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# CITY OF HEROES®

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*art by:* MIKE CHOI
ADRIANA MELO

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# JULY

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WE ARE:
FORESHADOW.
NUMINA.
POSITRON.
CITADEL.
SISTER PSYCHE.
STATESMAN.
SYNAPSE.
ROSE STAR.
SWAN.
AND ME, MANTICORE.
SPARK BLADE.
UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES, THIS WOULD BE QUITE A FORMIDABLE FORCE.
MIRROR SPIRIT.

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BRICKSTOWN PRISON, TO BE EXACT.
WE HAVE NO IDEA WHAT FREED THESE VILLAINS.
AND AT THIS POINT WE DON'T CARE.
WE ONLY KNOW THAT WE NEED TO STOP THEM BEFORE THEY CAN REACH THE CIVILIANS IN TOWN.

SOMEHOW.
I HAVE TO ADMIT THAT THIS FIGHT SEEMS MORE THAN A LITTLE...DAUNTING.
WE'RE JUST LUCKY WE HAVE SOME ALLIES FOR THIS FIGHT. NAMELY FORESHADOW AND HIS TEAM.
SURE, HE AND I GOT OFF ON THE WRONG FOOT...*
*SEE LAST ISH FOR DETAILS!
...BUT RIGHT NOW I'M VERY HAPPY THAT HE'S ON OUR SIDE.

LOOKS LIKE I HAVE COMPANY.
C'MON-- LOAD--
TWOOOSHHH
IT LOOKED LIKE YOU COULD USE SOME HELP.
THANKS, POSITRON.
ALLOW ME TO RETURN THE FAVOR!

STATESMAN, THESE VILLAINS ARE NOT IN THEIR RIGHT MIND.
SOMEONE... OR SOMETHING... HAS ENTRANCED AND ENTHRALLED THEM...
...CAUSING THEM TO FIGHT WITH AN ALMOST INHUMAN FEROCITY.
I'M AFRAID, BASED ON SHEER NUMBERS ALONE, OUR OPPONENTS SHALL SOON OVERWHELM US.
WE NEED TO STOP THEM-- QUICKLY!

ELSEWHERE, AT INDEPENDENCE PORT.
POLICE ARE WARNING RESIDENTS OF BRICKSTOWN TO REMAIN IN THEIR HOMES UNTIL THIS UPRISING IS UNDER CONTROL.

WE NOW HAVE WORD THAT THE FREEDOM PHALANX IS ON THE SCENE SO WE EXPECT THE SITUATION TO BE RESOLVED MOMENTARILY.
HEY, DO ME A FAVOR AND SHUT THIS OFF. THE NEWS IS DEPRESSIN'...
SO FAR, NOBODY KNOWS WHAT CAUSED THE RIOTS AT THE PRISON, BUT THIS REPORTER SUSPECTS THAT SINIST--
CLIK


WHATTA THEY EXPECT PUTTING A PRISON IN THE MIDDLE OF A NEIGHBORHOOD. JEEZ. WERE THEY LOOKIN' FOR TROUBLE?
HEY, DID IT JUST GET DARK IN HERE OR IS IT JUST ME?
MMMHMMM.

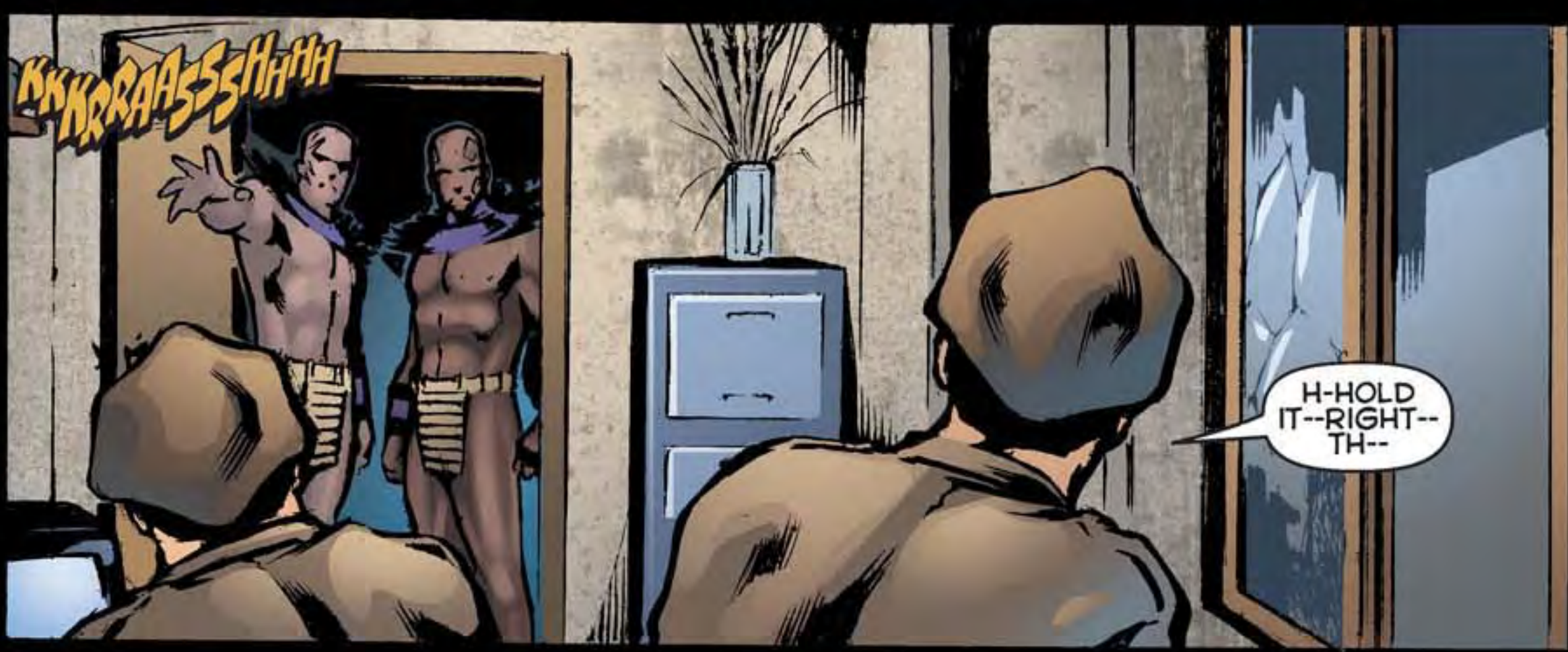

LOOKS LIKE THE FOG'S COMIN'--

HOLY...

WHAT IS IT, FRANCIS? WHATTAYA SEE?
...$#!@

THWAKKROOOMMM

RRRRMMMMMBBBLLLE
FRRRAAANNNCIISSS!


KKKRRAASSHHHH
H-HOLD IT--RIGHT--TH--

THWAKKOOOMMMMM

BE CAREFUL, MY BROTHER.
IF WE DAMAGE THEIR RECORDS, WE WON'T BE ABLE TO LOCATE COLDWELL'S BELONGINGS!

NOT TO WORRY. I KNOW *EXACTLY* WHERE TO FIND WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR...

ELSEWHERE.
NUMINA, I BELIEVE I'VE DISCOVERED A SOLUTION. WE'LL NEED YOUR ABILITIES, AS WELL AS THOSE OF SISTER PSYCHE AND MIRROR SPIRIT.

BUT IT WILL *NOT* BE EASY.
SEEMS LIKE NOTHING EVER IS. FILL US IN, HONEY--
-;GASP;- NUMINA-- ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?!

I AM UNHARMED, AMHEE. ONE OF THE ADVANTAGES OF INTANGIBILITY. NOW, SWAN, TELL US OF YOUR PLAN.
IT BEGINS WITH YOU, SISTER PSYCHE AND MYSELF, POOLING OUR ENERGIES...

AND CHANNELING THEM THROUGH *HER!* I BELIEVE I UNDERSTAND.

SINCE ALL THESE VILLAINS ARE BEING MIND CONTROLLED BY SOME KIND OF EXTERNAL SOURCE, WE NEED A WAY TO *JAM* THE SIGNAL, AS IT WERE.
AND THAT'S WHERE *YOU* CAN ASSIST US.

FWOOSH

FWOOSH

LET US BEGIN...

VNNNNNNN

VNNNNNN

VNEEOOOOSHHH

VAKKKSHHHEEEOOO
VAKKKSHHHEEEOOO

VAKKSHHHEEOOO

WELL DONE, AMHEE.
YOU MAY RELEASE THE ENERGY NOW.

