

SOULCATCHER

Issue #1

Written by Jason Henderson

Opening Notes

Greetings.

Whoever you are, artist, chances are we've talked already, and I urge you to shake your head at these introductory notes in consternation and just email me at Jason@jasonhenderson.com with your questions and comments. But here we go.

New Orleans is one of my favorite topics—the most haunted city in America. I've written articles on all the ghost stories, and if you're doing this story, you'll want to put yourself in the mind of that old, scary city—a city that has a creepy, sexy atmosphere seeping through every humid day. It is an amazing place, a character itself.

This story takes place in a cycle of heroes called the Lockmans, who go back to Roman times. Some of them appear as ghosts in this story, but this particular story is about the last Lockman and his chosen non-blood-relative successor, the Soulcatcher called Roma. A Soulcatcher, you'll learn, is someone who has the power to suck up the abilities of the recently dead. SOULCATCHER tells the tale of a woman who, thanks to her innate power, becomes the latest of a long line of ghost and demon hunters as she deals with a ghost rampage in New Orleans. To some extent it's as if this is the last issue of an unseen Chris Lockman series, when our new hero Roma takes over. I've always loved things like BUCKAROO BANZAI, where you can enjoy the story but get the idea that there's a whole bunch more flowing in both directions in time.

I urge you to squeeze the dripping atmosphere of New Orleans out of every panel—there's a shadowy dankness to the place, in daylight when the tourists eat sandwiches and do homework in the grass, and at night when kids dressed as vampires wander down the streets to goth clubs. If you can, go to the city itself and take a tour from Haunted History Tours (<http://www.hauntedhistorytours.com>) or order their excellent book or video. (That's a plug, and a well-deserved one.)

We'll see Mardi Gras because there can be no New Orleans story without Mardi Gras, and we see the swamps because that's where evil lurks. For inspiration, I'd spend a lot of time looking at thick-atmosphere movies like HELLRAISER and ANGEL HEART (which takes place in New Orleans), and certainly the AMAZING Alan Moore/Steve Bissette SWAMP THING SAGA, which is available in trade paperback. The more phantasmagoric you feel like, the better—there's no sense in being pedestrian when the subject matter is fantastic. All I care about is that we keep a clean idea of what's going

on. It's not my skill, so if you can come up with a better way to show an action in the same page time, hey, go for it.

Generally I've tried not to be overbearing about the panel descriptions because laying out panels is not my skill. Sometimes I've been very detailed, but often I've simply described what's going on. You're the expert and your mileage will vary, and to be honest, I would not presume to assume my directions even when specific are in fact the best option.

One big challenge I see is, we have two narrators, and we'll need a good visual way of separating the two. It may be as simple as reversing the text for one "voice."

As for what the characters look like, Chris Lockman I'm thinking is a super-hero in cargo pants or denim, with blond hair probably in a ponytail, sexy and charming. Roma is mousy but athletic, the type who it'll make sense to see jumping from fire escapes—think Alexandra Paul (<http://us.imdb.com/Name?Paul,+Alexandra>), the smart one on Baywatch, for starters. (Or not. I can entertain a lot of ideas visually.)

Gus the dog is a border terrier (<http://www.bterriers.co.uk/appearance.html>).

If I could think of anything else to say, I would.

-Jay

PAGE 1

SPLASH PAGE.

INT. A LARGE, DARK, WOOD-LINED ROOM

We're looking down from above at a dojo.

CHRIS LOCKMAN (30ish) sits cross-legged in the center of a great circle of CANDLESTICKS. He wears black leather ropers, blue jeans and a denim jacket.

Before him are two rows of seven each of HAND-SIZED WOODEN DISCS, SCRAPS OF PAPER ABOUT THE SIZE OF A GUM WRAPPER, and CHICKEN BONES. His arm is stretched out as he brandishes a KNIFE with the other hand, about to cut his palm.

The mantra in the caption (which will be explained later) is in Chris' narration-- we need some visual modifier that makes it clear this is Chris' narration, as opposed to other people's narration later.

CAPTION-CHRIS

Three things that scare me:
Faces in mirrors. Oncoming trains. And big men with
machetes.

CHRIS

Strength within. Strength without.

A balloon comes from the wall itself.

MARTA (O.S.)

(balloon comes from offscreen)
That MAGIC?

PAGE 2

PANEL 1

Now we're looking over Chris' shoulder and see the GHOSTS that line the wall.

Some of them stand very regally, while others are just leaning, arms folded. This is the COUNCIL OF LOCKMANS. One is MARTA, THE PIONEER WOMAN LOCKMAN, about 40, dark hair, leather clothes, with a long old-fashioned single-shot black powder rifle. Her hands are at her hips in exasperation as the rifle hangs wedged between her upper arm and her ribs, pointing down.

Conveniently for the artist, when a given Lockman ghost speaks, he or she is illuminated in some shadowy way that makes their features clearer. Otherwise they are obscure silhouettes against the wall, some with visible weapons at their sides, like swords, or slung over their shoulders, like rifles.

Chris raises an eyebrow in annoyance.

CHRIS

I'm preparing my weapons here, Marta.

MARTA

You're doin' magic. Th'Lockmans never needed no magic.

PANEL 2

Next to light up amid the row of ghosts is SEAMUS LOCKMAN, Scottish, white-haired and athletic with a sword and axe strapped to his back, has a disgusted look on his face. Seamus is a hero, the greatest Lockman ever-- by face he looks strong and a little craggy, like the oil-painted covers of Dick Benson, the Avenger, but with long hair. He's dressed like SOLOMON KANE, and in fact is patterned after him, with a Puritan outfit.

