

## The New Dawn

*Judah Lee, 11*

The woman sits alone, drinking water. The TV is blaring. The room is messy to say the least. The couch is littered with food wrappers, and the living room smells of Cheetos. The woman hears a knock on the door. She goes to answer the door, and a black silhouette awaits her. She screams as the man walks into the light. Her body hits the floor. The mystery is only beginning. Far away from her, a man's phone begins to ring. He changes into his suit. It's a part of his life, but this announcement is of some concern. He wears his black and white tuxedo, it's his calling card. He rises above the city and glides, admiring the yellow lights and nearly barfs when he zooms through a puff of smoke. He floats back down to earth to the woman's average house being investigated by police. He walks in, and nobody stops him. He investigates her body; bullet holes are apparent. "This doesn't make any sense," the man says.

"Tell me about it," a man says from the shadows. His face is barely concealed, only slightly blocking off his mouth. "How can someone who passes through walls get killed by a bullet?" The man in black and red shakes his head.

"Whoever it was, they were careful," the man in black says, examining the floor where the bullets would have gone if the person was normal.

"Maybe she was off guard?" The man from the shadows asks. The man in black shakes his head.

"No, she was one of the best," the man in black states, "maybe someone killed her another way? Then he shot the bullets through her to make it look regular." The man in black ponders.

"Nobody knows she's one of us, right?" The man from the shadows says.

"Her identity's secret," the man in black replies, "but whoever killed her knew it was her." The man in black continues.

The man in black heads back to his apartment and turns on the news. It's 2022 and the world is depressing, but nothing compares to the death of the woman. "Today, the Oracles announced the death of teammate Cougar. She had the ability to pass through walls and was the team's only female hero. Mr. Bullet released this statement." A clip rolls of the man in the shadow reading a statement.

"Cougar was a good friend. Not only that but was she a good person. She lived her life trying to save every person. She felt that with our gifts, we should all do the same. She may not have led the team, but she was one hundred percent the heart of The Oracles. May her heart rest in peace. Thank you." Mr. Bullet says, quietly crying.

"What does this mean for the Oracles? After this," the blonde woman says as hopeful music plays. The man in black looks outside his window, waiting. Suddenly, the sky becomes a light, and the bright "O" symbol displays like a shadow puppet show. He opens the window to his balcony and jumps, letting adrenaline get to him like a skydiver. He boosts himself back up into the air at the last second. There stand his 3 teammates: Nightman, in his black cloak, with a mask that covered his entire face, Mr. Bullet, his mustache waving in the midnight wind, and Roboman, his grey and yellow metallic body shimmering despite the darkness. The man in black steps down back on to earth.

"Oracles, what do we do?" The man in black asks. They eye each other carefully.

"I don't know Angelman," Nightman says, turning off the bright light. The meeting is consumed by darkness.

"I think someone doesn't like us anymore," Angelman says, "In 2020, everyone had to wear masks, not just us, and the police were allowed to function, and we weren't."

"So?" Roboman asks. Angelman turns to the sky, admiring the stars.

"Ever since the end of lockdown, crime numbers have gone down," Angelman says, veering to the bottom of the building, "but whenever we stop something big, crime numbers go drastically up."

"But we knew that walking in. That the numbers can lie," Mr. Bullet says, fiddling with his pistol.

"I guess there's one thing we should do." Roboman says. "Go to her funeral."

Five days later, Angelman is dressed in his black suit, takes no cape, and closes his door solemnly. He doesn't feel like flying today, so he walks. The parade isn't hard to miss. Journalists crowd the area, and

children clutch to their mothers. The sky is white, and the clouds crowd the sky, almost like the crowd for the funeral. Angelman remembers the group's forming in 2014, how Cougar brought them together, made them put aside their differences, and work for a brighter tomorrow. Angelman remembers how Cougar led them against the gangs that used to flood the streets. They hunted in the night, but also forged a trust with the people in the day. The fights they had were legendary, and their reputation even taller. But now without that link that bonded them together, would the Oracles fall apart like a crumbly cookie?

\*\*\*\*\* Continuation Begins Here \*\*\*\*\*

Angelman takes his place with the rest of them, carrying the brown coffin with her Cougar insignia scratched on to the well carved wood. Bagpipes begin playing, and they march. Birds chirp, and, to them, all is right. But to the remaining members of the Oracles, their hearts were shattered. After some time, they set down the coffin, and soldiers fire gunshots. Angelman goes up to speak some words, his heart heavy. "Cougar united us. Not just us Oracles, but us people. We have a duty to keep the streets clean. She will not die in vain; her legacy will be clean streets. No crime and no hate. That's what she lived for, and that's what she died for. Thank you," Angelman says. There're a few claps from the crowd.

"Beautiful," says Nightman into Angelman's ear. Angelman nods, trying to keep back his subtle tears. Another person goes up to speak, and Angelman wipes his face and listens intently. But as the woman begins to speak, a boom interrupts her like a kid when he wants something from his mother. A window shatters as a projectile flies like a fire powered bird. It hits the street as the crowd is blown back, and some are wiped out.

"Roboman, crowd control," Angelman yells as Roboman flies off with his jet pack shooting back energy. "Nightman, investigate the explosion," Angelman tells the cloaked hero. "Mr. Bullet, with me," Angelman tells him, as they enter the building of the weapon's origin. They run up the steps, breaking into the building on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor.

"Put your hands up," Mr. Bullet says, levitating the bullet. It accompanies him and they run through the apartment, finally finding the man. Mr. Bullet beats Angelman to the man. "Who are you?" He turns around the body and shouts. "Oh my god!" Mr. Bullet says, his eyes wide in shock like he was trying to stretch his skin like plastic wrap. The body was no body, but rather a skeleton of sorts. Out of nowhere, the eye sockets light up in red, and its fists turn into sharp spikes as Mr. Bullet and the robot spar. Mr. Bullet's floating piece of ammunition slices right through the skeleton's head. "Yes," Mr. Bullet says, pleased with himself. But the skeleton repairs itself like an orange peel in reverse. Angelman cuts in, punching the metallic skeleton. He flips it on to the ground repeatedly.

"I need to find the computer this thing is using," Angelman shouts while struggling to maneuver around the stabbing skeleton. "Is it on this thing's chest?" he asks. He feels around, and the skeleton gashes his chest. Angelman smashes him into the wall, able to use the momentum to rip the monstrosity's arm off.

"Battle lost, activating self-destruct." The robotic voice says, a beeping noise becoming more apparent.

"Did you get everyone out?" Angelman asks Mr. Bullet. Mr. Bullet simply shakes his head. They run down the corridor, turning on the fire alarm as the final stragglers from the building attempt to escape the apartment tombstone. Mr. Bullet ushers them out as Angelman flies through the ceiling and underneath him. The building collapses into dust. People scream, shout, cry, or all of them at the same time. Police arrive at the scene. Angelman sits down, and people move past them, crowding the area. Angelman holds part of the robotic arm in his hands. He sets it into his pocket. Roboman and Nightman await them.

"What happened up there?" Nightman asks. Mr. Bullet gave him the answer.

"There was a robot. It could repair itself. It was hard to destroy, and in the end, it destroyed itself," Mr. Bullet says, "I don't know what it was."

"But we can figure it out," Angelman says, holding out the metal arm. Nightman nods as Angelman hands it to him. "Let's go," Angelman flies up with Roboman, and Nightman and Mr. Bullet are left on the ground.

“Oh, come on, you’re going to make us walk?” Mr. Bullet jokes as they begin running. Soon, they all arrive at the grey warehouse they call base. They walk in, and Nightman is already going to town. He’s looking at every part of it closely, running computer programs and writing things down. Angelman is punching Roboman. Everyone’s doing something. Mr. Bullet floats his bullet, but surprisingly, it is difficult. He struggles to lead the projectile around a short distance like his head.

