

Patreon (02/April/2023 - 17/September/2020)

[Revelations: Basic structure](#)

[Apr 2, 2023](#)

Alright, still travelling, but at least my brain has gone back to normal. So, how will I write Revelations after the massive variations of the ending? Glad you asked!

Cataloguing the basic structure!

I needed to catalogue the main ending variants of Retribution. And by main, I mean the ones that will lead to different starting positions in Revelations. There will of course be a lot of variables within them, but that will be dealt with later. There are four major paths where you can end up. They are:

1: Crashed as Sidestep, stuck in Sidestep.

2: Crashed as Sidestep, stuck in Puppet.

3: Crashed as Puppet, stuck in Puppet

4: Crashed as Puppet, Stuck in Sidestep

A fun fact, a little less than 30% end up being stuck in the puppet. Good to know! Now, let's go through them one at a time.

Path One

This crash path splits in two parts, innocent and guilty depending on whether you are revealed as a villain. So, let's call them 1.1 (innocent) and 1.2 (guilty). And not only that, this is the most widely split path where you end up. Unless I have missed something (which is possible) this should be the major branches:

1.1.1 (innocent, staying with Ortega)

1.1.2 (innocent, staying with Daniel)

1.1.3 (innocent, staying with Chen)

1.1.4 (innocent, staying at the Ranch)

1.2.1 (guilty, Skyrider rescue, Mortum end)

1.2.2 (guilty, stuck with the Rangers)

1.2.3 (guilty, Ortega breakout)

1.2.4 (guilty, Daniel breakout)

1.2.5 (guilty, Argent breakout)

1.2.6 (guilty, Chen breakout)

In addition, it is important to remember varying poly situations, especially for the innocent variables. It is also important to remember your possible HG variables.

I can guess that the innocent paths will fuse rather soon, as will the guilty with Ranger breakout ones. The Skyrider rescue, and the stuck with the Rangers will be the odd ones out here.

Path Two

In this one, Sidestep still crashed, but you are caught in the Puppet and is desperately trying to get your body back. The paths with the Hench and/or Mob Boss Team are similar in all but numbers and will be abbreviated as H/T.

2.1 (saved Sidestep with H/T and escaped afterwards. Blissfully unaware of the Impostor.)

2.2 (saved Sidestep with H/T and escaped afterwards. Knows of Impostor and ran.)

2.3 (saved Sidestep with H/T successfully but was arrested)

2.4 (saved Sidestep with Mortum/Skyrider)

As you can see, there's only four variables here, a much easier time. However, they all lead to very different paths, so no quick mergers or similarities other than possibly between 2 and 3.

Path Three

Crashed in puppet and stuck in puppet is a painful path.

3.1 (saved by Mortum/Skyrider)

3.2 (stuck in the hospital, innocent or protected)

3.3 (stuck in the hospital, under arrest)

There are a lot of general variables of importance here. Who did you ask to check on Sidestep if any? Is Sidestep coming to read your mind? How guilty does Ortega think you are? How loyal is your Hench or Team? There are not many different situations, but a lot of different ways it can play out.

Path Four

Crashed in puppet and jumped to Sidestep is the closest thing to an easy path. Still free, still in control. Well, in most cases.

4.1 (saved Puppet with Mortum and was betrayed)

4.2 (ignored puppet, still free and whole)

Again, there are a lot of variables here that open up new paths at the start. However, the important thing here is that apart from the captured by Mortum path, this will be all player choice. Did you go into Chen's mind? Did you learn where Hollow Ground live? Did you get any Sentinel clues? In this one, the plot can start immediately.

So, in conclusion, now we have the major paths that needs to be written. I will start the way I always do, by writing codeless prose/dialogue of a single outcome/scene to get a feel for the characters and what's going on. Occasionally, there might pop in a choice or two if it appears as I write, but the goal is not a finished scene. That will be finalized/put together later. Also, I will put them on here, clearly marked with the number code so you can see which path it is. If you prefer not to be spoiled, avoid anything prefaced by numbers.

Once I have got enough snippets to make a scene, I will put it together and will fill out with variables. Once I have enough of that, I will post a demo. At the start, the demo will probably only follow a single path, until they fuse. As you might imagine, the puppet resolution point will be the big fusing point for all the paths. It might come sooner for some, later for others. We'll see.

So yeah, sorry about VIP lack of updates, this is when the fun starts.

[Time for your questions of the month! \(and update\)](#)

[Mar 24, 2023](#)

Feel free to ask about anything, story, process, lore etc.

Also, a short update. I have been very busy this month wrapping up the remains of my work here in Sweden, in April I will be doing the same in France, so I will be traveling for most of the month. This will

either lead to lots of writing or none... hotel room vibes vary.

It is kind of sweet, though. Fallen hero: Rebirth was started when I was stationed elsewhere when my workplace moved, and I was sat in a nearly empty borrowed work apartment in the evenings. Looks like Revelations will start the same way.

I am nearly finished wrapping up the story threads for the first chapters, and since I am torn between a few possible scenes to start with, I will probably put this to a vote soon. The Retribution fallout will be fun to deal with!

I am also still working on the Rebirth update, but with the chaos at work, I haven't really found the peace to fix bugs and extend things, so it is still a work in progress.

[The Void - 6, Ortega revisited.](#)

[Mar 18, 2023](#)

Once upon a time, I was told what my story would be. I wasn't old enough to get it yet; I felt mostly curious when I looked at the family pictures. The medals. The stories. They weren't about me. They were about my father, and his father, and his grandfather and what they had given for this great country. What they had been gifted in return. I was supposed to be one of them. Eventually, when I was old enough and knew enough, I would understand. Understand why it was all necessary. Obedience. Sacrifice. Blood.

I didn't get it then. I don't get it now.

Or maybe I do. It's all about the power to make someone listen to you. To give them no choice, by force if necessary. But even if you can force someone to listen to you, you can't force them to understand. Or agree. My father never got that part, and it looks like the Void is just as in love with the sound of their own voice. Lofty ideals. Sweet words. For your own good. And if you don't understand, well, then there's only one thing left.

Pain.

I have no idea how Sidestep does it. I can feel their shoulder shivering under my arm, but no hint of the weakness that still plagues me. Or maybe it's not weakness but relief. I could have killed them. I could have paralyzed myself again, and I can't stop the laugh, painful though it is.

"Shut up," Sidestep mumbles, and they would have elbowed me if my ribs were whole. "People at the door ahead."

"Good," I smile through bloodied teeth. Legs work somewhat, even though my spine feels rusty, and there might be swellings in dangerous places. "I've still got some juice left."

"Are you mad?" Without the mask, I can see the eyes go wide. Still bloodshot. Still green. I don't flinch because I really don't want to think about what that means.

"As in angry, yes. You didn't have to listen to them talk about you being the chosen one for a few hours of light torture before you woke up."

"You can hardly walk." As if to prove it, they shrug off my arm, and I have to stand on my own.

"I can." I stretch to my full height, ignoring the superficial pains as I try to figure out how bad the deeper ones are. The spine is bad, it feels like gravel, but it's still functional. Don't know how hard I can push it, but we need to get out of here. They can always fix me later. They've invested too much by now to throw me on the scrap heap. Hopefully.

"Good." Sidestep looks anything but happy about it, but the voice is softer. "I was tired of dragging your ass around."

"You're lucky my legs have recovered faster than my sense of humor." I wink, and to my relief Sidestep looks away with a frustrated sigh. Still acting the same, despite the eyes. Good.

"Stay behind me," Sidestep cracks their knuckles, tilting their head as if they were listening for something. Probably is. Not for the first time, I wonder what it would be like to be a telepath.

"As long as you're sure of the way, this is a goddamn labyrinth."

"I am. I..." A pause, scanning the corridor. "It makes sense to my eyes."

"Not something that makes me feel better about this. Are you sure you're alright?"

"No." A small admission. "That's why we need to get out of here. Before Void returns."

"What did you do to them?" I'm almost afraid to ask the question because I didn't see much through the flare of electricity, but what I saw didn't make sense.

"Pushed her away."

"Where?"

"I don't know." Sidestep's hand twitches. "I don't know how their travel shit works."

"Oh," I feel a stab of relief. "You just tricked them. Like how you made Groundhog jump off the roof instead of landing on me?" Just another misdirection, nothing to do with poison-green eyes.

"No." They look away. "But close enough. Now come on, I'll try to make them look away for as long as possible."

"I'll be right behind you." I keep my mouth shut as we walk. No need to make this harder for either of us. Sidestep has been growing weirder since the Nanosurge, but manipulating others to this extent is new. I hope. Or maybe that is what always happens in a fight.

A discussion for later.

As we walk, I try to get a feel for how much power I have left, but the gauge on my wrist is broken, and all the sub-dermal bars are black. It can't be much, but I'm still moving. Which is good. Still shivering, which is bad. Probably would have gone into shock already if we weren't in danger. Adrenaline does wonders, even if the comedown is less fun. Don't exactly want to process what the Void...

"Keep quiet," Sidestep hisses as we round a corner and walk towards the guarded door. Nothing to hide behind. No disguises. And yet the two guards keep chatting, oblivious to our approach.

I can't see Sidestep's face, but I can't imagine this is easy. Still, it gives us enough time to get close. Gives me enough time.

Fuck, it hurts to move.

I go right, Sidestep goes left, two punches and my knuckles scream, so I grab the guard's face and zap them. The scream is not as loud as the crackle of electricity, but the smell of burned meat makes me want to throw up. He drops to the floor, and I feel myself sinking to my knees to join him. Keep it in. Keep it in. There's nothing but bile there anyway, get a grip, getting out of here alive is the priority here. Not my feelings.

A huge crack as Sidestep smashes their guard face-first into the wall brings me back to the present, and I struggle to my feet before Sidestep can offer a hand. Clinging to my dignity, as it is.

"Weapons?" Sidestep looks at me, and I look down because those eyes are still nightmare fuel.

"None. Probably won't fit into their boosts first agenda. I got the impression this was their holy ground or something."

"Maybe." Sidestep looks at the door. There's no keyhole there, just several oddly shaped geometric buttons. "Would make sense. This place is big. And wrong." Pressing without hesitation, eyes unfocused. A chain, several in sequence. Did they read the code from the guard's mind? Hopefully, the alternative is worse.

"What do you mean wrong?" I pull a jacket off one of the guards. It's nondescript green, but I've started shivering. "It's just corridors."

"Yeah. Just." The door slides open, and there's a shaft behind it with a small metal ladder leading up.

"No bunks. No guardrooms. No kitchens. Just concrete and lights."

"And cells," I point out, "and torture chambers." But they've got a point. Nothing here has the feel of a base. Or even a prison.

"It's a test." Sidestep grabs the ladder, pulling themselves up. It holds. "I think."

"What do you mean a test?" I step after, looking up. It's a cold shaft, a faint wind through grates near the bottom, and I can't see the end of it. A long way to climb. I wish there was somewhere to hide the bodies, but there's nothing but concrete.

"It feels like one." A quiet mutter I have to strain to hear. "I'm used to them." Sidestep starts to climb, angry, frustrated moves.

"You mean they let us escape?" I follow as fast as I can, forcing my fingers to cooperate.

"No." A pause so I can catch up. "They didn't plan for this. For me."

"What do you mean?" I pat Sidestep's bare foot, so they continue.

"They wanted you."

"I mean, yeah," I do my best to lean into the smug because I'm still unnerved. "Everybody does."

"Idiot." A pause, both in words and in climbing. I hook my arm through a rung to rest my fingers. "I was supposed to be your sacrifice. Whatever they did to me would help what they would do to you."

"Guess they weren't prepared for how contrary you can be." I rest my forehead against the heel of their foot, and they allow that for a few seconds before they continue climbing.

"They weren't prepared for me, period." There it is again, that confidence that makes me ask questions that won't be answered. "I was supposed to die or turn."

"And you decided not to?"

"Yes." There is a sound of fans in the distance. Is this what this is? An air shaft?

"Huh." What can I say to that? Nothing that won't be mocked. "Glad you didn't decide to play along. They were unhinged."

"What did they... tell you?" The 'do to you' remains unsaid.

"That the Void had seen what I could be. My... future, I suppose." I know I'm wheezing, and my legs are weakening, so I must rely on my arms to pull me up. "Gave me a bunch of bullshit about being the chosen one."

"Surprised you didn't jump on that." A dry chuckle as welcome as the sight of what looks like a lid up ahead. "Being worshiped sounds right up your alley."

"You'd think." I stifle a groan as I force my legs to cooperate. "But I'm allergic to others picking my outfits." A joke is better than getting into the truth. Always.

"And the Void would always be on top."

"Don't even joke about that." I groan and cling to the ladder as Sidestep starts working on the lock above. "I have never felt that undressed." Not while being helpless to do anything about it.

"Sorry." An uncharacteristic apology. "I know what that feels like."

"Any luck with the lock?" I ask instead of looking for the answers I want.

"Maybe..." uncertain. "I'm losing whatever shit she put into me. I can't see the angles the same way. I think..." a click, and the hatch slides open to sunshine.

"Quickly," I urge, and Sidestep obeys, climbing out of the shaft before offering me a hand up.

"You're heavy," they grumble as they pull, the eyes still faintly green though they have lost the shine.

"Legs are giving out," I admit. "Walking will be easier." But for how long? I refuse to think that the lack of power might not be the issue here.

"Walking to where?" Sidestep closes the hatch, and only then do I notice the utter desolation of the place. No house. No walls. No roads. Just the open sky, the setting sun painting the horizon crimson. The hatch is low to the ground; with an hour or two of wind, it will be covered by dust and sand once more, only the small air intakes sticking up from the ground.

"We can get a hint of where we are once the sun sets," I mutter, trying not to think about whether we are still in California. "Meanwhile, let's walk west before my legs give out."

"Alright." Sidestep starts walking, and I can't help but wince, looking at their bare feet. Not that I am in much better shape, but it's always easier handling my own pains than those of others. At least there's no sign of pursuit. For now.

We walk. And then we walk, and I shuffle. I can feel my back ache, a low, throbbing pain feels almost benign rather than the sharp stabs of a break. I know swelling can be just as dangerous, constricting nerves and blood. My saving grace is that my nerves are metal threads, so hopefully, this is just a lack

of power rather than a full neural breakdown. I've heard stories about mod-rejections due to infection and stress. Not pretty.

"How come nobody is following?" I finally ask, after having expected interception for the last hour. The sun is nearly gone, but there's no sound of engines. No glint of light but the strengthening stars above. "They can't just let us leave like this?"

"They won't. But..." Sidestep pauses so I can catch up, lending me a shoulder to lean on. "This isn't like their compound. I don't think it's made for living here. Void brings the people. Void takes them back."

"Teleportation?"

"No. More like..." I can feel their breath. Slow. Conserving energy. "Walking sideways. I don't know how to describe it. For a moment, I saw it. After they fed me the blood. The world is..." another pause as we limp on. "It's like there's more to it than I see now. Paths to take. Places to go. Shortcuts. I pushed Void down one of them. And that place we escaped from..." a shiver. Not from the growing cold. "It's a labyrinth. Not just in the way we see it. I think it's a test for their followers. If they can find their way to the center."

"Not outside?"

"No, we went the other way. I think that shaft was for ventilation." Sidestep stops, and I do too. The moon is far from full, but there's enough light to see a darker shade ahead. A house.

"You think we dare?" I ask though I know the answer.

"I think we have to. Wait here." Sidestep shrugs away from me and disappears in the dark like another shadow.

I remain on my feet for a few seconds before sinking to my knees. To preserve energy. In the distance, I hear the howl of a coyote. No sound of footsteps. No sound of Sidestep. I remain immobile and quiet and try not to think too deeply about things. Not yet. We must get out of here alive first, then I can get a drink. Throat dry enough to hurt. Too much screaming. Not good for hydration.

Neither is a chuckle, but I can't help myself. Staying sane is priority one.

It takes too long for Sidestep to return, and I have run through too many bad scenarios in my head. What does it say about my imagination that the best ones were coyotes and pumas? But I don't voice my concerns. "Took you long enough," I hiss instead.

"I needed to check things out." Sidestep helps me up, as always so much stronger than they look. "It's a deserted town. Been here since the Big One, I bet. I've found a place."

"Good," I lean heavily, my legs are uncooperative. "Any cars? I need a jumpstart." A battery might work, there won't be any electricity in a place like this.

"Better than that, come on." There's a tension to the words I can feel but not decipher. Something happened.

"Lead the way," I sigh, because even if I can smell a rat, this is not the place to dissect it.

"Just keep quiet until we're inside. There's nobody here, but I can't account for fliers."

"They could be on our side too," I protest, hoping that Sentinel is searching by now. They must have wrapped up things around the compound once the Void left.

"Not willing to take the chance. Now shut up."

Sidestep half leads, half carries me past deserted houses with collapsed roofs, over a road of cracked asphalt covered in dust and ashes, behind what looks like an old garage. With one hand, they pull open a storm cellar and help me downstairs.

"How did you..." I start, but am shushed as we stumble down the stairs. The darkness is heavy, but Sidestep dumps me on the concrete floor and closes the doors to make it complete. I can hear them shuffle around, and then the lights turn on, blinding me.

"How?" It's just a small kerosene lamp, but it feels like a star in the darkness.

"Think it must be a smuggler's safehouse." Sidestep drags me over to a mattress on the floor with a light coating of dust that makes me sneeze as I roll on top of it. "Must be close to the Mexican border."

"Lucky find," I mumble, looking up at their face. Eyes are more or less back to normal, but there are streaks on their cheeks. Tears? It's hard to imagine it could be anything else.

"Yeah." An evasive shrug. "There's a battery back here, but I don't want to start the full lights. I figured we need it for you."

"Not sure what ports are workable, though." I groan and roll over on my stomach. "I suppose we could jury rig something."

"We have to. There's no radio here."

"Any water?"

"Yeah. Tastes like plastic." A bottle is placed in front of me, the plastic covered in dust. It doesn't taste good, but it's better than nothing.

"How long do you think we have?" I shift my shoulders so Sidestep can pull my jacket off.

"I don't know." I don't have to hear the sigh to feel it. "I don't know how easily Void can follow us here. If she can step close, or if she has to return to that place and start from there."

"Your guess is still better than mine." I don't wince as I feel cloth and water start to clean the skin around my ports. Burns. I overloaded a lot of things back there. "Hours?"

"Hopefully. Your quickload port is toast. What the hell were you thinking?" The wet rag hits the back of my head with an annoyed slap.

"I was thinking that I didn't want you to die." I don't move, feeling the water drip down my cheeks. "You were screaming. I thought they were going to kill you, so I..."

"So you took that risk instead." Dry words. Not exactly reproachful

"Yes."

"You could have killed yourself as well."

"I mean, that's one way of sticking it to the Void." I wipe my face with the cloth before I look over, watching Sidestep pull the battery closer. Linked car batteries, two of them. Probably easily chargeable by a generator somewhere, but that would mean noise we can't afford.

"Don't even joke about that." A muttered swear. "There's no useful cord; we have to go through the converter."

"And hope we've got a few hours." I rest my forehead on my arms, letting Sidestep set it up. Trust. Even in this hellhole, that feels nice.

"You won't get enough power to zap someone with these, though."

"I don't need power to zap. I need it to move." If I can move, I can fight. Electricity powers or not. But could I fight the Void?

"Ready?"

"Do it." I tense as Sidestep connects the battery, relieved that there's no feedback, just a feeling of gentle heat as the charging commences.

"You okay?"

"It works fine. Now get some rest." I let my head drift back down.

"You too."

The silence lasts for half an hour or so, but neither of us falls asleep. Sidestep keeps fidgeting. Having cleaned the wounds on their feet, it looks like they'd rather be anywhere but here.

"Thank you," I whisper to defuse the tension.

"You saved me first." A reluctant mutter. "I messed up. I didn't know Void could blindside me like that."

"Sidestep sidestepped."

"Shut up."

"And I messed up as well. I didn't know Ashfall would bail. We should have gone in together."

"Because we never mess up then." A stifled chuckle. "At least your guts are on the inside this time."

"So far." I turn my head but can only see their outline next to me. Not the face. "Void wanted me to join them."

"Not fancying a trip on the villain side?" The words are heavy and filled with meaning. Do they know I know who their family is? Do they know I've seen Hollow Ground's face and added up the dots? What it is that Sidestep is running from? Sometimes it feels like they suspect, two parts of a conversation with a bottomless pit in the center. Nobody dares to take the leap.

"I don't know," I tease, opting for humor. "Are you fancying a trip on the hero side?"

"I won't join." Expected words. Exasperated ones. "Vigilante is good enough for me."

"For me too." When did my voice go this soft? "You know you don't have to prove anything to me."

"Sap." A sigh. "You shouldn't be this soft in public. The Void knew. That's why I was hooked up to you."

"Because they knew I wouldn't hurt you?" I expect an insult in response; instead, I get silence and a sigh.

"No. Because they hoped you would kill me." Sidestep shifts, and I can feel them looking at me.

"Because they hoped that would break something inside you. Make you cross a line. Hate yourself enough to turn."

"Not the best of plans," I mumble. "That would only make me hate them more."

"That's not it." Sidestep finally lies down, close enough to almost feel their breath on my shoulder. "They wanted you to hurt. Physically. Mentally. They wanted you broken."

"I've been broken." I don't move.

"You haven't." They finally settle in next to me. "You've been hurt. It's not the same thing."

"What's the difference?" I whisper back.

"When you're broken, you're willing to do anything to stop the pain." There's an echo there, that I don't want to touch. So instead I deflect.

"I did sell my body to the military," I joke. At least I pretend it's a joke. It's closer to the truth than I'd like. Was that really all it took for me to cave? A chance to walk again? And if my father had rubbed it in, would I have said no to spite him? Or suck it up? I wish I knew. "Not that it matters. Not in the end."

"It sucks, though." Sidestep rolls over enough so we can talk face-to-face. Rare enough to make me wonder. "Being the tool."

"What do you mean?"

"You were the one Void wanted. I was just..." an expression of disgust is quickly pushed back.

"Incidental. I was there because you cared. Nothing else."

"I get the feeling you've gone through that before." My question is soft, not probing. Sidestep speaks about their past rarely enough that I don't want to spook them. It's easy enough to imagine. The younger sibling of the Kingpin of Los Diablos. Worth nothing but the blood running in their veins. Family can be a curse as well as a blessing.

"It's not something I like to talk about," Sidestep admits. "But yeah."

"Does..." I nearly break off. "Does it bother you? When the papers call you my 'sidekick'?"

"I don't read the papers." Not an answer, instead they sit up and drape the jacket over my shoulders once more. "You get some sleep. I'll keep watch."

"Wake me after an hour, and I'll do the same for you." I rest my head back on the mattress. The conversation is over. I know them well enough to understand that.

"I will," they lie, scooting back to lean against the wall. "Now shut up and go to sleep. We need to move before daybreak."

[Sorry I'm late](#)

[Mar 12, 2023](#)

Sorry I am late with this month's lore post, wrapping things up at work (quits at the end of may) has left me utterly exhausted and I have come down with something. Will kick my brain back in gear as soon as possible.

[Old QnA spoilers unlocked](#)

[Mar 4, 2023](#)

I think I have unlocked all the old Retribution spoiler questions and answers for everyone now. If I have missed one, please let me know!

[February questions answered!](#)

[Mar 4, 2023](#)

First of all, congratulations. The second book is a triumph, and I hope that you've been enjoying the response. Here's a question: I like Rosie and Boris equally. The different parts of Part 2 all seem to reach a point that feels like an opportunity to bring the one you didn't choose originally into the fold. Is that something you might consider just to have both of them available for storytelling purposes?

I am not sure yet. I do know that you will meet the non-recruited one of them in book three, so you can see where life have taken them. But not sure how much interaction there will be, I am still planning those parts. It will probably depend on how fun it is to write, and how much it will complicate the story.

Having identified a visual styling for the Rat King in Part 2, any thought to revisiting Part 1 to add in similar where appropriate?

I am currently making a big Rebirth update with little quality of life choices just like that. So the answer is yes.

Has Ortega ever seen the effects one of steps nightmares has had on other people?

Not at this point in time. Back in the day when Sidestep trusted enough to sleep around them, their powers were not this strong. This is a newish development.

How would Ortega react if one of said nightmares effects Tia Elena while we are recovering at the ranch?

Oh I have plans...

How did sidestep first find out about Ortega's epilepsy? Was it first hand experience or heard (physically or telepathically)

Hmmm. I have not written it into the book yet, but I imagine it went something like this: Sidestep is bothered about the static. Suspects anti-telepathy drugs or something similar. Pickpockets Ortega and instead finds anti-epilepsy medication. Puts two and two together. But, this might change if I ever tell the story, I just feel like Sidestep might have been proactive enough to try to figure out if Ortega is a farm spy or not.

Did Ortega have to revive the MC after car crash? If so, is that why their generator is messed up?

Yes, Ortega did have to revive Sidestep after crash. You get hints of that in the nightmares around that event. But that's not why the generator is messed up.

How long did it take Ortega to recognize what the tattoos were?

Probably in the nervous hours between having revived Sidestep and spotted something, and Sidestep getting out of surgery. Probably took a while of trying to think of alternative things, but when being able to look at them closer when Sidestep was still out sealed the deal.

I have quite a few questions and i am sorry if they were asked before, i really tried digging through previous q&a's, tumblr and the forums. In a tumblr post on the 7th of April 2018 you answer a question on the rangers height with the following:

I can't remember if I said exactly before, but here we go. This is the new canon now. Ortega: 6' Lady Argent: 5'8 Steel: 5'11" Herald: 5'9" Steel used to be shorter, his cybernetic prosthetics have added a couple of inches to his height. Herald feels taller, but he tends to hover. Not giving heights for the MC or the puppet.

is this still the case? because Argent being 172 cm is not that small, quite average. yet in Retribution, when the mc romances her - though a tall mc - it is commented several times that she is quite small.

Nope those are old numbers and before I added the variable heights for the MC! When I did I sat down and recalibrated the heights of everyone involved.

The correct heights are Ortega 6' Chen 6'1 Danny 5'9 Mortum 5'7 Argent 5'3

Also, I will once more admit that my perception of height is skewed by my own experiences (I am around Chen's height, so Argent was small to me even before).

Will the mc ever be able to ask why Argent wears the cape (no matter stolen or given)? What the point is she wants to make by wearing it? And would Argent be honest in her reply? If not, can you tell us

Oh that would be a great scene to have. I have to include that one in the book. The reasons can vary.

In Retribution one can make a character and decide to give the cape to Argent. Is this something that will be added to the first game? This was hinted on the forum by a user.

The scene is written already, and it will be out once I finish with the rest of the Rebirth update.

Will the mc be able to learn more in regard to lady argent and the nanovores in following books? for example what she is 'really capable of'?

Yes, that is one of the "revelations" in that book (even for the non-romance Sidesteps)

In addition to the question above: someone asked about if the li's would want to live together with the mc. your reply in regards to argent was: 'Doesn't matter what she wants, she lives alone. that's it.' This has likely to do with the nanovores, will we at some point in the upcoming books get more clarity on this?

Yeah, there will be an option for that talk later, and to learn about the nanovores if you haven't already.

In another q&a you say about argent falling in love with Ortega that it takes time and work. is this the case for every ro in the whole series? or is it easier for let's say Herald? probably not, but i am just curious

It is different depending on the RO. Argent is a bit on the demi side of the spectrum and doesn't open up fast. Herald is more the type to fall fast and hard for someone.

Will there be more interaction with the rat king possible? Just an innocent scene? Like a telepathic conversation or telepathicly petting the Rat King without it necessarily being in the middle of a fight?

I love the Rat King, I need to write this.

When you are writing anything about FH, do you have a go to snack or drink? Do you listen to music while writing?

I always listen to music. So much of it. Music helps me get in the mood for writing (most often metal variants) but when I edit I need classical music. Beethoven is great for that. I tend to binge either tea or energy drinks, and do love to snack as well. Brain needs fuel.

I'm curious, in the ending where Sidestep is exposed as the villain if you've fulfilled the requirements for more than one of the Rangers to break you out will the one that does it tell the others? For example when Chen breaks Sidestep out he says he hasn't told Ortega what he's doing, will he tell them after your out or does he leave Ortega thinking you've possibly been taken by the Special Directive?

Some Rangers will speak to each other after the fact, some might pretend to be innocent. It depends on the relationships and circumstances. For example, If Chen breaks you out even though Ortega is also

romanced (I think Chen is higher on the list, Ortega is busy shopping), then Chen would most likely tell Ortega once they started fretting. But if Argent broke you out, and Ortega thought you were a faker, Argent wouldn't say anything even if Ortega was legitimately worried about where you had gone.

I was reading an old lore post about how Re-Genes are made, you talked about how the process of boosting them can vary, have you set on a "canon" one for our sidestep, or is it up to headcanon? If not, will we be able to learn it?

This is something that we will get into in book four, once we truly start digging into the Farm. Things might change until then, but I think that I will most likely allow some modicum of choice. So far it's headcanon only.

Who was Riley? I saw a post answer about their relationship with Ortega but maybe I missed a thing in there? Did their relationship begin before Sidestep appears? Does Sidestep know about that? And what did they think?

Riley was one of the longer lasting relationships for Ortega during the Sidestep days. They were a business executive with a love of extreme sport. They had a lot of things in common, and hit it off. The relationship was not before Sidestep appeared, but it was before Sidestep started getting really important to Ortega. At the time, Sidestep just accepted it as another person Ortega dated. There was a lot of other speculations in the media, and I think Sidestep just assumed that there would always be one or more people in Ortega's life.

What made Riley notable was that this was the relationship where Ortega started to get uncomfortable, and yet could not really step away easily. Riley would not take no for an answer and was not above using emotional blackmail. Combined with money and influence, Ortega found themselves on the back foot for once. Nothing bad enough that it would be easy to break off, and still the discomfort grew. Ghosting didn't work either. Add to that Sidestep, who Ortega was growing closer to. Where they could be themselves and not have to act.

All this led to Ortega asking Sidestep for something they should not have, and Sidestep reacting accordingly. It was one of the few times when Ortega really admitted to themselves that they were out of their depth, and it is a painful memory. How Sidestep thinks about it (if at all) is up to you.

Mods and Boosts have slightly infertility and that also applied to Re-Gene. If in the future, Step and the ROs start a family, will they have a chance to have children?

It will be very hard, but since it will be beyond the scope of this book, I will not say that people can't headcanon it. Medtech is good, and there are always alternative ways. I won't forbid people to want that in their future, but it won't be in the books.

If Ortega retired from Ranger and so did the other ROs, what will they do to make money?

Good question. Both Ortega, and in a lesser way, Chen have big debts and a need for a solid income to deal with mod upkeep. Chen could go back to the military, or to a military contractor and make a

comfortable living, but I don't know if he'd want to. Might go private and hire out as a consultant with mod-training and adaption and the like. Could earn enough money for a quiet retirement then.

Ortega on the other hand is not the retiring type. If they were not a Ranger, they would need some other wealthy sponsor. It's a tossup between going corporate/political or just going villain.

Argent could make a lot of money with her tech talents, she wouldn't have any problems there. Might invest in a few companies, don't ask where she got the money.

Herald might have a dream of getting a normal job, he'd like to be a teacher, or an artist, or a dozen other normal things. But he also have that hero instinct, so chances are he'd stick to that, just in a different form. Not going back east to manage the family business, that's for sure.

Any chances of the Rangers and the Special Directive having to work together again in the future?

I don't know. Maybe if the villain becomes bad enough ;)

Did Ortega believe Chen when he said he no longer has the autopsy evidence?

Nope. And they called bullshit at the time, but Chen stonewalled.

You've said that regenes don't have genital tattoos but what about boobs and butts?

Leaving that to people's own designs.

Does Elena have plot armor?

In book three.

On a scale from 1 to 10 with 1 being femme and 10 being butch, where would you place Julia, F!Mortum and Argent?

Hmmm not too fond of these scales, but Argent would be around a 3, Julia a 5 and f!Mortum a 6.

Does Ortega ever regret stepping down as the marshal, given that they eventually went back to the Rangers anyway, only for a worse pay and less influence?

Yes. But there are perks to being out of the spotlight.

Has Sky-Raider ever been seen without armor?

Yes.

Do any of the handlers, in their own twisted way, ever grow somewhat "fond" of their regenes?

Oh yes, in an isolated world like that, things turn weird.

Do bluegenes resent cuckoos? Since they likely partake in less deadly missions and have better chances of escaping

Yes, that is quite common.

Any choices you were surprised were popular among the players?

Yes. The amount of people pining for this long, and wanting longer secret crush romances with Ortega. I did not predict that! Imagine having that kind of self-control.

Out of curiosity, why was the suicide scar made into a tag in Retri?

Because I wanted a more flexible solution. I also wanted the option to set it in Retribution, and not rely on a single choice path in Rebirth. It is a painful and interesting thing to write about, and I felt that it stuck out from the other scars enough that it deserved it's own flag.

What does book 2 title refer to? Who, exactly, is getting this retribution?

It's not that specific. It is a general term for Sidestep lashing out against a world that they believe has wronged them.

Would Ortega's father have disapproved of sapphic chargestep as much as he would've of the male version of the couple?

Yes, but in a different way.

will there be consequences for the rangers down the line (from sources other than sidestep, like their higher ups/potentially hg)? e.g for things like argent killing the civilian/moonlighting, ortega's own "off the record" escapades, or anything else they Might get up to in the future?

Oh yes. Some people can end up in a LOT of trouble, I keep track of things, but since Sidestep doesn't know yet, it hasn't shown up in the books.

has the pr team ever had to cover up a ranger-related disaster and Not been successful?

I mean, partially successful might be the best description then. But the news cycle is fast, and things move on.

what is chen most afraid of? why?

Failing the people he cares about (and Spoon).

in order of most to least how scared are the rangers of dying on the job?

Herald, Argent, Chen, Ortega.

what does the future look like to the hg trio? a changed system? do they envision it together, staying the path of crime or perhaps something different entirely?

I think they have slightly different ideas. For HG, this is pretty great. No need to rock the boat. I think Nocturne would like to push the envelope further and go more legit, getting real political power. Jake is worried everything is going too smoothly. Don't bite off more than you can chew.

what does regina's mindscape look like?

Oh that is spoilers.

what does a typical day look like for her? does she spend much time outside of the farm?

She has business trips, and can be away from the Farm for a week or two at a time, but mostly her job is on-site. She's in charge, so these days there's a lot more meetings and travel than she would like. She misses the simplicity of the lab.

How has the community response been to the release of Retribution?

Absolutely ridiculous beyond expectations. I'm still blown away. There's been a criticism or two that I agree with and taking with me to the next game, but on the whole I am just... this is unreal.

What are the rangers' favourite foods and how good are they each at cooking?

Argent likes sweet things. Loves everything baked and and loaded with carbs. I think fresh bread out of the oven might be a contender, covered with butter melting into it and maybe a strong cheese. She's good at cooking, but better at baking.

Ortega likes traditional Mexican/Texan cooking. Has a preference for meat, but also the one most likely to eat lots of veg and salads. I think a nice barbecued steak is a contender, or maybe even just barbecued bacon might be a favorite. Something about eating things fresh from the grill. That smoky flavor. Ortega is very good at cooking and does it often.

Dr. Mortum is a notoriously bad eater, subsisting on fast food a lot of the time. Honestly, I think the humble macaroni gratin might be a favorite, though they would say something fancier if asked. Can't cook, but likes to order good food in restaurants and knows the ones with the best chefs.

Chen has a sensitive stomach after many injuries, so he can't eat a lot of the things he used to love. These days his favorite food are variations of congee, because that's one of the things he can almost always stomach. He's an average cook, but mostly for the things he can eat.

Herald likes to experiment with food, and is currently a fan of eastern European cuisine. He's often hungry, and likes filling, hearty meals. I think his current favorite is those rich meat stews, with a good

rustic bread. He can cook, and actively tries new things.

Would Ortega ever participate in the equivalent of celebrity hero master chef?

Oh you know Ortega would be all over that! Adore every second of it, disasters and all.

Did Ortega ever try cooking random food using their electricity powers?

I mean... who wouldn't? But, like exploding things in the microwave, it's not really conducive to good food. They have exploded a sausage or two.

We know Herald likes art but does he have any creative hobbies himself?

Herald draws and paints. He has a lot of sketchbooks filled with things, mostly in charcoal and pen. He also have a small "studio" in his apartment, where he's playing around with proper painting again, mostly acrylics. He's not really happy with the results, he's still trying to find out what he wants to say. He's a lot more comfortable with the sketching. He spends a lot of his free time just flying around the city, sketching places and people.

I want to pet the rat king. Can we make it a tiny little robot body to control so we can pet it?

The Rat King would love a body, so I think that is coming.

Is there any content that you ever decided to cut from either rebirth or from retribution? And if so why

Yes, I cut the "Ortega breaking up with Sidestep over the Puppet" path that was in the early Retribution demo. The repercussions just cascaded through the entire game, and since there were so few people that would ever happen to I didn't think it was worth the work. I didn't want to just half-ass it. I also decided to cut/change a few small instances of more violent interaction with Ortega because I didn't have time to delve into it properly at the time. I want to have a discussion about the habitual violence between them eventually, but it didn't fit where I had it.

There are probably other minor things I have cut as well that I don't remember on the top of my head. In general, things that have already been written gets cut because I didn't foresee the effect it would have on the story down the line, or because I didn't like writing the consequences and what it turned the story into.

This may be a silly question but has there been other people riding around in Sidestep's head without their knowledge?

Spoilers.

Is it possible for the original Ace to regain personhood?

Spoilers.

Is the Handyman/Leo going to become a more prominent character in the next book?

Yep, especially in certain paths.

How do all the love interests feel about kids? (like having their own or just in general.)

Ortega: Everyone's favorite uncle/aunt, but has not really pictured them in their life yet.

Chen: A little uncomfortable these days. They are so fragile, and occasionally gets scared of him.

Argent: Never says no to autographs, or fan pictures from children. Ever. Adults might get the finger.

Herald: It's complicated. Doesn't really know how to act around them. As he would say, he wasn't really comfortable around children even when he was a child. But he would also say that he'd just need practice.

If everyone didn't become heroes what else would they be doing?

Ortega would have either become a sports/movie star or died at 25 from a terrible accident.

Chen would still be in the army, and probably promoted to command by now.

Argent would be working in a bank or business, on the tech side.

Herald would be a business executive.

I was wondering if you had a timeline for the next book yet? No rush or anything like that, I'm just curious.

Nope, I will get into that once I am done with the Rebirth update.

How do you go about writing stories with so many branching paths?

By making a very rough sketch on paper with arrows and explanation marks, then proceed to not follow it once I start writing. I am a terrible role model when it comes to this, I keep it all in my head, and explores what is fun to write. I am so bad at planning, I like exploring more.

Would you support or be interested in someone making a wiki for the fallen hero series? something people could find descriptions of characters and bits of lore that are involved/available in the free versions and pictures of characters that the community or you have made/commissioned?

I would love it! I support all fan endeavors, go and have fun!

will we get the mitchell's guide to anathema now :p?

Once the Void thing is over, yes. Then the big secrets will have come out!

Do regenes grow and lose baby teeth?

Yes, it is a basic biological process.

How common are facial injuries for the Rangers and other heroes? Has Ortega ever had to have surgery to repair their face or mouth?

Sadly for people not wearing helmets, facial injuries are common. Both Ortega and Herald have had to have surgery for that more than once. Their uniforms do include helmets for the more dangerous opponents, but that doesn't help if you're not expecting things. Both prefers to go helmetless by default.

Does Hollow Ground have a canon name? Can we learn it? Also not a question, sorry, but looking back at the past Q&As I saw there was some Book 3 HG snippet where they found out that Sidestep was related to them through a lab test? I looked through ficlets and snippets and couldn't find anything. thanks if anyone can help :)

Hollow Ground doesn't have a canon name, it will be chosen by the player. And I did share a book three snippet on discord about that, but it has not been in any officially published things yet. You did not dream it ;)

Man I had so many questions until Q&A opened XD but one I remembered is is how aware is sidestep of the 'Ai' part of his mind? Are they completely mentaly merged or quite seperate? Would another telepath sense it in his mindscape? Would it be weird? Alien? Is the ai part how he manages to 'telepath' the nanovores at all or could other telepaths potentialy do this?

Alright. Sidestep is not aware of the 'AI' part, nor is any ReGene. It is an integral part of their being, and completely merged. It might have feel weird right at the start of their existence, but that fades fast as memories are integrated. Another telepath might sense it if they are good and go deep enough. It would feel disjointed and strange, yes. A bit like watching a photo when someone has pasted two left halves of a face together, one of them mirrored. It is a face. It is a person. It is also... odd. And yes, the AI part was how Sidestep was able to interface with the nanovores, it is doubtful any other telepaths would have managed.

How much HG know about The Farm ? Do they aware that their youngest sibling is part of The Farm's experiment ?

Nothing at all.

has heartbreak's true identity been mentioned to us before? (either in game or in lore posts, discord etc)

Hmmm. I don't think so. Just vague suggestions.

Apologies if this has been asked before, but would the Special Directive be bold enough to use samples from well known boosted/heroes for their Re-Genes? We know they collected Sidestep post Heartbreak, so it got me thinking if they would have tried to take Anathema (or what was left of them) or anyone else of interest that has passed/disappeared.

Oh yes the SD would be bold enough. Hero genes are free real estate, and not that hard to get a hold of if you have the right contacts.

how immediately recognizable are sidesteps tattoos as regene tattoos? to a civilian? to a hero who hasn't worked with regenes? to heroes who have? how much of them would someone have to see to recognize them? could they be mistaken for something else?

The normal civilian wouldn't recognize them if they saw an arm or a leg or a hint. A more "nerdy" civilian, or a hero who hasn't worked with ReGenes would recognize a full body thing, but might be confused by the human skintone. A hero who has worked with ReGenes would spot them immediately, but might hesitate because of the skin color if they didn't know about cuckoos. Might be able to bluff it off as an art/tattoo thing. Sidestep is a bit more paranoid than is realistic about their chance of discovery.

At the moment, the game seems more geared towards the redemptive/reluctant villain sidestep route, will there be more in depth options geared towards those not interested in being an anti-villain/revel more in destruction and the villainous lifestyle? it would be fun to play a truly remorseless sidestep.

That is in the plans, sadly some parts there got cut off when I had to cut Rebirth in two, but they will be at the start of Revelations instead, so you'll see them soonish. That to be said, you can do some pretty gruesome things in Retribution if you take those paths.

will there be more fights in revelations, compared to retri?

Hard to say. I still struggle with writing longer fights, it's easy to write an argument or discussion that goes on for pages, but fights tends to end so fast when Sidestep is involved. I need to figure out how to extend them without getting boring.

Hai! I'm new here! I just started getting into the FH series and I love them! But I have like so many questions so I'll just ask a couple for now. Also there are a lot of names I do not recognize. Where they in books? Did I just misread them or is that content here on Patreon?

There are years of questions and answers here on Patreon as well as lore posts where I have expanded the world and the people that live in it. So yes, there are many people who have never and will never appear in the books, but people have grown fond of them and asks questions all the same. I recommend starting from the beginning and read through, then you will discover them in the same order as everyone else has.

Which kinda leads me to my second question, who is the void? I must have missed that.

The Void is mentioned in a quick flashback in Retribution, when Sidestep is reminiscing sitting in a safehouse near the Mexican border, waiting for Ortega's batteries to reload and hoping the Void won't find them until then. I have talked a lot about the Void in past FAQ's too. It is not something in the current books, or in future ones. But since the Void is one of the biggest/weirdest villains of Sidestep's past, people are interested.

My last question is regarding m! Ortega. He seems to know a lot more than he lets on. But I don't quite understand why my SS and Ortega rather hate each other. Like my SS blames Ricardo to an extent of not I guess rescuing her. And Ricardo blames my SS for not telling him she was alive. I guess I don't get the hate. Even though they seem to be OTP. My Sidestep is romancing Ricardo. But does he actually love SS or is he just pretending to ? I have more questions but I'll save those for another time

Hate is a strong word, and it will vary depending on the path and the Sidestep. If we take the harshest Sidesteps, the ones that truly hate Ortega, it might be because of something like this: Ortega was one of the people that befriended Sidestep back in the day, and showed them the world. Made them soft. Made them think they could be human. Could have a life. Showed them hope. And all that did in the end was to make the fall and capture more terrible. Having something and losing it is worse than never having it in the first place. And then Sidestep spent years in captivity, first thinking Ortega would rescue them like always, but they never came. And the Farm was working hard to make Sidestep think that Ortega had just forgotten about them and moved on, showing magazines and pictures about how happy Ortega's life was now while Sidestep wasn't there to drag it down. The Farm kindled the fires of hate there, because losing hope of the future was useful to them.

And then Sidestep met Ortega again, and could maybe start to realize that the truth was a bit different than it was presented, but the feelings were still there. The anger. The hate. The frustration. And above all, the fear. Fool me once. What if Sidestep would grow soft again? Trust Ortega? Be betrayed again? These feelings are something Sidestep has to navigate, and people will move in different directions.

Ortega on the hand had no idea that Sidestep was alive. They thought Sidestep was dead. Grieved. Nearly destroyed themselves. Finally got back on their feet and made a new, bleaker and less happy life for themselves. And then, suddenly, there is Sidestep back. Alive. And Ortega was happy and overjoyed, and also deeply angry. Why had Sidestep pretended to be dead? Why let Ortega carry that burden? The guilt? And now they are back, with all their secrets, and Ortega has no idea how to feel. Love. Anger. Frustration. All in one. You can love someone and still be furious about their decisions.

Ortega and Sidestep are complicated people. There is nothing easy there. But the feelings are real. Not always justified. But there.

Is it possible to romance or befriend Ortega without having them know that Step is a villain at the end of Retribution if they meet HG in person and end up in the crash? So far I've only had luck with that if Step and Ortega are distant, or if they're friends but no one knows that the villain is a telepath.

Oh yes, the OC stat is not tied to romance. However, the closer you get, and the more like Sidestep your villain is, the more clues will happen. But it can be done, I know there are guides out there.

What choices and actions affects Ortega's suspicion level?

There are guides out there, I might link them on my patreon too as soon as I ask the creators for permission.

What were the main points that you wanted to focus on when developing Sidestep's main stats and the relationship variables and stats?

Basically, the stats are there to help me form a bespoke story for every Sidestep. The main stats are all tied to the flavors I want to write in the text. Do I need different text if Sidestep is a vicious villain or a softie? Guess I need a villainy stat (originally called ruthlessness). Some will brag and be confident, while others secretive? Guess I need the arrogance/anonymity. The caution/daring is the one that is mainly for skillchecks, to set how you usually fight. There are two flavors of telepathy because I realized early on I wanted a variation there. I have had more stats and removed them, or reduced them to on/off flags like tactician/fighter. I decided early on to only have stats that I saw a use for, if not, remove them.

When it comes to the relationship stats, I go a bit weird. I have a "friendship" percentage level. It is not what Sidestep thinks, but a measure of the connection between Sidestep and the other person. As such, it is a mutual thing, and can sometimes go up and down without direct Sidestep knowledge. When it's high, people are close, they get each other, but it also gets harder to keep secrets. You can have genuinely fun with someone at 50%, but you don't know them that well. You can be utterly furious at someone with 80%, but you get each other.

Since I was using the "friendship" in such an abstract way, the "relationship" text is what I most often use in text. There I just wanted fun names that described people's relationships.

Separate to this I have the pure "flirting" tags, the "pastflirting" tags, the "secret crush", the "kiss" tags and so on. This details the other relationships, and makes things easier to write in text. It doesn't matter if people are flirting, dating or lovers, I can just use the "flirting" tag in the text for things like a kiss on the cheek and so on.

Basically, all stats are born when I find a use for them in the story, they are not pre-planned.

How would HG react if they were unable to help someone they care about?

Devastated. It has happened in the past and it nearly broke them.

What are HG, Nocturne's, and Jake's pet peeves?

HG: Ass-kissers. People who don't understand when they're not wanted.

Nocturne: People pushing blame on others for things they failed to do.

Jake: Braggarts.

What kind of reactions did Nocturne notice on HG during the meeting with Sidestep?

The tension and absolute focus.

Around what age is the Crack?

I would say 30-40 or so.

Between the Crack and Deadeye, which of them is the better sniper?

Deadeye

What were HG's older brothers like?

I think we will get into that in Revelations, so spoilers for details. HG loved them.

In the aquarium memory there's a line: "It's the best day of your life, you didn't think..." how would that sentence have finished?

Spoilers. There's a lot of wonky shit with memories in this game that we will be getting into.

Sidestep can potentially read the emotions on HG and Nocturne if they turn down HG's offer but did Nocturne, Jake, or HG have any verbal thoughts going across their minds?

Only HG. "That figures."

How much money did Nocturne and HG lose if Sidestep successfully robbed the auction? Did it vary depending on if Sidestep kept things quiet or went on to cause mayhem and havoc?

A lot. And definitely more of Sidestep went mayhem and havoc. I have no numbers.

Did Tina cause the Nanosurge?

What a thing to accuse an honest aquarium director of...

In one of the Q&A's there was a mention of possible new villain romance (or two) and if the characters are developed enough, is it possible to hear a what kind of characters they might be?

Do they have any powers? Any descriptions on their personalities? Are they active or retired villains? Are they independent villains or affiliated with someone? Even if there isn't romance, are they potential allies or friends to Sidesteps who are more interested looking allies outside the law?

Alright. You have already met one, Sky-Raider. He's Benjamin "Ben" Garret, tall, outgoing and loves being a pirate. White, blonde from a bottle, flamboyant hair. Ex military with an upgraded armor. He owes Dr. Mortum a few favors, so you got a sneak preview in Retribution when he can rescue you from the hospital.

The other one I still need a better villain name for. She was called "Birdbrain" in the original book. Her real name is Vera Saleh. Lanky woman in her late twenties with long limbs and skinny jeans. Mixed race, Lebanese dad, Mexican mom, born in Mexico. Controls pigeons, can see through their eyes, and turn into one with a bit of effort. Can't do it if she's eaten recently. She has glasses, and that pattern passes over to her pigeons

What relationship between Dr . Mortum and Vitruvian? Only business partnership or something more?

Business partners. Lab partners. Science bros. No romantic relationship, but they were close.

What mean " partner" between Dr. Mortum and Sidestep If they are RO ? Is it different "partner" with Vitruvian?

It is different, partner can be both with and without sex. But for Mortum it is mostly an expression of closeness.

Does HG always put Red thread on their partnership ? Or have specific reason ?

Only when they warrant it. But they wouldn't meet in person if Sidestep wasn't interesting enough to warrant threading.

In book 3 Can we gain Telepath Stat. more ?

Yes, and perhaps lose some as well...

Are we free to write fanfiction based off of FH to satiate yourselves in wait for the 3rd book? I have so many little ideas swirling

Go wild, fanfic and fanart is wonderful, enjoy yourself with my blessing!

Will the readers get to see interact with Ortega's mother? happy family reunion!

Yes.

What kinds of weapons would be available to sidestep during his vigilante/hero era?

Pretty much whatever Ortega could check out from the Ranger's armory and get away with. Most were returned after use though.

Will we get more 'flashbacks'?

Oh yes.

Hi! I just wanted to ask a few questions. I've tried looking through the old q&as but I might have missed the answers. Are Regenes (normal and cuckoo variants) made the same way?

They are made exactly the same way, the blue skin comes later.

And is it possible that cuckoos are made from human corpses?

I mean in the sense that there might be genetic material taken from them, yes. But that breaks down fast.

I thought there seemed to be a reactive feedback loop when Sidestep connected with HG, instead of a one-way memory. Is that possible? Thank you!

That is indeed a feedback loop, but from who to who is a question.

Does Chen feel more comfortable leaving some / most of his prosthetics off in his downtime? Or does he prefer to still have the mobility they afford at a moment's notice when he's just sitting around the house/ relaxing?

At home, when he's not expecting visitors, Chen prefers to not have his legs on. It works fine with the wheelchair, and it's nice to take the weight of what remains of his legs. Some days he can be very sore. He usually leaves his arm on until it's time to bed, because so much of that support structure is embedded in his shoulder. He switches to a simpler, lighter model though. He leaves the hands on, though the basic ones are quick-fit, he doesn't like how helpless he feels without them.

Will there be a ending in book 4 where Step stays in the puppet permanently

I dunno yet.

Has Tia Elena ever called up Ortega to yell at them for doing something particularly dangerous/reckless/stupid as a hero or just in general?

Yes, on occasion. Some things look a lot scarier on the television, though Ortega is lucky that there is no camera most of the time.

Does Tía own and wear Ranger merch?

I think she owns some, but I don't think she wears it very often.

Who are some of the heroes that have gained bad publicity because of their actions or persona?

I think the most high profile one was Five Pennies, who killed a reporter on live television, hard to get back from that. Cavalier turned traitor and blew up the Pentagon. Thunderhead got an unsavory

reputation towards the end because of allegations of emotional control. There are more, but not on the top of my head.

How does Vernon know Ortega is obsessed with the new villain?

Vernon and Ortega shares some of the same contacts.

Would Nocturne's powers work on Themmy?

No.

Because I'm very curious Malin - what did the headlines say if Argent kissed Sidestep during the bridge fight?

It depends a lot on the reputation of the Villain, and whether they are known as a telepath. It might be things like "Mind Control once more? Is Lady Argent the weak spot of the Rangers?" for a revealed telepath. Or more saucy "Star-crossed lovers, a who is this new heartbreaker?" Especially funny if the villain is called Heartbreak. I am so bad at headlines.

How did Steel feel when he was requested to be Carter's bodyguard?

Annoyed.

Was the "Heartbreak" Sidestep saw the same person that Chen and Ortega saw?

It's complicated.

Was this "Heartbreak" Chen saw the same person that Ortega saw?

Yes.

Chen says "There's more to almost every major incident in this city." Did he also look into the nanosurge?

Yes, he did.

In what year was the old man in HGs epilogue threaded?

I don't know exactly, must be over two decades by now, it's a long-term thing.

Will it be possible to convince Dr. Mortum to join a mob boss pc's organization?

Not join, but be closely affiliated, yes. Mortum is very set on being their own boss.

Even though she's not modded, does Owl ever use prosthetics, or does she stick to her wheelchair? If not, was it out of choice, the state of her legs post nanosurge not making her a

good fit for prosthetics, or both?

Owl likes her wheelchair, it is pretty kitted out. She has tried prosthetics, but she's not fond of using them for everyday life. It's mostly a choice, she didn't want that kind of medical debt, and she's not one of the people whose body easily accepts mods. She tried a smaller one early in her life, but it got infected and she had to remove it.

Will there be a way to get into Ortega's head without doing damage to them (psychic or physical)?

Spoilers.

Do Argent nanovores understand the concept of love? If Sidestep and Argent are dating, do they understand why Lady Argent is falling for Sidestep?

Nope, they do not.

I noticed Ortega's suspicion always increases if you puppetcrash and are mcstuck. Does Ortega always suspect that Step knows about the crash or plays some part in it?

Ortega have their theories, yes.

Which of Ortega's kill do they regret the most? Which one do they stand by the firmest?

Ortega do regret Elyise, even though they saved her from a horrible death by nanovores. Still pops up in nightmares now and then, sometimes with Sidestep's face. The one they stand by the firmest is Daemon Darkly, an particularly unpleasant villain early in Ortega's career who had a habit of killing hostages and laughing about it.

How long ago did Daniel start sponsoring Marek's investigation team? How did they meet?

Quite a few years, I haven't decided exactly. Daniel became a fan of the show after moving to Los Diablos, and dropped by the office as a fan.

Adding on - why did Daniel decide to sponsor Marek's team? Was he hoping that they would look into the Heartbreak incident?

Among other things, there's a lot of stuff that Daniel is interested in. But he doesn't do many requests, he trusts Marek there.

Did Owl help create the Handyman's gadgets? Is his connection to Owl the reason why Step feels uneasy about pursuing him as a target?

Yeah, they are a team. He would have access to a lot of old Owl tech, but also makes his own.

To what extent could fighting near bodies of water / in an aquarium / using water against Argent could sway the fight? Could it trigger the nanovores faster?

Possibly, but Argent is good at keeping control over that these days.

Owl seems to have kept an eye on things during retirement. Is she onto Sidestep (as a villain) in any way?

Spoilers, but she likes to keep in touch.

What was Sentinel and Owl's relationship like? Could they work together well now? Are they already?

Sentinel and Owl didn't really get along, they were both a little too stubborn and bristly and pushed each other's nerves a lot.

What's the likelihood of one of the Rangers (other then Ortega) calling a revealed Step's phone and them regretting not changing their number already?

Pretty darn high.

What does Ortega think is Hollow Ground's boost?

Doesn't think it's earthquakes, must be something mental if everyone else handily ignores them.

Is Ortega aware that possession is possible to develop with a powerful enough telepathy boost?

It's a theory.

Has Ortega connected the two dots and concluded that something as traumatic as HB, like the nanosurge, might have boosted Sidestep's abilities further?

Oh yeah.

Hypothetically, if Lady Argent had to choose an armor to make a villainous debut would she choose an armor that would be similar to Sidestep's armor or would she try something new?

Oh she would have her own, she's got style.

Is it considered tacky to use demon-based names in Los Diablos? Is it worse for heroes or villains, if so?

No tackier than any other name!

Can we keep dr mortum gun?

Hmmmm not sure yet.

Will we have a chance to meet other survivors of the Heart Break incident?

Yes.

Strange question- but can either Skybright or Cavalier dance? And what're their heights?

Huh, I have no idea! Probably? Enough official circumstances to warrant learning. I would say that Skybright is 5'7" and Cavalier was 5'11"

What were the first thoughts of every Ranger when they have heard that Sidestep had lost their telepathy? How did it change when Sidestep had stepped out of the Ranger's HQ?

Herald was devastated, how horrible. Once Sidestep have left, he started realizing the implications and suddenly became nervous for his own sake. Argent was relieved, she suspected Ortega's plan. Chen was suspicious at first, but later realized that was actually logical due to the trauma, and felt bad for suspecting.

Can Argent talk with her TV?

She can turn it off and on, but it doesn't hold a conversation.

Has anyone ever stolen Argent's food and lived to tell the tale?

Yes, Ortega.

Vernon doesn't want to tell Mia what he found. Was he threaded into this decision? If not, was he forcibly coerced not to tell her?

Vernon cares about Mia and doesn't like her risking her life.

Who are some heroes that Mia thinks deserved getting their butt kicked by a hero hunter (training them) Sidestep?

I don't know, but I certainly will make up some for the next book!

Do we know what kinda goat snowball is? Like is it your run of the mill goat or something funky like a Damascus goat?

She's a nigerian dwarf goat, mostly white but with some black.

Were Sidestep's tattoos always orange?

Yes.

Is there a history of aquatic villains or heroes? We know fliers like Herald or Sky Raider are common enough to be their own “thing”, but what about swimmers?

There are in Portland, yes. For some reason they rarely last long in Los Diablos...

Did Tia Elena attend Sidestep's funeral?

Yes.

After Sidestep's second escape, did the farm put personnel to watch the Rangers Sidestep was close with pre-HB in case Step run to them?

Oh yes. But as that didn't happen, they were withdrawn over a year or so.

Sidestep says that their dreams have been getting worse. What are they dreaming about? Is this influenced by the awakening imposter?

Varying things. Old bad memories and weird unrecognizable things. Hallucinatory nightmares. Things remembered and best left forgotten in the morning.

I can't believe I'm asking this but. Malin, in your opinion - Is Void or Ortega hotter? Who is the hottest (not literal) character in FH?

I am no judge on hotness, that is very personal.

You mention that Tina would want to let the west heal 'uninterrupted', would she be willing to go completely scorched earth, eliminating all human and non-human life from the area, in order to have a fresh start?

That would be the simplest solution.

What are the Rangers +Mortum's go to Karaoke songs?

I have no idea! I am a metalhead, and that's rarely on the karaoke rooster.

Is Skyraiders suit modified from his own military suit?

No, but a similar model.

Could Sidestep possess an animal?

Sidestep has never tried.

Did Step snap out of their "heartbreak vision" the moment they crashed out of the window?

No.

If so - did this "snapping out of it" coincide with the moment Chen felt the pressure stop too?

No.

Does Step remember reaching out for Ortega's hand?

Yes, though some might have repressed it.

When the Sidestep scar acts out badly, does Ortega fall with Sidestep in their hallucination? I feel like this would resonate with some of their own deep-seated fears.

Yeah, that might happen.

Did Sidestep ever unknowingly get into Ortega's mind or read their thoughts? Especially during events where Sidestep's telepathy is at an "all-time high" like the Nanosurge and Heartbreak.

I will very quietly whisper spoilers to that.

The New Flesh feeds on boosted flesh; did the Green Sky, thanks to the Void's powers and the Choir "feed" on the boosted in other ways, like something located in the mind? Is Sidestep a good sacrament because they're a boost?

They fed on filtered Void blood, by feeding Void's blood to people, and then drinking their blood in turn. It was still very physical. And yes, Sidestep was good for that, boosts survive the Void blood better.

Just spoilers How does ortega reconcile sidestep's ability to fight/tactics expertise with their belief that sidestep is HG's younger sibling during sidestep days?

Oh those go very well together, of course they would have training.

After all that Sidestep did to help out in the Nanosurge, Void fight, and who knows how many other things - why was Chen still so distrustful? Was Step's telepathy and unwillingness to submit ot the background checks such a big reason that it overruled all the times their actions could have proven their loyalty?

I mean Steel became less distrustful as time went on, but yeah, there was something that he felt was a little off about Sidestep the whole time. And Ortega acted weird around them.

How well is it known to the public that it was Sidestep who stopped the nanosurge? I mean, we know it's known to the heroes, but what about the civilian?

No, to the public it was a concerted hero effort.

In terms of percentages, how similar is Step's Heartbreak nightmare in Rebirth to their first encoded memory of the actual Heartbreak event?

Maybe... 75%? It's pretty close but condensed.

If Lancaster is still around in FH... is Edwards AFB being used still? :hmmmmm:

The Edwards Air Force Base is one of the small military installations that are allowed in the Free Western territories.

Have any unsuspecting folks ever walked up to the farm while on a hike or a drive? How has the Farm dealt with them?

No, it's not hiking terrain, and the road is blocked a long time before it reaches the farm.

Has the Ranger HQ ever been attacked before or was Sky Raider breaking Step out a first?

It has happened now and then, but not as often as you'd think.

Does Dr. Halabi have a family? Spouse? Kids? ... pets?

She has an estranged spouse, they are not divorced yet, but they live apart. She has two cats and a workaholic habit.

What was Ortega's reaction if we bolt after leaving Parkfield and go across traffic successfully

Suspicion, frustration and admiration.

Which book do you think that the politics stat will start being check

Book three.

MALIN DOES SKYRAIDER LIKE JIMMY BUFFETT

I don't know. Maybe?

Back in the past, how did those who made the hiring decisions for the rangers feel about Sidestep? ignoring Steps unwillingness to submit to the background checks, were they considered a good candidate?

A little underpowered, most were happy to have them as an associate. The Nanosurge changed this, and had Sidestep wanted they might have gotten in if they have the "hero" status from the past.

The powers of FH seem to go deeper than they appear, given that: is Nocturne's ability to take people's sight just the temporary removal to various degrees or does she gain anything from that?

Spoilers.

What's Alaska like? What about Hawaii? How is the US dealing with its western extremities now that there is an FEZ in the way?

Alaska is cold, and mostly depopulated. Some stay on, but the oil industry is mostly in Texas now. The indigenous people have mostly retaken the land, and there have been discussions about making a bid for their own country, but nobody wants to rock the boat.

Hawaii had to live through several years of isolation, and is a lot less reliant on tourism than it was. It has a very suspicious stance towards the rest of the US, and there were discussions early on to join the free western territories. It didn't happen, but the sentiment is still there. If it wasn't for a large fleet presence, it might already have happened.

Can we potentially have a bigger fan club than Charge :bigcrimes:

Why do you think I am tracking the fanclub stat? One day perhaps.

Do all the threads in HG's mind have a common origin point?

Can a sufficiently powerful step snap most/all the threads from this origin point?

I think it is more spread out, but there are focal clumps.

Is Nehal enrolled in any kind of education, or is she just going to the School of Villainy™?

School of villainy, education is expensive.

Would it be possible for Sidestep and/or Mortum to "teach" Argent's nanovores how to regulate sensory input better? Is that something she'd be open to trying in lieu of skin?

It is possible that something like that could be attempted with Mortum's help.

What did Argent and Herald think when they first learned Step stopped the nanosurge? When/how did they find out?

They learned it in Ranger orientation, when they get to know a lot of classified shit. Herald was very impressed.

Would we be able to cut the string that mortum has from HG

If Mortum ever trusts you.

Have any of HG strings been accidentally cut somehow? Is that even possible?

Yes, it is possible. They fade and grow weak in time if they are not renewed. They can break due to forgetting, and from being confronted with conflicting information if they are weak enough.

On hero fanclubs? Do they operate much like Fandoms? Do they have fan names or do Herald and Argent get fan art of each other and do people "ship" Any of the Rangers with other heros, much to their amusement/annoyance?

Yeah, they are pretty much fandom, think a cross between sports fandoms and old Star Trek. Remember that the internet is a bit behind in the FH world due to being behind with satellites and an open world wide web. It is more like the days of netscape around the turn of the century. Thus most fan interactions are message boards rather than tiktok videos.

Would Dr. Halabi punch us if they found out that we are using dr mortum.

No, she's not a violent person. But she would not be happy.

Has Argent ever talked to the chip in our head? Does she know what it is?

She has not spoken to it. She is aware that it's there, but not the details.

How aware was Sidestep while they were in the vat post-boosting but pre-memory implant? Did they get taken out for mental testing before they were officially decanted?

Normally, a ReGene does not remember any of their time in the vat, even if they are aware of things happening. It is before the brain knows how to recognize and know about things. It's like we don't remember our time in the womb, or the early years afterwards. However, things were different for Sidestep (and any ReGenes with similar capabilities). Due to telepathy, they begun to get sensory and mental input after they had been boosted, and thus could start retaining memories from a time when they should have been a blank slate. They were aware, and more important, they remembered some of it.

A ReGene is taken out of the vat post-boosting for testing and classification. This could be once, or several times depending on the ReGene. Some undergo surgery during this time to correct for boosting errors, and others simply need more time to stabilize properly. The speed-growth process is not perfect, surgical corrections are common during the growth phase for things like vestigial tails, fused fingers and other variations usually corrected in newborns.

Did the Special Directive wipe/try to wipe Sidestep's mind after they said 'no' prior to their memories being implanted? Was their first rebellion kept secret for the good of the project?

They saw it more as a curiosity at the time. Was it a mental artifact from the researcher? Was Sidestep just parroting words without understanding them? It was seen as a fascinating opportunity to look into early ReGene development, and there were a few scientists that were very disappointed when Sidestep was fitted with the AI chip and ruined their research.

Were there any other regenes who displayed hints of consciousness/preference (eg. who refused needles) prior to implantation? How common [or not] was it among mental boosts?

It was not uncommon in mental boosts of a certain kind, and in the occasional other ReGene who had remote sensory experiences prior to decanting. It did not seem to impact AI chip implantation in any way.

Will we have more time to go into the other aspects of being a mob boss besides robbing places 😊 and hanging out with a crew in book 3 or is that going to be a book 4 thing

Book three and four.

Would Nehal want to go to school (again) if Sidestep were to offer the option? (If yes, in what field?)

Nehal is not the school going type.

Following up on what Void would think of current!day Sidestep, what about Pyroclast?

Void would be proud and impressed.

what kind of music does danny like.

I know too little of non-metal music. That's all headcanon.

What was HB's mindscape like? How did it change after the experiment?

I think that before the experiment, it was pleasant and open, probably a bit urban but friendly. After, it was a hellhole vortex of shards and blackness.

Can you tell us more about Chen's heartbreak scar?

Nope. Not yet.

Had they been active at the same time, would Vera have a rivalry with Owl like she does Daniel?

Oh yes.

What does Tina think of Kirk Witt?

Spoilers.

How do you keep yourself from going back and rewriting things over and over and over and over until they match what you imagined perfectly?

Experience. You can't finish a long work until you get to the point where you accept "good enough". Because nothing will ever be perfect, and the more you write, the more you learn, and your past texts will be unlike what you have written today. It helps to remember that 80% of a book is not remembered,

but the 20% that are is what gives people the taste and flavor and which they love. Yes, I made those numbers up, but the point remains.

Focus more in finishing than perfection, once you have finished you will be tired enough of the story that you only have the energy to rewrite the parts that really needs to be. So remember, NO BIG REWRITES UNTIL FINISHED. That should solve a lot of problems.

Who is the most possessive/jealous among the ROs and how would they react if placed in such a situation?

I honestly don't know. Things like that is really hard for me to figure out until I write a situation where they react like that. It is especially hard for me personally since I don't understand or get jealousy in the way it seems to be portrayed by media. I remember when I was writing a couple of years back I had some people on another discord server sit down and try to explain it to me, and the closest I understood it was that it was about fear. I am still faintly confused. I don't see any of the RO's as very possessive or jealous, but who knows?

How did you get started writing a choice game? How did you decide what characters were going to be ROs, which ones just central to the plot, which potential paths there are, which endings are possible, etc?

Basically, in 2014/2015, Choice of Robots went viral on tumblr. I was interested and checked it out since I love the old choose your own adventure books back when I was a kid. I played a few of the CoG games and liked them, and when the job I was working at the time moved (I had to move with it) I was stuck alone in a stopgap apartment for about six months until my partner could move here too. During those months I decided to start writing a choicescrypt game because I was bored, and it looked interesting.

I had a few unfinished novels at the time, and tried to figure out which one might work as choicescrypt. I looked at what was popular in media at the time and which I predicted would remain so, which was superheroes, zombies and urban supernatural. I had book ideas for all, but there was already a really popular and good CoG games for zombies, and the zombie story I had was a collaboration with another writer. So that one was out.

In the end, I picked the supervillain one because I really missed writing the main character, and liked the premise of old hero turns villain, fights old friends. This was where Sidestep, Argent, Mortum, Hollow Ground and Herald came from. However, I needed a new world, since the old one was based faintly on my partner's superhero comic script. I stole the world from a more post-apocalypse/cyberpunk book I had started, set it a few decades later and fused it with superheroes. This was the book where Ortega and Chen came from, and why Ortega truly has main character syndrome. They are just in the wrong book. I also stole a lot of the main character from my urban supernatural story, and a lot of the writing tricks I had used for that (it was about dreams and nightmares).

I started out by picking two RO's, which was the minimum I could get away with. I did not want the story to get away from me, this was my first foray into this and I wanted to make sure I could finish. I picked

Ortega and Mortum, which had the other two major part of the story, and were on opposite sides. As Rebirth was a success, and I had learned a lot, I decided to add some more in the next game. Yes, this was in part to player wishes, but I only added them because I felt that each romance would let me dig into a different part of Sidestep. I don't have them because of romance, I have them because it makes for interesting character studies. This is also the same reasons why there are two new ones in book three, we will explore the villain side a bit more, so there are room for villain RO's.

I had a basic overview of the main plot since it was based on an (unfinished) book. This meant that I had a few what I term "climax scenes", to hang the story on. Like the museum assault, or the pist HG crash. Rebirth sticks very close to the original book, it has a linear structure because that was what I felt I was capable of at the time. Finish the book. Make sure it is cohesive. Don't overreach. There was one main ending with the museum, not much deviation. It was also ended earlier than I had planned, because interactive fiction took a lot more words than normal fiction.

In book two, I decided to really have fun with the interactivity and went a bit wild. I planned a normal run, then branched from there. My planning was not very good though, things got expanded, moved around and there was a lot of trial and error. For the longest time I did not want to use the bodyswitching thing in the crash that was in the book, but I decided to actually do it. However, the length expanded even more, so I had to cut it in two, which meant that all of a sudden you get a cliffhanger ending which I had never planned.

In short, do your planning, but be ready for it to change as you write. Maybe book three will be smoother, as I have learned more now.

Does/did Chen's armor ever have a body cam so there was a reliable recording of event on missions? If so, did he have one for HB and did it survive the bombing? Where would it be now?

Yes, Chen's armor does include that capability. It was often used, but not always. Sometimes it was turned off because there can sometimes be issues having certain things recorded, but often it was because cameras often malfunction around Ortega. A very handy talent I am sure everybody can agree on. The camera was running when Heartbreak happened, but it was destroyed in the collapse of the building, and no footage was recovered.

Is Rahim threaded by HG?

Spoilers.

Is there any way Jake's powers could negate/work around HG's threads on their own?

Possibly in time, they are a bit weird, but Jake has no reason to question his loyalty.

And also: would he trade his enforcer position for a nice lieutenant position with benefits?

It's a tough sell, not saying it's impossible, but almost.

Can you tell us more about Nightstalker? I want to know all about the person that got the top ranking spot for vigilantes.

Sadly I have no idea at this point in time! My brain drew a blank.

Are the nanovores comprising Argent's body sensitive to temperatures in any potentially-compromising ways?

No, but Argent is. One reason she doesn't like fire powers.

Why did dr. mortum have sidestep on a shortlist of possible villain identities if they were presumed dead from the heartbreak incident?

Now see, this is a very good question...

Would the infection in the core be more like a viral infection or bacterial? Or possibly even fungal? If that metaphor even holds up

Not connected at all.

Could you describe Rosie's boost? What type of damage is she better at resisting in terms of being "bulletproof"?

Basically piercing damage, and also blunt trauma to a lesser degree. A high speed rifle bullet would leave a bruise, a laser some reddening of the skin, an explosion small burns and bruises. A knife or sword would bounce. This also includes things like her eyes. Her weak point would be blunt trauma to the head, she might be knocked out there even though the actual damage would not be much. However, it would still take more than a normal person could take.

What is the state of video gaming in Fallen Hero? Are any of the main cast particularly interested?

Cartridge and CD style games, no internet capabilities. You buy a game and play it. Expensive but cool. Might have really good graphics and interactivity with your body. VR stuff. No multiplayer, only LAN. Lots of military games. Don't think any of the cast is really into it.

What would Hollow Grounds' reaction have been if they'd noticed the threading hadn't worked then and there?

I mean in some cases they do notice...

Does Ortega's theory of us being a clone of the original Sidestep with implanted memories hold any merit?

In Ortega's head it does. If they are angry enough.

When did streetwise Sidestep have the opportunity to become streetwise, was it a part of their Farm training or did they figure it out very fast on their own after they broke out?

I think it's just part of their interest, the knowledge can have been received both ways.

How has transplant science advanced? Is the need for anti-rejection meds still the same as in the real world, and what's the success rate of artificial transplants (like lab grown organs or mechanic organs)?

It is a lot more advanced than today. There is still a need for anti-rejection meds if you choose human transplants, but there are better meds. Basically they are more focused on a narrow band of rejection sensitive receptors rather than the broadband nuke the immune system with all the drawbacks. Note that these are not medical terms. However, it is far more common to use lab grown organs, which can be tailored to be as acceptable as possible to the body they are inserted in. There are also functional artificial organs, which tends to be what is used when speed is of the essence, or for cost-saving purposes. They have a good success rate, comparable to the more advanced heart surgeries today. The lungs are still the trickiest ones.

What kind of dialyses (or the equivalent of ecmo) exist?

They classic external dialysis still exists, but is more of a placeholder procedure before a new organ (or internal dialysis support) can be fitted. This is often solved not by removing the malfunctioning organs, but by implanting support "filter organs" that can work as internal dialysis filters, and be easily serviced once every few months or so. If you have the money, you wait for a homegrown organ for a full transplant.

How many organs could be removed from a person while still keeping them alive on machinery alone and for how long? Has the Farm tested the limits of this? Are there any regene used as part of these experiments still alive?

There is no strict limit there, it is very dependent on the body. Some go into shock easily, others can be almost disassembled before being put together again. There have been experiments with removing the brain into a full robot body, but that tends to lead to madness and death. Exactly why is still unclear. And yes, of course the Farm would have tested these things. I am not sure if any of the ReGenes involved are alive, it is doubtful. You don't use the useful ones for things like this.

This might be spoilers, but would Ortega be up to seeing the Sidestep pictures and recording Chen has/had? Or would that be too hard for them?

Oh Ortega would watch if they had the chance.

Does Argent ever have nightmares about the Nanosurge?

Yes. Those are the bad nights, and one reason why Sidestep can't stay at her place.

Isn't that why she has sharks in her mind?

Yes, exactly.

If Step is Wealthy or Rich, where are they keeping their money? Do they have a bank account somewhere or strictly using DS?

It is probably a combination of a bank account under a fake identity for "official spending", a bunch of cash store at their base, and some DS for Dr. Mortum and criminal purchases.

Why cant we hide our tattoos with a sleeve tattoo. And pass the color as ink?

It would have been possible to tattoo the flesh, but the ink falls off the actual tattoos. It's like the tattoos shed any damage or thing meant to cover them. Sidestep does not know why. However, they could certainly have added tattoos and fake it being a real one, but Sidestep is very paranoid about being found out. They are convinced that a glimpse of the tattoos means they will be spotted, it's not an entirely rational feeling.

If we're playing as a killer step, will we be able to get a hold of weapons (like swords, guns, etc) or will we be raw-knuckling it through the entire series?

Yes, weapons will be in book three. Even some familiar ones...

When 'testing' new Re-Genes by forcing them to fight and catalyse their boosts, what measures does the Farm have in place to keep them from (whether accidentally or not) killing each other?

Mainly armored guards, and certain older, trusted ReGenes with suitable powers.

I'm not sure how to phrase this but - how does "reprogramming" regenes usually work? Say, the regene has already built neuronal connections in their brain based on what the learnt/the personality they showed signs of developing. When these are erased/reprogrammed, do they remove the memory while neural connections remain? Or are these neurons themselves cut out?

There are two stages to reprogramming. The easy one is just wiping and reprogramming the AI chip. This is usually enough for a very young ReGene without very many experienced memories. This is often done when a ReGene reacts badly to the memory set they have received, and a new one is inserted to see if it works better for them. Any neuronal connections built are just left to fade on their own as the new memories take hold.

If a ReGene is older, have experienced the outside world and as you say, have built many neuronal connections in their flesh brain, things are harder. This requires full insertion into the Core, where those connections will be changed and adapted as well. This takes a long time, and runs the risk of a full mental collapse. It is only done if the ReGene is valuable enough.

Did HG ever consider trying to thread Sidestep back when they were active as a Hero?

No.

Compared to other precognitive boosts, how strong are Ace/the Puppet's powers? What would be their designation on the Alpha, Beta, etc scale, and how much room for growth do you see their powers having?

It depends, you have a precognition stat for a reason. There is a lot of possibility for growth.

Considering the mental nature of both Step and Ace's powers, do you see it ever being possible to access one power set in the other body, or is it something fundamentally tied to the biology of each body?

You might find out soon.

Was anyone who knew Ace prior to their demise (not Shroud) aware of their status as boost? If so did any of them know what their specific power set was?

Nope.

Did Ace hit other casinos outside of Lord Ember's purview? If so, did the people running them notice their extreme luck and did they have their own plans for dealing with them (for example, Hollow Ground)?

Yes she did, she moved around a lot though. Most of the time, precognition kept them one step ahead but they slipped up with Lord Ember.

Are Common Law Marriages a recognized thing in the FEZ?

Yes they are.

You've mentioned that these days the farm work on boosting via certain stimuli during the process to try and create the desired boost effect. What were the conditions for Shroud's batch? What kind of boost were they aiming for?

They were aiming for telepaths, and were using the classic sensory deprivation technique.

Has Argent's family seen her, even if they don't know it's her they're seeing?

Yes.

Have any of the Rangers (past or current) been back to the HB site?

Argent and Herald has.

Is the apartment number "412" that we see in the heartbreak vision significant to Heartbreak, or Sidestep?

Heartbreak.

Is there a reason that heartbreak stopped instead of continuing moving?

Oh yes. Very much so.

[This month's questions here!](#)

[Feb 20, 2023](#)

Alright, I have just sent in a big bugfix update on Retribution (not sure when it goes live on various platforms) and I am working on the Rebirth update. Once that is done, the first Revelations content will pop out here.

Until then, please amuse yourself by asking me weird things about writing or Fallen Hero here!

[The Void 5 - Sidestep revisited](#)

[Feb 12, 2023](#)

The funny thing with pain is that they think it gets to you. Think you fear the bruises or the damage. Sure, it's not nice, and your body does its reflexive twitching like always. Tries to turn. Tries to yank away. Tries to mitigate the damage. Breathing is an issue, your lungs do what they want, and that feral imperative touches even you.

But pain? Not so much.

You scream anyway, because it's expected, because being silent invites more, more brutal means. They don't want to destroy you. They want to break you.

Instead, you watch them.

The tall one, not putting all the weight on their left leg. The kicker with the poor balance. The one who stands back and looks unsure, still new, you guess. None of them are professionals. All of them too sure of themselves. They removed your mask so they could see your tears, but that's just another reflex easily ignored. It's better even; no snot to clog the mask. That's the worst.

This you can handle.

There's a timer ticking, you know the plan, and there's only a matter of time before people come for you. You did your part before things turned south, and the power went out, and the Rangers went in. Void might be sure of themselves, but overconfidence is a killer, and their time is running out. The people hurting you are not fighters. You suppose that's why they aren't on the first line of defense, but you'll still do your best to keep them busy.

You wish you didn't have to feel their thoughts.

They have done this before. Broken people. Brought them back to Void, who would do something to their remains. To the shards of people. Show them the light. Most died. Some turned. The one standing back had been in your position not long ago, and you can feel the fear. Stronger than your own. If you could influence him, that would have been useful, but there are no cracks, and you need that to work. Fear is as big a shield as faith.

What had he seen?

He doesn't understand it. Doesn't want to remember it. Hopes you'll die rather than share his knowledge. There, that might be a crack worth exploiting if you can focus if they could give you a moment to...

"We need to scram. We're under attack!" You can't see the door with your face pressed against the floor by a heavy boot, but you can hear the urgency in her voice. Is this your opening?

Hands bound. Body bruised but functional. Not great odds.

"Fuck. What's happening?"

"It's the Rangers!"

And for a moment, nobody is looking at you.

Without moving your head, you push a feeling of vertigo and unease into the one keeping you down. As expected, the weak leg wavers and the boot comes off your head as he has to readjust.

"Shi--" your feet hits his chin, slamming teeth together around his tongue, and you roll aside before the other grabs you.

"Get them!"

You grit your teeth and tense your muscles, leaping to your feet more gracefully than you should be able to with your injuries. You can't do much damage without your hands, but you can still run. All you need to do is get through the door.

Feel them. Avoid the blow to your head, down, and to the left when they're thinking right. Jump back, pull them out of balance, a kick to a knee, and yes, the door is clear and...

And...

The intrusion is like a cloud of acid, not in you, but in the new guy. His eyes widen in fear before they go green and endless. Somewhere far off, he screams, and you are the only one that hears it.

His body reaches out, and you scamper back like a snail before the salt, reacting by reflex, but this time that is what ends you. A fist to your head, unseen.

And everything is darkness.

...

It's the scream that awakes you from your dreams of grabbing hands. Not yours, but familiar. Ortega.

You force your eyes open. They are stuck together with dried tears and blood, and it takes a moment for you to take in the scene. A concrete room, a different smell than where you fell unconscious. You've been moved. You're chained upright against a wall, your wrists burning from your weight. You ignore the pain but tense your aching legs to relieve some pressure. You need them functional.

Across the room is Ortega, stripped to the waist, wires tangled from their spine. The wires snake across the room to you. Oh, So that's what the pressure around your ankles is. Removed your boots. Hooked you up. Insurance. If Ortega unleashes their electricity, you're dead. You have to admire their restraint, looking at the bruises and cuts they've put them through, something similar that was done to you.

No pain-gate to take the brunt. Just stubborn self-control.

You close your eyes again, keeping as still as the grave as you hear another scream. Then silence.

"Huh. Thought the famous Charge could handle more." The soft sound of a blow against limp meat.

"We've got time. Nobody's going to come after us here. Let's check with the Choir if it's ready yet."

You keep still as they leave. The heaviness of the door that shuts behind them tells you this is probably at least as secure as a jail cell. You've escaped from worse.

Right.

You open your eyes, and since you don't see any obvious cameras or guards, you straighten your legs and let the blood run back into your abused hands. You've lost a few nails. They'll grow back. You're just

grateful they didn't strip you further like they did with Ortega. Probably needed access to their spine; at least you hope that was the only reason.

"Oh, you're awake." Ortega's whisper is quiet, and one eye is nearly swollen shut. "I was afraid they had brained you."

"I've got a thick skull," you mumble. "You should know that."

"Guess this got royally fucked up." Ortega is scanning the room, same as you. "Ashfall bolted, and then I heard you and... I guess I miscalculated."

"Void got me," you admit, instead of calling Ortega for the idiot that they are. Not the time. "No idea how they snuck up."

"And Anathema?"

"Had hung back." You don't say how far. "I'm quieter alone."

"Damnit," Ortega curses, still so quiet between bruised lips. "I told you to stick together."

"Tell that to Ashfall."

"I will. I think... I think the Void got to him somehow."

"Huh. Thought he might be immune as ash."

"So did I. Turns out we were both wrong. Guess it's not physical then."

"Could they affect you, or are you just a shitty fighter?"

"Hey," Ortega winces as they smile. "I happened to be an excellent fighter, but all of a sudden, the world turned weird."

"Not a telepath either, then." You let out a pained breath, trying to feel if anybody was close. Outside the door, you think. Your head is hurting.

"Oh. Yeah. Because of that thing." Ortega flinches as they move, the cables brushing against the wall behind them. You can see the needles sticking out like spines, half embedded in their mods, the rest connected to the cables running to your feet.

"How badly hurt are you?" You try to judge the sheen of sweat, the deep bruises, and the shallow cuts. It's always hard to gauge how much damage humans can take before they stop functioning. Ortega is more durable than most.

"I'm fine," they lie. "Think they mostly liked to make me scream."

"Adrenaline." You shift, trying to determine if you could slip out of the manacles if you dislocated your thumb. Maybe, but can you get the leverage to do it?

"Adrenaline?" Ortega is busy checking their own restraints.

"Yeah. I think I'm starting to figure out how this works." No way of getting the cables away from your legs either. Not without your hands. No wonder they felt secure leaving you in here.

"The Void?" A disbelieving frown.

"Yeah. Do you know the stories? How they make people drink Void's blood, and it gives them power? How it turns them into believers?"

"Yeah, shitty ghost stories are a dime a dozen for cults like this."

"I think it's a boosting process." You stop struggling and look over at Ortega, meeting their eyes. "Either with the blood or in the blood."

"Hood was on to the same thing. Never really believed him. Guess I should have. So why the torture?"

"I can't be sure. Maybe they want to push you to the brink? Adrenal fatigue?" You've heard discussions at the Farm. Whether it's the boost drugs or the nascent ReGene's own bodily response to them that kills them. Perhaps making sure the body was already exhausted would make the transition easier.

"And here I thought they just got off on it." A bitter laugh and Ortega stops struggling in their bonds. No more luck than you.

"Probably that too," you admit. Is it a coping mechanism to try to find reason in this place? Perhaps.

"You think anybody's listening?" Ortega lowers their voice. "I don't think there's any bugs or cameras. They would be afraid I could tap into those systems and use them against them."

"That was once, and you need to touch," you scoff, but you can't feel any attention on you, so maybe.

"They don't know that. Am I right or not?"

"Possibly." You try to focus, but you feel unwatched, and that was the first and most sensitive manifestation of your powers.

"If I get the opportunity, I'm going to try something stupid." Ortega's laugh is soft and desperate. "But I'll be out after that, so I need you to get us out of here."

"Fine that you've got such faith in my abilities."

"I do. But..." there is a pause there, and then Ortega looks you in the eyes. "I'll try not to hurt you, but this could go badly. I could kill us both."

"Do it anyway," you say without hesitation.

"I thought you'd say that," another soft laugh. "That's why I--"

The door opens, and you both fall silent. No use in pretending to be unconscious this time.

Two women enter first, not the torturers from before. They are tall and clean, in pristine white, smelling of chlorine and anticipation. Behind them, the room twists into shadow, and the Void steps through.

Through the door? You wish you could be sure, but the way the world bends, you can't be. You close your eyes and divest yourself of one sense that could confuse you. You hear Ortega make a joke, met with no discernible response. There is a feeling of anticipation in the air, the two women, no the Choir, are looking forward to this. Their minds are synchronous waves, like a chorus going back and forth, rising and falling with their breaths. The Anchor and the Kite. What does it mean?

What will they do?

You open your eyes again because you can't sense the Void without them. It's barely better with vision, the light is bending green and heavy, liquid syrup in your lungs, and you can feel it. Sticky. You can't help but gag, nausea, your body's rebellion against a world that doesn't make sense.

"Sidestep." The Void is standing in front of you now, at least in ways you can understand. Looking up. The voice is ethereal, but you can hear the hollow echo of a vocal modulator in its dulcimer tones. "How fitting that you will be the last sacrament."

"Hey! I thought I was the main course here?" Ortega's voice is loud, but the Void doesn't turn around.

"We need a filter," one of the Choir women says.

"It is only fitting it should be your best... friend," says the other.

"Perhaps you'll pass through the crucible untouched," the Void says as they reach out for you. "But I doubt."

You press your back against the wall, staring at the gloved hand. Slender. Elegant. Five fingers. So why is it so WRONG? Why do you scream when it touches your skinsuit?

The world makes a revolting turn, and you are PULLED through the chains, out into the middle of the floor. Floating. Immobile. The cables brush against the floor, a reminder that you are still a physical being. Sound has gone deep and distorted, underwater echoes in your ears moving wrongly. You still hear Ortega.

"No, let them go, you bastards!"

"If you want to spare them, you have the means to kill them." The Void, you can hear clearly, their words existing in the same space as you are. There is a sense of anticipation as if pushing Ortega to make

that decision would be preferable to whatever use they have for you.

Useful. You were never good at being that.

"Sidestep." The Void's words crawl into your ears like slugs, resting heavily on your spine. "Be honored and blessed to partake in the sacrament of my blood."

The glove is removed, no, it still hangs in the air inside the voidfield, but a slender hand rises out of it like a snake shedding its skin. The other hand, still gloved and alien, holds up a blade and slices a clean cut through the thumb. As the blood starts to bead, the Void reaches up, and you try to pull back, but the thumb is thrust into your screaming mouth, and you feel it hit your tongue.

Two conflicting sensations race up your spine like twin snakes and light up your mind in horrible illumination. On the one hand, you want to curl up. Suck that thumb as if it was your own, and be reborn into something new and better. Trust your mother to make sense of the world for you; you don't need this terrible self-determination. On the other hand, the pain is terrible enough that you want to escape your skin and beg Ortega to kill you to make it stop.

Or that's how it should be. If you had been human.

It hurts, sure, but the pain-gate stands firmly in the way of paralysis. It hurts. You can imagine that it should hurt more. But your scream is half for show, half to get that thumb out of your mouth before it detaches and crawls down your throat to lay eggs inside you.

Your knees hit the floor, and it hurts; the acid running through your veins makes you enough like the void-field that it can't keep you trapped. It shouldn't matter. You shouldn't be able to move. You should be paralyzed by pain; if not, you should be a babe curled up, awaiting your mother. But you were never a child. You never had a mother. There are no fond memories to trap you. Just the hatred of a disobedient experiment too used to turning on its makers.

Your muscles are tensing up in cramps, and you bang your fists against the floor, but it doesn't stop. You can see the Choir standing close to Ortega, one on each side, but not taking their eyes off you. You can feel their anticipation more strongly than before, longing to devour what you leave behind so they can approach their own aspirations and guide Ortega through their ordeal. You're not important. You don't deserve their guidance.

Perhaps they are right.

The Void sits hunched before you, watching you twitch and turn. You can sense them now; sense her watching. Trapped in her void field, you should be helpless. You should be dying. You should know nothing but your own helplessness and the futility of resistance, but behind her, you can see Ortega.

Still trapped, but moving. Switching positions and then slamming themselves back against the wall. At an angle. An angle sharp enough to snap the needles in their back, the cables falling to the ground.

And the room goes white.

Around you, the strange time-twisting effect of the void field enables you to see in detail what happens next. The twisting arcs of lightning moving jaggedly through the air, one from each emitter, hitting the back of the two women of the Choir. There's a silent scream as their mouths open, smoke and fried flesh, and they are stuck, as frozen in convulsion as you are, as the lightning in a bottle travels on. Sparks fly from the manacles you were pulled out of and through the void field into the shadowy body of the Void.

There is no scream there. Instead, it tightens, and you can feel heaviness weighing upon you as the Void turns towards Ortega, still caught in the moment of discharge.

The heaviness should feel worse, but it feels better. Steadying you. Outlining your body, which is still YOUR body, and filled with power which is HER power. She's not looking at you; she's looking at Ortega, in shock, in awe, in elation. Perfect.

She doesn't notice you standing up.

Or holding up your hand.

You get it now, and you PUSH her, in the right way, at the proper angle, and she falls, elsewhere and wrong, perched on a branch that betrayed her, and she's gone.

Your scream echoes Ortega as you fall to the ground, the world around you real again in ways that hurt. You can't remember, you won't remember, but you need to move. Now.

"Sidestep." Ortega's voice, raw and worried, hanging from their chains. A stupid risk. It's a wonder they didn't electrocute you both.

"Alive." You cough and crawl over to the fallen women. One of them has keys. Neither of them is alive. You are. You hope.

"Be careful when getting me down." There's a giddy tone to Ortega's voice that sounds too much like panic. "Think one of the needles got jammed. I can't move my legs."

"Idiot," you mumble, trying to open the manacles with too few fingers bending the wrong way. You're still hurting, but with the Void gone for now, there's hope it might stop.

"I thought they had killed you. Carefu--ow!" Ortega swears as you help them to the ground, rolling them over on the stomach.

"Hang on," you mumble, searching the ports for remains of the metal needles that had been inserted. They are broken in half, most of them long enough that you can pull them out.

"How does it look?" Ortega tries to keep still.

"There's one in there, let me find those damn pliers." You crawl over to the tool bench in the corner and grab the pair of small pliers they had used earlier.

"How long do you think we have?"

"No idea. Just try not to electrocute me, okay?" You take a deep breath and reach for the needle; you can't afford to break it further.

"I don't have much left; I think you're safe. Just ah--!"

"There." You slide out the remains of the needle. There's blood on it, which can't be good. "Anything?"

"Wait..." Ortega stretches, gingerly lifting one leg. "I think that does it."

"Good, not gonna carry you out of here."

"Want to help me up, though?" Not exactly puppy dog eyes, but you fall for them anyway.

"On your feet." You use your own weight as leverage. Neither of you is in the best of shape. But you are alive, and that's what matters.

Now all you need to do is get out of here.

[Got asked for writing advice](#)

[Feb 11, 2023](#)

- How did you improve your writing specifically beyond 'just writing more'?

The first thing is to read different things from different genres. Read an old book, and see how that is written. Read a genre you normally don't read. Read some poetry. Go to the library and walk to a random book, open it in the middle and read. Read on paper, and out loud. And then read some more. And when you read, try to think about why you don't like or likes something. Is it boring? Why? Is it hard to understand? Why? What is it in the words you like? Does it feel good to read out loud? If it doesn't, why not?

A tip is to take a book you think is interesting. Take a paragraph from the middle at random, and write it down in a word document. Pay attention to how it feels to write. How are the sentences? Do they feel different from your own? Close the book and continue to write a few paragraphs. Does your style

change? What is the difference between your paragraphs and the one above? Sentence length? Comma use? Does it make it better or worse

Another tip is to write down a bit of dialogue from a tv show or movie you like. There might be transcripts online even. Take that dialogue and write a scene with it. Especially if you find dialogue hard to sound natural this might be freeing. Or, you might even find that what sounded good on the screen looks terrible on paper when it's not said by a charismatic actor.

A third is to write fanfiction and try to make it as good as you can. Try to make it real, as if it might have been from the original source. Think about what it was you liked about it, and then try to imitate that and make your own story. Fanfiction gets a bad rep, but it is a great way to experiment with writing without having to come up with characters and a world. That way you can just focus on the language.

- Would you have any tips regarding writing interesting characters? Mine are always very flat and bland OR 'mary sues'

First of all, there is nothing wrong with a "mary sue". The way this is used these days, it might as well mean "protagonist". If Batman or James Bond can get away with their shit, your protagonist certainly can too. And your characters will be flat at the start because you a story consists of so many parts. You have your language, your plot, your world, your story rhythm. And when you are starting out, there's simply too many things to focus on. You won't get depth in all of them, and the characters are what you spot being flat first, because that's usually what attracts us to a story in the first place.

My characters were terribly flat when I started out, but I wrote short story horror so it didn't matter. Nobody read that for the characters.

A trick I have to try to get my characters to feel alive is to write arguments. Take two characters you have trouble with and let them talk. Argue about something. Be stuck in an awkward situation together. Don't bother writing anything but dialogue, never mind the actual scene. Just write them talking, and after a while you might get a feel for how they feel different from one another. Maybe they start talking about things about them that you didn't even know. Explore. Have fun. Have them say something weird. Something hurtful. Write reactions. Don't bother thinking if it's usable or not. I've written pages of dialogue just to get a feel for how people talk.

I usually build characters by combining archetypes. I start with one people will know immediately, then add another, and a third. They will be uncovered one at a time, adding depth. Let's take Ricardo Ortega for example. The first archetype is "the sexy leading man/hero". Then, we get to know what I fondly call "the himbo". And finally, we discover "the clever, sneaky asshole". I didn't need to bring in all those things at once, as long as I got writing the first archetype, people would be interested and intrigued when they learned about the new facets.

- Would you have any tips on writing humor/banter? You're pretty dang good at it but I could never figure out how to be funny lmao all the jokes I write are Extremely Cringe.

Oh I wish. I honestly have no idea. I was terrible writing characters and dialogue. I think something clicked when I wrote massive amounts of DA2 fanfic, because that was a game which consisted of nothing but banter, so I tried to mimic it the best I could. I have never liked comedies or really understood humor, so I never try to be funny. It's the one part of my writing I truly does not understand, some of my characters are just like that.

- What's your plot planning process like, if you have a consistent one? I can only figure out the very generic broad strokes but it falls apart as soon as I try to come up with details.

All plots are generic broad strokes. Rebirth is basically just emo protagonist monologues a lot, meets up with some old friends and proceeds to beat them up. That's it. All plots will look flat and boring in your head, because what makes a plot cool and interesting is that you don't know what's going to happen. You do. You're the author. So of course it will look flat and uninteresting in your head. The hardest thing is trying to ignore this.

My workaround to this is only knowing the barest of broad strokes. I know where I want to go, who the opposition is, some basic scenes that needs to be there (not in detail) and then I write and discover things as I go along. That is the only way for me to remain interested in the plot, if I had planned it in detail I'd get bored. And oh, sure, there's a lot of foreshadowing and hidden things in my writing, but that's only because I know some big things that's going to happen. It's not like I have sat down and detail planned every chapter, what things I need to plant there, and so on. A lot of the times I forget things, and have to go back and add them, and so on.

I would say focus on the characters before the plot. If you manage to figure out how to write fun characters first, nobody will care if the plot is bland.

[January QnA, consolidated.](#)

[Feb 11, 2023](#)

As one of the upcoming changes of my Patreon, the QnA will no longer be split in spoiler and no spoiler questions and will assume that people have read Retribution. I will go back and change the level of the old ones in the future, but there's a lot so it will take a while. I've got some other cool things coming up once I have finished bugfixing stuff!

And with that, time for questions:

Hey, just wanted to say I love your work. I wasn't sure where to post the questions for the Q&A, but I just wanted to ask: How involved is the US President in the Farm, and what is the current

President's opinion on the Farm activities? Thanks!

Here is the thing. Theoretically, the Farm is not something that the current President should be aware of at all. It's a fringe thing, only vaguely connected to the US government in that way military-industrial firms often are. If a reporter would ask the question, there would be plausible deniability.

However, that is not completely true. In the past, President Ross was aware of the work going on there, if not personally involved. In fact, this was one of the reasons that he pushed for the Ranger system, and how independent he made them.

The current president, an older gentleman named Gerard Jonas, has no interest in the Farm. He is on his last term, and seems more focused on building his legacy of economic recovery than anything else. However, his vice-president Ronald McIntyre has traveled west on many occasions, and is reputed to be relying heavily on military donations. Whether this means that he is for or against the Farm and what goes on there, is an open question. What can be said for certain is that he's certainly not unaware.

What's the HG trio's love language? What about Zephyr and Blaze?

HG is touch, as might be expected. Nocturne's is gifts. Jake is... hmm... I think acts of service.

Zephyr is gifts, and Blaze is words of affirmation.

Did Locus leave any family or friends behind when she became a hero? What was her childhood like? How did she meet Porphyry, and what did they bond over?

Locus never felt like she had close friends growing up, she was always the odd one out, bullied and estranged for being smart but not having the family that could help her use that intelligence constructively. She was a bit of a recluse, thinking she was better and smarter than everybody else. She fell into bad company, and took the boost drugs betting that she'd ace that test like she did everything else. It worked, and to her horror and surprised she could now read people's minds. It made her realize that she had utterly misjudged many of the people around her and her family, and she was ashamed that she had thought so little of them. That was what pushed her to become a hero at such an early age, to become who she wanted to be and make up for who she had been. She met Porphyry very early on, and as immediately attracted to the fact that they don't really have any insecurities and says what they mean. Honest and confident. And Porphyry felt more than a bit protective of this young powerful girl who was dead set on becoming a hero, so hey, guess she needs a backup.

When did HG and Lord Ember start to see each other as an actual threat and rival to their empire? Have they met face to face? Do they do correspondence with each other?

They have met, back when Lord Ember was a Los Diablos villain called Emberfall. Fun fact, Lord Ember is also immune to HG's shenanigans, and an attempt or two on his life later, Ember decided that maybe he'd have more luck reinventing himself in San Francisco where he grew up. Which he did. Right now there is an uneasy truce between them.

Has Sentinel ever tried his hand at mastering lightning/thunder, or was his wind manipulation enough for him? Can he create sonic booms?

Sentinel can theoretically create thunderstorms by manipulating the winds and make clouds of that type form. He's trying not to do that though, it can be quite damaging. He can create sonic booms with enough space around him.

Who were some of the Boosts that had future vision?

There are two notable ones that are known. The oldest one was Harriet Gould, a boosted precog living in Britain in the late seventies. She became famous when it was revealed that she had helped preventing several murders and terrorist attacks by calling in with tips to the local law enforcement departments. Once she had become public she had a brief and infamous tour in America which ended with her having a mental breakdown on stage during her Los Angeles appearance. She had to be hospitalized and was flown back to Britain a month later, catatonic and unresponsive. The Big One happened six months later. She died the next day, and is credited with having predicted the disaster though nobody understood her garbled warnings at the time. Her precognition seems to have been focused on disasters, deaths and accidents.

There other one was Aaron Williams, and he was employed by the US military There is still debate whether he was a true precog, his talents depended on the information he had access to. Given enough background information he could accurately predict events, and even individuals' actions. Even with very little information his predictions were surprisingly solid, and he was considered a major asset by the Pentagon. He had an honorary rank as Colonel, and a spotless record until he failed to predict the Cavalier turning traitor and attacking the Pentagon. He died in the attack, but the record of his past predictions and analysis is still used to dictate policy today.

Will Step get the chance to make public examples of HG and Lord Ember if they angered Step enough?

Yeah, I think that would work.

On that note, can we kill either Jake or Nocturne (or both) in retaliation to HG if they did?

None of the HG trio has plot armor.

Does Sidestep have any forged ID? Passport, birth certificate, social security number etc. Or do they rely on their powers to get by in situations where they need those types of documents?

And if they do have forged documents, what name is written on there? Their old names, or a fake one, just incase the farm looks into things?

While Sidestep prefers to avoid being remembered, they do have paperwork just in case. A simple forged ID is handy to have around, and since the Free Western Territories doesn't have much of a paperwork record (no social security numbers and stuff) it is easy to be just as legitimate as everybody

else. Many people go to the west to disappear and reinvent themselves. What name there is on the forged documents is up to Sidestep.

Will there be any new RO's in future books or are you sticking to the current amazing ones?

I do have at least one new RO (maaaybe two) planned on the villain side, but nothing is solid until it is in the book. I want people who embrace the villain side to have some more choices than Dr. Mortum, and I had hoped to introduce them earlier, but I ended up cutting the book in half.

Has the Farm ever considered creating a standard regene? For example if a regene was created with enhanced strength and durability would they consider cloning that individual to serve as shock troops and grunt work for the SD?

The boosting process is too unreliable to be able to create a standard one, but it is one of the Farm's goals. They want the reliable grunt, but keep getting weird individuals.

Now that you've reached a sort of "halfway point" in the story (finished writing 2 books out of 4), have any of your characters developed in unexpected ways or are they more or less the same as you first envisioned them?

Ahahaha they have all gone weird except Ortega and Mortum. Developing the rest of the Rangers as RO's has meant I had to add a lot that wasn't there from the start, and think of them as people and not just opponents. They are still the same, but just with more nuance (Chen's dog, Danny's art, Argent's softness).

Has any character had an impact on you as a writer? If so, how?

Hmmm not Fallen Hero characters. But I would say that Hawke from DA2 really helped me write dialogue, since DA2 fanfiction was where I first started to write seriously in English and push my boundaries. I hated writing dialogue before.

What is Tina's organization focused on?

Reclaiming the West Coast for nature and letting it heal uninterrupted.

If Sidestep in some cases lied about losing their powers to the Rangers, is Mortum aware of it? What would they think of the possibility of someone losing their powers?

Mortum doesn't think it is possible to lose your powers, however, repressing them is. And the results can look similar up to a point.

Mortum mentioned to HG they researched them, where did Mortum get the information? Did Mitchell give it to Mortum or did Mortum get the information somehow else?

Mortum has contacts, but not gonna tell you who they are here. That will most likely come up in game.

How did Nocturne come to notice Ortega's potential danger? Was there any particular situation/reason or did she decide to take a deeper look due to maybe discussions with HG and/or Jake?

Nocturne is very good at seeing people for who they really are, and Ortega's bullshit facade doesn't fool her. If it was up to her, Ortega would be dead already.

On the precious QnA mentioned HG feels like they messed up with their younger sibling because of the way they had been, what kind of shortcomings/flaws does HG consider themselves to have had then?

Working too much, being too much of the overbearing older sibling, being too protective, or too pushy. The flavor changes by the day.

What kind of narrative voice would Nocturne, HG, and Jake have?

I won't know that until I write them. Often it takes a page or two before the voice clicks, and then I need to go back and correct the start.

What would HG's younger sibling's mindscape looked/felt like?

Hmm. Constrained and stormy.

What is the initial response once the ROs find out Sidestep has been kidnapped in that arc?

Since at that point they know about the whole ReGene thing, utter panic hidden to varying degrees. They will not let Sidestep stay lost this time...

Do you have an estimate on how many different branches there are for endings right now?

There are four major branches of endings, and inside each of them there minor branches. I would say about 11 or so when it comes to functional starts of the new book, but there are variations within them all.

The rat king is putting in the work, do they have an initial reaction to sidesteps accident?

Depends on whether they are a part of it or not. But they would be very worried!

You've mentioned that the new flesh cannibalized boosted individuals in an attempt to gain powers - did this work? are there rumors, whether or not they're true?

In some cases, it did work, yes. There are a lot of rumors about it, slightly overblown, but they are grounded in facts.

Considering the timing of their hallucinations, and their vividness, I'm willing to bet Ortega has a mindscar of their own. Is that right? And if yes, is it a HB scar, or a Sidestep scar?

It would be a Sidestep scar.

You said "Ortega lost a lot of trust that day" about Ashfall and his encounter with the Void. We know from the game that Ortega will end up stranded with Sidestep with their mods fucked up. Did Ashfall's behaviour / temptation directly bring about Ortega's demise there?

Ortega sees it that way. It might not be entirely fair.

You've said that Chen's "I can't tell you yet" hinges on him being "not sure [about what he found]" (or what it means). Does it mean that Chen is back to work on that particular piece of information? In that case, wouldn't that mean that he'll quickly go back on the radar of the people who attacked him last time?

That can certainly happen....

Was Chen's attack orchestrated because he dug into Sidestep, or into Anathema? Or is that the same thing?

I would call that the same thing, since it was the Heartbreak incident.

Can the Void appear to people as things other than human?

Human-adjacent for sure. Things that should not be human. Things that you hope are not human. Things that might not never have been human.

Void lore: what happened the last time Sentinel went up against the Void?

Sentinel is sadly not invulnerable to Void, and more susceptible than Hood was. It's not an easy thing to keep control, and Sentinel would not like to get into close quarters unless he had no other choice.

Are we going to be able to upgrade our bases in anyway? Personalize them in how we choose to modify them?

Not sure yet. I'll see what makes sense to write, and what will be left to headcanons.

What was Argent's vigilante outfit like?

One of those no arms and no legs wetsuits you use for surfing. It was pink and grey.

How often do real names slip out when on the job? Do heroes often know each others civilian identities to get these types of slip ups or is it mainly just friends? Has somebody like Ortega ever accidentally called Step or one of the other Rangers/heroes by their name when in suit?

It slips out easily, sadly. Some are better at it than others. Ortega is rather good at it, but it has happened once or twice in super stressful circumstances when the mouth acts before the brain does. This is one reason why Sidestep was so secretive.

Do Ortega and/or Chen have a Heartbreak scar of their own?

Chen does, Ortega doesn't. Just Sidestep trauma.

If so how high or low would theirs be?

Hmmmm about 50 or so.

Building on Anti's question - is Chen more certain of what he found after an mc crash regene reveal?

Yes, he is.

Any additional information you're willing to share about Sledgehammer?

I don't have much information there yet, there haven't been any need for it. Some people pop into life with tons of trivia, most are just a name.

Void Viewpoint Spoilers Sentinel mentions a "hero?" he dismisses immediately when winding across the field. Are the Rangers powerful enough to... get rid of other heroes without consequences, if for example Rangers and independent vigilantes happen to attack the same villain, but not in a coordinated effort? Has that happened to Steel or Ortega before? Have they ever had to get rid of a hero not in the midst of battle, but because they were going after the government / the rangers?

Yeah, that has happened. Sometimes it even comes to fighting. Rangers have very specific goals and rights, which might contrast, especially with vigilantes, but also with independent or corporate heroes who might not have access to the same information.

Will the original sibling always have a set personality, or is it going to change from Sidestep to Sidestep?

I will be vague about it, but there will be some common threads. I am not sure how much yet, but it will vary.

We've heard of a couple he/they's and a couple they/them's so far, any she/they's you could tell us about? 🙄✨

Well... there is one in game where it haven't really come much into play yet. Mayor Alvarez actually uses she/they. She mostly used they back before she became mayor, but there are some conservative forces there so the media treats her as pure she. Some things gets sacrificed for power. She didn't really wear skirts much before...

Was Mitchell a member of the cult of the green sky?

Nope.

The Void seems to have a particular interest in boosts that tap on dimensional planes, or ones that involve some change to the human body. What then was it about Ortega, a mod, that captivated Void so much?

This is going to sound so base, so mundane compared to all the other Void lore. But the fact is that Charge is hot. That's at the heart of it. A villain/hero crush. Not that Void would ever admit it, far better to turn Ortega into something worthy. Also, Ortega's mind is weird, even to Void.

What would void think of current Sidestep ?

So close to their full potential.

Does anyone of the information gatherers (Vernon, Mitchell, Marek, Mortum) know who Angie really is?

No.

Void Spoilers if their third eye shows them the truth, did The Void see that Sidestep was a Regene? Was the Void aware of the farm? Are they now?

No. But they saw the AI chip. The Void was not aware of the Farm.

Was Cornelius Vaughn from the same military squad as Cavalier?

No.

If the puppet releases the Catastrofiend, the Fiend seems to recognize them ("you?"). We've previously conjectured that it recognized Sidestep, but the Catastrofiend is not supposed to be telepathic. So, does the Catastrofiend recognizes Sidestep (and if yes, how?), or does it recognize the puppet?

It recognizes Sidestep... as for how. We will see ;)

Following up on that, if the Catastrofiend recognizes Sidestep, is it because of telepathic or psi-sensitive powers, or could it be tied to something else? Say, for example, if Sidestep and The Catastrofiend have both been tw experiments, blood dosed with Void blood, would they be "connected" in some ways, ways that the Catastrofiend would be sensitive to? Or would Void Blood make it psi-sensitive by default?

Void blood can make you psi-sensitive, but I would more say that it makes you sensitive to other...things. But yes, their "bond" it is more tied to Void than telepathy.

Did the Void Compound have stained-glass windows?

Nope.

When they modded Ortega, did the military mess with their brain, or... even edited their genome?

No genome edits. They did mess with Ortega's brain, that was necessary to hook up the mods to allow that kind of fine-tuned control.

Void lore spoilers: If Void deemed Sidestep an unsuitable candidate, why did they still choose to "kidnap" Sidestep alongside Ortega?

Because Sidestep might be a nice snack for the other cultists to feed on once the Void blood had been filtered through.

Did HG's youngest sibling know what HG's powers were?

No, they didn't.

Have there ever been any experiments/projects Mortum regrets conducting or being apart of? If so, what was it/were they?

A few. Mortum says that they don't do regrets, but that's not true. They have done some work for Psychopathor that they would rather have undone.

We know that physical gestures can help with telepathic power usage/moves, but do colours and patterns have any influence as well?

It all depends on the person. Like with all powers, getting in the right mood is important. Some people use music, for example.

Did Void show the same interest in Hood that they showed in Ortega?

Nope.

What's Locus's mindscape like?

Blank clouds filled with whispers and projected text bubbles.

Could HG make it so somebody wouldn't be affected by a Heartbreak 2.0?

Possibly, with proper preparation.

What does each member of the team feel about the return of the Catastrofiend, if it's out? What did Argent tell them?

Argent told them she ran across it heading into the sewers and cornered it there. She tore off an arm, but it managed to escape. As for what people think, you'll have to see that in game.

What access do ReGenes have to hygiene at the farm? How in control are they when it comes to keeping themselves clean? Is there any consistency to it? Does the access differ depending on the job they have, their behaviors, or not different at all from ReGene to ReGene?

Hygiene is mandatory and enforced. It's a standard health issue, not up to the individual Regene.

tw: body horror, cannibalism Question: We know that the organs of boosts are sometimes harvested in the black market for transplants into other people, but has there ever been a particular villain who would kill boosted individuals and then eat said organs in order to gain their powers? or at least attempt too?

Yeah, hello Cult Of The New Flesh, among others.

Chen seems to allude that the "pressure" in heartbreak ended before the bomb. However, not all Sidestep's would have gotten the "Bullseye" achievement in Heartbreak.

Exactly.

Does this imply that the "pressure ending" is independent from whether or not Sidestep shot Heartbreak?

Yes, the cause of it can vary.

Will there ever be ways we can proactively lower sd_clue in the future?

Possibly, not sure yet.

We know about HG's mindscape: what do Nocturne's and Jake's look like?

Nocturne's is a richly furnished apartment with tinted windows and many rooms. Jake's is a beautiful tropical beach with a thick forest further inland and the sound of people in the distance.

What would Void have thought of the nanovores?

Oh wow. I have not considered that, but now my mind is buzzing with possibilities. I am not sure yet, I need to think.

There can be several instances in Retri where we can use Bo's driving speciality, so will there be upcoming instances where we'll get to use Rosie for muscle or another type of speciality she may have we may not be aware of yet?

Yeah, sadly Rosie got a bit cut when I cropped the book. However, she's got some nice stuff in the final chapter depending on path. But yes, she will have.

When's Cavalier's birthday? And his famous opponent- Skybright's?

I honestly have no idea!

What does the Catastrofiend eat? What's their favorite snack?

Everything. It used to love Doritos.

Are Five Pennies' pennies sentient?

Probably not.

If yes--can Five Pennies "talk" to them? Whether yes or no, could Argent and her friends "talk" to them?

They are pennies.

Has Mortum ever been commissioned by the Mayor (for tech or armor work)?

Nope. The companies running the place don't like the competition.

Piggyback: By the Guardians? The Rangers? Other government/authorities-allied heroes?

No heroes, but some vigilantes.

Did you choose the name Ljungstrand (be honest, is it "a strand of Jung" with an added L for pizzazz) as a gesture towards Jung at all? Is there something in Jung that might have inspired your take on telepathy and that we can dig at (I'm looking at Synchronicity and Collective Consciousness intently

Nope, it is a swedish surname meaning Heatherbeach. I am not that into Jung.

Where was Ashfall during the Heartbreak incident?

He was working to bust a boost drug smuggling ring near the Mexican border.

How would sentinel fare in a negative vs positively pressurized room?

Better in a positively one, but if sufficiently negatively pressured the walls might be easy to crack.

Does the Free Western Territories possess military forces, even if its a glorified corporate security force, or is it completely dependent on the US military for protection against foreign threats? In that vein does the US military maintain any of their old military bases in the FWT or would that violate the agreement between the US govt and the FWT?

There is no official military force, but there are several military firms/companies working out of there. Think Blackwater or Wagner. Also, some company and city security forces are strong enough to be counted among small armies.

The US army have a few bases in the FWT, a bit like they do in Japan and Germany. They are there to defend against foreign threats, but have their powers severely constrained under the current treaty.

If you already know, what does Five Pennies look like? What's their general mind ambiance / telepathic vibe?

I have no idea! Rancid?

Curious: can a telepath of decent strength "feel" when another telepath's mind moves as far as body hopping goes? Or do they have to have an inclination towards that side of telepathy themselves?

It would depend very much in the telepath, it's not a given that they would notice.

Which cities did HB hit before LD?

The first one where they were spotted and their powers had started working at close range was Lancaster.

Do we know how long after heartbreak the funeral for step and anathema took place?

I would say about three weeks.

Considering the farm prefers regenes not get any funny ideas about them being actual people, but a bond of sorts to the handler would make training easier, how are regenes like cuckoos introduced to their (new) handlers? Do they get handed to a handler like someone picking up a grocery store order, or does an actual introduction take place?

More like a grocery store order, but then it depends a lot on the handlers how they want to do things. There's a lot of variation there.

What made Chen decide to try to interact with and get to know Sidestep, post heartbreak? How has his perception of Step changed from when they were in their vigilante days to who they are now? (assuming Step is a nokill Step or Chen had no clue they're the villain).

At first, it was suspicion, but very soon it turned to guilt as he started adding things up. He knows he's made mistakes, and doesn't want to repeat them. He knows he saw the things in Sidestep that he did, but misinterpreted the reason.

How really aware is Mia of Vernon's "project" and what went down during the funeral? She says to the villain that she only knows that it's smth big, while she tells the puppet that it's not her story to tell; meaning she knows more than she let on previously.

Mia knows more that she lets on, but not so much about the Funeral specifically.

Did any of the Ranger teams ever conduct missions going into other states or did they have a strict area of responsibility and jurisdiction they were limited too? if the former, did the Los Diablos Rangers ever conduct any missions in or near Nevada (with or without the approval/assistance of Marshal Dave)?

In general, they stick to their state. If they operate elsewhere, it's supposed to be in cooperation with the local Ranger's team. Sentinel was often operating in other states, as was Hood. This was due to their specialized powers, which could be very useful under certain circumstances. These days, Herald has on occasion helped other Rangers teams out. Nevada has not been on their list.

Another question: In regards to Sidestep's mental state going into Revelations, just how far could we potentially push it? is it possible that we could end up at the point where Sidestep completely snaps mentally?

I am not sure yet. Playing around with some possibilities, but I need to get further in planning the book because I know what end states I want.

Is there any secret agenda behind why Argent and/or Daniel were recruited for the Rangers?

Nope, just good candidates.

We know Daniel can be prone to floating when he sleeps--when he has a nightmare, does he sink?

Nope, that's also floating.

Considering his advice, how well have Joes' relationships gone? Does he have anyone he's currently seeing?

Joe has a long time girlfriend, yes. They are happy, but he's not the marrying kind.

Do any of the named heroes and villains (from the books) share a familial connection that we are still unaware of?

Not that I remember on the top of my head.

Does Lady Argent ever hear fans say, "I thought you'd be taller." and if so, how often does it happen?

It happens on occasion, one reason she tends to wear very high heels when being official.

Does the Farm have spies within Hollow Ground's organisation? Or are HG and their organisation not significant enough to warrant keeping tabs on?

It is not in the Farm's current interest, no.

Is Mitchell threaded?

Only lightly.

Has Herald had to lift anything on the scale of that bus (or more) since that incident?

No, thankfully not.

To what extent outside of flying do his powers come into play during his day to day Ranger work?

He basically does it everywhere. It's an integral part of how he lives his life.

You've said he does a lot of training his powers (enough that Ortega chides him for being too lazy to go for a proper run), what does that boost training workout routine look like?

Basically precision flying and lifting, speed and agility.

Danny says he almost didn't survive his boosting. Was it all because of Josh's powers going out of control or was he also having trouble controlling his own? If the latter, what was going wrong with his powers?

Mostly it was because of Josh, Danny was actually pretty okay with his powers from the start.

Was the death of HG's sibling not put in the records? Did the police cover up their death? Ortega doesn't seem to have found out about it. Unless it was actually registered and they did find out, but just brushed it off as untrue...

Oh it was put in the records, but Ortega thought it looked utterly faked.

Will we, in game, ever return to the Heartbreak site?

In book three!

Was there any particular instance that made Blaze realise how sneaky/underhanded Ortega can be?

Just many cases of recognizing a bullshitter when he sees one.

Has the Guardians ever worked with the Special Directive?

Nope, not yet.

Who is the best and worst wingman/wingwoman in the main cast?

Best: Chen. Worst: Argent.

Did Mitchell bring their own sources/connections to HG's operation or did they only gain access to them after joining?

Mitchell had a lot of sources, but got even more after joining HG.

Is Mitchell a real name or a pseudonym?

Real name.

How many, if any, of the rangers know Heartbreak's civilian name?

Chen and Argent.

What were the first thoughts that went through Nocturne's and Jake's minds when they first saw Sidestep in the flesh?

Nocturne: Oh. That's interesting. And then she mostly focused on HG's reactions.

Jake: Wtf, this might complicate things.

Did either of them think that HG wasn't entirely honest with them about their little sibling/family at that point?

No, they trust HG to tell the truth.

What kind of cars does the cast (who have a licence) drive?

Dr. Mortum drives a prototype, it's a one of a kind custom build.

Ortega mostly drives motorcycles, something in the style of a 2022 Honda CB650R for action, and the classic Indian Chief for cruising.

Argent drives something small and cute, like a MINI hatchback.

Danny doesn't drive.

Chen drives something like a Land Rover Discovery. Whatever he gets sponsored, as long as it's good for Spoon and got a four wheel drive.

What were the scope of Special Directive operations outside of US soil, would the cuckoo's like our dear Sidestep be used to infiltrate foreign governments?

On occasion yes, and it has happened in the past. Like all shady organizations, they are not bound by international laws and treaties. That being said, the foreign incidents have mostly been on Canadian and Mexican soil, not going very far from the Americas.

Has argent ever visited her own grave?

No. That would be creepy.

Do you plan on giving Chen other opportunities to talk about the pictures he found in Book 3?

Oh yes, he needs to bare his hear.

Which of the Rangers, past and present, have the biggest/most active fanclubs?

I mean we all know it's Charge...

Is Mortum a boost?

If they are, they haven't admitted to it or shown any sign of it.

Does whoever orchestrated the nanosurge have any other plans for LD?

