

Beauty Meets the Neo Brigade

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This Title is False (or I am true)

When you go through life, it helps to learn as best you can. Everyone can agree that intelligence is something to be valued. But while that's important, intelligence and being smart can be seen as two different things. One is about knowledge and facts that's meant to enrich a person's understanding of a subject that they can use in life. The other can involve how people see themselves for having intelligence. It's how someone can value being smart while around people with relatively less intelligence that might make this person a little more difficult socially. Basically, there are ways of being smart that are better than others.

As a teenage superhero, social problems aren't exactly a priority. But as a person, it still comes up, particularly for me who's made being friends with the Neo Brigade, the people who recruited me to the team, almost as important as protecting the town of Minor City from evil. Fortunately, I was at a point where I managed to connect with most of them, including Tel-E, the alien girl with vastly greater intelligence than I can ever hope to acquire.

As friends, we all decided to spend our Thursday night going to a Sci-Fi movie together. After befriending Pyra, who I discovered to be the shiest member of the team, I managed to talk her into joining us despite her fear that she could potentially cause harm with her pyro-kinetic abilities. We all got to the movie

theater and took some seats in the corner where she would feel comfortable.

After a few minutes, I found watching the movie wasn't as enjoyable as I hoped. I'm all for a night out with friends, but while I was happy to be with my pals, Race, Bendy, Pyra, as well as my intelligent friend, Tel-E, I was seated next to the "smarter" Brigade member, Nator. I felt weird enough with him when he was the only one who really loved the theater being called the Minor City Multiplexor, but watching a movie with him was much worse.

"Oh, this plot makes no sense. Why would the general give the orders to retreat? There's only forty enemy soldiers and we just saw him fight two-hundred in the beginning. Why is he running away? Oh! Look! That moon in the background! It had five craters in the last shot. Now it has four. It's not even rotating. How does it go from five to four?" Nator questioned the logic of the movie.

While Nator just went on and on with this, the rest of us tried ignoring him as best we could. We could have our fun while he chose not to have any of it. This didn't last long, though.

"What? They wore the same uniforms on that one planet. And now they're on a different planet that's further from the sun and they're wearing the same clothes. Why are they acting like the temperature is exactly the same? That's not possible." Nator criticized.

"Nator, it's fiction. It's not meant to be so accurate." I informed the cyborg as he continued to unintentionally toy with my patience.

"Oh, look at that. That one guy's boots went from black to brown in that last shot."

"Ugh. Can you just shut up?"

"Yes. Do hush up so we can watch!" Tel-E added.

"I know one of my Charevo Elements is Tolerance, but I don't need you testing me." Pyra told him.

"Yeah, no one likes a smart guy." Bendy noted.

"And no one needs to listen to how you feel about this! Just let us enjoy the movie and you can whine about it later." I whispered, still frustrated.

"Oh, come on. This movie is full of flaws. I mean, don't get me started on everyone acting like the planets all have the same gravitational force. The one they're on now clearly looks like it has a larger mass than the last planet. Therefore, the surface gravity must be greater, yet they're carrying their weapons just as easily as they did on the other planet. You know, they can at least address the impossibility if they're gonna do it."

"Race, can I kill him?"

"No." Race sighed.

"Oh, this is so stupid. How do ALL the planets have oxygen? And there's no sun nearby, and yet there's plant life?" Nator continued to nitpick.

"Please? Can I kill him?"

"I'll tell you when you can kill him, Beauty." Race asserted.

I'm sorry if my sarcasm sounded a bit dark. I do want to make friends, and I sometimes talk to them in the middle of a show if we're having a good time. But interrupting the movie to point out logical flaws is one of my biggest pet peeves.

I wasn't the only one annoyed with this, though. Other people in the theater could hear him too as we learned when a theater usher approached our row, shining a flashlight at the team. I turned and saw this guy looking at me as I was still upset, resulting in my powers mildly electrocuting me from the neck since I wasn't smiling.

"Sir, we've been getting numerous complaints about you talking throughout the film. You're going to have to quiet down, or I'll have to ask you to leave." The usher warned Nator.

The usher left as we all went back to the movie. Time went by as Nator still didn't get the idea. He was clearly told that people didn't want him to talk. But despite this knowledge, it conflicted with all the other stuff he knew the movie seemed to be doing wrong. He just continued to be as annoying as he was before.

“Oh, that starship is so fake. Look, it’s got no propulsion on the underside. The thrusters at the end would only propel it horizontally. Oh, look, those turrets are fake. Everything about this movie looks so fake.” Nator complained.

“Of course it looks fake! The movie is animated! None of this is real!” I shouted at him as I looked at him who looked back. This only caused yet another electric shock I had to deal with from not looking happy for him and his interruptions.

“I’ll say it’s not. I mean, it’s like the speed of light doesn’t exist here. Do these people not know how lasers work?”

My powers electrocuting me and proper movie theater etiquette. Nator didn’t get it with either of those things. There was just no way I could watch a movie with the cyborg. And I guess the theater usher decided to make this happen. He returned and forced the whole Brigade to leave in the middle of the movie. We all left the theater as I kept suppressing more electric shocks from still being bothered with this whole thing.

“Way to go, Nator. You actually proved robots still have a long way to go before they become self-aware.” Pyra remarked as we left.

“Yeah, I know you can remember anything. But how come you couldn’t remember the thing at the start of the movie that says to not be disruptive?” Race asked, annoyed.

“Hey, if it’s a crime to point out when something is not completely accurate, then just lock me up and throw away the key.” Nator argued as Bendy turned his team communicator on and called our boss, Chief Lou Trotterberg.

“Trotterberg here.” The Chief said over the communicator.

“Hey, Chief. Uh, yeah. Nator’s here. He says he wants to confess to a crime.” Bendy told our boss before Race ran to him and turned the communicator off.

“Hey! Hey! He’s gonna take that seriously, you know.” Race alerted him.

“Ah, let him. It’s probably the only way we can enjoy anything without hearing Nator’s input.” I commented.

"Well, excuse me for knowing more about space than those animators. Apparently, with all those loud explosions, it's like sound waves exist everywhere and I just wasn't informed." Nator mentioned, still missing the point.

"Nator, the Internet called. They want its nitpicky comments back."

"That doesn't make any sense. If I have their comments, why are they calling you? I never said you were my secretary."

"All that knowledge and he still knows very little." Tel-E implied.

"Although, that would probably be a better position for you."

"Uh. I'm sorry. What?" I asked, unaware of whether Nator's secretary remark was him being sexist or just being a jerk. Either one, not a good excuse.

"Nothing. Just the obvious thing about us having you in our team." Nator replied as the rest of the team looked a bit uneasy about this.

"No. What? What's the obvious thing?" I interrogated Nator, wanting an answer.

"Look, I'm just saying I know you've been with us for a little while now, but I just wouldn't put someone so new to this city and the people we know in such an equal position with us. I mean, it's more of a dig at Race than you if anything. But, come on, I'm sure you know that it doesn't make much sense for you to be with us."

I just couldn't wrap my mind around what he was talking about. Did he not know that I helped everyone else in the team? He had to have taken that into account when looking at me as part of a team. I'll admit I agreed that it was totally unusual for me to have joined the group so soon after Race met me, which was about two minutes. That's a legitimate criticism for him to yell about if this was a movie he was watching.

But while that's about me joining the group as a hero, it should be perfectly fine for someone like me to have friends. Even if those people are considered more experienced than me, it should still be okay. I will point out how everyone else on the

team was well aware how much friendship meant to me. Nator, on the other hand, was a little too slow on this.

“Okay. Now, just a minute . . .” I began, about to talk to him about this.

However, before I could grill him on this subject, the earth began to heavily shake.

“Whoa! Earthquake!” Bendy hollered.

“On the east coast? Are you sure?” I asked.

“Look!” Race alerted us, pointing to a strange looking machine the size of an old boombox implanted on the street while the device had some bars to measure frequency as it was displayed with a digital number on the side next to a knob.

But it wasn’t just this device on the road that appeared to be causing trouble. There was a teenage girl with a jet rocket sticking out of her back, hovering over the device. This girl had shoulder length dark hair with a streak of it dyed pink. She wore a dark blue blouse, a tight black miniskirt, and blue boots.

Going to the abnormal side of her appearance, there was a mechanical look to part of her body as was evidenced by the rocket on her back, which seemed to sprout from the back of her neck that was made of metal. In fact, looking at the rest of her body, her right arm, left hand, left leg, and the right side of her face was entirely made of metal with her right eye being entirely red. Apparently, this girl was a real cyborg almost exactly like Nator. How cool is that?

But this girl was also a villain too as I was informed not long after seeing her for the first time. On both the metal and flesh hand of hers, there was a Charevo Emblem, seeming to appear on a person’s hands regardless of whether a substitute is used. Her emblem was of a brain, a balloon, and an old cell phone. This represented her Charevo Trinity of Intelligence, Arrogance, and Technology, three elements to describe my new foe, Cyhack.

Tel-E levitated the team in the air to avoid the trembling of the earth, bringing us closer to this girl.

“Heh heh heh. I bet no one ever thought to make an earthquake device to create some chaos here. I guess I better

leave a nice mark so they know the Cyhack had the idea.” Cyhack laughed to herself as she produced a gadget from her metal leg that stamped the machine with an emblem resembling her.

This device may have been small, but we could see a couple trees beginning to collapse. Before it could create any more rumbling, Bendy stretched his arms out to snatch the machine from the ground, stopping the earthquake, and getting Cyhack’s attention while Tel-E set the team on the ground.

“Cyhack, I know you like to advertise yourself, but I think you should wait ‘til after your stuff helps you get away with something.” Nator mocked his rival cyborg.

“The Neo Brigade? Oh, so you still think you can beat the Cyhack? Well, let’s see who’s smarter!” Cyhack declared as she flew up to some cable wires with the rocket on her back.

Don’t try this at home kids. Cyhack grabbed hold of the wires with both hands as they connected to a few more poles and cables. Rather than get electrocuted, Cyhack demonstrated her powers by having the wires all move closer to her, disconnecting from the poles. Not only did they move towards her, but they actually moved INTO her.

Suddenly, the wires completely merged with her body, sticking out of her back like she was some Sci-Fi octopus. As these cables appeared from her, Cyhack was then able to send a stream of electricity out around her to all nearby powerlines. Before we knew it, this shockwave caused every street light to turn off, not to mention the fact that it struck our whole team, forcing us away from her briefly. We were okay, but there was basically a huge blackout in that area of the city.

“Whoa! She can absorb the wires into her body? Nator, how come you can’t do that?” I asked, getting caught in the thrill of seeing this new villain.

“Oh, there’s more than just the wires.” Tel-E noted.

It was still completely pitch black on the street, so we could barely see Cyhack as she had landed with her rocket in front of us. The only light we could see were the small flickers of

electricity that sparked from the ends of the wires mixed into the cyborg.

After getting these cables into her, she controlled them at will, just like how I could control my hair, moving them to several nearby cars, street lights, lamp posts, and inactive neon signs that surrounded her. We couldn't see what was going on, but in those small flickers of light, we saw all these electric devices moving through the wires and over to Cyhack. There may have been limited light from all this, but as we heard all these things go to her, we saw them all merge together, forming Cyhack as a giant cyborg as she was about twenty-seven feet above us. There were pieces of each device sticking out of her as she was just a colossal mechanical beast at this point, staring down at the entire Neo Brigade with only the small part of her face being the only organic thing we could see of her.

"Here. You hold it." Bendy told me, handing the earthquake device to me and stepping aside.

As cool as it was to see Cyhack have the power to absorb technology into her, it did look a little scary to see a mechanical monster attack us as she tried to get her earthquake device back. Cyhack just blasted more electricity through her hands at the team as we all scattered to dodge it before we retaliated.

Race used his super speed to dart into Cyhack's legs made of cars to get her a little off balance as Tel-E projected an energy beam from her mind at the cyborg, causing her to topple. While what we saw of Cyhack as this huge beast was what was on her exterior, there was still more that she had as she demonstrated by extending some street lamps out of her back to put her upright again. The street lamps returned to the inside of her back as she attacked with another wave of electricity, firing in different directions with the wires she still attached to her back.

Thinking quickly, I morphed into one of my female characters, choosing an alien named Feckle who was covered from head to toe with electronic nodes that I used to absorb her electric attack. I then shot some of my character's own electricity back at the cyborg, but Cyhack blocked it with her giant car arms.

We all tried to attack while she withstood it, keeping her attention on me, the person holding her earthquake device.

Optional Dialogue 1

Cyhack finally sent one more round of electricity at me as I was too slow to absorb it this time. I was hit and dropped the earthquake machine on impact.

Cyhack was about to retrieve it as she extended her wires out to it. However, Bendy grabbed hold of her invention right as the wires wrapped around him instead. Cyhack tried shocking the rubber fighter, but he was able to withstand the attack no problem.

As Bendy had the upper hand in this situation, he went on the offensive by expanding his hand to the form of a giant hammer and stretching it out to punch Cyhack in the chest, forcing her back a few feet. This didn't really hurt her much either, though, for as Bendy went to slam her again, her giant mechanical hands grabbed the stretcher's hand, and finally swung him around, throwing him to a lamppost that wasn't absorbed. His body just comically wrapped around it, leaving him unable to retaliate right away.

During this last attack, Bendy dropped the earthquake device. Before Cyhack could get to it, Race darted down and snatched it off the ground. While he held the machine, I had fired one more lightning attack with my Feckle character. Rather than block it, however, Cyhack dodged it by using the power of her enormous mechanical legs to jump high into the air, disappearing from our sights, quite literally as the flickers from her wires were the only sources of light we had.

Race looked around in the pitch darkness, not seeing or hearing Cyhack at all. As the rest of us looked up, however, we could see a shadow moving under the moonlight as Cyhack suddenly came crashing down on top of Race who had stopped to look for her.

After crushing the Brigade leader, Cyhack was about to pick up her device, but Pyra suddenly appeared out of the air in her flames and snatched it.

"You can't fool with me! I work well in the dark!" Pyra insisted as she projected a round of fire at the cyborg.

As if the electricity projection wasn't enough of a hint, Cyhack absorbing technology also allowed her to use new technological abilities, which she showed by shooting some yellow energy at Pyra from one of her arms, forming a cannon from it like Nator would. This energy wound up getting to Pyra and solidifying by wrapping around her like it was a chain. The restrained fire girl fell to the ground and dropped the earthquake device in doing so.

Cyhack victoriously retrieved her invention as the rest of us were about to try and get it from her. But as we ran to the cyborg, she held her massive arm out again, and somehow created an invisible barrier entirely between us and her. It covered the whole area between two buildings on the other side of the street, and none of us could get through it.

"Wow! She has an invisible force field?" I asked, still thinking this girl was cool.

"Well, I wouldn't use an energy field with color, or I'd just illuminate the place and let you see me." Cyhack laughed. "Anyway, speaking of you not seeing me. Hack ya, later!"

With this defense keeping us back, the amazing colossal Cyhack turned around, about to run away with her deadly earth weapon, when all of a sudden, Nator shot an energy blast at Cyhack, knocking her into her own force field, revealing himself to have been on the other side with her.

"Darkness doesn't work on a guy with his own night vision to detect heat signatures. Also, you have to put a barrier between everyone or nobody for you to prove it works, Cyhack." Nator taunted his rival. "I believe that's related to atomicity, in case you . . ."

Without warning, the evil cyborg's wires blasted Nator away with electricity before extending them out to wrap around the Brigade member and electrocute him further.

“You talk too much.” Cyhack laughed.

“Oh yeah? . . . Well . . . get a load of my latest creation! It’s my particle vaporizer!” Nator declared, firing a new cannon from his chest at Cyhack.

After that weapon’s energy hit Cyhack, she dropped Nator who activated the rocket jets on his feet to propel him away from Cyhack. Nator even had his feet even release wheels at the bottom to rocket away like he had some tricked out roller skates. The cyborg girl tried whipping her wires out at the Brigade member, but his feet allowed him to stay out of the way.

“Hello world! Looks like the Cyhack can’t keep up with my rocket propelled feet either.” Nator claimed as he then hit Cyhack with his arm cannon.

Cyhack withstood this attack, blocking it again with those enormous arms as she still held her earthquake device. Nator was trying to knock the contraption out of her hands, but she decided to make that task near impossible.

With a wicked smirk on her face, Cyhack held her invention like she did with the wires, cars, and lights and suddenly absorbed it into her body. Before I knew it, she became her own deadly weapon as she merged with it. The change wasn’t as noticeable. The only thing that altered with her was the pistons on the bottom of the machine that had latched onto the street appearing in place of her giant car hands. Somehow her powers made those pistons proportional to the rest of her body.

After merging with the contraption, Cyhack put her hands on the ground, and suddenly blared a roaring sound like a lawnmower. As she held her hands down on the road, the earth shook once again like it did when we first saw her. All of us behind the force field felt the trembling beneath us as we struggled to stand. But we could still keep upright for the most part.

Nator, however, was on wheels, so there was no way of him to even struggle to stand. Like Race running on Cold Miner’s floor of ice, Nator tumbled to the ground instantly, falling on his back like a bad roller skater. As he lay there, the enormous Cyhack then stepped on the cyborg’s chest.

“Ya need a static surface for wheels, Einstein.” Cyhack chortled as she then grabbed Nator by the head with both hands. “If I can shake the earth, let’s see if your only human organ can withstand these tremors.”

As both those earthquake producing hands clasped to Nator’s metal skull, she was ready to shake him up. His robotic exterior may have had the potential to withstand such punishment, but his human brain wasn’t exactly built for this kind of thing.

“Leave him alone, Frankenstein!” I challenged the mechanical girl from behind the force field.

“Let me deal with this, Beauty! You can’t get to her.” Nator inaccurately acknowledged.

“Just watch me.”

Before I could let Cyhack hurt the cyborg, I transformed into a ghost character to intangibly faze through her barrier. This was a rock star ghost girl character with a magic electric guitar weapon, which I took to strum a chord more deafening than Cyhack’s earth movements. This chord produced a sonic blast directed at the female cyborg, knocking her away from Nator.

Seeing me interrupt her torment of her rival, Cyhack countered with her lightning blast again. As I saw it coming, I quickly turned intangible again as it passed through me, hitting the force field, while I just stayed staring at her with a smile of confidence.

“Careful now. Ghosts in the dark are at their best. Unlike you.” I warned the cyborg.

I didn’t know how right I was at that point, for as Cyhack had drained the area of power to outsmart us, we were still fighting on a public street. And as Cyhack faced us, we could see a pair of dim lights approaching her. As it got closer, we found it to be the head lights of an oncoming truck.

Oblivious to this vehicle as its driver was to her being in the road due to the power outage. Not seeing her in time, the truck got even closer, as the driver tried breaking, but not quick enough. The vehicle plowed right into Cyhack, knocking her giant

metal body into her own force field, falling flat on her face at the end.

She was so caught off guard by this that she couldn't get up right away. Taking this opportunity, I floated my character right in front of her, and utilized her powerful guitar to play a few more notes. The succession of each note resulted in a continuous sonic wave projected at Cyhack and her mech. This was longer and stronger than my earlier attack.

Cyhack may have had all the armor to take this blaring without it coming apart all at once. But she was still a girl with a human brain and human ear drums connected to a human brain, even if there was a bunch of metal surrounding it. She was just so agitated by all this noise going into her skull, her brain just couldn't take any more of it. As if her mechanical body was reacting to her mind's pain, her body glowed in a flash of white before we found the technology she absorbed become completely separate from her body.

The neon signs, the cars, the street lights, and even the earthquake device had all become defused from her. She couldn't keep her power going after that attack to merge again. Cyhack was just lying there back to normal, surrounded by all the stuff she had merged with. Of course, when I say "normal", that still included her as a cyborg as the right side of her face remained mechanical as well as those other parts of her body.

As she was lying there, I took the chance to grow my hair out again, wrapping it around her arms, keeping her from grabbing any additional technology to fuse into her. With her restrained, she was completely helpless as I stood over her, about to pick up her earthquake device. I was about to, but Nator grabbed it to mock the cyborg first. He then gave the confused truck driver a thumbs up as he drove away.

"Ha! It's ours now, buddy. That'll show you to mess with me." Nator gloated over his rival.

"Mess with YOU? I got hit by a truck, you idiot." Cyhack corrected him as she was on the ground.

“Well, either way, you won’t be moving the earth anytime soon.”

It sure was a relief to see Cyhack forced back to her less dangerous form as opposed to the one where she was covered in cars, lights, and wires. But while I was mostly focused on her being defeated, I was a little surprised as I looked at Nator who didn’t even seem to note my role in stopping her. Cyhack came so close to severely hurting him, yet he, for some reason, just didn’t acknowledge me at all.