SEAMUS

I never used magic.

CHRIS

Well, gosh, Seamus, you Puritans were just the **best**.

Panel 3

Chris is cutting his hand.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Did you have disks that sent the bad guys into other dimensions? No, you just hacked at 'em.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

This is New Orleans.
Voodoo's been pretty useful to the family work, so I'd
consider cutting me a little slack.

Panel 4

He's dribbling his own blood over the discs, papers and bones.

MARTA (O.S.)

Yew given any more thought ta how ye're gonna carry on
th'name?

CAPTION-CHRIS

Faces in mirrors.

Panel 5.

Chris press his forehead with the palm of his knife-hand in irritation.

CHRIS

Are you really bugging me about this?

MARTA

Lockmans be guardians first. Continuin' the bloodline
should stay on your mind.

CHRIS

Okay... duly noted.

CAPTION-CHRIS

Oncoming trains.

Panel 6

Wide shot, as he bows his head, fingers spread out over the weapons (the papers and
discs and bones.)

CHRIS

Prepare these weapons...

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Dammit.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

You guys really make me nervous, you know that?

CAPTION-CHRIS

And big men with machetes.

PAGE 3

PANEL 1.

Long panel -- a graveyard, rainy, reddish sky. ROMA CANTO (20s), a brunette woman with short hair, wears a black dress, walks in the rain. We see MOURNERS in black ahead of her, and tombstones.

A long sound effect runs under the image:

VOICES

Skkkkkskkk-ing me? Are you--

CAPTION-ROMA

Static. I hear static.

CAPTION-ROMA

I'm a therapist. This is *not* good.

Panel 2

From a distance. An older woman is patting Roma's hand.

CAPTION-ROMA

People at funerals are:

CAPTION-ROMA

Helpful. Quiet. Awkward.

SFX

Ssssskkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkssssssssss....

Panel 3

A long line of tombstones in the rain stare back at her as she passes.

CAPTION-ROMA

People say—

CAPTION-ROMA

“Let me know if there is anything I can do to help.”

CAPTION-ROMA

As if I have the *wit*... to give them an *assignment*.

SFX

Ssssskkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkssssssssss....

Panel 4

Closeup Roma, turning towards the stones as if they're making the static sound.

CAPTION-ROMA

What's that, STATIC? Timmy fell down the well? Don't tell anyone I hear you or they'll think I'm....

CAPTION-ROMA

What's that word— the one therapists don't *use*?

CAPTION-ROMA

Crazy?

SFX

Ssssskkkkkkkkareyouhearingme?

CAPTION-ROMA

What?

Page 4

Panel 1.

INT. AIRPLANE

Close on Roma, asleep, next to a small airplane window.

STEWARDESS (OS)
-- hearing me? We'll be landing soon.

PANEL 2.

She's awake. We see her body, one eye open, she wears a rumpled UD GROUNDHOGS sweatshirt. Hand on a PHOTO of a YOUNG MAN lying on the tray table. Also on the tray table is a book: GHOSTS OF NEW ORLEANS on her lap.

CAPTION-ROMA
Oh. Right. Landing soon. Get it together. Therapists don't act like patients.

Panel 3.

She's stuffing things into her backpack, rain against the window.

CAPTION-ROMA (CONT'D)
You've got it together. You're cool.

Panel 4.

Wide shot of the waiting area at the terminal. Roma has emerged from the jet finger and stands with her bag over her shoulder.

Waving her arms is ALISE (30s), girlish and funky in a floppy hat. Her hair is curly and strawberry blonde. Roma's smiling a little weakly.

ALISE
Roma!!

CAPTION-ROMA
Fun, even.

Page 5

EXT. DECATUR STREET, FRENCH QUARTER, NEW ORLEANS - DAY

PANEL 1.

WIDE UPPER PANEL

Now we get a look at the world that is Decatur Street in the French Quarter.

FRAT BOYS with kegs and GOTH KIDS and tourists swarm past BARS, CAFES, and TATTOO PARLORS.

Roma and Alise walk arm and arm.

ROMA

You know, I could have gotten a cab.

ALISE

No way, there's like a best friend rule that says you gotta pick 'em up at the airport. So what's the plan?

ROMA

Well, staying with *you*, that's one. Got the interview next week. Plus I got a lot of interviews for this paper I'm writing.

ALISE

On that?

Panel 2.

Close on the two. Roma holds up the book "Ghosts of New Orleans, America's Most Haunted City."

ROMA

Ghosts. I'm doing a thesis on people who deal with grief by seeing ghosts. It's this whole big thing.

ALISE

Cool! So... you're doing *better*.

ROMA

Yeah! Yeah. It's better. After a year, you know, it's gotta be....

Panel 3.

They've stopped at a corner. A GOLDEN MIME, a tall muscular man painted all in gold, is performing behind them.

ALISE

You believe in ghosts?

ROMA

There's sort of this understood therapist code that doesn't allow you to believe in ghosts.

ALISE

Oh, so you're one of the Smart People. Chris talks about you guys.

ROMA

Chris?

Panel 4.

Alise moving out of frame, with Roma looking after her, eyebrows raised.

ALISE

This way.

ROMA

Who's Chris?

ALISE

Guy who knows a lot about ghosts. You know, maybe his tour is --

(looks down the street, checking watch)

Come on, come on.

Page 6

EXT. ST. JOHN'S STREET

Panel 1.

Wide shot of the street.

This is a narrow street of bars and more bars, lots of wood fronts.

