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DOLCE
LEISTER
CALDWELL

"Truly Inspired" - Ethan Van Sciver

The SIRE



talentest 10/10
M. K.

The SIRE



MICHAEL DOLCE

Creator/Writer/Colorist

DAN LEISTER

Penciler

TALENT CALDWELL

Cover Artist

ANDREW LUVUOLO

(From GI Studios)

Logo Design

DARREN SANCHEZ

(Editor)

GUIDO FONDOOCHI

(Chief)

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I REMEMBER...

...I REMEMBER
THE *SMELL*.

OF BURNT CINDER
AND *ASH*...LIKE RAIN
EVAPORATING OFF A
HOT *PAVEMENT*...

AND I REMEMBER...

...THROUGH THE *PAIN*...AND
THE *SMOKE*... AND THE FIRE
BURNING ITSELF AWAY...

...I REMEMBER *IT*.

THE *COSTUME*.

CLINGING...

...*SURROUNDING*...

...*CONSUMING*!

YOU ASK ME HOW IT
FELT? WHAT I WENT
THROUGH...

...I WOULDN'T
KNOW WHERE TO
BEGIN...

UHHH...

MIKEBOOKS & AFTER SHOCK COMICS
PROUDLY PRESENTS:

The SIRE

I WAS ON THE NEWS
THE OTHER DAY...

WELL,
FELLAS...

POLICE
SECURITY CAR

THIS IS A REAL
FINE MESS
YOU'VE GOTTEN
ME INTO.

HAHAHAHA!

SHUT YER
TRAP! YOU GOT
SOME NERVE
JOKING AROUND
LIKE THIS AIN'T
YOUR FAULT,
FIREHEART!

AW, CHEER
UP FELLAS.

THINGS
ALWAYS HAVE
A WAY...

...OF
WORKING
THEMSELVES
OUT!

POLICE
SECURITY CAR

SOMETHING'S COMING...

JUST THINKING OUT LOUD, WALTER.

SOMETHING'S COMING... SOMETHING WE'RE NOT SEEING.

A BILLIONAIRE TECHNOLOGY MOGUL GOES MISSING THE SAME DAY ONE OF HIS WAREHOUSES EXPLODES.

YOU SAY SOMETHING, J.J.?

THIS, AFTER STOCK IN HIS COMPANY, *SIPHON TECHNOLOGIES* TAKES A NOSE DIVE DUE TO *SPOTTY* SERVICE.

YOU THINK THERE'S A CONNECTION?

I DON'T KNOW *WHAT* TO THINK AT THIS POINT.

WHAT ABOUT ALL THE *LIGHTNING* STRIKES REPORTED SINCE THE WAREHOUSE EXPLODED?

SAMUEL ANTONETTI'S RICH AND POWERFUL DOUG, I'LL GIVE YOU THAT---

FIFTY CASES WORLDWIDE IN JUST SIX HOURS!

--BUT HE'S NOT GOD!

NO, BUT HE IS AT THE CENTER OF THIS.

QUESTION NOW IS, JUST *WHAT* EXACTLY HE'S AT THE CENTER OF.

SOMETHING'S COMING WALTER...

VMMMMMMMM



SOMETIMES, YOU LIVE
YOUR LIFE NOT KNOWING
THE *IMPACT* YOU'RE GOING
TO MAKE ON THE WORLD...



I
FEEL
ALIVE!

YEAH, WHAT
HE SAID.

CAN SOMEONE
TELL ME WHAT THE
HELL'S GOING ON?!
HANDS AREN'T
EXACTLY SUPPOSED
TO...GLOW LIKE
THIS.

HAHAHAHA!

THIS IS J.J. WATERSTON, REPORTING *LIVE* OUTSIDE OUR STUDIO OFFICES WHERE A *HORRIFIC* SCENE HAS UNFOLDED!

REPORTS ARE STILL UNCLEAR AT THE MOMENT...

...BUT IT APPEARS A POLICE CONVOY HAS BEEN SOMEHOW *STRUCK DOWN* JUST OUTSIDE THIS BUSY NEW YORK CITY STREET CORNER.

THE BLAST SIGNATURE WAS ENOUGH TO SHATTER WINDOWS AS *HIGH* AS TWELVE STORIES BUT WHAT'S EVEN MORE *UNSETTLING*...

POLICE! FREEZE!

...IS THE *SKIRMISH* THAT HAS DEVELOPED BETWEEN POLICE AND CRASH SURVIVORS.

>HUK--!

THEIR FEATURES APPEAR *CHANGED* SOMEHOW... *DEFORMED*.

THOUGH, TO BE HONEST, NO ONE'S EXACTLY SURE *WHAT'S* GOING ON.

HAHA...

>HURGH--!

HEY!

SOREN, PUT HIM DOWN...

HAHAHAHA!!

COMPANY'S HERE!

...AND SOMETIMES, YOU'RE FORCED TO MAKE ONE!

THAT'S PRETTY MUCH
WHERE I *FOUND* MYSELF.

I DIDN'T WANT TO BE THERE.
IN *FACT*, I WANTED TO BE
AS *FAR* AWAY FROM THERE
AS HUMANLY *POSSIBLE*.

YOU
GUYS ARE
GOING TO HAVE
TO...UH, *STOP*, OR
SOMETHING.

BUT THAT *WASN'T*
AN *OPTION*.

ANOTHER MAN,
DRESSED IN WHAT CAN
ONLY BE DESCRIBED
AS A *HALLOWEEN*
COSTUME OF SORT--

--HAS INEXPLICABLY
JUMPED *BETWEEN* THE
COMBATANTS...

INSTEAD, I WAS THROWN
INTO THE FRAY AGAINST
MY WILL. *FORCED* TO
FIGHT FOR REASONS I
DIDN'T UNDERSTAND.

HELD *HOSTAGE*...

...BY MY *COSTUME*!

I WANT TO
REMINDE EVERYONE
THAT YOU ARE WATCHING
EXCLUSIVE COVERAGE OF
THIS BREAKING EVENT
ON *WNBW*, CHANNEL
SIX.

THAT A *GIRL*!
YOU SEE THAT?
YOU *TAKING* NOTES?
THAT'S HOW IT'S
DONE!

BUT
WALTER,
COME
ON!

THE
DANGER...
DOESN'T SHE
REALIZE?
DOESN'T SHE
CARE?

THAT'S WHAT
MAKES HER THE
BEST, JIM...

...SHE'S
FEARLESS!

I MIGHT NOT HAVE HAD MUCH OF A CHOICE.

UH, YEAH...
SO, YOU'RE ALL
UNDER ARREST.

WHAT'S HE
DOING?

WHO IS
THAT?

...FILMING A
MOVIE?

BUT I ALSO KNEW I
WASN'T HELPLESS.

MY BODY WAS CHANGED
SOMEHOW. LIKE AN
OVERNIGHT UPGRADE. THE
POWER I FELT...
INDESCRIBABLE!

AND SOMETHING ELSE...

FIREHEART
WAIT!

FOR WHAT?
IF THIS GUY
THINKS HE'S
GETTING IN OUR
WAY--

HAHAHAHA...

...MY
THOUGHTS
EXACTLY!

551-63

...SOMETHING I
COULDN'T QUITE PUT
MY FINGER ON.

THE TENSION IS
EXCRUCIATING AS THE
HALLOWEEN MAN HAS
WORKED HIS WAY THROUGH
THE CONFUSION AND IS
STARING DOWN THE
OTHER THREE.

THE CROWD
IS FIXATED, NOT
SURE WHAT'S
GOING TO HAPPEN
NEXT!

WAIT--

LIKE I WASN'T WORRIED
IF I COULD TAKE THEM...

6

SOMEONE'S
MAKING A
MOVE!



DOWN
YOU GO!

HUUU--!

BOOM!

HA! I CAN'T
BELIEVE IT! I
ACTUALLY...! I
ACTUALLY HIT
HIM!



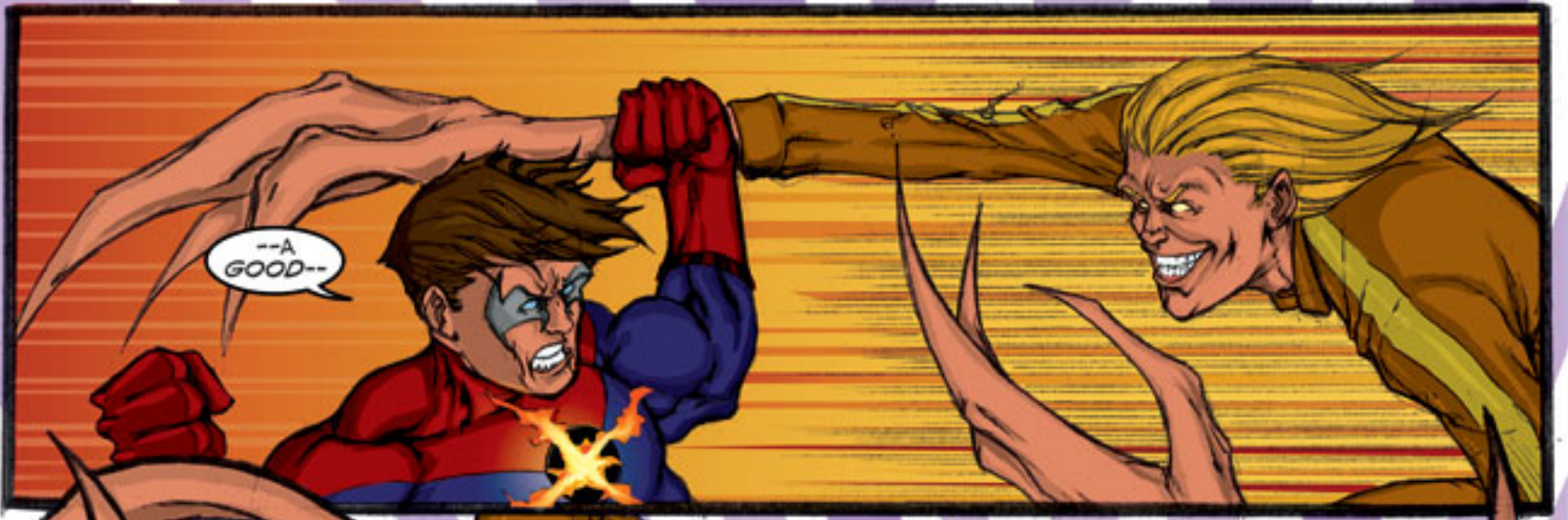
NNN-YARGH!