“Something’s wrong with my powers,” Mr. Bullet says, “They’re not as strong.” He continues trying to spin the bullet in midair, something he can usually do so easily. His muscles strain under the pain of using his abilities. But powers never weaken, they usually grow stronger. It is like a never-ending fountain: you take one sip, two gulps take its place. It was the world’s only never-ending resource, until today.

“I think I know why,” Nightman says, examining the metallic arm, “This metal, is the same metal they used to kill Cougar.” Roboman and Angelman stop sparring as they come towards Nightman

“That’s quite the breakthrough,” Roboman states robotically as his name suggests.

“The metal’s US government made and is experimental,” Nightman says. He continues in a darker tone, “And it can weaken superheroes.”

“What?” Angelman says, freaking out on the shocking announcement, “That’s impossible.” Angelman had never heard of such a property.

“I think that the U.S. government doesn’t like us anymore,” Mr. Bullet says grimly. Angelman remembers back to a time where they were worshipped like god, a time where they even got government funding. Now the funding died like small businesses, like communities. The government claimed it wanted to recover, but they were spending money like this. For foolish gimmicks for people on their side?

“We have to do something we haven’t done in a long time,” Angelman says, looking into the distance, remembering the uncomfortable experience of last time.

“And what is that?” Mr. Bullet asks, rolling his eyes sarcastically.

“An interview,” Angelman says, equally sarcastic, but also speaking the truth. Roboman groans as he walks off to take his mind off the public torture. Angelman also remembers the last awkward moment; he stuttered live, Roboman made the host angry, Cougar was fiddling with a fidget spinner behind her back, and Mr. Bullet, well okay he didn’t do anything, but he still didn’t like the experience. All of them loathed that they lived in the public eye, every hero more over-worshipped, until now. Now they were hated. Now the only thing people associate them with were the costumed heroes who blew up a building. 2 days later, they were sitting in seats paired by tables each with a cup of water. They had taken off their costumes. Everyone knew who they were at this point. Each came well dressed. They wanted to make a good impression. The man sits, his cup of coffee and set of questions ready.

“Welcome to You Know These Guys. My name is Dave Veterman. Today’s special guests are The Oracles.” The studio audience is told to cheer, and the four had their practiced grins. They had to have them. “Can you introduce yourselves and show off your powers.” Angelman goes first, taking a deep breath.

“My name is Angelman, and I can fly,” he levitates like a ghost to the oohs of the crowd.

“I’m Mr. Bullet and I can float bullets,” Mr. Bullet lazily takes several from his pack and makes a halo, to the once again engineered oohs and aahs. They fly back into his pouch and Roboman begins.

“I am Roboman. I can do several things with my body,” he turns his hands into a blade and into a machine gun, he turns his foot into a bird, and his chest into a cannon.

“I’m Nightman. I can do this,” he instantly creates dark circle sections, and they darken the room. He turns the lights back on and turns the sections into 2 sharps swords.

“Now the question on everyone’s mind: what happened at the funeral?” Dave begins. Mr. Bullet answers his question.

“Dave, we found a robot, and he was responsible,” he begins, “It was a metallic skeleton, and it could repair itself until we destroyed the computer. Then it blew itself up.”

“But Mr. Bullet, how do we trust you? Society went on fine without you for a year,” Dave says.

“Yeah, because there was no society,” Mr. Bullet says, “COVID 19 stopped all efforts to run society.”

“No, but afterwards we had record breaking crime numbers. They were lower than ever before,” Dave says.

"Society was just starting again," Nightman says, "Are you asking whether or not we think we're effective?" *Oh no*, Angelman thought, *Here we go*.

"No, Nightman I'm asking you to tell your story about those numbers," Dave asks cautiously.

"Those numbers are showing how badly COVID 19 hurt every aspect of life, even crime," Nightman says.

"Those numbers mean that crime is so low, it will come back," Mr. Bullet says, "We know that's how crime works. It heals."

"No, in 2019 we had super high crime rates. That's the year after your organization's founding," Dave states. Angelman sips his water carefully, analyzing every word he's saying. "And now that you're back in public again, we get a terrorist attack," Dave continues.

"You're comparing two unrelated factors," Angelman says, "It's like saying that an increased amount of selling of oranges made the increase of clocks bought."

"But these 2 items are related," Dave states, "You fight crime, and we're talking about crime." 😞

"Well, we fight fires as well, why don't those go up?" Roboman says, "The relationship should work there as well." Dave sips his coffee.

"No, fires are different from crime," Dave says, emphasizing each word, barely holding back anger. "Let's move on. Tell us about the tearing down of US Mexico border," Dave says, shifting his sheets of paper. Nightman looks at Roboman, and he shrugs, so Angelman answers the question.

"We tore down a huge symbol of American xenophobia. That wall is unacceptable. We did it before Joe Biden could, we had to do it. And I'm sure he thanks us for it." Angelman says.

"Some would say it would stop illegal immigration," Dave says.

"No, why are these people illegal? Because America doesn't trust them," Angelman says. "They view them as threats, the others."

"We just try to do the right thing, but law is always trying to tell us what's right," Nightman says, "For example, we wanted to tear down the wall, we do it, and government leaders say it's wrong. That's why we exist."

"Why do you think the Oracles exist?" Dave asks.

"Uh... I think we all have our answers for that," Mr. Bullet says, occasionally pausing to think of the best way to describe the purpose, "I think the Oracles exist to promote the good in the world. There's so much evil, but we must try our best to be as perfect as possible. We owe every second to our supporters for helping us continue in this battle."

"We exist... well, I guess I'll start with George Floyd." Nightman says, the room becomes eerily quiet. "In the middle of a pandemic, George Floyd was killed brutally. He became a symbol that we need to change. Now there are good cops, and there are bad cops. But we aren't cops. We started opening other locations recently, employing people who just want to do good, whether they are superhuman or not. Policing is dangerous, because they care about quotas. The only quota we care about is the lives saved, and the lives we didn't. The glass shard in our heart. The shame we feel. We don't want money; we are a nonprofit. We must be everything the police can't be. We can't be racist; we can't judge anyone by anything except character."

"Uh, well that's something hard to go off of," Roboman jokes, and even though his tone is monotonous, the audience laughs genuinely. Even Dave laughs. "I think we exist to change the world; I think we exist to make hard decisions. I know we have a duty. We're called superheroes. We have to be super."

"Oracle means 'prophet,' and we have to be the bright future. We must tell every citizen about the bright future, the sun on the horizon. We have to push every minute to that dream." Angelman says.

"Thank you, this is Dave Veterman, You Know These Guys," the audience claps, and just like that it's over. The Oracles walk out.

"That wasn't that bad," Roboman says.

"It was okay," says Nightman. They head out, and some walk and some fly. Angelman pushes into the air, and the stars shine in the night, a beautiful sight stained by pollution. The white flecks were interrupted by grey, like a painting with a mustard stain. He flies back to his apartment window and turns on the tv.

"Today the Pro Human Organization of America, or PHORA started a petition to ban superhero acts. PHORA was started in 2019, the year after the founding of the Oracles. Politicians, cops, and regular citizens provide the companies money to raise awareness against the Oracles. This is a video found today." A clip plays of a rally in Texas.

"What do we want?" a rally leader asks.

"Ban Oracle!" the crowd yells triumphantly.

"When do want it?" the leader yells again.

"Now!" they skip sections of the video to a speech.

