

An Astonishing Meeting

Townburg was bustling as usual; shining, clean and crime-free. Captain Striker was seated at the usual window of his usual coffee shop, as usual. He peered out the window at his handiwork and sipped his coffee. The economy was up, people's cholesterol was way down. Clean streets, clean air, and beautiful people as far as the eye could see. He took another sip. It tasted a little bitter so he emptied a second french vanilla creamer into it and stirred. *Yessiree*, he thought. *What a perfect day. How incredibly boring.*

He sighed and took another sip. It needed more sugar. As he opened another pack of all-natural sugarcane sugar he thought of the city from a decades back. Newspaper tumbleweeds littered the almost desolate streets. Now that everybody has switched to iPads or Kindles or whatnots, there weren't anymore newspapers. Now that all the petty criminals were gone people could afford expensive electronic gizmos.

Striker looked across the street at a Verizon store. It had been a small credit union two decades ago. It was that very credit union that he'd caught The Cash Burglar mid robbery. *The Cash Burglar. What a stupid name.* The thought made him chuckle.

Now that he thought about it, that bank was only a block or two from where he defeated Viper Moon, fifteen years ago. Ol' Vipe had swiped his utility belt so he'd been forced to administer a beat down with his kevlar-enhanced gauntlets. That was one of the last times he'd resorted to fisticuffs. Actually, come to think of it, a couple years later he had beaten down the entire Sundance Brother family in front of a cheering crowd.

Those villains were small time, all sent away to Townburg Penitentiary. The really good ones, like Colonel Boom-Boom, The Argonaut, and Red X-ray required a more nuanced approach. And Major Terror. *Dang*, he thought. *How could I forget Major Terror?* MT, or Jerry, as Striker like to annoy him with, was by far his greatest nemesis. The two of them sparred for decades, almost as long as Striker had first donned his vinyl mask. Their rivalry was legendary, and the single greatest source of merchandising he'd ever had. Captain Striker's leaned back and closed his eyes, thinking about the last time he had fought MT.

"Excuse me," a women said as she tapped his shoulder. He opened his eyes and turned around too see an aging women looking back at him. A small boy, maybe twelve, was standing next to he, holding her hand.

"You are Captain Striker, aren't you?" She asked.

"I am indeed," he replied, deepening his voice and speaking from low in the diaphragm to approximate his old heroic inflection. A look of nostalgic glee spread over the woman's face. The boy seemed unimpressed.

"Look Peter, it's Captain Striker," she said to the boy. "From that video game you like." Peter looked confused.

"But he's old," he said.

"Don't be rude," she said, shaking his arm.

"Please ma'am, it's no trouble," he said to her. He looked down at the boy. "So you like my game do you? What's your favorite character?"

"I only play as Major Terror."

“His daddy plays as you,” the woman said almost apologetically.

“I’m glad you like it. Would you like a button?” Striker asked.

“...Sure,” the kid said.

Striker reached into his back pocket and pulled out a small pin of his mask with STRIKER written across the bottom. Earlier in the day he’d found it in his car and pocketed it.

The boy took the pin and looked at it. Striker could tell the boy didn’t really care.

“What do you say, Peter?” She said to him.

“Thank you,” he said.

“Thank you so much for everything you did,” she said to Striker.

“Don’t mention ma’am. We all did our part, just like young Peter here will do, right Pete?”

“Kay.”

Peter’s mom shuffled the two of them away. At the door she looked back and waved. Striker waved back then returned his attention to the window. Striker’s grandson showed him the *Captain Striker Strikes Back* video game a few years ago. The royalty checks from that game alone paid for the kid’s boarding school. He remembered Major Terror again.

It was on the roof of the Daily Chronicle headquarters. The building was rigged to blow and the entire staff was bound and gagged. Everything worked out in the end but that was last time the two of them met. Striker’s heroics left MT in the hospital with a broken back but three days later he vanished. That was almost twenty years ago. Terror’s absence left a villain vacuum that filled with small-timers like Viper Moon and The Sundance Family. Small-timers that were barely above common criminals. None of them had Terror’s ambition. Striker closed his eyes and remembered Major Terror’s deep, insidious voice; a voice he’d recognize anywhere.

“I’ll have a grande espresso please.”

Striker snapped to attention. There was no mistaking it, that was Major Terror’s voice. Aged and gravelly, but unmistakable. He turned around to see the hulking man standing at the counter.

