

Aphrodite City: The Nightmare Begins

By Psion

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Author's Note: Once upon a time, about two or three Halloweens ago, a friend of mine suggested taking a darkly satirical look at the superfur fandom as well as the clichés and troupes within it. The project has been in limbo since then, mostly because neither he nor I were entirely sure if people would be able to tell the difference between a lamp-shading parody and the real thing. However, I feel the time is right to see if this experiment was worthwhile... Finally, I would like to make a general apology to almost everyone reading this; if you self-identify as anything other than "White, heterosexual American male" and are not offended by the end of the first chapter... just give it time as the bad clichés are only going to keep coming unapologetically from here on in.

Addendum for Sofurry Users: Hard to believe it's been almost two years since I first typed the above paragraph out. In any case, enjoy the complete saga of Aphrodite City after I cleaned it up a bit from its original Fur Affinity posting. Some of you will invariably find this dark or offensive, to which I must repeat myself by saying, "that was the whole point." Fortunately for me, some of you will hopefully find this hilarious.

Aphrodite City, a prosperous metropolis in western New York State. Situated in some of the finest wine country in the United States and home of Ambrosia Biotechnology, Aphrodite was a world away from the broken dreams and metabeing brawls of Silicon City. Indeed, by some strange whims of fate the city didn't even have a population of caped crusaders or criminal masterminds to call its own. For the most part its citizens preferred it that way, stubbornly managing to remain in isolation from the world around it. While this position was not without a number of benefits, it unfortunately made the city the perfect canvas for some to make their mark in the darkest way imaginable....

Deborah Autumns, beat cop of ACPD. Hardly on the force for a year and already she had come to one defining conclusion about Aphrodite City. Unless she got some serious action in her career, she was going to have to start hitting the gym or otherwise end up looking like the donut-chugging veterans responsible for showing her the ropes. The German Shepherd anthro shook her head as she stopped for breakfast on her way to work; it was undoubtedly something else to get assigned to Aphrodite City right out of the New York police academy. The city where nothing bad happened, no capes, no shadowy conspiracies, no registration political bickering; it was as if some invisible hand protected this city and kept the metabeing riff-raff out.

Deborah chuckled to herself as she sat down in a nice little Russian restaurant and ordered a quick breakfast. Riff-raff, now she was starting to think like Commissioner Phillips and the rest of the senior officers. Not that their distaste wasn't warranted, during her training at the academy she had been sent to New York to help restore order

after a big supers brawl. The amount of carnage caused by just two teams of supers was ludicrous. Autumns arrived in the city and it looked like a war had shattered the city. Streets were torn apart, buildings were in ruins...

“Attention all units! Metabeing disturbance reported on the corner of Seventh and Main!” The Aphrodite City Emergency Dispatch barked over Debbie’s radio.

The canine blinked and promptly swallowed the breakfast pastry in her mouth before grabbing her radio; she could not have heard that right. “This is patrolman Autumns on the corner of Twelfth and Main, please repeat.”

Autumns’ only answer was a burst of static as an explosion echoed from somewhere down the street. This wasn’t happening, this could not be happening. Yet in an instant she downed her coffee, threw some money down on the counter, and was out the door before anyone could so much as say a word to her. Whether she liked it or not, this was her job....

The corner of Seventh and Main looked as if a bomb had gone off. A school bus had been turned on its side and set on fire while motorists caused a four-car pileup trying to avoid the chaos unfolding in the intersection. Sirens wailed in the distance, emergency services were five minutes out. The first one on the scene, the canine quickly took cover behind a mailbox and drew her service pistol. Peering around the corner, she surveyed the scene and tried to figure out where the “metabeing” was. Part of her was hoping this was caused by something relatively ordinary like a bomb or a crazed gunman but the other part knew there was something wrong here. Fortunately, the perpetrator was definitely a fan of the ostentatious school of supervillain costume design. Even if he weren’t the only person standing in the midst of his handiwork she’d still have no trouble picking him out of a crowd.

Standing in the middle of the carnage with a psychotic grin on his face, his hands wreathed in flame, was a short brown field mouse. Standing a little over four feet tall, he seemed practically invisible inside his sombrero and blanket-like sarape. Indeed, were it not for the brown-furred ears as big as saucers sticking out of convenient holes in his hat, she’d have a hard time guessing what species he was.

“Buenos dias chica!” The rodent greeted with sadistic glee as he spotted her, blasting her out of cover and forcing her to dive behind a parked car with a perfectly aimed fireball.

Flicking off the safety and chambering the first round in the magazine, the Doberman shook her head. “God damn it... Cultural sensitivity class here I come.” She grumbled and readied herself.

Sliding herself across the pavement, Deborah sighted the pyrokinetic and fired. *Please don't be bulletproof, please don't be bulletproof...* She silently prayed as her training kicked in and she emptied the magazine into her opponent.

While her opponent was indeed normal flesh and blood, the canine in turn clearly needed to spend more time at the target range. Most of her bullets failed to find their mark, instead sinking harmlessly into the pavement or metal debris of wrecked cars. Fortunately two managed to bite into the mouse's amber-furred flesh, nailing him in the left shoulder and lower right side.

The short pyrokinetic screamed in pain. "PUTA! MALDITO PUTA! DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?" He shrieked while channeling a fireball through his good arm.

Deborah sucked in her breath as she reached for a spare magazine kept in her pocket for these occasions. "No but I have a feeling you're going to tell me anyway so by all means, please enlighten me." The shorthaired canine panted sarcastically as she quickly went through the motions of reloading.

"I am Gonzales! The Mexican firestorm! The male who will dance in the ashes as this city burns to cinders." He exclaimed with a maniacal glint in his eyes.

What you are is a hammy little piece of shit. She thought to herself, rising to her feet. Her opponent merely stared in her direction, something about her suddenly causing him to forget about his pyromania. Autumn looked behind her, expecting to see a battalion of cops or the National Guard, and saw nothing. Turning her gaze downward however... her brown pelt had turned a metallic copper in color. Instead of her normal c-cup breasts, a pair of figurative basketballs bulged out of her chest. She looked back at her still spellbound opponent before glancing one more time at her gravity-defying breasts. Really, was this how Aphrodite City's first supervillain was going to be brought down?

Sighing, she saw her opportunity and took it. Moving surprisingly unhindered by her endowed bosom, the metallic police dog charged Gonzales and punched him with a strength that was not entirely her own. The mouse took her hardened knuckle squarely in the jaw and flew backwards, colliding with a parking meter in an explosion of spare change before falling unconscious. With the enemy out of the way, Deborah ripped open the rear emergency door on the burning school bus and drug the injured occupants to safety. She had just rescued the driver and the last of the children when suddenly the world started to spin and her vision blurred...

And suddenly she was back at her precinct, sitting at her desk, as the rest of the squad room was a flurry of uniforms with police officers responding to reports of metabeing activity all over the city. Deborah herself had no sooner stood up in response then one of the other officers put a hand on her shoulder.

“Autumns! I just finished processing this one female’s statement and the chief needs me out with the others to handle the mess on Seventh and Main. Can you see that she gets home safely?” The voice asked. The canine turned around to see Officer Franklin, one of her coworkers at the precinct. The raccoon cop looked fit to be tied, as frazzled by the sudden explosion of activity as the other officers in the squad room. Come to think about it, this looked like a horrible time to volunteer for a busy-work assignment...

Franklin saw her hesitation. “Come on, if the chief asks I’ll tell him it was my call. Please, this lady nearly got done up by some muscle freak roaming Evergreen Park and I’m pretty sure she’s still a little crackers from the experience.”

“Crackers?” The Doberman asked quizzically. Franklin had a way with words, only he would find a way to poetically say that he just finished filling some paperwork with someone who nearly got raped and was still unnerved by the experience. Still, with Franklin “crackers” covered a broad spectrum of mental instability from “slightly anxious” all the way to “stark raving mad.” Better make sure she was dealing with the former and not the latter before the ring-tailed officer shoved a complete stranger onto her lap.

“Sorry, her name is Sonya Winters.” Franklin began as he led her to where Sonya was waiting. “Afghan Hound, female, mostly works as a musician in the clubs along Ritz Boulevard. Says she was jogging along the edge of the park when this huge bovine male showed up. Description is kind of vague but seems to match several other reports that are coming off the bandwidth. Anyway, Big Foot lifted her off her feet and ripped her pants off before she, and I quote, ‘screamed like if Tarja Turunen and Annette Olzon mated with an angel.’ Any idea who those people are?”

“Two European rock musicians I think.” Deborah replied as she followed along.

“More than I know. In any case, if she wasn’t imaging the whole thing, her voice stunned him and allegedly set off every car alarm within a block radius.”

His coworker blinked as she mentally processed what he was saying. “Did... did a super just come in to report that her powers developed?”

Franklin laughed. “I know right? Part of the reason why I think the stress was getting to her. Probably just managed to give Big Foot one good kick in his manliness and the rest is just the stress talking, guess the asshole isn’t so tough after all.”

“I wouldn’t bet on that given the kind of day it looks like we’re going to be having Franklin.” She cautioned, still trying to figure out what happened. Did she really fight with a psychotic mouse dressed like a bad ethnic stereotype or was it just a dream?

The other officer snorted, he never had a particularly fond view of rapists. “Deborah, anyone who targets women jogging alone in the early hours of the morning is

never anywhere nearly as tough as he thinks he is. We'll get him, most likely sooner than later if he's dumb enough to try this in broad daylight."

The canine wished she were just as certain. No matter how she looked at it, she couldn't shake the feeling that something big was going on. Stepping into the office where Franklin left Sonya Winters, the policewoman went through the motions of introducing herself and taking the other female home. Perhaps a busywork assignment wasn't such a bad thing after all. At the very least it afforded her some time to clear her head and listen to the police radio without looking suspiciously eager. Just what the hell was going on?

Elsewhere, in the suburban neighborhoods surrounding the city, two mysterious figures watched events unfold thanks to the power of a magically enhanced television. The frame of the giant flat-screen TV was painted with arcane runes, the screen split between dozens of smaller images. On one, the battle between Gonzales and Deborah's metallic, muscular, hyper-endowed form was looped in slow motion. Another image showed Sonya stunning her attacker with a piercing shriek that would have made a siren jealous. Others still showed the current activities of promising candidates for the show as well as individuals they needed to keep an eye on. Overall, more of a success than the two brothers dreamed of.

"Ooooooh, porn time!" One of the figures cooed with child-like enthusiasm. "More! I want more! Give me more!"

"Patience brother, patience. It took us a while to put even this much together. And there is still much to be done if we want more entertainment. At least two more heroines need to be made, several more villains need to be recruited, and we have three individuals who need to be watched very closely." The other individual replied as the television highlighted the images of Commissioner Philips, the ursine Mayor O'Connor, and Dr. Alexander Townes, the tiger CEO of Ambrosia Biotech.

"Cockblockers..." The first conspirator hissed, sounding more like a fantasy goblin than a mentally well-balanced specimen of anthrokind.

"Indeed, we will have to keep an eye on them, especially Dr. Townes. There is something about that tiger that tells me he will be quite an annoyance if we give him the chance. In the mean time... let's see, we have Shield and Amp appropriately baited, we still need to bring Express Panda to the city, and I think we need at least one more..." The smarter one mused.

"Oooh, ooh! I know, how about a British vixen with a weakness to caramel, just one bite will cause her to inflate like a balloon." The first one replied eagerly.

"That would be retarded... but I like the idea of an inflating vixen. Perhaps she could be British, the city does have a few expats from the United Kingdom living here.

Hmmm, now about the villains; the two mercenaries are both inbound, the hero-hunter Venom has been appropriately enticed, just need a few more..." His cohort pondered.

"How about a big Russian? Those are always scary." The dumb sibling asked, clearly just saying whatever came to his mind first.

"Yes, because nothing says 'Murica' like a cold war reject from a country that hasn't been a major threat to the stars and stripes for over two decades. I suppose the idea has merit though, we do need another brute villain; one that's hopefully smarter than Panzer Beast. Hmmm, but I feel like we're missing something, a key role for making this all flow together." The intelligent brother responded.

"Don't we need a planner?" The dim one blurted.

"A what?" His co-conspirator replied, clearly confused.

"You know; a planner, a thinker, a... the word you are always using." Simple Brother continued.

"A mastermind?" His smarter brother asked, finally starting to understand the other's mad rambling.

"That's it, we need a mastermind!" The dumb one cried out, looking pleased with himself for providing some contribution to the conversation.

The smart one stroked his chin. As much as it pained him to admit it, his brother was right. They either needed someone to make plans for them or step in and do it themselves. As wonderfully promising as Gonzales and Panzer Beast had proven on their first day, they were far too impulsive to be trusted for the long term. And the brothers were only interested in the long term. They had been quietly planning this for the better part of three years, nothing was going to be left to chance, absolutely nothing....

Later that day...

Sweat began to condense on the canine's brow as Sonya Winters finished tuning her guitar. Night had fallen on Aphrodite City and people were gathering in the clubs, trying to not live in fear despite getting their first real taste of the Metabeing Age that morning. The pyrokinetic on Main Street had done a great deal of damage, over a dozen people were hospitalized and the entire street had been shut down to clean up the damage. And then there was Him... the blond Afghan hound felt a sudden chill run through her body despite the muggy heat of the basement nightclub. He was still somewhere out there, that bull...

Shaking her head, the tall, slender female forced the unwanted thoughts out of her head the best she could. The police said they had the matter in hand and she believed them, at least she wanted to believe that they had things under control. In any case, she

had to stop worrying about it and try to move forward. People were depending on her to put on a show to help forget today's troubles after all....

Picking up her electric guitar and walking out from backstage, she quickly surveyed the crowd while going through the motions of plugging her instrument into her amplifier. The basement club was a relatively diminutive affair; fifty people and the floor was already packed, one bartender moved briskly to supply patrons with a steady source of cheap beer, and the stage was barely big enough to hold a proper four-man band. Taking a sip of water from a bottle provided by the barkeep and sitting down on a wooden stool, she imagined how she must of appeared to the audience as the canine rocker warmed up with a metal rendition of Greensleeves.

The audience slowly swayed in time with the music as the ancient melody began with a slow, soothingly somber pace before Sonya woke them up with a screeching finish any guitarist would have been proud off. Winters stood up to her full height, at six-foot-four she had gotten used to being something of a circus freak. Clothes that fit were always a pain to find but being tall helped make a presence on stage. Long blond hair hung freely, flowing like a river of pure gold as her bright blue eyes shone with an inner fire. "Alright metal heads, are you ready to ROCK?" She shouted, the tight confines of the venue meant she didn't need a microphone to project her voice.

For a small crowd, they had no trouble roaring with approval. The canine guitarist smiled and nodded her head. "Alright then, time for a little number that's a personal favorite of mine." She replied loudly, getting cheers as she opened up with Halestorm's "You Call Me A Bitch Like It's A Bad Thing."

Only Elizabeth Hale herself could have sung a better cover then what Sonya had blasting out of the club. Club-goers began to bounce and headbang in time with the music as she switched from Halestorm to Lordi with "The Riff" and "The Devil is a Loser" before winding down with a cover of Blind Guardian's "Sacred Worlds." An eccentric selection to be sure but Sonya always did like challenging herself with a variety of ranges and styles, the better to show off to recording producers.

And frankly, neither she nor the audience seemed to care that much. Her long blond mane bobbed violently as she bounced around in time with the music, the rockers starting to sing along with her even if they didn't know or were too drunk to remember the words. Particularly enthusiastic partygoers were either throwing up the "devil's horns" or holding up lighters way in the back.

Finally, after finishing her last chord, the longhaired canine looked up at the spectators while sweat began to drip down her face. The swarm of metal heads cheered and Sonya drank up their adoration like it was an endless bottle of hard liquor. Finally, the weirdest part of the morning's tribulations began to fade into a dream. Clearly that... encounter with the bull had stressed her out. A superhero with a siren shriek, the stress was just putting her mind into overdrive. After all, how could she think there could be anything more awesome then this...?

Enter the Panda

By Psion
An Aphrodite City Story
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Haru Sakurako head was still swimming when her surroundings finished changing to an empty street in a city she didn't recognize. The young panda woman blinked, as she looked around once the world stopped spinning. This didn't make any sense; last thing she remembered was walking home from a karaoke bar in Sapporo when suddenly she began to feel disoriented. The Japanese native couldn't tell what was stranger, the fact that she was feeling woozy despite spending the entire evening sober or the fact that this wasn't her city. It couldn't be her city, the architecture was completely wrong; it looked too Western to be a city in Japan. What happened and where was she? And why was she inexplicably dressed in this absurd dark green jumpsuit?

"Hey awesome! Guess you must be the Express Panda chick the boss men were talking about. Damn, they know how to pick them." A smug voice called out from somewhere to her side. English, a crisp American accent with the enunciation of a native speaker. There was something else too, confidence. The speaker lacked the sheepish uncertainty of a tourist... where was she and what happened to Sapporo?

Sakurako turned to face the caller and found herself looking at a large, muscular bull with long red hair, his eyes hidden by some of the tackiest sunglasses she ever saw on a male's face. Attire was unremarkable except for his lack of shirt showing off a marvelously sculpted chest. The well-built male looked pleased to see her, and not in a good way. One of the things she taught other women at her father's dojo was how to identify dangerous men and this stranger had all the tells of a dangerous man. His smile projected an unspoken promise of violence and... other things, especially if that bulge in his stupidly tight-looking leather pants was anything to go by. Still, she must not give into fear. Fear was the mind killer.

"Where am I?" She asked coolly, trying to keep her focus.

"Where are you? Don't you know? This is Aphrodite City, soon to become the hottest place to be a dude with power and ambition."

The displaced female may have not known the words to express her current emotions in English just yet, but her thoughts were perfectly clear. What the fuck was this? Who was this guy and why was he speaking gibberish? Aphrodite City... where in the United States was that again? What followed next only provided more questions than answers. Appearing from out behind a dumpster tucked away in a side alley, a duo of vulpine males, one tall and the other short, dressed in a finely tailored pair of three-piece suits stepped into the bright light of the midday sun.

“Good day Express Panda... or should I say good evening since that’s where your mind’s likely still at.” The taller one greeted in surprisingly fluent Japanese, his manner as immaculate his dress.

“Who are you and where I am?”

“As our friend said, you’re in Aphrodite City, New York, part of the United States of America. As for who we are... you may refer to us as your masters because we own you now.” The sharp-dressed one smiled evilly.

“No one owns me. Especially not a pair of shady kitsune who refuse to stop talking in riddles.” The strong-willed female scowled menacingly.

“No choice! Porn time now!” The shorter fox screamed, looking completely disheveled in his suit, a complete contrast to his taller counterpart.

“Yes indeed, time to dispense with the formalities.” His cohort waved dismissively. “Let us see how well you use our gifts. Panzer Beast, she’s yours... if you can take her.” Tall Fellow replied while giving a nod to the big brute. Then, as suddenly as they appeared, the mysterious duo disappeared back behind the dumpster.

That reply was all Panzer Beast needed to hear. The big brute lunged, eager to claim his prize, and Haru threw her body in motion. The two strangers somehow managed to make even less sense than the giant bruiser in front of her. She had no idea what gifts they were talking about, but that didn’t matter. She knew how to handle larger opponents, especially ones as open with their masculinity as this one was, use their weight against them.

Ducking under his opening swing, she struck his overdeveloped crotch with an open palm. The resulting flush of pain did not stagger him as much as she thought, but it left him open long enough for her to execute a perfect scissor kick to the chin. The bull fumed and swung his fist again, this time connecting with her mid-abdomen. For what his technique lacked in grace, it more than made up for in power. The instant his fist met her chest, she was thrown back and bounced against the asphalt like a skipping stone. Pain seared her body like fire as Haru rolled to a stop.

Climbing back to her feet, she looked back at the buff bovine standing at the other end of the street. Her opponent smiled as he appraised her carefully. “Awesome, your costume’s made out of pretty decent stuff if you went through all that and still haven’t had a wardrobe malfunction. Guess I shouldn’t be surprised, the bosses don’t like it when the clothes come off too early.” He grinned evilly before trying to catch her in a charging tackle.

Sakurako’s English was hardly fluent, earning only a passing grade in her foreign languages classes when she was at school, but she knew enough to get the general idea of what he was saying. And his combat telegraph was certainly easy enough to understand.

Stepping out of the way at the last moment, she swung her leg low and tripped her foe up in a sweeping kick. Panzer Beast tripped, flipped head over heels, and landed flat on his back with the wonderful sound of pavement cracking.

Roaring in fury, the carrot-topped brawler leapt to his feet and grabbed her by the arm. “You’re really starting to piss me off you know that?” He shouted while flinging her like an Olympian discus thrower.

This time the panda martial artist was somewhat ready, falling into a controlled landing causing her to come to a skidding stop as she landed on all fours. Unfortunately, so was her opponent, racing after her and punting her into a mailbox. The blue metal box crumbled in an explosion of uncollected mail, letters flying everywhere, as pain and agony became a fireworks display in front of her eyes. Struggled to stay conscious after that onslaught, she fought with her sore muscles to try and get moving.

Bovine hooves clicked against the pavement as Panzer Beast walked after her, all smiles and looking only slightly worse for the wear despite the solid beating she gave him. “Finally, I get to fuck that tight ass of yours.” He muttered with no small amount of arrogance, hand drifting down towards the zipper on his pants.

Typical alpha male scum, self-entitled narcissist that accepted no blame and demanded the world revolve around himself, she realized. But it couldn’t end like this; it couldn’t end like this... What happened next was a blur. One second she was on the ground, the next she was on her feet, briskly acquainting Panzer’s crotch with her knee before taking off with a speed that was literally faster than she could think. By the time she thought to stop, she was outside the city limits, the speedster now lost in the Appalachian foothills south of the city.

The city had shrunk to size where she could have cupped it in her hand as she removed her mask and sat down on a convenient rock. There, as her adrenaline finally faded, she put her face in her hands and cried. Too much, this was all too much. But still, could she move fast enough to escape? Could she run fast enough to be back home by the time the morning’s rays shone on Sapporo? She had to try...

Putting her mask back on and calculating the right direction from the sun’s present position, she took off towards the west as fast as her newly discovered super speed would carry her. Running along the highway she left the nightmare of Aphrodite City far behind her, the shores of Lake Erie growing larger in front of her. Then suddenly, quick as a blink, she was back in Aphrodite City, standing in front of the first national bank of the city. Pedestrians barely got more than a fleeting glimpse at the jade-clad newcomer before she took off in another blur. Again she raced the span of a hundred miles in a matter of minutes; again the first major landmark on her journey across the United States greeted her with arms stretched wide like a loving sibling. Again... she was taken back to Aphrodite City, this time dumped in the middle of the city’s main park. Her hopes crushed, she collapsed on an empty park bench and cried again, becoming oblivious to her surroundings...

“Excuse me panda lady, are you okay?” A small voice asked. Haru looked up to find a small raccoon boy, barely older than six, looking back at her. In his hand was a single buttercup, freshly picked from the grassy park in front of her. He gave single flower to her. She accepted it wordlessly, first looking down at them then up at the child.

“Mommy always said to give flowers to sad people.” He offered as an explanation.

“Tha... thank you.” She stumbled, more due to the stress of the previous hour than the language barrier.

Satisfied that he had done a good deed for today, the raccoon child ran to reunite with his calling mother. Haru looked down at the flower and briefly inhaled their sweet scent. A place where children could still give flowers to complete strangers even as a pair of lunatics run amok and spread misery for their own perverse pleasure. Perhaps this city wasn’t as forsaken as she first thought...

Meanwhile...

Down in their suburban basement lair, the brothers watched their recording of the past hour’s events. Overall, the performance of their latest reluctant porn star was exceptional but not without flaws. Or at least what the foxes considered flaws. To be fair to their newest acquisition, she unwittingly put on a marvelous show. Her jade-green jumpsuit hugged her augmented measurements like a rubbery second skin, the panda’s muscular body flexing and contorting in response to her opponent, breathing beautifully with every gasping inhalation. Her long black hair matted with sweat as she pulled her hood back as she sat up in the Appalachians. And finally the utter despair in her bright green eyes when she realized there was no escaping the Brothers...

“Ooooh, you did well on her costume brother. Look how it hugs her breasts.” Shorty smiled, eyes glued to the enchanted television screen.

“Yes indeed... However it looks like we’ll have to keep an eye on this one.” Tall replied with a contented sigh, shaking his head as he kept enough of his wits to look at the bigger picture. “She’s strong, she gave Panzer Beast a real fight. If we had given Express Panda her powers sooner, she might have actually won. And of course there’s this matter of running back to Japan that we’ve put a stop to for now. She will try again when she thinks we aren’t watching but we should break her of this habit sooner or later.”

“We’ll break her brother, she has nothing here, no home, no money, no one who can help her. She will submit soon...” His brother replied, resuming his goblin-like mannerisms.

“Indeed. However I think we need to recruit more villains before we add any more eye candy. When are those two mercenaries supposed to be arriving in town again?

The Australian and the Canadian?” Tall asked as he pulled out a planner, reviewing the plans he had for the two heavily armed additions to their rogue’s gallery as he added a note to arrange for that raccoon boy and his family to get caught in the crossfire of his next incident, no one makes his girls happy and gets away with it.

“They said they’d be here tomorrow.” The imp-like sibling answered, rewinding the day’s recording to watch it again.

“Very well then, tomorrow the fun will begin....” The more cunning brother replied with a wicked grin. Tomorrow was shaping up to be a fun day indeed.

Aphrodite City: The Bank Job

An Aphrodite City Story

By Psion

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First National Bank of Aphrodite City, Almost 4 PM...

The afternoon sun hung high above downtown Aphrodite City as rush hour died down and most of the city’s inhabitants successfully hurried home. Home, behind upgraded alarm systems and reinforced metal doors projecting a false feeling of safety as the city buckled under a sudden explosion of metabeing activity. It had barely been a week since that first clash between the still unknown Latino pyrokinetic and the equally mysterious masked policewoman yet that hardly mattered to the local hardware stores. Sales on reinforced doors, deadbolt locks, and other home fortification devices weren’t just climbing, they were skyrocketing like a NASA shuttle with no end in sight. About the only good thing to come out of this turn of events was that it was a great time to own a hardware store...

Some brave citizens were still out on their errands, rushing into the bank to make some last minute withdrawals or deposits before it shut for the evening. Pity, as none of the pedestrians paid much mind to the nondescript van parked on a side street across from the building. At least not until the doors opened and four costumed figures walked out of the back towards the towering marble shrine to the financial markets. Bystanders walking past suddenly thought better of it and turned to run in the opposite direction. Unfortunately one of the four masked males was having none of that, turning an armored gauntlet into the direction of the fleeing civilians and spraying them down with a quick burst of bluish-white energy. Wherever Venom’s P.A.I.N.E.D beam touched flesh, people fell over in agony, lying on the ground twitching as their nervous system was overloaded with a seizure-inducing amount of electricity. Not exactly fatal but few people were ever the same after getting a taste of the Pulsed Agony Inducing Neurological Emitter Device.

The immediate concern taken care of, the armored bat took point for the group and turned back towards the bank, mechanically-augmented strength practically tearing the double doors off their hinges as the demonically armored Venom threw them open in a grand, sweeping gesture. His partners in crime filed in around him as tellers and a handful of bank customers looked up in response to the noise of metal sheering on metal. The sole security guard watching the main foyer reached for his sidearm, getting gunned down by a snow leopard dressed in an exceptionally patriotic Canadian jumpsuit and jet black fingerless gloves, the masked gunman from up north snickering as he cradled an exotic looking assault rifle, wisps of chilled vapor seeping from the barrel as the unfortunate sentry fell over and slowly bled out from a pair of icicles shot into his chest.

The third member of the group, a masked bear dressed in a Soviet Union-inspired costume, raised his voice. "EVERYBODY DOWN, THIS IS A ROBBERY!" The ursine clad in a blood-red overcoat shouted, sweeping the frightened crowd with a steely gaze hidden behind a dull gold-colored domino mask. "Please, think of your loved ones. Don't give my three trigger-happy friends any reason to hurt any more of you." He added with a thick Russian accent. *Please... do as I say, I don't want any more blood on my hands.* He added silently. Gods above and below, how did his life end up like this?

To his relief, their hostages complied. People got down on the floor as the tellers immediately began stacking up bundles of twenty, fifty, and hundred dollar bills. The bear's minions looked at each other as the stacks of money grew taller, forgetting about his slight jab as they were briefly stunned by the display of compliance. "Aren't they supposed to you know, run around and scream for help or something Red Storm?" The fourth member of their group, a masked wolf dressed in a red and black jumpsuit asked the bear, a thick Australian accent to his words.

"What did you expect Screamer? Venom ripped down the doors, a second later Hypothermia shot the one guard stationed in the foyer, and the rest of them don't seem to be in a hurry to get killed. Of course they're going to cooperate." Red Storm growled as he motioned for Screamer and Hypothermia to start collecting the money. The foyer was silent except for the rustle of money being stacked... and the sound of someone chuckling softly.

"Who was that?" Hypothermia shouted, the Canadian snow leopard waving his cryo-gun around threateningly. "Do you think my name is funny, eh? EH!" He yelled, firing a bolt of cryogenic energy into the air, the skylights shattering from a burst of hailstones and causing shards of glass to rain down on the terrified crowd.

Red Storm was behind the feline in an instant, pointing the gun harmlessly towards the ground before giving the other masked male a hard slap upside the back of the head. "Stop terrorizing the bargaining chips! It's your own fault you picked such a stupid name." The bear growled violently. He hated himself for referring to the victims as objects but what choice did he have? This team consisted entirely of psychopaths and drunken sociopathic frat boys, he had to think like them if he wanted to survive this experience with the least amount of blood on his hands.

