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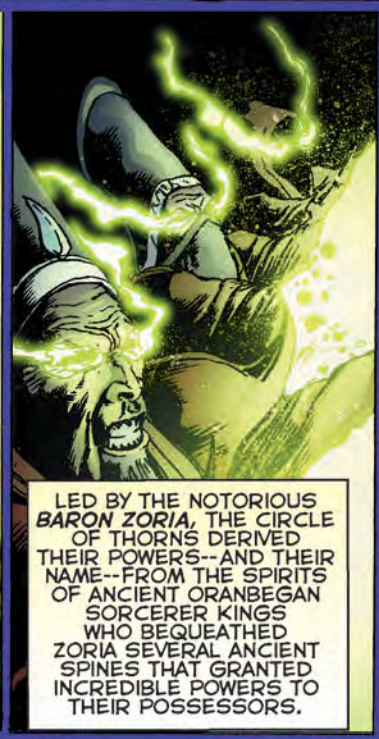
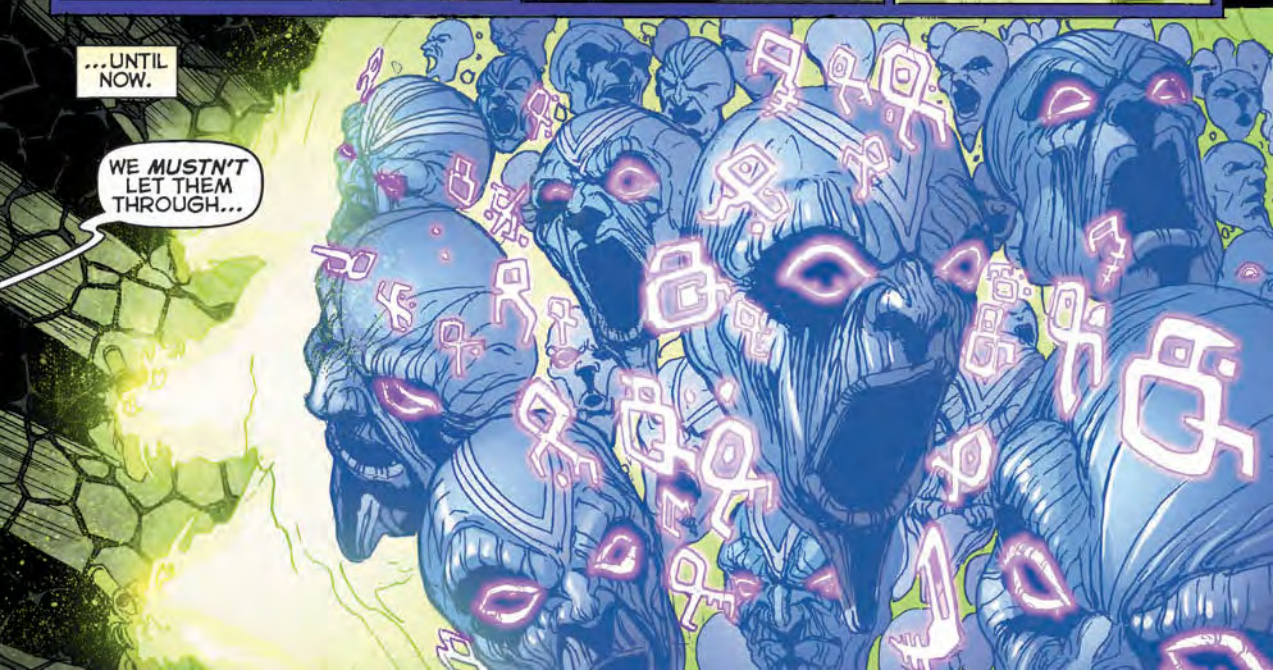
DEEP BENEATH THE SURFACE OF PARAGON CITY LIES THE MYSTERIOUS AND LEGENDARY SITE KNOWN AS *ORANBEGA.*
AWAKENINGS
PART I
WRITER: DAVID WOHL PENCILS: JAMES RAIZ
DIGITAL INKS & COLORS: BLOND
DESIGN: CHAZ RIGGS LETTERING: TROY PETERI
COVER: RODOLFO MIGLIARI
Plot Editing Assists Sean Michael Fish Statesman 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

HOME OF THE EQUALLY MYSTERIOUS AND LEGENDARY TEAM OF VILLAINS KNOWN AS THE *CIRCLE OF THORNS.*


LED BY THE NOTORIOUS *BARON ZORIA,* THE CIRCLE OF THORNS DERIVED THEIR POWERS--AND THEIR NAME--FROM THE SPIRITS OF ANCIENT ORANBEGAN SORCERER KINGS WHO BEQUEATHED ZORIA SEVERAL ANCIENT SPINES THAT GRANTED INCREDIBLE POWERS TO THEIR POSSESSORS.

THE SPIRITS ALSO LED ZORIA TO THIS TREMENDOUSLY POWERFUL PLACE, WHERE, FOR THE MOST PART, HE AND HIS TEAM COULD PRACTICE THEIR ARCANE ARTS FREE FROM OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE...
KEEP UP THE ASSAULT, MY MINIONS. OUR ENEMY IS *FERVENT,* BUT WE...ARE...*MORE POWERFUL.*
YES, BARON ZORIA.


...UNTIL NOW.
WE *MUSTN'T* LET THEM THROUGH...

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WHAT MANNER OF CREATURE COULD ENACT SUCH A BRAZEN ASSAULT... AGAINST THE SEAT OF OUR POWER... AND...
YAAGHHH
DAMN YOU!
NO.
NO!
WHO SENT YOU?!
...SUCCEED?!

