

SIDE-KICKED ORIGINS

#4



ABOUT SIDE-KICKED

In a world where Super-Heroes are celebrities, egos rampage out of control.

Five of Chicago's most dependable Sidekicks are faced with the reality that despite their dedication, they will invariably be disrespected by the Heroes they work with and the citizens they protect. Taken for granted by society and ignored by the media, how much can the Sidekicks endure before they decide they've had enough?

WHY ORIGINS?

"Now begin in the middle, and later learn the beginning; the end will take care of itself."

--Harlan Ellison

Side-Kicked can certainly be said to start in the middle of the story. When we meet the sidekicks, they are already paired up with their respective heroes and fighting established villains. There is even a reference to a past incident in New York which led to the dissolution of America's super-teams.

But how did the sidekicks (and heroes and villains - for that matter) get their super powers? What was their motivation for putting on the capes and masks?

As comic book fans, we love a good origin story. But that wasn't the story I was trying to tell with *Side-Kicked*. Instead, I saved the origins as bonus material for the backers of the *Side-Kicked* Kickstarter campaign (which, along with selling my personal comic book collection, was how I raised the money to pay my incredible art team). I wanted to give the backers a special **"Thank You"** for taking a chance on a first-time creator. A little something extra that would add to the story and to the world of *Side-Kicked*, but wasn't necessary for enjoying the book on its own.

This is the first time since the Kickstarter that these character origins are being made available (abbreviated origins for the sidekicks-only can be found in the back of the Trade Paperback).

I hope you enjoy them.

--Russell Brettholtz
(Writer and Co-Creator)

PHANTASM

Real Name: Richard Gerry

Age: 28

Height: 5'8"

Weight: 165 lbs

Powers: Phantasm can create and control light projections.

Back Story:

Richard didn't sleep well as a child. He would complain to his mother about "lights" that were keeping him awake at night. His parents at first disregarded Richard's complaints as a creative excuse to stay up late from a rambunctious child, but the lack of sleep eventually took its toll on Richard's health, and his parents couldn't ignore his ever-persistent grievance. But the doctor was little help. Nothing was physically wrong with Richard. But the doctor did prescribe a sedative that would help him sleep.

Finally able to sleep, Richard's health improved. He continued through life as a typical kid and teenager. It wasn't until college that he discovered the truth about his childhood ailment.

During his freshman year at Chicago City College, he pledged a fraternity. The late nights required proved nearly impossible while Richard was on his sleep medication, so he stopped taking them. He didn't seem too affected by the change until a few weeks into pledging when the late nights started taking their toll. At the end of one particularly long night, exhausted, Richard was lying in bed when the lights returned.

Distraught, Richard threw a nearby book at the ball of light floating in the center of his room. To his amazement, the book bounced off the light. It was solid. And not only that, but when the book hit the light, Richard felt the impact on his own body. Richard got out of bed and closely examined the light. It was like nothing he had ever seen, but he could feel that he was connected to it.

Richard stayed off his medication, and at night, when exhausted and the lights returned, Richard sought to exert his control over them. Days turned to weeks. Richard quit the fraternity. And finally, he was able to make the lights appear and disappear by will. He could move them around the room with his thoughts. He could even control their shape. The only thing he couldn't do was alter their color. They were always yellow. Richard considered that a minor loss.

Richard grew up watching Super-heroes on the news. He knew that with his power, he had the potential to join them. He also knew that the best way to achieve that goal was to start small.

He would be a Sidekick.



MUSTANG

Real Name: Daniel Burr

Age: 26

Height: 6'4"

Weight: 205 lbs

Powers: Mustang can shoot plasma blasts from his hands.

Back Story:

Dan has always led a charmed life. Through childhood he was always the tallest kid in his class. He got good grades despite not studying for tests. He was a natural athlete, excelling at soccer, basketball and track. His good looks meant there was always a girl interested in going out with him. But Dan wanted more. He just didn't know what it was.

Bored one weekend, he was sitting at the kitchen table flipping through the Classifieds when an ad caught his eye. *"Adventure... Glory... Riches... Sign up today!"* Dan was intrigued. He called the phone number and made an appointment. The interview began with answering 200 multiple choice questions on a computer. Dan determined the questions were designed to measure his basic cognitive ability, moral reasoning, and critical thinking. When he finished, no score was given, but he was ushered into a small room where a doctor (or so Dan presumed) gave him a physical and took a blood sample. After a short wait, Dan was invited to continue the interview. It was then that he learned that the job was not really a job at all, but rather recruitment for human testing of a new drug that would give ordinary humans super powers.

Dan was overjoyed. This was what his life was missing.

The drug worked, and Dan developed the power to fire plasma blasts from his hands. It was then that he discovered he was working for a covert government agency. The agency was tasked with developing super-powered humans and using them to take down super-villains. Dan couldn't be more excited. He was joined by four other recruits and trained as a fighting unit. Finally, they were unleashed on their first target.

The team easily gained access to the villain's compound on a small island in the South Pacific. The training had clearly paid off, as they worked well together, incapacitating the island's security forces and defeating the villain. The agency sent in a crew to confiscate all of the villain's resources, including weapons, money, gold and jewels. Dan and his team had proven themselves, and they were just getting started.

One year and several bad guys later, Dan was up late, wandering the corridors of the agency's secret headquarters. He wasn't paying too much attention to where he was going and found himself in a wing of the complex he usually didn't venture into: The Command Center. He was about to turn around and head back to his quarters when he heard voices in conversation. Dan stopped to listen when he recognized the voice of his agency handler. His handler was saying that the program was working great. It was so much easier to steal from super-villains who had already done all the hard work, than from the initial owners themselves.



Mustang Continued

Back Story:

Dan was shocked. It never occurred to him that he was lied to about his employers. That they were also villains. He quickly made his way back to the sleeping quarters, woke the others in his team, and told them what he had heard. They too were shocked. They all thought they were the good guys. They knew they had to get out of there immediately.

It was easier to make their escape than Dan had anticipated. Dan had to give the agency credit: his team had been well trained. Once free, they decided to go their separate ways. They rationalized that it was for safety reasons, but Dan was confident that it was from shame.

Nobody wanted the reminder of how they were used. Dan didn't like being taken advantage of, and he vowed to never let it happen again.

So Dan returned home to Chicago. He knew he owed a debt to society for his actions of that past year. It only made sense that he would put his powers and his training to actual good use.

Besides, he liked playing the hero.



JOLT

Real Name: Albert Clinton

Age: 22

Height: 5'10"

Weight: 175 lbs

Powers: Jolt can generate electricity and shoot electric blasts.

Back Story:

Al didn't grow up with much. His father was a school janitor and his mother stayed home to take care of him, his little sister and the household chores. There was enough money to keep them housed, clothed, and fed and for a bi-annual family vacation to a nearby attraction. Al knew he shouldn't complain, he had it better than many of the other kids in his neighborhood, but he couldn't help wanting more. A bigger TV. A newer video game console. A more glamorous vacation destination.

But Al wasn't one to wallow in his disappointment. Even as a kid, he was always looking for ways to make some extra money. He had particular success in elementary school selling candy to the other kids during recess. In high school, he worked after school and weekends as a furniture salesman at a local wholesaler. The job was entirely commission based, but Al had spent his life in sales, and despite his youth, he proved to be adept at the job.

Unfortunately for Al, he started the job at the beginning of the worst recession the country had seen since the Depression, and despite his skills, he wasn't making the kind of money that he had hoped. Al knew that he was going to need to make more money if he was going to be able to move out of his parents' house after graduation. So he started taking small jobs that wouldn't interfere with his school and work schedules.

One of those jobs was at a chemical research facility. Al didn't know (or understand) what exactly the research was for, but his job was simple enough. Move the test animals out of their habitats (cages, tanks, etc...), clean the habitats, and then return the animals. One night, exhausted from a full day of school and a shift at his other job, Al was careless in moving an electric eel back into its tank. The eel bit him, and he received a jolt of electricity that hurt in a way he had never experienced. After several minutes the pain subsided and Al cleaned up the mess he had caused, finished up his work, and went home.

