Zero's Mask

by Raoul Vehill

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SuperZero, in a dark hoody, silver goggles over a black ski mask, watches over dark city street of 2 flats and tiendas drinking a styrofoam cup of coffee. The sentinel thinks, 'on a night like this, my life changed.'

A child of 7 or 8 sits in a living room with an elderly Latino couple watching TV. A large black sedan speeds down the street outside. A thug throws a pipe bomb thru the duplex window. The explosion hurls the kid thru the shattering glass into the street.

'Tio and Tia didn't survive.'

As fire trucks and police cars race towards the scene, a small wiry old Asian man dressed in pressed black work pants, shoes and a gray Asian cut shirt looks out from inside of his store window across the street a few buildings and runs out. He checks the child, picks it up from the asphalt and cradles it away back to 'Fangs Herbal Elixir Shop'.

'Dr. Fang educated and trained me; made me what I am.'

A youngster goes thru a series of martial arts punches and kicks and Fang nods approvingly in a brick basement hung with banners painted in Chinese characters.

Later the teacher scrutinizes from around the corner of the stairway as the student sits in the lotus position and meditates while staring into a candle.

SuperZero still watches the street from the rooftop when the trip down memory lane ends.

'Now I fight wrong and protect the weak.' The keen eyes of the phantom stare from behind shaded goggles, 'It's
quiet now, a slow night for crime.'

In a few moments a heated argument between a man and a woman rides the breeze.
"You're holding out on me!" the man accuses.
"Rico, I aint!" the female responds.
Zero adroitly jumps from the roof, swings from a drainpipe and stealthily lands like a cat, then proceeds in the shadows toward the hassle.

A tall dark man in a crisp pressed suit wearing lots of gold and silver rings holds a less dark woman in a tight dress and high heels by the wrist at the mouth of the alley barely lit by a streetlight.
"There's no action Baby," the woman pleads as her mascara runs.
"You're playing me."
"I'm not, no."
The slick man grabs the woman by the neck and smacks her.

SuperZero steps out of nowhere instantaneously.
"Sir let the lady go," the masked being practically whispers, almost friendly.
The man turns to Zero. "Who the hell are you?"
"Your friend, or a big problem. Your choice." Zero smiles slightly.
The womanizer lets his lady friend go to face his challenger and whips out a large blade from the inside of his jacket grinning with shiny gold teeth.
"Leave It alone, freak," he menaces.
"I hope you have health insurance, Vato."
The woman watches, paralyzed by panic, as her knife wielding extortionist rushes the costumed vigilante. SuperZero grabs the quickly descending knife arm with the left and a metal 3 fingered plier/claw and strikes hard in the dude's solar plexus with the ball of a black gloved palm. The hero then thrusts a black booted leg behind the opponent's foot, shoots a right hand to his neck and throws him back, tripping him down
to the pavement.
  "Ughghr!" the loser spits out.
  "Sucks to be you." Zero tells him.
The vanquished bully tries clumsily to get back up but SuperZero steps on his neck.
  "Stay down hombre."
The pretty victim looks at her rescuer, "Thanks Señor."
  "De nada, hermana. If you need help you can try the hospital a shelter or Social Services."
The young lady considers. "I'll be all right, thanks."
  "Stay away from men like this." Zero nods down at the miscreant.
The grounded man tries to grab Zero's foot but the hero just steps on his neck harder.
  "Behave, and I'll let you off with a warning."
2 hoodlums step from the shadows onto the sidewalk between the trio in the alley entrance and the street.
  "Señor, mira!" The woman screams an alarm.
Zero looks behind and turns quick and relaxed to regard the youths in hooded sweats, hanging jeans, baseball caps and gold chains.
  "I can assure you gentlemen that this is all over," SuperZero informs them.
  "Nothing is over until we say it's over."
  "Really, it's none of your business."
  "Everything that happens in this 'hood is our business. You're stepping on our amigo, stupid." One of them whips out a gun.
  "Do yourselves a favor and put your toys away."
  "Not!" the other hoodlum answers approaching the masked hero fast.
Zero puts up the metal plier/claw in front of the punk's gun before he shoots, stopping the bullet which ricochets against the pavement with a ping. The crusader uppercuts him hard under the chin with a right as the criminal's partner also pulls a gun. Zero uses the left arm to lift the first thug from
under the arm and thus uses him as a shield from the second opponent's gun. SuperZero throws thug one into the other. The woman runs down the street.

The original lady killer runs to charge Zero from behind. The vigilante hears and elbows the foe in the neck, dropping him. The 2 gangsters get up to attack but Zero roundhouses both of them with the same kick before they even get their balance back and knocks them to the asphalt too.

"Boys, your disreputable activities will only get you hurt or locked up. I suggest getting real jobs or seeking out a vocational counselor at the City Community College. Good luck gentlemen."

SuperZero disappears into the shadows once again. The invisible hero watches from the rooftop shadows long into the night before silently descending the building.

Zero returns to the basement of Dr. Fang's Herbal Elixir Shop. The ageless master sits with a cup of tea and stares into a candle. The hero, like a ghost, prowls along the wall.

"Hello Tadpole. How was your night?" asks Dr. Fang. "Calm enough. My pliers need to be fixed."
"What happened?"
"I used it to stop a bullet."
Dr. Fang nods. "We have a replacement."
Zero crosses the basement to a metal tool cabinet.
"Top drawer." says the physician. The vigilante grabs an identical mechanical tool arm, pops off the old one and clicks the new one on.
"This is fixable." SuperZero says.
The inscrutable sage nods again as the hero leaves the shot tool arm on the work table.
Zero crosses the basement to a futon and an old wooden dresser, pulls a duffelbag from the bottom drawer and
begins stuffing clothes into it from the top 2 drawers.

"Are you going somewhere?" the sage inquires.

The hero stops and looks at Fang. "Alma put a security deposit and a month's rent on a warehouse space. I'm leaving master."

The doctor ponders before speaking and smiles, "It makes my heart glad, Tadpole. But you will need advice, if not instruction, and also tools, repairs and supplies. The door to the Elixir Shop will always remain open to you."

"I'll come in and do chores and make deliveries, Dr. Fang, but I need to take care of my enterprise. It's showing profit."

"This is good."

Zero finishes packing and looks to the doctor.

"Thanks for everything, Master."

"De nada, kid. You have exceeded my expectations."

The masked hero bows to Dr. Fang, who bows back, though not as low.

"I'll see you soon, Dr. Fang."

"I'll look forward to it."

SuperZero pulls the duffelbag over a shoulder and exits up the stairs.

Alma Azul, thin yet solid for a woman, in a long sleeved t shirt, blue stocking cap, gloves, sunglasses and backpack, sells flowers from a plastic bucket on a busy downtown street in front of the Capitol in the post workday bustle.

A woman dressed like an office worker checks Alma's selection and picks out a bunch of daisies.

"$7 dollars please," Alma says.

The woman smiles and pays. "I love daisies. Thank you."

"Thanks." The flower vendor smiles back.

The woman walks off. Traffic and pedestrians rush by.
An old lady sits at the bus stop with a bag of groceries as the sun sets and shadows grow longer. Alma looks up at the clock tower which tells the time of 5:36.

A long armed raw boned youth in a hooded sweater slinks toward the lady's groceries and when she looks down the boulevard at an approaching bus, snatches the bag.

"Stop thief!" the lady yells.

The rip-off rushes around the corner. Alma watches the scene happen and grabs her bucket to follow the thief into an alley.

Alma runs and stays on his tail. When she turns the corner she speedily pulls a ski mask and black hoody from her backpack and dons the most distinctive part of SuperZero's uniform without breaking stride.

The bag snatcher dexterously climbs an electric conduit to the roof.

"Darn! I don't have my tool belt," Zero says following the sneak thief up.

The kid runs across the rooftop clutching the grocery bag chased by the crimebuster. He jumps from one roof top to another, using his free arm to propel him as well as his legs, like a monkey.

SuperZero corners the kid at the edge of a roof where he can't jump across or down.

"Game over, Donkey Kong," Zero tells him, using the Mongolian voice control technique to loosen her vocal chords to create a lower male voice.

He snatches a banana from the bag, which he drops, then squats and uses his free arm to help launch himself over the head of the vigilante who grabs onto his foot as he almost succeeds in escaping getting pinched.

SuperZero pulls the thief from the air and pins the scoundrel to the rooftop, who manages to peel and eat the banana by the time both land.

Zero whips out a pair of handcuffs from a pocket and slaps them on the thief lickity split.

They both stand. The masked crusader looks at the
You stole the groceries because you're hungry."
The kid looks at his captor from under his hood. The vigilante pulls it down, revealing the youth to be a long jawed big eyed monkey looking teenager, maybe.

Superhero scrunches forehead. "Something's not right about you."
The apprehended nods in agreement. Darkness falls further down. Zero thinks.
"Stay here, Junior. I'll see if I can return the groceries, come back and decide what to do with you. I won't even cuff you to anything. Where are you going to go with cuffs on?"
The hero takes the bag, climbs down to the street, returns to the bus stop but can't find the lady. Zero ponders for a few seconds and finally decides to leave the bag of groceries at the stop. The crusader next jogs back to the building where the thief waits.
When Zero returns the kid hangs upside down from the rooftop drainpipe clutching it with feet shaped like hands. Obviously he tried to escape by climbing down with just his feet.
"What the...?" the hero asks, awestruck.
SuperZero climbs the gutter pipe half way up and grabs the bag snatcher by the scruff of the neck and pulls. "Let's go bud, I won't let you fall."
The hero tugs at the upside down youth again, swings him toward the ground, finally letting him drop just a bit.
"The cops would've grabbed you cuffed like you are."
The monkeyboy shrugs as the crusader just watches.
"Want a hamburger?" Zero asks.
The boy nods excitedly. "Uh huh!"
"If you promise to not run away, I won't turn you into the police. You promise?"
He nods, 'yes!'
"I'll uncuff you then." The vigilante does so. "Come on."

The 2 walk off to a fast food restaurant. After Zero has purchased 2 burgers, fries and cokes, the odd couple sit at a semi secluded table under a tree in the park. The hero takes a bite and looks at the captured thief wolf down the food.

"You're homeless, huh?"

The swallowing youth nods almost oblivious to the question.

"You understand what I say? Can you talk?"

"Nnnunhr," the kid answers as he shakes his head.

"No."

Zero gawks in wonder. "You've got really long arms, and a weird face, like an ape. There's something very strange about you. I can't quite figure it out... Here, want the rest of my burger?"

The hero hands it over and the thief starts eating it up. I should take you to the homeless shelter."

"NnnUnhr." The monkey like boy shakes his head 'no' vigorously.

"But you'd just leave," Zero figures. "I'm going to let you stay at my place tonight. I've got work to do, but I'll figure out what to with you later."

The boy eats the 2nd burger and they both finish the fries and coke. The criminal then follows the crimefighter down the street onto which night has fallen.

Back in the section of a warehouse on the 2nd floor the hero and new ward enter a 500 square foot room walled off in old wall board and corrugated metal with large windows on 2 metal walls. The sparse furniture, an old couch, cabinet and table occupy the space. A couple of banners bearing Asian calligraphy hang from the walls.

Zero changes shirts for one which bears a red Z symbol, shoes for boots, bag for back pack, belt for black tool belt and sunglasses for goggles as the crusader changes and
lectures the kid concurrently.

"You can leave, of course, but you'll probably just end up stealing again. You'll get caught again. If you stay, I'll help you. I don't have a TV but I have a few books. It's warm here."

Zero inserts in a mini wire from the goggles into a micro plug connected to eye socket bone before putting the visor on.

The youth goes to a row of books on the table and takes his time choosing one. He picks a hardback. The hero joins him to see what he's picked.

"The Iliad, Homer, a classic. The language may seem dry by today's standard but it's a great story. Well, I've got things to do. Hope to see you later. Goodbye."

The boy nods and waves, smiling as SuperZero exits down the stairs.

Later that night from the shadows of a rooftop on a street the defender watches again like the night before.

'I didn't know before I became a crimefighter that I'd spend so much time waiting and watching for rapscallions to prey upon the weak.'

Zero listens to the wind blow as silent clouds drift by and the occasional car drives by and pedestrian walks down the street below. Our masked hero pulls a thermos out of the backpack to pour a cup of coffee. The hero drinks the steaming black liquid.

A noise of scraping metal sounds from across the roof, and then a quiet 'snap'. The hero slinks quickly to the other edge of the building and spies down into the alley.

2 shabby burglars dressed in old torn jeans and flannel shirts use bolt cutters to chop the iron bars bolted onto a window. SuperZero looks down at the dim scene before pulling a cable and hook from around the belt. The vigilante uses the hardware to swing from the roof and kick the tool from the hands of one thief, who falls back from surprise and shock. Zero then lands deftly.

The other burglar whips out a blackjack but SuperZero strikes faster with a kick to his gut, jerks the cable,
whips it around the legs of both criminals and pulls their legs out from beneath them.

Both men, in their mid 20s, look in confusion at the costumed crusader, their eyes set back in hollow dark sockets and sick unshaven faces drawn tight.

"Gentlemen, I'll let you off with a warning. I should call the police but I won't. I'm taking the bolt cutters and leaving you tied up. If your thievery is caused by substance abuse problems there are counselors that you can find in the phonebook. Both of you should know that crime will only get you into trouble." The crimebuster uses the Mongolian voice trick again.

"Whatever dude," one of them replies.

SuperZero turns toward the street just as headlights from a dark car nail the hero with light. 2 gangsters in hooded sweatshirts jump out of the front seat, pistols drawn and hold them on the masked character.

"Mira, Dog It's the Fantasmo that dropped los muchachos last night!" says one of the thugs.

"No quiero problemas, Señors. I go now," Zero interjects.

"Nuh Unh," the other gangster says.

They both step forward. Zero falls forward fast and throws an object which explodes into a quick cloud of white smoke. The hoodlums from the car choke and fall. SuperZero melts into the shadows again to creep quickly into the alley and back out the other end.

A huge brown bald man in a crisp black suit sits at a large desk in a richly furnished office petting a big black python. The 2 thugs who got gassed by SuperZero enter. The man in the suit looks at them from behind big lensed refector sunglasses.

"Que paso?"

"El Fantasmo. We saw him again."

The large bald man says nothing for a moment, "You didn't deal with him?"
The 2 pawns look at each other, then at the man.
"No Jefe, he gassed us."
"He what?"
"He threw a bomb at us that exploded, knock out gas. We passed out."
The Jefe nods almost imperceptibly. "This is the 2nd night in a row this creature has beaten our soldiers. We have to find a way to deal with him. Go now."
The 2 soldiers exit the office.
The bald man puts the snake down and taps the desk as his pet slithers away slowly.

Zero enters the warehouse hidden in the night shadows
'Those thugs knew about the tangle last night. They all seem like members of the same gang,' the vigilante thinks going up the stairs to the room.
SuperZero takes off the hoody, goggles, mask and tool belt. Alma Azul then takes an eye patch out of her pocket and pulls the strap automatically under the back of a wide mohawk placing the patch on over her eye socket.
The kid lies on the couch on his stomach. The Iliad rests open on the floor next to him.
Alma grabs a blanket from the back of the couch, spreads it on an oval throw rug in the middle of the wooden floor and after rolling the hero's hoody for a pillow, she pulls the mask of Zero on too and then lies down to go to sleep.
When Zero wakes late in the morning the strange kid sits on the couch reading the Iliad. The crusader pulls the ski mask tight, straightening it, while the youth reads.
"Hi," says SuperZero.
"I," he responds.
The crime fighter looks at him, perplexed for a couple of short moments before telling him, "I'm going to get us breakfast. I'll be right back."
The apish youth looks up at Zero from behind the book and nods. "Nn kay."
Zero leaves and returns before he's even finished a few more pages. The hero gives him 2 oranges and 3 chocolate donuts from a plastic shopping bag, taking 2 oranges and donut to eat too. They also have a jumbo coffee to share and Superzero sits on the couch next to him. They finish breakfast quickly.

"Can you write?"
The kid nods, 'yes'.
Zero grabs a mini pad of paper and pen from the bag.
"You've got no home. You're not what I'd call normal. Can you please tell me how you ended up...how you ended up?"
The vigilante hands him the pad and pen and he stares at the paper a minute before he writes.
The kid hands Zero the pad back. She reads the scrawled word, 'Escaped'.
The masked phantom knots up forehead. "Escaped from where?"
Zero passes the pad and paper back to him. He writes 'Lab' and passes it back.
SuperZero reads it and ponders, "Are you some kind of experiment?"
He nods, 'yes' slowly.
"Just who runs this lab?" The vigilante passes him the writing tools. "Where is it?"
The kid writes, '69th and Grant' and gives Zero the pad back.
"Tradesville, hmmm Are you some kind of supermonkey?"
The monkey nods enthusiastically. "Uhn huh."
He puts his hand behind himself, pulls his tail out of his pants and smiles wide. The hero's eye widens and jaw drops open.
"What am I going to do with you?"
Zero stands walks over to the wall and pulls a dark blue windbreaker off a hook. "Wait for me awhile. I'll be back."
The crusader exits and walks down to the warehouse
stairs. After closing the door to the space Alma pulls the mask off at the staircase bottom.

"The creature now knows where SuperZero's hideout is. I can't take him to Social Services..." Alma opens the door and proceeds into the sunny morning as she talks to herself quietly. "He's very athletic. I had a hard time catching him. If I throw back on the streets he'll have to steal to survive. I've compromised my alter ego's alter identity yet can't fix the situation by abandoning this semi blameless creature. Hmmm. What to do? What to do?" SuperZero's alter ego walks quickly down the sidewalk.

Alma walks down the street and into Dr Fang's Herbal Elixir Shop

The doctor, dressed in a white lab coat, grinds dried roots into powder in a porcelain dish with a ceramic utensil and looks up when the bell against the top edge of the door rings. He smiles kindly at his student.

"Hello Master."
"Hello Alma."
"I have a slight problem sir." Dr. Fang ponders for a brief moment before he says, "Go on."

"Well, I caught this sneak thief yesterday who turned out to be a super monkey, an escaped experiment from a lab. I took him to the new place and he now knows the secret abode of Zero. I could move, I guess, but what would I do with the monkey?"

The Doctor twists the bottom of his Fu Manchu goatee as he thinks. And finally says, "I could mix up an amnesia inducing potion, but..."

"What would he do, except return to a life of petty theft?"

"Ah yes. You could take him to the authorities at the zoo, or the university."

"But would they treat him good?" Alma asks.

"Do you trust this monkey?"
Alma thinks. "As far as I can throw him," she answers.

"It's not an easy call. If you could keep your identity secret for a couple of days, keep him for a short time. Maybe a better answer will present itself. If not you'll have to take him by the university, I expect."

"I think you're right. Thank you Master."

Dr. Fang continues grinding roots. "Alma, can you make deliveries to Mrs. Ortiz and Mr. Brown?"

"Yes sir."

"Just collect and pay me whenever you next visit. I know you're busy."

"Ok, Dr. Fang. See you soon." Alma smiles and heads out the door.

"Be careful, Tadpole"

"I will." She goes.

Alma pulls the SuperZero ski mask on before entering the hideout. Monkeyboy looks up and puts the Iliad down. Zero hands him a burrito wrapped in foil.

"You can stay here, or leave if you like. I'd rather you stay. I hope we can figure out a way for you to support yourself without stealing. I've got to go to work. When I return, I'll bring dinner."

The hero gets up and leaves again. The monkey waits a minute and sneaks quietly after her, taking the burrito.

He watches from the staircase as Alma pulls the black ski mask off and puts her blue stocking cap on and then exits. The mutant follows her out onto the street.

At a big white cement brick flower wholesale store the monkey watches Alma enter and then exit with a full bucket of flowers.

At the same downtown intersection as the day before he watches Alma sell flowers. After a little while Alma's new ward leaves.
As the sky darkens Alma enters the warehouse with a bag of groceries.

By the time she enters the apartment Zero wears the ski mask again. Monkey looks up. The hero pulls out cheese, lettuce, a loaf of wheat bread a bag of flaming hot taco chips and a jar of salsa from the grocery bag and proceeds to make sandwiches. The mutant joins her and they both eat and share a big bottle of orange juice to wash it down.

"I know it must be boring for you, but I'll try to find something better for you to do soon."

The creature finds the pad and pen and writes and then hands it to the vigilante.

Zero reads, 'Thanx' written on the pad.

"No probelmo." The hero stands and puts on the rest of the costume.

"I've got to go again. Sorry. Please stay."

Monkeyboy writes in the pad again and hands it to his guardian.

'Good book,' it says.

"I'm glad you like it. See you later, I hope."

The hero exits. The youngster picks up the book. A minute later after SuperZero leaves monkeyboy follows stealthily.

A red sedan sits parked on the dark street in which a hoodlum and a young woman in a long coat sit

"So I'll get out here and when Guermillo snatches your purse, make sure that you scream for help real loud. Got it?" he asks.

"It aint hard. I think I'll manage."

"Just make sure you yell real loud. We need to make sure that this guy hears."

"Ok. Got it." The woman gets out and walks down into shadowy street.

The car drives off.

Up on the roof SuperZero watches from the shadows. The monkeyboy watches the hero holding onto the top
of the street lamp hiding behind the light housing.

The young woman stroll down the street. A street thug jogs up silently behind her, snatches her purse from her and rushes away.

"Give me my purse back! Stop! Somebody HELP!!"

Zero speeds to the side of the rooftop from where the yells come from just in time to see the purse snatcher running away. The vigilante leaps over the edge of the building, grabs a gutter pipe and slides down to the street. SuperZero runs silent and fast after the thief.

The mutant watches as he climbs languidly down the light pole down to the street to follow the action.

When SuperZero catches up to the thug 2 more jump out of a yellow compact, 3 others emerge from the shadows of the alley or from between the buildings as the 1st gangster gets out of the red car. The 7 hoodlums circle the masked vigilante and all step closer together.

In the empty eye socket Zero's silver goggles, which enhances the light coming in, wire to the skull bone, and senses the motion from the tightening ring of villains.

Zero revolves to look the adversaries in their eyes.

"Guess I'm trapped."

"We just gotta let you know that these streets belong to us." The hood from the red car declares.

2 of the pack rush in from the front and 1 from the back. Zero feels a tingle against bone from the wired eye socket triggered by the moving gangbanger in on the blind side.

The 1st attacks and the hero grabs the arm he strikes with and pulls him off balance with the force of the blow with the metal plier/claw hand and hits the thug with the ball of the palm in his chin.

Another grabs the hero from behind but Zero takes his arm and flips him on the sidewalk cement. All the others ratpack the vigilante.

The hero pulls a tazer from a pocket and zaps 2 of the thugs before the others restrain the arm. Zero grapples and
struggles to get free from the grip of the 5 opponents but begins to lose strength.

One of the gangbangers pulls a pistol out of his pants. Another hoodlum exclaims, "Put the piece away! El Jefe said 'No guns.'"

One of the thugs cracks SuperZero in the bridge of the nose with a pair of brass knuckles. The crusader falls back onto the pavement with a thud and almost chokes on the tang of blood. Another gang banger stomps on Zero's forearm with a crunch right where it joins the stump.

The crimefighter rises against the gang with a mangled limb though gripped and restrained, swinging and throwing punches while dodging blows and struggling against their holds. Again Zero's resistance wanes as the hero's legs begin to buckle

"AAIIIEEEEIU!" the monkey screams as he leaps thru the air.

The super animal boy claws, bites and swipes at Zero's attackers. As the villains fight the crazed little demon the hero breaks free of their clutches. 3 try to pin Zero again as the other 2 try to catch the monkey. The gang can do neither.

Zero and the adopted mutant animal flee toward the building that the hero came down from. The vigilante climbs up the drainpipe as the monkey jumps on to ride piggyback.

On the roof top Zero's charge jumps off and they both run, rushing thru the shadows and jumping from one roof top to another.

The confused pack looks up at the roof but lose sight of the duo.

"What happened?" One of the criminals asks rhetorically.

"No se. It was the monster again, I think."

Crouching in the shadows SuperZero and the monkey look down at the street but can only see the gang faraway.

"Thanks pal You got me out of a tight spot."

The monkey smiles. The crusader smiles back.

"C'mon chango."
"'nkay."
Zero stands and nods at the monkey boy. "You Ok?"
He nods 'yes', then nods toward Zero and points to his own nose and forearm.
Zero shakes off the events of a few minutes ago and feels the throb of a cracked nose. "Wait a sec."
The vigilante grabs the nose feeling the heartbeat throb of pain and shoves the nose back into place with a quick explosion of agony.
Zero bites back a scream and waits a moment to return back to normal. The hero takes a deep breath and extends a hand to the monkey again.
The monkey nods yes and takes SuperZero's hand, who pulls him up to to ride piggyback. The duo proceeds away across another rooftop into the night.

3

In the morning Alma walks down the street toward the Elixir Shop and rings the bell opening the door as she enters.
Inside Doctor Fang sits on a high stool, still as a statue, in the lotus position. Alma smells cones of incense burn.
"Hello Tadpole. I didn't expect to see you today."
Alma puts the money from yesterday's deliveries on the counter. Dr. Fang pushes a few dollars back.
Alma puts her palm up, "They tipped me, Master That's ok." She leaves the money on the counter.
"Take it anyway. Your nose is all swollen! Tough night?"
"It'll heal."
"Tough guy, huh? Anything else hurt?"
Alma holds out her forearm with the black gloved prosthetic hand. It looks bent.
Fang motions for her to come closer. "Let's see."
Alma steps forward and puts her fake black gloved arm on the counter. Fang hops off his seat and takes Alma's
forearm gently and bends closer to inspect it. He touches the stump where it's been joined with the attachment socket. He feels the limb with long skillful fingers for a long moment as he closes his eyes in deep contemplation.

"The pins are damaged. The bone is fine. I need but insert new pins without any invasive surgery whatsoever. Come back to the workshop." The Doctor sneaks the cash off of the counter and slips it secretly into Alma's windbreaker pocket.

Alma follows the sage back into the workshop. She pulls her sleeve back and places her arm on a clean work table underneath a large magnifying glass. Fang extracts the old mangled pins and inserts new ones concentrating absolutely on the procedure, though it takes him but a few moments.

"It's just a bit swollen. How does it feel?" Fang asks. Alma holds it up. "This attachment is just the cosmetic one, but it feels fine."

Dr. Fang produces the repaired plier/claw Alma left before, "Try it."

Alma pops her fake arm off and snaps the fixed tool on. She opens and closes the plier fingers holding the utensil out for both of them to inspect.

"It works fine, Master. Thank you."
"De nada. What happened?"
"Well, I think I've provoked the attention of a criminal network with the 1st incident in which my claw got shot. They laid a trap for me and probably would have had me but for the aid of my little monkey friend. He had followed me secretly and attacked right when I thought I was done for. But he gave me the edge I needed to turn the tide and then we escaped. I'll say this for my new amigo. He's got spunk."

Dr. Fang thinks and says, "I see."
"My situation gets risky if an organized crime gang knows of my alter ego."
"Indeed. And what of your new friend?"

Alma reflects, "Well Master, I thought that perhaps you would let him let him take over some of my old duties,
chores and deliveries so he could support himself. If you like him maybe you could teach him some moves, routines."

Dr. Fang thinks and says, "Ok...but Alma, lay low for awhile. Learn more of this gang. Watch, listen and investigate. Find another part of the neighborhood to watch for now."

