

Courtney VOLUME TWO Crumrin



The Coven of Mystics

— ❖ TED NAIFEH ❖ —



This book belongs to

Courtney
VOLUME TWO
Crumrin

The Coven of Mystics





Courtney VOLUME TWO Crumrin

The Coven of Mystics

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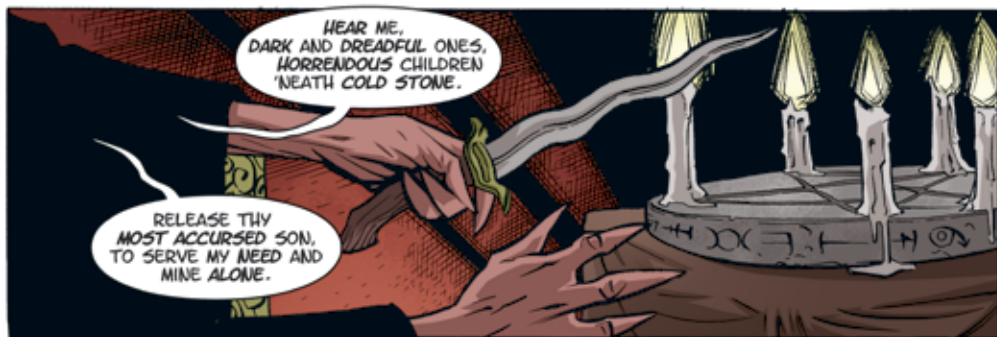


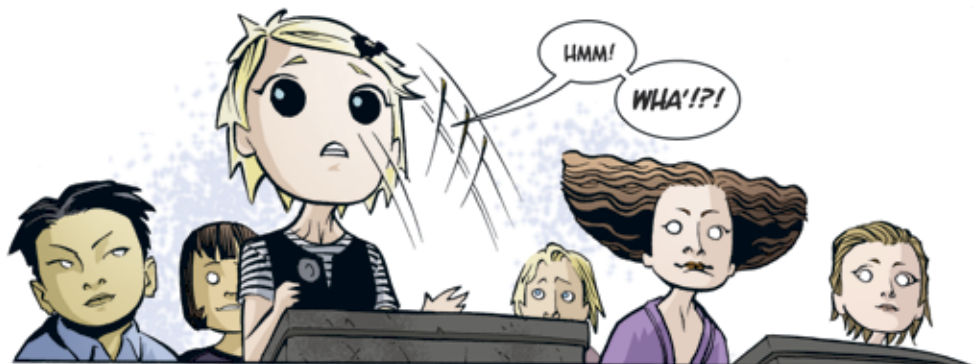


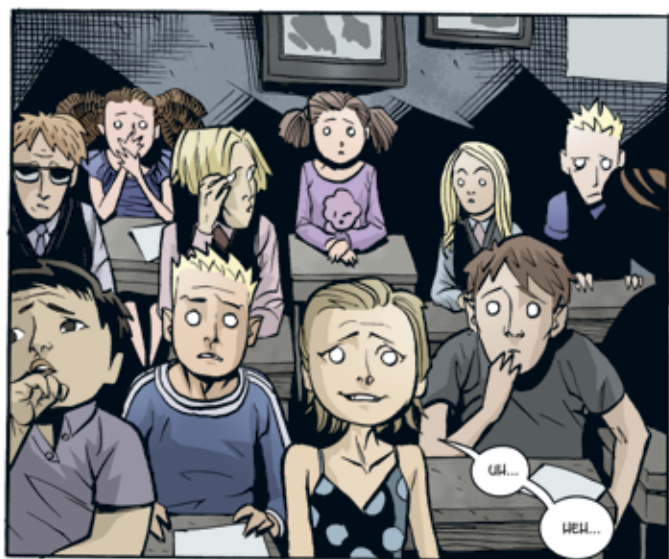
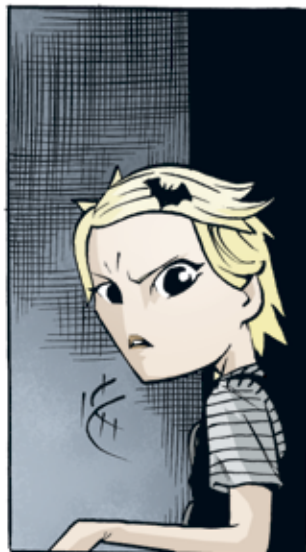
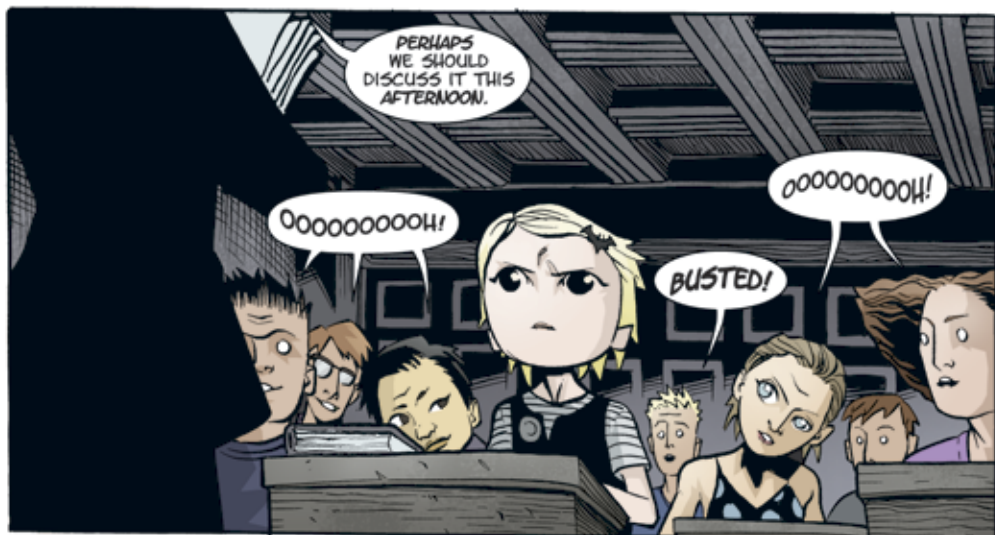
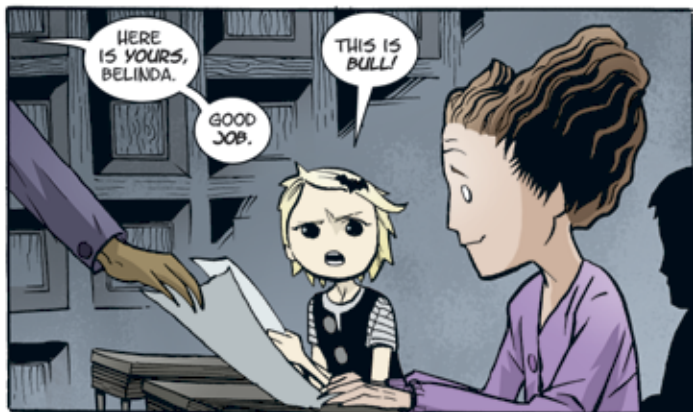
Chapter One











IT WAS NOW TWO WEEKS INTO THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR, AND COURTNEY WAS BEGINNING TO NOTICE THAT HER NEW TEACHER, MISS CRISP, WAS A DREADFUL NUISANCE.

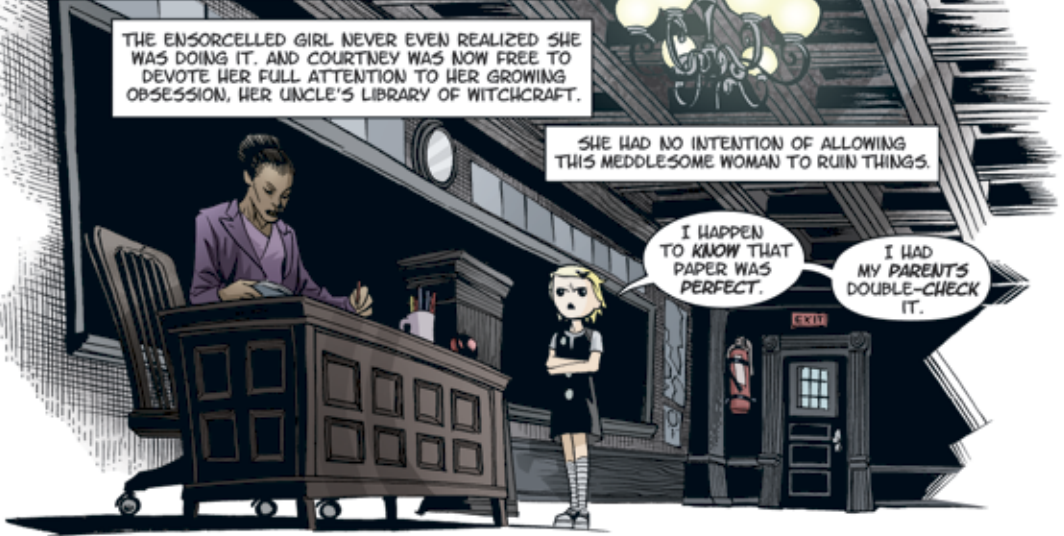
THERE WAS NOTHING WRONG WITH THE HOMEWORK, OF COURSE. THE COMPLEX COCKTAIL OF ENCHANTMENT'S HAD REQUIRED WEEKS OF RESEARCH, BUT NOW A BEWITCHED BELINDA BLOOM HANDED IN TWO COPIES OF HOMEWORK EVERY DAY, ONE WITH COURTNEY'S NAME ON IT.

THE ENSORCELLED GIRL NEVER EVEN REALIZED SHE WAS DOING IT. AND COURTNEY WAS NOW FREE TO DEVOTE HER FULL ATTENTION TO HER GROWING OBSESSION, HER UNCLE'S LIBRARY OF WITCHCRAFT.

SHE HAD NO INTENTION OF ALLOWING THIS MEDDLESOME WOMAN TO RUIN THINGS.

I HAPPEN TO KNOW THAT PAPER WAS PERFECT.

I HAD MY PARENTS DOUBLE-CHECK IT.

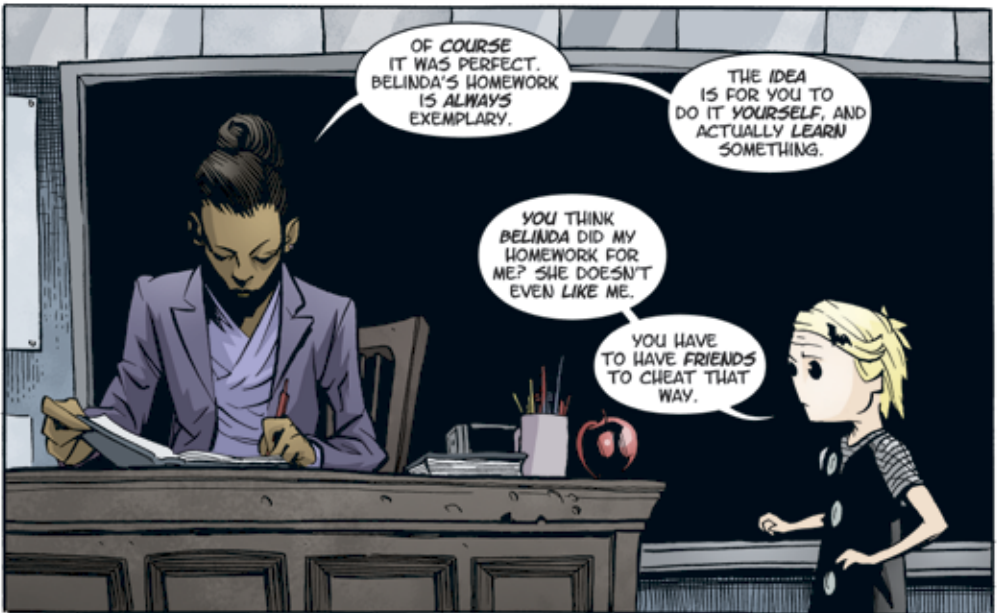


OF COURSE IT WAS PERFECT. BELINDA'S HOMEWORK IS ALWAYS EXEMPLARY.

THE IDEA IS FOR YOU TO DO IT YOURSELF, AND ACTUALLY LEARN SOMETHING.

YOU THINK BELINDA DID MY HOMEWORK FOR ME? SHE DOESN'T EVEN LIKE ME.

YOU HAVE TO HAVE FRIENDS TO CHEAT THAT WAY.



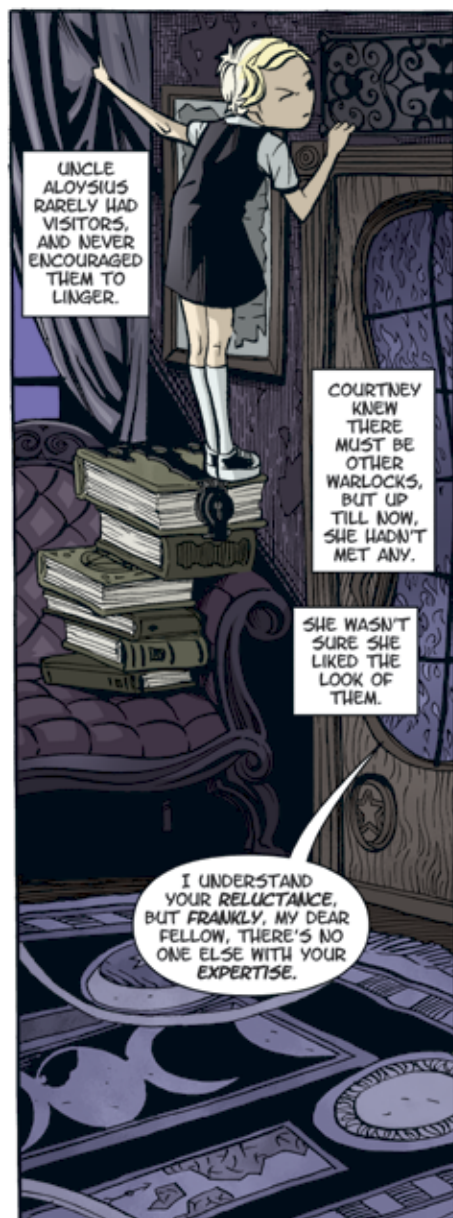
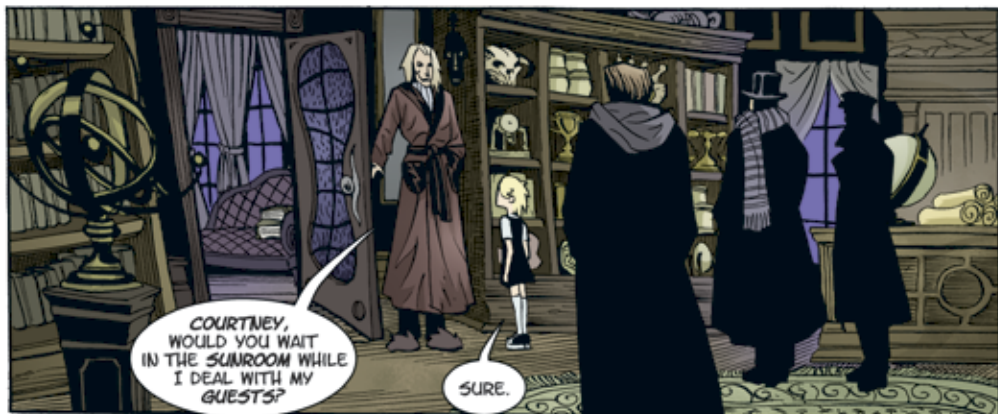




BUT THE STRANGE OLD NEIGHBORHOOD WAS AT LAST BEGINNING TO FEEL LIKE HOME.









INDEED, THANK YOU FOR THINKING OF ME.

I HOPE YOUR NEXT CHOICE PROVES MORE FRUITFUL.



YOU DON'T SEEM TO APPRECIATE THE GRAVITY OF THIS MATTER, ALOYSIUS.

PROFESSOR, WHAT ABOUT THE MANDRAKES? JACK AND THE CHILDREN?



JACK MANDRAKE, THE SELF-PROCLAIMED GREATEST WARLOCK OF THE AGE?

SURELY HE ISN'T IN ANY DANGER.



HAVE YOU NOT HEARD?

PROFESSOR, THEY'RE DEAD.



LAST NIGHT.

THE CHILDREN AS WELL?

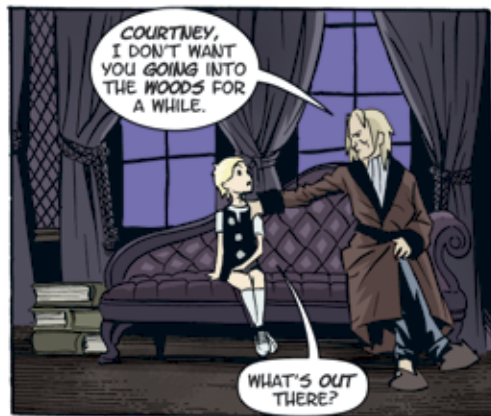


HECTOR HERE IS DOING HIS BEST, BUT HE JUST ISN'T EQUIPPED TO DEAL WITH... YOU KNOW...

NIGHT THINGS.



NOT LIKE THIS ONE.





C'MON,
BUTTERWORM.

DON'T
MAKE ME
GET MY DAD'S
ELECTRIC
CLIPPERS.



WHAT YEH
WANT?

AND
KEEP YER
VOICE DOWN,
GIRL. FER
GOODNESS
SAKE.



WHAT IS IT,
BUTTERWORM?
WHAT'S OUT
THERE?



OH,
'IM? THAT'S
OL' TOMMY
RAWHEAD.

BEEN
AWHILE SINCE
HE COME OUT
O' THE MARL-
PIT.



TOMMY
RAWHEAD?

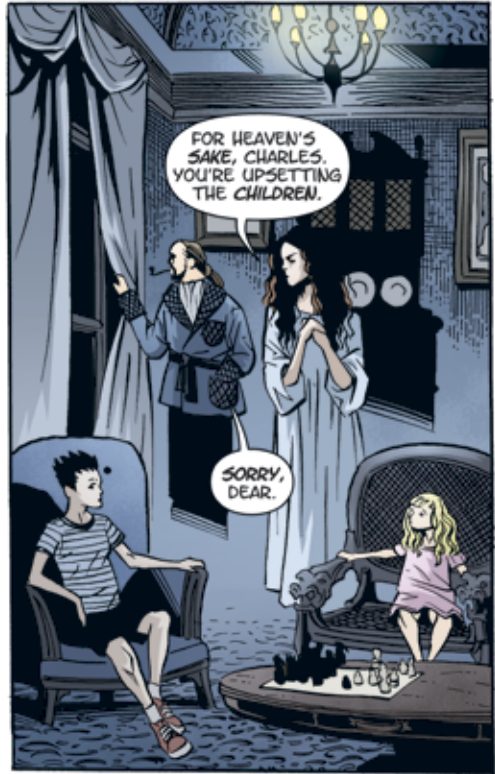
WHO IS HE?