“What are you talking about? Hypothermia is an awesome name!” The feline argued through bared teeth.

“No, it’s a stupid name that makes you sound like an idiot that thinks he’s smarter than he really is. If you ask... have ice powers and you can’t think of a name like Frostbite, Hailstorm, or Glacier, that’s your own damn fault. Now stop trying to give these people a heart attack and get back to work!” The bear rebutted effortlessly.

Hypothermia glared at his cohort and snarled, but he walked over to the counter and did what he was told. Taking a duffle bag slung over his shoulder and setting it on the counter, the feline started stuffing it full of money. Venom turned his attention towards the main entrance while Red Storm watched the rest of the atrium. At the moment everything seemed to be going like clockwork. The tellers were quickly tapped dry and Venom switched places with Screamer and Hypothermia, using his armor’s weapons to break into the main vault.

The bear was nervous, a fact he fought desperately to keep to himself. This was the largest bank in the city, where were the rest of the guards? Where was the alarm, there had to be an alarm, was it a silent alarm? Between the walk up the marble steps into the bank and their grand entrance, someone had been bound to hit the panic button that would send the police running. Yet nothing appeared to be amiss, the money was being bagged up and the vault door was soon cut open. Just had to keep working for a few more minutes and maybe they might actually make a clean getaway...

“So love, come here often?” Screamer could be heard asking one of the female hostages near the door.

“Screamer, if you really want to be here when the police arrive by all means say so and I’ll make sure you’re left behind while the rest of us run for our lives.” Red Storm interrupted harshly over his shoulder as he turned to check up on Venom. The armored villain was slowly staggering out with about a hundred pounds of gold bullion in his arms. The Russian bear grabbed a duffle bag and motioned for the other two to do the same, it was time to leave.

Gathering up their loot and keeping a free hand on their weapons, the foursome walked out back the way they came. Several squad cars had parked in the street and almost as soon as they walked out, an armored truck with the livery of the ACPD rolled up and came to a screeching halt in front of the bank. Ah yes, the bear recollected, these days bank robberies brought the immediate attention of the local SWAT and... the Federal Bureau of Investigation... Well at least this nightmare had an end even if it wasn’t a good one.

Cops in heavy armor poured out of the armored vehicle like water from a burst dam, a rhino and a bear slowly creeping forward with riot shields at the ready while their coworkers followed right behind them with shotguns and assault rifles locked and loaded.

Meanwhile the driver turned on the police truck's speaker system. "You there, in the cheap-ass Halloween costumes, drop your weapons and get on the ground now!"

I'm sorry... surrender isn't in the cards. Red Storm thought silently as he raised his free hand and blasted the armored truck with a blast of blood red energy. The force of the blow caused the parked vehicle to slide back into a fire hydrant and drove the dismounted police officers into cover. Screamer and Hypothermia saw their cue and took it as water rained down from the ruptured hydrant, peppering attackers with automatic fire. The Canadian feline was brutally effective; his gun-shaped cryokinetic amplifier had no trouble turning the excess moisture into more ice projectiles, blasting vehicles and lawmen alike with icicle-like bullets.

Meanwhile the Australian Screamer preferred a more conventional arsenal to compliment his eccentric collection of superpowers. Barrett REC7 roared with a 6.8 mm bark as the red and black wolf lived up to his name, screaming insulting three-syllable gibberish with a voice that knocked SWAT cops off their feet and rocked squad cars like they were made of wood. The most coherent of his barbs was of course "Suck My Dick!" Clearly the frat boy mercenary was not using his sonic powers to their full potential. Then again, it could have been worse, he could have also preferred the discontinued M468 that tended to jam up unless the operator was an anal-retentive obsessed with weapon maintenance....

Fighting frantically behind cover, SWAT officers returned fire as gradually more and more of them went down from bullets, sonic screams, ice blasts, and energy beams. A pointless effort as The Brothers made sure all of their villains were immune to conventional firearm ammunition, projectiles bouncing harmlessly off of power armor cuirasses and sculpted chests as the four bank robbers waded through the onslaught. Red Storm tried to not think about how many of the cops may have stopped in his bakery or had families. While he made sure he took careful aim to wound instead of kill, his cohorts were far less merciful with where their attacks ended up.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, the last officer went down, either dead or wishing they were with a dull moan. With no opposition left, at the moment at least, Red Storm hurried his cohorts towards the getaway van. In their haste, they failed to notice a Doberman policewoman slowly rising to her feet...

In a flash the loot was loaded and the van's engine roaring to life, the costumed bear hit the gas pedal and whipped the vehicle around as fast as he could... and narrowly avoided getting the engine crumpled by Shield's metallic fist. Fighting to keep control of the vehicle, the "communist" villain swerved and finally came to a stop when The Brothers' latest addition, the super-fast and super-strong Express Panda, did what Shield couldn't with a flying kick to the van's grill. Gold and bank robbers were all thrown around like dice in a jar, making the living occupants grateful that the bullion hurt them as much as bullets did.

With their getaway vehicle forced to a stop and dead in the water with the engine crushed, the robbers scrambled to unbuckle themselves and escape. “Leave the gold, it will only slow us down. Just grab the duffle bags and start running.” Red Storm shouted over his shoulder as

“Seriously mate, why did the bosses put you, a god damn doughboy, in charge of the robbery? Screw this, I’m going to get me some spandex pussy!” Screamer yelled as he kicked the rear doors open and came out with a hail of gunfire. Almost immediately Express Panda was on him, knocking the rifle out of his hands and pummeling him with a flurry of rapid blows. The Australian merc threw her back with a shout, flinging her away like a toy. And then she appeared to put the punk in his place, Amp the All-American Rock Goddess.

Dressed in rather revealing patriotic attire, unsurprising given the costume choices the Brothers made for her peers and the slightly gravity-defying enhancements they made to her bust, Amp let out a sonic shriek that... Red Storm never quite appreciated the phrase “voice like an angel” as much as he did just then. If her scream had destroyed the bear’s eardrums in that instant then no one would be able to say that his last moments of hearing weren’t glorious. The resulting blast of sound threw Screamer off his feet and sent him flying back into the van and out the front window in an explosion of tinted glass, even with his enhanced endurance he was out of the fight for a good several minutes.

The other villains wasted no time in getting out of their vehicle and joining in the fight. Secretly part of the bear wondered how much of an amateur night this was going to turn into, none of them had their powers for more than a week. If he didn’t have The Brothers coaching him, Red Storm probably would have never figured out how to use his energy blast technique, so how much of the fight they were getting from Shield and Express Panda was from their powers and how much was their training as a policewoman and martial artist?

Hypothermia spotted the police Doberman and fired a burst of ice shards at the metallic canine. The feline might as well have splashed Shield with a glass of tap water for all the good it did beyond cutting holes in her rather minimalist top. Icicles shattered like the super cop was made of steel, the irritated female ran up to her attacker and tackled him to the ground before pummeling him like a punching bag. He called to his cohorts but they couldn’t help him, both of them were having problems of their own.

For being a heavily armed hunter of caped heroes, Venom was not off to a particularly good start with Express Panda. She wasn’t really that much stronger than the armored fruit bat but the martial artist was certainly much faster. Metal crumpled and hydraulics squealed as she slowly gained ground against her battlesuit-wearing foe. Electronics began to spark violently as the damage piled on Venom’s power armor. He tried to deploy his P.A.I.N.E.D. beam but it appeared to have no effect on the disciplined warrior monk. She just fought right through the agony to deliver a metal-crunching blow to his gargoyle-themed helmet that looked like it did a fair bit of damage to the face within.

Red Storm focused on Amp believing she was the weakest out of the three, as far as fighting spirit went at least. Power-wise, he was starting to have second thoughts on attacking her so the other two would have to face real opponents. In addition to her haunting siren shriek, the Rock Goddess was capable of conjuring an azure blue electric guitar seemingly out of thin air. That turned up to open up quite a few little tricks for her sound-controlling abilities, all of them painful. Bubbles of sonic energy that dissipated his energy beams, bolts of pure sound that knocked him around like a toy, she was definitely the girls' artillerist, keeping foes from getting in close with surprisingly precise area of effect attacks and effortlessly juggling between dealing with Red Storm and giving Express Panda support for handling Venom with a head banging guitar solo.

And like a flash, the battle immediately shifted. Shield's fur lost its metallic luster, Express Panda slowed down, and Amp's sonic attacks fizzled. Where the girls could originally dent steel with a single punch, now they could do little more than cut up their knuckles on Venom's metal shell. And yet Red Storm and his cohorts were just as strong as they were when the heist began, an advantage they were quick to capitalize on. The panda brawler went down from a second P.A.I.N.E.D. beam, Screamer getting back to his feet and using his enhanced strength to join Hypothermia in pummeling Shield. Amp fared only slightly better due to Red Storm's quiet reluctance, the bear's blows were aimed to neutralize his opponent as cleanly and as non-lethally as possible. The rest of the fight lasted barely a minute before it was over; all three of the heroines were knocked prone against the pavement. Venom's expression was impossible to read behind his dented gargoyle-like helmet but the others... the other two quite clearly still wanted their "spandex pussy."

As the faint wail of police sirens echoed off in the distance, Red Storm breathed a sigh of relief. Saved by the bell... The masked villains remembered their priorities and quickly disappeared with their bags of loot on foot. Fortunately the safe house wasn't too far from here, just a few turns down the right back alleys and through a manhole cover and they'd be back in their hideout beneath the city.

A little while later...

Deborah "Shield" Autumns sighed as she sat down on the couch in her apartment. Little by little she was starting to piece together just what was going on and the more of the puzzle she could see, the more she wished she couldn't. Her fight with Gonzales, the Brothers, the rules of this twisted little "game," Panzer Beast, and now four new psychos adding to the hurt locker. The Doberman policewoman groaned as she put tried to put an ice pack on her face, handing one to Sonya "Amp" Winters and Haru "Express Panda" Sakurako as they joined her on the sofa. At least it could be worse, she could have been facing this alone instead of having the company of her fellow captives; there was a small comfort in that.

Sonya whimpered softly as she applied an ice pack to her bruised side while Haru saw to her own cut hands. Both girls reflexively put an arm around the jittery Afghan

hound and gave her a squeeze. The physical wounds would heal quickly enough; the Brothers couldn't stand having their little sex dolls remain "ugly" for any real length of time. But the mental ones... as hammy as it sounded the only real source of healing for that was each other. Which reminded Deborah...

"Haru, where are you staying? The Brothers did at least give you a place to rest didn't they?" The rookie cop asked her foreign friend.

The panda grew quiet, looking down at the floor. Autumns connected the dots and growled savagely. "Guess it was too much to expect that they'd at least keep you from having to camp out under bridges. Well then, after dinner you can make yourself at home."

Sakurako opened her mouth to try and politely refuse but the canine shook her head. "No and that's final. This city is going downhill, you stay out on the streets too long after most people are in bed and who knows what will happen to you... other than that the Brothers would probably like it. My landlord just replaced the locks on my door, I'll see about getting you a spare key."

Pride may have prevented Haru from asking for help but she certainly appreciated Deborah's offer, hugging the group's reluctant leader almost as hard as Sonya was. Autumns didn't fight it as their combined weight pushed her into the couch, the three of them wrapped in an affectionate embrace as tears silently stream down their cheeks and the adrenalin left their system. Just another day in Aphrodite City...

Meanwhile...

Boris grumbled as he counted the money from their heist in the safe house living room. Half a million dollars in potable currency and a hundred pounds exact in gold bullion, and his fellow villains were still sulking about like a trio of spoiled children. Between the money and the current price of gold, he valued their haul at 2.4 million dollars. Meaning in turn everyone got a little over half a million dollars. Not a legendary run by any stretch of the imagination but still much more than Boris's bakery currently made in a year. And still his cohorts were not happy. Granted, the bear could see why Venom was upset; most of the bat's share was likely going to go back into repairing his armor. But Screamer and Hypothermia... it would be the case that they would be too upset over "missing out" on molesting and violating the "Aphrodite City Girls" to realize they both had more than enough money to both hire three prostitutes to dress like the heroines. The unmasked Red Storm merely rolled his eyes and shook his head. Idiots, idiots the pair of them; at least Venom was a decent fighter. Hardly the kind of warrior Boris was initially lead to believe he was but a decent hand in a fight all the same.

"So why are you here Doughboy?" Hypothermia asked suddenly, walking into the meeting room licking a maple syrup treat. Apparently he was finally finished sulking.

“What difference does it make? I’m here.” The bear rebutted curtly as he started to figure out how to split the haul in four even piles.

“Oh it makes all the difference eh. Way you carried yourself; you had to be something other than a baker back in the old country. So what are you in it for? Money? Recognition? Those smoking hot bimbos the Brothers keep sending our way?”

“Back in Russia... I was a baker. I left the ‘old country’ when a witch who thought she was Baba Yaga attacked my village and burned it to the ground. My family escaped due to a bit of luck and no small amount of cunning on my part. And our foes are not bimbos, there is only one reason why they faltered when they did.”

“And what was that?”

“That what the Brothers give, they can take away whenever they feel like. Never forget that, we are not friends, partners, or even useful foot soldiers to those two freaks. We are merely captives, same as the girls.”

“Haha! That’s a good joke, us, captives. But I noticed you didn’t answer my question, what do they have you working for?”

“My family.” Boris began simply. Noticing the raised eyebrow the snow leopard was giving him, he shrugged and continued. “When I came to this country, I had only the clothes on my back and my wife and daughter. I settled in Aphrodite City because I was told it was a safe, ordinary city somehow existing apart from a world gone mad. Once here, I rebuilt my bakery and slowly clawed out my piece of the American Dream... the classic immigrant story really. And then your best friends in the whole world visited my home one evening, causing my family to sicken and slowly die right in front of me with some clever trickery. And I was given a choice, become Red Storm the Communist Terror or watch them die from that slow poison. You can guess what my decision is.”

“Dawwwh, now that’s just so sweet. Guess your sculpted abs really are the only thing that isn’t soft.” Hypothermia cackled; Boris didn’t need to be a native English-speaker to know he was being mocked.

“Be grateful that is the case... because their uncertain fate is the only reason why you and that other flea-bitten mongrel are still alive.” Boris replied, his gaze as cold as Hypothermia’s sub-zero ice powers.

The Canadian feline opened his mouth to continue arguing but promptly decided against it. Boris was full of crap about their latest benefactors, he had to be, but at the same time the cryokinetic realized that the most dangerous person in the city wasn’t Shield, Amp, or Express Panda, it was the bear right in front of him...

Aphrodite City: The Private Doll Collection

By Psion
An Aphrodite City Story

Another evening in Aphrodite City, another episode in a completely staged nightly drama against evil put on for the amusement of two juvenile horndogs... Shield didn't know what horrified her more, the fact that her struggles were starting to become routine or knowing that somewhere out there was a world where it was perfectly normal for the kind of crap the Doberman superheroine in a sexualized patrolwoman's uniform trudged through to happen on a regular basis. Neither thought was particularly comforting. At least this time the "commie" supervillain Red Storm managed to herd the rest of the Freak Brigade into an abandoned warehouse in the city's industrial district far away from where bystanders could get caught in the crossfire.

Boots clicked against the cold cement floor as the super-strong heroine forced open the loading bay door and walked inside with her teammates Amp and Express Panda right behind her, fur glistening with a coppery sheen as her powers armored and protected her. Shield smiled despite herself, in this moment she was invincible in both mind and body. Raw power radiated through her muscles and Screamer's initial burst of assault rifle fire did little more than muss up her fur. Shame she knew it wouldn't last....

Tonight's plot was an oldie but a goodie for comic book geeks, the Brothers clearly didn't have a single original thought in their heads if they had their "Irredeemably Evil" frat boy villains kidnap the mayor's daughter. Yet there they were, every last one of them from Gonzales and Panzer Beast all the way to the Captain Ethnic psychos Hypothermia and Screamer, all of them surrounding the bound, gagged, and stripped black bear Tiffany O'Connor as she looked up at the three heroines hopefully. Meanwhile the empowered policewoman secretly hoped she wouldn't disappoint her audience... the audience that was physically present at least. The Brothers, wherever they may be watching, could go hang themselves for all she cared. Time to dance for as long as they could before the rug got pulled out from under them.

The numbers were firmly stacked in favor of the bad guys but Shield was hardly worried. Out of the six villains the Brothers produced so far, one was a lunatic, three were brainless sociopathic frat boys, one would have been trouble if he didn't have such an over hyped opinion of himself, and the only one that did have promise as a supervillain didn't want to be one.

When they told her where Tiffany was being held, the Brothers gave Shield some corny lines to say that sounded like they were ripped straight from a four-color comic book. Those lines were not what came out of the Doberman's mouth as she stared down the villains. "Alright assholes, hand over the mayor's daughter quietly and no one has to get hurt."

"Now why would we want to do that love?" Screamer asked with a smug smirk, clearly already picturing the three girls naked. God did Shield want to kick his over-endowed crotch right up into his throat...

“Because there’s a buffet special tonight and I want to get this over with so I can go make Them hate me.” She replied; the only person who had to ask who “They” were was currently incapable of speaking.

“Screw this, enough talk!” Panzer Beast interrupted as he lunged for Amp... and got a metallic fist to the balls when Shield placed herself in front of the charging super. Express Panda and Amp quickly followed up with attacks of their own.

“Sorry T-Bone, but you’re going to have to ask nicely if you want a slice of American Apple Pie.” The police canine quipped as she engaged the bull as well as Screamer and his butt buddy Hypothermia. Meanwhile Express Panda took on Gonzales and Red Storm, subjecting both of them to a flurry of punches and kicks as she moved like a high-speed ballet dancer.

Flip and kick, uppercuts, chops, grapples, even a few moves that would only be possible with the panda’s super speed like that “spinning bird kick” from that one fighting game series... The pyrokinetic mouse was knocked out almost immediately, his body not used to taking such extreme punishment even after receiving his superpowers. The Russian-American Red Storm definitely knew how to take a punch though, staggered and pushed away from the mayor’s daughter despite his energy shield but quickly recovering to fight back. Venom was knocked and flipped repeated by Amp’s opening salvo, armor sparking as it skidded across the concrete floor, the bat was definitely not becoming a fan of the Afghan hound’s sonic powers. The air distorted as the canine rocker wreathed herself in a shield made of sonic energy, readying herself for the inevitable counter-attack as she moved to assist Shield.

Despite the three to one odds, the police dog was doing pretty well for herself. Thanks in no small part to the fact that two of the three idiots could do very little to actually hurt her before they were sorted out. Unfortunately the third was Panzer Beast. “Come on T-Bone, it’s steak night at the buffet and someone needs to show Express Panda some proper American ‘hospitality’ after you roughed her up last week.” She grunted as the two of them grappled together, bovine super strength pushing against canine hyper-charged muscles. Biceps and triceps bulged as the two wrestled against one another, the armored super-cop started to see veins popping over Panzer Beast’s arms.

“For the love of Christ, what’s with you and the fat fur porn innuendos?” He growled. “Don’t you know it makes Them unhappy?” he snarled while trying to desperately gain ground against his stronger opponent

“Panzer, why in God’s name should I not try to aggravate them?” She replied with a fierce head butt, making both bull and dog take a step backwards in pain. “Hey Amp! Any chance you know Spinal Tap’s Big Bottoms or Queen’s Fat Bottom Girls?”

The canine super-musician didn’t acknowledge her cohort at first but soon the head-banging super began playing the familiar cords of Spinal Tap’s chubby chasing anthem. Express Panda kept fighting on, regretfully not getting the joke, but Shield couldn’t help but laugh as the lipophilic tune became the soundtrack to the beating that

was being served. Punches were exchanged with enough force to crumple steel, blows were dodged or shrugged off by augmented endurances, and gradually the three girls were able feel, for a brief instant, like the kind of heroes the city silently prayed for.

And then, just as they established an indomitable offense and were starting to enjoy the high of their accomplishments, the rug was pulled out by the unseen puppet masters. Express Panda slowed down, Shield's brown fur lost its metallic luster, and Amp's magical electric guitar disappeared back into the ether from whence it came. *If I wasn't going to be scared for my life in the next few seconds, I have a feeling I'd be drolly remarking on how this can't possibly get old.* Shield thought to herself in the instant before Panzer Beast punched her in the gut and sent her flying across the largely empty space, coming to a bouncing stop on the concrete floor. *And thank God we heal fast, that last one should have had me coughing blood.* She lamented silently as the pain of the previous fifteen minutes of fighting began to finally catch up with her. Words could not describe how much her everything hurt at that moment.

"Heh, you always were the most uppity of the lot Shield. I'm going to enjoy bringing you down a peg." Panzer Beast chortled as the towering mountain of bovine muscle loomed over the prone heroine. So this was it, battered and beaten, the mighty Shield was the first one to go down... And then someone shot Panzer Beast in the back of the head with a .45 caliber handgun. It was about as effective as Shield thought it would be, she wouldn't even think of tackling the bullet-resistant bruiser with anything less than a .357 Magnum. But it got his attention and distracted him long enough for her to get back on her feet, long enough for her to look downrange at the masked brown bear that arrived to their rescue.

Shield's heart started to pound in her chest as the new heroine holstered her pistol strutted in with the practiced walk more appropriate of a pinup than a hardened crime fighter. Looking at the USMC Parade Blues motif and the overstuffed military backpack on the bear's back, the canine's first hopes that the Marines had finally landed to straighten things out were quickly dashed out when her mind finished registering all the things that were wrong. Fighting in a parade dress uniform that was no way regulation cut, it was way too tight in the she-bear's muscular hips and taut buttocks and revealing way too much of her overly generous bust. And then there was the minigun by her side, barrels spinning with the soft whirl of an electric motor... CHRIST ON A CRACKER SHE HAD A MINIGUN!

"S'up? Am I too late to help own some noobs?" The mysterious heroine asked behind a navy blue domino mask, her pronunciation of "own" sounding suspiciously like it was being said with a "p." It took all of Shield's strength to not break down into a sobbing fit. Why, just why? Couldn't the Brothers get a real army girl at least? Or were they so stupid that they thought this punch line on two legs actually WAS military?

Without waiting for a reply, the newcomer squeezed the trigger on her weapon and opened fire on the gathered clump of supers. The whine of the electric motor was drowned out as the multi-barreled gun roared to life and began spewing a torrent of lead

at... pretty much everything. However much strength she may have had, it wasn't anywhere nearly enough to compensate for the recoil of handling a weapon meant to be mounted on a Humvee or helicopter and keep the gun from "walking." The other heroines dived for what little cover was available, the villains likewise scattered on instinct. Even the Brothers' little frat boy psychos doubted their invincibility in the face of such heavy ordinance.

Only after the mysterious female finally finished firing did the other Aphrodite Girls dare to get up and survey the damage. The villains were scared off; none of the heroines were shot, but looking at the now understandably terrified Tiffany... At the beginning of the battle the six supervillains had propped their hostage's chair up against a stack of empty crates and shipping pallets. The chair was still intact and upright, its occupant physically unharmed, but the wooden shipping materials she was seated against was now a giant pile of splinters and sawdust... shredded by the barrage of fire that somehow managed to miss the poor black bear.

Battered, bruised like a piece of overripe fruit, and nearly raped, it was all Shield could do to keep from screaming. Unfortunately Amp lacked the same sort of self-control that the other canine was struggling to maintain.

"WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU ON? YOU NEARLY TURNED THE MAYOR'S DAUGHTER INTO FUCKING HAMBURGER!" The Afghan hound screamed as she grabbed the unnamed heroine by the collar and started shaking her violently.

Her body still sore, Shield slowly staggered to her feet and managed to find the strength to pry the two women apart. "Amp, Express, find Tiffany's clothes and make sure she gets home safely, I'll wrap things up here." The police dog interrupted curtly.

Amp still looked angry and shaken from the ordeal but complied. Searching through the rubble, they managed to find the black bear's clothes miraculously not shredded and took the now-clothed hostage out of the building. Only after they left did Shield turn to the newcomer. "Okay, who are you and where did you get that thing? Answer the second question first."

"Same place you got your powers and that nice costume if those two foxes weren't lying to me, they gave me this backpack that allows me to summon any weapon I want and infinite ammo for it. And my name is Pvt. Doll." The military-themed heroine replied matter-of-factly.

Shield grabbed the ursine's minigun and walked around behind her, pressing down on her shoulders to make sure she got the idea to stay put, then opened up Pvt. Doll's backpack. Jokes about bags of holding and British time-traveling space ships ran through the canine's head as stuffed the giant automatic weapon back into the seemingly infinite storage capacity of the military surplus bag and pulled out a Mossberg police shotgun with a bottomless ammo pouch full of beanbag shotgun shells. "Honey, we all

appreciate your willingness to help but the next time you show up could you make sure to use THIS? Please...” The canine requested as she shoved the weapon and ammo bag into the bear’s hands with a mix of appreciation and exasperation. Without waiting for a reply, the battered heroine did her best to storm off, a difficult proposition to do in an intimidating manner with her body as beat up as it was...

Later, Shield, Amp, and Express Panda...

Deborah Autumns smiled as she led a disoriented Haru Sakurako into her apartment. The panda’s head was spinning, understandable as after the two of them visited the buffet to bloat up on cheap food Debbie took her foreign friend to a little bar she knew where she introduced the displaced Japanese woman to a fine bottle of French Gray Geese vodka... Sonya Winters regretfully had to go home to make dinner for her father, the older Winters was still recovering from heart surgery, but the Afghan Hound promised to drop by with a surprise later.

About an hour later, after Autumns had helped the tipsy Haru into bed, Sonya knocked on her door. Looking out the spy hole, Deborah smiled as she saw the female musician waiting outside with two tubs of ice cream. Undoing the collection of locks, chains, and deadbolts that most citizens now depended on to keep them safe, the Doberman let Sonya in and promptly locked the door behind them before getting a pair of spoons.

There, lounging lazily on the sofa, the two spent the remains of the evening eating ice cream straight from the cardboard tub while laughing softly at late-night trash TV. Just two girls being lazy in front of a television blasting them with mind numbing programming, grateful to have another day in this nightmare down. If only they knew how many days were left...

Meanwhile, Pvt. Doll...

Samantha Summers grumbled as she returned to her small home on the edge of the suburbs after what she thought was a successful night of heroics. Unfortunately the rest of the girls didn’t see it that way, Amp and Shield really needed to chill out. They won, the bad guys were beaten, the hostage was saved, and all was well. Score one for the good girls... at least the four of them had these awesome superpowers, most folks could only dream about being superheroes.

Signing and locking the door behind her, she stripped off her street clothes and got some snacks from the kitchen before collapsing on the couch and turning on her game console. Reclining in her underwear, Samantha looked down at her scrawny, unflattering figure and sighed, at least she was pretty when she was Pvt. Doll.

Slipping in a disc for the latest Battlefield of Honor video game, she put her headset on and settled in for another night of online gaming in her favorite first person

shooter. At least in cyberspace she didn't have to deal with any negative criticism for smacking some noobs...

Meanwhile, the Brothers...

Sitting in their lair somewhere in the suburbs outside of Aphrodite City, the demented vulpine brothers Tall and Short watched both shows with a mixture of disgust and disappointment. The battle in the warehouse had been excellent, the heroines' downtime was not so much.

"Where are the tits, I thought we gave Pvt. Doll tits?" Short grumbled, dejected that watching a gamer girl play in her underwear wasn't quite as sexy as he pictured it being.

"Easy brother, I'm still figuring out how we can use our powers to gradually bring their normal measurements more in line with our ideals. Besides, if these girls all suddenly became that tall and wonderfully endowed all the time, people might notice. We already had a small slip up with Shield and Panzer Beast." Tall replied, gesturing to an image of Tiffany O'Connor, already telling her daddy dearest the mayor and the police commissioner everything she could remember about her ordeal. The aptly named taller brother didn't doubt that the mayor and the commissioner were now going to be very interested to find out who these "Others" were... Oh well, perhaps it couldn't be helped; people would have to figure it out eventually. Like it mattered though, even if they were at full strength, the ACPD would have a lot of suburbia to cover before they found the right house.

"And why are they all being couch potatoes? Damn it, we can't have them getting fat. I won't stand for it." Short snarled savagely, stamping his feet against the polished wooden floor of the lavishly built man cave.

"Just shut up and take it brother, Shield is the anchor upon which the others depend on or will depend on eventually. She has the strongest will but that in turn makes her the most difficult to control. She believes it offends us and she is determined to rebel. We must make her think it isn't if we want to steer her towards actions that are less likely to put us under any more mental strain..." Tall replied harshly, it was a horrible shame the one they needed the most was also the most difficult one to control...

Wrench In The Plan

By Psion
An Aphrodite City Story
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What is the true measure of a heroine? Is it in the sum of her powers or the costume she wears? Or is it something deeper such as the strength of her convictions or her willingness to fight for what is right no matter how outmatched she may be?

Nearly three weeks into the Brothers' twisted little porn games, Aphrodite City was starting to show the strain of the "sudden metabeing siege." Those that could afford to leave were and those that couldn't leave struggled to fortify their homes. Businesses closed up and larger companies moved out of the city as property values plummeted and insurance rates skyrocketed. Curiously, the outside world continued to remain strangely ignorant of the city's plight and attempts to send a message were mired in all manner of horrific luck. Communication failures, bureaucratic black holes, and even more outlandish incidents of misfortune kept the mayor and the police commissioner from contacting the FBI or federal metabeing law enforcement. Some was the doing of the two masterminds but most of the setbacks were sadly a case of simple incompetence or rotten coincidence.

