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DARK MIRROR

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I MISS THIS SHOT...
EVERYBODY DIES.



BUT LIKE THE MAN SAID...WHO
WANTS TO LIVE FOREVER?



24 HOURS EARLIER...





LIKE YOU HAD A CHOICE? YOU 'LET' ME BACK ON THE TEAM BECAUSE YOU NEED ME, STATES, JUST LIKE YOU NEED MS. LIBERTY TO STAY HERE AND KEEP THE HOME FIRES BURNING.



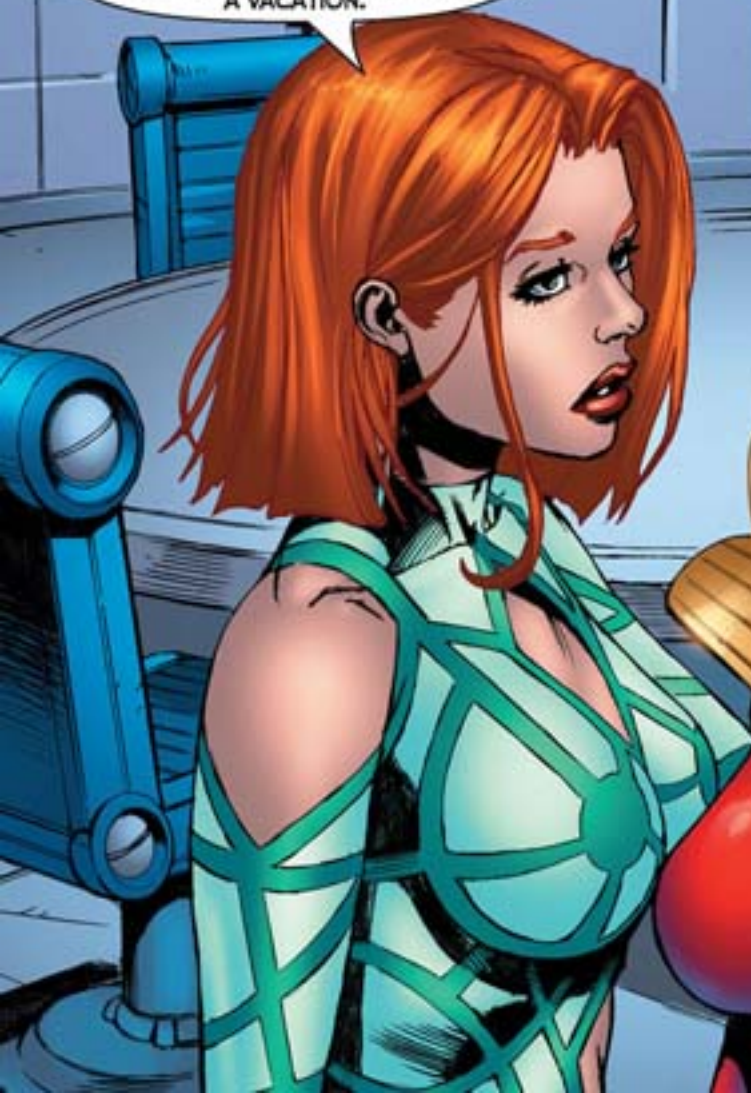
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?



JESSICA! WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE!

BITE ME.

WHAT JUSTIN IS TRYING TO SAY, PRETTY POORLY I MIGHT ADD, IS THAT WE ALL NEED YOU HERE TO KEEP AN EYE ON PARAGON CITY. JUST BECAUSE PORTAL CORP HAS HAD ANOTHER BREAK-IN, DOESN'T MEAN THE REST OF THE PSYCHOS ARE GOING TO TAKE A VACATION.




BUT THIS IS DIFFERENT! THESE PRAETORIANS ARE EVIL VERSIONS OF THE FREEDOM PHALANX FROM AN ALTERNATE EARTH. LAST TIME GRANDFATHER FOUGHT THEM, THESE JERKS BEAT HIM DOWN AND TORTURED HIM.*



*EDITOR'S NOTE: IN THE CITY OF HEROES GAME.



THAT'S WHY WE ARE GOING AS A TEAM THIS TIME.




YOU GOT THAT RIGHT! NO ONE CAN TAKE ON THE COMBINED MIGHT OF...



...THE FREEDOM PHALANX! DON'T WORRY MS. LIB, WE'LL WATCH OUT FOR GRAMPS HERE.



FINE. I GET THE POINT, BUT YOU BETTER WATCH OUT FOR HIM, SYNAPSE! AND WHILE YOU'RE AT IT, WATCH OUT FOR YOURSELF TOO.



DON'T WORRY. WE'VE BEEN SAVING A FEW TRICKS FOR JUST SUCH AN OCCASION. NOW, CALL UP THE OTHER VINDICATORS AND WARN THEM WE'RE LEAVING. THE REST OF US NEED TO GET OVER TO PEREGRINE ISLAND.





COULDN'T YOU HAVE GOTTEN HERE FASTER BY TELEPORTING?

SURE, BUT THE VIEW IS MUCH NICER THIS WAY.

LET'S GET INSIDE SO POSITRON CAN GET THE LAY OF THE LAND.



