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BLOODLINES

PART 2 OF 3



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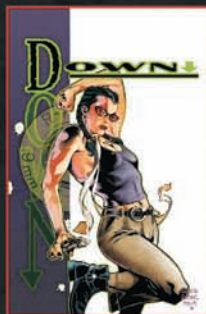
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JUSTIN SINCLAIR, BETTER KNOWN AS MANTICORE TO MOST OF THE WORLD, WAS BEATEN COMATOSE EARLY THIS MORNING.

I THOUGHT I WAS LOOKING FOR HIS ASSAILANT.

NOW I'M AFRAID I'M LOOKING FOR HIS KILLER.







BLOODLINES

PART 2 OF 3

WRITER: DAN JURGENS PENCILS: DAVID MAKAYAMA
INKS: RICK BASALDUA COLORS: BLOND
DESIGN: CHAZ RIGGS LETTERING: TROY PETERI
COVER: RODOLFO NIGLIARI

Plot Editing Assists: Sean Michael Fish
Statesman and Sister Psyche created by Jack Emmert
Positron created by Matthew Miller
Manticore, Synapse and Lord Recluse created by Sean Michael Fish
NCsoft Producer: Brian Clayton
NCsoft Product Manager: Kevin Sullivan

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PSYCHE.
YOU'RE
HERE.
BUT I'M
NOT SURE
WHERE
HERE IS.

WHEN A
MAN NEARS DEATH,
HE SOMETIMES
CREATES A
PEACEFUL SETTING
FOR HIS MIND AND
SOUL.



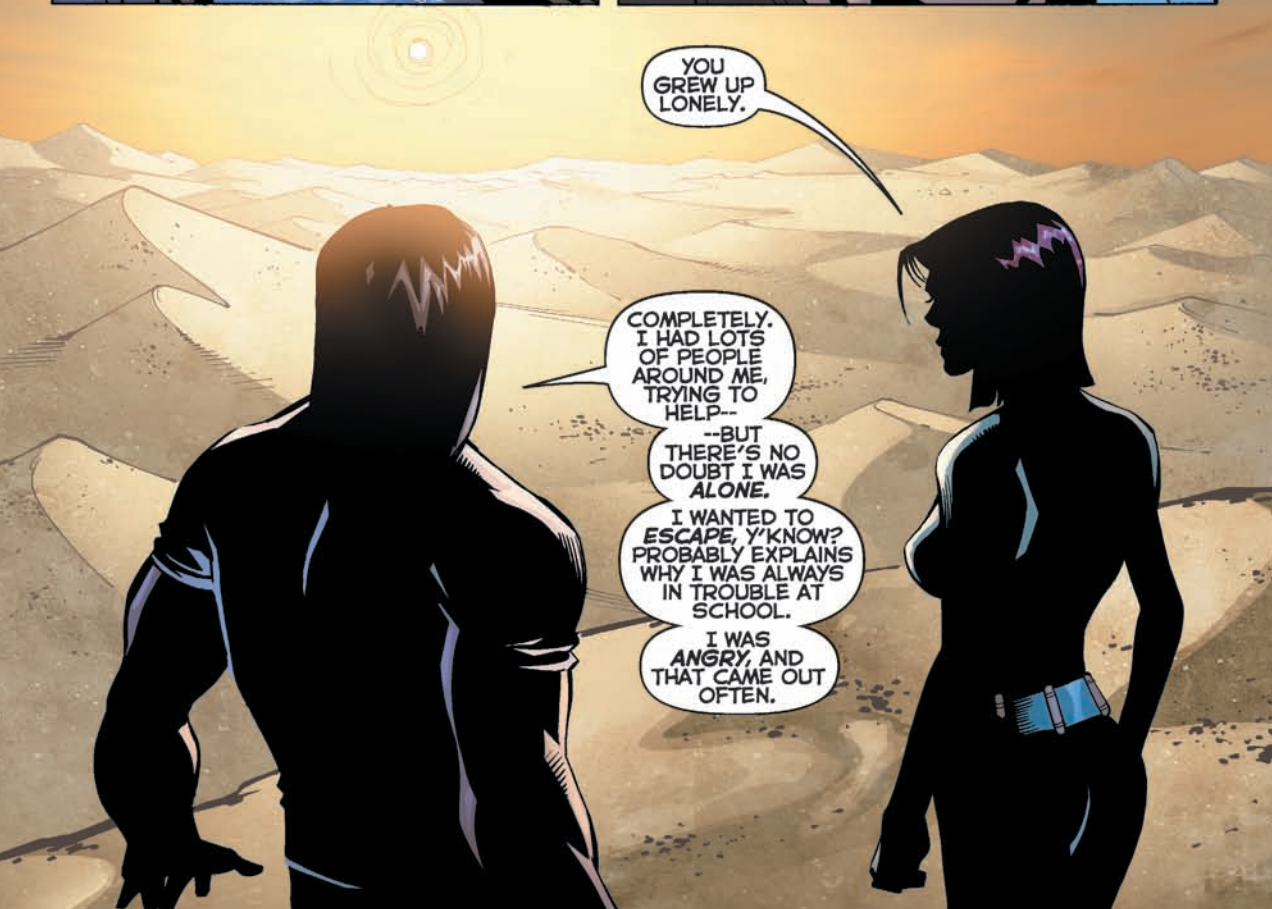
YOU'RE
TELLING ME
I'M CLOSE
TO DYING?
WHOA...

MAYBE. MAYBE
NOT. BUT THIS IS
THE TYPE OF PLACE
YOUR SOUL CRAVES.



