

RESEARCH

Doom's Law: Spaces of Sovereignty in Marvel's *Secret Wars*

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Sovereignty is both the foundation and source of law and the determination of the territory to which the law applies. In this latter sense, sovereignty and the law it supports are an explicitly spatial phenomenon, as can be seen in the meanings of the Greek word *nomos*, which aside from the law can also refer to a division that marks out a specific territory. This article posits that the Marvel crossover event entitled *Secret Wars* (2015, 2016) encapsulates the ways in which superhero comics might help us to understand the spatiality of sovereignty. It also considers how resistance to Doom's law was focused on the transgression of borders and the creation of alternative spatial arrangements.

Keywords: Agamben; graphic justice; law; political theory; Schmitt

Introduction: When the World Goes Rogue

Fifteen years of a 'War on Terror' have been an especially fruitful time for studying superhero comics. The exceptional politics of the Bush Doctrine encouraged numerous scholars to return to important questions about the relationship between law and violence, and the nature of a state of emergency that are central to both the superhero mythos and an understanding of sovereign power. At a time when states themselves became rogue or took on the role of the vigilante—at least from the perspective of established International Law—scholars naturally gravitated towards thinking about what the exceptional status of the superhero might tell us. Good examples are Jason Bainbridge's study of how superheroes reveal 'the gaps or lacunae in law's operation' (2007: 461), or as Todd McGowan puts it 'law's inadequacy' (2009: np). Also important are Cassandra Sharp's discussion of the 'retributive desire' inherent in the 'penal populism' (2012: 356) of superhero comics (something that

became very evident in the early days of the War on Terror), and Thomas Giddens's analysis of the link between superheroes and natural law, in particular how Batman represents something 'beyond the limited resources of an imperfect system' (2015: 783).

In these and other studies (Bainbridge, 2015; Curtis, 2016), the exceptional status of the superhero has also been used to talk about more generalizable problems within our conception of sovereignty. Here, the seemingly opposed concepts of law and violence bleed into one another, introducing a certain instability or Derridean 'undecidability' (Bainbridge 2015: 461) into a concept supposed to be the epitome of decisive thought and action (Schmitt, 1996, 2005). Elsewhere the effects of the exercise of law's violence have been shown to produce another example of that undecidability in the form of the *pharmakon* that is both cure and poison (Brooker, 2012; Curtis, 2012). In superhero comics this is something most regularly seen in the dangerous and unwanted side effects of superhero powers, where their pursuit of order often generates more chaos.

In this article, however, I want to address the specifically spatial arrangement of this instability. In Giddens's work noted above he addresses the way in which the superhero might be thought of as 'a counter-sovereign stepping outside official avenues' (783) in order to protect the innocent, but I'm interested in the way that sovereignty and the sovereign use of violence is rather a complex knot in which inside and outside become indistinguishable. There is no outside for a sovereign or counter-sovereign to step into because the very concept of sovereignty dissolves the border between them in the very act of maintaining it. The philosopher most attuned to this topology of sovereignty is Giorgio Agamben, and I will argue that the Marvel event entitled *Secret Wars* (2015, 2016)—designed to reform and reboot the Marvel Universe, recalling the *Marvel Super Heroes Secret Wars* limited series published between May 1984 and April 1985—is a perfect vehicle for thinking through this problem.

The premise of the story is that giant cosmic entities called The Beyonders want to destroy the universe, but Dr. Doom manages to preserve fragments of it and collect them together to form a planet called Battleworld of which he is now both the creator

god and the ruling sovereign. As sovereign he oversees a collection of jurisdictional territories in which he keeps the peace through the use of appointed barons. The threat of disorder both from within the collection of governable territories and the ungovernable badlands beyond the wall known as The Shield means Battleworld is in a permanent state of emergency supposedly warranting Dr. Doom's "benign" tyranny. Much like the sovereign Leviathan that Thomas Hobbes argues is necessary to hold the commonwealth together, Doom has 'the use of so much power and strength [...] that by terror thereof he is enabled to conform the wills of [...] all to peace at home and mutual aid against their enemies abroad' (1994: 109).

In what follows I will use *Secret Wars* to explore the relationship between space and sovereignty, both in the way the rule of law is distributed across Battleworld, but also in the way resistance to that law takes on specifically spatial features. This story, I will argue, enables us to get to the heart of a very complex concept in which law and violence, rule and exception, protection and banishment, inclusion and exclusion, inside and outside, are all intimately entwined. By doing this, the event spoke a profound truth about the dark nature of sovereignty, but by making Dr. Doom the sovereign of Battleworld the event also performed a decisive ideological function by suggesting that the dark heart of sovereignty only emerges with a super-villain in charge. It thereby wrongly suggests that once the good guys wrest back control the politics of the exception is truly the exception to the normal order of things.

