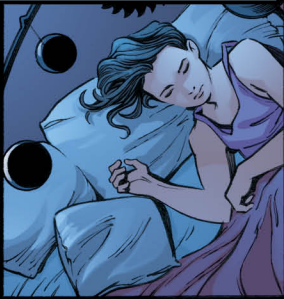


EACH MORNING, ZATANNA'S FATHER WOKE HER PROMPTLY AT FIVE WITH A SIMPLE COMMAND.

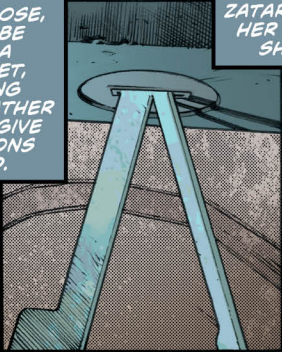


TEG PU.

SHE WOULD COMPLY, UNTHINKING, AS IF IT WERE MAGIC.



AS THE SUN ROSE, SHE MIGHT BE ESCAPING A STRAITJACKET, OR COUNTING CARDS. HER FATHER WOULD ONLY GIVE THE DIRECTIONS BACKWARD.



ZATARA WOULD TELL HER TO NARRATE HER INTENT. AS SHE PICKED A LOCK SHE WOULD WHISPER "KCOLNU."



AS SHE PULLED AN ACE FROM THE DECK, IT WOULD BE "EVIG EM NA ECA."



HE WOULD TELL HER MAGIC WAS ABOUT FOCUS. ABOUT CONTROL. ABOUT ORDER.

HE WOULD TELL HER BACKWARD. AND SHE WOULD START AGAIN, FROM THE BEGINNING.



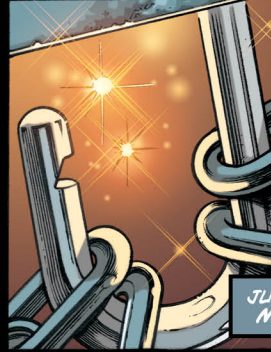
AS THE SUN SET, HE WOULD HAVE HER GO THROUGH THE LESSONS OF THE DAY AGAIN. BUT THIS TIME, SHE WASN'T ALLOWED TO USE THE TRICKS HE HAD TAUGHT HER.



NO LOCK PICKS. NO SLEIGHT OF HAND.



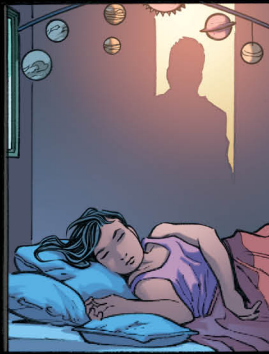
JUST THE WORDS. JUST THE FOCUS.



JUST THE MAGIC.

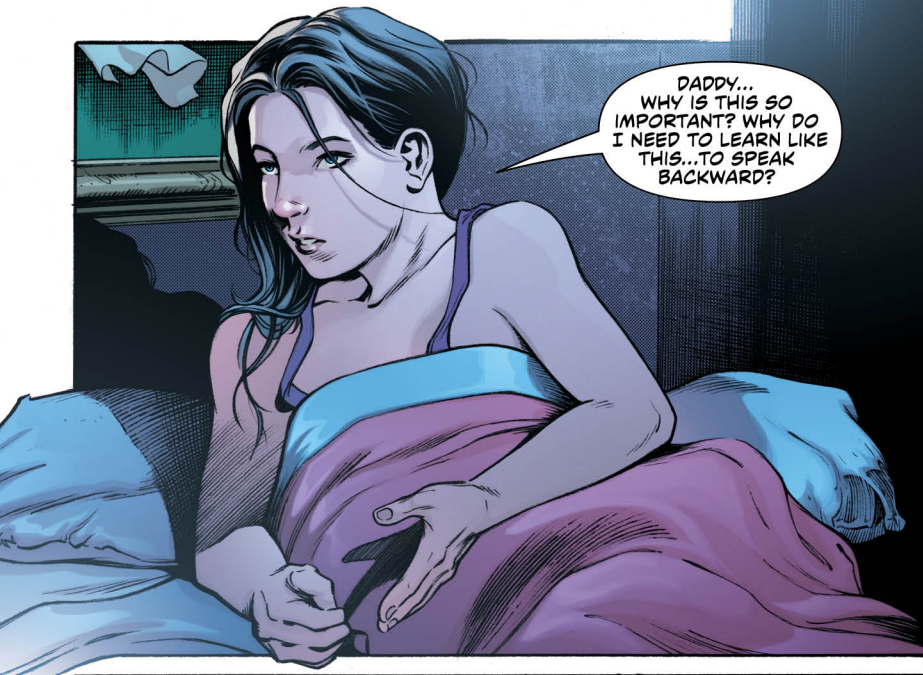


EVERY DAY WAS THE SAME, BACKWARD, AND FORWARD. ORDERED AND PERFECT.



THAT'S HOW IT WAS, BY DESIGN.