"Those Oracles aren't bad people. They're just like us, but society is callin' 'em heroes. Heroes are the cops." The crowd cheers at this. "The firefighters." The crowd roars at the mention. "Now when we had real problems, like corona, they couldn't stop it."

"That's not my fault idiot," Angelman growls, anger pooling out of him like sweat mixed with cow fat.

"And they didn't solve them riots," the leader says, "they couldn't stop no small businesses to close." The crowd cheers. "They invite violence, why people talking about guns, when they are the problem." The crowd agrees. "We need to ban them, lower violence, save the jobs of the worlds true people. Not some stuck up 'heroes.'"

"Yeah!" the crowd yells. Angelman turns the tv off, covering his face. He heads to his bathroom and washes his face, his gaunt features shown off in the dim light. He looks into his own eyes, clutching his forehead. He shouts at his reflection. He walks away, shaking. He looks at his costume in its secret glass case.

"My god, what am I becoming," Angelman says. He investigates the suits dark mask and cape. He walks down the hallway and stops in cold blood.

"A monster," A voice says, a voice he doesn't recognize. No one else should be in here. He puts his hands up.

"Who is there?" Angelman asks, genuinely scared. When no one answers, he goes off to make himself a cup of coffee, but when he turns around his suit floats like a ghost. "Oh my god," he shouts. He attempts to fight it, hitting the cloak, but the suit dodges, and straps on to him. It flies him out of his window and levitates him above the clouds. "Stop!" he screams. Then the suit follows the order. He flies down, the feeling of falling entering his nerves. But he wakes up. Angelman blinks and turns on every light and puts his iPhone on camera and sets it up to see behind him. The tv was never turned off, and he shakes his head. The same dream for a week now.

"Antifa and Qanon protested and fought today." Angelman aggressively flips channels.

"Scientists say Florida will be underwater by 2030," another anchor says in the news anchor tone. Angelman flips the channel.

"Child missing-," another says.

"Darn, show me some good news!" he shouts at the television.

"In other news, Hurricane Xerena has killed 2,000 people so far," the news anchor continues. Angelman turns off the television, the bleak announcements creeping into his mind like worms in a stomach. He takes deep breathes, slowly releasing angst. He focuses on his breathing, letting his mind calm him slowly. When the sun had risen, and Angelman had slept a small amount more, The Oracles met again. Nightman investigates the arm further.

"I did some work last night," Nightman says.

"What did you find?" Roboman asks. Nightman looks solemnly at the group, announcing the terrible news and terrible prediction.

"The bullets they shot Cougar with were made out of the same metal," Nightman says sadly. The world seems to let go, the U.S. government which had always supported them, encouraging police cooperation, and praising them when they stopped horrific events.

"The U.S. actively shot Cougar?" Roboman asks.

"It seems apparent," Nightman says slowly. Angelman places his hand across his eyes.

"What do they want?" Angelman asks to nobody.

"Well, I know what I'm going to do," Mr. Bullet says, "I'm going to find that man who killed her. Then I'm going to kill him."

"Vengeance isn't supposed to be in a superhero's vocabulary," Angelman growls, quoting Cougar.

"It's justice," Mr. Bullet says.

"Justice isn't killing, it's putting the man in jail," Angelman says.

"A jail run by the U.S. government," Mr. Bullet points out.

"You kill one person; you can kill any person. Your saying that you can kill, so when you think you need to, you will," Nightman says, "You kill one, you can kill all."

"You don't want someone who killed our friend to be killed?" Mr. Bullet says, "Were you even her friend?"

"Shut up Mr. Bullet," Nightman says tauntingly, "You can float a piece of metal; I can do this." He creates 2 dark blades. "How you like that?"

"Oh, I'm done," Mr. Bullet raises his pistol, and fires, but in a blink of an eye, a savior arrives. Roboman stands between them, and the bullet cracks on impact.

"Stop it you fools," Roboman says, "What about her, do you think she'd want to see you kill someone?" Nightman undraws his blades, and Mr. Bullet grudgingly puts his pistol in his holster. "Good, now we do need to talk about a plan of action."

"What we know is that the bullets shot was made out of the same metal," Nightman says, "Maybe a criminal got their hands on it?"

"You know what's good about being a superhero?" Mr. Bullet says rather randomly.

"Lots, what are you thinking of?" Roboman asks.

"The press coverage," Mr. Bullet says, suddenly they all knew how they could strike back at the government. They release all that they know. They send the email to the New York Times and let their story be released. 2 days later, the paper had been delivered. The exposing of the government's involvement, or lack of security of the metal was monumental. Senators called it an embarrassment, generals were investigated, and President Joe Biden defunded the military. All was satisfying, but all could not last. A week after the announcement, while the Oracles were inside their base, they heard a knock on their door.

"I'll get it," Angelman says. He walks to the doors and opens them. He hears a gun cock. A squadron of SWAT stand armed and ready.

"These bullets are made of the metal you were talking about. I don't want to do it," The leader says darkly. Angelman is shocked, and slowly drops to the ground and puts his hands up. The others follow, just as shaken. The four are confused, as they tie them up in chains. "These chains are also made of the metal." The squadron's leader tells the four, on the floor and being escorted in armored vehicles, each one in a separate car. Angelman's calm exterior, is mirrored by his intense, nervous interior. The black bench is cold, and the soldiers have their guns surrounding him. The escort is uneventful, as Angelman's entire life passes through his head. His greatest feats, his greatest falls. When he stopped a mass shooting, when he couldn't save the pregnant woman in the fire, her eyes open in shock, and clutching her inflated stomach. The sadness, how he rushed back, but the building collapsed on the 2, leaving there corpses not even visible. He remembers the forming of the Oracles, how Cougar brought them together. How they saved so many and left so few. Now what was to become of them? Is this what he got for trying to stop crime, to save innocent lives? Karma must not exist, because good guys in real life always lose. Karma doesn't kill off killers; they let them live, karma lets them hide. Angelman wonders if he is karma, the unstoppable force of balance. He stops the criminals; he saves those who really haven't done anything wrong. If God exists, Angelman thinks to himself, then why is he smiting me? Why was he torturing Angelman like he smote the 500,000 in 2 Chronicles, simply because some asked him too? The world is becoming the underworld, now all Angelman wants is to become Thanatos. Soon, they arrive at the jail, where they await trial. The four are dressed in the typical orange jumpsuits, and their heads are shaven of hair. After five days, they are escorted out and trial begins.

"Order," The judge says, "Defendants, please state your opening arguments." A lawyer wearing a PHORA badge steps up first. "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?" the judge asks.

"Yes, I do," the lawyer says. Roboman, and Angelman look each other in the eyes randomly, but although random, very intently. "The men we see today exposed lies about our glorious military and

dishonored those who served. They have continually taken law into their own hands, and they cause crime.” The judge nods at the Oracle’s lawyer.

“Do you swear to tell the truth, only truth, and nothing but the truth?” the judge asks. The lawyer affirms and begins.

“Your honor, these men saved hundreds of thousands since there forming, and if you think that these acts of kindness, empathy, and bravery are wrong, then I think some would call that as bad as dishonoring veterans,” their lawyer says. The four of them aren’t really listening, waiting for the tough questions on the hot seat.

“Defendants, draw your first witness,” the judge says.

“I draw Nightman,” the lawyer replies.

“Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, only the truth, and nothing but the truth?” the judge asks.

“Yes, I do your honor,” Nightman says, as solemnly as any person can, his eyes are gaunt from his short stay in prison.

“Nightman, have you ever killed anybody?” the lawyer asks.

“No,” Nightman says, carefully revealing only the bare minimum.

“Have you saved thousands of lives?” the lawyer asks.