AND I CAN'T
BELIEVE YOU'D
ACTUALLY LEAVE
THE HOUSE LIKE
THAT!

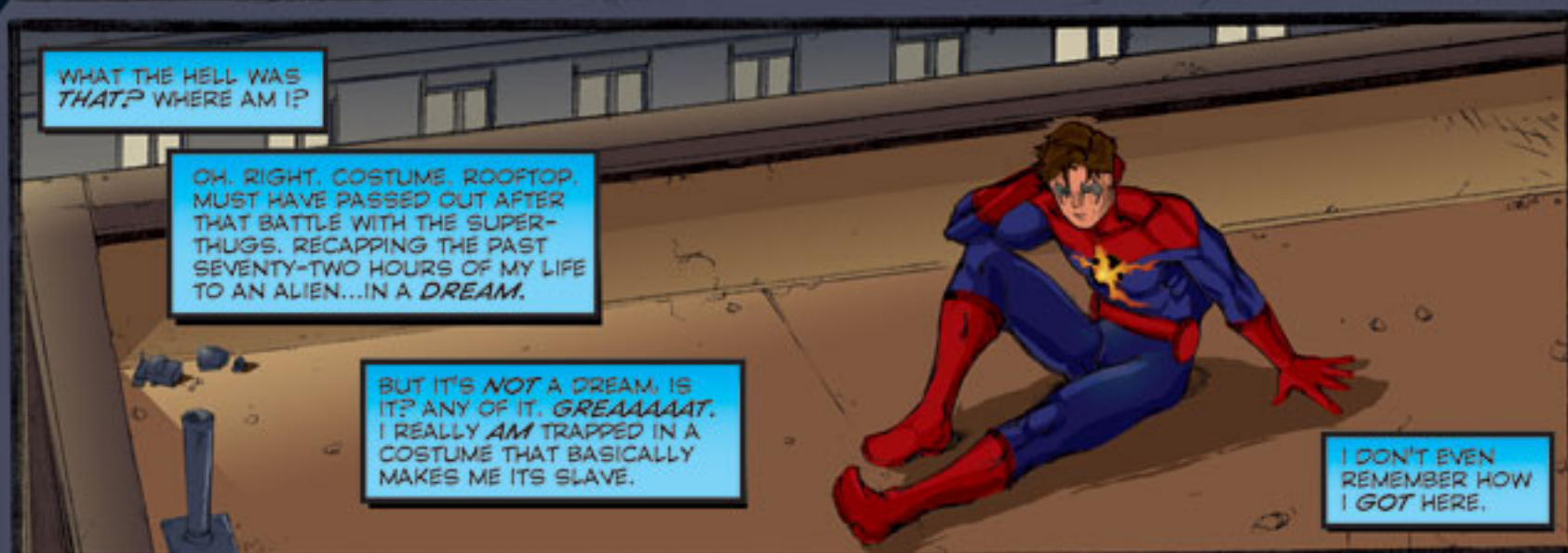












WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT? WHERE AM I?

OH, RIGHT. COSTUME. ROOFTOP. MUST HAVE PASSED OUT AFTER THAT BATTLE WITH THE SUPER-THUGS. RECAPPING THE PAST SEVENTY-TWO HOURS OF MY LIFE TO AN ALIEN...IN A DREAM.

BUT IT'S NOT A DREAM. IS IT? ANY OF IT. GREAAAAAT. I REALLY AM TRAPPED IN A COSTUME THAT BASICALLY MAKES ME ITS SLAVE.

I DON'T EVEN REMEMBER HOW I GOT HERE.



HELLO?

CREAK!

THINGS CAN'T GET ANY WORSE... CAN THEY?

GOOD
EVENING MR.
WRIGHT.



MY NAME IS
SAMUEL ANTONETTI.
I'M SURE YOU RECOGNIZE
MY **NAME** THOUGH I DOUBT
YOU'D RECOGNIZE MY **FACE**
IN THIS...**CONDITION**.



YEAH, I'VE HEARD
OF YOU. YOU'RE THAT
BILLIONAIRE **MOGUL**
THAT WENT MISSING.

ANY PARTICULAR
REASON YOU HAPPEN
TO BE ON THE SAME
ROOFTOP AS ME? I MEAN
IT'S--OH MY GOD!
YOUR **FACE**! IT'S--



YES, WELL THAT
WOULD BE **YOUR** FAULT.
YOU HAVE SOMETHING
THAT BELONGS
TO ME.

DUDE, I DON'T
KNOW **WHAT**
YOU'RE TALKING
ABOUT.

OF COURSE YOU
DO. A PLAN WAS SET
INTO MOTION THREE NIGHTS
AGO THAT WOULD HAVE
YIELDED ME GREAT AND
UNIMAGINABLE **POWER**.

DURING THE
EXCHANGE HOWEVER,
THERE WAS SOMEONE
PRESENT THAT DID
NOT BELONG.

AN **INDIVIDUAL**
WHOSE MERE
PRESENCE DISRUPTED
THE CAREFUL **BALANCE**
NECESSARY TO ACHIEVE
THIS GOAL.

THAT PERSON
WAS **YOU**. THE
WAREHOUSE YOU
STUMBLED
UPON...





...WAS *MINE*.
AS IT STANDS, YOU
HAVE SOMETHING THAT
BELONGS TO *ME*.

AND UNTIL I GET
IT *BACK* I AM FORCED
TO ENDURE THIS
UNFORTUNATE
APPEARANCE. NOW, IF
YOU DON'T MIND...



SERIOUSLY?
LOOK, I DON'T KNOW IF
YOU'VE BEEN WATCHING
THE NEWS LATELY, BUT I'VE
GOT *WAAAAAY* BIGGER
PROBLEMS TO DEAL WITH
THAN YOUR SKIN
CONDITION.

SO IF *YOU*
DON'T MIND...



DON'T BE *COY*!
YOUR COSTUME IS THE
SOURCE OF *UNIMAGINABLE*
POWER! THE MISSING HALF
YOU STOLE FROM ME!

WE ARE
CONNECTED TO IT,
YOU AND I. IT'S HOW I
WAS ABLE TO *FIND* YOU
HERE. IT'S HOW I KNOW
YOU ARE *LYING* TO
ME NOW.



LOOK, YOU'RE
RIGHT. TRUTH IS,
THESE POWERS, THIS
COSTUME, THEY'RE *NOT*
MINE AND I REALLY,
REALLY, DON'T WANT
ANY PART OF THEM.

BUT I GET THE
FEELING THEY'RE
A *ONE-WAY*
TICKET.



OH, I
WOULDN'T SAY
THAT...



BEHOLD! I AM
KNOWN AS...
THE SIPHON!

DO YOU KNOW
WHAT A **SIPHON**
DOES?

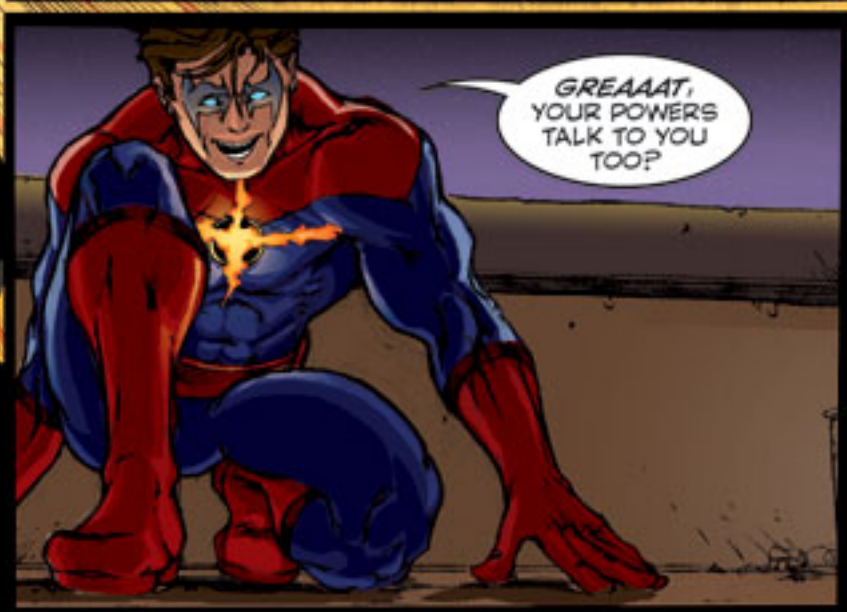


IT TAKES!

