Henchmen Wanted

"Ms. Jones!"

"Yes, Dr. Dreadful?"

Madeline Jones looked up from her desk. She'd been going through the emails from the Heroes Guild accusing Evil Inc. of any number of crimes. Madeline had been sorting them into 'True' or 'False' when her boss shouted her name.

The man towering in front of her in an all black suit adjusted his tie with a menacing robot hand. He had cement colored hair and sharp incisors among his perfectly straight teeth. Smoothing back his disheveled hair, the CEO of Evil Incorporated let out a breath.

"I'm afraid that Crimson Steel will no longer be working for us. After a rough run-in with the Heroes Guild, he has decided that villainy is not his preferred line of work. I need you to find an immediate replacement."

"Understood, sir."

When Dr. Dreadful went back into his office, Madeline adjusted her short bob and straightened her skirt. She still jumped when her boss would get into one of his barking moods. He did his best to direct his anger into his current projects, but it still radiated off him like a heavy sweat. The people she dealt with were all evil, but at least they were honest about it when they walked through the door.

To be fair, villainy was hardly Madeline's first choice of work either, but Dr. Dreadful's position for a secretary fit her credentials . She had to do whatever it took to stay in her studio apartment and--surprisingly--Evil Incorporated came with some good benefits. Madeline opened a new chat window to the HR department.

-Dr. D needs a new henchman.

-Did he throw this one out the window?

-Would you ask? He's in one of his moods and we need a replacement pronto.

-Take look at the incoming resumes. I'll send you the link.

Madeline opened the file that came through her email. She sifted through the resumes, considering each one. She printed off a few that she liked and knocked on Dr. Dreadful's office. Dr. Dreadful's voice was short and irritated. "Come!"

The office was in disarray, but Dr. Dreadful hadn't shattered any windows. The fireplace roared within a frame of white marble stone. It complimented the blood read carpet that Madeline had suggested a year ago to address the cleaning crew's complaints. Dr. Dreadful had flipped his desk and thrown one of the chairs across the room. Madeline didn't see Crimson Steel's body in pieces on the ground as she'd expected. He'd probably quit over the phone and Madeline couldn't blame him for that. It was just as well. Madeline had liked Richard and he didn't strike her as the villain type.

"I apologize for the mess," Dr. Dreadful said, straightening a stack of papers from the desk. "It's been a very stressful morning."

"I went the resumes as you asked, sir."

"Good," Dr. Dreadful sat and interlocked his flesh and mechanical hands. "Anyone, you think would qualify?"

"A few might be worth looking at." Madeline passed over the resumes. "There's a new recruit from New York…Trance. Reportedly, she can hypnotize people with a single glance."

"Still not quite enough. If we promoted one of the lower henchmen, she could take his place. But she's too green to bring in to replace Rich—Crimson Steel. I want to bring in some fresh, experienced blood. Who else?"

"Plant Man," Madeline continued, "not a lot of practical experience, but he did cause a major flood that the Heroes Guild had to contend with. He has a lot of potential and would be a good entry hire."

"Agreed, but he doesn't have an email. I don't make job offers in person unless I see someone with a lot of power. Who else?"

"Vertical Vector is—"

"No, out of the question. No more alliteration names. I won't have another Quilt Queen disaster. Any others?"

"Well, there's Chance. He can manipulate probability and likelihood within a defined radius."

"If he was as good as he thinks, he wouldn't need to submit a resume would he?" Dr. Dreadful sighed. "No, no, these just won't do. This was all we had to offer?"

"I could have HR put out another ad. There's always fresh powered people hitting the streets with their hearts set on the Heroes Guild only to have it dashed before their eyes."

"Perhaps," Dr. Dreadful nodded. "I'd like it filled by the end of the month."

"I'll set up some interviews," Madeline said, picking up the resumes and heading back to her desk. She sat her computer and called Charlie in maintenance.

"Dr. Dreadful needs a new desk. What do we have?"

"We got a red and brass number or an oak and polished steel."

"Red and brass, for sure," Madeline said. "He's in a mood, but he'll still keep the aesthetic."

Madeline confirmed that the doctor would be leaving at four and posted an ad on a few job sites: "Henchmen Wanted, Excepting All Levels of Experience. Inquire with Evil Inc."

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"Duplicity," Madeline sat across from the man sitting in the desk chair across from her. "Multiplication powers?"

"My reputation proceeds me."

"Your resume proceeds you. Take it from me, Dr. Dreadful doesn't tolerate cockiness and neither do I."

"I didn't expect the good Doctor to have a secretary. What do they call you? The Receptionist?"

"Ms. Jones," Madeline growled. "Or Maddy, if we're close—and we aren't for the record."

"Suits me fine," Duplicity grinned.

"Now, according to your resume, you have six years of villainy experience. Is that chronological or compounded with your other selves?"

