

RECKONING

THE MANY DEATHS OF DYNAMISTRESS

BOOK ONE

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with
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“Show me a hero and I will write you a tragedy.”
~F. Scott Fitzgerald

FOREWORD

As most readers know, *Supers* magazine spotlights a “Super of the Month” in every issue, featuring an exclusive interview and photos. A handful of years ago, on our weekly teleconference, one of our stringers suggested a particular individual for this honor. Everyone was probably thinking the same thing, though I was the only one to give voice to it. “*Who the hell is Dynamistress?*” I said.

I looked at the promo photo she’d sent, which she told me had been an unsolicited submission from our slush pile. It’s common for the new metas to contact us, in hopes of finding fame. It seems to never occur to them that we’re a magazine that reports on those who are already famous.

She took a good photo, though, I had to admit. It was a typical cheesecake pose, leaning against a wall, one leg bent, a stiletto-heeled boot resting against the bricks. But her costume was much more modest than her name would imply.

I read the attached brief as my reporter told me what she’d dug up on her. Evidently, she’d been part of the Nevada Incident. That was newsworthy enough, but the other information she’d found was... intriguing.

I clicked back to the photo, staring at the piercing blue eyes that seemed to carry both pain and humor. “*Do the interview,*” I said. “*Then I’ll decide.*”

Well. You know how I decided.

The January 2008 issue was our best selling ever, aside from “memorial” issues honoring the fallen. And it’s the one most often requested

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as a back issue in our circulations department. (We're sold out, by the way. Try eBay.)

I've read hundreds of books about metas, from boastful recitations of exploits to poorly ghostwritten "autobiographies" to scandalous, unauthorized exposés. But this book – Dyna's book – is one of the very few that I'll actually recommend to friends.

And strangers, too. Buy this book. Read this book. It's not what you'd expect.

And stay safe out there.

Malcolm Goodman
Publisher / Editor-in-Chief
Supers

ONE

"We do not remember days, we remember moments. The richness of life lies in memories we have forgotten."

~Cesare Pavese

Every moment of our lives is an iceberg. The moment we call "now" is just the tip of things, the short sliver visible of all those other moments that have led to it. The rest lay drowned in the past, out of sight, out of mind. Only upon close inspection does the magnitude of "now" really slam into us.

My "Titanic moment" was my sixteenth birthday, February 12, 1987. It had been a good day, I suppose. It was a Thursday, so I spent it in school. Afterward, it was dinner at my favorite restaurant with my family: Mom, Dad, and my brother, Dana.

Dana was in grad school on the other side of the state, in Philadelphia. I practically idolized him. He was smart, funny, and always treated me like his equal, despite me being seven years younger. And he'd do anything for me, including ditching two important days of classes.

After dinner, it was cake and ice cream back at home. And presents. Mom, as usual, had gotten me a new dress and shoes. Dad bought me a new stereo, complete with one of them newfangled compact disc players. And, of course, Dana got me some CDs.

Dana helped me set up the stereo in my room, and we sat there on my bed, listening to Duran Duran. And even though it was more than two decades ago, I remember our conversation like it happened yesterday.

“Sweet Sixteen,” he said in that teasing, older brother kind of way. I rolled my eyes and told him to shut up. “And no girlfriend to share it with?” That’s how close we were. He knew of my attraction to girls. He’d never judged me, and was totally accepting of it. Of *me*.

I just shook my head and said, “I wish.”

Our hometown was small. The population was of European descent and not much else. Two thousand people, the vast majority of which were conservative. Not the freaky, wingnut, gun-loving variety, but the old-fashioned, family-centric, God-fearing variety. Still, despite the outward friendliness, it was clear that certain people weren’t treated with the same amount of Christian love. Anyone of non-hetero inclination was deep in the closet. No one I knew of was “out.” AIDS was still “the homosexual disease,” and “gay” and “lesbian” were insults, not attributes. Non-heterosexuality was regarded as just as much of a mutation as those other, more flamboyant, examples on the nightly news.

Dana gave me a reassuring hug. “Someday,” he said. He was always telling me how much more open-minded the college environment was, and I was so looking forward to actual communities made up of those who wouldn’t condemn me.

