

DIARY OF A SUPER HERO

I need to write this down somewhere since I do not dare tell anyone. They call me Iron Hand and I am a shill for the World Motors Consortium. The public sees a shining example of all that is good. The PR handlers spin it for the different countries we play to but the main audience is North America. I guess I really do not have much to complain about with the cars, apartments, money and women but it all changed earlier today. It seemed like a normal photo op. The Motor City Saviors, me and my team, would swing in on a tour boat on Lake Michigan under attack by a group of terrorists. We would save the day, be the heroes. John, A.K.A. Redwing, would fly in and we would come up in the Turbo-sub. So simple, but I am getting ahead of myself.

I should have guessed something was up two weeks ago when Henry Jonston, the exec in charge of promotions, called me into the high brass meeting on the future of the MCS. The talk was all about how Lenny Brent had been killed while working for the Health Food Council. He had been shot in the back while his team tried to stop a bank robbery in New York. Then there had been that girl in Cuba who had died for the Revolution. That was the way the media wanted it but I know she had stood on the wrong end of a firing squad.

“We need something flashy, you know, to get the public’s attention. Real Hero stuff.” Jonston puffed on his stogy, a habit I detested but could do little to resolve.

“Umm, we could, um, stage a...an...um, a save the whales?” That was Rince, Foley Rince, head of research and personal physician to the team. I don’t really like him, never did, but it does not pay to tell your doctor that. He looked nervous and like he had run a marathon. Black hair covered a greasy scalp in a way that made his grey eyes look blank.

“No, it’s already been done by that environmental group in Alaska. No, we need something new and big. Any ideas I.H.?” That was Jonston, everyone an initial. I had been a steel worker before this. Times had been hard but simple. I did my job and came home to my family. I wondered what Jill and the kids were doing. In the midst of my thoughts I realized everyone was staring at me.

“Well, terrorists are popular this month. Can we do something with them?” Rince gave me a look, one that seemed to almost be pity, and then it passed. “Something local that would catch everyone’s attention. Anything on the Lakes is always good for some prime time coverage on the networks.” I could not shake the feeling that this was not a new idea to them, that I had somehow been steered here.

“Good idea. Allie, get working on it.” A cute redhead just nodded and left the room. “Jim,” puffed Jonston, “I like you. You state your mind. It always helps for an organization to have someone as clear headed and spoken as you on the team.” I sensed the tension like an approaching summer thunder storm. The rest of the people from the meeting faded to exits while Jonston put his hand on my armored shoulder. “I have heard you are having some problems with Redwing. Do we need to talk about what happened at Ann Arbor?” The fight. Well, not really a fight more of a loud argument that the news networks had picked up. If we had fought there would have been property damage.

“No, I think John and I have hammered out a truce.” I made an attempt at a smile but it came off more as a grimace. The truth was that we were not speaking at this time. John had questioned

my leadership of the team. He had been an MBA, manager for a large consulting firm and he did not like taking orders from some blue collar shmuck, his words not mine. “We just need to get into a groove is all. He will do what is needed.” I hoped.

“Well, he better. We pay him enough. He actually came in and asked me to fire you. Said you were bad for the team. You have been with us for three years and Redwing nearly as long but I know you are the man to lead the MCS.” Jonston leaned on the table, his paunch settling on his thighs. “You know the board has its concerns about him. He’s always been a pain in the ass. He files more grievances...” Jonston sighed and must have noticed my blank look. I knew those grievances were about me but I could give a damn. They amounted to a paper trail that John could create in order to get me fired. I led this team because the board wanted me to not to make John happy.

“Don’t worry Mr. Jonston, I’ll deal with him.” That seemed to be all it took. I left the meeting room with the feeling that I was out of the loop. I felt that way most of the time since I took the treatment. Heart disease ran in my family but when the doctor told me I had six months to live I had looked at him like he was out of some grade-B movie. Once it sunk in I was going to die I determined not to go peacefully. Jill and the kids were great, supportive only the way a family can be. When I started to get chest pains and fainting spells I knew my time was up. Then my doctor told me about Daedalus and the Genesis treatments.

It changed my life. The Military was looking for volunteers and I had nothing to lose. They sponsored me and within six months I was washed out of their program. I had an aversion to killing that they were disappointed to find. I was cured though and they did not make it easy for me. I ended up working all sorts of jobs and being exposed to less than traditional Metas. One taught me about body armor and I taught him about speed despite the warnings of the Major who had done my exit interview.

Armed with my knowledge I ended up with the World Motors Consortium. I can’t say they were my first choice but there are worse jobs.

Jill stayed with me longer than she should have though and WMC was a final straw. She could barely handle me being a Meta in the privacy of our home but now I was on the news services and it was just too much. When she left she was in tears and so was I. It was a tough time but I threw myself into the work.

For the past three years I helped come up with and execute the publicity events, called Harkers in the business, and almost took a kind of pride in my work. It was not all fighting and crime busting, that is a surprisingly small part of it. Most of it was going to schools, meeting with politicians and photo ops. Then the call came in for the Michigan run.

The three of us, Wisp, Kenny and me took the sub and went out to meet the boat. John had always said that having one flyer on the team made us look ridiculous. He always pushed for more flyers but they were rare. During the ride out to the ship we went over the plan again. Wisp would sneak on board ahead of all of us while John distracted them. Kenny would make the sub look like an innocent patch of lake while we docked. Where Wisp had gotten her powers was a mystery. We didn’t ask but the WMC would love to know. The tricky part being getting me onto the ship. I weigh close to 400 pounds with the armor on and sink very quickly.