Oh yes, definitely. Maybe you'll find out more about that in book three...

Is anyone else who has been named in the book also threaded?

Honestly, probably yes.

How have those who pissed Hollow Ground enough to be on their kill scope really died?

It varies, mostly shot, that's usually the quickest way.

How would HG take a Sidestep (little sibling) joining Lord Ember's organisation because they thought he offered a better deal than them?

A massive personal affront, and if there wasn't war between HG and Lord Ember before, it certainly would be now.

If there weren't dampeners on the Carter property, would step have been able to sense the mind of the person who set the explosion? Were they still there when step arrived?

Nope, not there any longer.

Was the person who set off the bomb in Carter's mansion also a telepath?

Nope, they were not.

[Discord info](#)

[Feb 3, 2023](#)

Since the discord invitations seem to be going out of business even if I set forever, here is one that will last for seven days.

If it doesn't please DM me!

<https://discord.gg/QvWjNE2C>

Fallen Hero: Retribution

Stay one step ahead of your past and build your future as Los Diablos' greatest villain. Can you keep up the lies, or will you risk everything trusting the people you once called friends?

<https://www.choiceofgames.com/user-contributed/fallen-hero-retribution/>

It is released!

[Feb 2, 2023](#)

Finally Fallen Hero: Retribution is released, thank you for your patience!

Have fun, and don't forget to write a review!

Thank you so much for your support, I really couldn't have done it without you.

Fallen Hero: Retribution

Stay one step ahead of your past and build your future as Los Diablos' greatest villain. Can you keep up the lies, or will you risk everything trusting the people you once called friends?

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2:nd February is getting closer!

[Jan 27, 2023](#)

The demo for Fallen Hero: Retribution is up! Go have fun and tell your friends!

Time for questions of the month again!

[Jan 20, 2023](#)

Well, it is time for your questions this month again! I am currently in the process of revamping the Patreon, though you won't see any changes until the feb/march update. Going to be some new stuff once Retribution is out, but until then, feel free to ask anything!

[The Void 4 - Sentinel](#)

[Jan 7, 2023](#)

It's been a long time coming.

The evening is quiet and the sky is clear. Just like last time, the winds are heavy with promise. Not mine. Not yet. I lay on my back in the sand, watching the sunset. Waiting for something to change.

I'd rather have been up there, but the radar would have spotted me and so I drove. My bike is laying down, like I am. I'm amazed that it's still working. John did good work, and I'd rather trust this old thing in the desert than anything new. Or maybe I just feel that something of John's should be here for the final assault.

Final? Hopefully.

How many times have we thought that? A decisive strike, a broken cult, only for it to be rebuilt because the Void was still out there. Gone. How do you catch someone who can step through walls and shadows alike? How do you make sure they stick around to see the show?

Bring the right bait, as John would say.

That's how you make people walk into your trap. Was that what got him killed? I wish I knew. I wish I knew what kind of information would be worth enough to take that kind of risk for. I wish he would have told me. I wish he would have asked me to keep an eye on things. I wish he wouldn't have gone alone.

I wish he wouldn't have died.

"Hope you're watching from up there," I whisper to the darkening sky. "Hope you will forgive me." He probably would. Too soft. Always too soft. I keep remembering those parts, but as kind as John could be, I can't forget that Mount Hood was always ready to do what needed to be done. Pragmatic. Like I am. Like all of us who lived through the Big One. Can't afford to have illusions of a fair world. It isn't.

At least Charge is aware of that as well.

Does Ortega know that they are the bait? Most likely, always too sharp behind that charming smile. Clever in the way they pretend to be anything but. But they don't know the whole truth. They weren't the one who saw the room. The posters of their face. The plans.

I hope Hood will forgive me for that as well. For destroying them. I couldn't risk anybody deciding that Charge was too valuable not to risk. Ortega wouldn't like that, of course. They like the danger. But orders are orders and there are limits to the kind of disobedience you can get up to as a Marshal. This could just as easily be in the San Diego jurisdiction. And then I wouldn't get to be here.

And I want to.

"Sentinel?" The communicator crackles to life. Steel.

"Any word?" I sit up and scan the horizon, but everything looks calm. The sun has set now, the crimson is darkening to purple.

"Not yet. They are behind schedule."

"Don't fret. Not by much. You can't stick to a timeline when it involves that much walking. You know Anathema isn't the fastest." But they agreed. I still can't believe that. Maybe they want closure as much as I do.

"What should we do if they don't call in? I can't do a point-to-point in the direction of the compound. That might be picked up."

"They will." I will the confidence to shine through. "You're not used to the supporting role, are you?"

"No," he admits. "I prefer to go in with the first wave."

"In an attack. But this infiltration." Sometimes Steel is still very much the soldier. What would he say if he knew I had read his file? All of it? "We follow the plan."

"Fine. Contact me when you hear anything. Over and out."

The communicator goes quiet, and I shake some dust from my braids. I can't say I like this plan either, but it is the only one I could see working. Even if it meant putting Charge in harm's way.

Not that they'd mind that. Would probably laugh and volunteer. Would say it was worth it if we succeed.

And if we don't?

I banish that thought, and ask Hood for forgiveness one more time. Above me, the sky is dark like condemnation. The stars blink to life, one by one as the last hint of crimson fades.

The communicator crackles once more, filled with static. "Charge to Sentinel. The power is down. We are moving in. Give us ten minutes, then clear what's left outside."

"Roger that." I stand up, my mouth suddenly dry. This is it. "I'll coordinate with Steel as planned. Over and out."

I pull down my goggles and put on my mask once I've made sure the earplugs are in. The landscape is a nauseating pale green, enhanced starlight that reminds me of other worlds. Worse worlds.

Am I doing the right thing? Have I made a mistake?

"Steel," I say, opening a channel. "Charge is on the move. I'll drop in ten minutes to clear up the outside. Make sure you stay outside the perimeter until then."

"Roger. I'll make sure nobody goes in or out for now."

"Do that. I'd rather not have any surprise reinforcements. Over and out." Too many things that could be unaccounted for. Just like the old days.

I take a deep breath, feeling the air in my lungs and the air surrounding me. I stretch my senses far and wide and feel the winds pick up. There is no room for doubts now. Only surety. I crouch down, and then I jump. As high as I can.

The wind takes me to the skies.

Sometimes I wish I had words for this. How it feels soaring high over the landscape, the wingsuit carrying me like an errant kite. I have a body, sure, but I am the wind. My senses stretch to the horizon, and every breath is an eddy in the fabric of the world. Down below, lightning flashes in the dark clouds, obscuring my nightvision. Looks like Ashfall's and Charge's little plan is working. Clever.

Not for the first time I wonder if Void is right. Are we even human anymore?

I'm not sure I feel it. Not up here. Among the winds, my body is mainly leverage. The goggles protect my eyes, and the earplugs helps with the noise. It's cold, but my wingsuit is insulated, a dry suit for an explorer in the higher realms. Soaring instead of diving.

I tighten my grasp of the winds, twisting them to my will. I can feel the temperature difference, the weather was one reason we picked this day for the assault. Wet and warm, more moisture than is normal for these parts. And I can bring the cold.

Breathing in the winds, I feel the rollercoaster thrill of dropping pressure. Cold from above. Warm and moist from below. Twist and turn, and once the rotation starts, it's easy to keep it going. You don't work against the wind, you twist with it.

Ten minutes? There is no more lightning, Charge and Ashfall must have gone underground, just like we planned. There are flashlights and revving engines, the rest of the compound stirring to life. I keep hold of the rotation as I drop, the clouds condensing into darkness as the air chills. Above me in the dark, a supercell starts to form, a miniature weather system held in place by human will and anger.

Human?

I fall, and the wind twists with me. How many have the New Flesh killed by now? How many the Green Sky? How many lives on our conscience when we could have stopped it years ago? How many will I kill today? How many do I want to?

There are not supposed to be civilians around. Not right now. But if there was, would it really matter? They would be doomed to a painful death as their apotheosis failed, or be turned into a monster perpetuating the cycle. It's better it ends now. It's better I do it. I know the stakes. Steel would not argue, he's seen war. Everybody else is either not present, or below ground.

I'm as bad as Thunderhead.

A gunshot rings out, hitting the wings, spinning me around. So they've spotted me already. Of course they would be ready, they must have known I would be coming. If not today, then tomorrow. I see a flier rise to meet me, no wings, which enables them to maneuver in the storm. I laugh and curl up, wrapping the winds tighter around me. Breathing life. Breathing death.

Above me, the clouds twist faster, reaching down for the ground. I give it my all, pulls down cold, drags in warm. Turn and twist and people scream as the twister curls into reality.

"No!" A flier hits me with a tackle, but the finger on the ground is two now, dancing around each other, growing as they suck dust and debris from the dirt. Dead man walking, one step, a twist and a curve and it's on the compound.

I will it to stop.

A hand is hitting my face, goggles sliding crooked and I open my eyes to eyes as green as witchfire.

"What have you done?" the echo asks, borrowed power mixing with innate abilities.

I resist the urge to answer, instead I stab him. Perhaps he was expecting powers, but he doesn't know me. There are precious few things a blade in the gut can't solve, and this is not one of them. There is a scream through blood-flecked lips, and then the wind takes him.

Hero?

Not the first one who made that mistake. There are two kinds of heroes in this land. The ones who came here after the chaos, and the ones who lived through it. I don't have the patience for people like this

anymore. I've seen them at their worst. Perhaps that makes me as bad as them. Perhaps that could make me worse.

But not yet.

I can feel the buildings breaking apart, people and vehicles sucked up and tossed carelessly across the countryside. If anybody lives, they are up to Steel to deal with. Oh, there the roof went, adobe walls exploding from the changing pressure. Alright. That's enough. I tear off my mask, my nose is bleeding from the blows and it was getting hard to breathe. I clench my fists and push, sending the tornado meandering northeast. It will die out on it's own in due time, the conditions here are not favorable for a long life.

Without me pushing.

I land on the courtyard, a final updraft covering me in dust as I cushion my fall. It is swept clean, the walls still whole, but everything remaining is crushed into the corners. Cars twisted around pillars, the houses half in ruins. Maybe I went a bit overboard. I hear a moan coming from one of the piles, and walk over there, arm covering my face in case they have firearms.

I needn't have worried.

"Ah. Sledgehammer, is it?" I lean down over the grayish shape, trapped under a twisted Jeep. It makes sense, her metal form must have made her too heavy to carry off easily. "Do you plan to break my legs now like you promised last time?"

"Fuck. You." Words pushed forth with effort. One of her arms is twisted wrong, and from the look of things her legs might not be in better shape. Iron can be surprisingly soft and impacts heavily.

"You're not my type." I look around, but there are no others that I can see. Good.

"You. Should have." A pained gasp. "Taken the offer. Don't you see?"

"See what?" I send up a flare to signal Steel that things are covered here.

"You're not human either." Sledgehammer attempts to push the Jeep off, but there's no leverage. "You're one of us."

"I'm human," I say, wishing I was sure of that. "And you're all loonies." Not wise to make fun of them, but I can afford to take this seriously. Not with my lungs still hurting from what I did. Was. Dead man walking north, collapsing into dust.

"Bullshit." She spits, and I wonder how deep the metal goes that she still has spit. To the bone? How would that work? "Let us show you the truth of the world."

"Answers are overrated." I look up, the sound of motors are growing louder, as Steel is going in for landing.

"The truth is everything," she hisses. "You already changed yourself to be in line with your truth, why not take the final step?"

"Shut up." I don't kick her, I know from experience how much that would hurt. Instead I gesture for Steel, who lands, then walks over. Heavy footsteps. "Everything cool outside?"

"So far. I'll be up again in a moment. Just wanted to check in." I can't see his face behind the helmet. Military VTOL armor. Was it something similar he used in the army?

"Got any cuffs?" I ask, looking over at Sledgehammer. "I'd rather not leave her here unguarded."

"Sure, I—"

"—help!" Ashfall's voice, and we both turn as he stumbles out of the half-ruined house. Naked.

"I got you." I run forward, sweeping him up in my arms. He's shaking, shock and cold most likely. "What happened?"

"Void," he whispers, a strange vulnerability in his voice. "Too many. She took Charge. I barely got away."

"I understand." And I do, though I keep my face calm when I spot a hint of green in his dark eyes. She. Huh. "I'm going in. Steel?"

"Yes?" He finishes cuffing Sledgehammer to the Jeep. The magnetic strips might look thin, but they cling to her skin like chains.

"Get Ashfall a spare skinsuit and secure this area. I'm going in."

"With all due respect," he starts. "Like hell you are. We go in together."

"Yeah," Ashfall nods. "Just give me a moment."

"That's not the plan." I give Steel a stern look, but I only see my own reflection.

"This wasn't the plan either. We will improvise." He holds his ground, which is impressive.

"Fine." I'm less bothered than I pretend. I trust him to agree with my calls. Ashfall is the bigger worry.

"You okay there, kid?"

"I am." He's struggling into the spare skinsuit, the limp, inactive fabric hard to deal with. I resist the urge to help him. He needs to get his confidence back.

"With Charge their captive, they have no choice but to remain here for some time." I scan the horizon, but there is no trace of an enemy. "That means we have a chance to take them down."

"What do you mean?" Steel is moving his scanner, doing the same as I did, but with better chance to pick something up. "What makes you sure they won't just kill Charge?"

"Oh, I'm sure," I say, with grim determination. "They want to turn Charge. Induct them in the Green Sky."

"Fuck." Steel swears, but doesn't contradict me.

"Why?" Ashfall has pulled the suit up now, activating the tension battery. It contracts around him tightly. There is a tone in his voice I don't like. Does he sound jealous?

"Don't ask me," I lie. "The important thing here is that an induction takes time. And Void can't take Charge with them if they teleport."

"Unless there are other exits." Steel looks at me as if he knows I am hiding things, but don't want to bring it up. Ashfall is not a Ranger.

"Good point," I say. "You have the best scanning equipment. It would be best if you took to the skies and searched the surroundings. Ashfall and I will go in."

"Understood." Steel's voice is hard, but he knows he's played himself. "Bring Charge back."

"Sidestep and Anathema is still down there as well." I clap him on the shoulder. "We won't be alone."

Underground, the air still smells like static. I take point, Ashfall following behind. I'm not sure he's able to transform yet, and this way I can send my winds ahead.

Fingertips following the wall.

Some people think I'm useless underground. Granted, I can't use any of the atmospherics around me, but the narrow corridors also help constrain my powers. Focused down a tunnel, it becomes nothing more than the barrel of a gun, and I am the bullet.

I try not looking at the murals as I descend the stairs.

Ashfall follows.

"You have fought the Void before." His voice is softer than normal, no longer the hero. Just a nervous young man.

"Since the start." I send down a gust, it curls effortlessly downwards, but I sense no movement. "This was your first time, right?"

"Yeah. I..." he hesitates. "I saw something. No. She saw. Me?" He pauses in front of one of the murals, a stylized piece of seven heavens and the angels that flies between them. Borrowed christian mythology, familiar to so many.

"That's what they do." I stop, focusing on my winds as I look at Ashfall. He rubs his eyes but doesn't meet my gaze. "They get in your head and makes you doubt the world."

"I don't doubt." He bites his lip. "But I wish I know what she was."

"Someone who has killed more people than Psychopathor. Someone who captures people they deem worthy, tortures them into submission and feeds them boost drugs until they either die or change." My voice is hard. "I have seen the dead." On my conscience as well.

"I know." He sighs, as if resigning himself to the truth. "Let's continue."

We walk, through empty stairs and burned tunnels. There are signs of battles here, and Ashfall relates what happened. No bodies though, which mean they must have pulled them back. Back behind the barricades.

As if they would hold.

Eventually we reach a locked door, thick iron, locked securely.

"I can go under and open up," Ashfall says, though he's covered with a thin film of sweat. Still shivering, despite the skinsuit.

"Don't worry. I can deal with this. Step back around the corner." I make sure he's safely out of sight, then I focus on the door. On the corridor behind me. I don't hear voices, most likely this is the first in a long line of doors, blocking everybody from the most holy. Had John still been alive, they wouldn't have dared to stay underground.

But he's gone.

I send the wind flying, strengthening it, strengthening it until the door starts to rattle. Only then do I walk back to Ashfall, around the bend, and then I PULL. The door flies off the hinges, the difference in pressure too much to deal with. It impacts the wall right in front of me, and I do not lessen the winds before I step out.

I keep them wrapped around me.

Of course they attack. An ambush, intending to take us down. My winds are hurricane strong now, and it's all I can do to keep my own footing. They have no chance. What better bludgeon for people than stone walls and metal doors? None of the heavy hitters either, they should have known better.

They should have known better...

What have I missed? I can't run, but I pick up speed, keeping Ashfall close so I can weave the winds around us both. One final door, I can feel my winds rushing under it, a massive cavern there and then I push it back. It bends, then buckles, then flies inwards, and I tug to send it to the ceiling. No hurting what I can't feel. Charge is here somewhere.

Oh no.

The room is bright with candles as I step through the door, quieting my winds to avoid snuffing them out. I see Charge on the floor, unconscious and restrained. Sidestep as well, equally out of it. There are four harbingers standing close to them, too close to easily hurt. I know them all, Arsenaux, tall and imposing with her fire. Ladybug, shelled and bright. Swordsman still has his sword sheathed, and Venomous has his foot on Charge's back. There is a fifth girl, which I don't know, which must be new.

"Welcome." There is void, a chuckle in the shadows, a shade of green in the air.

"Do you think holding them hostage would stop me?" I can see the Void now, here, present. Short next to Arsenaux, with their hand on the woman I don't know. Her eyes glow bright green, she must have been fed Void blood recently. If I struck now, I could get them all. Void is fast, but I am faster. And they think I would hesitate. I'm not that precise, chances are my friends would die too.

I should do it.

And yet I hesitate. Like last time. Fuck.

"Long enough," the Void says, whispering in my ears from the other side of the room. "Goodbye Nazar, we'll see each other again."

And with that, the group shimmers, they linger long enough to hear my scream of frustration as the new girl teleport them out.

All of them.

[Spoilers QnA december](#)

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Is Sidestep's vision of Themmy any indication of how the real Themmy would have responded and spoken to them, had Themmy survived Heartbreak?

Yeah, at least Sidestep thinks so. It was nt out of character.

Is it possible that sidestep could have been revived or at least remade had they died during the heartbreak incident? For example since sidestep has a AI chip and the farm probably still has access to the DNA used to make the VAT grown body. Would a regene with both the same genes and sidestep's AI chip technically be the same person or would that be entirely new individual?

That would be an entirely new individual, so no revivification here.

What are some of the things that HG first recalls about their younger sibling when they think about them? What memories they have a harder time remembering or have grown more vague over the years?

I think what sticks are unfortunately the missed chances. The times they argued. The advice taken the wrong way. The missed opportunities. HG feels like they messed up, if they hadn't been the way they are, then their sibling might still be alive. Yes, HG takes that blame on themselves. I think the actual events, personalities and memories of the sibling has faded, since HG tends to focus on their relations to them. Not on them personally.

What's the most common way HG uses their powers and what are some of the more rare examples?

The most common are calming small fires. A touch "calm down," a brush "let's talk," a handshake "pleasure to meet you, we will do great work together." Just things to open opportunities, not intended to last. All they need is a foot in the door, and they are convinced that reason and opportunities will do the rest. It is actually rare for proper, long term threading, that requires effort, and in many cases, repeat exposure. But in all cases, HG tries to nudge rather than force. If there are people completely opposed, it is easier to remove them completely than thread them. That's what Jake is for.

What kind of impressions/opinions do HG and Ortega have on each other?

Honestly, it wasn't bad at the start. Hg felt Ortega was a bit of a charming airhead, and Ortega thought HG was charming but sleazy. Hood changed all that. Now Ortega thinks HG is a manipulative, murderous backstabber, out to rule the city. And HG thinks Ortega is fanatical and narrow minded.

Do Nocturne and Jake have any opinion on Ortega considering they're the Ranger most focused on taking down HG or is Ortega right now only kind of an irrelevance/nuisance to them?

Nocturne is the one that knows there's more to Ortega than meets the eye, and is the main reason Ortega's plans so far has failed. Jake would like to beat their smug face in the ground.

What would Ace have thought of Mortum?

Would they have gotten along with our good doctor?

I don't think they would have gotten along very well. Ace was spiky, and didn't get close to people.

What would Ortega think if Sidestep suddenly got more comfortable showing their skin after they used the regenerator? It'd be pretty sus behaviour.

Ortega would chalk it all up to their efforts, finally Sidestep trusts them enough!

Once we get our hands on the regenerator, can we choose to keep our tattoos? As a reminder/promise to ourselves or something.

Oh yes, this will be entirely up to you. Not everyone might want to get through with it.

What was HG's little sibling's personality like?

An independent little shit.

In terms of power scaling, where does orange fall when it comes to Re-Gene tattoos?

The color has nothing to do with power.

If a Sidestep's vice had damaged their organs sufficiently, eg smoking or drinking, would the Farm had fixed that while Sidestep was in their care? New kidney, cleaning up the vocal chords, what have you?

Haha nope. Not on the second run. No repairs then apart from what was needed to keep them alive. Any damage while they were still there would have been dealt with. If it affected performance, that is.

What's Shroud's opinion of the Farm? How would she react if asked to help destroy it (by a fellow cuckoo)?

Spoilers, spoilers. Can't tell you that when it might come up in game!

If there's anyone that Step considers their sibling, would HG see them as part of the family too?

Oh yes, definitely.

How did HG's little sibling die?

The details HG found was that they died in custody, and they think that points to either an overdose, or police abuse. They never got a clear answer, but made sure to ruin the lives of the people involved anyway. They deserved it.

I think you said we'll cross paths with The Catastrofiend whether we get the gun or **not. Is Arsenaux planning to unleash it on her enemies, or would that version of the Catastrofiend be on the run?**

Spooilers.

How would Ortega react if they found out about Argent scarring/injuring Sidestep during the few occasions where it's possible, ie the hospital ending or in the sewer?

"What the fuck, Angie? What the fuck?"

How long had the puppet been on Ortega's radar before they decided it was worth orchestrating a meet cute?

A couple of months, and then Ortega was bored one day.

In book 3, will we get to see the scenes involving the Puppet/other characters?

I'm not sure how I want to do it yet. Most likely not, but I have a few ideas how it could work. We'll see.

When Argent first 'ate' someone, was it on purpose?

No, the nanovores reacted purely on instinct. Argent was horrified.

Prior to approaching the puppet in Rebirth, was Ortega aware that the puppet had originally been in a coma?

Yes, they checked that out. Drew a blind before that though. Ortega's theory was that there had been an attempt on their life, and they changed their identity as a result.

When Chen went looking for Sidestep, did he also go looking for Themmy?

Of course.

What suit of cards' ace is Ace named after?

Ace of spades, of course.

When Sidestep asks what Chen found when he went looking, why is Chen's answer "I can't tell you yet?" What's the reason why he does not want to share what he discovered?

Because he's not sure.

How would HG (big sibling) feel about a marriage for love between Step (little sibling) and one (or even two!) of the Rangers?

Conflicted. On one hand, what the hell, risky. On the other hand, what an opportunity! And love is always worth taking a risk for.

Can we flirt with Chen in our villain persona?

That should be doable!

In heartbreak, the victims drew eyes and/or tried to claw their eyes out. Is the reason for this similar to how Sidestep can attempt to 'reach for their eyes to gouge them out' in a post-mc crash ending when relating about that farm?

Yes, indeed it is.

Is whatever big threat Sidestep believes is coming related to any of the imposters?

Nope.

Adding to this question - if he did look for Themmy, is whatever Chen found re. Themmy part of the information they can't tell Sidestep yet?

Yes.

[December QnA here we go](#)

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Any IFs out there that caught your attention or tv shows you watch? What's your favourite genre?

I don't really care about the genre, I just want something to grab a hold of me. I am so behind on checking out IF's, but I just bought and love "The Passenger," and I look very much forward to "I, the forgotten one" this summer. Both are very much my vibe, and I can't recommend them enough.

As for TV, I am currently watching "Gundam: The Witch from Mercury" which is a goddamn delight. "Kamen Rider: Geats" is turning out to be one of the better ones so far, which is much needed since I didn't even manage to finish the last one. I recently finished "Kamen Rider Black Sun," which surprised the hell out of me. Nicely political. This Christmas I also watched Hautalehto: Kylmä syli, a Finnish detective show which was criminally charming. I really watch too few things, my watchlist is a mile long.

Do you have, or give yourself, a deadline to get things done? If so, is it a step by step deadline or an overall goal?

I need deadlines, and they need to be close. Step by step all the way. It is tricky though, it is hard to tell how long time things take, and if you are too strict, you will feel like a failure. An overall goal is too easy to put off. And yes, I fail my self-imposed deadlines all the time, but never my outside ones. That's worth losing sleep over.

How respectful were each of the Rangers (and company) in regards to Sidestep's no hospitals policy? What did each of them think was the reason behind it?

I think Ortega was the most pushy one, mainly because they were very much "But this doctor is okay, really." I think they talked a bit about it behind Sidestep's back, and came to a consensus that it was probably because Sidestep might be wanted. Being a reformed petty criminal would explain everything, and since they were doing good at the moment nobody wanted to push the issue.

Any short story ideas you're willing to share? Or are you currently only focused on the void?

Currently, the Void one is my main focus. I need to get back to Bones of the Land (the Hood story) too, but work has been very very hectic lately. Been too exhausted to write when I come home.

How many ideas have you had that won't fit into the Fallen Hero universe? Will you someday recycle those ideas for another story?

SO MANY. Seriously, I do not lack for cool ideas, I have a number of them. And even though I stole some bits of them for FH, there is still a lot remaining. I just try not to think about it, not to distract myself. But, right before the holidays, my brain apparently got feeling and decided to map out my "crap dad" series of books, so now that one is prepared in case I ever want to write a quick 5 book pulp modern magic series.

What are the general superhero movies like in FHR? Similar to Marvel/DC? (E.g. Standard save the world/universe plot) Comparing how weird the events in FHR are to most hero/villain movies, is reality stranger than fiction?

I would say that most are more like action movies/thrillers. You know, Top Gun, Mission Impossible or the Bourne series. This is a part of everyone's life, they deal with normal problems. Of course, over the top, but not dimension jumping universe saving things. People are more interested in seeing movies that makes sense of these people, instead of blowing them up to massive proportions.

What were the educations of the Guardians like? What subjects were Blaze and Zephyr good at? On that note, how did Blaze and Zephyr come to meet each other for the first time? On the job as heroes? Or were they already acquainted before that?

Huh. I have never thought of that. I think Zephyr was a high school dropout who lucked out with the boost drugs and never looked back. School? Who cares. Blaze might have had some ambitions, was probably alright in English and social sciences stuff, but didn't go far since he took the boost drugs before any exams.

Where does Jake fall in the family as a sibling? Oldest?

Second oldest. He has an older sister who deals with most family things, Jake sends home the money.

Has Pyroclast confided in anybody about his interaction with Void? At all? What does he think of Arsenaux's renewed Void cult? Oh that is spoilers, not going to tell you that. But it does soundlike the thing he'd keep close to his vest.

What would Nazar have done if he didn't become a hero?

Probably started a business, he's got ambition but also likes to be in charge.

Beyond being a devout believer, how would you describe Arsenaux's personality?

Decisive, passionate, a bit of an introvert. Has a few close friends, but puts up a front for everybody else.

Is it possible for all the Rangers to defect from being a Ranger to be on our side as public 'villains'? Or will some of them strongly prefer just to keep at their jobs while secretly siding with Step?

It is possible for all the Rangers at the end of the game. Who, how and when is dependent on path.

Besides possibly Sidestep, what were the funnest fights the Rangers have had? Why? On the flip side, what were the most frustrating?

Oh the funniest and most frustrating was against a fairly harmless villain called "Flipside". She was a vandal and occasional bank robber, who focused on making large parody drawings of important people. The Rangers were tasked with bringing her in after she had made a 20 foot tall drawing of the current chairman of the Pacific Bank being 'ahem' busy blowing the current president. It was made on the Pacific Bank corporate HQ. The president's image being used was the thing used to request the Rangers.

The problem was Flipside's powers. Apart from having the very handy ability to stick to walls, she also had the power of random wall teleportation. Basically, if she hit a solid surface at any major speed, she would randomly teleport to another surface within fifty yards or so. An impact from falling, being hit into a wall, slamming her fist into a wall, things like that would send her teleporting. As long as she stayed conscious, she could somewhat control the direction. But if she was rendered unconscious (let's say through a lightning bolt), she would teleport truly randomly and might end up sticking to the roof inside a building, or the sewers, or anywhere, making her nearly impossible to find. This was before Sidestep, so no telepaths.

In the end, they never caught her. Marshal Hood managed to drag them out of the mission, and she was active for a few years more before retiring.

Was there ever a moment during Sidesteps vigilante/hero career where they lost control, to the point of potentially scaring the other Rangers? If so, what did the Rangers/other vigilantes think at the time?

Some Sidesteps might have, probably by going too hard and serious in a fight early on. I will however leave this mostly to headcanon, since I won't detail those times.

Other than that, were there any incidents where others got a peek into what could be termed as the "inner darkness" of Sidestep?

I will leave that to headcanon. There are a lot of messed up vigilantes out there, I never saw Sidestep as one of the worst.

In retribution Mia mentions a top ten list for heroes and villains. Who are the Villians and how would Sidestep compare to them power level wise. Would they be able to beat any in a fight? (assuming in armor)

That would vary depending on the fansite. There are a lot of arguments about that, and whether people are actually dead or just in hiding/retired. Thus there is no straight answer, but I will present a list that might have been seen as correct right before Sidestep debuted. I won't go into comparing and beating, telepathy makes everything weird. That's a different battlefield.

1: Cavalier. There are a lot of people who do not think he's dead, but in hiding, plotting to overthrow the US. Many don't agree, and he's at the center of the most tinfoiling on the forums.

2: The Catastrofiend. Once more, missing but not presumed dead. Many puts it higher, and there's a lot of lore only tangentially connected. Like it's a demon broken through into our world, the original source of the boost drugs, or an alien. In this case, the reputation certainly overshadows the actual powers.

3: Cornelius Vaughn. Operating in the greater Seattle/Vancouver area, he has refused to adopt a villain identity. Ex-military, maskless, and nearly indestructible. He also has the power to induce the people following him to near suicidal acts of bravery, as well as lending them some of his invulnerability. Also known as "The Zombie General," a moniker he hates.

4: Dread Reactor. It is unknown whether this is a boost in armor, a mod, or a true robot. What is certain is that it is the size of a small building, completely submersible and operates out of the scattered remnants of Moresby Islands on the Canadian west coast. It has the powers of a battleship, and has so far resisted any attempts to shut it down. Some people would rank it as nr. 2, but there has not been enough footage to truly convince people of its destructive powers.

5: Vimana. She titles herself "the atomic woman," or "the ultimate weapon." She's currently dug down in the midwest, regularly raiding in the Salt Lake - Yellowstone - Denver triangle. She can fly, but the greatest danger is her atomic blasts, which leaves the surroundings contaminated afterwards. Thus, people are very reluctant to engage her, and she gets what she wants mostly without a fight.

6: The Void. The Void is consistently underestimated. A lot their powers are kept inside the cult, so there is a lot less tinfoiling around this one than there should be.

7: Danger Zone. Living on the Mexican border, she could be described as living artillery. If threatened, her circle of light activates, going from a small halo to a massive circle in the sky, hundreds of meters across. Anything beneath that circle can be hit by spears of light, like non-electrical lightning. She has a small following, who reveres her as The Saint of the End, but she is not religious.

8: Arsenaux. Probably the most powerful living fire boost out there, and with the New Flesh backing her up, she consistently ranks high. Besides, her powers look very cool. And yes, she has powered up since the encounter during the Void assault.

9: Psychopathor. While not too powerful, he has been around a long time. And, having done a lot of weird shit, people tank him higher than they should. It might help that he's got backup from Tina and her organization.

10: Bonnie Belle. The resident Oregonian villain, her powers have been described as looney tunes in origin. She is a shapeshifter, whose body has the consistency of rubber, impervious to much damage. She can imitate people, and even their powers to some extent, at least if they are physical in nature. She is a major problem for the Portland Rangers.

Excluding Sidestep's old energy caster, are there any additional toys/gadgets planned for the future books? Or will we mainly get small upgrades to the suit like we did in book 2?

Not sure yet. I will see what could be fun as I start writing the fights. That's the big limiter here, if I add stuff, I need to write variables for it.

Pre-Heartbreak, if Sidestep and Ortega had a thing, did things ever progress beyond kissing and maybe light groping? you don't have to specify anything =)

Not as stated in the books, but I will never ruin headcanons.

Third question: What would each Ranger play as part of a dnd party, and how do you think that would go?

Hmmm Ortega would play evocation wizard, but forget to max out their con so would be very brittle and swear a lot. Argent would be the bard that seduces everything, because this is just make-believe so of course she can. Daniel would play warlock, maybe with a faerie patron. Would be fun to play around. Chen would play a battlemaster fighter because all of the others are brittle as fuck and someone needs to pick up the slack. He would grow bored early on, and multiclass with rogue to get some versatility. If Dr. Mortum was the DM, then nobody would ever figure out the plots, and the good doctor would soon realize that whatever was planned would devolve into craziness.

Has Elena every thought about remarrying? Or is she interested in dating again? Has she already?

She has not thought about about remarrying, but she has dated on occasion. She never tells Ortega, she keeps her private life to herself.

Was it difficult for trans Steps to get access to HRT in the FEZ? Were they able to obtain it legally or did they have to find black market sources for it?

It was easier than it would have been on the east coast. Mostly everything is for sale here, it's not a black market substance. All that's needed is money.

In their hero days, did Step ever get any money (directly or indirectly) from the Rangers? Or was that not really allowed?

You bet Ortega tried to funnel as much as they could on Sidestep's direction. Some practical things, like a proper skinsuit, or cash for medical care and stuff. I doubt Ortega would care if it was allowed.

When did the Crack debut as a villain? What had been their motivation for killing the former mayor? Did Mia ever get a chance to interview the Crack?

The crack debuted in 2015. There has been speculation to what the cause was for the murder of the Mayor, but considering most of the other targets where LDPD it is possible it was because the current Mayor was closely aligned with them. Some would say he had swept quite a few things under the carpet.

What kind of work did Tina want to offer for Vernon?

Research. He knows alot, and she could use that.

What are some of the things Ortega remembers about Hood when they think about him? Are there any particular memories they enjoy sharing aloud?

I think Ortega often thinks back on the quiet moments. There was a calm surety about Hood that I think Ortega needed at that stage of their life. Not needing to prove anything. And it was inspirational to see how little Hood was impressed by military and politicians, no hostility or need to prove his point. Just very no-nonsense. Ortega took a few cues from that. I think one of the memories they like to share is when someone tried to put down Hood and failed abysmally.

Does Blaze have any family? If so, how did they take his possible death? How did they take him becoming a hero and later the leader of the Guardians?

Yeah, Blaze's dad is still alive, but they are not close. Vince was never really close to his family, he didn't feel like he had much to lose when he took the boost drugs. He regularly sends his dad money, but mostly to keep him out of his hair.

For your endgame Void project, what platforms are you thinking of making/releasing it on?

It is just a little fantasy, that is not even on the menu yet. Might never happen.

Who suggested Regina as a potential green sky recruit? What made them decide against recruiting her?

I don't know who it was, but the Green Sky has people in many walks of life. One of the things that made them decide against it in the end was the ties to the US military. She was deemed too risky to approach.

What are Dr. Finch's thoughts on regenes? Assuming, of course, she knows anything about them.

She only knows of them like most people do, as organic weapons of the army. She doesn't think it's morally right, but then again she is not a pro-military person. She's treated too many traumas for her to be.

When did Ortega's hallucinations of Step first begin?

Pretty much the first days after Heartbreak.

Would love life advice would Joe give?

It's better to apologize than focus on being proven right. Nobody keeps count, and if they do, walk away.

How are Re-Genes usually punished if they try to escape and are caught?

It depends. If they are deemed too much of a risk, they are mentally scrubbed clean and their AI chip reset to start over from scratch. If that's been proven to be a repeated issue, it's recycling time. However, if the attempt was clumsy or hesitant, they are kept whole. The punishment is usually removal from their team, and placed in a new one (a bit like the punishment battalions of WW2). It will also involve restrictive mods, like implanted explosives, poison injectors or more tracking devices. A penal team is often used for training, and rarely leaves the Farm. Other teams are pitted against it, often with the odds against them. Of course any privileges previously had would be lost. If any Farm staff got injured in the attempt, there will be retaliation. This is not official punishment, but rather people looking the other way when ReGenes gets hurt or abused.

Can a non-telepaths infect another non-telepath with the "infection"?

Hmmm. Under very special circumstances perhaps.

What made Dr Jansen consider Ljungstrand "too dangerous to her career"?

Ignoring scientific ethics will blow up sooner or later, and she wouldn't want to be implied in any scandals there.

How deep does Void's base go?

A couple of hundred meters. There were plans for more expansions, but they ran into problems.

How would Ortega react finding out that Daniel is involved in Marek's show? Would they even find that out actually?

Ehehehe oh that is too juicy to spoil. We will delve into that in game.

Is heartbreak's mind in the same place as their physical body?

Nope.

What's Lord Ember's sexuality? Would he ever try to impress Step out of spite if they were interested in him, but didn't find him attractive and told him so?

I think Lord Ember is mostly straight. Who knows, maybe he'll have a bi awakening eventually. But yes, he definitely wants to be admired by men as well, especially the reluctant ones. There, the ego takes hold. If anybody has read/seen Dorohedoro, he is very close to En.

Is Marek still a little dickhead? Does he know who his benefactor is, and could he be keeping that up his sleeve for later use?

Marek is good at business, and knows a lot of things. Wouldn't still be in the business otherwise.

How well did Chen get along with Themmy, Sunstream, Sentinel, and Nazar? Does he stay in contact with the latter two?

Chen got along with them in this order from best to least: Sunstream - Sentinel - Anathema - Ashfall. He felt a bit like a big brother to Sunstream, and was sad when she left, though he understood it. It was best for her mental health.

Were the nanovores created by GeniTech?

Nope.

What would be everyone's (Rangers, Mortum, and the Trios) presentability score and sense fashion be?

Argent: Feminine, fashionable elegant: 50

Nocturne: Feminine, expensive elegant: 45

Hollow Ground: Androgynous, expensive suits: 45

Julia: Androgynous, expensive casual: 35

Ricardo: Masculine, expensive casual: 35

Daniel: Androgynous, elegant street wear: 35

Dr. Mortum: Androgynous, quirky preppy: 35

Jake: Masculine, edgy suits: 30

Chen: Masculine nondescript military surplus: 15

Are there any famous solo heroes who never signed on to be with a team/partner/company/organisation?

Most sign up with at least a company or an organization eventually. It is hard to become famous on your own, unless you are already rich. There might be powerful solo heroes, but they are rarely famous.

What's the likelihood of the west coast mysteries team's benefactor suggesting they look into the truth about regenes?

Maybe eventually.

Has Ortega already come out to Elena? If yes, how did it go? If no--do they dread it? Do they dread it in different ways (Julia VS. Ricardo)?

It varies, and we will deal with that in game. I will say however, that in some cases Elena might already know, but no official words have been said between them. Ortega is a bit tense about talking about this, it's awkward as hell.

Were there ever any attempts to enhance the abilities of people who are born with natural "powers" (like natural born psi-sensitives) the same way it can be done for boosts (via trauma/life-or-death situations)? If yes, were they successful?

There have been attempts, and they have on occasion been successful.

Where does Nocturne sit as one of the sisters in her family? Oldest? Youngest? Middle? What was her relationship to them like?

She's in the middle, and she has a distant but polite relationship. No thanksgiving dinners, but a polite card at Christmas.

If Argent is dating Sidestep has she ever gone to sleep cuddling up on a pillow and imagining the pillow was Sidestep?

Yeeeeeep.

Aside from Cavalier, how many ex-military soldiers have turned villain or considered turning villain? How much of these was a direct result of what they saw on the battlefield?

More than there would be if it was random. And yeah, it is definitely related to what they saw and did.

Does the Void appear differently to different people? Like, in terms of looks or voice or physicality or anything?

Yes, that is one effect of the voidfield.

What does void see/sense with their usual senses vs when they open their third eye?

What we see (with a bit of special sauce). And then, they see the truth. It hurts, so can't do it indefinitely.

Did Ortega witness firsthand that Ashfall might be susceptible to mind fuckery? Might that have influenced their decision not to involve him in the Heartbreak incident?

Are the events of Void Compound what prompted Charge to not bring Ashfall along for the Heartbreak raid? Or rather, did they affect the Marshal's opinion on who could or could not handle it to any degree?

I think it is fair to say that was one of the reasons. Ortega lost a lot of trust that day.

Did ashfall have scars that have disappeared since boosting and using his dispersal powers? Has he gotten any since being boosted or do the wounds fade completely when he... reintegrates, i guess? Is it possible to wound him irreparably with his dispersal and reintegration?

Yeah, Ashfall don't get any scars. However he can be hurt, especially if he can't reintegrate with a larger part of his ash. He doesn't miss parts of himself when he returns, but his body reacts strongly, like influenza or an infection. If it's real bad he could end up in a coma.

What pushed anathema away from the cult?

A growing self-confidence.

Is the place that ashfall goes while in scattered form the same "void between bodies" that sidestep goes to in between body hopping?

Unclear, it is certainly possible.

How much did the Farm use Sidestep's "human" identity after their second imprisonment and capture? Did the farm weaponize it / call Sidestep by their "name" / anything of the sort for Psychological Warfare, or did they go back to simply treating Sidestep as an object?

As an object. Sidestep was irrelevant as anything but a source of scientific information.

Does Arsenaux have to commission builders to make doors tall enough to comfortably fit her? Or does she have to hunch like Lady Dimitrescu?

I mean in places she has control over, yes. Otherwise it's hunching.

Can the decreasing of the heartbreak scars variable be described as "the scar becoming less inflamed/angry/raised", or is it more of re-opening the wound?

The former, it is a measure of getting better.

We know that the Void presented to Pyroclast as a "She," but physically what did she look like? Did she have a consistent physical appearance in Nazar's eyes, or did they shift and change despite the gender being consistent in his perceptions?

Oh Void had a specific physical look for him. No changes there.

Ashfall saw void as a "she" while step, in using the eyes of one of void's followers, saw them as short. Is void's physical appearance actually shifting? or is the form void is perceived dependent on the viewer, kind of like how mind shields can look different to different telepaths?

The Void's appearance is not shifting, but not all people can see all of the Void.

Can Step ever talk to Pyroclast about the Void and what he felt about the experience he had? Maybe even help him? Because that emotional aftermath worries me.

That didn't happen, sadly.

How does Blaze feel about the casualties he's responsible for when he uses his powers? The civilians who are hurt/killed because of him?

Real bad.

Was The Void actually physically there at the compound? Or were they chilling in the between space, and using similar powers like Heartbreak did to make people "hallucinate" their presence?

Oh the Void was fully there. Too tempted.

Hypothetically, could Sidestep possess/mind dive into one of the Void's followers?

These days, yes. It might get interesting though. Back then, not deep. Just picking surface things.

Could Ortega, if they were still in their Marshal position, have been able to pay off their debt eventually?

I mean... possibly. But not with how they likes to live.

If he went all out, just how high in temperature can Blaze get with his heat generation?

Hmmm. It depends on the area. On very small areas, he can reach welding temperatures (3000-5000 C), but the moment he expands it, it drops a lot. In a room he could perhaps reach 500.

Basing on last month's QnA answer about the heartbreak incident: Everything the government knows was based on Charge and especially Steel's testimony.

Why is it especially Steel, considering that Ortega is the one who is immune to heartbreak's telepathic attack, and would thus most likely have a testimony closest to the truth?

Because Ortega was a wreck, and not at all cooperative. They were not trusted at that point, and were suspected of lying.

Anathema and Sidestep were killed by the terrorist. Considering Themmy's invulnerability, how did they actually explain how the terrorist killed them?

They didn't. This was just for the normal people, no explanation needed. Basically it was "not as invulnerable as previously thought."

Does Mitchell know much about Porthole? What about the Rangers/Guardians themselves?

Not much, neither of them has had much interaction.

Is the intel on them kept private but accurate like the Rangers? Or is it more like Argent's, where it's falsified?

It is cleaned up, but the truth is known to people who have access to the records. So the Rangers knows, but the public doesn't.

If an adult non-human animal brain, which already has a concept of a body, was implanted into an artificial body - will the experiment fail? Will it it because just like human brains, they cannot reconcile being in an artificial body after having a memory of a real one?

So far, every single experiment has ended in madness and self-destruction. It is considered a bit of a golden grail for mod-related research.

Will we ever be able to have some sort of positive relationship (platonic or otherwise) with catastrofiend? If so what's the chance that it ends terribly for Step and or everyone else?

Ahahaha.... hmm... don't think so. But it's not written yet, so who knows.

How does Ortega's static feel to Sidestep's telepathy when they're having a seizure?

Loud, to the point of pain. At least if Sidestep is not prepared. These days, it is very easy to shield out, but back in the day it was quite a shock the first time.

Will Sidestep have an opportunity to talk about moving in together and having a family with RO in the future?

Yeah, in the future. Right now the mission comes first.

Some people have a preferred ways of arranging the room before they can comfortably sleep. Some prefer to have the fan on, others like the room warm. Some people enjoy a pillow fortress around them, others are satisfied with one pillow. Sleeping positions (soldier, fetal, etc-). Light levels, etc- How do the Rangers prefer their bed accommodations?

Ortega: Complete blackout curtains, no light. Pillow to hug, cold temperature.

Chen: Can sleep anywhere, a bed is nice but not needed.

Argent: Likes it warm, a very soft mattress. No fan. Somewhat dark. Lots of pillows.

Daniel: Cooler. Doesn't mind a bit of light. Light bedclothes. Tends to float unless he's clinging to something.

How much does consciousness play a role in being able to shield one's thoughts? If someone naturally has good mental shields, would their mind be easier to invade while they're asleep or would it be about the same?

It depends on the kind of defenses. Passive ones are almost better when asleep, but active ones (like focusing on an earworm) are better while awake. A sleeping mind is harder to make sense of, though. And easier defended through nightmares.

How does sleep affect Sidestep's telepathic powers?

That is slowly becoming an issue. There are reasons Sidestep prefer to not sleep.

What was each of the pasts Marshal's greatest and most defining "Leadership" moment? Not asking about Chen because his greatest leadership moment could very well be ahead in his immediate future, and we all know the more our villains fuck around the more they will find out

Marshal Hood: Most people don't know about it, but it was during the creation of the Rangers. He was one of the ones making sure it was just not a division of the military.

Marshal Charge: I think the Nanosurge was what defined Marshal Charge for many, though they were certainly not alone there.

Does Ortega know about Mia's connection to Vernon? If so, do they care?

Yes, and no.

Do they even know who Mia is?

Oh yes.

Does Chen have any particular things he's planning on doing/picking up if and when he retires?

No, that still feels far away.

Would Argent have any sort of faith in Anarchist Steps? Or will she always stay suspicious of them?

Argent can grow to trust them!

Are there any specific prisons for telepaths?

No, but special blocks fitted with dampeners. However, the telepath prison population is much lower than it was five years ago.

If there had been (or if there are and we just don't know it yet) other "survivors" of Heartbreak, like Sidestep, would they also have the psychic scars of it? Would their scars be different than Sidestep's, and what would determine that?

Any survivor would have scars. They would be similar to Sidesteps, but some parts would be personal. It is partly based on the person. For example, there might be a "megalomaniac" scar for some, or a "parasocial attachment" scar for others. The first one would have people feel like they are the most important people in the world and should run it, the other might have people automatically assume people are friends and treat strangers as family.

Also, was killing the victims (or rather, causing them to kill themselves) Heartbreak's intent, or were the people who died in the incident victims of an unfortunate side-effect of something Heartbreak himself was experiencing/ projecting maybe?

It was an unfortunate side effect.

Sidestep seems to have formed very dense neuronal connections in the brain post-first escape. If Sidestep's DNA or AI chip is cloned, will this clone possess the same "neurally denser brain structure" as Step, or will the clone simply possess the base brain connection Step originally had when they were decanted?

Hmmm I think it would be like the original setup. It's hard to close things like that, just like you can't decant someone with olympic athlete training. Some things the body and mind needs to learn.

If a Sidestep gifted Elena one of those twelve foot tall giant lawn skeleton decorations for the holidays would Elena ever use it?

Sadly, I think that would end up in the barn, ready to scare the shit out of anybody unprepared.

What are some of Zephyr's techniques for attacking enemies/causing damage? What weapons do they use?

With Zephyr's speed, they prefer to use precision weapons. Things like icepicks, stilettos, things that penetrate but doesn't need too much force. It is easy to damage yourself in high speed combat. In fact, Zephyr's left arm is armored on their suit, with a very stiff glove and support for impact. This helps reduce the strain on their body. But most often they use more passive means, like entangling things, shaped charges and stuff. Since they can just run up and place things, they can be very dangerous against armored, slower foes.

Are the memories for Regene chips considered "used up" once they're implanted? Or... is it possible there's a bunch of Regenes with the same memories as each other?

They are not used up, and many regenes share similar memories if they have proven successful. In fact, that is the closest thing regenes has to blood relations, people who share similar memory sequences.

On a scale of 1 to Dad, how often does Leo pun outside of the Handyman identity? Has Owl ever contemplated murder from it? Does he wear Hawaiian print shirts?! IS HE CAMP?

100% Dad. Owl suffers for it, but he has brightened up her life. Would wear Hawaiian print shirts as unashamedly as Ortega.

We know Daniel comes from money. What is the other members of the Rangers Team's class background? Is there any matter of... divide / unease that grows from class dynamics between them?

OOooh interesting. Yes, there is some. Ortega's background is more influenced by the military than money. But they certainly remembers not being able to afford things as a child. That is one of the reasons why they tend to love spending their wealth. Show off a little.

Chen is from a solid middle class background, his parents owned their own large apartment in NY and made good money. However, with the rents, and the many children there was not much left over. He is very aware of how cavalier Danny is around money, but also how he tries.

Daniel is upper class, comes from money but also ran face first into a world without it when he ran away to the west. He still has the reflexes of someone who is used to not thinking about money, but he is aware that others might be broke. However, he is a lot more conscious of dignity than Ortega, and doesn't offer things as openly. He's aware that charity can be humbling.

Argent is on the cusp of working class/lower middle class and comes from a family where you work for whatever you want. Your money is your money. No charity, that makes people lazy.

Why reasons does Herald's family have of not being approving of heroes? Are they the same to Sunstream's mother's?

Sunstream's mother is more opposed on religious grounds. Herald's family is opposed because it's gauche, risky and not really in line with how you are supposed to be as a part of the family. They would

have disapproved as hard if Daniel wanted to become a teacher or something.

How prominent are the regular Olympics and superpowered Olympics in-universe? Is the hype about the same as it is irl, or does the lack of combat kinda lower the hype? Are there full-force combat competitions out there?

I'd say it's the same as here. There are a lot of people who thinks boosts are just cheap showboating, much like people dislikes halfpipe when slalom already exists. The combat competition are a highlight though, that's where the real drama is.

Does Chen know anything more than the population about Cavalier's "death"?

Not much.

Chen seems to be comfortable with hiding a Sidestep he agrees with. Does he aid and abet other people that wouldn't quite be considered on the "right" side of the law?

On occasion, yes.

Does Ortega and Dr. Halabi have a deeper relationship than patient/doctor? Does Ortega trust and share anything with Dr. Halabi? Has Dr. Halabi let useful things slipped that could have helped Ortega's conspiracy board?

Just a little bit. Ortega is good at worming out information. But the relationship is patient/doctor, but a warm one.

Does Ortega know Mortum because of the Nanosurge, or have they rubbed elbows in other settings? If the latter, was that before or after the nanosurge? Have they been in contact, directly or indirectly (and barring the hospital scene in Rebirth), since the start of Rebirth?

It has been in other settings! As to whether they have met post Rebirth, the answer is yes.

Daniel seems breezier about protection than other Rangers can be. Has anyone managed to slip in his apartment unnoticed before for info-gathering? Would that explain some information leaks Sidestep has been picking up? Or--is Herald's apartment more protected than it looks (just like his mind wink wink)?

It is more protected, but yeah, Danny is less focused on security than the others. Most of the protections are focused around the door, it is securely sealed most of the time. Danny used the rooftop exit, which might be a weak point for another flier.

And finally: what does Marek think of Ortega's career and public persona? If the opportunity arose, would he participate in trying to shoot them down / leak information again, or is there no bad blood on his side?

Hehehehe spoilers....

On the other hand, is Ortega aware of Marek's new career and his potential sponsors, or is Marek not on their radar anymore?

Ortega is aware of Marek's new career, they like keeping track on things.

Will you give us choices regarding how Sidestep's second escape went (stratagems used, casualties...) or will this be more of a Heartbreak sequence type of scene (Sidestep's control curtailed, lots of choices and almost no agency?). Which of course brings me to: was Sidestep fully aware / in control of themselves when they escaped?

I am not sure yet. I am still working that out.

Wait while I'm here, I'll shoot my shot again: want to spare any crumb, any cryptic encoding, any obscure hint about Ortega's mindscape?

1929's gentleman club.

The "look" variable in rebirth - is it tied to what step saw at the actual point of heartbreak, or the reliving of it?

What they actually saw.

[Time for your december questions!](#)

[Dec 18, 2022](#)

Alright, it's time to see what questions you have for December. Feel free to ask me anything, about the books, about my process or just general weirdness.

[The Void 3 - Ashfall](#)

[Dec 10, 2022](#)

Impossible but functional. Not my words. No brain to think them. No tongue to speak them. And yet, even dispersed at my widest, they are there. Words. Thoughts.

Impossible.

Not really. I exist. I think. I speak. I change. I'm not impossible; the natural laws of the world just never took something like me into account. But I exist, so the laws need to change.

Can I trust them? The scientists circling the Rangers, subjects, and projects both. Does it matter? It will if I want to walk that path. And if I don't, what am I doing here? Risking myself to help people? Without insurance, I'll be in trouble if I'm badly hurt.

Unless Charge bails me out again.

Baggage. I'm riding the electric fields; no need to move, just cling. Truly baggage now. Or protection. Or a weapon. The static charge tickles, no, no skin anymore, but it's close enough. Like a rash. The urge to scratch. The urge to lash out. I will restrain myself for as long as I can.

The sensation burns along my nerves, but I can't scream. Or, if I do, there's nobody around to hear me. It's not pain, not exactly. Not in this form. Words for senses fail me, just like words for body parts. Am I destroying myself every time I shift? Am I restoring myself every time I reform? What do I bring with me?

What would the scientists do if I told them my body comes back whole? The bullet hole healed? I haven't dared to tell them. There are limits to the freedom my association with the Rangers gives me.

Association. Maybe I should make the jump. Join. Become indispensable. That's a protection of sorts. Useful. Sidestep would laugh. They've got a point. I'm naive, but less so by the minute.

Hard to stay naive in this line of work. If you keep your eyes open. Can't exactly do that now. I used to joke that I was nearsighted in my ash form, but that's not true. Not exactly. It's not sight. Not touch. Just sensation. Part electrical fields, I can sense their pull on me as clearly as the noonday sun. That's why Charge is useful. Lodestone. Anchor. Magnetic fields too, for direction, for north and south. The rest, I feel. Stretch myself thinner, particles dancing around winds, around surfaces. People breathe. Their skin is sticky. No detail vision, no colors.

It will be easier indoors; out here, I am blind until I feel them. A disturbance in my field. In my body. Yes. No friends here, so I finally let go and release the charge that had been building. Finally scratching that itch.

Lightning. It tickles less than the charge, a sharp rip, like staring at the sun, licking a blade.

I can't smell the ozone. I can't smell the burnt flesh. Can Charge? Probably not through the filter. Are they dead? Are they boosted? I don't know the answer to either, and Charge moves on, and I feel walls surround me. Good. Borders. A space. I tense and breathe, taking stock as doors open and people

enter my embrace. Charge discharges, and I amplify, reflecting the lightning through my body into theirs. Grounded.

They breathe me as they fall.

The first time, I threw up as I changed back, but now I only pull myself together tighter, trusting Charge to lead us right. Down. Cramped. I can feel the walls as I press against them. Feel the steps as I surge downwards, roiling black. I imagine. I've seen pictures. I'm coating Charge by now. Sticking to the suit.

Not bare skin. Intimate. Rather not think about that.

How long can I hold this? Charge asked me as we tested. As we planned. Long enough, I said. Long enough to get the job done. Couldn't very well tell the truth. Holding it is not the issue; changing back is what is.

This feels good. Too good. Fire tears at my body and does nothing. No. Not nothing. Feels good. Like inhaled smoke. I can sense it. Fire in the shape of a woman. Holding it inside. Holding so much inside. There are others, but she is mine. Charge is burnable, and I am not. And it is so warm in there.

So wet. Inside. What would happen if I crawled deeper and solidified? What would it do to me? Would it hurt? Would I... like it? Would I want to do it again?

She faints before I am tempted to find out.

Electricity flares on the outskirts of my body, and I tear myself from the fallen and back to Charge. More bodies. Unmoving. Steel promised no civilians would be present. I wish I could trust him. I have no choice but to.

A scream? Like all sounds, it echoes strangely more vibrations than urgency. Charge is running. I cling to the current like a cloak, no roiling before now. Too fast. Clinging to the slipstream. Relax. Wait until there is a pause. Until there is a pause.

Until...

I don't see color, but I do.

Green.

Electricity fills me as Charge surges forward. Into the green. I fill the room with lightning. Impossible to survive.

I am not the only one that is impossible.

There is. Light? Light.

There is light, and it touches me. Not my body. Me.

I didn't know I was a me. Not like this. In my body, people are fighting. In my body, Charge is losing. With my body, I am stretching. Amplifying. Choking. But...

There is a hand on my cheek in the vast reaches of my self. A hand of light warmer than what I could become. I can't help but think it's beautiful.

"Beautiful," it whispers back, a Cheshire mouth of smiles and teeth. "Oh, what are you?"

Everything is distant now as the hand is touching (not touching) me. Me. The smile grows wider, grows a face, and the hand grows a body.

She's the most beautiful thing I have ever seen, filling my sight in ways the world can't. Senses I never knew I had spring into bloom. And yet...

"Yes," she says, her other hand now on my other cheek, my face more real than the world, heavier than the solar system. "I'm your enemy. This should be hurting."

"It doesn't." Cheeks and a mouth between them, and eyes to see her and tongue to speak.

"Birth should come with screaming," she says, and I have ears to hear in this moment between breaths. Between blows. "Why aren't you?"

"Do you want me to?" I reach out, and I have hands to touch. Fingers to run through her hair, a tingle of energy less kind than electricity. If I tugged it, could I blow up the world?

"Yes," she admits, pulling herself closer in ways that regular physics can't contain. "If it isn't paid for, it can't be trusted."

"I've paid." My forehead touches hers. A spark. A connection. Why could I never see this before? This way? "In a different way."

"Then tell me," she says, opening her third eye, looking at my scattered form. "You won't lie to me."

"I won't." I am nothing compared to her, but I am using her gaze to make me whole, like I've used everyone else. Charge. Sidestep. Filling in the world in this body where senses are muted. Lodestone. Mouth and eyes. And with her...

With her...

Oh Lord, what is she?

"Void," she whispers, mouth into mouth. "The beginning." Her eye inside my mind and the world fit together in ways it never had before. "You're mine now."

"I love you," I say, and it's not a lie. How could it be when she is the first to truly see me? "But I'm not yours." A breath is not a breath. "That's the price I pay."

And then I shift. I tear myself from this place between places, out and back, directions true once more. I land hard, on stone, naked skin and goosebumps. Back up the corridor, behind a corner. Out of sight. I hear, with my ears, vibrations in the air. Charge goes down with a soft groan. They won't kill them. I know this.

I know it would be kinder if they did.

But I can't help.

I don't dare to shift back, so instead, I run. On bare feet, on stone floors. Up winding stairs. I need to get up. Fast.

I need to get help.

I need to get to Sentinel.

[Spoiler QnA November - edit with more questions](#)

[Dec 4, 2022](#)

Sorry, I was alerted to the fact that the questions got cut off. Here is all of them!

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Steel finds what sidestep shares, about heartbreak, "interesting". Is it "interesting" because (1) it matches what he found out when he went looking, (2) it made him rethink what he himself had seen in heartbreak, or (3) something else?

Honestly, all 3. Mostly 2, then 1 and then 3.

Ortega mentions that post heartbreak, Vernon kept pestering the rangers - specifically, them. Why did Vernon choose Ortega instead of going after, say, Chen?

Hehehe. There is a very good reason for that, but I won't tell you. Spoilers.

And is there a reason where Sidestep seems to forget that Themmy died too when Ortega brings up the topic of their funeral?

I mean there could be many, depending on the Sidestep, so people can have a bit of headcanon there. But the main one in my mind is that at that point in the game, Sidestep has spent years trying not to

think of what happened. Deny. Block. Watching Themmy die was traumatizing, and probably laced with no small amount of blame. Why couldn't they stop it? Why didn't they try? How was it possible? Anathema is tied up with a lot of guilt, and it's very telling that the only times Anathema pops up is when Sidestep has experienced utter failure and being close to death.

Is there any chance we might get to see Skyraider again?

Oh yes. He has a role to play in Revelations.

Does Norma Lee have any connection to the Farm?

Yes. No further info will be given.

Chen was able to find out that Step was a Re-Gene. Would the other Rangers have been able to be the same? What about Pyrocblast or Sentinel if they went investigating?

Probably not. They lack the kind of contacts in the military that Chen has. I doubt they would have find the right threads to pull on.

Was the person who orchestrated Lou Carter's assassination the same person who planted the bomb?

Yes.

Be it yes or no, did they plan the outcome to accommodate Steel and Sidestep being there that very same night?

Nope. That was a surprise. Steel was a possibility, Sidestep a complete surprise.

We know prepare-them! Hunters have a specific, future event/scenario in mind as the reason why they do what they do. Is this same event connected to the motivations behind anarchist Steps' agenda and goals?

Yes it is. And my apologies to keep it secret from you this far, but that's just how I work. Thank you for your patience and your tinfoiling.

If VillainStep is a known telepath, did Mia ever consider taking any precautions before the interview? If so, what were they?

Mia was naive and reckless and since she had no secrets she figured the villain was interested in, and had no reason for the interview other than honest interest in a scoop, she figured it would probably be safer if the villain could read her mind.

How did Ortega get to see Hollow Ground's face?

Basically HG was the one initiating contact, though Ortega had no idea who they were. HG had been having problems with threading Hood, and had finally pinpointed Ortega as being the issue in keeping Hood on track. So, HG figured that threading Ortega would stop Hood from being reminded of his priorities. Didn't work so well though... but it took many tries before HG figured Ortega was unthreadable.

While we know that Ortega called regenes "blue skinned freaks," what did Chen say about them?

Chen called them "classified weapons". Just like he had been taught to.

Why did Carter-Macaroni decide to "ask" for Chen as his bodyguard? From the text I figured that Carter is the Mayor's ally. Wasn't it more logical/easier to ask the Guardians for protection? Was asking for the Rangers an act of showing off Carter's power/status? Or were there other reasons for Carter to not trust the Mayor and/or the Guardians? Are the Guardians considered so less than the Rangers (even after Argent's lash out and the museum gala)?

Asking for Steel was definitely a status move. A way to show both the Mayor and the Marshal that yes, he was important and powerful enough to warrant such protection. And yes, the Guardians are considered to be a less powerful team, even after that. They are the new kids on the block.

How did Jake get his clothes and such to phase with him?

He doesn't know, he has always been able to.

Since Jake can get his clothes to phase with him, is Ashfall capable of turning the clothes/watches he wears into ash too?

Nope, Ashfall's powers work differently. He transforms his physical body, and any clothes/accessories just fall through the cloud.

In a same vein as this question: Can Jake phase carrying another human or heavy object in hands?

Working on it. Once he gets there, he will definitely be Alpha level.

Is whatever Carter and Deveraux were up to connected to (1) what Vernon found, or (2) why Cavalier attacked the Pentagon?

Hmmmmmm. Tangentially, yes.

how much control does Argent actually have over machines? Does it work easier/faster with "software" or "hardware" (hacking into a computer vs turning on the dishwasher)? Could she, say, defeat Sidestep by simply ordering their armor to shut down or malfunction?

It is easier with software, and machines connected to things like that. So a camera hooked up to a security system is a lot easier than a camera held in someone's hands. In general, there is a curve, much like the standard curve. On one end are the simple machines like dishwashers, car engines, and cash registers. On the other end there are major computer networks, like military and banks. Her power is strongest in the middle, where things are complicated enough to give her leverage, but not so complicated they are hard to grasp. She could potentially try to work with Sidestep's armor, but in a fight she generally needs to focus on keeping her friends under control. She needs to be calm and collected for proper machine manipulation, and she's not that while she is fighting. Besides, that would be cheating.

Before Regina was director she was Dr. Siepen. What did she specialize in?

Her PhD was in genetics, but she was increasingly focused on genetic predictors of behavior. Before she started working for the Farm, she was on a list for possible recruitment for the Green Sky, but it did not get that far.

Since Deadeye freelances with HG's permission, could we hire her?

Depending on your relationship with HG, that might be possible. HG doesn't let her work for their enemies.

How does HG handle/deal with people wanting to leave their organization? Are they allowed to? What happens if they leave?

HG works very hard on making people want to be a part of their organization. If someone wants to leave, they see that as a failure. Of course people are allowed to, but what would happen would depend on the reason. Switching to another boss/gang could either be seen as having a valuable in there, or be a reason to get killed. Someone wanting to retire/marry/go straight might be encouraged, and HG would be sure to leave them with enough benefits that there would be no blood. Just future useful contacts.

Could we call and leave a message at Parkfield or do we always have to leave one in person at the downstairs bar?

A message in person for now, though Sidestep can get other ways to contact in the future if things go well.

If Step has been revealed to be the villain and decides to continue going to therapy, how would Ortega react if the bill was still sent to them? Would they continue to pay it? How'd they feel about it knowing Step continued to see Dr. Finch even after all that happened?

Ortega would keep paying the bills, hoping the sessions might help.

Would Ortega use this information to try and catch Step?

Not to catch them, but perhaps keep an eye on them. They wouldn't want to risk spooking Sidestep.

Who's next in line for the directorship after Regina? Is there anyone specifically gunning for the position?

Spoilers.

Did HG's sibling actually have a plan/good reason to steal the car??

I mean that's what they did? Stealing cars and other stuff. This time was no different, just bad luck.

If Josh had survived the boosting process, what type of person would he have become? A hero like he and Daniel planned or would he have ended up taking a different path?

Would most likely have turned villain fast. Perhaps dragging Daniel with him.

Will HG's sibling's personality actually coincide with Step's? Or is it just HG projecting?

A lot is HG projecting. They want it to be true, and with many years, and the sibling being a child at the time, it's easy to remember wrong.

What were the genders of HG's other siblings? And in which order are these siblings? Is HG the second oldest? Or perhaps the second youngest amongst their siblings?

I have said a few different things in the past, as I have been pondering what to reveal. But now that the sibling reveal is done, I think I will finalize it as this: Oldest brother (original HG), second oldest brother, third is HG, last is the sibling. The latter two variable gender.

Was the sniper who shot out the car tires aiming to do in Ortega, Sidestep, or both of them?

It can be either, depending on the path.

How does HG feel when they realize they can neither thread Charge nor their sidekick? Is this some sort of curse?

HG is really getting tired of Charge and their bullshit at this point. Might have to do something about it.

Whether knowingly or not, did Chen ever interact with cuckoos while he was in the military? Was he ever curious about them?

Nope. He did not know they existed at that point.

Why is Jake skeptical of poly marriage?

Because he still feels a bit like a third wheel. Sure, he might be fucking the boss, but he has the feeling that he's in that bed mostly because of Nocturne. Besides, marriage is such a final thing.

Do HG's threads leave a mind scar behind?

Depends on how deeply they have been embedded. Generally, no.

For Chen, would it depend on Sidestep's finesse when removing the threads?

Not necessarily. Could also have high force and pull them out fast.

And, unrelated to HG, but: does Ortega have any mind scars of their own?

If by scars you mean trauma, yes.

Will an unthreaded mind, now aware of HGs powers, be less prone to being threaded again?

Oh yes.

Related to the scar/thread ask there, would it leave a (bigger) scar if step bungled the dethreading? Doing more damage?

Yes, it would.

Nocturne and HG were attracted to each other's intelligence... what is Jake attracted to in each of them?

Jake is attracted to Nocturne's poise and drive. And well, as for HG, power is always sexy.

Are Ortega's spy / hearing / new mods "off the record" from their Ranger and government modwork? If so, who did they go to to have them done?

Nope, this is all legit in-team stuff.

Are the kidnappings of telepaths overseen by only one organisation, or are different players involved?

Different players.

Is argent meant to know everything that's in the vault? Or are those technopathy privileges?

Technopathy privileges.

Re-Gene tattoos--they aren't composed of nanovores are they?

Nope, they are not.

That Snippet for Book 3 has got me wondering, how does HG feel about the Farm using their sibling's DNA to make Step? Are they mad at them for harvesting and using it without HG's knowledge or are they grateful for the Farm giving them, in their eyes, another sibling? How did

they feel and react when they got those lab results back that said Step and them were most likely related?

HG does not know yet. And how they will react when they learn the truth is going to have to be experienced in game. But considering how protective HG can be of things they consider theirs, I can imagine both being true.

Does Sidestep have any boosted organs from the post-HB surgery?

None.

Has Sidestep got any organs harvested by the farm?

None.

If Argent communicated with Sidestep's AI chip... Could she get infected if Step's chip holds an infection? Or could the nanovores protect her? Could the nanovores get infected?

That is a frightening thought.

If Step goes to the HG meeting as themselves, did they take an image of Step to use in their new Mitchell villain file from the security cameras or is having a civilian picture of them not something HG generally cares about? The Independent Hero seemed to of had a civilian picture, so having Step come without the armor to also obtain a picture for the file would be an added bonus to the threading

Oh you bet they did. Mitchell likes to keep updated.

Is the "infection" a communicable disease? Or, can there/has there been instances where infection develops in isolation - aka, people can become "infected" despite no contact with those already infected?

Yes. They can. Though it can also infect.

Nobody likes Shroud.... Not even her butler?

It's less about liking there, and more about mutual need.

Is her butler her handler? If not, how the hell did she get such a specific... butler?

Nope. They met, and realized they had things in common.

Does Mitchell work solely for Hollow Ground? Has he ever worked for Lord Ember or other kingpins or villains?

Mitchell was independent, but after he got recruited, it's just for HG. Gets paid well.

Is shroud's power automatic with touch or does she need to have intent?

Automatic.

Could HG thread Step to get rid of or lessen their nightmares to allow them to get sleep in their own body?

Yes, especially if Sidestep let them.

Curiosity compels me: is Jake attracted to Nocturne herself, or more so the personality/version of Nocturne that has been—for lack of a better phrasing—made by Hollow Ground? Would Jake still love her if her strings were snapped and she reverted back to her former self?

I honestly don't know. Jake has never seen that part of her. Nocturne is convinced he wouldn't.

How long would it of taken for Pelayo and the Crew to realize Step had been arrested and injured and would they of mounted a rescue? If they would have, what would of been their plan to get Step out of the Ranger's HQ?

Some Sidesteps might still be stuck there, let's not spoil book three.

Will it be possible to raise Sidestep's wealth status (or lower it) again in future books?

Oh yes. So far many Sidesteps have not started truly spend their money.

What does HG (as Big Sibling) think of Step and their possible RO(s) dating? What is HG's opinion of each of them?

Oh not going there, any of the Rangers are stupid and risky. Obviously Sidestep must be doing it for a reason. Dr. Mortum would 100% be approved.

Can Herald's powers go the opposite way? Like we know he can make things lighter... but can he make things heavier too and crush people's heads like a melon with the sheer force of gravity?

Not so far.

Can dampeners actually stop shroud's powers or alter how they affect someone?

No. They are touch-based.

Could HG ever love Sidestep as their own person, as part of their family? Or will Step always be the replacement goldfish for their dead sibling?

I think HG definitely could. HG is quick to care for people.

If Argent made a machine from scratch, will it become 'alive' to her like all the other machines Argent 'converses' with?

Yes, it would.

Were the nanovores made by the farm, or did someone or something else create them?

The nanovores are completely unrelated to the Farm.

How old is Shroud?

Physically in her thirties.

By the end of Retri, have any of the Rangers caught on to the fact that the Villain is using nanovores as a weapon? More specifically, if you pick the "mods, meet nanovores" option during the auction, would the mess you leave behind ring any bells to Chen, Ortega, and/or Argent?

Nope. The nanovores ate flesh, not tech.

Why is Jake skeptical of poly marriage?

Because he still feels a bit like a third wheel. Sure, he might be fucking the boss, but he has the feeling that he's in that bed mostly because of Nocturne. Besides, marriage is such a final thing.

Can Re-Genes multiclass into other roles? (Spook, Spider, Actor, Blade) Or are they just restricted to one?

Mostly one. But they can transition, and thus have past experience with several.

[November QnA - edited with more questions](#)

[Dec 4, 2022](#)

Sorry! I was alerted to the fact that about half the questions got cut off. This is the whole shebang!

Disregarding Hood's death, would Ortega have any interest in bringing down Hollow Ground?

I mean... yes? They are running the major criminal enterprise in Los Diablos. However, it's not exactly a flashy fight, is it? If revenge for Hood was not on the table, HG would be quite far down Ortega's list of priorities. Much like city corruption, it's something they think is bad, but also not something they feel is their job to deal with.

What does Pyroclast like to do outside his job? Does he have any particular favourite things to do, like Argent with her movies? Or Herald with his art?

Good question. Ashfall/Pyroclast was always a workaholic, and most of his time off was spent on working out and training. He does have hobbies, but they are much neglected. What he used to do back in the hero days was a bit of house renovating/building. He got interested in it when building his vigilante base (not much money back then) and true to his nature tried to learn as much as he could. These days he has money, and I think he sometimes miss the days when he just couldn't go out and buy things, or have a government paid apartment and headquarters.

Have other telepaths been able to 'mind dive' before? Or is this a new development?

This is rare, but not new. Sidestep however, is one of the ones who has used it the most and been most skilled at it.

Argent mentions that the dress she wore to the gala was Versace and Ortega wears/buys Gucci quite a bit, do all the Rangers typically wear designer brands or is it more for formal occasions instead of casual wear (Ortega clearly not counting)?

Like many famous people, the Rangers do get offers of sponsored clothes. Ortega is the one that is the most open with it, and there has probably been others in the past before Gucci.

These days, Argent is the most sought after, but she has not gone exclusive, and will pick what she likes for her public appearance. She also likes to partner/buy from smaller, local designers that fit her soft pastel aesthetic.

Chen has no clothes sponsor (unless you count Ortega buying stuff for him), and he says that's because the Marshal should remain neutral. Of course the true reason is that he dislikes being treated as a dress-up doll. He does however have a lot of sponsorships for his artificial limbs, and he keeps trying new things out to find what works best.

Daniel will wear sponsored clothes on occasion, especially in official circumstances. He draws the line at his private life, though, and tends to dress down a lot. Of course, what he'd pay for a pair of jeans and a t-shirt is still ridiculously much, and much of it is also tailored to his build. There is a reason why his clothes fit him so well, it's not exactly off the rack.

How old is Lord Ember? What's his birthday and year?

5 May 1988

How old is Regina? What's her birthday and year?

6 April 1971

How old is the Handyman? What's his birthday and year?

23 September 1990

How old is Owl? When's her birthday and year?

11 November 1984

If Sidestep shot HB, how does Ortega know? How did they relate it to the public? Was there any recording of it, or is everything based on the Rangers' account of what happened in that room? What does public opinion exactly knows about that shooting?

Ortega knows because they entered the room in the aftermath of it. They saw what had happened. Probably the only one that really saw the truth. Everything the government knows was based on Charge and especially Steel's testimony.

The public knows nothing. The official version was that terrorists had hijacked the building and was releasing a gas that caused people to go mad and kill themselves. Anathema and Sidestep was killed by the terrorist, and the building had to be bombed to contain the threat. Only Charge and Steel survived, the latter with massive injuries.

Is the crack okay with the current mayor or do they want her gone?

Pending judgment.

You said that sometimes, events call for Marshals to meet up. Where does the leader of the Guardians fit into this?

The Guardians are connected to Los Diablos, and has nothing to do with the federal Marshal system.

Are Lord Ember and Lady Argent related by blood?

Nope.

Has Pyroclast ever killed?

Yes. It doesn't happen often though, he tries to find other ways. However, it is far too easy with that kind of power.

Have Cavalier / Cavalier's attack on the Pentagon and Hunter-Sidestep's ominous "something bad is coming" hints anything in common?

Indeed they do.

Would the federal government ever use regenes as a way of enforcing martial law on a civilian population?

Right now they have too few of them for that to be an effecient measure. It is far easier to recruit cops and soldiers than grow regenes.

Was Blaze ever actually in love with any of his past partners?

The definition of love is always tricky. What is it? How does it feel? I don't think Blaze would say that he was. He's always been resistant to be tied down like that. But there definitely were feelings involved.

Despite being government dogs, would any of the Rangers [any branch] bite the hand that feeds them if the government tried to invade the FEZ once the deal is up?

I think it is fair to say that some might.

During HB did Step's mask get removed at some point during the mental intrusion for Heartbreak to be able to stick their fingers in our mouth, for us to be able to see ourselves smiling in the window, and for us to put the gun in our mouth? If so, did we remove it or did Heartbreak? Was it found after the building was destroyed?

Or.... was it?

Building on Anti's question - was Cavalier's attack on the Pentagon an attempt to (1) retrieve something, (2) terminate something, (3) assassinate someone, or (4) send a message to the government?

Honestly, all four. Mostly 4, followed by 1, 3, 2.

In a battle of wits between Steel and tactician!Step, who do the rest of the Rangers think will win? 🙄🙄

Back in the day: Sidestep would get most votes.

Current day: Steel would get most votes.

Whom are all the current Alpha levels that Sidestep knows/knows of.

With the caveat that I might add more in the future:

Has heard of: Locus (telepath), Marshal Hood (geokinesis), Cavalier (induced explosions), Skybright (telekinetic), Thunderhead (telepath), Marshal Rivergrass (hydrokinesis), Marshal Trailblazer (speed)

Has met: Sentinel (wind control), Catastrofiend (regeneration), Anathema (invulnerability), Pyroclast (superheated ash transformation), Void (dimensional manipulation), Heartbreak (psychic)

Is the heartbreak memory we see in rebirth influenced by memories of sidestep's time in the farm post-capture?

Most likely, yes. Trauma often bleeds together.

Would Mortum be able to add that camouflaging ability Ortega used during the Void raid to the armor? If so, how effective would it be at hiding Step? Is it like full camouflage or more like subtly blending in?

It would be possible to add to the armor, but it might compromise some other defensive properties of the surface treatment. It is basically a form of adaptive camouflage. Think squids. It wasn't really a concern of Sidestep since they have more effective ways of remaining out of sight.

Is there a specific area of the brain where telepathic activity is found? After boosting could a physiological change be seen in this area? Would telepathy actively in use show up on an fMRI scan?

Telepathy is one of the boosts that alters the way the brain works on a holistic level. However, the area vital to making it work is the corpus callosum, and in a lesser way, the temporoparietal junction. I think telepathic activity would show up as it was being used on a fMRI scan. Probably not if it wasn't in use at the time, unless you really knew what to look for.

Would physiological or activity changes be easily detected if a boost's power has increased?

If you had a past record to compare to, it would.

What was herald's vigilante gear like? Did he wear a mask?

He did wear a mask and an improvised outfit. I think it looked a lot more sleek than most debuting vigilantes though. He had a good eye for design and still some money left from home. Pretty much a sportswear base, with one or two designed key things to make it his.

We know he had a ridiculous helmet as Kinetik, but what about when he was doing courier work as Kestrel?

The Kestrel outfit (and name) actually came from his vigilante work. The company decided to keep it since it fitted their profile. So the suit just got upgraded to a proper skinsuit, and the mask became a sleek helmet. The color scheme was basic gray and rust, if you look up "kestrel" online, you can see what he was going for. Unfortunately he didn't think when he signed the sponsorship papers, and the courier company now own the Kestrel name and design. Daniel is quite bitter about it. He quite liked that design.

Sidestep comment to how the rangers break room looks impersonal. Is this because they're actively discouraged from decorating it with personal belongings to make it more homely? Or was it a conscious choice on the Rangers part?

Sidestep is comparing to the old HQ, which had years of being lived in by many disparate personalities. This HQ is new, and still has that slightly impersonal feeling to it. It is less being actively discouraged, and more like if something is new and shiny people feel less need to try to spice it up.

Will we ever get to see Chen snap and truly, truly be absolutely furious? Ortega said his blowouts were magnificent and now I'm interested.

Oh yes. You can only bottle things up so long.

How fast is Zephyr? What's the upper limit to their speed? Would they lose a race to anyone?

I don't know the exact upper limit, it hasn't been needed. They could definitely race and win against a car. The issue is as always, maneuverability. At those speeds, a single misstep can lead to big crashes, and Zephyr's not invulnerable. In fact, they mostly use it for the reaction speed, and to be able to run on water and the like. They would lose a race against Trailblazer, who is much faster.

How does Teresa feel about being seen as a 'neutral' mayor? Does she feel any particular worry about the dangers (like what happened to the previous mayor) associated with the job?

She is very aware of the dangers, and is pleased to be seen as neutral. You don't get work done by being seen as partisan.

What was the previous mayor like?

Geoff Hansen was a former investment banker who became elected mayor because many of the companies owed him favors, and believed he was the right person to take Los Diablos from glitchy startup to west coast powerhouse. They weren't wrong, but Geoff stepped on some very sore toes in the process.

Sidestep has preferred profanity: do any of the other main cast have particular phrases/a tendency to use certain swears?

Hmmm. I think that Ortega likes to vary, mixing both English and Spanish. They are by far the greatest user of profanity. Mortum uses "merde" whenever they get briefly annoyed. Argent doesn't swear that often, but when she does it's things like "shit". Chen can swear, and while he tries not to these days, when he does it will most likely stay within the "fuck" range. Herald voted most likely to not swear. He was not raised that way.

Did Ortega ever blame Chen for them not getting to Sidestep fast enough during HB? Do they still feel the same way? Likewise, does Chen resent what Ortega said to him to make him snap out of the telepathic attack, or blame them for the loss of his legs?

There has been blame shared between them, yes. Mostly Chen took it all on his shoulders. He doesn't blame Ortega anymore. The reverse is... still up for debate. Ortega might still harbor some resentment.

What do Blaze and Zephyr do on their downtime? Any hobbies?

Honestly, still surfing. They started out as part of that daredevil crowd who defied the risks of the ocean and they haven't forgotten that part.

We know Argent, Ortega and Steel can't leave work at work and all have their little side projects in their free time (Argent hangs out with bad-at-fighting vigilantes and looks for the regenerator, Steel dips his toes in governmental conspiracies, and Ortega is generally... a shady asshole with fingers in 88 different shady pies). Along those lines, what does Daniel do? He's been looking into HB; how did he do that, and is he still looking? What forms does his "street" heroism take?

Daniel has been looking into Heartbreak because the shadow of that event still looms over the team. He feels he needs to know to be a good Ranger, and make sure it doesn't happen again. Also, and this he doesn't say out loud, that was when Sidestep died, and that is important to him. He started by going through the systems, and quickly realized that there was an official version and an unofficial version that did not make sense. Even in the version kept from the public, things didn't add up. So he went looking.

That is how he met Marek and became loosely involved with the "West Coast Mysteries and Murder" crew. Yes, Herald has been part of the funding for that show (in secret, Ortega has no idea), and has gotten them out of trouble on more than one occasion. He gives tips on occasion, when he has encountered something weird that doesn't quite add up.

Other than that, he still occasionally stops street crimes if he happens to come across them. He doesn't like involving the LDPD if he can avoid it, and sometimes people just need a second chance. He actually has quite a positive reputation among henchmen and lower level villains.

1) How deep do the regene tattoos go? Does it reach the subcutaneous tissue?

Yes it does, every layer of skin is penetrated.

2) Does the process of tattoo creation involve injecting something into the skin?

No.

3) If (2) is a yes - does it involve injecting mRNA, or

4) some kind of dye?

No injections.

Does the main cast have any particular comfort foods?

The comfort foods they don't really want people to know about: Ortega likes that stupidly strong beef jerky. They are not a fan of their breath afterwards though. Argent likes raw beef. She has on occasion eaten an entire tray of fresh, ground beef with just pepper and salt. Chen is the type to empty a tub of icecream (particularly cookie dough or peanut) and then pay for it afterwards because his stomach on occasion dislikes dairy. Still worth it. Daniel would live on pancakes and waffles if he could. Especially fresh from the stove. On occasion he cooks them and eats them right there by the counter while the next one is cooking. Preferably banana and maple syrup or berries and cream.

Are there any animals you associate with the Rangers and Mortum (or any of the characters)? If yes, what are they and why?

I was about to say I leave that to the readers, but then I realized that I did have answers. Silly answers.

Ortega: Red Fox.

Argent: Cat.

Chen: Bear.

Daniel: Capybara.

Mortum: Crow.

Here's a self indulgent one: a fight between the Void and the Catastrofiend, one on one, who wins.

I would say the Void, but only like 60% of the time. The Catastrofiend got a few cards up it's sleeve.

Would you classify the Void's armor as Mysterious, Imposing, or Terrifying? Any other info you could give on how it looks?

I would say the intention of it is to be Terrifying, but it is more verging on Mysterious. It is the Void that makes it terrifying.

The sense of unease the void base and the heartbreak site give off - can they only be sensed by psi-sensitives, or is it a general vibe that non psi-sensitives can pick up too?

Psi-sensitive is a spectrum. Many people have a faint talent for feeling what's off there, even if they wouldn't see themselves that way.

Has Step always been able to read animal minds, or is it a skill that arose as their telepathy grew stronger?

It arose after the nanosurge, though they felt some vibes before that too,

Physical age wise, what's the currently oldest living Regene?

I am not sure. They would look around 50, but that is not the actual years since decanting.

If Spoon got boosted, what powers would he have? How would Chen handle it?

Oh Spoon would 100% be a teleporter, and Chen could not handle it.

How do registered heroes get tested for telepathic resistance? What sort of training regiments are in place to help develop said resistance?

This is mostly a case for the Rangers, and certain other heroes who work with sensitive issues. In general, the training would be with a registered telepath, and they would learn various techniques for recognizing when they are influenced, and distracting mind readers with other thoughts, as well as shielding themselves. There used to be several licensed mid-level telepaths working wither for companies, or with them as a independent contractor. However, during the last few years, they have gone out of business.

Boost registration is a thing on the east coast, is that something they'd intend to impose once (if) the FEZ is reabsorbed into the US when resolution 32 is up?

That would 100% be on the agenda.

Does the Rat King have any opinions on bats?

They have not had many close interactions with them.

how old was Anathema when they were first boosted?

Twelve.

Do we know what the Green Sky's views on children were? Were members with established families encouraged to 'introduce' their children into the group?

Oh the Green Sky loves children. They are a very important part of the cult, and children were encouraged to participate and be introduced at an early age. They also worked with various orphanages, who where secretly supported by the cult.

Will we ever get to punch ppl for Ortega? They punched so many ppl for Sidestep, it's only fair we do the same for them.

Oh yes. I agree that would be fair.

At the time of the raid on the green sky compound, how many active members were in the cult?

I think there were about thirty members at the compound, but the cult numbered in the hundreds. Most were still out in society, and only spent weekends or longer periods at the compound. The raid was picked to be at a time between major meetings, to avoid too much civilian interactions.

What was Themmy promised when they joined the cult?

A place to call home.

What's Cavalier's sexuality?

Bi/pan but with a preference for the ladies due to general social pressure.

What about Pyroclast's?

Workaholic. Somewhere in the spectrum between demi and ace, very faintly biromantic.

Does Mortum have any competition in regards to their line of business? 🗨️ Was there a possible rival Sidestep could've gone to for their suit?

Of course Mortum has competition. This is a lucrative market. However, Mortum was the one in Los Diablos where Sidestep found no ties to either the military, or companies wanting to test black market stuff.

Does sidestep remember what anathema's thoughts felt like?

Yes.

Sidestep turned against everyone in their past life to fight the farm. Has Ortega ever taken similar extreme actions in their pursuit of taking down HG? How far is Tega willing to go for this?

Ortega has cut a lot of ties to people. Not to the Sidestep extreme yet, but they have lost friendships over their obsession. How far Ortega is willing to go depends on what else they have going in their life. If there is not much else, all the way, baby.

How would Nazar react upon learning about Ember's grudge against him and the reasons behind it?

Faintly amused. It would bolster his confidence a lot.

What year did Blaze and Zephyr debut as heroes?

Around 2011 or so. They stepped up after the nanosurge, which impacted them and their friends heavily.

Are there any boosts/mods not allowed on airplanes or other types of transportation?

Boosts and mods must have a special license to travel by plane. This was implemented when air traffic finally started to be possible in the west coast, and is stringently applied in order to keep the few lines open to the rest of the world. Much like bringing a weapon aboard, it is forbidden in most circumstances.

Mods are easy to catch on security scans and metal detectors. But mods with smaller work done has an easy time getting a permit, especially if it is defensive. Chen has a permit, which details the modwork done, and the licensing agency. Ortega has one too, but with a lot more classified marked on it.

It is harder to identify boosts, but anybody with visible weirdness would have a hard time. Argent does not have a permit and would not go on a plane. Herald does.

The same rules goes for trains and buses in the east. Not on the west coast, because of liberty. Of course individual companies can ban and enforce stuff like that.

After their death, did Ortega ever watch old interviews just so they could hear Step's voice?

Yes. And would get drunk, depressed cry a little.

With Marek and/or his investigation show - do you have plans to have them mentioned/appear in the game per se, or will they stay exclusive to background lore?

They are planned for book three, at least in a minor role.

Has Ortega ever openly talked to anyone about them being in love with Sidestep? Or is it more like an unsaid but obvious thing everyone close to them knows?

I think book two is the first time those words might be mentioned out loud. It was always a mostly unsaid thing that people picked up on.

What would Mr. Ortega (Snr)'s mindscape have felt like to Sidestep?

A house with lots of closed doors. Some locked. Slightly cold. Feeling watched.

And what about tia Elena's? Did Sidestep actually try to see it themselves? What was the result?

A busy market, like one of those festivals when you are a small child. Everybody's faceless but happy, but the feeling of lots of weird things hiding in the shadows. Sidestep has not tried to get a feel for it so far.

Any chance we'll cross paths with farm employees (big or small) before Book 4?

Perhaps book three. I am unsure where it will end.

Do any members of the green sky cult have day jobs? Normal 9-5 shifts?

Oh yes. Most of them.

How would Bo/Rosie and the Crew react if Step asked them for relationship advice? How good of advice would they give?

Bo: "Oh don't ask me, I'm terrible at that. I'm divorced, you know that, right? But if you want any advice I guess I would say don't work too much."

Rosie: "Look, everybody asks me that because a girl like me should know, right? Nope. I don't. You should probably ask Joe, he's good at that stuff. You know, barkeep stuff."

Pelayo: "Don't date a Ranger, that's a good start. Seriously, what were you thinking? Love will conquer all? No. It won't. I would say break up, but honestly, at this point having your ex be a ranger is even worse. I need a raise." alternatively "Mortum? Wow, they are out of your league. Keep doing what you have been doing, it's obviously working, but I have no idea why."

Ward: "Keep at it. Sure they might say they hate you now, but just keep getting in touch and eventually they will cave. Or not. But are you planning to give up?"

Nehal: "You need to figure out what they like and give the biggest present you can afford. I'll help you steal it. Oh, and apologize. Even if you don't think you've done anything wrong. It always worked for my brother, and he's married now."

ZaZa: "Really? Me? You're desperate enough that you're asking me for advice? You're doomed."

Did Mortum go straight from academia into villainy or did they spend any time doing private sector/corporate research?

They did their years in the private sector. That was where the money was, and also where they were backstabbed.

How would the Marshall of LD react if the new kingpin (after HG is gone) wanted to work with them by giving info on criminals/villains or help when there were big threats in exchange for letting them run the city's criminal world in peace? Could an alliance of sorts be formed or would something like that be completely off the tables?

Chen is nothing if not pragmatic. A deal could most likely be negotiated.

Do farm employees come from a specific social environment? Like, are they all single people with no friends or family attached, in case of needing to disappear them without too many questions asked?

I mean, that helps. And that would be the kind of people that would agree to lonely postings in the middle of nowhere and going home during the weekends. You get the kind of people whose work is their life, or they will eventually lose the connections to their former life because it's hard to keep them up.

Do villains worry that high infamy hunters will start hunting them next?

I think some at least considers the possibility.

Aside from how intensely Sidestep would fight, were there any other behaviours/thoughts Sidestep exhibited back in the day that had any of the Rangers and/or other vigilantes they hung out with go 'hmm... Something weird is going on there...'??

I will leave that to headcanon, but I think it was fair to say that Sidestep was considered an oddball by many at the start.

Sidestep doesn't need to see or to look at people in the eyes to mindmeld with them, and Heartbreak's influence didn't seem to be limited to their eye-range. So why does Heartbreak's strongest hold on Sidestep seem to hinge on crossing their gaze?

There is a 'look' variable in Rebirth, and it is tied to other things as well. But what it means is so far unrevealed.

Has Sidestep ever, knowingly or unknowingly, possessed another telepath?

No.

was sidestep's mind always "sticky" or it became one?

Hmmm. I think part of it was always that way.

Is there a renewable void blood source at the farm? Considering Geni-Tech does a lotta cloning around and all...

If that was the case, there would be worse people hunting for them.

The HB victims that tw gore clawed out their eyes... Could they have seen the same thing that terrifies the Rat King when you lose consciousness during your panic attack at the auction?

A similar thing. Not the same.

In Ljungstrand's final notes (1998) in the lore post, he talks about dimensions, folding and "seeing is believing". Was he aware of the Void and their theorised powerset? Has he ever come into contact with the Void?

This was in part inspired by the Void, yes. No personal contact, but a lot of research.

Could the hole on the heartbreak site (that's been covered up with a roadworks-style metal plate) have been caused by strong acid damage?

That is possible, yes.

Building on that: is the hole as deep as it was in Heartbreak, or has it grown deeper?

It is approximately the same depth.

Did the rat king know the laser dolphins? If yes, did they get along?

They were aware of them, yes. Probably interacted on several occasions. A bit weird and irritable, and with a nasty sense of humor. Probably glad to be with Psychopathor at that point.⁴

What are the benefits of getting donor organs from a boosted individual?

It depends. Most of the time it's psychosomatic, but on occasion the powers can bleed through, and in rare cases, manifest fully.

What's Sentinel like as a dad

Busy. Affectionate. Lots of hands on, bring the kids along to stuff. Kinda silly at times. Likes making voices and reading stories.

Who boosted and/or modded the laser dolphins?

It was part of Tina's research once upon a time.

Does Ortega really not recall what Vernon said to them, or are they just pretending they don't?

They are pretending, 100%.

Is the entity causing the bad vibes in the Tesseract, the same entity causing the bad vibes in the heartbreak site?

Nope. Though the means are similar.

Will we get the chance to talk about Anathema (and the grief) to Steel and/or Ortega?

Yeah, once people start talking...

Is the "bio boot drive", or a different part of the core, where the infection first began in the core?

The bio boot drive is the culprit.

A bit of a nerdy question but - will Vitamin D supplements help Ortega? And if not, could they at least confer some form of protection to boosts with high neural loads, hence delaying the rate at which degeneration or strain sets in?

Ortega has a big regiment of supplements, vitamin D is one of them.

Can dampeners protect against the "other" root/branch tag in the telepathic classification system?

It depends. Not against all of them. Especially the ones who need skin to skin contact.

Did Themmy know the Catastrofiend before they became the Catastrofiend?

No. But they had met.

Has Dr Mortum ever heard of, or perhaps come into contact with/worked with Dr Anna Jansen (the other telepathic specialist who corresponded with Ljungstrand)?

Religiously read research.

Where is Dr Jansen working now? Did she accept the job with GeniTech?

Nope, she has since moved east, and is working in the private sector.

Did she continue to correspond with Ljungstrand after the final intercepted communication?

No, she cut those ties. Too dangerous to her career.

Has Dr Mortum ever been scouted for by the farm? If so - what came out of it? If not - why were they deemed not ideal?

No. Too much controversy and arguments in their academic past. Not a good fit. Deemed a possible security risk.

The farm seems to pay special attention to scientists who have earned their doctorates. From this group - does the farm aim to recruit specialists who will benefit the farm? Or, do they focus on those with certain personality traits instead, recruiting them even if they do not possess particularly specialized or coveted skills?

Skills AND personality. There are people they have wanted to recruit that didn't pass the security assessment.

How much money does the storefront base actually make as a business. It seems to get some customers. Is it enough to pay Marcia and "Step the employee" or does most of the costs for keeping it looking legitimate come from Steps own villain funds?

Much of it comes from villain funds.

Could the Regenerator be used to instantly heal wounds?

Yes.

Who joined the void cult first, vitruvian or themmy?

Anathema.

What's the current diameter and circumference of the hb sinkhole? Has this changed since it first appeared?

I think around 3 m or so. It has not changed.

What is its current depth?

A bit over 100m or so.

Has the farm ever implanted chips into the brains of non-lab grown individuals? Human or otherwise.

There has been attempts. Not very successful.

What would Blaze and Zephyr have done if the Guardians didn't exist/weren't offered to join?

Probably start/join another team.

On that note, what would Locus and Porphyry have done if they were offered to join instead of them?

Locus would have said no, probably. And Porphyry would have gone with her.

What colours do Re-Gene tattoos come in? Is it just orange? If not, what colours can be found?

All colors of the rainbow and some more. Mostly bright and strong, so they stand out.

Is Dr. Finch married or does she have any family?

She is divorced, with two daughters. She lives with her elderly mum, who doubles as a babysitter.

Since void blood has properties that can pass through the blood brain barrier - are these 'properties' also indicated in psychedelic drugs?

Relatives, yes.

Adding on: what is the effect of void blood on the neurons in the brain and/or nervous system?

I am not deep enough into the pseudoscience to be able to detail that without major spoilers.

You've mentioned that Sidestep's telepathic code changed from T123567 (Post Nanosurge, Pre Heartbreak) to T12345678 (Current Sidestep).

When did Sidestep gain root 4 and branch 8? Was either/both gained

(1) during or immediately after Heartbreak, or

(2) during their farm capture?

A combination.

Can Ashfall reincorporate inside someone else's body?

Yes. But it's not nice.

Does ortega's static brain help protect them against void powers?

Partly, not wholly. Just against some bits.

Are the sides of the heartbreak hole also smooth sandstone?

No, it's odd. More like melted glass.

Void lore question: did Ashfall hear sidestep scream as well?

Yes.

Is the core also used to create Re-Gene tattoos?

Nope.

How did the void find out that their blood could temporarily transfer some of their power to the recipient?

Because it made spiritual sense, they tried.

So uh how did Arsenaux take potentially not getting Mortum's gun from the auction?

Not pleased.

How can the Void tell if somebody is already a boost? They knew Step was and their telepathy wasn't known by many nor public knowledge

Because of their vibes. With their senses, it's immediately obvious and unmistakable.

Do Re-Genes have diseases specific to them?

No, just the normal ones. They do have an increased cancer rate though.

Did void set up their cult before or after getting boosted?

After.

Absolutely necessary, vital, needed question... how does one actually pronounce Arsenaux? is it with a little bit of french or is the X pronounced

It is pronounced like the french. But it's not a real word, just a pun on arson.

What's the relationship between The Farm/the SD and the Green Sky like ? Were there ever any interactions between the two or are they keeping away from each other ? We know Regina isn't fan of the cult, but what do each "organization" as a whole think of the other ?

Faintly hostile.

What did Arsenaux do before joining the green sky? Was she already a boost?

Yes, she was.

What was Arsenaux and the Void's relationship like

Strained. They occasionally disagreed on things, but Arsenaux was loyal to the cause, not the person.

Can we get a hug from Hollow Ground?

Yes.

Could Ashfall be defeated by a vacuum? Or a leaf blower?

No. At this point, even Sentinel would struggle.

How does Ortega know how much power they've used/have left? Is there an indicator? In their vision, located somewhere on them, connected directly to their senses? A completely different way they know?

They can feel it. There was an indicator in the old one, on their arm, but the new generator is hooked up so closely to their nervous system that they know it intimately.

is the color changing suit standard for ortega or was it made special for the void assault?

It was an adapted military issue suit, used for infiltration and wilderness missions.

Is Miss Arsenaux taking cultist applications?

Always.

When is Blaze's birthday? 🧐

12 January 1988

When was Mia and Blaze born? I need to know how old they are too

Mia is a 26 July 2000 baby.

When a boost is arrested or apprehended are there any precautions that can be taken for those who have more dangerous, offensive, destructive powers? They have dampeners for telepaths, but what others are there?

The LDPD has measures to deal with many things, but in general a lot of them depends on making the boost in question unconscious or in other ways incapacitated. There are no general power dampening fields.

How long had Ortega and Ashfall been planning their Combo? Do they have any other team up combos?

For a while. It was actually Chen's idea after watching a volcano documentary while bored. They do have other combos I think, Ashfall is all about that.

Including Sentinel into the combo: what's the maximum radius they could spread that effect while Charge is able to maintain Ashfall/Pyroclast staying connected?

Depends. At the time of the Void compound it would be about ten meters. At this point, much more.

And could it keep up with Charge at, well, full charge—speed and agility and all?

Yes, using static electricity to cling.

What are the rangers opinions of the guardians?

Ortega: A bit more of an annoyance than a classic corporate team due to the city backup. They have not worked together in a major way yet. Ortega is convinced they are meant to replace the Rangers.

Argent: Kind of a fangirl though she would never admit it. She was aware of both Zephyr and Blaze from the days before she became a hero, and admired them.

Chen: Very aware that it is a rival team, but respects their work. On good terms with Blaze.

Herald: They are heroes, right?

If someone was guilty of hiding and aiding a Re-Gene from getting recaptured by the Farm, do they face any punishment for it?

Theft of government property, and breaking a ton of top-secret laws.

Do escaped Re-Genes have bounties on their heads? Does whoever turn them in get a reward?

That would be admitting it had ever happened. Which the Farm doesn't.

What was the weirdest thing sidestep did in their vigilante days that made Chen/the rangers go "wtf??"

I leave that one up to headcanons.

We begin causing uhhhh big problems, will the SF Rangers be assigned to team up with LD Rangers to handle us?

Not in book 3.

If you put a blindfold on lady argent, does it obscure her vision completely?

No.

How is argent's color vision? More or less range than average human eyes? Can she see in shrimp colors? Can she see infrared or ultraviolet wavelengths average human eyes can't pick up?

Mantis shrimp, infrared and ultraviolet.

Will Mortum let us add/remove a cape later to our armor?

Maybe. Not sure.

Will we ever have the chance to kill Lord Ember?

Don't know yet.

Are Regenes expected/allowed to reply verbally to their Handlers or are they meant to remain silent at all times? Are they supposed to speak at all given they aren't allowed to talk to other Regenes?

They use verbal communication with their handlers, but see that as their work language and avoids using it between themselves. In general they are supposed to be silent until spoken to.

Is the area covered by the tattoos still 100% comprised of the same human skin cell genetic makeup, like the rest of the non-tattooed skin?

With a bit of extra in there.

How does the Farm handle Regene relationships if they're noticed?

It depends. If they work together well in a group and doesn't cause issues, they tend to keep them together. The most important unit is the team. If it causes problems, or dereliction of duty they are separated.

You mentioned Regenes don't distinguish if a relationship involves sex or not, but how does the Farm react/handle it if Regenes are caught sleeping together? Does this happen often?

It happens now and then, they still have a sex-drive, especially when young. In general the Farm tries to ignore it, nobody can get pregnant. And I bet some staff finds it... interesting. For science. There are some genuinely creepy and bad people working there.

How does child support and stuff like that work in the FEZ? Is Bo required by court to pay child support or is it an agreement between him and his ex wife?

It depends. While there are no federal oversight, an insurance agreement is often signed with the marriage license to determine what happens when a couple split up. Especially if there are children planned or involved. Some companies have similar clauses as part of their insurance package. So it is an agreement between Bo and his wife.

Does Chen ever have to worry about where he sits in public places?

Just in fancy places.

Does Mia have any particular opinions on the Guardians?

Not yet. But she will.

Is what sidestep remembers about heartbreak now different from the memories they encoded during their actual experience of heartbreak?

Yes.

What was the name Themmy went by when they were part of the void cult?

Paragon.

Would Ortega prefer we gift them HG (alive), or they hunt HG themselves? 🙄

Depends on how nice the package is.

When Daniel was shot by Deadeye back when he was still a corporate hero, was he aware of who she was or who she allegedly worked for?

Nope.

Is he aware of her and her alleged affiliations now?

Yes, he researched.

Might we ever get a chance to kick her ass for it?

Why not? Sounds pleasant.

...is Blaze a cuddler?

I think so. He likes the warmth.

What do the Fallen Hero sinister corporations specialize in and what are their names?

I recall PharmaCore and GeniTech but there were others I can't remember.

Oh boy, I honestly don't remember. The others haven't played into it yet, thus they are just names.

Do the effects of the Void's powers differ on Ashfall depending on whether he's in his human form or sprinkle form? If yes: how do they differ, exactly?

Yes they do, and you will know in the Ashfall segment of the Void story.

What are the components in void blood that make it different from normal boosted human blood?

It's not about what the components are...

A few questions for Heartbreak:

- Where is heartbreak's physical body now?

- Where is their mind?

- Do any of the named cast know Heartbreak before they became Heartbreak - and if so, how many knew them?

Oh this is sweet. Did you REALLY think I would answer this? When you don't even know the truth about the whole incident?

Does Pokemon exist in the FHR world?

The game does, yeah.

There are plasma weapons, energy casters, lasers, fusion batteries, nanites, superpower drugs, mecha, cyborg, man-machine interfaces, advanced medicine, telepathic studies, gene-modification, quantum-tech, teleportation and probability prediction/future sight.

Any hint of other technologies/powers/science disciplines do you think might be revealed in the future ?

Anything that would make for a cool story or gets stuck in my head as a hyperfixation. Nothing planned I am willing to spoil.

Is Mitchell a boost, mod, neither or both?

Neither.

Is the Rat King a bunch of brains in a jar or do they have their little bodies and could theoretically be removed from their container?

Just the brains, no bodies. They were implanted so young they only have the barest memory of a body.

Is The Crack's true identity someone Sidestep has (or has the potential to have) met before?

Yes.

What happened to the suit Psychopathor was wearing when he first fought Ortega and Step? Did he have to make a new one or did he steal it back?

He had to make a new one. But it was no big chore, he's constantly upgrading.

When a villain with a suit is arrested what happens to it? I assume they don't get it back.

Goes either in the vault or to research.

[Some personal updates:](#)

[Dec 4, 2022](#)

First of all, apologies, I forgot to put up the question of the month this month, so it is only the questions from the discord server. If you want the discord invite, just DM me if you're on the right tier. Life has been very weird lately, with some bad turns, and it just slipped my mind. I'll write something cool later to make up for it.

So, life. I got news a month ago that **the company I am working for is closing down**, and we will all be out of a job. Moving the production abroad. So, I will be out of a job come June next year. However, they are paying us good money until then, so I will try to save up as much as I possibly can and try to make a go of it with my company. I have been working on that behind the scenes for quite some time, but with a full time job, and finishing off Fallen Hero, I have not had much time left. Now's the time to start gearing up. I am **planning to start publishing things** of my own, not interactive fiction, but old-fashioned books. I will start in Swedish, but translations are underway. I'll share the news here once I am ready to show more.

I am also **providing coding and backup writing for another piece of interactive fiction** (written by my partner). It's not for regular viewing yet (some on the discord got a peek), but once a bit more is done I will certainly share it here. The premise is giant robots/EVA/traumatized kids/nordic mythology and takes place both during the events, as well as fifteen years later once they have grown up.

There is also **a superhero ttrpg** I am working on, which I hopefully will have time for later.

Another, more pleasant but also sad news is that finally **Breaks, the comic me and Emma Vieceli have been working on since 2013, is finished!** You can read it all on Tapas, we are working on print stuff.

<https://tapas.io/episode/190485>

All three volumes are done, and oh boy, I like finishing projects. If you were ever worried I would not finish Fallen Hero, don't worry. I am too stubborn to quit! And I love endings.

I will take the time **in the coming weeks to update my Patreon** a bit. I got the option to turn on anniversary billing, which means that new patrons will be billed every month on the sign up date, so there's no longer any risk of double billing if you sign up late in the month. I am going to work more on this patreon since I will be reliant on it for income come June next year. So there will probably be new tiers and content once I've had time to think about things.

And, don't forget, the **Fallen Hero: Retribution release date is 2 February 2023**. Getting closer! After that point (Mars probably), the Patreon will definitely be adjusted, as I switch the Retribution spoilers to past content, and will chance the highest tier to let you be apart of the Revelations journey. Yep, this time you will get to see how I make a book from step one.

I think that was pretty much everything, it feels like every year since 2016 has been more chaotic since the last, so I hope 2023 will calm down some. I need some time to rest, and I don't think I am alone in that.

I have an idea for Yuletide content this year, but we'll see if I have time to finish it.

Thank you so much for your support. I would not have managed without you.

/Malin

[The Void -2- Charge](#)

[Nov 12, 2022](#)

Butterfly nerves. Like standing on the edge before a big jump. Making peace with the fact that I might not come back alive, yet certain that I will. The illusion of control over my own destiny.

Will that ever get old?

"We should be closer." Ashfall's voice is hardly more than a whisper, pressed flat against the ground.

"We follow the plan." I shift, the boulder is blocking my sight as well as hiding me, but I don't need to see right now.

"Charge," Ashfall starts, the familiar annoyed growl setting my teeth on edge.

"We trust the team. Don't mope just because you're not the spearhead."

"I'm not moping." A deep breath, forcibly lowering his voice once more. "I just think I should have been there. I don't trust..."

"Sidestep and Anathema can handle it." I stress the last name because Ashfall has picked up on it too. The way Anathema was acting. "If I can be patient, so can you."

"Fine." He looks down at his wrist, the cheap digital watch counting down the numbers. Cheap, because it will be abandoned when he shifts form.

I'm grateful he abandons the argument. It's too late to change anything; I know he knows. No outright accusations. Not yet. Not that it would help. I can lie well enough to make him shut up. Besides, it's not really Anathema that bothers him. It's the inaction.

I can sympathize.

The skies grow darker, deep reds and blues as the air goes cold. I press the control on my neck, and the skinsuit shifts from desert tan to deep black. A nice toy; too bad it will probably be ruined after tonight. They keep telling me I'm too hard on my toys, and I keep telling them to build them better. One day perhaps.

In the distance, lights come on, a small pinprick in the emptiness. It reminds me of the ranch. Of being on horseback all day, returning as the coyotes come out. Sore but happy. Good times.

Not like this. The Tesseract is nightmare country, every bit of intel agrees on that. I'm not exactly thrilled to send Sidestep and Anathema in alone either, but it was the smartest choice. Chen didn't protest, and I know he would have. Even if he doesn't know the whole truth.

The truth. I hate that I can't entirely trust Anathema. Not to betray us but to keep their head in the game. If we are walking into a nightmare, they are walking into their personal hell. But I asked, and they assured me they wanted to do this. No, they needed to.

I get that.

"They're late." Ashfall, once more unable to shut up.

"Not much. The schedule was always an estimation."

Elsewhere, Sentinel must be thinking the same thing, but he's more professional about it. Waiting for the call. Waiting for my call. Trusting my judgment. Does he ever regret not accepting the Marshal title? I can't lie. It feels weird to give him orders. I can see he thinks the same. Something's gonna break eventually, but it won't be tonight. Too much at stake.

At least I can trust Chen to have my back. It's a relief to know that, at least. Whatever arguments we have are not taken into action. Here, he will follow the plan. Be the backup. Move in last. Stay at range. Even if he argued differently. Maybe he was right. Maybe it would be smarter to move in as a group. Overwhelming force.

Except for the Void. Too many unknowns. If we all got caught in their voidfield, it would be bad. A staggered approach. Hit and run. Take out the cultists. Some of them are boosts in their own right; we can't win a game of numbers. Remove them. Then deal with the Void.

"Down!" Ashfall's voice is an excited hiss as the lights in the compound go out.

"Charge to Sentinel." I don't wait for a reply. "The power is down. We are moving in. Give us ten minutes, then clear what's left outside."

"Roger that." Sentinel's voice is filled with static, and I force myself to calm down. Don't blow the connection. *"I'll coordinate with Steel as planned. Over and out."*

"Alright." I turn the communicator off. It will probably not survive what we have planned. Normally Sidestep would handle that bit, but Ashfall has as many problems as me when it comes to tech. "Time to light this place up."

"Finally." Ashfall breaks into a run, but I catch up without effort.

This is my favorite moment of a fight. Unlocking the breakers, one by one. Feeling my nerves light up like landing strips, air tasting ozone in my lungs. Control waiting to be released fully. My night vision goggles paint the landscape simulation green, but no test run could ever come close to what this feels

like in real life. The spring in my step, as if the cracked ground was rubber, adding power step by step. I have to slow down; we need to be a team.

"Ready to try this one live?" I sound breathless but from excitement, not exhaustion.

"Of course." Ashfall's voice is hard. "The moment I change, I'll be blind. I'm following your lead."

His goggles won't change with him, and I can't promise mine will last long either. They are insulated, but I'll put them through more than they were made to handle. It doesn't bother me much. I can make my own light.

The wind is picking up around us, a precursor of Sentinel's arrival. The compound is visible now, as are the people on the wall, scanning the horizon. Our skinsuits are good at depressing our heat signature, but this close, they will pick us up any second.

"Alright, let's go!" I pull my filter mask on. It covers my nose and mouth, muffling any communication. But I'm gonna need it for this.

Next to me, Ashfall disincorporates, leaving his goggles and camouflage suit behind. The cloud of ash is warm as it surrounds me, slightly hotter than my body temperature. He isn't fast in this shape, but I've got a cure for that. The faint crackle as I urge my emitters to life is nearly inaudible, but the surge of static I produce is enough to make Ashfall cling to me like a second skin.

I smile behind my mask as I really begin to run, picking up speed with every step. Visibility is shit through the cloud, but I don't need any details. A shot rings out, then another. But the bullets fly straight through Ashfall, unable to pinpoint the solid kernel at his center that is me. I can feel him struggling to cling on, so I increase the voltage as I leap, grabbing the top of the wall and swinging up.

Two sentries close to me. I don't bother fighting them. Instead, my spinal ports light up as I pump residual charge into Ashfall, feeling the static tickle. The Faraday shielding embedded in my skin keeps me safe as the charge builds, and Ashfall expands into a cloud of volcanic thunder. A crack, a hiss, and two lightning bolts leap for their rifles. The discharge is blinding, but I don't stick around to see if they are down or just stunned. Sentinel can handle them, and I have bigger fish to fry.

I leap down, relieved that the compound looks like what Anathema described. The buildings above ground should hold some of the acolytes, as well as the main entrance. Let's see if anybody wants to pick a fight with me. No. Us.

I can't stop smiling. Ashfall has spread out as far as he's able, still clinging to me as I keep feeding power into him. It hardly drains my batteries. Just like he theorized, my power can charge his particles, and his output will be far more than I put into him. No precision, but it doesn't matter. I don't have any friends here I can hurt. Anathema is invulnerable, and Sidestep knows how to stay away.

Just me and the Green Sky.

I kick in the door as the wind strengthens, stepping inside the common room, instantly transforming it into a death trap. Electrified ash fills the area, lightning discharging into the cultists that try to attack us. One by one, they fall. They don't even get close before they collapse, their weapons magnets for the powers unleashed. With Ashfall spread this wide, I have no issues finding the door to the stairs leading down.

Just in time for the storm to pick up outside.

The night vision effect on my goggles has given out by now, but the darkness is parted by bluish lightning arcs, playing inside Ashfall's cloud. My filter mask is barely keeping up, but at least I don't have to run now that I'm inside. Instead, I walk cautiously, prepared for the inevitable ambush. As I head down, the stairs spiral downwards, and the metal railing lights up like an electric snake.

Down. The stairwell shaft is smooth sandstone, as if someone had melted a hole into the earth. I wonder if Ashfall is connecting the dots or if he's busy concentrating on his thundercloud shape. Hopefully, the latter. The drawings on the walls are lit up by lightning. Stylized. Bold colors. Telling a tale as I descend. I don't fall for the distraction. I'm no cultist needing otherworldly approval.

I'm here to tear this place down. To finish what Hood never managed.

The stairwell ends at another door. I try the handle, and it's unlocked. Almost like an invitation.

I smile as I kick it open anyway, rolling through the opening as Ashfall billows inwards. The blast of fire just misses, flickering red clinging to the floor like napalm. Alright, can't get hit by that.

Maybe I should say something snarky, but instead I step closer, enveloping the hulking figure in Ashfall, pumping a massive charge into his... no, her body. I get a scream in return, but no collapse. Instead, her arm swings in my direction, glowing vents erupting like gills in her arm as she fires again.

Close. I can feel the heat through my skinsuit and Ashfall's insulation. She's at least a head taller than me, so I keep close to her body, landing a blow on her kidneys. No effect, like hitting rock. I only hurt myself. Even though the corridor is spacious, it feels too cramped to fight freely. The lingering flames are a nuisance. The longer the fight goes, the more it turns into a deadly game of the floor is lava. On my own, I'd be in trouble. But I'm not.

You hear her gasp, then struggle for breath as Ashfall forces his form into her mouth and nose. Thickening, sucking moisture, turning to a painful sludge. Her arm flares open, and I barely dodge another jet of flame, but her knees are buckling, and she collapses on the floor as reinforcements arrive.

Two men, identically dressed but unmasked. Their eyes widen as they spot me, bereft of my Ashfall cloak. I leap across the fire, feinting a kick to get a read on their abilities. The first one clenches his fists, and his skin erupts in thorns, tearing his clothes. The second steps back, eyes turning green and nauseating. I ignore him for the moment, flexing my wrist to send a thin wire toward Mr. Untouchable. The thin spike at the end hits home, and I send a lightning bolt down the line. The impact is loud, accompanied by the stench of charred flesh as he flies backward into the wall.

"Ashfall," I shout, but he's still fighting with the woman, who is refusing to go down, clawing at her mouth and throat. That could take a few minutes, so I'd better focus on...

on...

I could have sworn there was another man here, but the tunnel is suddenly dark and empty. No fire. No light. Nobody.

The ground twists under my feet and only a lifetime of acrobatics let me keep my balance. The sounds echo strangely, invading my brain, but I bite down hard and open my ports wide. An electrical cocoon surrounds me, and I scream as I let it erupt in all directions. The darkness falls away in an instant as the green-eyed man collapses.

That. That took more than I had planned. My battery levels aren't looking good. At least Ashfall wasn't hurt, and the woman has stopped struggling.

"Are you okay?" As he detaches himself from the body, I look on, but the ashy cloud can't nod. And Sidestep is not here to interpret. I just have to trust that he is. I'm going to need his help.

It's only a matter of time before we face a proper attack. We haven't exactly been quiet, which was the point. Draw everybody's attention. Sentinel should have arrived now. With the radar down, there is no risk of anti-air missiles. He's not at his best underground, though. And that's where the Void is.

I hold out my arms, and Ashfall envelops me once more.

"We should move cautiously," I say, mostly to myself. The flames have died down, so the only light is the faint lightning inside the cloud. "By now, they will have had time to react."

That's when the scream rings out. Loud. Desperate.

Familiar. Sidestep.

My feet start moving as soon as the sound registers. Fuck caution.

That was never my thing anyway.

[QnA October!](#)

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Any advice for sticking with an idea and seeing it through? I've been interested in writing my own choicesscript game, but have a hard time picking one idea and developing it.

My advice would be to ignore the idea and pick the people. Which characters are the most fun to write? Then they can be transported into whatever idea you find coolest, or most marketable if you have several. The thing is, once you have started writing you should try to fold in any new or cool idea into the story and adapt as needed. Many times this can be done, and if there are any that are too odd, then just type them down and put them in a folder and ignore them. You need to settle on one and go for it.

If you have several to pick between, start writing a bit on each, and see which one works the best with you. In essence, Fallen Hero is one book idea, with characters and setting from another book, and writing vibes and style from a third. So yes, I gutted two stories of cool stuff to fill the third. Any good story is a turducken at heart.

In moments where it's difficult to write, how do you motivate yourself to write anyway?

Spite and telling myself "I'll fix it in the edit". When you write something long there is no way you can wait to be in the mood. You need to be prepared to write mediocre shit, and sometimes it gets fixed later, sometimes you get in the mood while writing, and sometimes it turns out better than it felt when you wrote it. Just write. Don't focus on writing good. Just on getting to the end.

How organized/"finished" is your first write-up of a chapter/scene? For example, is it close to what we saw for the alpha, or was that several revisions in already?

The alpha was pretty close to my first draft, but it was more like draft 2. Because every new chapter, I went back and fixed and added to the earlier ones. A lot of the time, what gets fixed is more variations and variables, then grammar and writing.

It did underwent a massive overhaul when I switched the order of many chapters and events, and added new ones in because the timeline of the herald romance went weird. I had not accounted for that in my planning.

Do you already have a name picked out for the fourth book? Any hints, if so?

Yes. it will be called Fallen Hero: Revolution.

Now get lots of rest and enjoy the holidays. You've earned it! :)

I will try, but I will relax by doing other projects... I'm a workaholic.

Would the mayor of Los diablos ever publicly throw shade on the Rangers if their reputation plummets as the result of a certain new villain in town?

Oh yes.

What is the mayor's stance on federal influence over the west? What is her opinion on the Rangers? Would she like to see them gone and replaced with more teams like the Guardians?

She is very much for the west as it's own political thing, and dislikes federal influence and thus the Rangers. She would like to see them gone.

Does the mayor have political ambitions that goes beyond "running" Los Diablos?

Yes, she does.

How did the public find out Sidestep "died"?

In the reports from the Heartbreak terrorist attack.

In the future books will we have the opportunity to help Ortega pay of their debt?

Yes.

did sentinel ever end up having/adopting kids with his wife?

Yes, they have two adopted children together.

Ortega seems to harbour some doubts of their own even without Sidestep's push, and they rub shoulders with shady characters all the time. So what do they think about villainy, really?

For Ortega it is all a sliding grayscale, not just black and white. The definition of villainy for them is that it is against the law, but they are very aware that not all laws are just, and sometimes it is better if you break them. Sometimes that is the only morally right thing to do.

Has ortega or chen ever had to bring in someone they don't particularly disagree with, but the powers that be (corporations/government) demanded it in the past?

Oh yes. And it doesn't sit well with either of them. And well, at times a villain or two has managed to get away... things like that happens.

Does argent know how to roller skate?

Yes, she does. She's got good balance.

How does the media usually respond when a hero turns villain or a villain turns hero? Do they try to spin the stories in any certain direction?

Oh that's gold. They will be able to spin that narrative forever. In what direction varies though. For example, with Five Pennies, they ran the narrative that he had been a villain all along, and questioned people who had worked with him, and companies that had sponsored him. It was a big scandal.