GREAT JOB!
YOU DID IT!
WE DID IT!

SHORTLY...
HMM. THERE'S DEFINITELY A MYSTICAL RESONANCE HERE.
IT IS SIMILAR TO WHAT I FELT AT TALOS ISLAND AND GANGNAM-NU.

THIS DAMAGE WAS CAUSED BY SOME KIND OF ELEMENTAL ENERGY.

AND THEY DESTROYED THE *LIGHTS*, APPARENTLY.

NO PROBLEM.
FWOOSH

HMM. EVERYTHING IS MOSTLY INTACT, BUT THEIR ENERGY TRAIL LEADS THIS WAY.

IT APPEARS THAT THEY FOUND WHAT THEY WERE LOOKING FOR.
AND WE *NEED* TO GET IT BACK, BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE... FOR *ALL* OF US!

YOU!

MEANWHILE...
OH, GREAT AND POWERFUL LUGHEBU...

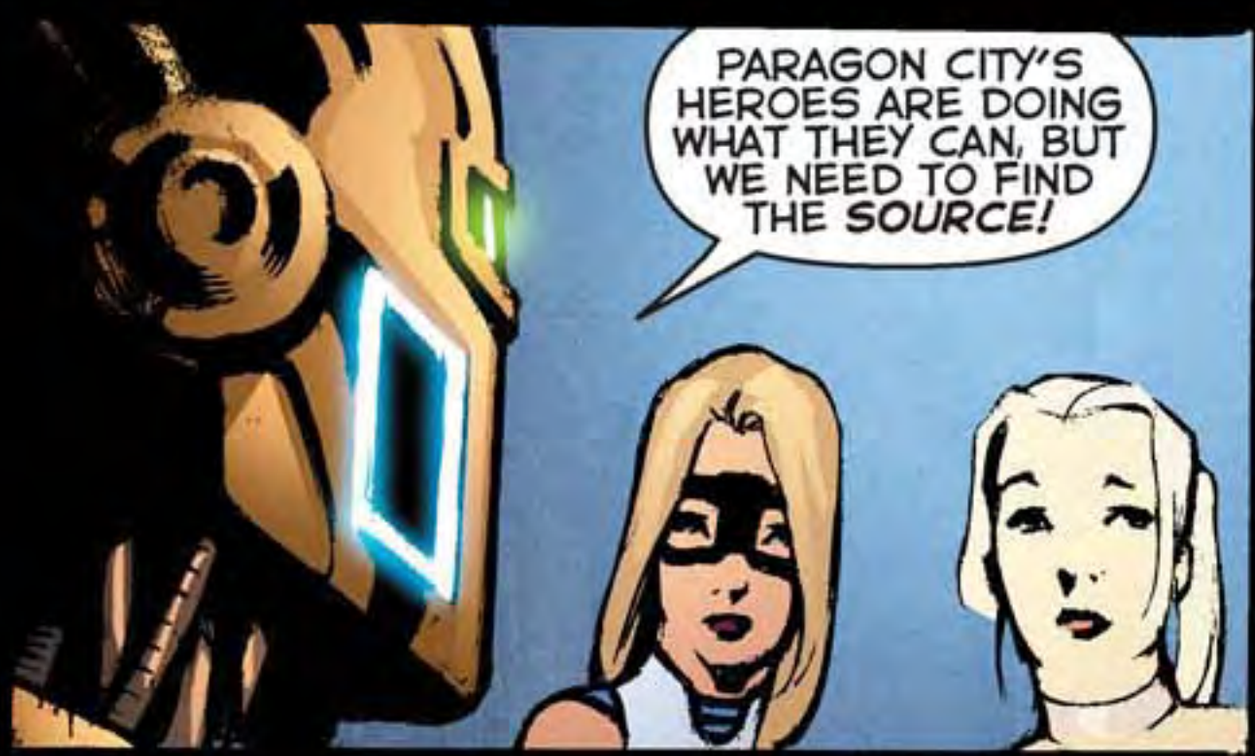
WE, YOUR HUMBLE SERVANTS, HAVE SUCCESSFULLY RETURNED FROM OUR MISSION, AND SEEK AN AUDIENCE WITH YOUR EMINENCE.

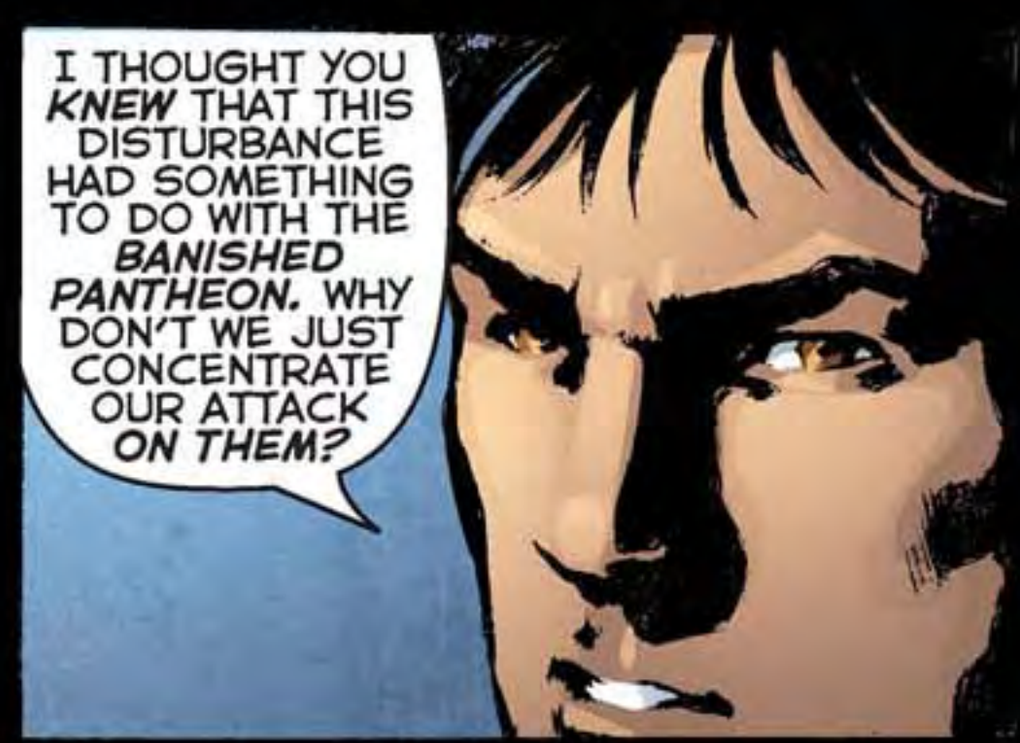
YOU POSSESS THAT WHICH I SEEK?

YES!
SOON, OUR FREEDOM SHALL BE AT HAND!

MMMMM... YES...

ELSEWHERE...
WHAT SHALL WE DO NOW?
UNFORTUNATELY, WE *STILL* HAVEN'T ASCERTAINED THE SOURCE OF THE POWER THAT IS TERRORIZING THE POPULACE, AND THE ATTACKS ON CIVILIANS SEEM TO BE *INCREASING!*


PARAGON CITY'S HEROES ARE DOING WHAT THEY CAN, BUT WE NEED TO FIND THE *SOURCE!*


I THOUGHT YOU *KNEW* THAT THIS DISTURBANCE HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE *BANISHED PANTHEON.* WHY DON'T WE JUST CONCENTRATE OUR ATTACK *ON THEM?*

NOT SO FAST, MY FRIEND. WE CAN'T BE TOO HASTY. BEING RASH COULD GET US INTO *MORE* TROUBLE.

HUH? MANTICORE'S THE VOICE OF REASON? IS THIS THE *TWILIGHT ZONE?!*
WELL DONE, SON. THERE'S HOPE FOR YOU YET!

WHAT? A GUY CAN'T BE LEVEL-HEADED ONCE IN A WHILE?