Chris, whom we saw at the beginning, is leading a tour group. A tag hung round his neck says GHOSTLY TOURS. Close at his heels is GUS, a small, scrappy Benji-like BORDER TERRIER.

About FIFTEEN TOURISTS are in the group, including a FAMILY OF FOUR and a few COLLEGE GIRLS.

A FATHER next to Alise has his hand raised hand.

CHRIS

They were here when they were last sighted.

FATHER

How many victims?

CHRIS

The Carter Brothers killed eight that we know of...

Panel 2

In the back, side-view of Roma and Alise as Alise waves at Chris.

Panel 3.

Over Chris' shoulder.

From this perspective, Chris' perspective,

Two GREY, GHOSTLY MEN in Victorian outfits and top hats walk next to Roma and Alise.

Panel 4

Side view of the CARTER BROTHERS, on either side of Roma and Alise, dapper and dragging long razor-tipped CANES while people step through them.

CHRIS (OS) (CONT'D)

They lived in that building over there, where the bar is.
They were draining the blood of three children when they
were caught.

GUS

Grrrrr.

Panel 5

On the balcony, the ghost in the top hat is hacking at a chain that holds a heavy flower
pot as Roma passes under it.

ROMA

You know, it's not better.

ALISE

What isn't?

Panel 6.

Chris turns, with a "follow me" gesture to the crowd.hand.

ROMA

Everything.

CHRIS

Of course the Carters were put to death, but there are those
who've seen them up and down the block. That's as far as
they go.

Panel 7.

Chris has stopped as the group has turned a corner. The Carter Brothers stand at the
corner, glaring at Chris.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

And no farther.

PAGE 7

Panel 1

EXT. BOTTOM OF THE CUP TEAROOM, FRENCH QUARTER

Establishing shot.

Wet streets, balloons and trucks unloading kegs. An old hanging sign has the tea room's name. Chris is standing at the door, pointing.

CHRIS

Bottom of the Cup Tea Room, guys. Home of our most reliable ghost.

ROMA

(to Alise, in back.)

Hey, I've *heard* about this one.

Panel 2

INT. THE TEA ROOM

We're looking at the counter, where Roma aims a tape recorder at MRS. FRICK, who wears a plaid shirt and over that a T-shirt that proclaims RESIDENTS SAY NO FAT TUESDAY.

MRS. FRICK

Julie, that's what we call her. She moves papers around. Sometimes she hangs up the phone when I'm on the other line.

ROMA

Yeah, so why does this "Julie" come here?

Panel 3

Over Roma's shoulder, Chris projects to the crowd. Gus is hopping up towards the counter next to Roma.

CHRIS (O.S.)

She's cranky.

ROMA

What's that?

CHRIS

She's mad she isn't mistress of the house anymore.

Panel 4

Mrs. Frick feeds Gus a cookie as the dog stands on the counter, while Chris reaches for a pound bag of pumpkin spice coffee.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

You guys are getting ahead of me. Julie was an octoroon.

ROMA

Octoroon?

Panel 5

Chris has hopped on the counter himself, seated next to Gus, addressing the crowd, a little smug. Roma has a look that sort of says, "get over yourself."

CHRIS

One eighth black, which in this town meant she couldn't marry the man she loved, whose house this was. Isn't that right, Miss Frick?

MRS. FRICK

You tell it better'n me.

Page 8

Panel 1.

Now, from his perspective on the counter, the room has become what it once was, a well-appointed nineteenth-century parlor.

There are guests dancing, women in frilly dresses. The master, a man with a long moustache and a black suit, has his arms crossed as he and a beautiful light-skinned black woman, Julie, argue right in front of Chris.

CHRIS

So Julie was the mistress of the house but she couldn't marry the master.

Panel 2.

The modern day scene. Chris looks over the crowd to see the legs of Julie, as a wispy-see-through ghost, descending the stairs.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

She begged her lover hundreds of times. Then one night -- at a Christmas party -- he answered her with a challenge.

Panel 3.

From Chris' perspective: Julie the ghost sits on the counter on the other side of Chris and strokes Gus the dog.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

He told her that if she'd strip naked and stand on the roof until morning, he'd marry her. It was an impossible request-

-

Panel 4.

EXT. THE TEA ROOM BUILDING

We're looking at a big window on the roof of the building, where curtains blow out, discreetly covering the naked Julie, standing on the roof.

CHRIS-NARRATION

-- and probably a lie. He forgot all about her till dawn, when he found her. Naked and frozen on the roof. This building. Her home.

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Panel 1

INT. THE TEA ROOM

Chris turns to Julie, who's stroking Gus' belly (the dog has turned over for her.

CHRIS

I guess she is still mistress.

MRS. FRICK

That's three dollars for the coffee, there.

CHRIS

Right. Anyway, lots of folks have seen Julie. She's friendly enough.

Panel 2

Chris has hopped from the counter, holding aloft the bag of coffee.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

End of the line, folks! But I, uh, recommend the pumpkin spice coffee.

Panel 3.

Julie the ghost is moving away as Roma shakes hands with Chris.

ROMA

You believe all that?

CHRIS

Oh, I don't have to believe it. Chris. Lockman. This is Gus, my assistant.

ROMA

Cool.
I'm Roma Canto.

Panel 4

Next to Roma, Alise looks over-enthusiastic. Behind Roma and off to the side is Julie the ghost, now staring at Roma with a look of horror.

ALISE

Roma's working on a paper. She wants to know about our ghosts.

Panel 5.

Julie holds out a hand, as if to say, "get away." Chris is walking out, talking to them over his shoulder.

