

RENAISSANCE

THE MANY DEATHS OF DYNAMISTRESS

BOOK THREE

Dinah Geof-Craigs
with
Vincent M. Wales

DGC PRESS • SACRAMENTO

*“For he who lives more lives than one
More deaths than one must die.”
~ Oscar Wilde*

FOREWORD

Editorial
Supers
March 2010

Two years ago, in our January 2008 issue, our “Super of the Month” was a largely unknown meta named Dynamistress. Some on our staff thought this was a risky move, predicting a lukewarm response, at best. I, myself, said, “Who the hell is Dynamistress?” when she was proposed to be featured.

At first glance, she didn’t exactly stand out from the crowd. But there were some things about her that were unusual even in the world of metas. For one thing, she was older than the average new hero by a good bit. Most metas debut in their late teens or early twenties, but Dyna hit the scene at thirty-two. For another thing, her meta abilities didn’t manifest naturally, but were the result of her own actions, the only known example of self-induced meta mutation.

In the end, I went with my gut. This was a woman who was obsessed enough to become a geneticist specifically in order to manipulate her own DNA to bring about meta abilities. And my gut said this was someone who wouldn’t be just a flash in the pan. She would really do something.

As evidence, we already knew she had been involved in Project Echo, colloquially known as “the Nevada Incident,” and this was a large factor in causing that issue of *Supers* to sell out. At the time, though, none of us knew the extent of her involvement, as she downplayed her contributions to the event.

And I was right about her future accomplishments. She would be the one who not only determined the cause of the year-long disease outbreak that

killed more than fifty people in the San Francisco Bay Area and sickened thousands more, but would also be the one who worked out how to stop it.

Just as Dyna herself was a virtual unknown when she graced our pages, her role in these events also isn't common knowledge, which is why she's not a household name. Maybe someday she will be. Many remarkable people were virtually unknown in their times: Dickinson, Poe, van Gogh, and so many more.

Sadly, there's a reason I compared Dynamistress to those who only became famous posthumously. As this issue of *Supers* was about to go to press, reports began to come in stating that Dinah Geof-Craigs – Dynamistress – had perished. Details have been limited, but the reports come from several eyewitnesses, including her own teammates.

As the saying goes, only the good die young. Dinah was only thirty-nine on that fateful day. Her career as Dynamistress spanned less than seven years. But the legacy she leaves behind will be long-lasting.

One thing we at *Supers* knew that had not been publicly revealed was that Dynamistress had signed a contract with a book publisher to bring her story to the world, including details of the Nevada Incident unknown outside of her team. Her co-author intends to move forward with the book, and the publisher has agreed to allow us the honor of printing excerpts in the pages of our magazine.

All of us here at *Supers* mourn her loss and will keep her memory alive, always. A memorial issue devoted to her career is forthcoming.

Malcolm Goodman
Publisher / Editor-in-Chief
Supers

ONE

“The timing of death, like the ending of a story, gives a changed meaning to what preceded it.”

~ Mary Catherine Bateson

Golden Gate Park is where the kids hang out. I don't mean children, though some of them seem pretty damn young. I mean the ones celebrating their new status as registered metas in the city. They strut around, appropriately, in Peacock Meadow, where they pose in their costumes like jocks trying to impress cheerleaders. Recruiters for government teams swoop in on them like pimps on runaways at a bus station.

As it happens, I'm there as a pimp, myself, because I go there to look for potential recruits, too. But I'm much more selective than the government scouts. I look for those who aren't so puffed up with pride. I look for the humble, not the haughty. I watch for the ones who look lost or confused, or are there just to meet other metas, rather than boast and show off. In other words, the ones the government folks tend to ignore.

But I see them all, the timid and the bold, with mixed emotions. I look at them with fond nostalgia, for I remember being one of those neophytes, not so long ago. I look at them with hope, for that's what they are – the hope for the city's future. But mostly, I look at them with pity, for I know some of them will become part of another group – a group I call “The Disappeared.”