ELSEWHERE...
I COULD REMEMBER A TIME, NOT TOO LONG AGO, WHEN THIS WAS ONE OF THE BIGGER TOURIST ATTRACTIONS IN PARAGON CITY.
THAT WAS BEFORE THE GANGS STARTED HANGING OUT HERE--MIXING IT UP--BATTLING FOR TURF.
NOW, SUFFICE IT TO SAY THAT THE TOURISTS ARE LONG GONE...
...LEAVING THESE GUYS TO FIGHT FOR THE SCRAPS.
WHAT'S HAPPENED HERE, VERMIN?
THE GUY IN THE HAT IS PART OF A GANG CALLED THE TSOO: ASIAN GANGSTERS WITH BAD ATTITUDES--AND MYSTICAL POWERS TO MATCH.
YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT, STRANGER. WE HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS.
I DON'T KNOW WHO THE OTHER TEAM IS...
<LOOK AT THIS, FORESHADOW...>
...EXCEPT FOR THAT GUY. FORESHADOW IS HIS NAME.
<JUST LIKE WE FOUND AFTER THE ATTACK ON GANGNAM-GU.>
BACK IN THE DAY HE FACED OFF AGAINST MY DAD.
MY PATIENCE IS NEARING ITS END.
TELL ME WHAT UNGODLY ENTITY YOU'VE ALIGNED YOURSELVES WITH OR I'LL HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO--
YOU'LL HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO PUT YOUR HANDS IN THE AIR AND TURN AROUND SLOWLY. ALL OF YOU!
WHEN THIS IS ALL OVER I'LL HAVE TO REMEMBER TO ASK HIM HOW HE KEEPS HIS YOUTHFUL APPEARANCE.

I'M MANTICORE, BY THE WAY, AND THESE ARE MOST OF MY TEAMMATES--THE FREEDOM PHALANX.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING HERE, FORESHADOW, BUT IT'S DEFINITELY A LONG WAY FROM KOREA.

SO WHY DON'T YOU TAKE WHATEVER YOU'RE COOKING UP WITH THE TSOO OR ANY OTHER GANG, AND GET IT THE HELL OUT OF PARAGON CITY.

YOU SHOULD LEARN TO SHOW SOME RESPECT, BOY.

FUNNY, I WAS JUST THINKING THE SAME THING, PUNK!

MIND IF I TAKE THAT OFF YOUR HANDS?
HNH?
YOU MUST BE CONFUSED, SIR. WE MEANT YOU NO HARM!
IF ONLY YOU FELT THE SAME!

MANTICORE--

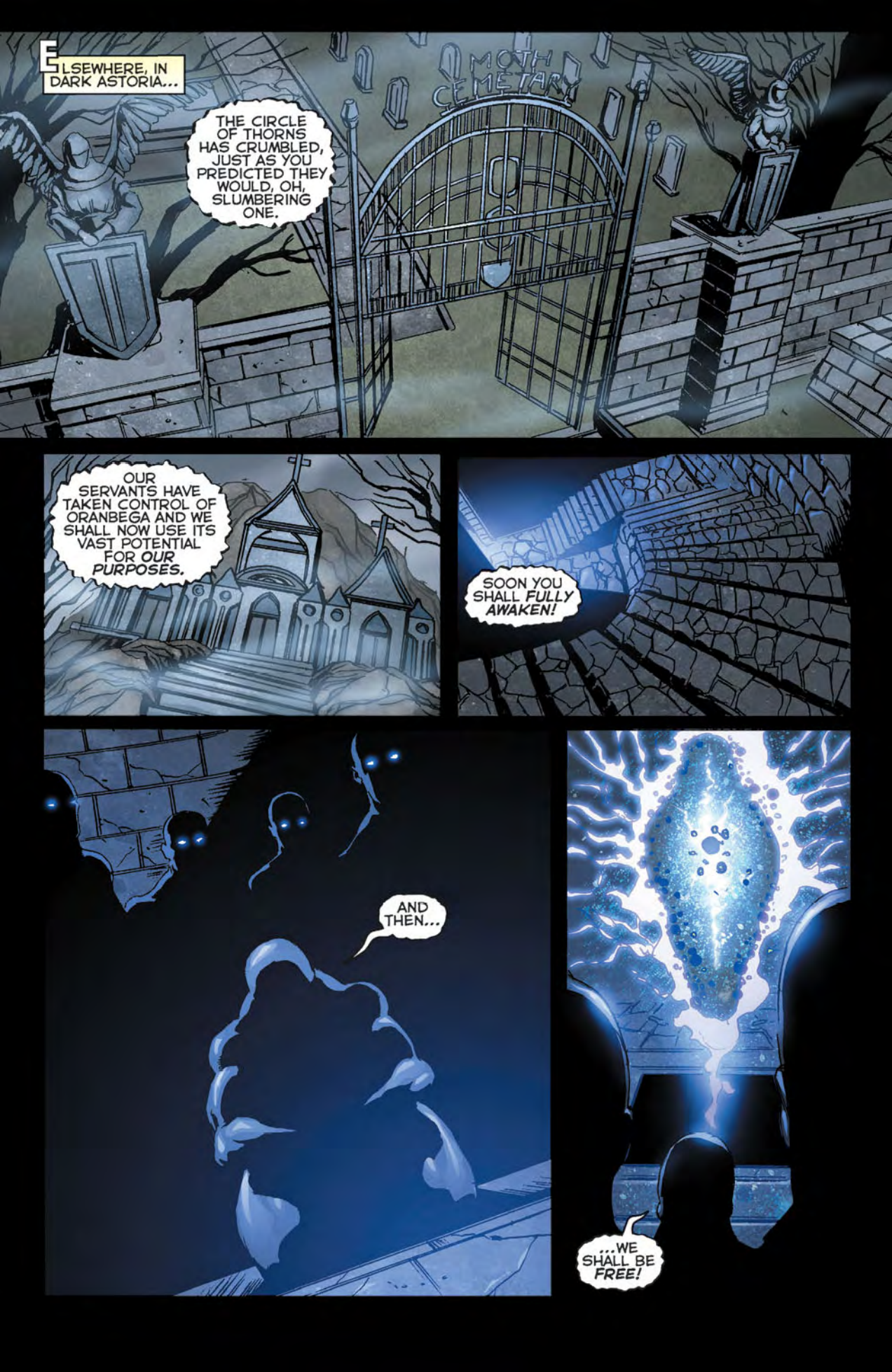
NUMINA--
LOOK OUT!