PROBABLY BECAUSE I
GREW UP RETREATING
INSIDE MYSELF...
RUNNING AWAY FROM
EVERYTHING AND
EVERYONE.

SEEING
YOUR PARENTS
MURDERED WILL
DO THAT TO
A BOY.




YOU
GREW UP
LONELY.

COMPLETELY.
I HAD LOTS
OF PEOPLE
AROUND ME,
TRYING TO
HELP--

--BUT
THERE'S NO
DOUBT I WAS
ALONE.

I WANTED TO
ESCAPE, Y'KNOW?
PROBABLY EXPLAINS
WHY I WAS ALWAYS
IN TROUBLE AT
SCHOOL.

I WAS
ANGRY, AND
THAT CAME OUT
OFTEN.



BUT
THERE WAS
SOMEONE
WHO HELPED
YOU.

NO
DOUBT.

IF NOT FOR
MICHAEL WHITE, I
PROBABLY WOULD
HAVE ENDED UP
DYING AS AN ADDICT
IN SOME RUNDOWN
METH HOUSE.



I WAS FIFTEEN
THEN, SO MAD AT
THE WORLD THAT
I WANTED TO
LASH OUT.


MY NANNY
KNEW I NEEDED
A SWIFT KICK IN
THE BUTT SO
SHE CALLED IN
WHITE.

HE WAS DRILL
SERGEANT, COP AND
SURROGATE FATHER
ALL ROLLED INTO
ONE.



YOU
LISTENED
TO HIM?

FROM
THE SECOND
HE SHOWED
UP.



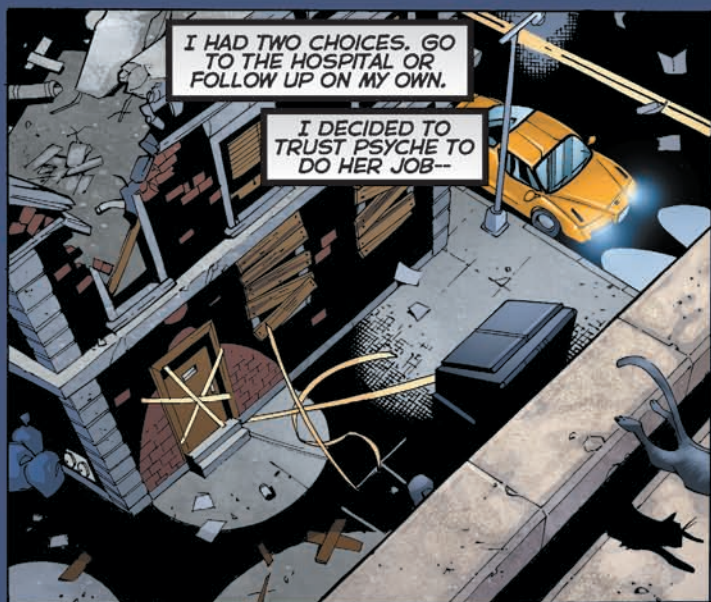
WHY? HOW DID
HE HAVE SUCH
A HOLD OVER
YOU?



RESPECT. I
OWED HIM.

HE WAS
THE ONE WHO
AVENGED MY
PARENTS.

HE'S THE
ONE WHO TOOK
CARE OF
PROTEAN.



I HAD TWO CHOICES. GO TO THE HOSPITAL OR FOLLOW UP ON MY OWN.

I DECIDED TO TRUST PSYCHE TO DO HER JOB--



--WHILE I DID MINE.

JUSTIN WAS FOUND HERE.



WHY? WHO WAS HE AFTER?

WHAT POSSIBLY COULD HAVE BROUGHT HIM HERE?

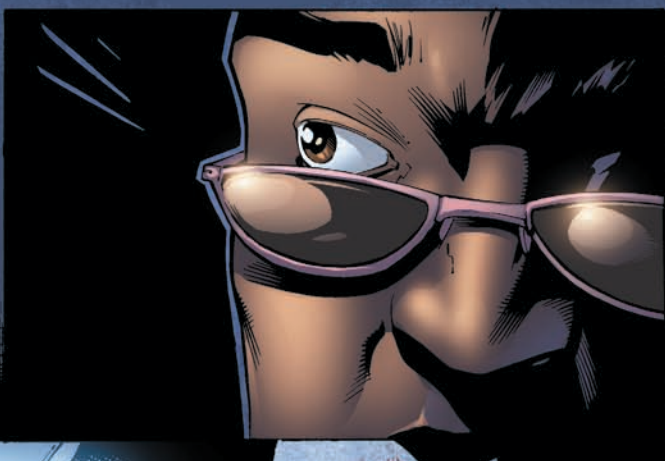


AND WHOEVER DID THIS... WHY LEAVE JUSTIN ALIVE? WHY NOT KILL HIM?



IT'S A MESSAGE.

SOMEONE WANTED ME HERE.



IT CAN'T BE.

IT SHOULDN'T BE.

BUT THERE'S NO DOUBTING WHAT THIS MEANS.



IT WAS YEARS AGO.
NOT LONG AFTER
JUSTIN'S PARENTS
WERE KILLED.

THE QUEST FOR
JUSTICE HAD
BECOME MY
OBSESSION.

IT WAS ABOUT TO
BE ANSWERED.





--YOU SURE
AS HELL AREN'T
FORGOTTEN.

YOU MIGHT
BE GONE,
SINCLAIR.
BUT WITH
TOYS LIKE
THAT--

LORD
PROTEAN!
WHA--?!

IT'S AN
ATTACK! MOVE
INTO DEFENSE
FORMATION!

IT'S
A WASTE
OF TIME,
FRIEND.
TODAY,
NO ONE
TAKES ME
DOWN.



