

# [CHAPTER ONE]

WHEN MY LEVEL 2 Hero Sense started tingling, that was when I knew I was in danger.

Yeah, I know. ‘Hero Sense tingling’? That sounded like a cheap rip-off of Spider-Man’s spider-sense. But it was also an accurate description of the sensation that went up my spine when my Hero Sense kicked in.

You see, Hero Sense, unlike most Powers I had, was Passive. That meant it was active at all times, even when I wasn’t consciously using it. Hero Sense allowed me to sense whenever a hidden or disguised Villain was nearby, especially if said Villain was actively planning to harm or kill me. Although not the flashiest Power in my arsenal, it had saved my life once or twice over the last couple of weeks, especially since I leveled it up and made it even more powerful, capable of detecting even well-hidden, albeit low-level, Assassins (for example, one time it helped me see through the Disguise of a [Crook] who was pretending to be an elderly grandmother on her way to the grocery store. It did cause some commotion when I punched out the old lady in the street at first, but when ‘her’ wig fell off and everyone saw the basketballs shoved into ‘her’ shirt to mimic breasts, no one held it against me).

Why did I take note of this?

Because my Hero Sense was tingling in my room in my Base, where I was supposedly safe from all harm. And even worse, it happened while I was in bed, trying to rest my muscles after a long day of completing Missions and keeping the streets of Adventure City safe.

My eyes snapped open and I saw a long, sharp knife falling toward me. Dodged kicked in and I rolled off of my bed onto the other side but due to my sleepiness I accidentally fell onto the floor wrapped in my blankets. As I struggled to free myself, a new notification popped up in my view:

*Debuff added: Sleepy. Agility, Evasion, and Dexterity are decreased by 10%. Duration: Until you get a good night’s sleep.*

I scowled at the notification. Ever since I defeated Dark Kosmos, it seemed like Capes Online’s notification system had become even sassier. I wondered if this was one of the effects of my newly-increased Fame Stat or if the developers had increased its snarkiness just to mess with me.

In any case, I activated Freezing Touch and instantly froze the blanket around me. With a shrug of my shoulders, I shattered the blanket and jumped to my feet. As soon as I got up, I flipped on the light switch next to my bed. The darkness of my room was instantly banished by the lights on the ceiling, allowing me to see my assassin for the first time.

Standing in front of my bed, her knife plunged into my pillow, was a female ninja. She was small and lithe and wore a bright pink ninja costume that, I couldn’t help but notice, clung rather tightly to her body. She wasn’t exactly my type, but I would have thought she was cute if she hadn’t just tried to kill me in my sleep. The only parts of her face that were visible were her blue eyes, which were wide and surprised as if she hadn’t expected my reflexes to be so quick.

Floating above her head was the nametag [ELITE NINJA ASSASSIN AIMI], so I Scanned her and was quickly shown further information about her:

*Elite Ninja Assassin Aimi*

*LEVEL: 25*

*ALIGNMENT: Anti-Villain*

*CLASS: Assassin*

*WEAK POINT: Arms*

*WEAKNESS: Light*

*Members of the feared Ninja Guild, Elite Ninja Assassins put ordinary Ninja Assassins to shame with their skill and effectiveness. Although fewer in number than ordinary Ninja Assassins, they are far more efficient and effective at killing people, with the stronger ones racking up kill counts in the low hundreds. Despite their skill, they are only slightly stronger than normal Ninja Assassins and can usually go down with a few well-placed hits from Heroes or Villains who specialize in fighting.*

I smirked. Leveling up Scan was already paying off, seeing as it now showed me enemies' Weaknesses in addition to their Weak Point. It was only Level 3, but so far that had been more than adequate for helping me deal with the various enemies I had fought over the last couple of weeks.

Even better, Aimi's arms now faintly glowed red in my vision, which was how I knew they were her Weak Points. They certainly looked weak, more like sticks than arms. Even so, I knew better than to underestimate her. Ninja Assassins may not be the physical strongest class in the game, but they had all sorts of Powers and equipment they could use to take out even higher-leveled enemies. I also found it interesting how she had a name. The last Ninja Assassins I dealt with didn't have individual names, so either she was special or maybe it was because Scan was a higher Level now and could show me more information.

In any case, I had no more time to analyze her, because Aimi ripped her knife out of my pillow and leaped over the bed at me. I tried to Dodge her, but the Sleepy debuff meant I was clumsier on my feet than usual and almost tripped over myself. It did help me avoid getting stabbed, but as she flew by, she struck my chin with her foot, which sent me stumbling backward against the wall.

Shaking my head, I looked up in time to see Aimi rushing toward me, her knife pointed directly at my face. Recalling that her Weakness was Light, I slid my hand up against the wall to my right and flipped on the light switch in my room, instantly dispelling all of the darkness and even making me blink in surprise.

Aimi, however, almost tripped over her own feet when the light came on. Seeing my opportunity, I rushed forward and, knocking her knife out of her hand, grabbed her wrists and held her arms above her head. She struggled to free herself, but with my Super Strength, all she could do was wriggle uselessly in my grip.