★★★★★

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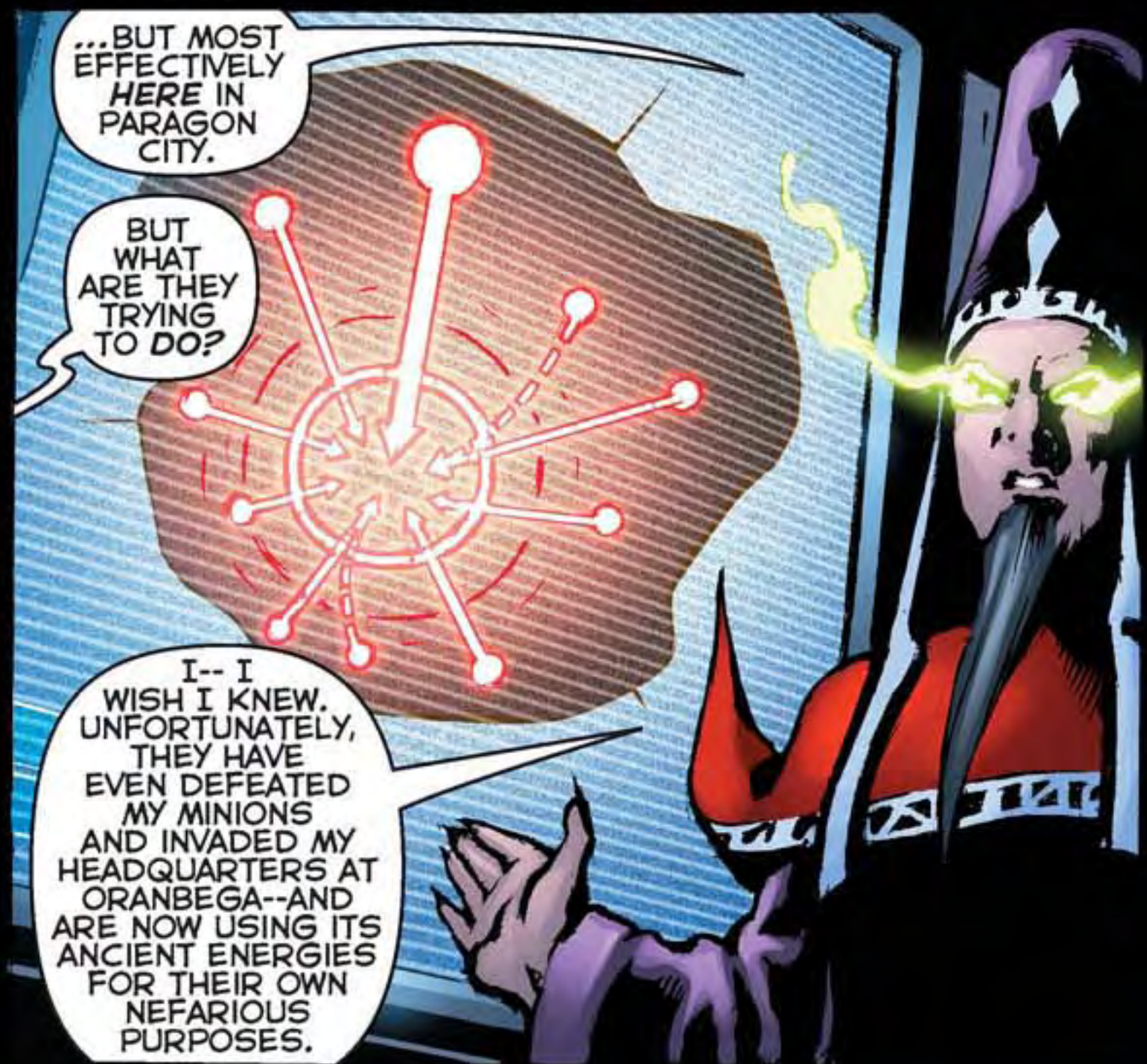
THE BOY IS RIGHT.
WAIT!
HOLD YOUR FIRE!
YOU NEED TO HEAR WHAT HE HAS TO SAY.
WHO'S HE CALLING "BOY?"
I NEVER ENVISIONED THE NOTORIOUS BARON ZORIA STEPPING FOOT IN THIS PLACE.
BELIEVE ME: THE FEELING IS MOST ASSUREDLY MUTUAL.
BUT THE GRAVITY OF THIS SITUATION COMPELS ME TO SEEK... A PARTNERSHIP, SHALL WE SAY. FOR THE SAKE OF ALL OF PARAGON CITY!

THESE CREATURES HAVE DEVISED A WAY TO SIPHON PSYCHIC EMANATIONS CREATED FROM HUMAN EMOTIONS.

THE EMOTION THAT PROVIDES THE MOST ENERGY IS *FEAR*, AND THEY HAVE BEEN *EXTREMELY* SUCCESSFUL IN ACCESSING THAT FROM FRIGHTENED CIVILIANS ALL ACROSS THE WORLD...


...BUT MOST EFFECTIVELY *HERE* IN PARAGON CITY.
BUT WHAT ARE THEY TRYING TO *DO?*
I-- I WISH I KNEW. UNFORTUNATELY, THEY HAVE EVEN DEFEATED MY MINIONS AND INVADED MY HEADQUARTERS AT ORANBEGA--AND ARE NOW USING ITS ANCIENT ENERGIES FOR THEIR OWN NEFARIOUS PURPOSES.

AND YOU'D LIKE US TO HELP YOU GET IT BACK SO YOU CAN RESUME *YOUR* NEFARIOUS PURPOSES?!
WE DON'T HAVE A CHOICE, STATESMAN. THE ALTERNATIVE IS...

WHAT EXACTLY *IS* YOUR PLAN, ZORIA?

WE'LL NEED TWO GROUPS. ONE WILL HEAD TO *DARK ASTORIA...* AND THE OTHER WILL JOIN ME...

"...AS WE INFILTRATE ORANBEGA!"

I THINK I CAN SAFELY SAY THAT I NEVER THOUGHT I'D BE HERE AGAIN.
THE LAST TIME WAS LONG AGO, DURING THE RIKTI INVASION. IT WAS ONE OF THE STRANGEST PLACES I'D EVER SEEN.

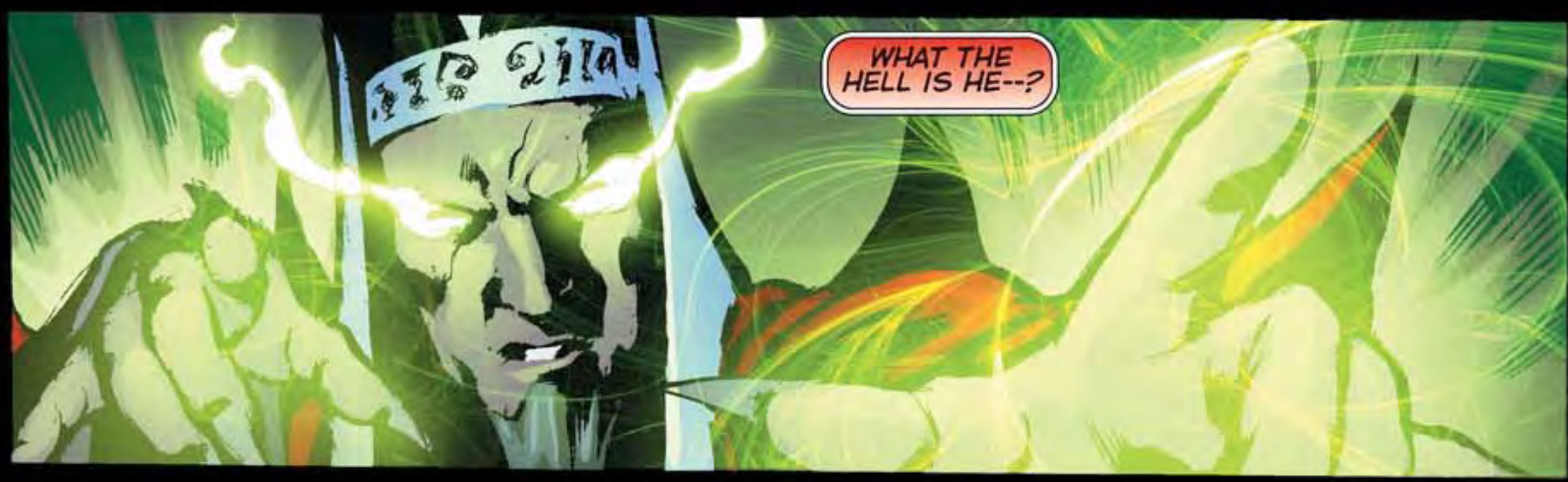
WHO'D EVER HAVE THOUGHT A PLACE LIKE THIS COULD EXIST RIGHT UNDER PARAGON CITY!