The next day, Al was shocked to discover that his entire body was crackling with electricity. He also found that he could generate a blast of electricity if he concentrated hard enough. He assumed it was a result of the eel bite, but he wasn't smart enough to understand the science of it (nor did he particularly care). He now had a super-power. And like most kids, Al idolized the super-heroes he saw on TV. And even though there was no money in it (in fact, he realized he would be making less money because of the time demand), Al knew that he wanted to use his new-found gift to become a hero himself.



ATLAS

Real Name: George Adams

Age: 24

Height: 5'6"

Weight: 250 lbs

Powers: Atlas is super strong.

Back Story:

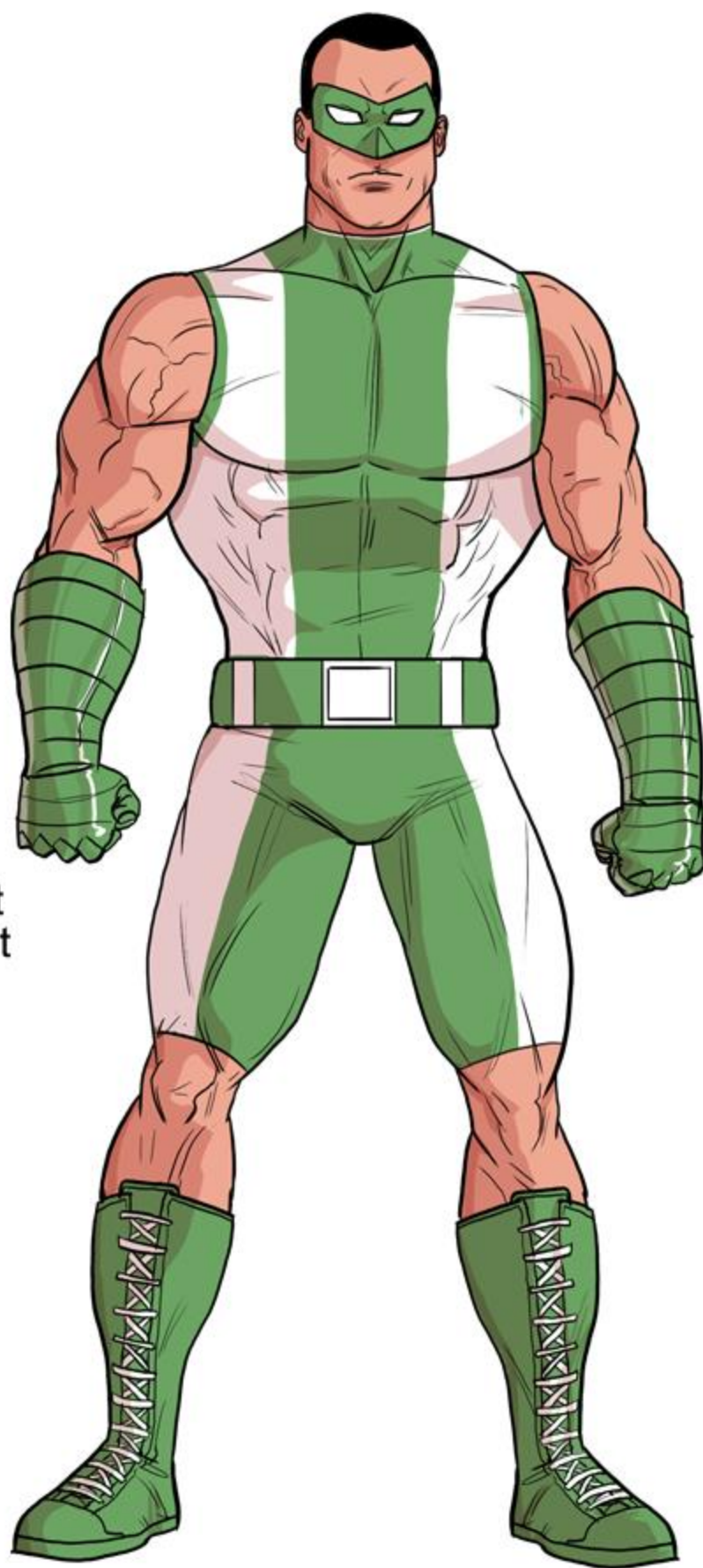
George was a happy child. Raised by a single mother, she worked hard to provide him with everything he needed. His father was a marine during Operation Desert Storm and was killed in combat. George was born without his father ever meeting him.

But George's mother was (and still is) a very religious woman. A devout Catholic, she managed her grief with the knowledge that everything happened according to "God's plan." She didn't allow the death of her husband to consume her, and instead focused on raising an incredible son.

George's childhood was a happy balance between schoolwork, friends, and church. His mother wasn't rich, but between her husband's death benefits and her own job, she was able to provide adequately for her family. But George wanted more for his mother, and he knew that good grades would mean acceptance to a good college, and a successful career, the money from which he could help take care of her.

School wasn't always easy for him, though. Being one of the few Latino students in a small school in a rural Chicago suburb, George often felt like an outsider. He had a small group of friends with whom he was very close, and very loyal. In elementary school, George was the one his friends turned to to ward off the attacks of bullies. He may not have been tall, but he was stocky, and stronger than he appeared. They were a small group, but they were happy together.

Aside from school and friends, George was also kept busy by his church. Sunday services, bible study, the food pantry, community outreach... George participated in all of it. It made him happy to not only serve his community and God, but to be able to share the experience with his mother. When he was twelve, George and his mother were driving home from church during a thunderstorm when lightning struck a tree near the road. The tree collapsed toward the road in front of them, and George's mother was unable to swerve out of the way. The tree fell onto the car. George was mostly uninjured, but his mother was trapped, her legs pinned beneath the crushed roof of the car and tree.



Atlas Continued

Back Story:

George didn't know what to do. But he knew he needed to help his mother who was crying in pain. He got out of the car and tried to lift the tree off it, but it was too big. As the rain poured down, the thunder roaring over the cries of his mother, George prayed. He prayed for the strength to help his mother. And in what he would later describe to his priest as a miracle, George poured every ounce of strength and will into lifting the tree, and succeeded. George pushed the collapsed roof of the car off his mother and was able to pull her free from the car. Knowing how skeptical the world could be, George kept the details of the rescue secret.

The strength didn't fade. George tested himself continuously after the accident, and always found that he was still super-strong. George knew the danger of power without discipline, so he took up wrestling, boxing, and martial arts. George didn't like to fight, but he needed to know that if he had to he would be able to control his strength.

After high school, George joined the Marines. He wanted to honor his father's memory as well as give back to his country. But his heart wasn't really in it, and when his four year tour of duty was over, George returned home. Between his good grades in high school and years of military service, he found it easy to find a job. George also continued his volunteer work at the church, but he wanted to do more. George believed that his strength was a gift from God, and that he should be using it to do His will.

He prayed long and hard and finally came to a decision: George would use his power to help the people of Chicago.



FROSTBITE

Real Name: Walter Jefferson

Age: 32

Height: 6'2"

Weight: 195 lbs

Powers: Frostbite can freeze objects near him and shoot ice blasts from his hands.

Back Story:

Walter grew up in Hyde Park, a racially integrated, middle class neighborhood on the south side of Chicago. Neither the subtle (and not so subtle) racism that plagued many of the other middle class neighborhoods, nor the gang violence that plagued the lower class sections were an issue for Walter. He was able to grow up without the shame and anger of so many young black youths. Walter was mild-mannered and cool headed; traits that served him well in all aspects of his life.

His parents (lawyer father and doctor mother) extolled the virtues of a good education to him and his siblings. As such, Walter was an astute student in school, studied hard at home, and earned high grades. He always knew he was bound for college and a white collar job, and despite his racism-free childhood, he wanted a career in which he could champion social justice. Walter decided to follow in his father's footsteps and become a lawyer.

But after a year in the county Public Defender's Office, Walter was overworked, underpaid, and worst of all, he didn't feel like he was really making a difference. There had to be a better fit for him. Walter had been editor of his high school newspaper and was invited to join the law review in his second year at law school (becoming editor in his third year). He understood the power of the pen and thought his talents and mission could best be served in that medium. He interviewed with the Chicago Herald and was hired on as a copy-editor. Three years (and several promotions) later, he was promoted to Assistant Editor.