The Space of Sovereignty

When sovereignty is thought in terms of space and borders it is usually as a geopolitical analysis pertaining to national identity or international relations. With regard to superhero comics, there are excellent examples of this (Dittmer, 2012), but here sovereignty will be thought in philosophical terms. This will be done by considering three related issues: the law's primary role in the distribution and partitioning of space; the declaration of a state of emergency; and the sovereign ban, or the relationship between law and banishment. In all of these it will also be necessary to bear in mind the relationship between law and violence that has defined sovereignty from Bodin to Weber. All of these issues create a constellation of sovereign order and arrangement that need to be thought together.

In *The Nomos of the Earth* Carl Schmitt begins his analysis of the word *nomos*, normally translated as law or rule, by stating its original meaning in Greek was 'the first measure of all subsequent measures' (2003: 67), and therefore pertains to 'primeval division and distribution' (67). This also introduces the normative order of the law precisely because the *nomos* represents how the world *ought* to be divided and arranged as opposed to how it is, but Schmitt reminds us to not reduce *nomos* to this normative understanding. Derived from the Greek word *nemein* meaning to divide, Schmitt argues '*nomos* is the immediate form in which the political and social order of a people becomes visible' (70). Thought in terms of sovereignty, then, it is 'a constitutive act of spatial ordering' (71). The centrality of ordering, dividing and arranging to the *nomos* is also evident from the fact that another meaning of the word in Greek is a wall or hedge. *Nomos* is therefore the division, partition, distribution and allotment of space. The law as we understand it then becomes both the representation and preservation of that primary partitioning. It is therefore no surprise that on Battleworld Doom's 'first law' is that no border or boundary can be crossed without special permission. In fact, the only place people from different regions can meet and mix is a building in New Attilan called the Quiet Room.

The *nomos* is also something of a conceptual division that separates and connects the sacred from the profane, for example. It is not just a matter of property, but also what is proper or appropriate in a given space. Regulation of behaviour and language is therefore another way of maintaining spatial divisions, and here we can immediately see how what is excluded by the sovereign division is essential to the definition of what is included. For Robert Cover, the *nomos* also functions through another form of distribution, namely the stories that circulate giving legitimacy to the law as it is set out. The law for him is something we 'inhabit' (1992: 95). He writes: 'understood in the context of the narratives that give it meaning, law becomes not merely a system of rules to be observed, but a world in which we live' (96). The management of language and narrative, especially in the form of stories is therefore an important aspect of sovereignty. This is most evident in *Secret Wars* where Dr. Strange—Doom's sheriff on Battleworld—is in charge of religious observance across the territories, while his daughter, Valeria—Reed Richards daughter in the normal

universe—is in charge of science. Thus, the two principle narrative realms are managed to maintain the worship of God Doom.

We are introduced to this narrative division on Battleworld in issue 2 of *Secret Wars*. While (virtually) everything on the planet is as Doom wills, an important part of the story is that two craft managed to survive the end of the multiverse and arrived on Battleworld carrying heroes and villains with memories of the time before Doom. When one of the craft is discovered and its existence is brought to Valeria's attention at The Foundation, home to Battleworld's science division, it threatens what she calls an 'ideological breach' (np) or what Dr. Strange refers to as 'schism'. He then immediately enacts a sovereign order to 'seal off the site', telling Valeria: 'I am invoking ... *quarantine*' (Hickman and Ribic 2016: np). In quarantine, the site or location of the craft is immediately walled off, so to speak. A border is placed around it marking it as heretical and hostile to the law. While this is not explicitly visualized it is formally created by the following page being one of the most impressive images of The Shield that we see (**Figure 1**).

To understand the importance of this act of quarantine in relation to sovereignty and the creation of a sites of exception, we need to look at a couple of related issues in Schmitt's work. The first is the distinction between friend and enemy that Schmitt argues is essential to the conception of the political. Unlike morality, economics or aesthetics the ultimate criteria for politics is the threat posed by 'the other, the stranger [...who] is, in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien' (1996: 27). The difficulty Schmitt himself has maintaining this distinction, as well as any criticisms of it cannot be explored here, but it is introduced to set up Schmitt's major contribution to sovereignty that occurs at a time when a sovereign state is threatened by alien forces abroad or at home. The true test of sovereignty is the ability (power and legitimacy) to announce a state of emergency.

