



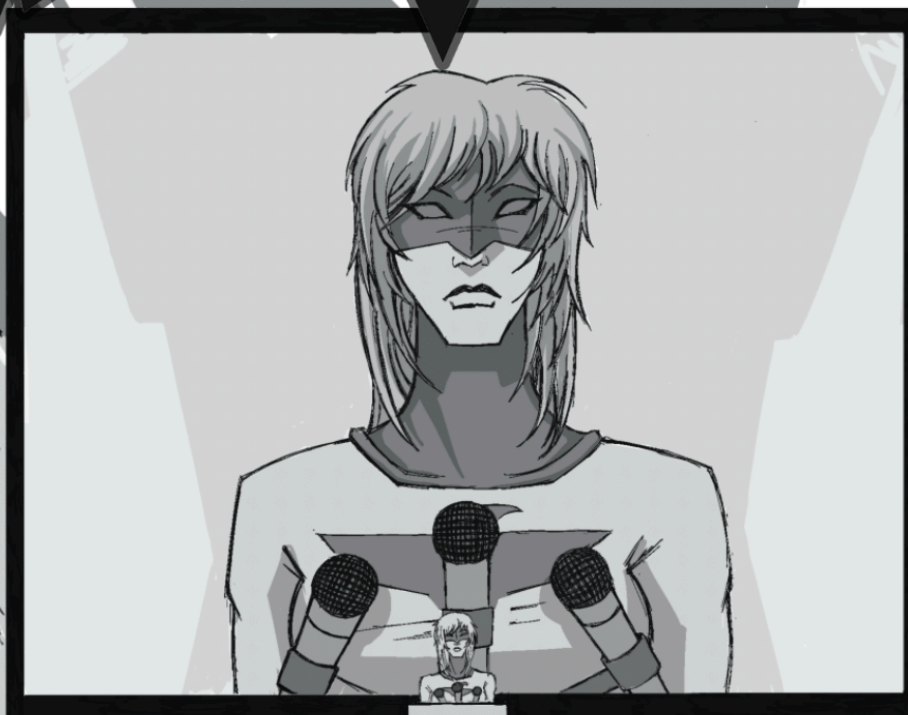
ABSURDIST

#5 OF 6

\$3

STRENGTH & COBALT

PITTSBURGH'S
RESIDENT
SUPERHEROES
VOLUME TWO



FEEDBACK LOOP

Part Four of Four
Finale

by Jude Profit

Liz Moto and **Eric Petersen**, seemingly normal librarians in love, have been living a double life as **Pittsburgh's Resident Superheroes**. With her expert skills in **deduction, armed combat** and **forensics**; along with his **impeccable aim** and **quick mouth**, they are...



Our young heroes have been protecting the public of Steel City for **five years** now. They encountered their first **super-villain** in the **King of Hearts** four months ago. It's Autumn of 2020, and things are only getting more complicated for **the sleuth** and **the archer**.

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13

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Siren & Cobalt

in

Feedback Loop

FINALE

The door to Audiophile's warehouse slammed shut as he walked into it, leaving Charade in the back alley. The villain trudged through his burning lair, grasping his bleeding face, leaving our young hero to face down a threat she's taken on before and lost against; Paragon. Izzy Guevara-Robinson kept as brave a face as she could under the mask. She took a deep breath and eased her pose, standing up. Paragon hovered down to meet her at eye level, gently landing on the ground.

"This isn't you." Charade said. "Your name is Deborah Pines."

"I know." Paragon zipped over to Charade and picked her up by the throat. Charade grasped at the villain's spandex-clad arms. She futilely tried to get the grip of her adviser off of her. "I gave up my entire life for these powers, sister. I intend on this plan going through without a hitch."

"Sure, this plan may work, but what about the next? What makes you think he won't turn you into a drone next?" Charade asked. "What makes you think you're not one already?"

"Shut up."

"If you trust him that much, then get this over with and kill me already." Charade stared her down. Paragon hesitated for a brief moment before flinging Charade straight up into the sky. The heroine looked upon the Pittsburgh skyline on her ascent and subsequent descent. She could've sworn she saw her mother's car off in the distance on 376. She closed her eyes and accepted fate before she felt two warm arms embracing her and leading her gently to the ground. Charade looked up and saw the surprised face of Paragon, breathing rapidly.