YEEEAAAGGGHH...

NICE
SHOT.

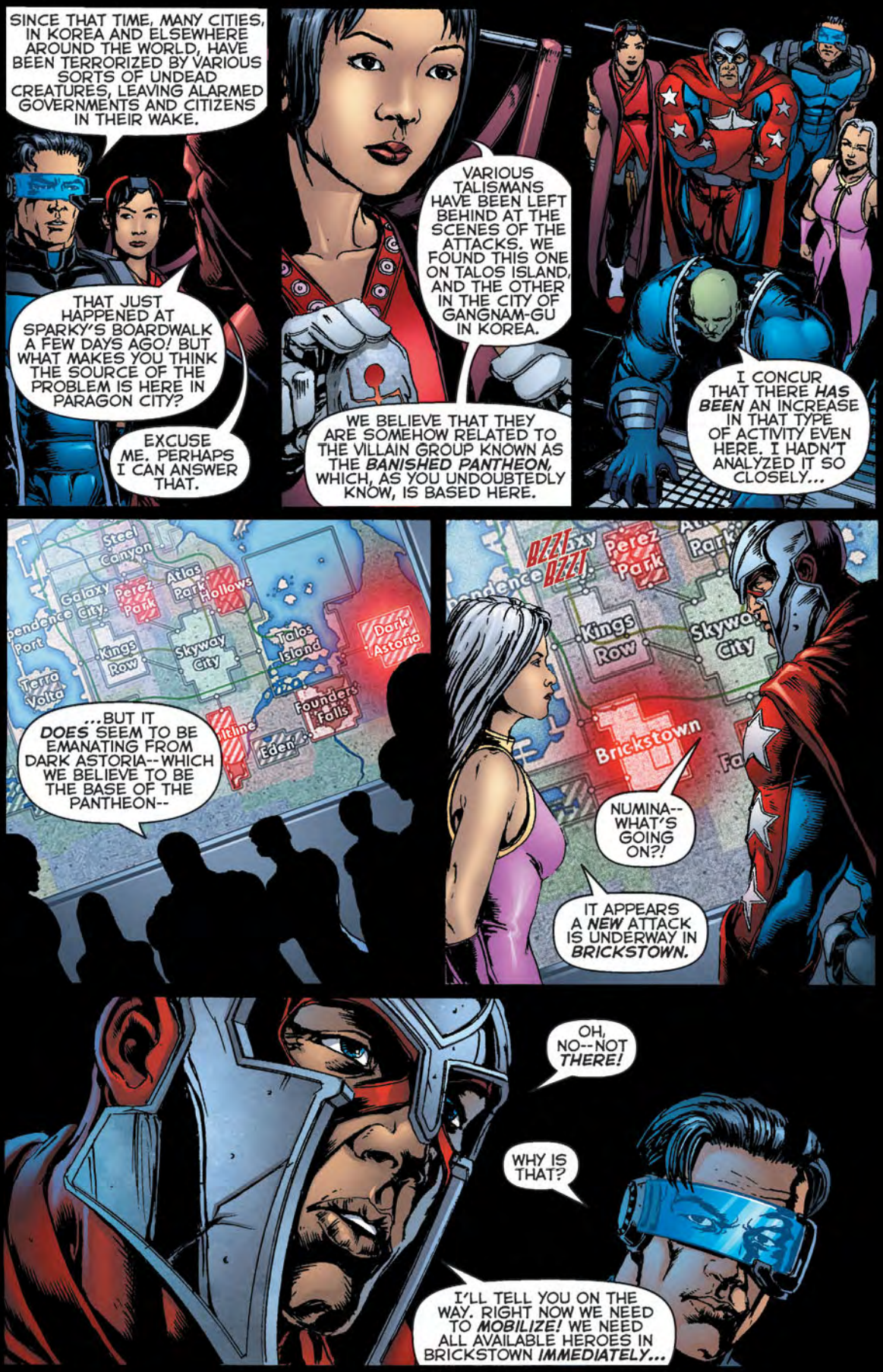
NOW THAT WE KNOW YOU CAN GIVE IT...
...LET'S SEE IF YOU CAN TAKE--
THEY DON'T CALL ME CITADEL FOR NOTHING!
HEY-- I'M NOT LOOKING FOR A FIGHT. NONE OF US ARE!
YOU COULD'VE FOOLED ME!
THERE APPEARS TO BE A MISUNDERSTANDING HERE. WE ARE MERELY--
WHAT IN GOD'S NAME IS GOING ON HERE...?
I RECOGNIZE THAT VOICE...

