

Reason

By Matthew Miller

The sudden influx of new heroes in Paragon City had brought just as many problems with them as they had solutions to previous ones. It was the city's policy to provide free housing for any and all heroes who requested it, provided they were registered on the active duty list. But most of these heroes had certain unusual necessities, making it impossible to throw them into just any old rundown building. With little other choice, Paragon's officials began a massive effort to buy up any property they felt they could retrofit with the necessary tools required by the city's new, fledgling super-beings.

The latest building to be seized up was the old Mason Hotel on Fifth, now known as the Whitmoore Apartment Building. And while most of the staff had been given a suitable severance package, the oldest employee, Stanley Green, had lobbied to keep his position as the night doorman. Loved by the community, his wish was granted.

And so, it was like any other night when Sebastian Stevens arrived at the front door and was greeted by Mr. Green. Having just come off his nightly patrol, the would-be hero had dropped from a nearby seven story building and landed with a clumsily-executed tuck-and-roll maneuver, narrowly missing Mr. Green, who had to sidestep out of the way.

"Good evening, Mr. Stevens," Mr. Green said with a wry grin, reaching down to help the teen to his feet. "Still working on that landing, I see."

"Yeah, sorry about that, Stan" was all he could offer after having nearly bowled the wiry Mr. Green over. "And didn't I tell you to call me Bastian?"

"And I asked you to call me Mr. Green," he said with a laugh, slapping Sebastian on the back. "Looks like we're both going to have to live with disappointment!"

Sebastian could only smile and shake his head at the old man. But corny as he may have been, Bastian found his presence comforting. With his parents gone, it was nice to finally have a parental figure in his life. Mr. Green knew Sebastian was the youngest tenant in the building, and of his questionable background. It was only natural for the two-time grandfather to take the seventeen year old under his wing. And though the kid would never admit it, he was thankful for the attention.

"Is this really necessary tonight, Stan? I'm pretty tired," the teen remarked, reflexively patting himself down as if he were looking for something in the nonexistent pockets of the costume he wore. He was, of course, referring to the city's policy of checking all ID cards before allowing admittance to the building. But he already knew the answer, so there was no hesitation when he finally reached down inside his boot to pull out the dirtied card, handing it over to the man.

"What are you trying to do, put me out of a job? Besides, there are some pretty weird things out there these days. For all I know, someone could make themselves look like you and try to sneak on by." He gave the identification a quick once-over, noting the word 'Slipshod' in the area marked for the hero's name, before returning it to Sebastian. "Then again, I doubt they could mimic your award-winning personality." Mr. Green smiled.

“Har-dee-har-har.” In mock disgust, Bastian placed the card back in his boot as Mr. Green opened the door for him. Just as he was about to enter, he stopped and turned to look at the older gentleman. “Uh, speaking of, what could you do if a villain did try to sneak in?”

At that, the man pushed aside the front of his uniform to reveal a gun tucked away in a concealed holster, giving a little wink. The sight reminded Sebastian that Mr. Green once told him he'd been in the army.

“Remind me to tip you next time.” The two laughed before parting ways, with Mr. Green staying behind at his post, and Sebastian passing by the now-unused front desk and moving on to the row of elevators. After a quick ride to the ninth floor, the teen sluggishly moved towards his room, passing a young couple making out in the hallway as they struggled to gain entrance to the man's room.

“Lucky him,” he muttered to himself, fishing his keys out and fumbling to get into his room. He heard their door open, then promptly shut after they'd fallen inside. When he heard them giggling, he turned to look at the door, shocked to see a rubbery arm snaking out from beneath the crack under the door, hanging a ‘Do Not Disturb’ sign on the doorknob, then slowly drawing back in. “Lucky her,” he said with a chuckle, as he finally unlocked his apartment and went inside.

The lights were flipped on, revealing just how little he had in the way of possessions. The city didn't have the money to fully furnish every room to the owner's liking, since the hotel had taken all their furniture when they were bought out. At least utilities were free, so there was never worry about water or electricity. Then again, he couldn't keep track of all the times he'd blown a fuse in the building by using the microwave to heat up his leftover Happy Hero Meal from the local Up-N-Away Burger while the guy across the hall was recharging his power suit.

Sebastian felt like a nice, hot shower, but he figured Mariner Man had already used up all the building's hot water that evening. Instead, he headed over to his televisions, individually flipping each one on. Most of them had been collected from junkyards or clockwork dumping grounds, and fixed by a few local shop owners he'd helped out from time to time. All seven of them worked perfectly, ranging from a five inch black and white to a thirty inch color, all stacked upon one another in a shaky pyramid. But the duct tape held them together well enough, so Bastian never felt the need to go rescue someone who could build him an entertainment center.

With a labored sigh, the teen flopped down on the ragged couch he'd found on a street corner, slipping the goggles off and haphazardly tossing them towards an end table a few feet away. They landed beside a wooden picture frame, the contents of which consisted of a black-and-white photo of a young boy playing outside taken with a telephoto lens, and a smaller, bent and slightly-ripped picture of Sebastian's parents, pinched between the frame and the glass.

He allowed his eyes to get acclimated once more to the peripheral vision the goggles hindered, pinching the bridge of his nose to help the process along. Once they had adjusted, his gaze lingered momentarily on the pictures, before returning his attentions to the stack of televisions.

Each was turned to a separate station: two or three to news channels, another to a

late-night talk show, and then the occasional infomercial. His enhanced sense of surroundings brought on by his mutation afforded him the ability to keep track of all these at once, understanding each program without missing a word.

As the newscasters told of the day's events, he found it ironic how the things they were talking about -- the things he put a stop to on a nightly basis -- were actually subject matter he was barely old enough to go see at the local movie theater. Why would anyone his age put themselves through this? What possible reason could they have to kill themselves night after night for a world that never seemed to change?

Lulled to sleep by the redundancy of the infomercials and the lame opening monologues of late night television, Sebastian had nearly drifted off when something on one of the news channels jumped out at him amidst the other broadcasts:
...breaking news, as the Skulls celebrate the death of a high-ranking Hellion member by rioting on the streets of Paragon. The death toll increases as the city-wide gang war heats up. All heroes are urged...

There was no need to listen to the rest. In a few moments, he had roused himself from the couch and prepped to go out once more. Reaching for his goggles, Sebastian paused just long enough to smile at the photo he had paid someone to take of the playing child. Then, in a flash, he was perched on the window sill, watching as other heroes who had been called into action rushed to the scene of the riot.

Sebastian Stevens pulled the eyewear on, once again donning the guise of the daring Slipshod. Drawn to do good by his wish to become a better man; a man worthy of the love of his only surviving family member, Slipshod leapt from his position and joined his peers in the fight against injustice. They all had their reasons for the things they put themselves through -- some were just more apparent than others.