AGH! KIND
OF...TICKLES!



WHAT?
NOTHING'S
HAPPENING! BUT I
WAS TOLD...MY
POWERS
SAID...



GREAAAT,
YOUR **POWERS**
TALK TO YOU
TOO?



NOW
WE'RE **BOTH**
CRAZY!



HA! MADE IT!
STILL IN ONE PIECE
TOO! IF IT WAS UP
TO THAT GUY...

...I WOULDN'T BE!

WHO WAS HE? IS HE
REALLY LIKE ME?

...OR IS THAT WHAT I'M
ABOUT TO *BECOME*?

YES...I
UNDERSTAND
NOW

HE CANNOT BE
SIPHONED. NOT
YET. I MUST GROW
STRONGER
FIRST.

THE
OTHERS...
THEY ARE THE
KEY.

HMMP

THOUGHT I
SAW...

...HMM, NOTHING.
NEVERMIND.

HEHEHEHE...

MEANWHILE...



WALTER!
WALTER, WAIT
UP!

WHAT IS
IT, JIM?



WHAT IS IT?!
WALTER, DO YOU
EVEN HAVE TO
ASK?

...WAS KIND
OF HOPEING I
DIDN'T.

WE'VE GOT
NEWS ANCHORS
POSTING RESUMES
BECAUSE OF
HER!

WHEN J.J. FROZE
UP ON CAMERA, SHE
MADE US LOOK LIKE
AMATEURS!

OUR REPUTATION
AMONG VIEWERS,
WITH RIVAL
NETWORKS...WE'RE A
LAUGHING STOCK!



LOOK, JIM, IF IT
WASN'T FOR HER,
WE WOULDN'T EVEN
HAVE A REPUTATION
TO LOSE!

THE HARD
WORK SHE'S PUT
INTO MAKING THIS
NETWORK A
CONTENDER...

...AS FAR AS
I'M CONCERNED,
OUR JOBS ARE
HERS TO LOSE!



AND IF SHE
DOES, WALTER?
THERE'S A FINE LINE
BETWEEN LOYALTY
AND STUPIDITY...

...AND I'LL LET
YOU KNOW WHEN WE
CROSS IT. FOR NOW,
LET'S GIVE HER THE
BENEFIT OF THE
DOUBT.

IF SHE SAYS
SHE'S TAKING
CARE OF IT...

...SHE'S TAKING CARE OF IT!

...AUTHORITIES ARE STILL ON THE LOOKOUT FOR THIS MASKED *LUNATIC* WHO, DESPITE AIDING IN THE CAPTURE OF AT LEAST ONE ESCAPED CONVICT, IS STILL WANTED FOR QUESTIONING.

GREAT...LIKE I HAVE ANY ANSWERS.

WS FLASH..

IT'S SAD NO ONE ELSE HAS EVEN RECOGNIZED ME FROM WORK BESIDES J.J.

THE DON WRIGHT CHARM IN EFFECT. FADE SO FAR INTO THE BACKGROUND NO ONE NOTICES WHEN YOU TURN INTO A SUPERHERO.

OF COURSE, THAT'S NOT EVEN CLOSE TO WHAT I AM. IS IT? WHAT I AM--

--IS I'M AN IDIOT TRAPPED INSIDE A COSTUME!

I'M WANTED BY THE POLICE...

...HUNTED BY SOME PSYCHO BURN VICTIM...

...AND I WANT IT ALL TO STOP!

KNOCK KNOCK

WHAAT?!

OH CRAP!

DON, IT'S J.J., OPEN UP!

CRAP! CRAP!

WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT WHAT *HAPPENED* TODAY.

CRAP! CRAP! CRAP! CRAP!

COME ON, I HEAR YOU MOVING AROUND IN THERE...

...HELLO?

DON?

OH SH--

NEXT: Uh-Oh!



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CERISE-ARANA

The SIRE

"Off To a Great
Start!"

- Greg Land



AVAILABLE NOW!

CHAPTER TWO: "Choices"



POWER. WHO HAS IT? WHO WANTS IT?

DON!

TAKE ME FOR
EXAMPLE...

DON OPEN
UP! IT'S ME,
J.J.!

...IN THE SPAN OF A WEEK,
I'VE GONE FROM SECRETARY
FOR CABLE NEWS HOTTIE
J.J. WATERSTON...

THEY SAY POWER EQUALS
CONTROL. THE ABILITY
TO DO WHAT YOU WANT,
WHEN YOU WANT.

...YOUR
BOSS.

...TO TRADING HAYMAKERS
WITH SUPER-POWERED
CROOKS AND DEFORMED
MILLIONAIRE MOGULS!

...AND
SHE'S GONE
ABSOLUTELY
INSANE!

AND YET, WHAT
TERRIFIES ME EVEN
MORE THAN THAT...

YOUR
INSTINCTS ARE
PROVING AS
ACCURATE AS
I'VE BEEN TOLD.

AND GIVEN THE
SITUATION, CAN
ANYONE BLAME
YOU FOR YOUR
REACTION?

YOU HAVE LESS
THAN TWO
SECONDS TO
IDENTIFY YOURSELF!

OH, I
WOULDN'T SAY
THAT!

WHOP?

...IS THE THOUGHT OF
ACTUALLY HAVING TO
TELL HER ANY OF THIS!

MY NAME IS
PROFESSOR ZEUS
WYNDELL.

MY CURRENT
EMPLOYER GOES BY
THE NAME SAMUEL
ANTONETTI. A NAME I
BELIEVE YOU KNOW
ALL TOO WELL.

IN A *BOTCHED*
ATTEMPT TO HARNESS AN
ALIEN ENERGY SOURCE DEEP
WITHIN SPACE, WE INADVER-
TENTLY UNLEASHED A GREAT
AND POWERFUL *BURDEN*
UPON THIS PLANET.

BURDEN?
WHAT ARE YOU
TALKING
ABOUT?

EVOLUTION, MS.
WATERSTON...

...EVOLUTION!

SHE STOPPED
KNOCKING.
NOW'S MY
CHANCE!

YOU CAN MAKE IT,
YOU CAN MAKE IT, YOU
CAN MAKE IT, YOU CAN
MAKE IT...



YAAAAHH!!!!

OOF!

HUNH, HUNH...
OUTTA BREATH...BUT I
MADE IT...I MADE IT. I
CAN'T BELIEVE...HUNH, I
CAN'T BELIEVE...

...I CAN'T
BELIEVE I HAD TO
JUMP IN THE FIRST
PLACE!
THAT'S TWICE
NOW! IN ONE
NIGHT!
ALL BECAUSE
OF A COSTUME
THAT WON'T
COME
OFF!

GET OFF ME
ALREADY! LEAVE
ME ALONE!

I WANT TO BE
NORMAL AGAIN!
I WANT--

--YAAH!

THUMP

CRAP! WASN'T THINKING! WASN'T WATCHING!

I HATE YOU SO BAD!

THIS IS GOING TO HURT!

ARGH!

CRASH!

BRILLIANT... JUST, BRILLIANT.

SIGH... PLAN B ANYONE?

WHY DO YOU FIGHT IT?

AT LEAST I WASN'T KILLED.

OF COURSE, NEITHER WAS THE SUIT.



WHO'S THERE?



OH...IT'S YOU.

YOU TREAT YOUR NEW LIFE AS IF IT IS A BURDEN.

FAR EASIER JUST TO EMBRACE IT, NO?



EMBRACE WHAT? A SUIT THAT MAKES ME ITS SLAVE?

A BUNCH OF PSYCHOS OUT TO BURY ME?

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT I'D SAY BURDEN DOESN'T COME CLOSE TO DESCRIBING WHAT'S HAPPENED!

IF YOU ARE GOING TO CONTINUE TO PLAY THE ROLE OF INNOCENT BYSTANDER THEN YOUR MISSION HAS FAILED BEFORE IT'S EVER TRULY BEGUN!



MISSION? WHAT MISSION? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? THIS ISN'T MY FAULT!

THEN IT IS TIME FOR YOU TO REMEMBER...



WHAT? WHERE AM I?

REMEMBER...



WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME?

...REMEMBER WHAT BROUGHT YOU...



HEEEEEELP!

...REMEMBER WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO ME!

MEANWHILE...

THE DIARY OF
ISSAC BANKS.

AFTER FLEEING LOCAL
AUTHORITIES FOLLOWING
YESTERDAY'S *ESCAPE*,
FIREHEART AND I HAVE
HOLED OURSELVES UP
FOR THE TIME BEING.

CONSIDERING THE EXTRAORDINARY
NATURE OF OUR ESCAPE, I FEEL
COMPELLED TO KEEP A LOG OF
EVERYTHING THAT TRANSPIRED.

THIS NOTEBOOK I FOUND
SHOULD SUFFICE.

THOUGH MAKING SENSE OF WHAT
ACTUALLY *HAPPENED* IS FAR
MORE *DIFFICULT* TO COMPREHEND.

THE *PHYSICAL* NATURE OF
OUR TRANSFORMATIONS
AND THE SEEMINGLY
RANDOM SELECTION OF IT
ALL IS *UNSETTLING*.