We rarely talk about them. We never publicly admit that so many of us don't last. Nor do we wonder aloud whether those faces we haven't seen in weeks or months are gone because they moved, they quit, or they're dead. We pretend none of that ever happens in our bright, costume-clad worlds.

But it does. All too often.

In the past six months, I've counted at least ten faces in the park that I've never seen before. The names attached to those faces are logged into the computer in City Hall, and their deeds will be recorded as the days roll on. But, a year from now, how many of those names will still be active in the system? Six? Three?

City Hall might keep track, but we don't. It's too much like reading the obituaries every day. It's too morbid, reminding us of our own mortality.

But I can't stop thinking about The Disappeared.

Faces haunt my dreams, of friends not seen in too long, like Rachel and Esteban. And others never to be seen again, like Valora and Transcendant.

And of course, there is always the very real possibility that one day, when I'm off my game just a touch, when my attention is broken, my mind distracted...

I'll disappear, too.



Much to my surprise, I was in San Francisco. I was excited, and wanted nothing more than to explore this amazing city. But that would have to take a back seat. I had a mystery to solve. I had so many questions to ask, and could only hope that the combined answers would reveal what had really happened on February 12, 2010.

What was known was that Dynamistress had been out with several of her friends, celebrating her thirty-ninth birthday. There were few eyewitness reports in the news, and those few didn't all agree. Some said it was an explosion. Others said it was a fire. Her friends tried to avoid the press, which is why there was so much speculation in the media. Whatever it was – explosion, fire, or something else – it killed her and put her brother in the hospital, where he is still in a coma, weeks later.

Dynamistress had obviously not told her team about me. Except for Bloodmoon, they had no knowledge of me until just before we met. Though she explained the reason for my presence, none of them were comfortable with me. In fact, some refused at first to speak with me at all.

I really couldn't blame them.

Jasmine Cruz, a.k.a. Bloodmoon, is an imposing woman. In her early thirties, she stands about six feet tall. She is of mixed race, with Mediterranean features and a lovely *café-au-lait* skin. She is telepathic and empathic, and has a virtual arsenal of weapons. She told me that, these days, she focuses on the non-lethal sort. I didn't ask about the days before she had such a focus.

Bloodmoon was the first member of the Pariah Project that I met, so she has been my liaison to the team. She introduced me to everyone and tried to make things go as smoothly as possible for me. We laid down some "ground

rules” for the interviews – which topics were off-limits, for example – and she would be present at each interview to make sure they were followed. She, herself, was naturally the first one I interviewed.

Bloodmoon served us tea in the conference area of the Project’s building as we talked. It’s not accurate to call it a conference *room*, since it had no doors. In most peoples’ eyes, it would be the dining half of the living/dining area. I would have, too, if it had lacked the large monitor and lots of computer gear beyond my familiarity.

“I wasn’t out with them when it happened, so I can’t give a first-hand account. In the days following, as you can imagine,” she said in a warmer voice than one might expect from such an intimidating woman, “the team fell into disarray. Even though our group doesn’t have a ‘leader’ in the conventional sense, we all know the Project exists only because of one person. Dyna was the heart of the team. And we’d never had any formal discussions about what would happen in the event that she wasn’t around, any longer.” Bloodmoon sipped at her tea, seeming to collect her thoughts. “The two of us had spoken casually about it, though, so – as agreed – I stepped in to fill the role of facilitator,” she continued, “since, after Dyna, I’m the most familiar with the inner workings of the group. And we wanted to continue, of course.”

Bloodmoon explained that the Project was a young group, less than a year old. “We formed on August first, last year. That’s not the date on our legal paperwork, but that’s what we consider the anniversary of our founding.”