"Ok sir." Alma lifts her arm and works the metal claw hand. "Thanks for the repair job. Shall I bring in the chango to meet you tomorrow?"

Fang nods slightly. "Yes that would be fine"
Alma quickly changes prosthetic arm attachments and puts the plier/claw in her bag, "I'll see you soon Master. Have a nice day."

"You too. Be careful Tadpole."
Alma leaves Dr. Fang's Herbal Elixir Shop back out into the daylight.

Ms. Azul walks down the street of her neighborhood looking at everything thru her sunglasses She surveys the apartments and shops, mostly 19th century brick behind small yards fenced by black wrought iron. She looks at the cars and people and notices graffiti on the alley walls and light poles.

'DSP' deface the bricks, spray painted a few times on a wall in a psycho scrawl multiple times in different sizes.
Continuing down the street Alma notices the same initials on phone booths, newspaper machines and bus stops. She stops and looks at the initials written in black marker on an aluminum pole.

"Of course, Dinero Sucio Pandillo. They've marked SuperZero Enemy Number One," Alma tells herself quietly.
She goes on down the street back toward the hideout.

Walking up the stairs inside the warehouse, Alma stops to think for a few seconds, 'No need to reveal my secret identity to the chango just yet. I'll wait to see what Master Fang says about him.'
She puts the ski mask of SuperZero on and pulls it down before entering the space. Monkeyboy wakes on the couch and looks up at the hero.
"Do you want to learn some fight moves?"
The monkey nods excitedly.
"Let's go then."
The duo walks out the door.

Zero and el chango walk into the Herbal Elixir Shop.
The vigilante walks out alone after a couple of minutes, continues a half a block and then pulls the hood down and mask off. Alma then strolls down the street.
In the Elixir Shop basement Dr. Fang demonstrates a routine of blocks kicks and punches. The monkey performs the same rigamaroll.
Fang nods, "Good, now add these moves."
The Master begins the routine again.

Later, upstairs in the shop Dr. Fang and el chango drink tea as incense burns. SuperZero enters.
"How did our friend do, Master?"
"Monkeyboy shows promise," the sage answers.
"Good. Monkey, I have business. Meet me at the warehouse later."
"I have deliveries. I suppose el chango can do them."
"That'd be good," the vigilante approves. "I'll see you both later then. Thank you, Doctor."
"My pleasure."
Zero takes leave and Fang gets the bags ready for the monkey to deliver.

Later in the afternoon, Alma stands at her spot on the sidewalk downtown selling flowers.
El chango comes scampering down the pavement, stops in front of her, smiles and waves.
Alma's jaw drops. "You knew. You followed me yesterday, didn't you?"
The monkey nods in agreement.
"I guess if you know, you know." Alma sits.
He sits next to her. The flower girl pulls a $5 and 2
singles from her pocket and gives it to her charge.

"Here, go to the store down the block and get us some lunch. Whatever, but something healthy."

The sidekick takes the money and goes off. Alma grabs the thermos from her bag, opens it and drinks the last of her coffee.

'I guess i've got myself a partner,' Alma thinks to herself.

SuperZero's alter ego stares past traffic into her thoughts. Presently the monkey brings back chips, candy bars, bananas and a bottle of apple juice. They start eating without saying anything.

"You passed your 1st test today with Master Fang. He'll teach you what you need to know to be SuperZero's partner."

The monkeyboy eats, barely acknowledging what Alma says.

For the rest of the day Alma sells flowers and the monkey hangs out as the clock turns slowly turns toward 6:30, quitting time.

Alma and el chango walk out of a large sporting goods store with a bag. They rush home thru the evening to the warehouse.

The duo comes in the door to the warehouse space Alma puts the bag on the table and pulls out a dark blue one piece long sleeved nylon ski suit and a black goalie mask.

"Your costume."

The monkey takes the items and looks them over.

"Tonight, we only fight if we have to. We're watching our enemies now. They know about us. We need to learn more about them. You can stay here tonight, but if you come with me, put your new suit on."

El chango starts to change as Alma walks to the bathroom to take out the black hoody on and take her blue knit cap off. She takes her sunglasses and eye patch off as she stands at the sink looking in the mirror. The young woman
stares at herself marred by her swollen broken nose and empty eye socket. She gets dizzy and grabs the sink.

"My face is trashed." She whispers.

The monkey knocks lightly once, steps past the door and sees Alma wobble. He walks over and nudges her back with the top of his head. She stands up steady and pulls on the mask of Zero. After putting on the silver goggles the hero leads the sidekick back out to the living space.

After changing shoes for boots and putting on the utility belt Zero grabs an old black down jacket from the closet and tosses it at the monkeyboy, who catches it.

"Put this on over your new uniform. We're spies tonight."

When the divergent duo has finally donned their dark attire, they exit their digs to do their work.

2 of the gangbangers who almost wasted Zero the night before sit in the red sedan on the dark street. El chango, in the down jacket and a stocking cap, walks by, noticing them clandestinely. When the mutated monkey has gone a half a block the criminals get out of the car.

"We'll take a break and drink a cerveza," says one.

The monkey hears the sound of the car door shut and sneaks a look. The gangsters walk to the Westside bar and go in as the monkey boy follows watching from almost a block away.

Alma waits in a bus stop shelter with her hoody wrapped around her waist. She wears a baseball cap with the brim pulled down low over her eyes.

The monkey hurries to meet her.

"What did you see?" She asks.

The sidekick pantomimes scribbling so she pulls the pad and pencil out and gives it to him. He writes a message and hands it to Alma.

She reads it and nods. "Let's go."

Alma follows him to the Westside bar and motions for him to wait in the doorway of a closed shop.
"Wait here I'll be back." Alma instructs.

The monkey complies as Alma goes under the lit plexiglass sign into the stucco 1 story Westside bar. Inside the bar the 2 thugs drink their beers. Alma crosses to the bar. A short chubby Latino bartender looks at her garb and then steps nonchalantly toward her.

"Orange juice, please," Alma orders.

The bartender nods and moves to get the juice. A barback in an apron comes from across the hallway and leans across the bar to say something to the bartender, who then walks to the gangsters. Alma leans in closer almost imperceptibly.

"El Jefe wants the news," the bartender tells them before getting the drink for Alma.

The thugs take their beers and walk down the hall as Alma pays for the drinks quick.

"Gracias," she tells the bartender and makes for the door.

"Buenos noches!" The bartender calls after her before she walks out.

Alma walks fast to the alley without breaking stride, pulls the hoody from around her waist, grabs the ski mask and puts them both on.

Zero slinks in the back doorway of the bar and tries to open the locked door but can't. The Superspook stays invisible in the dark shadows creeping against the wall to a window and pulls up from the sill to get a look see.

SuperZero watches the big bald boss from behind at his desk as his pawns stand facing him.

"Nothing's goin' down, Jefe, no sign of the Fantasmo o el Demonito," one gangster reports.

"Probably the fool is taking a timeout realizing he's pissing off the wrong clica. I bet he shows himself after another night," the sharp dressed crime boss concludes. "Keep an eye out."

"Check," says the other.

The hoodlums take their beers and go. The giant man
stands and leans, arms wide on the desk.

"This do-gooder won't come into our country and push El Dinero Sucio Pandillo around. Not if El Sanguijuelo has something to say."

Zero slinks back away from the window and to the street, pulling the ski mask off and putting the hat on. Alma then wraps the hoody around her waist.

Alma returns to the doorway where the monkey waits. "Good job tonight, muchacho. We've learned a lot."

In the late morning upstairs in the warehouse hideout Alma and the monkey wake. After they wash and break their fast with nutrition bars, apples and coffee, they both throw the trash away and straighten up.

"You report to Dr. Fang's Elixir Shop for your combat lessons and duties. I'll go sell flowers," Alma instructs.

The monkeyboy grabs the pad and pen to write a message. Alma takes it and reads when he finishes.

'What about the bad guys?' it says.

Alma thinks, "We need to be careful. It is a whole network of villains we're up against. For now our crime busting needs to protect the weakest victims and most obvious transgressions where the DSP is concerned, until we've planned an extremely effective attack."

El chango nods in agreement.

"Meet me downtown at the corner when I get done and we'll go get more furniture for our hideout," Alma tells him.

The duo puts on their citizen jackets and walk out to meet the day.

In the backroom of the Westside bar as the sun sinks below the mountains, El Sanguijuelo sits behind the desk in a dark business shirt with his sleeves rolled up. A knock sounds at the door.

"Come in." el Jefe says.

A slim yet solid vato with a thin moustache and slick
backed hair in a white business shirt and slacks enters and stands across the desk.

"Hola, boss," he says.

"Sit, Brazo."

The vato grabs a wooden chair and sits. He looks into the lenses of El Sanguijuelo's glasses and sees his reflection. The huge bald man holds his finger against his nose.

"We need a square."

Brazo waits a few moments before answering, "To incorporate?"

"Now that the Dynacorp researcher have developed the secret formula and we have the can prototypes, yes, we need a legitimate organization to put a down payment on a plant, get a bank account, get square money invested and begin manufacturing, advertising and distribution," the Boss spells out in a quiet baritone.

"I think you need 5 squares to incorporate and do all the rest."

El Sanguijuelo makes a face and shakes his massive head.

"Just use the research team," Brazo suggests.

"Idea bueno! That's why you're my right arm."

"We're going to need some clean money. Again, that means squares. The more DSP funds we use, the bigger chance we take of getting cracked, if the gang can even afford it."

"If we have a party when we incorporate we can introduce the hypno power drink and bend more squares to our will. We can even invite people from the city government."

"If we could get the Mayor and Police Chief addicted, we'd have boo-ya protection."

"They're both up for reelection." Brazo reminds El Jefe.

"The Dinero Sucio Pandillo could afford to contribute to their campaigns through the corporation, once we start it."

"That would get them to attend the incorporation party."

"What should we call the company?"
Brazo's eyeballs look up as his brain storms. "Let's call the corporation and the drink, Juice."

"El Sanguijuelo smiles a little and nods. "Esta bueno."
Brazo nods too. The big man pulls a chrome cigarette case from his suit jacket, draped over the back of his chair. He pulls out 2 dark brown cigarettes, passes Brazo Derecho one and lights them.

"Let's smoke. We'll dominate the world." El Sanguijuelo declares.

The criminals smoke their cigarettes.

Outside of a small new moped lot Alma rides a black moped away with the monkey behind her on the seat in the early evening.

A little later in the warehouse hideout Alma parks the new bike and they get off.

"Maybe the new ride costs more than I can afford, but SuperZero we need to be mobile now."

The duo goes in A bit later they come out in their crimefighting disguises. They get on the scooter and ride away.

Zero and Chango ride down an almost deserted dark back street.

"I want to check on the lab you escaped from. Experimenting to evolve monkeys doesn't seem right somehow."

A 3 story cinderblock building about a block big sits on an asphalt lot surrounded by an 8 foot barbed wire fence. Over the locked gate a white sign hangs which says 'DynaCorp' in 2 foot black and red letters.

Zero parks down the block and across the road in the shadows. The vigilante and goalie masked monkey creep as close in the shadows as they can without stepping out of the dark.

They both watch the building. A uniformed guard sits
in a booth at the gate and a couple of other sentries patrol around the building.

Hero turns to partner, "I'm going over the fence. I'll understand if you don't want to come with. Why don't you just stay here?"

The crimefighter creeps toward the fence pulling a pair of wirecutters from the toolbelt. When Zero gets there the sidekick follows. The hero scopes the area around the fence far from the gate and then starts cutting the chainlink. The sidekick catches up. SuperZero looks down at him as he pushes thru the cut fence.

"Ok, let's go!" The vigilante whispers and follows.

The team waits for a security guard to finish surveying the perimeter. Next they cross the asphalt lot following the shadows of trucks for cover and get to the building.

The crusaders look in a window. The monkey jumps to the sill and pulls himself up for a peek. All they see is a sterile looking white wall. A researcher in a lab coat goes into a door and another comes out holding a clipboard.

Footsteps sound around the corner of the building. The sleuths retreat quickly for the shadows of the trucks before a guard patrols under the window.

"If we try to get in the window, it'll likely trip an alarm. Maybe we can find an HVAC vent." Zero looks at the building wall and sees a grate about 14 feet up. "There."

When the guard goes around the corner they sneak to the wall again.

SuperZero pulls the hook and cable out from around the waist and swings the tool and hooks it into the vent grate, penetrates the metal, pulls the cover off and catches it before it falls to the blacktop.

El chango jumps on the hero's back after grabbing the grate off of the ground. Zero swings the hook again to catch it in the vent and then climbs up the cable into the open duct to the inside of the building.

The sidekick lays the grate flat as the hero unhooks the tool and pulls the cable up before the guard makes another
The metal descends sharply after 40 feet or so. Soon they come to a grate at the bottom and look thru it. The room can only be partly
seen.

Zero uses the claw to force a wedge between the grate and the vent and pushes the rift wider till the prowler rips off the cover, catches it and sets it down in the vent.

Hero and sidekick stick their heads down into the barely lit room. When sure nobody occupies it they drop adroitly to the floor.

SuperZero surveys the clean sterile room which has a work table set up with scales, microscopes, test tubes and specimen jars in the center and desks and a file cabinet on the side.

The sleuth pulls a penknife from the pocket and opens the file cabinet, quickly flipping thru, file after file, drawer after drawer. The monkey watches his mentor for a few minutes but then turns to explore the rest of the room.

Zero pulls some papers from a drawer and pockets them. The crusaders then search independently of each other. The vigilante uses the light on the backend of the penknife to look over shelves and finds specimen jars filled with liquid and various insects and small mammals in progressive degrees of evolution.

SuperZero looks down to see the sidekick has climbed up a shelf and stares into a jar that holds a dead baby monkey in formaldehyde. The hero puts a hand on the shoulder of the sidekick.

"Let's go chango. Somos finito."

Zero pockets a small jar with a monkey paw in it.

The alarm shrieks loud enough to break ear drums suddenly and lights come on simultaneously. The monkey leaps up into the vent and the hero grabs the vent edge and pulls it up inside.

3 guards rush into the room and look around. One guard looks up and sees the vent cover gone.
He whips out a walky talky. "The thieves are in the HVAC system. Notify the perimeter guards."

The duo crawls fast down the aluminum tunnel toward the exit. When they get to it they just drop to the asphalt and run for the fence. 2 guards, already heading for the vent, chase. "Got 'em!" one calls.

3 more guards rush around the corner of the building. They join the 1st 2 and all converge to chase the masked intruders.

"STOP!" a guard orders.

Zero and the monkey keep running.

The guard pulls out a .38 and fires a warning shot.

Hero and supermonkey run faster making lateral moves to evade the shots.

The guard shoots at the duo and bullets ricochet close off their heels off the pavement.

As they both fall prone to crawl a shot hits el chango in the shoulder.

"AIEEEEOOWII!"

Zero pulls the Uzi machine gun attachment from the backpack, pops the plier/claw off of forearms, puts it away and snaps the automatic firearm on in less than 2 seconds. The avenger blasts like 10 rounds above the heads of their pursuers, who hug the ground quick.

SuperZero grabs the wounded monkey up, sprints for the fence and jumps. Jumbo springs pop out of the bottom of the crusaders boots shooting Zero over the fence and clear across the street.

The hero hits the ground cradling the monkey, rolls, pops up and runs thru the shadows as the supermonkey pulls himself up to ride piggyback despite his wound.

The guards recover and search the terrain over the fence with flashlights. As the duo coast down the road for almost a block. Zero kick starts the bike and they ride away.
It snows lightly the next day as Alma and the monkey go into the Elixir Shop.

Inside Dr. Fang sits on the tall stool behind the counter in the lotus position as incense burns.

"Good day, Master. Our pupil was wounded last night," Alma relates.

"What happened?"

"He was shot."

"Shot? Why did you not bring him sooner, or take him to the hospital?" Dr. Fang asks.

"I think the bullet passed because monkey boy is so skinny. But not only that, the wound healed itself by the time we got home."

"Strange."

"Our little friend is a SuperMonkey."

"How did he get shot?"

"We went fact finding at the lab he escaped from and the guards shot at us as we made our getaway," Alma explains.

"Tadpole, were you taking unnecessary risks?"

"Risks are in a crimefighter's job description, Master."

"True, true," Dr. Fang grudgingly agrees

"What can you make of this specimen and files we pinched?" Alma shows the jar with the monkey paw in formaldehyde and the files.

Dr. Fang looks at the jar and the papers for a couple of moments. "Interesting." The Master puts the evidence down.

"All of this bears closer inspection."

He stands, walks to a cabinet and pulls out a folded black bundle the size of a small pillow. "You need this, a Kevlar vest."

Fang hands it to Alma.

"Thank you."

"You need it Tadpole. Ill get one for Monkey too."

Monkeyboy screeches happily and makes the AOK sign.

I'd better get to work sir. I'll see you later at the corner, Monkey."
"Take care, Alma."
Alma bow slightly and exits.

When the sun's almost gone down the monkey meets
Alma downtown as she finishes selling flowers.
"Let's go get groceries, go home and figure out our
crimefighting itinerary for tonight."
The pair takes off down the street for the grocery
store.

Alma and the monkeyboy arrive back in the hideout
with a bag of groceries. Monkey takes off his hoody and then
a Kevlar vest."
Alma reaches toward him. "Let's see."
He passes it toward her. She places it on the table and
nods.

They unpack the groceries to prepare a dinner of
whole wheat, cheese, lettuce sandwiches, chips, apples and
orange juice. They eat, clean up and the monkey sits on the
couch.

Alma paces, thinking out loud, "Last night I wanted to
see just what kind of a business would mutate monkeys into
people and what else they might be up to. I've known about the
Dinero Sucio Pandillo since I was a kid. But now they're aware
of us too. Both of these organizations are too big and
dangerous for us to take on now. We'll know more about
DynaCorp tomorrow. We know about the DSP, but I want to
know more tonight. We'll just watch around downtown and
help anyone who needs it. Tomorrow we'll figure out if we can
screw up the activities of either DynaCorp or the Dirty Money
Gang."

Alma makes a thermos full of instant coffee with hot
tap water. Both the young woman and monkey change to their
crusader disguises and go out the door, down the stairs and out
of the warehouse. Then they get onto the moped and ride into
the night.

Later that night on a boulevard just out of downtown
moderate traffic drives by a superette as occasional pedestrians go by.

A young short haired man with a bandanna wrapped around his face bursts out the doorway of the store shoving a handful of cash in his pocket. He then races away.

"Stop!" a female Asian clerk shouts running from inside to the doorway.

The alarm wails right at that instant as superhero and monkey drop onto the pavement from the fire escape over the hotel entrance a couple of storefronts down the street.

The duo chases the robber, gaining on him. A siren screams from blocks away. SuperZero grabs the cable from around waist and throws it and the claw hook away at the thief's legs, tripping him.

Vigilante and sidekick can see the flashing lights on the police car approach fast from up ahead. SuperZero sprints up to grab the cable, turns and signals for the monkey to follow. They flee down the alley.

The cops drive up and see a shadow of Zero and monkey disappear but get out of the car more concerned with the crook.

"We don't want to talk to the cops tonight." The crusader tells apprentice as they rush thru the dark path between 2 buildings.

El chango waits an instant for SuperZero to pass, smoothly jumps piggyback and rides as crimefighter climbs a phone pole and jumps to grab the edge of a rooftop.

3 stories up the duo looks down as the cops put handcuffs on the robber and shove him into the back of a squad car. When they finish the police talk to the store clerk. After a couple of minutes she points in the direction that the vigilantes went.

"The DSP, DynaCorp and now the law all know about us," Zero concludes and pulls back from the building edge.

Superanimal and masked champion look into the starry sky. The city lights paint the under sides of the few clouds with a pale orange light.
"I wonder if Dr. Fang would understand if we gave up our calling."

The monkey glances up at Zero and nods like he thinks that the Master would understand.

"I guess you don't remember your parents, huh?"

The sidekick sits at the feet of his mentor.

"I don't remember mine. I remember my tio and tia. They died. Dr. Fang raised me."

The monkey leans his head against Zero's calf. They remain like this for a short while.

"Before we give up our fight against evil though, we can do a little more reconnaissance. I thought of a trick."

The next day Alma and the youth walk out of an electronics store as the sun shines in a blue sky.

A bit after that they both walk into Dr Fang's Herbal Elixir Shop.

A woman customer, wearing a thick long grey coat, thanks Dr. Fang as he smiles and says goodbye. She leaves with her purchase when the Master's students enter.

"Hello, sir," Alma greets the sage.

"Good day, Tadpole, Monkey." Dr. Fang sits in his usual spot. "I've analyzed the clues you brought. Very interesting."

"What's the deal?"

Dr. Fang stares hard at the incense smoke in front of his eyes. "Sparing you the details of the method of analyses, DynaCorp seem to be pursuing a program of mutating species by altering DNA structures of various insects and animals by injecting formulas which evolve the specimen in days. That's what it adds up to in layman's terms."

"What about the monkeypaw?" Alma peers at Dr. Fang as if to read for some sign in his expression.

"I did various tests of the flesh which confirm what the files you pinched told me. I'd like to do a little blood draw from our little friend here a bit later. I bet it'll only confirm
what we already know."
"The more we learn the better."
"Indeed. I want to look at Monkey's wound again." Dr. Fang takes a deep breath. "You have gained too high a profile with 2 nefarious networks. Before you strike, if you do, you must watch invisibly and silently for a weak spot."
"We will, Master. I purchased a microphone which senses sound from vibrations on glass to learn what the DSP's agenda is."
Fang pulls on his beard. "Good idea."
"I should get to work. Meet me later, monkey. See you soon, Master.
Thanks."
"Take care, Tadpole!"
The bell on the doorframe rings as Alma exits.

Right after dark falls, monkey walks thru the alley behind the Westside bar. He wears his hoody but keeps in the shadows anyway. The youth sneaks the mike on the bottom corner of the window quickly swinging up to the sill by grabbing into a gap in the cement joints between brick layers halfway up the wall. The monkey sticks the minimicrophone to the window with a small piece of transparent tape. He then sneaks back down into the alley shadows.

By the time he walks around the front of the street, thru a yard and climbs to the top of a building, SuperZero already listens to the goings on inside of El Sanguijuelo's office. The hero gives him a thumbs up holding small earphones tight to the ear paying attention to the transmission.

El Sanguijuelo sits at his desk, pale, eyes totally black and glazed in dark sockets with his suit jacket unbuttoned.
"Madre de Dios. Donde esta the help?" the boss wheezes weakly.
A knock sounds at the door.
"Come in." the big man struggles to call out loud.
The barback enters with a canvas bag that something
squirms around in. He throws the bag on the desk. The Boss opens it to look at what's inside.

"Puppies," El Sanguijuelo observes.

He grabs a small white and brown puppy and bites into it with a series of sharp white fangs. The dog yelps.

Color comes back into the large bald ghoul's face. The black of his eyes lightens and his eye sockets do too.

The barback watches the boss suck the puppy's blood, trying unsuccessfully to mask his revulsion.

The leech burrowed inside at the top of the big man's spine under the cerebral cortex sucks at blood which darkens saturated muscle flesh. The bloodworm undulates as the fluid satisfies its hunger.

El Sanguijuelo drops the dead puppy onto the desk, pulls up his suit sleeve and wipes his mouth with his shirt sleeve. He burps and grabs a 2nd puppy from the bag and repeats the process. When he finishes he drops the 2nd little dog, burps and wipe his mouth again. His eyeballs look fully white.

"Hot blood. Que bueno," the Jefe says quietly, satisfied, and puts his sunglasses back on.

On the rooftop across the alley the sleuth listens, open mouthed.

"He's a puppy vampire " Zero utters, shocked.

The barback walks out of the office with the bag of dead puppies as Brazo comes in.

"How are plans proceeding, Brazo?"

"Bueno, Jefe. We'll have dosed cans of the powerdrink soon, cases. We'll be incorporated too. I've got a lease in negotiation for our plant. Of course when we go into production we'll need business loans. I've already let the Mayor and Police Chief know that Juice wants to make generous contributions to their reelection campaigns. I'll hint that the corporation's debutante ball will sweeten their pots."

"Good, good. Has the DynaCorp research team agreed
to act as our corporate front?"
"Not just yet. I still haven't made the deal. We've gotten a lot from them already."
"Dinero talks. Carrot and tazer. If the carrot doesn't work..."
"We'll use the tazer," Brazo Derecho finishes.
El Jefe opens a bottle of tequila and pours 2 shots. He then grabs his cigarette case, pulls 2 cancer sticks and passes a shot to his lieutenant. He lights his cigarette, gives Brazo one and ignites it for him.
"The world is ours." El Sanguijuelo toasts.
"Salud."
They swallow their tequila shots and slam the glasses back onto the desk.
The monkey watches SuperZero listen to the gangsters on the headphones.
"I don't know what they're up to, but it sounds big. I'd better write it down." Zero pulls the pad and pen out to take notes.
"Somebody, the big homecheese, I think, mentioned DynaCorp. They're starting a legitimate business and buying influence with the Chief of Police and Mayor." The hero thinks out loud and looks down at the sidekick. "This is big."
They may have been joking but they mentioned taking over the world."
El chango whistles.
"We'd better talk to the Master about this ASAP."
SuperZero listens some more.
Later the spy stops, "Go pull the mike off the window, please. We don't want the DSP finding out that they've been snooped on."
The monkey climbs down and carries out his guardian's instructions. Zero follows but waits on the street in a doorway of a closed shop for the monkey to complete his mission and rendezvous.

Late that morning in the Elixir Shop Alma and her
charge lean against the counter close to Fang.

"So the DSP has begun a legitimate business, want to put the Mayor and Police Chief in their pocket and want to use DynaCorp researchers. There's a big party to inaugurate the company."

Dr Fang processes information, "Are you sure about all of this, Tadpole?"

"No, but I know what I heard. And, oh yeah, The DSP wants to dominate the world and the shotcaller killed a couple of puppies by sucking their blood."

"Nuh Unh!" Dr. Fang can't believe it.

"That's what I heard," Alma says

"The more we learn the crazier this all seems. Obviously, more must be gleaned. Monkey's blood revealed that his DNA had been successfully enhanced when he was very young, confirmed both by what a supreme specimen he is and his miraculous recuperative powers."

Monkeyboy smiles proudly.

Dr. Fang continues, "What does DynaCorp want to do with this data? Their website says that their research involves evolving super soybeans and peanuts to develop more efficient crops. What would the company do with super animals and bugs?"

Alma shrugs with a confused expression and looks down at the monkey, who apes her. They both look at Dr. Fang.

"What now, sir?"

"You've opened a can of worms, Tadpole. We've learned a lot. But not enough. We should meditate upon what we know and perhaps the dots will connect or at least you'll figure what line to explore for more info. Stay silent and invisible for the time being," Dr. Fang advises.

"Monkey and I need to work on the hideout. I'll buy a used computer today. I need to get online to investigate our leads."

"I'll buy you a new one, and pay for an internet connection."
"That would help a lot, Master. I'll consider it a loan."
"Nonsense, Alma. It's for the common good. Go to work. I'll give Monkey his lesson today between our tasks. Come back later and I'll have it for you."
"Thank you, Doctor."
"Don't mention it."
"See you later." Alma bows.
"Good day." Fang nods.
Monkey waves. Alma smiles at them both before she walks out the door.

Outside the warehouse a workman walks from the CableCom van inside with a toolbox.

