1 Moon Girl

"Good evening humanity."

A woman sighed as her favourite TV show changed to a man sitting on a black throne.

Tall, with a sharp suit and an evil smile, he pushed back some overly gelled black hair as he leant forward on his throne, turning blue eyes that were almost too bright, to the audience.

Seriously? It's like the fifth time this month…

"I know many of you have already seen me in the morning papers, on the news or in videos on the internet, battling it out once more with good old Frigid Hack, but I will introduce myself for those not enlightened. I am..."

"Apex Illusionist! Master of the sense of sight and I have come to make you see! See what? See the world as I do?!" The girl swished her short and unruly red hair as she mimicked every move of the man's villainous announcement routine. "Get some new moves, Apex," she sighed.

Flopping back into her seat, her ocean-blue eyes turned dull as she listened to yet another attempt to take over the world, or threaten heroes, or a general declaration of chaos to come.

It didn't matter which because, in the world she lived in, this was normal.

Ever since the turn of the millennium, humans had been developing powers, super powers, just like superheroes. They could fly, throw fire, shake the earth just like the heroes and villains of comic books and movies. Out of nowhere people were waking up with supernatural abilities.

A lot of people didn't want to believe it was happening. Those without special powers called them Tricks for a long time. Many convinced themselves that people with these powers were just faking so people with these powers were widely referred to 'Tricksters'.

But now, fifteen years after people started getting these powers, the natural order of the world was being rewritten.

Things had reached a point where these powers had to just be accepted as reality, but by that point the term Trick and the term Trickster were being widely used as scientific terms to describe these powers and those who had them.

Tricksters were somewhat cut off from the rest of the world, hated and feared. But even if they had powers, they were still human, so naturally there was a divide of opinion within Tricksters on how to deal with the discrimination.

Some tried to get back at humanity for treating them differently, for making them feel isolated, or attacking them for power they never asked for. They became villains.

Some tried to help humanity, to show the world that Tricksters aren't monsters to be feared. They became heroes.

All in all, the world turned into one big comic book. Apex Illusionist was one of many supervillains using the powers the world gave them to try to take over the world or gain a boat-load of money and power.

But then there were superheroes like Frigid Hack who would try to stop the villains, fight crime, and save the world.

There were epic battles between good and evil, heroes and villains, fought every day, but sadly, that meant for anyone who didn't have a Trick, the world had become a dangerous place. Law enforcement was all over the place due to the vigilante justice messing up the system and the villains' plans normally lead to hostages, bombs, and quite a lot of collateral damage.

All it took was to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Dreda Toth was twenty, with no Trick to speak of and so sick of the world's shit she turned off the TV and went to make some tea. Someone would deal with Apex as they always did with every villain. She gave

a glance to a figure of a hero in grey robes she had on her bookshelf, hoping that her favourite, Mist Paragon, would deal with him so she could see her on TV. But, turning away, she knew Apex Illusionist was the arch enemy of Frigid Hack, so it wasn't likely.

Even if it was Hack or her favourite, more people would die as a result of the conflict and the world would continue spiralling down into the strange, dark place where anything could happen. Except for her one hero, Dreda did her best to turn a blind eye to the world of Tricksters and live her own life.

She'd worked hard the past few months to try and pin down a job. She wasn't...well, she had no qualifications to her name so she had been finding it near impossible to even pin down an interview. But she had a stroke of luck.

A large office firm had agreed to meet with her for an interview. They said her lack of qualifications wouldn't be a problem as they were willing to train her up. She was meeting them tomorrow. She was nervous as hell though, as it was going to be her first job interview.

She clamped her hands around the hot cup of tea and blew out her breath, trying to picture blowing out her anxiety instead of air. In her head, she went through all the advice the job centre had given her a thousand times before going to bed that night.

Although, all it took to get mixed up in the mess of heroes and villains was to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Or, at least in Dreda's case, to hand in her CV to the wrong person.

The next day Dreda found herself sighing again, wondering if she hadn't turned off the TV last night, would she have been able to figure out that her job interview was a trap to lure hostages for Apex's plan. She'd arrived, a red haired bundle of nerves buttoned into smart black trousers and a shirt, only to find the familiar face of Apex sitting on the other side of the desk.

He flashed her his infamous insane grin and gleefully told her, "You're hired."

Just as the room started to fill with gas, Dreda had darted to the door to get out, but it was locked, and before she could knock it down, her world had turned black.

When she next woke up she was seemingly...on the moon.

Her body stiffened, frozen as her mind tried to process the utterly bizarre situation. There was white rock beneath her and it made her hands dusty with a chalky substance from touching it. There was a black abyss above her with only small pin pricks of light scattered throughout. When she looked to her right she saw, well, the earth: a ball of misty white with bits of blue peeking through the smoke screen.