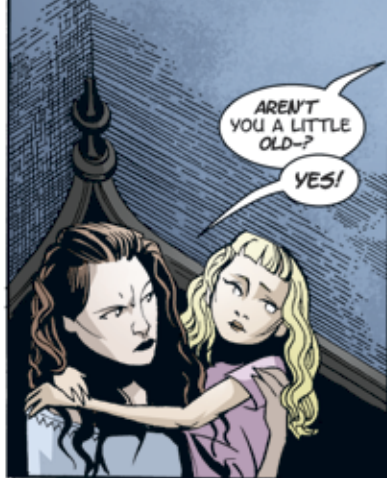
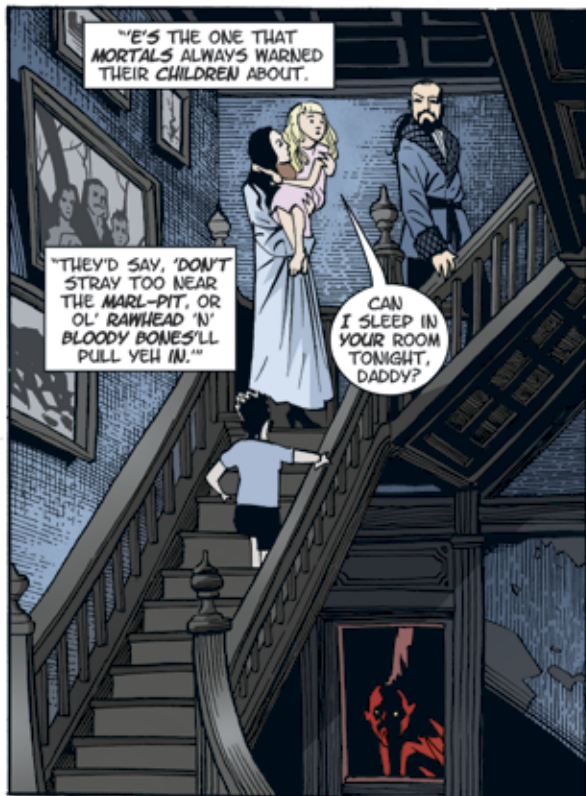


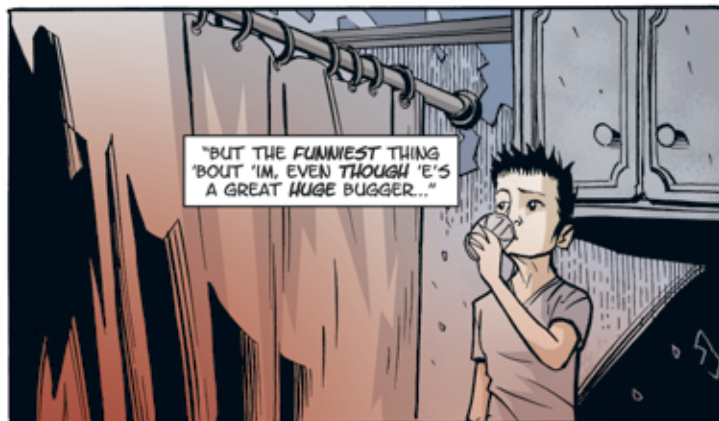
COURTNEY WISHED
FOR SOME DAYS
AFTERWARD SHE
HADN'T ASKED. IT
SEEMED THERE WERE
SOME THINGS SHE
DIDN'T NEED TO
KNOW AFTER ALL.

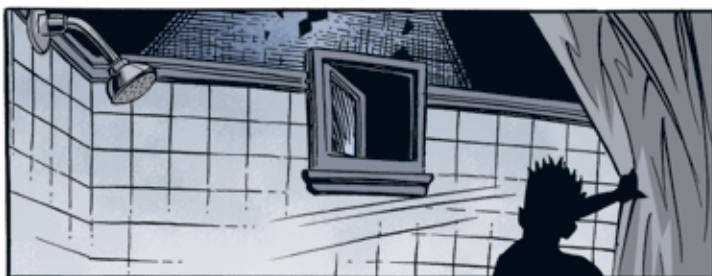
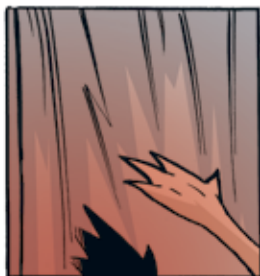
THE GOBLIN
SMILED ITS NASTY
LITTLE SMILE.

AND THEN
IT TOLD COURTNEY
ABOUT THE
WORST
HOBGOBLIN
THAT EVER
WAS.











WE'LL
SEE HOW THIS
BEAST LIKES THE
TASTE OF THE
FIRE AMULET.



AAAAAAAAHHH!!!

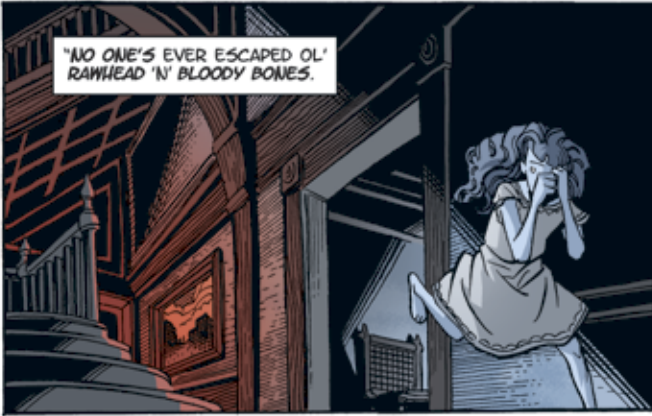


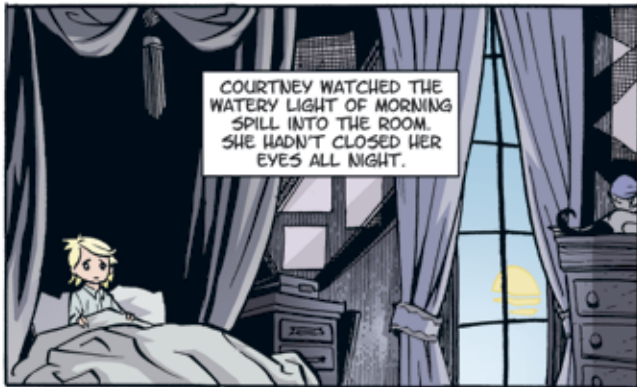
RUN,
BABY.

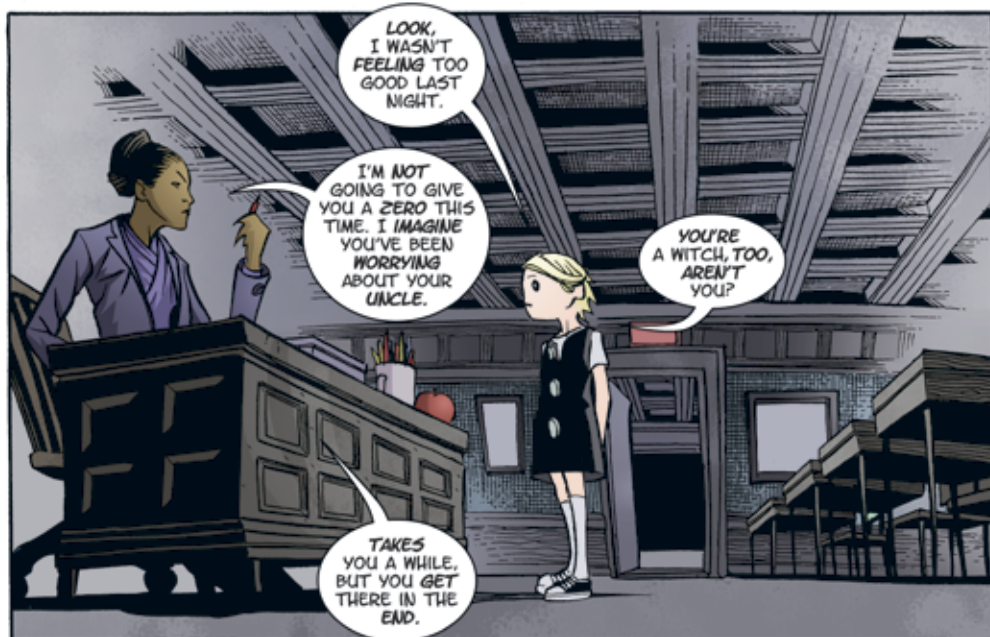
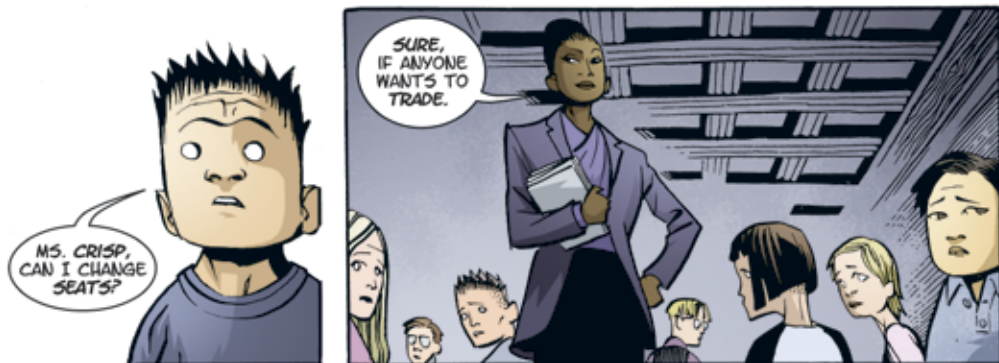


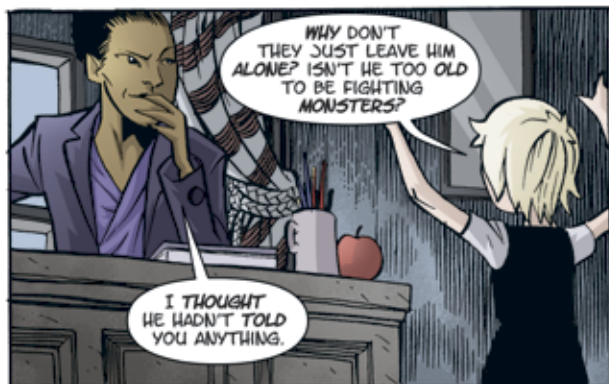
LET
THE IMMORTAL
BODIES CURSE
YOU, UNCLEAN
THING!

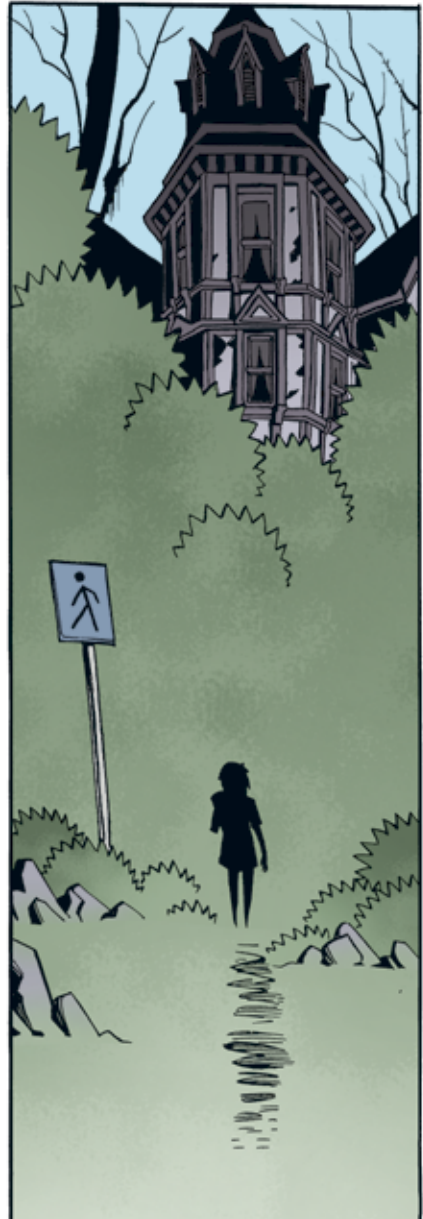
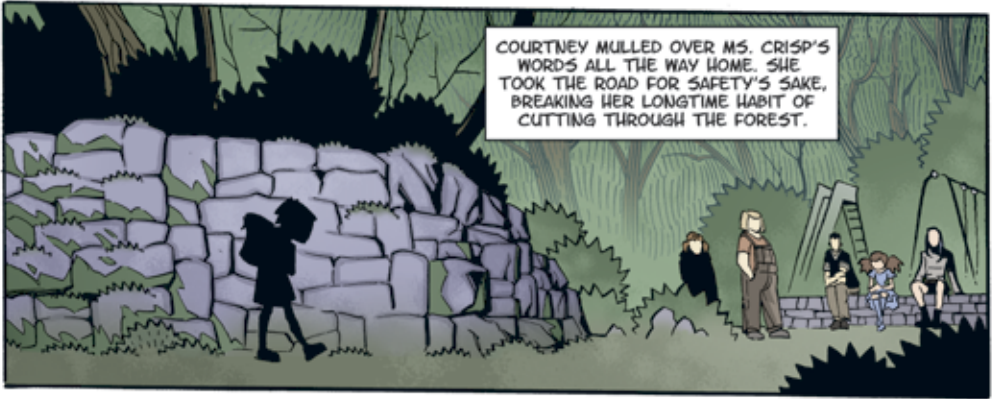
















I JUST HOPE WE CAN FIND THE BLOODY THING BEFORE IT HURTS ANYONE ELSE.



I DON'T THINK WE HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT THAT, WOODRUE.

WHY NOT?



BECAUSE SOMETHING TELLS ME IT'S COMING HERE.



HMMM...

I'LL BE BACK SOON.

HAVE A GOOD TIME.



COURTNEY DIDN'T REALLY KNOW WHAT SHE INTENDED TO DO.



SHE HAD NO PLAN, AND COULD THINK OF NO SPELLS THAT WOULD BE OF ANY USE.



BUT SHE COULDN'T SIT IN HER BED ANOTHER NIGHT KNOWING THAT HER UNCLE WAS OUT ALONE, FACING AN UNSTOPPABLE MONSTER.

PARDON, MISS.



OF COURSE, SHE HADN'T THOUGHT SHE'D BE FACING IT ALONE HERSELF.

DO YOU LIVE IN THAT HOUSE?



ME? UH...

NO. I LIVE, UH, DOWN THE STREET.

I DIDN'T JUST SEE YOU COMING OUT THE BACK DOOR OF THAT HOUSE?

THAT ONE BEHIND YOU?



OH, YEAH, THAT HOUSE. I WAS, UH, JUST VISITING.

I SEE.



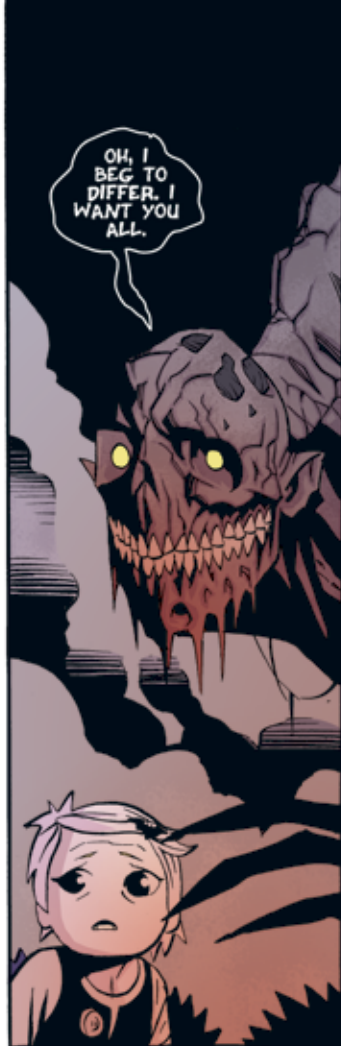
YOU WOULDN'T BE LYING TO OLD TOMMY, NOW WOULD YOU?



COURTNEY!!!

BACK AWAY.

I'M THE ONE YOU WANT, CREATURE.



OH, I BEG TO DIFFER. I WANT YOU ALL.



THEN TAKE ME FIRST, IF YOU CAN.

I AM FAT ON YOUR KIND, WARLOCK, BUT ONE MORE WON'T HURT.

DO YOUR WORST.

I HAVE BEEN CURSED A THOUSAND TIMES BY SUCH AS YOU.

I AM A JUMBLE OF CURSES.





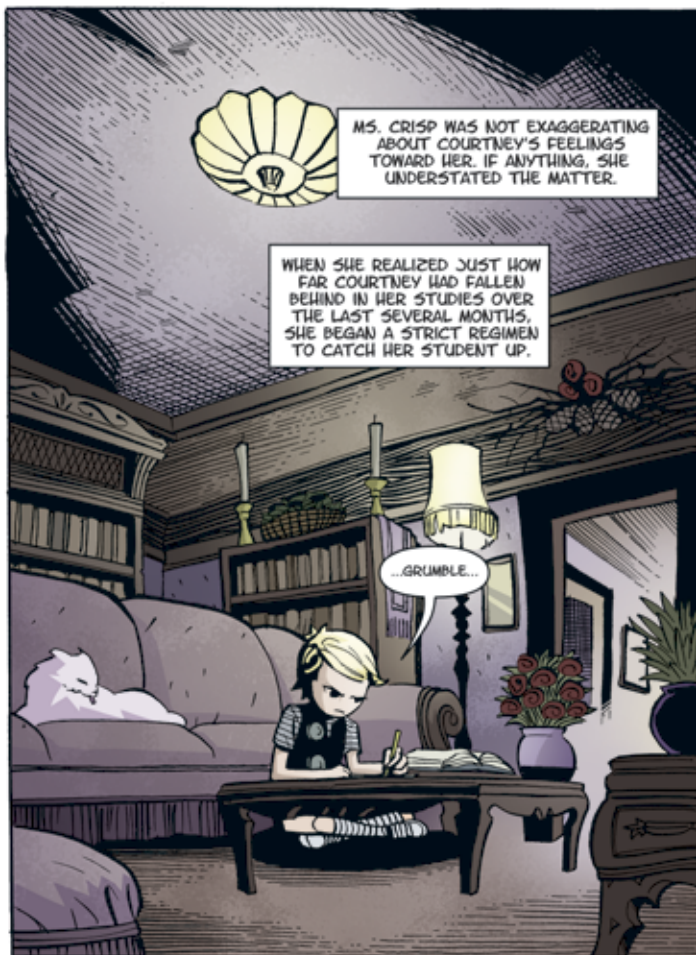


Chapter Two









MS. CRISP WAS NOT EXAGGERATING ABOUT COURTNEY'S FEELINGS TOWARD HER. IF ANYTHING, SHE UNDERSTATED THE MATTER.

