

PART I : THE FALL

ANOTHER DAY AT WORK

I was, like all days, patrolling around Omegapolis to check if everything was ok before going to work. It is true that I could have just used my super-ear to verify the status of the city. I was Omegaman, not just another random superhero. The strongest, the bravest, who could lift an entire city, destroy any supervillain with just one punch, or even defeat whole armies with only my aura ! But I preferred to see things with my two own eyes, like they say, instead of just relying on what I hear. Plus, some crimes are very silent, so my super-ear doesn't catch everything. I was therefore flying around, when I saw the cutest thing alive : a little caniche dog who was barking. It was so cute ! I don't know what people like about cats. I stopped a moment to take a look at him, when I noticed that he was on top of a big tree and that he seemed to look at me when he barked. Oh no, he was in danger ! I went towards him and observed that he was in fact quite up in the trees, which was strange for a dog. I put him down and I looked around to see if its owner was around. I saw a young lady who looked at the dog I was holding and called him.

- Donut, come here !

Instantly, the dog jumped from my arms and went to see her. Phew ! The dog finally found its owner. Everything finished well again, like it always happens with Omegaman.

- Eum... sorry,... I just wanted to thank you... she began saying.

- No need, miss, Omegaman is just doing what he can, I replied fastly to go to work.

- ...Sam, she said with a strange smile.

At that moment, I froze. That lady just called me by my name. My personal name !
That wasn't good, really not good.

- Oh ! sorry, you were talking to someone else, I thought you were talking to me, I said, trying to not look surprised.
- Tsk. Stop playing, Sam. Sam Summers, periodist at the Global News.
- What ? How do you... Who are you ?
- What is happening, Sam, you don't remember me ? she said, pressing a button on her elbow.

At that moment, her clothes changed and some hi-tech glasses appeared from behind her head and covered her eyes with a dark glass which seemed like onyx.

- Zenith Ender, it was you ?

That wasn't good either. The fact that it was a known supervillain who knew my secret identity was even worse than if it was just a fan or a random citizen. My only hope was that she was the only one to know about it.

- Oh. Have you told the H.V.A about it ?

She laughed at me when I said that.

- The H.V.A ? Hahaha ! Like if they could do anything useful with such info. No, I think I am the only one to know about your identity. But don't worry, this is just the beginning of your doom.

Ok...

- Eum... Zenith Ender. I don't know what you are up to this time, but I will stop you as I always have stopped villains and will always do ! I said as I pointed towards myself. Now, surrender before anyone gets hurt and tell me who gave you my civil identity.

She looked at me inexpressively, like if she was thinking. She seemed very concentrated, more than I have ever seen in the past. She answered after a few seconds.

- Well, it's fun that you ask, because it appears that it is your own good old friend who told me about you.

- What do you mean ? Benny ? You kidnapped him ?

I suddenly felt quite angry. Benny Helper has been my best friend since I got to Earth and in the last months he was kidnapped by the H.V.A. I thought I lost him, but I

found him in a secret base of the H.V.A in the south of the country after some days. It was the worst crisis of my life. Just the idea of losing him again made me feel sick.

- I hope you didn't, you little... second-class villain.

She just gave me a mocking smile.

- Still troubled because of the little kidnapping, huh ? Well... what if I told you that... you never got Benny back ? That the Benny you know is just a robot I made up so I could spy on you ?

She looked way more ambitious than she usually has been in my past encounters with her. Something in her was different.

- What do you want, Ender ?

She ignored my question and continued.

- Knowing this, you could, of course, investigate and search for the real Benny, which shouldn't be too hard for someone with so much power as you. But, you could also interest yourself in the little bomb-activator I have in my hand.

She retrieved from her pocket what looked like a tv-controller and shook it beside her head. Things were going too fast and I didn't have time to come up for an effective solution to the problem I had ahead. I needed to slow down some things. At that

moment, I had an idea. I incremented the speed of my metabolism, so that my life-experience went as fast as light. To say it simply, I stopped time. Then, I took a moment to think about what was happening. This little minion of the H.V.A knew my name, said to have Benny as a hostage and probably had a bomb hidden somewhere in the city. I know I am repeating myself, but this was definitely not good. I thought about her. If she knew about my secret identity, what else did she know ? She said she spied on me through a fake Benny, but what for ? Is H.V.A planning something big ? Usually they just provoked me with big villains and I brawled with them a little, before sending them to jail. She also said that she didn't tell H.V.A, but it was hard to believe since she has always been one of their pawns. The type of supervillain that is just useful to help the bigger villains to plan their masterplans. And Benny... was it really a robot with whom I've been talking too in these past months ? I mean, he's got quieter than before and he doesn't laugh so much at my jokes anymore, but I thought it was normal. It really made me feel angry, but I had to control my emotions. Superpowers are easily influenced by feelings, and mine are too great to let them be influenced by something else than rational thinking. I had to be focused on knowing if Benny was really her hostage. I had to talk with her and discern if she said the truth. So, I decided to go back to normal speed and take her with me, so I could interrogate her at the H.Q.

- Miss, you are going with me.

- Mister, I am not. Because if I do, she said, putting her thumb over a button of her controller, a big kaboom will be heard in hundreds of houses.

I stopped. If I moved towards her too fastly, I would kill her. If I moved fastly without hurting her, she would probably press the button before I could touch her. I decided to buy some time.

- Hey, is that another bomb, Ender ? You definitely like bombs, don't ya ? I don't know, maybe you should try a demolition job or something. They could let you smash a lot of things.

She didn't laugh. Instead, she remained calm and said to me :

- No spare time for you, Omegaman. When I press this button, I'll activate the bombs I implemented in the hardwares of many computers around the city and the poor citizens will die. I will take their money while they rest in peace, and nobody will pursue me.

I looked her to her eyes and said :

- Is that your plan ? Robbing some people and killing them ? Is it just that ?
Your plan is kind of... I don't know... floppy ? Why did you come here, then ?

She remained silent for a moment and replied :

- Because I don't want to kill these people.
- Ha... I knew that you had a good-

- I want you to be the one to rob them and kill them.

Nobody spoke for some seconds and then I said :

- And how would you make me do such a thing ?
- I have your secret I.D. If you don't do it, you'll be known by everyone and you'll lose your friend forever.

I looked at her, with incredulity. Did she really thought that I would kill hundreds for a single friend ? She was nuts. But, knowing that these villains killed for less, maybe they thought it was natural for anybody to do the same.

- I will never fail on my duty of protecting Omegapolis, Zenith Ender ! I will find the way to stop you without anyone dying.
- I doubt it, Omegaman. There is no way you will stop me from pressing this button. Even if you achieve to destroy this controller, the bombs will automatically activate as a result of their destruction. The only way you could stop me would be by destroying my secret bunker ultra-protected in Detroit but-

BOOM ! I went ultra-speed towards Detroit and searched for her secret bunker by looking for her smell in the city. I found the bunker hidden in an abandoned building.

There were some defenses, like tasers and automatic guns that activated with intruders, which was probably what she wanted to warn me about, but it didn't make me anything. The bunker had a one-meter layer of steel, which she probably thought would stop me, but I smashed it with a single punch. Inside, there were some computers with red flashy screens. When I saw what was written inside I saw : Welcome Omegaman ! with smileys in the background. She planned my intrusion. Something was wrong. I returned as fast (and safe) as I could, but when I was back to where she was, I couldn't see her. Then, I heard with my super-ear her whisper : Up here, Omegaman. My ear told me that she was on the top of the building that was in front of me. I flew towards her and saw that she was standing alone on the plain roof of a 30-floors building. What was she doing there ? She still wore her sunglasses but she didn't have her villain costume anymore.

- Hi. I see that you destroyed my bunker.

I began to feel mad.

- Where is Benny.
- You only worry about Benny ?
- What do you mean **only** ?
- Well, what about your dear favorite interviewer ?

- Lisa ?
- Yeah, whatever her name is.
- What did you do to her ?
- That is a good question, she said, smiling a little.
- Answer me !
- Woah, calm down a little, man. Before rushing anywhere, maybe you should hear what I want to say to you.

I waited, so she said :

- When you destroyed my bunker, you activated the automatic detonation. I programmed the bombs so that if it didn't receive a signal from my base, a clock of 10 minutes would activate itself and the bombs would explode after that.
- What ? Bu-
- Wait, you still have a chance of stopping the bombs. When you destroyed the base, you also altered the function of my controller. Now, if you press the button of destruction, it will instead deactivate the bombs.

I ran at hyper-speed towards her, but before I reacted, she already had her finger over her glasses, and when I runned, she evaded me. What ? But I was at hyper-speed ! Unless that... But if that was true, her power, her secret ability, it was all just a trick !

- Bismuth, a little gift for you, she said pointing to her glasses.

There was nowhere to hide in this plain roof. Nor anything to cover her glasses. Zenith laughed a little and then stopped abruptly.

- Now, let's get straight to the point, Omegaman, Sam Summers or Larz Xurel, however you prefer. You have two options, or even three. One, you flee from here to the east and help your friend and your fiancé. Two, you go to the west and destroy the bomb-implemented computers and save the day another time. Or three, you just try to fight me and you lose. We both know that without super-powers you can't beat me.

She was an expert of martial arts, while I always relied too much on my super-powers. She was right. But something else bothered me :

- How... How do you know my alien name ? Even I didn't knew. Where did you get that information ?

She didn't answer.

- The clock is ticking Omegaman, and you got no light-speed to think for years.

You have to choose now : East or West ?

I thought for a second then went towards the east. It was merely instinctive, because, in fact, I just needed to fall off the building to be out of her sight for a moment to be able to think. When I was, I went to light-speed again, making everything stop.

This wasn't good. It was even worse than at the beginning. It made me think a lot and I wasn't so good at that. If only Brain-man was with me. But I couldn't make the time stop for him too so that I could explain everything to him without losing seconds of the clock. I had to find a solution to this mess. But, then I thought : Omegaman, you have always found a way out of every mess, that's why you are the better superhero. No villain nor masterplan has ever beaten you ! Why was I even worrying ? I took an internal breath and thought about solutions. I could go to deactivate the bombs, which I think I could achieve in ten minutes, maybe nine and thirty. I could save my close ones, which would take me around 15 seconds each. I wasn't very optimistic about a fight with her, but I could surprise her by attacking her through her dead angle. These were all good options. The problem was the unknown aspect of this issue. Everything was mysterious about her schemes. She seemed to be aiming towards something greater than what she pretended. She always looked a step-ahead of him and never lost her calm. I felt like a Titanic rushing towards a block of ice who hides an enormous mountain under it. I feel I began to think clearer at that moment. I asked myself about the veracity of her affirmations. Villains were liars after all. What if she only pretended about the bombs and about my close one ?

Maybe they were all safe. She had never killed anyone, as long as I remembered. Why would she kill someone, I thought. But I remembered the bombs she exploded months before and I began to doubt it. It wouldn't be so crazy of her to explode houses. She exploded a bridge some months before. But, was the Benny I knew really just a robot ? And Lisa ? Urgh ! I needed to do something. I didn't know if she was telling the truth, but I had to discover the truth and I couldn't take risks. If Benny and Lisa were in danger, maybe they needed to be saved immediately, otherwise they could be dead by the time I arrive. Instead, the civilians had a ten-minute delay before they could be saved. I then thought that it was better that I save my close ones. There was always the risk that she was lying about the delay, but my long-time experience as a hero made me think otherwise. Villains always like to see superheroes struggle with clock-time bombs and ethical dilemmas. It was part of their nature. Probably Zenith wanted an ultimatum with me at the end, which I would win as always and, at the same time, save the civilians. Yup, as always. So, I reviewed my plan : A- look for Benny and Lisa if they're okay. B- Call the other superheroes so that they find and deactivate the housebombs. C- Fight Zenith to keep her distracted and, if possible, get the controller to deactivate the bombs just in case the others fail. It seemed to me like a good plan. Thus, I went back to normal speed and went towards the east.

EASTERN PROBLEMS

I arrived at my apartment. I lived there with Benny, my best friend since I began being a superhero. Nevertheless, Zenith told me that she replaced him with a robot, so I was probably just living with a spy the last few months. When I knocked at the door, nobody answered. Usually, at this time of the day, Benny was still home, watching TV on the couch. I knocked another time and called him, but nobody answered. I decided to force things a little, so I twisted the handle of the door, breaking the lock without damaging the door. It will just cost me around two hundred bucks. Not too much. When I entered, the apartment seemed empty. I checked each room, one by one, my ultra-sense telling me that danger was close, when I finally arrived at my own room.

There, sitting in my bureau, in front of my computer, Benny seemed to be searching for something on my desktop.

- Benny ? What are you doing ?

A feminine voice, disrupted by what seemed radio interferences, said in a metallic voice :

- Benny ? You still call him like he was Benny ?

He turned over and the face of Benny was half without skin, revealing a metallic skin underneath. She was right. All this time, my friend was just a robot.

- Where is he ?
- Why do you ask me, she said in a disrupted voice, I am not a hero to help you. I am a villain waiting for your next move. And I remind you that you have 9 min and 30 seconds left.

Then the voice changed and it turned back to Ol' Benny's voice.

- Hey Sam !
- Benny ?
- You want to play 1v1 ? he said, referring to the fighting videogame we both loved, Mortal Fighter.
- Um...

Then, he got up and his eyes began to shine like rainbows. Ugh. It was bismuth. His arms began to expand, tearing the flesh and revealing huge steel arms. Oh oh. I evaded the first blow and runned back to the kitchen. I had no chance to beat him without my powers. Where did he get that bismuth anyway ? Bismuth was supposed to be banned from international production since they discovered it was my only weakness. Though, I was ready for this kind of eventuality. Twenty years of experience teaches you a lot of stuff. For example, big robots are slower. I waited for him to arrive at the kitchen then I jumped on him. I covered his eyes with the towel

we use, Benny and I, to dry the dishes and gave him a single punch with my restored powers. They don't call me Omegaman for anything. I took the bismuth's fragments from the junk that laid in the floor, to destroy them later, but I remarked at that moment that a word was written on each fragment.

"Lisa ?" "And"

And Lisa ?