"I did it." Paragon said. Deborah Pines sat Charade down on the asphalt with care. She took the earpiece out of her head with her gloved hand and held it in her palm. "I saved someone."

Paragon crushed the device into dust and in the next moment slumped over herself. She would've hit the ground immediately if it weren't for Charade catching her. The teenager felt a swell of conflicting emotions as she supported her prior opponent.

"I'm gonna set you down now." Charade did what she said she was going to and Deborah nodded vigorously. "Does this happen every time you sever control?"

"I guess so." Deborah looked like she was in a daze. "I just thought it was a regular kind of tired, but this is super tired."

"Can you stand?"

"I'll try." Paragon stood up and took a breath. "Siren and Cobalt are in there, aren't they?"

"I'm afraid so." Charade let go of Paragon and let her step towards the warehouse, smoke billowing out of the door. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm gonna beat that son of a bitch within an inch of his life."

-

Siren and Cobalt were clearing the area of any people as the fire blazed out of control. The building was empty. All of the headphone drones were knocked out of the Earworm System when the control panel went down. Coming to their senses, the folks evacuated as quickly as possible. As the flames got more and more unbearable, Siren and Cobalt went for the back exit. Then, Audiophile stepped from the smoke towards our heroes, his hand raised in a contorted anger. He aimed his gun at them.

"Savages!" He yelled. "Tyrants! You'll regret the day you put on those costumes in the first place. You—" Siren took him down hard, holding him up by the collar of his cloak. Cobalt

gripped Audiophile's arm and held it behind his back.

"If you spoil this, I'm gonna brain ya." Cobalt said snidely, applying handcuffs.

"Paragon!" Audiophile cried. "Help me!"

"There's no helping you." Deborah Pines's voice came from the other end of the burning room. Paragon stepped forward, her eyes bloodshot. She wound up a fist. "There's only ending you now." As Paragon swung down with all the power she could muster, Siren took Audiophile's head out of the way. Paragon toppled over. "What are you doing?" She growled.

"I'm not letting you go down that road." Siren said. "Not after everything else." So Paragon knelt to Pittsburgh's resident crimefighters, weeping as Raymond Tyler's house of cards crumbled around him.

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It wasn't long before the National Guard was alerted of Tyler's location, thanks to Rose Bishop's incredible timing. There were helicopters there as the heroes left the building with Audiophile in tow. Cobalt made sure to search him before they let the authorities detain him. At the book-cave, everybody breathed a sigh of relief. Izzy was reunited with her mother as Dani Guevara, city councilor, entered the city. Siren and Cobalt personally delivered her. She was out of her usual Charade garb. She had enough cameras for a whole lifetime. When she looked at her phone, Katie had her number blocked.

Eric Petersen and Liz Moto went back to their apartment and awaited the return of Ms. Jessica Dillon. She came back in, graciously accepting their embraces and complimenting their performance on their first national radio appearance. Pretty much every local station had aired them talking briefly to the press as they turned Audiophile in.

After new year's, Pittsburgh was quiet. Sure, crime never sleeps. In this first month of the new year though, it was merely daydreaming. The Yorba Public Library was closed on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. This also happened to fall smack dab in the middle of

Siren and Cobalt's well deserved vacation. They had both figured bringing the occasional breaks back would be good for everyone involved. Charade picked up their slack for the time being.

They went to Blue Moon, a hip watering hole on Butler Street on this particular Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Eric was about three whiskey sours deep and Liz was still sipping on her first vodka tonic. This is one of the only nights that these two actually dressed up for. Another rule they established after this particularly bad encounter was monthly date night. Today was to be the first of these.

"I mean, it's *okay*, right?" Eric said. "Zack Snyder all together is *okay*. There's going to be *okay things* about his version of Watchmen. But all the slow motion? The pop songs playing under cinematic shots of pure, unadulterated violence? It feels— I don't know, glorifying in a way that the book just isn't. Don't get me wrong, it's the best movie he made, given that he just stuck to the book as a script, but there's no— depth in it."

Liz stared at Eric with soft eyes and chuckled.

"Oh my god." Eric said. "I'm drunk and I've been talking for too long haven't I?"