What else could it be? she thought, tilting her head as she took a few deep breaths to calm herself.

"Illusionist," she reminded to herself.

At least she couldn't complain about his idea of holding hostages. Out of curiosity, she tried jumping, but it seemed Apex's illusions couldn't affect gravity or temperature. She didn't go flying and landed back on the ground like she normally would.

"That would be pretty over powered…" she mused, looking around, wondering if she was alone in her moon adventure.

She wasn't. The other hostages were here too, but some were sitting on seats that weren't there in her vision, others leaning on invisible walls. It was like watching a mime convention.

"So, where do you think you are?" she asked the person closest, assuming everyone had a different illusion.

The geeky guy jumped out of his skin, whizzing around to face her. He fumbled with his glasses that nearly fell off, and pushed a few dark blond bangs out of his face.

"I think...I'm in a database," he eventually responded after looking around a bit, "You seem really–"

"What does a database look like?" Dreda tried to picture being in a 2D screen.

"Zeros and ones."

"Right…so it's the matrix for you."

He laughed. "Suppose."

"Gah!" another hostage screamed. "W-what are you doing? D-don't touch me there!"

Matrix and Dreda watched the man fall back, his face completely red, panicky, but not afraid of the touches from thin air.

"Is he…?" Dreda found herself blushing a bit as she thought about what his little illusionary prison was.

"I…I hope not." Matrix turned away and Dreda followed suit. They tried to ignore the loud man stuck in a hentai game.

"So…" Matrix tried to start a conversation, "where are you?"

"The moon, apparently. It's quiet and the view's pretty nice, so can't complain."

"That says a lot about you." The voice came out of nowhere and all the hostages fell silent.

Apex gradually came into view like someone had used a video transition to bring himself into existence.

Dreda wondered how long he had been there without her being able to see him, or whether he had just walked in a door that she couldn't see.

"Are you all having fun?" He looked around.

Observing his hostages gave him a few different answers. Hentai's boner said 'yes', one woman's teary face said 'no', Dreda's plain expression said 'bored', and Matrix's now icy expression said, 'okay, but now you're here'.

"Why show us such horrible things?!" the crying woman barked between sobs as she clutched herself.

Horrible things? Dreda tilted her head.

"Oh, I'm not 'making' you see anything. You yourselves are shaping the illusions. I'm just giving them the power. If you're seeing horrible things it just means, you're a horrible person."

Apex gave a smug grin as those words sunk in. One hostage, a well-built man, was red with rage. His fists were shaking, clenching so tightly Dreda thought he might end up breaking the skin on his palm with his nails.

"What do you want with us?!" the man gave a shout that made many in the room flinch.

"As I said to the world last night, I have a show to put on. A show to dazzle and probably make a lot of people puke, and you, my friends, are the stars of that show," Apex told them in a proud and animated fashion. "The show will be called 'Apex Job Hunt' in which I will pick two of you each week to battle it out for a chance at the Apex prize: freedom and life! Only one of you will have the privilege of coming out of this alive."

The atmosphere in the room turned cold.

Hostages flinched as the emotion changing their illusions; the teary woman screamed and clasped her hands to her head as she fell to her knees, sobbing uncontrollably.

But Dreda.

Dreda's outward appearance seemed calm, if only a little tense. Her world did change, though. The 'earth' in the sky moved on a path to block out the light. The 'sun' was consumed by the misty planet until it was completely taken over by the black abyss. The bright white rocks were left in shadow, but it was nothing compared to the darkness that lay behind Dreda's eyes.

"Why?" she asked, her voice flat.

"Why?" Apex turned to her, his insane grin thinking nothing of the look of death he was receiving and honestly that pissed her off more. "Must I answer that? Why do I do anything? To show the world. Make everyone see."

"The way you do," Matrix hissed, his almost too bright-blue eyes surpassingly sharp compared to the jumpy geek that was there before.

"Exactly," Apex said, pointing to him. "To see the monsters that lie in everyone. Even the most normal and nicest of people."

"You're the monster!" the teary woman screamed as she burst into a fit of sobs.

"You can't keep us here!"

"You can't make us fight each other!"

"You're a psycho!"

The hostages burst out into a chorus of abuse and protests and Apex did nothing but smile back at them. His smile grew and grew, until it

split his face in two as he threw his jaws open and all sound was consumed by laughing madness.

Anger gave way to fear as the laugh chilled the hostages to the bone. The small group looked between each other, hentai backing away from the laughing man, and the teary woman getting up and scrambling as far away as she thought she could get.

Apex's laughter died down and the man wiped his eyes of tears. With a smug look of victory, he turned to leave through whatever door he entered, but he hadn't noticed the person who had moved in front of him. He stumbled a bit to avoid bumping straight into her and quickly pushed away his expression of momentary surprise to plaster his face with a smile again.