BUT THE *MENTAL*
CHANGE UNDERGONE
BY OUR FORMER
CELLMATE *SOREN* IS
OUTRIGHT *SCARY*.

HIS NEWFOUND MENTAL STATE
MADE HIM A *LIABILITY*. THE
DECISION TO LEAVE HIM BEHIND
WAS *EFFORTLESS*.

BESIDES, IN OUR LINE OF WORK...

WHAT DO YOU
THINK OF
PARALYS?

...THERE'S NO SUCH
THING AS *LOYALTY*.

WHAT?

MY CODENAME!
PARALYS! THE
PARALYZER! WHAT
DO YOU THINK?

I'M NOT
SURE I
FOLLOW.

COME ON BARD,
YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO
BE THE *SMART* ONE.
YOU REALIZE WHAT
WE ARE?

WE'RE SUPER-
VILLAINS! LIKE IN
THE *BLOODY*
COMICS!

ON THE RUN,
BACKS AGAINST
THE WALL, READY
FOR ACTION SUPER-
VILLAINS!



WE'LL CALL YOU **SMASHER**, OR **BRUISER** OR SOMETHING CLEVER LIKE THAT.

AH, YOU'RE NO FUN AT ALL!

NO...WE WILL NOT!

IT WAS BAD ENOUGH I HAD TO PUT UP WITH THAT **RIDICULOUS** NICKNAME THEY GAVE ME IN PRISON.

BARD. THE STORYTELLER. THE LEARNED MAN.

A **POSSIBILITY** ONCE, BUT TO THEM JUST A **JOKE**.

IT'S SAD, REALLY. I'VE **STRIVED** FOR SO LONG TO AVOID PEOPLE'S **EXPECTATIONS** OF ME. A LIFE OF CRIME, OF **VIOLENCE**...



...AND I'VE **FAILED** IN EVERY POSSIBLE WAY! AND NOW, AFTER USING MY **LATEST** PRISON SENTENCE TO STUDY AND BECOME **SMARTER**...

...TO **FINALLY** CAST ASIDE WHAT PEOPLE HAVE COME TO **EXPECT** FROM ME...

...I'M TRANSFORMED INTO THIS...THIS MECHANISM OF **VIOLENCE**! THIS **OGRE**!

IT SEEMS **FATE** FINDS ME **LAUGHABLE** ONCE AGAIN...



THEY'RE HERE!





...YOU WORK FOR SAMUEL ANTONETTI, THE TECHNOLOGY MOGUL WHO'S BEEN MISSING FOR DAYS NOW...

...AND TOGETHER YOU UNLEASHED AN **ALIEN** ENERGY ONTO THE PLANET...

...THAT'S BEEN STRIKING PEOPLE AT **RANDOM**, CREATING SCENARIOS LIKE THE ONE THAT HAPPENED YESTERDAY.

PROFESSOR CAN I ASK YOU...

...HAVE YOU TAKEN YOUR **MEDS** TODAY?

VERY FUNNY MS. WATERSTON, BUT WE BOTH KNOW WHAT YOU EXPERIENCED YESTERDAY CAN IN NO WAY BE DESCRIBED AS **NORMAL**.

EVOLUTION HAS BEEN **JUMPSTARTED** ACROSS THE GLOBE AND THE MAN YOU CAME INTO CONTACT WITH, **THE SIRE**, IS AT THE CENTER OF IT ALL!



THE CENTER OF **WHAT?** I STILL HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT, LET ALONE A **CLUE** AS TO WHY YOU'RE TELLING ME ALL THIS!

THEN I'LL MAKE THIS **SIMPLE**.

YOU'VE BEEN TRYING FOR **MONTHS** TO BRING MY EMPLOYER DOWN, TO CONNECT HIS TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES WITH THAT OF ORGANIZED CRIME...

...BUT IN THE END YOU'VE ALWAYS COME UP **SHORT**.

WELL, NOW YOU HAVE SOMETHING **BETTER**. YOU HAVE **ME**

AND ALL I ASK IN RETURN IS THE **SIRE**...YOUR **SECRETARY**.



SECRETARY? ARE YOU KIDDING ME? HE'S NOT--

--OH **PLEASE**, SO YOU **DIDN'T** RECOGNIZE HIM ON TV YESTERDAY, **DIDN'T** BLOW THE STORY OF THE CENTURY BY LETTING HIM GET AWAY AND **DIDN'T** LOOK LIKE A FOOL IN THE PROCESS.

NOT TO MENTION WE'RE **STANDING** OUTSIDE HIS APARTMENT...



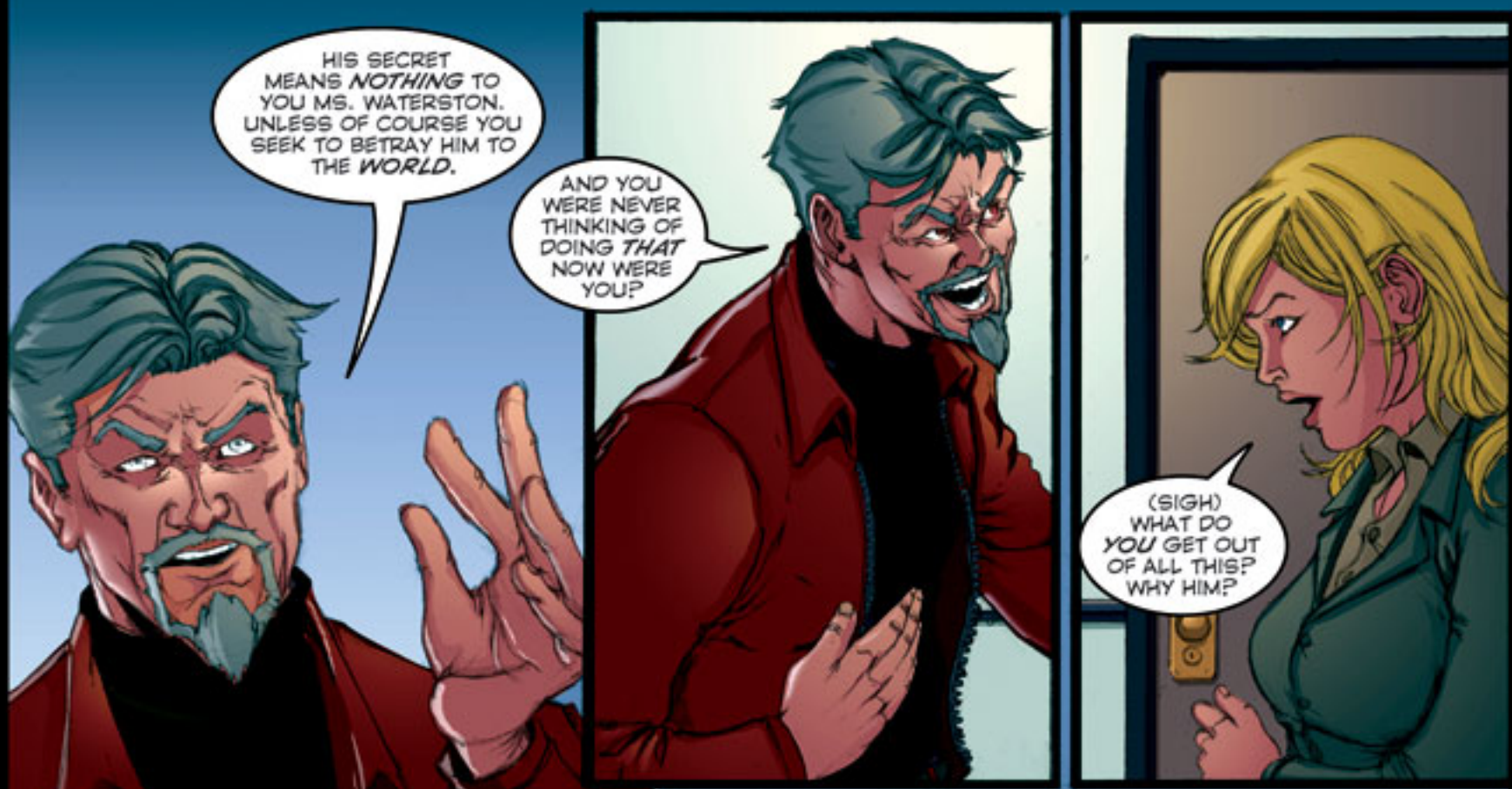
OKAY, YOU MADE YOUR POINT. WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH **ME?**

SIMPLE...



...YOU CAN GET CLOSE TO HIM. AND WHEN THE TIME COMES...

...YOU CAN BRING HIM TO **ME!**



HIS SECRET MEANS *NOTHING* TO YOU MS. WATERSTON. UNLESS OF COURSE YOU SEEK TO BETRAY HIM TO THE *WORLD*.

AND YOU WERE NEVER THINKING OF DOING *THAT* NOW WERE YOU?

(SIGH) WHAT DO YOU GET OUT OF ALL THIS? WHY HIM?