MADMEN AND MADWOMEN. DON'T FORGET THE LADIES, STATESMAN, OR PEOPLE MIGHT THINK YOU'RE SEXIST. OH WAIT, THEY ALREADY DO.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION I SUPPORTED THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT...WHY ARE WE EVEN HAVING THIS CONVERSATION? WE'RE ON A CLOCK HERE PEOPLE. POSITRON? ARE WE READY?

I HAVE THE PORTAL CALIBRATED FOR THE COORDINATES YOUR TEAM PROVIDED, MR. KEMEN. THEY APPEAR TO BE IN ATLAS PARK.

I APPRECIATE YOUR ASSISTANCE REGARDING THIS MATTER, POSITRON. I AM AT FAULT FOR ALLOWING YOUR ENEMIES TO PENETRATE THIS FACILITY. WHATEVER PLAN THEY HAVE FOR THE STOLEN NAVIGATIONAL MODULE, IT CANNOT BODE WELL FOR PARAGON CITY.

DON'T BLAME YOURSELF, UNAI, WE'RE DEALING WITH MADMEN HERE.

AS WE'LL EVER BE, I'VE SCANNED THE ARRIVAL AREA AND IT SEEMS CLEAR FOR THE MOMENT. I ALSO ADDED SOME SPECIAL MODIFICATIONS TO THE PORTAL, JUST IN CASE.

UNAI, IF THIS PORTAL IS ACTIVATED FROM THE COORDINATES WE ARE HEADED TO AND YOU DON'T RECEIVE OUR SIGNAL, INITIATE AN OMEGA LEVEL SHUT DOWN.

OF COURSE YOU REALIZE YOU WILL BE CUT OFF IF I DO SUCH A THING.

IF IT COMES TO THAT, WE'LL BE PAST CARING.

WE NEED INTEL AND WE NEED IT FAST. LET'S SPLIT UP.

YEAH, WE CAN TAKE MORE DAMAGE THAT WAY.

PSYCHE, FIND SOMEPLACE QUIET TO HOLE UP AND START A MENTAL SCAN. YOU ALSO NEED TO BE READY TO KEEP US ALL IN MENTAL CONTACT. POSITRON, I WANT YOU AND SYNAPSE TO TRACK THE STOLEN TECH. MANTICORE... DO WHAT YOU DO.

WHAT ABOUT YOU, STATESMAN?

THERE'S SOMETHING I NEED TO DEAL WITH.

IS THAT A GOOD IDEA?


YOU HAVE YOUR ORDERS.

WHATEVER YOU SAY THERE, CAPTAIN BLIGH.





I KNEW MALAISE WAS CAPABLE OF SOME NASTY ***@, BUT THAT WAS JUST PLAIN WILE. LOOKS LIKE I'M GOING TO HAVE TO CLEAN HIS CLOCK ON THIS WORLD TOO.



AND WHAT WAS WITH THAT REJECT FROM THE AURORA BOREALIS LOOK-ALIKE CONTEST?

JUSTIN, I THINK I'VE BEEN MADE AND I'M ON THE MOVE.

WANT BACKUP? I THINK I CAN BREAK AWAY FROM 'DOING WHAT I DO' IF YOU NEED ME.

HONEY, I WAS DEALING WITH PEOPLE LIKE THIS BEFORE YOU WERE A GLEAM.

EASY RED, NO NEED TO GO ALL STATESMAN ON ME. ONE IMMORTAL IS ENOUGH ON THIS TEAM.

IF THAT MOTHER MAYHEM CHICK IS THIS WORLD'S VERSION OF ME, IT LOOKS LIKE SHE MIGHT HAVE SOME SERIOUS SPLIT PERSONALITY ISSUES.

I'M NOT GOING TO LIVE FOREVER. JUST A REALLY LONG TIME THANKS TO MY MINDRIDING. I DON'T AGE WHEN MY MIND IS IN SOMEONE ELSE'S BODY YA KNOW?

SO MANY IMAGES, SO LITTLE TIME. STAY IN TOUCH.



I HAVE A FEELING I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT SCORE OLD STATES WANTS TO SETTLE.



I'VE COME FOR THE GIRL, TYRANT. IF YOU AND YOUR CUR MARAUDER OVER THERE GET IN MY WAY, I'LL GO THROUGH YOU.

YOU CAN'T EVEN SAY HER NAME, CAN YOU? IT'S DOMINATRIX, FOR THE RECORD. DO YOU REALLY THINK YOU CAN DEFEAT US BOTH TO RETRIEVE HER? THAT DIDN'T WORK OUT SO WELL FOR YOU LAST TIME.




BESIDES, WHAT IF "THE GIRL" DOESN'T WANT TO LEAVE? DID YOU EVER THINK OF THAT, GRANDFATHER-FROM-ANOTHER-PLANET?

WELL, IT SEEMS WE HAVE A DILEMMA. AT LEAST IT WILL GIVE US A CHANCE TO SEE YOU LIVE UP TO YOUR NAME.

ANTI-MATTER... OUR GUESTS HAVE ARRIVED. THEIR LEADER IS WITH ME NOW. MAKE CERTAIN THE OTHERS FEEL WELCOME.

AS YOU SAY, TYRANT.





IF STATESMAN HARMS DOMI, I WILL MAKE HIM PAY. IF I HADN'T NEEDED THE NAVIGATION MODULE FROM THEIR WORLD TO GUIDE OUR DIMENSIONAL TRAVEL, THAT BUFFOON WOULDN'T EVEN BE HERE.