There's a part in Retribution where Sidestep wonders what name Ortega has saved them under on their phone, so i have to ask : what is it? For a romanced and non-romanced Step, if there's any difference.

It is a nickname, Ortega wouldn't use their real name. It can vary. It can be a cute nickname from the past, or a more descriptive one like "asshole."

Can Sidestep's powers change dreams? For example, someone is having a nightmare and Sidestep switches it to a peaceful dream.

Yes, with enough skill. It's also possible to be pulled into the nightmare though.

Does Void blood contain properties that can cross the blood-brain barrier?

Oh yes.

What's Spoon like when he gets a bath? Polite, well mannered? Does he scream during it??

Stands stock still like a statue, he hates his feet going slippery in the tub.

Is the Catastrofiend telepathic or psi-sensitive?

A bit psi-sensitive, yes. And there are things that can resonate despite lacking understanding.

Will we ever get to kill the Catastrofiend?

The question is whether it can be killed at all.

Do any of the Rangers know how extensive Psychopathor's mods are? What do they know about him?

Hmm they do know the basic mods. He has been scanned in the past, the problem is that he keeps adding and changing. What they do know is that he has massive invasive mods. Not limb replacement like Chen, but integrated in his muscle, skin and bones, like with Ortega. A lot of his hitting power comes from his various armors, and the heavy weapons he uses.

Building on the previous question - boosts that require a high neural load are theorized to be capable of inducing psi sensitivity. My questions on this are:

- how powerful is this psi sensitivity, on the boost ranking scale? Can they perform the same deeds as, say, a baseline telepath?

A psi sensitive is not a telepath. It's a different thing. It's like... both sight and smell are senses, but they are not the same. It is in general very, very low on the bower scale, because it doesn't have any active parts, just passive, sensory ones.

- is this "psi sensitivity" more like telepathy or technopathy, or can it be either or both?

It is a different thing, unrelated to either.

- when it develops, will the person be aware they are psi sensitive?

They might call themselves different things, but they will be aware of something being different with them. They might call themselves sensitives, psychics, empathics. They might be able to see auras, psychometry, dowsing, visions, and a number of similar, low-key ways of perceiving the things outside the normal world. Not all psi-sensitives have the same skills. Not all psi-sensitives are boosted.

How long can the Rat King live? Is there anything they've always wanted to do? I know they want to try flying like Herald- is there anything else like that?

That's the thing. Theoretically they have already exceeded their rat lifespan many times over. Obviously something was changed/done to them during their creation, so currently their lifespan is unknown. If their braincells are not breaking down, they might be essentially immortal. And they are very curious and exploring. They want to fly, because that feels cool. They also miss the ocean, it was very weird and felt like home.

Mortum says Ortega is "wired for strength and agility in addition to their electrical powers,"--how does Ortega compare to the average person in terms of strength and speed? Just how much stronger are they (how much can they, for lack of a better word, lift or cause impact, how does this influence their fighting?)

The biggest change to Ortega physically is their reflexes. They are way faster than normal people. Could easily do things like catching arrows shot at them. Dodging bullets would be a stretch, but reading the reactions of the shooter would make it possible. So Ortega wanting to go out there and dodge Psychopathor's guns is nothing new, and the only thing that would have made it hard was the Rat-King. Ortega is not very resistant to damage without their suit, so avoiding it is important.

The other change is strengthened joints and stuff. They are naturally very agile, but the mod-medical tech has allowed them to stay that way despite years and injuries. This is especially focused on things like their hands, enabling Ortega to have far stronger and more secure grip than a normal person. Could hang from their fingertips for hours, and is able to lock their fingers in place if needed.

The strength is not superhuman, but on the very top of the human spectrum. Can effortlessly carry another person, and could feasibly run with them for quite a while. Their standard Ranger suit works as an enhancement to their strength. It has active fibers in the skinsuit that works like an extra layer of muscle. It is hooked up to Ortega's neural system and runs on their electricity. In their suit Ortega would be able to lift Chen in his armor (or a car), though it would be rather bulky. He would still not be as strong as an armor with the strength modifier though.

Would the speed of Pyroclast's dispersal and dispersed-speed be something that he could improve or is it a limitation of his boost? Would he ever be able to achieve a true Pyroclastic-

flow level of heat and speed? His heat has definitely come closer.

Like all boosts, it can be improved on. Pyroclast could get there, though things like speed is dependent on stuff like slope angle and water evaporation and explosive bursts. But working with Sentinel it can very much be achieved in time.

How is "neural load" measured in relation to their likelihood of boosts developing psi sensitivity? What's the threshold? Could Herald, for instance, possibly develop psi sensitivity.

Neural load is a general term for the demands placed on a human's nervous system. You know that old thing about only using 10% of your brain capacity? When you increase the neural load, that increases. Normally the brain has a lot of excess capacity to handle things like injuries or sickness. If one part of the brain is hurt, often a different part of the brain will step in and take on those tasks.

Being boosted or modded however, takes up a lot of that excess capacity. Just like a lot of a bird's brain is taken up by managing all the sensory information related to flight, a boost's or a mod's brain is adapting to handling their various changes.

How much neural load you can carry is personal. One of the reasons for boost death is the brain not being able to handle the new pressures put on it in that short a time. The boosting process usually takes from an hour to a week, and the brain is not used to changing that fast. This is one reason why being boosted in your teens has a higher survival rate. The brain is already primed for massive bodily changes. This is also why it is preferable to do small mods, then increase the number, rather than doing a big change fast.

When the neural load exceeds the capacity of the brain, then one of three things happen. The first one is sort of a bodily emergency break. Mods might stop functioning and the body might start rejecting them. Boosts might be suppressed, or grow volatile and unpredictable. The second one is mental issues, especially with mods. The brain might start to reject the body, and schizophrenic symptoms might follow. If not dealt with, the brain might lose it's entire sense of self and shut off the body, and landing it in a coma. The third, and most rare one, is the development of psychic sensitivity. The brain has broken through it's old limits, and sees the world in new ways, thus reducing it's neural load (together with other effects). A bit like reducing friction.

Herald could develop psychic sensitivity, yes. If the neural load his powers place on him becomes too high. It is more likely other bad shit will happen instead though.

If high neural load can induce psi sensitivity...

1. Can high neural load, induced in a non-boosted individual, still make them psi sensitive?

Yes.

2. Will high neural loads amplify an existing telepath's (or psi sensitive's) powers?

No, but add more width and variation.

3. Is survivability from boost drugs partly influenced by neuronal density prior to taking the drug?

Partly, yes.

Can Marshal Dave's powers distinguish between boosted and non-boosted individuals (including animals)? Can he distinguish between Re-Genes and non-Re-Genes?

Yes, they all feel different.

When Chen spots Sidestep at the dog park, what was going through his mind when he saw them and when Sidestep failed to notice when he sat down next to them?

Sidestep looked so lonely and tired. Without the "don't look at me" shields actively up, it was a lot easier to see.

If Sidestep causes another Heartbreak 2.0, what would be its scale and reach compared to the original Heartbreak event?

That would depends on Sidestep's stats. Anything above 75 is as bad. Anything above 80 is very very bad. 85+ is city-wide bad.

If we encouraged Ortega to shave or to get a beard, will we ever be able to tell him "actually, nevermind, this is worse, you looked better with the mustache." ?

There is a limit to the facial hair shenanigans in this game.

You said before that it will be possible to keep all the secrets (villain identity/re-gene status/puppet) from the rangers if we play our cards right. Do you if know mortum included in this as well?

Not all, Mortum already knows things.

When Herald was watching the Heartbreak incident unfold on live broadcast, did he actually Sidestep go through the window, or was it only reported after the airstrike? What made him want to dig more into Heartbreak and doubt the official narrative?

They did not show Sidestep going through the window, that was in the later reporting. He realized that the few things Chen and Ortega said didn't add up, and they didn't want to talk, so he started looking.

Could anyone use Five Pennies' pennies, or are they only responding to him?

Only him.

Any fun facts to share about Five Pennies while we're at it? Anything you're looking forward to write regarding him?

Still thinking of the details, some people don't come to life until they appear on paper.

Would Herald have been happy working for the Guardians? Would he have taken Mayor Alvarez's invite?

If he had not been a part of the Rangers, yes he would have.

Since it's Halloween month, any chance you'd indulge us with a few quick cursed facts, but about villains?

Sorry, that takes a specific mindset I don't have at the moment! I don't have any of them prepared, and they require beer and silliness.

Where is Ljungstrand now?

Still working for the Farm.

As it's spooky season, what other kind of places/mysteries did Marek's "West Coast Mysteries and Murders" team investigate?

I have another Lore post about that in store, I will save it until then.

How did their investigation of the void go?

It went... interesting. But since it was after the fact, everybody was okay in the end. Just some more nightmares for Bennet.

What happened to Bennett and Perry after their investigation of the Heartbreak site?

Hehehehe spoilers.

Who's Kulina Petrova? (Or rather, can we have more details about her)?

She is loosely inspired by Nina Kulagina, but in the Fallen Hero world, she was also so much more. (google her, she's fascinating)

What was Step's Ljungstrand classification during the Farm Days and pre and post Nanosurge?

Roots: 1: Emotional 2: Rational 3: Subconscious 4: Other

Branches: 5: Project 6: Receive 7: Influence 8: Control 9: Other

Farm Sidestep: T236

Pre Nanosurge Sidestep:T1236

Post Nanosurge, pre Heartbreak Sidestep: T123567

Current Sidestep: T12345678

What is Locus' telepathic range?

With people she knows, it's far. She's been in contact with San Francisco from Los Diablos, for example.

How many Directors of the Farm are there? How often are they replaced?

One. There is no set number of years they serve. They handle the day to day work of the Farm.

A lot of high-interest bodies have disappeared over the years, so... Are Heartbreak, Cavalier, The Void, Anathema's bodies (dead or alive) kept in the same vicinity, by any chance? If not all, are at least some of them?

Some of them, yes.

Is Ortega's epilepsy at all relevant, either as a hint or a plot point, in regards to the mysteries surrounding Sidestep's abilities / the gates? Will it play a role beyond Ortega being protected from telepathy?

Yes.

How many times has the farm attempted the heartbreak experiment? have they succeeded, and if not, are they any closer to succeeding?

I don't have an exact number, but it is more than a dozen times. And success is... a loaded word. Not all have been equal failures.

Did the void-field fuck with Ortega's mods? Did it fuck with their static?

Mods, yes. Static, no.

I'm sure the good doctor has a PhD. What was the topic of their research/thesis?

Planck-length circuitry, it's possible uses and integration in biological systems.

Was the earthquake that cracked The Void's compound wall "at the right time" natural, or boost induced?

Boost induced.

What's Marcia's personal life like? We already know she has friends, but does she have a spouse? Kids? What did she do when she was younger?

Marcia is divorced, and can spend an hour shit-talking her former husband who drank and was an asshole. They never had children, but she dotes on her little nieces and has pictures of them at work. She's always worked in retail of various sorts.

^can I introduce her to Elena?

Who knows, maybe that will happen?

Think you'll ever let us wear one of step's old jackets as a fashion choice~?

I'm not sure it will be just a fashion choice.

How often does official ranger business take the rangers outside the city limits? What areas would fall under the LD rangers jurisdiction?

The city of Los Diablos, and the surrounding countryside. There are no specific lines drawn on paper, and if things are getting close to another team, the jurisdiction will be shady. It happens on occasion, less these days now that the worst warlords and wanna be dictators have been cleaned up.

Is Mitchell a technopath, or has access to one?

Nope, other means.

Hypothetically speaking, if you were to lay your head against Ortega's gut, would you be able to hear their generator working? Or feel it buzz?

It doesn't buzz, but you would be able to hear it faintly. It's more of a thrum.

what happened in Catastrofiend's attack on the Duncan building?

Lots of death, I have no details. But the inspiration is the Angel TV series episode 18:4 Habeas Corpses.

What does the Los Diablos' accent sound like? Same as LA in our world, or any notable differences? What are the most spoken languages in LD, aside from English?

I am bad at dialects, but I think it would be similar to the LA one. Possibly with a lot more Spanish influence. I would say about 80% of the LD inhabitants has Spanish as either their first or second language, about the same numbers as for English. With the strong influence and comparatively easy connection to Mexico rather than the east coast, Spanish is on the rise. There is also a strong presence of Chinese (mainly cantonese), Tagalog, Korean and Armenian.

How high can Herald fly into the sky? Are there specific heights he's legally not allowed to reach? Can he fly alongside a commercial airplane and wave hello to the passengers inside?

When Herald flies above a certain height, he activates a beacon, similar to the one airplanes use. He also has a monitor, and radio communication with flight leaders to make sure there's no issues. He's very conscientious about using it, and knows a lot of people working in that field. With the residual issues with ash (during certain weather patterns it gets stirred up, and there are still smaller eruptions), flight is not as common as it was, so the skies are not as full. Also, part of the Free Territories agreement was that they would not host international flights, so it is mostly within the Free territories, or to the east coast. He has found no height limits yet, but the issue becomes the cold temperatures and lack of oxygen. He would not fly fast enough to keep up with many planes though.

When Argent kissed Sidestep, and Herald is disapproving, what did she mean when she told him "you've made your point quite publicly?" What did Herald do?

I think I will save that between the two of them for now.

Why did Rosie want to become a villain? What made her realize she wasn't cut out for it? And how long was she the Riveter before quitting?

Mainly because of the money. And not sucking up to the man. But it was a lot more stressful and complicated than she figured. She was the Riveter for about a year or so.

When is Mia Ochoa's birthday?

4th of July.

What are the favourite hero movies of each LD Ranger, Dr. Mortum

Hmm, dunno specific titles, just vibes: Argent, the cheesier the better. Musicals are perfect. Ortega: Sticking close to reality, with twists. Chen: Please, no. Herald: Biographical ones. Dr. Mortum: Fantasy ones. Good inspiration for stuff.

What does tia Elena think of her child's presentation in such movies? Does she watch them at all?

She has no interest in watching them, and think they are garbage.

Has Dr. Mortum ever made it to any hero/villain movies? What do they think about it?

Nope, not high profile enough. Thinks it's rather silly, but good inspiration.

Of the main male characters, who has their ears pierced (if anyone)?

Ricardo had, but like Julia he realized soon it could cause issues with his mods. And now he thinks he's too old (would never admit it). Herald had an eyebrow piercing but it got infected and he doesn't

anymore.

What would the Rangers and Mortum think about an MC who names their villainous persona Sidestep and insists that they're a totally evil villain, but acts basically as a hero? (saving everyone they can, rising their life to protect innocents, etc)

Ortega: Peer pressure. Steel: Something's up. Argent: Wuss. Herald: Furious. Mortum: Bait.

What are the symptoms of telepathic infection? (Not attack or influencing.) Would they differ between an infected telepath and an infected non-telepath?

It varies. It can be similar to PTSD or a psychic breakdown, intrusive thoughts and an inability to perceive reality correctly. Also, memory issues. It would essentially be similar regardless of telepathic talents.

For the specialist that used to deal with psychic afflictions, is it possible we can ask him to tutor us?

Not sure. It's a bit crossing the streams. The character in question is from another unfinished book.

Does Chen ever smoke?

Yes, when others do, he might bum a cigarette, especially if stressed, or at a bar.

Can we get a brief physical description of Dynamate? What pronouns they go by? (I'm not sure if it was strictly male/NB or if they go by he/they like Porphyry.)

Dynamate is currently he/they personally. They in their hero/villain form. They are short, kinda stocky, with brown wavy hair and glasses.

What would you describe their personality being like? Has it changed at all since joining the Rangers?

Was always kinda upbeat and cheerful. It's essentially the same.

Do they like dancing??

Why not?

While dispersed—though not too finely dispersed—is Pyrocblast still able to carry any weight? Or does he specifically need to be in his more solid form for that?

Needs to be solid for anything heavy. Can push smaller things along.

This might be a bit too early to ask but how many endings do you have planned so far for the end of the series

No idea. I have like four main ones in my head, but that will most likely change when I get there.

Are there more epileptic seizures planned for Ortega's Book 3 and Book 4 future?

Oh yes. We will get into that.

We know the Rangers keep dangerous objects / weapons from villains they defeat. Did they keep anything from The Void's compound?

Yes. Void was defeated away from the compound, and when they returned, the cult had evacuated and abandoned it. Some things were left and confiscated, including the altar.

Malin, what was Sidestep's vigilante entry number in Mitchell's files? And if we were to ever redeem ourselves and rise as a hero, what would be our hero number? Do we get a free subscription to his entries with that

If Sidestep had enough rep, they would have had number 256. If not, they would be a "known associates" of Charge.

Does Mitchell have a file on Hollow Ground (that HG may or may not be aware of)?

No. Would not dare.

Apparently Ortega's spine basically belongs to the government, but what's the situation with Chen's mods? Does the government or the army have control to any extent over his mods' function / updates? Is Chen's in debt too?

Chen had an insurance through the army. They pay for that, and the mods do belong to the army. He's still a part of it after all. However, since they are less complicated, it would not be hard for Chen to replace them with civilian models should he ever resign. Ortega is different.

How rare are geokinetic boosts like Hood?

Not as rare as you'd think on the west coast. That big a scale is, though.

What did Hood think of Anathema's name?

He understood it.

Why did five pennies get a display at the hero museum? Were there any other heroes/vigilantes who'd turned, or might now be classed as a villain being memorialised there?

Probably, I don't know all the details.

We know about Bad Riley and we know about Vincent, but have Angie and Danny have had any noteworthy romantic relationships (save for each other)? What about Dr mortum?

No noteworthy. I think Danny's longest one was about six months and ended amicably. None for Angie. Dr. Mortum has had in the past, yes. Before turning villain, when they were still in the science world. Ended badly. They can talk about it in game.

Excluding Step's samples, where did the nanovores end up post-Nanosurge? (Or is it better to ask who has them now?)

Most of them were destroyed at the beach, whether any other samples were taken is unclear.

Sidestep uses the terminology "word of power" (regarding the word "no" specifically). Does "word of power" mean something specific in the telepathy field? How is it trained into telepaths, why do they use them, and what do words of power help control?

Yes. Especially for more verbal telepaths like Locus, it is a shorthand for their powers. For example, "Shield" might have to be a conscious thought, setting of a cascade of mental reactions. Not unlike the sword of damocles, but self-inflicted. It is taught early on to trained telepaths to help with their powers. Sidestep went through that training too, and moved beyond it, but the terminology stayed.

Could Anathema survive being trapped in Mortum's gun?

Yes.

Did Dr Anna Jansen (from the correspondence with Dr Ljungstrand) ever work for, or in association with the Farm?

Nope.

What prompted Ljungstrand's disciplinary hearing?

Morally skeevey human experiments.

Sidestep mentioned that "no" was the first word of power they learnt. What are some other words they consider to be "words of power"?

None other, they stopped using that terminology. But that was so deep that it stuck.

How does Herald start flying? Does he have to consciously focus his thoughts on lifting off into the sky - or is he like a helium balloon, and has to focus on not floating away?

It is more a focus on not floating, as you can see it's easy to start if he's flustered.

From last year's urban legends lore, is there any correlation between where "the bad place"/"the dark" is experienced? Is it anywhere near the HB site?

No. That is different.

Does Ortega's generator affect their body temperature in any way? Does it ever have overheating issues?

In normal use, no. But it can overheat, and thus affect Ortega badly.

Since Argent can control her hair length does she try different hairstyles? Does she have favorite hairstyles? If Sidestep compliments any hairstyle she remembers and tends to wear this hairstyle when she wants to please Sidestep?

She does, she likes to have fun, especially at home. Her favorite is long and straight, because that was what she had before. But she can do a lot of cute things in her civilian life. She would remember if Sidestep complimented any of them, and might be more inclined to wear it more often.

Arrogance / Anonymity, Ruthlessness / Empathy, Caution / Daring: what would have been Heartbreak's personality stats, approximately, at the time we meet them?

Arrogance 30, Ruthless 70, Caution 50

^^^ Stealing this question: How about the Void?

Arrogance 94, Ruthless 94, Caution 60

Who was the director prior to Regina?

A man named Jonas Richter.

Is there any variance to how time passes during Sidestep's telepathic/mindscape talks? How long could one feasibly hold meetings of the minds in there? Would it be useful, for say... holding out with someone in their last moments?

Like daydreaming, time can be malleable. But it's hard to control willingly.

Is Marek a Boost / Mod?

Just minor mods.

How high can Chen jump?

Depends on the legs. About 4 m standing for the work ones.

Has Chen's heavy armor gotten any better at climbing stairs?

Yes, the new model is much smoother.

Beyond their mods and a few indulgences, Ortega doesn't seem to live that high above their means. Is there any other reason why they're so deep in debt? Are they funneling their money

somewhere we don't know about? (shady activities, information gathering, sponsorship of any kind...)

Ortega has uses for their money, yes.

What is Bennett's boost? (from Marek's west coast mysteries team)? Were the tablets he takes like Talodine?

The closest description would be psionically sensitive, with psychometric specialization. In short: Picking up vibes from places and people. And the tablets were Talodine adjacent, yes.

How many times has ownership of the heartbreak site changed hands?

Four, until it became impossible to sell.

Who was responsible for the investigation into the "attack" and for clearing the rubble from the site?

The army.

What other kinds of investigations has Marek's "sponsor" encouraged? What kind of "facts" are they interested in while the shows maintain an air of mystery to their published investigations?

A lot, I will get into it eventually. But you are right that there might be more than just cool shit to it.

Do Talodine or Numbers confer any protection against Void's powers?

It would help, but not entirely protect.

Does Mitchell decided to order in which he compiles his guides? What made him decide to do the Void entry first of the villain guides?

Partly. Some he does on his own accord, others are because he is asked to. The void was no 1, because they were the biggest threat to HG. It was asked for, before that it had only been heroes (which had a different numbering system.)

Who got the top spot on the heroes and vigilante lists?

Heroes: Cavalier. Vigilantes: Nightstalker.

When Ortega fried Psychopathor's armor, was he still conscious stuck in the armor or did it knock him out as well?

Conscious but stuck. It is too heavy to move in without the servos.

Will we ever learn more about who The Crack was, in-game?

Yes, you can.

How did Psychopathor get ahold of the Rat King?

Stole it during a raid at a lab. Was not the intended target, but he could feel them.

Did the rangers receive any special super-hero vehicles to patrol the city? (I'm thinking Baycycle, Batmobile, Batboat, Batplane, Batwing, Batjet and Batgyro, batcopter)

Not the Los Diablos ones. The Seattle Rangers have, but they get the nicest toys.

Weird question: do Re-Genes have different types of relationships that don't quite fit in what you'd normally classify in human ones? (E.g. Family, enemies, lovers, friends, etc.)

Yes, they do. The way they are raised and used puts different weight on different things. They don't have the term enemy for relationships, that's just a designated target. A work term with no emotional context. They don't have the normal familiar relationships, but things like "teammate" (a double tap to the team insignia) carries a LOT more weight than normal. A bit like "Partner" but more family than work or marriage. "Batchmate" (a double tap to the navel) is used for the ones you are very close to (siblings, friends) regardless of if they are from the same batch or not. "Heartmate" (a double tap to the heart) is for close personal relationship just between you two. Like lover, or best friend.

Like, say, different categories/types of romance?

They don't make a distinction whether the relationship includes sex or not. Teammates, batchmates and heartmates can all sleep together, or not. That's just physical, not an emotional thing.

How are handlers recruited by the farm? Are they scouted for, acquired by job application or referral (from a current farm employee)?

Scouted for, or referral. No open applications.

Also, when these handlers retire or resign, how does the farm ensure they do not become whistleblowers?

They have their means. Not all of them good (but the pay is great).

Is the red balloon a real red balloon? Or could it be that it was a code or symbol during Sidestep's memory absorbing / regene training / being experimented on, a symbol that then stuck with them through dream imagery? (I'm grasping at straws here but I'm thinking for example that it could have been a disambiguation or distorsion of "lead balloon", which their drug-addled mind latched onto and made theirs?)

It is a real balloon, as much as any memories are real.

How would Dr. Mortum feel if something they were paid to work on, and they quite enjoyed (armor, weapon, ect), was destroyed? Would they care or is it once a project is delivered they no longer feel anything for it if they did at all?

They would be sad, creations are always very personal. And they hate failure.

We know that step has a hard time reading Ortega at times. Is that partly due to them relying on telepathy too much? Or is Ortega just that good?

It is a bit of both. Sidestep has always relied on telepathy to help make sense of people, and bereft of that, struggles to compensate. And, with someone like Ortega who is very good at putting on a mask, it gets twice as hard.

Do people use credit and debt cards in the FEZ?

I will say that it is common for people from the middle class and up. Cash is a lot more common if you don't have a good job, because banks are a lot more cautious since things are more chaotic here.

What does the Sky Green think of Regenes, specifically boosted directive regenes?

They see them as a dead-end evolutionary offshoot. To be respected, but also less than them. But more than humans. They haven't had much interaction though, so that might have changed with more experience.

Does Argent no longer enjoy surfing?

She doesn't.

What's been your favourite action/fight scene to write so far?

Argent and Sidestep on the bridge.

Did Julia have a lot of male friends in high school?

Yes, she was seen as a sporty tomboy.

Do any of the characters in FH have middle names?

Ricardo Felipe José García Ortega

Julia Esperanza Maria García Ortega

Those are the only once I know, there might be others. Haven't decided.

Are there any books (or any media really) you read and found helpful and/or inspirational during the creation of FHR?

Many, and I have left a ton of media recommendations for the vibe on earlier QnA's. But there are some specifics about the writing. Vicious by V.E Schwab inspired me in the back and forth timeline structure. Undertale (game) inspired me that you could do wildly divergent paths with consequences in a similar game structure, and Nier: Automata inspired me to build an exploring narrative without straight answers from the start and use emotional storytelling.

What happened to Joshua the cop who you can make punch Steel? Did he face any consequences for punching the Marshal? Will he be back in future books? If he won't What is he up to in Retribution and the time skip? Do you have fun facts about him?

Yes, you can meet him in Retribution, and what he is up to depends on the path. He might have a bigger role in future books depending on his fate.

Will we be able to do a good old villian laugh at some point?

Oh definetly.

Congratulations on finishing Retribution!

Thank you! It still feels unreal.

What would the Dr. Mortum, HG trio, and the Rangers consider their biggest challenge to have been so far?

HG: The Void. That took some finagling.

Nocturne: Flying to Los Diablos.

Jake: Adapting to Los Diablos culture.

Dr. Mortum: Getting that PhD.

What had been HG's reaction to Ortega being named the Marshal?

Big surprise. Lots of swearing. That was not what they planned for.

Herald feelings are pretty clear if Sidestep made the Rangers believe they lost their powers, but what do the other Rangers think about the possibility of someone losing their powers? (even if some of them were to suspect Sidestep about lying)

Chen thinks it's just a mental block. Argent thinks it's true. Ortega is spoilers.

Lore spoilers below:

Does anathema's hero name have any relation to say an odd colored sky cult and perhaps leaving it?

Oh yes. 100%.

What is the use of the Void's green forehead light? Is it actually adjacent to a pineal gland (helping regulating their body, maybe when moving through dimensions)? Or does it help with accessing the planes themselves? Or does it hold offensive power (focusing the void field and / or whatever the hell hides in those fields)? Or is it only decorative?

It is symbolic and decorative, like so many things with the Void. If you're running a cult, that helps. No functional armor here...

Why does the pineal gland / third eye emit light? Where does the light come from?

A small LED light.

How much time passed between step getting caught in the generator room and then waking up in that chamber?

Not that long. An hour, tops.

If you've associated with the Green Sky, can the Void keep an "eye" on you, as it were, either through their blood having been ingested or their dimensional powers? Basically: could the Void and their followers have been aware of Anathema's presence on their compound thanks to whatever they've done to them?

Yes. But Anathema doesn't know.

what is the shape of the altar? Could it be an enneagon... ?

yes, in fact it is.

Is the bad/weird vibes sidestep gets from the Tesseract similar to the bad vibes the heartbreak site emanates?

Yes.

Is the emphasis on "9 walls / 9 rectangles" in the heartbreak experiment inspired by the shape of the Tesseract? Did the Farm hypothesize that, considering the Void has access to multiple dimensional planes, simulating the same environment would allow them access to the "mind" dimension - hence granting them the ability to conduct whatever experiment they needed Heartbreak for?

They were both inspired by the same source.

Sidestep mentions that the Tesseract "looks too familiar". Is the Void base reminding them of the Farm? Main compound hidden underground; a innocent "farm" on land?

Yes, it does.

Is the hole in the Heartbreak site connected to what the Void cultists are digging for?

No.

[QnA for October with spoilers!](#)

[Nov 5, 2022](#)

Is what Chen found, when he went looking for Sidestep, related to what Vernon Browne had found too?

Nope, that's not connected.

Did Shroud ever come across Dave? If not, did she get any help from anyone we know in her escape?

Hmmmm not from anybody you know yet.

When Sidestep's telepathy is dormant in the puppet, are the nanovores psi-sensitive enough to interface / sense / taste Sidestep's mind? ie: would Ximena's nanovores recognise us if they met us while we're in the puppet?

Nope, they would have no idea.

Have Ortega and Vernon interacted again since Sidestep's funeral?

Not apart from glaring at a distance.

Is Shroud a double boost?

No.

Probably won't get an answer for this one..... but has Ortega ever suspected or wondered if Sidestep could possess someone? Does the possibility of possession factor into their conspiracy board depending on the path?

That thought has not crossed Ortega's mind.

How likely is it that Mortum is going to release the Fiend (on accident or otherwise) if the catastrofiend doesn't get released in Retri

Very, very likely.

In regards to ReGene memories: are ReGenes eventually able to differentiate between what memories are and aren't theirs? Is this something that improves over time or is it just... a core part of their mind that's been etched in?

It varies for every ReGene. Some see them as alien, and does their best to partition them and bury them. Some see them as their own, and see no difference whether they really happened or not.

Before the start of Rebirth, did Argent know that the Rangers had nanovores stashed in their vaults?

Yes. Argent knows everything that's stashed in the vaults.

If the answer is yes, has Argent ever thought about stealing these nanovores?

No. She thinks they are safer there. They are different from her own, they are still the "wild" variety.

Aside from the nanovores, is there anything in the Rangers' vault that would benefit Sidested? Like a weapon, armor, etc

Oh there is a LOT. A vault raid could yield some nice toys for villains... (imagine an avocado emoji here)

Can we kill both Teddy and Tina? Murder couple special?

I think so, yeah. Just not until book 4.

Is HG's sibling the same gender as Sidestep?

Not necessarily.

Will we see Dr. Finch again? Will she be able to influence the plot in any way?

Yes you will, but I don't think she has a major plot significance. Just one on Sidestep (which I suppose is plot in a way).

Has the new member of the Guardians ever been considered to be a villain?

Yes.

With Shroud's draining abilities, was she originally considered for combat (assassination) use until it was discovered she retained the memories of her victims or was she always designed to be a cuckoo?

She was always designed as cuckoo, but was meant as an assassin variant. Yes, they are cuckoos meant for silent killing as well. The memories was a bonus.

So, on the topic of Argent: how dangerous is the possibility of her using the Regenerator? As of now, the Nanovores have been breeding and multiplying and filling the spaces and skin she needs for her—while using the Regenerator, once it starts replacing the pieces she's been using them for will that force them out of her or just push them aside/to the surface? Can she use it while fully conscious and either way, will she be able to keep control of the nanovores while it goes?

This will be a very dangerous thing, and exactly what happens depends on what is done with the regenerator. There are a few options, it is not a single yes or no. Even at the most evolved option, Argent will have some tough choices to make. It would not be safe for her to use alone.

Are there any kinds of food/flavor argent's nanos really don't like?

They are not fond of green vegetables.

Are regene tattoos inked, a separate layer adhered/stuck firmly onto the skin, or something else?

Something else.

When Jake phases in and out, does he move planes / dimensions?

Yes.

Is Argent's apartment positively or negatively pressurized?

Negatively. Making sure things don't get out.

What determines whether the Rangers or Guardians are chosen to handle a threat? Where were the Guardians, for instance, during Heartbreak and the Nanosurge?

The Guardians were not yet created during the nanosurge or heartbreak. This is a new project of the current Mayor. The best description might be that the Guardians are the local cops, and the Rangers are the feds. Different bosses, and sometimes there's conflict.

How does the farm memory erasure procedure look and feel like? How effective is it and what determines the criteria? Would the one undergoing it know to some degree their memories were missing?

It works by connecting the ReGene to the Core and basically rebooting them back to the base memory layer. Most people would not know that things are missing, but remnants might bleed through and confuse things early on. But the brain adapts fast.

How are the memories implanted in a Re-Gene preserved for future generations? Is there a telepathic procedure that takes the memories of past agents/soldiers/etc and stores them in a database to be extracted when a new batch survives the boost?

Yes, there is what might be called a "bio boot drive" connected to the core where all the various memories are kept. It is from this that memories are chosen to implant, and various sequences are cataloged for efficiency.

Back in their farm days, was sidestep ever on a mission to capture another escaped Regene?

No. That was a thing that was human only, would not want the knowledge that regenes could escape to spread.

How versatile can the commands of HG's threading actually be? With complex enough threading, could HG command a mind to believe it is comatose/to remain comatose - essentially keeping them in a coma when they should have awoken?

It can be very versatile, but it also depends on the mind in question. Let's say that HG threads someone with "you are asleep". This might be taken by the mind as that everything that happens around them is just a lucid dream. Or it might cause the person to lie down and sleep. It depends. So what in some cases might be easy threading, might be very complex for others. But yes, that is something they could do.

Shot in the dark but are the reasons Ortega's generator is failing in any way linked to the reasons why the Core is also failing / the infection?

Nope, not connected.

Building on the previous question - if not the infection, is Ortega's mods causing them trouble due to the overstrain on their nervous system?

Yeah. That's the thing. Close to maxing out their neural load.

Does Shroud like Regina? Does Regina like Shroud?

Nobody likes Regina. Or shroud.

Was Argent being comprised of Nanovores always something you planned for her character? Or did the 'skeletons in her closet' part act as a placeholder first while you figured out the secrets she'd have been hiding?

Originally in the book, there were no nanosurge. There was another cataclysm. But since that one was in a different universe, I needed a replacement. And once I came up with the Nanosurge, Argent fitted perfectly into it. So yes, she has been nanovore infested since I started writing the interactive fiction version.

How long ago did Regina get promoted director?

If the core was responsible for monitoring, cleaning and sanitizing memories to be implanted into regenes and now the core is failing, does that imply that memories in new regenes are more unreliable?

Oh yes, but it also implies so much more.

Can the core be replaced, or only repaired?

Unclear. The Farm hopes for either.

Was Step's wiping attempt what caused the Core to begin failing or was it already having issues before hand? Or is it unrelated and the problems began more recently?

It had issues beforehand, but Sidestep didn't help.

Does Lord Ember know Shroud is a regene?

No.

How much harder is it for argent to maintain control of her lil pals if her enemy has been blooded?

Harder. But she can handle it.

If the imposter ends up in Sidestep's body, will they be able to open the gates?

Depends on which flavor of imposter.

Has Rat King ever noticed someone/something (not Step) piloting Step/Puppet's body?

Not that they have reacted to.

HG saw the Void as being able to "influence and bind their followers to them". Would that influence be stronger than their threads? Has HG ever tried to thread a void follower?

Yes. It did not go well. Didn't take.

Does the "protected" HG variable mean that HG is/will be reacting to or seeing Sidestep as if they truly are their missing sibling? And are hence protecting Sidestep, the same way they would their sibling?

Similar but not exactly.

How heavily threaded is deadeye compared to before and after her demotion?

About the same.

Has Mitchell ever obtained intel for his files from Dr Finch's records, given she's known for treating heroes?

Yes.

Is there any equivalent to dealing with technopathy that telepathy has (numbers/dampeners)?

Not that Sidestep is aware of. The issue here is that tech is something the technopath might influence, and chemistry works on biological things.

Does the Farm have uniforms/a dress code for its employees? For Handlers, Scientists, the Administration in the above ground facilities, other employees?

Yes they do. Very military in that way.

Is Mitchell a technopath, or has access to one?

Nope, other means.

If Sidestep's telepathic classification code is currently T12345678, will opening all nine gates make them T123456789?

Yes.

Hypothetically speaking, if you were to lay your head against Ortega's gut, would you be able to hear their generator working? Or feel it buzz?

It doesn't buzz, but you would be able to hear it faintly. It's more of a thrum.

Since telepaths have been disappearing - has HG been safe thus far because (1) they are not a good candidate, (2) the government needs HG alive, or (3) the farm doesn't even know that HG is telepathic?

3. HG is smooth.

Is there any kind of security system that could actually keep argents out? Are some harder to sweet talk than others?

There are hard ones. Mortum's lab would be HARD.

Which year did Chen obtain Sidestep's autopsy pictures?

In 2015.

How long after obtaining them did he stop looking for Sidestep?

Maybe 2016. He needed to double check they were real.

Does Ortega realise that HG had kissed/flirted with them in the past? If so, how do they feel about it?

Yes, and they feel used and angry.

If you steal the jewelry successfully during the Blaze meeting without getting caught/noticed, what was Blaze and the politicians reaction when they saw the case was gone/found the calling card if it was left behind?

Well, they felt pretty stupid, like any victim of a theft. Also, ruined that deal.

Why does step think they can leave their body from inside the dampeners in guilty reveal? Is this ability somehow different from most telepathy?

Yes, it has been in the past. Possessing someone through the dampeners is how they got out the second time.

A while ago you talked about how it would be possible to turn the rangers and it would be different for each of them. How big of a role would the doubt stat play in it and would it be possible to turn all of them in one run?

The doubt stat is the most important one, and yes it is possible with everyone in their own way.

Does Deadeye work exclusively for HG? Has she always since she joined them?

Yes, but can occasionally freelance with permission.

Could argent interfere with ortega's spyware mods if she wanted to?

Oh yes.

In a lore post we saw that the government could and would "deactivate" Ortega's mods, including their leg mobility, if they chose to. could Argent override this?

Yes.

Would Ortega have a heart attack if Sidestep (that they had a thing with) started dating Blaze.

No. But they would be miffed.

Had Sidestep told Chen and Ortega about being a Regene pre-HB, would they have been as "tolerant" and understanding as now? Or could Sidestep's fear of being sent back to the Farm

have been correct?

They would have been tolerant. Things are always different when you know the person in question. Also, the Farm worked hard on making their ReGenes feel apart from the human world, and make sure they knew everybody hated and feared them. So every little clue would have been taken as proof by Sidestep.

When you're in his mind with him, what does Chen see? He replies to your mental questions easily--can he hear your mind in that moment?

Yes, he sees Sidestep when they talk. How Sidestep looks to Chen varies. If Sidestep focuses, they will be their own shape, but it is easier to allow themselves to be influence. Like, be in uniform among the soldiers and so on.

Will we ever have a chance to meet/find out about Bo's child?

Yes.

Does Blaze have any particular resistance to fire/heat? Not only against enemies, but his own powers?

Yes, he is resistant, unless someone chooses to mess with his powers.

Let's say in an alternate universe Sidestep has a thing with Ortega, jumped out of the window, survived and the Farm never found them. The Rangers get a doctor who takes care of Sidestep and keep their mouth shut about them being a Re-Gene. After months of recovery Sidestep tells Ortega that they want to get out of the hero life and live a life of retirement as far away from Los Diablos as possible and so they ask Ortega to retire and go live that life with them. Ortega has two options in front of them, 1. live a life of retirement with the love of their life or 2. continue to seek revenge on Hollow Ground but that comes with the fact that they will have to end their relationship with Sidestep. What do they choose?

The first, but it is doubtful that it would last.

Does Blaze ever need anything for his bad knee? Wheelchair, crutches, etc?

He usually uses one of those knee-support things. He avoids crutches if he can.

Building on that - Could the regenerator restore Blaze's knee back to normal?

Not in the base configuration.

Could Sidestep's telepathy be able to help Nocturne's mind in case the red threads were to disappear permanently?

Hard to say, Sidestep is not used to using their power in such a permanent and fiddly way.

What topics do Nocturne and Jake enjoy talking about together?

People. Movies. Books. They both read a lot.

If HG's older brother had survived, how different would the crime organization look like? Would HG's brother have been the kingpin instead?

It would have been very different, and yes, the brother would have been. It would probably have been a lot more straightforward and open.

Did it affect Jake's reputation much if he lost against Sidestep?

Yep, it will.

How complicated might things end up if Sidestep ends up having a close rapport with both Ortega and HG, considering the history there?

Oh that will be complicated as hell.

Did Vernon happen to find the same arrest records as Ortega?

Yes, he did.

[Time for your questions!](#)

[Oct 22, 2022](#)

Well, it feels weird to finally have submitted Retribution, my brain is still wired up. I plan to rest until November, then work on a different project for a while for a change of pace. In the new year, I will work on an update of Rebirth, with bug and grammar fixes, and some extended content. Of course, there is no guarantee that I won't get Revelations feels during that time and start writing early... I am letting my brain decide that. There are also some Patreon updates and stuff planned.

But, until then, time for questions! Maybe this time I won't be so stressed that the answers get short. Feel free to ask about anything!

[The Void - I - Sidestep](#)

[Oct 13, 2022](#)

2012 - Summer

The thoughts won't stay out. Not even if you try. Ever since the Nanosurge, things have been weird. You hardly need to dig anymore. The minds around you open up and vomit their thoughts at you without invitation. Except Charge.

More of a relief than before. Closer than before. Trust.

Dangerous.

They all are. But you trust them now. The Rangers. Proven again and again that you're useful enough to help. Powerful enough to be kept around. Human enough to be befriended.

You've gotten so good at pretending that the mask sometimes doesn't even chafe.

"Are you okay?" Your words. Spoken by reflex because Anathema has that odd look on their face. The one where you shouldn't touch them. Because sometimes accidents happen, and a fingerprint gets lost, and then ice cream as apologies. You know how it is.

You never planned to scan their thoughts either. Hard. Like looking through opaque plastic. Not clear. No details. But you don't need that to smell the fear. A deep, visceral terror that hurts deep in the roots of your teeth. And yet you keep worrying it.

"No," Anathema admits, just between the two of you. The smile wavers, then get pasted back on. You do your best to keep your distance not to get pulled in. "But I'll manage."

"Why didn't you tell Charge?" Ortega is still too personal. Not when it's mission time. You can separate work and leisure even if others can't.

"Because it needs to be done," they say, scanning the horizon as they lead you along the almost imperceptible path. The sun is setting, it will be dark before you get there. "And because I'm the only one who knows this way in."

"And I'm the only one who can ensure we're not spotted." Not just you. Anathema as well. You keep your senses open for any sign of recognition from the surroundings. Thoughts. Humans. You wish keeping your mind open didn't mean Anathema was spilling over as well.

"Exactly." A pause as Anathema leads you up a rocky crevice that needs your full attention in the dim light. The shadows are growing longer, sending a shiver down your spine. The Void's allies. Shadows. Darkness. This is stupid, but it is the plan you agreed on.

"I can't spot cameras. You'd better be sure about this route," you say once you've reached level ground once more. Hidden from sight, below the horizon, shadows among shadows.

"There won't be any." Anathema sounds too sure, feels too sure. Willing it to be true. "They don't work well with..."

"With the Void's powers." You say the name and catch the flinch again. History there, that's evident. And yet nobody asked. Are you the only one that spotted it?

"Yeah." Anathema sighs, and you can't keep your distance. Can't stay focused on the mission. This is your friend feeling bad. Feeling worse than you've felt before.

"You don't have to enter the compound," you say, surprising yourself. Deviating from the plan. Increasing the risk. Making decisions you shouldn't, but Charge would. "I can handle it," you lie.

"We need to destroy the generator first. They might not have cameras, but they have other defensive systems. The radar would pick up Sentinel. Hopefully, they don't have any fliers around." Small words filled with truth and careful hope.

"I can handle the generator," you say, and this time it doesn't feel like a lie. "You get me close enough and tell me where to find it. I can sabotage it. I don't need your acid." You know that's not why Anathema is here. Knowing the way. Knowing how to get in unseen. Get out... "You signal the others once you see the lights go out."

"Are you sure?" Almost breathless, and not from the climb.

"It will be easier to stay hidden if it's just me." Logic. You have a point, and you both know it. "You can be the backup."

"That wasn't the plan..."

"The plan was made with faulty intel. Marshal Charge doesn't know how you feel because you never told anybody." Stones in glasshouses much? Doesn't make it less true. "The important thing is that the generator goes down so Sentinel can approach unnoticed." Charge and Ashfall will move in at the same time. As sneaky as you two. Steel in heavy armor, ready for when the shit hits the fan.

"I never told them because it shouldn't matter." Anathema pauses, looking back at you, eyes wet. Dust in the wind. Both of you pretend that it's true.

"But it does." When did you start to sound like you're in charge? "Trust me to take care of this."

"Thank you." Not a smile, but a sigh of relief.

You know all too well how they feel.

The Tesseract looks too familiar. You hadn't expected the Void's base to look so unassuming through your night-vision lenses. Adobe walls surround the compound. Several large buildings within. Looking innocent. Looking like a farm. No fields, though, and the only livestock is the coyotes you can hear in the distance. How often do they get fed?

The main compound is underground. Anathema told you. Described rooms and corridors they shouldn't be aware of. Neither of you commented on it. Some secrets are best left unshared. You've approached unseen. No cameras on the walls. Just guards. You're betting your life on that.

You've bet it on worse odds.

You crawled the last of the way. Prickly bushes. Uneven ground. Stones and boulders. A scenic area, you suppose, the single gravel road private property for miles. Guards paying attention.

Not focused. Even from here, you can feel them if you focus. If you close your eyes and listen hard. When did you become this strong? Would They be proud? An owl screeches in the distance, and you take that opportunity to run closer. Their attention is caught, both of them. A distant cry, a change of pace. Boredom. Maybe it would get close enough to take a shot at? The moon is out; a silhouette would be easy to spot.

You sprint to the wall as they scan the skies. It's not too tall, and the adobe is rough and uneven. You wait until their attention has drifted away once more, and then you take two steps back and run, up the wall, trusting speed and friction to get you within grabbing distance of the top. Gloved fingers digging in, you heave yourself up and over, dropping down behind a shed before anybody can notice. Don't listen. Don't hear. They seem to heed your wish. Your command.

Ortega couldn't have done it smoother. No. Charge. Stop.

Two more breaths through your mask, and nothing stirs. One of the men on the wall lights a cigarette. A little pinprick of a star. You sprint towards what looks like a storm cellar as he sucks in that first warm breath and holds it. The doors are locked, and you don't have Anathema to open the padlock. But you lived on your own for too long before you met the Rangers, and not always on the straight and narrow. Your lockpick makes fast work of the lock, and you pull the door open quicker than you should. Someone could have been down there, but this time, you're lucky.

This time.

The ladder is old, but the door in the storm cellar is newer. Also locked. The old entrance, Anathema called it. Before the Cult of the Green Sky expanded. Before they started digging. Digging for what? You didn't ask that question. You doubt you would have got an answer.

Behind the door is a corridor, just like Anathema said. Straight forward, then left. Stop and listen. Nothing. You should close your eyes and feel for minds, but something here makes you clamp up like a dried-out slug. Close yourself down and rely on the lenses in your mask instead of your increasingly

anxious mind. The night vision helps; the corridor lights are out, but there is a light strip under one door. Enough to help you see.

The night vision turns everything green.

What are you going to do when you kill the generator? You can hear it now, muffled behind a door. Will you dare to turn on your flashlight, or should you run by memory? It would be easy to get lost down here. Distance is weird, and the light from under the door flickers. The other door, your hand is on the handle. The generator growls like a primal beast. Someone is thinking about you, and you're trying not to think about them.

About the fact that your heart beats. One. Two. Two hearts. You step inside, and the room is cramped and hot. Smelling of diesel fuel. You pull the lever, and the generator coughs and dies. Dark. No more light.

But everything is green.

You breathe. Hard. Your mask clings against your mouth. Warm. Wet. Can't get enough air. You should break something on the generator, but something is moving. You can't sense it. No static. Just green. Something is coming. You can feel it. Behind the wall. In the wall. Behind you.

"Welcome." A whisper. A chorus of whispers distorted by your ears.

You strike, of course. Training trumps terror, and you make contact. A hard blow. A gasp of surprise. No armor. Soft.

And then the world turns to sludge. Heavy. Breathing through a plastic bag, in your mouth, in your throat, no panic, no panic, just act. React. But you can't MOVE.

You do it anyway.

No focus. Dropped in a barrel underwater. Hold your breath. No up. No down. Darkness. Distortion. Don't panic. Don't breathe. Don't move until you know which way is up. They'll let you drown before they pull you out. You can't afford to swim toward the bottom.

It doesn't matter that everything is wrong. It doesn't matter that you don't understand because you have never understood. All you need to know is...

know is...

know...

no...

This time you can't breathe because there are hands around your throat. This time you can't move because your limbs work wrong. Time does. Too. Does Time? Wrong?

Black.

Black.

Wrong time. Right place. Can't move. Mask still on. Relief. Wet. Hard breathe. No.

Focus. Your mask is still on. Why? You're wet because someone has dumped a bucket over you. You're at the right place because you can see well enough to recognize Green Sky iconography. You can't move because you're chained to a pillar. Oh. That's why your hands hurt. You force yourself upright to relieve the pressure.

You'll need your hands to get out of here.

The light is not green, but it is pale. Not electric. Fluorescent? The symbols on the walls glow. Reflective? The candles don't seem enough to light the place up like this.

Huh. The ceiling is tall, like a church, but it smells like damp earth and blood. Still underground. No windows. The walls are smooth earth, rounded as if someone has smoothed out clay. No straight angles and you're grateful. Can't see if anything is wrong if it's just curved. Chandeliers with candles overhead, like an underground cathedral. But the floor is packed dirt, redder than the adobe outside. Wet from the bucket. The blood seems fresher than it is. Cages lining the walls. Empty. Doors open.

Three people are arranging objects on the altar. Stone. Smooth. An odd shape. Shifting if you tilt your head. More candles. Objects. A weird statue. Knives. Oddly shaped metal bars. A pyramid of glass. A golden ball. You blink before the shapes turn weird.

You can feel their minds, distantly. There's an answer there. They haven't removed your skinsuit because that is your skin. They haven't removed your mask because that is your face. You are Sidestep, not whatever pathetic creature that lies beneath.

Oh, if only they knew.

It takes you a moment to realize that the Void is standing right in front of you.

"You should be scared," they, he, she notes. Vocal distorter like a chorus of whispers. Strangely beautiful. Terrifyingly strange.

"I am," you lie, because villains relax if they feel secure. You press back against the pillar. It feels smooth. Polished by others' backs. Unyielding.

"No, you're not." Again the chorus. Again the whispers. No mind in front of you. No face in front of you. Just the black, blank helmet and skinsuit. Just the black, heavy robes. Just the single, green light, right where the forehead should be. Third eye? Pineal gland? *"You're analyzing."*

"Does it matter?" How long has it been since the power went out? You don't know, but judging by the tingling in your hands as the blood returns, not too long. "Or are you mad I'm ruining your fun?"

"I can be patient." Gloved hand touching your chest. Sharp fingertips. Not claws, but the allusion thereof. *"We have some time before the main course gets here."*

"So what's it gonna be?" Your fingers work again, but the shackles are tight enough that you won't get out unless you risk damage and dislocation. They were stupid enough to keep your skinsuit gloves on, which will help. "Some light torture? A bit of human sacrifice?" Your voice is flippant, but you've heard enough of the Green Sky that neither is off the table.

"You're one of the Touched. You've survived the emissary." The lighter tones are stronger in this whisper, angelic instead of hellish. *"We don't need to initiate you. You've already transcended humanity."*

"I..." it's the last word that does it. You can't help yourself. The laughter bubbles up unbidden, not forced but irrepressible. "Humanity." The spell is broken; this is no all-seeing being. They don't know you haven't even managed to crawl up to the level of humanity yet. Not to be tramped under their feet, but far below. In the ground.

"Hhmm." The snort is annoyed, not transformed into whispers. Then the Void turns to the other three, and the distortion is back. *"This one is not ready yet. They would ruin the ritual. Lock them up until we have dealt with the Chosen. Feel free to hurt them as long as you leave them intact."*

"Of course." Two of the robed figures approach, robed in black, but you can see green underneath. Patterened skinsuits. They reach for you, and the Void steps back.

No. No steps back. The distance increases. You can't see them move. There's a vertiginous feeling as if the floor stretched and twisted under your feet, and you nearly fall sideways before the pillar stops you. Their hands reach out, unaffected by...

unaffected by...

You struggle in their arms for show as they drag you off. Their minds are heavy and hard, opaque. Like frosted glass. Bulletproof? Maybe, but you can still peer through. Try to see what they see...

Different. The world. Different. No. Not the world. The Void.

Short. The Void is short. You didn't realize that before, but the world doesn't twist as much, filtered through another's perceptions. Or perhaps through theirs. Short and thin, and you can see them raise a hand to their helmet, speaking softly. A microphone? Giving orders?

A word. No. A sentence.

"Make sure to bring Charge in alive."

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I don't know if this has been asked before but would it be possible for our step to potentially take hold of multiple people at the same time?

Oh yes, but the question is to what level of control. As well as they do the puppet? Not yet. Well enough to do a synchronized dance number? Perhaps. That will depend on your stats.

I watched Cyberpunk Edgerunners recently and Chen came to mind. Does Cyberpsychosis, or something similar exist in your series? (Ignoring the Catastrofiend, since they're a mix of boosts and mods). Does installing too many mods affect one's psyche? Or can you swap out everything, but your nervous system and still be sane?

Something adjacent. Every mod has a neural load, think of it like juggling. Mostly everyone can have one ball in the air at once, many can manage three. But the more you expect your nervous system to control, the bigger the chance that you'll have a breakdown. Inability to control the mods. Shakes. Weakness. Psychic issues. The most common symptom are similar to Parkinson or MS.

So, it depends on the person how much they can handle. Both Chen and Ortega has very high neural load capacity.

How common are nokill villains?

Quite common. There are many people who has a criminal lifestyle but are not interested in murder. Though the longer they stay in the game, the harder it will be.

Given that for work purposes it's in Dr. Mortum's best interest to give off an air of neutrality, do they have to keep their relationship with new villain's henchman on the down-low?

Mortum has not exactly advertised it, but well-informed people might have an inkling that something is going on.

Since in the past Ortega didn't stop seeing other people even if they had a thing with Step, have they ever cheated on any of their dates with them? Or did they at least alternate between one and the other? lol And regardless have any of Ortega's exes ever been jealous of Sidestep?

Ortega's exes had no idea Sidestep existed, or if they did, no idea they might be more than a friend. Also, all of this depends on your definition of cheating. If Ortega and Sidestep had a thing in the past, it

would be a while before Ortega stopped seeing other people. How long would depend on how open Sidestep was with this actually being something more, and the genders involved. As time progressed, the other people became less relationships, and more people that Ortega would take to official parties. And once Ortega and Sidestep were together, any other date became more of a cover than anything else. Not that Ortega ever bothered telling them that.

What would Daniel's brother actually think about his brother actually getting to date step.

Angry. Frustrated.

As a vigilante has sidestep ever been hit by Ortega's charge?

Yes. It's not a precise power.

In the last Ortega POV thing, Ortega didn't tell Steel any of the explanations Sidestep could tell them at the diner. Is this a writing choice because there were three different stories we could tell Ortega? Did it have an in universe reason?

This was very much a writing reason. Though to be fair, Ortega is secretive.

If Sidestep had developed the ability to posses people before the Heartbreak incident how would the rangers of their day reacted? Would any of them approve of using that power?

Ortega would have seen the use, Anathema would be horrified, Chen would disapprove, Sunstream would hate it, and Sentinel would be worried.

How expensive are the "hero drugs" to produce? And how widespread is the black market? Would a desperate person need to spend their life savings just to get hold of a single dose? Or is it more in line with the prices of illegal narcotics sold on the street or somewhere in between?

Originally they weren't very expensive, but the refined versions very much are. Another reason why they have gone up in price is the fact that several of the chemicals needed have become restricted in order to hinder production. And, of course, most of the price is added to compensate the maker/seller for the risks involved.

The price depends on where you are. On the east coast, you might pay what amounts to the price of a car for a single, good quality dose. It is heavily restricted there. In Los Diablos, it is a lot cheaper. Not as cheap as narcotics, but desperate people could get the money for it. However, the cheaper it is, the worse quality.

Because it's coming up to Halloween I'm wondering if Sidestep as a telepath ever picked up strange vibes from places like graveyards etc or get impressions from things a little more paranormal like ghosts or would that be a different ability altogether?

That would be a different ability, though for some boosts or sensitives, it does overlap. Not for Sidestep.

If we choose Ortega as our rival in Rebirth, Step mentions a deal that Ortega broke when they were captured post-HB. is this just an example of how Step views their past relationship or did the two actually have a spoken agreement to be there for each other before?

I don't think it was ever intended as an actual agreement, but it was something that was said more than once. And, up to that point, they had saved each other more than once.

What would be the perfect date nights for ROs?

Ortega: Dinner at a place with a good bar, where you can talk and yet be surrounded by people.

Chen: Going somewhere quiet, where Spoon can join. Maybe a walk, maybe somewhere nice with a view. Most likely to picnic.

Argent: A fancy restaurant and a movie.

Daniel: A nice dinner after a museum or gallery visit.

How often would Ortega take Steps to eat out back in days? Like, I assume that Ortega was the first real learning experience for Sidestep's eating habits, so maybe they even mimicked Ortega at that time/do so until this very day out of, well, habit?

It would vary depending on the Sidestep, but considering what a mess many of them can be, Ortega would have figured out their bad eating habits quickly. Ortega, like their mother, feeds people. At that point in time it was buying them dinner, later it was bringing them to their mother for a home cooked meal.

Where did Sidestep get the fake Nanovore void box from?

Since Sidestep had seen how it looked, it was easy enough to pay someone to make a superficially similar one. The various dangerous items stored at the Ranger's HQ are not stored openly on shelves. Instead they are kept in "lockers" in a vault. Thus, as long as nobody opens that particular locker, the deception stands.

How tough is Harold? Like on the one hand regular old Sidestep can hurt him. On the other I believe I remember him taking the force of a bus before? Like what would happen if Super strength suit Sidestep took Harold's head and squeezed as hard as they could.

He is tougher than a regular human, for sure. But the strength armor will mess him up bad.

How durable is Ortega compared to a normal person?

More so, but not massively. Ortega rely a lot on their skinsuit. However, this is a superhero universe, so they are more durable just by doing this for a living.

For the Rangers and Mortum. What are some of there I'm a genius...Oh no moments?

Oh I have no idea! Nothing comes to mind at the moment. But I bet Ortega has had many.

Building up on a question above: how strong is Ortega? Where would they fall on a scale between a normal person and the villain's strength-upgrade armor?

Ortega's forte was never strength, it was speed and reactions. So Ortega is as strong as a well-trained athlete. They could lift and carry Sidestep without much effort.

What are food markets like in LD and the FEZ? Are there supermarkets around? Is growing food common? Where does the cast usually get their food from and what do they buy?

There are supermarkets, but not as many as today. There are more specialized stores, since Los Diablos has better communal traffic than in our world. Many companies have well-equipped company stores, where employees get part of their salary in credit. This is especially true for the factory areas on the outskirts of the cities where people live and work.

Many of the independent neighborhoods run their own cooperative stores, who often have agreements with farmers in the countryside. In general, the selections in most stores is a lot more local than it used to be. Things imported from Mexico is common in the south, and things from Canada in the north. It is easier to get hold of those than things that were made in the midwest or the east coast.

Does Ortega actually believe that step has a life outside of him or do they think step is lying?

Oh boy. Ortega is convinced that Step has an entire life divorced from them these days.

WAIT, did Anathema's invulnerability protect them from sun damage? Could they just walk around barefoot and shoulders-out in hot ass Los Diablos as a flex?

Oh yes, that's where all the freckles come from.

Back with more Ashfall/Pyroclast/Nazar questions because I am very fond of him. What was he like as a child? Did he always want to be a hero or did he have other career aspirations? How old was he when he took the boost drug?

Ambitious and athletic, but not enough money to be able to afford going for it seriously. He didn't really consider trying to be a hero until he became friends with someone whose sister was involved with the boost drug trade. He was only 14, but he did some serious work for that sister, which let him get his hands on a dose of the drugs.

Do you consider him more of a tactician or fighter?

Tactician.

How did he meet the Rangers? What was the first case he worked on with the Rangers?

The same way many vigilantes do, by running into them enough times when he was working, and helping out. I have no idea what the case in question was.

What were his first impressions of the Rangers + Step?

Since we have not interacted with him much in game yet, I'll have to wait until I actually write him. That's where the personality comes out.

What is his greatest fear? Does he have any phobias?

A bit of claustrophobia. Like many born on the coast he's not fond of earthquakes.

What would he say is his greatest strength? Greatest flaw? What do you consider his greatest strength/flaw?

Once again, I don't know him that well yet. One of the strengths is the fact that he is very driven.

What is his mindscape like?

Like being inside of an ash cloud, visibility varying as the winds swirl.

About his relationship style + history: Is he the type to flirt a lot? Does he casually date or does he prefer serious relationships? Has he dated a lot of people?

Not a lot of flirting. He's always been very serious, and his job comes first. What would work was someone as busy as he is, or were willing to let him live his own life.

How much sway has the mayor have over the ranger as compared to the guardians? If a potential hero has no prior relations to either team, what are the traits that determine whether they're delegated to the rangers or to the guardians?

The Mayor has no influence over the Rangers, that is the US government. If they want someone, there is little the Mayor could do.

Do each of the Rangers have a specific vigilante or independent hero they've wanted on the team but couldn't get that they regret the most?

I think I have answered that in a previous FAQ.

Villain armors for the rangers + Hero armor for Mortum, Go. Aesthetic category, + upgrades, plus any design hot takes if you have them. Also cape, yes/no?

I have no idea! As you might notice, I hardly describes the characters. I am not a designer that way!

Does argent have an all time favorite movie? How about the other rangers?

I don't know actually, I can't even decide on my own favorite movie. Things like that varies. However, you can get their favorite genre: Ortega-Thrillers, Argent-Horror, Chen-Film Noir, Herald-romantic adventure.

What are the Rangers, Mortum's, and the Trios favorite snack?

Good question, the only thing I know for certain is Mortum's terrible microwaved pizza. Ortega is probably peanuts. The others I don't know yet.

If asked to swing by your base and pick up your armor, how likely are Bo and Rosie to remember the skinsuit for underneath? Would they remember on their own or have to be reminded when asked? What about the members of the crew?

I think they would remember the skinsuit, it is stored right next to the armor.

What would be Marshal Hood's opinion of Sidestep's "death" and subsequent rise to villainy? If he were retired rather than... dead.

Since he had enver met Sidestep, they would just be another fallen hero. Nothing special.

How's the Los Diablos real estate market? Is it worth to buy or invest? Would a slow, quiet takeover via a telepathically inclined real estate agent be a viable takeover strategy for those with the funds to throw around?

Oh it has become well worth investing over the last decade. The city has been prosperous and growing. And yes, it would definitely be a workable income in the long run.

How did Steel + Herald feel in Rebirth when the crowd starting rallying against him/the Rangers? Was it something that happens somewhat regularly?

Not really, that was new and bad. It disturbed him greatly.

Inspired by a post I've seen somewhere before: what would the ROs wear to the Met Gala?

I don't know anything about fashion! I'm a metalhead country bumpkin. I leave that to the artists.

What are Sentinel, Anathema, and Nazar's opinions on telepathy? Do/did they ever feel uneasy being around telepaths?

Sentinel was alright with telepaths, he had no issues. Neither did Anathema, but they trusted their head to be hard to read. Which it was, but not like Ortega's. Pyroclast found telepaths super helpful in his transformed state.

Does the rat king operate on a shared, collective consciousness, or do they also possess individual minds and personalities? In the case of the latter, how do they feel about each other and do they ever have disagreements between one another?

Since they were connected at such an early age, they do have more of a collective personality. But, yes, they do have different personalities and tasks they like to do, but not to the point of having taken names. They love each other, but occasionally there might be disagreements about what to do.

Did Nazar ever play any pranks on Ortega & Co? Or get into a petty argument with Charge and change into his carbon form to set off the fire suppressant systems or alarms?

Nope, Anathema was the prankster.

How did Sidestep first come across their puppet? Was it a conscious choice picking them out of all the abandoned bodies, or was it accidental? (like what you see with a daring Step possessing the wrong body in Rebirth?)

Sidestep had been theorizing that it would be possible for a while, but most of the bodies they scouted had been very old or badly physically damaged. The puppet was chosen because it was young, and had no massive injuries or relatives.

Can Step feel the pull of that psychic blackhole located at Lot 16?

No. Too good shields, and wanting to avoid that place at all costs.

Are there other psychic blackholes in Los Diablos? (like at the site of the Nanosurge)

No.

When he distrusted Sidestep back in the day, was Steel right to fear the Rangers might be under threat? Has there been or is there still people within the LD Rangers institution that Double Agent for others?

Steel thinks he was right.

Will we ever be able to interact with the regene you encounter in rebirth?

I track things, so it is likely!

Would Sidestep qualify Heartbreak's mind as having a "sticky" or tar-like quality? Out of the two (heartbreak and sidestep), which one has the stickier mind?

It would depend on the Sidestep, not everyone had the same interactions.

Riding on that - is the "stickiness" a sign of infection?

No.

How did Dr. Mortum and Vitruvian meet? How did they form their partnership?

They met when robbing the same lab and decided, after an argument and showdown, that since they were both very intelligent it was better to work together than against each other.

Who's the first telepath known in history?

Interestingly enough, that was Kulina Petrova, back in the fifties. Though some debate this, and think it was all fake.

Can you tell us more about the Founding Marshals and what they were like?

Not now, maybe in the future.

For science, how often has sir Lord Ember burned off his eyebrows?

Once

Are there boost circuses

That sounds fun! There probably is one touring the west.

How tall were Sentinel, Sunstream, and Anathema?

Sentinel was average, Sunstream was short, and anathema was short.

Can telekinesis be used to cut things?? (tw gore Like limbs? Or is it just restricted to lifting stuff?

Depends on the user. Just like with telepathy, there are variants.

Who was Geistcarver?

A homage to my partners old warhammer mmo character, I have no more details now, except that he had a sword who cut spirits.

Aside from Ortega and potentially Argent, who, among the current and former Rangers, has ended up on the fridge for kissing villains?

I honestly think it's just those two.

If Herald didn't take the Boost drug, what would he have become? What would his life have been like?

Either a depressed artist, or a repressed businessman.

A question for science: what would happen if you were to stick a pencil in one of the ports on Ortega's back? Or your finger?

They are safe, just like the

How would Argent react to being told she was rather difficult to puppet when we possessed her?

Depends. Maybe "serves you right", or "oh, you have no idea how difficult I can be".

What's Anathema's first name? Did any one close to them know it and use it?

Not telling, and nope. Themmy works fine.

Are "kind" handlers a thing? Can we chose what type of handler our Sidestep had back during the farm days?

Yes, relatively. And there will be a choice.

What would Anathema have done in the wake of HB, if they survived and Sidestep died?

What they always does, try to carry on and be kind.

Dunno if it's been asked already, but will we someday get a map of your Los Diablos?

If I ever befriend a good mapmaker that would be super cool.

How does Ortega feel about Sidestep not being able to read their mind? Relieved? And are there times when they wish Sidestep could?

Most of the time, yes. At other times strangely wistful and sad.

Does the colloidal silver combat Regenes are given have any adverse effects on their health? Does it ever put them out of commission? Or has the Farm figured out a way to get the cyanosis without any possible complications?

It is not cyanosis, it is silver ions binding with pigments in the skin. It has no big adverse health effects.

Does Skybright have any friends?? Is she a social creature??

I think she is. And she meets a lot of people.

What're the Rangers currently looking for most in their searching for new recruits? What department do they think they need help with? What department do they actually need help with?

Hmmm that's a good question. I need to think about that.

What's the likelihood Dr. Mortum is going to add a tracker to their gun so they can't have it stolen again?

Very likely.

Is there any boost that can steal powers from other boosts?

Not that we have met yet.

How do telepath Regenes get trained? Were there telepaths among the handlers/training staff who didn't get mysteriously disappeared?

Telepath regenes are very much individuals. No standardized training regimen, it is all up to the variant of powers. There were telepathic staff, but no longer.

What has Steel done to celebrate Spoon's birthday?

Just extra nice food and some dog toys.

Who picked the name 'Herald'? Was it rangers pr department? Did Daniel get some input?

Daniel got a handful of names to choose between, and picked one.

Mia mentioned that Vernon had "important contacts", plural. How many backers, or important/powerful informants, did Vernon have?

One major.

when did the farm realize that Sidestep had "gates"? And by extension - did Sidestep already have the ability to open/shut their gates in their farm days, or was it something they developed pre or post heartbreak?

What makes you think the Farm has any idea?

does sidestep know/aware what the gates are? they could hear the term in the lab (heartbreak nightmare, rebirth) but did they make sense of it/understand it?

Nope, they don't.

how known/common is the term "gates"? do scientists specialised in telepathy know it/know about it? or does it belong only to the "whatever-the-farm-is/was-doing" project?

That is not a common term at all. It is only in that project.

What game mechanics are you looking forward to implement or experiment with, if any, for the next books — or maybe dream games you're thinking about?

One day I will implement randomness in something, and yet I know I will backtrack. I will finally get to do telepathic combat. And the dream project is a small game about the void endfight with several

viewpoints.

After getting their invulnerability, did Anathema keep aging? More or less what age were they at the time of Heartbreak?

They aged normally. They were in their mid twenties.

Other than Sidestep, who else did Mortum suspect to be possible candidates for the villain?

Nobody who has been named in game.

[September spoiler questions.](#)

[Oct 10, 2022](#)

Alright, I have one week left before I send in Fallen Hero: Retribution to CoG for their edit round. So if the answers are short, that's because my mind is busy. Soon I will have more time to get back and do a lot of cool stuff on here!

Could Argent sense Sidesteps computerchip if she focused, even if it's off?

Yes.

Spoilers: will we get to know Ortega's immediate reaction to MC getting broken out of HQ by Mortum? Would he already make the connection to Mortum like with the puppet, or would there be a worry that the SD showed up like MC said they would?

I am not sure yet! I need to think about it.

With Ortega's bday coming up, any chances we'll be able to tell them Sidestep's actual age if the regene reveal's happened? I know they're in their 30s in every way that counts but I still think it'd be hilarious to see Ortega's reaction.

I dunno yet. It might come up once they start talking more about Farm stuff.

If Argent attacks Step in the elevator scene, Ortega's reaction is something like "disappointed, but not surprised". Has Argent attacked allies/civillians out of the blue like this before? Has she attacked any of the Rangers?

Ortega is the one who knows the most about Argent's control issues, even if they don't know the full truth. Argent have had issues in the past, and Ortega has covered for them. And the other way around.

Spoilers In the next book are we be able to change step's appearance again? Especially cuz in some routes step is hiding from the rangers

Oh yes. That is planned.

If we don't release the Catastrofiend in Retri, will we still have the chance to meet it again in future books?

How could I resist? It is still there, in stasis.

SPOILER: in the endings where the MC crashes but jumps into the puppet, is the Regene cat out of the bag to the Rangers? Since the SD is now on Step's trail, I wondered how many other people are in the known.

The cat is out of the bag, yes.

Spoiler: Did Ortega when they first mistakenly started thinking Step was HG lost sibling did they try to steer Step in a direction away from HG and crime or did they ever consider Sidestep as some kind of leverage against HG?

Not leverage. Because by the time Ortega finally saw Sidestep's face and started to add things up, they were already friends. So Ortega tried to steer Sidestep towards hero side.

Being a regene was there ever anything Sidestep did (behaviour/said) that made Ortega, Anathema, Steel etc think that was odd or strange?

So many things! Sidestep was inherently very weird at the start, but Anathema got it.

Alpha Spoilers Argent is missing a good few chunks of flesh, but how does the underlying bone structure look? Does she have all her bones, but are those also largely replaced by nanovores?

Nope, she's missing bones as well, especially in the hands and feet.

Alpha Spoils What's the relationship between Umbral and his girlfriend like? Does he know she's got flirtatious relationships like Jake?

Umbral has no luck with women. He did not know that.

How long has Hollow Ground been possibly causing earthquakes?

Somewhere around the turn of the century.

Alpha Spoilers: What would an X-Ray of Lady Argent look like? Points of interest?

Whatever she wanted it to look like.

^on that note: what segments are the nanovores augmenting/supporting or posing as entirely? is it a constant or ever-changing kind of symbiosis? if she loses more of herself during fights or events, how do they go about replacing or fixing? are there any telltale signs that's she's losing/lost more of herself?

The major bits are focused on hands and feet, that's why the most through transformations happen there. Also, eyes. And skin.

Okay wait part 2 to my question!! cw medical, body horror Do they act as her blood/bloodstream? When they function as her eyes are they connecting directly with her ocular system or in eating that, is it her technopathy that's connecting the image they're presenting to her? Also what's with their little Predator triple dot look when they're in charge? If they change the appearance of her limbs like when she does the sword and such, are they also morphing her bone? Does she need to actively recall human anatomy or do they do that for her?

The eyes are usable only because of Argent's technopathy. Ironically, she can see through her skin, on a basic level. The nanovores forming her eyes are specialists at this point, rather different from the rest. They can translate their surroundings a lot better. The triple points are what would amount to the "brains" of the nanoswarm, the central hive focus points. Yes, not every nanovore is the same since Argent started to interact with them. And Argent really needs to focus to get the proper shape with the nanovores.

Alpha spoilers: With the nanovores being partly in argent's throat, have they affected her voice at all?

Yes, they have. Her tongue is all nanovores.

Would Steel know how to get Step out of their armor in an emergency situation or would they have to crack it open like HG

Steel would most likely be able to figure it out.

What did the Special Directive do to review or monitor the implantation of memories into the AI chip with regard to bias in how concepts were introduced? Was there an acceptable, quantifiable, threshold of unavoidable bias from the holder of the original memories?

Oh those memories were monitored, cleaned and sanitized. It was the most important part of the Re-Gene process, and a lot more predictable than the boosting. This was what the core was for.

Would any memories have been added with the intent of providing a specific bias favourable toward the SD? Would it have been possible to intentionally slip in biases that the SD would not have wanted under the radar?

Yes to the first one. Loyalty and obedience were focused on. It would not have been possible to slip in biases, this was very controlled.

What were Blaze's and Zephyr's childhoods like? What about Locus and Porphyry's?

I don't know yet, I haven't detailed them like that.

How did Hollow Ground get a hold of the regenerator?

They did not, someone was selling it at the auction they held.

Alpha Spoilers What the hell does Chen trust Blaze with?? The man can tackle you out the window and burn himself out while fighting.

Doesn't mean he can't keep his mouth shut and give good advice.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how much is Argent creating expectations about her romantic relationship with Sidestep? 1 being "Only friends who kiss" and 10 being "Imagining the wedding dress and them in a house with white picket fences"

That depends entirely on the Sidestep, but she is demi, so it will take time.

How did Mortum obtain the footage of shroud and ace?

Contacts in San Francisco.

Spoilers How would things have changed had Ortega seen Sidestep's face from the start? Would they still genuinely have wanted to befriend them/flirt with them? Or would Ortega have tried to use them for their own revenge agenda against HG?

That is a tough call. I honestly don't know. The thing is, if they had seen Sidestep's face from the start, then they would have slotted them into the bad guy folder. Someone to be used. Perhaps that would have changed once they got to know Sidestep, but who knows?

[Ask your questions here!](#)

[Sep 29, 2022](#)

Sorry for being late, real life is busy, but please ask any questions here! Only two weeks until I submit the game for good, so I need to work.

[Sep 19, 2022](#)

There's an emptiness in the conference room once Sidestep has left with Chen.

The quiet before the storm.

I let out a breath I didn't know I was holding, and oh boy, I finally dare to breathe again. Good job remembering life's basic functions. Maybe you are the one that should be thinking about retiring here.

As if. I sigh and am about to rise when Angie steps in and pushes me back down in the chair. Leaning in to take advantage of the fact that I'm seated. Hard to loom otherwise, but she's making the most of the opportunity.

"You could have asked first." Her face is narrow in the particular way it gets when she's angry but doesn't want to show it.

"I did," I say with what I hope is a shrug. Right now, it feels uncomfortably like overloading, tension crawling through my nerves, making every reaction an overreaction.

"On the phone," she snaps, in your face and not backing down. "What was I supposed to say?"

"No?" The word slips out of my mouth before I can stop it, and for a moment I brace for a hit, but instead she takes a step back and flings her hands to the heavens.

"You're hopeless. I can't—"

"But Sidestep might help you," Daniel interrupts. He always had more guts than brains; maybe that's why he's still putting up with their fake relationship. "And you know you would have said no if you had the chance to think about it first."

"So blackmailing is better?" She bares her teeth, and oh boy, they look sharp.

"Daniel, why don't you go and check so Chen doesn't put his foot in his mouth on the way out?" I can sense an argument growing, and I can't handle that. Not now. They can be idiots together when I'm not around.

"Sure," he says, taking the chance offered without hesitation. I can't blame him. Angie is in a foul mood, and I suppose it's partly my fault.

"Cut him some slack," I say once Daniel has left and I have risen from the chair. Good. Mobility. Just in case. "And he's got a point."

"Oh, shut it. Don't feed his ego." But some of the vitriol has left her voice.

"I know I probably stepped on all your toes, but I think this might be a chance to figure out what happened to you."

"Keep telling yourself that." She runs her hands through her slick hair, then lets out a tired sigh. "We both know that's not what's going on here."

"Okay, maybe this is for both of us," I admit, because she's as sharp as her claws when finding my weak spots. I've shown her enough of them over the years. "And if you want to call it off, you can."

"It's fine." She looks down at her hands, flexing them. "It's worth a shot to find out who did this to me. Now excuse me. I need to get some dinner."

"Put it on my bill," I say graciously. A small peace offering.

"Hah," that got a laugh from her at least. "You can't afford me." And with those ominous words, she heads off, leaving me to meander aimlessly towards the kitchen.

Abandoned to my thoughts.

Funny how the best day of my life feels like the worst day all over again. Out of sight is not out of mind, but at least I'm not hallucinating. No one-way ticket to a padded cell, with headlines screaming that Charge has finally snapped. Little do they know I snapped years ago; I'm just good at pretending. Pretending to be smooth. Pretending to be in control. Pretending that it doesn't hurt.

Too bad I'm not as good at fooling myself.

The beer is cold and opens with a satisfying tsh, but the taste barely hides the lack of alcohol. Oh well, sometimes going through the motions is enough to calm my nerves, and I need to get a grip right now. Chen's steps are too heavy to miss, so I turn and smile as he enters the kitchen, beer held high.

"That had better be non-alcoholic." Chen frowns, and I hide my smile. Bait taken.

"You know that's the only thing we stock," I say and roll my eyes, mask back on. Habits. Where would I be without them?

"I also know you've not limited to what's in the fridge." He walks over and grabs an energy drink for himself. As bad for him as the beer is for me, but I don't give him shit about it. It's been a three-beer kind of day.

"I also don't like lukewarm beer." I take another sip, it's a lie now, but it wouldn't have been a few years ago. Though lukewarm vodka is better. And doesn't smell as much. "I'm fine."

"You don't look fine," he mutters, leaning against the counter. Looking at me. "You look like you've—"

"Seen a ghost," I fill in before he can finish. "Except I haven't?" I wish the last didn't sound like a question.

"No ghosts." But from the look on his face, he's as shaken as I am. And worse at hiding it.

"Did they pass muster then?" So nonchalant, as if my peace of mind didn't depend on the answer.

"I think it really is Sidestep if that's what you're asking. I just don't know how it's possible." Sidestep. Always that slight distance though he knows their name.

"Me neither," I admit because I remember what I saw. On the other hand, shouldn't I have been dead twenty years ago? Bad decisions. Bad falls. Another thing we have in common now. "I get surviving against impossible odds, but..." I drift off, unwilling to finish the sentence. Chen comes to the rescue, as always.

"Staying away for seven years."

"Yeah." I put down the beer and begin to pace. Too antsy, can't stay still. "That I don't get."

Am I lying to myself or to him? I know too many reasons why they would want to lay low. Captured. Convinced to change loyalties. Too much baggage coming back to drag them down. Maybe even trying to keep me from getting involved, the idiot. Keeping me safe.

"Did you ever ask yourself if you made the right call bringing them here?" Chen says the words I'm avoiding. He's irritating like that. "It looked to me like they were brought here at gunpoint."

"Don't use that term, please." I blink hard. Memories you can't unsee. Was that another reason?

"Sorry." Not an apology, not really. "But you know I'm right. They couldn't wait to get out of here."

"I needed to..." Not good for me to get this upset. Deep breaths. Bite down the burning behind your eyelids. In your stomach.

"You needed to what? We could handle Argent without help, you know that."

"I needed to know if I was going crazy." There. It's out.

"Oh." Chen looks like he's not sure if he should hug me or not.

"Yeah."

"But you're sober now," he says cautiously, looking at the beer you've abandoned. Safe. Unlike you.

"More or less." It's under control, as I would tell my non-existent therapist. "Doesn't mean the ghosts have left me alone."

"Do you... think you have spotted them before? Maybe it wasn't a ghost." Trust Chen to think of this as a mystery. He has too much faith in you.

"No." I look away. "I had never pictured them like... this." Like the years had made their mark on them. Like time had moved on and left my mind rooted to the spot while they moved on without me. This was a version my mind had not invented. Scarred but whole. Not bleeding. Not like the others. So many images were torn from my past to parade in front of me. Sometimes pasted on other people's faces or hiding in the corner of my eye. But this is new. This is real.

"Okay." Chen finally puts a hand on my shoulder. Heavy. Solid. "I need to know if you are going to be okay."

"Of course I will." I put my hand over his, feeling the rubbery fingers. "You've seen me worse than this." Swearing in a wheelchair, falling over when I try to stand up. His hands were stiffer then. Newly modded. Left bruises I didn't mind.

"I would rather not repeat that experience. This is a good thing, right?" His grip tightens as he pulls me into a hug.

"It is," I agree, unsure if there are tears in my voice or laughter. "I just don't know how to deal with it."

"Neither do I," he admits. "I was convinced they were dead." Is that guilt in his voice? Close enough. Maybe he's thinking back like you are. The long line of what-ifs.

"Me too." And I hate myself for buying into that. Into the whole story. I knew the government was lying about what really happened. I just didn't think they would be lying about that. No reason to. Sidestep was a vigilante. An ally. A hero. There was no reason their death would be faked, no reason at all, except...

I should have known. It was the perfect opportunity. No chance to say no, but the perfect time to bring them home. Make them stop the heroics. Get back in the fold. But if this was the case, why were they out now? Walking free in Los Diablos? Lots of reasons came to mind, but none of them were good. I wish I could shake the look in Sidestep's eyes. Tired. Broken.

No more rebellion. No more fire.

"Hey." Chen's voice is quieter than my thoughts. "You will be able to deal with this, right?"

"Of course." I push away and run both hands through my hair. "I can take care of this. You don't need to worry."

"That wasn't what I asked." He steps into my line of sight and refuses to let me look away. "I want to know if you will be okay emotionally."

"Probably not," I admit with the first smile that felt real. Like time was restarting. Ice cracking, revealing running water underneath. Drown or swim? "But in a good way. You don't have to worry."

"It's my job to worry," he grumbles.

"Not paying you to be my friend, so I'm not your job." This time it's my hand on his shoulder, and the smile stays. "Go Marshal someone else. I'm fine." Fine? Better than I've been in years more like it.

"I'll take your word for it. I need to head down to the harbor."

"Are they still planning to start it up again?" The pumice rafts might be gone, but the seas weren't safe for anything less than armored cruisers.

"The commercial side, yes." A heavy sigh. "And they want to convince me that it's a Ranger problem. Sounds like the military already turned them down."

"If it is, count me out." I let out a sigh of relief. Back to business, other issues than mine. "Doubt my insurance would cover any form of water-related shenanigans."

"It is not a matter of regional security, so you're safe." Chen gives me one final stern glance. "And please check in with Argent so she's okay."

"One step ahead of you; I already did that."

"Really?" How bad a friend have I been that there's doubt in his eyes?

"Yes. She's off having dinner on my dime."

"I'm surprised she accepted that as an apology." This time Chen smiles as well.

"It wasn't an apology." I head towards the door before the discussion takes a bad turn again. "I made the right call, and she knows that."

"I hope for your sake you're right." Chen follows, one step behind. A comfortable distance. "I'm worried about her."

"So am I." I stop and turn because this is important. "I've lost too many people." Even if one of them has returned, the scales are hardly balanced.

"So have I." There's a melancholy look on his face. "Please don't become one of them."

"I won't," I say with as much confidence as I can. "Now go have fun at your boat meeting."

[August Q&A](#)

[Sep 10, 2022](#)

Do you ever feel stressed or unsure about how you write your story? Like, feeling like you're just making things up and not being sure if it's any good? (Cause writer feelings have got me down. I was wondering if it ever got to you, especially since so many people think well of your writing + FHR.)

Okay, story time. I published my first story when I was 39. Not the first story I wrote, not by a long shot. For most of my youth I was convinced that what I wrote was boring crap. The first things I showed to people were little short stories and the like for my Skaven army for an online Games Workshop campaign in the late nineties. People liked them, and I got involved in an online Skaven forum (the Underempire) and ran an online campaign there as well, and wrote what amounted to a book about what was happening. I didn't care if it was good, or if anybody liked it, because it was for a bloody table-top game so I could relax and have fun.

Eventually I wrote more fanfic, never in any popular forums, so not really having much of an audience. Just having fun. I first got readers when I started writing post Dragon Age II, since the game didn't get a proper end, I wrote two books finishing it for me. I did this on Deviantart, publishing a chapter at a time and actually got an audience. I learned a lot here, especially how to craft cliffhangers to make people stick around for the next chapter. This led to me meeting Emma, and writing a comic (Breaks) with her. But still, just fun. For myself. Who cares if fanfic is good?

At the same time, I was trying to get some proper writing started in Swedish. Horror. This was different. This was me trying to do actual writing in my native language. I got short stories published, yes, but I never liked them. I still don't, and I'm going to translate them anyway. In retrospect, the problem here was that I was writing for an audience, and I was aware of it every step of the way. And, unlike fanfiction, it was an audience that was not on the same page as me. They were strangers, who would buy the magazine and read it, and for some reason that made a big difference. If my fanfic writing was a fun party with friends of friends who you might not know but like the same music, this was an official party with work. Big difference.

When I started writing Fallen Hero, that was also just for fun. I never thought I'd finish, I didn't do it for publication, I did it because I was bored in a new town, and thus I didn't really do it for anybody but myself. And, moving forward, I have managed to keep hold of that feeling.

That's not to say I don't feel like crap. I do. A negative comment about something can be a kick in the gut that can spiral if I am already in an anxious mood. Not because I think it sucks, but because I don't

want to disappoint people. But I can't make everybody happy. All writers (and artists, and any other form of creator) feel like shit now and then (or often). Our ideas are stale, boring, or they are interpreted in ways we were not prepared for. It sucks. It's horrible. And there is only one way through it:

Be prepared to suck. Be prepared to be boring. Be prepared for bad reviews and people to hate you. That's going to happen. You're going to have to write a hell of a lot before you turn good, and at that point your taste levels will have advanced so much you still think you suck. But do it anyway. Writing for praise is a sucker's game. Writing for yourself sets you up for being eviscerated by your worst critic: Yourself.

So focus on one single thing: Finish. Don't worry if it's good. Don't worry if it's boring. You already know what's going to happen, of course it would be boring to you. There are two things that can happen with your story. Either it will suck to the end, and by finishing it you will have learned a valuable experience and can move on to your next work. Or there will be a story in there somewhere, and you can bring it out in the editing stage. But you can't start edit until you are finished.

And yeah, I feel sucky a lot of the time too, but I can't let that stop me. And neither should you.

How long did it take for you to come up with a story structure that you were happy with for *Rebirth and Retribution*?

Rebirth was easy, I had already mapped that one out for the book. However, I had to break off earlier than I'd like, so the ending is still not something I am happy with, it is just sort of there. Retribution I did a big reshuffle of the structure around halfway through when my wonderful editor said that the flow didn't work right, especially with the Herald romance. So I moved a lot of things around, and added some more. I am honestly never happy with a structure of a story, but there comes a point where I have to accept that it is what it is. Especially when it comes to interactive fiction, where so many different paths have to exist at once. Perfection doesn't exist.

What's your process for overcoming road blocks + being unsure about the progression of the story you were writing? At what point do you think something (event, entire premise, story) should be scrapped?

Writing blocks always have a reason. Always. You just might not know what it is. For me, it is often my subconsciousness telling me that there is something wrong with the story. Until I figure it out, I will have a hard time writing it. My first step in resolving it is to skip the part I am having trouble writing, and write another part, jumping ahead. If that is possible, the story is alright, and I need to figure out if I really need that scene or if I can approach it from another direction. However, if I can't think of a future scene to write, the problem is in the story itself, and the reason why I am stalled is because I don't believe in the direction that it's going.

I have scrapped a LOT of stories. Whole books, in fact. *Fallen Hero* is one book, fused with background and characters from another book, and vibes from a third. All of these three stories lacked something, but when I put them together they became something more. And that's the lesson for scrapped events, stories or premises. Just put them away, don't delete them. It might not just be the time for them yet, or

maybe they are missing some component you can't come up with right now. Nothing written is ever in vain. And, trust me, it is better to take the step to abandon a project for the time being rather than having like five projects going. Retire the troublemaker and move on to something else.

One final piece of advice: Sometimes the trouble comes from scenes you think have to be there because it's traditional. Ignore that. Start the story at the cool parts, even if that's close to the end. There is nothing worse than draggy beginnings that could have been summarized in a short flashback if needed.

Will the MC identity be discovered by the rest of the rangers by choice or will it be a scripted event?

It will depend on the players path and choices. It will be possible to go through the entire game and not reveal anything.

Anarchist is one of my favorite paths, so that got me curious about how exactly are "Anti-establishment" people like that viewed in the FHR world. Like, what's the political climate like, overall? Are people who speak out against the system seen as kinda punk (if a bit crazy) or is the general population more hostile towards views like that, a la "red scare" era?

It depends on where you are, as the local events often flavor how things are seen. In the east, what amounts to the real United States, anarchism is viewed as badly as communism. The political system never recovered from the emergency laws passed post-The Big One, and is very authoritarian. On the west coast, they tend to be seen as decidedly more punk. Since the political climate is so fractured, they have actual influence in many local communities. The companies that runs Los Diablos are not concerned unless they are trying to change the bigger system. But, since voting is money based, there's no real legal way to change things, so they are sitting pretty safe as long as people keep disagreeing on the details of how to change things.

On a similar note, is there anything you can share about the Mayor? Like, what's her politics like, what kind of things has she done for the city, etc.

Mayor Alvarez is viewed as a moderate. Unlike the last Mayor, she is not associated with any particular company, but have a background in local government. In fact, that was part of why she was elected, a neutral party to end the vicious infighting that ended the last Mayor.

I'm SUPER curious about what went down in that Void fight; is this something you plan to show more of in the books? Or, if not, would you consider writing some of those cool snippets on it? I'm SO hyped for this!

I have very loose plans of making a mini game about that eventually, but if I don't, then I am definitely going to write something!

Can braindead/comatose bodies be used for the Re-Gene process? Was it ever attempted?

No, though genetic material might be taken from them to mix into the vat.

With same sex Chargestep in a past fling, how did the relationship become the subject of so much media if Ortega and Sidestep took steps to keep it quiet? Just press being press, or was Ortega not as subtle as they thought?

The press is very good at making a hen out of a feather, but most of the time Ortega can just laugh it off if it's made up. It hits differently if there's truth to it.

Can Sidestep use their powers on themselves? (Give themselves false memories, control their own emotions, etc.)

Sadly not, if that was possible Sidestep's life might have been a lot easier.

How often did the farm use dampeners as well as numbers when dealing with telepaths? we know sidestep was able to listen to thoughts when they weren't supposed to, but did any areas in particular always have those precautions in place?

They had dampeners near the living areas, but they could not be used during training. Also, Sidestep's powers grew faster and quicker than people realized, so especially at the start there were very few protections.

sorry if something similar has been asked before, but what causes chen to become suspicious if you retrieve the nanovores as yourself in the start of rebirth? does he think he recognises you? or was it more of a retroactive conclusion, after he learns you're alive?

Chen spotted you, but didn't immediately recognize you. But once he saw you again after Ortega found you, he remembered and put two and two together,

any hints on what sentinel is up to?

Nope.

The Shrink that Sidestep is seeing, is she more like a psychiatrist or a therapist? Is our poor Sidestep getting the proper prescription meds that they most likely need?

Therapist. Medication has not come up yet.

How would Ortega's abilities be affected by rain?

Riskier to use, especially for others. While Ortega is insulated against stray currents, they try to avoid using their powers during rain, at least if they have allies there. It is easy for currents to spread to places that weren't intended.

I'm curious about Ortega's mods. They seem to have a lot of side effects from them. Is this normal for Mods? Do Steel's mods have side effects? Is Ortega the first living being to have their

mods? Were they ever tested on a regene?

Side effects are pretty common for bigger mods. Even if you can make something interact successfully with nerves and muscle, it's not going to go smooth. Steel's mods are limb replacements, which is one of the more reliable variants. Even so, wearing them is an effort. He often uses a wheelchair at home to get some relief. The worst parts for him are the points where the base for his prosthesis are, especially for the legs.

Ortega's mods are unique, nobody before or after has had something similar. There has been no Re-Gene subjects.

If animals can be boosted. Are there any modded animals around?

The Laser Dolphins are modded as well as boosted. Modded dogs are common for guard duty, especially with cameras or scanners. They can also have modded jaws and teeth for biting. Modded birds exist, usually with cameras.

Is human trafficking common in the FEZ?

Sadly, yes. There's no central registry of who lives there, so in many cases it won't even be discovered.

Is the pay of the Marshal higher then that of a normal Ranger?

Yes, about five times.

Have regenes ever been used for kill and replace missions?

No.

Are there any horror movies about boosts, mods or regenes out in the FH universe?

Oh plenty! I have not detailed any though.

How common is it for mods to have to change their diet for their mods?

It can happen, but most times not.

I want to know more boost cravings. What does Blaze crave? What does the HG trio crave? Does Catastrofiend crave anything? Does Locus crave anything?

Blaze doesn't have cravings specifically, but he shares the Sweetsteps need for calories. Hollow Ground has no cravings. Nocturne smokes, though whether that is because of her boosts or old habits are hard to say. Jake has a weird need for seafood, especially crustaceans, The Catastrofiend craves boost drugs, and Locus is a sugar fiend.

Can we/Sidestep break someone's mind with telepathy? How much damage can Sidestep do to someone's mind? Will Sidestep be able to do this in game?

Sidestep could potentially destroy someone's mind, unless they have very strong defenses. They might get that opportunity in the future.

Can telepathy knock someone unconscious? Could telepathy be used to make people feel extreme pain? Could Sidestep use their powers to convince someone they injured them? Could telepathy permanently erase memories?

Yes to all of these, and Sidestep has used most of them in the past (and some in the books).

Would Sidestep be more dangerous to a fellow telepath than normal human?

No. Or at least that is what would be true for any telepath. In Sidestep's case, things gets... complicated.

Do regenes grow wisdom teeth? Do they get dental care?

Yes and yes.

If a regene's boost powers evolve, will that be noted in their tattoos? Can regene tattoos be altered?

No, and no.

Are there ever errors in regene tattoos? What would the Farm do if there was a mistake in a regene's tattoos?

There are occasionally errors, but once they are made, there's not much to do about it. And over time, the number of errors have been minimized.

Are regene boosts more likely to reach Alpha level than human boosts? What is the most common boost level for special directive regenes?

I don't think there's much difference. The most common type for SD are Beta level boosts.

Are regene boosts provided with the thing they crave if they have cravings?

Yes, it is needed for them to be efficient.

The HB incident aside, because that's pretty clear to see, would you say the Rangers may have some PTSD about all the horrible stuff they had to be put through along the years? I suppose this would be more about Steel, Ortega, and Sentinel, since they're the ones who've been active long enough to have seen some shit...

Oh yeah. There's a reason for the psych evaluations.

If HG, Nocturne, and Jake all ended up going their separate ways, what would each of them do?

Honestly, they would probably still do crime.

How did Argent feel about moving back to Los Diablos?

Scared. Nostalgic.

Argent didn't seem too happy with the fact Ortega was going to be present if Sidestep decided to "help" her figure out who possessed her, was that because she was afraid she might lose control during the process?

She doesn't like people to see her weak, and she has to work with Ortega the next day. And yes, she might also have been nervous that Sidestep would ferret out some secrets, and she would have witnesses.

What advantage would each of the Rangers say they bring to the team?

Ortega: Unpredictability and luck.

Steel: Firepower.

Argent: Fighting skill.

Herald: Flight.

Does Mitchell have any files on people outside the hero/villain circles?

No, he's not interested in norms.

How satisfied would the Rangers and Dr. Mortum consider themselves to be of their lives? What about HG trio?

The HG trio is pretty pleased with themselves, but none of the Rangers are. Dr. Mortum is also pretty alright.

Sidestep can think that their past self would be horrified of the person they are in present day, what do the Rangers and Dr. Mortum think their past selves would think of their present selves?

Ortega would be impressed, Steel disappointed, Argent terrified, Herald proud, Mortum pleased.

The conversation with Ortega and trans Sidestep was very lovely!! Do we get a conversation similar with the other ros?

Yes, not the same, but they will talk about it.

Scaling the ROs, how flexible are they with their morals?

I think I have already answered that in the past.

Does the Farm attain the DNA needed to make Re-Genes from dead people, or do they need their subjects alive?

Live subjects are best, but dead ones will do as long as they can be sampled before the DNA starts to break down.

Will we have the options to choose to train our telepathy, instead of waiting for/coming across an event where our stats will get boosted?

No. At this point, Sidestep is as trained as they can be. If you want the extra powers, you need to seek out dangerous situations where you can push your powers to the limit. But be advised, high numbers might not be so good in the long run.

Can you tell us more about Shimmerglow?

I honestly haven't detailed much about her. Her powers are what she calls "hard light", she can produce glowing solid constructs of neon light. This includes weapons, shields and armor as well as more esoteric constructs. One of her favorites is a horse she calls Star.

Was Cavalier ever a good person?

He would say so, and he had some friends who would agree.

What's the policies around romance with the Rangers? Can members date each other? Can the Marshal date any of the members? Who *can* the Rangers date?

There are no real official rules on this, but the HR can get involved if things turn messy.

... did Marshal Hood have an open casket funeral?

Yes, there was a wake with an open casket where people could say their goodbyes.

Can you tell us about the Skinless man? His hopes, his dreams, was the the dude actually good at fighting? Most importantly where did he get the confidence to rock out with his John out?

The Skinless Man was actually a good fighter. He demolished a lot of heroes and vigilantes over the years. And there are some people who gets off on showing off, maybe his see-through skin was a reflection of that. He was active for six years, focusing on stealing money, and after that he disappeared. Rumor has it he bought a yacht and now sails the oceans.

Who was the swordmaster? What was there whole deal.

The Swordmaster was a boost with delusions of Zorro. He was a villain, sure, but apart from stealing money, it seemed like his main motivation was finding heroes and vigilantes to fight. Flashily. Flamboyantly. He was a fan favorite for many, and is currently serving a ten year sentence in Lancaster Prison.

Does Sidestep have the ability to telepathically scramble people's brain? If they do, how does that work? What does it look like when people examine the person who got scrambled?

While the term Scramble is not a scientific term, Sidestep can certainly do it. It would read as a combination between amnesia, a psychotic break, and a minor stroke.

Given that men who get around are generally perceived more positively than women who do the same, have Ricardo and Julia ever been treated differently either by the press or in their private lives? Like is Ricardo seen more as a charming casanova who can get all the women while Julia as simply "slutty"?

I think we all know this is 100% true. And, as a result, Ricardo has also been a lot more open with his relationships than Julia has. She would have more of an "eternally single" vibe, going on a lot of dates, but not being in as many official relationships.

Can you tell us more about Umbral?

A loudmouth bully with a flashy mansion, the kind of man who shows off his wealth at every opportunity. Clothes, cars, jewelry, cash... you name it.

Has Ashfall ever tried communicating by contorting his ash form into images? Like the school of fish from Finding Nemo?

Ashfall in my head right now is doing the 'pikachu face' because he never thought of that.

What kind of writing styles/signatures does the cast have?

Ortega: Wide and curvy, Steel; Narrow and neat, Argent: bad, Herald: elegant and cultured.

How would the cast react to a Step that likes them, admires their skills, but doesn't truly trust or take them seriously + dismiss them out of hand if they want to help Step? (E.g. Offering to pay for therapy, be a willing listener, giving advice, telling them they need help? Just for it all to fall on deaf ears, possibly getting hostile if they press?)

Honestly, you will probably have to find out in game for most of them. Ortega however, is used to it, and it is annoying, but they get it. Ain't gonna stop them from trying to help.

What would Chen's life be like if he took the boost drug instead of joining the military? Would he have joined anyway? If so, how different would his life have been?

If he had taken the boost drugs at that early point in life and lived... I'll be honest. He would probably have turned to crime.

Building up on a question above, does the way they get hypersexualized ever make Ortega (either Julia or Ricardo) uncomfortable? I know they like to be charming, but with the way the media tends to treat "sexy" celebrities irl, and the straight up creepy movies people make about Charge in-universe, I can't imagine it always feels exactly flattering...

Ricardo: Is often uncomfortable but never shows it. Jokes about it, leans into it and makes a thing of it. Has a cold shower and a big drink once he's alone.

Julia: Is more comfortable with calling people out on their bullshit, including the media. Has hit people. Has on one occasion paid a villain to do a raid on a particularly obnoxious magazine office.

I recently joined, so I've been reading past lore posts, and I just read the Truths story you posted for the 100 patrons. I was wondering, what question would Sidestep have asked the group if they hadn't been tricked? Or was it that they pretended to get tricked so they wouldn't have to ask a question?

The latter. Asking questions are awkward in more ways than one, especially if you are not sure what would be weird. Social interactions are dangerous.

There's been some interesting convos about Ortega's bi angst but I wonder will Ortega ever ask Sidestep about their sexuality? If they're in a same sex relationship do they assume Sidestep's gay or bi? Do they think they've also had difficulties coming out? Did they ever talk about this stuff from Step's point of view?

I hope to have some talks about that in book 3.

How many times has sidestep been boosted?

One, when they were created.

Additionally, did the green sky cult achieve their goal in boosting ortega? Feels like them to keep that kind of thing on the hush hush for a decade.

Hahah indeed it does, but nope. They did not get to that point yet.

Is there a higher likelihood of boosted siblings/family members getting similar boosts?

That is one theory, but it has so far not been proven.

Has Ortega ever been at Joes?

Oh yes.

Could the Nanovores get "sick" if they were to eat something "bad"?

Not so far...

When was the Green Sky first formed?

It is unknown, but they claim that they were around before the Big One.

Had Anathema and the Catastrofiend ever crossed paths before Themmy joined the Rangers?

Not in battle.

Would Herald ask for Step's autograph?

That would be too embarrassing.

On a separate note, what sort of Step merch/paraphernalia would he willingly spend money on? Would he pay top dollar if there was only one item of its kind in existence? How much would he fork out for the only Step autograph in Sidestep history?

If Daniel hadn't become a hero, he 100% would have done all of this. However, he thinks of his past self as rather childish, and has tried to push down his fanboyness.

In addition, is this where sidestep's hand stab wound came from, or an unrelated event?

No, that was a different event, when Sidestep's gun got shot out of their hand.

What was Danny's favoured fan theory back in the day about how step's "sidestepping" power worked? What did he think when he found out the truth?

Daniel thought it was some sort of danger sense, and well, when he learned the truth he didn't think he was far from it.

Are Logarithm and Five Pennies still in jail?

As of Retribution, yes.

Can five pennies' powers work with any five pennies or do they need to use the same pennies?

He always claimed it needed to be those five, but whether that was true is unclear.

When is resolution 32 due to come to an end?

When did West Coast Mysteries and Murders (Marek's team) film their Void episode? They mention cellar dungeons and blood. How did they get away?

This was an abandoned base, they only went there after the Rangers had routed the cultists. It was still plenty creepy though.

What happened exactly when Angie bailed Ortega out (before Ortega found Sidestep again)? Does Angie have a habit of covering for Ortega? Is Steel aware?

Haven't detailed exactly what it was yet, it might come up in game. But yes, she has a habit of covering for Ortega, and Steel has noticed.

There seems to be a lot telepathic residue fucking with people's minds in FHR. It's interesting to me that Ortega was so haunted by the "ghost" of Sidestep during their 7 lost years. Was that just human grief, or could it be that despite the static, (with the extreme turmoil of the HB incident and since Ortega found Sidestep while their powers were expanding), Sidestep left telepathic residue behind in Ortega's mind?

This is an interesting theory.

So uh. Is the technology there in the FHR world for tracking hardware to be installed in something as small as say... Facial piercings?

Oh yes, if you know the right people good at miniaturizing.

After sidestep's return, has Ortega ever seen them when they're not there?

No.

Before the diner had Ortega ever caught a glimpse of actual step but lost them and assumed they'd imagined it?

Yes.

In Ortega's POV of the Rebirth scene (August lore post), Ortega isn't sure whether Sidestep is real. Is there a shred of truth to their unease? Could they be weary of their own senses because of earlier hallucinations when it's actually their gut instinct warning them off? Is the Sidestep they see wrong in some way, and if yes, what exactly is bothering Ortega there?

I said what I said in the story, not going to elaborate on that.

When Dr. Mortum was working on our suit and had the girls in their possession, did they read their mind or did the good doctor take precautions for even telepathic animals?

Oh the Rat King knows some shit, there were no dampeners or numbers employed.

Do the girls recognize Sidestep in the puppet's body? How does the puppet feel to them?

The girls knows it's Sidestep, but more muted. Like seeing someone through thick glass so they can't hear you.

What was Regina and Sidestep's dynamic like? Or will you give us a choice, and if yes, what kind of options are you planning to give, roughly?

I will give you choices, but I'm not sure exactly which ones yet.

What were the Highwayman's powers? Did Sidestep utilise their stolen energy caster to its full abilities or is there something (I'm quoting) "esoteric" about it that they're not aware of?

Highwayman was a boost, with a pretty standard setup. His gun was the most interesting thing about him, and Sidestep knows his gun pretty well.

Bo used to drive for bank robbers, and Lord Francis Ember used to rob banks back in his LD emberstorm days. Did they ever work together?

Maybe once or twice, they weren't close.

How long has Deadeye worked for HG? What are her opinions on Nocturne and Jake?

She originally started working for HG's older brother, so a long time. She keeps her opinions to herself.

Can I buy Ortega a Birthday gift for their birthday party :/

Probably. The question is what.

Most of the villains and heroes that we know of all have names that match their powers, characteristics, or how they want to be seen. So... given that Locus is defined as "a particular position or place where something occurs or is situated" - Does any part of this definition hint at Locus' role in the story? Or perhaps, say...the Core?

Not really.

During the memorial park scene, Ortega asks sidestep to see a therapist. Had they already come in contact with doctor Finch, or did they decide on the spot that sidestep needed to see someone? How did they process of them reaching out to psychologists go?

Ortega was already aware of Dr. Finch. They hadn't been seeing her, but had heard good things in the hero community. So when they thought Sidestep needed help, she seemed like the natural choice.

Does Dr. Mortum offer a warranty on our armor incase something were to happen to (say some Rangers get a hold of) it? How would they react if we started to add our own modifications?

No warranty. That would be a bad idea in the villain business. And if you want to add your own modifications, that is entirely on you.

This is going to be a ridiculous leap but: Does Grossberg's Adaptive Resonance Theory have any influence on Ljungstrand's theory of telepathy? How about the more recent General Resonance Theory suggested by Hunt and Schooler? Was Ljungstrand trying to establish the origin of consciousness in his research, much like how philosophers of old tried to locate the soul?

Not exactly, Ljungstrand is convinced there is more to it than that. And yes, Ljungstrand was very interested in the origin of the consciousness.

If it isn't Grossberg, is there another pre-existing theory of consciousness that you've taken as inspiration?

Nope, this is all me.

If a classification was made above Alpha, what would it be named?

Omega.

What would tia Elena have done if she knew how bad the fights between Ortega and their dad had gotten? Especially since some paths suggest he got physically violent with Julia. Is it possible that he had ever been violent with Elena as well?

Tia Elena didn't know how bad things had gotten. And the violence was not just to Julia, but she is the one who is more ready to be open about it. In fact, it was probably worse with Ricardo. However, Ortega was no less good at keeping up appearances as a child. Elena suspected that something was wrong, and knew their relationship was not good, but chalked it up to both of them being very headstrong. She was also worried about Ortega taking a lot of risks, and perhaps ending up in bad (or even criminal) company so she understood the need for discipline.

I know Elena has Snowball, but does she keep that muhfuckin' thang on her, too? Is she more than capable of putting up a fight?

Elena is not defenseless.

We know Anathema's pronouns but do they have a canonly fixed gender identity?

I will say what I always say: The only one with a fixed gender identity is Dr. Mortum, who is trans. Everything else is up to headcanon and I embrace people making the characters their own. Things are open to interpretation, even if I don't mention it in the text.

What's Nocturne's ethnicity? HG varies, and Jake is Filipino. What about her?

African American.

Will it be a possibility in the future for the ROs to have a secret crush on Step, like Danny's (not so secret) crush on them?

I have enough variables.

What did Anathema's mind feel like to Sidestep? What was their mindscape like? (Any stickiness?)

Anathema felt solid and cold, like a comfortably cool rock in the shadows on a hit day. Sidestep could pick up thoughts with effort, but they did not project.

If Step had gotten into contact with Ortega before they'd run into them at the diner and asked to see/barrow/take the nanovores after reconnecting, what would have happened? Would Ortega have let Step into the area for them to get access to them?

The nanovores? Probably not. Not even for Sidestep. Too many bad memories.

What was the inquiry about which was ruled an accident during the HB lab flashback?

One of the many experiments with the Core.

Disregarding Ortega's immunity to telepathy, would they have survived the Heartbreak incident?

Probably not, but you never know. Ortega has survived a lot.

Was Sidestep conscious (as in no sleeping / fainting / seizures) during the entire Heartbreak incident? Was Ortega?

Yes.

Adding to that: Were Chen and Themmy?

Yes.

Has Mortum ever gotten their hands on a Regene AI chip?

No.

**In a past QnA, you said that Chen is attracted to 'strength of character.' Can you define that? 🙄
What about Sidestep does he see that fits that criteria?? Step is a huge mess.**

Step thinks they are a huge mess, but as you might have realized by now, Sidestep is not an unbiased observer. Chen might see things in them they do not see themselves.

Does Regina have a particular opinion on the Cult of the Green Sky and the Void? asking for a friend

She thinks they are dangerous fanatics.

Is the information that Cavalier found related to the special directive and specifically Regenes?

No.

Are Regene ever given braces?

Yes, if it's needed.

Was the core infected before or after heartbreak? How long was the incubation period?

Before. A couple of years.

This is the Dumbest question, but considering the spin medical technology has taken, how has that impacted dental advancement?

It is also more advanced, but I'm not going to go into great detail.

What do Blaze and Zephyr think of Locus's disappearance?? Are they worried about her? What did they think of her post-break up of the LBH?

They think that she is off infiltrating or solving another of her weird mysteries. It's not the first time she's been off on her own. In fact, that is one of the reasons that the group broke up.

In a Rangers PVE: which team is strongest? In a Rangers PVP: which team would win out of them all? Which individual Ranger would win out of them all?

I seriously have no idea, and not much interest in trying to figure out these things.

Was the heartbreak experiment always doomed to fail? Had they utilized a telepath with a different classification code, or had external environment conditions been different - would they have succeeded without causing, well, heartbreak?

It was not doomed to fail, but the classification had nothing to do with it.

What (precise) difference do you make between telepaths and psi-sensitive people? Who in the story would you categorize as a telepath, and who as psi-sensitive?

To borrow a comparison: A psi-sensitive would have vision like a dog, but a telepath would be a mantis shrimp. Also, psi-sensitives have existed before and outside of the boost drugs.

Does Mortum live in their lab full time or do they have an apartment/place somewhere else as well?

They do have a sadly neglected apartment.

How big is the lab? We know it's got a bedroom, bathroom, main lab, kitchenette, infirmary, storage, and a side room or two, but how expansive is it really? And how deep underground is it/does it go?

It is a lot larger than that, but I won't tell you details. That might knowledge come in very handy in the future.

Building off the Trio as parents question... what would the ROs be like as parents??

I have no idea, I am not good at parent stuff.

And what would Mortum and Ortega be like as older siblings?

I think you can be the judge of that by reading the book.

What was Chen like?

Not as disciplined as he is now, that's for sure.

Tw suicide We know that Step can try to (unsuccessfully) commit suicide in-game, but how would the Rangers react if they were successful? And Step was on good terms with them? Would they have a special grave made to honour Step the way Blaze gets if he dies?

I won't get into that. You have no idea.

In a previous QnA, you said that Step didn't fit the preconceptions of a telepath. What were said preconceptions like?

Not as physically adept as they are.

What kind of 'bedroom secrets' does Blaze have?

Him fancying men is one of them.

Does Ortega's static convey telepathic "patterns" to Sidestep, who's so tuned into their mind? Since apparently Ortega has a brain (what??), and if we consider the static to be a shield of sorts, then can Sidestep feel "ripples" of different kinds through the static when Ortega's mind is upset, or powerfully focused, etc?

Yeah, there are differences, and if Sidestep focuses they can sense moods. But, just like listening to static, this is not very pleasant, so it's not something Sidestep commonly does.

Was the heartbreak experiment an attempt to transfer a human mind/consciousness into an artificial body?

No.

How many living survivors of the heartbreak incident are there? People whose minds were actually touched by heartbreak

Probably a dozen or so left.

Have HB and Regina ever met? Or, if not, were they aware of each other?

Yes.

This may seem strange, but depending on circumstances, will Step's telepathy start to feel more 'tangible' to them? More like a physical limb perhaps?

Probably not, unless you want to headcanon it.

Does Snowball ever wear any little Christmas sweaters or flannel? The desert gets cold

Nope, that would not be dignified.

So it's a well known fact that Ortega's accidentally the funniest person alive and they straight up ask Sidestep advice on how to deal with them under the guise that it's "about a friend," who sidestep assumes is lady argent. Have they ever pulled this kind of move with anyone else, like asking lady argent on advice About lady argent under the pretence that it's for example about Sidestep? If they have done it with any of the other Rangers, have any of them caught on and either called them out of played along?

Probably, but only Chen called them on it. Honestly I can see Chen turning the tables and doing the exactly same thing.

Say if a government hero (e.g. The Rangers, the Guardians) had retired from active duty... and has been discovered to have had ongoing romantic/sexual relations with a known villain while they were on active duty.

Only in the tabloids, nothing that seems to be correct.

Are there any repercussions for that, or...? Are they safe because they're no longer serving as an active hero?

I mean, that would depend very much on the situation. There might be, especially if there might be suspicions of dereliction of duty.

What's Joes' boost? Strengths? Weaknesses? Any fun things he can do?

He can split into several copies of himself. That's why the bar's name is Joes and not Joe's.

Will it ever be possible to get on good terms with Owl? Not being friends or anything, but mutual acceptance and less hostility.

Maybe, who knows?

Does the AI part of Re-Genes in any notable way save for the uploaded intel into their mind? E.g. Affecting mental processes to some extent? Making them a bit more robotic and wearing off in time as they develop?

Oh yes, they are very glitchy at the start, before they have internalized all the different memories. Prone to outbursts, mismatched emotions and other oddness until the Farm has broken them out of the worst habits.

Would Re-Genes have survived without the AI chip?

Survived maybe, not in a pleasant state though.

What does a Re-Gene language sound like? Is it just all code-words with hidden meanings, or is it also more like an actual language with its own grammar/alphabet/etc?

It's a simple language of gestures and innocent sounds and knocks. There's no grammar, no written form, and it is still constantly evolving.

Was Cavalier ever affiliated with anyone we know / know of? Has Cavalier ever communicated with Vernon, for example?

Yes, Vernon did interview him back when he still lived in the east.

With the rise and study of telepathy and psi sensitivity, has the definition of "brain dead" (as in legally brain dead) in the FHR universe changed at all? (as a widely known understanding or otherwise)

I do think it has adjusted slightly, but it's mostly similar.

Five Pennies' pennies were at the gala's exhibit, right? Where are they now? Did someone get hold of them in the kerfuffle?

It depends on what happened with the museum.

Did Mortum have any hidden motives for being at the gala in Rebirth?

Not deeper than the fact that they love fancy parties.

Chen's family is Cantonese-speaking, right? Is his family originally from Hong Kong/Macau/Guangdong/Guangxi?

His family is originally from Guangdong.

We know that sidestep picked Lady Argent up from where she does therapy. Must have been a fair walk To the ranger's HQ to go get the nanovores. Roughly how long was Sidestep possessing her before Herald found her?

It was a long walk intentionally, Sidestep wanted to make sure that they had her body under full control before approaching the headquarters. It would have been about two hours or so.

What were Hood and Sentinel's first impressions of Ortega and Chen?

One cocky and one calm, they might be able to work with this.

Are there any rivalries between the various Rangers teams?

Not really, they seldom have to work together. It's more between separate members in that case.

Has Owl ever been to jail? 🙄 Does she have a criminal record?

No, and no. That would be sloppy.

How would things have been different if Step had possessed Herald?

Herald would have a bigger bruise from Argent.

Have any notable villains, heroes, or vigilantes debuted during the course of Rebirth and Retri? (aside from Villain!Step)

Yes, but I have not come up with any.

Has anyone at the farm ever used their own dna to create new regene? If yes, are those regene still around? If yes, has regina been one of those people?

Yes, yes and no.

Malin. Is stealing the Chargebike written in the stars of Book 3 or 4 for Sidestep?

That sounds sweet.

So could we perhaps take over the FEZ? And if so.... Could we perhaps go further? :thenperish~1: United States domination? (Mister NSA agent: this pertains to fiction, go to bed)

Well, high ambitions can be encouraged in book 4. The FEZ might be on the table...

During Heartbreak, did Ortega actively make a wrong move we're not aware of, or do they only feel responsible because they were the Marshal/responsible for the team?

The latter, though Ortega thinks the former.

After the heartbreak disaster... did the farm ever try the same experiment again?

Yes.

Who would win in a chess game between:

Mortum and Chen

Ortega and Argent

Herald and Chen, but Chen has 5 seconds to move and herald has all the time he wants

Chen, Ortega and Chen.

Could weighted shoes help Herald reduce hovering and lower his centre of gravity?

No.

How was Cavalier trained? Beyond his initial military boosting, was he a "normal" soldier (à la Chen) or was he part of any specific programme geared towards experimenting with boosts (double-boosting, pushing power levels, or even the early years of the Special Directive?)

He was a part of a special program.

Did Cavalier ever serve alongside Regenes?

Yes.

How come Cavalier is "rumoured" dead? What happened to him after the Pentagon attack, how did we lose track of him? Where is his body now?

He was defeated in the Pentagon attack, and declared dead. However, there are rumors that he was just captured, so nobody knows for sure.

Did Cavalier manage to do what he wanted in the Pentagon attack?

As a villain, what kind of suit did he don, and if applicable, what kind of mask? Any specific symbols or design choices that could orient the public as to why he switched sides / what he was fighting for?

Oh Cavalier didn't change his suit, and he never wore a mask. This was all done in his classic red white and blue dress uniform outfit. As to whether he did what he wanted to before being brought down, that's unclear.

You think Catastrofiend would let me take them out for a little lunch? I feel like it probably hasn't had many platonic, non-murderous luncheons in a while.

Oh you don't want to do that. Trust me.

How much public info is there on incidents like the Nanosurge or threats like the Void and how they were stopped/dealt with, what went down, so forth?

How much public info is there on secret military operations? Some exist, but is very hard to find.

Vernon had been investigating something before he was forcibly stopped - How close was he (in percentages) to the truth?

Oh he knows the truth, he just can't use it.

How did Locus take being blamed for the Long Beach Heroes' break up? What about Blaze? Zephyr? Porphyry?

She was alright with taking the blame, and she is not really worried about it. In her mind, the accusations weren't actually that wrong. Porphyry felt badly about it though, and didn't want her to blame.

Whose idea was it to pin the blame on her?

Zephyr was the outspoken one.

Was locus active when sidestep was a vigilante?

They never interacted.

To a telepath, could Sidestep "camouflage" / subterfuge their thoughts so that they don't appear to be a telepath (by filtering or blocking any hints that they're reading the world around them / the telepath in front of them, for example)? And if the other telepath bumps into Sidestep's shields, would those shields feel telepathic to them or could they mistake it for a normal person with very good defenses?

Yes.

Could Locus have fared better in Heartbreak if she were in Sidestep's shoes instead?

Oh no. Not at all.

If the Rangers could pick/design their own uniforms what would each of them pick?

I have no idea! Maybe you'll find out.

What would Ortega have done differently during HB to prevent that whole tragedy, if they could turn back time?

Never leave Sidestep's side.

Theoretically, how would the psycho couple (Teddy/Tina) take it if the other wanted to divorce them? Would they react badly?? Or would things be amicable?

It would most likely be amicable if there wasn't any political differences. Then, it's murder.

Was Anathema's hair also invulnerable? Could they cut their hair or was it stuck the same length from when they became invulnerable?

They could not cut their hair, that was forever their style.

[August spoiler Q&A](#)

[Sep 10, 2022](#)

Spoilers for the end of the alpha - on the endings where the puppet is the one caught in the crash, Ortega calls you from the hospital and asks to see you. I don't know if I totally misread this scene, but it didn't feel like there was any ulterior motive for this, they just wanted to see you for like, emotional support? If this is true, isn't this super rare coming from Ortega? Sidestep acts pretty blasé about it, so I don't know if I read too much into it as if 'step is just that thick lmao

Oh Ortega had an ulterior motive alright, but one that Sidestep is not aware of. And to be fair, Ortega has probably called Sidestep a lot off screen, but I do not chronicle every single interaction.

will there be more consequences for our heroes' (potential) actions down the line? as it stands, neither argent nor blaze seem to face any sort of repercussion for killing civilians. were the events that well covered up, despite the witnesses, or are people that desensitized to it even when the perpetrators are heroes? is there more to chen's decision to not reprimand argent further at the end of retri?

There are a lot of liberties that comes with a badge and a position of power (as can be seen with the police in our world), and what consequences there are, is seldom public. Sidestep is not aware of everything. But, that being said, people are rather desensitized, and the ones that disapprove have no real outlet. It takes something as brutal and publicized as what Five Pennies did to make people react. As for Chen, he might think that Argent was not careful, but he doesn't think she would willfully murder someone.

What was chen's immediate reaction to finding out sidestep was a regene? was the reaction initially more focused on sidestep or on the people operating?

A combination of pity, horror, and the feeling that he had been right that something was off.

what would Jake have done if sidestep was at the penthouse while he was visiting?

Introduced himself in his cover identity and see what he could learn.

what kind of decor does hollow ground decorate with? do they have a lot of personal effects or do they decorate more simplistically?

More on the lavish side, but not especially personal. They save that for their office.

Our MC can "disguise themselves a bit" when invited to meet Hollow Ground? How good of a disguise is it? What would Sidestep use to disguise themselves?

