



Battle of the Jens

- a City of Heroes story by David 2

(Note: the following events take place in the City of Heroes prior to Issue 9 "Breakthrough".)

In everything there is a balance between opposing forces. Light and dark. Yin and Yang. Order and chaos. Right and wrong. Good and Evil.

Jenny Star pondered these things as she went through her morning ritual.

When she was a little girl, she broke her neck when she fell off a vaulting horse. The doctors said she would be paralyzed for life, but a friend of the family managed to heal her with a special mystical spell and a small talisman injected into her spine. To keep the spell active, Jenny would need to spend a few years training with the Order of Equius and refresh the talisman with the flow of natural magic in the world.

Over the years, the talisman did what it was supposed to do. It completely healed her spine. But she never stopped the training, even though she no longer needed it. Her training gave her both inner and outer strength, and the teachings of the Order of Equius gave her a sense of balance so that she would face any kind of personal challenge with confidence and optimism.

Her morning ritual awakened the senses and helped tone her body in ways that normal workouts wouldn't be able to. In just five minutes, she would accomplish what would have taken her thirty minutes to do in the gym.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING??"

That sound came from the room next door. Jenny put on a pair of sweat pants and a sweatshirt and stepped outside her hotel room to see what was going on.

The hotel door next to hers was wide open, propped open by the room service cart, and she could hear an ungodly shriek of agony from inside. She stepped in cautiously.

"Jen? You okay?" she asked hesitantly.

The bellboy was sitting on the floor by the wall, his mind locked in fear and terror. Jenny could hear weird noises coming from the bathroom.

"Jen?" she asked.

Just then, Jen Glamour stepped out from around the corner, dressed in red satin robe and looking all made-up like she was ready for a photo shoot.

"I'm fine," Jen said nonchalantly. "What are you doing in my room?"

"I heard you yell out," Jenny explained, "and then..."

"I SAID I'm fine," Jen interrupted with an annoying tone and a condescending smile. "The bellboy was trying to peep at me in the bathroom when he delivered my breakfast and I scared him. Serves him right, the little perv!"

Jenny went over to the bellboy, who was starting to come to his senses. “Are you okay? Can you hear me?”

The bellboy started to open his eyes, but were immediately locked on the sight of the blonde model. “I... I... I didn’t... I didn’t...”

“Were you peeping at her like she said?” Jenny asked.

“That... that’s not... that’s not...” The bellboy struggled to say what he wanted to say, but he couldn’t formulate the words.

“Okay,” Jen said impatiently, “the little perv can go. And he’s certainly not getting a tip from me! In fact he’ll probably be fired for...”

“Okay, okay, don’t get in an uproar,” said an effeminate voice from the hallway.

Duncan Ross, the head of publicity for Glam Bunny Magazine, was waiting on the other side. “Jenny, darling, can your blond counterpart and I have a few minutes alone, please?”

“Of course, Duncan,” she replied as she helped the bellboy to his feet.

Back out in the hallway with the door closed, Jenny Star talked to the bellboy. “Was that the truth? What were you doing in there?”

“I... I was delivering her breakfast... she was in the bathroom... she came out and I... I...” He was struggling to remember what he saw or did. “I don’t remember anything.”

More people started to come out into the hallway. Some of them were other Glam Bunny models, and others were regular guests. The hotel concierge soon arrived, and he was demanding an immediate explanation, which the bellboy had none to offer.

At that point, Duncan stepped out from Jen Glamour’s room. “Okay, ladies and gentlemen, this was all just a case of a simple misunderstanding, that’s all. Nothing to be concerned with. Jen Glamour is perfectly fine.” He whispered something in the ear of the concierge and the two of them walked back into the room.

A minute later, the concierge would walk back out with a different look on his face. He took the bellboy aside, and after a minute of quiet whispering, Jenny Star could see the two of them walk back to the elevator.

Duncan came back out of the room and was surprised at seeing Jenny still waiting in the hallway.

“Everything is okay, Jenny darling, so you don’t need to worry about her.”

“I’m not worried about Jen,” Jenny replied. “I’m wondering what happened in there. The bellboy said that he doesn’t remember what happened after Jen stepped out of the bathroom. What was going on to cause him to just collapse like that in sheer terror?”

“It’s nothing for you to be concerned about,” he said in his motherly tone as he coaxed her back towards her own room. “Really. Just head on back and get ready for your appearance and I’ll take care of the rest. You girls have a busy day today and we need you all at your best.”