“That’ll be 7.49 please,” the teenaged barista said.

Major Terror handed her a ten and told her to keep the change. Striker watched the man pick up his drink and sit a few tables from him, also seated out the window. For a few minutes Striker contemplated walking away but curiosity got the better of him. He picked up his drink and walked over.

“Hello Jerry.”

Major Terror didn’t look up. “Captain Striker.”

He turned and the two men sized each other up. Captain Striker was by no means a small man but his age had caught up to him. Bright white hair, and wrinkled skin were his two defining features. Major Terror, on the other hand, was a colossus. He was getting on in his years too but he was still bulked up.

“Well, sit down if you’re going to sit.”

Striker sat across from him. “How long’s it been Jerry?”

“A long-ass time, Matt. I assume you’ve given up the hero business?”

“The city doesn’t need me anymore. What about you? What were up to all these years?”

“A little of this, a little of that. My father got sick so I took over his construction company over in Cityville a few years after leaving.”

“I never would have imagined. Did you ever work construction in your suit?”

Both men laughed.

“That I would’ve motivated the employees for sure, but I was trying to stay on the down-low.”

Striker chuckled and took another sip of his coffee.

“You know, the whole time I thought you were just insane.”

“Naw, just a joker. I was just going through a rebellious phase. Mine was just a little more...proactive than most.”

“I missed having you around all these years. Once you vanished the hero game hardly seemed worth playing anymore.”

“Yeah well, what good is a hero without a decent villain?”

“Did you here what happened to The Dynamo?”

“I’m in town for his funeral.”

“I thought about it but can’t go for PR reasons. Did you know him?”

“We teamed up on the Townburg Capital Bank heist, remember?”

“Oh that’s right. Geez, it’s been what, thirty-five years since then? That was a properly planned job. You almost slipped away that time.”

“I never forgot to disable the front-door alarms after that.”

Striker smiled as he drained the last of his drink. That was the thing he always admired about MT. He had brains and brawn. He was a stupendous challenge. Most of the other villains were thrill-seeking daredevils.

Terror had finished his espresso too and rose.

“I’d better be off then,” he said.

“I suppose I should too.”

Strike rose to meet him and walked out after Terror after disposing of their cups. Once outside he was surprised to notice he’d extended his hand. Major Terror looked at, puzzled, but then met Striker’s handshake.

“Nice to see you again Major Terror.”

“Likewise Captain Striker.”

“You know, we should have teamed up. We would have made a stupendous team,” Striker said.

“I’m sure we’ve have been marvelous. I suppose we’re too old for that nonsense anymore.”

“I think you’re right.”

“Farewell.”

“Cheers.”

Striker turned the opposite direction and walked a step or. He was clenching at where his utility belt used to be. Specifically where the Strike-a-rangs used to be. His heart rate was elevated, he could feel it.

Something felt oddly familiar. His old reflex kicked in and he spun around, while straining to the left. A shot from Major Terror’s portable heat ray whizzed by where he’d been

standing only a few seconds ago. He bolted forward with his right fist raised. Major Terror dropped his heat ray and turned to run but Striker was already on him. He felt a twinge of pain in his shoulder when his fist met Terror's jaw.

* * *

Striker sat at his usual window with his coffee and a copy of The Daily Chronicle. He opened it to the current events section on page seven and read the top headline.

CAPTAIN STRIKER STRIKES AGAIN

(Townburg) - A chance meeting at a local coffee roaster led to the arrest of Major Terror by retired superhero Captain Striker. Striker was a frequent patron of the cafe. He told the Chronicle reporters that Major Terror was in town for the funeral of The Dynamo, another regular villain of Captain Striker, and the two met by pure coincidence. The two exchanged small talk and the exchange seemed to be cordial. But then Terror unexpectedly pulled a heat ray weapon. Striker dodged the shot and subdued Major Terror. Mary Jane Stacy, a local mother, caught the exchange on video from across the street. When asked for a comment Captain Striker joked "Don't let anybody say I don't have it anymore. And let this be a lesson for any would-be criminals that the people of our fair city have still not given up." Major Terror refused to comment.

He folded the paper and set it on the counter. Outside the window he saw a small team of construction workers installing some sort of cable on the side of the credit union. He took sip of his coffee. It tasted amazing.