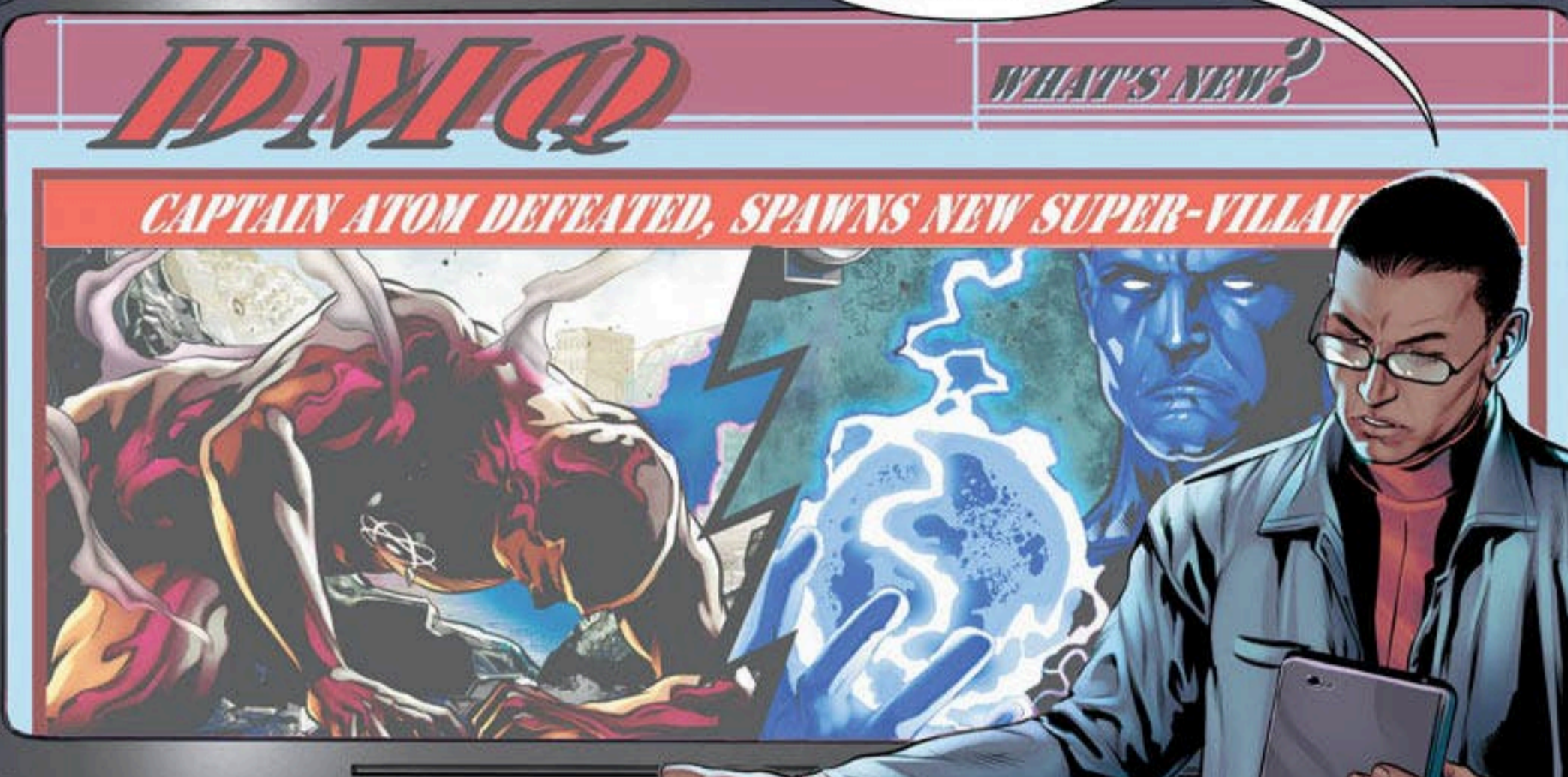


NOW THAT A GOSSIP WEBSITE HAS FOOTAGE OF OUR MAN GETTING TROUNCED, WE'VE BEGUN DAMAGE CONTROL.

PEOPLE HAVE TO BE REMINDED *HOW* THIS DEBACLE BEGAN--YEARS AGO WITH THE *FIRST* CAPTAIN ATOM.

HIS *QUANTUM MELTDOWN* CREATED THE ENERGY BUBBLE THAT SHIELDED THE CONDEMNED KILLER MAX THRANE FROM ELECTROCUTION.



FIVE YEARS LATER *OUR* CAPTAIN ATOM HAD NO WAY OF KNOWING THAT OPENING THE BUBBLE WOULD BACKFIRE--

--EXPOSING THRANE TO A QUANTUM-FIELD ERUPTION THAT TRANSFORMED HIM INTO A *METAHUMAN*.



