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TRADING PLACES
Part 3



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I MUST
APPLAUD YOU,
MANTICORE.

DID YOU EVER DO
SOMETHING THAT
SEEMED LIKE A
REALLY GOOD IDEA
WHEN YOU FIRST
THOUGHT OF IT, BUT
IN RETROSPECT
IT DIDN'T QUITE
HOLD UP?

TO BE HONEST,
IT'S NEVER REALLY
HAPPENED TO ME
BEFORE. USUALLY
I HAVE NO
REGRETS.

I'D EXPECTED
THE ABDUCTION
OF SISTER PSYCHE
TO BE MORE...
DIFFICULT.

VILLAINY
DEFINITELY
COMES
NATURALLY TO
YOU, MY DEAR
BOY.

BUT THIS
TIME... I'M
NOT SO
SURE.

ON SECOND
THOUGHT, YOU'RE
NOT LOOKING SO
WELL, MANTICORE.
FEELING ANY...
REGRETS FROM
YOUR BETRAYAL
OF THE FREEDOM
PHALANX?

I'M
FINE.

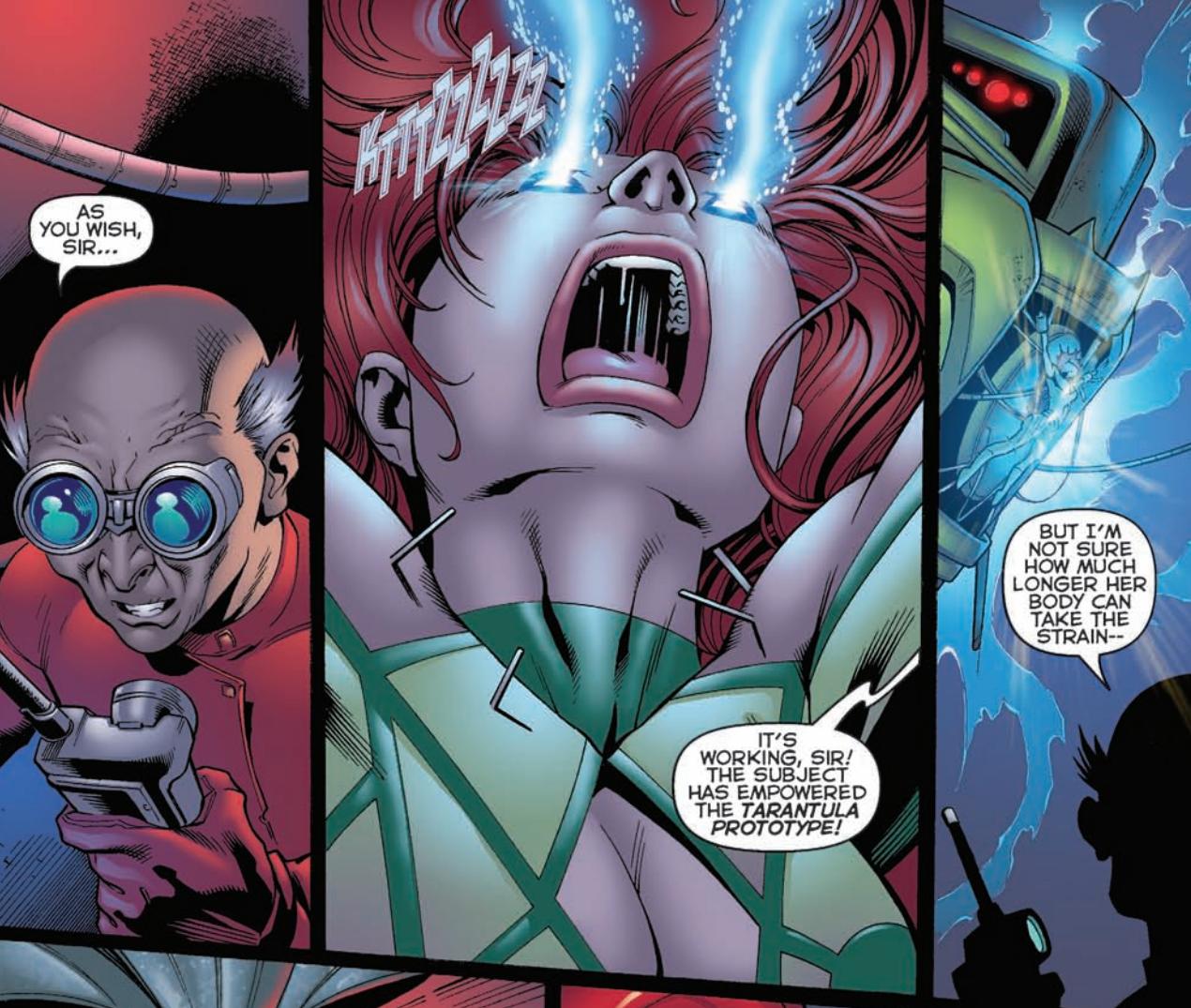
BE
THAT AS IT
MAY...

...PERHAPS
YOU'D BE MORE
COMFORTABLE...

...WITHOUT YOUR
ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

LORD
RECLUSE,
THE SUBJECT
IS READY.

EXCELLENT.
PROCEED...