What did she mean ? Was she saying that something was about to happen to her ? I jumped from the window and went towards Lisa's apartment, ready to save her. I was two kilometers away, when I saw her on the edge of her balcony, which was on the thirtieth floor of her building. She seemed to... No ! She was about to jump ! I flew as fast as I could, and saw her fall, with her body crossing the windows of the building, who reflected her as she fell to the ground. I couldn't lose her. Not when I maybe had also lost my best friend. I flew a little too fast but I caught her at the third floor. As I expected, the impact of my movement fissured the glass of the windows, but at least she was safe. I flew back to her apartment and woke her up, since she seemed asleep. She looked at me, startled.

- Omegaman ? Wait.. what was I ? The computer ! Destroy it !

I looked at her computer, which was on the table of her balcony, and punched it. It was just some dust now.

- I was working on my new article, she explained, when a kind of purple spiral appeared on my screen, with the word “Jump” in the center. Then... I heard a soothing sound... and I thought I fell asleep. But, I think the hacker used a special frequency to put my brain in trance to be able to hypnotize me.

Wow, she understood what happened in such a clever way. She was definitely an incredible person.

- Thank you Omegaman, you saved me... again, she said blushing a little.

I felt my whole face turn red and my heart go full-speed.

- Uh... no, it's nothing. Just doing my work ma'am.

I cleared my throat, searching for something smarter to say, when I heard a bip.

- Hey, it's that from your phone ?

- Oh, yeah. Maybe it's work.

She took her cellphone and froze when she saw it.

- What ? Why are you like that ?

- My-my cell. It's al-also hacked, she said in a panicked voice.

- Let me see.

She gave me the phone and I saw the number. 8:27. 8:26. 8:25. Each second, a bip resonated. Shucks. I had no time left. I was about to fly, when she stopped me.

- Omegaman ! Tell me, what is happening, why is someone hacking my electronic devices ?
- Sorry, I don't have time to explain. I'll call the H.Q. Stay where you are and avoid electronic technology. They'll send some superheroes to protect you until everything is finished.

Then, I flew back towards where I left Zenith. I began to think about the villain's cruelty. What did Lisa have to do about this ? Zenith wanted me, no ? Why did she put Lisa, an innocent journalist in the equation ? Just because she was supposedly my girlfriend ? It wasn't even true. I didn't even ask her out. I just knew her because I worked with her at the Global News. That's all ! Though it's true that I felt some attraction towards her, was it a sufficient excuse to involve her in Zenith's plans ? I felt mad towards Zenith. I didn't hate her, I just felt the justified anger towards something that was wrong, which was Zenith's lack of scrupulosity. I was almost where I thought Zenith was, when I felt a familiar sensation. I stopped for a moment and focused on that sensation. It was not really a scent, nor an aura that I perceived. It was more like... music. No... a sound. More precisely... a voice ! It was Benny's voice ! I could hear it, in the west, in the low-class people's town. Without waiting for

a second, I flew over there. It seemed weird to me that I didn't hear it before, but maybe the voice of the fake Benny tricked my senses and made me ignore his voice in the town. He was saying :

- Omegaman... Omegaman... If you hear me, I am trapped in a weirdo's apartment. The Benny you know is just a replica. If you can hear me, come and rescue me, he whispered.

"I am coming, Benny" I thought, before going towards where I heard his voice. When I arrived (I kind of broke the wall of the apartment, to be honest), I saw him inside a room which was separated from the rest by a wall of glass. The wall only had one hole, which was connected to an air-filter through a tube. That is why I never smelt his scent around here before. Benny was sitting on the floor, in front of a simple bed. He looked sad and depressed.

- Benny ! Benny ! Are you okay ?
- Sam, here you are, he said with a tired smile. You have arrived at least, after all this time.
- Sorry Benny, I was fooled by the fake Benny.
- It's okay. The only thing that matters is that you are here.

“Oh Benny, you sure are a good friend” I thought inside. Then, I was about to punch the glass, when he stopped me.

- Wait, Sam. You shouldn't crush the wall.
- Why, Benny ?
- Because if you do, you'll follow exactly her plan.
- What do you mean ?
- Sam, you gotta hear me. This villain, she's obsessed with you. I saw her room, I observed her while she built her plan. She has thousands of posters of you, from all the collections. She has been spying you for months, through the fake me. She knows more about you than I knew about you.
- Oh, well. But you know, I got a lot of fans, Benny, and some know the brands of my underwear more than I do, I said with a cheesy smile.
- Euh... ok. That was kind of odd to say.
- Why ?
- Anyway, I am serious Sam. She is not just another of your fan-club. She is a psychopathic weirdo who has only one goal in her life.

- Which is ?
- Destroy you Sam. Destroy the icon that Omegaman represents.
- Ok... You don't need to be dramatic Benny. I've beaten up thousands of villains before. She doesn't even have superpowers. I learned it a while ago.
- Sam. You didn't see what I saw. She literally says in her dreams "I'll destroy you, Omegaman !" and then she laughs.
- Well, Benny. I am sure many of my arch-enemies say that in their sleep.

He looked at me, sighed and then pressed his nose with his fingers.

- Ok. But at least hear what I managed to get as information.
- I hear you.
- She has put a trap connected to this wall. If you destroy it, the whole room will be exposed to Bismuth's radiation and a net will fall on you.
- I can evade it by going superfast.

- No, she knows that you are as fast as light. The mechanism acts simultaneously. If the wall is damaged, the room is instantly exposed to Bismuth.
- But then, how are you going to get free ? I can't let you here at her disposal.
- Don't worry, Sam. She isn't interested in me. She's just interested in destroying you. She has planned to let me free when everything finishes.
- But-
- Trust me bro. Have I ever lied to you ?
- ... Ok.

I thought about leaving, but then an idea crossed my mind.

- But then, why did you call me ? You said you have been calling me for months.
- Because I needed to warn you. She has Replicator Mayhem working with her.
- What ? And what is he doing ?
- He's guarding the houses of the people who have bombs in their houses.

- Ok, that changes things a little.
- But that's not all. She has a Bismuth trap on every house with a bomb. She is planning to capture you the moment you step in one of them.
- Oh. But I could avoid them.
- I don't know Sam. She prepared them for you. I don't think she will make a trap for you that doesn't even work.
- You know, it happens to me a lot of times, with the super villains that I stop.
- ... Promise me to be careful Omegaman. You know it's different this time.

I thought about what he said for a moment, then I agreed.

- ... ok, Benny. I'll be careful.

After that, I said goodbye and flew away. I hoped that he was right and that she would free him afterwards. She was still a criminal. She could use him for experiments or something like that. But Benny seemed to understand her way of thinking better than me and I trusted him. Benny had always had a good instinct.

ULTIMATUM

What Benny told me didn't change a lot with what I had planned to do, since I didn't plan to deactivate the bombs myself. I still alerted the other superheroes that were assigned to the deactivation of bombs to be watchful for traps in the houses. Then, I changed direction to land on the H.Q. I entered through the roof entrance and took the elevator to descend to the underground laboratory. After that, I entered the maintenance room, where they left the brooms and the mops and I took the oldest broom to tap the floor. Afterwards, I said "Beta Century" and a quick flash scanned my iris, giving me access to the hidden elevator behind the room. I entered and pressed on the only button of the elevator : " Dr. Maniacs Lab". The elevator descended very fast and stopped abruptly 200 meters below. Then, the doors hissed as they opened and I saw the familiar face I was looking for.

- Omegaman ! How are you ? said the seventy year old scientist with the crazy white-hair haircut.
- Good, Mr. Maniacs, but I have no time to lose. There is a bomb, or better said, many bombs that are about to explode.

He looked at me smiling.

- Another normal day for you, huh ?

- I wished I could say so, but my enemy seems to be smarter than me and she seems to always be one step ahead.

- Mmm... that seems interesting. A strategist. Been a long time I haven't seen one. These days all that villains seem to be searching for is raw power. Maybe it's because of you Omegaman. You haven't understood it yet, but you changed the world of superhumans. Your arrival on this planet was an historic event. The balance of the superhuman world flipped to our side when you arrived.

- You mean the good side ?

- Yeah... But you seem worried, Omegaman. Is it because of her seeming-ability to read your mind and predict the future ?

- Uh huh. I don't get it. It never happened to me before.

- Ha ha ha, he chuckled. It's because you've never been confronted by one. All supervillains strategists decided to flee from you when they saw you. They estimated that they could never beat you, so they now hide in the darkness, taking advantage of every shadow to do their evil plans without being seen by you.

I was surprised. I never thought that someone could hide from me.

- But don't worry, we have our intelligence unit here working in such cases. But tell me, why did you come in such a hurry ?

- I need the anti-Bismuth suit. The strategist, as you call it, is Zenith Ender. She seems to have a substantial quantity of Bismuth with her and I suspect her of using it to provoke me in a duel without super-powers. The thing is that I am sure to lose, since she is a master of many types of martial arts and my karate is kind of rusty.

- Zenith Ender ? The second-class villain ? That is unexpected. But... Does it mean that her super-power was just a Bismuth's activated gadget ? This could be something that our intelligence would need to investigate. But, I still think that you don't need to worry. As I said, taking in account your immense powers, it is almost impossible that you lose against a human. The probabilities are almost non-existent, even if you are sleeping ! I calculated it myself ! Though, if you want to be reassured, take the white pills that are on my desk.

- You said almost ?

- Yup, they are around zero point a hundred decimals one. And I estimated generously.

- Hmm. Ok, thank you doctor. I'll be back later on to bring you... the pills ? Wait, wasn't it a suit ? I thought that you created an anti-radiation suit to protect me, no ?

- Well, I did create a protection for you in case that someone used Bismuth against you, but it isn't radiation that you need to be protected from. In fact, even though Bismuth is radiative, its scale of radiation is very low. The problem of Bismuth is its subatomic composition. As you have probably noticed, Bismuth has a unique and special structure and color. It is due to his number of subatomic particles, which altered the way that the atoms assemble between them and the frequency of light that is reflected. The thing is that its subatomic composition also alters the spin of the electrons of the atom in a way that is harmful to you. The spin of electrons of Bismuth follows a specific pattern to which you are nocive. It is a phenomena way ahead of modern scientific knowledge, put to put it simply, that pattern prints in the subatomic plan of reality a certain code that deactivates your powers when you are too close to them. It's interesting, because it allows us to postulate that your powers are somehow linked to subatomic power, which makes us consider the possibilities between genetic and quantum physics, since we know that your powers come from birth...

I looked at him silently for around ten seconds, not understanding anymore what he was saying, but knowing that time was still running.

- Ahem. Sorry to interrupt, but how do I take the pill ? Do I just take one ?

- Oh, for that you just need to swallow it. You don't need water. Just one, or it won't work. And also, it works for an hour, so you need to take another one if you want to be immune again.
- Ok. Sorry to stop the conversation, but I can't stay anymore. I need to stop that scoundrel before there is any victim.
- Ok, take care of yourself.

After that, I took the elevator and went out of the building. On my way to where Zenith was (I didn't remember where she was, so I followed her scent, to find where she was), I took the pill the doc gave me. It didn't make me feel weird, and I didn't notice any side effects as I was expecting. When I found her, she was still on the roof of the building, seemingly waiting for my return. I landed smoothly on the roof, still thinking of a cool line to mark my entrance, but she interrupted me before I could think of one.

- There is five minutes left, Omegaman. Later than I expected, she said smiling. Which is good for me. But I'll have to kick your ass faster.
- This is the end of your evil plan, Zenith Ender. You will not succeed in your spiteful schemes.

(That is the best I could come up with).

But, in contrast to what most villains do, which is to respond to my provocation by attacking me or respond with another witty line, she just remained silent. Then, she put herself in a strange position, which seemed like the starting position of a martial art, but I didn't know which one. From the knowledge I had on martial arts, it seemed like a mix of karate and Brazilian Jiu-jitsu. She probably created her own style. She was making herself very clear. She was here for the fight. It made me remember that she had previously provoked me in a duel the last months apparently because she wanted to beat me. It was now clear in my mind that she did all this scheme just to fight me again. But why such a complex plan ? Maybe she wanted me to feel pressured because of the clock so I rushed into her and then...

- If you are hoping to make me fall into a Bismuth trap, it won't work this time. I am immune to Bismuth for an hour.

When I said that, she looked sincerely surprised. She seemed to reflect on what it implied, but then she gained back her cold expression. It seemed like it wasn't too bad for her.

- You are so dumb, she said in a sharp, crude voice. You are voluntarily saying your weakness to your enemy.
- What do you mean ? I am immune, I said, confused.

- You just told me the exact duration of your immunity. It's like if you said to a killer, in one hour I'll be exposed so you give me a free shot.
- Well... I said, thinking about something smart to answer. I still have some other pills to protect myself.
- Ugh, that's even worse.
- What ? The fact that I can make the duration of my immunity ?
- No ! The fact that you told me that you had the pills with you !
- Oh.
- Anyways, she said to cut the conversation. We are here for the fight, so come and fight.
- But, I told you I am immune ! You can't beat me. You should run or something. Or do you have a way to cancel my immunity ?

She looked at me with an amused smile and answered.

- That would be a fun thing to try, but no. I am not using your Achilles' heel. I have my honor. We will fight in a fair punch-to-punch fight as you like them. Or let's say an almost fair fight.

The moment later I was laying on the floor. I felt a strong pain in my neck. I got up fastly and got in a defensive position.

- What ? What did you do ?

She looked at me with disdain.

- Not even activating his invulnerability on close range, tsk, I heard her whisper.
- What did you say ?
- Nothing. You should know your own weaknesses, Omegaman.

She took again her characteristic pose and waited. "I guess it's my turn" I thought.

Then, I went 200 km/h and got behind her to hit her in the back of her neck. But she disappeared when I was about to touch her. What ?

She was behind me.