"Not too long." Liz said. "It's only been about one Return of the King Extended Edition since we sat down and you started your rant on Zack Snyder, Watchmen, and all things related."

"I can't help it, the guy pisses me off."

"I'm just messing with you." Liz smiled and grabbed Eric's hand. "Your passion is just one of the things I love about you."

"Please tell me that my encyclopedic knowledge of Highlander is one of them too."

"It's up there, definitely." Liz took a sip of her drink

Eric sighed and smiled. "Do you feel it?"

"What?"

"This is the first day of the rest of our lives." Eric grabbed his partner and kissed her head. "I love you so much."

"I love you too, you goof."

-

Izzy Guevara-Robinson was only the Charade two nights a week for the month of January,

barring filling in for Siren and Cobalt's vacation. The other nights and weekends she had free, she studied to retake her SAT. Dani said that she got an offer from a prestigious university, but refused to elaborate any further. The only other details that Izzy got were that her scores were too low to qualify as it was. She took them right when she started being the Charade, so her mind was elsewhere. She did get one more piece, the school itself was in San Francisco. English was always Izzy's best subject, but she struggled in the practical sciences, specifically chemistry. It made her that much more uncomfortable when she was stationed in the chemistry lab in her high school to take the test. Sweat dripped down her brow the entire time, but she was able to stay focused throughout. The whole affair took five hours. Afterwards, Izzy noticed something off about the chemistry lab. Dani was ready to pick her daughter up when Izzy arrived about a half an hour after she was actually done with the test.

"What's with the tardiness, girl?" Dani asked, smirking.

"I had a hunch after the test." Izzy said, getting into her mother's car.

"You had a hunch." Dani scoffed. "You sound like me, and that's not a compliment."

"Some of the chemistry equipment from my classroom was missing." Izzy said.

"How did you—" Dani paused. "Did you take inventory?"

"It's a good way to pass the time." Izzy pulled out her phone. "I noticed there were a few kids missing from my chemistry class. Some of the more outsider types. Not great home lives, parents in and out, that kind of situation." She began tapping on the device. An itemized list came up with her school's logo at the top of it. Dani noticed this and looked over at her daughter, going at ease. "Turns out they've been missing from the school entirely." Izzy continued. "Seems suspicious. I'll bring this to the masks and see what they think."

Dani smiled. "You know how proud I am of you. But do you really think that Siren and Cobalt are gonna care about some missing bunsen burners?"

"Like I said, I have a hunch."

-

Siren and Cobalt were investigating the missing weapons from the bust in July at the Neon Man's mansion at the end of February. The license plates belonged to one Fraction Rental Car Company on the South Side. The name was a double entendre. The first meaning was that it offered rental cars at a fraction of the price. The other meaning was that it laundered a fraction of Mark Moreno's money. He was the criminal often referred to as Knuckle Duster, currently rotting for collaborating with the King of Hearts in the convention center shenanigans. As far as the heroes were aware, Moreno was still in prison with David Allen. The fact that Allen was seen at the bust and the cars came from Moreno's shell company couldn't have been a coincidence. At least, that's not what Siren thought. The remote investigations involving Fraction Rental Car Company and their finances were deemed futile. Most of the money was coming from several investors, all with solid reputations.

To tie up this loose end, Siren and Cobalt decided to visit the office of the company when it was closed. It was easy enough getting in, but this investigation turned up almost as much as the remote ones. Siren found the front register's computer and put the USB port from her utility belt into it. It wasn't like she actually needed it. The password was "Fraction1234".

Cobalt was leaning nonchalantly on the counter and started schmoozing. "So, what's a dame like you doin' in a dump like this?" He asked.

Siren chuckled. "Fella done me wrong." She said.

"You got a lousy taste in men."

"If that's the case, you can make your *own* coffee tomorrow."

"Are you suggesting that I'm incapable of making coffee on my own?"

Siren continued typing. "Xavier Davis and Moira Shultz."

"Do we have any coffee filters?" Cobalt took a second to catch up with the conversation. "Who's Xavier and Moira, and why aren't they solving paranormal mysteries on the CW?"