In a suburban home ironically not far from where the Brothers made their base, the owner's garage had become a flurry of activity. For the past two weeks since the robbery at the First National Bank of Aphrodite City, the tech-savvy Rachel Arsenel had been hard at work in her private workshop nonstop. Not like she had anywhere else to be, a mechanical engineer formerly employed by Allied Metals, the white-furred mink lost her job when the manufacturing concern packed up and left without any advanced notice after the first metabeing attacks in the city. So far she had been supplementing her limited savings with the odd handyman job but it couldn't last... something had to change the city and try to turn it around. Most of her neighbors fought to stay positive but Rachel wished she could be as blind to the truth. The police were all but completely beaten, the four heroines that emerged to challenge these roaming sociopaths seemed to be as effective as wet noodle, and almost a month without outside help; people had to step up. Never one to sit idle, Rachel was also one who believed in becoming the change she wanted to see in the world.

Gathering up all the scrap metal, spare parts, and seemingly random bits of junk she could find, the mink had been welding, grinding, and forging something or several somethings. Exactly what, no one was willing to get close enough to the power tool-wielding mustelid to find out even though she frequently had her garage door open to keep her workshop from overheating, giving the slightly perverse of her neighbors a good look at her as she worked.

Rachel was a white-furred mink female in her mid twenties, with her long black hair currently tied into a bun and pale blue eyes covered by a pair of polarized welding goggles as she held a white-hot welding torch over two joined pieces of metal. Even fully decked out in appropriate personal protection equipment, she managed to fill it out in a manner that would appease even the impractically juvenile Brothers responsible for much of the city's misery even without their body manipulation abilities. Beneath the leather apron, gloves, and steel-toed work boots that protected her from the dangers of working with hot metal; she wore a simple t-shirt and jeans over a body that was no stranger to hard work, a modern female blacksmith.

Toned muscles from repetitive labor held the metal in place as she fused it together, beads of sweat dripping down her face and onto her D-cup breasts as she worked under the oppressive heat of her workshop. Even with the garage door open to the outside, the space was like a sauna. Jeans were stretched tight as her plump bubble butt squished against a metal stool, even though she was a girl that positively loved building machines and pounding metal into a variety of useful shapes and had the muscle to show for it, she would occasionally joke that “a girl’s gotta have her donuts.”

Yet her latest project could hardly be called a joke. Thick metal plating salvaged from a wrecked police armored personnel carrier, the motors and hydraulics from nearly a dozen different drills and other fine machines, and a pair of brand new car batteries slowly came together to form a vaguely humanoid golem. A hollow humanoid golem with an interior space measured to Rachel’s specific measurements. The mink smiled as the metal “statute” she was building was finally taking shape. Soon, very soon, it would be time to take her creation out for a test drive....

The next afternoon...

Another day marked by another piece of Boris’s spirit slowly withering and dying like a magnificent tree that had been infested with a colony of termites. Today had been a good day for “business.” The safe house had been moved to larger quarters, from condemned subway station to an abandoned factory, and another bank had been successfully robbed. The police response was practically a joke; their fangs had been almost completely removed, and the Brothers’ female sex puppets had yet to make an appearance. The Russian bear almost hoped that they wouldn’t, there was only so many times the whims of fortune could deny the Brothers and Red Storm’s fellow supervillains their twisted pleasures... and then the armored figure burst through the ceiling and jumped down onto the table as the villains gathered to split up their loot.

Rising up from the shower of wood splinters and strewn valuables, a glistening black and steel gray robot-like being rose up and regarded the villains with a baleful gaze. Screamer and Hypothermia were the first to recover enough of their wits to start attacking the metallic warrior however their shock caused them to instinctively reach for Screamer’s scattered firearms and not their powers. The Australian canine opened fire with his REC7 while the feline grabbed his partner’s FN five-seven and started emptying the magazine into the steel stranger. Bullets bounced harmlessly off the being’s metal shell as a pair of large caliber revolvers were drawn. Someone definitely did their homework, the girls could use someone with this amount of brains and gall, Red Storm realized as he raised an energy shield on reflex.

As her armor held up to the initial round of abuse, Rachel dared to be hopeful. Twin .357 magnum revolvers belched fire and metal as the hydraulic counterweights she installed in the gauntlets soaked up the recoil. *Well Pa, you always said I’d never shoot half as good as a boy, guess you were wrong.* The mink mused with a wry smile inside her armor as she took down Screamer and Hypothermia with one bullet apiece, so much for the mighty Australian and Canadian washouts.

Gonzales was the next to try and rush her, panic and disbelief had caused them to attack her in ones and twos, hardly the most effective way to take her down but the Latino mouse still had to be taken seriously despite his ridiculously stereotypical costume... whoever provided this wannabe League of Evil with their costumes had no sense of taste. His pyrokinesis was intense and she had yet to figure out how to build a proper cooling system in her armor without adding too much weight. Sweat dripped down her body as she took a gout of flame straight to the chest, the suit was going to quickly turn into her own personal oven if she took another hit like that.

Leveling both revolvers at him, she pulled the triggers and fired; blowing apart both of his shoulder blades and making him disappear in the same oozing black cloud of smoke as the others. *<Stupid cockblocking bitch, now we break your toys!>* A voice screamed telepathically in her head as the remaining villains rallied and struck at once. Now the battle began to turn for the worse...

As an armor-monger herself, Rachel knew exactly where to hit Venom for the best effect. Joints were always a structural weak point on larger body armors, always have and always will be until engineers figure out how to armor them without cutting down on range of motion. The metal plating around his body cut down on the killing power of her revolvers but they did their job, crippling him and taking that damn P.A.I.N.E.D beam of his off the playing field.

Unfortunately that left Red Storm and Panzer Beast, the former being smart and accurate enough to realize where her armor was the thinnest and able to cripple her arms. Pain briefly seared through her limbs as she lost all feeling in her lower arms and automatically dropped both of her guns. That turned out to be the only opening the big bull needed, the still-hot metal chest plate crumpled as he punched her hard and sent the mink flying across the factory floor. The residual heat from the metal scalded her while the impact caused her to cough and sputter.

The smooth concrete vibrated as Panzer Beast stomped over to pick her up and grabbed her armored helmet. "Alright tin man... wait a minute." The mammoth mountain of muscle remarked as his thick fingers felt the latch in her armor and pressed it. Guess even Panzer wasn't stupid enough to not recognize a switch when he felt one. It took seconds for her helmet to come off and fall to the floor with a solid clang; it took a full minute for them to realize the truth.

"Damn, you're a woman?"

"Very observant of you sugah." She replied; her honeyed Southern accent tainted with the bitterness of her sarcasm. "I do indeed have all my plumbing on the inside."

"Fucking finally, we get to strip one of you spandex cunts and bring you down a notch... wait, don't the Brothers usually tell us when they created another heroine?" The bull replied, his expression changing from violent lust to concerned confusion in a span of seconds.

“What’s the matter Panzer Beast, having second thoughts now that what you most desired is in your hands?” Red Storm asked cynically. Apparently there was a bit more to the bear than Rachel first thought.

“Oh hell no, bitch is still getting my third horn. It’s just... if she’s not one of the Bosses super sluts, then who is she? DSA? FBI? DAMN IT CUNT, WHO SENT YOU?”

<No one sent her.> A second telepathic voice, calmer than the first, interrupted suddenly. *<She may get it in her head to tell you otherwise but she is a nobody... congratulations Red Storm, you managed to keep our fun from being ruined by a mechanic that MacGuyvered a suit of power armor in her garage.>*

“What do you want us to do with her?” Panzer Beast asked, his tone hopeful as he clearly already had an answer in mind.

“Knowing them, I expect the answer involves a threesome position where one of us plums the depths of her back acres while the other introduces her to a new taste sensation. Then they’ll want you to break her neck like a dry twig.” Red Storm replied with a blatant roll of his eyes. Clearly there was much more to him than she originally suspected. “But that seems like just such a waste of such a talented woman.” He continued, clearly mulling over his words and choosing what he said carefully. “I mean just look at her audition. No powers and a suit of armor hammered out of scrap metal, yet she still horribly maimed three of us and seriously wounded a fourth. Yes, she is definitely dangerous, but perhaps she can be controlled? At the very least, I think they underestimate the appeal of a pair of Double-D’s with a mustelid’s flexibility, this lady must be a riot at parties and dance contests.”

<I sometimes wonder why my brother picked you Boris, you can try to make yourself seem like the others as much as you want but even this wench can see the truth about you. Still, you make an intriguing argument...> The calmer voice intoned sinisterly.

And at that moment the canine heroine Shield kicked the fire escape off its hinges and lead her costumed friends in behind her. Rachel could not imagine Red Storm was capable of smiling as broadly as he was. “Curses, the heroines of Aphrodite City have found us again!” The bear shouted with the hammy air of a “four color” supervillain. “Panzer Beast! We must retreat, the capitalist whores have won this day.” Red Storm ordered.

Seconds later, after a fairly anti-climatic retreat, an injured Rachel was left standing inside her damaged suit of armor. For a moment no one spoke then finally an exceptionally busty she-bear dressed in a laughably stylized “Dress Blues” military parade uniform broke the ice. “So who the hell are you and what happened to the other guys that were with Super Commie and Tons of Bricks?”

“I killed three of them and wounded one more.” The mink smiled, not caring what they thought of the idea of killing, three sociopathic villains was much more manageable than six.

“Killed them, with what?” Shield asked incredulously, seemingly more shocked that such a feat was actually pulled off than that the mink killed them in cold blood, vigilante-style.

“With my .357 magnums. Strangest thing though, made Screamer, Hypothermia, and Gonzales all fall over and disappear in a cloud of black smoke instead of just falling over dead.”

That Shield almost did smile at. “Nice choice of weapons, better than someone else’s first choice.” The canine replied, shooting a glare at the she-bear before continuing. “But they’re not dead...”

“What, but I shot them all in major arteries! The blood loss alone should have killed them by now.”

“Yeah, and two days ago I took an opportunity to wipe almost all of them out with a grenade launcher, including Panzer Beast and Venom.” The she-bear replied dejectedly. “Yet obviously that didn’t work because you can’t kill a guy twice.”

“Miss, the black smoke means they were taken away before the trauma could kill them. Now, you did us a big favor because that means it’s going to be a couple days before we’ll see them again but no... you didn’t kill them.”

Rachel was silent for a moment as it slowly began to sink in. The rush of slaying three of them in almost as many seconds, the terror of nearly being killed, it was all for nothing. Despite all her exceptional efforts, through no fault of her own abilities, the new status quo remained unchanged. Except now she had the attentions of whoever the true puppet masters were behind this macabre nightmare. None of the masked heroines were surprised to hear her scream in frustration when reality finally set in...

Two days later...

Boris sucked in his breath as he found himself whisked away to the Brothers secret lair. The Russian baker had no idea where it was other than it was somewhere in the suburbs on the city’s outskirts. The vengeful family man would have loved to know more but perhaps always teleporting him into their secret lair was one of the Brothers rare moments of intelligence. In any case, time to see what these basement dwelling troglodytes wanted now.

The Brothers’ “command center” was luxuriously furnished but virtually indistinguishable from any other man cave built around an overdeveloped home

entertainment system. Three overstuffed leather-bound sofas formed a semi-circle around a polished glass coffee table and a massive flat screen television complete with one of the most lavish sound systems Boris had ever seen in a home on either side of the Atlantic, it begged the question where they got their resources? Did they merely create what they needed regardless of the consequences much like their current “entertainment” or did they have some seemingly bottomless slush fund fueled by perfectly mundane means? A trivial question but one that could go lengths towards helping him figure out exactly what he was dealing with.

Tall Fox looked up and regarded the bear with a surprisingly friendly smile while his shorter brother remained engrossed in the television. It was at that point that Boris noticed what was on the television; both Brothers were admiring the latest addition to their collection... an addition that had been made at his recommendation. “Hello Boris, my friend. How are you? What do you think of Wrench Wench?”

The bear politely nodded in approval as he sorted through a conflicting series of emotions. *Better you live to hate me than die forgotten.* He lamented, justifying the amputation of just one more piece of his soul. Her magnificent armor was gone, reduced to a pile of scrap metal shoved in the corner of her workshop or melted down to form the weapon that was the center piece of her new persona. The Wrench Wench alter ego was... typical of the Brothers. Brown work boots, short blue denim shorts worn tight over her ample bottom, gray leather gloves, and a plaid halter-top made up the core of the costume. A construction yellow domino mask was worn over her eyes and a large black tool belt carried all her gadgets. The pistols were retired alongside her armor; her new signature weapon was an oversized sledgehammer with a mean-looking head.

Right now, they were enjoying a show she was putting on outside of her costume. She wasn’t doing anything particularly special at first glance, just the “mild-mannered” Rachel Arsenel, one of his more frequent customers at the bakery he quietly realized, chopping firewood for friends with wood-burning furnaces. Raise the axe over her head, bring it smashing down on a piece of kindling, put a new piece of wood on the chopping block, then repeat. Her chest moved beautifully as she panted with exertion, plush bubble butt bouncing with each swing that connected with the chopping block. It took a moment for Boris to recognize the secret brilliance of the activity; this was training. She was exercising with the ax to improve her swing with Wrench Wench’s sledgehammer.

“Yeah baby! Sweat those pounds away, melt that last bit of stubborn fat off your ass!” Short crowed, perhaps the longest, most coherent sentence he made since Boris first met him.

The bear kept his expression neutral, resisting the urge to smile. Yes this one was definitely brilliant, the kind of brilliance that called for being rewarded with a glazed treat. Short Fox could keep hoping that she would melt off the pounds that the Brothers’ flesh manipulating magic somehow couldn’t erase, Boris knew what donuts were Rachel’s favorite....

Sleeping Beauty

An Aphrodite City Story

By Psion

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It had been only a few days since Rachel Arsenel was recruited as Wrench Wench and new developments were leaving Deborah Autumns fit to be tied. Out of all of them, the police Doberman concluded that the tech-savvy mink was probably the most promising out of all of them. And her reliance on technology, while a weakness in some respects, was definitely her strength. “Debby” just wished that Rachel’s arrival didn’t coincide with the feeling that an invisible switch had been flipped on the city.

Once, a time that felt like it was ages ago, Aphrodite City was a nice place to live, a decent-sized city tucked away in upstate New York, sheltered in the vineyards and wine country of the Finger Lakes region, a world away from the madness of superheroes, supervillains, and the at-times ludicrous ecosystem that grew up around them. No capes, no cowls, just regular people. Then suddenly, faster than a comic book manchild geek could say “fuck normality,” the city slid into chaos. First came the Brothers, bizarre beings with the ability to imbue normal people with superpowers and their twisted desire to set up glorified rape pornographies between misogynistic supervillains and inspiring but ultimately “weak” heroines. The police, untrained and under equipped to take on superpowered threats, were crippled as these “play villains” laughed off bullets and handed lethal hits out like candy. Three-fourths of the city’s law enforcement was presently either dead, hospitalized, or had handed in their badges out of fear of the criminals they couldn’t bring in or take down.

And like an arrangement of dominos in a demonstration of cause and effect, other criminal groups began to form outside of the Brothers’ influence and become powerful entities in their own right. Worst of these were the Hedonists, depraved “fanboys,” lead by the charismatic “Loco,” that started to idolize the villains and worship the mysterious “entity” that put on such a “magnificent” show. And of course, the slow slide into oblivion wouldn’t be complete if there wasn’t a new drug on the streets. Sleeping Beauty, the ultimate date rape drug, was becoming all the rage among the Hedonists and other sadistic freaks. An aerosol compound that could easily be pressurized into pocket-sized containers, one puff was enough to knock even a female hippo flat off her feet and send her dozing for well over an hour. No one knew who was making and distributing it but the police were desperate to find out, taking this drug off the market wouldn’t solve all their problems but it would be a badly needed step in the right direction...

Larry smiled as he stood on the landing overlooking his operation in the basement of an abandoned apartment building. His laboratory had been assembled piecemeal, a dizzying maze of gently used high school chemistry equipment and jury-rigged contraptions he made himself, but it was his and right now it was making him rich. When he first stumbled across the formula for the drug, part of the spoils his gang bagged

when they searched an abandoned warehouse, he didn't think it could possibly sell but damn did those Hedonists love their violent sexy times. He and his crew, the politically incorrect Medicine Men, were having trouble keeping Sleeping Beauty in stock. Still, the component chemicals were easy enough to get even with the city completely gone to shit and the process was easy enough to follow for anyone with a basic background in high school chemistry. If they were lucky, another month and they'd all have enough money to escape Aphrodite City and move somewhere that wasn't a warzone. Now if only he could just deal with the nagging feeling that there was something he was missing, like it was all just too easy...

Deep within their basement hideout within the suburbs outside of Aphrodite City, the Brothers watched things develop. Unsurprisingly, this was all ultimately their handiwork. The Brothers were frequent visitors of a place where the drug that was known locally as Sleeping Beauty was commonplace and information was easy to find for those who knew where to look, a place that actually provided much of their inspiration for the chaos now plaguing Aphrodite City. Unfortunately, it appeared their latest scheme wasn't going quite the way they wanted it to go...

"Are they planning on leaving? THEY CAN'T LEAVE!" Short Fox, the smaller and less mature of the two vulpine Brothers, screamed in frustration, wiping spittle from his mouth when he finished venting his frustrations.

"Indeed, I had hoped that the Medicine Men would be willing to stay and ensure a regular supply of the drug and possibly even weaponize it for Loco to use on the girls. But if all they're interested in is making a quick buck and moving on... well we'll have to change that won't we?" Tall Fox, the more intelligent and at least appeared to be the more mature one, mused while stroking his chin. While more in control of himself than his brother, Tall was just as unhappy to discover the unwitting actors in his plan had plans of their own and maintained as naïve a view about people as his sibling did. Inevitably that was going to be their downfall...

"Yeah! Criminals never stop being criminals! They don't have dreams outside of crime or get tired of the life they're living!" Short shouted in agreement, practically jumping off of his couch in excitement.

"Indeed, let's see if we can't arrange for them to stay longer..." Tall replied sinisterly as the wheels began to turn within his head. Time to try a more direct approach to the situation.

Larry shook his head as the gang called it quits for the night, shutting down the lab and setting up the compressors to run overnight so they could start packaging the product next shift. Everything looked good; byproducts were carefully collected and sealed away, temperature was a little on the cool side but that was actually a good thing, and there were no new leaks after that patch job where Mac got a little too friendly with

the duct tape. Time to lock the doors and bar the windows, make sure everyone that wanted to conduct business tonight had to go through the reinforced side door and walk the "Gauntlet." The Gauntlet was a bit of "offensive remodeling" the Medicine Men did to their abandoned tenet building to shift the odds in the event of a rival gang attack, created by expanding the already open foyer by demolishing some nonessential walls and moving anything that someone could take cover behind at least fifty feet away from the doors. The result was a large, mostly empty space taking up half of the first floor... perfect for wasting intruders with a hail of gunfire from half a dozen Medicine Men seeing how many rounds they could fire in under a minute. It wouldn't stop any of those supers running around but after the first rival gang got mowed down trying to run the Gauntlet, the other crews decided it wasn't worth the trouble to try and sneak past several sentries in open terrain... So how the hell did these two suit-wearing foxes manage to slip upstairs into his personal pad on the third floor?

The 9mm handgun was out of his pocket and in the ferret's hand before his guests could even say a word to him. "Who the hell are you and how did you get in here?" He barked, switching off the safety as his index finger hovered over the trigger.

"Larry, Larry, is that any way to treat two friends who you owe so much?" The taller fox began; the mustelid wasn't sure which of them he trusted less. Tall boy look and sounded like a used car salesman, his shorter partner looked like a barely restrained lunatic in a two-piece suit. Both of them made him edgy.

"Owe you? Dudes, did Mac sell you some of our PCP or something? I don't owe you, I haven't even fucking met you before now... Oh Christ, one of you is 'it' aren't you? The guy who made all this shit happen." Larry realized suddenly, his hand tightening around his pistol as he began to back slowly towards the door, the better to try and take both of these bastards out or call for the rest of his gang.

"Very astute, I see we made the right choice at first. You are half-correct, we are both 'it' as you called us; we both changed Aphrodite City for the better."

The mustelid gang leader snorted at this but declined to comment further. "Okay, what brings you to my little corner of soon to be the biggest slum city east of Detroit?"

"It has come to our attention that the Medicine Men are planning on leaving Aphrodite City, using their drug money to start up again somewhere else. We were wondering what it would take for you to change your minds?"

"For real? You really want to know what would make us stay in the ol' AC?" Larry asked, the gun never leaving his hand and the barrel never swaying from its vigil in front of the two foxes. Tall fox nodded, prompting the ferret to spit on the floor. "Leave, leave and take your super sluts and your frat boy rape squad with you. Don't care where you go as long as it's not fucking here. Business was risky enough back when we were just cooking ecstasy and other designer shit, between the cops and the Mexican drug cartels moving up through Pennsylvania. Now... I don't care if you left the formula for

Sleeping Beauty where we could find it, I don't care if you even hand delivered it to us on a silk tapestry with solid gold thread, we are out of here and that's it."

"Please, don't be hasty. Perhaps a few hours with superpowers will change your mind." Tall insisted.

Larry had heard enough; he knew enough to know that nothing in life was free, especially a chance to become a superman. Leveling his gun at the taller one's head, he started to pull the trigger and... nothing. The foxes were gone as abruptly as they appeared, leaving the ferret ganger waving a gun around at an empty studio apartment. It had to be a dream, a side effect of inhaling the fumes from the production process, but at the same time it just felt too real. "Yo Mac, tell the rest of the crew to be on alert tonight. Something weird is going on..."

"How can he turn us down like that? We offered him powers! He could have been our best rape god yet!" Short fumed.

His brother was silent for a moment; mind wreathed in silent fury as he tried to deal with what just happened. While the more logical of the two Brothers, his sense of reality had been similarly warped by badly written comic books that recycled the same tired plots and clichés over and over. And in the comics, intelligent criminals didn't exist. Crooks didn't plan on plying their trade with an endgame in mind... and yet that's what just happened, a ganger disgruntled with the "thug life" just turned them down.

"I believe it's time for plan B then..." Tall Fox said after what felt like a long time.

To say Shield was suspicious of this sudden turn of events as the heroines gathered in an alley outside of an abandoned apartment building in the bad side of Aphrodite City was an understatement. It was completely unlike the Brothers to do anything so completely altruistic as help locate the drug lab producing Sleeping Beauty that the masked police-themed heroine wondered if there was something more going on. Who was she kidding? Of course there was more going on, but whatever it was probably wasn't important right now. The important thing was to shut this plant down and take the drug off the streets. If they could accomplish that then maybe the skimpily dressed Doberman could start to feel good about her double life as what was essentially a super-powered porn star.

Turning her head towards the others, she let a small smile escape from her lips. Amp did her best not to look nervous as she shouldered her magic electric guitar; the canine sonic controller was as ready as she'd ever be. Express Panda was definitely ready, the super-fast panda had a fire in her eyes that Shield felt herself all too often. Pvt. Doll looked grumpy as she fingered the safety on her police shotgun and loaded it with beanbag shells but she complied with the canine's insisted "recommendation" all the

same. Lastly was Wrench Wench, the final girl unlucky enough to get forced into this superhero farce. In addition to her “Southern pinup mechanic” costume and an oversized hollow sledgehammer with a liquid mercury weight, the white-furred mink carried a large bag from a local industrial supply store. Without saying a word she stuck her hand in the shopping bag and started handing out industrial-grade half-mask respirators. The others regarded her with silent confusion until finally Private Doll said something.

“You know I probably could have pulled some military-grade gasmasks out of my backpack right?”

“Military grade gasmasks provided by a pair of idiots who thought a bastardized, almost painted-on, version of Marine dress blues was appropriate combat wear? No thanks; I’ll trust the guy behind the counter at the local hardware store long before I trust those two bastards. Told him some friends of mine and I were going to do some auto body detailing over the weekend and well, if these are good enough for painting with pressurized paint guns, they’re good enough for whatever these guys are cooking up. Besides, if the Brothers have a problem with it then they can go pound sand; gasmasks and rubber suits can be very très chic.”

“Don’t give them ideas, bad enough we’re all a bunch of spandex Barbie dolls. Do you really want them to turn us into rubber sex toys too?” Shield shook her head and half-joked before putting her respirator on. Time to see what fresh nightmare awaited them this time...

The canine brick-style heroine had barely kicked open the door and called up her metallic shell before the Medicine Men gang had her sighted and opened fire on her. Almost a dozen mustelids of various species, clad in street clothes and decorated with a variety of Native American tattoos they probably had no business wearing, were ducked behind sofas and flipped tables, leaning out of cover to take a shot at her. For not the first time, Shield was grateful she was practically bulletproof.

The other heroines filed in behind her and in the span of a heartbeat, the canine police avenger knew Wrench Wench made the right call getting them all respirators. With a scream of “MASKS ON!” the gang’s apparent leader pulled a lever by the stairs leading up to the second level of the apartment building. Jets of a pale, lime-green gas blew up through the ventilation system in the floor and quickly flooded the arena with a lime-colored fog. A classic supervillain gas trap loaded up with Sleeping Beauty made by someone that wasn’t one of the Brothers’ play-villains, almost flattering in a sense.

“Dawwww, look sugahs. They rolled out the red carpet just for us.” Wrench Wench commented sarcastically, her voice muffled by her breathing mask as the heroines fanned in.

On the plus side, the shooting immediately stopped once the room was filled with gas. On the negative, none of the girls could see more than a foot in front of them. Meanwhile, somewhere in the building there was the sound of ten or twelve pairs of feet

running upstairs and racing around above their heads. Shield wasn't a veteran beat cop but even she knew a perp escape when she heard one. Fortunately, leave it to their resident Southern science genius girl to come up with a solution for at least one of their problems.

"Amp honey, your guitar creates shockwaves when you play it right? Could you play us a little ditty just to clear the air and blow out the windows?"

The Afghan Hound replied with a nod and blasted the room with the opening cords from Five Finger Death Punch's "Under and Over It." Glass shattered and the cloud of Sleeping Beauty dispersed as if an invisible giant had blown the building out like an old game cartridge. And not a second too soon either, the instant the room was cleared, one of the Medicine Men threw a lit road flare down into the room below, clearly there was something that was supposed to be extremely flammable. A second burst of sound extinguished the flare and the small fire it had started, leaving the girls free to explore the now vacant building.

A search upstairs revealed nothing, any notebooks or laptops that were up there were taken when the Medicine Men fled the building. The basement on the other hand was a completely different story. Several air compressors, about a thousand dollars in chemistry equipment, and all of the gang's notes on Sleep Beauty. Wrench Wench immediately thumbed through the notebook, looking annoyed as she paged through formulas, descriptions, and other things that made Shield wished she paid more attention in high school chemistry. "Something's not right, none of the Medicine Men could have written these original notes."

"What makes you say that?"

"Well for starters it's mostly typed in all caps like the original author was god damn brain damaged or had a broken keyboard. The few times they do write something out, it looks nothing like the little foot notes the Medicine Men clearly wrote for them... oh God... oh God no..." Wrench Wench explained, a chill visibly running through her body as her voice trailed off.

Nervous, Shield looked over her friend's shoulder and read down where the mink's white-furred finger stopped. There, typed out in capital letters, were the words "IT HAS THE SAME PROPERTIES AS LOX (LIQUID OXYGEN)" next to a Medicine Man's hastily scribbled "Note to self: Do NOT put any of our smokers on the Sleeping Beauty line." Even with her chemistry as spotty as it was, she knew that, before revolutionizing the healthcare industry, liquid oxygen was originally used as rocket fuel for both NASA and the military. Rocket fuel was being made in a building with an electrical system of questionable reliability.

"Everyone, out NOW!" The masked policewoman bellowed.

Turns out it was the right decision, no sooner did everyone get out then something shorted out in the basement. The entire building completely exploded in a violent fireball, within an instant the apartment complex was reduced to a crumbling shell of its former self. Holding the notebook in her hands, Wrench Wench tossed the notebook full of the date-rape drug formulas into the roaring conflagration. Like that, Sleeping Beauty's hold on the city was weakened. Not gone, as there were probably other black market chemists trying to replicate the formula and cash in on the drug's popularity, but seriously weakened.

After a quick call to the Aphrodite City Fire Department was made before the firestorm in front of them consumed the entire neighborhood, the girls stood and silently watched the burning building from a rooftop across the street.

"So does anyone believe in karma or some kind of higher power?" Amp asked suddenly.

"Why do you ask?" Wrench Wench replied, curious what brought up this topic.

"Well... it just feels like a message was sent. I mean, okay so who here believes the Brothers have something to do with the Medicine Men getting the Sleeping Beauty formula?"

"I think it's safe to say all of us believe we were used as mob muscle just now. What are you trying to say Amp?" Shield replied, wondering where the Afghan hound was going with this.

"Well, the recipe had to come from somewhere right? Probably somewhere more messed up than Detroit or here if they made a knockout drug for girls. So it feels like someone or something said 'No, not here' and burned the building to the ground." The All-American Rock Goddess explained.

The other heroines looked at the canine in the tri-color costume then back at the burning building. Was there really a place that could be worse than what Aphrodite City was turning into? Shield and the others shuddered at the implications. But if that was the case, and it was entirely possible that it wasn't the case, then Amp was right and today was a greater day than any of them realized....