That evening, Alma and el chango move a futon, metal shelving unit and computer up the stairs of the warehouse and into the hideout.
In the apartment that night the monkeyboy watches as his mentor puts the computer together on the work table.
He taps on her shoulder as she struggles with the keyboard to get the operating system running.
"Darn!" she exclaims, oblivious to the youth's tries for attention.
She clicks the mouse again and the desktop comes onscreen.
"Shazam!" Alma calls.
The monkey continues to tap on her shoulder and points at the clock.
"No street action tonight, Monkeyboy. I want to get online, plus I need a workout. It'd be good to get the shelves assembled tonight too."
The monkey nods. As Alma hooks the cable from the wall jack to the tower the youth gets tools from the worktable and starts to assemble the shelves.
Alma gets back on the keyboard and mouse to try the internet connection. When she gets it going, Alma stands and stretches.
"Time for a break."
Alma starts doing calisthenics and then some punch, block and kick routines. Monkey joins her.
When they finish Alma gets back on the computer. As she finds the DynaCorp site Chango grabs the edge of the table almost crowding her to look at the screen.
"If I click the 'Staff' menu, it says 'Research Team Members', and here are pictures and brief bios of them. Awesome"
Alma nods as she reads. th monkey looks at the screen too, fascinated.
"This looks like what the Master called 'A line to explore for more info', maybe."
Monkey nods.
They look at the site into the evening. Finally Alma closes the site and the windows.
"I need to crash," she says.
Alma rolls out the futon, undresses and crawls under the blanket. The monkey takes the couch.
"Buenos Noches, Monkey."
The crimebusters go to sleep.

Brazo Derecho walks from a long black sedan carrying 2 wooden cases into the front of the Westside bar. Inside Brazo sets the cases up on the bar and signals the bartender who comes over to him.
"Que paso?" the bartender asks.
"Put these cases in the cooler, por favor, where nobody will open them," Brazo directs.
"Por que?"
"Because I said." Brazo answers calmly.
The bartender tells the barback to put the cases away, who does. The barkeep then goes to serve a customer.
"Free samples tomorrow, to see if people like it." Brazo tells himself.

Downtown the sun shines the next day as Alma sells
flowers. A customer buys a bunch of daffodils.

A long black sedan drives up to the corner and Brazo gets out of the passenger side of the front and then grabs 2 big coolers from the back. He sets them down on the sidewalk and shuts the car door before it drives off.

Brazo picks up the coolers and approaches the edge of the park as he simultaneously steals a quick look at Alma, probably taken by her offbeat beauty.

He opens the coolers which are filled with blank silver cans on ice.

"Powerdrink, free samples!" he cries.

Alma looks over a few passers by take him up on his freebie. After a few minutes she walks over to him for her can.

"I'll try it," she says

"Here you go, miss." Brazo hands her a can and notices her black glove take it.

"Thank you."

"De nada."

Alma walks back and puts the can in the bucket with her flowers to save for later.

Brazo stops hawking free samples for a moment to watch Alma. He shrugs and goes back to work.

Alma takes a break after a little while and grabs a silver can from her flower bucket, pops the top and takes a swallow.

Immediately she wretches, spits it out and doubles over.

"Eeuuw!" Alma staggers to the curb and hurls the rest of what she drank in the gutter.

Brazo glances at her just then. He looks at another sampler, a long brown haired skater boarder, who finishes the drink with no ill effect. He sees Alma again and starts to step toward her to help but notices 1st that she recovers. After this the flower seller throws the can in her flower bucket, grabs it and walks away, visibly shaken.

"What the heck?" she mutters as she goes.
Alma enters the Elixir shop ringing the bell with the door. Dr. Fang comes from the back. His smile turns to a took of concern as he notices his protege's shaky demeanor.

"Are you ok, Tadpole?"

"Yeah. A vendor gave me a free sample of this. It made me sick." She puts the can on the counter. "I thought we should check it out."

Dr. Fang takes a jar from a shelf from which he drops a small spoonful of powder into a teacup and pours hot water in the cup from a hotpot.

"Drink this," He instructs. "It'll clean out the noxious substance."

Alma does so. "I spit up the powerdrink. Ill be ok."

Monkey comes in the front door and puts cash on the counter.

"i" he smiles at Alma

"Hola." She rubs the top of his head. "Do you think you could analyze this sample soon?" Alma asks the Doctor.

"I have a feeling about it. If you don't come back today, what's your email address?"

Alma fishes the pad and pencil from her bag and writes It down. Dr. Fang takes it.

"Thanks, Master."

"De Nada, hita. You'd better get back to work now, huh?"

"Yeah. See ya Sir. Bye Monkey"

Her partner waves. Fang and Alma bow to each other and then she leaves.

In the hideout that evening the divergent duo enters and el chango makes sandwiches while Alma gets on the computer.

When she opens Fang's email she reads it out loud,

"There's a strange substance in the beverage very similar to the evolutionary catalyst outlined in the files that you took and that I found in the monkeypaw, and that I found in our little friend's blood sample. However, if my analysis is correct, the
sample that you gave me today would devolve an individual. The agent, very similar to DynaCorp's evolution serum, is probably addictive too."

"Hmmm," Alma says quietly before sending an email back, thanking Fang.

Monkey sets a plate with a sandwich and chips by his guardian as he starts to eat. She ignores her dinner and keeps hitting the keyboard with her right fingers and clicking the mouse.

"The 1st serum was DynaCorp's. The 2nd is close. The DSP shotcaller and lieutenant talked about DynaCorp researchers. The guy giving away powerdrink samples seems like he could fit right in with the pandillo, but that's an assumption. But the fact that somebody's distributing a dangerous addictive devolving beverage and that it's presumably linked to dirty doings probably justifies us using tactics bordering on ruthless. There, got it, the DynaCorp research team. Monkey, we're going to pay them a visit."

Monkeyboy finishes his food and pantomimes eating while tugging on Alma's sleeve.

She obeys and they both wash their meal down with apple juice.

Alma then searches the telephone directory and looks up the researcher's addresses on the Internet.

The crimefighters then don their disguises and head out.

Outside of the warehouse in the gloom of night Zero and Chango jump on the moped and zoom off into the city streets.

On a gentrified city street that night the sleuth and sidekick watch the 1st floor of a 3 story condominium from up in a tree. A 30ish slight Asian man in slacks and a long grey coat comes out after a spell and walks out to the sidewalk.

After he passes the tree, the crimebusters drop from the tree like silent shadows.

Zero slinks up behind the man and karate chops him
in the back of his neck. The human shadow and monkey drag him down the alley and proceed to a passage between the buildings.

They drop him to the pavement and Zero handcuffs him to a conduit. The interrogator bends over the suspect researcher and shakes him by the jacket collar.

"Wake up sir."
"Who...who are you?" the scientist asks, opening his eyes.

"SuperZero."
"What ...what do you want?"
"Answers."
"I don't have any answers."
"I haven't asked any questions yet. I know about the evolution/devolution formula and powerdrink. I know about the DSP corporation and your role in it. What I want to know is, what is the Dinero Sucio Pandillo up to?"

The prospective snitch looks at the masked inquisitor and sidekick with a blank expression and shrugs.

"I know who you are, Dr Lee. I know where you live. You're going to tell me what I what I want to know."

Cars pass Liquid, a hip watering hole on Broadway Boulevard that night

Inside the semi busy bar Brazo sits at a table and finishes his drink. He waits a second, takes a deep breath and looks at his watch. Next he takes out his cellphone and makes a call. He puts it away when nobody answers after about 30 seconds.

Brazo Derecho looks slightly toward the ceiling for a minute then makes another call.

"Gato Malo, Brazo. Lee's late... He was supposed to meet me 15 minutes ago...Do me un favor, por favor, and run over to his place on 311 west 11th... Yeah, muchos gracias."

Brazo hangs up his cellphone, puts it back and signals the waitress for another drink.
Zero swings a washer from a piece of string slowly in front of the face of Dr. Lee. "You are getting very sleepy! Close your eyes and snooze."

The DynaCorp scientist's eyelids close groggily, open and then shut again. A dog barks a half block away and Lee's eyes open again.

SuperZero sighs and pulls the silver goggles up, revealing the eye patch beneath the mask but staring into the scientist's eyes with the good eye.

The hypnotist swings the washer in between their eyes again.

"Look, look deep into my eye," Zero commands.
Lee stares into the Hero's eye, mesmerized.
"Again, Doctor, what is the DSP up to forming a corporation and with the powerdrink?" the crusader asks.
"I...don't... know exactly?"
"What do you think they're up to?"
"They...want...to make...zombies with...Juice...the drink."
"Zombies?"
"Lots of...zombies...to...do their will," Lee reveals.
"What else do you know?"
"Nothing."
"What about DynaCorp? What about evolving animals?"

The scientist shakes his head coming out of the trance.
"What about DynaCorp evolving monkeys?"
SuperZero demands, pulling her goggles down.
"I don't know anything?" Lee protests loudly.
"You know!"
"I DON'T!"
The interrogator whips out a tazer and zaps Lee, who Jerks spastically.
"OK! They are! I don't know why. We just ARE!"
"What else?" Zero hisses. "Tell me something I don't already know."
"They evolved convicts, humans. I don't know why. It
stopped when one escaped."
"What?" Zero asks.
"What I said. I've already told you way too much!"
"Don't worry I won't snitch that you snitched.
Anything else?"
"I don't know anything more," Dr. Lee mutters.
"Ok." The masked crusader unlocks the handcuffs.
Lee stands up shakily as Zero and the monkey bolt toward the street.

The crimefighters slink out between the condos right as a long blue classic car with 3 gangsters riding in it drives by. The criminal in the passenger seat notices the duo and points.

"Mira! Los Fantasmos!" the thug yells.
The car screeches to a stop as the 3 pile out, guns drawn.

Hero and sidekick sprint for the porch of a condo and start up the gutter drainpipe.
The bad guys follow shooting. Bullets ping off of the bricks. SuperZero makes it up right as her monkey friend, right behind, gets hit in the chest. It knocks el chango down to the ground.

"I hit El Demonito," says one of the hoods.
Zero drops off the roof, picks up the little demon, who leaps up and climbs the pipe. The hero follows in a flash.
The gangsters shoot, missing, almost shocked by the almost suicidal bravery of the hero and the resurrection of the little demon. The guerillas escape across the top of the building.

2 of the shooters grab the pipe and start to climb clumsily as the 3 follow them up. It breaks and all crash in a 12 limbed, 3 headed human ball.

Having sprinted across the roof, Zero and El Demonito broad jump across an alley to another roof. The hero uses the cable and hook for both to swing down into the alley shadows.

"Demonito!" Zero looks at the Supermonkey.
El chango points to himself wearing a mischievous smile.

"Thank God for Kevlar," Zero declares.

Hero and sidekick sneak down the alley and into the city at night.

5

El Sanguijuelo sits at his desk leaning the bridge of his nose against his steepled fingers when a knock sound at the door.

"Enter." The boss says.

Brazo walks in. "Los muchachos saw El Fantasmo and El Demonito by Lee's apartment. He met me late for an appointment. He seemed nervous."

"What do you think?"

"They might have got to him."

"Do you think he talked?"

"You know as well as I do that it's best to assume that he did," El Brazo concludes.

"Put out an APB on these freaks."

"We already did."

"Put a price on their heads."

Brazo nods and waits a bit. "That pretty much goes without saying. Can I get one of those fancy cigarettes, Jefe, por favor."

El Sanguijuelo nods slightly, preoccupied. Then he gets Brazo a smoke from the case in his coat pocket. The lieutenant lights it and takes a drag.

"Gracias Chief."

"De nada."

Brazo turns and walks out the door with the lit stick on his lip.

SuperZero pulls the scooter off the road with Demonito riding behind and parks it a block away from the warehouse in a dark alley. They get off and go into the living
Zero and the monkeyboy come into the hideout. The hero takes off the hoody and gets on the computer immediately without taking the ski mask off.

Demonito takes his goalie mask and changes from his disguise to jeans, t-shirt and grey hooded sweat shirt. Pulling the goggles off, the sleuth works the keyboard and mouse, getting on line, but can't gets caught in a maze of screens on the Department of Corrections site.
"Damn! I knew it. I can't get to the good part. Not even a password box." Alma pulls her ski mask off and sighs. Her sidekick watches as Alma calls up a search engine and type a word in.
"Let's see what happen when I look for 'Juice'...Just like I guessed. There's like a billion sites."
Zero's alter persona leans back. "Tomorrow I'm going on a mission. I don't know how to hack into the DOC system. We need to know more and it's the strongest lead we've got."
Alma gets up and stretches after shutting the system down. Then she turns to the monkeyboy and rubs his head.
"I'm tired, Demonito. Let's catch some Z's."

The sun peeks thru the clouds late the next morning Alma and Demonito stroll tentatively down the sidewalk across the street.
The supermonkey's guardian gives him a few dollars. "Here 'Nito. Go buy something to eat. I'm going to sneak in the front door and 2's a crowd."
He rolls his eyes, walks off slowly and turns to look at her keep an eye on him. 'Nito walks away further.
Alma crosses the street and goes into the front door of the Police Station. The sidekick formerly known as Monkey follows Alma when she almost gets thru the front door.
In the Police Station one female cop in a blue uniform does paperwork behind the counter oblivious to the middle aged man imploring her to move faster.
A short line of people stand behind him and 6 or 7 others sit on benches facing the counter of a high ceilinged classic/modern waiting area.
Alma strolls inconspicuously in and sits in the 2nd row.
Demonito slips in too but stays in the back of the room. He wears his hood down. Nobody notices his not quite human face as he keeps it lowered to the ground.
Alma cases the woman cop as another citizen petitions the implacable officer. Alma walks toward the restroom, unwatched, but passes it and tries a door with a 'Keep Out' sign at the end of the halt before she quickly picks the lock.
Demonito has followed and watches from the end of the waiting room then slips to the hallway.
He reaches the hall just as the door almost shuts and gets the nails of his monkeypaw into the doorway with a fraction of a second to spare and thus penetrates the restricted area behind his mentor.
Alma, in the hall, sneaks a look in the windows of a couple of office doors. After seeing people inside she pulls back from each.
She creeps into the janitors closet. "I'll try at lunch," Alma whispers to herself.
The Supermonkey jumps into a trashcan to hide. He peeks over the edge every few seconds.
In the closet Alma listens at the door. Later, a uniformed male and female cop comes out of the offices.
"What do you want for lunch?" asks the bull.
"Let's get a sub," the lady officer suggests.
They both proceed down the hail in the other direction.
Alma comes out and creeps into the office. She sits at a desk and starts working the PC. The main page of the Police Department site has been left open, nullifying the need to enter a password.
Demonito crawls out of the wastecan and follows
Alma to the office. He looks in the window and scuffles back to jump in the can again.

In the office on the computer Alma clicks open icons opening screens and finds files about DynaCorp and a screen and icon that says 'Project Uberman'. She clicks on the icon but a window that asks her to enter a password pops on.

"Drat!" Alma mutters with a sigh of disappointment "Maybe I can tap into my nascent psychic abilities."

Alma assumes the lotus position in the office chair and closes her eyes.

"9 Mississippi 8 Mississippi 7 Mississippi...," she whispers.

In a short while she becomes silent, going into a trance. After 3 seconds her face lights up like a Christmas tree.

"DONUT!" Alma utters the password.

Alma hurriedly types the password and gains access to the file. She explores screens and opens more files till she stops on one of particular interest.

"They were evolving humans with the serum in Duckberg State Prison. One of the convict/experiments escaped." She clicks open a screen with a mugshot. "Fabian Mondragon, sentenced to 73 years for Manslaughter, Distribution of a Controlled Substance, Kidnapping and Aggravated Robbery. He looks familiar."

The sound of the door opening prompts Alma to push the escape button, grab the ski mask from her backpack and put it on in a flash before she races around the 2 surprised cops for the door.

Miss Policewoman pulls out the remote cop radio from her belt. "A masked intruder just ran into the hall from 1 C 25. Schmidt and Rollins in pursuit now. 10- 4."

Rollins, the female, runs out after Schmidt, chasing Zero down the hall. The race speeds away from Monkeyboy in the wastecan but he jumps out to follow the action like a rocket.

Zero leads the police around the corner, stops right
around the edge on a dime and sticks a leg out. Schmidt trips over the intruders shin. Zero bolts again. Rollins stops to avoid stomping on her partner but then carefully steps over him, and then runs after the masked prowler again.

Another tall stocky cop with a gray crewcut and Hitler mustache comes around the corner that the hero runs towards. Schmidt gets up again and rejoins the foxhunt.

Zero skids to a stop and looks both ways.

"Stop, in the name of the law!" the big Policeman orders.

The masked intruder holds arms out and lowers head in a gesture of surrender and takes a step toward the officer. "I give up." Zero, as usual, uses the Tibetan baritone voice control technique.

The cop relaxes a bit and SuperZero kicks the tazer out of his hand.

Zero tries to run around him but he grabs a thigh as the hero passes. The intruder swings back around quick, kicks the cop in the stomach and squirms out of his clutches but the other officers tackle their quarry.

Demonito watches the tangle and notices a fire alarm on the wall. He leaps toward it and pulls. Instantly a deafening mechanical wail blasts and sprinklers spurt out water.

SuperZero hits Rollins in the bridge of the nose, who loosens her grasp enough for the vigilante to break free, to run back the way all 3 came.

As Zero approaches the door she came in at 1st she grabs a wastecan and throws it in Schmidt's, the frontrunners, way. He falls over it and Rollins and the big cop pile over him and the can.

SuperZero joins the 40 or 50 citizens and Police rushing out of the lobby to the street as the fire alarm keeps wailing. After the cops get up to chase Zero the monkeyboy actually sneaks under the legs of the big cop, as he gets up, unnoticed. He makes the outer hall before the door closes and
joins the crowd evacuating the building.
   Alma pulls the mask of Zero off after she slips away from the crowd in front of the station. She walks back to where she left her sidekick.
   Demonito catches up with her and holds out the $3. "You pulled the fire alarm, didn't you?"
   'Nito nods 'yes'.
   "I don't know whether to be mad at you for disobeying me, or what, but thanks."
   The monkey demon shrugs and smiles sheepishly as if to say, 'It was nothing.'
   Alma and the sidekick remember their situation and bounce quick.

   An old Mexican man waves goodbye to Dr. Fang behind the counter when Alma and 'Nito enter the Herbal Elixir Shop. The man exits with his purchase in a white paper bag.
   "Come again. Thanks," Dr. Fang calls out before the door closes.
   "Good day, Master," Alma greets Fang.
   "Good day. I worried when Monkey didn't come to work on time."
   "We call him Demonito now."
   "Why?"
   "He likes it," Alma explains.
   Fang stares intensely at the monkey for a moment.
   Alma notices the look. "The thugs chasing us named him that."
   "What have you 2 been up to?"
   "We interrogated a Dr. Lee, of DynaCorp. He told us that the DSP wants to make a zombie army with the power beverage and also that the corporation did evolution experiments on human convicts. One escaped, Fabian Mondragon."
   "And Lee knew all of this?"
   "Well, I had to sneak into the station at the Police
Dr. Fang whistles, then continues, "There was no password to the police files?"
I divined it by getting psychic for a minute, by meditating."
Fang nods. "What about this Mondragon?"
"He's a killer, and from this part of town. His mug shot looked familiar somehow."
"Possibly he's in the Dinero Sucio Pandillo," Fang hypothesizes.
"Probably."
"You've taken chances, Tadpole."
"Without risk there can be no reward."
"How will you use what you've learned?"
"I don't know if we can somehow discredit the DSP's phony company so that its legitimacy becomes suspect. But that would throw a wrench in their works."
Fang strokes his long white goatee. "Somehow ruining the debut party of Juice could do that."
"I'll have to figure out when and where that will be," Alma says.
"That will be well publicized," Dr. Fang points out.
Demonito watches Fang and Alma stare hard into nothing 7 inches in front of their faces.
"I should go sell flowers but I need a nap."
Fang looks at the teenaged primate. "You can take the day off if you want, Hot Stuff."
'Nito shakes his head 'No', smiling slightly.
"Buenos dias, Master, 'Nito." Alma bows, then makes for the door.
"Pleasant dreams, Tadpole."
Fang and Demonito wave to Alma, who waves back as she walks out the door.

Alma comes into the hideout, takes off her hat and coat, hangs it and lays down on her stomach on the futon. She falls asleep almost instantly after her head hits the pillow.
Alma dreams of herself as a little girl flying thru the night air from her aunt and uncle's apartment being blown up by the pipe bomb thrown thru the front window.

When she hits the street the black sedan pulls a hard fast right around the corner. The arsonist who threw the grenade hangs out the passenger window to watch the destruction wreaked. Alma sees his face, then sees the memory of the mugshot of Fabian Mondragon, both with short black hair.

Alma's eye pops open wide and she sits up. "Fabian Mondragon threw the bomb," she hisses.

Alma sits up and scratches her Mohawk and bites her lower lip, her eyes looking up in deep suspicion.

"I've only seen the back of the Pandillo Jefe's cabeza. Why do I have the feeling that that it's Mondragon?" she thinks out loud.

She gets up, puts the hoody and hat on but leaves Alma's jacket. Then the hero's alter ego grabs her backpack and takes off.

As it gets dark 'Nito watches the warehouse. He tries to enter but the door is locked. He steps back, cocks his head and thumps his forehead with his index finger.

Demonito studies the warehouse wall for about 5 seconds and notices a ventilation grate 8 feet off the ground. He takes a running leap and grabs the ledge of the opening with one arm, takes hold with the other and pulls himself up. He grabs his hand between one of the horizontal sheet metal slats and bends it up to force the gap open far enough to squeeze thru. 'Nito has only to force the inside screen frame out and drop into the warehouse. He then pops the screen back in, hanging from the inner ledge, one handed, and then drops to the warehouse floor. Demonito then goes up the stairway to the hideout and in the unlocked door.

Inside the space he looks all around for Alma. Not finding her he puts forehead to his palm and thinks, 'Now
SuperZero looks across the dark alley at the back of the Weststde bar from the top of the same roof used the other night to spy on the DSP with the mini window mike.

The hero has watched the backdoor for awhile and uses a small telescope to see in the back window, then collapses it and puts it back in pocket.

"I'll risk a little vandalism," Zero decides quickly.

The mercenary pops the claw/plier attachment off of the arm and clicks on the wristrocket super slingshot from the backpack. Then after pulling back the rubber tube cords, Zero releases the sling and launches the metal ball at the window. It hits and explodes the glass.

3 seconds later El Sanguijuelo scans the alley thru the broken window.

"What the frickin' frack?" the villain hisses quietly.

SuperZero gets a good look, crosses to the front side of the building and drops into the shadows, 20 seconds before a posse of 3 gangbangers come out the backdoor searching for the slingshooter.

The masked sleuth zigs and zags silently and gets a few blocks away before taking the mask off and putting Alma's cap on.

She stops to confirm her suspicions out loud, quietly to herself, "The DSP shotcaller is Fabian Mondragon, who killed Tio and Tia."

Alma walks fast toward the moped and then rides home.

Outside the door of the warehouse Alma approaches, unlocks the door and goes in.

In the hideout monkey muchacho plays Donkeykong on the computer and looks back at Alma as she walks in.

"Ay," he says.

Alma stops and says "Hello 'Nito. Sorry I left the door locked. I see you got in ok though."
Demonrto jumps off the chair, grabs a pencil and pad, writes a note and hands her the pad.
"Where, have you been?" Alma reads.
"I had to check out a hunch I had. I couldn't wait. I found out that Fabian Mondragon is the leader of the Dinero Sucio Pandillo."

Demonito screws his face into a mask of confusion, steps up to Alma and grabs the pad and pencil back.
"So what?" he writes.
Alma grabs the pad back and takes a look.
"Well Watson, it means that Mondragon is an escaped genetically enhanced criminal experiment bent on distributing a powerdrink meant to devolve an army of zombies and that we, me, you and Dr. Fang, have got to stop him somehow."
"Ooo," the mutant monkey says loud.
Demonito holds his paw out for the pad and pencil. Alma gives it over to him.
"How are we going to do that?" he scrawls.
Alma reads and answers, "We have to expose Juice Corporation as a DSP front at the big debut party, I guess."
Alma sits on the couch. Her sidekick sits next to her.
"We should lay low for now. We've learned a lot. Let's stay home tonight."

Demonito gets up, goes to the computer, jumps on the chair and resumes playing Donkeykong.

Days later on a bright day Alma and 'Nito walk into the Herbal Elixir Shop and find Dr. Fang meditating while doing a hand stand on the stool as the incense smoke wafts.
He breaks the pose to turn right side up from the chair and stands to greet his students.
"Hello Alma, 'Nito. Good day," Fang says.
"Good day! Master."
"Any news?"
"No. Nothing in the papers or on the internet." Alma shakes her head.
"It may take a few days longer, or a week, maybe as
long as 2 weeks. The Pandillo has many details to work out before their ducks are lined up."

"But if we lose our shot, what then?  
"The JuiceCorp debut party will be promoted. We won't lose the chance to derail their foul plot. The publicity value is too great."

"You're probably right," Alma agrees, though she looks at the floor, long faced.  
"I know that waiting is the hardest part, Tadpole. Keep checking the Secretary of State site for new corporations named Juice."

Fang bows back slightly. "Adios Rueñacuaja."
Alma exits.

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6

Downtown at the Black Palace hotel at lunchtime, people walk by and patrons enter and exit the front doors to the lobby.

A lot of people sit down to lunch in the huge plush hotel restaurant decorated in a Victorian style. Mayor Greenback, a tall thin smiley fellow in a black topcoat, and Police Commissioner Stone, a taller solid gray haired black man wearing a more rumpled black suit jacket, pass the diningroom threshold where a dark thin Maitre De greets them. He escorts them, along with 3 beefy plain clothes police in dark glasses, to the VIP room.

In a private velvet curtained mahogany furnished private diningroom Dr. Lee stands as 2 attractive professional looking blonde women and Brazo Derecho, dressed sharp in a sharkskin suit, stand to greet the Commissioner and Mayor as well. They meet in front of a circular upholstered couch surrounding a large table with a white table cloth draped over it.

"Hello Mr. Mayor and Commissioner Stone. Allow
me to introduce our CEO and 2 executive officers, Mr. Lee, Miss Thompson and Mrs. LaFrance." Brazo has shaved his mustache.

    Everybody shakes hands and says 'hello'.
    "Please, let's sit down," Brazo invites.
    All take a seat. Lee and Brazo let the Mayor and Commissioner sit next to the ladies.
    "Thank you, gentlemen, for coming today Right now, JuiceCorp is eager to contribute $200,000 to your mayoral reelection campaign, Mr. Greenback, and $75,000 to yours, Commissioner Stone. We would hope, of course, that you could fast track city approval of the purchase of our manufacturing facility near Tradesville, and also rezoning of the plant we're buying. But most importantly, attending our opening gala in the Grand Ballroom here at the Black Palace. Frankly we need your help to persuade some of the cities more prominent bankers and financiers to loan and invest in our venture. While we have the funds that we feel we need to thrive, your support would practically guarantee In JuiceCorp's success." Brazo sells slicker than an oily snake thru a river of bacon grease."