It seemed obvious that the Pariah Project wasn’t a typical team, I said to her. “What sets us apart,” she explained, “is our goal of being more than just intercessors. We’re not there just to stop the bad guys.” She paused in her explanation and looked wistful. “Dyna had a deep sense of justice and was keenly aware that we have a system full of gaps into which victims often fall, where they fail to receive the attention they need.”

Bloodmoon stopped, but I must have looked confused, because she went on. “For example, rather than just make sure the victim of a crime is physically unharmed, we assess their mental well-being. No, none of us are qualified to diagnose, but we’ve had enough training to be able to do a quick assessment. Being the victim of crime can be traumatic, after all, and everyone reacts differently. So if the person needs it, we’ll escort them home, for example. If they need assistance, we have them come here, where we provide them with information on all the available resources out there that could help them, be it housing needs, drug counseling, financial assistance, or just about anything else.” With a shrug, she said, “It’s not that the police or other teams never do that sort of follow-up, but we make it a priority. All government teams are trained in crisis intervention, but the Project emphasizes it more than other groups I’ve been with. We’re also trained in the basics of crisis *counseling*, which I’ve never encountered with other teams.”

I understood, now. It was like a full-service team. Everything short of picking up the victim's dry cleaning. I wasn't sure if it was a cool idea or a bit pointless.

Vicky Valentine, a.k.a. Nexus, had been Dynamistress's girlfriend. Based on the photos and videos I saw, she was about thirty years old and quite pretty, with auburn hair and gray eyes that seemed to sparkle silver when she smiled. Her abilities are hard to describe, but she is able to open miniature portals into a number of planes of existence and use them offensively, defensively, and as teleportation-like transportation.

She was also not around. Nexus had taken a leave of absence from the team. "I'm not sure where she is," Bloodmoon told me. "I respect her need to heal in her own way, of course, but the truth is, we could really use her, right now."

I asked why, and Bloodmoon explained. "I recently received a call from Arsenal – my arms supplier – about a few strange weapons. From the description, they match those that Dyna and the others encountered before. Energy-draining weapons." She frowned before continuing. "The fact that these are here is quite disturbing. According to Arsenal, the weapons look new and unused. Apparently, the shipment came via Los Angeles, but that's about all we've got, so far. Vicky could be of great help in investigating this. I've left her a voicemail with details and suggesting that maybe doing some work would help her, psychologically. I'm still waiting to hear back from her."

Bridget Mason, a.k.a. Brick, is Nexus's cousin and shares an apartment with her. Brick is the youngest member of the team, at sixteen. But even that age was hard to believe, as she appears even younger. She's slim with long, blonde hair, and an adorably cute face. As her name hints, Brick is able to transform the skin of her body into something resembling brick. She was young enough to still get an enormous kick out of her abilities and jumped at the chance to demonstrate them for me. She also didn't hesitate to tell me that she was probably the toughest member of the team, despite her size. That makes it sound like she's full of herself, but she's not.

The first thing she told me was how much she liked Dynamistress. "I was invited to join the team, even though we barely knew each other. I mean, yeah, I know it's because I'm Vicky's cousin and everything, but still... In the Gatekeepers, I was a reserve member, because I'm not eighteen, yet. That was fine, but here in the Pariah Project, I'm equal to everyone else. My opinion is as valued as anyone's. And that's so cool. I can't tell you how much it means."

Her enthusiasm disappeared, though, when I asked the inevitable question. "I wasn't there, thank God. And the others haven't been exactly gabby about it. Kinda thankful about that, too, honestly."

Jennifer Dusk, a.k.a. Vesper, is one of several members of the Project who is quite obviously a meta. It's the large, bat-like wings that give it away. She's one of the younger members, being just shy of twenty. She has deep red hair and a scar across one eye. Vesper can fly, produce deep shadows, and even has a form of echolocation, making darkness much less of a drawback for her than for most people. She was the first I spoke to who had witnessed the event.