“. . . Take my machine, will you? Urgh . . . I swear, Rodriguez, when I get that device back, I’m cranking it up to its maximum frequency. It’ll rock this city so hard, it’ll make the San Andreas Fault look like a paint shaker. Just . . . you . . . wait.” Cyhack vowed.

The evil cyborg seemed just as serious as ever despite the fact that she couldn’t take the earthquake device back right, for her arms were tied together. On top of that, we were all set to take the girl to jail. However, while she couldn’t move her arms, her mechanical leg still worked the way Nator’s did in that she had a couple gizmos built into it. For her, we could see a red button come out it, which she went on to press with her foot.

Upon activation of whatever that button’s interface was connected to, Cyhack’s body suddenly became surrounded by blue energy before she began fading away in some white light. As that happened, she seemed to dematerialize entirely.

I didn’t know if her thinking was that she’d rather die than get captured by Nator. It all seemed like a surprising move from her. Was Cyhack really taking her own life with a self-destruct button?

Well, as I found with villains like Christy Ferguson and Whitney Trainor from my earlier time in Minor City, this wasn’t vaporization, it was teleportation. She was still alive, but free from us completely. That was when I started to think maybe Nator not acknowledging me in her defeat was almost preferable.

“Are you sure it’s a good idea to antagonize her again?” Race questioned, sounding concerned.

“Pff. What’s she gonna do? It’s not like she’d come after us, knowing what we can do to her. I think she’d know better.” Nator argued. “Besides, we can keep this locked up later, so she won’t even think to . . .”

“CAR!” I cried as a car approached. Seeing as how it was still dark out and we were standing in the street, it wasn’t much of a surprise as we all ran to the side.

That was the end of the night for all of us. We had acquired the earthquake contraption, but Cyhack had escaped. That was only one dangerous piece we had under control. That cyborg seemed to really want her invention back to use, so we should’ve just destroyed it then. However, our boss, Chief Trotterberg, told us we needed to keep it intact as evidence. I know. It would’ve made sense to just arrest her on sight after we knew of all the damage she had caused, but these were the rules we had to follow.

So the Neo Brigade just had to hold onto the evidence until the Chief would arrange for a special security team to keep it in a remote and more secure location where Cyhack couldn’t steal it. So, until then, we just had to worry about making it ‘til that day and keep the device safe ourselves.

The next day, we were all at school with the exception of Pyra who was still dealing with her agoraphobia she admitted to the week before. A small movie theater was only baby steps for her compared to a school full of kids. So she continued to attend school remotely, which, I guess, helped in that we could have someone at home to guard the earthquake device.

For the rest of us, we went through the day before we were all together again at lunch to talk about things. We all sat at our own table to eat. Nator was there too, even though everything about his body outside his brain was mechanical, which meant he couldn’t eat and digest food, not even having a sense of taste anymore. I didn’t know how he went through life like that. I’m sure my body would’ve malfunctioned from all the electric shocks from my miserable looking face if it was made out of metal. But he just endured it himself to live. I didn’t know what was keeping him going.

So, instead of lunch, Nator sat with a book in front of him, starting on homework early while we all talked as Race sat down after getting his lunch.

“So, Race, did the Chief tell you if anyone found Cyhack last night?” I inquired.

“No. She’s still out there.” Race answered, not feeling too good. “Well, Nator, I guess you might be hearing from her again soon.”

“Come on, Race. So we stole her earthquake machine. There’s no way she’s gonna take it from us. Sure, she’d probably pay a lot o’ cash for it if someone else had it, but I’m too smart to put that thing up for sale.” Nator said with confidence.

“Still, you never know what’s going to occur when you encounter someone like that.” Tel-E noted. “You may be smart, but you should still be careful until the device is secure.”

“It is secure! I think I know how to keep someone from stealing a deadly earth shaking machine.” Nator proclaimed.

“She’s got it! EARTHQUAKE!” Bendy screamed, standing behind Nator and slightly enlarging his hands as he put them on the sides of his head.

As Bendy was out of Nator’s view, he rapidly shook the cyborg’s skull back and forth like he had something close to the power of the earthquake device. And once Bendy mimicked the machine’s function, Nator didn’t catch on right away, and, instead, jumped out of his seat, scared silly.

After thinking Bendy’s hands were part of the actual contraption that could injure his skull, he hurriedly got out of his hands, landing on the floor and screaming. He finally looked around for Cyhack as a bunch of other kids had their attention to him as Nator freaked out.

“Ha! Gotcha! Not so smart now, are ya?” Bendy gloated as Nator looked both relieved and annoyed and two twin girls at the table next to us laughed at that little joke. Feeling like he impressed them, Bendy decided to take a bow for them. “Thank you, ladies! I do my best.”

“Good one, Bendy.” I complimented the stretcher, high fiving him as Nator got up off the floor.

“What are you doing?” Nator questioned Bendy, irritated.

“What? It's just a joke.” Bendy defended himself, still laughing.

“You're making me look stupid in front of the Boole twins!” Nator groaned as the two twin girls whispered to each other as they looked at us.

“Oh yeah. Isn't that Tiffany, the one who beat Tel-E in that trivia contest?” I inquired.

“Her and her sister, Elsa. I don't like them. They think they're so smart, but they're not. You're with me on this, right, Tel-E?”

“Truthfully, I'm not one to hold a grudge over a silly competition.” Tel-E admitted, sounding more mature.

“Why not?”

“Nator, are you still bitter about them beating you in the science fair last year?”

“No! I asked Elsa to work with me and she said yes. She kept telling me she'd meet up a bunch of days so we could get started on it. Not only did she never show up, it turns out she was working with her sister the whole time. And then they beat me in the science fair.” Nator clarified. “Trust me. They are no good.”

“I don't know, Nator. They're lookin' pretty good to me.” Bendy argued as he just stared at them while they whispered to each other some more.

The more the stretcher looked at the twins, the more attracted he appeared to be as he just continued to smile at the girls. The Boole twins certainly looked cute. And they were identical too. Both had green t-shirts, and green skirts, and long black hair with a purple headband. And as Bendy looked at them, they stared back too, though not as long as him. The girls just went back to eating before one of them got up to throw out the garbage on her lunch tray.

“But since you like to obsess over them, maybe you can tell me which is which.” Bendy challenged his friend.

"I don't know. They're identical. Identical twins can't have an explicit distinction."

"Not exactly." Tel-E interjected. "If they have super powers, they would each have Charevo Emblems on their hands. Distinct ones like any others. Of course, if they're evil, the emblems can be hidden at any point, though."

"Oh, that is so not a real thing."

"Well, if you want to not believe in the magical side of the Charevo Gene, then sure, there is nothing that could possibly distinguish them."

Suddenly, as the Boole twin who got up was carrying her tray to the garbage, she got to some water spilled on the floor, and slipped. She dropped her tray and was about to fall back as soon as she lost her footing over that spill.

Before she could fall to the floor, though, Bendy quickly elongated his arm out behind her to catch the girl. No one in the Brigade knew which of the twins this was, but she was saved by the stretcher who approached her.

"Oh! My hero. I wasn't expecting that." One of the twins uttered, sounding grateful as Bendy held her like she was a movie damsel.

"No problem. I'm kinda used to expecting all sorts o' stuff where people can get hurt. I, uh, I'm Ben. Ben Ducilman." Bendy introduced himself, sounding a little modest at the end.

"Sounds like you forgot you protect the city too."

"Well, yeah. I mean, no, I didn't forget. I . . . uh, I don't think we've met."

"Oh, I'm Tiffany Boole. It's very nice to formally meet you. I have a great respect for you and everyone in the Neo Brigade."

"Yeah? Well, the feeling isn't mutual." Nator interrupted, pulling Bendy by the shoulder. "Come on, Bendy, don't waste your time on her."

"What's wrong, Nate? You think I'm gonna open your locker and replace the lock again so you'd think you forgot which one was yours?" Tiffany asked the cyborg with a grin.

"I told you never to bring that up again." Nator grumbled.

"Well, as much as I hate to make you feel insecure, I'm a little more interested in your friend here."

As Tiffany turned back to Bendy with a smile, Tel-E suddenly levitated Nator over to her.

"Whoa. What are you doing?" Nator asked, surprised.

"I'm keeping you from making a scene." Tel-E stated.

"Ben, since I've kinda liked seeing what you do, would you like to go out some time?" Tiffany inquired.

"You wanna go out on a date? With me? Heck yeah, I'd like to!" Bendy answered, excited.

Following Tel-E's example, I immediately grew my hair over Nator's mouth just before he screamed at the top of his mechanical lungs while I kept him muzzled. The cyborg didn't make any move to get my hair off him as he only seemed focused on Bendy and Tiffany. It was like I wasn't even there.

"Great. I'll see you at five o' clock at the beach tonight?" Tiffany asked.

"I'll be there." Bendy confirmed as Tiffany smiled and walked back to her table to sit with her sister. Bendy meanwhile was as ecstatic as ever as he turned back to us and high-fived Race. "Yes! Am I smooth, or what?"

As I kept Nator muzzled, he just mumbled through my hair in frustration while Bendy was just beaming in joy. The cyborg sounded pretty unintelligible through his anger and my hair over his mouth, but Bendy seemed to pick up on it.

"No, I'm not going out with her to make you suffer." Bendy assured the cyborg as Nator mumbled some more. "Hey, if you wanted to keep me from dating her, you should've asked her out yourself. That way, you can make her miserable the way you've always wanted."

"Nator, what are you so worried about? She seems nice enough. What's the problem?" I asked as I took my hair off Nator's mouth.

"The problem is Bendy is going out with one of my most hated rivals. I mean, I know he wouldn't go out with Cyhack, but this is just wrong!"

"You're not in charge of what's right and what's wrong." Bendy argued.

"Well, I for one support Bendy's decision. Just because Nator doesn't like her, it doesn't mean she's a terrible person." I noted as Bendy put his arm on my shoulder.

"You heard Hairpiece, Nate. I think I'll be fine."

It's nice to see a pal feel even happier than you normally see him. But it's a little different when it's offset by someone else having to feel completely miserable. The rest of the school day was just Bendy and Nator acting as additionally positive and negative respectively. I can't say my input was helping Nator's opinions, to be honest. Whenever I looked at him, he seemed to be lost in frustration over his rival. However, he did eventually simmer down the less he thought about it.

After school when the Neo Brigade returned home to our HQ, Nator had apparently been a bit more calm as I was walking down a hall on the upper floor and saw him tinkering with a lock on the wall near a door. All I could see was a tiny keyboard connected to a bunch of wires as the cyborg had a screwdriver in his hands to do some work. I was a bit curious as I hadn't actually been to every room of the HQ yet. So I just approached him on it.

"Working on something?" I asked as Nator looked up.

"What? Oh. Just inspecting the biometric scanners on the security system to this room. It was a little buggy when I put Cyhack's earthquake device inside last night. Now it should be good." Nator explained, looking at the biometric terminal. Apparently, that room he was securing was where Cyhack's machine was being kept. Wish he could've told me that before.

"I didn't know you had this. Hey, do all the members of the Neo Brigade have access to these rooms?"

"Oh, uh, yeah. All of us have our fingerprints on file here. I would've told you about it, but . . ."

"But what? Come on. You can trust me. I know I'm the new girl, but I'm not gonna steal anything restricted."

"I'll think about it."

"No, really, Nator. I . . . I feel like you haven't really been seeing me as a member of the team like everyone else. I know I haven't been here as long as you and I'm still learning things, but I've helped you guys out a lot these past couple weeks. And I care about you and the Brigade. So it would really mean a lot if you could make me feel like I belong here. Whaddaya say?" I appealed to the cyborg. He paused.

"I'll think about it."

After being as polite as I could with my usual smile, I just let out a sigh from that refusal. Of course, that was when my smile ended, causing the weakness of my powers to once again kick in as I received a sudden jolt of electricity through my neck. Those shocks ceased, though, as Nator got up and walked away, averting his gaze at me that triggered the jolt.

"Really, Nator?" I asked, feeling a little annoyed as he turned back around.

"Beauty, I know you've done some good, but, so far, you've been acting more like a fiction fangirl than someone who takes this stuff seriously. I'd just rather have some more time to let you grow out of this." Nator explained.

Grow out of this? Really? I could kind of see his point, but I felt even more annoyed when he implied I was more of a problem than an asset for the group. He was basically saying I had to be someone else entirely as if he was someone far superior.

"Uh. Excuse me. But this smile isn't just to react to cool things, you know. Sure, I can be a little excited at times, but I'm not . . ." I argued with a fake grin before Nator cut me off.

"Look, I've seen you, and you just don't seem like someone who thinks the best way for the team. That's all. Don't worry. It could all change." Nator informed me.

I gave up after that. It was obvious Nator still wasn't on board with me being on the team. Now, I know being new involves taking time to learn new things, but this wasn't just about knowing team protocol. This was about me being me. I know I can have fun sometimes, but I've never completely steered anyone wrong from that. It's not like I'd prefer to be scared in the face of

danger. It's just how I react to get through it. But it didn't seem like Nator would understand any of that. It's just not logical to him to think more than one way for a given situation.

You know who is more flexible in approaching danger? Bendy, of course. And he had just left his room, walking down the hall to me and Nator.

"Hey, guys. Don't mind me. I'm just getting ready for my date with a girl Nator hates." Bendy mentioned, knowing Nator would get upset. "If Pyra asks, tell her I'm taken tonight."

"Dude, you are making a big mistake. You barely know Tiffany. I know her and I know she's a jerk. Knowing that, you can't still want to date her." Nator warned him.

"Give it a rest, Nator. I don't think this affects you, like, at all." I argued.

"Beauty, let the senior Brigade members sort this out." Nator said to me, sounding more condescending this time.

Predictably, I instantly got another electric shock after he looked at me receive that request.

"Excuse me. I'm his friend too, you know. If he needed a robot girlfriend, I'd leave it to the expert." I acknowledged, faking a passable smirk again.

"I am an expert on the Boole twins though. So, when you think about it, whose opinion is more valid?" Nator argued, again with the condescension. Luckily, Bendy saved me from having to talk about this more.

"Don't worry, Beauty. I can handle this." Bendy told me. "Look, Nator, I hear you. But I'm not listening. Because, as Tel-E would tell you, I'm hoping to know her better than what you already know. So there. Now, on an unrelated note, don't tell anyone, but I'm actually a little nervous about this date."

"You? Nervous? Some daredevil you are." I snickered.

"No. Really. I actually don't date people I don't know too well. Beauty, can you come along to keep watch over me? Just so I know a friend is nearby. Please?" Bendy begged.

"You want me to go along on your date? Alright. Fine. I don't have much else going on. Not with Nator, anyway."

“Yes! Thank you!”

“Hang on. If you’re letting people keep an eye on you, I’m going too. I know insincerity, and Tiffany seems pretty phony to me. So I’m gonna see what tricks she has before she does anything.” Nator insisted.

“Ugh. Fine. You can come too.” Bendy reluctantly accepted Nator’s offer. “That way, you can see she’s perfectly normal.”

“Nator too? Okay, this isn’t what I had in mind for a double date.” I commented.

Don’t get me wrong. Helping Bendy get through a first date with someone through some supervision was perfectly fine with me. But did I need my own supervision for this too? Well, I guess Nator was so adamant in the idea, he had to tag along too as we joined Bendy down at the Minor City beach.

The beach spread out pretty far, but Bendy was right near a family fun center by the main parking lot. The center had go-karts, batting cages, games, mini-golf, a lot of things Bendy and I could enjoy. Nator? I don’t know. Maybe. He would’ve had to tell me first, and I wasn’t holding my breath on that.

Nator and I stayed off in the distance near some bushes on the parking lot, which was up on a small hill over the sand. We could see Bendy down by the water close to the family fun center close to us. We remained out of sight, as I remained not as comfortable being around Nator, and saw Tiffany Boole arrive at the beach, walking up to Bendy on the sand at the bottom of the hill.

“Hey, Tiff. Uh, I can call you Tiff, right?” Bendy asked, kind of shy at first.

“Sure. My nickname is One if you wanna save a letter.” Tiffany said with a grin, looking more innocent as she kept her hands in her pockets.

“One, huh? As in ‘One of a kind’?”

“Heehee. Well, I am a twin, so not exactly.”

“Right. So, hey, you wanna start with the go-karts?”

“I wouldn’t object to it much.”

The two seemed to start their date off pretty well. I could see Bendy still looking a bit nervous, but he adjusted well. Bendy and Tiffany then took off for the go-kart area right by the main building of the family fun center as Nator and I stayed behind them, remaining undetected.

“She seems alright to me.” I mentioned.

“She’s gonna try some kinda prank out on him. I know it.” Nator maintained.

“Even if she does, don’t you think Bendy can take it? I mean, the worst that could happen is his ego could get hurt, and I can’t see the problem with that.” I argued.

“There’s more to it than that. If Tiffany or Elsa gets the better of you, she won’t let you forget it.”

“Not to steal your logical thinking, but I think your super powered memory is what would keep YOU from forgetting it.”

Nator did have a super memory as part of his powers, but, with the look he gave me, he wasn’t buying it. I mean, he had a Charevo Emblem on his skin covered metallic hands, which carried the mark of a brain, three black circles, and a graph, but he didn’t seem to believe he even had powers. It’s weird. I talked to Tel-E about this, and she surmised that he had the ability to remember anything, the power of enhanced intelligence, and the ability to control anything he creates at an above average level. But Nator seemed to think this was all completely organic for him, which, I couldn’t blame him for thinking as none of those abilities are all supernatural and fanciful like everyone else’s. Still, there were just parts of the Charevo Gene he couldn’t accept were real, no matter how often Tel-E tried to convince him of their existence.

Anyway, I wasn’t gonna try arguing with him that much. Nator and I just continued to watch over Bendy and Tiffany, not saying a word to each other. It wasn’t like I didn’t want to talk to him at all, but with all his smarts, I didn’t know if he and I could talk about anything. At least there was one person around with a much smarter friend who didn’t have trouble relating to her.

We could see Bendy smiling and laughing with Tiffany while they went for a walk on the beach, skipping stones along the

shore. They even held hands as I watched them stroll with the sunset in the background. They looked pretty cute together. And Tiffany didn't do anything bad to him as Nator predicted. It just looked like a silly guy with a smart girl acting like best friends. That was nice to see it wasn't impossible.

After their long stroll, their date reached the two-hour mark as Bendy and Tiffany sat in the sand together, innocently staring at the sunset over the horizon of the beach.

"You know, Nator. With all the warnings you've been giving, I was kinda hoping Tiffany would do something to stop the boredom." I moaned.

"She's going to do something. I'm telling you. I don't know what, but she's going to make Bendy look stupid. But she doesn't know we're here, so when she does whatever she's gonna do, I'm gonna surprise her myself." Nator assured me.

"Well, I think you can put the sniper away, 'cause they're just talking."

"I still don't like her. I don't care how happy Bendy looks. She knows Bendy's connection to me. She's gonna try something to humiliate both of us."

"You seem to obsess over her and her sister a lot. You sure this isn't because YOU like them?" I asked, teasing the cyborg.

"What? That's preposterous! I . . . I don't like them!" Nator stammered while sounding defensive.

"Why not? It's not logical for smart people to like each other even though they know one is better than the other?"

"I'm not talking about this."

Oh, I could see Nator's jealousy a mile away. I'm sure part of him respected the Boole twins for seeming to be smarter than him, but, of course, the cyborg wasn't going to show it. Instead, he just stared even more coldly at Bendy and Tiffany like a deranged stalker as the two continued to sit there, looking all the more romantic together.

"I gotta say, Tiffany, this has been fun. I'm glad I listened to you instead of Nate." Bendy told his date as he had his arm around her.

"I'm sure my sister would've said you know how to treat a girl." Tiffany complimented the stretcher.

"Really? Well, you're all I need right now."

"My sister would probably say you're all I need too."

"Ah, I hope we can do this again some time."

"Oh yeah? You don't wanna leave my side?" Tiffany inquired, sounding comfortable with Bendy as she put her head on his shoulder.

"After tonight, I like where I am." Bendy replied.

"Well, let me ask you a few things. Just answer yes or no."

The two started to sound a bit playful as Tiffany began asking Bendy questions. Only, these were rapid fire questions where she wouldn't wait even a second after Bendy's answers to start a new question.

"Do you like me?" Tiffany asked.

"Yes." Bendy replied.

"Do you think I'm nice?"

"Yes."

"Are you glad you were asked out?"

"Yes."

"Do you think Nate was wrong about me?"

"Yes."

"Do you really like me?"

"Yes."

"Can I take your powers?"

"Yes. Wait. What?"