“Yes,” Nightman replies. Angelman sits back in his seat, observing the members of the audience. Some wear PHORA badges, while others have badges with the O symbol. Angelman had always known that their moral decisions would be challenged. That media would not worship them but use them as story magnets. Controversy revolved around them, and it does so even more. But they tried to stand above the petty attempts, but now they are in court, malicious lawyers ready to strike at any slip. Petitions demanding their incarceration, all crept behind them like a cobra. How could it come to this, kids worshipped superheroes, and like the stories of old, the Oracles saved people. These people, who take it all for granted, who let them take the flack for giving them the chance to live. How dare they? Soon, the first day of court ends. They can’t pay their bail, so they stay in prison. They sit in their own cell, because if the other criminals got their hands on them, the ones that put them in prison, they would be in danger.

“I don’t have much hope,” Mr. Bullet says truthfully, looking outside their barred-up window, the sun’s light not able to shine in such a grim situation. There’s nods, nobody wants to talk. The metal kind of dims the ability to converse. The truth isn’t what you believe, it’s what everybody thinks, Angelman states to himself. He continues by thinking, that’s why the truth we say in court doesn’t matter, anyone can twist every word into their molded hateful image they call truth. There used to be core absolutes, the good of forgiveness, understanding, and that those who can protect, should. Angelman sleeps, waiting for the next day to come with its scythe of bleak and sadness. The second day of trial is uneventful, even the once malicious team of lawyers seemed bored. But on the third day, the jury became their Pontius Pilate. Jury said that the people could have what they wanted; the peacekeepers had been sentenced 5 years each. The prison yard would become reality, dirt and grime would become clean. They would live with criminals. They wouldn’t even have each other; they would become separate. His cell is welcoming, with a buff man, an angry expression burned on to his face. They don’t talk, they know that it’s a waste of time. They live in a place of restitution, where they lock people away because their crimes are so bad, they can’t even look him in the eye. Angelman has a lot to think about, and a lot of time. He thinks about what he wants to be. He wants to be something to fear, he wants the world to be in his image. He wants to twist the world until it’s his. He wants to be the rider of death, coming with a blade to bring apocalypse. The people who sat by, letting him take the fault, he wants to see them punished. Tortured for their sins. Soon, they are pushed outside, and the four that used to be called the Oracles find them and unite.

“I’ve already got a black eye,” Mr. Bullet says, pointing to the shiny coat of black, purple and blue.

“Why are we here?” Roboman asks.

“Because when someone does the right thing, it makes the people who don’t nervous,” Nightman says aggressively. After time in the yard, Angelman just sits on his cot until dinner of green pudding and wobbly hotdogs. Angelman doesn’t eat and offers his cellmate his meal.

“Um, thanks Angelman,” The criminal says nervously.

“You don’t have to call me that. Call me James,” James says simply, “Listen we’re stuck here for a while, so don’t be awkward, it’ll help to make this experience livable for both of us.” His cellmate nods,

trying to be normal, and the two turn away from each other. Every day in prison has its routine, it's order, and no one disrupts that order. Fights break out, but fights are regular. People are released, people are brought in. James learns that the world doesn't matter if you don't want it too. James adjusts to the chaotic order easily. He destroys all the morals he used to know and decides to build his own. He wants karma to rule, not God. No, he wants to become god's hand of wrath, his warrior, his horseman. Angelman slowly loses his angelic persona. It's replaced by something different, something darker. James watches people protest the Oracles incarceration in joy.

"Alright, here we are at Mason Prison, and mobs protest to release the Oracles," the female news anchor says one night. Angelman and his roommate got television privileges, and his cellmate quite enjoys the news. "It's been two years since the four's arrest, and each has three more years in prison. After their arrest, the U.S. government tore down their offices, and crime numbers have gone significantly down. I'm Sarah Tomlinson, this is channel 4 news."

"Dang, why you arrested. I mean I did some bad things when I was young, but you, you don't seem the type," his cellmate says.

"I got arrested for... what was it? Unintentional murder and defamation," James mutters back, as their disgusting food on trays arrives, and its lunch, the only meal James can tolerate, because it's usually sandwiches. The ham and cheese is soggy, but James is used to the quality. James and the rest of the Oracles grow closer with each other, and the once heroes, now are hungry for revenge. Cougar would probably never want to see them like this, and James know this, but he tells himself the Cougar is dead. Roboman's armor grows slightly rusty, but the group agrees it looks cool, and doesn't do any real structural damage. Somebody tried stabbing Mr. Bullet one day, and a fight broke out, as Nightman jumps on top of the prisoner with the knife and broke his jaw ruthlessly. Nightman was removed of privileges, and Mr. Bullet recovered. It was the closest thing to exciting for a long time. Nightman occasionally showed off his skills in break time in the corner. Some would watch him create an assortment of blades from darkness, and because Nightman had picked up meditation, the blades became even stronger and sharper. Really, all their skills sharpen. Mr. Bullet can twist metal, Roboman learns he could run at lower electricity, and James can now levitate others. They aren't alone, a good amount of the prisoners are metahumans. Some are friendly and keep to themselves, embarrassed of what they used their powers for, while others proudly rule the prisoner hierarchy with an iron fist. James spends much of his cell time reflecting on his role in everything he has ever been a part of. James thinks his role as Angelman was to reflect the American dream, the brutal lie. The rich get richer, the poor fall down the corporate ladder again and again. Hope is a despicable mechanism used to take advantage of those with less. James thinks about how he gave people hope, flying through buildings with criminals in them, yet people always die. The American dream is infused with hope, saying you can climb to the top, get rich, but no one can. The rich not paying taxes means they don't care about the people on the streets, they give them no hope, but the world tells them to hope. They can't get out of their tough spot. The American dream looks at black neighborhoods and tells them they can become something new, but hope doesn't lay out a plan. The government doesn't lay out a plan. The prison system doesn't rehabilitate inmates back to society, no it destroys their chances. James sees it every day, inmates released, but there thrown right back in for ridiculous reasons. James and his cellmate earn video game privileges. They play Minecraft, and James does everything he wish he could do. He blows up buildings with iron bars, he sets American flags on fire.

"When you get out, what you gonna do?" his cellmate asks. James sits back, realizing he hadn't thought of anything. Three years had passed now, and he still had no plan.

"I probably can't go back to my old job," James says, "I guess I'll find a job somewhere. Maybe fast food, or a factory." James continues sadly. Sometimes, James would just find himself staring at the wall, pretending it was another world. A place where he was rejoiced. A perfect place, a beautiful lie. The environment was perfect, children walked with their fathers, the architecture was blue and futuristic. Superhumans flew through the sky freely, among the birds. Food went around fine, there was no need for government. No need for police, all got along just fine. James would just get lost, sometimes realizing he had stared at it for hours. Sometimes he dreamt he had a wife and kids. Kids who he could hold in his arms, who begged for stories. He grew old, retired. He never went to prison, he hung out with his old buddies. Roboman, Nightman, Cougar and Mr. Bullet were all there. But he would always find his way



back to reality, this momentary heaven broken by himself. It was all fake, and he knew it, but he went to sleep thinking about his plans in the dream world. To get a cup of coffee, take his kids to school, buy a new necklace for his wife. The mirage was his hope, and like all hope at that level, it was a mere dream. Soon, his time in jail was over, and it ended just like it begun. He was thrown outside of the gates with the rest of the Oracles. No one waited for them, no protestors. The controversy died down.

“What do we do?” Nightman asks sadly.

“We have to find jobs,” Mr. Bullet says, “We have to split up.”

“No,” Roboman says, his robotic tone held sadness deep inside.