"It was horrible," she said in a slight Texas drawl. "We'd all gone to lunch down to Fisherman's Wharf and then jus' kicked around for a while, goin' in some shops and whatnot." She paused, frowning slightly and glancing at Bloodmoon, who was, as always, present. "We'd just left the Ghirardelli store. Dunno why this sticks with me, but I remember Dyna was munchin' on a chocolate mint square. Next thing I know, she got this panicked look on her face and spit it out. She grabbed Jack's hand and they stared at each other. We all knew what that meant, of course. After a few seconds, she looked around at the rest of us, all wide-eyed and freaky, before blasting into the air and flying toward the water. We went after her..." Vesper looked away for a moment. "Got there just in time to see it."

Vesper got choked up and fell silent. I watched the emotions play across her face. She closed her eyes, shook her head, and stood up from the table. "Sorry," she mumbled. "I can't..." Then she hurried out the door to the street.



The Pariah Project headquarters is in a not-so-attractive neighborhood, to be honest. And this is what makes their HQ so amazing. It sits on a cul-de-sac accessible only to pedestrians, so the area is much nicer than the street beyond the gate. The front of the building is brick, with two doors and a pair of stained glass windows. The simple, white, wooden door off to the side reveals a staircase leading directly down to the basement level. The main door is much more ornate, with beautiful oak framing a grid of twenty rectangles of art glass. Just inside is a small reception area, separated from the main room by a glass wall and door. To the left inside the door is the reception area, and past that is a set of beautiful oak stairs to the second floor.

Beyond the glass wall, across the deep red tile floor, is the "living room," which is a sitting area in front of a gas fireplace, with a leather sofa and armchairs.

Past this is a small conference table. In the rear wall behind the table is a huge, flat panel monitor. The monitor is on at all times and has as its screen saver a revolving selection of art. I was told they were all favorites of Dynamistress, from van Gogh and Maxfield Parrish to Peter Max and Banksy, with lots in between. It made sense that she chose the art, because this

building was more than just the Pariah Project's headquarters. It was also her home.

All the rooms on this floor are lined with oak paneling, and many of the wall panels are false fronts, as Bloodmoon showed me. When giving me the tour, she slid one open, revealing the building's security system controls. Another one hid a rack of guns. There was nothing unusual about most of the guns, she told me. It was the ammunition that was special. A regular-looking, shotgun, for example, fired rounds that delivered five hundred volts of shock to the victim, having a range of about a hundred feet. She showed me other munitions, too, including a variety of custom rounds from explosives to expanding foam to pepper spray. Before closing the panel, she told me she had "a few other surprises" in there.

Bloodmoon is a scary damn woman.

Through a door at the back of the room are two sets of stairs. A short flight leads up to the Project office. Bloodmoon showed me the room, briefly. "Here's where the magic happens," she said. Seeing my doubtful expression, she said, "Well, here's where a lot of important things happen, at any rate." I noted the stack of papers next to the computer keyboard. "Grants," she said simply. "The Project is funded primarily by them, and we continually have to apply and reapply for them." With her permission, I looked through them. There were grants for general non-profits, for the purchase of life-saving equipment, disaster relief operations, social support, and more.

In one corner stands a rack holding dozens of different brochures, many of them on victim resources, victim rights, and so on. Most are official brochures from different sources, but some are put together by the Project.

There are soda and snack machines. "No money needed," I was told. To test this, I pushed a button for a Dr Pepper, and the machine dutifully offered it up to me.

We turned to leave, and that's when the bulletin board caught my eye. The length of the wall is filled with a row of low windows that look out on the stairwell to the basement. Above the windows, a cork board stretches from wall to wall, filled with photographs. "This was Sinta's idea," Bloodmoon said. "Some of the people helped by Project members." There were quite a few. Most everyone was smiling. I noted that many of the photos appeared to have been taken there at the headquarters.

