and eating a bit of it raw, on the spot) and even a crocodile we see him grapple with, kill with his sai-staff, then drag back to his lair. Raphael is silent here, save for grunting. It seems very clear that this is a Raphael very far removed from what we have known, even at his angriest "I want to be alone!" moments. He sees the flurry of airplanes/spacecraft in the skies above him of the modern age but pays them no mind – he is in his own world now, bestial, and detached from reality. A wicked voice seems to goad him, taunt him through it all, though Raphael pays it no more heed than the sky traffic above him.

Soon Renet, the now-Mistress of Time, arrives. She attempts to talk to Raph as he ignores her, choosing instead to just go about his business. She mentions from observance that his brothers miss him, wonder what happened to him and fear the worst, and that it has Renet herself broken up, knowing the truth of Raphael's needless self-imposed exile. She begs with him; she pleads. Getting nowhere, in a moment of desperation Renet uses her powers to whisk Raphael back in time against his will.

In a hopeful attempt to jumpstart Raphael's sensibilities and clearly damaged psyche for his own good, she uses her command of the Timestream to force him to visit times and places in his past. She begins with the somewhat "bad," taking him (the two of them traveling as invisible, non-corporeal entities) to view/relive such moments as the one from the original Raphael micro-series where he nearly struck Michelangelo with the pipe, then where he was killed by the Shredder Elite in *TMNT* Vol. 1, #21 before being saved by Leo, [a bit of demutating Raph from "The River" arc as well if it is still canon], Raphael chopping wood feverishly in *TMNT* Vol. 4, #11 at Splinter's funeral, Raphael going into a rage in his dinosaur-like state later in Volume 4. This angers Raphael to see, but she now has his full attention. He already seems to be coming out of his animal-like state, speaking intelligibly (if in anger).

Renet explains that she needed to show him that first to show him how far he had really come, to show him the *real* Raphael he had only forgotten. In new time periods/ places, we see the positive now. Happier times. We see Raphael getting ambushed by Klunk the cat during that Christmas in the Leonardo micro as he attempts to peek at Michelangelo's presents in the 80s, we see a happy Raphael babysitting an adolescent Shadow and her managing to beat him at cards in the late 90s, we see Raphael, Casey, and Cha-Ocho having beers together during a Superbowl in the 2000s. At last we see Raphael (looking very much as he appeared in *Tales of the TMNT*, Vol. 2 #40) attending what is a TMNT "family reunion" of a sort in Northampton in 2062: as that Raph nears the front yard, he can hear the other Turtles remark that they don't expect Raphael to attend, that they should just go ahead and carry on without him as usual. Hearing this, Raphael stops in his tracks, throws off his baseball cap, his jacket, and storms back the way he came with his head low.

Raph grabs Renet, shakes her by the shoulders and urges her to stop this at once. Crying, she is about to agree when... a familiar voice jars the two from their reverie. Savanti Romero materializes in front of the two. Much older, perhaps much more bitter, (and very much still holding a grudge against the TMNT) but every bit the menace he was in the past. He explains his powers had waned over the passing decades, and, keeping an eye on the Turtles in 2099, was able to piggyback on Renet's portal. It was *he* who was goading/taunting Raphael earlier in the Louisianan swamp (at least partially to blame for his further descent into semi-madness during his self-exile in the swamp, we can assume). Having absorbed enough choral energy, Savanti now has enough power to move about the Timestream relatively freely. As Raphael rushes to charge him, Savanti vanishes, cackling into a choral flurry of energies.

From Savanti's words Renet realizes he is out to erase the TMNT from ever having being. Renet expresses to Raphael that the clock is ticking, that they need to track Savanti immediately to stop him before his changes solidify in the Timestream. Renet, stating she is able to ascertain the exit point of his jump into the Timestream, creates a portal they both plunge into with urgency.

We cut then to the late 70s. The TMNT, just shy of toddlers, are seen in a sewer. They are racing about, playing a game as they chase each other. They vanish down the sewer corridor as Renet and Raphael appear. Renet and Raph flail about, looking for Savanti Romero... as he appears behind them. Suspending both within a paralyzing energy field, he gloats as he prepares to deliver the killing stroke with an ornate spear.

It is a young Splinter who appears from the shadows to knock Savanti down with his walking stick, breaking his concentration. Raph seizes the moment, cathartically releasing his anger as he rips into him with physical blows and his sai-staff. When Savanti is lying beaten and bloodied, perhaps dying, Renet whisks the old villain away. Somehow even at his young age Splinter is able to recognize his "son." He embraces old Raphael, compelling him to "Never lose your way, my son" before departing down the corridor.

We cut to Donatello in the present (2099) in a bedroom with what appears to be a toddler Mutant Turtle; his child. Don tucks the young one in, says goodnight, and is about to leave the room when he pauses. It seems clear he has done this before; he's only running through the motions. His voice cracks as he says, "Chet, end program." The computer program facsimile of the room and his child fades away – his family is all an artificial representation, a lie. He stumbles outside to find Raphael standing in his living room along with Leonardo (with the same sword Don had given to him years ago in a scabbard over his shell) and Renet, joyous. Conspicuously absent is Michelangelo (dead? holds them in ill will? left to readers' imagination and/or other stories). Even blind, Don knows exactly who is there and smiles joyously. They exchange fond greetings and embrace. Brotherhood is restored... if only for the time being.

We end with a kinetic glimpse of Savanti Romero at the End of Time in the year 3,088, writhing in agony as ephemeral, effigy-like Time Lords – the only things left at the End of Time – rip through his body until he, too, fades out of existence at last.