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Sledgehammer and Powerslide out of their armour. Sledgehammer needed urgent hospital treatment and the agents suggested taking her to a secure CLEA medical facility and confiscating the armour citing the fact the agency was experts when it came to dealing with uber criminals.

The police chief though disagreed and wanted to keep jurisdiction and so sent word that the NTPD had everything in hand. The logic behind his decision was that outside of their armour they posed the same threat as any ordinary criminal. That later proved a mistake for once Sledgehammer had recovered enough from her injuries she slipped her armed guard at the hospital. Several days later there was a break in at a NTPD storage facility and the armour belonging to Cyberus was stolen. Then a few days later Sledgehammer, in her repaired armour broke into a prison and freed Powerslide from incarceration.

After nearly beating her to death it had been assumed the partnership was over so consequently the escape attempt had not been expected. However by the time she grabbed her partner there were rumours circulating on the New Tokyo that someone was snatching powered criminals and dosing them with Marathon.

The hero community also heard the same rumours and drew its own conclusion. Some thought Powerslide had taken the drug knowingly whilst others considered that the rumours were true which meant somebody had managed to get the drug into his body for reasons unknown.

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“Sorry but he was really beginning to irritate me!”

By now the police were swarming around the group.

Union looked at Piledriver.

“So are you staying here or coming with me for some answers.”

“I’d like to come with you,” she said “but I have to think this through first.”

“Well it’s time for me to go as I really don’t want to spend the rest of the day talking to uniforms.”

With that said he made a few hand gestures and a gentle wind began swirling around him. He was a few feet off the ground when the first officer got close enough and asked for a statement, but Union simply ignored him.

“By the way, when you are ready the Phoenix Alliance will know how to contact me.”

Dwaine presumed the comment was for Piledriver who confirmed it with a quick nod. After that Union levitated higher before the winds increased and carried him out of sight.

With him gone and officers shouting for statements Dwaine was about to ask Piledriver for some help in sorting the mess out. However, before he got the chance she boosted herself clear leaving Dwaine surrounded by a crowd of uniforms.

“Thanks guys, very smooth!” he shouted.

CLEA’s “help” arrived not long afterwards. Though too late to do anything the agents and specialists were able to assist in getting

Ever since the first Alpha humans appeared, those rare few lucky or unlucky enough to acquire access to super human abilities have always been left with three choices. The first would be to keep their “gift” hidden. The second choice would be for them to use their gift for good and conversely the remaining choice was to use their gift for criminal intent.

In the case of the latter choices, two “sides” formed, those that protected the people and those that would harm the people. This same balance was maintained even when others “special” humans appeared such as the genetically altered hybrids, the technology enhanced humans, the cyborgs and a whole host of others.

At first the “powered” criminals only needed to worry about their “good” counterparts so battles were often fought very publicly since law enforcement and even the military could do very little but eventually technology caught up and the balance of power shifted. The clashes that then took place between heroes and villains moved to the shadows which meant only very rarely did they occur in full view of the public. Criminals, powered or otherwise liked to keep their freedom and that meant not attracting the law.

Only the odd few powered criminals would brave giving public displays and these were limited to the extremely powerful or the extremely insane. For that reason New Tokyo’s police chief was surprised to be called from a meeting during morning rush hour when reports came in that one half of the duo known as “Cyberus” had taken up residence in one of the city’s busy streets.

“Powerslide” and his partner “Sledgehammer” were well known to many law enforcement agencies and were easily identified because they each wielded a massive sword that was nearly the height of a man. Ordinarily such a weapon would be impossible to use but the

pair wore suits of powered armour which gave them increased mass as well as added strength and agility. The suits also provided good protection against small arms, so the officers that had arrived at the scene first decided to use caution and give Powerslide a wide berth. Since he was not “doing” anything they chose to cordon off the area and tried not aggravating the criminal whilst they cleared out civilians.



With the area secure the officers were at a loss as to what to do next. The general consensus of opinion was that they stood zero chance of

around wildly like they were unable to focus on anything for more than a few seconds. The veins on his face and neck were also raised and the skin looked pasty.

“What the hell drug did you take?”

“Nothing” snapped Powerslide, “I don’t do drugs, they cloud my logic. I should kill you for that insult!”

The response piqued Unions interest and he took a closer look.

“I’ve seen those ‘symptoms’ before,” he announced.

“What is it?” asked Dwaine.

“That is the signs he’s taken Marathon.”

“Never heard of it.”

“Really? It’s rife in all the major cities.”

Dwain just shrugged his shoulders.

“Okay, here’s the quick low down,” explained Union. “It’s a drug that once taken the drug massively boosts a person’s adrenalin. Allows them to keep going for longer and makes the stronger as well. Downside is it usually makes them irrational or enraged or even both. Gang members often use when dealing with rivals as it turns them into something like Viking berserkers.”

“I told you I don’t do drugs,” protested Powerslide. He tried to get up, but the weight of his own armour prevented him.

“Shut up,” said Dwaine and punched him in the face which was enough to finally make him pass out.

The other two looked at him.



Dwaine bent over.

“What are you doing?” asked Piledriver.

“Seeing if he’ll give us some answers.”

He then removed Powerslide’s helmet. Dwaine was hoping that the villain might explain his actions but before he got chance to ask any question he noticed something strange on the face looking back. Not only were Powerslide’s eyes all bloodshot but they were dancing

capturing and arresting him and that provoking him would probably result in massive collateral damage. Secondly none of them wanted to be on the receiving end of the sword either. Since the only “official” authorities able to contain the threat posed by Powerslide were outside of police control there was only one thing that could be done and that was contact the chief, so he could make the necessary calls through official channels.