Aphrodite City: Rise of the Castigator

By Psion
An Aphrodite City Story
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Aphrodite City, once a bustling city in western New York State, now a metropolis in a slow, painful decline into silent oblivion. Miraculously isolated from the wonders as well as the horrors of the metabeing age, this sleepy burg managed to avoid having a

population of capes and cowls to call its own for virtually all of its long history. Unfortunately this completely blank canvas had left the city vulnerable to arguably the most horrifying kind of supervillain, the Brothers. Twin perverts with the power to imbue seemingly random citizens of the city with fantastic powers, rather than use their powers to assemble a team of do-gooders to fight evil both great and small, they chose to squander their gift by arranging the most elaborate live-action superheroine bondage porno any being had ever conceived of; malevolent male super villains, reluctant female heroines, a horrible pornography that would make most heterosexual males ashamed of themselves. Unfortunately the Brothers were shameless... and completely unconcerned with the carnage and collateral damage their “staged” metabeing clashes caused upon the city...

One Hour After First Encounter...

Stanley Dewpond was sitting in the local Veteran Affairs office, filling out forms for his benefits when the police officer walked into the waiting room. The blond-haired bear felt a chill run down his spine as he saw he look on the cop's face, it was the look he had seen on military officers back in Eastern Europe when they had Bad News to report. And the blue uniformed fox was heading straight for him...

“Are you Stanley Dewpond?” The police todd asked without emotion.

“I am...” The grizzly bear replied, his stomach starting to twist itself into knots.

“Mr. Dewpond...” The ACPD officer began then stopped to suck in his breath. “There was an explosion downtown about an hour ago on Twelfth and Main. We're still trying to figure out exactly what happened but your wife was caught in the blast. She's currently in intensive care at Saint Mary's. I'm sorry for your-”

“Just get out of my way, she's not dead.” The muscular bear growled furiously, quickly rising to his full six-foot-two height as he handed his half-finished paperwork to a nearby secretary unfortunate enough to hear everything. “I'm sorry but I'm going to have come back later for these.” He handed them to her and ran out the door without waiting for her reply...

The drive to the hospital and the walk to their room in Saint Mary's Intensive Care Unit had been a numbing flood of information. The attack downtown was the city's very first supervillain; not a bomb or something equally mundane. That would have almost been reassuring. The mayor and the chief of police both issued a statement promising answers and swift retribution yet more telling was what they didn't say, the identity of the attacker beyond being some pyrokinetic with a horribly cliché sense of fashion. Meaning whomever this guy was, Aphrodite City was his first appearance anywhere. While never involved in the tactical planning while he was in the service, Stan still knew enough to recognize when the men upstairs had no idea what was going on. Not a good realization to have as he walked through the bright and clean hospital hallways to the ICU.

Somehow, despite mentally preparing himself for it, the sight of Kimberly, his wife, in that hospital bed, second and third degree burns all over her body, all those tubes and IV needles... he still nearly lost it. She was conscious but the look in their eyes... there was no recognition there, he could have been part of the cleaning staff for all she knew. That almost hurt as much as seeing them in here.

“Mr. Dewpond?” A voice asked. The bear turned to see one of Saint Mary’s doctors standing right next to him.

“What is it, is she going to be alright right?” For a fellow that fought in the Eastern European micro nation of Igoroth, Stanley found it hard to keep the uncertainty out of his voice.

“She will be alright... we think.” The raccoon doctor began before gesturing for the other male to follow him into a private meeting room tucked away in the side of the ICU.

Surrounded by comfortable furniture, motivational posters offering hollow encouragement, a message board with half a dozen flyers for grief counseling services, and four windowless walls painted with cheerful, pastel colors; Stan was ready for bad news. “What do you mean, you think?”

“Well Mr. Dewpond, barring unforeseen complications she should both make a full recovery in a couple months. However, your wife has an unusual blood type and there have been problems contacting the state blood bank.”

“What are you trying to say?”

“Mr. Dewpond... this is not a major hospital in one of the bigger cities, especially not in one with a large population of capes causing all manner of chaos. We barely have the supplies to deal with the casualties coming in from today, forget about what might happen tomorrow or next week. Normally this wouldn’t be a problem except... we’re having trouble contacting other hospitals in the state.”

“What?”

“No need to worry, it’s probably just the telephone system overloading itself with people trying to contact loved ones. We’ll keep trying. If we have to contact them with smoke signals, we will. Meanwhile we’ll keep you informed of any change of status. Is there anything else you need?” He asked, looking eager to get on with his rounds.

“No, not unless you have a miracle handy.” Stan replied glumly.

The bear sat in the room for a few minutes after the doctor left, rising up to leave when a nurse brought in the next unlucky soul to sit down and give them the bad news.

Dewpond left the crying female alone in her misery and turned to go visit his wife's room one more time...

There was no change in his wife's status since he last arrived. Running his fingers through her hair brought no response from her and no solace to his heart. Sighing, he left the hospital, dodging gurneys being raced into an operating room. Too many people were coming in. Hopefully the DSA would be in by the end of the week to help straighten things out...

One Week after First Encounter...

The DSA did not arrive nor was there any word of when they were to arrive officially announced. Meanwhile this communications blackout was starting to look oddly suspicious, Stanley couldn't contact any of his old Army buddies either by email or telephone. A few conversations with his neighbors revealed they were all having similar problems, any attempts to contact people outside of the city ended with either static or a mailer demon.

Meanwhile, a new normal started to form in Aphrodite City. Six villains, all male, and three heroes, all female, had been spotted in various locations around the city. The city was slowly starting to feel the effects of this abrupt explosion of metabeing activity. The police were worn down, suffering heavy losses in a bank robbery at one of the largest banks in the city. Gangs started appearing in places outside of the city's poorer neighborhoods, a mix of hooligans with more ethnic pride than sense and new "themed" gangs apparently inspired by their "heroes," the villains currently destroying the city. Everything was starting to look a lot like Igoroth...

Igoroth was a micro-nation, a country literally only one city in size, tucked away somewhere between Central and Eastern Europe. Stan didn't remember exactly where it was, just that he was sent there as part of a joint mission between America, Germany, Poland, and the UK. A merry band of supervillains decided to have a team-up and overthrew Igoroth's democratically elected government then started going about turning the little country into a haven for fugitives from the law. Since at least half a dozen countries weren't about to have any of that, pretty much every member of the UN Security Council either declared war on the country or promised aid.

When Dewpond arrived in the country with the rest of his unit, Igoroth was in utter chaos. Resistance fighters and NATO military units clashed with armies of robots and genetically engineered mutant... zombie... things. Sickened children and starved females huddled in bombed out buildings, desperate mobs crowding aid stations, the opposing force frequently breaking lines to raid rear positions like Stan's. It just wasn't right. And right now it felt like he just brought the war home with him...

Two weeks after First Encounter...

A new heroine emerged, the Marine-themed Private Doll, and rumors of some kind of cult worshipping the mysterious figure or figures suspected of being behind the sudden and strangely contrived explosion of superhero battles occurring right in front of him began to circulate. As a military man, Stan wasn't sure how he felt about Pvt. Doll. Yet he was also a fellow that had his priorities relatively straight, and a potentially threatening band of cultists ranked higher than figuring out how he felt about a GI Jane wannabe. Especially when said cultists started showing up in his neighborhood.

"Do you wish to join our leader Loco in embracing the glorious bosom?" The fox in purple robes asked Stanley as he handed out fliers to male pedestrians and only male ones the bear couldn't help but notice.

"No thank you." The ex-military male replied briskly as he continued to run his errands.

The cultist didn't take the hint, following after a "promising mark" while spewing some long-winded, sexist, pseudo-objectivist philosophy that basically translated to "we should enjoy the earthly pleasures provided by women because we have the right to." Or at least that was the impression Stan had gotten when he finally turned around and punched the hooded fox squarely in the face, sending his fliers scattering in a gentle breeze before turning back around and kept walking. Supermarket, hardware store, and looks like the gun store just got added to the list as well. It was moments like this where he missed his M4...

The parcel was set next to his front door when he returned, a sealed cardboard box with a note that said, "Read Me first" taped to the side. Setting his groceries down and picking up the box, he gave it a tentative sniff before holding it up to his ear. No chemical smell, no suspicious clicking noise. Guess it couldn't be too hazardous to his health, he decided as he picked his groceries back up and balanced them against the mysterious package. Once inside and set everything down on the kitchen counter, Stan detached the envelope and opened it, unfolding the letter inside and starting reading.

Dear Mr. Dewpond:

Let me begin by saying that no, this is not a bomb or anything cliché like that. My real name is not particularly important though if you ever were out on the West Coast you might have heard the story about the "Gunrunner." If you haven't, it's no big deal. Short version, I'm a gunsmith that manufactures weapons for vigilantes and people that have no one else to turn to but themselves. I arrived here shortly before everything was turned on its head, I know what a beautiful place Aphrodite City was and still can be if a few brave heroes rise up. Real heroes, not the puppets on strings that someone has running around.

Enclosed in this package is a new weapon I'm working on. I wish I could say the design was mine, as it is fiendishly brilliant, but the truth is that I got the idea for this weapon from a friend who heard of a supervillain that made a name for himself with a

similar contraption. Basically the weapon is an air compressor designed to shoot a “bullet” of air through a long-barreled pneumatic rifle, essentially an enhanced battle rifle with nearly infinite ammunition and the ability to pierce steel. It’s pretty much as illegal as you can get so if it turns out you’re not interested, there is a safe way you can return it to me outlined below and no one will be the wiser; you have my word as someone else opposed to this sort of atrocity.

- Gunrunner

Stanley put aside the instructions for operating and if necessary, returning his present should he decide it was not worth the trouble he could get into with it, and turned to examine the contents of the package. On top was a beautifully assembled “rifle” made out of pneumatic pipes and valves painted gunmetal gray. The bear spent a moment holding the wonder weapon in his hands without plugging it into its companion compressor tank, getting a feel for the heft and ergonomics of his new gift. The ex-soldier held the butt of the compression gun against his shoulder and tried to picture the recoil as he aimed at an imaginary target on the kitchen wall and pulled the trigger on an empty chamber. If the gun was strong enough to punch steel, then this guy got it wrong, this wasn’t an EBR, this was an anti-material rifle; a long-range weapon used for disabling IFVs and armored cars. A potentially military-grade gun capable of one-shot killing almost all of those caped freaks terrorizing the city, in the right hands this could be the one thing that tips the scale back in favor of regular people. The question remained, were his hands the right ones?

Putting those thoughts aside for the moment, he looked at the “ammo pack” that was supposed to go with the rifle. Again, it was obvious this was hand-assembled by someone that knew what they were doing. The pack was a fifteen-pound contraption consisting of air compressors and something that looked suspiciously like an oxygen tank meant for senior citizens. The whole thing could be worn from a shoulder strap and plugged into the rifle at his side.

“An air gun that can punch through steel with four nine volt batteries. Either this guy is a genius or I’m getting set up for one of the biggest pranks of the year.” Dewpond mused, still fairly lost in his thoughts. Take on the Big Five dressed in urban camouflage and a black balaclava? Well if he did it once before in Igoroth, he could do it once again in Aphrodite City... Still, better make sure he was prepared for the possibility that this could end really, really badly for him.

Kimberly had been slowly getting better, she was still fairly weak and still remained unconscious, but she looked much healthier then when he first saw her. The doctors were still holding off on surgery until they could get more blood for a transfusion. Apparently they still were unable to contact any other hospitals in the state. Stanley couldn’t imagine what the trouble was, it wasn’t like some entity was actively blacking out communications wasn’t it?

Kimberly was still asleep when he walked in, bright brown eyes closed and her long crimson locks poetically draped on her pillow as she slumbered peacefully in bed. Stanley didn't dare wake her, pausing only long enough to kiss her on the forehead and drop off a rose. Standing there, watching her rest, he felt himself fill with a singular purpose. That moment, he made his decision. "Don't worry honey, I'll make it all better." He whispered to her unresponsive ears, his voice filled with a intention that would have been dark were his surroundings not already so grim...

Four Weeks after First Encounter...

Apparently classic comic book supervillains are quite stupid. This was one thing that crossed Stanley's mind as he looked down from a rooftop across the street from one the city's lower end jewelry stores, getting comfortable in his chosen perch after studying his opponents for the better part of three weeks, practicing with his new rifle, and assembling a "good enough" disguise out of a trench coat, sunglasses, and a baseball cap. The store below him was not quite mall-store quality but definitely not quite as pricey as the big name places that had already been robbed. Still, there was enough in there that the bear's targets saw fit to take it slow, allowing him plenty of time to get set up on top of the office building across the street as the wind blew at the trench coat that helped conceal his rifle.

Probably not the best place for him to hide in hindsight but he still wasn't sure what the weapon's maximum effective range was so it would have to do. Regardless, if it worked as advertised and all his initial practice with it suggested that it did, he was definitely going to take down one or two of these psychos before they even realized what was happening.

He had just settled into a crouch and peered down the weapon's scope when the four of them walked out onto the street like they owned it. Panzer Beast, Crimson Screamer, Hypothermia, and Venom. The brick, the energy controllers, and the battlesuit "hero-hunter," all of them bunched nice and tight...

Down below, the four villains moved at a lazy pace, bags of jewelry slung over their shoulders as they sauntered along. Oblivious to the looming danger, Crimson Screamer chattered idly, unintentionally letting his powers carry his words much further than they would have normally. Carrying them into the ears of a concealed gunman that was about to have another reason to begin his personal crusade against them...

"Oi, this communications blackout the bosses have set up is really something now that the police cannot put up a fight anymore. No National Guard, no FBI, no DSA, and no visiting vigilantes. Only way this could be better is if we could mind wipe all the people leaving the city. Ah well, by the time the outside puts it all together; we'll be long gone. Still wish I could bag some spandex pussy before we go though. Think they'll bring the girls along when they take this act to other cities?" He asked his cohorts; unaware of the assailant currently trying to decide which villain was the most dangerous target.

“Sure they will eh. Maybe even make entirely new heroines with the exact same powers and costumes so we can bang two police ladies at once.” Hypothermia replied, the snow leopard’s feline tail flicking mischievously. “Besides, with the police almost gone there’s plenty of other pussy you can bury your big Aussie dick in.”

“Crikey, I never thought of it that way. Perhaps I could raid that hospital and help myself to all the women in recov- OH GOD IT HURTS!” The Australian wolf screamed in horrific agony as the unseen marksman took his first shot, hitting the self-styled super-powered playboy squarely in the crotch. Male urinary organs exploded in a small eruption of blood and gore as the projectile went through his manhood and carved a large gash directly below his rectum. Like hell Stanley was going to let this narcissistic little fuck help himself to his wife. Something told him that dog was long overdue to get neutered anyway...

Screamer’s villainous cohorts stood frozen in horror for a few precious seconds, watching the masked wolf disappear in a puff of oozing black smoke before reality finished setting in. “SNIPER!” The Canadian screamed and tried to dive for cover as the undetected sharpshooter zeroed in on Venom, landing multiple “rounds” on the armored bat to try and crack his helmet.

Nervously, arguably the first time he felt as such since arriving in Aphrodite City, the cryokinetic snow leopard peered from out behind the mailbox, raised his cryo-amp rifle, and scanned the skyline for his unseen assailant, locating Dewpond’s vantage point seconds before the ursine sent a bolt of compressed air right through the scope on the spotted cat’s rifle... and the eye socket behind it.

As the second member of their team went down in a puff of smoke, whisked away back to the Brothers’ hideout to be put back together like a broken action figure, Venom and Panzer Beast promptly dropped their loot bags. The bull almost immediately panicked while his partner did his best to salvage the situation. That changed when Stanley finally found a weak point in the gadget-wielding hero-hunter’s armor and brought him down. Alone with a brutal sniper somewhere Out There, Panzer lost any remaining decorum he had and ran away screaming. Seeing roughly four hundred pounds of bovine muscle run away screaming like a little girl brought a smile to the bear’s face. He could have easily capped the mighty Hamburger Beast once in the head but he spent too much of his pressure reserves trying to crack Venom open. Oh well, perhaps it was better this way. One of them was still alive to tell the story of the Castigator... or whatever the masked freaks decided on calling him. Either way, he made his point; the people of this city won’t be bullied by whoever was calling the shots for this “entertainment.”

The five costumed heroines had just arrived on the scene after he left his perch and started climbing down the fire escape. By the time any of them thought to check the roofs, he had concealed his weapon beneath his trench coat and finished casually walked back to his car. After hiding the compressor rifle in his trunk, he started his car and

began to drive home as calmly and as casually as if he had just finished an ordinary eight-hour shift at one of the office complexes. There was nothing to mark him out as the mysterious vigilante that just cancelled another episode in this twisted drama. Granted, one successful battle did not win the war but damn did it make him feel good...

Meanwhile, Shield and company...

“What just happened?” Amp asked as the group arrived to find splatters of blood and abandoned bags of jewelry. The Afghan hound was confused but reassured by the apparent fact that someone powerful just took out three villains and scared off her arch-nemesis.

Shield and Wrench Wench were silent as they did their best to mentally reconstruct the scene without touching anything. The four supervillains were moving out of the jewelry store, likely casually walking given how they’ve been acting now that they “owned the city” and police response being as horribly lengthy as it was now. Then one went down, hard to tell which one without a body, shot in somewhere with a lot of circulation based on the amount of fresh blood on the sidewalk before the projectile augured itself into the pavement about a foot away. Wrench Wench carefully probed the ridiculously diminutive bullet hole with an unsharpened pencil and removed it with a bewildered shake of her head.

No bullet. Given how the shooter had absolutely no time to clean up the crime scene before he escaped, the only logical explanation was that the lack of a projectile was a feature of his weapon. But what weapon left a bullet hole but no bullet? It couldn’t be a laser or other directed energy weapon, judging by how fresh the blood was they would have had to seen a heat wave or other telltale sign of a energy weapon. So what was it?

Whatever it was, it was in very efficient hands; one villain taken out of action almost immediately, then the other, likely Hypothermia if Crimson Screamer was the first victim, taking down swiftly afterwards. Venom and Panzer Beast would have been the last to go, no matter how much punch the stranger and their weapon had, it still would have taken a bit of concentrated effort to take down the armored nightmare and the towering brute. Yet one question remained, one that the evidence in front of them couldn’t answer. Was this mysterious stranger an ally? Or, just as plausible, were they a spiteful agent of vengeance, lashing out at anything that reminded them of their tortured existence in the city?

Meanwhile, Brothers...

“COCKBLOCKER!” Short screamed with an appropriately unsettling shower of spittle.

Tall, the marginally more levelheaded brother, at least compared to his shorter sibling, gritted his teeth and shook his head before turning to look at Red Storm. The Russian bear did his best to not smile at the sudden turn of events. If there was anyone

on the villains side that needed a reality check, it was those four. The baker couldn't help but wonder who the mysterious marksman was. A disgruntled police officer, some tech-savvy vigilante, maybe an ex-special forces type upset that his quiet retirement had been rudely interrupted? Who knew, what was certain was that the Brothers were having trouble getting a bead on him.

"Having trouble with the reception are we?" He asked with a smirk.

"We can only track people we have seen or have shown up on the news. If he didn't show up on the camera, we can't track him."

"So you're saying that if Wrench Wench had attacked us with a scoped rifle instead of charging in with a pair of revolvers, you would still be looking for her?"

"Yes... unfortunately." Tall admitted begrudgingly, reluctant to expose his weaknesses to any of their "toys." But no matter, they would find this interloper and then they would deal with him in an appropriate manner. No one challenged their control of things, no one...

Beginning of Week Five of the Aphrodite City Crisis...

"As that one song went, something's got to go wrong because I'm feeling way too damn good." Stanley Dewpond said to no one in particular as he set up the stove in his new diner. His VA paperwork was filed and oddly enough, he was already receiving benefits for establishing a new business. Why his VA paperwork was processed when every other form of communication was stone dead was a mystery he didn't even begin to understand. Perhaps it had something to do with what he overheard Crimson Screamer talking about before the bear shot him. Whoever was running things was actively muddling in all channels they were aware of, it sounded like the Veteran Affairs was one they weren't familiar with. Which... could mean a whole number of things, the honorably discharged Army cook wasn't sure which, if any of them, held water.

Another thing that surprised him was how quickly and how cheaply he managed to outright buy, not lease, the space he was building his diner in and all the appliances and equipment he needed. Surprised and saddened him, the original landlord sold the property for a steal in order to liquidate all his assets and flee the city while he could. Most of the home improvement stores were either holding "going out of business" sales or running out of stock so fast they might as well be empty. Hardly anyone was staying which made him briefly wonder if now was a good time to be opening a restaurant.

All that was left was to put everything together. It was at this moment he really missed Kimberly. Not only was she good at handyman things but it was also a place where she was at her happiest. What a pair they were; the Army cook and the Peace Corps carpenter. Still, what he wouldn't give to see her again in those tight denim jeans of hers... or just see her up and out of her hospital bed period. God, if he was this depressed just by having her being in the hospital... He shook his head, refusing to go

down that road. This was not a comic book, if whoever orchestrating this nightmare wanted to shove Kim's body in a refrigerator to piss him off... well then fuck that bullshit about heroes being too highbrow to off a mass murderer; when those villains see him it will not be "Oh there's Stanley," it will be "Wraith of God incoming." Then again, to be crass, there weren't a lot of places they could find a refrigerator big enough to hold all of Kimberly...

Lost in thought and the repetition of setting up appliances, Dewpond almost didn't notice the tiger in the two-piece suit tapping on his window until he happened to be looking in that direction. Stand outside was a fit and trim well-dressed male tiger; Dr. Alexander Townes, the CEO of Ambrosia Biotech. Out of all the people the ursine cook expected to see today, Townes was not one of them.

"Can I help you?" He asked the other male while opening the door.

"Perhaps, are you the husband of Kimberly Dewpond? I have an offer you might be interested in hearing." The striped feline answered as he carefully sat down on an unfastened chair.

"I am Stanley Dewpond, what do you want to ask me about?" The bear asked curiously

"Do you know what Ambrosia Biotech does?"

"Yeah, I heard of you. You're the cosmetic biotech firm where supermodels go when they aren't 'pretty' enough. The place where they get biotech injections for breast enlargements, ass reductions, height increases and whatever else those vain bimbos want." Stanley replied with a roll of his eyes, unable to hide his distaste for Townes' main business and the clients it attracts.

The well-dressed tiger brushed back his long mane of black hair and didn't say a single thing to refute the blond bear's accusations. "Indeed we do, it was either that or super-soldier serum research and after our first and last client in that market horribly misrepresented himself, providing biological alternatives to silicon implants and invasive cosmetic surgeries seemed like a more responsible way to fund medically beneficial research like organ cloning, skin and fur regenerations, and the like. As for what this has to do with you and your wife, I am personally going around, visiting the families of victims in... well, let's be honest, your wife is still in fairly critical condition. I'm here to ask for your permission to transfer her to Ambrosia's research hospital where my doctors can treat Kim more easily."

"Is it-"

"Safe? In all honesty I cannot say one way or another Mr. Dewpond. We have not been able to move onto furson testing so I cannot say with full certainty what will

happen but based on the data I have... I would say the odds are strongly in Kimberly's favor."

The male bear shook his head. "This just seems too easy."

The tiger laughed and smiled. "Easy like I'm a cheap villain in a bad horror movie or worse, a comic book? I understand and honestly I would be more worried if you did jump on the opportunity. Though on that count you don't have to worry, I love this city too much to betray it."

"Weren't you the first businessman to come back during the recession five years ago?"

Dr. Townes laughed again at this. "Has it been almost that long? It seems like yesterday bankers were telling me Aphrodite City was a bad idea. I would be bankrupt in a year they said. Well it's almost year five and in the vulgar words of the great comedian David Chappell, I'm still here bitches! And I am not about to run off now, not when my city needs me the most."

Stanley thought about this. He still had his doubts but on the other hand, the doctor's sincerity seemed hard to fake. "I'll have to think about it for a bit, is there a way I can get in contact with you?"

Alexander Townes had a business card in his hand so fast Stanley almost believed it was there the whole time. "My card, feel free to call and leave a message when you have reached a decision."

Dewpond felt the cardstock in between his fingers before asking the one last question on his mind. "What about security, what are you doing to keep... them, away from the Ambrosia Biotech campus?"

The good doctor's response was framed with a look of grim determination that Stanley knew only too well. "Don't worry about them, I am taking... steps to make sure they will not threaten any of the patients trusted into my care." He answered with a tone that told the other male that there would be a nasty surprise in store for Panzer Beast, Red Storm, and all the other psychos terrorizing the city if they tried attacking his hospital. Stanley found himself liking this guy already; maybe Kimberly would be all right in his hands after all.

Aphrodite City: Trash Television

By Psion
An Aphrodite City Story
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Aphrodite City, once the jewel of upstate New York. Now its splendor swept away by a conspiracy as insidious as it was juvenile. Two entities known only as The Brothers, two siblings as perverted as they were mysterious, have had the city in chaos for nearly three months. First came the supervillains, all of them carefully crafted to appease their patrons' completely tacky fashion sense and general lack of worldliness. Then came the heroines, sexualized to the point where their effectiveness as anything other than a pinup was questionable. For nearly three months, the two groups had clashed in what was little more than a glamorized superhero pornography; the villains causing horrific casualties and nearly endless amounts of property damage, the heroines showing up to try and stop them until the Brothers depowered them when the two of them felt it was most convenient for their "interests." Yet while the city endured and the fickle whims of fortune continued to protect the heroines, it remained to be seen if either would handle the latest scheme...

"Do you know what we need?" Tall, the taller of the two vulpine Brothers, asked as they went over the "scripts" for the next couple "adventures" together.

"I dunno, what?" Short, the smaller and arguably more simplistic of the Brothers, asked.

"We need a guy whose sole purpose is to follow our heroines around and take lewd pictures of them then broadcast them across the city." Tall replied, thinking of another cliché that would likely stop being funny within a week if it was even humorous to begin with.

"THAT'S A GREAT IDEA!" Short boomed with approval, apparently he felt the need to shout the few times he said something coherent that was more than a few syllables long.

"Brother, inside voices." Tall replied with forced patience as he tried to massage the headache that was starting to form thanks to that outburst. "I think I know where to get the ideal recruits as well..."

The "headquarters" of the Hedonist cult was pretty much what one would expect of a fraternity made up of perverted basement dwellers with no money and even less in the way of originality or decorative taste. An abandoned factory in the heart of the city's industrial quarter brought to life with a variety of stolen electronics and furniture, Loco's followers had turned the old metal fabrication plant into a debauched pleasure palace. Discarded beer cans were strewn across the floor, projector screens displaying a combination of skillfully taken "artistic photography" of the five heroines plus home movies of the cult's other... exploits lined the walls while a stereo sound system projected sounds that would drive purer men mad with the wanton chauvinistic depravity on display.

“FOR THE LOVE OF GOD! PLEASE STOP!” The red vixen screamed on screen seconds before a Hedonist’s purple robes briefly blocked the camera...

The room filled with a malicious air as the audience cheered and watched events unfold with a bottle of beer in one hand and the other around wrapped around something better off left unmentioned, a sea of purple robes unzipped to allow their wearers to cool off as their bodies started to sweat due to a indecent increase in circulation. And then the film was interrupted mid-scene; a mysterious power spike causing the projector to sputter violently then shut itself off in a fit of pique.

Then, suddenly He was standing among them. A sharply dressed male fox in a two piece suit nodded to the audience and slowly walked towards the back of the main amphitheater where Loco sat on a high throne and overlooked his followers like a perverted king. There was no question among any of the Hedonists who this fellow was, their beloved god had come down from his place in “the high heavens” to visit them. Some chose to express their pleasure by throwing themselves at the stranger’s feet in naked reverence, others stared paralyzed by disbelief as they were unable to believe this was really happening. The taller of the Brothers soaked up the attention as he stepped up and stood next to Loco’s chair.

“Loyal Hedonists, thank you so much for your unwavering devotion, such devotion should be rewarded.” Tall began, resisting the urge to smile as he watched his audience practically eat out of his hand. “Unfortunately, my power for such remunerations is limited so rather than simply ask who is the most devoted amongst you and have things devolve into an all-out brawl, I have come up with a relatively simple test to gauge your devotion...” He continued before starting to explain what he wanted of them. Judging by the smiles that started to cross most of the cultists’ faces, he could tell most of them didn’t need much prompting to get started...

Back at the Brothers’ suburban command center, Tall returned after having successfully completed his errands. “It’s done. The Hedonists have been given enough of an incentive and the various gangs we have built up have been successfully riled up. The Fitmen are on the prowl and I paid a visit to those two lovely madams, the Scarlet Countess and the Jade Empress, everything is ready.”

“YAY! GOODIE!” Short yelled again, earning a long sigh from his taller brother. At least they didn’t have to plan anything for a while....

Adrian knew he hit it lucky when the Hedonist cat realized he was the first to arrive at a fight between the Fitmen street gang and two of the city’s heroines, Express Panda and Shield. The stench of sweat and mild constipation hung in the air as the bothersome cultist pulled out his camera and started to record the unfolding battle. Overuse of potent and allegedly experimental muscle supplements had turned the Fitmen into a troop of excessively over-muscled meatheads, their bodies so hideously

overdeveloped the female members were almost completely indistinguishable from the males appearance-wise.

The bronze-tinted Doberman and jade-clad martial artist were so much more appealing. Slender arms flexed and contracted as breasts bigger than either girl's head bounced and jiggled seemingly in contempt of gravity as the heroines suppressed their opponents with a barrage of punches and kicks. And the way their butts looked in those tight outfits when the girls executed a perfect high kick that sent a flat-chested Fitwoman flying into a parking meter, loose change flying everywhere, or a ripped Fitman into a dumpster. God, the way Shield filled out that costume...