WHAT THIS COLD-BLOODED ASSASSIN DOES WITH HIS NEWFOUND POWERS REMAINS TO BE SEEN...



...BUT THE MEDIA HAS ALREADY GIVEN HIM A SUPER-VILLAIN NAME BASED ON THE PRISON HE ESCAPED FROM.

ULTRAMAX!



THE GOOD NEWS--OUR FOCUS GROUPS CONFIRM WE'VE PERSUADED THE PUBLIC TO SEE THRANE'S TRANSFORMATION AS A DELAYED **AFTEREFFECT** OF THE OVERLOAD INCIDENT.

EXCELLENT. NOW OUR MAN GETS TO BE THE **WHITE HAT** WHO STEPS UP TO TAKE ON THE BIG BAD SPAWNED BY HIS TRAGICALLY FLAWED PREDECESSOR.

SERIOUSLY, YOU TWO--



--WHEN **I'M** IN THE ROOM AT LEAST STOP PRETENDING THE FIRST CAPTAIN ATOM WAS "SOME OTHER GUY."

AND THIS WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A DEBRIEFING, NOT A PR SEMINAR ABOUT TWEAKING MY IMAGE.

I'M OUTTA HERE.

IS IT JUST ME, SIR...OR DID HE SEEM A TAD TESTY?

HE'S A SORE LOSER--AND THAT'S **GOOD**.

NOW THAT HE'S HAD A TASTE OF DEFEAT, HE'LL FIGHT THAT MUCH HARDER TO WIN THE INEVITABLE **REMATCH**.

GENERAL EILING CAN SPIN THE **ULTRAMAX FIASCO** ANY WAY HE WANTS.

I'M THE REASON THAT PSYCHOPATH IS ON THE LOOSE--SO IT'S MY DUTY TO BRING HIM IN. BUT UNTIL HE RESURFACES...

...I NEED TO DEAL WITH MY DUTIES AS A PARENT.



QUANTUM MECHANIC

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I-I WAS STRAPPED, MR. LONNIGAN. THE WIFE'S MEDICAL BILLS WIPED ME OUT.

IF YOU'D COME TO ME FIRST, MICKEY, MAYBE WE COULD'VE WORKED SOMETHING OUT.

BUT *SKIMMING?* THAT I JUST CAN'T ABIDE.



I LET YOU LIVE, IT SENDS THE WRONG MESSAGE. AN *EXAMPLE* NEEDS TO BE MADE...



HEY, WHAT HAPPENED TO THE LIGH--

BOOOFF!

UHHHE



ABOUT TIME YOU WOKE UP, LONNIE. WHILE YOU WERE UNDER, I LET MICKEY WALK. DEAL WITH IT.

M-MAX?

SO THAT REALLY IS YOU UNDER THERE!



YOUR PRISON BREAK WAS ALL OVER THE NEWS. CONGRATS! AND I DIG THE *NEW LOOK*.



YOU AND I ALWAYS DID MAKE A GOOD TEAM, AND WITH THOSE *POWERS* OF YOURS--HELL, WE COULD RUN THIS CITY.

YOU AND ME, LONNIE? A TEAM?



EIGHT YEARS AGO AN UNNAMED CLIENT GAVE THE FEDS ENOUGH INTEL ON ME TO SET UP A STING OPERATION. THE BUST WENT SOUTH...AND I KILLED A COP. THE MURDER RAP GOT ME THE *CHAIR*.

HOW DO I KNOW *YOU'RE* NOT THE RAT?



ON MY MOTHER'S EYES, MAX... IT *WASN'T* ME!

REMEMBER-- YOU DID SUCH A GOOD JOB WASTING THE D.A. WHO WAS HARASSING ME, I EVEN PAID YOU A FAT BONUS.



I WANT TO BELIEVE YOU, LONNIE...SO I'LL TELL YOU WHAT.

SINCE YOU BROUGHT UP MY *POWERS*...