    Greenback and Stone look at each other, poker faced, for a few seconds.
    The Mayor smiles a little finally. "I think we can do that, Mr. Lucero."
    "Well that's great, fine." Brazo Derecho smiles.
    A waiter brings in an iced bucket of cans of powerdnnk and sets them in the middle of the table. Lee, Thomson, LaFrance and Brazo all have opened cans from the top of a chrome cart poured into iced glasses. The waiter sets glasses of ice before the municipal bosses. Brazo grabs cans from the silver bucket and sets them next to their glasses.
    "Please," he offers.
    The Mayor and Commissioner look at each other. Brazo watches inscrutably, like a hungry serpent. Greenback and Stone pop the tops off of the cans, pour the fuzzy red liquid into the glasses and swallow.
"A toast. Today the beverage market, tomorrow, the world. " Brazo Lucero smiles.
All clink glasses and drink.
The waiter comes in with menus and passes them to everybody.

That night Alma sits at the computer as 'Nito swings around a Wiffleball bat around like a samurai sword, his expression gnm and his eyes focused.
Alma clicks on the Secretary of State site and gets to the New Incorporations page. She stares intently at the screen, her face lit by it.
Ms Azul scrolls down as she checks the list, "Bingo!"
She double clicks an entry entitled Juice
"It says right here, CEO, Mr. Lo Lee and executive officers Miss Betty Thompson and Mrs. Paris LaFrance."
Zero's alter ego checks all the info on the screen but learns nothing but a phone number and address that she copies and files on a new document. Then she checks on a City News Site and the local TV News Station sites, but finds nothing.
"Well, they've incorporated but nothing about a party. Maybe Mondragon's changed his game plan."
’Nito glances over at Alma and trips on a Wiffleball bat strike but resumes his exercise as though he never missed a beat.
"I hate waiting." Alma gets up, walks over to the table, opens a bag and grabs a handful of chili cheese taco chips.

A few days later in the late afternoon Alma carries her flower bucket and Demonito follows down the street.
The teenaged mutant monkey follows in his street get up though the weather has warmed up too much for his hoody. Alma wears a long sleeved thermal undershirt, right for the weather, but looks slightly strange in dark glasses, a stocking cap and black gloves.
The divergent duo walks into a grocery store.
After they've put out various food stuffs into a plastic
basket 'Nito picks out a bonus bunch of bananas and they then approach the counter. The same Asian woman runs the store as on the night when SuperZero and 'Nito foiled the robbery attempt about a week ago.

Of course the clerk doesn't realize this as she rings up the groceries and bags them with a smile. Alma looks up at a TV turned to local evening news.

The videogenic white toothed anchorman smiles at TV land and reads the teleprompter and superimposed in front of a JuiceCorp logo and portraits of Mayor Greenback and Commissioner Stone, "A new powerdrink company will begin operations in our fair city bringing a manufacturing plant-distribution center and jobs to the metro area. The Mayor and Police Chief will attend the company's inception ball at the Black Palace Ballroom on Friday night."

The screen behind the talking head changes to a photo of a large Victorian house. "JuiceCorp will also donate a month's supply of Juice to St. Mary's Orphanage tomorrow night In other news..."

Alma stares at the TV, her mouth hanging open.
"That'll be $11.95," the clerk prompts.

Once the news switches to another story the alter ego looks thru the clerk but says to the sidekick, "We've got to stop the orphans from drinking Juice."

"Uuh, $11.95...puleeze."

Alma switches the dial in her skull back to the here and now of the grocery superette.

"Of course. Sorry. Excuse me." She pulls out $12 bucks and pays for the food.

"Thank you. Come again." The clerk smiles halfheartedly.

Alma takes the bag with one hand and Demonito's paw with her other and they go.

On the street the flower girl stresses softly, "Zero and you have got to stop that powerdrink donation to the orphans tomorrow night, the night BEFORE the Juice party we've got to squash. We've go to do A without getting caught to do B the
next night, without alerting out foes, to boot."
Alma shakes her head. 'Nito pulls on her sleeve and
pantomimes writing on a pad. She gets it and gives it to him.
"Let's ask the Master what to do," he writes.
Alma stops and lowers her forehead to her index
finger for a brief spell. The teenageeto stops too.
"Let's not. I feel a plan coming on." Alma starts
walking."You should play hooky for a couple of days."
'Nito catches up and they cruise towards home.

A couple walks into the Westside bar later that night a
second before a drunk guy stumbles out as the inside plays
Tejano music.
Brazo walks up to El Sanguijuelo's desk with his shirt
sleeves rolled up as the boss sits.
"Es todo going according to plan, Brazo?" El Jefe
asks.
"Si, I think so."
"Bueno."
"Oh, the Mayor y Jefe de Policia want more Juice."
"Muy bueno. Give it." Fabian Mondragon, El Jefe
smirks.
He gives Brazo Derecho a brown cigarette.
"Gracias, Jefe." Brazo turns and walks out the door as
he lights the cig.

The next night SuperZero drives the moped thru the
back street with Demonito riding behind her.
The hero parks behind a dumpster in an alley, keeps to
the shadows and the duo sneak to the street toward St. Mary's
Orphanage, the big Victorian house.

The Wacky Mountain Remote News Cam Van sits
parked in front of the orphanage. A strapping almost middle
aged cameraman holding a portacam stands listening to a
woman TV news journalist, a blond in a dark blazer who looks
like an ex department store catalog model, go over
instructions.

Brazo, in a dark suit, and the Westside barback, in black slacks and a white tuxedo shirt, carry coolers up the front steps.

The blonde signals the crewman to follow her toward the front door of the orphanage following Brazo and the barback.

'Nito follows Zero over a fence, thru a dark yard a couple of houses down the block and over a back fence to the alley.

The crimefighters jump the fence into the back yard of orphanage and sneak up the rear of the old house. The hero uses the pen light to search the scene.

In the living room of the orphanage 7 girl and boy orphans between 5 and 12 years old of all races stand with the Director, a thin benevolent expressioned middle aged woman in slacks and a white blouse. Brazo and the barback open the coolers with ice and cans of Juice.

The cameraman shoots the scene lit by a light mounted on the camera. The on-the-scene reporter stands with a mike in the foreground of the scene. The cameraman uses his free hand to give a 5 second count down and then points at the Newswoman.

"I'm Wanda Sugarcakes of the Wacky Mountain Eye Rockit Hard Newsteam here at St. Mary's Orphanage covering a new company's charitable donation.

At the back door of the orphanage Demonito leaps up to a window and pries a jalousie apart, slides the glass out and squeezes thru the gap

Meanwhile SuperZero has used her claw/plier tool arm to rip the lock tab of the circuit breaker box off and opens it to throw the circuit switch.

The lights go out at the same instant that 'Nito unlocks the back door and throws it open. Zero enters.

In the living room all stand and baffled and confused.
"Hey!" says a white boy.
"What the?" exclaims the barback.
"It's dark!" remarks a Latina girl.
"Calm down children, it's just a power surge," says the Director.

The remote light on the camera lights the scene weirdly.

"Something's apparently happened with the power here," reports Wanda Sugarcakes.

Zero and Demonito zip silent and unseen into the room. The sidekick makes a jump at the camera and knocks it down, extinguishing the light.

The children scream as bewilderment turns to fear in complete darkness.

The vigilantes quietly and swiftly snatch the coolers.

The cameraman quickly remounts the light on the camera and chases the powerdrink thieves out the front door.

A skinny snaggle toothed 9 year old black kid in a torn t-shirt follows on the heels of the cameraman who gets a mysterious shot of a dark phantom and a smaller banshee trucking away with the coolers.

But the cameraman can't keep up with Zero and Demonito. In seconds they disappear around the side of the house and maybe thru one of the yards or the alley. He looks all around from under a huge old oak tree, trying unsuccessfully to spot them with the camera light. The cameraman notices the dark boy peering out into the night too.

Ms. Sugarcakes catches up with her crewman in a few more seconds.

"Where'd they go?"
"Lost them," he answers.
"Hey kid," the crewman advises, "you can't go following bandits out into the night."
"Why the hell not? You do."

El Sanguijuelo watches the news on a big TV in an open cabinet from behind his desk.
Wanda Sugarcakes looks out at TV Land from inside the boob tube in front of St. Mary's Orphanage talking into the microphone with a grave expression, "The reception didn't quite go as planned, getting disrupted by 2 burglars full of iced Juice powerdrink right out from under the noses of company representatives, staff, the orphans and us, the Wacky Mountain Remote News Team. We have Mr. Jerome Tyler, a resident of St. Mary's Home, here with us to give his eye witness account of the robbery. What happened Mr Tyler?" she puts the mike in the face of the black kid.

"Well, these 2 booglers dressed up like for Halloween stolded all the pops, 2 coolers full, fast, like bip bam boom, and then we ranned after them but they was too fast and they done split into the darkness, like slick as all hell." The boy relates, smiling.

The shot on the tube changes to the video of Zero and Demonito, fleeing like 2 ghosts into the darkness.

"Which leads us to the question: Should children be drinking an energy drink?" Sugarcakes asks when the shot switches back to her live onscreen.

Fabian Mondragon takes his mirrored sunglasses off and stares at the TV with pure black hate filled eyes.

"In other news..." the anchorman continues.

"I'll Pierce their veins and suck their flesh dry," El Jefe hisses venomously.

He grabs a bottle of brown liquor but squeezes it so hard that it breaks. It cuts his hand which bleeds onto the desktop, mixing with the booze. El Sanguijuelo doesn't notice, but puts his glasses back over his eyes and switches the TV off with the remote from his other hand.

Later, outside the office door, Brazo stops, breathes deep and crosses himself before he knocks.

"Come in." the Boss calls from inside.

Bazo Derecho goes in.

Sanguijuelo's lieutenant approaches the shot caller's desk standing straight, head up, with a relaxed pace.
"What happened?" El Sanguijuelo Mondragon asks. Brazo shrugs. "It couldn't be helped, Jefe. You saw it on the news. It went down like that, exactamente."
"What about mañana?"
"We'll need to take more precautions."
The Boss gets up and goes to the liquor cabinet and brings back a new bottle of brown liquor. He pours himself a shot, gets a cigarette out of the case in his jacket pocket and lights it, without offering Brazo a drink or a smoke.
"I'll start setting up security for tomorrow night."
Brazo turns to walk out.
"Tell the muchacho to come and wipe up the table," The big bad guy orders.
"Sure." Brazo walks out the door.

In the alley behind the Black Palace the next night a white delivery van pulls in and decelerates. Alma, in a white chef's jacket, apron and hat as well as dark glasses steps out in front of the vehicle as it slows and raises her palm, smiling.
The van stops and the driver gets out. She pays him and signs a receipt. Her sidekick stands with her too, in black slacks and a white shirt holding a dishrag.
The delivery man goes to the back of the van, opens it, pulls a ramp out and wheels a refrigerator sized box on a dolly out.

'Nito and Alma wheel the box away into the backdoor of the hotel as the delivery man gets in the van and drives off.
The party swings in the big ornate 19th century ballroom. The partiers, well dressed in suits, dresses, gowns or tuxes, either sit or stand. They eat, drink, mingle and a few even boogy to upbeat dance music.
Undercover cops, almost conspicuous in cheap blue suits and cop sunglasses, stroll thru the crowd. DSP thugs in black slacks and white busboy shirts patrol too.
The Mayor and Police Commissioner arrive in tuxedos as news photographers take pictures, flashing bulbs.
'Nito pushes a 8 foot white layer cake from the back
kitchen off into the ballroom.

Wanda Sugarcakes stands with a mike facing the cameraman and portacam in front of a podium where Brazo Derecho in a tux steps up and clangs a spoon against a glass.

"This is Wanda Sugarcakes with the Wacky Mountain Eye Rockit Hard News, here at the Juice inaugural ball at the Black Palace Hotel. It's about to begin and Mayor Greenback and Police Chief Stone are in attendance," the newslady reports in a loud stage whisper pointing back towards the podium.

The cameraman steps back to widen the shot to fit the municipal celebrities. They both wave, and the Mayor smiles too.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please let me introduce to you, JuiceCorp's Corporate Executive Officer, Mr. Lo Lee," Derecho says into the mike, holding his hand out toward the CEO as he steps out from behind the podium.

All in the room applaud as Lee, in a tux too, steps up.

"Thank you."

The busboy/Supermonkey turns his back on the crowd, bends low and slips on a gas mask.

SuperZero pops out of the jumbo cake in a gas mask too with the wristrocket drawn and lets a shot fly. It hits a column and explodes into a thick cloud of white smoke. The kitchen gangbangers pull out guns, but remember to put their gasmasks on too late. The guerilla jumps popping off bomb after bomb and the DSP soldiers fall, knocked out. Smoke clouds the ballroom.

Brazo pulls out a mini gas mask and pulls it on over his mouth. 'Nito finishes changing into his crimefighting costume too. People drop asleep, everyone mostly, cops, VPs, thugs and restaurant staff. The hero shoots even more sleeping gas bombs. Ms Sugarcakes and the cameraman fall too.

Zero takes the mike and Demonito hoists the big portacam.

Brazo tries to make his way thru the smoke as it begins to clear.
'Nito points at Zero as a red light shines at the front top of the camera.

"People of Denvoid, beware. JuiceCorp is a front for the Dinero Sucio Pandillo, a local crime gang bent on distributing an addictive devolving powerdrink from our city to create an army of zombie servants for god knows what reason. If you don't believe me analyze the ingredients of this noxious beverage. My name is SuperZero, a concerned citizen. Thank you people..."

In that instant Brazo rushes across the room, picks up a chair and knocks the portacam off of 'Nito's shoulder, dropping him.

Zero immediately charges and drop kicks the criminal to the floor. The vigilante advances quick but the crime lieutenant scrambles away whipping out his pistol.

He shoots right as Zero kicks his gun hand sending the bullet wide. Brazo holds on and shoots again. The bullet in the chest knocks the hero down. The villain presses his advantage, stands over his foe and sticks the gun into the masked face.

"Check mate," he says.
"I already did what I needed to do," the hero answers.
"Take off your mask."
"Nope."
"Don't then, I will." Brazo leans down to grab the ski mask.

"AIEEE!!" 'Nito screams as he flies thru the air. Brazo turns towards the Supermonkey arcing his gun towards him but Demonito's feet collide with his head 1st slamming him to the floor.

SuperZero and 'Nito flee. Brazo gets up and gives chase but as they burst thru the swinging kitchen door the monkey pulls a bus cart in the way and Brazo crashes over it, spilling to the ground.

Hero and sidekick rush out the back door into the alley.

In the alley the duo ducks behind a dumpster.
Police cars arrive, sirens blaring and flashing, and cops get out. Some walk quickly into the hotel and others scan the street, entrance and people coming in and out.

Alma and her ward, in black pants and t-shirts, exit the alley past the cops.

Dr. Fang watches the scene of mayhem from under a black wide brimmed fedora over a newspaper that he pulls lower as he sits at a train stop across the street.

When his students have escaped, he smiles.

In the lobby bar of the Black Palace Brazo Derecho sits drinking a tumbler of brown liquor. A TV shows the news up above the mirror behind the bar. The criminal signals the thin distinguished bartender, who comes over.

"Yes sir?"
"Another double, please."
The bartender pours him another drink and Brazo turns his attention to the TV.

"And now more about the bizarre chaos unleashed at the Black Palace this evening," the talking head announces.

Derecho looks up, oblivious to the bartender setting the drink in front in front of him.

Chip Dinkledorf, identified by the title superimposed at the bottom of the screen, informs the viewing audience as he's matted onto the scene. Wanda Sugarcakes covers Brazo introducing CEO Lee at the podium.

"A masked terronst calling himself SuperZero burst from a supersized cake shooting sleeping gas bombs and hijacking the EyeRockit Hard News Cam to tape this slanderous clip meant to discredit JuiceCorp alleging that it's a corporate front for the local DSP cnme gang, as you'll see from the tape."

The news runs the tape of SuperZero shot by Demonito in the ballroom. The crime lieutenant watches as Zero spills the beans about the DSP's evil plot. His eyes look
big and mouth hangs open.

Dinkledorf talks onscreen again, "The mayhem finished little more than an hour ago. The terrorists escaped. Wacky Mountain EyeRocklt Hard newswoman Wanda Sugarcakes still covers the scene at the Black Palace Ballroom. Wanda, what's going on?"

The shot switches to Sugarcakes at the ballroom. "Chip, there are more questions than answers right now. The attendees of the function remember only one assailant, but he must have had at least one other accomplice. Somebody ran our newscam. But they both escaped. The police have assured us that the knock out gas is harmless. But just who are these fanatics? What do they want and why did they do this? Nobody was hurt, but what of their strange allegations?"

"So everybody's ok then?" Chip asks, still superimposed over Wanda. "So far it seems that way." "Thank you, Wanda. And in other news..." Brazo slams his double shot down and drops his forehead on the bar. After a couple of minutes the bartender comes over and taps Brazo on the shoulder "Are you ok, sir?"

Brazo raises his head, "Yeah, fine." The bartender pushes the bill on a black plastic tray towards him. "Hit me again, por favor." The bartender considers for a second before nodding and bending to the liquor well. "Yes sir."

Demonito and Alma walk up to Dr. Fang's Shop the next morning. Though it barely needs it, Dr. Fang sweeps a little bit of rubbish off of the sidewalk. The duo stops and the Dr stops to look at them. "Good day, Master." Alma bows. "Good day." Dr. Fang bows slightly to his students. 'Nito grabs the broom even as the Sage holds it. "Sorry I kept 'Nito yesterday. I needed him."
"Yes. You've both been busy, I know." Fang lets the monkey take the broom.
"It was quite a chance you took and you've exposed your crimefighter persona..."
Alma interrupts excitedly, "But Master, I couldn't think of another way. We had to move. I kept 'Nito from work because I didn't want you to question him about our plans."
"As I was saying, once again you've both far exceeded my expectations and thrown a monkey wrench into the plans of the DSP, way more than the 2 of you should have been able to do. The media and the government may both look into the ingredients of Juice. The city will reexamine the Pandillo. For now their plot has been derailed, but the snake has not been decapitated. It will strike back again, harder, if only for revenge. Now SuperZero is a star. Now more than ever you must watch and wait for a place to attack where the foe is weakest."

'Nito only pretends to sweep, listening.
"I hate waiting, sir."
"You are only 2 against many and now your enemies will hunt you down. Perhaps SuperZero should take another mask."
Alma thinks this over for like 2 seconds. "I can't. I need a black mask to become one with the dark."
Fang looks at Alma's face. "I see."
"Something else, sir I remembered something from the night that you picked me up out of the street the night they bombed the house. I saw the man who threw it, watching as the car drove away. It was Mondragon. He killed Tio and Tia."
Fang lifts an eyebrow. "The genetically enhanced escaped convict of the Dinero Sucio Pandillo is our arch enemy."
"Yup."
"We must step lightly."
Alma stretches and shakes her head, neck and shoulders. "I should go to work, Master."
"Yes, Tadpole."
"Goodbye, sir."
"Alma, one more thing."
"What's that sir?"
"I know it's hard, maybe the hardest part, but it can never be about revenge."
Alma studies Fang, bites her lip and nods. "Yes sir. See ya. See ya, 'Nito."
Demonito stops sweeping and waves.
The monkey and the master watch the young girl walk away.

Outside the Westside Bar later that morning 3 thugs in slacks and dress shirts and Brazo Derecho walk in the front door.
Inside El Jefe's office 4 other slicked up gangbangers stand around his desk as Mondragon sits in a suit wearing his mirrored sunglasses smoking a cigarette.
Someone knocks from outside the office door
"Come in," Mondragon calls out.
Brazo Derecho/Lucero walks in first and 3 other thugs follow.
"Brazo, sientate." El Sanguijuelo points at the empty chair across the desk from himself.
The lieutenant sits looking directly at the boss.
"Buenos dias Señor."
Fabian Mondragon, El Jefe Sanguijuelo nods in reply.
"Quiero Zero y Demonito. Alive!"
"Alive, Jefe."
"Si. Then I want to kill them slow so that they feel it."
The Boss looks at each of his soldiers. "Find them and bring them to me."
"Look in the shadows of the alleys and on the rooftops," Lucero adds.
"Si, what he said." El Jefe signals for the thugs to leave.
When they've gone, Brazo still sits with El Sanguijuelo.
"What happened?" asks El Jefe.

"We'd added soldiers. I thought he might try the circuit box trick or gas again. I could only get a few gas masks before the party but didn't train the muchachos. I almost had him. I shot him but he wears Kevlar. I almost had his mask him but Demonito attacked me and I lost them. Sorry."

"Normally I'd fire you, but I don't know who could handle your job and we go back too far. You've got one more chance. You're good but Zero's better. The question now is, how do we salvage our plans to take over the world?"

"Well, sir, we still have the Mayor and the Police Chief in the palm of our hand. They're addicted. If we dose the water supply it'll actually be cheaper than getting the public to buy Juice. If the people look the other way for 2 or 3 weeks we can still get the powerdrink distributed. We merely wait for the scandal to die down nationally, taint the water, change the name of the drink and carry out our plan. The Mayor and Police Chief will soon be our pawns. They probably still won't let us have a week's worth of access to the water plant. We'll have to figure out how to sneak the ingredient in, put the water workers in our pocket and bend them to our will," Brazo plots out loud.

"Or persuade Greenback to fire the water workers working now and put our own people in," El Sanguijuelo suggests. "Last night's fiasco may have forced us into using your new plan."

"I agree, señor."

"Find out about the waterworks, Brazo. Let me know."

"Ok, sure."

"And bueno thinking." Mondragon pulls out a cigarette and hands it to Brazo.

"De nada. Gracias, Jefe." Brazo gets up, lights his cigarette and walks out the door.

When the day ends Alma walks up the steps in the warehouse carrying the flower bucket and a small TV over her shoulder. She puts them down to open the hideout door and
next takes them inside.

In the space Alma puts the television set on the work table, plugs it in, turns it on and sits back to watch.

"This is the 4th day of the sanitation workers strike but the union is scheduled to meet with the city council to discuss possible wage and benefit package increases," Chip Dinkledorf informs. "And now with more on the mayhem at the Black Palace last night here's Wanda Sugarcakes with the 13 Eye Rockit Hard News Team live, on the scene. What do you know, Wanda?"

A shot of Wanda holding a microphone standing in front of the hotel switches on behind the talking head onscreen.

"Well Chip, lots. A private lab has identified a mysterious ingredient in a sample of Juice which bears a resemblance to other known addictive substances, like SuperZero, the invader of last night's ceremony cautioned. Also, the same marauder, who taped the broadcast last night, looks like one of the same assailants who disrupted Juice's donation of a free supply of the powerdnknk at St. Mary's Orphanage 2 nights ago. And 13 News has also discovered that according sources 2 raiders, fitting the same descriptions of the terrorists, entered into the Police Station illegally during business hours and escaped capture by pulling a fire alarm. Also we've learned that the Juice Corporate Board of Directors are all as DynaCorp R & D research team members. DynaCorp, a local genetic research firm developing superior crop strains, refused to comment. We asked Mr. Lo Lee, JuiceCorp CEO about the possible connection between Juice and the DSP, a local crime gang, as SuperZero alleged."

The scene switches on TV to Lee walking out of his condo earlier that day away from the camera. "Please, we have no ties with any...crime gang."

The scene switches again to Lee surrounded by DSP thugs in restaurant worker clothes and Brazo Derecho after the ruined ceremony last night. Sugarcake's voice broadcasts over the shot, "But Lee seemed to be protected by these individuals
last night, none who could be identified by the Ballroom manager. When we ran their images thru the Police database all had criminal histories and 3 are known members of the Dinero Sucio Pandillo, Denvoid's most notorious Mexican street gang.

Chip's head pops back onscreen. "Disturbing Wanda, thank you for that report. Now in other news..."

'Nito comes in and crosses the space as Alma sits back as she turns the TV off.

"That was nothing that I didn't already know. But now the world knows."

The teenaged monkey tugs on Alma's shirt. Alma rubs his head without looking at him.

"Which could shut them down, but Fabian Mondragon, El Jefe, will strike back."

El Sanguijuelo watches the news on TV. As the shot onscreen changes from the gangster busboys in the Ballroom with their mug shots superimposed over back to a headshot of Chip. Fabian Mondragon Sanguijuelo throws a shot glass at the TV screen, shatters and explodes it.

He pulls his cellphone out of his jacket pocket, punches a number in and puts it to his face.

"Brazo, that TV puppet lady, we need to shut her up. Get back here."

"I'm right outside, Jefe. I'll be right there."

El Sanguijuelo breathes hard in seething rage.

Brazo knocks from outside the door but then walks in without permission to enter. He comes right up to face the boss at his desk.

"Sugarcakes said something bad on the news again, huh?" Brazo asks.

"She made us. We've got to put a boot in her mouth. Do it."

"Señor, I'm going to lay a trap and bag her. She's too connected to back down to a threat and too in the spotlight to just smash or kill."

The next day outside of the DynaCorp labs a few workers and vehicles come in and out past the guard shack check point.

In the DynaCorp boardroom 5 men and women in suits or labcoats sit around a long table. The director, a silver haired rail of a man, sits at the head of the table, somber and alert.

"We've fired Lee, Thompson and LaFrance?" asks the Director.

A balding East Indian in glasses answers, "We bought them out. We thought it over and decided that their termination might be bad PR if the media caught wind, given the current media debacle, Mr. Grimm."

"How did this happen?" Director Grimm asks, stone faced and calm.

"Fabian Mondragon, the escaped convict experimental specimen, leads the gang who paid off our research team. It's the most likely theory." A heavy brunette in a lab coat explains.

"It seem this masked character, SuperZero, effectively ruined the plans of the gang. Our chiefs are aware of the events. The best course seems to be to watch, wait and sever any connections DynaCorp may have. We have resources if the situation degenerates. Our objective is to extinguish culpability for us and our executives."

Everyone nods in agreement.

"The board of Juice is the link to us. Probably the ingredient of the product in question is similar to experimental serums developed here, but this is in no way public knowledge," The Indian administrator says.

"Good. Go back to work then," Director Grimm instructs and stands.

Everyone stands and they all start to leave the room.
Later that evening a dark sedan pulls into the parking lot outside of the Columbine Steakhouse, a one story glass and brick post war structure marked by a white plexiglass sign on the top of a 20 foot metal pole.

In the car Brazo in his dark suit sits and looks at the driver and 2 vatos in the back seat, all in blue uniforms. "Wait until they turn their camera on. Here's some badges. Only pull the rods if she don't come right away. They'll be here within half an hour."

"Where'd you get the badges?"
"Commissioner Stone's a good friend of mine."

Brazo Derecho/Lucero gets out of the car and walks into the steakhouse.

Inside Brazo sits down at the white formica counter The dinner rush has ended and only a few consumers eat. A cute plump redheaded Latina waitress walks up the crime lieutenant from behind the counter and hands him a menu.

"Just an order of steak fries, Reina."
"That's all you want?"
"Well actually, if you're not too busy, I was hoping you could do me a favor." Brazo slides a $50 across the counter at her.

"I guess. Depends on what it is."
"All you gotta do is make a call." He pulls his cellphone out.

Eunice takes the $50. "OK What do I gotta say?"
"Here I wrote it down." Brazo pulls a half sheet of paper out of his jacket and hands it to her.

She reads it over to herself silently. "Ok, sure."
"If they ask who you are just say you're a concerned citizen. Stick to what's on the paper If they ask more questions tell them you've got to hang up. Make sure you got thru to the Newsroom before you start you're act."

"Yeah, sure sweetie. I got it!"
"Do me a favor hun. Read it to yourself again, just to be sure."

