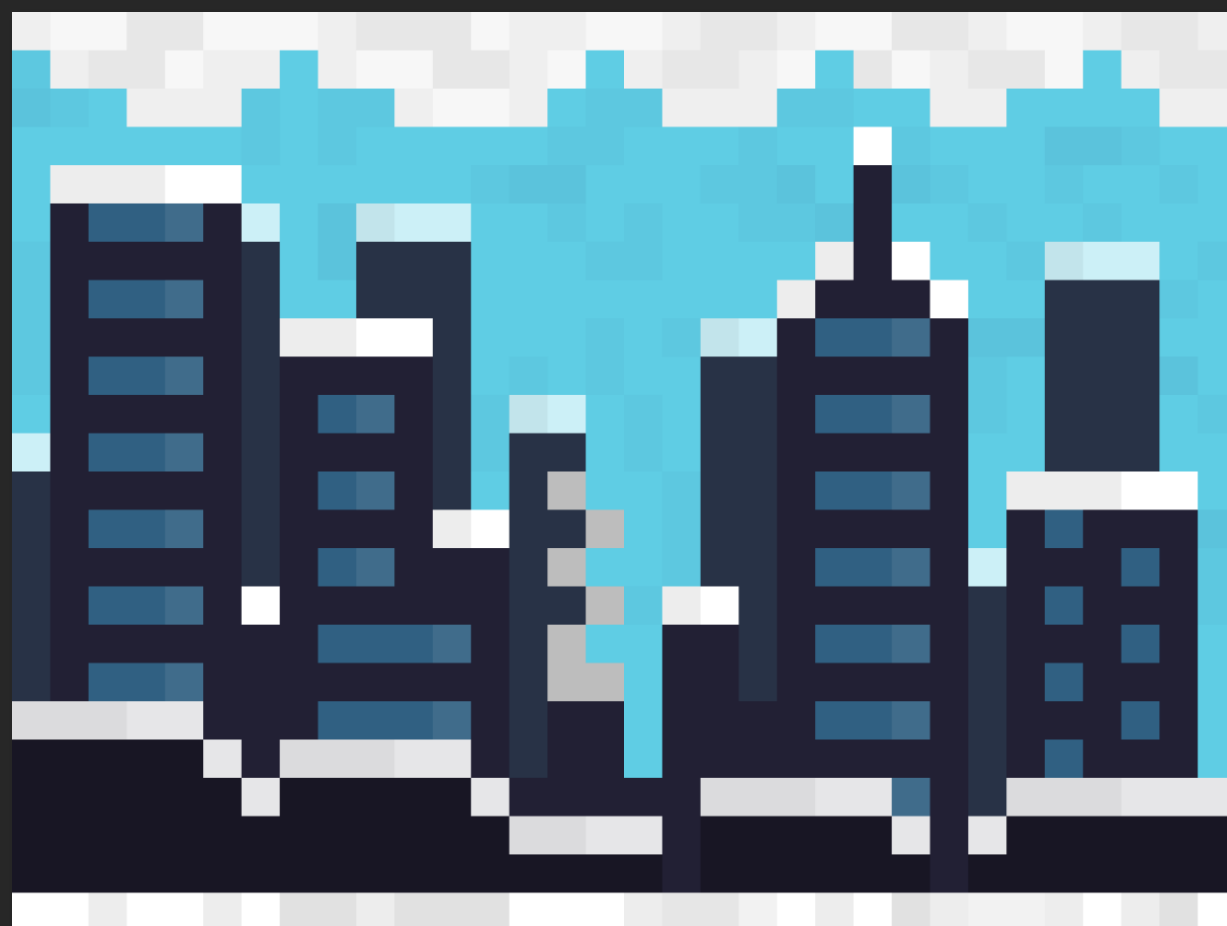


75¢

Protectors For Profit: Season 1 - Issue 1
Circadian Kleptomania



On the streets of Skum City, The Protectors for Profit surrounded Cicada Woman as she set her bag of cash into the snow.

Cicada
Woman
Hibernating
Hazard



The heroes watched her remove the gloves to her outfit. A large cape sat on her back. She wore a thick metallic mask with bright red bug eyes on it. Cobra Commando, Chainlink, Totem, and The Phantom stood ready.

Totem



Perseverant
Projectionist

Totem reached for the golden scarab hanging from her necklace.

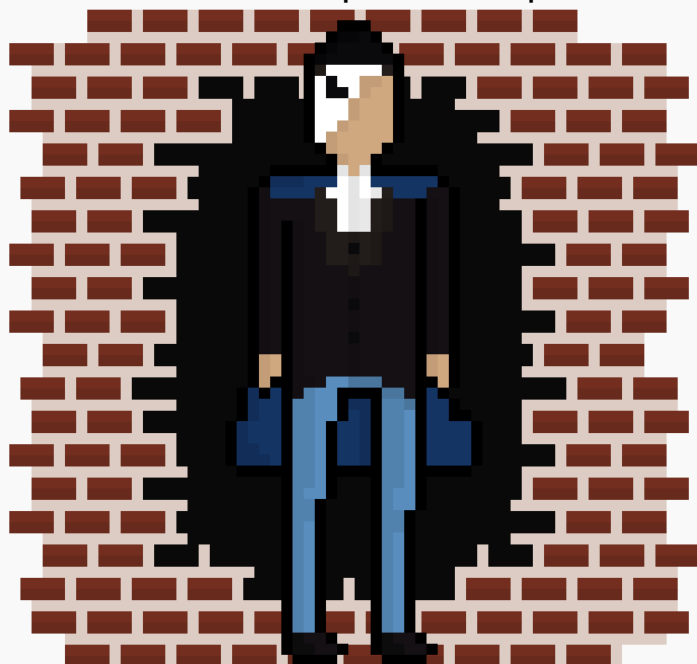
“Don’t let her touch you. If you make contact with her skin a toxin will spread through your body preventing you from producing energy,” she said.

“Layman's terms please,” Cobra Commando asked as he adjusted his hood. He wore a bright green suit that resembled a snake.



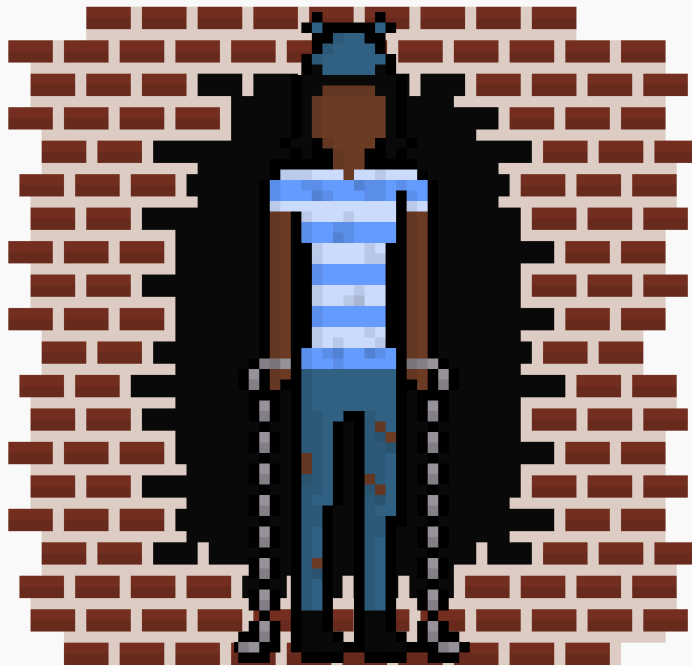
“It’s not that complicated, my friend. If she touched you, it would be like a rechargeable battery turning into a one use,” Phantom said as he fluffed up his blue cape.

The
Phantom
Histrionic
Hero



“Stop it with the vague metaphors. I’m just going to hit her,” Chainlink said as she ran forward.

Chainlink
Maternal
Marvel



CRACK! She whipped a chain forward and Cicada Woman rolled to the side narrowly avoiding it. Cicada Woman reached behind her and pulled a cord on her back. Wings erupted from behind her suit, and she fluttered forward at Cobra Commando.

“EEK! Don’t touch me!” he said as he rolled to the side.

Phantom looked over to Totem then asked, “Why don’t you just go scarab mode and take this dastardly villain down?”

“I don’t quite know if the scarab counts as an extension of my body or if it is a separate entity. I might get poisoned if she touched it,” she said.

“Fair enough, we can handle this without your fancy magic,” he said.

Cicada Woman continued darting across the street as Cobra Commando repeatedly contorted his body to avoid being touched. Phantom watched each movement searching for a pattern in her movements.

“PHANTOM! GET HER! I am going to get turned into a one-use battery!” Cobra Commando shouted.

“Remain calm, I’m almost ready to strike,” he said.

Crack! A chain ripped forward and around Cicada Woman's wings. Chainlink thrust her arms back and tore the wings off. Cicada Woman fell and tumbled across the ground. Phantom unpinned his cape and approached her as she picked herself up.

"Who are yyyyou people?" she asked.

"The Protectors for Profit and we're about to bring you in, Cicada Woman," Phantom said.

RING. RING. RING.

"Oop. Sorry guys, that's me. It's the babysitter. I gotta take this," Chainlink said as she reached into her pocket.

She lifted the phone to her ear.

"Uh-huh. Really? That soon? Alright, I understand, I'll be right there."

She put the phone away.

"Something came up with the babysitter, so she has to leave early. I gotta get home to my kid. You guys got it from here, right?" Chainlink asked.

"Our odds are looking decent currently, I think you could leave," Totem said.

Chainlink gave a thumbs up then ran off.

"Am I worth that little to yyyyou that yyyyou chatter as we clash?" Cicada Woman asked.

"You aren't worth much to us, but the bounty for stopping you is," Phantom said.

"If it is moneyyyy yyyyou seek I would payyyyy yyyyou more than whoever hired yyyyou to stop me."

"Tempting, but I don't think that would lead to a good Y-y-y-yelp review," Phantom said.

Cicada Woman hissed at Phantom before jabbing her hand forward. He sidestepped then threw his cape over her. **Pow!** Phantom slammed his fist against her.

"Seal the deal, Cobra Commando!" Phantom shouted.

"On it!" Cobra Commando said as he ran forward before collapsing to the ground and slithering up around Cicada Woman. He coiled around her body and tightened the cape.

“Who wants the last punch?” Phantom asked.

“I wouldn’t mind it considering I didn’t get to participate otherwise,” Totem said.

Phantom nodded and she stepped forward. **pow.** Totem punched Cicada Woman lightly. Cobra Commando uncoiled and she toppled backward. As she fell to the ground Phantom pulled his cape off her and refastened it.

“Alright, let us cash our check from the bank owner and then you can all head home. I’ll handle the paperwork at HQ,” Phantom said.



On a street in the Prol district a musty office sat. It was a brown bricked building at the edge of a neighborhood. Phantom worked at his desk hours after fighting Cicada Woman.

Ding.

He opened the P4P@gmail.com account to see a new message.

For Phantom: Urgent Matter (TIME SENSITIVE)

He clicked on the email and read it. His eyes opened wide. Phantom reached for his cape and tied it around his neck. He opened a drawer in his desk and reached for his mask

“Tonight, it ends.”



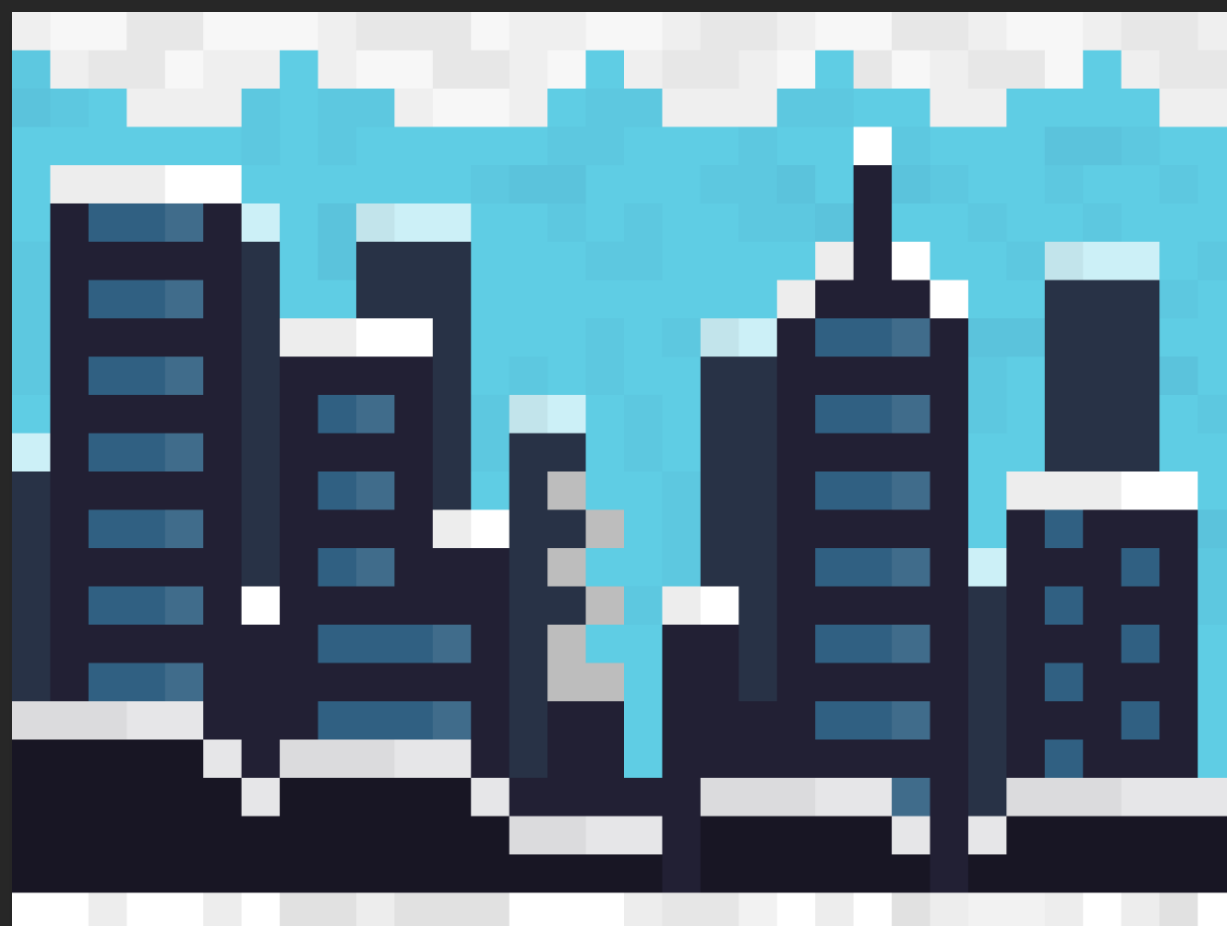
A VHS video played quietly in an office. The box TV sat on top of a Mahogany desk and the tape player hummed.

This video showed an event that occurred at the top of a penthouse in Skum City. On screen, there was a long distance shot of Phantom sitting in rafters. He was so far away from the camera there was no possible way he knew he was being filmed. The camera watched steadily as The Phantom stalked his prey. He wore his long blue cape and had a white mask covering half of his face. The camera panned to show a man in a purple suit discussing plans with another man on the other side of his Mahogany desk who wore a bright yellow suit. The man in the purple suit rubbed his goatee with one hand and stroked the diamond on the top of his cane with his other. He was illuminated by the nightlight shining in through the glass walls. Snow fell past his window.

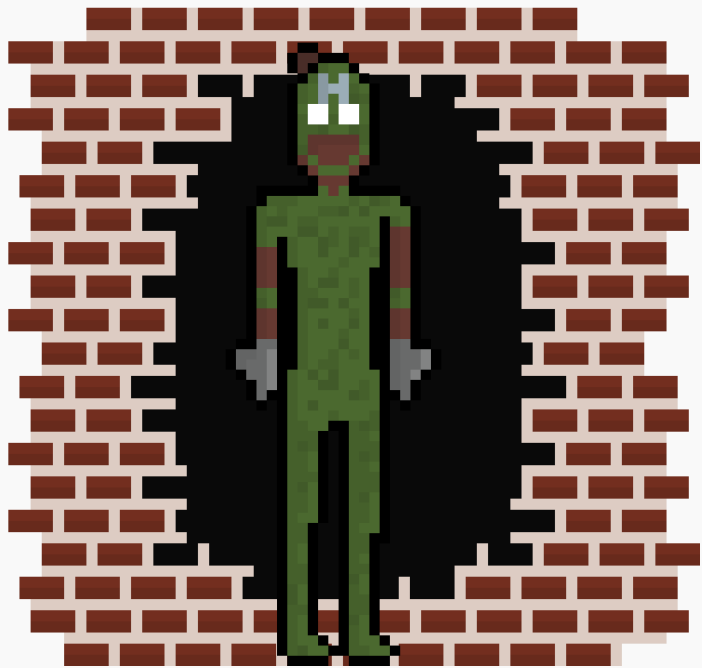
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Protectors For Profit: Season 1 - Issue 2

Threading A Path

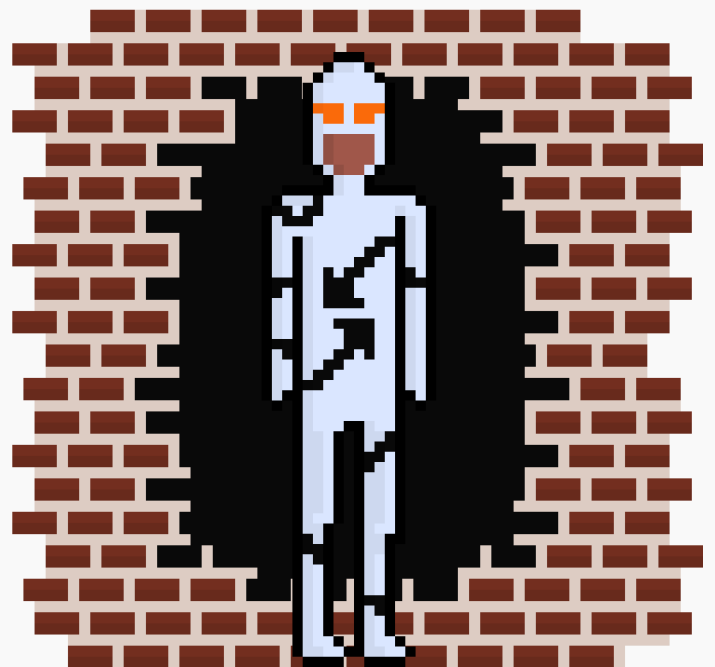


thup. thup. thup. thup. It was late evening in Skum City as a news helicopter circled above Hero and Zigzag battling down below. **Zoop, Zoop!** Hero rolled to the side to dodge blasts from Zigzag's guns aptly named Zig and Zag.



Hero
Principled
Paladin

Zigzag
Angular
Assailant



The jet-black beams moved past then randomly turned one hundred and eighty degrees and blasted Hero in the back. Hero grunted slightly as Zigzag chuckled. He wore a bright white body suit covered in angular black lines. On his face, he wore a visor that hid his eyes behind a bright orange piece of plastic.

“Surrender, Hero. Admit that Zigzag has finally bested you!”

Hero bent over to catch her breath. White wisps of air flew out from her mouth in the cold winter air.

She had gauntlets on her wrists each with a shield attached to them. On one of the shields, a picture of sparkling water was plastered and on the other, was the title of a mobile game.

People cheered as the hero and villain stared at each other.