YOU'VE GONE TOTALLY 'ROUND THE BEND HAVEN'T YOU?

YOU JUST GOT BACK IN TYRANT'S FAVOR BY REVERSE ENGINEERING THE PORTAL TECH, BUT THAT STILL DOESN'T MAKE UP FOR THE CRAZY %%% YOU PULLED WHEN YOU MADE NIGHTSTAR.

AT LEAST HE DOESN'T WANT TO KILL YOU ANYMORE. HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO SAY IT? KEEP YOUR METAL MITTS OFF HIS GRANDDAUGHTER! NO ONE IS REALLY SURE WHAT'S UP WITH THE TWO OF THEM. DO YOU REALLY WANNA BE THE GUY TO LIFT UP THAT ROCK?

I DON'T SEE HOW ANY OF THIS IS YOUR BUSINESS, NEURON. WE MIGHT HAVE BEEN ALLIES ONCE, BUT NOW YOU ARE JUST AS MUCH TYRANT'S LAPDOG AS MARAUDER IS.

ALLIES? IS THAT WHAT YOU CALL FRIENDSHIP THESE DAYS? DO YOU EVEN REMEMBER THAT WE DEVELOPED THE CLOCKWORK TOGETHER? YOU HAVE YOUR HEAD SO FAR UP YOUR ANTIMATTER...

EASY, BOYS. YOU KNOW WHAT YOU NEED? A COMMON ENEMY TO UNITE AGAINST. TRUST ME, THAT WILL MEND THE RIFT IN A SUPER FRIENDSHIP EVERY TIME, RIGHT, POSI?

THAT IS WHAT I LOVE MOST ABOUT POSITRON. ALWAYS READY TO HELP PEOPLE IN NEED AND ALWAYS RIGHT ON TIME.

LESS TALK AND MORE ACTION, SYNAPSE. GRAB THE MODULE AND LET'S MOVE!



GOT IT!



NO, WE HAVE YOU!
SPRING THE TRAP
NOW,
NEURON.



MEET THE
PRAETORIAN
CLOCKWORK,
YOU IMBECILES!



OK, THIS WAS
UNEXPECTED.

SYNAPSE,
WE NEED TO GET
OUT OF HERE,
NOW!

HOW
ABOUT...
THEN?



I KNOW THIS SOUNDS LIKE THE BUZZING OF A GNAT TO THE REST OF YOU BUT I RECENTLY DISCOVERED I CAN MOVE FAST ENOUGH TO DEFY TIME FOR VERY SHORT BURSTS.



SO I CAN LITERALLY BE IN TWO PLACES AT ONCE. I GOTTA SAY I LIKE BEING IN THIS PLACE BETTER THAN THAT ONE RIGHT NOW.

YOU'VE GOT A POINT THERE, ME. SEE YOU A FEW SECONDS DOWN THE TIME STREAM.



IDIOT! NOW WE HAVE THE MODULE AND WE HAVE YOU!

WELL, POSITRON, WILL YOU SURRENDER OR SHALL WE HAVE THEM KILL YOUR PRECIOUS FRIEND?



WHAT?

HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE?



SORRY BOYS, I GUESS THERE WASN'T ENOUGH OF ME TO GO AROUND AFTER ALL. CATCH YOU LATER.



THEY MANAGED TO GET THE MODULE OUT OF THE LAB. WE'RE SENDING THE CLOCKWORK AFTER THEM AND FOLLOWING OURSELVES.

CAPTURE THEM!
IF THEY MAKE GOOD
THEIR ESCAPE YOU
WILL PAY.

MAURAUDE,
HOW IS THE
REUNION
GOING?

YOU DON'T PAY ME
ENOUGH TO ANSWER
QUESTIONS LIKE THAT.

AT LEAST IT SOUNDS
LIKE POSITRON AND
SYNAPSE ARE DOING
WELL. THE SITUATION
HERE IS ABOUT TO
GO SOUTH, I CAN
JUST TELL.

I'M ONLY
GOING TO
SAY THIS ONE
MORE TIME!
COMING
BACK WITH
ME IS FOR
YOUR OWN
GOOD!

DON'T YOU
THINK THAT
SHOULD BE MY
DECISION?

WHEN YOU ARE
OLDER, YES I DO,
BUT FOR NOW I
THINK YOU NEED
HELP.

LIVING THROUGH THIS CONVERSATION
ONCE WAS ENOUGH FOR ONE DAY. I'VE
GOT TO GET HIM OUT OF THERE.

I GROW
WEARY OF THIS.
MAURAUDE... KILL
HIM.

WITH
PLEASURE!

GREAT, NOW I'M
AGREEING WITH
TYRANT. HERE
GOES...

WHAT THE
HELL?!
CHIMERA!

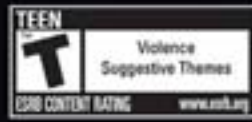
WE SHARE
THE LION, BUT
YOU LACK THE
SERPENT.





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I SEE THAT CHIMERA HAS FOUND A PLAYMATE AS WELL. EXCELLENT, THIS SHOULD PROVE AMUSING.

MOTHER MAYHEM, HAVE YOU LOCATED YOUR 'SISTER'?

SHE WAS KIND ENOUGH TO COME HERE AND ADMIT HERSELF FOR TREATMENT. MALAISE IS ABOUT TO ADMINISTER HER FIRST SESSION.