Jenny returned to her room, but she still wasn’t comfortable with how things were being handled.

Jen and Jenny were polar opposites of each other. While Jenny Star was warm and friendly and eager to help whenever possible, Jen Glamour was cold and demanding. Jenny appealed to the common fan, preferring to live in her humble home in Rhode Island while Jen lived it up with movie stars and power-brokers in Los Angeles.

They had only one common connection: Glam Bunny Magazine, the swimsuit and lingerie magazine originally founded in the 1940’s to inspire soldiers during World War II. Jenny Star was the Showcase Bunny for August of 1994, and Jen Glamour was the Showcase Bunny for the following month of September. Ever since then, the two of them were always pitted together in what would be hyped up in the magazine as the “Battle of the Jens”, and Jen Glamour had always managed to come out on top.

The following year, Jen Glamour was named the Glam Bunny of the Year, even though Jenny Star had far more fan support. Old Man Hare, who founded Glam Bunny and was an honorary member of the Freedom Phalanx in the 1930's, had picked Jen personally for the honor, as he always had the final say on such matters, although he would later admit to succumbing to some "private encouragement". It was an allegation that constantly surrounded the buxom blond model in everything she did.

Later that morning, Jenny Star took her place at the demonstration area with the half-dozen other Glam Bunny models that represented the Glam Squad. The team was actually Jenny's idea. She wanted to prove that glamour models were more than just pretty faces in a magazine; that they could also compete in extreme physical challenges and win. And they did just that, taking part in several of the extreme challenges across the country and even winning a few of them. They were so good at it and generated so much publicity for the events and for the magazine that their story soon became the subject of a major motion picture.

After a quick demonstration of their athletic skills, including climbing up fake walls and racing with logs tied to their feet, the ladies returned to their signing table to sign autographs and pose for pictures. Their appearances were mostly for charity, which Jenny was all-too-happy to do since it wasn't too far of a drive for her from her Rhode Island home, but the other models, who were based in Florida, New York, and LA, were grumbling about the long flights they would have to make.

But once again, Jen Glamour wasn't around, either for the team demonstration or for the start of the signing segment. This was pretty common for the blond primadonna. Even though Jen would always look like a million bucks, she would often complain about not being "ready" for appearances.

Jenny motioned Duncan to come over to the signing table. "So where is the princess?" she said softly from her chair.

"She's got some business to attend to," he replied. "Why are you asking?"

"Because I've had eight of her fans show up asking about her. They want to see the 'star' of their favorite movie."

That was another personal sore spot for Jenny and another bitter victory for Jen Glamour.

Jen Glamour never wanted anything to do with anything that involved physical activity... until she heard about the Glam Squad movie. Then she suddenly wanted in on all the team activities. She wouldn't compete, but she would show up for public appearances. She would put on the team uniforms with her rose-colored glasses and be there as autographs were signed. Then Jenny Star found out that Jen Glamour had used her Hollywood connections to not only put herself into the movie, but to completely take out Jenny's on-screen role and reduced her to being listed in the credits only as a behind-the-scenes "consultant".

When "Glam Squad: The Movie" came out, it was given major box office treatment and brought in four million on opening weekend. And even though she was the founder of the group, from that point on whenever anyone brought up the Glam Squad, they would always think of Jen Glamour, not Jenny Star.

Jenny would try to keep it all in perspective, to tell herself that it was about improving the image of the models and for Glam Bunny. But she couldn't help but admit that the behind-the-scenes politicking was really a slap in the face for her and for all of the hard work that she did to bring the team together and to make all of those accomplishments.

Almost on cue, Jen Glamour strolled out to the signing table wearing a custom-designed version of the Glam Squad uniform, complete with neon pink sequins on her bright yellow tee-shirt, black workout shorts that looked more like lingerie with frilly lace edges and peek-a-boo sides, and yellow designer sneakers with glowing lights that flashed on every step. She topped the attire with her trademarked rose-colored sunglasses and she even had sparkles in her hair.

"Hi everyone!" she said cheerfully. "Glad you could be here to see me!"

The other girls at the Glam Squad table were in shock at what they saw. Jen Glamour was always something of an attention hog, but this was over-the-top even for her.

“What are you wearing?” asked Ms. January 1998.