Huh. That last question sounded a bit odd.

"What was that last one?" Bendy inquired, just as confused as I was.

"Oh. You know, I'm just trying to steal your abilities and render you completely helpless." Tiffany joked as the two of them laughed together.

"Oh man, you are funny."

"Thanks. Hey, before we head home, do you wanna go somewhere else? I know a certain place."

"Uh, yeah. Sure. Just gimme one minute."

I saw the stretcher take his team communicator out as he then made a call. It turns out it was to my own communicator, which I took out and answered, seeing Bendy's delighted face pop up on the screen.

"Thanks, guys. You can go home. I'm feelin' good about this now." Bendy told us as he waved to us from a distance to go.

"Alright, Bendy. Take care." I said as he hung up. "Well, Nator, a whole date with Tiffany Boole and nobody died. Are you satisfied now?"

"Satisfiability with the Boole twins is impossible to obtain." Nator argued.

"Really? You honestly think Tiffany would wait this long to do something?"

"Well, we waited this long to stop her."

"Hey, don't drag me into your fake ambush. I'm just here to help a friend feel comfortable."

"Alright. That's fine. I'm just here to keep a friend safe."

"Nator, Bendy has powers, which include invulnerability. What's the worst that could happen to him?" I argued.

"Look, I'm just looking at what's in front of me: My friend with an untrustworthy girl. Something could totally happen with those parameters." Nator answered. "And, by the way, after I insisted on coming here, why'd you choose to come too if you knew Bendy only needed one friend to feel okay?"

"Because I'm his friend, and I didn't want you ruining his date by attacking from the shadows! I mean, really, he just said he'd be fine, but you won't listen to him. I know you think you know everything, Nator, but can you just know when to stop and listen? Like, listen to me and what I have to say?" I impatiently reasoned with the guy.

I looked at Nator as he started to give this some thought. I didn't know what to think, but it felt like Nator agreed with me. He still wanted to monitor the situation as closely as he could, but I just had to let him know that there was absolutely no situation. He finally looked up at me and appeared satisfied, though, also reluctant, and not without concern.

“Alright. Fine. Let’s go home.” Nator conceded. “But if something happens to Bendy, you can forget about me adding you to that biometric scanner.”

So I went to the beach to help take the pressure off a friend. But that only created more pressure on me after hearing what Nator said. Even after half-convincing him to leave Bendy and Tiffany alone, I still couldn’t get him to trust me. I knew Bendy was going to be just fine, but, in the back of my head, I was starting to think of the possibility that Tiffany could do something to him. It just wouldn’t go away. However small a prank that might occur, Nator would just think he was right and I should stay out of making decisions for the Neo Brigade entirely. Nator would never trust me or call me a friend. And who knows what being on the team would mean for me then?

Nator and I went home, and as I tried to bury the idea of Bendy’s date going wrong, I went to bed, but Nator’s words were still stuck in my head. I could barely sleep. No one wants to be responsible for something terrible. Tiffany didn’t come across as destructive, but Nator doesn’t set the threshold for terrible events with her that high. Even Tiffany accidentally dropping a book on Bendy’s foot could be seen as deceptive by the cyborg. I could only hold onto hope that Bendy would just report that all went well so Nator could finally trust Tiffany. And me.

The next morning, I woke up, having gotten some good enough sleep, not even thinking of having a bad day. That was mainly because the Chief had arrived to wake everyone up and not let us think of anything else.

“Early roll call! Everyone report!” The Chief hollered from the front door.

The whole Neo Brigade woke up and reluctantly trudged down the stairs while I faked an early morning smile for them and our boss.

“This is a surprise inspection. Everyone wait here while I see how clean you’ve kept this area.” The Chief told us. Apparently, part of the surprise was he wasn’t going to do roll call

first as we were all there. Although, I shouldn't say "all" exactly as Race looked around.

"Hey, where's Bendy?" Race whispered, anxious.

Not the two to three words I needed right then. I looked around and couldn't find the stretcher either. I could feel my stomach move with every second of not seeing Bendy. This couldn't have happened. Not just that he could have been in trouble, but that Nator was right and we shouldn't have left him early.

It was that terrible feeling of something awful happening, but the first thing you think of is you getting in trouble for it. I'm sorry, but I just felt so much pressure. "Please let him be okay. Please don't let Nator be right about me and Tiffany." That's all I could echo in my mind as I impatiently waited for Bendy.

"I . . . don't know. We haven't seen him since his date last night." I worriedly mentioned as Nator gave me a look while I struggled to keep a calm grin.

"Bendy was on a date?" Pyra asked, surprised.

"Ooooooh, why does that guy have to do this with my dad here?" Race moaned.

The Chief approached the group as we had all lined up in front of him while he held a clipboard.

"Okay, everything looks acceptable so far. Now, let's just see if everyone's here." The Chief began as he began to walk down the line of us. "Let's see. Race, you're here. Pyra is here. Tel-E? Oh. You're still here, I see. Okay. Nator? Yes. Beauty? Okay."

As he took roll call, he didn't see Bendy missing right away. He just walked down our line and had his name last this time. As nervous as I was about something having happened to Bendy, Race didn't have any concerns about him being in trouble. He was just more worried for himself and everyone about a member of a team not showing up for roll call.

Suddenly, as Race and I looked around, hoping Bendy would arrive, the door to the main entrance opened. We saw the blue pants of a leg step in, followed by the arm of a green shirt as we saw a tall kid with a flat top haircut. It was Bendy!

Not taking any time to feel relieved, Race just used his super speed to grab the stretcher and bring him to the line for roll call as fast as he could. In a split second as the Chief read his name, Bendy was next to me like he was there the whole time.

"And finally, Bendy? He's here. Good. Everyone's present. Okay, you can all go about your business now while I continue my inspection." The Chief concluded as he walked off, having not seen anything suspicious.

"You seriously had me worried, Bendy." I whispered. I wasn't looking to complain, though. I could only feel intense relief.

"Dude, where were you last night?" Race queried our rubber friend as a voice then called to us.

"Hi, everyone." Tiffany said as she suddenly walked in.

"With her." Nator grumbled, glaring at the twin with his teeth clenched. "What are you doing here?"

"I, Bendy, invited her." Bendy told the cyborg, stretching his arm around Tiffany.

"You brought my worst enemy who isn't Cyhack to our home? What were you thinking?" Nator questioned Bendy.

"Relax, Nate. You have the home field advantage. You're not afraid of me, are you?" Tiffany inquired, giving Nator a wicked grin.

"Bendy, the Chief's here for an inspection. You know how he feels about unauthorized guests." Race reminded the stretcher.

"It's okay. It's not like she's gonna steal anything. I promise she'll behave." Bendy vowed.

"Ugh. Fine. But you have to hide her until my dad leaves."

"Okay, but where do you want her? Oh, Bendy has an idea. How 'bout that room where we hid Cyhack's earthquake device? Is that safe enough?" Bendy suggested.

"Alright, fine, but just keep an eye on her."

"And you BETTER not let her into my room! Keep her with you at all times!" Nator added.

"I won't disappoint you." Bendy assured us as he grabbed Tiffany's hand and began to walk with her. "Uh, where's that room, again?"

“It’s upstairs, third door on the right. Just stick your finger on the scanner and you can get in. At least YOU can.” I informed Bendy as I reminded Nator how he still wouldn’t let me put my biometrics in.

So not only was Bendy okay, but he and Tiffany acted like absolutely nothing had gone wrong. Needless to say, that was a load off my mind. I was right after all, I thought. But Nator wasn’t ready to acknowledge that, for he was just fixated on the fact that Bendy actually brought the Boole twin to the HQ. Not the best thing to keep Nator in a good mood, but I was willing to accept it.

As the hours went by, everyone in the team was either hanging out by themselves or doing some homework. The Chief was still busy with his inspection, but eventually finished without even finding Tiffany Boole smuggled into the building, much to Race’s relief.

“Alright, that’s just about it for today. Now, before I go, I’ll just take the earthquake gizmo you seized and be on my way. I trust you have it secure in your evidence storage area.” The Chief presumed.

“Yeah, it’s there.” Race confirmed as the Chief was about to go to the evidence room. However, Race knew what else we were storing there and darted in front of his father. “Uh, but we can get it for you.”

“Nonsense! I know where it is.”

“Uh, really, Chief, you don’t need to get it now. You just stay here.” I insisted, blocking his path with my hair as he continued walking.

“Don’t tell me what I need or don’t need! I’m the one who determines that for you! Besides, evidence belongs in my hands more than it does in yours. Now, move aside!”

Without much to argue with, Race and I stepped aside as the Chief walked past us, up the stairs. The Brigade leader was visibly concerned as I could see him sweat through the thought of his father getting mad for seeing Tiffany. He had already been upset enough when he saw me in the HQ for the first time, unauthorized. And everyone else in the Brigade knew this only

meant trouble as we all followed our boss to that storage room Bendy was keeping Tiffany in.

We stood at his side as he stuck his finger in the scanner and was granted access. He slowly opened the door as we could only guess how enraged he would be.

“Don’t worry. I have a plan: We blame Bendy.” Nator whispered.

“Sounds simple enough.” Pyra commented.

“Now, Dad before you go in there, I just want you to know, we had no intention of causing any harm.” Race mentioned.

“Well, why would I need to know that? What are you hiding from me?” The Chief questioned as he opened the door.

Seeing the room for the first time, I could see a light bulb sticking out of the ceiling as the Chief pulled a chain hanging down to turn the lights on. That was when I saw a large computer monitor on the side of the wall as there is also a shelf on the other side reserved for evidence as I noticed a large sign saying “Evidence” just over it with a “Miscellaneous” sign over another set of shelves.

What I didn’t see in the lit up storage room was Tiffany Boole. She was nowhere to be found at all.

“She’s gone!?” Nator exclaimed as he looked into the empty room.

“Gone? Who’s gone? Who are you talking about?” The Chief questioned us as he walked to the evidence shelf. “Never mind. Let me just take the device so I can . . . it’s gone.”

We all entered the room and looked at the shelf. All evidence we acquire has to eventually be turned in to the police, which would explain an empty shelf. But the earthquake device was missing and nobody turned it in.

“Why is the machine gone!? Where are you keeping it? Tell me where it is!” The Chief ordered.

“I . . . I know I put it here after I took it.” Nator recalled, looking around.

“Well, it didn’t just get up and walk away. And you didn’t just invite some evil-doer to come in and take it away. So where is it?”

“Uh, Chief? About that . . .” I uttered.

Alright. I can salvage this, I thought. I wasn’t responsible for this. Nothing happened to Bendy at the beach, but I did claim Tiffany wasn’t up to anything. I had to be the one who did some explaining, which is just what I did, remaining as calm as I could.

“YOU DID WHAT!?” The Chief roared. “You brought someone into this headquarters without my permission!?”

“Did I mention it was Bendy who did it?” I reminded him.

“Oh, he’s done it, alright. Where is he, anyway?”

“Hold on. Nator, was that flash drive always there?” Tel-E inquired.

As the alien girl pointed to the computer, she saw a flash drive plugged in. Nator looked and didn’t remember seeing it. Curious, he turned the computer on and opened the drive’s files. The only contents, however, were a single photo and video file.

“What’d Tiffany leave this here for?” Race asked.

“I don’t know. But if she took the earthquake device, I can’t say it was a fair trade.” I commented.

We needed to investigate this. Fortunately, we had something to start with. Nator opened the video file first, playing what looked like security camera footage to some room. I didn’t know where it was. It just looked like some empty space with a rake, a chair, and not much else.

As the video played, I tried to think of where this might be, when, all of a sudden, the door opened to reveal Tiffany Boole as Bendy followed her inside. Tiffany closed the door and walked further into the room. This must have been where she said she would take him at the end of their date before Nator and I left.

“So what are we doing here? You wanted to show me something?” Bendy asked.

“I have something very special for you to see.” Tiffany informed our rubber friend.

Suddenly, Tiffany held her head up as it appeared to be moving upward. Not with the rest of her body, though. Her neck began to stretch itself to the ceiling as it moved over Bendy like she had super stretch powers like him. In fact, it was exactly like that, for she followed that by elongating both her arms out in different directions.

Tiffany Boole actually had superpowers! She showed them off, stretching her neck and limbs all around for her date. This was cool, but also strange. I didn't see a Charevo Emblem on that girl's hands.

"Whoa! You can stretch too? Now, that is something I find very attractive in a girl." Bendy commented.

"I bet you can't stretch as well. You aren't the most attractive guy yourself." Tiffany remarked as her neck was over him.

"Seriously? Now, that's just a lie." Bendy scoffed as he prepared to elongate himself. However, he had some trouble doing so. He held his arms out, expecting to stretch, but they just remained at their constant default length. "Whoa. What's up with my powers?"

"I'm not the one to lie."

Tiffany had powers like Bendy and Bendy had lost his powers. This didn't look right. And it looked much worse as Tiffany then stretched both her hands to Bendy and expanded her hands to grab hold of him, lifting him up while he only struggled to get away.

This happened after Nator and I left him. As I watched this, I could only feel so worried for my friend before looking at Nator who turned to face me as I remained concerned. This only produced yet another electric shock through me as I was as preoccupied as ever. I just couldn't deal with what was going on. Tiffany Boole attacking Bendy? This just wasn't supposed to happen.

But it was. And while this may have looked like some kind of prank, it continued into some more ominous territory as the video cut to a camera shot right in the middle of the room. The

next thing I could see was some rope around Bendy as he was tied to a chair with tape over his mouth. Tiffany had captured him, and she entered the frame from one side while, like the image in a mirror, her identical twin sister, Elsa, entered from the other side. We couldn't tell who was who, but they both addressed the camera, appearing no different in their sinister smirks they gave.

"To Gina Mozetti, AKA Cyhack, if you're watching this, we've already acquired the weapon the Neo Brigade took from you." One of the twins began.

"As our final statement, we are Tiffany and Elsa Boole, but you can call us One and Oh. And we carry power strong enough to capture a member of the Neo Brigade as you probably wouldn't guess by looking at our hands." The other twin who went by "Oh" mentioned as she pointed to her sister and then to herself as she mentioned their names. She then pointed to their captive, Bendy, and held up their hands, appearing blank at first, but with a pair of Charevo Emblems suddenly fading in on them out of nowhere.

On One, who was on the left, we could see a check mark, three black circles like the one on Nator's emblem, and a star shaped medal. On Oh, on the right, her Charevo Emblem consisted of a burning pair of pants, three black circles, and a TV remote control.

"Since we have your earthquake weapon, we'd like to make a proposition. Meet us at three o'clock today and we can discuss a price for your invention. And if you want, we can also negotiate on the Brigade member here." Tiffany/One offered as she then stroked her hand over Bendy's face while he still struggled.

"But we don't think it should just be the highest bidder who gets the device, because the two of us are very nice and want to make sure you're smart enough to know where we'll be." Elsa/Oh added.

"So see the attached photo for the location. And if you're smart and paying attention, then One and Oh will be happy to see you." Tiffany concluded, pointing to herself and then her sister.

“And I'm sure he will too.” Elsa/Oh concluded, looking at Bendy.

The video ended.

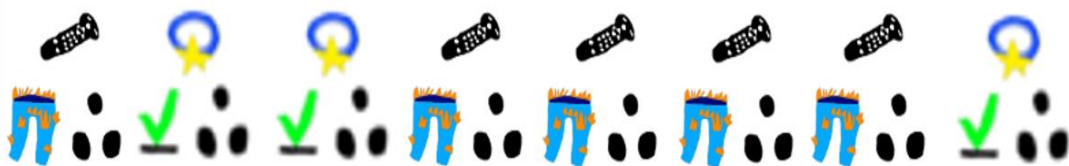
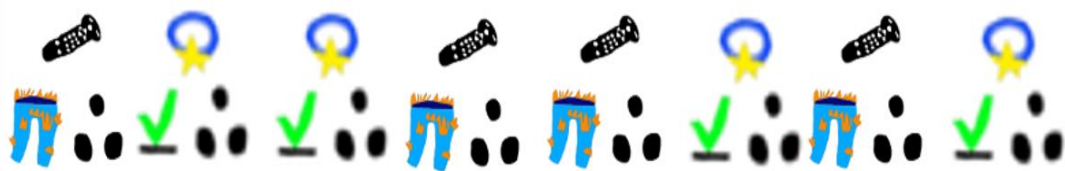
So much had occurred as we watched that, and yet we didn't know where to begin. All anyone had in their minds was confusion and concern.

“Tiffany AND Elsa are behind this? Foo! I knew they were out to get me.” Nator groaned as he looked at me again, not happy at all.

“So it seems they did steal Cyhack's device. But they said they had their location written down in that. Is it in that file perhaps?” Tel-E asked.

“Well, if it is, I'm gonna be the one to make them look stupid.”

Nator opened the photo file as I hoped we could find them and end this as soon as possible. However, rather than provide an explicit location, there was just a diagram of images. As we looked at it closer, these images were One and Oh's Charevo Emblems. It was five lines of eight emblems, some being One's, some being Oh's that seemed to just go across the page in some random order. We didn't know what it was, but it wasn't where they were keeping the earthquake device. That's for sure.



"What is this? This isn't a location. It's just gibberish." Nator said, bewildered.

"It is not gibberish. It appears to be Tiffany and Elsa's Charevo Emblems." Tel-E acknowledged, getting an idea of this. "They must be arranged in some specific pattern to indicate where they'll be."

"How are you supposed to get a location from this? It doesn't say anything."

"Nator, I feel like you don't spend that much time on brain teasers." I commented.

"Just let me think about this, Beauty."

"Think about what? You were just being all dismissive of this meaning anything."

"I said let me think. I didn't ask for anything from you."

Nator still wasn't giving me a chance to have him trust me with some input. I couldn't blame him, though. After what happened at the beach with me convincing him to leave, we maybe could have stopped this. But we didn't. I felt like such an idiot. Nator may not have known me well enough to have an opinion of me I agreed was too accurate, but he knew Tiffany Boole a lot better than I did. And that was when I thought maybe he was right. Maybe I can't be trusted. Maybe he did know me better than I thought I even knew myself. I definitely wasn't helping Race as this was a Neo Brigade situation he was involved in now.

"Guys, we have a real problem here." Race mentioned with concern. "Cyhack said she would turn her machine up to its highest point and level the city if she ever got it back. Now Tiffany and Elsa are gonna sell it back to her."

"Well, I need you to get that machine back. I can't live in a city buried in rubble! I won't have any people to arrest!" The Chief barked.

"Okay, so we just have to find Tiffany and get the weapon back. She couldn't have gone too far, right?" I suggested.

"Wait. Time out. The twins captured Bendy in the video, and yet he invited one of them here? Exactly what are his standards?" Pyra questioned.

"Hey, yeah. And in the video, Bendy said his powers were gone, and yet we saw him use them earlier." Nator informed the team. "Something's fishy here. If you ask me, Bendy's in cahoots with the twins and they're all trying to pull something on me."

"Right. 'Cause everything's about you." Pyra replied with sarcasm.

"Let's look for Bendy first. Maybe he can fill in a few holes for us." I recommended.

Everyone split up to search for Bendy. Nator went off on his own, but I felt like I had to go with him, if nothing else, to not let him worry I'd screw something up on my own.

"Look, Nator. I'm really sorry about what happened." I apologized, still feeling guilty.

"We'll talk about this later. Let's just focus on finding Bendy." Nator said, feeling a bit calmer than me.

"No. Seriously. I didn't mean for . . ."

"Look, I was a little annoyed, but I thought about this, and just look at what's happened. We saw that video, but we just saw Bendy an hour ago. So, logically, this is more likely to be some prank. We just gotta clear it up first."

I was relieved to see Nator wasn't yelling at me. Still, I was pretty sure Nator was resenting me in his mind. He didn't predict anything criminal like faking a kidnapping, stolen powers, or theft of police evidence when we were at the beach, but even if this was just a prank, that was what he thought would have happened if we left Bendy alone. Prank or not, I wasn't off the hook for him. But Bendy wasn't looking too good at all based on what we saw. All I could do was just pray that this was some stupid prank Bendy was pulling.

This was a moment, though, where Nator's words calmed me down more. He was right. We saw Bendy captured in the video. We saw him not at all captured earlier. He had to have been okay. Why wouldn't he be? But, then again, One and Oh had their

own powers, which we knew nothing about. What were they up to?

Fortunately, we had the opportunity to get to the bottom of this as Nator and I saw Bendy walking down a hall.

"There he is." I said as Nator and I spotted the teen daredevil. "Bendy! Hold on! Can we talk for a minute?"

"Sure, you can talk to Bendy." Bendy replied.

