

**Time since last explosion: 00:00:00:15**

*Bang.*

The staff in the hallway jumped as Megaton let off a blast. No larger than a firecracker, not even enough to leave a mark on the floor. His cheeks flushed as he waved an apology at them.

Already he could feel it building up again, rising with the embarrassment. It was like having a cowbell attached to him, announcing his approach anywhere he went. He was sure some people would love such a thing. But those weren't the people who got flustered when they had to share their name with the class, or who spent their time in libraries because it was the only place people wouldn't talk to them.

"Another in fifteen. Sorry," Megaton said as he passed them.

"Thanks for the heads up."

A permanent countdown in his head, a constant swelling expanding beyond his body. It was never quite uncomfortable, but it was constant. His power had done away with his need to sleep, so he could *a/ways* be counting down to the next explosion. As if to apologize for the inconvenience, his power gave him an impeccable sense of time. Four seconds had passed since he'd focused on the sensation. Eleven more to go. Any more and he might cause damage to the hallway.

"What's on the docket for you today?" One of them asked. He was young, with a carefree smile. Probably pretty new. This was the worst part of his power. The constant blasts were interpreted as 'hey, I'm here, come chat' instead of 'get the hell away from me, I have anxiety.'

Was it normal to try and make conversation with strangers? Megaton hated the game of 'who was in the weird?' It was usually him. It would be weirder to ignore the comment, now that it had been said.

Three more seconds had passed.

"Oh, um, I don't think I have much. Cover your ears." Megaton counted the remaining seconds, then fired the blast down the hallway to try and mitigate the noise. "Sorry."

"Don't worry about it," the stranger said, as if that would solve anything.

Megaton rubbed the back of his head. Was it his turn to ask something? He didn't really care. He didn't even know the man's name. Would it be awkward to ask?

The pause that lasted for six seconds.

"Um, what are you doing?"

The two employees shared a glance. Oh no, was he an asshole for asking that, because of the power disparity?

"Uh. Cleaning?" The employee gestured to the mop in hand.

"Oh... Cool."

"Should we be doing something else?"

"N-no. Keep, uh, keep up the good work. Ears."

*Bang.*

"Sorry."

"Yeah."

He felt the omnipresent eye of his Bead on him, an unknown amount of people tuning in and watching him make a fool of himself in real time. His face heated further.

His power wasn't the worst part. It was that Bead. Always watching. Turning everything into a show, everyone in the City into actors. Even these people could be actors, civilians given

a pretend job for a chance to meet real life extrahumans. It made this hollow world feel less empty, at least.

Megaton looked down the hall for anyone to save him. Nothing. Sweat took three more seconds to pool on his forehead.

He felt his phone buzz. *Thank God.*

"I have to take this. Have a nice day."

"Thanks, you--"

*Bang.*

"Sorry." He accepted the call. "Megaton. What's the situation?"

**Time since last explosion: 00:00:03:12**

It took Megaton three minutes to get to the ops center. Three minutes of trying not to focus on the nerves making him all vomity, which meant focusing on his power, increasing with each tick of its proverbial clock.

Inside was pandemonium. People in suits helped people in costumes send and receive orders. Across the multitude of screens at the front of the windowless room was the same scene from a dozen different angles. Most of them were filled with blood.

They only called Megaton when it was bad, and this was several tiers past bad. He stood at the doorway, trying to take it all in and failing miserably, instead just getting in the way of the very busy people surrounding him.

"Megaton, over here," Hyperion, his boss and leader of Gemini, was in the corner, next to a private terminal. He was dressed in full combat gear, literally covered with weapons, which made Megaton sweat more than he already was. Hyperion almost never took to the field.

"What's happening?"

Hyperion spoke without looking his way. "An Extra that calls himself Father Leather. Started killing his way through town. Gold Dawn went in, we thought the situation was contained. A few minutes later they requested all hands. We've mobilized the patrols, and we're acting as a comm hub between teams."

Megaton tried to stammer out a reply. All he could get out was, "oh."