STOP HIM!

NO CHANCE.



I'VE BEEN AFTER YOU GUYS FOR TOO LONG TO BE BEAT NOW.



FACT IS, YOU SHOULD RUN.



BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE.





I RARELY
MAKE
MISTAKES,
BRAWLER.

BUT IT'S
CLEAR I SHOULD
HAVE KILLED YOU
WHEN I KILLED
THE SINCLAIRS.



YOU'RE
RIGHT. YOU
SHOULD
HAVE.

BECAUSE
I'VE BEEN LIVING
WITH THAT EVER
SINCE IT
HAPPENED.

THERE
ISN'T A DAY THAT
GOES BY THAT I
DON'T GRIEVE FOR
THEM... THAT I
DON'T SEE THEM
IN MY SLEEP.



YOUR
POINT?

YOU KILLED
THEM IN FRONT
OF THEIR SON,
PROTEAN.

I'LL
NEVER FORGET
THE LOOK ON HIS
FACE WHEN HE
SAW WHAT YOU'D
DONE.





YOU
NEED THERAPY,
BRAWLER.



TOO BAD
YOU WON'T
LIVE LONG
ENOUGH TO
GET IT.



YOU WANTED
VENGEANCE.

I WANTED
A CHANCE TO
MAKE UP FOR
ONE OF MY FEW
MISTAKES.



--NNHH--!



ON THEIR
WORST DAY, THE
SINCLAIRS--



--WERE A
THOUSAND
TIMES BETTER
THAN YOU
COULD EVER
HOPE TO
BE.





I DIDN'T
LINK TO
WASTE TIME
TALKING ABOUT
YOUR PAST,
JUSTIN.

YOU'RE
WOUNDED.
BAD.

R...
RIGHT.

I
REMEMBER.

EVERYTHING
HUMANLY POSSIBLE
IS BEING DONE ON
YOUR BEHALF.

BUT WE
WANT TO
KNOW WHO
DID THIS,
JUSTIN.
TELL ME
WHO HURT
YOU.

ISN'T IT
OBVIOUS?

THE PAST HAS
EVERYTHING TO
DO WITH NOW.

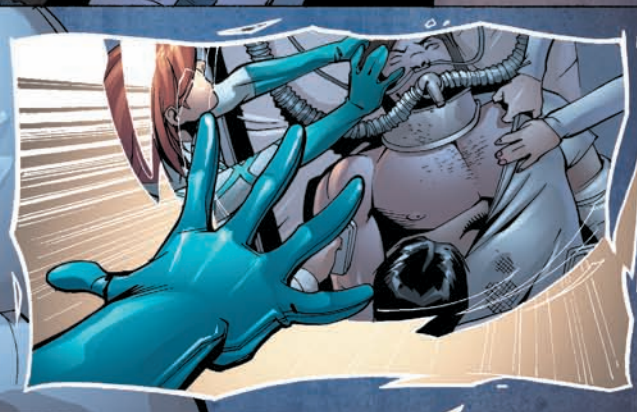
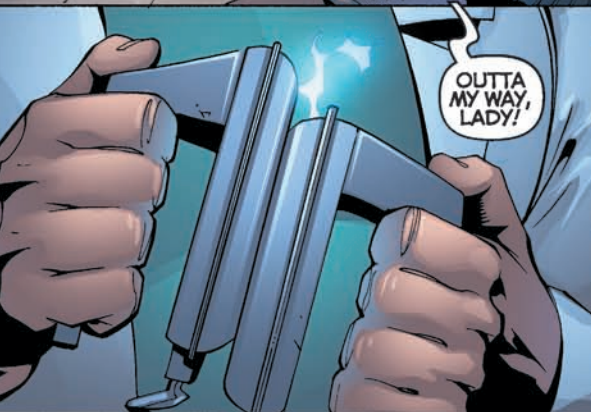
IT--
IT--

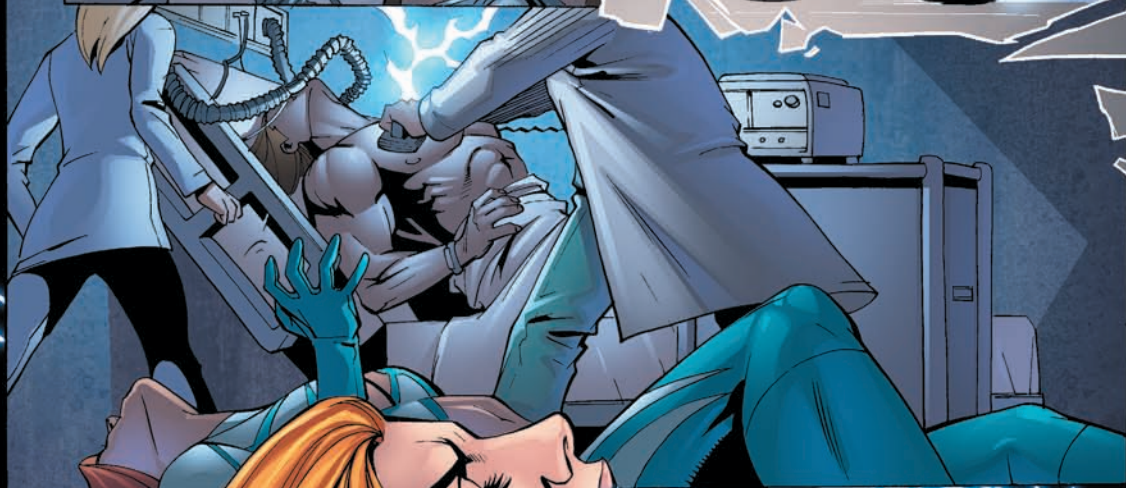
WHAT...
WHAT'S
WRONG?