A state of emergency is understood to be an exceptional situation in the sense that the law that usually applies is suspended. An example of this would be the implementation of martial law, which is the suspension of the civil and legal rights and protections that citizens normally enjoy. For Schmitt, the sovereign is the person 'who decides on the exception' (2005: 5), or the person with the power or right to

according to Agamben, remains 'continually operative in the civil state' (1998: 109). This gives justification to regular displays of sovereign strength or force. In this regard, Agamben can argue that 'exteriority [understood as the state of nature...] is truly the innermost center of the political system' (36).

The potential for violence and the consequent logic of the state of exception that legitimizes the use of violence is the first instance of sovereignty's curious spatial arrangement.

The state of nature and the state of exception are nothing but two sides of a single topological process in which what was presupposed as external (the state of nature) now reappears, as in a Möbius strip or a Leyden jar, in the inside (as state of exception), and the sovereign power is this very impossibility of distinguishing between outside and inside, nature and exception, *physis* and *nomos*. (Agamben: 1998: 37)

This curious topological feature is encapsulated in two important elements of Battleworld's security and law enforcement: The Shield and the Thor Corps.

As noted, The Shield is the architectural symbol of Doom's sovereignty. It is a giant wall that traverses the lower southern hemisphere of Battleworld. It is the physical expression of Doom's law and is key to the arrangement of his kingdom. It serves to protect the relatively orderly regions in the north from three ungovernable regions in the south: Deadlands, Perfection and New Xandar. We are asked to believe, by Doom himself, that although he is God there remain certain parts of Battleworld that even he can't control, and yet it becomes clear these regions have an important ideological or propaganda function in that only Doom can supposedly protect the north from this existential threat, thereby legitimating his tyranny.

As he notes in issue 1 of *Inhumans: Attilan Rising*, without the exercise of his strength 'the weak become *meat* for the beasts beyond The Shield' (Soule and Timms 2016: np). Doom's rule is thus sanctioned in part by his role as creator but also as protector, where the permanent state of emergency in relation to the threat from the south justifies Battleworld's exceptional politics and Doom's use of violence to

maintain order. In this sense the *external* threat posed by the ungovernable regions becomes an important *internal* component in Doom's tyranny. As Black Bolt asks in issue 4 of that story: 'What purpose do those beasts serve in Doom's perfect machine?' (np). The answer is simple; the beasts and the monsters, the anarchy and existential threat legitimate the division and maintenance of the world according to Doom's will.

The threat from south of The Shield that becomes an integral part of Doom's rule is indicative of the intimacy between law and violence in our conception and practice of sovereignty—even if that intimacy is disavowed in our politics. In Battleworld this relationship is suggested by the fact that Doomstadt, the capital and legislative centre of Battleworld has Doomgaard, the home of the Thor Corps, as its neighbour. We can understand this through Agamben's claim that the police have become 'the place where the proximity and the almost constitutive exchange between violence and right that characterizes the figure of the sovereign is shown more nakedly and clearly than anywhere else' (2000: 104).

For Agamben, the focus on "public order" and "security" on which the police have to decide on a case-by-case basis defines an area of indistinction between violence and right exactly symmetrical to that of sovereignty' (104). In a state of exception in which the order maintained by the police is given priority over whatever protections citizens may have in normal conditions, any adversary automatically becomes a criminal (106). This intimacy, Agamben argues, has an 'intangible sacredness' (105) displayed in various ceremonies and public pageants. On Battleworld it is shown in issue 2 of *Secret Wars* by Castle Doom being built inside Yggdrasil, the World Tree, home of Thor and the Norse gods in the regular Marvel universe. Here, not only has a man taken the place of the gods, the gods have become the tyrant's police, and their home has become his castle.

The violence of sovereignty has two other spatial components crucial to Agamben's analysis, and which are also central to *Secret Wars*. The first is the sovereign ban, which includes banishment and exile, while the second is the related figure of the camp, an area in which the exceptional nature of sovereign power can be brought to bear without any legal hindrance. Banishment has long been the prerogative of

sovereigns who had the capacity to exile those who threatened them and in many cases confiscate their property. The ban is therefore related to the exception in that it is a moment in which the law and its normal protections are withdrawn from the person banished. This manifestation of exceptional politics does not mean the law no longer applies, as Bainbridge argues (2007: 461), rather the law is performed precisely in and through this withdrawal. Again, what appears to be outside the law is very much internal to it.