She does and Brazo dials a number and the cellphone
and hands it to her.

"Hi, I need to talk to the Newsroom," Reina performs anxiously.
"Can I ask you what this is about?" the receptionist on the other end asks.
"The guy on the news the night before last who introduced the CEO of the drink company at the ballroom. I know where he is right now."
"May I ask who's calling?"
"A concerned citizen."
"Where is this guy?"
"Let me talk to the Newsroom."
A click sounds over the line.
"Newsroom," answers a female voice.
Reina repeats the set up to the Newsroom Associate.
"Who's calling please?"
"A concerned citizen."
"Where is he?"
"Make sure this message gets to Wanda Sugarcakes or the News Editor," Reina instructs.
"You have my word, Miss."
"At the Columbine Steakhouse, 4th and Federal."
"You're sure it's him?"
"Sure I'm sure. Bye."
"Wait."
Reina hangs up. "How was that?"
"Beautiful, Baby. You shoulda been an actress."
"I'll get you your fries."
Brazo holds his finger up. "Better bring me a steak sandwich and a coke too. It might take a minute."

It only takes the News 13 Eye Rockit Hard Newsvan 15 minutes to pull into the lot of the Steakhouse. Just a minute after that Sugarcakes and the cameraman emerge from the side of the van like gangbusters. The 3 gangbangers in cop suits instantly rush from the sedan to go after the reporter and crewman.

"Hold it Miss, sir. I need to see your license," says the
thug in cop drag driver.
   The cameraman turns the camera on the fake cops.
   "What? What's going on?" demands Sugarcakes.
   "I'll ask the questions. I need to see ID." The thug
driver puts his palm in the camera lens.
   "This is absurd!" the Newswoman snaps.
   "That's it. You're going downtown for resisting arrest!
Officer Mendoza, grab the camera."
   One of the other cops grabs the portacam from the
camera operator.
   "You can't do this!" the crewman protests as he lets
Mendoza grab the camera.
   "I want to see your badge!" Sugarcakes insists.
   The driver complies by flipping it open off of his belt
and putting it back quick.
   The Police Commander and a DSP cop take Wanda's
mike and both of her hands.
   "Come along," the C.O. orders as they walk her to the
sedan.
   Mendoza ejects the tape from the portacam, rips a
bunch of the tape from the cassette, throws it on the ground
and smashes it with his boot. He then catches up to his
partners and Newswoman as the driver and other cop put her
into the back seat. They leave the crewman in the parking lot.
   Mendoza and the 3 kidnappers get in the rear doors on
both sides of Sugarcakes. The driver sits behind the wheel and
pulls the car out onto the boulevard.
   In the back seat Mendoza pulls out bottle of
chloroform and soaks a napkin in it.
   "Who are you, God damn it! I want to call my
lawyer!!" the Newswoman orders loudly.
   Mendoza jams the rag into her face and she passes
out.
   The cameraman watches the sedan drive north on
Federal. He pulls out his cellphone and quickly makes a call.
   Brazo watches from in the restaurant, eats the last bite
of his steak sandwich and 2 last fries, hands the waitress $10
and gets up.

"Thanks again Reina!"
"Thank you, Mr. Lucero."

Brazo pulls out his phone and makes a call, "I'd like a cab at the Columbine steakhouse... Brazo Lucero... the Westside bar."

Outside a cab pulls into the restaurant lot 7 minutes later. Brazo exits the steakhouse and gets in the back seat. The cab drives off.

The cameraman leans against the sign pole smoking a cigarette. He recognizes Lucero and watches the cab drive away.

In the hideout Alma and 'Nito go thru their martial arts exercises, practicing kick, block and punch combos. Zero's secret alter persona sees the digital clock; 10:01. She stops in the middle of a routine. 'Nito continues, the movement looking like a dangerous dance.

Alma breathes hard and grabs a towel from over the back of a chair to wipe her sweat. "Time for the news."

She switches the TV on, which now sits on a milk crate in front of the couch. Alma sits. Demonito stops fighting imaginary enemies and joins her in front of the tube.

"...and Spugsy, winner of the city's ugliest dog competition, wins a free makeover from Doggy Do at 511 East Kentucky," Chip Dinkledorf tells Denvoid, his head superimposed in front of a black Chihuahua/Pug close up.

"And now an alarming development in the Juice, DSP, SuperZero scandal. Wacky Mountain Eye Rockit Hard Newswoman Wanda Sugarcakes was abducted by kidnappers disguised as Police Officers from the Columbine Steakhouse on 4th and Federal.

"The outlaws set a trap by calling the Newsroom saying the suspected DSP MC at the Black Palace chaos the other night was at the Columbine. News 13 remote cameraman Jack Cracker escaped being kidnapped narrowly."

The TV cuts to on scene video of Jack in front of the
restaurant. A sharp Asian Newswoman talks into the mike, "What happened, Jack?"

"The 3 fake cops arrested me and Ms. Sugarcakes, grabbed the portacam and smashed the tape. Then the MC at the Black Palace the other night came out of the restaurant, got in a cab and drove off."

"Were you frightened?"
"Yup. I'm more scared for Wanda though."
"This is Zu Tang signing off. Back to you, Chip."
Chip's head pops back on TV. "We're all scared for her. Police Commissioner Stone has ordered a city wide dragnet for Wanda. In other news..."
Alma looks at her sidekick. "We've got to do something. Any ideas?"

'Nito shrugs and then gets up. He goes to the work table to grab the pad and pencil. The monkey writes a note and hands it to his mentor.
Alma reads, "Let's ask Fang."
She shakes her head. "He'll just tell us to be careful. Let's go see what's going on at the Westside bar."

Alma and 'Nito, in street clothes, watch from across the street in the dark doorway of a closed shop.
"Ok, go see if you can find anything out," Alma tells her sidekick.

'Nito strolls down the street toward the Westside, ducks in the alley and climbs the wall. He grabs at gaps in the tuckpointing for handholds to peek thru the window, replaced since Zero shot it out.
Demonito can see the office and the back of Mondragon's head. The Supermonkey puts his ear to the glass but can hear nothing, though the crime boss talks on the phone.

'Nito jumps back down and sneaks back to Alma.
"Did you hear or see anything?"
'Nito shakes his head, 'No.'
Alma looks up. "I'm going to have to take a chance on Plan B. If I catch a rat, you know what to do."
Demonito stares at the door of the bar as he gives Alma the AOK sign with his fingers.
Alma takes her stocking cap off and puts a long black wig on. "If I don't get any bites soon, we'll forget about it for tonight and figure something else out." She then puts on her sunglasses to hide her eye patch.
She makes for the bar and goes in.
In the Westside 3 men, 2 who are 35 or older, sit at the bar watching a basketball game drinking their drinks. Alma crosses to the bar and sits 2 stools away from the youngest man.
The bartender steps toward her. "What'll you have?"
"A coke please," Alma says forlornly, loud enough for the man, dressed in black Dockers and a leather jacket over a black hooded sweatshirt, to hear.
"Something wrong, Miss?"
Alma sighs theatrically. "My car died. I need to buy medicine for my Grandmother."
The man, who sits 2 seats away, looks Alma over wolfishly with a gleam in his eye, and says with affected concern, "What's wrong with your car?"
"I don't know. It won't start."
"Can you drive with those dark glasses?"
"I have supra-illumna-insensonia." Alma smiles demurely.
"What's that?"
"My eyes are hyper sensitive to light."
"I've never heard of that."
"It's very rare," Alma explains.
"I'll tell you what. Let's go take a look-see, and if we can't start your car, I'll give you a ride to the drug store."
"Oh would you?" Alma swoons.
"We can't let Abuelita go without her meds." The wolf smiles.
He finishes his drink and she gulps down her coke.
"I'm Jorge. What's your name?"
"Beatriz." Alma beams.
"Good to meet you." He offers his hand.
"Yeah, thank you." She takes it and they shake.
They both get up and Alma leaves $2 on the bar.
Jorge and Alma come out of the bar and walk towards the shop where she and 'Nito had hid 5 minutes ago.
"My car's up at the end of the block," she tells him.
They walk on the sidewalk past the alley and Demonito leaps from behind them silently from behind a trashcan and pulls a cord tight around Jorge's neck. The player struggles and the monkey pulls the cord tighter. Jorge's eyes bulge. He chokes as he grabs at the cable and 'Nito rides him like a cowboy rides a bucking bronco. Soon the hapless fall guy drops out of consciousness and spills to the pavement. The monkey bounces off deftly.
Alma and 'Nito pull Jorge into the alley and drag him past the 3rd dumpster. She takes the wig and sunglasses off, puts them in her bag and puts the ski mask on.
"Duck out of sight," SuperZero tells the sidekick, who slips around the corner of the dumpster.
The hero shakes the victim but he's out. "Geez 'Nito, I hope you didn't kill him."
Zero feels Jorge's pulse, and then slaps him back and forth. He comes to. The hero pulls the washer on a string from a pocket and swings it slowly between their faces.
"Look into my eye, deep, deeper. You will tell me what I want to know."
Jorge shakes his head trying to get his bearings, then looks into SuperZero's eye past the swinging washer. He sees a hyno spiral spin around the vision organ orb of Zero.
"Tell me Jorge, where does the DSP have Wanda Sugarcakes hidden?"
"I...don't...know."
"Oh you know. I know you know."
"I can't tell you."
"You'll tell me," Zero tells him.
"No." The mark starts to come out of the trance.
"I could taze you, pal, but I'm not a sadistic person by
nature. I'll just do this." The inquisitor grabs the man's earlobe
and twists it hard.
"OOWW! OW!" Jorge screams.
"Where's Sugarcakes?"
"The Piñata factory, 12th and Santa Fe! Gaw!"
"Thanks, Jorge."
Zero stands and steps on the rat's chest. "Don't follow
me. Don't tell your gang anything. It's done. Leave it alone."
The vigilante ducks around the dumpster. The
gangster stays on the pavement. 'Nito follows his mentor and
they race deeper into the dark of the alley.

That night later a few cars drive down Santa Fe
Avenue past a gray basic 2 story cinderblock warehouse, about
2000 square feet.
3 vans sit parked outside the large garage doors. A
generic sign over the front door reads 'Piñata Distributor LTD,
1230 N. Santa Fe' over an ordinary cartoon of a toy pony.
Inside Wanda Sugarcakes sits on a plastic moduform
chair at a large table with the 3 thugs who kidnapped her, now
changed back to their hoodlum clothes with gas masks
hanging around their necks. They play cards. A less than half
eaten burrito plate and a can of coke sit in front of her.
The table sits at the front end of a shadowy
warehouse, filled with metal racks of Piñatas of all kinds.
They also hang from the ceiling. Horses, bulls, cartoon mice,
cats, monster heads, people, moons, stars and suns all wait to
be purchased and taken or delivered.
"Who do you boys work for?" Wanda asks tiredly.
They ignore her.
She waits a bit before asking again, "Why'd your boss
kidnap me?"
"Hey, lady, why'nt you eat your food? Aint you
hungry?" Mendoza asks.
"No, I'm not. I just want to know what this is all about."

"I don't know. Probably the Jefe just wanted to shut you up. I can see why. You talk too much."

"Well," the Newswoman replies.

On the roof thru the skylight SuperZero and Demonito can see Wanda and the gangsters.

The guerilla quietly informs the sidekick, "If we're going to save Ms. Sugarcakes, 1st we've got to arrange a get away ride."

Deminito nods. They watch for a minute and then 'Nito follows Zero across the roof and down the side of the building.

At a payphone the vigilante punches in a phone number and waits a second with Demonito.

"Newsroom, please."

"Who's calling?" a female receptionist asks.

"SuperZero."

"How can I help you?"

"By transferring me to the Newsroom."

"Transferring."

"Hello, Newsroom," the Newsroom operator says.

"Hello, this is SuperZero. If you can have transportation at 11th and Santa Fe, I can deliver Wanda Sugarcakes. How soon can you get here?"

"What? Wait. Let me get you the Producer"

In 5 more seconds a severe News Producer answers,

"What's this all about?"

Zero repeats the offer.

"How do I know you're who you say you are?"

"Do you want Sugarcakes or not?"

"We want her!" the Producer barks.

"When can you have a vehicle at 11th and Santa Fe?"

"10 minutes."

"Check. And no cameras," Zero orders.
On the Piñata Warehouse roof Zero drills in the lock of the skylight window with the powerdrill arm attachment going slow and quiet. The bit goes all the way thru and the hero tries the window, opening and shutting it quietly.

Wanda sits away from the kidnappers, who play cards. "I need the restroom."
Mendoza points at the bathroom door across the room. She gets up, crosses the floor and goes into the restroom.

"How much longer we gotta sit on her?" a thug asks.
"I don't know, not that long," the chief answers.
"Come on, Mendoza. I wanna know. How long?"
"Ok, Listen. I'll tell you."
Inside the restroom Wanda overhears this and puts her ear to the door.

"El Jefe wants to dose the water supply with the Juice drink, I think, however long that takes. They'll relieve us soon, I figure."

Zero motions to 'Nito and they go over the side of the building and follow a conduit from where a powerline connects from a pole down to the breaker box. The vigilante snaps off the drill, pops the plier/claw on and rips the lock tab off the breaker box door and switches the power off. SuperZero and Demonito race back up the building.

Back out in the warehouse Wanda comes out of the bathroom right as the lights go out.
"Turn the battery lights on!" Mendoza orders.
SuperZero and Demonito drop a cable from the skylight and slide down it.
The hoodlums fumble around trying to find the battery lights. Hero and sidekick find their way with the penlight and locate Sugarcakes in no time.
"Sssh, come on," Zero tells her.
The criminals turn the emergency lights on but it's still pretty dark. They point down the rows of shelved and
hanging piñatas.

Immediately Demonito starts up the cable.

"Hold on," Zero whispers to Sugarcakes. The hero starts to climb with her hanging on back.

The vigilante ascends slowly with the extra weight. The kidnappers notice when Zero and Sugarcakes almost get all the way up. They barely have time to draw their guns, fire and miss as the Newscaster and her champion escape out the window. The impotent thugs watch as the cable disappears too.

"You 2 go out the front and I'll go out the side door so we can cover more area around the warehouse!" Mendoza orders.

All 3 exit the warehouse.

On the roof 'Nito slides down a conduit as Zero drops Wanda onto a parked van. The hero then jumps on top of the van too. They both drop off and join the monkeyboy on the asphalt and run for Santa Fe across the lot.

The 2 thugs come out the front door just as Mendoza runs out of the side door but the rescuers and rescued already run down Santa Fe towards 11th.

All 3 shoot at the hero, sidekick and reporter but miss as their targets get too far away for a clean shot.

"Stop, it's too conspicuous out here," Mendoza orders.

"Let's get them though."

The thugs follow, running. Zero, Sugarcakes and Demonito come upon the parked Newsvan and 2 cop cars. The cameraman holds his portacam and shoots.

"Go on Miss. You're free," Zero declares in the deep bass hero voice.

"Uh thanks um Mr. Zero. They want to dose the city's water supply..."

But the Newswoman doesn't finish because the vigilante and monkey just bounce. The thugs just turn around and walk the other way.

"Stop all of you!! Police!" a cop calls out on an electric bullhorn.

The thugs run and 2 cops chase them. "Stop, in the
name of the law!"

SuperZero and Demonito speed up an alley, up on a rooftop and back down to the shadows of the street.
At the Newsvan 2 cops stand in front of the Newswoman. The cameraman stands with them all.
"Can you give us a description of your abductors, Miss Sugarcakes? What happened, are you ok?"
Wanda ignores the cop and stares in the direction that Zero, Demonito and she came from.
Finally she looks at the cameraman, "SuperZero, what a brave man."

The channel 13 TV station stands 5 stories high at the intersection between 3 busy streets, one diagonal boulevard, the river and an interstate. The sleek building occupies a lot with a few transmitter towers that rise even higher, dramatic against the clouds, stars, city lights and sky.
Inside of the Newsroom the Producer, Phil Phlash, a burly greyhaired balding white man with rolled up sleeves and a goatee, sits behind a desk in a big white super modern office where a few interns run around.
Phlash looks at a sheaf of papers as he chomps on a lit cigar.
Wanda and Jack Cracker, who carries the portacam, rush thru the double doors.
The Producer looks up at them. "Wanda, you're ok! The caller was for real."
"I'm fine Phil. We've got to warn people," Wanda tells him excitedly.
"Warn people? What? Why?"
"They're going to dose the water."
"Who? What are you talking about?"
"The DSP is going to contaminate the water supply with the secret powerdrink ingredient! We've got to broadcast a warning!"
"Where did you hear this?"
"I overheard from the cavemen who kidnapped me."
"Listen Wanda, we can't go creating mass hysteria over something you heard a couple of punks say. Tell you what. We'll broadcast a special announcement that you've been rescued and notify Commissioner Stone about the plot."

Sugarcakes rolls her eyes and shrugs. "Yeah, Phil, Ok Whatever."

Later, Brazo walks down the street slow and straight and enters the Westside bar.

He strolls up to the bar and the bartender puts down a glass with a double shot of brown liquor on the door. Canned laughter from an old sitcom blares out from the TV. Brazo swallows half the drink.

"We interrupt this broadcast to bring you a Special Report," the announcer says as the screen switches to a shot of Zu Tang holding a mike to Wanda Sugarcakes in front of the Piñata factory.

"This is Zu Tang of the News 13 Eye Rockit Hard Action News Team. My esteemed colleague who was abducted earlier this evening by DSP gangbangers was rescued a short while ago by SuperZero."

The DSP lieutenant watches the shot on the TV cut to a long shot of the hero and sidekick disappear down Santa Fe earlier and then switch to a muted close up of Zero at the Black Palace with a voice over by Tang.

"What happened, Ms. Sugarcakes?"

The shot changes back the the 2 shot of the Newswomen. "Mr. Zero was amazing. He broke out a skylight and he and his partner rescued me and we escaped out the window. We ran away as they shot at us but we were too fast."

Brazo finishes his drink and stands wearily.

In his office El Sanguijuelo sits at his desk with his head down, trembling and sweating. His glasses lay on the desk.

The barback leads a brown black mutt with a piece of meat towards the desk.

"Here, Boss," the barback tells El Jefe.
The big bald brown monster man looks up, eyes white in black eye socket pits, cheeks sunk, lips drooling and fangs chattering. He stands.

The barback tosses the meat to the front of the desk. The dog looks up at El Sanguijuelo who looks at it. The animal bolts away but the bloodsucking gangster charges with blinding speed and grabs it by the neck. The barback leaves, quick.

El Sanguijuelo breaks the dog's neck, sinks his fangs in and sucks. The dog kicks, spasms, whimpers for half a minute and then stops.

Inside the bloodsucker's brain the white worm squirms and twitches, whining sickly. When the thick red blood drowns the cortex of synapses and surrounding cells the grub swallows blood, calms down, floats and sighs.

Brazo walks down the hall towards the office door just as the barback exits.

I'd wait a few minutes," the worker tells Lucero. Brazo stops and wrinkles his forehead, perplexed. "I just gave El Jefe so mething to eat," the barback explains.

The DSP's 2nd in command leans against the wall and sighs.

In the office El Jefe drops the dog corpse on the floor and put his shades over his now entirely black crystal eyes. Brazo knocks on the door from the outside. El Sanguijuelo pulls on his suit jacket to sharpen it.

"Come in." the crime boss wipes the sweat from his forehead.

The lieutenant steps in, look down at the dead dog, up at his boss and walks toward the desk. His face shows no change in expression, all business.

"Habla con migo."


"No!"
"I just saw it on TV."
"Fire Mendoza and the other 2. How does this freak always figure out our play?"
"Boss, that Newslady don't matter. We're ready to make our move."
"I agree, once we dose the water supply. How soon can we do it?"
Brazo thinks a few seconds, "Tomorrow, late."
"How about before the sun comes up?"
"We could, but to be safe we should wait so I can make sure that Commissioner Stone keeps the heat off long enough for us to pour the stupid serum into the water," Brazo schemes out loud.
"You're sure he'll cooperate?"
"He asked to re-up on Juice yesterday. I said that I'd take care of him today but left him hanging as a matter of policy."
El Sanguijuelo's Fangs gleam as he smiles. "Bueno."
Brazo looks down at the dog, emaciated and sucked dry.
"Let's think this over, Boss. Maybe we should wait."
"Por que?"
"If we get cracked by the Feds, say. Can we handle it?"
"We'll have the whole city under our thumb. How'll they know it's us? I want to do this now. This Superduck keeps screwing with our play I want to sew up the city so that when he and his Clownito try and mess with us again we can just squash them like the cucarachas they are!" El Sanguijuelo hisses and leans against the desk.
Brazo gulps just barely. "Ok then. We'll do it"
He turns to walk out.
"Wait," El Jefe orders.
Brazo turns toward him. Fabian Mondragon tosses him a cigarette.
"Gracias, Boss."
"De Nada."
Brazo walks out without lighting it. The lieutenant closes the office door behind him in the hall, stops, leans against the wall and lights the cigarette. He looks up at the ceiling and takes a couple of deep drags. "Muy psycho," he whispers to himself before he continues again toward the bar.

Outside the Police Department the next day Brazo walks in carrying a black briefcase. Commissioner Stone sits behind his desk with the sweats and grinds his teeth. A cute 20 something Latina secretary sits at a computer in a large smart yet functionally furnished office typing away.

"Did you hear back from Mr. Lucero?" Stone asks her. "No sir." She barely looks at him, not missing a keystroke.

Brazo walks in without knocking, looking sharp, as usual.

The secretary stops typing and looks at him, surprised at his impropriety. "Can I help yo..." she starts.

Commissioner Stone stands, his eyes opened expectantly. "Thanks for coming, Lucero."

"My pleasure, Commissioner."

"We need to talk Miss Valdez, go ahead and take a break. You can take another later."

"I have lot of work, Sir."

"Miss Valdez, please."

The smart looking secretary gets up and heads for the door. "As you wish." She stands, grabs her handbag and walks out the door.

"Did you bring any Juice?" the large police boss asks.

"Yeah, but first I need to you to assure me of something," Brazo instructs.

"What?"

"If you get an emergency call at the Waterworks later today, hold it back 10 minutes."

Commissioner Stone thinks it over for a moment.
Brazo gets out a can of Juice. Stone grabs for it but the gangster pulls it away.

"Ok, yeah, I'll hold the squad cars for 10 minutes if I get a call."

Brazo lets the cop grab the can who then opens it and gulps it down.

"Aahh," says Stone, throwing the empty can in the trash. "Got any more?"

Brazo pulls 2 more cans from his brief case, "I only have 2 cans right now. I'll bring you another case tonight. Call me around 10."

"Ok, yeah. Sure."

Brazo and Stone shake hands and then the DSP fixer leaves.

The sun hangs at about 2 o'clock in the PM over the warehouse when inside the hideout Alma finally wakes up and stretches. She yawns and puts her forehead in the palm of her hand.

"They didn't knock off the water Treatment Plant last night. I don't know where else the Pandillo would dose the water. We can't watch the Plant all night, every night and go to work too."

'Nito wakes and sits up on the couch and scratches his head sleepily. Alma looks at apprentice and monkeys him, scratching her mohawk.

"I'll send an email and you can take the day off again, I guess. I want coffee." Alma heads for the coffeemaker and starts to make a pot.

Dark hangs in the back streets of Denvoid. The motorized whine of a moped grows louder as the headlight of SuperZero's bike gets brighter and bigger as it gets closer. The hero rides with Demonito on the back, both dressed in black.

Suddenly a loud 'POP' sounds out. Zero skids the bike in a semicircle safely spilling on the pavement while decelerating so that ’Nito can jump off safely too. The rider
gets up, picks up the back end of the moped and inspects the rear tire.

"Darn! Lucky thing we have a spare innertube." The vigilante gets the toolkit from the backpack after wheeling the bike to the roadside and propping it up on the kickstand.

SuperZero looks back at Demonito to make sure that he's ok. He saunters over.

The vigilante starts taking off the back wheel of the moped. "I hope this doesn't slow us up too much.

That night 2 lowriders pull up slow into the parking lot of the Municipal Water Plant and park. 3 vatos get out and go to the door of the main entrance.

Chico pushes a buzzer as 4 other DSP soldiers pull huge drums from the trunks of the cars.

A skinny black worker in a gray unitog and baseball cap opens the door. The 3 criminals at the door pull their pistols out and hold them out at him.

"Hands up," Chico says
The worker puts his arms up. "What's this all about?"
"Never mind."
"Ok. I don't want no problems."

The 2 thugs behind Chico put their guns away and rush back to one of the cars for another big drum. Chico grabs the worker and holds his gun to the laborer's head and leads the party of his 6 homies into the plant.

They all file down a cement halt which opens into a big open inside reservoir with 2 main arteries running in and out, circled and bisected by an elevated catwalk. 3 other plant employees look up at the intruders and their hostaged coworker.

"Stop, or I'll do your amigo!" Chico calls out.

In a side work room another pudgy unshaven Anglo worker gets on the phone. "Get me the Police."

The 6 DSP soldiers open the drums and pour the 3 drums of serum in the water wide over the whole surface of the city water supply.
"Hey Chico, is this enough for the whole city?" one of the gangbangers asks.

"It's superconcentrated. Brazo told me."

They finish pouring the serum and put the empty drums down. Chico motions to his crew and they gather all of the workers together. One of them finds the worker in the work room and pulls him out with the others. Chico gets a 6 pack of juice out of his backpack and also a plastic bottle. He passes 4 cans out to the municipal employees. Then he uncaps the bottle. Chico holds his gun on the hostages, as do a couple of the thugs and hands one the bottle.

"Take a swallow. Don't fake it or I'll kill you. I'll know. You can chase it with a can of Juice."

All of the unitog wearing men do as they're told.

"That's just so they help us out tomorrow. They'll give us the keys to the city if they can." Chico tells one of the other hoods quietly.

Their work done, the DSP crew take the empty drums and leave quickly.

Outside the gangsters put the drums back in the trunk, get in the lowrider and drive off.

A few minutes later 3 squad cars pull up in the plant lot. 6 cops get out and head to the entrance.

Inside the cops find the plant workers talking over the whole robbery.

"It took you guys a minute, huh?" the black supervisor who opened the door for the DSP soldiers says.

"The dispatcher screwed up. She told us the waterpark."

Outside SuperZero and Demonito ride up on the moped. From down the road they see the cop cars parked in the lot. The guerilla pulls off the road a ways away and gets off the bike with the Supermonkey. They hide in the shadows behind the trees to watch.

In a short while the police get back in the patrol cars and drive off.

Zero turns to the sidekick and observes, "They didn't
apprehend any criminals. What's our next move, 'Nito?"
'Nito looks back at his mentor and shrugs.
"We might have to take the airwaves again," the
masked avenger considers.
The crimebashers mount the scooter and ride off.

9

In the 13 Newsroom Phlash sits behind his desk,
biting his cigar and glaring at Ms. Sugarcakes.
"I'm just saying that we should at least investigate,"
she tells him, straining to keep her cool.
"I'm telling you, forget it. The authorities are aware of
the situation. Stone told me not to aggravate the public. I want
you to cover the clown convention at the auditorium downtown
later today. Go home and take a nap," he growls.
Wanda doesn't respond but glares back as she crosses
her arms and taps her foot.
Across the Newsroom a blonde male receptionist talks
on the phone and presses the hold button.
"Ms. Sugarcakes, a call from that masked man,
SuperZero, line 7."
Wanda rushes to her desk to grab the phone.
"Mr. Zero, hello. What can I do for you?"
"You've got to alert the public not to drink the water.
The DSP has tainted the municipal water supply."
"How do you know this?"