So engrossed in his perverted fanboyism, Adrian was oblivious to the 1987 Chevrolet thrown in his direction until it impacted with him, breaking bones and rupturing all sorts of important organs with the sickening squish of a ton of metal impacting with less than a hundred and fifty pounds of organic tissue. Fortunately it wasn't a direct impact; he was able to regain consciousness on the ambulance ride to the hospital despite suffering multiple fractures and internal bleeding. He'd live... barely.

Benjamin was unknowingly doing much better than his fellow Hedonist Adrian. Having successfully located Wrench Wench, the fox carefully followed the masked mink. Demonstrating a rare level of intelligence that would be completely unheard of for a pervert in other stories about hormone-crazed losers chasing skirts long after it ceased to be funny, Ben decided to hang back and avoid filming her during a fight with a trio of Medicine Men still ticked about the loss of their lair. Her mighty sledgehammer rang true but the drug chemists were still able to beat a hasty retreat to their new hideout. Losing their trail, the skimpily dressed gadget mistress resumed her original route. The sliver fox slowly crept along behind her, feeling a smile cross his lips as she shouldered her hammer and stopped again, this time in front of a homeless shelter. Taking a moment to feel the contents of her utility belt and making sure everything was there, she walked up and was promptly greeted by the charity worker in charge of the shelter.

As the two started to talk, Ben crept closer before ducking around the corner of the brick building. Was this one of Wrench Wench's secret contacts that helped the heroine keep a finger on the pulse of the city? That would make sense, why else would she stop here to chat with someone shepherding a bunch of hobos? Curious, he leaned around ever so slightly to better listen in on their conversation.

"Thank you so much for stopping by." The shelter manager said with obvious relief in his voice.

"Not a problem, where's the heater and how long has it been out?"

"It's in the basement, it broke about a week ago and we need it working before the first snows. I'm really sorry to bother you with this but our normal maintenance guy is still in the hospital after that time Crimson Screamer and Hypothermia shot up a

supermarket... seriously, who does that? And of course all the other contractors in the city are backlogged until this time next year so-”

“Mr. Hanes, breath.” Wrench Wench interrupted calmly. “I said I’ll see what I can do and here I am. I’ll give it a look over. If I can’t fix it, I’ll send a friend over with the right parts.” She reassured as they disappeared inside the building. Benjamin blinked as he leaned back behind his hiding place. Seriously, she was stopping to fix a piece of junk appliance for a homeless shelter. Of all the stupid, silly, non-heroic sounding things... He stopped in the middle of his silent diatribe when he realized he was completely missing the point.

Wrench Wench, bent over a machine, a cornucopia of opportunities for excellent butt and cleavage shots. This would get him the blessings of The Great One for sure and at no real risk to himself either. He just had to search the perimeter of the building for a good basement window and... jackpot, an open one that would take him right behind the white-furred mink. Just had to squeeze through and... avoid crashing into a shelf full of soup cans like he just did.

Wrench Wench turned around so fast the Hedonist could have almost sworn there were ball bearings on her stylized work boots. For a moment there was nothing but deathly silence, the costumed contractor glared at her opponent as the light of recognition shone in her eyes. She knew what those purple robes represented and it was immediately apparent to the sliver fox that the mink loathed the Hedonists. Her sledgehammer had just returned to her hands by the time he was halfway up the stairs, deciding that discretion was the better part of valor.

The instant he stepped into the shelter proper, Ben knew he made a mistake. Almost immediately all conversation stopped as charity workers, homeless bums, and families that had lost their homes in various supervillain rampages looked up and stared at him. Emotions ranged from cold hatred to casual contempt and in that instant he knew, Wrench Wench could easily kill him if she was angry enough and no one would care; no one would say anything except maybe lament how much bleach it took to clean his blood off the floor. He had to get out before they decided they weren’t going to wait for the masked mink.

The violet-clad cultist didn’t even make it a foot before they were on him; a mob of dirty street urchins all jumped up and tackled him in a writhing heap of raw vengeance. A vagrant pulled out a baseball bat from somewhere and was about to hit him when a strong, feminine arm reached through the dog pile and roughly dragged him to his feet. Ben put on his most disarming smile as he found himself face to black-haired, blue-eyed, extremely angry face with Wrench Wench. Wench soon smiled back, an evil grin positively dripping with malicious intentions. Faster than the robed fox could blink, he was violently stripped to his underwear and thrown out of the shelter. “Hope you don’t live far from here sugah.” Wrench Wench said with a smirk before heading back inside to finish what she came to do.

As his misfortune would have it, Ben lived on the other side of the city from the homeless shelter, leading to a very embarrassing bus ride and an equally humiliating walk to get home. By the time he returned to his apartment, one of the other heroines beat him to the door, taping his wallet to his door with a note. *We know who you are and where you live. If we see you again, we're forwarding your membership in the Hedonists to your employer in the Department of Public Works and you can enjoy unemployment with the rest of the city.* – Signed S, A, EP, Pvt. D, and WW.

Ben trembled as he read the note in his apartment; perhaps it was time to rethink his life. At the rate things were suddenly going the Hedonists probably weren't going to be around for very long anyway...

Matthew was one of the more hardcore Hedonists, one that really should have learned from the failures of his fellows Adrian and Benjamin if he had the opportunity. Fortunately he had the perfect idea to prove himself to The Great One, it took him a while but then again, he had been collecting video footage of the heroines for his own reasons almost since the crisis began. As he was supposed to set up a citywide network capable of broadcasting his exploits as well as take pictures of the heroines, the slender jackal decided to get to work on the technical side of things while his competition was out getting beat up by those damn contrary bitches.

Rubbing his hands together as he looked over his basement setup, the canine carrion-feeder mentally went through a quick checklist. Transmitter was activated and broadcasting a clear signal, the video was edited and properly synced; all that was left was to hit play and start broadcasting. Hmmm, did he disable geo-tracking? Ah what difference did it make? If he had it on that meant they knew where to send the fan mail. Time to go live and introduce the world to Matthews Davis...

By his personal account, the broadcast went well. All of his equipment held up and there were no technical glitches, even managed to put a little money into his online account. It looked like he might actually have a career at doing this sort of thing, maybe he should consider getting more pictures to add to his collection. As a matter of fact that sounded like a great idea. Grabbing his camera and getting ready to leave the house, he opened his front door just in time to save a group of four police officers the trouble of knocking.

"Matthew Davis?" The officer in charge asked calmly.

"Yes, how can I help you?" The Hedonist replied politely, thinking he had nothing to worry about.

"Matthew Davis, you're under arrest for the illegal sale of pornographic material unless you can produce signed consent forms from the heroines Shield, Amp, Express Panda, Private Doll, and Wrench Wench. You're also in possession of an illegal television transmitter unless you can show us a valid license from the FCC."

“What consent forms? I don’t need any consent forms. Don’t you have anything better to do than bother me?” Davis rebutted.

“Yeah, yeah, tell it to the judge. I’m sure he’ll be happy to explain how you violated the Decency Act of 1994 and at least three FCC regulations.” The cop replied dismissively as his partner handcuffed Matthew and hauled him out into a waiting squad car....

Thomas presently stood a very good chance at proving himself to be the most “devoted” of the Hedonists. It took a lot of planning, tracking, and tense negotiations with a being that could snap him like a twig with just his pinky finger, but everything was coming together beautifully. It took the better part of a day, in which time three of his cohorts had been judged unworthy by the whims of fate, but now he had everything he wanted within his grasp. The camera was set up, his fellow Hedonists were gathering as fast as they could once they heard the news, and Panzer Beast, his partner in this endeavor, was looking perfectly pleased with the fruits of their combined effort.

Between the two males, Amp squirmed and struggled against her binds, her mouth tied shut to prevent her from unleashing her sonic scream. Both men looked at one another with a glint of malice in their eyes, their monstrous expressions the stuff of horror movies as Thomas twirled a switchblade in his hand. Just a little cut and they’d be able to take off the last barrier between them and their prize. Just one last step and they will be able to enjoy the rewards of their efforts in front of the entire order...

And then it all went wrong. Someone tipped off... pretty much everyone there was to tip off. The other four heroines arrived behind the crowd while somewhere, that infernal marksman the Castigator had set up a secret perch and took a shot at Panzer Beast. Thomas had no idea what kind of weapon the unknown sharpshooter was using but whatever it was managed to put a hole in a supposedly bulletproof supervillain. One minute Panzer was just standing there, the next the giant bull was falling over with a bullet piercing his left lung. Blood splattered from the exit wound and splattered all over their bound prisoner. The Hedonist canine scanned the roofline in an attempt to find the mysterious shooter but it was futile, the Castigator had moved. Besides, what was happening on the ground was quickly becoming more important.

Of the four heroines, Pvt. Doll froze in place as her mind struggled to process the horror of what almost just happened. However only one thought overcame Shield, Express Panda, and Wrench Wench; save their friend. All three females began to tear through the dense crowd of cultists like women possessed. Raw, unadulterated fury ran through them as they forced their way through the mob of Hedonists thinking they had a shot at the three women. They did not. Even after the Brothers depowered the girls to make them vulnerable... There are stories of adrenaline allowing mothers the strength to lift cars to save their children, of everyday people finding the strength to do the impossible simply through a stubborn, single-minded refusal to accept the alternative. Such power was what radiated through the three of them at that moment. Kick, punch,

block, hammer swing, parry, head butt, no quarter was given though it was certainly begged for once it became clear that the girls' way was the only way the brawl was going to go.

Undisciplined and with their enemy's offensive digging deep into their morale, the remaining Hedonists broke and scattered, leaving the grassy park strewn with injured and moaning purple-robed perverts and the lingering smoke of a teleported Panzer Beast. With black and purple bruises covering their bodies and numerous small tears into their already immodest costumes, Shield gave her cohorts a meek smile before staggering over to the park bench to offer some comfort to a sobbing Amp. Too close, that was way too close....

Epilogue...

Thomas was running as fast as his feet would carry him. The Castigator had found him, it wouldn't be long before that muscle-bound male bear would be... -BANG!- A single shot rang out from the barrel of a 9mm pistol loaded with armor piercing ammunition, sending a metal slug through the back of the canine's head and out between his eyes. His work finished, the masked Stanley Dewpond holstered his sidearm and did his best to appear inconspicuous as he disappeared deeper into the back alleys of Aphrodite City.

Rachel Arsenel, the "friend" of Wrench Wench, smiled as she finished fixing the homeless shelter's heater. It was a simple problem of a faulty starter, didn't even take her more than half an hour at the most. She was just about to pack up her tools and leave when Mr. Hanes took her aside and brought her upstairs. There, one of the women living in the shelter picked up a folded quilt she was sewing and presented it to the mustelid mechanic.

"Ms. Arsenel, you're a friend of Wrench Wench and that Amp girl right? We heard about what happened at the park, could you give this to her to let her know people are still thinking about her?" The middle-aged porcupine asked politely as she handed the younger female the finished quilt.

"I can do that." Rachel replied stoically as she unfurled the quilt to examine it. What she saw took her breath away.

Surrounded by a purple border that looked suspiciously like it was cut from a Hedonist's robes, the focal point of the quilted blanket was a five by five foot azure square as detailed as a medieval tapestry. Against a navy blue background, quilted versions of the Aphrodite heroines walked towards the viewer. Behind them, a shadowy figure with angelic wings flew overhead, wings spread wide as he kept watch over the heroines.

"She'll love it." Rachel said at last. "But who is the angel supposed to be?"

“The angel’s supposed to be that vigilante fellow that’s been following those girls around for about two weeks now. Preacher at church has been talking a lot about him, believes he’s an angel sent from Heaven to punish the wicked men that have descended upon this city. I’m not so sure, for one if he really was an angel he wouldn’t need a gun, but I can see how some people can think that way. Your guess is as good as mine as to who he really is. Still, the six of them are the only hope any of us have anymore of turning things around. Hope they don’t mind if I took some liberties with their costumes, felt the girls would look more heroic if it looked like there was more fabric on their outfits.”

Rachel was speechless, at that moment the only thing she felt capable of doing was giving the quilter a hug and thanking her for the gift. A simple token, but one that meant more to the mink and her friends than the gift-giver would ever realize.

For the first time in a long time, Samantha Summers’s mind wasn’t in the game. No matter what she did, she couldn’t help but think about how things went down in the park. As her game ended with her as the worst player on the losing team, she found she didn’t care. It had finally gotten through her thick head, why Shield was always so high-strung and why Amp was always so close to a mental breakdown. Letting the controller fall on the carpet floor, she buried her face in her hands. Damn it, she was supposed to be a superhero. She was supposed to be powerful and making rights from wrongs and... except she never was and she was only now just starting to realize how wrong she had been.

Squatting in an abandoned suburban home, three individuals finished editing video and quickly started packing equipment into a van that would be vaguely familiar to any heroine of Silicon City.

“Oi you Smith scallywags, careful with that box of camouflaged cameras. After surviving fireballs, cars, sound waves, and bloody hell what else, I would hate to lose one of them just because you two tripped out on your own damn feet.” Pirate Pete ordered; for the purveyor of scandalous spandex shots, every time the stout rat wore his privateer-themed costume was Talk Like A Pirate Day.

It had been a while since anyone had seen a sign of Pirate Pete, most had presumed his failed misadventures in Silicon City had ultimately bankrupted him. That could have hardly been further from the case. Bunkering down, Pete took a vacation as his alter ego Keith Quikmoor and spent time thinking about what had gone wrong. Ultimately, the king of perverted paparazzi concluded that he had strayed too far from his core principles; he took too many risks and didn’t hedge his bets. And that nearly cost him. If he wanted to avoid embarrassing himself by getting caught in the same rookie mistakes as these Hedonist jokers, he needed to get back on his game.

Ending up in Aphrodite City was the latest in a string of incredibly good fortune for a male in his profession, beginning with the discovery that the presumed dead sister of his last sidekick Maurice Jacob Smith was alive if only barely. Getting her up to snuff to the point where he could use her to blackmail the coyote Maurice back into his service and making sure he had the appropriate leverage to keep his henchman under control required him to cash-in more than a few favors in the criminal underworld but one back alley doctor and a pair of biofeedback collars later, everything was as it should be. Hell, Claire Smith proved to be useful beyond keeping her brother in line, having the kind of eye Pete needed to get the kind of shots he needed to break into the “rich and sexually frustrated housewives” market.

Aphrodite City itself was an interesting proposition for Pete. There was the opportunity to make some good money on a few episodes but at the same time he had to be realistic about what he had. Based off of some of the Internet addresses Claire managed to back trace, he estimated that a tenth of his viewers were lawmen in the FBI, the DSA, or their overseas counterparts. And he doubted they signed up for a membership on a “company account” just to have something to beat off to when they finished their paperwork. Heaven only knew how many of the rest were vigilantes with an axe to grind against him. Still, at least he was going to get their money once he got out of here.

He knew the only reason the ringmaster or ringmasters of this freak show had been getting away with what they were doing with Aphrodite City was because they somehow cut all major communication traffic in and out of the city. The instant he smuggled his hard drives out of the city and uploaded the first episode of his adventures here online would be the end of that whole charade. After that the fuse was lit and he didn’t want to be anywhere near this powder keg when it went off. At least two borderline crazy women, a bunch of frat boy villains that didn’t know the difference between evil and stupid, and God only knows what whoever in charge was like.

Yes, they certainly couldn’t leave here fast enough. And though he tried to stay completely to the shadows, he couldn’t resist tipping Shield off about what was going on in the city park. After all, if any of Loco’s followers truly wanted to have a shot at being the next Pirate Pete, they needed to have someone teach them the number one rule of the profession: your cash cow was not your sex toy....

Aphrodite City: Ambrosia Biotech

By Psion
An Aphrodite City Story
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Aphrodite City, once a jewel of upstate New York, almost completely turned into a decayed dystopia straight out of a cyberpunk novel. Little by little, the city’s light had grown dim. In the skyscraper headquarters of Ambrosia Biotech in downtown Aphrodite

City, Dr. Alexander Townes watched a night of a more literal variety descend upon the city from his office window. High above in the sixtieth floor of the skyscraper, the city beneath the orange and black tiger's feet looked deceptively peaceful. Streetlights still worked, the madness that had fallen upon the city over the past few months had yet to claim any major substations or other utilities, though Townes suspected that was only a matter of time. Already reports of other atrocities had begun to circulate. Gang rapes, increasingly depraved acts of violence from the supervillains... already the city had suffered one major riot. And now it was snowing, winter had finally come to Aphrodite City and adding the biting cold of New York to the city's already enormous list of problems.

Standing next to him, Dr. Annelie Okeke silently busying herself with a tablet computer. The scrawny female cheetah knew what he was thinking, pretty much all of the skeleton staff left at Ambrosia Biotech's East Coast laboratories was thinking the same thing, how could things fall so far and when will Ambrosia get caught up in it. Okeke did her best to not sigh; while she could hardly say she was with the company since the beginning, she and Townes somehow managed to hit it off extremely well thanks to a number of shared interests. Some days she almost... no, there was no time for that now even if she openly admitted to liking the change that had occurred in her fellow biotech scientist recently.

Over the last few weeks, the tiger had been undergoing a gradual increase in body mass. While at the start of the crisis Townes could have been best described as of average height and build, he had gradually been increasing in mass and tone over the past few weeks. The official excuse given was that he been simply working out at the company gymnasium and the fact that he was now a roughly four-hundred-pound bodybuilder in a business suit was nothing newsworthy. The truth on the other hand was a bit more... elaborate.

Once upon a time, in the beginning of the company's history, Doctor Alexander Townes had a dream. He dreamed of a world where medical science had reach a point where industrial accidents need not lead to permanent disfigurement, where being put on a waiting list for a compatible organ donor was a thing of the past, and other wonderful miracles. Unfortunately, this brilliant researcher discovered quickly that idealism cost money and that if he wanted to start up a biotech research firm to fulfill his dream, he needed to produce something a little less noble in order to pay the bills. Ambrosia Biotech's ever-growing line of noninvasive cosmetic treatments, little injections full of custom-tailored genetically enhanced microorganisms that did virtually everything a competent plastic surgeon offered and more, had become so ubiquitous that few people remember the research company ever doing anything else. Yet during the first year of the company short lifespan, Townes had a completely different client in his sights; the United States military. At least, that's what the good doctor thought at first.

His client turned out to be an Army general playing with thoughts of going rogue and setting up his own personal fiefdom somewhere in the South Pacific, defrauding the government into paying for a "universal inoculation" for soldiers serving in disease-

ridden Third World countries while tricking Townes into thinking he was working with the full approval of Congress and the Pentagon. When the doctor realized the truth however, he blew the whistle on his own project and presented copies of his notes and communications with the renegade general to a federal investigation. His client ended up disgraced and arrested, he received a metaphorical pat on the back for bravely coming forward, and as far as both his client and the government knew, the project never went anywhere anyway.

In reality however, the research was going fantastically but Townes had started to question what he was doing just his contact with the Army had started behaving suspiciously. Somehow, everything he ever wanted to achieve ended up right there in front of him in a little test tube a megalomaniac wanted to use to create an army of soldiers that were faster, stronger, and tougher than almost anything ever seen before. So as the contract fell apart, the project was secretly shelved and kept in storage. Yet needing a new source of revenue in a hurry, Alexander decided to roll the dice and take a chance on a curious property he kept seeing in the test animals. The end result of that gamble were the first two cosmetic injections Ambrosia sold, eventually inspiring knock-off products known by obnoxiously crass names like “LuvJug” and “ManCannon.”

The commercial success of these products made the company millions, enough to develop several dozens of new products, eventually pay off the money he owed the federal government after the Super Soldier scandal, build an auxiliary headquarters on the West Coast in Silicon City, and finance his dream. It also left Townes feeling hollow at times, catering to a never-ending parade of supermodels wanting bigger tits, naturally blond hair, and god only knows what else would be “in fashion” next month. In retaliation, the striped feline scientist set up medical charities and dived headfirst into making his dream a reality. He also kept an eye out for individuals like Okeke, people with perceptions that were different from the norm.

And then the Aphrodite Crisis happened. Supervillains and their heroic counterparts virtually appeared out of nowhere. There was no event or even series of events that he could see that may have caused the sudden explosion of metabeings in the weeks leading up to The First Incident, the battle between Shield and Gonzales. Nothing that seemed out of the ordinary... and yet something obviously did happen. Then there were the patterns, the predictability that caused him to draw comparisons to bad superhero comics in his mind. Somewhere in the city there were puppet masters pulling the strings, there had to be. And whether they realized it or not, they were the weakest link in the chain.

The decision to dust off his old super soldier research was not one Townes made lightly; it took the better part of a week before he would even admit to Okeke that Ambrosia had even done such a thing. But as the hospitals struggled to deal with the influx of wounded even after he made virtually all of Ambrosia Biotech’s research available to the citizens and it became clear that whatever masking or jamming effect was placed over the city wasn’t going to end, he dusted off his old notes and started using the observations he made during his cosmetic and medical research to improve it. Now, after

nearly three months of solid research and two weeks of daily injections, he had come to where he was now, a nearly four hundred pound brute capable of easily benching more than twice that in controlled testing. The only way this news could be better is if they knew how much Panzer Beast could dead lift. If they only had any idea how strong he was...

“So how is your personal project coming Dr. Okeke?” Alexander asked finally, concluding roughly two pages of silent exposition.

“Extremely well Dr. Townes, Pagan Harvest is currently progressing better than I expected and I’ve documented at least two interesting offshoots to explore once I conclude my research. My only regret is that this seems like hardly the most appropriate time to be indulging in simple vanity, even if it is the kind I’ve wanted for a long time. I can’t wait to inject myself with the final results.” The skinny cheetah replied with a smile, her feminine features so underdeveloped one could have easily mistaken the female scientist for a slightly effeminate male or an unusually tall “boy,” a curse she had sought to change for years.

Her enthusiasm elected a badly needed chuckle from Townes. “Oh Annelie, don’t ever change. The fact that there are women in the world that actually agree with my perceptions, as ironic as they may seem to some, always brightens my day. By the way, you said you had something important to tell me.”

The scrawny feline blushed and found something interesting about the carpet as she figured out what to say. “Yes... I wanted to say it for a while.” She began before stepping up and kissing Alex squarely on the lips. Time seemed to slow down as Townes paused, then returned her affections. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, they both broke away.

The Afro-German scientist looked away. “I’m sorry that was-”

“Don’t apologize. I understand, tomorrow might be too late. We’re in the middle of a crisis where no one can afford to have doubts or regrets. Besides, I would be lying if I said I didn’t think the same myself at times. And we both know what a horrible liar I am.” He smiled, giving her an affectionate squeeze.

She returned his grin and bid him good night with a peck on the cheek before leaving his office and disappearing into the company dormitories set up ten floors down. Alex briefly looked at the city one more time; everything was so broken yet in that moment, all seemed right with the world...

The next day, right after lunch, it finally happened. The villains of Aphrodite City, backed by a small mob of Hedonists, were spotted making their way towards the Ambrosia tower. Who knew why they came. Perhaps the puppet masters heard of Townes research in super soldier serums and sought a way to boost the number of

monsters plaguing the city, perhaps they merely ran out of things to loot and thought the research labs made as good of a target as any. Regardless of why they came, they were coming.

A high-tech firm that normally catered to wealthy clientele, Ambrosia did have some defenses for deterring more mundane miscreants but not even remotely enough to stop what was coming their way. Still, there were protocols for disasters like this and by the time Aphrodite City's worst stroled through the front door, those procedures were being carried out. Lightly armed security forces gathered in the main lobby as researchers and support staff fled for the nearest panic room and locked themselves in. In the research hospital above, metal security cages closed and locked down patients rooms. The hatches were battened down; they were as ready as anyone could ever be in this city.

Against his security team's recommendation, Townes was there, dressed dapper in a tailored two-piece as the villains barged in with a display of overplayed theatrics that would have been impressive had most of the defenders not already seen them a dozen times already.

"Oi! Where's the bloke in charge?" Crimson Screamer bellowed as Red Storm, Panzer Beast, and the Aussie's best butt buddy Hypothermia stood next to him. The four-man band of Hedonists, a boar, horse, wolf, and rabbit. Each of them looked about as forgettable as one could get.

"Now, now. There's no need to shout, I am Dr. Alexander Townes. How can I help you?"

"Alright, we want your super soldier serum and all the pussy you have in this joint." Crimson Screamer demanded, walking up to the more muscular male to plant a defiant index finger on the tiger's sculpted abs.

"I'm sorry, but we have never been publicly in the super soldier market. Nor do I think we have as many cats in the building as you desire." Alex rebutted calmly.

"You know what I-ACK!" Screamer began, cut off as Townes swiftly landed a solid punch into the shorter male's gut.

As the Australian wolf was sent flying back, feeling like a truck had hit him, Townes calmly turned his gaze towards the other intruders as virtually everyone in the lobby regarded him with a shocked expression. "Alright, so I might have been experimenting on myself in private." He explained with a chuckle before his expression turned serious once more. "This is your last chance to leave, I suggest you take it." The tiger ordered coldly.

Unsurprisingly, the majority of the intruders were the kind that didn't recognize how generous his offer was. Recognizing him as the strongest fighter, Panzer Beast charged the muscle-bound tiger while his cohorts engaged the rest of Ambrosia's security

forces. In the chaos that ensued, no one noticed the four Hedonists slip through and board an elevator bound for the genetics laboratory...

Upstairs in the genetics laboratory, Dr. Okeke and her coworker Dr. Susan Weaver raced to finish locking down research materials. Figures the attack would come when they were in the final minutes of a test that could not be interrupted. Bringing up a display of the security grid on her tablet computer, the cheetah's heart sank like a stone. All the panic rooms within the immediate area had already been sealed shut and unidentified users were detected in an elevator car heading for their floor. They could hide, but odds were they would be found before long unless... there was something to distract or fight them off until help arrived. Looking at the vials of serums and treatments, she made her decision and started mixing up an injection.

In its pure form, the Ambrosia super soldier serum would introduce toxic levels of testosterone into her bloodstream. Townes avoided this by taking small doses over a period of several weeks. With intruders mere minutes away, Annelie didn't have that luxury. Thinking quickly and crossing her fingers, she diluted the core injection with a large dosage of Pagan Harvest, more than she ever planned on taking if she ever proved the cosmetic augmentation was viable. Designed for the crowd that craved something more "Rubenesque," PH was supposed to increase the body's production of fat cells across the board, focusing on the "three B's" evenly. With about another week or two of further tinkering, she probably could even get the metabolic effect to make certain shapes; all a moot point right now.

Finishing making the injection and introducing it directly to her bloodstream despite the rational part of her mind reminding her that she was taking a month-long series of injections all at once, the cosmetic scientist took a brief moment and tried to gauge what the reaction was. The fact that she didn't immediately die from injection overdose meant that... her body was going to go mad with hunger until she had consumed enough to satisfy the biochemical reactions she just started inside herself. One way or another, this was going to end very badly for someone but there was still one last thing she had to do while she was still sane...

Even as she shoved her colleague into a storage closet and locked her in with the key, Okeke could feel herself start to slip away. The combination of Townes' super soldier serum mixed with her Pagan Harvest cosmetic treatments was making demands on her body. The more primal parts of her brain were starting to take over in order to satisfy those desires and there would be no fighting them. Once she made sure Weaver was safe, she let what was going on inside her take control...

The four Hedonists fanned out as the elevator disgorged them in the genetics laboratories. Bill, Drake, Hicks, and Wesker looked at one another as Wesker pulled out the map the Brothers had given them. No sooner had they confirmed that they were on the right floor when the lights abruptly went out. Key chain flashlights and smart phones were dug out, pitifully small beams of light sliced through the darkness as the more

intelligent members of the group swept their immediate surroundings for a possible aggressor.

“Well isn’t this just peachy.” Hicks said with a scowl. “Stop me if this doesn’t remind you of at least one movie.”

“Oh quit whining, let’s just grab a sample of the super soldier serum the geeks here have been keeping from us while Townes’ rent-a-cops are busy with the others downstairs and get out of here. In and out, no problem.” Wesker rebutted, shining his flashlight in a promising direction. “Map says the main lab is that way.” He pointed.

Sticking close together, lights fanning their surroundings, the foursome slowly walked along. Pausing long enough to compare their map to a sign hung over one of the laboratory doors, each purple-robed Hedonist felt a chill run down their spines as a savage growl echoed from somewhere in the darkened labs behind them. “What was that? And don’t anyone say it was the fucking wind.” Bill asked, hastily shining his flashlight behind him to see if he could catch a glimpse of whatever was loose in the labs.

“Another reason to hurry up and get out of here. Come on, it’s not far from... wait, where did Drake go?” Wesker replied, taking a quick head count.

“Said something about heading back to use the bathroom.” Hicks replied just as a short-lived scream echoed through the deserted floor. For a moment none of the remaining Hedonists spoke. Fear hung heavy in the air as Wesker checked his map a second time and pointed out a route that took them further away from the mysterious monster. None of them was stupid enough to ask if they were going to go back to look for Drake. Drake was gone and they all had to hurry if they wanted to avoid the same fate he had suffered. A menacing air hung over the remaining thieves as they continued to search fruitlessly.

“Do you even remember which lab we were supposed to look through?” Bill growled, looking over his shoulder in case the monster showed up. “I doubt even Panzer Beast can last long against whatever Townes turned himself into.”

“Don’t rush me, we’ll find it.” Wesker shot back.