WHEN SHE REALIZED JUST HOW FAR COURTNEY HAD FALLEN BEHIND IN HER STUDIES OVER THE LAST SEVERAL MONTHS, SHE BEGAN A STRICT REGIMEN TO CATCH HER STUDENT UP.

...GRUMBLE...



COURTNEY WAS BEGINNING TO LOATHE HER.

THIS ESSAY WAS MUCH BETTER.

I SUSPECTED THERE WAS AN INTELLIGENT GIRL SOMEWHERE UNDERNEATH THAT SCOWL.



GEE, THANKS.

CAN I GO YET?



AS SOON AS YOU FINISH READING THAT CHAPTER.



I'VE GOT TO RUN SOME ERRANDS. WOULD YOU MIND LOCKING UP AFTER YOURSELF?



QUICK WASN'T THE FIRST TALKING CAT THAT COURTNEY HAD COME ACROSS. SHE WAS BEGINNING TO SUSPECT THAT THE NEIGHBORHOOD WAS FULL OF THEM. SHE WASN'T EXACTLY AN ANIMAL PERSON, AND REGARDED CATS AS TCHOTCHKES THAT WALKED ABOUT.

BUT SHE WAS AN INQUISITIVE GIRL, AS I'VE MENTIONED BEFORE, AND HER CURIOSITY WAS PIQUED.

WHAT'S THE DEAL ANYWAY?

CAN ALL CATS TALK, OR WAS THERE SOME RADIATION LEAKAGE AROUND HERE OR SOMETHING?



WHETHER A CAT CAN TALK OR NOT IS THE CAT'S BUSINESS.

IT'S NOT FOR ME TO TELL, UNLESS THE CAT IS MYSELF.



UH-HUH. WHAT I GET FOR ASKING A CAT.

YOU CATCH ON FAST.



QUICK!

THERE YOU ARE.



WHAT'S THE HOLD-UP, GIRL? WE HAVE BUSINESS.



AH. HELLO, MISS CRUMRIN.



HEY, BOO. WHERE ARE YOU GUYS OFF TO?



NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS.

ACTUALLY, YOU MIGHT FIND THIS INTERESTING. COME WITH US.





SO NOW WE HOLD OUR SECRET COUNCILS TO ENTERTAIN MORTAL CHILDREN?

SOMEHOW I SUSPECT THE OTHERS WOULDN'T APPROVE.

PERHAPS NOT.

BUT I SOMETIMES THINK IT UNKIND NOT TO SHARE THE WISDOM OF THE NIGHT WITH LESSER CREATURES.



I SEE, AND YOU REALLY THINK SHE'S BRIGHT ENOUGH TO LEARN SOMETHING USEFUL?

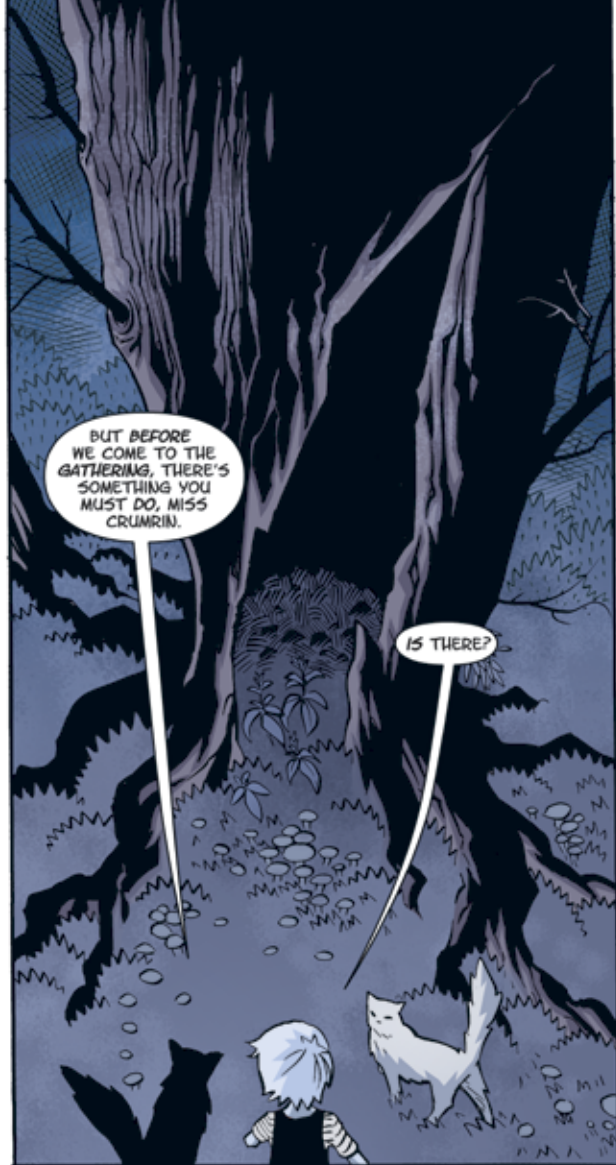
THAT IS UP TO HER.




GEE, GUYS, I'M HONORED.



YOU SHOULD BE, MORTAL. EVEN YOUR GREAT UNCLE HAS NEVER BEEN PRIVY TO OUR GATHERINGS.







COURTNEY HAD NEVER BEEN THIS DEEP INTO THE WOODS BEFORE.

NOT ONLY WERE THE TREES LARGER, BUT THE BUSHES AND UNDERGROWTH WERE THICKER AND GREW HIGHER THAN EVER, AS THOUGH THE WHOLE FOREST HAD GROWN TO IMMENSE PROPORTIONS.

WE'RE HERE.





WHERE ARE THE OTHER CATS?

I THOUGHT YOU SAID IT WAS A MEETING OR A COUNCIL OR SOMETHING.

USE YOUR EYES.



THEY'RE ALL AROUND YOU.

COURTNEY FELT THE HACKLES ON THE BACK OF HER NECK RISE. THE NIGHT WAS ALIVE WITH THE FIERCE GAZE OF HUNTERS.

THEY'RE HUGE.



NO, CHILD. YOU'VE SHED A BIT OF UNNECESSARY WEIGHT.

WHAT!!!
OH, YOU GOTTA BE KIDDING...



QUIET, GIRL.

DON'T WORRY. YOUR LARGE, LUMBERING FORM WILL RETURN IN THE MORNING.

FOR NOW, KEEP SILENT. MORTALS ARE FORBIDDEN HERE.



YOU'RE RISKING MUCH FOR YOUR ENLIGHTENMENT.

GREAT. THANKS FOR THE WARNING.

"THE BEST VIEW CAN ONLY BE HAD FROM THE MOST PRECARIOUS BOUGH."

OLD CAT SAYING.



MY KINDRED.

AT THE BIRTH OF NIGHT, I GREET YOU.

WHO'S THAT?

TOBERMORY, THE LEADER OF THE PRIDES.

IN AS MUCH AS WE HAVE LEADERS.

COURTNEY HAD NEVER SEEN SUCH A CAT. HE WAS HUGE AND SCARRED AS THOUGH FROM A THOUSAND BATTLES.



HE LOOKED AS IF HE COULD GIVE A FAIR FIGHT TO A TIMBERWOLF.

MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN DO NOT GLADLY GATHER IN THIS FASHION, UNLESS SOMETHING OF GREAT CONSEQUENCE DRAWS THEM.



IT HAS.

SOME OF HIS SCARS, COURTNEY SAW, WERE FRESH, MOST NOTABLY THE ONE ACROSS HIS LEFT EYE. THE REMAINING EYE WAS STILL BRIGHT AND KEEN, AND GAZED PIERCINGLY AT THE ASSEMBLY.



I HAVE FULFILLED THE DUTIES AND REAPED THE PROFITS OF LEADERSHIP FOR TWENTY WINTERS.

LAST NIGHT, AS WAS MY DUTY, I FACED DOWN AND SLEW THE HOUND OF RADLEY HALL.



IT WAS A COSTLY VICTORY.



AS ONE, THE GATHERED ANIMALS LOWERED THEIR HEADS IN RESPECTFUL SADNESS.



EXCEPT ONE.

A LEADER MUST LEAD BY EXAMPLE.



HE MUST BE THE GREATEST HUNTER AMONG US.



UNTIL YESTERDAY, I HELD THAT DISTINCTION.



BUT A HUNTER NEEDS TWO GOOD EYES, AND I SHALL ONLY EVER SEE AGAIN OUT OF ONE.

TONIGHT, YOU MUST SELECT A NEW LEADER.



SUDDENLY THE LABYRINTHINE BRANCHES WERE ALIVE WITH THE WHISPERINGS OF CATS. THE SOUND CHILLED COURTNEY TO THE BONES. ONE WORD SEEMED TO ECHO THROUGH THE ASSEMBLY.

MITTENS.



MITTENS, GRAY AS MOONLIGHT, WHICH SEEMED TO PASS THROUGH HIM, LEAVING HIM ALMOST INVISIBLE, BUT FOR HIS WHITE PAWS.



IT'S GOING TO BE A CLOSE THING. BOO IS WELL REGARDED, BUT MITTENS IS DEADLY.

DEADLIER THAN I, THOUGH I'M FAST AS MY NAME.



PERHAPS DEADLIER THAN BOO.

COURTNEY TRIED AGAIN TO PICK HIM OUT OF THE DARKNESS.



PERHAPS.



CERTAINLY QUIETER.



WE SHALL SEE.



INDEED.



A MEMBER OF YOUR PRIDE, QUICK?

YES. COURTNEY IS HER NAME.



A STRANGE ODOR.

NOT UNPLEASANT, BUT UNUSUAL TO BE SURE. ALMOST...

SILENCE.



TOBERMORY SPEAKS.



THE HUNT BEGINS TONIGHT. YOU, WHO WOULD BE LEADER, MUST KNOW THAT TO RULE A SINGLE CAT, MUCH LESS ALL CATS, IS AN IMPOSSIBLE TASK.



THEREFORE, YOU MUST SHOW US THAT YOU ARE EQUAL TO IT BY HUNTING THE UNCATCHABLE PREY.



YOU HUNT
THAT CREATURE ONCE
CALLED IN THE ANCIENT
WORLD "ELLYLLDAN,"
THE ELVEN FIRE.

IGNORANT
MEN NOW CALL
IT "THE WILL O'
THE WISP."



RETURN
WITH THIS PRIZE
AND TOMORROW
THE PRIDES WILL
BE IN YOUR
CHARGE.

THE WHA-
DA-BA-WHO?



BOO?

QUICK?



NOT EAGER
FOR THE HUNT,
I SEE.



N-NO, SIR.
I WAS JUST SORT
OF WATCHING.



YOU CAME
WITH BOO. I SMELL
HIM ON YOU. A FINE
ANIMAL.

I
GUESS.



WERE IT UP TO ME, I'D NAME HIM AS MY SUCCESSOR.

BUT LEADERSHIP MUST BE EARNED. IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO PRESERVE THE RESPECT OF OUR KIND.



DO YOU THINK HE'LL WIN?

I'VE SEEN MANY SKILLED HUNTERS IN MY NIGHTS UPON THIS EARTH. BOO IS ONE OF THE BEST.

HE WOULD MAKE A GREAT LEADER.

BUT HE WILL NOT WIN.

YOU THINK MITTENS'LL BEAT HIM?



MITTENS IS DEADLY.

I'M SADDENED, FOR ALL WILL SUFFER UNDER HIS RULE.



HE IS COLD AND CRUEL, MORE SO THAN IS GOOD EVEN FOR A CAT.

THAT SUCKS.

INDEED.



BUT YOU CAME HERE TO WATCH, YOU SAID.



YOU'D BETTER MOVE FAST, OR YOU'LL SEE NOTHING, AND YOUR JOURNEY WILL BE IN VAIN.



SUDDENLY COURTNEY FOUND HERSELF PLUMMETING TO THE EARTH. IN A PANIC SHE TWISTED ROUND TO SEE THE GROUND COMING UP TOWARD HER.



WITH HER CAT EYES, SHE SAW THE FOREST ANEW. EACH RAY OF THE MOON ILLUMINATED THE TREES WITH A FROSTY BRILLIANCE. OF THE OTHER CATS THERE WAS NO SIGN.



YET SOMETHING PROPELLED HER FORWARD; A COMPELLING SENSE WHICH LED TO BOO.



WHEN SHE FOUND HIM, HER NEWLY ACQUIRED INSTINCTS HELD HER SILENT. HE WAS PREPARING TO SPRING.



HIS PREY MUST HAVE BEEN CLOSE, BUT SHE COULDN'T AS YET SEE IT.



...BLIND TO ALL ELSE.





TRUE.
I SHALL
NOT FORGET
AGAIN.



THEN HE MELTED
INTO THE NIGHT.

YOU
OKAY?

YES, BUT
NOW HE'LL MORE
EASILY SMELL
MY COMING.

SHOULDN'T
YOU BE TRYING TO
CATCH THE THING
YOURSELF?



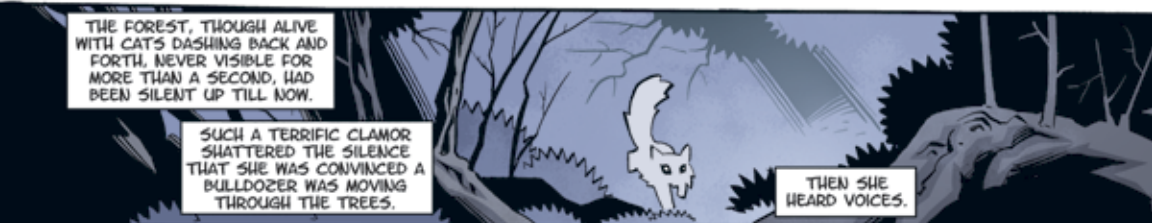
PERHAPS,
I CERTAINLY
SHOULDN'T BE
SITTING HERE
LICKING MY
WOUNDS.

FAREWELL.

BOO SLIPPED LIKE A
SHADOW INTO THE
DARKNESS, LEAVING
COURTNEY ALONE
ONCE AGAIN.



JUST AS SHE
RESOLVED TO
FOLLOW, SHE
HEARD STRANGE
NOISES.



THE FOREST, THOUGH ALIVE
WITH CATS DASHING BACK AND
FORTH, NEVER VISIBLE FOR
MORE THAN A SECOND, HAD
BEEN SILENT UP TILL NOW.

SUCH A TERRIFIC CLAMOR
SHATTERED THE SILENCE
THAT SHE WAS CONVINCED A
BULLDOZER WAS MOVING
THROUGH THE TREES.

THEN SHE
HEARD VOICES.



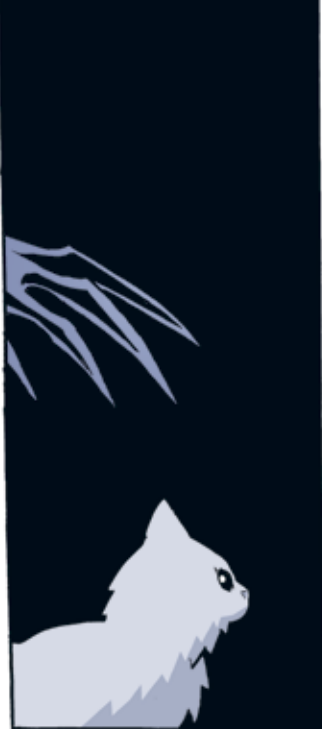
HUMAN VOICES.

THERE.
DO YOU SEE
THE TRACK?

THE BEAST
CAN'T BE FAR. THE
UNDERBRUSH IS
STILL MOVING.







COURTNEY WENT RIGID AS SHE TURNED TO MEET THE GAZE OF THE CREATURE. WHAT SHE SAW IN ITS EYES GAVE HER PAUSE.



THEN IT DEFTLY PLUNGED BACK INTO THE FOREST.



COURTNEY WAS QUITE ASTONDED. SHE'D MET MANY CREATURES OF THE NIGHT, BEFRIENDED A FEW, BEEN CHARMED BY SOME, REPELLED BY OTHERS. SHE'D NEVER REALLY CONSIDERED BEFORE WHETHER ANY OF THEM HAD A SOUL.

LOOKING INTO THIS ONE'S EYES, SHE HAD NO DOUBT.

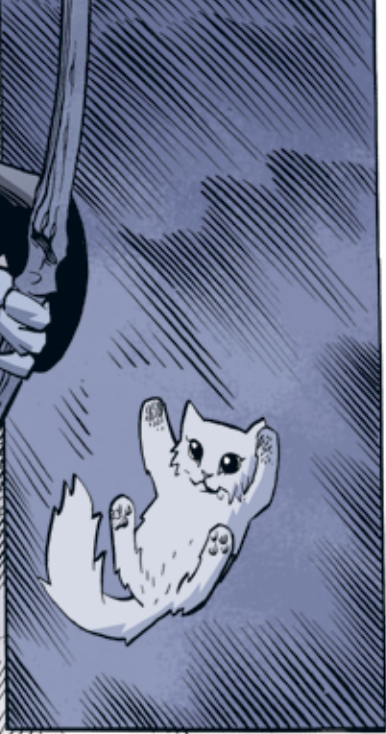


FILLED WITH WONDER, SHE DETERMINED TO MEET IT AGAIN.





HUH?!