Instinctively, I dashed to get far from her. She took her pose again. Something was wrong. There had to be a trick or something. I then regulated my metabolism speed to hypersonic level. I looked at every movement she made. I saw her arm press a little against her rib in an unnatural movement. Almost like a tic. The second later, I felt pain in my right ribs. Ouch, it really did hurt ! I got up again and prepared

myself so she couldn't place another hit. I knew what she meant when she said that I didn't activate my invulnerability. My superpowers only were active when I voluntarily (or involuntarily) activated them. I wasn't strong all the time, though I could be strong enough to move the Earth. I wasn't invulnerable all the time, though the Sun itself couldn't burn me when I was. But I never saw it as a weakness. It helped me to hide my secret identity, since I could be weak and bleed as any other human being when I was in civil mode. Then, if any danger arrived, my ultra-sense would prevent me, and I would activate my super-powers. But, since I touched the floor of the roof, my ultra-sense didn't stop ringing in my mind and I couldn't make it stop. Ultra-sense was the only power I couldn't control. It was like a migraine you can't control, though you know it's for your good. I just could fight knowing that for some unknown reason, she was a real threat for me. She again seemed to teleport herself or something, because I felt a slight contact in the side of my head, though it didn't hurt, since I was as resistant as a rhino in this moment. It was not a very scientific term, but it helped remember approximately what kind of hits I could receive in that state. A rhino wouldn't feel anything if a human kicked him in the face, though he would die if a building fell over him. I looked at her again. What did she do ? Teleportation ? Why didn't I saw her when she touched me then ? I could have used my aura power, which allowed me to knock out everyone in a radius of a kilometer, to see if it was some kind of dimensional teleportation that she used, if it wasn't because there were too many civilians around. They would complain if they woke up an hour later with a headache because of me. That wouldn't be good for H.Q. I thought about other villains who could do something similar. For example, there was this lizard man who could hit me then disappear through some sort of camouflage who looked like a chameleon's. Or the Invisible Hitter, who could give you punches just by

conceptualizing them in his mind. But all of these villains had superpowers, while Zenith Ender simply didn't have any. She was just a plain normal human. But she used high-tech. Thus, she was surely using some kind of object or technology that allowed her to hit me like that.

I was still thinking about the origin of her ability, when I remarked that she was analysing me.

- Still thinking about my superpower, Omegaman ?
- You don't have any ! It's a trick, I answered angrily.

Instead of replying, she observed me, seemingly trying to calculate something. Probably about her next move or something like that. That was what the doctor said : she was a strategist, thus she should be analysing her strategy.

- Ok, I'll tell you, she finally said after some seconds. I have a gadget in my armpit. With it, I stop the time for a short amount of time, to be able to hit you on a weak spot.

A gadget that can stop time ? Only the Time Breaker could do so, but it was a legendary artifact that was thought to be lost in the WWW. How could a simple human without any powers obtain it ? Though her explanation was the only rational option.

- Weak spot ? You mean when I put down my guard ?

After I said that, I felt another hit, this time in the belly.

- Urgh. I guess you are not very chatty today.

Then, I put up my guard again, so she didn't hit me again.

- I can stay all day here, Zenith Ender, I said placing my fists in front of my face, like a boxer.
- Just call me Zenith, please. And no, you can't stay all day here, she said, shaking a clock in front of her.

The bombs ! I forgot about them. The clock marked 1:30, which meant there was only 90 seconds left. Hundreds would die if I didn't stop her ! Though I still had my backup plan.

- You think you got everything under control Zenith, I said, respecting her wish of being called just by her first name, but I got my guys working on the safety of the civilians. You won't harm anyone.

She lifted an eyebrow.

- Are they ?

She took out a cellphone from her pocket and showed me what was on the screen. With my super-vision I could see very distinctively the 150 different panoramas that cameras seemed to be filming. It was the entrance of every house with a bomb. There was a guard on each one but all of them looked identical. It was Replicator Mayhem, one of the top-villains of the H.V.A. His power was quite strong, since his clones were immortal, superstrong, and invulnerable. The only way to stop him was by knocking out the original, since he had to consciously maintain them existing. I had dealt many times with him, succeeding in stopping him, but Replicator Mayhem had found a way of escaping all those times and returned to the secret base of the H.V.A. Placing Replicator Mayhem as a guard was a big problem to resolve, since he could only be defeated if the original was found, and there were 150 possibilities to verify. But I was confident in the squad that was assigned to deactivate the bombs.

- Hey Team Omegaman, how is the situation ? I said talking on the radio that was on my clock.

- Bzzz. Bzzz. Here Team Omegaman. The situation is a little complicated. We found the locations that were connected through radio signal to the place you said was the activator of the bombs. We have a super-hero ready to enter the inside of every house. But, we have a super-villain with cloning powers class AAA guarding every entrance of the house, windows included. We are preparing a plan to distract them, but we don't have much time left. We are thinking of just rushing all at the same time, hoping that one of us hit the original. We hope that you have better luck in your side. Over.

I remained silent. I went at light-speed to calm down a little and analyse the situation. Around one minute left, a hundred and fifty civils on the edge of dying. A single villain with a button that could stop everything. I had been relaxed because I knew she was just a powerless villain and that I could stop her easily, but now time was up and I couldn't allow that so many people die just because of her. I had to become serious.

So I looked at her serenely and said :

- You are going down.

I rushed towards her, preparing to take her out. As I was just about to touch her, she disappeared and I felt pain in my back. Urgh. Another hit. I turned over and I saw her looking at me. I went very fast and did a half-circle to get behind her, preparing to hit her from her back by surprise, but she disappeared again and I felt many hits on my back. I fell to the ground. Dang, she was too fast. Better said, I was too slow. She knew I had to slow down before hitting her, or she would die, so she used that time where I slowed down to react and stop the time. Her method was rather suicidal, since she would die if I miscalculated my strength, but it was rather effective for the moment. I tried again to hit her through her dead angles or to attack her directly, but she always had the time to react and stop the time because I slowed down. So I changed my strategy. I went full-speed towards her, my arms in front of me, then I passed my arms under her arms and carried her towards the air. I just slowed down when we were in the air and I did a circular movement towards the sky to not kill her. Though it surely hurt her a little and cut her breath, since she seemed to choke a

little when I slowed down. Now she couldn't stop time and I could knock her out. But, as soon as I slowed down, she kicked me on my belly with her knee. My guard was down at that moment, since I wanted to knock her without hurting her too much, but she used it to hit me first. Now I was the one with no air and I accidentally released her. I thought she was going to fall, but she disappeared instead. The instant later, she was taking my right arm and doing an ippon on me. I was going to react but she disappeared again and then some invisible force smashed me to the ground, as if a thousand kicks had hit me and accelerated my fall. I felt pain all around my body. I got up with difficulty and saw that she was still standing there, with her characteristic pose. I felt mad at that moment and I have to admit that I lost a little bit of control there. I went light-speed, preparing to hit her so fast that she couldn't react before, but just before I did, I saw that she was already pressing her arm. Bad timing. She was about to stop time again, probably to hit me again, and I was going light-speed a millionth of a second too late. When I was at light-speed, though, I saw her move. It was strange, because it was as if the whole universe was going slower and that she was just going at a normal speed.

- This is the true origin of the Time Breaker power, she said in a calm voice. It slows down the whole universe, except the one who is in direct contact with it. Usually no one can observe it, except the one who uses it, but, probably because you are going at the same speed that light goes, you can also see it. Look around you, look how light moves.

I looked around me and saw how light moved, since I went at the same speed. I was used to seeing the world like this, since anytime that I used light-speed, I could see

the light move like a current and the rest of the world being still. It was a strange vision, hard to explain, but it was rather beautiful. I looked again at her, waiting to see what she was going to do, but instead, she just continued talking. It wasn't like I heard her, since sound traveled very slow at this speed, but I knew how to read lips (spying villains' conversations at long-distance was part of my job, and sometimes they used anechoic chambers to hide from me).

- Most humans would most probably never see this, she continued. But you, just because you were born that way, you can always see the world like this.

I heard anger and reproach in her voice, but I didn't understand why. She seemed to sigh and she got her severe expression again.

- Now, my dear, let's consider you. You are presently going at light-speed. Probably to hit me, huh ? Quite dangerous, don't you think ? If you managed to hit me, you would have caused a light-boom in this city, in a radius of around... two kilometers. In a radius of two kilometers, how many people do you think live around here ? Probably more than a hundred and fifty, don't you think ? You wouldn't be a superhero anymore, you would just be a villain, like me.

I saw in her eyes some kind of amusement and I sighed internally. She was right. I lost my self-control and I was about to do something dumb. I returned back to normal speed, preparing myself to receive multiple hits in my hurt body. But, because I was prepared, my invulnerability was activated and I didn't feel any damage on my

body. Ouf. I rolled back through the roof and fell on the other side of it. I then heard a big explosion and felt shocked. Did the bombs explode ? But there was still a minute left !

- What did you do ? I asked her, panicked.
- Nothing. It's just the consequences of your actions. You went light-speed and you hit the particles of the air too fast, which created a destructive rush. You are lucky nobody died in the process.

Argh. She was right. But I had no time left. I was the hero and I had to save the people. So, I used one of my favorite techniques : my fake clones ability. I used my speed to make it seem like there were many clones of me. I used it to circle her. Last time I used it against her, I knocked her out very fast. She looked calm while I was using my technique, and when I was about to hit her from her right, bang ! She teleported in front of me and she was giving me a karate punch in the upper part of the torso. I lost my breath again and I was propelled behind. Ouf. She totally cancelled my technique. I was again on the floor, trying to catch my breath. I began to see the world blurry. I was alarmed, because I was going to lose consciousness and there were just some seconds left. I lifted my head.

- Zenith, please, no. These people are going to die, I said in a weak voice. If you want to kill me, because you are mad at me or something, then deal this with me. But these people, they are innocent. They haven't done anything wrong.

She approached me and I felt her foot over my head.

- Yeah ? Well, I think I can kill both you and these people.

At that moment, I went light-speed. She was too close, probably because she thought I was done. And she was kind of right. I received too many direct hits and I had just enough strength to activate my light-speed mode. The next hit I'll give will probably be my last one. But I just needed a single hit. I always just needed a single hit to destroy any opponent, alien robot or human. I thought about building a strategy to hit her once, but I let down that idea. She was better than me with planning, and I had almost no strength left. I felt like she had stabbed me directly to the heart when I had my armor on. Like if she managed to place a knife under my armor to slowly kill me. She got me, but I still just needed a single hit, then take the control and press the button. I had to take the opportunity that she was too close to me and place an uppercut. A moment where she let down her guard.

- Bye bye Omegaman, have a good time in the afterlife.

That was the moment. I used a technique that I learned recently with my mentor, Nitroman. Basically, I had to move at light-speed, moving in the directions where I knew that there was nothing, doing a circular movement to be in front of my target. It was a kind of circular movement that allowed me to move light-speed without doing any damage. When I succeeded, I could be in front of my enemy way faster than usually. It was impossible for her to react fastly enough to my hit, since I was literally in front of her, my punch ready to hit her, before her brain could even think about

what was happening. I was saving the day in the last second, like many times before, but I noticed something before placing the uppercut. She was smiling, looking ahead of her, like if she expected something to come from that direction. Was it me ? I looked fastly to her right arm and noticed the slow movement of pressure. She was activating the Time Breaker again. It was too late. She had already predicted what I was up to, because she could only had been so fast by knowing what my reaction would be. The moment later, a hit on my cheek sent me flying. Well, it was more like a thousand punches, or even millions. I tend to be more vulnerable in my face, since I unconsciously lower my invulnerability there to look more human. Alien's complex. But, in that moment, I felt the greatest pain I have ever felt. I felt dizzy and I felt the necessity to puke. My body was done. I couldn't even get up. Zenith Ender looked at me inexpressively. She approached and sat down at my side. Then, she put herself in a strange position around me, probably a Brazilian jiu-jitsu technique that she modified and she began to choke me.

- Omegaman, she said, whispering at my ear. Look at the clock, there is only ten seconds left. All these people will die because of you. Aren't you the hero ? Aren't you the one supposed to save them ?

I saw the clock she had in her wrist. 10, 9, 8.

- Look at me, Omegaman, she said turning my face towards her as I lost consciousness, didn't I told you ? Didn't I warn you to be careful who you save ?

At that moment I looked at her and saw her smile. Her huge and wide smile as I have never seen Zenith have. 7, 6, 5. A wide smile unfamiliar from Zenith, but familiar from... the past. Yes... the little girl... So it was her...

Then, I lost consciousness.

PART II : THE PLAN

ORIGINS

I was five years old when I first saw him. He was flying (as always, tsk) to save a little dog that was drowning in the polluted river of Mississippi. After giving the dog to its owner, he went toward the interviewer who was calling him to ask him some questions. At that moment, he smiled with his well-known smile, that one who was shiny white because of his perfectly-brushed teeth. At that moment, I instantly knew I hated him. He answered the questions of the interviewer, who appeared to be a pretty woman. He answered with classic and heroic comments like “just doing my job, miss” or “duty never waits”, which just contributed to me realizing how perfect he thought he was. He then took a heroic pose for the photograph and then flew away. “Who do he think he is !” I thought. Immediately after, the pretty interviewer answered my question : “Here in live, we have seen and heard another time the legendary Omegaman !”. Omegaman, so that’s the name of sworn enemy, I thought. Tsk, even his name is cringe.