The first thing the chief did after being pulled from his meeting was to talk to a senior officer on the scene. Over the radio he learned that Powerslide was simply standing in one spot, in the middle of one of the main streets and all the armoured maniac seemed to be doing was calling for his partner. The officer commented that the felon seemed to be unusually calm, but was convinced that he was getting more agitated as time went by and feared he might start lashing out if Sledgehammer did not appear soon.

Now aware of what was happening the chief quickly barked out orders to his subordinates in the office. Their first task was to locate Sledgehammer. Law enforcement agencies both local and foreign were contacted. The chief hoped that one of them might be holding her or knew her whereabouts, but all the calls went nowhere. However, there was an interesting lead from a European Criminal Task Force.

The commander of the team informed the New Tokyo police that they had encountered the pair recently when they attempted to steal tech from a research facility outside Europa. Of particular note was the fact that Sledgehammer made several tactical errors and that had allowed their strike team to nearly capture them. The commanding officer mentioned that had it not been for the armour allowing them to fight their way clear they would have been in custody. The most bizarre thing that happened in the incident from her point of view had been

the fact that in the middle of their escape Powerslide had chosen chastise Sledgehammer for going “off book”. Since that event the Task Force Commander had never seen or heard of either putting in an appearance until now, so she was sorry she could not have been of more help.

Though the leads had all gone to dead ends the chief could not help but wonder if Sledgehammer’s actions during the failed robbery was the source of Powerslide’s irritation. With no legal authority holding her in custody or admitting to holding her in custody, the chief surmised that either somebody was holding her against her will or she had decided to end their partnership, or she had simply not chosen to answer her partner’s calls. Whatever her reason for the “no show” the chief did not like the prospect of Powerslide getting angry and going on a rampage in the middle of his city.

As there was now a good chance the situation would quickly escalate the chief decided that Powerslide had to be dealt with sooner or later and that task would be a lot easier without his partner around. There was no way his officers could take down the criminal so that meant using outside assistance.

The military was one possibility, but the chief figured in a city filled with millions of people, turning it into a warzone was not a good idea. In his experience, soldiers with guns always seemed to make a bad situation worse.

That meant his only option was to make a call to Combined Law Enforcement Agency for assistance. In his opinion they were the only known international agency with the equipment and expertise to deal with the unique threat posed by powered criminals.

“Now stay down” ordered Dwaine.

It was over.

With Powerslide finally stopped the area erupted into life and police chief officers headed towards him from the cordon. As was usual in these situations Dwaine expected that he’d be asked to make a statement. However, there were a few things about the battle that troubled him and he needed answers.

For a start Powerslide was a known tactician and yet he had made many tactical errors. Then there was the curious attack on his own partner. Nothing really made any sense. As he ran the thoughts through his mind he was joined by Piledriver and Union who joined him in staring at their fallen foe. The appearance of the latter added another question to the list which he thought he’d clear up first.

“How the hell did you survive that collapse” he said to Union.

“Managed to use a wall of air to create enough pressure to leave a pocket in the rubble”

“Well anyway glad to see you’re okay”

An awkward silence now fell over them. Dwaine wondered if they were thinking about the weirdness of what had transpired and decided to break the deadlock first and share his thoughts.

“Something is not right here” he announced.

“How so?” asked Piledriver.

“This guy is supposed to be a thinker.”

“Agreed,” said Union, “I’ve fought Cyberus before and Powerslide has never acted this way. Sledgehammer is the impetuous one.”



Dwaine though was taking no chances for there were still signs of movement. Clearly Powerslide refused to be defeated. However before entering the battle Dwaine had already taken a look at Sledgehammer and learned how to end the game once and for all.

One more punch into the back of Powerslide's armour sealed his fate when the power conduit was severed and the villain collapsed to the floor.

Australasia's CLEA chief got back quickly and explained that they did not have any 'special' assets in the area, but was sending everything he could mobilise. Furthermore, the CLEA chief suggested, perhaps if things went south, then he should consider asking the 'hero' community for help, the so called "Code White."

The idea had initially been proposed by CLEA to police chiefs in major metropolitan centres around the world as a means of putting assets in place during times of crisis rather than relying on heroes to turn up at random. However, the police chief was one of those that was opposed to the idea. He felt that "vigilante heroes" were undisciplined and since they did not answer to anyone, they were a worse option than the military.

With the clock ticking, he resisted the Code White option and hoped CLEA's help would arrive in time. Fate though intervened, as Sledgehammer answered Powerslide's call and the clock ran out.

By now, he had access to live pictures being streamed by the media and could see the crisis unfolding with his own eyes. Unfortunately for him, with no media blackout in place, whatever decisions he made were now on public show, courtesy of the many news channels relaying video feeds of the unfolding drama.

From one of the helicopter views the chief saw Sledgehammer make her approach to the area from the roof tops. The armour protected her as she then dropped some fifty feet to the ground. Once there, the chief watched as she seemed to move cautiously towards her partner. He told his officers over the radio to ready their weapons, not that they could do any damage.

As the two armoured criminals closed on each other, the chief had many questions going through his mind.

Were the pair going to simply leave?

Not likely!

Was this all an elaborate means for the pair to meet?

That did not seem to track since it was much too public for criminals of their calibre.

Ideally, he really wanted his first thought to come true since his city could return to normal but the chances of that happening were negligible.

That left another possible outcome and that was the pair would simply go on a rampage or perhaps start robbing from the area. Whatever scenario the chief expected to happen, a moment later he found himself standing with his jaw agape as even he could not believe what he was witnessing.

“What the hell are you doing Tyler?” she enquired as she made her way over. She felt safe to use his real name since nobody could hear her unless the police hacked their private comm frequency.

Her steps were slow and deliberate. Linette knew there were police officers all around, possibly even a couple of snipers, but feared none of them whilst in her armour. However, she did recognise the fact that something about Tyler was a little ‘off’ so erred on the side of caution.

