

The Party of the Second Part

...BATTLED THE "PERFORMANCE CRIMINAL COLLECTIVE" KNOWN AS ARTCRIME, WHO MANIFEST GIANT FIGURES OF SURREALIST PAINTERS...



...MELTING BUILDING FACADES AND CLOCKS THROUGHOUT CITY CENTER.

IT'S A FUNNY WORLD. I MOSTLY THINK ABOUT VAMPIRES DURING BREAKFAST.

DENIS ARDISIAN IS A PROFESSIONAL RENFIELD, CONTRACTING WITH VAMPIRES AND OTHER QUASI-IMMORTALS TO ASSIST WITH THEIR FINANCIAL HOLDINGS.

IMMORTALS LIKE TO APPEAR TO DIE...

...THEN REAPPEAR CLAIMING TO BE THEIR OWN DESCENDANT, INHERITING THEIR WEALTH. THIS USED TO BE DONE BY FRAUD...

...BUT IN RECENT YEARS, THEY'VE ARRANGED TO TRANSFER THEIR HOLDINGS AT DEATH OR SEEMING DEATH TO SOMEONE LIKE DENIS, WHO THEN DEEDS THEM BACK TO THE NEW IDENTITY, MINUS A SMALL COMMISSION.

IT'S A GROWING FIELD ON SHADOW HILL, DUE TO THE PROTECTIONS WE HAVE AGAINST VAMPIRES WHO GET CRABBY ABOUT THE COMMISSIONS.





I ADMIRE THE HEROES. I THINK THEY'RE AMAZING.

IT DOESN'T EVEN BOTHER ME THAT WINGED VICTORY LOOKS LIKE SHE'S BARELY AGED A DAY IN THE LAST 20 YEARS, EVEN THOUGH I HAVE.

VAMPIRES AND GHOSTS GET YOU USED TO THAT KIND OF THING.

IT'S JUST...

I TELL THEM WE'RE PLANNING TO HAVE FRIENDS VISIT AND WATCH THE WORLD SERIES THIS WEEKEND. THEY SAY THEY'LL SET IT UP.



HEY. FLY HIGH, YOU. SOAR LIKE ANYTHING.

...I DON'T WANT TO HAVE TO DEPEND ON THEM. TO HOPE THEY'RE THERE WHEN AND IF I NEED THEM.

I WANT TO DEPEND ON MYSELF.



TOM FREAKS OUT ABOUT THE OCCULT CREATURES THAT LIVE ON SHADOW HILL...

...BUT THEM, I KNOW HOW TO HANDLE. I CAN SAFEGUARD MYSELF.



I CALL THE HOSPICE TO TALK ABOUT PAPA.

HE'S DOING WELL, THEY SAY, BUT NO CHANGES.



THANKS. I APPRECIATE IT.

I LIKE TO CALL WHEN I'M OFF THE HILL, BECAUSE TALKING ABOUT PAPA MAKES ME THINK OF MAMA...

...AND OFF THE HILL, SHE'S LESS LIKELY TO MANIFEST.

I GUESS WE WERE TOO CLOSE.

BUT I DON'T HAVE THE TIME RIGHT NOW.

SORRY, MA.

I CAN FEEL HER DISAPPROVAL AND WORRY. THAT I MIGHT LEAVE THE HILL. THAT MY JEWISH BOYFRIEND WON'T GIVE HER GRANDCHILDREN.

AND I FEEL GUILTY. BUT MA'S NOT GOING TO CHANGE, AND I'M NOT GOING TO BE EVERYTHING SHE WANTS.

THANKS, RAY.

THIS IS THE WORLD WE GET.