"Uh, okay. First off, um, are your powers okay?" Nator queried him as we tried to sound as not freaked out as we could.

"Yeah, Bendy's powers are fine." Bendy answered, twisting his neck around before it spun around one more time. "Why? Somethin' wrong with yours?"

"No. We're good. Uh . . . did anything interesting happen on your date last night?" I inquired.

"Not really. It was kinda boring. But Bendy knows how cool Tiffany is, and he is totally dating her again soon, no matter what you say, Nate."

"What? Again? You . . . ugh. Uh, alright. Look, Cyhack's earthquake device is gone. Do you know where it is?" Nator interrogated the stretcher.

"I don't know where it is. What? You're saying you lost it? I thought you smart enough to keep it safe! What happened?"

"It wasn't my fault! We think someone took it. Where's Tiffany?"

"Haven't seen her. Sorry."

"Haven't seen her? I told you to keep an eye on her!"

"No you didn't."

"Yes he did." I reminded him. "Now, about Tiffany. Uh . . . Have you noticed anything . . . evil about her lately?"

"Evil? Hey! Look, I'll tell you the truth so you'll drop it. Tiffany and Elsa Boole are not evil!" Bendy insisted.

"We . . . didn't ask about Elsa."

"Oh. Well . . . you'd like 'em both. You can trust me on that."

Bendy wasn't telling us something. Just how far was he trying to keep this prank going, I wondered.

Tel-E then arrived and saw us talking to Bendy as her eyes narrowed as if she became suspicious, more so than Nator and I as we continued our interrogation.

"Look, Bendy, we just found some video of the twins keeping you as a captive with your powers gone. Can you please explain that?" I asked, not believing Bendy about Tiffany, or One as she called herself.

"Well, obviously, that video was just a fake. Nothing bad happened to Bendy, because Bendy's right here, and he's alright." Bendy answered, sounding proud of himself.

"Okay, that's another thing. Since when do you always refer to yourself in the third person?" Nator questioned.

"That? That's something I've done for a while now."

"You didn't do it just then." I acknowledged.

"Look, I don't know why you're giving me all this heat. I didn't do anything wrong."

Suddenly, Tel-E generated some energy from her mind and blasted Bendy with it, knocking him down the perpendicular hallway, away from us.

"That's not Bendy!" Tel-E alerted us. "I read his mind. Or should I say Elsa Boole's mind."

Things became a whole lot weirder and more disconcerting as we looked at Bendy who stared back before fading away as a new figure faded into the scene, taking the place of each particle of Bendy's body that vanished. We could see that Tel-E was right. This new figure appearing before us wasn't Bendy. It was Elsa Boole.

"Call me Oh, and your loyal friend, Bendy." Elsa told us with a grin.

"I knew you were up to no good!" Nator accused her.

"Right. Because you didn't see a video of me and my sister capturing your friend."

She just kept that wicked smirk like there was nothing wrong with what was happening. Not letting her feel like she was getting away with whatever this was, I grew my hair out and wrapped it around Oh a few times.

"Where's Bendy? Where are you keeping him?" I demanded an answer from her.

"Bendy's here. He was never captured." Oh asserted with a sly smirk on her face.

Before I could even process why she would lie with that kind of conviction, the Boole twin used her own powers again. She seemed to have the power of shapeshifting and was posing as Bendy that whole morning. She tricked us into letting her into the storage room to steal the earthquake device. It was all part of their plan. And the shapeshifting part of it continued as her body faded again, this time being replaced with what looked like me.

Oh had my blonde hair, my purple skirt, my Charevo Emblem of a unicorn, dragon, and princess, everything. The one thing she didn't have was a smile that wasn't evil as she smirked at me and managed to utilize my own powers too. Having taken my form and abilities, Oh suddenly grew the hair she copied and formed a sword out of it, cutting the end of my own hair, freeing herself from it.

After that, she morphed again, fading out as me, and fading in as another Brigade member, taking Race's form and abilities.

"But I'm sure you can catch me." Oh laughed as Race.

Before we could respond, Oh utilized Race's super speed to dash at Tel-E, Nator, and I, knocking us all down while she disappeared down the next hall. We couldn't let her get away that fast even if she did have super speed to use. The three of us got up and pursued her.

I know it didn't make too much sense running after someone who had copied the power of super speed, but we did, and eventually found her in Race's form near a dead end in the hall.

"Hey, guys, what's . . ." Oh began as I grabbed her with my hair and started slammed her against the wall.

"No one impersonates anyone in the Neo Brigade! And that includes Race!" I asserted as I beat "her" down some more, smacking my hair against the faux speedster.

“Um . . . Beauty? That’s really him.” Tel-E informed me as what looked like Race just seemed so confused.

“Oh. Not Oh.” I uttered, embarrassed as I released the real Race as Pyra walked in, having witnessed all that.

“I don't know what's going on. But you're lucky the Chief didn't see that.” Pyra commented.

“Elsa, or Oh as it is now, has shapeshifting powers, and she was posing as Bendy the whole time.” Tel-E explained, helping Race up.

“Well, I'm hoping she turned into me, or I'm staying away from Beauty.” Race remarked.

We were about to go back to looking for Oh when we suddenly heard cries of help nearby. It was the Chief. He was just shrieking in terror while Oh was on the loose. We all immediately rushed to help him.

When we got to the room he was in, we found him lying on the floor, injured. His glasses and hat were on the floor, his hair was messed up, and there were a few holes and burn marks in his shirt. This looked serious.

“Dad!” Race cried.

“Ah! Her! Get her away from me! She's a monster!” The Chief muttered, pointing at Pyra in fear.

“What? I . . . I didn't . . .” Pyra mumbled, feeling uncomfortable about being accused as dangerous.

“I was just walking around, minding my own business. And she attacked me! Just burst a flame right in front of me like a maniac!”

Revealing herself as the true attacker, Oh appeared from behind us as a fireball shrouded in darkness appeared and exploded on the team. As it did, Pyra absorbed the heat to leave us mostly unharmed. As soon as she cleared the room of smoke and ash, we turned to see Oh posing as Pyra, having ambushed the Chief earlier.

“That's right. Pyra did attack you.” Oh laughed, turning back to normal.

“You! Oh!” Nator yelled, glaring at her.

“No. I'm One.”

“No you're not. I know which mark you have on your hand!”

Feeling vengeful at how clever she was being with him, Nator held his mechanical arm out and fired an energy cannon that came out of a circular red port on his elbow, and directed a round of energy right at the Boole twin.

She wasn't taking anyone's form at that point. She was just herself. Unfortunately, that was her most deceptive form.

Once Nator's attack reached the girl, Oh held her hand out and glowed with a white aura. As the energy blast hit her, she seemed completely unfazed at first, and for good reason. She didn't get hit at all. The blast seemed to just bounce off her and reflect itself back at Nator who got hit by his own attack, getting knocked back near the Chief.

As we looked back at Nator's attacker, totally caught off guard by this defense she put up, Oh just stood there snickering at us. As she mocked us, she quickly transformed into Pyra again and used her abilities to disappear in a puff of flames.

We weren't sure if the Boole twin had vanished from the area completely or just mixed the flames into the air to sneak up on us. We could only look around to see where she would reappear. As we did, I turned to the window and saw someone outside. There she was. Oh was outside and had morphed back to normal. And there was no way I was letting her get off Scott free.

Once I alerted the Brigade of her location, we all took off outside to catch her. She was running down the street before Nator ran in front of us and held his arm out to bring another weapon out. Suddenly, out of one of his red arm ports, Nator shot a mechanical claw on a cable down to Oh. As she ran, she heard the pop sound of the claw shooting out of Nator's wrist and turned around. That was when the claw grabbed her by the shoulders and waist, stopping Oh in her tracks as the claw closed.

“Just because you can break into our HQ, doesn't mean you can leave.” Nator affirmed as he sent a surge of electricity from his arm onto Oh to shock her. “Ha! Who's smarter now, Oh?”

The girl almost looked injured, but, on closer inspection, she was completely unharmed. Normally, when my powers electrocute me, I don't get severely hurt every time, but it does slow me down a bit. But Nator's surge of shocks looked even more powerful than what I was plagued with. And yet Oh appeared like the electrocution from Nator had absolutely no effect whatsoever. Maybe that was because there was absolutely no shocking effect on Oh whatsoever.

As the girl was restrained and unharmed, her hands suddenly stretched out at great lengths just as One had done with Bendy's abilities earlier. She elongated one hand out all the way over to Nator, punching him away as his mechanical claw let go of her. After landing that hit with her long reach, she stretched her arm back and got up, ready for battle.

"I'm One." One corrected the cyborg, revealing a Charevo Emblem on her hand different from her sister, containing a check mark and medal as opposed to a pair of burning pants and TV remote.

As this twin was One and not Oh, she had used Bendy's abilities to gain a rubber body to avoid that electric attack. However, she wasn't immune to every attack.

Pyra then shot a wave of dark fire at One. But before that attack could hit the girl, her sister appeared in dark flames of her own before solidifying into the form of Pyra she had taken. And as the flames came at her, Oh absorbed the fire just like my friend could, remaining totally unscathed. After defending that just fine, Oh transformed back to normal.

"And you're no one." Oh added.

"Okay, we know you two have Bendy somewhere. Now, where is he?" I queried the twins.

"I don't know what you're talking about." Oh claimed.

"Actually, we do. We're just not gonna tell you." One noted.

"Well, we can always force that outta you." Nator told them, ready to attack.

"Easy, Nator. We don't know what all their powers are. We gotta be careful with them." Race cautioned the cyborg.

“Well, if you wanna know, my sister can take anyone’s form and negate any attacks, and I can steal or copy anyone’s powers if I ask for them and I get a yes.” One explained. “But that’s not all. We’ve had some interesting side effects to our powers. For me, I can speak nothing but the truth, and my sister can only speak lies.”

“One only tells the truth and the other tells lies? Wow. I feel like we’re in some kinda cursed temple.” I commented, liking this whole concept of the villain pair.

That may have been an interesting side effect, but as the girls spoke, they held their hands up and managed to hide their Charevo Emblems. The marks completely faded, leaving absolutely no distinguishing physical traits for us to observe.

On top of that, Oh morphed into Race and used his super speed again. But it wasn’t to attack us this time. Instead, she grabbed her sister and spun themselves around before morphing back to normal, mixing the two up.

“So as I’ve just explained that to you, can you tell who’s who?” The twins asked in unison.

This was a bit of a conundrum. We couldn’t tell who was who, because, if One was telling the truth like she was supposed to, their powers made it all the trickier for us if we were to attack one of them. But we had to tell them apart. The only thing we had was that One tells the truth and Oh tells lies. And both girls could say that last part as it applied to both of them, hence the speaking in unison.

“Oh man. If we attack Oh the wrong way, she could reflect our attacks back at us. We need to know who we’re fighting first.” Race warned the team.

“Well, let’s just ask a question and get it out of them.” Nator said, pretty sure of his plan. “Now, is the earthquake weapon still in the HQ?”

“My sister would tell you it is.” The twins answered in unison, not helping us with distinguishing them.

“Yeah, that oughta do it. Time to fire, Nator.” Pyra sarcastically remarked.

"Hang on. I'll get it. What city are we in?" Nator asked.

"It's . . ." The twins began together before they covered their mouths with their hands.

". . . Not . . ." One of them uttered.

". . . Minor City." The two ambiguously answered.

"Okay. As a whole answer, what is two plus two?" Nator impatiently asked.

"I'm the truth teller, and the answer is four." The twins answered in unison again as Nator got frustrated.

"Okay. One tells the truth and the other tells lies. How can they both say the same thing for that?" Pyra asked, confused.

"Individual statements? It's gotta be different. A conjunction of statements? They can keep jerking me around." Nator explained, bitter.

"Is Nator really this bad at picking us out?" One of the girls asked her sister.

"Is a process' favorite utensil fork?" The other twin inquired, laughing.

We weren't making much progress, as you can tell. We just had to think of a way to tell them apart before attacking. That's all we needed.

"Gee, Nator's pretty smart, isn't he?" One of the twin's remarked.

"Ha! Not the liar!" Nator declared, firing the energy cannon from his hand at the twin who just spoke.

Not thinking it would have been so easy, the girl raised her hand at the attack and glowed white, revealing herself to be Oh, and revealing herself further by reflecting that attack back at Nator, knocking him to the ground again. Not our ideal method of telling them apart, but Nator took one for the team.

However, before we could attack, knowing who was who, Oh morphed into Race again, repeating her move from earlier, completely mixing the girls up again.

"Anyone else wanna take a guess?" One of the twins inquired.

“Ugh. One of them really needs a giant nose, or something.” I commented.

“Everyone, I've analyzed their thoughts. The one on the left is the truth teller.” Tel-E alerted us.

Now, that was some clever strategizing. As soon as Tel-E identified One, Pyra shot a fire blast at the truth teller, forcing her to enlarge her hands with Bendy's powers to block the flames, absorbing the attack with the rubber body she took from him. Knowing her cover was blown, Pyra stretched her arms out to have the Brigade between her hands before clapping them together over the team as we all dodged the clap.

After we got out of that, Race charged for Oh who instantly negated his attack, forcing him to bounce off her as he felt like he ran into concrete, getting knocked to the ground next to Nator.

After Oh defended from the speedster's attack, Tel-E went after her by levitating her in the air as she floated in front of her. But before the Boole girl could face any damaging attack, she instantly transformed herself to copy the Knowlgian's form and powers. With her new likeness, Oh used Tel-E's powers against her, generating energy from her mind and directing it at the alien, knocking her out of the air. As she was down, Oh then levitated her up herself before slamming her down to the street, levitating her up and down several times.

Coming to the Knowlgian's aid, I grew my hair out into the form of a giant hammer as I held it over the liar from behind. I then swung it down, giving Oh a good bonk on the head, causing her to drop out of the air and lose her hold on the real Tel-E.

“Can't levitate while you're hurt? Well, you can't copy someone powers without copying weaknesses.” I declared.

While Oh still embodied Tel-E's form, I was about to bring my hammer down on her one more time. However, as I attacked, the liar suddenly morphed back to normal, allowing her to glow white again and negate my attack as it hit her. This caused my hammer to swing back at me against my control.

"You sure know how to fight with what you know." Oh laughed as the hammer swung back at me before I just got rid of it altogether.

Meanwhile, Pyra dealt with One, throwing several fireballs at her while she stretched herself out of the way, dodging all of Pyra's shots, moving whichever part of her body she needed away from danger.

"You seem a little aggressive." One noted. "Perhaps you're jealous that I was on a date with your friend before I took his powers and kidnapped him."

"I'm not jealous of anything!" Pyra growled, shooting more fire that One stretched her body around to avoid it.

"I always tell the truth, you know."

One stretched her arm out, hitting Pyra and knocking her to the ground.

"But maybe you can join him. Pyra, can I take your powers?" One asked as the fiery fighter was about to answer.

"Be careful, Pyra!" Tel-E cautioned. "The outcome of whether or not she steals your powers is based on the next time you say yes or no. And that includes answering with sarcasm."

"No!" Pyra replied to One's question before looking back at the alien girl. "Thanks, Tel-E. That was too close."

"See? And you were always bothered when I'd read your mind."

Optional Dialogue 2

As we continued this little brawl, Race's darted right into One, hitting her several feet back. With her new rubber body, she withstood it, though. But then he added to it as Pyra flew her ignited body to One, projecting his speed waves at the Brigade member, increasing her flight velocity as she hit the truth teller like a flaming bullet. That extra force left One looking near defeated and exhausted as she lay on the ground.

"I know you tell the truth. Now, tell us where Bendy is." Race told the twin as he stood over her.

Suddenly, One sprang to life, enlarging her hands and stretching them up at the Brigade leader. She obtained a strong grip on him, even lifting him up off the ground while his feet swung back and forth as he tried to get out of her hands.

"You'll found out soon enough." One assured the Brigade leader as Tel-E and Pyra were about to attack. However, before they could do anything, One held Race in front of her as a human shield. "Careful. At least one of us wouldn't wanna hurt this guy."

Heeding her warning, Tel-E and Pyra backed off, acting more cautious while One twisted her hands back around, turning Race back to her.

"Now, Race, can I take your powers?" One requested. "If you say yes, I'll release you from my grip."

"No way! I don't care if you'll let me go." Race refused.

"Can I not not not take your powers?"

"Uh . . . Yes."

"Then would you object to me not asking if I can't not take your powers?" One questioned, sounding even more complicated.

"Um . . . Yes?"

"Thank you."

So sure of herself, One let Race go as he was ready to charge for her again, but ran just like the rest of us. His speed was gone, which he discovered when he slowly ran to the Boole twin and she used his super speed to run behind him. To Race, it was like she just disappeared completely. As he looked around, he finally turned to see One standing there before she just charged at him with one rapid hard punch, hitting him to the ground.

After that attack, One stretched her arms to Race and chucked him up in the air so he couldn't run away. While he ascended, One had charged to Tel-E and Pyra, keeping them down before she dashed far down the street, disappearing over the horizon. As Race then plummeted to the ground, One darted back down, building up her momentum as if the super speed wasn't enough. She just became even quicker as she timed it perfectly, running into Race just before he hit the ground, knocking him all the way down the street past Tel-E and Pyra.

“Race!” Tel-E cried, running to the speedster and picking him up by the arms as he fell unconscious.

“Oh, we’re not done yet.” I declared.

At that point, I utilized my own shapeshifting for battle and transformed into a young girl character named Ruff. All you need to know about her is she had geo-kinetic abilities to move parts of the earth. I quickly used this by focusing on small sections of the earth surrounding Oh to lift up like rising pillars. However, she easily evaded this upward ground assault by morphing into Race again, running all across the road before I could even move the spot she stood on.

The liar had all this speed she could copy and didn’t even make any move to attack me. She was just taunting me and the team with what she could do. It looked impressive, but she was still dangerous, more so in her prolonged defense than by just attacking. It was like she wanted to see how long she could watch me fail.

With that speed, she didn’t just mess with me by dodging my attacks, though. After running past a few more raised earth attacks, she darted back near her sister who joined her in a team move of their own. The girls both had Race’s super speed, and used it to run around the whole team a few times, passing by in a blur. It was only for a few seconds, but they then came to a halt with Oh, stopping on two different ends of the street while we were all between them and Oh had apparently morphed back to normal while we weren’t looking.

“Care to take another guess at who’s who?” The twins asked us in unison.

While we looked back and forth at the girls, not knowing that answer, Nator had finally recovered from Oh’s initial attack.

“You can’t trick us for long.” Nator insisted.

“As my sister would not say, we’ve been tricking you for longer than this, Nator.” The twins taunted the cyborg.

“You only have your super cool advantage if we don’t know which is which.” I reminded the twins. “Tel-E, who’s the defenseless truth teller?”

"Give me one moment, and I'll give you the answer." Tel-E informed us, looking at one of the twins.

"I don't think so." One of the girls said from behind, revealing herself as One, using Race's super speed to run next to her sister.

Suddenly, Oh transformed into Nator, using his mechanical body's function to disconnect his arm, propelling it out with a jet booster on the end of it. The arm was aimed at Tel-E, but before she could stop that attack, One utilized Race's array of circular speed waves to project them from her hands at the arm, increasing its speed by, like, a hundred times. As it flew to Tel-E, it was a blink and you'll miss it moment. The speed wave hit the arm as it was about thirty feet from Tel-E, and in a quarter of a second, the arm had ended up hitting the Knowlgian with the force of a rocket powered arm flying at a hundred-fold velocity.

With such an enormous speed of getting hit by a steel arm, the force knocked Tel-E unconscious instantly as she collapsed to the ground.

"Tel-E! No!" I cried as One utilized Bendy's powers to stretch her arm over to us and grab the Knowlgian while her sister morphed back to normal.

"How are you gonna beat us without your telepath?" Oh questioned us as only Nator, Pyra, and myself remained standing.

Once again, before we could strike back, the twins were one step ahead of us like they planned it all out, mixing themselves up again as One used Race's super speed on the girls. They stood a few yards from each other, staring at us from across the road.

"Okay, if you think I can't do one better than you, then you haven't met my Neutron Destructinator!" Nator announced, revealing a cannon weapon from his chest. A blue ball of energy began charging as he spoke. "Even with super powered abilities, there's only a five percent chance of stopping this baby. But just to be safe, which of you is Oh?"

"I'm Oh . . ." One of the twins replied, raising her hand.

"Then the other one is my target."

“ . . . Or I'm not Oh.”

With his new weapon, Nator fired it at the girl who didn't answer his question, creating a large energy blast directed at her. However, while he thought he was attacking One, it was actually Oh. And just as the attack reached her, Oh glowed white again without even flinching as she reflected it back at Nator who received the painful blast instead.