“You like it?” she said with a smile as she put on a couple of quick poses. “It’s the new team outfit! Isn’t it just to die for?”

“More like we wouldn’t be caught dead in them,” muttered Jenny Star under her breath.

“Excuse me, did you say something?” Jen asked sarcastically.

“Nothing,” Jenny replied quickly. “It’s not really functional, is it? I mean, I don’t see anyone wanting to climb up a hill wearing it.”

The blond star laughed. “Functional? Oh please! Who cares about functional? It’s all about LOOKING good! And this is what I’ll be wearing when we start shooting ‘Glam Squad 3’ next month!”

Duncan came up to her. “Uh, excuse me, Jen darling, but I thought we agreed that we wouldn’t talk about this yet.”

“Oh please it’ll be in the news anyway!” she said with a dismissive waive of her hand. “I’ve got all the big names in it... K-No and Brucie and of course our celeb teammates from GS2 will be in it... and I’ve even managed to get Louis Gossey to play our new trainer. I mean, if he could whip that hottie Ritchie Gee and win an Oscar for it, imagine what we’ll win with HIM on our team!”

The crowd surrounding Jen started asking about the news that she was all-too-eager to give.

“GS2” or “Glam Squad 2: All-Star Winners” was a pitiful sequel that went straight to video. Jen Glamour took complete control of the production, casting nothing but Hollywood starlets who were just as vain and temperamental as her. The finished product was so bad that her co-stars refused to even admit they took part in the movie, never mind be willing to participate in anything else associated with her.

But as Jenny Star was discovering, all of that didn’t matter to Jen Glamour. It was all about the attention the blond starlet was getting, and she was clearly relishing every moment of it.

After the buzz created by Jen’s arrival died down, the primadonna took her seat at the far end of the signing table. The line of people waiting to meet her stretched long, while the attention for the other ladies quickly dwindled.

As the day wore on, though, Jen Glamour was starting to look less and less glamorous. The bounce in her hair was starting to disappear, the glitter in her hair disappeared, and... was she gaining weight? Her features were starting to droop a little bit and her custom outfit was getting a little tighter around the midsection.

The other girls could notice the difference, but none of them wanted to tell the blonde starlet. They chuckled and whispered amongst themselves, but they wouldn’t say anything. Finally Jenny Star walked over to her blonde counterpart, who was busy talking endlessly about her glorious career in Hollywood and her plans to write a book.

“Excuse me...” Jenny said softly, “I need to speak with you privately.”

“Excuse ME,” Jen replied in an annoyed tone. “I’m busy with my fans. It will have to wait.”

Jenny walked behind Jen and whispered in her ear “You’ve got a pimple on your face and it’s getting really ugly by the minute.”

Jen’s eyes went wild as she scrambled to find a mirror. Sure enough, the blonde starlet DID have a pimple that was getting more and more infected. Without even saying a word, she bolted back to the hotel.

Duncan walked up to Jenny. “What did you tell her?”

“I just told her the truth,” Jenny replied. “She had a pimple on her face that just appeared.”

“I saw it too,” said Ms. January 1998. “It was getting really ugly!”

“Yeah, and she was getting really ugly too,” said Ms. April 2002 quietly. “I mean, she was starting to pork out like she had an allergic reaction to something.”

“All right, enough,” Duncan said with a slashing move to his throat for effect. “I’m going to check on her. You ladies hold the fort, okay? And whatever you do, DO NOT gossip about this! Jen Glamour is still a celebrity, and the last thing that she needs is to have this splash on the gossip pages and run it for her and for Glam Bunny!”

The rest of the day went surprisingly well for the rest of the ladies. The sudden disappearance of Jen Glamour only disappointed a small number of fans, with some of them even wondering what they ever saw in her. It gave Jenny Star some relief to know that Jen’s own ego would eventually come back to hurt her. The Law of Balances was once again in play.

Strangely, Duncan didn’t return to the signing tables after going to check on the blonde primadonna. This was something that Jenny was made painfully aware of when the time came to break down the signing area. There were checks that needed to be handed out, and he was the only one that could issue them. She politely excused herself and then went up to the hotel.

She heard a lot of commotion as the elevator got closer to her floor. She could feel it in her spine that something wasn’t right.

As soon as she stepped out of the elevator, she saw the corridor awash in swirling lights and ripples of distortions. People were crouched on the floor screaming in agony, begging for help.