"He's not going down to anything that's been thrown at him. Hindsight told us only one thing can hurt him at a time, and he wrapped himself in barbed wire, so it cuts him whenever he moves. That's where you come in.."

Megaton leaned towards the terminal to watch the feed, aerial footage recorded by a flying Extra. Father Leather was nude, unless you counted barbed wire and what looked like a leather apron as clothing. He carried a home-forged meat cleaver almost the same size as him, and was hefting it like it weighed nothing. Bloody footprints revealed the path he'd walked, the side effect of the wire pulled taut around his feet.

The camera zoomed in further. Father Leather had an unkempt beard slick with moisture, bits of gristle stuck in it. His hair was a wild mane of black locks, and dried blood splattered his ruddy skin. Some ran out of his mouth, into his beard.

"Does that apron have... a face?"

Hyperion nodded without looking at him.

"Is there a trashcan--"

Hyperion nudged a wastebin with his foot, stepping out of the way of Megaton's vomit without looking at him.

"Hindsight said the whole family got powers that were shared if they were close to each other. Father Leather apparently decided the best way to be close was to eat and skin his family. Got all of their powers, full strength."

“How’d Hindsight get all this?”

“He asked him directly. Big mistake. He’s dead now.”

He remembered Hindsight from one of the holiday parties he’d been forced to attend. Young guy, really talkative and outgoing. Megaton had been forced to hide in a toilet stall to get away from him. He spent the next four minutes and sixteen seconds having a panic attack, but Hindsight had tracked him down later and apologized.

“Fuck.”

“He’s not the only one. Five other fatalities so far.” Hyperion was deadpan as he listed off names. One of the aides looked at the Extra with disgust as he did so. Megaton remembered feeling the same once, put off by the way Hyperion was apparently unaffected by all this. It hadn’t been until they’d both sought the same storage room to quietly panic in that Megaton had understood the emphasis on *apparently*.

Megaton also understood why he’d been called. The nuclear option. His heart sank like it always did.

“How quickly can I get there?”

“Four minutes. How long do you need?”

Geminga stepped into the camera’s view, growing a fifty foot pole of pure matter so heavy it warped the air. It toppled toward Father Leather. The Extra didn’t attempt to dodge as the pole went straight through him, bisecting him vertically and continuing straight through the Earth with no indication it would stop any time soon. Megaton blinked and Father Leather was back, blood oozing from where the wire bit into his arm but no worse for wear.

He’d need to be strong enough to destroy every atom if he wanted to be sure.

“Twenty--no, thirty minutes. A-and we’ll need a field, or somewhere uninhabited. This will be big.”

“On it. Stay here.” Hyperion looked at him. “You don’t have to watch. I do, because they’re my people. But you don’t have to.”

“I feel...” Megaton paused. Most times he didn’t get the choice to turn away. He glanced at the screen. Ragdoll lay writhing in pain as a cut on his side turned into ten cuts, then those grew deeper and longer, hunting for vital organs.

Ambrosia came onto the screen, her amber liquid sloshing out of cupped hands as she desperately tried to reach him in time. Father Leather swung the cleaver and a telekinetic tried to shunt Ambrosia out of the way. Still, the blade had nicked her in the wrist. The cut looked small, but it kept growing, more cuts appearing and creeping up her arm. There was no audio, but Megaton could tell she was screaming.

He remembered how softly she spoke to him. The gentle touch to the shoulder when she saw he was upset. She’d smelled like lilac.

Someone off-screen sliced the rest of her arm off with a laser before the cuts spread further.

“They’re dying so that I have the time I need. I have to.”

Hyperion put his hand on Megaton’s shoulder. A touch of solidarity. Megaton looked back at the terminal and knew what he needed to do.

**Time since last explosion: 00:00:23:17**

Centurion was touted as the most fierce fighter in the City. He’d been one of the top heroes for three years. They had audio in the ops center now, so Megaton could hear him scream as he died.