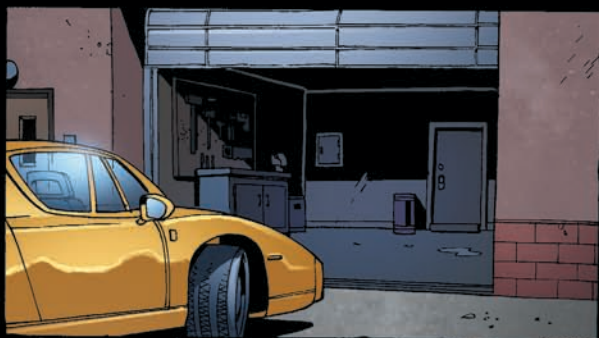
NO.
NOT NOW.
THIS CAN'T
HAPPEN
NOW.

HELP...

OR
BOTH OF
US DIE.







MY DAYS IN COSTUME
HAVE BEEN OVER FOR
QUITE A WHILE.



THREE KNEE SURGERIES,
FUSED VERTEBRAE, A
SHOULDER THAT'S BEEN
SEPARATED SO MANY
TIMES IT'S READY TO FALL
OUT OF THE SOCKET...

...I JUST CAN'T
DO IT ANYMORE.

I CAN'T ANSWER
THE BELL.





COMPUTER.

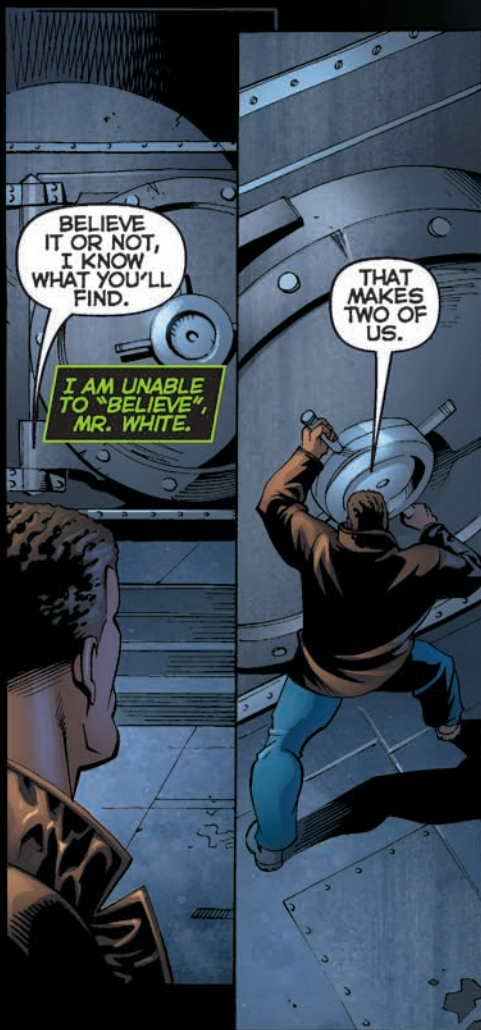
OPERATIONAL.

SCAN MATERIAL
AND ANALYZE BLOOD
STAINS. APPLY DNA
RESULTS IF POSSIBLE.



TIME TO
COMPLETION,
THREE MINUTES,
FORTY-SEVEN
SECONDS.

TAKE
YOUR
TIME.



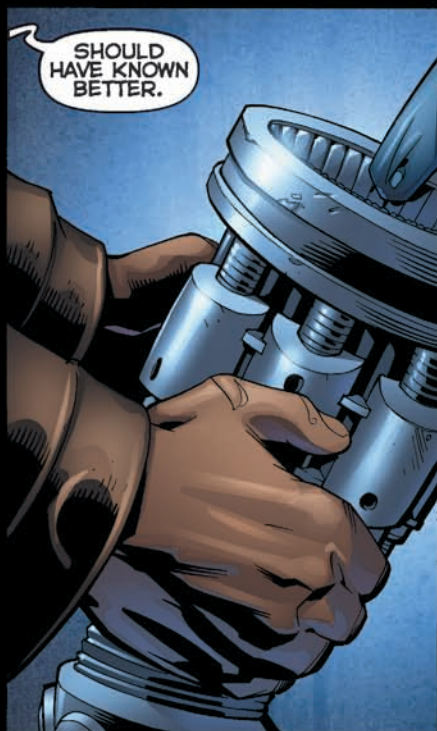
BELIEVE IT OR NOT, I KNOW WHAT YOU'LL FIND.

I AM UNABLE TO "BELIEVE", MR. WHITE.

THAT MAKES TWO OF US.



FOR EXAMPLE, I BELIEVED I WAS DONE WEARING THE SUIT.



SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER.



ANALYSIS COMPLETE.

SING FOR ME, BABY.

A CAPELLA OR SHOULD I ADD MUSIC? IS THERE A SELECTION YOU PREFER?

FORGET IT. GIVE ME THE REPORT.



THERE ARE THREE SEPARATE TRACES OF BLOOD ON THE FABRIC. THE OLDEST IS IDENTIFIED AS COMING FROM THE INDIVIDUAL KNOWN AS PROTEAN, NOW DECEASED.