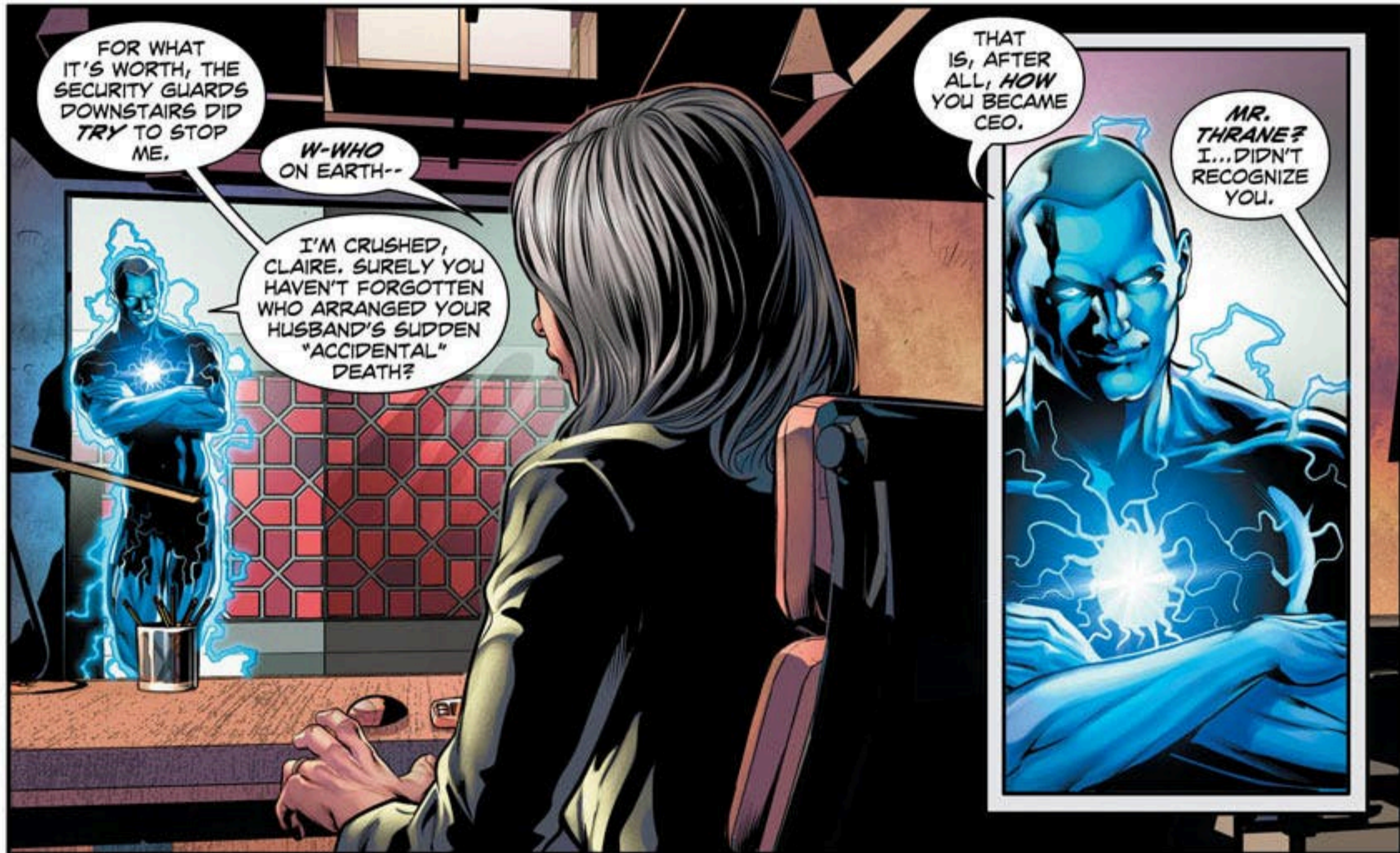
...WHILE I THINK IT OVER, HOW ABOUT A CLOSE-UP *DEMONSTRATION*?

ARRGHH!



WELL, WELL. BIG PHARMA HAS CERTAINLY BEEN GOOD TO YOU, CLAIRE.

A PENTHOUSE OFFICE, NO LESS...EVEN YOUR OWN PRIVATE ELEVATOR.



FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH, THE SECURITY GUARDS DOWNSTAIRS DID TRY TO STOP ME.

W-WHO ON EARTH--

I'M CRUSHED, CLAIRE. SURELY YOU HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN WHO ARRANGED YOUR HUSBAND'S SUDDEN "ACCIDENTAL" DEATH?

THAT IS, AFTER ALL, *HOW* YOU BECAME CEO.

MR. THRANE? I...DIDN'T RECOGNIZE YOU.



WELL, THIS IS A WHOLE NEW ME.

BUT IT WAS THE *OLD ME* WHO ENDED UP ON DEATH ROW. WAS THAT *YOUR* DOING, CLAIRE?

O-OF COURSE NOT! JOHN'S DEATH WAS RULED A SUICIDE, JUST AS OUR CONTRACT STIPULATED.



I PAID SIX FIGURES FOR YOUR SERVICES. WHY ON EARTH WOULD I IMPLICATE MYSELF?

MAYBE BECAUSE YOU CUT A DEAL TO GAIN IMMUNITY? NOT LIKELY, I CONCEDE...



...BUT I CAN'T RULE OUT ANY POSSIBILITY, NO MATTER HOW REMOTE.

SO I DO APOLOGIZE...

FOR WHAT?