Everything seemed to go to plan. The terrorists saw Redwing and began firing on him. Wisp took out the guards left on this side of the boat. We docked and then things changed. It



happened in that way bad things happen, only “bad” did not begin to cover it.

The ship rocked with a staccato blast. I rushed towards the bow and saw soldiers, not terrorists but armored soldiers with automatic weapons.

“Remember, nail the flying one, the rest get a by this time,” a sergeant said to one of his men. They were standing less than a meter below me. The reality of his words shook me to my foundations. We had been set up...by friggin’ trade organization! Kenny was back on the boat. I knew I had to get back.

I turned in time to see a squad come out of a side passage onto the gangway I was on. One of them tossed a grenade down onto a patch of water. I clanked then went off. The sub sank before Kenny could even get the hatch open. They knew what to use, they were wearing infra-red goggles and saw the exhaust from the sub. Still, someone had told them.

Wisp came out of the wall as I plowed into the soldiers who had killed Kenny. I moved with an enhanced speed that came from my martial arts training in the military. They really did not have a chance. In seconds it was Wisp and I standing alone on the deck.

“There aren’t any hostages Jim.” She was shaken. I knew because she never called me Jim and her face made her look like a ghost. “I think they got Redwing too. What are we going to do Jim?” She was beginning to cry. Her sugar would be getting low, she was hypoglycemic and when she used her powers it just got worse.

“Try and make it to shore. Get help but don’t go to anyone at the Consortium. Jonston set us up.” I sighed, feeling the weight of the memory of Rince’s pitying look. “I will try to get John out.” For a second, Wisp’s blue eyes looked like she would put up a fight. She knew she couldn’t make it all the way to shore but

WMC. He had learned a number of different and classified skills in his time with them but, in the end, he had to leave...quietly. Now, whatever monstrosity of a gun that was mounted on the bow of this ship had finished him.

“John, don’t worry, I will get you out of here. I’ll get you fixed up.” We both knew I was lying and doing a terrible job of it. Automatic fire rang out. I had not killed everyone apparently.

“Jim, we have had our...differences, but you...have got to...get out of here.” John was having trouble breathing. I tried to make him more comfortable but only seemed to hurt him. “There are more...coming...on helicopters. You need to go.”

“I won’t leave you!” I could not, would not leave another to die here.

“You’ll leave me and I will deal out a heap of pain.” He seemed to breath better which made it all the worse.

“You told me I was not a good leader, I was poorly suited to the job. If I leave I will just prove you right.” The weapons fire was getting more determined. They would not stay back much longer.

“You don’t get it, John, there is no more team to be a leader of. You need to look to yourself now. Wisp and Kenny are beyond pain. I will be there soon. I am no hero but I would like some payback before I buy it.” He pulled out one of his sub-machine guns that he was so fond of and a string of grenades. One was magnetic that he clamped to my side. “Remember, you can’t swim with your armor on.”

Then I was jumping over the side. It was a shaped charge and directed most of the blast away from me towards the ship. What sank the ship I will never know. I was rapidly plummeting to the bottom encased in my iron armor. Willing it free from my skin is difficult in the best of conditions, it was nearly impossible while slowly drowning. Somehow, I must have done it and struggled to the surface. I floated for days before I was picked



that her intangibility would get her out of weapons range. I could hear the sergeant yelling for the detail that had sunk the sub. With a silent thank you she turned to float off the boat.

Once she was clear, I turned to the bow of the ship. I heard a peculiar popping behind me and saw Wisp dropping towards the water. Four neat holes showed in the back her shirt. I saw the rifle sticking out of a porthole a few feet away and ripped through the walls like they were paper. The sniper held an incredibly complex looking rifle with an impossibly large magazine. All this is a blur as were the next minutes. How many I killed would never be recorded and I could barely see through the haze produced by my rage. In the end I was destroying equipment. Pounding metal into scrap for the slight relief it gave me and witnessing two of my best friends killed.

I stood for a moment, dazed, at the bow of the ship. Dead soldiers all about me, the body of the sergeant in front of me when I heard a voice.

“Jim, you never could hold your temper.” It was Redwing but he was busted up pretty bad. His armor had been strong but light. He had worked for some intelligence agency before joining the

up by a tourist yacht.

The Kisingtons, a nice family, set me ashore in Chicago. After many assurances that I would be alright I went to one of the safe houses that I had set up. It seemed untouched. Inside, I found clothes, money, ID’s, and weapons. Everything I would need to make things right.

Floating in the lake had given me time to think. Jonston, for all his corporate lack of soul, did not have the brains for something like this. The news, even after several days, was still running the tragic story. Allie, the PR exec, made a very convincing weeping widow. She talked about the team like they had been family. She spoke of a memorial that would be held in three days in Detroit. The WMC became the center of a 24/7 media blitz looking at angles, interviewing family and analyzing every aspect of the “Super Heroes”.

All the time, Rince was in the background, his look of sorrow very practiced, his stance poised for movement. Rince was the one. He had set them up, killed his friends with as little emotion as he would a fly. It was time to set aside childish things and become a man. Rince had chosen this fight but I will end it.