"Those were the folks that rented the cars that night." Siren unplugged her USB and stood up. "Turing, can you run those names?" She turned to the side. "Nice of you to join, but

isn't this your off night?" She asked. Charade stepped forward from the shadows.

"Wait, how long have you been there?" Cobalt asked.

"Thirty seconds maybe." Charade said. The archer sighed in relief. "To answer your question, it is my off night. I just found something that might be relevant to one of our current cases."

"Okay, shoot." Siren said.

"I found a paper trail. A potential paper trail, rather. It might lead to a lab. Most of the city's high schools have had chemistry equipment stolen, including mine. If all of these thefts are by the same party, then I have reason to believe that there could be a resurgence in Bloodstone over the next few weeks."

"Bloodstone is still kicking around on the streets." Siren said, walking over to Charade. "There haven't been any drops since the last lab burned down. Perhaps Damien Freeman is going to drop another supply soon. At least, he's most likely planning to."

"How do we know it's Damien and his posse of the undead?" Cobalt asked. "Maybe someone's reverse engineered the compound and is making a new batch."

"When was the last time either of you heard from Ash Dawson?" Charade asked the two.

"Not since he fled the scene." Siren said.

"He called me out afterwards." Cobalt said.

"How can we trust him?" Charade stepped towards Cobalt.

"We haven't heard anything from him since the lab burned down." Siren put herself between the two. "And he's in Arizona, as far as I know. I kept tabs on him. By process of elimination, it would have to be Damien Freeman or one of his associates that's organizing this." And so, a conclusion was met. They would gather all the data they could from the Fraction Rental Car Company and then head to the one high school that hadn't been hit yet.

Liz and Eric hadn't been to this high school since they both attended it five years ago. The parking lot was familiar enough to stake out. Most stake outs didn't turn anything up other than Eric's takes on this week's pull list. This one didn't turn up anything useful either.

The heroes spent the night catching up since Charade's last patrol. Siren congratulated her on getting her college invite. Cobalt bonded with the teenager over test stress. They went back to the book-cave where Liz made hot chocolate for the three of them.

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After a short free run home, Izzy crawled into her room through the window. She closed it fast. Dani had already complained about the heating bill enough. She almost immediately clocked an opened letter sitting on her desk. Here is what it said:

"Ms. Guevara-Robinson,

Congratulations! It is with the utmost pride that I invite you to join the newly established Superhuman Studies Program at the University of San Francisco for the 2021 Fall Semester. We at the program have been impressed by your achievements academically and personally.

You may ask what the Superhuman Studies Program may entail, and I won't keep up this *Charade* much longer. As a member of the Superhuman Studies Program, you will join a community of like minded individuals that work towards the study of the superhuman way of life. This will develop spectacular connections and enrich your life as a whole! ..."

And so on. Izzy got the urge to stay up researching, but then she looked at the clock. It was already 3:30 in the morning. She made the decision to get some sleep and get back to it in the morning.

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After the weeks went by, there had been nothing heard from Deborah Pines. It was assumed that she had wandered off, never to be seen again. That was, until she stumbled into the Yorba Public Library one day in March, looking for a

computer. Liz was able to help her, and kept the guise that the two had never met. Through smalltalk, Liz got most of the story. Everybody knew who Deborah was, but her life was gone now. All records that she even existed were wiped from every available database the second she signed the contract with Audiophile. Deborah was currently applying to be a Sandwich Artist at a Subway near Morrison House.

"I just—" Deborah said. "I don't even know who I am after everything with Audiophile. And now, I can't even grasp onto anything. All I have is a picture of me and my mom, but she's gone too." She choked up a bit.

"I'm sorry." Liz said. "You don't deserve that."

"You don't know me."

"You're right. I don't. But nobody deserves to go through what you did." Liz got up "You wait here. I'll be right back." Deborah sat as Liz went to the back of the library. Deborah was alone for a second, scratching at her neck. She sat like a deer in headlines as the quiet hustle and bustle of the library played on behind her. Liz came back with a stack of papers, resources for job offers and benefits available to her. Liz offered to sign Deborah up for anything that she could be qualified for. They sat for about a combined two and a half hours getting the balls rolling on acquiring a new social security card for her. After that, everything else would fall into place.

"Liz," Deborah said, after the forms had been submitted. "Is there any hope for me?"