“Goodbye. Keep in touch,” James says, as he walks down the hill back to society. The clouds matched the bleak atmosphere. James walks back to his apartment, and several people stare as he passes them. Children mutter to their mothers, and they run away. James remembers a time where he would have to assemble a line of autographs. Now the hard-crushing reality of the soul of his world hits him in the face. James walks into his apartment and finds the glass case holding his costume. The reflection puts his face on the costume. “I’m sorry, I can’t be an angel in a world full of devils,” James says, in a growly whisper. He heads into his kitchen, grabbing the sharpest knife he could find. He gazes at the costume one last time, opening the glass case with the hidden key. His costume lays on the ground. The brilliantly bright knife plunges into the mask’s eyes. “I have to adapt,” James says, while butchering the once symbol of hope, “You are a symbol of the past. I’ll become a symbol of the future.” James says, leaving the costume on the floor. Far away, Roboman lays in his large home. It’s empty, and Roboman flips a coin absentmindedly, his mind focused on learning how to become a lawyer. Reading articles on why superheroes got banned. On reasons to bring them back, he becomes an expert in 15 minutes. Roboman ponders on the one thing no news article can tell him. Something that has pained him ever since he set foot on this earth, coated with metal, fused with a computer. He asks himself whether he is man or robot, mind or program, nature or technology. He had always been connected to something, giving him gifts, he was nowhere near human, yet he feels closer to human, emotions spark. He feels happiness, sadness, anger and loss. Yet he is also distant, always connected, never needing sleep, never experiencing true, just programmed reactions. He never felt love, never had a partner. Maybe if he had a mother he would have. His mother, who put him in a cage, held prayer meetings calling him a demon. He remembers it all, he has it brutally recorded. His father tried, desperately, but didn’t know how to treat him, especially with his demon-fearing mother. He was separated, sent into the street. Left to die. His contemplation is ended by a knock on the door, which Roboman answers by connecting to his doorbell camera. It’s a man, and Roboman feels fear. The door cracks open, and Roboman watches bullets go through his hip. Roboman watches the man turn away mechanically, his last thought suddenly leaving his memory. Nightman’s dressed normally, except he also holds a pen and pad. Roboman’s house is a crime scene. Nightman walks in, the cops allowing him near the crime scene. Nightman exams the body on the floor, wires littering the floor. Nightman finds what he had suspected, bullets. Nightman silently mourns, exiting the crime scene quickly and driving off into the night.

“Two friends dead in five years. And now he won’t be given a hero’s death,” Nightman says sadly, the twilight welcoming his car mirror, “They’re after us. We’ll have to regroup quicker than I thought.” Outside the city, a man in pants and overalls walks in, his mobile home’s light off. He makes himself a microwave meal, and sits on the couch, turning on his lamp. And he dropped his plate with a loud crash. A white conical hood standing up and is held by a hand. The lamp is slammed on to his head.

“No, stop, please,” he shouts, as James steps into visibility, his silhouette menacing. “What do you want?”

“I want nothing more than to see you get what you deserve,” James says growling. James punches the man’s neck, watching him squeal like a pig. “You’re a coward, wearing a mask to protect your racist self,” James twists his leg.

“Hypocrite,” The Ku Klux Klan member says, “I’m the grand dragon.”

“So, you give yourselves titles to make yourself feel better?” James asks aggressively, “I know you were at the stop the count rallies, the clashing black lives matter and white supremacist protests.”

“I’ll die a martyr for my race,” the man says defiantly.

“Oh, you’ll die alright. But you’ll die for nothing,” James says, the menace quietly exploding in his voice. The man on the floor grimaces, as James ties him up. He throws him into his car, and they take a drive.

“Thought they put you in prison,” the man says angrily, “should’ve stayed there with them blacks, your just as filthy.”

“Shut up, I’m going to do something so bad, you’ll regret the hate you committed while your being tortured in the afterlife,” James says, driving to a park. James thinks about racism, how despicable the idea is. That one race is superior to the others, how they should have better jobs, how the immigrants took jobs, when they provided them. The US has had a bad track record with racism, that most school children don’t get taught about the cruelty of slavery, they glorify men who owned hundreds of slaves. How us versus them is built into society. James remembers the police brutality that got attention in 2020. George Floyd died, but he birthed a movement that tried to change. Breonna Taylor, Jacob Blake, to many died. The police were defunded in some places, confederate statues were tearing down, but people insisted that this was wrong. Racism needs to exit our system, unity is essential, and unity shouldn’t be race, but rather the people themselves. The midnight sky is perfectly quiet, no one is walking. James escorts him to a tree and gets a stool and rope. He places the man on the stool and ties his neck into a noose on his neck and connects on to the tree. The man’s cowardly nature kicks in, terrified of his fate. But the worst was yet to come, James pulls out a metal stamp and a metal working torch, and lights it quickly.

“Stop, please,” The man says fearfully. James slams it on to his head, the man screams. The endless knot, the symbol of karma burned on to the man’s head. James kicks the bucket and the man’s life is done quickly. James walks away, leaving the bloody scene behind him.

“You get what you deserve,” James whispers to the street, “but so, do I.” He pulls out the still hot device, ready to brand himself. He pulls up his leg and burns the symbol. “And the loop is ended.” Nightman’s car drives up, and he lowers the window.

“Get in,” Nightman says as James hops in, “Was that you?”

“Yeah,” James says, letting the rush of the road take his mind off worse things.

“Who was he?” Nightman says, disappointed and troubled James had killed someone, his old friend. Someone who helped after the death of his mother. He loved his mother dearly but hated his father. One fateful night, years after they became divorced, his father broke into his mother’s house. His father shot her in the head, and Nightman was across the country. It broke him, and James had helped him up and back into duty. Attended their funerals, been a good friend. But after prison, things changed with all of them.

“A white supremacist,” James says.

“You shouldn’t have done that,” Nightman tells him quietly. James nods, “I saw you brand yourself, what did you do?” Nightman asks slowly. James pulls up his leg, showing off his self-induced burn.

“Karma,” James says, explaining the symbol simply.

“What about grace?” Nightman asks, “Karma doesn’t provide grace. It doesn’t forgive.”

“They don’t deserve grace,” James says simply.

“Neither do any of us,” Nightman converses, “In god’s eyes, none of us deserve grace. But he gives it to us anyway.”

“God isn’t real,” James says.

“Maybe so, but I like to believe we have a purpose. That we aren’t just sent here to continue the circle of life,” Nightman confesses, “The real reason I picked you up is because Roboman’s been shot.” James’ heart seems to stop for a second. James closes his eye, his hand covering them as hot, wet tears dribble down.

“No,” James says.

“The government’s after us,” Nightman says, equally sad, yet silent, “I’m getting Mr. Bullet; we should stay at my place. It’s discreet and I have room.” Nightman stops the car at the house.

“What are we even going to do?” James says.

“Hide,” Nightman says. The two walk out, and Nightman carefully places his hand on James’s back, and James surprisingly embraces, as the Nightman knocks on Mr. Bullet’s door. Their relationship strong, and Mr. Bullet answers the door in pajamas.

“Oh no. What’s wrong?” Mr. Bullet says drowsily. Nightman explains the situation, and Mr. Bullet comes out with a duffel bag, and hops in the back. “Did you find jobs?” Mr. Bullet asks.

“No,” James answers.

“Figured,” Mr. Bullet says. James thinks about what Nightman had said. James had always thought that god couldn’t exist, there was no proof. If god exists, why can’t he stop poverty? Stop crime? If god did exist, James thought of him as more of an orchestrator than a father. Someone who thought humans were playthings. If god exists, then why did he unleash the flood on humanity? If he made humans in his image, then what does that say about god himself? That even before Satan crept from the tree, humans were unsuspecting, following the voice of someone that banished them from his home. Once humanity had knowledge like god, they were banished. Did god need to feel superior? God is the king of kings, but kings often lead the world to human atrocities, overtaxed their citizens. If god really is king, then what is his tax? They soon arrive in Nightman’s house and make themselves comfortable.

