

"We have three items on the agenda. First, I'd like to introduce Volt," Statuesque said, sweeping his arm at Volt.

"He's a new hero, he's currently independent, he's looking for a team, and he's quite skilled. I'd normally go more in depth but, well, time isn't on our side. I—"

"Hang on. Let's hear about him," a woman in black and white zebra stripes chimed in.

"I'm sorry, what are you doing here?" a black-clad woman answered from beneath an ornate masquerade bird mask. Her super suit shimmered with a pattern that looked like feathers as she shifted. "I was under the impression Professor Quantum was still in charge of your organization. You're just a lieutenant and—"

"I am perfectly capable of—"

"Stop!" The table fell silent as Statuesque slammed a rock fist into the table. "We don't have time for your bickering today. Blur, tell Professor Quantum next time he doesn't show up you don't get to attend. He can read the minutes. Lady Avian, if you could cooperate with me for one. Damn! Minute!"

The two nodded after a moment, and Statuesque continued. "The second is the event on Pluto Island six weeks ago. It was being kept under wraps, but..."

He took a deep inhalation, and then stood, surveying the room. "Pestilence was responsible."

There was a flurry of activity. Drinks spilled, chairs shuffled, and the room chilled, literally.

"This would be the focus of the meeting, but they aren't here, in New York. They've gone underground."

"Instead," Statuesque paused, surveying the room. "We have information that Chaoticus has moved to the city on a permanent basis. He has brought a number of mercenaries with him. We know he has hired Hashashin, Killian, Terroria, and Doctor Lobotic at the least. we've received information from the Association," he said, nodding at Blur, "that they are building a device to induce powers."

If the room had chilled before, it was ice cold now. Volt could have heard every breath if anyone in the room was still breathing.

"As we all know, or should know," Statuesque said, throwing a meaningful look at a few figures, including Volt, before turning back to the room, "past attempts have typically ended with massive casualties. We could be talking millions if he does this downtown, but if he were to somehow avoid that, and give people powers without mass casualties, then he'd be able to build an *army*. He has between fifty and two hundred unpowered followers in the city. If they were to all gain powers..."

Volt felt a shiver down his spine. Accounting for every independent hero in the city, Chaoticus would now have roughly an equal amount of villains. It'd be an all out war. New York would be the next Chicago or Austin.

Statuesque went on, giving all the information they knew. Volt considered mentioning the event that triggered his powers, but he held back. It was too personal, too pointed. He hadn't been Volt then, and explaining it could tear the veil, the delicate, poorly understood power that kept heroes and villains identities from being exposed. The more Volt had read, the less he had been able to determine what was safe. Until he could, he had decided to exercise caution. Extreme caution.

The meeting broke, and a few heroes left immediately. The rest stayed, and coffee and donuts were brought in. Most could eat through their masks, and the few who couldn't mingled anyway. Volt grabbed a glazed and a coffee and sat at the table, contemplating everything that had been dropped in the meeting.

"Mind?"

Rather than wait for an answer, Lady Avian slid into the seat next to him.

"Everyone in this room is gonna give you the hard sell before you leave, so just remember this," she said, handing him her card. "We're fully independent. We have our own financing. The Administration are the only other ones who have that, and you're not joining them unless you have a certain philosophy that, well, the less said the better. If that's you, join them. If not, give us a call."

She stood up and left before Volt could say another word. Glancing at the card, Volt read the delicately inlaid letters.

Lady Avian

The Manhattan Irregulars