“Losing to a guy named Zigzag wouldn’t be good for my sponsorships,” she said with a bright smile. She turned to a news camera behind her and winked.

“GO GET HIM, HERO!” A voice from the crowd shouted.

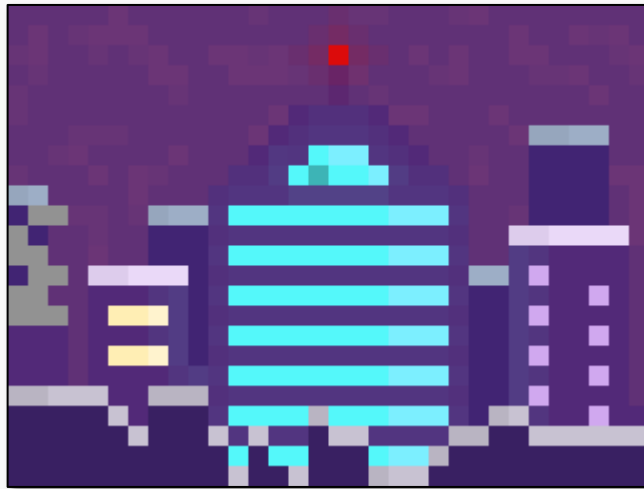
Hero stood up straight and locked her gauntlets in front of her then charged forward. **Zoop, Zoop!** Zigzag blasted his guns. The blasts flew toward Hero then right before striking her shields they split to go around her. Before they could strike her in the back, Hero leapt into the air. She turned around midair and blocked the blasts with her shield. **Clink, Clink.** Hero used the force from the blasts to fly toward Zigzag. She reoriented herself so her legs pointed toward him, and she dove into him. **CRASH!** Zigzag collapsed to the ground and slid through the snow.

“You almost made me late to my meeting!” she said.

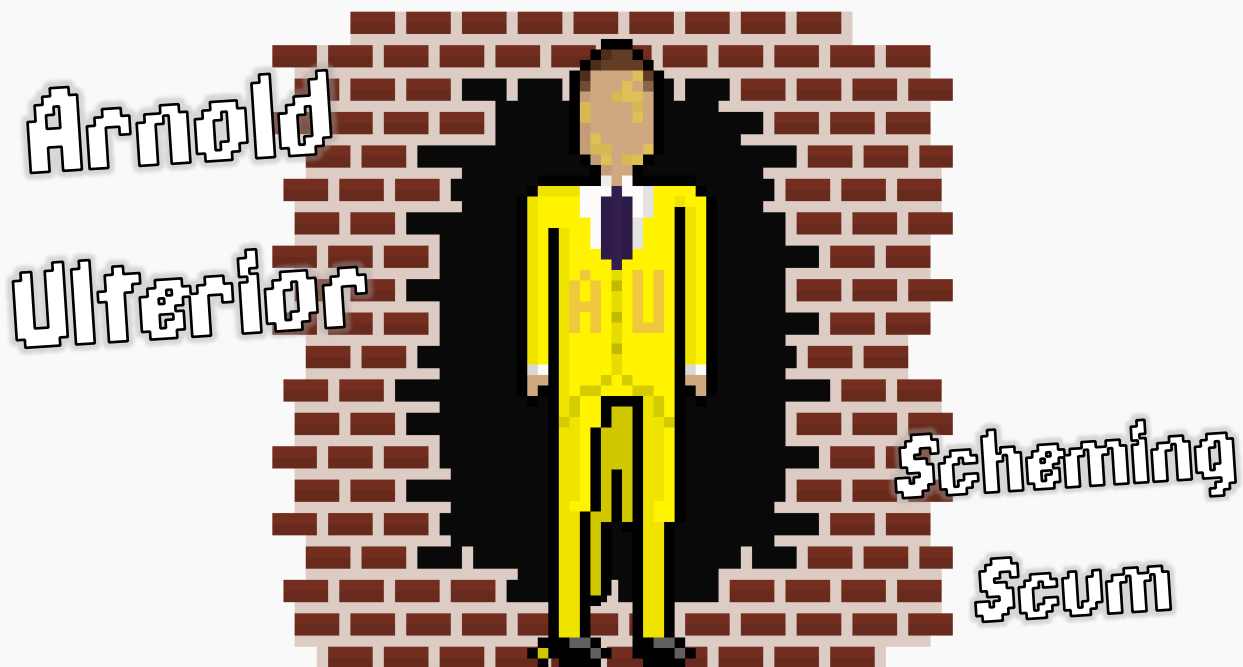
The crowd cheered as a man with a news camera ran up to Hero.

“HERO! Wow! Incredible work there. What do you have to say to everyone watching back at home?” the man said as he raised a microphone to her face.

“Always remember that the police are the real heroes. Also, don’t forget to keep drinking Super Sparkly Soda! I always make sure to drink one before I go out on patrol!” she said as she held her gauntlets up to the camera. She waved goodbye before running off.



Hero sat down in front of a birch desk in an office. She stared at the white walls as she waited. **Click.** The door opened and a man in a bright yellow suit stepped into the office. He pulled out the chair and sat down at the desk.



“How is it going, Kendall? I see you have been hard at work. Great job bringing in Zigzag! I liked how when the press came you made sure to pose so the logos were facing the camera!”

“Thanks, boss. Why did you call me in for a meeting?”

“I have great news for the brand. You are doing incredibly well with the younger demographics. Older people are still hesitant to heroes, but that is to be expected with S-Day. Super Sparkly Soda is doing so well right now that it is now in all the Transaction Tavern stores. Yes, their store is a little...what is the word...crummy, but it is a start to getting into the real grocery stores!

“Second, I wanted to discuss a raise for you. You have been performing so well I wanted to up your rate. Currently, we pay you about five thousand per caught criminal with three percent bonus for getting into the news. We are looking to up it to five thousand five hundred per criminal brought in!”

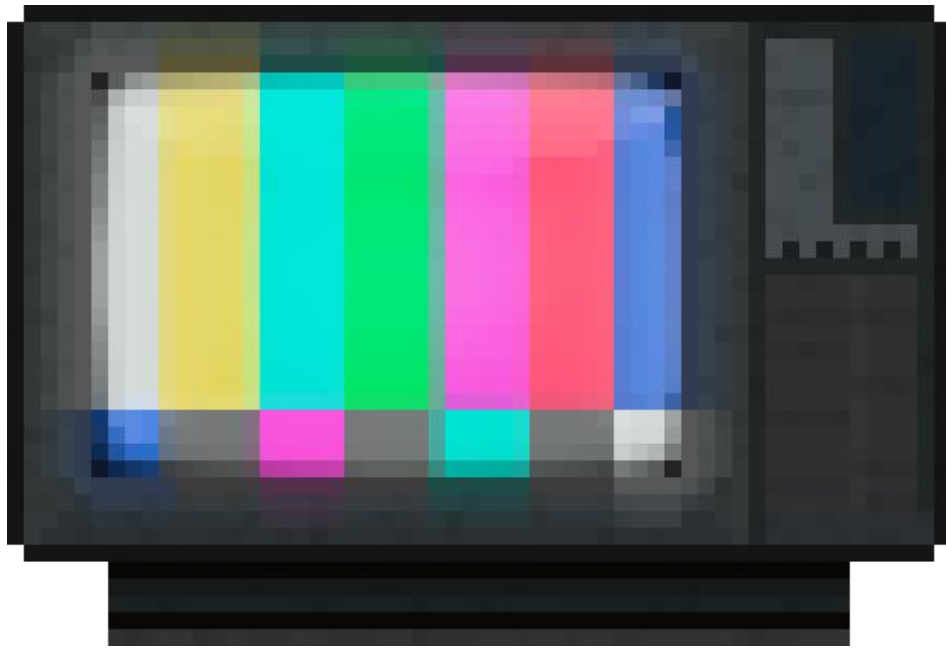
“That’s great! What’s the catch?” Hero asked.

“I just want you to take this gift from me,” the man said as he reached under the table and pulled out a briefcase. He opened it up to reveal two brand new gauntlets with shiny new shields attached to them.

“I increased the shield size by twenty-two percent for more room to show off the brands, plus these new ones can detach for ranged combat,” the man said.

“Thank you!”

“My pleasure, now I don’t want to keep you for too long. Keep protecting the fine citizens of Skum City!” the man said as he waved to the door. Hero got up with the briefcase and left.



In the dimly lit room, the VHS video continued to play.

“The Landlord...” The Phantom could be seen mouthing as the camera shakily zoomed in on his face.

Landlord waved out the man in the yellow suit then sat at his workspace signing papers. Phantom dove down and landed on his desk. He picked up the ends of his cape and lifted them into the air to make himself appear larger to his bulky adversary.

“Where are they?” Phantom asked.

“Where is who?” Landlord responded.

“I’ve had enough! Your tyranny over this city ends tonight, Landlord! Skum City will no longer suffer under my watch!”

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Protectors For Profit: Season 1 - Issue 3

A Step Down



A few days later, three adults sat in their musty office waiting for something to do. Sunlight shined in through the blinds in the windows and illuminated the dust floating through the air. They craved for action. Cobra Commando sat at a desk as he ate spinach from a bowl. He took his purple gloves off to remove a piece of spinach stuck between his teeth. His hand grazed across his stubbled chin as he reached into his own mouth.

A TV hanging from the ceiling had the news on. On the news, a ground crew ran up to a crowd of people and panned the camera to show Zigzag laughing maniacally as he tried to rip a purse off an old lady's shoulder. **Thud.** Hero landed next to him. Snow erupted from the ground as her boots collided with the ground making for a cinematically pleasing shot.

"Zigzag? What are you doing out again?" she asked.

"Ugh, I hate her. Why does the news always seem to be right there when she fights a villain?" Chainlink questioned. She adjusted the blue bandana on her head and continued to spin her chains around. She slashed at a wooden dummy at the center of a training mat.

Crack...thud! Her glimmering chains whipped against her target.

"Seems nice enough, maybe one day we can team up with her," Cobra Commando said.

"Maybe one day I can be gifted the pleasure of punching her perfect face. I just know she's fake," Chainlink said.

"Hands off the purse, Zigzag!" Hero exclaimed on the TV.

"As you say..." Zigzag said as he took his hands off the purse then reached for the guns on his belt. **Zoop! Zoop! Zoop! Zoop!** Hero held her shields up to protect her face as the blasts zapped her body. The news cut to another camera crew on top of the building. The camera watched from above as she slowly marched forward while Zigzag continued shooting his guns. **Click.** Zigzag fumbled with a switch on the side of his gun then stopped firing them. He pointed Zig and Zag forward. **zzzzzzzzZZZZZZZZ!** Hero lowered her shields down just in time to see--**ZOOP!!!** A large, black laser blasted her in the chest. Hero flew back into the apartment building behind her. **CRASH!**

“Hmm. These new upgrades are something else,” Zigzag said.

At another desk, Totem held her hand against her chest. She leaned back in her chair and said, “Please be careful, Jenna. We can’t have you keep breaking things. I am afraid we would not be able to replace another broken window.”

“I told you to call me Chainlink when we have the costumes on,” she responded as she continued to spin her chains around.

“I’m telling you...that codename is too simple. You need something...that makes you stand out,” Cobra Commando said in between bites of spinach.

“Your name is literally Cobra Commando, I am not going to take flak from you. Didn’t you rip that name off from a kids show?” Chainlink asked.

“One, it is not a kids show. Two, my name is different from his,” Cobra Commando responded.

The news camera zoomed in on Zigzag as he charged his gun. **zzzzzzZZZZZZ!**

“You’re not the only one who has gotten upgrades,” Hero said.

click. click. Hero detached the shields from her gauntlets and threw them forward. **KLANG!** Zigzag’s guns flew out of his hands. **KLANG!** The second shield flew into his face and knocked him to the ground. Hero grabbed her shields off the ground and stood over him.

She asked, “How did you get out of jail?”

“As if I’d tell you,” Zigzag said.

“What is she even talking about? People getting out of jail? I haven’t heard of that happening in years. She’s lying to make her fight sound more exciting,” Chainlink said.

“She is conventionally attractive. That alone makes people watch her fights. She wouldn’t have to lie too,” Totem said.

“You saying I’m not good looking enough?” Cobra Commando asked.

“Erm, we have the whole teamwork thing going for us. We have quantity,” Totem said.

“Speaking of teamwork, where is Phantom? He never misses a day,” Chainlink said as she continued swinging her chains around.

“Yeah, you’re right. He isn’t here. Weird,” Cobra Commando said.

“My shield just gets so heavy. It could slip from my fingers any second now,” Hero said with a mocking tone. She held one shield loosely over his head with her pointer finger and thumb. The crowd gasped as the cameraman zoomed out to show everyone watching for Hero’s next move.

“You wouldn’t do that. It would crash your ratings,” Zigzag said.

“I don’t know--oop,” Hero dropped her shield and caught it just before it hit his face.

“LANDLORD DID IT! He let me out.”

“And who gave you your upgrades?”

“I don’t know. Take a look at them if you want.”

“Thanks. I will.” Hero reached her hand out and lifted Zigzag. She winked at the camera.

“You weren’t actually going to drop that on me, were you?” he asked.

“No.”

“DANG IT!”

Hero inspected his guns. She rolled the formed metal in her hand and noticed a golden U embroidered on the handle. She threw the guns on the ground.

“Don’t forget. The police are the true heroes!” Hero said as she ran off.

The news station cut back to the anchorwoman who said, “And there you have it, folks. Some fine detective work from Hero!”

“That wasn’t even detective work. She just played twenty questions with him,” Totem said as she rolled her eyes.

“More like two questions,” Cobra Commando said. **Knock...Knock**

“Come in!” Totem said.

Hero stepped through the door.

“Holy crap, wait. You were just on TV,” Cobra Commando said.

“I was?”

Hero looked at the TV hanging from the ceiling and chuckled.

“I guess so.”

“Christmas came early,” Chainlink muttered. She stopped swinging her chains around and began to loop them up.

“What brings you around these parts? Wait, this implies you know about us,” Cobra Commando said.

“I love Skum City. That means I’m willing to work with Street Rats every once in a while. You are as ratty as they get, so you should be able to help me solve my cockroach problem,” Hero said as her smile turned sour.

“Street Rats? Isn’t that redundant? I thought they only lived on the streets,” Cobra Commando said.

“Technically, they could live in the sewers or perhaps a field,” Totem said.

Cobra Commando nodded as he processed this fact.

“Just tell me what I need to know, and I will get out of here. I don’t want to be seen with the Street Rats.”

“What are you looking to know?” Chainlink asked.

“I know what she wants to know. You want to know about Landlord,” Totem said.

Everyone appeared stunned that she knew what Hero was going to ask.

“What? Am I the only one that actually pays attention to the TV?” Totem asked.

“Yes,” Cobra Commando said.

“Information about him comes with a cost. We will tell you everything we know about him for one hundred bucks,” Chainlink said.

“I’m not going to pay you guys anything. I never have heard of this Landlord guy, so he must be a street level thug. As it appears right now, I am cleaning up your guy’s mess.”

“You are acting a lot meaner in person than on TV. Not sure I like this in person Hero. Also, you are kinda tall and it is intimidating me a bit,” Cobra Commando said.

“Hero, is it? What kind of a name is that? Do you need to keep a plain name so you don’t overshadow your brands?” Chainlink questioned while looking at the stickers on Hero’s gauntlets.

“I don’t have time to be chastised. Just tell me what I need to know,” Hero said.

Chainlink approached Hero then said, "What's stopping me from throwing you through that window right now? We don't take kindly to sellouts."

"Don't claim the high road with me. I take these sponsorships so I can afford to be a hero. In your guy's work people must pay to be protected. My way is better," Hero said.

Chainlink reeled her fist back, but Totem stopped it.

"Enough bickering. We are on the same side at the end of the day. We know almost nothing about Landlord. Phantom and him go way back, but that's all we know."

"Where is Phantom?" Hero asked.

"We don't know. He didn't show up today. We actually haven't seen him for a while," Totem said.

"Typical Street Rats. Never organized..." Hero muttered.

"At least we stand for something. You're just a blank slate for corporations," Cobra Commando said.

"What do you think Landlord is up to?" Totem questioned.

"I don't know, but I think he is letting criminals out of prison. I bagged a nemesis of mine, Zigzag, a while ago and he was out and about just today. No point in fighting crime if they just keep coming back."

"Wait, so that was serious on TV?" Cobra Commando asked.

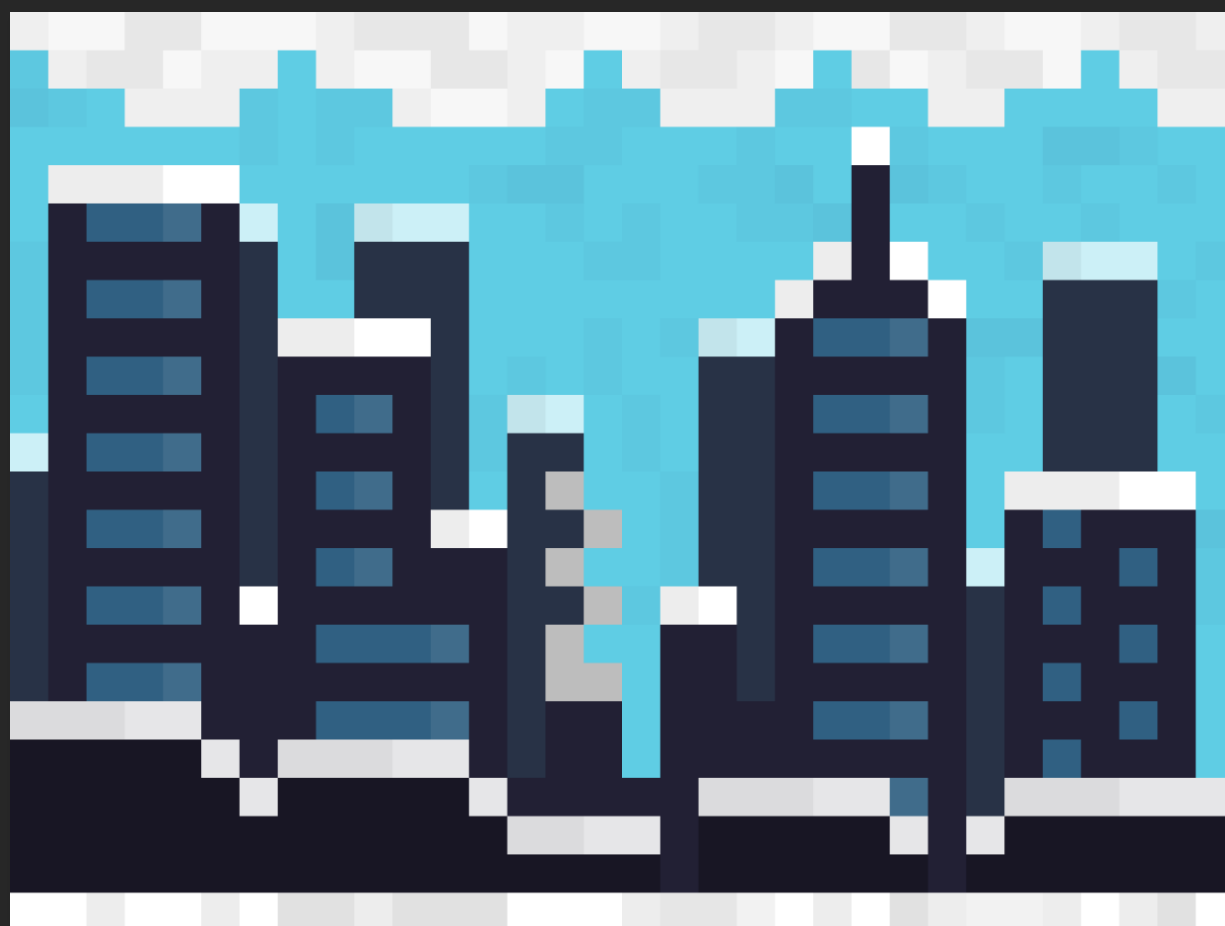
Chainlink gasped then ran out of the office.