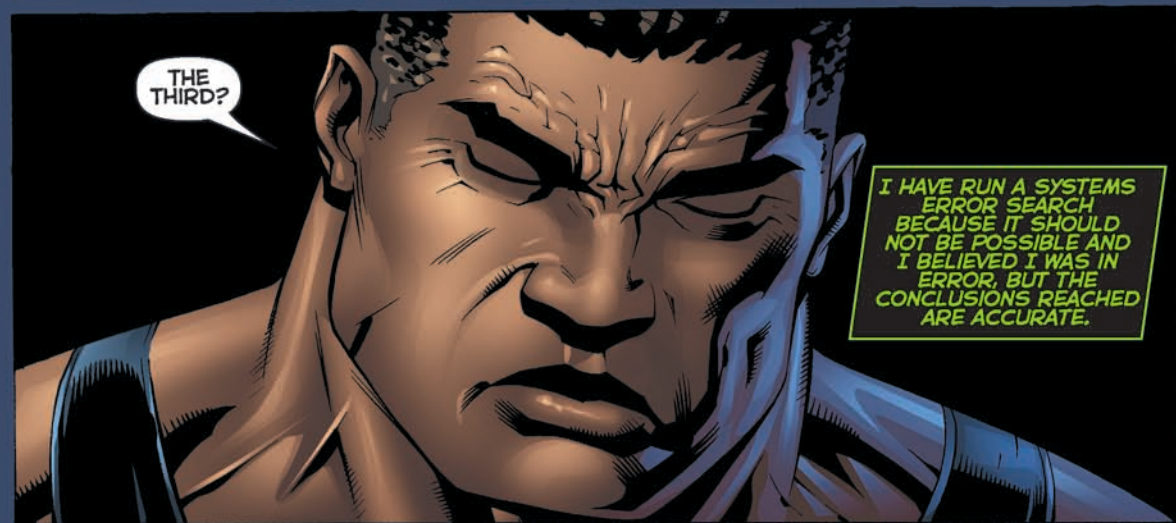
A HIGHLY DETAILED DATING PROCESS IDENTIFIES IT AS BEING APPROXIMATELY TWENTY YEARS OLD.



AND THE OTHERS?

BOTH WERE LEFT RECENTLY, WITHIN THE LAST 48 HOURS.

THE FIRST IS IDENTIFIED AS COMING FROM JUSTIN SINCLAIR, ALSO KNOWN AS MANTICORE.



THE THIRD?

I HAVE RUN A SYSTEMS ERROR SEARCH BECAUSE IT SHOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE AND I BELIEVED I WAS IN ERROR, BUT THE CONCLUSIONS REACHED ARE ACCURATE.



THE BLOOD IS IDENTIFIED AS COMING FROM--

DON'T BOTHER.

I ALREADY KNOW.



IT'S FROM
PROTEAN.

HE'S
ALIVE.

NOTIFY THE
AUTHORITIES,
NURSE.

JUSTIN
SINCLAIR IS
DEAD.

TO BE CONTINUED...

Paragon City's *ONLY* source for the TRUTH



FANTASTIC FAN ART!

from the City of Heroes Community. PAGE 6

THE PARAGON *TATTLE*

January, 2006

\$2.75

A HERO'S PRICE

What would you do for Love?

PAGE 2



A BAD DAY IN PARAGON CITY

RECONCILER'S JOURNAL: Part Two

By Michael Grant

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DON'T COUNT YOUR CHICKENS... OUT!

PAGE 5

THE FURTHER MISADVENTURES OF

Q-4ORCE

PAGE 7



A HERO'S PRICE

By Dusty Monk

William hated Astoria. Occult forces had begun to take hold about twenty five years ago, and as the Paragon officials were fond of doing, instead of fixing the problem they'd just walled the damn thing off and left it for the Pantheon. And here the Pantheon had flourished. The constant influx of mystical energies had created a thick miasma of smoke and fog that drifted through the town, making it all but impossible to see. The residents had fled the district long ago, and those that hadn't had given up their mortal coil for their ignorance. In time the district had come to be known as Dark Astoria. Almost every hero, at some point in his or her career, had to do time in Dark Astoria. The first night sends chills down your spine, and rightly so. It was a deadly place.

William had been here hundreds of times, and while he no longer felt fear when he entered, he still hated the district as much as he did that first night. Things had a way of going wrong in Astoria.

William stood by himself outside a long abandoned office. A soloer, he was never truly alone. The sheathed sword resting between his shoulder blades thrummed quietly. A single, quick vibration he felt at the base of his neck. He smiled, despite his gloomy surroundings. The vibration sent images straight into his mind -- thoughts, impressions, even moods. Not words, exactly, but William Garateneel had been interpreting those sensations for almost two centuries. He understood exactly what was said.

"Yes, I know," he breathed. "This is where Cadao said we'd find the Banished Pantheon's new army. Ready, love?" As the sword hummed again, comfortably, he pulled the office door open and slipped inside ...

... And stopped stone cold. His mouth dropped at the site before him. Even the sword was still. Before him was the large, open expanse of the office lobby, but within it was some sort of carnival. There was no better word for it. Bright floodlights of purple, green, and red played over the walls. A carousel dominated the center of the lobby, spitting out garish, calliope music. Games of chance had been set up all around the perimeter walkway, and William could hear criers practicing their catcalls for people to come test their luck. Female performers -- acrobats, trapeze artists, and flame throwers, dressed in colors so bright they were almost painful to look at, milled about, talking casually to each other or practicing their art. To William's side was a Feat of Strength

game, attended by a pair of hulking giants. They had iron helmets shackled over their heads, and each held an enormous wooden mallet. But there were no visitors, no spectators, no marks for this carnival. It all seemed like practice.

What the hell? Where were the Pantheon's husks and chambers?

The sword's strident quiver broke William out of his reverie, and she was unsheathed and in his hand in a blink of an eye.



