WRIT2050: Genre Fiction Manuscript

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AI Acknowledgment

I confirm that this submission is the result of my own research, planning, conceptualising and writing. It is all my own work. I confirm that AI ***has not been used in any form*** *when writing this creative work.*

Genre: *Science fiction (superhero). Science fiction depicts future-oriented, high-tech settings, and alternate histories. Superhero fiction follows characters with superhuman powers, and features high action, tension, and themes of morality and justice.*

LEVIATHAN

It's only Monday evening, and already I'm being kicked off a skyscraper. Talk about a bad start to the week.

I don't know how this guy can see me, considering being invisible (yes, *literally* invisible) is one of the only aces up my sleeve. Yet he's managed to corner me on the top floor of the bank. Usually, I let a little bit of stupidity slide when it comes to the outfits that superheroes (and villains) prance around in, but this guy's ridiculous.

"Blue, green, *and* red?" I find myself saying, aloud. "Pick an accent, buddy."

He sneers. At least his garish outfit pins him as Nexus City's solitary self-proclaimed superhero, responsible for our rapidly decreasing supervillain population: Leviathan. A stupid pretentious name to match his stupid pretentious costume. If I were a little less scared shitless, this would be like meeting a celebrity.

I'm up against the rooftop edge now, Leviathan penning me in. His shoulders look even broader up close. I glance back; the ground is dizzyingly far away, nearly shrouded through the smog and countless skybridges, criss-crossing adjacent buildings like a glass spiderweb. Hot breeze carries up the dying warmth of the pavement as dusk vanishes over the smudged city horizon.

"A poor choice of final words, Whisper." Leviathan's over-gelled hair doesn't budge a millimetre in the wind. There's a streak of grey at his temple, unnaturally perfect. And he *is* looking right at me — maybe because I spoke. *Shutting the fuck up* is sometimes lifesaving, though I'm yet to internalise the notion.

"Final words? They weren't my final words. My final words are *suck my d*—"

And *that's* what gets me kicked square in the chest, winded, and falling backwards into a hundred storeys of empty space. Falling shouldn't bother me; flight is a pretty common superpower these days. On technicality, I *can* fly, but as the world's most unreliable guy, it tracks that I have superpowers to match. As I reach for the power (a light, swelling feeling centred in my chest), it isn't there.

So I'm falling to my death.

I imagine winding up like all those entries on the Villain Registry, the ones with photos plastered across their file. Mugshots. Postmortems. Or, worst: stark close-up shots, where there's fear in their eyes. *NEUTRALISED*. That section of the Registry keeps getting longer, and I'm starting to suspect I'll be the latest addition.

My flight sputters back in, like a wholesome bout of heart arrhythmia, but I can tell it won't stay. I guide my fall a little, slow the descent, and slam into a skybridge so hard I hear the glass crack.

"Ow, fuck," I groan, and drag myself upwards onto the peaked roof. A stab of pain in my ribs suggests it wasn't the glass that cracked: it was me.

I realise Leviathan is peering down at me from the top of the building, about seven storeys above, his vibrant blue cape flowing behind him like he's a particularly opinionated flagpole. My invisibility must be gone. I can picture exactly what I look like: sprawled across a skybridge and utterly winded, a bag of stolen cash slung across my shoulders. It's so unfair. I go off my mood stabilisers — *specifically* so my powers will work — and they bail on me anyway.

"Worst heist ever," I mutter. Hopefully my modgear visor is still working. For supervillains, modgear is the best thing since sliced bread. Before our faces were protected

from human eyes and facial recognition, our lifespans were far shorter. Nowadays, it isn't facial recognition that gets us: it's *this* asshole.

The asshole in question leaps off the skyscraper after me.

Oh, shit. I forgot he could fly. But *apparently*, he can do everything. I swear aloud — several times — and hurl myself off the skybridge.

After a few moments of (frankly terrifying) falling, my flight's back, but my invisibility isn't. Leviathan is in a streamlined dive behind me; I bet he doesn't know I can fly. Why spoil the surprise?

My invisibility is seeping back in: a cool breeze, a tingling sensation that gives me goosebumps. The skyscraper lights and billboards zoom past in a multicoloured blur. The street below is getting closer; speck-sized pedestrians are already making themselves scarce. Come on, come *on*…

It's back. I snap out of visibility and brace to pull out of the dive.

Something slams into me from the side, and I experience the joys of a full-body tackle. Shockingly enough, it's *not* the guy who's trying to kill me; he narrowly avoids eating pavement as I — and my dark blur of an attacker — careen towards a nearby building. Thick vinyl yields and breaks, and we've ploughed through an advertising banner. A billowing explosion of purple smoke, and Leviathan is swallowed up. Yelling from the street, only a few metres below. The stranger has me by the front of my suit. I kick at them and push away, floating in empty space.

A husky, annoyed voice comes from the smoke. "Hey! What's your problem?"

"You tackled me!"

"I *saved* you!"

"I had it handled!" I dive down to the ground, deserted in the haze of acrid mist. Which way did Leviathan go? I aim away from where I last saw my unwanted rescuer and start to jog. I make it about ten paces before a hand grabs me by the throat.

I choke as Leviathan slams me back against a streetlamp. My head makes a dull *clang*. I'm seeing spots already. He's lifted me off my feet with one hand. "How…the *fuck*…are you…*seeing* me?"