I WAS WONDERING WHEN STATESMAN WOULD SHOW UP.
FORESHADOW!
NOW WOULD CUSTOMARILY BE THE TIME THAT STATESMAN WOULD CONGRATULATE ME ON MY INITIATIVE IN MOBILIZING THE HEROES IN HIS ABSENCE TO TAKE ON A LONGTIME FOE OF THE FREEDOM PHALANX.
BUT I GUESS THAT CAN WAIT UNTIL LATER. FROM WHAT DAD'S RECORDS SHOW, FORESHADOW IS A DANGEROUS GUY--AND HIS TEAMMATES ARE NO SLOUCHES EITHER...
HAHAHA! IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN, MY FRIEND!
...OR NOT.


ELSEWHERE, IN DARK ASTORIA...
MOTH CEMETARY
THE CIRCLE OF THORNS HAS CRUMBLED, JUST AS YOU PREDICTED THEY WOULD, OH, SLUMBERING ONE.
OUR SERVANTS HAVE TAKEN CONTROL OF ORANBEGA AND WE SHALL NOW USE ITS VAST POTENTIAL FOR OUR PURPOSES.
SOON YOU SHALL FULLY AWAKEN!
AND THEN...
...WE SHALL BE FREE!

AGAIN I MUST APOLOGIZE FOR MANTICORE'S ACTIONS. BELIEVE ME, HE SHALL BE SEVERELY REPRIMANDED FOR HIS... IMPERTINENCE.
YOU'VE BEEN REPEATEDLY WARNED FOR THIS IMPULSIVE BEHAVIOR, MANTICORE--AND WHILE YOU'RE STILL ON PROBATION, NO LESS.
CAN I HAVE A CHANCE TO EXPLAIN MYSELF, HERE?!
LOOK, IT WAS AN HONEST MISTAKE! WE RECEIVED WORD OF SOME NEW PLAYERS ON TALOS ISLAND-- FROM KOREA. I CHECKED THE PICS AND RECOGNIZED FORESHADOW FROM MY DAD'S VILLAIN FILES. HOW DID I KNOW HE WAS A GOOD GUY NOW?!
NOT TO WORRY. THE ERROR WAS QUITE UNDERSTANDABLE.
ACTUALLY, I MUST COMMEND MANTICORE FOR HIS LEADERSHIP SKILLS. I MUST SAY I ADMIRE HIS...HOW YOU SAY...MOXIE.
MAYBE A LITTLE TOO MUCH MOXIE, IF YOU ASK ME.
I MUST COMPLIMENT YOU ON YOUR COMBAT SKILLS, MIRROR SPIRIT. YOU'RE TRULY AN ASSET TO YOUR TEAM.
OH-- IT WAS NOTHING... REALLY.
HEY, MAN, SORRY ABOUT GOING AFTER YOU BEFORE. I THOUGHT YOU WERE IN CAHOOTS WITH THE BADDIES, YA KNOW?
HMPH.

PLEASE BE CORDIAL TO OUR HOSTS, SPARK BLADE. AS I'VE SAID, THEY HAD NO REASON NOT TO THINK WE WERE VILLAINS...
"AFTER ALL, I DID, IN FACT BATTLE AGAINST THE FREEDOM PHALANX LONG AGO...IN A SENSE.
"BUT THAT WAS IN MY PREVIOUS INCARNATION AS A VILLAIN, WHICH I AM NOW ATTEMPTING TO ATONE FOR.
"UNFORTUNATELY THAT IS THE LOT IN LIFE THAT THE GODS HAVE DECIDED FOR ME-- TO LIVE THROUGHOUT TIME, FOREVER ALTERNATING BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL-- AND NOT UNDERSTANDING HOW OR WHY.
"SOMEDAY I SHALL KNOW WHAT FATE HAS PLANNED FOR ME...
"...BUT UNTIL THAT TIME I ENDEAVOR TO OPPOSE ALL VILLAINY, FIGHTING ALONGSIDE CAPABLE HEROES AND HEROINES SUCH AS THESE.
"AND YOU, STATESMAN-- WHOM MY TEAM HAD THE PLEASURE OF ASSISTING DURING YOUR RECENT VISIT TO MY HOMELAND."


SINCE THAT TIME, MANY CITIES, IN KOREA AND ELSEWHERE AROUND THE WORLD, HAVE BEEN TERRORIZED BY VARIOUS SORTS OF UNDEAD CREATURES, LEAVING ALARMED GOVERNMENTS AND CITIZENS IN THEIR WAKE.
THAT JUST HAPPENED AT SPARKY'S BOARDWALK A FEW DAYS AGO! BUT WHAT MAKES YOU THINK THE SOURCE OF THE PROBLEM IS HERE IN PARAGON CITY?
EXCUSE ME. PERHAPS I CAN ANSWER THAT.
VARIOUS TALISMANS HAVE BEEN LEFT BEHIND AT THE SCENES OF THE ATTACKS. WE FOUND THIS ONE ON TALOS ISLAND, AND THE OTHER IN THE CITY OF GANGNAM-GU IN KOREA.
WE BELIEVE THAT THEY ARE SOMEHOW RELATED TO THE VILLAIN GROUP KNOWN AS THE BANISHED PANTHEON, WHICH, AS YOU UNDOUBTEDLY KNOW, IS BASED HERE.
I CONCUR THAT THERE HAS BEEN AN INCREASE IN THAT TYPE OF ACTIVITY EVEN HERE. I HADN'T ANALYZED IT SO CLOSELY...
Steel Canyon
Galaxy City
Perez Park
Atlas Park
Hollows
Kings Row
Skyway City
Talos Island
Dark Astoria
Terra Volta
Founders Falls
Eden
...BUT IT DOES SEEM TO BE EMANATING FROM DARK ASTORIA--WHICH WE BELIEVE TO BE THE BASE OF THE PANTHEON--
BZZT BZZT
Perez Park
Kings Row
Skyway City
Brickstown
NUMINA--WHAT'S GOING ON?!
IT APPEARS A NEW ATTACK IS UNDERWAY IN BRICKSTOWN.
OH, NO--NOT THERE!
WHY IS THAT?
I'LL TELL YOU ON THE WAY. RIGHT NOW WE NEED TO MOBILIZE! WE NEED ALL AVAILABLE HEROES IN BRICKSTOWN IMMEDIATELY...