While banishment meant removal from the protections of the court or the city—sometimes with a price placed on one's head—it often meant removal to a place of imprisonment and torture. In Agamben's study, he brings these together under the figure of the *homo sacer*, a being defined by '*the unpunishability of his killing and the ban on his sacrifice*' (73). In other words, the *homo sacer* is that special category of being—and I say being because it is no longer a legal person—who can be killed without the killer facing any responsibility or reprisal, and without the killing taking on the social significance of a sacrifice. In this sense the *homo sacer* is nothing. Stripped of the form of life given by political association (*bios*), such a being is reduced to the insignificance and worthlessness of 'bare life' (*zoē*).

The political importance of the ban for Agamben can be seen in his claim that it is more foundational than the contract Hobbes argues marks the foundation of the commonwealth. Adapting Schmitt's primary distinction between friend and enemy he argues the sovereign ban is the 'originary exclusion' (83) that creates 'the first properly political space' (83), and is 'the originary juridico-political relation' (109). The ban marks out who does and does *not* belong and therefore who is protected and who is not. In *Secret Wars* the ban features in this primary way. While it is Doom that creates and holds together Battleworld this order is made possible by his banishment of two former enemies. In the regular Marvel universe, Doctor Doom's most noted antagonists are the Fantastic Four who included Reed and Sue Richards, Johnny Storm and Ben Grimm. As the leader of the team Reed Richards was an especially significant adversary, it is therefore interesting that he is completely excluded from Doom's World, only appearing by accident in the two groups that saved themselves from the destruction.

The other members were included in his arrangement of Battleworld, but two of them only existed under the condition of the sovereign ban. In issue 3 we learn how Johnny Storm, the flying, pyrotechnic superhero was banished to the sky where he existed as Battleworld's sun, shedding light on the orderly clearing Doom had made amongst the multiversal chaos. Then, in issue 6, we discover that Benn Grimm, the stone-based behemoth also suffered an originary exclusion by being made to exist *as* The Shield. Benn Grimm wasn't exiled beyond it like other heroes that incurred the wrath of Doom. Grimm was The Shield. Indeed, the first time we see Grimm in this situation is when his face appears on the wall of one of The Shield's holding cells where Doom has Thanos imprisoned (**Figure 2**), thereby further developing this close



Figure 2: *Secret Wars* #6, Jonathan Hickman, Esad Ribic, Ive Svorcina and Chris Eliopoulos. © Marvel Worldwide, Inc., 2015.

link between the wall and the law. As the principle sign of Doom's law, the creation of The Shield in and as an act of banishment is thus a wonderful personification of sovereign power. What is more, with Reed Richards absent and Johnny Storm and Ben Grimm banished, Doom, in the style of the patriarchal despot (*despotēs* in Greek means head of the household) was also able to "confiscate" Reed's family, taking Sue Richards as his wife and her children as his own.

However, if exile removes a person from their place in the community, the camp is a specific localization of the sovereign ban. In such places people are abandoned. They lose the protection of sovereign command (*ban*). It is therefore the place where the state of exception physically manifests itself. For Agamben, '*The camp is the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule*. In it, the state of exception, [...] acquires a permanent spatial arrangement' (2000: 39). Battleworld is such a space. Although different regions are shown to contain camps—such as the 'biolabs' in *Age of Apocalypse*, or the 'sanitation stations' in *Hail Hydra*—it is in fact the entire planet that has become the camp. In political conditions determined by the state of exception, Agamben argues the sovereign ban becomes the new '*nomos of the planet*' (45).

The Thor Corps who subject any dissenters to executive and often extreme violence across Battleworld are evidence of Doom's new, exceptional *nomos*. As are the numerous heroes, such as America Chavez and Abigail Brand, who are exiled to The Shield to continuously battle the invading hoards from the south, or are exiled beyond The Shield to face certain death, like Greer Nelson or Hank Pym in *Age of Ultron vs Marvel Zombies*. In fact, just as we saw with this ungovernable region that is essential to the authoritarian governance of Battleworld—its *exclusion* is an *integral* part of Doom's perceived legitimacy and power—the inhabitants of the south are themselves marked by this contradictory mix of exteriority and interiority; belonging to two categories at once. The zombies are, of course, living *and* dead, while the Ultron robots are both animate *and* inanimate. Just like *homo sacer* who is a 'living dead man' (Agamben 1998: 131), and belongs by being excluded, these monsters epitomize the curious topology of sovereignty where inside and outside are clearly marked and yet indistinct.

The politics of the exception that defines sovereignty therefore undoes the stable division between law and violence, order and chaos, becoming a threshold or passage through which one can cross over into the other. In the many Battleworld stories, one in particular draws out the implications of this with especially disturbing effect. In *1602: Witch Hunter Angela*, the eponymous hero hunts and kills entities known as Witchbreed (the early 17th century term for mutants) that threaten the security and stability of the realm. In this mode she operates in the sovereign role that Schmitt likens to the biblical figure of the restrainer (*katechon* in Greek), a manifestation of exceptional politics that holds back the manifestation of evil and the apocalypse it threatens (2003: 59).