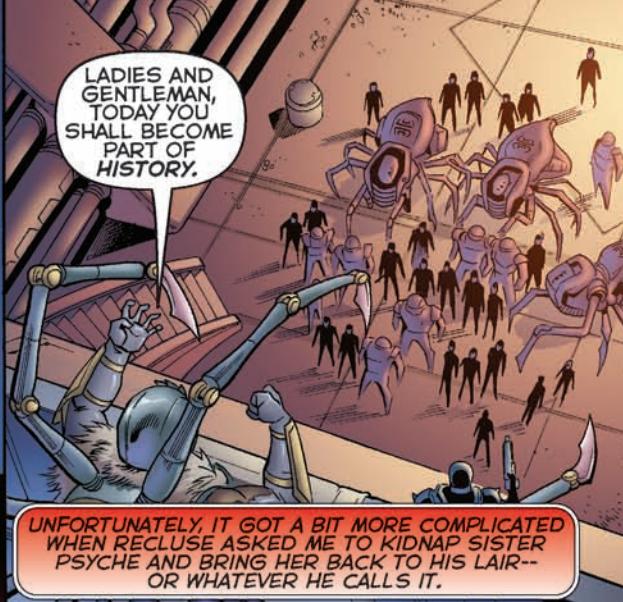


TRADING PLACES

Part 3

WRITER: DAVID WOHL PENCILS: DAVID NAKAYAMA
INKS: ROLAND PARIS & JOHN LIVESAY
INK ASSISTS: RYAN WINN
COLORS: BLOND & TYSON WENGLER
DESIGN: CHAZ RIGGS LETTERING: TROY PETERI
COVER: RODOLFO MIGLIARI

Plot Editing Assists: Sean Michael Fish Statesman and Sister Psyche
created by Jack Emmert Positron created by Matthew Miller
Manticore, Synapse and Lord Recluse created by Sean Michael Fish
NCsoft Producer: Brian Clayton

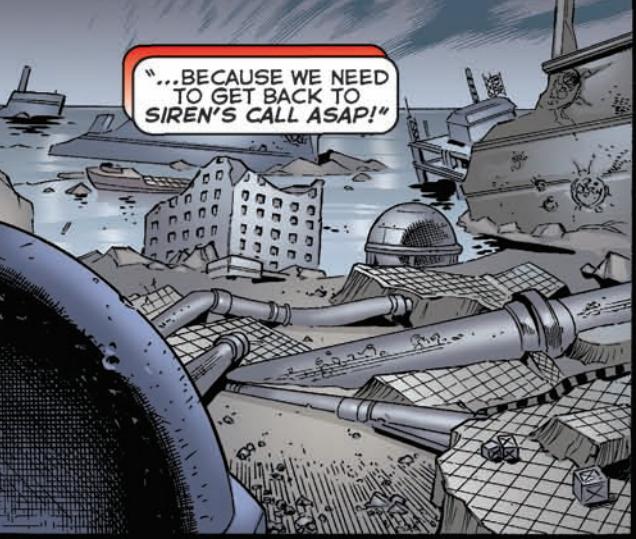


NO!











DO YOU
THINK I'VE COME
UNPREPARED?

I LAID THE
GROUNDWORK
FOR THIS PLAN
LONG AGO.

BEGINNING
WITH THE SO-CALLED
ACCIDENTAL EXPLOSION
UNLEASHED BY THAT
UNFORTUNATE FOOL
SUNBURST...

*SEE ISSUE #10
FOR DETAILS!

...TO THE
MYSTERIOUS RADIATION
LEAKS THAT KEPT THIS
PLACE OFF LIMITS TO
HEROES AND CIVILIANS
FOR SO LONG...

THUS,
MS. LIBERTY,
IN ANSWER TO
YOUR QUESTION,
I BELIEVE IT
SHALL BE THE
LATTER.

...ALL
OF IT TO
BE READY
FOR THIS
MOMENT!







IT'S NOT OFTEN THAT I GET TO SEE A REAL LIFE SUPERHEROIC BATTLE FROM THE SIDELINES. I HAVE TO ADMIT IT'S AN IMPRESSIVE SIGHT.

LARGER THAN LIFE HEROES BATTLING LARGER THAN LIFE VILLAINS-- WITH NAMES TO MATCH:

LIKE ICE MISTRAL AND INFERNAL...

...CITADEL, WHO IS HOLDING HIS OWN AGAINST BARRACUDA AND SILVER MANTIS...

...SCIROCCO AND SYNAPSE...

AND OF COURSE, OUR FEARLESS LEADER AND ALL AROUND PAIN-IN-THE-BUTT... STATESMAN.

THIS FARCE IS OVER, RECLUSE.