"Ah, you're good. I confess, that is a combined number, but I like to imagine experience like mine compounds easily. I keep the memories and experiences of my duplicates, up to and including injuries. Speaking of, what's the compensation policy here?"

"10% per loss of limb," Madeline said. "You're new to this aren't you?"

"I've been doing the superpowers thing for a little while, but small town heroics don't make headlines."

"So you're looking for fame?"

"I can split into twenty copies of myself. Would it surprise you that I'm a narcissist?"

"This conversation wouldn't surprise me. So you were a hero?"

"Briefly."

"Why not go to the Heroes Guild? That's more their style."

"Former hero. I got out when I realized there wasn't any money in it. When I saw Dr. Dreadful had an opening, I figured that my skills could finally be put to good use."

"Skills such as?"

"Well, multiple copies of—"

"You said your duplicates could retain experiences after you've reabsorbed them?" Madeline asked, flipping the resume from side to side. "How many languages do they know? What martial arts have they studied? Lock picking? Safecracking? Do any of them have medical certifications? As far as your resume goes, your only real contribution is an excess of self. You could learn more in a year than some people do in lifetimes and you barely took the time to grasp how to set up a resume."

"I can promise you, I'm worth Dr. D's time."

"Not until you learn that you can't squander your gift for fame and fortune when you could develop some real talent. We don't need rookies, we need villains. Now, do you have anything you can offer me?"

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"Mr….King Ray?" Madeline asked. The behemoth sitting across from her barely fit in the chair provided. King Ray was a half-human, half-stingray creature with grey, rubbery skin. His chest was as wide as the doorframe and had arms as thick as Madeline's waist. He almost didn't fit in the chair across from Madeline. As a specimen, it was astonishing, though lacking as a practical conversationalist.

"Yes…" King Ray said, a hissing sound drawing out the alienness of his speech.

"This is quite a list of references. Have you worked much with Dr. Anarchy? He couldn't speak highly enough of you."

"Yes…"

"Right." Madeline made a note on his resume and looked back up at the hybrid man. "We haven't had many hybrid henchmen before, but we're always looking to diversify. You were predominantly hired muscle with Dr. Anarchy?"

"Yes…"

"Any other duties or skills required for that job?"

"No…" King Ray said. Madeline wasn't sure if that surprised her or not."

"Where do you see yourself in ten years?"

King Ray remained quiet. Madeline made a note on her paper: no ambition.

"Do you have any questions for me? About the company or the doctor? The position of henchman?"

"No…"

"Would you like a tour of the facility?"

"No…"

After the unbearably short interview, Madeline clicked her pen and forced a smile. "Well, thanks for coming in today. Let's show you the way out and we'll just double check some of your paperwork before you leave."

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"Celsius Zero," Madeline looked over the superhuman's resume and looked up at the woman sitting across from her. Celsius Zero sported ice blue hair and icicles at the tips of her fingers like acrylic nails. Her movements were slow and graceful, a small smile on her frosted lips as she examined Madeline in turn. Madeline suppressed a shiver and continued. "Your powers: Natural or Artificial?"

"I didn't make 'em, if that's what you're asking, but there ain't nothing natural about this." Celsius Zero flexed her hand and the ice on her fingernails lengthened into sharp points.

"On the contrary," Madeline grinned. "Mutation is the most natural thing there is. If it wasn't, we'd still be basic protozoa floating in the ocean. What's your strongest asset?"

"A good old fashioned Ice Tornado? It was one of my first real tricks and I've been practicing with it."

"What's the range?"

"About…a mile? If I focus I can make it bigger. That's how I escaped the Heroes Guild when I robbed the Science Center last month."

"Yes, very impressive work. A little…sloppy with the evidence—"

"I'm a freelancer. If I wanna get hired, I have to take credit for my work."

"If you worked for us? That kind of showboating would be out of the question."

"Showboating?" Celsius Zero asked, offended.

"You frosted over exhibits you weren't anywhere near. I can recognize someone trying to show the extent of their skills and it's not as easy to impress Dr. Dreadful. That being said? Keep up the good work and try not to 'sign' every crime you commit? I think that could happen. Now, moving on with the interview…"

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"Celsius Zero is an excellent choice." Dr. Dreadful said. His office was completely refurnished, with a new desk of red wood and brass trim. Madeline sat across from him with the resume she had chosen from the roster. "And I agree, we could always use King Ray as a retainer for when we need a distraction. Be sure to tell human resources to expedite her paperwork."

"Already taken care of."

"I'm impressed. And you had no reason for moving her through the process?"

"Doctor…I would never try to trick you like that."

"Glad to hear it. You're an excellent assistant. That's all for now, take care."

Madeline walked out to her desk and closed Dr. Dreadful's door. She pulled out her phone and texted the name 'Frosty' on her phone.

-Nothing on the books yet, but you got the job!

-No shit? That's awesome! Want drinks to celebrate? I know a great villain bar…

-Sounds fun. It'll be nice to have another woman working here again. Seven tonight?

-I'll send you the address.