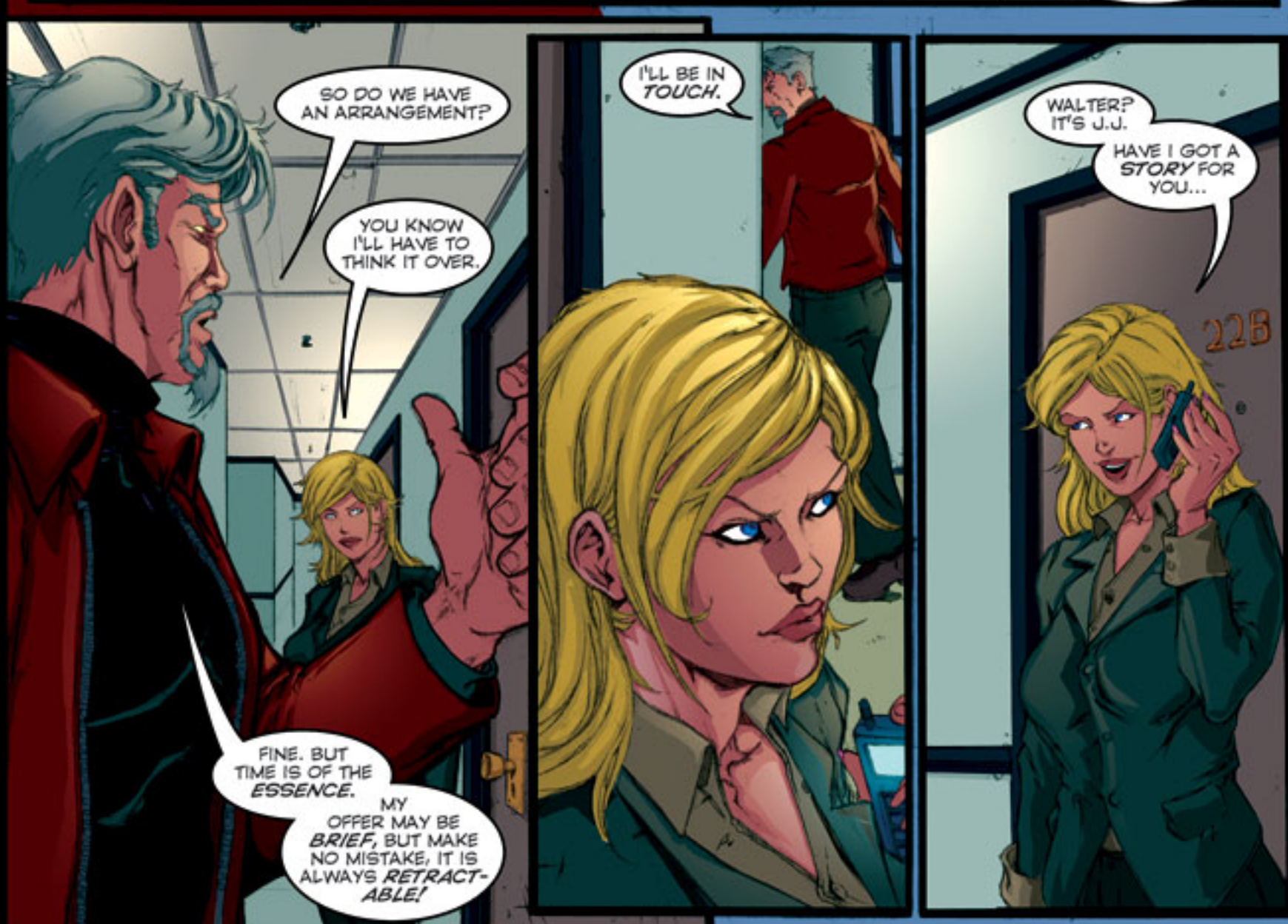


BECAUSE HE DOESN'T *COMPREHEND* WHAT HE IS YET. AND WHAT HE MEANS TO *HUMANKIND* IS SOMETHING ONLY I CAN SHOW HIM!

I COME TO YOU BECAUSE I NEED THIS TO BE HANDLED *QUIETLY*.

MY EMPLOYER IS A *DANGEROUS* MAN MS. WATERSTON...

...YOU MAY THINK YOU HAVE YOUR EYE ON HIM BUT BELIEVE ME WHEN I SAY HE'S ALWAYS KEEPING A CLOSER EYE ON *YOU!*



SO DO WE HAVE AN ARRANGEMENT?

YOU KNOW I'LL HAVE TO THINK IT OVER.

I'LL BE IN TOUCH.

FINE. BUT TIME IS OF THE *ESSENCE*. MY OFFER MAY BE *BRIEF*, BUT MAKE NO MISTAKE, IT IS ALWAYS *RETRACT-ABLE!*

WALTER? IT'S J.J.

HAVE I GOT A *STORY* FOR YOU...

MEANWHILE...

WHAT THE HELL'S GOING ON?!

ONE MINUTE I'M IN DREAM-LAND...

...THE NEXT I'M BACK AT WORK?!

WRIGHT!

WHOA!

I NEED THESE NOTES TYPED, STAPLED, AND COLLATED!

AND I NEEDED THOSE TRANSCRIPTS ON MY DESK YESTERDAY!

AND GET A HAIRCUT FOR GODSSAKE, YOU LOOK RIDICULOUS!

YES, J.J.!

I DON'T CARE WHO PULLED STRINGS TO GET YOU THIS JOB...

...YOU'D BETTER COME READY TO WORK!

BECAUSE THE ONE THING I CAN'T STAND IS LAZINESS!

IF YOU'RE NOT WORKING TO MAKE ME OR THIS STATION BETTER, THEN YOU'RE WASTING EVERYONE'S TIME!



ARE WE CLEAR?

CRYSTAL, J.J....



...CRYSTAL.

SHE WAS AMAZING. UNLIKE ANY WOMAN I'D EVER MET, LET ALONE WORKED FOR.

SO I SPENT THE BETTER PART OF THE NIGHT TRYING TO GET THOSE FILES READY FOR HER...



...JUST TO SHOW HER I COULD.

WHEN I GOT THIS PHONECALL...

WNU, DON WRIGHT SPEAKING...

...NO, I'M SORRY SHE'S NOT IN RIGHT NOW, CAN I TAKE A--

--WHOA, HANG ON SLOW DOWN...



...ANTONETTI, WHO?

SIR, YOU'RE GOING A MILE A MINUTE HERE...

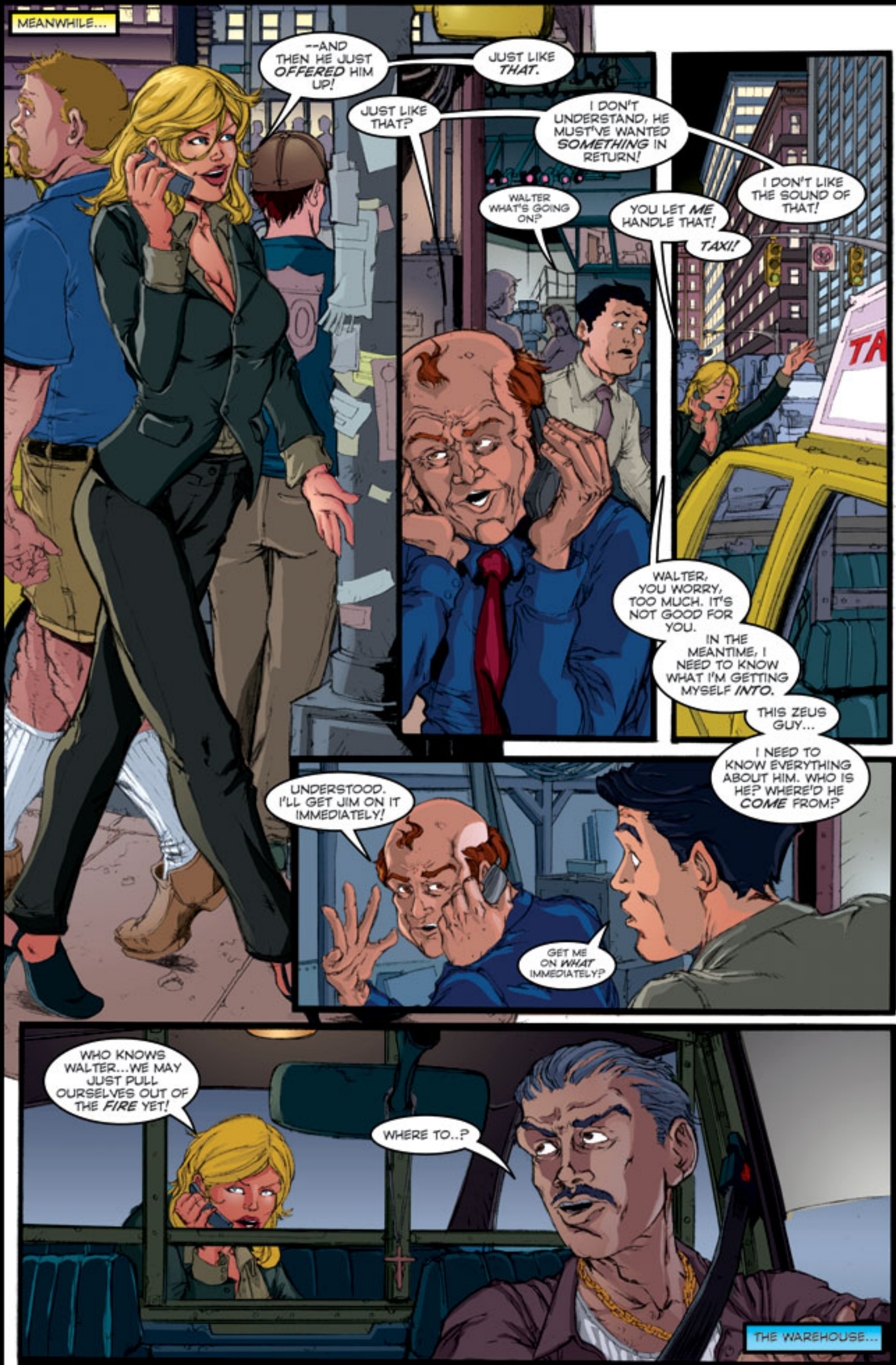
YES, I'M AWARE OF HIS SATELLITE TECHNOLOGY. THE EXCELSIOR HANDHELD, RIGHT? WAIT, WHAT?