DON'T LET YOUR 'GENIUS' DALLY.

STAY CALM NOW. THIS IS FOR YOUR OWN GOOD.

I DEALT WITH YOU ON MY WORLD. I CAN DEAL WITH YOU HERE TOO. HAVE A LOOK AT YOUR WORST NIGHTMARE.

NOOOOOO! MY BEAUTIFUL COLORS ARE... GONE!

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO MY FAVORITE? AVENGE YOUR BROTHER MY CHILDREN!

TYRANT, I AM GOING TO TEAR THIS WITCH INTO LITTLE PIECES!



IF YOU FEEL YOU MUST, THEN GO AHEAD, BUT STOP BOTHERING ME. WE'RE ABOUT TO WRAP THINGS UP HERE.

I DON'T LIKE THESE ODDS AND TYRANNOSAURUS REX HASN'T EVEN GOTTEN INTO IT YET. ANY IDEAS, BIG GUY?



I HAVE JUST THE THING. OR RATHER ZEUS DOES!

HOW WAS THAT?

WORKED FOR ME. NOW GRAB THE GIRL AND LET'S GET OUT OF HERE.



JUSTIN, I
COULD USE THAT
HELP YOU OFFERED
EARLIER!

I'VE GOT A
PACK OF CRAZIES
ATTACKING ME AND
I CAN'T SAVE
THEM ALL.



WHAT'S
GOING ON?
WE'RE ON
THE RUN!

MALAISE IS
DOWN FOR THE COUNT
BUT MOTHER MAY-I'S
'CONVERSIONS' ARE
SWARMING ME LIKE
ANTS ON A SUGAR
DONUT.

SHOW
ME THE
ROOM!

WHAT?

PUT THE
ROOM IN MY
MIND AND THEN
CLOSE YOUR
EYES!





I'M CLEAR!

EXIT



THEN GET THE HELL OUT OF THERE AND CONTACT POSITRON AND SYNAPSE. WE NEED TO KNOW WHERE THEY ARE!

I'LL LINK US, POSITRON? SYNAPSE?



WE FOUND THE REMNANTS OF PORTAL CORPORATION HERE. I THINK I'VE GOT A PORTAL RIGGED TO SEND US HOME.

IRONICALLY THIS PLACE WAS PROBABLY TRASHED WHEN TYRANT TOOK OVER. I WONDER IF THAT KEEPS HIM UP NIGHTS?



PIPE DOWN, SYNAPSE. WE HAVE REAL PROBLEMS HERE.

YOU BETTER BE SURE THAT PORTAL WILL WORK, POSI, BECAUSE WE'RE BRINGING A LOT OF COMPANY WITH US.

IT'LL WORK BUT I'M GOING TO HAVE TO OVERCLOCK MY ARMOR AND USE IT AS A POWER SOURCE. AFTER THAT THE PORTAL JUST NEEDS TO BE ACTIVATED BEFORE IT EXPLODES.

YEAH, WHAT COULD POSSIBLY GO WRONG THERE? BY THE WAY, ON THE SUBJECT OF REAL PROBLEMS, WE'RE GOING TO HAVE COMPANY OF OUR OWN SOON. I CAN HEAR THE CLOCKWORK COMING.

EVERYONE RENDEZVOUS AT THE FACILITY. POSITRON, SYNAPSE, BE READY!




DON'T LET
THEM DESTROY
THE DEVICE.
THAT'S OUR WAY
HOME!

WE'RE
ON IT!

ASSUME A
DEFENSIVE
FORMATION.
POSITRON,
ACTIVATE THE
PORTAL!

COVER
ME!

TAKE
THEM!



FINISH
THE JOB.
MY CHILDREN.
MAKE HER PAY
FOR WHAT
SHE DID!

OH SHUT
UP, WILL YOU?
YOU SOUND
LIKE A BAD
HORROR MOVIE.
TIME FOR A
LITTLE MIND
RIDE!

I COULDN'T MINDRIDE YOU
BECAUSE OF THE TURMOIL IN
YOUR HEAD. YOU EVIL HAG, YOU
TOOK AURORA'S BODY WITHOUT
HER CONSENT! SHE'S
TRAPPED IN THERE!

I'M DONE
FOOLING
AROUND
WITH YOU!

I WILL
KILL YOU!

SOMEONE
NEEDS TO HIT
THE SWITCH!
I CAN'T DO
IT WITHOUT
BLOWING THE
CIRCUITS.

AND
SOON YOU
WILL BE AS
WELL.

TIME FREEZES FOR ME WHEN I'M FIRING
AN ARROW. FOR THAT INSTANT THERE IS
NOTHING BUT ME AND THE TARGET.

I TELL MYSELF THIS IS NO DIFFERENT THAN ANY
OTHER SHOT, BUT DEEP DOWN I KNOW THAT ISN'T
TRUE. I MISS THIS SHOT...EVERYBODY DIES. BUT
LIKE THE MAN SAID, WHO WANTS TO LIVE FOREVER?



I HOPE YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING. THEY'RE GONNA COME AFTER HER.

LET THEM COME. WE'LL BE READY WHEN THEY DO.



IT WON'T BE ANY TIME SOON WITHOUT THIS NAV MODULE. I CAN TELL YOU THAT MUCH.



