

Whitmoore Apartments Issue 2 Party on 9th

Sebastian Stevens couldn't sleep. Maybe it was the memory of his past that kept him up; the fear that he could fall asleep and wake up having missed an entire portion of his life. Perhaps it was the haunting faces of the victims of Paragon City that appeared on the nightly news, as if taunting the heroes that couldn't save them. Or maybe it was the blaring music coming from across the hall.

Yeah, that was probably it.

He'd actually put up with it the last couple of nights. After all, a seventeen year old who couldn't party seemed a little odd. But under these circumstances, anyone would eventually crack. And the funny thing was, the people in this building were other heroes! You'd think they'd have a little common courtesy for their own kind.

This was what Bastian continued to repeat in his head as he approached the offending apartment. Apartment 937. He wasn't the most forward person, and if he didn't practice what he was going to say, he just knew he'd end up stumbling over his words and come off looking like a schmuck.

A quick knock was given, but there was no answer. Thinking he hadn't been heard, Sebastian beat his fist against the sturdy slab of wood -- which turned out not to be as sturdy as he thought, when his enhanced muscle strength kicked in and left a large, cracked indentation in the surface.

Muttering a curse he'd learned from one of the local gangs, Sebastian fidgeted in place. In light of the recent turn of events, he decided it would be best to go hide in his room. But before he could get two steps from the scene of the crime, the door was already opening...

Julia lay in her bed, her music blaring, drowning out her own thoughts. It was what she wanted though; it was all she could do to stay sane some times. As the disturbing images of her thoughts began to leave her head, there was a light rap on the door. She sighed as she ignored it, only to have a sound of wood splintering echoing from her door at the obvious frustration of her visitor. Slightly annoyed, but still able to put on her bright spirits, she flung her slender legs off the bed and pulled the door open.

Looking to be in her mid 20's, she stood at about average height, her full red lips curled into a smile, her eyes an aqua blue as clear as a mountain river. She wore tight jean shorts on her slender hips, loosely fitting tube socks, and a sports bra that

held a modest bust. What was the most striking about her was her shoulder-length hair, a pearl white as pure as snow.

Shouting over the loud heavy metal that had just increased in volume when she opened the door, she greeted the youth in a bright tone, "Hi! Is there something I can help you with?"

Sebastian stopped dead in his tracks, having been caught before he could make his escape. Thinking quickly, he nervously raised the volume of his voice to stellar heights, trying to convey a sense of annoyance and anger. "Y, yeah! You better run!" he hollered, shaking his fist at the end of the hallway. Then, with all the acting chops of a daytime soap star, he feigned shock at the voice behind him. "Oh! I didn't see you there. I was just coming back from a, uh, concert... 'cause, you know, I love music! Yeah, can't... can't get enough of it... Anyways, saw some kid beating on your door!" he explained, complete with elaborate hand gestures. But when he noticed the large sliver of wood stuck in the palm of his hand, he quickly shoved them into his jean pockets. "And, I, uh... chased him away. Darn teenagers, huh?"

Julia caught a quick glance at the youth's newly bruised hand and giggled as he shoved them into his pockets. The boy didn't look more than 20, and yet exceptionally strong for his apparent age.

She grinned and indulged him, "Yeah... Teenagers. Real hell raisers they are," she said with a wink. "But I can understand. My music's a little loud." She went back inside, the door slowly swinging open as she left it ajar, and she lowered the volume to a more conservative level. Her tiny studio was rather neat with the belongings she lacked to clutter it. A closet, a futon, a TV and a small dresser with a laptop and her rather sizable stereo on top of it. As she turned back to him, she spied her utility belt on the floor, and quickly kicked it under the bed, hoping he didn't notice. Walking quickly back to the entrance. She gave him another smile, drawing his eyes to hers as she greeted him more properly. "I'm Julia Wright. Nice to meet you. Do you live in these apartments or do you just chase away unruly teenagers and do good deeds like everyone else?"