“Home sweet home,” Nightman says. James sets out on the couch and falls asleep. For the first time in five years, he has the suit dream. His costume breaks out of its glass case. But instead of being afraid James touches the clothing, and it transforms to dust. Instead, it transforms slowly, as his black cape and red mask fuse with him. The suit doesn’t make the man, the man makes the suit. For years, James pondered on whether this suit made him Angelman, or he was Angelman. James realizes that he’s ready once again to take the mantle. To become something, maybe not Angelman, but he is ready. James wakes up, to the sound of a tea kettle. He walks over, Mr. Bullet pours the hot steaming liquid into a well-made cup.

“Want some?” Mr. Bullet asks, taking out a second cup. James nods, and he pours. James’ first sip was warming, and the bitter yet sweet taste comforted him. The herbal smell reminded him of the burnt tea from the old headquarters. And although that sounds like a bad thing, it’s very good. The reminder of their life before, bittersweet. Soon everyone’s awake, and James offers to make breakfast. He makes eggs and toast, the egg yolks runny and the toast crunchy. The four eat quietly, nervously. You could hear a Lego drop on carpet. Soon, they’re done, and Mr. Bullet takes first guard, while the others set off to do an activity of their choice. James meditates, making books float around him. He attempts to concentrate, but too much is on his mind. The books wobble before falling back to the ground. Nightman’s watching the news, so James listens in.

“We’re at the scene of the crime. The murder of Roboman is quite mysterious, a member of the now defunct group the Oracles, Roboman was the most popular by recent polling, with Nightman and Cougar in second,” the news anchor says. Nightman grins, and James scowls sarcastically. “His armor was one of the strongest metals on earth, nobody knows how a simple bullet could penetrate that. More on the situation, after this.” Commercials play, and Nightman flips the channel.

“Michael Keene was sworn in today. Several republican candidates did not support Michael Keene. Michael Keene was a senator for two years, and then ran for president. Michael Keene strongly supports border control, the recovery of small businesses, and the discrimination of superhumans,” the news anchor says.

“What?” James yells. James thinks about how Joe Biden couldn’t even stop their arrest, now what? James sits back down, tuning out the sound and books rotate in an eerie yet beautiful way. Time passes quickly, and Mr. Bullet yells for someone to switch places.

“Alright, someone else has to take the job,” he says. James goes to the window, his eyes open and ready. James’ mind is calm, as he watches people walk their dogs, tails wagging furiously, panting and licking their leash. James chuckles at the sight. No robot skeleton comes, no army arrives with a bazooka ready for firing. James is happy, an uneventful day is all they want. Just relaxing and enjoying their partial freedom. James counts down the hours, and his shift is done. This goes on for a couple of days, as they finish several Netflix documentaries, beat video games, and sleep.

“I just had an epiphany,” James says one morning, as the three of them were in different places around the house, each drinking their hot liquid of choice. James’ being coffee, Nightman’s being tea, and Mr. Bullet’s being warm water. “The only place we were safe was prison,” James finishes. Out of prison, Cougar got shot, and when they served their sentence, Roboman was killed.

“Was that a joke?” Mr. Bullet asks temptingly.

"No, just think about it," James says.

"I got stabbed in jail, remember," Mr. Bullet says, raising one eyebrow, and a slight frown on his face.

"Oh right," James says, sarcastically backing away. But all of them were thinking about it, each of them had a pained look on their face, pondering the unique statement. But this could not last. After two weeks in Nightman's house, one night an army came for them. Nightman was on guard and woke them up, as police officers, metal skeletons, and soldiers stand outside of them.

"What do we do?" Nightman asks frantically, to the exclamation of threats from a megaphone a police officer was using. Mr. Bullet grins, as he takes out a projectile, allowing it to float. Nightman nods, and the bullet flies through the door, and smacks guns out of the officer's hands, like a bee slapped someone in the face. The bullet zooms through the robot's computers, and they fall to the ground like dominos.

"Well, technology hasn't gotten that much better," James jokes, as they walk out calmly. The police officers attempt to shoot at them, but Mr. Bullet takes the ammunition and reverses their direction like he was driving them. The surprised looks on the officer's faces were priceless, like platinum.

"Good morning gentlemen," Mr. Bullet says tauntingly. The army attempt to wrestle them down like fools, and Nightman sighs, taking out their light and continues to walk. But the army gets a rocket launcher ready.

"I'll shoot, I know you can't float these," the general shouts.

"Continue walking," James whispers. The general counts down from three, and the word fire exits his mouth. The rocket's going straight for them. James concentrates, as the rocket is sent flying into the sky.

"How did you do that?" The general asks.

"I learned a lot in prison," James shouts back, as he takes to the sky, and Nightman and Mr. Bullet mutter curses under their breath. "Oh, right. Sorry," James says, floating them up with him.

"That's a whole lot better," Mr. Bullet says, nervously looking down, the fear of heights rushing to his face.

"Don't worry, I probably won't drop you," James jokes, as he lets the rushing air fly through his hair. The adrenaline rush gone, now calmed by the beautiful sights. They land in an alleyway, and the blue-sky creeps in through the darkness. "I have an idea, it's kind of crazy," James begins.

"We like crazy," Nightman replies, a grin and an eyebrow raised.

"We break into PHORA," James states. Mr. Bullet shakes his head.

"Impossible, everyone knows who we are," Mr. Bullet says which is true, "How would we get in?"

"I have an idea," Nightman says. Soon, they stand outside the grey building of PHORA, in regular clothing, no extravagance near them. They walk into the office, some gasping, others not even noticing them.

"We made an appointment with Stephanie Nelson," Mr. Bullet says, the situation slightly awkward. The receptionist escorts her anyway, and they soon arrive in her office. The large window and marble floors make the room seem expansive and luxurious. Stephanie looks out, the sun touching her face, her blonde hair reflecting the rays of light. The three sit down, like this was completely irregular.

"Why did you come?" she asks.

"We have some questions, and we'd like to get some answers," James says, crossing his leg, as she turns to them. She nods.

"You threw us in prison, but once we were out of prison two of us got shot," Nightman states, "Did you throw us in there on purpose?"

"You could say that," She replies, quiet sarcasm in her voice, "I put you in there because your dangerous."

"Did you put us in there to protect us?" Nightman asks, more direct this time. She shakes her head, and for the first time James knows who she really is. A snide, cold, calculating politician, who like most of them cares about personal gain, with a shell of an engineered smile and an engineered speech. She wants to ban them, not because she genuinely believes in the cause, but because the stance will get her publicity, fame, interviews and sponsorships. She would support the three of them if there was money involved, and James' hate sharpens like a snake's fang. Politicians should run for honor, knowing they have a responsibility. They shouldn't sell their souls to remake the world in their image; they should listen, learn and explore. James wonders what would happen if children taught adults. Children have a stronger sense

of morals than most adults. They care about everyone. They should lecture adults on how to be a good person, because kids see the world in black and white. They see evil and good, but they also empathize, they are constantly learning. Stephanie begins again, "You see, some believe what one wants is connected with one's needs."

"What does that have to do with anything?" Mr. Bullet asks.

"You see, one way of looking at this is a drug addict, who after one last whiff of cocaine, calls the hotline for help and support," Stephanie says, "What we want is to ban you, and what we need is less crime. When we took you out crime dropped, you don't do what you're supposed to do. You should see this and stop yourself. Just because you can, doesn't mean you should."