"Darkcandle. We've been waiting for you," the voice that drifted to him from behind the carousel was polished stone wrapped in velvet. "Please, put Nikomi back into her resting place. I assure you, neither you nor she are in danger here." The speaker's voice was soft and sultry, with only the barest hint of the hard core within.

William made no move to comply. As the speaker stepped forward into the limelight, William's stoic features betrayed no expression. Within however, he could not help but marvel at the woman's beauty. Nikomi, held snugly within William's grasp, was attuned to her master every bit as much as he was to her. He winced at the sudden sharp stings that coursed through his hands.

"Who are you?" William asked, his voice a knife's edge. "How do you know who I am?"

The woman was splendid. Her face was porcelain white, and she dressed in attire that seemed almost Victorian in nature. With a high, crumpled lace collar adorning her perfect neck, a tight corset with a plunging neckline, and a scepter in hand, she looked distinctly regal. She smiled, and the smile was so inviting William found his sword stance naturally faltering.

"Forgive me. My manners have completely deserted me. I am Mistress DeVore. I am a seer -- a fortune teller, if you will. And believe me, my dear Darkcandle, even were I not gifted with the art of precognition, the exploits of Darkcandle and Nikomi are oft told." She made a small bow, the hint of a smirk playing across her lips. "Now, please. Put away

your sword. I have a business proposition for you. I ask only that you hear me out. Should you dislike my words, you walk away, no strings attached."

William took a long breath. He had no reason to trust this woman, but then he had no reason to go picking a fight either. He could, he supposed, just turn and walk out now. Brazen confidence and driving curiosity were his nature, however. Without them, he and Nikomi would have grown old and died together like ordinary people. He could feel Nikomi's violent objections in his hands. Those objections were silenced as he slid her back into her sheath.



Mistress DeVore smiled. She turned her back on him and led the way into a silken tent. Inside it was calm, an opulent oasis of lush pillows. Young, beautiful attendants set steaming cups of tea and platters of fruit before them, then stood back. Judging from the long blades dangling at their hips, they were as skilled at swordplay as at acrobatics. DeVore sipped at her tea, and stared deeply into William's eyes. Uncomfortable under that gaze, he cautiously picked up the tea cup.

"You see," she began, "I'm something of an expert in souls trapped within containers." William blanched at that, and set his tea down. DeVore's eyes flicked past William to the hilt of his sword, resting against his back.

"How long ago was Nikomi trapped within the blade?"

William nettled at that. "First of all, she wasn't 'trapped.' It was part of ... an arrangement ... I made. It was the only way I could save her."

DeVore gave him a dismissive shrug. "How long?"

William sighed. "Two centuries."

"And in that time, have you ever spoken with her? I mean, actually spoken? Have you touched her, felt the warmth of her skin, heard her voice?"

"No," William growled. "How could I? She's—"

"You could."

That stopped William cold.

"Listen to me now." DeVore leaned forward on her pillow, her emerald eyes holding his gaze. Her voice dropped to a low smolder. "In a few months, my ladies and I are going to set up a show. What

you see here is but rehearsal. Now, some people are going to become a bit ... concerned ... about our performances. You will be called in to investigate. You, being you, will do so. You will not like what you find. We will do battle. Many will be killed."

William blinked twice. "Okay." He wasn't sure how to respond to that.

"Or ... this could all be avoided. As I told you, I am an expert in the matter of trapped souls. In this matter, I am not being boastful. I could, temporarily, transfer Nikomi's soul into another woman. A woman who has already willingly agreed to the process. The woman will be unharmed. It would only be for a few hours, but during those hours you could talk to Nikomi again. You could hold her. Feel her. And she, you."

That rocked William back. He sat there for a long moment stunned, digesting what she had proposed. Just the thought sent shivers down his spine. To hold her again Finally, he found his voice.

"And the catch?"

"Small. You allow me to implant the smallest of suggestions in your subconscious. A niggling idea, a tiny hunch, something that would assure you and I do not cross paths again."

"Let me get this straight," William narrowed his eyes. "You can make it so that I can talk to Nikomi, herself. If even for a few hours. In return, I basically agree to not come after you."

Mistress DeVore smiled. "That is it exactly."

"Why should I trust you?"

"Oh you shouldn't! You don't know anything about me. You should turn around and just walk out of here. In a few months you and I will have a reckoning the likes of which the city has not seen." Mistress DeVore leaned forward, her gaze again catching William's and holding it. "But I am not lying to you. You won't just feel the sword called Dark Candle, but feel the woman, Nikomi."

William could only sit and stare for a long moment. Slowly, he stood, and drew Nikomi. He ran a finger along the razor's edge.

William pushed open the door and entered the offices of Dynatech. He was smiling. The battle against Nemesis's minions had fared well, and the dent he'd made in the villain's forces would set him back months. He was eager for more. He was a little surprised to see a short, balding man chatting with Cadao as he entered the store. William had been working with Cadao for months now, and knew he wasn't one much for socializing.

"Darkcandle, I'd like you to meet Harvey Maylor," Cadao nodded at the man. "Harvey's a newspa-

per man, and he has a story I think you might want to hear.”

Harvey seemed more than a little nervous, and the hand he offered to William was slick with sweat.

“Um, yeah,” Harvey began hesitantly. “You see ... I know it’s going to sound strange, but there’s been a carnival operating in Peregrine Island the last week. I’ve been getting some really strange reports from people that have attended their performances. I was wondering if, if maybe you would be interested in taking a look.”

William’s smile faltered a bit.

RECONCILER’S JOURNAL:

Part Two

By Michael Grant

November 25, 2004

Thanksgiving.