That was number twenty three. Megaton wasn’t sure if he was in shock or if it was just that he’d never met Centurion in person, but he didn’t feel as much this time. It took eight

seconds for the gash in his leg to make its way up his body. Hacking through until it got to the heart. Quick, but painful.

The ops center was an odd mix of frantic activity and shocked silence. Most of the civilians had been taken out as the veneer crumbled. They were actors looking for a thrill and they'd found trauma instead. Now, actual jobs needed doing and they couldn't do them. Megaton couldn't blame them for it, he didn't want to do his either. Unlike them, he had no choice.

Someone was screaming something into a mic, voice choked with emotion. Megaton realized he felt nothing. The grief and fear had been drained out of him by now.

Twenty three Extras had died trying to stop this monster. He was pretty sure he would be number twenty four. At least, he hoped he would. That would mean no one else would sacrifice themselves.

It was abstract, thinking about how he had only a handful of minutes left. A perfect knowledge of time passing, and nothing to do with it but wait.

He would die a hero. That was something, he supposed, but the more he thought about it, the more the platitude rang hollow.

The longest he'd ever waited to fire a shot was five minutes. It had leveled a building. He wasn't sure if his power had a limit, he'd been too scared to ever find out. He understood he never would, and that was probably good.

But how many times had he run from conversations from would-be friends? How many people would even mourn him, aside from the lip service most heroes gave fallen comrades?

"What did I fucking tell you? Pull anyone back who isn't completely invulnerable. He hits harder each time he hits the same target. If your invulnerability isn't perfect you *will* die."

Sacrosanct, the leader of the Amber Order, screamed into the microphone. His voice cracked.

Understandable, seeing how half his team was dead now. In a perverse way, Megaton was glad he wasn't the only one breaking.

There was a garbled response and Sacrosanct screamed back. "Machina, listen to me, he's got a rage aura. That's what you're feeling. If you're near him you are *going* to get overly aggressive and you *will* fuck up."

They had managed to draw Father Leather out of the city, into the suburbs. Only another block or two to the target, a large park on the outskirts.

"How many times do I have to say it? Any wound he deals is fatal. Do. Not. Approach. Any Extra who needs to get within ten meters for their power to work *must retreat*. And get that fucking barbed wire off him. Are there seriously no ferrokinetics in the area?"

There was shrieking over the mic and Sacrosanct fell bodily into a nearby chair. Number twenty four.

"What's the view count like?" Sacrosanct asked, deflated.

"Two million in total, fifteen thousand from Leather's perspective," an unfamiliar Extra with a clockwork motif to his costume said. Megaton's heart sank.

"Sick fucks."

The small army of Extras was beginning to fall back as Slapdash hastily constructed a wall of forcefields. Father Leather swung and his cleaver bounced off. He swung again, and cracked several of them. The next swing shattered half of them.

Lady Justice, the rising star of Gold Dawn, slammed down on him, making a crater in the asphalt deep enough it obscured them both from view. There was an explosion loud enough to shatter windows down the street as Lady Justice was hit out of view fast enough to create a sonic boom. Across the city, debris erupted from the skyscraper she crashed through. The last



hit had taken her two minutes and sixteen seconds to return from, this time would take even longer.

“Jesus fuck.” Sacrosanct mumbled as he sunk into his chair. Several other Amber Order Extras were with him, watching helplessly. Their team was based on imagery of knights, and they specialized in close-quarters combat. They were useless here and knew it.

The ops center was almost completely silent now. People stood and watched, their initial gusto had drained as they understood the feebleness of their situation.

Storm clouds rolled in as Downpour was finally able to conjure a storm without risking the lives of other Extras. Liquid gravity crushed the ground, making pinpoint divots in the road and tearing effortlessly through his flesh, only for it to be repaired instantly.

The deluge slowed him nevertheless, ravaging the road and soaking into it, making the soles of his feet weigh hundreds of pounds. It would root a sane person in place, but Father Leather simply pulled his leg until his sole came off, dripping viscera onto the ground and taking another step, repairing mid stride.