Zero stands outside a 7-11 holding a payphone as
'Nito sits on the back of the bike.
"I just know," the hero says into the receiver.
"Let me talk to my Producer. Hold on a minute,
please."
Wanda pushes the hold button and crosses to Phlash's
desk. "It's him. He says the DSP has already dosed the water."
"How's he know?"
"He said, 'I just know.'"
"We can't ignite a mass panic based on the word of a masked lunatic. The Police have got it under control. Leave it alone," the News Producer barks as he stands and leans with his fists on his desk turning red.
Wanda 'harrumphs' and walks fast back to pick up her phone. "Uh, Mr. Zero, Sir? No can do."
"Drat. We've got to do something, Ms. Sugarcakes," the crusader states.
"Where are you, Sir?"
"At the 7-11 right down the street from the station."
"Wait. I'll be right there."
"Ok."
The TV Reporter hangs up the phone, grabs her purse, puts on her blue blazer and starts to rush off.
"Where are you going!?" Phlash asks loudly.
"To meet him."
"Where?"
"The 7-11."
"Wait Wanda. Don't. I forbid it!"
"Whadaya mean you forbid it!? What are you, my Dad?!?" Wanda keeps on going for the door.
"I'm your boss!"
"I don't punch a clock. I'm on salary. You're not my boss. You're my Producer!" Wanda reminds him over her shoulder before she rushes out the double doors.
Phlash picks up the phone to make a call, fuming.
"Hello, Police?"

SuperZero and Demonito share a jumbo coffee standing of to the side of the phone when the Newswoman arrives.
"I want to thank you again for saving me," Sugarcakes says.
"All in a nights work. There's no hope of alerting the
Wanda shakes her head. "My Producer won't risk public hysteria without further proof."

"I know that the Police finally arrived at the Water Treatment Plant, but caught nobody. The Police Commissioner and Mayor were at the Black Palace function. If they've been drinking Juice, it could be very, very bad. You heard your kidnappers talking about the plot. The preponderance of evidence supports some sort of action. Is it possible to sneak a warning broadcast on the air somehow?"

"With all due respect, you've probably already got the FCC on your trail. The reason that the station ran the tape you shot was that it was such a scoop. Now my bosses seem afraid of encouraging you, creating havoc and antagonizing City Hall," Wanda explains to Zero.

"I almost want to take the station over for long enough to force a broadcast. Innocent people may be hurt though. I've got to think of something."

"I wish I could be of more help."

"Fear not, Ms. Sugarcakes. Me and Demonito will think of something. For now, drink bottled water only. Oh I'm sorry, forgive me. You haven't met my partner. Ms. Sugarcakes, Demonito."

'Nito waves and smiles his monkey grin. "I"

"Nice to meet you."

"We've got work to do. Thanks Wanda."

"Mr. Zero, here's my card with my cellphone number. Call me if you want to talk more, or have coffee."

The crusader seems at a loss for words for a moment, but finally says, "Thank you. Will do."

The divergent duo mounts the scooter and blaze off into the night.

Early in the hideout the next morning Alma wakes with a start and sits up quick. She starts to get dressed but then goes over to the couch and shakes 'Nito awake.

After the monkey wipes the sleep from his eyes Alma
says, "I've got to tell the Master not to drink the water. I'll be back."

Demonito gets dressed into his street clothes quick however. Then they leave the hideout and go out to the main warehouse and out the door.

Outside Dr. Fang's Herbal Elixir Shop, Alma and 'Nito hurry to the door. The shop hasn't opened and Ms. Azul just pulls out a key, unlocks the duo and the pair go inside.

In the shop they hurry behind the counter to the stairway to the basement and go downstairs.

Dr. Fang goes thru a series of athletic graceful Kung Fu moves as his students barge in. Fang, in a black gi, stops and turns to them.

"I thought I taught you 2 how to knock."
"I'm sorry, Master. I needed to warn you. Don't drink the water."

"I know, Tadpole. When I tasted my tea this morning it seemed funny. The Pandillo took a more extreme course because Zero keeps foiling their evil plans."

"What are we going to do?"

Dr. Fang strokes his FuManchu goatee. "I thought you'd have been at the Water Plant. They may have been prepared for you last night..."

Alma interrupts, "We got a flat tire. By the time we got there they were gone. The Police were there."

"They'll probably dump more serum into the water tonight."

"They'll be expecting me and 'Nito, I bet."
"Watch and wait before you attack."
"Yes, Master. But what if they are in the middle of pouring the potion?"

"What good are dead heroes?"

Alma stares into the space in front of her face, unable to answer.

"What next, Tadpole?"
"I should go sell flowers."
"No, go home, the 2 of you. Rest."
Alma yawns. "Ok. 'Nito and I can spy tonight."
"That seems best."
"Let's go," Alma tells the Supermonkey.
She bows to Fang. "Bye, Master."
"Be careful, Tadpole, 'Nito."
The duo goes back upstairs.

Alma and her sidekick walk down the street. Fewer people walk the sidewalks than usual. Nobody talks. Everybody drags their heels, as if in slow motion.
"Look, 'Nito. Everybody seems.. not right."
The monkey nods in agreement. They both continue towards home.
"Let's go get sleep," Alma says.

That night the lowriders pull up to the Municipal Water Treatment Plant. Chico gets out and so do 6 of his underlings who pull out 3 drums of serum. The crew takes the load to the front door.

None of the thugs pull their weapons. The same black plant worker answers as the night before.
"Do you fellas got any of that Juice, and that real strong stuff from the bottle?"
"Yeah. Just let us in to drop the stuff and we'll take care of everyone," Chico assures him.

The worker looks at the rest of the crew and their drums. "Yeah, sure. Ok."
The worker signals them in with a nod and the crew schleps in the cans of concentrated addictive devolving fluid.
SuperZero and Demonito watch from the shadows across the road.
"I feel like intervening. But we'd just get in a 7 on 2 gunfight and you're not even packing. We'd just expose ourselves again and they'd do it later. We need to shut the whole operation down, pull the poison vine out at the root, somehow."
Demonito nods, 'yes', watching the plant door close. "Come on, let's go. We need to figure out a plan."
They emerge from the shadows, get on the moped and drive off.

Brazo enters the inner sanctum of El Sanguijuelo once again. He sits across the desk from the Boss, just another executive meeting with the CEO.
"Brazo, Buenos noches. Que paso."
"Chico and the crew dropped another batch in the water. We've got enough for a few more nights. Lee's working on another batch."
"Is he trustworthy now?" Mondragon questions.
"Well, the buyout DynaCorp gave him was stingy. He needs to be on our payroll, for now. I'd say we can proceed, more easily than before, now that the City's political bosses, Municipal Government and most of Denvoid's population have become addicted. Today the Wacky Mountains, tomorrow the World."
The lieutenant smiles serenely.
"Bueno. And what of our nemesis, SuperZero?"
"He's eluded us. He's sneaky."
"He'll strike again, probably sooner than later. When he does, we'll squash him like a bug," El Jefe declares.
"And his little friend."
"Si," The Boss agrees.
Both men sit for a few seconds, contemplating. El Sanguijuelo grabs a bottle of Tequila from the end of the desk, pulls out a couple of cigarettes and pours a couple of shots. He passes Brazo a smoke and he and his 2nd light their own.
"Salud!" El Jefe toasts.
They both throw back their shots.

Alma walks down the bright Denvoid morning boulevard toward Fang's.
Lots of people shuffle along the way, plodding along like glassy eyed zombies. Even people in cars drive slow.
'Nito looks at his mentor, who looks back at him.
They stop.

"It's gotten worse, I know. We've got to do something soon," says SuperZero's alter ego.

The monkey nods his head up and down vigorously.

Alma and Demonito briskly continue towards the Elixir shop. After about a half a block Alma puts her hand on her partner's shoulder.

"I have a good idea of where they might be stashing the secret juice serum. Let's go!"

The divergent duo crosses the lethargic molasses flow of traffic.

Ms. Azul, now sporting her raven wig, and the humanoid costumed monkey, approach and enter the front of the piñata warehouse.

Inside a big fat graying Chicano in glasses makes notes on a clipboard as he stands concentrating as the girl and youngster come in.

About 20 piñatas hang or sit on display as the 2 sleuths regard each as if they're shopping.

"Can I help you?" asks the man after glancing up but looking back at the clipboard like he's too busy to help them.

Demonito disappears behind the counter silently.

Alma barely looks at the man. "I need some piñatas for a party. A friend recommended your business." She continues shopping for the right candyfilled paper mache sculpture.

The shop keeper looks up at her, puts his pen in his pocket, turns on his sales smile and steps towards her. He sweeps his arm across the front showroom.

"This is pretty much our line." He pulls a card from his front shirt pocket. "I'm doing inventory right now but please let me know if I can assist you." He hands Alma the card.

"Thank you." Alma looks at him politely and then continues shopping.

Back in the warehouse Demonito sneaks around
ducking behind shelves and racks of piñatas. 2 workers load a couple of vans out of the garage doors and another moves boxes. 'Nito evades their detection and sneaks to the back of the warehouse.

He sees 15 or so drums stacked at the back of the storeroom with thrashed piñatas and pieces of them piled on top. 'Nito creeps up and lightly knocks on one and then another, to test if they're full or not. He discovers a huge metal vat behind the barrels, with a thermometer dial, a couple of pipes and a valve sticking out of the top, out of which steam spits and hisses out. 'Nito pantomimes whistling.

After finishing the reconnaissance the Supermonkey slinks back toward the showroom.

In the showroom the monkeyboy slips back into the door like a shadow from the warehouse to join Alma. He tugs on her pants leg just as she glances down at him.

The shop keeper looks up and walks over to them after grabbing a slick brochure.

"Miss, well have a few new models available in a week or so." As he hands her the leaflet he realizes that her companion has returned. "Hey, where'd your...er....brother come from. He was gone a few seconds ago."

Alma cocks her head with a blank expression. "Was he gone? Let me go over the party budget and I'll get back to you."

The merchant looks over the youngster who innocently inspects piñatas.

"Ok, great. Thank you, Miss." He turns to her with a smile that doesn't quite hide his suspicion.

"Thanks sir. Come on Pancho. We've got lots to do." Alma tugs on her sidekick's sweater sleeve and they both take off out the front door.

Outside the piñata distributor's Alma and 'Nito walk briskly down Santa Fe thru the shiny morning.

When they get a block away Alma asks the sneaky simian, "Did you find the serum?"

He shakes his head 'yeah' with a knowing smirk.
They keep on going to Dr. Fang's Herbal Elixir Shop.

When Alma and 'Nito get to the shop they just enter, ringing the bell that hangs over the door edge. Fang sits behind the counter in his usual lotus position on the stool. He looks up as if waking from a light trance. "Tadpole, 'Nito, good day. Fill me in."

"Master, we watched the DSP dump the formula at the Water plant," Alma informs Fang. "6 drums of it."

"Probably super concentrated," Dr. Fang deducts. "I thought that the DSP might have a stash at the piñata warehouse. We checked it out before we came here. They do."

"How much?"

'Nito holds out all 10 of his fingers, closes them and opens only his right hand. "15 drums; enough for 2 and a half nights," Fang calculates.

"Should we destroy it?"

"It would put them out of operation for long enough for Denvoid to recover. Perhaps we could hotwire some kind of public service announcement. I wonder if they have a new batch brewing. I'd bet my last ginseng root that they do," Fang figures.

"Maybe I should pay a visit to Mr. Lo Lee?"

Demonito shakes his head, 'NO', emphatically. He pantomimes writing. Alma fishes the pencil and pad from her backpack and hands them over. The monkey writes a note and hands it to Fang.

"They cook it at the piñata garage. I saw the pressure cooker," The Asian sage reads out loud. "I guess that answer that question."

Fang looks gravely at his students. "I know what you Superheros are thinking. This probably presents an opportunity to strike. They outnumber and outgun us. We must use the element of surprise, superior tactics and all of our resources to defeat this nefarious organization in their evil
plan."
A little old Mexican lady comes into the shop.
"Hello Miss Galvez. Buenas dias."
"Y tu, Doctor."
"I'll be right with you," he tells the woman.
"Let me take care of business and then well finish planning the party," Fang tells his students.
"Yes, Master. Well just step outside and get some sunshine," Alma and Nito take their leave.

The sun climbs to 10:15 AM high over the Channel 13 broadcasting complex between lanes of traffic crawling in 10 different directions.

In the Wacky Mountain Eye Rockit Hard Newsroom Wanda Sugarcakes sits at her computer typing at her keyboard. The receptionist's voice comes stuporously monotonous over the speaker, "Wanda, line 4. He says he's the Superhero."

She stops typing immediately, quickly picks up the phone and pushes the button for line 4. "Sugarcakes here."
"Hi, Ms. Wanda. It's me, SuperZero. I've got a hot tip for you."

Phil Phlash takes a swig of water from a plastic bottle and then walks over to the Newswoman's desk, tilting his head to listen.

"I've got to admit, that sounds like a hot tip. It's obvious something's rotten in Denvoid. Thank you. Hopefully I'll see you soon." Sugarcakes hangs up.
"Wanda, what's up?" Phlash asks.
"Boss, this is hotter than hot. We've got to cover this."
"What?"
"He'll call me tonight with the where, but it's obvious that someone's dosing Denvoid's water supply and it sounds like he's shutting it down tonight. You've got to let me cover it."

Phlash wrinkles his forehead. "Let me think about it. I'll get back to you."
"Aaaw, Boss!"

The wind blows that evening on 5th Avenue. On Fox Street, 2 houses from the Avenue, a light goes on in the living room as the daylight dwindles.
Brazo sits in an easy chair holding a drink in the understated yet tastefully furnished smallish living room. He wears a wifebeater, smokes a cigarette and stares hard at nothing.
"There's something about that guy," he mutters.
Brazo takes a drag, drains his drink, pops a tape in the video player and turns on the TV. He pushes on the remote and the clip of SuperZero warning the city at the Black Palace.
"He seems familiar somehow," Brazo says to himself. He keeps smoking as he watches the tape with the sound turned off.
"Todo esta loco," he whispers.
The clip ends and he switches off the TV and video with the remote.

Later in the dark alley SuperZero sneaks up to the back door of the Westside Bar, looks both ways and picks the lock.
Fabian Mondragon sits at his desk petting his huge python.
The hero opens the door slowly and sneaks into the hall which runs from the front of the bar to the inner sanctum of El Jefe. The vigilante loads a wristrocket and without even checking to see if it's locked and kicks the office door in. Zero then pulls the missile back and lets it rip into the room spitting smoke.
The raider busts in the office of El Sanguijuelo which fills with fog as the 6'5" 350+ pound boss stands with 2 9mms blazing caps.
"Que en Infierno?!?" bellows The Boss.
Out front in the bar 3 DSP soldiers sit drinking and hear the ruckus.
"Ayudame muchachos!" El Sanguijueo yells demoniacally.

The thugs get up, baffled for 2 seconds, and then run down the hall toward the office. SuperZero crouches low in the office doorway and launches 2 more projectiles that fill the corridor with smoke. The vigilante runs out the door into the alley.

The thugs fall in the hall knocked out by the gas.

In the bar the bartender grabs the phone and makes a call.

El Jefe/Fabian Mondragon, immune to the effect of the gas, chases his foe out into the alley.

On the roof of the building across the alley, 'Nito and Zero watch the piñata warehouse.

In the warehouse 3 hoods sit around a table by the drums and cauldron playing pinochle when the phone rings.

"Bueno," Mendoza answers.

"Mendoza, get back here with Chico or the other guy. El Fantasmo busted into El Jefe's oficina."

"Qué?"

"He attacked and el Jefe went and chased him. The soldiers here are out. I'll call Brazo. Move it Homes."

Mendoza tells Chico to move and they get up and race to the garage door.

"We just drop the serum later, I guess, huh?" Chico asks.

"I guess," Mendoza answers.

From the roof the vigilante and sidekick watch the thugs get in a lowrider van and pull off.

Zero looks at Demonito and whispers, "It's showtime."

The crimefighters drop off the roof onto a dumpster. They nimbly jump the fence and land at the back of the piñata warehouse lot. In no time they reach the side door.

Zero picks the lock to the door toward the front of the building next to the garage doors, opening it in less than 15
'Nito runs in 1st with the guerrilla close behind. They zip towards the drums and vat of serum.

The lone thug sees Zero 1st and points his gun. "Hold it!"

The hero falls right as the Supermonkey jumps, invisible and silent, thru the air higher than the gangster's shoulders and hits him square in the face. The DSP soldier drops.

'Nito jumps off before the criminal gets up but the masked raider presses the attack, falls on him grabbing his neck and squeezing until the gangbanger gets knocked out.

With the only defender of the brew stash out like a light, the divergent duo begins emptying the drums.

SuperZero runs down the alley in the shadows dodging bullets.

El Sanguijuelo chases the vigilante with a speed that betrays his size, shooting when he sees his foe. He stops shooting to switch guns. The hero stays like a 1/2 a block ahead, though El Jefe gains a step or 2.

The lowrider van pulls up to the Westside Bar and skids to a stop. Mendoza and Chico get out, slam the door and rush into the bar.

In the bar the bartender sees them hurry in and immediately points down the hallway. "Down the hall! Out the back! El Jefe chased him out the alley!"

"What about Demonito?" Chico asks.

"No Se."

Mendoza and Chico tear down the hallway and out the door to the alley to join the chase.

In the alley they look both ways and stop for a second to decide which way to go. Finally they run deeper into the alley away from the street.

El Jefe keeps shooting and missing and exhausts a clip of one pistol and puts it in the shoulder holster.

A streetlamp bathes the alley outlet in light so
SuperZero cuts a right into a dark passage between 2 buildings. The giant gangster sees and accelerates with inhuman speed after the crimefighter, who scales a 5 foot fence to surmount the blocked way.

El Sanguijuelo aims and shoots the hero in the back. SuperZero falls to the ground, stunned for 2 seconds and then tries to get up. But the villain catches up before Zero can get up on both feet. El Jefe kicks his quarry's legs out and throws a punch to the chest and knocks down the raider.

Mondragon points the other pistol at SuperZero's face. "Don't make me kill you."

The hero kicks the bad guy's leg and tries to leap up. El Jefe squeezes the trigger but the gun's empty and his opponent's kick barely staggers him. He steps on Zero's chest.

Sanguijuelo pulls a .22 from his boot taking his eye off of his collared prize, who sneaks a dagger from the belt. "You counted my shots and you're wearing Kevlar," El Jefe concludes.

"You're not as dumb as you look."

Sanguijuelo bends down, puts his gun to Zero's head and grabs the top of the ski mask. "Let's have a look see."

The Boss pulls the mask off of Dr. Fang's head, who sticks the dagger thru Mondragon's gun wrist. The gun goes off but Fang dodges it, grabs the gun hand by the thumb and twists till the boss drops his pistol.

Sanguijuelo pulls the dagger from the wrist as Fang jumps up. The bleeding gangster recovers as Fang kicks him in the sternum which barely knocks him off balance.

El Jefe punches back at Fang's head who sidesteps it and lands 2 blows on the bad guy's bald head. This phases him but Sanguijuelo throws. Fang catches the fist arm and judo flips the Boss over his shoulder. Chico and Mendoza run down the alley, guns drawn and see the scene just as Fang bounces.

Back at the piñata warehouse the gangster shakes his head awake and watches Zero and Demonito struggle to tip the vat of serum on the floor with the rest of the empty drums.
The thug gets up and sneaks to the phone on a work table and makes a call.

   In the way between buildings off of the alley Chico and Mendoza climb the fence at the front end as Sanguijuelo watches. The bartender runs by and finds them.
   "Jefe, they're dumping the drums of stuff at the piñata place, the Fantasmo and el Demonito," the bartender informs.
   "NoOOoOooO!" Sanguijuelo howls, punching a hole in a brick wall. "You 2, get back there, AHORA!"
   Chico and Mendoza race off at their overlord's command.
   El Jefe takes a look at his hand, which has already healed. He takes a deep breath, composing himself, and walks towards the bar thru the alley regally as the bartender follows.
   "That Zero was a decoy," El Sanguijuelo says to himself.
   Up on the rooftop at the mouth of the alley Fang watches them, then pulls his hood up, speeds across the roof and jumps to the next.

   Outside in the lot of the piñata warehouse the News 13 van sits parked as Jack Cracker pulls the remote cam out and Wanda starts crossing to the building towards the garage doors.
   "Come on. Let's check it out ," she instructs.
   The cameraman follows as SuperZero opens a garage door from inside as 'Nito stands there too. The camera remote light switches on.
   "This way. We already dumped it !" The hero says.
   Jack has already begun shooting. Wanda and he follow the crimefighters in. Zero turns the warehouse lights on passing the switch and then leads the Newsteam toward the emptied vats and drums.
   Ms. Sugarcakes puts on her serious Newscaster face.
   "These are the emptied vats of alleged addictive serum that the DSP planned on dumping into the municipal water supply"
again tonight."

Suddenly the sound of tires screech from the lot outside. Car doors slam.
"Wanda, Cracker, we'll split up. Get to safety. They'll chase us, I'm sure," SuperZero instructs.

The sound of running footsteps herald Chico and Mendoza busting in with guns drawn. Zero and 'Nito charge for the door to the side of the garage door toward the gangbangers.

The hero and monkey throw piñatas at there enemies scoring direct hits that rip the animals apart in explosions of candy, causing the criminals to fire their guns inaccurately.

Demonito kicks the front door open as the guerrilla drop kicks Chico into Mendoza, who both fall.

The crimebusters blow wheels. The Newsteam hightails it out the front of the store and the gangsters get up and chase their adversaries.

Wanda and Jack make for the Newsvan as Chico and Mendoza follow Zero and the Supermonkey, who already jump over the fence at the back of the lot.
"Shoot 'em!" Chico yells.

Both gangsters shoot and miss as hero and sidekick speed into the shadows. Chico and Mendoza head for the van, get in and peel off out of the lot, around the fence and into the alley in pursuit of the masked 2-some.

The Newsvan lays rubber out of the lot too, chasing the action.

The lowrider van zooms out thru the alley and pulls out onto 12th. SuperZero kick starts the moped, 'Nito on the back, by the side of the building in the shadows. The thugs see the headlight.

Zero peels out. Chico turns toward the scooter, accelerating. The van gains on the bike, which speeds up too. But the vehicle clips the back tire of the scooter and sends it sliding into the pavement. Zero and 'Nito spill and roll. The van pulls around and stops. Hero and sidekick get up.

The Newsvan stops and Jack Cracker gets the
portacam from the back quick and starts getting Out on the street with Wanda.

Chico puts the van in gear. SuperZero and Demonito run.

Fang rides up on a bike right behind the Newsvan. The lowrider van burns rubber chasing the vigilantes down.

Demonito leaps, as does Zero, but the van nails the hero who flips mid-air over the short sloped hood and lands on the street.

"Oh my God!" yells Sugarcakes. SuperZero lays supine, tries to get up but can't. So the avenger whips out the uzi arm sitting up finally to blast out the lowrider van's headlights and windshield. Chico and Mendoza barely duck behind the dashboard without getting shot.

Fang watches wideeyed as if hypnotized from behind the Newsvan. So does 'Nito, from behind a newspaper machine.

The gangsters throw open the van doors and jump out with their 9s drawn. In the semidark they speed behind the van for cover.

Demonito runs to attack the hoods but injured, falls on a lame leg.

Fang, like lightning, sneaks up and drop kicks Chico from behind and lays him out. Mendoza turns to join the action holding his gun out but the sage grabs him by the weapon wrist and flips him to the street too.

A black Benz pulls around the corner from the other side of the Street so that the van and action sit between it and the Newsvan.

Fang runs to Zero who has layed back down again. He grabs an arm of the hero and pulls up.

"Grab me," Fang instructs. The Master turns around and Zero hooks arms with him so that Fang can drag the hero almost piggy back back towards the Newsvan.

El Sanguijuelo gets out, starts to pull his gun but
notices the cameraman and portacam.

Demonito follows, limping as quickly as he can.

"We'd better get out of here, ASAP," Fang says to Sugarcakes and Cracker.

All get into the Newsvan. The Cameraman hands the reporter the portacam as the 3 crimefighters find room in the back and then Jack Cracker starts the engine and drives off.

El Sanguijuelo walks slowly up to Chico, picks him up off the asphalt, slaps him conscious and hisses, "You blew it, Estupido!" and clocks him in the jaw unconscious again. Then he drops him.

"You can't get good help these days," El Jefe decides.

Later the Benz parks in the alley next door to the Westside bar. El Jefe gets out of the car, slams the door shut with cool precise anger and leaves the garage pressing a button on his key ring that closes the garage door. He then walks up to the back door of the bar, unlocks it, enters and shuts the door behind him.

In the front of the bar Brazo sits with a cup of hot coffee watching Chip Dinkledorf on TV.

"New developments in the DSP/Juice connection story," the talking head announces.

The shot changes to Zero in the piñata warehouse leading Sugarcakes back to the empty vats and drums of serum.

"The character who calls himself SuperZero who shut down the Juice function at the Black Palace recently says he dumped a stockpile of allegedly addictive devolutionary serum..."

The picture changes again to Zero getting hit by the lowrider van and shooting the front of the vehicle.

"A gunfight ensued but all the combatants fled before police arrived." Dinkledorf’s head pops back on. "Whatever's happening between the DSP, the masked terrorist and the Juice corporation is causing mayhem on the Street of Denvoid and the authorities need to shut it down. In other news..."
Lucero shakes his head, puts it into his palms, elbow on the bar, and massages the sides of his forehead.

On a lonely empty dark street stands a big neoclassical mansion on an immaculate huge lawn. All the windows look dark except for one on the 2nd floor, in which a flickering blue light, like from a TV, shines.

In a huge bedroom Director Grim lays with him back propped up against a huge headboard in silk pajamas under velvet sheets and a dark bedspread in a kingsized bed in an immaculately furnished master bedroom.

"...and 657 of Americans polled preferred ketchup to mustard..."

The genetic research company CEO shuts the TV off with the remote.

He grabs the phone from the nightstand. The grayhaired feral Doctor punches a number in.

"You have reached the voicemail of Star Whitebread, administrative assistant for Director Grim of Dynacorp Research Incorporated. Please leave a message by pressing 3 If this is an emergency..."

Grim presses 3. "Ms. Whitebread, set a meeting up with the board first thing in the morning. This terrorist/DSP thing is getting hot again !"

He puts the phone back and lays down again and stares at the ceiling hard.

The Wackymountain Eye Rockit Hard Newsvan speeds down a dark street.

In the back of the van Demonito watches as Fang attends to SuperZero, who lays on the floor between the equipment and remote workstations. Wanda Sugarcakes watches too, turned around in the passenger seat.

Fang turns around. "You can slow down Sir. I don't think we're being followed."
"How is he Doc?" Wanda asks, sounding unsure of how to address Fang.

"Some broken ribs; lower back's thrown out; a dislocated hip. Everything will heal," He answers gently while feeling the Vigilante's ribs.

"Shouldn't we be taking Mr. Zero to the hospital?"
Sugarcakes says almost as if it's a challenge.

"I am capable of taking care of the patient at my office. I'm sure that you understand that we should respect Zero's wish to remain incognito," Fang calmly addresses Wanda's concern without looking away from the injured crimefighter.