“Thinking!” he said.

“Thinking?” she said confused, “About What?”

“How you keep screwing up!” he replied with a raspy tone.

Having called her out to a very public meeting she found the comment rather insulting and considered she should have stayed away if he was going to talk to her like that.

The villain tracked the incoming object and stopped briefly.

Dwaine did not wait for another moment and made a headlong charge. The goal was to make it inside the sword’s swinging arc.

The ruse had worked because when Powerslide next hit him with the sword the momentum was greatly reduced, not that it mattered because a second later he was face to face with the villain.

Now up close and personal, Dwaine turned the sword fight into a boxing match. He now got a couple of punches into Powerslide’s upper torso. Dwaine expected to get a punch in the face but no attack came. That’s when he noticed Powerslide hopelessly trying to hold onto his weapon instead of letting it go and defending himself.

Capitalising on the tactical error, Dwaine slammed in a couple of quick body blows. He was not looking a gift horse in the mouth.

The force staggered Powerslide who presented no counter move.

This is ending now, thought Dwaine.

He grimaced as he lunged again and got in another few punches and for the first time he had the inkling that Powerslide was in trouble.

Feeling victory was on hand Dwaine made one huge concerted effort and gave it everything he had, sending in a huge right hook which struck Powerslide under the bottom of his helmet.

The collision of armour sent the villain flying upwards with enough force that it dislodged the massive sword from his hand.

His body sailed through the air before hitting the ground with a thud after clearing some thirty feet.

This time he did not appear to be getting up.

Powerslide he took a slightly wider course in order to allow the armour to build up his running speed.

The blade caught him and sent him flying.

It caused some minor damage to the exterior and a few bruises on the inside and to his pride but nothing to worry about.

This was getting frustrating. Try as he might, it seemed every tactic he could come up with would be thwarted by Powerslide and his random sword swinging

Dwaine though was stubborn and would not be outdone. He rethought his options and concluded that since the sword was the problem the logical solution was to take it out of the equation. A direct intercept was out of the question, so he decided that a better option would be an indirect approach to the problem.

A distraction perhaps?

Certainly, if his opponent was not “thinking” tactically then it would probably work.

Now with a plan in place Dwaine backed away.

Powerslide started to give chase.

This was intended and so as soon as Dwaine gained enough of a lead, he grabbed hold of the nearest streetlamp and wrenched it out of the ground.

Dwaine pretended he was going to swing his weapon like a club.

Powerslide manoeuvred his sword to block the attack.

Seeing this Dwaine threw the lamppost up in the air over the top of his swinging sword.

“Shouldn’t we be discussing this elsewhere, preferably away from the law and anyone else that might be on their way here?”

Linette was trying to suggest they settle their differences elsewhere. Though the police posed no threat, the middle of the street was no place for an argument. He may as well have shouted from the roof tops, “come get me”.

“And why would I do that?” he replied

“Perhaps because I rather like my freedom!”

She feared the longer they just ‘hung around’ the more chances were that the area would be swarmed with the military, CLEA, armed police, any wannabe hero in the area or all four. Some threats did not bother her, their armour probably could not take a massed attack

“The problem with that is I want people to witness this?”

“What? Witness what?”

His crazy behaviour and talking robot fashion was now starting to irritate her.

“Witness what will happen to people who keep failing me!”

As soon as he finished his sentence, Powerslide spun around lowered his sword and charged like a bull right at her.

Linette only just managed to jump out of the way of the incoming blade with milliseconds to spare and a parked car clocked the full force of the impact which sent it somersaulting into a nearby shop.

“Are you insane?” she shouted.

He did not reply but turned around and charged again.

This time she decided to defend herself.

He tried to get in a couple of strikes, but she blocked the attacks. The force of the blows caused her to stagger backwards and he appeared to have been affected similarly so by the time Tyler stopped a gap of about twenty feet had opened up between them.

“Why are you doing this?” she called out.

Again, Powerslide did not reply and once more advanced towards her. This time instead of keeping the blade straight, she noticed him perform a back swing like he was using a golf club and could not believe what he was doing.

“Stupid!” she muttered to herself, realising that the momentary lapse in concentration had allowed Tyler to build momentum.

A split second later she felt the blade connect with her armour and then she was thrust skywards. The air time seem to last forever and when she eventually came back down the side of a van ended her travel, its body deforming around hers as the armour slammed into the steel panelling.

“That does it,” she said whilst extricating herself from the twisted metal carcass.

She’d had enough. She was pissed. Though their working ‘relationship’ was a little strained of late he had gone too far now.

Well you want to play rough, then I’ll give you rough!

“Looks like I’m going to knock them some answers out of you!” she screamed.

No longer content to defend she was out for blood, namely his.

As she approached Tyler, he started to circle her.

Powerslide was ‘out of his tree’ and needed to be stopped one way or another.

With two heroes in trouble, throwing the van had been a slightly desperate move on his part but the ploy had worked because Powerslide was now focussed on him.

This could get interesting thought Dwaine as he sized up his opponent Powerslide.

Both had armour and though his opponent carried a huge sword, Dwaine felt sure his Meteor armour was far stronger which evened the odds in his opinion.

Dwaine moved into attack but instead of acknowledging the challenge. Powerslide seemed content to swinging his sword in a completely haphazard way. It was like watching a kid playing a video game where they have no idea what they are doing so they just keep mashing buttons at random and hope they get lucky.

Dwaine knew the guaranteed way to deal with an armoured opponent was to try and get in close and turn it into a physical contest. However there seemed to be no way to get past the whirlwind of metal.

“Activate blasters” muttered Dwaine and his armour responded by firing bursts of energy from his wrists.

Both shots where deflected, by the swinging sword, an outcome he pretty much guessed would happen. He did not even think the blasts would hurt Powerslide but now that he knew for sure that meant he had no choice but to get in close.