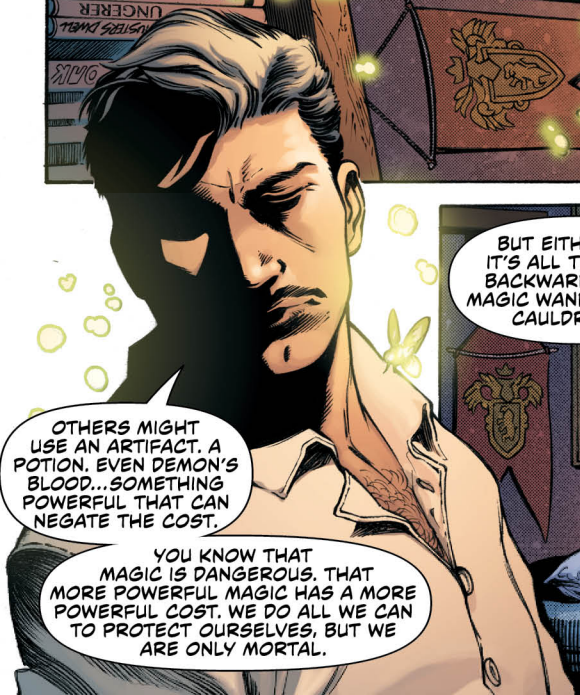




DADDY... WHY IS THIS SO IMPORTANT? WHY DO I NEED TO LEARN LIKE THIS...TO SPEAK BACKWARD?



WHAT? YOU'RE LOOKING TO DROP THE BEST STAGE GIMMICK SINCE HOUDINI?



OTHERS MIGHT USE AN ARTIFACT. A POTION. EVEN DEMON'S BLOOD... SOMETHING POWERFUL THAT CAN NEGATE THE COST.

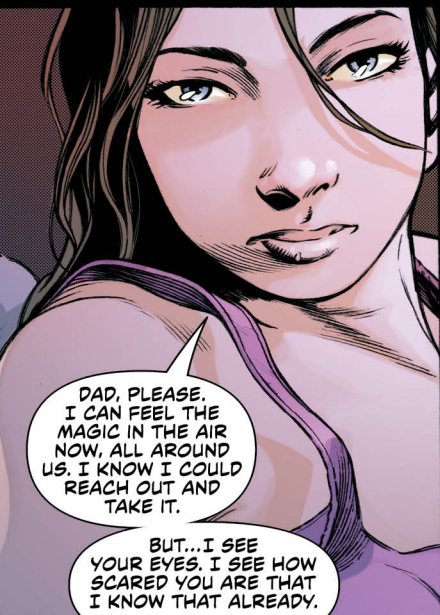
YOU KNOW THAT MAGIC IS DANGEROUS. THAT MORE POWERFUL MAGIC HAS A MORE POWERFUL COST. WE DO ALL WE CAN TO PROTECT OURSELVES, BUT WE ARE ONLY MORTAL.

BUT EITHER WAY, IT'S ALL THE SAME. BACKWARD WORDS, MAGIC WANDS, BOILING CAULDRONS...

IT'S A TRICK, MY DEAR. A SLEIGHT OF HAND. A MISDIRECTION.







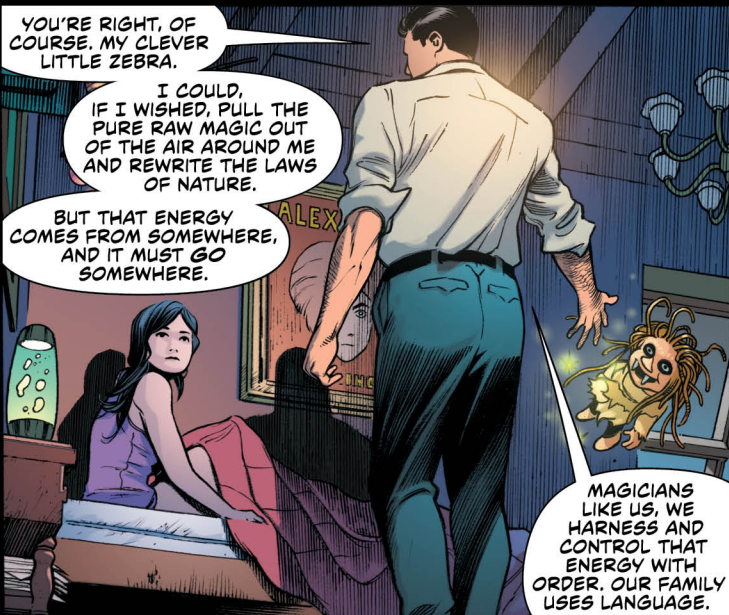
DAD, PLEASE. I CAN FEEL THE MAGIC IN THE AIR NOW, ALL AROUND US. I KNOW I COULD REACH OUT AND TAKE IT.

BUT... I SEE YOUR EYES. I SEE HOW SCARED YOU ARE THAT I KNOW THAT ALREADY.

YOU'RE RIGHT, OF COURSE. MY CLEVER LITTLE ZEBRA.