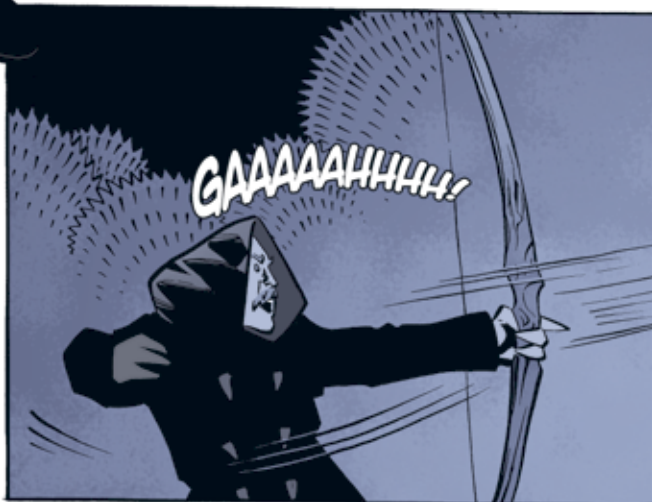


YOU AGAIN!



I'LL KILL YOU, YOU LITTLE-

HECTOR!



GAAAAAHHHH!



EHEM.



PROFESSOR!?!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?



I MIGHT ASK YOU THE SAME QUESTION.



RATHER UNSPORTSMANLIKE CHOICE OF QUARRY, DON'T YOU THINK?

I'M SO SORRY, PROFESSOR. I WAS HUNTING—

I KNOW WHAT YOU WERE HUNTING.



I THINK YOU SHOULD GO HOME NOW.



BUT PROFESSOR...



YES, SIR.



AND YOU TOO, YOUNG LADY.

IT'S PAST YOUR BEDTIME.



WHEN COURTNEY RETURNED TO THE TREE, THE CAT'S HAD GATHERED AGAIN. BOO LAY IN A CORNER, LICKING MANY WOUNDS.



ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

THE CLAW THAT DOES NOT SLAY ME STRENGTHENS ME.



DID YOU CATCH IT? THE WILL-O-THINGY?

NO.

MITTENS.



A GREAT HUNTER. BETTER THAN I.



HE TRACKED HIS PREY AS I NEVER COULD.

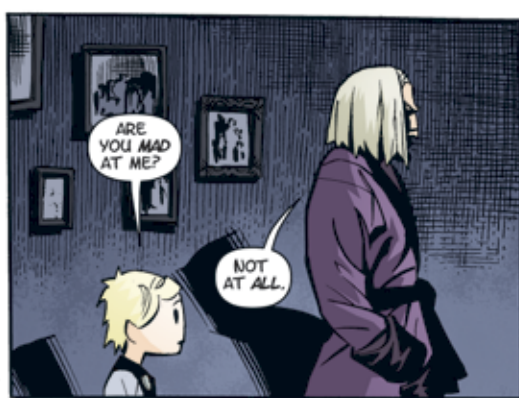
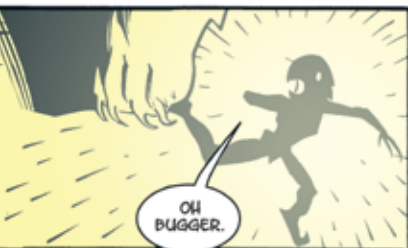


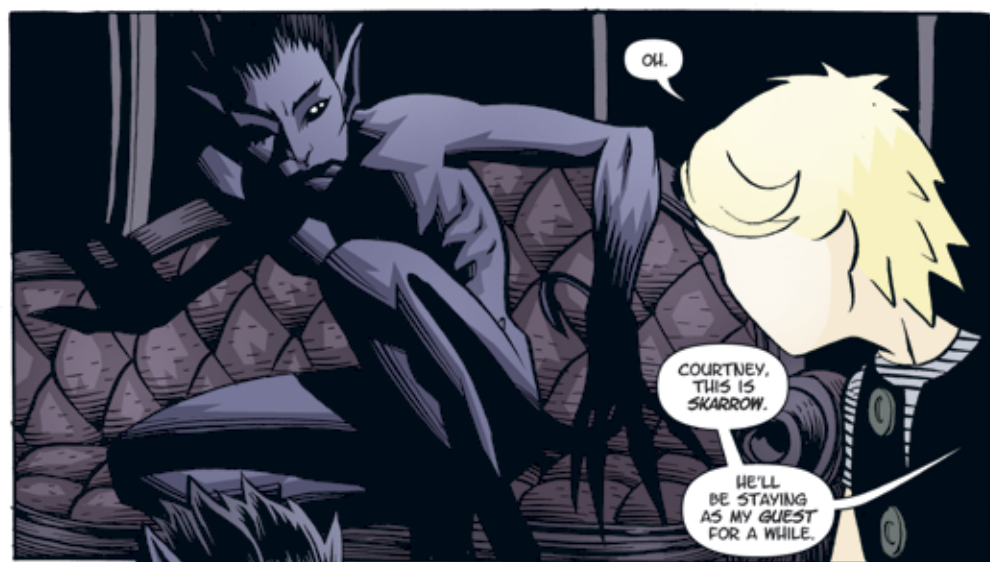
YET HE'S NOT AS WISE AS SOME AMONG US. HE FORGOT, OR NEVER LEARNED, THAT THE ELVEN FIRE LURES THOSE WHO SEEK IT TO THEIR DOOM.



MITTENS SANK INTO THE MARL-PIT.








Chapter Three







MADAM HARKEN'S GARDEN WAS OVERGROWN EVEN BY HILLSBOROUGH STANDARDS, AND THAT'S SAYING SOMETHING.



BUT THEN, AS YOU MAY HAVE HEARD, SHE WASN'T THE SORT OF WITCH WHO STROVE TO KEEP UP APPEARANCES.

I CALLED YOU ROUND AS SOON AS I'D HEARD, PROFESSOR.

YOU KNOW HER BEST.

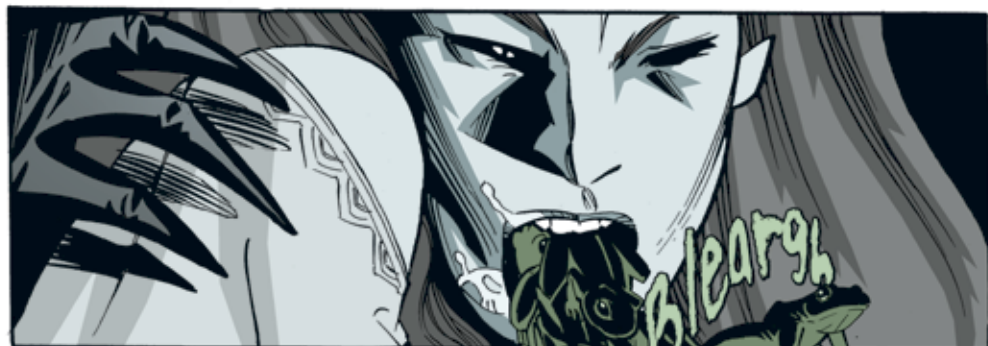
PERHAPS. YEARS AGO.

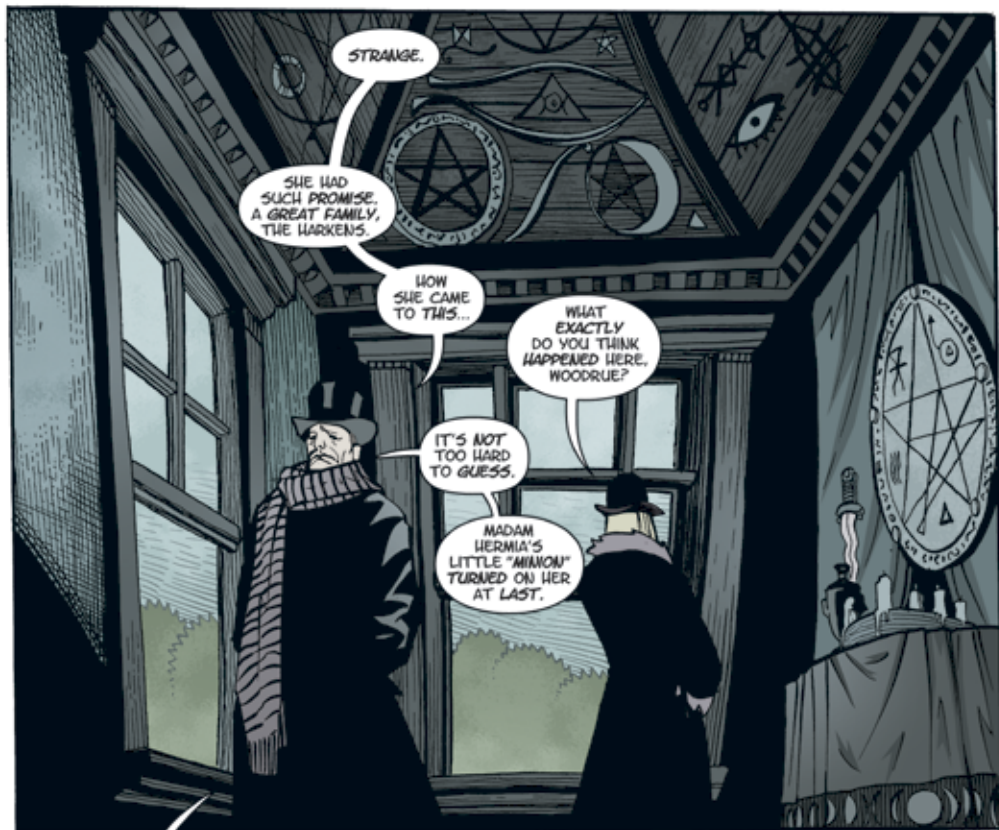


THE HOUSE WAS DARK AND DISHEVELED; BOOKS CLUTTERED THE SHELVES, KNICK-KNACKS OBSESSIVELY COLLECTED ON EVERY SURFACE.

DUST COATED EVERYTHING.

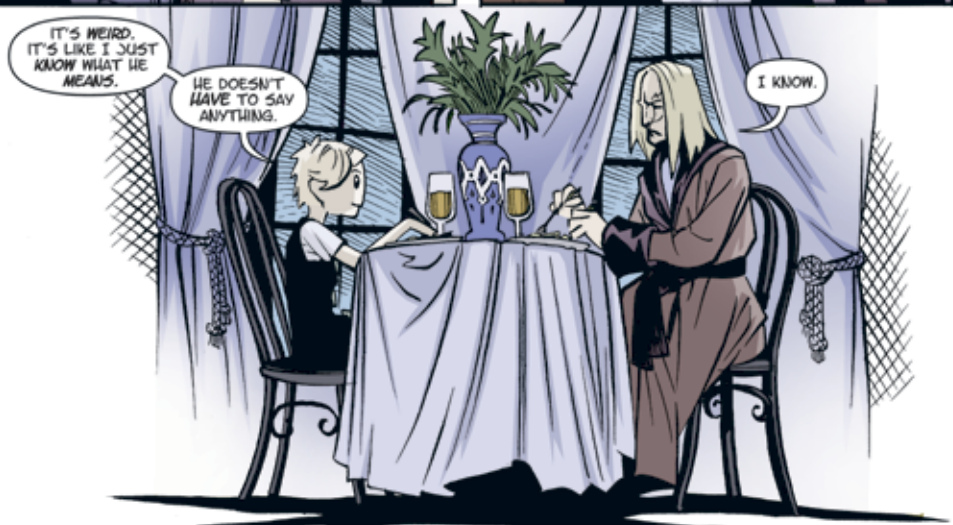
MADAM HARKEN?

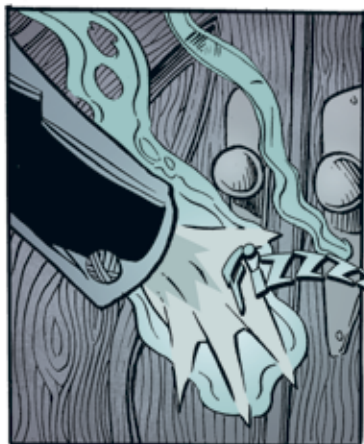






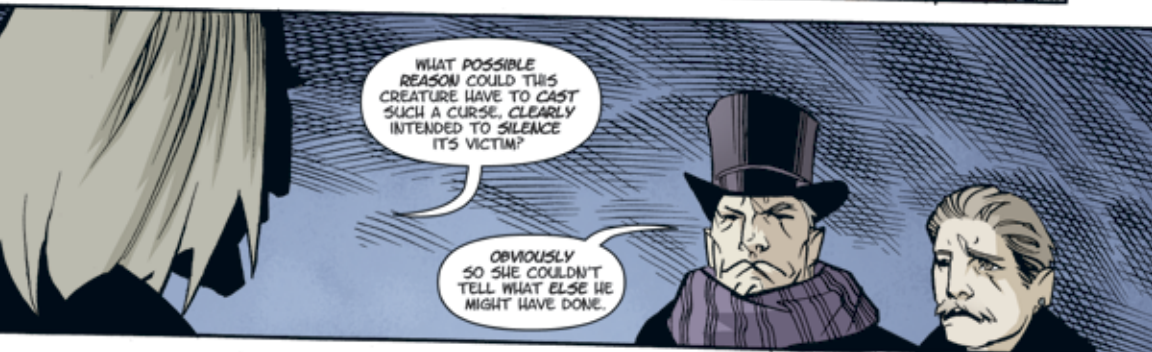
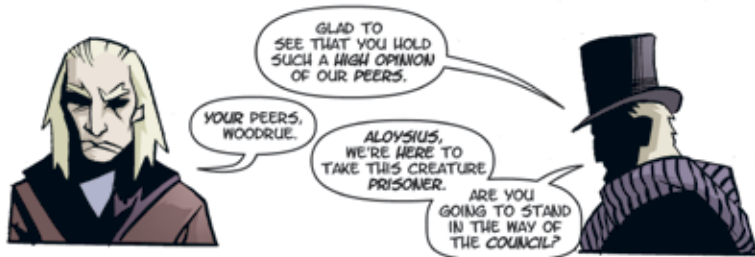






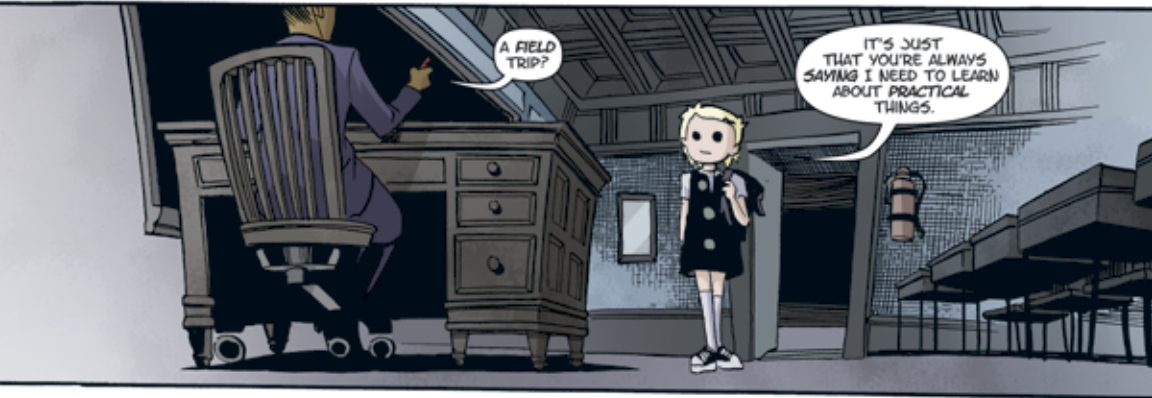






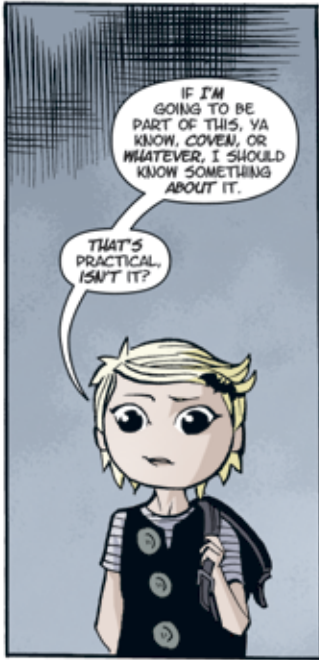






A FIELD TRIP?

IT'S JUST THAT YOU'RE ALWAYS SAYING I NEED TO LEARN ABOUT PRACTICAL THINGS.



IF I'M GOING TO BE PART OF THIS, YA KNOW, COVEN, OR WHATEVER, I SHOULD KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT IT.

THAT'S PRACTICAL, ISN'T IT?



EXTREMELY SO.

TELL YOU WHAT. YOU KNOW THAT CREATIVE WRITING PROJECT YOU WERE PLANNING ON NOT DOING?



I WAS GOING TO-

UH UHH.

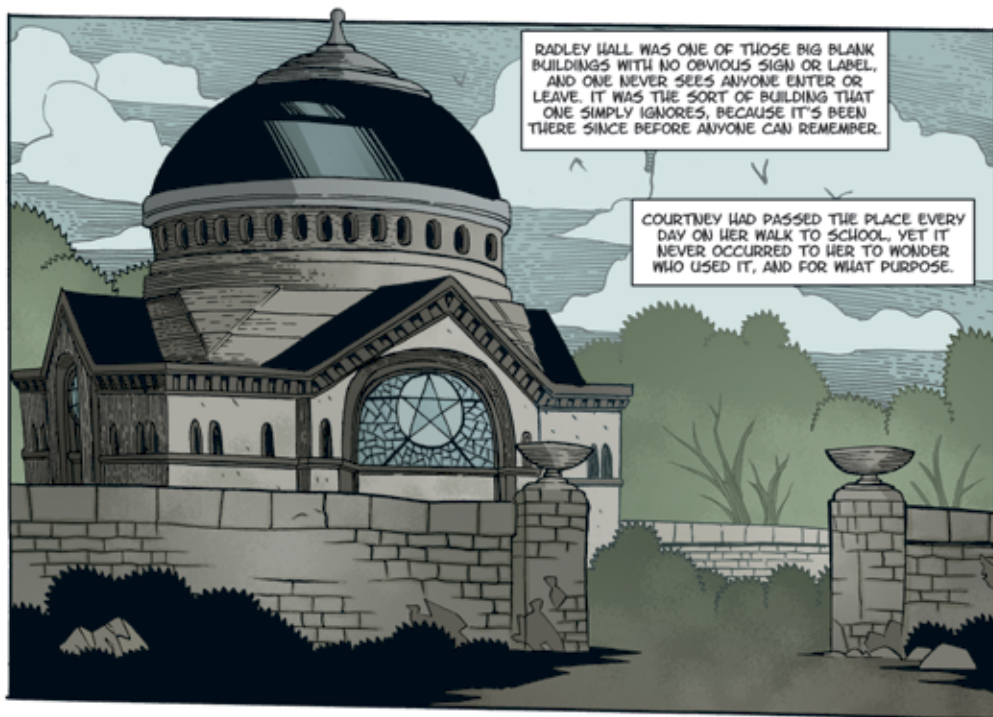
OKAY, I'LL DO IT.