CHRIS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Interesting. She should know the ghosts around here don't seem to like her very much. See you at Minerva's party, Alise.

Panel 6

Roma and Alise are watching him go. Roma pursing her lip, unimpressed or at least intending to look that way.

ROMA

So like how do you know this guy?

ALISE

Just a part of the scene. I watch his dog. Why, you wanna know him better?

ROMA

The dog's pretty cute.

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Panel 1

EXT. THE BUILDING

We're looking down from above as Chris walks into the street with Gus **at** his heel.

Panel 2

An 1800's PROSTITUTE GHOST, REBEKKA (17), approaches. She's cute and sweet, but a bit tartly made up.

REBEKKA

Hello Gussy Gus! Hello, Chris.

CHRIS

Rebekka, any business today?

REBEKKA

Quiet.

Panel 3

They're walking, Gus dancing around Rebekka's feet.

REBEKKA (CONT'D)

Who was that woman?

CHRIS

Did Julie talk to you already? My God, what a bunch of nosey ghosts.

Panel 3

Close on Rebekka as she scowls, and through her, we can see the outline of a building in the background.

REBEKKA

I don't like her.

CHRIS

Why?

REBEKKA

She makes me nervous--

Panel 4

She's whipped around to look up as a PUFF OF SMOKE rises from the top of the building.

SFX

Blam!

EXT. HOTEL ROOF

Panel 4.

We're looking down from the roof, where a GHOSTLY SAILOR lies on the shingles with a sniper rifle. Far below are ghostly police, lying dead or dying.

Chris and Rebekka are looking up as they go, their word balloons small in the distance.

CHRIS

Sniper's out.

REBEKKA

You need to *relax*, Christopher.

CHRIS

That's just what I intend to do.

Panel 6

Medium shot, both of them. Rebekka raises an eyebrow, completely sincere.

REBEKKA

I can help.

CHRIS

Uh-*huh*. Yeah, I'll keep that in mind.

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Panel 1.

EXT. JEAN LAFITTE'S BAR.

Establishing shot. Chris has stopped at the door. This bar is two hundred years old, squat and brown-wooded on the outside.

Panel 2

Medium shot Chris and Rebekka, he's holding up his hand as he backs into the door.

CHRIS

Later. You can't come in here.

REBEKKA

Why?

CHRIS

Because you can't. And anyway, you're underage. Look. You're pretty peaceful, Rebecca. Far as I can see. Maybe it's time to move on.

Panel 3

At the door. Rebekka looks like she wants to cry.

Panel 4

Chris shrugs as he walks into the bar.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Your choice.

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Panel 1.

INT. JEAN LAFITTE'S BAR

Inside, GREAT WOODEN BEAMS slice across the ceiling, where COORS SIGNS hang. The bar is empty except for a COUPLE eating lunch in the corner and KIP, a college-aged BARTENDER behind the bar.

Kip sees Chris and Gus roll sit at the bar.

KIP

Chris.

CHRIS

Kip. Jean.

Panel 2.

Now we see from Chris' perspective, and there is a TALL, ATTRACTIVE GHOST with an Errol Flynn moustache standing beside Kip. His black sleeves are rolled jauntily up to his elbows and he twists a cigarillo in his mouth. This is JEAN LAFITTE. Off to the side we now see there are ghosts EVERYWHERE-- playing darts and drinking, some turning to look at him, some not.

JEAN LAFITTE

And how are you?

CHRIS

I dunno. There's this woman making Julie nervous. I was a little mean to her.

JEAN

Some women, they like that.

CHRIS

Don't be disgusting, Jean.

KIP

Are you talking to them, now?

Panel 3.

Chris leans forward, touching his fingers together.

CHRIS

It was just this writer, I guess. She was gonna write one of those articles that make ghosts sound like... I dunno. An amusement park ride.

JEAN

What eez an amusement park?

A withering, icy word balloon creeps in from off panel.

SKAL (O.S.)

Place whurr the livin' go ta flirt with death.

Panel 4.

We're now at Skal's table. He looks like SLINGBLADE, sits in a chair with his feet on a card table. Skal is wearing a Confederate coat and silver spurs. He smokes a cigar, his hair plastered back. Chris keeps his back turned but is glancing back, and Jean is looking down with disgust.

SKAL (CONT'D)

Yew know a lot about that, don't yew, Lockman?

CHRIS

I wasn't talking to you, Skal.

Panel 5.

Skal crushes his ghostly cigar.

SKAL

Maybe yew should *listen* more.

Panel 6.

Over Jean's shoulder we see Chris drinking.

CHRIS

You know what the problem with this place is? Too many people never leave.

Page 13

PANEL 1.

EXT. AN APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Establishing shot. An apartment building in the Quarter, iron-gated and ivy-covered.

Two word balloons escape from some lights on on the fourth floor.

ROMA (O.S.)

So what is this?

ALISE (O.S.)

This is a party. We have them among the living, remember?

PANEL 2.

INT. THE PARTY

This is an eclectic party, full of freaks, turtlenecks and professor types. Alise and Roma are near a table with snacks and a punch bowl. There's a staircase behind them.

ROMA

I hate parties.

ALISE

How did you ever meet a husband?

ROMA

He hated parties too. Our misanthropy was like a musky scent.

Panel 3.

Close on Roma, as she looks over her shoulder.

CAPTION-ROMA

Static. I hear static.

CAPTION-ROMA (CONT'D)

It says, "skkkksssskkk-ring me?"