“Yeah, I guess I wasn't in that five percent.” Oh mocked the cyborg.

“And it also seems you forgot that admitting to lying is impossible for my sister.” One added as she and her sister mixed themselves up again.

“Okay, so that weapon didn't fly. But get a load o' this!” Nator announced, as part of his shoulder produced a binocular-like device that was positioned over his eyes. “My Bio-Detector can analyze DNA AND give me the name of the person it belongs to. So choke on that!”

As Nator looked at the girls, presumably with the vision setting in his eyes he set, it looked as if he was actually able to distinguish the two. Analyzing DNA sounded like a sure thing in this situation.

However, after Nator announced his invention he had in his eyes, One and Oh calmly stood across from them, and each took out a small bag of hair. They then opened the bags and sprinkled some of it in front of them. I didn't know what holding hair in front of them was supposed to do, but I guess they knew it was clean.

After the twins dropped that hair out, Nator took aim with his arm cannon, pointing it at the girl his eye device determined was One. He fired an energy blast at her, anticipating no deadly defense from her. Contrary to his expectation though, his target glowed, revealing herself as Oh, and reflected the attack back at him. Nator got hit by his own cannon again, becoming not nearly as hurt, but much more surprised by the result than last time.

“What? How . . . my Bio-Detector said you were Tiffany Boole!” Nator cried in disbelief over his invention’s failure, pointing to Oh.

“We heard you go on and on about a DNA detection device you made last week.” One reminded Nator.

“So we thought we’d each carry some of each other’s hair, just in case we didn’t wanna mess with your machine.” Oh added.

“Looks like your mech suit isn’t as great as you once boasted, now is it.”

“Boy, Nator, you are slower than a traveling salesman today.”

There was no denying it. The Booles were just too smart for us. They had all the power they needed to attack us normally while even being clever enough to trick us. Tricking Nator, especially. They had thought of every way to outsmart us while, as impressive as they were on paper, Nator only had his inventions to help him fight, which weren’t doing much against the twins.

Nator kept trying though. Almost every weapon he put in himself, he used against the girls. But they still knew how to mess with him. He’d fire his extendable steel fists out, fire missiles from his shoulders, use the cannon in his chest, fly himself out with his jet propelled feet. Every attack, they knew how to counter, and even trick him into going after the girl who could easily defend against these contraptions. He tried everything, but nothing worked.

Despite all these failures, Nator continued to try and think of what else he had that might stop the girls. As he stressed over this some more, One and Oh both used their acquired super speed to mix themselves up yet again.

“Anything else you wanna put against us?” The girls asked, momcking the cyborg.

“Nator, we need to come up with a plan.” I asserted.

“Yeah, it doesn’t look like anything of yours is working.” Pyra added.

“I can make it work! Just lemme think of something!” Nator insisted.

“You can think. I’m doing things the old fashioned way.”

Opting for her own strategy, Pyra ignited herself in dark fire to fly, hovering above the twins and shooting flames at both One and Oh.

As Pyra attacked, the liar chose not to reflect the flames back at her as Pyra could just absorb it. Instead, Oh transformed into Bendy again to expand her right hand and hold it over her to block the fire as One did the same with her left hand, using the abilities she stole from Bendy as she stood to the right of her sister. As the twins defended from Pyra’s attacks, they both stretched the other hand out and grabbed hold of the Brigade member simultaneously, stopping her attack. After getting this grip, One and Oh slammed Pyra on the ground before I finally jumped in.

I grew my hair out to Oh, wrapping it around her. But I couldn’t hold her for long, though. After the liar found herself in my hair’s grasp, she transformed into Pyra again, igniting herself to disappear into the air in her flames. She reappeared right next to the end of my hair before morphing into Bendy one more time, stretching her arm down to throw a long punch at me.

I blocked her attack by shielding myself with my hair. However, as she tried for one more punch, One used a piece of Race’s powers to project a speed wave at her sister, increasing the velocity and force of her attack, causing her to punch right through my hair barrier, knocking me into Nator.

“The limited speech notwithstanding, we really must thank you for giving us these powers, Nator.” One commented as we were all not in very good shape.

“It’s the only thing you created that actually works.” Oh remarked.

“But as much as we’d love to see you pretend to be smarter than us, we really have a business transaction to get ready for.”

Nator gave them their powers? Now, that sounded a bit peculiar. But before I could stop and wonder what that meant, Oh suddenly morphed into Race as the girls used their super speed to

run around Pyra, Nator, and I one more time. They both circled around us, going much quicker this time, not to mix themselves up, but to create a vortex around us. The circulation was so quick, it sucked most of the oxygen away as we all struggled for breath. Even Nator, who seemed to require oxygen too despite having no organic lungs.

After a few seconds of the twins creating a miniature whirlwind that whisked all the air away from us, me and the two remaining Brigade members collapsed, too weak to fight anymore, feeling the strength we used to stand was too much to substitute for gasping for air. That was when One and Oh stopped as the cool air flowed back to us like we were just in a desert and finally entered an air-conditioned building.

With us down, and the twins victorious, they both picked up the still unconscious Race and Tel-E, holding them by the legs and upper back.

"And just so you'll have a little extra help, we'll be taking these two as well." Oh informed us as Race.

"You never know what else Cyhack would be willing to pay for." One commented.

"Can't . . . let you . . ." Nator mumbled, trying to recover from the vortex.

With their speed again, the girls took off in a blink of an eye. They were gone. With two more of our friends. Two more of the friends I had made. All I had left was Pyra whose company I was more than glad to still have, and Nator.

It was a real burden on us, the fight and its aftermath, but the three of us eventually recovered.

"Oh man. I wish me and my sister could work together that well." I commented, getting up.

"Yeah, I'm sure you'd rule the city with her." Pyra remarked as Nator appeared all the more frustrated.

"Gah! Idiot! This is all my fault!" Nator screamed as he got up, about to run off. "I gotta go after 'em now."

“Slow down, Nator. We’re all upset, but we really need a battle plan against those two. They’re just too smart for us now.” I acknowledged.

“Well, we only have three hours until their meeting with Cyhack. Anyone here wanna try something?” Pyra inquired.

“I know what to do.” Nator said. “I may not have anything right now that can take them down, so I just need to invent something even bigger and better that they’ll be running away for real.”

“Okay, unless that invention’s a time machine, I don’t think you heard me when I said IN THREE HOURS.” Pyra reminded him.

“Yeah, and I don’t think new weapons are the key to this. One and Oh seem to know how to counter them both with their powers and by just being smart. We need to outsmart them somehow.” I suggested.

“No! Let me come up with something! I’m sure I can make something of my own that’ll be too good for them.” Nator insisted.

“Why do you need to outdo them yourself? Why are you so obsessed with them getting the better of what you invent?” I asked.

“Because One and Oh are my responsibility!” Nator insisted. “And if they’re my responsibility, I should be the one who fixes this! No one else. It’s the only logical solution.”

“Your responsibility? Does this have something to do with what they said about you giving them their powers?”

I was seeing something personal with Nator that he just wasn’t feeling too good about. Nevertheless, the cyborg explained his story to me.

“Since grade school, me and the Boole twins were always the smartest kids in math and science. We started out as good friends when we were really young, but, as time went on, school and grades and awards just kind of made that harder. After a couple years, we just got so competitive. We would constantly try to surpass the other with being smart. We liked technology too, so it only seemed natural that we would try to impress each other

with what we could make.” Nator explained. “But then I got an idea for something that they would never beat. It was a mechanical body that could provide a person’s brain with life support to allow a person to survive and talk in it.”

“You mean your mech suit?” I acknowledged.

“Yeah, but it was still in a primitive form. And I had no way of testing it. But then one day when a car slammed into me, my regular body was falling apart, so the only way to save myself was to have my brain put in this new body. Well, apparently, my brain was able to move the limbs like it was totally organic. After that, I felt like I could add this human skin. And, knowing about the city being full of villains, I even included weapons to defend myself. Well, it turns out when I finally revealed it to One and Oh, something didn’t go quite right. They got a close look at it, and all of a sudden, I guess I wasn’t paying enough attention, but I lost control and electrocuted them both, destroying their science project too.”

“So that’s how they got their powers.” I inferred.

“Yeah, and how our rivalry escalated, ‘cause they just started messing with me even more, starting that day. And since I gave them those abilities to enhance their sick and clever mischief, I have to be the one who stops them.”

“I admire your desire to be accountable for what you did, Nator. But you don’t have to be the only one who tries to undo their damage.” I affirmed.

“Yeah, this isn’t a trial.” Pyra added.

“Well, Bendy may have been joking about me committing a crime, but I’m definitely guilty of opening the door to trouble for them.” Nator argued, still feeling down. “I guess I took our rivalry too seriously. I just thought if I could make something so cool, I could prove I was smarter than them. But it didn’t work then, and I guess it isn’t working now.”

“Nator, you don’t always need to make the fanciest things to prove you’re smart. Sometimes you only need to make the smartest decisions. And sometimes the smartest decision isn’t to fight with everything you’ve got.”

“Well, it's not like I set out to fight at all to begin with. Just like when I made this mech suit, I always wanted to focus on developing health solutions. Make things that could benefit people. But I guess this town's level of crime demanded something else. Now that I have to help people by stopping crime, to me, fighting has always been the most logical method of winning a battle. And logic is the only way I know to think.” Nator mentioned.

I thought it was interesting how Nator was almost completely mechanical. I never stopped to even think of what made him have to use that robotic body. It saved his life, but created One and Oh too. I guess your ideas may be impressive for their main function, but not when someone only thinks of its bugs.

I was starting to see why he didn't think I belonged on the team. He's all about logic, which is how thoughts and events should work ideally. That's what math and science is revolved around, which is what Nator spent so much of his life with. It didn't seem reasonable to try and talk him out of logic. Still, even after hearing his reasons for why he wanted to fight One and Oh after we asked him why he was upset after we lost a fight against One and Oh, I felt like there was room for another event in that sequence.

“Nator, I just want to know . . . Are you happy with your mech suit?” I inquired.

“What? What's that have to do with what we need to do?” Nator questioned me.

“Well, nothing. I'm just curious. I'd imagine it's difficult to live with. You can't eat or drink anything. The only senses you have are sight and hearing. Do you ever miss just being you, not full of weapons?”

I could tell by the way Nator looked at me that no one had ever thought of asking him this.

“Well . . . yeah. I do miss it. It's one of the reasons I made this human skin to cover the mechanical features. I almost feel normal again, certainly to others. And I still appreciate the

company of friends to seem like they're not looking at a robot, even if it means having to see you guys enjoy having food, and getting to feel soft surfaces, and being able to walk and sleep comfortably, and all those things." Nator replied, thinking back to his earlier days.

"How do you live with knowing you can't do that anymore? I don't know how I would ever get used to it. I know it's not the same, but it almost feels like how I thought I would be here without any friends. It just sounds horrible." I commented as Nator looked at me, seeming to understand what I meant.

"Well, I guess maybe I don't always think of it like that. I just look at all the facts. Does this new body make me not want to go on anymore? At times, yes. But when I think of how it saved my life, something I made saved me, I just think of what else I must be able to do to help others. It's terrible for me, but me being alive could save some other lives."

"That sure sounds like some more positive logic as opposed to what I've seen from you."

"Well, the logical answer isn't always negative, but, based on the answers I've been getting to what I can do with a super powered opponent like One and Oh, all I got is a result where they overpower us, unless I can put up a stronger fight. And all I have for that are the weapons in this body I'm cursed with."

Nator looked like all hope was lost after looking at all the facts in front of him, but he still looked as if he wanted to stop them nevertheless. And I had to convince him.

"It's okay to think logically, because it's what makes the most sense. And of course you'd wanna fight your opponent. But you don't have to win by fighting, or at least only fighting. I mean, just like a stealth video game. In that, there's violence involved, but the key to progressing is to not fight. And it's alternatives like that that help you learn to do things differently. And the more new things you learn, the more smart decisions you can make, and the smarter you become."

"So what are you suggesting I do?" Nator asked after giving this a bit of thought.

"I just think that it pays to be creative and think differently. I mean, when you think of something that doesn't work, naturally, you'd have to think of something different. And if you still have trouble, there's no shame in asking help from someone else. Even if that includes me."

". . . Look, about how hard I may have been on you for being on the team . . . I just wanted to look out for everyone as carefully as I could. It's like what happened with Pyra and her friends after she got her powers. It's all fun until someone gets hurt." Nator explained as Pyra looked slightly depressed, thinking back to how her friends left her.

I realized Nator had a point when I thought back to how Pyra accidentally burned her best friend's brother just by showing off her powers. And Nator was showing off what he made to One and Oh, giving them their abilities. I couldn't blame him for wanting to be more careful with everything.

Suddenly, in the middle of the cyborg's despondent mood, Nator's Charevo Emblem started glowing. He may not have had organic hands, but the mark of someone with a Charevo Gene still appeared, regardless of how much human DNA the gene could inhabit.

With the Charevo Emblem glowing, his Charevo Fairies emerged, floating above him. These three creatures looked just as they were supposed to. They resembled the person with were within and the symbols on their emblem. For Nator, they looked like him as a brain, three circles, and a graph. More specifically, they appeared like Nator as his Charevo Trinity, the elements of Intelligence, Logic, and Data.

"Ah! What? I'm hallucinating again?" Nator asked, surprised by what he saw.

"Uh, Nator, you can choose to believe the Charevo Fairies don't exist, or you can pay attention." Pyra told the skeptic who still had trouble understanding the logic of the Charevo Gene's magical qualities.

"The most intelligent person can be the one to know when he is wrong." The Intelligence Fairy informed Nator.

“With only logic, there can be only one result, which works well when an enemy anticipates a different result.” The Logic Fairy noted.

“Information on a subject works for who knows it and against the one who doesn’t think of it.” The Data Fairy concluded.

Hearing the wisdom of these creatures, Nator looked at them with thought as the three sprites floated back down into his hands before his Charevo Emblem turned back to normal. I could tell the cyborg didn’t know if these things were real, but, real or not, he could hear what they said. And it must have helped.

“Okay, I feel like we can beat One and Oh even without gadgets and excessive force.” Nator informed Pyra and I.

“That’s what I wanna hear.” I told him, ready to go.

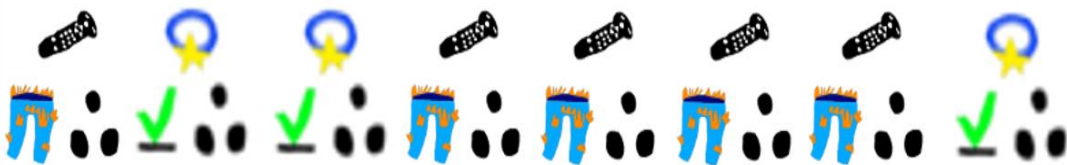
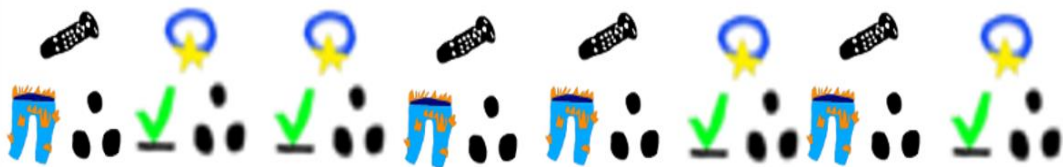
“But it’s not like I’m about to abandon logic altogether. If we’re gonna beat ‘em, we have to find ‘em first.”

“Well, it’s not like they stopped to give us directions to where they’ll be. We don’t have any way of finding them.” Pyra acknowledged.

“Not necessarily.” I commented.

Getting an idea of some sort, I brought Nator and Pyra to the Neo Brigade office in the police station right next to the Brigade HQ. It was where we would report all the damages that have been done in Minor City caused by super villain attacks. We all had our desks against the wall in different areas as we went to Nator’s while he sat down. Nator still had the flash drive One left, and I had him put it in the computer on his desk.

I still wasn’t sure how we would do it, but if we were going to find One and Oh, we had to look at that picture they sent Cyhack. The one with their Charevo Emblems printed out. They said it contained the location, so it was worth looking at one more time.



"They said we could find the location in this photo." I mentioned, looking at the picture.

"But it's not saying anything. It's just the marks on their hands." Nator said, having trouble reading between the lines. "Unless . . . maybe there is something I'm just not seeing."

"I still think the pattern of the marks is saying something. Nator, do you remember which Charevo Emblem belonged to who?"

"Well, like they showed them in that video, that first one is Oh's and the second is One's. Why?"

"Well, maybe it's not the emblems we're supposed to look at. What if instead of reading it as Oh's emblem, it's just a zero? And instead of One's, we have a one?" I suggested as I wrote on the diagram.

Under each Charevo Emblem on that picture, I wrote down the corresponding ones and zeroes. As I marked them all, it resulted in the diagram saying 01000010 01100101 01100001 01100011 01101000.

"One-million-ten? One-million-one-hundred-thousand-one-hundred-one? One-million-one-hundred . . . okay, do I even have to go on? What is this supposed to be?" Pyra questioned my idea.

"I don't know. I'm just spitballing here." I told her.

"Hang on." Nator said, taking a look at what I wrote. "This looks like binary."

"You think so?"

"All ones and zeroes, eight bits each, it looks like it to me. Maybe this is how their message was to be decoded. It's like using reduction for proving NP-Complete problems."

"Alright. What does it say?"

"Let's see. B, e, a, c, h. Beach."

"The beach? That's where Bendy's date with One was."

"Of course. That's where the twins are meeting." Nator realized. "Ha! Hello world! We got it! Neat, sweet, and NP-Complete."

“See? Now, was that so hard?” I asked, proud of the cyborg.

“Thanks, Beauty. You sure know how to help a guy think.” Nator commented with gratitude.

“Yeah, can we maybe pat ourselves on the back after we save our friends?” Pyra suggested.

She was right. Our friends were still in trouble. And who knew how long Cyhack could have received and decoded that message. Getting our location, the three of us took off for the Minor City beach.

We were right in the spot by the parking lot near the family fun center where Nator and I spied on One and Bendy. It was just in front of the bushes where we could see the beach at the end of a hill. Luckily, we saw One and Oh sitting on the sand, playing some kind of game with cups and dice, and Cyhack was nowhere to be found. We made it there before her. Now we just had to get out of there before she could arrive.

We went over our plan ahead of time as we went from the HQ to the beach. I was going to use my character transformation power to become a character named Copi who could morph into any non-fictional person as opposed to my fictional characters I could become. Using those abilities, I just had to morph into Cyhack and get One and Oh to show me where they were keeping the earthquake device and our friends. That’s when we’d free them and stop One and Oh together. Sounded simple enough . . . almost.

Beginning phase one of the plan, I transformed into Copi, a small girl with a yellow dress and pink skin who I had dematerialize and reappear as Cyhack. I got the look down just how I needed it. I had the outfit, the mechanical body parts, the Charevo Emblem. I was all set.

I snuck out from behind the bushes as the Boole twins saw me approach them incognito.

“One and Oh, I presume?” I said, posing as Cyhack.

“Cyhack?” The twins uttered, surprised to see her.

“You’re early.” One acknowledged.

"We weren't expecting you in exactly another two hours." Oh added.

"Yeah, well, the Cyhack don't wait too good with someone else holdin' what the Cyhack built." I explained, trying to imitate the cyborg villain as best I could, perhaps going a bit far with her New York accent. "Now, you said you got my earthquake weapon. So where you keepin' it?"

"We'll show you. But first, how much are you willing to pay to get it back?"

"So you really think you can charge me for my own invention? You're lucky I don't just blast you two and take it from you right now." I mumbled, trying to act tough.

"Yeah, because you obviously know where we're keeping your device." Oh sarcastically replied.

"We hear you consider your weapon to be worth quite a large sum. I think it's only fair you pay that much for it." One argued.

"Well, I ain't payin' for it up front. I ain't got any cash on me. Of course, the Cyhack has had a history of stealing a good amount o' dough. It's not like I couldn't pay ever." I mentioned.

"Sorry. No money? No weapon." One concluded as the twins turned around.

"Hey! I need it more than you! Once I have it back, I'll be able to properly get back at that punk, Nator for beating me earlier."

The twins turned back around, looking more intrigued this time.

"A real fan of Nator's, it would seem. And I thought I was the only one who liked making him look like a fool." Oh commented, impressed with me.

"Alright, since you're out to humiliate Nator too, how 'bout this? You agree to give us a percentage of the money you steal for the next year. We can make a little I.O.U for that." One suggested.

"And if that amount at the end looks too small, we'll just come pay you a visit and be very nice about it." Oh noted.

"Alright. Deal." I agreed.