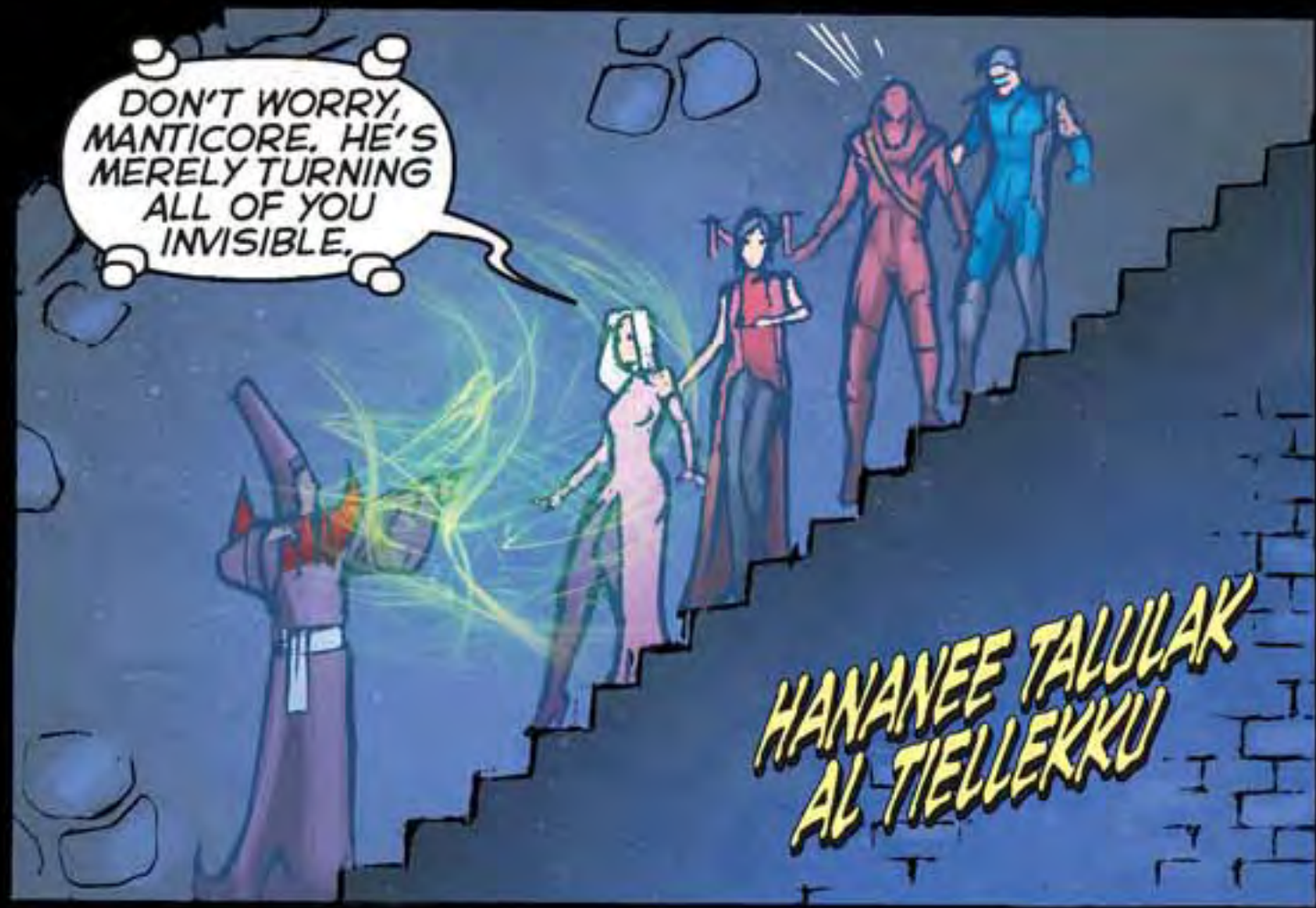
NOW WE MUST REMAIN SILENT.
NO $#!@.
AND SPEAKING OF STRANGE, THEY DON'T GET MUCH MORE WACKY THAN THIS GUY, ZORIA.

THERE'S SO LITTLE WE REALLY KNOW ABOUT THE GUY-- AND HIS GROUP, CIRCLE OF THORNS.

THINGS MUST BE REALLY DIRE IF WE NEED TO WORK WITH HIM...
...AND VICE VERSA.

WHY ANYONE WOULD WANT TO SPEND THEIR LIFE LIVING AND WORKING OUT OF A CAVE IS BEYOND ME. BUT THIS PLACE IS IMPRESSIVE...
...AND OCCUPIED.
HANANEE TALULAK AL TIELLEKKU


WHAT THE HELL IS HE--?


DON'T WORRY, MANTICORE. HE'S MERELY TURNING ALL OF YOU INVISIBLE.
HANANEE TALULAK AL TIELLEKKU

OH. COOL! THANKS, NUMINA.

UNFORTUNATELY, WE DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME.

FOR WHAT?
HANANEE TALULAK AL TIELLEKKU.
I KNOW ZORIA SAID WE'D LEARN THINGS ON A NEED TO KNOW BASIS, BUT THIS IS A LITTLE RIDICULOUS AT THIS POINT, WOULDN'T YOU SAY?

YES. BARON ZORIA IS VERY SPARING WITH THE INFORMATION. THOSE CREATURES DOWN THERE ARE SHAMANS FOR THE BANISHED PANTHEON.
HANANEE TALULAK AL TIELLEKKU

AND THE REASON YOU WEREN'T TOLD ALL OF THE INFORMATION IMMEDIATELY WAS BECAUSE WE FELT IT WOULD BE EASIER TO MASK YOUR BRAIN FROM PRYING MINDS.

UM, I DIDN'T SAY THAT OUT LOUD, DID I?

UNFORTUNATELY, YES.

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## FANTASTIC FAN ART!

from the City of Heroes Community. PAGE 6

THE PARAGON
# TATTLER

July, 2006 $2.75

# Strike Hammer

Part Two

PAGE 2

## CRASH!

*Bleeding, breathing, bones...*

PAGE 4

*THE FURTHER MISADVENTURES OF*

## Q4ORCE

PAGE 7

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

# Strike Hammer

## Part Two

## By Lucien Soulban

The white-uniformed Arbiter studied Troy a moment, both of them standing amid the ruins of Mercy Island.

"You're sure?" the Arbiter asked.

"Citadel hacked into your emergency mediport grid," Troy said. "They're sending villains with tagged genomes into the Zig and their own people to Siren's Call."

The Arbiter nodded. "All right, little brother. You did good enough. Get yourself out of that costume before these monkeys jump you again," he said, pointing his thumb at the other villains.

Troy smiled. "Finally," he said. He concentrated a moment, using bio-stimulus to activate the universal assemblers hidden in his uniform. The Longbow costume reformed into ceramic armor, the reds and whites tinting black, the Longbow logos vanishing in favor of new trim. A mask-plate covered his face; from invisible tesseract pockets orbiting his body, Troy retrieved a pair of welder's goggles and an old flight mask.

"Those are dad's," the Arbiter said. "I knew you stole them." He turned to the Crab Spider soldiers with their twitching articulated spider-arms. "Inform the Registry that Siege Engineer is now active. Oh… and tell them no special favors on my account."

The Crab Spider soldiers chuckled as the Arbiter walked away. They followed.

"Nice to see you too, bro," Troy whispered.

The remaining villains drifted away as well, picking through the ruins or heading off to another skirmish.

"Sorry I tried killing you," a woman said.

Troy turned and discovered the same woman who threw a brick wall at him earlier now addressing him. Despite the metal plate over one eye and square features, she possessed a rugged beauty.

"What happened to the Warden you were fighting?" Troy asked.

"He ran." She grinned. "No hard feelings?"

"Part of the job, right?"

"Right. Name's Brutallia."

Troy shook her outstretched hand. "Siege Engineer."

"So, you want to go hunting? Longbow's everywhere --"

A triumphant cry from the ruins drew their attention. A man, solid muscle and dressed in tight leather, held a Longbow woman by the neck. She struggled in his massive grip.

Michelle! Troy realized.

"Lookie what I caught," the man roared. "I fried her t-port beacon. We gonna have us some fun now!"

"No," Troy said, striding forward. "She's my kill."

"Says who, little boy?" the man said.

The air around Troy blurred and five robots materialized from the ether. Three small bots and two larger ones, their bodies plated and their arms strapped with blasters, pointed their weapons at the man.

"Ask me that again," Troy said. "Now drop her! She's mine."

"Better listen to him," Brutallia said. "His brother's an Arbiter, which means he ain't no slouch either."