YOU'RE BACK! IS EVERYONE ALL RIGHT? WHO IN THE NAME OF THE FURIES IS THIS?



IF I DIDN'T KNOW BETTER I WOULD SWEAR I JUST WOKE UP IN ONE OF MALAISE'S LITTLE MIND PAINTINGS. YOU MUST BE MY ALTER EGO, MS. PRISS.

WHOSE BRIGHT IDEA WAS IT TO BRING HER BACK? A WHIP? ARE YOU SERIOUS?

LOOK WHO'S TALKING. DID I HEAR RIGHT THAT YOU CAN'T EVEN DRAW THAT SWORD?



SOMEONE IS GOING TO HAVE TO TAKE HER BY THE HAND AND GUIDE HER.

DON'T LOOK AT ME. THIS WAS YOUR PLAN.

JUST OUT OF CURIOSITY WHICH ONE ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

BOTH!



END.

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FANTASTIC FAN ART!

from the City of Heroes Community. **PAGE 6**



THE PARAGON
TATTTLER

October, 2006

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Q-4ORCE

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Clash of the Titans

By Charles Lemme

The lightning cracked and the thunder boomed. Out on the bridge spanning the port, Liberty Raye stood alone, blinking as the rain splashed on her face. Invulnerability didn't mean you never had to blink. Standing by one of the bridge's support pillars, she looked out to the sea.

Liberty stood eight feet tall. Her body bulged with muscles yet she was weak in her knees. The cause wasn't the wind or rain. Tied back in a ponytail, her blue hair didn't fly about her from gusts. Her blue and black body suit kept out the worst of the cold while letting her body breathe, and her cape fluttered harmlessly around her in the wind. She was going to see a sight no one from her dimension had seen in over sixty years. Everything rammed together in her head. Her hand tightened on the pillar to hold herself up. Cracks in the concrete spider-webbed around her grip. She should have been thrilled to be standing there on this occasion, yet all she felt was infinitely sad. What she had to do made her sick with apprehension. Doubt and awe mingled with love and fear together in her mind. Then came the footsteps.

Under that alien sky a giant appeared, striding toward her through the waves. Maybe he didn't see her. In less than sixty seconds, Liberty had to have his attention. Otherwise, the Praetorians of Shroud City were doomed.

Her conversation with Tina Macintyre, her contact with Portal Corporation, rang in her head as she watched the titan move with a grace belying his size. Liberty's breath grew sharp. Tina's words couldn't describe what it was like to see him. Him!

"Okay, Tina, what do we have today? A trip to the dimension of cats under the iron heel of a canine dictator? Every week I ask if you've found one of those and every week you give the same reply."

"Liberty, today's trip isn't about exploration. An entire city, maybe an entire world, is in grave danger."

Liberty had stiffened, scared of making light of a bad situation.

"Oh! Okay, okay... where do I have to go and who needs saving?"

"You remember the Praetorians?"

"The Praetorians..." Liberty said, but of course remembered. On one of the many parallel earths that Portal Corporation had discovered, they had found a world controlled by villains who were distorted reflections of the heroes on Liberty's earth. The Praetorians' rule reminded all the metahumans of their potential for evil or good.



Then Tina had said a word, a name, and it had made shivers dance on Liberty's spine. Few things could do that. She had to sit down. "You mean... an evil version of him..."

"Tyrant got lucky all those years ago. However, he only put him to sleep. He never thought he would wake up."

"How... how can this be?"

"Think about it. World War Two ended much differently for their world. And let's not even start with its heroes. In fact, Tyrant and the rest stood by and invited the Fifth Column to attack the city. The problems came in the war's aftermath. Tyrant wasn't about to share power."

"So... in their world, Atlas never died."

"He's called Briareus on that side. But... Liberty, you don't have to do this. There are lots of other heroes we could send."

"And you're sure it isn't a trap?"

Then Tina showed Liberty the pictures. She didn't move for several minutes.

"I think I know why they want one of our heroes to fight him. They want us to suffer. And to force the issue, you know they'll let Briareus have his way with the populace of Praetorian Earth until either we intervene, or they finally get bored of the cataclysm. It's a trap, and we have no choice but to walk into it. And it's going to hurt."

"Even for me," Liberty said to the blistering wind. Atlas, whose statue stood in front of town hall, bearing the world upon his shoulders. Atlas, the giant whose love for the helpless had known no bounds. Atlas, who on her world was dead and on this one came in with the tide to destroy, a storm called Briareus.

She found her strong limbs unwilling to move. She wanted to cry for joy but she knew she couldn't. Common sense told her a fight was inevitable. She wiped her glasses with her thumbs, but it didn't help much. She bent the stem hooks on her glasses so they would stay on tighter. The titan's shadow crossed over her, and she looked up. He appeared to contemplate whether he would slam his fist through

the bridge or walk right through it.

Liberty bit her lip and yelled. "Hey! Briareus!"

The giant looked down at her, and Liberty felt small. She dug her fingers into her palm, making a fist. Muscles tightened through her arm.

When the giant spoke, it could have been the storm talking. "WHO ARE YOU?"

She waved. "I'm Liberty Raye. Nice to meet you." Old habits died hard, like taunting the supervillain.

"YOU'RE HERE ALL ALONE. YOU MUST BE TYRANT'S PAWN. GET OUT OF MY WAY."

