

FANTASTIX

A novel by
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Where were you when it happened?

That is the question that will forever be on the lips of anyone who speaks about *that* day. It will be the big topic for those who wonder what really happened. Who did it? How could such a thing actually happen?

The world did not end that day so surely the good guys must have won.

But at what price?

The morning of the event that would later be described as the biggest historical event of the first decade of the 21st century took place no one could have expected what was to come. It was just too unbelievable a concept to fathom. Sure, there had been earth shattering moments and many a near miss over the years, but somehow, miraculously, he had survived.

Even for the man who would tomorrow be on the headline of nearly every newspaper across the globe it came as much of a shock. While the man was acutely aware of his mortality, the end was never really something to which he ascribed much thought.

His name was Wallace Wilson, a man who was no stranger to making history.

Wallace was a respected investigative journalist. In his ten-year career he had reported from every corner of the globe, exposed corruption, toppled evil corporate tycoons, and put a human face to victims of injustice.

Wallace Wilson was a hero.

And that was just his day job. It was his side job that made him famous. Although not under his own name.

When not saving the world with a keyboard and a camera, Wallace Wilson was saving the world in other ways. Despite his mild mannered looks, his unassuming baby face, and perfectly coifed hair, he was much, much more. Toss on sensible, loose fitting clothes, a pair of less than fashionable glasses, and add in just a dash of poor posture and you would never know that mild mannered Wallace Wilson was also Dominus, the World's Most Powerful Man.

Dominus was considered the world's greatest super hero by the numerous newspapers and magazines that portrayed him as such.

And the public loved the big lug.

He was both mentor and teacher. His message of peaceful coexistence was known throughout the world. Even in places where such ideals were shunned everyone knew Dominus.

And most everyone loved him.

You can't be a super hero without enemies, he used to say. Dominus certainly had his fair share.

And then some.

In his time he had battled the Unliving Monolith in London, the demolished pieces of which were currently rusting at the bottom of the Thames. Dominus staved off an alien invasion single-handedly in the 90's with only a handful of well-trusted individuals even aware of how close the planet came to doom. He was also the first line of defense against the various world conquerors and troublemakers that came along, of which there seemed to be at least a new one each month. Triptech, Brahma, The Magistrate, the Zindaaree, and the list went on.

Dominus stopped them all.

Sometimes alone, but sometimes, when things looked bleak, even Dominus had friends he could call. Heratic, Believer, Visage, Sama, Shimmer, the Fatalistic Five, and even the Black Rider were there to lend a hand every now and again.

New York City was Wallace's home these days. He had settled in after landing a job with a major news service early in his career. New York was a far cry from where he grew up, but Wallace liked it there just fine. And really, where else would the world's greatest hero live except in the world's greatest city?

It just made sense. New York provided him with everything he needed, both legal and not so legal.

"Jones? You here?" Wallace called out into the early morning chill.

"Now where else would I be, junkie?" a gravelly voice answered.

Dressed down in shaggy gray jogging pants and a sweatshirt with a faded University of Alabama logo on it, Wallace Wilson stepped into an alley he knew all too well in search of a man he both hated and needed.

“You got the cash?”

“Yeah. Yeah, of course I do,” Wallace answered nervously. “Do you have my stuff?”

“Of course I do,” Jones said with a smile. He looked like somebody Wallace or one of his super pals would arrest on any other day. Jones was younger than Wallace by at least ten or fifteen years and looked every bit the street tough. Tattoos ran up and down both arms. Wallace almost laughed the day they first met when he noticed that one of the tattoos was Dominus’ shield insignia.

If you only knew, he thought, but dared not reveal his true identity to the man. Although, if Jones had any brains whatsoever, putting two and two together would not be that hard. In their dealings, Jones had intimated knowledge of his customer’s true identity, but thankfully had not commented directly on the matter. In this particular line of work, discretion truly was a valor.

A knit cap covered Jones’ shaved head, where Wallace assumed more tattoos resided. Three loops pierced above his left eyebrow while a stud stood out on the right side of his nose. A small tuft of bright red hair sitting alone under his lower lip completed the look.

Jones, if that was indeed his real name, which Wallace assumed it wasn’t since he was not exactly being forthright in regards to his real name either, had that swagger of a man with the upper hand, which was not an inaccurate assessment. He knew his customer *needed* what he supplied. The fact that Wallace could bench press a couple Buicks at the same time did not intimidate him one iota. In their dealings, Jones held all the power.

And he knew it too.

“I wouldn’t come all the way down here to easy street if I didn’t have the stuff, now would I?”

“I... guess not.”

“Here ya go!” Jones tossed a small inhaler that Wallace caught easily. “Looks like you need a little sumpin’ now, Chief. Why don’tcha go ahead an’ take a puff offa this before ya cause an earthquake wit dem shakes?”

“Th... thanks,” Wallace stammered as he squeezed the inhaler, unloading a thick puff of the purple mist inside into his mouth. It burned going down, but the momentary pain was far more bearable to the shakes he endured without the help of this mysterious magic purple elixir.