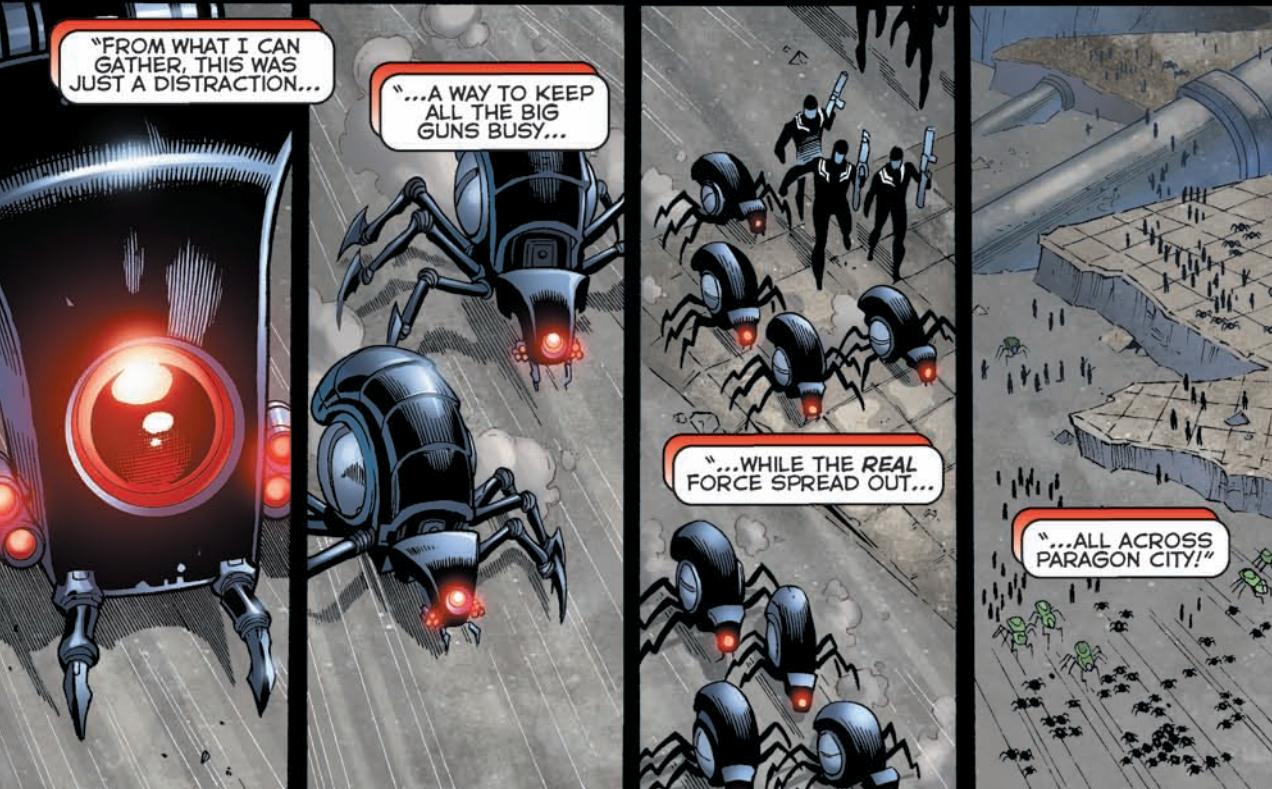
YOUR LIFE IS OVER, MARCUS...

ALLOW ME, GRANDFATHER...









"NOT TO WORRY, MANTICORE. BELIEVE IT OR NOT, WE WERE PREPARED FOR JUST SUCH AN OCCURRENCE."



"EVEN AS WE SPEAK, ALL THE HEROES OF PARAGON CITY HAVE GATHERED TO FIGHT ARACHNOS."





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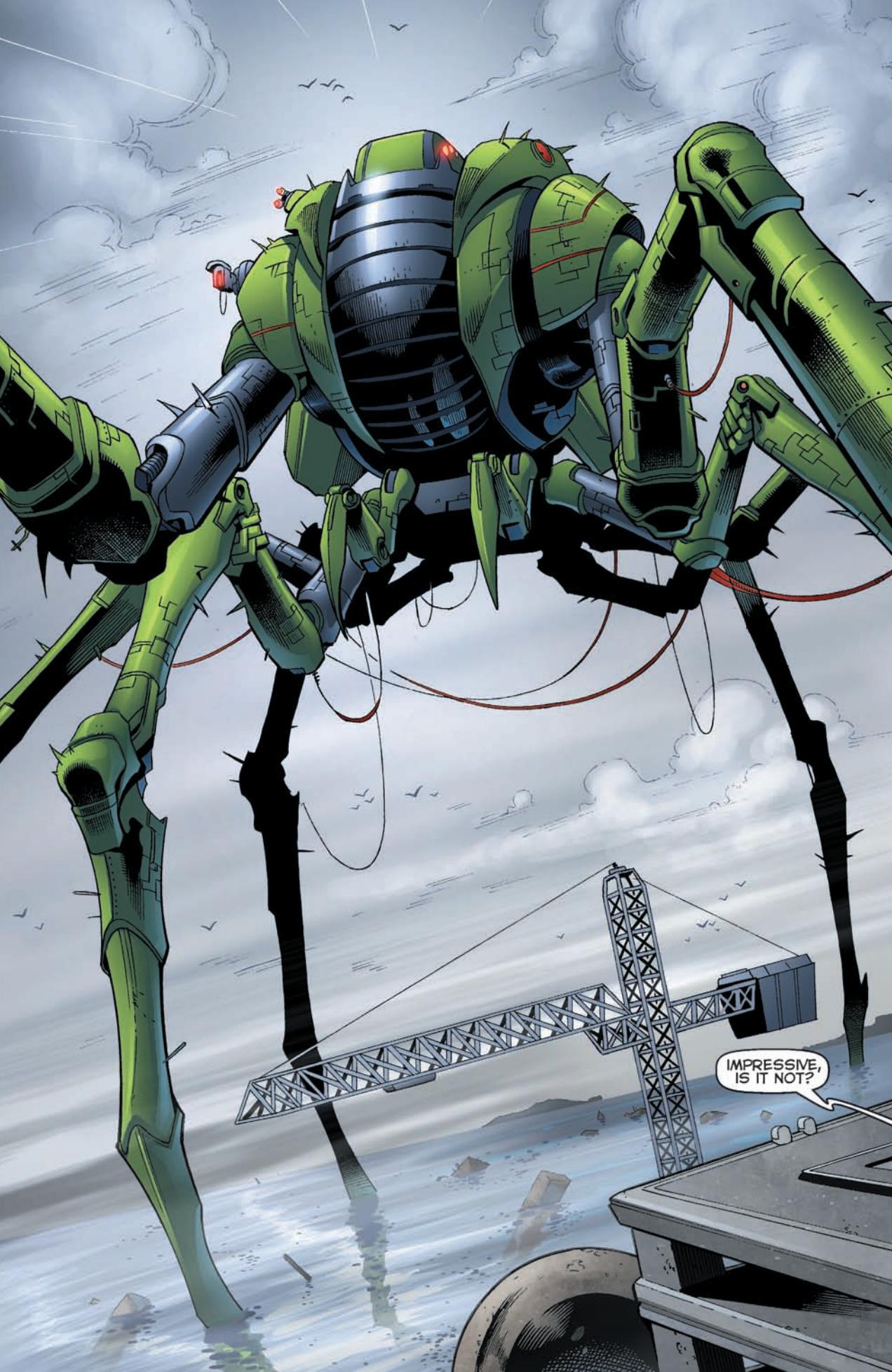
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IMPRESSIVE,
IS IT NOT?