That winter, Chicago experience one of the worst blizzards in its history. Over 21 inches of snow fell in less than a 48 hour period. Walter had been working late and got caught in the storm. While driving home, he lost control of his car and ended up in a ditch. The poor conditions and visibility made it impossible that anyone would see his car and be able to help him. He was unconscious for several hours before awakening to discover he was trapped in the car. Worse, one of his car's windows had broken and snow was beginning to accumulate inside. Walter yelled for help, but to no avail. He was unable to reach his cell phone.



Frostbite Continued

Back Story:

After several more hours, the car continued to fill with snow and the temperature dropped to dangerously low levels. Eventually Walter lost consciousness, assuming he was going to die. And he should have. But he didn't. The next day, the snow finally slowed and Walter's car was discovered. Mostly buried in snow, his car was pulled from the ditch. The emergency personnel that found Walter were certain he was dead, but they found a faint pulse and rushed him to the hospital.

Walter made a full recovery. In fact, his exposure to the cold and snow didn't seem to impact his health at all. The doctors couldn't explain it. But Walter didn't much care. He was just happy to be alive. It was several months later, during an intense May heat wave, that Walter woke up in the morning covered in ice and snow. He thought for certain he was the victim of a prank, but he quickly realized that the cold wasn't bothering him. He could barely feel it. A few days after that, Walter was taking a glass out of a cabinet when it froze in his hand. The shock caused him to drop it and it shattered. It was then that Walter realized it was him. Somehow the night in the blizzard had changed him. Had given him powers.

But what to do with them?



CHICAGO'S HEROES



Mr. Marvelous

Real Name: Kevin Fell

Age: 30

Height: 6'4"

Weight: 235 lbs

Powers: Flight, Enhanced strength, Invulnerability

Back Story:

When Kevin was five years old, his parents revealed a startling secret: They were not his real parents. They explained that four years prior, while driving home from a night out, a meteor crashed to earth just up the road. When they got to the crash site, Kevin's father got out of the car and inspected the area. Lying in the middle of the crater was a one year old baby, Kevin.

Distrustful of the government and what it would do with the child, his father picked him up, carried him to the car, and brought him home. That night his parents discussed what to do. Not having children of their own, they finally decided they would keep the child, making up a story about a family tragedy that resulted in them needing to adopt the baby. A little bit of time, a lot of research, and a few bribes later, they had the paperwork to back-up their story. Kevin grew up in Normal, Illinois, a small town about two hours south-west of Chicago. His parents were both professors at the local university and did their best to provide him with a "normal" childhood. School, friends, birthday parties... Whatever a typical child would grow up with.

But he wasn't a typical child. Kevin was stronger than his peers. He didn't feel pain when he knew he ought to. And when he was twelve, he fell off the roof while helping his father clean the gutters, and he flew! All of this he kept hidden, afraid of what his life would become if people discovered his secret.

Which isn't to say he didn't use his gifts for his own benefit. Football is the name of the game in Normal, and Kevin knew that his abilities would allow him to dominate. In high school, he tried out for the team and immediately earned a spot on the varsity squad. He excelled as a running back, his strength and invulnerability allowing him to blow through defenders. He became the school's highest scorer, and carried the team to four consecutive championship titles. It didn't take long for colleges to come calling.

Pride and the adulation of the locals kept him in town at the local university. But his talent didn't translate well at the college level. Kevin always relied on his strength to perform and never learned the proper technique or strategy for the position. Despite his abilities, his performance suffered. Kevin was eventually benched and then cut from the team in his sophomore year. Humiliated, he quit school and returned home.



MR. MARVELOUS CONTINUED

Back Story:

His parents died a few years later. Ready for a fresh start, Kevin sold their house and moved to Chicago. When he saw how the people and the media treated the local super-heroes, he knew that that's what he wanted to do. He cobbled together a simple costume and joined the fight under the moniker, Mr. Marvelous. With his abilities, it didn't take long before he was making headlines.

But the headlines weren't always good. Mr. Marvelous wasn't always aware of the collateral damage that ensued during a fight, and innocent bystanders sometimes got hurt. Kevin couldn't understand why the people just didn't stay out of harm's way. But he also knew that something would have to change if he were going to gain popularity. He needed a way to prevent the injuries.

He needed a sidekick.



Atalanta

Real Name: Nicole “Nikki” Maheras

Age: 26

Height: 6’2”

Weight: 170 lbs

Powers: Enhanced strength, Superior fighting skills, Magical swords



Back Story:

Nikki always knew she was special. Her mother told her so. Growing up she was always a little bit stronger, a little bit faster, a little bit BETTER than her peers. When she turned 13 her mother finally explained why.

She was the direct descendant of an actual Greek Goddess: Atalanta.

As legend has it, Atalanta was a great hunter and warrior. But she drew her strength from her chastity. So when Atalanta finally fell in love and consummated the relationship, she was cursed by Artemis (to whom she had plead her fealty) to live out the rest of her days on Earth among the humans. However, this did not stop Atalanta from continuing to live the life of a warrior, nor from raising the daughter born of her failed love.

And for every generation thereafter, the first born daughter (born with a portion of the power of the original goddess) inherited the mantle of Atalanta, and sworn to protect those who needed her most.

And so did Nikki inherit the mantle from her mother (along with a pair of really awesome swords).

Genuinely kind and honest, she lives with a secret: That while she must find a suitable companion with whom to conceive the next Atalanta (a companion whom she needs to truly love), she will forfeit her power to that daughter.

And giving up that power is not something Nikki has any inclination to do.



Captain Celerity

Real Name: Brian Donald

Age: 34

Height: 6'

Weight: 195 lbs

Powers: Super-Speed

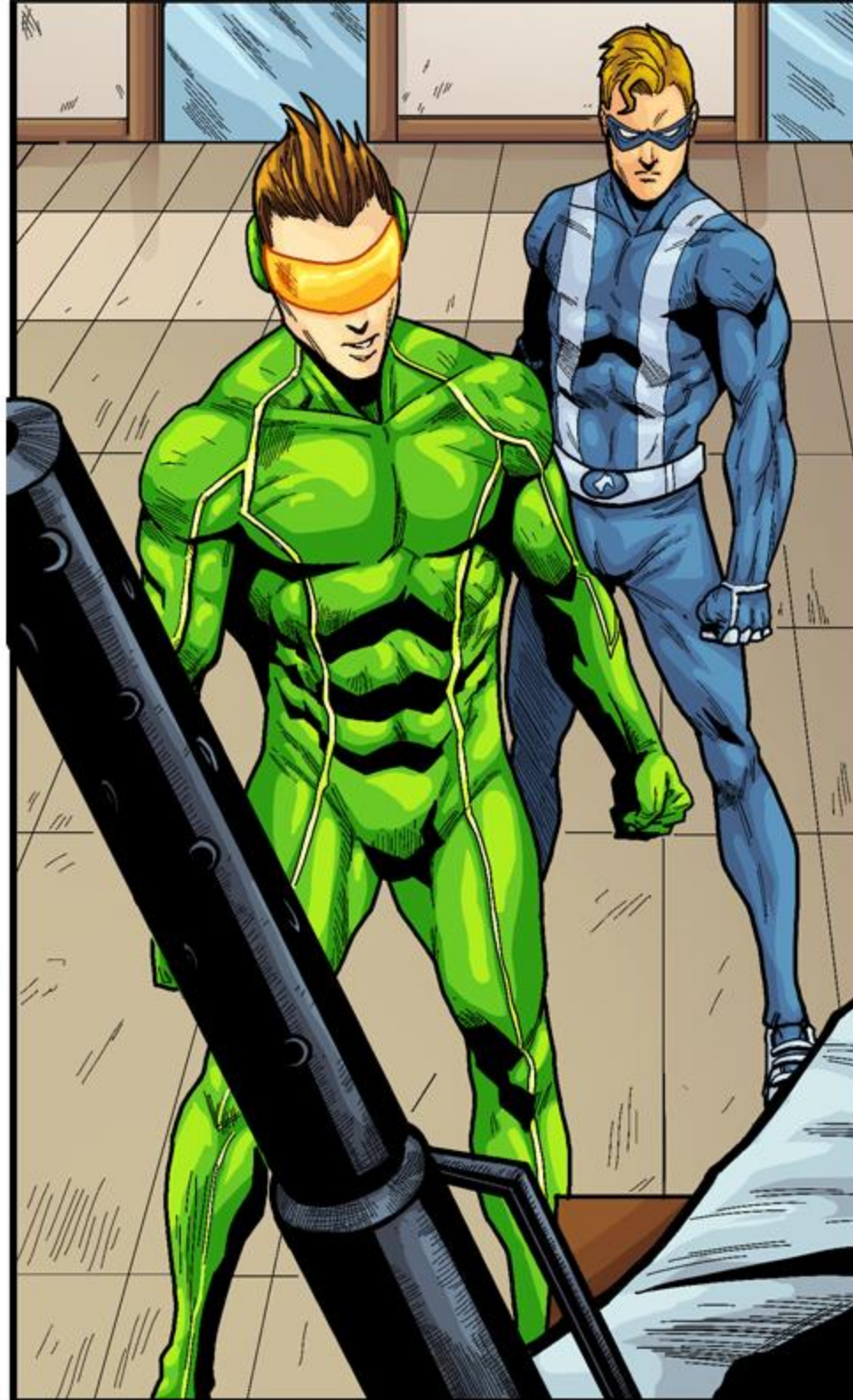
Back Story:

As a child, Brian was always fast. And he only got faster as he got older. Realizing that he was one of the lucky few on the planet to be born with super-powers, Brian kept his gift a secret. But not such a secret that he didn't win every race he entered.

Earning a track and field scholarship to a top university, Brian shattered local, state and national records. It wasn't long before the Olympic team came calling. Hungry for the attention and adulation, Brian joined the US Olympic team. In his first Olympic outing, he broke four world records. Four years later, he broke them again (but never by enough to make his feats seem illegitimate).

But the glory of the Olympics soon faded. Brian needed the attention. So he did what any ambitious, self-absorbed, super-powered twenty-something would do: he became a Super-Hero.

Moving to Chicago (a city without another speedster to rival), Brian quickly established himself as **Captain Celerity**: *Chicago's fastest Super-Hero!*



Flying Fox

Real Name: Howard “Howie” Urgayle

Age: 28

Height: 6’2”

Weight: 210 lbs

Powers: Genius intelligence, Superior fighting skills, Gadgets

Back Story:

When Howie was a child, he and his parents were on their way home from a movie when a man with a gun stopped them. The man demanded his father turn over his wallet and watch. But when he grabbed for Howie's mother's pearl necklace, his father sprung into action. A former Navy SEAL, there was no way he would allow this human filth to touch his wife. Howie's father broke both of the would-be mugger's arms, and beat him so badly he was in the hospital for three months (until eventually being transferred to prison).

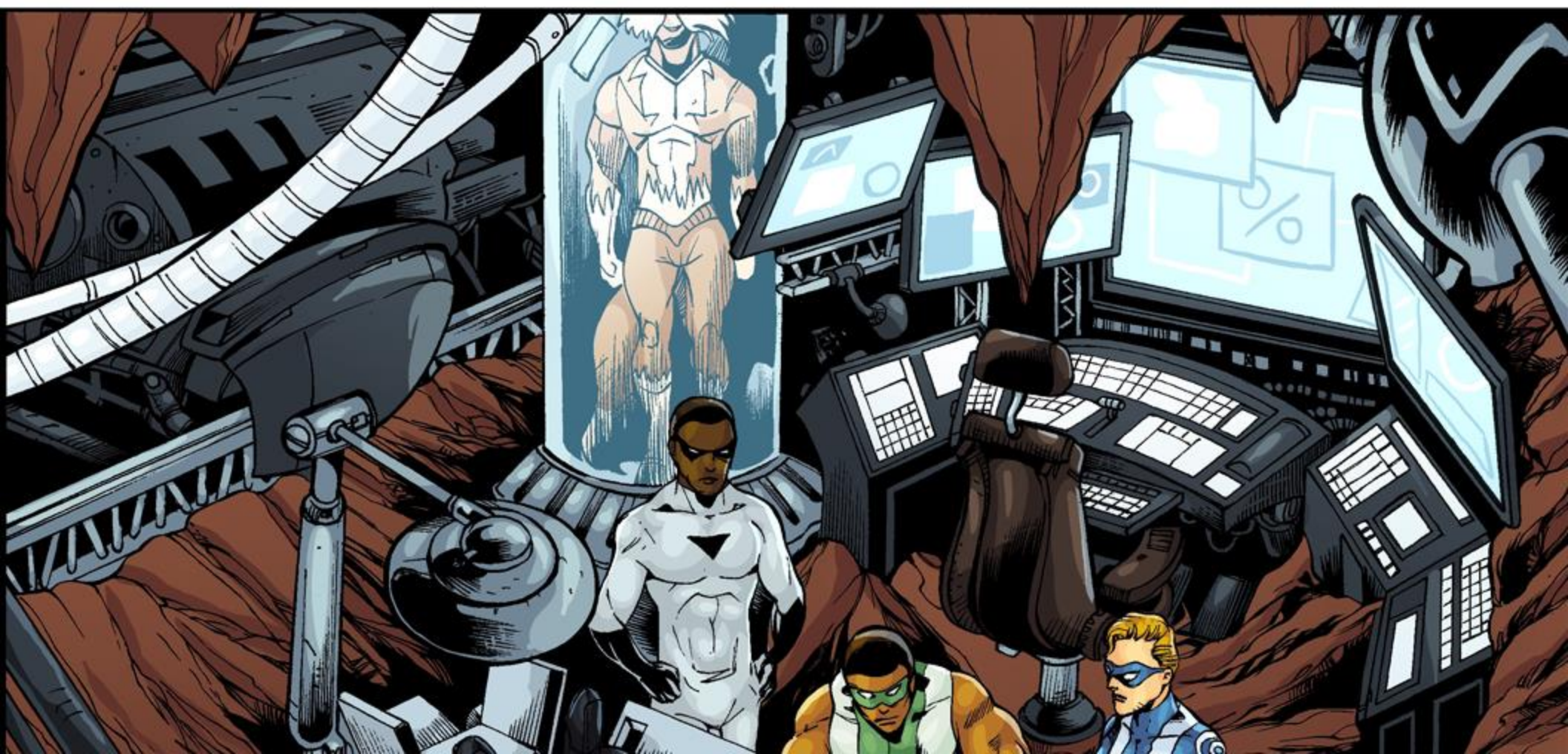
Howie learned a valuable lesson that day: *Protect what's yours.*

Growing up as the only child of a wealthy, business oriented family, Howie had it all. At 18, Howie followed in his father's footsteps, joining the military, and eventually Special Forces.

After 10 years, he returned home and worked as the CFO for his father's multi-billion dollar company. Five years after that, his father retired to Nepal, leaving Howie in charge.

But never forgetting the lesson of that fateful day at the movies, Howie wanted to do more. Given his particular skill set, Howie fell easily into the life of a crime-fighting super-hero.

He now uses his vast resources to lay siege to Chicago's underworld.



The Scepter

Real Name: Asim-Jabari (A.J.) Abasi

Age: 28

Height: 5'10"

Weight: 200 lbs

Powers: Energy blasts channeled through a magical scepter.

Back Story:

While on an archaeological dig in Egypt as a student pursuing his Ph.D, AJ discovered the scepter. Upon touching the ancient artifact he could feel its power coursing through him.

Keeping the scepter secret, AJ smuggled it back to his apartment in Chicago.

Through seemingly endless experimentation, AJ learned how to channel the energy of the scepter to generate blasts, shields, and several other energy manifestations. Running with the Egyptian theme, AJ designed a suitable costume and took up the mantle of **The Scepter**.

Author's Note:

It should be noted that A.J. is, in fact, of Arabian descent.

He was originally written as just another white American, but as I fleshed out his back story I realized I was falling into the same trap of so many other Egyptian themed characters: namely, not having a direct link to the heritage or culture being represented.