Bloodmoon followed me out of the room, and we headed down a full flight of stairs to the basement level. At the bottom is a landing. Turning right, there is a door leading to a few steps up into a guest room and bath. This is where her brother had been staying, and would again, when he returned.

To the left of the landing are a few steps down to the basement, which is actually a kitchen and dining area running the length of the building. It has a black and white tile floor and white, ceramic tile fixtures. As in many peoples' homes, the kitchen is where the group often congregates, so they made it a comfortable place. In addition to a couple round dining tables,

there's also a small corner bar. The walls around it are lined with shelves holding a huge array of bottles, including probably two dozen different flavored syrups. Dynamistress used to work as a bartender, I learned, and enjoyed creating drinks for her team, including non-alcoholic ones for the younger members and non-drinkers. At the far end of the kitchen are the stairs up to the street level.

The second floor of the Project's building is the main bedroom. It's a beautiful room, with a herringbone parquet floor and two long skylights. There are no closets, but there are a few large, standing wardrobes. One of these holds nothing but shoes. The deep doors have shelves inside and there are even more shelves in the wardrobe itself. I estimated more than a hundred pairs. I dubbed it "the cavern of footwear."

There is a small vanity table with a mirror, a leather love seat, and a bed that spins upside-down and recesses into the floor at the flip of a switch. I couldn't help but think this was clever, but wondered how often such a thing would be needed. "So far, never," was Bloodmoon's reply.

On the vanity is a jewelry box, which I absently went through. Aside from the standard assortment of baubles, I found some items that deserved a closer look. One was a pair of silver earrings in the shape of DNA strands. Another was a gold necklace with a pendant that I recognized as the "drum" icon of the Pariah Project. The final one was a real curiosity, though. It appeared to be a spent bullet, flattened from impact and silver-plated, on a silver chain. What was the story behind this? I was sure I'd learn soon enough.

Near the stairs is a stone-tiled half-bath with a walk-in rain shower, separated from the sink and toilet by a glass wall. Talk about decadent.

At the back end of the room are stairs to a tiny nook with a skylight. The nook leads out to the rooftop deck, which itself is maybe ten by twenty feet, surrounded by a short wall. It overlooks the roof of the rest of the building. Bloodmoon said they had planned to convert the roof into a bigger deck, but had never gotten around to it.

But there is also another door at the back of the bedroom. "When Dyna bought the building," Bloodmoon explained, "this was a huge, walk-in closet and dressing room. Dyna converted the space into her lab," she said. I tried to open the door, only to find it locked. Bloodmoon shrugged. "I suspect she had the key on her when... you know."



It was strange for me to be living in her home, sleeping in her bed, and speaking with her closest friends. And it was all still just a mess of confusion. The brief talks with her team members helped provide some context, but for the most part, I was no closer to understanding than before.

Dynamistress, it seemed, was a prolific diarist. A small shelf held her journals, all hand-written in bound books with date ranges on the covers. I

picked up the most recent volume and skimmed through a few pages until one caught my full attention. It was dated May 9, 2009.

“Well, I did it. I called K.T. today and told her that I was okay with the idea of a book about me, even though I still didn’t think anyone would be interested. And besides that, I told her I hadn’t the first idea of how to write a book, nor did I really have time to do it. She mentioned having a ghost writer, which is evidently the way we’re going to go with it. I told her I’d start putting some things together for her. I have doubts, though, that this will ever happen, or that anyone will buy it.”

I wondered why she would have doubts. The little I knew about her was fascinating. I couldn’t imagine I was the only one who’d think so.

“It’s still a bit uncomfortable, talking to her. I’m not sure whether I’m relieved or disappointed that she’s not in the city any longer. I miss her terribly. It’s difficult, sometimes, not to let memories of our time together just overwhelm me. I have to consciously remind myself that ‘our time together’ was just as friends, that she wasn’t able to return my affection. And of course, I can’t forget how I made an utter fool of myself. That bit in particular is usually enough to pull me out of the spiral of self-pity.”