Almost immediately, the slight tremor in his hands faded. He was himself again. If only for a moment. It seemed that the inhaler’s effectiveness grew shorter with each use. Wilson was up to three, sometimes four vials a day whereas one dose used to last him at least a week.

Jones carefully handed him a cardboard box. Stenciled on the side was a printed faded indigo blue logo that read simply *Fantastix*.

Fantastix.

Such a simple and unassuming name, perhaps even heroic sounding when used in the right context. Unfortunately, while this was a somewhat accurate statement, the fact was that Fantastix did not create super powered individuals, or *Metas* as they were being called these days.

It did, however, keep them all alive.

Fantastix was a Meta’s only hope of survival. Without the drug, which was becoming a rare commodity in the ever-changing sociopolitical landscape of the day where those responsible for the creation of Metas and the Fantastix inhaler had turned their back on them and left them to die, his fate was sealed. A very violent death awaited him without the Fantastix.

It was the same for every one of them, whether they were hero, villain, or just trying to get by. There was no escaping that one insoluble fact.

Without the Fantastix, all Metas would die painfully. As legitimate manufacturers of the drug ceased production, underground labs cooked up generic versions of the drug, often with catastrophic consequences. The meta human community began fighting over the last vestiges as supply began to far outweigh demand.

That's where men like Jones and their compatriots came in. They somehow managed to fill that need.

And Dominus, role model to billions of people the world over, was an addict.

Just like every other super hero and villain on the face of the Earth.

"I tripled your usual order," Jones said. "Just as you requested."

"Thanks."

Jones' features softened, his mannerisms were no longer those of a heartless drug dealer, but of someone with a bit more compassion. "Look, pal," he said softly, careful not to be overheard even though the alley appeared devoid of anyone other than the two of them. "You be careful with this stuff, okay? Too much of this shit will kill you quick."

Wallace chuckled. "You almost sound like you care, Jones."

Jones quickly returned to his thug-like act. "Nah, man. I'd just hate to lose a faithful customer is all."

"Uh huh. You take care, Jones," Wilson said as he turned to leave the alley. Then, he stopped, looked back at his supplier and added, "Stay out of trouble."

"Yeah. You too."

Once Wallace left the alley and was safely out of range, Jones pulled a scrambled cell phone from his hip pocket and suddenly there was no trace of the arrogant swagger he'd displayed in front of his *customer*. He flipped open the phone, but did not dial a number. There was no need. The voice on the other end spoke a single word. "Report."

“It’s done,” Jones said, looking skyward. He closed the phone and returned it to his pocket without waiting for an acknowledgement. He knew none would be forthcoming. Operatives of Haven were trained to follow orders obediently and without question. Even when those orders sometimes made no sense.

Like the order he was following now.

It made absolutely no sense to Jones, but he was a loyal agent. He did as he was told.

He gathered up the duffel he had surreptitiously hid before his customer arrived. Then, just as he was about to leave, he saw it, a streak of blue and red. There, on the morning breeze, Jones caught sight of the world’s greatest super hero, Dominus soaring by overhead and he couldn’t help but stand in awe.

Dominus. The idol of billions.

Carrying a cardboard box in his arms.

And suddenly Jones felt sick to his stomach.

He knew what was coming. There was no way to stop it.

The man Wallace Wilson knew as Jones watched until Dominus was out of sight before leaving the alley. He burned the image of his favorite childhood hero into his brain. He would never have the opportunity to see this sight again. He wanted to have one last positive mental image before *it* happened.

Events had been put into motion that would either save the world or plunge them all into a brutal war.

Dominus had been targeted for sanction.

He was not the first.

He would not be the last.

Haven would see to that.

They had a plan.

As he walked out of the alley, Jones removed the fake loops from his eyebrow, peeled off the fake nose stud, and pulled the fake red hair from his chin. The tattoos were also removable,

but that would require a shower. But there was no time for that now.

Jones walked into a public restroom at a nearby burger chain and changed clothes, discarding those he wore in the alley into a prearranged trash receptacle for pick up. The man that exited was the polar opposite of the man that entered. Now carrying a briefcase instead of a faded duffel, clean cut and wearing a tailored suit, the man Wallace knew, but would hardly recognize as Jones got in the car he had left at the restaurant earlier and drove away.

He drove straight home where he held his wife and daughter close while he awaited the news report that would eventually interrupt all regularly scheduled programming.

Today, history would be made one way or another.

Although he could not tell them what he knew or when it would happen, it was classified information after all, his family was glad to have him home for the day. He was happy to be with them too. He needed a happy moment because he knew that it might be the last happy moment any of them would have for some time.

He needed to be with the people he loved most in the world when *it* happened.

He wanted to remember exactly where he was when the news broke.

History demanded it.

Where were you when it happened would be one of those important questions often posed for years to come, but it was not the question that should have been asked.

There was a more important question that went unasked.

What was going to happen next?

Continued in the pages of “FANTASTIX”...