Jenny could feel a wave of panic hit her. It was the panic that she experienced as a young child when she was told that she would never walk again. It wasn’t a similar feeling... it was the SAME feeling... as though something was forcing her to relive it all over again.

But then she remembered her training. She knew this was fear being artificially-generated. She closed her eyes and focused her thoughts on the talisman in her spine. The natural magics would guide her and filter out the false feelings.

When she opened her eyes again, the feelings of fear and panic were gone. They were all just tricks of the mind. But she still saw the swirling lights and colors, so she knew that the problem was still there.

As she moved further up the corridor, she somehow wasn’t surprised to find that the epicenter of the distortions seemed to come from Jen Glamour’s room. She saw the same horrified expressions on the faces of the people in the hallway and recognized them as those exhibited by the bellboy that morning when he had walked in and supposedly “saw” Jen.

The door to Jen Glamour’s room was propped open by Duncan’s catatonic body. He was clutching torn fragments of Jen’s tacky outfit in his hands. Jenny could hear crying from inside the room. She checked Duncan to make sure he was still breathing, then propped him up in a sitting position so he wouldn’t swallow his tongue.

“Jen?”

She walked into the room.

“Jen? It’s Jenny. Are you in here?” She spoke in a calm and even voice.

“Go away.” The sound came from the bathroom. But it didn’t even sound like Jen. It sounded deeper, almost masculine.

“Jen, everyone on the floor is hurting,” Jenny said calmly. “What did you do to them?”

“I didn’t do anything. Just leave.”

Jenny hesitantly took another step closer.

“Jen, whatever it is, I’m sure I can help you get through it. Can we at least talk about this?”

She could see a shadow moving in the bathroom.

“Go away,” Jen warned. “I mean it. Just... go... away!”

The brunette rounded the corner and was shocked as what she saw.

A morbidly obese woman sat crouched in the bathtub, her modesty barely covered up by athletic lingerie stretched further than it was ever intended. Her stringy dirty blond hair was like a bird’s nest in front of her face, and her body was covered in acne.

It took Jenny Star a moment to realize that THIS was really Jen Glamour. This was the image that the bellboy saw earlier that morning before something happened to him to force him to forget. This was also the source of the waves of fear and panic that were sweeping the whole floor.

“Are you happy now?” Jen said sobbing as she struggled to pick herself out of the bathtub. “You’re seeing the REAL me now! The REAL me before I have to lie to everyone just so they would love me! But you would never know what that’s like, do you? You and all those other pristine ‘Liberty Dolls’ that never have to work hard at being beautiful!”

Jenny could see where this was heading, and it wasn’t looking good. This was a woman that feels trapped and angry. She was already building herself up to attack.

“Jen,” Jenny said cautiously, “calm down... whatever you’re going through... we can work through this, okay? I want to help you.”

“Help?” she said with a nervous laugh. “HELP? Right! More like you’re going to have pity on me for being this way! You don’t know what it’s like to be fat and ugly! You don’t know what it’s like to be ignored! No, you’re not like me!” Jen started to snarl in hate and jealousy as she righted herself and steeled herself for what she was going to do next. “You never had to go through being told that you’re just ‘special’ when everyone else laughs at you! You never had to put up with the snickering and the giggling behind your back! No, your life is PERFECT! Your life is ALWAYS PERFECT! I HATE YOU! I HATE YOU!”

Jen screamed as she charged at Jenny in a blind rage.

Jenny’s physical training immediately kicked in, side-stepping the larger woman and then unleashing a well-timed low roundhouse kick at the backside of the knees to bring Jen down to the carpet. Once Jen fell to the floor, Jenny got on top of the larger woman and applied two quick strikes to the side of the neck. These were special strikes, magically charged from the magic in her talisman to induce quick unconsciousness. Jen’s obese frame quivered briefly, and then she lay still. As soon as she did, the sweeping waves of fear and paranoia that emanated from Jen’s body subsided.

The whole floor of the hotel was closed off to everyone except for emergency workers and Jenny Star while Sister Psyche dealt with the very distraught primadonna. Members of the Freedom Corps came along to help treat the victims of the psychic assault, some of whom required extensive physical and psychological help. Duncan was one of the people who needed that help as he was the first victim of Jen’s unprovoked psychic attack. Two others suffered heart attacks from the stress. A woman who was three months pregnant almost had a miscarriage. They all had to be rushed to the nearby hospital.