“I’m not the one rushing you, whatever the fuck’s loose in this mad scientist’s dream house laboratory is what’s...” Bill countered, his voice trailing off as his foot touched something round and sticky. Turning his flashlight towards the ground, he let out a feminine shriek loud enough to wake the dead.

Turning immediately to silence their partner in crime, Hicks and Wesker turned ash pale as they saw what had made their fellow Hedonist scream like a little girl. They had found what was left of Drake the boar, a severed head that looked like it had been heavily chewed on. All three suddenly found themselves on a knife’s edge, the hungry snarl of a monster on the hunt enough to push them over and make them panic. The next

several minutes were a blur to Hicks. One second he was staring at Drake's head wondering where the rest of his body went, the next he was locking himself in a custodial closet and finding himself making an appeal to a god that wasn't Loco. Outside he could hear the sound of a savage roar, Bill screaming in a combination of fear and pain only to be cut short by the feeble gurgling of a ripped throat, and the futile report of Wesker's small caliber handgun before the equine audibly met the same fate as the others right outside Hicks' closet. Throughout the laboratory, the lights suddenly came back to life. Though peering through the ventilation grate in the bottom of the closet door, the lupine Hedonist suddenly wished he was still stumbling around in the dark.

On the other side of the door, a growing cheetah female with a maniacal glint in her eye knelt beside the still warm corpse of Wesker. Blood dribbled from her mouth as she leaned forward to feed, tearing off gobbets of raw flesh from the slain cultist before gorging herself on his internal organs. The wolf's stomach was doing flipflops as he fought to avoid vomiting at the macabre sight in front of him. Christ above, she was ENJOYING herself, throwing herself into the indulgent airs of a glutton that had discovered chocolate for the first time.

In less than five minutes it was over, Wesker had been reduced to a pile of gnawed bones. The crazed scientist suckled her fingers before licking her face clean. Her clothing was shredded almost to the point of indecency; only her lab coat and a nametag that read "Annelie Okeke" remained intact. The rest of her outfit had been torn asunder in the vain attempt at containing the ballooning ball of fat and muscle the cheetah had turned into. The glint subsided and for a moment the lunatic researcher looked almost sane... then she caught Hicks' scent and leered at the grate he was watching her behind. Her expression was a mixture of biological hunger and pathological hatred as the voracious female rose to her feet and effortlessly ripped the door off its hinges.

Standing at her full height Dr. Okeke was an immense mountain of a cheetah, Hicks might have observed were she not currently smashing him into the walls, ceiling, and floor like a rag doll in the hands of a child having a temper tantrum. Arms and legs had developed into an almost freakish mass of muscle countered by an enormous beer belly, huge breasts, and a vast, pronounced backside. The Hedonist barely paid attention to any of this though... bones cracked and the skin beneath his gray pelt began to turn a magnificent purple to match his robes as multiple organ systems started to suffer from internal bleeding. Finally, after what felt like an eternity of pain, his tormentor felt he was sufficiently tenderized and opened her mouth wide. Sharp fangs tore into bruised flesh but her latest prey was already gone, his body had gone into shock and his heart had stopped beating long before his flesh was "offered" to the bountiful Annelie Okeke...

Her body having consumed enough protein to be satisfied, the cheetah woman managed to regain her sanity just in time to come to grips with what she had done. The horror of having eaten her foes fought with the cold opinion that they were Hedonists that would have raped both Weaver and herself if she had given them even a fraction of a chance. Consuming them was infinitely more practical than letting them continue to otherwise be complete wastes of meat. Still, acting on horrified instinct, she gathered up

their saliva-slick remains and threw them all down the biohazard chute leading to the incinerator in the basement. A furnace rated for temperatures far above what was needed to kill the most heat-tolerant pathogens, the basement incinerator would have no problem turning their bones to ash.

She had just finished destroying the incriminating evidence when the elevator dinged ominously and the loud thud of someone being thrown against a wall could be heard down the hall.

“Fucking finally, god this Townes asshole doesn’t know when to quit.” The boisterous Panzer Beast could be heard as the bovine brick punted a suspiciously tiger-shaped blur past Okeke’s laboratory.

Fear and shame evaporating like dew on a hot day once she realized Townes was in trouble, the immense cheetah bulk heroine stepped out in the hallway and placed herself between her lover and the intruders. The four villains raised a collective eyebrow at the newcomer, clearly unsure if they should laugh or not. The spotted feline titaness found she could care less, time to see just how strong she had gotten in the past half hour.

Proving to be an impatient sort, Panzer Beast was the first to step forward. “Get out of the way cow, your boss has to cough up the super soldier serum.”

“You’re wasting your time, Dr. Townes only made enough for two treatments and you’re looking at where the second one went.” Okeke found herself saying. Not entirely true but these Neanderthals didn’t need to know that.

“Why you greedy bitch!” The bull swung his fist at her head. On reflex Okeke tried to catch it... and was promptly surprised by how little resistance she felt pushing his arm back.

“Hmmm, fascinating.” She replied clinically while snapping Panzer’s wrist like a dry twig. “You appear to no longer be the strongest person in Aphrodite City.” The cheetah observed while her bovine opponent howled in pain. “Perhaps the city now has a true Aphrodite among them.” Annelie concluded with a malicious grin that sent chills through the other villains, throwing Panzer Beast back towards him as if he was little more than a small bag of carrots.

“Oh like hell we’re losing to the likes of you. I’m not afraid of a wannabe Silicon City lard ass!” Crimson Screamer retorted. Hypothermia raised his fist in agreement as they both opened fire.

The resulting barrage of bullets and hailstones bounced harmlessly off of her like a gentle rain. Smiling with a spiteful grin, the cheetah made a show of slowly waddling towards her attackers and stomping Panzer Beast squarely in the chest before grabbing both gunmen by the throat and beating them senseless much like she beat Hicks before

them. Bovine titan and both paramilitary geeks beaten and teleported away, only Red Storm remained to challenge her.

And as the only intelligent one out of the group, he showed his willingness to fight by turning around and running for the stairs. Picking up the pace to something more respectable, Okeke took after him but still he proved to be faster than she was. Losing the last intruder, she alerted security that there was still one supervillain left in the building then turned back to see to Townes. Back upstairs in the genetics laboratory, the tiger had risen back to his feet. Bruised but not beaten, the muscular striped feline looked at the cheetah with a mixture of confusion and relief before recognition finally settled in.

“My dear Annelie, I always knew you’d end up looking positively divine.” The physically ripped tiger smiled as he began to look at her longingly.

The super-strong female merely blushed and licked her lips; the transformation may have tired her at first but the fight still left her with some tension that needed to be burnt off. Looking into his eyes, she could tell that her crush felt the same way. As the two of them threw themselves at each other with passionate relief, both partners realized one good thing came out of the events of the previous hour. It was very easy to rip off each other’s clothes in a fit of desire when said outfits were already reduced to shredded rags...

Aphrodite City: Daybreak

By Psion
An Aphrodite City Story
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Immediately after the attack on Ambrosia Biotech...

Townes massaged his temples as he was given the final damages of the attack on his company. No deaths, a first for anyone that engaged the super villains of Aphrodite City, but a number of security guards were going to be collecting on the company’s health insurance policies within the immediate future. The damage to the labs was minimal but the main lobby needed major renovations before it would become presentable. And unsurprisingly his head of security was angry but then again why wouldn’t he be? He only learned that his boss had become another metabeing the same time the villains did. There was a lot of issues that suddenly had to be smoothed over with both his staff and the city, but there was one nagging detail that worried him.

While inspecting the genetics lab after the attack, Townes counted the canisters of super-soldier serum. He knew he had synthesized enough for four treatments in total, one for himself and three more for three promising candidates. Dr. Annelie Okeke injected another into herself during the battle in the Ambrosia tower, the cheetah submitting herself for a medical evaluation to make sure the transformation didn’t cause any

unforeseen complications, so that should have left two... yet there were three empty canister spaces in the sealed storage unit... so either there was one missing or the stress he was under was causing horrific memory loss at several major points in a multi-step production process. And if one went walkabout, did Red Storm somehow get a chance to take it in the confusion? Townes couldn't leave this mystery linger for long but at the same time he needed to find another candidate for the last injection and try to capitalize on the momentum he had going....

Meanwhile...

The Scarlet Countess smiled as she squeezed her plush bottom into an elaborately carved oaken throne, her feet resting atop the head of a kneeling slave. The Aphrodite City crisis had been good to the overstuffed turkey hen and her slave trafficking business. No one would notice if a couple people went missing in the chaos that had been going on for the last few months, her troop of skilled henchwomen had been able to "collect" a most profitable haul from the local population. Ah the sex slave industry, the malicious turkey hen mused, there was nothing quite as sexy as glorifying a thirty-six billion dollar black market industry based on cruelty and gross violations of basic sapient rights, dressing up sadism and a deep-seated desire for control in a silky red corset and matching panties that left little to the imagination.

Yes business was good for Angelic Clearwater, the bloated bully inside the Scarlet Countess costume. A common brown turkey hen with pale hazel eyes, a small pinkish-red wattle, and a body fit for countless Thanksgiving vore jokes. There was no doubt that the Countess was someone who loved her stuffing. But as much as she enjoyed living lavishly, she enjoyed inflicting misery upon others even more. Turning her cruel gaze to her enslaved footstool, she contemplated giving the terrified rabbit female a quick swat across the buttocks for laughs but no, no sense damaging the merchandise just for fun. At least not yet at any rate...

Rising to her feet and throwing a furred cloak over her shoulders, the Countess motioned for her lounging assistants to join her out on the balcony overlooking the city. Outside the Crimson Palace, her brothel and the fortified lair from which she extended her vile reach upon the city, she looked down at the streets below. Situated on a hill overlooking the Back Acres, the city's small red light district, the small shops and strip clubs of the scandalous side of Aphrodite City lay before her like a perversion of Main Street USA hedged in by the sprawling skyline of the main city. And as a light snow began to fall upon the city, adding further insult to the injury of multiple citizens struggling without heat or even a roof over their heads after the last supervillain rampage, Angelic and her two favorite handmaidens sat in her heated balcony and sipped warm drinks as they watched desperate individuals try to search nearby abandoned buildings for supplies of food and medicine. The mistress of the house then spotted a female scavenger that looked promising and pointed her out to her lieutenants. The word was quickly passed down to the snatchers on duty and soon two armored avians took to the streets. Their target saw she was in danger and tried to run. The black she-bear was surprisingly fast for a normally ponderous species but her pursuers were faster and

weren't weighed down with a hiking backpack crammed with all manner of scavenged trinkets. In a minute they were on top of her, knocking her on her back and beating her with police batons...

And were promptly taken down by an unseen gunman announcing himself with the crack of a high-powered rifle. One minute her minions were standing, the next they were both on the ground bleeding. Realizing that someone had intervened in her fate, the she-bear climbed to her feet and ran for the relative safety of the alleyways. The street grew deathly silent as the Scarlet Countess and her female entourage promptly returned to the relative safety of her renovated fortress. It was moments like this that Angelic appreciated the fact that she was originally a stonemason before beginning a completely random descent into flesh-peddling supervillainy that would make an inexcusable lack of literary sense. Fortunately, as the author of this particular story would still like to maintain a minimum standard of quality, we will skip that part of her origins...

Oblivious to the narrator breaking the fourth wall, Stanley Dewpond had relocated to a new firing position further down the street and watched the Crimson Palace through a pair of binoculars, a scoped hunting rifle by his side. The winter air was too cold for the compressor rifle Gunrunner had made for him, so the balaclava-wearing bear had switched to a more conventional weapon for this operation. In hindsight he shouldn't have intervened with that poor woman; because of his sharp shooting, the Scarlet Countess was aware of his presence and likely more than a little pissed that he had cost her two henchwomen. But at the same time, he saw that helpless she-bear down there and immediately thought of his Kimberly. Somewhere someone was waiting for that black bear female... there was enough suffering in this city without another person waiting for someone who was never coming home.

Yet that act of kindness changed his plans completely. More reconnaissance was necessary if he wanted to continue with his original objective to break into the Crimson Palace and rescue at least a dozen people being held prisoner there. Odds were he wasn't going to accomplish what he needed to do now without storming the Countess's little neo-Victorian castle. Either that or get comfortable and wait until that damn turkey bitch stuck her head out again for some ballistic decapitation, either way he wasn't going to go get what he wanted today anymore. Might as well pack up and disappear before anyone sees him, maybe visit Kimberly and see how she was doing after he finished checking up on the diner...

By the time he finished climbing down the fire escape and concealed his weapons, the Countess had already sent three more goons out into the street to recover the two thugs he shot. One, a colorful female parrot, hung back and carefully scanned the skyline with a scoped rifle while her two cohorts dragged their fallen comrades into the Crimson Palace. Stanley wasn't particularly surprised, one of the missing people he was looking for was a doctor kidnapped from Saint Mary's. That turkey bitch was probably going to throw those two on a table, shove a medkit in the doctor's hands, and tell her to fix them. Which... was still probably a better health plan than the Countess's lackeys deserved or received from similar enterprises.

Disappearing into the alleys, Stanley quietly broke down his rifle and walked back towards his diner. With gasoline getting scarcer in the city, driving just wasn't practical anymore, especially now that the department of public works was too frightened to come out and plow the roads, but Dewpond was nothing if not able to tough things out. During the liberation of Igoroth, the enemy had managed to slip a detachment of shock troops past the frontlines and attack where the brown bear was posted. Until that point, Stan was an Army cook with delusions of seeing "some action" and spent all his free time at the firing range, managing to get certified with several different weapons. When the enemy shock troops attacked his posting however... while he survived and fought bravely until a troop of French Grenadiers, late arrivals to the Igoroth conflict, reinforced the base and repelled the invaders, the experience opened his eyes. To say that actually fighting was "not as fun as he thought it was" was a gross understatement, after his tour was up at the end of the Igoroth campaign, he resigned and thought his fighting days were over. Then the Aphrodite Crisis happened...

Which ultimately lead straight to where he was right now, a shadowy vigilante known only for the crack of a scoped rifle and laughable rumors of a supernatural talent for appearing just about anywhere, like he was that one wolf lady from those Tales From Grant City comics or something. Heh, what a joke, he was just a beat-up vet trying to put the war behind him only to have it follow him home, nothing out of the ordinary... except for perhaps that shrouded snow owl following after him, working hard to avoid arousing the suspicions of the legendary Castigator...

"I'm sorry Mrs. Dewpond, but there is nothing we can do. When we arrived at your husband's diner in response to a 911 call, the place was trashed and one of the Countess's roses was left on the counter." The police officer explained sympathetically. "If the Scarlet Countess wants you for her little harem, she gets you. And there's nothing we can do about it anymore."

Kimberly Dewpond blinked in disbelief. The last thing the stocky she-bear remembered clearly was her car getting caught in some kind of an explosion. Everything afterwards was a barely coherent blur of being strapped into a hospital bed, then spending two months suspended in a giant vat of kind of warm, comforting slime that healed her burns, disinfected her body, and left her feeling physically better than she ever had been. Now she learned that in the meantime her husband was kidnapped, the one responsible was one of several that owned the streets, and some twisted, macabre superhero drama was responsible for the sad state of affairs the city had fallen into over the course of little over three months.

Whether he was misinterpreting her silence for grief or was merely looking for an excuse to leave before the screaming and accusations started, the police detective nodded his head and tipped his hat on the way out the door. His card was left on the nightstand by her bed but both of them somehow knew she would never use it.

Right on cue, with the kind of incredibly convenient timing that would have allowed him to hear everything, Doctor Townes appeared to take her vitals. “Well let’s check the residual nanites in your system and see how you are today. Hmmm, pulse is elevated, not surprising, but everything seems to be well within acceptable limits otherwise. Just have to lower that blood pressure...” He began tentatively, waiting for some sort of response from the ursine female.

“I need to get out of here, I have to go get my husband.” Kimberly replied automatically.

Townes resisted the urge to smile. Manipulating her concerns was at the very least unethical but all other candidates were either not as biologically compatible as she was or didn’t have quite her level of determination. “While I certainly understand your concern, how exactly do you plan on doing that? The Countess’s Handmaidens are a paramilitary squad in their own right; at least as well trained as your husband was and armed with equipment stolen straight from the ACPD SWAT armory, I don’t think you can just walk in there and-”

“What would you do then?” The she-bear flustered until a light of realization went off in her head. “Wait... didn’t you and Doctor Okeke do something to yourselves?”

“Yes we did and rather than drag things out like a manipulative little shyster, I’ll just ask; are you willing to become another recipient of Ambrosia’s... special treatment? I won’t lie; we’re still working out all the problems and documenting side effects. It might do something, it might do nothing; we’re still not sure why it balanced out so well with Okeke’s Pagan Harvest treatments. But if you’re sure... well Aphrodite City could use some proper heroines, ones that don’t get tripped up by... I suppose there’s no point in ignoring the fact that there are some unseen puppet masters out there somewhere that are not doing a particularly good job at being invisible. If you are really serious about taking me up on my offer though, it will take three days to complete the treatments and we can start right now.”

The brown she-bear looked down at herself as she thought about what she was doing for a moment. Long red hair crowned a sturdy ursine body built by building houses and digging wells in third world countries with the Peace Corps and padded out by a combination of bear genetics and being constantly spoiled by a cooking husband that liked “well rounded girls.” She was no good with a gun but she could swing a mean sledgehammer when it counted; yet what she was facing was going to take more than smashing a few walls to fix. And Stanley... Stanley took a risk trusting Townes with someone he loved and the tiger had done all right, now she had to do the same.

“Alright, after spending two months naked in a tube, I suppose three more days won’t hurt.” She consented, hoping this wasn’t the wrong choice.

“Very well, I’ll make the arrangements right now.” Townes nodded, disappearing to set more wheels in motion then either of them realized...

The Brothers’ Suburban Lair...

The basement lair of the Brothers, the unnamed puppet masters of Aphrodite City, was in an uproar after the failed raid on Ambrosia Biotech and the fallout of their contest getting mysteriously co-opted. Not one but two biologically enhanced beings had emerged with the intent to challenge their rule over the city with the possibility of more being on the way. Not only that, but as two individuals that maintained one of the last stable Internet connections in the city, both were shocked and surprised to see Pirate Pete putting up “First Ever Live Footage of the Aphrodite Five” on his website and began posting some of the best shots of Shield, Amp, Express Panda, Private Doll, and Wrench Wench that they had ever seen. Yet the most unsettling part was not seeing their playthings posted online but what people were writing in the forums and comment sections of the Quest for Booty website...

“WTF? I thought Aphrodite City was a superhero dead zone, why haven’t we seen these hotties on the news?” One poster wrote.

“Five unregistered supes in the middle of vigilante-hating New England? Where’s the DSA in all this? Nice tits on the police babe though, wouldn’t mind seeing her on a pole.” Another QfB regular commented.

“Guys, I have a problem... I can’t fap to this. I mean, the girls are hot and all but I used to live in Aphrodite City about a year ago and... Jesus what the hell happened to the place? AC looked nothing like this, I almost mistook the backgrounds for downtown Detroit. Does anyone else here have family in Aphrodite City? My dad still lives there, I tried calling him six times since QfB last updated and I’ve been getting nothing but static on the other end. Anyone else having problems?” A third web deviant posted.

After the third post, the forum thread immediately derailed to people talking about relatives or friends they had in the city and the fact that no one could call them. The only moderator intervention was a polite shifting of all conversations not regarding the Aphrodite Five to its own thread. Pirate Pete himself even expressed sympathy towards those that had families in the city in his latest webcast, acknowledged that things were pretty bleak for the city, and with a sly wink that send chills down the Brothers’ spines, told his audience that matters were in hand as “not notifying the appropriate people of conditions in Aphrodite City was both bad business and completely un-American.”

Throughout the Brothers’ neighborhood, a primal howl of frustration echoed down the street as it bounced between houses. The city’s first signs that the nightmare was finally coming to an end and no one was around to hear it...

DSA Regional Headquarters, New York City

The DSA regional headquarters, situated in a series of geodesic domes at the bottom of the majestic Hudson River, was buzzing with activity. At first Director Wilkenson was dismissive of the reports but at the FBI's repeated insistence he had tried contacting Aphrodite City. The mayor's office, the police commissioner's desk, even the head of the department of sanitation, all of his calls were met with this buzzing static that the labs were trying to analyze. On paper nothing looked out of the ordinary. Banks still filed their electronic paperwork on time with the federal treasury, several government agencies like Veterans' Affairs didn't have any unusual discrepancies to report, everything to be in order.

Except that apparently it wasn't. Not only were most digital communications knocked out but no one seemed to be able to get a good satellite picture of the area either. Military reconnaissance satellites, cartography satellites, even the damn weather satellites were getting a ridiculous amount of interference over the area. The FBI was reporting similar difficulties, and then there were the rumors of vigilante heroines operating in the city... Wilkenson despised vigilantes, disorganized rabble that somehow managed to persist despite his best efforts to stamp them out. No matter, there would be time to deal with them once he sent a team of operative in to sort out the situation. Still, he wished the FBI director hadn't requested to use the Homeland Security Protocol on something that looked so trivial. Assembling a self-sufficient DSA-FBI team equipped for the possibility of urban warfare was turning into such a headache. Between the red tape, back and forth arguments about whether or not this violated Posse Comitatus, and just the simple logistics of getting everything together, the Maine coon cat was at the point where he was almost hoping there was a threat to national security brewing in Aphrodite City after all the bureaucratic hoops he had been jumping through. Still, the team was assembled, all veterans of the border skirmishes with Mexican drug cartels no less, and ready to go. Now to see if this little "emergency" wasn't a colossal waste of time in disguise...

The Styx Motel, two days later...

The Styx Motel was an old hostel on the edge of the city, part of a truck stop that represented the absolute limit of the Brothers' control. With the decline of industry and commerce in the city, the rest stop had been largely abandoned. Shops were closed or almost deserted; hardly anyone was around to notice a slender black furred bunny with platinum blond hair and ice blue eyes check into the hotel as the sun settled into a late afternoon position. At least no one physically at the truck stop at least, Brittany Buckwheat was fairly certain that she produced enough of a psychic disturbance that the Brothers couldn't help but notice. She didn't want to believe it, of all the people to put something in her network of dead drops and anonymous email accounts; Pirate Pete was the last person she expected. Yet when she pulled up that fishy message out of one of her online inboxes, there he was with a video message addressed directly to her alter ego, Mentalrix.

It sounded like a distraction to get her off his trail; Mentalrix had been searching for him ever since she discovered that Pirate Pete had pressed Maurice back into his

service and was holding the coyote's sister hostage. But at the same time, what the rat tipped her off to was just so... even after fighting some of the most depraved sexual predators of the metabeing age, what he told her sounded almost unreal. Yet as she traveled to Aphrodite City, it became obvious that there really was something very, very wrong. If the general vibe she was getting off the worn desk clerk at the motel wasn't enough, she had been picking up a "presence" of sorts ever since she arrived in Aphrodite City. It was hard to explain, a sort of a vague feeling of being watched by something just out of sight to non-psychic minds. Unfortunately for the "thing" or "things" watching her, a window opened both ways. She could see them just as well; a disgusting pair of sub-sapients, little better than inbred mutants, had the city under their control. And here she was, a threat to their control and at the moment, all alone. It wouldn't be long...

Three hours later, it was time. She felt the presence of the entities' minions, their psychic impressions tainted by whatever fell energies were at work here. Normally Mentalrix would have had a harder time picking out aggression or malice from background psychic static, but normally aggressive people weren't supercharged with an energy that defied known classifications. Whatever it was that gave those three their powers made them stand out like a heat signature in Antarctica. No matter, she had been expecting them...

"This where the bitch is holed up?" Panzer Beast asked as Crimson Screamer and Hypothermia joined him. Standing in front of the rundown motel just as a gentle snow began to fall on the parking lot, the three villains scanned the building for signs of activity.

"Yep. So, should we find the clerk and beat him up until he tells us where she is or just torch the place?" Hypothermia asked, his expression saying everything about which method he preferred.

"Let's torch it! We might not get another chance to burn something down so... hey what was that?" Crimson Screamer shouted, pointing at a flicker of movement from a side corridor connecting the front of the roadside hotel to the back of the building.

Like the gullible idiots they were, the three immediately went down the hallway all at once, not spacing themselves out or having the two gunners hang back to cover their brick as he scouted ahead. Nor did they check their corners, which was how all three of them, including two military washouts, managed to walk right past the gasmask-wearing rabbit hiding behind a soda machine. Following after them, as silent as a phantom, Mentalrix scanned and assessed her foes ever so briefly... then struck. The snow leopard with the "Captain Canada" themed costume and the oversized cryokinetic amp rifle was first. Cover his mouth to keep him from crying out then break his neck in one fluid motion. Quick, messy, but entirely necessary given the kind of sociopathic taint that lingered in their minds. The Australian in the black and red hooded costume was next, grappled and introduced to the "twist and snap" before his friend even finished falling into a heap of black fog... wait, dead bodies didn't turn into puffs of smoke. A

mystery for later though, right now it was more important that she focused on the big bull that just noticed his friends were missing...

“Hey guys you got real quiet all of a sudden... guys? This isn’t funny.” The muscular bull looked around and suddenly found himself alone in a darkened hallway full of menacing shadows. The last thing the bull remembered before his dark patrons brought him back for regeneration was a gasmask-wearing rabbit dressed in a trench coat, leaping towards him with an unsheathed knife aimed directly at his eyes...

Aphrodite City: All Things Must End

By Psion
An Aphrodite City Story
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Downtown Aphrodite City, a day after the events in Daybreak

It was never a good thing in Kraken’s mind when orders came down that looked like the folks up top were making things up. It wasn’t a good thing when he was a SEAL in the Navy and it was an even worse thing now that he was taking orders from bureaucrats in Washington. The Homeland Security Directive getting deployed to Aphrodite City was one such thing, a call to play a vanilla-sounding name for a protocol that in reality was about as ridiculous as the Pentagon’s plans for a zombie outbreak. Worse than that, as at least the Pentagon blatantly labeled their zombie procedure as an intellectual exercise. The HSD on the other hand was supposed to be an actual, no-holds-barred, “black box” contingency plan in the event that a supervillain or cabal of supervillains managed to successfully take over an American city... except that there were so many things wrong with it there might as well be no plan at all, a useless program written by saber-rattlers more accustomed to rattling their swords than using them.

Still, the sea otter contemplated as he walked through the ruined downtown with the rest of the taskforce, navigating streets clogged with wrecked cars, none of that mattered as much as the fact that he was here to make things right. Before volunteering for the supersoldier program that turned him into the amphibious commando Kraken, the aquatic mustelid had seen dozens of warzones, all of them located in faraway lands that would be seen as exotic if not outright alien to the average American. To see the same kind of destruction visited upon a country he had fought to keep safe from the commonplace cruelties of foreign soil... someone was going to pay.

“So what’s the plan ma’am?” Dozer asked professionally, trying hard not to look at a small memorial set up on the sidewalk, a stuffed teddy bear holding a silk flower surrounded by pictures of children. Normally Kraken would have sneered at the inclusion of the donkey jack. Though he was the “Land” aspect of the “Land, Sea, Air”

trinity of the same program that gave the otter his powers, Dozer hardly cut the kind of professional figure one would expect of a super soldier, guess allowing him to digest virtually any carbon compound with perfect efficiency wasn't really a good idea after all. That being said, the rotund, black-haired donkey was both as strong and as tough as an Abrams tank and currently cradled a custom-made semi-automatic shotgun built to fire 10-gauge shells, welcome things to have considering the sheer number of unknowns they were presently facing.

"Knock on doors until we find someone, anyone at this rate, that can tell us what is going on." Special Agent Susan Gales of the FBI replied automatically as she scanned the street ahead of them, lapine ears searching for a sign of someone trying to sneak up behind them as the crack profiler processed information with a detached calm more appropriate for a machine than a person. "At this point I wouldn't care if the last lawman in the city was a vigilante named Captain Tiddlywinks as long as he could tell us what happened to this place."

Kraken was about to question the wisdom of being so open when the crash of broken glass erupted from an abandoned grocery store grabbed everyone's attention. A sliver fox vixen screamed then ran out of the shop with a crude pack stuffed with necessities slung over her shoulder. Two sinister men in magnificent purple robes followed behind her, malice in their eyes, neither group looking in the lawmen's direction until the vixen, in an attempt to flee, ran down the street towards the armed strangers and slipped on some black ice.

Landing at the otter's feet, Kraken could only imagine what the cut-up black-furred fox with long platinum blond hair thought when she saw this muscular mustelid dressed in heavy cold weather clothing looking back down at her. To the sea otter's right, Dozer slowly lumbered up into position with his weapon raised, Agent Gales drew her handgun and took up a position by Kraken's left. Overhead, the carapace-clad figured of Black Vespa hovered ominously. Yes, the SEAL could see why there might have been a bit of hesitation in the young female's eyes as he leaned forward and held out a gloved hand to help her up.

As the woman rose to her feet and hid behind him, the amphibious hero extended a pair of wicked-looking claws through his fingerless gloves. Even as the two members of the Barney Appreciation Club started to reach for their weapons, Kraken could see the doubt in their eyes. Running was starting to look like a really good idea to both of them right now. They probably would have started to retreat if another troop of six of the colorfully dressed hoodlums hadn't appeared further down Main Street. Eight versus four... even with all of the hooded weirdos carrying semi-automatic weapons, Kraken had fought worse odds and he knew the others with him had as well.