Interestingly, the last of the Witchbreed Angela kills just happens to be King James. Already, then, in the opening scene of issue 1 we have a complex relationship between power and subjection, friend and enemy, inside and outside where the supposed foundation of the law, the King, is also an agent of its dissolution. With the Witchbreed no longer a peril, Angela turns her attention to a new enemy, the Faustians who have gained powers through deals with the “devil” and as such present a threat to the established order. In doing so, Angela and her fellow hunter/lover, Lady Serah, attract the wrath of the Faerie Queen—the real power behind the Faustians—who declares that when Angela kills three more Faustians she will kill Serah.

Aside from the invocation of evil that the Faerie Queen represents, her threat is also presented in explicitly spatial terms. In issue 2 we are told that the borders of the Realm of Faerie ‘drift like smoke, and open and close as they please’ (Bennett, Gillen and Hans 2016: np). The Realm of Faerie is therefore the enemy because it is an ontological threat to the principle of order itself, a theme that is visually explored in Stephanie Hans’s choice of page layouts (**Figure 3**). The Realm of Faerie, then, is either the antithesis of the clear, stable boundaries marked out by sovereignty or it reveals a disturbing truth about the indeterminacy of those divisions. The Faerie Queen is also the opposite of the Hobbesian corporation or commonwealth, instead of unifying she multiplies and spreads by colonising bodies of the Faustians with whom she deals and uses them to ‘claim lands’ (np).

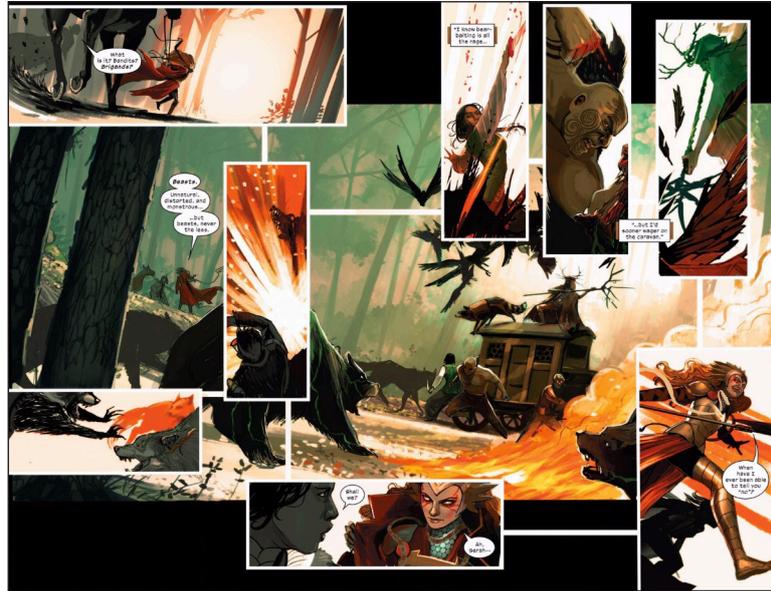


Figure 3: 1602: *Witch Hunter Angela #2*, Margueritte Bennett, Stephanie Hans. © Marvel Worldwide, Inc. 2015.

Having hunted and killed two more Faustians, they track down the third, a young woman going by the name of Anna Marie, at Castle Caldecot. Angela tries to save Anna Marie from the realm of the Faerie Queen, but fails and is forced to kill again. As promised the Faerie Queen immediately takes the life of Serah. In issue 4, unable to deal with the loss, Angela decides she cannot live without her lover and finds a way into the realm of the Faerie Queen by using faerie magic. Once inside she confronts and kills the Faerie Queen in order that she might assume her position and return Serah back to life. Through this, what was the restrainer has become the manifestation of the very menace she sought to end, and the problem with the politics of the exception that defines sovereignty lies in this very dangerous dynamic.

As has already been noted, the exception makes interiority and exteriority indistinct, situating sovereign power both inside the law (as foundation and guarantee) and outside the law (as suspension and violence). In other words, the exception renders the law always already extra-legal. The sovereign is therefore also the rogue, which makes it especially interesting that Angela's passage from one world to the next begins with her killing Anne Marie who is the member of the X-Men known as Rogue in the regular Marvel universe.