Bastian edged closer to the open doorway, peeking in on her. Unlike his place, there was actually a sense of interior design working in the room. He chalked it up to the feminine touchings of its owner. There was always some show on where a high-class woman was turning crap into gold. When she returned to the hallway, he moved back to give her some space. "Ah, you know how it is in this city. Everybody's gunning for the keys to the city," he replied, grinning, obviously thinking

he had successfully duped her with his hackneyed story. "Oh, sorry, forgot...the name's Sebastian Stevens. I live across the hall." He turned to regard his door, drawing her attention to it as well. "So, cool music you're listening to... Who is it?" he asked, wiping the bloodshot from his eyes in an attempt to hide his lack of sleep.

Her smile instantly sunk at the mention of her music. She didn't really care what it was, just so long as it was loud and obnoxious. She leaned against door, now fully ajar, and sighed, a somewhat blank stare on her face as she looked down at their feet. "I... I don't know what it is... I just turn it on... to distract myself... from things." She brushed a lock of snowy white hair from her face, and looked back up at him, trying to put her smile back on. "Well, Sebastian. Can I invite you in? Maybe for a cup of coffee? I'm kind of a night owl, so I tend to forget other people are trying to sleep at this hour."

Leaving the door and her invitation open, she walked over to the TV and switched it to the news, where yet another righteous hero stood triumphantly over a defeated villain. Smirking at the report, she strolled over to the tiny walk in kitchen and began pulling out her French press coffee maker, searching for anything else that might classify as breakfast.

Not far from where they were standing a door flew open, and from the doorway stepped a man wearing a pair of orange pajama pants, and a yellow sleeveless undershirt. He also was wearing an orange rebreather which glowed with yellow light from the vents. His hair was a mussy brownish-red, and his eyes glowed yellow. He turned to the pair standing in the hall, giving them a sharp glare. "The music isn't enough is it? You have to go and bust down doors and talk loudly? Some people have to have their sleep or it gets veeeery unpleasant," said the man. He then sneezed and a burst of yellow energy blew from his rebreather and busted a hole into the wall opposite his apartment. "Well, crap. That guy is gonna be pissed. You see what lack of sleep does?"

It was at this point the door to the room with the newly formed hole opened, revealing an eight-foot tall man in gold armor. "More annoyed than pissed, seeing as I'm trying to find a better place." He looked at the hole and sighed. "I'm not even going to try to get that fixed."

"Hey, dude, how do you sleep like that? Isn't the armor kinda uncomfortable?" he commented as he grabbed another rebreather and replaced the scorched one on his face.

The golden man held his arm up and willed the armor to melt back. "It's more of a second skin...and I sleep standing up."

"Well, anyway. Can you believe these guys? They make a ruckus and don't even listen when someone tries to complain. I tell ya what. I'll call the super in the morning and tell him that some stupid Hellions broke your wall. Sound good?"

As for the hole...yea, we'll blame the hellions." He looked toward the pair as they went into the woman's room.

Noticing the others coming out to complain, Bastian quickly accepted Julia's offer. Not so much for the company, but just to get away from perhaps being the next thing that ended up with an energy-blasted hole through it. "Hope that guy never gets a cold," he mumbled, shutting the door behind him.

"Coffee? Um..." Bastian had never had any before. "Sure, 'cause... coffee is good. Yum!" He smacked his forehead, embarrassed at his actions. But forcing himself not to dwell, he moved further inside, looking around for a place to sit... not really realizing he hadn't been invited to. But what were you going to do? He was just a kid.

Julia raised an eyebrow at his comment about "yummy" coffee. Pressing the grinds through the steaming water, she took the device and poured two cups. She gave him a smile as he looked about, looking for a place to rest his tush.

"I used to be up nights, but I ended up sleeping half the day and feeling like I'd missed something," he called into the kitchen. "Nice place you've got here! You must've lucked out, mine's a craphole."

He blinked. Did he really just say 'craphole'?

"I used to drink it to wake up in the evenings because there's no sun," Julia said. "Now I'm just kind of used to it. You can sit on the bed, if you like... I don't really have any chairs. Don't really have the need for them when that futon doubles as a couch."

Placing a couple slices of bread into the toaster, she came back into the main room, and offered him the mug of black murky liquid. Pushing slightly on the edge of the bed, the other side propped up to create a comfortable sitting bench. Reaching over to turn off the stereo and then taking a seat, she took a delicate sip of her coffee and watched the news. She continued to smirk and shake her head disappointingly as superheroes thwarted the petty crimes of the street punks, making their high and lofty accomplishments known to the starving media.