Not an expert disguise by any means, even if Sidestep had skills in that direction they have grown out of habit. Too used to rely on telepathy. It was mostly dressing differently, since they can easily blur their face into neutrality.

Regarding HG's sibling that died in police custody did HG or their family ever look into the situation? Mainly because the sibling in question was a minor. If so did HG or other family members try to revenge on those involved?

Oh yes, there were more than a few dead officers after that.

What would the mob boss crew think if they saw the similarities between HG and Sidestep?

You'll have to wait and find out.

What would HG's powers have looked like if they had been more force based?

Wouldn't have worked. This power is only for subterfuge.

Has there been any particular disagreements between HG and Nocturne on how to deal with certain people/problems/opportunities? How do they settle any disagreements between them?

There have been some friction, but Nocturne tends to win the arguments. They talk things out.

What had HG's youngest sibling been like? What differences/similarities did they share with HG?

Spoilers.

Does Jake ever talk about his family or his home with Nocturne and/or HG or does he prefer to keep it more private?

He's pretty open with Nocturne, and slightly more guarded with HG.

Did either HG or Nocturne have a particular moment when they realized they had fallen in love with one another?

I honestly don't know, I will have to think about that. Love tends to be gradual in the way I think about it.

Had Dr. Finch been a therapist for HG's youngest sibling?

No.

How would the farm go about recreating the conditions to get powers like Hollow Ground's or Jake's?

That would be hard. Jake's might work if you restrained the subject uncomfortably.

If the characters from the main cast were offered one chance to use the regenerator, would they take it? Would they use it on themselves or offer the chance to another character?

Argent would use it 100%. Steel would as well, though if he learned the truth about Argent, he would offer it to her. Ortega and Herald don't feel the need.

Could we use the regenerator on the puppet to try and restore them back to a conscious state?

It doesn't really work that way, it repairs physical damage, it can't restore minds.

Is Ortega's ethical code more rigid when it comes to murder than that of the rest of the rangers? Argent and Steel will break Step out of the hospital even if they're a killer and even with Herald you can at least have a conversation about if you've regretted killing people, started saving them etc. and even if ultimately it isn't enough to sway him, it does seem that what you say makes a difference in his mind. Ortega on the other hand seems to draw a harder line than everybody else at killing.

I would say that it has less to do with Ortega's ethics, and more with their disappointment with Sidestep personally. It will take some time to deal with that.

If Sidestep hadn't personally been a victim of the Farm, would Dr. Mortum still have disapproved of what went on in there?

Oh yes. Very much. Dr. Mortum can overlook much in the name of science, but that is too much.

I understand we can't have many spoilers about the imposter.... but. without revealing their identity, could you give us a sentence or two from their pov of something they've actively thought? maybe when they left Sidestep's body during the crash?

Nope, that is very much spoilers. And, it might vary depending on the path.

What was Argent's reaction when she first saw the potential kiss on the fridge? Did she rip it off and destroy it? We already know she assumed it was Herald, but why did she think it was him to begin with? Has this happened before?

Of course she ripped it off, and ripped it apart as well. She jumped to the conclusion that it was Herald, because she took it as a barb aimed at the fact that she wouldn't kiss him for the magazines.

Is the child in the moray memory actually HG's sibling? Is HG the one singing?

Good question. Not going to answer it.

Since anathema helped ortega with HG sometimes, were they privy to ortega's thoughts about who sidestep actually was?

No. Ortega was very quiet about that. Nobody knows.

Is HG gonna help us out against the Rangers if we're allied?

That might be arranged.

What did Josh think of Sidestep and Daniel picking them as his favourite hero?

What's the point of picking a weak sidekick?

How old was HG when their siblings died?

They didn't die all at once, so it varies. I haven't set exact years or ages to it yet.

Was the person who killed Marshal Hood the same person who shot Chen and sniped at Ortega?

Sounds likely.

Alpha spoils, Was the person responsible for bombing ortega's apartment the same as the person who behind the sniper at the end of retri?

Nope.

If Ortega has thought since before Heartbreak that Sidestep was HG's sibling... after HB, did they use that as fuel for their revenge quest at all. Or is it still only Hood?

Oh you bet that Sidestep was a big part of it too.

If we removed the red thread from Nocturne's mind, what would happen? Would she regress to her normal agoraphobia or would it be worse, considering her dependency on it?

I honestly have no idea, but it won't be pretty.

What do the girls think about the imposter in the puppet's/Sidestep's body at the end of Retribution? Have they noticed the difference?

Spoilers.

You mentioned sidestep's line was entirely made up of a series of genetic clones, and that they were the only one to survive to the end of the vetting process. Did the other ones land with different boost powers? Were they rejected because sidestep ended up being the only telepath of the line up, or were they "defective" in other ways?

They were defective in various ways that rendered them unusable to the Farm's purpose.

Retribution Ending option question If we stalked HG to their little vacation home could we perhaps leave a hint or address on a certain Electrical Outlet's desk

Oh you will have some options at the start of book 3.

Ace's mind had been eaten by Shroud, and was potentially "brain dead" by the time Sidestep came along. I've a few questions about this:

1) was Ace actually brain dead - meaning they had zero brainwaves activity, and their brain was not receiving any oxygenated blood?

Zero brainwaves, but it still received blood. The braindeadness was not caused by a stroke or similar.

2) If Sidestep had chosen another brain dead patient - say, as a result of a car crash as opposed to Shroud's victim - will the same "signs of brain activity" begin to show in them?

It depends on how physically damaged the brain was. If it had localized damage, it might have been possible. And if the brain had been too damaged, it would be hard for Sidestep to have any fine control.

3) In this manner, if (1) and (2) are true ... can telepathic body hoppers potentially reverse brain death?

It is not as simple as that, but just as keeping the heart beating and the lungs working long enough for the body to heal enough to do it on their own, things can happen.

Will Sidestep's main stats impact the impostor's "essence"?

Yes.

Does Sidestep's mind "leaks" into what it touches telepathically? By fragmenting itself towards others, does it leave an imprint behind, as sort of "copy" of itself?

Anything that happens leaves memories.

Alpha spoils? Could the rat king unthread step?

No.

Bouncing off that a little.. can HG thread non-human minds? Could they thread the Rat King

Good luck being able to physically touch their little brains...

Are we going to be able to body hop during a fight? I'm sure the Rat King could do a good job at keeping our body safe for us while we're someplace else

There's already been some experiments with that.

Alpha spoils? Theoretically, could a threaded puppetmaster figure out how to pull the leash from the other end, so to speak?

Good question. Most likely not, but with Sidestep, who knows?

How would Blaze react to the Rat King being huge excitable fans of him after saving Step?? Would he be endeared/flattered or freaked out? Especially if they wanted his autographs + pets + wanted to (telepathically) cuddle with him? I am just struck by the image of the girls being really excited and happy to see him again and I can't get it out of my mind.

I think Blaze would be confused and slightly flustered as he realizes what is going on. But yes, they would be very happy to see him.

If step was able to stay with argent in her apartment, how would the nightmares affect her and her little friends?

There is a reason why they don't.

We know dr halabi has treated regenes for the special directive. Has she consulted on/heard about any serious infections back at the farm?

No.

The gates seem to protect something. If that's the case, when they're closed, are they protecting the outside world from Sidestep, or protecting Sidestep from whatever wants to enter them? Or both? Or does the protection start when they open?

I am not going to tell you that!

Alternatively if not above, are the gates a defense mechanism to protect sidestep from memories/experiences/something else within themselves that they're subconsciously repressing?

Not going to tell you that either! You should have known.

Does the Core's function hinge on regenes, on telepaths, on both, or on neither?

Telepaths.

Could Hollow Ground use their threads to make it so a person couldn't see them? Like they'd see Nocturne and Jake but not the person standing between them?

Yes.

How would Blaze react if a male villain (pretty wholesome: no kill, save civilians) he found attractive flirted with him? 🙄 (Like, actual interest flirt? Not just banter flirt?)

I am not adding more romances.

Has Blaze ever burnt off his eyebrows

No. You're thinking of Lord Ember.

You said in the latest qna that Sidestep's entire batch was genetic clones of them. Has the farm since tried to make more genetic copies of Sidestep?

There has been similar batches, yes.

Are Sidestep's nanovores technically in another telepathic plane (another dimension) since they're in the void cage? If not, how does the void cage work to contain them? How does Argent contain her nanovores?

Yes they are. Argent's nanos are her friends, she talks to them.

Okay, so Sidestep can leave little... commands, almost, ala the Sword of Damocles, and could feasibly influence people along a slightly more HG route if they trained that direction. But could Sidestep potentially turn people into sleeper agents?

Not to the same extent, but on a smaller level, yes.

When sidestep achieves the "protected" variable, is hollow ground aware that they're "protecting" sidestep?

Nope.

Okay, so Herald has been incredibly blasé and not-really-sorry about his lack of boundaries in Retribution. Can we have a Serious talk about that?

Sidestep doesn't really have the best idea of what boundaries are either, but we'll see.

If sidestep was a hero back in the day, Hollow Ground knows their face and name. Obviously they originally took interest because sidestep was an up and coming figure in the hero/villain scene, but did they also make the connection back then that Sidestep might have been their missing sibling? Were they intending to make contact in some capacity to confirm? What were their thoughts once heartbreak happened?

Hollow Ground never saw Sidestep's face, nor was very concerned with them.

If you manage to get a sample from Argent, does she know some of her nanovores are gone since they're her friends?

No, the hair is dead, shedded shells.

Will regenerator actually help Lady Argent with her.. condition?

A piggyback: Was it the first time Lady Argent tried to get her hands on something that promises to help her? Does Ortega know (to some extent) about Lady Argent's interest in healing/regeneration technology?

You know I will not answer contents for book three. And yes, much like Sidestep, she has done other research, but nothing else has worked. Ortega has no idea.

When Argent wears the Oryx costume, is it fully what the real Oryx would have worn or did she add anything to it? Did she get the costume when she "removed" Oryx?

It is Oryx costume, she got it after Oryx disappearance.

Can HG thread someone who's unconscious?

No.

What does Blaze think of Chen? What does Chen think of Blaze? 🐞

You'll have to find out in game.

When/if argent calls you after puppetwreck, how did she get step's number?

She asked Ortega's phone.

I don't remember if it's ever been asked: can Argent talk to our AI chip?

You'll have to ask her.

Could Sidestep use their telepathy to make her [briefly] forget she's a technopath?

That would be very hard, but they managed to get her to forget to breathe so it is possible.

Alpha Spoils Does Argent's 'blackouts' from losing control over her vores correlate with her hunger?

At times, but not only.

In Jake's Mitchell post, what did Nocturne mean by 'bribes'?

You don't know.

For an innocent ending Step both living above and using the business base, would it be possible to bring somebody back home? Cover wise you just live above your workplace, not all that suspicion, so if you're already using it as a cover, could we commit?

It would be possible if you want to take the risk.

If we are puppetstuck are we going to be able to change our appearance like we could as Step?

Yes.

At the farm, could doctors be handlers? If yes, in what circumstances, and what did that double status entail? If not, what would warrant doctors being very hands-on with a specific regene?

Yes they could, and a Re-Gene would have many handlers at different stages of their life.

Was Step given anything to occupy themselves while in their cells back at the Farm?

Probably yes, that is calming for people.

If they behaved or did well were they rewarded with anything? Were their vices ever used as incentives?

There were rewards, and maybe that was where some of the vices were picked up.

[Time for your questions for this month!](#)

[Aug 25, 2022](#)

Ask away, about the game, process, lore or anything else you can think of!

[Back from the Grave](#)

[Aug 7, 2022](#)

When did I start feeling this old? Not past forty yet; anything below can be ignored. Joints ached worse when I did climbing. Nothing a few painkillers can't fix. Maybe I should do that. Go for a climb. Leave the city. Breathe some fresh air. Yeah, right, do that and realize I'm heavier than I used to be, and my fingers don't grip right. Shouldn't do it anyway. Bad for the mods. Still miss it. Alone. No mistakes. It would only take one fall to...

Yeah. No. Stop that. Kill that thought dead and move on, smiling apologetically at the cab. People here can't drive. At least shouting back at him is real. Too bad he didn't pull a gun. Could have used the distraction.

Talking to myself isn't healthy; I know that. Should be in the moment, be present, and smile at people. But all that runs on autopilot. There is no need for me there. No need for a brain behind the mask. Maybe it would be easier if that was the case, I wouldn't have time to run these endless monologues to myself.

Focus. I've got a job to do. Some light scouting. Having lunch in a place I wouldn't, dressed like an aging peacock smiling through the wrinkles. There's a ghost whispering over my shoulder, calling me old. There, now the smile sits right. Sometimes ghosts are just the company you need.

Sometimes they're not.

Ghosts are supposed to stay in my head; it's when they slip out into reality that things start getting hairy. My hand is frozen on the handle of the door. It takes a moment for me to step through so it can swing shut behind me. Ghosts. Over my shoulder, someone chuckles. In front of me, the owner of the voice is sitting at a table in the diner, looking like they belong six feet underground. This is why my brain is my worst enemy. I didn't need that thought. Not again. Not right now. So let's do this. It's not like it's the first time. A deep breath. Close your eyes. Open them.

Still there. Not good. Haven't even had a drink today, not when I'm working. Need to be sharp, not lost in hallucinations and memories. Except... It doesn't feel like a memory. The face is too old. Marked in new ways. The hair is different. The outfit is new yet hauntingly similar. Maybe that's it. Mistaken identity. A brain seduced by a ratty hoodie and the right slouch. Pathetic. I was over this.

I was over...

No. No name. No dragging that one back to the surface again. I have work to do. I didn't dress up to go running home without getting the job done. This place is a possible point of contact. All I need to do is walk up to the counter, grab a coffee and look around to see if my target is there. If not, I'll wait for a

while. Not a big deal. Just a routine job. Likely amounts to nothing, but I need lunch, and this place is as good as any.

If it wasn't for the ghost.

Maybe I have drunk too little water. Or the meds are acting up again. Or it's the stress. What happened to Angie isn't a good sign. Something is building, I know it. I can't afford to crack again. A deep breath. Nails in palms. Just go over there, you idiot, and talk to them. At best, it's a mistaken identity. At worst, people will stare because I'm talking to myself again. I can handle that. Not like anybody will tattle. No cameras.

Just don't forget to breathe. Act natural. Steady steps. No reaction. Surely they would have noticed, right? A hero. Ridiculous reflexes. Not this. But need to be sure.

"I can't believe it!" The name tastes like acid on my tongue. "Is that really you?" My face knows the drill, and my smile is wide and friendly. It will be so easy to turn it into an apologetic smile when...

"Who?" Eyes meeting mine, wide in shock, hands fumbling. It's not annoyance in those eyes. It's fear. Fear, then recognition.

"I can't believe it!" Words are formed somehow. I'm not sure my brain is involved, it's skidding out of control, unable to keep a grip on reality. "It really is you—you're alive!" Am I lying? I must be, but I hope I'm not. How I keep smiling, I'll never know.

"Ortega?" My name on their lips. Rough. Like a curse. I can see them tensing. Will they run? Could I catch them? "Is that really you? I just... fuck, what has it been? Almost a decade?"

"Seven years," I say automatically, stopping myself before I start counting off the days. I don't keep track anymore. I stopped. It wasn't healthy. One day the number of days would have been too much to bear. Or I would have forgotten. Which is worse. Stopping is better.

I sit down without an invitation, another thing that hasn't changed between you. There wouldn't be one, and I feel too self-conscious to remain standing. If I'm going mad, I'd rather do it sitting down.

"I... this is..." They are looking at me, and I am looking at them. Eye contact, and that isn't good. Running or attacking? What was it they said? Humans are predators, but right now, they act more like prey.

"A surprise?" I can do this. Add words. Weave a narrative. Calm down the situation. Be fucking professional.

"Got it in one." They haven't leaned back yet. Frozen in the way that makes people ignore them. Never worked on me. Another thing remembered. I tried so hard to forget, but I failed.

"I can't believe it's really you." I say the name again, and they flinch as if I had hit them. Too open with it in mixed company. Shit. I should have remembered. "I thought... I mean, they said you were dead, but that's a load of...." Why did I say that? But the ghost doesn't evaporate when faced with their own improbability. Just frowns deeper. "You are all right, right?" They don't look it. You don't feel it.

"I am alive, anyway." They look down, every gesture as familiar as a stab in the gut. Shaky hands trying to clean up the mess they made earlier. It doesn't go so well. "I'm sitting here having a coffee. That counts as all right, I suppose."

"It does." I should reach out and touch, dispel the illusion. Chuckle at the people staring at the weirdo talking to an empty chair. I should, but instead, I lower my voice and pray I won't wake up just yet. I haven't had time to say I'm sorry.

Sorry for failing. Sorry for not being there. Sorry for falling apart. But I don't say that; instead, I go right for the jugular, words tumbling blindly into the silence that had started building between us.

"When you went through the window," I say, seeing the scream reflected on the frowning face in front of me. Harder. Angled like a tombstone. "I thought... I guess we all did. It was a long way down—I never would have thought you survived." Begging for the answer you expect, the whispered 'I didn't' that would ruin the illusion. It doesn't come. Instead, I get a blank stare and an intake of breath I don't think is a sob. They were never much for crying. Oh boy, I wouldn't be ready for that.

"I almost didn't." Looking down. Hollow eyes. Dark circles underneath. When did they get so old? How can I remember what I've never seen?

"Once we..." I swallow, suddenly unsure what to do. "There was an explosion. I guess you wouldn't know that. Steel made the call, and I was too close, so I got knocked out. Once I woke up, I tried looking for you, but there was medical staff everywhere, and Steel said you had been taken away in an ambulance. Died on your way to the hospital."

"Steel said..." A familiar twitch. Bad blood still. Or bad memories.

"I guess he misunderstood." I'm babbling. I know it. Making excuses. Could he have been wrong? Could the person that told him? "It was...chaotic. His dampeners were blown. When I tried to find your body, they said it had been cremated together with the rest of the victims. They feared there might be a chemical agent involved, and all the bodies were...disposed of quickly."

"I...was very badly hurt." It almost sounds like an apology. Or a peace offering.

"Where have you been all these years then?" Stupid small talk to someone who always hated that. But I can't help it. I need to know. Why didn't they come back? Why didn't they call? Why pretend to be dead? I want to shout the last at the top of my lungs, but instead, I smile and try not to look hurt.

"There was a reason why I never joined the Rangers, even though you invited me." A little twitch. Familiar. Telling the truth was never easy for them. "I did survive the fall, but there were people there

waiting for me. That ambulance Steel saw me carted away in did not bring me to a hospital. At least not to an official one. I had enemies..." a half-choked chuckle, and I fight not to join in. Not my pain. Not my joke. Instead, I smile as the story continues, connecting dots they don't know I have access to. "Have enemies, I suppose. They got to me. Faked my death. Once I got free, it seemed like my best option was to just retire and pretend to be dead."

"Why didn't you contact me?" I try to make it sound like concern and not an accusation. I'm kinder to my ghosts these days. "If you were in danger, I could have helped. We could have helped."

"Don't you think that if there was anything you could have helped with, I would have asked?" Sharp words, your ghosts never bothered being gentle back. "I had my reasons to stay away."

"I'm sorry." I look down because they have a point. I know that. I know too much. I know they probably had reasons. Keeping me safe. At least I can pretend that.

"It's okay." There is an echo of a smile. The biggest one you've seen yet. "I'm fine."

"I'm glad you're fine," I say, unable to stop the sigh. Unable to stop the hurt. "But you could have at least sent us a message or something. We thought you were dead. I've spent the last seven years thinking about what I could have done differently. Why didn't you contact us?" I know why, and maybe part of me hopes the ghost will at least have the decency to tell the truth.

"Once I had escaped their...care," they trail off, looking like they are judging what is safe to tell. "We're talking about people with the ability to whisk me away from an ambulance and fake my death. If I had told you the truth, all I would have done was risk your lives as well."

"We're the Rangers. That's what we do." I can't hide the relief. Maybe that's why this ghost is here. Because I've needed to say this for seven years. "And you are my friend. You think I wouldn't risk my life for you?"

"That's the point...." Their face twists in a pained grimace. "Maybe I don't want you to do that? Maybe I want to protect you for once? Maybe I want you to be safe, to be happy?"

"What makes you think I would be happy thinking you were dead?" I can't help it, I snap, and people stare, so I force myself to whisper because there is no way I can have this conversation as if it was nothing. "I was devastated. I spent seven years thinking I'd caused your death."

"I never wanted you to blame yourself," they say, louder than before. But people ignore them like the ghost they are. "I thought you'd just...."

"Move on and forget you?" The words are sharp enough that they look up, but I can't read their eyes. Not this time.

"I wasn't the only one who died...." They look away, deflecting again.

"I know. We held a funeral for you and Anathema, but you were my friend, my...." How dare they accuse you of forgetting..." but it's not anger on their face. It's something else, and for a moment, I'm wondering if I am the one seeing a ghost here. "Are you sure you're fine? I know you said so, but you look like hell. I just..."

"I am fine," they lie. "I'm just living a quiet life now. Sidestep is dead."

"Sidestep might be dead, but you are not." It feels true when I say it. Is it? Is this real? Is it actually happening? How can I be sure? "You're still a telepath, right?"

"I am," they say slowly, trying to work out your angle. "But it's a long stretch from having powers to having the guts to use them. These days, they mostly save me from getting jostled when someone hurries through a crowd." The laugh is jarring, as if their own life is a joke to them.

"I'm glad," I say, and I mean it. I even join in the laughter, even if it's mostly from relief. Deep down, part of me had already started to consider that it might have been an imposter if this wasn't a ghost. Some sort of trap. But telepathy rules that out. And more than that, it is an opportunity. "I could really use your help."

"What?" The surprise on their face is a relief. This doesn't feel like a plan. Even if I don't dare to hope just yet.

"I know this is sudden, and I know you're retired, but I just don't know who else to trust. You showing up here right now is...I won't lie, it feels like providence." Like my prayers had been answered. Like a weight had slipped from my shoulders and landed in my gut.

"Why me?" The fear and paranoia in those two words make me pause. They should know the answer to this. Because there never really was anybody else who got it.

"Because I trust you. Because I always trusted you." I look into their eyes and will them to believe it. That whatever happened hasn't changed that. There is a moment when the silence stretches, and you worry the illusion will break, but then they sigh and look away.

"Tell me about it." As much as an invitation as I am ever going to get.

"Would it be all right if we talked somewhere safer?" Calm words, even if I feel anything but.

"Safer? Is it that bad?"

"Maybe." I don't laugh, even though I should. Worse than fearing for my sanity? Maybe. Probably. "I don't know. It's just that it's not just my secret."

"Secret? Ortega, since when did you start having secrets?" They sound so scandalized I almost feel proud. If only they knew.

"Well, to be completely honest," I say, delighting in the irony. "It's my friend... she's...."

"Friend?" The raised eyebrow is as familiar as my own reflection.

"It's not like that," I say, chuckling to myself. "Don't tease me. She really is just a friend." Not a lie. Technically.

"If you say so," they tease, and for a moment I can't stop the frown. But then they relent. "Fine, she is a friend of yours. A friend in trouble, apparently."

"That's not something you're a stranger to either," I point out.

"Yeah, I do have a habit of putting my nose where it doesn't belong, don't I?" Is that pride? Maybe. Figures.

"Just let me give her a call and check first, okay?" I pull out my phone, wondering how I should phrase this. She won't take it well.

It's almost a relief to look away from them, even though I have to look back quickly to see that they haven't faded while I take my eyes off them. No change, just the faintly amused smirk. Maybe this is real. Maybe I can hope.

"*What is it?*" Angie answers almost before the signal starts. As always. Her voice is sharper than usual.

"Angie?" I say, though there's no mistaking her.

"*Who else? Don't tell me you've fritzed your phone again. I swear I am done fixing them.*"

"No, are you around this afternoon?" I keep my voice light, aware of the company.

"*Still grounded, if that's what you mean.*" Bitter. Understandably.

"Good," I say, unable to stop myself.

"*Good? I can't do my job locked up like a—*"

"And the rest?" I interrupt her before she can continue, probably sounding giddier than I should.

"*Yeah. Everybody's here.*" Her anger has shifted to confusion.

"Good..." I say again, looking over at the perhaps not a ghost and resisting to give them a thumbs up. "I was thinking about coming by. I've met someone that might be able to give some input." I lower my tone as I speak their full name. But judging from the look on their face, they still don't like you using it like this.

"Are you drunk?" She's blunt, and she's got a point. "Sidestep is dead. Are you telling me they're not? Are you aware of how that sounds, especially coming from you?"

"I know." I shake my head, but I can't have that discussion here.

"I bailed you out last time, and you promised me that was it. That you'd stop."

"I know. I know, but..." I lower my voice, I hate how much it sounds like begging, but here we go.

"Would you be willing to—"

"Meet them? Check if you've actually gone crazy this time? Do you want to join me in here this bad? We can be grounded together. Play some cards. Or..." she pauses as if she's realized I haven't talked back to her yet. *"You're serious."*

"Yes"

"This sounds nuts."

"I know."

"Your former partner."

"Yes..."

"The telepath."

"I know. That's why I'm calling you."

"Are you absolutely nuts?" Her voice is loud enough that I have to hold the phone some distance from my ear. *"You can't possibly be suggesting what I think you're suggesting."* She sighs, then whispers softly. *"Do you trust them?"*

"Yes, of course I can vouch for them. I wouldn't suggest this otherwise."

"And you are absolutely certain this is Sidestep and not some poor sod you've dragged into this and who is too afraid to tell you no?"

"Yes, I'm certain. Who else would it be?"

"I dunno. I went and beat up Daniel without remembering a thing not so long ago, I know you're supposedly proof to that sort of thing, but this sounds nuts."

"I know," I admit, but the ghost is sitting right there pretending not to listen in.

"So what happened? How are they still alive? They are alive, right? This isn't some Dawn of the Dead situation?"

"That's a long story, but yes, very much alive. And retired. I just thought...."

"That you'd drag them back to the headquarter so we could make sure you haven't finally lost it?"

"Yes, that's exactly why I suggested it." I can't stop the sigh of relief. "I'll see you in a while then."

"I'll tell the others. No way they'd miss out on this." And then she hangs up.

There. Done. For better or worse.

"Are you okay over there?" I look over at them, a soft smile to show I don't mind them listening in.

Yes," they say, rubbing their head. "I was just thinking. I hope you don't expect too much from me, considering I haven't done this in years."

"It will be fine," I assure them. "We're looking for advice more than anything." I pull out some bills and put them on the table. A familiar reflex. "Honestly, I'm just glad to have someone who knows anything about this to talk to." To talk to, period.

"Someone?" The smirk hits your heart in a way that's just unfair.

"Well," I look down, hands restless, feet already wanting to be on their way. "If by someone, you mean you." I look up, bad idea, because my arms are moving and I don't have the heart to stop them. "I've missed you."

I hug them tightly. The familiar initial stiffness, as if I was going for the kill and not for an embrace. For a moment, I expect them to fight me off and slide out with a laugh and an elbow to the ribs. But instead, they just stand there, and so do I.

I stand there until the ghost has evaporated, and the only thing that remains is my old friend. Asshole. Bastard. But alive.

"Sorry," I say, finally letting them go. "I couldn't give you a hug before since you were sitting down."

"Been working out?" The smile is tense, and they shift their shoulder. Teasing. Good. I wouldn't have been able to handle a tender moment right then. Not without tears, and with my luck, someone would have had a camera.

"Wouldn't be able to stay in shape otherwise." I tease back. The truth hurts. "I'm not as young as I used to be. Looks like neither of us is."

"Older and wiser, hopefully." They look away, the thin smile too familiar for me to be able to look at it for long. "Now, should we go meet your friend?"

"Sure," I say, gesturing towards the door. "Let's grab a cab."

Nobody even looks twice at us as we leave.

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Has Daniel ever flirted with villains on the job? Are there any villains in LD that he wouldn't kick out of bed? Since he's been a bit pearl-clutchy about Argent kissing Sidestep's helmet: how does he react when the press pairs him up with villains for publicity stunts?

The Daniel in my head is blushing fiercely now. He has, so far, not flirted with any villains on the job, but some have flirted with him. And there has been villains he thought were attractive, but sadly, not the ones who flirted with him. The whole thing feels a bit weird to him. Like they aren't taking things seriously. Thinking of things is one thing, acting on them is quite another. He always vehemently speaks out about being connected to villains that way by the press.

What's Bo's relationship with his ex-wife like? What about with his daughter?

Not exactly close. It's not like they are enemies, but she has a new guy, and that whole thing is just awkward as hell. He pays his part of his daughter's upbringing, so there's no economic squabbles there. He does meet with his daughter regularly, but it's always a bit tense since he's not living with her. He's doing his best though.

During the destroy your past path at the gala, what was going through herald's mind when he saw the villain destroying the sidestep exhibit? especially if there weren't any civilians there to worry about?

Anger. It felt personal to him, though he didn't make the leap to connect it to that it might be personal for the villain too. He saw it was just a place to start, and would have expected the villain to continue to the other exhibits if he hadn't interfered. He doesn't have a conspiracy board like Ortega does.

Has herald ever spoken in interviews about sidestep being his hero growing up?

I think he has mentioned it a few times, but it hasn't been picked up as a big thing or anything. If the new villain was named Sidestep too, there definitely was some questions about that, and a minor rant from Herald on the subject.

In interviews are the rangers often asked what inspired them/led them to becoming a hero? How close to truthfully do they answer? Are they free to answer as they like or are there media team

preprepared preferred answers?

It is a classic question, every hero has got it, many more than once. Whether they are telling the truth or not depends. In general, they are free to answer as they like. It's seen as an important step in establishing a genuine persona.

Were the Void's telepathic planes situated in their mind (so, now that they're dead, they don't exist anymore), or could they somehow still exist / are they still accessible, for example by ingesting Void's blood? And if they still do, could anything still be trapped there?

That is a very interesting question, and not one that someone has a clear answer to yet. The Cult of the Green Sky claims that the "green skies" as they call the other planes still exists, and also claims to have means to reach them. However, they can't be trusted to tell the truth. If they truly do remain, it might be possible to reach them by ingesting Void blood, or perhaps by other means if they have figured out how to duplicate the effect. As to whether anything could be trapped in there... let's hope not. It's doubtful anybody would have survived that experience.

Does the Void have a Ljungstrand classification?

No.

What was Mia doing at the time Vernon was investigating Hollow Ground? She mentions her "past" with Vernon to the puppet: was she already working with him, did she have access to some of his info? Does she know some of his sources? Is Hollow Ground aware of her and her "past"?

She was an intern! She did proper journalism, and weren't privy to Vernon's special projects until they had already gone off the rails.

How is the Farm facility set up? Is there an above-ground façade and underground labs and such? Or anything else about the structure that helps with security/ secrecy?

There is an above-ground facade, where most of the administration is housed. But the real site lies underground. On the surface it is an agricultural research facility in order to produce resilient and higher-yielding crops. It is surrounded by vast fields of various recombinant-gene crops, growing lushly despite the otherwise barren landscape. It is fenced in and guarded, perhaps more securely than people might think is necessary. But, patent-theft and similar is always a threat, so nobody would care too much.

Are there any mysteries/plots/incidents unrelated to Hollow Ground that Ortega is trying to unravel? If there are, have they ever used "taking down Hollow Ground" as a cover-up for their other activities (whenever they're asked what they've been up to)?

Hehehe you'd have to ask Ortega about that, but all signs points to yes.

Was Ortega aware of Locus and Porphyry's plans to root out Hollow Ground? Would Ortega have wanted to get involved, if they knew? How would Ortega react if Locus and Porphyry successfully caught Hollow Ground?

Ortega was not aware, but if they had known, they would have wanted in. If Locus and Porphyry had succeeded Ortega would have been happy, but also miffed that they didn't get there first. Also, Locus would never have involved Ortega because they were unreadable and could not be trusted.

After meeting Sidestep again, how did the conversation between Ortega and Steel about Sidestep being back go? How did Steel react? Did they decide to look further into it (even if Steel knows more than he lets on), or to drop it?

I might be planning to write about this soon, so no answer for now.

Does Ortega suspect Sidestep to be the one who possessed Argent? Did they from the get-go?

That depends on the Sidestep and the point in the story. But I would say definitely not from the start. Sidestep never showed any talents in that direction, there would be no reason to suspect. But if the new villain goes around obviously forcing people to do their bidding, and if Ortega suspects the new villain might be their old friend Sidestep, then you can bet that thought has crossed their mind.

In one of the catastrofiend flashback it mentions the energy caster is stolen. Where/who did step get it from?

From a minor villain called "Highwayman". However, he did not make it, and where he bought it from is unknown. It doesn't look like it was military issue, but there are several people dealing in the more esoteric arms.

Does Jackrabbit call people "sugar" and may I be a sugar?

Of course she does, and you can if you're sweet enough.

One hot guy (gn) down, so round 2—Blaze v Pyroclast: who's hotter?

Hotness is in the eye of the beholder. Blaze certainly considers himself hotter.

Based on how Dave's powers work, would it be also possible to echo other humans, like boosts? If yes, could they for example echo Sidestep's bodysnatching?

Can Dave echo a boost and use their powers?

He can't echo humans, at least not yet.

Might we have a little telepathic interaction with Mister Mitchell and get access to his files?

Mitchell might be a thing in some paths, yeah. Both as an ally if you align yourself with HG, and as a source if you manage to find out who he is.

With Angie's shrimp vision, what does she think of Danny's art if she's been shown any?

Argent thinks Danny's art is good, but not her thing. She's more into watercolors. Probably has a Monet print or two in her flat.

If Dave likes to stay away from populated areas because he can sense life forms... does he know a very busy spot in the Nevada desert that shouldn't be there?

Sounds like it would be hard to miss

Was ortega at joes when mortum takes the puppet out for drinks in rebirth?

No.

What would the rough "stats" on Mortum and the rangers be? (daring, ruthless etc)

In order from most ruthless to least: Mortum, Ortega, Argent, Steel, Herald.

In order from most daring to least: Ortega/Argent (very close), Herald, Steel, Mortum.

Is Pyroclast capable of raising his internal temperature without going into his loose form or are those, as of now, tied together?

They are tied together, but he can also do it him his more solid ashy form. But he needs to transform to do it.

Was the Green Sky interested in boosting Ortega for random reasons (good hair, hot smile, legendary resilience), or was there more to it? Did they know anything we don't about their mods? Or was there some mysticism to it (considering their cult Name and Ortega's lightning-adjacent powers?)

Oh, and... by any chance... Has the Green Sky boosted one of their subjects twice?

Oh this is interesting. Let me see what I can tell. There were many reasons for the cult to want to boost Ortega. Some of those were the reasons you mentioned, but at heart I think it came down to one thing. A central tenet of the cult is that boosts is the next (and superior) step of humanity. And if they think that, anybody who is powerful enough stand against them is a threat to those believes. Thus the solution is to take the people that seems to challenge their view of things and boost them. Either they die, and problem is solved. Or they get boosted, and thus prove them right. Ortega was a very visible and admired subject, so of course they would go for them.

And yes, double boosting has been attempted on many occasions. At times it even works.

Is being a laser dolphin genetic?

Like most boosts, procreation is problematic after you get boosted. No baby dolphins.

Is Void's blood the only blood that can briefly lend boost powers when consumed or ease the boosting process, or is it all boosts?

So far, Void is the only documented case.

Furthermore: could any telepath ease the boosting process?

They could possibly help, yes. Keeping somebody calm and not panicking would at least lessen the chances of catastrophic power eruption.

What is Resolution 32? 😊

The joint resolution that enabled the creation of the Free Western territories.

Did Ortega already notice the similarities between a mirror image puppet and Sidestep before they finally arranged an "accidental meeting?" How did they feel about the mirror image then, if at all?

The similarities were noted, but deemed not important. At that point, it wasn't the first ghost that Ortega had seen. Maybe, in a way, it felt good to scratch that old wound.

With the advanced biotech of FHR universe, how long could one expect to be alive if they could use every available medical means prolong their lifespan? Are there any well known figures in LD who are extremely old?

So far, the current record for oldest human in the FHR universe is 132 years old. And yes, it is indeed a rich old bastard able to pay for everything the medical research system could offer. So far, there are no extremely old people on the west coast, the environment is too volatile for them. They are old money and prefer the comforts of their homes.

Is Mortum modded? Or have they been in the past?

Nothing major. They tend to prefer gadgets, that way they can tinker with them.

I know Fallen Hero already has a crap ton of variables, but would you ever consider adding "secret crush" variables for the ROs (other than Ortega) in the future?

Maybe for book three.

What were the favourite fan theories during sidestep era about how step's "sidestepping" boost actually worked? Did anyone theorise correctly?

The top 3 were: Mystical martial arts, danger sense and luck. The danger sense one was pretty close considering. Telepathy was very low on the list, Sidestep didn't fit the preconception of a telepath.

Who was Elyise? What was she like before her death? Was she an associate of the Rangers or an unaffiliated vigilante helping out?

Elyise was a vigilante helping out. She hadn't worked directly with the Rangers, but Ortega knew her.

How would the Catastrofiend romance someone?

It has no interest in that sort of thing.

Who is/was the Armada? Any information on them?

He was just a mod using military armor to rob banks and do minor mercenary work. Not a massively weird threat, but a minigun is dangerous!

Do mortum and argent already know each other?

No.

Did the Rangers and/or Sidestep ever fight against Five Pennies? How did that go?

No, they were on the same side.

What in the heck of it is going on with Five Pennies weird range of powers?

Good question.

Are those pennies still around? Do the pennies even matter?

Those pennies are still around, or at least they were... They were in the Museum that Sidestep attacked in Rebirth. Their fate depends on the damage done there. Five Pennies certainly seemed to be dependent on them.

Five Pennies' powers seem to be telepathic to some extent, but also rooted in the body / physical contact... If one of the pennies attached to Ortega, would they be hurt / controlled, or are they also immune?

Oh Ortega would certainly be hurt.

Can the Catastrofiend be killed? And if so, will we have an opportunity to root around in there and see what's going on, or what we can take inspiration from?

So far, nothing has been able to destroy the Catastrofiend. Good luck trying.

How many years ago did HG meet with the Catastrofiend? Has HG had occasion to use their services?

Oh, back when the Catastrofiend was more... normal, HG hired it on occasion to get rid of rivals. But eventually, the risk outweighed the usefulness. HG doesn't like things they can't control.

And on that topic, what on earth services does the catastrofiend offer?

Death. Quick or slow, clean or messy.

Who taught Herald to shoot? When did he learn?

Steel taught him soon after he joined.

How did Anathema discover what their boost powers were?

The invulnerability took a while, and the extent of it took even longer. The acid was pretty much of an immediate thing.

How much genetic variation is there in a single batch of regenes (changes caused by the boost drug notwithstanding)? Would it create regenes like identical/non-identical twins or is there a large amount of variation between individuals in there?

Extremely high variation. Think of it this way. If you have a box of numbers from 1-9, and pulls three of them, how likely would it be to pull the same numbers in the same order twice? And this is even more complex.

Does Owl know how Hollow Ground look? Did she meet them? Any personal story/connection?

Owl does not know how Hollow Ground looks. As far as she knows they've never met.

Did Steel actually want Sidestep on the Rangers? I would've thought that the team was doing fine, considering heroes like Sentinel, Anathema, and Sunstream were on board.

Steel wouldn't have minded Sidestep on the team, IF he felt he could trust them. It wasn't for the powers, it was for the synergy.

What does Steel see in Sidestep that makes him think they'd be a good team member?

Steel always thought Sidestep made good tactical choices, and worked to make sure others could use their skills to the best advantage.

What are the Void's pronouns?

You don't know.

Why does Sidestep lie to Ortega that they "don't swim"?

Because that is the simplest explanation to get out of awkward situations. Not that they can't. Just that they don't.

We know about the rest of the rangers more or less and have an idea of their style, by when it comes to clothes-shopping how expensive does Argent shop? How about doctor Mortum? Do they have a specific style they gravitate toward, or is anything a full outfit as long as it includes the labcoat?

I think Argent is moderately expensive, but she is focused more on style than on brand. She quite possibly owes more expensive items of clothing than Ortega, even if her wardrobe as a whole is cheaper. Mortum is actually more of a clothes snob than they come off. Much of their clothes is tailor made and bespoke. No off the rack here.

Does Nazar mind being called 'Dusty' (affectionate) or would he prefer another nickname / no nickname?

Big nope to the Dusty. Other nicknames might work.

You've said the Void is definitely dead. Did you mean body, mind, or both?

Bodies die. Does minds?

Are the members of the Green Sky aware of that, or do they believe The Void is still among them somehow?

To admit that The Void could die would be to undermine the cult.

If we asked Mortum to help us "push" our telepathy, would they accept?

Depends on your relationship with them.

HB, the Catastrofiend and Sidestep all seem to share an uncanny ability to "leak" and "stick" to minds that touches theirs. Could that be related to their ingesting Void blood? Does the Void's blood develop specific abilities in psi-sensitive subjects?

I am trying to figure out how to answer this without massive spoilers, but I can't. Just saying you might be on to something, but it is not as simple as that.

Okay..... and just for indulgence's sake. Will we meet Heartbreak again in game beyond the HB's incident elucidations, whether as a dream or as a real presence?

I don't know yet. It is possible, but I can't guarantee it.

Does Mortum know about the Core project?

No.

Did the Rangers + Step ever run into / fight Arsenaux back in the day? Do the Rangers know she's still active?

Yes they did, but she noped out before she could be captured. And yes, the Rangers knows she's still around, but she's keeping her distance.

This is a ridiculous question but if/when a bug lands on Ortega can they just zap it like an electric fly swatter?

Yes.

Does Chen have a preference for who gets Spoon if something were to happen to him?

Tia Elena.

What made Locus to start investigating HG back when she was part of the long beach heroes?

Maybe you'll get to ask her.

What would Hood think of the current Ranger team and how Ortega and Chen have both done as marshals? What would he have made of Sidestep?

There is no world in which Hood wouldn't be proud as hell of the work both of them has done. And I think he would have been patiently amused by Sidestep, if a little worried about the telepathy.

Has Mortum ever worked for the Rangers? Would they be amenable to it in the future, if the price is right?

No Rangers work, it would be too much of a risk even for a lot of money.

And if that was not directly bought/asked from Mortum, then how did the Rangers get their hands on the Nanosurge's mysterious emitters?

Well, friends of friends of friends.

Neither Daniel nor Hollow Ground is a fighter, so I'm wondering who's the better combatant of the two?

Daniel, hands down.

And while we're on the topic, how are/were Pyrocblast, Sentinel, Sunstream, Hood, and Nocturne's fighting skills (with and without their powers)? Are any of them proficient with any weapons?

Without powers, good to bad: Hood, Sentinel, Pyroclast, Sunstream, Nocturne.

With powers, good to bad: Sentinel, Pyroclast, Hood, Sunstream, Nocturne.

We know that we can sway the Rangers into joining the dark side, but what about our villainous allies? Will there be the future option of redeeming them to join the heroes? (Mortum, Bo/Rosie, the Mob Boss crew?)

I think you can imagine the answer would be yesish, at least to the grayish side. They all have reasons they do what they do, the definition of what a hero is might not appeal to them.

What were some things Themmy enjoyed doing outside work? Any activities or hobbies?

Movies. Clubs. Cafes. Museums. Libraries. Watching sport. Just being out in the city.

Hypothetically, if Psychopathor could choose a way to die, how would he go out? Blaze of glory? Something calmer?

Blaze of fucking glory!

On the flip side, how would he not want to die?

As a failure.

What's Catastrofiend's favourite ice cream flavour?

Chunkey Monkey.

Does Psychopathor have a favourite exhibit at the aquarium?

Stingrays.

Has Mortum ever interacted with the laser dolphins? Even by proxy?

Yes.

Did Arsenaux have a Thing (crush, relationship, etc) for/with Void?

No, more like deep, almost fanatical admiration.

Did Heartbreak ever have a birthday that was celebrated?

Yes, several.

What's Pyroclast's favourite food?

Tacos.

Is Owl ever going to apologise? What if I tell her that punch is my villain origin story?

She'd tell you she was right all along, and to get over it. Apologizing is not for her.

What would the rangers count as the best and worst adverts/products they've had to be involved with?

Worst: Argent: Shower lotion. In the end they did cgi. Herald: traffic safety. He doesn't even drive. Ortega: Probably the one where the director was an asshole, otherwise they are down to clown. Steel: Artificial limbs. He felt very self-conscious.

Best: Argent: Clothes. She loves clothes ads. Herald: Serious ads, he once had one where he was talking about depression and it was great. Ortega: Whiskey. Always a good vibe. Chen: There are no good ones.

Just how bad were Daniel's Kinetik ads?

Think nineties pepsa ads bad.

do any of the RO's have a bucket list? do any of them have completed bucket lists?

Bucket lists is yet another thing I don't understand and doesn't make sense, so I am gonna say no. I know what it is, but the concept just comes off as weird to me.

actually, to go along with that: do any of them have specific wishes for the kind of funeral / memorial they'd want, or what would be done with their remains?

I don't think any of them have any specific wishes. It would be too much like inviting it to happen. Ortega has probably spoken about it at length when drunk and depressed though. Many variants.

Is Sidestep's body in any way adapted to process sugars/carbs differently than most people, whether it's artificially augmented or natural? How much sugar can they safely ingest? Can their body store and process it better than most?

Well, better than most. But people do metabolize things very differently. Some people can eat anything and never gain weight, while others eat very healthily and still is what society would consider overweight. Sidestep's mind does consume a lot more carbs than the average mind tho. If a normal brain consumes 20-25% of calories eaten (carbs preferred), Sidesteps consumes around 60-75%.

Do Catastrofiends dream of electric sheep or organic ones?

It would gladly eat them both.

Overtly, what was Hood and Anathema's relationship like? How did Anathema react to Hood's death? Did Anathema work on Hollow Ground with Ortega?

Hood and Anathema got along great. They had a few things in common, and Anathema saw Hood as a big brother or uncle figure. Anathema did work with Ortega on Hollow Ground, though not very actively. They weren't built for stealth and intrigue, but Ortega was very happy to have someone to vent to.

What do Blaze and Zephyr find attractive in a prospective partner? Physically and otherwise?

Blaze is torn. On one side he's very sensitive to what others see in his partner, so he wants them pretty and representative. On the other hand, he's drawn to strong personalities.

Zephyr has been too focused on work to have more than short flings, they get bored fast so partners that are interesting and innovative is preferred.

At the start of Rebirth, did the Farm / Special Directive think Step was dead?

It was seen as likely.

what would have been ortega's reaction if someone else was calling the shots during HB? Would they blame them (secretly or not) for sidestep's death and themmy's? Would they hold a grudge? Or would they "understand" the situation and believe they'd have done the same?

They would 100% blame who it was and probably never forgive them.

What did The Rangers' superiors think of Sidestep back then and them working closely with the team? What were their opinions of Ortega and Step being involved romantically? Whether they knew about it or just heard about the rumours, that couldn't have been good for the image they wanted for the marshal no? Or was the direction back then a lot more "lenient"?

The direction back then was rather lenient, mostly because Ortega was surfing on a wave of popularity. Sidestep was seen as just another vigilante, and if Ortega was rumored to be involved romantically it was nothing anybody expected to last for long.

You've hinted that Ortega's birthday party will be a big moment in Book 3, with a bunch of moving parts. Are you willing to share any plot details? A teeny crumb? Just a taste?

I have not planned it yet! Right now all the details I have is "Ortega's birthday party" and "too small a cake for all those candles."

Has Ortega always (since childhood) had epilepsy and seizures? (It was so dangerous to do extreme sports: mountain climbing etc, no?) Or has Ortega got it only after being modded? Or did the trauma after the incident cause it?

It is a relatively recent thing, the first seizures came after modding, but it might also have been a result of the fall, even if it didn't manifest until then.

ok this is mostly self-indulgent but would Ortega ever admit out loud to step that they're the love of their life?

100%, and in the most sappy way possible.

Do you have any contingency/back up plans for FHR/other projects so they can still move forward and be finished, even if something happens to you? (You're okay, right?? How have you been doing recently?)

I am okay! I have been having health issues since 2020, but that is mostly burnout and stomach problems due to me doing way too many things at once and being unable to carry the load. A lot of people around me has suffered a lot, and real life has been making big demands on me. I am back working full time since May, and it seems to be working alright. Real life is a mess for everybody these days I think. I have no backup plans, this is all in my head, I have no team. But, I am also stubborn and finishes projects I start, so no need to worry about me.

Was Hood aware of HG's family/family name as a crime family in LD before they became Hollow Ground?

Yes, somewhat. But only one among many.

What exactly did Hood do to piss off Hollow Ground? Did he mess with their organization? Was he partially responsible for Hollow Ground's siblings' encounters with law enforcement tw death (and subsequent deaths)?

Hood was dangerous because he threatened Hollow Ground's livelihood in a way most other heroes didn't.

How old is Regina? What does she look like? Does she have any family? Any extra information about her?

Regina is loosely based on an old RP character of mine. I always saw her with dark, straight, shortish hair in a bob or something, but not really any other details. I am very bad with faces. She has no close family, you might say that she is married to her work.

What was Dr. Mortum and Vitruvian's relationship like before their falling out? Did they work well together? What was their opinion of each other?

They worked very well together, which was the reason they stuck together for so long. Their skillsets were complimentary, though they clashed on the personal side now and then. Mortum saw Vitruvian as a bit of a close-minded bigot, and Vitruvian thought Mortum was not taking things seriously enough.

What makes Mitchell start a file on a hero/vigilante/villain? What qualifies someone to go from nobody to noteworthy?

If he's interested in them.

What're the cast's stats in the classic Sidestep stat sheet?

That is for you to put in. I don't give such details about people, just your impression of them.

Have Mitchell and Mortum ever hung out or exchanged information?

...possibly.

Was any villain discovered to be tied to the Nanosurge (as in, helping to release the nanovores)? And conversely, did any villain help with the effort against it?

No villain was tied to it, and the official explanation is that they died in the release. This might very well be true, there would be no way to know. The ocean is big, and there wouldn't be many remains. There were villains helping, and there would probably have been more if it had proceeded. Some enemies are too big to worry about sides.

Could I bribe Pyroclast into [light] villainy with kaolin clay ice cream and cookies?

No. He's serious about his job.

Was anyone blamed or prosecuted for the Nanosurge? (negligence, etc)

No.

Is it in any way legal to access footage or reports about the event? Were there security systems in place to handle witnesses and footage?

There was a lot of footage, there were security cameras in some business close to the beach. The footage has been confiscated and deemed too disturbing to release to the public.

How would Pyroclast react upon discovering Step had a crush on him? Would his reaction differ depending on how obvious Step was?

Probably feel a bit awkward, he's not the smoothest.

What did the nanovores from the Nanosurge "sound" like to Sidestep?

Crayfish in a bucket.

We've seen a glimpse of that with Herald's mind if Sidestep leans into the rush, but I'm wondering: with a non-psi mind that's loud / strong / focused enough to do so, could Sidestep be "manipulated" by their own telepathy feedback? Could they be lead to react or think like the other person? In effect, another kind of possession, this time not by invasion but by reflection?

Oh yes. That is a danger, especially to low force Sidesteps.

Hopping in with an angst-related one: what were some of the worst injuries Sidestep had to patch up on their own, back in their Sidestep days?

Dislocated shoulder. Stab through hand. Anything on the back, or in awkward places to reach. The pain-gate and additional painkillers stopped the worst pain, the difficulty was being able to treat them.

Getting on the Nanosurge bandwagon, what would have happened if Step would have ended up getting infected by the swarm or became a casualty of it like so many others? How would it have effected Ortega if they'd lost Step then and not during HB?

Ortega would be dead too, and quite possibly a lot of the frontline. It's touch and go whether others would have managed to contain/destroy, or whether they would have firebombed the city.

Are the individual Rangers more aware of the secrets other members are keeping from them than the others are aware of?

That is: would sharing truths tear them apart more than we think? Or less than we think?

Both. It depends on the secret. I think in general they other Rangers are more aware than their friends give them credit for.

How different is the new HQ run from the old one? Is there more security now? Better location? Did they also have receptionists?

Newer. Better security. Larger quarters. And yes, they had receptionists there too.

What would happen to the Rangers/Dr.Mortum/others of main cast if they had never met Sidestep. Please, share if you have any ideas.

It is too early to tell yet whether Sidestep will have a good or a bad influence on their lives.

Just a random curiosity I have: malin do you have experience with marital arts? If so what type(s)? Just read the herald training scene for the first time and the way sidestep explains that he needs to lower his center of gravity is super similar to some training I've received. If you've thought about it, what form of martial arts does each character favor?

I did a bit of jiu jitsu during university. Can't say I was very good, except during the wrestling bits. My feet couldn't handle it in the long run, the skin fell off.

Aside from talodine, numbers, and dampeners, is there anything else that can interfere with telepathy? Do any of those random "telepathic protection devices" mentioned in the June QnA actually work?

Those three are the big ones. It is doubtful if any of the others work.

If Ortega is oblivious of a Steelstep romance, is it possible to go through the entire series without them realizing Chen and Step are dating?

No. Chen is not that good an actor.

A timeline related one: what happened during the 2004 human rights abuses in Panama?

Just look at what Russia is doing in Ukraine today. I won't go into details, but it sure ain't good.

Has the treatment of Orcas changed over the years, and has HG an opinion on it?

Since the pacific coastline is no longer a commercial hub, the population of Orcas has grown. They are no longer kept in captivity. HG has no particular views on this matter.

What does Green Sky cult do to their captives? Do they have a boosting process for victim they decided are worthy?

All captives will eventually be subjected to boosting, if they survive the trials. And yes, they do have a boosting regiments for the worthy ones, and in fact, it has as much success as the Farm methods.

Will poly relationships where Sidestep isn't the hinge be possible in game? Such as getting M!Ortega and Chen together while romancing Ortega ourself?

Oh yes, there is already a variable for that in the game.

Who were the Long Beach Heroes? What happened to their teams? How many teams did they have? Who ran the organizations? and who funded them? It sounded like they were on good terms with the LD Rangers. Were they?

The Long Beach Heroes were a group of local vigilantes that banded together after a joint sponsorship from the local business association. The members of the team were Blaze, Zephyr, Porphyry, and the baby of the team, Locus. They weren't the big league, mostly due to lack of money. They had a base, and an admin, but no big infrastructure. It was very much a neighborhood team. But, they were capable as individuals, and would probably have been outgrowing their funding if the team had not broken up. It all started when Locus got the wind of some things and started her own investigation together with Porphyry. It culminated with the attack on HG's current base, and in the fallout after that, the team split up.

Besides Ortega, have other heroes, teams or sponsors tried to recruit Sidestep? How would/did Ortega react?

I think a few have tried, but that's like trying to hold a cat that wants to get down. All you get are scratches. Ortega found it most amusing.

How would Ortega react to realising that Step was planning to break up with them back in the glory days, but never got to due to HB? Especially if they knew that Step was still in love with them?

I don't know. How do you react to something like that? I think it would depend on the circumstances in which it was learned, and how their current relationship was.

What about them learning that Step felt so betrayed and enraged over them apparently abandoning their friend/partner to die for 5+ years, that Step seriously considered killing them when they were hospitalised after their debut?

Oh that would be a combination of shock, guilt and regret, quickly followed by "but I thought you were dead."

Would Ortega be put-off by a quiet Step that's **very inexpressive? (E.g. Not even smiling when they're happy/jubilant, seething rage under a calm veneer, etc.) Or would they see it as more of a challenge to get them to express themselves more often? Do you think they'd be better at reading this sort of Step due to paying closer attention to them and the (very) limited cues they have? Or would they be worse at it than reading the standard Step?**

Ortega got to know (and start crushing on in certain instances) Sidestep back when they wore a full face mask. Hard to get less expressions than that. Ortega would just see it as part of the Sidestep package, and would be very good at reading them. Ortega pays much more attention to Sidestep than Sidestep notices. I think at the start, there would have been a brief period of trying to get Sidestep to "loosen up", but Ortega would quickly have realized that was just how they were.

How would the Rangers + affiliates react when they realise Sidestep always carried an L-Pill around during their hero days? Just in case something **cough the Farm coming for them **cough** happened, and they wanted to spare themselves a fate worse than death? Would any of them have considered carrying something similar under the right circumstances?**

I think most of them would have been surprised (not Chen), it is one of the things that would have driven home the seriousness of the situation. I don't think anybody has realized exactly how bad things were yet.

Why does Ortega like caustic people so much?? Some might say they're difficult people to deal with.

But they are also honest and predictable in their own way. Since Ortega is rather secure in who they are (apart from certain sexuality bits), they don't feel threatened easily. And, compared to the kind of fake smiles and compliments they are surrounded by daily, an asshole is a breath of fresh air. It also lets Ortega let out their own inner asshole, and feel that they don't have to pretend for the camera. I also think Ortega feels like people who behave like that doesn't want anything from them, and thus are safer to be around. Not to mention it is a bit funny watching them be an asshole to others, who can't take it very well.

Couldn't Argent have asked the cameras who pinned the front page on the fridge if she kisses Step?

She could have, but at the moment she was too pissed to think of it. She jumped to conclusions instead, and acted without thinking. Why bother checking if you "knew" who must have done it.

Would Ortega do their best to stop flirting if a romanced!Step has an issue with it?

Yes. 100%. The big issue here is that there might be a mismatch between what Ortega sees as normal, polite and pleasant behavior, and what Sidestep sees as flirting. Sidestep unfortunately has the ability to hear what the people who are subjected to that "polite and charming" smile reacts. And they might definitely take that wink as flirting, while Ortega was in reality just blinking.

Considering the existence of mods, is it still possible for untreatable disabilities to exist? E.g. Complete blindness/deafness/etc?

Oh yes. Mods are not a magic solution. First of all, they are expensive. Very few people have access to them, and many requires regular upkeep which costs more money. Second, some might not want to use mods. It is an invasion of your body, with their own sets of side effects. Third, some people might not see their disabilities as something that needs fixing. They might live full lives with it, and the inconveniences they encounter they might see as something that should be fixed in society instead of trying to change them to fit in. And fourth, not all things are fixable by mods. You might get something that helps you function better in regular society, but it's not the real thing.

Just think of hearing aids today. It is a common mod, which can help/fix a wide range of hearing related issues. But not everybody with a hearing issue use them. They might think they look clumsy and would designate them as old, or disabled. They might not afford it. They might dislike the sound they get through it. There are many reasons.

The previous posts got me thinking... what's Blaze's relationship to his sexuality? How does his feelings about women differ from how he feels about men? Does he want to keep quiet about his sexuality, or be more open about it? Is there anything he's insecure about?

Blaze and sexuality is a complicated thing. He is bisexual, yes, but he's not very comfortable with his attraction to men. At least not openly. He is currently keeping it under wraps, and while he has had male lovers, he always makes sure they know that this can't be something they are open with. This has made longer relationships hard. Women are easier, there it has mostly been his work (and his bedroom secrets) that has kept him from having a steady relationship. It is safer to date, that also fits the successful persona he has built. He is rather insecure, and is worried that he might be seen as "less of a man" if he came out.

How would you describe Owl's personality? What was her childhood like?

Owl's personality is intense, focused, and abrasive. She grew up rough, and feels that she's had to fight for who she is her whole life. Thus she defaults to taking things as attacks, and is prone to overreacting.

Even as a vigilante she didn't work well with people, the ones that are close to her are the ones that can accept her as she is. She's not going to change, she would rather force the world to change around her.

Are there any mods for completely blind people that isn't directly related to sight? E.g. Boosting reflexes/'awareness' of their surroundings?

Yes. There is a mod that is available for purchase that has been thoroughly tested. It is a combination hearing, sound emitting mod packages which works in a similar way that bats navigate. There are also variants of this that translates the sound signals to sensory skin input, mostly on the hands or face. There are also experiments going on with a tremor sense which picks up on minute vibrations of the ground and air, but that has the drawback of being hindered by shoes or clothing.

Can Dave echo the powers of other Boosts? What's his personality like?

No echoing of humans so far. But who knows if things got bad, boosted powers can evolve. He's carefree and mellow, hates routine and orders. He comes across as rather harmless, but that's mostly because he keeps his own council. He would not be a Marshal if he couldn't do the job. Just don't ask him to wear a tie.

What was Cavalier's motivation for blowing up the Pentagon?

Classified. People have been killed looking for that nugget of information.

What're the fighting styles of the Guardians? Which ones are the fighters/tacticians?

I am still deciding that! So no answer yet.

What does Mortum find physically attractive in a partner?

Physical attraction is weird. I honestly don't know. I think the mental bit is a lot more important for them.

Are there any individuals that the Special Directive is afraid of? Like a boost or mod that even they think "nope, we're not messing with that."

OH yes. Some things just wouldn't be cost effective.

If there is, my bets are on Catastrofiend, or Cavalier if he's still alive.

That would definitely be two of them, and I would add The Void (while alive).

What would Anathema think of Herald and Lady Argent if they were still alive and part of the Rangers?

They'd love Herald like a little brother (and mess with him a little), and have a healthy respect for Argent. They might become very close friends, or annoy the hell out of each other. There would be no middle ground.

Do the Rangers get a lot of holidays off, since they're employed by the government?

Yes, and they have very good benefits.

What's the West's general opinion on superheroes in the East? What's the East's general opinion on superheroes in the West? Do the Rangers have any opinions on East coast superheroes?

The east coast thinks the west coast heroes are exotic and cool, but wouldn't want to have them in their neighborhood. A bit like it's nice watching lions in the zoo, but not stalking the local forest. Dangerous.

The west coast thinks the east coast heroes are government stooges or military staff. Controlled and very dangerous. The Rangers thinks the same.

Did Ortega get along with any of the other Marshals back when they were one? Does Chen get along with any of them now?

I think Ortega had a very volatile relationship with the other Marshals. A bit like tossing a bunch of cats in a room together, there's bound to be yowling. Chen gets along better, but I don't think any of them are close.

What are the Rangers typical reactions when they get recognized out in public? I assume this has happened at least once for all of them?

Ortega smiles and writes autographs and poses for pictures. Herald does the same, but a bit more shyly. Argent it depends on her mood, but since she can't hide as well, she often stares them down until they leave unless she likes them for some reason. Little girls always gets autographs and attention. Chen just deadpans and says that they must be mistaken. He's very good at it.

In Rebirth, one of the default names you can give a female puppet is Yasmin, like the doll. What doll? Is this a movie reference? Or did I miss something?

It is a reference to the Bratz line of dolls. My friend's daughter was obsessed with them when she was little, so that stuck.

Can we please have some more facts about Bumblebee? How old is she? How many years did she work as a vigilante? What hero teams has she worked with? How long has she been in Los Diablos? What's her suit look like?

At this point, Bumblebee is in her early thirties. She was working as a vigilante since her late teens, but she was never one of the risk takers, so she avoided major injuries despite her relatively weak powers. She can fly, and lift heavy things, but she's not fast, even though she is maneuverable. During her vigilante days her weapon of choice was her stingers, which started out as a taser, but was upgraded into proper multi-use weapons as she got more contacts. She was always friendly, and worked with many teams or other vigilantes, but was never a member of any groups until she got the offer to join the

Guardians. She leapt at that. She was originally from El Paso, but has lived in Los Diablos since childhood. Her suit is black with yellow accents, and her trademark fuzzy bumblebee hat. She has no mask, but a pair of big goggles.

What would Harold and Ortega say is the coolest thing Sidestep has done among their various feats? Either something they have done in the past or in the games if they found out about them?

Ortega: Taking on the Catastrofiend. That was WILD.

Herald: He played the clip of Sidestep fighting Swordmaster again and again. Yep, he had it recorded. It wasn't an important fight, but it looked very cool, and it was actually recorded almost in its entirety.

Say Ortega finds out Sidestep has turned villain and done horrible things. Would they have preferred Sidestep actually had died and preserved their heroic legacy or do they consider Sidestep back a blessing even with some dirty complications?

The latter. Ortega has lost enough people.

In your personal opinion, what is the coolest thing Sidestep can do in the first two books?

It is utterly silly, but it is this one: #"[Marshal](#)," I tip my imaginary hat.

Is the WFZ televised or shown / talked much outside of the west? Does the rest of the country try to quietly forget it exists? How is it depicted (romanticized, etc.)?

Basically, the Free Western Territories is dealt with in three ways:

1: Let's try to forget. What happened on the west coast was a massive trauma both for the populace and the country's self-image. While it changed the US, perhaps permanently, it also is difficult to deal with. While the memorials and ceremonies were huge in the first few years, many tried to move on as soon as possible. This is how the current political climate is treating it.

2: We are all one country. Sure, the WFZ is their own deal, but so was Costa Rica once upon a time. We're still one country, right? These people see the WFZ as a temporary inconvenience, a bit like when a road is blocked because it is being repaired. Soon they will be one country once more, just like back in the old days. Often, these people don't want to see exactly how much has changed, or that the WFZ might not want to go back. Some politicians are very vocal about this.

3: Live-action Disneyland! Many (especially in the media) sees the WFZ as a combination of a live-action Disneyland and the Wild West. It is exoticised in news and television shows, and an exotic background for many movies and novels. Think of how Berlin was the focus of so much Cold War drama. Los Diablos is the same. Even though Los Diablos is not the largest or most influential city in the west, it is the most famous one. Partly because of the old Hollywood glamour, partly because the new name makes it so evocative.

Is it normal to gain additional or 'support' powers after being boosted? If I remember correctly, Herald also has enhanced durability as well as flight, right?

Often powers come in packages, yeah. While nobody has figured out exactly how these things work, enhanced endurance, durability, strength or healing are common in combination with more flashy boosts. It is theorized that these changes to the human body makes it possible to deal with the demands the other boosted powers put on it. One of the main reasons for the high mortality rates for boost users is that the body can't handle the strain, and it makes sense that the ones who would survive would be the ones where the body has adapted to that.

What're the cast's relationships to their respective ethnicities + cultures?

And this is where I, as a Swede, falls short. While I have done my best to research, and talk to relevant people, I will not go very much into depth on that regard. The short answer would be: It's complicated.

While I feel that it is important to show a Los Diablos that is as diverse as Los Angeles is today, I also feel that I am not the right person to write in depth about these things. In part, this is because every person in the main cast has taken steps to divorce themselves from the person they feel they were meant to grow up to be. This is a story about misfits of various sorts, people leaving their past behind to try to make something new, something that belongs to them only. And this is doubly true for Sidestep.

So, while I will make nods to where people come from, and what attitudes and traditions that helped formed who they are today, that is not the main story I am telling. Perhaps it is revealing that Sidestep is as unmoored from the various cultures of humanity as I sometimes feel. I feel more at home writing about alienation, gender, sexuality and mental issues, so that is what I will focus on. Ethnicity, culture and religion will only be briefly touched on, I leave much of that to people's headcanons.

What's Mountain Man's powers/abilities? What about his weaknesses?

Rather basic, heightened strength, endurance and durability. However, he also grew to a height of 8 feet, so that became the most easily recognizable part of the package. Also, he sported a massive beard, and his weapon of choice was a high-tech axe. His weakness was his commitment to the bit, his lack of ranged weaponry and transport left him a bit open.

Does the Heartbreak incident have a canonical date?

Not yet, we are working on a rough timeline, but it would be around Valentine's day.

did themmy have much of a routine back in the day, besides ranger-ing and volunteering? were they particularly close with anyone? how much did chen trust them, given themmy's lack of history and despite passing the vetting process?

Themmy was always on the move. They seemed determined to fit as much as possible in their days, but the word routine never really seemed to fit them. They would often go with their whims. Themmy liked everyone, but was very close to Hood, who was also the one who had been responsible for their vetting.

Chen did not distrust them since they had passed, he did not personally need to see the papers. He trusted the system.

how close to hood was chen? does he ever wonder what he might think of the state of the rangers now?

Chen and Hood weren't as close as Hood and Ortega, or Hood and Anathema or Sentinel. There was respect there, but at that point in life, Chen tended to treat Hood more like their military commander than as a friend. In retrospect, Chen regrets not letting his guard down more, and he often wishes he could have had a long talk with Hood about what leading a team really does to people.

ortega pulling out a gun at the gala seems a little out of left field, is it common for them to react that way? is it a desperation move?

Ortega uses the tools available to get the job done. Yes, it was a bit of a desperation move, they weren't at their best without their skinsuit. Ortega is a decent shot, it's not the first time they used a gun, but they are not very fond of them. Clashes with their self-image.

What sort of things might we expect from trying to bond with hollow ground, as in how would they attempt to get to know us? casual or formal setting? that kind of thing!

That depends on what impression they have of their Sidestep. In some cases it might be a more formal "villains working together" thing, while in others they might let you under their skin and be more casual.

Why does everyone who live with Ortega tend not to like her so much? In this book we got a taste of how the characters seem to clearly perceive their problems, except for the blind Sidestep, in the future can we have a frank conversation with Ortega? that it's not just the Sidestep that's broken?

I think such a conversation has been building for a while. It will be at the start of the next book (Revelations) for at least some paths more focused on Ortega.

Has there been any heroes (or villains) that have retired from active life and became actors?

The most well know one is based in Seattle, and is a former vigilante that used to go by the name "Hellhound." These days he goes by his real (?) name, Sam Beaulieu and stars in a series of action/adventure movies loosely based on his own (very embellished) career.

Is there many, if any, enhanced actors? do they use their powers or mods during filming?

Just like some professional athletes takes the step to become an actor, the same goes for some boosts or mods. The problem with becoming a big star is that there are strict rules for boosted or modded individuals in the main US, so they tend to be restricted to moviemaking on the west coast. And yes, of course they use their boosts or mods in the movies, in many cases that is their biggest selling point.

Which is the longest Ortega has been in a steady relationship and with whom? Has there ever been a significant other for any of the other Rangers (or Dr. Mortum)?

Discounting Sidestep (since that might vary) I think Ortega's longest relationship was about two years, up to right before their accident. Steady is not really part of the Ortega package. Dr. Mortum was in several relationships before they became a villain, but none after. They would have seen at least one of them as very significant, but it did not end well. Chen was deeply in love with his boyfriend, who was killed in action. Since then he has not had anybody serious, though he has had several relationships who lasted from a few months to up to a year. But his heart was not in it. Argent has never had a relationship to speak of, and while Herald has had several girlfriends, they have been more into him than the other way around. It's been nice and pleasant but not exactly passionate.

Would Ortega rather see Hollow Ground arrested for their crimes or killed off as revenge for Hood's death? May we influence how Ortega might choose if given the chance?

I honestly think that at this point Ortega doesn't know either. If they ever got the opportunity to end this threat once and for all, I don't know what they'd do. If Sidestep is around when that time comes, you bet that they would be a big influence.

Can we recruit other Heroes or Villains to our cause in the future?

That is planned, yes.

Can Steel still fly helicopters? could he fly a plane?

Steel has licenses to fly both helicopters, and various military aircrafts. However, he hasn't flown a fighter jet in years, and would not consider himself proficient. He does occasionally fly small propeller planes and helicopters since he thinks it's important to keep up the flight hours. He considers it a valuable skill for the team, and he likes it.

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Could Shroud eat Ortega's mind?

(And if yes, could she access its content? What would it "taste"/feel like?)

That is actually spoilers I won't be talking about for reasons.

Excluding boosting, what makes for a tasty mind in Shroud's eyes?

Cool memories and a lot of experiences.

Has the puppet been spending time with Ortega or the crew beyond what Step knows about?

Now that sounds you should worry about if it was true.

Are the CB initials related to Sidestep's code at the farm, or to Hollow Ground's real name?

It's farm code.

Was it Argent's charges that caused the Casino to shake or something else?

Argent's explosives.

Starting with the end of Retribution, would an attempt to wipe sidestep's mind be possible?

No. And good luck to the poor bastard trying.

If some monster-loving Sidestep wanted to have a date with a sexy CatastroHunk, would Mortum lend them their teleporter gun to insure the Catastrofiends attendance? (Alternatively, would Mortum lend Sidestep the gun to fight off the murderous Catastrofiend and save lives?)

Mortum miiiiiiight lend their gun to a Sidestep they trust implicitly. If it was an emergency.

How would the Farm/Regina react/what would they do if Step turned themselves in?

Regina would be pleased as punch that she was right. This is where Sidestep belongs.

Has ortega ever talked to elena about their hollow ground crusade? their suspicions of step's heritage?

Nope. Ortega doesn't endanger other people, especially not their mother.

Could Dr. Halabi become our personal Regene medical doctor?

It's possible.

Alpha spoilers, fully expecting to be hit with a "spoilers :avocado~1:" but, we know that Mortum was threaded by Hollow Ground and that they recognised Sidestep. Do they recognise them in connection to HG, due to Mitchell's files, or for unrelated reasons? If yes, is it because they managed to get themselves unthreaded?

For unrelated reasons. It's not in the HG direction you should look...

Will we be able to name the allegedly dead sibling?

Yes.

Was Vitruvian the person killed by the Cat when it got trapped in the gun?

No, at that point, Vitruvian was already dead.

We know that Argent is aware that she was mind controlled by a telepath in the very beginning, but because she has the secondary “mind” of the nanovores with her, is she aware or have any hints that a telepath was fully riding her consciousness/in her body, not just controlling it externally?

I don't think that Argent would be able to know the difference. For the person being controlled/possessed I think the experience would be similar, the biggest difference is on the other side.

What's up with Ace's father?

He was an asshole.

Ortega knew from “rumors” that HG was meeting with villain at Parkfield. Will we be able to point out to HG that their info isn't entirely secure? Can we use that as an excuse for attending meeting as puppet? Or at least berate/threaten them a little for jeopardizing our security? And the part I know really won't get answered: was it truly “rumors” that clued Ortega in?

That sounds like a good plan for dealing with HG. And yeah, you can bet it just wasn't rumors Ortega was chasing.

Does Argent's real hair texture match her nanovore hair? Can she change her hair texture if she wishes to, or is she stuck with the pin straight hair?

It does match the texture she had before her change, but she could change it if she wanted to.

Is Argent's facial appearance still resembling that of her 17 year old self in some way or is it a guestimation of what she'd look like at her current age? Is it perhaps based off of a resemblance to a family member?

This is a bit of a spoiler, but I'll answer it anyway. Argent's face is made up. It is the result of her looking into the mirror for hours and hours on end trying to make herself a face that wasn't just the nanovores thinly covering the ruin of her real face. That's why it was so hard to pinpoint her ethnicity, it is a mix of models and movie stars, her own idealized face.

Was sidestep's batch created with the donor it had with an ulterior cuckoo-y motive or was it just coincidence their donor is HG's little sib

It wasn't a cuckoo ulterior motive, but there was a motive. And the DNA of HG's little sibling was chosen intentionally.

Can we tell the truth to Mortum in one of the stuck in puppet routes in book 3 if we didn't in book 2

Of course.

How far does HG's threading reach? Can they keep somebody threaded say across the country or is it restricted to a relatively localized area

As far as HG knows, there's no distance limit.

While the Farm was digging around in Steps mind for the HB imprint, did they take any of their heroic memories to implant into future Regenes

No way, runaway memories would be too dangerous, even if Sidestep wasn't... compromised.

Is it possible to move out of range for HG to maintain their thread connection?

So far, not.

How long ago did Deadeye get demoted?

Five years ago or so.

Was there a particular reason Deadeye was step's welcoming committee at the HG meeting? Was that part of her usual duties or maybe just useful to let your personal assassin to get eyes on a potential target just in case something were to go wrong?

It is indeed part of her usual duties to check out the people allowed to visit in persons. And yes, you've got the reason right.

Does HG have any influence in Chicago or is it still just investments?

Just investments, they are focused on Los Diablos at the moment.

How likely would it be for HG (or one of then other two) to ask Step about HB, the Void, the Nanosurge, or other major events they were apart of back in their heroing days?

Dunno. Would depend on the relationship. If friendly, it might happen. HG is chatty on occasion.

What would the HG trio be like as parents? Individually and/or together?

HG would be doting as hell. Nocturne would make sure the kids had everything they needed, but secretly couldn't relate or connect to them at all and would be afraid they'd find out. Jake would have to

carry a big load there, he used to look after his siblings, he knows how to deal.

Has Sidestep ever tried to read/decrypt their own barcode? Does their barcode correspond to national classification or did the farm create specific characteristics that makes their barcode unreadable with a generic barcode reader (and nosy technopaths?) And since spacing and flow also participate to a barcode being legible, would it become illegible if Sidestep altered their appearance (stretching the barcode by losing or gaining a lot of weight, chest surgery, etc)?

Sidestep has never tried to read the barcode. And it would most certainly be Farm specific coding, no risk of information leaking. The barcode, like the tattoos, resists change.

I imagine argent's little friends do the bulk of the work keeping her sparkling, but does argent like taking showers/baths with her skin? Would the temperature difference of hot water bother her? Is there any concern about her little metallic buds rusting or getting gunked up by soaps or scented oils?

She loves water. It feels good. She was not kidding about the pool. She is not fond of too hot or too cold water though, but up to body temperature is nice. Her little friends don't get gunked up, but they tend to eat soaps and oils. She perfumes her clothes, not her skin.

What did Hollow Ground's younger sibling do to end up in juvie?

The specific incident was stealing a car. A very expensive one. And yes, they were waaay too young to have a license. Might have needed a pillow.

Soooo.... lady argent currently has silver teeth.... will the regenerator be able to give her regular teeth or will she be stuck with the silver ones even if it repairs the rest of her body.....

Good questions. There are some variable options there.

With lady argent's nanovores covering the inside of her mouth, does she actually have any sense of taste?

Not as good as it was. Just like with her sense of touch, what the nanovores pass on is limited and muted. Sweet tastes comes through well though.

Was the fiend really trapped in the gun? Or was it being transported, and the gun just ended up falling in the wrong (our) hands?

Now that is a paranoia inducing thought.

The fiend recognises sidestep's mind when we encounter it. Does that mean it's psy sensitive? Did its original disappearance have anything to do with the farm?

The Catastrofiend would be considered psi-sensitive, yes. The original disappearance had nothing to do with the Farm.

If Shroud had to assign a flavour profile to a mind, what would it be?

Red bean ice cream.

What does Shroud's mindscape look like?

Shattered Disneyland stained glass mosaic.

Would a shapeshifter Re-Gene's tattoos temporarily vanish if they changed their appearance to someone else?

It would depend on how strong their shapeshifting powers were. it is possible.

^Along those same lines; would any sort of physical-mutation Boost maintain the tattoos?

Again, it would depend on the strength of the boost.

Does HG's connection to Dr. Finch lay through Nocturne? Was/is Nocturne Dr. Finch's patient? Considering Nocturne's agoraphobia I guessed this might be the case.

Actually, no, the connection is not through Nocturne.

This doesn't seem like an important question but it's been on my mind so much : Is the barcode placed horizontally or vertically on step's (regenes') chest ?

I always saw it as vertical, but it is up to the artist who draws it.

Is there any way Sidestep would be able to... develop their own form of "red strings"? That is, would there be any way to make a more semi-permanent telepathic change to another's mind without that specific telepathic strain?

It is possible that Sidestep could develop their powers in that direction. The sword of Damocles, or the false memory planted in Argent's mind was a simple version of that kind of manipulation.

In the epilogues, Argent can choose to kiss Step if they turn out to not be that bad instead of carving a new scar into their face... why is that? And is there any reason why she doesn't do something similar (e.g. Backing off) with a platonic, impressed!relationship with Step?

Letting herself be romantically attracted to someone is a huge step for Argent, there is a MUCH bigger difference for her comparing that to the impressed status. She is the one RO where the difference is that big. You will be able to befriend her eventually, but that will take some time.

IF we teamed up with Argent for villainous or villain-adjacent activities, could she use her technopathy to stimulate Ortega's neural paths via their extensive mod works clearing up the head static long enough for us to... take a little peek? Just a little crack of the crème brûlée? A minor juicy little meeting of the minds?

Now that is an interesting plan. Feasible? Probably not.

Another question if that's alright: How did Chen obtain the pictures of Sidestep's "autopsy"? And, how long had Sidestep spent in captivity when Chen found this piece of information?

Chen has some friends in the military, and they have some friends in the intelligence services. It was a lot of debts being cleared. At that point, Sidestep would have been a year and a half or more in captivity.

Also, argent must like, really fear death right? Given that her nanovores would be released if she died?

She does. It is one of her big moral quandaries.

Is this something she's thought about? Sidestep describes her as indestructible, but how indestructible is she ~really~? Certainly at least poison would kill her if someone really wanted her gone enough to try to assassinate her, which, as a hero, she must consider is a possibility.

She has thought about it, and has taken as many precautions as she can. With the nanovores coating her mouth and part of her throat, it is possible that they might be able to deal with ingested poison. People have tried to kill her a lot, and she's very good at surviving. The horrible part of this all is that if she gets hurt enough that some of her human parts gets irreversibly damaged, the nanovores just fill in the blanks.

What did the Farm do with Sidesteps that had become addicted to their vices?

The Farm did not make any accommodations for smoking or drinking. It was cold turkey immediately.

What did the Farm do with Sidesteps that had started to medically transition and had been taking hormones?

As for Sidesteps who had started to transition, there would have been two paths, and I will let people choose between them. On one hand, the changes that the additional hormones made on the body in combination with the increase in powers might have been seen as scientifically interesting, and the hormone regiment kept up not to disturb what was going on inside Sidestep. On the other hand, it might have been seen as irrelevant and discontinued. It will be up to the reader (and probably dealt with eventually in a future book.)

Can Zephyr run on water? Can they phase through walls? (Inspired by the Kid Flash episode on Teen Titans.)

Zephyr can run short distances on calm water, but the waves makes it hard. Since the pacific ocean rarely is placid, they don't use it often. Can run across as swimming pool without issue though. No phasing through walls, they can't vibrate their molecules.

Would HG try to mentally coerce Jake into forgiving them and Nocturne if Jake blows up about being threaded?

I think HG would be tempted to. It would be the easiest solution, and how HG generally deals with things. However, Jake has become more important than a pawn, and I don't think they would do it, unless they felt that their life was at risk.

Are we going to find out how the farm knew about Sidestep and was there to get him after Heartbreak?

Yes. The whole Heartbreak truth is coming.

What's next in Los Diablos? When you're a hero hunter the conquest comment is they wouldn't believe what's to come so better prepare them is it some kind of war? Is the farm linked to this? Or is it just Sidestep madness?

It is not just Sidestep madness (though there might be some delusions of grandeur there). There is something about to happen that might affect the whole west coast, and Sidestep knows about it. Not sure when I will tell the readers though, Sidestep has other things on their mind right now.

Also, i'm not sure if i was just misreading it then, but in the last qna you said that hg wasn't trans. how come their moray memory checks for whether step is trans or not? was it just them imagining themselves as a child or something like that, since hg shares gender/presentation with sidestep?

You did not misread it, and there are reasons for the scene as written. We'll get into that in book three.

TRIGGER WARNING. What was going through Steel's mind in the scenario where puppetstep threatens themselves? Especially if Puppetstep calls him out on his ignorance.

I think that was the moment that Steel realized this was bigger than he thought. We will deal with the fallout of that in book three.

In addition to this, what about a mirror image!Puppet?

It did not affect Steel the way it would have affected Ortega.

Did all of the regenes in sidestep's batch have the same genetics? Or did they all have different dna donors?

They were all the same DNA mixture.

What're the Re-Gene tattoos made of?

It feels like skin, but with something in it. Changed somehow. Sidestep doesn't know, but you will, eventually.

The Handyman can crack a pretty lame one-liner at the bridge... what did Owl even see in him??

She has a soft spot for kind, silly people.

How would Argent deal with a thoughtful (but also bit of a teasing jerk) romanced!Step that would willingly soothe any touch starvation she has... in the form of showing up in an embarrassing onesie to embarrass her while they're at it?

She would 100% start crying. Nobody had ever done that for her before. And hug the hell out of them.

[Time for questions!](#)

[Jul 26, 2022](#)

Time for you to ask the questions of the month! Anything about the game, writing process, or story or anything else really.

[Beta testing for Retribution has started!](#)

[Jul 14, 2022](#)

If you want to be a part of it, here is the link to the discord server where you can find the link to the game and all the information about playtesting:

Copy and paste this link: <https://discord.gg/AWDTMKZzx9>

It is preferable if you report your bugs in the server as well, but if you want to, you can also DM me to me directly on Patreon. There is no need to interact on the server at all, but I do require people to join it mainly because it is easier to keep all the information in one place rather than send it everywhere. This way you are guaranteed not to miss updates or new info.

All the information should be in the "Read this first" section of the forum, the links to the game will be in the "Links to the Game" section.

Thank you so much for your support, I can't believe we're finally at this point. It won't be long now until I start to plan/plot book three, then the VIP section will really be busy....

/Malin

[The Los Diablos Guardians](#)

[Jul 13, 2022](#)

An except from Mayor Teresa Alvarez personal notes, archived for autobiographical purposes.

Los Diablos, 12 November, 2018.

Present: Teresa Alvarez, Mayor (MA), Justin Koch, (JK)

Topic: Preliminary discussions about the proposition of forming a new team of heroes, the Los Diablos Guardians.

JK- Are you sure you want to go through with this?

MA- You know that's not the issue here. I wouldn't have put in the work if I didn't intend to put it up for debate.

JK- Fine, but are you sure you want to risk your reputation as a fiscal conservative to push for this?

MA- Is that what they call me?

JK- That's why you got elected. What's so funny?

MA- I'm just thinking about what my father would have said.

JK- You asked me to find a way to spin your candidacy that didn't involve your family.

MA- And you did. And I'm grateful. Just didn't realize that successful entrepreneur and community builder translated to fiscally conservative.

JK- What we say and what they hear might not be altogether the same thing.

MA- And that's why you're worried about this proposition. Because they might hear other things than what I am saying.

JK- Namely "how will this affect the budget?"

MA- Money. Always money.

JK- That's the reason this place is not just a pile of rubble.

MA- Don't give me that crap, if the companies hadn't moved in, there would still be people living here.

JK- I know. I'm on your side, remember? I've been here since before the Big One too.

MA- Sorry. This isn't your fault. You've already done wonders.

JK- I assume you have a plan how to get them aboard? I know Lou is eating out of your hand, but this is too expensive to sweep under the carpet.

MA- I do. Money might be a big motivator, but so is paranoia. It's cheap to rely on the Rangers, but that also means relying on the US government and all that entails. And the LDPD might have an enhanced crimes division, but everyone knows how corrupt that is.

JK- Some in the council might ask themselves why pay twice for the same thing?

MA- The answer is simple. The Guardians will appeal to the kind of heroes that wants to help their community but won't lower themselves to join the LDPD. The bigger the powers, the bigger the ego. Everyone knows the LDPD has had recruitment problems for years.

JK- You're not wrong. I can make something with that as long as you've got the right recruits.

MA- I have some suggestions.

JK_ Already? How long have you been working on this?

MA- Honestly? Since long before I got elected. And Eric Deveraux has been helping me assemble suitable candidates. Don't worry, I didn't tell him why yet.

JK- I think he still can put two and two together. We don't want another assassination on our hands.

MA- I agree, what happened to Lehmann was a tragedy. But that can still be used to our advantage. LDPD's failure at catching the Crack meant the murder of the Mayor. Obviously, they can't be trusted. Combine that with the decimated Rangers, the Marshal shot to years ago, their biggest gun retired.

JK- Okay. Let me see what Deveraux has come up with.

MA- Of course. Please let me know what you think.

JK- Okay. Just give me a minute.

Possible team leader*: Blaze*

Identity*: Vincent Marino (he/him)*

Powers*: Generating heat strong enough to melt steel.*

Pros*: Former leader of Long Beach Heroes. Charismatic and outgoing. Good media contacts. A heavy hitter, can potentially destroy most villains if casualties is not an issue.*

Cons*: Problems with accuracy when it comes to powers. Collateral damage expected. Rumors about his sexual orientation (might not be relevant if Symmons has retired before it comes to a vote).*

MA- So, time for you to blow holes in my plans.

JK- That's not what I do, I just point out the places you need to be bulletproof.

MA- The good news first, please.

JK- I like the idea of re-purposing the Long Beach Heroes. That means you've got a core of people used to working together. Is there a reason you picked the Blaze faction rather than the Locus faction?

MA- Yes. I don't think I could sell a telepath to the Council.

JK- True. Too bad, Porphyry would have been great.

MA- But won't work with Blaze. You know that.

JK- And with Blaze, you get Zephyr.

MA- They're a potent duo. And I think Blaze has real leadership potential, at least when it comes to representing the team.

JK- Going for the Charge approach then, are you?

MA- For better or worse, during the time of Marsha Charge, the Rangers were relevant. The ratings were high, everybody talked about them.

JK- Both good and bad. You're counting on Symmons retiring soon then?

MA- Yes. He's been alluding to it for years, and his health is slipping.

JK- Good riddance. The man is a dinosaur. Is that why you've been pushing so hard for refurbishing the sports center?

MA- Yes. Having it named after him when he retires is a nice push in the right direction. You know how much he loved the Sharks.

JK- You really has planned this for a while.

MA- Honestly, I just wanted to get rid of him. He's an odious relic of the old days. Most of the company decisions have been made by his niece for years.

JK- True. I assume you already know she'll be amendable to this?

MA- At least to the point that she won't let what people do in the bedroom influence her business decisions.

JK- Good enough. You think Blaze is the right man for the job then?

MA- I do. And his powers are useful when taking down bigger threats. If the Guardians are to be relevant, they need that power.

JK- You know he's got a reputation for collateral damage.

MA- And for getting results. We're used to rebuilding.

Possible second in command*: Zephyr*

Identity*: Mackenzie Blake (they/them)*

Powers*: Hyperspeed. Enhanced reactions.*

Pros*: Familiar with Blaze since the LBH days. The tagline "faster than a speeding bullet" is not technically true, but they do move and run fast enough to literally run circles around most opponents. Very money oriented.*

Cons*: Reliant on weapons to do damage. Vulnerable to area attacks. Relatively fragile for a boost.*

JK- I assume Zephyr is there for flexibility?

MA- Line you said, Blaze is not a scalpel, Zephyr is. Speed is rare, and you've seen what they've done in the past. Saving people.

JK- Which is good optics.

MA- What the hell?

JK- Sorry. You know I need to think that way. That's why you pay me.

MA- You're right. Sorry. I'm not as good at code-switching as you are.

JK- As long as you keep it up on the job, I won't complain. And you're right about Blaze and Zephyr. They complete each other.

Possible member: *Rick the Brick*

Identity*: Richard McCulloch (he/him)*

Powers*: Enhanced strength and resilience. Skin armor, which takes on a brick-like consistency when activated.*

Pros*: Popular vigilante. Rated 2 in the Confidential "most family friendly hero" list 2017. Good command of his powers. Fully armored up he's gone toe to toe with military armors and ordinance.*

Cons*: Haven't worked in a team before.*

I assume... Rick the Brick is there as muscle since we can't get Porphyry?

MA- Don't worry. We are going to have him change his name in case he accepts our offer. I'm thinking "Brickwall", unless you want to workshop it?

JK- Brickwall is fine. And no matter how much of a goofball he comes across, I do agree he's got potential. Strength and armor might not be the most glamorous, but very useful.

MA- I feel he might also humanize the team. You know the kids love him.

Possible member*: Bumblebee*

Identity*: Amanda "Mandy" Moore (she/her)*

Powers*: Flight.*

Pros*: Experienced vigilante. Has worked extensively with other hero teams. A team player. Great maneuverability. Can carry others.*

Cons*: Reliant on weapons to do damage. Not very fast.*

JK- Bumblebee is a bit of a surprise.

MA- The team needs a flier, I had my eyes set on Kinetik, but then he went and joined the Rangers.

JK- He hasn't been a member for long, we could make him an offer?

MA- No. I can't have any ex-Rangers in here, not with how we need to sell it.

JK- True... but Bumblebee isn't the most powerful, is she?

MA- She could be with the access to the right equipment. Get her some proper firearms instead of her dinky little stingers.

JK- That is true... by the way, is there a reason you've only gone for boosts?

MA- Yes. Representation. The thing that separates us from the rest of the US is how we have accepted boosted individuals as equals in our society. It is easier to write off Mods as a product by the military or deep company pockets.

JK- The pockets we are trying to raid.

MA- For a good cause.

JK- Is there a particular reason the core team is... how to put it... rather white?

MA- I asked Deveraux the same thing. According to him, and I quote "better chance the Council will approve faces that looks like them." In other words, I'm apparently just enough what they can stomach and I shouldn't push my luck.

JK- Ouch.

MA- That's why I hired him. He knows how to work with these people. I can't say I'm happy by the fact that he's probably right, but once the team is established, it will be easier to add candidates without the same scrutiny.

JK- True. Like your dad used to say, get your foot in the door and worry about the rest later. Have you checked whether these people are interested?

MA- In general terms, yes. They don't know who is sponsoring the project, only that someone with deep pockets is putting a team together for the good of the city.

JK- And the other... possible suggestions here?

MA- Not contacted. And won't be mentioned to the Council until the team has proven it's worth.

JK- I would recommend not bringing them up to anybody else but me. This could ruin any chance you have of getting this off the ground.

MA- I know how this might come across, I'm not stupid. But please, let me know what you think of them.

Optional candidate*: Logarithm*

Identity*: Syed Akmal (he/him)*

Powers*: A self-proclaimed genius. General boosted physical characteristics, strength, agility, speed and endurance.*

Pros*: Military training. A tactical expert. A great number of contacts in both the villain, vigilante and hero community.*

Cons*: Currently sentenced to 20 years in jail for industrial espionage.*

JK- Three years ago I would have agreed, but the man is in jail for stealing from the very people on the Council.

MA- Not ideal, I agree. Deveraux said the same thing.

JK- This was your idea, not his?

MA- I just think that one mistake shouldn't wipe away a decade of good deeds.

JK- What are you up to?

MA- Nothing. I just feel he would be an asset to the team, none of the others are exactly known for their planning abilities.

JK- Apparently neither is he since he's currently in jail. If you want my opinion, remove him from the optionals, it will leak sooner or later, and then you'd be in real trouble.

MA- Fine. But we do need someone with similar talents sooner or later if we want the team to be successful.

JK- Then let's get someone without a jail sentence. Speaking of which...

Optional candidate: Five Pennies

Identity*: Gerard Hines (he/him)*

Powers*: Weird. Telekinesis and various other matter control powers, usable through the five copper pennies floating around his head that he took the name from. Once they attached to a person they would give him a limited control over the victim. In the past he has given burns through the pennies (his calling card, the more burns (up to five), the greater the crime). he has also caused convulsions, controlled bodies and even boiled the blood of those affected.*

Pros*: Powerful and experienced.*

Cons*: Unbalanced. Aggressive. Currently sentenced to 50 years in jail for murder.*

MA- I know what you're going to say.

JK- That you're nuts? Because I can't see any reason why this murderer should even be considered. Why not invite Psychopathor directly and be done with it?

MA- Because we might need him one day.

JK- Why? What's so special about him? He was never more than a back-alley vigilante. Sure, he took down some bigshots, but you saw what he did. Half the city did.

MA- Sometimes beggars can't be choosers.

JK- What aren't you telling me?

MA- You need to trust me on this, Justin.

JK- I thought *you* trusted *me*.

MA- I do. But some things are best kept secret. And it's probably nothing. You've got a point. I think it's better to keep the optionals off the book for now.

JK- I won't argue that. But please, Teresa, don't do anything stupid. We've worked too hard to get to this point.

MA- I won't. You saw the proposed team. Perfectly on the level. I shouldn't have bothered you with things that might never come to pass.

JK- Is this about Resolution 32 again? I thought that wasn't on the table.

MA- It's not. But it might be in the future. The threat hasn't gone away just because the discussion has been tabled.

JK- Just because he's dead doesn't mean you have to carry on your father's legacy.

MA- Wasn't that why I was elected? Not that half the old bastards would admit it?

JK- I thought that was because of my work, but you've got a point. I wish you didn't though.

MA- So do I. Now, let's work on pushing this through the council.

JK- Fine. I think we can do that.

[July questions are answered](#)

[Jul 9, 2022](#)

In Ortega's office, their conspiracy board seems a bit... incomplete. Did Ortega run by their office to clean it up before fetching Sidestep in the kitchen? Is Sidestep's (villain or civilian) picture on it usually?

Yes, in certain paths, they certainly did that. If Ortega is suspicious enough, there might indeed have been a familiar picture.

How was Dynamate recruited into the Rangers?

After helping put down a prison break and the resulting hostage situation. There were enough people putting in a good word that he was released under Ranger supervision.

Are we ever gonna meet, the Crack? Or have we already? 🙄

Perhaps. I am still pondering.

Entirely serious question, Sidestep casually mentions Argent's multi-spectrum vision... can Angie see shrimp colours? (Or any colours not visible to the human eye?)

Yes, she's more like insects, she can see more than usual, especially in the ultraviolet spectrum.

Will Ortega get a age discussion with Sidestep like Danny did? I can only imagine it'll probably be worse since we tease Ortega about their age all the time are they going to get payback on Step? Or will it be more like "damn I really am old"

It will probably come up early in book three, yeah. Not sure how it's gonna turn out, it's hard to know until I write them. Ortega is slippery like that.

Will Mortum and Argent in poly route have bonding moment over their experience with Sidestep using their telepathy to screw them over? (Romancing Mortum through puppet and taking over Argent body)

It is very likely. They have more shared experiences than they might expect.

OKAY... would it ever be possible to see the Sidestep Gun again in-game... and possibly use it for newfound villainy purposes...

Yes. It will appear in book three.

Did HG's distrust for The Void carry over to Arsenaux after The Void's death, or is Arsenaux irrelevant to them?

Arsenaux is also a risk. Not as big, but HG doesn't want them anywhere near Los Diablos. People of faith, no matter the source, are dangerous and hard to manipulate.

And could Arsenaux and Lord Ember be working together / at least scratch each other's back when needed or is that not at all on the table?

You'll have to find out in the story. It's a little like putting two betta fish in the same aquarium.

Have we encountered any of Norma Lee's other aliases (or real name) in game?

No.

Did Daniel take the boost drug knowingly and willingly?

That's debatable.

How does Pyroclast's powers work during strong winds? You know, storms and winds are frequent in San Francisco. And rain? Can particles move when wet?

In the past, Ashfall used to have issues with wind, but over the years he managed to keep himself more together. However, he can't spread himself too thinly then, and takes more of a solid, ashy shape. He spent a lot of time with Sentinel practicing that. Rain is more interesting. In the past, rain tended to ground him, make his constituent particles too heavy to move. But, at this point he has overcome that drawback. There are two ways he can deal with it. The first one is to be able to move while wet. That turns him into a muddy, cement-like liquid. A bit like a small lahar, or mud-man. Can only glide along the ground then though, no floating. The latest development is for him to simply increase his internal temperature enough that the water turns to steam. This makes his Pyroclast form even more dangerous.

Does owl know sidestep is back? If so who told her and how did she react?

Yes, she does. Ortega told her. As for her reaction... I think it is safe to say she was mostly worried that Ortega would get messed up again.

What were the circumstances of pyroclast's boost level up to alpha?

While I haven't settled on a specific incident where it was first used in active combat, this happened because of Pyroclast's hard work. It was intentional, focused, and he took more than a few personal risks to push himself to his limits.

Does Pyroclast's dust-brain feel different than his brain when his powers are off? And did he find out about Sidestep's powers quicker than the others because of them still working on him

while his own were active?

Pyroclast's brain does feel different in his transformed state. It's a lot harder to read and communicate with, the thoughts are faster and more scattered. The different is a bit like reading a book by strobing disco lights instead of in normal daylight. And yes, Ashfall was indeed the first to suspect what was really going on with Sidestep's powers.

Could Sentinel team up with Pyroclast to increase the range/effectiveness of his powers or for a tasty little combo?

Yes, but at the time Pyroclast ran with the Rangers, he wasn't as powerful. Then it was mostly helpful to speed up movement. What they could do together now would be nasty, but they haven't worked together in years.

Is Pyroclast close to his family?

Ashfall is friendly with his family, no particular traumas there.

What did Pyroclast's family think of him getting boosted and becoming a vigilante/hero?

I think they probably thought it was a bad decision to get boosted, but since it worked out, they're relieved.

How did Ashfall's vigilante debut go?

His vigilante debut was uneventful but successful, he did a lot of low-key night time work since he didn't want to be caught on camera at the start.

Does Ashfall wear a mask or helmet when he's working, or is he bare-faced like Ortega, Daniel, and Argent?

He doesn't wear a mask or a helmet, and his identity is pretty much an open secret, much like Ortega's.

What would Pyroclast say is the toughest fight he's been in?

The toughest fight would have been the assault on the Void compound (he'd rather not remember that).

Pyroclast's met Argent, right? What's their relationship like?

I think he and Argent are a bit like two alpha cats circling each other. No fight yet, but that's only because they each have their own territory.

May we have a colour scheme for the dusty man?

Greyish black undersuit, very thin and smooth, not armored like a skinsuit. Big boots, and a long, armored coat in dark gray with red inner lining. (Red is the team color for the San Francisco Rangers)

I loved that Ashfall piece from last week. I hadn't thought about the drawbacks to his powers. Poor guy. Since he spent a portion of his vigilante career running around naked did he have a costume? If he did what was it like? Have the Rangers and Sidestep seen him naked?

For the costume, see the question below. But yes, the Rangers and Sidestep has seen him naked, at least in passing.

Does Ashfall's streaking days effect his Pyroclast's hero career?

Nope, that is ignored and forgotten!

Ashfall acted like he assumed Ortega disliked him? Did they?

Nope.

Okay this one is probably unanswerable by my sci-fi textile brain is thrumming so I'll ask: HOW DOES PYROCLAST'S SUIT WORK WITH HIS ABILITIES?

Back when he was Ashfall, that was a big problem. He would leave his clothes behind when he transformed, which meant that once he did so, he would be reluctant to turn back until he could do it in private. One of the reasons he was a vigilante and never went corporate. However, as he gained more experience and contacts (and with unofficial Rangers funding), he had a special suit made. It is basically made of his own "ash", spun into carbon-silicate fibers and made into a thin suit. The color is a plain grayish-black. While it's protecting well against heat, it has none of the normal skinsuit perks, and Pyroclast wears heavy boots and a long, armored coat in Ranger colors over it. This, and other items he's carrying or wearing, drops to the ground like normal when he transforms. But at least now he doesn't have to be naked while he turns back.

When Pyroclast is in his dust-state, are the particles still considered organic, or could Sidestep's nanovores..?

The particles are a mixture of carbon and silicon. The nanovores wouldn't be interested other than as a last resort. Not solid enough for them to get a good grip. And these days, the internal heat would fry them.

What kind of information on regenes is available to a high security clearance? How are regenes referred to in that context (eg tools/weapons/beings etc)?

Basically they are referred to advanced weapon systems, much like the rare military artificial intelligence or robots. They are classified in the same way, with semi-independent robot drones at the bottom, and military analyst AI's at the top. The Re-Genes are in the middle.

Did mortum have prior experience with nanovores, given their ease for them to reprogram the little monsters?

Yes.

In the Heartbreak sequence, they mention Heartbreak's id getting trapped... Could Sidestep's HB scar be a remnant of HB's id? If yes, does Sidestep leave behind something similar (remnants of their id as telepathic scars) when they possess someone for a longer time or through telepathic struggle? (the puppet, Argent...)

It is possible. What is a mental scar anyway? PTSD? A bad memory? Permanent damage? Something more? It won't be the same answer for every Sidestep, and all the scars are different.

As for Sidestep leaving something behind... well, what is the nature of memories? Everything you experience leave a mark in your mind, whether fleeting or permanent. A memory. A change. By possessing someone, you change their mind temporarily, and there are traces left behind. Footsteps perhaps. But are they footsteps on the beach, to be washed away the next time a wave moves in? Or in soft sand, lasting longer, but erased by wind and time? Or in cement, preserved forever in a distorted form as they harden? It will vary. In general, Sidestep is good at sweeping away the footsteps as they leave, they want no trace left behind. But there are exceptions to that, mostly in cases where there was no time, or, in Sidestep's view, no need.

What do you draw inspiration from on the topic of telepathy? (Any piece fiction or non fiction to recommend? Any branch/concept of psychoanalysis or neuroscience that tickles you especially?)

Oh. I don't think there is one thing in particular, it's been an interest of mine for years, and I've picked up tiny things from everywhere. It has a lot to do with my interest in consciousness in general, and what it actually is. Near death experiences, memories, quantum physics, psychic phenomena, reincarnation and the like. It is a massive subject, and looking through my notes, I think I might need to do a post solely about this eventually.

How often does Ortega's generator give out?

These days? Never. But at times it needs to be shut down for maintenance.

Just because it's been a while since anyone's asked and sometimes things change... What's Argent's ethnicity? 😊

Not telling yet.

May I use my ill-gotten but incredibly-large gains to take Argent out on a nice date to a rented-out place where she can dress up and have fun and not have to worry about people looking at her [like a sideshow]?

Play your cards right, and you certainly can.

Could Sidestep possess a Regene?

Yes, that should not be an issue.

What do the rangers think of the movie portrayal of sidestep?

Ortega is amused, and thinks it's no big thing. Herald is a bit annoyed at most of them, they are not even close to the truth. Argent thinks that Sidestep tends to be the director's self-insert most of the time, and Chen tries to avoid watching them.

How big is LD these days, in terms of area or just population? Have any notable parts of old Los Angeles (Hollywood, Beverly Hills etc) taken on new uses or become their own smaller towns or suburbs, or vanished entirely off the map?

The population of Los Diablos is notoriously hard to count. There is no central registry of citizens, and people come and go as they please. It has been estimated to hold about a million people, which is a third of what it had in 1982 when the Big One struck.

In general, the notable parts still remain. While the city was devastated, massive destruction did not follow neighborhood borders. Everything close to the ocean looks very little like the old days, and while there still is a Long Beach, anybody who knew Los Angeles would see it as a sliver of it's former glory. Santa Monica got hit hard, and the Pacific Palisades is mostly buried by lahars. The area around Venice Beach and the Marina has been hollowed out into a deep bay, and it is across this ravaged landscape that the bridge at the start of Retribution has been built, to reconnect the former 405. Beverly Hills, West Hollywood, and all the other areas climbing the hills suffered greatly from mudslides once the ash had settled and the rains began, but by that time, most people had left. The fires gutted many buildings as well.

I would say that rather than having parts wiped out entirely, Los Diablos has grown less dense than Los Angeles was. Newly built areas are mixed with refurbished old ones, and inhabited ruins. The rivers now run free, and are avoided, as they still occasionally flood.

Did sidestep ever spar with steel back in the day? If so, how did they match up? (fighter/tactician wise)

Yes, they did. I think Steel was more eager for that than Sidestep, who always got the feeling that there was something else going on there than just sparring. Fighter or Tactician wouldn't have changed much, but daring or cautious would have. The cautious Sidesteps let Steel win, it just felt safer that way.

I think it was mentioned that back in the days Chen and Step used to play chess together. Who was winning? Was there a score? Or it is free for headcanons/interpretations?

At least the tactician Sidesteps did, they were the ones with the patience for it. Whoever used to win is up to headcanons.

What exactly did Anathema get tested on by the "research team"? Did the scientists collect samples? Were the results of those tests only used for their stated purpose, or were they kept /

sold / redirected elsewhere?

Mostly to test control/effect of the acid in order to develop countermeasures, and also helping testing out weird and dangerous shit because Themmy was invulnerable. Anathema did suspect that they were testing the limits of their invulnerability rather than whatever excuse they had, but they let that slide.

Did Mortum build the Nanosurge's emitters? What were the emitters' purpose, exactly? Where are they now?

Spoilers.

Back in the day, was sidestep ever taken prisoner and ortega had to save their bacon for once?

Oh yes.

What was the Green Sky's goal in capturing Ortega? Ransom? To send a message? Or was there something else going on?

Well, Ortega was worthy of making the attempt to become superhuman. In short, they wanted to try boosting Ortega.

will we hear more about these other heroes/vigilantes from the ashfall post? had they worked with the rangers before?

Maybe. Who knows who I have use for later? I think most of them were at least familiar with the Rangers.

Did Ashfall beat Ortega in their fight by choking them out in ash form?

Good guess. Ortega saw that as cheating.

What did the rat king think of that first night being with step? The night with the HB nightmare?

Cautious. Hidden. Don't move. Don't breathe. Also: Worry.

So... Pyroclast is Armenian then?

He is of Armenian heritage, yes. But he was born in the US.

Now that I know he's a short king, may I get an eye and hair colour for character designing purposes?

Hazel eyes and brown hair.

And are my in-laws safe in Seattle? How're modded/tech crime rates doing up there?

Seattle is probably the safest city in the Free Western Territories. It's the seat of many of the big companies/tech firms, and close enough to Canada to almost be a part of it. People who make trouble are invited to leave fast.

Which Rangers team would you say currently ranks the highest as far as powers and actual synchronicity goes? I mean other than Dave, the obvious number one 😊

Probably the Seattle one.

Completely self-indulgent but... if Sidestep is helping the Rangers and manages to turn one of them to their cause, will we have the opportunity to still "work with the Rangers" and gather-information / sabotage some Rangers missions from the inside, with the help of our new found ally?

You will have to see!

Has Arsenaux ever collaborated with the Farm?

No.

What were Daniel's fly-learning years (months?) like? Did it involve a lot of falling and trying again, or was it pretty smooth sailing? Did it differ from Sentinel's experience? And what gives him the most difficulty today?

Danny had a ridiculously easy time compared to Sentinel. No crashes. Not many bruises. The biggest issue was control, speed and not hover every time he gets nervous. He's still working on the last one...

Just curious: if Sidestep, at their Alpha-but-nearly-higher-level of telepathy were to pull a silly little HB 2.0... how bad a situation are we looking at here? Would we be able to compound that with the nanovores in our possession? Would the government consider the Nanosurge solution of taking out the west? Would the Rat King even let us get that far or would they attempt to stop us first? Will I have to fight the girls, too?!

I will just leave this here, without an answer, but as food for thoughts and nightmares for everybody else.

Have we already met whoever has gotten their hands on the Heartbreak incident recording in-game? What format is it—just video, or are you planning to do an array of recordings (like radio, voicemails, etc?)

It is a mixture of media, and that is all I am going to say.

How's the tap/ground water sitch in LD? Are there problems with contamination? Old/failing infrastructure?

The water is not good. Most households have a water filter. While it is not subject to as much drought as today, it is very reliant on snowfall and the rivers. The biggest problem is the ash. Several sediment dams have been built to help keep the water clean, but it's still an issue. While there is a waterplant that services central Los Diablos, many of the outlying areas have bad water. Some of them have pooled their resources and manages their own communal water purification plants, which has made their quality of life much better. A desalination plant has been under construction for years, but it has proven to be much more complicated than planned. It keeps breaking down.

There are also problems with leaking pipes, so much water gets lost, and occasionally sewer water during floods and heavy rains. Water is currently the biggest issue for continuing growth.

Sooo... why is Vernon's photo actually on Ortega's conspiracy board? ""To remind me not to be an idiot again."" sounds a bit like an excuse... does Ortega think Vernon is connected to HG still, or something else?

Look. Don't you think you should ask Ortega that? I'm sure they'd make a joke and distract.

is currency different in the FEZ than regular USD? different exchange rate like versus CAD, or maybe a new currency altogether?

There are actually several currencies common in Los Diablos. For cash, US Dollars and Mexican Pesos are widely accepted. Credit cards can be issued in both. Canadian dollars are also common up north, in both Seattle and Portland. The exchange rate is different than in the regular US, as it is not controlled as much by the federal Reserve.

There is also Dark Script, or DS for short. A blockchain-based counter-currency, it's heavily encrypted and not dependent on outside authorities. It's what most criminals prefer when the sums start to grow beyond what might comfortably fit in a bag. The exchange rate is not the best, but sometimes it is worth it to keep your secrets. It is also commonly used by companies wishing to keep transactions off the record.

There are discussions to issue a new currency common to the free western territories. It is planned within the next few years.

You've told us HG's opinion of the Void (a massive threat and needed to be removed at any cost), but what was the Void's opinion of HG?

Irrelevant.

Was HG involved in the Crack's killing of the last mayor? How long ago was that?

The murder happened in 2017, and as far as anybody knows, HG was not involved.

Please excuse my suspicious little mind, but might part of the reason the guardians were formed by the current mayor be to give the LD political powers that be their own pet heroes while also

removing their dealings from any ranger jurisdiction?

That is certainly how it was sold to the city council.

What kind of corporate gigs did Herald hold/companies did he work for before joining the rangers? What were his favourite/least favourite of them?

There were two corporate gigs. The first one was for a high-end courier company, and he was allowed to keep using his Kestrel vigilante name because it fit the theme. He wasn't one of the regular couriers, but rather handled the high-end cases with a great risk of being intercepted or attacked. He actually liked this job, it made him feel useful, and since it meant he was out in the city a lot of the time he felt he had the opportunity to do some good on occasion. He made some friends as well, but the company went bankrupt in the end. After that, he was picked up by a car company to be the face of their flagship sports car; Kinetik. While the pay was better, he quickly grew dissatisfied with his position. He felt like there wasn't really anything for him to do other than being representative. While he was very good at that, he took every chance he got to do actual hero work, and if the offer from the Rangers hadn't come, it is likely he would have quit in time.

What kind of testing does a regene go through after decanting for their boost to be discovered and analyse how it works?

It starts with a standardized regimen to figure out any sort of immunities/resistance to various types of damage. This also serves to see if there are other reflexive reactions to pain, or to being trapped or in danger. In short, the goal of the testing is to goad/provoke instinctual reactions, and danger and pain are great motivators. A part of this is to put the untrained Re-Gene in fights with others, to get some adrenaline going. This is all done with great caution, since boosted powers can be dangerous and unpredictable.

If this gives no results, the next step is a series of psychic tests, and if these also are fruitless, the Re-Gene is flagged as potentially useless. They are kept around for a month or so, often used as collateral in various tests/fights, and if there is still nothing after that, they are recycled.

What level boost would step have been classified as before the nanosurge?

A low level Gamma boost. Possibly even Delta.

Anathema mentions the (?rangers?) research team paying boosts to research their powers, how often does that happen? Are there particular types of boosts that they're interested in? Are there samples such as dna taken? Are research results available to other government research departments/contractors (anonymised or otherwise)?

It happens now and then with the weirder boosts. Samples are taken, and at times, if permission is given, they are used for government research programs. It is in everybody's best interest to know as much as possible about boosted biology, and this program has given rise to many scientific advancements.

Are the rangers themselves expected to submit to testing as part of their contracts?

It is not mandatory, but many take the opportunity to explore their powers further.

The higher ups keep a lot of information away from the Rangers. Do they have any suspicions about what the ranger team might be up to on their respective missions they try to keep hidden (such as Ortega's HG investigations)? Would they intervene if they did?

I am sure some people might be suspicious, but in general, as long as people do their job, it's not an issue. Being a Ranger comes with a certain amount of freedom.

Speaking of Los Diablos, the higher ups, etc—are fights ever orchestrated? Are there behind the scenes dealings to give the rangers people to go up against for image management? Do the people involved ever play both sides?

Sounds like politics to me.

And could we meet any of the individuals in charge at some point?

Most likely, at least in certain paths.

Did the Rangers as an organisation ever become aware of step's actual boost?

Ortega did their best to keep it out of the official records.

After they hit 40, will we be able to call Ortega "Mr" or "Mrs Charge" to show respect to our elders?

Ahahaha only once, and you'd better run fast!

Does reality TV of any kind exist in LD? Has any of the characters participated in it?

I think reality TV is a bit more complicated with the privacy laws regarding unsolicited video/photography. It exists, but it's less reality and more like wrestling. Semi-scripted. None of the main characters have taken part in it.

did danny ever have to deal with mysteriously chapped lips while "dating" argent or did they not play that way for the press?

They did, occasionally, and Danny certainly would have noticed something wasn't cool. So he'd avoid pressing the issue.

Just how many illegal modifications does Bo's car have?

It's Los Diablos, most of them are not technically banned ;).

I just need to know. Is Sidestep mad about Mortum just reheating pizza in the microwave (which is fine for me) or did Mortum buy frozen pizza and MAKE IT IN THE MICROWAVE ???(in which case they are a monster)

Both. Those little portion pizzas in the microwave is a staple snack for Mortum.

Can I babysit Spoon? (With adult supervision if necessary. 🙄)

Probably. A lot of people have babysat Spoon, Chen is a busy man and he doesn't like leaving Spoon alone for too long.

On a worst-to-least-bad scale, how are the ROs going to take learning about Step's bodysnatching habits? (revealed Argent and Mortum included, since it feels like accepting the One Incident they each know of maybe be one thing but the dozens or hundreds of others might be another?)

I am honestly not sure. I need to write those confessions/confrontations before I know for sure. When I write dialogue and arguments I don't really go in knowing the end result, or where I want it to go. I go in with knowing where they both start, and where they will end up depends on how the talk progresses. It's the same with writing in general, I like to discover things as I go along. Sometimes people I think will feel very strongly about one thing, turns out to see it another way due to other past experiences. That's what I love about writing, exploring people and the world. It's not planned beforehand.

Are there hidden members of the Cult of the Green Sky working at the Special Directive?

No.

Did Mortum keep any of the nanovores that Sidestep stole from the Rangers?

I think both you and I know that is very likely.

What are Dave's powers?

Hmmm. It's a bit complicated to describe. Dave calls himself an "Echo". He can mimic various lifeforms around him. He doesn't actually change his physical shape much (if you know him well, you can see hints of what he's echoing), but he can use their "special abilities". If he's echoing a bird, he can fly. A coyote might give him sense of smell and running endurance, ants and insects strength and armor, and so on. There's a limit to the distance he can echo, and how long he can keep the powers after the source disappears.

A side effect of this is that he is aware of the general lifeforms in his surroundings. This is one of the reasons why he's a loner and sticks to the desert, he can get very overwhelmed in more densely populated areas. He's content hanging out with Jackrabbit and their dog, an Afghan hound called Leo.

Since post-HB!Step telepathically projects bad vibes, what was Rat King's first impression of them?

Wary, but also curious since they hadn't been able to communicate that deeply with someone before. Also, Sidestep's bad vibes are mostly towards people, not as much animals.

Please, could you share more about Jackrabbit (gender, pronounce, how are they competing with modded and boosted villains, anything you'd like to share really).

Jackrabbit is an unmodded/unboosted woman in her forties. She competes with gear and planning, and by being smart enough not to get into fights where she doesn't have the odds on her side. She's an excellent mechanic, driver and pilot and cook. I see her as a cross between Dolly Parton and Tank Girl, make of that what you wish.

How common are unmodded and nonboosted heroes/vigilantes/villains? So far we know about Jackrabbit, Dr Mortum and Handyman.

It's not that uncommon when it comes to lower stakes vigilantes and villains. You can be as powerful with gear as with boosts, at least to a point.

What is Rat King's Ljungstrand classification?

They would be: 1-5-6. Though one might argue that there should be a 2 in there, at least for receiving. Things gets complicated for non-human boosts.

We know Locus's telepathy is more word-based, while Sidestep's is more visual. How does it feel to read Locus's mind for Sidestep? What does her mindscape feel / look like, and does her type of telepathy bleed into Sidestep's impression of her mind?

You will have to wait to find out

How does Ortega fantasize their "first" meeting with Hollow Ground and the way they could avenge Hood?

Probably various version of gangster movie showdowns, it varies a lot. Ortega likes to daydream.

Is there anyone (villain or otherwise) in LD that Steel would get rid of (kill) if given the opportunity? What is Steel's stance on preemptive justice?

Oh yes. But I'm not going to name names (though the Catastrofiend would be on that list). Steel can see the advantage of preemptive justice, but does not indulge very often.

Does the rat king focus their five lil brains on one thing at a time or are they able to track and detect separate targets/threats?

They can do both!

What kind of pyrokinetic is lord francis ember?

Classic one. He can generate and project fire. Think flamethrower.

Who's the hottest, Ember or Blaze?

Blaze is the hottest in both ways.

How did the Catastrofiend get it's name? Did it pick it or was it given by the media?

It is unclear, but it wasn't the media. It was its callsign from the early days, when it was a hired killer, before it had changed quite so... drastically.

When did the Farm try to wipe Step? Shortly after surgery and raiding Step's mind so when Step woke up they could start over right away or did Step do something that made them say "yep, we're done. Time to start over"? And how did they react when they realized Step was still Step?

This is mostly spoilers, but I will say that the first attempt was done shortly after surgery and oh boy, it did not go as expected.

So we know they were present for it, but what were Ashfall and Sentinel's opinions about Sidestep stopping the Nanosurge? Did they see it on any footage or in person while the swarm was being idly held?

Both of them were thoroughly impressed. Neither of them would have predicted Sidestep to be able to do that, though Sentinel later claimed not to be surprised. It might even be true. Sentinel saw it on footage, they were busy adjusting wind patterns. Ashfall saw it in person.

And as a member who frequently interacts with Sidestep's telepathy during use of his own powers, how did Ashfall feel about the after-effects on Sidestep's telepathy? Did Side's powers feel any differently to him? Did he pick up any residual alien/crawling sensations? Anything change in their telepathic interactions once Step healed?

Nothing that he noticed, except that Sidestep understood him a lot more clearly, and at greater range.

Did any of the Rangers and their associates feel any residual effects of the Nanosurge on Sidestep's telepathic interactions with them? Especially while their shields were fried and mind still mending?

Not exactly. The biggest effect was that Sidestep needed to withdraw from people for a while, and was a lot more wary about crowds. In the immediate aftermath, both Sidestep and Ortega spent some time at Elena's ranch. At the time she did not yet live there full time, so after giving the caretaker some time off, they had the place to themselves. Sidestep was too raw and open to be around people.

Is there a specific mind feel from the aftermath of the Nanosurge event or is that more for us to head canon via our Sidesteps?

Feel free to headcanon!

The Boys featured a telepath trapping people into a loop of their own personal nightmares, so... Here goes. If Sidestep did something like that, what nightmare would the main characters be trapped in?

Argent would be in the water, getting torn apart. Herald would be on fire, trying desperately to put it out. Chen would be trapped under a building, slowly suffocating. Ortega would... good luck getting into that brain ;)

Since Ortega is immune, Sidestep's info is a bit flip-floppy about what Ortega knows and does not know about telepathy. What does Ortega think an A or B level telepath can do? Have they furthered their knowledge about telepathy after HB? Are they aware that abilities like Sidestep has even exist, or would they be surprised by some of them, or their scale / scope? What's their grasp on Sidestep's abilities, and does that change drastically depending on the path? And finally, has Ortega looked into weaponising their static brain instead of just using it as passive defense?

Oh boy, this is slightly spoilery since Ortega's not entirely talkative about these things. It is fair to assume that at this point, Ortega has researched this as much as they are able. They might be surprised by some of the more esoteric things Sidestep can do, but at this point Ortega has seen a lot of weird shit.

Speaking of, is Ortega's static "slippery" for Sidestep, or could they make use of it even if they can't breach it? For example, against an enemy telepath, could Sidestep redirect Ortega's static to blanket themselves and other minds around them against the external threat?

Ortega's static is not something that's easily manipulated. It is possible that it might be used in desperate hail-Mary situations, but that's not come up yet. Dampeners are a lot easier to handle...

What was the purpose of Ortega's mods originally?

It was a military project, but if Ortega knows more, they ain't telling.

Ashfall and Sidestep debuted the same year; did they ever have any run-ins with each other before formally being introduced? Did they meet through the Rangers?

It's up to headcanon, I have no opinion on either.

