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Opening extract from
**Superhumans:
Enemy Invasion**

Written by
A. G. Taylor

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ENEMY INVASION

Another volley of bullets ricocheted off the metal.

“I’m not a thief!” Hack screamed. “You’ve got the wrong guy!”

He was answered by more gunfire.

Holding on for dear life, Hack looked at his feet and wondered just how far the drop was to the level below.

“It’s too far to jump,” a voice said at his side, as if in answer to his thoughts.

Hack turned and saw a blond-haired kid just a little younger than himself leaning casually against the glass right beside him. In shock, Hack’s grip on the support loosened. He took a step back—

And fell off the side of the building...

ENEMY INVASION

A. G. TAYLOR



For Sandra

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HIDRA INFO SHEET
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THINK!

Do you have security clearance to view this document?

If in doubt, contact your supervisor immediately.

*Viewing confidential HIDRA material without
permission will lead to automatic suspension,
court martial and a possible jail sentence.*

OVERVIEW

As a new military and/or scientific operative at the HIDRA UK and/or Asia-Pacific base, this document is designed to bring you quickly up to speed with the events of the past twelve months. *If you are a returning HIDRA operative or have already been briefed, please skip to the next section of this induction booklet.* All material is strictly confidential and only to be discussed with operatives with an equal or higher security clearance.

BACKGROUND: THE FALL VIRUS

The virus is known to be of alien origin, carried to earth by space-born debris. Twelve months ago, a meteorite strike in central Australia led to a significant fall virus outbreak, with several thousand people affected. Adults exposed to the virus fall into a deep coma for which there is no known cure at this time. However, among a small percentage of children, remarkable side effects have been noted.

SIDE EFFECTS: PSYCHIC/TELEKINETIC POWERS

Current data suggests that 0.01% of those under the age of sixteen exposed to the virus develop a number

of incredible side effects: mind-control abilities, teleportation, invisibility, pyrokinesis (fire-starting) and telekinesis (the ability to move objects with one's mind). All these subjects develop the ability to communicate telepathically. With time, these subjects (hereafter referred to as *superhumans*) can learn to control and even develop their powers, although at first their manifestation can be disturbing and potentially dangerous for themselves and others.

RECENT EVENTS: THE MAKAROV INCIDENT

Six months ago, a storm of fall virus-bearing meteors was detected on collision course with earth. It soon became clear these objects were being controlled by Nikolai Makarov, the Russian billionaire/genius, who wished to cause global infection for his own gain. With the help of a small team of superhuman children, Makarov's base of operations (the skyscraper in eastern Russia known as *the Spire*) was destroyed and the alien storm deflected. Theories of an alien intelligence controlling Makarov and the meteors remain unconfirmed at this time.

SPECIAL OPERATIVES: SUPERHUMANS AT HIDRA

Following their assistance in the Makarov incident, the members of the superhuman team led by Sarah Williams have been designated *special operatives* within HIDRA, reporting directly to Colonel Rachel Andersen. Please talk to your supervisor for operational guidelines for working with superhumans. For quick reference, here is the current list of special operatives and their associated powers:

Sarah Williams – Mind-control

Robert Williams – Teleportation

Alex Fisher – Invisibility

Louise Bates – Telekinesis

Sikong Wei – Pyrokinesis

Nestor del Fuentes – Aerokinesis

Octavio del Fuentes – Telekinesis

ONGOING THREATS: MAJOR BRIGHT

The former second-in-command of HIDRA Asia-Pacific was stripped of his position and is currently wanted for trial for his actions during and after the Australian fall virus outbreak. His obsession with harnessing the powers of the superhumans has led him to various illegal

activities, including kidnapping and attacking HIDRA personnel. He was originally believed killed in the Spire collapse, but images have recently come to light of the major alive and well and attempting to purchase weapons from a black-market dealer in Indonesia.

Current whereabouts: unknown.

Prologue

Wilkes Land, Antarctica

The helicopters came just after dawn, two of them flying low along the coast from the direction of the Shackleton Ice Shelf. Dr. Jan Petersen spotted them as he was prepping the snowcat for his weekly trip to the Casey Research Station, twenty kilometres west. Squinting against the brilliant blue of the Antarctic sky, he watched the helicopters make a circle of the three single-storey buildings that made up the Wolfe Station and then touch down on the snow.

Helen Brooks walked out of the communications

shack to get a look at the unexpected visitors. Winter had set in and the Wolfe Station was preparing to close until spring, so they were the only two researchers left on site. Normally the station, an offshoot of Casey, would have closed weeks before.

But the discovery out on the ice had changed all that...

“Who are they?” Helen asked.

Jan shook his head. “Beats me. There’s no flag on the helicopters.”

