
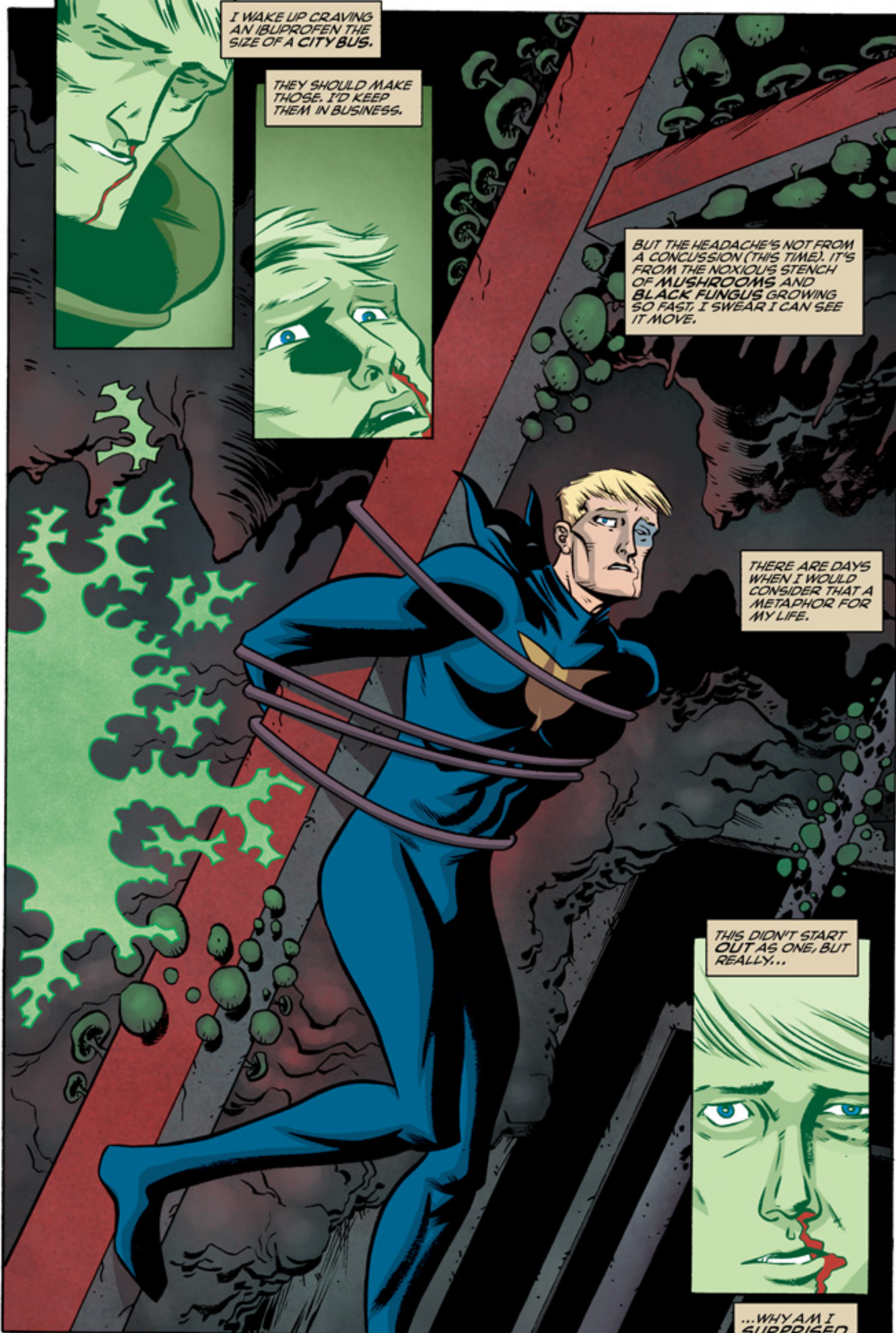




I WAKE UP CRAVING
AN IBUPROFEN THE
SIZE OF A CITY BUS.



THEY SHOULD MAKE
THOSE. I'D KEEP
THEM IN BUSINESS.



BUT THE HEADACHE'S NOT FROM
A CONCUSSION (THIS TIME). IT'S
FROM THE NOXIOUS STENCH
OF MUSHROOMS AND
BLACK FUNGUS GROWING
SO FAST, I SWEAR I CAN SEE
IT MOVE.

THERE ARE DAYS
WHEN I WOULD
CONSIDER THAT A
METAPHOR FOR
MY LIFE.