Did Danny and Argent ever have any run ins before joining the

No.

What happened during horse riding that made Ortega laugh at Ashfall? Was step there for this incident too?

Yes, the Rangers were there, as were Sidestep. It was during a visit to Elena's Ranch, everybody was having a riding/camping/team bonding experience and a gust of wind spooked Ashfall's horse with painful results.

under what circumstances did anathema join the rangers? was there a specific event that prompted it? Were they invited by someone, or did they seek someone out to join?

Anathema was brought into the Rangers by Marshal Hood, but neither of them spoke about how they met, or the circumstances. Unusually enough, Anathema did not have a career as a vigilante before joining the Rangers, but their powers were impressive enough to allow them in anyway.

have there been times chen has worked outside the law in the past for the sake of those close to him while part of the rangers? if so, why? what was it about those circumstances that pushed him that far?

I would say no, but ONLY because being in the Rangers (especially as Marshal) allows him a lot of leeway to bend the law rather than outright break it.

asides from going to the bar and spending time with spoon, what else does chen do to unwind?

He likes going out and spend time at cafes and bars, talking to people not involved in the hero business.

do the guardians have a set uniform/colour scheme they adhere to?

No. They each have their own individual uniform, but they all have the Guardian symbol in it somewhere, a bit like a patch.

Did sunstream have a particular type of mission she liked doing best? (like helping regular people out or taking down the real notorious villains)

She was actually surprisingly good at straight up battle against the bad guys. She liked taking down the worst of the worst.

How did Ortega's parents meet and fall in love?

They met when Enrique was stationed at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Elena lived in Ciudad Juárez at the time, and often crossed the border to go to the cool clubs. They met at a party with mutual friends, and got along well enough for dating to be a thing

From one of the previous Q&A, Sentinel apparently didn't think a Chargestep romance would last. Why is that? In a similar vein, in what way(s) did Ashfall think Ortega would hurt Sidestep? Did his beliefs make the fight that he had with Ortega after Heartbreak more volatile?

Sentinel was of the opinion that Ortega was a heartbreaker, who wouldn't really stick with anybody in the long run. And an inter-team romance (as it was), was a bad idea. Ashfall agreed. I don't think that had much to do with the fight post-Heartbreak, but it sure didn't help.

If the Sullivan family (especially Daniel) discovered that a Re-Gene was made from their DNA, would they consider adopting them? (To help control the situation before the media finds out if nothing else?) Or would they be too freaked out by their existence to even consider them as family? What would Daniel think of having a boosted little sibling enslaved by the Farm, possibly rejected by the rest of his family?

I think the Sullivan family would be upset and angry at the invasion of privacy. I don't think they would consider Re-Genes to be related to them, rather it would be upsetting that their genetic material was stolen without their permission. Daniel might see things differently, he'd definitely see them as family.

Building on that question, what would Argent and Daniel be like as older siblings?

Oh we are all lucky Argent is a younger sister. But if she was an older one, she'd probably be the type to say never to borrow her clothes (but will pretend not to notice), and who would scare away friends/boyfriends/girlfriends who she got bad vibes from. Daniel would probably be a little too nice and easy to manipulate, taking the blame for things that weren't his fault.

Why are Re-Genes age accelerated to 14 when they're born? Does it have anything to do with federal laws surrounding crimes against kids 13 and under?

It is more of a matter that the greatest success of the boosting process comes if it is applied during puberty. An approximate physical age of 13-15 at decanting (it varies, and is hard to measure) is suitable both for a good boost result, and to still keep mental plasticity for chipping, training and indoctrination. An average physical age of 14 at decanting, and an average of two years of out of tank training means that they are a good age to start being used in the field. The Farm cares nothing for federal law, and they don't consider Re-Genes to be children. Rather they see them as weapon systems.

Is Mitchell happy with the life he has now?

It's alright. He's got no big complaints.

Can we have a Mitchell file on Mitchell himself?

Hahaha. No.

How would Ashfall and Sentinel react to a reunited, committed Chargestep romance that's actually healthy, happy, and stable? Did they have any bets on if either Ortega or Step could actually keep a relationship like this, given their individual issues?

Surprised but happy! Ashfall would still be deeply suspicious, but it would wear off in time. Sentinel is more of a romantic like that. I don't think either of them would have made that bet, since both of them would have betted it wouldn't last.

Would the Rangers be interested in a power swap scenario with Sidestep's telepathy? Or even experience what Step's telepathy is like for a day?

A hard no for everyone except Ortega, and possibly, possibly Daniel.

Are there any treatments for psychic ailments, both for psychics and any psychic afflicted victims?

Yes, there are. In fact there used to be a therapist specialized in those things, but he closed up shop a few years back.

How would people react if Charge got married? What about Tia Elena? Did she ever think the day would come?

Oh no, Los Diablos most sought after bachelor/bachelorette finally taken off the market! The media would be on that one for weeks. I think everybody on the team/their friends would be very happy for Charge. Also, a few has most likely lost some bets on that never happening...

What kinds of jealous are the ROs in general?

I personally have trouble understanding jealousy, let alone write it, so I probably won't touch too hard on that. Just like religion, it's something I have a hard time relating to personally, so it feels fairer not to make it a major point of the story.

Would the ROs consider projecting/using their own thoughts to (playfully) mess with Step? I remember you saying that Daniel would at least use it from time to time for fun, seeing it as another weird, nice couple thing.

Danny 100% once he realizes how much Step picks up. Argent might, but a lot more judiciously applied. Chen probably not. That is for private time. Ortega wishes...

In addition to that, would they consider doing something in a similar vein in sex? I know Steel was thinking some things that made Step blush... I kind of want to go down that line of exploration.

There, I think the order would be Chen, Daniel, Argent and Ortega misses out as usual. It might very well be explored in game.

How would the ROs deal with a sentimental, affectionate, romantic Drunk!Step that sincerely confesses some heartfelt feelings about them and their relationship?

Herald would think it's sweet, Argent would make fun but turn into a blushing, protesting mess, and Chen would take it with dignity and make sure they drink some water. Ortega would probably be just as drunk.

If Ortega grows a beard, what do the Rangers (Ortega included) think of it?

I think they all agree it makes him look a lot more mature than he is.

If a Regene is created and has a disability what happens to them? What if its something minor like needing glasses or food allergies? What about something that develops later like mental illness or diabetes? What would happen to them?

If it is easily dealt with, it will be. Glasses, allergies and the like are easily accounted for and not seen as a big issue. Mental illness is treated with medication, or various telepathic treatments the Farm has developed. Diabetes, likewise, is treatable and not an issue. As long as they can fulfill their role, it won't matter if their upkeep is a bit more complicated or expensive.

What would have happened if President Ross had gotten to deploy the national guard in the FEZ?

Probably civil war.

Could Pyroclast turn isolated parts of his body into ash? If not, is it possible for him to accomplish that?

No, it is all or nothing so far.

Has Pyroclast tried to do combo attacks with his heat and ash manipulation?

Yes, hence the name. Add water for steam and it becomes truly nasty.

Will we have a choice to decide how close we were to Pyroclast?

Yes, you will be able to decide the details later

In the Heartbreak incident, some people believe Ortega made the wrong call. What call would Sentinel, Steel, and Pyroclast have made in that same situation, without the knowledge of what would happen to Anathema + Sidestep + almost Steel?

Steel would have made the same call. He probably would not have brought Sidestep, but he understands the reasons, and didn't argue. He doesn't blame Ortega for his decisions. Pyroclast would not have sent in a full team. He would have sent a scout first, probably Anathema since they could survive it, and kept in touch by radio. Sentinel would have destroyed the building first, taking out anything in it. The civilians were most likely already dead. Yep, Sentinel was active during the rougher days, Hood was always the soft one.

How would it affect HG's and Jake's relationship if Nocturne was killed?

Badly. Depending on circumstances, it might either fall apart completely, or perhaps, grow closer.

What was Spoon's old name before Steel renamed him?

Comet.

What're the effects of having a high fan club value?

Gonna be some fun things in book three. Mostly small text variations, like many of the hidden stats, I start building them before they come into full use.

What's the relationship like between Blaze and Zephyr in general? What do they think of each other, honestly?

Bit of a rivalry. Zephyr thinks they should have been the leader.

What's Blaze's and Zephyr's reasons for becoming heroes?

A combination of wanting to be the best that they could be, a lust for fame and popularity, and because they like excitement. They are more similar than they'd like to admit.

How did you first conceive and write the Rangers? How long did it take for them to become a character you felt satisfied with, as well as their dynamics with others? What was your process in fleshing them out?

Wow. I love this question. Okay, The Rangers basically were born in two of my old, unfinished books. Argent and Herald were part of the book I based Fallen Hero on (different world tho), and at the time I wanted the new guy, who was trusting and could easily be beaten up, and the dangerous fighter, who you would be slightly scared of. Ortega and Chen came from another book (as did Los Diablos), and were brought in to replace the two members of the Ranger team I weren't happy with. Chen replaced Porphyry (who I reused elsewhere), who never really did much in the book. He was originally the suspicious one, who wasn't easily fooled or approved of shenanigans. The straight man (ironically). Ortega replaces the Marshal, who I now tend to call surfer-Rick. Yes, a blonde California asshole.

When I create character, I always start with an archetype that is easy for the reader to identify. Argent is the sharp, sexy, pointy hunter. Herald is the sweet newbie with a heart of gold. Steel is the military drill-sergeant. Ortega is the open, charming daredevil. Then, when I start writing them, I start to figure out where they start to chafe. The different archetype to provide contrast. Argent is a tech-nerd. Herald is very observant and analytical. Steel is a soft dog-dad. Ortega is clever and secretive. Now we have two dimensional characters who can interact in new ways, and every interaction brings out new sides to them. It is at this point that the hidden core of the characters pops out, the final piece of the puzzle to make them three dimensional.

For me, when the characters finally coalesced into a fully realized hole was the argument in the park in Rebirth for Ortega, which made me realize that there was a vicious, angry and hurt side to Ortega too that they kept hiding. It was the pastel and cupcakes in Retribution for Argent, and the softer side filled with longing for a life it showed me. For Herald it was actually a scene that has not appeared in the game yet, but which has been talked through with people. And for Steel it was thinking more about what it actually would mean to be as heavily modded as he is, which humanized him.

My process for fleshing characters out is to write them. Have them talk to each other. To other people. A lot of the time this happens in my head, especially as I am driving. I am a very dialog driven creator when it comes to people. That's why so many of the questions I am asked here are so hard to answer, I often haven't even considered them until that moment. Sometimes the answer comes quick and fills in empty holes in the character which is great, at other times I draw a blank and leaves it to headcanon.

How would the ROs deal with a Step that's completely oblivious to any and all romantic come-ons that they may make towards them, seeing it as normal bonding interactions? (E.g. Flirting, compliments, literally asking them out directly, being affectionate.) What would they do with this, if they suspect Step might have a romantic interest in them as well?

Oh boy. There are certain Sidesteps (certainly not named T*bi) who are exactly that. And trust me, the RO in question is frustrated. I am not sure exactly what shenanigans will be needed to break the ice, but in order from most direct to trying to be clever, here are the RO's: Dr. Mortum - Herald - Argent - Steel - Ortega. Yes, Ortega is placed last because they tend to want to make a production of it, and are hindered by their own overly friendly demeanor and flirty reputation.

Boosts have craving. What does Herald Crave? What does Ashfall/Pyroclast crave? What happens to Sidestep if they go a long time without carbs or sugar?

Herald eats a lot more meat than he's comfortable with. Ashfall has cravings for kaolin clay, which he eats regularly. Sidestep gets tired, headaches, has issues with focus and lack of shields. In game terms, their telepathy levels would drop.

What kinds of problems are the Rangers known for causing for their PR staff?

Argent is known for walking out of things without warning. Ortega is known for going off-script. Chen and Herald are well behaved.

Will we be able to choose how long Sidestep has worked for the Farm? How they lived their life after they escaped before they became Sidestep?

Not how long, that part of the background is set. How they lived their life before they became Sidestep is up to headcanon though. Go wild! I won't touch that.

Theoretically, if Argent was completely human and became a modded hero, what sort of mods would she choose to take?

OOOooh. Stabby weapons. Armor interface. Drones! Sensory enhancements.

Is it possible for us to get some more short stories on the Rangers's pasts? E.g. Chen with Soo, Daniel and Joshua, Argent when she decided to leave her family, Ortega telling Tia Elena about their decision to sign on with the Rangers, etc?

Once I have submitted the game I will do NOTHING BUT WRITE COOL SHIT! I miss it so much. Editing is hell.

What're some of the weirdest boosts that the Rangers have ever come across?

Oooh. Ashfall is pretty weird. There's a guy that's basically a living slime, but he escaped into the harbor and was never seen again. They don't even know his name. There was a villain called Mr. Astair, whose only power was that he could make people step when he did. Synchronized dance fighting. There was also The Skinless Man, whose actual boost powers were basically armor and strength, but his skin was see-through so he looked horrible and was really gross to fight. Yes, he fought naked. There was also a vigilante, a young girl called Nest, who could control insects. She's still active as the protector of one of the small communities on the outskirts of Los Diablos.

What's Porphyry's gender identity? I think I might've gotten some things confused.

Porphyry goes by he/they. They fluctuate along the agender/nonbinary spectrum, but started out as male.

You answered that villains would be incredulous that Sidestep turned villain... what about the heroes? How would they react that Step had turned to the dark side?

Owl wouldn't be surprised, but mostly everyone else would.

How old are each of the Guardians?

I have NO idea yet.

Would any of the cast be interested in boosted/modded/powered competitions? Similar to the training and tests found in My Hero Academia? (E.g. Testing your mantle in simulated battlefields, scenarios, experimenting and finding out new applications for your powers, winning over fellow competitors and rivals, etc.)

I have not read that comic, but I think both Ortega and Ashfall would be competitive as hell in those circumstances. Argent would see it as a waste of time, and Herald would be a bit hesitant. Steel would do it if ordered, but not of his own free will.

What's Mia's opinion of Psychopathor, especially considering he gave her a job? How would she react to somebody finally killing him?

She is torn. He's obviously a criminal, a murderer and a villain. But he's also not as bad as some law-abiding people she's met. She would be sad if he was dead, but she wouldn't be surprised. She has no illusions that she's safe from him though.

How big of a threat is Locus without her telepathy?

Not much. She's more dependent on it than Sidestep.

How did Sentinel feel about leaving his life as a Ranger behind and getting to live bit more normal life with his wife?

Relief? A hint of regret? It was a big change at first, but now he's adapted and couldn't see it any other way.

What is it about aquariums and aquascaping that HG loves so much?

(I love it. HG got that part from me.) It's just pretty and soothing. HG saw one of those big aquariums as a kid in a restaurant their dad took him to celebrate something, and it made a deep impression as something fancy and impressive.

In one of the Q&A's it was mentioned Nocturne, Mortum, and Steel have hard time getting to know people/letting people close. What is it for each of them that makes it hard for them to get to know people or let them close (if their reasons vary in any way)?

Nocturne had a lot of mental hangups and issues. She was deeply troubled, and close to agoraphobic.

Dr. Mortum on the other hand, has issues with trust. Let people get too close and they will stab you in the back. They learned this the hard way.

Steel just takes time to get to know. He's not someone to open up quickly, and has the drawback of looking and sounding more inhospitable than he is.

What would Dr. Mortum have done with Void's powers if they could have weaponized it? Would they have tried to use it with their teleportation gun somehow?

Spoilers.

What is the theme of the Rangers, Dr. Mortum's, and/or HG trio's character arcs?

Hmmm. While this would normally be a question I would love to talk about for ages, it is also rather spoilery. You see, these people don't have one arc. It is affected by the choices in game. Take Ortega for example, the arc can be one of corruption, of redeeming an old friend, of finally letting go of the past or a dozen other things. The arcs can be benevolent, and they can be tragedies. It all depends on your choices.

Is there anything the Rangers, Dr. Mortum, and/or HG trio are insecure about?

Ortega: Their age. Steel: Their mods. Argent: Their self-control. Herald: Their abilities. Dr. Mortum: Their judgment. HG: Their defenses. Nocturne: Herself. Jake: His position.

How soon after Catastrofiend's first appearance did HG arrange a meeting with Catastrofiend?

Soon after. It was a lot easier to talk with it back then.

What was Locus's motivation for deciding to become a vigilante/hero? How did she feel about joining the world of heroes and villains?

She had powers, she felt she had a duty to use them to help people. She was a bit nervous and thrilled.

Did HB have their own HB scar?

Oh yes.

In the telepathy lore post, Dr. Ljungstrand's notes talks about "two halves. Two pathways. Competing and completing" and how "it/we were never whole", has he managed to find a way to connect the two halves/pathways, if that was even his intention?

Hehehehehe. I should probably get into that one day.

Has there been any particular mission among the current Rangers team where they've disagreed how to go forward with the mission? How do they deal with any disagreements that come up?

A lot. The Marshal decides for good or bad. Yes, Ortega pulled rank repeatedly, but so do Chen.

How well would the Rangers say they work as a team?

Not as well as they should. Bits of the team do, though. Both Ortega and Argent are a good team, as is Ortega and Steel.

Given Sidestep's variability, what would you say are the core things that make up Sidestep? The stuff that has to be there to still be Sidestep. How do you keep these things in mind when you write there branching off points?

I don't need to keep them in mind, they are always there in my head. Has been from the start. What I do need to focus on though is HOW Sidestep chooses to deal with those traits. That is where the branching occurs and I can distill it into distinct paths to cut down on variability. The things I see as the core concepts of Sidestep are the following:

- Telepathic ignorance, thinking you know everything just because you can read minds.
- Layers of trauma, the deeper you go, the more things pop out. Repressing is a valid option.
- Issues with understanding how people work and a feeling of isolation from society. Very bitter, feeling mistreated by life.

- A skewed view of what actions are moral/just/permitted because of the way they were raised. Monkey see, monkey do.
- A barely suppressed core of intense emotions they try not to poke. A mixture of anger, frustration, need for justice, freedom and revenge.

If the Rangers could get into a fight with anyone, no consequences win or lose, who would it be and why?

Oh that would probably be an intra-Ranger fight. Los Diablos vs San Francisco teams!

Could Telepathy be used to cut someone off from their senses or use of their limbs? Could Sidestep do that temporarily or permanently?

Temporarily, yes. Permanently is doubtful, but with the way Sidestep is growing, who knows?

Could telepathy cut off someone's connection to their mods?

Yes.

I have a messed up question. Are there any LD Rangers fans working at the Farm?

Probably.

Working with Vigilantes is one thing, but have the Rangers ever had to team up with a Villain to take down a even bigger threat or achieve some other common goal? If so, does the public know about it or did it happen in secret?

It has happened on occasion, but it is all kept very secret. Not something you'd want out there. And no, I have no occasion in my head right now, but it is likely.

Okay, I gotta know: is Ortega still turned on by danger? Or is that past behind them? If they still are, what are the chances of them being into a badass non-murder Step?

A leopard doesn't shed it's spots. Ortega is still the same when it comes to that. I bet the chances are pretty high...

We know that Argent has the impression of a fighter/streetwise Step, but what about Herald? Did he think the same as her, or did he pick up on Sidestep actually being a tech savvy/tactician hero if things were different?

Herald has probably judged Sidestep pretty accurately there, he's more perceptive than Argent.

How old were Jake and Nocturne when they took the boost drug?

Jake was sixteen, Nocturne was in her mid- to late twenties. Not entirely sure of the timeline yet.

If Mortum was boosted, what can you see them having for powers?

What makes you sure they aren't?

Would Mortum resort to unsavoury/underhanded tactics if a living subject of interest (say, an interesting telepath) refused to let them conduct experiments on them, if their research needed the person in question instead of samples and case studies of their powers?

Dr. Mortum is a villain. Never forget that.

This may be dark, but I have to ask. Will there be a choice for Step to commit suicide if it's not in a crisis situation?

Attempt, probably.

what did the heartbreak event look/feel to anathema? anything at all you can share rn? :)

Oh that is spoilers.

How many words do you estimate book 3 will be?

I am afraid to make a guess. Shorter than this one, this was nuts.

What kind of houses did the Rangers live in as kids? Did Herald's family live in a mansion??

Ortega: In a classic one floor house, not extravagant, but solidly middle-class.

Argent: In a refurbished flat in a rather nice independent community.

Chen: In a slightly too cramped apartment in Queens, New York.

Herald: In a historic mansion in Brookline, Boston.

What're the Rangers' opinions on the police/LDPD?

A necessary evil, neither of them are too fond of them, their encounters often ends up in conflicting jurisdictions. But at this point in time, they think they do a decent job. That might change...

Would Sidestep's Ljungstrand telepathic classification number (abilities development, etc) have gone through any changes between decantation and where they are now?

And if yes, which Events (nanosurge, HB, experimentation, etc.?) unlocked which abilities?

They would have changed massively, and all of those events mentioned would have changed and unlocked new abilities.

So... Emberstorm... What was Lord Francis Ember up to before his glow up? Was he operating in LD or were the rangers on a mission in SF for sidestep to have fought him?

Emberstorm operated out of Los Diablos, and at the time he was basically an ambitious bank robber and worked on building his own organization. In a way, it's not unlike the situation that a Sidestep on the Boss path is in during Retribution.

How would Lord Ember react to an infamous, respected villain absolutely losing it over his one-sided grudge against Pyrocblast, struggling not to laugh whenever they even think of him? Embarrassed? Angry? Would he get pissed off if they made jokes about it- especially to his face?

Oh Lord Ember would be livid, he's sensitive about his reputation and dignity. It would be all the emotions above.

In addition to that, what would Hollow Ground think of the whole thing? Both of Ember's grudge and Villain's (slightly) mocking hysterics?

Probably faintly amused, keeping a straight face, but remembering every detail for later retelling. Would definitely try to be the adult one.

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During the Moray Eel memory, does HG get glimpses of Step's own tank memories since they've dived too deep and are seemingly losing control until HG saves them?

It is a mutual feedback loop, yes. HG definitely saw some stuff.

Are Herald's powers developing into a type of telekinesis--just how extensive would his ability to "lift" things be? Could they be expanded into him not needing to touch those objects or people to make them float?

That will be something to explore in the future. Something is certainly changing. I'm looking forward to see what will happen, Daniel is one of the people with the greatest capacity for change depending on the path taken by people.

Not sure why we can't have access to the alpha build anymore

It should be there? I haven't removed it. Putting (an more updated) link here again:

<https://dashingdon.com/play/malinryden/fhrjwjejrwltestlatest/mygame/>

I am also very close to the proper beta test, just trying to work out the last kinks with CoG, my save system is causing issues. Once that is done, I will of course post about it here as well so you can dive into the real thing!

Sidestep notes in some paths that Jake is easier to possess than most people, like he's used to telepathic invasion. How does that work? Does telepathy create "holes" in peoples brains that allow for easier access to invasion? Does the mind get used to another consciousness taking it over? Or something else? (and did Heartbreak make any Grooves of access when they fought with Sidestep..)

Hmmm. Not in general. However, it is possible for a telepath to influence another mind to allow easier access. That's one reason why it is so easy to slip into the Puppet. It is doubtful Heartbreak had time to do that.

Will the reflection you choose to punch in the mirror at the end of Retri influence the nature of the impostor, or does it only impact immediate stats?

Hehehe.

Did anybody see Skyraider take sidestep out of the ranger hospital in the mortum "escape"?

Good question. Who else might have been there?

What triggers the nanos for taking over argent's body when she's knocked unconscious? it seems like sometimes they do when step and/or something else knocks her out and sometimes they don't.

It depends on Argent's control. Most of the time she manages to keep her last command to them to stay calm, but at times the situation throws her off enough that she loses it. Or, perhaps, it is the nanovores that makes the judgment.

Is there a link between nanovores and water? In the case of Angie, they've been shown to appear when she's near water / in danger near water (falling into the water on the bridge; threatened to be drowned in the sewers; obviously the nanosurge on the sea), and her mind also has an aquatic quality, but I don't know if this is a coincidence or not?

Good question. There is definitely something going on there, but it's mostly Argent.

If we go about plucking red strings, how many does it take until Hollow Ground notices the lack of... pressure, from their limits?

Maybe you'll see... So far, it's not been enough to be a danger.

In a prior QNA you said argent's nanos liked danny best. Is that like as a person or like as a snack?

With them, it's hard to tell the difference, and that is exactly why Argent is trying to keep him at a distance.

How long did it take the Farm to work out what Shroud's boost was and how it worked?

It was during a fight with another Re-Gene, and she got her hands on them and drained them dry. At that point, they only thought it was a life drain. It took a long time before the fact that Shroud also ate memories became apparent...

Regina's prize project. Is Sidestep themselves the prize project or are they a part in something bigger? (Example: Sidestep personally or Sidestep, a cuckoo, as a part of a cuckoo project) And did Sidestep become the prize project after the Heartbreak or was one from the very beginning?

Hmmmm I would say that they are a part of something bigger. And that was certainly not the case from the start, it is a relatively recent development.

After getting their hands back on sidestep, did the farm ever dig into what all their errant re-gene had done during their vigilante days? Requisition ranger records? Did the farm try to dig into their personal life? (find out about had-a-thing, if applicable, for example)? How deep did they dive into the life of sidestep?

Honestly? It wasn't that interesting to them. There was a cursory examination, but no real digging. Mostly collecting publicly available materials and making sure that none of the Rangers seemed to know what Sidestep really was. That was the important part, the risk of exposure for the Farm. They could care less about the private life of a runaway Re-Gene.

The regenerator regenerates everything, right? Are steps who choose to use it gonna come out of it bald/ only have baby hair for a while?

Exactly how it works is unknown yet. It might even vary depending on who puts it together. I would say that if it was applied on the scalp, yes, there is a risk that the hair might be damaged.

We know Argent wants it, but... Would anyone in the main cast be interested in getting their hands on the regenerator and use it on themselves? Who, and why, or why not?

I think the only two who might be interested in it are Dr. Mortum and Chen. Not in a desperate way, and certainly not in a "I want to go first" kind of way, but if it works and they are aware of it, they might be interested in using it.

Would nocturne's powers work on argent?

I was going to say nope, and then I thought a bit more about it, and right now it is a solid maybe. It is complicated.

When rescuing Step with the crew, Pelayo knows what the Regene tattoos are, but doesn't let how he feels about them show. What were his thoughts on discovering them all over his Boss?

Shock. I think that was the strongest first reaction. Disbelief, thinking about it a bit more, realizing that yep, this is real, and then trying to work out how the hell he feels about it. I don't think he knows yet, this changes everything he thought he knew about a lot of things. The final reaction might depend on what Stats Sidestep has.

Considering the Rangers can arrest Step on suspicion of being a villain without having tangible evidence (i.e. just based on Step acting, in their opinion, suspiciously), I'm curious to know what sort of legal powers they have in regards to solving Enhanced crime.

They are pretty much in charge. They do have legal powers to arrest and detain, and while it is assumed that they will pass people off to the correct authorities (in the US or the various western territories authorities), there's not really any time limits set. No Miranda rights either. Their authority is a lot more akin to military in war, or intelligence services. Unless the target someone with influence or friends, nobody will bother to investigate if they have an adequate reason.

How's hollow ground on the self defense front? Any particular styles they favor if trained? Are they able to protect themselves or have they been relying too much on hired muscle and their forced anonymity?

Hollow Ground is not much of a fighter, as some Sidesteps might already have realized. They do rely on hired muscle and anonymity, but they are a pretty good shot.

What kind of relationship did Hollow Ground have with their siblings? Were they the sort to, say, dote on their youngest sibling?

Oh Hollow Ground is 100% someone to dote on people. Massively. And they felt hugely protective about them.

If Sidestep got regene-revealed to the Rangers but decided not to work with the entire team, is wiping that info from their sweet brain on the table or not at all?

I don't know. We'll see. It's not entirely off the table for me, but I have not detail planned book three.

We know telepaths + villain and hero corpses have been disappearing conveniently for a while, and we know Argent would be a PRIME subject for research and experiment, so... is Argent under any kind of scrutiny she isn't aware of? Have Shady Organisations found a way to keep an eye on her / watch for a moment of weakness despite her technopathy?

Possibly. Argent doesn't think so, but despite what she thinks, she isn't perfect.

Who was Ortega jealous of if they see Sidestep and Argent having a thing? Why?

Knowing Ortega, it might have just been a bit of jealousy not being the center of attention for once. But, that will be explored more in game, so I won't spoil it too much.

Why is HG so... prone to sleeping/relaxing? Does it have anything to do with their telepathy?

Yes. Sidestep has their own vice to deal with to recharge, Hollow Ground needs their nap time.

Is there any reason why Steel doesn't plan on acting on his crush on Step without Karen's prompting? I can understand Ortega, given the power difference in Marshal status and his reputation as a straight man. What about Step?

Steel is not an impulsive man by nature. He would most likely have done something about it, but it might have taken a few more months. Also, he is far too aware of how bad it would be to be turned down, and how easily it would be to ruin what he sees as a fragile, rebuilt friendship. Better safe than sorry. As for Sidestep, that is up to the reader.

Is the puppet's name actually 'Ace'??

It is their taken name, the one they used in their past life.

Do any of the Rangers know that Danny's powers deal with gravity manipulation? Or is it just flight to them?

It is just flight to everybody, even Danny. What it might turn into the future is a different thing.

If Ortega and Steel had to get glowing mod tattoos, what designs would they go for? What about when they were first modded? What spinal tattoos would Ortega have chosen? (I'm pretty surprised that's a thing in-game. I'm also sappy and want to imagine a scenario of them getting mod tattoos in solidarity with Step's Re-Gene tattoos. 🥰)

Ortega would go for neon/lightning blue. If they would be able to make them glow, that would be sweet. As for patterns, I don't really know. I think abstract, probably circular base to connect to the spinal ports, with collecting lines. Like a fashionable electricity diagram.

Steel would go dark green. Probably patterns radiating out from his mods, maybe fracture lines or something more organic.

What do Daniel's parents think of their son becoming a hero? Does anyone in their elite circles know he's a boost/Herald? What was his parents' cover story as to where their surviving son went?

As far as Daniel know, they deeply disapprove of his choices. I do think that people in their circles knows, Herald is on the television enough for that, but they don't talk about him. It's the polite

disapproval, nobody really brings it up. That would be gauche.

If our MC is trans, does that mean that Hollow Ground is also trans?

No. HG is not trans, at least not if you want to include being genderqueer in that label (some do).

What was it like for Daniel when he rescued civilians from the California fire? Did he get any vivid flashbacks to Josh?

Some. But the scale was big enough that he could push it back. It wasn't nice though, but he did like that this time he could save people.

Would HG and Jake have ever gotten together without Nocturne in the picture?

Probably not.

What's the extent of Nocturne's education? What subjects does she like/is good at? Are there any that she dislikes/needs help with?

She's got a degree in accounting and business law. She's good at math and numbers. She didn't use to be good with people, but she has gotten a lot better at it. She's still prone to bad self-confidence though.

Does Jake ever cheat when he gambles? How does he feel about it?

Hmm. I don't think so.

What would Ortega have liked about Ace, pre-Shroud?

Caustic and competent. A risktaker.

How did Mitchell end up working for HG?

He was running a hero-ranking site on the side, and got recruited because his research and theories were impeccable.

Did HG see Dr. Finch for therapy or did they have other reasons they might have wanted to approach her?

Other reasons.

What had been Nocturne's motivation for deciding to become a villain?

Love.

How well does Herald think he knew his brother?

Too well.

In the first game you could go the whole game never being hurt. While in the second, unless I'm incorrect, there is no way past Steel without taking a hit. If this is the case, would you mind telling why this is?

Good point, I should adjust that. It will be in the beta.

You said regenes get AI, is it possible for Sidestep to survive even if his chip gets fried? Do you think Sidestep ever formed his own "organic consciousness" independent of AI and thus became a human being? Will we learn about this in the future or would that be a spoiler to say?

We will get into that in the future! It is a big plotpoint.

Would the HG trio consider getting married if poly marriages became legal? How long have the three of them been dating?

Possibly. Jake would be the doubtful one should it ever come up. And hey, poly marriages are legal in the Free Western territories! All three of them has been dating for a couple of years, HG and Nocturne longer, and Jake and Nocturne also slightly longer.

How did people find out/come to suspect that Jake was sleeping with Nocturne/HG? I can't imagine he'd be talking about it willy-nilly.

People gossip. And he doesn't have that good a poker face.

[Ask your midsummer questions here!](#)

[Jun 24, 2022](#)

Happy midsummer everybody, I am within inches of opening the beta testing, but until then, have fun asking me any questions about game, process or world.

Now I am off to have a nice midsummer weekend, hottest one in 50 years, so I expect to be melting. Hope everybody is keeping safe.

[Mitchell's Guide to Vigilantes entry 124: Ashfall](#)

[Jun 10, 2022](#)

Mitchell's Guide to Vigilantes entry 124.

Subject: Ashfall/Pyroclast.

Civilian identity: Nazar Sarkisian.

Family: Parents are still alive, no siblings. They currently live in Seattle.

Birthdate: 4 June 1988.

Birthplace: Evacuation Camp 43, Nevada.

Height: 5'9"/176 cm

Weight: 188 lbs/85 kg

Classification: Ashfall was a Beta level boost. Can disperse his full physical body into an ash-like carbon-based substance. In this form he can hover at normal running speed, and has limited flight/gliding powers not exceeding a height of 10' or so. He can disperse himself as thinly as a fine mist, and in that form cover large areas, seep through cracks and be breathed in. The latter is not recommended, and his main avenue of attack. In his more solid form he loses the hovering capacities, but is not as vulnerable to wind. In his dispersed state he is invulnerable to most forms of physical or energy attacks.

Update: Though technically beyond my job now that he's relocated to San Francisco, I'll include the updated assessment as well. Since changing his name and joining the Rangers, Pyroclast has been reclassified as an alpha level boost. In essence, the powers remain the same, but with a larger dispersed radius. He has also gained the ability to control the temperature of the cloud. The maximum temperature reached is still under debate, but temperatures exceeding 1000 Fahrenheit (540 C) has been recorded. Higher temperatures have been measured, but as these were taken inside the resulting firestorm, they are uncertain.

Notes: No post-Ranger admission materials have been sought. These are all from the Ashfall days.

Surveillance camera footage from the G'Day chip manufacturing plant recovered after the Cephalobrood terrorist attack in 2011.

[A half-ruined building, still smoking from the recent fight. Anathema of the Rangers is standing, back turned to Ashfall, Ranger associate. Ashfall is nude, but getting dressed.]

Anathema- So how does it really work? Turning into dust like that?

Ashfall- Are you getting paid by the research team to interrogate me?

Anathema- No, only to help test stuff. On account of me being invulnerable if they mess up. Do you want to be? They do that on occasion for interesting powers. It's good money, and a good way to test your limits.

Ashfall- No thanks.

Anathema- It's just so cool. I've never seen anybody being able to do that before.

Ashfall- Same.

Anathema- One syllable words and pained sighs... okay, I might be entirely off base, but I get the feeling you're kind freaked out by them?

Ashfall- Maybe I don't know. It's...

Anathema- Weird?

Ashfall- Yeah. Maybe I'm afraid to find out I'm not human anymore.

Anathema- Worrying about you being human is the very definition of being human. I don't think any other creature has as much anxiety as people.

Ashfall- Horses.

Anathema- What?

Ashfall- Horses. They're messed up. Freaked out by a plastic bag.

Anathema- Are you still sore about that? Or was it that Ortega laughed?

Ashfall- You'd think we'd get nice horses if we hadn't ridden before.

Anathema- You're trying to distract me.

Ashfall- What do you want me to say? That turning into ash scares me?

Anathema- It would scare me.

Ashfall- I thought nothing scared you.

Anathema- Nothing hurts me. Lots of things scare me.

Ashfall- You can turn around now, I'm decent.

Anathema- I'm not sure I am, but I'll do my best.

Ashfall- Thanks for bringing me my clothes. It's a bit more private turning back in here than out in the open.

Anathema- Not a problem. I've had the same issue too many times myself before I got this suit. I figured that's what you wanted when you started hovering over them.

Ashfall- At least someone on this team has a brain.

Anathema- Is that why you usually stick to Sidestep?

Ashfall- Can't talk in cloud form, I need someone around who gets it.

Anathema- I'm doing my best, at least you can't hurt me if I misread your clues.

Ashfall- It wasn't my intention to be an ass. I know why they keep teaming us up. We do make a good front line team to draw attention.

Anathema- I'm glad you agreed to help out again. With Sentinel and Steel off on business, we're short-handed. Hopefully Charge and Sidestep managed to chase down The Ammonite while we kept the rest of the team busy.

Ashfall- If not, they'll never live it down. You mind getting me a drink? I'm parched and this damn vending machine is stuck.

Anathema- No worries. Acid is handy, I'd make a great thief.

Ashfall- You'd think a major company would provide free drinks to their staff.

Anathema- Well, you know. Capitalism. Here.

Ashfall- Thanks.

Anathema- I keep wondering, and if I'm getting too personal, please tell me to shut up. Does it hurt to do what you do? Changing?

Ashfall- No. It... tickles I suppose. Tingles. Everything becomes numb. Like limbs waking up after sitting on them too long.

Anathema- Aren't you worried about losing parts of yourself?

Ashfall- I think I already have. I must have. I don't really notice a difference though.

Anathema- I suppose it's hard to keep track of which bits it would be. Maybe it was just the poop.

Ashfall- Don't make me laugh when I'm drinking soda. It went up my nose.

Anathema- Sorry.

Ashfall- See, this is why I don't want to deal with doctors, even if it's your staff.

Anathema- Maybe they could help design a suit that would transform with you?

Ashfall- Oh God, who is leaning on you to try to talk me into this?

Anathema- Nobody. Maybe we don't want you to end up naked every time you turn back. It's fine for a vigilante to streak, but you know how they are with Ranger stuff.

Ashfall- Do they have any idea about how to do that? I feel like I've tried everything.

Anathema- Well, not that I am a scientist, I just have lunch with them sometimes, but the current top theory would be using some of your transformed mass and turn it into carbon fibers to make into a suit.

Ashfall- That's why you asked if I was worried about separating.

Anathema- Maybe do a little at a time? I mean it took a while until they finally got a suit that could hold up to my acid, at least for a while.

Ashfall- But won't it turn back when I do?

Anathema- I mean it shouldn't if it's blocked from rejoining you, right? Otherwise you'd be spraying the area with little bits of you every time you turn back if things have got stuck somewhere.

Ashfall- Little bits of poop. God, that's going to be stuck in my head now.

Anathema- You're welcome.

Ashfall- But I suppose it's worth a shot. If I can get a proper suit out of it, I'm willing to be a lab rat for a change. Even if it's just enough for an undersuit.

Anathema- Or a speedo.

Ashfall- Somehow that's worse.

Anathema- Again, you're welcome.

Ashfall- What I don't get is why'd they go out of their way for someone not on the team?

Anathema- You've worked with us enough. You're trusted. And maybe you can be more in the future.

Ashfall- Don't tempt me, I might take you up on that if I didn't suspect it was just because I'm the only one with a sense of humor enough to be properly scandalized by your bad jokes.

Anathema- My dastardly plan has been revealed. Come on, I hear helicopters. Let's go greet the cops and then find the others.

Surveillance camera footage courtesy of Big Cone Ice Cream Parlor. Taken during the Nanosurge event in 2011.

[Black and white footage of an Ice Cream shop, filled with costumed heroes looking at a map. On the counter rests two elaborate electronic devices, each the size of a small backpack.]

Ashfall- We don't have time to discuss this! Anathema takes one emitter, I'll take the other.

Anathema- He's right. The swarm is growing. Sentinel is slowing their approach but we can't stop them. We need to do this.

Captain Steel- How are the evacuations going Marshal?

Marshal Charge- [not present, reception filled with static] Not good. Streets are getting clogged. I need Sunstream down here as fast as possible. Need to get the cars out of the way.

Captain Steel- I'll send her over. Stay safe.

Marshal Charge- You too.

Owl- I'll grab Sunstream and head over as well. You don't need me here, I'm better off getting the civilians out.

Captain Steel- Thank you.

Owl- Don't thank me. Solve this.

Bumblebee- I can fly into position and drop Anathema.

Anathema- Just don't get too close. You can fling me if you like, I don't mind a rough landing.

Logarithm- The emitter might.

Anathema- Go high and drop me straight down then. I'll protect it with my body.

Bumblebee- Okay, let's go, I'm not the fastest flier.

Captain Steel- Do it. Signal once you get in position.

Anathema- Will do. Have fun without me.

Viceroy- There goes the one person who doesn't have to worry about the nanovores.

Zephyr- Shut up Roy. Will they even work?

Logarithm- No idea. The theory seems sound, not that it matters. We don't have a better idea.

Captain Steel- You don't even know who made them.

Logarithm- Could be a villain for all I care. Probably is. They live here too.

Captain Steel- Good point. I'll take the other one.

Ashfall- No. I will. You're running this show. Besides, your armor might be hermetically sealed but it's not rated for nanovores.

Captain Steel- Neither are your powers.

Ashfall- My ash form is not flesh and blood. And in my solid form I can carry the emitter.

Zephyr- I can get him close, fast.

Ashfall- And get away faster I hope.

Zephyr- You just watch me.

Captain Steel- Then do it. We don't have time to debate. If the resonance field can interrupt the nanovores, we'll gain valuable time to evacuate.

Ashfall- I'm on it. Zephyr, do your thiiii....

Logarithm- I hope this works. I don't like this. The Marshal and the rest are too close to Sentinel's gustfront if something goes wrong they won't be able to get out in time.

Captain Steel- If something goes wrong, proximity will be the last of our worries.

Logarithm- The others are gone, I can see you're hiding something. You know you can tell me.

Captain Steel- Got the call from command earlier. If we lose control of the situation, they'll drop the bomb.

Logarithm- Shit. I predicted that would be the case, but...

Captain Steel- They already would have, but there are too many important people that have still not evacuated. They'll hold the order for as long as they can.

Logarithm- And then Los Diablos becomes the hottest place on earth.

Captain Steel- If we fail.

Logarithm- Which we can't afford. So let's figure out how to stop these things while we still can.

Recovered internal audio from Halcyon, a former Green Sky cultist currently serving twelve consecutive life sentences. It appears to depict events during the final assault on the Green Sky compound in 2012.

[Sound only. Voiceprints identified as Captain Steel and Ashfall.]

A- This is the plan?

S- This is the plan.

A- I was afraid so. Is it yours?

S- Only partly.

A- Sidestep?

S- Good guess.

A- It's nuts.

S- And it could work.

A- IF Charge is still conscious. If Charge is...

S- Charge is still alive.

A- How can you be sure? You know what the Green Sky does to people.

S- And you know how stubborn the Marshal is. Lived through worse.

A- Fine. But I still don't like separating the team like this.

S- Neither do I, but it makes tactical sense. If it is a trap, which is likely, Sidestep will be the only one walking into it.

A- And you're ready to sacrifice them?

S- I'm ready to take them at their word that they can stay undetected. I'm ready to trust them with the life of my best friend. I'm willing to risk my life to walk into the same trap in their place.

A- Sorry. You're right. I didn't think.

S- It's fine. We're all on edge here.

A- How long do we have?

S- Sentinel and Anathema will launch their assault on the compound in an hour.

A- They'll go in high, and we're going in low. I still think I should be up there.

S- They can cause enough havoc on their own. I need you.

A- You mean you need my powers.

S- Yes. Do you have a problem with that?

A- No Sir.

S- We're going to have trouble communicating once the mission starts, let's go over it again.

A- Fine. I'll stay dispersed as much as possible. If any cultists show, I'll choke them immediately. If they think we are the main rescue party and run into the Void...

S- You'll follow orders.

A- I will disperse and surround you. As soon as I feel my form disturbed I'll counterattack.

S- They shouldn't be able to teleport into you.

A- A lot is riding on that theory.

S- Teleportation is rare, but in every surviving case there has been an instinctual reflex not to materialize into a solid object.

A- And you think I will count as one, even dispersed.

S- Yes.

A- If not, you'll be the one in danger. Not me. You know what they do to people. Normal people.

S- I'm willing to accept that.

A- You're nuts.

S- I'm a s... Ranger.

A- You were about to say soldier, weren't you?

S- Old habits die hard. Being in one of these brings it back.

A- How good will it be in a fight?

S- It's a stealth suit. It's not made for battle, but it'll be enough. I don't need my MBA to fight.

A- To kill.

S- You know they have done worse to people.

A- I know. And I am prepared to...

S- Wait. Are you telling me you haven't killed anyone?

A- I can if I have to.

S- But you haven't.

A- I haven't needed to. I'm very good at being careful.

S- You creep into people's lungs and choke them out.

A- But I don't kill them. They'll be hurt, sure, but I'm not actual ash. I don't leave parts of myself stuck in them.

S- Impressive.

A- Don't patronize me.

S- I don't. I am legitimately impressed.

A- So you'll vouch for me if I apply to be a Ranger?

S- It won't be up to me.

A- But it won't hurt.

S- Fine. If we survive here, I will write you a letter of recommendation. And I'll have the Marshal sign it as well.

A- Oh I'm sure that'll go over well.

S- After what we are about to do, I doubt there will be any objections.

A- I don't need a bribe to save Charge, but I won't lie. It will be sweet revenge.

S- Now, let's go over the map again. We'll only have one shot at this.

[Spoiler QnA June](#)

[Jun 7, 2022](#)

When you tell Steel about HB being an experiment, he replies "huh, that's interesting", as if "your words triggered something inside him". You also tell him about medical equipment being attached to HB right before Steel replies that. What does he find interesting here? Did Steel also think HB was an experiment? Did he see HB's body? Was the corpse not attached to medical equipment when he saw it, which could make him find Sidestep's comment "interesting" (as in "odd")? Or, could it be that your body (on the autopsy pictures) were the one attached to medical equipment as well?

Let's be honest here. Do you really think I would spoil that when everybody is desperate for that book three discussion when everyone might start putting their one braincell together in a jar and compare their Heartbreak experiences? I wrote what I wrote for a reason. ;)

Alpha spoilers Can Spoon "feel" Argent's nanovores? How does he react to her?

No, and he wants to be friendly, but she doesn't seem to like dogs.

It's been asked what civilians and the media would think of rumors of a Ranger dating the new villain, but what about other villains? What would HG and other big players, even small ones, think of rumors of the newest LD villain dating a Ranger?

Not really caring that much, that kind of rumors always happens. If they wanna get caught, that's a good way to do it.

Piggy-backing on that, since HG seems to have done some info-gathering both about Sidestep as the villain AND Sidestep as a civilian, is HG aware of Sidestep's close relationships with the Rangers or Mortum?

Spoilers. Want you to sweat a little there.

How did the HG trio discover their powers?

They all took the hero drugs willingly, so they were expecting powers once they survived. In some cases it took a while to kick in.

HG: It took months of fine tuning and figuring out what it actually was. It wasn't until they met Nocturne when they really started to push the boundaries.

Nocturne: A panic attack during a fancy dinner.

Jake: Pretty immediately after taking the drugs, we're talking hours here. Fell through a wall which saved his life.

Did Hollow Ground thread Psychopathor?

Yes.

How much of the PullInStripDownKissDevourWant... is argent and how much is the nanovores?

It's a mix, which is why personal physical interaction is so dangerous to her.

Have we met the new guardians recruit in the text yet?

The name has been mentioned, yes.

If the letters "CB" were part of Sidestep's old regene code-name at the farm... Could the "C" stand for "Core"?

No.

Is Mortum's disintegration/teleportation ray made with Void tech?

Yes. That's the part Mortum can't work out, because that was Vitruvian's deal.

Was Arsenaux the party interested in buying Mortum's gun from the auction?

Ahahahahaha.... yeeeeeeeah. Good work connecting the dots.

Does sidestep remember before they were boosted? Is that something regenes remember or not?

Not before they were boosted, no. That happens rather early in the process for most, to minimize the waste when things go wrong. But, with the telepathy acting up, Sidestep has more memories from the tank days than is usual for Re-Genes.

With Ortega knowing about Puppet's excursions to Joes and clearly having looked into them, how much do they know about Bo or Rosie? What about Mob Boss crew?

Spoilers. What Ortega knows stays with Ortega.

Is Ortega aware that Finch might have had ties to HG? Is therapy one of the Charge Ploys™ where they try to kill 88 birds with one stone?

No, in this case they genuinely are trying to help Sidestep.

Does Sidestep still have the chip?

They have never removed it, so yeah. As far as they know.

Did the memory wipe attempt Sidestep underwent when they went back to the farm fail because of them having grown too far out of their training (ie, did they become too "human" to be erased by virtue of living more human-ly), or is it related to something else—their powers / their... passengers, for example?

Oh that is all Sidestep's own stubborn self.

Doesn't Mitchell supply the files on heroes/villains? Wouldn't HG know for sure that Step is a telepath?

Mitchell does provide files when asked, but they usually takes a while to dig out. It's not like HG's got them all memorized. And the Sidestep from back in the day (if famous enough to warrant a file) would be marked as a possible telepath. Remember, there was a concerted effort to keep that under wraps, and Sidestep was not on the top of any list of people Mitchell needed to research.

However, HG had no idea that Sidestep was the one behind the current new villain, so there was no preparations for a former Rangers associate. Had they know, it's doubtful they would have ever met.

At dinner with Herald, Step senses a microquake- the table rattling wasn't really a microquake was it?

Hehehe if it was, it was VERY localized.

At the art exhibit, the paintings made Step uneasy & Herald remarks on the color orange being 'toxic'. Does Step recognize the painter's work in anyway? Or is this an Ace reaction?

Sidestep (unless they are an art thief) is unaware of the artist and painting. Why they reacted so strongly is at this point unknown, but it was strong enough to be felt. Is it a Sidestep reaction to the color reminding them of their tattoos? To the subject and feel of the painting? Is it an Ace reaction? Not telling, and it might be a mixture of things.

How does Jake feel about Sidestep that beats them up while robbing the auction?

Wants a chance at a rematch.

How do the HG trio feel about how similar Step and HG look? Nocturne seems to be a bit uneasy in the epilogue. HG seems taken aback at first but not put off by it.

It's raised some questions that will be explored in game.4

We know how Ortega handled it but, How would the other ROs react if they thought HG and Step were related?

Spoilers, you'll see in game.

Does whoever possesses the puppet in the end change, if you aren't the one who's stuck in it?

The answer might be different depending on Sidestep and path. I'm collecting behind the scenes stats for a reason.

What did Ortega think of Step supposedly defecting from HG's 'influence' and becoming a hero + defying them? Sad that they have to go against family? Worry? Admiration? Would they have killed HG if they knew Step loved them? Or would they let Step kill them- if not, at least have some time alone with HG before they're sentenced to death?

Oh you will get to find out. Some things will be explored in the books, not going to spoil them here.

The PuppetStep is more Action Survivor to Sidestep's main body Action Hero(Villain). Is it going to be possible to take a few levels in Badass for Puppetstep or is this going to remain the case? (repeated question)

Expanding on this for the spoilery section. Oh you'll get your levels of badass in certain paths, trust me on that. Looking forward to writing them. Precognition can be fun if used proactively.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6L2xaklGm1s>

Something I've been wondering is Why does Sidestep concern themselves to be 30? Do they consider themselves to be born as a teenager? If its not too much of a spoiler how old is Sidestep really?

Partly because that's how everybody else sees them, and they are a telepath so that bleeds through. It's also how their body looks/feels. They've been indoctrinated from an early age to provide socially acceptable ages when people ask, that's included as a Cuckoo. You get a more thorough background feed to be able to bluff being human. So yeah, they do consider themselves having been born as a teenager, especially with the fake childhood memories implanted to ground them. I haven't decided on an exact decanting date, that will probably remain headcanon.

if Puppet goes to the gala alone, Sidestep recalls a vague memory of psychiatrist asking "at what point did people stop feeling real to you?", was the memory some random person's memory and nothing else or was it a hint of deeper layers?

Oh I am not going to tell you something that juicy.

will we get to see the conversation between the rangers when they are discussing step's plan of escape?

I will probably write a snippet one day, it's too hilarious not to.

will we be seeing more themmy memories in book 3?

yes.

Will it be possible to attempt to seize control over the criminal underworld and steal Hollow Ground's position as top dog? Could we fan the flames between HG and Lord Ember while building our own strength? Maybe infiltrate their organizations with our own people or recruit some turncoats? Los Diablos is too small for more than one ambitious Mastermind...

That is indeed a possible path for ambitious Sidesteps.

Or conversely, can we choose to attempt coexisting peacefully while pursuing our own agenda? Perhaps even becoming genuinely amicable with HG and their inner circle (I.e. Jake, Nocturne + others)?

That is also a possible path I've planned.

What would the Rangers have thought about Daniel getting involved with Re-Gene advocacy? Would they have suspected Sidestep to be one if they hadn't already because of him?

No. Danny gets invested in causes now and then, this is nothing new.

Alpha spoiler: Does HG powers work through clothes?

Nope.

Alpha spoilers since the puppet is apparently walking around when we're not aware, has the puppet ever met with people we know without us knowing?

Sounds like a good way to get revealed to me.

Alpha spoilers: during the guilty breakout Herald says "I... looked into things" regarding regenes, does he have any contacts outside of the rangers who might have specialist knowledge of regenes?

No, this was more looking up what would be readily available to a government agent with a high security classification. So while he knows a lot more now, he still only knows what's released within the system.

[QnA for June!](#)

[Jun 7, 2022](#)

When does it drop 😭😭

Sadly, I can only submit (beta test coming VERY soon, working on the save system now), and then it is up to Hosted Games schedule.

Can we destroy the HG trio's confidence? Individually? As a team? Can we destroy their relationship to each other without killing them?

Yes, yes and yes.

Building off the 'what do the ROs find attractive in a partner' what about Mortum?

Oh boy. Going for the tough ones. I'm trying to find a good english term for the swedish "självgående". Basically Dr. Mortum is attracted to people who have their own lives, their own goals and their own path in life. The ones who doesn't need a romantic relationship to define them. People that are sure of themselves. People that can accept distance as a necessary thing without needing constant affirmation. Also, they need to be able to respect their skills/mind. It doesn't hurt if they are able to take a bit of charge now and then either.

Can we astral project and sleep in our ROs minds? Or have a symbiotic relationship with them? If it's possible, will it also be possible to share our telepathy with them?

It will be possible to start experimenting with that for some of them, yeah. However, sharing telepathy is a very underused part of Sidestep's telepathy, they have never trusted anybody enough for that kind of instant two-way communication before. Will it change? We'll see.

What do the HG trio like to eat?

HG likes fancy and meat. Nocturne wants it to look elegant and refined. Jake don't think it's a meal if it doesn't include rice. He's also the one most likely to cook of the three. The food is what he misses the most from home, and he's worked hard on trying to get his favorites as right as he can with the lack of ingredients. Don't think either of them has a sweet tooth.

Do all telepaths need carbs for their powers? Or can their 'fuel' vary? Does the need for their fuel, in conjunction with their powers, give them any cravings for the foods that supply it?

In general, yes. Glucose is the fuel the brain needs, and that also goes for many other mental powers. And yes, many telepaths (and other boosts) get weird cravings for whatever their body needs. Sometimes said things can be rather odd, think of it like pregnancy cravings tuned up to 11.

How would Jake feel about a Sidestep that regularly defeats him in battle when he challenges them, especially if his reputation started taking hits? Would Nocturne and HG tell him to back off, since Step isn't instigating the fights?

They 100% would do that. He's got a job to do, and that's not providing some upstart villain with a sparring partner/punching bag. Would probably lead to a big argument too, Jake hates losing and would love another rematch as long as he's having fun.

In addition to the above, how would he feel about a Step that doesn't really want to fight him because of how one-sided the battles are, and just quietly finds him embarrassing?

Then he would probably back off fast, if there's no fun to be had, he's not going to press the issue. He knows he's not the best there is. And he's not a costumed villain, he's got a job to do.

Would Step's telepathy be considered 'toxic' to other psychics if they tried interacting with it?

I really am not going to spoiler this. You'll find out in game.

Did Blaze ever apologise to Locus for lashing out at her in the Angles story? Which Marshal was he thinking of back then?

Blaze did apologize. And he was thinking of Charge if I remember correctly.

Does Argent ever get lonely, considering her select few friends don't know some crucial truths about her, compounded with her separation from her family?

Often and very. That's why she spends so much time watching movies.

Given the option, would the ROs be interested in witnessing Step's life throughout the years firsthand through shared memories? (Like a pseudo-movie/biography/etc.) How would they feel about the idea, provided that there's a disclaimer for particularly disturbing experiences in Step's life?

Hmmmm. After considering this, I think the ones that would be up for it are Daniel and maaaaaaaybe Ortega.

Was Sidestep the first telepath to work with The Rangers (pre-HB ofc) or were there others before them?

Yes, at least repeatedly and closely. There might have been a teamup or two during Marshal Hood, but I have no names or details.

Ortega was obviously furious at whatever accusations Vernon was throwing toward Sidestep but did that ever gnaw at them? Have they ever thought that maaaybe there was some truth to them and they weren't baseless? Or did they just absolutely not believe any of those claims?

Ortega doubts everything, that's their curse.

Did Ortega ever forget what Sidestep looked like some years after HB? You know how after not seeing someone for some time, their features get blurred in your mind and you don't clearly

remember their face. Did that happen to Ortega or did they constantly look at the rare pic(s) they have of Sidestep so it wouldn't happen? But if it did happen, how did they deal with it?

No, Ortega remembered all too well (and yes, there were some rare pictures to remind them). However, what bothers them more is that now they are starting to forget, the current Sidestep replacing the past one. What did their smile look like again? That's cause for occasional bouts of panic.

After i did a playthrough where i kept things friendly with Ortega, i noticed they're "a lot" more open with a friend Step compared to a romanced one. They're not afraid to show them how worried they are, to call them out on (some of) their lies and just generally open up more. Why is that?

First, there might be other variables at play as well, so it might not be the only thing that changed. But yeah, I think a romanced Ortega is more scared about losing/driving away Sidestep. The closer they are, the more Ortega knows the risk of Step running gets. So they might start walking on eggshells...

If you had a thing with Ortega pre-HB and you continue romancing them in the books too, are the other Rangers surprised to see that Ortega and Sidestep kind of rekindled their relationship after such a tragic event and especially a very long time? What do they think of it? Particularly Chen, since he knew them the longest?

I think everyone that was aware of the whole history was very surprised. Ortega doesn't really have a reputation as someone sticking around for that long, or returning to a previous relationship. People that knew Ortega REALLY well (Chen, Owl) weren't surprised though. it was very much in character.

Is Ortega and Sidestep's ship name in-world still Chargestep?

Probably, it's a good name.

When did Ortega realize they were in love with Sidestep? Was it like a sudden revelation after some event/outing/interaction? Or more of a gradual realization?

I will leave those details up to headcanon since it can vary depending on Sidestep. But in general, I think it was a mix. A gradual thing building up but never realized, and then something happens and the lightbulb goes on. Probably with an "Oh no" as the first reaction, since Ortega would be very aware of the problems that might cause.

If Sidestep gained the power to mimic appearances and voices, especially perfect ones of the Rangers, how would the team react?

Argent, Daniel and Chen would be horrified, Ortega would immediately think of the utility and possibilities of mischief.

How would Locus react upon realising that Sidestep is *nowhere near as weak* as they said they are, and the Rangers are in the dark about it? Especially a Sidestep that lied about losing their

powers? How would she react if Step outclasses her as a telepath in every way? Would she consider becoming their student if they were relatively wholesome as a villain?

Oh I am NOT gonna spoil that. You'll simply have to find out in game.

Imagine this scenario... how would the Rangers + the HG trio + Mortum react to a Sidestep that's disturbingly good at making accurate guesses and evaluations about them and their past, if their telepathy was briefly lost?

None of them would believe that Sidestep had lost their telepathy. Cried wolf too many times.

What does Mortum think of child experimentation? Would they endorse torture if it yielded promising results in experiments?

Mortum dislikes child experimentation, and considers it distasteful but, at times, worth the moral discomfort if it is necessary. And if you think about it, it's not torture if it's during a productive experiment, it's just a very painful experiment. Torture for torture's sake is a useless waste.

Why doesn't Jake like horror?

Creeps him out. Probably has too much imagination.

How does HG treat the LDPD, knowing they killed two of their siblings?

The organization is a useful tool, the individuals involved are long dead.

Disregarding their current popularity as the Rangers and the subsequent recognition that comes with it... how would the Rangers fare at being spies?

In order of being good at it: Argent, Ortega, Chen, Daniel.

Does Hollow Ground know how to detect telepathic manipulations in their mind? Or are telepaths too rare for them to develop that sort of defense?

Spoilers. You don't know the limits of their powers, or what assets they might have access to.

What sort of role to HG's organisation would Mia have played if she was recommended? Would she have accepted it, given that HG didn't thread her?

Informant and spreader of information. And probably not.

How would the ROs react to the truth between Step and the Puppet?

Spoilers, you have to find out in game.

Would Chen ever ask Sidestep about what Spoon says/has said? Would Ortega be the same when it comes to the animals on Elena's ranch?

Once Chen realizes that Sidestep can hear Spoon, he probably would after some consideration. Ortega wouldn't even think about it, nor be particularly interested.

The poly routes sounds sweet but I live for drama. Will it be possible to get the ROs to fight over Sidestep?

Some constellations can be that volatile, yeah. But the risk is they'll turn their annoyance on Sidestep instead so... it's a risky route.

so we know how tía elena feels/felt about sides will be determines in game. what about her relationship with the pre hb rangers? :)

Some she almost saw as family (Hood, Sentinel, Chen). The rest of the team she liked. She saw more of them when she still lived in Los Diablos. She had a soft spot for Sunstream, and was worried about her mental state.

How much say do Ortega and Chen get in upgrades to their mods and gear?

A bit, but they don't have final say. At this point, they've got more pull than Daniel does.

What were the Guardians doing before they were on the team? Did any of them ever try to be Rangers?

Zephyr and Blaze used to be on the Long Beach Heroes team with Locus and Porphyry. The rest of the team (I haven't detailed everyone yet) were independent heroes. None of them had aimed to become a Ranger.

Since Step can body hop does that make them have the potential to be immortal?

They still return to their original body when they fall asleep, so at this point, no. If they can figure out how to stay in another mind permanently things might become interesting.

For the last question... I'm guessing no. Their original body has the telepathy that allows them to body hop. If it dies, I feel like Step might either also die, or live an extended life in a puppet body: but not immortality.

The biggest question here is if the telepathy is tied the body. So far, that seems to be the case. It's acting like a bluetooth hub, connecting the new body and old.

Is there something that Step finds unexplainably soothing? Like how babies are with rocking and their parents? Or some people with certain places? How about Ace?

That is entirely headcanon. Dogs is the closest thing to canon.

you said before that it's a theory that a boosted person's surroundings/what is being done to them influences what type of power they get. if it is not a spoiler, what was sidestep put through?

We will go into that in future books, so my lips are sealed.

Just to clarify, how many siblings did Hollow Ground have? I think some older posts mentioned both 2 and 3.

I am going back and forth, right now they are Shrödingers siblings.

Does Ortega have Sidestep's Gun? If so would they give it back if Sidestep asked?

Ortega does indeed. And if Sidestep ever realized or asked, they would hand it back in a heartbeat.

How strong does Ortega think Sidestep is in the current day?

It depends on the Sidestep. Ortega has a clear opinion, but it won't be the same for everyone.

The PuppetStep is more Action Survivor to Sidestep's main body Action Hero(Villain). Is it going to be possible to take a few levels in Badass for Puppetstep or is this going to remain the case?

Oh you'll get your levels of badass in certain paths, trust me on that. Looking forward to writing them.

Does the Farm ever try to make Re-Genes mixed in with other species?

Yes. It did not go well.

What's the biggest + smallest Re-Gene *ever* recorded?

The largest would have been about twice the height of a normal human, but six times heavier. The smallest would be the size of a toddler.

How did Daniel's family acquire their wealth and prestige? What sort of business were they in? (Considering their aversion to Danny getting into art, I'm guessing it's probably not anything art-related?)

I haven't detailed it, but it's old money (probably third generation). This means it's mostly business and investments today, but originally I imagine it would have come from manufacturing of some sort. These days, like most rich people, they are in the business of making more money.

How much of each of the Rangers' past is known to the team? What do they know of each other?

Ortega and Chen knows a lot about each other's past, but they are both hiding secrets from each other. Argent's past is nobody's business (Ortega knows a little tho). Herald is deceptively open but also very good at not talking about the big stuff. In short, everyone's got secrets.

Did Hood work with/for HG? Did they ever have a more personal association with each other that isn't just rivals/enemies? (E.g. Friends?)

Hood had no association with HG back in the day, in fact, they didn't even believe a kingpin existed. So many real threats in Los Diablos, there was never any time investigating rumors of shadowy manipulators. HG the person was known as a criminal, but certainly not Ranger's level. Unfortunately, Hood stepped on some very tender feet there without realizing it, and paid the price.

What would Mia's main question for Catastrofiend be if she ever got a chance for an interview?

Are you going to kill me?

Which of the Guardians would have fared best against Sidestep in a close-quarters combat?

Zephyr. Speed is annoying, even for a telepath.

Is Mortum aware that telepathy has different branches such as force/subtlety? Have they studied Ljungstrand's telepathic classification?

Yes they have. Quite extensively.

What kind of D&D character would the Rangers, Dr. Mortum, and HG trio create?

Ortega: Wizard! Probably evocation. Chen: Life cleric. Argent: Ranger, and shut up, it is not underpowered. Daniel: Battlemaster fighter. Dr. Mortum: Druid is clearly the most overpowered. HG: Psionics, if we're talking overpowered here. Nocturne: Lore bard. Jake: Warlock, pact of the blade.

In what ways does Locus's telepathy differ from Sidestep's in how she sees people mindscapes or reads people minds?

We'll get into that in more detail in the books, but in short, Sidestep's telepathy is very sensory, especially visual. They see mindscapes, they feel them. Locus is not. She's verbal. She sees minds more like reading books, she doesn't see mindscapes that way. Maybe more like those tag clouds, or snippets of text conversations.

How did Locus feel about being part of the Long Beach Heroes? What was her relationship like with rest of the team? Are she and Porphyry still in contact?

She loved it! She was the baby of the team, but she always felt very welcome and valued. It was only towards the end when things started falling apart, when she started investigating HG. She and Porphyry is still in touch.

Does Nocturne's mother know Nocturne moved to Los Diablos? Is Nocturne in contact with her mother or does she prefer to keep her distance from her old life?

She writes, and there is the occasional phonecall on holidays, but she prefers to keep her distance.

How much do the Rangers, Dr. Mortum, and HG trio consider their decisions before they make it?

From most impulse to most considering their decisions: Jake, Herald, Argent, Chen, HG, Mortum, Ortega, HG.

Did Puppet have any family? What was their childhood like? How content had Puppet been with their life?

It is still very hazy for me, but no close family they were in contact with, and not a very happy life.

is there in universe trading cards for heroes / villains / vigilantes?

Oh yes. Should probably bring that up at some point.

did sidestep live anywhere during their hero days, were they homeless, or will it be a player choice?

Player choice. It can be everything from basically homeless to a comfortable little apartment.

did you write the other side of the conversation ortega has on the phone with lady argent in the diner about letting sidestep go into her head?

Yes. Yes I did. Maybe one day I'll post it.

Will we get a chance to give Chen, Argent, and/or Dr. Mortum nicknames in the future? Or do they not like being called pet names? Actually, does Dr Mortum even enjoy calling the Puppet ma chérie/mon chéri? Or is that just them trying to keep up their polite french persona?

Everyone will have the opportunity for nicknames eventually. Even though some of them might groan (not that it would stop Sidestep). I think at this point it is mostly a habit for Mortum, in the future it might become something more personal.

Can you inject the hero drug into any living thing? Are there boosted plants out there? Boosted mushrooms?

Oh thank you for those nightmares. I had not even considered that.

On that note, we know Sidestep can kinda communicate with (or at least listen to the thoughts of) animals; Can they/would they ever be able to do the same with plants? Or is their "language" just too different to comprehend?

Too different. Just like with insects.

You mentioned in another Q&A that Dr Mortum has a side project to make a lab-compatible roomba for cleaning purposes, but did they ever add anything extra to it? Laser beams? A freeze ray? Perhaps a knife duct taped on top?

Look, that extra strength floor scrubber was bad enough. You wouldn't want to arm that. Though I do love the idea of Mr. Stabby, Dr. Mortum is too safety conscious.

What kinds of things do people buy/commission from Dr Mortum? Is it mostly armor and weapons, or are there other things they specialize in? Have they ever made things for vigilantes? Or have their customers always been villains?

In order of most common to least common: Surveillance gadgets, weapons, armor, vehicles, robots. Whatever it is, it tends to be compact and small, miniaturization is their specialty. And yes, there are vigilante customers.

Did Vitruvian have any mods and/or take the hero drug? Or was he just a 'normal' human? Did his armor compliment Dr Mortum's at all, or did they have totally different villain aesthetics? Wait actually, did they even go into the field together at any point? Or did they only work together in the lab?

Vitruvian was a boost. He was very vocal about it too, saw that as making them better than ordinary people. They had... hmmm... not intentionally complimentary aesthetics, but they did not clash. Both of them were mainly white/pale, with green details for Vitruvian, and orange for Mortum. They went into the field together often, and were known as a villainous duo.

were there any standout missions/encounters that sidestep and ashfall did together? can we get some more insight on what their relationship was like?

I need to do some more thinking of that, I am planning a future lore post for Ashfall.

what's ashfall's motivation for being a hero?

Being the best they can be without being an asshole about it and do some good in the process.

Does LD have a Pride Parade? Would any of the ROs go if it did?

Yes it does! As for going... I think Herald has been there many times as an "ally", probably the most openly Rangers presence there. Chen doesn't go to the parade, but there are people he meets up with for more private parties during that time. Dr. Mortum always goes.

What did Mortum think of Sentinel?

Brave. Powerful. An inspiration.

Can Re-Genes be 'charged' with electricity? If they can, what's the effects of it?

I am not sure I understand the questions. They can be shocked, just like normal people. It doesn't affect their AI chips in particular, they are well insulated.

Would an NB!Ortega have a similar relationship to their father as a Julia one, since he would've been unsure with how to connect with them?

Hard to say. In some ways it would be similar. Their dad would not have been very supportive, and not considered a real identity. A phase.

What types of jealous are the ROs when it comes to a Sidestep with lots of admirers who want to make a move on them?

My brain literally broke down at this question. I think neither Sidestep, the RO's or me can even imagine this particular scenario. I think they would not be jealous, but try to help Sidestep escape the scene as fast as possible.

What do the ROs wish for/from a revealed Step the most if they were on good/neutral terms with them?

I'll have to work that out in writing, I'm not sure yet.

Would the aforementioned EMP blast have killed Sidestep/Re-Genes if they were caught in its blast radius?

Probably not.

Ortega seems to harbour a lot of guilt for the call they made in HB, and wishes they could've done things differently... how would they react to a Tactician!Step admitting they would've made the same call if they were Marshal, and never blamed Ortega for what happened? Would they feel better about their decision? Or would the guilt still remain?

Ortega would probably cry. And feel a lot better. The guilt would still be there though, they are supposed to be better.

How would the ROs take a Sidestep that's becoming more and more of a paranoid, mistrusting shut-in?

Try to help in any way they can.

HYPOTHETICALLY, would Dave throw hands with the Farm?

What makes you sure it's hypothetical?

Have all of the Marshals gotten together for interviews or photo shoots before? Like, full on Vanity Fair/Annie Leibovitz spread?

Oh yeah, that has happened on several occasions.

What, specifically, is Pyroclast's powerset? (If you've come up with it) I'm dying for dusty boy lore

They are rather rare as boosts go, since they have a form of reversible full-body transformation. Most people who go that way don't survive the boosting process, let alone manages to reclaim their human form afterwards. In short, he can turn his body into a black, carbon-based substance that resembles ash. While his weight remains the same, the volume of course becomes much larger. In this form he can pass through cracks, choke and blind people, as well as control his internal temperature. The last is a recent development, which is the reason for the name change. He's been upgraded from beta to alpha since this new faced was revealed and mastered. He can stretch himself as thin as a gentle ashfall, or pull himself together into an almost solid form.

While transformed, he can't talk, which is one reason why he loved working with Sidestep, who understood him just fine. This is one of the reasons he was not named Mashal yet, having a leader who can't communicate while using their strongest abilities is not ideal. He's actively working on developing new facets of his powers.

If certain unnamed individuals were to take precautions against a second Heartbreak-like event caused by Sidestep, what would those precautions look like, given the presumed (?) failure of dampeners to contain that kind of telepathic power?

Let's be fair here, those precautions would look like Ortega. They're a very good build for an anti-telepath assassin.

Okay, fine, a lighter question... we know we can ride Ortega's bike with them.... but will we be able to DRIVE the bike?

Oh yes.

Any chance we might meet Marek in game? And, I don't know, say, punch him in the face?

Perhaps, on both accounts.

Did Mortum have a museum exhibit?

No, but Vitruvian did, and they were mentioned as part of that.

So... How much money did the Sullivans funnel into Genitech over the years?

They are far too conservative to be involved with something like that. Would consider it gross and unethical to even consider.

What numbers does Ortega, Chen and Herald have in Mitchell's Guide to Heroes? (you've started writing them since Lady Argent's interview)

13, 22 and 425.

And what is villainsona-Sidestep's number of profile in Mitchell's Guide to Villains?

Okay... horror inspirations question part 2, do you have any specific media inspirations for Heartbreak and the nanovores you can think of? Or even Shroud? — and Hollow Ground if there any, mob/thriller/crime genre included?

If I should pick one thing of my massive horror watching pool that inspired me, it would be Pontypool. Yeah. I don't think anybody would feel calmer about Heartbreak after watching that...

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ehq2a8lum_4

For the nanovores I'm honestly not sure I can pick one. The closest might be the Stephen King short story "The Mist", it's very different, but that feeling of slowly approaching dread is similar. Not the movie though...

I've got no particular inspirations for Shroud or HG.

Was there any media at the HB incident, or were they all shuffled off? Was the helicopter that crashed media or police?

The media was kept off-scene due to the dangers, but some tried to get close anyway. The helicopter that crashed was from the media.

Do any of the characters play any instruments? I can totally picture Ortega “kinda” knowing like 2 guitar riffs and argent being like virtuosic on 4 instruments and never mentioning it

Ortega plays the guitar, and is quite good at it. Not as good a singer as they think, though.

Herald had piano lessons, but never really got into it.

Chen played a few instruments (guitar and drums mostly) in high school, and was part of a rock band, but it never really went anywhere. Has not touched anything since he lost his hands.

Argent never played any instruments, and neither did Mortum.

Rosie is good at the guitar as well, but better at karaoke.

How did Sidestep win against Dreamweaver?

I don't know yet, maybe I'll detail it later. It might come up in book three for... reasons.

Where is Clarice Holmes now?

Still working in Los Diablos.

Does the military have the right / the means to disconnect Ortega's spinal bypass whenever they decide to? Can they do so from a distance? Does Ortega have a plan or 7 to dodge that?

The tech belongs to the military, yes. So they could do that. Not from a distance though, and the ethics of it would be debatable since it is doubtful Ortega could function without it.

Ortega having plans? Does that sound in character?

What kind of protection does Vernon have? Is he tied to someone powerful?

He was. Once upon a time.

Is Vernon himself aware of these protections, or is someone interested in keeping him around without him knowing? Did he trade retirement for protection?

Vernon is unaware of the current arrangements, but would probably not be too surprised if he learned about them.

Important question: is the "Sad Charge Bitches About Retirement" reel still available online and has Sidestep seen it? I think it would fix them.

Sidestep doesn't know it exists, it's a very rare find.

I don't suppose you'll give us a hint on what happened to the people who Sidestep has possessed in the past, right?

Most of them probably never noticed/passed it off as a weird daydream or momentarily blanking on what they were doing.

Sidestep can reference ortega's mean streak in the interview with mia. Could we have an example or two of when that reared its head pre-heartbreak that sidestep would have witnessed?

I think the most common thing would be that Ortega would say "nice" things, which in reality were terribly condescending, especially in front of cameras. They often made fun of rival heroes that way, and the LDPD or politicians. A bit "bless your heart" about it all. They could also be more violent and threatening when angry, their mods "accidentally" acting up and breaking things belonging to people that annoyed them and their friends. Like cameras trying to catch Sidestep, and likewise.

Or did they ever turn that mean streak on Step back in the day?

Not intentionally I think, but there might have been times where things were taken the wrong way. Ortega is not the most thoughtful person, and they do have foot in mouth disease.

If the Rangers, Mortum, HG trio were to go to the beach, what activities would they enjoy doing?

Ortega: Anything that involved moving around. Volley ball, other beach games. Surfing too. Not great in the long run though, while their mods are waterproof, there's always more wear. Salt water is corrosive.

Chen: Watching Spoon play in the water and eat some ice cream in the shade. Sand and mods are not a great combo.

Argent: Surfing and swimming. And ice cream. Let's not forget that.

Herald: Basking in the sun. Probably joining Ortega for whatever beach games they try to start. Swimming.

Mortum: A good book in the shade. Hopefully someone gets the bbq going.

HG: Sleeping and working on their tan. It would have to be a private beach though.

Nocturne: People watching and sipping a drink.

Jake: Whatever, as long as it's in the water.

How does argent's physical therapy help with her pain?

It helps giving her the knowledge to modify her limbs/skin to help mute/connect/disconnect nerves and damage. She needs the help of someone intimately familiar with how bodies work.

What kind of guy is lord Francis Franny Ember? What are his vibes ✨, his ruling style, his private hobbies? How would you compare him to HG, personality- or at least image-wise?

Flamboyant as hell. Larger than life. Thinks about his image. Unlike HG, he doesn't rule from the shadows, he's very much at the front. Likes to demonstrate his powers and make examples of people/places. Has burned more than one person alive who questioned him. Has enough control over his flames to make things very unpleasant without killing people if he wants to. More interested in personal power and luxuries than political influence. More russian oligarch than american congressman.

He's very generous to people he trusts, to be on his good side is to always have backup, even in the smallest ways. Knows the first name of the people working close to him, even henchmen. Keeps up to date with their family business. Gives birthday and wedding gifts.

Like fire, he can be warm, supportive and giving. Make your life safer and easier. But fuck up, and you'll get burned.

And where does the inferiority complex (that a man who would willingly take the title of "Lord" in our year 2022 probably arbors) stem from?

Honestly? Probably from the same place where the desperation enough to take the boost drugs came from.

Had DNA ever been taken from the Rangers (past, present, other sections) and used in the Regene project?

Yes.

Has Julia ever worn a fake mustache on a stakeout before? Or a beard?

Probably a beard and mustache. Needs both. She's tall and built enough to be taken for a man at a quick glance if she dresses right, and a beard would reinforce that first impression.

What was Regina and Sidestep's rapport before Sidestep's first escape? There's a "welcome home" flashback in Rebirth that might indicate familiarity between them. Did they already know each other and if yes, how/why did they work together?

They did work together. Exactly what their report was will be subject to player choice once we get to dig more into that particular relationship background.

In the latest lore drop, owl calls Ortega Sparkles. Did sidestep coin the nickname and others took to it? Or did step start using it after others did?

Sidestep coined it.

How many Re-Genes are there?

I genuinely have no idea. Above 100 but below 1000 decanted.

If the Rangers have the suit at the end of Retri, has Steel done a diagnostic run on it? They know the Rat King is apart of the suit, so was that discovered after checking the specs of the suit or was it found out another way?

It is fair to assume the suit has been thoroughly analyzed and the Rat King identified.

Has DNA from anybody at the Farm been used in the Regene project?

Yes.

The game lets us decide a surface-level answer as to why Sidestep came back to Los Diablos, but... is there a deeper reason? Are they aware of something brewing specifically in Los Diablos, which would make LD the best stage for their villain career?

Not specifically Los Diablos, but close enough.

Or is there a deeper reason that they're not aware of? A kind of telepathic imprint pulling, for example?

I think one of the deeper reasons is that Los Diablos was the city where Sidestep became themselves. Grew up. Made a name. The closest thing to a proper home. When hurt and uprooted, that kind of comfortable familiarity can be a tempting beacon, despite the added risks. Combine that with Sidestep's tendency to keep poking old wounds, and there would be no better city.

Are we ever gonna get to go to one of those Villain Parties Dr. Mortum organizes?

I think so, that would be fun.

Does Los Diablos have functioning Subway lines, or just ruins? How's transport in the city?

Not anymore. Los Angeles of the FH world used to, though. In this reality the subway/railway system wasn't discontinued but expanded, looking more like Chicago or New York. However, post-quake this system was not salvaged and rebuilt, and the current public transport relies heavily on a fleet of buses. While many are run by the city, there are over a dozen transport companies that runs limited lines, and many smaller communities that manage their own communal/informal transport pools. Parts of the light rail network has been restored, but mostly servicing outlying company sites.

The traffic is bad, but not as bad as current LA, since private ownership of cars is not as common. Lots of people take the bus, including the middle class, and there are many "luxury" buses with comfortable seats and air-conditioning which offers a nice ride to and from downtown. Hundreds of small cab-companies makes up the difference. Since it is very easy to start and run a company, many people run small one and two person cab businesses ferrying people around.

What kind of add-ons does Charge's bike have? Do they have specific protections in place or mario-kart-type traps at the ready, or is it just a normal-ish bike?

It is mostly a normal-ish bike, though built to the highest standard and power. That being said, there are several gadgets in it, though I would call them more James Bondy than anything else. It is important to remember that it is relatively low-tech since Charge has a tendency mess up delicate electronics.

What are the rangers offices like? Are they strictly professional spaces or do any of them keep things like memorabilia/photos/thank you cards etc?

They are more professional now than when Ortega was Marshal back in the old headquarter. It's a newer place, built for show and giving an official impression. That being said, people put their mark on things behind the public spaces. Both civilian staff and the Rangers themselves have personal effects in their offices. The places that are free from that is the lobby, as well as conference rooms, and other spaces where they interact with law enforcement or the city. Some offices are quiet messy behind the scenes. Yes, even Steel's (Spoon got a bed there).

What happens when a known villain retires? Are they kept on a watch list? Or are they allowed to just disappear back into society? Do heroes ever keep their own eyes on them?

Like with any cold case, the crimes don't disappear. However, it's not like there's a lack of new emergencies that needs to be dealt with before digging up old dirt. Some villains do manage to slip between the cracks and retire to a normal life, especially if they managed to conceal their face from the public. It is speculated that some rather spectacular deaths were in fact planned to provide closure to a villain career, letting the person behind the mask slip away quietly into the shadows. Some heroes probably have their own suspicious watch lists, but there's no official ones.

What does Mia think of the Rangers as a team and individually? Which villains and heroes does she respect, if any?

Mia is torn. She understands the need for the Rangers, and respects what they have done in the past, but she's also deeply suspicious of their greater purpose. She has talked far too much with Vernon to think the Rangers project is entirely benign. In general she respects people who have the guts to stand up for what's right at a personal risk, but sadly that doesn't apply to every hero. She judges them as individuals, and there are heroes she respects as well as villains. I can't list everyone here, mainly because I haven't decided, but I will say that when it comes to the Rangers she respects Herald, is suspicious of Steel and Charge, and is deeply worried about Argent.

And... since I'm eyeing the classic journalist-as-bait comics trope with trepidation... Is Mia at risk of being put in danger because of us in the next books?

That might certainly happen in some of the paths, yes.

Is Step acquainted with Ljungstrand?

Not to their knowledge.

How's Tina been holding up without Teddy? Has she found any new information now that he's been missing for a year? What does she think has happened?

She's coping. Theirs is a dangerous business, and it's not the first time her husband has fucked up. Nor the last. She's working on getting him back, and thinks she has a pretty good idea what happened and who has him.

Is Norma Lee an alias used for her art? Does she go by any other names?

Yes, it is a "pen name". She does have other names, but she also values her privacy.

what's Hollow Ground first name(s)?

I haven't decided yet.

would hollow ground or anyone in their family have the initials CB?

No.

would Heartbreak have the initials CB?

No.

You've said Josh is definitely dead... Where is his body? Was he buried? Any chance we might encounter any Sullivans down the line? If the Sullivans have ties to Genitech, did they preserve... anything from Josh... through Genitech?

Herald's brother was buried back in Boston. It was a big funeral, but nobody mentioned boost drugs being involved. He died in a fire. Daniel was a hero for trying to save his brother and burning himself badly in the process. Just another in a long line of family secrets. I don't have a future meeting with the Sullivans planned in the future, but who knows? Also, I am not sure how Genitech got involved in this... I take no responsibility for reckless tinfoiling ;)

How does Herald feel about the art thief in particular?

Part of him truly understands the temptation, and in a way, it's no different from the rich people buying stolen art and never showing it to anybody. Another part of him is jealous. The thing that bothers him the most is that he doesn't know why. Is it to sell it off to the highest bidder? Or to keep and appreciate? He hopes it's the last, and then he feels guilty for thinking that would actually make a difference. It shouldn't.

What's the public's opinion on telepaths in general?

In general, they would be viewed with suspicion and/or fear. Imagine all the nervousness about privacy on the internet and needing VPN's and the government spying on you but applied to your own head. There's probably a thriving subculture of people hawking telepathic protection devices, everything from jewelry (magnets work for everything) and hats (more fashionable than the good old tinfoil hat) as well as drugs (metallic ions, and nano everything). It's one of the powers people are most nervous about back in the east, because how would you KNOW? They look just like everybody else.

What did Chen and Ortega think of each other when they first met? How did their first meeting go?

Chen thought Ortega was hot as hell, but kind of an ass. Charming, stubborn, would drive him nuts every time they talked and yet he kept coming back.

Ortega thought Chen was nice but sad. He needed to lighten up a little, show that the military hadn't crushed him permanently.

What kind of entry requirements are there for joining the Rangers? Is there a minimum boost/mod level preferred? Preferred background/experience level? Is there an age

requirement?

The age requirement is 18 years old, but everything else is open to interpretation. In practice, only powerful, stable heroes and vigilantes who has worked as such for a year or more would be considered. Often a background check is initiated before an offer is even made. The power level is less important than the skills they can bring to the team, and how well they can fulfill their role as a united states representative.

Who was the youngest ever Ranger recruit?

Shimmerglow joined the Portland Rangers at 16 by lying about her age and faking the documents well enough to fool people. Or perhaps the recruiters didn't care enough to check thoroughly.

If you were going to estimate, how many people have actually seen Sidestep's face from their pre-HB days, through photos or otherwise? Just how "known" is their face in villain, vigilante, and reporter circles, ala Mortum recognizing their face?

Maybe a dozen or so that Sidestep knows of. Maybe 50 or so in total, some of which might be dead. Not super widespread, but enough that if you dug for it, you could find out.

What does happen with Herald's crush if Step didn't agree to train him? Does it never happen, does it fade away or being left at the same "level"? Or smth else?

It will fade away. No use pining over something not meant to be, Herald will move on rather quickly. He is not Ortega.

If Step decided not to train Herald, is he training on his own, asked other "professionals" to train him or did nothing? Or smth else mb?

It will vary depending on his experiences from Rebirth.

Dear Malin, can we know, why the Rangers were sent to handle Heartbreak and not the Special Directive?

It was their job to protect the city. Bringing in the Special Directive would have caused too much attention at that point since they have got nothing to do with Los Diablos, and is closely tied to the military. Whether they were deployed (and failed) earlier in the process, before Heartbreak closed in on Los Diablos is unknown.

Would the Farm agents who picked up Sidestep from the HB scene have had something stronger than dampeners/ numbers around to protect themselves, or were they just taking their chances with numbers alone? Would we be familiar with whatever they were using?

Most likely there were mobile dampeners in the ambulance, and the people there were using numbers. Doubling down seems safer. That being said, they kept their distance to the last moment, remember,

nobody saw an ambulance going in.

[Post your question of the month here!](#)

[May 26, 2022](#)

Ask away, about the game, history or my writing process!

[re: Heartbreak Postscript.](#)

[May 15, 2022](#)

RE: Heartbreak postscript.

This is all I could find. No video, just transcripts, and I suspect they are manipulated. Especially the Charge one. If you read it carefully, you can see how jarring and disjointed it is, as if several parts had been cut away and the rest spliced together. Also note that I have not been able to find the full session notes leading up to this anywhere.

If I had to hazard a guess, I suspect these were put together to show to someone higher up in the chain to give the all clear to return to business as usual. If there was further context, I haven't been able to dig it up. But I'll keep trying.

And no, you don't need to pay me for this. I'd rather not have a money trail leading right to my doorstep. I want answers, same as you. I think you're right, Heartbreak is just the top of an iceberg and the Rangers were at the heart of it.

Take care, and don't go public with this without talking to me first, okay? You saw what happened to Browne, and you don't have the kind of protection he does.

/.*

Sentinel: Debriefing, final session.

Interviewer: Clarice Holmes, team therapist.

S- Why do I have to go through this? I wasn't even present.

CH- I know. How does that make you feel?

S- What do you think? My teammates died because of me. People I liked. My friends.

CH- Do you feel like you could have saved them?

S- I... don't get into this with me. Not now. We've talked enough about my "savior complex". This is about real people. Real deaths. Maybe I couldn't have saved Anathema, but I might have been able to save Sidestep, not to mention the other people who jumped first.

CH- And if you had been there and not in Vancouver... do you think you would have been affected?

S- I could have stayed at range. I don't need to be close to manipulate winds. Maybe it wouldn't have been a comfortable landing, but they would have lived.

CH- It sounds like you have thought this through.

S- It's the only thing that keeps running through my head at night. What I could have done. How I could have fixed this.

CH- Do you think that's healthy?

S- No. But I can't stop. I have these powers, and I can't...

CH- It's okay. Take your time.

S- How long do you have? If I start cracking now, it's gonna take a while.

CH- As long as we need to. You know that. I'm here for you.

S- Thank you. It's just...

CH- Marshal Hood all over again?

S- Yes. What good am I if I can't even keep my friends safe?

CH- You've most likely saved more lives than any other Ranger out there.

S- Not the ones that mattered.

CH- They matter to me. My grandmother lives in Weaverville. She wouldn't be alive if you hadn't turned that fire.

S- I didn't know.

CH- You couldn't. And that's the thing. There are thousands and thousands of people here on the coast going around living our lives because you were there to help. Us or our friends or our relatives. And you might not see it, but I know there are people praying for you every night. Because you do what you do. Because you are who you are.

S- It's hard to forget the ones you fail.

CH- I know.

S- I bet.

CH- Have you thought more about what we talked about last time?

S- Retiring? I don't think this is the right time. The team is in shambles. Charge...

CH- Yeah. Do you think you will be offered command if things don't change?

S- I already turned it down once. The reasons haven't changed.

CH- Even if the circumstances have?

S- I could do so much more outside the Ranger system. I'm not in this to fight villains. Not anymore.

CH- Really? What changed?

S- The world? When we started out here in the west, it was warlords, chaos and criminals. Now there's politicians and companies, and sure, everything's not perfect but there's a distinct lack of would-be warlords who need a kick in the mouth. Void was the last. Besides, my powers are better fighting natural disasters. Not many people that can do that, why would I waste it on bank robbers?

CH- Or whatever Heartbreak was?

S- Yes. I know what you're trying to make me say, but it doesn't change anything. I know I'll always regret not being there, but I'm not blind. For all I keep saying I could have handled it, can I be sure? What range would be too close? What if I had been dragged under it's influence? We don't know for sure if it was gas, wind might not have been enough to keep me clear. And if I had lost it... more people could have died than already did. Losing control...

CH- Dreamweaver still haunts you, then?

S- Of course. And I never got to repay Sidestep for getting me out from under her influence. I'm too powerful, if I were to go bad...

CH- We can take a moment if you want to collect yourself.

S- No. Let's get through this. I don't think I'd want to talk about Heartbreak again if I can help it. You can't tell me anything I don't already know.

CH- Sometimes talking to someone about a traumatic experience helps. Even if they don't tell you anything new.

S- I know. And I am talking about my other issues. Those sessions won't end, right?

CH- Of course not. This is just procedure, you know that.

S- Are you going to give me a clean bill of mental health?

CH- You know I can't tell you that. But what do you think?

S- I think so.

CH- What makes you say that?

S- Because while you might want to recommend a leave of absence, you know they wouldn't listen to you. Right now the Rangers need me. And yes, savior complex. I know. Even if Ashfall agrees to join, we'll still be dangerously understrength, and like it or not, I'm the heavy hitter.

CH- If I thought you needed more time I'd tell them that. You know I want what's best for you, the Rangers will survive. New recruits will be brought in.

S- And once they do, I'll think about stepping down.

CH- I can't say that I'm surprised.

S- We had a similar talk after the Nanosurge, didn't we?

CH- You were there though. You helped. If you hadn't channeled the Santa Ana winds, the nanovores would have advanced on the city much faster. You gave everyone else time to try to get people out of the way. To figure out a permanent solution.

S- And people still died. Friends. Heroes. Sometimes I feel old. There's not many of us left that went through the disaster. I really mean it this time, I want a shot at a normal life. Once things have settled down.

CH- But until then?

S- I'll do my job.

Captain Steel: Debriefing, final session.

Interviewer: Clarice Holmes, team therapist.

CH- How are you feeling?

CS- What to you think?

CH- I am here if you want to talk. You know that. And if you don't feel you're ready, I will come back again next week. I do understand that what you went through was deeply traumatic, and I don't think is something that can be fixed quickly, but it's not healthy to bottle things up.

CS- Fine. I feel terrible. Like yesterday. Like the week before. Like the week before that. But I'm moving forward.

CH- I hear that the operation went fine. Do you have a date when they can connect your new legs?

CS- No. It depends how fast the connection ports heal. They don't want to do it too soon.

CH- I sense the implication that you might have asked them to hurry up?

CS- I can't stay in bed with things falling apart around me. I need to do something.

CH- You will be able to leave the hospital as soon as you're cleared physically and mentally. But I think you will have to ready yourself for some months in the wheelchair. If you're lucky, and don't push yourself.

CS- So you're a surgeon now. Good for you.

CH- I'm not. But I have done a lot of therapy with people who have lost limbs. And suffered greater losses. I know how that can weigh on you.

CS- Have you?

CH- Lost someone? My father, when I was young. He served in the army.

CS- My condolences.

CH- Talking about the people you lost helps. Survivor's guilt can eat you alive.

CS- I know. I was in the army for years. It's not the first time I've lost a friend.

CH- And how does that make you feel?

CS- Empty. Terrible for living through it. Again. But I don't think we made the wrong call going in. If we hadn't, more people would have died.

CH- You sound certain of that.

CS- I am. What security clearing do you have?

CH- Verdant. You know I wouldn't be here if I wasn't cleared to hear what you have to say.

CS- And keep your mouth shut about it?

CH- That goes without saying. What passes between you and me won't reach further than our superiors. And it won't affect the cover story.

CS- A terrorist attack. Hallucinatory gas. Did they reveal it was me who called in the airstrike?

CH- You're a hero. All the Rangers are. Sacrificing your life to stop a threat to the city.

CS- Again. Why go with the gas story?

CH- Quite frankly, neither of us are cleared for that knowledge. If I should be truly unprofessional and speculate, perhaps because it would be easier to understand for the public. After Dreamweaver, there is precedent.

CS- I've never encountered anything like it. My unit were trained in psychic defense, but I doubt that anything could have helped. Even the dampeners overheated.

CH- I didn't know they could do that.

CS- Me neither. I suspect there's a lot we don't know about what happened. And now we'll never learn.

CH- They are dead then? Heartbreak?

CS- Yes, during the bombing. I felt... it pop. Something. Like breaking the surface after a deep dive. Being able to breathe.

CH- I assume you have been debriefed about that in detail?

CS- I have. As soon as I regained consciousness.

CH- Do you want to talk about it?

CS- I can't. Classified.

CH- I understand. You are one of the few that survived who was in direct contact. I think you should be proud of that.

CS- I wouldn't if it hadn't been for Charge.

CH- How does that make you feel?

CS- Grateful. Disappointed. I should have held up better. You know the drill, the things you keep telling yourself to do better next time.

CH- Do you think there will be a next time?

Not like this I hope. But I'm not about to lie down and die. Or retire. You heal. Scar over. Then get back to your feet and move on.

CH- Just like that?

CS- Of course it's not easy. But if I keep telling myself this is how it will be, I'll get there eventually.

CH- Normally I would question whether you're lying to yourself, but with your record.

CS- Yeah. Done it before. Will do it again. As long as I'm given space to do my thing.

CH- I've got instructions that you will be provided the best possible care. Physical and mental.

CS- Good. But between you and me, I'm not the one you need to focus on.

CH- Marshal Charge.

CS- Yes. I'll deal. Not so sure that goes for the Marshal.

CH- You went through a traumatic experience together after Marshal Hood's death. Do you think this is different?

CS- Yes. This time there's nobody to hunt down. Nobody to punish. Just a tragedy you need to live through.

CH- Two teammates dead.

CS- Sidestep was an associate, not a member of the team.

CH- I stand corrected.

CS- I'm sorry. I shouldn't have snapped. The pain is making me irritable.

CH- Of course. I'll alert the nurse to increase the dose once we're done here.

CS- Thank you. Do you know if Sidestep will be buried with full Ranger honors?

CH- I'm sorry, I'm not involved with that side. But I suspect there will be a joint ceremony soon.

CS- Ah, so the bodies have been cleared then?

CH- I'm not sure.

CS- Considering we both know that the toxin story is a cover...

CH- I really have no involvement with that. My concern is for the living.

CS- Of course. Excuse me, you're just the first person I've spoken to with a higher security clearance since the initial debriefing. And I was... raw then. Didn't know what questions to ask.

CH- If you want to, I could try to arrange a meeting with someone who knows more?

CS- I would be grateful. It's easier to move on if all the lingering questions have been put to rest.

CH- I understand completely. But I do think that my questions are answered. It sounds like you are already getting back to work.

CS- Like I said, this is how I deal with things. I'm glad you're indulging me.

CH- I don't think burying yourself in work is necessarily healthy, but I don't think you're a danger to yourself or others. But please, I know we talked about further therapy and you were hesitant, I...

CS- I will use that offer if I need it.

CH- I will have to settle for that.

CS- You might be glad to know that I have been considering your advice, though. Once I get through the rehabilitate process I might consider getting a dog. Maybe.

CH- I'm glad. Having someone around to talk to and care for can be a wonderful tool to manage mental health.

CS- I make no promises.

CH- Of course. And if we don't see each other again, good luck.

Marshal Charge: Debriefing, final session.

Interviewer: Clarice Holmes, team therapist.

MC- Fuck you.

CH- We've been through this once already. It's my job.

MC- Write what the fuck you want then and I'll sign it.

CH- That's not how this works.

MC- Fire me then, you think I care at this point?

CH- I don't have the authority to fire you. And I am not the one you're really angry at.

MC- But you're here. They're not.

CH- Who are they?

MC- Yeah, good luck. I don't want to get you killed. Sentinel likes you.

CH- Would you like to elaborate on that?

MC- Sure. The patient is suffering paranoid delusions that they hold some secret knowledge that could get their therapist killed if revealed, thus making impossible to challenge their delusions. That's enough buzzwords for you?

CH- Are you... drunk?

MC- You know I am. Have been since...

CH- Since?

MC- Fuck off. I'm not talking about it.

CH- You talked to the people that debriefed you afterwards. Why wouldn't you talk to someone who's sole purpose here is helping you deal with your grief?

MC- Because I don't trust you.

CH- I've been this team's therapist for years. We talked at length after the Nanosurge.

MC- Things have changed since then.

CH- How?

MC- ...

CH- I know Anathema's and Sidestep's death was a hard blow to everyone. You were close. It's natural to grieve.

MC- Natural? You think anything about me is natural at this point? Look! Fuck. You need to imagine the lightning with the fingerwaggles, the fuckers won't plug me in yet. Thinks I'm a danger.

CH- Are you?

MC- You tell me? Aren't you here to make sure the Marshal is fit for active duty?

CH- I'm here to make sure you stay alive.

MC- Is that what they think? That I'll kill myself?

CH- You drove against traffic on the highway. Drunk. You could have killed someone. Killed yourself.

MC- Haven't you got the memo? That's what I DO.

CH- You don't have to shout. I'm not the one you're angry at.

MC- You're working on getting there.

CH- I'm working on getting you to open up.

MC- And you're supposed to be ready for what comes out.

CH- I am. That's my job.

MC- And my job is getting sure who's responsible for this gets taken down.

CH- Marshal... the person responsible for this is already dead. I know it's hard to accept, but it is time to move on.

MC- The person...

CH- What's so funny?

MC- The person responsible. Are you talking about Heartbreak?

CH- I do have security clearance enough to know the truth about what happened. I wouldn't be here talking to you otherwise.

MC- Not sure if you're naive or willfully stupid.

CH- Does it feel better insulting me?

MC- You know what? Yes. Yes it does.

CH- I know it was some sort of mental attack. I also know Heartbreak died in the bombing.

MC- Chen? He told you?

CH- I can't verify where I get my information from.

MC- Of course you can't. I bet you can't get me a drink either.

CH- Don't you think you've had enough?

MC- What? This? You want me to walk and turn, officer? Maybe stand on one leg? One hand?

CH- Please, Marshal, you don't need to...

MC- See? No problem. Fit for fight.

CH- Is that important to you?

MC- What?

CH- To be fit for fight? Do you want to go back to active duty?

MC- Why the hell else are we sitting here?

CH- Because I'm trying to help. Because I'm trying to understand.

MC- So do I.

CH- Then help me help you.

MC- Then write me a clean bill of health.

CH- I can't do that unless I think I'm right.

MC- Bullshit. I know how you fuckers pushed Sunstream. Laid on the guilt and responsibilities. How she was serving her nation.

CH- As are you.

MC- Oh please. I thought you were smarter than that.

CH- Did you hear those words often growing up?

MC- This is not about my father.

CH- What makes you say that?

MC- Because people are dead. People I were closer to than any of you fuckers. This isn't about my issues with authority, this is about...

CH- About what?

MC- You've got a point. Maybe I am overreacting. I do that on the best of days, and this isn't one of them.

CH- Getting things out is healthy. Talking about your grief is necessary.

MC- Only if you want to accept it.

CH- And you don't?

MC- I don't want it to be real, don't you get that? I don't want to wake up screaming thinking it was a nightmare and realize it was worse than that. That it's my life now. I don't want to remember seeing...

CH- Here. Have a napkin.

MC- You don't get it. And I'm not interested in explaining.

CH- Watching someone you care about kill themselves is something that will stay with you for the rest of your life. But it will get better.

MC- Maybe I don't want it to. Get better.

CH- Would they thank you for wallowing in your grief like this?

MC- Low blow.

CH- What do you imagine they'd tell you?

MC- Probably to get my sorry ass off the couch and get to work.

CH- And how do you feel about that?

MC- Like screaming out loud.

CH- Would that help?

MC- It didn't. I tried. Why do you think I sound like shit? It's not just the drink.

CH- I'm going to tell you something I shouldn't, because I think you need to hear it.

MC- That I'm being melodramatic?

CH- No. You're grieving. But I was asked to make a judgment whether you could be considered a danger to yourself.

MC- I'm already disarmed, what are they gonna do? Take the keys to my bike? It's not that hard to hotwire.

CH- They were talking about disconnecting your spinal bypass until you had stabilized.

MC- Take my legs.

CH- You broke your hand training in the gym.

MC- I should have wrapped it better.

CH- You're driving drunk.

MC- So charge me.

CH- I'm trying to tell you that you're on thin ice here and I'm trying to help you get to shore safely. Please, please let me do that.

MC- I... I don't know how.

CH- Neither do I. That's why we're talking.

MC- You mean me screaming at you.

CH- Trust me, I've been screamed at by the best.

MC- They... they really suggested that?

CH- They are worried you are going to kill yourself.

MC- Are you sure that's all they are worried about?

CH- You don't think that's enough?

MC- I don't know what to think anymore. Nothing makes sense.

CH- Sometimes the world is like that.

MC- You don't believe in some greater plan for all of us?

CH- If I thought you needed to talk to a priest, it could have been arranged. But your profile doesn't suggest that would be helpful.

MC- Might have cursed less at them.

CH- I don't mind bad language.

MC- Just silence.

CH- Silence can be helpful. But not right now.

MC- So, what's on the list doc? Drink less? Do stupid shit less? Play it smart?

CH- There's no instruction manual for grief. But drinking less is advisable. And please, when you do, take a cab if you need to go anywhere. If you want to, we can assign you a driver for the time being.

MC- A minder you mean.

CH- Do you think you can be minded?

MC- Probably not successfully.

CH- See, you can smile.

MC- Only when I'm tricked.

CH- It will get better. I can't promise much, but I can promise that.

MC- Maybe I don't want it to.

CH- What makes you say that?

MC- Maybe as long as I hurt that means they're still alive.

CH- How did that feel when you said it out loud?

MC- It made me feel stupid.

CH- You smiled when you said it.

MC- Oh they would one hundred percent have been the one to call me stupid. If not in those exact words.

CH- Do you want to talk about them?

MC- No.

CH- I can respect that.

MC- Unlike my privacy to grieve.

CH- You know how this works. You're the Marshal.

MC- I still am?

CH- Unless you step down.

MC- Huh. Sentinel must have said no.

CH- What makes you say that?

MC- I presided over the biggest failure of a Ranger team since the San Francisco fiasco. I've spent the last two weeks a belligerent drunk. I can read the writing on the wall.

CH- Your past accomplishments are not erased by this.

MC- Feels like that right now.

CH- Do you feel like it's your fault?

MC- Yes. I should have made a different call. Gone in alone if I had to.

CH- You couldn't be certain you would be protected.

MC- But I was. And if I hadn't been, it would just have been me.

CH- Do you think your team would have let you?

MC- No way in hell.

CH- You made a decision with the knowledge you had at hand. That's not a crime. That's not even necessarily wrong. You saved the city.

MC- I know. And now I have to live with it.

Re: Heartbreak postscript

You won't believe what I found. Just DON'T share this with anybody. My ass is grass if this comes out. And before you ask, I didn't bug the place, this was auctioned off as part of a "Sad Charge Bitches About Retirement" reel. Don't think any of the other buyers knew enough to connect the dots. The funeral footage was way juicier, what I paid for this is a steal. Audio only always gets overlooked. And no, I'm not going to use it. You should know me better than that. I love that asshole. Gonna tip Owl off about checking the place for bugs. Anonymously of course.

Don't say I never gave you anything.

/M.

O- You need to go home Sparkles, you can't sleep here.

C- Watch me...

O- I swear I will throw you out. Don't think I can't.

C- Just... can I ask you something first? You're all closed up, right?

O- Yeah. Been closed for the last hour, just sent Olive home. You owe her a tip, she had to clean around you.

C- Did I throw up?

O- No. But you can't keep doing this to yourself.

C- Stop quoting me at me.

O- You were right then. I am right now. Deal with it.

C- How did you?

O- Afraid you have to specify. Is this about Sidestep again?

C- No. Yes. Kinda.

O- Fine. You've got ten minutes, then I'm calling Al.

C- What if... what if you had done something terrible. Something absolutely inexcusable. But also necessary.

O- Oh it's that kind of discussion.

C- I don't... I can't... I can't unsee it. And I can't make sense of it.

O- You mean you don't want it to.

C- Maybe. If it... if it did make sense, I...

O- You need to speak up if you want any answers.

C- I can't. Not even to you. Not yet.

O- Fine. So you saw something terrible. Or more than saw? Did? Am I getting warmer.

C- Warm enough.

O- And you want it to be a senseless thing. That doesn't make sense. Just another random cruelty, like a what happened to this shitty coast.

C- Exactly. The earth didn't suddenly sit up and decided to kill off a sizable chunk of population.

O- No, but it wasn't chance either. Plates colliding. Pressure building. It was gonna snap eventually, everything that followed was just billiards. Physics.

C- People aren't physics.

O- Of course we are. You think you being here is some sort of unique pain you're the only one living through? You hurt. Get drunk. Hit someone. Gets fired...

C- I quit.

O- Gets fired, then gets drunk again. Cycling back to being hurt. Predictable as the fucking weather.

C- So if there's something that's too terrible for me to wrap my head around...

O- It's because you don't want to know the answer.

C- But I do...

O- Bullshit. That's why you're getting drunk. That's why you're sitting here whining to me, ex-hero to ex-hero. Because you're afraid.

C- Is that why you retired?

O- You think you can taunt me with that?

C- I wasn't taunting.

O- Don't. Of course I was afraid. I cut off my own legs to save my life. I have to live with that. And if I wanted to keep doing what I do, I would have to go deep enough into debt that I'd never be free of it. And that's what I'm afraid off. Being trapped.

C- Unlike now.

O- It's a wheelchair, asshole, not a chain. Just because you were willing to barter your soul to be the military's latest superweapon doesn't mean I'm the same.

C- I'm sorry.

O- Now I'm getting worried about you.

C- Me too. I don't like myself like this.

O- Nice to know you still have some grip on reality.

C- Hey...

O- You're charming, Sparkles, not likable. There's a difference.

C- You're right.

O- As always.

C- What happened happened. I need to figure out why. Without preconceptions. Even if I won't like the answer.

O- The answer is probably that you're an asshole who took a shortcut instead of putting the work in. Like always.

C- Not this time.

O- So what are you gonna do? Go vigilante?

C- No. Not even if you'd tempt me with handing over your old suit.

O- Your ass is too big. You'd stretch it weird. Don't tell me you're prepping to cross the line? I might come out of retirement just for the opportunity to kick your ass.

C- No. I'm going to go home and sleep. Take a shower. Sober up. And start working on my begging.

O- Don't tell me you're going back to them? To the Rangers? Haven't they chewed you up and spat you out enough times already?

C- I need access. I can get that there.

O- No way in hell they will make you Marshal again.

C- Wei can handle that. I'll be a humble Ranger, doing my best to redeem myself.

O- Do you think anybody will actually believe that?

C- Maybe not. But that I love the limelight and is carrying around a mountain of debt? That people can and will buy.

O- You're not wrong.

C- Thank you. And please, don't let me get shitfaced in here again.

O- I'm going to put that in gilded letters behind the bar.

C- You want my autograph on it too?

O- Shut up and go home. But if you do find whatever answer you're looking for? Let me know if you need a hand.

C- A hand to do what?

O- Oh, is that's how it's gonna be? Fine, keep your secrets.

C- You know I will. Night, Fluffy.

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How would Ortega react to a romanced!Step that loves them, but are neutral about their good looks? Like a 'yeah, they exist' mindset instead of a 'they're pretty attractive' one.

Part relief, part challenge. Because honestly, while Ortega would be happy to just be loved for who they are, I don't know if they'd really believe it. Not deep down. I think they might have been too hurt growing up knowing they look good and having people treat them accordingly. They might take it as a challenge to prove Sidestep wrong.

When did Sentinel propose? Was it heavily featured in the news, or was it downplayed since it was likely he did it after he retired?

It was heavily featured in the news. In fact, he did it the same day (and time) that he was announcing his official retirement, live on television. If there was one thing he had learned over the years in the (controversial) spotlight it was to take control of the situation (with some help from co-conspirator Ortega).

Is it possible for Step to become so powerful that a classification above Alpha could be created in-universe?

Yes.

How would the public react if one of the Rangers was dating a (relatively wholesome) villain? What if it was Steel, who's currently the Marshal? What would be the legal repercussions for said Ranger (or Marshal) for doing this?

Officially dating a villain as the Marshal/Ranger? Nope. Oh no. Never. Grounds for getting fired. Can't have the rule of law be compromised like that. Rumors about dating a wholesome villain? Cool speculation. Generating interest in the Rangers. But don't go too hard with it. The public would react in many different ways, it would depend on the circumstances.

If Steel and Argent were Boosted, what can you see them having for powers?

Hmmmm. Steel might actually have ended up with something close to precognition or similarly mental powers (thought it would depend a bit when he took it, during some phases it might have been more

volatile). Argent might have something connected with computers, she always liked tech. Or, maybe, water breathing or manipulation? This is the kind of thing that's hard to predict for anybody, nobody can for certain predict what might come out.

Is anyone on the Rangers aware of the fact that if Step hadn't come with them, Steel would have died in Heartbreak? Can Step, Ortega, and Steel actually talk about the event themselves and confide in each other about what it was like? What Step tried to do to take HB down, or what they even sacrificed in their attempt to do it?

The talk is coming, trust me. It's long overdue. What people are aware of, I'm not telling yet, but it's a fair bet that at least Steel is very aware of that fact.

Can you list the levels of Boost classification system and give examples for them? As well as the individuals who were considered to be the 'first' to be applicable to each tier? (E.g. The first Alpha level, the first Delta level, etc.)

Part of this is reposted from the very first QnA, but I took the time to fill out some stuff.

There are four generally accepted categories of Boosts. Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta.

Delta: Boosts at this level have small extra-human powers, but not enough to be military or commercially viable. It can be things like generating enough heat/fire to light a cigarette, changing the color of their hair or other, essentially harmless tricks.

The first known Delta level boost was Jeanette Sneed, a pyrokinetic called "Miss Fire" going live on television 1971 (on the short-lived Loomis Family Variety Show. She died years later in a house fire, and people speculate her powers might have been to blame.

Gamma: These boosts have useful, but still limited powers. In general, they are utilitarian rather than dangerous. They are things like having sense of smell as good as a dog. Being able to hear radio waves. Seeing in the dark. They are enough to give the boost a legit advantage, and can, within certain contexts be commercially viable. Villains or Heroes that are gamma level boosts will still need to rely on mods or gadgets in order to make a career out of it.

The first known Gamma boost was Kirk Witt, also known as "Aquatic Man" in 1972, a young environmental activist who could breathe underwater and used his powers to bring awareness to the destruction of the ocean habitat. He's currently retired in the Florida Keys.

Beta: This is what most people think of when they hear that someone is boosted. It is a strong, functional, but still somewhat limited power offensively. Most boosted heroes and villains in Los Diablos would fall into this category.

The first known Beta boost was also the cause for the nickname the "hero drug" in 1971 and the popularity despite the dangers. Her name was Joy Tatz, and she foiled a bank robbery thanks to her newly boosted strength and armor. She became a feminist icon due to her outspoken views on the

subject, and became one of the first boosted crime fighters under the name "Bulletproof". She tragically lost her life in the Big One.

Alpha: These are the most dangerous, offensive boosts. Most people changed this deeply do not survive the experience as the powers tear their body apart. However, there is a theory that Beta boosts can strengthen into Alpha during particularly intense brushes with death and trauma. It is certainly true for many of the currently known Alpha boosts.

The first known Alpha boost (and arguably the strongest one so far, as well as a possible double boost) was Patrick Fregoso, known as "Cavalier". He had massive explosive powers, as well as speed, strength and limited invulnerability. As he worked for the military he was mostly deployed overseas fighting the US enemies. However, he crossed the line in the year 2000 and became a villain. He is believed to have died 2002 as he attacked and partially blew up the Pentagon.

???: There are rumors of a classification above alpha, but what it entails or who would be need to have a separate category is unclear.

How would the Rangers react if they realised that Sidestep could be the next Heartbreak if they snapped/went insane? What precautions would they take in light of this information?

Hehe. Oh boy. NOT telling you that, or if someone already has started...

not asking for like a voice claim or anything, but what do imagine the rangers + mortum to sound like when they speak? things like pitch, cadence, word choice, syntax, etc? anything you really keep in mind while writing the character in that regard? or is it just sorta fully left up to reader interpretation?

This is entirely up to the reader. They have a text voice and that is what you can read. I have no further input.

Another question: does anyone 'talk with their hands?'

Ortega! Gestures is like half their language. Also, Dr. Mortum is very vocal with their hands.

What languages do the Rangers, Mortum, Rosie, Bo, Mia Ochoa, and the HG trio speak? Ortega knows Spanish and a bit of Cantonese, Steel is fluent in both, and I feel like it's safe to say Mia knows Filipino.

As always, I might be forgetting something. I feel like I might have answered this before.

Ortega: Spanish, English, bit of Cantonese. Can swear and insult in many more.

Steel: Cantonese, English, Spanish, a bit of Russian and Korean.

Argent: Spanish, English. (officially)

Herald: English, Spanish, a little French and Italian. Can order food in more.

Dr. Mortum: Kreyòl, French, English, Spanish, Arabic.

Rosie: English, Spanish.

Bo: English, Ukrainian, Russian, a little Arabic.

Mia Ochoa: Filipino, English, Spanish

Hollow Ground: English, Spanish

Nocturne: English, Spanish, a little Tagalog

Jake: Tagalog, Filipino, English, Spanish

This might be spoilery... but is it possible in the future to join the Rangers? Or would Sidestep be completely banned considering their 'status', their crimes, and what they're capable of?

That is indeed spoilers.

What kind of criminal was Dynamate? What's the public opinion of them now? What're their powers?

As a villain, Dynamate was essentially in it for the cameras and kicks. They'd create situations to draw out the heroes so they could fight and show off for the cameras. They never really hurt civilians (though they often took them hostage), but they robbed a lot of money to fuel their expensive hobby. While Dynamate was a Beta level boost with some form of regenerative powers, they mainly serves as a means to acquire some of the more extensive mod-jobs seen outside the army. To all extents and purposes, most of their body is metal, and very variable. They are especially fond of extendable limbs and tentacles.

Are there any mandatory events that call for the Marshals to meet up? Or do they mostly just keep to themselves until a situation calls for it?

Yes, there are a few.

Was pre!Heartbreak Ortega ever bothered by a sizeable amount of people genuinely not liking them despite their popularity?

Outwardly, no, but inwardly it stung a bit. Part of Ortega really, truly thrives on being liked.

Was Herald ever tempted to take up the Sidestep mantle? Did he ever try?

No, he would consider that tacky.

What kind of hero would Mortum (or rather, Translocator) be?

One thing is sure, it would be the kind that monologues about how smart they are and how you should probably give up before you get hurt because you have already lost. Lots of bark. Not as much bite.

If an RO confesses to Step, or if Step admits their longing to RO, can we have to option to choose to say we might be interested, but want to start out as friends first just to go slow and see if we might work?

There are tons of variants, and I don't cut people out of content. I don't think I have that exact scenario, but similar ones. There are many ways to slide into and out of relationships in this game, I am trying to make it as fluid as I can.

How common is Anti-enhanced bias in the FHR universe? Is discrimination common? How is it in LD compared to the rest of the FEZ and the USA?

Los Diablos is the most open when it comes to the enhanced population. The rest of the FEZ is pretty open as well, it's generally seen as just another thing, and any bias is on an individual level and not a societal one. The rest of the USA is different, there they are often treated with suspicion and seen as volatile and dangerous.

Have the Rangers experienced any effect of Anti-enhanced bias?

Yeah, Herald in particular. He grew up and got boosted on the east coast, so he had to face the shock and dismay from both his parents and their friends. There is a reason he moved west as soon as he was able to do so. Chen saw some bits of it in the army, but mostly directed at boosts, so it wasn't at him personally.

When Regenes are injured how are they typically repaired? If a regene had a crippling injury would they be more likely to be treated with Mods or clone flesh replacements?

Depends on which would be the most cost effective and result in the best outcome for the viability of the product. Most of the time, mods would be the first choice, but there are many ReGenes that has powers connected to their physical body where that might cause issues. Also, there's ongoing experimentation with cross-grafting of bother boosted bodyparts to see if anything carries over.

Rate the Rangers dancing skills for us. Who's good at dancing? Who likes to dance?

Ortega loves to dance and is good at dancing. As is Herald, though the floating can become an issue (for good and bad). Steel likes it, but is not good. Argent doesn't swing that way for many reasons.

How do corporations recruit heroes?

Mostly by poaching promising vigilantes, but at times they do hold auditions or contract casting agencies to find suitable candidates.

How common is it for vigilantes to become heroes? How common is it for them to stay vigilantes?

Most stay vigilantes for their entire career. Some by choice, because they like the freedom, while others never make it big enough, or are too morally questionable to be treated as a hero by the press and the public. The proportion of vigilantes to heroes is perhaps 75% vigilantes to 25% heroes, but this is slightly misleading since heroes tends to have longer careers. There is a lot more volatility in the vigilante community, people come and go at a much greater rate.

Does Chen wear his prosthesis to sleep? Does he ever take them off and do things without his hands and legs?

In general, Chen takes his prosthesis off whenever he can. While they are more advanced than what is available in our world, it is still a strain on the body to use them. His apartment is wheelchair adapted, and that's what he tends to use when he's at home. The legs are what he ditches most often, or at least switches into lighter, simpler versions (his civilian legs as he calls them). They are always removed for sleep.

His shoulder implant is permanent, he can't remove that, which means he keeps the arm on as well. He tends to remove the arm while sleeping, unless he's feeling particularly worried about security. Then he keeps it on. It tends to be a rougher sleep then, he can get back issues if he does it for too long.

The hand on his flesh arm stays on 99% of the time. It is by far his most sophisticated piece of tech, he's been using them the longest, and he doesn't like how helpless he feels without it.

Does any of the heroes consider villain Sidestep as their nemesis?

That is set by relationships in the game.

Would Ortega have a heart attack if Hood and Tia Elena had started dating?

Yes. Or at least a minor(major) freakout.

Can Sidestep use their telepathy as a psychic block to Boosts so they can't use their powers? In a similar vein, can they use their telepathy to 'disconnect' certain sensory organs, such as taking away eyesight? Or telepathically 'curse' people so they'll have chronic pain?

Sort of. While they can't actually do any of those things, they can influence the mind to think that it happens. It's a similar thing to their "don't look at me" aura. While the people certainly see Sidestep, they don't consciously register them. Making people feel pain in the moment is easy, but so far they can't make it stick without an active hand in it. They fade quite quickly, as the mind is quite flexible protecting itself against trauma. The same goes for blocking active boost powers. They can trick the mind into thinking they are doing something they are not, or even forgetting that they can do it. However, that doesn't really affect passive abilities, or for very long. It's like making Argent forget to take a breath, it needs active and constant focus. For example, making Herald think he's lost his flying

abilities is workable in the short run, but kick him off a roof and chances are the autonomous reflex would kick in and make him float before he hits the ground.

What's the biggest telepathic range ever recorded? Is there a specific type of measurement (e.g. kg, N, ml, similar to them) to measure psychic power?

There is no specific unit of measurement of psychic strength (yet), but the longest distance communicated telepathically has been from Seattle to New York (and no, it wasn't Sidestep).

From previous posts, it seems like Captain Blaze isn't personally liked by many people. Is that the norm? Or is it just the occasional case? Does he care about it? If nothing else for how much of an ass he can be?

I dunno? I like to compare it to sport stars. Some are admired for their capabilities, while others are for being team players, while yet others are liked because they're great with fans and genuinely nice and generous people. Blaze is powerful and successful, and admired by many, but like he would say, he's not in this business to be liked.

In Rebirth, when you romance Ortega as step and you flirt/date them as the puppet, why did they not let Sidestep go with them to check on the puppet in the hospital?

There are reasons. I am sure you can figure them out.

Would we have the opportunity for Step to ride Ortega's bike with them?

Oh yes.

If the ROs were each granted one and only one wish, what would that be?

I can't answer that, it is spoilery as hell for most people!!

Did HG have any particular opinion on Hood before they chose to have him killed?

Oh yes. Not gonna tell you though.

What was Psychopathor's opinion on HG when they met?

Short little peacock, too confident, too arrogant, but good with words. useful.

What is Mitchell's opinion on each of the HG trio (if he has any opinion)?

Oh he keeps those VERY MUCH to himself. He prides himself of being objective.

Do Mia and Vernon have any particular opinion or thought if the Rangers reputation is suffering?