Only a look was exchanged between the FBI agent and the three DSA super soldiers before they all flew into action. Kraken found an abandoned car and shoved the vixen inside the back before ripping the door off its hinges to use it as a shield. Dozer chambered a round into his shotgun and took cover behind a hot dog cart that had clearly

seen a few gunfights already. Meanwhile Gales knelt behind a pile of trashcans and garbage bags that looked like they hadn't been picked up in weeks.

Meanwhile the opposition was emboldened, believing they had the advantage. The fact that three out of four of their challengers wasted no time hunkering down didn't seem to faze them in the slightest. Yet it wasn't until one decided to open his mouth that the four agents realized what idiots their foes were.

"Hey everyone, look at the fat ass trying to look scary with the big gun and the metal skull mask. Bet it's loaded with beanbag shells or something, heroes are always too much of a pussy to-BAKOOM!" A single shot from Dozer's shotgun rang out, carving a huge hole out of the concrete wall directly behind his head as well as vaporizing the heckler's head.

"Damn, that was supposed to be a warning shot." The donkey deadpanned nonchalantly as he chambered another round in with an ominous 'ka-chunk!'

The mood quickly changed as the Purple Brigade immediately realized who Kraken and his fellows must be. The opposing force promptly opened fire, bullets pinging off of metal as the gangers... cultists... whoever they were tried to take aim and were doing an incredibly poor job at it in the otter's mind. Retaliation was swift and merciless; Black Vespa briefly cloaked and disappeared from sight only to reappear and strafe targets with energy bolts, Dozer and Gale peppered foes with one round after another, and Kraken advanced behind the cover of his improvised shield. Bullets whizzed past as the government agents began to move up and push their enemies back, gunned down cultists falling over in showers of crimson blood.

Seeing their comrades mowed down, the survivors turned and attempted to flee. But Kraken wasn't having any of that. Grabbing the car door by one side, he spun the projectile like an Olympic hammer thrower and flung it at the retreating thugs. As all their opponents lay dead, dying, or knocked out cold due to blunt force trauma, the four outsiders turned to the vixen still hiding in the abandoned car.

"Excuse me miss..." Dozer began calmly as he shouldered his shotgun.

"Kara." The vixen replied automatically, still clearly in a bit of shock.

"Well then Kara, what do you say we take you someplace warm and you can explain to us exactly what has been happening here for the past several months?" The donkey replied with a disarming smile as he held out a gloved hand and helped her out of the car.

All jabs and disparaging remarks aside, Kraken had to admit Dozer had a way with the civvies at times. Several minutes later, the DSA team was getting in contact with Mayor O'Connor and began piecing together the story of the Aphrodite City crisis...

Scarlet Palace...

Stanley should have figured that anyone willing to build a small replica of a Scottish castle smack in the middle of an American city was probably crazy enough to go all the way and include a dungeon in the deal. Made sense in a way, the Scarlet Countess would need a place to hide her latest trophies away from paying customers. Can't have the depraved rich folks the turkey hen was somehow smuggling in from outside of the city getting killed by violent prisoners. After all, not everyone they tried to beat down would have their spirits so easily crushed.

Chained to the wall and suspended inches off the ground, Stanley Dewpond glared silently at the rotund Countess as she admired her latest catch. The avian munched on a large plate of stuffing, gesturing to the muscular bear with her fork.

"Good job girls, you caught us a Force Recon Marine. That has to be worth a pretty penny to the right people. So pretty boy, what's your name? Your real name I mean."

"Stanley Dewpond, Sergeant, Food Service Operations." The brown bear with the blond buzzcut replied automatically.

The Countess stared at him blankly; her prisoner could almost see the rusty wheels slowly creak into motion. "A cook? I lost two of my best snatchers to a damn cook? I swear, if this is a joke..."

"Served with the 41st Quartermasters in the Igoroth conflict; worked as part of the kitchen staff at UN Aid Station Zulu for pretty much the entire engagement. Spent a lot of time on the rifle range because I was a naïve apple-polisher, only saw combat when the Blackstone Syndicate managed to sneak an attack group past our frontlines. Held out with the rest of my unit until the French sent a battalion of grenadiers to mop things up. And that's pretty much it. Came back, used some of my GI Bill money to open a restaurant, and tried to forget the things I saw. Was doing a pretty good job until you had to go remind me. Which is how I ended up as... what is it people are calling me now, the Castigator?"

Dewpond could tell his captor was halfway between decking him one good and trying to find a way to turn this to her advantage. "Oh well... I suppose this isn't a total loss. If nothing else, I can put you to work in my kitchen." The round avian mused with a greedy smirk as she gobbled up the rest of her stuffing.

Does the job come with an oven big enough to cook you in? Pretty sure the only way you'd be tolerable is as a part of Kimberly's delicious ass. Stanley thought to himself, keeping his expression neutral. She really wouldn't be stupid enough to put him in a position where he could easily poison her would she?

“Milady, you do know that-” One of the Countess’s henchbirds, the parrot sniper, began.

“Yes I know, I know. If I put him to work I can’t let him near any knives or cleaning supplies.” The turkey hen waved dismissively. “Come, we have other matters that need to be addressed.” The Scarlet Countess beckoned, leaving Stanley alone with the rest of the new captures...

Meanwhile, Ambrosia Biotech...

Kimberly Dewpond’s biotech treatments were coming along better than he anticipated, Dr. Townes realized as he took note of the progress being made by the stout ursine woman suspended in a nutrient bath. Overall body mass had already made noticeable increases, and while Kim did not appear to become significantly taller, she was certainly getting broader. Dense muscle coated by a thick layer of body fat particularly concentrated in the hips and belly, giving the she-bear a sturdy pear shaped appearance.

“Well you certainly have some interesting hobbies Dr. Townes.” An unfamiliar voice called out. Even after putting up a fair fight against Panzer Beast, something about the stranger nearly made the tiger jump out of his skin, probably the fact that the lab was on the thirtieth floor and there was at least two dozen armed guards between him and the lobby.

Turning around, the CEO of Ambrosia Biotech found himself staring face to masked face with a vaguely familiar rabbit dressed in a trench coat and a gasmask. Barely remembered stories of a vigilante from St. Louis began to surface from deep within his mind. Could it be?

<Yes, I am Mentalrix. Hopefully you’ll forgive me if I don’t go through that whole ‘I am the night’ routine the media keeps attributing to me. Theatrics have their place, just not with me.> The rabbit answered the unspoken question telepathically.

“How... I’d say it’s about time someone showed up but how did you even know? The entities have cut off easy access to mass communications; people have been trying for weeks to get some kind of a signal out of the city. And any requests to get the DSA to pay us a visit have apparently been lost in a bureaucratic black hole.”

“Believe it or not, Pirate Pete has managed to come and go through the city. The Aphrodite Five have made quite a stir with the public and a great deal of money for him. And apparently he feels that whoever is mucking things up here is bad for his business in the long-term, which is why he left a message for me and a couple others in the vigilante community then submitted a request to the DSA and the FBI on behalf of the city after he left.”

Townes did his best to not roll his eyes at this news. “I suppose it makes sense given the blatant ways the Entity has been-”

“Entities, there’s two of them.” Mentalrix interjected. “I know, I know; how do I know? Whatever they are and however they do what they’re doing, I can look back at them when they’re looking at me. Currently they’ve stopped looking at me, partially because I’ve started to narrate what they’re doing when they watch me. That and what is happening to Kimberly and Dr. Okeke is a major mood killer for them. Something about no fat chicks or some similarly juvenile rubbish. But enough about that, the point is I’ve been spending the past day or so learning everything I can. I know about Shield and the other heroines, I know about the Brothers as the city’s supervillains call them, I know about the Hedonists and the slavers, and I know what you’re trying to do about all of it. Very noble what you’ve been trying to do overall but might I suggest having a plan for when the DSA starts inquiring about your scheme to manufacture ‘proper’ heroes? Or at the very least have a plan for escaping and resuming your normal life once the media attention has died down a bit?” The rabbit asked then shook her head. “Nevermind, if you do it’s probably better if I don’t know what it is. Besides, I’m told you have your mind on more immediate goals concerning a certain bloated turkey hen. Would you like some company on that errand?”

“Are you offering to join us?”

“Yes. Slavers, sadists, rapists, they’re all the same. Disgusting creatures that need to be put down for the good of the world.”

“Is there any other way to view them?” Townes asked rhetorically.

“Not unless you’ve been to the bondage fetish sections of Flesh Affinity lately.” The rabbit replied coolly.

“Alright, I suppose we should start making plans then.” The tiger replied with a nod. Time to start making plans to see how they could save Kimberly’s husband...

Scarlet Palace, two days later...

It was a quiet snowy day outside the Scarlet Palace; Old Man Winter, the actual metaphor and not a silly oversexualized personification created by adolescent comic book nerds, was starting to show his full fury upon Aphrodite City with a heavy snowfall. The Scarlet Countess rubbed her chin as she sat on her heated porch and contemplated the latest developments and what they meant for her business. A team of government agents had finally arrived and was paving the way for the DSA, FBI, and National Guard to show up in force. Even if the rumors that at least one vigilante from out of town had arrived and managed to somehow defeat three of the city’s biggest supervillains were not true, that was going to put a serious cramp in her business and soon. Perhaps the Jade Empress had the right idea when she packed up shortly after that fiasco with the Hedonists competing with each other to become the city’s top pervo paparazzi. But

where would she ever relocate? She had heard there was opportunity for her business to grow in Silicon City as well as Austin, Texas but she also heard that a number of vigilantes took a fairly ruthless stance against her business, even going so far as outright killing humble merchants like herself. Such savage intolerance to free enterprise, perhaps there was something to the assertion that deep down all superheroes were communists...

Further down the snow-covered street, taking shelter within an alleyway, Mentalrix watched the out of place building carefully. A stone castle, built in the style of old Scottish or British castles but at the size of a particularly large suburban "McMansion." A wrought iron gate with matching fence enclosed the main entrance and about half of the perimeter of the property, the rest was blocked off by a thick, six-foot-high hedge that may or may not be part of a Victorian hedge maze. With Townes, Okeke, and Dewpond all having super strength, there was nothing there that could keep them out for longer than five seconds. Tearing down the gate or the fence would be loud though...

"What do you think?" Dr. Townes asked, having traded his lab coats and business suits for a costume that the rabbit couldn't help but find a little ostentatious; a combination of the paramilitary and classic colorful spandex. Still, she couldn't rightly argue against his logic for "an inspiring symbol" even if now was a good time for it.

"Well we're not going in without having to smash through something, the question is do we want to smash the hard, noisy thing or the soft, not so noisy thing that's further away from the castle... never thought I would get the chance to use that word literally while still staying in America."

"Yes well... Aphrodite City always had an eccentric element, it's just that the Brothers have done an excellent job bringing it to the forefront." Townes confessed apologetically as both of them turned to the others.

For a biotech think tank corporation, Mentalrix concluded, Ambrosia Biotech had a strange amount of high-tech hardware of a more inorganic variety. Then again, with every other manufacturing or high-tech company packing up and leaving, there was probably enough stuff left behind or sold at a loss to put some kind of workshop together. Given Townes' determination to take "his city" back, there probably was one somewhere in the Ambrosia tower dedicated to supplying equipment to his latest project. Couple that with the fact that the Gunrunner had resurfaced in the city and assembled a present for Kimberly and the Brothers might want to rethink the script of their little porn games if they want to maintain their control on the city much longer. Between the industrial equipment and the ferret prodigy's help, there was practically no delay in getting the others equipped with something.

Clad in an elastic nano-membrane jumpsuit dyed white with blue trim and equipped with an overstuffed medic's bag slung over her shoulder, Annelie Okeke was the classical female bulk heroine meshed with the archetypical combat medic. "Love my body or fear it" tight bodysuit with a trauma medic's "crash kit" in arm's reach. The

psychic rabbit couldn't help but stare at the mountainous cheetah heroine for a second longer than was necessary. She knew how Okeke slew her attackers during the Hedonists' attack on Ambrosia Biotech even though the others didn't have a clue, yet the spotted feline was oblivious to just how much the gasmask avenger's telepathy revealed. And after thinking about it, Mentalrix decided the other female deserved to be blissful in her ignorance. The irony of dealing with the savage Daschund only to find herself fighting along side someone that ate or had eaten monsters was a meditation for another day.

Kimberly Dewpond on the other hand was a she-bear who benefited a great deal from the Gunrunner rising to the challenge of crafting a proper weapon for someone with super strength. Apparently a carpenter with the Peace Corps before the events that put her in the hospital, Gunrunner thought it would be fitting if the she-bear's "weapon" was as aptly suited for construction as it was for destruction. So the ferret kid gave her a giant double-head axe with mechanical morphing properties. Meaning it was a wood axe that could turn into a sledgehammer, a pickaxe, a mining pick, and a shovel of all things. If that wasn't enough, there was a smaller version clipped to Kim's orange utility belt that could turn into half a dozen other hand tools. Stupid-sound gadgets yet at the same time they looked sturdy enough and Mentalrix could see a market for them somewhere.

The she-bear was built just as largely as the cheetah Okeke, strong muscular arms stood in contrast to Kimberly's thunderous hips and softened abdomen. Long red hair was tied back in a ponytail, her brown eyes fixed with grim determination as she tightly gripped her axe with a pair of gloved hands. A black and burnt orange full body suit kept her warm despite the steady snowfall... or at least it helped her thick bulk keep the she-bear warm at least. The newly remade she-bear "brick" looked ready, they all looked as ready as they'll ever be.

"Alright... I usually work alone so I'm a bit out of my element planning things out in groups. Here's what I managed to observe. The countess is currently lounging out on a heated patio with a bodyguard carrying a large rifle meaning we have at least one sharpshooter guarding the lair. We could smash through the gate, run up the driveway, and break down the front door. If what Townes tells me is true, that should not be a problem for any of you. Whether you can do it quietly remains to be seen. On the other hand, a tall hedge blocks the part of the property closest to us. Kimberly should be able to chop that down and allow us to slip in. Personally I favor cutting through the hedge. With this snow it will be harder for the castle guards to see us, allowing us to slip in quietly."

"Why not just charge on in and cut through them? You might not be bulletproof but the rest of us should be tough enough that you can just duck behind us right?" Kimberly replied impatiently. On one hand, Mentalrix couldn't really blame her but on the other... they would be no good to anyone if they got trapped by blindly charging in.

"That might work but the less time they have to react, the less time they have to think of things like use hostages as shields."

Dewpond opened her mouth to argue but Mentalrix could tell she knew the rabbit was telling the truth. Ultimately the three agreed to do things her way and like clockwork, a hole was cut down in the hedge and the band moved up into the castle courtyard. Keeping out of the light, the foursome quickly trudged through the snow up to the front door. There was a tense moment when the parrot sniper promptly stood up and stared into the grounds below, clearly thinking she heard something. But the avian's mistress quickly called her back, audibly complaining that she was spoiling the view.

As the solid oaken doors loomed in front of them, Anne and Kim slammed them open. Inside the foyer, the noise and sudden gust of wind caused the attendants and a small group of lounging clients to look up at the new arrivals. Seeing that violence was imminent, the "domesticated" females fled for cover as the Scarlet Countess emerged with her troop of enforcers.

"Well, well, well. What do we have here, more self-righteous do-gooders eager to become the latest attraction in my harem? Oooh, Mentalrix herself has apparently decided a career change is- wait, what are you doing?"

At the mention of Mentalrix's name, four out of five of the countess's retinue immediately laid down their arms. Gun safeties were engaged and swords were sheathed as the slaver's mercenary warriors threw down their weapons and held up their hands. "We surrender." The colorful parrot sniper, the leader of the armed band, explained flatly.

"You can't surrender, get out there and go do what I'm paying you for!" The Countess fumed, pleasure slaves and guests scattering as the heroes made their way through the main hall unchallenged.

"Yeah go fuck yourself boss. First rule of our profession is 'live long enough to spend your paycheck.' The local amateur show is one thing but you aren't paying us anywhere nearly enough in hazard pay to take on a proper brain burner." The parrot shot right back as all four avian soldiers of fortune walked down the stairs right past the four intruding heroes and took a seat at the bar.

The remaining loyal member of the slave mistress's entourage, a tawny-feathered chicken hen clad in dominatrix gear and clearly had more loyalty and sadism than sense, charged down the grand staircase towards the heroes... and was promptly tripped up by Mentalrix and made to fall head over heels the rest of the way down the stairs.

Still upstairs on the balcony landing, the Scarlet Countess feebly reached for one of the discarded weapons only to look up and find the masked face of Dr. Alexander Townes glaring back at her. Hauling her up by the collar of her red unitard, the costumed tiger only said one word. "Where are they?"

"Who... who are you?"

“I am Dr. Viva and I will only ask one more time, where are they?”

“Alright, alright. The dungeon is down that hallway, third door to your left, the key is around my neck. Now show me what a goodie-goodie you are and put me down.” She demanded.

His temperament as it were, the masked medic would have probably very well put her down gently if she had asked politely. But the naked arrogance and contempt for her fellow beings in her voice filled him with a sudden empathy for Mentalrix and her barely restrained hatred for people like the Countess. Upon ripping the key off of her neck, Dr. Viva turned and flung her off the open balcony into the foyer below, causing her to crash into an overstuffed sofa. Patrons and “entertainers” shrieked and dived for cover as a roughly two hundred and fifty pound projectile crashed into the couch and flipped it over. From outside of Townes’ immediate field of view, the turkey hen groaned but didn’t try to get up. The last immediate threat had been successfully neutralized.

Not a word was said between the four heroes as they made their way deeper into the castle. As the dungeon door was unlocked, the psychic rabbit was the only one who didn’t gasp at the horrors within. Already hardened to the cruelties of the world, seeing furs suspended up against the cold stone walls under the harsh light of an incandescent bulb, most of them bearing horrific scars, didn’t faze her so much as provide a painful reminder of how much humanity she had lost since she became Mentalrix. Townes and Okeke found themselves unable to stop themselves from identifying implements based on the scar tissue, their minds involuntarily reconstructing what had happened. Whips, branding irons... neither of them was ever going to be able to look at a penknife the same way again. Kimberly was similarly aghast to the point of paralysis, Mentalrix could feel her torn between searching the chained furs for her husband and just smashing their restraints one after another with her sledgehammer.

And yet in an instant, a feeling of detached calm washed over them. A tempered resolve flowed through Townes and the two giantesses, Mentalrix’s way of empathetically urging them to keep moving. Strengthened with her resolve, the heroes went back to work. Chains were broken or ripped right out of the wall and the emancipated thralls gathered to mob rush the door to freedom. Male, females, all battered and bruised, looked expectantly at their saviors as adrenaline began to flow through their veins and give them the strength for one mad push.

The last prisoners to save were Stanley Dewpond, a blond haired, muscular specimen of ursine kind, and a black-haired, gray-furred raccoon girl whose eyes had been covered by a bloodied bandage. Blinded by things the heroes didn’t want to think about, the raccoon stumbled onto the floor only to get promptly scooped up by Mr. Dewpond. The brown bear army cook stood with a purposeful look in his eyes, mentally shutting out all the parts of his personality other than the soldier that refused to leave a man behind. They were ready.

In the chaos they had caused with their sudden entrance, the Countess's patrons and her mercenary bodyguards had fled the scene. Even the turkey and her chicken hen lieutenant had recovered enough to somehow disappear, leaving the scared slaves working the main hall to their own devices. No matter, Mentalrix decided, there would be time to hunt them down like the animals they were once these people were taken to safety. Outside in the snow and the cold frigid air, the four unregistered heroes discovered just how close their timing was. Turning onto the street just as the vigilantes led a mass procession out of the castle, Special Agent Gales and the three DSA heroes looked ready to demonstrate to the Countess just how unromantic medieval warfare really was. There was a lengthy, awkward silence as the two groups looked at one another, registered lawmen and self-motivated vigilantes regarding each other with a wary gaze that was only broken when one of the freed civvies spoke up.

"Ummm, excuse me? Ms. FBI agent ma'am? Any chance you brought a school bus or something because I don't think most of us can walk all the way to the hospital in this weather?" A bystander asked sheepishly.

Like that, the stalemate was momentarily broken. The FBI agent gestured to a vehicle they had parked right around the corner just as all of them began to feel a sudden sense of dread and apprehension.

<COCKBLOCKERS!!!> A voice that was most definitely not Mentalrix screamed telepathically. Looks like the ringleaders decided to finally make themselves known.

Panic broke out amongst the crowd as people fled for either the parked bus or the flimsy cover of the nearby abandoned buildings. A few even ran back inside the Countess's abandoned castle, preferring its tainted stone walls to the danger of what was to invariably follow.

Where the crowd once stood, a pair of foxes dressed in fine two-piece suits appeared. One was tall and immaculately groomed; the other was short and disheveled. Surrounding both of them was all six of the supervillains that had been terrorizing Aphrodite City for weeks. "Well, well." The taller fox began. "I suppose we should have realized we would only be able to go for so long before someone tried to challenge our rule."

"THIS IS OUR CITY NOW COCKBLOCKERS!" The shorter one screamed.

FBI agent Gale, the apparent spokesperson for her group, shot the vigilantes a quick look, their other argument was going to wait until later, before turning to the Brothers and their troop of villains. "Umm excuse me but don't we outnumber you?" She remarked academically as both heroes and villains began drawing weapons and staring daggers at each other.

“Bah, typical superhero blather. You cannot hope to hold a candle to their vaguely-defined strength that we never truly bothered to elaborate on because it kept distracting us from the bondage boobs.” Tall waved dismissively.

<Did he really just say that?> Mentalrix telepathically projected to the rest of the heroes.

Gales was undeterred as she tightened her grip on her handgun. “You can’t win. The game is over.”

“NO, YOU’RE OVER! ATTACK!” Short bellowed.

And like that, pandemonium erupted. Five of the six villains immediately lunged to defend their claim to godhood. Crimson Screamer traded shots with Dozer while the bullet-resistant heavyweight positioned himself between Gale and the Australian thug. Kraken battled with Venom, the armored villain spewing anti-hero rhetoric as cybernetic claws clanged with alloyed gauntlets. Panzer Beast decided a rematch with Dr. Viva was in order while Hypothermia fought to fend off Okeke and Kimberly. Recognizing the threat Gonzales posed to the others, Black Vespa goaded the Latino pyrokinetic into focusing on her. Cloaking in and out, she avoid the worst of his heat while keeping him pinned behind a wrecked car.

And standing in back was Red Storm, waiting, waiting... until finally his patrons noticed he hadn’t thrown himself into the fray. “What are you waiting for you big dumb Russian? Attack!”

“No.” The bear replied.

“What, what do you mean no? You have no way to refuse.” Tall rebutted just as Short held up a flask amulet both brothers worn around their necks. Inside the crystal container was a dark amber-colored fluid, more than enough of the antidote to completely cure his family of the poison the Brothers had inflicted upon them.

Red Storm, known publicly as just Boris, merely smiled as a glass vial fell out of his coat pocket, a vial that looked identical to the ones Alexander Townes used to store his super soldier serums. “Actually... I do.”

Muscles augmented by the same serum treatment that coursed through Dr. Viva’s veins, the “communist” “supervillain” punched Short in the face, knocking him over as the bear snapped the flimsy necklace chain and pocketed part of the antidote. Both of the arch-villains of Aphrodite City turned on him, stripping him of his Red Storm powers. A pointless gesture as he had already demonstrated he had all the superpower he needed.

Punching Short squarely in the chest, he pulled his blood-soaked hand back out... with Short’s still-beating heart in his palm. In that instant, hero and villain alike froze midbattle and stared at the blood-splattered bear. “On behalf of the city and everyone in

it, this has taken too fucking long.” Boris snarled, crushing the fox’s heart in his hand like an overripe melon.

Confusion immediately broke out amongst the villains as those that received their powers from the Brothers began to feel their abilities weaken. Who was the bigger threat, the heroes or their now-mad compatriot? Wielding the dead fox’s body like a club, Boris soon answered that question for them. “Come one, come all. Red Storm, the Soviet hero of Aphrodite City is striking a homerun for all the friends of freedom!” The bear bellowed, cracking Tall’s skull while swinging Short’s body like a baseball bat. Believing he was the one with perhaps the most to lose, Panzer Beast abandoned his battle with Dr. Viva to fight the crazed Red Storm. Bones cracked as bear and bull clashed, Boris’s serum making both of them equal in strength. But the Russian-American immigrant, running on a combination of adrenaline and a raw singularity of purpose, beat back his opponent long enough to steal Tall’s half of the antidote and grab a weapon of convenience... that turned out to be Tall’s left arm.

With Short dead and Tall quickly going into shock from having his arm ripped off, the villains of Aphrodite City started to feel their powers quickly slip away. What began as a confident battle against a numerically superior foe quickly turned into a hasty, every-man-for-himself, retreat. Panzer Beast and Gonzales outright ran, too much of their fighting ability hinging on the powers they received from the Brothers. Hypothermia and Crimson Screamer, marginally proficient with modern firearms, fell back and withdrew in a fighting retreat. Not receiving any powers from the Brothers and confident in his armor’s abilities, Venom fought on, not noticing his cowardly comrades had ran for their lives until it was too late. He was alone, his only saving grace was that Red Storm and the vigilantes had also taken advantage of the confusion to disappear. In the end though it was not much of an advantage. With Black Vespa taking shots at him from above, Kraken and Dozer proved to be too much, both males working together to rip his armor apart like it was made of tin foil. As Venom fell before the four heroes, the Aphrodite City Crisis was over. Except that for the people who lived through the ordeal, it would never be over....

Aphrodite City: Epilogue

By Psion
An Aphrodite City Story
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Immediately after the events of All Things Must End...

In most superhero stories, the demise of the villain generally concludes the story. The bad guy dies or is hauled off to prison and everyone else gets to live happily ever after. If only reality was quite as neat and tidy as it was in the comics. But no, the hand that had been dealt to Aphrodite City was not something that could be easily washed away with a few happy words or a scene transition. No, the end of the crisis was merely the beginning of an arguably more difficult process, healing... Both the city and its

people had been dealt a horrific blow over four long months, removing that constant threat to their existence only allowed them to absorb the full extent of the damage. Industry was gone, infrastructure was in ruins, and the people left were either too few or too broken themselves to simply put things back together the way they were and carry on as if nothing had happened. What was once a glistening jewel of upstate New York had become little more than a shattered husk and a grim testament to the dark side of the Metabeing Age.

Faced with a situation regarded as hopeless by many of the survivors, most simply left the city. As the citizens departed in groups of all shapes and sizes, no one paid any attention to five seemingly random females that had been bound together by fate. By the time specialists within the FBI taskforce had pieced together profiles for Shield, Amp, Express Panda, Pvt. Doll, and Wrench Wench, the girls had quit their jobs, packed their bags, tied up remaining personal loose ends, and crowded their depowered bodies together in a clunky pick-up truck with an old camper trailer. It wasn't the last time the world would hear of any of them but it was the last time the world would see the Aphrodite Five as the Brothers had made them...

Gonzales, two months after the Aphrodite City Crisis...

Gonzales was running as fast as his short rodent legs could carry through the back alleys of St. Louis. He thought that by taking a detour and laying low in the city, he could avoid pursuit and wait things out until it was safe to cross the border back into Mexico. Yet as soon as he started asking around and making waves, she found him. Not Mentalrix despite this being "her" city; no this was someone else, someone new; someone vaguely female weasel/ferret person with a bulky metal chest plate, a hockey mask, a meaty sledgehammer, and a seemingly unrelenting vendetta against him.

Lost in the unfamiliar city, the Latino mouse took a wrong turn and found himself staring down a dead end. Saucer-like ears quivered as he picked up the steady "clang-clang-clang" of metal boots walking across the pavement. Damn it, she wasn't even running. It was like that bad cartoon with the frantic cat and the patient skunk between the two of them.

As the mask-clad visage of his mysterious assailant turned the corner and stared at him with an unfeeling gaze, the polished steel of her head. The masked mustelid took one measured step towards him, then another, and then swung. Cold metal slammed into his side of his head; blacking out his vision as the warmth of life began to slip away from his body. So cold, why was everything suddenly so cold...

Panzer Beast...

"And now for our latest update on the country-wide manhunt for the supervillains responsible for nearly four months of chaos in Aphrodite City, St. Louis police have found and successfully identified the body of Ernesto De Calor, also known as the pyrokinetic Gonzales, last night. A fastfood clerk on his way to work found Ernesto

early yesterday morning; a still unknown individual had apparently beaten the male to death with a sledgehammer. More on this story as it develops but for now Lucas has our seven-day forecast.” The anchorwoman reported; her audience could almost see the smile that was fighting to break through her stoic delivery.

Ralph Casing did his best to not appear worried at the news. Gonzales murdered, Crimson Screamer seemingly disappearing off the face of the earth, Venom dying in prison only for his body to vanish from the morgue, the Brothers’ old gang was falling apart like a house of cards. Red Storm seemed to have the best idea at first, disappear in Silicon City, but when the bovine bull formerly known as Panzer Beast saw what became of the ex-leader of their gang... Well in a sense Ralph shouldn’t have been surprised, the immigrant baker was always whining on and on about what they were doing so it shouldn’t have been a surprise to find that Boris had volunteered for the Peace Corps, putting his Townes-enhanced strength to work building homes, schools, and hospitals in the metabeing-scarred ruins of former North Korea. Blegh, like hell Ralph was going to leave the country to be a goodie-goodie overseas, that never got anyone anything. Besides, one good thing about losing his powers was that hardly anyone was going to recognize him as Panzer Beast...