THIS DIDN'T START
OUT AS ONE, BUT
REALLY...

...WHY AM I
SURPRISED
ANYMORE...?



ANNND... NADA. WHOEVER SHE WAS, SHE DOESN'T SHOW UP IN ANY OF THESE PICS. JUST A SKY, A HOUSE, AN OPEN...

...DOOR...



...THAT WAS CLOSED A MINUTE AGO.

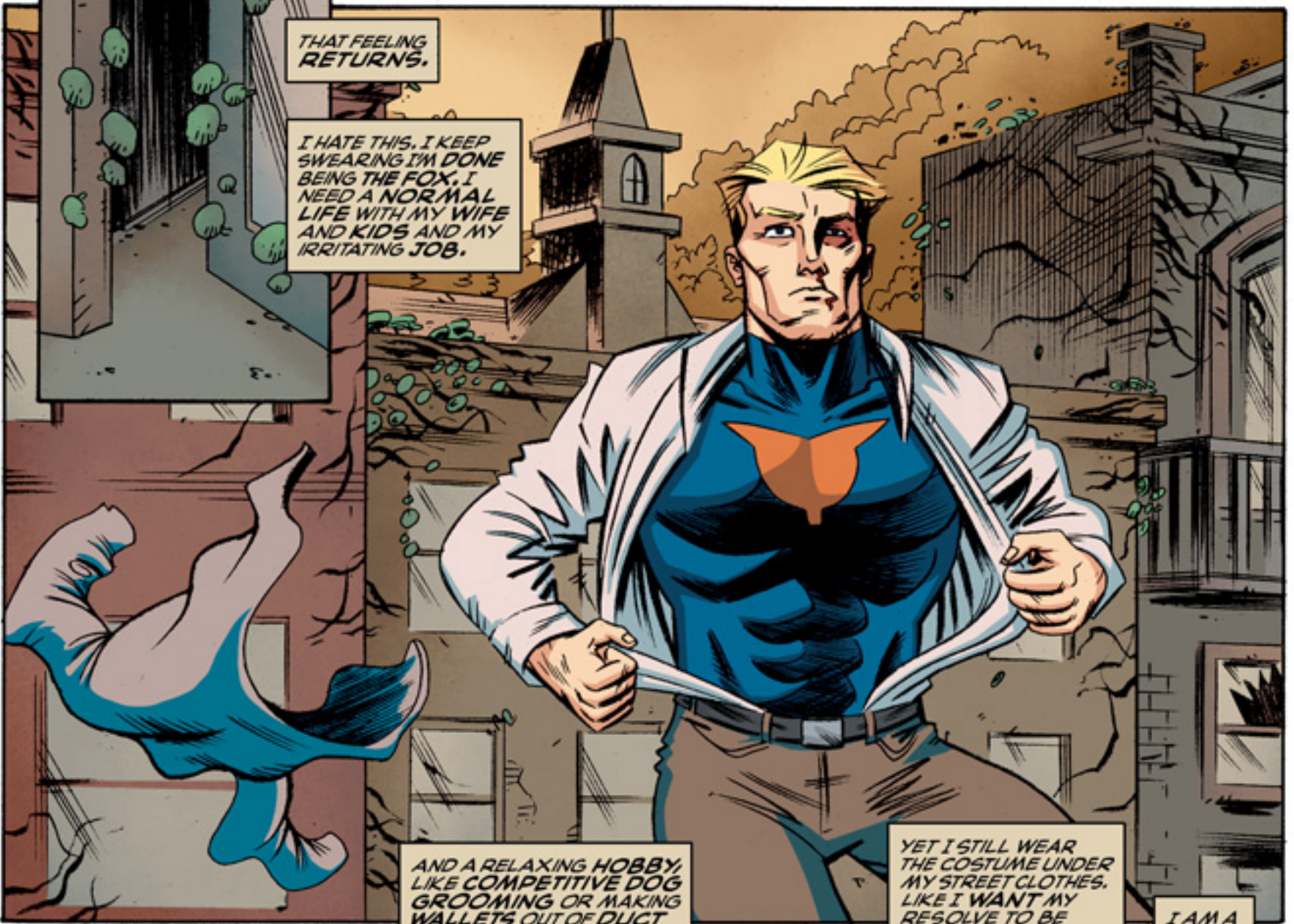
AND I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT JUST ANY DOOR.

THE DOOR TO MADAME PEGGY'S FORTUNE PARLOR.