Mia is worried, since that's not good for the stability of the city (despite that she might have have a hand in it), Vernon is probably pleased.

If the Rangers and Dr. Mortum had to describe their childhood, how would they describe it as like been?

Ortega: Wild. Fun. Made the best of a boring town.

Steel: Normal. Nice.

Argent: Wonderful, and that's none of your business.

Herald: Distant. A bit weird in hindsight.

Dr. Mortum: Childhood? Hard work more like it.

Are there any theories what affects what level of boost someone becomes (alpha, beta, etc)?

Nothing coherent. At this point, it seems likely that part of it is influenced by genetics. There is a slightly greater chance of relatives of strong boosts also becoming strong boosts. However, that doesn't influence survival much, since it is theorized that most of the stronger boosts self-destruct within weeks of taking the drug. It also seems likely that long-term survival with a boost will lead to it growing in power (within limits) with use and training. Another thing that has been observed is that traumatic life or death experiences can lead to another boost in power if the subject survives. Some boosts, due to the classification rules, can never become alpha or beta level due to how the boost works. Aggressive boosts are ranked higher than peaceful or utilitarian ones.

What kind of reputation did Vernon have before he was fired? What had been his focus as a journalist?

Crime, military and foreign policy. He was respected in his field.

Are there any other villains (or any heroes) that Mia would like to interview?

All of them! But the Catastrofiend is the holy grail.

If Re-Genes are AI, would they have reacted to any signal broadcasted that would deactivate other forms of AI?

The only thing I can think of that would affect all AI instead of just being personal codes would be a massive EMP blast. And that would indeed fry the AI chip, most are not shielded to deal with that. However, some ReGenes deployed in front-line combat might be shielded.

Did Steel find out anything about Heartbreak, like he did with Sidestep?

Yes. Not gonna tell you what yet. The thing is, he might not think it important since he doesn't have the rest of the information, everyone needs to put their pieces of the puzzle together.

If Sunstream was Alpha level, what could she be capable of? Could she see different spectrums of light? (UV, Infrared, Heat Detection, etc.)

Yes, if she was Alpha level she might go beyond simply creating/controlling photons. She might have control over more parts of the electromagnetic spectrum, and that could very easily propel her to power levels beyond Alpha if she could handle it.

Is Pyroclast a tactician or a fighter? What's his fighting style like?

Ashfall started out as more of a fighter than a tactician. Like many vigilantes, what he needed to work at was teamwork. Since joining the Rangers as Pyroclast he has matured a lot, but still likes the personal touch. I have been thinking of what clip I'd show to give a feel for his fighting style (I did that for the other Rangers in a previous QnA) and this is the closest to what's in my head:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RozYeggV220>

How would the Rangers react if someone was trying to poach Sidestep for their hero group, knowing Ortega wants them on the team? How would Ortega react, knowing that they're their first pick for the Rangers?

Oh Ortega would go out of their way to sabotage that before it goes anywhere. And no, they wouldn't tell Sidestep...

Did Blaze ever try to flirt with Argent? If he did, how did she react?

He did. She shut him down fast.

What kind of marriage proposals would each of the Rangers like? I'm guessing Chen wouldn't like anything public + flashy and attention-drawing, and same with Argent.

I am as bad with this as I am with music or children. I have no idea.

How much do the Rangers know of telepathy in general? (E.g. Ljungstrand's classification system, telepathy needs carbs, how hard it can be to live with, strange forms of telepathy like Sidestep/Shroud/HG and the like, etc.)

Not very much at all. Ortega and Steel has researched it a bit, but it's not as if they are experts in the field. Much published in the area is not easily accessible.

In Alpha Retribution, Argent said she didn't think Step was 'that sort of brains' when they say they're assembling it themselves. What 'sort of brains' was she expecting?? Streetwise? Something else?

Yeah. Her preconceptions based on Ortega's stories were very much of a fighty/streetwise Sidestep, and was quite surprised if things turned out to be different.

Are there any heroes who admire/begrudgingly respect a 'better than them' hero hunter? Or are they all wary and hostile towards them? Is it possible a Hunter!Step could get invitations to fight from heroes/villains who want to be the one to defeat them in-game?

There might be respect AND hostility. And I think there is definitely heroes/vigilantes who'd try to draw out the hero hunter villain to fight them. Maybe even in game, that is a cool idea!

What would Chen have done if he was never offered the invitation to join the Rangers?

Probably remained in the military, rising in the ranks.

Did Anathema's invulnerability protect them from internal ailments? Like for example if Anathema had Appendicitis or the like, would they have been screwed? Or did their invulnerability cover that? If so, then how far did this go?

As far as anybody knew, it also protected against internal ailments like infections. As for whether it would work against things like cancer where the very body cells were the culprit is a different story. It never happened, so it is hard to say.

Most boosts are unable to have children, for the ones that are, do the powers become inherentible? Like would that eventually make it so it's common for people to have powers? Like over thousands of years?

It is hard to say, but over that long a time I do think that there would be "natural born" boosts, even with boosted parents further down the line, and that humanity would have been permanently changed. Powers are not inherited directly, but something has changed, enough to perhaps activate in a personal way if given the nudge.

Does being modded affect fertility and ability to give birth?

Not unless the mods themselves affect those areas. For example, Steel would not be affected, Ricardo might be slightly, and Julia would be a lot.

How well known was Sidestep when they first met Charge? Would they have recognized each other? Or is this headcannon territory?

Headcanon.

I know Themmy was open about their transition & talked with Step about it, but did it go both ways? Was (trans) Step out to them? If so, were they out to anyone else as well? Sentinel maybe?

I will leave that to headcanon for now. But both are certainly possible, and you might get the option to specify it in the future.

For Steps that are kind of trying to get better, will we start to have opportunities to cut back on their vices? Dealing withdrawal, nicotine patches, etc...

Maybe in the future.

What song did everyone sing at karaoke? If not a specific song, a genre?

I am so bad about normal music, I am leaving that to headcanon because I don't know enough.

In a past Q&A, it was mentioned that sometimes the Ranger's friends & family would be targeted by villains... Did Sidestep ever go along with Ortega to rescue one of their kidnapped dates? If they had a secret crush on Charge, exactly how sulky would they have been about it?

Oh yes. Probably more than once. And Sidestep could probably be very caustic about it regardless of secret crush.

I always struggle over which potential henchman to pick in FH: Rebirth as I really like both Rosie and Boris. Will it be possible to still meet the one who doesn't get picked later down the line? Might we get a scene where they meet and interact? Do the two even know the other exists?

I do have plans for the other that doesn't get picked down they line. They do exist in the world, and they have interacted more than once.

Ortega's epilepsy is a closely guarded secret which not many people know about (for good reason) but do the same people also know this renders Ortega virtually immune to all forms of telepathic manipulation? If not, which characters are in on it?

Yes, they ones that knows the secret knows that as well.

Several characters in the story are boosts with superhuman durability/toughness; how would you rate them from least to most invulnerable? What's their upper limit in terms of durability (if not too spoilery)?

Like everything else, it depends on what I need for the story. I have no internal rating, just a vague scale which might change if they ever encounter each other in a fight in game. That goes for all powers, I never specify, because then I will only hinder myself in the future.

If we refuse to see a shrink and Sidestep's mental health is visibly declining, would Ortega ever try something drastic like an intervention to sit down and plead with us to seek help? Who else might join in on this?

Oh Ortega certainly would, and drag Chen and Danny if he's involved enough along for the ride. Maybe certain others too (spoilers).

What are some of the weirdest recorded superpowers in the Fallen Hero universe ? What other types of mental powers exists, besides telepathy? Has anyone ever gained the ability to perceive the future?

Oh boy. I really have no idea? There once was a TTRPG supplement called "The ultimate powers book" for the old Marvel RPG. I used to roll up tons of random characters from that. I will say that the weirdest ones that Sidestep encountered was probably either Mucous Creation/Manipulation (gross and sticky) or Mathematical Hypnosis (forcing people to freeze until they have solved a mathematical problem).

There is a lore post from way back about all the various psychic powers and telepathy classifications.

And yes, people have gained the ability to see the future. It's not a benign power, few have survived it for long.

Wait, I'm not sure if we ever got a physical description of Blaze in game? If we did and I just somehow missed it, what does he look like? What's his ethnicity?

I tend to be very vague with my physical descriptions. This is what you get in some paths: *"Captain Blaze is half a head taller than most people here, with the careless confidence of the popular. Brown hair slicked back in a fashionable wave, the olive skin smooth and photogenic. And he certainly looks good in a suit..."*

He's Italian-American.

Do the Rangers suits focus more on depicting the powers of the individual? Or do they include other things too? What sort of practical uses are they outfitted with?

They are more focused on giving a team look than depicting the powers, though that has certainly influenced the design. Apart from offering protection with a state of the art skin-suit and added light armor, they also include communication devices as standard. While they get different equipment depending on the circumstances, there are some things that tends to be standard:

Ortega's suit helps protect, direct and project their electrical powers. Probably the one after Chen that gets the biggest power-up from being in suit.

Steel's suit is very plain, just for comfortable wearing under the armor. No extra frills apart from the standard skinsuit protection. He gets most from the various armor configurations (which has been described in earlier QnA's)

Argent's suit leaves her hands/lower arms/feet/lower legs uncovered. She wears gloves and boots most of the times, but strips them quickly for serious fights. She sometimes wears a narrow visor to assist with fighting in low-light conditions and for other visual aids.

Herald's suit comes with goggles for eye protection/visual enhancement when he's flying high. Great zoom capabilities and low-light enhancements. The one most likely to carry the first aid pack.

Specialized: Night-fighting gear, underwater re-breathers, coats, pants and jackets for colder weather. Pocketed jackets, vests, bandoliers and packs to keep other equipment, especially when operating outside the city limits.

What put Dr Mortum on the map as a villain back in the day? Were they a well known villain to the general public? Can you give us some details of what they got up to back when they were an active villain? Thank youuu

No matter how much it pains them to admit it, Dr. Mortum was a painfully mediocre villain. They weren't famous or well-known, and what reputation they had were mostly as Vitruvian's partner. They were just another science/weapon villain who robbed stuff and weren't very interested good at cinematic fights. Dr. Mortum has become a lot more flamboyant and outgoing after deciding to stick to their path as a scientist, they never had that confidence as a villain.

How did Ortega get into parkour and filming their stunts? How did they develop their skill set? Did they pursue any sports at a high level when they were a kid / tween? Did they have any sport career ambitions? What did their parents think / encourage?

Ortega got into parkour after seeing it on the television and in movies in the early nineties. They were already climbing everything, and it was a natural progression from the military obstacle course type of challenge they were so familiar with. But with this, you could look cool while doing it. They were into many sports as a kid, but tended not to stick with them too long. Too much restless energy, and they clashed with the trainers trying to channel their energy into professional results. Their mother Elena in particular did have professional sports ambitions for them growing up since she quit gymnastics before making it to the Olympics, but she eventually realized that their child was too much of a restless spirit to focus on one thing. Repetition was always Ortega's worst enemy.

If things had turned out differently and they connected with the right trainer/team the way they did to Hood, Ortega would have been able to have a professional career in basketball, the high jump, pole vaulting, decathlon or motorcycle road racing.

Ortega got into extreme sports/stunts when they met Marek, who was already filming local skateboarders, BMX riders, and rollerbladers doing stunts. Ortega joined the "team" and quickly became one of the stars. They already had the grounding, and took to free climbing and basejumping as if they were born to it.

Sidestep is convinced that Anathema's invulnerability could sustain everything BUT Anathema's own acid powers. Is that true? Did Sidestep ever see Anathema burn themselves inadvertently before HB?

Yeah, Sidestep is convinced that is the case. Looking back, they can see several occasions where skin blemishes might be connected to acid use. And, Anathema often scratched, picked at their skin as if it

itched.

When we meet HB in the HB sequence... is that their real body? Or rather: does the mind we feel belong to the body we see, or is there something amiss between the two?

Hard to say at this point, Sidestep don't like thinking about it. It certainly felt real, and in some cases disgustingly solid to the touch, but with powerful telepaths that might not be saying much.

The rangers have celebrity status, but the headlines probably aren't always positive. What's the main thing Steel, Argent, Herald and Ortega are most often mocked for? What kind of headlines or taunts sting the most for each of them?

Ortega: Are they flirting with the villain AGAIN?

Steel: Boring and generic. Could be replaced by any competent soldier.

Argent: Everyone just thinks she's cool because she's pretty, she never really does anything. Kept around for looks.

Herald: Ineffective. Why isn't he using a weapon?

Warning Desperate question I have no hope of getting an answer to how would Ortega describe HB? As in, what did HB look like to their eyes?

Good try. Spoilers. Maybe they'll tell you one day.

Did ortega ever try to involve other rangers in helping with their vendetta against HG back in the day or keep it close to their chest? If yes, who? Or step? If yes for step, much did ortega try to involve them?

Yes, Sentinel. Ortega were general in getting the team involved, but only in the most general terms. The shady stuff they planned with Sentinel.

Would locus be able to unravel memory alterations sidestep has committed or are their versions of telepathy (locus being more verbal and sidestep being more emotional) so distant that they wouldn't be able to detect anything amiss that the other did?

It would be an interesting challenge, that's for sure.

Do you have any (horror or otherwise) media inspirations for the Catastrofiend or the Void? If so, can you give us a little detail on what aspects of the media you drew on for your villains 🙄

Thank you SO MUCH for this question.

The Catastrofiend:

Tetsuo: The Iron Man. Impeccable vibes and main inspiration. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFPdN2GgJJl>

Also: Death Machine: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKBK1Hv8QX8>

with honorable mentions to Hardware, Videodrome and battle Angel Alita for flesh/metal synthesis horrors.

The Void collected vibes, only snippets and moments:

The Prince of Darkness: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGsv0pJemTY>

Blair Witch project: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmYsRcLMvO8>

Neon Genesis Evangelion: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r43Z2bRsFwo>

Jacob's Inferno: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOD0DZRdQ9w>

Does Tia Elena still wear her wedding ring?

Yes, she does.

Be honest... Has Ortega ever done one of those tacky dramatic full of sexy metaphors perfume commercials?

Oh definitely. Complete with the sultry/sexy french voice over.

If the rangers (and Mortum) had to wear masks / helmets as part of their hero/villain suit, what kind of design (or effects) would they go for?

Ortega: Sleek and form-fitting, reinforced over skull but with parts of the mouth bared.

Argent: Blank slate, with loose hair.

Herald: Practical. Not too intimidating.

Dr. Mortum: Impressive. Many lenses. Probably light-up.

Who was Mortum's assistant and why'd they quit?

Spoilers.

What's up with Marek? What does he do exactly? Is Ortega aware that Marek is in Los Diablos / are they still in contact?

Marek is still an independent filmmaker, focusing on whatever gets him paid for the moment. Currently, is various weird documentaries. Ortega knows Marek is in town, but they are not in close contact. They had a falling out after Ortega joined the Rangers, and Marek sold the footage of their accident for a LOT of money.

Has Mitchell met any of the heroes and villains he's researched in person? If yes—which ones? If no—why?

No, in general he prefers to research from afar. He's not a hands on type of person. Besides, these people are dangerous.

And... obligatory Ortega question of the month. Does psychological stress put any extra strain on their mods (both new and old), or just physical stress, like fighting? (including of course physical effects of stress etc etc)

Mostly physical stress, but like we all know, mental stress can make the body tense up and hurt as it is. It doesn't get better with mods.

What was going through the other Rangers minds when Argent went on her "rampage" when Step was puppeting her in Book 1?

Oh shit, oh shit, how would we even stop her?

Jumping off that question: did they all believe it was telepathic stuff going on, or was there maybe something else going on there

Ortega was convinced there was something else involved, Herald and Chen firmly believed she was mind controlled.

What was it about the Void that made HG see them as “a massive threat that needed to be removed at any cost”?

The way they could influence and bind their followers to them. One villain can be killed whenever, a fanatical organization needs to be rooted out fast.

You've said that Arsenaux was the lieutenant of the Void and she took over their empire after they died. Does she just control the criminal landscape that was the Void's turf or has she continued the work of the Green Sky?

She was a member of the Green Sky, and continues their work as best as she's able without Void.

Was she actually a believer or did she just work for them? Did she join during the green sky or was she part of the new flesh before the void splintered off?

She joined during the Green Sky era, and she's a fervent believer.

Do boosts often come along with changes to physical appearance? Like, is there precedent for something like Lady Argent as the public probably assumes, having silver skin as a result of her boost? Or like Catastrofiend, do people assume its appearance is at least in part due to the boost drug?

Well, physical changes are common but the public thinks it's even more common than it actually is. They don't notice those who don't change. In general, boosts are often seen and depicted as monstrous regardless of the truth.

Or is this relatively unheard of, and has anyone picked up on there being something extra weird about these two because boosts don't usually alter the physical body that much?

No, there are a lot weirder boosts out there.

Knowingly or not, has Dr. Finch ever come in close proximity to Hollow Ground?

Yes.

How would Dr. Finch react to discovering Step is a villain? Would she still want to help them?

Spoilers.

Does Francis know Argent's real name?

No.

After sidestep "died," did Ortega continue keeping their powers/identity secret or was Ortega more open about it to other people/press/etc?

Ortega kept their secret, would have taken it to the grave.

[May Spoiler QnA!](#)

[May 7, 2022](#)

Why does Steel still continue/pursue a (false) romantic relationship with Step when he knows they're manipulating him?

Does he know? Or does he deep down hope that the feelings might be real? Maybe real enough to pull Sidestep back from the brink? Is he maybe a romantic at heart? Maybe there's guilt involved? Maybe he

thinks he's mistaken about the manipulation and feels bad for suspecting Sidestep of things they weren't guilty of, like so many years ago?

As you might have guessed by now, I'm not going to give any answers here. Situations might vary too much between Sidesteps.

What's Argent's relationship to her brothers like? Her parents?

It was a close and loving one, but she's cut off all contact. They don't even know she's alive.

In Retribution, we can silently dare Steel to kiss Sidestep. I was honestly expecting him to back off... what was running through his mind back then? Him actually going through with it was a bit of a shock to me.

Honestly? Steel has been around the block. He's not overt about it, but he's no stranger to romance, or to take the initiative. So it was mostly "oh, I guess I'm doing this, because Sidestep would never".

Can we donate to charity without lowering our Ruthless stat? Like picking our reasons for doing so. I'd like my Step to be very pragmatic and manipulative, donating not necessarily out of empathy (at least mostly), but rather because it lets them control how the public sees them/discourages heroes from prioritising taking down Step first/discourages villains from stealing back the money Sidestep stole, since it isn't there anymore? Is it possible to add an empathetic edge to it? E.g. Donating because we truly do care, just a little bit, about alleviating other people's pain/donating because we don't want to create future villains, even if we'll never admit it?

You just have to accept that hit to the ruthless stat, there are limits to the variable motives I will add for doing things.

Will we be able to choose what sort of 'job' Sidestep was obligated to do back when they were still working for the Farm?

You will be able to give more details about their service, yes.

What do you think the Rangers would be like if they were a Re-Gene on the run like Sidestep? How well would they fare going under the radar?

Argent and Steel would do well and keep under the radar, Herald would fail badly (probably trying to go public), and Ortega... hmmm... hiding in the spotlight daring people to find them out.

Why was Nocturne bullied? What was her family like?

Nocturne was very awkward, quiet, had no social skills and bad acne. Her mother was busy working two jobs to keep food on the table for the three kids, her mom did the best she could, but Nocturne was on her own most of the time. She aced her studies, but grew increasingly antisocial, and while she was

successful in her IRS job, her personal life was dead. Over time she became downright agoraphobic, and worked from home as much as she could.

How expensive was Sidestep back at the Farm?

Not very for a Re-Gene. The combat models were much more expensive.

How was HG doing before meeting Nocturne and Jake? What would his empire look like if they were never in the picture?

Honestly? I think HG might have been dead. They need a family, someone to ground them. On their own, things start going weird.

What's Captain Blaze's fighting style? Can he do long range fights/attacks? Can he make explosions?

Captain Blaze is normally medium range, Sidestep forced him into a corner. He can manipulate heat at a range of a few hundred yards, though precision and strength grow the closer he is to the source. He can't make explosions, however, if he heats up objects that can blow up (cars, gas tubes, boilers), they will.

Why did HG kill Hood? Was he taking away their influence by helping the city recover?

Spoilers.

Is it possible to do a body swap scenario with our RO(s)? Similar to a Freaky Friday situation?

Not so far.

Comparing telepathy and the nanovores, which one would Argent have an easier time asserting control over?

Spoilers.

How... curious, would the Rangers be about the Farm and/or Re-Genes? Would they personally rather just stay away from the two topics if Step is revealed to be a Re-Gene, compacted with the gruesome rumours behind the Farm?

I think we can safely say all the Rangers would be curious in one way or another. From greatest to least: Ortega-Herald-Steel-Argent.

On that note, how curious are they about who Step is, and their past if they're unrevealed, and haven't talked about a life before the Rangers/Sidestep at all? What theories do they have based on what they know about them?

Ahahaha okay that is BIG spoilers and you'll find that out in game.

Can we have the option of choosing Step's 'native' language? In a similar vein to Ortega lapsing into Spanish, can we choose a multilingual Step that might lapse into a Re-Gene language, be it accidental or on purpose?

While I do love this, I'm going to leave it to headcanons. That can entirely be a thing I might change my mind on in the future though...

How many Re-Gene languages exist in the Farm?

One main, but teams who stick together long tends to create their own dialects.

Hypothetical scenario. If Sidestep has Dissociative Identity Disorder, can they, with enough training, divide and split themselves and their alters so one could live in an empty body (e.g. Puppet) and the other can live in Step's original body?

Spoilers, wait until book three. (yes I removed part of the question)

Argent prefers not to have physical contact with people if she can help it. Do the nanovores not like being touched? Or is that a psychological issue for Argent?

Psychological due to bad experiences after having bonded with her "friends". Touch is always a danger, especially if she's hungry.

Ok i'm so curious about this; what was going on in Ortega's head when Sidestep revealed it was their first time having sex? There was that line about Step knowing what Ortega might be feeling/thinking but i honestly have no clear idea lol. It was obvious they were surprised but I imagine that was a big giveaway that Sidestep does love them no?

Whatever goes on in Ortega's head stays in Ortega's head. But I think it is safe to say that whatever Sidestep thought Ortega was thinking might not have anything to do with the real thing. You are probably a better judge there than Sidestep.

We know regenes are referred to with "codes" at the Farm, but how are these codes constructed? Is it numbers, letters or a mix between both? Do they have a significance or are they assigned chronologically, based on the order of decantation? And does sidestep have a "canon" code or is that up to the reader?

The code is a combination of letters and numbers. Currently they consists of between 2-4 letters, and 6-8 numbers. An early regene might have the code AL-004.516, while a very late one might have the code AyPb-0623.01257. There is a canonish Sidestep code, yeah.

Are the HG trio's focus on the past, present, or the future?

HG: Present. Nocturne: Future. Jake: Present.

What kind of reputations do the HG trio have within the organization? How do each of them feel about their reputation if they have opinion on it?

HG is in a weird spot since most only see them as a shadowy kingpin, and even those that meet in person has a hard time remembering their face. Imagine those old comic book pages, where the face of the villain is always in shadow. HG likes cultivating their air of mystery, but they are also social and needs their trusted little circle of compatriots to be able to function. It would be easier if they could be more open, but that wouldn't be a sound tactical choice, which sucks.

Nocturne has two reputations. For most, she's the boss's girlfriend and arm-candy, and she draws the eyes of everyone who gets the privilege of a personal meeting. Everyone keeps looking at her, not the boss. For those in the know, she's feared and respected as the brains/moneymaker of the organization. She's helped craft her reputation, and is at peace with it with HG's help.

Jake is seen as a high-level enforcer by most. A trusted bodyguard for those who know more. And, for a select few, they strongly suspects he's sleeping with Nocturne and/or Hollow Ground themselves. But that is not something people dare to gossip openly about. Jake is very touchy when it comes to the last.

If Mia had been accepted as an asset like Mitchell considered they should do, what would that have entailed? How much would she have been aware of?

Hard to say, it would depend on how the conversation with HG themselves went. She could have been very useful and risen fast, that's for sure.

How would the HG trio describe their childhood as been like?

HG: Exciting. Felt loved.

Nocturne: Anxious. A lot of hard work.

Jake: Boring but nice.

What was Nocturne's initial impression on HG when they first met?

Not what she expected at all. More pop star than suspected criminal. No wonder they can't handle their taxes, maybe this is all overblown and due to a mistake, and... wait a moment. Why am I smiling? This is bad. I like this person. I don't like people. And this was all over the phone. When they met in person finally she was very, very wary and skittish. But the first impression stuck.

If the HG trio had been public villains with an armor, how would they have dealt with any interviews? Would any of them have had fans? I assume Jake would have managed himself the best in fights, but what would Nocturne's and HG's strategies been if they ended up in any kind of fights (and how would they have managed themselves)?

HG would never have removed their helmet, but would have teased about it all the time. Would have been outgoing and gregarious with the media, but ruthless in a fight. Relying on their armor (best that money could buy).

Nocturne would have had the most beautiful armor to help channel her powers, and she would have removed her helmet in interviews now and then. She would have preferred to assist the others, and wouldn't be above playing weaker than she was to make heroes hesitate to hurt her before she moved in for the kill.

Jake would have been very open with who he was, more at home in a fight than in interviews. Very short, unless he liked the interviewer. Most likely to have a favorite reporter, and ignore anybody else. Would try to draw out heroes to attack him in his civilian gear to shame them for losing anyway.

what would each of the HG trio consider a deal-breaker in a relationship?

Not sure. We'll see if we get there.

If Jake had to choose a codename, what codename would he reluctantly choose? What kind of codename would HG and Nocturne suggest for him?

Oh boy. Even that thought hurts. I really have no idea. Probably something very generic and bland like "Bodyguard". Something suggesting physical strength and durability, he prefers to keep the rest of his abilities as hidden as he can.

If HG had chosen a villain name more along the lines of their real powers, what name would they have gone with?

Probably something bragging but still vague like "Mastermind".

What would HG's father have thought of the plan to create a criminal empire?

Good. It was what he was already trying to do.

What do Nocturne's and Jake's mindscapes look like?

Not sure, we'll see when we get there.

Besides each other, do the HG trio have anyone else they would consider themselves to have some kind of rapport or bond with (and would they consider the relationship friendship or business/professional)?

Spoilers, but yes.

Could Argent absorb more 'passengers' into her body for more 'material' to work with? Could she absorb metal in the same way? Could she cut her hair and use it as scrap metal?

The first one is still unclear, the latter two however are very unlikely.

Would the nanovores still have listened to Argent if Sidestep was never involved? What made them listen to her in the first place, as opposed to the other screaming victims they devoured?

Yes, they would have. As to why, it's spoilers.

Is Chen in love with Ricardo? If he is, at what point did he realize he was? At what point in their relationship was he **actually in love?**

At this point in the book? No. Not romantic love. Was there a point where it might have been called romantic love in the past? Yes, it straddled that line around the time they both joined the Rangers. Does he still love Ricardo as a friend? Yes, even with all the bullshit. Could what he feel be rekindled into romantic love in the future? Possibly, but it would require circumstances to change, and probably an outside force to provide impetus, because Chen buried that torch deep, a long time ago.

^^ Relating to the above, can we choose to break up with Steel because we don't want our own heart broken?

You can choose to break up with Steel for many reasons, but unless Sidestep is actively pushing for it, Ricardo is a past chapter Chen doesn't particularly want to revisit. Most people in the cast have had past loves and crushes, that's just life. I am not fond of the soulmate/one true love trope.

What was Joshua Sullivan like?

Popular. An athlete. A leader. Very much a driving force with a strong personality. Some might say slightly overbearing.

How does aging affect Argent? Does the fact that the vast majority of her body is metal affect that all?

Hard to say, she's still young. But, she's looked very similar in the pictures from her debut and her current incarnation.

How long did Charge and Step know each other before Step showed their face? Did it change their relationship at all-- eg, did Ortega decide to try and get closer to Step to try and find more out about HG, and then it turned into genuine friendship? Or were they already pretty close at this point and it didn't make too much of a difference?

They were already close at that point, it didn't make a difference, but it did make Ortega more protective of Step's privacy, especially towards the media.

I'm guessing there's some wiggle room from Step to Step, but what are the 'definite' characteristics of Sidesteps tattoos? I know they're orange, but pattern wise-- Intricate? Circuit-y? Geometric? I'm an artist and it's killing me to settle on a design while drawing my step!

I have refrained from settling on a pattern, just as I have avoided settling on a fixed look for anybody. They are orange, yes, and they are a pattern, not depicting anything in particular. The bar code is on the chest, but apart from that, go wild. I have seen many different cool patterns, there's no right answer here.

If we get revealed as the villain at the end of Retribution, will there be other opportunities later on to go to Tia Ortega's ranch? I need to recruit Snowball to my cause.

Most likely.

In the Void lore post IB mentioned that they have therapy available to help GV with his recovery, is Dr. Finch one of the therapists who helps people who are affiliated with the organization (or seen as valuable intel like GV)?

No.

If Daniel's brother had survived and had gone on to become a villain, how would Daniel have handled that? Was his brother a strong enough influence over him that he'd have dragged him down that path with him?

Danny would not have handle it well. He might have reluctantly been pulled onto that path, until something happened and he'd snap back.

Could Argent's nanovores be reconfigured to only eat inorganic material, like Sidestep's? If Sidestep's nanovores were to... rejoin Argent's swarm, would they be "different" in any way from the other nanovores? Would they go back to eating organic material only?

Maybe you'll find out.

Are certain minds harder for HG to thread and hold onto than others? And does this difficulty increase whatever strain the threading puts on them? If yes, would Sidestep qualify as a difficult mind?

Oh yes, there is a great difference, just as some people are easier for Sidestep to read. Sidestep would definitely be a difficult mind, requiring a constant strain.

With her technopathy, would argent be capable of reprogramming the nanovores? Has she ever tried? What does it take to reprogram them?

No. She uses things within their parameters, she doesn't change the parameters. That takes a lot of work, and some physical changes.

Since Ortega was born and raised in Texas until 14, does that mean they've got a bit of a twang? If it's disappeared over the years, does it ever slip out?

They probably have a hint of one, yeah, especially when talking to their mother or other people from the area. The media team is not fond of it, and Ortega occasionally plays it up to piss them off.

Could Argent's technopathy allow her to take control of someone's mods, even if they're internal?

It would be harder than unconnected tech, but yeah, at least influence.

Beyond the obvious healing / keeping her alive aspect, what does Argent "enjoy" and share with her nanovores? They seem to be a strain on her self-control and hunger and she is in constant pain, yet she seems to regard them as friends or pets and to trust them deeply. Compared to how Sidestep handles another example of "enemy within" kind of parasite (ie: their HB scar), her approach is quite... affectionate, I think? So, how did that trust build? Why does she feel like she can rely on them?

If there wasn't trust between them, they'd both be dead. It is a marriage of convenience, sure, but they've made the best of it. She has a hard time talking about what their connection is like, but she works hard at keeping it a positive one.

What's it like for argent when she regains cohesion after losing it? How does she feel? Does she remember what "she" did?

She doesn't remember. It all goes blank.

You've mentioned Sidestep didn't have the "same handler" the second time around at the farm, but since they weren't really going on missions and were more of a lab rat (correct me if I'm wrong?), what did being their "handler" entail?

Taking care of their physical well-being and keeping them in line.

Does Steps original handler have any opinions on them becoming a hero after their first escape? Did they ever see Step again after they were recaptured?

Spoooilers.

How do Sidestep's nanovores "feel" about Argent's nanovores? How do Argent's nanovores feel about Sidestep's nanovores? Did Argent recognise the nanovore technology in the glove, is she aware of them? Can she communicate with them? If yes, is that through her nanovores or her technopathy?

Spoilers. We will get into that in the future.

Do the Rangers suspect Step still has the nanovores if they've been revealed as the villain?

I don't think anybody (apart from possibly Argent) suspects nanovores is how Sidestep does the disintegration thing.

Will the hidden doubt stats for the Rangers start having a impact in book 3 or book 4?

Book three for some, book four for others. It depends on path.

What exactly is hero hunter prepare them Step talking about when they go on about them not having much time left.

**if prepare_them*

You're running out of time.

**if prepare_them*

You have to admit that he's got more promise than you thought. If he had a few more years under his belt, he could be a great hero.

He won't have a few years. Nobody will.

I am not going to tell you, you know that. I'm not about to reveal major plot points in a QnA. But I will give you one hint. Steel (and others) suspects what's up.

Did Locus and Ortega get along? Have the Rangers tried to go after Locus after her "disappearance", and if not—why not?

Locus and Ortega didn't interact much at all. They haven't investigated her disappearance much, it's not uncommon that heroes and vigilantes come and go, if anything they probably thought she had retired or taken a leave of absence since no villains were bragging about beating her.

Could the imposter have body-hopped to anyone, or were they confined to either Sidestep or the Puppet's body

Spoilers.

Has Ace, when they were "alive" (pre-Shroud) ever been possessed by a Powerful Telepath?

No.

Was there an effort made to experiment with, fuck with, or recalibrate Sidestep's memory during their second stay at the farm?

Most likely, the standard procedure would be to do a full wipe and reprogramming once they had gathered what they could.

What's going on up in San Diego? Is there a kingpin there too? Who are they? Is there a big hero/villain scene? What is the general opinion of San Fran and Los Diabos, especially the squabbles/rivalry between HG and Ember? For those to whom the situation between those two matters/is interesting

There is probably a kingpin there too, but not one I have detailed. In general, in any city with a large boosted/modded villain populace there is either a Kingpin, or a turf war. San Diego is somewhat calm, so someone is probably keeping an eye on any upstarts. Both Hollow Ground and Lord Ember feel so secure in their own domains that they might see reason to expand their influence, and thus come into conflict with each other. It will probably end in open war sooner or later, and wise villains play it cool and skip town unless they fancy picking sides.

If the gates are inside your mind... Does that mean that what lies behind them is created by and belongs to your own mind too?

What's in your mind is yours, right? Any memory caused by outside interference becomes yours once it is remembered.

Is there a system of how regenes are assigned to a handler? Are personality, work ethic, leadership style taken into account? Are there different handlers for groups v. individuals?

Like in any organization, that is the ideal, but rarely in practice.

What kind of evidence did Ortega have that convinced the other Rangers Step is the villain if they don't confess but have a high enough suspicion?

Not going into details, but it would vary depending on the Sidestep. But, in the end, trust in Ortega's judgment was probably the biggest argument.

The Anathema we see in Sidestep's dreams... Is that only Sidestep's subconscious acting out, or could there be even a SMIDGEN of Anathema's... I don't know, mind, essence, real self, in those apparitions?

Hard to say. What are memories? Is anything truly lost as long as it is remembered? Are memories of a telepath different than those from a normal person?

What did sidestep's physical therapy look like post HB if they received any?

Only the first steps of rehab, once the wipe and rewrite failed, physical therapy stopped. Not until they escaped and got the opportunity to try on their own.

Alpha? If it's known Step is the one who robbed the casino and Ortega is suspicious, what reasons did they think Step did it for given they think Step is working with/being forced by HG?

It did give them pause. Something was up there, but Ortega hadn't decided what yet. There was more to the auction than they thought there was.

If the puppet trains aikido, Ortega shows up in uniform with the black belt... did they lift that off somewhere, or have they been attending that gym for awhile to watch the puppet? — or does Ortega just train aikido for pleasure either way?

Ortega has trained aikido for years, the joint techniques are very useful against stronger opponents.

By the time Heartbreak happens, would Sidestep's own telepathic abilities have been powerful enough to cause a HB-esque event of their own, or is that only after the experiments the Farm did

Not at that time, no they wouldn't have. What cause the rise in power is still unclear.

Follow-up to this while I'm at it. Did Ortega even see HB?

Yes, Ortega is the only one with an unbiased view of what actually went on in the physical world.

Did the Heartbreak site already have a weird reputation or strange sitings, habits of the occupants, etc. BEFORE the Heartbreak Event itself.

Actually yes, that entire area has been weird for decades. Unexplained deaths. Strange sightings. Odd experiences of the inhabitants. Physical and mental problems.

And a Tech question—dampeners can suppress telepathic abilities, but is there any technology out there that can simulate, for lack of a better word, psychic damage to telepaths—or anyone, actually. Tech that could cause hallucinations? Mentally harm people/telepaths?

Not tech, but drugs could. Subsonic vibrations could also cause unease and heighten paranoia.

Does Mitchell have a file on HB (either the incident or the "villain")?

Yes.

Re: Marek's team and their episode on the Void... blood is mentioned in the lore post. Did they try the Void's blood? Does the episode document its effects?

Not a bad guess.

Was the attack on lou carter's mansion a plot by lord ember?

Spoilers.

What do Nehal, Pelayo, Ward and ZaZa think of the Rangers and Mortum? Does any member of the crew have personal experience with anyone in the main cast?

None has personal experiences. Pelayo has been hired as a guard by Mortum once or twice, but that's it. We'll get into their opinions in game.

Okay... listen—the Heartbreak sequence—is the puppet gender setting Heartbreak's gender just foreshadowing + hints of the imposter, and the imposter seeping into Sidestep's brain, yes/no...

Remember back in the day when I said some variables were just red herrings?

👉 **Or is it the impostor now fucking with Sidestep's memory and dreams retroactively, and the variable actually doesn't have any bearing on HB's gender?**

Wouldn't you like to know?

Also. Most importantly. When will Ward admit that Pelayo is a catch and take that beautiful man on a date? Sidestep can pay for the meal.

Oh, Ward is not the bigger issue here, Pelayo is.

Does argent's family know/suspect anything about what she's been up to or do they think she died in the nanosurge?

They think she's dead.

I imagine it's not cheap to set up Argent's apartment as nanovore proof, and that a Ranger salary will have gone a long way to making that possible. How did she cope when she was still a vigilante in San Francisco? What was her home like there?

Oh dear, she's not gonna like it that I let this secret out. In fact, she lived in the sewers for security reasons. Yes, she was in fact the one with the sewer base.

Did the Farm ever experiment with their mind-transferring work on the dogs? We know they were the test dummies for a lot of things...

And may I psychically rehabilitate all those good boys and girls?

The Farm did a lot of experiments on dogs, and if you go back, maybe you can do something about it.

Did Step discover their body-hopping ability before or after their 2nd escape?

Before.

Did Mortum have a cape?

No, but a very sweeping long coat and hood which served the same purpose.

[Lore poll!](#)

[Apr 20, 2022](#)

I was thinking we'd switch it up a little this time around and see if you have any suggestions of what you might like more lore on? I am curious, and any suggestions I don't use might be added to future polls if I don't judge them as too spoilery. So make your suggestions!

[Time to ask your questions for next month!](#)

[Apr 20, 2022](#)

Feel free to ask away about anything.

[Mitchell's Guide to Villains entry 19: Psychopathor](#)

[Apr 17, 2022](#)

Mitchell's Guide to Villains entry 19.

Subject: Psychopathor

Civilian Identity: Kurt Theodore Moran.

Birthdate: 12 December 1971

Birthplace: Des Moines, Iowa.

Height: 6'9"/206 cm.

Weight: 450 lbs/204 kg

Classification: Gamma level boost (?). Type B mod, including among other things: Armored skinweave, reinforced skeletal structure and joints, integrated modular weaponry, full sensory neural interface with his armor.

Note: A fair bit of guesswork here when it comes to the boost. Officially, he's never admitted to being boosted, but there are enough reports of psychic sensitivity and possibly enhanced healing and strength that it can't be disproved. However, the main danger is the extensive physical mods, and especially his custom-built armor. The integrated weaponry is confirmed to be at least three hidden blades, a needlegun and smoke/gas ejector, all poisoned. There are also reports that he can function without oxygen for a considerable amount of time.

The Psychopathor armor: Unlike most, this is not based on a military blueprint/prototype, but seems to be a custom job from the ground up. The specs seem comparable, with a heavy laminated plasteel shell over an exoskeleton, powered by an internal reactor. The reactor also powers the shoulder mounted plasma cannon which is the main weapon, and the auxiliary blue lasers. There are no integrated close combat weapons, as he prefers to rely on handheld ones. With the helmet on, it's underwater capable down to a considerable depth, and has an internal oxygen supply.

Note: Intercepted letter containing a transcript of an unpublished interview with Psychopathor. Despite continued surveillance of VB, no reply was recorded.

Hello.

I'm sorry to impose on you like this, but your name came up in an interview I did. I know you're not my mentor anymore, but I really valued our talks, and I wouldn't want to submit anything that might get you in trouble. I haven't submitted anything to my editor yet, and I really think this piece could land me a job, but I also know you're in a tough spot when it comes to The Confidential and might not want to help me. I think it was a shitty decision firing you, you were just doing your job. Please excuse my notes, like I said, this is just a rough. Not a finished article, but you'll understand why I'd want to contact you.

Hopefully we can meet up for a coffee soon?

/Mia.

Date: 2 June, 2014.

Present: The Psychopathor (Kurt Moran), Mia Ochoa (interviewer)

[Make sure to describe the surroundings. Set the mood. Spooky. Dangerous. Young intrepid journalist talking to famous villain. Don't mention the tea. Got the okay on the helmetless picture, use the one with the light coming from the back. Need a title that doesn't sound lame or plagiarized. Transcription from audio tapes. Cut as needed.]

Psychopathor - Are you afraid?

Mia Ochoa - Should I be?

P - Probably, little girl, but you asked for this meeting so you tell me.

O - I didn't think you'd actually agree.

P - What can I say, I was bored and had the night off.

O - Night off from what? Villaining?

P - You could say that. Why do you want to interview me?

O - It's my job.

P - No, it's not. You're an intern.

O - Oh.

P - Yes, I looked into you.

O - And you're still here.

P - As are you. With your little recorder and prodding questions.

O - I need them to take me seriously to land this job.

P - They won't.

O - You don't know that.

P - I know people.

O - He told me that. That you were smarter than you acted.

P - He?

O - Vernon Browne.

P - Ah that's where you got the idea.

O - Not the idea. But enough information to contact you.

P - So how is the old curmudgeon?

O - I don't know. It was a while since we talked. I didn't know you knew each other?

P - He liked asking questions. I liked that he asked the right ones. Tea?

O - Please.

P - Not afraid to drink it?

O - No. You don't need to poison me to hurt me if you wanted to.

P - True. But if you know Browne, you also know I generally don't hurt the media. How else would I get any decent coverage?

O - You care about that?

P - We all do. Why else the theatrics?

O - You're refreshingly honest about that.

P - Please, I am too old to play pretend.

O - Thank you. That makes things easier. I assume you want to read the finished version before I send it in to the editor to make sure you're not misquoted?

P - No need. If I don't like it I'll simply raze your precious little newspaper to the ground.

O - Oh.

P - That was a joke [boisterous laugh]. Now, let's get on with it.

O - Ah, yes. Questions. One of the rumors I have heard about you that is rarely talked about is your marriage?

P - Who told you that? Don't bother lying to me little girl, I'll know if you do.

O - Nobody told me exactly. I saw your folder when I helped Mr. Browne clean out his office, and read it in the bathroom.

P - He did get fired then.

O - He did.

P - She offered Browne to work for her, you know? My wife.

O - Work as what? Is she a villain too?

P - She's quite... respectable.

O - That's not an answer.

P - She wears a less obvious mask than mine. We've got a good partnership that way. Not that we agree on everything. We did not agree on Mr. Browne.

O - So you were against recruiting him?

P - Of course. It could easily be a ploy. Stage an incident, fake a fall from grace, leave yourself open to offers to switch sides.

O - And then what? Write an article about you?

P - You really don't know, do you?

O - Know what?

P - Huh. Looks like I was wrong about you, girl. I thought you were here as part of his plan. Maybe you still are. An unwitting tool, finding the right folder, drawing the right conclusions.

O - Are you worried that someone is listening in? You keep tilting your head. I promise, I came alone. Nobody else is here.

P - Nobody but you and me and my... advisers. Looks like you're in the clear with them.

O - And if I hadn't been?

P - You'd be dead.

O - Oh.

P - You know my reputation. Did you really think I wouldn't kill you if you were a threat, media or not?

O - But I'm not.

P - I know that now. Browne still might be.

O - If you are threatening him...

P - Down, girl. If I wanted him dead he'd be dead years ago. All I care about is not to get caught in the trap when it slams shut.

O - What trap?

P - You want to be an investigative reporter? Figure it out.

O - Perhaps later. But we're here to talk about you.

P - Of course we are. What do you want to know? How it feels to kill someone? How rich I actually am? What the specs are on my armor? Why I am doing this?

O - I want to know why you blew up the Virginia. Nobody ever figured that out.

P - The cruiser? Oh that takes me back. You might say it was a wedding present. My wife is quite the romantic.

O - Two hundred and fifty two people died.

P - I suppose some would have made it to the lifeboats.

O - Is that really the reason? For a wedding gift?

P - Oh spare me the moral outrage. People die every day, I'm just a bit showier about it than most. The biggest killers in this town still sit on the city council.

O - There's a difference between death and murder.

P - Is there? You walk past someone collapsed on the street and leave them to freeze and die because they look like a junkie and you don't want to get involved. Or you put a bullet in someone's head. Dead is dead.

O - It's not...

P - Are you here to interview or argue with me?

O - So what are you saying then? That you consider yourself a hero?

P - Oh no, I am a villain and a murderer, but I'm not the only one. The moment a person get some modicum of power, they turn from victim to monster. Look at this place. Freedom? Don't make me laugh. Freedom to hurt others. Freedom to not have to bother with others. A freedom from morals perhaps.

O - So what's the solution?

P - I don't care. My wife has ideas, but the way I see it, people won't change. It's either hurt or be hurt.

O - And nobody is hurting you anymore?

P - Clever move. Did you think you had uncovered my hidden past? My time as mind-mannered nerd Theodore Moran? Shunned by girls? Bullied by my peers? Desperate enough to take the boost drugs and turn myself into this? Is that your angle? Try to get some sympathy for this wicked old monster?

O - When you put it that way, it does sound rather melodramatic.

P - I named myself Psychopathor.

O - Point. Though you do seem saner with your helmet off.

P - I tend to get carried away in battle. It can be quite rousing.

O - Are the rumors of drugs true then?

P - I assure you I do not need performance enhancing drugs to go on a murderous rampage. But they do add to the ambiance.

O - Make you sound more like a murderous thug you mean.

P - Please. I am too old to have to work on my image.

O - Really? I've seen pictures of your armor through the years, it's changed quite a lot.

P - Upgrades. Technology has advanced quite a bit.

O - Spikes and skulls technology?

P - [boisterous laugh] Oh, I like you.

O - So is there a significance to the updated looks over the years?

P - Oh yes. It's an arms race. Imagine the competition I had when I started out. The sorry state of heroes and villains. Utilitarian. Drab. Or worse... homemade!

O - There are few who has had such a long career in this field as you have, what do you feel has changed the most in the villain community over the years?

P - Money. Not from crime, but the surrounding infrastructure. Designers. Media managers. Stylists. Look at former villains like Sylvan, or Dr. Mortum. They are more successful as consultants than they ever were as villains.

O - And have you ever used their services?

P - Of course. At least the technological side. I don't exactly need any brand development. I'm a household name at this point, I was active when the Catastrofiend still had only two arms. Sad story that.

O - Would you like to elaborate?

P - They've gone downright unhinged. That's what happens when you lose control. Drugs are useful, but never let them be a crutch or eventually, you'll find yourself unable to walk.

O - Some people would say the same of you.

P - And yet I am here sharing a cup of tea and a pleasant conversation with you. Trust me, you won't be able to do the same with them these days.

O - Any comment on this current crop of heroes?

P - Oh they won't get any free advertisement from me.

O - Any general comments? In comparison to the ones from the past?

P - They're more worried about getting hurt. All these armors and skinsuits. Don't they understand that the public wants to see them bleed? That's what made Charge so popular, you know?

O - I didn't?

P - The public loves an underdog. They crave the bruises and the scraped knuckles. They don't want military armors or invulnerability. They don't want gods. They want people.

O - I never thought of it that way.

P - People rarely do. Look at the fights, if people really wanted to kill each other it would be easier to get out there with a sniper rifle.

O - You mean like the Crack?

P - I do. Stupid name. Cowardly tactics. Will be a forgotten footnote in a decade. If they hadn't been picking off cops, nobody would have cared.

O - You make it sound almost like pro-wrestling.

P - Aren't you too young to like that kind of thing?

O - My dad used to love it. Thought it was very American.

P - It used to be a lot more popular. But now people can watch real blood. True drama. Higher stakes. They don't need things directed in a ring. It's on the streets now.

O - And you are a part of it.

P - As are you. You're sitting here interviewing me. On my terms. And you'll walk away to write a piece flattering my image, because you fear the consequences of what might happen if you don't.

O - And people will pay to read the article.

P - Exactly. And you might get a job riding on the fame of my atrocities.

O - ...

P - What is it? Getting cold feet?

O - That's beside the point. I just realized that none of the things I read about you in the past necessarily are true.

P - Bingo. But my acts are.

O - What if I write the truth? About what we talked about here?

P - Nobody would buy it. It's not interesting enough. It might complicate their worldview.

O - Are you this open with all reporters?

P - Oh no. You are new. So I am curious where you will go with this. What kind of reporter you will become.

O - Is this some kind of experiment?

P - More like entertainment. Apply pressure. Watch what cracks.

O - And if you like my piece? Regardless of the truth in it?

P - Might be the start of a lucrative career. I know plenty of people to talk to.

O - Is this... did you do this with Mr. Browne?

P - Don't make me laugh. He already knew the stakes. Even if he tried to pretend that he didn't. Dropping his old pen name doesn't make him into a new person.

O - What are you talking about?

P - Might want to look into his career before he moved to Los Diablos and joined the Confidential. Maybe interview him about his pal. [chuckle]

O - What's so funny?

P - Do your homework and find out. You're supposed to be the reporter, not me. Now get out, looking forward to see what you do with this.

Note: Mia Ochoa's career has been successful since her debut piece on Psychopathor (which contained very little of the recorded interview.) Is she working with him behind the scenes? Possibly. She has a reputation of being able to talk to people who normally shun the press. Could be worth looking into making her an asset?

//note: Stick to your lane. She's more useful as she is. /N//

[QnA April](#)

[Apr 9, 2022](#)

I know if your trans in the game you can have some surgery to make your physical appearance more of what you want did you ever consider letting some of our characters not trans have some plastic surgery on there face to be more unrecognizable/ make some changes to make them more comfortable with there appearance?

I have thought about it, we'll see what happens in the future.

How would the RO react seeing the MC or the puppet, playing with kids.

I think all of the RO's would have the same "WTF?" reaction to the MC. It's not exactly something that's been known to happen. For the puppet it's more normal, I don't think there would be any particular reaction other than a find smile or two.

If we're a ruthless MC, is it possible for us to choose an option of the MC legitimately not understanding the crueller implications to their actions and decisions? I like the idea that it could add another layer of horror when certain truths come to light, especially with the Rangers who knew that Sidestep used to be a genuinely good person in the past...

(E.g. Legitimately not understanding what's wrong with what they're doing with the Puppet, and being confused as to why Mortum feels betrayed/angry/disgusted with them.)

There are some paths that comes close to that, yeah.

Like Damocles, is it possible for us to create our own telepathic weapons and techniques in the future? If so, is that development only restricted to reactive situations? (E.g. Someone tries to raid your memories = leads to Step making sure it doesn't happen again.) Or can we create fail safes so it doesn't happen in the first place? It feels a little out of character for my cautious MC to not have any fail safes beyond the one trump card.

There will be more exploration of telepathic flavors and tactics in book three especially. That's when we might encounter other telepaths. I think you can safely assume that Sidestep already does have rather spectacular psychic defenses and traps, it's just that there's been nobody around to test them... yet.

If we do lean towards that area... will we get to customize our own repertoire of telepathic techniques and how they work?? Focusing on healing? Defense? Offense? Support?? Balance across the spread?

As we start to explore more complex telepathic conflict, there will be new options other than Force/Subterfuge. I haven't pinned down exactly what yet, but I look forward to doing it. Right now, Sidestep has mostly fought against non-telepathic entities. That might change in the future...

Has Argent ever tried making whips with her body? (Possibly with her hair/arms?) To make up for distance, if she's dealing with a long-range fighter who refuses to get close, for example. Or is she cautious of potentially whipping out some poor civilian's eye?

Not whips exactly, she has range issues. However, she has played around with things more akin to flexible Chinese or Indian swords.

How would Ortega react if we took down HG and their organization by ourselves? Would they be impressed? Or would they feel anger and betrayal because they wanted to be the one to corner and finish them?

Oooh, tough question. I honestly don't know, it would depend very much on the circumstances. Quite likely it will be a mix of the two, though what Ortega will project to the world might not be what they really feel.

In addition to this, how would Ortega react if Sidestep stole access to HG's bank account details/debit card/etc (or the illegal equivalent of them) and chose to max it out to pay off Ortega's crushing debt?

Now, that calls for a celebratory dinner (on HG's dime, of course).

Will we ever find a way to read Ortega's mind?

There might be a possibility in the future, yeah. In a way...

Before, you said that telepathic sex would be an option in game, with the exception of Ortega due to their immunity.

Once enough trust has been built, that might be an option with some RO's, yes.

If they trust and love Step, how do the ROs feel about the idea? Apprehensive? Curious? Excited? If they're not romancing Step, what do they think of the idea in general? It'd be incredibly intimate, and I think they can all agree on that front. Does Ortega feel like they're missing out on something cool and sexy? Or are they not torn up about it?

Ortega might feel a little left out, because it's new and exciting and intimate and they can't do it. The last is something Ortega tends to take as a challenge...

Chen would initially be very hesitant, but if he trusts, he trusts.

Daniel will be the most open to it, he doesn't really get what the problems might be.

Argent will be the most reluctant. For good reasons.

If Step were to broadcast a message telepathically, how many people can they reach with one 'shout' at once?

I don't know. It depends on how many that are in range. A lot. Probably in the thousands or more.

How would the Rangers + Mortum react to Rat King? For the former, would they regard them with the same affection they have for Spoon if we gave RK a translator to talk with them? Those little rat emojis won over my heart and I'm wondering if that'll be the same for them.

I don't think anybody can resist the Rat King. I mean how could you?

Is it possible for Step to imprison someone's consciousness within Step's own mind? Separating them from their body entirely? With their body-hopping generally regarding bodies as containers, with the consciousness being the 'true self,' I was wondering if it'd be possible to trap someone within Step's own mindscape; or a specifically constructed mental prison for Steps who want to keep their privacy, leaving the detainee's actual body prone to being arrested without a fight.

Yes.

How do you figure out if a someone can handle mods? Is there a test? Since every combat use Regene is boosted are they all capable of being modded as well?

There are a few indicators, but not a simple test that can tell for certain. The two used by organizations doing voluntary modification are the Seiss Neural Compability Assessment, and the ImmunoActive Response Simulation.

The SNCA entails connecting the subject's nervous system to an exterior object (a hand or arm is most often used) through non-surgical means and see how adept the brain is to control it. The subjects real arm is immobilized, and their field of vision limited while having to work a manual dexterity puzzle with the false and the real hand, both in gloves to help with the immersion. Another test includes applying visual sensations to the fake hand, like brushing it with a feather, or moving it close to a candle and see if the brain deduces sensation from visual clues only. These tests are done mainly for limb replacements.

The IARS is a series of tests to try to predict how the immune system will react to foreign bodies without massive immunosuppressive drugs. One of the tests include inserting a small probe for about a week, while charting the body's response to the intrusion.

What was Ortega's childhood like?

Ortega would say that it was a good one. They were popular and had a lot of friends, and managed to keep their grades decent. It wasn't that they didn't understand what they were studying, it was rather that they didn't really have the patience or focus to get really good at it. Also, it didn't really fit their image. Sports were where they shone, and if they had been more of a team player, that would probably have been a great career option for them. As it was, they had problems dealing with authorities (coaches included) and preferred to do things their own way. Killeen, Texas wasn't exactly an exciting place to spend their childhood, but they made do.

At the age of 14, their father got a new posting so the family moved to San Diego, and Ortega started to spend more time away from home hanging out with their new friends. Their father was home less, which meant more freedom, which was great. They got into extreme sports and parkour, and once they (barely) finished high school, they moved out immediately and spent the next years roaming the coast with their new group of friends filming stunts and the desolation, subsisting on sponsorships, selling shots, and odd jobs.

Can you explain a bit more about Ortega's debt?

Well, experimental surgery is a big investment. That is all I will currently say, there are things there you need to find out in game.

How are the creators of the Boost drug doing now? What's the public opinion of them, if there's any?

Oh they were sued out of existence in the eighties, but their legacy remains. The team is mostly forgotten, and while the lead scientist, Marcus Eyre, claimed to his death that he was robbed of a nobel price, it is generally agreed that he has no idea how his drug did what it did.

Relating to a previous Q&A... How unsettling would Sidestep be to other telepaths? And how bad would their general vibes be? From 'creepy' to 'on the verge of a panic attack if I don't get away from this person *right now.*' How would other telepaths perceive Step's telepathy? Is it disturbing in any way? Or does it feel like your regular old telepathy?

It would depends on Sidestep's shields (force). High shields would mean few vibes unless actively interacting telepathically. However, low shields would be very bad vibes. How bad would depend on what kind of telepath the other person was. It would be especially bad for empaths and other sensitives. Sidestep could definitely cause panic attacks just by walking into a room.

Is it possible for Step to use their trauma as a weapon? Say, forcing their trauma onto someone who thought was a good idea to invade their mind?

Hell yes.

What did Ortega's father think about heroes and Boosts? On a more angsty note, did he genuinely love Ortega and Tia Elena? Sometimes I get bad vibes from him.

Ortega's father thought of heroes and boosts as a security risk, and something that might portend the collapse of social order. So no, he was not a fan. He saw them as theatrics for the media age. He did genuinely love Elena and Ortega, but love doesn't have to be uncomplicated.

Are there any fundamental differences between the combat units and the infiltrator units besides the different training and skin colour?

No.

Were Re-Genes sold/rented to people who aren't directly related to the Farm/military to gain more money for the Farm? Or were they strictly and exclusively trafficked by the two?

Re-Genes are an exclusive property.

We know that the hospitals Step/Puppet has been to have generally been top-notch, but what about mental hospitals? Are they well funded like them? Because if they aren't, I'm gonna be nervous for Step, who isn't in the greatest state of mental health right now...

Sadly, the mental health facilities have not benefited from the leaps in medical technology. Also, it might be good to remember that the hospitals visited in game so far has been for the high-end/paying patients. Not the common man. Yes, even the one where the puppet was found. Organ harvesting was always a thing for the wealthy...

How might the Rangers have reacted to a villain using Sidestep's name if Ortega hadn't met Step in the diner? That is to say, if they all still thought Step was dead? Would it be similar? Different?

It would have been very similar.

How are poly relationships treated and portrayed by modern media? If any of the Rangers were to get into one, how would the PR team handle it? Would there be an uproar if two Rangers were in the same one? If one of them was involved with a former villain like Mortum? How would Chen, Argent, Herald, Mortum, and Ortega handle any publicity that comes with it if their poly relationship status became public knowledge?

It would, without a doubt, be a source of massive interest and curiosity if it came out. There would be headlines, speculations, saucy articles and all of it would be very hard for the Rangers media team to handle. In a way, it would be a lot easier if it included Mortum, because they could just be ignored. It's rather unlikely that poly would be open news the same way as one with two Rangers involved would be. They'd probably deny everything until Ortega opened their mouth and made that impossible.

Ortega could handle the publicity (might actually thrive from it and brag a bit), Chen would hate it, he doesn't like having his personal affairs aired. Would be most likely to deny it in public if the others were cool with that. Daniel would be overwhelmed, and trying to explain things. Argent... would depend on the mood. She could be as bad as Ortega if she wanted to. Mortum... I don't know yet. It will be interesting.

How common is it for Ortega to develop a crush? What about genuinely falling in love? We all know they flirt fairly regularly, but how often do they actually have casual relationships/flings?

Ortega crushes often, but it passes just as quick. Falling in love is very rare, and in some playthroughs might never actually have happened. Love is real in a way that Ortega is not really prepared for. Also, they flirt a lot more than actually going through with it. While they have had some flings, there were feelings involved, even though they might have been fleeting. Ortega can flirt when they are stressed, bored, wanting to get something out of it and a myriad of other reasons that has nothing to do with wanting to sleep with someone. That being said, a lot of their normal interactions can also be taken as flirting, even though they didn't intend to.

How did Sidestep get their hero name? I remember you saying that they got it from a frustrated villain screaming the name at them- is the lore still the same? If so, who were they?

I will probably never detail it in depth, but that's my personal headcanon. If you have another one, feel free. I have no idea who the villain was, it might just have been a random mugger early on.

If his brother survived, how differently would you imagine Daniel's life would've been?

Very, very different (and maybe not in a good way).

Do different machines have different 'voices' to Argent? Are certain machines completely 'mute?' Or just straight up impossible for her to converse with?

Yes, they do. She is aware that she is anthropomorphising things, but talking to them is the best way she can describe what she does. And some machines are too simple, or too complex to converse with.

Why did Ortega follow the puppet? It must be spoilery, sorry i'm just so curious.

It is. You will be able to learn why in certain Retribution paths.

You explained the differences between Julia and Ricardo, but how do you picture an NB!Ortega? Personality, relationships, how they were perceived in the media, etc.

They would probably have to fight the hard to not just be seen as their assigned gender regardless of what they do. Most people would see them as "eccentric" rather than non-binary. If they were in a "perceived non-hetero" relationship, people would attribute things to their sexuality rather than their gender.

Are there any agencies/communities that provide specialized services for certain Boost types? In addition to this, are there any reputable handbooks/‘guides’ for certain Boost types that’s available to the public? Sort of like the ‘For Dummies’ series, except it’s for Boost powers? Including how to live with it/take care of it, how it generally works, etc.

Probably just as many as there are books about how to get rich on the stock-market, or how to write a book. And about as helpful...

How would the ROs seek vengeance for Step if they were killed? What if they weren’t romancing them?

I don't know, the circumstances are too varied to speculate.

What happened in the interview with Ortega after Marcus mentioned the Heartbreak movie and Sidestep?

A short power outage and some light threatening.

Following a question in the comments, the Rangers all have their own preferences about who they want to choose to join them. Sidestep, Verdant, Temerain, and Ashfall/Pyroclast. Excluding Sidestep, how well would each member get along with the rest of the team?

Huh. I actually don't know enough about them to say for certain. Most of the time, characters personalities only come into play once I start to write their interactions.

Why was Ortega so fascinated with/care so much about Sidestep, if we chose to not be as close to them in the past?

Spoilers. Might learn in Retribution ;).

Hypothetic scenario. If Sidestep was to be in, say, an indefinite coma with very unlikely chances of recovery, which Ranger would be the first to resign themselves to suggesting they finally pull the plug on them? How would the rest of the team take it, depending on who suggested it?

I don't think any of them would do it.

Would you say Argent is in love with Ortega?

I would say in some paths Argent has a crush/deep admiration for Ortega. But in love? She wouldn't call it that. Not yet. Love takes time and work, it's not something that just happens.

What are the reasons beyond sentimentality that Ortega wants Sidestep back in action? What do they expect them to be able to bring to the table?

Tactical flexibility. Imaginative out of the box thinking. Even without (or with very limited) telepathy, Ortega knows exactly how valuable Sidestep can be for a team.

Could anyone have taken on The Void in a straight fight? If so, how?

That is a spoiler. I have my reasons not to get into it.

How was Anathema's acid able to get through their body? Was there something special about it or could any similarly caustic substance have done the job?

A good question. Normally Anathema didn't seem to get hurt by their (or others) acid, though in retrospect one might wonder if the freckles/pockmarks/scars on parts of their body might not have been a result of that. It is theorized that abject fear made the acid strong enough to overcome even Anathema's inherent invulnerability, so in theory it might have been possible with outside substances, just that they hadn't been encountered yet.

Who would win in a fight, The Catastrofiend or Psychopathor?

The Catastrofiend.

Who's your favorite character? (If you can choose)

I don't, what I love are the interactions between them.

Do FEZ territories have legal ages?

In theory, no. In practice, businesses set age restrictions on certain things. For example. There is no legal age for driving, or need for a driver's license. However, you need traffic insurance to drive, and the insurance companies demands a driver's license, and the most permissive one has a minimum age of 14. In practice, the higher premiums at younger ages makes it hard for anybody not rich, or getting it through their job.

Are there any restriction on getting modded if one was trying to do it legally?

Not in the west. In the US proper, there are restrictions limiting weapons and surveillance mods.

A lot of the Rangers seem to choose Hawaii as a favoured vacation spot. Would they be open to a group vacation? Or would they rather go there individually and alone to enjoy themselves?

A group vacation would be exhausting to Argent and Chen, but Daniel and Ortega might be up for it.

What were the most embarrassing/unflattering ways that the Rangers have been portrayed in movies? What about some of the best/generous ones?

Charge: Bad: Horny, vain and quarrelsome. Good: Good leader. Worthy of following in Hood's footsteps.

Steel: Bad: Didn't even get to take the helmet off. Good: The voice of reason.

Herald: Bad: Bumbling newbie himbo. Good: Eager point of view character showing his worth.

Argent: Bad: Loose cannon bully. Good: The competent one.

Is Ortega as curious with the mysteries surrounding Argent like how they are with Sidestep? Or did Argent's coverups do enough to thwart the bulk of it?

Oh Ortega is always curious... they know something's up.

Did Steel ever draw inspiration from Tactician!Step's plans and strategies? Did he ever sincerely compliment Step for them? I feel like it can be hard to imagine, given how suspicious Chen was in the glory days.

Yes. Chen's respect of Tactical Sidestep's mind was one of the reason why he was suspicious. Too smart for their age. Too well trained.

Branching off of what the Rangers find attractive in someone else, what about the Guardians?

I haven't written them enough to know!

Would Ortega be more flattered or insulted that a romanced!Step thinks they're adorable and hilarious instead of hot and charming?

Mostly the former while pretending the latter. Ortega can laugh at themselves.

What are the rooms that the Re-Genes are living in like? Do they share rooms? Are they built like prison cells with a toilet and sink in the same room as their bed?

Prison cell is an apt comparison, yeah. They don't share rooms in general. At times, a team can have a communal room, to help foster cooperation, but this is dependent on the Handler's view of what would work best.

Sort of random, but I'm curious if Step has ever run into other unnamed telepaths (civilian, henchmen, etc.) throughout Rebirth and/or Retribution and simply didn't notice them?

No. As you might guess from an earlier question, they might have done their best to avoid Sidestep in the first place...

How did Argent and Herald feel about the whole fake dating angle in the beginning versus toward the end? How did it affect their relationship?

They were both awkward and reluctant at the start, then it started going rather well until Argent pulled back and started to get annoyed. It did affect their teamwork and friendship for the worse.

Had IB been affiliated with HG's organization or had Mitchell just been keeping an eye on IB?

Affiliated.

Do any of the Rangers have particular opinion on any of the major villains like Psychopathor, Catastrofiend, or The Crack in terms of their actions, powers, and/or threat level?

The Catastrofiend is the official team boogeyman. Dangerous, and nobody wants to fight it. Big threat level. Psychopathor is deemed a threat, Steel is convinced he is up to something, but everyone else sees him as a powerful but normal villain out for power and money. The Crack mostly targeted the LDPD, and it was a matter of pride for the LDPD to keep the Rangers out of that business. Steel looked into it, but didn't see a reason to turn it into a team priority.

What was Lady Argent's and Herald's first meeting with each other like? What were their initial impressions on each other and how much has it changed over the years? How do they feel about each other in present day?

The first meeting was polite, pleasant. Herald thought she was imposing, dangerous and professional. Didn't want to shake hands for some reason, which was weird and slightly rude. Argent thought he was friendly and way too open and personal. Not going to say how they feel now, we'll investigate that as we go.

What topics do Argent and Ortega like to talk about between them? How do they like to spend time together?

Training, fashion, movies. Argent likes listening to Ortega's stories of the past, and Ortega is interested in Argent's perspective on people and events.

What would Argent, Chen, and/or HG think or feel if they saw their mindscapes the way Sidestep can see them?

Fascinated. That's not usually a way you get to see yourself.

What would Chen and Ortega have thought or how would they have reacted if they knew Herald went to Sidestep to ask about the Heartbreak Incident?

A mutual "oh no, that's not good." Neither of them wants to drag up bad memories, but of course Herald would have no such fears.

Did the HG trio or Mortum have any particular opinion on villains or heroes before they entered into that scene?

Not any I can think of right now. Jake thinks it's a bit too theatrical, that's it.

How aware is the Rangers team of each other's priorities as a Ranger/hero? What would their opinion be on each other's priorities?

I think it's one of those things where people working together tends to assume that everybody shares the same priorities until an event happens that makes the differences clear. That event might happen in

the future, guess we'll see then.

Building off a question above, how would Chen and Ortega react to realising that Herald grabbed Step out of nowhere and flew them off the ground without warning? Considering Step's aversion to touch + new fear of heights, I don't think they'll take the news well...

Facepalm first, anger second. Herald would get a stern talking to.

What kind of leader/commander would a fully realised Herald be? Personable with his team? Charismatic like Charge? Similar to Hood back when he was alive? How would you rank him as a tactician, especially compared with Steel and Tactician!Step?

Hmmmm I don't know yet, there are several directions he could go. It would depend a lot whether he'd keep his faith in humanity or go deeply cynical. He would be more on the charismatic side like Ortega, but more focused on the team like Hood. He's not a good enough tactician as either Steel or Tactician Sidestep yet, but he's learning.

Would plastic surgery be able to get rid of the Re-Gene tattoos?

Not without effort. Would need to go down into the flesh for that.

Can Step and Rat King communicate while Step is possessing a different body?

Not so far.

If current Ortega and Lady Argent fought glory days Ortega and Sidestep which team would win? Assuming it's a time magic friendly spar not a death battle.

Oh shit. That would be a close battle. Past Ortega is a better fighter than current Ortega, but Argent packs a harder punch than past Sidestep. It would depend a lot on luck and timing.

Who was your favourite character to write in Book 2? | Are there any characters you've wanted to write an interaction with but haven't had a chance to in this new book?

My favorite character to write is Ortega because it is such a balance between what I can say/must only imply, and their own particular mix of goofy jokes and deeply seriousness. I need to write on like three levels of knowledge with them, and it's a fun exercise for the brain. Also, I get to write the worst stuff... Ortega does suffer from foot in mouth disease at times.

I can't wait to write Ortega/Mortum and Argent/Mortum. That will be fun.

In the last Q&A you mentioned that Ortega isn't above hanging out in villain bars on occasion; any chance for them to show up at Joes and surprise/spook us?

How do you know they haven't?

Will we get to meet Mortum's hitherto unseen assistant? The one whose car we get to ride in during FH: Rebirth on the way to the doctor's secret base?

She got fired. We'll see.

At the end of the first game, Mortum might deduce that our puppet's "boss" may be trying to eliminate the puppet with the explosives they provided for the Gala. When this is suggested to us, Sidestep may react very strongly and become offended at the thought of being betrayed and killed off after outgrowing their usefulness, before remembering that they themselves are both the puppet and their "boss". Is this the first sign of some sort of personality split? Or maybe something else?

It is very much an intentional scene, and we'll see what comes of that.

You said before that Ortega punched Ashfall (for Step) and they fought with the intent of hurting each other. What was the exact reason for that fight?

It had been brewing for a long time, they were always destined to clash. But the triggering incident was over Sidestep.

Will we get to witness any of the ROs crying in-game? As much as it would hurt seeing Ortega who is intent on not showing any vulnerability cry is smth i'm kinda looking forward to.

Yes.

How much does the reality of being a Ranger differ from what Herald imagined it would be?

Much more what amounts to desk jobs than actual heroing. He didn't anticipate so many meetings and press briefings, he thought that was just a company hero thing.

Does Herald still feel he's making more of a difference in his own role within the Rangers than he did as a vigilante?

Oh yes.

After Ortega's apartment was bombed, where did they end up staying until it was repaired? Bunk with Chen/Tia Elena, or did they just get stubborn about it and decided to stay put?

Started staying with their mother, moved out and in with Chen after three days, then went back as soon as the hole in the wall was plugged and just lived through the renovation.

So Ortega's getting a 40th birthday party~ Does a revealed Step get to come or are we gonna be stuck crashing it?

Depends on the circumstances. In some cases Ortega would invite, in others, it's crashing time. Or both.

Does Mitchell perhaps have a guide to Pyroclast? 🙄🙄

Yep.

There will be an hero edition of Mitchell's guide (maybe when/if It will not be too spoilery?)

Yep.

Since there seems to be several dimensional planes in the FHR world, what's the situation in terms of the occult, esotericism, spirits? Does anything akin to that actually exist or is suspected to exist (beyond superstition)? If yes, are there boosts that can access / communicate with / unlock paranormal planes?

It's pretty similar to this one, but with more "mainstream" acceptance and research since the Boost drugs have made people more open to things they can't explain. The current scientific discussion is about trying to work out exactly what physical laws we are missing/misunderstanding, because it's clear that there must be something central we have missed. And, some of the occult/psi/spirit research connects to that, because people theorize that might also utilize the same unknown means.

So far, no traditional occult things (like reincarnation, demons, vampires, ghosts) have been proven, but there is ongoing work.

Chen's from the east coast, did/does he have an accent?

He speaks pretty neutral American English by now, too long in the armed forces, and then the west coast.

Sorry if this has been asked before, but when did Ortega get equipped with the plasmacore generator?

Post Heartbreak.

Anathema had a rough, dark past. Any link to the Green Sky?

No comments.

What happens to a Regene if their handler is killed during a mission? Are they punished for not being able to keep them safe or just handed off to another?

Depends on the circumstances, if it was their fault, they will be evaluated before being handed over to another handler. And yes, that evaluation might be seen as punishment...

Did the Void and the Catastrofiend ever fight each other, or work together?

They avoided each other like the plague.

Does Julia pronounce her name with the English or Spanish "J" sound?

She uses the Spanish "J", but will answer to either.

Which "version" do different people/organisations in her life use? Does she have a preference, especially from those closest to her?

In English speaking media, the English "J" is more common. In Spanish speaking media, it is the other way around. Both Chen, Argent and Sidestep use the Spanish version, Herald sometimes slips and used the English one. She says she's fine with either, but secretly prefers the Spanish.

If the Rangers were villains and Mortum was a hero, what names would they choose?

Charge - No change, wouldn't give up the puns.

Herald - Harbinger.

Steel - Cataclysm.

Lady Argent - Piranha.

Dr. Mortum - Translocator.

Has Sidestep ever felt the presence of non-physical entities with their telepathy?

Possibly.

How much experience did Ortega have with the void prior to the final showdown with Step? Did Ortega ever assist Hood with some void operations? If yes, how did they usually go?

Brief experiences. Ortega did assist Hood on several occasions, and they didn't end well.

What would happen if two telepaths tried to read each others minds at the same time?

House of mirrors.

I know this won't come up for a while still, but do you have clearcut Regene characters set up to appear down the line? If yes, can you drop a few hints about them?

Yes. But I won't drop hints.

Who's at the top of HG's wish-kill list, as of Retribution at least?

Lord Ember.

What would the Rangers, Mortum and the HG trios vices be?

Ortega: Alcohol.

Steel: Smoking (he quit a long time ago, the urge is still there)

Herald: Don't know.

Argent: Sweets.

Mortum: Junk Food.

HG: Alcohol.

Nocturne: Don't know.

Jake: Gambling.

Out of all the Heroes and Villains Mitchell has done research on, who did/does he find the most interesting?

The Catastrofiend.

Did any of Herald's family call him Danny?

Sort of, his nanny called him Dani.

Has he been in touch with them at all since leaving home?

By letter and the occasional phonecall.

[Spoiler QnA for April](#)

[Apr 9, 2022](#)

For Romanced!Steel. At one point did Chen's opinion evolve from growing understanding/empathy to actual attraction?

Sometime during Retribution, probably during one of the dog park meetings.

Did Step's venture into his mind influence him to make the choice to sleep with them in any way? With something like that, especially with how intimate and personal it is, I can't imagine

that it *didn't* have any effect. Or was he silently hoping that something might happen when he invited them to his home?

It's a question of intimacy on both counts. Chen had made that decision before he let Sidestep into his mind.

What does Chen like about Ricardo? When and why did he start falling for him? What did he see in Ricardo that made the transition from 'trusted friend' to 'crush'?

The crush came way before the friendship. Chen got interested right when they met that first time in the hospital when they were both doing rehab from their injuries. Apart from Ortega being objectively hot, there was just an instant attraction to that stubborn, won't give up, won't lie down attitude and humor about what had happened to him. Of course Chen later learned how annoying that stubbornness could also be...

Has Argent ever asked her 'passengers' what they think of Step after getting to know them? Especially if she's on good terms with/romancing them?

Oh she doesn't need to ask. She knows.

Has Argent ever tried having actual conversations with the nanovores? Do the nanovores themselves have a sense of morality? Or are they just mirroring Argent's own set of beliefs?

That's going to be a thing to find out.

Can we make Shroud regret everything if she tried to eat them, considering the sheer amount of pain, fear, despair, and trauma Sidestep has? I want to know if we can actually make her sick for trying: I can't imagine Step would be tasty, or go down without leaving some serious (mental) scars on Shroud.

See, all of this would depend on whether Shroud also gets the emotional residue of the memories or only the hard facts.

What's the PCV stand for in the hidden stats? What about the Ranger doubts? I think I might've misunderstood what they were.

PCV is puppet comfort value, how much at ease you feel inside the puppet's body. Ranger doubts are how much the Rangers are starting to doubt that they are on the right side of history.

In the world of FHR, how would the world re-classify Re-Genes if the truth about them came out- and they, in fact, aren't the emotionless humanoid tools used for war that everyone thought they were? Humans? Would they be legally defined as cyborgs due to their microchip + biological brain? Sentient AI/Androids? Maybe even just straight up robots? I feel like there'd be a lot of thin lines to slice when it comes to redefining what Re-Genes *are,* especially since they would be killed if their chip was removed.

That is a good question. None of the classic definitions really apply. Right now, they are legally defined as AI/Robots, and thus have no human rights. It will depend a lot on how the truth comes out, they might be redefined as enhanced humans (essentially mods), or a new category of non-human intelligence might need to be made. Historically, humanity has been very reluctant to accept that any other species might share their "special" status.

Did Chen and Ricardo ever get any bad vibes from Argent due to her nanovores? Especially since they're both mods?

Nope. None.

What would each of the Rangers have done if they knew Step was a Re-Gene, but nobody else on the team knew? Steel kept quiet, watching and adding up things... what about the rest?

Ortega is good at keeping secrets, would never have told a soul. Daniel would have had a hard time keeping it quiet for long, not by telling people, but rather than become actively involved in Re-Gene advocacy. Argent would have told nobody.

Why is Jake so averse to getting a code name and suit?

He finds it slightly embarrassing. He'd feel too self-conscious. He really doesn't get why everyone else can't see that.

On another note, while Jake does love Nocturne and HG, does he ever feel like he's limited his life to them?

No, he's pretty content. And it's not as if he's made any promises, this is all voluntary, and he has his own dalliances on the side.

If the three were separated and scattered from each other, who would Jake prioritize finding and saving first?

Nocturne.

Was there anything at the Farm that could (temporarily) remove Re-Gene tattoos? I understand that Infiltrators have to pass off as human, but surely the staff had to have something to briefly camouflage or remove those tattoos if exposure was a huge risk on certain missions for their Re-Genes?

No.

This might seem like an odd question, but is Sidestep made from genetic components that... *aren't* entirely human?

Yes. The AI chip.

Are there any limitations on what Argent can “eat”?

Organic matter only.

Step has Re-Gene tattoos all over their body, but where do they end?

The clear areas are: Face, neck and collarbones. Hands and lower arms. Feet and lower legs. Genitals.

What was HG’s opinion on the major villains like Psychopathor, Void, and/or The Crack?

Psychopathor is reasonable, and can be dealt with as an (almost) equal. The Void was a massive threat and needed to be removed at any cost. The Crack was useful.

What happened to the people HG first used their powers on without realizing it?

Nothing much, they were friendly and cooperative and did what they should. The first time HG realized was probably in combination with a hissed threat like "Go away" at the same time as they pushed them or similar.

Did Bo work for The Crack?

In a way, yeah.

What would HG trio’s powers look like if they were alpha level?

HG would be able to do what they do at a distance, not needing touch. Nocturne is harder to predict, possibly affecting other senses as well, maybe even making her practically invisible instead. Jake is very close already, just needs more training.

Sidestep can recall Catastrofiend used to give them glimpses they didn’t want to see and taunt them with insights they wanted to avoid, did something similar happen between HG and Catastrofiend?

Oh yes.

If they had a close relationship, what would HG's opinion be on the different villain bases Sidestep can have?

Anything but the luxury base would be met with a fond chuckle. Like... why choose to live like that?

Idk if this was asked before but will we ever get tia Elena's reaction/opinion on Sidestep being a regene and villain?

In some paths, most definitely.

Has Hollow Ground ever tried to thread the Catastrofiend?

Of course.

What was it about the jazz music playing at Joes the first time we go as puppet that made us feel so ill at ease? Was it actually Step responding to it or Ace?

Ace.

Can Shroud's powers be used on a corpse to gain information from just before they died or does it only work on the living?

Only the living.

In the puppet/Catastrofiend auction scene, it's implied that Catastrofiend recognized Step's mind but not the body they were possessing. This is true even with a mirror_image puppet (which I assume looks very similar but not completely identical to Step). Does this mean Catastrofiend knows what Step looks like? If so, how does it know what Step looks like? Did it see them unmasked? Can it see through/past the mask? Or can it see them via telepathic means?

It knows what Sidestep *tastes* like.

Are regenes often given "childhood" memories?

Yes, it is part of the standard package to help with mental stability.

[Ask your questions for next month's FAQ!](#)

[Mar 17, 2022](#)

I'm in good time this time!.

[Retribution progress report.](#)

[Mar 13, 2022](#)

Time for an updated progress report!

First, some facts. I am still working a full time (40h week) day job, so this is done in my spare time. I have also had health issues and other real life problems last year and a half which has slowed the pace some (not to mention general 2020, 2021 and 2022 shenanigans).

June news: Health issues are better, I am back at working 100% at work, which is a step in the right direction. Summer vacation coming up, that will give me four weeks of nothing but this. Also, there's a secondary thing I've been working on, which has taken time, and is exciting but sadly secret yet. Hopefully down the line that one will give be the chance to allot more time to writing.

December news: Health crashed again, back to working 50% for now. More doctors. More tests. Nothing conclusive. Getting close to finish Breaks, the comic I write with Emma. That will free up more time.

March news: Luckily my doctors seems to have pinpointed what has been ailing me physically, and I am feeling a lot better with medication. Working 75% currently. Now I just need to get my head back in gear, and I am slowly getting there.

So where are we now?

2022 13th March

[DONE] The game is finished, all chapters and epilogues are written. The closed alpha is around 1 398 000 words including code (1 279 000 without code), so it's around three times as large as the last one. The average playthrough is around 94 000 - 105 000 words but can vary greatly.

[DONE] Cover, graphic and text assets for release.

[DONE] Steam pre-release page.

[ALMOST DONE] Bug fixing and playtesting, additional content and variables. (mostly done, but new ones are always discovered). I have added achievements, screen reader support, and am working on the last bits needed for beta testing (mainly a chapter save system).

[ALMOST DONE] Editing, rewrites, copyediting, spelling and grammar. Has submitted the last chapters to proofreaders.

[PENDING] Final Beta testing with a new testing group. Coming very soon. Will find/fix more bugs/language at that time.

[PENDING] Submitting the finished game to Hosted Games.

[PENDING] Hosted Games editors makes the game ready for release on various platforms and systems. I have NO control over how long this takes, it all depends on their workload and the number of games in the pipeline. Once they know, the game will enter their release queue and only THEN will we have an estimated release date. For Rebirth, it took 4 months between submitting and release.

[Mar 12, 2022](#)

You said that when it came to Chen's/Blaze's relationship, Chen got the feeling that Blaze was more interested in Julia. Was his instincts wrong? Because you mentioned several times that Blaze hated Ortega.

Ortega has that effect on people. You can hate them AND be interested in them, I am sure many Sidesteps out there would agree. In essence, Chen was not wrong, and at heart of it is that Blaze felt less threatened by Julia than by Ricardo, because she is a woman. Blaze is very much bisexual.

How did HG and Nocturne react when they learned that Jake wanted to sleep with them/date them? Was their poly relationship something they negotiated on beforehand, or was it something that just developed?

Well, the emotional seeds sort of happened bit by bit. But, it was negotiated before anything actually happened. Nocturne always talks before she acts. She and Jake had a thing first, with HG's knowledge and blessing, before HG was brought into it.

Does Shroud eat normal food? If so, what's her favourite?

She does, a lot. However, except when she's "full" she can't really taste much, so it gets harder and harder to force herself to eat as she withers. She likes seafood.

Is Shroud able to activate her power at will or is it always "on" like King Midas' golden touch? What happened to her handler when she first discovered her powers?

It is always on, but it was not always as strong as it is now. It just used to be a flicker of memories and a moment of weakness. Then they were catalyzed into growing (much like what happened with Sidestep). And well, you can imagine what happened to her handler.

At La Cantina, did Mortum notice the gun was already "full" when they decided to shoot Sidestep? It doesn't seem like something the inventor would miss if Sidestep was able to notice it in the alternate scene with Argent. If Mortum knew, why did they still pull the trigger knowing it wouldn't work to remove Sidestep?

Mortum did notice, but let's be fair to the good doctor, it was a rather stressful experience. They weren't thinking clearly, it was all emotions, anger and desperation.

Sidestep mentions they don't think medical advancements have come that far yet (to impregnate someone), but just how advanced is gender-affirming surgery considering non-trans Sidesteps can't tell even in bed?

Even in our world, gender affirming surgery has gone very far as long as you have the money and time to put into it. At least for women. Regardless of what myths float around in certain parts of the internet, most people have a hard time telling. This is of course doesn't helped by having men play trans women roles in movies, which reinforces the stereotype. The biggest obstacles for men is a functioning male sexual organ. In the FH world, medical tech and mods have progressed a lot further, and that is something that can be achieved.

The way I see it, the moment a surgical technique is invented, it will be used to improve people's looks and sex-life because people are willing to pay for it. And, with the amount of money that can be made even from cis men with issues (just consider viagra), it makes sense that it would be a priority. And, once the groundwork is there, it can be adapted.

When Ortega says they "poked the wrong bear" does that have to do with the Immovable Bear from Portland?

Nope, it's just an expression.

What does Nocturne think of HG's powers? How does she feel about the lies she and HG are keeping from Jake and her part in it? How worried is she about the consequences that might happen with telling the truth?

This is her biggest concern. She doesn't feel good about it, but she also is afraid of the fallout, and thus hasn't pressed the issue. She keeps bringing it up, though, but it's always risky to rock the boat.

Where does HG prefer to keep their family photos? Do they prefer photo albums or more visible places (walls, shelves, fridge door etc)?

Both. Not the fridge though. Frames are nice.

Did Deadeye's demotion affect her opinion on Hollow Ground in any way or her relationship with them?

Yes, that's only natural.

How did it affect HG that they were unable to stop/affect the arrest despite being more powerful than before?

Badly. Drove home the point that they needed to cast a bigger net, and try to be ready for anything.

If they have such a flaw, what would be HG trio's biggest flaw/trait that hinders their capacity for change/growth?

HG: Overconfidence.

Nocturne: Overcautious.

Jake: Thinking inside the box.

What would a "perfect day" look like for each of the HG trio?

HG: Lazing around the pool with the people they care about.

Nocturne: Same as HG actually.

Jake: Being able to go back home and surprise his parents and other relatives.

If Sidestep kicked Hollow Ground then ran amuck killing some of their men, how bad did this incident look for them? How big of a disruption was this given that the people in the club were lieutenants and the like?

Hehehe it certainly didn't look good. Not gonna give details, but there will be implications of this in book three.

Sidestep thinks it would be war if they were to ignore Hollow Ground's invite. Under the circumstances where Sidestep has proven themselves a badass, how eagerly would Hollow Ground pursue each profession if at all? After all Hero Hunters can probably go the whole game without stepping on any toes.

Some of this can be seen in the code for the game, HG_reputation and dialog differs depending on what your profession and reputation is. Not going to say anything more.

The fighter path mentions The Rangers having toys for special occasions. What are some of them? Is it going to be possible to play with them in the present?

We'll see, I haven't decided yet.

Will we ever get to have the option(s) to specify *why* we hate Ortega? Similar to Step hating them for some days for bearing a resemblance to the Farm's 'staff,' but instead of their unreadable mind, it's their personality? Their actions? Can this be possible with the other Rangers?

I think so, I like having these kinds of discussions.

Who's power is stronger Shroud or Sidestep or are they about equal at the moment with one being able to improve?

NOT gonna tell you that ;). Keep being nervous.

Has Step ever done missions in other states while they were still working for the Farm? Or was it only restricted to Nevada and/or its immediate surrounding states?

Many times. Has been to the east coast as well, in New York and Boston.

Argent was planning to kill Step if she hadn't found out that they were a Re-Gene, despite not being that bad of a villain. (E.g. No civilian kill) Is her kill list standards really that low?

Let's put it this way. 1) She likes to threaten, but whether she'd actually do it is another thing entirely. She likes being seen as dangerous and impulsive. And 2) she's not the only one who has input on that choice, and certain other... passengers might have their own fears of what Sidestep can do to them.

Would Argent be able to recognise modded villains who she's tangled with before, outside of their armour/signature villain look by her technopathy recognizing the mods?

Depends on how specific and extensive. Just like recognizing someone's car. If it's a prototype, it's a good way of identifying them, if it's a standard model sold in the thousands, it's less significant. Also, it can be hard to focus on details in a fight, she is busy with other things. She needs peace and quiet for her technopathy, in stressful situations she's busy with her passengers.

Alpha spoilers: on a guilty end, how did breaking the news to Herald that Sidestep was the villain go? Who took responsibility for breaking it to him?

Not good. Chen did it, and he's not the best with words.

Alpha spoils: in one of the endings, chen can reference an incident argent was involved in that happened in san francisco, and ashfall/pyroclast was a witness to. Could we have some details about what happened?

Nope, that might come up in the future. Both Ashfall and San Francisco will have a bigger part to play.

Had Ortega ever seen even a glimpse of Sidestep's tattoos? Even if they weren't aware or registering what they were? Like during the Psychopathor incident or at Elena's

Sidestep doesn't think so.

The person who realised the extent of Sidestep's telepathy back during their first farm days, are they still around? Are they step's handler. (mild alpha spoiler) Are they the him Sidestep refers to?

You might be on to something there...

Can you elaborate a bit on the surveillance mods someone like.. say... Ortega... could upgrade themselves with? Is it just enhanced hearing, or recording possibilities as well? If it is enhanced hearing, how far does the hearing extend?

There is a great variety of spy-mods out there. Both increased acoustic range, pinpoint microphones, recording abilities, lense/eye replacements, and many other things. What Ortega has I am not telling ;).

Maybe alpha spoils? Was the Farm aware of Step developing talodine resistance?

No.

Could Sidestep devise a way to leave a "protection" against Hollow Ground's threading in some of their allies' mind? A sword of damocles type of deal, but defensive instead of aggressive? And would that require more force or subterfuge?

An interesting idea, which would rely more on subterfuge, but force to make it last longer.

Alpha spoilers: when step was in the hospital after the car crash and had emergency surgery, what was that surgery for?

Mainly to repair the compound fractured legs.

Also during surgery, was step's telepathy still active or were there precautions taken by the staff? Who told them step was a telepath in that case?

Sidestep was deeply unconscious. No sign of any telepathy was noted.

Alpha spoils? Also tw sui in the blaze fight, when step goes out the window with him and he says 'i got it' and fires the grappling hook, was that the rat king he was talking to? Were they guiding him?

Yes, that was the Rat King Blaze was talking to. They were most insistent.

And just one more (alpha spoilers) did Ortega pass on the same story to the rest of the Rangers that Step told them, or did they make up a different one, given their assumptions regarding Step being related to HG and how that might factor into why Step actually disappeared?

Ortega's story was adjusted, making sure to keep the secrets they thought Sidestep was hiding.

Question for Argent, if this hasn't been answered already (lore post/alpha spoilers): you mentioned she doesn't like changing her facial features. Is she afraid that she won't change back right if she does? And related, do the nanovores know what to change back into, or is it a conscious effort to remember her shape?

This is something we will get into in the future, but in short, your speculations are not wrong.

Remember, she doesn't even know what she would look like as a grown woman, her memories of her face are from a teenager. She's worked hard on getting a suitable hero face.

What are Argent's bad days like? Is she at higher risk of losing cohesion or is it mostly just bad pain/hard to function?

Both, they go together.

Why and how does HG's telepathy work despite the dampeners?

Physical contact, nervous system to nervous system.

Will herald ever get to have the conversation he wants to have with Norma?

In some paths, yes.

Alpha spoilers: If given a chance, would Shroud like to take over Lord Ember's position as the new kingpin?

No.

Mortum lore spoilers: Does Mortum suspect their mind has been telepathically influenced?

Yes.

Can argent "talk" to ortega's generator? Would she be able to get to the bottom of issues with it?

We'll see.

How did Argent look before the nanosurge, could you give us a physical description of her pre-silverness?

No, that is spoilers ;)

Alpha spoils, in the Rat King epilogue, they say understanding but not understood. I'm assuming Argent is in charge of them. Is the Rat King having trouble understanding Argent or are they having trouble understanding her? What do they "sound like" to each other?

They have trouble understanding her. And she can't really talk directly to them. In a weird way, Argent's sharks are a very basic form of translator here. It's like trying to talk underwater, in dim light. Big gestures, no details.

Has Hollow Ground ever put their grubby hands on one of our hench(wo)men, mob boss crew included?

Good question, but they are probably not important enough.

Are revealed Steps going to be able to meet tia Elena

Yeah.

In Rebirth, Argent tells Ortega that she finds Step creepy. What is it about Step that unnerves her? Are the nanovores influencing how she feels about them?

The nanovores gives her their bad vibes.

On the bridge, a tech thief mentions that they were "approached by a prospective buyer", was this the Handyman setting up the ambush? Or a coincidence?

Not the Handyman in person, but definitely his handiwork.

Alpha spoilers: There Will be other occasions in Revelations to up the Rangers "doubt" even in the guilty path?

Oh yes.

In the puppet-crash route (innocent and guilty), there will be a possibility for Step and the others Rangers to know of the existence of Step's autopsy photos?

Oh yes.

Now we know what Daniel and Chen thought after the confessions of virginity or abuse suffered by Step in ch 18, but what about Ortega?

Ortega's mind is unreadable, you have to go by their reactions, it's the closest you'll know for now.

What would happen if somebody interrupted Shroud "eating" somebody?

You might find out, but it won't be good for either party.

If Shroud had been able to actually "eat" Argent, would she of used any of the information gained? What would have been the most important thing she would have learned?

Hehe not telling you Argent's secrets.

Was argent upfront about her technopathy to chen and ortega? Or did something happen to make her admit it to one or both of them (some deets if yes, please?) Do they have an idea of the full scope of her power or has she kept those cards close to her chest?

Nope. Nothing. Ortega has got to know some small bits once she started to trust them. But not the full scope.

Alpha Spoilers and tw sui? Did Ortega see Anathema die or only Step thinks to have seen how they died? In Chen's memories he thinks that they are still alive even after Step's fall but did he not see them die or was just wishful thinking? If Ortega and Chen did not see it, what do they think/what did they tell them, was Themmy's cause of death?

What exactly what seen and not during Heartbreak will be something I get into in game. Sidestep's memories are not exactly clear. Sidestep thinks they were the only one that saw what happened. Did they tell Chen and Ortega? They must have. There would have been questions. A hole in the staircase where the acid had eaten away and the body fallen down. Something to be dealt with later. Right? Does that make sense? It must.

Who's paying for step's medical bill in mc crash ending? I doubt they'd be generous enough to let the Rangers pay for whoever they felt like and end with them footing the bill, so I guess it's fair to ask if Ortega was up waiting for sidestep rather than being kept overnight like the puppetcrash ending because it sidestep is receiving care under Ortega's name.

Ortega foots the bill, but whether they can get it back from the Rangers later is an open question. So yes, good guess.

The info Step can retrieve from Lou Carter will be important? If yes can Step obtain them through other means later on? Is Chen still looking into the accident at Carter's house? If yes, does he have some clues? If Step didn't help him with the civilians or took credit for the bombs does Chen still think Step is the culprit? If Step saved Carter, is he still alive and keeping his mouth shut?

It's not a major thing, just a starting scene to set things off. That being said, there are things there that will come back later. If Carter is alive, he will be seen again. Chen is investigating the issue, and the actual cause of the explosion will have an influence in book three. Whether Chen thinks the villain did it or not will also matter.

Alpha spoilers Is there some kind of connection between the "It" of the Core, and the "second voice" of the Catastrofiend?

No.

Is there an official or unofficial hierarchy among handlers at the farm (like cuckoo handlers vs blues being differently ranked/promotion from one to the other)? Rivalries/jealousies? Do field handlers differ from base handlers or is it the same handler all the time that stays with them on missions?

There will always be unofficial hierarchies in any workplace. There's a LOT of office politics in as isolated a workplace as the Farm. Not much else to do there. In general, base handlers work with early training. Once the Re-Genes are assigned to a team, the field handler takes over, even when they are at the base.

Does farm staff live on premise or local commute? What happens if someone wants to quit?

Most are on premise, or commute locally. If someone quits, it's the same precautions with any other high security job. But it is dissuaded, often they just switch branches or jobs.

What was step's handler's role during the second stint at the farm as step was no longer involved in field work/training?

Reprogramming/care.

Was there a shark tank at the farm? If not in Sidestep's farm, was there a shark tank in other farm facilities?

There was a shark tank. Some species have very interesting genetic profiles for research into regeneration and aging.

During the raid on Lou Carter's house, step mentions they "don't give off a human scent." Is that a feature of their armor, or do Regenes not smell human...?

The armor.

If you're on the path of romancing steel, do any of the rangers know/have an idea of what's going on between step and steel?

If it's anybody, it will be Herald that picks it up first.

Does Hollow Ground's power work on non-humans?

No, and believe me, they tried.

[Here's your March QnA and oh boy, it's big.](#)

[Mar 12, 2022](#)

Hi I just joined your patreon (love your first book) is Chen only attracted to Male MC or is he also attracted to NB MC? Sorry if it's been asked before. I tried to romance him as NB MC (my usual gender) but he doesn't seem into it? Looking forward to reading retribution in it's full!

Chen can indeed be romanced with a NB Sidestep that doesn't present too female for him, but the route is a little more complicated at the moment (and not in the open alpha).

Just out of curiosity, what would be the relationship deal-breaker for each ROs?

Not going to tell you that, would take the tension out of things.

Also, my SideStep is a prankster at heart, so he would likely romance the ROs with the puppet, butcher the puppet in front of them, and then reveal that he is, in fact, the puppet all along. Which one of the RO would most likely be OK with this, haha. (Sorry if this is too weird lol)

Sorry, I am not implementing any Catastrofiend romances, so none of them.

Has ortega ever been into día de muertos? If so, did they ever do anything for sides and anathema?

I imagine so. Ortega is both nostalgic and slightly maudlin, and it would have been a way to cope with their loss. It probably took a few years before getting to that stage though.

Ignoring personal relationship values, if Step were to deliberately fall off the radar and go into hiding, and is REALLY good at it, (e.g. Changing their name/appearance/mannerisms/voice/movements, avoiding cameras, taking on different personas and identities to throw people off their trail, switching up their routes/vehicles to avoid tracking, using their telepathy) how good would the Rangers be at finding them? Individually and as a team?

So what I am reading is which Ranger will be the most likely to find you in case things go bad? I'm not sure I want to tell you that. Each of them has their own particular areas of expertise, and also has friends to call on.

What would you say were the most badass moments the Rangers had that were caught on camera? What about off-camera? I know Lady Argent put up an amazing fight against the Crack, but what about the others?

Ortega has had a ton. But, ironically enough, the ones caught on camera are rarely the ones against the strongest villains. But, the one that really made the headlines was back when they were fairly new as Charge, back when Hood was Marshal. They used the city electrical grid to channel a massive lightning bolt at the villain Flashback. It was caught on tape, looked massively impressive, and cemented Charge as the number one electricity user in Los Diablos. Also nearly fried their system.

Lady Argent had an impressive fight caught on camera back in San Francisco, against Swashbuckler, a lieutenant and enforcer of Lord Ember. It was broadcasted live, and one of the reason why Lady Argent was recruited as a Ranger.

Herald did some impressive rescue work during the United California fire. Diving into the highrise fire to get people out won him a lot of fans (and burns).

Steel had a very impressive fight with Psychopathor early on, when Ortega was new as Marshal. It was a true slugfest, and the reason why Psychopathor focused on taking out Steel from a distance in the later rematch.

In Rebirth, you mentioned that Steel fought even ‘the Calamity’ into a standstill. Who were they? What were they known for?

The Calamity is officially a modded villain in power armor. There are few attacks attributed to them, but their final stand was destructive enough to damage large parts of El Segundo until the Rangers stopped them. The truth is slightly different. There never was a villain called the Calamity, that was constructed after the events, to give an explanation to what happened that didn't incriminate anybody important.

In reality, the Calamity was a rampaging AI enhanced prototype military MBA (Main battle armor). It is still debated whether it was an AI malfunction, or whether the pilot suffered a psychotic break due to interface issues. The Calamity armor was massive, thick and strong, made for frontline assaults. It had limited flight/jump capabilities due to the weight, armor piercing micro missiles, internal flechette anti-personnel rounds, a close range plasma burner and an experimental anti-tank rifle. Steel had been present at the base for armor modifications, and was the first of the Rangers on the scene. Once the others showed up, the battle had moved from base into the city, and Steel had been holding his own against the best the US military could build for half an hour.

Will there be an epic telepathic battle that we can have in the series?

Yes. Might be some fun ones in book three, and oh boy, book four is tasty. I can't wait!

Can we have a heartbreaking argument with Steel about his long held crush on Ricardo if we're NB/M!Step romancing him? Sidestep can feel worthless when Ortega was flirting with other people, can we also have something like that with Steel for breaking Step's heart? The kiss scene with the brief 'Ortega. He shouldn't even be thinking about it.' made me flinch.

Thank you for helping me find a bug (a faulty indentation)! That thought is just supposed to pop up if Sidestep is already flirting with Ortega as well, and is a precursor to the big talks they can have about it (including a possible poly route) in later chapters if you end up in certain paths.

If the circumstances allowed it, would Herald take a break from being on the Rangers to go on leave to train himself and his powers? I have a feeling that between his duties as a Ranger and with Steel being the tactician/Argent and Ortega being the spearhead/support, Daniel doesn't have many opportunities to develop and grow into a fully self-actualised hero. If he does, what sort of hero role do you imagine him growing into?

I think Herald would absolutely take that opportunity. He knows he needs time to work things out on his own, but life with the Rangers is very busy. Given time, he could be a good leader and commander.

Would a telepath be able to tell if someone with epilepsy is going to have an attack? (Like would the static in their minds change in any way?)

If attuned to it, yeah.

Are Heralds powers limited to just flight or does he have a more general “flying brick” set?

Herald's powers are mainly flight, but there are some weird aspects to it that makes him more durable and stronger.

what are the Rangers routines like? What do they do for training?

It's a bit like for top athletes. Lots of basic physical training to keep up with the demands of the job. There is also much full-contact fighting, both to work better as a team, and to find their own weaknesses.

Ortega trains the most, easily. They are very aware that they are getting older and hates every second of it. Lots of endurance and agility, though they have more muscle and heft than in the old days.

Chen needs specialized training to deal with the effects of his mods, and the demands they put on his body.

Herald does a lot of training his powers, Ortega chides him for being too lazy to go for a proper run.

Argent tends to train on her own, Ortega would tease her for slacking off, but she could kick their ass in a fight, so...

Regarding Sidestep's telepathy, can they communicate with animals to some extent? Like actual conversations? I can imagine city-dwelling animals knowing some smattering of English, and we'd be able to get informed by what's been happening in their area... I do know that certain corvids are interesting when it comes to telepathy, and raccoons are near-indistinguishable from human mental imprints. Maybe we can create a secret intel system composed of nothing but city-dwelling crows?

Sidestep could lean more into communicating with animals, yes. Connecting this long to the Rat-King has meant that they are more open to how non-human mental communication might be like. It's not english, but it can be understood.

^^ In addition to the previous comment, will we be able to go into Spoon's mind/pseudo-'talk' to him and learn that he ate one of Ricardo's ties? Find out where he's hiding Chen's missing socks? Can we tease the Rangers (especially Ricardo and Chen!) about this information??

Spoon will certainly be one of the animals there will be a possibility of connecting closer to.

If Daniels brother had survived what would his boost be? Fire related?

Yes. He was very much a pyrokinetic.

Can Argent turn back to skin colour at will or is she permanently silver? If it's permanent, how does she feel about never being able to blend in as a normal person?

She is permanently silver, and she plays it off like she doesn't care (but she does).

Can Regenes have their memory wiped like a computer?

Yes, and it was common practice to do with malfunctioning ones, especially early in the training process when not much experience was lost.

Would numbers have helped in the Heartbreak incident? If the Rangers knew it was telepathical, why didn't they use numbers in the first place?

Numbers are not common, most people do not know they exist. Yes, even the Rangers. It was simply not available to them, and they hoped that the portable dampeners would suffice. Numbers might have helped, or there might have been overload and bleedthrough, just like with the dampeners.

The dangers with the numberers are that while they are very good at preventing minds being read, they are less good at preventing them to be influenced on that primal level Heartbreak worked.

How high are the Los Diablos taxes and how does the government afford to pay the Rangers so much?

There are no taxes in Los Diablos! However, there are lots of fees and mandatory insurance policies, which essentially amount to the same but with a more palatable name. The government also gains a lot of income from corporations, paying for their voting rights. In essence, the more they pay into the city, the more say they have into how it is run. However, the Rangers are paid by the US government, not Los Diablos, so they are not on the city budget.

What percentage of the book is in the open demo?

About 50% looking at the wordcount. Lots added both before and after the open demo cutoff.

Do the Rangers, Dr. Mortum, or HG trio have a favorite movie or favorite movie genre they like to watch?

Ortega: Fond of thrillers, seventies action and film noir.

Steel: Likes documentaries more than fiction.

Argent: Watches the most of anybody, and has very diverse taste. She is very fond of visual flair, horror, adventure and camp.

Herald: Science fiction.

Dr. Mortum: Fond of musicals and costume dramas.

Hollow Ground: Romantic comedies and sappy endings.

Nocturne: More fond of TV-series, movies end too fast. She likes mysteries.

Jake: Likes visual action movies with snappy dialog. NOT horror.

What do the Rangers consider their priority to be as a Ranger? Do they have different opinions on it or all of them in agreement in that regard? If they have different opinions, what would each of them consider their priority to be?

While the majority of them share the same general priorities of keeping people safe, there are differences in how to go about it which have led to rifts in the past and might do again in the future.

Ortega's priority is taking down the people that the LD justice system can't touch. By taking down the people that create conflict and problems, they believe that the city will be safer.

Steel's priority is responding to threats too dangerous for other people to deal with. He sees being a Ranger as being reactive, once something has appeared on his radar, he will take it out. At this point, he thinks building a better society or changing the system is for others. This might change.

Argent's priority is to do what the others can't/won't and get away with it. She sees herself as the final solution, in more ways than one. She also sees being a Ranger as holding herself accountable in case she starts going off the rails.

Herald's priority is saving people and keeping them safe. He hasn't thought about systems much yet, he'll do what he can within his limited grasp.

What were Lady Argent's and Herald's first meetings with Ortega and Chen like?

Herald's was a bit like when meeting Sidestep. Starstruck, awed, impressed, and really trying to do his best and give a good first impression.

Argent was not impressed by Ortega, who was at a low point at that time. She found common ground with Chen since they shared many of the same views what the Rangers were meant to do. She warmed up to Ortega once they got their snark back.

What was HG's meetings with Psychopathor and Catastrofiend like? Did they actually get to properly talk with Catastrofiend?

The meetings with Psychopathor was very civil, this was after the Void had been destroyed, and Psychopathor didn't want to be the next target. They agreed on their respective territories and influence.

The meeting with the Catastrofiend is spoilery, maybe HG will confide in the future.

We know that there are regular, i.e. non-enhanced, people who are active as heroes/vigilantes (like Handyman) in Los Diablos, but are there any enhanced people hired by regular law enforcement like the LDPD?

Yes, the LDPD has a section staffed mostly by mods/boosts who deal with powered crime. They tend to be looked down on as second-rate, since the general view is that anybody with real talent would be a company hero or join one of the big teams like the Guardians or the Rangers.

Will our choice in base-picking in FH: Retribution have any significant impact on the story or be mostly for flavor? Will we have to choose wisely?

It will have an impact, yes. But there is no choice that is wiser than any other, it all depends on the path and the story.

Will we have the option to claim more trophies from defeated foes in future installments of Fallen Hero? I think it would be really cool to furnish my Evil Lair™ with souvenirs from Heroes and Villains who crosses my path >:)

That is a good idea, actually. I will take it into consideration!

Are any of the Rangers friend with other heroes besides each other?

Oh yes. It's a weird line of work, and sometimes the only people who can understand you are others with similar experiences. This is not an exhaustive list of names, but rather a general thing:

Ortega has lots of friends, and even more rivals. Meets people at Hoots and various functions, and is not above going to hang out in more gray area vigilante or even villain bars on occasion. Also has some friends on the wrong side of the law. However, the term "friends" is misleading, acquaintances might be more accurate. Ortega might be smiling a lot, but very few gets under their skin.

Steel has some hero friends, but they tend to share his military past. He also has some hero friends in the gay community that prefers, like him, to keep a low profile.

Argent has vigilante friends, some decidedly more towards the lawless side of the spectrum. She often works together with them when not on the job as a Ranger, and is the one, together with Ortega, who most often involve outsiders in her business.

Herald has a few, but he tends to hang out more with people outside the hero business. He doesn't like his job to be his entire life, he likes just being Daniel.

What is Steel's relationship with the Mayor like? Does Ortega have one with her?

Ortega doesn't have much of a relationship with the current Mayor. They have met at parties, sure, but Steel is the one who deals with her. Steel is never fond of dealing with politicians, and view her as a combination of superior officer of another unit, and a necessary evil.

In a previous Q&A, you mentioned how Steel would view different armour combinations of our Step. What about the Speed + Armour upgrade?

An interesting combination speaking of someone who is more afraid to get hurt than hurt others. A rather defensive loadout.

In a similar previous Q&A, Chen appreciates a good back... what about the other ROs? Any particular body parts they like? Legs? Chest? Ass? Something else?

Spontaneously what pops into my head is that Ortega likes mouths/lips, quirky smiles, frowns, the movement of the face. Argent is all about poise/grace, how people move. Herald has a thing for eyes, but also legs/ass.

Can we ask more than one question? If so then in addition to my previous one, how powerful would our armour be if it had all the upgrades and whatever else Dr. Mortum wanted to add if time and money were no problem?

It would be powerful, but still not military grade. To get there it would need to bulk up a lot. This armor is still more body armor than proper armored suit.

Building on a question above, what does Chen think of a Strength + Telepathy upgraded armor?

Aggressive. A bruiser, who also doesn't neglect their main asset. Best defense is a good offense.

Was there any particular reason Sidestep chose to go to Los Diabolos for their first escape? Had they ever been there before for a mission?

They had been there before, and it has one of the highest concentrations of boosts in the continental US, easier to stay under the radar with so many oddities around.

Any more cute/cursed "fluff" info about the Rangers + Mortum + HG that you can share? I love the random tidbits you included in the past Q+As!

I have so many questions this time! But next time my brain goes on a curse facts tangent I will make sure to include it.

What did the Rangers think of Enhanced and heroes before they became one?

Ortega thought they were cool and rad. Steel didn't pay them much heed, just another celebrity. Argent and Herald are younger, and had posters growing up.

Will we ever get the chance to watch a hero/villain movie featuring Sidestep themselves in it?? Both hero and their current villain persona??

Who knows? Not me actually.

If they have such a flaw, what would be the Rangers and Dr. Mortum's biggest flaw/trait that hinders their capacity for change/growth?

Ortega: Secrecy.

Chen: Cynism.

Argent: Fear.

Herald: Naivety.

Dr. Mortum: Rigidity.

what would the Rangers and Dr. Mortum consider a "perfect day" for themselves personally?

Ortega: A long bike-ride on narrow, winding mountain roads with good company, ending the day at a cozy bar with good food, a warm shower and a soft bed (with good company).

Chen: No work. Spending time with Spoon. Maybe go for a walk.

Argent: Winning the bid for some rare videos and curling up to watch them with fresh snacks and a quiet head. Being able to be distracted, and relax.

Herald: Being able to spend a whole day just painting where nobody can reach him. He misses that.

Dr Mortum: A good day in the lab, with projects that move forward.

If the nanovores are telepathically sensitive/have some sort of telepathic interface, does their um preference for humans comes from an ability to track and locate sentient minds within the vicinity?

Partly. But it's mostly chemical signals (smells). It's a complex algorithm which gets stronger the bigger the swarm is, and the more processing power it gets. In essence it's a basic feedback loop. Consume matter fitting the right profile for procreation, identifying patterns connecting to said matter, find more, repeat. Things like sound, movement, lots of stuff goes into it, and the longer the swarm lives, the better it gets and finding what they term "people". This is the algorithm Mortum interrupted, and also why Sidesteps neutered nanos are less dangerous. Since they subsists on mainly petrochemicals ("inorganic" matter but carbon-molecule based) they grow slower, and doesn't risk triggering the swarming urge. While they "eat" things like metal and concrete, they don't get sustenance from it.

Could we possibly meet the person who is tasked with designing and keeping track of all the regenes' barcodes?

Yeah, in book four.

Who was the boost who could teleport? Did they become a hero, a villain? Are they still alive?

One of them was the Void, who was a villain, and is dead. There might be others, but they were the most high profile one.

Was argent ever under ember's employment in the past?

No.

Are the "second voice" in the Catastrofiend post and whatever the Fiend is asking "Query: What is 'Lance?' Query: What is 'Heaven?'" in its POV related?

Not a bad guess.

What happened during the Catastrofiend fight? What did Ortega say to it? Did the Catastrofiend reach Ortega's generator when it impaled them? Was Ortega's generator already equipped with a plasmacore at that time?

Ortega did a massive amount of shit-talking, mainly not to be terrified. What didn't they say is a better question. Ortega was not equipped with a plasmacore generator at the time, just the smaller, original one which was mainly battery powered. And luckily enough, the Catastrofiend didn't cause major damage to it, but there was still major surgery needed to get Charge back up and running.

Is Ashfall/Pyroclast single? :fulloflove~1: 

Yes.

Chen saw regenes on the battlefield while he was still with the army. What were his impressions of them then? Did those impressions differ at all when the rangers ended up working with Special Directive regenes?

This was heavy duty modded war-regenes. I don't think Chen connected them to people at all, they were more akin to autonomous robots and armors, something the army was also experimenting with at the time.

was there much in the way of differences between the original openly deployed for combat regenes and the ones they train/develop for special directive, given its black ops?

Oh yes. The Special Directive Re-Genes are more based on heroes in their look. Less mods, more concern for style, sleek suits and so on. The army ones are all utility.

you mentioned radius of step's abilities is related to their force value, would there be a wide range difference between high and low force steps?

Yeah, but I have no specific numbers. Above 75 is when it really starts to show massively.

Why was it just step and ortega fighting the catastrofiend in 2010? Where was everyone else?

It was Step and Ortega at the start, the rest of the team arrived in time. Neither Step nor Ortega had planned on cornering the Fiend on their own, but hey, sometimes shit happens and you have to deal with it.

Hypothetically, who would win in a fight between Locus and Step? Like telepathy v telepathy, or fighting skills v fighting skills?

Not telling, and not sure. You might find out in book three.

Had Argent and Herald heard Sidestep's actual name before the day Ortega brought them to HQ in Rebirth? When did they find out step was a telepath?

I think both had heard the first name mentioned by Ortega, because there's been a fair amount of wistful reminiscence. Probably also where they learned Sidestep was a telepath, the nanosurge stories would have made that clear.

Is Regina boosted or modded?

Nothing apart from small quality of life mods.

Has tia elena ever thought about what being a grandmother would be like?

Many times.

Forgive me if this has been asked, but did Tia Elena ever imagine ortega moving on from step, if ortega was in love with them? Or was it ever sorta like that feeling of step was The Person (ha) her child only ever had eyes for?

Elena knows how stubborn Ortega tends to be with their likes and dislikes, so she knew it would take time if ever.

How much did Tia Elena “help” ortega out after HB? Like being there for her child physically, emotionally, etc? (I’m sorry I got a lot of Elena feelings today ;—;)

Ortega spent a lot of time with Elena at the ranch, basically rebuilding their life, sober up, and start getting back in shape and do things they liked again rather than just wallow in memories.

What are the Rangers' and Mortum's social lives like? Do they have/make much time for a social life?

Chen and Argent doesn't have much of a social life. They have a select few they hang out with, and most are connected to their work (Argent) or past memories (Chen).

Ortega and Herald both have a thriving social life, though Ortega has less time for it these days. They have friends, hobbies, goes to parties, and makes time for people outside work.

Mortum works a lot and is rather insular, but also likes the occasional party (especially organizing it).

Did the Sidestep days Rangers ever have to pull PR nonsense like fake dating each other or is that a relatively new phenomenon? If new, when did that stuff start?

Not that Sidestep was aware of at least. It was stepped up as a way of focusing on more positive rumors after Heartbreak. The new Media director preferred more hands-on ways of manipulating

people's opinions.

If we're villain revealed and living in our bases, will we ever be able to invite our ROs over since they already know?

Yes. I look forward to writing their reactions.

If the Rangers were to pick secret villain bases, what would they be? And would they live in them or someplace else?

Oh boy. Herald's would be either outright inaccessible on top of a cliffside or an island, and he would definitely live there. No place near where normal people could get hurt. Steel would be in the center of things, hidden under a normal surface. Would also live there. Ortega would have a cool base in case of hero fights, probably industrial property, but would want a nice apartment to unwind in and pretend to be a regular person. Argent would have the glitziest most high-tech place she could, preferably outside town, far from people. And she would live there.

Can you tell us more about Sidestep's handler? I know some things will be open to choice, but what are the set elements that will remain the same across the board?

I honestly haven't decided much yet. I trust future Malin to come up with cool options once it's time.

When did Herald get a speech coach after moving to LD? Why was having an east coast accent seen as enough of an issue that they couldn't wait for it to naturally acclimatize? Was getting a speech coach something Herald looked into himself, or was it for one of his corporate hero jobs?

It was for his first corporate hero job. There is still a schism/rivalry between the west and the east coast, with a lot of historic grudges since the Big One. It's not good press to be an east-coaster in a high profile role.

Was Mia still spying on Argent and Herald arguing at the gala even if you don't go to the balcony

Yes.

What were the circumstances of the stunt that Herald pulled off with the bus that made Sentinel think he was ready for the big leagues?

Classic hero stuff, catching a bus crashing off a bridge during a fight.

Was he technically capable of lifting that much already or was that like a little boost level up moment from pushing himself? kind of like with step and the nanosurge

It was a small boost moment, yes. Adrenaline does wonders.

What kind of career did Chen imagine for himself before he went into the army? Does he have any hidden skills or hobbies he enjoys pursuing in his free time?

He liked math and physics, wouldn't have minded working as an engineer or in similar fields. However, right now he is married to his work (and physical rehab). Spoon and occasionally playing chess in the park is the extent of his free time.

You've said everyone in the main cast of FHR could have been the protagonist, and they all have a story to tell. What kind of distinctive characteristics (in style, POV, voice, tone) would you have made sure to include, off the top of your head, if the MC of FHR had been Ortega, Argent, Steel, Herald, or Mortum? Would you have chosen the second-person POV for every one of them?

Ortega would definitely have been first person, and the tone would have been a lot more glib. Lots of narration, commentary, and possibly fourth wall moments. Mystery and romance.

Chen and Argent would be second person. There's more of a distance there, other mysteries to unfold. They both would have very similar styles to FHR, they both have their secrets and scars to deal with.

Herald I'm torn between first and third person. It would be more of a classic hero story, focused on growth and romance and figuring out who you are and what your powers can do.

Dr. Mortum feels third person to me. A story you follow along and control, but doesn't get in the head off. More managing the disparate parts of your life and build and extend your lab and your network of contacts.

Has Ortega ever had a seizure during a fight besides the one Step can trigger?

Yes. It's not common, but the team has had to pull them out once or twice. Sidestep too. Usually when Ortega has been sloppy about taking their medication, or when it needs to be adjusted.

Are there mods that can imitate telepathy or telepathic effects (mind control, mind defense) to any extent?

The defensive aspect, yes. It's dangerous though, messing with mods and the brain is never safe. Nothing to the more offensive/active parts.

Sidestep left Mortum with the Rat King and the nanovores while they were building their armor. Did Mortum take advantage of that for their own work before delivering the armor? Did they take any sample, or do any experimenting, or take any important notes that Sidestep is unaware of?

All signs point to yes.

Also, what the hell can Mortum see with their glasses? Thermal vision? X-ray? Can they see through clothes?

No body scans, that's weird and intrusive. What's under a person's clothes is not interesting to Mortum. Thermal and low-light vision, yes, as well as other image enhancers like various zooms and microscopic options. X-ray needs a bigger power source. It's also an interface with their far, and other equipment. Can work as a targeting and facial identification system too.

Will there be any chances to dig into Mortum's knowledge and/or to possess Mortum and tap into their very useful skills in Book 3 and 4?

You can certainly try...

Does the rat king have a mindscape? What would Sidestep feel/see if they went further into the Rat king's minds instead of... "interfacing"?

In a weird way, the Rat-King's mindscape is the real world. So Sidestep going deeper would just see the real world, but with little spectral rats interfacing with it.

When Step gets taken to HQ that first time in rebirth they tell Chen their being alive is a long story and Ortega will fill him in. What did Ortega end up telling Chen?

You have no idea ;). Sidestep trusted Ortega to make up some bullshit. They just wanted to get Chen off their back.

With Step's sudden reappearance, what did Argent and Herald think happened to Step post-HB? Did they get told the same story as Ortega fills Chen in on?

Yes, they did.

Are any of the Rangers or Mortum familiar with sign language?

Dr. Mortum is. Chen knows some.

Ortega's turning forty soon... So, is there or is there not an old wo/man party scene in your outline?

How could I resist? What a perfect time to meet some... old friends.

Does it bother Argent that she carries no lasting marks from any of her fights? Does it ever affect her mentally? Like, make her feel unreal? Is she bothered by the impervious reputation, knowing how much she does acutely feel everything that happens to her and then some?

Yes, it does. She feels very distant from everything.

Can dampeners affect precognition?

No.

Are catastrophic events (the Big One, the nanosurge, heartbreak) commemorated in LD? Are there any memorials? Does the main cast participate, or do they steer clear?

There are, and the cast takes part. There is a massive memorial in the Memorial Park, which was started to the victims of the Big One, but which has added victims of other notable disasters, like the Nanosurge and Heartbreak. There is also a Nanosurge monument down at the beach where they made landfall.