She changed the rain, the storm subsided for five and a half seconds before more sheets of light green liquid fell. Megaton heard the telltale hissing of acid as a nearby streetlight drooped and the barbed wire began to melt off Father Leather.

He reacted fast, pulling some from his chest and stuffing it into his mouth. Blood flowed as he swallowed it, an end piece hanging out his mouth like a stray piece of spaghetti until it dissolved in the rain.

Father Leather trudged forward, unbothered by the metal-eating acid. It had been a good idea. It had failed.

“Megaton. It’s time.”

Hyperion was back, looking more serious than ever. Megaton nodded. After what he watched, the usual thoughts weren't playing in his head. There was no questioning the morality of what he was about to do. No thoughts about why people had deemed him qualified to decide when a life needed taking.

The two left the room, and silence settled as the door closed. Megaton only now realized he was shaking.

"This is Hyperion. We are on our way. Cathedral is prepped as a fallback. Clear any Extra off the field except reactive teleporters and those with S-level durability." He muted the call. "Let's go kill this guy."

**Time since last explosion: 00:00:29:43**

The helicopter landed on the other side of the park. It took three minutes and fifteen seconds. After watching for so long it was surreal to be standing at the scene. Like he'd wandered onto the set of a horror movie. The costumes gave him and Hyperion away. They were fresh and clean, while the ones who'd been fighting since the start were filthy, splattered with... stuff.

The Extras who couldn't fly or teleport began to load up onto the helicopter. They were a silent procession. One of them carried his own severed arm, covered in small cuts. Ambrosia, silently sobbing and clutching her stump, noticed him. She broke from the procession and touched his shoulder as gently as she had before, then she raised her cupped palm toward his mouth. Her namesake bubbled up, forming an amber pool that trickled onto the ground.

"Drink, please."

"I don't think it'll help."

"It might."

Megaton obliged, pressing his mouth to her warm palm. It tasted like a welcome dawn, the morning sun flowing through his veins.

“Kill him.” She whispered.

“I will.” He said. “Sorry about the arm.”

“Just,” her breath faltered. “Just kill him.”

He wanted to say something else. Something like, ‘I’ll miss you’ or ‘thank you for your service’, but it felt like it would be weird, so he didn’t.

Megaton approached Hyperion, who was speaking to Downpour. He couldn’t see much of her face from under her hood, but her mascara had run from tears. She faced him with a smile that made her stronger than he’d ever be.

“You’re the ace in the hole, huh? Glad to have you.”

“I’m here to help. I’m sorry I couldn’t be faster. My power needs to charge.”

“I understand. My rain has him bogged down. Our cognitives say we have a few minutes until he gets here.”

“Tell everyone to evacuate. I’m not entirely sure how big the blast will be. I decided I would rather make sure he’s gone than be safe.”

“Megaton?” Hyperion said, the way his dad would say his name when he was doing something stupid.

“You’ve been an incredible captain, Hyperion, but you need to leave.”

“Are you sure?”

“Who else can stop him?”

Hyperion paused, then huffed, nodding to himself. “You’re braver than most.”

Megaton didn’t have the heart to sabotage the person Hyperion thought he was. He just nodded grimly, instead of saying how he felt like fainting, or crying, or running.

Downpour wiped her arm across her eyes. “Lady Justice will return in two minutes. I’ve been talking to her, she understands. She’ll try to restrain him, make sure you have a clear shot. Don’t worry about hurting her.”

“Understood.”

“And thank you. I know we’ve never met before, but, if it helps, I’ll never forget you.”

It surprised him that he’d managed to hold back tears this long, but that did it. It was a similar sentiment he’d shared with his father, when he’d been on his deathbed. The desire to memorialize.

This was it. It was really happening.

His Bead floated in front of him, putting him in the spotlight. How many were watching right now? Should he give a speech? Did it matter?

“My name is James Cutter. I... I don’t want to just be remembered as Megaton. I want *someone* to remember me as James.”

