

The Honorable

Biosphere

Issue #1: Accidental Genesis

Part One

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The bus pulled over to the side of the road, parking at one of the many stops along the streets of Atlas Park. Busy traffic whizzed by without any notice of its parking. That was how Paragon City was. Business was almost everything about the city. Citizens regularly crowded the streets, mumbling to themselves or talking on the phone, carrying groceries, or just taking a walk. Much like New York, Paragon had a progressive attitude about it. The breakthroughs of Portal Corp in Peregrine are just one example of the achievements of the province in Rhode Island. The people carried on with their lives, building and inventing, and each morning when the sun rose on the shimmering hills, it was clear this place wasn't like any other.

Unlike other cities, of course, Paragon has a large hero population. They even have a special department to deal with those affairs, and licenses to give out. You'd suspect that in a city full of heroes you'd have a lot less crime than it does. Yeah right. Not one hero can do so much work that all crime stops; there's too much of it. Numerous villain groups crowd the streets of Paragon with the civilians, and injustice occurs right in the faces of shop owners and pedestrians. That is, until some hot shot hero comes by and whips up a fire ball.

Against the dynamic background of the city, however, a man finds his bearings. The bus doors opened and expanded out, inviting him to walk outside. He held on to the rail and stepped down, finally making his way off the vehicle and onto the sidewalk. In his hand he carried a black suitcase. Thin, round glasses perched on his face, holding tight to his nose and ears. A blue long sleeve shirt draped over his average frame, a perfect fit for him. Soon the bus closed its doors and sped away, and the man turned to look behind himself, watching as the wheels turned on the pavement, rolling up to a stop light. Sighing a bit, he readjusted his glasses, even though they were perfectly fine. He held up his free hand, examining the watch wrapped around his wrist. Nine o'clock A.M.

Taking in the sights for a moment, he began a long stroll up to the City Hall building. As he walked he stared up at the Atlas Statue. Heroes every day passed by this monument, and yet it seems like its significance is forgotten. At least, that's how it seemed to Aaron. Shrugging it off, he lightly stepped up the staircase, reaching for the door handle and making his way inside. It was slightly crowded, but then again this was Paragon City. The superhero registration line was always in supply and the super group line even more so. He was supposed to meet a man by the name of Dr. Montgomery, one of the supporters of the project he had just been elected for, Project Sphere.

Of course its creation was influenced by the Rikti. Within fifteen minutes of invasion they had Earth's power grids and systems down, and the people of

Earth have only themselves to blame. Becoming too dependent on electricity was inevitably going to come back to bite, only the Rikti made it feel ten times worse. So bad was their stain on the problem that the community of scientific minds got together to make Project Sphere. Meant to mimic the energies used by Rikti, the overall plan was to have Earth rely on a renewable and reusable energy source. There's a strange fact about disasters or tragedies that comes up out of the rubble of any failure. You can always make something good out of it. Two problems were how they would accomplish it, and who would do it. Not many had an understanding in the fields required for making such an energy source, and those who did were few and far between.

Eventually they found their mind, Professor Nellis, a bio-chemistry teacher from New York. He had influenced community organizations in the state and made sure that his classes demonstrated the fun side of science, while still being informational. Needless to say, his students loved his teaching. When asked about it, he felt a moral obligation to take part. This was a chance to make something to benefit mankind for the long run and he wasn't going to pass it up. Out of the crowd, a round man in a black suit waved his hand up in the air. He had a look of frustration as he pushed through some people still holding his hand up in the air. Aaron walked forward on the marble floor of the building, meeting with the doctor close to the center.

“Good! You are here.”

The old doctor held out his pudgy hand to him, expecting a hand shake that was quickly given. His hair was barely covering his head, a signature comb-over dressing his shiny head. Aaron took his hand away, standing in front of him fiddling his fingers on the handle of the suitcase.

“Yes, Dr. Montgomery?” Aaron looked at him, a bit unsure. The old scientific mind seemed nice enough, but something within him wanted to ask if his identity was true.

“Yep! You're lookin' at him.” Montgomery placed his thumbs behind the collar of his suit, curling his hand on the side of it as if holding trousers. His southern accent swam around his words. He reached his right hand up, placing it on Aaron's shoulder, staring at his face with a welcoming smile and a shine in his eyes.

“Welcome to Paragon.”

“Thank you. Atlas looks wonderful.” Aaron observed the statues inside the city hall building only to find they were the same ones on the outside. He noticed the appreciation the city has for its heroes. “Hm...where, specifically, is the project taking place, Doctor?”