"WAIT! We have to--" Hero said as Cobra Commando pushed her to the side to run after Chainlink.

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Protectors For Profit: Season 1 - Issue 4

Rusted Bonds



Cobra Commando, Totem, and Hero chased after Chainlink as she darted down the road.

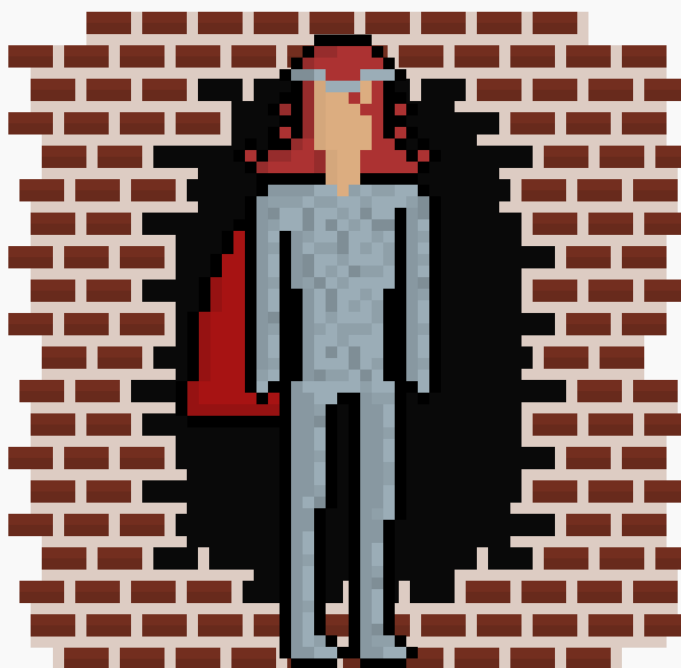
“WHERE IS SHE GOING!” Hero shouted as she ran.

“She is likely running to her house. Since you said criminals are on the loose, her rival is probably going after their kid. Her ex has the ability to move metal through the air hence the name Metal Manipulator. She would know that on workdays Chainlink’s mom is looking after their daughter,” Totem responded.



Chainlink turned right then ran up to a thin brown building. She kicked open a door that had the numbers “423” on it. She flung the door open to find a storm of utensils in the air. A woman floated a few inches above the ground as she held a baby in her hands.

Metal
Manipulator
Mendacious
Miscreant



Metal liquid rolled across her body and a crimson red cape hung from her back. The baby's cries could be heard over the clinking of metal. A frail old woman laid on the ground unconscious.

"GABBY! LET THEM GO!" Chainlink shouted.

"So nice of you to join us, Jenna. It's almost like a family reunion," she said.

"She isn't your family anymore. The court gave full custody to me after you went to jail!" Chainlink said.

"Now what is ironic about that is I found her with your mom. It is not fit for a baby to be raised by someone other than their parents," the woman said.

"Hand Janet over right now before someone gets hurt!" Chainlink said.

"Too late for that."

Chainlink whipped her chains against the ground. She then spun one rapidly in a circle in front of her to cut through the storm of metal to get to Metal Manipulator.

"STOP RIGHT THERE, JENNA!" Chainlink froze as her ex-wife's words cut through to her core. The metal dropped to the ground as Gabrielle and Jenna stared at each other.

"Hmm. I got you to stop without even using my powers. Cute," Gabrielle said before waving her hand. Jenna's chains coiled around herself, and she flew backward. Cobra Commando ran in through the front door.

"Chainlink, the cavalry is--OOF," Cobra Commando said as he was knocked to the ground by Chainlink's body. Totem and Hero ran in through the door. Totem gasped for air as sweat rolled down her face. Hero stood strong and unphased by the cardio. Metal Manipulator waved her hand, and a kitchen knife flew at Totem.

Hero knocked it out of the air then ran toward Metal Manipulator. She paused mid run as her gauntlets stopped moving. She tried to thrust her arms forward, but the gauntlets felt as if they were stuck in invisible cement. Totem chanted quietly to herself as yellow lines of light spun around her. Hero pulled her arms out from the gauntlet then continued running forward.

Thunk. Thunk. The gauntlets flew toward her and smashed off her back. She fell to the ground.

Totem grasped the scarab on her necklace as she continued to mutter words to herself. Slowly the yellow lines moved to form the outline of a scarab around her. Metal Manipulator snapped her fingers, and the scarab pendent flew toward her and ripped off the necklace on Totem's neck. The yellow lines immediately disappeared. A pan flew toward Totem and knocked her to the ground. Cobra Commando rolled Chainlink off himself and stood up.

"Metal Manipulator, on behalf of the Protectors for Profit I, Cobra Commando, am bringing you in!"

"My name is not Metal Manipulator, call me Metal-ica."

"I think that name is wrapped up in legal affairs," Cobra Commando said.

"Your name is just stolen from a kid's show!" she said.

"I think you are confusing me for someone else," he said. Cobra Commando looked toward Chainlink who laid on the ground entangled in her own chains and said, "This one will be pro-bono, family and friends discount. She should be easy to deal with, no metal on this suit!"

Cobra Commando ran forward as knives, forks, and spoons flew at him. A knife was about to cut his elbow and he bent his arm into a U to avoid it. He then bent to the side at a ninety-degree angle to dodge a hammer that flew for his neck. He contorted his body perfectly each time to avoid the debris. Suddenly, he stopped running forward.

Metal Manipulator set the baby down on the ground and pointed both of her hands at Cobra Commando. They shook in the air as she gritted her teeth. Cobra Commando walked in place as he struggled to continue his approach.

"You fool! The very essence of your body is metal! The iron in your blood means I can bend you to my will!" she shouted.

Cobra Commando pushed his body forward as hard as he could. Even though everything in the room stood still, he felt as if winds from a hurricane blew against him.

He felt as if the weight of the ocean pushed against his shoulders or as if gravity had increased tenfold. He tensed his muscles and took a step forward. Metal Manipulator continued to hold one hand towards him as she used the other to wave objects at him.

The man in the green snake suit slowly walked forward one step at a time. A knife flew past him and slashed the side of his chest. A fork grazed his calf. He focused all his energy toward walking forward. The utensils were meaningless. To put any energy toward avoiding them would mean he would lose his footing. He took another step.

“IMPOSSIBLE! I COMMAND YOU TO YIELD!” she shouted.

Cobra Commando stepped forward, so he stood in front of her. She swung at him, and he sidestepped then uppercut her. **CRUNCH!** She flew into the air then landed on the ground.

“Jokes on you, I’m iron deficient.”



Cobra Commando sat in the office and bandaged himself. Everyone had left except for Chainlink. Hero had returned home but left her number so they could call her.

“You, okay?” Cobra Commando asked Chainlink as he wrapped gauze around his arms.

“Yeah...it’s just hard. You never stop loving someone even when they’re as messed up as that. I guess I always hope that there is a future for us someday.”

“I used to feel the same way about my parents,” Cobra Commando said.

“What helped you move on?”

“They died.”

“Oh,” Chainlink said.

“But regardless, that doesn’t mean you have to move on. No one is past saving.”

“I’d like to think that too. I’m sorry for your loss,” she said.

“I’m sorry for *your* loss today,” he said.

Cobra Commando got up to give her a hug. Chainlink squeezed him and Cobra Commando groaned in pain.

“Sorry, did I hug you too hard?”

“No. You’re good,” Cobra Commando said as he laughed to himself.

Chainlink walked over to her desk and packed her bag to return home.

“Are you good to close up here, Bart?”

“Yep! Have a nice night, Jenna.”

Chainlink smiled at him but before she walked out, he asked a question.

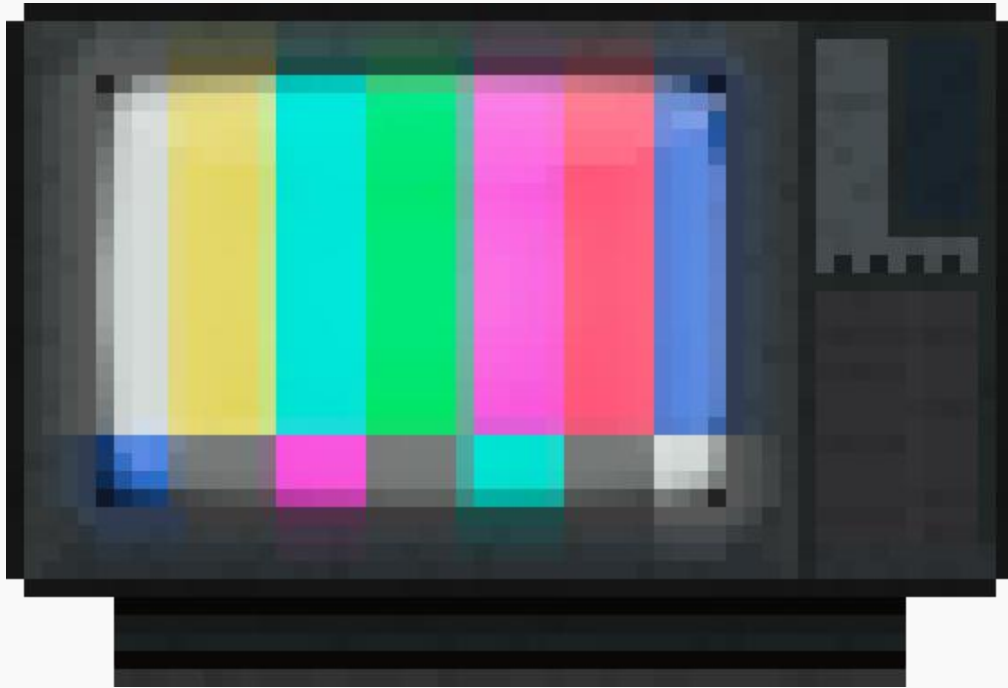
“Do you think Phantom is okay wherever he is?”

“I’m sure he is fine. He always is,” she said before leaving.

Cobra Commando pulled out his phone and scrolled through his gallery until he found a picture of him posing with Metal Manipulator. He opened Facebook and began to type out a caption.

He turned on the radio and “Harden My Heart” by Quarterflash played quietly. He went to retrieve his spinach bowl from earlier in the day. When he got there, the crisp, green leaves were now juicy and brown. Cobra Commando collapsed to the ground.

“NOOOOOOOOOO!”



Snow fell outside the window as the video continued to play.

“Tyrant? I do not think the citizens would say Ed Casnoff is a tyrant. In fact, I think they would call me an exception. I rose up from the bottom, but society loves to box people up. The rich stay rich and the poor stay poor. I broke through and that wasn’t easy. I stand out, but I do it by standing for something. I am a symbol for the less fortunate, a beacon of opportunity. You can’t arrest a symbol,” Landlord said.

“You can’t arrest a symbol, but you can kill one,” The Phantom said.

“I know you, Phantom. You don’t kill.”

“I will now.”

75¢



Protectors For Profit: Season 1 - Issue 5

Search For Profit



The Protectors sat in their office searching for a way to make a profit. Days after their encounter with Metal Manipulator they scoured the internet for the next gig. Each sat at their desk browsing the internet on their laptop. Cobra Commando munched peas quietly as they worked.

“So, to be clear, we made no money from defeating Metal Manipulator?” Totem asked.

“Correct, we couldn't charge Jenna because then we would have just been charging ourselves,” Cobra Commando said.

“Alright well it is in our best interest to start milking this outpouring of villains. If Metal Manipulator was released, we must think about who else is on the loose,” Totem said.

“Rattlesnake is out there I would guess,” Cobra Commando said.

“Angst will be around,” Chainlink mentioned.

“Panthief will be on the streets as well,” Totem added then said, “Since we know those three best, we stand the greatest chance of turning a profit with them.”

“Plus, they are our responsibility,” Chainlink said.

“Okay so we have to position ourselves to be hired specifically in situations where we know those three will be?” Cobra Commando asked.

“Angst doesn't attack places. But I bet we could turn a small profit for turning him in to the police. Rattlesnake is a wild card. I think we stand a good chance of profiting off Panthief,” Totem said.

Cobra Commando tipped his bowl upwards to pour the rest of the peas into his mouth. He chewed as he said, “How will we profit off Panthief?”

Totem scrolled up on the webpage she was on then flipped her laptop around to face him.

“The local museum is receiving a brand-new shipment of pricy artifacts. Seems fit for him. Even better, there is a position open for temporary guards to ensure a safe transfer of goods,” Totem said.

Chainlink slammed her laptop shut and walked over to the training dummy.

“Thank goodness we are done researching. I hate that! I don’t even know why you make me do that with you all. Totem always finds the gigs anyway,” she said while smiling. Chainlink uncoiled her chains and began slashing at the motionless training dummy.

“It’s the thought that counts,” Totem responded.

“Personally, I never got past the search page. I just spent the whole-time eating peas,” Cobra Commando said as he leaned back in his chair to stretch.

“You guys would be incapable of accomplishing anything if not for me,” Totem said.

“Let’s see if you keep that opinion when we are finally fighting Landlord,” Chainlink said as she continued to whip her chains.

“Yeah, yeah. I don’t need the whole brain and brawn spiel,” Totem said.

“Where does that leave Bart?” Chainlink said as she coiled her chains around the dummy and whipped it over her head. It slammed into the ground and shattered to pieces.

“I’m the snake. It goes brains, brawn, and snake,” he said.

“You literally made that up right now,” Chainlink said.

“Sorry, I don’t think brawn would know anything about colloquial,” Totem joked.

Cobra Commando raised his arm to high five Totem.

“What day are you two going to be needing brawn?” Chainlink asked.

“I scheduled us to protect the museum in two days,” Totem said.

“Shouldn’t we bring Phantom along?” Cobra Commando said.

“We would if he was here,” Chainlink said.

Totem looked over to see the laptop shut on his desk. She walked over and opened it. She hit the power button and it didn’t turn on. She plugged it in and tried again. The screen lit up and she typed on the keyboard silently. **click...click.** Totem sat there quietly as she stared at the computer.

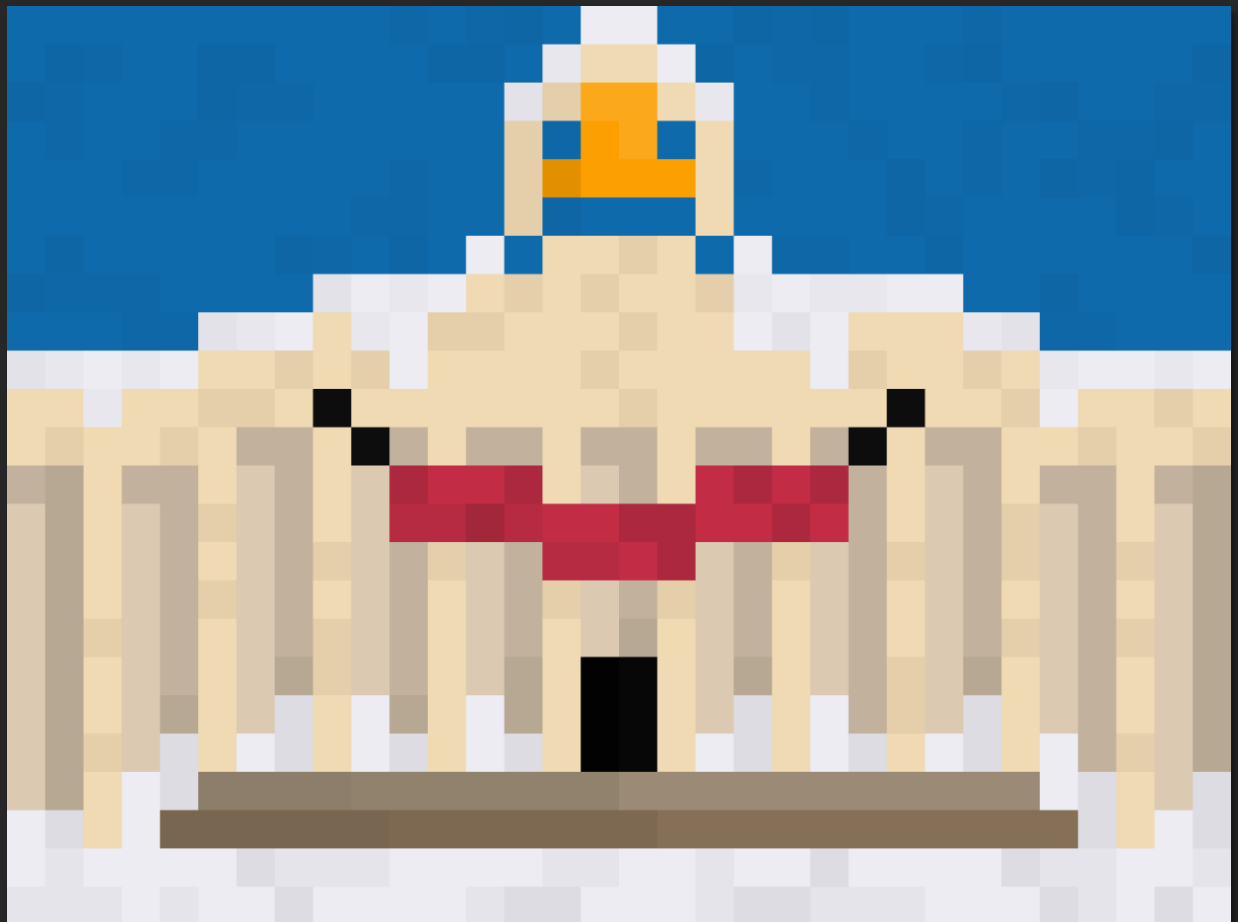
“What is it, Aiyana?” Cobra Commando asked.

“I know where he went,” she said.

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Protectors For Profit: Season 1 - Issue 6

Feline Theft



Chainlink, Totem, Cobra Commando, and Hero sat on the bus as they rode to the museum. They rocked up and down as the tires rolled over the divots in the road. With each bump the lights on the bus flickered. Cobra Commando walked over to another man sitting on the bench and reached into his pocket for a business card holder. He pulled out a small card that advertised the "Protectors for Profit" business and spoke to the man.

Hero examined her gauntlets quietly.

"We need to work together tonight," she said.

"We did work together last time," Chainlink responded.

"That wasn't working together. It was like we were in a pinball machine bouncing off each other and we happened to win," Hero said.

"I get that you rich heroes do things like team meetings and team moves. Us average people don't have time for that. We go in with what we got and either it is enough, or it isn't," Chainlink said.

"Except for when you lose track of teammates completely, like Phantom," Hero said.

"Why are you even coming to this with us?" Chainlink asked.

"You guys are my closest link to Landlord so I figure I should tag along. Plus, I never skip a chance to fight a criminal."

"By the way, we know where Phantom went now. He went to fight Landlord," Totem said.

"Did you find out where Landlord is?" Hero asked.

"The email didn't say," Totem responded.

"That's great. He's probably dead. That's why he isn't back," Hero said.