The Bead floated back and away. The Directors didn’t like it when they tried to remind people Extras were human.

“I’ll remember you, James.”

She hugged him. The gentle touch shattered the dam, and that lump in his throat went up and out through his eyes as he wept with her.

They hugged for seventeen seconds. Hyperion didn’t speak.

“We need to go, Downpour. Goodbye, Megaton. James.”

“Goodbye, Hyperion.”

James realized they would be the last people he’d ever talk to. He wished there was more to say, but he’d never been good with stuff like that.

As the helicopter left, he found himself restless. His power wanted out, more than it usually did, and that dull sadness hammering on him had begun to bubble and burn. He'd shove his hand down Father Leather's throat and set it off. He wanted to watch the fear in that crazy fuck's eyes when he realized there was no coming back.

Megaton shook his head. That must be the bloodlust aura.

As Downpour flew away, her rainstorm faded, and it meant Father Leather was moving faster now. Two, maybe three football fields away. The scariest speck of a person he'd ever seen. Sixteen seconds until Lady Justice would return.

He looked to the sky for her, because he really didn't want this *monster* to be the last person he saw. He wanted to be able to look into the eyes of another hero, and see the moment memorialized, because he felt like he should.

James held out his arm and focused his pointer finger carefully. Father Leather moved much faster than a normal person. The distance had closed to one football field. He could hear him now, shrieking bloodlust.

Fifty yards and Lady Justice came crashing down. She wrapped her arms around one of his tree-trunk arms and pinned him down.

"Do it!"

He looked for her eyes, but found only fabric. Her signature blindfold.

"Cover your ears!" He wished he'd chosen better last words.

"Just fucking do it!"

Father Leather twisted and turned, somehow back onto his feet. He severed his own arm, then sent both it and Lady Justice flying off into the distance with another swing of the cleaver.

James fired. The goldenrod orb of boundless energy flew for two seconds. He closed his eyes. At least it would be quick.

Light.

Noise.

Heat.

Nothing.

**Time since last explosion: 216:16:13:46**

James didn't think he would have another thought, so his next one was especially muddy. He was lacking an anchor, nothing but a vague sense of fear.

To say he was in a void felt wrong, since he would need to perceive in order to understand where he was. This was... nothing. An absence of absence.

Something pierced the veil, and his world turned from nothing into a dull gray, like he was at the bottom of a filthy pond.

*What is this?*

"Bringing him out now."

The words reverberated throughout his essence, like his mind refused to let go of the stimuli. Anything to avoid the true emptiness.

"Everyone be ready. Make it gentle."

"James, can you hear me?"

There wasn't a way to tell whose voice that was. There wasn't a way to reply. Whatever connection he had from ear to mind to mouth was severed. Thoughts went out and simply filled the gray around him. Trapped.

Was this it? Was this his forever?

“Heartbeat is spiking.”

“Is that a good thing or a bad thing?”

“Don’t know.”

Heartbeat. He was alive?

He tried to breathe. Here in this gray, he felt air with his lungs. It stung.

Pain clarified things, centered him in his body.

“Megaton, don’t panic. You’re safe.”

That time he knew the voice. Hyperion. Connections were beginning to form again as the gray grew lighter. Brighter. Blinding.

He opened his eyes.

A hospital room, but harsher. Concrete and plexiglass, with machines and Extras surrounding him. They looked scared.

“Hhhhhhhh.” He tried to speak, but his vocal chords weren’t used to it.

“Shh, it’s going to be okay.” Downpour was here, in costume, but her hood was down. Her hair was much longer now, in a loose braid.

“Hhhhow?”

Movement to his left. He shifted his head to see Ambrosia. Her costume was more regal now, an amber toga and a gold shawl that masked her missing arm.

“We’ve been working to restore you. You... there was barely anything left of you, and we wanted to make sure it was done right, and carefully. It’s been almost eight months.”