“I’m surprised that you were able to keep your wits about,” Sister Psyche said to Jenny Star as she crouched over the starlet secured on the stretcher. “Everyone else on the floor was driven insane.”

“I had some help,” Jenny said modestly.

“Yes, I know,” the expert telepath replied. “It’s a little hard to keep that a secret from someone like me. Unlike Ms. Glamour here, of course, who had every reason in the world to keep this under wraps... no pun intended.”

“So... how did she do it?” Jenny asked. “I mean, it wasn’t a projected illusion or anything like that. I would have seen through it if it was an illusion. She was real. She could fit into a size 2 dress without any problem!”

“I’m guessing the pills that she took were responsible for that miraculous feat,” Psyche explained. “There’s a pill bottle sitting in the tub and a couple of tablets by the drain. I’ve heard about experimental drugs that would internalize a telepath’s power, to give them the ability to make physical changes instead of just creating illusions of change. Most of them are derivatives of Superadine, though, which means they are illegal and have plenty of adverse side effects.”

“So... you can’t just...?”

Psyche looked over at Jenny and smiled. “Sorry, Miss Star... I work out four times a week just like anyone else. Or, at least when I’m not doing missions. You would honestly be surprised how much work goes into being with the Freedom Phalanx. You ought to try it someday.”

“Thanks,” Jenny replied with a smile, “but I’ll stick to my treadmill.”

“We both know that you don’t own a treadmill,” the redhead said, matching Jenny’s smile. “Okay, I think she’s ready to be moved. I’ve put all the mental blocks that I can on her, which should keep her powers in check until we can reach the Freedom Corps headquarters. And there are enough sedatives in her bloodstream to keep her out for the duration of the trip. Make sure the Freedom Corps medics are ready and that they have cleared the hallway of civilians.”

“Okay,” Jenny said as she moved towards the door.

“Oh, and by the way,” Psyche said as she stood up, “next time you see Hare, tell him that that the answer will always be no. I won’t be in his magazine. It’s bad enough I have to deal with the fantasies of some of the guys I work with, never mind giving them something to actually fantasize about.”

Within a few weeks, the secrets surrounding the prima donna came out. It was impossible to keep any of it a secret after that day, especially when an errant shot of Jen Glamour’s real form showed up on the Internet.

Reporters managed to backtrack Jen Glamour’s previously confidential life all the way to when she was a chubby teen named Jennifer McGillicutty, who used her early telepathic powers to make people see her as being thin and beautiful. But at that time it was still only an illusion, and one that could be easily negated when seen through a camera. That was when she started a pattern of blackmail to keep her secret intact. The CEO of a local pharmaceutical company led her to the discovery of the experimental drug, which was, in fact, based on the illegal substance Superadine. The drug, later called “Glamourall” at Jen Glamour’s vain request, did internalize her telepathic powers, giving her the ability to physically assume whatever form she desired the most. Since she always saw herself as the perfect blonde bombshell, that image became the form that she physically assumed when she injected the drug.

Glamourall gave her the physical illusion of perfection, which allowed her to eat whatever she wanted to, stay out as late as she wanted to, and do whatever she wanted to and still look absolutely beautiful. But it was still just an illusion, which was why she refused to take part in any kind of physical activity. No matter how physically fit she appeared to be, she was still out of shape and painfully obese.

But there was more than just blackmail involved. Jen’s telepathic ability eventually included the power to influence others to her will, including seducing the supposedly “un-seducible” effeminate Duncan, as well as to dredge up hidden fears and terrors. It was this power that came out in uncontrollable surges when her supply of Glamourall was swapped out with a dangerous hallucinogen.

Her ex-boyfriend, a burned-out rock star, eventually admitted pulling off the substitution when she forgot to bring enough of the supply for the appearance and she berated him to get more, hence her disappearance for most of that day. When the effects of Glamourall started to fade, she took the substituted drug, and then kept on taking more of the drug when her body didn't change back.

Jen Glamour's career came to a screeching halt. The people at Glam Bunny quickly distanced themselves from their former "star", although Old Man Hare was generous enough to provide financial help for the treatments that she would need. Hollywood itself washed its collective hands clean of her. The whole incident opened up a Pandora's Box of civil and criminal charges, not only for Jen Glamour, but for others associated with her, including the people at the drug company that made Glamourall.