The day of the Big One (Nov 10, often called Remembrance Day) is a day of mourning in the rest of the US. The people originating in the west remembers what they left behind, both people and possessions. A tradition has started to form, of a period of mourning starting Nov 10, to culminate in the happiness of Thanksgiving and family celebrations a few weeks later.

In the Free Western territories, especially the southern, more Spanish-speaking parts (including Los Diablos), the day has mostly fused with Día de Muertos. Here it is a day of remembering the dead, but also celebrating family and life and the fact that people are still here.

Is argent's family still in los diablos?

Yes.

How do Rangers shifts/patrols work? What do they get up to when they're on duty?

I honestly haven't detailed that, it is what I need it to be for the book.

Are there unexpected side-effects to the rapid aging that ReGenes go through ala the Clone Troopers? Does age continue to speed on for less stable ReGenes or are all of the "finished product" perfected by now?

In general, age continues as normal once the speed-growth process has stopped. There is a greater chance of cancer, though, but that only shows later. Occasionally there will be an issue with something similar to Werner's Syndrome, where aging will continue at a rapid pace. Those Re-Genes are quickly purged, and the gene combinations used are kept under observation to see if they need to be eliminated from the program.

Were the Rangers informed that Psychopathor had been taken in by the Special Directive?

Yes.

How are those kind of government interdepartmental communications passed along? Would the Rangers be forewarned if any operations were being conducted in their jurisdiction? Or a curtesy memo after the fact? Or would they just not be informed at all?

All of them, depending on the operation in question. In general, they would be informed, if it wasn't too shady.

If the situation arose, would a tech-savvy Step be able to hack the communications in Steel's suit to relay info or for spying purposes? Would the suit be able to do that without needing techy know how? Or do the Rangers use a frequency that wouldn't be able to get hacked?

It would depend on access to the suit, it's not something you do in the middle of a fight. But get your hands on it outside of battle, and it could get interesting.

MALIN HAS MITCHELL BEEN WATCHING? Just there, the whole time?

No. He has a job to do.

Have there been any Sidestep wannabes or vigilante babies trying to take on the mantle, especially in the case of a Hero Step?

Yes. They were given a stern talking to by Ortega.

A few questions regarding Pyroclast:

-Does Pyroclast use his civilian name or does he just go by his hero name (like Themmy)?

He does, but he likes boundaries between his hero identity and his personal life. Classic secret identity.

-Why did he change his name from Ashfall to Pyroclast?

Wanted a clean break and a new beginning. Wanted a more foreful sounding name.

-How old is he in Retribution?

Early thirties.

-What is his current reputation? Does it differ from his reputation as a vigilante/independent hero?

Yeah. He's got a good reputation, driven, hard-working, if ambitious. Doesn't always get along with people. Described as more harsh now than he used to be.

-What motivated him to take up hero-ing in the first place?

Becoming someone. Making a difference.

-What is he like, personality wise? Has he changed post-Heartbreak?

He has gotten harder, more driven. Life is short, he'll make the most of it.

-Is he currently in a relationship / Is he open to relationships?

No, but he's got nothing against it on principle. Just married to his work.

Are heroes' civilian identities generally public knowledge, or do most try to keep their 'alter egos' a secret? Do those who go unmasked just rely on not being recognized out of costume to uphold some kind of anonymity? Have any of the Rangers had security issues with fans or foes arise from doing hero work unmasked (aside from Ortega, whose apartment is clearly on the map already)?

It varies. Most have masks and secret identities, others live the hero lifestyle around the clock. Even people who doesn't use masks aren't always recognized, it depends on how distinctive they are and how famous. Many corporate heroes are masked or helmeted because it should be easy to replace them when their contract runs out.

There has been security issues for the Rangers, but not as much as you'd think. They are quite capable of dealing with threats, and persistent fans are managed by security. Both Herald and Argent's places are very inaccessible to the general public, and Chen is not as easily recognized outside his armor. Ortega is the biggest issue, but tends to handle it.

There have been many other heroes's sudden/strange retirement or disappearance? If yes, did someone took notice (maybe someone like Vernon or the dear doctor...)?

There is always someone watching and keeping track...

What was Sunstream's civilian name? What was she like before the Nanosurge? How old was she when it happened? What was public opinion on her? Was she... okay, when she "left?"

I haven't detailed Sunstream much yet, maybe she will settle into my head one day and tell her story. Until then, everything is very vague. But I can say for sure she was not okay after she left.

Will mob boss step ever get the chance to name their little organization?

Yes!

^Will Mob Boss Step get to name their hideout and use code names? Can we get our henchpeople nifty uniforms to disguise their identities?

Pelayo is already cringing internally. This will be fun.

How likely is it for the media to pick up on possible romances between a revealed Step and one of the Rangers? looking at Ortega and Argent in particular

Less than it was, due to Sidestep blasting NOTHING HERE TO SEE.

Have any of the heroes introduced so far ever used their fame to try their luck as actors taking on roles in movies? If yes, how did that go for them?

You know Ortega would have loved to, I think there's probably a tape somewhere before the Ranger's legal team put a stop to it.

how did Pyroclast feel about Step being kind of adopted by the Rangers? Did it ever bother him, given his aspirations and the fact that he debuted first?

Honestly, at that point, he was kinda happy about it. Sidestep needed some stability, and since Sidestep were so open about never joining and not being a threat to Ashfall's ambitions, it never bothered him at all.

Was Pyroclast aware of Step's telepathy back in the day?

Eventually, yeah. Not at the start.

What is Daniel's opinion of Hollow Ground? Does he believe in them? If not, when their existence is proven, will he stand against them, or does he, like Argent, see the use of having a system protecting the underbelly against chaos?

Spoilers.

I don't remember if it's already been asked (apologies if it's the case), we know that Ashfall liked Step but if/when we'll meet Pyroclast will we be able to choose what kind of relationship they had (friends or just allies), like for Sentinel or it will be already "settled" like with Themmy?

Not sure yet, most likely choosing. I am more for choices now than when I made book one.

If someone like Ortega, immune to telepathy, would start taking the numbers what would happen? Would the numbers reinforce their natural immunity to telepathy? Could they cause more health issues than in a non epileptic person?

Not much. The health issues would be the same.

So this might be a very boring question compared to the others but what did Dr. Mortum study in college (other than the basic stuff everyone has to do)?

Focused mostly on stem subjects, chemistry, physics, programming.

Do all government agencies share the Special Directive's goal of capturing regenes alive because they're so expensive, or are there other branches that would just shoot on sight against escaped genes?

Most would shoot on sight.

I don't remember if it's already been asked but how restful is Step's sleep when their conscious mind is in the puppet?

It looks restful from the outside, but who would know?

For how long Step can avoid sleep, letting their body rest, while their conscious mind is not there?

It's complicated, and at this point, Step is not sure. Weeks, perhaps more. Eventually they slip up, and that's when the dreams happen.

And for how long Step's body, and the puppet can stay alive, on their own, without Step's consciousness in them? If the bodies would have medical assistance (for breathing and nutrition) could they stay alive indefinitely? And could they be possessed even after a long period of time (weeks/months)?

Unknown. Like for any person in a coma the decline can come suddenly, or it might last years.

Will there be more opportunities to increase/decrease Steps wealth?

Yes.

Once again i am asking (void lore spoilers) where the hell were the other rangers when this shit with the void went down? why were step and ortega alone?

The other Rangers were also in trouble, they got split up... it was a big mess.

More void lore does IB work for the farm and/or special directive?

No.

Void lore related question: who were the other 2 major villains whose bodies went missing?

Not telling.

More void has step ever imbibed or been injected with void blood?

Yes.

(spoilers for the Void post) If the Void's field messes with mods ("The batteries got fucked up") did Ortega's generator get fried during the Void attack? Were they able to use their mods to fight the Void the same way, or were their mods too severely impacted/mostly useless?

Ortega's mods got messed up, yeah. Batteries drained of power.

More void! Could you tell us some more about the beliefs of the Cult of the Green Sky?

Standard supremacy bullshit. They believe that the boost drugs are a key to other planes of existence (heaven, hell) and will let humanity evolve into their true form. Bringing out their potential by taking the

boost drugs turned into imbibing Void's blood instead, which is far less lethal, especially when filtered through other victims first. It's an offshoot of a movement (The New Flesh) which in addition to extensive modding, were hunting and harvesting boosts and operating/ingesting their bodyparts and organs to attempt to get powers with less risk than the straight drugs.

MOAR VOID spoilers just in case, Will we be finding out more specifics for how step and ortega actually managed to take down the void in the text in the future? If no, could we please have some deets about how that whole thing went down? Their strategy for finally defeating the void?

Yes, you might, in game. But you have some clues already.

Void spoilers: to what extent does the technology of Vitruvian and Mortum's gun rely on their study of the Void's powers, if at all? Does Mortum still actively use anything they've learned or lifted from the Void today?

It is connected, yes. But Vitruvian was the one who was really into that, not Mortum.

still Void spoilers: Is there a link between gates and dimensional planes? Has the Void's blood been used in the HB experiment?

No comment.

Spoiler Void Did Step was able to "feel" the Void or they were an "empty space" like for other telepaths? Was the ability of picking up the thought-voids that helped Step to deal with the Void?

Sidestep could pick out the absence. And yes, that helped, but not the most vital thing.

Void spoilers: if minds operate on another plane, as Mitchell surmises, and if the void cage present in Sidestep's armor functions like the actual Void's cages, does that mean that Sidestep could send or trap someone's mind inside this cage, instead of / along with keeping the Rat King's in?

Technically it might be possible, but you're gonna need a bigger boat.

[Mitchell's Guide to Villains entry 1: The Void](#)

[Mar 8, 2022](#)

Mitchell's Guide to Villains entry 1.

Subject: (The) Void.

Civilian identity: Unknown.

Birthdate: Unknown. Estimated early 80's.

Birthplace: Unknown. Accent suggests California.

Height: 5'4"/165 cm.

Weight: Unknown. Reputedly less than seems natural for the body type.

Classification: Alpha level boost. Possibly multiple boosting occasions, or else there is a connective thread between the disparate powers that I am missing. So far, there have been confirmed sightings of: Punching their fist through reinforced armor (and the body inside). A personal force field resistant to military-grade munitions. A field (the infamous void-field) capable of trapping victims inside. The ability to teleport short distances, reportedly between shadows.

Status: Presumed dead after their defeat in 2012. However, no body was found, though that could be due to the strange nature of their powers and the nature of their demise.

Notes: There are many unconfirmed reports of other strange effects within the void-field. I have included some witness testimonies and some speculation about the possible nature of the powers. I hesitate to close the file, but as we now have complete control of Void's former territory, they have become irrelevant.

Testimony 19

Date: June 12, 2011

Subject: Grigori Varga, retired mercenary.

Interviewer: Imani Bloom.

GV - Just so we got this clear. I tell you what happened, and you pay for an overhaul of my mods? And my medical bills?

IB - And therapy if you require it. We have an excellent specialist on staff.

GV - You saying I need therapy?

IB - Calm down, Sir. All I said is that it is included in the medical package. Whether you accept is up to you.

GV - I don't need that shit. It's the pain that gives me trouble sleeping, not... that.

IB - I am sad to say, it is exactly "that" we will need information about. And in as much detail as you're able to remember.

GV - Remember. Hah. I can't forget. Ask away, I suppose.

IB - How long ago was it that you were captured, Sir??

GV - 2005. In August, I think, it was hot as hell. You probably have a better date in your file. This was back when Void had moved their headquarters to the outskirts of Santa Ana. Too close to Los Diablos for some, and I was part of the force hired to... discourage them.

IB - That was when Vertigo was killed, right?

GV - Yeah. Didn't see it happen, so don't expect details.

IB - Most people involved in the operation died. It's the survivors we are interested in.

GV - Nothing special about my survival if that's what you're angling for. Pure luck. An earthquake at the right time cracked the wall of that hellhole. Not sure if I have your organization to thank for that. I was one of the ones alive that could still move, so I climbed out and ran.

IB - How were you captured?

GV - Outmatched. We didn't know what we were in for. We expected those damn cultists, or henchmen at worst. Didn't plan on squaring off with the Void right then and there. Most of my squad...

IB - It's fine. You can take a moment.

GV - The thing is... their power doesn't... it doesn't kill. Not like some boosted freaks. Not fire or plasma or any of that shit. The world just... shifts. Changes.

IB - Changes how? Please be specific. The nature of their powers makes them hard to record. We think they affect the electromagnetic spectrum as well.

GV - You ever done any deep-sea diving? The pressure is like that. Everything turns slow, like being encased in kinetic jelly. I tried to run, but my body...

IB - It's fine. Take a moment if you need to.

GV - Your brain still works, but it's like running in a nightmare. Even the ground felt less solid, like it sucked at my boots, like hairs on a band-aid. The light... went green? Dark? None of us could move right, and the Void... they just walked over to us. Distance was weird. Same with the perspective. None of us could shoot.

IB - Were you paralyzed?

GV - No. Maybe. It's like I said. Too slow to make a difference. And the armor, in that light... it didn't look like armor, you know? Soft-looking. Almost organic. Like something squeezed out of... Limbs too long. And then the Void started killing us.

IB - Just like that?

GV - No. It felt like it took forever. We just couldn't do anything about it. They started cutting up my sergeant right in front of me. Bit by bit. Just removing...

IB - We've seen pictures of the victims.

GV - But you don't get it from the pictures. Do you know how long it takes someone to die in one of those damn fields? The blood will hardly run. Cut someone's throat, and they'll know they are dead, but it will take minutes for the body to drop. And you'll be aware the entire time.

IB - Do you know why they kept some of you alive?

GV - For later entertainment, I suppose. Never saw their face, but the Void is a sick bastard. I've worked for a lot of psychos; it happens out here. But this was different. Could have just shot us all when we were incapacitated, but I guess that was too quick. They've got cages, you know? At their base?

IB - The Tesseract. Yes, I've heard rumors. The Cult of the Green Sky is banned for a reason. But that's not what we...

GV - Gotcha. Information. Powers. The void-field glitched up my mods, you know. Not my hand, but I've got audio implants since I got too close to an explosion. Couldn't hear a thing once the field blew them. I think that's why they saved me for the end. Probably figured I was stunned or traumatized since I didn't react to them speaking. Or the screams. Wanted to give me a chance to collect myself to appreciate what they'd do to me.

IB - Did you find out what had gone wrong with them?

GV - The batteries got fucked up. Was easy to fix once I had got out. Not sure how. Guess that's what you're trying to find out?

IB - Yes. With the Void in Los Diablos, we need information.

GV - The field looks like it's centered on them. It's more like an aura, I think. I never saw them project it anywhere. And it affects friend and foe both. Not that the Void cares. Since it's not destructive, allies won't be hurt.

IB - Still not a pleasant experience, I assume.

GV - No. Not unless you're into breathplay.

IB - I don't understand.

GV - Your body slows down, so you don't really breathe. But your brain wants to. So you feel like you're drowning even though you're not. A bit like waterboarding, I suppose.

IB - How far did you see them extend the field?

GV - Maybe... ten yards? 20? I didn't spot them before the field hit us, so I can't be sure.

IB - And how long could they hold it?

GV - Haven't you been listening? Time gets weird in there. It felt like forever.

IB - Anything else you can think of?

GV - There was... afterward. When we were captives. When they were killing us. The Void... they dripped some of their blood in the mouth of whoever they were planning to kill. The screams. Sounded more painful than their knives. Maybe they have acid blood, like that Ranger. And then... afterward, the cultists drew blood from the victim and drank it. Like some damn cannibal ritual.

IB - Did they remove the armor then?

GV - Just the glove. I don't know if it was more horrifying that it was just a normal hand under there. I could have sworn the fingers were a foot long when we fought. Not large either. Pale.

IB - Did you drink any?

GV - Hell no. They only did that to the people slated to die. Wouldn't be here if I did.

IB - A lucky escape.

GV - Like I said, lucky earthquake. Think they had too much to think about after that to bother with me. I wasn't important, just another useful body. You're going to take the bastard down, right?

IB - That is the idea.

GV - Good. Hope this helped.

IB - We will see. Thank you for your cooperation, Mr. Varga.

Excerpt of an audio recording placed within the cell of "Blake Montgomery," a member of the Cult of the Green Sky. Recorded July 12, 2011.

Comment: Since the subject was unresponsive to even advanced questioning, this is the limited intel we could get. We need to attempt to capture another one of them alive and keep them that way.

[scraping sounds]

Oh bringer of the green sky, oh child of the great black eye. May the yawning mouth of the void swallow our breaths and make us whole. Make us one.

[scraping sounds]

Oh destroyer of the old, oh bringer of the new.

[scraping sounds]

Time everlasting. Time unmoving.

[a faint gurgle]

Apostle of the world's end. Purifier of humanity.

[heavy breathing]

Your blood, our sacrament. Our blood, your offering.

[muffled voice]

... we will be... as... one... long live... the new... flesh.

Asset 7 - 21 January 2012

A - Are you sure you weren't followed?

IB - Of course. We have as much interest in secrecy as you do. Neither of us wants our collaboration to leak to... certain interested parties.

A - I do detest having to trust your professionalism.

IB - As do I, yours.

A - Fine. I suppose the end justifies the means in this particular case. Speaking of which...

IB - The money has been transferred into your account. Feel free to confirm, or let your partner...

A - My partner is not involved in this. Nor will he be.

IB - As, so the rumors are true. You are retiring.

A - I like to see it as getting to work. This villainy thing was never more than a means to an end.

IB - And now we have given you the means. And will keep giving if this collaboration proves fruitful.

A - Enough with the glib remarks. I don't appreciate being doubted. You were looking for insight into the so-called void-field, no?

IB - The question is whether you have something more than rumors?

A - Of course I do. You knew that when you approached me, despite my former partner's... associations.

IB - It was a risk on our part as well. People connected to the Green Sky tend to be... particular.

A - One way to put it. He was never a member, but all their talk about bringing forth humanity's greatest potential must have struck a chord.

IB - It doesn't sound like you parted amicably.

A - No. We did not. I'm lucky I'm still alive.

IB - I take it that he is not?

A - Take it as you wish. It's my private business.

IB - Then let's talk about ours.

A - I won't bother you with the science behind it. I know your type. You want workable solutions. A countermeasure.

IB - So you found one?

A - Perhaps. As you are undoubtedly aware, there are several separate manifestations of the Void's powers. The first is dimensional in nature. My theory is that the Void is capable of seeing and interacting with more dimensions than we normally account for. If we disregard the theory that time is the fourth dimension, they have access to at least four physical ones plus time. And, what's more troubling, they can bring other people in contact with them, which explains the spatial and time distortion experienced by the victims. We cannot perceive and interact with the source; we only see the effects on our three-dimensional world. To Void, their power might look as simple and logical as throwing a ball looks to us.

IB - How does that help us?

A - It does not, but it's a fascinating subject worth further study. As is the time aspect. The field only affects physical entities, not minds. That might mean that minds work on an even higher dimension than

the Void can manipulate. But that's unfortunately not helpful. As far as I know, telepaths have reported that the Void is exactly that, to their powers. An empty space.

IB - And direct attack is a problem. I've seen the Void stop bullets. They seem impervious to harm, even when the attack is unexpected.

A - Ah, not impervious. I would think they are simply avoiding the impact. Imagine someone drawing a line on a paper towards your finger. It would be easy to avoid it by lifting your hand in the third dimension. Or blocking it with your fingertip, but only the fingerprint would be visible.

The green sky...

A - Possibly an aftereffect, yes. Distorted light.

IB - So what is the third aspect then? Presumably something we can use?

A - Now, this is partial conjecture on my part and partially based on some rather... rambling conversations from my ex-partner. You are aware of the Void's penchant for inflicting pain, right?

IB - Yes, they're not the first villain wanting to terrorize others.

A - I am sure the terror is handy, but there might be more to it than that. To their blood sacrament in particular. The Void feeds their blood to their closest followers.

IB - Not the first cult to go into cannibalism.

A - It's more than symbolic. The sacrament is apparently excruciatingly painful to a debilitating extent. And yet their followers crave it.

IB - Addictive blood?

A - No. Not in the physical sense. It seems that they can connect to what the Void experiences and sees for a brief time. And, technically, gain limited use of their powers during that time. It is said that the higher acolytes can work miracles of their own by withstanding the pain.

IB - No wonder the cult is obsessed with suffering for a higher purpose.

A - What the Void gains from it, I do not know. Perhaps they simply like to see people suffer. Or enjoy the power of having people crave their gifts.

IB - So what is your suggestion then?

A - It's simple. Gain access to Void's blood, and have an operator digest it. They should then be able to work on the same spatial network as the Void, and it will be easy to kill them.

IB - A strange definition of the word easy.

A - My partner gained access to a sample. Sadly it's no longer viable. Your organization has a long reach. You should be able to groom an operator for that kind of mission.

IB - That is for my superiors to decide. There are no other physical countermeasures?

A - None that can be produced quickly. Perhaps after a few years of research and materials to do so with. Neither of which we have. I did get the impression this is a pressing matter.

IB - It is.

A - Then, I would recommend finding an asset willing and able to take that risk.

IB - Any recommendations?

A - No. I work with sensible people, not heroes willing to sacrifice themselves for the greater good.

IB - Neither do we. But I am sure my superiors can find a suitable assassin.

A - I hope so. For all our sake.

Final debriefing notes, HG's eyes only.

Fine, I admit it, I lost the bet. Getting the Rangers involved worked. No casualties even, though from the look it was touch and go for Charge. Nine lives. You are aware that this has lost us any access to possibly weaponize Void's powers? Dr. M. won't be happy about that. Though I suppose we are in a position where we don't have to worry about that now.

I've been pouring over what was left of the Tesseract. Not sure if we want to keep that lair, I'm not the only one getting bad vibes from it. My advice is to burn it to the ground and raze the ashes. That way, we won't have to deal with any stray followers returning to the scene. I doubt all of them were taken in. The Rangers are sloppy like that. They rarely bother to finish a job properly. Not their job, I suppose. Speaking of which, if you want Charge taken out for good, now would be a good time. Still not sure why you haven't done so already. I keep telling you, Charge is smarter than people think.

It's your call.

Debriefing notes, personal copy.

No body. Again. Third time a major villain got taken down and the body disappeared. Every time a plausible reason. Fire. Volatile powers. Landslide. I don't like it. Putting a pin in it, if someone's collecting boosted corpses, there's got to be a reason. And if there is a reason, we need to know.

[Time to ask your questions for this month!](#)

[Feb 25, 2022](#)

The world is falling apart, please take care of yourself and your loved ones. But, nothing will change by succumbing to despair. I'm 50 years old, I've seen bad times before, and even though things seemed like they would never end, they did. The world moved on, and in a generally progressive direction. Right now might look dark, but keep moving forward, and things will change.

In the meantime, if you need an escape from reality, please ask any questions you want answered for this month.

[Mitchell's Guide to Villains entry 2: The Catastrofiend](#)

[Feb 5, 2022](#)

Mitchell's Guide to Villains entry 2.

Subject: The Catastrofiend.

Civilian identity: Unknown.

Birthdate: Unknown. First sighting 2006, El Paso.

Birthplace: Unknown.

Height: Estimated 7 feet/213 cm (possibly taller if standing up straight)

Weight: Unknown.

Classification: Type A Mod. Massive structural reinforcements as well as additional limbs and integral blades. Alpha level boost, affecting regeneration, durability, strength and speed. Reports of psychic sensitivity, or other sensory augmentation. Possible multiple boosting occasions?

Status: Unknown. Last sighting Christmas 2016 in Phoenix.

Notes: Too many unknowns, especially when it comes to powers and mods. It's impossible that everything can be true, too many of the tales surrounding it reads like urban legends rather than hard facts. What I have included is backed by evidence, not hearsay. If the rumors of a "psychic aura" is true, that would explain some of the more esoteric reports.

Update: *I don't trust the reports of it's "death", as long as there's no corpse, I won't close the file.*

Commentary: The enclosed tapes contain the best footage of the Catastrofiend available, together with my comments and conclusions.

Video 1

Yeah, I got the full run of the Charge fight back in 2010. From what I can see it looks legit, spliced together footage of three security cameras, and what looks like surveillance mods belonging to the security guard eviscerated at the start. Don't think he survived, but it ran on internal batteries rather than piezoelectric implants, so we've still got footage.

1:20 - Not sure how it popped into view that fast, the last scan was clear. Possibly from the ceiling? It's been known to climb. I don't trust the rumors it can teleport, that's too rare a boost to happen twice. I've run the audio through Verity, we still can't catch what it's saying to the guard. Nothing good, judging from what happens next.

5:45 - Not sure what it's doing here. The guard is clearly dead, so why is it circling him? Around, and around. I counted 11 laps. surprisingly soft footsteps. This thing is quiet. The body moved twice, perhaps it was doing something to the corpse. Wet sounds. Audio is breaking up worse and worse. Sounds like static. Could it be malfunctioning audio implants? I'm not sure what damage was done to the head.

12:15 - It's back, if you watch the upper corner of the screen you can see it perched on one of the boxes. Waiting? The timing coincides with the arrival of Charge and Sidestep as per the security camera. Is it listening? Sensing? It seems to be aware of them, even though there are no windows, and I doubt they were making much noise. It stands to reason that it has some form of audiovisual enhancements. I've heard the theory that it's originally military, if that's true we can assume a standard sensory web. For me, it makes more sense than the psychic theory.

12:30 - The security feed outside the warehouse. I've still not been able to find out what was stored there, or why Charge and Sidestep was at the scene. A careful approach, I'm betting they know the Catastrofiend is there. It sounds just like Charge to rush in rather than call for the full team.

14:50 - The feed from the guard shows Sidestep entering about a minute after the Catastrofiend disappeared from view. Hard to tell with the full-face mask, but there's shock there. That half step back as the dead guard is noticed. I think the Catastrofiend did something to the body, most likely to draw the

attention of whoever came first. That's why this thing can't be underestimated, it's not a berserker, it thinks and hunts and lays traps. It understands patience.

15:20 - The angle is bad, but you can see that the Catastrofiend tries a similar ambush as it did with the guard. Sidestep dodges, It's a stupid power, but it comes in handy. Couldn't see if it dropped down or hid behind something.

15:45 - The following minutes are hard to parse. They move in and out of camera, but as far as I can see, Sidestep is unhurt at the time they exit the building. Impressive. Note the full range of motion of the scythe arms, it has no dead angles. Does it have some sort of rear vision? Or is it just fighting instinct? It doesn't need eye contact to strike, which I presume takes many off guard. It's almost as if every limb moves independently.

20:05 - Back to the security camera feed. Sidestep escapes the building at a run, the Catastrofiend right behind. Charge drops down on its back. From the roof? Most likely. Ballsy ambush. Ballsy of Sidestep to taunt it enough to follow recklessly.

20:20 - Charge tries to fry the Catastrofiend and the electrical discharge destroys the security camera. A fair tactic, it doesn't look insulated, but the results must have been disappointing.

21:50 - Another, more distant security feed spots Charge running. Then the Catastrofiend. If you pause you can see that it runs on all fours, with the knuckles on it's scythe-arms. I don't know what to make of that. I know there are theories that it might be a boosted and modded simian of some sort, and this could be a point in that theory's favor. I know some speculate it's a Bigfoot, but it's weird enough without adding cryptids to the mix.

24:15 - A new security feed, this time with a better angle. Not sure why Charge thinks fighting it is a good idea, but it's possible that the dark splotch on the suit is a leg wound. Hard to tell in this light. This is the part that ran on the news, and I can see why they released it. This is the kind of fight that gets ratings. Charge must be running low, either that, or the electricity doesn't affect it much. It might just be me, but I get the feeling that it's playing with it's prey. Not like with the guard, he went down immediately. Charge wouldn't have been able to keep up for that long if it wasn't having fun. Non-vital wounds.

25:30 - Look at the small auxiliary hands. Human looking. What are they doing? Grabbing for something? Gesturing? Creepy fuck.

27:15 - We're now in the parts they didn't release. The Catastrofiend stabs, too quick to be avoided. Went straight through Charge's gut. Not a quick kill. Doesn't pull out. There's no audio on this feed, but if I zoom I think Charge's mouth is moving. Talking? Begging? Can't see if the Catastrofiend talks back. Not sure how that mouth works. Not human, that's for sure.

27:45 - This is fascinating. Charge is still impaled, but what is the Catastrofiend doing? It looks like it froze. Charge is grabbing it's hand. A final electric surge? Or did it connect with something inside Charge? I doubt that massive battery damage would be survivable, but I am running out of theories.

Something happened, that's for sure. Look at the tremble of the auxiliary hands. The way the head twitches.

28:00 - Sidesteps enters and shoots the Catastrofiend in the head. Repeatedly. Not a bullet, but what? EMP? Laser? Plasma? Bad angle for it. The Catastrofiend collapses. Charge is pulled free. Even with a skinsuit, that must be massive damage. Think they downplayed it afterwards, that hospital interview was clearly staged. Charge wasn't back in action for six months. Sidestep drags the Marshal away.

29:30 - The Catastrofiend's arm twitches.

31:45 - Movement of it's legs.

35:00 - This is legitimately creepy shit. Look how it moves. The angles are all wrong. The head is just lolling there. No control. Makes me wonder if that report that it still continued to function after decapitation might not have been an exaggeration. It looks half reflexive, but it is moving out of there. On all fours. Note that the auxiliary arms are as limp as the head. Could it be a programmed response from the mods? Possibly.

Video 2

I wasn't sure if I should include this, since it's not a positive ID. But the movement matches. I got this from Belvedere, he didn't want to name his source, so it's probably military. No date. No recognizable faces. You can tell me I'm jumping to conclusions, but this gave me nightmares.

5:25 - Might as well fast-forward, nothing happens early on. Just the padded cell. Note the blurriness of the picture, I think the camera is set outside a porthole window. It looks like thick glass distortion.

8:00 - Check out the thickness of that door when it's opened. It's not just armored, look at the seals. It reads pressure chamber to me. Is this underwater? Is there another reason for that construction?

8:30 - I'm not sure if this is a prisoner or a patient. It could be a prison jumpsuit, but what is that thing on their head? It looks like a helmet, but without eye holes. Connection ports everywhere. Something down their throat. Hard to guess gender with the straitjacket on. The way they bang their head on the floor is probably why the cell is padded. Dark stains already there. It's hard to know what they are in black and white.

15:25 - Is there a rhythm to the banging? I keep nodding my head to it.

20:00 - I am theorizing now, but they might be gradually increasing the pressure. It looks like the prisoner is reacting to something. Pain? Probably.

25:00 - No more chest expansions visible. Still moving.

34:00 - I think they might be cycling the pressure. A stronger reaction, then relaxation and relief. Is this punishment? Something else?

38:00 - Here it is. You can spot it on the back first. Something moving under the straitjacket. Keep your eye on that rather than the banging.

39:15 - The ties snapped. The prisoner can move their arms now. Were they strong enough to tear loose? What was moving under the straitjacket? It's still there, if you watch closely. Doesn't move right.

42:45 - Look. Look at the way their hands move as they circle the cell. Can't see the fingers in the straightjacket, but the arms move in similar gestures to the Catastrofiend earlier. Round and round. I think they're still in the pressure cycle, you can see how their steps gets heavier, then lighter.

48:00 - Yeah, it attacked and cracked the glass. Safety glass. probably a few inches thick. Not too proud to admit I screamed. It's FAST. Might as well fast-forward to the end, it's an hour long. Can't see much through the cracked glass, just occasional shadows. Don't try to make out what happens, I got a headache even trying.

Did the military try to build their own super soldiers? Is this a volunteer? A prisoner? It's not inconceivable we watched a boost cycle. Or something else. I wish I knew, but it's all dead ends. At least to me, this settles it. The Catastrofiend is just a particularly nasty boost. No demon or zombie or whatever fucked up idea that's going around.

Video 3

The best footage of the Catastrofiend, from 2006, only a month or so after it's first sighting. We don't have sound, Corben's mods were visual only. But it's clear that the Catastrofiend is capable of having a conversation. It's less modded than in its later outings. Still got a human mouth, and the head looks... I'd hesitate to say normal, but close enough. Those eye-mods though... nightmare fuel. Why do that to yourself?

3:45 - I've identified the meeting place, it used to be a bar down south. Hellwood. Burned down a decade or so ago. Looks like it's after hours.

5:15 - Corben had guts, rest his soul. Accepting a drink from the Catastrofiend. I wonder if it's the same arms as the shrunken appendages later. These look human. Strong.

7:45 - I've had Verity try to decipher what the Catastrofiend is saying. It's hard, apparently the lips move oddly. But it looks like they are talking about a deal. Something Corben is supposed to bring.

9:00 - I'm not sure, but I think it's boost drugs in the suitcase. It looks like "Milagre", I think they used the red and green casings back then.

12:00 - Yeah, watching the Catastrofiend hand over a suitcase full of money is weird to me too.

12:30 - If you pause right before Corben turns to leave, I can swear that it pops a vial in it's mouth before it closes the suitcase. Just like that. Bites down, glass and all. Yeah, I know that probably means

it's not boost drugs, but some other substance. But, and bear with me here, what if it is? What if it keeps taking them?

There are several sightings that has been tied to boost manufacturers and drug runners. Is it possible the drug could be addictive? I've never heard of anybody surviving more than a second dose (and even that only three times), but considering it's regenerative capabilities, if anything could, this would be it.

Video 4

This is the only clear audio we have of the Catastrofiend. It's from the attack on the Duncan building from 2012. I do NOT recommend listening to this with the audio on. Or watching it at all. The words are almost impossible to make out, and the voice... does things to you. Thanks for helping Verity, she's my best transcriber, if she had quit because of this, it would be a setback for both of us. You know her skills, I trust this transcription to be as close to the audio as possible. The main voice is from the Catastrofiend. The source of the second voice is uncertain. The third voice might be the researcher it's threatening, but neither of them were in the field of vision of the camera.

| Don't move. Don't breathe. The air is heavy.

(a second voice) heavy like clockwork

| Need to talk talk talk tick tock tick tock unlock.

(a second voice) words are an avalanche

| Come come come.

| Come come down.

| Come down.

See.

See!

SEE!

(a third voice?) drown. drowned out.

| Open the door.

(a second voice) jaws

| Good. Good. Breathe. Inside.

(a second voice) open wide

(garbled) did... said...

(distorted) pillar

(garbled screaming)

(a second voice starts humming)

Wakeful. Hateful.

(distorted) two(?) down

(distorted) shell(?)

Get the goddamn door open!

(a second voice starts screaming)

-audio cuts out-

(silence, for several minutes)

(a faint giggle, which continues until the tape ends, 79 minutes later)

[QnA January 2022](#)

[Feb 5, 2022](#)

How does the world of Fallen Hero match up against the likes of DC or Marvel in terms of power levels, general vibe and overall scale?

The problem here is that both Marvel and DC are huge and varied entities with stories and heroes going from street level to the cosmic scale. The same with the vibes. So I can't say anything general, but I can name some similarities:

Marvel: Daredevil, Heroes for Hire, Hawkeye, Black Panther, Spider-Man and any street level heroes. At times, X-men is adjacent, at least back in the Chris Claremont days.

DC: Birds of Prey, Secret Six, Batman, Doom Patrol and other street level and weird heroes.

When you take the step up to heroes/teams that operate on a country level like Avengers or Justice league you leave the levels I imagine my universe to be at.

(NSFW) Scaling the 5 ROs, who's the most vanilla-kinkiest? If there isn't much difference between the 5, are any of them interested in trying out any specific kinks/fantasies? How long did Steel have a crush on a male!Step? What was it about Sidestep that made Herald question his sexuality?

Not going to canonify any of the RO's sexuality. That is entirely up to the reader. Someone might be kinky as hell in someone's playtrough, and entirely vanilla in another. That's not up to me (I wouldn't be allowed by the apple store anyway).

Steel didn't start getting interested in m!/nb! Sidestep until Rebirth. At least that's what he claims, and I think I do believe him.

What it was that Herald saw in Sidestep depends a lot on the Sidestep. I can't give a single canon answer there.

Might be a potentially spoilery question, but how would the ROs react to MC's death? Would they seek vengeance if the MC was killed?

I think I can say that there's unanimous agreement there. Of course they would!

In the playable teaser, there is a moment where Side can reveal themselves to Argent as the villain. In response she then reveals her actual name, and immediately seems to blanch and tell us she doesn't know why she did that. Side can then use her name once and she winces and tells us not to do it again. Side thinks to themselves that they don't think they butchered the pronunciation. So the question if you don't think it's too spoilery to talk about motivations, did Side butcher it? or is there an association of her name on someone else's lips that caused that reaction?

It is a bit spoilery, but I'm going to share it anyway. It wasn't the pronunciation, it was the fact that hearing her old name brought her back to the person she was, and that hurt. A lot. She can't go back. Ever. And being called by her old name made her want to.

Will we have a chance to meet Ashfall in book 3?

Not sure yet. It is a possibility.

IS Ashfall possibly one of the unlucky people that has gotten punched by Ortega for Step?

Yes. They had an actual fight, as in both of them legitimately tried to hurt each other. Ashfall won.

Can we get the list of 7 people (if i remember correctly) who got the taste of Ortega's fist for Sidestep?

I have no list! Seven was a good number in case I needed to fit people in there. Vernon, Ashfall and Chen is on it.

Is Chen really that easily manipulated by possible relationship? (He seems to be very lenient to romanced Sidestep)?

That depends entirely on what Sidestep does. Chen has crimes he can justify overlooking, and crimes he doesn't. Perhaps he's hoping he'll be a good influence and get Sidestep to stop before he goes too far. If so, when will he decide that enough is enough?

Is Anathemas backstory plot relevant? If it is, will we learn it in-game?

It is not plot relevant, and will probably not be touched on in-game, but it might. We'll see.

IN the intimate scene with Wei, he compliments Sidestep. My question is: Does he truly find Sidestep attractive or is he more attracted to the person (his personality, as hard as it is to believe for some Sidesteps), because he didn't like Sidestep pre HB?

Chen does find Sidestep attractive, there were enough embarrassing thoughts to listen into to be sure of that. But the person is part of it as well, can't separate one from the other.

Does Wei like it when his significant other is wearing his clothes?

Yes. It is very cute.

Did Sidestep ever go clubbing with someone from the team, who would be the most likely to teach Sidestep club dancing? How mortified was Sidestep at first?

I think Ortega and Ashfall dragged them along. (No clubs for Anathema). Ashfall would have taught dancing, because as he said, Ortega is too old for that life. Ortega claimed that was a dirty lie. Sidestep was honestly more overwhelmed than mortified, the crowd-mind in a club is overwhelming even for a baby telepath.

TRIGGER WARNING, dark question ahead. How are telepaths able to get people to do themselves in? What allows some people to resist and others to drop like flies? For example Sidestep can potentially do this to like a dozen people at once with seemingly the same effort it takes to snap their fingers. How many people could Sidestep just do that to if they ever just lost it?

It is related to how easy it is to make things do things in general. Let's say Sidestep wants to force someone to punch someone else. In some cases that's very easy, like with the cop at the start of Rebirth. Already annoyed with Steel, used to violence and being able to use it without repercussions. If it had been the receptionist at the Ranger's HG, it would have been MUCH harder. One, she knows and likes Steel, two, she's not used to violence, and three, she would be terrified of the repercussions.

It's the same with darker manipulations. The ones giving in are the ones who has already been struggling with thoughts like that in the past. However, at this point, Sidestep has become powerful enough to not just manipulate people's emotions, but to flood them with their own despair. And Sidestep has a lot of despair, pain and anger. Share that with people and things... happen. Just a little push. If Sidestep lost it it would be Heartbreak all over again. Or worse. Maybe even a lot worse.

If Sidestep decided that the Special Directive were too risky and tried to get the Rangers to handle Psychopathor, how would things generally have gone down? Could the Rangers have taken Psychopathor in the state Sidestep left them? Or at full power?

Well, this was before Sidestep started to dismantle the team, so they would be at full power. They could have dealt with Psychopathor, BUT Ortega would be a bigger risk than the Special Directive. Even if the latter was dangerous, their minds are still readable.

Considering that we can spend time at the RO's apartments, will we ever be able to invite them to our apartment if it's not our base?

Yes.

After sexy times with Ortega, Sidestep has the option to thank them for showing them that it doesn't have to be horrible. Would something similar be possible with the other ROs?

Yeah.

Morbid question, but say if someone tried to stab Anathema in the eyes. What would happen?

Thonk! It would bounce. Or, more likely, twist and slide, which would be uncomfortable. Like an eyelash under your eyelid. Gross and uncomfortable, but not harming them.

Ignore if it's spoilers, but is it possible to solve major problems in Los Diablos? E.g. Refugee problem, emaciated boosted/modded populations forsaken by the gov, major systemic issues, etc, irregardless of what type of villain we choose to be?

Depends. I don't think that what you pick in book two will cut you out from dealing with this, but there will be other choices later which might. Some paths are more straightforward than others. Both Anarchist and Boss are focused on a grander scale, and will have easier chances to affect grand changes (but for different reasons). Hunter and Thief are more individual/self-centered (with the exception of prepare_them Hunter) but might affect change anyway if they make the right contacts. Some Sidesteps might not care, but enable others who do to change stuff. I try not to cut people off from content early on.

Will we ever get to pet a kitty?

That sounds like a good thing to add.

How do cats feel to Sidestep, do they like them?

It depends on what mood Sidestep is in. Cats are more sensitive to that than dogs.

Are there other disorders, apart from epilepsy, that negate telepathy?

Probably a few, but not as common.

Sorry if it been cleared up before, but how are you handling RO's sexuality? I remember that you mentioned they'll be more fluid since it's a game, but F!Step is supposed to be only a friend to Chen. Did you then simply meant Ortega and Herald Bi awakening?

The only hard lock I have is for F!Sidestep and Chen. Anything else is possible.

If it's not a spoiler. How would Psychopath react if he found out Sidestep had stolen his rats and become a villain?

He would be livid. Frothing at the mouth bellowing "Sidestep?" livid. He'd never live that down.

What would some of the other villains think about Sidestep going villain?

Most would be incredulous. Even more so with the Imposing or Terrifying armor. The other two, they could see, but yeah... that is not something people saw coming.

From the demo there is non-enhanced vigilante. How common are non-enhanced vigilantes? What about non enhanced heroes and villains?

There are a few, especially vigilantes. There are some heroes and villains as well, a well-made armor can even the scales quite a bit. But most have some minor enhancements, especially neural connections to better connect to their armor and equipment.

If fallen hero were to get a live-action adaptation, who would you cast as which characters?

I am terrible at faces and names, I have no idea who I would cast. That's what casting directors are for!

If Alpha Level Telepath Sidestep joined the Rangers, what would the PR team have proposed renaming their hero name to, if they didn't need to keep their telepathy a secret?

OOOOHhhh. I could see something like "Nexus" or "Psion". Something simple and sleek, avoiding the more manipulative hints.

What is Ortega's father's name? How old was he when he died?

Enrique Salvador García Trevino. Sometimes called Rico by his friends. He was 55 when he died.

What piece (of his art) is Herald most proud of?

I think it's his Los Diablos sketches. That's something he does in his spare time, charcoal and pencil, often from weird vantage points up high. He keeps wanting to make something more elaborate, but he lacks the confidence right now since it's been years. Oil is cool but also permanent.

This may have been answered before: What are the highest the Subtle Manipulation and Strength of Mind stats can get in Book 1 and again in Book 2? Are they exclusive of each other or can they both be raised?

Honestly? I am not sure. Everything I think I know, someone manages another percent. High eighties for sure, think someone managed 90+ in Subtle. They are not exclusive, but in general, you get higher if you focus on one. It is slightly easier to raise Subtle. They both have their uses, and having both balanced can also be good. A high value can be dangerous as well as powerful.

Are Re-genes able to have biological children? Are they sterilized just to make sure things like that aren't a worry in the first place? I could imagine that menstrual cycles could be a bother, and something that the scientists don't want to have to deal with, so how are those handled?

Re-Genes, like most boosts, tends to be sterile, or have problems with miscarrying. Menstrual cycles are controlled with hormones, and with the stressful life of Re-Genes, most stop having them.

A while ago you listed some comics and media that gave some inspo for fhr. I zoomed through a good portion of those comics/shows and think doom patrol and zenith were my favs!

What about those comics did you particularly like/are there any more comics you recommend? Thank you for all the good reading material by the way!!!

What do I like about them? I mean that's a long discussion, but both have a combination of good character writing, art, dealing with characters outside the norm, nice dialogue and some serious worldbendy curveballs. I love comics that teases my imagination. Also words. Good words.

Some other comics worth checking out that are adjacent to my Fallen Hero mood:

One Punch Man (One), but read the webcomic, not the prettified manga! Seriously, the raw energy and panel design is amazing, and I feel like that gets lost when other people draw it.

Hellblazer (mostly the Jamie Delano original run) for the mood.

Nemesis the Warlock (Pat Mills), for the attitude.

Charlie's War (Pat Mills), probably my favorite war comic.

Tekkonkinkreet (Taiyō Matsumoto), think it was known as Black and White in the US.

Mister X (Jaime Hernandez and others), because of the City.

Nextwave, Agents of H.A.T.E (Warren Ellis), for the style.

Bratpack (Rick Veitch), tear down your heroes.

Hawkeye (David Aja and Matt Fraction), the mood and visual design is on point.

Anime (since I didn't have this last time)

Paranoia Agent (even if you don't watch it, look up the intro on youtube. Just DO IT.)

Tiger and Bunny (a classic, this is corporate heroes indeed)

Concrete Revolution (got the ending truncated, but still a cool superhero treatise the Japanese way. very political.)

Deca-Dence (not spoiling anything, but it is relevant and good)

Fire Force (also a manga, which I binged). The fight scenes are tasty, and the manga gets seriously weird.

How is Psychopathor pronounced? Psycho-PATHOR? PSYCHO-pather? Psy-KOPA-thor? Psychopa-THOR?

I pronounce it as the first one, but I am Swedish and probably wrong.

What do SD regenes do when they are not on duty? What are living conditions like for working regenes?

They are confined to their base/quarters. The living conditions are spartan, and they are always on duty. They have very little time for themselves. Idle hands and all that...

Do the ROs celebrate Valentines day? What do they like to do? Who would still celebrate if they were single?

Once again, my lack of knowledge of holiday things strikes. I really have no idea how people in general celebrate that, it's not a big thing here. But I think we can all agree that Ortega would make a production of it.

Will we have the choice to take the Boost drug again?

No. That's outside the scope of this story.

what does being a corporate hero entail? what's in a typical workday for them?

It's a bit of a cross between being an influencer, paid spokesperson and security guard. Depending on the company, the focus will be more on one part of the other. There is no typical workday. Some might spend most their time in scheduled promotion events, never seeing much real action. Others might be

more akin to bodyguards, protecting company properties or personnel. Some are close to free agents or vigilantes, fighting crime with a sponsorship.

If we mess up enough in the future, will we possibly lose even more body parts?

Probably.

Who debuted first Sidestep or Ashfall?

Ashfall, but not by much.

The Los Diablos rangers have had three different marshals over the years: marshal Hood (late), marshal Charge (former) and marshal Steel (current). I imagine that being the Marshal is quite different from being only a "regular" ranger (If such a thing exists, they all seem very unique) and I've been wanting to know more about the following:

How did each marshals style of leadership differ from their precursors/successors? Was any marshal more/less popular with the team/public/government and why?

Hood was very much rooted in the disaster years post the Big One. He was big on cooperation, building bridges with the city government and making Los Diablos a better place to live. A lot of construction efforts and disaster mitigation too. Charge became a lot more focused on fighting actual Villains, in no small part because of Hood's death. Less focused on Los Diablos, and more on taking down the people that threatened civilians. Here teamwork became more mutable, with many smaller teams within the team. Steel has tried to rebuild the political connections, and get the Rangers back in order after Heartbreak. A lot has been damage mitigation, and taking more of a backseat role for the team. It's hard to judge popularity, but Charge switched between most/least popular fast. The public liked them best, because hey, Ortega. Hood had been there since the start, so he was seen as a fixture. Best liked by the team because he genuinely tried to work with everybody's strengths. Steel is the most anonymous, but best liked by the government since he makes an effort to work with them.

During which years did each marshal lead the rangers, what made them accept the position as team leader and which was the biggest crisis they each had to resolve during their time in command? Do/did they have a nemesis?

Hood accepted because he saw the need for the Rangers, and the funds he could get through the program. Better to be inside and control the direction. Charge accepted because they wanted revenge, and this gave them a position of power. Steel accepted because he realized there was nobody else, unless they would bring in a complete outsider. And he didn't want that.

The biggest crisis for Hood was The Void's attempt at taking over Los Diablos early on. For Charge it was the Nanosurge. For Steel it was the Heartbreak fallout. Both in his injuries, the team's near collapse, and the massive outbreak of violence that followed in Heartbreak's wake. Hood's nemesis would be The Void, Charge has Hollow Ground, and Steel tries to avoid all that.

Who do you consider the most effective marshal and for what reason? What were their different strengths and weaknesses as a leader?

The most effective Marshal was Hood. Mainly because he was focused, a good leader, and a powerful enough boosts that even the companies and politicians were forced to listen. Got a lot of things done through... well, not exactly threats, because he was nice about it. But he's an imposing man, and you don't mess with earth powers.

Hood was a good leader, but sometimes didn't see the trees for the forest. Charge was a charismatic tactician, who could punch above their weight class and make others do the same. Lacked an overview of the bigger picture though. Steel thinks before he acts, and has more pull than people think. He rarely uses what leverage he's got however.

What was Step's telepathic range pre-Heartbreak?

Pre-Nanosurge, perhaps a 100 yards or so. After, maybe 300 yards, but a longer when picking up threats intensely focus on them or their friends (like a sniper).

What were the Rangers' first impressions of Sidestep?

Squirrely little thing, well-trained, but needs to eat more. Possibly homeless. Weird.

Is Lord Ember's real name Francis?

That sounds like a lame name for a villain, doesn't it? The kind of name you'd like to keep secret.

Ok, i know that it'll be.. a strange one. But someone should ask that... if I remember correctly, Step's nightmares can affect others. But will Step's horny dreams affect others in any way?

It might already have done so. But, joking aside, it is probably best for their surroundings that Sidestep has spent so little time sleeping.

I know we can't know what the inscription on Sidestep's grave is yet... but can we know who wrote it?

Ortega. They saw what the media team had suggested, crumpled the paper and supplied their own.

Is Vitruvian really dead?

Yes. Very dead. If not, Dr. Mortum would have had a new project on top of their list of priorities.

May we hug and/or reunite [in a friendly way] with Pyroclast? Can we thank him for caring like we did Ortega?

I am planning to bring him in eventually, and if I do, that will be one of the possible reactions.

Are we ever gonna find out what happened to/meet back up with Sunstream?

Who knows? It's not a main part of the book. I have no plans, but plans might change.

The scene where Sidestep meets Ortega again for the first time in Rebirth is deceptively subtle in the text, but Sidestep is still experiencing very strong emotions. Did Sidestep unwittingly deal some psychic damage to the customers in that coffee-shop as a result?

Certainly to the more sensitive ones. Though, damage might not be the right word. Anxiety, fear and maybe that wistful wish to reconnect with that friend you haven't seen in ages. Maybe Sidestep actually caused some people to reach out that wouldn't have done so otherwise.

Sorry if this has been answered elsewhere, but how long (months, years?) was Heartbreak held by the people who experimented on them?

A nice and subtle question, which I won't answer, because the answer might reveal/affirm certain theories.

What kinda boosting process did Step go through?

We'll get into that in the game, so be patient.

What does the typical farm meal schedule in a week look like?

The meals is probably the best way to tell time, because the schedule repeats. It's three meals a day, 07.00, 12.00 and 18.00. The morning meals are always the same, oatmeal with soy milk and a protein shake. Vitamins and medications given separately to ensure they are taken.

The noon meal is always vegetarian, rice with beans and vegetables.

The evening meals rotate on the following schedule: Day 1, rice and seafood. Day 2, pasta and reconstituted meat stew.

Day 3, potatoes and chicken. Then repeat.

The meals are not bad, if not very spicy. They are the greatest source of joy at the Farm, and a major punishment is to be barred from mealtime and be fed separately. Then the food is tasteless but nutritious, various pastes and the like. If the Farm uses any carrots, the food is it. On occasion, special treats can be rewarded for good behavior or exemplary performance. Bread is the most common. A Re-Genes probably eats more animal protein than the average Los Diablos citizen.

That lore post about re-genes makes me think... "Retirement" re-genes, when their AI chip is extracted, are they still conscious until the very end? Or, after extracting the chip, they already, in fact, do not live, do not remember and do not realize anything?

They are "retired" before the AI chip is extracted. That's a procedure that's almost certainly lethal anyway.

I know you said that there are extra factors influencing non-regene boosts, but I'm curious which stimuli would most closely correspond to the stressors boosts such as Herald and Argent were under at the point of their boosts kicking in?

Epinephrine injections to simulate adrenaline response. Applying physical damage.

Does any external recording of the HB incident exist (camera, sound, whatever), or will we only ever explore it through the subjective perspective of the people involved?

Yes. Yes it does.

What was Anathema's fighting style? Did they train often, or was that not really necessary?

Like all the Rangers, Anathema trained for hand to hand combat. However, they were never really good, they were rather clumsy in fact. Still, they were a good target dummy.

Look.... I have to know: if Ortega stuck a fork in an outlet, what would happen.

Quick charge for their batteries.

What happened to Step's energy caster?

You'll know in book three.

Have the research for putting minds/brains into mechanical bodies continued, or have they halted with the regene project having more success?

It has continued, but there has been no major breakthrough. It's rumored that the EU has some interesting new theories.

When were the Guardians formed?

2018

Silly question time, back in the day when Sentinel would scoop Step off the streets, what was his preferred carry method? Huggy cling? Piggyback? Bridal style? Something else?

Huggy cling if unprepared, but piggyback for longer rides. It's rather chaotic riding the wind, and it's easy to interfere with his wingsuit. It's not needed for flight, but it helps a lot with effort and stability.

What was Anathema's civilian name?

Classified.

I can't hold it in anymore, I have to ask, was Bo the Crack??

Not exactly.

Can you tell us more about Vernon? What happened to the people he cared about? What does he do now? Does he still have... on-going projects?

Vernon lost a lot of friends when he lost his job. He's not an easy person to be around, and it's testament to Mia's thick skin that she has. He's got plenty of projects, but few people to talk about them to. The people that knew him think that he has spiraled into bitter paranoia and conspiracy theories.

i was digging around in the art gallery scene and now you've got me wondering, is there a time when Danny has given out a fake name and it's backfired? And if he doesn't like to use fake names, but also wants to go unrecognised, what on earth does he do when he wants to like place an order for something?

I think it most certainly has backfired. Danny isn't that good at running separate identities, he feels very awkward trying to do so. He tends to accept that he gets recognized and trying to deal with it as it comes. It can be annoying, but it's simpler in the long run.

How far has AI tech gone? How are AI's created? Is it say feasible to create an AI that acts/behaves like someone else?

How much of regenes is the AI chip v a brain doing whatever is it that brains do to conceptualize a sense of self?

Have there been experiments to implement an AI chip in a non-regene brain before? If yes, what kind of effect did it have?

This is probably a whole lore post coming eventually, but essentially what is called functioning AI are advanced algorithms that can function without human input for longer periods of time. Outside the EU, the US army is the greatest user of AI. It's mostly implemented in aerial vehicles, because the size can be dropped when you don't have to account for a soldier. For example, the army has hive AI's running drone swarms that can fly in and scout areas without a signal to guide them, adjust for changing circumstances, and make decisions whether to return or eliminate. AI is heavily used in the financial market, for research and development, and for long range simulations.

A simpler version of the Re-Gene AI is the various neural chips people use to connect directly to machinery. While not technically AI, they are more "assisted intelligence," closer to what the anonymous nervous system is for unmodded humans.

There are experiments connecting human minds to an outside AI through a neural link, to enable them to draw on the AI's vast resource of knowledge and computation capacity.

It is theorized that the Re-Gene's AI chip gets less important as time passes, and the organic neural network takes over the load. It has been shown that older Re-Genes are far more flexible and capable than newly trained one, even though their AI is the same.

Does argent ever morph her features into things that are less for immediate function and more just for fun? Like could she change her face into something that'd fall under the uncanny valley, or something resembling a mask, for example?

Yes, she could, but she changes only her hair and limbs. Never her facial features. She could, though.

What's the story behind that time Step had to cauterize Ortega's wound with a dagger? 🙄

Oh that was during the fight with the Void. Not the best times. Might tell the story eventually, but not here.

What were Rosie and Bo up to during the Heartbreak and Nanovore incident? If they were around, how do they remember it?

They were running for their lives with everyone else that tries to evacuate the city. It was terrifying, too many people, no way out, and knowing that was coming for you.

Not sure if this has ever been asked, but what are the Rangers, Mortum, and the HG trios favorite color? My bet is Mortum likes orange

Mortum: Orange. Ortega: Red. Chen: Red. Herald: Blue. Argent: Pink. HG: Maroon. Nocturne: Gold. Jake: Green.

Is Mitchell boosted in a way that helps him create and keep his files?

No.

Did HB escape from the Core?

As much as anybody can.

Would Ortega choose to be modded if they had more of a choice in the matter and they knew where their life would lead? (e.g. they knew they would be saddled w/ debt and that heartbreak would happen, etc.)

If they knew the good parts too, they would have. In a heartbeat.

You've said before that Sidestep is visually-oriented — that they see mindscapes as they do because they think in symbols and landscapes. Off the top of your head, if the characters of the main cast had the same powers as Sidestep, how would they "see" mindscapes? How do they think?

Herald would be the most similar, he's also very visual. Argent would sense more than see, she'd know things but be unable to say how. Ortega would see it as a lot more abstract, facts and words connecting. Would probably see everything filtered through their own mindscape. More words than pictures. Chen wouldn't enter someone's mind, he'd see more overlay on the real world, revealing moods or thoughts. Like augmented reality. Mortum would be full immersion, putting themselves in the other person's memories and reliving as their own.

When did Ashfall debut on the LD vigilante scene?

2008, slightly before Sidestep.

For Steps who panicked and passed out when Herald picked them up that first time, is that information he'd ever use against a revealed villain Step?

You really think Herald would do that to you?

How long after decanting do shiny new regenes tend to go out on their first mission? Does it vary between combat regenes and cuckoos?

It varies a lot. It could be six months for some, two years for others. What matters is that they pass muster, learn how to use their powers and act as a team.

In the Mitchell's guide entry on Bo, Tina talks about him letting his enhancements go to waste and he says he couldn't afford to keep them all running. Which does he keep running? And if it's not too spoilery, could you maybe tell us about any that are no longer relevant to his current career?

The ones still active are the scanner/GPS ones, enhanced reflexes, and the mods needed to connect to the car. In short, things usable for his current job as a driver. Maybe we'll get into the others in game, not going to talk about them here.

How long was Herald working as a vigilante before he landed his first corporate gig?

Not long, a few months.

How long did it take Step to get back to LD after their second escape?

A while. Probably a couple of months. Could be more depending on the Sidestep.

What's the first thing the rangers + mortum notice when meeting someone new?

Ortega: Are they relaxed or not?

Chen: Stance. Threat level.

Argent: Roving eyes?

Herald: Do they meet his eyes?

Mortum: Mods. Glasses scans automatically.

Have there been experiments of removing a regenes AI chip? Especially with ones who have been given time where their brains sorta "acclimate" to the chip?

No, they are too expensive to ruin for frivolous experiments.

If they know someone's "mindvoice" or imprint, could Sidestep track them by parsing through/filtering the others and focusing on what they're looking for? If yes, what's the approximate extent of their radius? Could they track a static brain (pinpointing void in the noise)? Could they track Locus's mind, despite having not "heard" her mind in a while?

Yes. The Radius depends on the Force value, the skill in finding the track is Subtle Manipulations. Sidestep tracks "thought voids" in the encounter with the Special Directive. However, these are not truly static minds, they are just heavily drugged and shielded. Ortega would be a lot harder. Locus might be trackable, but telepaths tends to be heavily shielded, so it would be nearly impossible.

Could the paingate technology be used to block other things related to the brain? Memories, reactions, telepathic abilities, etc?

Possibly other sensory experiences, but pain is the simplest.

If it's not too much in the way of spoilers, could we get some Sullivan family lore?

Oh that is entirely spoilers I'm afraid.

Who are they that Daniel expected step would recognize the name?

See the answer above.

What is the Rangers' policy in the event of civilian deaths directly caused by one of the team members? What about infrastructure damage? Have Steel, Ortega, Sentinel or Anathema been involved in civilian deaths or collateral damage public scandals, like Argent has / can be?

They are insured, and in fact, Hood in particular was very into rebuilding damage done regardless of whether they were responsible or not. But yeah, all that comes from the PR budget. There has been incidents and accidents, it's a violent world, but it tends to go away with enough money. Most of the time it's easier to contain than what Argent did.

[January 2022 Spoilers QnA](#)

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Is it possible to go as the puppet to meet HG but not deliberately crash the car with Ortega in it? If it ends up having to be that way just because otherwise there's no differences between the choices made I totally get it, it just felt a bit out of character I guess for my Sidestep to not even park the car before leaving the puppet lol.

Yes, but you can't do the early abandoning of the Puppet when you get that option.

Is there a particular reason for choosing orange specifically as the Regene tattoo colors? And contrasting it with Sidestep's teal in the stats page?

I like orange and teal! I picked orange for the tattoos because it is an odd and vibrant color that is unlikely to be confused with real tattoos. I almost went with a neon green instead, but orange fitted better with teal. They are good contrast colors.

Can we have one night stand with Jake, can i be homewrecker.

Thinking about it.

Will it be possible to permanently recruit Jake as BossStep, how pissed off HG will be?

Pissed off is not the word. Murderous rage more like it.

Saw a question this last qna in regards to Sidestep being rescued by the rangers post heartbreak instead of the farm, and now I'm wondering how Chen, Ortega and Sentinel as the present rangers would have taken finding out Sidestep is regene at that point. Most everyone was in a really bad state physically, how would the recovery process have gone for sidestep in particular? Would they have been turned into the SD outside of Ortega's jurisdiction?

That is such an extensive scenario, I will leave that to any AU writers.

How much does Nocturne know about HG's family history... and would she know of or have seen pictures of the dead sibling that resembles Sidestep.

Nocturne knows a lot, HG is sappy. She had probably seen pictures, but it hadn't really stuck in her mind. Her partner sharing their childhood photos is a nice act of bonding, it's not something she'd remember or care about. HG is what's important to her, as is the act of sharing. Not remembering the details.

From your first book I take it Sidestep and the regenes were raised to believe in a sort of "Darwinist future" bullshit ideology with an added sense of duty above all else. How did Sidestep cope with their philosophy/pseudoreligion falling apart?

Sidestep had an advantage compared to the other Re-Genes. Since they were a telepath, they were exposed to "deviant" thinking early on. Once they started to be deployed as a cuckoo, there was ample time to see the world through different eyes. However, how Sidestep dealt with this is personal. Some might still be stuck in the same lines of thinking, while others lost "faith" before they even escaped the Farm. Maybe we'll get around to talk about it in game, so I don't want to say anything that applies to all Sidesteps. There will be choices there.

Argent is able, in some paths, to permanently mark / wound Sidestep. Plot armor and bad endings aside, will every one of the main cast be able to wound Sidestep so fully down the line?

Maybe. Probably.

Alpha spoilers: Has Ortega ever suspected that Chen was threaded by Hollow Ground?

Spoilers. Not telling.

Alpha spoils: Did Ortega ever air their Hollow Ground relation suspicions about Step to Chen before he got threaded? Did Chen ever air his suspicions about Step being a secret spy to Ortega?

Not the former, definitely the latter.

Beside the pain-gate (and boosting), are there other body or biological modifications implemented in cuckoos that humans don't have? If yes, what are they, and is Sidestep aware of them?

It varies depending on the cuckoo. Usually it's mods to help with their information gathering. Sidestep had no need of such recordings since it was impossible to record telepathic impressions. It was useful to have a "clean" cuckoo to use in places where they scan for mods.

Is Lord Ember "a collector of villain memorabilia"?

No.

And of course, just out of curiosity... Who would be most likely to dress up as a squatter in order to scout a waterplant, Ortega or Jake?

Ortega.

Please excuse my tinfoil hat but was what happened during Herald's dinner actually a microquake? Or perhaps stress touching on triggering a dormant layer of Herald's boost abilities?

Good question.

Could HG potentially get Regina to forget all about Step and that any confirmations are just fake?

Yes.

Alpha spoilers: Could telepathic connection between Sidestep and HG be able to strengthen HG's red-threads to a degree where they wouldn't even need touch or to say the words aloud for their powers to work on someone?

No.

Was the memory of being seven and standing on a boardwalk HG's sibling's childhood memory?

No.

What had Nocturne done or said that had pissed off Alvarez?

Called her tacky.

Is the Impostor limited to either Sidestep's or Puppet's powers or do they have their own powers as well?

Hehehehehehhe.

Character lore question connected to Jake: Jake mentions in his lore post about HG that "They do that, don't they? Change things. Change people.", does Jake nowadays suspect at all HG's actual powers are somehow connected with the way people change around HG?

Yeah.

Does each regene have different tattoos, or are there regenes with the same tattoos? Are sidestep's tattoos unique? Funny question (kinda) but who designs the regene tattoos?

They are all unique, like snowflakes or fingerprints. There are some common themes between similar powersets and symbols though. And yes, there is a person at the farm whose job it is to sit down and design and catalog every single tattoo and bar code. Sidestep never met them, that part was kept away from the Re-Genes, to make the tattoos feel natural, like a part of you.

Could Thunderhead have been able to use her powers successfully on HG or would they have been able to notice her powers influence?

Hmmm good question. HG would notice, but perhaps not immediately. They have taken some precautions towards things like that though.

Alpha spoilers: will it be possible get the Herald lore about when his and brother's boosts kicked in in the future if we don't do the innocent stay with herald ending?

Yes, there will be more chances.

How many people can HG thread in a row before starting to suffer from mental exhaustion

Not many. It's an exhausting process.

Alpha spoils for argent At the end of rebirth, when argent has step pinned to the wall and they can't telepathically break free and she's uh. Call it playing with them like a cat does a mouse. Would she have had any concerns about her rather ruthless behavior getting out or was she kind of already intending some uh extra judicial justice and snack time? If the latter would she have cracked the armor to see who she was snacking on or would she have just nommed and gotten rid of the armor?

Depends on the villain. A villain who just blew up the museum with people inside might have been a snack.

Completely random and outta the blue question but one I've been thinking about for a while now: Are Herald's powers actually flight or is it more like gravity manipulation? The fact he can seem to stop the full impact when Step puts him on the ground during training (not sure if this should be spoiled but gonna do it to be safe)as well as being able to levitate Step while they're touching makes me think its not just flight but something more

Good spot.

At the end of rebirth when argent can have step pinned to the wall and step actually does succeed in getting free telepathically and argent falls unconscious, what does argent think happened there? Step is not outed as a telepath.

Most likely gas. Villains love gas.

SPOILERS. In the playable teaser there is a situation where Sidestep gets captured and the Ratking bails them out. Given a situation were Hollow Ground has no reason to suspect telepath shenanigans and Ortega is pretty sure Sidestep is the Villain, what do they think happened here? Without knowledge of the Ratking I imagine things get confusing fast.

Yeah, the Rat King is a massive curve ball for everyone. Nobody will see them coming. I'm so proud of the girls! I think most people will leap to the conclusion that the villain has an accomplice, or maybe even two people using/sharing the same suit. It has been known to happen.

Is opening 9th Gate an automatic game over or just baaad?

No auto game over until book four (so I reset them to 7). Not sure yet if I will give you a peek of what might happen in book three. I probably will, but can't promise.

Alpha spoilers? better safe than sorry: What hypothetically could have happened to step if Mortum had shot them with the gun when it was empty? What would Mortum have done with them?

Probably dumped them somewhere embarrassing like the harbor, with a towel and a note once they climbed out. Basically to leave them the hell alone.

[Pick your lore!](#)

[Jan 22, 2022](#)

For this month, I feel like writing about bad guys. I can't include all on the poll since I know some are spoilers to be discovered (Hollow Ground, Heartbreak), but there are some others being mentioned that might be interesting.

Psychopathor

14%

The Catastrofiend

47%

The Void

27%

The Crack

3%

Vitruvian

9%

Poll ended Jan 31, 2022 · 119 votes total

[Time to ask questions!](#)

[Jan 20, 2022](#)

New year, new thoughts. Take your time to ask some questions, about the story, the world, my process or anything that strikes your fancy.

[Re-Gene creation and production.](#)

[Jan 8, 2022](#)

Historical background.

All Re-Genes begin their life in the massive genetic database of the GeniTech corporation. This register was built during the seventies and early eighties when GeniTech was focused on growing organs. As there was a severe lack of both organs, blood, and skin for a medical system increasingly able to treat the previously untreatable, they were given access to vast hospital databases of blood and DNA samples through various research projects.

This, in many parts, government-sponsored research quickly bore fruit, and in 1986 GeniTech presented their first vat-grown organs, quickly replacing many of the mods used to treat things like heart failure. As the organs could be genetically tailored to apply to a large segment of the population, many previously used methods like dialysis, pacemakers, and insulin became stopgap measures awaiting a suitable organ to be grown.

However, once these technologies became accepted on a larger scale, it became obvious that it was not as cost-efficient to cure an ailment as it was to treat it. Parts of the GeniTech board pushed for the methods to be taken further, and project Methusalem was born.

Now that medical technology had advanced, a cure for human aging was the holy grail everybody sought. While some companies invested heavily into cryo-tech to preserve the already ancient with the money to pay for it until technology had a chance to catch up, others focused on mods and artificial bodies. As neural interfaces became smoother, experiments were made where brains were extracted from their host bodies and put in fully artificial constructs. While this worked in the short term, the subjects quickly succumbed to either the inherent degradation of brain tissue due to aging or to what became called ABS, Artificial Body Syndrome. A sufferer of ABS would become increasingly withdrawn, the neural interface breaking down until the artificial body could no longer be controlled, trapping the mind in a paralyzed, or occasionally wildly spasming, body. It was theorized that the reason for this was that the human mind could not see itself in the artificial body, and the self-image would break down. This had been seen on a smaller scale with some recipients of limb replacements, and it was theorized that it was related to whatever caused AHS, the Alien Hand Syndrome.

Project Methusalem was an attempt to circumvent this issue by growing a replacement body from the subject's own genetic matrix. While this would work for sufferers of physical ailments, it did nothing to mitigate the numerous afflictions of the aging brain. While research into dementia and Alzheimer's had been ongoing, no cure had been found. Even the causes were debated, and it became increasingly obvious like just with cancer, there was no single silver bullet that could solve everything. After their relocation to Los Diablos in 1992, GeniTech acquired a small startup focused on artificial intelligence and got to work.

A new division was set up, focused on merging GeniTech's organ growth technology with artificial intelligence and solving the transplant mind issue. One of the major problems with growing whole bodies for anything but organ harvesting had been that methods used for the accelerated growth process almost inevitably resulted in either Microcephaly, Anencephaly, or other issues with the developing brain. While the Artificial Intelligence part of the project quickly ran into computational power issues, a consultant brought in to work on digital storage for analog memories had a breakthrough.

For a long time, the biggest obstacle had been the actual transfer of thoughts from a human mind to an artificial one. Research into mental changes resulting from the Boost drugs showed that there were ways that the human mind could manipulate certain materials, and telepathically programmable memory circuits were born. For the first time, a purely artificial brain running implanted memories could be put into a vat-grown body and make it function. It was a breakthrough!

It was also economically unsustainable. The memories implanted in the artificial mind were subject to the telepath's discretion and were not a direct copy of the donor's. They were also subject to breaking down unless subjected to continual reinforcement and conditioning. The project was on the verge of being shut down when the man in charge of the telepathic side of the project, Dr. Ljungstrand, made a suggestion that the board could not ignore.

Since the clones were grown from scratch with carefully curated genetic profiles, why not fuse this with the research into boost drugs already done by other companies? It had already been shown that animal research into the subject rarely yielded transferable results, but with human embryos, you could experiment with genes and dosage with a minimum of ethical concerns. The non-viable clones would simply be flushed until a suitable genetic baseline had been set up that would be able to accept the changes the boost drug wrought with a greater chance of success. Ljungstrand had contacts in the military willing to jointly fund such research into organic weapons.

The project was approved, with Dr. Ljungstrand as the director. It was located in the wastelands of Nevada to minimize leaks of both information and materials. It was nicknamed "The Farm," and it was here that the Re-Genes were born.

The Re-Gene Life Cycle

1: Selecting genetic lineage

Several genetic lineages have been determined to lead to a greater chance of successful boosting. These are mixed with new potentials; the Farm is always improving its stock. Often the material is

harvested from relatives of successful boosts, as this is one of the only ways to get some form of a preview of whether the genes would be compatible. Both splicing and recombining are used to test theories about which parts of the DNA are the most influential.

2: Preparing the first batch.

The first batch of prepared eggs is fertilized, this can run in the thousands, and once they have matured for five days, they are anchored to the artificial endometrium. This lab is nicknamed the spawning pond, and the process tends to be likened to how salmon spawn to make the process easier to understand. Once the eggs have attached, and the leftovers have been flushed, they are left for about five weeks before being subjected to their first, extremely diluted Boost flush. This takes place around the time when neural development first starts and serves two purposes. First, it weeds out any embryos likely to suffer from microcephaly or other major genetic issues, and second, it also destroys any completely incompatible with the boost drugs. Out of a thousand eggs, perhaps ten survive this process to the next stage.

3: The force growth stage.

Each embryo is extracted (together with the endometrium patch it is attached to) and moved to its own vat. It starts out as small as a test tube but will be changed many times during the process until the final container is large enough for a fully grown human. This process stage is similar to the tried and true GeniTech forced growth process, with some major differences. First, the growth is markedly slower. Growing a Re-Gene from embryo to pre-teen takes around two years, instead of the under a year that's the standard for organ clones. This allows the body to develop the required neural pathways, with growth paused entirely during the early phases of vital development.

Second, there might be an early-stage boost drug regimen applied.

4: The early boosting process.

No single boosting process is used for all Re-Genes; this is still a work in progress. There are two main variants currently used: Microdosing and Pubertydosing.

Microdosing: The lessons learned from Project Stripes led to the theory that low-level microdosing of boost drugs might result in a greater survival rate. Every Re-Gene batch is microdosed during several key points during their growth process. With every dose, there are fewer survivors, and the theory is that the body will get used to the drug, leading to greater final survival rates during the last stage.

Pubertydosing: In contrast, Re-Genes on this path are not fed the drug before the first evaluation. This is a more expensive path, as the numbers in the batch are not reduced early on, but results have suggested that it also leads to stronger boost results.

5: First evaluation.

After around two years, the surviving pre-pubescent Re-Genes are decanted for the first time and subjected to a full physical. Any defects are culled, functional organs are used for replacements. At this time, the AI chip is inserted to give it time to bond with the neural tissue. However, it is still blank, and Re-Genes have no memory of this stage.

6: Puberty and the boost drug.

Research on surviving boosts has shown that the survival rates are higher if the drug is taken at a young age, preferably at the onset of puberty. It is theorized that this is due to the body already being primed to undergo massive changes. Regardless of whether the Re-Genes have been previously microdosed or not, they are now individually monitored and prepared for the final boost process. Puberty is induced, a session of forced growth is implemented, and the boost drugs are added.

7: Induced boost results.

Contrary to popular belief, the boost process is neither random nor uncontrolled. The body reacts to the boost drug as it would have to a threat, and the powers resulting from the exposure vary depending on the environment and previous experiences. As the Re-Genes have no mental baggage yet, this is all physical. Some of the various ways of producing results are as follows:

Induced coma: This leads to greater survivability, as the mind and body are shut down and cooled almost to the point of death. The risk of the body destroying itself during the change is minimized, but the results are random and unpredictable.

Physical stimuli: In contrast, the body is subjected to physical stimuli to provoke it to defend itself. Pain, cold, heat, sharp objects, or crushing have all been used to induce boosts dealing with such things. This is a common path and produces good, military-grade Re-Genes.

Hormonal stimuli: The Re-Gene is flooded with chemicals inducing physical responses provoking aggression or fear. Adrenaline can give volatile results, and these experiments are always done in extra-secure facilities. Few but valuable survivors.

Mental stimuli: As the Re-Gene has no conscious mind, mental boosts are a rarity. Most of them are produced by the induced coma method, but there has also been experiment with massive loads of psychic stimulants and hallucinogens. Dr. Ljungstrand has pressed for more research into this, but it is less popular with the people providing the budget as they rarely lead to deployable results.

In general, no matter which boost process is used, the final leg of Re-Gene development takes around a year, though it has been known to both be quicker or take longer. Once the body has stabilized, it is time to implant the various microbes that live on and inside the human body. While it would have been preferable to introduce this at an earlier stage, the growth process and the boost drugs can have catastrophic effects on the gut biome.

8: Decanting.

The newly boosted Re-Gene is decanted and tested. Once more, they are examined for viability, and the ones deemed unfit are culled and harvested or used for further experimentation into their various boosted abilities. If there had been a hundred entering the boosting stage, maybe ten survives to decanting, and of those, maybe two or three are selected for memory implantation. However, the survivors will be strong, physically healthy, and with stable examples of powerful boosted abilities.

9: Memory implant.

Once decanted, the Re-Genes are implanted with their basic memories and training. This is a carefully curated batch of composite memories taken from a mixture of individuals. They are picked to induce loyalty, obedience, subservience, and other traits useful for a tool and a weapon. Most of the donors were fanatically loyal to a cause, able to set aside their individuality for the greater good, whether that be nation, religion, or political cause. Much of the memories are taken from soldiers, providing the Re-gene with basic training and military tactics and the general knowledge to function in a military setting. Re-Genes picked for other purposes can have varying skill packages. At this time, the Re-Gene is tattooed according to their purpose.

10: Basic training.

Memories mean little if they are not reinforced. Re-Genes are subjected to basic training to ensure the implanted behavior is set in stone. They learn how to work in teams, fight using their boosted abilities, and always obey their handlers. If the implanted memories are faulty, they will be retrieved and reprogrammed until the mind accepts what the AI chip tells it. They are also vaccinated and subjected to various diseases to prepare their immune system for the outside world. During this time, Re-Genes might be modded to make them more efficient. Once fully trained, they graduate into a semi-permanent team led by a military handler, installed with a pain-gate, and deployed where needed.

Some Re-Genes never leave the Farm, instead, they are used for training, experimentation, or other non-combat purposes their boosted abilities make them useful for.

11: Repair and retirement.

Re-Genes gravely injured, either in training or in the line of duty, are returned to the Farm for repair. They are retired if the damage is too great for either organic restructuring or mods. The AI chip is extracted, and the body is used to harvest organs and limbs for other, still useful, Re-Genes. The AI chip is analyzed and used to improve further generations or be implanted in new Re-Genes.

[QnA december \(spoiler version\)](#)

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Did Ace have acquaintances in Los Diablos?

Ace knew nobody in Los Diablos.

What's the worst trouble ace's precog has gotten them out of?

Ace's precog got them into more trouble than out of.

Do Pelayo and Ward (still) harbour ✨ feelings ✨ for each other?

Pelayo and Ward has the complicated status, as some epilogues show...

Could Sidestep's nanovores ever create a "solid" weapon similar to what Argent does with her limbs?

Step's nanovores could technically do that, but it is very unlikely.

Excluding the fiend because that feels like the obvious choice, who is the person Mitchell is most afraid of?

Hollow Ground.

Did Hollow Ground indeed add the strobe lights to the club to keep Ortega out?

No, that's just a club thing.hollow ground doesn't know....

After HG has successfully red-threaded someone, do they require touch again to strengthen or weaken their influence over the person or can they do it remotely, no touch required?

They need touch to strengthen it, though they have methods to keep the bond from weakening remotely.

Sorry for the repeat, my curiosity was stronger than restraint so...: who was the "visitor" that Sidestep takes for a squatter at the waterplant?

Obviously just a squatter.

Have Jake and Ortega ever interacted (beyond the parkfield fight)? What do they think of each other, even if they haven't?

They have fought, more than once. No clear winner, though neither have gone at it for real. Jake has stuck to his solid/strong/tough form and not phased. He doesn't want that trick to be too well known.

When ashfall is in his dispersed form, are his thoughts obscured like Jake's when he's not solid?

No.

at one point in the dinner scene ortega says "I got my apartment blown up when you were dead, and that's only one of about a dozen more or less messed up things that happened". What were some of those other things?

Honestly, I haven't decided yet.

Would/does Chen have an opinion of HG without the red strings in his mind? I know he says that Ortega might be onto something, but is it a thing worth pursuing?

Chen needs to think about it. Too soon to say.

Was HG already a kingpin when the arrest occurred?

No, but powerful.

Would Mortum be able to reprogram Argent's nanovores so they could feed on inorganic material instead?

Technically, yes. But they are more... willful and evolved than Sidesteps sample.

Is Argent's human body actually still there underneath/inside the nanovores, so to speak, or have she and the nanovores completely merged together?

Argent's body, such as it is, is still there.

Who wanted to buy Mortum's gun?

A collector if villain memorabilia.

That HG sib who died in police custody... Did they have a proper burial or was it say more of a sidestep funeral with an empty casket?

The body was not returned to the family, but buried by the state.

Does Argent's super-strength come from the nanovores, or is it a separate power?

It is a combination of Argent's powers and the nanovores. A joint effort.

why did none of the other regenes in sidestep's batch survive?

Because the boost drug is dangerous, and the effects unpredictable.

I'm not sure if that was already asked but... How would Ortega react if Step told them about Re-gene part before scenes in 18 chapter?

Probably in a similar way.

Why did Blaze and Steel split and how did they get together? Also what was the dynamic of steel/blaze/charge when Steel and Blaze were together? What were The Rangers opinions on it?

They met during official occasions, and Chen, being Chen was less than enthused about being there. Blaze tried to cheer him up, and they started to talk. They were never officially a thing, the Rangers or the Guardians knew nothing. Blaze detested Ortega, and the feeling was somewhat mutual. Both of them like being the center of attention, and Ortega was simply better at it. It fell apart because neither of them wanted it to become something more, and thus it became more of an effort than it was worth. If Ricardo was in the picture, Blaze probably felt that Chen was comparing them. If Julia was in the picture, Chen had a feeling that Blaze might be more interested in her.

Hypothetically, if step hadn't been taken by the farm at the end of heartbreak, would the Ranger's medical team have been able to save them? Curious if the farm is more advanced or not. Happy new year and thank you for everything!

The Rangers would have been able to save Sidestep, but they might not have been able to repair as much damage. Being ruthless and fast and taking massive risks can pay off.

If Dr. Finch knew Sidestep was a telepath, how would that change the protocol of their meetings? Would dampeners be installed or would she recommend a therapist with more experience on telepathy?

If she had known, she would have used portable dampeners, or, if trust had been established, she might agree to do it without. She has experience in treating telepaths, that's actually the reason why Ortega suggested her name to Sidestep (though they didn't tell Sidestep, just that she was used to treating people like them and took privacy very seriously, which she does.)

Were Hollow Ground's parents involved with the farm / the regene programme at all? For example, were they on the client list for regene organs?

No.

When Steel tells Sidestep about destroying the "autopsy" pictures, Sidestep tells us he's lying. What did he do with them? Where are the pictures now?

Steel doesn't get rid of evidence, but where he keeps it is a good question.

Did Mortum find out sidestep is a telepath before or after Heartbreak happened?

After.

What happens to regenes when they get older? Are they recycled/harvested for parts when they reach the end of their service? Who are the oldest regenes and are they still serving/where are

they?

It depends. This is still a young technology, so it's not like there are geriatric Re-Genes running around. Most of the combat ones die before age becomes an issue, but ones who fail to perform physically and lack other uses tends to be recycled/harvested. Some are used within various training programs, and others for research into their powers. The oldest Re-Genes has been working for the Farm in non-combat roles as their powers are useful in that role. They are few, not even a handful.

Can HG feel it if someone say tugs at the red strings trying to fight the compulsion? Are they able to tell when something needs to be reinforced before an issue is caused?

No, it's experience and judgment.

Would HG be able to thread Argent or would the sharks take a bite out of the moray before it could be achieved?

Oh they'd bite before any threads could be placed. Argent is as safe as Ortega. Dual minds are tricky.

Has Argent thought further ahead of making the regenerator work? What kind of outcome does she imagine, and what would she want to do with her life if it works well enough that she is divested of her powers (ie. her impervious skin and limb malleability)?

Spoilers, you might get to talk about that in game.

Does a Re-Gene's pain gate have to be moved/removed in order to access their AI chip?

No. The pain gate sits lower down the spine.

What would HG's reaction and/or actions been if family member didn't want to follow into the family business?

Probably not too good at first.

Tw suicide and also real dark question in general, sorry folks. Are suicides/suicide attempts common between regene? How does the farm treat those occurrences?

It's about as common as in any population subjected to massive stress. The Farm tries to deal with it through conditioning, and occasionally they have to do a fresh mind wipe to return the mind to default settings and try again.

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Who's a pretty kitty?

His name is Nosse (Nosferatu), whom we adopted as a 3 year old together with his brother Samhain, who sadly passed away years ago due to congenital heart failure. He's a lovely orange with orange eyes (half american bombay, his brother was coal black) who loves people and hates other cats. He doesn't miow, just does these little chirps, but he's very talkative with them. Likes to sleep on top of people and wake at sunrise to get fed. Super fastidious and tries to bury every time we spill something. Not his litterbox tho, he does all the burying on the floor next to it. Wouldn't want to get dirty. He was an indoor cat for the start of his life, so the outdoors is still scary and good for small walks only unless it's windy, wet or cold. Then he stays inside. Wouldn't poop or pee outside, that's for barbarians. Doesn't understand birds, but hunts mice. Has been in a few fights with other cats, and has won them all. He has very thick fur and likes getting brushed, and becomes twice the size when angry or scared.

Do you trust the cat to leave those plants alone?

Yes, he doesn't eat indoor plants at all. Not even when I try to grow him cat grass. That's the main reason for him going outside.

How was the movie industry affected by the Big One? What is the USA's like in present time?

The movie industry was devastated, but quickly recovered. The current center is Atlanta, though there is a sizable NY industry too. The US in the Fallen Hero world is more... hmmm stressed? It's been dealing with four decades of internal refugees, the loss of the west coast, and lessened international importance. The self-image has taken a turn, but unlike with 9/11, there's no outer enemy to direct the anxiety at.

Are there reality TV shows in the FEZ? Are there any Hero or enhanced people themed ones around?

Reality TV shows are not as common as today due to the privacy protection laws. They tend to be fictional, though "based on a true story".

Do the Rangers prefer to live in survivor ran areas/buildings or corporate run ones? What about Dr Mortum? Do they prefer criminal run areas?

All the rangers live in corporate run areas, since that encompasses most of downtown. Dr. Mortum's lab is in an industrial area, which is also corporate run. Easier to stay under the radar if you know the right people.

Would Ortega consider being called a Silver Fox or a D/MILF insults or compliments?

Both. More the former though, they are sensitive about age.

What does the cutting edge of armor technology look like in the fallen hero world?

Full flight capability. Plasma, laser or railgun armaments. Reactive armor, energy shielding or stealth capacity. Exoskeletons. Fully submersible. But armors tends to be specialized, and not have every single option out there. Some are like tanks, others like helicopters, artillery or submarines. There are more experimental ones, like the "swarm," with one person controlling a multitude of drones.

Would you mind explaining some of the more advanced weaponry available to people who either aren't mods or boosts, or wish to further enhance their setups.

Energy weapons exist and are portable, down to handgun size. However, they might not be the best choice unless you have access to a portable generator (as in an armor) since they use massive amounts for each shot and battery capacity runs out. Sidestep's gun could fire five times at the max setting, though Ortega could reload it (they had a plug for it made). Railguns and related magnetically propelled missiles are available, from small needle guns to large armor-mounted cannons. Plasma has mostly replaced flamethrowers since they have similar effects to napalm technology but is easier to control and fire. Napalm is the cheaper variant. Various magnetic and EMP devices exist to disrupt mods. The full range of modern rifle/handgun/missile weaponry exist. Drones are handy, and can be easily controlled with goggles and joysticks.

What would each of the Rangers + Mortum say is the dumbest thing they have ever done and why? What would you say is the dumbest decision they've made?

Ortega: Doing something dumb? Why, never. (going hand to hand with the Catastrofiend)

Steel: Agreeing to become Marshal. (not telling Ortega a thing they found out about Sidestep)

Argent: Agreeing to fake-date Herald. (trusting Francis (not telling who that is))

Herald: Not stopping his brother from taking the boost drugs. (deciding to lie in therapy)

Mortum: trusting Vitruvian. (not stealing Vitruvian's notes)

Process question! Do you have any particular tips/tricks for tracking all the endstates/threads you're planning on picking up in later entries? (There's so many epilogue variations!)

Are there any scripting lessons you're carrying from Retribution onward?

Oh boy. here we go:

1: Don't have a major ending state unless you already know which scene will start with that end state, and how to fuse it back to a major path eventually.

2: Makes notes in the startup file or notebook what each variable actually is and tracks. (I learned that in retribution)

3: The amount of work it takes to use a variable might not be relative to how much enjoyment it is for the reader. I have cut out variables for that reason, and added variables people have wished for because it has been little work for me to do so. Sometimes it has been a lot of work to add a variable, but if I think that it is worth it and adds to the story I want to tell, I will do it.

4: Think about long term consequences of deceptively easy variables. I planned to add a pet variable in Retribution, but decided against it, since it would unduly influence Sidestep's behavior. I want people to be able to explore bad paths without worrying about whether their cat gets fed.

5: Better to track a variable if not, it might be used in the future.

If the ROs were forced to take a vacation outside the city, where would they go and what would they do?

Right now (because this varies): Chen would like some nice mountain forests and go hiking. Ortega would go skiing, preferably offpist. Argent would like to visit Atlanta and catch some shows. Herald would like to go to Hawaii and lie on the beach.

How in the world do you manage to keep track of all of your variables? (I have a spreadsheet for my small game, but even that is getting out of hand)

I add a *comment in the startup file with what the variable does right underneath it. I try to group them in related sections. I try to name them logical things so I remember what it is just by seeing it.

Do dampeners work on all psychic powers, or just telepathy?

It also work on related powers, and, in fact, some powers that are not related.

Will we meet and/or fight other members of the guardians in book 3?

Most likely, but it might vary depending on path.

How strong is Temerain? how does she utilize it in fights, and whats her limit when it comes to lifting and interacting with things?

Her limits are as high as the author needs her to be at the moment. She is definitely more strength based than for detailwork, her telekinesis is good at lifting and tossing. She doesn't use it for direct punches, but throws, breaks and tosses things. Her favorite move is using one villain as a weapon against the others.

Were any of Ljungstrand's ideas on "implanted memories" or how trauma/traumatic memories affect the mind used in the creation of Re-genes AI chips or in telepathic experimentation?

Yes. They were central.

Curious, are there any side characters going to therapy?

Bo. Mia.

In Ljungstrand's telepathic power levels, both 4 and 9 are labeled as "other", what does the definition "other" exactly mean in terms of telepathic powers and how do the 4 and 9 branches differ from each other?

Nr. 4 is the root, Nr. 9 is a branch. Nr. 4 is for those telepathic roots that are not emotional, rational or subconscious. This means a source of telepathy that affects other parts of the mind, outside the id/ego/superego doctrine. It's basically a placeholder for weird shit not yet encountered, it is VERY rare. Nr. 9 is more common. This is how the telepathic powers influences someone, outside the more common project, receive, influence, control.

What was the very first scene written for Fallen Hero?

Actually the very first scene in both book and game, being punched through a wall as Argent.

Does a Re-Gene usually have a single genetic donor or does it vary? (with the Farm splicing select genetic info from multiple donors)

It varies. Multiple donors is the most common, though some pure-strains exist.

Approximately what percentage of Los Diablos' population is boosted and/or modded? How does it compare to other major cities in the FEZ and eastern US?

If we discount minor mods comparable to glasses or hearing aids, around 1%. It's about ten times the numbers of any other FEZ city. There are few mods or boosts in the eastern US, at least officially. Maybe a few hundred in each city.

What percentage of the boosted population does each category of boost make up? (e.g. 'classic' boosts make up 30% of the boosted population, psychics make up 10%, etc.)

It's always hard to estimate, but here's an educated guess: Around 50% are minor boosts, not really something to write home about. They don't have any major changes to the body or mind, and usually don't bother trying to use them for a living. Around 30% are boosts affecting normal physical attributes, like speed, strength, durability, regeneration and the like. Especially the latter ones have a disproportionate amount of boost survivors. Around 15% are psychic boosts and similar (low-grade sensitives are included in the minor boosts above). They don't have major physical changes, but have issues with mental health. The remaining 5% are the weird and dangerous ones whose powers truly breaks the laws of physics. Elemental powers, massive physical transformation, teleportation or flight.

In FH: Rebirth we can defeat the heroes present at the gala without utilizing our telepathy or the nanovores in any obvious way, instead relying on skill and our new armor, thus leaving the Rangers/public unaware that we do in fact have both powers and a secret weapon. For all they know this new villain could just be some crazy non-enhanced guy in a fancy battle suit.

But how much further will we be able to push this advantage? Will we be able to go through FH: Retribution without the Rangers figuring out that we are the same one who manipulated lady Argent if we play our cards right? How might the story change if we remain an unknown telepath? So far only Mortum, having built the armor, would have reason to suspect us and the good doctor seems unlikely to tattle on us to the Heroes.

My goal is that you will be able to go through the story without revealing anything officially if you play your cards right.

Also, how (un)wise is it to strap a literal weapon of mass destruction to ourselves and go fist fight some superheroes? It sure doesn't seem ideal to be caught at the center of another Nanosurge...

Sidestep has done more dangerous things, it's a good weapon of last resort if nothing else.

Does Sidestep's grave have their full name on it or just Sidestep? Or Both?

It just has Sidestep on it, as well as an inscription. What that inscription is, I won't tell. You will find that out in game if you ever visit (parts of it will vary depending on playthrough too). Ortega kept Sidestep's name secret to the end.

Assuming Ortega never found Step at the diner, how would Chen react to seeing Step at the dog park? Would he approach them? And would he tell Ortega about seeing Step again?

Chen would not have approached, but would have started to research. If that research had proved fruitful, he would have approached Sidestep himself in good time. He would not have told Ortega until he had been 100% sure.

What did the Void keep in their own "void cages"?

Good spot. The "void cage" technology is indeed based on Void's powers. The way they used it led to some interesting breakthrough in electromagnetic theory. Dr. Mortum would hate to admit it, but the void cage is also based on Vitruvian's work, and Vitruvian occasionally worked with the Void in early on in his career. As for what the Void kept in their cages? Themselves. People.

What did Anathema think of Ortega, really? What did they think of their work as the Marshal? Was Anathema privy to Ortega's personal vendettas and secrets? Who was Anathema closest to on the Rangers' team?

Anathema liked Ortega a lot, it's very easy to do so. However, there was also a part of Themmy that was a bit intimidated, and occasionally scared. It was a bit like "I'm glad they're on my side". Anathema was privy to a lot of Ortega's personal stuff, Themmy is an easy person to confide in. It is hard to say who Themmy was the closest to, they sure hung out with Ortega and Sidestep the most, but they had a very close relationship with Sunstream. Anathema thought that Marshal Charge was a mad idea that should never have worked yet somehow did.

Ashfall/Pyroclast & Ortega: what was the beef? What was it about Ortega that soured his opinion of them? Especially in regards to the possible Sidestep relationship? And did he feel vindicated or upset that his opinion of Charge getting them killed was [in many's eyes] right?

As you no doubt has realized now, Ortega can be a bit overbearing and abrasive, especially when they don't get their way. Like Sidestep, Ashfall liked being independent, but unlike with Sidestep, Ortega never found a balance between them. Ashfall thought Ortega took stupid risks just for the hell of it, which was fine if they had been a vigilante, but wasn't fitting for someone running the Rangers. It increasingly became a case of Ashfall thinking that he could do this better. And, since Ashfall liked Sidestep, there was also a bit of worry that Ortega would get them killed because Sidestep had no sense of self-reservation. Yes, he did feel vindicated when Sidestep died, but he also felt deeply ashamed that he hadn't stepped up earlier and done any of the things he was talking about doing. It was in part this which got him to finally accept becoming a Ranger and step up his game. Put his money where his mouth was.

How many dollars did mortum charge step for that fancy set of custom armor? What's the upkeep run?

I have no idea what the dollar is worth in the Fallen Hero universe so I will settle for A Lot of Dollars. The upkeep depends on the damage taken, but the electricity bill is a constant pain in the ass. It's expensive to charge.

Uh,, yeah, I have a question @ Ortega: what the FUCK, my guy

I suspect know what this is in reaction to, and I can only say one thing: Ortega is complicated and also the protagonist of their own story.

Did Sentinel have a cape? Considering his flight is wind-based I imagine it would be helpful for getting lift

Not a cape, but a wingsuit. Think of him a bit like a sugar glider, but with the ability to pull back the wingfolds into the suit. A cape would flutter too much, he needs some structural stability.

How did Chen and Ortega feel about the headquarters move? What is the old hq used for now?

They both felt it was nice to get a fresh start. Less memories, and better facilities. Chen was one of the ones pushing for it. The old hq is undergoing renovations, the LDPD is planning to move part of the operations in there soon.

Do Re-Genes get sick like regular humans? Or have they been engineered to have like a perfect immune system or something?

They get sick like regular humans, their immune systems vary.

How old was HB during the HB incident?

Late teens.

What kind of drugs would allow Sidestep to put their telepathy to sleep for a while while still being conscious and operational? Is there anything like that on the market? If there is, is Sidestep aware it exists? And what effects would numbers have on Sidestep—would the shielding of thoughts be external like with any other user, or would it also impact their telepathy?

There is a drug called "Talodine" which suppresses telepathic (and telepathic-adjacent) abilities. Sidestep knows it exists, and has experienced it's effect more than once. It's quite rare, and not something commonly available since it's quite a specialized drug. Numbers also affect a telepath if they are used. The shielding of thoughts would be external, like for a normal user, but it would also affect telepathic fine motor control. It would be a bit like trying to do fiddly things while very drunk, or listening to a broadcast through bad static. For a strong telepath it would be useless since their shields would have the same amount of protection already.

Just what kind of impact has having superheroes and villains had on the cultural landscape of Los Diablos? Are civilians desensitized to the chaos and the villains, or do they on some level live with fear? Do any of them resent corporate heroes or find them to be a flawed system? What is general public opinion on heroes vs vigilantes vs villains as a whole?

You do get desensitized pretty fast, the people who react the most tend to be the newcomers. It is a human instinct to downplay dangers that you are surrounded by every day, even if they are objectively a threat. Cars. Smoking. Covid. This is no different. In fact, some citizen take a pleasure in being as jaded as possible. "Oh yeah, my last car got wrecked when some asshole decided to throw it at the cops. You won't believe the problem I had with the insurance." That the view on heroes, vigilantes and villains are tends to vary. Just like today if you think about people's varying views on cops or the military. There is no general public opinion, it is a thing that is, just like the weather and earthquakes. Some support and are grateful, maybe they or someone they knew even got saved by someone famous. Others resent the power and privileges, others think heroes are no better than the villains, just with better press.

Bit silly, but have to ask.. what are the fire risks of Ortega's powers? Do their mods have anything to sort of manage that, or has Ortega accidentally (or on purpose) started fires before with their powers?

Ortega has caused fires, both intentionally and accidentally. Just like anything electrical, sparks can cause fires, especially in dry conditions. There is no way around that really, but the latest generation of

emitters are safer than the ones when Sidestep was active. They are less prone to accidental discharges or power leaks.

How do the Rangers and Mortum think about their gender? Do they think about it at all? How would they describe themselves, gender-wise? To what extent did they question, deconstruct and explore their own gender, and if they did, what triggered that questioning? Are they currently happy with their gender identity and gender expression?

For this I will split Ricardo and Julia, but keep Dr. Mortum as one entry as the F and M versions have a similar view. Also, please note that I do not address whether a character is cis or trans. There are characters in the book who are named to be one or the other, but there is room to do readings in either direction for the others. I will not take away anybody's truth there. Cis is not a default, it is a choice of the reader.

Ricardo: He's very confidently male, he's secure in his body, and likes it (apart from the grey hairs). He never really experimented with gender presentation, but he also never really had any fears of playing with his masculinity. Could totally wear nail polish or other female-coded accessories, but wouldn't see it as affecting his manhood. It's just style (and he's a bit flamboyant).

Julia: She's been a bit back and forth. When she was younger, she embraced the male parts of herself because that's what she perceived gave her power and freedom. She was already tall, which gave her a head start, and added to it with muscles and training, as well as shorter hair. She had a bit of a punk phase, and had she fallen in with other (more queer) friends, she might have headed down the road of proper genderquestioning. As it was, her rebellious streak made her reclaim her femininity as she matured, because why shouldn't she be able to kick someone's ass and look smashingly hot when she did so? Nobody should be able to dictate how she's supposed to look to be respected. These days, she's comfortable in her gender, but is aware that if things had been slightly different, she might also have been. She still likes playing with masculine attributes, but not to hide her femininity.

Chen: Chen is male. Has never considered himself to be anything but. Why question what is? It's only lately that the question of what gender actually is has occurred to him, he was a bit slow on the uptake.

Argent: Argent has a complicated relationship with gender. Just like her body, it doesn't quite feel real to her. It's an affectation, an act perfected through countless hours in front of the mirror. To her, gender is attributes more than emotion, and she has spent a lot of time thinking about it and experimenting. She has created what she feels is her best self, but is it anything like her true self? She's not sure, but she can't allow herself to be uncertain. Her self-image is her everything.

Daniel: Even if Danny hasn't spent much time thinking about his own gender, he has spent a lot of time thinking about what gender means. How you are supposed to act. The legacy to live up to. He didn't like how manhood was defined when he grew up, he never fitted into the mold. And yet, the other alternatives felt equally constrictive. One reason he came west was to re-invent himself and be able to explore who he wants to be. He hasn't got exactly got room to do it, though. The PR team is as strict a teacher as his family ever was.

Dr. Mortum: Dr. Mortum has made a choice and is comfortable in that. How they have chosen to look like. How to act. How to live their life. They thought that being a villain would somehow give them freedom to be themselves, but the real freedom came post-retirement. Any act they put on is for their own accord, they don't need to please anybody else. Such a relief.

Does Elena have any favourite dishes to cook, particularly to cook for/ with Ortega and/or Step?

Tamales, it's all hands on deck for that. She's got such fond memories of it.

Was Danny's brother also a fan of Sidestep or was his favourite hero someone else?

Josh thought Mashal Hood was super cool. Masked, massive, took no shit, rode a cool bike.

What kinda hero would Danny's brother have been? Would they of been a team or would they have eventually gone solo?

What makes you sure he would have been a hero?

How did things go for Danny when he first moved out to Los Diablos? Where did he end up staying? Did he know anyone?

It was tough at first. He had some money, and ended up staying in a cheap hotel. He didn't know anybody, but during that first year, he did end up meeting a lot of people. A lot them was the kind of people he had never interacted with before, people running soup kitchens, drunks and drug users, social service people and other ones down and out of luck. He lost some of his naivety there, but he never lost his faith in people. He's still got some friends from those days, and funnels a lot of money their way without making a big thing of it. He desperately wants that side kept out of the papers, he knows the media team would ahve a field day with it.

There's been hints that you've been writing an emotional scene in your latest chapter... Any chance you would copy and paste a sentence or two from the new scene? A teaser? A crumblet of content?

"Oh." Her father. Dead. Military man. You've seen pictures. She doesn't talk about him much.

"I really don't feel like talking about him. Just... think about what you're doing, okay?" She shakes back her hair, then she holds out her hand for the bottle. You hand it to her. She takes a few deep gulps, coughs, then hands it back. Just like that, her smile returns, and the mask goes back on.

For Herald and Argent, I guess being boosted might count as the original motivator for becoming a vigilante. But what prompted that first step into actually being one, to actually act on that potential?

Argent: She needed to do something good to justify her existence.

Herald: He finally had the power to do something.

How did their first forays into vigilantism go? Had they been preparing/working themselves up to it and waited for a situation where they were needed? Or did they like just stumble upon crime?

Argent: She had been prepared, and willingly put herself in harm's way. This was all planned.

Herald: It was sort of planned? But he mostly fell into it through chance. He lived in a pretty skeevy area when he came to Los Diablos, so he didn't lack opportunity.

If Ortega hadn't been fast tracked to ranger status once they got their mods, would they have been tempted to be a vigilante?

Even if they would have liked it, they couldn't have afforded it. And Rangers were better than being a company man/woman.

Is touch-based telepathy influenced by dampeners?

Not to the same extent.

During the HB incident, how did HB feel about Sidestep? Was Sidestep a victim / threat among others, or was there familiarity / recognition / interest / pity or anything of the kind? Did HB mean to pull Sidestep into their memories?

That is, as they say, big spoilers.

If they had been given unlimited budget, what kind of weapons and devices would Mortum have devised for Sidestep to go against each of the rangers?

I think the main thing would have been to add some form of distance weapon, either plasma or a small rail gun. That would have been possible with a first-rate plasmacore. Same goes for energy shielding. Both would have helped enormously against the Rangers.

Mortum strikes me as a one-step-ahead kind of person. Is there a secret failsafe they can use against Sidestep in that armor?

Heh.

Do nanovores themselves have any capacity to feel pain, temperature changes, etc.?

No pain. That is a foreign concept. They can feel temperature changes and energy fluctuations, but there's no value judgment to them. There is a "danger" feeling when things run the risk of harming them, and a "pleasant" feeling when approaching food. It's the latter feeling Sidestep connects to and intensifies to get them to eat the right things.

Not to make that a tradition or anything, but I loved the cursed facts post in December last year, so... Are there any sweet facts you want to share about the main cast this year?

Guess it's a tradition now. Here are this year's worth of cursed facts:

First the quickie chat questions from the discord:

Where is anathema Malin

Chillin'

Can we get some more Dave info?

Dave had a hero name once, but when he told someone, they laughed, and he never mentioned it again. And no, I don't know what it was. He's just Dave now.

Okay, questions you can actually answer... How does the Chargebike look like?

Do a picture google of "40's motorbike" and you will see the style. Ortega's had a few over the years, not actual vintage, but inspired by. The retro aspect is cool, and works better with their mods.

will we get a mitchell's guide to anathema at some point ? :D

Mitchell's guide to anathema is all blockletters: DO NOT ENGAGE

Do some meats work better for nanovore satisfaction than others.

Human is the best.

Speaking of bikes... what kind of car does Ortega prefer to drive?

I don't think Ortega is as particular with cars. Just like with clothes, they drive what they give them.

as long as it's fancy. Danny has however crashed one of Ortega's cars.

can ortega swim or do they sink

Ortega can swim, but it does take more effort. Lounging on the side of a pool though. Give them a wetsuit and it works fine with the extra buoyancy.

Which one of the rangers makes the nanovores more... difficult to handle then. I'm thinking they might have a favorite

Oh yes. Danny.

What's Mortum's favourite car then, since they're the car fanatic of the bunch?

If you pic google "70's concept car" you might get an idea.

Do they ever attend car shows?

Oh yes. And loves concept cars. In fact... Ortega attends the same shows...

Do Dr. Mortum actually need glasses or is it just Fashion and Tech?

Mortum has no need of glasses

Does Mortum alter their cars? Like add new and/or dangerous tech. If so what was the worst addition?

Mortum always alter their cars. That's the point. The worst addition for the longest time was the remote driving thing, until they finally got it to work and now it is the best one.

On a related front: No flamethrowers. not anymore.

Was there a flamethrower incident?

Imagine shooting flamethrowers forward while driving.... physics suck.

does boost drug work on non-mammals? superbirds yes or no?

Superbirds is a yes. Insects, not that anybody is aware of.

Is jewelry a hazard on Ortega?

Not as long as it's not conductive. Gold is good.

If danny gets under the influence of alcohol or something does he start to float?

Danny do indeed often start to float while drunk!

Does anyone have/had tattoos?

No idea, probably Chen, though if he still has them I don't know.

Can Argent cut her hair / let it grow? And if not, does it mean it's the same length as when she... changed?

Argent can change the length of her hair at will!

what's danny's throwing arm like? how far could he chuck a guy in a fight?

Danny has an okay throwing arm, but he never really played baseball. Could chuck things pretty far tho

How long can Danny stay flying before he eventually gets tired

Danny can fly as long as he can stay awake. The flight doesn't affect it.

On a scale from go fuck yourself to double-dog dare, how likely are the rangers to engage in idiot dares?

Idiot dares, yes to NO: Ortega, Argent, Danny, Chen.

Can Argent paint her nails?

Argent can and does paint her nails on occasion.

Does ortega have a favorite dance style?

Anything close. In interviews, they would say Tango, but they're not as good as they think.

Would Mortum actually go clubbing

Mortum would go clubbing, used to do it when younger. Now it is mostly villain shindigs.

What's Elena's favourite dance style?

I think Elena liked the freeform ones the most, like disco. She has breakdanced, and wasn't bad. She was too busy for that most of the time tho.

best dancer in the rangers, past and present?

best dancer is Ortega, pretty much by default. NO. Wait. Sentinel. Could give them a run for it.

Is tia Elena's first name Elena or is that a middle name? My abuela has it as a middle name but it's what everyone calls her.

Elena's first name is Elena.

Has snowball ever had to defend the ranch

Snowball has defended the ranch. Ortega doesn't know about that. Elena does. She has seen what Snowball does.

what's snowball had to defend the ranch from?

Some unfortunate villains wanting to take a hostage

Office gossip with the past and present rangers. Have any of them dated? Office liaisons? Any secret feuds?

Hmmmm Ortega actually never dates staff. Ever. But the rumours fly anyway. Chen has had a secret feud with many. They never know, and now works elsewhere. Argent plays open favorites, and gets away with it. Daniel remembers people's birthdays and buys cake.

Would Mortum ever let us... borrow their gun?

Mortum might let you borrow their gun. There are a few possible guns in Sidestep's future.

what happened to psychopathor's gun? or what was left of it?

It fell off, what happened after that is...

How pissed was the SD when they got the gun home and found it ratless?

The SD doesn't care about the rat king.

The saved regene... what does he think of Sidestep?

The saved regene doesn't know Sidestep saved them.

Who would enjoy a car chase? I feel like Mortum and Ortega would be into it but idk about everyone else?

They would! As would Chen actually. Danny if he could fly.

is there any part of being the marshal and/or fighting villains that chen really does enjoy?

Chen actually likes keeping track of villains and making sure to break things up before it gets too bad. Chen also REALLY likes being clever and winning.

Some more cursed tidbits without questions:

Argent is fond of shouting out the answers to quiz show questions wanting to be first. Nobody else does though, so it becomes awkward.

It took Daniel about six months to learn how to jog again after getting his powers.

Chen has kissed Ricardo once. On the forehead. While Ric was blackout drunk a year or so after heartbreak. Ric doesn't remember.

Ortega wanted a name with "lightning" in it, but the cool ones were trademarked.

Argent could drive Mortum's car better than they can.

Ortega actually reads the most books, but nobody would believe it. And they joke their bookshelf is for show.

Everyone except Argent has skinnydipped, and she thinks they're all gross. Probably cleaning up after gross fight and celebrating. And drunk bbq. And out in the middle of nowhere and it's warm. There is always an occasion. Chen included. Nudity is not so much of a thing after the military

Spoon has eaten one of Ricardo's ties.

Julia do like her suit jackets without a shirt when she wants to distract/provoke.

Julia is in fact not above stealing a random man's jacket after fighting in civilian gear and getting her dress/top ruined.

That man has been Chen more than once.

Ricardo is better playing the himbo than Julia is the bimbo, and yet people underestimate her more. In a twintega universe she would hate that.

Ricardo grew a mustache as he got older since he hated he started to look like his dad.

[Ask the Julkatt your questions for december!](#)

[Dec 25, 2021](#)

God Jul and happy holidays to everybody, and don't forget to add your questions here!

[God Jul \(the spoiler version\)](#)

[Dec 23, 2021](#)

As I said in the last post, I had a small surprise for you all.

There's a little link below of the latest version of the game, have fun with it, it will be down after the new year. I've fixed and added things up to ch20, so there's new things to find.

Thank you once again.

/Malin

<https://dashingdon.com/play/malinryden/fhrgodjul20ch6755671234/mygame/>

[God Jul!](#)

[Dec 23, 2021](#)

I wanted to take a moment to thank everybody who has supported me. 2020 was bad, but 2021 has not been much better. My health is still bad, slowing progress on everything, and we're trying to find out if there's anything wrong apart from the stress. This patreon has continued to be one of the bright and shining lights in this year, and I am so very grateful to people who have chipped in to support me.

I know the holidays are pretty stressful for a lot of people (myself included), so there will be a small surprise for people who are chipping in at the highest time in a second post.

Hopefully 2022 will be better for us all.

Once again, thank you from the bottom of my heart.

/Malin

[Law and Order in the Free Western Territories](#)

[Dec 11, 2021](#)

Property

One of the central tenets of the WFTP (Western Free Trade Protocol), one of the protocols that founded the FWT (Free Western Territories), was inspired by the "principle of effective occupation." This set of guidelines was used during the colonization of Africa in an attempt to prevent conflict between colonizing powers over land and trading opportunities. In short, this document laid down several new rules for land ownership in the affected territories.

To claim ownership (even when previous paperwork existed), the party must effectively occupy the area in question. This would include:

- having representatives present in the area.
- buildings and/or infrastructure built or maintained.
- providing security and control of the area.

- adding to the local economy.

Once the above criteria had been fulfilled for a period of no less than a year, a claim could be registered with the WFSLB (Western Free States Land Bureau).

This was intended to expedite the rebuilding of the devastated areas without having people or companies risk being tied up with pre-disaster paperwork and unclear chains of ownership. It was also intended to reward active participation in reconstruction and dissuade passive ownership of currently useless land that might become valuable in the future.

In practice, this would divide the land between four different groups: Companies, survivors, organizations, and the military.

Of these, companies control the largest areas. Some were present before the disaster, while others moved in fast to claim what land they could. Mutual treaties between these powerful entities formed much of the current political leadership and organization of the FWT.

The second-largest group is the survivors. These were the people who remained behind or moved west before the official treaties were implemented. They are the backbone of the west, local communities, farmers, co-ops, and landowners who started rebuilding the moment the ash stopped falling. Much like early pioneer communities, they are self-sufficient and somewhat insular.

The third group is various organizations. This is a mixture of religious, political, or otherwise strongly motivated people moving west to start a new society together. They tend to be insular, sometimes aggressively so, and view any outsiders with suspicion as they don't share their particular views. This also includes several criminal organizations interested in setting up bases outside official control.

The fourth, and smallest group, is the US military, which went to great lengths to secure what they saw as areas vital to the nation's interest (including their former bases). They are not there officially, but it is an open secret.

Taxes and economy

There are no federal or state taxes, but the local communities can and do levy local taxes. Often these are called "fees" to avoid the stigma of taxation, which many moved west to escape. They are often tied to infrastructure use, like roads, water, electricity, schooling, policing, health care, and emergency services.

Policing

Most policing in the west is local and private. This ranges from tax-and-ticket funded community sheriffs to the large city-wide police departments whose funding comes from pooled company resources. The only federal presence is through the Ranger's initiative.

So what laws are being policed? Again, this varies depending on the community's priorities where the policing is being done.

In general, property laws, theft, and violence are a priority. The policing is done to keep order; whatever that entails depends on the local statutes. Individual freedom tends to be a priority. For example, speed limits are rarely enforced other than as a means for local communities to earn money from fines.

To use Los Diablos as an example, the city proper is policed by the LDPD, while the surrounding (non-company) communities have their own sheriffs or have paid into the system to get LDPD coverage. The LDPD gets its funds from the same Municipality Fund covering other vital city infrastructure. This fund is paid into by various companies and individuals in exchange for voting rights and representation on the city council. Thus the LDPD's main focus is making sure the city is safe and functional for business.

The city also contains several heroes (company-sponsored and freelancers) who are deputized to make arrests and enforce the laws. An unknown number of vigilantes fight "crime" to a varying degree but leave it to law enforcement to make actual arrests. They operate in a legal gray area, but the LDPD relies on them to the point of putting out bounties on various villains to entice capture. Vigilantes specializing in this often call themselves bounty hunters. The Guardians is a relatively new addition to the status quo. This is a personal initiative from Mayor Alvarez, partly sponsored by the city and private donations. It is intended to relieve some pressure from the local Ranger team, though whether successful or not depends on who you ask.

Courts and Sentencing

While based on the system present in the rest of the US, there are several important differences. There is no jury. Instead, guilt is determined by a trio of judges (one senior, two juniors) unless it is for routine cases where only one is used. Much of the judicial system is funded partly by fines; thus, fines are the most common punishment meted out even for crimes that would lead to jail time in the rest of the US. Of course, this means that people of means can break laws at their leisure, as long as they are prepared to pay the fines if they are caught. For people unable to pay the steep fines, incarceration and labor are alternatives. Few people have any illusions that this is a fair system, but it gives a semblance of predictability and order.

Jails and Incarceration

Jails are private and more akin to factories and work camps than anything else. They make money providing a cheap workforce unable to protest to various companies, and many jails are so closely tied to various companies that they might as well be just another factory with free labor. This slave labor is one reason why many companies see soaring profits despite the need to invest heavily in the infrastructure of the surrounding area.

For boosted or heavily modded prisoners, things are handled slightly differently. If their various powers are deemed useful, they will be added to the prison-factory system, though there is always a lot more security for them. Some, however, are far too dangerous. While the death penalty exists, the most common solution tends to be to use them for research and experimentation. Very little is still understood

about the changes the boost drug makes on the human body, and there are always researchers willing to pay steep prices to get access to rare specimens.

Protests and Debate

Of course, there is a lively debate about the current status quo. Human rights protesters have singled out the FWT for years, and the current practice has been called unconstitutional in the rest of the US. However, according to the treaties that formed the Free Western Territories, the Justice Department has no authority on the ceded ground. This has not stopped the UN from speaking out on the matter, but words are words, and money is money.

The human rights campaigners hope that once the current deal expires, which it will in less than a decade, the US government will step in and return things to some semblance of normality. Some, however, fear that the FWT is nothing more than an experiment to see whether this can be implemented in the rest of the states.

[December spoiler questions](#)

[Dec 10, 2021](#)

Tread carefully, this has spoilers for the full alpha demo:

It looks like Ortega might have an informant within HG's circle. Is Deadeye their mole, by any chance?

Not going to tell you that, might be something to uncover if you ally yourself with HG.

Will Steps who didn't get injured get to move in with their RO'S in the foreseeable future? Asking for a friend.

It will be possible eventually, yes. At least to the point of staying over for periods, having your stuff there.

When you go to therapy, Ortega seems to be listening in. If you wipe Dr. Finch's memory, they seem to notice it in the code. How do they notice it? and does Dr. Finch know that Sidestep is a telepath?

Dr. Finch does not know that Sidestep is a telepath, and the rest is spoilers. However, it's well worth thinking about what kind of explanations there could be.

Does Ortega have regrets about what they did to Vernon? If they had a redo of that moment, would they handle it differently, especially knowing the treatment Vernon ended up facing in prison?

Does Ortega deal in regret? It will be interesting to see, Vernon's story is not over.

Between the imposter perhaps riding shotgun in Step's mind and the scar from heartbreak, what kind of vibes would a receiving telepath get from step's mind pre-retri-wreck? Would they run for the hills?

Oh Sidestep is all filled with bad vibes, nothing there any telepath wants to get close to. Running for the hills is the smart choice.

What happened between Herald and Deadeye? Did Deadeye cause his bullet scar you can see on his date? Was it a hit authorized by HG? When in his career did this happen (vigilante/corp/ranger)?

Deadeye is indeed the cause for the bullet scar, and it happened during his stint as a corporate hero. The details you might learn in the future.

If/when it comes up, will step have a canon designation from the Farm or will that be left up to the player?

It will be a variable canon designation based on your initials among other things.

You've mentioned before that combat regenes communicate secretly at the farm. If you've already come up with some details about it, is there some kind of... secret regene subculture? A coded language? Things they share or celebrate? is it different from facility to facility, or are there things that have traveled and become more global?

There is a secret Re-Gene subculture indeed, with its own coded language and traditions. It is very much based around the facility where they are deployed, but since they are all grown and trained at the Farm, the core remains similar.

When you follow Ortega to their secret office, Sidestep mentions Ortega having a faint "limp" they don't remember causing or reading about. How did they injure themselves?

Good question.

Closed alpha spoilers will subtly step who are exposed to HG's threading attempt and sidestep it be able to sense the threads in others now that they're aware of what it looks like?

If they delve deeply enough into their mind, they might.

Related to ^ question, will we get the opportunity to cut the threads in Mortum's mind? Or at least inform them of the threads if we don't?

Confident that you will get access to Dr. Mortum's mind, I see....

Did HB wear skirts when they were seven?

Hehe, good try.

Did sidestep have visceral dreams of anathema before their near death experiences in retri or are these a relatively new phenomenon for them?

This is new, at least in such a detailed form.

Post crash step mentions difficulty breathing and sharp chest pain, alluding to broken or cracked ribs... Was that the crash, or cpr?

Both. The seatbelt and impact didn't help, but it was the CPR that did the major damage. Ortega was desperate.

To what extent are Argent's nanovores aware of the world around her? Do they have a 360 field of "vision," or is her visual input strictly to her eyes? Do they increase her senses at all (better eye-sight, smell, etc.) or are those sensations kind of dulled? Just how much are they helping her fight, beyond the bulletproof skin and strength/speed?

Good spotting. Argent does indeed have what amounts to a 360 field of "vision", but it's not detailed. It's sensitive to movement and light, more as if she was a combination of prey animal and predator. They don't enhance her senses much, but they have changed them slightly. Dulled might be a good descriptor, not what she remembers from before. They help her fight my forming weapons, and is able to take over in case things go badly.

Could we have an estimate of how many regenes have successfully escaped from the Farm? Is Sidestep an anomaly, or are escapes more common than they think?

A handful or two, can't be more exact than that. Most escaped abroad, during battle, and are believed to be dead.

How much of what Argent sees in Ortega's mods and electronics/circuitry in general is her brain interpreting her technopathy and how much is the nanovore eyes?

Mostly her technopathy.

What's the favor Sky-Raider owned Mortum?

Armor related, he's had some work done.

Is argent able to see the re-gene chip in sidestep's head? Could she affect it?

She should be able to see it, yes. Not going to answer the other part.

Could argent theoretically use her nanos to like form and use bullet projectiles or would they revert back to nomming the city if they lost physical connection with her?

They'd lose shape. At this point they have bonded quite thoroughly with her, if they detach, they turn smoky and hungry, as can be seen in certain confrontations.

How useful were Shroud's powers seen as before she went her own way?

Very.

How did Jake's fight against Poryphyry and Locus went?

He won, though it wasn't a decisive victory since they got away.

Would Dr. Mortum have the tech required to be able to read what is hidden in the barcode?

Yes.

What was HG's and Nocturne's first meeting face to face like?

Awkward as hell. Nervous.

Did Nocturne's eyes change color after she boosted or after the first time she used her powers?

After she used her power for the first time.

What do the HG trio think of Deadeye? How much do they trust her? Has Hollow Ground used their powers on her just in case?

She's one of the team, they trust her as they do the others. Hollow Ground has made sure she wouldn't betray them.