"No, we can save people so we should try to save everyone's life," Nightman replies.

"You don't save people; you just don't kill them. You have the power to murder everyone in this building sir. There's a fine line between those two ideas, see I think that you are psychologically human. Humans have a bad track record with promises, with ideas that people think are good. See, we have always thought superheroes as good, but you're the heroes, you're human. And humans are proven to be corruptible, greedy, and chaotic. For example, Donald Trump. See, the entire wall idea, as well with everything else he supported, means that the us versus them mentality would get better healthcare, less poverty, and lower drugs. But in the end, he lost. Humanity can come together and said what's wrong. We came together and said what's wrong, and we were right, the cities you've operated in, have less crime then ever," Stephanie says. So, what if we're human, James asks himself. Humans can make the world a better place. They can lead movements to improve equality, feminism, the civil rights movement, LGBTQ+ inclusion, and so many more. Humans pick each other up, while in the wild losing pace means losing your life. Humans can be everything animals can't, in good and bad ways. James always thought he was doing the right thing. The right thing was always ahead of him, haunting James, waiting for the deed to be done. He wanted to save every life, but Stephanie has a point. He worries about regular things; he gives in occasionally.

"You're the leader of a large political organization, why are they hunting us?" James asks.

"They're hunting you because we gave them 10 million dollars to have you killed," she whispers. Nightman stands up, paranoia creeping in. "You see, the government already has enough information to make the perfect superhuman. In our image," she says.

"Your insane," James shouts.

"Maybe, I'm doing this for humanity. We should've stayed clean, less godlike. You give people power, they abuse it," she says. The door bangs open, and soldiers use surprise to hit them with bullets. The metal diminishing their abilities.

"Load these freaks up in the car, remember how much moneys at stake," the leader says. He kicks James in the face, letting blood issue from his lips. They are once again taken to the all too familiar site of the escort vehicles. But instead of strapping them down, they bring out syringes.

"Not so super anymore," one of the soldiers says, getting cheers and laughs from the rest of the group.

"I'm more super then you will ever be. You serve a government that doesn't admit the fraud in elections, fakes frauds in other elections, kills innocent citizens in foreign countries, started wars and promotes violence. Have you no shame?" James asks savagely. They proceed to beat him, breaking several of his ribs.

"You don't deserve to die quick. Who votes we kill this mutant slowly?" the vote is unanimous. But first, they do Nightman and Mr. Bullet, James shouting his sadness and anger. But before the injection is done, two surprising voices arrive. Cougar live and strong lifts one of the man's guns and shoots them. The shock of the soldiers is initiated, as the bullets pass through her. The car's a mess of bodies, mangled corpses shot by Cougar.

"Cougar? How are you alive?" Mr. Bullet asks.

"No time, we gotta go," She yells. The five of them run out anxiously, dodging bullets, or floating them, and find a black van. "Get it!" Cougar shouts as them, as they run in and drive, leaving a flurry of dust behind them. James has a million questions going through his head. How did she survive? Why has she been hiding for so long? Perhaps he will soon get answers.

"How are you alive?" Nightman says to both Roboman and Cougar.

"When I was shot, it wasn't a bullet. It was a tranquilizer; they took us to a place where we were briefed on the situation," Cougar explains.

"What about the body?" James asks, "That looked real to me."

"It was fake, took a dead body, shot it a couple of times, and gave it plastic surgery," she says.

"Kind of morbid, but ok by me," Mr. Bullet says.

"Wait, who took you?" James asks.

"The US government," Roboman says truthfully. Nightman and James eye each other to ask if he's joking. Roboman shakes his head, "I sense doubt, but my statement is true."

"The US government is under attack by PHORA. Something big is about to happen," Cougar says, "No one knows what, but it's coming. And they need our help."

"Where are we going?" James asks.

"Somewhere safe," Roboman says automatically, "At least I hope so."

"Hey, you made a joke," James says.

"Yes, the US has installed artificial humor," Roboman says, "And artificial voice tone, so I feel human," James can't imagine how Roboman feels, a perfect robot, but so desperately wants to be human. Wants to have an emotional investment in this world, wants to connect to it like another computer. But this is the only programming he can't understand. James knows that prison gave him human experience, as Roboman continually learns. Maybe that's why he seems so much more natural, happier, even showing some signs of affection, as he puts his arm around Nightman in the car. Strange to see a machine you thought you knew evolve into as human as possible, pushing the limit between artificial and human intelligence.

"This is new," Nightman jokes. The car soon stops at an US army base. They walk in, and a general stands and salutes, and Cougar and Roboman pass by, as if it's normal, but Nightman's eyes are wide open in bewilderment. They lead them to a man in a dark blue suit with several medals attached to his jacket.

"We know what President Keene is going to do," he says, looking at all of them intently, with a slight bit of coldness. The serious nature of the room is impenetrable. "He's going to issue a national emergency. And now we know what Project Judgement Day is," he continues.

"And what is that?" Roboman says naturally.

"They're going to send US soldiers to every house and take any metahuman prisoner," he says.

"No," James says, "That's despicable, how did America vote him for president?"

"I ask myself that question every day," The man says. Democracy shows the true face of a country, what percentage of citizens believe in self-righteousness, prejudice, xenophobia, and ridiculous ideas. Trumpism hadn't left the US yet, it probably never will. It will be like a shadow creeping on us, telling us to fear the other, when we should welcome them. Keep immigrants out, even though our country was founded by immigrants. White supremacy, even though indigenous people were here first. Hate LGBT people, reinforce the false ideologies that have children beaten and abused. Don't break the system, reinforce it. Don't trade, make war. Fund the military, not social services. Tell people who march with neo Nazis and white supremacists that they're just as good as Black Lives Matter supporters. Now the fear of metahumans has crept in, subtly making sure that children with newfound abilities they see as curses aren't supported, but rather discriminated.

"They have a finger prick test that instantaneously tells if you are a superhuman. They will be sent to jail, it doesn't matter their age, they'll be treated the same," the man continues, "They're calling it the Purge." Cougar imagines a waste field of houses, ruined by invasion, broken by discrimination. Cougar remembers discovering her powers, how she was still loved by her parents, encouraging her to use her powers for good. How the children wouldn't have parents to comfort them in their jail cell, that adults would be separated from children. How the government would experiment on them until they could make perfect soldiers. She sees people scream, as martial law takes place. Tanks ruin the streets, soldiers run rampant.

"We can't let that happen," Cougar says the dark future she imagines too close to reality.

"Well, we have an hour, so head out and guard democracy," the general says. James and Roboman fly up, while the remaining three get in cars. James looks out, tanks already crowding an urban

neighborhood. Screaming is apparent, as soldiers grab people's hands and prick them to test whether they are metahumans. Roboman flies down, ready with a machine gun, and empties bullets on the tank. The whirring and the bullets falling to the ground alerts to soldiers, who shoot at them.

"Kill those mutants," one shouts. Roboman flies down and pushes him to the ground.

"You can't kill me if you tried," he says, turning on his angry growl mode. He detects fear, so bangs his head on to a light pole, with a large bang, the soldier is knocked unconscious. Meanwhile, James moves from house to house, assessing which are currently being searched. He finds a house, soldiers screaming at a child to prick his finger.

"Stop, mommy help," his mom cries, as the purge shows its evil intentions.

"This kid is positive," the female soldier yells, "Put him with the others." A truck comes, but not before it floats from the ground. The back of the truck is filled with small children, crying for their guardians. James sets them on the ground. He slams the truck into a nearby tank.

"Angelman, thank you," a woman says.

"Yeah, your welcome," James says. Mr. Bullet shoots off with soldiers, easily passing through their necks, cracking arteries, painning legs. The battle seems won, until another tank shoots randomly, sending rocks everywhere. Cougar runs toward the tank, passing through the metal shell.

