

CREDITS

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PROLOGUE

DARKEST BEFORE THE DAWN

The cold and chilling winds around America's capital reflected the mood of the heroes involved.

They were gathered around the Washington monument, brightly lit as black helicopters fluttered through the air. The United States was on its highest level of alert and it was well known to all that it would soon be under siege by beings that possessed power enough to level the city – and the world.

At the base of the obelisk were two separate groups of individuals, a collection of what the United States soldiers around them called '*costumed freaks*' or '*Metaman Maniacs*.' Nevertheless, there were only a few of them that did not gladly welcome their aid in the coming struggle.

The first of these groups was a bastion of older superheroes. The great goddess Athena, armored in golden steel that had been forged by her brother Hephaestus, would wield a sword that held the power to slay even immortals. Beside her were luminaries such as: Samson - the Judge of Biblical Times come again; Isis the Incredible – vessel and wielder of the powers of the Queen of Heliopolis and Captain Aeon, stellar warrior who had wandered and warred across the Galaxy and beyond. These were the few superheroes that had not lost faith that freedom was worth fighting for.

Across from them was a group of younger individuals, though most were at least in their mid-twenties. The second Black Wing was wearing the costume of his mentor predecessor and looking almost as formidable. Beside him was the beautiful Angel Girl, possessed of nearly as much power as her older brother Divinos and the darkly mysterious Red Queen. The second group was larger than the first but lacked both their experience and raw power. They were the offspring of older heroes and those few

idealists that still held to the beliefs that a superhero was meant to serve the populace rather than rule it.

"How many does that make so far?" The second Black Wing did not bother disguising his young and untested-sounding voice. Alexander Timmons had more experience than many of the older heroes. He had been trained practically since birth by the first Black Wing and as his absolute sidekick, Dawn Wing, he'd faced every evil imaginable. Still, this would be the greatest test of his life.

Athena looked towards him with her cool gray eyes. "We number somewhat less than fifty. More than a third of us have powers, though only ten of us are in the Alpha-Class of Metamen."

Black Wing nodded grimly at those figures. They were actually larger than he'd expected, given how unforgiving the past decade had been to superheroes of the "old school". "Do we have any numbers on the Psychotic Seven's forces?"

The Psychotic Seven were the root of this conflict. Numbering seven of the most infamous villains in the world, they had launched a surprise attack on the United States. Aquarius, King of Atlantis, had defeated the United States' fleets. The gravity bending Jack Union had crushed air reprisal. The Red Cheetah had used advanced Nestorian technology to cripple the United States military's communication. Ramses the Second had brought a vast horde of Egyptian-themed warriors from the far future. The radioactive Manhattan Project had threatened nuclear retaliation if other nations intervened. Finally, the psychic Jane Union had used her powers to convince several high ranking Generals to order the men under their command to stand down.

"Over four hundred" Athena gave a grim but cool-headed answer. "They have rallied the vigilantes from dozens of cities across America. They have also emptied the various super-powered wings of most of America's prisons. Those that they do not kill they recruit to their cause. More than half of them have powers, at least fifty of them in the Alpha-class of Metaman."

"I see." The new Black Wing sighed. There was little they could do against such a force. "Is there any sign of Divinos?"

Divinos was the greatest of all superheroes. A strange visitor from another galaxy, Divinos was stronger than any other superhuman on Earth. Even Athena, a genuine Greek Goddess, could not match his power. Even more than his physical might, the awe inspired by his appearance alone would send many of their enemies scurrying back to their holes.

"No" Athena shook her head. "We fight without him."

"So be it –" Black Wing was about to give a grim assent when his eardrums practically burst at the sound of a gigantic crash of thunder.

"HAIL BRETHERN!" The voice boomed loudly as rain poured down and carried a black-haired figure on buffeting winds. Lightning flashed above them and cheer went up from both groups. It was not Divinos, but it was still a figure that all of them welcomed the sight of, Ymir the Half-Jotun.

Athena walked over and embraced the demigod. "It's good to see you, old friend."

"And you, Lady!" He shouted. The atomic powered Viking had updated his attire a bit from the original archaic chainmail he'd once worn. Now he had his hair in a ponytail and an earring of all things, an incongruous mixture of styles. "I bring word from Jotunheim and have come to fight by your side!"

Black Wing smiled at the figure. He knew that his exaggerated theatrical speech was entirely an affectation. Miles Westlake - the true identity of Ymir - was a Canadian and a former atomic physicist rather than a genuine son of Asgard. Finally, the black cowled hero spoke "May I ask what this news is?"

Ymir's face took on a serious cast as he finished hugging his fourth - or perhaps his fifth - superhero. "The Jotuns have mounted an attack upon the Asgard and cannot withdraw their forces to assist thee."

"Dammit," The second Black Wing growled at this news. The giants had been friends of the Earth's people since the Patriots had saved their Queen from a forced marriage to the god Phol.

Ymir then slapped Black Wing II across the back, sending him staggering forwards. "Take heart, for this act also prevents Thunaer from calling on reinforcements to aid his cause and old debts are not easily forgotten in Jotunheim either. Fenrir the Mighty, King of all Werewolves will join us with his brother Garm. My old friend Loge, the God of Fire and Illusion, has promised to confuse their armies while we battle. It may not defeat them but will save many soldiers of America from death."

Athena gave him a kiss on the cheek. "That is good news indeed."

Black Wing shook his head. "We won't be able to defeat them with just this team."

"Undoubtedly not," Ymir seemed almost too pleased. "Death awaits us on this battle field. But can you imagine a worthier cause?"

The Red Queen answered this rhetorical question with a statement on the minds of many. "If I must meet my death, I would have preferred it not be against those who were formerly friends."

The Psychotic Seven had all once been Patriots. Some of their associates had been superheroes that had fought and bled with those who'd agreed to fight beside Athena or Black Wing II. In some cases, marriages had been broken or sibling set against sibling by the choices made that day.

The Psychotic Seven had promised that the United States' citizenry would not be harmed. They had argued that Democracy had failed the American people and that an age of super-powered beings meant that these godlike figures should rule mankind. They had promised that the new age would offer super-powers to all and advanced technology to fix all the world's problems. All that was