Waiting for the right moment Dwaine, made a mad charge in an attempt to sprint past the blade. Rather than heading right at

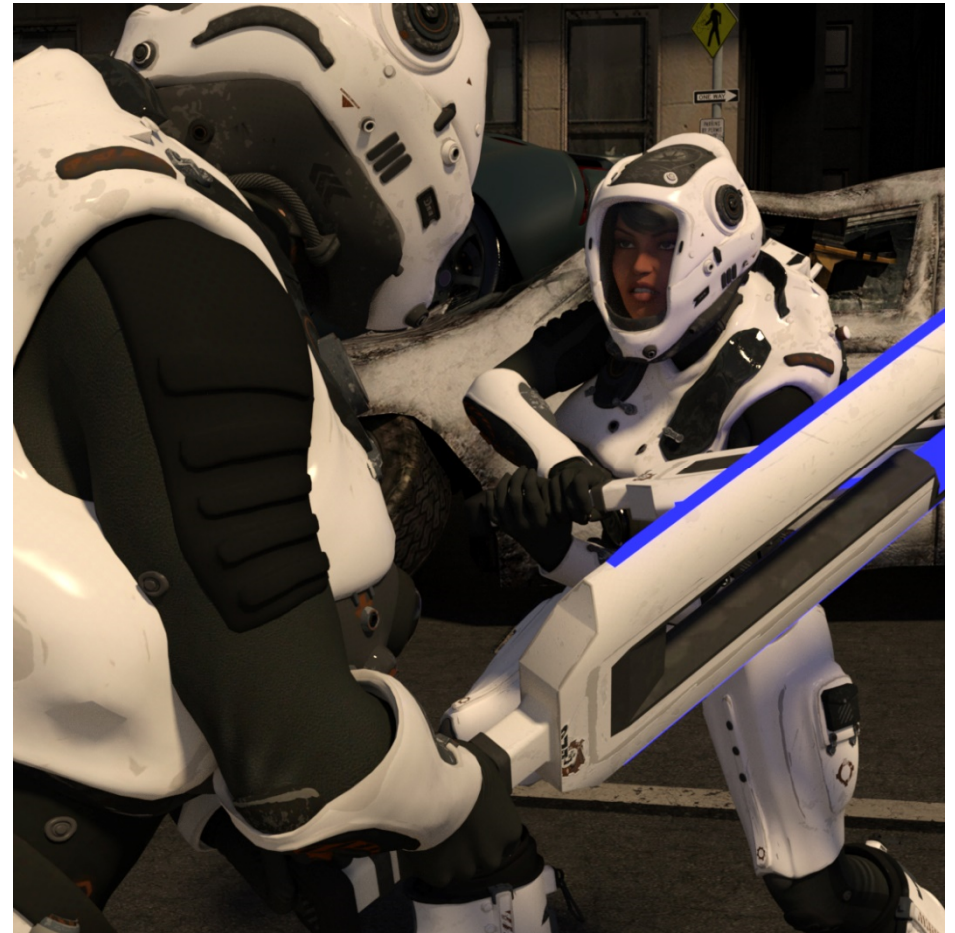
Natsuki was so relieved. Having made up her mind to go toe to toe with Powerslide her heart had been pounding so hard that she thought it was going to burst out of her chest. Now she could calm herself down for someone else had taken that responsibility from her, which left her with one important job, learning Union's fate under the rubble.



Having just arrived in his Meteor armour, Dwaine had not seen how most of the battle had progressed but worked out pretty quickly that

She did the same, since she did not want to get outflanked.

He tried for a torso strike.



She dodged the attack and returned the favour.

Again, he did not back down and tried again.

Fury now took control of her body and she snapped. An instant later she went mad trying to get in as many blows as possible.

He parried her blows and went on the attack. She defended against his strikes and not got through.

Assessing the situation, she noted that she could not get past his defence and neither could he get past hers which only left her frustrated. The entire battle was pointless but unless he backed down then she was not going to stop even if that meant they died of old age.

Despite the effort needed to keep on fighting she refused to simply make her escape and allow Tyler to think he had won, but after ten minutes had passed desperation finally set in. Every chance she recovered enough to try for a strike she made a mad charge at him.

He appeared to be tiring as well for the number of attacks he was making had also slowed.

Her conscience tried to tell Linette that what she was doing was illogical but when she got angry she got bloody-minded and this was one of those times.

Hardly able to hold her blade up, even with the increased strength her armour provided her attacks were all over the place. She no longer cared if they were on target or not.

Tyler though also seemed unable to get her and his attacks kept going wide and the only damage caused was collateral as vehicles started to get catapulted into property like missiles, propelled from the blows from the missed strikes.

Then after what felt like an eternity something completely inexplicable happened.

Tyler dropped his weapon.

"Please help me. Something...in my mind" he called out.

She was now left with the choice to rescue Union if he was still alive, take on Powerslide or there was the last option, simply run.

The latter was not really anything she gave serious thought to as she was no coward. Similarly, though she wanted very much to discover Union's fate, a rescue attempt was out of the question since she could not watch her back. That only left her with one choice and that was to fight.

However, knowing that Powerslide had already bested her once due to her inexperience meant it took a hell of a lot of inner strength and courage to stand and face him. This time she was going to have to fight smarter or else fail herself and Union.

Bracing herself, she waited for the attack

As if on cue Powerslide charged towards her and then there was a blur of something large and white.

A van?

It came crashing down from above and sent her opponent flying.

She traced the flight path backwards and sighted a figure in blue at the origin. It was Meteor, New Tokyo's local armoured hero.

"Hey you, popsicle with the big knife. You want to trash my town then let's dance!" he mocked.

Whether it was the insult, or the challenge Meteor got a response and Powerslide immediately stopped his attack on her.