"Are you angry? Well–"

He couldn't even finish his sentence.

It took the entire room a few moments to take in the series of fast, practised movements that led to the scene before them; Apex a seconds more than everyone else to process the view of the floor that he had from his knees. His smile was gone as he blinked at the ground, until he registered there was a hard boot on his back pushing him forward, and a searing heat from his muscles as his arms were held back in positions they were not supposed to go.

"You can't see a monster when it's standing right in front of you." Dreda calmly put more weight on his back. "I won't let you do this to these people."

Apex gritted his teeth in pain trying to hold back a cry. The cold blue of his eyes turned icy as he hissed, "W…What are you? Some kind of hero?"

"Would a hero really be doing this?" She put on more pressure and Apex screamed out as one of his arms gave a sickening click.

"Pathetic," Dreda commented.

"There are better ways to handle this, Moon Girl!" Matrix yelled, slowly approaching the scene like Dreda was some kind of animal that would react to a sudden movement.

"You want me to let him carry on with this?" She turned her head to him, everything about her calm.

A sickening crack echoed through the room again and the woman crying on the floor yelped. The rest of the hostages stood, stunned. Even the man whose skin had been red with anger was now pale as a ghost.

"Yeah… I mean…" Matrix struggled to think of what to say. "What if I said I can get us all out of here unharmed and all you have to do is knock him out? Apex will be taken to prison and no one will get hurt."

Dreda took a few moments to consider it, the sea-blue of her eyes meeting the icy-blue of Matrix's.

She didn't see why he would lie at a time like this, but at the same time, she struggled to think of how he could get them out if she just got Apex out the way. Surely he had henchmen, and how could Matrix contact anyone when their phones had been taken away?

Not to mention, Dreda had her own trust issues and was reluctant to put her faith in his word. She looked back to Apex unable to find a reason not to break his spine right now.

"For the sake of one less death."

Matrix prayed that his words got through to her and they did. The words resounded with Dreda and she stopped pushing her captive's back.

"But…he wanted to kill all of us," came the whimpering words of the teary woman through the stunned silence. "Why shouldn't he die?"

The posed question seemed to snap the other hostages out of their shock and the well-built man who had been angry until a few moments ago chimed in.

"She's got a point. That monster doesn't deserve to live."

"And now you're proving his point!" Matrix turned to them in fury. "You're all as much a monster as him if you decide to kill so quickly!"

"We're not the ones who wanted everyone to kill each other," one hostage told him.

"And he's hurt and killed loads of people. We've all seen the news," said another.

Matrix seethed, fists clenched and teeth grinding. He barked arguments back at the other hostages but seemed unable to make them take the high road.

Though, they all seemed to forget it was Dreda in the end that held Apex's life in her hands. Quite literally.

"You've been quiet," she spoke to Apex, wondering on why he had nothing to say to defend himself.

"I know when I'm beaten." He strained to look around.

"So you're giving up when there's an argument on whether you live or die going on?" She tilted to see if she could get a look at his expression.

"In the end, this is what I wanted. For people to become the monsters they are." He chuckled at his victory. "Anyway, their opinion doesn't matter; you're the one who would do the deed if asked, am I correct? So, really, it is your choice what you do with me."

"I did have all intentions of killing you. I'm already a monster, it would make no difference to me. Those people aren't yet, though, and well… for the sake of one less death you're actually going to survive this." She sighed, not sure if she had made the right decision, "I am going to break your arms though," she added.

"Well, thanks for the warning at least." He braced himself.

With that the argument was stopped as a second sickening crack echoed through the room followed by a scream. Dreda then let go of Apex and kicked him in the head as he fell, successfully knocking him out.

Like when she first grabbed Apex, there was a frozen silence. None of them really saw what happened so for all they knew that crack could have been his neck.

"He's alive, just both his arms are broken," she kindly filled them in.

"I just said knock him out!" Matrix glared.

"You never said 'just'," Dreda shrugged.

"At least you didn't kill him," he sighed, hands landing on his hips as he shook his head.

The rest of the hostages seemed to abandon the argument to kill him and now that he was taken care of, a sense of relief was washing that darkness away.

"So…can we leave?" one of the hostages asked Matrix.

"Yeah, I just need to make a call," he answered, pulling a device from under his collar and using it like a phone.

While this happened, Dreda walked away from Apex before getting tempted to hurt him more and was stopped by a,

"Thank you."

She paused and looked around to where it came from, her eyes eventually resting on the teary woman who had gotten up from the floor.

"What you did was scary, but you saved us," the woman smiled at her.

"Don't thank me," Dreda said simply.

"Why?" the angry man, who was no longer angry, came in. "It's like she said, you saved us. Thank you."

Dreda's eyes just went dull and she looked away, not really sure how to react to their gratitude.

"Alright, we'll be picked up soon," said Matrix after finishing his call.