Once upon a time before the Brothers turned him into the brutish, muscular Panzer Beast, Casing was a scrawny bull struggling to become a bodybuilder. Nothing he tried ever worked; not helping the matter was the fact that he kept getting kicked out of every gym he applied for a membership to, god females could be so damn finicky. Sexual harassment his bony ass, they wanted him or at least they would once he finally got his training regime in order... And then the Brothers appeared and offered him everything he wanted. Losing it all when Red Storm turned on the two foxes like a rat bastard was a setback but the overall experience opened his eyes to a wider world of possibilities. So what if his clothes currently hung on him like a baggy “thug” even with a belt? This was Silicon City, while most supers got their powers the “normal ways,” there was also a small black market for things like budget power armors, “surplus” super soldier serums, magic talismans, and the like. It was a Paper Shop for anyone that wanted superpowers. You just had to know where to look...

Sitting in the dismal Lucky Strike diner with only a cup of coffee for company, Ralph watched the world go by as he waited for a message that suddenly buzzed on his phone. The text was brief, all it said was a time, an address, and a confirmation for his meeting with the black market bio-technician Michael Goldstem, responsible for no less than three of the last champions of the local underground metabeing pit fights. Yep, if there anyone who could help him recapture Panzer Beast’s lost glory, it would be Michael...

For someone who used mind-numbingly advanced biological science to turn people into elite, prize-winning killing machines, Michael turned out to be a surprisingly unassuming red fox male. Average build, average height, looked to be in his early thirties, blue eyes, and short-cropped black hair; nothing about this guy would have stood

out at the local supermarket or hardware store. Which, the mentally slow bull eventually realized, must have been the point as he looked at the freelance mad scientist meeting with him in front of the old theater downtown after dark. Police were probably pulling their hair out trying to find a “perfectly average” red fox male that only looked like half a dozen different people.

“Mr. Casing?” Black asked politely, his voice as smooth as bourbon.

“Yep, you Goldstem?”

“That would be my name. So tell me Mr. Casing, what motivates you to seek out my services? Fame, fortune, or revenge?”

“All the above. Let’s just say I had it all once; power, money, and hot chicks. But then things happened and I was no longer on top because I made one mistake, I let myself depend on someone else for my powers. This time I’m going to do it right and make sure the strength is my own, which is why I want to talk to someone like you. You make guys strong.”

The fox crossed his arms and smiled. “Yep, that’s what I do alright. I just got one question I need to get out of the way though. By any chance would you happen to be one of the guys from Aphrodite City everyone’s looking for?”

Ralph hesitated for a second then returned with a question of his own. “So what if I am? My money’s still good for the down payment isn’t it? Beside, you’re the male behind Omega Predator, you should be one to talk.”

“Ah yes, Omega... God I outdid myself with him. Okay fair point, I’ll accept your offer... Panzer Beast?” Michael affirmed; his last two words as much a question as they were a statement.

“Hell yeah! Look out Silicon City, Panzer Beast is making a comeback!” Ralph replied enthusiastically, fighting to keep his voice down as he was soon led to the fox’s secret laboratory.

Goldstem’s laboratory turned out to be an old factory in the industrial district. The abandoned metal fabrication plant had been converted over into one part gymnasium and fighting arena, and one part mad scientist’s genetics laboratory. Inside what the fox referred to as the “consultation room,” posters of the geneticist’s three greatest successes. There was Bruno, an utterly enormous “warhorse” of an equine positively ripped with muscle. Jack Rabbit, an ungodly agile lapine kickboxer. And of course, the infamous Omega Predator, legendary in the most brutal arenas for how he savagely finished his opponents... by introducing them to his digestive tract. Ralph couldn’t help but feel a sudden chill as he stared at the picture of the fat porcine brute, the gruesome glutton

staring back at him with a hungry glint. Guess it was true what they said, pigs would eat their own mothers if given half a chance.

“Changing your mind about Omega Predator are we?” Goldstem asked with a sly smirk.

“What? Oh no, fuck that fatty. Just that... is he just as freaky in person?”

“Surprisingly no. He’s actually quite nice outside of the ring, likes pets, chess, and his husband... the latter being the cause of much disappointment in a pair of new fans he picked up over the last few months. But enough about him, what about the other two? Do you want to be swift like Jack, strong like Bruno, or perhaps we could-”

“Bruno, Bruno all the way. I mean just look at those guns. When I was Panzer Beast back in Aphrodite City, I wasn’t even half as ripped as that awesome monster and I still tore vault doors off their hinges when I was robbing banks. I can’t imagine how strong he must be. To say nothing about what a hit with the ladies he must be with that damn male cannon.” Ralph replied, becoming increasingly laidback with a fellow he had only just met.

“Bruno once benched well over a thousand pounds... and broke the damn weight machine in the process. So even I have no idea how strong he really is.” Mike replied nonchalantly. His eyebrow twitched ever so slightly when the topic of Aphrodite City came up but the movement was so minute the other male thought he was imagining things. “I must admit it’s nice when the client wants to work with a template, you would be my fifth customer in the last two months to want a standardized inject plan.” He mused idly as the telephone on his desk rang. His eyes went wide with joy as he recognized the number on the caller ID.

“Sorry, I have to take this.” He apologized before picking up the phone. “Hey there! Still resting up from your last big fight? No, good because you will not believe who I have here in my office right now. Yep, he’s here right now, your favorite idol. I don’t know, I’ll ask him.” He chatted idly before cuffing the phone and turning back to Ralph. “It’s one of my previous clients, he’s a former Hedonist that always looked up to you, wanted me to make him as strong as you were. He wants to meet with you and get your autograph. Is that alright with you?”

Flattered to the point where his ego trumped his common sense, Ralph agreed wholeheartedly. The two then went back to discussing his augmentation schedule, possible complications, as well as business terms. The bull only half listened to what the freelance bio-technician was saying, all that mattered to him was that not only was he going to get his strength back, but he was going to end up even stronger than he was before. This was great, this was going to be so awesome that the excitement had almost made him forget that he was supposed to meet a fan before he left. Fortunately, Goldstem seemed more than happy to politely remind him, even lead him out into the arena where new gladiators would test themselves against the trainer in sparring bouts.

Standing in the bleachers above the fighting pit, set almost a full story below the seats, Casing looked in front of him for the mysterious fanboy. He was so intent on looking forward, he didn't see Michael Goldstem, fight trainer and bio-technician without peer, run up and shoved him into the fighting pit below...

The bony redheaded bovine woke up with a minor headache, rising up to find himself in a steel cage in one corner of Goldstem's arena. Standing right outside of the metal pen, blocking the only exit that he could see, was a large, blond Afghan hound that gave the captive bull an unsettling sense of déjà vu. Standing at a mind-numbing six-foot-five with a plump, thunder-thigh figure squeezed into a set of biker's leathers and weighing in at around four hundred pounds if he had to take a guess, his captor watched him intently with a pair of familiar blue eyes. He remembered staring into those eyes once... when they were full of fear. From a wrought metal chair above them, Goldstem watched with rapt interest.

"Hey Mikey, what gives? I thought there was supposed to be a fan that wanted an autograph." The bull asked nervously, taking a step back and looking frantically for a way out of the fighting pit he had been thrown in.

"Why Ralphy, I'm giving you exactly what you wanted, a chance to be alone with Amp and get into her pants. Don't you still recognize her? Course, she goes by the name Valkyria now. As for the Hedonist, well there was none, I just needed an excuse to get you to stick around long enough for Valkyria to get here." The geneticist replied nonchalantly from his perch above the arena, like it should have been obvious what was going on.

"What did you do to her? Why are you doing this?" Casing shouted as Goldstem's hand hovered dangerously close to the lever that controlled the cage that kept him separate from Valkyria, the leather-clad female continuing to eye him like an animal at the zoo before feeding time.

"Oh you should have a rough idea what I did to her and why. Silicon City may be my stomping grounds but I planned on moving to Aphrodite City to retire from this business, even sent my wife and son ahead of me... about a week before your bastard benefactors made their debut. My family is still alive, thank God, but what they went through... I should have been there. So, I paid some people who make it their business to find things to quietly find out what happened to the Aphrodite Five." The fox began, his expression growing dark and brooding before a cruel smile crossed his lips and he continued with his spiel.

"When I finally encountered the girls formerly known as Amp, Express Panda, Shield, and Private Doll, we both had needs to fill. They needed to be made stronger to face a world they could no longer close their eyes to, I needed to do something to help me sleep better at night. I get my beauty rest knowing that I took four of your favorite Spandex Barbies and gave them teeth. As for Valkyria in particular... well, funny that we discussed Omega Predator, when I heard what repeatedly happened to this poor girl I

figured that she deserved the best and Omega IS my masterpiece, even his husband Bruno thinks so. Heh... oh the challenge it was to weight-train her and teach her to fight. You would think that after you did such an excellent job making her batshit crazy she would be all for turning into a vorephilic sumo wrestler or something. But no, she was horribly squeamish when the conversation turned to Omega's infamous appetite. Fortunately your loser friend, the Scarlet Shriek or whatever his name was, did a good job jumpstarting the fire in her belly last night. He's another one that got his wish to get into her pants... and look how marvelously she fills them out now. But enough chitchat. Good-bye Ralph, bon appetite Valkyria." Michael concluded with a little wave as he gave the lever by his side a good yank.

Oiled gears lifted the gate up to point where the ravenous Afghan hound could squeeze in to get at her archnemesis. Ralph turned and tried to dodge, but Sonya Winters made sure to keep her huge, ponderous figure between her opponent and the open gateway. Azure eyes glistened with a mad mix of anger and hunger, this was her vengeance and she was not going to be denied.

Once she had him cornered, the female warrior elbowed him in the ribs. Bones cracked as the scrawny bull was thrown back against the wall. Ralph floundered in the melee that ensued, even when he was outmatched as Panzer Beast the odds were never stacked this badly against him. The towering mountain of a vengeful canine female beat on him like a cheap microwave. Knee bash to the crotch, haymaker to the back of the head, then hoisting the bull up by his collar just to punch him in the face repeatedly. At some point the blows shifted from his face to his lower abdomen, sending sharp jolts of pain through his liver and pancreas, before she threw him against the concrete wall and knelt down to pick him up again.

Pushing his tormentor away and staggering back, Ralph did his best to get into a fighting stance just as Goldstem decided it would be really funny if there were some appropriate music playing in the background. Soon the arena started to echo with the sound of the Mortal Kombat soundtrack as bull and canine squared off and got ready to begin again. This time Casing was determined to get a few good attacks in... and might as well have been hitting her with a feather duster for all it was doing him. Blows to the head were either swatted aside or shrugged off by a woman with pure rage flowing through her veins, punches and kicks to the gut discovered just enough belly fat to absorb the kinetic impact. Meanwhile she kept beating him with those beefy arms of hers; landing blows on both his skull and abdomen that hurt like he was hit by a truck.

Coughing blood and fighting through the sharp, throbbing pain of having his head beaten like a drum, the male bovine looked up at his opponent and was disheartened to find that she was barely winded. Indeed, if he didn't know better he'd have said she looked almost bored... and disappointed to discover Ralph wasn't all he was cracked up to be without his powers. From his cobbled-together throne above the arena, Michael Goldstem uttered the only two words anyone said once the fists started flying, "Finish him!"

Bull rushing and pinning her prey against the arena wall, Sonya slammed her fists down towards his skull and broke both of his horns clean off. As the bony protrusions clattered on the floor like fine china, the canine lifted her meal above her head. Stretching her mouth wide like some kind of mutant python, the Afghan hound proceeded to swallow her defeated foe feet first. Bruised, battered, and beaten, Ralph Casing's resistance was as weak as it was short-lived but Valkyria was determined to take her time, savoring every second he rubbed against her tongue and making a big show of letting her meal slowly slide down into her greedy gullet. From his perch above, Mike smiled as he recorded the final moments of the fight on a camcorder. Val would want this saved for posterity and to show her friends the foul evil imprisoned within her girth. By the time she began to close her mouth around his head and consign him to oblivion with one last gulp, Ralph had just enough strength to realize the poetic justice of his fate. He was always fighting to get into Amp's pants, now he was about to become a permanent resident...

As the bull turned into a squirming bulge inside the canine's gut, Valkyria declared victory with a loud belch and a proud belly slap. Finally, it was over. The nightmare was cornered, beaten, and sentenced to a leisurely digestion. Come Friday night's battle of the bands he would be gone, a casualty of that old adage "a moment on the lips, a lifetime on the hips." Until then she was going to just kick back and let her stomach pound him into submission. Thanking Michael for his help, the Afghan hound headed home to her studio apartment in Silicon City with her bloated belly riding up her long-suffering t-shirt.

Home in Silicon City wasn't much, especially not on a club musician's pay, but it had everything she needed. A working TV, small bathroom, small kitchen, and most of the remaining space given over to a Californian King mattress and reinforced steel frame, her one true indulgence. Laying down and looking not unlike a beached whale, the rising dome of her belly towering above her like a small mountain, Sonya smiled and rested a hand on her groaning stomach and listened to Ralph's occasional, gradually weakening struggles in between the labored sounds of digestion.

Stripping off her clothes and shifting her position to better watch television while she lazed about like a couch potato in her underwear, the Afghan hound picked up her remote and turned on the news. Time to see if there were any new updates to the manhunt before she channel surfed and lost herself in trash television.

"Now for the latest on the Aphrodite manhunt. The SCPD are confirming initial sightings of Ralph 'Panzer Beast' Casing, Jonathan 'Crimson Screamer' McQuinn, and Alexander 'Hypothermia' Sharps. As of right now, local authorities are collaborating with members of the FBI and DSA but I am told there have been no further sightings of Casing or McQuinn. Police are still investigating reports that Sharps is in the area."

"Mmmmmmm." Sonya contemplated darkly with a lick of her lips as she gave her belly a quick slap. The mound quivered in protest, was that movement just basic inertia or was the bull still alive in there in spite of dwindling oxygen and a harsh acid bath?

The canine found that ultimately she didn't care, Winters was more interested in debating whether she should go out on the hunt one more time to try and complete the set or let someone else have the pleasure.

Shaking her head, the engorged musician decided to go to sleep and let someone else have the glory of slaying the "Last Villain of Aphrodite City." She had already proved she could finally pull her own weight, two meatheads down wasn't anything to sneer at especially given how damn hard to kill they used to be. Arm draped lazily over her slowly shrinking abdomen, Sonya fell into a wonderful dream where she was eating the world's largest hamburger....

Meanwhile, the Scarlet Countess ...

He was late, the turkey hen concluded with a shake of her head. Ever since the loss of her palace in Aphrodite City, the Scarlet Countess had been doing her best to lay low and try to slowly rebuild her empire. At first she thought her chance encounter with the Canadian mercenary Hypothermia was an incredible stroke of luck. Eventually she realized the snow leopard was too unstable to be reliable. Not to mention all the attention that still surrounded him, associating herself with him was probably going to turn into a mistake.

After waiting another ten minutes for him in the alley they had agreed to meet in, the brown-feathered turkey hen returned back to her new pleasure palace. It was hardly the grand opulence she had back in Aphrodite City, a refurbished Victorian home still undergoing renovations in the city's historical district, but all great empires had to start somewhere. Walking in and nodding approvingly to her surviving lieutenant as the chicken hen "saw" to new acquisitions in the kitchen, the two plump slavers talked between themselves for a moment, discussing plans for expanding their Silicon City operations before the Countess retired to her room for the night.

Walking into her lavish bedroom, a strong arm quietly shut the sturdy oaken door behind her as the concealed intruder pressed something sharp and metallic up against the avian's throat. "Scream and I kill you." A vaguely familiar voice threatened ominously.

Turning slowly, the Scarlet Countess found herself squeezed belly to belly with a female Doberman with her black hair styled in a sharp bob and clad in an unfamiliar costume. There was only one person it could be but at the same time...

"Shield?" The round villain asked softly as the fallen Aphrodite City heroine continued to glare at her with a look that sent chills down the hen's spine. It wasn't just hatred, there was something else in there. Hunger? Psychotic insanity? Regardless, it was obvious the canine bitch had something broken inside. Meaning...

"What did you do to Hypothermia?"

The former cop belched and smiled wickedly. “It was hard being the one the others looked up to for support.” She began absently. “Between having my own demons thanks to people like you and fighting to keep the others from falling apart. I just couldn’t take the idea of any of you escaping to cause trouble anyone else. So I started hunting...”

The Countess’s blood ran cold as she finally felt something squirm helplessly inside Shield’s swollen abdomen. For a brief moment, she could just make out the impression of a feline face pressed against the canine’s stretched gut. Then Shield’s stomach audibly churned and the image faded, but not before a muffled cry for help could be heard from within the distended intruder.

“I started hunting... and found I worked up quite an appetite in the process. Guess I can’t fault Goldstem for making me into a monster; he only gave me what I wanted. And all I wanted was to be the thing that destroyed you and the others utterly.” She explained with a cruel grin, licking her prey’s feathered cheek with a predatory hunger.

The Countess opened her mouth in a short-lived attempt to scream. An ultimately futile gesture as her attacker promptly stabbed her twice in the chest and stretched her canine jaw over the avian’s head, first stab was with the knife that was held against her throat then with a sharp-pronged implement the turkey’s mind didn’t immediately register until her blackened surroundings became slimy... Fork, she had just been stabbed with a knife and fork on her way down into a lunatic ex-heroine’s seemingly bottomless gullet.

Deborah Autumns smiled as the slaver finished sliding down into the oblivion of her gut. Kidnapping people off the streets... selling them like livestock... feeling the Countess succumb to the biological forces of digestion was satisfying for more reasons beyond simple sustenance. As her belly happily groaned and churned, the blimp-like Doberman licked her lips and smiled as she imagined her foe writhing in pain, fighting for breath, until either suffocation or harsh stomach acids claimed the villainous hen. Her nose twitched with the scent of chicken as the Countess’s loyal henchwoman came upstairs after forcing the thralls into the basement for the night, completely unaware of the lurking danger. The sound of heavy footfalls was music to Deborah’s ears, a nice fat hen for a third course and her without a deep fryer. Oh well, time to improvise....

The SCPD had investigated many cases since the city’s founding but this was definitely one of the more unusual ones. Typically when they stumble upon a flesh peddler’s lair, the captives are the ones missing. In this case however, the owner of the house and her “secretary” were nowhere to be found. Once they were freed from the basement; the prisoners all described hearing a struggle upstairs, the chicken hen screaming for mercy from some unidentified attacker, then something heavy stomping across the floor on its way out the backdoor. Examining the upstairs revealed a kitchen in turmoil and a back door that looked as if it had something far too large for its meager dimensions forcibly smashed through it.

Standing in the middle of the mess in the kitchen, the SCPD detective did his best to try and make sense of the scene. If he was following the series of events correctly, the fight upstairs had come down into the kitchen. The slaver's assistant had been dragged down, her head beaten against the polished granite countertop a few times judging by the traces of blood on the counter edge, and then things started becoming muddled. A massive stewpot, presumably used to cook some kind of gruel for the slaves, had been put on the stove. The faint scent of poultry broth lingering in the pot brought more questions than answers, what assailant found time in the middle of a beating to start cooking? Something was very wrong here and the detective wasn't sure what...

Waddling to the home of someone she knew wouldn't turn her away; an almost impossibly "pregnant" Deborah couldn't help but smile as she rested a hand against her enormous belly. Haru was back home in Japan, she wasn't exactly 'well' but she was finding a peace of sorts as a masked street avenger. Samantha Summers was a similar story, after having Goldstem augment her body and commissioning a suit of power armor from Rachel, the she-bear took off to go look for trouble and lose herself in visiting some senseless violence upon the kind of people the Brothers would look up to. Every so often she would send the others a post card from places like Mexico, Central Africa, and parts of Asia.

As for their old foes, if it weren't truly over now, it would be soon. Gonzales was murdered in a back alley in St. Louis, possibly by Rachel, Venom was stabbed to death in prison, Red Storm had been left to his own devices after the girls found out he had volunteered for the Peace Corps, Hypothermia and the Countess were soon going to be turned into padding for the mother of all doughnut bellies, all that was left was Panzer Beast and the Crimson Screamer. Time to check on Sonya Winters and see if there was a story there.

Slowly walking through the hallways of Sonya's apartment building, the Doberman stopped in front the other canine's studio flat and knocked on the door. At first there was no answer but as Autumn knocked a second time, someone audibly groaned from within. "Alright, I'm coming. I'm coming." Sonya grumbled as the sound of many chains and locks being undone echoed from within the sturdy barrier.

Seeing who it was at the door, the Afghan hound's mood immediately changed. Her face promptly shifted from grumpy that she had been abruptly awakened to genuinely happy to see Debby before settling on embarrassed as she eyed her guest's battleship proportions before looking down at her own. Neither of them had to say anything, they both knew the other had privately asked for something "special" from Goldstem in addition the augmentations they openly shared with Samantha and Haru.

The rotund rocker stepped back a few feet to let her friend squeeze through the apartment door, the other zeppelin-like female bumping the door shut then reaching behind her to redo the locks as both canines looked at one another. Not a word was

exchanged between them at first; the two survivors of Aphrodite City were both perfectly content to just stand and take in each other's scent. Panzer Beast and Crimson Screamer's scents filled the room as the violent chemical reactions within Sonya's stomach forced a bubble of gas out of her mouth in a sinister-sounding belch. And like a macabre yawn, smelling the half-digested remains of the Afghan Hound's two reoccurring nightmares incited a similar reaction in Deborah, unleashing a breath that stank with the scents of feline, turkey, and chicken.

The Doberman smiled sinisterly as they finished soaking in the aroma of each other's half-digested meal. "I guess this means it's finally over." She declared, finding the words didn't give her quite as much comfort as she thought they would. Sonya's face fell as well, both females clearly thinking the same thing but trying hard to not let it show. For a moment neither spoke. Then, as their stomachs briefly groaned in stereo, the Afghan hound gestured to her bed with a wry grin. Deborah smiled sheepishly and nodded; joining the other female for an intimate night curled up against one another, beginning the slow process of turning seven into two. There would be plenty of time to figure out what to do with their lives in the weeks to come... and if nothing else they had both proven to be quite gluttonous when it came to taking care of vermin of the more sapient variety.

Wrench Wench...

The TIG welder buzzed like an angry insect as the white-furred mink toiled away in her new workshop in one of the rougher parts of Silicon City, fusing shaped pieces of metal together in her latest project. One would think a female living by herself in a neighborhood with a higher than average instance of break-ins and robberies wouldn't be a particularly intelligent move but Rachel Arsenel found that she couldn't function any other way anymore. Besides, after the first few failed assaults on her person, she had started to acquire a reputation as someone that tended to only call 911 when her attacker needs an ambulance.

Since Aphrodite City, things had changed for the raven-haired mink mechanic. Try as she might, she could not escape the nightmares. Flashbacks to close calls, desperate battles, and victories snatched away at the last second by malicious man-children with god-like powers. Even with the Brothers destroyed and the villains that served them slain... some days it was a fight to keep from pulling the blankets over her head and pretend the world outside her window didn't exist.

Mentalrix was a great help in introducing Rachel to the local vigilante community, a group of people who may not understand what was going through the mink's head but provided an unquenchable need for her technical expertise that helped keep her busy. And helped keep her in more ideas than she could possibly find the materials for. Such as her latest project...

Pausing long enough to scarf down her fourth donut in that hour, oh how hard she had fallen into that bad habit, Arsenel took a weighted step back to appreciate her

masterpiece. It seemed like ages ago she tried making a suit of power armor to try and stop the evil plaguing Aphrodite City. Now, here in Silicon City, she decided to try again. Unlike Aphrodite City, there was enough of an active high-tech industry here that she had no trouble finding appropriate parts for her latest creation... Fix-It.

Fix-It was a large, heavy-duty exoskeleton, built not unlike her creator after she discovered the Dough Girls and how easily their pastries made her troubles briefly go away when chased down with a nice bottle of scotch. Designed after a lot of thinking about what happened in Aphrodite City, Fix-It was effectively a civil engineering suit. While it had things that could be used as weapons and certainly had the strength to use her old Wrench Wench hammer, it was meant to address something that always weighed heavily on her mind; a lot of people in Aphrodite City died from simple overexposure to the cold. Not gang violence or supervillain attacks, just simple cases of getting too goddamn cold because they had no heat or even basic shelter after their homes had been turned into rubble. Ironical when she thought about it, of all the things she had trouble letting go of, it was the time she found someone that had frozen to death in Aphrodite City on her watch....

Stanley Dewpond...

Stanley Dewpond tapped his fingers against the oaken chair as he sat down for his appointment with the court appointed therapist. A purse-snatcher, of all the things it had to be, it was one little punk stealing something that didn't belong to him bellyaching when because the brown bear had broken his nose. It should have been an open-shut case but no, someone saw an opportunity to push an agenda. Next thing he knew the incident had turned into "disturbed survivor of Aphrodite City almost goes postal." Stanley silently swore right there, if he ever found out who started this waste of time, he'd show them what it REALLY meant to go postal.

Which is why he was here, at the Lakeview Home for the Disturbed, having a meeting with the psychiatrist Dr. Honeycomb. To say he was surprised to see a short Shetland mare walk in when he was expecting another bear was an understatement.

"Ah good, that is the normal first reaction when people see me. Mr. Dewpond?" The petite equine asked with a friendly smile.

"Hello Dr. Honeycomb, you'll forgive me if I don't say what a pleasure this is." The bear deadpanned.

"Humorless, frustrated, probably wondering if I will ever stop monologuing my observations. Sounds perfectly reasonable so far." Honeycomb mused as she took a seat across from Stanley. "So, why do you think you're here?"

"Because I caught a little punk trying to take something that doesn't belong to him and broke his nose because he wouldn't stop struggling."

“Hmmm, perhaps a bit more violent then necessary but hardly inefficient. Why do you think this was a problem?”

“Because someone believes I’m a crazy lunatic after surviving what happened in Aphrodite City... stupid idiots, I just want to be left alone with my wife and my restaurant. Is that crazy?”

“No it’s not. But I’m curious. The plaintiff referred to your service in Igoroth as to why you are unstable, not what happened in Aphrodite City. Why is it you focus on Aphrodite City and not Igoroth? To be fair, both of them were a particularly nasty business in their own ways.”

Stanley scowled in contemplation for a moment. “I guess with Igoroth I was trained to expect it or at least could rationalize it. Either way, it’s not like I saw much of it, spent most of my time cooking in an aid station kitchen while I was there.”

“And yet in an aid station you would see wounded civilians arriving for medical attention or for the first hot meal they had in weeks. You made comfort food for people who needed all the comforting they could get. I also read the part about where you and your fellows in the 41st Quartermasters posted at Aid Station Zulu fought off a large mob of...” She doubled checked her notes. “Mutant zombies?”

“Yeah, but that was different.”

“How so? Sounds pretty traumatic to me, genetically engineered horrors clamoring to break through the perimeter fence and none of you had the support weapons that could have easily wiped them all out.”

“Because I guess it’s easy to buy into the whole flag-waving ‘American paladin’ spiel when your enemy really does act like Satan’s son. That’s how I coped with it, because not only were we told that the Blackstone Syndicate was evil, they really WERE evil and we were keeping them from exporting their crap back home.”

“So you rationalized it, better over there then strike here with a vengeance. Which in turn leads to what bothered you about Aphrodite City isn’t it? Seeing the cruelty in Igoroth occurring in the States with no help from Blackstone? Sadly, cruelty is everywhere Mr. Dewpond.”

Stanley wordlessly nodded in agreement, the wheels quietly turning in his head. Cruelty is everywhere. So will he and the other heroes of Aphrodite City then...

Rik-Tah Fortress City 21, overlooking the frigid Pennsylvanian wastes...

In one of many fortresses overlooking the latest obstinate front resisting the expansion of their multi-dimensional empire, the Rik-Tah managed an army of robots and alien mercenaries to solidify their conquest of this new world, soldiers of fortune

ranging from “comic book-like” supervillains and amoral cyberfantasy adventurers to techno-organic dragons and evil wizards wielding digital sorcery. The human rebels had proven to be particularly stubborn on this world; possessing a particular talent for setting even the most carefully laid plans wildly awry. Such a problem required the Rik-Tah consider talent of all sorts including some they wouldn’t otherwise... Hence the latest additions currently coming out of the stronghold’s cloning laboratory.

Even inside his sensory depravation tank, the human slave telepath could still see him as the bat anthro was finally decanted from The Vats. Confused, likely violently recalling the final moments of his old body, his senses starting to return to him as he lay naked on the floor covered in embryonic slime; Venom, the hero-hunting technosavant. The first and hopefully the last of the Aphrodite City scum to cheat death. The others could be brought back as well, but the Rik-Tah overseers in charge of assessing the thugs that participated in that clusterfuck were unsure if the rest of them could be used for anything other than “tactically disposable assets” aka “meat shields.”

Brandon White, the human psychic trapped in the depravation tank, could think of a few uses for assholes of Aphrodite City’s caliber, most of those things involving giving them a cloned body with a sex change and a pair of double-D’s before shoving them out to get a job as a go-go dancer. Still, at least the decision to resurrect the likes of Panzer Beast or Crimson Screamer hadn’t been finalized, seeing Venom come out of the cloning vats was bad enough. An obsessed anarchist of some sorts, spewing anti-superhero gibberish that frankly made no sense to Brandon, and unfortunately a genius with technology; the fruit bat was an exceptionally dangerous fruitcake. The only two things really going against him besides his overinflated ego were his dependence on technology and his power armor, two things that prompted the psychic to check his files and... yep, default marching orders were to use Venom as a distraction to keep anti-armor and tech-warfare groups away from more valuable targets. Reading those directions, a smile crossed Brandon’s lips. Perhaps allowing the villains of Aphrodite City to cheat death might be not so bad after all...