Then Dana stopped smiling and said, “Dinah... there’s something I need to tell you. But you have to promise not to let Mom and Dad find out I told you.”

“Okay,” I said, frowning. I was used to this weird family trait. Any non-vital news that might upset someone was glossed over or kept quiet altogether. Our last surviving grandparent died when I was in third grade. But I didn’t find out his death was a suicide until I was thirteen, and that was by overhearing a conversation not meant for my ears. I found it insulting that our parents often thought I shouldn’t know something or other, but history had taught me to be more concerned than angry.

Dana got all serious and stood up from my bed and paced. I didn’t think people actually did that, except in movies. But there he was. Pacing. I would have laughed, had it not been for the look on his face.

Finally, he stopped and leaned against my dresser, not looking at me. His voice was barely audible. “You’re not the only one in the family who has a secret.”

I was stunned. What secret could he have that Mom and Dad wouldn’t want me to know about? My mind raced, trying to figure it out before he told me. I knew he wasn’t gay. He’d had a girlfriend up until about six months before, when she tore his heart out. And I knew of one other girl he’d “gone all the way” with. Bisexual, maybe? I offered this as my guess.

“Bigger,” he said softly.

“Bigger” meant “worse.” And there were only two things worse than being gay, as far as our folks were concerned. One of these things, Dana had already owned up to, years before.

RECKONING

I'm eight years old. I'm supposed to be playing in my room before going to bed, but I'm crouching at the top of the stairs, eavesdropping on the conversation below. It goes more or less like this:

Our father says, "Seems pretty odd that you only get sick on Sunday mornings, but feel better once the rest of us return from church."

There's only silence in response. I can picture Dana shrugging his shoulders.

Our mother says, "Don't you like going to church anymore?"

"I've never liked going to church," my brother says in the semi-whine that all teenagers seem to share.

"Son," Dad says, "you'll find there are lots of things in life that we need to do, even though we don't like to."

"I know... but going to church isn't one of them."

"Bite your tongue!" our mother hisses.

"But I don't believe that stuff!"

There's another silence, during which I imagine my parents are staring at Dana in shock. I know I'm stunned by his words.

Mother breaks the silence. "What do you mean?"

"I mean I don't believe in God. God's every bit as imaginary as Santa Claus!"

Now I'm aghast. I wait for Mom or Dad to refute him, to confirm that God and Santa are just as real as anyone.

"Richard, our son's going to hell."

"Now, Margaret..."

"Like you didn't already think I was going there, anyway," Dana sneers. I have no idea what he means, but don't have time to think about it before Dad speaks again.

"Son, I know you think you know better than everyone else. But that sort of arrogance will cause you nothing but trouble. Now, we'll hear no more of this talk."

"Especially around your sister!" Mom says. "She believes every word you say, so don't you let her hear that you've forsaken the Lord! And she still believes in Santa Claus, so keep your nasty mouth shut about that, too."

And there it is, from my mother's own lips: confirmation that Santa is just a figment of someone's imagination. The rest of the conversation is lost to me, as I shuffle back to my room. But resuming my pretend life with Barbie and the Rockers has no appeal for me. I look down at my dolls, in the little wooden house Santa had...

No.

Santa hadn't brought me this dollhouse. Santa wasn't real. My dad, though, was quite real. And I'd seen him make things with his tools in the garage. He'd made Mom those pretty planter boxes for outside her windows. He'd made the bookshelves in Dana's room. I look at the wooden house again with fresh eyes.

So if Santa wasn't real... then neither was the Easter Bunny. Or the Tooth Fairy. So what about God? Was Dana right about that? I shake my head. I'd pretty much always equated Santa Claus and God. If Santa wasn't all-knowing, I couldn't figure out how else he could have the naughty or nice list. But only God knew everything, I was told in Sunday School.

By the time Mom comes to tuck me into bed, I, too, am an atheist.

Eight years later, on that very same bed, I stared at my brother, finally seeing the rest of the iceberg. I know now what Dana had meant, all those years ago, by the going to hell comment. It's the other thing "bigger" than being gay.