"Can't. I need to be here or else you're going to get a lot of innocent people hurt."

"INNOCENT? THEY'RE TYRANT'S SUBJECTS, EXTENSIONS OF HIS WILL. THEY MUST PAY AS WELL."

"I guess we're going to have to fight then. I'm really sorry about—"

Liberty leapt back as Briareus brought his fist down on the bridge. The cars jumped ten feet in the air and she heard the bridge crack and moan. Tension wires snapped.

Liberty grabbed the nearest thing and threw it. The station wagon spun through the air, the bumper falling off, and it smacked Briareus in the cheek. Then came a BMW. Finally Briareus turned in time to catch a semi between his eyes. It stuck on impact, and Briareus wrenched it free and threw it casually into the sea. He snorted the air.

"What!" Liberty threw out her arms. "Never been in a car throwing contest before? They're fun!"

Briareus kned the bridge and it shook, throwing Liberty prone. The concrete buckled, and Briareus swiped her up and forced the air from Liberty's lungs. Liberty had read about the gentleness of Briareus's touch. Now her body writhed under the strength of his clenched fist. Rain pelted her face. Her vision blurred. She fought for breath as he squeezed. He held her before his eyes, each bigger than her head.

"NOW YOU SEE, LITTLE ONE, YOUR STRUGGLES AND YOUR STRENGTH ARE NOTHING COMPARED TO ME."

Speaking so close, Briareus deafened her. Thunder pealed, but Briareus boomed louder.

Liberty's jaw hung loose. Her ribs and diaphragm struggled against Briareus's might. He smelled of the sea, sixty years of salt and debris piled on top of him. The years hadn't eaten away at his skin or his strength. If anything, it had toughened him further. Liberty could feel the calluses of Briareus's fingers through her costume. The bit right in front of her, the skin stretching between his thumb and first fin-

ger, looked gray and soft.

Liberty sunk her teeth into it. Briareus flailed and Liberty pushed out. His hand flew open and Liberty fell. Her cape trailed her all the way down. The hard smack of the water whooshed the air out of her.

Fists raked through the water, hunting her. Liberty swam, fast. She twisted away from the blows. Briareus roared as she made her way out of his reach.

Her hand touched the concrete foundations of the bridge and she climbed out. The support column felt warm compared to the water as she huddled against it. Liberty held up her glasses; one of the lenses was cracked.

"WHERE ARE YOU!"

Metal bent and broke. Liberty looked up to see Briareus ripping the bridge out of his path. Cars and trucks spilled off the bridge into the sea. He held the bridge over his head and for a second, Liberty could imagine those arms lovingly cradling the earth. Then Briareus tore the bridge in two.

Liberty pressed her back into the support that remained. Her body ached but her brain thrived on the pain.

Briareus walked past her, the waves slapping the shelf where Liberty sat. A long girder poked up through the waves. Her eyes drifted up his body to his head and then to the city. No time left.

Liberty moved. She took hold of the girder with one hand and swam back to solid ground. Briareus was getting closer and closer to the city. Liberty hefted the girder into a comfortable position with both arms. She clenched her eyes. "I'm sorry..."

Liberty leapt and reared back with the girder. Briareus didn't hear her. He had to hear his skull ringing after Liberty brained him in the soft place where his spine met his brain. On anyone, invulnerable or no, a blow to that bundle of nerves could rob him or her of consciousness. She wasn't done. Balancing on his shoulders, Liberty rode the giant down as he crashed into the waters. Briareus thrashed and Liberty held onto whatever she could. In moments she found her footing on top of his bunched muscles.

The girder came down. It was the only language he understood. The sound it made rang out through the bay, cutting through the storm. The girder bent with every blow.

Suddenly he wasn't moving.

Liberty threw the girder aside and heaved Briareus onto his back. Hard, but she wouldn't let him drown now.

"Please, please, be breathing. Come on, please—" Liberty put her ear to his chest and heard the roar of his heartbeat and the movement of his lungs re-

main steady.

Liberty threw herself onto her back and looked up into the sky. The storm continued unabated, but it calmed her as did the lapping of the waves.

"Kill him."

Liberty sat up. Helicopters and gunships had surrounded her. Flying in the sky above her was Tyrant, his cape billowing behind him.

"No." Liberty got to her feet, her stance rocked by Briareus's breathing. "No!"

The portal heaved and spat out a wet figure eight

feet tall who fell on her knees. The technicians ran to her. The figure stood and then pulled away from them. They saw the shock and the tears on her face. A crack ran through one lens of her glasses. She unbent the stem hooks on them, first one and then the other.

The portal shut down and all was quiet except for the steady footsteps of the shivering woman walking away from it.

The next night the same figure stood in the shadow of Atlas's statue, holding a small candle. In his shadow, the light seemed incredibly bright.

THE END

Looking Glass Monsters

A guide to the Praetorians by Jesse "Arctic Sun" Scoble and Brian "Constellation" Gilmore (with thanks to Sean "Manticore" Fish).

Earth is not unique, and yet there is no other Earth quite like it. Researchers at the Portal Corporation believe that Earth – Primal Earth, as they have dubbed it – lies in the center of a vast array of dimensions. Each of these other dimensions has its own Earth, a world like ours that might differ from our own only by the placement of a single blade of grass, or be so radically divergent that it is now ruled by intelligent dinosaurs. Only a fraction of these alternate Earths have been detected, let alone explored. Limitless shadows and dreams of Earth exist beyond the portal.