The windows and front wall exploded inward. Aisles of food and merchandise were destroyed in a split second as a flying figure crashed to the floor. I spun around and got a quick glimpse of what happened. Never caught his name but I’d seen him on the cover of The Paragon Times once or twice. He was known for busting Trolls over in Skyway. I took one look at his bloody, limp body and realized that someone decided to “bust” back. And on they came ... my stomach did an immediate drop when I saw them climbing into the store. The stench of rotting meat mingled with a wash of fear.

I was expecting Trolls. Instead I got Vahzilok’s goons. Three cadavers and the largest embalmed abomination I have ever seen burst in. A mortificator followed behind them, hefting a nasty looking cleaver. The mortificator directed them toward the fallen hero, apparently already savoring this kill. The old dude behind the counter managed to duck out of sight. I stifled a groan as I dropped my coat, revealing my old colors. The only good thing about the old uniform was that it had thicker body armor than my newer suit. But without my mask I ran the risk of being recognized, and there were plenty of people who would love to see me deader than those cadavers.

Adrenaline was a good cure for my achy body and shaken nerves. I took two strides and leapt into the air, delivering a crane kick to the first cadaver that sent him spiraling limply back into the street. The instant I touched down I unleashed a thunder-kick that ripped the head off a second one, and its truly lifeless body did me the courtesy of dropping like a brick.

“A carnival? No, I don’t think I can. I’m engaged with Nemesis right now, and can’t let this lead go. I’m sure this carnival, whatever it is, is fine. People are always a little freakish about those things.” He turned back to Cadao, summarily dismissing the man. “What else do you have, Cadao?”

The two men just stared. Cadao couldn’t believe it, but William’s face was resolute. And unknown to either of the men, between Darkcandle’s shoulder blades, his weapon hummed a tiny note of contentment.

The mortificator lunged with his cleaver, but I sidestepped and delivered a flurry of punches that sent him reeling. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the old man crawl out from cover and pull the comatose hero to safety. The sound of twisting metal snapped me back into the fight, and I turned to see the abomination hurl a rack of shelving at me! I leapt past the last cadaver, and the shelving smashed its decayed body like mush against the wall.

I engaged the abomination. It swung its massive arms, but luckily it was too slow to get a grip on me. Unfortunately, I was too weak for my blows to deliver any real damage. Suddenly, the mortificator hurled his cleaver from my blind spot. Luck was with me, and the cleaver struck my shoulder pad and lodged in the old armor. Had I been wearing my regular costume I’d have needed serious stitches. Instead, I gained a weapon. I yanked the cleaver free and somersaulted behind the giant freak of nature. Two swift chops destroyed its life-support tank, spraying embalming fluid everywhere. The abomination howled as smoke poured from its body. I dived for cover as the mortificator ran past me, trying to aid the creature before its imminent destruction. Neither of us reached our destination.

The explosion rocked the remnants of the store.

Things were black for a while and then I felt hands help me to my feet. It was the old guy.

“You OK, boss?” he asked.

It took me a moment to confirm that I really was. “Is the other hero all right?”

He nodded, but the explosion had my ears ringing so much that I lost most of what he said. I cut in, “Look, I’m Reconciler. We need to call the police and paramedics.” I saw that his store had been destroyed along with the mortificator in the explosion. “I’m sorry about what happened here.”

His response caught me off guard.

I got back to my apartment an hour later. Dry-chewed some aspirin on the walk and I felt

Continued page 5

Journal

Continued from page 4

them working as I microwaved my meal. My double-vision even finally started to clear.

Tomorrow I'll be feeling better. I'll repair my costume and modify the body armor. Maybe my old ideas weren't so bad after all, just my color scheme. Dr. Vahzilok ... I can't wait for anyone else to solve this problem. When the night comes I'll start searching the sewers. A rematch needs to

happen, I realize this now.

Two hours ago I didn't feel like I had the strength to walk down the street, now I'm ready to take on the forces of evil. Why? The market owner. He lost everything in what amounted to a two minute battle, and yet when it was all finished he looked me in the eyes and said two simple words that reaffirmed why I am a hero.

Thank You.

Don't Count Your Chickens ... Out By Tyler Hughs

"Nice legs, chicken boy!" shouted one of the Hellion ne'er-do-wells. Several of the gang were clustered on the street corner, harassing an old lady. "Why doncha' lay yourself an egg ... and suck on it!"

Bantam had no doubt the jeers were directed at him. He'd heard them all before. It takes a brave hero to dress like a rooster, and Bantam had even more pluck than cluck. He was four feet tall if he was lucky, and he looked more like a mascot for a fried chicken joint than an imposing vigilante. Not being taken seriously was not an unexpected edge for the diminutive mutant to have, and once again he decided to take advantage of it. Already the Hellions were laughing so hard at him that they began to ignore the senior and her purse.

Strolling into the midst of the rude haw-haws and guffaws the street punks had to offer, he strutted to and fro, scratching at the sidewalk.

"Aw, whasamatter Chicken LITTLE? Can't take a YOLK?!"

The Hellion's idiotic pals giggled incessantly at his unoriginal insults. Before the lead Hellion could utter another cliché, Bantam suddenly leapt into furious action, taking them all off guard. With a flurry of punches and the flashing crackle and pop of mutant energy, Bantam made short work of the loud mouthed thug. As the Hellion hit the pavement with his clock freshly cleaned, he dropped the old woman's handbag.

