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## HAUS' WILL

The search for survivors had produced nothing. Still, Piro couldn't shake the feeling that this would not be the last they'd hear from their boss. When the heroes arrived at their midtown headquarters, Plinth Mold was sitting behind his desk. Their story did not amuse him.

"As you can see, I'm fine," he said, his stare boring a hole straight into Piro's eyes.

"We figured," Tom said, as if it had been obvious all along.

Piro sipped his coffee.

The other Plinth, for some reason still going by the name Haus, had not left a will. Piro reasoned that he must have come from some other timeline. "Yeah, *our* guy has his shit together," Tom observed. "Something like that," Piro allowed.

If they only knew.

Returning again and again was not easy. Plinth's visits would often overlap. He would see himself coming and going. The sensation was never pleasant—he didn't even like to look in the mirror.

He'd been born this way. Simple. But could that ever be enough?

Such questions were not helpful. There were so many of him running around that sooner or later he was bound to run into himself. And then what? Each of his selves looking out for their own self interest, the continuity would soon be a shambles.

No changes. Haus refused to abridge himself for the sake of mere humanity. The reader was on his own.

Raven beeped his key fob and climbed into his Mercedes coupe. He had just noticed the police cruiser pulling up in his rearview mirror when an outsized explosion rocked his vehicle, obliterating the automobile and himself along with it.

The police officer exited his cruiser, drawing his weapon and aiming it approximately at the smoldering wreckage.

"Request backup," he shouted into his collar mic, as bits of the Mercedes slowly rained down on his police hat and vest.

Unbeknownst to him, a piece of debris had damaged the antenna on his vehicle. There would be no backup, this time.

It was a sting. Piro and Thomas had set up a fresh sales operation to draw out loyal customers who might also have recently patronized their competitors. Evidence might be found in their pockets.

The very first customer into the barrel produced a hit. Piro searched the body, pulling its pockets out of its pants like rabbit ears. A bootleg comic wrapper bounced off the pavement and started to roll away, propelled by the rising wind. Thomas lunged forward and stepped on it, flattening it under his shoe. Piro scooped up the wrapper and turned it over in his hands, frowning.

"It's worse than we thought."

Sonic Boom leaned back from his microscope, allowing it all to sink in. He had rushed down to the lab, not even bothering to change out of his hero costume (he had simply thrown the lab coat on over his distinctive black and orange uniform), to examine this lately acquired sample from the distinguished competition's new fall line. A few moment's work confirmed his greatest fear: Somehow, someone had duplicated the Actron team's formula.

The thought itself was unthinkable. The repercussions would be catastrophic—how would this ultimately affect crack sales in New York? The loss of revenue to the Actron team would set back their larger program of halting the spread of illegal drugs by... years, if not decades.

Time stood still as Sonic Boom cleared his mind of distractions. He would bring all his powers of concentration to bear upon this, the most important task of his young life.

But first, a phone call.

Eva never like to interfere with Tom's relationship with his father. Whatever had gone on between them during Tom's childhood had left it's scars. Whenever the subject came up in conversation, Eva would simply let Tom speak until he had gotten it out of his system. She never interrupted, never interjected.

This time was different.

"You know he's involved with this somehow."

"Yes."

"What are you going to do about it?"

Tom seemed to consider his response, spreading his hands flat on the kitchen counter as he stared down into the sink.

"I'm going to kill him."

And this was why she worked so hard to never get involved.

The RAGNAROK remained in orbit, monitoring the events unfolding in NYC from a safe distance. Whatever her boys had decided to do about the pending copyright issue had altered the surface of the future as she could perceive it. Things might never be the same. It figured. Her boys always made a splash. She was proud of them.

Mostly, she kept it to herself.

Plinth Mold had a problem.

Someone was picking off his men. Whom? It was hard to tell.

He'd task Piro and TAB2 with getting to the bottom of it. His boys could handle just about anything. It was why he had let them live, after a series of unnecessary setbacks caused mainly by their inept response to novel challenges. That, and prior obligations to their mother.

Oh, he was well aware of the RAGNAROK, slowly orbiting the Earth. He'd deal with her as time allowed.

Plinth depressed a switch on his desk and a holographic display slowly resolved into view. The master map of his overlapping selves, superimposed upon the timeline in which he currently resided. It would be tricky, but he would find a way to wind a path out of this mess.

That, or something like that.

He was starting to lose interest.



NEXT ISSUE: MEME MAGICK DOESN'T WORK