"You shut your mouth," Chainlink said.

"Whatever. Why are we heading to the museum again?" Hero asked.

"It's the best chance we have to catch Totem's nemesis. He is a notorious thief, and the museum is displaying a valuable gem tonight. If we play our cards right, we are getting paid a massive check!" Chainlink responded.

"Totem, what can you tell me about this nemesis?" Hero asked.

Totem didn't respond. She sat there deep in her own thoughts remembering everything that led her to this moment. She thought about her time with her parents and how they taught her about her Native American heritage. They told her to always be proud of it, even if America tried to make her forget it. She thought about the names she was called as a kid and how she witnessed her culture slowly become erased around her. Steadily they changed what they ate, what they did to relax, how they dressed. Every day they worked harder to align with the white man.

It would have been easy to be mad. Instead, she knew that she could help others with this struggle. Her heritage wasn't the only one at risk. Countless other cultures have come and gone only to be good for a textbook page or a Halloween costume. Perhaps if she could work to save what is left of the societies that came before her, someone would do the same for her someday.

So, she graduated top of her class and became an archaeologist. She explored Mayan Temples, Egyptian pyramids, and countless other artifacts of the past. New information was constantly discovered and slowly the picture of what these people's lives were like formed in front of her eyes. But exploring wasn't a safe job.

These places were full of traps. Aiyana was well versed in exploring these isolated areas of danger, but her crew never heeded her warnings. After watching one too many people die, in rage she stole an item they had discovered in the Egyptian pyramid earlier that day. She planned to sell it off in the black market and never work another day in her life, but it turned out to be valueless.

One day she discovered that while it didn't sparkle, this totem could do much more. Now, she uses it to fight crime to make ends meet in her life.

The bus stopped a mile from the museum, and they walked the rest of the way through the harsh winter cold.

The Protectors sat quietly behind a podium that discussed how the dinosaur skeleton above them was discovered. Cobra Commando read it quietly to himself as the others rested on the ground. The moon shined rays down through the skylight and the museum smelled of cleaner.

“I can hear him coming, get ready,” Hero whispered.

“How? Do you have super hearing too?” Cobra Commando asked.

“No, I just possess the ability to focus on a task for more than a minute.”

“Well, I was focusing on a task, just not what you wa--” Cobra Commando was cut off as Chainlink ripped him to the ground so they all hid behind the podium. **Schhrrrrrr. dink. thump.** A circular piece of glass fell from the ceiling followed by a well-defined man in a black spandex suit.



He wore a helmet that covered his whole face and resembled that of a black cat. It had pointed ears and purple plastic where his eyes were. His fingers were tipped with claws. Panthief slowly approached the diamond. **Clank!**

He was ripped to the ground by a chain and Hero leapt into the air. The man rolled to the side before her gauntlets shattered the ground. He slashed at the chains to free himself and as he got up Cobra Commando wrapped around him. The man stood still as Cobra Commando coiled tighter and tighter around him.

“Now, this is an unexpected surprise. It appears some bootleg do-gooders are trying to stand in the way of the PANTHIEF!” the man said with a thick French accent.

Cobra Commando snickered to himself.

“Is that Aiyana I see back there? History truly does repeat itself...as you would know best,” Panthief said.

“How are you out of jail, Panthief?” Totem asked.

“The better question is why aren’t you in jail? We did the same thing, take from dead people. The only difference is you take it from their home, I take it back from the person that stole it first. I question which is more ethical,” Panthief said.

Chainlink whipped the ground then said, “Listen here you low level thief, give us the answer or I smash it out of you. We know it was Landlord, but who is he?”

“I only see one thief here. When Aiyana stole that totem, the whole team lost all of their credibility. We were stuck without a job for years,” he said.

“Loosen him, Cobra. I’ll get the answers out of him,” Chainlink said.

Cobra Commando loosened his coils and Panthief leapt out of them. As he flew up, he grabbed Cobra Commando’s head with his legs and flipped midair to throw Cobra Commando against the wall. Chainlink whipped her chain into the air and Panthief dodged it. He grabbed the extended chain then pulled on it which sent him flying toward her face. **Crack!** His foot collided with her jaw, and she went flying back.

Panthief delicately landed on the ground and slashed at the air before posing.

“Hold him off long enough for me to activate the scarab. The more time you buy me the stronger the projection,” Totem told Hero.

Hero ran at Panthief and swung at him. He evaded each attack and retaliated with a slash which she then blocked every time. They danced around each other swinging. Hero overextended with a punch and Panthief leapt back into the air. He dove at her with his claws extended. Hero held her gauntlets up to block the attack. **SCHINK!** His claws scratched against her gauntlet and a metal panel flew off her hands.

Hero looked at her gauntlets to see where the piece of metal had flung off and a golden U was embroidered on the wrist of the gauntlet. She stood there entranced by the golden penmanship and Panthief dove kick her in the back. Hero fell forward but caught herself with a roll. She got back up and faced Panthief.

Cobra Commando, Chainlink, and Hero surrounded Panthief.

“Chainlink go high, Cobra Commando go mid, and I go low!” Hero shouted.

They charged Panthief. He leapt into the air and Chainlink whipped a chain at him. He spun midair to avoid it and flew up toward the dinosaur skeleton hanging from the ceiling. He sunk his claws into a bone and flipped himself, so he stood on the ribcage.

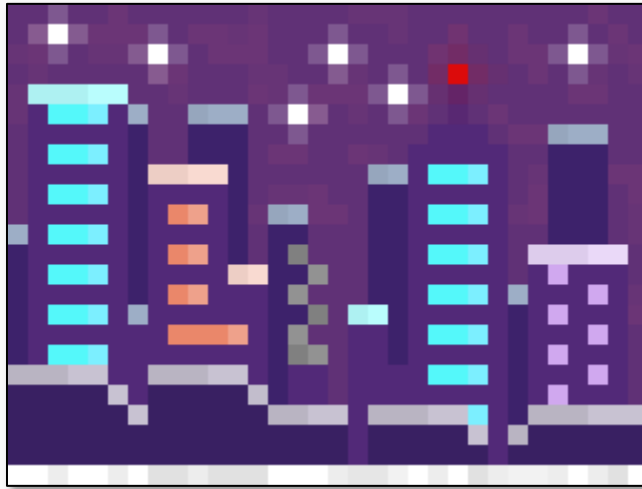
“A four versus one is hardly fair. I’ll let you keep this diamond. Pursue me if you want, but I know nothing about this Landlord. I went to sleep one day in my jail cell and the next I woke up in my apartment with my suit next to me,” he said as the Protectors stared up at him.

Crash! A giant golden scarab flew into and smashed through the rib bone Panthief was standing on. Its enormous pincers grabbed Panthief and flung him toward the ground. He landed on his feet and stared up at the massive insect flying towards him in awe. A chain wrapped around his feet, Cobra Commando grabbed his arm, and Hero grabbed his other arm. They held him still as the scarab flew down and collided with him. Panthief flew back against the wall and collapsed to the ground. The scarab landed on the ground and faded away revealing Totem standing next to them.

“We don’t have to pay for that skeleton bone, right?” Cobra Commando asked.

“No, the contract the museum owner signed clears us of all collateral. I put it in size one font at the bottom,” Chainlink said.

“Nice!” Cobra Commando responded.



The Protectors sat on the bus quietly as it rode home in the night. The lights in the back flickered on and off as Hero browsed her phone and Totem talked with Chainlink. Cobra Commando assessed the damage to his suit. They sat bruised with ripped clothes and fresh scratches on their bodies.

“Are you okay, Jenna?” Totem asked.

“Why are you asking me? You’re the one who had the rough night tonight,” Chainlink responded.

“Panthief can’t mess with me that much, I may have been the one to steal this totem from them, but he is the one that chose to become a thief afterward,” Totem said.

“Back then that jerk tried to get in your head. I fought my ex-wife the other day. Phantom is missing. We usually only get a case every few days. This is really turning out to be a lot for us...” Chainlink said. Totem could sense a slight hint of fear in her voice...or was it sadness?

“Decent teamwork tonight,” Hero said abruptly.

Chainlink ignored her and continued talking to Totem. Hero rolled her eyes. Cobra Commando looked to her and said, “Yeah, not too shabby.”

He got up and went to talk to the only other person on the bus. Cobra Commando reached into his pocket and pulled out a business card. As he spoke, Hero grew angry. No matter what she said to Chainlink, she was always rude.

Cobra Commando began his speech to the man on the bus, “So, have you ever felt unsafe in your neighborhood? We may look real rough right now, but that’s because we just got back from protecting a museum. A MUSEUM! We have done all kinds of jobs and we could help you with anything you need...”

Hero got up and said, “I am tired of your attitude, Chainlink!”

Cobra Commando stopped his conversation to stare at her. The bus grew quiet as it drove down the road.

“Like I care what you think,” Chainlink said.

“Quit that fake crap. What is it? What is this pseudo-toxic ‘I have to do everything alone’ masculinity act you have going on?” Hero asked.

Chainlink got up and stood directly in front of Hero.

“Funny of you to talk about putting on acts. Watch the news recently? Cause I have and you’re nothing like who you pretend to be for the cameras,” Chainlink said.

“That is who I am! But you are lesser. You’re barely a hero. You aren’t worth respecting. Everyone is under my protection. You just follow the dollar sign,” Hero said.

“Yeah, you tell her, Hero!” the one man on the bus said. Cobra Commando frowned at him, and the man looked away embarrassed.

“We do good work here. People are safer because of us,” Chainlink said.

“What about the people who couldn’t afford your fee?”

“Choose your next words carefully.”

“Or what?” Hero asked.

Crack! Chainlink’s fist collided with Hero’s jaw. Hero stood still and readjusted her helmet.

“Do you think it makes you strong when you try to do everything by yourself?” Hero questioned.

“At least I am on a team.”

“Whole lot of good this team did for Phantom,” Hero said.

“You don’t gotta say stuff like that,” Cobra Commando said.

“No, let her say this all. I want to hear it. Going to make my next punch feel all the better,” Chainlink said.

“Doing things by yourself doesn’t make you strong. It is needlessly risky. You aren’t better because you make things harder for yourself. And you know what? Sometimes that doesn’t matter. Phantom can go and do reckless stuff like that because he didn’t have anyone home waiting for him.”

“HE WASN’T BEING RECKLESS! He wanted to save lives!” Chainlink shouted.

Chainlink tackled Hero to the ground. **Thump!** Hero kicked upward and Chainlink slammed into the ceiling of the bus before falling to the ground.

“But you, you have people at home. You can keep up this tough guy act and maybe you think it makes you look stronger for your mom or daughter, but what are they going to think when you end up getting yourself killed?” Hero said.

“SCREW OFF! This whole past week has been one thing after another. First our friend is probably dead and then we each have to fight our worst enemies. And what have you gone through? Did Mr. Soda yell at you in a business meeting? Did zig-zag guy not smile perfectly for your newspaper photo? You have no idea what we are going through!” Chainlink shouted.

“HEY! Ease it up back there!” the bus driver shouted.

“One day you will realize it takes real strength to look for help, not to be a martyr,” Hero said as she sat back down.

Cobra Commando reached for the business card back from the man he was talking to.

“Yeah, I think this card is a lost cause for you.”

Eventually, everyone got off the bus except for Cobra Commando. He stepped off at the office.



Cobra Commando looked up at the moon and said, "Wish you were here, Arthur. You always kept things so balanced. I know you like your theatrics, but even this is a little much. Not to mention you are messing up our male to female ratio."

He walked up to the doors and noticed a letter tucked beneath it. The light brown paper was illuminated by the night and delicately sealed with a wax stamp. Cobra Commando looked around and saw nothing except for closed shops and the empty street covered in snow.

He opened the card and read it.

Dear Bart Huber,

I have heard that you and your motley crew have been going around putting criminals back in their place. I suppose that means you will all come for me soon. I do hate having uninvited guests at my club. For that reason, I invite you all to come down to the Snake Oil Lounge in two days. I do hope you accept this invitation. Unless I hear otherwise, I will assume you and your friends are coming. Looking forward to seeing you again.

Sincerely,

Ian Huber

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Protectors For Profit: Season 1 - Issue 7

Rattling Reverbs



Cobra Commando, Totem, and Chainlink got off the bus in front of the Snake Oil Lounge. The bus picked them up ten minutes later than it should have, but there is no time like the present for heroics. Thirteen minutes from their headquarters, this bar had become a stain on their already messy city. The orange neon sign in the shape of a snake glowed brightly in the night. The red tongue of the snake blinked on and off. Located in the Bourg district, few people were out on the streets.

“What is the planned course of action?” Totem asked.

“Rattlesnake is my nemesis so I will handle him. You guys just have to keep the guards busy,” Cobra Commando said.

Chainlink whipped her chains against the ground and kicked up snow. She then said, “This is going to be a lot of fun...well maybe not for you, Bart. Although, Hero isn’t here so we can have a much better time.”

“Probably for the best that everyone takes a mission to cool down,” Totem said.

“I guess you could say she isn’t here-o...” Cobra Commando said.

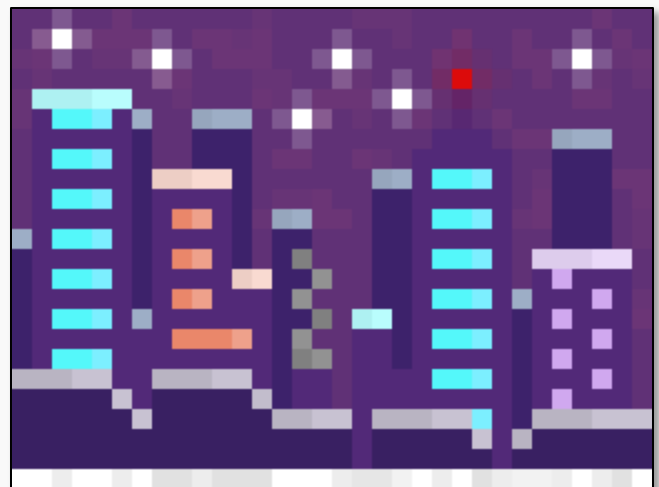
“Very clever, now open the door,” Totem said.

Cobra Commando stepped forward and opened the door.

“Ladies first,” he said with a smile.

In a room hidden within a tall tower Hero sat down at a table so she faced the man in the yellow suit.

“Kendall, you there?” the man asked.



Hero snapped back then responded, “Yeah, sorry what were you asking about?”

“I was asking you if it is true that you have been working along with the Protectors for Profit? It wouldn’t look good for Super Sparkly Soda to be seen with some glorified street cops.”

“I am. They aren’t perfect, but I am still capturing villains at the same rate with them as without. There has been a lot of work to do recently,” Hero said.

“And what would that work be?” the man asked as he leaned back in his chair before folding his arms.

“There has been an increase in escaped convicts recently. One day they’re in prison, the next they are back out on the streets mysteriously,” Hero said inquisitively toward the man.

“That is unfortunate, but I don’t understand why you seem to have framed that response as a question.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever caught your name. What was it?” Hero asked.

The man leaned forward and rubbed his finger across the table. He inspected it for dust then said, “Arnold Ulterior.”

Hero sat still. The U flashed in her mind.

“What's with all the questions today? I’m your friend. Don’t let those rats get in your head. They may hate people doing financially well, but that doesn’t mean you have to.”

“My apologies. Is there anything else you need from me?” she asked.

“No, just try to keep your distance from the Protectors. We don’t need you working with some fools that treat heroics as something you barter,” the man said as he got up. He held the door for Hero, and they made their way out of the room.

The Protectors stepped into the bar. Loud music played as bright colored lights flashed colors down on the crowd of people dancing. Terrariums with tinted glass sat around the bar. Each was incredibly spacious and held a snake. Cobra Commando looked up to a deck above the crowd. He saw the outline of a man with a thick scarf.

“HE’S UP THERE!” Cobra Commando shouted over the music. They approached from the outside of the dance floor. They got to the stairs where two guards stood.

“Let us through!” Chainlink commanded them. The man reached for the baton on his belt but was stopped by a chain. Chainlink pulled him forward by his arm and threw him into the wall. The second charged into Totem and knocked her into the dance floor.

“GO GET RATTLESNAKE! WE’LL HANDLE THE GUARDS!” Chainlink said as she leapt into the crowd after Totem.

Cobra Commando ran up three flights of stairs and kicked the door open to see Rattlesnake standing in front of him.



He wore a snakeskin vest that was unbuttoned to show his chest. He had dark pants on, a ring with a snake tooth on it, and a necklace with a snake eye in amber at the end of it. He tipped his fedora and adjusted the brown taxidermized snake around his neck.

“I always wondered how long it would take for you to come for me, brother.”

As a kid, Bart and Ian spent much time without their parents. Their mother and father were both CEOs of extremely successful companies. While they lived in a big mansion, the only people there were him, his brother, and their uncaring butler. Gertie did little for the boys. He had signed up to be a butler, not a father.

One day, for seemingly no reason, their father sent home a large snake. Its scales were the color of coffee and its large body slowly slithered across the cold, tiled floor of their mansion. Bart feared it, but Ian quickly befriended the arm-less creature. Little did they know their mother had always been fond of snakes since she was a child. Perhaps this would have been something they discovered if their mom had spent time with them.

His father had meant for the snake to be a replacement for their lack of family. If the parents couldn't be there, this cold-blooded creature could fill in the spot. That it did. Ian had gotten into trouble numerous times at elementary school for trying to sneak the snake in. Each time, he got out easy as there were no parents to show up for the parent-teacher conference. Gertie couldn't be bothered to show up either. There was little Ian and Choco didn't do together. Bart was slower to warm up to the creature.

One night, Ian and Bart fell asleep on the couch while watching cartoons. Usually, Ian would put Choco in his cage at night, but this night he had fallen asleep before he got the chance to.

Bart was awoken to the feeling of something large grazing his legs. He awoke to see the snake's large, beady, black eyes looking at him.

Bart froze and slowly moved his arm and shook his brother awake.

"Ian, Choco is in here...Ian...he's looking right at me."

Choco quietly stared at Bart.

"Don't worry about it, Bart," Ian responded.

"Please, Ian, he's scaring me."

"Bart, look here..." Ian said as he grabbed onto Bart's hand. He slowly moved their hands closer and closer to the snake's oblong head. Choco stood still as the hand moved closer and closer to him. Ian let go of Bart's hand as Bart continued to move closer and closer to the snake.

One finger of Bart's touched Choco's smooth body, then another, then another, then his palm. The snake hissed quietly before wiggling up onto the couch to be beside Bart. It slithered into a crevice formed by the pillows and rested its head on Bart's leg.

Gertie stepped into the room to see them sleeping. He quietly reached for the remote and turned off the TV before he went to bed himself. That was the best any of them ever slept.

Over the years they filled the mansion with more and more rope-like reptiles. They made their own family.

News came one day that their parents had both died in a freak plane accident. They didn't care.

Over time Choco's brown scales turned white. He slithered slower and slower. His mouth consumed fewer and fewer mice. When he finally passed, Ian and Bart cried for days on end. They held a ceremony and invited everyone they knew, which was no one. The Hubers would never be the same. They had lost family.

As they grew older, they were forced to make a life for themselves. Unbeknown to them, Gertie had been slowly siphoning off money all the years after their parents had died. Left with only thousands of dollars each, the brothers went their separate ways. Bart went to the circus and became a contortionist. Ian made this bar.

"So, brother. How is it going to be? You know I can't let you close up this club. It's one of the only things up and coming in this whole city," Rattlesnake said.

