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CHAPTER ONE**



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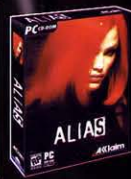
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PROLOGUE

Somewhere in Peru....

THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL CHAPTER ONE

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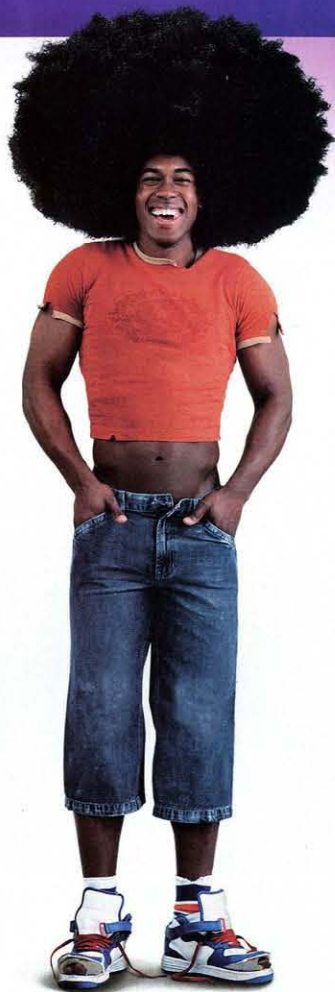
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And in sadness for what will happen to you.

Don't write me off yet, Miguel.



Others have tried before, but I always survived. I will survive this.

Perhaps. But understand: I will help you this one time more, but then you cannot return. If you try, I will not be here, and the door will be closed to you.

But--



I must do this, because if you return again, you will not be as you are now. And either you will die... or I will die.

This is the last.

I'm sorry.



Just...do it. The bleeding. Bleed it out of me, out of my system, enough to buy me the time I need.

And then?



And then... I'll do what I have to.


He'll help me. I've worked hard to make sure of it. He'll help.



You mean he will die, do you not?

Just do it, all right? Just... do it.

You cut the man...you bleed the spider. You cut the spider, you bleed the man.

A full-page photograph of Tracy McGrady in a blue Orlando Magic jersey with the number 1. He is in mid-air, holding a basketball in his right hand, with his mouth wide open in a shout. He is wearing white sneakers and a white wristband on his left arm. The background is a dark, textured grey.

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My friends told
me, "T-Mac, you're
gonna be big some day."
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height is added as a
teen and the calcium and
vitamin D can help.
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of milk make you the
hottest scorer in town?
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RRRRRRRRR!

HONK! HONK! HONK!





HONK! HONK! HONK! HONK! HONK! HONK! HONK!





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"...just get me the heck away from those two freaks."



What the heck were you thinking? She could have been killed--

Are you kidding?



We're both children of the spider, Peter. Both hunters.

He never had a chance.

Maybe. Maybe not. But I don't like taking chances like that.

No...no, you don't, do you?

And what was that bit with the eyes?

I got carried away, Peter...the thrill of the hunt...



And stop calling me Peter.

Sorry, P. Wasn't thinking.



I mean, I suppose I should be grateful that you showed up--

That would be a commendable start.

--but still...

It worked out in the end. That's what matters.



Anyway...

All things considered, it's... good to see you again, Ezekiel. So what brings you back to New York?

You do, P. But I'll tell you the whole story over dinner.

At your place.

Your wife does cook, doesn't she?



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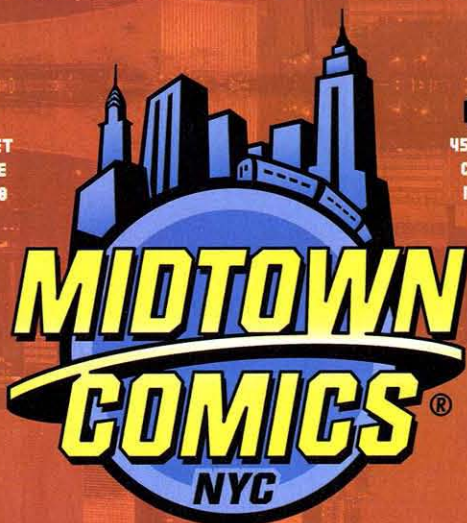
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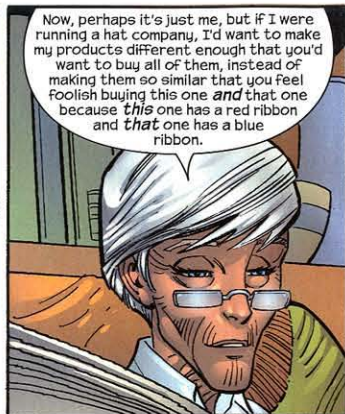
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"Depends. Does ordering in from Domino's count as cooking?"