WE KIDS USED TO BROWN OUR PANTS JUST IMAGINING WHAT SORT OF "WITCH-CRAFT" WENT ON IN THAT JOINT.

THAT FEELING RETURNS.

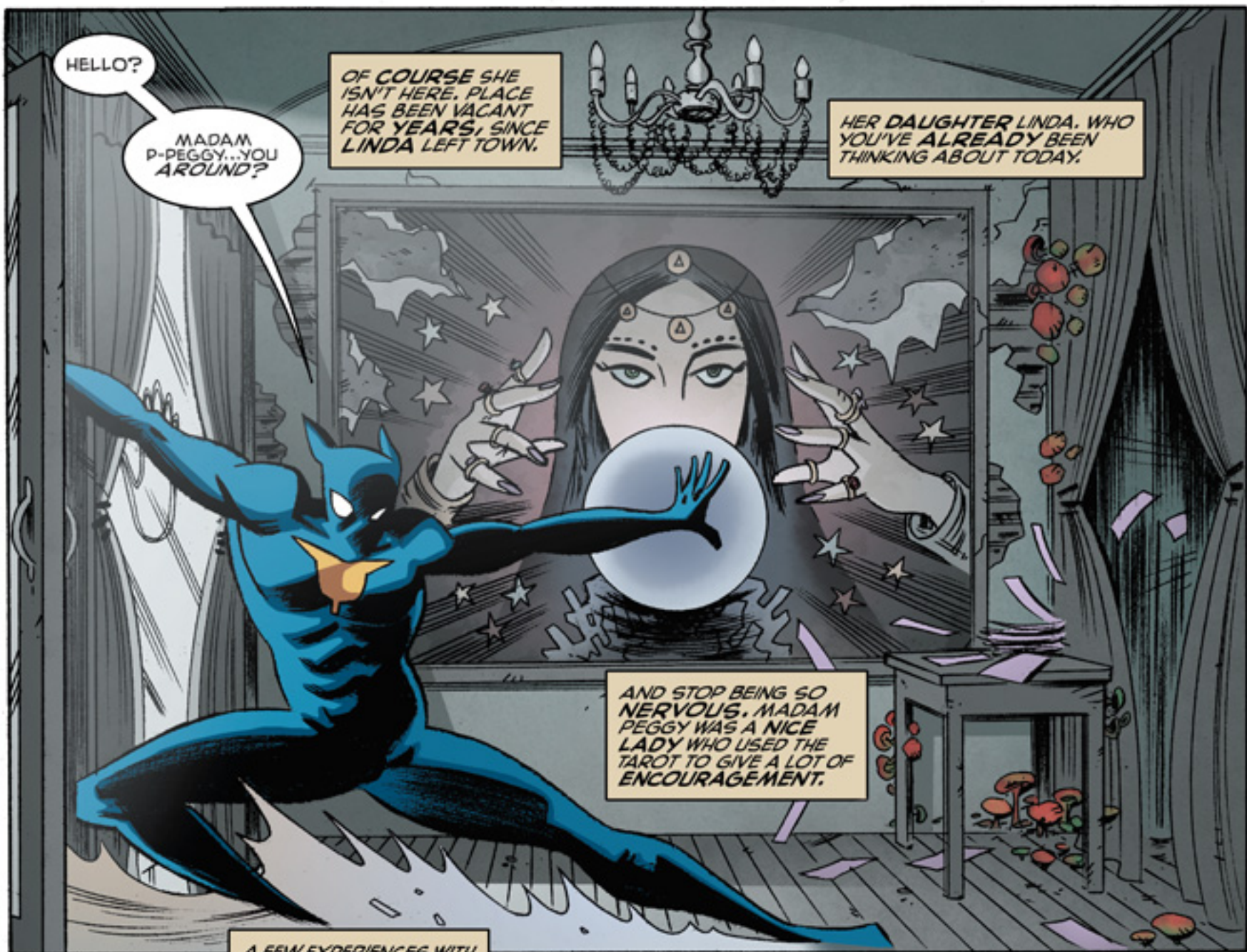
I HATE THIS. I KEEP SWEARING I'M DONE BEING THE FOX. I NEED A NORMAL LIFE WITH MY WIFE AND KIDS AND MY IRRITATING JOB.



AND A RELAXING HOBBY, LIKE COMPETITIVE DOG GROOMING OR MAKING WALLETS OUT OF DUCT TAPE.

YET I STILL WEAR THE COSTUME UNDER MY STREET CLOTHES. LIKE I WANT MY RESOLVE TO BE TESTED.