ALISE

Oh, hey, that's our host, Minerva, Mistress of the night. I hear she's looking for a webgrrrl.

Panel 4.

Alise is running off, arm raised.

ALISE (CONT'D)

Minerva! Hey, doll!

Traveling across the bottom of the panel are soundeffect words:

SFX

Skkkssssssss hearing me?

Panel 5.

Short panel. Roma pressing her eyes closed.

Page 14

Panel 1

Her view as she opens her eyes. VLAD, a round, badly bearded man in a Gary-Oldman-as Dracula outfit with little blue sunglasses, stands by the punch bowl. He eyes her like a madman.

VLAD
Good EVE-ning.

ROMA
Uh, *yeah*. Punch?

VLAD
I do not drink... punch.

Panel 2

She's smiling, pouring some punch, looking relieved that all she has to deal with is a very real idiot.

ROMA
Oh, yeah, I've heard about you "vampire culture" guys.
You dress up and drink pig's blood, right?

VLAD
Well, it's really a lot more complex than that.

Panel 3

Roma smirking into her punch.

ROMA
More complex than, like, trichinosis?

VLAD
The blood is the *life*.

CHRIS (O.S.)
And the punch is the kool-aid. Ahem.

Panel 4

Chris is pouring himself some punch, too, and has slid next to her.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

And the kool-aid is the thirst quencher.

ROMA

That's Gatorade.

CHRIS

So it is.

Panel 5

Vlad stares.

VLAD

I must away!

Panel 5

Roma and Chris lean back on the staircase as Vlad wanders back into the crowd, his cape regally over his nose.

ROMA

I have to remember that: "I must away."

CHRIS

I'd be careful around that guy; he dresses up and drinks pig's blood. Swell shades, though.

Panel 6.

From overhead, check these two out, leaning on the staircase and surveying the scene like the own it.

ROMA

So you just turn up everywhere. Where's your better half?

CHRIS

Gus? He lets me out alone sometimes. Seen any ghosts?

ROMA

Nope. You?

Panel 7.

Roma sets her drink on a step near her head. Chris has his arms folded, head tilted, sincere.

CHRIS

Soulcatcher- Jason Henderson

All the time. But don't feel bad, they only appear to who they want to-- and to me, 'cause I'm just lucky that way.

ROMA

Ohhh-kay. Okay. So—

Page 15

Panel 1

Close on Roma's hand as she brushes it along the staircase.

ROMA (CONT'D)

What is a ghost?

CHRIS

Are you *interviewing* me now?

ROMA

Sure.

CHRIS

(sighs)

Really want to know?

ROMA

Try me.

Panel 2.

Close on Chris, sipping his punch.

CHRIS

Okay. Ghosts 101. A person dies. Their spirit has a choice, then and there. They can move on to whatever lies beyond, or they can stay, for whatever reason. The one thing I know is, every spirit I see is here because he chose to be.

Panel 3

Medium shot the two of them. Chris actually laughing at Roma's response.

ROMA

Well, you know, I can appreciate that you *believe* that.

CHRIS

That's so... sweet in a patronizing way.

ROMA

I don't mean to be. It's just... you know what it is?

CHRIS

What?

Panel 4.

Roma looking down, more embarrassed to say all this than sad.

ROMA

Um... okay. I had a husband. He drowned about a year ago.

CHRIS

I'm sorry.

ROMA

No, it's... Anyway, that's... not what you'd call a good death. And we were in love. But I haven't met his ghost.

Panel 5.

Chris scratches his chin.

CHRIS

Well, have you called to him?

ROMA

Every night. I mean, sure.

CHRIS

And he comes to you.

ROMA

Well, in a Hallmark kind of way he's always with me, right? So, sure. Plus I have, you know, dreams.

Panel 6.

Roma is reaching for her drink, which sits on the staircase.

ROMA

Otherwise, you know, life goes on. I'm doing well. But ghosts, nah.

CHRIS

So which is it: you believe in ghosts but you can't see them, but you want to-- or you just don't believe?

ROMA

Maybe I'll believe when I see.

Panel 7.

Short panel. The drink TIPS, falling.

Soulcatcher- Jason Henderson

Panel 8.

Chris catches it.

CHRIS

Maybe that's not how it works.

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Panel 1.

Close on Chris. He's handing her the drink, searching with his eyes.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Are you haunted, Roma?

ROMA

No, I'm... doing well.

Panel 2.

She has the glass and he's handing her a business card.

Alise reappears at the edge of the panel.

CHRIS

My card.

ALISE

Roma! Hi, Chris. Minerva's looking for you.

CHRIS

Ah. Sorry. Client. Roma, nice talking to you.

Panel 3.

Alise grabs Roma's shoulder.

ALISE

Hey, making the moves on Chris.

ROMA

So the tour guide has a client?

Panel 4.

Look down on the card in Roma's hand.

It reads LOCKMAN... WITCHFINDERS, ETC. New Orleans, xxx-xxx-xxxx.

ALISE (O.S.)

Minerva owns the coffee shop I work at. Chris helped her with a ferret ghost problem.

Panel 5.

Roma has an incredulous look.

ROMA
BZZZT. I'm sorry, what?

ALISE
Minerva had someone breaking into her kitchen and moving food around. Chris figured it out.

ROMA
Ghosts?

ALISE
No, ferrets. But get this:

Panel 6.

They're watching Chris talking to big-boned, velvet-dressed Minerva across the party.

ALISE (CONT'D)
The ferrets were being brought in by a ghost who used to keep ferrets as pets. Go figure. Yeah. He's helped a lot of people.

ROMA
Great. Weird.