AND READ IT IN FRONT OF CLASS, JUST LIKE EVERYONE ELSE.



YES, MS. CRISP.



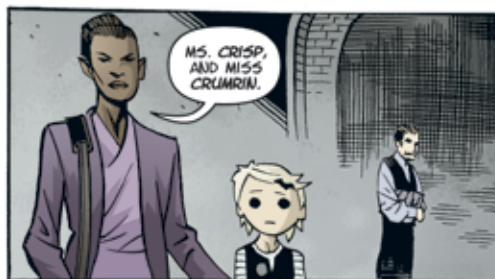
RADLEY HALL WAS ONE OF THOSE BIG BLANK BUILDINGS WITH NO OBVIOUS SIGN OR LABEL, AND ONE NEVER SEES ANYONE ENTER OR LEAVE. IT WAS THE SORT OF BUILDING THAT ONE SIMPLY IGNORES, BECAUSE IT'S BEEN THERE SINCE BEFORE ANYONE CAN REMEMBER.

COURTNEY HAD PASSED THE PLACE EVERY DAY ON HER WALK TO SCHOOL, YET IT NEVER OCCURRED TO HER TO WONDER WHO USED IT, AND FOR WHAT PURPOSE.



JUST TAKING MY STUDENT ON A TOUR, WE WON'T DISTURB ANYONE. SHE WANTS TO SEE THE HALL OF WONDERS.

NAMES?



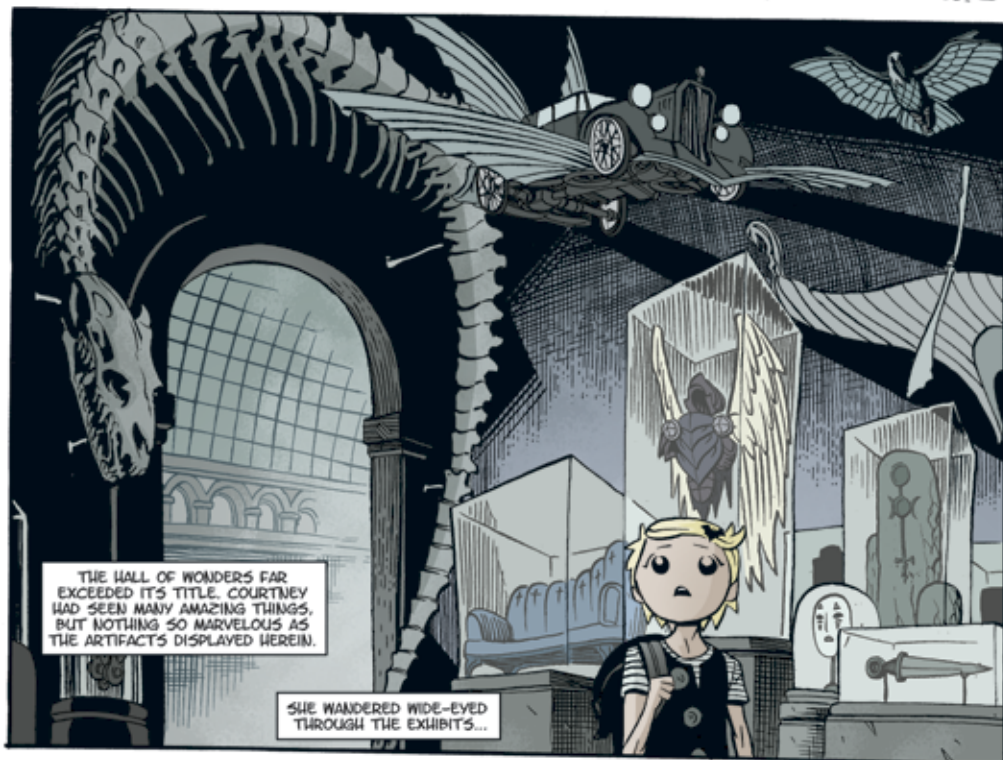
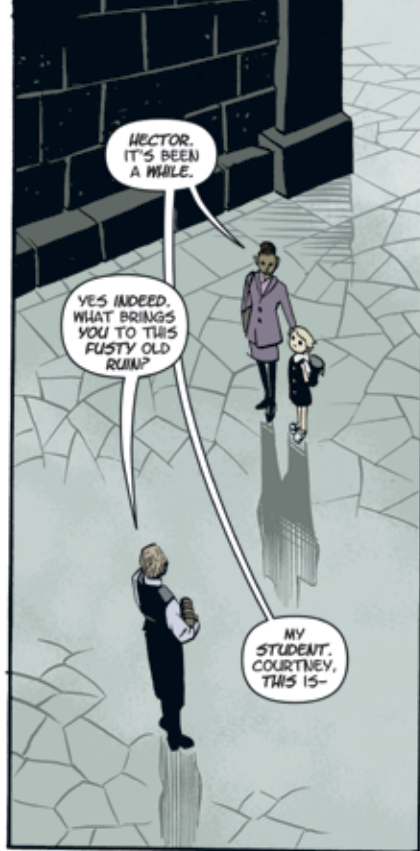
MS. CRISP, AND MISS CRUMMIN.

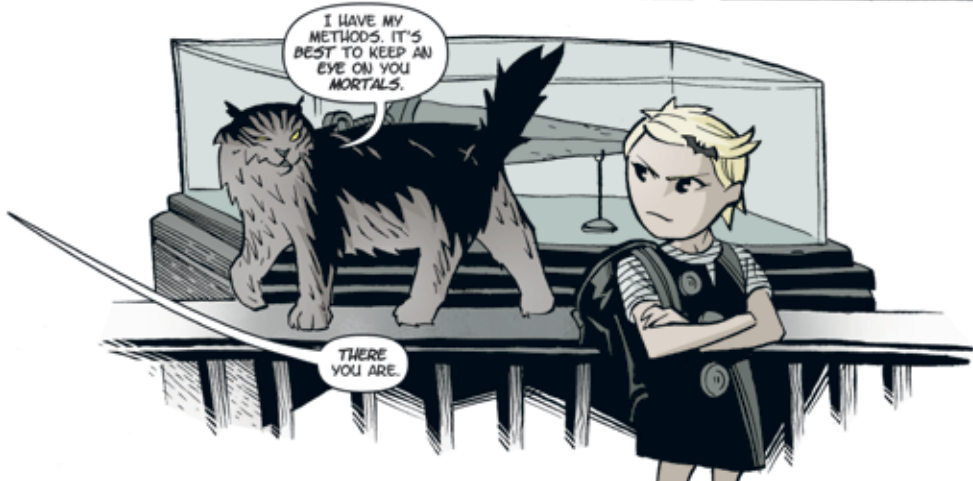
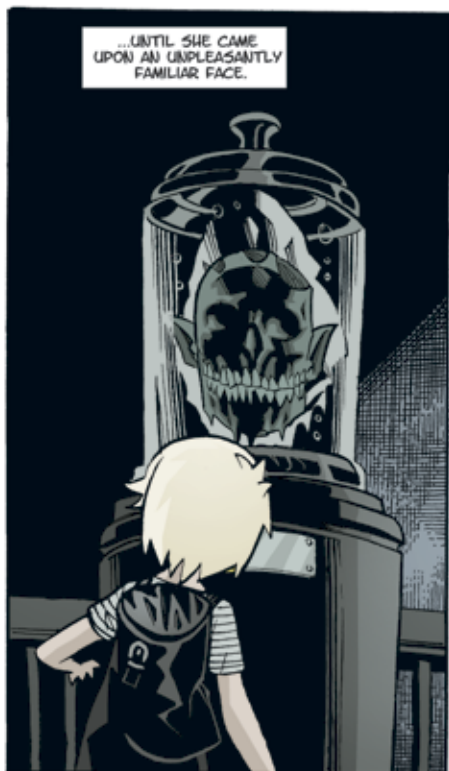


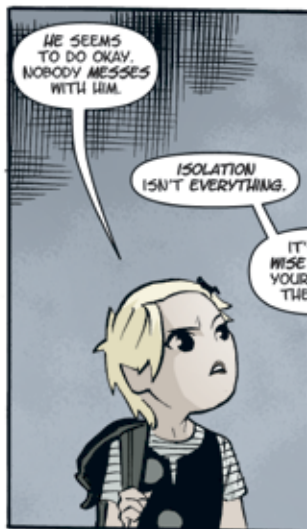
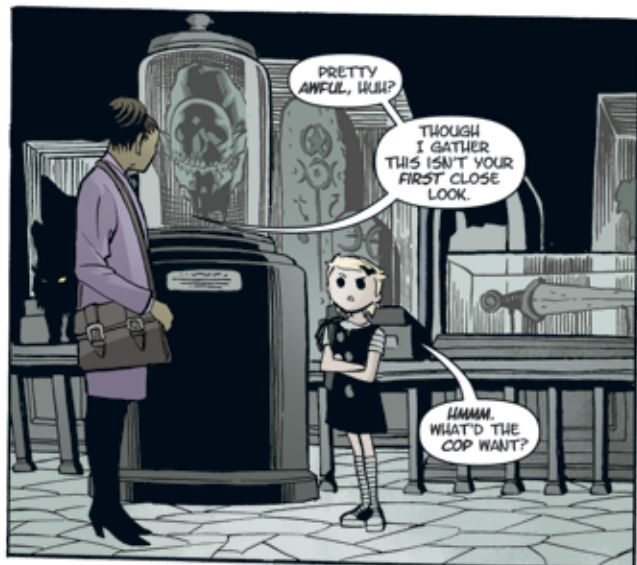
WHAT'S THE HALL OF WONDERS?

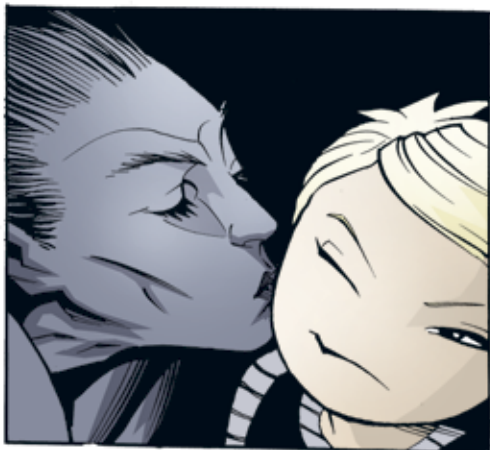
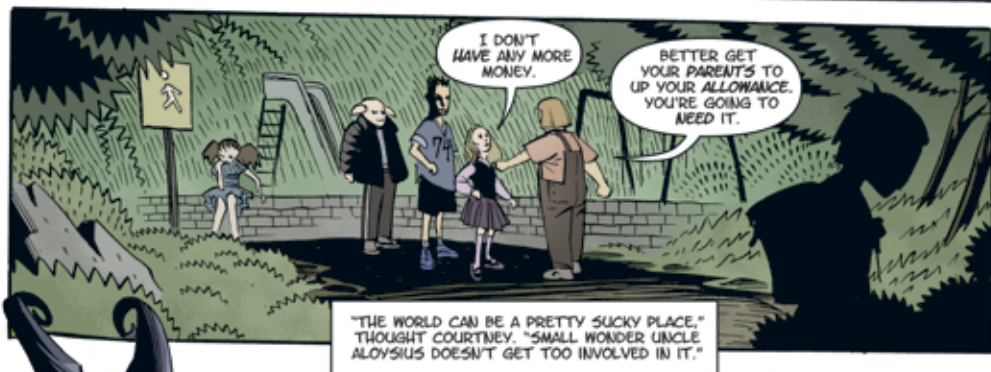
YOU'LL SEE.

CALPURNIA?











WORKING ON THE CASE?



BRUSHING UP ON THE ARCHAIC LAWS REGARDING SKARROW'S KIND.

WARLOCKS HAVE NEVER TRUSTED THE NIGHT THINGS.

WHY NOT?



WITCHCRAFT CAME INTO BEING PARTIALLY TO COUNTER THE CREATURES OF THE UNDERWORLD.

IN OLDER TIMES THEY WERE BLAMED FOR EVERYTHING FROM ECLIPSES TO TOOTHACHES.

I'M AFRAID THE PREJUDICE HAS STUCK THROUGHOUT THE AGES, DESPITE CENTURIES OF RESEARCH. PEOPLE LIKE WOODRUE WOULD STILL USE THEM AS SCAPEGOATS FOR ALL THE WORLD'S SORROWS.



BUT YOU WON'T LET THEM HURT HIM, WILL YOU?

I'LL CERTAINLY DO MY BEST, MY DEAR.



I'VE BEEN THINKING, SKARROW DIDN'T CAST THAT CURSE, RIGHT?

SO WHO DID?

GOOD QUESTION.

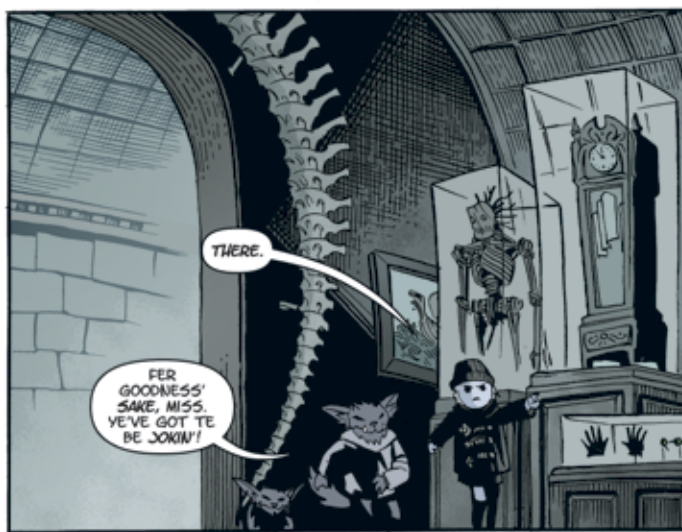


"WE'LL SEE ABOUT THAT," THOUGHT COURTNEY.

UNFORTUNATELY, THE ONLY PERSON WHO MIGHT KNOW CANNOT TELL US.















Chapter Four







THE JAUNDICE
ROOT, PLEASE.



SIX
SHILLINGS.



OW,
HEY!



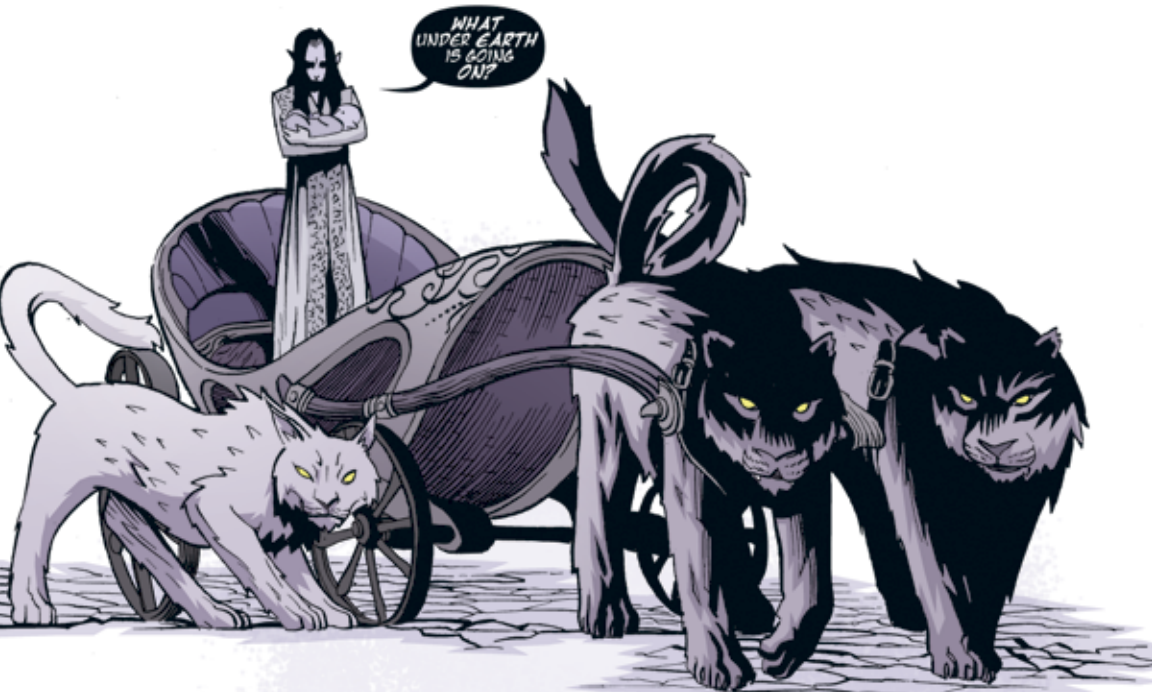
A MORTAL!
A MORTAL!



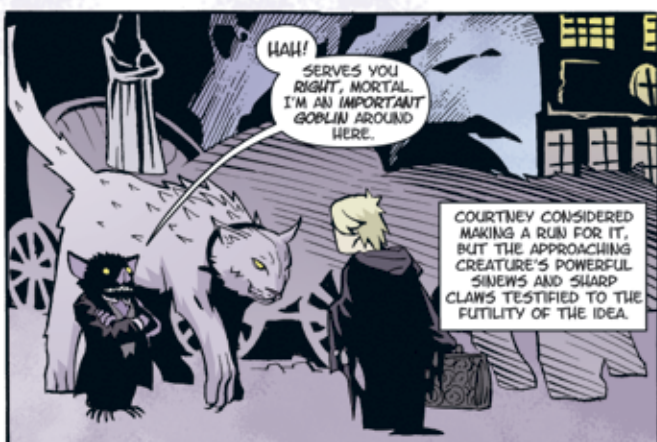
MIND YOUR
OWN BUSINESS,
FUZZY!



ANYBODY
ELSE WANT
SOME O'
THIS!?



THIS MORTAL ATTACKED ME, YOUR DREADFULNESS.