My heart almost burst as I blurted it out. "You're a *mutant*?"

He winced at the word. "Meta. I'm a meta."

I was glad I was sitting down, or I might have fallen to the floor. I couldn't believe it. I *didn't* believe it. "Show me!" I pleaded.

"Not so loud!" he said, and then I remembered the promise he'd asked of me. Our parents never had anything nice to say about metahumans. Not even the ones who clearly deserved to have nice things said about them.

Dana glanced at my dresser. Then, right before my eyes, my lip balm tube floated up into the air and over to me. When it dropped into my hand, I about peed myself. It was the most amazing thing I'd ever seen. There was, despite Dana's concerns, a hint of pride on his face. *Pretty cool, huh?*

Without thinking, I said, "Yeah!"

It was only after I'd replied that I realized his lips hadn't moved. I'd heard his voice inside my head. And I boggled again. Telekinesis *and* telepathy! Dana had struck the mutant gene jackpot, as far as I was concerned.

Lucky bastard.



There are many ideas floating around as to why metahumans began to appear. Heck, there's debate as to *when* they first appeared. Most scientists believe they began to appear in the '50s, perhaps the '40s, although there is a small (but vocal) minority claiming metahumans have always been among us. Certainly, by the time I entered the world in 1971, they were firmly in the public eye.

And they weren't just in the press, but in popular culture. Magazines popped up, detailing the exploits of metahumans doing heroic or nefarious deeds, dressed in bright costumes and sporting outlandish names. These adventures were made up of artwork done in a panel layout and scripted with largely silly and unrealistic dialogue. They were entertaining, I suppose... but when you could see the real thing on television, why would

you buy hand-drawn fiction? Regardless, these little books had an impact, and in a case of life imitating art, the media began attaching colorful names to different metahumans. And eventually, the government got involved, as it always does.

Whatever the timeline, and whatever the cause, the conservative estimate is that one out of every hundred thousand births will be a metahuman.

Now, mutations happen all the time, the vast majority of which are utterly benign. In many cases, without examining one's DNA, it would be impossible to tell there was even a mutation there. Other mutations are simply what we call "birth defects" or "congenital abnormalities." And many of these are innocuous. A common one is crooked pinky fingers, where the tips angle toward the ring fingers, after the outermost knuckle. Clinodactyly, it's called. About ten percent of the population has this, to one degree or another.

Other mutations are far more severe. Muscular dystrophy, for example, is the result of a mutation. And of course, some mutations are fatal, either before birth or at an early age.

But a small percentage of mutations are helpful. That's what drives evolution: mutations that allow us to adapt to our environment, giving us a better chance at survival. One example is a community of people in Italy who are seemingly immune to atherosclerosis, amazingly enough. This has been traced to a genetic mutation of a particular ancestor, who was even identified. Another example is that some people have a genetic mutation that makes them highly resistant to contracting HIV.

As beneficial as both of these mutations are, they're subtle and passive. But there are other mutations whose benefits are more blatant. There are instances of individuals who are unable to feel pain or are seemingly immune to extremes of hot or cold or even electric shock. Conversely, there are some who can generate heat, or manipulate magnetic fields. There are some blind persons who can use echolocation to "see." There are some whose "super" brains are capable of accessing much more information than the average person's, including some with "perfect" visual memory. There are those whose reflexes are abnormally fast and accurate and others whose muscles seem to remain undamaged from normal usage, enabling them to continue working or running essentially until they pass out from lack of sleep. Then again, there are those who don't seem to need sleep.

The average human would regard these as superhuman abilities, but the mutations themselves are still what we consider normal. Rare, of course, and undeniably interesting. But still "normal."

However, "meta mutations," as they've come to be called, make these remarkable abilities look positively mundane, and have thrown long-held scientific beliefs into chaos.

And as happens whenever such disruption to what is “known” occurs, research exploded in many scientific fields. When a human being can do things that should be utterly impossible, we have no choice but to either prove it’s done with smoke and mirrors, or consider that maybe the laws of physics have more loopholes than we thought.