"...BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE."
ONE OF THE OLDEST ZONES IN PARAGON CITY, BRICKSTOWN RECEIVED ITS NAME BECAUSE AFTER THE GREAT FIRE OF 1918, IT WAS DECIDED THAT ALL OF THE NEW BUILDINGS WERE TO BE MADE OUT OF SOMETHING MORE FIREPROOF THAN WOOD.
REEEOOOEEEOOOEEOOO
HOLY CRAP! SECURITY BREACH! SECTOR THREE!
BUT BEING THE HOME OF THE MOST BRICK BUILDINGS PER CAPITA ISN'T WHAT BRICKSTOWN IS BEST KNOWN FOR.
HUH?! WHAT THE F--
THAT DISTINCTION BELONGS TO THIS PLACE...
THIS IS BASE CALLING ALL UNITS... PLEASE RESPOND.
THIS HAS GOT TO BE A MISTAKE. DID SOMEBODY SCHEDULE A DRILL OR SOMETHING?
ANYONE-- PLEASE RESP--
THUMPPP
...THE ZIGGURAT PENITENTIARY. HOME OF SOME OF THE MOST HARDENED AND DESPICABLE CRIMINALS IN THE CITY...
...AND NOW, THANKS TO THE BANISHED PANTHEON, SOME NEW GUESTS, AS WELL...!

...MUCH TO THE DISMAY OF THE CITIZENS OF BRICKSTOWN.

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WHAT'S HAPPENING, MOMMY?
CLIK
I DON'T KNOW, HONE
EEEEEEEEE!!!
KRASHKL
NOOOO!
MOMMEEEEEE!
GET UP! PLEASE GET UP!
IF YOU'LL FOLLOW ME, I CAN GET YOU TO SOMEWHERE SAFE.

HELLLPP!
THWAKKKK
WHOOOSSH
YOU'RE SAFE NOW.
TH--THANKS?!
WHMMPPP

NNH?!
DIIIEEEEE!
PLEASE... ALLOW ME.

ARE YOU PREPARED TO FIGHT *ACTUAL* VILLAINS NOW?
...
...YES.
WELL, THEN...
KRKZZZLLLL
THWIPP
KRTHOOOOMM
I'LL BE RIGHT BACK.
KNOCK YOURSELF OUT.
YAAAAAAAA!
SURE, HE SEEMS A LITTLE TOO HAPPY TO BE IN A BRAWL...
KLANK
...BUT AT LEAST HE'S ON *OUR* SIDE.

THERE'S TALK AROUND HEADQUARTERS THAT YOU'RE A FAIRLY ACCOMPLISHED *SINGER.*
YES...I DO HAVE QUITE A FOLLOWING BACK HOME.

DO YOU EVER THINK OF GIVING THIS UP AND DOING THAT FULL-TIME?
IT SEEMS LIKE A MUCH *SAFER* CAREER PATH.
ACTUALLY, CITADEL...

...BELIEVE IT OR NOT...
...COMPARED TO *PERFORMING* IN FRONT OF AN *AUDIENCE...*

...I FIND THIS TO BE... *RELAXING.*
WELL, IF YOUR SINGING IS EVEN *HALF* AS GOOD AS YOUR FIGHTING, I THINK I'LL HAVE A *LISTEN* WHEN THIS IS ALL OVER.

YOUR TEAM IS QUITE IMPRESSIVE, STATESMAN. JUST AS YOU DESCRIBED.
THE FEELING IS MUTUAL, FORESHADOW.
UM, I HATE TO CUT YOUR ADMIRATION SESSION SHORT, BUT WE HAVE SOME REAL PROBLEMS OVER HERE, CHIEF.
WHERE ARE YOU, SISTER PSYCHE?
WE'RE AT THE ZIG.
AND SOMETHING BAD IS HAPPENING...
...THE PRISONERS ARE, WELL... MISSING!
WELL, BE CAREFUL OVER THERE. WE'LL CATCH UP WITH YOU SHORTLY. EVERYTHING SEEMS TO BE--UH--UNDER--
WHAT TH--
UH, CHECK THAT, SISTER PSYCHE. YOU AND NUMINA NEED TO GET OVER HERE...

NOW!
TO BE CONTINUED!

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Strike Hammer

Part One

PAGE 2

SURFING THE WAVES OF FATE

SOLAR SURFER: Part Three

PAGE 4

Badge Hounds PLUS MORE FAN COMICS!

PAGE 7

Be a *Tattle Tale* too! - see page 8

Strike Hammer

Part One

By Lucien Soulban

Troy Blankenship breathed slowly -- his nerves chattered and his heart stomped against his chest. With sandy blond hair, Troy looked better suited for clubbing than a military action.

All around him, a sea of costumed reds and whites filled the streets and mini-parks around the Steel Canyon gate; row upon row of Longbows' finest agents organized into loose phalanxes beneath the grey skies and skyscrapers of Siren's Call.

The air buzzed with anxious whispers and hardware. Agents waited while supply officers furnished them with grenades and clips. Flamethrower units tested their tank's mix of volatile cocktails; minigun operators loaded ammo belts into their chain-guns and checked their riggings.

"Makes you wish you had more firepower, eh?" Michelle said, smiling.