"Absolutely, P."

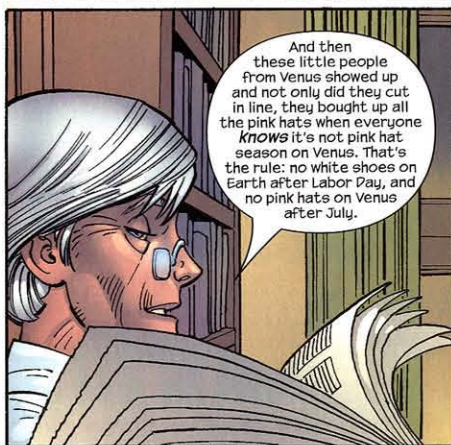
--and there were three very nice hats, and they were just similar enough that I couldn't choose between them.



Now, perhaps it's just me, but if I were running a hat company, I'd want to make my products different enough that you'd want to buy all of them, instead of making them so similar that you feel foolish buying this one *and* that one because *this* one has a red ribbon and *that* one has a blue ribbon.



Not that I own a lot of hats to begin with, and I wasn't looking to *buy* two hats in any event, but it's the principle, isn't it, Mary Jane?



And then these little people from Venus showed up and not only did they cut in line, they bought up all the pink hats when everyone *KNOWS* it's not pink hat season on Venus. That's the rule: no white shoes on Earth after Labor Day, and no pink hats on Venus after July.