"I guess you're right," the Newswoman sounds barely convinced.

"Trust me. My office is just 3 shops up on the right."

"How do you know? You haven't looked away from Mr. Zero."

"I know," Fang says serenely

A drunk guy walks out of the Westside bar as a sober guy walks in.

At the bar Brazo holds his head and stares at the counter.

"Brazo!" El Sanguijuelo yells from his office. The lieutenant sits up at attention, sighs, stands and walks down to the hallway to El Jefe's office door. The big crime boss sits behind the desk watching the door severely as Brazo opens it and walks calm and erect directly across from him.

"Señor?"

"You saw the news?" Sanguijuelo asks.

"Si."

"How long to cook a new batch?"
"3 days for 12 drums, enough for 2 days."

"We need more. Do we have the formula?"

"Yes, but we've never cooked it without Lee," Brazo explains.
"We'll learn. There we're 2 fantasmos anoche."
"I figured."
"We'll move again when we cook the juice. I demasked 1 of the creeps, an old man. I lost him. He's bad. The other got away again too."
"Maybe we can bait him. We did it before but he got away," the lieutenant plots.
"We'll do a better job and catch him and his little friend. Then we'll make them pay."
"We need the right bait, is all."
"Brazo, once we get the water dosed again then we'll start the Juice Plant operations ASAP."
"I'll start working on that 1st thing mañana. We've got 6 or 7 cases left, enough to keep the Police Chief and Mayor in our pocket after they start withdrawal. Then we'll get the whole city hooked again, change the product name and start cranking."
"We'll need loans."
"We'll get a new Board of Directors from somewhere. The main thing is to get the product out."
"I'm tired of pussy footing around," the big bad bald crimeboss declares.
"Maybe we should wait, Señor. Make sure."
"No," El Sanguijuelo decides. "We do it now. 1st we get the Fantasmo and Demonito under our thumb and then we raise our zombie army to take over the world. No more Mr. Nice Guy!"
"Ok," Brazo agrees.
El Sanguijuelo grabs a bottle of whiskey and shot glasses and pours the liquor. "Let's have a drink."

The Newsvan pulls in front of the elixir shop. The back doors open from the inside and Fang and Demonito pull SuperZero as gently as they can from the van. Wanda gets out of the passenger side and tags along impotently. Jack Cracker watches from the driver's seat.
"You're sure he'll be ok?" she asks.
"Zero's pretty tough, Miss," Fang assures.
"Can I do anything?"
"Actually I have my hands full. If you could reach in my left pants pocket you'll find my keys and open the door to the shop."
"Sure," she says and does as asked.
When the allies have pulled their comrade into the store Fang turns to the Newslady and says, "Thank you Miss."
"It was nothing."
Fang shuts the door and Wanda stands at the door looking at the doorknob like she wants to open it. Instead she turns and makes for the Newsvan.
"Jack, in all the chaos we never looked at the footage we beamed to the station. Let's take a look at the tape." Wanda and Jack go out the door of the Shop.
Fang and 'Nito take Zero through a door at the back of the store.

A bit later in the lab Fang bends over Alma, demasked and decostumed, on a vinyl mattress laid on the work table with her back propped up. She groans weakly.
"I've given you something for the pain," Fang says calmly.

'Nito watches attentively from up on a counter across the room.
"You'll go out soon and then I'll set you bones."
Fang, in rubber gloves, uses a big steel hypodermic needle to draw fluid out of a small glass jar and then shoots a thin clear stream of it thru the air.
Alma falls out of consciousness.

On 11th and Santa Fe a band of light cracks the horizon past the city buildings. Demonito, in his street clothes now, scampers toward the wrecked moped. He picks it up and starts to wheel it away, struggling a lot because of the bent back wheel.

Finally 'Nito has to lift the back end and push the back end and push the bike on the flat front tire. He must stop every
15 or 20 yards or so to realign the smashed machine.

On the Avenue in front of Dynacorp traffic passes. The cars of employees get cleared by the 2 guards in the booth to enter and park.

In the boardroom Director Grim sits at the end of a long table as his 5 managers sit at the sides.

"I'm sure you're all aware of the video report of that masked lunatic dumping serum at the piñata factory and the subsequent firefight in the streets last night. I've called you here to let you know that I've alerted our chiefs. The NSA have watched the broadcasts and have the entire area under spy satellite surveillance. Any other episodes and they'll send in damage control teams and dissolve Dynacorp. We've all been provided for with generous buyout packages. I merely wanted to inform you of the probable scenario and take this opportunity to say it's been a pleasure working with all of you."

The 5 scientists and administrators look at each other and at the Director. They all begin talking in subdued shock to one another.

"Director Grim, are we to understand that the company is going out of business?" asks a balding middleaged east Indian scientist above the din.

The executive raises his hand to stop the hubbub like some royal game show host. "I'm sure you all grasp the situation. You have your golden parachutes. Thank you. Good day."

Grim stands and the staff watches as he walks out of the room and closes the door behind him.

On the streets of Denvoid the sun shines bright but almost no traffic drives and few pedestrians go anywhere. Those that do walk like they're in pain, as if their joints ache.

The same situation pervades outside the Channel 13 building.
In the Newsroom Wanda hurries up to Phlash's desk, who rolls his eyes, as if he's heard way more than enough. "What?" he snaps. "You cut the story. You muted Mr. Zero saying the DSP was going to dump the fluid into the water supply and that it was allegedly devolutionary and addictive," Wanda asserts.

"You're lucky I ran the story at all!" Phlash barks. "You watered it down!"
"You have no proof. We can't create a havoc!"
"Everybody's calling in sick today! Have you seen the streets? If that's not proof enough, my name's not Sugarcakes!"
"Purely circumstantial, Miss Sourcakes."
"When I get proof you're running a Public Service Announcement," the Newswoman tells the Editor.
"Anything to get you out of my face!" Phlash pulls a sheaf of paper between his face and hers. Wanda turns and stomps off.

Inside of the showroom the shopkeeper arranges his stock on the shelves when Sugarcakes and Cracker walk thru the door. He recognizes her immediately and takes a couple of steps toward her with his palms raised vacillatingly.

"Please lady, you people took video of my business last night already, without permission. I don't want no problems. I got nothing to say."

Wanda smiles. "I don't want you to answer any questions." She holds a $100 dollar bill out to him. "I just want to see if I can get a small sample of the syrup in the drums and vat."

The shopkeeper thinks for a few seconds, looking at the bill, "Ok, that won't do anymore damage, I guess."

"Great." Sugarcakes pulls an empty corked test tube out of her pocket.
"This way," says the chunky gray haired man as he leads her back into the warehouse.
Even the boulevard in front of Denvoid City Hall seems almost deserted. A few people struggle up and down the front steps and a few others sit on park benches hunched over with their heads in their laps. One lady, dressed in a sharp business suit, though her hair looks like a tangled tumbleweed, gets sick in a trashcan.

In the Mayor's opulent office, adorned and furnished in styles from classic to postmodern, the hands of the Art Deco clock on the wall show 11:30.

Mayor Greenback and Commissioner Stone both glance up at the clock.

"Lucero's late," Mayor Greenback declares.
"A little. He'll be here soon," Stone assures.

They sit for a short spell before Brazo walks in the office without knocking.

"Mr. Lucero, please. You just don't walk..." Stone begins to chastise Brazo hollowly.

Brazo passes the Mayor a can of Juice. "Mayor Greenback, Stone, good day." He passes Stone a can too.

Both executives crack the trendy cans of powerdrink and guzzle them down. Brazo stays on his feet.

When they finish Greenback burps but covers it with a fake cough as he pulls his fist to his mouth.

"Did you bring more, Mr. Lucero?" Stone asks.
"It's in the car. Before I bring it up I wanted to make sure we were all on the same page."

"Concerning what?" the Mayor asks.

"Well, the Juicecorp has filed to change its name, which will happen the day after tomorrow. We need a letter from you for the bankers. We also need for your forces to give us a little window should there be a call out at the water treatment plant. We can handle any problems. There probably won't be any, Mr. Stone. Also, we'd appreciate you persuading the the media to not create a public panic with their coverage and help squashing this civic menace SuperZero." Brazo dictates.

Stone and Greenback look at each other and then at
"That's reasonable," Greenback says. "Of course, you both can expect a percentage when the company shows profit," Brazo informs them. "I'll go get the Juice."

Lucero leaves the Mayor and Commissioner, who look at each other.

"This thing could blow up. Are we in too deep?" the Commissioner asks the Mayor.

"Are you kidding me Leroy? We run this town," Greenback states.

From the front of Dr. Fang's Herbal Elixir Shop the wrecked moped sits parked up next to the side of the building in the passage to the back. A 'Closed Due to Emergency' sign hangs in the front window. A woman walks up to the shop door, reads the sign and walks away.

Back in Fang's lab Alma opens her eyes, stretches stiffly, gets up off the table wobbly and tentatively tries walking and extending all 4 limbs.

Fang stands against the counter regarding her academically. One arm across his stomach supporting the other elbow to hold his chin.

"I'm healed." Alma remarks, astonished. "How the heck did you do it?"

"Ancient Vietnamese secret, Tadpole."

Alma shoots him a look that would freeze warm blood.

Fang chuckles. "Well, I had the formula that evolved 'Nito. I merely concocted an Herbal equivalent. None of the wounds was serious but you would have spent months rehabilitating. You remember, of course, how fast 'Nito recovered from the gunshot wound. Our enemies have been but inconvenienced and I fear we will need to be at full force very quickly. In fact, I think your natural skills, talents and powers will be dramatically enhanced.

Alma finally pulls each knee up to her chest with both
hands then twirls both arms and rolls her head and neck. "I feel brand new."

Fang smiles just a bit.
"Where's Monkeyboy?" Ms. Azul asks.
"Taking a nap. He fell asleep so I told him to go downstairs."

"I feel like a workout, Master."
"Rest a bit. Dr.'s orders. When Demonito wakes I'm setting up a target range. It could get hairy soon so I want to teach him to shoot."
Alma nods.

Wanda Sugarcakes crosses the station parking lot holding a big manila envelope as Cracker follows.
At his desk in the newsroom Phil Phlash holds the phone to his ear.
"I'm sure you understand, Mr. Phlash, the gravity of the situation. The Mayor told me to assure you personally that everything's under control. Alarming the public and satisfying this masked terrorist's lust for attention serves no purpose," says the Police Chief on the other end of the phone.
"Yes Commissioner Stone. But if my reporters find irrefutable proof, the public has a right to know."
"I understand Phlash. Let the Mayor and I have a chance to clean this little mess 1st. I guarantee we've got it under control."
"Well sir, we'll wait then."
"Thank you Mr. Phlash."

Phil Phlash hangs the phone up and takes a big draw from his cigar. Wanda comes running up to his desk with the big yellow envelope and throws it onto his desk with a slap.
Phlash snatches it up. "What's this?"
"Proof," Sugarcakes answers.
Phlash opens it, pulls a piece of paper and looks at it. "What's this mean? In English, por favor."
"It's the lab report analyzing the liquid spilled at the piñata factory. Its definitely addictive, with an element very
similar to tobacco. Also it's probably degenerative."

Phlash jams his palm against his forehead, "Wanda, relax ok? Good work but we need to be 100% absolutely sure on this."

"Boss, all we gotta do is say it exactly like it is."
"Then we'll just wait a couple of days. Sorry."
"Then I QUIT!!!" Wanda Sugarcakes turns and rushes off. "If you won't air it I'll take it to a station with guts!"
Phlash stands. "Wanda WAIT!" He calls after her, "God damned primadonna!" He falls into his chair and bangs his head against his desk with a thud.

A target with a generic thug firing a gun design hangs at the far end of Fang's basement. The Master stands behind 'Nito, who holds up a 9mm and blasts off 5 shots loudly.
They take off their ear protectors and see that Demonito hit the target twice.
"Not bad. Let's try again," Fang directs.
The Doctor walks over and puts up a new target after taking the shot up one down.

On the side of the Elixir Shop building Alma finishes taking the back tire bolts with the wrench attachment to her prosthetic arm but struggles to to get the mangled wheel off. Her body tenses, she pants unsuccessfully, stops, relaxes and starts again. She pulls harder and harder, prying the moped frame apart but still can't quite get it.
She huffs, puffs, clenches her teeth and opens her eyes wide in fury.
"AIEE!!" She screams in the last ditch pull that frees the bent tire.
Alma Azul pants enraged for a bit and then grabs the tire and tries to straighten it by jamming 1 end down on the cement with her boot and pushing the other end with her hand and tool arm. She can't do it and becomes pure fury, picks up the tire and bangs it again and again on the walk.
"DAMN IT ALL TO HECK!!!!" she screams, throws it
to the ground and punches the brick wall with her flesh fist.

Downstairs 'Nito and Fang hear the ruckus and run upstairs.

The Master and monkey run up to Alma, who pants, trembling in rage.

"What's wrong, Tadpole?" asks Dr. Fang seeing the hole in the wall, the even more mangled tire and Alma's bleeding fist.

"I couldn't get the wheel straight."
"Buy a new one," Fang suggests serenely.
Alma drops and sits on the concrete.
"I thought this might happen. It's a reaction to the serum."

"Master, it's so hard. They killed my Tio and Tia. Everything we do, everytime we strike at them, they hit back harder. There's too many off them. We'll never win."

Demonito watches sitting on the concrete with his back against the wall.

"Nobody ever said that being a Vigilante was easy, Alma."

"Sometimes I feel like I'd like to take over the world, then destroy it," Alma admits in a grim monotone.
"Why go thru all that trouble? Just sit back and let it destroy itself."

Alma chuckles. "Yeah, huh."
"Calm down, Tadpole. We've got lots of work to do."

Fang offers his apprentice his hand.

Alma takes it and lets the Dr. help pull her up. "Yeah I know. I've got to buy a new back wheel."

Ms. Azul walks toward the street. 'Nito gets up and follows.

When they've left Fang inspects the hole left by Alma's fist in the brick wall and whistles, awestruck.

In front of the minimart a young rocker dude walks out of the store drinking a can of juice carrying a white plastic
bag. The kid finishes the can with an "aaah" and tosses the empty into the trash as a disheveled 35ish unshaven businessman and a stockier blue collar type, looking equally wretched, watch.

"Hey, where'd you get that?" the businessman asks.
The rocker points to the minimart. "In there."
"What's in the bag?" Blue collar guy asks.
"Nothing."
Both the white collar type and construction worker grab at the bag like rabid dogs and snatch a can each. Rocker dude holds onto 2 cans and runs away as the 2 juice thieves suck down their cans.

8 or 9 others see the episode and walk over. The 1st 2 desperados back up.

"There's more in the store!" "It's all in there." both say as they retreat.
The juice starved group rush into the store as even more people have noticed what the commotion means.
Inside the minimart the crush of people fight at the pop section of the coolers for the remaining cans of Juice. More people enter the store.

"Hey, give me those cans!"
"Those are mine!" people yell as they fight over the last containers of powerdrink.
A tall young mideastern man in a green smock comes from around the back of the counter, forces the door shut and locks it as he screams, "Wait Wait! I have another case in the back."

A Channel 9 Newsvan drives down the street in front of the minimart. A white man drives a black man, both in their early 30s. They notice the action.

"Lets get some footage of that," the passenger says.
The driver pulls the van over and parks. Soon the 2 get out of the side door, the driver with the Newscam and the Newscaster with a mike, and approach the scene to do their invideoostigation.
Wanda walks quickly down the strangely sparsely populated street and into a sandwich deli.

Inside at the counter a young brunette pierced lip sandwich jerk chick vacantly asks, "Can I help you?"

Wanda has one eye on the menu, "Yes, I think I'll have..."

She notices the TV tuned to the 1 PM News. It runs the story shot by the 9 Newscrew.

"And the cause of this mini riot at the minimart?" the African American Newscaster asks matted behind the anchorman. "What is all the ruckus about?" the remote reporter asks a Latino kid as cops bust the crowd for looting the store for nonexistent powerdrink.

"You know, Homes. They want the Juice."

"All of this mayhem over a can of powerdrink. It makes you wonder," Wanda ponders as she whips out her cellphone and punches a number in.

"You want something, Mam, or what?" the deli clerk asks.

Wanda, oblivious to the clerk, says into the phone, "Boss, check the 9 News site. They scooped us.

In the 13 Newsroom Wanda walks up to Phlash's desk and pulls him out a sandwich wrapped in white paper, a can of Coke and a bag of chips.

"Ok, Wanda, we'll run the lab results of the serum. See if you can get the minimart clerk to do an interview. We'll run it at 5."

"I'm on it, Boss."

Wanda rushes off taking her lunch along.

On a TV screen the shot shows Ms. Sugarcakes standing in front of the Piñata Factory telling the public the facts. ".The substance that the Vigilantes dumped, are according to a lab analyses, quote; 'almost definitely addictive, with an element very similar to nicotine, almost probably degenerative.' These are almost the precise allegations made
by SuperZero the night he assaulted the Juice inaugural at the Black Palace. The night I was kidnapped I heard my abductors plans to contaminate Denvoid's water supply, at this very Piñata Factory. They most certainly could have been DSP gang members. Given today's near riot at a local minimart over the last cans of the store's Juice supply, the preponderance of evidence almost certainly suggests a very large malevolent plot. Channel 13 advises drinking bottled water only. Now an interview with the minimart employee working when the riot occurred." The shot changes to Wanda interviewing the clerk.

Alma and 'Nito look at each other on the couch sitting in front of the TV in the warehouse hideout space.

"Fang said it would probably take 2 or 3 days for the DSP to cook more serum if we dumped it all. I feel like watching the Water Treatment Plant, or striking at the Pandillo again but we've got to sleep sometime. We'll get with the Master tomorrow figure out our next move," Alma says.

Demonito nods and they both turn to the TV again.

The clock on the tower of City Hall says 10:45 protruding against the rest of the city, the Wacky Mountains, the rest of the city and the radiant morning sky.

In the Mayor's office Greenback sits at his desk on the phone waiting for an answer on the other end. It clicks presently.

"Hello sir," answers Brazo's voice.

"Hello Mr. Lucero. I'm hoping that you can have more cases of the powerdrink in stores soon, to prevent anymore episodes like yesterday's minimart fiasco," states the Mayor.

"Well, your Honor, by tomorrow night, it won't be a problem. Until then, we can't give what we don't have."

"I see. Just so you know, I'm going on the airwaves with a press conference soon to assuage public unrest."

Brazo sits in the easy chair in his apartment on the phone. "May I ask when, Mayor?"

"For the 12 o'clock news."
"That's good. Thanks for letting us know."
"Sure thing, Lucero. Good day."
"Good day, Sir."

Brazo hangs up, gets a smoke, lights it and rubs his hand thru his hair repeatedly. "This just don't seem worth it sometimes. Maybe I should buy a fake identity, move south and sell used cars." he tells himself quietly

Back in the Mayor's office camera crews have assembled with lights and microphones pointed at the Mayor sitting behind his desk. A makeup girl, in a T shirt but a beehive doo and lots of makeup herself, pats Greenback's face with a small sponge.

"15 seconds Mr. Mayor," a crewman notifies. The makeup girl finishes and steps back. Greenback looks at the script and places it on the desk.

The crewman points to the teleprompter. "5 seconds." He gives him the last 4 second hand count down and points at the Mayor for the last second.

"This is a Public Service Anouncement from the Mayor's Office of Denvoid Colorady," a supernaturally disembodied voice announces.

The Mayor looks at the camera with a practiced alert relaxed smile of an insurance salesman.

"People of Denvoid, allegations have been made about a plot to contaminate the city's water. I want to assure you all that the Police have the situation under control. We've checked the water and I guarantee you that it's safe. Also, yesterday's mayhem at the minimart is in no way related to the situation. The local media's accusations of City Government's connection with local street criminals are totally unfounded. In 36 hours, all uncertainty will be satisfied. You have my word."

On the widescreened TV in the cabinet across the desk from El Sanguijuelo's desk the shot switches from the Mayor's office to an Anchorman in the Newsroom.

"What do you think?" El Jefe asks Brazo who sits
across the desk.

"I think he's stupid for calling attention to the situation at all. Sugarcakes already told the City to not drink the water. They'll forget. By tomorrow night it won't matter."

El Sanguijuelo nods. His suit looks tight because he's gotten bigger. His face looks more demonic, bone structure sharper and skin almost translucent.

"Damn, Boss. You been hittin' the weight pile?"

El Jefe waits a moment before he answers, "Yeah, that's it." He grabs a cigarette from a case in his suit pocket and offers one to Brazo too, who takes it.

"Thanks."

"Make sure that stuff's protected, homie."

"Check."

They both light up.

As evening falls 'Nito turns the sign from 'open' to 'closed' inside the door at the Elixir Shop as birds chirp and a few cars drive by.

Down in the basement Dr. Fang sits on a chair and Alma on a stool. The Monkey comes downstairs and pulls a plastic bucket, turns it upside down and sits, making a circle.

"Well it was good that Ms. Sugarcakes did a story yesterday but the Mayor's speech is a bad sign. It show he's in Mondragon's pocket," Alma calculates.

"They're brewing another batch. They'll dump it in the water tomorrow night. We stopped them long enough to alert the public but didn't realize they were fully in cahoots with the city's big cheese," Fang extrapolates.

"Why'd we even try?"

"We almost had them."

"We can try the Piñata Factory tonight and the Water Treatment Plant tomorrow night.

"They'll be expecting both," Fang points out.

"Where else can we strike?"

"Something unforeseen always happens."
"We need to make it happen," Alma decides. 
"I'm thinking."

The day dies as Brazo walks into the Police Station. Stone sits in his chair with his feet up on the windowsill holding a sheaf of documents at his side. 
"Mr. Lucero's here to see you sir," his secretary announces walking into his office. 
"I need your help, Mr. Stone." "My help?" asks the city's #1 cop. "You know to be there late at the Water Plant tomorrow. We need you to patrol for that masked menace at the Piñata Factory too, and also another location. We need him, alive." "Patrol for that masked menace..." echoes Stone monotonously.

That night, 'Nito, Fang and SuperZero, all in black, watch the Piñata Warehouse from an alley between buildings. Fang wears a classic Ninja mask and Zero and the Supermonkey their regular uniforms. Fang's bike and the moped sit parked deeper in the alley.
They see a patrol car parked in the lot of the storehouse. Another police car passes on the street. "Between the cops and the gangsters, we're seriously out gunned," Fang whispers.
Demonito stares at the building, which stashes the serum works, brandishing a 9mm strap. "Put that away!" The hero sighs harshly at the sidekick.
A while later Fang shakes his head and says quietly, "There's nothing we can do here tonight."
The master motions for the Supermonkey to give him
back the automatic weapon. 'Nito pretends not to notice but then complies reluctantly.

The trio get on their bikes and take off into the dark.

11

The sun hangs low in the sky and throws long shadows late in the afternoon in front of St. Mary's Orphanage. A lowrider van rolls up in front and parks, followed directly by a sedan. A moment later 6 DSP thugs get out and walk efficiently thru the wrought iron gate. 3 go around the back of the Victorian Mansion and the others go up the front porch steps. A White girl and Mexican Girl, about 8 and 9, play jacks on the porch. They stop and look at the men.

"Time to come in girls. Play time's over," Chico tells them.

They ignore his order and stare at him quizzically. Chico nods at his homies and they grab the girls by the arms. Chico kicks the door open and all 3 gangsters enter, pulling the girls in too.

Mendoza and the other 2 DSP soldiers join Chico and company plus the thin middledaged lady director and 5 other children in the orphanage livingroom.

"Just what is the meaning of this!?" asks the woman in dark slacks and blouse, despite the 6 hoods with guns.

"Relax lady, just a little kidnapping. Just play nice until we get what we want and everything will be ok," Chico instructs.

Mendoza makes a call on his cellphone, "Yeah, Sir. We done did it."

El Sanguijuego sits at his desk as Brazo Derecho stands in the middle of the office on the phone. "Bueno Mendoza. Esperate. I'll call back soon."

Lucero hangs up, "They did it, Boss." El Jefe nods, "Call the station."
Brazo punches a number on the telephone and waits a minute, "Newsroom, please."
"Who's calling?" asks an almost impolite female receptionist from the other end.
"The KKK and we've taken St. Mary's Orphanage hostage. Do everything we want or we'll start murdering orphans. Comprende?"
"Ok. Transferring."

A sharp 25ish male receptionist answers the phone, "Newsroom."
"I want to talk to Wanda Sugarcakes."
"Who's calling?" Phonedude asks like an insult.
"Richard Nixon. I've taken over the Orphanage. Put Wanda on the phone or there'll be hell to pay."
The receptionist makes a 'Well, I never,' face and pushes a button on the phone.
Wanda sits in her desk cubicle surfing the internet when the phone rings.
She picks it up. "This is Ms. Sugarcakes."
"Hi Wanda. Dick Nixon here. The KKK and I have taken hostages at St. Mary's."
"How do I know this isn't a hoax?"
"There were 7 orphans at the orphanage the night the masked clown and midget sidekick shut the lights out, right?"
Wanda thinks for a second. "Uh yeah, I think so."
"And the camera guy was a 40ish farm boy looking guy, right? Well obviously I know something about something of what's going on."
"...What do you want?"
"We want coverage, a camera crew, an on air interview. We want you. You got the scoop baby. You got half an hour."
"What if I say 'no'?"
"Then we start killing children." Click, the Mad Caller hangs up.
"WAIT! Hello?, Mr. Nixon, darn!" Wanda hangs up.
The Newswoman comes out of her cubicle and marches to Phlash's desk, "Phil, I need Jack Cracker and the Eye Rock-it Hard Newsvan."
"Why? What's up?"
"Dick Nixon and the KKK have just stormed St. Mary's Orphanage. They're demanding I do an interview or they'll kill hostages."
"What? Are you kidding me!"
"I think it's the DSP, or Juice, or whoever. The caller knew the details about the night we covered SuperZero's sabotage of the Juice giveaway at St. Mary's. We've got 28 minutes."

Phlash shakes his head. "Ok, sure. I'll call Commissioner Stone and get you some protection."
"Thanks, Boss. I'll call soon." Wanda runs off.
"Be careful!" Phlash calls after, watching her.
Then he shakes his head and stares hard into his desk top like it was a crystal ball.

The 13 Newsvan pulls in front of the orphanage and Sugarcakes and Cracker hurry up to the front door, the cameraman hauling the portacam and tripod. Wanda rings the doorbell and one of the gangsters opens the door wearing a white pointed linen hood with 'KKK' written in black marker in Gothic letters above the eyeholes.
"Come in," orders the Klanbanger.
As soon as Jack and Wanda enter the hooded thug and another, with the same coned mask, pull automatic pistols on the Newscrew.
"Set up in the livingroom."
Sugarcakes and Cracker look at each other and the abductors and quickly walk at gunpoint in front of the hooded thugs in the livingroom.
The children and Director all sit crowded on a couch, 2 easy chairs and the floor. 3 gangsters sit on kitchen chairs and 3 stand. All wear KKK hoods and normal athletic sweaters, shoes and baggy jeans. Some have there guns drawn.
A space has been cleared in the middle of the room. The black 9 year old boy sits on a kitchen chair in the middle of the space.

"Set up here and focus on the kid and me. You beam direct to the station, right?" asks Chico inside the hood.

"We tape it and beam it from the van. We have to call and let them know to receive the transmission."