ALISE
Some folks just call him Lockman. It runs in the family.

ROMA
Strange cats, Alise.

Panel 7.

Looking past Roma at the glass patio doors.

CAPTION-ROMA
That sound again.

SFX
Sskkkkkkkkssssssk -r me?

Panel 8.

Roma starts to walk towards the glass in horror. Alise looks concerned.

ALISE
Roma?

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PANEL 1.

EXT. LOIRE HOTEL

Establishing shot.

This French Quarter hotel is old, GATED in the front, with a courtyard covered in ivy and moss.

CAPTION-ROMA

He drives like he moves. He knows shortcuts. We're across town in five minutes. My head is still spinning when I'm entering a lobby.

ROMA (O.S.)

You live in a hotel?

CAPTION-ROMA

He's the first man whose apartment I've visited in years. The place below his apartment, through a secret passage behind the couch--

PANEL 2.

INT. CHRIS' INNER SANCTUM

This is the panelled room we saw Chris in at the start. Roma stands by the door while Chris puts lights a TORCH with a zippo.

CAPTION-ROMA

It's something out of *Batman*.

ROMA

What is this?

CHRIS

The Lockmans have been-- guardians. For a very long time. I'm just the latest. These are all those who have come before. I'm not a medium, but if there's a seance to be done, the Lockman Council can do it.

Panel 3.

Chris points to a CHALK-MARKED BOX near the entrance.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Stand there.

As Roma steps into it.

Panel 4

Chris points, indicating the chalk circle.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

The rest of the floor is the circle and only the Lockman can enter it.

ROMA

You keep saying your name with a "the," do you know that?

Panel5.

Looking over Chris' shoulder we see the ghostly figures from the teaser, with Seamus and Marta lit up.

CHRIS

It's a title. Lockman. Its very old.

Chris cont.

The name means "executioner."

ROMA

That sounds like a tagline.

CHRIS

Does it sound that way? I always wonder.

Page 19

Panel 1

Chris on his knees in the center of the circle of ghosts.

SEAMUS

Why have you brought a stranger into our council?

MARTA

I think it's charming-- it isn't often Chris brings a girl home to meet the family.

CHRIS

I have a request to make.

ROMA

Who are you talking to?

Panel 2

Close on Seamus, angry.

SEAMUS

The guest will be SILENT.

Panel 4.

Chris has eyes downcast but tilts head back to whisper to her.

CHRIS

(to Roma)

Uh, they kindly ask you to shut up.

ROMA

Oh, well, by all means.

Panel 5

From over Seamus huge, gray shoulder.

CHRIS

The woman is Roma Canto. She has lost a husband. A year ago. She thinks he wants to speak to her.

SEAMUS

You brought a girl here for a SEANCE?

Panel 7.

Close on Chris' hand—he smacks a FLINT against the line in the floor.

CHRIS

I think it could be important.

SEAMUS

You think.

MARTA

He is one of us, Seamus. Proceed.

Panel 8.

A LINE OF FLAME encircles the room, CLOSING EVERYONE OFF FROM ROMA.

CHRIS

This circle will not be broken. No evil will enter here. Here we call on the spirit that troubles our guest and bid him speak. David Canto, we have the ear of the spirits.

ALL

We bid you speak.

Panel 9.

Full shot, Chris' body, leaning back as he kneels, shouting to the ceiling.

CHRIS

David Canto! You trouble this woman but refuse to trouble us? Come six feet and meet with the Council of Lockmans! Come here!

ALL

We command it!

Page 20

Panel 1.

Roma is shaking, entranced. Chris is lunging at Roma, grabbing her wrist.

SFX

... are you hearing, are you hearing, are you hearing me?

CHRIS

Speak to us!

Panel 2.

Chris has yanked her inside the circle. The flames of the SHOOT UP, ROARING.

GHOSTS

Unclean!

MARTA

Remove her, the circle is tainted!

SEAMUS

How dare you!

CHRIS

But she's not...

Roma has her head against the boards.

SEAMUS

Take her out, you fool!

Panel 3.

Roma looks up from where she's crouched on the floor, her eyes burning. A weird, withered word balloon emanates from her.

ROMA/GHOST VOICE

Are you hearing me!

Panel 4.

Small panel. Above the city, many buildings. The SFX "Are you hearing me" actually stretches across this whole sequence as we bounce around the city.

SFX

Are you hearing me!

Panel 5

Small panel.

Inside Lafitte's bar. Lafitte looks up, clutching his ears.

Panel 6.

EXT. THE STREET

The Carter Brothers howl at the sky.

Panel 7.

INT. CHRIS' INNER SANCTUM

Chris struggles to drag Roma back out the door.

CHRIS

Okay... bad idea.

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Panel 1

EXT. THE SIDEWALK DINING AREA OF THE CAFE DU MONDE

Establishing shot.

Chris and Roma drink coffee next to a busy intersection.

CHRIS

... It was... Evil. It was violent. It was definitely... Upset.
Upset with us, upset with you, just generally friggin' mad.

ROMA

This is your response? Coffee?

CHRIS

The best I can see. Look, I gotta know, was that your
husband? Was he a violent man, an angry man?

Panel 2

Closer, Roma looking defensive and hurt while Chris has his hands splayed, a
gesture suggesting he's unfolding ideas.

ROMA

No!

CHRIS

Okay. Okay. Well, then here's what I'm thinking.

(He sighs.)

One, there's something that's attached itself to you, whether
it's this peaceful husband of yours or whoever, and it's
angry. Two, you freak ghosts out.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Maybe you attracted some *predator* here. You should go
home. You're in San Jose, I have a buddy there who's a
therapist. I mean, he deals with actual *living* people.

