

CHAPTER ONE

WITH A GASP OF pain, I fell from the sky and crashed into the street hard enough to leave a small crater where I landed. Clutching my chest, my head spun, making it almost impossible for me to think clearly long enough to get up. I had never been hit that hard before and for a moment I wasn't sure if I would ever see well again. It didn't help that there was a loud buzzing sound in my ears that made it hard to hear anything.

Nonetheless, I shook my head and looked up into the sky at the guy who had just sucker-punched me. He was one of the strangest enemies I'd faced yet, a fully-grown adult man wearing green spandex, floating above me on long, eagle-like wings which extended from his back like my cape. He grinned down at me, revealing row after row of sharp, jagged teeth that made him look like an alligator about to chomp down on its prey.

"Is this the best that the legendary Trickshot's got?" said the man in a loud, boisterous voice. He chuckled. "You certainly don't live up to all of the stories I've heard about you. Then again, you seem to be little more than a brat playing pretend, so maybe I shouldn't be surprised at your weakness."

I gritted my teeth. "Sorry I'm not very entertaining, but I don't give refunds."

The man chuckled. "Refunds? Why, I, the great Aeolus, do not *need* refunds. I shall finish you off and dominate this city, as I have done to countless other supers over the years. You may think yourself a superhero of great importance, but in truth, you are just a kid who is in way over his head."

Rising to my feet slowly, I said, "It's hilarious to hear 'the great Aeolus' lecture *me* about thinking I'm someone of great importance. Self-awareness clearly isn't one of your superpowers."

Aeolus' eyes narrowed when I said that. "And I tire of your childish banter, boy. Time to teach you a lesson you'll never forget."

Aeolus snapped his fingers and pointed a finger at me. A blast of wind came blasting from his fingertip, but I launched into the air at the last second, avoiding the wind blast that struck the crater I had been lying in. I arced in the air toward Aeolus, pulling back my fist to smash him in the face, but with a flap of his wings Aeolus shot away to the left, avoiding my fist and forcing me to stop in midair to look for him.

Aeolus landed on top of a nearby building and turned to face me with a mocking wave of his hand. "You'll have to be a bit faster than that to hit me, Trickshot! I, the great Aeolus, move as fast as the wind and hit as hard as the tornado!"

My hands balled into fists. Aeolus was a braggart, but he was the worst kind of braggart: The kind that could actually back up his bragging. I'd been fighting him for the last ten minutes or so, ever since I came here to take him down, but Aeolus had thus far managed to avoid most of my blows. It was because he was ridiculously fast, able to use those great big wings of his to fly in nearly any direction like he weighed nothing. But he was no feather. He also had super strength, which he had displayed by punching me in the chest not too long ago. He wasn't as strong as me, from what I could tell, but he was definitely not the kind of bad guy you wanted to let your guard down around.

I wasn't sure where Aeolus came from. He just appeared in southern Rumsfeld less than an hour ago, where he proclaimed that he was going to make Rumsfeld part of his 'dominion' and that he would kill anyone who got in his way. From what I'd been able to gather from his ramblings, Aeolus was a former superhero from California who had gone rogue and now thought of himself as some kind of god king who was destined to rule America. He had bird-like wings, control over the wind,

and super strength, which made him a 'Triplet,' that is, a superhero who got three powers from Superpower rather than one like most.

Normally, I would have been glad to let Bug Bite deal with him, but Bug Bite was still recovering in his home from being shot last month, so I'd had to pick up his slack when it came to dealing with supervillains and criminals that the police couldn't handle. It seemed like Bug Bite's absence had turned Rumsfeld into supervillain central, because Aeolus was the third villain in as many weeks to pop up out of nowhere with delusions of grandeur. It also seemed like a lot of these guys wanted to fight me, like it was some kind of badge of honor, but in any case, I was more than happy to fight them if it meant they would leave innocent civilians alone.

But it was annoying, as I found out during my fight with Aeolus. Aeolus might have been a blowhard, but there was a reason he wasn't rotting in jail somewhere yet and it was because, despite his bragging, he had some skill and ability.

Therefore, I couldn't let myself get complacent while fighting him. And I needed to end this fight quickly, partly because I wanted to have limited property damage, but also because I had a date and it was one I couldn't be late for. The longer this fight went on, the more likely it became that my date—a girl named Debra Ackerman, from my school—would decide that I had blown her off and go home. It would be just my luck if I didn't get to go on my date because I got distracted fighting some supervillain freak who thought he was the king of air or whatever.

"You talk about being a tornado, but frankly I think you're just a lot of hot air," I said. "Maybe you should call yourself Hot Air Balloon instead of Aeolus. Would be more appropriate, in my opinion."