I AM A MESS.



HELLO?

MADAM P-PEGGY...YOU AROUND?

OF COURSE SHE ISN'T HERE. PLACE HAS BEEN VACANT FOR YEARS, SINCE LINDA LEFT TOWN.

HER DAUGHTER LINDA, WHO YOU'VE ALREADY BEEN THINKING ABOUT TODAY.

AND STOP BEING SO NERVOUS. MADAM PEGGY WAS A NICE LADY WHO USED THE TAROT TO GIVE A LOT OF ENCOURAGEMENT.

A FEW EXPERIENCES WITH REAL DEMONS MADE ME SEE THAT.

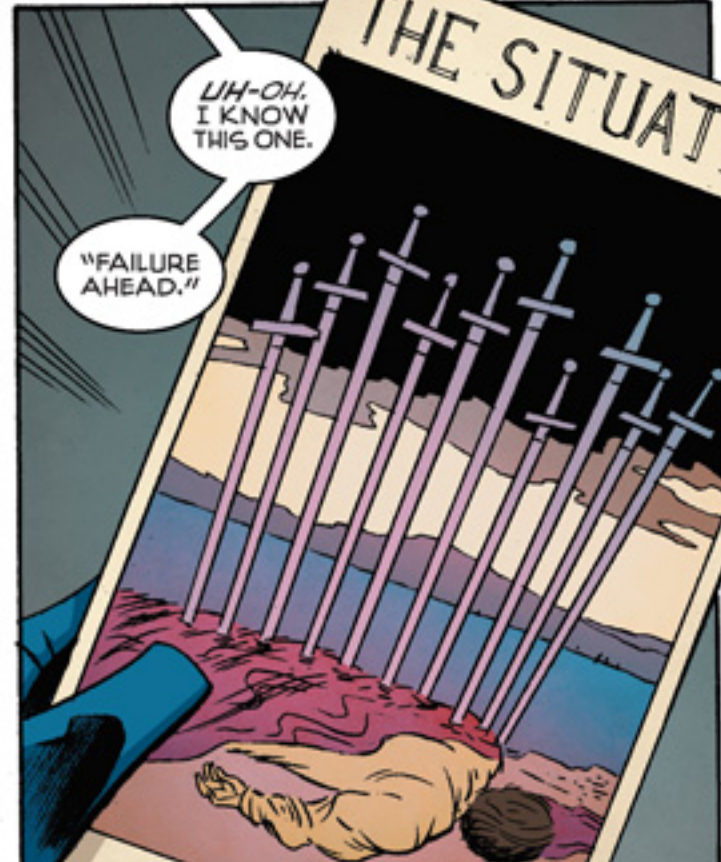


WHATEVER YOU ARE, DON'T MAKE ME HIT YOU WITH MY CHIN!

IT'S DANGEROUSLY POINTY!

SKREE!

SIGH



UH-OH, I KNOW THIS ONE.

"FAILURE AHEAD."

LINDA.

THAT'S REALLY WHAT'S GNAWING AT ME HERE, ISN'T IT? HOW MUCH OF EVERYTHING UP THERE REMINDS ME OF HER.

MY FIRST GIRL-FRIEND. MY FIRST-KISS GIRL.

BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTER OF MADAM PEGGY.

STUDYING THE TAROT TO BE LIKE HER MOM, SHE WOULD PRACTICE ON ME, AND I WOULD PRACTICE ON ME, AND I WOULD GO ALONG WITH IT...



...JUST TO BE NEAR HER.



MY LAST THOUGHT WAS, "WHATEVER HAPPENED TO LOVELY LIN--?"

KONNK!



...AND THEN I
WOKE UP, AND
HERE WE ARE.

CAN I TALK ABOUT A PART
OF SUPERHEROING I WON'T
MISS?

REGAINING CONSCIOUSNESS
IN A VILLAIN'S LAIR. WORST
FEELING. AND THEN YOU'RE
WONDERING...WHICH
VILLAIN?

I THINK I RECOGNIZE
THIS ONE FROM CRUSADERS'
CASE FILES.

SLEEP...? NO... DREAM-
SOMETHING. DREAM...
DEMON.

CRIMINAL SORCERESS,
FOUGHT ALL THE BIG
NAMES. BUT WHAT IS SHE
DOING, TODAY OF ALL
DAYS, IN BEAVER KILL,
UNDER MADAM
PEGGY'S--

OH.

OH.

LINDA?

OH.

HEY
PAUL.