"Okay, ninja," I said, doing my best to suppress a yawn as I held her wrists tightly, "I don't know how you got into my Base without my knowledge or permission, but your time is up. If you give up now, then I won't kill you."

Aimi didn't respond. She did, however, kick me in the groin.

Which hurt just as much as it would in real life. Stupid Real Pain option.

I cried out in pain, causing me to loosen my hold on Aimi's wrists. She pressed her feet against my chest and kicked out, breaking her wrists free of my hands and sending me staggering backward again. Somehow, Aimi managed to land in a perfect three-point landing and drew three throwing stars from within her robe and threw them at me with shocking speed.

Still suffering from her groin kick, I was unable to dodge the throwing stars, which hit me in the chest and shoulders. Each throwing star sent another wave of pain flowing through my

body and also took off a good third of my Health in one go. I imagined that if I had been lower-leveled, that might have been enough to take me down entirely.

But I was now Level 25 and, more importantly, I was *pissed* at someone breaking and entering my Base without my permission.

I immediately activated Freezing Touch and slammed my foot against the floor. A wave of freezing ice shot out from my feet toward Aimi, who, being the Ninja that she was, executed the perfect jump, landing onto my bed where she safely avoided getting turned into the most realistic ice sculpture of a ninja ever created.

But I wasn't done yet. I clapped my hands loudly, the sound practically echoing in the small space of my room, and a portion of the ceiling slid away and a robotic arm wielding a baseball bat fell down and slammed against Aimi's side. That attack took Aimi by surprise and also shaved off over half her Health in one blow. It knocked Aimi down onto the frozen floor, which did not freeze her, but its slippery surface made it harder for her to get back to her feet.

Without hesitation, I rushed across the frozen floor—which my Ice Man Costume prevented me from slipping on—and immediately straddled the fallen Elite Ninja Assassin, wrapping my hands around her throat and pinning her underneath my weight. As I suspected, Aimi was incredibly light, which was good for sneaking around, but meant that even a guy like me, who was of average weight, could pin her down to the floor very easily. I also made sure to freeze her wrists and ankles to the floor, making it impossible for her to get up.

“Gotcha,” I said, looking down at Aimi. “Where are your friends? Last time I fought you guys, there were at least three of you. Is the great Elite Ninja Assassin Aimi too good to have friends?”

Aimi, to her credit, did not seem afraid, even though I had her pinned to the ground and was in a position where I could choke her out if I needed to. She simply met my gaze with her own and said, in a soft, Japanese-accented voice, “Members of the Ninja Guild are never *truly* alone, Hero.”

Before I could ask her what she meant, my Hero Sense suddenly kicked in again. Before I could look over my shoulder, a knife suddenly appeared at my throat, causing my breathing to suddenly become much harder.

“Lay even one more finger on Aimi, Hero Winter, and you will die alone in your room like the murderer you are,” a male voice whispered in my ear all of a sudden. “Then you will no longer be known as the Savior of Adventure City, but as the man who died in his own Base due to his own arrogance.”

I gritted my teeth but did not reply. I should have known that Aimi wasn't alone, although I had no idea why I hadn't picked up on her male friend's presence. Perhaps Hero Sense would only allow me to sense multiple Villains at once after I leveled it up again.

Regardless, this was a tricky situation. I could easily choke out Aimi now and finish her, but if I did that, her male friend would slit my throat and I would die on top of her. This entire situation was certainly a step above my last encounter with the Ninja Guild when I first started playing Capes Online what seemed like an eternity ago now. I suspected Aimi's friend was also an Elite Ninja Assassin, although because I couldn't see him that meant I couldn't Scan him and find out for sure.

“If you let Miss Aimi go, Hero Winter, I will not kill you right away,” the male ninja said in my ear, his voice still barely more than a whisper. “And when I do, it will be as painless as going to sleep. Trust me, I know how to make death painless ... for those who cooperate, that is.”

I bit my lower lip. My reflexes weren't anywhere near fast enough to keep up with the male ninja's. For that matter, I wondered what would happen if I died. Normally I respawned in my Base and couldn't leave for an hour in-game, but what happened if I died *in* my Base? Would I still respawn here? I wasn't sure I wanted to find out, although I had a feeling I was going to either way.

That was when the door to my room suddenly burst open and my Sidekick, Cyclone, hopped inside and yelled, "Boss, I heard noises in here that sounded like fighting and I came as fast as I \_\_\_"

Cyclone—who I called Cy for short—stopped speaking as soon as he saw the situation I was in. His eyes went from Aimi underneath me to the ninja on my back to the robotic arm with a baseball bat hanging from the ceiling until finally landing on the icy floor underneath all of us. He seemed at a loss for words at my current situation, which was surprising because Cy was *never* at a loss for words for anything.

"Um ..." Cy scratched the back of his head. "I don't like judging people, but you have a *weird* fetish, boss."

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