After that event, I continued watching him on TV, motivated by a pleasant hate towards him. I saw his exploits and how everybody admired him. I understand after a few months that he was The superhero. The best of the best. No villain, cosmic or interdimensional, could resist the fist of his. Everybody relied on him like a secure assurance of the future. The scientists even talked about how to solve the environmental crisis with the aid of his powers. Everybody was crazy about him. And that just drove me crazy. I couldn’t understand how they could be worshipping so hard a guy who just knocked out a lot of weirdos because he was the strongest of all and that he didn’t want them to do their dangerous plans like destroying the Earth. I mean, what is heroic about stopping super-dangerous guys when you’re literally invincible ? Just because he is on the good side ? Tsk. Some even say he’s heroic

because he chose to use his powers when he could be in his apartment eating cheetos. I mean, what ? Wouldn't it be totally irresponsible for a guy who could destroy the Sun if he wanted to not stop villains from destroying the Earth, **on which he lives** ? I mean, duh, he's only protecting his home. And even there, it's not like it's his real home. He comes from Stratapedia, from a very far solar system. He is not even from Earth. And he just comes and arrives here and proclaims himself like a protector of the Earth. Could he be more arrogant than that ? It just feels like we are some kind of monkeys in a zoo that he likes and that he protects because he feels pity and that he wants to pet us. Tsk. Just thinking about that makes me feel furious. But, anyways, when I fully understood who he was, I decided that this superhero should lose at least once in his life. The other villains just lost over and over again when they fought against him. That's another thing that drove me crazy about him : he never lost. It was always the blond perfectly brushed guy who always won over, and over and over and over. It almost felt like it was a planned TV show where villains knew when to say silly jokes, so Omegaman could answer with smart comments while he beated them. I waited for a whole year to see if he would lose at least once, but he never did. I mean, what are super-villains good for if they can't even beat the super-hero at least once ? They better just stay home and find another hobby than being beaten up every week by a super-strong alien. I mean, where does their passion come from to be able to work 24/7 on trash plans so they can be beaten later on by a superhero ? I think that these weirdos are just some huge fans of Omegaman that decide to become super-villains so that they can speak to him and feel they're closer to him. I can't think of another reason for their losers' life. Yeah, those villains totally disgust me. I even have a little more respect for the little villains that take profits of the big battles between Omegaman and his sweethearts

by doing little hold-ups that they know Omegaman won't notice because he's too busy. Yeah, those are real villains, not just assigned-losers. But, still, it was frustrating that HE was at the top, invincible, when he was just a show-off dude that came from another planet. So, when I had six years, after a year of waiting for a single loss, realizing gradually that he wasn't going to lose, feeling a bit of sympathy for the evil guys (in the innocence of my childhood, when I didn't understand that they were just incompetent), I decided that I will become myself an evil enemy of Omegaman. When I made that decision, I won't lie, my whole life changed. It was as if I had found the purpose of my life, something that gave meaning to my existence here on the small planet that was Earth. Maybe that's why there are many supervillains. Plus, you don't need to make an effort since you will lose no matter what.

Some weeks after I made that decision, life decided that it was going to do the most unpredictable thing that I thought could happen : I met Omegaman. I was on the bridge, just looking at the stars, when some dumb super-villains arrived on some sick motos, because they were fleeing from Omegaman (bro, he's literally as fast as light, what are they doing on some motos ?). When they saw me on the bridge, one of them had the decent idea of pushing me to the river, to distract Omegaman, buying them some time to flee. I fell and was a little afraid, to be honest, and he arrived. He catches me in the fall and he smiles at me.

- Well, young lady, you should be careful where you take your walk. It's not safe for a little girl like you to be at the bridge at midnight. Where are your parents ?

When I realized he was talking to me and that he had just saved me, a rush of adrenaline poured out in my heart, which began to beat at a crazy speed. I felt so excited that I couldn't help but smile and answer :

- Well, young man, you should be more careful who you save. You don't know if it could be your future sworn enemy.

I think my confident smile shocked him, because he looked at me with a puzzled face for a second and then shook his head. When he put me on the ground he just said in an uncomfortable tone :

- Umm... go with your parents. They must be worried.

He then patted my head, but stopped when he saw that my confident smile hadn't vanished. He then flew away. I decided that that encounter was a sign of destiny that I was made to defeat Omegaman.

After that encounter, I started making a list of elements I needed to beat Omegaman :

- Know his weaknesses (mental and physical)
- Know what distracts him.

- An evil plan.

That's where my evil plan began to foment. At seven, I began learning programming by myself. At eight, I met the pretty interviewer and I installed a virus in her hardware, which let me see the screen of her laptop 24/7. At nine, I adopted a caniche, whom I named Donut and began training him. At ten, I have finished my evil plan. At eleven, I began taking karate classes. At fifteen, I earned the black belt. At that moment, I started taking kung-fu and jiu-jitsu classes. At nineteen, I began sewing a supervillain costume and building the "character" of Zenith. At twenty, I entered the H.yper V.illains A.ssociation (don't ask me what that is, it's just another silly attempt from villains to look credible and an effective way to get my plan done). Before I had twenty-one years, my master plan was going to be fulfilled.

MARCH 2040

Here I was, in front of a bank, ready for my first hold-up, or for my first failing attempt of holding-up a bank. I had to lose, since I was an official small super-villain, whose power was to make any flying object who was exactly over my head fall. I gained it by looking too much time at the Sun when it was at midday and that the eight planets were aligned with it. This power was called "Icarus' Fall" and my super-villain name was Zenith Ender. I didn't like it, since it was too cringey, so I told people to just call me Zenith (which was also the name of my evil masterplan). I had to choose a two-word villain name, since it was the implicit rule in the villainous society. They said it was because it sounded more intimidating than the one-word names of the superheroes. Tsk. Anyways, I had gained a certain reputation in the H.V.A (H.yper V.illains A.ssociation) because my power was "so strong it could even make Omegaman fall", which seemed to be incredibly amazing for the others. In fact, my "super-power" consisted in the fact that my suit had an inner-integrated simple condensator of gravity (very common in 2040, though the suit-adaptable version is a little more expensive), which usually wouldn't affect someone like Omegaman, if it wasn't because I carried a bit of Bismuth stabilized on an atomic-level inside my sunglasses. I then just had to have perfect timing between the moment I sent a concentrated radiation of Bismuth towards him (making him lose his powers temporarily) and the moment I activated the condensator. No, I hadn't really gained superpowers by looking at the Sun, but it was a crazy world, where random kids would get powers by being bitten by uranium-exposed spiders instead of dying atrociously, so the other villains believed me. I thus became (apparently) a key-member of the association, because I could make land the big guy for a moment, which often consternated him and gave us some extra time to flee or to do evil stuff. It also gave, supposedly, a chance to strong villains who could just fight at

the ground, like Lightspeed Death (a guy who is as fast as Omegaman) or Doom Smash (a guy who is almost as strong as Omegaman). Those guys with great egos really liked to have a chance to fight “equally” with him, so they really appreciated me. Though, my power was really limited, since it just worked if he was at my zenith (supposedly, he he), so the others didn’t consider me as a strong villain (even though I had some good fighting skills). I was just seen as a gear that could be very useful if you put it in the right place.

Today, my role was to stay in front of the bank, while the others robbed the bank. I had to wait until Omegaman arrived (flying of course, since the robbery would be made in the last floor of the bank) and make him go down, forcing him to pass through the elevator, since I would be there to not let him go up. It sounds dumb, but it was a relatively good idea for some technical reasons. First, if you wondered, he couldn’t fly at lightspeed and bypass my sight to enter the building since he had to slow down. If he didn’t, he would have made a huge mess (imagine a sonic boom, but a lot worse. A kind of “light boom”, if we can name it like that). Secondly, there were no stairs in the building he could climb superfast, since in 2040 almost no building had stairs. Finally, he couldn’t just break the floors in the building to go up fast, since it would look like if he just carelessly destroyed the building, which wouldn’t have been good for his reputation and his pocket.

So, in general, it was a good plan. The dudes were up doing their stuff, as I could hear through our radio, when I received the call

- Bzzz... Bzzz... Be ready, agent Zenith Ender. Omegaman is approaching at 200 km/h. He is almost there. Keep your eyes open. Bzzz... Bzzz... Big Boss out.

Yeah, our boss was leading the mission and he called himself “Big Boss”. A little redundant, don’t you think ? But, you know, I can’t choose their names in their place.

- Yeah, I am in position. Activating my super-power right now. Zenith out.

No way I am calling myself Zenith Ender.

- Bzzz... Bzzz... Super. Omegaman isn’t going to see it coming.

And he didn’t. When he slowed down to enter the building, my hidden fragment of bismuth did his job and he lost his powers. Then he started falling rapidly and I stopped the radiation just before he touched the floor.

Maybe you ask yourself why I didn’t just let him die by retrieving the radiation until the end. Well, I didn’t want to kill him so cowardly, with his only weakness as weapon. Nah, I wanted to beat him completely, with all his powers at hand, with only my smart brain and a punch on his face. Yes, I wanted to destroy him slowly, taking the time to masticate him like a piece of meat. Yes... But I am distracting myself. As I was saying, activating the Bismuth would have caused his certain death, which I didn’t desire without a proper defeat from his side. Also, if I (miraculously) failed in

the attempt of killing him, he would have understood that some Bismuth is implicated in my super-power and I could have lost an essential strategic advantage on him.

Thus, I simply let him fall on the ground in front of me with a big “Thump !” which made the floor vibrate under my feet. He then rose and looked at me.

- Ah, it's you Zenith Ender. I have to admit I didn't see it coming, this time.
- Yup, and there's no way I am going to let you go upstairs, Omegaman.
- I know, he said looking at me. You aren't going to let me fly, right ? Well, I guess I'll just take the elevator, he said, moaning between two words.

It was eight o'clock, so it's understandable that he was moaning, but I knew that it wasn't only sleepiness. It was boredom. I knew, and I am sure he also knew, that even if he had to take the elevator, it would be just a matter of time before he stops the robbers and gets back the money. Also, there were no hostages, so no potential danger he had to deal with. I was sure he already knew it, hearing every move we did inside the bank, hours before he arrived, thanks to his ultra-hearing.

- Well, buddy, I am sorry to tell you this, but if you want to pass, you will have to knock me out.

The character of Zenith Ender was a lot more sensitive and chatty than the real me. I planned it that way so I surprise him when I reveal to him the true me.

- Knock you out ? Oh. I never confronted you, Zenith Ender, and I don't want to. I know you couldn't stand a lot of my punches.

He looked at me with a worried look. Understandable. I never showed any desire to fight him, so he was kind of shocked. But, it was part of my plan.

- Well, why don't you come and we figure that out ? I said, calling him with the movement of my hand.

He sighed, then he floated towards me, ready to knock me with a tap in the neck. Classic from Omegaman. I have studied every move of his, every reaction he has and the logic behind them. He estimated me as an average human being with no fighting skills, so he expected me to land some random punches on him, which he could have resisted like dust, then he would have tapped me behind the neck, knocking me out rapidly. I knew all that, but I needed experience to really know how he measured his strength.

When he came to me so recklessly, I used the martial fighting skills I had to make him an Ippon Seoi Nage. He clearly had put too much of his balance in front of him (expecting to knock me out with a single tap), which allowed me to easily redirect the force of his movement towards the wall that was behind me. Another "Thump!" resonated in the city. He looked at me startled, but not too much. He simply didn't thought I had some fighting skills.

- That's the second "Thump" you take out of me ! Well, I am impressed. But that's not enough.

The second after I laid on the ground. Argh, so predictable. As I had expected, when he realized I knew martial arts, he augmented his speed and knocked me out in a second. It's easy to knock normal humans who just know martial arts by going faster, because the humans can't block with karate something that they can't even see.

I closed my eyes, losing consciousness until the next day.

When I woke up, I was in the HQ of the H.V.A, in a medical bed. Apparently, Demonic Healer had done his work and I already felt good to stand up. As I was thinking so, he entered the chamber.

- Oh, Zenith Ender, already on your feet, as I see. Be careful, you can walk, but you still have some ecchymosis on your neck and on your arms because of your fall. You should go slow for the next few days. You're just human, after all.
- Oh, ok. Thanks. Did we win ?
- No, he managed to beat all the squad as soon as the elevator got up. If only the elevator had been slower, Barricade Stopper would have made his invisible shield and our guys could have fled.

Yeah, sure. It was totally the fault of the elevator.

- Oh, ok. And how did I lose consciousness ?
- He touched you in the back of the neck, causing a momentary reboot of your neuronal system.
- Ok, thanks, I said, as I walked outside.
- Zenith, wait, he said, stopping me with his arm. The boss told me that you should be careful. He doesn't want such an important agent to be injured. He is planning something big in the next few days and he will need you.

I did my best not to laugh.

- Ok, Healer. Thanks for the info. But now I must return home. To my normal-person occupations.
- Yeah, sure. See ya.
- Bye.

And I got out of the chamber. As I took the bus to return home, I thought about what Healer said. The boss didn't want me to expose myself to dangerous situations. That

could interfere in my plan. If he didn't allow me to fight, I couldn't get the experience I needed in real-life fights. I needed to find a way to... Yes ! That was it.

I called Big Boss and told him about the vacations I wanted to have.

- Two weeks ? No problem. It's even better like that. You won't be hurt if you take some free time before the "Big Plan".

He sounded happy.

- Take care, Zenith Ender. Until then, stay alert for any order.
- Roger, Boss.

As I ended the call, I searched on Google Maps for a bus to take me to the city to the north of Omegapolis, which is where I was. There, the H.V.A didn't have criminal jurisdiction, because of the Evil Treaty of Peace of 1990. Which may sound odd, because of its contradicting terms "evil" and "peace", but was essential for the rise of criminal power. Villains, because they were villains, had difficulty to not submit weaker villains to them, but also to not betray the other villains. This led to internal wars between the different villainous groups and nearly destroyed the super-villain society during the World War of the Wicked in 1985. It was a very bloody war, where superheroes did their best to protect supervillains from themselves, but it was hard for them to arrest the villains, protect the citizens, protect their own lives, and also protect supervillains from being killed. Because of that, many great supervillains died

in that war. It is said that some of those supervillains were even strong enough to rival Omegaman's power and even defeat him. The war ended in a final arrangement between Big Boss' father, Big Boss Senior (representative of the Occidental Face of Crime), and Samurai Monster (representative of the Oriental Face of Crime), which was named the Evil Treaty of Peace of 1990. No one outside the villainous society knows about this treaty, otherwise all supervillains of the globe would unite to kill anyone who knows about it. Even for Omegaman, it would be hard to manage. The Evil Treaty of Peace had many consequences on crime as we know it nowadays, but one of them was that clear territories had to be assigned to different criminal organisations and that they needed to respect the geographical limits. Big Boss was very proud of his daddy's accomplishment, so he rigorously respected the limits of his empire of crime. I, then, if I wanted to fight Omegaman without being bothered, could simply go to the northern city, where my boss couldn't go, and do some crimes to attract his attention. I thought about renting a hotel and going there immediately, but I realized I was tired and still weakened because of the hit I received, so I slept in my apartment and the next morning I headed toward Oilerpolis, which was the name of the northern city.