"There's always hope." Liz offered her hand and helped Deborah up from her seat. "Everything's going to work out, okay?"

-

That night, Siren went out solo. She had a lead as to where the Bloodstone was coming from. On this foggy March evening, Siren visited Jason McMurray. The redheaded young man was now living in a three bedroom house, where there were currently five people occupying. He managed to get a steady job, but even then, it was only part-time. The name had come up in their investigation of Bloodstone, but the heroes never felt it was a good time to intervene. After

all, he was just a small time mover. Now that a new lab may be popping up, they figured they might as well chase any lead that comes around. Siren could've snuck in through the cellar door and gotten into Jason's shared bedroom, but she wanted to face this head on. Therefore, she used the front door, knocking politely.

Jason's roommate answered, a scruffy, light-skinned girl smoking a joint. She immediately gave Siren a dirty look. "What do you want?" She asked. "And before you ask, this is medicinal."

"I don't judge." Siren said, holding up her hand. "I'm here to see Jason. I need to ask him a few questions."

"He went out."

"Do you know where?"

"I don't know. He went out on a walk to clear his head, if you must know."

Siren looked down. "I see. Thank you." The hero said before walking off. She could swear she heard the girl at the door whisper "freak" as she stepped away. She worked her way around the immediate area by rooftop. It wasn't long before she found Jason, wearing headphones and smoking a cigarette outside of a convenience store. She dropped in an alley across the street and walked out from the shadows.

"I'll be damned." Jason said, pulling off his headphones.

"Whatcha listening to?" Siren asked.

"Cut the shit, Big Bird. I'm not exactly thrilled to see you."

"I know. You have every right to not want to see me. I'm sorry."

"It's nice to hear that for once." Jason sat down on the curb. "To answer your question: Nothing. I haven't brought myself to listen to anything since New Years."

Siren sat down next to him. "Audiophile tapped into you."

"I guess you could say that. Another way of saying it is I blacked out on my lunch break and woke up five blocks away. I'm lucky they didn't fucking fire me. You costume fucks just love following me around, don't you?"

"That's strange." Siren cupped her hands together. "You were fired a week ago, weren't you?"

“Oh, so you’ve been keeping tabs on me, huh? What gives you the fucking right?”

“I never gave up on you, Jason. I wanted to see how you were doing. And I knew you wouldn’t want to speak to me or Cobalt. So I saw your progress from a distance. That’s why I wanted to talk to you. I think we can help each other.” Siren reached into her utility belt and pulled out a small piece of paper. On it was a combination of numbers. She handed it to him.

“What is this?” He asked.

“It’s the King of Hearts’ off-shore bank account. We found it last year. We gave most of it to charity, but we transferred a little bit into a secure trust. \$5,000. That’s for you. Call it a gift from David Allen.” The young hero stood up and let her cape down, walking away. She stopped, her back facing Jason. “All I ask in return is that you tell me where Damien Freeman is.”

“So, that’s what this is about?” Jason stood up and ripped the bank info to shreds, tossing it on the ground. “I don’t need your pity. If all you wanted was information, then you shouldn’t have bothered coming in the first place.”

“You know what Bloodstone does, don’t you?”

“It helps me sleep. It helps a lot of people escape from the hell of being alive.”

“Being alive is a gift.” Siren furrowed her brow before gaining her composure. “Look, Jason, you’re young. You have your whole future ahead of you. You don’t want to go down this path.”

“You don’t know what I want! You’re all the same, you fucking tights. You could’ve stopped the King of Hearts forever at the convention center, but you didn’t. And now, the city’s imploding. You got fucking vampires and mad scientists trolling around. Have you ever thought about the people that don’t wanna live in your goddamn power fantasy?” Jason put his headphones back on. “Grow up, Siren. The world doesn’t need another clown in spandex. Not now.” The young man walked into the darkness, leaving Siren under the lone light of a streetlamp.

-

Here is what Eric Petersen was doing during this:

He took his day off as an opportunity to have a night in with Ms. Dillon. He would be the first to admit that he’s been distant while dealing with everything. They spent the night catching up on the Voice. Ms. Dillon made a reasonable amount of popcorn that the two then devoured in an unreasonable amount of time. Billie Marzett was performing a rendition of That’s Life by Frank Sinatra.

