

### Chapter 3: Team-Up Part 1

**TW: curse words, audience participation, unusually not much else**

"Where do you train to be a superhero?" Megan Carpenter, a volunteer at the local food bank, placed another box of donations on a table, "Does I.D.O.L.S. give training?"

Mouser placed hers down and started walking back to the truck, "They won't recruit you if you don't already have the skills. That's not really an issue, because anyone who wants to do this tends to have a lot of passion."

"Not a lot of hobbyists in the caped crusader market?"

Mouser laughed, "No."

"The 'passion' makes it running an organization of them a logistic shitshow," Cassidy Hightower leaned against the wall, staring at Mouser, "Sometimes they don't even have the respect to answer summons."

"Fuck you," Mouser gestured towards the box she was holding, "Can I put this back before you talk to me about the thing?"

"We aren't just going to talk about 'the thing', you're going to do 'the thing' because I have absolute authority over you right now. You can put the soup cans away first."

Magda said, "Actually we try to discourage people from sending those because they have a very high salt content and that."

Mouser started walking to the unpacking area faster, "She's the head of an international agency fully mad with power. If she wanted to know that already, she would."

"I've already told you everything. His name is Simon Aelon, The stairs to the Scabbard are hidden directly in the middle of the living room, Nigel can put up a fight but has a bullet wound on the lower left side of his chest. What more do you want?"

"Margaret Aelon, you are going to-"

"I don't use that name anymore."

"Should I use your new identity, then? Rebecca Palms, was it?"

"Call me Mouser. It's the name I registered to you with."

"Fine. We have already sent a local team to secure the Aelon estate. You are going to accompany the core strike team to aid in his arrest and deal with any other potential complications."

"No."

"We know where your van is. We can get you to join by force."

"I left Virgus to get away from him and Foil and everything that came with that. I'm not going back."

Cassidy facepalmed, "Again. I. Have. Absolute. Authority. Over. You."

"The only time I've seen him in the last twelve years is here. I don't know if I could take him on if I'm not on my own turf. I'm not going to be helpful."

"It'll be catharsis. You'll be fine."

"Catharsis doesn't exist."

"I have absolute authority over you."

"Fine, but I'm bringing a friend. I need someone who only met me here so they can stop me from changing."

Cassidy paused, "That's actually a good idea. I'm going to remind you again I could have said no to that, but chose not to."

"Of course, my liege," Mouser performed a mock curtsy.

"Fuck off and get them already. We don't have all the time in the world."

Mouser walked over to the plane, followed by Magician, a superhero wearing a jacket with a top hat painted on the back and a baseball bat.

Cassidy looked up and scowled, "You brought another superhero."

"This could get violent. I'm going to bring someone who can handle themselves," Mouser strapped themselves in, Magician following.

"Hi. Magician. Professional occultist/witch specializing in evoking Shades, healing, and sympathetic magic."

One of the C.E.N.T.E.R. agents across from him laughed, "You aren't needed here. I was classically trained at The City on Seven Hills. We have no need for your hedge witchery and sacrifices."

Magician smiled, "I don't do animal sacrifices, but I know some people who do. Do you want me to call them up so you can get a demonstration?"

The agent got up, pointing his finger at him, "Do you think you can just—"

Magician grabbed his hand, holding a tweezer with his other hand to collect an arm hair, "Thanks. Maybe I'll use it to freeze your tongue in place, so you're just a useless scholar with a wand up your ass."

Cassidy sighed, "Agent Gray. Magician. You both have valuable talents, but I'm benching both of you if you don't stop your religious squabble."

"It's also at least partially a class thing," Magician added, "There's some debate on it."

"And the time for that is not right now," Cassidy quickly moved to introducing the rest of the team, "You're met Paul Gray. Trained at The City On Seven Hills before being kicked out for unknown reasons."

"They didn't need to know that," he mumbled.

"You just let him on your team despite him not telling you what he did to piss off the immortal wizard cult?" Mouser asked.

"They generally don't like their secrets being known. When you're off the grounds of the city, unless you're a supremely skilled magic user, you can't remember much about your time there," Magician smirked, "Unfortunately in this case, the memory block didn't extend to his magical abilities."

"Hey!"

"Again, stop that. Moving on, that's Selina Cartwell. She can't age and maybe can't ever die due to very classified British government shenanigans."

Selina, wearing tactical gloves and a blank mask as well as standard C.E.N.T.E.R. body armor so no skin was showing, waved and let out a chthonic gurgle.

"She's really very friendly when you get to know her, but this will be a one-time thing, so you won't."

Selina looked down and made a noise that was a mix between a sigh and a high-pitched scream.

"That was harsh. I know." She turned to the third agent, "This is David Güller. He's a technopath, and we still don't know how his power levels stand against his predecessor. This is his third mission after said predecessor encountered a nasty firewall and..."

As she mimed a head exploding, David looked at the ground, "You don't need to keep repeating that detail. I understand the risks."

"Do you? I'll stop reminding you of consequences when you start recognizing them."

"I recognize consequences! I recognize them all the time!"

"Do you recognize the consequences of yelling at your boss?"

