



# **SUPERHERO IRL**

**Resilience Is My Superpower  
In the Age of COVID-19**

**By Dr. Janina Scarlet**

Some kids might find school cancellation or e-learning to be an exciting change. For others, it can be a nightmare to lose the normal schedule of going to school each day. Just like Harry Potter -- who hated the summer holidays because he was forced to leave Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and had to go home to stay with his abusive relatives -- some of you might be forced to spend more time than you prefer with difficult family members or unkind housemates. A few examples of unpleasant characters are Dudley Dursley in *Harry Potter*, Emperor Palpatine in *Star Wars*, or Thanos in *The Avengers*, each of whom can make others miserable. It can be painful to interact with challenging people day in and day out.

The new self-distancing precaution measures of the coronavirus, although necessary, can also be excruciating for those of us who might have relied on classmates and friends for social support. In fact, what most psychologists, including myself prescribe for treating depression usually includes going outside of our comfort zone (i.e., our home), socializing, and hugging friends and loved ones. Currently, at least some of these activities are not allowed. For people with depression or those who might be living with people who are unhelpful or unkind, staying home from work/school might feel like a nightmare. A seemingly “normal” activity, such as getting out of bed or watching TV, might make you feel as if you are facing a million Dementors from *Harry Potter* or facing Sauron’s army in *Lord of the Rings*.



The truth is that nearly every character that we love and care about -- including Bruce Banner / The Hulk (*The Avengers*), Rey (*Star Wars*), T-Challa and Shuri (*Black Panther*), Alex Danvers and Nia Nal (*Supergirl*), Elana (*One Day at a Time*), Diana (*Wonder Woman*), Frodo (*Lord of the Rings*), Sam and Dean Winchester (*Supernatural*) -- all have heavy burdens that they carry and invisible scars that no one else can see. For Frodo, who was carrying the cursed ring, sometimes taking a few steps toward his destination to Mordor, was excruciating, not to mention exhausting. Depression can feel that way sometimes, as can grief and trauma.

Many celebrities – including Kristen Bell, Robert Downey, Jr., Lady Gaga, Ellen, The Rock, Alicia Keys, Chris Evans, Kerry Washington, Matt Bomer, Katy Perry -- are real-life heroes who have won battles over depression, anxiety, and other issues.

But what if we looked at these experiences as a challenge, as our own invitation to our own version of a heroic quest to battle the monsters of depression, loneliness, anxiety, or trauma?

What if we turn this into a game, or a quest to be more precise?

Are you ready?