Two hundred and sixteen days, sixteen hours, thirteen minutes, forty six seconds, according to his power. Chills ran down his body, and James was unsure if it was nerves reconnecting or a physical reaction to the gravity of the situation.

So many questions, but his brain was still playing catch up and it was hard to nail down concrete thoughts.

“Did...I do it?”

People exchanged glances.

“You did. You blew up Father Leather and the entirety of Trinity Park.” Hyperion said.

He’d grown a beard, trimmed sharp to his jaw. It gave him a harder and more experienced edge.

“Are you feeling in control?” Lady Justice asked. Her voice was harsh, like she wanted to hear the right answer, and didn’t care much how he felt.

His first response was no. He was in a strange place in a strange bed in a strange body shaped like his but without the things that made his *his*. His wrist didn’t click when he rotated it, a dumb scooter injury from when he was six. His teeth were straight, but he’d had an overbite his whole life.

Then he focused on his power. The energy was almost overwhelming. All encompassing. Enough power to turn several hundred miles into dust, and all he’d need to do to release it was *think*.

His heart quickened. Why were there so many people here? He only knew a handful of them, and of those only a few were ones he was comfortable with. This was too much to put on one person’s shoulders, especially his. He’d never wanted power like this. It was too much. Take it back.

He had died. It had happened and he’d accepted it, and his death had done good. Now what?

Fresh skin grew slick with sweat.

“I can’t...”

“Can’t what?” Lady Justice asked.



“Why did you... bring me back?”

More glances, with the majority of eyes falling upon Hyperion. His face was stone as he spoke.

“You’re a hero. We don’t kill heroes.”

“My power saved you, but as little more than a pile of arteries. We didn’t find your body until several hours had passed.” Ambrosia elaborated. She paused, uneasy. “There were... conversations about mercy, but the cognitives we asked were adamant about that being a bad idea. We’re not sure, exactly, but we believe if you die, whatever is in you comes out. All of it.”

His anxiety seized the reins of his mind, taking his thoughts to the worst place. The longer he went without firing a blast, the bigger the blast. If it was already to the point they couldn’t risk killing him, what would happen if he dropped dead of a heart attack? Or got hit by a car? Or even worse, lived out a long life and died peacefully?

His death had done good, and now it was ruined. No matter what happened, it would always be bad. He couldn’t live forever and he was damned to cause so much pain. No matter his intentions, one day he’d become a villain. Not only a villain, but possibly the greatest villain.

Sweat pooled, and he tried to pull air into his lungs, but he just couldn’t. He tried short, choppy breaths, and it only made it worse.

“Fuck, he’s losing it.”

People sprung into action. Forcefields went up as Lady Justice approached, sealing herself within.

“Wait!” Downpour slipped through a still forming shield.

“Get out of here.”

“He’s having a panic attack. Give me a moment.” Downpour took his hand gently. “It’s okay, just breathe with me.”

People grouped and murmured amongst themselves as he focused on Downpour. When she breathed, he did, coaxing unfamiliar lungs to move. He felt like they had more room in them, since these weren't lungs that had lived in a house with parents who smoked.

Focus on small details. She held his hand, missing the graphite mark on the back where Bobby Milner had stabbed him with a pencil in the second grade. Her hand was warm and he focused on that, finding a rhythm in his breath.

The whole six minutes and eighteen seconds she held his hand, the other Extras conversed. It helped take his mind off the world-shattering power he was holding inside. Eventually, the forcefields went down, and Hyperion approached.

"If you want to. There is another option, instead of returning to your duties."

"Yes."

#### **Time since last explosion: 216:17:38:29**

The Cathedral lived up to its name. Gothic architecture that exuded power and ceilings that arched several stories above James as he was wheeled into the atrium.

It had all the trappings of a church with none of the iconography. For someone like James, who had spent his early life being dragged to Mass, it felt deeply unsettling. He wanted to be awed by the building, but where he looked for an altar, he found a guard post. Where clergy normally walked, instead men in heavy armor patrolled.