Aeolus' eyes narrowed again. "You dare mock my greatness? But perhaps I should not be surprised. The weak often do not understand the power of their superiors until they are crushed underneath it."

Aeolus waved his hands and a powerful gust of wind slammed into me, sending me tumbling through the air backwards. I tried to fight against the wind, but it was so strong that I couldn't make any headway. A particular strong gust of wind sent me flying backwards until I crashed into and through the window of a nearby office building, smashing into a desk and sending papers and pens flying everywhere.

A shriek of terror caused me to look up and see a woman in a business suit staring down at me with a mixture of shock and horror. Somehow, I had avoided crashing into her when I was knocked through the window, though I had completely destroyed her desk.

"Sorry about your desk," I said as I jumped to my feet. I glanced around at the desk's remains around me. "I didn't mean to destroy it."

The woman just stared at me with her mouth hanging open, but then she shook her head, screamed, and ran out of the room shrieking about how a guy in blue and red spandex had just crashed into her office and destroyed her desk. It would have been kind of funny, but I had no time to think about it, so I just shot through the window again and flew toward Aeolus, who had not moved an inch from where he stood.

"Back again?" said Aeolus. "Very well. I can do this all day, though I am not sure if *you* can do it all day."

Aeolus raised his hand again, but I pulled a disk out of my pouch and hurled it at him. Aeolus ducked at the last second, however, allowing the disk to go flying over his head, and stood up again, saying, "What was that? Are you just throwing random garbage at me now? You're getting desperate."

I smirked. "Why do you think I missed?"

The disk I'd thrown bounced off the wall behind him and struck Aeolus in the back of the head. It didn't knock him out, but he did stagger forward from the blow, so I zoomed forward and slammed my fist into his gut, making Aeolus gasp in pain. I followed up the punch with an uppercut that sent him reeling and then swept his legs out from underneath him with a kick.

When Aeolus hit the ground, I got on his back and twisted both of his arms behind his back as painfully as I could without breaking them. Aeolus groaned, but I pinned him down in such a way that he would break his own arms if he tried to throw me off.

"Get off me, you child!" Aeolus cried. "I am your superior!"

"Keep telling yourself that, bro," I said. "Maybe someday it will become true. Until then, I suggest not moving too much, because your arms feel awfully fragile under my grip and it would be a real pity if I accidentally broke them both at once. Well, a pity for me, but probably a pain for you."

Aeolus just grunted underneath me, but it was pretty clear that he wasn't going to risk trying to escape from me if it meant losing both of his arms. I couldn't help but smile to myself at the thought of how this big, bad supervillain, who liked to brag about how awesome he was, giving up because he was afraid of a little pain. What a wimp.

"Jack," said TW in my head suddenly, urgency in his voice, "*my sensors pick up a large force coming your way.*"

I raised my head and looked around, but I saw nothing except the roofs of nearby buildings on every side. "*Large force? What are you talking about? I don't see—*"

Abruptly, a foot came out of nowhere and kicked me in the face. The force of the blow was so unexpected that I let go of Aeolus and fell over the side of the roof and landed on top of a car on the street below. I landed on the car hard enough to crunch the roof underneath me, as well as set off the car's alarms, though thanks to my durability the fall mostly shook rather than hurt me.

"*What was that?*" I said, raising and shaking my head. "*That wasn't Aeolus, was it?*"

"*No, I don't think so,*" said TW. "*Whoever it was, they were too fast even for me to—Watch out!*"

I looked up in time to see someone falling down toward me. I rolled backwards off the roof of the car instinctively and landed on the street in a crouch just as the person who fell toward me landed on the car, though they landed more gracefully than me.

Looking up at the newcomer, I didn't quite know what to make of him at first. He wore a full-body black and white costume, but it was strange. It appeared to be an entirely white suit covered with black dots of various sizes, including a big black dot on the face of his costume. The black dot did not have any eye holes or mouth holes, which made me wonder how this guy could possibly see or speak or even breathe. He was muscular and athletic and carried what looked like a gun at his side. The black dots looked strangely organic, too, like they were stickers put on his body or something.

"Who the hell are you?" I said, looking up at the new guy with confusion. "Friends with Aeolus?"

The newcomer tilted his head to the side briefly, as if just as confused as me, before he said, "I'm not sure if you're stupid or just *pretending* to be stupid. You know who I am."

"Actually, I don't," I said, shaking my head as I rose to my feet. "Mind introducing yourself for me? That would be kind of nice."

"Call me Holes," said the newcomer. He pointed a finger at me. "And I am going to get the revenge I have been denied for all of these years."

Before I could ask him what he meant, Holes snapped his fingers and, without warning, a hole materialized underneath me and I fell to my doom.

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