Men wearing heavy-duty thermal coats, gloves and boots piled out of the machines. Jan started towards them as the chopper rotors slowed. Three of the men ran to meet him, bent low so their heads wouldn’t be taken off by the still-spinning blades. As they straightened up, Jan noted they were all tall, but the man in the middle was a giant, well over two metres. Despite the sub-zero cold, this man pulled back the hood of his coat. Jan was immediately struck by his piercing blue eyes and the scar running down the right side of his face. The crew cut and lack of a beard indicated that he hadn’t spent much time in Antarctica, where facial hair was a must if you wanted to stay warm.

“Hi,” Jan said, glancing over the two men flanking the blue-eyed one. They looked back at him

expressionlessly, eyes hidden by mirrored goggles. He noted the automatic rifles slung over their shoulders.

Blue-eyes gave him a smart salute and said, “Dr. Petersen?”

“Yes.”

“My name’s Major Bright,” he said with the unplaceable accent of a man who had lived all over the world. “We’re here to take over this operation.”

“Take over?” Helen spluttered from behind Jan, always quick to anger. “Why?”

Bright gave her a look like the question was stupid. “Why do you think?”

She began to say something else, but Jan held up a hand for her to be calm. “On whose authority are you doing this, Major?” he asked.

“HIDRA’s. I’m sure you’ve heard of the Hyper Infectious Disease—”

“I’ve heard of your organization,” Jan interrupted. “You have no authority here. This is a research station run by the Australian government—”

“Not any more. We have reason to believe there’s a contamination risk from the object you discovered.”

“You’re talking about the fall virus? There’s absolutely no reason to believe—”

“It’s a done deal, doctor,” Bright cut him dead. “You’re

under my authority now. Both of you.”

“We’ll see what the guys at Casey Station have to say about that,” Helen said, bristling. “I’m getting them on the radio.”

She started stomping back towards the communications shack before anyone could argue. Bright nodded to his men, both of whom followed. Jan looked after them, taken aback at how quickly things were moving. Major Bright took his arm and began to lead him towards the helicopter.

“Don’t worry about your partner, doctor. My men will make sure everything is taken care of. Right now I need you to guide us to the discovery site.” Jan tried to protest, but Major Bright’s hand was firm on his arm. “I won’t take no for an answer.”

Before the doctor knew what was happening, he’d been bundled into the back of the nearest chopper. Two burly men sat on either side of him, as if worried he might try to jump out. Major Bright took a seat opposite and produced a tablet PC as the helicopter took off.

“Mark the location of the crater,” Bright shouted above the noise of the rotors.

He handed Jan the tablet, which showed a map of Wilkes Land – the 2.5 million kilometre square area of Antarctica claimed by Australia. Seeing he had little

choice, Jan tapped the screen at the point thirty kilometres south of Wolfe Station where the object had been discovered two weeks before. A flashing marker appeared.

“Very good,” Bright said, passing the tablet through to the pilot. “Now, who else knows about the object?”

Jan shrugged. “Well, apart from Helen and me, just a few people at the Casey Station. We kept it as confidential as possible.”

“What about other research stations in the area?”

“There’s the Russians at Vostok and the French at Concordia Station. But they have no reason to be looking for anything in that sector.”

Bright smiled thinly. “We’ll see.”

“Where did you guys come in from?” Jan asked. “Is your ship close by? Are there HIDRA scientists on board?”

Major Bright gave no response. They sat in silence for the rest of the ten-minute trip, Jan feeling more and more uncomfortable sandwiched between the men with the mirrored goggles. None of the members of Major Bright’s group looked or acted like scientists. They were soldiers. HIDRA or not, it was clear to Jan that the military was moving in to claim the amazing find they’d made on the ice. And all he could do was grin and bear it.

Finally, the crater in the ice appeared through the windows on the right. “That’s it,” Jan said, although it was pretty obvious they’d reached their destination – the crater was almost two hundred metres across. The helicopter descended and made landing near the edge. The soldiers pushed Jan out after Major Bright and they walked the snowy incline to the rim of the giant bowl.

“Amazing,” Major Bright said as they looked across the indentation.

Jan nodded in agreement. A meteorite strike on a continent the size of Antarctica was common enough, although the size of the crater was unusual. (As was the fact that none of the global monitoring stations had picked it up, but given the amount of meteorite activity in the last six months, that was forgivable.) No, the truly interesting thing about this crater was under the ice itself. It was as if the meteorite had hit the permafrost and burrowed deep inside. In the centre of the crater the ice had turned the deepest black and it was possible to see a spherical object under the surface. From this object spread dark, slender veins, as if the matter at the centre was bleeding material out through the frozen Antarctic ground. It looked like a giant spider preserved in ice.

The second helicopter landed on the other side of the crater and Jan saw that there was some kind of camp

over there. Bright scanned the opposite rim with a pair of binoculars then handed them to Jan for a look.