One such world, however, is a sinister reflection of Primal Earth – Praetorian Earth is ruled by an oligarchy that is a dark mirror of the Freedom Phalanx. These superbeings are the pinnacle of power in their alternate Earth, and they have forged a paranormal army that has conquered their entire world.

TYRANT

Tyrant is the greatest superbeing on Praetorian Earth, a power hungry dictator that firmly believes in the mantra that "Might makes right." He has conquered his world like a modern-day Alexander, and now turns his eyes on Primal Earth. Tyrant rules through fear and torture, and he has the fanatical loyalty of Neuron and his creations, giving him a seemingly unshakeable power-base from which to lord over.

MOTHER MAYHEM

Mother Mayhem was born Shalice Tilman, a young girl with powerful mental powers. She reveled in them, dominating those around her. But when she was badly injured during a fierce battle, her body went into a coma, yet her mind remained active. She found a young psychic, Aurora Scott, and transferred her consciousness into the young girl's body, overwhelming Aurora's personality. Ever since then,

Mother Mayhem has kept Aurora a prisoner in her own body, while she's remained solidly in control. The fate of Shalice's original body is unknown, though considering some of the unhinged personas on Praetorian Earth, it may be better not to think about it. Tyrant made Mother Mayhem into his closest advisor, but also recognizes she is his greatest threat as well. Mother Mayhem controls legions of bent and broken minions, warped by the rehabilitation programs performed by her special asylums.

ANTI-MATTER

A brilliant scientist who created a suit of powered armor, his technological research brought him to the attention of Tyrant, who took him on as his primary scientific advisor. During an accident, he became trapped in the power armor – it was the only thing both keeping him alive, and keeping his energies from killing everyone around him. Anti-Matter was close friends with Neuron long ago; they created the Clockwork men, amongst other fantastic designs, and had many adventures. But over the years jealousy, paranoia, and envy drove the two apart. Anti-Matter created the android Nighstar both as a challenge to Neuron's Siege, and also as a testament to his unrequited love for Dominatrix. Anti-Matter's ideas have grown more radical over the years, and Tyrant is slowly shying away from the wild theories. But Anti-Matter has kept his greatest discovery a secret – he has unlocked the Portal technology, and can access the other Earths. He is simply waiting for the most opportune time to reveal his breakthrough to Tyrant and Dominatrix.

CHIMERA

Justin Sinclair, the sole heir to the Sinclair fortune, watched his parents brutally murdered by a shape-shifting assassin. The villain was impressed by Justin's

resolve and fearlessness, and adopted him. Over the years, he trained Justin to be the world's premiere silent killer, Chimera.

DIABOLIQUE

Tammy Arcanus was born with a great magical destiny, the daughter of the powerful sorcerer Tommy Arcanus. Her father, however, hid his powers from the world in fear of Tyrant's spies, and therefore did not prepare Tammy for her destiny. Her powers manifested when she reached adolescence, but without proper training she became lost in the rush of new experiences. She projected her spirit to the astral plane, but did not know how to keep her body safe. When she returned to her corporeal form it was too late – she could do nothing but helplessly watch her body wither and die. Tommy's father realized what she had done, but was powerless to help her recover; instead, the best he could offer was a ritual that bound her spirit to earth. In a fury at being neither alive nor dead, Tammy blasted her father into the netherworld, turning him into her first spirit minion. Tammy took the name Diabolique, and eventually found herself in service to Tyrant.

INFERNAL

On one alternate Earth, Infernal was a sorcerer who bound demons to his armor and weapons in order to defeat greater evils; when he ended up on Primal Earth, Numina helped temper his drive for power, and taught him to use his demons for good as well as to fight evil. On Praetorian Earth, however, when Infernal arrived he found Diabolique instead, who encouraged him to bind more and greater demons into his armor, until they completely corrupted his spirit. Infernal now has an insatiable hunger for more power, and wonders what spirits he might bend to his will on Primal Earth.

MARAUDER

Michael White was born into one of the violent street gangs struggling for survival beneath Tyrant's heel. Fate threw him across the Praetorian leader's path, and Tyrant selected him personally as a test subject. Bred for battle, Marauder loves nothing more than fighting and crushing his enemies. Most believe Marauder to be Tyrant's vicious hound, brutal but small-minded and loyal through abuse. In truth, Marauder willingly follows the leader of the Praetorians only as long as he is able to indulge his battle-lust. If Tyrant were to hold him back, many might be surprised at how quickly Marauder would snap his leash.

DOMINATRIX

Dominatrix was the daughter of the freedom fighter, Miss Liberty, but she never believed in her mother's

alternative, namby-pamby philosophies. At puberty, her powers manifested themselves, and her teenage rebellion turned deadly when she killed her mother in a heated argument. She proceeded to make a name for herself, and her actions caught Tyrant's eye, earning her a favored place in his empire – she serves him loyally, in everything he demands.

NEURON

Neuron is the creation of his own twisted scientific experiments. He gave himself complete control over his body's nervous system. Once he and Anti-Matter worked together as friends, but over the years personal rivalry, envy, and jealousy have formed a rift between them. Neuron's creation of the android Siege and the favor that garnered him with Tyrant, was the primary cause of discord between them, but it has only been aggravated in the years since.