Panel 3.

Roma rising in disgust as she throws down her napkin.

ROMA

Great.

Panel 4.

Chris is holding up a hand, looking off toward the street away from her, distracted.

CHRIS

Wait.

Panel 5.

From Chris' perspective we see, across the street, the Confederate ghost SKAL.

ROMA (OS)

What *now*?

Panel 6.

Skal is holding out the palm of his hand behind a WALKMAN-WEARING JOGGER WITH PONYTAIL AND JOGGING STROLLER headed for the curb.

CHRIS

Something's bad.

CAPTION-CHRIS

Faces in mirrors. Oncoming trains. Big men with machetes.

Page 22

Panel 1.

Smaller panel as Skal PUSHES the woman-- we see his hands impact with her shoulders.

Panel 2.

STROLLER ROLLS INTO THE STREET as the jogger falls to the ground. In the distance, a car is speeding this way.

Panel 3.

INT. THE CAR

In the car, an elderly MAN and WOMAN react with horror as the man turns the wheel sharply.

Panel 4

The car MISSES the stroller and SLAMS into a DUMP TRUCK.

Panel 5.

Roma has run to the car, looking around.

ROMA

Is there a doctor? Is-- is anyone here a doctor?

The elderly man whispers from inside the car.

OLD MAN (FROM INSIDE)

I'm a doctor.

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PANEL 1.

INT. THE CAR

>From inside, Roma is looking through passenger side window. The old man at the wheel is bloody at the forehead. His wife is crumpled against the dashboard.

ROMA

What do we do doctor, tell me what do we do?

OLD MAN

Nothing for me. Christ, I can't feel my arm.

The doctor looks over at his wife as he clutches his chest.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

But her you can save. Jeanie? Jeanie?

Panel 2.

Roma's hand is touches the old woman, whose neck is strangely distended, her leks trapped.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

Don't move her! Don't move her!

ROMA

Not gonna move her, just tell me what to do.

OLD MAN

Jeanie? Crushed larynx on the dashboard... gotta wear your damn seatbelt... touch her neck, can you feel, is it broken?

Panel 3.

The woman's eyes open and her teeth are bared.

CAPTION-ROMA

The woman hisses at me like a snake.

ROMA

I don't... I don't think so.

OLD MAN

She can't breathe you gotta... gotta perform field trake--

Panel 4.

Roma reaches over to take the old man's hand.

Roma grabs his hand.

ROMA
Doctor stay with me field trake--

OLD MAN
Tracheotomy quickly too much traffic quickly.

ROMA
Tell me what to do.

OLD MAN
Need a knife a pocket knife anything.

Panel 5.

Hanging above the wrecked car, we see Roma looking back from the wreck, shouting. At the edge, we see Chris, watching.

CAPTION-ROMA
I call for what he needs. Collecting donations. A trucker gives up a pocket knife. A busboy gives me a coffee straw.

Panel 6.

Inside the car, we see Roma reaching in, brandishing the straw and knife in one hand while she touches the doctor's hand with the other.

CAPTION-ROMA (CONT'D)
I brandish them like trophies.

OLD MAN
Okay... listen... caref...

ROMA
Okay. Stay with me, doctor!

Panel 7.

Roma's eyes shoot open wide.

CAPTION-ROMA
Suddenly I'm *jolted*. I gasp and my body shudders as something passes through me like electricity.

Suddenly Roma GASPS, long and deep, her body shuddering, and the old man looks at her with a strange calmness that makes his words come out smooth and even, like a lecture.

Page 24

Panel 1.

Close on the old man, staring at her, eyes open but lifeless.

CAPTION-ROMA (CONT'D)

Suddenly neither of us is scared.

OLD MAN

(this balloon comes from the Old Man, but the words are eery and italicized like that of “*The Spectre.*”)

Take yer hand and feel with yer index and middle finger just above the collarbone. We're going to proceed up because the larynx is crushed and it's easier from this direction. Feel for the minor indentation at the base of the throat. You should feel a space the size of a dime between the cartilage of the neck.

ROMA (O.S.)

Okay.

Panel 2.

Zoom in on his cold, black eyes.

OLD MAN

Open the knife.

Now carefully, smoothly, steadily, puncture the skin over the indentation you found.

Accept that there will be blood. The blade should enter about half an inch.

Panel 3.

On Roma, fearful, her hands working below frame.

OLD MAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Do it now.

SFX

Hissssss.

OLD MAN

You're doin' fine. Now insert the straw into the incision and be sure the top end of the straw is clear. You'll need to unwrap it.

Panel 4.

Roma looks back at the doctor.

ROMA

She's breathing. It's working. Okay. What now?

Panel 5.

Close on the old man -- he's dead.

Panel 6.

EXT. THE CAR

The old man stands next to the car—he's a GHOST, and he's reaching in, touching Roma on the shoulder. Chris, is leaning into the other car window, staring right at the ghost as he speaks to Roma.

CHRIS

Roma?
You need to come with me.

PANEL 1.

INT. AN ALLEY

Establishing shot.

They're running into an alley.

CHRIS

This isn't right.

ROMA

What isn't?

CHRIS

Ghosts are like-- stop signs. They have a place. Skal shouldn't have been able to leave his place!

Panel 2.

Chris is looking up at the roof of the hotel, worried, while Roma stares in confusion.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

And the sniper should be *up there*.

This is *dangerous*, Roma. Ghosts can do physical harm to people when they're *agitated*.