YOUR
MACHINATIONS
NEVER CEASE
TO DISTURB
ME.

STAY
HERE. I'M
NOT FINISHED
WITH YOU,
RECLUSE.

STATESMAN HAS A POINT. IT DOES SEEM
LIKE LORD RECLUSE WASTES AN AWFUL LOT
OF TIME COMING UP WITH EVIL SCHEMES.
IF HE ONLY USED ALL THAT ENERGY FOR
GOOD-- WELL-- THAT'S AN OLD STORY.

THE TRUTH IS, THE GUY
NEVER CHANGES. NONE
OF THEM SEEM TO.

AND THAT'S WHY THIS WHOLE
THING SMELLS FISHY TO ME.

ME TOO,
JUSTIN. AND
I CAN'T PUT MY
FINGER ON IT.
WHY AREN'T THEY
FIGHTING US
ANYMORE?



ACCORDING TO SISTER PSYCHE, THE HOST IS LOCATED IN THE ABDOMINAL AREA.

SLOOOOSH!



HMM... THIS SHIELDING APPEARS TO BE CONSTRUCTED OF AN ADVANCED POLYMER. I IMAGINE A COMBINATION OF HEAT AND RADIATION WILL DO THE TRICK.

SO WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?



THAT'S IT!



AND THAT'S RECLUSE'S PLAN-- KNOWING THAT THE RESULTING WAVE OF PSYCHIC ENERGY WOULD HARM ALL OF PARAGON CITY!



EXCELLENT POWERS OF DEDUCTION, MY DEAR, BUT UNFORTUNATELY YOU'RE TOO LATE.



WITH YOUR FELLOW HEROES' INCESSANT USAGE OF THEIR WEAPONS AND POWERS, MY DEVICE HAS ALREADY ABSORBED MORE THAN ENOUGH ENERGY TO SUIT MY PURPOSES.



AND THAT WAS WHAT HIS PLAN BOILED DOWN TO. IF HE COULDN'T CONQUER PARAGON CITY, HE'D DISCREDIT ITS HEROES-- LEAVING THEM TO TAKE THE BLAME FOR MASS CIVILIAN CASUALTIES IN PARAGON CITY...

...JUST LIKE HE'D DONE WITH SUNBURST YEARS AGO.

THEY SHALL NOT DEFEAT US. RESUME THE ATTACK!

YOU DON'T WANT TO DO THAT.

AND WHY IS THAT?

WELCOME TO PARAGON CITY.
HOME OF HEROES.

MY NAME IS MANTICORE, AND I'M PROUD TO BE ONE OF THEM.

END...

BECAUSE IT'S OVER.

INSOLENT WORM, IT'S NEVER--

--OVER...

DN
2-2KG
LIV
BLOND

Paragon City's **ONLY** source for the TRUTH

FANTASTIC FAN ART!

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



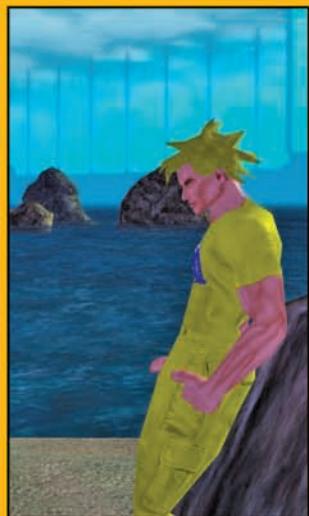
**THE PARAGON
TATTLER**

May, 2006

\$2.75

Ghost in the Machine

Part Two
PAGE 2



SURFING THE WAVES OF FATE

SOLAR SURFER: Part Two

PAGE 3

DORK TOWER COMIC!

PAGE 7



Ghost in the Machine

Part Two

By Warren Newsom (HEROID)

Now.

The data on the drive contained the utility maps of Paragon City. Ben processed the information from his secondary data system into the part of him he considered his mind. In seconds he knew intuitively how to travel the subterranean corridors beneath Paragon City.

He didn't understand how the process worked. He knew he wasn't just some number-crunching computer. He was no smarter than when he was a man, with a brain of flesh and blood instead of micro-circuitry. How was his being contained in this form? The science of it was beyond him.

Right now though, he knew exactly where he wanted to go. His massive hand effortlessly removed the sewer grate, and he stepped in. No map was displayed in his video display, he didn't need it. He knew instinctively which building in Steel Canyon he needed to reach, and what direction to travel in as if he were taking a drive around his home town.