SIEGE

The masterpiece of Neuron, Siege is the most advanced android ever created on Praetorian Earth. Neuron used Tyrant's DNA patterns to create him, making him virtually indestructible. He has also programmed Siege to be extremely loyal, but whether his true faith is with Neuron or with Tyrant has never been tested.

NIGHTSTAR

Anti-Matter created Nightstar, an android, as a testament to his love for Dominatrix. Nightstar's design was modeled after Dominatrix's DNA, as Siege was patterned after Tyrant. Neuron claimed to be unimpressed with Nightstar's design, but her creation simply fuelled the rivalry between Neuron and Anti-Matter.

MALAISE

Malaise was a thief who used his powers of illusion to commit robberies. His targets included the vaults of Shroud City, where he was captured by Tyrant's forces. Mother Mayhem asked for Malaise to be turned over to him, and Tyrant gave him to her as a gift. She locked him away in one of her asylums, where she worked with him for many sessions, teaching him to control his madness and to use it as a weapon to inflict insanity upon others. He quickly rose to a position as one of her favorite pets.

BATTLE MAIDEN

On War Earth, Valerie Kellum was an archaeologist studying ancient Scandinavian cultures. During the course of a dig, she found what appeared to be an ancient spear, but closer examination revealed it to be an advanced technological weapon disguised as a spear, and lost. At some point, the spear "activated"

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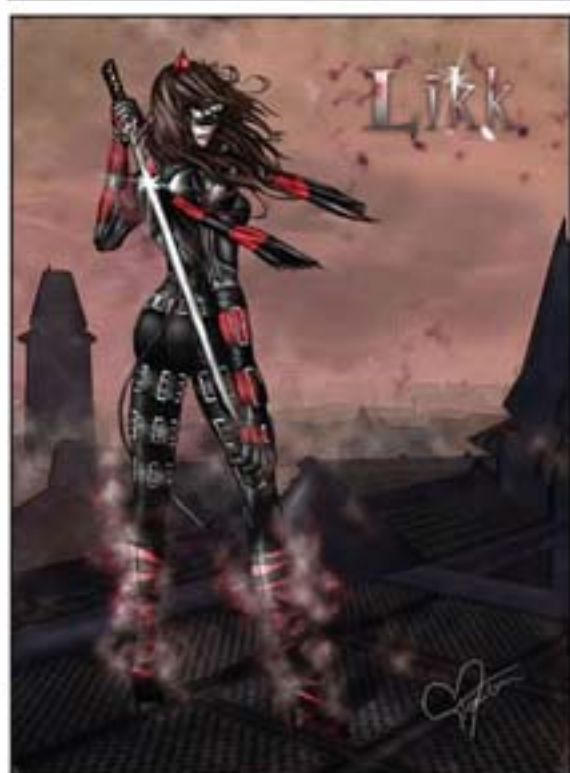
Elixir

By Whitney St. Charles



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Looking Glass Monsters

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and injected Valerie with nanotechnology. These nanites rebuilt her body, and what's more, altered her personality, transforming her into Battle Maiden, a warrior-woman searching for greater conflict. In time, her journeys took her to Praetorian Earth, where her battle-frenzy impressed Tyrant so much that he recruited her to his cause.

BOBCAT

Katherine was a young woman in the wrong place at the wrong time. She was picked up in a random sweep for test subjects by Anti-Matter's minions. He experimented on her, and mutated her into a hybrid woman/feline predator. The operations were long and painful, and it shattered her personality. Bobcat is now violent and feral. Her eventual escape was bloody and savage. Neuron found her running loose, and "adopted" her, slowly taming her into a willing pet. Neuron is the only person she trusts, but at times her fight or flight instincts will override even that familiarity.

SHADOWHUNTER

A twisted corruption of the "soul of the wood," Shadowhunter is infused with the fury of the Wild Hunt, untamed, ferocious, and predatory. Shadowhunter is a dark reflection of Primal Earth's Woodsman. Shadowhunter roams with his Pack, cutting

down everything in his path. He loathes humanity, and is an uneasy pawn in Tyrant's game. Tyrant gives Shadowhunter free reign over the wild lands, because he cares nothing for them. But if Tyrant's plans begin to encroach upon the natural places, Shadowhunter may turn like a rabid dog.

BLACK SWAN

Born with a connection to Shadow Earth in the Netherworld, she was born on the night of the Winter Solstice, given up to greater powers in a dark ritual performed by her occultist parents. Treated like a caged bird and a talisman of fortune, she was kept like a little doll during her childhood. Chimera came across her by accident, and saw the potential she had that was being repressed by her parents. He freed her from the physical and mental restraints keeping her locked up, and she lashed out with her psychic abilities, banishing her parents from this dimension. Black Swan can channel energy from the Shadow Earth dimension into her attacks and defenses. She is served by minions that some say she summoned from Shadow Earth, and others say she created by stealing pieces from the shadows of her victims.

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Diabolical Physics



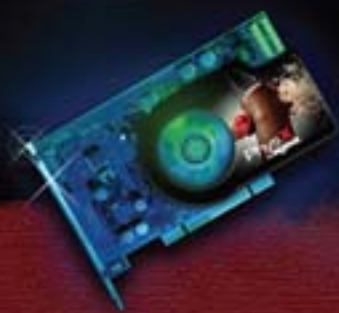
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