That was a great relief for immediately the armoured villain turned to face the new challenger and lost interest in her.

hit with the side of the weapon, but she could tell that Powerslide was about to correct that mistake and take a proper swing with the edge of the blade.

There was no time to think, only act so she leapt upwards.

As the sword came around heading for its target, she slammed her fists into the ground. The shockwave sent both Powerslide and Union flying. Though she had hit her ally she felt she had undoubtedly saved his life for the blast had put significant distance between the pair.

Powerslide, one more back on his feet now seemed to run towards the building nearest Union.

This was definitely a change in tactics and Natsuki could not work out what Powerslide was doing until he leapt into the air. The slashing blade caused cracks in the masonry.

"Look out" she cried, but her warning was too late for the entire frontage started coming down right in the area where Union was trying to stand up.

She now felt helpless and stared in shock as Union became engulfed in tons of masonry.

Before she lost sight of him in the dust cloud, Natsuki noticed Dylan making some hand gestures like he was trying to use his Alpha ability.

There was a brief surge of air.

Then there was nothing.

Natsuki was now alone once more with Powerslide.

Again, he did not choose to make his exit which was unexpected.

Not taking any chances Linette chose to approach him cautiously, holding her sword in a mid-guard position. When content that he had given up she finally lowered her weapon and they met face to face.

"Sorry" he said "I have no idea what is happening to me. It was like I was not in control."

"Psychic attack?"

That was one explanation which would account for him trying to kill her.

"Maybe, I don't know".

As he spoke, Linette became aware that he was moving his hand down her back which she thought was a little odd.

"What are you doing?"

He ignored her query and without warning she felt pressure on the small of her back as he thrust his hand through the outer armour and tugged at something.

An instant later Linette felt the suit start to shut down. Her helmet display flashed and went dark indicating a massive power loss.

Without power she lost the augmentation to her strength.

The sword felt like it was trying to break her wrist.

She screamed and was forced to let it go.

Panicking she tried to run but the armour was now ungainly dead weight.

Unable to balance properly she tripped and fell but using every ounce of her remaining strength, she was able to rotate her body so she ended up lying on her back rather than face planting the pavement.

Staring upwards she could no longer move, secured in her armoured straightjacket.

A moment later her opponent came into view, straddling her prone body and staring into her eyes. She then heard him speak which meant he was using external comms.

“Problem with you is you don’t think. Our fight was a stalemate, so I used my brains and tried a new tactic. Now you’ll pay for allowing me to sabotage your armour, and all your other mistakes!”

She half expected him to run her through with his weapon but instead he discarded it.

The next thing she felt was a blow to her head.

Then another one.

She tried begging for mercy but without power all her comms were down, so he could not hear her anyway.

Eventually she lost count of how many times he had hit her head and then he started on her torso as well.

In his years on the force the Chief had seen many of the worst aspects of humanity but as he stared at the monitor screen, watching Powerslide’s actions made him feel sick. The man was like an animal trying to prise a nut out of its shell and he did not appear to want to stop until he achieved that goal.

He could not help but wonder that if what was happening disturbed him, then it would be a lot worse for his officers actually able to witness

appeared to cause Powerslide some balance issues because Dylan noticed him staggering around like he was drunk.

Satisfied that Natsuki had done as asked, Dylan once more called forth his weather controlling skills and generated a breeze in order to levitate himself off the ground and once there he used his hand gestures to create a storm in the skies above.

Now he was going to end it.

A moment later there was a flash and a bolt of lightning dropped from the heavens and raced towards the ground where the only thing in its path was Powerslide.

As the electricity danced around his body the villain wind-milled his arms wildly and then suddenly stopped moving altogether.

Figuring he was safe he allowed himself to return to the ground and Piledriver stopped her ground punching. Slowly he made his way over to the armoured “statue”. He was hoping he had overloaded the armour and shut it down as opposed to accidentally killing the occupant as that had not been his intention.

Erring on the side of caution Dylan stopped when he was just out of range of the sword and then when confident Powerslide was indeed out of commission he moved closer until he was face to face with the criminal.

At that moment Powerslide suddenly raised his head and grinned through the helmet glass. “Thanks for the recharge, I needed that!”

Natsuki watched helplessly as the criminal batted Union with the massive blade. Sheer luck had meant that the weather Alpha had been

"Yeah, I want...actually I need answer-"

Her sentence was cut short by a loud bang and a moment later Dylan was covered in shards of ice.

"Time to table this," she said.

Though he had his back to Powerslide, he guessed the villain had somehow broken out of his ice cocoon. Before he had time to react he felt Piledriver's strong arms push him.

Where he had just been standing Dylan noticed a huge sword blade had come crashing down.

Though he was not in the mood for a rematch it was obvious to him that Powerslide thought differently. Then he considered that Powerslide was not 'thinking' at all, since most criminals would have scarpered if they were outnumbered.

"Look out" warned Piledriver, breaking his thought train.

It was a good job she had shouted for the huge blade was going in all directions.

Obviously, he was trying to hit them, but it appeared that the villain could not make up his mind who to hit and was trying to get them both at the same time. The resulting sword swings were completely random and unfocussed, akin to someone trying to swap a wasp in panic, and that gave him an idea.

"Keep him busy for a few seconds," Dylan shouted

She did not reply but obeyed the request, or seemed to as she started pounding her fists into the ground. Though the shockwaves were small she did seem to be keeping him occupied and what she was doing

what was happening since they would be having an internal struggle in trying to not intervene. Having come through the ranks, he knew that if he was one of those on scene then he would have difficulty in ignoring Powerslide since allowing a vicious crime to continue went against everything those that carried a badge believed in.

However, he had chosen to issue the orders as a means to save lives for the ordinary officers of the New Tokyo police were ill equipped to deal with such a powerful criminal.