"Ok, let's get the show on the road."

Jack Cracker finishes setting the camera on the tripod and turns the remote spotlight on the hooded hood. Wanda gets in the shot too.

"Ready when you are, Wanda," Wanda informs.

"Ok, just give me an intro, the let me do all the talking," Chico bosses.

"Right. It's your circus," Wanda jokes morbidly.

"Ok, 10 seconds," Jack announces, and after 5 gives the 5 second hand count and points.

The sun paints the sky dayglo orange and red above the warehouse.

In the hideout space Alma and 'Nito sit on the couch watching TV.

Chip Dinkledorf talks to Tvlambd from behind the Newsdesk, "And we have a disturbing newsflash live from Wanda Sugarcakes and the Eye Rockit Hard Newsteam from St. Mary's Orphanage. Fill us in Wanda."

The shot cuts to Wanda, Jerome the black kid and phony KKK knight brandishing a gun in the living room.

"Sure Chip. It seems the KKK, for some unknown reason, has stormed the Orphanage here, taken hostages and are ready to present their demands. Can you tell us your name sir?"

"Tricky Dick Nixon, Grand Wizard of the KKK."

"And what are your demands for setting the hostages free?"

"We of the Ku Klux Klan are tired of our city being terrorized by that ski masked clown, SuperZero. If he and his
retard midget buddy, Demonito, don't exchange themselves for the orphans. Orphanage Director and Eye Rockit Hard 13 Newscrew within 1 hour, well SuperZero, you can guess what we'll do," Chico Nixon menaces as he points the gun at the kids head and then straight up in the air and then fires a shot which rings loudly.

"DAMN FOOL! That's my MuThaSumPn EAR DRUUUMs YOU POPPEDED!!!" Jerome yells.

Alma gulps on the couch. She and 'Nito look at each other.

"We'd better get to he Orphanage, Demonito."
Both crimefighters change into their uniforms.

Fang, watching the news, grabs his phone and makes a call, "I need a cab at 9th and Fox at the Elixir Shop."
"Where are you going and what is your name?" asks the dispatcher's voice.
"Dr. Fang. St. Mary's Orphanage."
"10 minutes."
He hangs up and goes quickly to the closet.

Director Grim watches the news on a mini TV on his desk in his office. He grabs his phone and calls.
"This is Director Grim of DynaCorp. I need to speak with Colonel Helmut."
"What's this about, Grim?" asks a military male voice.
"It's a level 3 breach. We need to enact a damage control protocol."
"I'll put you thru."
"Grim, Helmut. What's the situation?"
"Hostage state at St. Mary's Orphanage. They say they're the KKK wanting that masked do gooder for exposing Juice and Mondragon's phony corporation. We need to squash these bugs to insure the project never becomes exposed."
"I'll initiate the protocol," Helmut says.
"Capital sir," Grim replies and hangs up.
Brazo switches off the TV in El Sanguijuelo's office, "It's all in motion, Señor."
El Jefe stands. "Let's get over there."
"Are you sure?"
"I need to take care of this. I'm going to make SuperZero and Demonito feel my wrath," El Sanguijuelo hisses with venom.

The Boss walks like the King of Hell for the door. Brazo follows, biting his lip so that his expression doesn't crack to reveal his horror. El Sanguijuelo leaves and Brazo shuts the door behind them.

The sun goes down behind the mountains right as SuperZero rides the moped toward the Orphanage with Demonito sitting behind. They park down the road to spy on the scene.

"I wish we'd have had time to talk to the Master."

Just then they see a cab pull up halfway between themselves and St. Mary's. A thin figure in a dark overcoat and fedora gets out of the back seat before the cab drives off. He stops for a moment, looking at the 4 police cars parked right in front of the museum.

"I'll get his attention," Zero tells 'Nito quietly.

The hero grabs the wristrocket prosthetic attachment from in the back tool pack and clicks off the plier/claw arm and snaps in the slingshot, then loads a rock in the pouch and draws the thick dual surgical rubber tubes and fires a shot at Fang's foot.

The sage looks back at them instantly.
"Psst." Zero signals with the flesh and blood arm. Dr. Fang walks just quick enough not to be conspicuous.

"What shall we do, Master?"
"I brought guns for 'Nito. Do you have your Uzi arm?"
"Yes."
"Good Tadpole." Fang hands 'Nito 2 9mms.
"We're attacking then."
"1st you 2 act as if you're making the trade. They'll start to disarm you. I'll attack without shooting. Free the children then before the bullets start firing. Then we'll shoot it out with the Dinero Sucio Pandillo," Fang decides.

Zero bites a lip and tilts a skeptical head, "Can this work? They'll dose the water anyway. We're playing into their hands."

"We can't let the kids be murdered, Zero. We have no other moves. If we survive we expose the plot. We must act. It's our only choice."

"But the cops are on their side. They'll be expecting you."

"We have 35 minutes. We wait 34. I'm sneaking in. 1st we free the prisoners."

"O noo!" 'Nito exclaims quietly.

All 3 look at the mansion. The black Mercedes Benz pulls into the driveway. El Sanguijuelo and Brazo get out and one of the cops gestures them in.


"He's huge. I get an evil vibe from that one," Fang reveals. "I'm going to sneak my way in. Get them to release the orphans somehow, or exacerbate the diversion and do it. This is Jazz. We improvise. When the kids are safe I'll start the firefight, then you 2 join in. But stay alive."

Fang purposefully makes for the end of the block away from the orphanage.

"Master," The hero calls, lowkey.
Fang turns.
"Be careful."

"Of course. You too. The both of you." Fang slips away. SuperZero and Demonito look at one another.

"32 minutes," says the vigilante.

At that moment a lowrider van pulls up to the front of the Municipal Water Treatment Plant. 6 gangsters get out the front and sides. They pull 3 drums out of the side and back
door and carry them to the entrance of the plant.
They set the drums down on their sides. One thug pulls a pistol but hides it behind his back. Another pushes the buzzer. The plant worker answers, nods in recognition and waves them in.
The DSP muchachos roll the drums into the Water Treatment Plant.

Back at the Orphanage a huge black mobile command vehicle, ultra sleek, modern and more than half the size of an 18 wheeler semi, with tinted windows, rolls up right across the street.
"What the heck is that?" Zero asks rhetorically. "We can't worry about it now. We only have 10 minutes."

Inside the monster van 3 techs in black uniforms sit at work stations looking at small monitors reading electronic text. Another tall lean solid military looking man with a gray crewcut, gold bars on his shoulders and badge on his chest looks at a monitor which shows the front of the orphanage.
"Do you have the machine all fired up, Capitain Torikawa?" asks the senior officer.
"Yes, Colonel Helmut. All systems are go with Wreckbot 3," answers the bespectacled skinny shaved headed Japanese Captain.
"Why do they call it 3? Is it the 3rd version?"
"No Colonel. It refers to cubed, as in a value times itself to the 3rd power, like 10 X 10 = 100 is squared, and times 10 again in 1000, or cubed. It's the memory chip which magnifies the computing power of the original Wreckbot to that degree, hence the name Wreckbot 3. The droid is effectively an AI, or Artificial Intelligence."
"There they go," says the Colonel watching Zero and Demonito walk thru the wrought iron gate toward the mansion. "So Wreckbot 3 knows that the 1st priority is to silence Fabian Mondragon 1st, SuperZero 2nd, the sidekick 3rd and then as many of the DSP thugs as possible?"
"Absolutely sir. I programmed it myself, personally."
"Then let's wait for the credits to roll."
"Yes sir."

Dr. Fang, without the hat and overcoat but a black martial arts unitog and skimask, slinks thru the shadows in the alley. He wears an automatic pistol strapped to his shoulder and another to his waist.

Fang jumps the fence of the house next door to the orphan mansion. A big German Shepard runs snarling at him. He fearlessly stops and holds his hand out for the dog to smell.

"Hello girl," he whispers.
The dog wags her tail and licks his hand.

Fang sticks to the shadows and creeps quick and silent to the next fence of the orphanage yard and jumps it in a fraction of a second. He uses the hedge and tree as cover and slides to the back porch of the mansion.
The Shepard stands with its forepaws up on the fence, watching the assassin across the yard next door.

SuperZero and Demonito cross the yard quick to the front of the porch. The hero holds out the Uzi arm and 'Nito both 9s as they both leap to both sides of the porch steps fast. They use the porch for cover, peek in a window and then crouch below the sill, having seen the thugs in white pointed hoods and automatic pistols at the window.

"We're here. Tell whoever's in charge we're here to negotiate." Zero uses the Mongolian voice trick turned up to 11.

One of the kidnappers in the window yells, "We'll take custody of youse both now!"
"Not. I'm not talking to you, Junior. I'll talk to the Shotcaller. No one else."
In 2 seconds the thug disappears.
In the livingroom where the 4 phony hooded KKK Knights with guns hold down 7 orphans, the Orphanage Director, Brazo and El Jefe sit. The soldier at the front window
comes back from it.

"Did you hear? They want to talk to you Senor," he tells El Sanguijuelo.


Brazo grabs the Jerome and a white 7 year old boy. They walk to the window at the side of the front door. Brazo sticks his head out from the side of the window from to get a looksee.

At the back door Fang kneels, wiggles the door knob and then in a heartbeat turns backward to crouch with his back to the wall on the doorknob side of the door. In his other hand he holds a small dark towel dripping with liquid.

The door opens. Fang springs up forcing it open further and thrusts into a white hooded pawn jamming the towel in his face causing him fall backwards on the floor.

Another hooded thug pulls a 9mm from right behind his comrade but the 1st soldier has passed out and blocks him as Fang grabs the gun hand of the 2nd. He twists it and pulls the gangster towards the floor pushing the little towel in his face too. He drops out of consciousness to the linoleum like the other criminal.

Fang reaches back out the door and grabs a brown bottle of formaldehyde and puts it in his pocket. He then creeps thru the kitchen towards the front of the mansion, leaving his senseless casualties on the floor.

Zero and 'Nito wait up against the brickwall crouching by the porch.

"Let's deal," Brazo calls loudly from the front door. "Free the hostages and we're yours."

"No. Turn yourselves into us 1st and then you can have the prisoners!" Brazo counters.

The Hero doesn't answer for a bit, then yells back, "We need a show of good faith. Give us the orphans. Keep the adults."
"No good," Brazo declares.
"You want us, we need a little quid pro quo."
"What the hell does that mean?"
"It means give us all the kids, then I walk in, then you let the women go, then my partner gives himself up, then you let the cameraman go. No games. I know there are 7 children in there."

No answer comes from the orphanage window.
"We're leaving!" SuperZero threatens.
"We'll start killing children!"
"Cut the games, Dick. You're not the KKK. You're the DSP. It's us you want. Killing us doesn't help you launch your powerdrink scheme. We're honorable vigilantes. Let the kids go and you got me. You're not babykillers!"

In the window at the front door inside the mansion Brazo looks at El Jefe.
"Give him all the orphans but this li'l guy." El Sanguijuelo nods at Jerome. "Don't tell him we're keeping the kid."

"Ok!" Brazo hollers out the window. "Let us get the kids together and we'll send them out the front door." Brazo turns and yells back toward the livingroom. "Send the orphans out here!"

Fang waits standing against the wall in a dark hall off the livingroom with both pistols drawn, listening.
In the livingroom the wannabe KKK Knights round up the remaining 5 orphans.
"Come on kids. Let's go get some pizza," Chico says leading them towards the front door. He hollers out. Brazo Derecho yells, "Ok, here they are. Now we want you." He motions the blond boy to join the line of kids who start walking out in a single file line.

Outside the wideeyed dumbfounded orphans walk out and march down the front steps. Zero looks at Demonito and when the hostages have walked by marches up and stands on
the porch, holding the Uzi arm trained on the window.

"Go kids! Run!" the hero yells keeping the machine gun out, falling prone on the porch and pointing at the front door. "That was only 6!"

From inside the window El Sanguijuelo yells, "I want the last one for me!"

The big bad monster crime lord lifts the kid who shrieks. El Jefe gnashes his long thin fangs. Brazo watches wideeyed and drops his jaw open in horror.

"I WANT TO SUCK YOU BLOOD!" El Sanguijuelo bellows.

"FOGET THAT NOISE MONSTA!" Jerome flails and kicks like a trapped wildcat.

In the living room Fang throws a metal ball from the hall. It explodes spewing a huge cloud of white gas. The Master throws 2 more.

Brazo and El Sanguijuelo put their gasmasks on and pull their guns out, the Boss dropping the kid in the chaos.

The 4 gangsters pull gas masks out but only one pointy hooded criminal gets his on before he goes down like the other 3. Wanda, the Orphanage Director and Jack fall choking and knocked out to the floor.

The thug draws his gun and jumps to where he thinks a couch provides cover but Fang charges out of the hall and shoots him dead center in the chest. It knocks him staggering back as he wears a bulletproof vest under his robe. Fang leaps upon him lickitysplit, grabs his neck, squeezes and knocks him out.

By the door gas pours in from the livingroom.

"The Nam got in the back door," El Jefe concludes.

Sanguijuelo looks down at the orphan hearing footsteps and seeing gas. His stomach growls.

The slithering leech in the brain cortex pops out suddenly tripling in size. It's eyes bulge and it chomps its fangs and it snaps its pumped body like a whip.
El Sanguijuelo swells up bursting his clothes at the seams, transforming. His eyes and fangs enlarge. His sunglasses fall off and a huge tail whips out. His skin transmogrifies to a pail slimy complexion. He roars, 8 feet tall.
The process rips the gas mask off his face which falls onto the carpet.
The last hostage kid scrambles away out the front door as Fang jumps into the room, both barrels blasting.
Outside on the porch the kids all rush for the iron gate and Jerome catches up halfway across the lawn.
On the porch hero and sidekick watch to see that the kids get to safety. Both wear masks.
Zero rises. "Time to bang!"
Demomito jumps up the porch steps too. Zero dives thru the window shattering it and the wooden frame in a crystal flower shower of glass.

Inside the Mobile Command Colonel Helmut tells Captain Torikawa, "Wake the Wreckbot up."
"Yes sir." the Captain gets up, opens a metal door at the vehicle's front to reveal a huge stainless steel robot, sleek and shiny, with a bullet shaped head styled like a 1930's rocket ship, humanoid body in medieval armor except for razor like fins and a shine that almost blinds.
Red eyes light up, gargoyle like.
"I am an evil robot," states the machine voice in a deep monotone.
"Weckbot Cubed, enact snuff mode 3 Charlie, targets 1,2,3 and 4," Torikawa dictates.
"Affirmative. I am an evil robot programmed to destroy."
Torikawa hurries to the back of the vehicle to open the door. Wreckbot 3, with huge clumsy looking sharp hands and giant chrome boots, swiftly and gracefully strides out of the Mobile Command Vehicle.
Inside the mansion at the doorway Brazo steps back looking at Sanguijuelo and then at Zero and Fang in the ski and gas masks and finally takes shelter behind the chair. Fang shoots at the giant leech. Bullets don't phase it. El Jefe slithers upon the Master in an instant and picks him up with one giant demon muscled arm. Fang pumps bullets from both guns into the titanic ghoul bug. The giant worm laughs malefically.

The clouds of knock out gas have mostly dissipated. Sanguijuelo pulls a strap and shoots Fang in the torso 5 times, pistol whips him and throws him against the wall. Zero blasts lots of bullets with the Uzi arm into the Boss's back. He turns to the masked avenger and with supernatural speed hurdles across the floor closing the distance to his prize, who retreats with Uzi ablaze.

Demonito jumps across the room too, shooting both pistols. A white hooded DSP thug points aims and shoots at the Superninja Monkey from inside of a closet and hits him in the Kevlar vest knocking him back.

El Sanguijuelo, having taken SuperZero's entire clip unphased, grabs the vigilante by the neck and raises the masked nuisance like a ragdoll.

"I have you now! BWA HA HA HA HA HA HA!!!!"

'Nito gets up off of the floor and jumps high thru the air at the evil giant bloodsucking worm. "AIEEEE!!!!"

El Sanguijuelo grabs the sidekick with his freehand and throws him across the room.

Brazo watches the spectacle, sighs and emerges from under the table and behind the chair, brandishing his semi automatic pistol and repeatedly pumps bullets into his boss as he approaches him.

El Jefe steps toward Brazo and thwaps him open handed, like a mosquito, sending his 2nd in command stumbling over the table, knocking a basket of fruit over scattering apples, oranges and bananas across the floor.

The giant leech still holds Zero up, who thrashes wildly. "Now I finally get to see the face of my enemy!"

Brazo watches from the floor under the table.
El Sanguijuelo rips off Zero's gas and ski mask, revealing Alma Azul, eyepatched mohawked Latina superhero supreme.

"Why, you're just A GIRL!"
"Yup," Alma replies.

Wreckbot 3 walks up the front steps of the orphanage like it means business.

Back in the parlor, just to be mean, El Sanguijuelo takes his index finger and rips Alma/Zero's eyepatch off. 2 thin metal wires with hooks shoot out and pierce into the huge vampire worm's translucent pale green ghoulish flesh. A mini super battery spring propelled custom tazer zaps El Sanguijuelo with thousands and thousands of volts.

As his flesh smokes he drops the hero, who clambers away.

"Now I'm really mad!" he bellows.
All in the room watch him and shrink away in mortal dread.

Wreckbot 3 pulverizes the front door and stomps into the room, "I AM AN EVIL ROBOT!!"

El Jefe turns to face Wreckbot Cubed, his new adversary, like a giant alligator confronting a gargantuan crocodile.

"Let's do this, Robot."

Monster Sanguijuelo and Wreckbot 3 step in and circle each other, fists up. Zero ejects the empty clip and loads another one. Fang lays bleeding, hit in the shoulder. Demonito and Brazo watch the face off of the SuperMonsters, awestruck.

The supra enemies close and bang, trading blows, slugging each other hard with earth smashing force.

Mostly they block each other's punches, but every few seconds Sanguijuelo or Wreckbot lands, knocking the other big fiend back, shaking the house's foundations. Mortar and tile fall from ceiling.

Finally Wreckbot points his fist at Sanguijuelo and
shoots it like a rocket which explodes in El Jefe's gut. He gets knocked back and Wreckbot 3 races in and grabs the stunned opponent by the neck. The big droid squeezes Sanguijuelo by the throat. El Jefe thrashes and swings around screaming. Soon enough the sound and fury fizzes down to a whimper as the demon's struggling dies down. Eventually Sanguijuelo hangs limp in Wreckbot's arm, a big slimy dead bug.

Demonito watches and without taking eyes off of the spectacle grabs a banana off of the floor, fallen from the spilled fruit basket in the chaos earlier. He peels the fruit and eats it quick.

Wreckbot 3 drops Sanguijuelo's corpse on the floor. The leech drops out of El Jefe's ear and crawls across the room and out the smashed front door. The giant blood sucking worm's corpse transforms back into Fabian Mondragon's big dead humanoid criminal body.

Zero grabs the skimask from the floor, pulls it on and makes tracks. But Wreckbot already has the avenger it in it's sights.

The robot stomps quick after, grabs Zero's clothes but merely rips off the backpack. 'Nito chases the chase.

The hero cuts a 90 degree angle blasting bullets which bounce impotently off the Robot's metal shell. Wreckbot stays on Zero's track. The SuperMonkey throws the banana peel in the Robot's path. It steps on it, slips and falls.

SuperZero sprints across the livingroom toward the hallway to the back and almost loses Wreckbot 3, who leaps across the room and pounces on the Guerrilla.

"I am an evil Robot!" exclaims the sentient destruction machine.

"I don't think you're evil," SuperZero says in it's clutches.

Wreckbot 3 jerks, taken aback, drops the Hero beneath itself and says, "I am an evil Robot, programmed to destroy!" raising it's arms.

"You're stupid."

Wreckbot cocks it's metal head. "Say what?"
"Look. You're a real good looking droid. And if you're programmed to destroy, that means it's not really your fault you break things and kill. Therefore, you're not really evil."
"But I am Wreckbot Cubed, AI, Artificial Intelligence. I think therefore I am."
"Are you sane?"
"Of course I am sane."
"What is being insane?"
"Being crazy," answers the Robot. "I am going to destroy you."
"Hear me out, Wreckbot Cubed. Would an insane being think it was sane or insane?"
The Wreckbot buzzes, whirs and clicks. "It would think it's sane."
"Would a sane being tell itself it was sane?"
The Robot looks up ponderously, a whistle joining the disyncopation of the other machine noise.
"A sane being might tell itself 'Maybe I'm insane.'"
"Affirmative."
"You just told me that you're sane."
"Affirmative."
"Are you sane...or insane?"
The Wreckbot buzzes, clicks, whirs and whistles faster and faster. The red lights in it's eyes blink on and off in an irregular staccato rhythm. It trembles and whines machine noise building in pitch and volume till it becomes red hot and smokes.

"I AM AN EVIL ROBOT," It declares one last time when a blinding light pops in it's head. The lights in it's eyes go out. It crumbles like a spineless scarecrow in a heap of metal. SuperZero just barely crawls out from under safely away.

Outside in front of the orphanage the kids walk out of the yard past the gate, gather together and drift down the street. 2 cops walk purposefully over after they notice them.
"Come over here, children. I'll have Officer Herrera go pick up some pop and candy."
The kids follow the cops in a daze towards the car. Back in the mansion 'Nito has disarmed the fake KKK knights and holds a gun on them. SuperZero attends to Dr. Fang, hunched over him, who lays on the floor of the parlor against the wall. The hero pulls the skimask off of her head and Fang's mask off too, then presses one into the gunshot wound in the Master's neck.

"'Nito, get a cop. No, wait. Grab the pad and pencil, write a note and tell them to get an ambulance here, ASAP."

"It's too late, Alma," Fang whispers.
"You'll be ok, Master."
"Yes, I will be. But I'm almost gone."

The SuperMonkey joins Alma Azul at her side.
"Don't die Dr. Fang. Hold on."
"I'm proud of you Tadpole, and 'Nito too. Now I'm going back to where everything comes from, and everything goes. Be good."

Dr. Fang closes his eyes and breathes his last breath. Both 'Nito and Zero shed a few tears, and then stand. The hero pulls the skimask on.

As the Orphanage Director, Sugarcakes, Jack Cracker and KKK gangsters get up thru the orphanage, Brazo Derecho Lucero inconspicuously creeps out the back of the house. Demonito tugs on Zero's hoody and points him out.
"Yeah, I know 'Nito. It's ok. He's not all bad."

Jack Cracker gets the portacam up and running, switches on the remote light and starts rolling tape. The hero and sidekick keep their guns pulled on the thugs.
"All you DSP punks, sit over here, and take off those stupid KKK masks."

The gangsters, rubbing the backs of their necks and head, comply.

4 Police Officers rush thru the front door, weapons drawn.
"What took you guys so long?" Zero asks.
The Caucasian Sargent replies, "It's only been
minutes."

"Seems like hours. Come on 'Nito." the vigilante grabs the visor from the belt and puts it on.

"Wait, we have to take a statement," the Sarge instructs.

"Fabian Mondragon, the DSP shotcaller, is dead, and Dr. Fang." Zero whips the Uzi arm out and 'Nito his 9mm, getting the jump on the Police. "We did your job tonight."

Zero lowers the barrel toward the ground and Demonito follows suit. "Be nice and let us bounce."

The Sarge sighs and nods. "Sure, ok, whatever."
Zero asks, "Oh, and Officer?"
"Yeah, what is it?"
"Make sure, somehow, to get my Master cremated."
"I got no say in that."
"Just say he asked you...He would've wanted that." The Policeman hesitates and says, "Yeah, Ok. I'll do that."

"Thanks." The hero and sidekick back out the front door.

The Cop gets on his walky talky, "Just let the 2 Ninjas go. The less they say, the better."

Wanda and Cracker notice from the livingroom. Sugarcakes starts to follow, and the cameraman does too till the Newswoman holds up her hand to stop him.

"Let me talk to them 1st," she instructs.
Cracker stays and Wanda jogs thru the parlor out the front door.

Zero and 'Nito walk down the front steps when Wanda emerges from the destroyed door.

"Mr. Zero, wait."
SuperZero and 'Nito stop and turn around. Wanda Sugarcakes catches up.

"Can we get an interview?" the Newslady asks.
"It's been a long night."
"Later then? Tomorrow?"
"I don't think so Ms. Sugarcakes."
"The public has a right to know."
"Tell them I said the plot's been squashed. It's over."
"Well then I'd like to talk sometime, personally, woman to man. Like let's have lunch sometime, on me."
"We hardly know each other."
"I'd like to know you," Wanda purrs.
"Are you asking me out on a date?"
"...I guess I am."
"I'm flattered Ms. Sugarcakes, but trust me when I tell you, I'm not who you think I am."
Zero and 'Nito start to leave again.
"Mr. Zero, wait."
"Good night Wanda." the hero calls back walking away.

In the command vehicle Helmut leans over Torikawa at the consol.
"The thing had a meltdown, huh?"
"Well, yeah. It crashed."
"We got it all on surveillance video?"
"It's all on computer."
"Can we fix the Wreckbot?"
"It's brain is fried. Order a salvage team but I'd say Wreckbot 3 is just a pile of scrap metal," Torikawa informs.
"Well, we neutralized Mondragon. The mission's not a complete failure."
"Yes sir."
The big black Mobile Command Vehicle drives off down the street.

SuperZero and Demonito get on the red moped and the vigilante kick starts it. Then the crimefighters buzz on into the night on the back streets towards home.

12

The next day late in the afternoon in her usual spot
Alma Azul still has almost a full bucket of flowers unsold. She sells a bouquet of daisies, sunflowers and violets to a young secretary before she leans against a newspaper machine to rest.

From a half a block away, Javier Lucero. AKA: Brazo Derecho, in black chinos, a windbreaker and sunglasses approaches the flower girl carrying 2 cups of coffee.

"SuperZero, hello." he takes off the shades.

Alma looks at him, surprised. "Brazo, Don't call me that. Call me Alma."

"Would you like a cup of coffee, Alma?"

Ms. Azul stares at the cup held out like it might be a bomb, then decides it's not and takes it. "You figured out who I am."

"When Sanguijuelo demasked you last night I remembered the day I gave you a can of Juice here."

"So you call the shots now, for the DSP?" she asks more like its a statement.

Lucero half smirks. "No. I gave it over to those younger fools, the ones who made bail. I'm selling used cars now. I got me a job today."

Alma takes a sip of coffee. "Good."

"And you're going to keep selling flowers out here?"

"No, I'm going to run my Master's business, or sell it."

"I won't know where to look you up."

Alma takes a minute to think of an answer and then looks at him, "I'm kind of, you know, a deep cover kind of girl."

"Well, I tell you what. I got business cards made up today." Javier flicks her out one from an inside windbreaker pocket.

She looks it over.

"Give me a call sometime."

"Maybe."

He nods at her stocking cap. "I like the mohawk. It suits you. Nice seeing you again."

"Thanks. Oh Javier."
"Yeah?"
"Please don't tell anyone about me, who I really am."
"Your secret's safe with me." Javier Lucero starts to back away. "Until we meet again."
"Goodbye," Alma says.
Alma watches him walk away and takes a drink of coffee.

In a bit 'Nito walks up in his street clothes. Alma looks down at him and rubs his head.
"You hungry 'Nito?"
Demonito nods his head.
"Let's go buy us some bananas, and ice cream."
"Ok," Demonito replies.
They walk to the store from the direction of the sunset.