“Good. Now, follow me.” One told me as she and her sister turned around to lead me to the device. As they looked the other way, I gave Pyra and Nator a thumbs up while they watched from the top of the hill behind the bushes.

“Alright. But you better show me where you’re keepin’ those Neo Brigade kids too. I’d be happy to raise the percentage if it means I get three prisoners.”

As the Boole girls walked, they suddenly stopped and turned back to me. This was followed by a suspicious look in both their eyes.

“How did you know we captured three of them?” The twins questioned me in unison.

Oh boy. You know that feeling you get where you know you really shouldn’t have talked too much? That may have been a mistake right there. All I could focus on was how to cover this slip of the tongue.

“Oh. Uh . . . well, didn’t One capture them and take their powers by asking in that video you sent?” I asked, trying to sound like I was right.

“We only had the stretchy one.” One clarified. “And how did you know I was the one who did it?”

“And how did you know my sister could steal powers by asking for them?” Oh inquired.

That was when I realized that when going undercover, being specific helps pass yourself off as who you’re disguised as, but not in relation to how the person knows the people you’re trying to deceive. And, boy, I really shouldn’t have tried to act smart by mentioning One’s powers.

“There’s only one liar here.” Oh declared.

Suddenly, Oh morphed into Nator and fired his arm’s energy cannon at me. The blast shot me far down the beach as the painful impact forced me to morph back to my Copi character before morphing back into regular Beauty. That was when One stretched her arms over to grab me, holding me over the twins.

“Well, look what we got here, Elsa. Beauty seems to be stealing your bit.” One commented.

"Which isn't worth as much as what you've stolen." I remarked as I struggled, resulting in an electric shock from not looking happy about this. "Now, where are my friends?"

"They're nowhere you need to know about." Oh answered, not talking.

"I'll tell you where they should be is somewhere with a location we could've made more cryptic. How'd some blonde like you figure out where we'd be?" One asked.

"Who said I was the one who figured it out?" I inquired.

At that moment, two flying arms appeared out of the corner of my eye, each one with a small jet booster propelling them to my location. These arms each slammed into One and Oh as they both formed fists on the hands at the end of them, forcing the former to release me as her arms retracted back to her.

As they dropped me, I saw the rocket powered arms fly away, back where they came from. Nator appeared from a distance, holding his shoulders up as the arms returned to him, reattaching to his torso while he walked forward with all the confidence he wanted when dealing with the Boole twins.

"Was someone talking about me just now?" Nator queried with a smile as the twins saw him.

"Oh, look, Sis, it's another girl dressed as a robot." Oh joked, pointing at Nator.

"I'm impressed you discovered our message, Nate. But come on. Can't you just accept that we're smarter than you?" One questioned the cyborg.

"I don't need to prove anything. I'm just here to make you answer for what you've done." Nator affirmed.

"Is that a rematch? Very well."

Continuing to play their intellectual game, Oh morphed into Race as she and her sister mixed themselves up again with their super speed, running back and forth where they stood before stopping in front of us. Pyra flew herself down with her flames as she and Nator faced them down next to me. The girls stopped and returned two identical devious smirks to the three of us.

“Can you guess who’s who?” The twins asked in unison.

“Be careful, guys. This time, we’re thinking before we fight.” Nator cautioned Pyra and I.

We decided to think of how this would go down, and the two groups just stared at the other. No one dared to make the first move, knowing what the other could do. If we attacked, we might run into Oh’s trap of a counter attack again. If they attacked, they’d reveal themselves and risk both girls being able to run together to mix the two up, which could cost them their advantage.

We all just stood there like we were in a super powered Mexican standoff, waiting for who would attack first. Some of us weren’t just waiting, though. Some were plotting ideas.

“Ugh. Is anyone gonna do something?” Pyra asked with impatience.

“Not ‘til we know which is which.” Nator reminded her.

We continued to wait a few seconds, but it was so long since Pyra got to attack a villain, she was just itching to get this going. And the Booles knew it.

“Hey, Pyra, can I take your powers?” One of the twins requested with a grin.

“Finally! There’s One!”

“Pyra! No!” Nator cried as Pyra ignited herself to fly at the twin who spoke.

Pyra aggressively flew at the girl who spoke, finding her to glow white, standing passive. It was Oh. And she negated Pyra’s attack as she continued to stand still while the force of Pyra’s flight was directed at the Brigade member, knocking her back down to us like someone created the same attack on her from the opposite side.

“One wouldn’t give herself away that easily.” Nator mentioned.

“Gee, thanks for telling me.” Pyra mumbled, not happy.

“Well, now that the secret’s out . . .” One began before she suddenly utilized Race’s speed to run into all three of us, knocking us down.

It was like they weren't going to try and fool with us again. They decided on a fight right there. After One charged for us, Oh transformed into me, and grew the hair out as One suddenly projected Race's speed waves at her sister, causing her to swing her deadly hair at Pyra even quicker, hitting the fire girl before she could get out of the way.

With that speed, Oh was ready to use that force on me and Nator. But before she could attack, I grew my more original hair into the form of a water cannon, solidifying it, and shooting it at Oh like a fire hose, soaking her entirely. Not only did it throw her off a bit from her attack, but it soaked her new hair so much, she lost the ability to control it, just as it would with me. Fighting myself, it was either that or get rid of her smile. This one worked.

After I neutralized Oh's hair weapon, Nator held his palm out and projected an energy blast at the liar. Since she wasn't in her default form, there was no reflecting the attack that time, and she was knocked down as the shot forced her to return to her regular appearance.

Nator and I were ready to fight some more, when all of a sudden, One came out of nowhere with her stolen super speed and slammed into the two of us. As quickly as she performed that attack, the truth teller ran back to her sister, grabbed her, and spun the two around. The two finally stopped as their identities turned ambiguous once again.

As Pyra, Nator and I got up and looked at them again, we tried to think of how to approach this situation again to know who was who. We thought letting them reveal themselves from a distance when they began an attack was our best bet.

However, the twins cleverly switched things up that time. Rather than stand and wait to attack. One of them suddenly ran at me, at a normal speed. Which girl was it? Exactly.

"Can you guess who I am?" The twin asked as she ran to attack, knowing I wouldn't have time to think of if I should attack or defend.

I felt like the best choice would be to block her with my hair, but, in the heat of the moment, I instinctively grew my hair

out to slam it into the attacking twin. And, as if it all went according to plan, the girl glowed white, revealing herself as the wrong person to attack, forcing my hair to return and whack me hard in the head.

After that clever move, we were ready to attack, but they were just too quick. One utilized her super speed yet again to run at Oh and grab her before running back to mix the twins up again as we couldn't tell which was which.

Repeating the same formula, immediately after the switch, another one of the girls ran at an appropriate pace to the team. We were forced to make a decision on this again. Who were we facing?

Unfortunately, we didn't even have time to make an option as this girl's arms stretched out to attack Pyra. Luckily, she missed and allowed Pyra to project a stream of dark fire at the truth teller. But with her rubber body, she completely withstood the flames, and combined her stretching and speed to throw one more punch at Pyra as fast as she possibly could with unbelievable abilities.

As she made this attack with her reach and velocity, she got her that time, punching Pyra right in the head with enough force that finally knocked her out as the arm continued to stretch right past her. She just fell to the ground, barely able to move. One of the last friends I had was out of it. It was just me and Nator. Fortunately, that's a sentence I was feeling better about.

As hurt as Pyra was, and how much I wanted to see if she was okay, the twins weren't in the mood for sympathy. Only for toying with us. And just like after any successful attack, One quickly ran to Oh as they mixed themselves up again.

"Well, that's one/One who performed well." One of the twins commented as Pyra just couldn't recover at all. "Anyone wanna try taking another shot?"

"Beauty, I have an idea. Throw me over them with your hair." Nator whispered to me.

"Are you sure?" I asked, unsure of his plan.

Nator nodded. I felt like he deserved my trust if I wanted his. I grew my hair out into a large hand, grabbed hold of him, and

lobbed him up right over the twins, landing far behind them. They both looked at him briefly as he seemed to not be moving. Not taking that as a chance to let me distract them, they instantly turned back to me.

"As my sister wouldn't say, you seem to be getting desperate." One of the twins laughed at me. Nator appeared not ready to attack, and he could've struck them while they weren't looking, but he had something else in mind.

"Hey, One!" Nator called from behind.

One of the twins turned to him while the other stayed focused on me. That was it. He identified her. Not wasting any time that would allow the truth teller to realize what he had done, Nator fired an energy beam out of his hand, shooting her near me. Following that move, I grew my hair out to swat One away.

Her sister didn't appreciate this any more than she did, for Oh was still okay and transformed into Race again, taking a good charge at both Nator and myself, slamming into us like a tree branch on someone sticking her arm out a moving train.

"Very clever, Nator." One commented as her sister helped her up and morphed back to normal.

"I'm sure that's bound to work a second time." Oh remarked.

"Too bad you didn't use your opportunity on a better attack."

The twins utilized One's super speed to mix themselves up yet again.

"She's right, Nator. We need a way to beat them if we can tell them apart." I informed the cyborg.

"Don't worry. I have a better plan this time." Nator assured me. "Just get ready to attack."

I grew my hair out into a stone fist like a warrior drawing her sword before battle. I was all set to attack. All I needed was my cue to do it. And I had faith that Nator could figure it out.

"Do you really think you can tell us apart again?" The twins mockingly queried.

"You two seem so sure you'll win. Why not taunt me by letting me ask you some questions? You know I'll just look stupid since you're so smart." Nator suggested as the girls chuckled.

"Do you think it took him this long to get it?" One of the twins asked her sister.

"That we have the superior minds? Who can say?" The other girl agreed. "Alright, Nate. Ask away."

"Great. So which one of you is Oh?"

"She's Oh!" The twins laughed, answering together.

"Alright. Now, what would the other one say if I asked who was Oh?"

"My sister would tell you I was Oh." The twins replied, still remaining ambiguous.

"Okay. Now, what would you both say if I asked which of you was Oh?"

"I would tell you she was Oh." The first twin answered, pointing to her sister.

"I would tell you I was Oh." The second twin replied, appearing less ambiguous as the two looked at each other.

"Uh oh." The twins uttered.

He did it! He got them to identify themselves. Again! Immediately after getting that answer, I launched the stone fist from my hand directly at One, hitting her away. Before Oh could counter that, Nator launched his arms out like missiles from his shoulders again. The limbs travelled with rocket-like speed in the air with those jet boosters in the back as they got to Oh who glowed white to reflect the attack.

However, rather than have an actual forceful attack, the limbs went to her arms, grabbing them both and moving her back. Nator's arms finally forced her to the ground as the top of each one opened up a panel that deployed some cables that shot out. This must have been like the cable he used to shoot his mechanical claws out. However, they were used to suddenly move at his will, wrapping around her legs, keeping the liar pinned down with both her arms and legs restrained.

"Careful, Elsa. Any force against my arms will only result in electric shocks. You'll have to stay still if you don't wanna get zapped." Nator warned. "Who's the smart one now?"

"This is impossible. You . . . you . . ." Oh stammered, trying to think of something to say.

"Having trouble speaking the truth?" I remarked.

"Hmph. You win now, I suppose."

She wasn't telling the truth that time. Suddenly, One recovered in time to charge at me and Nator with her speed. I tried to whip my hair out and attack, but she was just too quick. Nator wasn't much help either as his metal arms were still rocketing down on Oh's regular ones to keep her restrained.

One dodged all my attacks before she darted at me one more time, not ready to give up at all, even if it meant doing this without her sister.

"You haven't defeated us yet." One declared as she stretched her arms at me. However, contrary to hitting me, her arms stopped midway and retracted back as if she had no way of using Bendy's powers at all while One looked at her arms.

"Huh. Looks like your powers are only temporary." I commented.

"I don't mind. I can just take yours."

One might not have had the power to make it super hard to attack her like her sister did, but she was no less dangerous. With her power to steal abilities just by asking for them, she could easily win this fight. She was smart enough to make those questions confusing. I didn't know if I could outsmart her that time, but Nator sure looked confident as she brought up her powers.

"You know what? That is a smart move, taking our abilities. But before you go for us, why don't you copy your sister's powers?" Nator suggested.

"Nator, what are you doing?" I asked, concerned.

"I mean, with us, you'll have all the offense. But with Oh, you'll have defense, not to mention become any of us to use our powers. Why not ask for her abilities to become more powerful?"

Become as powerful as two separate people yourself? It is the most logical move.”

“He makes a good point, and seems to know what he's doing, Sis.” Oh commented, still restrained near us.

“Hmph. And I actually thought you were smarter than that for a moment.” One scoffed. “Maybe I will borrow from my sister. Twins do share quite a lot, after all.”

“Go ahead, One. Let's see how much you're meant to share.” Nator challenged her with a smirk on his face.

“Oh, Oh, can I borrow your powers?” One requested.

“I wouldn't say yes.” Oh replied, saying yes in the only way she could.

The twins gave an identical wicked grin at Nator and I as they were certain they couldn't be stopped. Their powers were about to combine into one person. They knew we couldn't get the better of them by knowing who was who if there was only one person to face. That advantage went out the window. These girls were all about adapting to a situation to outsmart their opponents, and they were just about to take it a step further.

One received a yes to her answer from her sister, and managed to copy her powers. She immediately displayed her new abilities, but not like you'd think.

Instead of shapeshifting, she was about to talk to us to gloat some more. She opened her mouth to speak, but nothing came out. She was completely silent. She wanted to say something, but was totally mute. Upon discovering her silence, One grabbed her throat in concern.

“What? What happened to her voice?” Oh asked, still restrained.

“Ho ho. Who's one step ahead of who now?” Nator chuckled.

“What are you talking about?”

“Yeah, you didn't do anything.” I acknowledged.

“Didn't I? I knew One could gain power by asking for it, and for her to do that, she has to speak. When she gets another person's powers, she also gets their weaknesses. With her powers,

she can only tell the truth. So if she has Oh's powers, she can only lie. And with both powers, you can't have statements be both true and false. And when you reach an impossible statement, all you can do is stop." Nator explained his ingenious strategy.

"So if she has to tell both a truth and lie, she can only be a mute." I realized out loud.

"And therefore, she can't steal any more powers as long as she has Oh's powers."

One just stood there, unable to comprehend how Nator did this. As she stopped, I grew my hair out to wrap it around her wrists, tying them together as I formed my hair into some steel chains. I pulled her to the ground, bringing her closer to her sister as they were both restrained. The truth teller tried to struggle out of my chains, but couldn't move as I then chained her ankles together, perfectly negating the speed she had stolen. Before she knew it, she was lying there, nearly powerless.

"How is this happening? There's no way you could outsmart us!" Oh exclaimed.

"I think I just did. Oh, and when I said my arms wouldn't shock you if you didn't try to break out . . ." Nator began as his arms that trapped Oh gave her some electric shocks, giving her a great deal of pain as she screamed and lay in a weak state while Nator's arms rocketed back to him after leaving her unrestrained. I then chained her arms up just like her sister just to be safe. ". . . That was a lie."

And with that, we had done it, we beat the twins. As surprising as that was, Nator had even followed my own advice to think more cleverly. And it actually paid off. How cool is that?

"Okay. That was pretty awesome. You actually outwitted them." I complimented the cyborg.

"I didn't do it by myself." Nator reminded me as he smiled.

With all that having finished, the two of us looked down at the defeated twins who were still unable to escape.

"Well, since it worked for Nator, I'll ask myself. Where would you direct us if we asked where our friends and the earthquake device were?" I interrogated the twins.

Not even trying to think of a way to fool anyone, the twins both pointed off in the direction where they were going to lead me initially. As Nator and I looked up, we saw a large barn off in the distance right by the beach. Eager to find our friends, we went off to look for them, opening the barn doors.

And there they were. Tel-E, Race, and Bendy, all either unconscious or tied up. They were beaten and captured, but they were all there. My friends were okay. And with them, just as the twins promised, Cyhack's earthquake contraption sat in front of them. Our troubles were over.

When Race and Tel-E woke up after their run-ins with the Booles, Race's Charevo Emblem still appeared faint as he discovered his powers were still gone. He began to panic briefly, but calmed down when he heard One and Oh were no longer a threat.

When the police later arrived to arrest the girls, they were still restrained, and we helped put them in cuffs as they were led to the police van in the parking lot. The van had the same lights I saw in the vehicle that our foe from last week, Whitney Trainor, was placed in. And just like what I saw with her, when One and Oh were put inside, their Charevo Emblems, which reappeared after being defeated, faded slightly. They weren't faded entirely like they were when the twins deliberately hid their marks and identities. They just had slightly less opacity like Race's, which suddenly faded back to its normal appearance. That could only mean One and Oh's powers were neutralized and Race's were restored.

After we turned the earthquake device over to the police, and out of the Boole's hands, the girls watched their stolen loot taken to another car by some officers who drove off with it, safely away from them.

"You know, I'm starting to think maybe we should've told Cyhack to meet us earlier." One noted.

"Yeah, nice scheduling, Tiffany." Oh sarcastically commented.

“Our powers have been neutralized. So I can’t tell. Are you still lying?”

“No. I’m as honest as I can possibly be with you. Maybe you should ask me a question that’ll give away my level of honesty.”

“Hey, you answered Nate’s question too, you know.”

“Yeah, well, it takes one to answer and two to verify.”

The police van doors closed as the girls were finally driven away to Charevo Penitentiary.

“Thanks again for stopping them, Nator. I don’t know what I’d do without my powers.” Race said with gratitude.

“Hey, I can’t take all the credit. If I was alone, my only plan would’ve been to exhaust all my weapons.” Nator explained, finally giving me credit for something.

“You mean someone actually convinced you otherwise?” Bendy remarked.

“I honestly don’t know if I could’ve faced them without you, Beauty.” Nator mentioned, turning to me. “Thanks for showing me how to think differently. Who would’ve thought creativity is a useful way to help you think and be smart?”

“See? You thought you needed all your big machines to prove your intellect when all you needed was the one human part of you that’s left.” I acknowledged, pointing to Nator’s head, indicating his brain. “I think that oughta put you closer to going back to working on your health software.”

“Hmph. Just as long as my friends could use my help, that’ll have to wait. That being said, I think someone’s fingerprints just earned a place in my biometric security access files.”

“Really?”

“Hey, after how much I tried to exclude you from team decisions, you earned it. I’m sorry if I made you feel like you shouldn’t be in our group. You’ve made me learn more than I ever thought I needed. And I’m glad you’re here.” Nator apologized. “So, which official team member name do you hate more? Beauty or Neo Brigade Member 06?”

I gotta say. To hear Nator talk to me like an equal, like a friend, like someone who belonged, that felt wonderful. Talking to him prior to all this, I thought it would have been like trying to convince a real robot to like me. But while he might not have had a physical human one, Nator had a heart. And that's just the kind of friend I wanted.

I didn't know just how I could talk to him, but I did, and it paid off. I guess even the smartest people in the world can be just as good a friend to more average kids. I wouldn't have thought so if you asked if I expected this after Nator ruined a movie experience for me. But for someone like Nator who has all these smarts, even he can think of others and what they want.

As great as it felt to have Nator as a friend, I was simply over the moon when I realized I had successfully befriended every member of the Neo Brigade. With each friend I won over, that was one less person who was indifferent against me. To know that the Neo Brigade supported me unanimously, I felt like I had finally proved myself as both a hero and a friend.

As grateful as I was for Nator's acceptance, I think Nator was even more thankful to have me on the team after how all this turned out.

"Well, it's great that you've finally opened up to new thoughts outside of straight logic. Does this mean you're ready to believe more of the legends behind the Charevo Gene?" Tel-E inquired with hope.

"Oh, not a chance." Nator casually replied.

"Hey, I'm just glad you can stop obsessing over the Booles now that they're in jail." Race commented.

"Knowing Nator, I'm sure he'd work them into a conversation when talking about the greatest of evil." Pyra remarked.

"Hey, he can talk about 'em all he wants after today." Bendy argued. "Listen, Nator, I'm sorry I didn't believe you about Oh. Next time you tell me something about someone you know, I'm not thinking twice about it."

"Don't worry about it. Your date led me to put them in jail. I don't think I'd get to fight them as villains if you didn't let them kidnap you. Besides, I didn't even know them as well as I thought I did." Nator said, putting water under the bridge.

"Still, the whole thing was on me, man. Are we good?"

"Bros before Ohs, dude."

Bendy and Nator gave each other a nice fist bump.

"Way to go Neo." Bendy uttered in satisfaction as he then stretched his arm over my shoulder, pulling me closer to him. "Now how's about we talk about my other hero who saved me tonight. I didn't forget you, Hairpiece."

"Well, that's a relief then." I commented with a friendly smile.