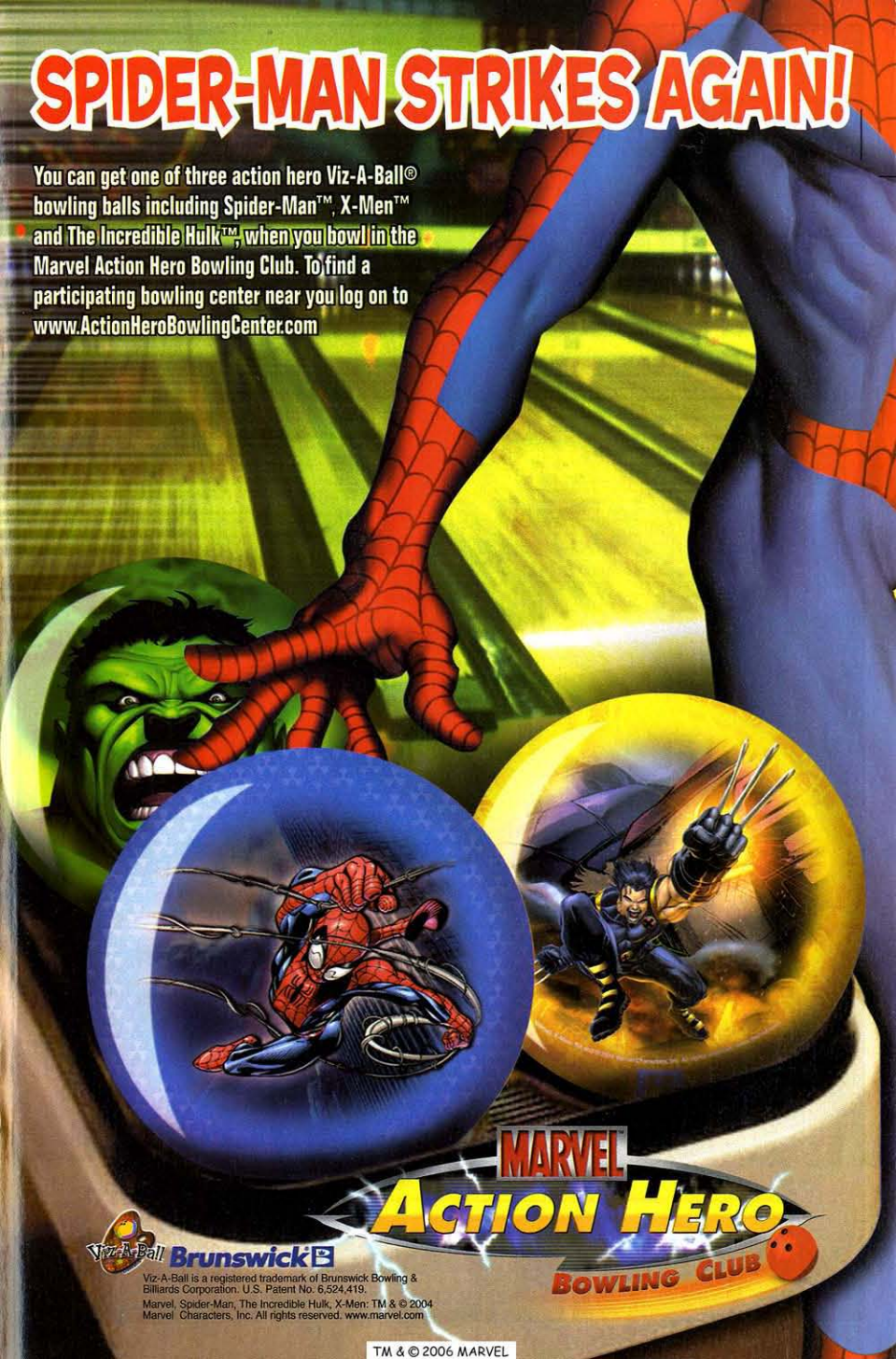


Isn't that right?

Uh, huh... I...

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...wasn't...
listening.

I'm
sorry, May,
it's--

I understand.
You've clearly got
a lot on your mind
right now.

Is it
anything you
want to talk
about?



When I
went to L.A. for
the movie, they...
they didn't want me
for the role. They
said they didn't want
some model with
delusions of being
an actress.

I told
Peter I turned
the job down, I just
couldn't...I couldn't,
that's all.

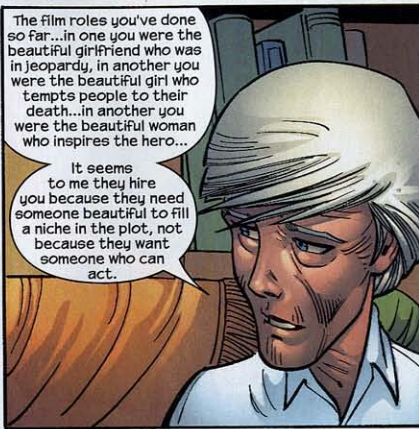
But I've
been wondering...
are they right?



Actors are paid to walk and talk
and be dramatic. Models are paid to
sit still, shut up, and be distant. We're
talking here about two different
skill sets. Maybe I don't have it.
Maybe I should just be what
I am, do what I've done.

Would
you like my
opinion?

Yes.
Please.



The film roles you've done
so far...in one you were the
beautiful girlfriend who was
in jeopardy, in another you
were the beautiful girl who
tempts people to their
death...in another you
were the beautiful woman
who inspires the hero...

It seems
to me they hire
you because they need
someone beautiful to fill
a niche in the plot, not
because they want
someone who can
act.



you haven't
played a character,
MJ, you've only played
things that move the
story ahead.

I know.
Which makes me
think maybe I'm
expecting too much...
maybe I'm shooting
too high. Is that
possible?

Yes,
Mary Jane,
it is.

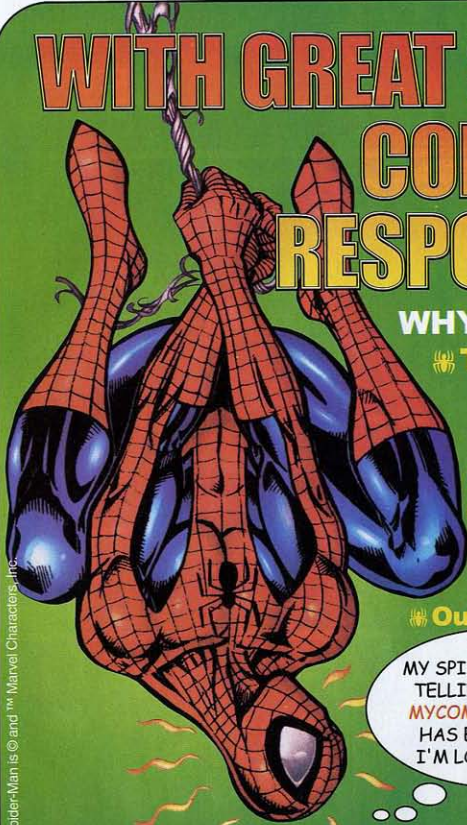


But it's also
just as possible
that you haven't
shot high
enough.

I left that
newspaper behind
on purpose,
incidentally.