Oddly enough, despite all we’ve learned, all we can actually demonstrate, there are plenty of people in the world who still insist that it’s all fake. I assume these are the same people who deny that we’ve set foot on the moon or claim the Holocaust never happened. To these people, the scientists who’ve made the breakthroughs in the past decade or so in discovering how metahuman abilities work are all conspirators, fleecing the public for reasons I can’t even begin to imagine. I’m just not that paranoid.

But then, I suppose it’s fair to say I’m biased.



Most kids develop a fixation with something by the age of ten. For my brother, it had been dinosaurs. I’m told that, at ten, he could recite a ridiculous number of facts about countless Cretaceous creatures, in much the same way that our father could rattle off endless sports statistics or our mother could quote lengthy passages of scripture, verbatim.

And me? By the time I was eleven, I could name probably a hundred of the known metas in America and list their metahuman abilities. I could tell you which metas composed any given team. Metas ranked right up there with movie stars and musicians, in the eyes of the public.

Well, most of the public, anyway. There were always people who didn’t think too highly of musicians or movie stars and for those folks, metas were maybe the lowest of the low. Among those with this attitude was our mother.

Father’s attitude was that they were all attention-seeking grandstanders, not deserving of respect, let alone adulation. Mother, on the other hand, regarded them as abominations. She ignored the idea that this was the next stage in human evolution because, religious fundamentalist that she is, she didn’t accept the truth of evolution.

But at least they were realistic about our exposure to them. They recognized the fact that, if we weren’t watching the metas on TV, we’d find out about them in other ways. Schools talked about them, after all. The whole field of biology was under the microscope, so to speak, and teachers lectured excitedly on the ideas behind human-to-metahuman evolution. By the last quarter of the twentieth century, it was flat-out impossible to ignore the metahuman contingent and its effect on society, though many wished otherwise.

The metas’ effect on me was profound. I wanted more than anything to be one of them, much as kids a decade before might have dreamed of

becoming astronauts. I dreamed about it while sleeping and fantasized about it during school. I tore off Barbie's clothes and painted a costume on her, hiding it again under her outfit. And of course, I put on a domino mask, tied a towel around my neck as a cape, and pinned a big letter "D" to my chest. I tried to put a matching cape on our dog, so he could be my sidekick, but he would have none of it. And always, I was imagining what abilities I might have, once puberty had its way with me. I guess you could say I was single-minded about the future. Or at least, *my* future.

The day I began my first period was a day of high excitement for me. After the initial panic, of course. No matter how much you prepare for it, you're never quite ready to see blood on your underpants for the first time.

For a month, I woke up eagerly, expecting to feel different, with whatever changes were happening inside me. I'd read the interviews with other metas. I knew that the changes took different forms and felt differently from one meta to another. I didn't know what to expect... just that *something* would be different.

Even though I didn't feel at all out of the norm, I tried to do things. I would concentrate until I gave myself a headache, trying to make my hands burst into flame, or to levitate off the ground. At least I had sense enough not to jump out of my second-story bedroom window, trying to fly.

But I finally had to admit, with the heaviest of hearts, that puberty had come and gone, and I was still just plain old Dinah Geof-Craigs, girl geek. More specifically, I was an *aimless* girl geek. So certain had I been that I'd develop superhuman abilities that I never gave a moment's thought to anything else I might want to do with my life. I was not only single-minded, but short-sighted.

As one might expect, my education wasn't of high importance to me. Oh, I got decent grades. But I wasn't the whiz kid Dana had been when he'd graced those halls of middle education, seven years earlier, and my teachers never failed to remind me of this little bit of trivia whenever I'd barely get a "B" on a quiz.

Despite this, I loved school. It was my social outlet. I relished the life of a teenage girl, even though I wasn't a member of the popular crowd. It didn't matter. Even unpopular girls could engage in the same mindless idiocy as the cool kids. We gossiped, shared makeup, traded clothing, and generally behaved like the superficial, material girls we were.

And that's how it was for me, up until Dana's confession. It seemed so wonderful at the time, that my awesome brother was even more awesome. But slowly, the wound his admission inflicted became more evident.