After a moment, the man unclenched his fist. A battered Michelle fell to the ground with a grunt. The man backed away, his gaze a scowl that never wavered.

Troy grabbed Michelle by the collar.

"Bastard," she moaned through the pain.

"No… Siege Engineer. And in case you're wondering, I was never part of Longbow. My family's served Lord Recluse for generations."

Michelle struggled against his grip, but Troy held on tight. Ordinarily, she would have beaten him soundly, but badly injured, she couldn't put up much of a fight.

Troy dropped her to the ground and pointed his blaster at her head. "Nothing personal," he said.

Before Troy could pull the trigger, however, Michelle evaporated, vanishing in an explosion of light.

Troy spun to face the man who'd captured her. "I thought you said her beacon was disabled!"

The man stammered, obviously shocked. Before he could articulate a proper retort, the five bots fired in unison. The blasts rocked the bruiser off his feet.

"Welcome back to Rogue Isles," Brutallia said with a laugh.

"This is what passes for a villain around here? Pathetic," Troy replied.

***

"Your friends are putting up one hell of a fight," Brutallia said, throwing a Longbow agent through a car's windshield.

"Not my friends," Troy replied. His HUD identified the next threat, a Longbow Eagle engaged in strafing runs.

Miguel, Troy realized, recognizing the Eagle as he passed overhead. Shell bursts ripped up the

ground beneath Troy's feet, spraying him with biting concrete. The HUD almost slaved his robots to the targeting protocols when Troy mentally overrode their parameters. He searched for another target… someone he didn't recognize. He located a Longbow minigun operator and targeted him instead; the robots followed suit, firing a barrage of crimson pulse beams. The minigun operator hit the ground hard and vanished.

"Nice shot," Brutallia said. "C'mon. We have more incursions at the Clock Tower."

"Right," Troy said. His gaze lingered on the spot where the Longbow agent fell.

***

"Out of my way!" Michelle yelled, trying to move past the Longbow medic.

"You're still hurt!" the medic protested, blocking her from leaving the field hospital pavilion. "The mediport system isn't a miracle worker. You still have micro-contusions!"

Michelle grabbed the man's medbelt rigging and pointed to the bank of mediport pods. The interior of two flashed with bright light, transporting in two agents. Longbow medics and combat nurses were on hand to catch and support them as they arrived.

"Any minute now you're going to stop receiving patients," Michelle said. "The system's been compromised! Our personnel are in danger!"

The medic's eyes widened. He nodded and quickly escorted Michelle outside, to the command post where two Longbow Nullifiers, a man and a woman stood guard. A moment later, Michelle found herself inside the tent, explaining the situation to Longbow's Field Commander….

***

"We suspected we might have traitors," Field Commander Warrens said. He stood at a foot higher than Michelle, with brick-wall shoulders. "So he's Mastermind-class?" Warrens asked.

"Yes. But look, he compromised our hack." Michelle said, doing her best not to fidget. At least five Wardens surrounded her, listening to her story.

"A red herring," Warrens said. "The hack's there, but we knew Arachnos would eventually find it. Lulls them into a false sense of security. We have other measures in place protecting our forces."

Michelle sighed. "Thank God," she said. "What about Troy?"

The Field Commander shook his head. "Traitors are another matter. We just dispatched someone to apprehend this "Siege Engineer.""

"Who?" Michelle asked.

Warrens merely smiled.

***

The fighting intensified, the surrounding buildings lost behind the thick haze of debris clouds and smoke. Fire Tarantulas with their glowing arm scythes and martial-trained Blood Widows vanished in and out of sight on deadly errands. Power flares and energy bursts lit the miasma-choked air. Troy switched to low-light display, the surge filters barely staying ahead of the random flashes.

If the distractions bothered Brutallia, she didn't show it. She waded into one fight after another, feeding off the adrenaline and endorphins racing through her veins. Troy, however, let his bots handle his adversaries while he cycled through his secondary arsenal. The acid mortar had just fired its last round, according to his HUD read-out, and his forcefield generator was low on power. Warning lights flashed on the icon of two bots, the battle putting a severe strain on their chassis. The other three appeared fine for the moment. Troy could no longer see them through the haze, but he did see through their sensors-array.

Suddenly, one of the heavily damaged bots, Catapult, caught something moving on an incoming vector. Before it could react, however, an electric blast shorted out its systems and the sensor-grid blipped out. Warning bells filled Troy's ear-piece and the HUD blacked out Catapult's icons.

Warning, the HUD message announced. Automaton designation: 'Catapult' destroyed.

Troy snarled a small curse and ordered the four remaining bots into tighter formation. Before they could move, however, another electrical blast slammed into Battering Ram.

Warning, the HUD message announced. Automaton designation: 'Battering Ram' destroyed.

"Brutallia!" Troy cried. "We got serious trouble!"

In the moment it took Troy to speak, Trebuchet fell next, followed by Shield Wall.

"This is happening too fast!" Troy muttered.

Siege Tower fell last; Brutallia had only now turned around to face Troy.

A blur of blue motion — too fast to distinguish properly — and a punch like a baseball bat in full swing caught Troy in the jaw. His faceplate cracked from the high-velocity impact of steel-covered knuckles. The world slipped out from beneath his feet, and for an instant, Troy sailed through the air, his vision blotchy from white pain flares.

He struck the ground abruptly; the ceramic armor absorbed much of the impact, but Troy stuttered a moment, trying to draw his breath. In a sud-

den, painful rush, he caught a lungful of air again and opened his eyes in time to watch Brutallia hit the ground hard.

The hero-speedster Synapse stood above her, but he locked sights on Siege Engineer. Electricity crackled around his clenched fist and ran across his red and blue lightning-bolt patterned costume.

"Get up, traitor," Synapse said with a snarl. "I haven't even begun with the pain yet!"

***TO BE CONTINUED...***

# Crash

## By Chelsea Romans

Breathing, bleeding, bones. Breathing, bleeding, bones. The mantra of triage priority echoed in Lilac's head. Less that four hours had passed since everyone's powers and the emergency medical teleport system had shut down. It was long enough for all hell to break loose in Paragon. Random bits of the day replayed in her head as her hands worked on the wounded. Tracy, staring at her lightning bereft hands, saying over and over, "What's wrong, what happened?" as Lilac and J.V. dragged her to the relative safety of a small parking garage. As a martial arts prodigy, J.V. had no powers to lose. He'd kept them alive, those first crucial minutes. Lilac had kept him alive later, improvising a pressure bandage out of torn clothing to staunch a wound that she could have closed with only a minor exertion of her Empathy powers yesterday. Yesterday was a whole different world. A Beatles song racketed around inside Lilac's overwhelmed brain. She grimaced as she finished the splint and helped her patient stand up. "You're all done. Go over there and see Nurse Clarence; he'll tell you where you should go."

The wobbly youth looked at the barricades. "I want to help…"

"If I catch you anywhere near the fight I'll break your other arm for you! No more being a hero today, now go!" The kid went. Lilac hated to sound so harsh but she didn't want the kid getting his overeager self killed. No more being a hero for anybody, ever. Wrong, she told herself. Today more than ever, Paragon teemed with heroes. The improvised barricade at the end of the street, made mostly of overturned vehicles and Clockwork parts, was manned by unpowered heroes, regular cops, and ordinary citizens. It was the cops who'd rallied the disheartened heroes. While the city had devolved into a riot zone, as the less superpower-dependant criminal elements vied for control, the Paragon P.D. had fallen back to their stations, donned riot gear, and set about re-taking the City. Those heroes who were capable to do so had joined them. Lilac had no illusions about her combat abilities so she'd come to Lagrange Medical Center to help with the wounded. There was plenty to do; the ER had overflowed and the least critical were being treated outside.

"Miss, can you help us?" Lilac turned to see an elder couple leading a huge and battered hero towards the ER entrance. "He's hurt…" continued the older woman. Understatement. The large man was mostly being held up by the frail-seeming old man at his side.

Lilac shouted for Nurse Clarence. The elderly couple hovered protectively near the wounded man as he was assessed. When he was moved inside for x-rays, Lilac gently told them that they couldn't go with him.

"But we don't even know his name, how will we know if he's alright?" asked the older gentleman.

"He'll get the best care possible, I'm sure he'll be fine. The safest thing for you now is to go back home," Lilac told them. The couple reluctantly left. Despite it all, Lilac smiled. She's seen this a lot today. Wounded or disoriented heroes who'd been whisked off the streets by the citizens of Paragon and brought in for treatment. Even though the City was for all intents and purposes a war zone, Paragon took care of her own.