Crossing through a water purification station, he suddenly picked up the unmistakable sounds of battle. Across the station, over the din of the huge sump pump, gunfire erupted. Shouted threats and the thud of massive fists echoed in the room. He needed to pass through here to reach Steel Canyon.

The fracas was intense. It looked like a group of heroes had encountered a band of the disturbed homeless, the Lost. The heroes -- a little green buggy guy, who jumped and dodged as he punched and kicked; a chick in a form-fitting, gleaming blue costume who was blasting the bad guys with a blizzard of snow; and a big guy in a star-spangled cape who had a dozen of the Lost hanging off of him -- were all unknown to Ben.

He waited until he was sure the good guys would win, and then snuck past into another dark tunnel.

Days ago.

"Hey, tin man, I got a lead," said Purple Nebula over the com. "A homeless man says he saw a truck make a delivery to a utility access in King's Row. His description suggested one of Dr. Vahzilok's Eidolons oversaw the unloading."

"Did he get the tag number o' th' truck?" Ben asked as he raced to where Purple Nebula waited for him.

"Yeah. Already traced it. It's registered to Crey Industries."

"Any idea what th' payload was? Weapons? Equipment?"

"The man said it looked like body bags."

Purple Nebula had already pried open the iron grate when Ben arrived.

"This is the spot," she said, "After you."

Ben nodded and they descended into the sewers.

Now.

Ben looked at the column of concrete and steel before him. Behind him a thirty foot long HEROID-sized tunnel emerged into this sub-basement. Hundreds of feet above him, a gleaming tower of glass stretched into the sky -- Crey Steel Canyon Center. Across the sub-basement were six more of the columns.

If one of these support columns was significantly damaged, the building would still be stable, though repairs would have to be made. Two of the columns and the building would be in danger of collapse. It would take months to repair, and then still might not be stable enough for use. It would be in danger of being condemned. Three columns, the whole skyscraper could fall within minutes.

A sound like thunder boomed underground as Ben began pounding away at a column.

"Are you a robot, or a man in a metal suit?"

The woman was pretty, but he had heard the question before.

He still didn't know how to answer it.

Days ago.

Purple Nebula left Ben to plant tele-tags on the recovered bodies while she ran after the last fleeing Reaper. The tele-tags would send the bodies to the morgue for identification. She hadn't been gone long before an anguished scream filled the sewers. She let the Reaper go, and raced back to where she'd left Ben.

She found him on his knees over one of the bodies.

"Is ... was it someone you knew?" she asked him.

"It ... it's me!" he wailed. "It's my body! The bastards let me die!"

Now.

"What are you up to?"

The voice startled Ben, and he stopped pounding on the building support and turned to face the speaker. It was the little, green, buggy superhero he

had passed a little while before.

"Whaddaya want Bug-boy?" Ben leaned forward and shifted his weight to his back foot, prepared for a fight.

"The name's Vandal Bug. Aren't you Heroid? I've seen you around."

"Yeah, well, go away Vandal Bug before I squash ya."

Ben couldn't tell if the hero was intimidated behind the bug-eye goggles and face-covering mask. He hadn't set out to hurt anybody, but if Vandal Bug challenged him, he would fight.

Vandal Bug put up his fists. "This bug squashes back."

"Yeah, well, go away." Ben turned and went back to smashing the support. "I got stuff t'do."

He wondered if Vandal Bug would attack him or not. A pile of concrete chips was up to Ben's robotic knees. He had beaten away a third of the thickness of the column.

Seconds passed and Ben heard Vandal Bug again. "At least tell me why you're doing this. Maybe you've got a good reason, say, there's an alien portal in the middle of that support. Or maybe you counted all the columns and that one's the fifth one"

Ben stopped and turned to face the buggy hero.
"Get it?"

"No."

"The fifth column...?"

"I don't get it. Now leave me alone," Ben growled.

"We both know I can't do that," Vandal Bug sounded earnest. Ben didn't really want to fight him.

"Revenge," Ben finally said.

"What?"

"I'm doing this for revenge. I'm going to bring Crey Industries down one building at a time. Starting here."

Even through the mask, Ben could tell that the bug was taken aback.

Vandal Bug shook his head and sighed. Ben turned to start bashing at the support again.

"Stop it!" the smaller hero suddenly inserted himself between Ben and the column.

A giant metal fist almost smashed into the bug's face. Ben growled and snatched him up, lifted him over his head to toss him away, but Vandal Bug twisted loose and landed gracefully.

"They won't care. Don't you see that? Their insurance will pay off and they'll turn a profit and they won't even care about the building."

Ben paused. He had not thought of that.

"And what about the people in the building?" Vandal Bug asked.

"That's why I'm doin' this so late. The buildin's empty. Automated security."

"But do you know that? Do you? What if some janitor is working long hours to pay for his kid's Christmas?"

"I ..."



"What if some jerk made his secretary stay all night to get a presentation ready for some big meeting? What if she's somebody's mom or sister?"

"I ..."

"And Crey still wouldn't care. You know what they would care about? That they corrupted you - turned you into a killer. They would care because that's what they do to us and they would be happy about it."

Ben was silent.

"Come on, Heroid. You're one of the Good Guys...."

Ben looked at the damage he had dealt. It was repairable.

Vandal Bug watched the big machine-man go limp, as if someone had flicked a switch and turned him off.

"So," Ben said finally, "I guess we need t'go turn me in fer what I done here."