# YOUR QUEST

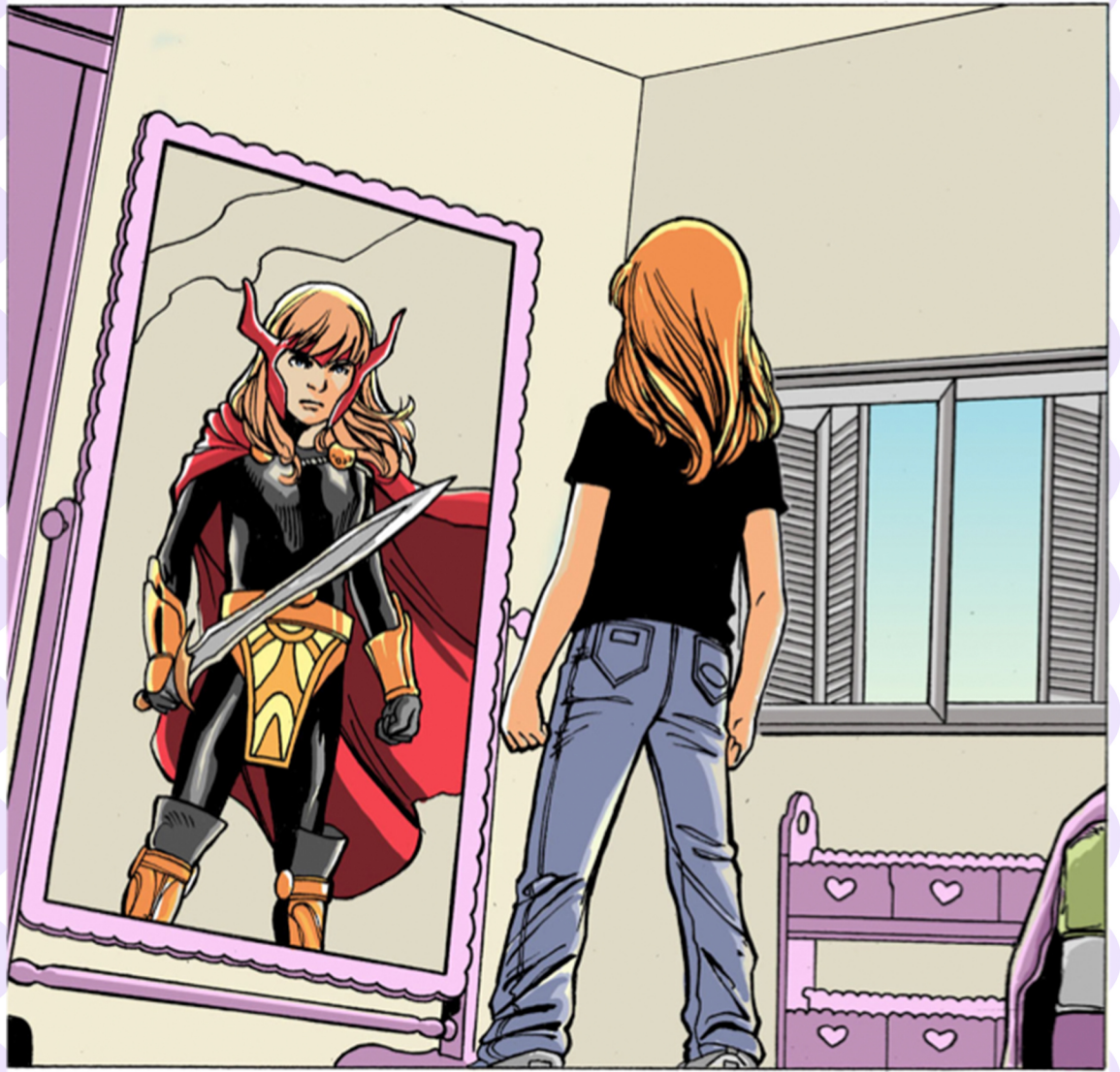


Illustration by Wellington Alves from *Superhero Therapy* by Janina Scarlet, Ph.D.

Here are some of the steps that we can take to start facing our monsters:

## 1) PICK YOUR HERO NAME

This means picking a name that you will be using for this quest.

This could be your name or another name, such as Vlad the Monster Slayer or Katie the Hero Master.

What would your name be? (Feel free to make it silly)



## **2) Describe your *CHARACTER***

Here's where you get to be creative. Write out what your character is like - are they a demon hunter, a Jedi, a vampire slayer, or a witch?

What is their armor like? What are their special abilities?