Montgomery replied immediately with a reassuring wave of his free hand, “Sai Labs is up in the Argosy Industrial area. Got tha’ lab all set up an’ ready to go for you!” He took this opportunity to pat both of Aaron’s shoulders; clearly he was impressed and confident about this man. He extended an open palm in the direction of the door, “There’s a car waitin’ for us.”

Caught off-guard, Aaron’s eyes widened a bit. “There is?” He didn’t expect free transportation, or even the appreciation of Dr. Montgomery. Always a humble man, he never asked for much of anything, and this catering was unusual, at least for him. The two of them walked side by side as Aaron cranked the door handle and exited the building. As they walked down the steps, a sense of reality sparked across Aaron’s mind. He had just signed on for a project bent on creating a new energy source and a lot of people were counting on him. The bonfires on the pillars outside the building blazed, as did his thoughts.

They approached a small four door black vehicle in the parking lot behind city hall. Its windows were tinted and it had an official logo on the side of the door, but Aaron could not make out the name. Montgomery was ahead and turned open one of the doors to the backseat, as if a chauffeur. Without saying much Aaron entered and sat in the backseat. Its leather interior was clean and shined. The front seat and back were separated by a small wall, a window mounted on the top of it so that he could see through to the driver. Whoever was supporting the project obviously had quite a bit of money. The driver wore clean white gloves and an expensive looking suit, and talked to Montgomery through the driver seat window before Montgomery himself got in the backseat of the car.

It’s always nice to look outside the window on a drive. Even more so on a flight. Aaron found that it allowed his mind time to process and think easier. The movement of the car making the objects outside whiz past at a steady speed was entertaining to him. He always found that on any trip there’s something about an area he had never noticed before, but saw on the drive. The idea is simply that he is watching the world, spying on the objects inside it and seeing what they are. That’s what he liked. Earth was important to him. He knows more about it than most people do. Not to say he’s a radical, Aaron just enjoys the home he was born on, and he wouldn’t pass up a chance to help it.

Scratching his beard slightly he thought about this as the car pulled into a parking lot by a metallic industrial building. As the vehicle stopped, Montgomery tapped Aaron’s shoulder, alerting him to get out of the car. Both men exited and noticed a man in a white lab coat by the door of the complex. Blonde haired, a goatee was the signature feature about his face. He didn’t look at all menacing, but an arrogant nature seemed to steam off of him. Montgomery introduced the two, and Aaron learned his name.

The man was Dr. Edward Alfonse, a rising star in the field of chemistry and a natural at creating chemical compounds. His skill in the subject seemed supernatural. Long beforehand, it was determined that the energy source would be composed of three chemical compounds, each working together to generate the power needed. Dr. Alfonse and Aaron would be working together quite a bit in the next few months, and as all three men stepped into the building, Aaron sensed the approaching hours would need to be spent on the project.

Edward led Aaron down the long halls, as he spouted little bits of information about each office and lab as they passed them. The windows allowed them both to see inside each room, fluorescent lights bright on the ceiling illuminating the complex. Finally they came to a large room filled with lab equipment, cabinets and three large canisters lining the wall. Aaron remained at the entrance, while Edward walked inside, locking his hands behind his back and turning on his heel towards Aaron.

“Here’s our home.” Edward was obviously joking, but Aaron was serious for the moment. There was truth in what Dr. Alfonse had said, and it was not joke to Aaron. He intended on working hard to finish their goal as fast as possible. Aaron looked at the calendar inside his new lab, reading the month as April. He rolled up the sleeves of his shirt, staring at Edward for a silent moment before saying, “Great, now where’s my coat?” Chuckling, Aaron walked over to the clothes rack and pulled off a lab coat made just for him, his name inscribed by the pocket on the chest. He looked down to read, “*Dr. Aaron Nellis.*”

Stepping away for a moment to put on the labcoat, Aaron turned back around to see a young woman in her teens, wearing a velvet sweater. Her hair was short and neat, a shade of black that almost appeared blue. Her eyes sparkled with the enthusiasm of a young woman, but her eyebrows remained curved above them, no matter how excited she seemed of her surroundings. Dr. Alfonse approached Aaron and directed him over to her, and she stared at both men as Edward explained.

“This is Allison Takahashi. She’s one of the students of Paragon University.” Edward nodded in her direction, “She’ll be taking part in an internship here while we’re working on the project.”

Aaron acknowledged this information, turning his gaze from Dr. Alfonse to Allison. She seemed eager to talk to him, clenching both hands down in front of her. Lips pursed out as if she was to blurt out words as soon as he introduced himself. A silent lifting of his hand out to her triggered a response, and she gripped at it in a firm shake.