The situation though changed for the worse when Powerslide succeeding in smashing off Sledgehammer's faceplate. Now the Chief knew he had no choice but to act.

Sledgehammer's life was now in danger and though she was a known criminal she did not deserve to die. Besides, the death of someone on live television whilst police appeared to do nothing would not be good publicity for the New Tokyo police.

Naturally the Chief was still concerned for the welfare of his officers which is why he had tried to hold off from making the call but with no news from CLEA, he no longer had a choice. He had to send them into harm's way to save her life.

Speaking to the senior officer at the cordon the Chief proposed that his officers should form two teams. One team would open fire on Powerslide hoping to distract him, whilst the second team would snatch the battered Sledgehammer lying prone on the ground.

With the order sent the Chief now returned to the TV screens. He felt rather helpless as he watched as the officers on both teams ready their weapons and move into position. A moment later the first team advanced and opened fire. The chief closed his eyes and prayed that

they would all make it, but then there were gasps of surprise erupting all around the control room.

The chief opened his eyes again and noted that everyone else's were glued to the monitors.

"What happened?" he asked.

"A sort of purple and yellow blur that dropped down from above and stopped the bullets" shouted someone.

"Then when it hit the ground a blast wave knocked everyone to the floor" added someone else.

The Chief now watched intently at the nearest TV screen and saw that when the dust cleared there was a new player in the game in the outline of a woman. She was wearing armour, albeit a different type to that either Powerslide or Sledgehammer. Particularly noticeable to him were the massive pair of fists and oversized boots.

Someone else shouted the word "Pildedriver" in reference to a new 'hero' that had been making appearances recently. Though the Chief never bothered showing an interest in amateur crime fighters he thought there was something vaguely familiar about her.

Then he remembered, her picture had been on a file that had come across his desk recently. The first time she had 'appeared' in his city, his own officers had been responding to reports of a woman, wearing 'armour' wandering the streets with no memory of who she was or how she got there.

She had then been taken to hospital to learn what was wrong but before she could make a formal statement she had slipped past her guard one night. What the chief found particularly curious about here was the fact that when he ran her prints there were no records of her.

"Funny, nobody really gave me a name so I chose Dylan. As I said we share a great deal in common, including no memory of our old lives. I also think we are pawns in a bigger 'game'." He paused for moment thinking. "One thing that I do find interesting is that since you 'reappeared', two months ago you said, as well as your memory you also seem to have lost some of your combat skills."

"What do you mean?" queried Natsuki

"Two years ago when we fought I recall you were far deadlier and I get the feeling you would not have made the same mistakes as you did today."

"I'm not sure if I should be relieved or offended by that."

"Sorry, I meant no slight, merely an observation that whatever took your memory also affected the way you fight. "

It was now, the Dylan finally decided to reveal why he was so interested in her. The reason he had dedicated a lot of time trying to find her since he heard of the new hero in New Tokyo with no memory and recognised her outfit.

"Now since I finally tracked you down I have a proposition."

He grimaced on the inside since it sounded like a pick-up line.

"What sort of proposition?"

"Maybe working together we can find out who stole our memories or even if there are any others like us. I'm sure you want answers and so far on my own I have not found any."

Pildedriver appeared to think for a few moments before replying. At first there was silence and then this was broken by a strange cracking noise.

"What sort of answer is that?" she snapped

"One that reflects a situation I think we both share."

She raised an eyebrow.

Again, he realised he was speaking in riddles once more, so tried to clarify his statement.

"Actually I have no idea who you are. In fact, apart from the last two years I too have no memory of my past. However when I saw you on the news a few weeks ago, it triggered something in my mind and I've been looking for you ever since. Kind of ironic that when I don't go looking for you, I find you!"

"Maybe it's fate," she suggested. "So I gather we have met"

She seemed excited.

"Yes two years ago" explained Dylan. "The memory fragment I got was from just before I was found in a field in England. We were fighting in the sky and I got the feeling that you were trying to kill me. However, after you sent me crashing to the ground instead of finishing the job, you left me for dead!"

"I'm sorry, Union, I suppose but I can't remember. Deep down I cannot believe I would do such a thing" she said, the wavering in her voice indicating she was disturbed by the revelation.

He guessed as much. He also realised that in her calling him by his code name he'd not properly introduced himself.

"Call me Dylan."

"Natsuki, although that's a name someone else gave me."

Since he was the most senior police officer in New Tokyo Piledriver's file had ended up reaching him after CLEA put in a request for intel on her.

Had CLEA never asked then he doubted he would ever have seen the file, not that there was much information in it anyway. Sneaking out of police custody, meant the Chief felt she was guilty of something although he did not know what.

The only thing he was actually glad of now was she had reappeared, since it meant he could call off his teams from rescuing Sledgehammer. Though he hated to admit it to himself he knew he and his officers needed her as she might be the only way of stopping Powerslide.

Being shot at by supposed allies was not the best way to start a confrontation with Powerslide so the first thing she did was frown at the police who just unloaded into her. Then having got rid of that irritation she turned her attention to sword wielding head case.

"As much as I like the idea of you pair taking each other out, fighting someone who cannot fight back is low even for a criminal," she announced.

The sound of her voice had the intended response for Powerslide finally stopped his attack on Sledgehammer and stared at her.

"I don't know you, so if you know what's good, you will go away. This is a private matter!" he shouted angrily.

"The name's Piledriver and no I will not go away."

The words leaving her lips sounded odd since it reminded her she did not actually have a real name. A nurse had named her Natsuki whilst

she was a patient rather than keep addressing her as 'you' so until she remember who she was it seemed logical to keep it.