While prosecutors were debating on what to charge her with, Jen was at a drug treatment center, listed under her birth name. Ironically, she was being placed ON drugs to keep her telepathic powers at bay while her body was being cleansed of the long-term effects of taking Glamourall. It was the only way that they could treat her.

Jen tried to lose weight naturally. She made some progress, but not much. She realized that she would NEVER be as fit and thin as she was with Glamourall. She had beauty experts try to give her makeovers, but they didn't work. Her blonde hair would NEVER be as long and full and golden-yellow as it was when she was taking Glamourall. She had dermatologists check out her acne, but the drugs would do little to treat the acne scars. Her skin would NEVER be perfect and flawless and acne-free as it was with Glamourall. Dental experts worked on her teeth, but she knew her teeth would NEVER be as white and as straight as when she was using Glamourall.

And no matter how many times the doctors and therapists would tell her otherwise, she REFUSED to accept any of it for being the way that things must be.

"Just hurry and get it over with," Jen said anxiously.

"Okay, okay," replied James Normal as he was typing away on the inventory database.

It was a long six months for Jen Glamour, especially for the last four weeks when she would hide her power-suppressing drugs instead of taking them. She needed her skills to be at their best when she would engineer her escape from the treatment center and then later break into the pharmaceutical storage facility.

But she also knew that she couldn't get there without help, and she knew what James was looking for easily. She had met him at the hotel on the night before the last Glam Squad event. He was fixated on Jenny Star and would do ANYTHING to be with her. She didn't even need her powers of influence to get his help. All Jen had to do was go online and promise to give him Jenny Star's home address and personal phone number and he came bounding over to help her escape.

"Found it," he said. "Storage door G-115."

Knocking out the patrolling guards was almost second nature for James. His skills at stealth and attacking people from behind were simply amazing to the chubby primadonna. Jen almost wished she could be there when James would pay Jenny Star a personal visit in her home. Unclipping the security cards from the guards, James made his way to the locked metal door. Two minutes later, the hermetic seals were released and the door opened up.

The storage facility warehoused chemicals in their liquid form that were slated to be disposed of. Jen knew that she couldn't let Glamourall be destroyed without making sure that she be set for life with her supply of it.

There, in the back of the racks of shelves, were five large containers of the drug. The glass containers glowed lime green in the low lighting. She picked one of them up in her chubby hands.

"There!" she said with a greedy smile. "Mine... all mine."

"I thought you said they were in pill form," James said.

“Not this stuff,” she said as her eyes were transfixed on the liquid. “This is the pure form of it, before it gets processed into a tablet. What I’m holding in my hands can probably last me for a good twenty years!”

“Well unless you know where we can turn that stuff into tablets quickly, we’re going to have a problem moving any of this stuff back out the door,” James said. “So let’s see if they have something we can move it with.”

She looked down into the glowing liquid. The secret of endless guilt-free beauty was in her hands.

“No more workouts,” she mumbled to herself. “No diets. No liposuction or plastic surgery. No facelifts. No gray hairs or wrinkles.”

James was getting nervous. “Hey, Ms. Glamour, we have to go. Those guards will be awake soon. If they hit the alarm, it’s over for us.”

“Fountain of Youth,” she said out loud, as if to give a toast. “Don’t hate me because I’m glamorous!”

And with that, she brought the liquid to her lips and began drinking it.

“WHAT THE...???” James exclaimed.

She could feel a burning sensation as the liquid hit her throat. She felt a wave of sickness reach her stomach. She was consuming the drug in its purest form, thousands of times more potent than when processed and condensed into pills. She continued to swallow as much of the chemical as she could before her muscles gave out and she dropped the glass container with a loud crash on the floor.

“What did you DO???” James said out loud.

But she couldn’t hear him. She couldn’t hear anything except the pounding of her heart and the roaring sound of her blood. Her body collapsed to the floor, twitching and convulsing violently. Green ooze started pouring out of her body. First out of her mouth and nose, and then out her ears and eyes and even the pores of her skin.

James wanted to drag her out to safety, but he was feeling nothing but sheer terror as he tried to get close to her. His fears of isolation and loneliness were kicking in. He could hear people running towards them. He needed to leave.

“I can’t help you,” he said as he made his way back out. “And I’m not going to jail because of your stupidity.”

By the time the security guards showed up, Jen’s body was surrounded by a gelatinous cocoon that they couldn’t come near without being driven insane with fear. They immediately called the Freedom Phalanx for help.