Lilac's slight smile faded as she looked around and realized there were a lot more patients outside the ER than there had been a short while ago. In fact… Lilac searched for Nurse Clarence to confirm her suspicions, tripping over a downed police bot in the process. Like everything else that flew or floated in Paragon, the bots had come crashing down. A lot like my happy little hero world. "Clarence, why are they bringing patients outside? They can't be evacuating the hospital, can they?" Moving patients was a dangerous business; you didn't evacuate a hospital unless there was no other choice. For an answer, Clarence nodded towards the busses that were being allowed past the barricades.

"Everyone who can go is going. I heard on the radio, just before the Cape went off the air, there's a force moving in from the river. They're taking over the City."

"It's an invasion?" Lilac had thought she couldn't feel any more fear today. She was so wrong.

"They're asking for volunteers to stay and care for the patients who absolutely can't be moved, but Lilac, you need to go." Clarence gripped her arm and lowered his voice. "This may just be a rumor, but I heard that when the invaders took over Bell Medical…they killed the wounded heroes there. Just killed them."

"That can't be true!"

"I hope it's not. I pray it's not. But you should go." Hospital staff hurried by, their arms loaded with papers, discs, and what looked like computer parts. Lilac watched, frozen, as they unloaded their burdens into a dumpster and ignited it.

"You're destroying the medical records of heroes, aren't you?"

"We are," said Clarence. "Especially records of next of kin and emergency contacts. Do you have family in the City?" Numb, Lilac shook her head. "Then I want you on the first bus out of here." Clarence's voice warmed. "You've done a good job today, kid. Now scram."

Lilac did as she was told, helping to load the busses. Every person she had talked to today, every patient she had helped, had added to the storm of rumors raging in her mind. The City's been cursed by the Circle of Thorns. The Backalley Brawler is organizing a counterattack; we just have to wait for the signal. No, the Backalley Brawler is wounded, in a coma. The military is calling in an air strike. This is some Crey experiment gone wrong; I've seen spider-shaped robots the size of ponies. The Statesman will be broadcasting instructions soon. No, the Statesman is dead. That last one hurt the worst. Lilac had grown up in Paragon and consequently been raised on tales of the Statesman. When she was a young child, he had symbolized all that was good and proper. In Junior high, she'd developed a secret and raging crush. During high school, she'd wondered just who the hell he thought he was anyhow. After two years as a registered hero, she'd developed a mature respect for his years of service...and occasionally wondered how he could have done this for so long without going batty. To think of him as dead, to think of Paragon falling to a foreign invader, was almost too much. Lilac moved on autopilot.

A sudden commotion at the barricade snapped Lilac back to alertness. Criminals and citizens streamed around and over it, like floodwaters breaching a dam. Those manning the barricade fell back to the steps of the hospital and braced for the assault. But no one attacked. The flood kept right on going. They're here, Lilac realized as a coldness beyond fear filled her. Dark garbed soldiers now swarmed the barricade, accompanied by...dear Lord...spider-shaped, pony-sized robots. The first of the busses took off, racing down a narrow alley beside the hospital, its sides scraping the walls and throwing sparks. Lilac tried to remember where the alley came out. Do we even have anywhere to run?

"Lilac!" Nurse Clarence sounded like a drill sergeant. "Get on a bus, now!" Lilac ran to help Clarence with the bandaged man he was assisting. She stayed with Clarence, helping him load evacuees and ignoring his curses. It wasn't her job to worry about the spider-bots or where the alley came out. This was her job, taking care of the wounded and she would keep doing her job until...

Lilac literally never knew what hit her.

Lilac woke to a lurching world of nausea and pain. She cautiously opened her eyes but didn't dare sit up. She seemed to be on a bus with stacks of cots instead of seats, military surplus maybe. Concussion, definitely. Without thinking, she invoked her healing powers...and they worked. Lilac shouted, "Stop the bus!" By the time the bus stopped, she'd managed to scramble out of her bunk. Nurse Clarence stared, astonished, from the back of the bus. She smiled back and invoked a group healing spell to stabilize everyone. The other busses in the caravan apparently figured it out as well and pulled over. The next few moments were a chaos of shouting and the sound of various beneficial powers going off. Those with helpful auras spread themselves out to cover the greatest area as the worst wounded were unloaded. Lilac and the other healing type heroes charged the line of stretchers as quickly as they came off the busses. She didn't often speak; she just closed wound after screaming wound. Deep satisfaction filled her as she took vengeance on the injuries that had mocked her all day. At some point she came across the huge, battered hero who had been brought in by the elderly couple. They still hovered nearby; they must have just hung around the hospital and jumped on the bus when he was evacuated. One other man she healed seemed vaguely familiar, but she didn't see anyone she knew. Wherever J.V. and Tracy had ended up, it wasn't here.

Finally, there were no more wounded. Recently mended heroes helped exhausted healers and civilian medical personal to their feet. Lilac's vision fogged as someone gently lifted her and carried her away from the bloodstained grass. She was set down and someone's torn cape was placed around her shoulders. The cape wasn't necessary, it was a mild enough evening, but the warmth was comforting. And comfort was necessary. As Lilac slowly regained strength, she realized who was taking care of her. "Valliant? Thank God you're alright!" Lilac barely stopped herself before throwing her arms around her supergroup leader's neck. "Have you seen anyone else from The League?"

"Not in this group. The evacuation was split up though. Some could be in another group. Have you seen anyone we know?

"There was one guy who seemed kind of familiar; he had massive damage to his chest, lots of bullet wounds..."

"Did he live?" Valliant spoke a little sharply.

**Continued page 8**

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**Stryke Force Trio**
By Anthony Goodsell