He smiled. “Nice to meet you Allison. I’m Dr. Nellis.” Examining his face, she smiled at his name, seeming to not want to let go of his hand, “Thanks! I’m

glad to meet you too!” Still plastered on her lips was a curved expression of joy. The shake soon stopped and Aaron turned his attention to Edward. The project could now be started thanks to his arrival, and the sooner they finished it, the better off the world would be. At least, that was the hope.

For the next three months the team worked, hard-pressed on synthesizing the components of the energy source so desired by humanity. Each day dragged on, as the scientists toiled with the structure of elements for countless hours. Unfortunately, most of what they created kept faltering as soon as they had generated it. Their determination, however, resulted in the final success of the compounds. They each were stored in the three separate canisters located in the lab Aaron and Edward had both treaded in for months. It was now July, and with the completion of the three substances, soon the new energy source would be available.

There was a single concept developed for this specific project. It was deemed, “Zero Hour.” Zero Hour was said to be the exact time in which all three of the compounds would be able to react together chemically with no dangerous after effects. That is, no combustion, no energy released, nothing. In that moment, they would be able to be combined, and synthesized into the new energy source. A single strand of time in the cosmos came down to that moment for Nellis and his team, the weight of his career hanging on that thread. Often was he reminded of this by Montgomery, on the rare instances when he saw him.

Now, only an hour before the presentation, Montgomery approached him. “Boy, now, you listen here.” Though they were almost the same height, the stout bald man tilted Aaron down and spoke in a whisper to him. “All these people here are waitin’ for that energy, an’ we’re gonna give it to ‘em.” He patted Aaron’s shoulder with reassurance. “Right?”

They stood there in the hallway near the lab in which Nellis, along with others, made the chemicals. A sense overcame him. There was a feeling in the air of anticipation and excitement. Aaron stared at the bald man’s brown eyes thoughtfully before answering, “Absolutely.” Nodding with a smile.

Without many other words to say, Montgomery showed himself out, and informed Aaron that he was going to check on the auditorium for their presentation. He also noted that soon Aaron would meet the benefactor of the whole project, something Aaron found of particular interest. The government, private investors, big time newspapers, and many others would be attending the showing called “Zero Hour,” with the highlight of seeing firsthand the energy source that would pave the way into all future business. It was only ten minutes away now. Aaron stood there in the hallway fixing his lab coat and straightening his tie. He had to look perfect for the presentation. Everything had to be exact.

Light found its way into the windows of the building, and shined off his glasses as he stood. He thought it right to check on the substances and made his way to the lab, until Allison unexpectedly approached him. She spoke behind his back, nervous, but remained composed.

“Professor!” She stopped herself some feet from him, breathing heavily. Seeming to have run out of nowhere, Aaron turned his neck slightly, the head following. Looking back at her he didn’t know what to expect. A slight amount of anger rose in him, for she could potentially damage the whole project by interrupting, but he quelled it. Turning to face her, he clasped his hands together.

“Allison, I'm just on my way to my lab.” He thought about the hour and questioned her, “Shouldn't you be in class right now? You need to keep those grades up if you want to keep your internship.”

She shook her head, not in defiance but in understanding, “I know Professor, I was on my way now, but I was having trouble with this chapter and was hoping you could go over it with me?” Finally the movement of her head stopped, and she looked up at him with her piercing blue eyes.

Just watching them destroyed his anger toward her. It was like watching an endless cascade of water, and he could not reject her request. “Hmm, of course. Tell you what, we can go over it after the presentation today. I'll help you then.” Again a smile plastered itself on his face. His cheeks rose, carrying his beard upwards.

She beamed, “Thank you, Professor!” He quickly returned to her, as if impatient, “No problem, Allison. I need to check on everything now. As you know it’s very time sensitive.” He added in a note for her to make it to class on time, and she answered, “I’ll just make it in time if I run. Thanks again, Professor!” before quickly running off again.

Aaron was in front of the door to the lab as he watched Allison run away. “Anytime,” was all he could say as she made her way to class. A familiar whisk of the automatic door opening signaled his entrance into the lab. It closed behind him with that same sound, and he stared at all the equipment. On the wall were the canisters of the three chemical compounds and the terminal that monitored their stats. Something unnerved him. As Nellis entered the lab he noticed that they were bubbling. Puzzled by this new development, he did as he had set out to, and walked over to the terminal. Uploading the status of the compounds, he found that somehow, something was agitating their make-up. Naturally they were unstable, but the team had worked hard to make sure they remained in phase for Zero Hour. A nervous sweat ran down his right temple. He didn’t like this. Muttering under his breath, he refused to believe what was happening.

“This isn’t right. This can’t be true.” For the few moments he had, he tapped on the controls of the terminal, fighting against the rising explosive nature of the compounds. Then, for one brief moment he felt a shift in the air.