MARCH-MAY 2040

In Oilerpolis, I had much more liberty to act as I wished. The super-criminal organization there was less authoritative, so I could do whatever I wished if I didn't interfere in their crimes. Nevertheless, I was received by someone who looked like a lizard-man, known as Camoufler Beast.

- What are you doing here, ZZZ-Zenith Ender ?

I jumped a little, surprised by his sudden apparition behind me. I was in a dark street in a dead end, testing a geolocalizer that was still in beta version.

- Oh my ! You surprised me. Who are you ? Are you from the Trashers group ?
- I ssss-see that you know us-sss, Zenith Ender. I am the one assss-signed to welcome new... visss-sitors. They call me Camoufler Beasss-st. And you, Big Boss' little pet, shouldn't be here.
- Ok. I am just on a trip. I am just going to stay here for a few days. I am not a spy or anything. I came here on my own. So... the Treaty doesn't apply in this case.

He looked at me silently for a few seconds, judging if he could trust me.

- Big Boss-ssss alwaysss been rigid with the Treaty... I guess you're right.

I began walking away, but he came fastly behind my back and added :

- But if we sss-see that you interfere in our... operationsss, you won't return to Omegapolis.
- Ok, I will let you do your stuff.

And I began walking away again. But, he jumped over me and blocked my way.

- Are you in a hurry ? he said, smiling malevolently. We have the tradition of receiving new villains here, with a very warm welcome. Wouldn't you want to miss it, right ? Oh, sorry for asking, you don't have any choice.

He came silently closer to me, but I saw that his mouth was slightly open, so he probably wanted to attack through biting. Unfortunately for him, he was just as strong as any man, and I didn't have five black belts in my closet for decoration. So, as soon as he jumped over me, I landed a quick kick on the side of his head, which made him fall to my right, due to the impulse of his jump. Then, I quickly gave him a direct hit on his head with my left fist, making him lose consciousness.

- Sorry for you, but I am no fragile woman walking at night in dangerous streets. Next time you jump on someone, make sure he isn't stronger than you, I said with a smile.

He couldn't hear me, but I was too proud of how I destroyed him in 2 seconds to not put a cherry on top.

I then headed to my hotel, where I could prepare myself. There, I planned some crimes to attract Omegaman's attention. Because I was farther than where he usually operated, I had to make crimes that were relatively big. I thought that the first good crime would be to explode the bridge that made the train pass between Omegapolis and Oilerpolis, just before the train passed. Noisy, important, and could be easily resolved by his superpowers. Nice.

I proceeded to make a home-made bomb powerful enough to destroy the bridge. With some Youtube videos it was kind of easy. The hardest part was to get the materials for the bomb but I got them at the black market. For a super-villain it was simple to find this kind of stuff. When it was ready, I placed the bomb under the bridge the night before and I prepared for my confrontation against Omegaman. The next morning, I woke up at seven and went to look at the bridge. I looked at the schedule of the train and I looked at the exact time where the train passed over my bomb. I calculated the difference between the two moments, his arrival and his passage over the bomb, and made an estimation of the next times when the train will pass over where I put the bomb. When I was ready, I waited until three minutes were left before the train passed in front of me and I activated the bomb.

“iBOOM !”

Mmm. Sweet sound. People screaming around me, as always. They really are cowards, aren't they ? Maybe they think some piece of the bridge will fall on them.

Maybe they are just afraid another bomb explodes, but under them. Eitherwise, I wait, counting the seconds before he arrives. Knowing him, he probably took five seconds to realize there was an explosion, another five to understand by what he heard what was happening, fifteen seconds to consider if the other superheroes could be there at time, five to conclude that they couldn't, another fifteen to get an excuse to get out of his normal-person work (yeah, I know his secret identity), then, in an instant he could be there. Approximately one minute to get to the bridge. Nevertheless, after two minutes, he was still not there. I looked at the clock impatiently, wondering what took him so long. When he finally arrived, he, for some reason, had a cat over his face gripping his cheeks with his claws to not fall. I smiled and told myself that it was a hard thing to be a superhero. Then, I positioned myself, exactly where I knew where he would pass, and with my "Icarus' fall", brought him down. He fell rapidly, protecting the cat with his body, and then let him go in the street. He stood up and looked at me, confused.

- Wait, what ? You, here ? Why aren't you in Omegapolis doing stuff for your boss ?
- I wanted to do some evil crimes on my own. And take up revenge on the last hit you gave me.
- Oh, I see. I guess that supervillains like the idea of revenge. But, I can't fight with you, I have to save those people.

He seemed to prepare to fly away, so I said quickly :

- Wait ! I got another bomb on another bridge. If you don't want me to explode another bridge and make the city lose millions of dollars, you will have to fight me.

He scratched his head. The country was losing a lot of money because of American criminals' taste for massive destruction and it was affecting the whole economy.

- I guess I could take it fastly from you. The train is only passing in approximately mmm... thirty seconds.

Twenty, more exactly.

- Then come.

This time, I tried another strategy. I guessed his first move, which was to use superspeed to get behind me and then give me a normal hit, and I prepared for it. When he did, I was already sending my elbow behind my back, landing a hit on his face. He lost his balance when he received the hit. Just as I thought... Because he measures his strength when confronting a normal opponent, he also diminishes the strength of the rest of his muscles when he does it. The proof was that he lost balance like a normal human being would.

- Hey ! That didn't hurt, but it wasn't nice.

Then, I tried to guess his next move. I thought that he would augment his speed to touch me without letting me land a hit on him, so I tried my other option. When I calculated that he would try to knock me out, I threw myself towards my back. An instant later, he was holding me from my back. He looked at me startled.

- Wait, what did you-

“Bang !” A hit on his neck. He lost his breath for a second and I released myself from him. Nice, another hit landed.

- You want to keep chatting, or are you fighting ?

He smiled at me, forgetting his confusion to fully concentrate.

- Well, I see you got some new tricks. Now it's time to show you some of mine.

The moment after, he began to vibrate and I began seeing many clones of him surrounding me. Ok, so that's how it feels when Omegaman uses his speed clones ability. I had to admit it was quite impressive. He went very fast, circling an opponent and going slower in certain places, making the impression that there were many clones of him surrounding his opponent. Like that, he could get a hit from any angle. I couldn't think fastly enough of another counter and he quickly landed a punch on my face. I was, another time, laying on the ground. I looked at my clock. Ten seconds left.

- I thought, koff, koff, I whispered in a weak voice, that you would be more a gentleman than that towards a woman.

He looked at me and said :

- Well, I went easy on you, considering your physiognomy. And you showed me that I couldn't treat you like a fragile and vulnerable person. See ya, Zenith Ender, he said with a smile.

He took the control of my pocket and crushed it in his hands. Then he flew away. Again.

I felt frustrated. I made a plan, I fought Omegaman and I lost. Again. It felt like wanting to take a cookie from a jar, but having a guardian that never let's you take it. Argh ! I hitted the floor. I took a deep breath, then remembered my plan. I couldn't allow myself to assimilate the loser's mentality of the super-villains. Because if I did, it would affect my determination and make me less ready to defeat Omegaman. So I shooked myself up and remembered. These two defeats, including the knockouts he gave me, were already planned. I did what was necessary to fight him substantially, without winning. I couldn't win, because if I did, I would attract his attention and then all my plans would be lost. For the moment, I was just a secondary-role villain and that was perfect for the operation of my plan. Instead of thinking about my supposed defeats, I told myself, I had to determine what I had learned. He measured his strength, like I saw in the last fight, but he controlled his strength on an exponential level. That's why he stopped himself when I threw myself behind, because if he

would have touched me a millimeter behind (which was I could move myself by throwing me on my back before he touched me) he would have killed me. Thus, my action seems a little suicidal, but it wasn't, because I knew Omegaman's personality too well to not know he will stop himself. Another element I gained was the real-life experience of his speed clones, which are more impressive than in television. I had to take that into account, because the intimidative aspect could affect my concentration when I really confront him. The mentality was really important in fights. I learned that through martial arts. Did you know that an elephant could be kept attached to a stick that he could tear off if you made him believe from childhood that he couldn't free from it ? That's the strength of intimidation. And that's why I couldn't let his power impress me to the point I unconsciously believed he was unbeatable.

Afterwards, I prepared for my second crime. I made it simple for this one. I just bought a grenade-shooter and went at three in the morning to shoot at random buildings. The other superheroes around didn't have super ears and weren't around, so they didn't intervene. Omegaman had then to come.

- Zenith Ender ? Again doing disturbances ? Are you doing this just to fight me ?

He has a good instinct, I noted for myself.

- Yes, I said, putting down my bazooka. Let's play.

He sighed and rubbed his eyes, visibly tired because he had to wake up so early.

- Ok, you know what ? Let's do it with your rules. We will fight, equal to equal, and if I beat you, you stop exploding things. If you win, you will finally have what you want, ok ?

I lifted my shoulders, showing that I didn't care what he wanted, and put myself in a combat position. He also positioned himself, two fists in front, kind of like a boxer, and waited for me. I attacked him, fastly and precisely, as I liked, but it didn't affect him a lot, since he was invulnerable. From my side, I had difficulty redirecting his punches, because he was still stronger than me at human level. He was kind of muscular, to be honest. We were fighting on an average equal level, when he said to me with an amused smile:

- Well, you know, I don't know if we could even fight on an equal level, because even if you landed a hit on me, it wouldn't affect me at all. I don't know if this is worthless.

He was furious the moment he said that. It was his arrogant confidence in himself because of his alien origin that he always had. He thought he was sooo strong ! Tsk. I decided to make him land on earth a little. I hit him on the third upper rib on his left side, where he had a fracture in 2023 in the fight of the Century because of the bismuth-induced slash of Hyperion Dark, his past sworn enemy. Bam ! He was on his knees.

- Wait. Argh ! You-you hit me on a past injury.

- Awn sorry, do you want me to take a pause for you ? I said with a smile.
- Gggh, he said looking at me resentfully, you villains have no compassion.

He slowly stood up and positioned himself again, as I looked if my nails were dirty.

- This time you won't touch me.

We fought again, but this time he used his super-speed to anticipate my punches and evade them. He didn't move faster, it's just that he put himself in hyper-speed mode, then moved very slowly to make it look like he was still going at my speed. Like that he could pretend going to my level and anticipating all my movements at the same time. I noticed it by the way he moved.

- Hey, you are cheating. You are using super speed to evade my hits, no ?
That's not very noble for a superhero.

He looked embarrassed when I said that and he promised that he would stop. I laughed inside of myself. We fought again and he went more serious, doing moves one could just learn in real-life fights. But there were still a lot of weak spots in his fighting style. As I assumed, he was too used to his superpowers to have a decent normal fighting style. When he showed me all his normal-human secret hits, I began letting him land some punches and I slowly began to lose. It looked like my concentration began to diminish and that's why I was fighting less well. In fact, I just couldn't allow myself to win for the moment. After a dozen hits, I was on my knees.

- Wait, wait, I told him. I can't keep up. I-I surrender. You won. I surrender.

I breathed heavily, as if I was really tired.

He took the bazooka and destroyed it with his hands. He looked at me.

- You are a decent fighter. I wonder why you are just following orders from a decaying villain like Big Boss... In any case, good fight ! But, take my advice : stop doing these kind of crimes or I will have to send you to prison.

He remained silent for a moment.

- You don't really look like an evil person. I say it from my long-life experience. You just seem like a child who has lost its way. You should try to get a job or have a family instead of doing these things.

I didn't reply, so he just flew away. Again.

I thought about what he said and just thought about how stupid it was to say that. Does he really think that we don't have to work ? He really thinks that I got that bazooka for free, because some weapon-dealer thought that I looked like a sympathetic person ? Tsk. Or that bomb that I got, I just got the nitrogenous liquid in a generous organism for homeless people ? Bruh, he really is dumb sometimes. Or maybe all the time. And a family ? When we could be life-sentenced to prison

anytime by any revengeful civil who recognizes us by accident ? We are not as dumb as superheroes who have families because they think that they just have to be careful. So, I ignored her remark and got up to continue my plan.

There was just one fight left and I could put my plan in action. I thought about it for around a week, then I found an idea. I engaged an actor to read some lines for an advertisement that had Omegaman as a special apparition in it, or at least it was the best excuse I came up with. The actor in question was really surprised to be chosen, since he didn't have any call from any company for a long time and he thought his career was finished. I kind of chose him because of that. Nobody knew him. Sad to be mediocre, as I always say. I managed to not give him a disdainful look when I met him in person and that he began to cry and thanked me for choosing him. It made me feel uncomfortable, to be honest. Anyways, I put him in an anechoic box that I built myself, supposedly so that he could concentrate better, but it was more to hide the recording from the super-ear of Omegaman.

- Save me Omegaman ! Save me, please ! I am in the garage of the house ! A super-villain is keeping me hostage ! I need you now, or he will kill me ! He shouted.

Maybe because of his determination of showing his value as an actor, he managed to do quite a good performance after around three hours. I gave him three hundred bucks and promised to recommend him to other companies. I was just kidding with him, but after he got out of the apartment, I saw that his shoes had big holes, and I felt something in my heart. Finally, I did recommend him to some

companies, under a false I.D, supposedly as a representative of a well-recognized advertising company.