The extra-legality of sovereignty, or the idea that the sovereign is always already something of an outlaw plays an important part in Jacques Derrida's analysis of sovereignty where he argues this being-outside-the-law means 'the beast, criminal and sovereign have a troubling resemblance: they call on each other [...]; there is between sovereign, criminal and beast a sort of obscure and fascinating complicity, or even a worrying mutual attraction' (2009: 17). For Agamben, too, the sovereign politics of the exception that suspends the law in the name of security has a similar logic whereby the 'sovereigns who willingly agreed to present themselves as cops or executioners, in fact, now show in the end their original proximity to the criminal' (2000: 107). It is only proper, then, that in issue 4 we are told that Doom did not create Battleworld from his own strength or will but from powers he stole from the Beyonders. It can therefore be said that the sovereignty of Battleworld was founded in a criminal act.

Resisting Doom's Law

While *Secret Wars* is a study in sovereignty and exceptional politics, it is primarily a narrative focused on discovering the truth about Battleworld and resistance to its order. When we join the story, supposedly eight years into the creation of Battleworld, there are already elements attempting to undermine Doom's rule, a problem accentuated by the unanticipated arrival of the two rafts from the Regular and Ultimate universes. What is interesting for this article, however, is the way in which the theme of sovereign space remains absolutely crucial for the increasing instances of rebellion that we witness across the planet.

In issue 2 of *Inhumans: Attilan Rising*, for example, it has already been noted it is home to the only space where people from different regions are allowed to mix. This space, known as the Quiet Room, is also the location for significant plotting against Doom. Interestingly, the resistance that goes by the name of the Voice Unheard uses the basement of the Quiet Room as a way station for guerilla missions throughout Battleworld, enabled by their use of an Eldrac Gate, a piece of technology based on the Inhuman known as Eldrac the Door, a living piece of architecture enabling inter-dimensional transportation of anyone or anything that moves across its threshold. In so doing it transgresses and undermines the first law of Doom, but it is also the

antithesis of the law itself understood as the arrangement and maintenance of space. The gate is potentially the dissolution of the law and hence of (any) sovereign order.

In terms of movement and the crossing of borders as a form of resistance, possibly the most dramatic instance of this occurs in *Captain Britain and the Mighty Defenders*. The resistance in this region is explicitly carried out by the titular character of the comic, a British Muslim woman and doctor, named Faiza Hussein who we see walking across the deserts of New Mars towards the Yinsen City wall. Yinsen City is a sub-division of the Battleworld region known simply as City. The usual walls separate it from the surrounding regions, and from its neighbour Mondo City—a deeply authoritarian area that playfully references the infamous Mega City of Judge Dredd comics.

The residents of Yinsen City see Captain Britain approach through a window in the wall that divides them from New Mars. The sighting of Captain Britain is reported by White Tiger who assumes she is a refugee and in need of help. “We have to let her in”, she says. “This city’s *supposed* to be a *utopia*—not some privileged little *enclave* where you have to be *born* here to *count*” (Ewing and Davis 2015: np). Here, White Tiger is articulating the problem the refugee presents for the concept of sovereignty. As has already been discussed, a political community is founded through the identification of those who do not belong. Sovereignty, even in its most democratic form is tied to a specific and predetermined identity. For Agamben, the refugee is therefore a limit concept that breaks the supposedly natural ‘continuity between man and citizen [...] birth and nation’ and causes bare life to appear (1998: 131). The refugee, in other words, is one way in which sovereignty’s exclusionary violence is highlighted.

It quickly becomes evident, however, that Captain Britain is in no need of assistance, and in one of the most brazen acts of defiance across the entire event she simply smashes the wall and walks into Yinsen City. This literal and figurative breaking of Doom’s law is motivated by memories of where she used to live. Speaking this way, as She-Hulk points out, is also heretical, but Captain Britain has no care for that. When Baron Yinsen explains that they can rebuild the wall, and She-Hulk points out that it is the transgression of god’s law not the physical damage that is the

problem, Captain Britain says that is not true: "Doom is a man—a man with power, but human all the same. He is not any kind of god" (Ewing and Davis 2015: np).

When this leads to a wider discussion of the memories of other lives and homes that citizens of Yinsen City admit to, Doom arrives to administer punishment. He notes that only his law, namely the dividing wall, is what protects them from the totalitarian and paramilitary region that neighbours them. "You *dislike* my laws, Baron Yinsen?" Doom asks. "Then you may *disregard* them. Your *neighbours*, too" (Ewing and Davis 2015: np). With this, Doom's law and hence his sovereign protection are withdrawn when he makes the dividing wall disappear, and Yinsen City is abandoned to its fate at the hands of Mondo City. It is quickly invaded by a sentient, multi-armoured tank called War Machine, and two Mondo police officers called Boss Cage and Boss Frost, who lead the internment of Yinsen citizens in temporary detention camps, only for the whole cycle of breaking walls to start again.