Whenever a person has a near-death experience, they usually report that they had seen their whole life flash before their eyes, right before the moment happened. Aaron had always heard of this but never truly believed it. Yet—BAM! Suddenly the canisters exploded with the compounds, and all three caused a violent rupture that broke the walls of the lab. In that moment, Aaron knew what it was those people talked about. Time slowed down in front of him. It was as if he was stuck in the moment, staring at himself watching the canisters explode. He could see all his previous accomplishments and how they had lead him to this point. What kind of hopes and dreams he had held for this project, and what the explosion of the chemicals meant to his career. Helpless, he was at the mercy of the present, thrown up against the wall by the force of the explosion. Later he would be found under the rubble of his former lab, a confused and burned man.

He awoke in a hospital bed, not particularly comfortable, but a nice change from being crushed under pieces of debris. He noticed he wasn’t wearing glasses anymore, and at first squinted to try and see. The only figure he could make out was that of a man in a black suit above him. Arching his body up a bit, he soon realized it was Montgomery. Relieved, he reached up to find some comfort from him, “Montgomery!” Still confused, he asked him, “What happened? Last I remember I—”

Not allowing him to finish, Montgomery pushed Aaron’s hand away from his shoulder. “I say, you really did a number on your reputation, boy.” Pointing an accusing finger in Aaron’s face, he said with a spiteful tone, “If you hadn’t been messin’ with them chemicals then we’d have our energy source!” His face turned red with anger, “Now we’ll never have it!” Unable to hold control of himself, Montgomery turned away from Aaron and gripped the bridge of his nose.

Aaron didn’t know what to say, but he was absolutely certain that this was not his fault, “Montgomery, I had nothing to do with the chemical instability.”

Turning to face him again, Montgomery displayed rage, “Nellis, this is all your fault! Go an’ look at that girl there, and tell me that again!” He threw one finger down the hall of Aaron’s wing to an open room. The sound of ventilators inside of it rang in the air. Aaron got up out of his bed with some pain, but he was able to walk. With Montgomery he walked into the room. To his surprise he found Allison tucked in the bed, with machines hooked up to her. He squinted more to see that she appeared sleeping. Pleasantly dreaming as she laid there.

“She’s in a coma.” Montgomery didn’t need to say more. Aaron felt sorrow deep in his being. It was as if he was in a nightmare. His once in a lifetime project,

prepared and ready to shock the world, and instead, it failed, and it ended up hurting Allison. He blamed himself. Guilt poured into his mind that could not be extinguished.

He kept remembering her eyes, the deep blue color that swirled inside of them. Now, they were locked closed. By the side of her bed he rested on one knee. One arm remained on the top of her sheets, and he rested his head down on top of it. Unable to stand the pain, he remained there, contemplating his future, and what hope he would ever have of success. Meanwhile Montgomery exited the room, having an agenda of his own. He left the hospital and made his way to Steel Canyon. Through the bustling crowds of people and commuting streets he came to the ground level of a large tower. It rose high in the sky with a defiance of power, and individuality. Riding the elevator to the top level, the gold doors slid open, and he stepped out on violet carpeting. A man at a long desk sat in a leather chair, staring out a large window. His hands were locked, one leg perched on top of the other. His foot tapped itself in the air, an identification of thought. The chair had its back turned to Montgomery as he spoke, "Sir...?" He was nervous, clearly, but still he managed to squeeze out the words, "Project Sphere, Sir. It's...failed."

The foot tapping stopped, and slowly the chair spun itself around, the man now in front view of Montgomery. His eyebrows were twitching in a curious fashion while his eyes burned a fire of disappointment.

"Montgomery," said the man in the chair, "you do realize how much spending I put into this, correct?" He pulled himself closer into his desk, resting both feet on the ground. "How much money it took to assemble those materials?" A hypnotic but threatening stare made its way into Montgomery's eyes. "There is no second try, the same amount of chemicals doesn't exist on Earth anymore."

He was intimidated and scared, but he didn't want to show it. Montgomery fought back against the deathly gaze, "But, Mr. Cyril..." His hands shook as he held them close by his chest. Mr. Cyril waved a dismissive hand, not wanting to hear anymore, "Do not bother me with excuses." Soon Mr. Cyril had Montgomery leave his office in disgrace. Spinning back around to look out his window, Mr. Cyril clenched his right hand in a fist. His money was wasted on what was going to be thought of as the most ground-breaking achievement of the 21st century. Yet even he did not remember the noble truth that remained in the shadows of all the torment and anger.

Out of any failure, something good sprouts.

To be continued.