Vandal Bug looked at the pile of concrete chips.
"Nyah. Let 'em think the Council did this."

Ben cocked his head.

"Let 'em think the Council was trying to take out the 5th Column."

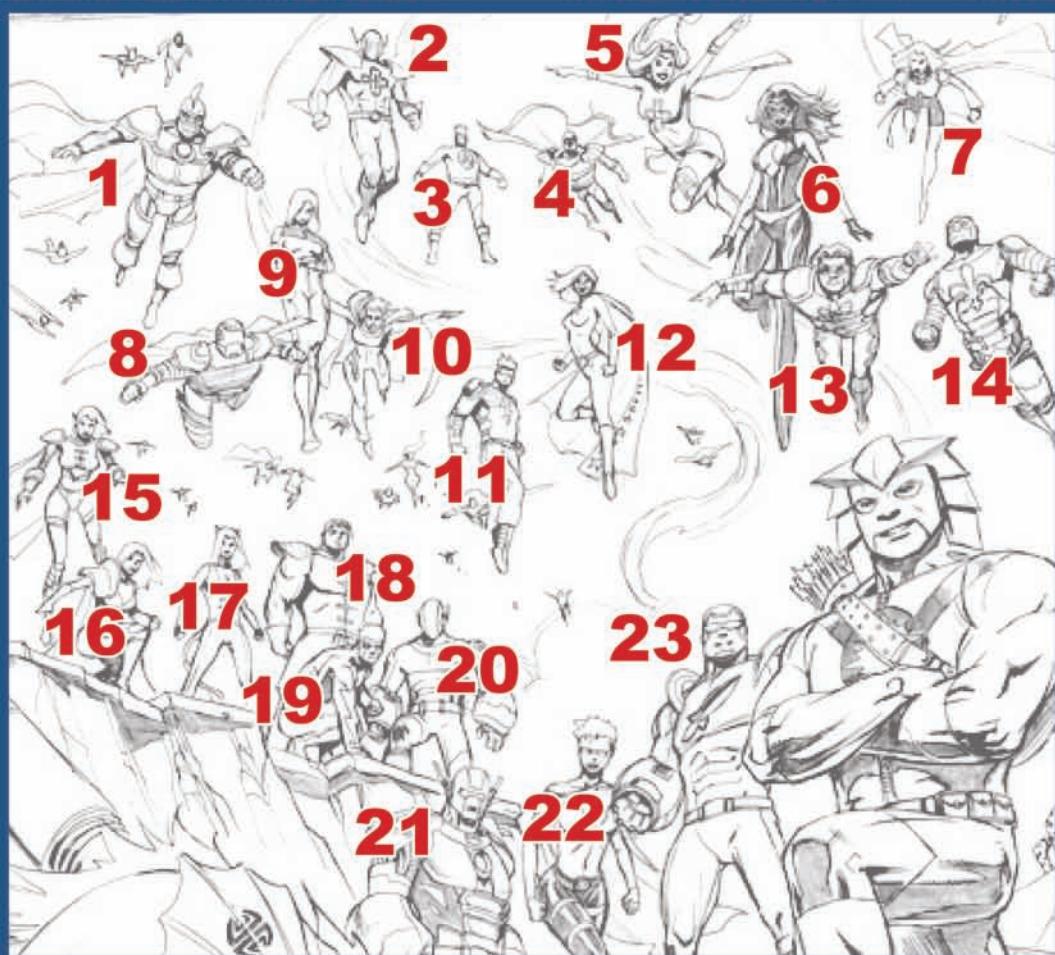
This time Ben laughed, loud and hardy.

"See, my jokes really are funny." Vandal Bug said. "I don't know why nobody ever laughs...."

Ben took a look around. His mind was clear for the first time in days. Revenge would kill his soul as surely as Crey had killed his body. Their victory would be doubled. He couldn't let that happen.

"C'mon Bug, let's get outta here."

"It is what is inside you -- what you feel inside you -- that makes you human," Purple Nebula had said. She was right.



LIST OF CAMEOS ON PAGE 22

CHARACTER

1. Centrvion
2. Medibot 3000
3. Nuclear-Fire
4. Salsero
5. Riverdancer
6. Lady Thanatos
7. Ardent
8. The Omega Ranger
9. Ais Kristl
10. Asrail
11. Zap Robotnik
12. Starglow
13. Captain Pulsar
14. Viceroyalty
15. Genani
16. Wraith Princess
17. Piracat
18. Flux Manchu
19. Ice of Wrath
20. Ultra Myst
21. Black Zenith
22. ForbiddenDesire
23. RetroRocket Man

PLAYER

1. Frank Monto
2. Adam Tanner
3. Lance Allen
4. Jose Cortina
5. Heather Gillie
6. Christina Rizzato
7. Eugene Law
8. Jonathan Hensley
9. Christy Bullimore
10. Michael Sparks
11. Andrew Barber
12. Merilee Aust
13. Aina Rasolomalala
14. Jesse Perry
15. Aaron Jensen
16. Michael Newhouse
17. Eric McCann
18. Simon Cox
19. James Hood
20. Davey McLellan
21. Fred Bohl
22. Karen Ayers
23. Chris Chettle

SERVER

1. Justice
2. Justice
3. Protector
4. Guardian
5. Protector
6. Virtue
7. Justice
8. Pinnacle
9. Virtue
10. Infinity
11. Defiant
12. Champion
13. Freedom
14. Infinity
15. Triumph
16. Victory
17. Freedom
18. Victory
19. Freedom
20. Champion
21. Virtue
22. Protector
23. Virtue

LIST OF CAMEOS ON PAGE 15

1. Flaymecat
2. Draco Templaris
3. Electric X
4. Psy-Control
5. Xeratul
6. Darkweaver
7. Bayani



Solar Surfer: Part Two

By Matthew Wallace (Plasma)

When Dylan awakened this time, it was with vivid sensation. Not in his arms and legs, which were still numb, but searing lashes of pain that cut across his face. Once again, his mouth was obstructed with a full-blown breathing tube.