Several days later, Jen Glamour emerged from the hardened cocoon, which had been placed in a special medical holding cell.

But it was the physically perfect Jen Glamour that emerged; one that, according to doctors, would STAY that way for the rest of her life. She would never physically age. She would never need makeup. She would never tan. She would never change, no matter WHAT she does to try to change her physical appearance. Her fingernails will always be the same perfect length with the red coloring built in. If she tries to cut them, they will grow right back in a matter of minutes. If she cuts her hair, or tries to dye it, it will come back to the original color and length by the end of the day. If she cuts herself, she will bleed, but then the wound would heal and there would be no trace of it; not even a scar. She would be locked into that perfect “Liberty Doll” body for the rest of her natural life.

But that was really all that mattered to her. It was all about looking good and being beautiful. Even as she stood trial for her criminal charges, she was wondering how the media would portray her and gush over the fact that she still looked like she was walking down runways in Venice. Even when she was found guilty and sentenced to thirty years in the women’s wing of the Ziggursky Prison, she was wondering who would play her in the Made-for-TV movie, and would Hollywood mind if she played herself?

As Jen Glamour was being sent to prison for her crimes, Jenny Star's career was taking a much different turn. "Thank you so much for coming along with me," Jenny's high-school friend told her as they left the clothing store in Atlas Park. "I really hate having to make a bank run in the middle of the day like today, but I just completely forgot to do it last night."

"That's okay," Jenny replied. "I've done a few of these myself when I was working at..."

Just then a man raced up in between them, grabbing the bank deposit bag, wrenching it free before running off. His red bandana and black jacket were clear signs of belonging to the Hellions gang.

"HEY!" Jenny exclaimed as she gave chase.

She knew that Hellions rarely worked alone, so she needed to take down this runner before his friends could show up to stop her. She felt the magic in the talisman kick in, boosting her running speed so she could catch up to the thief. A running kick quickly brought him down.

As she retrieved the bank bag, she saw four other Hellions approach, and the fallen Hellion quickly picked himself up.

"Lady, you're in a world of hurt now" said the leader of the group wearing a devil's mask.

"No," Jenny said, "you are."

She unleashed a sudden roundhouse kick at the leader, followed by a spinning kick that sent the leader flying back. The other four gang members tried attacking her, but baseball bats and fists were no match for her fists and feet. One member tried to pull out a pistol, but couldn't even point it at her before being knocked into unconsciousness.

The gang members were street tough and some even had talismans to boost their skills, but Jenny was trained in fighting by the Order of Equius, and was well-versed in how to use the magic in her talisman against others of equal skills. The gang members were clearly not of "equal skills", and in the span of two minutes, they were all unconscious.

As Paragon City police officers were loading the gang members into the truck, the news that a former Glam Bunny model single-handedly stopped a gang-crime drew reporters to the scene.

"You did nice work," said the police lieutenant on the scene. "The Hellions have really been getting out of hand with these grab-and-dash jobs. Your friend was really lucky that you were there with her."

"Well, I'm just glad I was able to stop them," she replied modestly.

"It's a pity you're not a resident of Paragon City," one reporter said out loud. "I'm sure the police could really use someone like you."

"I tried that," Jenny said, "I applied to the PPD a few years ago, but they said that because I was a Glam Bunny model they couldn't risk the 'exposure'."

That drew a few chuckles from the reporters.

"Well, the brass may think you're too much of a political risk," the lieutenant replied a little sheepishly, "but I certainly would love to have more people like you around, even as a registered hero. Maybe you could at least think about it?"

As the police lieutenant left with the prisoner van and the reporters raced to submit their stories, Jenny's friend came up to her. "The police had to take the bank bag, but they put my money in a new one... so maybe we can still do lunch after we make the deposit?"

"Actually..." Jenny said, "I was thinking... you still have that guest room?"

“Ya... you’re planning on staying overnight?”

“I was thinking a little longer than just overnight,” Jenny replied. “At least until I can get my own place here. You know those knee-high black boots we were looking at? Maybe I can find a use for them after all. Oh, and I’ll need to get those fingerless gloves too.”

In everything there is a balance between opposing forces. Light and dark. Yin and Yang. Order and chaos. Right and wrong. Good and Evil. This is the Law of Balance, the creed of the Order of Equius.

Maybe, Jenny thought, it was time for someone like her to balance things out in Paragon City.