In Arabic, the name **Asim** means "*protector, cuardian, or defender*" and **Jabari** means "*Bringer of comfort.*"



THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS



CRIMSON

Real Name: Paul Lloyd

Age: 50

Height: 6'4"

Weight: 190 lbs

Powers: Genius intelligence, Gadgets

Back Story:

Paul Lloyd was always smart. Very smart. Talented and gifted programs. Skipped grades. Early college acceptance. By the time he was twenty, he had Masters degrees in Computer Science **AND** Business Administration. But it was the 80s, and he didn't so much as want to save the world, as *rule* it.

Paul understood that money made the world go 'round. His combined degrees made him a prime target for head hunters from brokerage houses. Paul settled in at a Chicago firm writing software for their portfolio insurance division.

It was this same software that alerted him to the impending stock market crash of 1987. Paul could have sounded the alarm, and perhaps prevented the inevitable selling onslaught that feeds a crash, but he instead decided to exploit his advantage. He used a private, off-shore account to sell the market short, feeding into the crash, until he finally rebought his positions and established a large portfolio of stocks when his algorithms told him the market had bottomed out. By the time the market recovered a few years later, Paul was one of the wealthiest men in Chicago.

He established his own brokerage firm, Sanguine Securities, and set about using his superior intelligence to game the market to his advantage.

But it wasn't enough. Paul wanted to manipulate the market beyond what he could do with his computer programs and algorithms. He wanted more direct control. His research took him to New York, where super-hero fights could impact the daily trading of the market depending on the location and collateral damage to important buildings. Now **that** was something he could control.

Paul spent months tinkering on armor and gadgets, everything he would need to become a costumed villain. When his costume was finally ready, he once again turned to his computer programs to determine the best locations and businesses to damage in a battle. Ready to exploit the impending market impact, Paul stepped onto the streets of Chicago as Crimson. His plan worked. Sanguine Securities became the largest brokerage house in Chicago. And it wasn't long before Crimson became the most talked about villain.

But Paul was only getting started. If he was finding such success controlling the actions of one villain, what if he could control the actions of **ALL** the villains?



PROFESSOR PAIN

Real Name: Jasper James

Age: 58

Height: 5'8"

Weight: 150 lbs

Powers: Electric blasts

Back Story:

Jasper got his first chemistry set when he was eight. He *loved* it. Unlike most kids who just mix random chemicals together in the hopes of creating an explosion, Jasper followed the directions. *Precisely*. It was a passion that never faded. In high school, he excelled in math and science, particularly chemistry and biology. He just didn't know what to do with his aptitude.

It wasn't until graduate school that he narrowed his passion for biochemistry down to genetic engineering. There was just *something* about manipulating life at its most basic, fundamental level that piqued his interest. Having lived through an oil crisis, Jasper was obsessed with developing alternative energies, and he was convinced that the future of energy lie in biologicals.

A research grant provided him with enough money to form his own research group. He began by experimenting on electric eels. Successes were slow and few, but Jasper did manage to genetically modify eels to generate shocks of greater voltage. But then he had an idea: Could he genetically engineer *other* animals to **also** generate electricity?

Jasper spent years splicing the altered eel DNA with other animals, trying to get them to replicate the eel's abilities. He was met with failure after failure. It wasn't long until the grant money dried up and his financial backers pulled their funding. Jasper was left alone with a research laboratory in which he couldn't afford to keep the lights on.

But he was obsessed. He *knew* he could make it work. It was just a matter of creating the right formula, just like his chemistry set as a child. Jasper maxed out credit cards and borrowed money from loan sharks. Anything to keep his research going. And it paid off. Jasper successfully transferred the eel's powers to a frog. From that success it didn't take long to genetically engineer electric mice, cats, sheep, and finally a monkey.

By then, Jasper was in a dangerous amount of debt. He knew he could patent the process and make a fortune selling it to energy companies or the government, but both had abandoned him in his time of need. Neither had believed in him enough to continue to provide funding. Jasper was *angry*.

In his anger, Jasper did something he knew a researcher should never do. He experimented on himself. But it worked. He could generate an electric shock just like the eels!

Jasper realized this could be the solution to his money problems. He could sell "powers" to people. But he would need more than just electric shocks. Jasper immediately started research on other animals: Cheetah speed, falcon sight, ant strength.

But Jasper wouldn't sell to just anybody. He still had a score to settle with the government and corporations that wronged him. But turning criminals into *super*-criminals? That sounded lucrative.



FERROUS

Real Name: Aarav Vikram

Age: 52

Height: 6'2"

Weight: 180 lbs

Powers: Magnetism manipulation

Back Story:

Aarav was born in India, the child of wealthy parents. His father owned the largest iron mining operation in the country. The company's success was owed to a revolutionary mining tool: a magnetic "bomb" that would literally rip the iron from the mine walls. Traditional mining techniques are labor intensive and result in a large amount of waste. But by using the mag-bomb, the company was able to increase the amount of ore mined, decrease the amount of labor needed, and eliminate the waste; all of which meant money added directly to the company's bottom line.

One day, Aarav was exploring a mine while his father was conducting some business. But he got lost and wasn't sure if he was going back out the same way he came in. Aarav followed a trail of lights left by some of his father's laborers, and it led him to a wide opening in the mine. But in the middle of the opening was a mag-bomb. Just as Aarav was turning to run away from the bomb it exploded.

He was found shortly afterward by some miners who quickly alerted his father and the onsite medical staff. The doctors were certain that Aarav's exposure to such a high intensity electro-magnetic radiation would kill him. But it didn't. In fact, Aarav would eventually come to discover that his exposure to the radiation actually gave him the power to manipulate magnetic energies. A power that he kept secret.

Aarav always knew he would someday take over the company from his father, but he was growing impatient. By his mid-twenties he believed he was ready, but his father was unwilling to step aside. Finally, Aarav had had enough. He knew that it was the mag-bomb that gave his father's company its edge, but Aarav had something better. He had himself.

Aarav withdrew money from his Trust fund to purchase an old, abandoned mine and established his own business. When his father found out he revoked Aarav's access to the Trust and cut him off financially. But it was too late. Even old mines contain iron, though it is usually too difficult and expensive to extract. Aarav walked through the mine, touching the walls, the floor, the ceiling, testing the limits of his powers. He was successful. From that one abandoned mine he was able to extract a small fortune's worth of iron.

Aarav continued to buy up used mines, extracting the leftover iron. His competitors were baffled. They just could not understand how Aarav was succeeding with the used mines. Not even his father could figure it out. But even that success was not enough for Aarav. If he could be that successful with the used mines, just imagine what he could do with a new one. He purchased one of his mid-sized competitors and began exploiting new deposits. Aarav was extracting iron faster and cheaper than even he had calculated. It wasn't long before his company's only real rival was his father's.

In order to overtake his father's business, Aarav knew he needed to expand beyond India. He turned his sights to Brazil, Ukraine, South Africa, and other countries where he could bribe the governments to give him exclusive rights to their mines. It didn't bother him in the slightest that often times his mining operations meant the displacement of native tribes or endangered animal habitats.



MERCENARY

Real Name: Louis Kenn

Age: 50

Height: 6'

Weight: 190 lbs

Powers: Superior hand/eye coordination, Armor

Back Story:

Louis Kenn loved to play soldier. With three older brothers and a father who fought in Korea, he always had someone willing to play with him. So it came as no surprise to his family when, during his senior year of high school, he dropped out to join the military.

For Louis, the 80s were a boring time to be a soldier. The Cold War was cooling down, and outside of a few localized skirmishes there wasn't much action to be had. But he wasn't idle. Louis used that time to familiarize himself with all of the military weaponry at his disposal, and master their use. He held his brigade's record for field stripping and reassembling his service rifle (blindfolded), and was the only soldier to consistently score a 250 out of 250 on the shooting range. He was one of the deadliest soldiers in the Army's arsenal. There just wasn't a war in which to unleash him.

Louis finally got some action in small affairs in Bolivia, Honduras, and Panama which earned him several military honors and promotions.