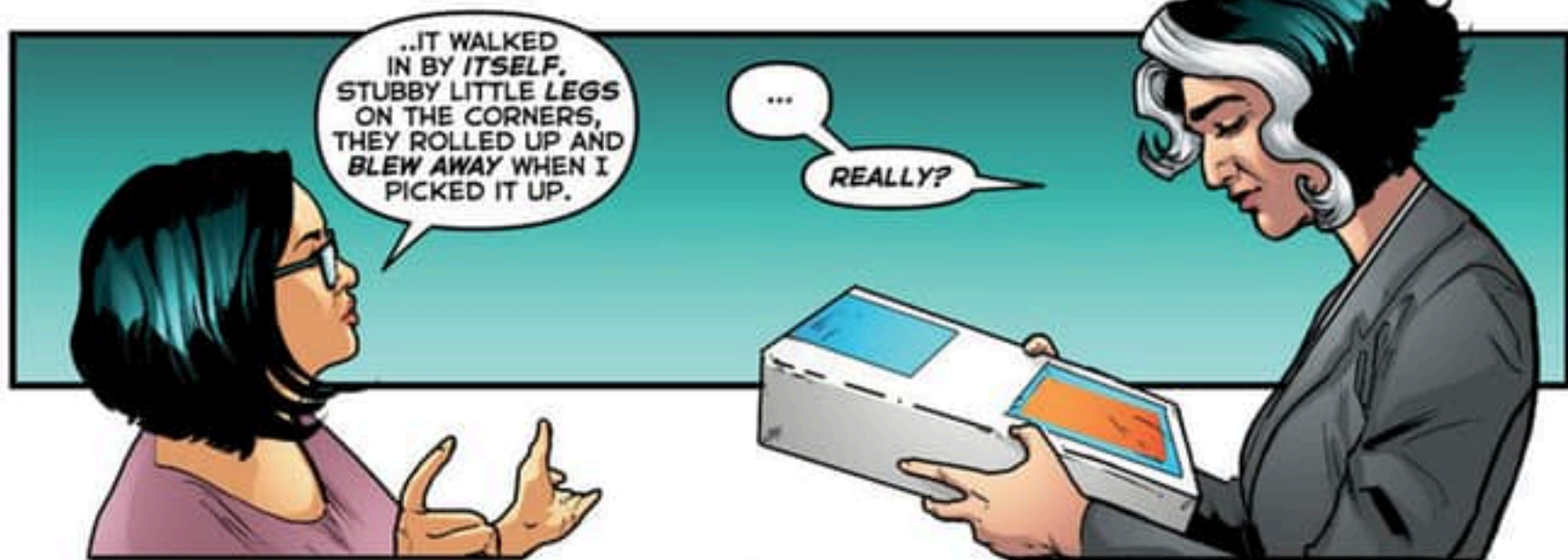
HEY, MARTA. BUNCH OF CALLS ALREADY TODAY.

SORRY, TRAFFIC WAS BAD AROUND DARBYVILLE.

ANYTHING EXTRA ON-FIRE?

MAYBE. THAT RAITHA McCANN HAS CALLED TWICE. SAYS IT'S URGENT. I COULD HEAR THE UNDERLINES.

SHE SENT OVER A PACKAGE, TOO. AND GET THIS...



..IT WALKED IN BY ITSELF. STUBBY LITTLE LEGS ON THE CORNERS, THEY ROLLED UP AND BLEW AWAY WHEN I PICKED IT UP.

...
REALLY?



OKAY. FIVE MINUTES TO GET SETTLED IN, THEN GET HER ON THE PHONE.

WILL DO.

I WONDER, MOMENTARILY, IF THIS HAS ANYTHING TO DO WITH THE CASE I'M HANDLING FOR THE HANGED MAN.



IT LOOKS LIKE SOME SORT OF...MAGIC SPELLS, I GUESS. SOME OF IT'S IN NO ALPHABET I'VE EVER SEEN, SOME OF IT'S IN IDIOMATIC ENGLISH...