Cobra Commando looked over the rail to see a golden scarab crashing into guards. The crowd ran out of the club as debris fell from the roof due to the force of Totem's projection slamming against the walls.

"This was a waste of what little was left from our parents fortune, we could have done some real good with it," Cobra Commando said.

"If mom and dad cared enough about their money, they could have spent some time teaching us how to use it, instead of always being on their trips. Or maybe they could have got a better butler," Rattlesnake said.

"I'm going to bring you in one way or another, it's what Choco would want."

Rattlesnake lifted the taxidermized snake head to his ear and muttered in a high-pitched voice, "Wow, Bart really became an ass when he left for the circus."

“I’m sorry Ian, we had to do something with our lives. We couldn’t just live in that mansion with those snakes forever. It wasn’t healthy,” Bart said.

“You went into the circus! You are in no position to tell me what ‘healthy’ is. You got to try out what you wanted, and I won’t let you take what I desired,” Rattlesnake said as he readied for combat. The two brothers ran at each other.

Hero watched the yellow coattails of Arnold Ulterior disappear from around the corner. She looked up to check for cameras. After seeing there were none, she quietly walked down the hallway in the opposite direction. While the skyscraper she stood in had dozens of floors she felt that anything of relevance could only be on this floor. Countless companies called the other floors home, only this floor had Super Sparkly Soda information.

Hero stopped at a room with “FILES” in big letters on the door. She tried the door handle, but it was locked. She twisted it again and broke the doorknob. The door creaked open to reveal a room full of countless cardboard boxes filled to the brim with papers. Hero closed the door behind her and turned her phone flashlight on. The light only illuminated one box at a time.

Transaction Tavern, Alpha, Colonel York, Trenchers, Stupendous Man, S-Day, Cobra Commando, Chainlink, Hero, Totem, ~~Phantom~~

The box entitled “Phantom” had a dark red line across the name. She opened the box to reveal countless papers about a masked hero. She saw his address, his weaknesses, his archnemesis, a biography about his father, and...his place of burial.

Hero stepped back in shock. She heard someone walking down the hallway and turned her flashlight off. Not a breath was taken until the sound of shoes hitting the ground disappeared. Hero turned back on the flashlight and opened the box entitled “Hero”.

She looked in and saw only one paper inside.

The light to the room flicked on and Ulterior stood in the doorway.

“What are you doing in here?” Ulterior asked.

“What are all of these papers here! This is insane!” Hero exclaimed.

“I am not sure what you are referring to. This is a big building. That could be anyone’s stuff. Although I am glad you’ve seen it. The fear is palpable. It reminds me why it should be kept as hard copies only. Some stuff you really shouldn’t have up online. Too many eyes,”

“QUIT the calm act. Something is up here,” Hero said.

Uterior walked forward and reached his hand up so he held Hero’s head delicately.

“I’m sure you’ve heard the story of Icarus.”

Hero stepped back from him and said, “DO NOT TOUCH ME.”

“Poor little boy. It was a shame he flew so close to that sun. He had so much potential, but he couldn’t listen to those that knew better than him,” Uterior said as he closed the lid to the box with “Hero” written on it.

“I’m going to call the cops on you, this is insane,” Hero said.

“For what? Because there are boxes full of papers in this skyscraper?”

Hero moved back and knocked over a stack of boxes by accident. Pictures of countless heroes spilled across the floor. Some had red X’s across, some were in black and white, and some photos were charred on the edges. Hero gasped.

“My only complaint with that story is the man waited for the boy’s wings to melt under the hot sun. I say, why waste time. He should have just snip...snip...snipped that boy’s wings himself,” Uterior said as he moved his pointer and middle finger together and apart.

“Anyway, I would hate to be Icarus. I imagine you would too,” he said.

Uterior stepped to the side and waved Hero out of the room.

“You have a nice day, Kendall.”

Cobra Commando and Rattlensake traded blows. After dueling for minutes, Bart's fist collided against Ian's cheek. Ian attempted to retaliate with a right hook, but Bart bent his body to avoid it. Below them, Totem and Chainlink continued bashing away the guards. Ian raised his open hands up to stop the fight.

"We had crappy parents, we are allowed to be crappy people," Rattlesnake shouted.

"We can't ride on that excuse for all our life. We are responsible for our own--"

Cobra Commando was cut short as Rattlesnake jabbed him in the face. The snake tooth on his ring slashed Bart's cheek. Cobra Commando recoiled and felt his face. Blood covered his purple glove.

"Are you okay, Bart?" Ian asked.

"Do I look okay?!?! I'm fighting my brother while we both are dressed in snake costumes and I got slashed in the face by a tooth," Bart shouted out. His brother had never hurt him like that before in all their years of heroics and anti-heroics.

"Sorry, I always was stronger than you."

Cobra Commando growled and tackled Rattlesnake to the ground. They smashed the low wall on the edge of the balcony. They rolled around as they punched and kicked at each other. They stopped moving with Rattlesnake on top of Cobra Commando. Their heads hung out above everyone. Rattlensake linked his fingers together and raised his arms into the air. The snake around his neck slipped off and fell toward the ground.

"NO! CHOCO!" They both screamed at the same time.

Cobra Commando reached out his arm and grabbed the dead snake by its tail. The snake's long body hung in the air held by Cobra Commando's hand whose body was pinned down by Rattlesnake.

Rattlesnake opened his eyes wide and quickly got off Cobra Commando then picked him up. Cobra Commando handed the snake back to him.

"We shouldn't be fighting, it wouldn't make Choco happy," Cobra Commando said.

"I agree, but you know I can't just be let go."

“Just promise me you will stop laundering money out of here and I’ll act like you escaped me,” Cobra Commando said.

“But...” Rattlesnake began to say.

“Just go!” Cobra Commando said as he heard the fighting stop down below them. Rattlesnake nodded then ran off. Totem and Chainlink burst through the doors.

“ARE YOU OKAY, COBRA COMMANDO?” Chainlink shouted.

“Yeah, he got away though,” he said.

“Not to worry. We tore through this place enough I think he shouldn’t be a problem for a while,” Totem said.



The Protectors arrived back at their office as the morning sun began to rise. Eclectic orange rays shined into the building washing away the dark purple of night. Cobra Commando turned on the radio which played quietly in the background.

“How are you holding up?” Chainlink asked Cobra Commando as they filed into the office.

“Well enough,” Cobra Commando responded.

“Logically, none of us would be okay after these past few days,” Totem said.

“Yeah. I mean I fought my ex-wife, Aiyana fought a coworker, and I imagine Rattlesnake is someone important to you. For someone who talks a lot, you never talk a lot about him.”

“Eh, not really. We just hate each other because we wore the same costume to the dance,” Cobra Commando said before laughing nervously.

Chainlink put her arm on Cobra Commando’s shoulder then embraced him.

“It’s okay, Bart. You don’t have to tell us everything if you don’t want to. I just want you to know we are here for you,” she said.

Cobra Commando chewed at the side of his mouth, but before his teeth broke skin he stopped.

As the two of them hugged, Totem joined in by wrapping her arms around them both.

“I suppose a hug is an appropriate response to our current situation,” she said.

The Protectors stood together as the sun rose higher and higher.

Meanwhile, Hero sat down on her bed. She reached into her pocket and pulled out a crumpled piece of paper. At the top of the paper her name was in bold letters. Her hands shook as she read the paper.

Hero A.K.A Kendall Hill

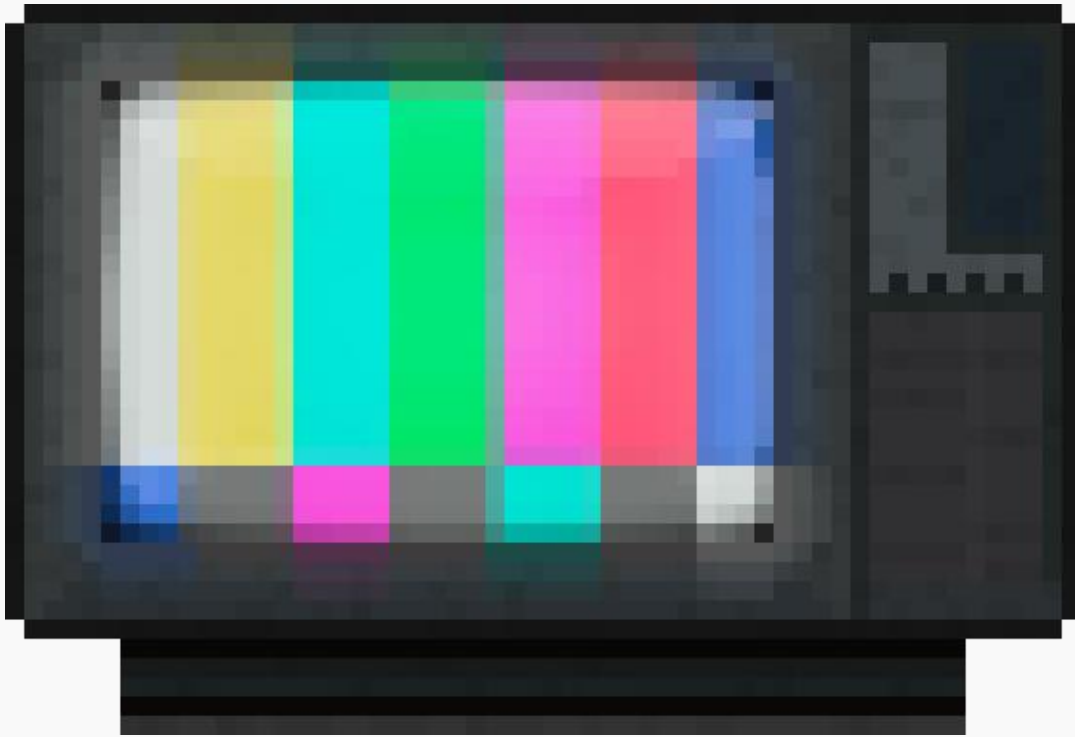
Place of Operation: Skum City

Powers: Enhanced Physical Capabilities

Notes: incredibly morale, no self-identity, easy to manipulate, gets results

Hero ripped the paper in two before removing her helmet. She held it in her hands and stared at the blank green canvas with a H plastered on it. No symbols were on it. Nothing to identify her. Kendall dropped the helmet and ripped off her gauntlets. She flipped them over to see the advertisement for a mobile game on one of them and the advertisement for Super Sparkly Soda on the other.

She delicately placed her fingernails beneath the stickers for the advertisements and slowly peeled them off. The soda sticker left a white residue on the metal. She aggressively wiped at it until the gauntlet was clean of all remnants of advertisement. Kendall stared at the blank gauntlets then set them on the ground. She laid down in her bed still wearing the rest of her suit and fell asleep.



The sound of footsteps slowly grew louder as the tape continued to play on the TV. On the screen, Landlord took a sip of his sparkling water and sighed.

“Fair enough,” he said.

Landlord stood up and adjusted his tie. **HRAGH!** He kicked his desk forward and it flew towards a pillar. Phantom leapt off it and dove kick Landlord. Landlord grabbed Phantom’s feet and spun him around before throwing him at the glass window. **Thud.** Phantom grunted as his body fell to the ground. A crack formed in the window.

“It was foolish of you to come alone, Phantom.”

“My father raised me to know I can handle anything by myself,” Phantom said after spitting out blood.

“Well then it appears I did you a favor by having him killed all those years ago.”

Phantom shouted and ran at Landlord. He repeatedly attacked Landlord. **thud, thud, thud.** Left hook, right hook, jab. Phantom reeled his arm back then uppercut Landlord. **Thud.** Landlord’s head leaned back from the blow then he looked back at Phantom.

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Protectors For Profit: Season 1 - Issue 8

Haunting Visions



Cobra Commando hummed as he unlocked the front door to the office. It was a Monday morning over a week after the encounter with Rattlesnake. Business had been booming as they spent the past week hunting down villain after villain. He stepped into the office and--

"We need to take down Landlord," Hero said. She sat at Phantom's empty desk in the corner of the room. A shadow covered her facial expressions.

"EEK!" Cobra Commando screamed. He paused, inhaled, then said, "Sorry, you startled me. How did you get in here?"

"I broke the lock. I'll pay you back."

"Yeah, you better. I'm not sure if we are at the 'sneaking into each other's place of work' level in our friendship yet. I haven't seen you since Panthief. Where did you go?"

"Sorry I disappeared. I had to do some investigating of my own," she said as she got up and approached him. "We have to bring down Landlord."

"Why do we have to take him down right now?" he asked.

Hero pulled a scrap of paper out of her pocket and showed him. He looked at it and saw "**Hero A.K.A Kendall Hill**" written on it.

"He has information on all of us. There is a file about you, me, Chainlink, Totem, Phantom, and countless others. We are scraping the tip of something huge," she said.

"How would you know any of this? We don't even know who Landlord is. Phantom kept everything he knew to himself," Cobra Commando noted.

"He's my employer. I think...Super Sparkly Soda is a shell company of his. I think my boss works for him. I found out all this after my last meeting with them. I can take you guys to the building. It's a skyscraper downtown," she said.

Chainlink and Totem walked in.

"What is she doing here?" Chainlink asked as she unpacked her stuff at her desk.

"Sharing critical information about our shared enemy," Hero said in response before turning back to Cobra Commando.

“Are you suggesting we pay him a visit?” Cobra Commando asked.

“Yes. What choice do we have? He has information on all of us. He killed Phantom and likely countless others. He is the one releasing all these criminals and we have been wasting our time scooping water out of a ship riddled with holes,” Hero said.

“Wait. Do you actually know that? Up till now we didn’t know anything about what happened to him,” Cobra Commando said.

“I saw papers, it didn't look good,” Hero said.

“But they were just papers. No body?” Chainlink asked.

“If you get me in, I can find you Phantom’s body. He recorded where it was buried. Then when we find a body, we can use that as evidence to put Landlord in jail,” Hero said.

Cobra Commando stood in shock. He stepped back and leaned against the desk.

“We don’t know for sure he’s dead. But if there is a chance we could find him then this is something worth pursuing, regardless of what state he is in,” he said as he looked over to Chainlink.

“So, are you guys in?” Hero asked.

“I really want to but look around you. We’re heroes out for hire. Ever since S-Day being an average hero is the quickest way to get people to not trust you and the police to arrest you. We don’t get to do things like storm buildings anymore,” he said.

“I need to do this. All I’ve ever wanted to do is help people and it turns out all I’ve been doing is running in circles all this time,” she said.

“You couldn’t have known. But we have to play smart here. Jenna, what do you think?” Cobra Commando asked.

“If Totem thinks it is a good plan, I’m in,” Chainlink said.

“I think it could work,” Totem said.

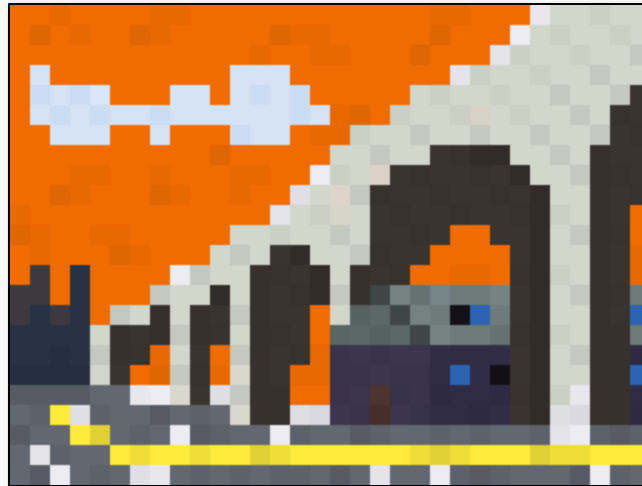
“Then I’m in. But before we take down Landlord, we owe something to Phantom in the case he could be dead. His second nemesis is still out there. We need to take him down first,” Chainlink said.

“He had two nemeses?” Hero questioned.

“Yeah, only he could pull something like that off,” Cobra Commando said.

“I can’t be seen with you guys. Landlord is on to me,” Hero said.

“Don’t worry. Where this guy would be no one is going to see us,” Chainlink said.



The Protectors and Hero finished their fourteen-minute walk over from the bus stop to the abandoned warehouse. Due to the lack of bus stop locations, this was the closest they could get. It had warmed up slightly today, but the occasional breeze reminded them of the harsh winter. The warehouse sat beneath a railway that ran overhead. The glass roof was shattered, and graffiti was sprayed across the stained, brick walls. They walked up to the entrance and Hero broke the chain link on the door.

“How do you know he is going to be here?” Hero asked.

“He’s a leftover Nazi scientist from the war. We keep tabs on him,” Chainlink said as they walked in. They stepped into the dark warehouse and closed the door behind them. A little light along with the infrequent snowflake snuck in through the ceiling, but the roof was so high it didn’t illuminate the floor. The loud crashing of a train rolling over the tracks could be heard above.

“Angst loves fear. He experimented in the camps for years trying to learn everything about it. He wanted to know how to cause it, what it does to you, how to beat it, et cetera,” Totem said. Wind blew quietly from within the warehouse and old newspapers fluttered across the ground.

Some newspapers placed in frames hung from shelves in the warehouse.

Hero read the headlines.

Siege on Moroseville

Dozens Dead in Ethereal War

Doomed to Repeat

Tokyo Destroyed in Battle

Mico-Man dies to Atomsplitter

Alpha Squad late to the scene

S-DAY

Superheroes destroy Hope City

U.N. Swears to disband the Alpha Squad

“This guy is insane. He has been keeping newspaper headlines from some of the worst events in recent history,” she said. The footsteps stopped echoing throughout the building as they stopped to talk.

“Yeah, he is a real sicko,” Cobra Commando said

Footsteps echoed through the warehouse, but no one was walking.

“Don’t mind that. He usually likes to try and scare us before we fight. It used to work, but it really loses the magic over the years,” Cobra Commando said.

“He’s just an average guy so he shouldn’t be too hard to beat,” Chainlink added.

“How’s he still alive if he was a Nazi?” Hero asked.

“I don’t know. Nazi magic? Maybe hatred keeps you going all these years,” Cobra Commando said. The footsteps continued to echo in the background.

“Well then I would think Chainlink will live forever,” Totem said.

“Nothing wrong with a little controlled hatred,” she said in response.

The thumps in the darkness rapidly picked up pace and the sound charged toward the Protectors as the wind picked up. Just as it sounded like the person making the noise would step out of the shadows, everything went silent.

A violet gas leaked out from the shadows to form a figure in front of them. It vaguely resembled a bear standing up in form, but its shape constantly shifted and molded into new outlines. Toward the top, two red eyes formed.



“Ahh. The Protectors. I have awaited your return since I escaped prison,” Angst said with a German accent. His face didn’t move as he spoke. The sound echoed out from within him.

“He didn’t look like that last time, right?” Chainlink asked.

“No...that’s new,” Cobra Commando said.

“I have become fear incarnate. There is no stopping me now!” he said as his body turned into smoke and spread out around the Protectors. Totem tried to pinch her nose, but the gas went in through her ears.

Chainlink was coughing then suddenly all the noise stopped. She looked around and no one else was in the warehouse except for her. The ground fell from beneath her and she slipped through the air as she screamed until she landed in a dark pit. Chainlink got up.



She blinked and when she opened her eyes she was standing at a door. It was Oak with the digits “423” on it. She knocked. **Thump. Thump.** The sound echoed through the air like she was underwater.