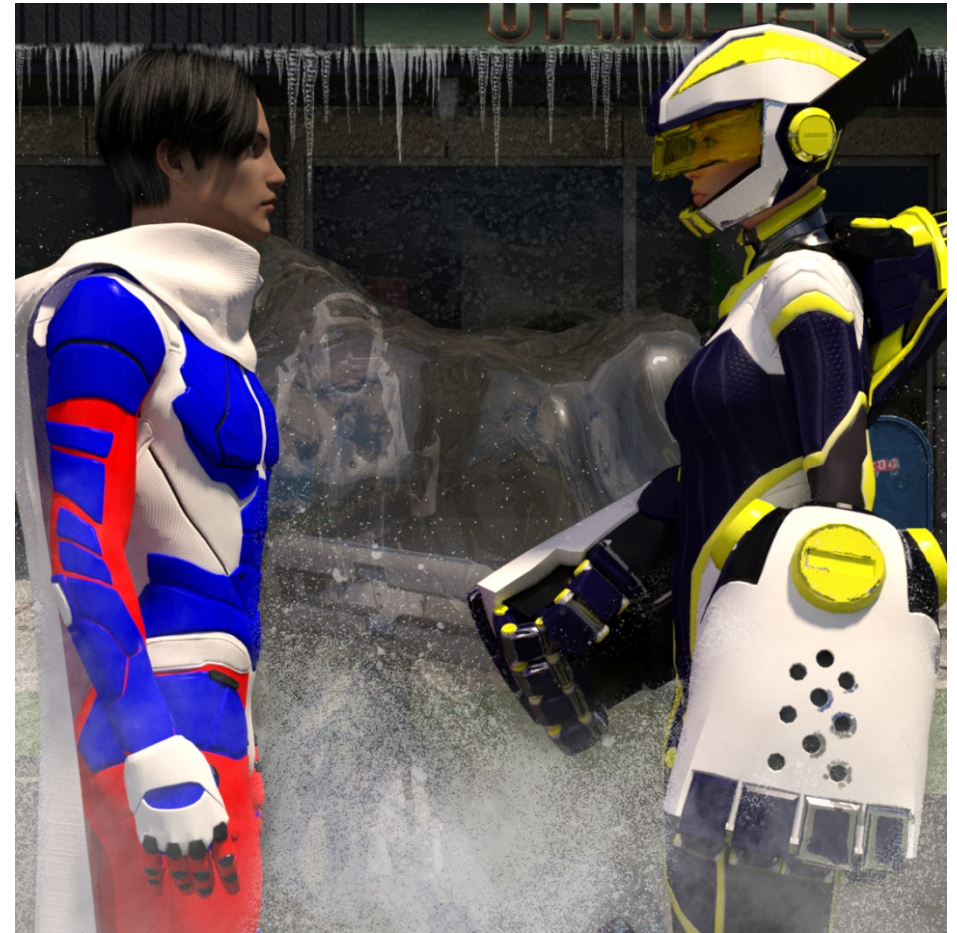


In her short time as a 'hero' Natsuki had never dealt with anyone that matched Powerslide's power, so this was all new so she hesitated. This gave him the time shuffle backwards on his knees and collect his sword before standing up. She then got the feeling he was aware of her inexperience for he just stood there proud and tall, like he was trying to intimidate her.

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Atlantica 2200 Special #1 - Downtown Fighting Marathon

"No" said Piledriver confused, "but I don't remember anything other than from the past couple of months. Not even my name." She paused slightly before adding "I take it we have met? Do you know who I am?"



"Interesting," he replied.

Admittedly the comment was neither helpful nor informative and he regretted saying something that stupid as soon as it left his lips.

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Atlantica 2200 Special #1 - Downtown Fighting Marathon

Looking upwards at the sky he moved his arms a wide vertical arc. The sky responded by moving cloud formations above him. The clouds darkened, and wind speed started to pick up. One of the clouds then burst into life by dropping a rapidly spiralling funnel of air.

Now he dropped his hands down in a fashion like he was pushing down on something invisible and the tornado seemed to follow.

It touched down within inches of the car that was pinning down the rookie hero whereupon the funnel collected the vehicle and lifted it off her body before hurling it into a nearby building, three floors up.

He watched as police officers nearby panicked and dived for cover, but the car was firmly wedged and going nowhere. With Piledriver out of danger, now he could finally relax.

Once more he allowed the weather to normal and the tornado simply faded to nothing. Dylan then headed over to Piledriver, held out his hand and helped her up.

Finally, free from the crushing weight, Piledriver stood up and dusted herself down.

"Thanks" she said.

Dylan said nothing and after a few moments of seeing her confused look realised he was staring at her.

"Is something wrong?" she asked.

"It is you. I had to be sure," he replied.

"What's me?"

"You don't recognise me?"

The image of gunfighters in the old west sizing each up before a show down entered her mind which meant what happened next would depend on who flinched first.

Natsuki got her answer sooner rather than later.

Powerslide charged towards her.

He pivoted his sword backwards, so it was facing backwards at shoulder height and then when he was in striking distance spun the blade forwards in a wide arc.

This was it.

She raised her arms his above her head and then the instant they reached their maximum height she drove them down, performing a double axe-handle and slamming both fists into the ground.

The shockwave that formed cracked the asphalt and then sped forwards collecting cars and debris in the process, turning them into rolling metallic boulders.

Powerslide's attack missed and the sword went wide.

As intended, Natsuki had caught him off guard and an instant later the wave found him and threw him backwards into the second floor of a building.

The wave passed and now gravity took over sending him falling to the ground where he landed in a sprawling heap.

That, thought Natsuki, should take care of him.

Powerslide however started to move to his feet.

Quickly she considered her options and decided a bigger blast wave should do the trick. Activating her boots Natsuki blasted herself upwards some twenty feet before allowing herself to drop.

Again, she slammed her fists into the ground creating an even bigger shockwave than before. However, her attack did not go as planned because as the wave raced away from her she noticed Powerslide bracing himself against a wall which kept him upright.