After that, I assembled the dollman and prepared the apartment for the final fight. I waited until the night and I activated the recording. Then, I waited. After some seconds, I heard a whistling outside the apartment. He was coming. The trap was laid, and he completely fell on it. He entered through the window, taking care to not break the glass. I noted for myself that he was always taking care to not break anything unnecessary. He was definitely a master of self-control. I think it was the only thing that I really admired about him. His capacity of controlling his powers with a sublime precision. It was that kind of precision that I needed to destroy him. When he entered, the window closed behind him with a layer of steel and the Bismuth hidden in the walls got uncovered. He was defenseless. In fact, I think I could have killed him there, but it wasn't what I was looking for. I was looking to destroy him completely, with his powers and all. Instead, I appeared from the closet I was hiding in the piece where he was. He was looking at the fake human who was tied to the chair, seemingly beginning to realize there was no one being imprisoned besides him. When he looked at me, he frowned his eyes, as if he didn't recognize me. It was because I took the precaution of wearing completely black clothes, since I didn't want him to know I was Zenith. With the lights that were off, he could hardly tell if I was a man or woman. I had night-vision glasses, so he couldn't even see my iris. There was just enough light for him to be able to see my punch going towards him. He evaded by going far from me, as he always did when he dealt with something unexpected. I turned the light on. I wanted him to fight the best he could and fighting in the dark wasn't, as it seemed, his strength, even with his ultra-sense. He looked

surprised when I turned the light on. I attacked him so he didn't think a lot about it. There, we fought for an hour, seemingly being equal in fighting skills. The truth was that I was seeing his fighting style's flaws in real-life. I memorized them the best I could, trying to "feel" his fighting style. I would also look later on at least a thousand times the fight that was being recorded through my glasses, but it wasn't the same as experiencing it. Having him before me, fighting punch against punch in real life. It was quite exhilarating. I was made for this. After an hour passed, I received a notification through my glasses that warned me that the fighting time was up. If I spent too much time in a fight with him, he could alert the superheroes H.Q or another super-hero that was patrolling could be intrigued by the activity in the apartment. So, I had to end the fight. I gradually lowered my speed and my fighting level, making it seem like I was getting tired and that he was taking the advantage. I knew that he would eventually give me a fair punch that would mark the end of the confrontation and then I would flee. As I planned, his punches grew more confident and at some point he got me some quite good punches that made me understand that I couldn't stay any longer. I was surprised at the strength of his punches, seeing that they were a little more powerful than the ones I received in the previous battles. I understood there that he was going harder because he thought I was a man. I felt a little sad because I knew that he would go easier on me in the real battle that he would have with a man, but it didn't change a lot. The results will stay the same, I said to myself. Then, I released the Bismuth's smoke bomb that I had in case of emergency and I left him coughing while I fled and disappeared in the crowded streets of the night.

MARCH-JUNE 2040

After I fled, the medias were very alert about a possible villain that could have Bismuth in his possession. Omegaman recognized that he hadn't seen such material for years. That caused a great commotion in the media and political sphere, since Bismuth was said to be banned from production in all the world. If some super-villain association was thought to be producing Bismuth, there were probabilities that a small war between heroes and that association would emerge. Maybe my idea of using Bismuth to flee wasn't the better one. Though the reaction of the medias showed how much people depended on the big guy. Why do humans need aliens to protect them, I thought. I will show them that we humans can be as strong as aliens, and even stronger. But for the moment I decided to disappear from the scene.

I went back to my apartment and to my normal life. There, I fed up my two pets, Donut and Benny Helper and made sure they were healthy. They were a key-part of my plan. Though Benny Helper was always complaining, which was exasperating. He was always mumbling, though I couldn't hear what he was saying, because he was in the glass room that cut out all sound. He was probably calling out for help, I thought, and I kept working. I worked for three months adjusting the last details of my masterpiece plan and hijacking the computers of the "Chosen Ones" as I liked to call them. They were a hundred and fifty persons I chose to use as victims that Omegaman had to save. I hijacked their computers, taking all their personal information and spying them through their cameras. I learned their individual habits and when they were at home for how much time. I needed all 150 to be home for at least thirty minutes during the operation of my masterpiece plan (without looking at their computers). They needed to look like hostages that were innocently in their houses, unknowing that their computers had bombs. It was a rather delicate thing to

achieve, because if one of them saw their screen with a clock, they could just trash out their computers and they would seem to be safe. The superheroes could then yell at them to throw their computers at the street. Thus, I needed the perfect timing. Because if I failed, some unknown person could discover that, in fact, there was no bomb anywhere and Omegaman would lose all interest in the fight I had prepared for him. I had hacked their computers, but only to make them look like they had a bomb and to get the good moment. Putting a bomb in each one of the computers was a lot more work and undercover operations, and I needed all my budget for the rest of the plan.

In the beginning of May, while I was still working on my plan, I received a call from the Big Boss, who called me to an important meeting of the H.V.A. I went to the secret base, which was hidden in the sewage system of Omegapolis and I went to the Affairs Room, which consisted of a business table with many chairs and a big one in the border, where Big Boss sat. When I entered the room, I saw that Big Boss was the only one in the room. He was probably going to scold me, like a disappointed employer.

- Zenith Ender, please sit.

So I did.

- Zenith Ender, as the chief of the villainous organization that is the H.V.A, I monitor the activity of all my villainous employees. I see their progress, their failures... and their lack of activity.

He turned to reveal an image that was being shown by the projector of the room.

- Here, as you can see, is the diagram of your villainous activity for the H.V.A.
As you can see, in the last months your activity has diminished remarkably compared to the rest of your career.

He looked at me with a severe look.

- I can't tolerate inactivity from my agents. Your lack of involvement is problematic for the functioning of the organization, especially from such an important pawn as you.

I heard him with an unexpressive look, thinking about what I could gain from this. As always, he was saying bla bla bla... you are not here bla bla bla... we need you bla bla bla... we can't do nothing without you bla bla bla... we have more failing plans and we want you to fail with us bla bla bla... I already knew what this was up to. I didn't get involved in the H.V.A simply because I didn't need anything more from her. Though... there was this missing piece that I had been looking for so much time...

- Well, I began with a calm voice, it is true that I have been doing less... villainous activity for the company, but it is simply because my powers and my role seems to me to be insufficient to bring a real contribution to the association. If you would send me to missions with a competent agent, I could achieve operations that would be more pertinent for the H.V.A.

- More pertinent ? What kind of operations are you thinking of ? he said with a seemingly interested voice.
- Well, something like stealing personal information from the super-heroes' H.Q, in order to obtain data that could allow us to destroy them.

His eyes opened wide.

- Personal information ? Like their secret identity ? Or weaknesses we don't know about ? It would be a rather useful operation for the association...

He thought about it for a few seconds, then he looked at me.

- Deal. You'll lead an infiltration operation in the H.Q in the next weeks. We'll put one of our best agents with you. Or were you thinking about someone in particular ?

Innerly, I smiled.

- Well, I was thinking about Replicator Mayhem. He has good stats in the company.
- Interesting choice. It is true that he is a rather effective agent... I like your way of thinking, agent Zenith Ender. You have the sense of business.

- Oh, but it is all my pleasure to contribute to the H.V.A.

After the end of the discussion, I was given access to the data about the H.Q that the H.V.A had and to the evil laboratory that we had in the secret base. It was kind of funny for me to go to the evil laboratory, since I knew that the superheroes had a hidden camera in the lab and that they were spying on us to prevent any plan or invention that was too dangerous for them. The H.V.A was really not what it used to be. But it didn't matter to me, since my plan was going perfectly, and that was all that mattered. In the laboratory, I encountered Replicator Mayhem, who was a twenty-years old dude who accidentally gained his super-powers when he almost died under the laser of an experimental cloning machine which was led by an illegal scientific organization. He was, at that time, only an orphan who managed to survive by stealing in the streets. He wasn't proud of his past, he told me once, but he did what he could to survive. He is still doing that, since he got in the H.V.A because Big Boss Jr found him and told him that he would deliver him to the police if he didn't join the H.V.A. Since he kind of has a heavy criminal history, he prefers to stay in the shadows rather than being caught. When I heard his story, I instantly knew he was an honest dude (at least as we villains can say, hehe). But when I first met him, I just saw him as the missing piece of my plan. I smiled a lot while I was talking to him, and I couldn't stop. He didn't know how important he was for my plan. But, I returned to the present and focused on the mission. I told him what the goal of the mission was and asked him if he had ideas. But, when he told me about building a gigantic mecha T-rex that would break into the H.Q and rob the heroes' files, I silenced him.

He was clearly just thinking like a little boy. I sighed and started to build the plan. It was a decent one, not too complex, nor too bad, just good enough to work in the circumstances. As a villain of the H.V.A, I couldn't make a plan who was too good, since it was an implicit rule that you had to lose if you were from the H.V.A. If I succeeded, I could attract unwanted attention, and that wouldn't be good for my true plan. So I built a plan who I knew would fail, in part because of the hidden camera, but also because the plan wasn't bullet-proof, metaphorically speaking.

- But, if there is anyone in the H.Q, we will be caught ! said Replicator Mayhem.

That was the weak spot of the plan.

- Yeah, but we don't have another option. We'll see the schedules of the employees and we'll hope that no one is there at two in the morning, I said to him.

That was a lie, but, as I said, I couldn't make a plan that succeeded.

- Ok... But then, we'll need a lot of time to prepare the perfect moment for the infiltration, no ? he replied.
- Mmm... you are right, I said, seemingly surprised, but smiling.

That was the whole point.

We spent many days checking the schedules of all the employees, looking for which moment was the better one. During that time, I began building a certain bond of confidence with him and we started talking through video calls to continue working from our “homes” (it was a sign of trust to tell your WhatsApp number to another villain). I felt relieved when we started calling, because I didn’t feel the eye of the hidden camera all the time and because I could talk to Replicator Mayhem more often. As I expected, as the time passed, he began to trust me more and I got closer to the point where I could ask him a favor. After that, we did the mission. We took janitor’s uniforms that we copied from the real employees and we entered late in the night. We passed through security with cards we stole from employees the day before and we entered the room of the archives. There, we took files from different superheroes and looked at them. I took pictures of them and kept an eye on Replicator Mayhem. He was looking interested in the file of Omegaman. They surely kept his secret identity there. It was the dream of all the villains to know if he had a secret identity. I already knew it, of course. But I couldn’t let any other villain know, or that could interfere in my plan. So I distracted Replicator Mayhem and showed him the file of Eagleman. His true identity was there and the origin of his superpowers was described. He looked interested so I began making comments about the information that was there, while I waited for the predictable part. Some seconds later, three superheroes arrived and told us to stay still. Replicator Mayhem tried to fight them by making many clones of him, but one of the superheroes had a stun gun which he used to stun the original in two seconds. The two others were looking at me, waiting to see my reaction. One of them had the ability to paralyze any opponent by looking at them and the other one had psychic powers that included mind manipulation. I raised my arms, surrendering before anyone got hurt. They packed

both of us in a truck and they sent us to jail. "Well, what had to happen happened" I told myself. It was a good thing that we got into jail. They say that prison friendships can be very strong. If that is the case, that could contribute a lot to my schemes. Though, when we arrived in prison, they put us in individual jails, since we were criminals with super-abilities, which meant we were more dangerous. I didn't like being put in prison, but I tried to pass the time by thinking about my super-plan, which was close to being realized. All the pieces were on the board. I just had to play them now.

JUNE- JULY 2040

After some days in prison, they freed us, since we only tried to rob confidential information from the superheroes' organisation. Replicator Mayhem looked perturbed when he got out of prison, since he thought he was going to stay there for the rest of his life. I told him that it was his other identity who would be imprisoned for life. His supervillain's identity was just guilty from the things that the H.V.A made him do. It was kind of complex in the legal aspect, but in general the government separated the individual that had a mask and the one who didn't have. It led to difficult court cases, since some people used that law to do awful crimes with masks and then retrieve them so that they won't be held responsible, but the law managed to solve that through a severe punishment. Despite these legal issues, it was a necessary law, since superheroes needed a cover from the "accidents" that could occur while they saved people. Furthermore, it allowed these superhumans to be judged without compromising their secret identity and thus their personal lives. The law, since it was equal for all, applied also for supervillains. They were judged with the mask, so no one sees their true identity. I explained this to Replicator Mayhem, who seemed more calm when I explained this to him. Inside, I just felt an increasing contempt for the H.V.A. The H.Q was freeing their agents because he didn't see them as a menace, not even for the life of their citizens. They were clearly showing that they weren't worried by us, because they estimated that they had enough control on us to stop any villain that could like to commit a crime. All this was like that because of him. Now that he was here, almost no crime committed in Omegapolis by a supervillain succeeded. But I let down my inner frustration to talk to Replicator Mayhem, who still seemed a little nervous. I asked him if he was going to be okay and he said that he was. I decided to let him a couple of days before asking him the favor I planned to ask him.

While I let things cool down a little, I checked and revised the details of the plan on the computer of my apartment. The computer was in the same room where Benny Helper was, so I had to verify that he was sleeping before checking important details of my plan. Usually, it was easy to know, since he spent hours complaining inside of the anechoic chamber while he was awake. But lately he had gone more silent, for some unknown reason. I suspected that he wanted to understand what I was doing, to help his buddy. He looked quite observant these days. But because I was still perturbed because of my time in prison, I didn't verify that day if he was asleep. I just opened the computer and started looking at the details about the part that Replicator Mayhem had to do. I scrolled and scrolled mindlessly, trying to forget that loneliness I felt. I then heard a noise behind me, like the friction between two clothes and I turned my head abruptly.

Benny Helper was sitting in his bed, looking at my computer. From that angle, he could see the housekeeping role of Replicator Mayhem. I turned off the computer.

- What are you doing ? I said fastly.
- Umm... I am looking at your computer.

I thought about what to do, but I didn't have any idea on how to manage this leak of information, so I just told him in an ironic tone :

- Go back to bed, little pet.

Then, I went out of the room and slacked the door. I sat on the couch, looked at the TV that was off and started crying. After a while, I regained control and thought about the situation. He learned about the role of Replicator Mayhem, but it didn't ruin my plan. The plan was still bullet proof. In addition, I could make better use of the leak by including it in my schemes. Now Benny Helper thought he had a key-part of my plan, and when he would be free, he would tell it to Omegaman. So, I could benefit from the situation and add other information that I would want him to believe. Following this logic, the next day I waited until it was late to open my computer again. I looked at Benny and saw that he was "asleep". He had his eyes closed and he laid in the bed, but his respiration wasn't as regular as someone who was asleep. I sat down in front of my computer and started creating the draft for a Bismuth's trap for Benny's prison and the "Chosen Ones" ' houses. I heard again the friction between two clothes, but this time I ignored them. After I managed to draw a decent draft of a potential Bismuth trap, I closed the computer and went to bed, which was beside the computer's desk. Benny would see them and guess that I was going to put those traps in the houses of the "Chosen Ones" and believe they are made to destroy Omegaman if he attempts to save them. Exactly what I wanted. Like that, when he will rescue Benny, his friend will make him believe that there are traps. But, in fact, there is no trap. Smoke and more smoke. Illusions are particularly good to defeat strong opponents who are used to frontal attacks. It also helps me with the budget. Imaginary traps are free. It also helps to build the mentality I want him to have. The impression that there is no other solution than to fight me.