The door opened and Gabrielle stood inside the house. Jenna peered in and saw her mom sitting with a young girl. Her mom put her hands over the girl’s eyes.

“Jenna, I told you not to come around here. I don’t want you ruining our daughter,” Gabrielle said.

“What are you talking about? You’re the one who’s a criminal.”

“Since when? You’re the one supposed to be in prison right now. How did you get here?”

“Get out of my way. You’re a hallucination anyways,” Chainlink said as she pushed into the house.

“Mom, Janet, let’s get out of here! Gabby is messing with you guys again!” Chainlink commanded.

Chainlink was whipped around by the chains on her arms. The chains dug into the ground as Gabrielle waved her hands.

“I won’t let you hurt them again, Jenna. You’re about to have another aggressive episode. Don’t worry, I’ll keep you restrained.” Gabrielle said.

“Another what? I’ve never had an episode,” Jenna said.

“Jenna, I’m here for you. Just please don’t lash out on me and Janet again,” Chainlink’s mom said.

“WHAT...no...I’d never” Her chains dug deeper and deeper into the ground. Chainlink was forced onto her knees as Gabrielle kept waving her hands.

“Janet! PLEASE! I’D NEVER HURT YOU!” Chainlink shouted as her wrists were pulled to the ground. Janet ran toward Gabrielle and cried into her stomach.

“Look away, Janet! I will handle this!” Gabrielle shouted.

Totem opened her eyes and saw a gravestone. She turned around to walk away but stopped and turned back around to look at it out of curiosity. She was aware of the fact she was likely in a nightmare. That meant this grave was probably her mom’s. It had the right number of unreadable characters. Where each letter would be, a scribbled drawing sat. It would be smart to ignore it, but Totem was curious. She looked to the side and a shovel leaned against a tree. Aiyana reached for it, and it turned soft like intestines as she picked it up. She shook her head in disdain as she threw it to the side. **Squelch!** The shovel splat against the ground.

Aiyana reached for the totem on her chest and ripped it off. She jammed it into the ground and used it to scrape off the top layer of grass. Once she got past that she used her hands to dig. The fingernails scraped against the dirt and slowly clumps of it flew up out of the hole. Aiyana kept digging and digging. She knew what she was looking for.

Eventually, she scratched something hard. Her nail chipped when it hit against the coffin. Blood dripped into the dirt. Aiyana tried to pry it open, but it wouldn’t budge. She reached for her totem and jammed it into the wood. **creek.** A small hole formed. She smashed the totem into the coffin again to make the hole larger. **CREEK!** Aiyana stopped and peered into the coffin. It was pitch black. A foul stench poured out into the air. The tart smell of metal filled her nose.

She saw something move deep from within. Not just one thing, many little things. Totem leapt back as hundreds of golden scarabs burst from the coffin and flew into the air. They filtered out until all she could see was gold around her. Slowly, more and more landed on her. She tried to swat them away to no avail as her body became coated in bugs.

Hero collapsed to the ground as she watched the man in the yellow suit reach into his pocket. They were in a penthouse at the top of the skyscraper. Cobra Commando and Totem's bodies laid on the ground with a pool of blood beneath them. He pulled out nothing, but he made a gun with his fingers.

Chainlink, beaten and bloody, laid on the ground in front of him. He pointed his fake gun at her head.

"Damn you, Kendall. I knew we shouldn't have trusted you from the start," she said weakly.

"It was quite fortuitous that she led you right to Landlord and me," he said.

"I swear it wasn't a trap...I didn't know this would happen," Hero whimpered.

"LIAR! I should have known how this would end as soon as you walked in. You have no symbol; you stand for nothing. How heartless can someone like that be?" Chainlink said.

"I just wanted to help people--**BANG!**" Hero was cut off by the sound of a gun. She looked over and smoke flew up from the man's fingers. Chainlink laid on the ground. Her eyes were open, but they stared at nothing.

The Protector's bodies slipped through the floor and Hero soon fell after them. She fell through the blackness onto something warm. She looked below her to see a mound of bodies. Cobra Commando, Chainlink, and Totem's bodies rested below her. Hero leapt up into the air but was pulled back down. Chains had attached to her gauntlets, and they ripped her back into the pit. She looked down at the gauntlets and the advertisements were back on them. Slowly her gauntlets grew across her arms and started to encase her body.

Cobra Commando opened his eyes. He couldn't feel his arms and it felt like his legs were tied together. His body stood still in an empty mansion. When he looked down, he noticed a tail beneath him. He had turned into a bright green snake.

A large blue snake slithered past him. Cobra Commando tried to reach out and stop it, but he had no arms. Another snake slid past him. This one was slightly smaller and pink. The walls to the mansion ripped away and he was suddenly inside of a plane.

For a brief moment they flew through the air, but the wings of the plane ripped off and it shattered in half. Cobra Commando fell through the air with the blue and pink snake. He landed on the ground and adjusted his new reptilian body back upward. **SPLAT! SPLAT!** The snakes slammed against the ground and erupted in red. The red blood splattered on his green scales and turned them brown.

He slithered over to see only shreds of blue and pink splattered around the desert. Something grazed him and he turned around to see an orange snake waiting next to him. This orange snake had a smaller brown snake sitting on its head. Cobra Commando tried to approach the snake, but it moved backward. Soon, he was chasing after the orange snake, but he could not gain any distance on it.

In the real world, Angst watched with great interest as the heroes knelt on the ground. None of them blinked as they stared into the distance blankly. Cobra Commando hissed quietly to himself. A scream echoed from Chainlink's closed mouth. Totem sat quiet. Hero had tears running down her face.

The pendant around Totem's neck glowed as a yellow aura formed around her. Totem was slowly lifted into the air before the light sputtered out and she fell into Chainlink. Chainlink collapsed into Cobra Commando and he fell into Hero.

Chainlink continued to struggle against the chains as she screamed. **CRASH!** A giant golden scarab made of hundreds of smaller scarabs fell through the wall. It wobbled across the ground and toppled into Gabrielle. With her focus broken, Chainlink ripped free from the ground.

“GET THESE THINGS OFF OF ME!” the scarab shouted.

Chainlink slashed at the enormous golden scarab. The small scarabs that fell off shattered into pieces and then dust as soon as the chains struck them. ***Klang, Klang, Klang!*** Chainlink continued whipping until an arm reached out from the mass of bugs. She grabbed on and pulled.

“RESIST IT, AIYANA!” Chainlink shouted.

With a heave, Aiyana was ripped out of the swarm by Chainlink. They toppled to the ground. The room went black, and everything disappeared.

Totem had a blank stare on her face.

“I’m going to fail my family,” Totem said.

“No more than any of us do. We aren’t failing today though. Get up, we have other people to save,” Chainlink said.

She picked Totem up. They heard hissing in the distance, and they ran toward it. Cobra Commando continued chasing after the orange snake. It seemed as if every inch he moved forward the orange snake moved forward three. Suddenly, he was tackled to the ground. He looked to the side and Chainlink laid next to him. His body had returned to normal, but everything was black.

“You would not believe the dream I just had,” he said.

“Don’t even get me started,” Chainlink said as she picked him up. They ran toward the sound of Hero screaming out.

Hero shouted out as the metal climbed up her neck.

“Hey, why are you screaming?” Cobra Commando’s corpse asked. He stood up with the hole still through his forehead. The metal slinked back, and Hero stood speechless as she pointed at the hole. He reached his finger up and stuck it inside his head.

“That can’t be healthy,” he said. Chainlink and Totem’s corpses got up too. They all stood in the pit with the bodies below them. Their wounds healed and the color returned to their skin. Phantom’s limp body laid beneath their feet.

The body convulsed slightly before lifting itself up. His bones cracked against each other as his flesh contorted itself back to normal. His cheeks were bruised, and an eye was dangling out from the socket.

Cobra Commando screamed out as the corpse approached him.

“How’s it going, Bart. We going to break out of here? You know how Angst is, always showing us our fears,” Phantom said. The muscles on the left side of his mouth had loosened and his words were slurred as his jaw struggled to close completely.

“No...you’ve been gone for weeks...you’re probably dead,” Cobra Commando said.

“What are you talking about? We all went on a mission to stop Angst and we found him powered up. We have been stuck in here for what feels like weeks,” Phantom responded as he popped his eye back in.

“What is the last thing you remember doing?” Chainlink asked.

“I was going to fight Landlord, but we heard rumors of Angst breaking out of prison, so we all went to fight him one more time,” he said.

“Then how does that explain Hero? Why is she here?” Totem asked.

“How should I know? She must be a figment of the gas,” Phantom said.

“You’re lying. He’s the figment of the gas! I saw the papers. He’s dead. It can’t all be a lie!” Hero exclaimed.

Cobra Commando, Totem, and Chainlink stood still observing Hero and Phantom.

“I know that I’m real and I’m going to prove it!” Hero said. She reached her arm back to hit Phantom, but Chainlink held her back.

“DO NOT HIT HIM!” she said.

“Are you guys seriously going to believe this?” Hero exclaimed.

“There has to be a better way to figure out what’s the truth,” Cobra Commando said.

“Any ideas, Aiyana?” Chainlink asked.

“This is a fear gas. It’s almost sentient. It can sense what we fear most and adapt to it. But fear is all it knows. Arthur, what was the last meal all of us had together?” she asked.

“Oh, come on, Aiyana. How should I know? It feels like I’ve been stuck here for weeks. I can’t remember anything, let alone that,” he said.

Cobra Commando charged into Phantom and slammed him against the black wall of the pit.

“Don’t mess with me on this, Arthur,” Cobra Commando muttered.

A crack formed in the wall. Phantom’s skin turned a light blue and his mask fell to the ground. Slowly more bruises formed across his face. Scratches spread across his cheek. Cobra Commando averted his eyes, but Phantom grabbed his head and ripped it toward him.

“LOOK AT ME! THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED. Landlord slowly kicked the shit out of me as he mocked my family. He didn’t stop there. I died with seven broken fingers.” His fingers snapped off and the blue flesh crawled its way up the wall. Cobra Commando escaped from Phantom’s grasp and fell to the ground.

“I died with a collapsed lung.” **Pop!** His chest burst open and pink, slimy material ripped through his shirt.

“He broke my jaw.” His face slanted to the side. Cobra Commando screamed as he crawled backward.

“My eye popped-” he was cut off as Chainlink slammed him against the wall.

“YOU DID THAT TO YOURSELF! YOU TOOK THE BAIT! We would have helped you...you just had to ask...” she shouted as she pummeled him.

“If that helps you sleep at night. You guys wouldn’t have come even if I asked,” he groaned out as Chainlink bashed him.

Cobra Commando ran in and pushed Chainlink to the side before pinning Phantom against the wall.

“We aren’t perfect, but we would never have just let you die! WE CARED ABOUT YOU!” he shouted out as he held his arm steady while Phantom attempted to wiggle free.

“We got pizza that night...” Cobra Commando muttered.

Phantom froze. **Drip. Drip. Drip.**

Phantom's body became slippery and fell out of Cobra Commando's grasp. It sunk into the ground. Blue blood remained spattered against the wall and all over Chainlink's clothes.

The dark walls of the pit shattered. They all stood in the center of the warehouse. It was quiet and Angst was gone. A small silver coin laid on the ground. It had a swastika engraved in it.

"Where did he go?" Cobra Commando asked as he panted.

"Perhaps since he had turned into a sentient fear gas breaking free from him also destroyed him," Totem responded.

"Did we kill him?" Hero asked.

"I hope so," Chainlink said.

"Hard to say, nothing can truly be destroyed. He may just reform somewhere else," Totem said.

"Well then we will beat him again...for Phantom," Cobra Commando said.

A train rumbled across the tracks above as they stood under the hole riddled roof.



Cobra Commando sat at the bar in the Snake Oil Lounge while wearing his suit. He ordered another root beer as he waited. Rattlesnake walked over with a pair of glasses on. He tiptoed over then tapped Cobra Commando on the back. Cobra Commando yelped and turned around to see him.

“Brother, it is me, Ian. You may not be able to tell from the disguise.”

Cobra Commando laughed then said, “You look like an idiot with those on. It wouldn’t fool anyone.”

“I swear I saw it in a comic once.”

“I think that person’s glasses were magical,” Cobra Commando said.

Rattlesnake sat down next to him and took off the glasses, “Oh, well. I don’t have to really hide anymore. I stopped laundering money!”

“Good on you, Ian.”

“Where is the rest of your crew? Usually, you all move around like a pack of dogs or something,” Ian asked. He waved over the bartender and asked for a glass of Mellow Yellow.

“It was not a fun day at work. Everyone went home to their family,” Cobra Commando said as he took a sip of root beer.

“That so? What happened?”

“Nothing too crazy, just hallucinated our greatest fears and saw my dead friend come back alive.”

“Does not sound fun. What fear did you see?” Rattlesnake asked.

“Spiders.”

“Still fear that crap, eh?”

“YES! I blame it on that Harry Potter movie,” Cobra Commando said as he laughed.

“Turn over here, Bart. I want to see if that cut I gave you has healed yet,” Ian said as he grabbed Cobra Commando’s head and tilted it toward him. He silently inspected it then let go. “It’s healing well, I knew you could take it.”

The bartender slid over the glass of Mellow Yellow and the two Huber’s drank together as they continued to discuss their adventures. Rattlesnake left to go to the bathroom and Cobra Commando sat alone. Someone sat next to him.

“So, he ‘escaped’ you?” Totem asked.

“It’s not what he looks like he--”

“I know he’s your brother. I’m not an idiot. There are only two snake themed individuals I know. Obviously, you two had to be related,” she said.

“Are you going to tell anyone?” he asked.

“Why would I? He’s not hurting anyone, and everyone needs family. I’ve been keeping an eye on this place since we left. I figured he was your brother, but I wanted to be sure. Can I get a cup of coffee to go?” she said as she looked to the bartender.

“Dang, you’re good. That reminds me. How did we escape Angst earlier? Was it the power of friendship?” he asked.

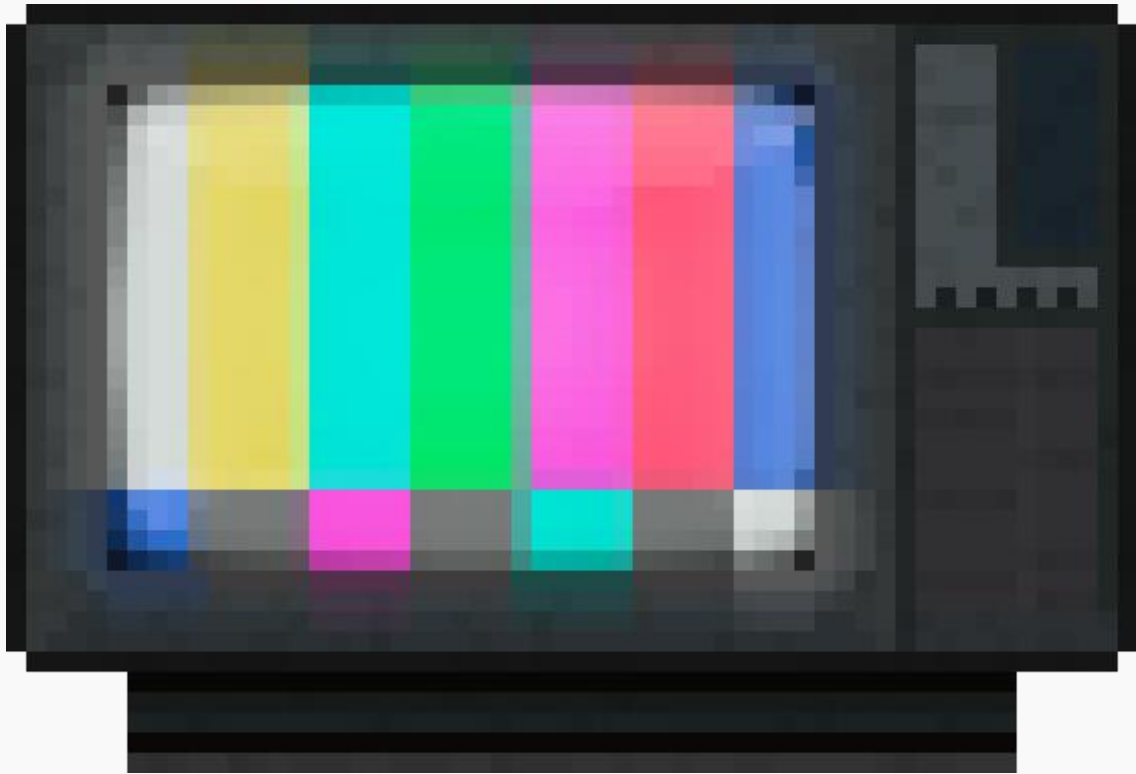
“That’s absurd. If I had to guess, it was the electrostatic shock of us touching each other. My amulet must have gone into some sort of self-preservation mode that knocked me into Chainlink. I would venture to guess that contact broke the gas’s control over our brains,” she said.

“I’m sure the friendship didn’t hurt though.”

“Maybe,” she said. The bartender came back with a coffee and Totem grabbed it. She threw some change down on the counter then got up.

“You have a nice night, Bart. We deserve it.”

“You too, Aiyana.”



“He should have spent the little time he had with you teaching you to hit harder,” Landlord said.

Landlord clicked a button on his cane and the diamond popped out. It hung by a chain to the rest of the cane. He spun it around and the diamond smashed against Phantom’s face. Landlord continued to slash Phantom’s face with the diamond as he spun it around. Phantom collapsed to the ground.

Get back up, Arthur. You can always keep fighting.

Phantom’s father’s words echoed in his head. Phantom slowly stood up. He tossed his mask to the side and unclipped his cape.