Panel 3.

He turns to her, pointing. She's backing up.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Let me ask you something: how long have you been a *soulcatcher*?

ROMA

Soulcatcher?

Panel 4

Chris splays out hands, "*duh.*"

CHRIS

You know, you catch the souls of the dying, *learn* what they *know*. How *often* do you do that?

ROMA

What are you talking about?

Panel 5.

CHRIS

(quizzing her)

You know, two parts of the soul, Gwoh-Bohn and Tee-Bohn-anj, and the Tee-bohn has the knowledge, and --

Panel 6.

He's yelling in her face as she turns her head, pained by his yelling.

CHRIS

(yelling)

How could you not know!

ROMA

Please!

Panel 6.

He's holding her shoulders, staring into her eyes. She's looking away, disbelieving.

CHRIS

That guy *died*. I know he was dead because I saw his *spirit* watching you use his knowledge to save his wife's *life*. I saw him. In the moment that guy died you *caught* a piece of his soul. And for a time, you can do anything that he could do. Catch a dying nuclear physicist's soul, for a while days you could build bombs. Somebody should have taught you how to use this thing *long* ago.

ROMA

What, like people die around me every day?

CHRIS

No. No, I guess that's right.

Panel 7.

Chris is hurrying out of the alley, now with a grim look on his face. Roma following.

ROMA

Where are we going?

CHRIS

To get some answers. We're gonna go see the Crab Lady.

ROMA

Did you say *Crab Lady*?

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Panel 1.

EXT. THE STREET

From above.

Roma and Chris are getting out of a PICKUP TRUCK in front of a huge house at the corner of Royal and Governor Nicholls Streets. Chris has already rounded the front of the truck and is handing her a flashlight, a white jacket and gray cap. We can make out the words "CITY POWER" on the back of the jacket.

CHRIS

LaLaurie Mansion. Most haunted place in town. Put these on.

ROMA

"City Power & Light?" Do you do this a lot?

**(Is City Power a name that is on the clothing?
If so, you need to tell the artist so, and put
The name of it in quotes.)**

Panel 2.

EXT. THE DOOR

Chris stares at the door, we see him looking at Roma.

CHRIS

Whoa. Faces in mirrors. Oncoming trains. Big men with machetes.

ROMA

What?

CHRIS

Three things I'm afraid of.

ROMA

The only things?

Panel 3.

Chris knocks.

CHRIS

No, just up there.

SFX

Nok nok nok.

CHRIS

New Orleans P&L, Dr. Shepherd!

Panel 4.

Door opens. DOCTOR SHEPHERD, very Fred MacMurray, looks out.

DOCTOR SHEPHERD

Again?

CHRIS

Gotta check out that auxiliary box again. Dang readings.
Weird.

DOCTOR

Don't track anything on my stairs.

PANEL 5.

INT. THE HOUSE

Inside the foyer-- freaky YELLOW WALLS and BRILLIANT CRYSTAL CHANDELIER. They're heading up some polished stairs as the doctor looks after them, Chris looking back solemnly ("trust me") while Roma keeps her head down.

CHRIS

'Course not, Doctor.

PANEL 6.

INT. AN UPSTAIRS HALLWAY

More of those freaky yellow walls. Modern art, speckled red, hangs on the wall. Chris touches the old wooden DOOR at the end of the hallway.

CHRIS

Feel.

ROMA

My God, it's cold.

CHRIS

It's the attic.

Panel 7.

INT. THE ATTIC

We see Chris and Roma in the doorway. Strands of light creep in through boarded windows.

Page 27

Panel 1.

Chris sweeps his FLASHLIGHT beam along the floorboards.

CHRIS

1834. Madame Delphine LaLaurie held a party down below, one of the finest ever seen. When a fire broke out, the screams from upstairs brought the firemen into these hidden rooms. She tortured people here.

ROMA

You like being a tour guide, don't you?

Panel 2.

He shines the light on a CAGE that is only half there, the light and cobwebs hanging through it.

CHRIS

There was a cage... over there. Slaves were chained to the walls, some of them without limbs. But the worst of all was a woman no one could ever identify.

Panel 3.

INT. THE HALLWAY- SEPIA TONED

We see men in Victorian dress, their hands over their mouths, looking into the open attic door.

Panel 4.

INT. THE ATTIC

Side view Chris, shining his light around the room, looking sad.

SFX

Skkfffl skffl skiffle.

CHRIS

She was broken, over and over, and re-grown, and her bones had set so that people said she resembled nothing so much as a human crab.

Panel 5.

Chris' and Roma's eyes have moved sharply to the right. A word balloon coming from no-where, dotted around the edges, whispers.

CRAB LADY (OS)

Lockman.

CHRIS

We've come seeking your help, Crab Lady.

SFX

Skkffle scuttle.

More scuttling. Roma scans with her flashlight.

CRAB LADY (O.S.)

You're not alooone.

Panel 6.

Chris holds up a hand, tilting his head towards Roma.

CHRIS

She can't see. Make yourself visible.

CRAB LADY (O.S.)

See!

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Splash Page.

A nightmare vision of the attic and its chief inhabitant.

The swinging IRON CAGE, SHACKLES, BLOODSTAINS appear. All of these ghostly items glow green, because Crab Lady walks on a web of green ghostly energy connected to the whole spirit world.

And barely glowing in the dark-- the CRAB LADY!

The Crab Lady scuttles on clackity fingernails, side to side and out from the shadows, body contorted and face upside down.

CRAB LADY (CONT'D)

And now why would you be disturbin' me?