I closed the book and returned it to the shelf. I had known that reading her journals would feel uncomfortable, at times. I was going to be diving into someone’s most private thoughts. But since it was unavoidable, there was no sense in feeling self-conscious about it. At least, that’s what I told myself.

I located the earliest book. As curious as I was about her recent life, I knew if I was going to truly understand this woman, I had to start at the beginning.



Bloodmoon and I were to meet with other members of the Project, and I sat in the office, waiting. I spent the time looking over the photographs on the room-length bulletin board. In many of the photos, people were posed with members of the Project. But I saw none with Dynamistress. I suspected she was probably the photographer, in most cases.

One photo caught my attention. It showed a girl with black hair, perhaps about sixteen, wearing a blue t-shirt featuring a DNA helix and the words “Team Dyna” vertically along one side.

“That’s Macy,” Bloodmoon said from behind me, causing me to start. “You’ll meet her eventually, I’m sure.” I was about to ask about the shirt, but she beat me to it. “Macy founded a Dynamistress fan club. All the members got a shirt. They had other things, too, like mugs and whatnot.”

I remembered reading somewhere that some supergroups had their own lines of merchandise. Bloodmoon escorted me downstairs to the kitchen. “Yes, some do, and they sell them to raise money for charity. We have some team items, too,” she said, digging in her pocket. She pulled out a keychain

featuring the Pariah Project “drum” symbol. “We don’t try to sell them, though, since we’re not exactly one of the popular groups.”

We entered the huge kitchen, where I took a seat at a corner table. Bloodmoon poured her ever-present tea into black, Pariah Project drum logo mugs, and sat with me as we waited for the first of several “interviewees” to arrive.

Cara Desmarais, a.k.a. Caracara, was one of those most resistant to speaking with me until Bloodmoon convinced her. All during our talk, she was fidgety, clearly wanting it to be over. She looked to Bloodmoon frequently throughout our talk.

Caracara is a dark-skinned, brown-haired beauty in her early twenties. She’s originally from French Guiana and has a lovely accent. She has enormous, feathery wings of brown and white, which fold neatly behind her when she’s not in flight. The woman herself is about five foot nothing, but her wings, when folded, rise a couple more. They span probably twelve feet, fully extended. She was not a founding member of the Pariah Project, but voted into the group soon after its creation.

“*Oui*, I was *très surpris*,” she told me, and I was suddenly glad I’d taken French in high school. “We first met when I was rescued from that other world.”

She was talking about what the media calls “the Nevada Incident,” where several metahumans from our world were replaced by doubles from another Earth. It’s a story many people have trouble believing and some flatly claim is a hoax.

“I was one of those exchanged,” she told me, “and even I sometimes cannot believe it.” She smiled awkwardly as she said this, but it quickly disappeared. “I next saw her at the memorial service for her *coéquipier*, Transcendant. A few weeks after that, she asked me to coffee, where she told me about her new team. I was asked to meet with them all. An interview. And then I was invited to join.” She smiled sadly. “It has been difficult, the past month.”

Caracara has a gift for understatement.

Nena Geissler, a.k.a. Neon had joined the group in January, and was the most recent addition to the Project. She was about the same age as Caracara. She’s pretty, but doesn’t think she is. And as her name implies, she’s a colorful girl. Tall and thin, with a pixie-like smile, she dresses in bright colors and always has hair to match. The day we spoke, it was purple. The color isn’t dyed, but is tied to her meta abilities. Neon, like Dynamistress, generates a form of bio-plasma. Dynamistress’s energy manifested mainly in intense blasts of force, but Neon’s plasma is of the more common sort: fire.

We sat at a corner table in the kitchen, a plate of cupcakes between us. Neon devoured one, then wiped frosting from her lips. “Lily brought me

in,” she told me, peeling the paper from another cupcake. “And I never met Dyna until the same day I met most of the others, which was maybe a week before... you know. I wasn’t there when it happened. I’m sorry I can’t be any more help.”