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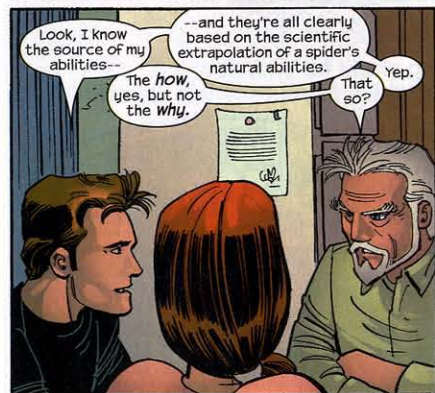
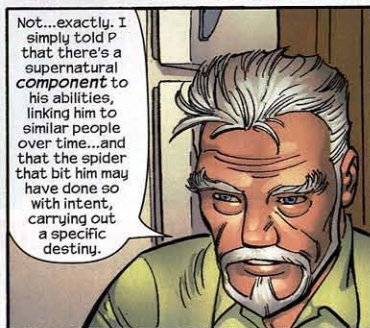
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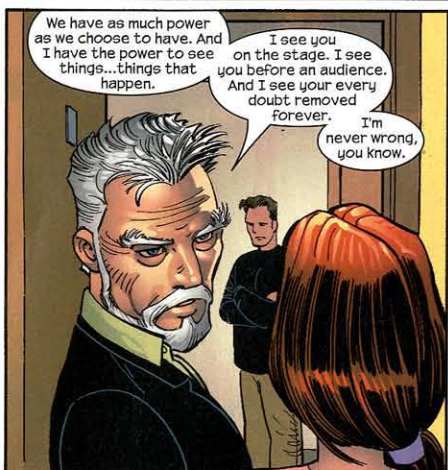
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Nice
night.

Yeah,
it is.

So why
do I get the
feeling you're
about to ruin
it for me?



"You've probably noticed that for the past year, more and more of your battles have been with forces coming from the supernatural side of the street."

"This is not a coincidence. It's what I warned you about before."

"You've been noticed."

"Your power has a supernatural aspect to it, whether you care to admit it or not, and sooner or later, what goes around, comes around."

You're in danger, Peter. Terrible danger.

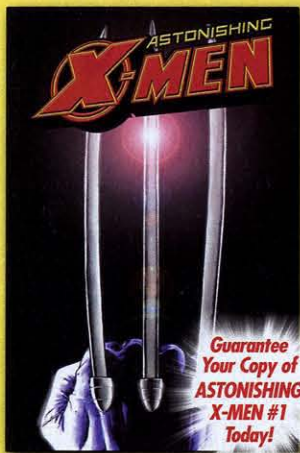
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"And it's about to get a whole lot worse."

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What you have to understand is that power has three components.

Those that want it.

Those that give it.

And the final component, those who control it. The gatekeepers.



The spider is your totem. Real totemic power comes through supernatural channels. But the way you got your power circumvented that. Which wasn't so bad, as long as the gatekeepers didn't notice.

But now that I've been noticed--

The bill is coming due.



I told you that you were going to go through several trials in terms of supernatural forces arrayed against you. I told you that the worst of them, Shathra, was not the last.

And that there was one more coming. The most dangerous of all.



And I'm guessing you didn't come all this way to tell me he's been held up in traffic.

I'm afraid so, P.

He's coming. The Gatekeeper is coming. Maybe even tonight.

You have two choices. You can choose to stand your ground here, and try to fight him.

Unfortunately, you will almost certainly be killed in the process. He will also come after you wherever you go, which means your presence will put Mary Jane in danger.

So what's choice number two?

Come with me.

Where to?

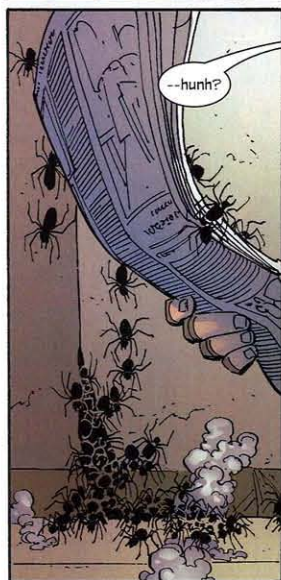
South America.

South America? Are you out of your mind?

Probably. Sure as hell I wouldn't be within a hundred miles of you if I were sane.

"Because unlike you, I know exactly what kind of hell is coming your way very shortly."

"Here, spider... here spider... c'mon..."





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