But Gunnery Sergeant Louis Kenn saw the writing on the wall during the first Gulf War. In the build-up to the ground invasion he thought he was finally going to have a war in which to prove his expertise. But the combat operations only lasted for four days. Louis couldn't understand why they weren't allowed to finish the job by marching on Baghdad. But he also noticed that ground troops were being relied upon less and less, with "smart" weapons being used more and more. Soldiers were literally being replaced. He realized men with his skill set were growing obsolete in the military, and if he wanted to continue to thrive he would need to get out of the military proper and join the industrial complex.

It was harder than he thought. Louis set up a private security services contracting firm in Virginia with a few of his Army buddies expecting that with their expertise they could secure several contracts. But despite their vast weapons knowledge, combat experience, and military contacts, they were too late to the game. Others were already occupying the space providing advanced weaponry and training to the US military.

For the first time in his life, Louis was unsure of his future. But then he realized, the military weren't the only groups in need of advanced weaponry and training. If the US government didn't want his expertise, he would take his wares to the black market.



QUARREL

Real Name: Nathan Johns

Age: 54

Height: 6'8"

Weight: 350 lbs

Powers: Emotion manipulation

Back Story:

Even as a child, Nathan was persuasive. He always got his way. Whether it was getting his parents to raise his allowance, getting store clerks to give him discounts, getting teachers to extend deadlines, getting dates... No one seemed to be immune to Nathan's charm and reasoning. And it didn't seem to have anything to do with his immense size. Nathan was built **big** and **strong**. But he didn't like to use his size to intimidate others. He preferred to use his words.

It only made sense that he would become a lawyer.

Nathan never questioned his power of persuasion. He just assumed it was a part of who he was. And he was right, in a manner of speaking. It was during a particularly difficult trial that he realized his powers of persuasion may actually **be** powers. The Partners in the law firm where he was working hand-picked him to first chair a murder trial for the son of a wealthy client. They had been told of Nathan's miraculous success in getting what he wanted, and they needed someone with his abilities. The son was guilty. And *everybody* knew it. Nathan was the firm's only hope, and he was blowing it.

He wasn't used to jury trials, let alone a murder defense. He was more comfortable negotiating contracts for the firm's business accounts (that's where the money is). The trial was going against him in just about every way possible. By the time he reached his closing remarks he knew he had a huge loss on his hands. Just as he finished, he sat down, exhausted and frustrated, and with every bit of will he could muster, looked at the jury and said, "You must find my client not guilty." At the time Nathan swore he imagined it, but when he said those words, he saw the eyes of all the members of the jury flash blue.

The deliberation only lasted five minutes. Everyone suspected it was because the guilty verdict was so easy to come by. Even the judge couldn't contain his shock when he read the verdict handed to him from the foreman: *Not Guilty*. The courtroom was stunned. None more so than Nathan. He knew that somehow, he **caused** the jury to vote the way he wanted.

After that, everybody wanted a piece of Nathan. He had his pick of the most lucrative offers he could ever have imagined. But he realized, if indeed he did have some special power, what did he need these others for? And using his incredible powers to further his law career seemed petty. Nathan didn't want just money. He wanted *influence* too. And that meant lobbying. It was such a natural fit for Nathan, and with his powers he became the top lobbyist in Chicago, bending politicians to his will while making a sizeable profit.



VILLAIN SIDEKICKS



TOBOR

Real Name: Anthony Mosca

Age: 28

Height: 6'2"

Weight: 210 lbs

Powers: Cyborg: Increased Intelligence;
Armored Skin; Gadgets

Back Story:

Anthony was smart, but lazy. A common complaint from his parents and teachers was that he was not living up to his potential. He just didn't feel like expending the energy to do things he didn't have an interest in. And aside from playing on his computer, that included nearly everything.

In high school, he hacked into his school's computer network and stole tests ahead of the exams. In college, he wrote a computer program that could right papers for him by scouring the internet for similar papers and cobbling together an "original" work from stolen paragraphs and sentences. Anthony was all about taking the shortcuts in life. Given his computer skills, it wasn't hard for him to get a job in the flourishing tech industry.

But he had no passion for the job. To Anthony, it was just a paycheck. And when it was announced that Paul Lloyd, founder and C.E.O. of Sanguine Securities, was going to host a reality television show to compete for a job in his company, Anthony finally got excited. Sanguine Securities was known for its cutting edge technology, and the opportunity to work for a genius like Paul Lloyd was alluring.

Anthony got straight to work, hacking into the television production company's website and made sure that his application was moved up the chain of command. He also edited the applications of other strong candidates to sabotage their chances. Through Anthony's relentless manipulation of the casting process, he secured himself a spot on the show. He won. But it wasn't easy. Not only did Anthony have to vastly increase the subtlety of his sabotage of the other players, but for some tasks he just legitimately had to work harder. It was a difficult transition for Anthony, but he managed. And the hard work was worth it given the prize: A one-year contract working directly under Paul Lloyd.

Anthony loved working for Sanguine. He now had access to technology years beyond what he could purchase through the retail market. He was amazed at the incredible programming Paul Lloyd had, and was eager to learn everything Lloyd could teach him. But one day about a month into his new job, he got bored at lunch and decided to test his abilities against one of the most protected servers in the world. The security software was the most impressive he had ever seen, but he took his time, avoided any actions that could trigger an alarm, and successfully hacked his way into the personal files of all of the employees. Including Paul Lloyd.

Anthony created a back door into the system so he could access it remotely, and that night he logged into the system from home to sift through the files. What he found was astonishing. Paul Lloyd was manipulating several aspects of the world economy. And not only that, but some of the action plans contained in the files coincided with attacks made by the super-villain, Crimson. Several hours of research later, and Anthony was convinced that Paul Lloyd was Crimson.



TOBOR Continued

Back Story:

The next day at work, Mr. Lloyd called Anthony into his office. Paul told Anthony that he knew he hacked into the server. Paul seemed to be waiting for a response from him, but Anthony didn't know what to say, so he just remained silent. Finally, Mr. Lloyd asked Anthony if he saw anything of particular interest. Intimidated by the brilliance of the man, Anthony eventually muttered one word: Crimson.

Mr. Lloyd smiled and offered Anthony an opportunity. To work with him beyond the capacity of the contract. Anthony didn't even pause before answering in the affirmative. Mr. Lloyd took Anthony to a building that housed one of Sanguine Securities' holding companies. Inside, Anthony saw that it was some kind of laboratory/mechanical shop.

Mr. Lloyd laid out schematics for Anthony. They were for a robotic skeletal structure surrounded by human tissue and organs, a circulatory system flooded with nanites, all controlled by a human brain. A human that could take on the form and abilities of a robot. A cyborg of sorts.

Anthony considered all that he would be able to do with that technology within his body. He couldn't wait to get started.



BOOST

Real Name: Tenzin Namduk

Age: 32

Height: 5'4"

Weight: 125 lbs

Powers: Power Amplification

Back Story:

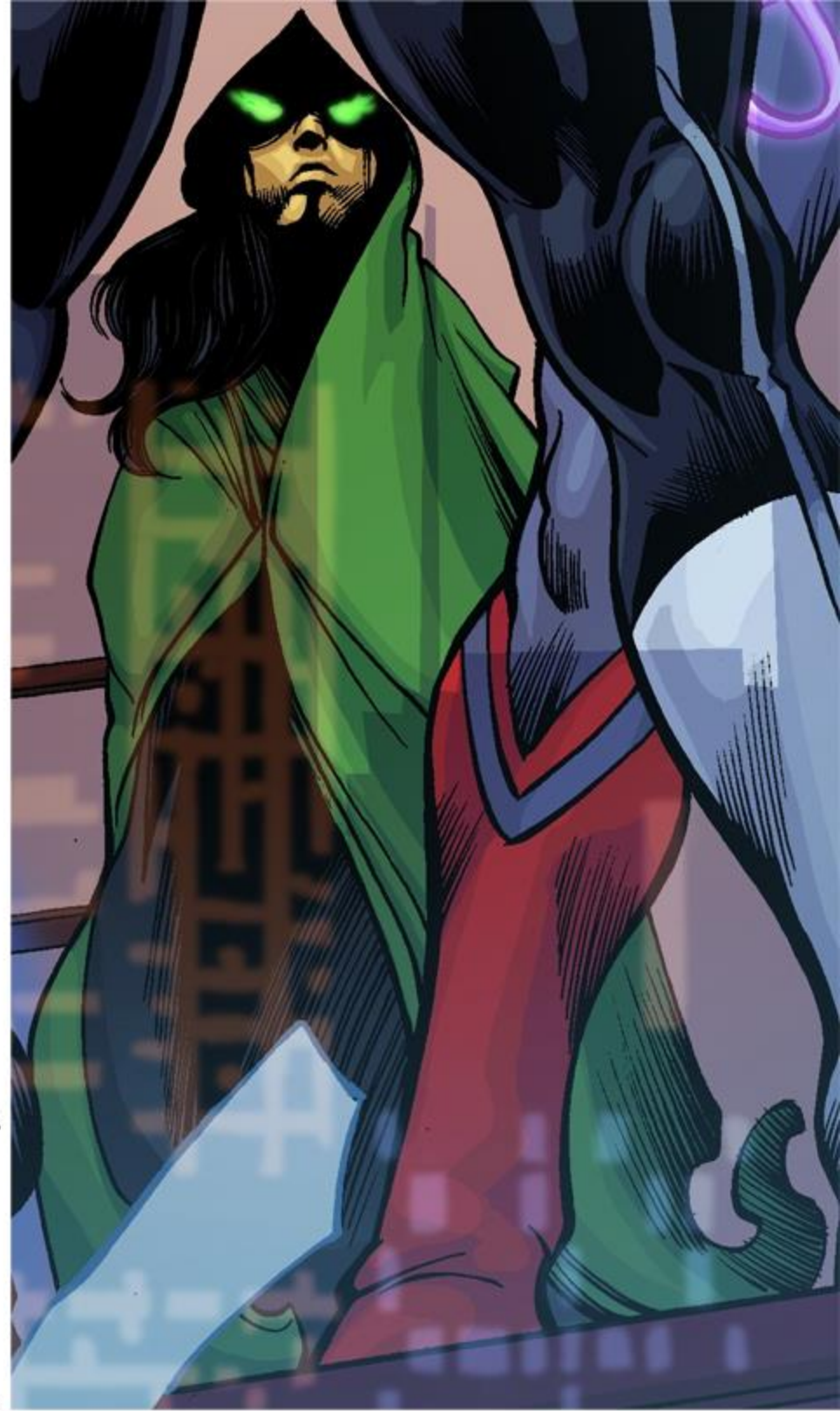
Tenzin's family fled Tibet for America after the failed uprising for independence from China in 1959. In America, her grandparents were active members in the civil rights movement and raised their children to be distrustful of government and to not be afraid to fight against it when necessary. They finally settled in a section of Chicago that was home to a relatively large population of Tibetan immigrants.

Raised in a traditional family, Tenzin attended both public school and religious school for Tibetan Buddhism. Meditation was a major focus of her religious upbringing, and she was intrigued by the prospect of achieving enlightenment. But she noticed that when she meditated, she didn't just *realize* herself, but she could also feel the energy of the living things near her. When she told the monks, they became excited and they increased her time studying with them.

After years of intense study with the monks, Tenzin was able to extend her awareness to not only feel the energy of plants and animals, but eventually other people. This was most pronounced when she was near the super-humans of Chicago. Tenzin noticed that when she was in close proximity to a super-powered human and in *touch* with their energy, their powers would increase. Super-strong became *stronger*. Energy blasts became more powerful. Heat and cold became more intense.

Tenzin knew that her gift could give a boost to the super-powered person of her choice. But which one? A lifetime of stories about the corruption of government made her wary of the *heroes* of Chicago who seemed to make it their mission to maintain the status quo. As individuals they may have believed they were protecting the city, but in practice they were little more than fascists protecting the moneyed interests of the establishment elites.

Tenzin felt more of a kindred spirit with the so-called *villains* of Chicago, who, at the very least, were fighting against the entrenched government and capitalist bureaucracy. She just needed to find the right one with whom to share her abilities.



BURST

Real Name: Ryan Butt

Age: 24

Height: 5'8"

Weight: 175 lbs

Powers: Can Create Plasma Bombs

Back Story:

Ryan was an angry child. It really wasn't his fault. If your last name was "Butt" you probably would have been angry too. He got picked on pretty badly by the other kids in his school, so he avoided going whenever possible. It resulted in a very lonely childhood.

The teasing didn't get any better as he got older. Kids can be cruel, but teenagers are vicious. By his senior year of high school, Ryan was ready to kill somebody. He *wanted* to kill somebody. But he wasn't crazy. He joined the army.

Boot Camp was harder than he expected. But at least the drill sergeants taunted everyone equally. Ryan discovered it was easier to handle the abuse now that he had an entire unit of recruits to commiserate with. Armed with a newfound sense of self-confidence, Ryan thrived.

His first deployment was to Afghanistan as part of a spring troop *surge*. For the first time in his life Ryan was truly happy. Because for the first time in his life, *he* was the one with the power. And there wasn't much in the way of oversight. Sure, he would get mildly reprimanded every so often for excessive force with detainees or for treating the locals too aggressively, but for the most part, Ryan had free reign to treat others the way others had always treated him. And he reveled in it.

Nearing the end of his first tour in Afghanistan Ryan was injured in an insurgent attack. While recovering in the hospital he was visited by an officer he had never met before. Ryan was told that he had a very rare blood type which made him eligible for a special program. Intrigued, Ryan agreed to join.

The program turned out to be bio-chemical research to design a performance-enhancing drug for soldiers. But prior experimentation showed it only affected people with Ryan's rare blood type. And even though, the effects were inconsistent. Ryan began weekly injections of the drug, but otherwise continued with his normal duties (plus the weekly physical to test for enhanced abilities).

Ryan was disappointed. After a month, he had still not developed any new abilities. While out on patrol one night, Ryan inadvertently stepped on a land mine. The explosion was blinding and knocked him off his feet. By the time he hit the ground, Ryan was certain he was a dead man. But he didn't die. In fact, he wasn't even hurt. After several shocked moments, Ryan checked his hands and his feet, his arms and his legs, and his head and his chest. He was *fine*!



BURST Continued

Back Story:

Ryan dusted himself off and stood up. He had no explanation for how he survived the blast. And that's when he felt it. Deep inside the core of his body, he could feel a power surging. Suddenly, a yellow and red orb began to form in his hand. Startled, Ryan quickly threw the orb away. It was incredibly light and traveled several hundred yards. But when it landed... Ka-BOOM!

It took Ryan several seconds to realize the implications of what had just happened. He must have absorbed the power of the land mine explosion and channeled it into a bomb of his own making. This was what he had been waiting for. Ryan was thrilled. He couldn't wait until his next appointment with the research team so he could show them his new ability.

But there wouldn't be a next time. The next day the base suffered a violent attack by an insurgent group. One of the buildings destroyed in the attack was the research facility where Ryan got his injections. Neither the commander who recruited him for the project nor any of the researchers who Ryan knew survived the attack. He decided keeping his new ability a secret was the best course of action.

Ryan was concerned that without the weekly injection the power would fade, but it didn't. He could still feel the energy stored in his body. It wasn't long thereafter that the base was shut down, and his unit brought home. Ryan was unsure what to do. After all, what does someone with the ability to create massive plasma bombs and likes hurting people do if he's trying to keep his identity secret?



PULSE

Real Name: Mark Cassidy

Age: 26

Height: 5'10

Weight: 180 lbs

Powers: Light Blasts

Back Story:

Mark never knew his father. It didn't bother him, though, because his mother was awesome! They were always travelling. By the time he was nine, Mark had lived in fifteen different states and four different countries. Most kids would find that kind of instability stressful, but Mark loved it. His mother was always teaching him interesting things about the places they were living, and she always made time for him. She was his best friend.

So it was particularly devastating for him when she was arrested. Mark was stunned to discover that his mother was actually a notorious jewel thief, wanted the world over. But she was more than just a brilliant criminal. She also had the super-human ability to generate bursts of light which she used to blind anyone who might foil her current heist. Mark was sent to live with his aunt in Chicago. He was only twelve.