"No, seriously. We really appreciate what you've done for us, Beauty. On behalf of all of us, thank you." Race said with pride as I got the feeling my temp job had just gotten extended.

There aren't many words to describe how nice it felt to hear the Brigade leader's gratitude. So I'll just leave it at that.

"Hey, guys, it's about three o'clock now. You think Cyhack's gonna show up?" I inquired, looking at my watch.

As the Brigade looked out to the beach at the end of the hill, we checked to see if Cyhack figured out the Boole's message. And, wouldn't you know it, she had. We could see the villainous teenage cyborg walking around aimlessly on the sand, looking around for someone, not finding anyone.

"Ha! There she is!" Bendy laughed. "Look at her. No one's there to meet her."

"What do you think, Race? Shall we ambush her?" Tel-E asked.

"Yeah, let's get her." Race said.

"Hang on. Hang on. I have a better idea." I interjected, transforming into my shapeshifting character Copi and morphed into One. "Let me lead her into the barn and you can all jump her."

"First, ask her on a date. Let's see if she'll do better than Bendy." Pyra suggested.

The six of us all had a good laugh as I took off down the hill while they just waited behind the bushes. I tried not to smile so wide, hiding my laugh, so I could fool Cyhack.

But that smile wasn't just from the fact that we were about to surprise a lonesome villain. It was from everything that I wanted.

I came to Minor City with the hopes that I could help others while being in a superhero team with a friend. And while I discovered that there are events that occur that you don't expect to take place, which can ruin your day, there are also positive moments. Moments of sharing the good times with people you love. Moments of making good out of the toughest of situations. Moments of just living out a dream that would have been just fine without superpowers.

Back home in Ohio, I had only one real friend. In Minor City, I made five. Five members of the Neo Brigade, five different adventures, five new friends. You could take away the superhero element. These were the people who could make every day worth while. Whether it's stressing to lead a team, being true to your own principles, struggling to deal with hero worship, worrying about feeling liked, or being insecure about intelligence, I'd want to be there for those five during any situation.

As a teenage superhero girl, I've been known to smile an awful lot. As I've learned through the Charevo Gene and the trinity of elements I've been given, that's just a part of who I am. And that can lead to the problems I have to deal with like being forced to smile at all times in front of others. I thought who I was was just someone doomed with intense pressure. And while that pressure remains, it became the last thing on my mind.

With five new friends, and the thoughts for all the adventures that were yet to be discovered in our future, and the acceptance of living the dream of being in a superhero team, what more could a girl ask for? You don't have to tell me to smile. With what I had, this grin wasn't goin' nowhere.

Optional Dialogue

Bad Ending

Things were going awesome. I didn't know if I could make the friends I made, but I did, and I had all their support. We were all set to do everything together as friends, starting with capturing Cyhack who was still looking around for One and Oh who had already been taken to jail. I had transformed into my Copi character to morph into One to play a joke on her before the rest of the team jumped her. We were all on board with this, and, honestly, I knew absolutely nothing could ruin this day.

As I approached Cyhack, she turned and recognized me as One from the video the Boole twin sent her. She seemed both annoyed, but also relieved to see that someone was actually there to meet her.

"You one o' them One or Oh chicks?" Cyhack asked, having been a little impatient before.

"Are you Cyhack?" I inquired.

"The Cyhack is I. You said you got my earthquake device. Where is it?"

"Oh, One and Oh did take it." I mentioned as the cyborg seemed to go along with the idea that I would speak in the third person like her.

"Well, let's have it then. The Cyhack ain't got all day."

“Sure. But, first, I believe One and Oh said something about returning it for a price. So why don’t we negotiate a deal first?”

“Hmm. A deal? You want a deal? Alright then. I’ll give you a deal. Ninja? You got an idea for a deal?”

Cyhack looked slightly to my left as she said that last part. And, suddenly, I felt two arms hold me under my armpits as someone’s chest pressed up against me, keeping me from moving.

“Whoa! What the?” I cried, seeing nothing around me, but still feeling someone hold me.

Just as I felt like there was some sort of invisible force restraining me, I looked to the side and saw some arms appear, fading in from total camouflage. It really was someone who had turned invisible. And upon a closer look, tilting my head further to the side, I could see the arms of a gray hoodie being worn by a familiar face. I confronted him with the team a week ago. It was Ninja.

I didn’t know the two knew each other. As it turns out, there was a lot I still didn’t know, unfortunately.

“Her freedom for your property. Sounds like a fair trade.” Ninja suggested, still keeping that hold on me. “Shall we raise the price to her life instead?”

“Hmm. I think we’d need some more force for that just in case.” Cyhack mentioned with a wicked grin as her Charevo Emblem started to blink. That could only mean one thing: She was contacting someone else through her Charevo Gene. “You’re welcome to join us now.”

I didn’t know who she was talking to, but they got the message. The next thing I saw was someone dropping out of the air after taking a huge leap from a distance. This guy had some incredible leg power to make a jump like that. I didn’t know if he was gonna hit someone when he landed, but this guy made a safe landing as he slammed his fist to the sand, causing a slight tremble in the earth and forcing the waves coming in on the beach to flow back a bit.

This fella looked strong, but as I looked at him, I noticed a familiar crew cut, large nose, sports jersey, and Charevo Emblem consisting of a wrecking ball, cave, and barbell. This was no ordinary brute. It was Dinomight! The same guy we encountered earlier at the architecture museum.

"Alright! Who we beatin' this time?" Dinomight asked, eager to fight someone.

"Take a guess, Block Head. It's either me or the thief here." Ninja mocked his apparent ally.

"Wait, Ninja, I thought you were the one who specialized in thievin'."

"Dinomight!?" I cried, surprised to see him.

"Oh, not just Dinomight."

"What time is it!?" A familiar voice shouted.

As we all looked up, I thought I saw the shadow of a kite floating down, but when I looked closer, it was much worse. It looked like seven identical clown girls hanging off each other's ankles while the top one held onto a giant balloon resembling them. That would have been cool if this wasn't a mischievous group made up of the same girl.

Spotting the bright orange jacket, yellow shirt, green pants, big red shoes, and colorful makeup, those clowns were all clones of the girl up top. It was the girl we battled a couple weeks ago: Tammy Time.

As she floated with her inflatable head and duplicates hanging off her, she slowly descended down beside Cyhack with her bottom clone hitting the sand and being removed from existence by traveling through the other clones, back into the original Tammy while the line of duplicates continued to descend. Each clone disappeared in a similar fashion before the real Tammy Time landed and deflated her head back to its normal size while she kept her bright mischievous smile.

"It's Tammy Time!" Tammy shouted, holding her hands out like a circus performer. "What'd I miss?"

"Tammy Time? Dinomight? Ninja? Cyhack? What is going on?" I asked, surprised to see everyone altogether.

“Just thought we’d stop by and help some girls learn a lesson or two.” Tammy answered.

“Nobody steals from the Cyhack.” Cyhack growled, glaring at me.

“Nobody steals from the J Gang.” A fifth voice clarified, stepping out from the shadows.

I turned and saw this guy strutting his way to the group. He was the same age as the rest of us, but he didn’t share as much enthusiasm as those other four kids. This guy looked a little more measured as he glared at me behind a pair of big thick glasses. He looked like a young businessman with his well-combed hair and bowtie while he wore a pink sweatervest over a blue shirt with beige pants.

As he gave me that cold stare, I almost didn’t know who this was. He seemed pretty forgettable on paper given his non-threatening general appearance, but that was when I glanced down at the back of his hands. Yes, they had a Charevo Emblem, but the tattoos consisted of an Ant, some grapes, and a pair of glasses. Again, he didn’t come across as memorable if you looked at him next to the other four who were just so powerful, but he stuck out in my mind. Why? This was the first villain in Minor City I saw after I was left on my own that first day I came to the city. The villain I saw just before meeting the Neo Brigade. It was Fourize.

As the skinny well-dressed kid approached the group, they seemed to welcome him in their company, respecting him well as they let him speak on their behalf.

“You should know better than to think you can extort the J Gang with their property.” Fourize said with resentment as he glowered at me through this big glasses. “Now it’s time for you to relinquish Cyhack’s earthquake machine. So tell me! Where is it?”

I was still disguised as One with my Copi character, which was why he claimed I stole Cyhack’s device. But I helped steal it back for the police, so I wasn’t off the hook in that form either. I knew Fourize was just gonna have this Gang of his attack if I told him their contraption was gone, which was why I simply attacked first.

As Ninja held me from behind, I kicked him in the shin to loosen his grip. I then took the opportunity to morph back to normal and grow my hair out behind me. As my hair reached Ninja, I grabbed him and threw the stealthy kid over my head to Cyhack who ducked as he landed behind her. I was ready for a fight after that, even if it was with all five of these guys.

"Your machine is gone, and it's not coming back." I informed them.

"You!" Cyhack exclaimed, recognizing me from the night before as the one who helped steal from her.

"The blonde Neo girl!" Tammy Time uttered similarly while Fourize didn't know who I was, but picked up on the fact that I wasn't just some random girl in front of him after seeing my hair.

"Hmm. So I see you've all met before. Anything I missed?" Fourize inquired, sounding intrigued.

"She has power of strength and variety. A nice target for payback for our earlier defeats." Ninja commented.

"Someone who thinks she can challenge my team, eh?" The leader mumbled.

"Yeah, I think a lot of things." I remarked with a grin, putting my fists up and raising the ends of my hair up to be pointed at these guys like weapons.

"Let's get her, Fourize!" Dinomight suggested, eager to brawl.

"My thoughts exactly, my slow-witted friend." Fourize malevolently said, turning back to me.

This team of five, the J Gang as they were called, suddenly advanced on me, about to go nuts with the powers at their disposal. To recap: Cyhack could absorb technology into her and use some strong gadgets inside her, Dinomight had super strength and the power to create explosions with his fists, Ninja had invisibility and teleportation along with his martial arts skills, Tammy Time could clone herself and anything she touched and inflate her head to fly around, and Fourize . . . well, maybe I shouldn't have ended with him, but he could shoot heat beams from his eyes.

But before I could see any of that, as I backed up, ready to fight back, the first use of superpowers I could see was a big pink blur going by as Fourize stood in front of me one second and then got knocked away between his team as the pink blur zoomed by a second time.

At the same time, Dinomight suddenly became levitated up into the air, much to his surprise. No, he couldn't fly, he was just sent flying away from the J Gang as that invisible force threw him a good distance from me. After that, I noticed a couple different hands come out of nowhere. One was flying on a rocket on the end of it before crashing into Cyhack, punching the cyborg to the sand. The other sprang out from another location, stretching its way like elastic and knocking Tammy Time away from me.

As Ninja was much less surprised to see this than I was, he was about to resume his attack on me despite this ambush. But before he could take one step closer, a puff of dark fire burst out of the air as it materialized into Pyra who settled into her non-burning self and finally punched Ninja in the face, sending him back.

After the fire girl showed up, Tel-E gracefully descended from the air in her levitation as Nator joined her, flying in on his jet boots. Bendy stretched one leg forward from atop the hill by the parking lot, sticking it next to me before stretching the rest of himself down. Race followed that by dashing all around the beach before stopping in next to Tel-E as the six of us were all lined up together. We all stared down the teen squad before us as they recovered while their leader stepped forward, moving Dinomight to the side to stand in front.

"So, Fourize, you likin' our new team member so far? We sure are." Race commented while the J Gang's leader wasn't happy to see any of us.

"Gah! You again, Race? You have to stick yourself into my business? You just plotted out your little ambush of me here, did you?" Fourize presumed.

"We've fought you before. There's very little to plan for." Pyra remarked.

"Is that so? You think you know me so well and what I've put against you? Why don't we see who's more prepared if you think you can just steal our earthquake device and not think of running away afterwards."

"We've beaten you guys before. What makes you think we can't do it now?" Nator questioned the Gang leader with confidence.

"Indeed. We have trust in each other that prevails over yours as a team." Tel-E added.

"Yeah, and in case you haven't noticed, we got us a strong new addition to the Neo Brigade." Bendy mentioned, pointing to me. "It's six to five now. What do you got that can match us?"

"Hmph. You think you're the only ones who can adapt to change?" Fourize asked with an evil smirk as he then looked to our left.

I was all set for this fight. The Neo Brigade and I had never battled a whole other super powered team before. This was gonna be so cool; I didn't care if this was gonna be tough. Just the thought of our two teams confronting each other like this sounded so awesome. It would have been just like two teenage teams on TV. That was the feeling, anyway. But, as I learned, not everything in real life is as fun as it is on TV.

"What's up, Ellie?" A voice called from the top of the hill.

We all turned. And, for a moment, I thought this day couldn't get any better. I had five new friends, but seeing an old one was just the icing on the cake. I thought I'd never see him again. After that first day, I assumed he had left Minor City and returned to Ohio. But there he was. With his green hat, blue t-shirt, black undershirt, and gray sweatpants, on his hands were the marks of a unicorn, dragon, and television. He looked just like I remembered seeing him last. My best friend in the whole world from back home. My fellow character shapeshifting friend. Tyler Vitti.

I didn't know what to think. All the happiest of emotions ran through my heart. The guy who I vowed to be in a superhero team with had returned. He stood up there with a bright grin on his face. It was like he was totally ready to talk to me again like the old days. I couldn't wait to reconnect with him. It was only a few weeks, but it felt like an eternity. My smile could only match his and exceed it when I caught him in my sight. Tyler Vitti. My friend back where I wanted him.

"Tyler!" I cried in joy, ready to run up to him to give him a hug. But he was ready for something much much different.

Just like me, Tyler had the power to transform into fictional characters. And, in the same white light energy I would materialize into someone with, he transformed into a TV superhero teen from a show we watched together, Eli Electric, character with electricity based powers. The character stood on top of a metal disc while surrounding himself in electricity to fly with it as he hovered in the air over us.

Tyler's hands shot out a huge electric attack in our direction. It was so cool to see him use this character we watched on TV for so long one more time. I didn't think I'd get to see it again. Unfortunately, I saw it a little too close as that surge of electricity got near us. It turns out it wasn't directed at the J Gang at all. It was headed for me and my friends.

"Look out!" Bendy alerted the Neo Brigade.

The stretcher quickly expanded his body over the team as we were all beneath Bendy like he was a tent in a thunderstorm. The electric attack wound up hitting him as his skin seemed to fizz a bit from the shocks, but he absorbed it without any harm.

Everyone was okay, but I wondered. Was everyone really okay that should have been okay? Was Tyler trying to attack us and not the J Gang? That move was just so surprising.

Bendy finally uncovered the team as we could see Tyler hover himself down to the sand of the beach, landing just across from us as the whole Neo Brigade was between him and the J Gang. All I can say is I was just pretty confused at that point as I looked at my friend.

“Tyler? . . . What are you doing?” I nervously asked my best friend as I held the most awkward smile you’ve ever seen.

“Ladies and gentleman . . .” Fourize addressed the Neo Brigade as I turned back to the Gang leader. “We’ve met the newest member of your team. Meet ours.”

Fourize held his hands out like a stage presenter introducing his next performer. Those hosts normally point in the direction of where that person is. And as I looked where the Gang leader was pointing, it was directly towards Tyler. My smile disappeared.

Hearing Fourize refer to my best friend like that caused me to receive a quick zap from my powers, though only a brief one. I was surprised to hear those words, but I decided not to think about it too much. I figured he was most likely referring to someone standing just behind Tyler, so my smile was right where I had it before.

I turned around to discover the real villain. But all I could find was Tyler. No one else. It was him with a mischievous grin on his face as he showed not a single sign of disagreement with Fourize’s introduction.

“Still think you’re safe from us?” Fourize questioned the Brigade with the most authentic smile we could see. “Gang! Attack!”

Fourize felt like he had just the team he wanted, and the six of them all rushed for the Neo Brigade, commencing a rumble. I dove out of the way as everyone separated to fight an individual opponent. There were several duels set up around the beach. It was Race vs. Fourize, Tel-E vs. Dinomight, Bendy vs. Tammy Time, Pyra vs. Ninja, and Nator vs. Cyhack. They were all going back and forth in their own fights, but I couldn’t recall much.

I could hardly pay attention. I could hardly even think of fighting. How could I? The only thing on my mind was Tyler. The attack he threw at the Brigade, Fourize saying he was on their team. This had to have been going somewhere. He couldn’t turn against me like that.

It turns out there's so much to be unexpected, even with someone you know. I found all this out as Tyler stood across from me while my friends and enemies fought in the background.

"It's go time, Ellie!" Tyler eagerly declared, morphing into another character named RPG, a shifty looking purple haired teen with the power to generate light energy to alternate his hands into different weapons.

He utilized this character's abilities to turn his hands into two large purple boxing gloves attached to some springs. Immediately, Tyler's RPG character fired his fist out from his spring like an extendable boxing glove you'd see in cartoons.

Everyone else had their own fight. But I just stood there, totally frozen. I just kept looking at him, expecting him to stop and say this was all just some joke and admit that he wasn't really working with a team of villains. I could only try and fool myself into believing he didn't really want to attack me. That's all I could do.

As I stood motionless, this only allowed Tyler's RPG boxing glove to slam into me in the stomach, knocking me to the ground. This would be where I'd fight back, but it was all too much to process. My best friend had just attacked me in a fight that we didn't agree to set up as friends. As I thought about that, my smile left me as I got shocked again.

Somehow, I pushed those thoughts away and forced a small smirk to get through this.

"Come on, Ellie. You can do better than that. Show me what you got." Tyler said like a pal with a grin after that unwanted attack.

"Tyler . . . why . . . why are you doing this?" I questioned as I got up with what little will I had to respond to him.

"You're a hero. I'm a villain. Simple."

Anything simple is easy to understand and accept. But this? This wasn't simple. No. It was impossible. There was no way I could accept this to be true. My best friend becoming a villain? It just couldn't be. But no matter how much I denied it, the words

still ran through my skull, influencing my reaction to cause several more electric shocks to return.

I tried to contend with the electrocution as well as this news as Couch Potato sprung out another punching glove at me.

"No. No. This . . . this can't be real. Tyler, I know you. We . . ." I began before he cut me off.

"Tyler's no more, Ellie. The name's Couch Potato now. It's only common for villains to have an alias." Tyler declared, morphing back to normal, once again identifying as the V word.

"But why?" I asked, feeling more serious, coming close to getting shocked again. "Why would you work with these guys? We always said we'd be heroes together. Remember?"

"Well, I guess me being in my own team doesn't seem so bad. After all, you ran off and joined a whole other team of heroes yourself."

"You left me first!" I reminded him, getting shocked again as I felt the resentment of him blaming me for this.

"Whatever. The dream died with both of us." Couch Potato insisted like I didn't want him around anymore. That couldn't have been further from the truth. At least, before that day. "But here we are now. Hero and villain. But, hey, you like to fight. I'm all yours!"

Like this was all some game to him as it would have been in our battles back home, Tyler, or Couch Potato as it is now, transformed back into RPG, charging at me this time. As he ran, he swapped out his energy gloves that faded away for two swords that formed in his hands.

I couldn't stay frozen for much longer. Like it or not, I had to fight back. I had to fight my best friend. I did so by growing my hair out to form two identical swords, blocking his attack. This was only for defense, though. Couch Potato swung each sword at me as I stepped back with each clang that echoed from my own weapons.

This felt so crazy and new, but all so familiar at the same time. Couch Potato and I used to put on fights like this with our powers all the time, usually with both of us as characters. Our

town had virtually zero crime, so that was the best use of our abilities we had. We had so much fun together. I looked forward to every day I'd get to fight him. But not like this.

I had to keep fighting Couch Potato with real consequences. He was working for someone who actually wanted to hurt us. Couch Potato wanted to hurt us.

The longer we fought, the longer I looked at him with an evil grin on his face. The face belonged to a villainous character, but the source of the smile was all Tyler. As I had to keep looking at him like this, the time took its toll as I thought more about him. With each second of seeing my friend having faded away, my own smile went as well. That was when the electric shocks came back yet again.

"Urgh! This isn't happening. This isn't happening . . . Gah! . . ." I mumbled to myself as I endured the electrocution.

Our swords locked together as we tried forcing the other one back, but he didn't need a sword to hurt me. The shocks continued. I just couldn't look at my friend like this.

Trying to stop the zapping, I turned my head where he couldn't look at me, and caught a glimpse of the Neo Brigade vs. J Gang action. This view was admittedly not much better. The first thing I saw was Dinomight grab Tel-E's arms, squeezing her so hard, she couldn't use her powers against him. He then slammed her down, ready to dish out some more damage on the Knowlgian.