I smiled innerly. That is how you manage unexpected issues. You use them to your benefit.

The next day, I stayed home to have an important discussion with Replicator Mayhem. I did the call in my room, since Benny already knew about him and that it didn't matter if he heard what I was going to say. My room was also the safest anechoic chamber I had at my disposition.

- Hi Zenith Ender, how'ya doing ?
- Good, Replicator Mayhem. Thanks for asking. Look Replicator, I will be direct. I need a favor and you are the only one who can give it to me.
- Woah, Zenith. You sound kind of serious today. Have you gone into some trouble with the cops and now you're asking me to help you out ? He said half-jokingly.
- No, don't worry Replicator. I just got an evil plan in progress and I thought you could give me a little help.
- You got an evil plan in progress ? Is it a Boss' order or something ?
- Well... not really. It's just a personal plan of my own.

- Ok. Well, it sounds kind of strange, since we are H.V.A villains, you know ?
We're supposed to follow orders and all. Not doing plans on our own initiative, without the Boss' approval.
- I know, man. I am just trying some stuff. I got a good hostage plan and I thought about doing it to gain some extra money. You know what I mean ?

I think I heard his eyes shine from the other side of the phone.

- Extra money ? How much are we talking about ?
- Well... I was estimating your gains to be around 2 billions.
- 2 billion ! 2 billion dollars ? Are you crazy ? Wait... are you joking with me, man ? I hope you're not, coz it wouldn't be funny.
- No, bro. I mean it. 2 billion dollars waiting in a Swedish bank account with your name. You will only have to retrieve it in Sweden in cash when everything finishes. What do you say ? Are you in ?
- Oh my gosh, Zenith ! He said almost screaming. This is too good to be true ! But, from my experience, so much cash means a dark operation. A very dark one. What do you have in mind, Zenith Ender ? he said now in a suspicious tone.

- No, Replicator, it's not so dark. You'll only have to guard the houses of some people whose computers I hacked to explode. They are the hostages. I just need you to prevent anyone from entering the houses while I operate my plan.
- Woah ! You put bombs in their computers ? How do you even do that ? Are you literally going to explode some random people to rob them or something ? How many are you going to explode ?

I stayed silent for a moment. I knew I could tell him the truth. Tell him that there were no bombs, only a program that "eats" digitally the hardware to make the computer unusable, so they could not trace me back. Tell him that I would not rob these people, that my true goal was to destroy the golden superhero Omegaman. That the people were just baits and that I have been dreaming so long to defeat him. I could tell him my whole plan. He would probably understand. It was tempting to share it, since I wouldn't be alone anymore in my lonesome trip. Replicator was the only friend I ever had. I probably wouldn't have another chance to share the plan of my life. But I hitted my head with my palm. No. No way I am going to share this. Replicator was just a pawn and the less he knew the better for me. He wouldn't understand. It was a plan too crazy for anyone to understand, except for me. I decided to tell him only the strict necessary.

- A hundred and fifty. I will send you the locations and the date. Any other questions ?
- Ummm... no.

- Okay, so you accept ?
- ... Yeah. I mean, 2 billion dollars is not anything.
- Nice. Have a nice day, Replicator.
- You too.

He was about to hang up, but I asked him a last question.

- Replicator ?
- Yeah ?
- Do you trust me ? I mean, I promise you 2 billion dollars but I don't give you any proof or anything.
- Well... Trust is a big word. Especially for us, Zenith, you should know it. But... let's say that I have a feel about you.
- What do you mean ?
- Well... it's kind of a feeling that... you are cool.

I laughed so he tried to explain himself.

- I mean, I have the impression that you are deep-down a cool dude. I don't say a good person, coz we're villains, but something like that.
- Oh ok.

I felt a little shocked so I didn't add anything more.

- Yeah. Well, if there's nothing more you want to tell me, I got a mission from the Boss and they're waiting for me.
- Oh. Yeah, go ahead. I'll send you the info later on.
- Cool, bye.
- Bye.

He hung up. I decided to forget what he said about me and concentrated on the construction of my plan. I opened my laptop, which had the general aspects of my plan. I had all the details of the project settled. Now, I only had to check everything was fine regularly and wait for the good moment. I still had about a month to go (according to my evil plan's schedule), so I decided to relax a little. I didn't want to have too much mental pressure when the moment came to destroy him. I wanted to be as peaceful as possible, since it would help me to reach a level of

concentration above normal human capacity. Because of this, I quitted the job I had and decided to only check the details of the plan and exercise my body so it is in the best shape possible for the last month. I, thus, let loose my seriousness and went into my living room with my laptop. I let my heart go into nostalgic thoughts about how everything happened while I built the plan. The hours that I spent analyzing the behaviour of Omegaman while he fought on TV. The encounter when I was eight years old with Pretty Interviewer (as I like to call her) and the USB that I plugged in her computer to control it at a long-distance. The spying I did through her laptop for many years. The day I adopted Donut. The moment I had to leave my sifu, who didn't understand me. The dojo... it was really beautiful. The night's street fights. My first technological invention. The adventure I passed to obtain the Time Breaker (a very odd one, I have to say). The practices I had to control its ability. The integration of the H.V.A. The beatings I received with them. The construction of cyber-Benny (which was a lot less annoying than the real one). The constant spying of Omegaman, who lived with his best friend (not a very wise decision, in my opinion). The building of the bunker, which allowed me to monitor the daily routine of the Chosen Ones (it was too much info for my home-computer). Everything was finally going to bear its fruits.

The last month passed very quickly. I took many walks around the park with my dog, I talked with Benny, I read some books I found interesting. Very casual, in reality. But my daily meditations helped me maintain my focus on my mission and the exercises I did maintained my body ready for the moment. The waves were steady and the wind was calm. The perfect time before a storm.

JULY 19th : THE GREAT DAY

I was ready. I felt it deep inside my body. I was at my best physically and mentally. The stars were aligned (I mean that the schedules of the “Chosen Ones” aligned in a perfect moment to simulate the threat of bombs) and all my pieces were in the perfect place. So, at 5 a.m, two hours before Omegaman usually gets up to check up on how the city is doing, I got up and prepared myself. I prepared my super-suit, that could change of appearance and had the Time-Breaker integrated, I activated the bombs, sent a notif to Replicator so that he would begin to place himself in front of the houses disguised in UPS’ vans (like that no one suspects anything, hehe) and went in front of the building I chose months ago to defy him. There, I waited. My net was ready, I just needed the fly to get caught in it. Then, I would slowly roll it with my silk until he couldn’t move anymore and then... snap ! I would eat him in one bite.

As I thought about that metaphor, which seemed to me very appropriate to my plan and my personality, the signal of his approach resonated in my cell. The satellites had informed me of his arrival, and the spider was going to see the fly that he had caught in his net. I admit it could have been Eagleman or Wingman, since they also patrol in the city, but Eagleman was out of Omegapolis since we found his identity and Wingman was on a collaborative mission with Japan, seemingly helping them with a power-absorber supervillain. So the only fly today was Omegaman. When he was close enough, I activated the bait.

- Donut, climb !

Donut raced towards the large tree and climbed as fast as he could. Then, he began to bark. I estimated two seconds before he came to rescue it. Oh, he took it in only one. His love for dogs was stronger than I estimated. But well, everything was going as planned. I approached in my civil's clothes. I had some glasses so he wouldn't recognize me. I thought that, because he thinks that wearing glasses makes you unrecognizable, then it surely meant that it worked on him. And it did, because when I called Donut he didn't seem to notice I was Zenith Ender. So, to begin destabilising him, I took off one of my best cards.

- I just wanted to thank you... Sam.

His secret identity. The greatest weakness in superheroes careers. I got him where it most hurts. Of course, denial comes after.

He tries to pretend he doesn't know who I am talking about. I told him his full name and his job and he couldn't pretend anymore. I got him. He began to panic, at least that was I guessed it was happening inside of him. A secret identity revealed is the worst thing for a superhero, you just have to see Spider-man to understand it. He tries to discover if anyone else knows. I reassure him, I am his only danger. He thinks fastly, thinking about all the consequences of this happening to him. Then he asks a question I didn't expect : who told me ? A very complex question, I say to myself. What could be the answer ? Could I tell him that the television "told" me when, at ten years old, I remarked the parallel between Sam Summers and Omegaman and the proximity they both had with the pretty interviewer ? Or the ticks that they both shared when they were thinking about what to answer ? Maybe I could

tell him that the interviewer's computer gave me enough evidence to prove logically that he was the top 1 superhero, since Sam's absences were exactly at the moments that Omegaman appeared ? Just with his schedule, the evidence was clear, if you suspected Sam. But the pretty interviewer was too focused looking at his azur eyes to see the clear parallel between both persons. Or maybe when I integrated fake Benny in his apartment and began spying him 24/7 ? So many occasions where I got to know him better. But, that wasn't something I wanted him to know. I didn't need to expose all my evil plan in front of him like all those kindergarten villains who are too proud of themselves to not show off for an hour. I told him the last time I learned it : with Benny. He will then know this : his friend is not in his apartment. He has been spied on for at least three months. Not too alarming, but enough to begin to make him nervous. That was what I needed. I needed him to slowly desperate, so I could, at the right moment, crush him completely. But it was too early to tell him all. He looked surprised when I told him that. He looked mad. I couldn't stop myself from smiling. After that, he was too shocked to react properly to my provocation, so I forced him to go back on trail. I put on my evil costume and present myself as Zenith Ender. Same ol' villain he knows. He has the same mentality as always : stop the plan of the villain, punch the villain, surrender the villain to the police. Now he is right on track. But I need him still unstable, so I make him doubt about the safety of his friend. Aouch, old wound being touched ; he goes crazy. A little bit more of instability, but on another side : a bomb. Where, how ? He doesn't know. But there begins the delicious dilemma : his friend or civils ? Who goes first ? He is insecure. A flaw ? Maybe. Let's see.

- I want you to kill them.

- And how would you make me do such a thing ?

Such a cheesy answer ! Ergh... It will stay in my mind now, that phony voice : “how would you make me do such a thing ?”. Though I have to recognize that there isn’t a flaw there. I already knew. I just wanted to check. He is kind of worried now. I let my thumb over the button of destruction. He is always looking at an opportunity, a moment of distraction to use hyper-speed and take the advantage. But I don’t let him have it. I can’t. I need every moment of the plan to go exactly as I planned, otherwise everything I have done, all those years, will mean nothing. So I stay concentrated, though calm as a leaf resting over a lake. He, on the other hand, is anxious. So, I let him see a solution that will bring him some comfort. If he destroys the bunker, he will stop the bombs. Not true, but necessary for the beginning of the plan. The moment I saw the location of the “bunker”, he left like lightning. I take advantage of the time he spends flying thousands of kilometers to take the elevator of the building behind me and get on the roof. He comes back, probably a little more relieved. But now I must let him see that not all is as pretty as he would like it to be. A regressive countdown. He has some time to save the people and I can’t bring more destruction in his perspective. He has two targets now, even three : the civilians, Benny and me. I let him know that there is a fourth target, Lisa, after he almost dies by the hand of cyber-Benny (such a delightful scene). I activate the hypnosis frequency in her laptop. She is working on her next article, as my cyber-virus is letting me see. He flies to save her. He supposes that she needs to be saved, because he is a superhero. Always on his nerves, at the edge of some imminent danger. His worst nightmare has come true and his close ones are in danger. He flies like a hypersonic

plane, and I let him have what he expects : A Lisa falling from her building of a hundred-levels. I see her falling and realize that I hypnotized her a millionem of a second too early. It could mean her death... But, argh. I am the villain. I am not supposed to care if someone dies. Though... my plans would need a severe adaptation if he gets very angry. Not that I wouldn't be able to manage it, but it would need a lot of changes. I see the camera and see that he catches her just in time, breaking a little bit of the building's windows. So epic, the perfect superhero catching her fiancé just in time. Anyways, I am ready for the next step. Time to let loose little pet Benny.

I deactivate the anechoic system of my room, letting him hear Benny. He is passing close to where I live, so he will probably sense his voice. I see in the cameras of the apartment how he literally destroys half of my room's wall. That was so deliberate ! He could have entered through the window, but instead he had to crush everything. Though it meant that he had lost a little bit of patience, which was good for me. But argh ! My room ! Anyways, he entered and talked with little pet Benny.

- bla bla bla Benny. I missed you so much.
- Bla bla bla Sam, I missed you too.

I couldn't hear what they were saying so I just guessed what they said. Don't judge me.

- bla bla bla. Benny

- bla bla bla. Sam.

Well anyways, they talked a lot, but then, instead of freeing Benny, he stopped himself because Benny told him something. He made some signs pointing to the walls and he seemed alarmed. Omegaman tried to ignore his warnings but Benny was insistent. Then, he went flying away from his good friend. At that moment I understood. Benny told him about the Bismuth's traps. Ha ha ! I forgot about the fake traps I showed to Benny. Now he told Omegaman about it and he forced him to leave without him. I didn't need Benny anymore, so it didn't change anything for me or my plans if he saved him or not. But it was funny to see that the lie I told Benny would make him stay a few days more in my room. Who knows who will free him ? Probably the H.Q. Well done for him. Now, step three : the confrontation. Everything was going according to the plan. Even better. But the hardest part was just about to come. It was also the most important and the one that mattered the most. The fight. Or, better said, the beating.

After he left my apartment, he went to H.Q. I began to feel a little nervous, since I didn't expect him to make a détour with the clock ticking. He was probably too confident in his abilities to stop me rapidly. I felt it was an offense to my career as an anti-hero, but let the anger pass through my body as the wind blows inside the leaves of the trees. When he came back, I was calm again. I greeted him, he replied, then he told me that he was immune to Bismuth for an hour. So that was what he did in the H.Q, I told myself. He went to see the genius scientist. That would be a great

problem if he had told him about the situation and that the genius gave him some advice. I laughed internally. As if he would ever listen to the advice of anyone ! He only listens to the advice of his punches. That is how he works, hit then think. One reason for which it was so easy to manipulate him.