In *A-Force* issue 1 this theme is also taken up, but the challenge to Doom's order is presented in a radical way. The comic introduced a new team of all female Avengers that protects the region of Battleworld known as Arcadia, an island located very close to The Shield. Arcadia is immediately threatened by a giant shark that appears in the waters around the island, but after a defensive maneuver by members of A-Force it is blown out of the water and ends up inside the city walls. Although it is incapacitated, America Chavez picks up the leviathan, raises the monster above her head—in a dramatic image of sovereign power—and promptly hurls it over The Shield into the The Deadlands to the south. Immediately the Thor Corps are dispatched for failure to comply with Battleworld's first law regarding the sanctity of borders. For this, Sheriff Strange orders America Chavez to be exiled to The Shield where she will face a permanent life and death struggle against the forces of annihilation that threaten Battleworld.

Most interestingly, though, the issue closes with another transgression of boundaries when a totally new character falls from the sky and we are introduced to Singularity, a pocket universe that has taken the form of a young girl. Why this is interesting is that Doom has declared the sky a limit beyond which there is nothing. Battleworld, he claims, is the totality of the universe, so where did she come from? While Singularity's arrival signals there *is* something and some place beyond

Battleworld this is not, however, the most striking moment of resistance in *A-Force*. In issue 3, when the team are under attack from Doom's forces, Singularity grows in size so that her new friends can hide inside her.

As a pocket universe, she is in effect an alternative dimension, a space completely at odds with Doom's *nomos*. She defies the predetermined division and arrangement of Battleworld and becomes the antithesis of his order, something that is exaggerated in the fracturing of space that is an important aspect of the image (**Figure 4**). In fact, as a mutable and mobile dimension she is the antithesis to order itself. She recognizes



Figure 4: *A-Force* #3, Margueritte Bennett, G. Willow Wilson, Jorge Molina, Craig Yeung, Laura Martin, VS's Cory Petit. © Marvel Worldwide, Inc., 2015.

no boundaries, nor do any boundaries contain her. She is both inside and outside Battleworld at the same time, and in a story in which the law is so clearly based in the organization and regulation of space, Singularity turning herself into a borderless, transportable refuge for her female friends is a wonderful image of resistance, and one that also clearly speaks to the gendered nature of Doom's tyranny.

Returning to the boundary set by Doom's declaration that there is nothing beyond the sky, it has already been noted how Singularity's arrival is both a transgression and a negation of that claim. However, the sky is interesting not only because it is a limit decreed by Doom, but because the vertical limit is itself so crucial to sovereignty. In an important essay on the topic, Jean-Luc Nancy argues that sovereignty 'designates, first, the summit' that 'towers over and dominates' (2007: 96), going on to argue that sovereignty is not marked by having the attribute of height, but that the sovereign is the subject 'whose being consists in height' (96). The sovereign is detached and separated from the mundane order of things. Sovereignty is thus superlative. It is the 'Most High' and the 'Inequivalent' (97). As Doom becomes increasingly aware of the growing resistance he laments in *Secret Wars* issue 3 that he has failed to inspire his people. In keeping with Nancy's analysis, he talks about the difficulty of being both an earthbound ruler and a god. 'I am a poor god', he concedes to his wife. 'I think now that once having made the world, I should have removed myself. Perhaps the gods of old had it right... It is better to be unseen—demanding faith, and beyond being defined by the mundane' (Hickman and Ribic 2016: np).

This ultimate sovereign limit is challenged in *Captain Marvel and the Carol Corps* where a squadron of all-female pilots known as the Banshees, lead by Captain Marvel defend a region of Battleworld called Halla Field. Resistance to Doom starts here because one member of the squadron, the especially inquisitive engineer called Bee, has a theory that the vertical limit cannot in fact be a limit. She is reminded by a teammate it is Doom's law that above the sky is simply the void, and yet she persists with enough conviction to begin to raise doubts in the mind of Captain Marvel. These doubts are amplified when the squadron is scrambled to take out a ship containing an 'invading A.I. force' of Ultron robots that is sailing towards Halla Field (DeConnick, Thompson, Lopez 2015: np).

When the Banshees engage the ship they discover it actually has a human crew, but not before rockets have been fired to sink it. Captain Marvel manages to enter the ship and save one member of the crew who turns out to be a refugee from an increasingly unliveable region of Battleworld called Limbo. It is interesting that the refugee in this story is once again a figure that challenges sovereign order and increases Captain Marvel's desire to challenge the vertical limit set by Doom. The rest of the comic involves the Banshees trying to avoid the surveillance of Halla Field by Baroness Cochran, before Captain Marvel and the rest of the Banshees take flight in issue 4 and break through Doom's ultimate limit and discover the whole world to be a lie.