"Yes..." he looked back down, "Sorry, sir. Won't happen again."

"Quite a team you've got here," Mouser smirked.

"They have their talents and follow their orders. At best, you only have the first point in your favor. Speaking of, the kid in the corner is The Futurist. He's local, so we figured he could tag along."

The Futurist wore a gray armor suit with bright blue highlights, it's helmet blank except for his logo, three concentric circles, "I'm not a kid. I'm out of college."

An electronic voice clearly designed to sound feminine came from the same suit, "You should respect him more. He's going to become one of the greatest heroes of this generation."

The Futurist looked around and said, "That's Maggie. She's the suit AI."

Mouser looked at him with disdain, "Did you make the suit?"

"It's... not important. I'm just here to do good, and that's all that matters."

Cassidy smiled, "So you've learned that telling people you're John Connor makes them look at you weird. Took you long enough."

Magician asked, "Why are we making Terminator references?"

"Apparently, the kid found a crashed powersuit and repaired it. During the repairs, Maggie here told him that the suit was a miracle machine from the future that he would use to become one of the most important historical figures of all time or something."

Maggie replied, "You don't need to be so harsh."

"C.E.N.T.E.R. has been trying to figure out time travel for decades. The closest thing we've come to it is making pocket dimensions with decreased or increased passages of time, but that doesn't allow you to turn it back. I'm not being harsh, I'm being honest."

"You may think that, but I know where I'm from."

Mouser smiled, "So time travel is real, but nobody uses it to mess with history unless when they were historically supposed to mess with history?"

"Exactly! The Berlin Accords in 2077 establish TIMEC (the Temporal Intervention and Manipulation Emergency Commission) to make sure that doesn't occur."

"So a group of people made a law and everyone followed it thanks to a perfect government agency that was never corrupt?"

"Are you being sarcastic?"

"Yes. I find it hard to believe that nobody managed to slip past them, even if this organization is fairly efficient forever. Maybe the people who slipped past are better at hiding."

"I suppose," Maggie clearly wanted to end this line of conversation.

Cassidy sighed, "There are plenty of active superheroes whose backstories don't make sense. It's not I.D.O.L.S.' primary concern. Simon Aelon and Nigel Kesta are currently in our custody. The advance team should cut their way into The Scabbard by the time we arrive. Should we expect any security systems?"

"If he's using it again, he might have updated it, but when I was Foil, the only security system is the vault door you're cutting through."

"If he's using it again?"

"In the video, this Steel Swordsman is moving incredibly fast for an 80-year old. He should have gone to prison years ago, so I don't have an issue with him being arrested now for this. But this looks more like a copycat killer to me. He could have chosen the successor and is working as his Man in The Chair, but I don't think he could do that. He's too selfish to be support staff."

"You didn't bring that up when we first contacted you."

"You were asking about him, so I gave you information about him. You're good at figuring shit out, and you would find out what was happening. If I offered up my theory, that would be making myself part of the investigation."

"Thank you for the compliment. And thank you for accepting your role in the investigation, I suppose. We're testing your father for performance-enhancing drugs that might allow him to still be physically active, but at this point do not have enough information to support any theory."

"I think it's a double from another universe," David said, "Maybe in his universe you were actually shot, and that drove him to-"

"Shut the fuck up right now," Mouser hand instinctively moved to a the band across her chest holding her throwing knives.

"Indeed," Cassidy nodded, "I just said we did not have enough evidence to support any theory. That was not an opening for you to repeat a theory that has already been shot down repeatedly."

"If we're tolerating pseudoscience like time travel, we shouldn't be so quick to dismiss actual scientific possibilities."

Cassidy facepalmed, "D.E.M.I.G.O.D. hasn't picked up any disturbances that would correlate to a direct universal portal being opened. There's some cross-border activity, but that mostly matches

with the three confirmed pocket dimensions with entrances inside city limits. You've been told this repeatedly, so stop."

"There is a small irregularity which could correlate to this. And Mouser's death could serve as clear motivation to-" A knife shot into the part of the wall just next to his ear.

"You were right," Mouser looked at Cassidy, "He does have a problem with recognizing consequences."

"Can we just get along?" The Futurist asked, "We're supposed to be a team."

Magician pointed at Mouser and himself, "We're part of a superteam/groupchat of fellow local heroes. The group dynamics are only slightly more stable than this group. Probably because there are only four people."

"He's right. The ideal is that there are no complications and we solve this as soon as possible. Shouldn't your AI have a databank of historical events or something? That would help this go a lot quicker."

Maggie responded, "Unfortunately, The Oblivion War of 2063 wipes out most historical records. The fragments I can access say CENTER collapses in the event, and that Mouser is involved in the training of The Futurist. Other than that, I cannot help."

"Something to look forward to, I guess," Mouser smiles, "And I doubt the sourcing of your documents. I'm not exactly mentor material."

Before The Futurist or Maggie could respond, Cassidy got a notification, "Fuck!"

Everyone looked at her.

"There's just been a breakout. Mr. Wonderland and Napoleon Necromantus are free, likely by an alliance of several old supervillains. This counts as a complication, if you're wondering."

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