WAREHOUSE...?





MEANWHILE...



--AND THEN HE JUST OFFERED HIM UP!

JUST LIKE THAT.

JUST LIKE THAT?

I DON'T UNDERSTAND, HE MUST'VE WANTED SOMETHING IN RETURN!

WALTER WHAT'S GOING ON?

YOU LET ME HANDLE THAT!

I DON'T LIKE THE SOUND OF THAT!

TAXI!

WALTER, YOU WORRY, TOO MUCH. IT'S NOT GOOD FOR YOU.

IN THE MEANTIME, I NEED TO KNOW WHAT I'M GETTING MYSELF INTO.

THIS ZEUS GUY...

I NEED TO KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT HIM. WHO IS HE? WHERE'D HE COME FROM?

UNDERSTOOD. I'LL GET JIM ON IT IMMEDIATELY!

GET ME ON WHAT IMMEDIATELY?

WHO KNOWS WALTER...WE MAY JUST PULL OURSELVES OUT OF THE FIRE YET!

WHERE TO...?

THE WAREHOUSE...



...I REMEMBER NOW. HE TOLD ME TO GO TO THE WAREHOUSE.

SAID THERE WAS SOMETHING GOING ON... AN EXPERIMENT.
SO I DID.

WHY? WHAT WOULD MAKE YOU DO SUCH A THING?

I DUNNO... I JUST THOUGHT, MAYBE...
...I COULD IMPRESS HER. SHOW HER I WAS SOMEONE SPECIAL. NOT THE LOSER EVERYONE THINKS I AM.

AND IS THAT NOT WHAT YOU'VE BECOME?
ARE YOU NOT THE VERY DEFINITION...

...OF SPECIAL?

WHATTYA THINK?

I THINK IT'S HIM.

CHECK HIS WALLET. MAYBE HE'S GOT SOME CASH ON HIM.

RUN!

UUHHH...

WE...
...UM, WE SHOULD...

...OK, OK, I'M UP...

WHERE ARE WE OFF TO--
--AAARGH!
OK, OK, I'M GOING...
...LEAD THE WAY OH GREAT AND POWERFUL COSTUME...





WE'RE ALL EARS
MR. ANTONETTI!

I MEAN, LOOK
AT THIS PLACE!

MAKES THE
WHITE HOUSE LOOK
LIKE A *BURNT OUT*
CRATER FULL OF--



--WHOA!

>AHEM<

SORRY...
HEH, DIDN'T
SEE YOU THERE.



YES, WELL,
LET'S MOVE ON
SHALL WE?

I SAW YOU
BOTH ON TV. MOST
IMPRESSIVE.

YOUR
PHYSICAL
ATTRIBUTES, YOUR
NEWFOUND
CAPABILITIES...

...THE POSSIBILI-
TIES OF YOU COMING
TO WORK FOR ME ARE
LIMITLESS.

I TOO HAVE
UNDERGONE MY
OWN APPARENT
CHANGES AND CAN
BETTER SERVE TO HELP
YOU UNDERSTAND
YOURS.



AND ALL THAT I
ASK IN *RETURN* IS
HELP IN CERTAIN
AREAS THAT REQUIRE
A UNIQUE BRAND OF
EXPERTISE...

...ONE
THAT EXISTS
OUTSIDE THE
LEGAL REALMS
OF SOCIETY...

...ONE I'M
SURE YOU'RE
QUITE FAMILIAR
WITH!



EXCUSE ME...

WHAT?
BARD?
WHERE'RE YOU
GOING?





WHOA...



WHO IS...

WHAT IS...

...DID YOU SEE...

...HE JUST...



YEAH, HE'S GONE. MY MEN...



...THEY TRIED.



I SEE. IT APPEARS YOUR FRIEND WILL HAVE TO BE DEALT WITH AT ANOTHER TIME.

LIKE I SAID, I BARELY KNEW HIM!



YES, OF COURSE...

...ON TO THE MATTER AT HAND...



...WHICH, IRONICALLY ENOUGH, INVOLVES ANOTHER OF YOUR SO-CALLED FRIENDS, SOREN CLAUS.



AS I UNDERSTAND IT, HE WAS RECENTLY TAKEN INTO CUSTODY. AS IT TURNS OUT...







YEAH, GREAT ADVICE. TOO BAD, I DON'T *REALLY* HAVE A CHOICE! MY *COSTUME* MAKES THE CHOICES FOR ME!

LIKE THE ONE TO FIGHT YOU IN THE *FIRST* PLACE...

...AND GET THE FLOOR WIPED BY MY *ASS*!

OK, MAYBE THAT WAS *MY* DOING. STILL...

SEE TO IT YOU *TAKE* MY ADVICE!

...IF POWER EQUALS CONTROL...

POLICE! FREEZE!

...IT LOOKS LIKE I HAVE *NEITHER*!

CHAPTER THREE: "Intervention"





SO HOW'S YOUR WEEK BEEN?
CHASED AROUND BY COPS
AFTER THROWING DOWN WITH
SUPER POWERED THUGS?

POLICE!
FREEZE!

YEAH, DIDN'T
THINK SO.



PUT YOUR
HANDS BEHIND
YOUR HEAD
NOW!

ALEX,
THAT'S HIM!
THAT LUNATIC
FROM TV!



YOU HAVE TO
BACK AWAY! I HAVE NO
CONTROL OVER MYSELF
WHEN I'M IN THIS COSTUME!
I CAN'T PROMISE I'LL BE
ABLE TO COME ALONG
PEACEFULLY..



HE'S THREATENING!
QUICK--

NO, YOU IDIOT!



WHOA!
MATRIX STYLE!

YEAH, IT'S
TIME TO GO!

QUESTION NOW IS HOW TO DO THIS WITHOUT PUTTING ONE OF THEM IN THE HOSPITAL...OR ME BEHIND BARS!

HOLY--P!

BLAM!

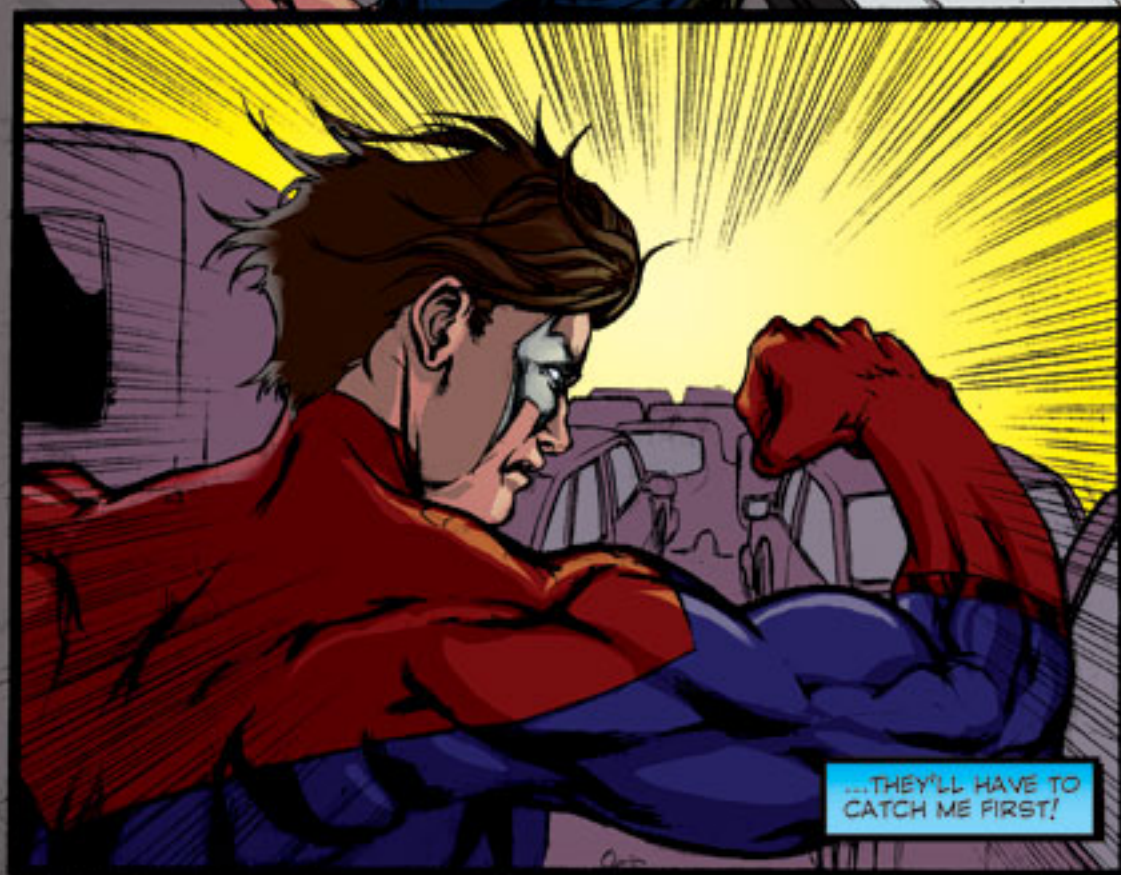
WHA--P!