Conclusion: Sovereignty Undone

Dr. Doom's sovereignty and his near omnipotent power are most clearly shown in the final issue of *Inhumans: Attilan Rising* where, after what appears to be a successful rebellion he simply clicks his fingers and resets the world and the timeline of that particular region. Doom attempts this again in the final issue of *Secret Wars* when he tries to get rid of Reed Richards who is undermining his rule and threatening to dissolve his kingdom. This time, however, nothing happens. "What is this?" he asks, "Mister Reece?"

The man to whom Dr. Doom is referring here is Owen Reece also known as Molecule Man, a character who possesses extraordinary levels of power even in the superhero genre. He has control over the atomic structure of reality. He is also one of Marvel's two composite entities that exist in every part of the Marvel multiverse at the same time. We are first introduced to Owen Reece's role in issue 5 of *Secret Wars*. After the death of Dr. Strange in issue 4 we discover that Dr. Strange was not the only assistance Doom received when he created Battleworld. The energy and reality altering power actually came from Reece who did a deal with Doom to protect himself from the Beyonders after they had tried to use his power to destroy the multiverse. Now existing only in one dimension, and kept captive in an underground bunker, Reece's power is diminished, but it is still enough to enable Doom to run Battleworld.

This relationship is the final significant feature of sovereignty that appears in *Secret Wars* and marks out the difference between the two poles of sovereignty

that Antonio Negri (1999) calls constitutive and constituted power. In the case of government by monarchy sovereignty comes from God but is represented in the divine right of the monarch as legislator and protector. In the case of government by democracy legitimacy is conferred by the People, and is transferred to their representatives in government who write law of their behalf. In the language of Agamben that has been used throughout, once this power is given actuality in a particular government, the potentiality of constitutive power suspends itself. In other words, the revolution that created various democratic constitutions, and is now supposed to lie outside that legislative act as the earlier moment of violent rebellion or the state of nature manifested in civil war, is simply suspended within the constitution, always at hand for the formation of something new.

It is interesting that *Secret Wars* writer, Jonathan Hickman, visualizes this suspension quite literally. When we first see Owen Reece in his underground bunker-cum-prison he is floating or in self-suspension in the centre of a white void. The strength of the light emanating from him is an index of his potency. The bunker is also directly beneath a statue of Owen Reece/Molecule Man in the garden of Doomstadt. This is a memorial to his contribution to Battleworld, but it is also a lifeless avatar that actually hides or masks the true power behind Doom and Battleworld. In such an authoritarian regime the creativity of constitutive power is carefully policed if not removed from political life. This means the spatial configuration of the bunker under ground, directly beneath the inanimate image of the power it is substituted for, astutely represents the way that constituted power always needs to defend itself against the radical creativity of constitutive power by preventing its living appearance within the arrangement of the *nomos*.

The questions "What is this? Mister Reece?" consequently mark the moment where Owen Reece withdraws his power from Dr. Doom and in effect disables him. Although Doom fights on he is already undone, and the end of Battleworld comes in a blinding flash of a new constitution and the creation of new universes replacing those destroyed by The Beyonders. With Owen Reece released and able to multiply himself again, Valeria Richards explains to her mother what's happening. Owen, she says, 'is the key. He's kind of a human repository of unlimited power. And that

omnipotent power has to be directed—used—by an individual. In this case, Dad [Reed Richards]'. Franklin her brother, she explains is 'a universal shaper' and has 'ideas' for universes that use Owen's power to become reality. 'Finally', she concludes, 'they slice off a bit of Owen' to go with each one as they spin off into the newly emerging multiverse (Hickman and Ribic 2016: np).

This is also, of course, a moment of significant ideological work. Having raised all sort of questions about the nature of sovereignty especially under the exceptional conditions that have governed the world since the 11th September 2001, the story proposes that when the constituted power—the element that gives constitutive power its direction and shape—is the beneficent, liberal and democratic Reed Richards the world is once again open, free and legitimate. In other words, the suggestion is that under such conditions the darker elements of sovereignty will not appear within the *nomos*, when in truth the manifestation of exceptional politics is always available to any sovereign in any territory because it is the constitutive centre of the concept. Unless we stop thinking sovereign violence only happens in other places, outside or beyond the boundaries of our democracies, we will continue to live a fantasy far more bizarre than *Secret Wars*.

Editorial Note

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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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