A girl gave him something to drink and invited him to sit on her bed. Sebastian was sure he'd seen this one the Turner Classic Movies channel. Say what you will about the government's standards of living for their heroes, at least they splurged for cable.

He took the mug, taking a seat on the converted futon at the opposite end, doing his best to imitate the men he'd seen on TV as he crossed his legs.

Julia turned her attention to the young man at the other end of the futon. "So, what makes you want to be a crime fighter, kid? I'm assuming this complex is still a housing development for 'superheroes', right?"

"Well, it's kind of personal. Not, like, 'Gasp, I must hide my secret!' personal. Just probably kind of boring," he shrugged, taking a sip, and almost sputtering at the taste. "Wooah, that's... good! Strong." A little cough, before he set the mug aside. "Guess I'm just trying to see if someone like me can make a difference," he answered, turning his attentions to the television. Pre-recorded footage of a hero hitting on the woman he'd just rescued from a burning building was being played during a montage of that month's greatest heroic deeds. "Definitely not to meet girls, at least. Some people..." He shook his head, before glancing over to Julia. "Then again, I guess I do get to meet *some* interesting people. So, what about you? It's not because of the glamorous lifestyle, is it?" he asked with a laugh, motioning at the 'splendor' of the room. "You'd think Paragon would try to put its protectors up someplace with a few more amenities."

Julia took another sip, and diverted her attention from the television for a moment. "I guess... mine is personal, too... Not supposed to talk about it really. I've always wanted to make Paragon a better place to live. Didn't really know what I was getting into before it was too late. But now it's all I know how to do, so there's no backing out. To stain thy hand with the blood of justice..." she trailed off, as if reciting something. Throwing her head back, she relaxed, looking up at the ceiling as if to find some meaning in it that would explain everything to her.

Haunt shuffled into the building, still sore from an earlier encounter with the Banished Pantheon that day. He'd been living in Paragon for a while, but hadn't learned about the heroes housing program until he'd registered after the Rikti War, and even then he thought that he didn't need one, focusing all of his efforts on rebuilding the city and catching the two hours of daily sleep he needed in whatever safe place he could find. For a while he'd been spending this time in Hide Park, but

after wasting half the day trying to locate his com that a band of Clockwork had stolen while he was asleep, he decided finding a somewhat more secure place was necessary.

He'd been assigned a room in the apartment building earlier that day, a small place with a mini-fridge, bed, stove, and television set, just as he'd requested. He was going through the building, barely aware of the crackle of cheap televisions and the hum of some of the technological heroes' chargers, but overriding them all was a loud racket coming from his hallway.

"No, Eidolon, we're not asking for someplace else. It was nice enough of them to provide the room, especially considering the fact that we have jobs," he mumbled to the shadowy face at his shoulder. True, he had requested a room before joining First Strike Security's operative program, but the point still stood.

He continued down the hall, noticing four people, two of whom entered the room the music was coming from as he approached. He recognized Riv, a fellow Operative, and turned to him after reaching the remaining two heroes.

"Hey, I didn't know you had an apartment here too," he said, still sounding somewhat out of it, apparently in need of some sleep, and not bothering to raise his voice above the music.

"Hey, Haunt. Yeah, I've got a place here. Don't use it much, though. I've been thinking of getting a place closer to the office actually. You here to get a bit of free room?"

Haunt turned to Geariven at his comment. If he drank, he probably looked as he was hung-over as he replied in the same mutter, a slight smirk on his face. Luckily the other tenant had turned their stereo down. "Yeah, Hide Park ain't cutting it anymore, I suppose," he said.

****WHAMMO****

The entire apartment building shuddered for a moment, and a hall on the first floor gained a brand-new impression almost, but not quite, in the shape of a person.

"Ow." She stated, pulling herself out of the wall, bits of mortar and shards of brick sifting down out of the hole. "That's a nice check there. Here, lemme cash it." With a grating sound, the dust, pieces of brick, and a few rocks nearby gravitated towards her hand, still encased in its heavy metallic glove, and formed what had to be the mother of all sledgehammers.

