

# CHAPTER ONE

I'VE BEEN PUNCHED IN the face before. I've been stabbed by a guy who thought using a nail gun made him a supervillain. I've been kicked, knocked out of the sky by murderous transforming robots, shot at, and mentally assaulted by crazy telepaths.

But I've never been crushed under the foot of a giant man the size of a small New York City skyscraper and about twice as thick based on how far his belly sticks out. That was new.

The giant man in question was notorious, small-time supervillain Enor, supposedly short for 'enormous,' but which sounded an awful lot like Eeyore to me. His name gave away his power; he could grow his size to gigantic proportions, including his own clothes and shoes, making him big enough to wrestle a whale. Based on the debriefing I received in the House, Enor—real name Ernest Rebus—could also shrink, though he usually preferred to be in his giant form.

Personally, I would have preferred it if he was in his small form, if only because then I wouldn't be desperately holding back his gigantic leather boot as he tried to squash me underneath. Although super strength was one of my powers, the fact was that Enor was still heavier than me, so all he had to do was keep pressing down on me until I either gave out and let him squish me like a bug or until I sank into the street under my feet. Considering how I could already hear the concrete cracking underneath me, I figured I didn't have much time before that happened.

Nor could I depend on any help. The other members of the Young Neos were out for the count. Stinger had been knocked from the air like a bug and was probably lying unconscious on the roof of some building somewhere, Blizzard had accidentally frozen herself to someone's car, Shell had tripped in a puddle and fallen on his back and couldn't get up, Talon had chipped her claws and was probably complaining about them somewhere, and Treehugger—who I couldn't even see—was basically useless because the closest plants were the sliced up tomatoes in an overturned burger cart, but I doubted that Enor was in any mood to have lunch.

Yeah, not exactly the team I was imagining when I was first made leader of the newest incarnation of the Young Neos. And that wouldn't have been a problem, perhaps, if I hadn't been about to be crushed like an ant.

“Stupid kids,” said Enor, his voice loud even though he wasn't sure. “I was expecting the Neohero Alliance to send an *actual* neohero to take me down. Is Omega Man taking a nap?”

I would have told him that we were sent to fight him because Enor was on the lower end of the supervillain threat scale, but I feared that if I spoke, I'd break my concentration and Enor would squish me.

Instead, I focused on pushing back as hard as I could. Unfortunately, Enor was almost too heavy. He pushed down on me harder than I could push against him. I looked around for anything I could use against him, but I was all alone. The cracking under my feet was getting louder and louder, while Enor felt like he was getting heavier and heavier.

But then, all of a sudden, a laser blast shot from a nearby building and struck Enor in the chest. Enor shouted, more in surprise than in pain, and staggered backwards. His foot immediately lifted off me, allowing me to see the sky again, or as much as I could see between the towering skyscrapers of New York City.

Then I looked over at the building where the laser had come from, wondering who had fired that laser, when I saw a guy about my age appear at the edge of the roof. I instantly identified him as a neohero, because he wore a costume similar to mine in design; but in contrast to my red and black, his was blue and yellow, like lightning. He also wore a cape, which blew in the wind behind him, which I had to admit looked kind of cool.

Then I heard someone running over to me and looked over in time to see Treehugger—a very thin, petite girl close to my age who wore a green superhero costume and a mask shaped like a leaf—running over to me.

“Bolt,” said Treehugger, coming to a halt before me. “Are you okay? Did Enor hurt you?”

I waved off her concern. “Nah, I’m fine. I’ve been through worse.” I glanced at the guy standing on the rooftop, his eyes glowing. “But who the heck is that guy? Have you seen him before?”

Treehugger looked at the guy on the roof and gasped. “Oh my gosh! That’s—”

Treehugger was interrupted when Enor suddenly shouted, “Hey! That hurt. Who did that?”

The neohero standing on the roof smirked. “I didn’t know you could speak English, ugly. You don’t look all that smart.”

“Smart?” Enor rumbled. He was rubbing a burning hole in his chest, which seemed to be where the laser had hit him. “I will have you know that I have a PhD in physics from Harvard. But it doesn’t matter. I’ve already beaten a few kids today. I can beat another.”

Enor grabbed a nearby lamppost and ripped it from its foundations. He raised it above his head, probably to throw it at the new guy, but then the new guy waved his hands.

Immediately, the lamppost started coiling around Enor’s arm like a snake. Enor looked at it in surprise before it tightened around his arm enough to make him scream in pain. He tried shaking it off, but the lamppost was wound too tightly around his arm to get rid of.

“Why are you screaming?” said the new guy. “I just wanted to make sure that you didn’t lose your new toy.”

Enor stopped screaming and now looked as furious as a bull. He stepped toward the new guy, but some kind of weird green sludge bubbled up through the cracks in the street and quickly encased Enor’s foot in a thick blob. Enor immediately stopped and looked down at his foot in surprise.

“What the hell is this?” said Enor. He tugged at his foot, but it wouldn’t come out. “It’s like glue.”

“Good job, Slime,” said the new guy, giving the blob a thumbs up. “Hold him steady while the others finish him off.”

The blob—which I guessed was called Slime—rumbled in affirmation, which I took to mean that it was either the new guy’s sentient pet blob or it was an actual neohero who had the ability to turn into slime. The latter seemed more likely to me, though given what I’d seen in my short time as a superhero so far, I wasn’t willing to bet on it.

“So you think you can stop me with glue?” said Enor. “Ha! I will ... I ... oh, I’m starting to feel dizzy ...”

Enor put a hand on his head and seemed about to lose his balance. I didn't know why, though, until I spotted a girl standing on the rooftop of yet another building. She wore a uniform similar to the new guy's, but hers was white and pink. She also wore a weird helmet on her head that reminded me of the helmet that my dad, the retired superhero Genius, sometimes wore. The helmet was glowing, but I didn't understand what was going on until Treehugger said, "She's making him dizzy with her mind."

Before I could say anything to that, the new guy shouted, "Lightning Triplets! Finish him off!"

Out of nowhere, three streaks of lightning flew through the air and struck Enor in his forehead. When they hit him, it made a sound of lightning striking and caused Enor to fall backwards. Slime must have let go of him, because Enor's foot slipped out of the blob as he crashed onto his back on the street.

Immediately, Enor started shrinking and shrinking until he had returned to his original height. But he did not get up or make any noises. Smoke rose off his forehead from where the lightning had hit him in his giant mode, although it seemed to have knocked him out rather than kill him.

The lamppost that had been wrapped around Enor's arm—which was now much too big for him—started wrapping itself around Enor's whole body until soon Enor's arms and legs were bound against each other. Enor still didn't move, but I guess the new guy just wanted to make sure that Enor wouldn't be able to escape or grow again if he woke up.

"Wow," said Treehugger, her hands on her cheeks. "They ... they're—"

"Better than us?" I finished. "Faster than us? More efficient than us?"

Treehugger nodded. "Pretty much."

Then I heard a hovering sound and looked over to see the new guy slowly hovering toward us. He was riding what looked like a metal surfboard, his cape fluttering in the air behind him as he came down toward us.

"Hey there," said the new guy, his smile revealing a set of pure white teeth. "Bolt and the Young Neos, right?"

"Uh, yeah," I said as the new guy landed in front of us. "Who are you?"

The new guy's smile didn't waver as he held out his hand. "My name is Strike and I am the leader of the New Heroes. And I wanted to meet you for a long time now."

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