**Wiccan Kitten**
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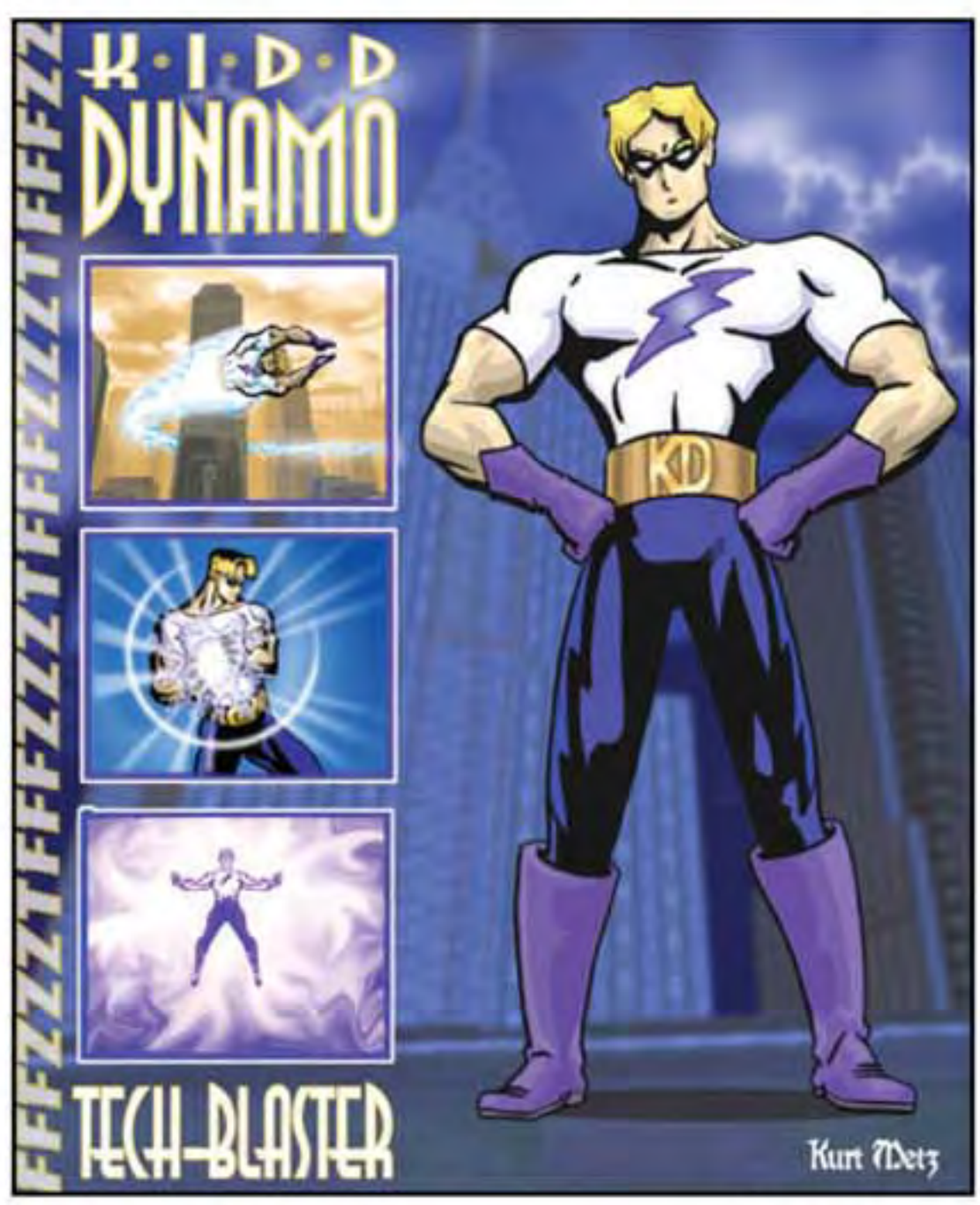
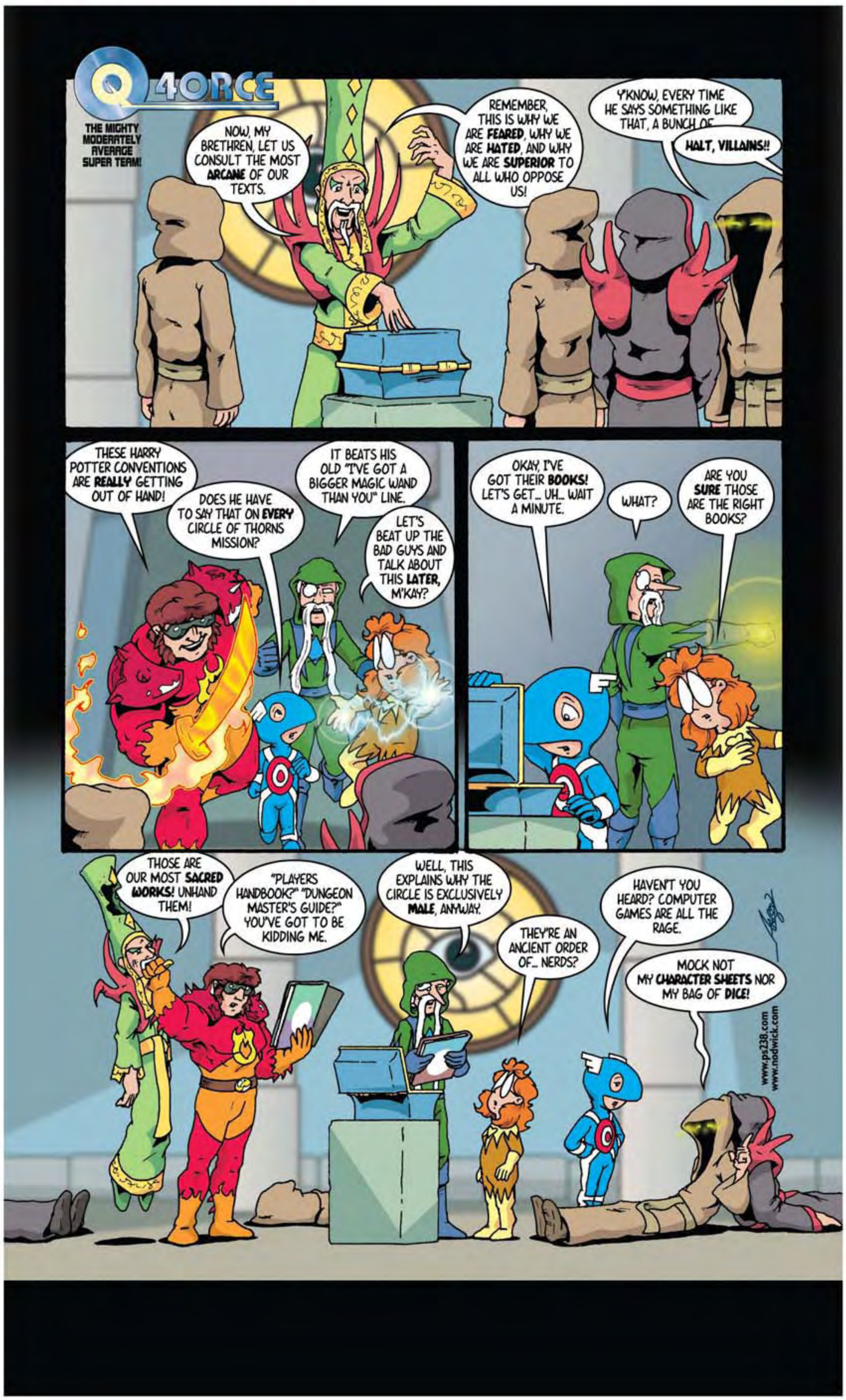



**KidDynamo**
By Kurt Metz


Q4ORCE
THE MIGHTY MODERATELY AVERAGE SUPER TEAM!
NOW, MY BRETHREN, LET US CONSULT THE MOST ARCANE OF OUR TEXTS.
REMEMBER, THIS IS WHY WE ARE FEARED, WHY WE ARE HATED, AND WHY WE ARE SUPERIOR TO ALL WHO OPPOSE US!
Y'KNOW, EVERY TIME HE SAYS SOMETHING LIKE THAT, A BUNCH OF
HALT, VILLAINS!!
THESE HARRY POTTER CONVENTIONS ARE REALLY GETTING OUT OF HAND!
DOES HE HAVE TO SAY THAT ON EVERY CIRCLE OF THORNS MISSION?
IT BEATS HIS OLD "I'VE GOT A BIGGER MAGIC WAND THAN YOU" LINE.
LET'S BEAT UP THE BAD GUYS AND TALK ABOUT THIS LATER, M'KAY?
OKAY, I'VE GOT THEIR BOOKS! LET'S GET... UH... WAIT A MINUTE.
WHAT?
ARE YOU SURE THOSE ARE THE RIGHT BOOKS?
THOSE ARE OUR MOST SACRED WORKS! UNHAND THEM!
"PLAYERS HANDBOOK?" "DUNGEON MASTER'S GUIDE?" YOU'VE GOT TO BE KIDDING ME.
WELL, THIS EXPLAINS WHY THE CIRCLE IS EXCLUSIVELY MALE, ANYWAY.
THEY'RE AN ANCIENT ORDER OF... NERDS?
HAVEN'T YOU HEARD? COMPUTER GAMES ARE ALL THE RAGE.
MOCK NOT MY CHARACTER SHEETS NOR MY BAG OF DICE!
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# Crash

**Continued from page 4**

"Yeah, he's ok. I'm surprised he made it this far, though." Lilac closed her eyes and her face crumpled. "Oh Michael, normally we don't have time to see it in battle, but bullets do ugly, ugly things to human flesh. And there was this other girl, she got mauled by something and…"

"Shhh Lilac, don't think about it. You did an amazing job today. You should be proud. I am." Valiant put an arm around her shoulders.

Lilac took a few deep breaths and regained control. "So where are we?"

"We're a few hours outside Paragon, off some back road. I'm honestly not sure which one. There's a small town over that hill."

"What happens now? When does the military arrive?" she asked.

"We're not sure there's going to be a military response, Lilac. And before you ask, no, we haven't found a way to counteract the dampening effect. We just apparently moved out of its range."

"But these are foreign invaders on American soil! That's an act of war! How can there not be a military response?"

"The situation is more complicated than it seems. It seems that Paragon has been considered not exactly under normal American jurisdiction ever since 1976 when The Phalanx neutralized the American anti-missile system before it could launch."

"The military can't actually be holding a grudge because they weren't allowed to have a nuclear war?" Lilac stared at Valiant in horror.

"Lower your voice, please. That's one theory. Possibly they don't have sufficient ground troop strength to repel the invasion."

Lilac closed her eyes wearily. "I don't know which theory is worse."

"We'll figure something out. It may take time but we'll get the City back." Valliant's voice rang with confidence. Lilac opened her eyes to see that he wasn't looking at her but rather staring at the patch of city glow Paragon created on the horizon. His face was resolute but his eyes were forlorn. Feeling a touch awkward, Lilac slipped her arm around his waist.