Troy nodded to the black-haired woman, briefly admiring the way her costume stroked her waist and the row of red stars spilled down her legs. He checked the slide on his semi-automatic and holstered his weapon.

"Don't sweat it," she said. "You'll do fine." Michelle tugged on his rigging, ensuring he'd secured it properly. "If you're hurt, the mediport transponders will blip you back to the field hospital."

Troy nodded. Even though the medical transport beacons couldn't reach the Rogue Isles, Freedom Phalanx's Citadel had hacked Arachnos' mediport network.

"I know," Troy said. "With our system, we can redirect their signals… us to the hospital and injured villains into the Zig."

"How'd you know that?" Michelle asked, laughing. "They briefed me this morning and I sure as hell outrank you."

"Not exactly the best kept secret, Captain," Troy responded. "But I'm more worried about Arachnos uncovering the hack."

"It'll be too late by then," Michelle said before swallowing her own smile.

Troy followed her gaze; the Longbow Wardens moved through the ranks, patting operatives on the shoulders and stopping long enough to give their troops a pep talk.

"Guess the briefing's over," Troy said.

"Guess so."

The various units gathered around their Longbow Wardens. Troy and Michelle headed for Warden Tyron, a commander with square features and a buzz-cut afro.

"Okay, listen up," Warden Tryon said. "Freedom Phalanx is leading the charge. All platoons under D Company will accompany Synapse to Charlie Point."

"How the hell we supposed to accompany Synapse?" Michelle said. "We're speed bumps to him."

"Don't try following him. Just secure the beachhead… like the simulations. The Freedom Phalanx and Agents will act as skirmish units, engaging the villains and pulling them off our backs until we're set."

"How come I don't see other heroes around?" someone asked.

"This is strictly a police action," Warden Tyron said. "We start using private citizens in this fight and the UN will be on Paragon's back faster than Synapse can sneeze."

The whine of turbines filled the air.

"Heads up," someone shouted, "this is it."

Several dozen bullet-nosed Longbow Chasers rose skyward, propelled on turbofans; on their heels soared wings of Longbow Eagles with their gleaming jetpacks.

"Debarkation in ten minutes!" Warden Tyron shouted.

The calm sea of white and red uniforms broke into brisk action. Men and women returned to their units, checked their equipment and made final preparations for the assault. Longbow operatives yelled and jostled into position, Wardens barked orders and the hum of machines rose in pitch. Warden Tyron gave his squad a nod before moving through the crowd.

"Listen," Troy said to Michelle. "If I don't come back. It was a privilege --"

"Hey!" Michelle said. "None of that."

"It's just --" Troy hesitated, his footing precarious at this moment. A dozen things he wanted to say, but nothing he could say. Too much was at stake — far more than anyone here realized.

Thankfully, a cheer broke through the crowd, distracting Michelle. Fingers pointed skyward. The

Freedom Phalanx jet had arrived with Statesman flying in the lead.

"Time to play the hero," Troy muttered.

***

Twenty minutes ago, Statesman touched down alongside the heavy turbine whine of the Freedom Phalanx jet. The men and women who emerged proved a who's who of Paragon City's epic champions. A cheer rose as Manticore, Synapse, Sister Psyche, Back Alley Brawler, Positron, Ravenstorm and Ms. Liberty each stepped off the jet.

Fifteen minutes ago, Statesman finished his speech, sending a rush of excitement through the crowd.

Fourteen minutes ago, the beautiful Azuria descended from the jet. Six other men and women from M.A.G.I. accompanied her.

Thirteen minutes ago, Azuria and her sibling sorcerers began their rituals using Rularuu artifacts to open iris-like portals leading to the Rogue Isles.

Michelle stood on the lip of the crater, spraying the advancing villains with hydro-kinetic rounds — less-than-lethal bullets with liquid cores. The remaining agents took shelter in the crater itself.

"Bingo on ammo!" someone shouted.

Troy tossed a magazine to the operative before unloading his clip into a bipedal dog-like villain trying to advance on them. The dog lopped away, yelping.

The ruins of Darwin's Landing suited the entrenched Longbow forces perfectly, but their well-coordinated assault devolved into a free-for-all. The villains responded far quicker than anticipated, swarming the invaders with sheer numbers. Chasers and Eagles soared skyward to establish air dominance, but the ground forces clashed with villains of all makes.

"These are the bottom-feeders!" Michelle yelled, oblivious to the hiss and whine of energy bolts and tracer rounds around her. "Where are the big-guns?"

"Protecting Lord Recluse!" Troy responded.

Ten minutes ago, the defense turrets along the Rogue Isles' coastlines pointed out, each one purring and moving as it tracked inbound objects. Longbow agents and crafts streamed through the portals, into Mercy Island…behind the automated defenses.

Ten minutes ago Troy activated a transponder switch hidden in his belt.

And ten minutes ago is exactly when all Hell broke loose.

***

He watched as Warden Tyron brought a spinning roundhouse into the gut of an armored undead brandishing a broadsword.

"Look out!" someone shouted.

A truck-sized section of wall seemed to hang in the air a moment before arcing toward the crater. The agents scattered from their cover seconds before the crushing mass slammed into their position; with a grunt, a tall, well-muscled woman in torn black tights picked up another section of wall.

"Brute-class heavy!" Michelle cried.

"Mine!" Tyron responded, flying straight for his

adversary. They collided, both careening into the crumbling ruins. Walls collapsed and a grey clot of dust choked the air.

The villains renewed their attack and swept in with a coordinated offensive. The mob of two dozen washed over the scattered and now isolated Longbow operatives.