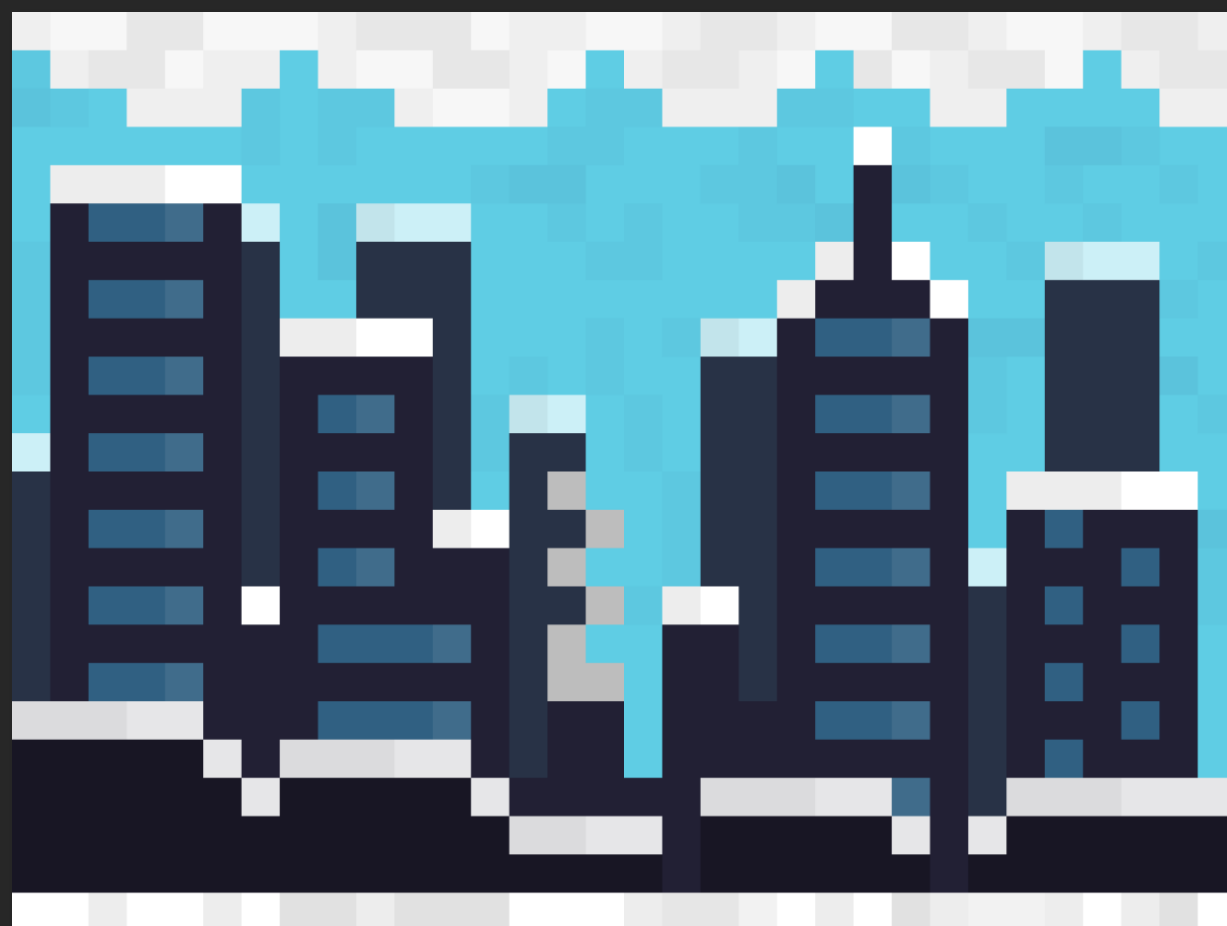
“Are the old man’s words in your head right now? I should have kept him alive just so he could see now. Weak. Defeated.”

Phantom screamed out in rage and charged Landlord.

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Protectors For Profit: Season 1 - Issue 9

Downtown Break-in



The Protectors for Profit and Hero rode on the bus straight to downtown. There was a questionable, yellow stain on the seat Cobra Commando was sitting on he was unaware of. One other person was on the bus.

“You guys look like idiots. What are you going to?” the man asked.

“We’re going to overthrow a crime lord. You wanna come?” Chainlink asked.

“Not really,” the man said.

“It was rhetorical,” Totem added.

“Let’s cover the plan again. Hero, we take on Landlord while you get the documents. How are we going to get in?” Chainlink asked.

“We would want to avoid the front entrance, I would imagine that is where most of the guards reside,” Totem said.

“What if we could avoid the ground floor all together?” Hero asked.

“How would we do that?” Cobra Commando questioned.

They all stood on the roof of a three-story building across the street from the skyscraper. Snow fell and covered the road below.

“NO! You are not throwing us into that building!” Cobra Commando exclaimed.

“I don’t see the problem; the walls are glass. I would imagine Landlord is at the top. If I had to guess, I could throw us to about the midpoint of the tower,” Hero said.

“I volunteer to go first if Bart is too scared of it,” Chainlink said.

“I’m not scared...I’m just--Aiyana, what do you think of it?”

“I just worry about two things. Won’t we rain glass shards down on the ground by shattering these windows? I also wonder what may happen if we were to be thrown into a floor that is populated. We aren’t here to kill anyone,” she said.

“Good thoughts. The glass should only fly into the building when I throw you and I know which floors are populated and which aren’t. I’ll aim for an empty floor,” Hero said.

“Then I’m in,” Totem said.

“Oh my gosh, we’re all gonna die,” Cobra Commando said.

“We need to get moving. You ready, Jenna?” Hero asked.

“Oh yeah.”

Hero grabbed onto Chainlink’s legs and spun her around. With a grunt she threw Chainlink into the building. She went soaring across the street. **CRASH!** Chainlink flew into a dimly lit floor. As she got up, she saw dozens of empty desks around her. **Thud.** Totem rolled into the room and got up. Snow blew in through the open window.

“ahhhhhHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!”

CRASH! thud. Cobra Commando flew through the window downstairs. Chainlink heard business workers shriek as they ran away from him.

Cobra Commando got up and brushed the glass of himself. As one of the workers ran away, they ripped out their headphones and “Roxanne” by The Police played quietly from their computer. He looked at the elevator and saw he was on floor twelve.

“Ah, I like this song. Turn this up,” he said as he cranked the computer volume up.

Hero leapt in through the window of the floor Chainlink and Totem stood on. They looked at her.

“Yeah, I know. Three out of four isn’t bad though,” Hero said as she smashed the floor to fall next to Cobra Commando. Totem and Chainlink followed her down.

“Sorry about that,” Hero said to Cobra Commando.

Cobra Commando rolled his shoulders and began to open his mouth as Chainlink pressed the up button on the elevator. **Ding.**

“Going up,” she said as the golden doors opened. A half dozen guards stood in the elevator. “NOT THIS WAY!”

“Take the stairs!” Totem shouted as she led them to the stairway. Chainlink kicked the door open, and they ran in. Below them concrete stairs spiraled down, and above hundreds of steps stood between them and the top floor. Guards ran up from below and down from above while the guards from the elevator ran toward them.

“The files are on floor eight. I’ll head down,” Hero said.

“And we’ll go up,” Chainlink said.

“Don’t kill anyone. These guards are just a lamer version of us, protecting for a profit,” Cobra Commando said.

“Stay safe,” Chainlink said as she whipped her chains up to the railing on the floor above. She ripped her arms back and she flew up and into the guards above them. Cobra Commando turned to fight the guards from the elevator. **BANG! BANG! BANG!** He dropped to the ground and slithered toward them to avoid the gunfire. He slinked up around one of their legs. He constricted then leapt at the next guard.

Hero leapt down the stairs to the floor below them. **BANG! BANG! BANG!** She deflected the gunfire with her gauntlets before slamming into the guards below. Hero grabbed the first guard and slammed them against the wall. She grabbed another by the legs and spun him into the other guards knocking them down.

Totem stepped over the railing as her friends were stuck in combat around her. **Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh.** Floors flew past her in a blur as she fell. She grabbed on to her totem.

“For all those that have come before me. I stand now as a symbol for societies lost to the tides of time. I fight for those not remembered. For those pushed to the side. Lend me your strength as I fight for a better future where no one is left behind.”

Ratatatatatatatatatat. Cobra Commando dove to the side to avoid the spray of bullets. **CRASH!** A golden scarab erupted from the staircase and flew into the guards. It spun around through the air thrashing its wings knocking the guards back against the wall.

“Nice work, Totem,” Cobra Commando said. The scarab knelt, and he hopped on its back.

Below them, Hero continued fighting as she moved downward. She grabbed a guard and threw them against the bottom of the stairs above her. Chunks of concrete fell out from above her and she punched them. They split into shards and flew forward into the guards knocking them back. She flipped over the railing and fell downward. She grabbed onto a railing and pulled herself up. **THUNK!** She kicked upon the door to floor eight.

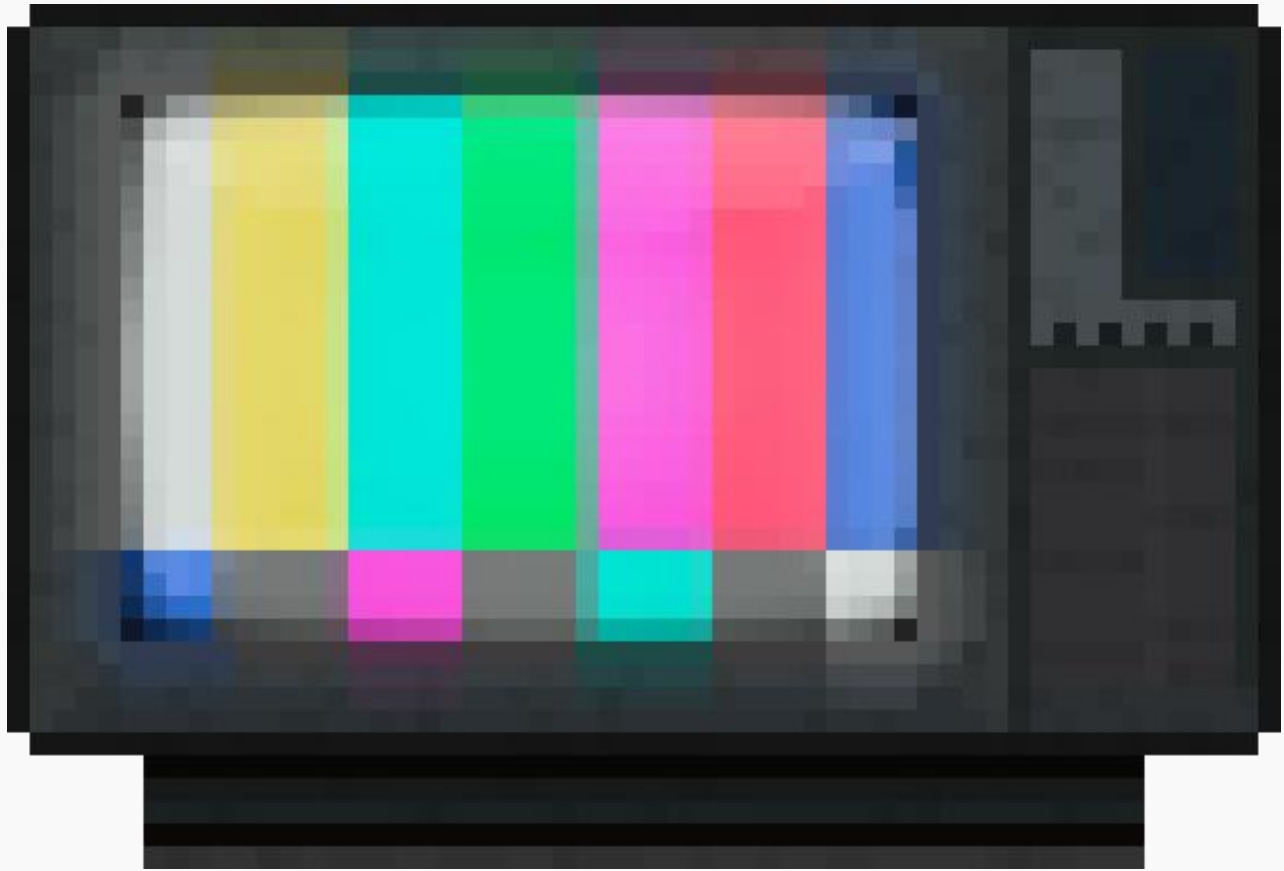
Chainlink whipped her chain under one guard’s leg. She pulled him to the ground and slid him down the stairs. She ran over him and lashed her chains forward. She wrapped them around two guards and pulled herself forward while knocking them down past her. Chainlink flew into another guard which knocked him against the wall. She now stood at the entryway to floor fifteen. Guards approached her from below and above.

Sweat beaded on her forehead. **crash. Crash. CRASH!** A golden scarab erupted from below and knocked the guards beneath her into the abyss. Cobra Commando leapt off it and dove into the guards above them. He slithered through them while stealing their guns. Chainlink ran up behind and bashed her way through the guards.

The scarab flew up next to them and landed. It bent down. Chainlink and Cobra Commando hopped on.

CRASH! The shining insect crumbled the door as it flew into Landlord’s penthouse. Cobra Commando and Chainlink hopped off it. The scarab slowly dimmed in color until it disappeared revealing Totem standing next to them.

A VHS tape played on a box TV which sat on top of a Mahogany desk.



The tape continued to play on Landlord's desk as Cobra Commando, Chainlink, and Totem continued to watch.

Landlord stopped Phantom by grabbing his throat. He held Phantom still and pummeled him with his free hand. **Thud. Thud. Thud. Thud. Thud. Thud.** Landlord threw Phantom and his body rolled into the wall shaking the painting hanging from it. It had splatters of blue, green, and yellow on it.

The camera turned to show two guards running into Landlord's office.

"Somethings wrong, sir! The alarm went off," one of the guards exclaimed.

"Nothing anymore. Hold this man still over there," Landlord said as he pointed at Phantom. The guards picked up Phantom by his arms and held his limp body up. Landlord cracked his knuckles.

BAM! “NEVER MESS WITH ME!” Blood splattered the painting.

BAM! “I WILL KILL EVERY HERO THAT COMES HERE!” Blood covered more of the painting.

BAM! Blood sprayed across the top of the painting.

“Your father wasn’t wrong with what he taught you. He just taught it to too weak of a man.”

Landlord reached into the pocket of his suit and pulled out a handkerchief with which he wiped his hands.

“Perfect. Put his body with the rest of them.”

The camera zoomed in on the painting as the blood dried before fading to black.

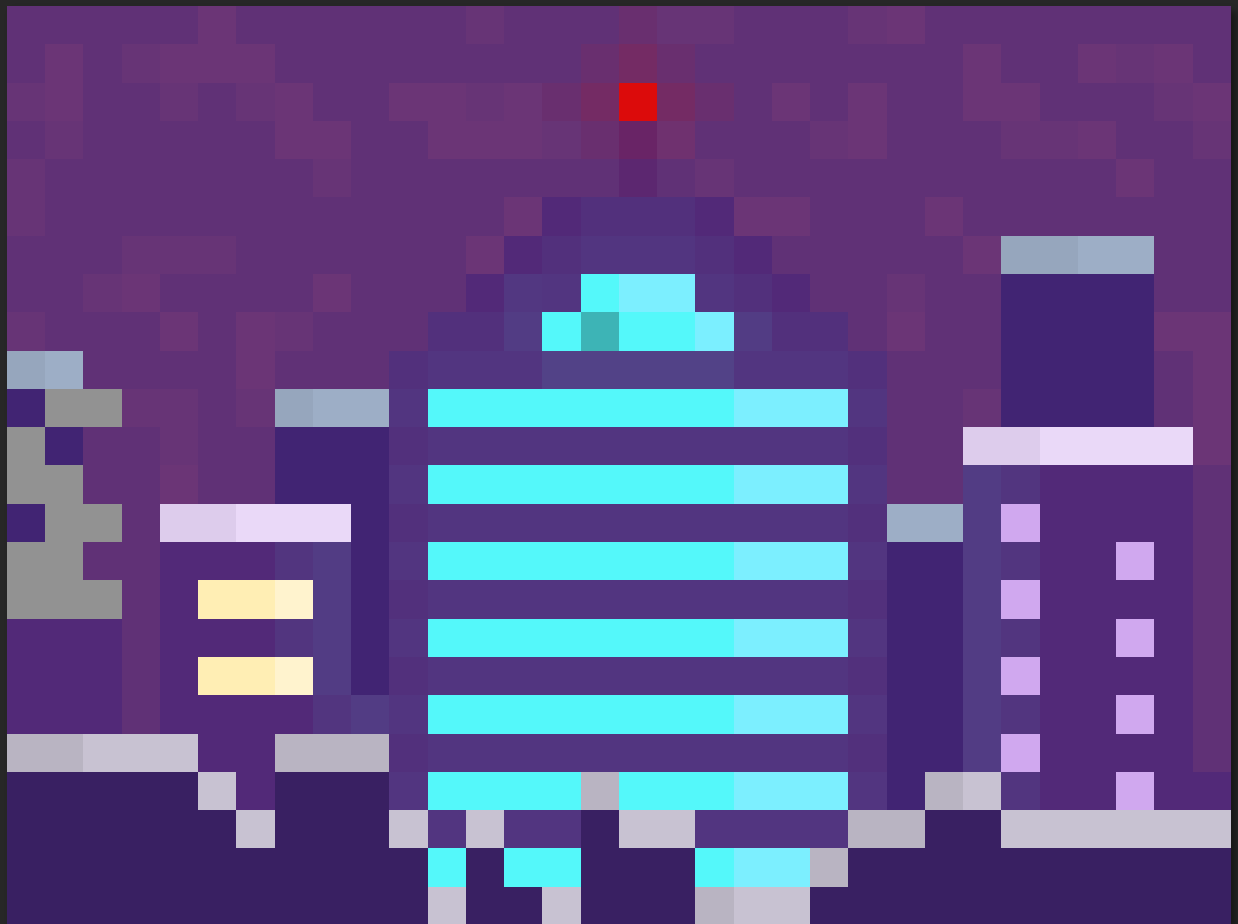
The TV turned off and the lights to the room flicked on.

“What’d you think of the show?” Landlord asked.

75¢

Protectors For Profit: Season 1 - Issue 10

Fresh Paint



“You’re...sick,” Cobra Commando said. He gritted his teeth as the sounds of Phantom groaning in pain echoed through his head.

Totem slowly swallowed to keep herself from vomiting. She looked back at the painting and gagged.

“I spent my life building up to this point. I will be the first to admit that everything I did to get my wealth wasn’t ethical. But who gives a damn? Money corrupts everyone so who cares if I got started early. I watched my parents skip meals so I could eat. Do you know what that does to a boy? To see so much compassion and sacrifice...I will never let my children ever experience anything like that,” he said as he stood still.

“I’m going to kill you,” Chainlink said.

“You all don’t scare me. I killed Phantom swiftly and he bled such a beautiful red. I would love it if the man dressed as a snake bled green,” he said while walking over to his desk. He reached into the top drawer. Landlord pulled out two brass knuckles and slipped them onto his fingers.

“So easy to manipulate. All I had to do was send him an email pretending to be a concerned citizen. I told him that Landlord captured my children, and he was here in an instant. A little video editing and now I have you whimpering. Don’t even get me started on Hero. We’ve been playing her from the start,” he said.

Chainlink shouted as she ran at Landlord.

Downstairs, Hero snuck through the hallway. **zzzzZAP!** She dove to the side as a black blast flew past her.

“Oh, Icarus. So gullible. We had you working for us all this time. All you wanted was to do good, but all you accomplished these past few months was put the criminals we released back in jail. You made the company look really good, but didn’t actually improve the world,” Ulterior said while putting the gun in his holster.

“I make all these weapons for people, but rarely I get the chance to use them,” he said as he raised his hand in the air. The fingers of his glove extended to form claws. He stood poised to strike.

“Your move, darling.”

Cobra Commando coiled around Landlord’s left arm.

“Someone get his right arm!” he shouted.

Chainlink whipped her chain out and pulled down on his right arm. Totem ran up and punched Landlord in the face. He recoiled then looked back at her. Landlord slammed his face forward and crashed into her skull. **CRUNCH!** Totem went flying back. Landlord shouted out as he flung Cobra Commando and Chainlink off him. They landed next to Totem.

“Can’t you go beetle mode and wreck this guy?” Cobra Commando asked.

“It’s a very complicated process involving countless spirits from past societies giving me their energy. I can’t do it so quickly again. It’s like trying to manipulate the flow of the ocean.”

“Then we wear him down the old-fashioned way!” Chainlink said as she charged Landlord. He grabbed her by the neck before she could reach him. **Thunk. Thunk. Thunk.** He pummeled her in the chest and set her down. She staggered while standing in front of him.

He headbutt her then spit on his brass knuckles.

“You’re getting evicted!”

CRACK! He smashed his knuckles into her stomach, and she went flying back.

“Jenna!” Cobra Commando shouted. He dove to catch her, and they tumbled into the wall. Landlord approached Totem.

“If my memory serves me correctly, you’re the one that always whines about your heritage. Get over yourself.” He approached her and knelt. “We live in a cruel world. The weak fade into obscurity and the strong find a way to thrive. The world doesn’t owe you or your family anything. They were weak and now they are no more. The world ran its course.”