I knew I'd have trouble fighting Couch Potato, but I had no problem fighting Dinomight. As our swords still locked, I finally mustered enough strength to force Couch Potato back as he fell to the ground while I turned and ran to help Tel-E.

"Whoa. Where do you think you're going?" Couch Potato interrupted as I could feel the earth suddenly move.

As I ran, my view of the area changed. I was actually moving to the side. In fact, as I discovered seconds later, the section of the earth that covered only where Couch Potato and I were standing completely rotated horizontally. It was like the ground was the floor of a carousel. That part of the ground had

just rotated one-hundred-eighty degrees as I actually wound up facing the hill at the back of the beach where I started from.

Surprised by the change of location, I turned around to see Couch Potato across from me, closer to Tel-E and Dinomight this time. His fist was in the ground, and I noticed he had transformed into a new character, one of mine as it turns out. It was my earth moving character, Ruff. And he just used her powers against me by rotating that part of the earth like it was nothing.

"This fight's only for you and me, just like the old days." Couch Potato insisted, morphing back to normal, keeping a friendly smile. The more he smiled as he kept me from the team, the less of a grin I could fake through this.

"I'd rather help my friends . . . urgh!" I affirmed, collapsing to the ground on my knees as my powers electrocuted me yet again. As I tried to go on, I could only keep my head down to stop the pain, keeping my face out of my old friend's sight.

"Your friends?" Couch Potato asked, surprised by my choice of words. He then turned around to see the Neo Brigade as he realized who I was referring to. "You made . . . new friends?"

As the Brigade and Gang continued their brawl, I noticed Fourize trying to fry Race with the heat beams from his eyes. The Brigade leader dodged one more shot and darted into Fourize, knocking him face down in the sand.

"Urgh! Couch Potato! Get over here and take care o' this guy!" Fourize ordered, trying to take a shot at Race again.

"You got it, Ira!" Couch Potato replied before turning back to me. "Wait here, Ellie."

Suddenly, Couch Potato took a new character's form: A character whose body was all a pitch black shadow with two white eyes. This actually wasn't a new character at all. It was the villain, Ebony, from the Eli Electric series. I'd seen this guy before. It was that same mysterious shadow figure who helped Dinomight escape when we fought him at the architecture museum. It really was Couch Potato there that day. He was with these guys from the beginning.

And he was with them then as he used the character's powers to sink into the ground, forming a large black shadow that slowly moved near Fourize and Race. The circular ground shadow of Ebony stopped right in front of the Gang leader as Race prepared one more attack. With all his speed, the Brigade leader charged at Fourize, stepping right on the Ebony shadow before he could reach his target.

Race was stuck. He was feet from Fourize, but he was stopped instantly when he stepped on the shadow. With the character's powers, after catching Race, Couch Potato forced the speedster to descend into it like he was caught in quicksand, only much quicker. Race had disappeared in the shadow in a matter of seconds as the shadow closed up and vanished with Race inside.

Suddenly, the Ebony shadow reappeared about twenty feet above the same location. As it opened, Race fell out of the shadow, landing right in front of Fourize who stood there, ready to catch him. The Gang leader didn't waste any time. He fired a heat beam through his glasses, turning it to an ice beam, flash freezing Race the moment it made contact with him.

"That's more like it." Fourize commented, satisfied with his new helper. As bad as it looked for Race, it was worse for Tel-E as she was caught in Dinomight's arms as he held her from behind like Ninja did with me earlier. Only, it looked much more painful as the brute was about fifty times as strong as Ninja.

As I looked around and finally saw the rest of the battle, everyone else was struggling as well. Bendy was surrounded by Tammy Time's clones who kept coming at him. Pyra was trying to shoot her flames at Ninja who teleported away before turning invisible and kicking her down. And Nator had projected a beam from his hand at Cyhack who used a similar attack from her own mechanical hand while the J Gang member overpowered our own cyborg's attack. The Gang was on top at this point, but Fourize only wanted him and his team to soar over us.

"Although, you know what would be better? Why don't you do us a favor and take out the rest of the Neo Brigade?" Fourize suggested.

“Really? All of them?” Couch Potato asked, looking at the rest of the Brigade.

“What? You think you shouldn’t have to? You have the power to beat them all at once. Now show us all that power!”

“Uh . . . sure thing, Ira.”

With Couch Potato and I, our character transformations weren’t just limited to one at a time. We could produce and control multiple compatible characters to fight together. The catch was the power and defense was limited, but Fourize didn’t mind.

Following orders, Couch Potato kept Ebony and summoned three of the character’s own team members as they appeared in a white light just like our regular transformations. Couch Potato summoned not just RPG again, but also a pyro-kinetic kid named Hot Dog, and a large footed guy with super leg strength, Walker. The Gang leader could see the power in these guys and was quite pleased.

“Kiss your team goodbye, Trotterberg.” Fourize muttered to the still frozen Race with an evil smirk.

The four characters took off in different directions. Hot Dog went to Tel-E, Ebony to Bendy, RPG to Pyra, and Walker to Nator. No one in the Brigade knew what could come with these guys, but I could see just what would happen. Hot Dog was going to burn Tel-E. Ebony was about to stretch his own shadowy body around Bendy to keep him down. RPG could turn his hand into a fire hose to douse Pyra and use whatever weapon he wanted on her with his other hand. And Walker would jump thirty feet up to crush Nator with his massive feet.

I remember enjoying watching these characters use those abilities on the hero who would come up with a way of stopping them. But I couldn’t remember them that way anymore. I just hated seeing these cool characters I’d watch used like this. To be used against my friends. Sure, they’re all villains, but none of this looked right. Those characters were made for the enjoyment of others, just like how I’d fight Couch Potato with these characters for fun back home. Those were some good times. But now? Now

those memories are all tainted. There was no other way to look at fiction or Tyler anymore.

“Don’t worry. I’ll return to your friend once this is over.” Couch Potato sneered to Tel-E as his hands ignited in flame while Dinomight held her in place for him to burn her. “And it’s all about to be over.”

This had to stop. Before Hot Dog, or any of those other Couch Potatoes could attack, I ran all the way from the hill and extended my hair out to fight them all. I got the attention of all of them, and I could feel the electrocution returning. But my friends needed me.

I made it to Hot Dog, hitting his hands away with my hair, causing his attack to miss before he could hurt Tel-E. I followed this by grabbing him and slamming the character on top of Dinomight’s skull before the brute could react. With that strong force, Dinomight collapsed to the ground, freeing Tel-E, though, not without receiving a few more shocks.

For Ebony, as he approached Bendy as Tammy Time and her clones still surrounded him in a circle, my hair grabbed the shadow by the waist, shoulders, and ankles as I lifted him up and stretched his elastic body in front of the Brigade’s own stretcher. As I held Ebony over Bendy, I stretched him by the shoulders and ankles with Bendy between the two halves of the shadow and held his waist back. As I stretched the character, I brought him all the way past where Tammy Time and her clones stood, and wrapped Ebony’s limbs all around the circumference of the clones, rounding all of them up, and tying them together with Ebony’s body.

Not wasting any time after getting electrocuted further, I went to RPG who had just formed his hand into a fire hose like I predicted and soaked Pyra, dousing her flame. Ninja was all set to attack my friend, but I wasn’t playing around this time. I repeated my move and wrapped my hair all around both RPG and Ninja, chaining the two together. I was so ready to be done with Couch Potato today, I felt some more electric shocks. But it was worth it.

After that, I turned to his Walker character who was all set to ambush Nator with his muscular legs. I decided to end it with him quickly and simply grew my hair into the form of an enormous foot the size of the character himself and held it above him, crushing Walker with it. He wasn't gonna be making any jumps after that.

However, Cyhack was still there and managed to blast my hair foot with her mechanical arm's energy cannon, vaporizing it. I wanted to make another one just for her, but I was feeling too many electric shocks at that point. I could barely stand. I decided to switch things up and morph into my alien character, Chroma.

I received continuous electrocution all the while as my character took it in, though I did use her power to absorb some of the shocks from within to harness it for her own abilities. As I absorbed it, I finally used Chroma to direct the electricity at an unsuspecting Cyhack as the cyborg collapsed upon the impact.

I was fighting while hurting myself, but I didn't care. I just wanted to keep my friends from Couch Potato. Fourize took note of my intervention, though, being the only Gang member left.

"There's only room for one powerful newcomer and it's only what I command!" Fourize affirmed, lifting his glasses and angrily shooting a heat beam at me.

Using Chroma again, I effortlessly absorbed the heat attack, remaining unharmed (external energy attacks don't hurt like the internal ones). After absorbing it, I channeled the Gang leader's own heat blast into my own attack, choosing Race as my target. The speedster was still frozen, but as my heat attack from Chroma hit him, he instantly unfroze as fast as he became frozen the first time.

My powers were still killing me, though. Fourize's cold stare at me and my serious face just resulted in more electric shocks. But just as I harnessed it with Cyhack, I immediately directed the electricity at Fourize, blasting him far away down to the hill. He was beaten. The J Gang was beaten. And Couch Potato was forced to morph back to normal and singular.

"Gang! Fall back!" Fourize ordered his team.

They may have been down, but they had another trick up their sleeves. All of them got away in their earlier individual fights with the Brigade, so they weren't letting us break the streak.

Two nights earlier, after we beat Cyhack, she escaped by pressing a button on her leg that activated a device to teleport her away from trouble. She pressed it that time. And as we found right then, it didn't just apply for her. It applied for everyone in the J Gang, at least the ones close to her proximity, which was all of them in this case. They all just dematerialized, beginning to vanish.

I looked at Couch Potato one more time as he began fading away, this time, physically.

"Til next time, Ellie. There's more fight comin' to you and your team." Couch Potato assured me as he and the J Gang all disappeared, but not before his sight gave me one last electric shock.

My friends were okay, and the J Gang had been beaten. There was no more risk for any harm to be done. But this was no victory. There was nothing for me to celebrate, not after witnessing my best friend being evil. We could have lost that fight without me learning my friend had changed and that would have been more of a win. This felt completely hollow. An ambush from the J Gang lasts a few minutes. Tyler's turn to villainy? Who knows how long this could last?

"Phew . . . I d-d-didn't know if we'd s-s-survive that. Way to G-G-Go Neo." Race stammered, still shivering from Fourize's ice blast.

"Would've been nice if we'd caught them all, but I guess surviving a surprise like that new guy will do." Nator commented.

"Nice save at the end there, Hairpiece." Bendy complimented me.

However, I couldn't accept that compliment. My back was turned as I remained totally silent. All you could hear was my heavy breathing as I tried to fight all the emotions that wanted to rush out of me. There was so much I was feeling, but I couldn't bring the team down.

“So, Beauty, what was with that guy you were fighting? Do you two know each other?” Pyra inquired as my back still faced them. “Uh, Earth to Beauty? Can you hear me? Do you know the guy you were fighting?”

I felt like I should at least explain some of this. I turned to face the Brigade. But, on first glance, I immediately got shocked again. There was no danger, no threat, no horrible insults thrown. I should’ve been able to smile, but I couldn’t. There was nothing I could do to help me look at my friends. I wanted to look like I was as good of a member of the team and stay by their side, but how could I do that if I couldn’t look at them. If I tried, I would only get electrocuted.

There was no way for me to get through this. The heartbreak persisted. Rather than explain like I wanted to, I just turned back and ran from this problem, stopping the shocks. I grew my hair out into the form of a jetpack, and flew off, away from the beach, and away from my friends.

“Whoa. Beauty, where are you going?” Pyra asked as I flew off, trying to get as far away as I could.

“Ellie!” Tel-E cried.

I just had to accept it. Tyler was gone. And, with that, I couldn’t look at anyone. Not with how I felt. Knowing he betrayed our friendship in favor of the people we vowed to fight against and protect people from, I just felt so alone. And that’s all I could do. Just be alone. It was the only way I could keep from hurting myself from the pain of my best friend leaving again.

It all brought me back to that first day in Minor City. I had no one. And I began to wonder if not having any friends would have been the right way to go. There’s no pain of feeling loss, and there’s no one to look at me when I’m sad to make me feel physically hurt. A solitary life was looking pretty good at that point.

I flew straight to the Brigade HQ to be alone in my room. I was lying on my bed facing to the right while I clutched my hands to my chest. I just lay there, staring at the wall, crying. All I could

do was cry, I didn't even bother having tissues or getting some ice cream to calm down.

I couldn't think of anything but Couch Potato. All the days I spent with him back home ran through my mind. I just tried to fish for something so happy that it could eclipse the pain of seeing him as a villain. From the day we met at age eight on the playground where I saved him from a bully to our first day in Minor City when we took down the Gamer together. I had a whole Rolodex of memories. But none of them did any good. They all meant nothing after seeing who he really was.

As I continued to sob like I experienced a terrible breakup, I continued thinking of him. I reached over to my nightstand and picked up the book we made together. Our Character Manual. I turned to the back cover to find the photo of me and Couch Potato smiling, looking just as happy as I remembered us before all this mess. We looked like such great friends back then. Seeing this only brought more tears out of me. It was beautiful, but it looked meaningless. If Couch Potato had become a villain in the past, the photo would have just faded away to nothing.

While I kept crying as I held this memento of my past with my former friend, my own Charevo Fairies emerged from my hands. The three sprites that represented my Charevo Trinity of Fiction, Imagination, and Femininity all arrived and I could sure use some advice at that point.

"Even those who seem to look the most truthful can be presenting fiction in place of the real truth." My unicorn Fiction Fairy assured me.

"One's imagination often manifests an appearance for someone, but only for a limited time." My dragon Imagination Fairy added.

"A woman need not a new man to feel complete. Only faith in herself and those who already support her."

The Charevo Fairies returned to my hands. After hearing their guidance, I tried to take it in. But as I thought about their advice, I had to put Couch Potato in my mind again. And it was no use. I could only look at my friend turning evil. Even advice that

implied I should get over him sounded like he was totally gone and there was nothing I could do about it. All I could do was look back at all that was gone.

I put the Character Manual back on the nightstand as I sat on the side of my bed with my head down, just wanting to be alone.

"Ellie?" Pyra uttered, having traveled through the air in her fire into my room. "You doing okay?"

Just like at the beach, I couldn't say anything. I could only sniffle from my crying.

"Race and Tel-E told me about that friend of yours you came to Minor City with. That was him, wasn't it?" Pyra inferred.

"I don't want to talk about it." I mumbled, facing away from her.

"Hmph. I've heard that before."

I heard the door open. Someone else decided not to leave me alone. As I listened, I found it was Tel-E.

"Ellie, is there something you wish to tell us?" Tel-E inquired.

"Uh, I'd go with the telepathy on this one." Pyra commented.

"Come on now, Ellie. Don't turn away from us."

I tried to look at the girls, but my smile wouldn't show up for them. As soon as my eyes met theirs, I could feel the electrocution act up again. As I got zapped, I immediately turned back to my previous position.

". . . I can never look at anyone ever again." I muttered, feeling miserable.

"You've smiled through worse, though. I'm sure you can put a positive spin on this one." Pyra claimed.

Listening to her, I thought she had a good point. Serious danger a superhero faces didn't make this look like much. But I still couldn't escape the pain. This honestly felt like the worst of the worst.

". . . Tyler was my best friend. One of my only real friends. We did everything together. We promised we'd both be heroes.

Seeing him run off was one thing. Seeing him turn evil? It . . . it felt like everything we dreamed of meant nothing. Like all we did meant nothing. Like our whole friendship meant nothing.” I explained, fighting back all the tears I could.

“Friendships never mean nothing.” Tel-E insisted, sitting down next to me while I still looked away. “Some friendships stay strong and last a lifetime as we all hope they do. Others tend to end, whether it’s due to an argument, other people in their lives, or . . . being unexpectedly taken from your friends against your control.”

“Or hurting someone that makes them judge you based on your mistakes.” Pyra added. “Or sometimes it just ends when you did nothing wrong. There’s just these different life goals you can’t stop someone from making.”

“But it’s when you have someone in your life, whether it’s for long or not, they bring happiness that doesn’t come from being alone. And with whatever time you have with them, there are valuable things to learn from another person. What you gain from friends doesn’t just go away when they do.”

“She’s right, Ellie.” Race said.

I looked in the mirror I had on my wall and found Race, Bendy, and Nator walking in.

“We heard what you were like when you had this guy. The more time you spent with him, the more you wanted to be a real hero.” Race reminded me.

“Yeah, Hairpiece, just look at you. Even without Couch Potato, you actually became a real superhero. That didn’t stop after he went away the first time.” Bendy argued.

“And it shouldn’t stop just because it did with him. Think about it. If you were gone tomorrow, do you think I’d automatically not try to think creatively anymore?” Nator questioned.

“Yeah, or would I go back to worshipping Captain D?”

“Or would I only focus on myself when leading a team?” Race asked.

“Or would I continue to think I can’t count on anyone’s support when I feel afraid?” Pyra queried.

“Or would I have believed that just because a friend is gone and may feel differently, I shouldn’t do what I think is right to help others?” Tel-E concluded. “What we learn from each other matters, Ellie, just as how you are important to us.”

With all my friends there to cheer me up, I began to feel a little better. I didn’t have memories of Couch Potato to count on, but I did have the Neo Brigade. I guess I did make a bit of a difference with them. I was hoping to help people in the city after all.

With all their positive thoughts in mind, I finally summoned the strength in my facial muscles to form a passable smile to turn and face my friends with. My cheeks were still soaked with tears and my makeup had run straight down my face, but I had a pretty natural small smile going.

“Tyler Vitti may be gone, but you still have us. I know we can’t replace him in the past, but we’ll give you the best future you’ve ever seen.” Race assured me with a grin.

“Sure, the few weeks of five friends doesn’t add up to the eight years of one, but you don’t need it to balance out to feel okay.” Nator added.

“You’ve been here for us even when we tried to reject your help. So we’re here for you. You can count on it.” Bendy affirmed.

“We may not have a bunch of nerdy knowledge and transforming powers to play with, but we have you as a friend.” Pyra informed me.

“And you’ll always have us.” Tel-E concluded.

I still had Couch Potato on my mind, but that didn’t mean I had to go straight to the negative thoughts, not with the Neo Brigade around. As I looked at them, I could only smile and think of my time with them and all I learned from them. There may have been some regrettable moments, but I knew, with them, it could only get better. All I needed were my friends.

While she sat on the bed next to me, Tel-E finally leaned in and gave me a hug while I hugged her back.

"Hey, what am I, nothing? I'm standing right here." Pyra remarked.

As Tel-E and I held each other, I could feel Pyra's warm touch as she sat down on my right and hugged me too.

"Don't worry. I exuded a lot of heat earlier. I'm sure you'll live through this." Pyra joked.

"Alright. Make room, girls. I'm gettin' in on this." Bendy said, stretching himself next to Pyra to hug both of us.

"Group hug, everyone." Race announced, sitting next to Tel-E to hug from her side.

"Friends maybe not forever, but savoring the good times 'til the end." Nator said as he squeezed in on the end next to Race.

"Dude, you'd make the worst writer for greeting cards." Bendy laughed.

"Could you, for once, pretend something that doesn't last forever actually does last forever?" Tel-E sighed, still happy, though in our embrace.

"Alright, but just this once." Nator replied.

"Come on, Nate. Get in closer." Bendy told the cyborg from across the bend as he stretched his left arm to the end, getting it around Nator and squeezing us tighter.

"So, Ellie, just how many action panels in your superhero comics include a whole team hugging like this?" Pyra remarked.

"Gotta be at least four. The Forewarned hero and his crew hugged a few times in the old comics." Race answered.

"Sorry I asked."

"How's this feel, Ellie? As good an embrace from Tyler Vitti?" Tel-E inquired.

When I first trudged through Minor City alone with no Tyler Vitti to support me and have to support, I didn't know if there was any chance for me to make it alone. Just after how much I had him in my life, I didn't know what having no friends was like. After seeing him as a villain, I thought there was no coming back. Before that, there was still a chance of having my best friend return.

But on that first day, after Tyler left, one of the first big smiles I had in Minor City was seeing the Neo Brigade. After losing Tyler a second time as he became Couch Potato of the J Gang, just look what fueled the first big smile of mine after my former friend became evil.

As my friends and I all locked in that hug on my bed, in the building where they welcomed me, it just felt so nice. I felt like a little kid sleeping with a bunch of soft plush toys surrounding me that I snuggled with.

I had all my friends there with me. A friend like Tyler could have easily disappeared the next day. But all I could think of was having them that day as I just couldn't let them go.

"Ace? Tel-E? Ben? Bonnie? Nate?" I uttered.

Everyone glanced over to me as my smile never went away while I closed my eyes, feeling more tears coming. Not tears that would shock me, though. It all just flowed out as I savored the moment with those five.

"Thank you."