Troy couldn't see anyone else past the hammering punishment directed at him. His gel-pack body armor protected him despite the rain of fists, bullet impacts and energy blows that buffeted him.

"Enough," Troy snarled, backhanding the zombie trying to bite his arm. He shouldered his way past opponents and headed, in his best estimation, away from the others. He dodged and wove, barely avoiding bolts of fire and frost that screamed past him. Suddenly, a frozen mass struck him square in the back, sending him tumbling forward. Troy tucked into a roll and sprang to his feet.

Can't maintain this farce, he thought.

Troy dropped his pistol, a poor weapon at best, but a necessary part of the charade. The advancing villains smiled, believing they faced a coward. Instead, Troy reached into one of the invisible nil-pockets orbiting him, one of the pockets only he could see and touch. His hand shimmered, a fact everyone noticed just before the pulse rifle materialized in his grip.

Troy smiled before unleashing streams of crimson blasts into the villains. A few backed away, frightened by the turn of the events. The more veteran among them avoided the shots and fired back with fire, ice and spore.

The blows struck Troy hard, sending him crashing into a pile of rubble. The rifle vanished as it fell from his grip; Troy could barely see through the haze of pain and soporifics. He waited for the killing strike to fall. In its stead, a helmet-filtered voice roared:

"Enough!"

It took Troy a moment to focus on the caped villain hovering between him and the mob. The other miscreants hesitated, obviously confused by the arrival of the white uniformed Arachnos Arbiter. A squad of five Crab Spider soldiers, with their red-eyed helms and articulated spider-arms, pushed through the crowd.

"I sent the signal twenty minutes ago," Troy muttered, getting back to his feet. "What took you so long?"

"Been busy, little brother," the Arbiter replied. He turned to the crowd. "He's one of us. Now go on… there're other Longbow incursions to fight."

Most villains moved away, their disappointment obvious. A few others, stubborn or powerful, continued watching.

"Why'd you break cover?"

"Because you got a problem," Troy said, pulling back his mask.

"We can handle the invasion."

"Wrong," Troy said. "Citadel tapped into your mediport network. Your defeated "chosen" are being sent to the Zig."

END PART I

Solar Surfer: Part Two

By Matthew Wallace (Plasma)

The two minds became one, like two instruments, playing one song in harmony. They were simply meant to be as one, and acting in concert with each other was as natural as breathing.

Dylan and Supernova agreed instinctively on a name, a celebration of the whole person they had become. With certainty and eagerness, Solar Surfer climbed from the bed. He looked down at his arms and legs, restored to their full use. In fact, he felt strong; as strong as he had ever been, and growing stronger each moment, as if the energy from Supernova had made his body more than human. As he thought this, that part of him which was Supernova flared with some pride, and he felt light headed, as if the energy were tangible and surging within him. He went to the dresser, and found his tuxedo inside, streaked with blood and plaster dust, with the buttons torn off the shirt. He stripped off his hospital

gown and pulled the tuxedo on, pausing to adjust the bow tie in the mirror.

He laughed vivaciously. He delighted in the sound of his own laughter. He realized he had not done it in over four years, because even when he was laughing inside, he had not physically been able to do so.

He strode with purpose out of his room.

"What the…?" said a nurse as she turned and saw him, a look of shock on her face.

"Thank you for your excellent care," Solar Surfer said with an elaborate bow. "But I must be on my way!" And with a chuckle, he turned, took two short steps and then began to slide. Energy swelled up under his shoes, a self-created wave of light to "surf" down the hallway out of sight of the stunned nurse.

As Solar Surfer emerged from the hospital doors, he took a deep breath and looked out at the city. The day had never looked so bright, the sky so blue. The air had never felt so fresh, the spring breeze so soft. Dazzling light exploded from his eyes as Solar Surfer pointed his arms up and, buoyed by the energy inside him now, lifted into the sky on wings of will, wispy streaks of energy trailing out behind him.

. . . .

August 29th, 2002

Dylan leaned his surfboard against the dock. The surf in Paragon City couldn't match Kirra Point, but it was respectable. It was a lot less crowded, too. Dylan wasn't sure if it was the encroachment of gangs on the Talos Island pier, or just that the hustle and bustle of everyday life in Paragon City left little time for surfing. But Dylan loved the beach still, and when he came to surf he felt most aligned with his human self. He could wistfully remember his carefree days, chasing his endless summer. The part of him that was Supernova was amused by such frivolity, as it was so foreign to his former nature. But Supernova was Dylan's equal in his passion for life and sensation, and they made a great pairing because of this.

"Lookie what we have here, a pretty boy out surfing," came a hoarse and mocking voice.

Dylan turned calmly. The newcomer was hefting a battleaxe in one hand, and two more thugs behind him carried imposing broadswords. They wore jeans and cutoff jackets, and one wore a bandanna tied around his forehead. They were clearly members of the Warriors, Paragon City's gang of militaristic, elite fighters. They were a meritocracy, where merit was decided on the edge of blade.

"Hey there, fellas," Solar Surfer replied. "Come to put down your weapons and get a tan?"

"You wish, Blondie. We're here to show you who owns the pier."

"What, do I look like a Tsoo spy or something?"

"We don't care who you are," the man said, hefting his axe menacingly. "You want to be here, you get permission. You made a mistake thinking you could play on our turf."

"No," Solar Surfer replied gravely. "The people of Paragon are free to go where they will, and the mistake today was yours."

A bubble of incandescent light flared out from the center of Solar Surfer's body, surrounding him. Energy blazed from his eyes like fire.

"A cape, just out surfing? We gotta show this guy a lesson," said one of the other thugs.

"Yeah, we do. Come on, pretty boy, your glowy eyes don't scare me!" said the leader, as he rushed forward brandishing his axe.