“I didn’t catch that. Could you say that one more time?” Totem asked.

Landlord leaned in and spoke into her ears.

“You come from a line of--**ARGH!**” Aiyana ripped off her necklace and jammed the totem into Landlord’s shoulder. He opened his hands as he screamed in pain. Totem rolled to the side and slipped the brass knuckle off his right hand. She put it on and put her hands together. **Crack!** She slammed her fists into his head, and he stepped back. Chainlink threw her chain around his neck. She pulled down as Cobra Commando pulled at the other brass knuckle. Blood trickled from Chainlink’s nose and Cobra Commando’s suit was ripped across the chest.

CLANG! Claws scraped against Hero’s gauntlets. Ulterior controlled the momentum of the battle as he jabbed at Hero. Stuck responding defensively, she was not able to make an attack. He retracted his claws and pulled a small metallic stick out of his pocket. **click. click. click.** It extended into a full staff with a fang at the end.

Ulterior spun it around then thrust it forward. Hero flipped back then detached the shield on her gauntlets. She threw them forward and Ulterior deflected them. In return, he threw his spear. Hero caught it midair before the fang at the end could pierce her skin.

“Going to have to do better than that to reach me,” Hero said.

“I wanted you to catch it,” he said.

click. The end of the spear opened, and a gas dispersed onto Hero’s face. She braced herself against the wall and started to cough. Her vision began to blur as the hallway grew darker. Ulterior approached her. She tried to swing at him, but he stepped aside.

Hero blinked and when her eyes reopened, she was standing behind Landlord at his desk. She stood straight as if she was awaiting a command. He was signing papers.

“Tenant, did you have any trouble with your assignments today?” he asked without looking at her. The room was warm. It felt comfortable as she watched the snow fall outside.

“No, sir.”

“Excellent. It seems you are adapting well to your new role with me. We can do real good here on a grand scheme. There is more to the world than returning purses to old ladies.”

Hero inspected her gauntlets and stared at the golden T on each of them. Her suit had been dyed a dark purple and the H on her head had been removed.

“Do you still think about them?” he asked.

“Who?” She genuinely could not think of who he was talking about.

“The Protectors For Profit,” he said calmly.

“...” *There were...three of them. A snake one, a mean one, and a smart one.*

“You can be honest with me. I know they began to mean something to you. But they were rowdy, unkempt, and unfit for what we are doing. That’s why they had to be eliminated.”

“I do think about them,” Tenant said. Her head felt murky. She remembered something about a plan. It was cloudy, but this wasn’t right. She would never dye the suit purple, no one can sympathize with the color purple. *It would crash my ratings. Ratings? No. I don’t care about ratings anymore.*

“They weren’t something you could believe in. I understand people like you. You’re incredibly capable, but you need something to stand behind. You need help finding what you symbolize. Tenant is something concrete, Hero was just an ideal,” he said.

Hero? She looked at her gauntlets. The T phased out then reappeared. Like the static on a blank television, it blinked in and out of existence. She looked at the reflection of her suit in the window. The purple coloring spiraled across the surface of the suit. It mixed with a dark green that pushed back against it.

“I am...a hero,” she said.

“That’s correct. We’ve been doing an incredible job at cleaning up Skum City together.”

“No...I am Hero,” she said.

He turned around to look at her inquisitively.

“What are you saying?” he asked.

“What is your favorite food?” she asked.

“I...I don’t know I--” Hero extended her arm and grabbed him by the throat, cutting him off. Suddenly, she was holding Ulterior in the air, and she was back in the hallway. He struggled to escape her grasp as he hung in the air.

“How did you...escape?”

“Can only read a book for the first time once.”

She threw him against the wall. Ulterior collapsed against the ground.

Cobra Commando shouted out as he pried the other brass knuckle off Landlord’s hand. He tossed it to Totem and she donned them. As Landlord continued to try and pull the chain off from around his neck Cobra Commando tackled his legs. He fell to the ground and Chainlink pulled him back.

He slammed his fists into the ground to mount himself in place. Landlord pulled a chunk of the floor out and threw it at Chainlink. She loosened her grip and dodged the debris. Landlord got up and the Protectors surrounded him. He loosened his tie and took off his jacket.

“This whole teamwork thing is cute. Someone should make a TV show out of you three,” Landlord said before chuckling to himself.

“There’s four of us,” Chainlink said.

“There were four before I updated my painting,” Landlord said.

Chainlink lashed at him while Cobra Commando and Totem battered him with blows. He grabbed Cobra Commando and threw him at a pillar. **Smash!** He landed against it and fell to the ground. Totem and Landlord punched forward at the same time and their fists collided. **Crack!** She went flying back against the window and fell to the ground. Chainlink whipped her chains forward and entangled both of Landlord’s arms. He pulled back while she held him still. Her boots slowly slid against the ground.

“Your strength is admirable. I am the most impressed by you out of this group.”

Chainlink gritted her teeth as she pulled back against him. It felt as if a bear was pulling her forward. She had never held a building up before, but this is what it must have felt like. Her boots squeaked against the ground. She leapt up and let herself be pulled inward. Chainlink flew into his chest forcing him backward. After landing on the ground, she whipped her chain forward. He grabbed them. Landlord spun her around then let go. Chainlink went flying back and braced for impact with the floor.

thump. Hero caught Chainlink and set her down.

“I’ll take it from here,” she said. “Your Hero has arrived.”

“Uterior never excelled at fighting. Makes a mean weapon though,” Landlord said before spitting blood from his mouth.

Hero ran forward and uppercut Landlord. **Crack!** He stumbled backward. Landlord cracked his knuckles then extended his fist toward Hero. She sidestepped it then grabbed his extended arm. She whipped him over her head, and he slammed into the ground behind her. Hero flipped backward but before she could dive into Landlord he rolled to the side.

He slowly adjusted to a kneeling position.

“What’s your favorite food?” Hero asked.

“Caviar, why do you ask?” he said.

“I just wanted to make sure this was real,” she said with a smile.

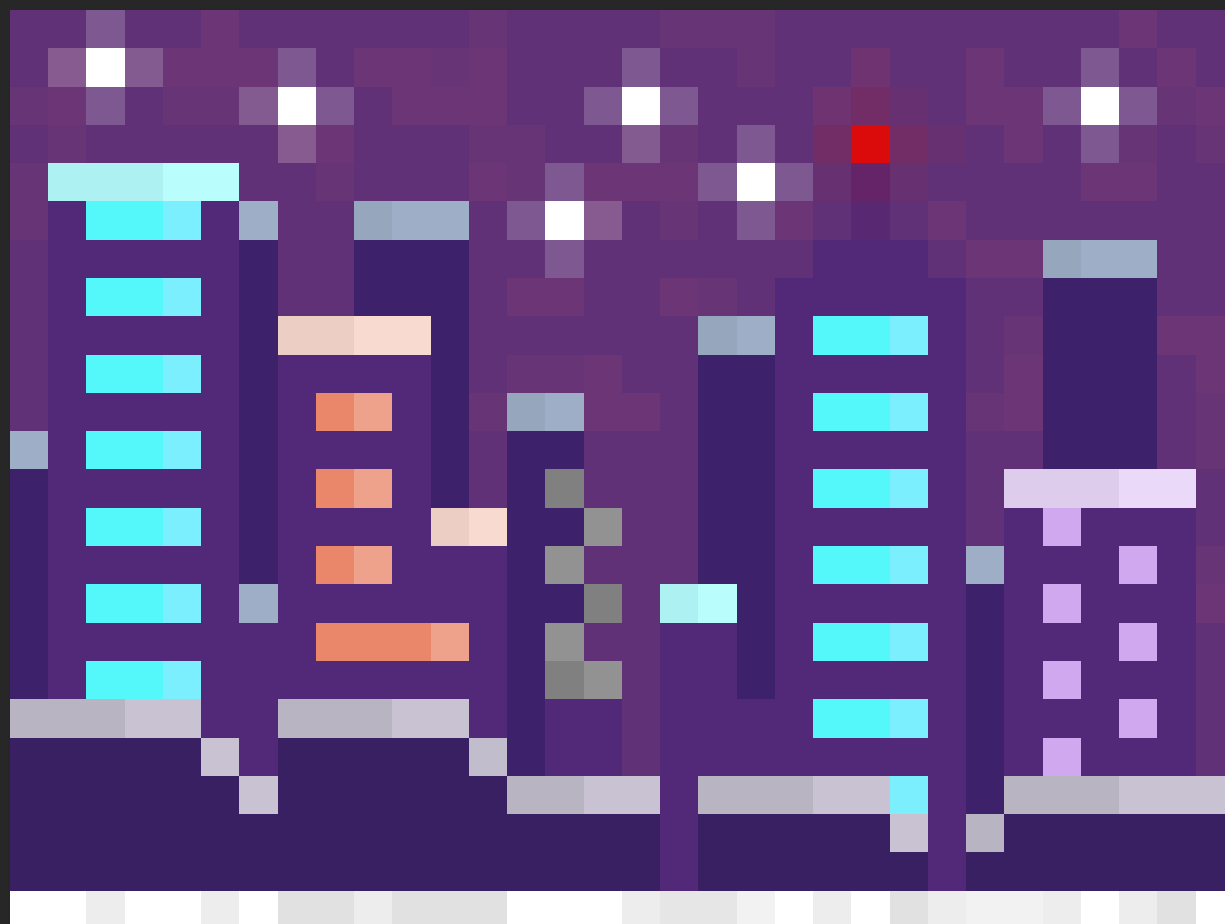
Hero ran forward and jumped. **CRACK!** Her knee smashed against Landlord’s face. He spun backward and across the ground. Hero leaned over to catch her breath as she looked over at him. He did not get back up.

Chainlink muttered, “That was...pretty good for a sellout.”

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Protectors For Profit: Season 1 - Issue 11

Old Friend



The Protectors and Hero rode the bus toward an unmarked site Hero told them to go to. The bus bumped across the potholes in the road of the residential area. Dried blood covered their suits. As night had arrived long ago, only two other people rode the bus with them. One was distracted with their phone, the second looked up at them.

“Man, you guys look rough,” he said.

“Should see the other guy,” Chainlink said.

After riding past three more stops, they got off and walked for another two blocks. Snow fell quietly around them as the Protectors followed Hero. She inspected the piece of paper in her hand under the light of the streetlights and led them down another road. At the end of the road there was a small community garden.

“He should be there,” Hero said as she pointed toward the garden. **crunch. crunch. crunch.** Their boots quietly compressed the snow as they broke through the fresh coat covering the ground while approaching it.

“How could he bury people in the middle of a community garden like this?” Totem asked.

“It was his community garden. I think a part of him actually did want to provide food for the less fortunate, but I don’t think anyone knew the ulterior use for it,” Hero said.

“But still, how did no one see him do any of this?” Totem asked.

“Maybe someone did, and we are about to find them,” Chainlink said.

The garden sat in the center of the circle in a large cul de sac. Apartments formed a wall around them. Most of the lights were off, except for some blotches of yellow scattered throughout.

Once they got there, Totem noticed only one part of the garden was not covered in snow. Two shovels laid against the beds where vegetables would usually grow.

“That is the only place that has been disturbed. He must be there,” Totem said.

Hero and Chainlink grabbed the shovels and removed the dirt from its resting place. The sound of metal piercing earth rang out muffled over the snow. The dirt came out of the ground in rigid chunks due to the cold.

Cobra Commando rubbed his hands together to keep warm. Totem carefully analyzed the hole as it got deeper and deeper across the hours.

Thunk!

"I think I hit something. Help me clear this off, Jenna," Hero said.

Hero and Chainlink quickly cleared the dirt to reveal a large wooden box. It was over seven feet wide and three feet long. The yellow wood had been stained brown from the earth around it. They stepped out of the six-foot-deep hole to analyze it.

"Maybe we shouldn't open it," Totem said. "We know what we are going to find."

"We need the closure. I need to see it," Chainlink said.

"He'd want us to open it," Cobra Commando said as he hopped into the hole. He cracked off the lock and heaved the wooden lid off. The lid flew out of the hole and revealed a container filled with dozens of dead bodies. The bodies were a pale blue hue and stuck in rigid, obtuse positions due to the freezing temperatures. A smell wafted up. It smelled foul, but the thought of what they were smelling was what made it worse.

Cobra Commando gagged at the sight of the frozen blood, skin, and eyes. Countless bodies eyes had frozen open staring blankly into the sky.

"You know, it's different seeing these things in person," Chainlink said while holding her hands up to her mouth.

"There could be all kinds of diseases in there, we need to use some gloves or something," Totem noted.

Cobra Commando grabbed the first body under the armpits and dragged it to the side. He tried to lift the dead body out of the hole, but it was too heavy.

"Can someone help me...these...these bodies are so heavy," he said. Snow formed a thin layer over the contents of the box.

Hero and Chainlink hopped in and started to throw out bodies. Totem would pull the ones Cobra Commando lifted out of the hole and line it up with the ones Chainlink and Hero removed. Totem made sure each of their eyes were closed.

Chainlink continued to throw the bodies out of the pit as she continued to not recognize them. She didn't care about any of these people. Only Phantom mattered.

"Where are you, Arthur?" she asked.

Cobra Commando recognized the shoe on a leg beneath some of the bodies. He reached for it and pulled. Totem noticed him struggling and came down to help him pull.

The body slipped out suddenly and they fell to the ground. Cobra Commando looked at it. He crawled over to the body and embraced it.

"Arthur, we finally found you," he said as he began to sob. He looked at the face and saw the slashes across it from Landlord.

Totem looked to his eyes and noticed both were still in their sockets. She closed his eyelids.

Chainlink grabbed his cold hands and inspected them. All his fingers were still there.

Hero sat down on the other bodies to face them all. She watched quietly as they mourned, unsure of what to say.

"You idiot. Why did you have to go alone," Cobra Commando said as tears rolled down his face.

Chainlink held on to Phantom's hands. She hoped maybe if she could give enough of her warmth up to him, he would come back.

"It's not fair," Chainlink said.

Totem stood back up. She walked over to Hero and obtained the papers that led to this location before stepping out of the pit. Chainlink grabbed Phantom's hands and crossed them across his body. She put her hand on Cobra Commando's shoulder.

"We found him. It can end now. We should get going," she said.

"But, we can't leave him like this. Not here," he said.

"He isn't here. He has been gone for a long time," Chainlink said as she wiped at her eyes.

Hero got up and added, "Besides, I don't think there is anything he would want more than his final gift to the world being putting Landlord behind bars."

Cobra Commando let go of the body and stood up.

“You’re right. He would love something as dramatic as this.”

Totem looked into the hole and said, “I called in an anonymous tip. I left the papers in the pockets of one of the bodies, but we probably have about ten minutes before it would look really suspicious for us to be here.”

The Protectors walked out of the garden together as snow continued to fall.

Ten minutes later, police cars swerved to a stop in front of the garden. Dozens of officers poured out of their police cars. They approached the scene with guns at the ready. When they ran into the garden, they found no one, at least alive. They scattered throughout the scene as they worked to survey everything. A male police officer took photos of the pit while another checked for a heartbeat on every body. A female officer noticed a paper sticking out from one of the body’s pockets and retrieved it. She ran it over to the forensics team.

A fourth man inspected the dead body of Phantom.

“Hey boss, I think this is Pha--” he stopped talking as a light blue glow outlined his body. The glow disappeared and he stood silent. The man stepped out of the hole and started walking off the scene.

“Hendrick? Where do you think you’re going?” one of the cops shouted at him. The man did not look back and continued walking off until he was no longer visible through the snow.

75¢

Protectors For Profit: Season 1 - Issue 12

Fresh Grave



One week later, Totem set up a funeral for Phantom. Cobra Commando, Chainlink, and Totem were the only ones that attended. Cobra Commando wore a suit over his costume while Chainlink and Totem changed out of their costumes.

Each gave a speech next to the casket in the cemetery.

"I know sometimes what we do is questionable. But good work gets done and people are happier due to our careers. The world is a better place because of people like Arthur, or Phantom as some of you may know. But the world doesn't become a better place without sacrifice. Phantom gave his life so families could sleep easy in Skum City. He was..." Chainlink speech continued. Once she stopped speaking, Totem got up.

"Legacy is something I never stop thinking about. The way time erodes at everything we have haunts me every day. What may be remembered today could be forgotten tomorrow. Phantom will not be forgotten soon, at least not by us. He never hesitated to step up if he thought someone would be hurt. That sort of selflessness is not easily forgotten..." Totem's speech continued. Once she stopped speaking, Cobra Commando got up.

"So, I never was good at speeches. I'm not a leader. I'm not a good follower. I went into the circus as soon as I was given free will. My whole life I've just been an idiotic surfer riding the metaphorical waves. But then you had people like Phantom. He...he relentlessly trained everyday so he could always help more people. I always looked up to his sense of what was right. He once said...he once said, 'There never aren't heroes. You just aren't looking hard enough.' I think about that a lot," Cobra Commando stopped talking as he cried.

"Hey, is this the funeral for Phantom?" a man with a handlebar mustache said as he walked over the hill.

Cobra Commando looked up and said, "Yeah, why?"

"Cause I wanted to pay my respects. Best damn hundred bucks I ever spent," he said as he set flowers down at the tombstone.

"I hired him to scare off two guys that kept robbing my store. I never had another theft after he stepped in," the man continued to say.

A tall woman in a dark dress walked over the hill.

“Glad I made it in time. I wanted to give thanks. Phantom found my daughter after she was kidnapped by a local gang. Not a scratch on her. She means the world to me, and he kept her safe. I owe him everything,” she said.

“Well as long as you paid his fee you don’t owe him anything,” Cobra Commando said.

“No, it’s not the money. I would have paid anything to get her back. He was the only one that actually listened to me when I said I needed help. The police didn’t believe me, but Phantom did,” the woman said.

Hero walked over the hill wearing a black suit. Five more people followed behind her. Each one of them walked toward the casket and thanked him. They were grateful for when he had found their lost dog, helped them move houses, or protected the retirement home. Phantom had made Skum City just a little bit better.

As those eleven people stood around the grave mourning Phantom, Chainlink stepped back to speak with Hero.

“Thanks for coming. Did you bring these people?” she asked.

“I wouldn’t miss it and I didn’t bring these people. I just mentioned this was happening and a bunch of people wanted to pay their dues,” Hero responded.

Cobra Commando stepped back to them then asked, “So, what next?”

“Well, I don’t have a job anymore. I just beat up my last boss,” Hero said.

“I think I know a place with an opening,” Chainlink said as Totem walked over.

“Can we talk about this somewhere warmer?” Totem asked.

“I’ll buy everyone pizza. I know a good place a few blocks from here,” Hero suggested.

“You better with all that sellout money,” Chainlink said with a sneer.

“Team meeting at Irina’s Pizza it is,” Cobra Commando said.

After the funeral, the Protectors ate pineapple and pepperoni pizza at Irina’s Pizza.

“Nighttiming” by Coconut Records played over the speakers as they chatted.

While they ate, a police officer walked up to the tombstone for Phantom. A nametag on his chest said "Hendrick". He knelt to read the engraving.

"Arthur Webber."

"'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players; They have their exits and their entrances, and one man in his time plays many parts...' - William Shakespeare," the man said as his eyes continued to move down the stone.

"For any heroic needs, email P4P@gmail.com."

The man chuckled as he read the bottom of the tombstone.