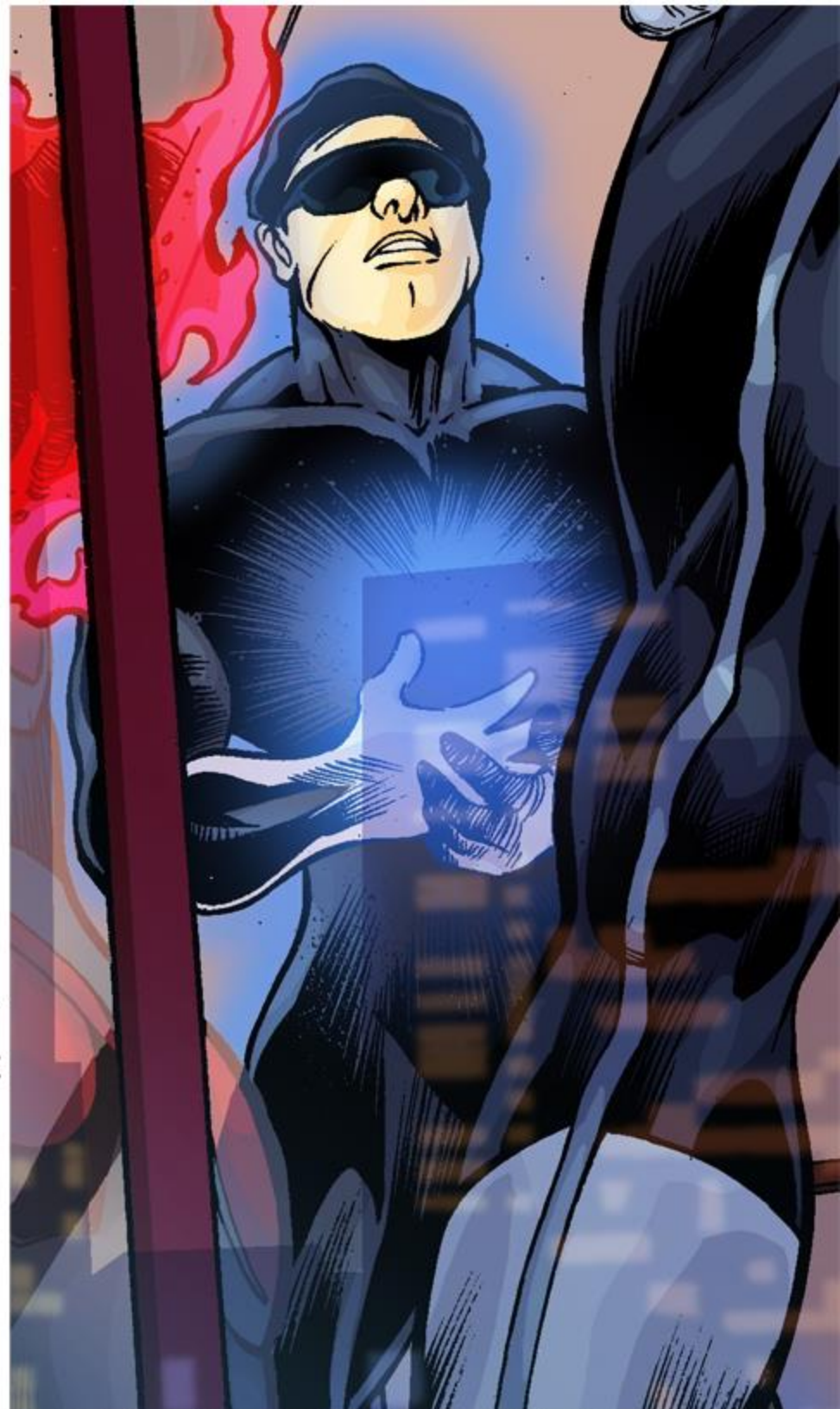
By the time Mark was sixteen he had racked up quite the rap sheet. Petty larceny, breaking and entering, and robbery kept him rotating through the revolving door of Chicago's juvenile detention facilities. But Mark had been warned: One more offense, and he would be tried as an adult.

The warning didn't stop him. Less than a month after his release from juvy, Mark found himself, yet again, in front of a judge. And just as he was warned, Mark was tried as an adult and sent to prison.

Prison was tough on Mark. He could handle his own among kids his own age, but now that he was mixed in with the adult population, he realized just how small and vulnerable he was. He did his best to keep to himself and avoid trouble, but one day in the yard he wasn't paying attention and bumped into another inmate who was playing cards, accidentally exposing his hand. The inmate set-upon Mark instantly, grabbing him and throwing him to the ground. But just as the inmate was closing in with clenched fists, Mark threw up his hands, protectively.

And a blinding, white ball of light shot from Mark's hand to the inmate's eyes. He let out a scream of pain, raised his hands to his eyes, and stumbled to the ground. Mark couldn't believe it. He had inherited his mother's powers. With a renewed sense of confidence, Mark stood up and surveyed the scene. And as the corrections officers were rushing into the yard to control the situation, Mark noticed the looks of fear on the faces of the other inmates.

Prison wasn't so tough for Mark after that. The other inmates gave him a wide berth, which suited him just fine. And when his prison sentence was up, Mark re-entered society with a renewed purpose: to live up to his mother's legacy. He crafted himself a costume and donned himself, Pulse, the same name his mother operated under. But Mark knew he didn't have the skills his mother did. If he was going to thrive he would need to team up with a more experienced partner.



STEALTH

Real Name: Felicia Knight

Age: 22

Height: 6'

Weight: 160 lbs

Powers: Aura of Invisibility

Back Story:

Felicia grew up in Englewood on the southwest side of Chicago. It's one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in the city, and growing up there, Felicia had to be tough. Even in elementary school a fight could break out over the slightest provocation. But Felicia's dad was an amateur boxer and taught her how to defend herself. The other kids learned quickly not to initiate a fight with her.

Education was very important to Felicia's parents. They were high school sweethearts but both dropped out before graduating when her mother became pregnant. They got married and struggled to give their daughter the best life they could provide. They knew how much they had lost by not finishing high school and not going to college, and they didn't want their daughter to miss out on those same opportunities.

Felicia didn't let them down. She was an excellent, straight "A" student. Her parents were incredibly proud. But what they didn't know was that Felicia wasn't earning her grades. She was cheating. And at night and on the weekends, when her parents thought she was studying, she was actually breaking into neighboring apartments and stealing anything of value she could find. Felicia had her own plans on how to carve a better life for herself.

When she started her senior year her guidance counselor told her she was on track to be her class's valedictorian. He also offered to get Felicia an internship as a lab assistant at Chicago City College. She accepted the offer imagining the access she would have on the campus to valuable items she could steal.

Felicia was initially disappointed with the internship. Her job was mostly just cleaning the lab and equipment. None of it seemed worth stealing. But when she overheard some of the graduate students discussing the diamond lenses used in the refraction chamber, she couldn't help but investigate.

She snuck into the lab that night armed with a jeweler's diamond tester. Once inside the refraction chamber she pried open some of the panels. Set at regular intervals running through the walls of the chamber were oval lenses. Felicia removed one of the lenses and used her tester. It was made from diamond! She went to grab for another lens when she accidentally pulled several wires out of a panel. Felicia couldn't remember exactly which wires were plugged in where, so she plugged them back in as best she could.



STEALTH Continued

Back Story:

Immediately, the chamber started to hum. Felicia could sense the danger she was in, but before she could flee the chamber there was a bright flash of light. She was momentarily blinded, but otherwise unharmed. Felicia put the panels back in place and quickly made her way home.

The next morning, Felicia started her usual morning routine, excited about the prospect of selling the diamond lens. It wasn't until she looked in the mirror that she realized she had been affected by the refraction chamber. She had no reflection! She was completely invisible. And not only that, but objects that she touched also turned invisible.

Felicia was terrified. What if she couldn't turn back? In her panic, she began to feel a tingling sensation surrounding her body. She could see in the mirror she was slowly becoming visible.

Once the initial shock wore off, Felicia started considering the possibilities. This new ability would certainly assist her in her night time activities.