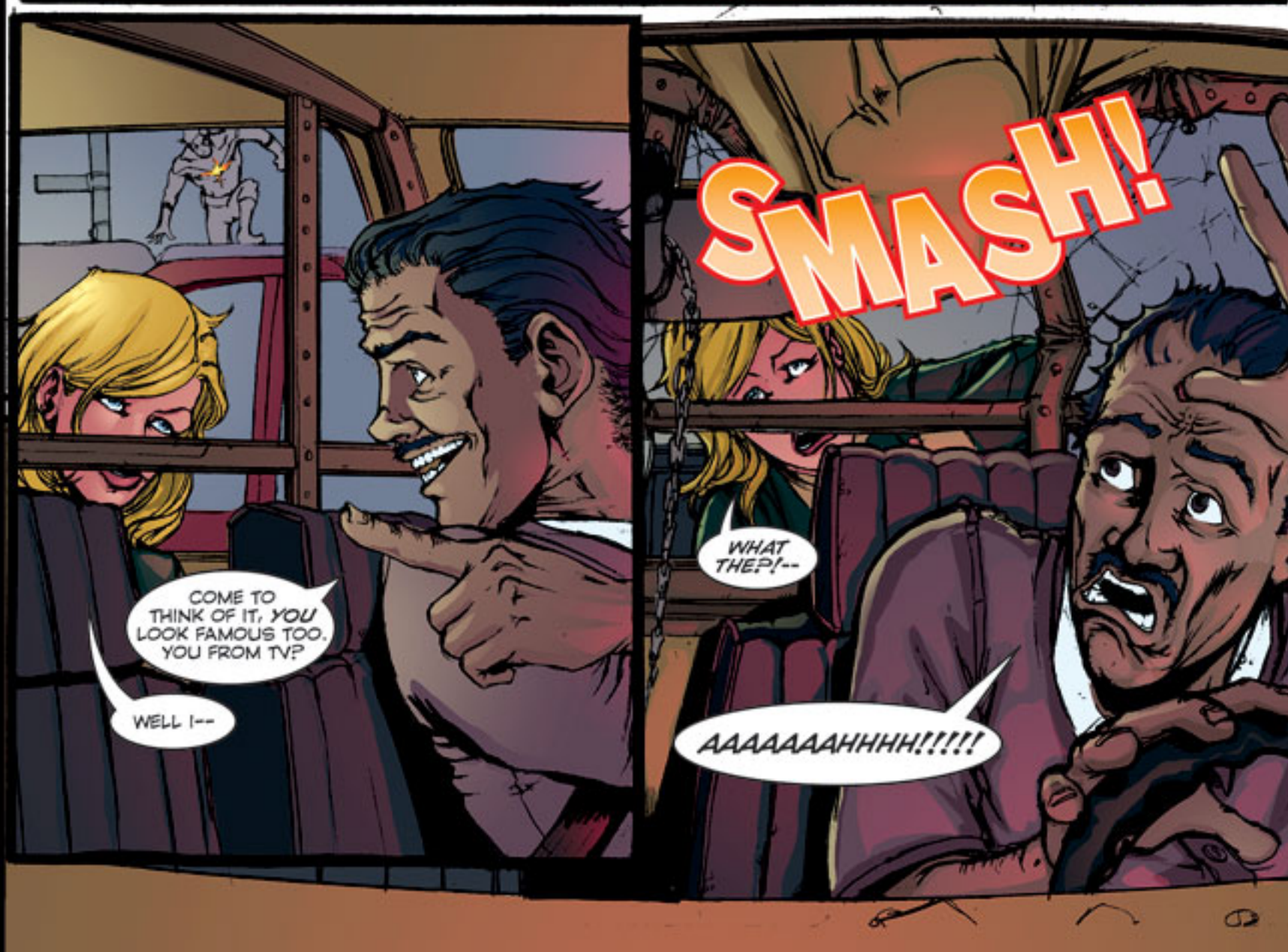
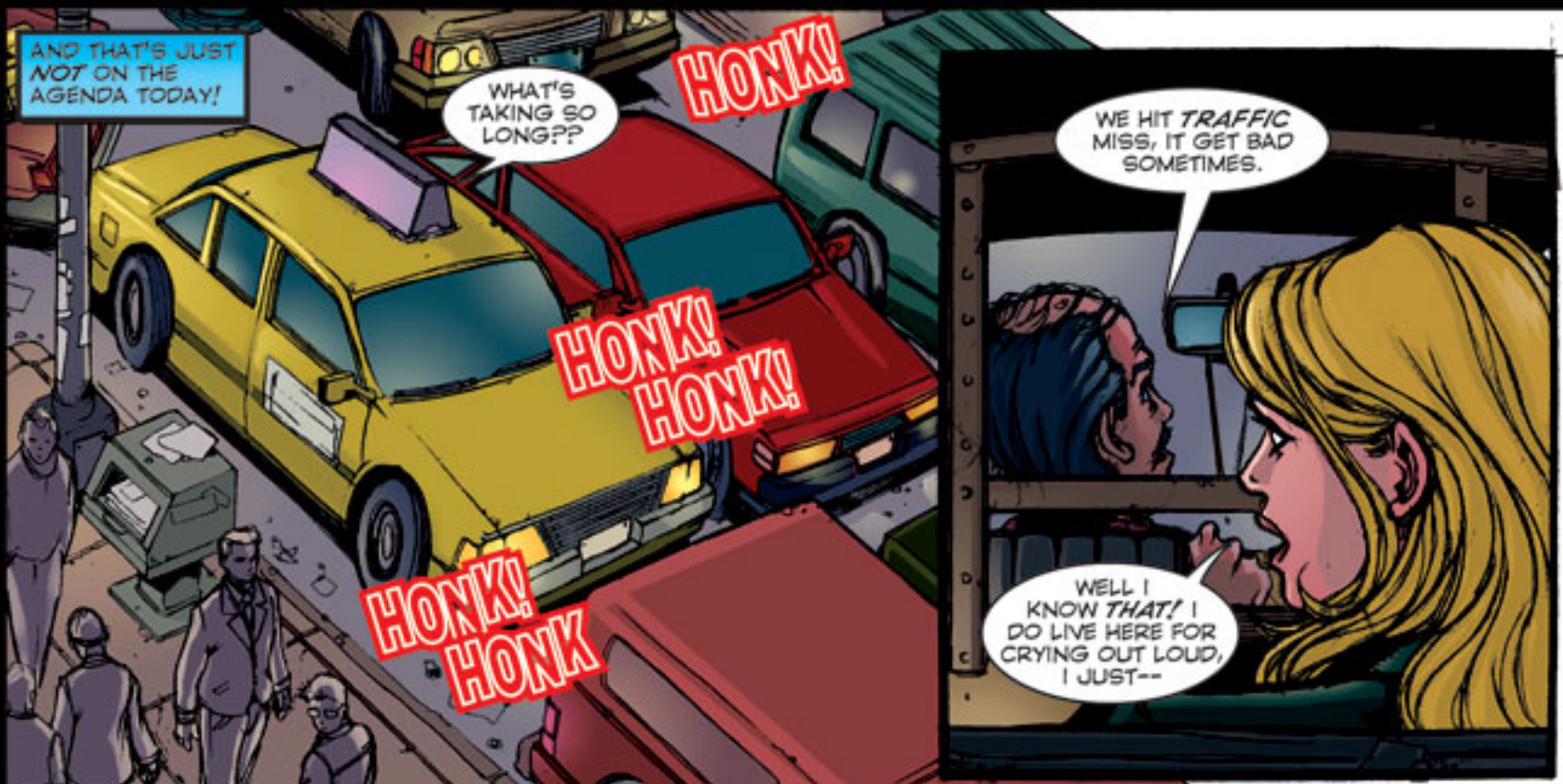
ASSAULT'S LIKE SEVEN YEARS MINIMUM SO I HAVE TO BE CAREFUL NOT TO ACTUALLY TOUCH ANY OF 'EM.