He was now running at her swinging his sword.

For the first time Natsuki felt fear.

This was not going to plan, not one bit. The second attack should have ended the battle.

As he swung his sword all she could do was try and defend herself by deflecting the blade with one of her massive fists.

Momentum carried the blade around his body, exposing his stomach.

An opening. An opportunity.

She took a chance and performed a gut punch.

The attack made Powerslide take a few steps backwards, but he did not fall.

Fists then met blade several times in rapid succession, but he would not go down. Never before had an opponent survived this long against her and feelings of doubt once more crept into her mind.

I must put him down for good, thought Natsuki .

She elected to boost herself even higher thinking that even if he braced himself he would not survive and remain standing this time.

he needed to, thus the officers at the cordon remained in brilliant early morning sunshine with nothing more than a gentle breeze to bother them.

Powerslide though still kept pressing forwards in his attack.

This was getting most irritating.

Alright, if that's not making you think twice then I'm going to have to make sure you stop, Dylan thought.

Adjusting his hand position a second time he concentrated and then pulled down moisture from the sky. In the already cold wind temperatures, ice now started to appear all over Powerslide.

Still the criminal did not want to give in.

There was only one thing for it, thought Dylan and a moment later he released the full fury of a localised ice storm.

The villain's advance was finally halted but this was not the time to let up.

Admittedly he was still quite angry, so he maintained the icy blast, forming layer upon layer of ice until the Powerslide, his armour and his sword had been engulfed in a thick shell of solidified water.

Perhaps it was overkill. Perhaps not, but either way Powerslide was not going anywhere and hurting anyone.

Having finally subdued his opponent and trapped him in a block of ice, Dylan could at long last stop. Dropping his arms, the storm dissipated to nothing and the area returned to bright sunshine.

Now he turned his attention to Piledriver.

A cyclone should do the trick, he thought.

expected one to be issued since he was all too aware that New Tokyo's police chief did not approve of costumed adventurers.

Brought at height by the winds allowed him to survey the area from above and having seen that Powerslide had taken out two women he was feeling pretty angry, so by the time he touched down he was just about fired up for a confrontation.

"You want to fight women? Then how about mother nature?" shouted Dylan.

The reaction from Powerslide was not entirely unexpected for he was already moving to attack.

Dylan though was not concerned. He had dealt with people far more trouble than a sword swinging maniac. In fact he had run across Cyberus once before and this time Powerslide was going solo.

He rotated his arms and made a few hand gestures and the sky started to darken. It always seemed strange to him that though he made the gestures even he did not know what they meant or how they affected the weather. It just seemed to be instinct, like he knew exactly what to do.

Pushing forwards with his arms he sent forwards a wall of rushing air moving at gale force speeds.

The winds slowed Powerslide but did not stop the villain who seemed undeterred and continued charging towards him.

Seeing the danger Dylan responded with yet more gestures and he increased the strength of the winds. Shifting his hand position slightly allowed him to now start decreasing the temperature as well. It had taken him a long time to fine tune his abilities, so much so he could localise the effects of the weather manipulation to a very small area if

High above the ground and at the top of her boost she noticed Powerslide running towards her position. Putting himself in the path of her shockwave seemed an illogical tactic.

Then on the way down she realised what he was up to. Fear turned to shock as he thrust his sword into a nearby car and used it like a trebuchet to fling the vehicle in her direction.

There was nothing she could do.

A moment later she felt intense pain as the projectile struck her in the chest, but the pain was not over for a split second after that she slammed into the ground with the car on top of her.

Desperately she tried to bench press the vehicle but unlike her opponent's armour, hers was not powered so it simply did not budge.

Natsuki's view now was slightly obstructed but she could see enough. Powerslide was coming towards her and he seemed to enjoy the fact she was trapped for there was a swagger in his step.

"Rookie mistake girl," he said whilst leaning over and gloating. "You exposed your need to build momentum for your big hits and just like my useless partner you will pay for your mistake!"

As he spoke he rotated his sword downwards but did not strike. Instead he aligned it to her neck like an executioner.

Panic set in and she struggled to break free but it was hopeless.

Around her she heard the sounds of gunshots as police officers opened fire, but the bullets simply glanced off his armour.

Time seemed to stand still now as she watched in wide-eyed terror as he now lifted the blade a few feet in the air and started to swing.

Natsuki closed her eyes and hoped that whatever was coming would be over quickly.

But nothing happened. No pain. Nothing.

She opened her eyes and let off a sigh of relief. Powerslide had backed away and he appeared to be more interested in searching the surrounding area rather than killing her.

Again, she tried to squeeze her body from under the vehicle and in doing herself ended up pivoting her head so it was facing upwards. That was when she noticed the sky above start to turn grey and darken.

This she thought odd because mere moments ago she had been in glorious sunshine. Bad weather never came in that fast, and yet she could feel a stiff breeze all around her. Perplexing as it was though she was still stuck, and the distraction had taken her concentration of Powerslide.

Quickly she searched the area and eventually found him again, and then let out another sigh of relief for he was not coming back to finish her off, at least for the time being. Instead he now seemed to be scanning the tops of buildings rather than looking for something at ground level.

Then he suddenly stopped with his head cocked upwards at a steep angle.

Tracing his eyeline Natsuki was able to move her head enough to see what he was looking at.

There in the sky above was the silhouette of a man slowly drifting downwards. She followed his movement until he touched the ground making no noise whatsoever. The grey skies now dissipated and

returned to bright sunshine, illuminating the new arrival in a bright shaft of light.

Instead of fearing for her life, she now felt hope. It was Union the weather controlling Alpha.



Having seen on the news the appearance of Powerslide, Dylan had decided to go an assist rather than wait for a code white. Not that he