Solar Surfer glared at him intensely, and twin beams of light burst from his eyes, sending the axe-bearing thug spinning to the ground. The other two moved to surround him. Solar Surfer tensed for confrontation as he drew his energy from within, then leaped towards the nearest one. A swing of the thug's sword glanced off the shield of energy, clipped Solar Surfer's shoulder, but then Solar Surfer landed a colossal two-handed blow, light exploding from his fists as they struck. The thug flew through the air to land heavily on the sand, and lay still.

Solar Surfer turned as the other sword came down, but he moved too slowly. The sword pierced the energy shield and sliced through his thin surf shirt, leaving a gruesome slash across his arm. He slammed his fist into the thug's gut, and a burst of energy sent him flying. The thug landed on his back, and sat up in time to see a wave of energy ripple up Solar Surfer's body, closing the wound and even repairing his shirt.

Lifting his hands skyward, energy crackled and swelled between them, then Solar Surfer heaved a scintillating sphere of light at the thug, who was struggling to rise. It smashed him squarely in the chest with palpable force, and he sprawled onto his back and lay still.

Solar Surfer walked among the unconscious criminals, tagging each of them with an arrest beacon and watching them fade away as the teleport system pulled them in.

"That was quite a show," came a familiar voice. He spun around.

"Mikaela!" he exclaimed. Tears came unbidden to his eyes.

She tilted her head to the side and regarded him. She still looked like an angel to him, with her beautiful curls spilling over her shoulders.

"You got my letters?" he asked nervously.

"Yes," she said hesitantly. "But … Five years, Dylan." She glanced around. "At least now that you're famous, you're easy to find."

A tear was rolling down his cheek as he replied, "I know. I … I wanted to call you. Or come see you,

Continued page 8

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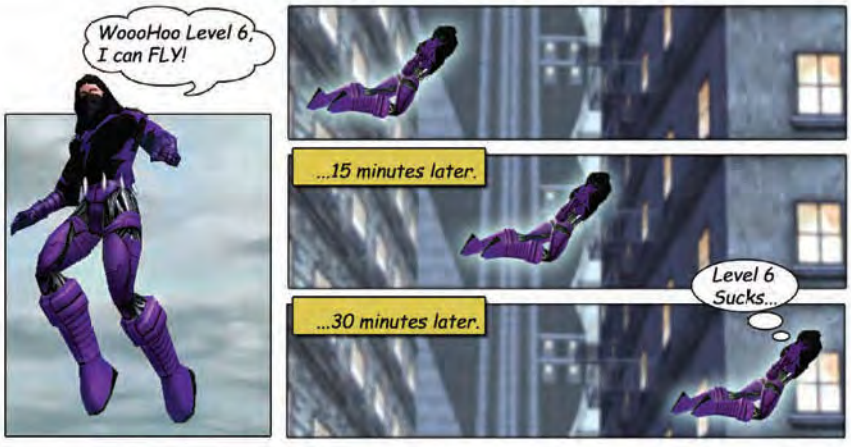

Surfer

Continued from page 5

but I didn't want to interfere."

She shook her head. "When I got your first letter months ago, I could hardly believe what you were telling me. Did you think I wasn't strong enough? Is it really true? Why did you tell me to leave?"

"I just couldn't bear becoming a burden to you. You deserved better than having a cripple holding you back your whole life. I could barely figure out how I was going to get through each day. I didn't want you to have to go through that too."

"But that didn't stop you from writing me. Did you think we could just pick up where we left off, five years later?" she asked, more amused than angry.

He looked sheepishly at the ground. "I didn't know you were with someone. Maybe if you'd replied to one of my letters … I couldn't let you go when I wasn't sure."

"I had a good thing going. I put your letters away when they came. I had a life again. Without you."

Dylan remained stoic and silent, but his tears betrayed his anguish.

"I couldn't stop thinking about you, Dylan. I tried, believe me I tried. You were my sunshine, but you sent me away…"

"Baby, I'm so sorry. I thought at first my life was going to be miserable, after the accident. I didn't want you to be miserable, too. And I don't want to take you away from your life, I just had to know what happened to you."

"Then why did you tell me the truth now?" she demanded. "Why confess now, after five years, that you loved me all along?"

He replied solemnly, "A day hasn't gone by in those five years when I didn't think of you. I missed you. After you were gone there were always two things I could never get out of my head: the ocean, and you. How could I not hope to have you back? I'm sorry to cause problems, I won't write you again. I want you to have a good life, no matter what, I really do."

Tears streamed down her face as she closed the distance to him. "You stubborn fool, you were never a problem, never a burden. You were the sweetest guy I ever met." Then she slapped him across the face. He looked stunned, and she sheepishly added, "That was for lying to me. I wanted to stay with you. You may not have been able to do everything you once could, but you had your voice and your soul, and I love you. I tried to forget you, but every letter that came reminded me that I never really could."

He didn't say anything. What could he say? He wrapped his arms around her, the regret he carried inside melting like snow in spring, and his energy enveloped her as they drifted up into the sky.

The Paragon Tattler Fan Art & Fiction Submission Guidelines are now Online! FOR THE SCOOP ON HOW YOU CAN BE A TATTLE-TALE TOO VISIT US AT http://www.cityofheroes.com/community/fansubmission_guidelines.html

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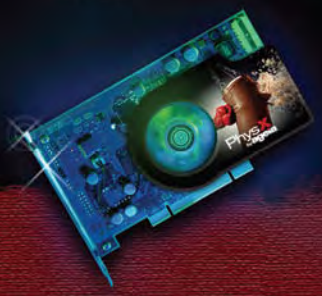

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