The Troll blinked up at the very large woman, abruptly realizing that there might have been a reason the leader had told him to follow her, not to try and beat

her up. Moments (and another resounding *WHAM*) later, he was driven up to his waist in the concrete by an overhead blow.

"That'll learn ya." The huge, yellow-skinned woman stated. Not that the troll could hear it, but....

As she dissipated the hammer back into more or less a cloud of dust, she mused that the Trolls were really learning to hate her. *I mean, really, following me all the way from Skyway City?* She'd have to watch out for tails next time around. *Extra ones, that is.* She noted, her rather reptilian appendage swaying slightly behind her as she strode to the steps of the apartment.

"Oyo, Mr. Green." She greeted the man, pulling out her registry card from one side of her black bustier to show to him.

"Evening, Destroya. Having a bit of trouble?" It hadn't taken the doorman long to get used to the large woman's direct manner. The black skull-mask had bothered him a little longer, but really, it seemed to fit her.

"Aaaah, nothin' th' cops can't handle as they come 'round when ya call." Mr. Green nodded, stepping out of the way of the yellow behemoth, as she ducked to fit in the door. As usual, her stiff, spiky blue hair brushed the doorframe, almost taking a splinter or two with it.

While tromping up the stairs, she noted that the Ninth floor music junkie had finally turned it down for once, and chuckled as she removed one of her heavy, mechanical-looking gauntlets. "I swear, 'sabout time. Can't never get any sleep 'round here withat goin' on." She paused at the Ninth floor for a moment, noticing the gathering. "Oy, what is this, a hall party er somethin'?"

"Nah, just a chance meeting at this ungodly hour. I'm Haunt, new tenant here, nice to meet you," he mumbled at the woman. He seemed to mutter something under his breath before looking back at the woman. "That's Eidolon," he added bluntly, pointing to the shadowy, serpentine face at his shoulder that seemed to be the focal point of the shadows swirling around him.

A low beeping sound came from her closed laptop and a red light blinked dimly. As if coming out of a trance, Julia snapped to complete awareness, leaping of the couch and over to the tiny portable computer. Lifting up the screen, she intently read for a moment, and then typed in what seemed to be a furious reply. Jumping back to the kitchen to turn off the coffee pot, she raced over to the now comfortable youth.

"I'm sorry Sebastian, but duty calls... You understand, right?" Quickly ushering him out the door and granting him a vibrant smile, "It was nice meeting someone in this complex. I don't get out much since I work at night. Hope to see you again."

"Not a problem! You should come over some time, I'll repay you for the..." And she slammed the door almost right in his face as he heard the toaster pop from the kitchen. "...coffee." Sebastian glanced over to the small group that had sprung up since his incident with the door, who were now all looking at him.

"I had coffee," he remarked with a sheepish grin,

Riv glanced at Eidolon, then turned his attention back to Haunt. "You look like you haven't slept in days. Get some rest Haunt. I'm going to do the same. After all, you never know when the boss'll need us for something." With that said, he headed back into his room to catch an hour or two of sleep.

"Yeah, I guess you've got a point," Haunt mumbled before shuffling back towards the second door in the hall, opening it with a creak and then quietly closing it.

Bastian rushed to get inside his own place before they remembered exactly who he was. Then again, once they did realize, they'd now also know where he lived, but he tried not to think about it, instead latching the door behind him and heading for the couch. The ratty furniture was a welcome sight as exhaustion crept in again, Sebastian falling face first into the patchwork cushions.

With a hefty sigh, he tilted his chin up, focusing on the black and white photo of his little brother, smiling and enjoying the day as he played ball with his adoptive father.

"Yeah, yeah," he grumbled. "Laugh all you want. Let's see how suave and sophisticated you are in ten years." Once again burying his face in the cushion, Sebastian fished around the edge of the couch, feeling for a half-empty water bottle he'd left there before trying to get some sleep.

And now that the music was gone, he could go back to doing just that. Finally feeling the familiar shape of the bottle, he casually lobbed it over his shoulder to hit the light switch. His accuracy was dead-on, leading one to believe he'd done something similar many nights in the past.

With the lights off, the teen finally allowed him to drift back to sleep. He just hoped nothing else would come up to interrupt his biological clock. He had a long day

tomorrow.

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