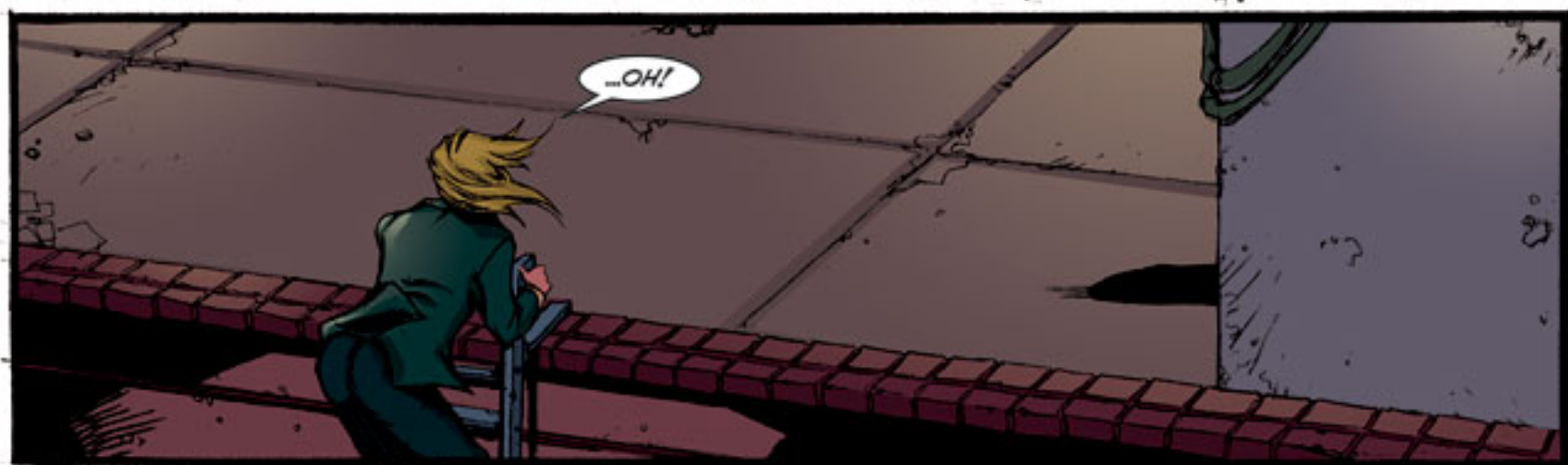
BLAM!
BLAM!
BLAM!
BLAM!

RESISTING ARREST ON THE OTHER HAND, WELL...

WHOA...









AAAAH!

AAAAH!



AHEM!

SORRY, I SAW YOU FOLLOWING ME. WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?!

I SHOULD ASK YOU THE SAME QUESTION.



YEAH I GUESS. NO USE HIDING ANYMORE.

COPS DIDN'T FOLLOW YOU HERE, DID THEY?

I DIDN'T SEE ANY.

MIND TELLING ME WHAT'S GOING ON?



I WISH I KNEW, J.J., I WISH I KNEW.

ONE MINUTE I'M YOUR SECRETARY, THE NEXT I'M FIGHTING FOR MY LIFE!

AGAINST WHO? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?



YOU MEAN YOU REALLY DON'T KNOW? HOW COULD YOU...

OK, I'LL START AT THE BEGINNING...



...WITH SAMUEL ANTONETTI!

THE TRANSPORT ARRIVES AT 0400--



MEANWHILE...



SO LET ME GET THIS STRAIGHT. YOU WERE WORKING LATE...

I WAS WORKING LATE, SIFTING THROUGH ALL THE WORK YOU PILED ON MY DESK--

IF YOU START BLAMING MY *WORKLOAD* THEN THIS CONVERSATION IS OVER.

--WHEN I GOT THIS PHONECALL.

WHAT KIND OF PHONE CALL? WHO WAS IT?

DIDN'T SAY. JUST THAT HE WORKED FOR *ANTONETTI*! AND HE HAD WHAT WE'D BEEN LOOKING FOR.



THIS THING *MAKES* ME DO WHAT I'M DOING. THE ESCAPED FELONS, THE POLICE...ALL OF IT HAS BEEN AT THE WHIM OF THIS COSTUME...



...AND I WANT IT TO END ALREADY!

HAVE YOU TRIED CUTTING IT OFF?

UNFORTUNATELY, THE SUIT IS *BONDED* TO ME.

AND THAT WHOLE THING WITH *ANTONETTI* TRYING TO *STEAL* IT FROM ME--



WAIT, HE'S ALIVE? YOU'VE *SEEN* HIM?

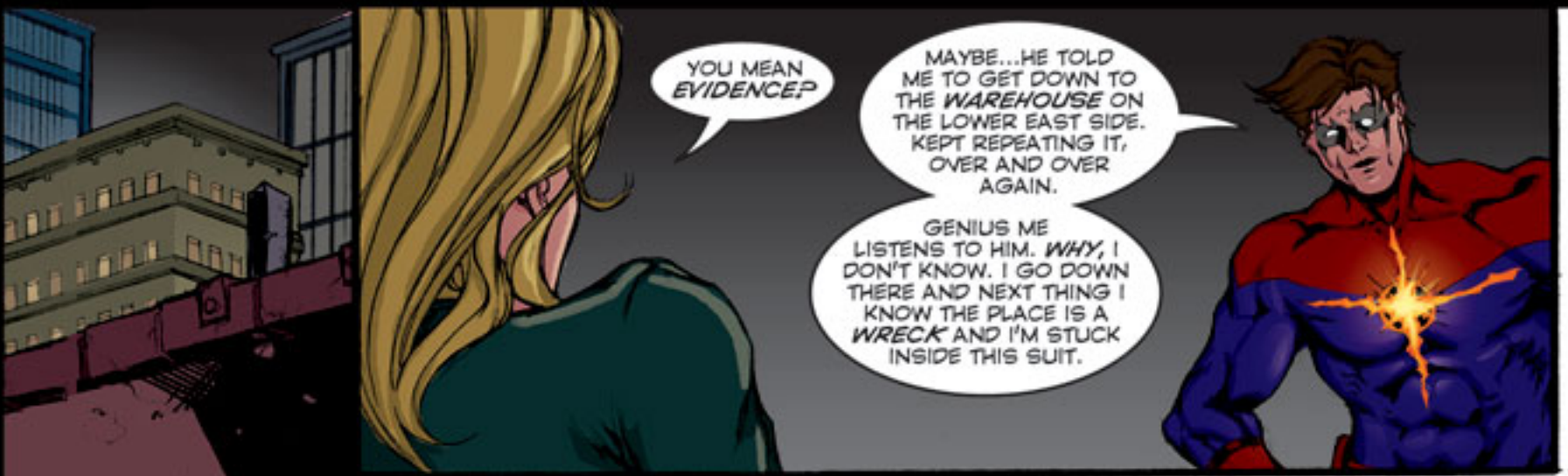
YEAH, I'VE SEEN HIM. LOOKS A LOT *DIFFERENT* ON TV. HEALTHIER.

HOW SO?

WELL, HE WAS BURNT...TO A *CRISP*.

WHAT?!

AND THAT'S NOT THE *ONLY* CHANGE. I GUESS I SHOULD CONSIDER MYSELF *LUCKY*.



YOU MEAN EVIDENCE?

MAYBE...HE TOLD ME TO GET DOWN TO THE *WAREHOUSE* ON THE LOWER EAST SIDE. KEPT REPEATING IT, OVER AND OVER AGAIN.

GENIUS ME LISTENS TO HIM. *WHY*, I DON'T KNOW. I GO DOWN THERE AND NEXT THING I KNOW THE PLACE IS A *WRECK* AND I'M STUCK INSIDE THIS SUIT.



WAIT, YOU CAN'T GET THAT THING OFF?

OF COURSE! WHAT, YOU THINK I WOKE UP ONE MORNING AND THOUGHT, "TODAY I WANT TO BE A SUPERHERO?"

WELL...



SO HE'S ALIVE AFTER ALL. AND IN *HIDING*.

IT ALL MAKES SENSE. *ALMOST*. THE ONLY PART THAT DOESN'T...

...IS WHY *YOU* WERE THERE.



WELL, THAT WOULD BE *YOU* ACTUALLY.

YOU SAID WE WEREN'T GOING TO BLAME THE WORKLOAD.

IT'S NOT THE WORKLOAD, J.J., IT'S *YOU*.

YOU'RE THE REASON I WENT. *YOU'RE* THE REASON I DO EVERYTHING I DO.

TO GET NOTICED. TO *IMPRESS* YOU.

WAIT, WHAT?



FORGET IT! I SHOULDN'T HAVE...

NO, GO ON, I DIDN'T MEAN TO--

ERRING!



HELLO?

MS. WATERSTON, HOW ARE YOU THIS EVENING?

WHO IS THIS? HOW'D YOU GET THIS NUMBER?



I SAID I WOULD BE IN TOUCH. I'M A MAN OF MY WORD, AFTER ALL.

HAVE YOU GIVEN ANY MORE THOUGHT TO MY OFFER?



EVERY-THING ALL RIGHT J.J.?

YES, FINE!

BECAUSE IF SO, I NEED HIM AT POLICE HEADQUARTERS IMMEDIATELY!

I WON'T TURN HIM IN IF THAT'S WHAT YOU'RE ASKING...



HA! DO YOU THINK I CARE ABOUT THAT? I NEED HIM THERE TO SAVE LIVES!

WHAT DO YOU CARE ABOUT SAVING LIVES?

DOES IT MATTER? GET HIM THERE NOW... ...OR THOSE POLICEMEN WILL DIE!



HEY!

HEY.

YOU DON'T HAVE SUPER HEARING DO YOU?

NOT THAT I KNOW OF.

BUT YOU DO HAVE POWERS RIGHT? LIKE YOU CAN'T GET HURT?

CLICK!



WELL I DID FALL OFF A BUILDING ONCE, BUT...

WAIT, WHAT ARE YOU GETTING AT?

REMEMBER HOW YOU SAID YOU WANTED TO IMPRESS ME?



WELL, IMPRESS ME NOW!

TO BE CONTINUED...

The SIRE



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