"Dylan? Thank God you're awake." It was Don Baxter, the President of the Writers Guild of Paragon City. "As soon as we got out, we watched another one of those ships slam right into the building and then fall over and take half of the theater with it. I thought for sure you'd be dead..." "... but out of nowhere, the Back Alley Brawler appeared, asking if we were OK. When we told him you and Jake were still in there, he started clawing through the rubble like a man possessed."

Don took a breath. "The doctors say you'll be okay, although you're not going to be quite the pretty boy you were. A shard of concrete dislodged from the ceiling and hit you dead on. Broke your nose and jaw." Don paused and grinned at him. "You really need to find a new way to get your inspiration. I know they say write what you know, but you have to live through it, first."

Dylan couldn't laugh with the breathing tube in place, but his friend could see the light in his eyes. After a moment, Don rose. "Okay, well, they want me to let you get your rest."

Dylan would have thanked him for being there if he could.

....

Hello.. The voice roused Dylan from his rest.

Hello? Dylan cracked his eyes, looking around, but the room seemed empty. His jaw burned from the breathing tube.

Good. You have regained consciousness. I must converse with you, human.

Dylan's eyes blinked frantically, peering around the room. *What in the world?* Dylan thought.

Not what, but who, human. You do not need to speak out loud. I can hear your thoughts. The voice was soothing and warm.

Uhh... who... who are you? Where are you? Dylan thought.

I am called a word that loosely translates into "Supernova" in your tongue. An exploding star.

I know what a supernova is, Dylan thought, *but what are you?*

I apologize, human. You are the first I have spoken to. I am a Kheldian. An alien, you might say. I am here, in contact with you. I do not have a body, so to speak.

You're... an alien? How are we talking like this? The breathing tube remained in his throat, and his chest rose and fell rhythmically.

I have touched your mind. I apologize for this, but I have rummaged through your memories while you slept. I would normally not have trespassed without your permission, but I am injured and will not survive long.

What? Why not?

I was injured by a Nictus. They are dark beings of energy, similar to my kind but with no respect for life or free will. My energies are weakening steadily.

Wait! Dylan's concern cut into the thought. *Invasion?*

Yes, human. Your world has been invaded by the Rikti, invaders from another world bent on taking yours for their own.

That's what crashed into the auditorium? Dylan thought back to the pewter-colored dreadnaught that shattered the theatre.

That is correct. I watched the first hours of the invasion, trying to help your people as best I could. Several Rikti craft were felled by your heroes, but the devastation was terrible.

This seems unreal, Dylan thought.

It is all too real, human.

For a moment, the sense of contact wavered, then resumed. *Can't a doctor help you?* Dylan asked.

No, human. Your hospitals cannot treat me. I do not have a body that they would even recognize as such.

What will you do?

That is why I am speaking to you, human. My only chance to survive is to find a human host. We kheldians have the ability to merge ourselves with a host being, uniting with them to become more than the sum of our parts.

Wait, you want to take over my body?

Not at all, human. I wish to enter into a partnership where we will share our bodies. I was drawn to you because your body is only half what it was meant to be. Likewise, I am reduced to half of my potential. Unlike you, however, I will perish if I remain in this state for much longer. That is why I ask you to share your form with me.

I... what would happen if I said yes? Dylan was sympathetic with the creature's plight, as he knew what it felt like to be whole one moment, and broken the next.

Where we are of two wills, we will become one. We will be very close. Your ideals are in harmony with mine, human, and that is why I am drawn to you as a partner.

So it wouldn't be like two minds controlling one body? I wouldn't be fighting you to walk forwards while you wanted to walk sideways?

Such chaos would render cohabitation of your form useless. It is difficult to explain to one such as yourself who has never experienced such a union. I can only

Continued page 8

FANTASTIC FAN ART!