I COULD, IF I WISHED, PULL THE PURE RAW MAGIC OUT OF THE AIR AROUND ME AND REWRITE THE LAWS OF NATURE.

BUT THAT ENERGY COMES FROM SOMEWHERE, AND IT MUST GO SOMEWHERE.



MAGICIANS LIKE US, WE HARNESS AND CONTROL THAT ENERGY WITH ORDER. OUR FAMILY USES LANGUAGE.



LLOD EMOCEB SEILFERIF.



IT'S SO THEY CAN'T SEE US DO WHAT WE DO.



THEY?  
WHO ARE THEY?



THE MOST  
POWERFUL  
MAGICIANS IN  
HISTORY HAD  
CALLED IT  
MANY NAMES.

IT WAS THE ABYSS.  
THE DARKWORLD.  
THE GREAT  
DARKNESS.

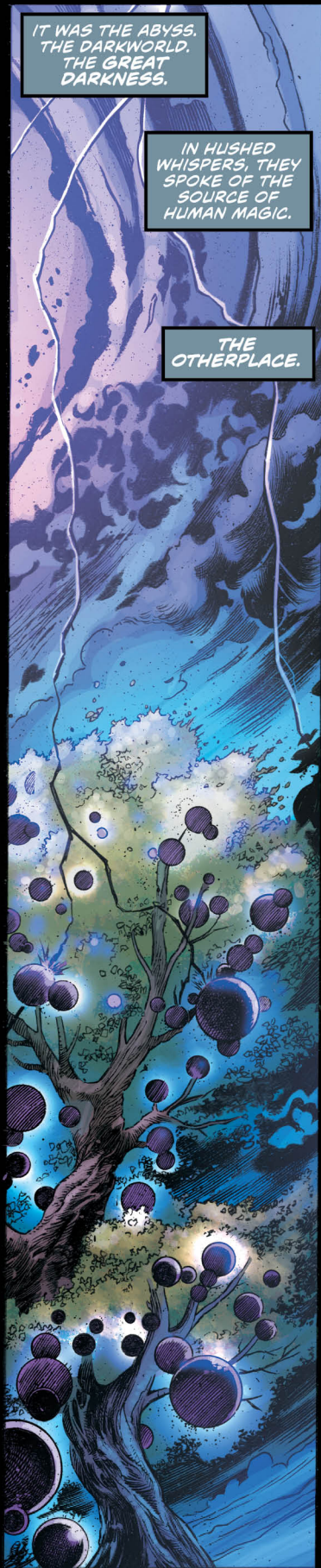
IN HUSHED  
WHISPERS, THEY  
SPOKE OF THE  
SOURCE OF  
HUMAN MAGIC.

THE  
OTHERPLACE.

JOHN CONSTANTINE  
HAD FELT ITS POWER  
BEFORE, WHEN A  
PIECE OF THE  
DARKNESS BROKE  
FREE AND NEARLY  
BURNED HEAVEN TO  
THE GROUND.

THREE LIVES  
HAD BEEN  
DESTROYED BY  
HIS MAGIC,  
SIMPLY TRYING  
TO COMMUNE  
WITH THE  
DARKNESS, TO  
UNDERSTAND IT.

HE WONDERED HOW  
MANY MORE WOULD  
DIE NOW THAT IT HAD  
CROSSED THE BRIDGE  
THE TREE OF  
WONDER HAD LEFT  
TO OUR WORLD.





I HOPE YOU'RE READY TO STOP ANOTHER APOCALYPSE BEFORE RETIREMENT, MATE.

I... HOPE SO, TOO, CONSTANTINE.

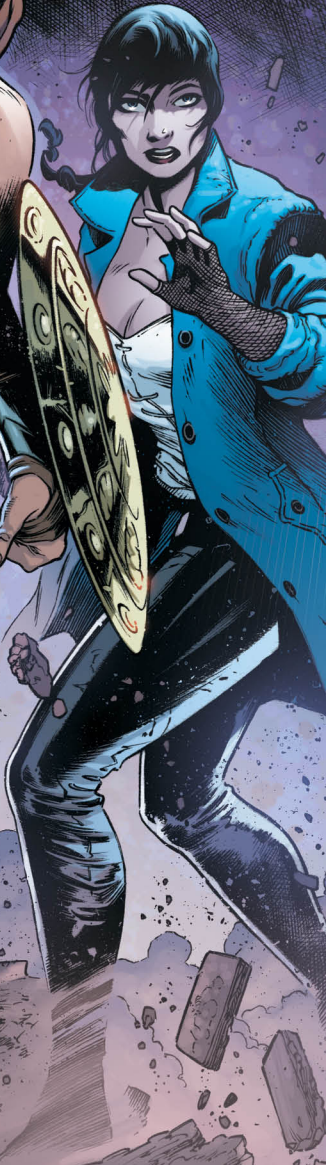


NOW, THE OTHERKIND WERE READY.



VISITOR, I MEAN YOU NO HARM...

STAND BACK, WONDER WOMAN...



YES... STAND BACK.

THAT IS... APPROPRIATE.