"What the-?" one soldier says, before being interrupted by a fist. He takes the man's pistol.

"Sorry gentleman, put your hands up and step out of the vehicle," the crew angrily follows the orders. "Why don't you tell me what's going to happen?" Cougar asks, the pistol still in her hand.

"Just following orders," one says, "Didn't have a choice, I don't know what's gonna happen."

"You always have a choice. You could've said no. I don't care if your low on money, this isn't moral," Cougar says, "This is terrible, separating families, destroying cities. I can't believe you think you didn't have a choice." Cougar leaves, giving him back the pistol, and goes on. But Cougar questions her belief, do you have a choice? Does god look at the world, knowing every outcome, the future already decided? If there is a god above, he must know everything, so does he know the choice? Does he let us choose, or are we puppets in this big game? Puppets that put-on plays with scripts practiced relentlessly, until god gets what he wants. Do we have the choice to end poverty, or does god already know when that will happen? Maybe god is like an architect, building the future with meticulously straight lines, no wiggly lines, or places where the line splits, just perfect square shapes. But free will and the hope of a good future disagree with themselves. To have a good future, decisions must be made to have that good future. But god's decisions decide that future, he knows who will win, who will lose, so how do we have free will? But even if it wasn't god's decision, the battle is done, and news reporters crowd the scene. The Oracles are back and flying in the skies again. So, Nightman uses the cameras to his advantage.

"Law has been replaced with chaos. Love has been replaced with hate. But fear will be replaced by revolution. Metahumans, come out of your shell. We will take back our country. We will rise again," Nightman says, "This revolution might last a day, a week, but we will evolve. We will look back on this time and look at how wrong it was. Take back our country. I don't care if your human, metahuman, black, white, Asian, Latinx, tall, short. We need you. We will take back Washington DC." There're cheers from the news reporters.

"Nice job," Roboman says. Nightman grins, even though the man he is talking to is a machine. Roboman notices that he made himself smile, not the programmed version. He notices, he felt afraid in battle. That he was becoming more human. His body felt stronger, like a flame had been lit inside of him, igniting him. Like he was missing so much, that his lack of emotion was such a curse. That it was stolen, but now floods of ideas and feelings crowded his central processing unit. Nightman looks confused, at Roboman's shocked smile.

"What's wrong?" Nightman asks hesitantly.

"No, nothing's wrong. I understand that something can be wrong. I feel... I feel, human," Roboman says, picking Nightman up, and hugging him. Nightman looks at Mr. Bullet uncomfortably, and he smirks.

"Put me down," Nightman says. While the experience was uncomfortable, he found it surprising that Roboman had felt an emotion, not a programmed one, but something from him. That his crises was done, that Roboman finally had an answer. He was human, being something biologically doesn't mean you are that. If you are a boy in a girl's body, you are a boy. Biology doesn't constitute the soul. The soul has a

mind of its own, it controls you. It gives you personality, originality, and love. When the soul is strong, one is strong. Now Roboman is stronger than ever.

"Let's go," Cougar says. Roboman gets ready to fly, and Mr. Bullet, Cougar and Nightman shakily climb on to the metal wings.

"Don't worry, I'll probably catch you," Roboman says. They fly to their destination, passing cities below them, specks of light, where fighting is visible. The world was being destroyed, but they all know what they must do. They must rise and kill the president. Cougar wished it hadn't come to this. She was the one that said vengeance isn't supposed to be in a hero's vocabulary. But she knows it's necessary, that to put him in jail would take years of law work. That they need to start new, clean off the canvas and reimagine government. Become Picasso, take an image and reimagine it. See all the possibilities, the strange beauty. The government could do so much more, it can solve problems, give freedom and do the right thing. Time's had been bleak, with COVID 19, the 2028 election, the rise of PHORA, the incarceration of her teammates, but they must be the perfect image. They must lead by example, be the hope in people's lives. But Cougar wonders if she has been a symbol of hope for so long, that her sight has become a symbol of false hope. She saves people, but she also doesn't save people. Cougar wonders on some of her decisions, the lives she wished she could have saved. The days in bed, crying herself to sleep, remembering the way they looked in her eyes, crying out her name. The ringing in her ears, haunting her. Their ghosts following her, telling her that she's worthless, while the world adds to her pain. But she always was very strong, trying their best, training for hours, and learning how to become more efficient. However, there was always a thought that she wasn't spending enough time. That she was wasting time relaxing with her family on Christmas. That she was wasting time sleeping. But she remembers the lines of children wanting her autographs, how they idolized her. How she felt she needed to tell little girls they can be anything they want to be. They don't have to work for a man, they can be the man's boss. That they can be the worker and the homemaker, that they don't have to be girly, but if that's who you are, or if you're not, just be yourself. They arrive, several people boo at them.

"Freaks, go back to the moon!" one yells.

"PHORA was right all along," another screams, throwing her coffee mug at Roboman, which he slaps in half.

"You tore down the wall, you tore down America," someone says, "You made America terrible. We should've made America great again."

"We don't want to hurt you," Nightman says, drawing his two blades, the points scraping the ground, sparks flying. Nightman really doesn't want to hurt the mob, it's already bad he'll have to kill the president. Nightman lifts the blades, smashing them on to the ground, the aggressive nature of his attacks getting to the mob, as the back away in fear. They let them walk through, muttering and making a path, the white house in view. Some float, some fly, but they arrive, easily destroy the bodyguards, and walk in to the building. The luxurious and quiet interior creepily welcoming them. They walk to the oval office, and the president's desk is filled. He stares at them.

"Ah, god has arrived," Michael Keene says. He stands up, and looks to the corner, staring at an unknown object. He walks around the room, observing every part of the oval office. Breathing it in. "Everyone wants a happy ending," he says, "I'm trying my best." He smiles timidly.

"Why?" Cougar asks, "I don't understand. Why did you do this?"

"See, morals are based on your tribe. Because your tribe has its morals, you have their morals. I was taught that god is the only one who should have power. That it's a brutally clumsy mechanism that only good people should use," Michael responds, ice in his voice. The sharp delivery being the icicles, ready to stab. Nightman looks at his fellow heroes, confusion in his face. They have similar expressions, all wondering the reason behind his statement.

"What does that have to do with my question?" Cougar asks.

"See, when I saw you fly or walk, or just use your powers, I saw humans with god's abilities. Now we grew up in similar places, are tribes share many core values. And I'm sure you know that nobody is perfect. So, why give imperfect humans perfect power? Are we supposed to trust you?" Michael Keene asks.

"Yes, have some faith," James says.



“I have faith, but only in the one true god. If you make the wrong decision, we could all pay. The more power you have, the greater the responsibility,” Michael continues, “Can I trust you with that?”

“Yes, you can,” Roboman says. Michael cries, tears touching the carpet. He falls to the ground, taking a deep breath speaks.

“Well then, I’m not needed anymore,” Michael tosses Mr. Bullet a metal projectile and he cocks his weapon.

“Are you sure?” Mr. Bullet asks. Michael nods. Mr. Bullet finishes the task, his body falling to the floor, and blood pools. They look through the window, Roboman suddenly kissing Cougar. The sun falls, as clouds fall apart.

“We have a responsibility,” Cougar says quietly.

“And people that need us,” Nightman replies in a similar tone.

“Let’s lead these people to a new light,” James says, smiling. Not a full smile, but one fitting for new leaders. The world would be restored. They would lead them, help every person. They would care. They would have to. James quietly puts his hands in Nightman’s, and they share a smile. The day was coming to the close, and a new dawn was coming. It would be good, good enough at least.