

THE PARCEL

By: Jason Hobbs and Ken Hallaron

The sky is dark with night and rain pelts the sodden ground. High above, two streaks of crimson flash across the sky. Eventually, they slow and their forms can be better discerned. Both wear blood-red capes, with skin of uniform of blue and white. There the similarities end. One is Morning Star, famed leader of the Champions of Justice; the other is Meteorite, young and untested, a provisional member of the elite group of superheroes.

As the flying forms slow, the granite-skinned Meteorite speaks, his voice tentative as his childhood hero flies beside him. "Morning Star, that was Spectrum and Captain Zero that came and picked up that giant hawk, right?"

Morning Star slowly shakes his head and glances at his companion and team member. "No, Meteorite, that was Spectrum and **Count Zero**."

Nodding, Meteorite continues. "Right. Count Zero, Guardian was wondering about that guy. He's an alien, right? What planet is he..."

Morning Star raises a hand to quiet his companion as their communicators go off. A code two directed at just the two of them. Another crisis to stop, most likely. "Morning Star here, what is it Victory?"

Seconds later, the two are nearing Brownsville and a tumultuous situation. Pillars of smoke rise from various sections of the town, adding to the pall of a brewing storm hanging over the small burg. Flashes of lightning strike near the center of town. Their nearness and effect offer tell-tale signs of their abnormality. Near Brownsville PD, police cars are overturned and burning. People are running about screaming madly. Chaos rules in Brownsville.

Meteorite slows hesitantly, his eyes widening. "The destruction...."

"Exactly, Meteorite. That's why we can't dillydally. Get yourself ready young friend. Brownsville needs us."

Scant minutes later, the various fires have been extinguished and the Soldiers of Fortune lie piled in an unconscious heap. The two crimson-caped heroes stand outside City Hall speaking quietly with Mayor Dunston and Chief of Police Alex Masters.

"I don't know what they wanted, Morning Star," Masters says, his look taking in Meteorite as well as Morning star. "We were all talking over the visit from Officer Edwards of Houston Strikeforce and the parcel he took an hour or so before, and wham." He pauses to gesture at the pile of mercenaries, "Those feller... people struck. The power went out and they started putting the hurting to us. I don't think much would have been left if you two hadn't shown up."

Morning star nods grimly. "fortunately, the Champions of Justice and a few other groups have taken this situation for the harbinger it is, Chief Masters. I'm glad Meteorite here and myself were available and got here when we did. You say Houston Strikeforce was here for a package...?"

THE PARCEL

By: Jason Hobbs and Ken Hallaron

Our heroes watch closely, their eyes narrowed in the darkness of Brownsville PD briefing room. The picture has a surreal effect. Deep water of the Cayman Trench was causing the light to bend unnaturally. The two armored men being taped have now noticed the camera and turn towards it. Missiles are fired and the tape ends.

Chief Masters voice speaks up. "That's it. We got the tape from a massive drug shipment broken up near the border." He stops speaking and turns to speak to another officer near the door. "Who was it that stopped those trucks, Washington?"

Washington, a dark-skinned officer, replies, "Three, probably four, heroes: Guardian, her young partner, Keymaster and some guy in purple we haven't placed yet, sir."

Plaster falls from the ceiling as the muted echo of a sonic boom shakes the building, the various officers glance at each other as the two heroes blur from the room. "What the h....?"

Morning Star slows to speak with Meteorite as they close on the space vehicle before them. "Stay close, Meteorite. Let's find out what these people are up to before we make any trouble."

The ship slows to a hover and a small aircar eases its way out of a hatch on the underside of the vessel. two figures are visible, one blue-skinned and grasping a large golden trident. The other, encased in an environmental suit of unknown construction. The former speaks, his voice booming across the short distance. "MORTALS OF EARTH, IDENTIFY YOURSELVES BEFORE TRITAN, GOD OF THE VAST OCEANS!"

Morning Star smiles slightly, whispering softly to Meteorite, "Well, that's that, then." He turns to the approaching aircar, his voice carrying across the whipping wind. "I am Morning Star and this is Meteorite. We are members of the Champions of Justice. We'd ask your reasons for causing a sonic disruption over the town of Brownsville, Texas. Those sorts of actions can cause permanent damage to people."

A few moments pass as the two groups eye each other, gauging reactions, and contemplating the next move. Another flying figure approaches; a red blur of motion in the dark sky. He hovers nearby, creating a triangle of hovering figures.

"TRITAN! Your presence here breaks the Treaty of Zee-os. Explain yourself or prepare to be expedited." As he finishes speaking a muted curse can be heard. Below the hovering group, a red and black form can be seen sprinting across the frothing water bearing a scaly-looking figure, vehemently cursing in Louisiana Creole.

"God damnit, Crit! You don' 'ave te be 'andlin' me so rough, na. Gator be tough, but ye don' 'ave te be tryin' me so. Look 'ear. If 'ol mullet-'ead ain' brought us face te face with the Champeens. Of all theh

THE PARCEL

By: Jason Hobbs and Ken Hallaron

Motheh Lovehn luck!" Gator smiles toothily, gazing up at the group hovering above him. His companion, a white-haired man in red and black, grins crookedly as he too looks up.

Morning Star mumbles under his breath, "Like it wasn't bad enough *before*, now the Rangers have to show up."

His musings are interrupted by a new voice, a bubbly tenor. "Humans, I am Keo-Towa, a scientist from the plant Trinim. Tritan has joined me in attempting to discern what is troubling this body of water on your planet. If you'll join us on my ship, I'll fill you in with what we've learned."

Minutes later, within a mid-sized chamber, a strange group has conglomerated. Morning Star and Meteorite sit side-by-side across from Olympian and Gator, while the hidden form of Keo-Towa sits on one end of the table and the fuming Tritan sits at the other. The Ranger speedster, Critical Velocity, flits nervously about the room. Keo-Towa is speaking, "So, I've concocted a serum which, when applied to any creatures affected by the unknown power, has a high chance of returning them to normal...."

Her explanation is headed off by Tritan as he leaps to his feet and points his golden trident down toward the floor. "The trouble stems from there, within the depths!"

Olympian stands at nearly the same moment. "there's no need to yell, Tritan. We're all in the same room, after all." His eyes narrow dangerously as his Erylusian power simmers from his eyelids.

Gator motions to Critical Velocity and murmurs to him, "Jes, when mullet-'ead figgers tha' out foh 'imself."

Tritan whirls to face Olympian, his trident taking on a shimmering glow, his voice an angry whisper. "No one speaks to me that way Xam Xian." A brief moment passes before he adds, "Especially you."

Morning Star speaks levelly, but his voice is heeded. "Please, let Keo-Towa speak. We've no time for this." He turns to the Trinim and continues, "What caused all of this?"

"I haven't precisely established that, Morning Star. I have determined that the storm, so recently bombarding the coasts of your Gulf of Mexico, seems to have been imbued unnaturally from some powerful source emanating from the Cayman Trench."