Lily McKay, a.k.a. Half-Life, is almost twenty. Looking at her is, in some ways, like looking at the opposite of her friend, Neon. Her skin is extremely pale, with an almost gray tinge. She contrasts this with a variety of bright lipsticks and eye makeup. Her hair is silvery. “It’s from the excess potassium I produce,” she said. She explained that the decay of the radioactive isotope of potassium is responsible for the focused explosions she can produce. And when her hair got wet, she explained, lilac flames resulted, due to the potassium reacting with water.

“Dyna saved my life,” she told me, with an intense gaze. “I was dying, being poisoned by my own abilities, which hadn’t yet fully matured. She figured out what was happening and how to prevent it from killing me. And then she helped me get control of it all. Her brother helped, too... I wasn’t in a good place, mentally. And of course, so did Kit,” she said, leaning into her boyfriend.

Kit, a.k.a. Resonator, is the only member of the Pariah Project who maintains any sort of privacy about his identity. “Just Kit is fine,” he said. Also in his early twenties, this quiet young man is, ironically, a master of sound. His armored battle suit converts noise into a variety of weapons that can deafen, cause dizziness or nausea, and even become a physical force.

“Dyna was special,” Resonator told me. “What other meta would have taken the time to analyze Lily’s condition and figure it out?”

“We weren’t with them when it happened,” Half-Life said. “It was hours later that we heard. They were all in a state of shock.”

“Dyna and Sinta used to live next door to us,” Resonator continued. “They share a birthday, you know. So it happened on Sinta’s birthday. Nothing like having an in-your-face reminder every year, huh?”

“Sinta” is the only name people know her by, including her friends. She’s the “catgirl” in the team, though I was told she hated being called that. Still, I wasn’t sure why she denied it, given that she had fur covering her entire body, had eyes and ears like a cat, and claws. I was surprised she had no tail.

“Oh, she was born with one,” Bloodmoon told me. “But she lost it when she was about two.” Seeing my confused expression, she explained. “Her parents... um... chopped it off.” I gasped and Bloodmoon sighed. “Yeah, that’s the reaction I had, too.”

She shared the details. Young Sinta was found at the door of a hospital, close to death from blood loss. As it so happened, this had been the same hospital in which she’d been born, and one of the nurses remembered her. They pulled her birth records, found the parents’ names, and called the

police on them. But when the officers arrived, the parents resisted. The official word is that they were both intoxicated and enraged. In the altercation that followed, the parents were killed. And thus began Sinta's terrible journey through the foster care system before being taken in by Scoutmaster when she was twelve.

She'd turned nineteen on the day Dynamistress turned thirty-nine. "Sinta has no family," Bloodmoon told me, "just her friends. Because of her traumatic childhood, with the numerous foster families and the abuse, she rarely became close to people. Oh, she's friendly with everyone and is far more trusting than most people would be, given her past. But despite the friendliness and the warmth, she still keeps her distance, emotionally." Bloodmoon smiled sadly. "Dyna was one of the few exceptions. Both of them."

Seeing my confusion, Bloodmoon told me that, through a strange series of events, Sinta had become close with the Dynamistress from that other world from the Nevada Incident. And the previous year, that woman had sacrificed her life to save the Dynamistress of this world. Sinta had been crushed by the loss. And now she'd lost a second Dynamistress, who'd been almost like a mother to her.

"To say she hasn't handled this well would be an understatement," Bloodmoon continued. "She withdrew, holed up in her apartment, and basically stopped communicating with the world. We urged her to get professional help, but she refused."

Referring to Bloodmoon's empathic abilities, I asked if there was anything she could do for the girl. "Not really," she said. "I'm not much good when it comes to trauma recovery. Anyway, as for meeting her... Well, I'll leave her a message, but I wouldn't expect an answer."