Leviathan curls his lip. "So you aren't working alone."

A devastating right hook crashes into his jaw, and our little moment is over. His grip vanishes, and he hits the ground hard. My attacker-rescuer emerges from the smoke, and I register a purple masquerade-style mask before she walks straight into me. My invisibility drops out for a moment; she sees me and pushes me into a run.

"*Go!*"

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We finally stop in a narrow alleyway, far from the light and motion of the main roads. The smoke petered out with distance, but my eyes are still burning, tears streaming down my cheeks. I flew until my flight started to falter (a dizzying, sickening vertigo), then every step twinged my rib like a punishment for trying to have it easy.

The stranger touches down elegantly beside me. She flew the whole way. Her modgear renders her face as a blur, but I can feel her eyes following me intently.

"This dark abandoned alley is pretty convenient," I mutter, narrowly dodging a suspicious pollution-slicked puddle.

"I make sure to know where all the dark abandoned alleys are." Her voice is deep and velvet. Unlike Leviathan, she knows how to dress: all in purple — deep, royal — with an acid green accent. She's slender and tall (intimidatingly so), and holds herself haughtily, like a stick of incense: one that fills every room with cloying air you can't breathe. That would be a

weird metaphor, maybe, if she wasn't literally producing smoke. Wisps of it coil restlessly around her fingers, drifting to the ground and skulking around her ankles like a stubborn morning mist.

I recognise her from the Villain Registry: Fatale. Her thing is poisons, which explains why my eyes are stinging so much.

I remember that *she's* looking at *me*, and, because I'm a hypocrite, I go invisible.

"Really, Whisper?"

The issue with flying under the radar is that you can't pick your own name. *Whisper* only appeared on the Registry three months ago, as a string of presumedly interconnected and marvellously executed robberies. Whisper, because they never notice until I'm already gone. Until today.

"Being invisible is kind of my whole thing," I drawl.

"I see that now."

"Technically, you *don't*…"

"I want to talk. I'm Fatale."

"I know."

"It's nice to meet another supervillain."

"Doubt it."

"Aren't many of us left."

"Bummer."

"It was almost you today."

"But it wasn't. Thanks so much for slamming me into a building and all, but I really gotta go."

"I *did* save you, though. Surely you owe me a moment." She beckons me further down the alley.

Whatever Fatale wants with me can't be good. Supervillains in this city love killing *other* supervillains almost as much as Leviathan does. And it's in the name: Fatale is a killer.

But hey. I'm a curious guy.

"Fine. Where are we going?" I jog (painfully) to keep with her long strides. We turn into an even narrower alley.

She glances over at me, but way too far to my left. "If Leviathan can see through your invisibility, you'll need to learn how to lose him."

Twenty-four heists across three years and I've been fine so far. I suspect Fatale underestimates how long I've been active, which just proves I'm *damn* good at getting away with it. But then again, my record still pales next to her intimidating Registry file.

"Yeah, what's with *that*? You can't see me, can you?"

She shakes her head. The alleyway ends in a rust-stained concrete wall. I baulk, but Fatale has already descended an uneven staircase and unceremoniously shouldered open a barred door. Against my non-existent better judgement, I follow her past the *DANGER, DO NOT ENTER!* sign and the long-broken lock.

"It's weird." My voice echoes. "At first I thought it was because I never shut up, but it's more than that."

The subway station is long abandoned. I can make out the suggestion of graffiti and yawning, pitch-black tunnels in both directions. Fifteen years since the Sentinel Laws were passed, and the city still hasn't excavated everything from the chaos that came before. I can't even remember which long-dead superpersona caused the subway cave-ins.

"Perhaps it's a new power." Fatale has finally stopped walking.

I stumble gratefully to a halt behind her. "Ugh, God. He whips a new one out of his ass every other week."

She chuckles briefly, then sobers. "That's what I wanted to discuss."

"Leviathan's ass?" His name echoes back at us.

Her disapproving glance flies way over my right shoulder. "Some of us villains are concerned about Leviathan. You've seen the Registry, haven't you? How fast we're disappearing?"

"Listen, I love what you do, with all the murders and the fancy calling cards and stuff, but I don't want anything to do with whatever you're doing." She can probably hear the way I'm doubled over, out of breath. My ribs are killing me.

"And if I could turn invisible, I'd do something a little more high-minded than robbing banks. But here we are, being picked off one by one all the same."

I sigh. "Just get to your point."

"We're going to meet up. You're invited."

"You don't want me." My laugh comes out sharp. "I don't work well in teams. At all."

She tilts her head. "We're supervillains, Whisper. None of us do. That's why we keep dying."

"Look, you clearly have a real purpose. I don't. I'm just fucking around, okay? Now Leviathan's onto me, I'll just stop."

Sure, I can't see her face, but I can feel her judgement. Erratic. Contradictory. Inept. That's all I've ever heard in exit interviews.

"I don't think anyone can describe what you do as *fucking around*, Whisper," Fatale says, finally. There's a smile in her voice. "Your work is impressive. You're destined for something bigger than a simple heist."

"There is nothing *simple* about a heist," I grumble, but she's caught me. "You think I'm impressive?"

"Don't let it go to your head." She holds something out to me: a folded piece of paper the size of a business card. "Can I count you in?"

I sigh, and take the card. I have a feeling we'll both regret it.