"Why don't you go on your way, ma'am." Bantam said firmly, and then turned to pummel another Hellion mugger. Two of the cowardly grapplers brandished knives, and with snarls and catcalls slashed at Bantam's back, but their knives simply bent and broke. A third whipped out a handgun and fired straight at Bantam's chest. The bullets bounced off, leaving no more than bruises to the Hellion's amazement. Bantam unleashed another rapid flurry of blows, this time upon the gunman, and when the bright sizzle of energy dis-

sipated the punk dropped to his knees with a loud thud, then cracked his head on the pavement with a louder one.

One of the remaining Hellions tossed his horned mask aside and ran. The final punk made a last ditch grab for the cowering woman and her purse, and yanked her up. Bantam began to sweat. This fracas just went suddenly south, he thought. As the Hellion placed a knife blade against the woman's throat she screamed, a scream that reminded him of his mother's cry at sunup one morning, years ago.

"There's a polecat in the henhouse!"

"Son, run out there and tend to your chickens!" hollered his dad. He remembered grabbing his old coat and pellet gun and running out into the yard. His pajamas were little protection against the chilly dawn air and he shivered as he quickly crept up on the ramshackle shed that housed the family's prized poultry.

Sure enough, as he kicked the door open wide, the light from the rising sun lit upon a hungry weasel menacing the horrified chickens within. Try as he might he couldn't get a bead on the lithe little villain, and the frantic flapping of frightened wings and clouds of floating feathers were no help. Tossing aside the gun he ran into the henhouse hoping to chase the wily weasel out. If it were a greased pig in the junior rodeo it would have been easier to catch, and the boy soon found himself flat on his face in a pile of feathers and hay.

With dread he spied the bold intruder lock his jaws on the neck of Clucky, their best egg layer. Wincing at the inevitable, he was surprised to see a tiny and unexpected hero intervene. Peep, the fuzzy chick he'd planned on making his 4H project, hopped into the fray and wobbled about, drawing the killer's eye. Clucky flapped free and the weasel darted after Peep.

The chick cheeped loudly and tumbled towards the door, followed by the ravenous villain. The boy scrambled after them, but was too slow and saw the weasel draw in for the kill.

Continued page 8

FANTASTIC FAN ART!



Positive Action

By Veikira



Section-8

By Jerry Suarez



General Lyme

By Mr. E



Redlancer

By Tsai Lim



Chickens

Continued from page 5

In the open yard the chick screeched defiantly. The weasel lunged ... but in Peep's last second, Barney the old barn dog dashed between them. With a lightning quick chomp, Barney dispatched the weasel with whatever teeth the old dog had left.

The boy learned a lesson that day, and it wasn't the last that Peep would teach him. Together in the days to come they would beat the odds by winning blue ribbons and bar bets, always counting on folks to count the little guys out. That little chick grew into a fierce feathered fellow.

When the boy's mutant nature became evident, the spirit of that brawling little bantam guided him through the fear and prejudice of small minded townsfolk, to don the heroic mantle he wore today. Because of that bold little chick he became Bantam, Paragon City's pluckiest hero.

The old woman screamed again, knowing the Hellion might kill her for spite. Bantam knew what he had to do. He smiled at the Hellion, drawing a frown from the punk. Bantam extended his hand, and beckoned the punk closer. When the Hellion tightened his grip on the old lady, Bantam taunted him, simply shaking his head and saying, "Ahaah!"

But what the Hellion heard loud and clear was what Bantam didn't have to say, "Coward ... pathetic little purse snatcher ... hiding behind a frightened old woman ... hiding from a munchkin in a chicken suit."

With a sneer the street tough released his

victim and prize, and charged Bantam full bore. Bantam gritted his teeth and focused his powers. When the Hellion drew close Bantam unleashed his trademark fury of flying fists. In no time the thug was bleeding and staggering, punch drunk. Bantam wound up to bash him into beddy-bye, but the old woman stepped up and brained the Hellion with her bag. It was over.

"Thank you, Chicken Man!" cried the woman.

"Bantam, ma'am. It's Bantam." He replied, steadying her.

"I've never met a real hero before," she said.

"Well," he said smiling at the heap of fallen Hellions, "from one hero to another, you have a good right arm there, ma'am. You get a cape and cowl and we'll call you ... Bag Lady!"

She managed to laugh a little at that, and started to calm down. "That's not the most flattering name."

"How about Purse Person? Or, uh ... The Heroine of Handbags?"

As she laughed at his jokes, Bantam hailed a cab. "Hospital!" he said to the driver as he helped the woman inside. Bantam snapped open the money pocket on his utility belt, but was stopped by the cabbie. "I saw the whole thing! This one's on me, Super Chicken."

As the cab sped off Bantam shook his head and smiled. His brief moment of reflection was soon interrupted by a sudden cry for help down the block. "Help us, Cock-a-doodle-Dude!"

"That's a new one" he sighed, as he ran down the street, looking for trouble.

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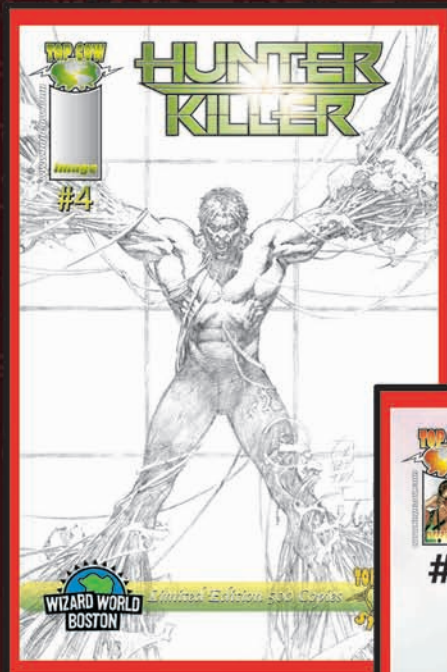
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