RRRINGG

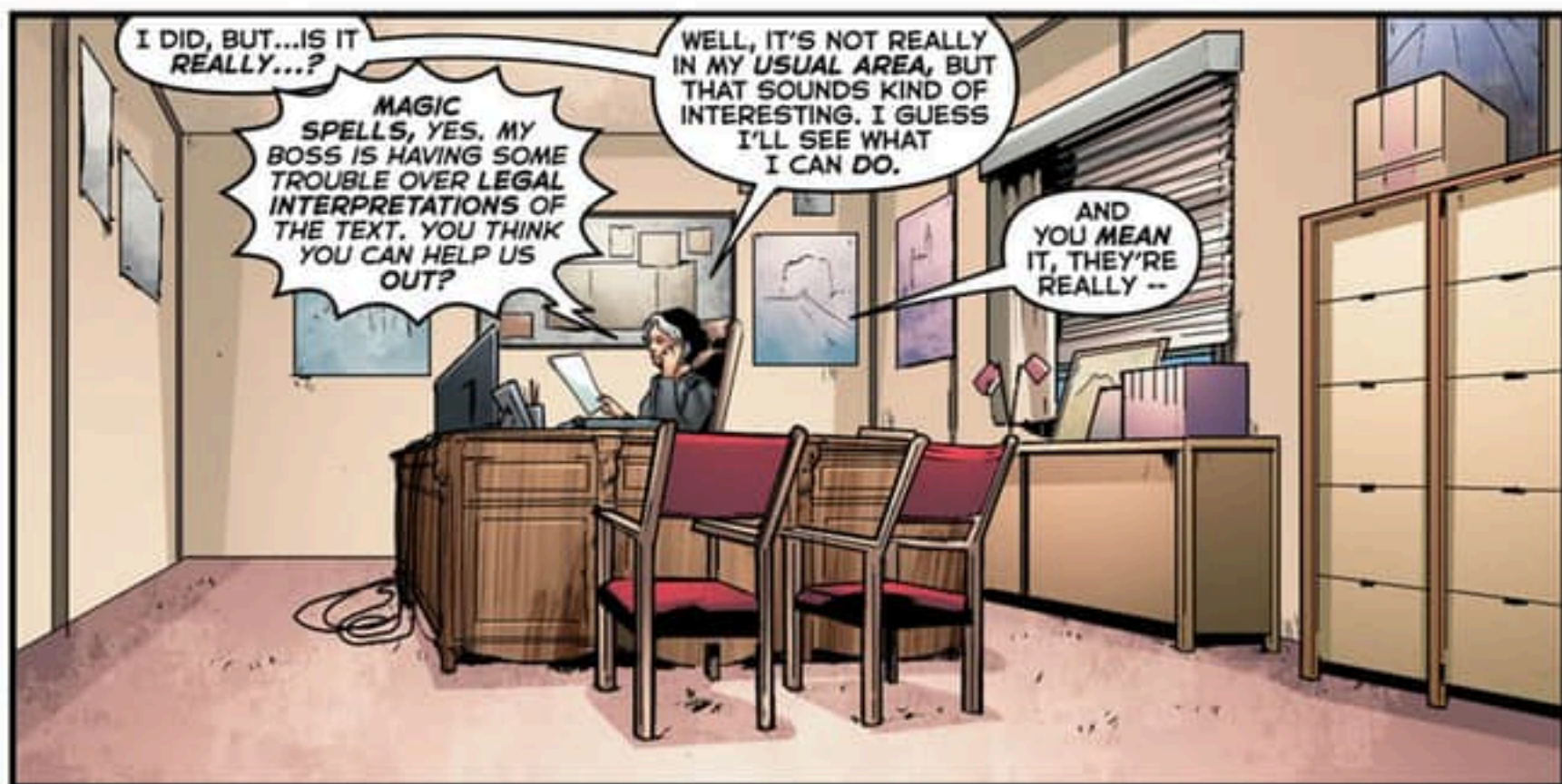
...AND SOME'S WHAT I'M GUESSING IS A LITERAL TRANSLATION, CHOPPY AND HARD TO MAKE SENSE OF.



IT DOESN'T SEEM LIKE SOMETHING YOU'D NEED A LAWYER FOR.

YES?

HEY. RAITHA MCCANN. YOU GET THE PACKAGE?



I DID, BUT...IS IT REALLY...?

MAGIC SPELLS, YES. MY BOSS IS HAVING SOME TROUBLE OVER LEGAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THE TEXT. YOU THINK YOU CAN HELP US OUT?

WELL, IT'S NOT REALLY IN MY USUAL AREA, BUT THAT SOUNDS KIND OF INTERESTING. I GUESS I'LL SEE WHAT I CAN DO.

AND YOU MEAN IT, THEY'RE REALLY --