His procesion was let through, Downpour still holding his hand. Lady Justice floated ahead, while Ambrosia walked beside him and Hyperion pushed the gurney.

They passed into the nave, and enormous stained glass windows came into view. Again, they were wrong. Where most stained glass windows sat high, to let in the light, these were set

on the ground floor, where he would expect alcoves. They glimmered like light shone through them, but James knew they were deep within the center of the building.

The most unsettling part of them all was the contents. Instead of saints and angels, these portrayed Extras. He was wheeled past one depicting a man in an angelic pose, arms open and cape billowing behind him. He was surrounded by a polyhedral field that shimmered impossibly with rainbow light. While his posture seemed to be one of peace and mercy, his face twisted into a vicious smile.

Another, a man wrapped in twisted bone, surrounded by worshippers that raised their hands toward a crimson sky not due to faith, but because their arms and spines had been twisted and contorted, bursting through their bodies.

James shuddered as more wires connected and he remembered. Prism and Growthspurt, two members of the Four Horsemen. The worst of the worst. There were two more windows down the path, but he closed his eyes. He did *not* want to see those two portrayed. He focused on his breath and Downpour's hand, probably the last person he'd ever touch.

Eventually, the procession stopped.

"Hello, Megaton. I'm sorry we have to meet under these circumstances."

Megaton opened his eyes. Cathedral was in his costume, stained glass glittered on his chest and his pauldrons, and gold-hemmed priests robes draped to the floor. He had close cropped blonde hair and soft features.

Megaton mustered the strength to hold out his hand. Cathedral stepped forward to shake it.

"If you have any questions, now is the time."

"Will I be aware, in there?"

“No. For you, time will simply stop for as long as you remain inside the pocket reality. No thoughts. Nothing.”

His mind was eased. If this was to be his forever, he’d rather not have to contemplate it.

“Do... do I choose what the glass shows?”

Cathedral smiled. “No, unfortunately. It shows an idealized version of whatever is inside the pocket reality. Based on what I’ve heard about you, I’d imagine it would be positive.”

He grabbed Megaton’s arm to support him. “Do you need help walking?”

Megaton flexed his legs. They were new, but weren’t atrophied.

Silently, he sat, then stood. Not as shaky as he imagined he’d be. He thought he’d be scared, but instead he felt relief. Like he was finally going home.

Cathedral walked him to his alcove, and he turned, face falling when he saw what was across the hall.

The stained glass window showed a feral man with bulging muscles, wreathed in thorns. A massive, bloody cleaver bit into the ground as he roared, stained glass veins bulging on his face.

Megaton turned to Hyperion, whose face was stone.

“I thought... you said I killed him?”

“I wanted you to feel happy. I’m sorry. He reformed from his severed arm. Erasing his body like that meant there wasn’t a way for him to hurt himself, so we were able to restrain him long enough for Cathedral to use his power. No one else died.”

“But he’s alive.”

“...yes.”

“But what about when he gets out?”

“He won’t.” Cathedral said. Adamant.

“But what if he does?” Megaton’s voice cracked.

“You’ll be there.” Downpour said. “If he ever gets out, you will too. You’ll be there to stop him.”

Megaton took a breath, deeper than he’d taken before in this body. The air here was stale. If he could be a hero one more time. That... that would be good.

He turned to Cathedral.

“I won’t feel time pass?”

“It’ll be like blinking.”

“...Okay.”

Downpour stepped into his alcove and hugged him. She whispered in his ear, so no one else could hear.

“Thank you, James.”

It was the first time this body cried, but this time they weren’t tears of fear. He was grateful that someone had remembered his name.

Downpour stepped back and James nodded at Cathedral. The Extra held out a hand, and glass began to emerge from the sides of the alcove, each shard creeping closer toward its partners.

James watched the picture take shape, slowly sealing him into his private reality. It was him, a golden cape billowing from behind him, finger held to the sky. Above him, a sun bloomed, giving light to the City.

The glass finished forming, and James smiled.

Memorialized.