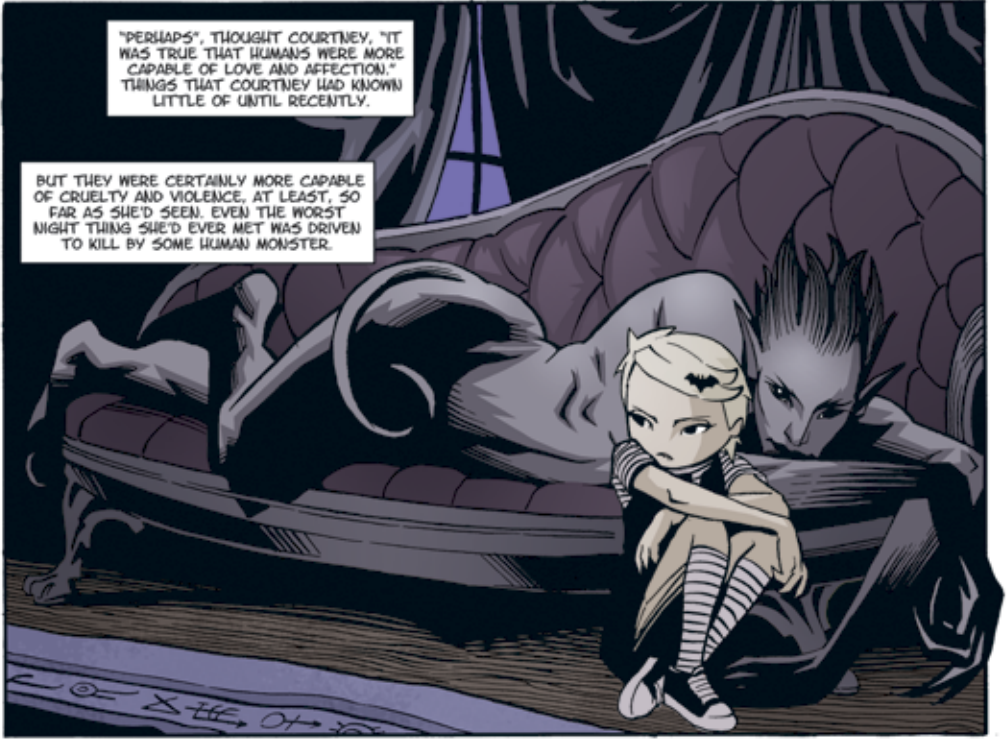






"PERHAPS", THOUGHT COURTNEY, "IT WAS TRUE THAT HUMANS WERE MORE CAPABLE OF LOVE AND AFFECTION." THINGS THAT COURTNEY HAD KNOWN LITTLE OF UNTIL RECENTLY.

BUT THEY WERE CERTAINLY MORE CAPABLE OF CRUELTY AND VIOLENCE, AT LEAST, SO FAR AS SHE'D SEEN. EVEN THE WORST NIGHT THING SHE'D EVER MET WAS DRIVEN TO KILL BY SOME HUMAN MONSTER.



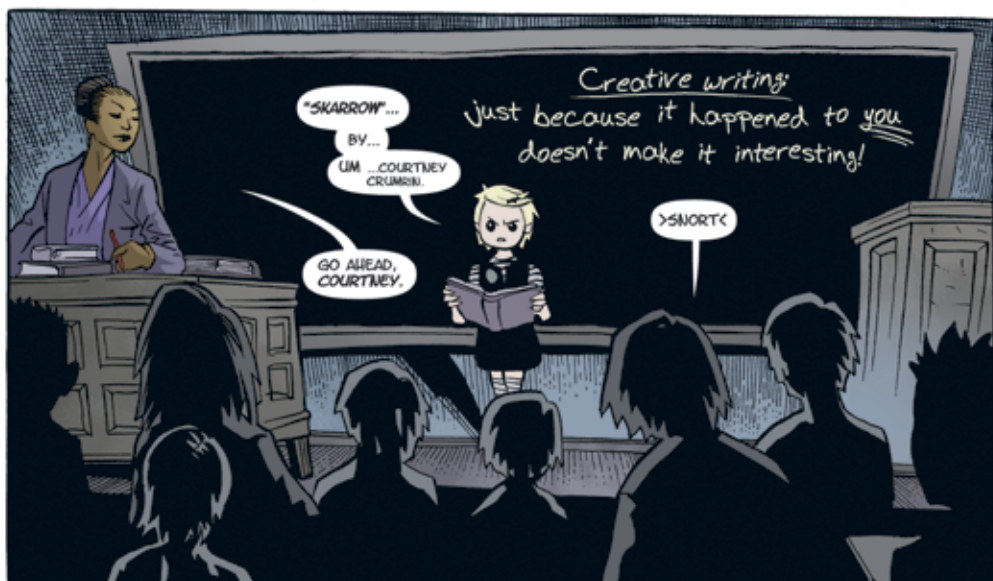
YOU BLEW IT, LEAVING YOUR PEOPLE TO BE WITH US.

WHAT'S HERMIA HARKEN EVER DONE FOR YOU?



SHE LOVED YOU, DIDN'T SHE?







DIMLY, AS COURTNEY READ AND THE HOTNESS OF EMBARRASSMENT FLUSHED HER FACE, SHE THOUGHT SHE COULD HEAR A THUNDERCLAP.

BUT PEOPLE FEAR AN OPEN HEART.

THE ROOM SEEMED TO DARKEN.



AND TEAR INNOCENCE APART.



HE'S CALLED A MONSTER BY THE FOOLS...



A DULL SENSE OF TOTAL HUMILIATION RESTED FIRMLY ON HER CHEST, MAKING BREATHING DIFFICULT, BUT SHE PLUNGED ON.

ROLLING THUNDER SHOOK THE ROOM, AND THE CHAIRS BEGAN TO VIBRATE.

WHO TREAT HIS KIND LIKE PETS AND TOOLS.



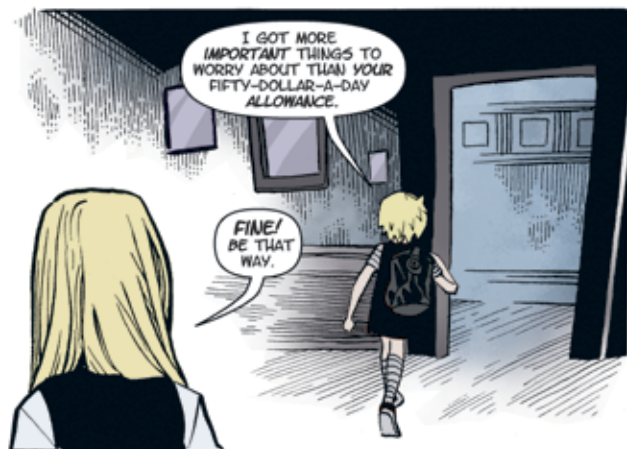
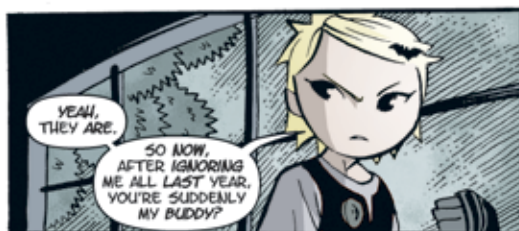
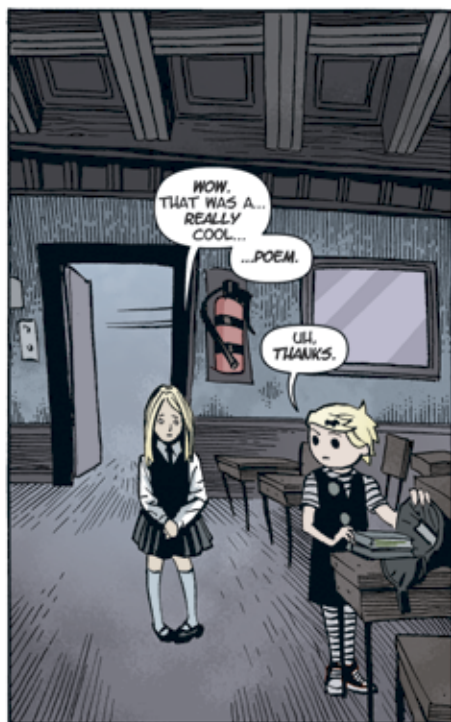
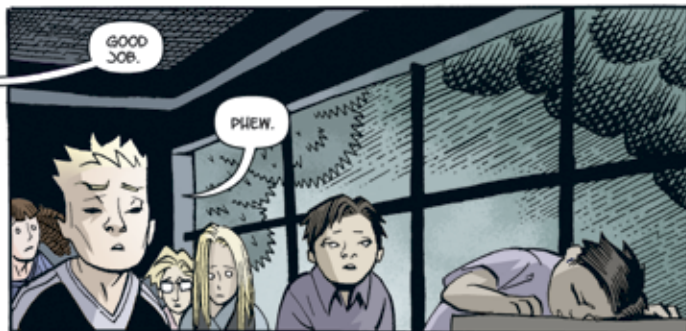
COURTNEY BARELY NOTICED, HER ONE THOUGHT TO GET THROUGH HER STUPID POEM AND BE DONE WITH IT.



I WISH I KNEW THE PERFECT CHARM...

TO SAVE HIM FROM THOSE WHO MEAN HIM HARM.

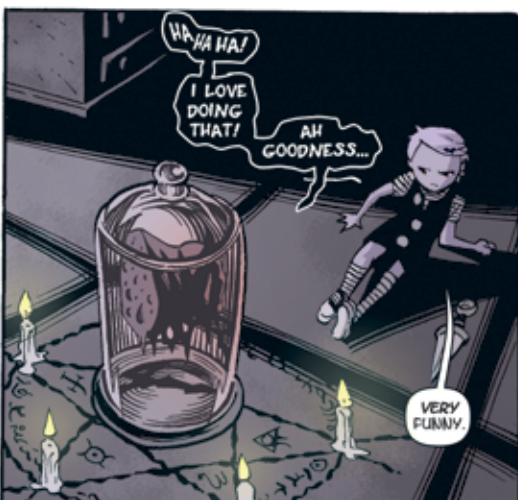
Creating because it makes it mak





O, DREADFUL SPIRIT, HEED MY CALL BY ELDRITCH POWER I THEE ENTHRALL.

SPEAK YE NOW THROUGH LIPS CLAY COLD DIVULGE THY SECRETS YET UNTOLD.



HA HA HA!

I LOVE DOING THAT!

AH GOODNESS...

VERY FUNNY.



WHAT HAPPENED TO MY BODY?

UNCLE A, YOU KNOW, THE WARLOCK WHO KICKED YOUR ASS...

HE SAID THEY BURNED IT AND THREW THE ASHES INTO THE MARL-PIT.

OH WELL. I'VE HAD WORSE.



SO WHO SUMMONED YOU?



I CANNOT TELL. I'VE BEEN BOUND TO SILENCE.



WASTE OF TIME.

POOR GIRL. WISH I COULD HELP.

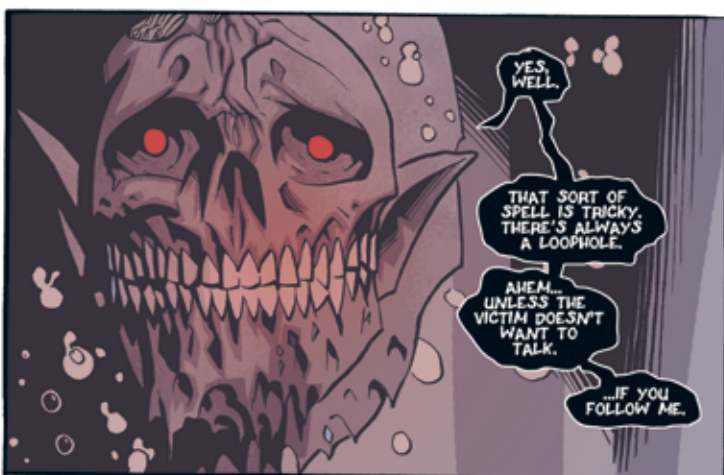


PERHAPS YOU SHOULD LOOK TO SEE WHO HAD THE MOST TO GAIN FROM MY MISCHIEF.

WAIT A MINUTE!

YOU JUST SAID YOU'RE UNDER A SILENCING SPELL.

DON'T HELPFUL HINTS COUNT?



YES, WELL.

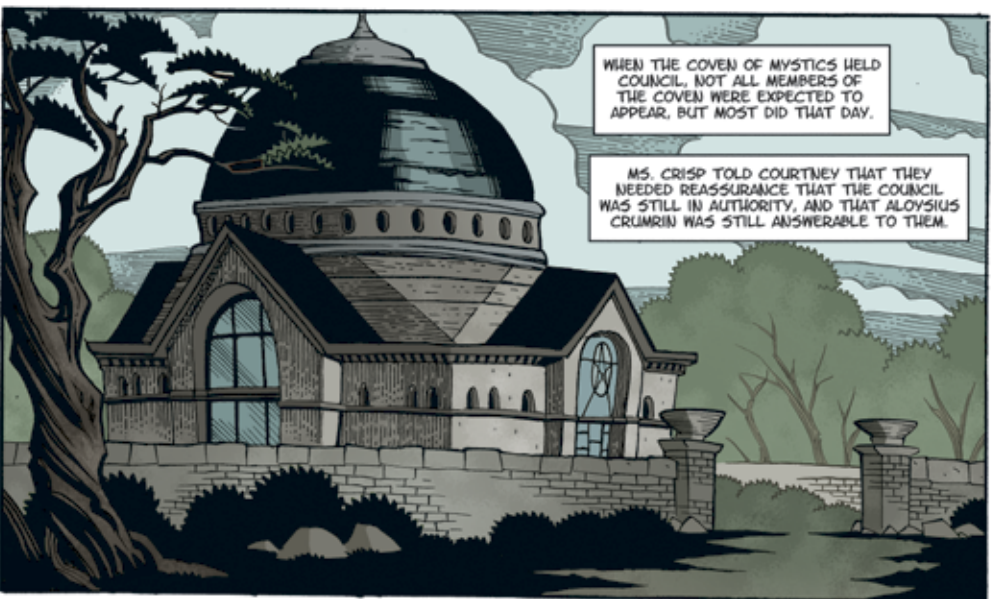
THAT SORT OF SPELL IS TRICKY. THERE'S ALWAYS A LOOPHOLE.

AH... UNLESS THE VICTIM DOESN'T WANT TO TALK.

...IF YOU FOLLOW ME.

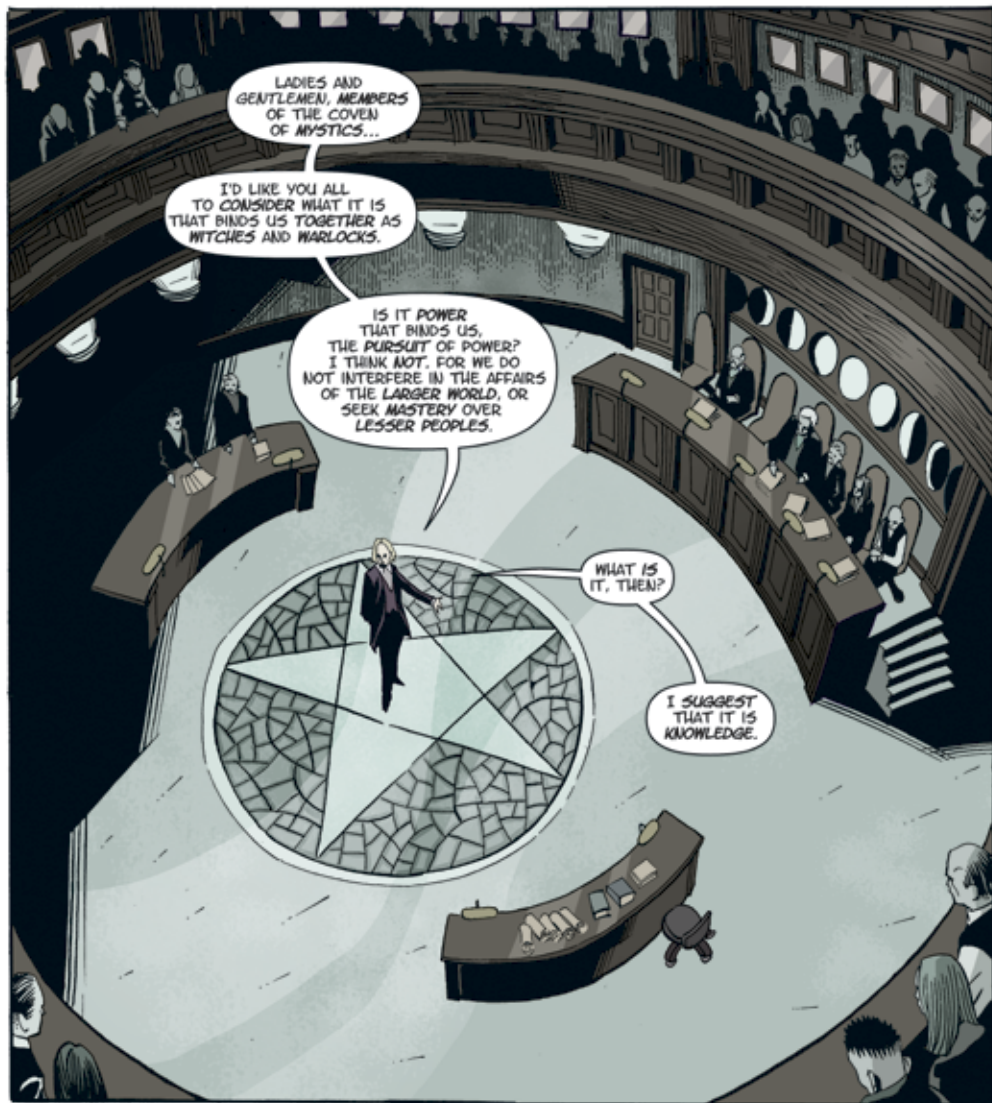


HMM. I THINK I DO...



WHEN THE COVEN OF MYSTICS HELD COUNCIL, NOT ALL MEMBERS OF THE COVEN WERE EXPECTED TO APPEAR, BUT MOST DID THAT DAY.

MS. CRISP TOLD COURTNEY THAT THEY NEEDED REASSURANCE THAT THE COUNCIL WAS STILL IN AUTHORITY, AND THAT ALOYSIUS CRUMMIN WAS STILL ANSWERABLE TO THEM.



LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, MEMBERS OF THE COVEN OF MYSTICS...

I'D LIKE YOU ALL TO CONSIDER WHAT IT IS THAT BINDS US TOGETHER AS WITCHES AND WARLOCKS.