“I’m gonna be back on top in June.” Eric mumbled to himself. He was a few beers deep at this point. “I’ve been sitting on the ground too long.”

“What are you on about?” Jessica asked.

“My whole life, I felt like there was something in my way.”

“Something stopping you?” Ms. Dillon took a sip from her beer. “And now you’re realizing that it might be you?”

“Yeah, I think so.”

“How do you feel about that?”

“Different.” Eric put on a slightly cross-eyed smile and shrugged. “Enlightened maybe.”

“That’s great. Keep up the good work.” Then, there was a bump from Ms. Dillon’s room. “What was that?” She asked

“Stay here.” Eric leapt over the couch and grabbed an umbrella from the stand by the door. He stepped ever-so-carefully towards the bedroom. In a split second, he opened the door and threw the umbrella with all of his might. It stuck in the wall right next to the Midnight Archer. She stepped to the umbrella and flicked it.

Eric entered the room and closed the door. “Now, you listen. I know you’re probably paid to get me out of the way, but this is crossing a fucking line. You came into my home, interrupted a nice moment, and I’m drunk. For these three reasons, I’m gonna need to kick your ass now.” Eric went in for a punch, but his opponent raised a hand before he could strike her. He stopped and stepped back.

“Okay. Okay, we’re playing nice mercenary.” Eric shrugged, then put up an accusatory finger. “You don’t ever fucking come back here. That is my one condition for returning the favor. Got it?”

The Archer nodded.

“What do you want?”

The Midnight Archer reached into a pouch on her belt and pulled out a card. It was a Miss Scarlet card from a Clue game. She handed it to Eric.

“What is this? Is this supposed to be useful for me?”

She tilted her head back and forth. Eric flipped over the card. It read “Masquerade” on the other end in bright red paint marker. He looked up and the Midnight Archer was gone.

-

The year proceeded on like usual after that. As usual as you can get these days. Siren and Cobalt hadn't heard from Damien Freeman or the Midnight Archer. Liz started a food drive program at the library. Izzy got a 1370 on her SAT. Eric turned 24. The most the heroes had to stop was petty theft, and after the past year, they had gotten pretty good at stopping petty theft. After some convincing from Cobalt, Dani was able to put in a motion to use the space from the former David Lawrence Convention Center to build something new. The main idea was that the space could become a park. The other proposal was that the site of the explosion that rocked Pittsburgh would become a massive greenhouse, feeding the city for generations. The proposal was called the Bleeding Hearts Project and the vote would be happening on the anniversary of the Hearts Attack. The day before the vote was to be issued, Siren gave a press conference on the concrete where the convention center once stood.

The crowd murmured with anticipation as Siren stepped forward, accompanied by Dani and the rest of the city council. There were armed security guards surrounding the stage. Siren stepped up to the podium and gripped the sides of it firmly. She straightened the papers that contained her speech. Then, Pittsburgh's resident superhero addressed the city officially for the first time.

“Hello.” Siren said. “I would say my name, but I feel like most of you know who I am already. I know this is unusual. We capes tend to not act in the public eye, but I felt like I should explain myself. You've lost a lot over this year,

Pittsburgh. That cannot be denied. But I'll let you all know something. I've lost too. I won't get into the specifics, but I lost some people who were very important to me. That's why I put on this costume in the first place. That's why I proposed the Bleeding Hearts Project to Ms. Guevara. Because I wanted to show you that there is a better way. That instead of getting caught up in ascribing blame and punishment, we can focus on forgiving and helping each other. That the people of this city and the world are good, decent folks; who want nothing more than to see a better tomorrow for themselves and their neighbors. And yes, there will always be those who abuse the power they have simply because they can. There will always be those who believe that might makes right. And there will always be those not willing to stand up to them. Today, I ask you, citizens of Pittsburgh, what most defines a person? If I can add my opinion, what most defines each and every one of us is what we do when we fall. And if you find yourself beaten, broken, unable to get up from this fall, don't worry. There will always be those who will lend you their hand. Thank you.”