The battle was about to begin. He was about to land a hit, so I needed to place a hit before him, to destabilize him with my secret weapon. I needed him to be unstable. I needed the weak spots. I stopped time in an instant, moved towards him, placed a kick on the side of his face, then returned. He was astonished. He tried to hit me, I stopped time again, and the battle was officially on. I pushed my concentration to the maximum of my capacity. Every moment, every fraction of second, was crucial. I couldn't let a single mistake slide through my hands. Not like it happened with Lisa. Now it was my own life that was at stake. Not literally, but metaphorically. The life that I spent on the destruction of Omegaman. Every hit that I placed was calculated, studied from decades ago. I had all this planned, every quarter of second following an exact choreography of the fight, like a dance that I led. I knew all his moves, every attempt he would make I imagined and thought of the better way to lead the dance. Everything happened as I imagined, and when he lost the balance of his emotions, at that moment, I knew he was going to use light-speed. I predicted his move and stopped time. There he was, moving in slow-motion, like trapped in time. I talked to him, but I knew he couldn't reply. But he understood I was right and stopped his rush. He went lightspeed for about a milli-second. Enough to make an explosion in a conic-radius of 100 meters. Waouh, what a big boom he made. The battle started over, but with more seriousness. He used his techniques (not that many, sadly), and I used mine. The hits on his

vulnerable body slowly began to affect his health. He was having several internal hemorrhages, but he didn't notice, because of his over-confidence and the adrenaline. I knew I was winning. He slowly began to understand it too, when he couldn't get up and that my foot was over his head (necessary ? Absolutely not. Delightful ? You can't even imagine). There it was, my sworn enemy at my feet. He had no escape. Only a fraction of energy to land a last, single, unique punch. What would it be ? Hmmm... Maybe the classic boomerang uppercut that saved him in the 2030, when he almost lost against Omni Void. A hit that surprised me when I first saw it, but that I learned later on that it had been the creation of his mentor Nitroman. Omegaman had no creativity at all : another flaw he had. He only had raw power. I sighed internally, knowing that it would soon be his end. It was good while it lasted. I activated my time-gadget, knowing that in 0.3 seconds his hit would be in front of my nose. I smiled a little too early, but he was too injured to see it in time. The whole universe stopped and I saw him, right before me, with a last menacing punch. It was time. I prepared the greatest, bigger punch I could give with my expertise in martial arts, placed all my strength in a single point of his face and sent him flying. My final punch. He was then on the floor, incapable of moving. I sat down beside him, began to choke him, telling him how useless he was, and, with a last breath, told him who I really was. That little girl he saved on a bridge. He lost consciousness, but I didn't mean to stop until his heart stopped.

And then, I lost. All these years, all the planification went down. I felt at that moment the biggest frustration of my whole life. When Eagle-man came of nowhere, going too fast for me to stop time and took me off the ground. Like a thunder he left me in the street and went flying again to take Omegaman. He lasted a little longer

while he took Omegaman and brang him down the streets. When he laid him down, I saw that his chest was moving. He was still breathing. I have lost. Eagle-man wasn't supposed to be in town. They have told him to relocate since H.V.A (more precisely) discovered his true identity. Eagle-man turned to look at me with a severe eye and said :

- Don't try anything Zenith. You are under arrest.

At that moment, I felt some invisible hands put some cuffs around the wrists behind my back. It was Transparent Sheet. I was definitely beaten. I felt this anger grow inside of me and I couldn't stop myself from shouting to Eagle-man :

- You don't know me ! You don't know all that I sacrificed for this. All that I did to end him ! All my... All my life ! You don't know me !

He looked at me serenely and replied :

- Well, you should have chosen a better hobby.

That was something that Omegaman probably would have said. They are probably friends or something. Argh. Another Omegaman-infected. I stayed silent and let the invisible hero lead me to the police car. I sat calmly in the back row and asked myself this single question : What did I miss to finish him ?

What did I miss ?

PART III : THE TRUTH

When Zenith was sent to prison, he received a visit. Omegaman, dressed as a civilian, came to discuss with her. He looked tired and anxious, even though he recovered completely from his wounds. When he saw her, he stayed silent. She didn't say anything, though he expected her to talk first. Impatiently, he began speaking :

- You knew. You knew this would happen, right ?

She didn't reply.

- All this... chaos. You knew it and you planned it, right ?
- ...
- Why would you do that ? Why... argh ! Why do... Why did you do it to me ?

She smiled, but he understood that she wasn't going to reply. So he began explaining, to calm himself :

- Now all the country is against me. This social movement anti... me is growing wildly in social media and no one can control it. I tried my best to explain myself, but no one seems to be hearing me, like if I was some monster or something. They only see what the video shows. Plus, you added some horrible subtitles. "150 humans or my best friend, who am I gonna choose ?".

She chuckled, so he continued.

- That was not what happened ! I had ten minutes ! I just needed to save my close ones who were closer to danger. I was going to save everyone. Those bombs weren't even real.
- But you still chose your two buddies instead of hundreds of people, she whispered.

The accusation weighed heavy over Omegaman's chest. Zenith laughed loudly. He sighed and stayed quiet some seconds before saying :

- I am bankrupt now, Zenith. No sponsor wants to finance me anymore because of the event. They fear the people. I lost my house, my car, everything. That is how we, superheroes, work nowadays : with the thrust of the people. But you knew it, right ?

She didn't move or even had a change in her facial expression, except for a little smile in the left corner of her lips. He sighed and frowned, revealing some new wrinkles that appeared due to the stress he was feeling recently.

- Is that what you wanted ? To stop me from being a superhero ? Is that all that your plan was about ? I live in the streets now, with the beggars with only a cent in my pocket ! Is that really what you desired ?

At that moment, something inside of Zenith was unblocked. And what she first thought as a tiny sarcastic remark became a torrent of bitterness :

- Well, mister perfect, or mister muscle, as you prefer. Maybe I did it so you know how it feels to have just one cent in your pocket. Or maybe I did it so the big perfect hero finally feels what normal humans feel day to day. Maybe I did it because I wished that you, who never experiences failure, disappointments, heartbreaks, poverty or anything else because of your big biceps, who never fail stopping crime just because you sway them around, with your perfect Caucasian hair and your pretty fiancé who is casually one of the prettiest girls on Earth, and your Benny who is so loyal and true, with whom you play golf every Sunday like the great snobs you are, that you, for one time, only one time, experience a little, small, minuscule, fr**king failure in your wholly holy st***d life ! Sorry to incommode mister Perfect. I didn't mean to bother his Highness with the disgusting life of the majority of people in the world.

He was surprised to see her reaction, so he didn't reply at first. He didn't expect that answer from a villain. And he couldn't reply to it.

After that, they just stayed silent for a few minutes. She seemed to be crying, but her face was red and she seemed deeply angry. He didn't know what to say, since she seemed to be talking about deep stuff that he didn't understand. It wasn't the classic hero-villain chitchat. But, he stopped looking away uncomfortably and looked at her for a moment and noticed a small detail. She looked Latina, when you looked attentively at her. He thought randomly about some Latino heroes he had fought

with, like Coffee Man or El Luchador. This last one once told him that his brother died in Mexico when...

- Zenith, where do you come from ?

She seemed embarrassed and looked away, shocked by her previous explosion.

- As if you care, *gringo*. she said in a whisper.
- Are you Mexican ?

He continued looking at her while she refused to speak.

- You are in your twenties, right ?

She stayed silent. He thought for a moment.

- You were born during the Mexico Cataclysm, right ? You didn't have parents.
- ...
- Not everyone is as lucky as you, she muttered.

He stayed silent, knowing what it meant to be an Mexico Cataclysm orphan. He didn't know what to say, so he changed of subject :

- Well, I guess it's not so bad if I live for a few months without top-quality food. Though I liked my burgers with fancy cheddar, he said trying to lose the atmosphere. Maybe you'll see me in the streets doing some tricks to earn money or something, Ze- uh, what's your name ? The real one, I mean.

She looked at him, surprised that he asks her, then, after some seconds of thought, she said :

- Jade. Jade June.

He looked at her, smiling :

- Ha, that sounds like the secret identity of a super-hero.
- Yeah... I know, she said, apparently relieved of all the tears she let flow.

Then, before leaving, he looked at her one last time with a strange look and said :

- Well, we will see each another time, Jade.

And he left, leaving her alone. Jade, since Zenith was dead at the moment she achieved her plan, thought about her condition. She fulfilled her plans as she expected, she now was more than multi-billionaire and could do anything she wanted, after she would be released from prison, of course. But, there was this strange feeling, this dissatisfaction that left her with a quiet question. Was this really

worth it ? All that training, all this effort, only to come to this... number in a bank ?

She didn't do it for money, she thought. She did it to make Omegaman descend a little from his perfect paradise on earth. But, now, she thought, was it really worth it ?

She would spend the next ten years in prison, due to attempted murder of the first degree, irresponsible psychic manipulation that could have led to murder and kidnapping. She will have to spend ten years in prison until she can enjoy the fortune of Omegaman, which she hid in a bank somewhere in Europe. She thought about it, and silently felt that her plan was incomplete. Something was missing that she didn't see. Something that she felt inside of her that she couldn't understand

The truth was that Jade June was born in Mexico, just a few hours before the villain Infinity Golem went into a highly-destructive battle against a recently-discovered Omegaman. That battle was the cause of one the most tragic events in modern history. The brawl turned so intense that earth trembled constantly, as if a high-scale earthquake was happening. The buildings fell and the sounds of lightning resonated through the whole country. When the media discovered that the ground itself was breaking to the level of tectonic plates, people began to panic. Many tried to flee, but at some point, from what they saw in the news, people understood that they wouldn't survive. The battle raged ferociously and the damages were expanding exponentially through the country. It was like a wave that went faster through time. The people of Mexico, in a last breath of hope, built wooden nests with what they had at their homes and put their babies inside. Nobody knew how this social movement started, but as people in other countries saw the wooden nests

covering the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, they knew that Mexico's history was going to its end.

Jade June was picked up by the International Forces of the Superheroes (IFS), which delivered her to the U.S.A, who agreed to receive the orphans due to some obscure diplomatic agreement. The U.S.A simply put the babies in the cheapest orphanages as soon as it was legal to do so and tried to erase the event from the people's memory. Jade was found with a single post-it barely readable on the top of his wooden nest, that was in fact a picnic basket. The post-it had the name *Jade* over it. When the orphanage received her and saw that her eyes were as green as jade, they decided to keep her name instead of choosing some other random name. Then, they gave her the family name of the month where they received her, which was June.

Jade was born in a cold orphanage. The ladies that kept her beated her for every single reason they had, maybe using her to express their frustration. The other orphans, the majority whom were older than her, saw in her fragile and small body an opportunity to feel more powerful and did all they could to humiliate her and make her feel like trash. Jade, who had no one to tell her otherwise, eventually believed what the adults said when they beated her or when the other kids mocked her : *you are scum*. But Jade was no weak person. Under that seemingly-fragile body laid a strong and resilient spirit, capable of doing what no one hoped to do, maybe because of the Mexican blood that runned through her veins. And as they beated her, her hate began to grow. Towards the other orphans, towards the adults, towards the whole world. He built a shell around her heart stronger than diamond, opaque as

gasoline, so no one would hurt her anymore. And as she grew, she had only one escape, one single place where her child-heart could open a little-tiny-bit : the television. There, no one kicked her or punched her, since the adults used it to entertain them when they had to go somewhere and had to leave them alone and the orphans stayed very quiet or went somewhere else to do silly things. There, she was, even if it was for some minutes, safe. When she saw the television, she liked the character of Omegaman. It was a big strong guy, who defended the weak and used his powers for good things. She felt security when she saw him. But, as time passed, she understood that he was real, and that he lived in the same country with her. Jade then thought about going to see him. She planned it when she was just five years old. She already had the mind of nearly an adult. But as she was about to flee the orphanage, a thought flashed through her mind like a poisonous arrow : you are scum, remember ? Why would you think that someone as good as Omegaman would like to talk to you ? You are dirty. Unworthy.

As we already said, she had no one to tell her otherwise, so she sincerely believed it. And she stayed. But when she saw the television later on from her personal hell, instead of the reassuring feeling she felt before, now she felt an increasing bitterness grow inside of her. Omegaman became the paradise that she could never reach. The human god that will always stay too pure for her to touch. And in the little heart of that broken child, an enormous hate began to grow, one that simply desired one thing : make that perfect angel go back to earth, where scum and dirt covered the ground. To make him go back to her level. But as her hate grew, and her plan started to develop, she stayed deep inside the little girl that desired one single thing, one thing that she couldn't name. She grew and became an adult,

trained harder than anyone, lived some adventures, but people around were always the same to her. Others were like the orphans, trying to abuse her like the Lizard-man and authorities were like the ladies that kept her until she was eighteen, trying to beat her for any reason. But her mind was always focused on one single person, the only who gave her, even if it was for an instant, the taste of a better world. The truth was that she heard on the news that Eagle-man had decided to stay despite the revelation of his identity. The truth was that she knew deep inside that Eagle-man would interfere if Omegaman was in a critical situation, since they were coworkers who had a good relationship, close to friendship. The truth was that she heard Eagle-man, the only hero in the city who could stop her at time, diving through the sky to catch her, but she decided to ignore it. Not consciously, but at a very deep-level of her heart, since, deep-down, she knew she didn't want to kill him. She just wanted to be seen by him.

Many months after her conversation with Omegaman, the mythic superhero was found in a poor neighborhood disguised in the night in a cheap costume, making himself be called Strongman by the civilians in the night, and working in a McDonald's during the day. When they will ask him about returning to the H.Q. organization, he would say that he will stay a little longer in that city before going back. He will then recommend someone else for the H.Q, saying that that person will be very useful for the intelligence unit. She would accept, since freedom would be included with the job offer. Time will pass, and she will get to be closer to Omegaman, until one day, he will ask her if she would accept him as her symbolic adoptive father. She would accept, and eventually, one day, she would become the heir of Omegaman's superhero legacy.