IS IT POWER THAT BINDS US, THE PURSUIT OF POWER? I THINK NOT, FOR WE DO NOT INTERFERE IN THE AFFAIRS OF THE LARGER WORLD, OR SEEK MASTERY OVER LESSER PEOPLES.

WHAT IS IT, THEN?

I SUGGEST THAT IT IS KNOWLEDGE.

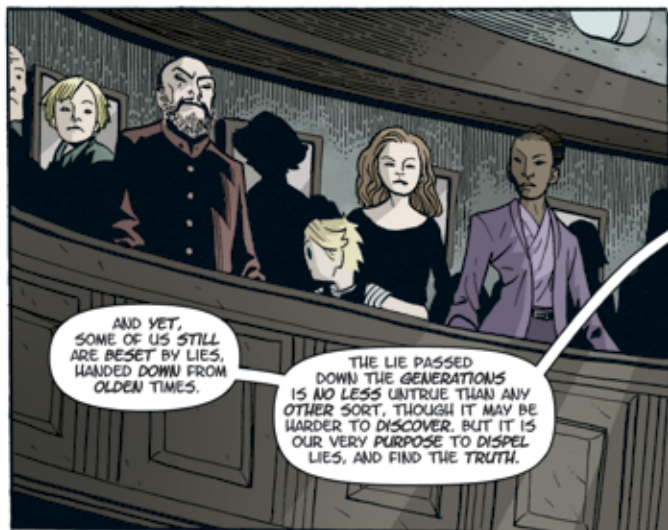


IT IS KNOWLEDGE THAT BINDS US; SHARED WISDOM FROM AGES PAST, AND NEW WISDOM FROM AGES THAT WE SHOULD ALL SEEK TO EMBRACE.

WISDOM IS OUR LEGACY; OUR REFUGE FROM THE WORLD OF THE IGNORANT AND THE FOOLISH.

WE CHOOSE THIS PATH THAT WE MIGHT WALK OPEN-EYED INTO THE FUTURE...

UNDAUNTED BY FEAR AND LIES.

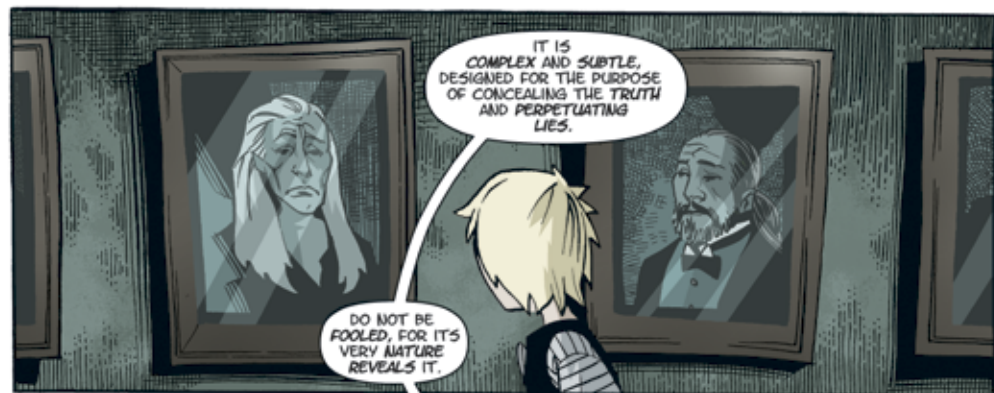


AND YET, SOME OF US STILL ARE BESET BY LIES, HANDED DOWN FROM OLDER TIMES.

THE LIE PASSED DOWN THE GENERATIONS IS NO LESS UNTRUE THAN ANY OTHER SORT, THOUGH IT MAY BE HARDER TO DISCOVER. BUT IT IS OUR VERY PURPOSE TO DISPEL LIES, AND FIND THE TRUTH.



THE CURSE THAT WAS AFFLICTED ONE OF OUR NUMBERS IS NO CREATION OF ANY SIMPLE CREATURE OF THE UNDERWORLD.

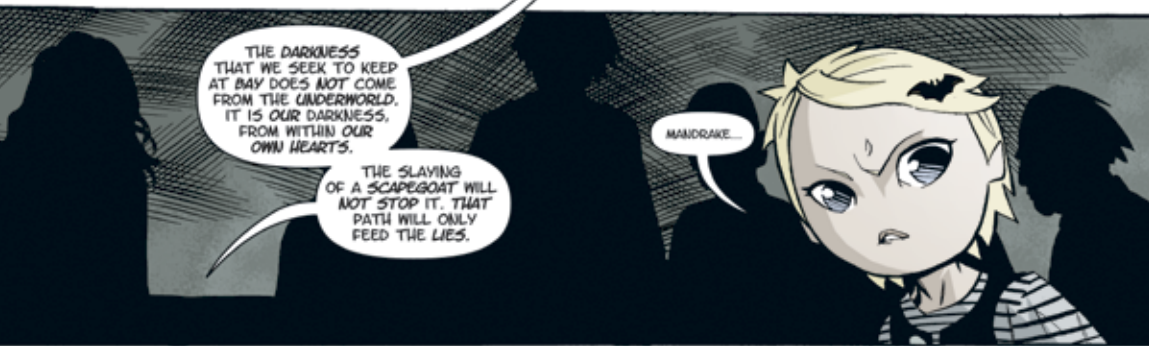


IT IS COMPLEX AND SUBTLE, DESIGNED FOR THE PURPOSE OF CONCEALING THE TRUTH AND PERPETUATING LIES.

DO NOT BE FOOLED, FOR ITS VERY NATURE REVEALS IT.



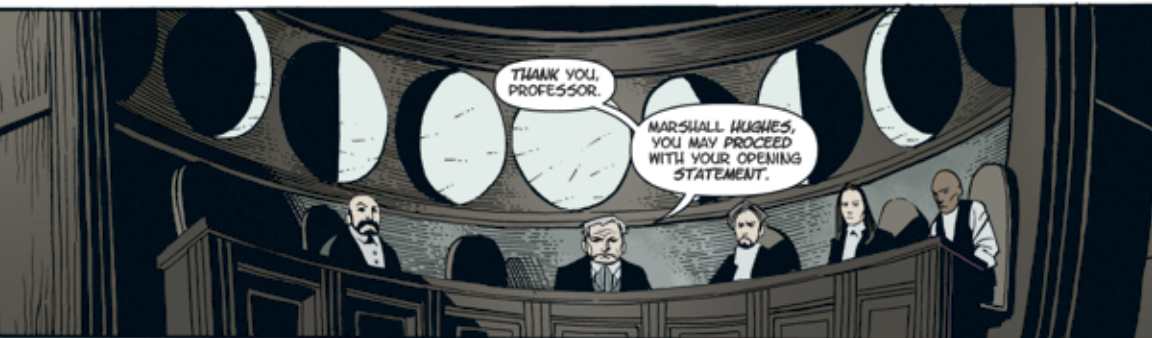
THE NIGHT THINGS ARE NOT CREATURES OF DECEIT. THAT IS THE REALM OF MEN.



THE DARKNESS THAT WE SEEK TO KEEP AT BAY DOES NOT COME FROM THE UNDERWORLD. IT IS OUR DARKNESS, FROM WITHIN OUR OWN HEARTS.

THE SLAYING OF A SCAPEGOAT WILL NOT STOP IT. THAT PATH WILL ONLY FEED THE LIES.

MANDRAKE...



THANK YOU, PROFESSOR.

MARSHALL HUGHES, YOU MAY PROCEED WITH YOUR OPENING STATEMENT.



I THINK I'VE FIGURED IT OUT, THE CURSE.

YOU KNOW THOSE TWO COUNCIL GUYS THAT DIED?

WELL, WHO BENEFITS?

AND WHO'S BEEN MOVERING OVER HERMIA HARKEN SINCE SHE WAS FOUND?



IT'S WRATHUM, YOU KNOW, THE HEAD DUDE, 'CAUSE-

DON'T BE RIDICULOUS.



CONSIDERING HE APPOINTED BOTH THOSE COUNCIL MEMBERS, WOODRUE WRATHUM IS THE LEAST LIKELY SUSPECT.

HE'S PRAYING THE REST OF THE COUNCIL ACCEPTS HIS NEW APPOINTMENT. IF NOT, HE LOSES THE MAJORITY AND STOCKBROOK WILL BE VOTED COUNCIL HEAD.



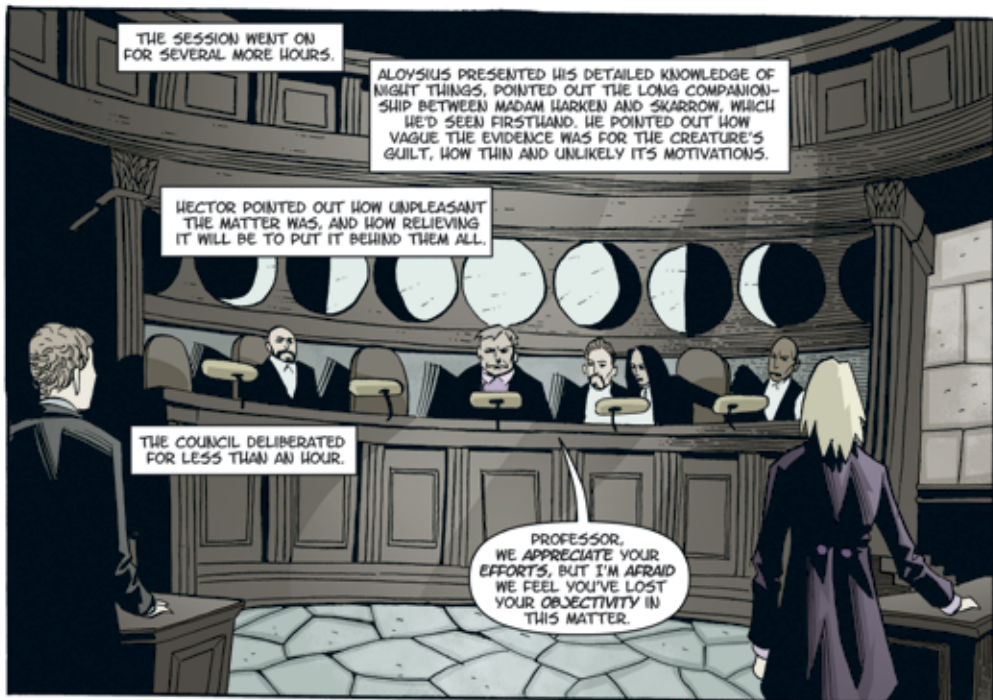
BUT WHO WILL HE...?

THANK YOU, COUNCILMAN WRATHUM.



I'D LIKE TO BEGIN BY EXPRESSING MY UTMOST RESPECT FOR THE ESTEEMED PROFESSOR CRUMRIN. I DEEPLY REGRET THAT THESE MATTERS HAVE CAUSED HIM SO MUCH PERSONAL TURMOIL.

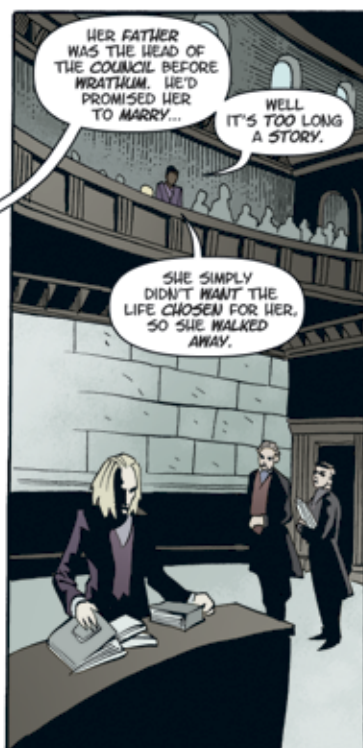
SUDDENLY, ALL BECAME SICKENINGLY CLEAR.





DON'T YOU SEE? THEY ALL KNOW THAT.

IT DOESN'T MATTER WHO CAST THE CURSE. WHAT MATTERS IS THAT THEY HAVE AN EXCUSE TO PUNISH YOUR FRIEND SKARROW FOR STEALING MADAM HARKEN AWAY. AND TO PUNISH HERMIA FOR CHOOSING A NIGHT THING OVER THE COVEN.













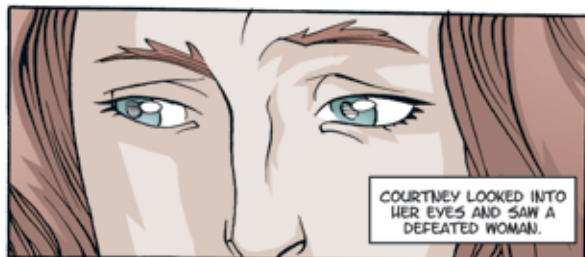




A FEW DAYS LATER, IT WAS ANNOUNCED THAT THE CURSE WAS BROKEN.



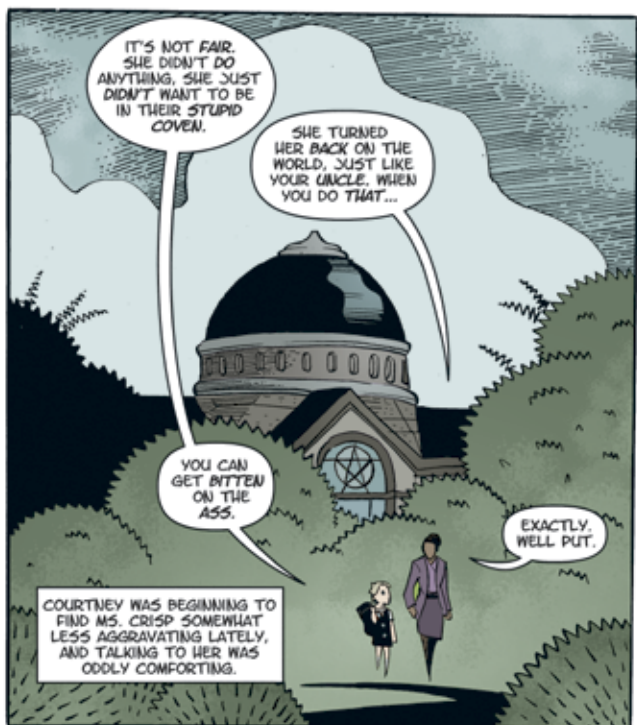
THE FIRST THING MADAM HARKEN SAID WAS "YES." TO MARSHAL HECTOR HUGHES' PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE.



COURTNEY LOOKED INTO HER EYES AND SAW A DEFEATED WOMAN.



LET'S GO BEFORE I PUKE.



IT'S NOT FAIR. SHE DIDN'T DO ANYTHING. SHE DIDN'T WANT TO BE IN THEIR STUPID COVEN.

SHE TURNED HER BACK ON THE WORLD. JUST LIKE YOUR UNCLE. WHEN YOU DO THAT...

YOU CAN GET BITTEN ON THE ASS.

EXACTLY. WELL PUT.

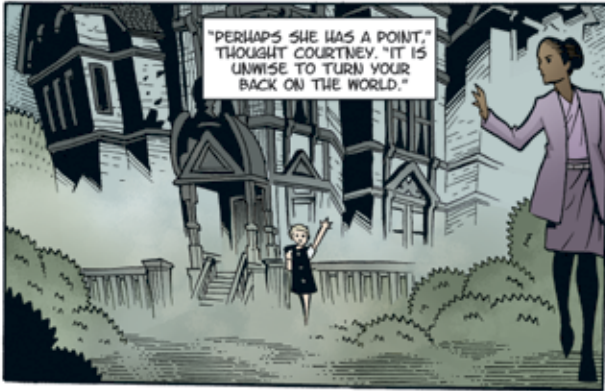
COURTNEY WAS BEGINNING TO FIND MS. CRISP SOMEWHAT LESS AGGRAVATING LATELY, AND TALKING TO HER WAS ODDLY COMFORTING.



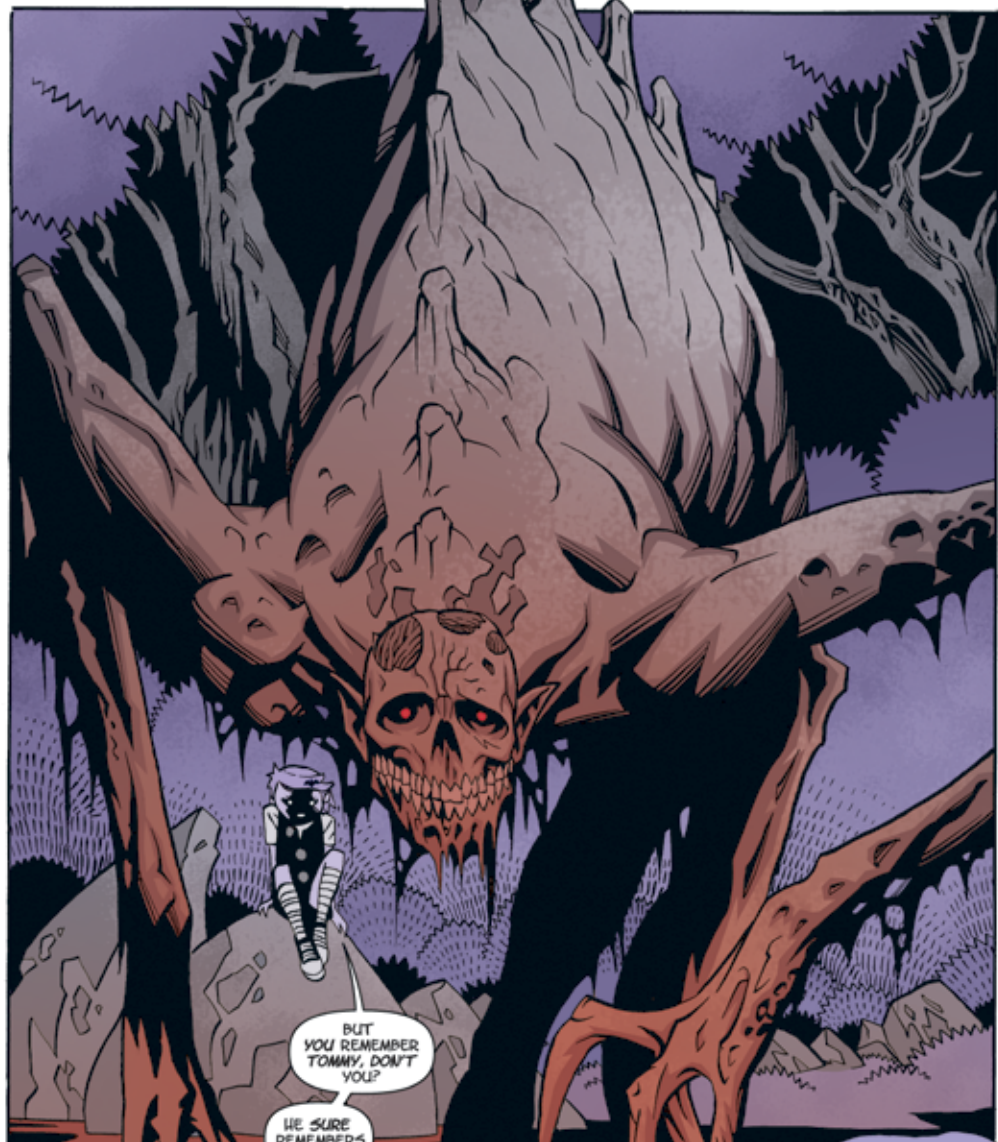
YOU SHOULD FORGIVE YOUR UNCLE, THOUGH.