"We will get the city back, Valliant. I'm sure of it."

Valliant smiled. "That's the Lucky Little Lilac we all know and love."

"Oh come on. You know I hate that name."

"Then you probably shouldn't have chosen it." Valliant's smile grew to a grin.

"It's a long story…"

"And someday I'll convince you tell it to me. We're loading up the busses in a few minutes; the town agreed to put us up in the school gym for the night." Valliant stood and stretched. "After that… your parents moved to Virginia last year didn't they? Are you going to stay with them?"

"No." Lilac frowned slightly. "I guess I'll go back to Paragon. In disguise maybe. Try to figure out what's going on."

"Sounds good. We'll do that. Time to go." Valliant pulled Lilac to her feet and together they headed back to the bus.

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***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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**The Paragon Tattler: Community Section**

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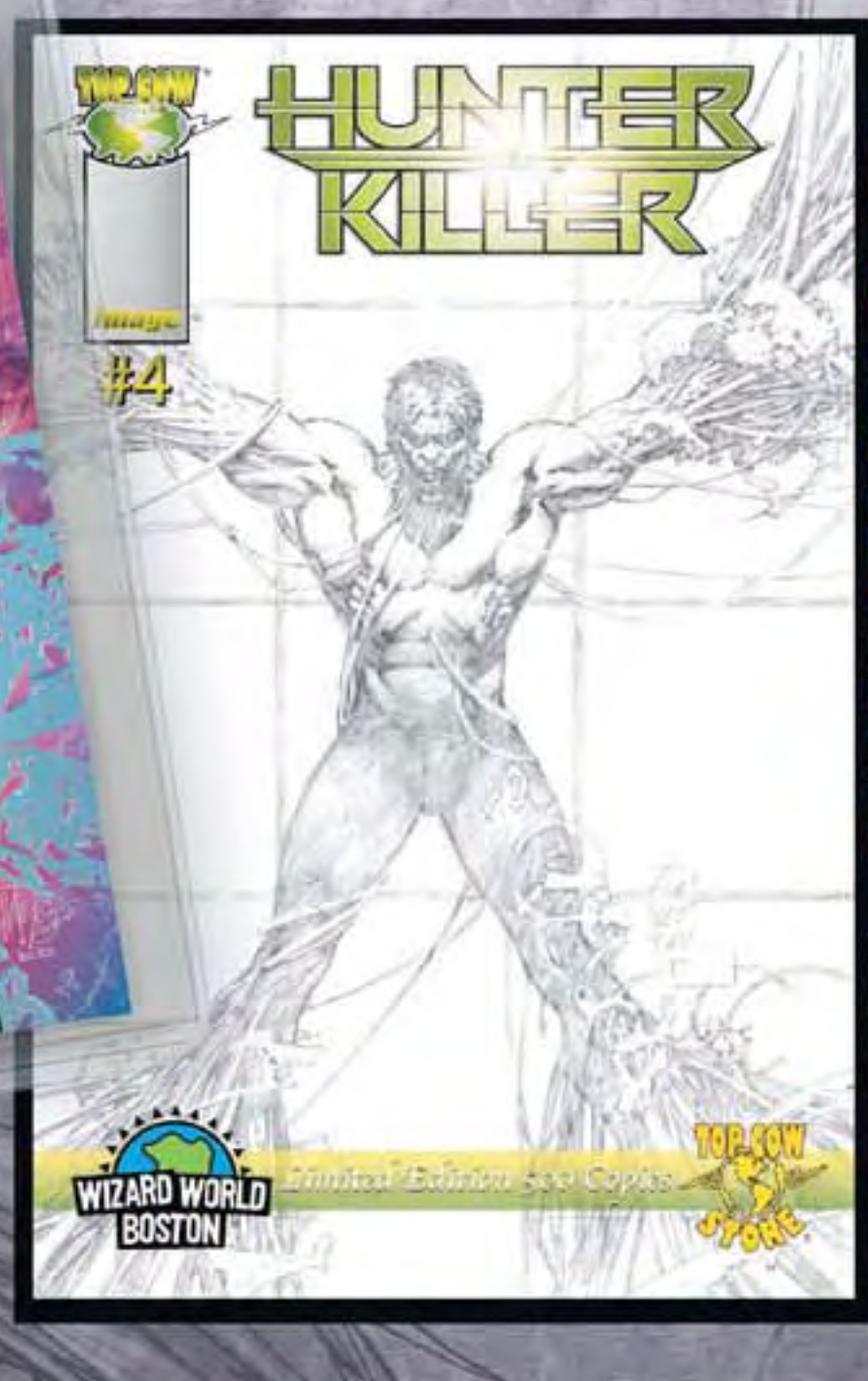

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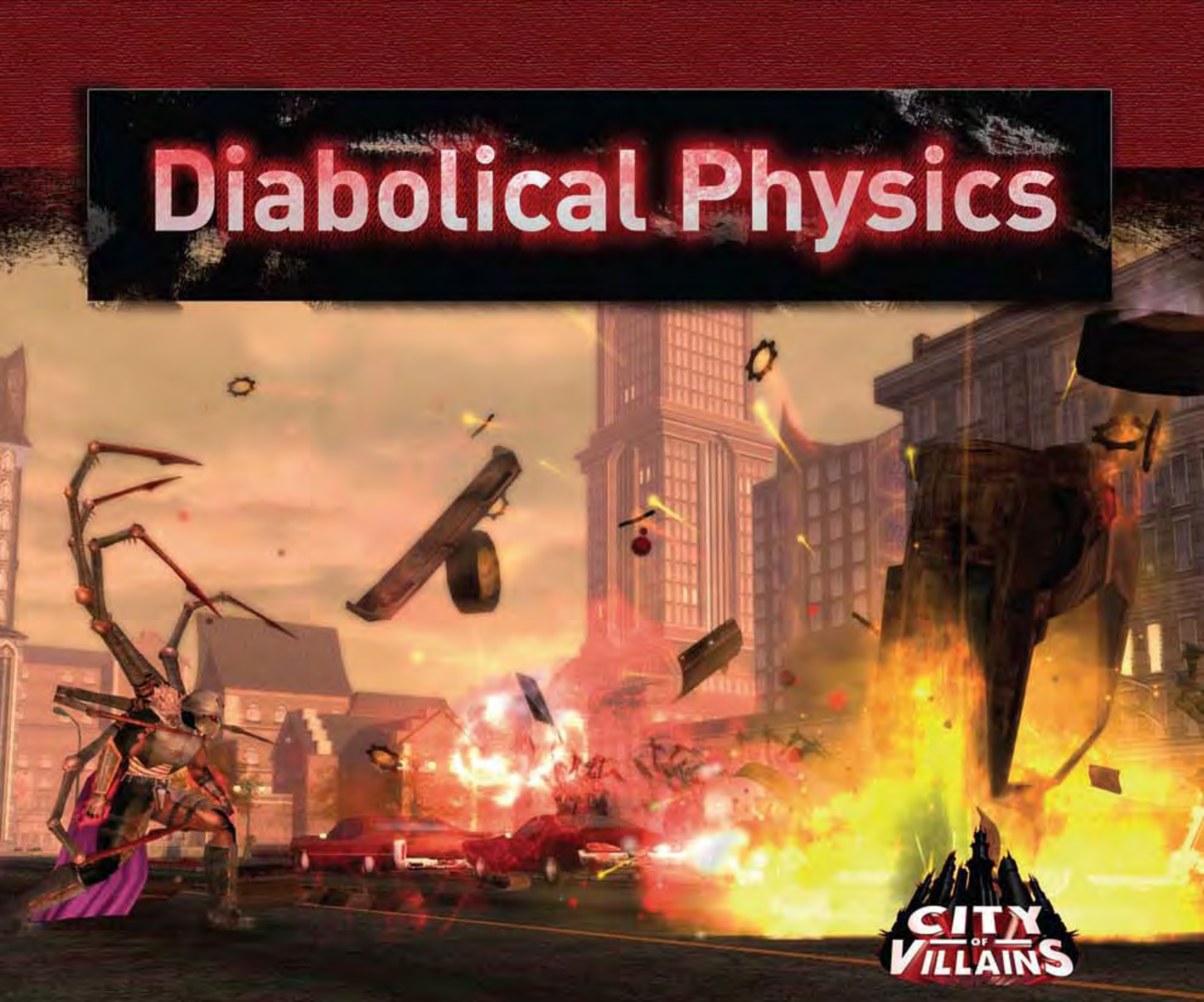


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