“The Russians!” Jan said. “I might have known the Vostok boys would come sniffing around.” He shook his head. “Those sneaky—”

The unmistakable sound of gunfire echoed across the crater. Jan brought the binoculars back to his face. A Russian scientist he recognized was running along the edge of the crater. One of the soldiers aimed a rifle at his back and fired a burst of rounds. The man's body jerked and went down. Bright's men were shooting the members of the Russian scientific party. Gunning them down in cold blood.

“What is this?” Jan demanded, hardly believing what he was seeing.

Bright smiled coldly. “Just protecting our find, Dr. Petersen.”

Jan lowered the binoculars and backed along the edge of the crater. “You're not from HIDRA.”

“Duh. You think?”

Jan's legs felt too weak to run. “Helen is calling the Casey Station, you can't get away with this.”

“No one from Casey is going to answer that call, doctor,” Bright said, producing an automatic pistol from the folds of his coat.

Jan stammered, “W-why?”

“Because we’ve already been there.”

Major Bright shot Jan three times in the chest. The scientist staggered back over the edge of the crater and slid down the curved edge, leaving a smear of crimson blood on the ice, all the way to the bottom.

One of the soldiers appeared at Major Bright’s side. “The Russian team has been neutralized, sir,” he reported. “As has the woman at Wolfe.”

“Very good.”

“Orders, sir?”

Major Bright looked across the crater and surveyed the dark, spider-like infection running through the ice. His gaze focused on the hard, black mass in the centre.

“Dig it up,” he said.

HIDRA Mobile Base, Pacific Ocean

The empty cargo bay at the rear of the aircraft carrier was the place Sarah Williams went when the voices in her head buzzed so loud they took on the intensity of a migraine. The power to read and even control people’s minds had been steadily growing in strength during the last six months (ever since her encounter with an infinitely

more powerful being known as the Entity), but this increased ability came at a price. Sometimes the constant stream of thoughts, visions and images from the people around her was impossible to control – like a television playing at full volume that could never be turned off. Only in the bay's dark stillness could she shut out the world for a while and focus in on the important voices.

The ones with something to say.

Understanding what Sarah was going through, Colonel Rachel Andersen had ordered the crew of the HS *Ulysses*, HIDRA's mobile base in the Pacific, to keep Bay 6 empty at all times. Therefore, no one batted an eyelid when they saw the dark-haired fifteen-year-old walk through the lower levels of the ship, turn the heavy wheel on the entrance hatch and slip inside.

The cargo bay door closed with a clunk behind her...

There were no windows in the bay, so the darkness here was absolute. Sarah didn't hit the light switches by the door, however, choosing instead to find her way to the centre using a flashlight. When she reached what she assumed to be the middle of the bay – which was half the size of a football pitch – she sat cross-legged on the floor.

And turned off the torch.

Darkness flooded in.

The images and disembodied voices that had plagued her all day came on stronger with the sensory deprivation. She caught glimpses of her friends – Robert, Louise, Wei – studying, practising their skills or just hanging out on the *Ulysses*.

But she also saw further afield...

...to kids she'd never met, in foreign countries, often using languages she could not speak but could somehow understand in the visions. They were all like her: given special abilities of some kind or another by their exposure to the alien fall virus. Some were trying to be found. Others were running away. All were attempting to come to grips with the changes their new powers brought.

Sarah zeroed in on the image that had been disturbing her – shutting out the irrelevant clutter and voices one by one until...

...she saw a vast city sprawl of skyscrapers, neon lights and traffic. Amidst the mass of millions of people crammed together she focused upon one boy... A tall, black-haired Chinese kid, who looked about fourteen...

He was on the run, desperate... Pursued by men with guns...

And also by other, darker forces that would not yet reveal themselves...

She saw a high tower... Bullets exploding through a window... And the boy falling, falling, falling...

“Are you okay, sis?”

Sarah’s eyes flicked open, but she didn’t look round. She’d been so intent on trying to capture the vision, that she hadn’t even heard her younger brother, Robert, enter the bay.

“Someone’s in trouble,” she said. “A boy – just a little older than you. His life’s in danger.”

Robert crouched and held up his own torch so he could see her eyes amidst the darkness. “Do we know him? What kind of danger?”

Sarah frowned. “Unclear. We don’t know him yet, but he’s one of us.”

Robert took his sister’s hand in his. Whenever she was like this – alone in the dark, so distant, almost alien – it worried him desperately. He squeezed her fingers, trying to bring her back to him somehow.

“It’s okay,” he said. “What do you want me to do?”

“You have to find him,” Sarah replied. In the light of the torch, her eyes snapped into focus, like a sleeper awaking from a dream. “I’ll try to guide you.”

“Why me?”

“Because you’re the only one who can save him from dying.”