HE LOVES YOU, AND THAT OUGHT TO COUNT FOR SOMETHING.

IT DOES.





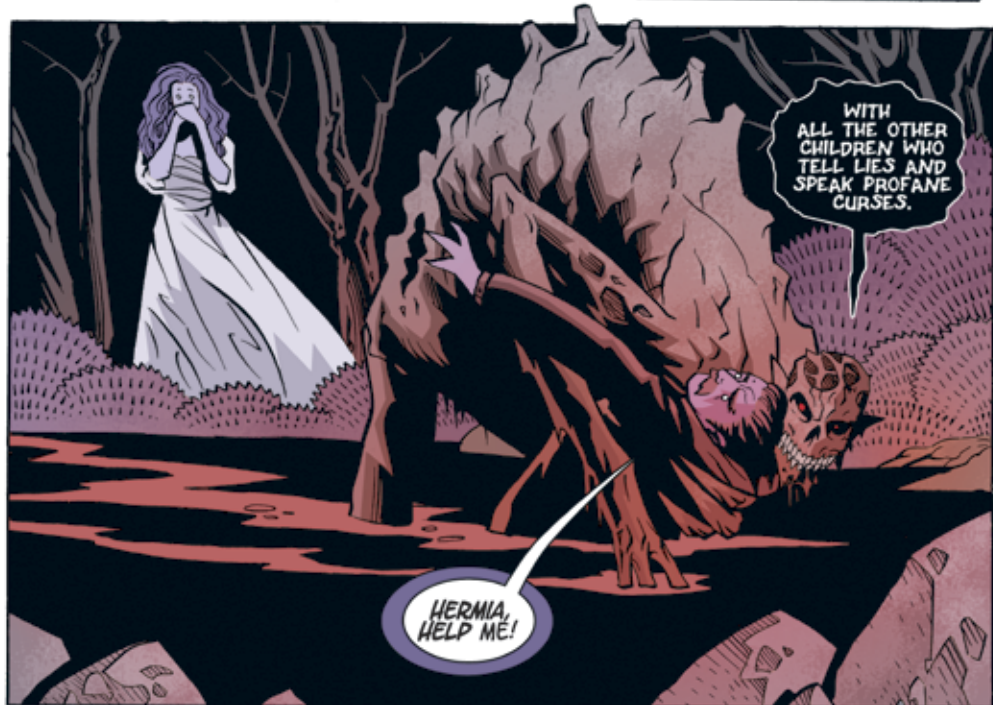


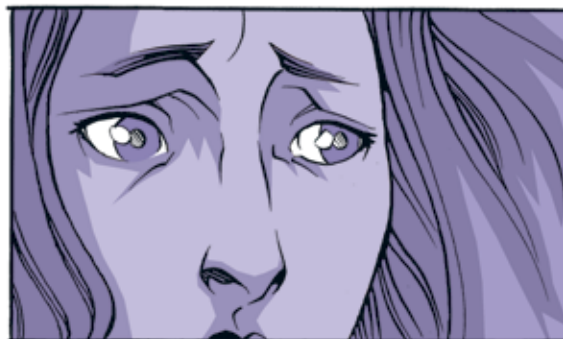
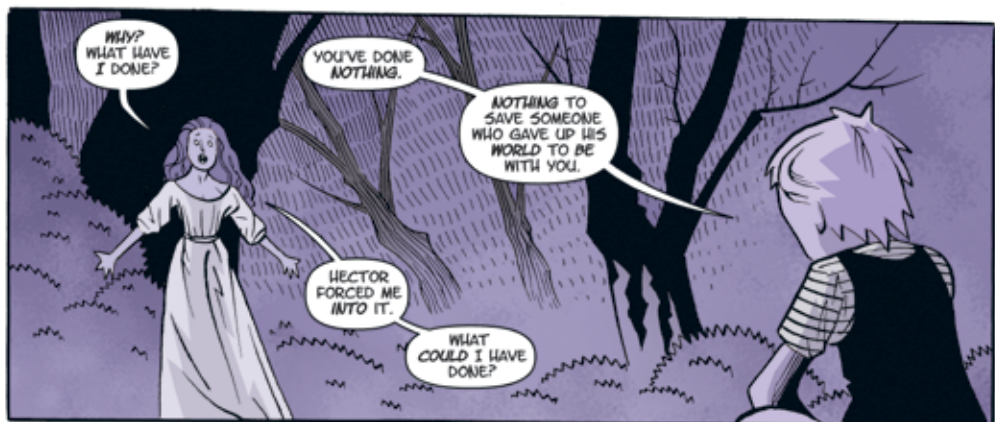
BUT YOU REMEMBER TOMMY, DON'T YOU?

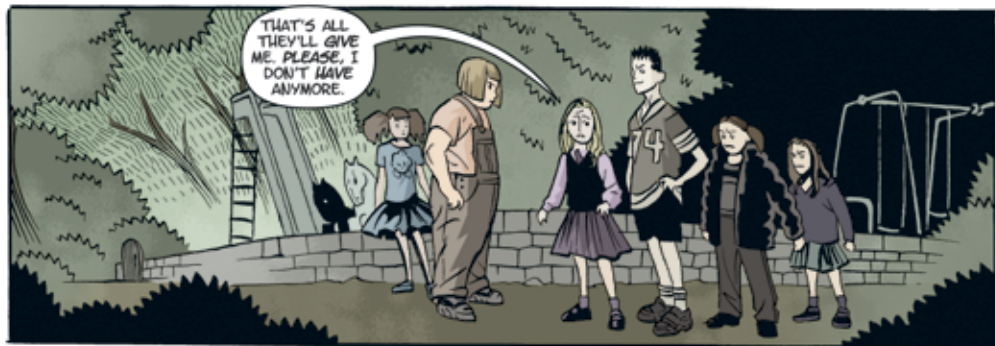
HE SURE REMEMBERS YOU.

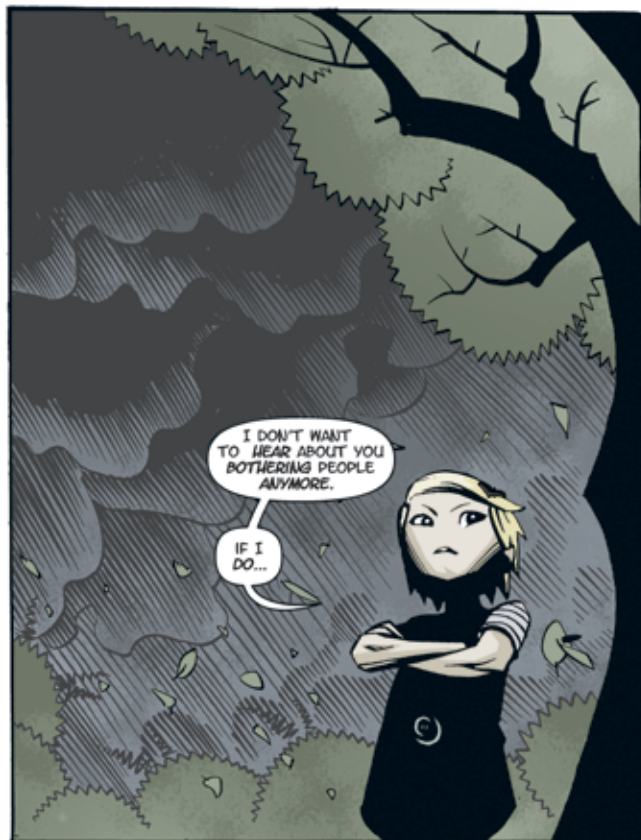
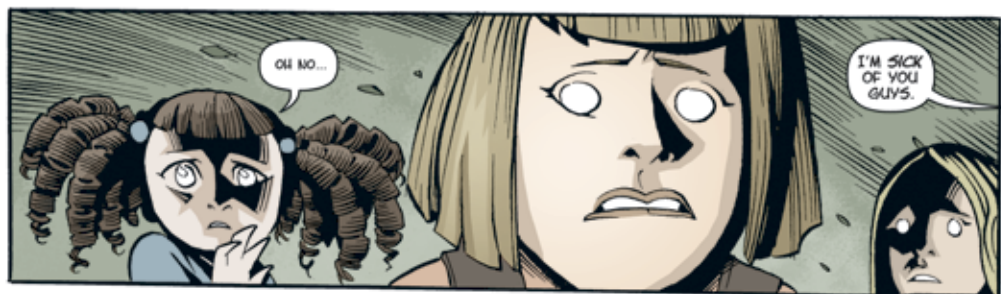
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE!?!

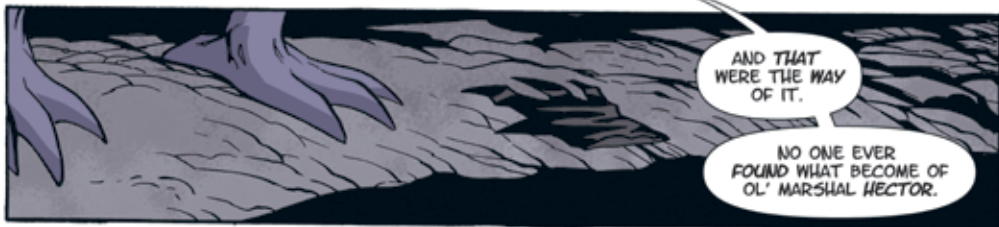












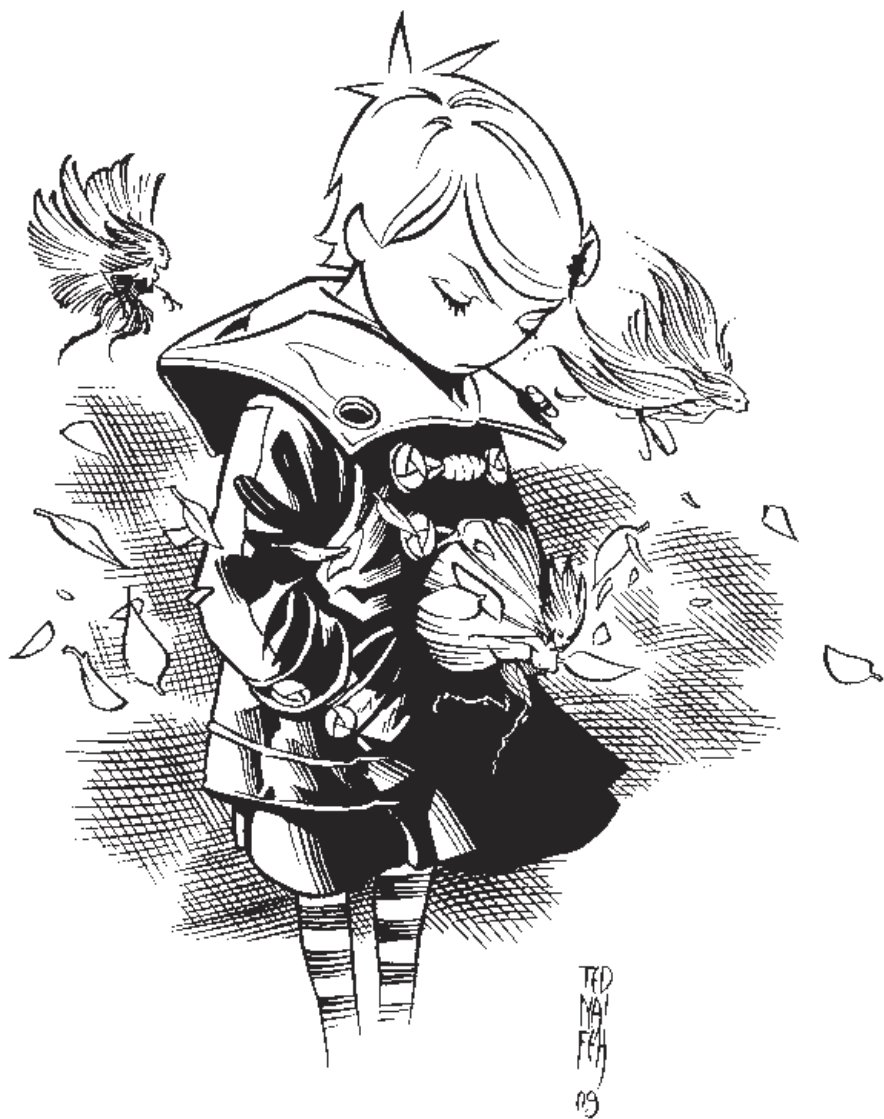


Courtney VOLUME TWO Crumrin

The Coven of Mystics

Bonus Material & Cover Gallery





A pin-up drawing of Courtney Crumrin drawn in 2009.



Original Cover for *Courtney Crumrin and the Coven of Mystics*.



Cover for the French Edition of *Courtney Crumrin and the Coven of Mystics*.



Cover for Issue 1 of *Courtney Crumrin and the Coven of Mystics*.



Cover for Issue 2 of *Courtney Crumrin and the Coven of Mystics*.



Cover for Issue 3 of *Courtney Crumrin and the Coven of Mystics*.



Cover for Issue 4 of *Courtney Crumrin and the Coven of Mystics*.

— ✦ • TED NAIFEH • ✦ —

Ted Naifeh first appeared in the independent comics scene in 1999 as the artist for *Gloomcookie*, the goth romance comic he co-created with Serena Valentino for SLG Publishing. After a successful run, Ted decided to strike out on his own, writing and drawing *Courtney Crumrin and the Night Things*, a spooky children's fantasy series about a grumpy little girl and her adventures with her Warlock uncle.

Nominated for an Eisner Award for best limited series, *Courtney Crumrin's* success paved the way for *Polly and the Pirates*, another children's book, this time about a prim and proper girl kidnapped by pirates convinced she was the daughter of their long-lost queen.

Over the next few years, Ted wrote four volumes of *Courtney Crumrin*, plus a spin off book about her uncle. He also co-created *How Loathsome* with Tristan Crane, and illustrated two volumes of the videogame tie-in comic *Death Junior* with screenwriter Gary Whitta. More recently, he illustrated *The Good Neighbors*, a three volume graphic novel series written by *New York Times* best-selling author Holly Black, published by Scholastic.

In 2011, Ted wrote the sequel to *Polly and the Pirates*, and illustrated several *Batman* short stories for DC Comics. He is currently writing and illustrating the ongoing *Courtney Crumrin* series, which will celebrate its 10th year in 2012.

Ted lives in San Francisco, because he likes dreary weather.



Courtney BY TED NAIFEH Crumrin



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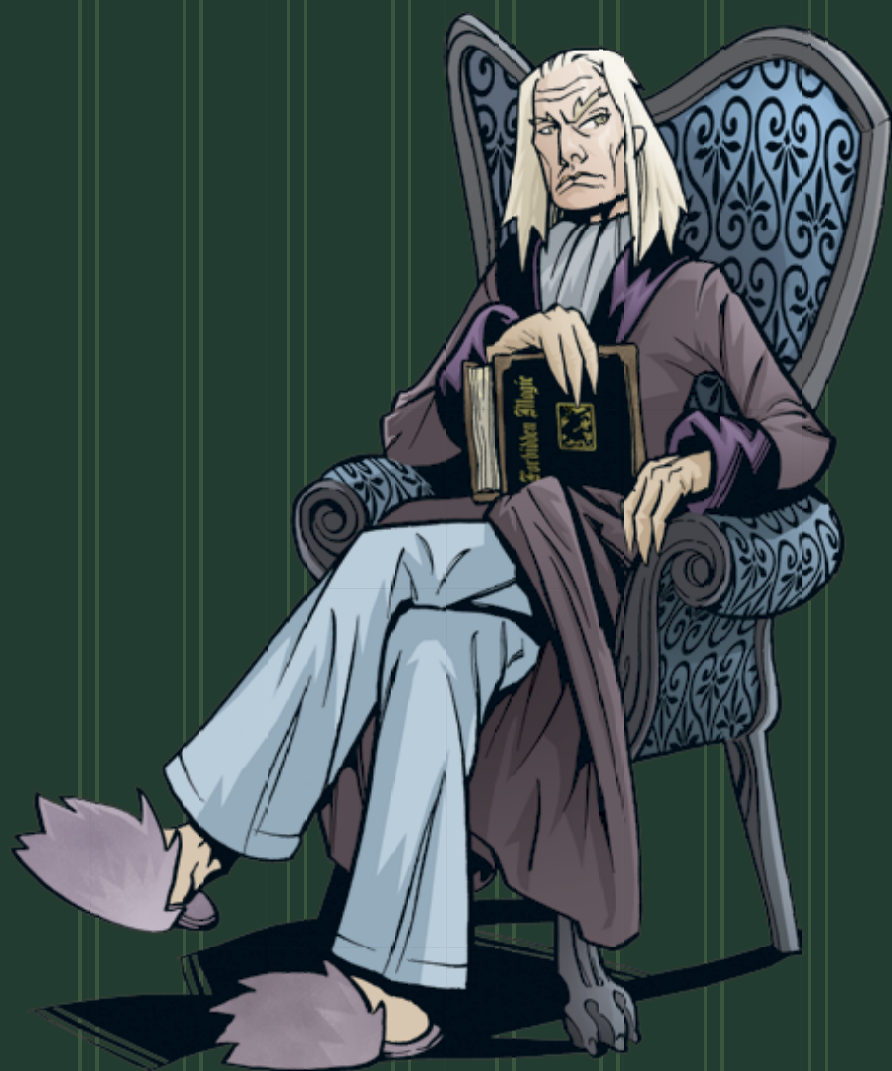
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