--- EPILOGUE ---

At the Ziggursky Correctional facility in Brickstown, Jen Glamour was wondering why she was always getting losers for cellmates.

Her first cellmate was fat and ugly. She always talked, and she always smelled like bad cheese. She was quickly transferred to another prison after an “accident”.

Her second cellmate was a skinny Superadine addict on forced rehab, constantly talking about hidden dimensions and bugs trying to eat her brains. She was always puking her guts out and it made the toilet glow in the dark. She was also transferred out after an “accident.”

The third cellmate was another winner. She cried all of the time. But she also loved Jen’s films and thought it was a miscarriage of justice that she would be behind bars.

As far as cellmates went, Jen thought, this one was at least tolerable.

That was, until she saw something on the Paragon Evening News that absolutely blew her mind.

“Paragon City has a new superhero, and she’s certainly raising eyebrows! Chip?”

“That’s right Dianne. When you think of Glam Bunny models, you think of either dainty and fragile women or callous manipulative criminal schemers. But not so with this former model!”

Jen’s jaw dropped when she saw who was on the screen.

“You may know this former bikini beauty as Ms. August, but here in Paragon City, Jenny Star is known as J-Star, the newest and certainly most eye-fetching superhero who does more than just dazzle the criminals with her looks. She reportedly also packs a mean roundhouse kick.”

“Wow,” exclaimed Jen’s cellmate, “she looks just as hot as you.”

Jen Glamour’s blood began to boil at the mere mention of her rival’s name. Even though her mutant powers were being suppressed by prison medication, she summoned enough rage to fire a telepathic bolt into the television set, causing it to explode. She then attacked her cellmate furiously.

“I HATE HER!” she screamed as she pounded on her cellmate over and over again. “SHE’S NOTHING! SHE’S NOTHING!”

All the other prisoners cleared out of the community area. They were obviously upset at losing their television, but they also knew better than to mess with Jen Glamour when she was this way, lest they too have an “accident”. The guards soon arrived and escorted her to solitary for the umpteenth time.

After a half an hour of screaming and shouting at the apparent injustices of her situation, Jen finally quieted down and sat down on the cold hard floor of the bare cell.

“Ah, good... you’ve calmed down,” came an unknown voice.

“Who’s there?” Jen asked nervously, looking around the small confined space for the source of the voice. It didn’t seem to come from beyond the metal door. In fact, it seemed to come from inside the cell.

“A friend.”

“I have enough friends,” she replied.

“No you don’t. You have fans, you have lackeys, and you have rivals. You have people who either will do anything for you or will conspire to destroy you. But FRIENDS... well, for people like you, those are rare.”

“Who are you?” she asked.

“Someone who knows real potential when they see it. And someone who can help you achieve your full potential... that is, IF you are interested.”

“Let’s say that I am,” she said with a cock of her head, “what’s the catch? What do I have to do for...?”

“Wait here, right where you are. In an hour there will be an explosion in the women’s wing at the far wall of the solitary cells. The cell door will open. You will leave this cell and go INTO that opening and meet up with a man named H.T. who will show you where to go afterwards. He will also show you which drugs you will need to counteract the inhibitor drugs that have kept your powers at bay.”

“That’s it?” she asked.

“That’s all that you need to know for now. Are you interested?”

She paused briefly. “How do I know this is all on the level? How do I know this isn’t a trap?”

“You’re right to be suspicious, of course. Here is a small present...”

A small object appeared on the floor by the cell door. It wasn’t shoved under. It simply appeared. She reached over to get it.

It was a wire-rimmed version of her favorite rose-colored glasses.

She put the glasses on and reached behind her head to let loose the rubber-band that kept long blond hair tied behind her. She felt almost as good as when she first awoke with her new permanent body. Almost.

“Are you interested?” asked the disembodied voice. “Or should I just let the guards take your new present away and take you back to your boring cell with your boring fawning fan of a cellmate?”

“Oh I’m interested,” she said. “As long as I get to put that brown-haired witch in her place.”

“I think that can be arranged,” the voice replied.

--- FAR FROM THE END ---

Story written by David 2. Characters written by David 2 based on the City of Heroes MMO by NCSoft and Paragon Studios. Sister Psyche, Hellions, Paragon City, and members of the Freedom Corps and Freedom Phalanx are the creations of NCSoft/Paragon Studios and Cryptic Studios.

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