Jack Fullerton, a.k.a. Zero-Point, had chosen to bury himself in work as a way to handle the loss of his friend. Bloodmoon took me to visit him at his workplace, Wonderland Robotics. Zero-Point is in his early thirties with an athletic build and what some referred to as "movie star good looks." As for abilities, I had a hard time understanding them. He explained that he was able to tap into energy at the atomic level and manipulate it, to an extent. For the record, that explanation didn't help at all.

"Well," he told me as we sat in his office, "as an example, I can siphon energy from people. Or I can stimulate them, like an adrenaline boost. This sometimes results in minor wound healing, too."

While that was equally fascinating and incomprehensible, I couldn't stop looking at his mechanical arm. It looked so real. He'd lost his original in the same event that took the other Dynamistress's life. Late in the year, he had a series of surgeries to reinforce his upper body, allowing him to have superhuman strength by utilizing a variety of "battle arms." He was still in physical therapy to get his body used to the new additions.

I told him I wanted to know what happened in those final moments. The bits and pieces the others had given me were frustrating in what was missing.

Zero-Point glanced briefly at Bloodmoon, almost as if asking permission to share information. Then he said, "Dyna's abilities were the result of her own genetic manipulation. Periodically, she tweaked her DNA to fine-tune them. Her most recent adjustment was meant to help her get the most energy possible out of the food she ate, so that she wouldn't have to consume a frankly ludicrous number of calories every day." He chuckled suddenly. "My God, that woman could put away the food. It was amazing."

Then he stared vacantly into nothing for a moment. "Metabolism," he said, snapping back to the present, "the process of converting food to energy, is a chemical reaction. And in chemical reactions, there is something known as 'runaway.' Basically, it's an uncontrolled acceleration of the reaction. And that's what happened with Dyna."

Zero-Point went silent for a long moment. Then he cleared his throat and continued. "She knew what was happening," he said. "She figured it out a few months before. And she tried a number of things to reverse it, including further tweaks of her DNA, but she knew that would likely take too long. We spent a lot of time together in the last month or so, with me draining excess energy from her in an effort to give her more time. In the evenings, I'd drain her to the point of passing out. Toward the end, we were together almost 24/7." He smiled sadly. "But it wasn't enough."

Kim Choi, a.k.a. Kimera, is another obvious meta. Her body, while human in shape, is covered in fur like a lion's, including claws and a tail. Her head is another matter. The fur tapers off around the shoulders and lower neck, gradually turning to fine scales like a snake's. Her eyes look serpentine, as well. And she has fangs. She has no hair on her head, but an impressive pair of ram-like horns. With all that, people rarely seem to notice that she's Asian, until she cusses in Korean.

Kimera has incredibly fast reflexes, is able to see heat signatures, and yes, her bite is venomous. She was also now the oldest member of the Project, being about five years younger than Dynamistress and a year or so older than Bloodmoon.

"It was horrible," she said in a raspy voice. "We all ran after her, on the pier." Kimera licked her lips and took a deep breath. "She was hanging there in the sky, maybe fifty or sixty feet up. And then," she said, her eyes closing, "she screamed. Like no scream I'd ever heard. As though her very spirit was in agony."

Kimera opened her large eyes and looked at me. "I hear that scream every night, in my dreams. Sometimes I even hear it while awake." She took a shaky breath. "And then, still screaming... she just..." Kimera blinked, sending a tear down her scaly cheek. "She just... erupted."

I'd read on Metapedia of Dynamistress's ability to "explode" tremendous amounts of energy. "It wasn't like that," Kimera said. "It was more like something catching on fire. There was smoke. And licks of flame here and there. And the smell of burning flesh." Kimera paused again to collect herself. "And then she dropped into the bay."

Kimera firmed her jaw as she stared at her lap. Then she looked up, turning her big, snake-like eyes to mine.

"She burned the whole way as she sank."