The iceberg tore a gaping hole in me. Only it wasn't cold seawater that came rushing in. It was something much more vile.



I wonder, sometimes, about the perceptiveness of parents. Teenagers, I think, typically assume their parents are clueless to the point of being socially embarrassing. I know I certainly held that opinion of mine, and they did little to prove me wrong. Mother's attitude toward anything outside the status quo bothered me immensely, as did my father's passivity. Even when he disagreed with her, he rarely spoke up.

I've never been able to understand how anyone could have a real understanding of the world, of people, and still hold closed-minded opinions toward those who, for example, didn't believe in God, who were attracted to the same gender, or had a genetic mutation that they certainly couldn't do anything about.

Yet, in retrospect, I wonder if my parents didn't know me better than I'd thought they did. Maybe their reasons for demanding that Dana not tell me about his mutation weren't just the same old reasons. Maybe it was because they knew how I'd really react.

Yes, at first, I was thrilled. I wanted to brag to all my friends about Dana's abilities. I didn't, of course. I knew what repercussions a public "outing" could have for him. But after a time, this filial pride was replaced by something I'd never felt before: sibling envy.

As much as I'd always loved and admired him, I'd never felt envy, because he always made me feel so good about myself. But our closeness was disrupted by the physical distance of him being away at college, which inevitably led to a growing emotional distance. As the years progressed, he came home on weekends less frequently, and even took summer classes some years.

I missed him. He'd always been my best friend, and now that I knew of his abilities, I wanted him around even more. I wanted to watch him float things around. Hell, I wanted him to float *me* around. I wanted him to read other peoples' minds and use his telepathic "inside voice" to tell me what they were thinking. Every time he "spoke" in my mind, I got a thrill. I figured if I couldn't be a meta, myself, I at least wanted to be one vicariously through him.

But he was two hundred miles away.

I'm sure this distance contributed to my feelings, but I'm not sure things would have been much different if he'd still lived at home. The truth is, I'd been so obsessed with metahumans, so convinced that I was going to be one, that it probably bordered on psychosis. When puberty came and went and I wasn't gifted with superhuman abilities, I was devastated. But I accepted it. What other choice did I have?

But there he was, with his abilities. Him. Not me.

But the worst part was that he didn't even seem happy to have his abilities. He just kept going to school, working toward his Ph.D. It was the height of insult, really. Given how rare meta-mutations are, we certainly had

no reason to expect that our little town would produce one. And how ironic was it that the one who'd gained abilities was someone who didn't particularly care to have them?

And my envy grew to resentment.

I didn't understand. Didn't he want to be famous? Didn't he want to be on the cover of *Supers* magazine? Featured on *Biography*? Didn't he want to be a member of The Liberty League, or any of the other teams of metahumans? Didn't he want to be loved by the masses?

I couldn't imagine anyone would *not* want these things. Being famous was what I craved more than anything. And I began to view it as a cosmic injustice that he'd been graced with abilities that he didn't want and wouldn't use, while I was denied exactly the same thing, when it's what I most wanted in life.

Did I ever confront him about this? Sort of. Once. On one of his visits home, I casually mentioned my envy. His reaction? "It's not worth feeling envious, Dinah. Believe me... It's not all you think it is."

When I asked why he felt that way, he waved it off and wouldn't discuss it any further. I was hurt that he treated it – treated *me* – so dismissively. It was adding insult to injury, as the saying goes.

If I'd been a believer, I would have been supremely pissed at God. But I wasn't. So instead, I turned my resentment and anger to Dana. I was no longer bothered by the distance separating us. Not seeing him made it easier to maintain the negative feelings.

I suppose one good thing did come of this. I stopped being aimless. I knew what I was going to do with my life. I knew enough about biology to know that we had the ability to induce mutations. So it seemed only reasonable to believe that we could induce meta-mutations.

My goal in life now was to become a brilliant geneticist, to study human to metahuman evolution, and to find a way to induce metahuman mutation. In myself.

My brother might not want the fame, the glory, the adoration... but *I* did.

And I was damn well going to have it.