Star of America

By Sharon



Thrillionaire and the Harathe Emissary

By Amanda Rachels



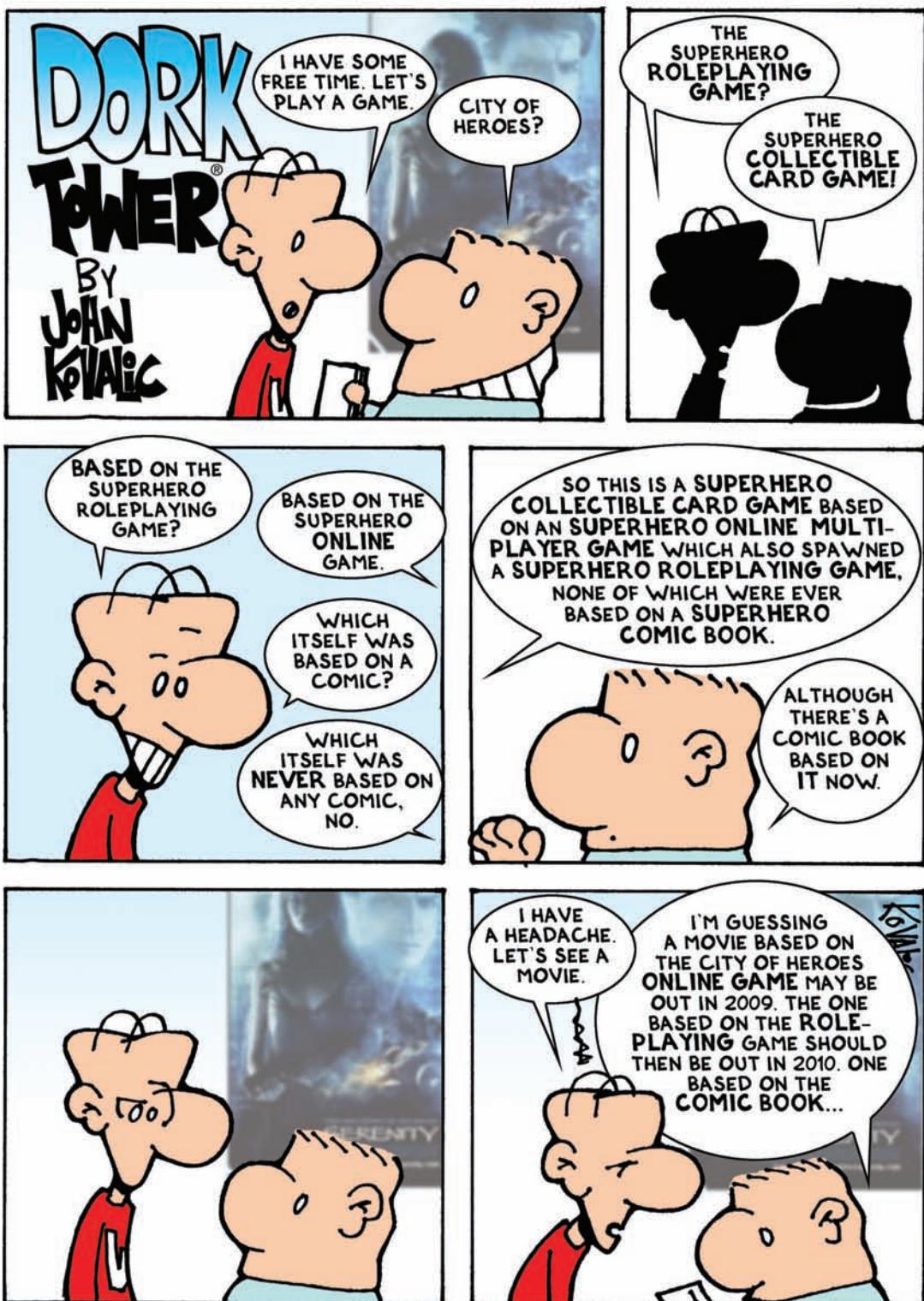
Iclander Ex

By Manuel "Poison" Clavel



KAKTOS

By David Rodriguez



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Surfer

Continued from page 5

say that harmony in a willing union is as automatic as breathing.

But I can't even do that myself, Dylan replied, a note of bitterness tinging his skeptical thinking.

But you will. Once I am anchored within your form, we will be more than the sum of our parts. I can heal your body. It will be stronger than it has ever been. That is the other reason I chose you. If you give me refuge, I can give much back to you.

What? Dylan asked incredulously. *You mean... I would walk again?*

That is correct. The injuries that you have sustained are easily within my power to correct after we unite.

I... I am afraid.

I am also afraid, human. My hour draws nigh. I chose you because I saw quickly how bravery pervades every fiber of your being, and how you have placed others above yourself. I have little time to offer assurances to you, but I can say that I may perish if you deny me. I would prefer more time to explain, but I have no such luxury.

I don't know. I've dreamed of walking. I have dreams where my arms and legs work, and I push out into the surf again... but I've spent years telling myself those were just dreams, and to live my life. To make the most of what I have, because it is still so much to be thankful for.

Dylan was expecting a response, but the feeling of contact grew tenuous. He got nervous.

Hello? Dylan asked, reaching out desperately to the thread of contact which remained.

I... am here, human. My time is here. I can offer no more assurances. If you wish to open yourself to a wayward traveler, I swear that you will surf again, in the sea and across the sky. Otherwise... And for a moment, the contact wavered again. ... otherwise I perish.

Dylan decided then: he didn't know what was going on, he wasn't sure if he could believe this, but if for one moment he could feel the sea again, he could not say no. If he was doomed for that weakness, that longing, then so be it.

I will do it. Dylan said.

There was no response. Then at the back of his mind, Dylan felt something. Like a tender embrace, he felt it. His very sense of self felt something smooth slide around it, then permeate it. He knew who he was. And he knew he was also someone else. In the space of a heartbeat, all he knew about himself was complemented. He had been a surfer chasing an endless summer, a crippled man who pushed away the woman he loved like a martyr, a writer who developed a talent for conveying sensuality he lacked and longed for. He was now also a soldier in a war between light and darkness, a selfless lover of freedom, and a surfer who rode across the sky as energy in the way that Dylan had once rode the sea.

Warmth began to spread through Dylan's body. It was like his dreams, when his limbs could feel again. A wave of pins and needles swept through his body, and then he began to cough spasmodically. His eyes wide, he reached up and threaded the tubing out of his mouth, his arms responding deftly as if he were never injured.

We are alive, he thought.

To be continued...

The Paragon Tattler Fan Art & Fiction Submission Guidelines are now Online!
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