Siren stepped away, avoiding a clamor of questions from the reporters at the scene. Eventually, she lost them and the council was left with a vote to make. The Bleeding Hearts Project passed by a slim margin, given that this would not only feed communities, but provide jobs and a good use for public funding that wasn't baseball. Dani Guevara stepped outside her office in the sweltering May heat. She took out her vape and exhaled a hit as a cool summer breeze hit her for the first time that year. She smiled and made her walk back to her car.

-

Raymond Tyler received a phone call towards the end of May. The call was from Aaron Alexander, his superior and owner of Andromeda Solutions Inc., the biggest tech conglomerate this side of China. Andromeda Solutions had happened to be the parent company of Saturn Industries. The latter company filed for bankruptcy and was dissolved on account of their CEO being a mind-enslaving supervillain. Raymond assumed that this phone call would be about that. There had been no

communication between Tyler and Alexander since the incident on New Year's.

"Mr. Tyler." Aaron said from his own lofty office in Seattle. His voice was off-rhythm and strange "How are you holding up in there?"

"Can't say the amenities are top notch, but I'm alive." Raymond replied. His shaved head from the new year had grown out into a greasy, scraggly mop. His orange jumpsuit kept him warm enough. The guards always blasted the AC far beyond human reasonability. "What do you want, Aaron?" He asked.

"I wanted to offer you a business proposal. I'm booking a flight to Pittsburgh for June. I want to discuss this in a more... private setting."

"Oh, does this have anything to do with the— *trouble* you've been having at home?"

Aaron looked over his vast holographic monitor, projecting from a single point in the center of his desk. It showed a man in a skin-tight red, black, and white suit, a gold tiara affixed to his head as he flew over the skyline of Seattle. Aaron grimaced. "No, no." He said. "The past is in the past. Only the future is of interest now." Aaron hung up and pulled up files on six individuals; a magician, a mechanical genius, a speedster, a lizard-human hybrid, a metal manipulator, and Izzy Guevara-Robinson.

-

Liz Moto and Eric Petersen were on their way to the Pride celebration happening in downtown Pittsburgh when they entered a store they hadn't been in since the debacle with the King of Hearts last May; Eide's Entertainment, a veritable museum of pop culture which stood three stories tall across from the Greyhound Bus Station. The couple explored the large store for a reasonable amount of time (though that may be an exaggeration on my part). Eric was checking out on the ground floor, having bought a few back issues of Firestorm: The Nuclear Man and a Fugazi bumper sticker, when Liz got a notification on her phone from the Turing system. There had been a break in at the Natural History Museum, the thieves getting away with the only deposit of gigantium available for public view. Gigantium happened to be one of

the strongest and most versatile metals on the planet.

"That can't be good." Liz said, a slight grump on her face.

"What do you mean?" Eric said, walking away from the counter. "He fights Green Lantern in this one! I can't wait for Robbie to punch Hal in his smug -" Liz cut him off by showing the notification on her phone. Then, they heard the approaching sounds of police sirens. The few patrons of the store walked right up to the glass plated windows to view what was happening; a high-speed car chase between the Pittsburgh Police and four armed goons, all wearing non-descript black and grey clothing adorned with plastic Universal Monster masks.

The crowd at the window gave Liz and Eric the opportunity to sneak around to the elevator and get into roof access. The elevator dinged on the fourth floor. Then, Siren and Cobalt snuck around the clerk at that floor's desk and made their way to the roof.

The two young heroes watched the car chase go down Liberty Avenue. Shots were fired and people began to yell and clear the area. Siren grabbed Cobalt's hand.

"You ready?" She said.

"With you, babe?" Cobalt squeezed her hand and stood tall. "Always."

Siren and Cobalt leapt into the streets of Pittsburgh, ready to save the day.

THE END.

MORE FROM THE ANNALS OF THE ABSURDIST UNIVERSE:

Athena is a Speedster who was always very good at getting away from problems. Especially when they were more than she could handle. That's what this next mission was going to be, getting away and dealing with issues that one girl could handle. That didn't exactly work out. As she investigates the strange events in an Arkansas town, she meets the town outcast; Katrina. But is she friend or foe, and how much does she have to do with what's going on in the town?

SPEED OF STRIFE

ART AND STORY BY DENVER MARTIN-BROWN



BE NOT AFRAID. THE SQUID IS WATCHING.



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