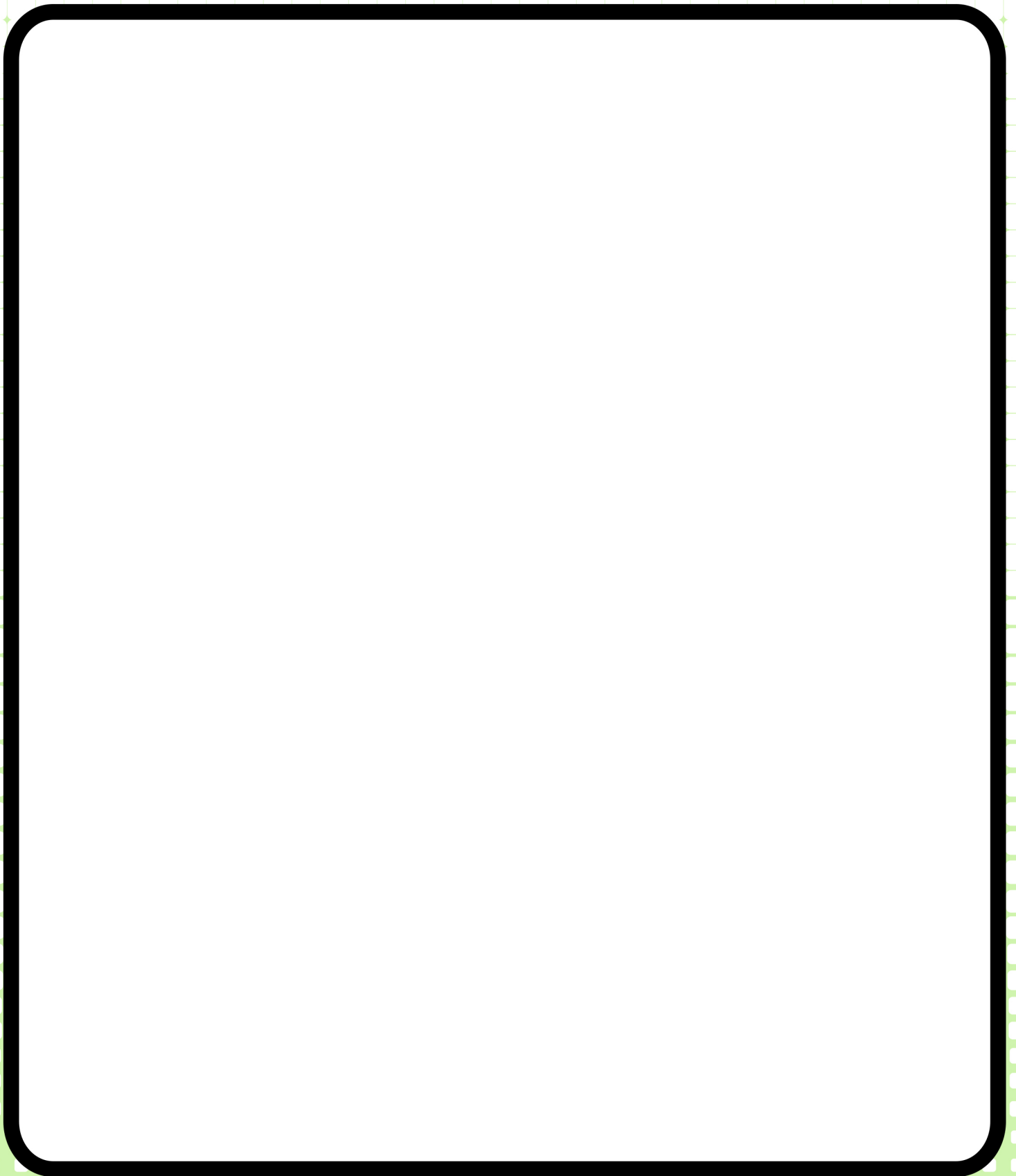


## **3) Describe the *MONSTER(s)* you are facing.**

Now, let's take some time to get to know your own monsters. First, write down some of the monsters that you commonly face, such as anxiety, depression, shame, self-doubt, loneliness, anger, or others.



**4) Next, take some time to draw them & color them in (seriously, do it, it's fun!)**





## 5) Describe the monster's **WEAKNESSES**.

You might have to really think about this one. Every single monster has a weakness. For example, depression monster's weakness might be connection, laughter, or creativity. Anxiety monster's weakness might be encouragement, support, and self-care.

<b>MONSTER</b>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b>

## 6) List at least 2-3 ways that you can face each **MONSTER**.

This is the biggest challenge – finding ways that you can face these monsters. Remember that facing them doesn't mean that they will go away.

Facing them means using all your skills to battle these monsters so that you can focus on what's truly important to you. See if you can write out 2-3 ways that you can face each monster when they show up.

Remember: You have a job to do and your job isn't finished yet. You are here for a reason. You matter and you are making this world a better place, even though you might not always realize it. Thank you for being wonderful.

**\*If at any point you are feeling overwhelmed, you can text HELLO to the free crisis text line: 741741. Counselors are available 24/7 and it's free and confidential.**

## **MEET THE DOCTOR**

Dr. Janina Scarlet is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist, author, and a full-time geek. A Ukrainian-born refugee, she survived Chernobyl radiation and persecution.

She immigrated to the United States at the age of 12 with her family and later, inspired by the *X-Men*, developed Superhero Therapy to help patients with anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Superhero Therapy refers to incorporating popular culture examples into evidence-based therapy to help the client to become the hero of their own journey. Dr. Scarlet is the recipient of the Eleanor Roosevelt Human Rights Award by the United Nations Association for her work on Superhero Therapy.

Dr. Scarlet's work has been featured on Yahoo, BBC, NPR, Sunday Times, CNN, CW, ABC, Huffington Post, The New York Times, Forbes, the Nerdist, BuzzFeed, Bleeding Cool, CNET, Mugglenet, LADbible, and many other outlets. She currently works at the Center for Stress and Anxiety Management in San Diego and has authored *Superhero Therapy*, *Harry Potter Therapy*, *Therapy Quest*, *Dark Agents*, *Super-Women*, as well as numerous contributions to *Star Wars Psychology*, *Star Trek Psychology*, *Wonder Woman Psychology*, *Supernatural Psychology* and many other books.

Founded in 2013, SuperheroIRL is a project of Pop Culture Hero Coalition, the first 501c-3 non-profit to use relatable stories from TV, comics, and film, to develop tools for living, including conflict resolution, resilience, empathy, and other crucial mental health skills.

Created by pop-culture-fluent clinical psychologists and educators, our work is in schools, comic cons, children's hospitals – and homes in the age of COVID-19.

**[www.PopCultureHero.org](http://www.PopCultureHero.org)**

For info and requests, please email **[info@PopCultureHero.org](mailto:info@PopCultureHero.org)**

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