How much of a priority was it for Farm to capture Sidestep after their first escape? How much of a priority has Sidestep become after their second escape?

It was a priority after the first one, but other things were more important. Things have changed since then... more than Sidestep might know.

MC can drop several bombs on Mortum during the reveal which one was the most shocking for them, the re-gene part, the ability to possess someone, falling in love with them, their identity?

Not going to say, you might find out eventually.

Did Thunderhead choose her name the same reason Sidestep chose theirs? To make people think their powers aren't telepathy related?

Well, in part, but in her view it was also a reference to it. It all depends how people see it.

[December QnA answers!](#)

[Dec 10, 2021](#)

Well, there are a lot here, but I'm going to start with some news. My health has recently taken a turn for the worse, and I am on 50% sick leave at least until the new year. Most likely longer. It's nothing dangerous, just annoying, and it impacts my writing and interaction. Just thought I'd let you know.

Now, let's get on with it!

In Rebirth, during the gala, you bump into a person:

"Excuse me," someone says as they bump into you, and you mumble something equally nondescript in turn.

Is this person important in anyway? Or are they just a throwaway character? It's been killing my theorizing brain.

Now, I am scratching my head how to answer this. Is it more fun to let everybody worry about what this might be and just be vague and slightly ominous? Maybe, but I am opting for honesty. This is just a chance encounter with a throwaway character that has nothing to do with the plot. However, it was put there precisely to instill nervousness about your surroundings. An innocent bump? Did something happen? Might something happen because of it? Anything could have been done, and not all words are innocent. Except this time. Enjoy a rare moment of clarity.

If Sidestep didn't bump into Ortega at the diner, would they have eventually run into Chen at the dog park?

It is likely, Sidestep wasn't as much on guard as normal there, as is evidenced by the surprise.

How do Chen's siblings feel about their brother being Marshal Steel?

I think it varies. Mostly pride, though there's also a bit of frustration that he doesn't acknowledge his family a would be expected.

Why did the stem of the champagne glass break during the Gala scene? Was it just the emotional response to what Dr. Mortum said? Or did something else cause it?

Emotional response. Oh no, I am ruining all my evil tinfoil fodder today, aren't I?

If the Rangers + Dr. M could guarantee an ability upon being boosted (again for some), what would they be?

Ortega: Flight. Steel: Regeneration. Argent: Regeneration. Herald: Durability/armor. Dr. Mortum: Hyper senses.

I don't remember if this was already asked but do any of the Rangers + Doc want/like kids? Are any of them good with kids (betting Daniel and Ortega -- tho suspecting Ortega would be a mischevious influence lol)

I will leave the wanting kids entirely up to headcanons for people. However, Ortega likes kids and is good with them. Herald is good with kids, but quite wary about them and easily overwhelmed. Argent likes kids, but never interacts. Chen is slightly awkward around them, but would be a good babysitter. Dr. Mortum has very little practice.

Could Sidestep send people to sleep using their telepathy?

Yes.

Does the Catastrofiend fear anything or anyone?

Good question, and the answer is yes.

Other than Anathema's acid, what could get through their defenses?

They were still vulnerable to certain mental attacks, though not to the same extent as others. Just in the cases where the mental attack affected their deeply personal vulnerabilities, in a way it was more like triggering their own internal traumas. Anathema's worst enemy was always herself.

We've seen that telepathy is not only cognitive, but rooted in the physical. If that's the case, did Anathema's invulnerability impact their mind state when under duress, or mind endurance to telepathic attacks at all?

Anathema's abilities helped, but there were weak points.

If they play their cards right, would raising a hero-army of sorts be possible for train-them Hero Hunters?

That does not sound impossible.

If Anathema and The Catastrofiend were forced into a confrontation were neither could leave before someone was dead, who would win and why?

Anathema. There are limits to the Catastrofiend's regeneration.

Besides the regenes themselves, what is the technology that goes into making then also used for? The ability to have access to renewable human bodies lends to a lot more than just the ability to make solders after all.

The first and most common is growing bodyparts and organs for transplantation. Though costly, this has led to a new lease of life for people in need of new hearts, livers, lungs and limbs. The organs in questions can be grown with the right genetic patterns to enable them to be transplanted without the need for immunosuppressive drugs to the same extent. It has also enabled stem-cell treatments for certain common diseases, like diabetes and several kinds of cancer.

However, as this is still every expensive, many people opt for mods when it comes to less life-threatening things like losing a limb. As can be imagined, the main users so far are rich, traditional, and willing to pay for the privilege of looking "natural."

It is also rumored to have been experiments done with full growth clone bodies and brain transplants.

What role does religion play in your world? We see "Our Father" being recited at one point so obviously Christianity exists, but does it influence politics in your world as heavily as it does in our time (question coming from the US)?

This is a tricky question. Religion exists, of course, and it influences politics. However, it won't factor heavily into my writing, because I have a hard time understanding it myself (coming from a non-religious background). The way I see it, religion is often used to justify other political goals/concerns, and I'd rather deal with those underlying motivations directly.

How closely does that tie in with the "Ninth Gate" we see in the HB flashback? Are they actually trying to breach a gate to reach Lucifer/the ultimate power/evil? Or are the gates more of a figurative & less of a literal thing?

The truth of what happened/what the aims were will be dealt with eventually, but not in an ask. It's a central mystery.

The scientists ask if they brought "it" back with them- what is "it"?

You'll see if you're unlucky.

With the HB scar as "outside" it's often mentioned that Step feels like they are missing the piece that helps them "fit". Did they actually lose a piece of their psyche?

It can certainly be read as that, the nature of telepathic trauma is largely an unexplored front. This will be dealt with in detail in book three, and the answer might not be the same for all paths and Sidesteps.

During HB, my Step chose to share their past as a hero with HB- did HB 'take' that piece that was shared? Is that why "outsider" Steps can't ever feel like they will belong again?

Again, it can certainly be read like that.

How would you feel if anyone were to make a walkthrough for your games?

I would love it, I know that a lot of guides, walkthroughs and the like already exists and are passed around on forums.

Also, I just wanted to add that I've been code diving & Chapter 4 of Rebirth is just *chef's kiss*. Thank-you so much for everything you do- you're fucking amazing.

Thank you so much! And yes, there are a lot of things that can be found with code diving, especially if you are the type of player who follows one main path on every playthrough. If you have no idea how, I will add a link to a thread discussing this on the CoG forums:

<https://forum.choiceofgames.com/t/how-to-see-other-games-code-current-info-posted-in-op-and-post-146-on-6-18-19/1328>

Okay, one more, just because I've been fixating so much on Rebirth: After Step's death/disappearance, would Ortega have taken it upon themselves to clean out their apartment/living space? Or was Step's things just left to rot and eventually be thrown away?

They would have done so. It might come up in book three in some paths, and might very well be a sensitive subject. You see, for some Sidesteps, technically Ortega might not have been supposed to know where they stayed... But they are sneaky and curious like that.

Steel has a sensitive stomach, is this a recent development? Is it related to his Mods?

It's not recent, but it does flare up and down. It's related to the injury that cost him his hands while in the military, it also caused some gut damage and he's had issues on and off ever since.

Are there heroes in the East or is that a FEZ only thing?

There are heroes, but they are much rarer. Being a vigilante is illegal, and they are actively persecuted/hunted down. That leaves corporate heroes (more like spokespersons, living ads) and government sponsored heroes whose role is very similar.

Do the Rangers have any holiday traditions?

Hmmm, I need to think about that, but I don't think they have any major ones. Sure, there are things like decorating the HQ for Christmas, and wearing costumes for Halloween, but most of them are tied up in

larger, more official celebrations. There is, however, an office Secret Santa going, and Ortega breaks the allowed cost limit every single time.

Sidestep can pick from a variety of hair and clothing styles in Retribution, which styles would the RO find the most attractive?

Not getting into that, it is entirely up to headcanons! All choices are equally valid to please (or annoy) your RO(s).

Is there an education system in LD? Are there any universities?

Yes there is an education system, but it's not state-run. There are several schooling options, everything from home schooling, to communal/cooperative schools in certain areas, to the more common ones sponsored by various companies to get useful employees.

For higher education, there are two rival technical colleges, each tied closely to various company groups. While there are some courses in the humanities, they are both very STEM oriented, and closely tied to various developments and projects easier to run in the less regulated west.

One more I forgot. Can telepathy be used to project your vision or experience into someone else's mind?

It depends, some telepaths can do that, others can't.

What did anathema do before joining the rangers (job/ general living) ? What prompted the second boost?

Anathema worked at one of the local shelters, they were involved in charity. They chanced the second boost because the first one didn't do what they needed it to do.

Malin be honest..... Was Anathema the Rangers' mole Chen was worried about??

Ahahahaha interesting. Don't think I will be honest about that today.

best to worst on who would be most emotionally and physically capable of taking care of the rat king for like....a long weekend? step not included (obviously)

Best to worst: Argent, Mortum, Steel, Herald, Ortega.

What happened during the mission back in Hood's day when the Special Directive was involved? Why were they involved? Was it a special interest to them specifically or a bigger problem than the Rangers could tackle? How often does the Special Directive get involved with Ranger operations?

I haven't settled on the details yet, that hasn't been important for the story. In essence, it was a big problem that involved an attack on, and theft of (and hostage taking) of some vital research materials.

The military was involved, but the Rangers never got to know the details why, only that they would get backup this time because there was no option to fail. There were large numbers of mods involved, and whispers of a foreign power. It is very rare that the Special Directive gets involved.

What is tia Elena's beef with Argent (or vice versa)?

That's personal between them, and something you might learn in the future.

tw for death discussion, slight morbidity

What happened to Anathema's body? Did their powers stop working after their death, or was their body caught in the explosion? Would it have been damaged further? Would it begin the decomposition process?

Like so many things with the boost drugs, it is hard to tell. Some boosted powers stop working after death, but some fail catastrophically enough that they can explode or destroy the bodies in question. As no body was left to bury, it is likely that either the invulnerability stopped working and what remained was destroyed in the blast. Or, the acid might have gone out of control, destroying the body entirely. It is unknown.

Is the rat king able to tap into step's senses and maybe pick up sights/sounds that step might miss because they're distracted by something else or do they operate purely in a telepathic sense and are only able to pick up surrounding thoughts/intentions?

The Rat King can interact with Sidestep's senses too, especially if they are allowed inside the shields.

What's the most inaccurate part of the Ranger movies' portrayal of the cast? Sidestep aside, who do you think they'd aim to typecast as everyone? (not specific actors, more hollywood archetypes)

The most inaccurate parts I think depended on the movie, but there were some tendencies. Many played up the internal team divisions to add drama, and added wildly flawed personal subplots since they had little access to personal facts. I think the one thing they got wrong most often was the fact that Ortega actually is smart, though Sidestep might argue the movies got it right.

Ortega tended to be typecast as either the sexy swashbuckler, or the intense rogue depending on whether they were a supporting character or the lead. Chen was always in the background, often taken out of action early since armor means more budget and licenses needed. Hood was a favorite, with the mask, anybody could be cast. Often the one who got the most famous actor. Sentinel was portrayed as a lot more temperamental, and often a cause for friction (his powers were also expensive to film). Once Daniel joined, he tended to be the audience point of view character, and Argent took over the dangerous sexy rogue spot as Ortega moved into more of a mentor role. Anathema was comic relief.

How often do members of the same family survive the Boost drug? Are there any family hero/villain teams? Are there any heroes who have villain relatives?

It is debated whether family members of people who got boosted has a greater chance of surviving the drug. There are hints in that direction, but not enough cases to make it statistically significant. There is research being done of possible genetic structures helping with surviving the change. There might be villains who has hero relatives indeed, but I won't give any details yet. Might come up.

How well do the current Rangers fight together as a team in the field? Do they have any interesting pair ups like Sentinel and Anathema did back in the day? Who works best with who?

If taking to the field at once, they are quite good at working as a team. That's why Sidestep was so intent on splitting them up and dividing them. The most common pairing is Argent and Ortega, they work well together as a point team. Chen tends to be tactics and command, with Herald as support and overview.

RO's from least to most likely to want to get married? Anyone who explicitly does/doesn't want that?

Again going to leave this to headcanons.

Did the rat girls have names before being merged into the rat king?

They had identities, and as much as rats do, they had names. However, they were merged when they were very young, before they were fully mature. They think of themselves as part of a whole/pack.

Could you tell us more about the conceptualisation of the mindscapes? Are they projections Sidestep uses to be able to grasp the mind of a person more concretely, or would any telepath with the same abilities see the same mindscape? Is the mindscape's owner aware of that mindscape if they dive into it? with Sidestep Is there a link between mindscapes and the method of loci?

Mindscapes are about as real as what we see around us. The world exists at levels we can't perceive, we translate what our senses tell us into something our brains can digest. I do not see the same world as my color-blind partner, and it's the same with mindscapes. Sidestep is visually oriented, they see symbols and landscapes. A more word oriented telepath might hear sounds or inner monologues, or even music. A mindscapes owner would not be aware of their own mindscape, but a telepath can share their impressions and make it a communal reality. It is still filtered through the telepath, though the owner might be able to pick out details the telepath had not focused on, and symbolism overlooked.

Since the rangers often have to take part in photoshoots, how do the rangers feel about photoshoots as a whole and do they have a favourite type to be involved in? (eg, magazine editorial, merchandising, rangers promo, fashion shoot, pin up etc)

Ortega likes it, and is game for pretty much everything. Argent says she doesn't, but she actually likes the attention. Fashion shoots are her favorite. Herald has a lot, and he's not very fond of it, and doesn't really like how it makes him feel. But he'll do it. The Ranger's promo ones are his favorites. Steel hates it, but has a secret soft spot for the fashion photo shoots if they allow his prosthesis to show (some do).

A very silly question, but will we only ever have the girl/boy/datefriend as the relationship develops, or will there ever be a point where we can pick what Sidestep's RO can call them (for example, playing a nonbinary Sidestep but asking to be referred to as partner, or boyfriend, etc.)

Not sure, but most likely. It's not hard to implement, and I do know there might be a need for "platonic best friend" out there.

What would happen if a Regene was removed before they were ready to be decanted? Would they just continue to grow from there or would there be some sorta side effect(s)?

There has been a lot of experiments to determine ideal decanting time. While it is possible to be decanted as soon as all bodily functions are functional, it is far from ideal. The speed-growth formula needs a controlled environment and VERY careful monitoring of amniotic fluids to counter any issues. To do it outside the growth-tubes, would mean a great risk of cancer, infection and genetic defects. Decanting without the speed-growth is possible, but it would just be a cloned baby with an uncertain genetic background. It would continue to grow as a normal baby, but chances are low it would be a healthy child.

However, there has been rumored experiments with single-cloned children, with only a single genetic donor. Some claim that there are people raising their own clone-children to preserve their family purity, but there is no proof. Theoretically it should be possible, as people have speculated that it is the rapid growth formula that damages the brain of the Re-Genes and necessitates the AI implants.

Is anyone in the cast actually seeing a therapist? If yes, do they listen to that therapist? What's their relationship with them?

Not in the main cast, but they really should, shouldn't they? They have all tried at various points in their lives, but at this point nobody is keeping it up. It all fell apart for various reasons.

Regarding Ljungstrand's classification: Can you elaborate on branches 7 and 8? What are the differences between the two?

Influence (7) and Control (8) are similar in many ways. Some claim that Influence is just a weaker subset of control, but the generally agreed definition is that Control works directly on muscles.

For example, you can Influence someone to think they smell smoke, and make them afraid enough to activate the fire alarm. A telepath able to Control people can simply force them to activate the alarm straight away, and the victim would be aware that they were being controlled, but unable to stop their own hand.

I noticed that Step has root 4 in their classification. What part of their telepathy could be classified as such? The body hopping?

Yes, that is indeed the body hopping.

If it isn't too big of a spoiler... will Daniel be getting a suspicion stat in book 3, or is he going to keep those rosy glasses on until a reveal or two smacks him in the face?

Probably not, he trusts the people he cares about. If he would notice something suspicious, he'd bring it up immediately.

Do the other Rangers know about Snowball's background/powers, or is it something Step and Ortega kept to themselves?

That is Step's and Ortega's (and Elena's) little secret.

How much does a single dose of the boost drug cost? Hundreds of dollars? Thousands?

Depends on the quality and where you get it from. It can be both, and more.

Is GeniTech the creator of the boost drug?

No, that was a different, now defunct, company, but they are one of the ones researching it and have their own variants.

Since Boosts can be found all over the world, would it be correct to assume that numerous organizations produce and sell the boost drug? Or do all the drugs originate from a single source and are simply distributed globally?

There are many variants and sources. Some have better reputations than others, and others are little more than a sham. It requires care and equipment to make, so it can't just be homebrewn anywhere, but the recipe is known and improved on for decades.

How did it feel for HB when their powers started to run out of control?

Pray you don't find out.

What are the annual villain parties like? Any there notable villains or henchmen that like to take part in the celebrations?

Most of the sociable ones, and then there are some who never show up (like the Catastrofiend). Psychopathor was always one of the loudest.

How long had Vernon been working on his big project by the time he approached Ortega at the funeral?

Years.

We know that Sidestep's telepathic abilities have grown since their vigilante days, in terms of raw power that is (not counting skill/experience here), but how did this growth come about? Was

it triggered by events like the Nanosurge and Heartbreak incident or was the potential for growth always present?

It was triggered by first the Nanosurge, and later Heartbreak. The potential was always there, if those events hadn't happened, chances are something else might have done the road.

How common is it for a Boosted individual to have their abilities grow even after a long time since getting Boosted without taking more of the Hero Drugs? Might we get to see this type of growth in other characters besides our protagonist, like Herald?

It isn't exactly common, but it is a well-known phenomena. All alpha levels can clearly recall the time when things changed for them, and the same goes for most beta levels. It is theorized that it is related to "hysterical strength," that the body releases self-imposed boundaries in desperate life-or-death situations. Of course this can also lead to catastrophic failure and burnout. It is theorized that this is the reason why so many die during their first manifestation of powers, the stress cause them to grow more rapidly than the ability to control them does. It might very well happen to Herald if the situation gets dire enough.

What if HG had recruited sidestep (probably not HG themselves but recruited into their group in general) back near the beginning of their debut as a vigilante? What would it be like in the current time if instead sidestep had been in HG organization since then?

Oh that is an interesting one. I think Sidestep would have taken to the organization like a fish to water, with familiar structures but new freedoms. I can see Sidestep holding Jake's position as chief enforcer/third in command, a vital part of a criminal empire. Since they would have been nowhere near the Nanosurge or Heartbreak I doubt they would be as powerful, but they might have been happier. Ortega would have been their absolute nemesis, that unreadable asshole. Quite possibly still some sexual tension there.

Hmmm, on second thought, they might have gotten involved in the Nanosurge, but at a later time, after it had started encroach on the city. A harder job, but they would have backup with some suggestions from HG. Still a massive trauma, but HG would have strengthened their influence as the secret "savior of the city." Ortega would have lost their arm in the attack, Sunstream would have shot it off. Ortega would most likely be the only survivor of the Heartbreak incident, and a hero for putting a stop to it. Charge would still be the Marshal, though the loss of their oldest friend almost destroyed them.

Sorry if this has been mentioned before, but what exact type and level of spinal cord injury does Ortega have?

They have an incomplete spinal cord injury in the thoracic region (T11-T12). The spinal cord was compromised, but not entirely severed. Ortega suffers from something similar to anterior cord syndrome, where the injury mainly was to the front of the spinal cord. Before modding, they were paraplegic, but with some sensation remaining. Whether this might have become better with therapy is hard to say, they were modded before the therapy had proceeded very far.

Does Mortum miss Haiti at all? Is there anything they get nostalgic over?

The food and the smells. They miss it, but they would never go back.

What was the relationship like between Sentinel and each of the other Rangers back in the day?

Quite good, if a bit tense at times. I haven't thought about it in detail, he was closest to Hood and Anathema, there was more than a bit of rivalry involved with Ortega.

How high was MC on dr Mortum's list of potential villains and was there anyone else on it that we heard of in the story?

It would depend slightly on what reputation Sidestep had. The one most likely was the vigilante one, then the hero, last the sidekick. The MC was pretty high, but not at the top. I'll refrain from naming other possible names as it might be very spoilery.

Since Argent seemed to be disappointed with who Sidestep turned out to be in person on the first meeting in rebirth, who did she imagined behind the mask?

She didn't care one bit.

From least to most who of the Rangers+Mortum would be most disturbed with what's going on on the Farm?

Mortum, Argent, Ortega, Chen, Herald.

"Well, maybe past me might have had a few issues, but then he would just have had to grow up. Remember Sentinel's birthday BBQ? I was an ass, but I did change."

What did Ortega do..?

Ortega has a massive case of foot-in-mouth disease, as is evidenced by their less than elegant comebacks to surprising information. It was also worse when they were younger. Exactly what happened I don't want to get into detail of, I might write that out one day when I have the brains for warmup writings and snippets again.

[Plugging some art](#)

[Nov 28, 2021](#)

I realized that I had forgotten to plug some wonderful Fallen Hero art here, which can be bought on posters with my blessings.

Jinzali is amazingly talented, and they are on sale right now!

[Ask your questions for november here!](#)

[Nov 26, 2021](#)

Been sick, and is late, but here it is! Ask away!

[West Coast Mysteries and Murders, season 2.](#)

[Nov 12, 2021](#)

Scenes from the filming of the upcoming "West Coast Mysteries and Murder" season two, set to premiere in early 2022. Featuring the two hosts, Gabe Bennett and Cloe Perry, on-site in Los Diablos.

"Damn, this place is creepy." Bennett straightened to his full, rather impressive height, but he couldn't see over the interposing fence.

"Try not to be so obvious about it." Perry looked around, shifting the heavy shoulder bag. "It's still light out. We don't want to get thrown out before we find a way in."

"Thrown out by who?" He gestured to the surrounding buildings, windows empty and black. "Nobody's here but us." And the eyes.

It was just graffiti. That's what he had told himself when they arrived. There was no reason he should have been so unnerved walking down the deserted streets as they approached their target. They had researched dozens of sites by now; he knew better than to be scared by rumors. He had been doing this for years. This wasn't like when they were filming the Void episode, where they knew there was a real risk of injury. No crazed copycat killers here. Nothing had happened at the Heartbreak site since it was closed to the public.

After the accidents...

"The cops make the rounds now and then, you know that." Perry had researched the site extensively, it was closed to the public, and signs at the entrance warned that trespassers would be prosecuted.

"Oh, come on, you know the LDPD. They'll take a drive around the perimeter, then leave. You really think they're gonna go out on foot and come in here?" The roads were blocked by massive cement blocks, ensuring that foot traffic was the only way to enter. Normally he would worry about any encounter with the law, but he doubted they ran the risk of that here.

"Better not to take any chances. I'd rather not get shot for trespassing." Perry unfolded the map, covered with notes. "Let's do a lap around the fence to see if there are any weak points and then find a place to set up."

"Fine. I'd feel better with a roof over my head. Less watched." Bennett tried to ignore the eyes painted on the surrounding buildings. Watching the site. Watching him. He resisted the urge to check his pill dispenser. He knew he had taken this morning's dose. It wouldn't run out until after nightfall.

They quickly made their way around the fence, and Bennett tried to quiet his misgivings. The fence was standard issue building fence, wood, and steel, tall enough that he had to jump to reach the top. Normally, it would have been covered with posters for whatever development firm was working here or trying to sell the place. Not so here. Instead, the surface was covered with silhouettes of people, painted in black and gray. Some were spray painted. Some had brushstrokes and dripping paint, making trails that looked unnervingly like blood.

"Do you think they represent the victims?" Perry checked her notebook. "I wish I could get an accurate figure, then we might have counted them."

"No flowers or candles." Bennett reached out to touch one of the figures. Lifesize. A man? He withdrew his fingers before they touched paint. What if it was still wet? Warm? Like blood? He shook his head, causing Perry to give him a worried look.

"If you don't feel up to it, we can skip the sensitive segment. I get the feeling we'll have enough material anyway."

"I'll see how I feel once we get to it." He shouldn't feel anything; that was what the pills were for. This was just ordinary jitters, the same unease that made Perry light up a cigarette.

"No easy way in, though." She blew out a cloud of smoke as they completed the circle. "You think we could climb it?"

"Probably." Bennett shrugged; he had climbed worse things. No barbed wire on top. "But honestly, I think the biggest selling point is the outside. The graffiti alone would make a great episode. The inside is probably just a cleared-up building site."

"And we shouldn't ruin the mystery. I get you." Perry looked up at the surrounding buildings. Six floors. Eight. Tall enough to loom. "You think we could get a peek in from up there?"

"No roof on the site. I can't see why not. If you fancy climbing stairs, I don't think any of the buildings' got power."

"They look structurally sound, though." She frowned, weighing the pros and cons. "Keep an eye out while I shoot some daylight footage before we head inside. This place is weird enough that will only add to the ambiance."

Bennett nodded and headed over to a spot where he could keep an eye on what he assumed would be the way any cops would enter. He could see it in his mind's eye as he sat down. How they'd stop the car, walk over, have a look, then go back and try to forget this place existed. Like they should have done.

This was a bad idea. He knew it with the same bone-deep surety that he knew he had no choice in the matter. He shouldn't have mentioned his misgivings to Marek, then maybe they could have postponed this particular project. But his bad vibes made for good television, and Marek knew that. The Void episode had nearly got them both killed, but it was their most highly rated one yet and had netted them both a bonus.

Maybe this one would too. He needed one; the pills weren't cheap.

Closing his eyes, he felt the edges of the muffled muteness that surrounded him. His security blanket. Five hours to go until he had to decide whether he dared to forego the next dose and take the plunge. Plenty of time to agonize about it.

"Hey, I thought you were supposed to keep an eye out and not fall asleep." Perry kicked his foot, but he didn't move.

"You know I don't need my eyes for that." But he reluctantly opened them and pulled himself to his feet once more.

"Let's get inside." She kept looking around, and there was something about that particular nervous tick that didn't sit right with him.

"You see anything?" The rush of adrenaline cleared his head, and he found himself repeating the motion.

"Nothing. Not even birds." She had put the finger on one of the things that bothered him. Deserted buildings were perfect roosting spots, and yet there was no trace of bird shit anywhere.

"Residues?" There had been a chemical strike here; at least that had been the official story. Birds were sensitive. If they had died, it was usually a bad sign.

"Marek swore that was just a cover story. It wasn't a terrorist attack. It was a boost that did it." Perry looked back towards the fence. "He thought it was probably a military project gone wrong or something, hence the secrecy."

"Please tell me that's not going in the episode." Marek had already skirted close to being banned more than once, and Bennett needed this job.

"Of course not. We're not here to deconstruct a mystery, only document it." She patted her camera. "No politics, just spooks. Now, which building should we pick for our stakeout?"

"Give me a moment." Bennett stepped away from the wall, letting his eyes go unfocused. Pale shapes. Staring eyes. Keeping watch. Over what? Why eyes? Why... "That one," he said, pointing at one of the neighboring buildings. In truth, there was no better vibe from that one than the rest, but it had a broken front door, and he needed to move. Get to higher ground.

"Good, let's get going then." She sounded as if she felt the same urge he did. "Let's get into character."

In a way, it was a relief to focus on filming. Staying in character meant staying out of his head. The banter between him and Perry was habitual. By now, they knew each other well enough to follow through with what the other set up. The skeptic and the psychic, Bennett reading walls and spirits while she provided rational explanations. Good television.

Except this time, it was different.

As they made their way up the stairs, taking time to document the lack of interior vandalism, Perry started to go quiet. Missing her cues. Bennett found his comments met with silence, or worse, with nodded assent. As they reached the fourth floor, he stopped, and not only because she was wheezing from the stairs.

"Cut," he said, a sign to future Marek to ignore this part and not include it in the episode. An instruction he usually obeyed, except when it made for a dramatic scene. "Are you okay? You look like you're going to faint."

"I'm... fine..." she wheezed and then turned to look downstairs.

Bennett found himself doing the same.

"We're high enough, I think. No need to go all the way to the roof." He didn't ask the question really on his mind. Whether she also felt someone following them up the stairs. He knew she did.

"Why are all the doors locked?" She tried one of them to prove her point. "They've been abandoned for years. There should be squatters."

Bennett didn't answer as he tried another door. She was right; there should have been traces of squatters, birds, or rats. The stairs should have been smelling of piss and garbage. Instead, there was nothing but dank air, the stillness of a building abandoned.

Abandoned.

Waiting.

He shook his head, trying the doors one by one. Nothing. They hadn't brought any tools for breaking in; they hadn't thought they'd need them. The glass of the front door downstairs had been smashed, making for easy entry. They had assumed it would be the same inside.

"Want to go down and try a different building?" Bennett turned to look at Perry, who had collected herself by now. "Or head back to the car and pick up our kit so we can get in?" He didn't want to get arrested with such tools, so he didn't carry them needlessly. Enough to send him to jail if the cops didn't like the look of him, which few did.

"Probably for the best..." she took a step towards the stairs, then stopped. Listened.

Bennett didn't ask. Instead, he cocked his head and listened with her. Nothing but their own breathing. No creaking doors. No footsteps. Buildings made noise; he knew that. Settling and abandoned. Microquakes. Vermin.

Nothing.

"Let's..." Perry turned around but looked over her shoulder nervously. "Let's get to the roof."

"If you're sure." Bennett frowned but followed upstairs, looking back every time she did. He didn't hear anything, but there was something about that frightened, wide-eyed look that scared him more than the building. Perry didn't spook easily. That was his job.

Marek was going to love this, he realized with a sinking feeling. A place spooky enough to scare even the resident skeptic. Was that why he had sent them here? To finally get an episode to top the Void one? Hopefully, with fewer cellar dungeons.

And less blood.

Luckily for them, the access door to the roof gaped wide open. The smell of fresh air invigorated them both, and they almost ran the last few steps towards the sunshine. Perry continued towards the edge while Bennett turned to close it behind him. He wasn't sure what it was that bothered him about the black opening, the concrete damp with rain damage, but he didn't want it staring at them. However, the lock was broken, as well as the handle. Had someone kicked it open? It looked like that might have been the case, saving them the trouble. As it kept swinging open, he finally pulled off his backpack, resting it against the door. That worked, and he felt comfortable enough to look around.

Deserted. No sign of birds; the concrete faded but clean. Even the sounds from the surrounding city had dulled to a distant drone. The wind made him feel lonely, as if he had climbed a mountain peak.

"Perry?" He realized with a start that the roof really was deserted, he didn't see her, and the terror he had been suppressing broke free.

It would be so easy to jump. Walk towards the edge, as she had, not stopping. Over and down. Fall and scream and smash and...

"Come here!" Perry's voice, from behind what looked like an empty water tank.

"Coming," Bennett said, knees weak from relief.

There had been accidents in the surrounding buildings; they knew that. People painting graffiti and falling to their deaths. Some suicides. The exact number had been impossible to find, but there were enough to worry him. Had others felt that same urge he just did? Sensitives? Or were they caught up in a game of dare? Who could draw the most out-of-place eye? Marek had thought that was the case, kids doing stupid stunts for attention. Accidents happened.

"We've got a perfect view from up here, look!" Perry was standing at the edge, camera out. She sounded like her old self again, as if the episode in the stairwell had been nothing but a bad dream.

"Just be careful," Bennett cautioned. There was a low concrete wall around the edge, but it wouldn't be hard to climb over.

"The building is solid," she said as if there were no other reasons she might fall. "Get the binoculars out. I want you to tell me what you see behind the fence."

"Let me get my pack," he sighed, heading back towards the door. Back to normal. His bad vibes and her unbridled curiosity.

Except that the pack had moved and the door now gaped open.

"What the..." Beckett stared at the black opening. Nothing moving. No sound. His backpack lay a yard or two in front of it. Had he really...?

Yes. Yes, he had. And it was a weird angle for the wind to blow it open.

Biting his lip, he looked around. Nothing to see here, not many places for people to hide. Except back in the hole. No. Not hole. This wasn't the Void. It was just a staircase. And he was being stupid. Maybe they weren't alone here. Maybe some squatters wanted them out.

"We're just here to shoot some footage of the place," he said, feeling stupid talking to the dark. "We'll be out of here soon." They had to pick another building for the stakeout, that he had already decided. Closer to ground level. "Our producer is in the van," he lied, better that there were witnesses to where they were. "If you want, I'm sure we can pay you for some comments about this place."

No reply. He hadn't expected anything else. Trying not to look spooked, he grabbed his pack, heading back to Perry while looking back over his shoulder. Nothing. Just the opening staring back.

It should have been a mouth, his brain supplied. The door. It should have been an open, yawning mouth, and yet he felt it staring at him. Unblinking.

Shaking his head, he pulled out the binoculars as he whispered to Perry.

"Not sure if we have company or not," he said, looking back. She did the same. "Thought I heard something, but nobody's answering. You got your gun?"

"Always." She patted her pocket.

"Keep it ready, just in case."

"I need to film you, but I'll keep an eye out."

"Fine. Let's get this over with." Even with the pills, he trusted his instincts to warn him if someone approached.

He scanned the site with the binoculars as Perry started the introductory speech. It didn't look like much. Without the strange silhouettes painted on the outside of the fence, it looked like any other building site.

"Did it ever get sold?" Something was bothering him, but he couldn't put his finger on it.

"Yes," she said, panning her camera over the surroundings. "It was bought for quite a sum, but there has been no development from the buyer."

"They cleared the plate. All the rubble is gone, but there's no sign of any machines."

"They cleared the plate right after the incident," she corrected. "As part of the investigation and to remove any dangerous chemicals."

"Huh." There was no graffiti on the inside of the fence. No sign that anything had been there since it was put up. Except... "I see something."

"What?" Her voice was filled with tense excitement. "Describe it to the camera. My zoom is not that good."

"Looks like something is covered up on the ground. It looks like they might have been doing some digging. A metal plate, like they put out for roadworks. There are warning cones around it, but I don't think anybody's been there in a long time. They have fallen over, and the lines are all tangled."

"Do you think it's worth getting in there for a closer look?"

"Not really," he admitted, lowering his binoculars. "But I think we have to."

"What do you mean?" She panned the camera over to him, and he did his best to ignore how rattled he must look.

"The eyes. The silhouettes. They are all looking at something. I think we need to figure out what's so interesting."

Four hours later, night had fallen. It had been hard getting down from the building. Neither of them had felt comfortable taking the stairs, but once they started their descent, they kept speeding up. It had ended in a run, falling over each other in their hurry to get outside. As Marek would undoubtedly say, good television. Once they got it in the cutting room and added context, it would likely be one of their best chase sequences. And nothing had been chasing them.

Nothing. Bennett was sure of that.

They were alone here. They had walked around the perimeter once more. He had been filming this time, trusting his eye to get the interesting spots as Perry related the history of the place. Ground zero of the Heartbreak incident, the terrorist attack that left hundreds of dead. She talked of the later suicides, of the tradition of painting eyes, and the people who had been killed while doing it. He knew it would be interspersed with the interviews they had done before coming here. Survivors. Relatives. Former residents. Individuals. Stories people could connect to.

Names. There were no names anywhere on the walls. No tags. It was as if this place had been wiped clean of identity, ignored by the usual daredevils who competed to tag the most dangerous and difficult places to prove they had gone there.

Weird. Bennett shared a look with Perry. She had noticed it too.

"Over or through?" He gestured to the fence with the camera.

"If you give me a boost, I think over is easier." Perry looked up as she pulled her gloves on. "The fence looks sturdy."

"Sure." He did the same, more for protection from cuts and splinters than to avoid leaving fingerprints. Nobody would look for that here. Putting the camera down, he laced his fingers together, and she stepped into his hands with practiced ease. He boosted her up, and she grabbed the top, heaving herself over with a grunt. She caught the camera he tossed after with practiced ease.

Now it was his turn. A running start was enough to give him the height needed to grab the top of the fence, clambering up and over. It was easier than he thought it would be. Guess they didn't guard it too hard since there was nothing here to steal.

"Huh." Perry had the camera up and panned around. "This is underwhelming."

"They cleared everything away. We might be the first people to set foot here in years." He switched back into his patter, walking around the area, shining his flashlight, talking as he did so. Picking up the vibrations he felt, meandering slowly towards the cones. If he wanted to call this off, he should take his pill now. He could feel the place starting to leak through.

Intense. Terrifying. This would be a bad one; he knew it.

But that's what he got paid for.

"There was no cellar in this building." Perry turned her camera on what he had spotted from the rooftop, what looked like a covered opening in the ground. "Could the explosion have caused a collapse into the sewer system?"

"Maybe," Bennett said. He was no expert on collapsing buildings. "Or a sinkhole?" He hunched down, but the metal slab placed over the possible hole was too heavy to shift. He stomped on it, which made Perry flinch, but the sound was hollow. There was an opening underneath.

"Can you move it?" She panned over the cones; the orange faded from exposure.

"Not a chance, even with tools." He eyed the surrounding ground. No cracks. Things seemed stable.

"This was where the Marshal lost his legs, right?"

"The current Marshal, yes." She paused. "Marek? Add footage of past-era Steel if we can get away with it." They most likely couldn't, not without the episode being pulled. "Or, better, the headlines. The Confidential rarely prosecutes fair use."

"Two dead heroes. One maimed. One survivor with a ruined career." Bennett didn't name names, another thing they couldn't afford, despite Marek's contacts.

"And one mystery," Perry finished. "One which we are here to shed some light on."

It was their usual catchphrase, but it had never felt emptier. Bennett knew they couldn't reveal everything they found. All they could do was let him read the place, making sure that whatever he said was vague enough to deepen the mystery rather than solve it. The facts they uncovered they kept to themselves, Marek hoarding them like a dragon of old. Or feeding them to his sponsor.

"I think I'm ready." He could feel the drugs wearing off, his surroundings bleeding into focus.

"Sit or walk?" They could use flashlights freely here; the fence gave them cover. That meant that they could save the darkvision camera for the final vigil.

"Walk. I need to get a feel for what this place was." Is. Bennett shook his head and stepped away from the covered hole.

"The usual drill then. Go ahead." The gentle light of the camera focused on him, but he ignored it.

He was listening to the building now, not her.

"Door," he started, walking towards the side of the fence. "Door." It tasted odd in his mouth, but he let the words come. Stopping them would be bad. "Impacts. Gravity feels weird." His senses screamed at him that he had to get up, but also that he was falling down. "Up. Down. Door." He shook his head. That was wrong. Up, up, up, "Up. Door. Down." A terrifying roller coaster, but there was no quake damage. No physical disturbance.

Psychic.

No wonder he had felt it was inevitable coming here, the more his system purged the drugs, the more he could feel the massive psychic weight of the place. Like a tornado, sucking everything in. No. A black hole. Walk the path. *Up. Up.* His feet didn't find steps. Stairs. Gone. Down. The ground remembered impacts. Soft. Bodies broken like peaches. Bruised. Erupted. Boot on hand, broken bones, a scream he gritted his teeth to suppress.

"Talk to me Bennett, what do you feel?"

He shook his mutely, he couldn't speak, he couldn't scream, he tried, but nothing was coming, only wave after wave after wave...

"Bennett!" Perry grabbed his hand before it reached his face.

Eyes. Eyes. He couldn't... Bennett let out a hiss and scrambled for the pills in his pocket. One. Two. Fuck the migraine that would result. He couldn't listen to this. To the screams. To the whispering voices.

Down. Walk. Hands over ears so he wouldn't touch his eyes. Breathe. The pills would kick in soon. He could do this. Let it wash over him. A stone on the beach, indifferent to the waves. To the terror. This place screamed loud enough that even the headblind would hear it; to any psychic, it must be a beacon impossible to resist. He'd never been in Los Diablos clean. The place was heavy enough with trauma that he needed the pills every time he visited Marek's studio.

He had never been here clean.

If he had, would he have noticed? Even on the other side of town? A sinkhole this size had its own gravity. Would he have walked here?

Would he have drawn an eye? Torn out his own? Fallen to his death rather than walk back the stairs?

"Bennett? Talk to me. You're scaring me." Perry's voice, from a great distance, but enough to focus on. Breathe.

"I'm..." not fine. Afraid. Dead and buried. "... here." He could still feel the building in his veins, concrete stairwell spine broken gaping toothless maw...

What?

He blinked, ignoring Perry, ignoring his own revolting mind. He had wandered close to the fence and spotted something. No graffiti. Plain wood. Something black, glinting in the light. Technological. A lense, a...

"What's that camera doing there?"

Footage ended.

[When will Fallen Hero: Retribution be released?](#)

[Nov 8, 2021](#)

Update of this spring's post.

First, some facts. I am working a full time (40h week) day job, so this is done in my spare time. I have also had health issues and other real life problems last year and a half which has slowed the pace some (not to mention general 2020 shenanigans).

November news: Health still shaky. Working full time again, which I'd rather not do but they won't let me work less. So I have to snatch what writing time I can, which is complicated by the fact that I'm so tired that the evenings are mostly out. Pushing on. Almost done with the last Breaks script, which means that at least I will have one less project with deadlines.

So where are we now?

2021 8th November

[DONE] The game is finished, all chapters and epilogues are written. The closed alpha is around 1 372 900 words, so it's around three times as large as the last one. The average playthrough is around 97 000 words but can vary greatly.

[DONE] Cover, graphic and text assets for release. A preview on Steam is up, with the option of adding it to your wishlist.

[ALMOST DONE] Bug fixing and playtesting, additional content and variables. (mostly done, but new ones are always discovered)

[UNDERWAY] Editing, rewrites, copyediting, spelling and grammar. Currently my main focus, around 895 542 words in (Ch18 done). This is where the story actually gets good, and the part which takes time.

[PENDING] Final Beta testing with a new testing group. Needs to add achievements, a save system and tweaks for screen readers. Will find/fix more bugs/language at that time.

[PENDING] Submitting the finished game to Hosted Games.

[PENDING] Hosted Games editors makes the game ready for release on various platforms and systems. I have NO control over how long this takes, it all depends on their workload and the number of games in the pipeline. Once they know, the game will enter their release queue and only THEN will we have an estimated release date. For Rebirth, it took 4 months between submitting and release.

[QnA finally!](#)

[Nov 8, 2021](#)

What is the most stupid thing that the Dr.Mortum has done or built.

Their many attempts to build a lab-compatible roomba also capable of cleaning surfaces. So far it has been nothing short of disastrous, but they hate cleaning so the quest continues.

Has Chen ever accidentally hurt himself with his mods while still getting used to them?

Yes. Many times. Especially the legs took some time to get used to, and there were many falls involved. While there is an "assisted walking" algorithm involved which makes it easier to move around at the start, to get the kind of functionality you need in the hero business he needed to move beyond that to direct interface. It's harder than it looks. In fact, he's still using the assistance algorithms with his more lightweight legs he uses for walking spoon. It lets him relax and not have to pay attention to what he is doing as much. His "work legs" are the only ones that are direct interface, and they are a bit of a strain to use.

Also, his shoulder/arm gave him some bruises before they got the setting right. Brushing teeth was a hazard.

Have the boost drugs ever had a person grow any additional features? Things like extra eyes, limbs, wings, etc?

Yes, it has happened. The most common ones are things that already are vestigial in humans, like tails. It is theorized that some of the more extreme boost changes, like multiple limbs or heads, are due to the people taking it unknowingly being a genetic chimera. Functional wings are extremely rare, and massive bodily changes like that are more commonly incomplete/non-functional boosts. Major physical changes are one of the leading causes of death.

Is it possible to explain the choice of the name Sidestep in subsequent books how is revenge for the original Sidestep?

That's a nice idea, I'll do my best to remember it!

Have the rangers ever had villains going after their loved ones to get to them?

It has happened, but not as often as you'd think. Sentinel's girlfriend was kidnapped a few times, and that was probably one of the reasons he retired when he did and moved out of town. The same thing happened with some of the people that Charge was dating, and was indeed considered to be a risk of getting involved in the superhero business. The Rangers provided security to people high-profile enough to need it. It was not officially known that Elena was Charge's mother, but she was targeted once or twice. Once Snowball entered the picture, that was no longer a problem.

Who is the strongest telepath in the world?

Debatable. There are several strong telepaths around the globe, but they aren't exactly in contact. When it comes to alpha level telepaths the discussion tends to be more about what they are good at, as their talents differ. I do know who I would have named the top contender, but I can't tell you due to spoilers.

Can Sidestep become an even more powerful telepath?

Yes.

How would Chen react if he found out that Sidestep wants him to stop him after completing his plans?

Oh that is massive spoilers, you will have to find that out in game. It will also depend on their relationship at that point.

Will there be an opportunity to laugh villainously in the next books?

You are right. I need to add more cackling laughter in there.

It's been mentioned that Steel has a few general Armor set-ups. Would you mind explaining what they are? Knowing Steel's favorite and what Steel looks like when he needs to bring out the big guns would be cool.

There are three general setups, which can be complimented by changing loadout and weapons.

Maneuverable: This armor is lightweight and flexible, made to be used indoors and in cramped circumstances. That's the one you see Steel use in Retribution. It won't wreck floors, can handle stairs, good armor and flexible weaponry. The strength is comparable to the strength upgrade of your villain armor, but the armor is better. This is because it's a fully interfaced armor, which means that three of the limbs are fully robotic and connected to ports. Steel does not wear his prosthetic mods in the armor, apart from one hand on his non-modded arm. This also gives him greater flexibility and maneuverability. The best armor for hand-to-hand and close-quarter combat.

Combat: This is the main battle armor, brought out to fight heavy hitters like Psychopathor and Heartbreak. It is very heavily armored, and with enough power to fuel dampeners or energy weapons. It is large and not very maneuverable in tight spaces, and would ruin buildings if fighting in them. It's basically a military armor, but re-skinned for civilian use. Relies on ranged combat, missile and guns rather than hand to hand. It's not fully interfaced, Steel uses his mods inside it.

Recon: This is also a combat armor, but made for flight. It's similar to the ones that he used to pilot in the military. He doesn't use it often, as it's the most fragile of the three. But, if they need to get airborne, it's a useful tool. It tends to be used for scouting, and has good sensors. The weaponry tends to be missiles and sniper attachments. If Herald had not been a part of the team, it would probably be used more often.

If each of the Rangers could choose one person to add to the team, who would it be and why?

Charge: Sidestep, but then you knew that.

Steel: Ashfall/Pyroclast. Steel is still sore that he choose to sign on for another team, he would be a great addition. Tactical sense and a powerful boost for handling crowds.

Argent: Temerain, currently a member of the Guardians. She's a clever telekinetic, and they have worked together on and off.

Herald: Verdant, a local vigilante and medic. They have plant/growth/healing abilities, and Herald admires their commitment to try to avoid violence to solve everything.

How many of the rangers has Ortega's mom met? What does she think of the ones she's met past and present?

Most of them. She was always open and friendly with whoever Ortega worked with at the time. She hasn't been close to most of them, Chen (and some Sidesteps) being the big exception. What she truly thinks about the Rangers she's kept to herself, but Ortega knows there's been tension between her and Argent.

How old was Ortega when their dad died? Did he live to see them become Marshal?

Ortega was nineteen, and in the middle of getting their mods. Their dad didn't even get to see them join the Rangers, though they very much had a hand in getting the application expedited.

How close can you get to the ROs without romancing them? Can you find out their secrets and backstory while being friends?

You can get just as close, I don't plan to have a difference there, though the timing of things might differ (especially with Argent). All the romance gets you are optional sexytimes.

How well do the RO handle spicy food? What are their favorite foods?

From best to worst: Argent - Ortega - Dr. Mortum - Chen - Herald.

Argent can handle spices well, but she prefers sweet things. Loves everything baked and and loaded with carbs. Ortega likes traditional Mexican/Texan cooking. Has a preference for meat, but also the one most likely to eat lots of veg and salads. Dr. Mortum also handles spice well, but is a notoriously bad eater, subsisting on fast food a lot of the time. Chen loves spice, but sadly, his stomach doesn't, so he has to be very careful with it these days. These days his favorite food are variations of congee, because that's one of the things he can almost always stomach. Herald likes spicy food, but let's be honest here, it's not what other people would call spicy. At all. He likes to experiment with food, and is currently a fan of eastern European cuisine.

Has Ortega cooked for any of the rangers?

Yes. All of them. They do like their occasional team bonding.

Can you share some non-spoilery info on the Guardians?

Current lineup as of Rebirth:

Captain Blaze, team leader. Boost. Controls heat, and can set fire to things. Charismatic. Flamboyant. He was a former member of the Long Beach Heroes before they dissolved.

Zephyr, official second in command. Boost. Some variation of speed and possibly air powers. Sharp. Impulsive. They were in the Long Beach Heroes with Blaze before joining the Guardians.

Temerain. Boost. Telekinetic. She was a vigilante for many years before joining the Guardians, and closing in on 40, she's the oldest of them. She's clever, and still a bit of a lone wolf.

Porthole. Mod. What could be described as a brain in a jar, connected to a robotic body. Very little is known about them.

There are other heroes they work with on a regular basis, some company heroes might as well be members, but other people pay the bills. It's hard to say whether they are efficient crime fighters or just there to make the Mayor look good, but the individual members are powerful enough to be a threat.

Do states and territories outside the FEZ have their own Ranger teams?

No. The Rangers are a FEZ entity, a way for the US government to have some semblance of presence there.

The worldbuilding you've done is incredible! Do you have any scraps of info about past side characters? I remember reading somewhere about a Five Pennies; who are they? I just adored the Argent/Handyman fight in the demo. Thank you :)

Thank you!

Five Pennies was one of the weirder boosts out there, and there is still debate on exactly how his powers worked. The focus of his power, and where he got his name from, were five copper pennies which hovered around his head like a halo when he powered up. While this is a classic telekinetic feat, he didn't seem to control or lift other items, just these five pennies.

When he used his powers, one or more of the pennies would fly over and attach themselves to the victim. They always gave a very notable burn on bare skin, which was one of his trademarks as a vigilante. He was fond of doing it to the forehead or hands of criminals, leaving deep scars behind. Once attached, Five Pennies could affect the victim in various ways. He could cause pain, collapse, and in a very gruesome act which led to the end of his career and subsequent imprisonment, he could literally boil the blood of people.

When you first came up with the concept for Fallen Hero, did you envision it as a book or a game?

It was a book at first, mainly because I didn't have any money to pay an artist for a comic book. I learned of Choicescript many years later, and decided to use that concept in combination with bits from other books as well.

Also, would you say that romance is an integral part of the story? If so, was it your intention for romance to be a major part of the novel, or did you add the romance to better accommodate the Choice Of Game format?

Not romance, but friendship. That deep personal connection (and lack of it) is at the core of the book. Whether you go for platonic or physical love matters less than if you try to connect at all. I don't think I could write anything where the relationship between people (for good and bad) were at the core of the story.

I didn't add the romance to accommodate anybody, that was at the core of the original book. What I did add however, was the choice of romances in Retribution. I only had two planned originally, but after I saw people talking, and had a think about it, I realized that if I added the other three romances/friendships I could widen the scope of what kind of story I could tell. Argent, Chen and Daniel all bring three different nuances to the story, and it has become deeper and better for it.

I would also like to add that in the past, I have been rather dismissive of romance, as I have never liked reading books that focused on that. I still rarely do, but I have come to terms with the fact that I do write romance and love it.

Are any of the Non-ReGenes at the farm in anyway powered or enhanced?

Yes. Oh yes.

Is Argent a self-taught fighter or did she have a mentor or something when she started out as a vigilante?

She is mostly self-taught, but she did have mentors. One of them being Owl, though they met later in her career.

How closely tied is the farm to the government? Is it apart of a specific department or military branch or are they independent military contractors operating under grants/contracts?

More of the latter. There are layers of secrecy and plausible deniability.

How would the ROs and Mortum spend Halloween? Would they try to drag Sidestep into any particular festive activity if they're close? What costume would they use, if anything?

I know very little about Halloween, but here's my initial thoughts:

Ortega has 2 variants. Either high class Halloween with celebrities, would dress outrageously and have fun with it. Or, if they managed to rope Sidestep in (or felt depressed), the annual Halloween party at Owls. Still outrageous costume tho, preferably supervillain ones.

Steel is not fond of Halloween. Might be dragged along by Ortega, but his heart wouldn't be in it. Wouldn't drag Sidestep anywhere, but might be dragged if they wanted to do something.

Argent shows up at Halloween parties in a cool costume, but would leave within the first hour or so. Might drag Sidestep along.

Herald thinks Halloween is fun, but wouldn't go over the top about it. Might try to talk Sidestep into coming to a party, it's a good excuse to be someone else.

Dr. Mortum is one of the ones arranging the yearly villain Halloween extravaganza. Of course Sidestep should come, it will be amazing.

What are the short-term and long-term effects of taking the Boost drug, besides potentially gaining abilities or death?

It varies greatly, some side effects come later, as does some powers. Cancer is a common long-term side effect, as are various immune disorders.

Does Ortega actually like being in the public eye or not? Sometimes it seems like they enjoy the attention while others it's clear they do not want to perform for the press the way they did back in the day. Where is the line drawn? Is the answer similar to something Herald said at one point on the subject (since he's occupying that role these days): "I know what the team needs from me."?

Ortega likes being in the public eye, but on their own terms. That's where the conflict comes from, especially when they were the Marshal, they were very aware of what was expected. If they can get away from that these days, they will. Especially as questions often touch painful subjects they want to repress. But in general, attention makes Ortega happy. Whether that be from one person or a rapt audience matters less.

What would Puppet have thought of Dr. Mortum and Ortega before they ended up comatose?

Ortega was a prancing peacock. Dr. Mortum might be useful.

Did Locus have particular opinion on any of the Rangers?

Yes. But I'm not going to tell you.

How did Locus feel about having telepathic powers?

It's tiring sometimes, she wouldn't mind an off button.

How did Catastrofiend and Psychopathor make their debuts as villains?

I think I'll avoid answering that question now, it might come up in the future, I am still considering options.

What did Locus like to do on her free time?

She's a big reader. She also liked to swim and dive.

If Catastrofiend and Psychopathor fought against each other, which one of them would win?

The Catastrofiend.

Did Psychopathor or Catastrofiend ever face an opponent they would consider their toughest opponent to fight against?

The Catastrofiend doesn't have opponents, it has prey. Psychopathor always hated fighting Steel, which is why he tends to go for him first and take him out before he's ready.

What had been Vernon's motivation for approaching Ortega at the funeral?

Oh that is a massive spoiler, maybe you'll get a chance to ask him...

What are some of the main differences with being a corporate hero and being a Ranger?

Corporate Heroes have both more and less freedom. You're in essence a corporate spokesperson/walking ad, and your main job is to make your employer look good. Rangers have more rules, but also more freedom to decide what they think are important.

If Ortega had been the first one to find HB instead of Sidestep, would it have changed the outcome of the HB mission much, considering Ortega's immunity to telepathy?

Yes. It would have changed everything.

What would the each Ranger consider to have been their "main reason" for joining the Rangers, if they had any?

Ortega: Best of bad choices.

Steel: No more overseas deployment.

Argent: This is where I need to be.

Herald: Bigger platform to do good.

How did Ortega feel about being appointed as the Marshal after Hood's death?

Very surprised. Also very flattered. Jumped into it without thinking about the consequences, still wired from grief.

What is it about telepathy/telepathic communication that most interests Dr. Mortum?

The next step in human communication. The possibilities are endless.

So found some text that implies Ortega has dated other criminals in the past if they're "dating" puppet. How often has Ortega started dating someone who turned out to be a criminal? How often was it an oops vs an info gathering technique?

Not as often as Ortega likes to pretend. And "dating" might just be battlefield flirting, or a kiss or two. There's about 50/50 split between genuine oops/attraction and info gathering through charm. Ortega likes to pretend that they have flirted a LOT more than they actually have, they are very hard to get close to.

We know the main cast will lose their plot armor in Book 4. If you've already thought about this... does that mean they'll only risk being killed by Sidestep himself, or could some choices lead to them being killed by other characters?

Hehehehehehehehe... oh I am not going to tell you that. However, I always thought it was a cheap shot to gank someone off screen for reasons you couldn't affect at the time. I will try to make it story

appropriate.

When Sidestep possesses a person, does it always have to be a total take-over of their consciousness, or could Sidestep "possess" a person but be more passive in the possession (essentially sitting in the back of their brain and letting the host steer while still being in the body?) Is there any way to have a more symbiotic "possession" where both parties are fully aware of what's happening and can give-and-take, or communicate?

The total takeover is the rarest form of possession. It is more common that Sidestep is in the back seat, especially when information gathering or infiltrating. Often they only need to step in and take full control at the last moment when something needs done, a button pushed or an item stolen. There is no reason why it wouldn't be possible to have a symbiotic possession, but Sidestep hasn't trusted anybody else like that yet.

How much information was Herald able to access about the heartbreak incident? Do the official reports the rangers have access too keep the same story the public was fed about a chemical attack? Is he aware of how sidestep actually "died"?

You will learn that in the story. He knows more than the public, he knows it was a telepathic attack, but he doesn't know the details.

Ignore this if it's already been asked, but do you think Step and Ortega would have been friends if Ortega didn't have the accident? Say, if they met in this hypothetical situation, how would that go?

Yeah, I think they might!

during the heartbreak sequence in rebirth, step can potentially lose subtle/force points depending on their choices, but the subtle loss is 10% variable and the force loss is a hard 10 points. does this have something to do with the kind of telepathy heartbreak used?

Nope, a bug that will be corrected.

Revelations will coincide (I think?) with Ortega's 40th birthday. It's obviously not the main focus (shit is HAPPENING), but will Sidestep get to mention it to them in passing? Maybe gift Ortega a nice little gucci denture with their hard-earned villain money?

It would be impossible to ignore that, too many fun things that can be done with it.

Was Villain!Step Herald's first real big encounter? Had there been any other big shake ups since the Catastrofiend disappeared?

Hmmm not the first one, but one of the bigger depending on what Sidestep does at the museum. Blowing it up is big, stealing stuff, well that happens every month.

If Ortega had never received treatment after breaking their spine and thus wasn't Charge today, what would they be like as an individual? Would they have learned to be content with their disability? What other avenues in life would they have followed career wise, and would those have panned through?

I'm not sure if they would be content, but they would have learned to live with it. I think that they would have gone heavily into sports, probably ending up doing wheelchair basketball. Might well have had enough drive to fulfill the Olympic dream their mother never got to do. Would probably still live in Texas, and be very active in their community. Might work with children once their professional athlete life was over.

[Spoiler QnA at last!](#)

[Nov 8, 2021](#)

Did Step have the same handler for both their stints at the Farm?

No. It was two different ones.

If our Sidestep learned about it, will we have an option to investigate into the mass disappearance of telepaths, or to at least drop clues about it to the Rangers?

Yes.

Say Sidestep goes to HG as themselves, did not notice or prevent HG's threading, then get puppetstuck. Did the red threads stick despite the mind transfer? Are they located in the body or the mind-transferred? Is the impostor-in-Sidestep's body a red-threaded unhinged villain-suited telepath?

And, secondly: if they have a good relationship with sidestep, would HG be willing to work with them (or them-in-the-puppet-body) in order to thread the impostor? Would it even work?

Hehehe oh I am NOT going to tell you that. Keep sweating.

What kind of technology is able to be influenced by a technopath? Does the tech have to be functioning independently? Does it have to be a full fledged machine all on its own, or can just parts of a machine be influenced? Argent can interfere with things like the hospital tech or security cameras, but could she make Chen or Ortega's mods glitch or stop working altogether?

The limits of technopathy is, like the limits of telepathy, very blurry. It's a less researched field, and any research done is always suspect as the subjects could influence the results quite easily. Argent could most likely glitch mods, though for once hooked closely to the nervous system it would be a contest of will.

What powers would Shroud gain if she used her abilities on Catastrofiend?

The question is... could she? Or would it be another Argent disaster...

If MC doesn't get involved, what is the outcome of Shroud and Argent's fight? Where does the Regenerator end up?

Spoilers.

We know Sidestep might be able to help with or steal the regenerator from Argent. Will there be a possibility to sabotage her and / or the regenerator too?

Most likely, haven't detail planned book three yet.

Why don't nocturne's powers affect locus? Is she too strong as a force telepath? Do nocturne's powers have like a telepathic angle for them to work?

It is unknown. It might be easy to think that Nocturne's power might have a telepathic element to them, but given certain events with Sidestep, it seems unlikely.

You mentioned before that Step incorporated something from the void in their villain persona, like they took rat king and vocal distortions from psychopathor and catastrofiend. Will we be finding out more about that in the future?

You will be learning more about this in the future. Void might be showing up soon...

if we don't talk about what happened at the Farm after Heartbreak at the end of book 2, are we gonna be able to bring it up in book 3 or 4?

Yes. It's never too late, and the subject will be brought up again.

What do the other squatters around the water treatment plant think of a Sidestep who dresses expensive and nice? Cuz clearly they got money but decide to live out here. Do they think they're just eccentric or something?

There are some eccentric squatters who maintain a good personal appearance, it's good for not being hassled by the LDPD, and for the temporarily inconvenienced it is important in order to get a job. But yeah, there are some rumors, which Sidestep squashes on a regular basis. It's not hard to change someone's impression of an expensive suit to a suit that just looks expensive but is a cheap copy.

What is going through Ortega's head when they focus very pointedly on the barcode during the voluntary regene reveal?

They want to know what's on it.

Does the MC sleep walk?

That's a trick question, ennit?

Would the regenerator be able to replace Step's eye if Argent claws it out, or are they shit outta luck because it only regenerates skin? If that's the case, will Argent be blind if she uses the regenerator, or would she keep the nanovore eyeballs?

It is very unlikely it's advanced enough to replace something as complicated as an eye. And what the effects of that is, you will have to see.

How far is argent's range with her technopathy?

Unknown, but not massive.

Ortega says to same gender steps that they've never kissed anyone like them during the dream, but it being a dream, is that actually true, or did they ever had any same gender flings/relationships/casual flirtation in their past, especially before their time as a Ranger?

The closest thing would be casual flirtation growing up, but it wasn't recognized as such at the time. Looking back, Ortega could see that they had a crush, but not while being in the middle of it. You have to remember that they grew up in a military town in Texas, it was a lot easier to ignore that part. Better to stick with close friendships, even if they never made a conscious choice. Just adapting to their surroundings.

With societal gender bias coming into play, did that differ at all between Ric and Julia?

Only slightly. I think Julia had insulting slurs slung after her more often since she was tall and athletic, and that might have been one of the reasons she went into her feminine, sexy style once puberty hit. Ric on the other hand felt more pressure from his father, but he never had issues finding girlfriends so it was more of an unspoken 'don't be like that'.

Has there been a person in either of their lives that they wish they would have pursued before Sidestep, but chose not to at the time because of that fear of being outed?

No, not really. Ortega is easy to get along with, but hard to get close to.

How did their feelings towards being out change from before being a Ranger to after? Assuming they never dated a same gender step, or that sidestep doesn't fall into that category to begin

with, how did things change after Heartbreak and what was the internal process that got them there?

I will go more into that in the books, but I think in short that Ortega started to realize that life was short and you couldn't take anything for granted. Their reputation was already shit, so a lot of the unspoken social pressure fell away as well.

If the combat style taught at the Farm is distinctive enough for Step to identify it on sight, couldn't someone (i.e. a Farm agent) watch the Villain fight and draw a connection between the Villain and the Farm?

Sidestep made VERY sure to adapt other fighting styles back when they were a vigilante. It comes up now and then in the game, Sidestep switching from one person's style to another. Also, Sidestep wasn't taught much fighting as an operative at the farm, that was not their role. They learned by observing and imitating.

Was Ortega being so driven to befriend sidestep in the past the same as their method/reasoning for befriending the puppet? And they just eventually came to the conclusion that sidestep was mostly harmless (to them at least) and allowed themselves to catch feels for reals?

Nope. That was entirely real feelings, Steel was the suspicious one, Ortega only saw a cool vigilante they had fun with.

Why does the Catastrofiend immediately attack Sidestep while the puppet only aroused his interest?

Many reasons. One of them was that Sidestep is a threat, while the puppet was not. The others I won't say.

Has Dr. Siepen ever been apart of any other dubious projects of notoriety that the public is aware of?

Spoilers.

How well Sidestep can control telepathy during bed scenes and if the control is lost, what do RO feel?

I will leave that up to the reader, I won't get into detail.

What level of Boost would Puppetstep at the best possible for book 2 be? How would Ace have been rated? Could you say why?

It's still too early in book two to tell, you'll see in book three. And Ace is spoilers.

Is there anything the HG trio would like to tell their younger selves if they could?

Hmm. I don't think so, at least nothing that comes to mind right now. HG might say a few things, but those are spoilers.

What was Psychopathor's and his wife's first impressions on each other? How did the relationship between them develop?

I honestly don't know! Maybe I'll get into that eventually, right now it is undecided.

How accurate were HG trio's opinion on their best/worst qualities to their actual best/worst qualities?

I mean that lies in the eye of the beholder, doesn't it?

Could Catastrofiend have gotten away from HB or would HB's telepathic powers affected them as well?

Heartbreak's powers would affect it, but whether it would result in death is a very different question.

Would the red-threads have worked on HB or would HB's telepathy have been able to tear through them?

Depends on what stage in the journey and the situation surrounding it. It's an interesting question, I can see it could go either way.

What was HG's father like?

Charismatic. Larger than life. Born in LA, and stayed and survived during the disaster. Took good care of his allies, and made sure his enemies met a swift end. A lot more forceful than HG is, which has let to them feeling a bit inadequate at times.

Before Sidestep debuted as vigilante in 2008, about how long had they been on the run from the Farm by then?

I don't think I've set a clear date yet, a year or two at most.

How much did the boost drug change Ace's life?

Quite a bit for the better.

What was Nocturne's first impression on Los Diablos? How does she like living there?

Warmer than Chicago. Better weather. Less people. More freedom. She likes it a lot.

How did Herald, Nocturne, or Locus first discover their powers?

All spoilers that will be dealt with in game.

How long has Deadeye been part of HG's organization? How did she find her way there? How well does she know the HG trio?

Deadeye has been a part of HG's organization since very early on. She was actually recruited by HG's oldest brother back when he ran the organization. She was very young then, but once she opted to take the boost drugs, she advanced quickly. She would say that she knows HG well, but Nocturne remains a mystery. There's a bit of rivalry with Jake, since he's taken over some of the positions she considers her due to seniority.

[QnA time of the month! Questions wanted.](#)

[Oct 24, 2021](#)

It's been a busy month, sorry I am late with this one.

Please deposit any questions you want answered here, you've got until the end of the month!

[Bones of the Land \(chapter 2\).](#)

[Oct 24, 2021](#)

1992, Southern California, on the road north.

"How's it going up there?" John shook the communicator, trying to dispel the static. No luck. No answer. Shadowing his eyes, he looked towards the skies, trying to spot Sentinel.

Traveling with a flier had made him lazy, no two ways about it. It took him back to his childhood, sitting in the back of the bus, dozing off. He didn't have to worry; the driver would deliver him to school, bring him back again, take him wherever he wanted. Life had been so easy then. Travel had been a minor inconvenience, time put on hold as he was left with his thoughts, but it had been safe. Predictable. Even the traffic jams hadn't bothered him, though he imagined he would have felt different if he had been old enough to drive. It was a pleasant helplessness to be transported somewhere, and it had done little to prepare him for what would happen. He'd always be grateful to Bernard for that, even though he had come to realize that the man hadn't been the best role model.

"Looking clear." The communicator's crackling nearly made him jump. "Sit tight. I'm coming in."

"Will be waiting," he replied, pulling the goggles down. Even if Sentinel played it safe and landed up the road, the dust and ash would still play havoc with visibility.

He adjusted his mask, looking around the desolate valley. Sand. Dust. Rocks. Some sage clinging to the steep hillsides, but no taller vegetation. Might as well make sure the bikes were okay. Though Sentinel learned to be more careful, she had blown them off their kickstands more than once. A few scrapes weren't the end of the world, but he was more reliant on them than she was. You had to respect the tools that allowed you to stay alive.

Closing his eyes, he let his awareness sink into the surrounding dirt. It had taken years of practice to be in control of what he did and not react reflexively, but he still had a hard time finding the words to explain what he felt when he let go. You weren't aware of the skeleton inside your body; it was there, existing, supportive. Not interacted with. It was the same with the bones of the land that surrounded him.

Heavy. Hard. Immutable. Its sheer mass dwarfed him, frightened him enough that he didn't dare to delve too deep. Instead, he stuck to fragments detached from the whole, rocks, stones, far heavier than he could lift with his muscles alone. They were as light as styrofoam as he cajoled them with his mind, rolling, floating, building an improvised windbreak around himself and the bikes. Once he detached and opened his eyes, they settled heavily like mountains. It took some adjustment to stabilize the wall, just in time for the wind to arrive. A sudden downburst, sand abrasive enough to strip skin from bones. And then, just as suddenly, it was gone, and the skies were clear once more.

"You need to be more careful." John straightened his back, dismantling the rocky windbreak, sending the stones back to the side of the road like a flock of concrete sheep. Sentinel looked on in amusement.

"Looks like you've taken care of it." She shrugged, pushing her own goggles to her forehead. "If I landed behind the hill, it would be a ten-minute hike back, and you know how much I bitch about sand in my boots."

"I do," he admitted, clearing the last rubble from the road. "Did you see anything interesting?"

"Got some trouble ahead." She hunched down, drawing in the soft, ashy sand that now carpeted the road. "Big crack in the ground a couple of miles up, just when it opens up into the valley. Think there was a faultline there that slipped, no use trying to go around it. The terrain here's atrocious."

"I guess that's why we haven't seen any traffic." John looked down at the sketch. They were traveling slowly, partly because he stopped to fix what damage he could on the way. If they had a functioning road between San Diego and Los Diablos, it would help a lot. The I5 was a wreck, so the I15 was their best bet.

He hadn't gone this way when he had made his way south; he had tried to take the direct route along the coastline. The I5 had looked inviting on the maps he had, but between the quake, the rockslides, and the tsunami, it had been a painful trek. He had to go offroad more than once, using paths accessible only because of his growing powers. There was no repairing that road, not for a single man, no matter how powerful.

"Doesn't look worse than the last rockslide you cleared." Sentinel interrupted his musings, which was good because they rarely ended up in good places. "You want to have a go at it?"

"Might as well. Did you get a look at Temecula?"

"Yeah. The city looks a mess, but there are people in the valley. Too much green not to be agriculture. There's water there, so that makes sense."

"Huh. Farmers. Any sign of fortifications or defenses?"

"Not that I could see, but I didn't exactly drop down low enough to say hi. Not looking to get shot at again, those ruins could hide anything."

"I know what you mean." She was a good scout but sometimes missed the signs he knew to look for. Signs of people. Dangerous people. He pulled out his worn map, scanning the area. "We need to get through the valley to get to Corona, then we can cut through the hills to Los Diablos. The old 91 is our closest entry point."

"You're the boss. I've never been to Los Diablos."

"I only passed through." John folded up the map, putting it back in its soft casing. Who knew when he could find a new one?

"Still more than me. You say there are people there?" She put on her helmet, kicking her bike into gear.

"Yeah. Lots. Not as friendly a place as San Diego, though." He had left some friends behind and gained some enemies. "No Thunderhead to keep the peace." He still wasn't sure how to feel about what had happened, so he revved his bike and sped ahead, leaving Sentinel's reply fading in the wind.

How was he supposed to cope with the fact that someone had gone into his head and adjusted things to their liking? Would he even have noticed if it was something small? Had it happened before? It made him feel small and helpless, crawling out of another wreckage into a world that had changed around him. He wasn't a kid anymore, he was supposed to be able to handle shit like this, and yet he couldn't bring himself to talk to Sentinel about it. She was a fellow victim; she might have some insights.

And yet, he kept his mouth shut. Don't show weakness. People will tear your throat out just because they can. He didn't think Bernard was wrong when he said that, not exactly. But he also didn't think that was a healthy way to think. He was trying to be different, not rely on size and fear to make people obey him. When they encountered people, he hid his tattoos beneath a mask rather than display them proudly. His leather jacket had been stripped of symbols and designs, carefully neutral. Just like he was trying to be.

Making things better. Thunderhead hadn't been wrong about that. Maybe that was what made it so hard to swallow. Maybe...

He screeched to a halt, grateful that Sentinel had already slowed down. The steep slopes on either side had shed rocks and stones down on the roadway, and while they had passed many smaller rockfalls, this one was big enough that he had to do something about it. Sure, they might be able to get around it on a bike, but cars or trucks would have problems. Problems he could fix.

"What?" Sentinel asked, pushing up her visor.

"Sit back and have a breather. I'm going to clear this up." He pulled off the helmet, goggles, and mask. He needed fresh air on his face. Thinking about what had happened had left him covered in a cold sweat. "Where was the break in the road?"

"Not far up ahead, once we exit into the valley."

"There was another exit back there, right?" What had the sign said? He couldn't remember. Too caught up in his own thoughts, a fly lamenting his fate while the spider was moving in.

"Not functional. Rockfall there too, and the crevice goes past both roads. If we're gonna clean something, might as well make it the big one."

"We?" He took a drink of water, watching her crack her knuckles.

"You're making me drive the long way there, might as well sign on to your infrastructure development project. As long as I don't have to wear a hi-vis vest."

"Fine, then make sure there's nobody up ahead. I don't want people to get hurt."

"Sure thing." She pulled down her goggles, and John quickly did the same as she took off.

Distraction. He needed that. Get his frustration out. First, he led the bikes off the road and into the ditch, making sure to lay them down so they would be less of a target for the coming wind. Once their transport was as secure as he could make them, he turned his attention to the blocked road.

There were three big blocks half-buried in the rubble, might as well start with those. A deep breath, flexing his shoulders, readying himself to MOVE. It was exhilarating, though his heart beat faster than it should as the rocks started to move, connected to him with an awareness that never ceased to fascinate him. Breathe. Push. Roll. He could feel the stone as if it was his own body, conforming to his wishes. One block pushed to the side, he felt out of breath as he braced himself and moved against the second. Like working out with only his own body as resistance, pushups on his fingertips, dust, and metal in his mouth. When Sentinel came back, he was breathing heavily, downing water as if he had been as parched as the land.

"Nobody around, nothing here for people. It's a dead-end, not much sightseeing to do."

"Good." He coughed, putting his mask back on. "How much can your winds lift?"

"Dunno," she admitted. "But rocks are not aerodynamic."

"Dirt and sand are. If I shift the rocks, do you think you can shift the rest?"

"I can certainly try." She cracked her knuckles. "Been a while since I let loose. You'd better stand behind me, though."

"I need to move some more rocks first. If you can give me some wind to clear the dust, we can work from there?"

"Sure. I can play this by ear. We don't want to cause another landslide."

"Good point. Let me check." John made his way over to the hillside, falling to his knees in the dust. Contact helped with reading, so he buried his hands in the dirt, trying to breathe with the land.

Steady. Heavy. Everything felt solid and secure. It had been a new development when he traveled the I5 south, stopping for a break only to realize that the entire roadway was two breaths and a small shake from collapsing. He had felt breathless anticipation in the surrounding ground, a sense of tension more suited to a bent branch than resting soil. He had got out of there fast, and to test his theory, he had put the smallest pressure on the resting slope. The resulting landslide had sent half a mile of road plummeting into the ocean, something he would have felt bad about, except at least now he knew nobody was on it when it fell.

He felt none of the same restlessness here; things had already settled into a stable configuration. New pressure could build, but it would take a larger quake or heavy rainstorm to change the status quo. It should be safe for them to work.

"Anything?" Sentinel had started building pressure. He could feel the shifting atmospheric conditions in his joints, like the air before a thunderstorm.

"Looks steady, but try to focus on the road."

"Yeah, yeah, pinpoint accuracy with a tornado. You don't ask for much, do you?"

"I wasn't asking for a tornado," he mused. "Can you create one?"

"Maybe if the weather's right," she admitted. "Not here. Wind will have to do."

"Have you?" He was curious; so far, he'd only seen dust devils and one terrifying fire tornado. The thought that a human could create a monster like that... what had they become? Something more suited to this world, the cynical voice at the back of his head told him.

"Not a big one. Small vortices are easy, just like smoke rings. The bigger things you need to build large to sustain themselves, and if there's no atmospheric fuel, I need to provide it." She shrugged as if she was unsure if she would have the stamina to.

"Well, if you can clear the smaller debris, that's good enough for me." Dirt and dust muffled everything, even his senses. Technically he supposed he should be able to control the sand and the dust, but it was like scooping water with a sieve. Couldn't get a grip.

"Will do." She stood in front of him, arms out as he sat down, cross-legged on the ground, making sure to put on his mask.

He could feel the winds tear down the valley, dust, and debris pelting his back. They weren't the focus, but as Sentinel tugged and pushed the air in front of her, new air got sucked in to fill the gap. That's why he was reluctant to work with bedrock, tug at one end, and something might shift miles down the line. Stones though... stones he could do.

As the wind increased in speed, he ushered the larger stones to the sides as they were freed from the surrounding dirt, then urged the smaller ones into the air so they could easily be swept aside by the strong winds. It was easier for him; he only had to make them twitch enough to overcome the friction. As soon as they were airborne, the winds were strong enough to blow them off the road.

Finally, they had cleared a gap large enough for vehicles to pass through comfortably, and Sentinel let the winds die down. Even without her continual effort, it was still windier than it had been.

"There," he muttered, pulling off his mask so the wind could cool his sweaty face.

"Not bad." Sentinel coughed, spitting dust on the roadway. She rarely used a mask, claiming that her powers protected her from breathing the noxious dust and ash. John wasn't sure he believed her, but it was her decision.

"Here." He got to his feet, offering her some water which she gratefully took. "Did a good deed there."

"Yeah, yeah." She walked over to her bike, struggling with the weight to get it upright and back on the road. John didn't offer to help. He had quickly learned that was what she hated most of all.

"Not sure what we can do about the crevice, though." He got his own bike back on the road as well.

"Though I suppose I could fill it up with enough time and material."

"Can't you just zip it back up again?" She didn't bother to put on her helmet. Apparently, it wasn't a long drive.

"That's not how it works." He shook his head, and before she could ask why, he revved his bike and went to have a look.

Sentinel had been right. As the hills split apart to reveal the valley beyond, the road was interrupted by a deep crevice in the ground. It wasn't very wide, maybe ten, fifteen feet depending on where you measured. One side a foot or two higher than the other, the road shifted a few feet sideways. If he had

to hazard a guess, he thought it must be a decade or so old, maybe from the Big One, maybe from one of the many aftershocks. It had probably been deeper and with sharper edges originally but had widened over time as the sides collapsed, filling in the bottom with a thick layer of dirt and ashes. It wasn't as deep as he had thought, but he thought he spotted signs of erosion on the sides. Perhaps it filled with rainwater occasionally, which would mean it wouldn't just be as easy as filling it with rocks and hoping it would stick. Maybe they needed an actual bridge. Hopefully, the people in the valley ahead would be willing to help with that.

"Want me to..?" Sentinel made a wave with her hand, indicating the other side.

"You do not fly our bikes across." John had let her fly them both once, and it was not an experience he wanted to repeat. Flying was terrifying, but it was the landings that worried him. His bruises would heal, but they didn't have access to a shop to repair any damage to the bikes.

"Fine." She shrugged. "Just thought I'd offer. You look tired."

"I'll be fine." He turned around, walking back towards the hills, carefully selecting a large enough boulder. Grunting with the effort, he tugged it towards the crevice, mostly floating, occasionally dragging the heavy rock behind him.

He refused to stop for a breather as he reached the crevice. Instead, he let the rock roll over the side, leaving it hovering in the air.

"You want me to get on?" Sentinel gave him a reluctantly impressed look, and he nodded wordlessly.

Thankfully she obeyed fast, holding her bike steady as she balanced on the rock, trusting him to bring them across safely. John did his best to move the rock smoothly, but it still bumped into the other side, and she suppressed a surprised yelp before pushing the bike off. Once it was secure, they repeated the process with John's bike, and finally, he carried himself across before gently letting the boulder rest at the bottom of the crevice.

"Breathe." Sentinel clapped his back, and John realized he hadn't. Not for a while. He felt lightheaded as he sucked in air, his body trying to adjust to being flesh and bone once more.

"Getting... better..." he gasped, willing his heart to slow down, trying to ignore the pebbles bouncing into the crevice every time it beat. Breathe. Calm.

"Pretty damn impressive if you ask me." Sentinel hadn't noticed. Instead, she dug around in her pack for one of their precious chocolate bars, tossing him half. San Diego was close enough to civilization that Mexican chocolate was, if not a staple, at least readily available.

"Thanks." He bit down, the sweetness of the creamy chocolate a nostalgic memory, though he knew the main purpose was to get some sugar in his system.

That they shared, their need to eat after major expenditures of power. He didn't claim to understand why, but he supposed it was the same reason their coach had always made sure they had snacks and drinks readily available during halftime. Maybe they'd get lucky in town and be able to get a hot meal without having to cook it themselves.

They'd know soon enough.

"Don't move." The voice was loud enough to be heard clearly, and John politely raised his hands.

They were taking a chance here, with him going into town alone while Sentinel keeping watch from the skies. His body armor might be able to stop a lucky bullet, but not a well-armed one. His hope was that people who took the time to farm and clean up their surroundings would be less likely to open fire on a lone stranger.

"My gun's on my bike," John said, hands raised high in the air. "I'm not here to make trouble, just passing through."

"You alone?" Another male voice, slightly off to the side. Crossfire, a good position for them, less so for him. But the ruined buildings lining the road leading towards the field were concrete, and concrete was almost as easy to manipulate as stone.

"No, I've got a companion, but she's hanging back to see what kind of reception I get."

"Depends on how obedient you are. Get off that bike, keep your hands up."

"Alright." John obeyed, making sure to move slowly enough not to be threatening. "We're from San Diego, traveling north. We've got important news that I think your community might be interested in."

"I doubt it. We blocked the roads for a reason."

"Oh." John bit his lip; he didn't like the sound of that. "But you would want to hear this. Can we talk?"

"Step away from the bike," the first voice ordered. "Alvarez, search the bike and him for weapons."

"Just make sure you don't pop me by mistake." A man gingerly stepped out into the open, short, broad, and tanned, the heavy black mustache giving him a look of permanent worry.

"I'll behave," John assured, remaining still as he was patted down. He'd predicted this might happen and had stashed both his handgun and rifle on the bike, in plain sight. Alvarez grabbed both, then stepped back.

"He's clean." Alvarez retreated back to the wall, taking cover but remaining in sight. "Had a communicator though, could be a scout."

"It's to keep in contact with my partner," John said, though he knew Alvarez had a point. Back when he had still been with Bernard's gang, they had used tactics like this. Send in someone nonthreatening to scout the place, then signal back whether there was something worth stealing. He had been used for that early on, before his growth spurt and tattoos. It had left a sour taste in his mouth every time, and though he knew it was a risk, he had lied to Bernard about possible loot on more than one occasion. Maybe that's why they stopped sending him in; perhaps Barnard had suspected he had a soft heart.

"Call her in," the first voice said. "Then we can talk."

"Promise not to get spooked." It was a risk, making this call. It could end badly. But it was also the best way to show they were not a threat, by revealing what kind of damage they could have done if they wanted to.

"No weapons," Alvarez said. "And be careful with the communicator."

"Understood." John slowly raised the communicator. "Sentinel? Prepare to land on my position, but be gentle. Our hosts are skittish."

"Understood," came the curt reply.

"Might want to hold on to your hats," John suggested as he felt the winds kicking up.

"Why..?" Alvarez started but fell silent, mouth agape as Sentinel dropped down from the skies in a controlled fall.

John understood the feeling; he still got it every time. The instinctive reaction of fascinated terror, watching someone plummet to their death. Few people could look away, it was a gruesome spectacle, and by the time Sentinel called up winds to buffet her into a rough but serviceable three-point landing, he knew he had them hooked.

"Gentlemen," he said, voice raised as Sentinel remained wrapped in winds. "Meet Sentinel, one of the heroes protecting San Diego. I'm Mount Hood." A theatrical name, but it helped with authority.

"Oh great," the first voice sounded less than excited, but the person it belonged to finally stepped out from behind the wall. An older, dark-skinned man with military bearing. "Heroes," he grunted, but kept his rifle lowered. "That figures."

Being invited to sit down for dinner was good progress, but John knew everyone was still cautious around them. Temecula was a thriving community for these parts, which was a welcome surprise. The outskirts of the valley had been all ruined buildings and ash, but further east, the farms were inhabited. Had they left the outskirts deserted to deter visitors? It made sense. John doubted they would have bothered to come here if Sentinel hadn't spotted the settlement from above, and not many had the means to navigate the blocked roads.

The fact that they had cleared the way had not been met with pleased looks, and only Sentinel's promise that they could just as easily block it once they left had calmed emotions somewhat. Enough to get them dinner with what he assumed was Alvarez's family. The dining room was large enough to seat them all, thick walls protecting from the worst heat. It had made John self-conscious; the room felt too homely for him not to feel like an intruder. They had to squeeze in at the table; Alvarez and the other man, who had introduced himself as Juan Gutiérrez, as well as four children of various ages, made the table more cramped than usual. John was acutely aware of his wide shoulders, even when he tried to make himself as small as possible.

"Aren't you going to take your mask off?" One of the kids had been staring at John the whole time, awed by his size and exotic appearance.

"That wouldn't be a good idea," John started, unsure how to continue. How did you explain that revealing his face would blow any chance they had of convincing people that they were not raiders out of the water?

"He's got a secret identity," Sentinel filled in, gesturing with a piece of bread. "Got to keep his face hidden."

"You don't?"

"I don't have a secret identity," Sentinel said with a wink. "I'm Sentinel all the time. There's nobody else."

"True." John knew that the adults listened as intently as the kids. It was a question that had been on all their minds. "I don't even know her name."

"You do," Sentinel snapped, a hint of temper showing. "It's Sentinel."

"When are you going to move on?" Alvarez shushed the child, who reluctantly sat back and continued eating.

"That depends," Sentinel said, looking at John. "We're headed to Los Diablos, but we're not on a schedule."

"And you're sure what you told us was correct? About the government pulling out?" Juan looked like he had spent the entire meal trying to digest the information.

"Yes." John put the cutlery down, wishing he could adjust the mask. With it pulled up, the fabric bunched painfully around his nose. "That's one of the reasons why we were clearing up the road. If we're left on our own, nobody else is going to fix our problems. And once word gets out, I bet people will start to move in again."

"And we who already live here?" Juan's voice was hard. "We blocked the access ways for a reason. You have no idea what kind of people are out there."

"I do." John felt his own voice go hard in return. "I lived out there. And I know the kind of people who'd be tempted by a state with no laws. Everyone willing to make a buck and not have the government look over their shoulder. We've got to be ready for that."

"Easy for you to say, you've got powers."

"But you have numbers. I saw the farmland; there must be hundreds of households here in the valley. If you would let us speak to your mayor..." Sentinel pleaded.

"I told you." Juan turned to her, giving John a chance to scratch his face without being watched. "We don't have a mayor. We're a community."

"They still let you speak for them."

"Only because someone has to." Juan lowered his voice, suddenly aware of the children present. "And because I have experience with your kind."

"Our kind?" John could feel the seeds of a story he was curious about.

"Boosted. Outsiders." He shrugged. "Do-gooders. The question is if you're willing to do more than just clear roads we didn't ask for."

"Juan," Alvarez interrupted. "I don't think..."

"Who do you want taken care of?" Now everything made sense. John thought the discussion had been building towards something, and this was a logical conclusion. Utilizing what resources they had.

"The reason why we blocked the roads." Juan was smiling now, the pleased smile of finding someone who understood him. "Got some creepy fucker running around out west trying to start his own empire."

"We didn't see anything." Sentinel frowned.

"Think they moved north," Alvarez added, wiping the chin of the youngest one who had managed to get food everywhere but her mouth. "Las we heard, they were harassing Santa Ana. The 74 is blocked, luckily. There's another community near Lake Elsinore we're keeping in touch with."

"What makes them... creepy?" John kept his eyes on Juan, who looked uncomfortable.

"Not right to look at. Only saw them once. Left a mess behind too, but that was before I settled down here."

"I was afraid of that." John sighed, scratching at his stubble. "Passed through those parts a year or so back and heard the same rumors. Never saw anything, though, but I'm good at staying out of trouble." Thankfully nobody paid attention to Sentinel's snort.

"Easy to run away on a bike," Juan pointed out. "Harder when you've got house and home to defend."

"It's a good thing, though, having roots." Sentinel winked at one of the kids, sending a gentle breeze through the room to their delight. "And people like you are going to be needed in the future. You do realize that since this place now is outside of US jurisdiction, nobody can come around to claim that they own this land, right?"

"They... can't?" Alvarez blinked in surprise.

"Nothing to stop anybody else from taking it by force either," Juan muttered. "Though I suppose you've got a suggestion for that if I'm not reading you wrong."

"You've got an organization running here. Agriculture. Whatever companies move in here are going to want fresh produce. Be open to negotiations, and you might make some powerful friends."

"I believe that when I see it." Juan shook his head. "But you're right. Can't stop this, might as well try to ride the wave instead of drowning."

"Nice." She smiled brightly. "And we'll take care of your creepy problem. That way, you don't have to worry about leaving the roads open."

"You will?" Juan asked, frowning.

"We will?" John echoed at the same time. He had planned to do that from the moment his suspicions were confirmed, but he hadn't thought she would be that eager to go along with it.

That would make what he was planning a whole lot easier.

[Urban Legends of Los Diablos](#)

[Oct 8, 2021](#)

The Tunnels Beneath.

Rejected article found on freelance journalist Karen Baxter's computer, post disappearance. Notes included in [brackets] have an unknown origin. Her editor? Some other, unknown collaborator?

While it is a fact that the tunnels of old Los Angeles still run beneath the streets of Los Diablos, some of the stories told of what happens there ventures far into the realm of the imagination. So what then are the facts of this intriguing location? *[Tourism or tales, you need to decide, right now, it sounds awkward]*

What most people misunderstand is that it is a single tunnel system. It is, in fact, a hodge-podge of passages from different times and built for different purposes. The first popular use of the service tunnels for something other than their intended purpose came during prohibition. The town's nightlife left the dimly lit streets and moved underground, but the party never stopped. As street congestion increased, other tunnels were dug for transport, both pedestrian and traffic. They were used to safely transport criminals and cash between banks and other institutions since they were considered safer than the streets*. [Did they transport the criminals to the bank? Clarity for fuck's sake]*

For the same reason, they proved to be useful places for mobsters to stash their hapless victims, dead or alive. The Pacific Electric subway extended the network further and served as an air-raid shelter during the war. While the expansion of the network halted after the San Fernando earthquake in 1971, it remained a vital part of the Los Angeles transportation network right up until the Big One.

Now, the less official parts of the tunnel network are where things start getting interesting. While never confirmed, it is assumed that the Air Force had a substantial presence underground. There are rumors of tunnels connecting Fort MacArthur with Inglewood, deep underground bases, and hidden facilities. Some claim that the Air Force still has a foothold here, operating in the shadows of Los Diablos, in breach of the Free Territories protocol. While interesting and a source of conspiracy theories, we will now leave the realm of facts and figures and venture deep into the imagination. *[I wouldn't bring up the military, that never ends well. Also, an awkward transition, are you sure you need this introduction? Your heart's not in it.]*

As you might imagine, the tunnel systems suffered no less from the Big One than the city above ground. It is no longer a disjointed, if cohesive, whole. Instead, it is a fractured labyrinth, broken by collapses and new connections. Post-disaster, survivors used the upper tunnels as protection against the elements only to be trapped as aftershocks collapsed the entrances. Today, many of the more well-known tunnels have stories of the trapped dead, ghosts tapping on the walls, trying to free themselves. More sinister tales have them lure trespassers to their demise, enticing them to go deeper and deeper until the roof or floor collapses, and the maze gains a new victim. There is hardly an accessible opening without one of those legends attached, and the homeless who are dwelling there take great care not to venture too deep, even on the coldest nights. *[Now you're getting somewhere.]*

In the plethora of urban legends and ghost stories, there are two that stand out. I will retell both briefly, not trying to capture the full experience but focusing on the facts. *[Facts again. What's your target audience? The people that believe don't need facts, and the others won't believe them. You just sound unsure]*

The first, often referred to as "**The Bad Place**", or "**The Dark**", is infuriatingly vague on details. However, I find it interesting that it has clearly left a mark on the people claiming to have been there despite this lack of substance. Unlike many other urban legends, this is a story often told by someone who actually experienced it, not a friend of a friend. The teller, often a tramp or urban explorer, tells of heading down an innocent-looking tunnel. Sometimes for shelter, sometimes for fun. As they walk, a feeling of absolute dread comes over them. They generally can't pinpoint the source of their unease. Many of the usual signifiers of spooky stories are lacking. There are no strange sounds, the light levels

have not changed, and they don't feel watched. The change is described as sudden, and if several people were present, it happened to the whole party. The people telling the story immediately turned and ran, but there was no sign of anything chasing them. The closest thing to an actual threat I have recorded was people pointing out that "the darkness felt wrong". [Still think you should have gone with the faceless girl; that's got more substance. Just because you experienced something doesn't make it interesting to others.]

The second one has all the details the first one lacks, and they are generally consistent between tellings. I have chosen to call it "**Chains**", since that is the common denominator. This story is widely spread in the urban mapping/explorer community while not being present among the homeless. This, as well as the details, points to a single point of origin within this community, though it could be argued that the homeless rarely venture deep enough to encounter this place. The story starts in different ways, but they all merge as the teller describes entering a tunnel described as being "natural" and not man-made. Sometimes it is a crack into the earth; at other times, it intersects a tunnel broken by the quake. Once inside this natural cave, the descent gets steeper. Often climbing gear is used. The air is described as fresh, and the teller is often excited, expecting a new connection to the surface. Instead, they find what is described as "the room".

The room is large and square, about twenty feet across, and clearly man-made. There are no other exits; the natural tunnel/crack is the only entrance. This is something everyone points out. There is no door, and they are entering through a broken crack in the wall. The ceiling is high; most say it is out of sight in the darkness, but some claim to have spotted it with strong torches. From the ceiling, dozens of chains are dangling. The exact number varies, but all agree that they come to a stop a foot or so above the floor. At this point, the stories diverge. Some refer to searching the walls for a hidden door out, to get into what underground complex this room must be a part of but finding nothing but unbroken, stained concrete. Some mention a distant hum of fans. Some mention broken chains or manacles. Where all agree is that after a short time inside this room, the chains begin to move. First one, dangling slightly back and forth as if brushed against. Then another one, a larger swing, impossible to ignore. At this point, some mention shining flashlights towards the ceiling, trying to see what is going on. Some mention seeing a distant ceiling, but nothing else. Others a strange shadow clinging to it, and yet others something pale starting to descend. At this point, all of them turn to flee and make it to the surface to tell the tale. [We need to find that room. I believe it is real. I know you've got contacts with the explorers, can we find someone who has been there? A witness to interview? Or lead us back.]

Lot 16.

E-mail from John Barr to Chadwick Lansing re: Lot 16.

Mr. Lansing, I can in no way, shape, or form endorse bidding on the rights to exploit Lot 16. Not being a local resident, I am not sure if you are aware, but this site has a very bad local reputation. I am not the superstitious type; I am very well aware that the site has been deemed safe, and the location is ideal. I am also aware that many places in Los Diablos have suffered mass deaths in the past, as is the nature

of this city. However, the Heartbreak incident is more recent than most, and the locals still remember. While the building partially collapsed in a military airstrike to take out the terrorists and later razed to the ground to clean up any remains of the chemical agents they used, I must inform you that it is still there.

No, I have not gone mad, and I do know that it is physically gone. We both received the pictures of the site, and I was allowed to inspect the empty slab locked away behind the fence. While doing so, I was gripped by a massive unease, which led me to research matters further. The neighboring houses were all empty, ostensibly to prepare for demolition in order to develop the whole area for a paying clientele. They showed no sign of squatting, and I noticed that the facades were strangely clean. Unwilling to let my competitors in on my disquiet, I returned later for some investigations of my own.

It turns out that people moved out shortly after the Heartbreak incident occurred, and nobody else has moved in there since. I suppose it is understandable; being next door to terrorist attacks might leave bad memories, but I sense that there is something else at work here. I encountered a local community activist who showed me photos of what the site had looked like before it was cleaned up for sale. The fence around the ruined building was covered in graffiti. No, I know what you are thinking, but it wasn't the usual collection of tags and insults. It was hundreds of silhouettes of people. All sizes. Black. No faces, as if they were all looking at the place where the building used to stand, and we saw their backs. I asked who the artist was, and the community activist replied that it was everyone. That people would find themselves waking up in the middle of the night, painting them. You could see some of them were half-finished, missing heads or arms.

I am not going to lie; the thought unnerved me enough that I asked what was painted on the other side of the fence. Had anybody drawn anything there? The look I got was one of dread. You did not go into there, and having felt the odd ambiance yesterday, I could understand why. This was all disturbing enough, but then she showed me her photos of the surrounding buildings. I made sure to get copies, and I am attaching them to this mail.

As you can see, the buildings had to be cleaned because they were also covered in graffiti. I'm not sure what to make of the eyes; I'm really not. Hundreds of them, all looking towards the center. Most were close to windows, but some were further away. Apparently, many people had fallen to their death, drawing them, and that was the main reason why people moved out. No mouths though, I don't know why that stuck with me. Or why it terrified me so.

In short, I can't recommend this project. Even if this is only collective trauma finding an outlet, I have difficulty seeing this place ever becoming desirable. In fact, I would avoid this city altogether. I am leaving for San Francisco in the morning; we can discuss things in person once I get there. There were details I was not comfortable putting in writing, and you know I am not prone to flights of fancy.

Sincerely, John Barr

Cryptids of the Greater Los Diablos area.

A notebook marked "projects?" found on John Doe, age early twenties.

Bigfoot: San Gabriel most suitable habitat? Still not sure what to make of the Devil's Canyon spotting. Some weird shit going on there, but it feels more human than cryptid. Won't go back alone. Or unarmed. Too many people do not want visitors. Don't want to run into someone's operation and get my head shot off by a villain or something. *[carefully drawn maps of the San Gabriel Wilderness area, with possible sightings marked]*

Catalina Dolphins: Spotted the dolphins, but still no pictures. Nobody wanted to go there after the close call last week. Annoying. Don't have enough money to convince them, and I can't run a boat. What was it? We sprung a leak, but the captain seemed to think it was more than that. I swear I could see lights in the ocean. The pumps took care of it, so we made it to shore, but I wish I could have inspected the hole. It smelled odd down there. What makes the dolphins bad luck? They used to help sailors, didn't they? And now everyone is terrified. The harbor is still wrecked, but are there reasons it's not being rebuilt? I'm going to need a partner if I am going to investigate further. Preferably someone with underwater experience or money to pay for it. *[maps with sightings plotted]*

The Gray Men: Might just be an urban legend, but worth investigating. I've visited a few afflicted areas, and they truly are creepy with the empty ruins and ash-covered ground. It's not hard to imagine zombie-like creatures living here, survivors from the Big One who just never really died. Not one lick of proof though, any spottings might as well be emaciated homeless or weird loners who prefer the isolation. The stories about faces opening up into inhuman mouths sound like an overly active imagination. *[a map of various deserted small town ruins where the gray men have been spotted, mostly towards the northeast]*

Firestarter: I've seen this one walking the East Fork trail. A shadowy figure in the distance, whose footsteps set the underbrush aflame. I had to retreat, of course, couldn't risk getting caught in a brushfire. I've heard some claim it might be a boogymon, but I'm not sure. It didn't look human, more like a massive dog or some other canine, but the legs seemed wrong. Impossible to find traces of, though; anything physical would be burnt before it could be collected. *[maps of recent fires, with scribbled notes of the possible cause]*

The Catastrofiend: While technically a boosted villain, many people think this creature is not human, and I can't say I blame them. There are too many strange things happening in the vicinity when it shows up. An odd stench, which some liken to rotting flesh, and others to bad engine grease and ammonia. Feeling watched, then terrified. The creature speaks, but there is nothing human about syntax or voice. Some describe it as disjointed phrases put together without rhyme or reason. So far, the lead theory is that it is demonic in nature. The ability to disappear in thin air, as well as the terrifying presence, lends credence to that. Others think it is a modded cryptid, possibly a military experiment to weaponize things already stronger than humans. I think I've watched every video of its fights available to the public, and I don't think it's of this world. The way its face works alone is too at odds with conventional biology. *[a map of known spottings of the Catastrofiend, together with dates and details.]*

Runners: I've been collecting footage of this one (ones?) for a while now, and there seems to be a pattern; urban areas with security cameras. Vie put me in contact with her security guard cousin, which opened up a treasure trove of content. The shit those guys see late at night when watching the cameras is unbelievable. The question is whether they are just humans on drugs or something... else. The reflective eyes, the inhuman speed, it looks odd, but on the other hand, people do strange things doped up. Not sure if the one chasing after the car or the one running full tilt on all four disturbs me the most. Naked people aren't supposed to move like that without caring for their bodies. Not sure if I believe the one whose friend saw one of them eat a deer on the train tracks before walking back into the forest again. Human teeth and fingers don't seem capable of that, and there was no footage. Could there really be something more to this?

There are countless tales of cryptids imitating people. Could they have gone urban post-disaster? Or are these feral people? Or something else? Vie has promised to set me up with her cousin so we can investigate some of the hotspots. There seems to be a recurring pattern; perhaps human eyes can see more than the cameras can. *[no maps included, last entry in the notebook]*

[Spoiler QnA for October.](#)

[Oct 6, 2021](#)

Would argent and her technopathy or step and their telepathy be stronger at controlling nanovores?

You will have to find out, Sidestep vs Argent no holds bar is going to be gruesome and interesting.

What ranking is argent's technopathy?

Close to, if not alpha level.

Not sure if this is too big a spoiler, but is the sniper who shot at MC/Puppet and Ortega in ch.19 the same as the one who fired the warning shot in the Puppet/Ortega diner scene in ch.15?

Ortega certainly thinks so.

Outside of big disasters such as Heartbreak or the Nanosurge, how common is it for high-profile heroes to die? Blaze's death another in a sea of many, or something that will stick with the public for a long while and get its own memorial day?

It happens, but it's not common enough to make people stop caring. Blaze's death will stick with people, but not to a memorial day or anything like that. Just a really fancy grave and lots of documentaries.

I can't remember if this has been asked before, but theoretically could the regenerator or something like it be used to give one of the non-cuckoo regenes normal skin? plus, bonus question if it isn't too spoilery— are there any already-existing examples of runaway blue regenes who've successfully done something like this?

Theoretically, it should work. And the last one is spoilers, but it seems unlikely.

Are there any other Boosts who've gained their powers via stress-induced mutations, or is Argent the only one? Is the Farm aware of this phenomenon?

The Farm is aware and actively researching. And yes, there are similar occurrences elsewhere. You might learn more in the future, it will be covered in the story.

If Nocturne takes someone's vision and doesn't reverse the process (for whatever reason), does the person remain blind indefinitely?

No, it will wear off after a few days.

Sidestep made it seem like Re-genes get recycled for the slightest offense (like talking back to handlers). I was wondering if this is true, or if that's just a fear The Farm instills in their Re-genes to help keep them in line.

80% fear to keep them in line, but there's truth to it as well. Re-Genes that can't be controlled are too much of a risk to keep around.

Regarding ReGene, how much about them is common knowledge? We know that Cuckoos are on extremely few people's radar by design, but are battle ReGene something the average person would know about? If so, how much?

The public are aware, but have a very vague and garbled view of what they are and how they are used. It's similar to other military tech, most of you are probably too young to remember, but there was a whole slew of rumors and alien sightings before the B-2 Spirit stealth bomber was finally revealed. And even after that happened, there were almost no sightings, pictures or stats for decades. The Re-Genes are half urban legends already...

Sidestep's first escape was a fluke, so I'm imagining something similar was true with Heartbreak, since their rapid deterioration doesn't lead me to believe they would have especially been able to formulate a proper plan. You've also mentioned that Sidestep's second escape was planned. My question is, how did security measures change following the Heartbreak incident?

They became much more strict, nobody had expected a telepathic surge of Heartbreak's level. Enforcement of Numbers use during experiments became mandatory, and automatic containment

protocols reliant on machines and not people were implemented.

Following Heartbreak, obviously the Special Directive would have wanted to do everything in their power to make sure that the public's eye, they had as little attachment to the incident as possible. Is there anyone other than Sidestep who is aware they were the ones that were responsible? Did Chen's snooping land him in that direction, therefor leading to his receiving the pictures as a warning, or was that the farm playing it safe? Have there been any reporters who tried to uncover what happened, leading to them getting similarly handled as Chen's attempted assassination, presuming that it Was the SD who called the hit on him?

Chen's snooping went in that direction, yes. And many reporters who have tried to follow that path has ended up dead. I won't say if it was the SD that called the hit on him, but it is likely.

If step wasn't a Re-Gene would they have been able to get on the LD rangers team?

Yes, they would have been welcome.

Step panicking post-wreck kind of sets off the nanovores when Argent is in the room with them. Could Step also help soothe the nanovores if Argent is having a bad day with them?

Sidestep is NOT trusted right now, but maybe they would warm up with time.

Aside from Step, has Argent ever interacted or worked with ReGenes before?

Not that she's aware of.

Are all the telepaths going missing from Los Diablos? Or are some from, say, San Francisco?

It is not a localized Los Diablos phenomena, it has also happened elsewhere.

Was Chen just being a worried friend while he was waiting during Sidestep's surgery? Or was he there to make sure no Farm operatives came to take them away, like they did after Heartbreak?

Got it in one. He was not about to let that happen.

How did Ember and Shroud first meet? What were their initial impressions of each other?

Two Betta fish flaring at each other.

Considering Ember's name has that dramatic Lord in it, how would he feel about the fact some people just ignore the Lord part and just refer to him as Ember?

It would annoy him, he likes feeling important.

Do the HG trio have any particular thoughts on alpha telepaths like Locus/Sidestep? Any worries/thoughts if Sidestep is known to be a telepath or are they confident the dampeners and

their mental defenses are enough to keep them safe?

They are pretty confident about that, yes. HG thinks they've got this under control. They have yet to meet a telepath that could work around their own talents. A bit overconfident really. Locus was considered very annoying, she was high force, and thus couldn't be threaded though she wasn't skilled enough to pick up on what was happening. And with Porphyry also being immune due to his physiology, they were a real danger together.

Did Nocturne already have plans when she moved to Los Diablos or did her plans form over time? What does HG think of her plans? Is Jake aware?

Nocturne's plans are still forming. She hasn't shared most of them with anybody, not even HG. Eventually that time will come, but not right now.

How did HG feel about being honest with Nocturne, considering how private they've always been? Were they honest out of their own volition or did Nocturne notice there was something going on with HG and asked about it?

HG did it of their own volition, and they were scared shitless that they would ruin everything. Nocturne were already suspecting something was up, and was getting ready to find answers, though HG had no idea about that.

What did the mob boss crew potentially think if Sidestep sent the puppet to the HG meeting instead of going there by himself?

Ohhhh you will find out about that in book three. It will depend on crew relationship, loyalty and leadership.

Did any of the mob boss crew have thoughts what they would have wanted Sidestep to do after they got the "invitation" to meet with the kingpin?

Oh yes. None of them voiced them though, which will lead to an interesting aftermath.

Was it HG or Nocturne herself who suggested she move to Los Diablos?

HG suggested she come and visit. Nocturne suggested she'd stay once she was there.

How did Chen get the photos? Did someone personally hand them over to him or were they sent to him anonymously?

Spoilers.

Did HG trio have any particular thoughts on villain names like Anathema, Sidestep, or Heartbreak or were their reactions more or less "well, it's a name"?

Much of what is shown in the meeting scene, they don't really have any relationship to any of the names.

Was Sidestep becoming a villain something Farm wanted or influenced them to become or was that Sidestep's own decision?

Spoilers.

What would Nocturne, HG, and Jake consider their best quality? What quality they would consider their worst flaw/shortcoming (if they have considered that)?

Best/worst

HG: people person/too nice

Nocturne: hard working/neurotic

Jake: caring/impatient

What do HG trio most appreciate in one another?

HG: Nocturne keeps them human, Jake keeps things interesting.

Nocturne: HG saved her sanity, Jake made her like herself.

Jake: HG helped him become more than he thought he could, Nocturne challenges him.

If Dr. Mortum and Lady Argent had a "tech-based" fight, which one of them would win? Or would it be a tie?

Could Dr. Mortum theoretically somehow slow down or hinder Argent's capabilities with tech and control or would Argent be able to overpower Dr. Mortum eventually, given she has her own skills with tech?

Interesting. Depends on the location. Outside lab, Argent. Inside lab, Mortum. Preparation will be vital for Mortum, if they had time to figure out how she works, they could counter it.

What would HG's family have thought of HG's powers? Would it have affected their relationship with HG in any way or no?

Hmmm, good question. HG was vague about exactly what they were for that reason. Didn't want to find out.

What was HG's and Nocturne's first few months of living together like?

Weird. Rocky. Cathartic. Lots of sex and crying.

When it comes to the secrets among HG trio, is it something that might stay fixed/immutable unless Sidestep encounters Jake in some paths in Retribution or is there a maybe possibility to affect some kind of change in the future as well, depending on things? Have the secrets gone off for too long telling the truth would be an impossibility?

Things can change in the future as well, we will see! I have not decided yet, the characters will tell me as I write them.

I think this has been answered before but to confirm, in the ending where MC crashes but you jump to the puppet body has the regene secret been revealed?

The tattoos are plainly visible, so yes, people would be able to add up the dots. That being said, depending on your actions, not many people might know.

Can the MC have the gendertalk with Mortum even if you are not trans, gender questioning, or romancing them?

Yes. There will also be more chances for that in book three.

Would it be possible to tattoo over the regene tattoos?

No, it chafes off as the tattoo heals. The pigment won't stay.

[QnA October!](#)

[Oct 6, 2021](#)

In one of the snippets, Ortega doesn't have the best reaction to being carried by Sentinel—do they still have a fear or anxiety toward flying or heights (or jumps) after their accident in the present time?

Yes, even though they hate it. It's one of those things that Ortega has managed to stuff away at the back of their mind and forget about, but occasionally a situation occurs where it will hit entirely wrong. I doubt many people have noticed, Ortega tends to laugh it off or just work through it, it was rougher early on. It was worse with Sentinel, since his powers were wind-based and very reminiscent of using a wingsuit. Herald is easier and rarely triggers any fear. Most likely it's because he's a smoother ride, or perhaps Ortega has just grown older and more at peace with what happened.

Could rich Sidesteps pay off Ortega's debts?

With effort, yes. It's not something that can be done without sacrificing most of what they have amassed though.

How much does Sidestep actually know about Ortega's life before being Charge? Do they know anything about Ortega's relationship to their father? Any details about Ortega's accident?

I haven't decided in detail, some of that is up to headcanon. But, Ortega tends to overshare, so Sidestep probably knows the broad details, filtered through drunk ramblings. Sidestep does know about the accident, Ortega has been open enough with that in interviews even, but what they don't talk about is the aftermath. Perhaps that's a coming discussion in book three... About Ortega's father though... hmmm... not sure. Probably not much. Those are feelings Ortega keeps very much to themselves, especially around their mother.

Time restraints in their personal life aside, has Ortega ever considered getting a service dog for their seizures, or is that something that feels too close to admitting to other things not being quite as right as they used to?

No. And Steel has suggested it more than once. However, Ortega doesn't want a pet (they have never detailed why), and having a service dog would mean that they had to admit they need one. Far better to pretend that everything is fine until it isn't.

Ignoring the racism/sexism in the genre for the sake of argument, slasher/horror movie tropes, who's who of the five ro's and are they alive at the end? Have you watched any horror movies you feel any of them might feel especially attached to or be especially affected by? Second part applying to Argent especially, does she have any favourites?

Argent is alive at the end. Ruthless, smart, a girl and genre-savvy at that. Phenomena by Dario Argento would be close to her heart for... reasons.

Ortega would be the first to go, only to crawl back at the end and scare the hell out of everyone who thought they were dead, and then get killed for real a moment later. Ortega would get a kick out of Jason X by Jason Isaac. Just enough rock and roll and cheese for them.

Chen would die, the logical one who tries to rally the others always does. I almost don't want to name Chen's horror movie, but... Suicide Circle by Sion Sono. He only watched it once, but it stuck badly post Heartbreak.

Herald would live almost to the end, but he's the type to sacrifice himself so... I'm actually going to pick Hellraiser 2 for him. Might be surprising at a first glance, but the vibe fits.

Mortum would be the fake-out dead again and again, but would live to the end against all odds. The movie is definitely Prince of Darkness by John Carpenter.

And yes, all those movies have tangents in Fallen Hero too so... ;)

What exactly was “Dave” thinking when they choose their superhero name?

Is there a story behind Marshal Dave's name?

His name is Dave. Like... why would he bother getting a new one?

Is Marshal Dave ever going to make an appearance in the book? :3

More than likely. He's fun.

What is the status of climate change in the Fallen Hero world? Obviously the Big One caused changes in America, but is human-made change still on track to be as devastating as in the real world, or has the invention of fusion reactors mitigated the upcoming damage?

Climate Change is still there, it was set in motion long before the Big One. However, it is not as far along due to the cooling effects of the massive eruption, as well as less reliance of fossile fuels. As you say, fusion reactors have given an alternative source of energy over the last decades, though it's not a universal panacea.

Are there any longterm Escaped ReGene that the farm has never been able to catch? Are there any the farm has no interest in catching?

Yes. But that's spoilers and might come up in the books.

Could you spare a few details about Dave and Jackrabbit's dynamic and partnership? 😊

Might be closest to an aging hippie uncle/ energetic techie nephew situation (they are not related tho). Everything else I need to figure out when I write them.

I'm curious as to what it feels like to be read telepathically, specifically when a subject becomes aware they're being read (due to a lack of subtlety on the telepath's part).

Being passively read (and not influenced in any way) doesn't feel like anything though perceptive people might feel watched or creeped out though they don't know why. However, if the telepath is looking for specific information, it is easier to spot. It will feel a bit like daydreaming or deja vu, thoughts rising to the surface, only to shift into new ones. Like being scatterbrained and unable to focus.

If we use Chen for example. How would he come to realize an unsubtle Step is secretly trying to read his mind? Does Chen get the feeling he is being watched? Maybe a vague sense of discomfort pops up out of nowhere? What sensations does he experience that makes him realize that "yes, Step is reading my mind right now"?

Honestly? Chen thinks he's getting read a lot more often than it actually happens. It's the sense of being watched, and his suspicious nature. In a way he's like someone visiting a house they know is rumored to be haunted, every sound and weird feeling is taken as proof.

Would someone with next to no knowledge of telepathy/telepaths/mental shielding be able to pinpoint that they're being read? Or do they go "huh, I feel funny for some reason" but can't identify the reason?

You need training to be able to spot the reason for the unease.

I would like to add to the question above: How would a subtle step feel, too? Going off the assumption that the person would notice.

Subtle steps will feel more like wandering thoughts, thinking freely, unable to focus. More forceful ones trigger déjà vu, and a feeling that someone just walked over your grave. Maybe even feeling someone touch you, whisper to you, or stand right behind you and breathe in your ear. Things like that.

Will we get to meet the mayor in the next books? And if yes, will she have plot armor? (asking for a friend)

A meeting with the mayor is long overdue for some Sidesteps. She won't have plot armor.

What does Steels armor look like?

I have no idea. I suck at designing things like that.

What do the Rangers or Dr. Mortum think about telepathic powers, considering some of the characters experiences with it? How do they feel about the fact Sidestep is a telepath? Would Sidestep's strength and abilities with their telepathic powers in present day affect their thoughts or feelings?

Herald isn't disturbed by telepathy, he's not paranoid about having his mind read. And yes, Sidestep being a telepath probably helps with that.

Ortega doesn't get telepathy, or why people are disturbed by it. Realistically they know it's dangerous, but since they are not affected, it's a big blind spot.

Argent is more and more aware of how dangerous telepathy really is. Sidestep is the cause of that.

Chen never liked telepaths, he's fond of his privacy. Funnily enough, Sidestep was never to blame, this came long before they met.

Mortum is intrigued by telepathic communication and is actively researching how they work.

Does Ortega still see their therapist?

Ahahaha.... no.

How much influence do Canadian mining companies and banks have in the Free Western territories? Did lots of companies move their head quarters to the area due to tax breaks?

In the Seattle area, a LOT. And yes, Vancouver suffered massive money drain to Seattle as companies moved, the Canadian government tried to legislate to stop it, but it failed to stem the tide.

This doesn't happen in story, but what would have Ortega done if Sidestep had just refused to interact with them. Just completely stonewalled and then ghosted? Forcing Sidestep to interact with them seems like a little much even for Ortega. On the other hand I can't imagine Ortega just letting their partner/ best friend/ Lost love just walking off into the abyss.

Massive surveillance "just to make sure they were alright", and probably an intervention eventually.

I've have wondered what would happen if Sidestep played dumb and claimed they didn't know/remember Ortega.

Well, guess Ortega would have to hunt down Locus then, because something bad has obviously been done to Sidestep's mind. Ortega doesn't give up.

What would the Rangers, Mortum, and Jake have thought about each of the physical takedowns delivered to Argent from their fighter/armor expertise viewpoints given from an outside point of view.

I really don't know, maybe I'll get into it eventually.

As the author, what are the pronouns we should use for you?

Oh boy. Okay. Hmm. I'm old and genderqueer, so I usually let people use what pronouns they like because thinking about the fact that people might be talking about me at all is really uncomfortable. Being perceived is hard, since that is something I have no control over. Better to ignore that it happens at all rather than try to dictate how people refer to me.

That being said, I do get a little happy spike when people use "he/him" unprompted, but not to the point that I get annoyed when they don't. Honestly? I very rarely see/hear people use pronouns about me at all, so go with whatever.

Do the Marshals have contact with each other? Any interesting relationships behind Marshals and ranger teams? '

Yes they do, and there are probably a lot of interesting relationships, but I haven't written any of them yet so I have no idea! Dave knew Hood though...

Sorry if this has been explained somewhere else, but can Sidestep permanently move their mind to another body? (permanent as in even if the original Side Step body perishes, their mind can still exist.) Also, is Step powerful enough to completely erase a person's mind and turn them into a puppet for future uses? (It's always nice to stock up on extra meat puppets!)

It is so far unknown if Sidestep's mind can truly survive without the body. It will be explored in the future...

A high force Sidestep might be able to completely erase another person's mind, yes. Whether they would be able to get everything depends on the subtlety level though...

How would the Los Diablos Rangers past or present fair against Skybright in a one and one fight? Would they be considered fights, or would Skybright just be delivering curbstomps? Any particular standouts?

Sentinel might be a challenge, but would only be prolonging the inevitable. Anathema would be the one to be truly dangerous, but that is only if Skybright remained close. The old team (pre-heartbreak) might pose a real threat though. They would need combos.

Questions for the RO. Do they prefer to kiss, cuddle or hold hands with a partner?

Ortega is a kisser. Chen cuddles, as does Argent and Mortum. Herald likes holding hands.

If Ortega and Sidestep had a thing in the past, was Ortega aware they were in love with Step or did they only come to that realization after they lost them?

Ortega knew, but it was that kind of thing where they were afraid of the consequences and tried to play it off as having a bit of fun, especially with Sidestep being so skittish.

How common is it for heroes and villains to change sides? Is there a legal definition of villain?

It's more common that heroes switch side than the other way around, but it's known to happen.

"Rehabilitated" villains can serve on community or company teams in exchange for shorter sentences if they are deemed trustworthy enough. There's no real legal definition of a villain, but people generally agree that it's criminals that use a fake identity and dress up in outlandish costumes.

once on Tumblr u answered an ask about sidesteps birthday and that everyone just guesses how old they are and when their birthday even is. could we maybe somethen get a lil snippet of that ? i thought the idea was very cute

Who knows? Maybe I will be in a cute mood one day and write it.

Are the nine gates in the game inspired by or related to the concept of the nine gates in The Club Dumas novel or The Ninth Gate film?

I have no idea what the Club Dumas is, but I did like the Ninth Gate movie. The number nine comes from old nordic mythology, where 9 (3x3) is a very powerful number used in many mystic connotations. Some bonus content if you know what the Uthark is and looks at number 9... ;)

Is Locus' telepathy more Force or Subtle Manipulations? Is she also able to telepathically "possess" another body the way Sidestep does with Argent and the puppet?

Locus is more force. She can't possess people at all.

Are birth certificates and marriage licenses a thing in the FEZ? Was same sex marriage legalized with California out of the picture? What is getting married like in LD?

Birth certificates exist, and you will get one if you are born in a hospital (with the attached bill). However, a lot of people don't have one, and are what amounts to stateless, unable to prove their identity.

Same sex marriage was legalized decades ago. In the Free Territories you can also get married to several people, there are no laws against that. Marriage varies depending on culture and traditions, just like always.

What would someone from Los Diablos be called? (For example, a person who lives in Seattle is called a Seattleite.)

Demonyms are always touchy, and I am very much aware that I am not a native Spanish speaker. That being said, I think Diableño has a good mouthfeel. If anybody has any better suggestions, please let me know in the comments!

After Heartbreak, who told Ortega Sidestep was dead?

One of the debriefing team at the hospital, as they were taking down the details.

Was Ortega or Anathema the one who bought the novelty Sidestep mug?

Anathema. Ortega goes for expensive stuff.

In your recent lore post I noticed the Marshal of Portland was named Trailblazer. This stuck out to me because I remember in an older build of Retribution there was a hero *very* briefly mentioned in a hero-hunting route with the same name. He fell off the roof, if I remember correctly. Depending on the type of villain you were, he would either be very hospitalized or very dead. Was the Trailblazer name repurposed, was it a little nod back to this hero? Or were they the same person and in an earlier development of the story Sidestep beat a Marshal?

I liked the name and reused it, no relation!

Can MC incapacitate/kill someone by hijacking their autonomic nervous system and, say, cause a heart attack / make them stop breathing?

Very strong Sidesteps can possibly do that. They already have the option to do something similar in the sewer fight with Argent during Rebirth.

Was HG's encounter with Ortega tied to their plan to kill Hood or did they have some other kind of plan going on then? Did Ortega tell about their encounter to Hood?

Spoilers! We'll get into that.

Do the Rangers or Dr. Mortum have a favorite time of the day?

Morning people: Chen. Herald.

Daylight people: Argent.

Evening people: Ortega.

Night people: Mortum.

What were Hood's, Sentinel's, or HG's lives like before the Big One happened?

Spoilers. Already getting into that in the Hood novel I am writing on Patreon.

Did Hood have any particular dreams for the future before the Big One happened? Any particular thoughts for education or career? Or was he more of a "live in the moment" kind of kid?

Live for the moment like most kids.

How is one defined either a hero or a vigilante?

Dressing up in distinctive clothes/armor under an assumed identity. Then it just depends on which side of the "law" you are.

What would happen to the Rangers if their team was disbanded?

Herald would probably become a company hero. Chen would try to retire and might just make it. Ortega would need to pick up another paying job, but would hate it and things would end badly. Argent would return to being a vigilante and do her best to keep Ortega alive.

What do Argent and Ortega most appreciate in one another? What about Chen and Ortega?

Argent and Ortega has a similar mindset in many ways. Outgoing/thrill seeking on the outside, with a lot of more introspective thoughtful parts that they rarely share. They genuinely like hanging out, and if Argent dares to get into certain secrets more in detail, they might get very close.

Chen and Ortega are very much opposites that complete each other. They can bring out the best as well as occasionally the worst in the other. They have known each other for a long time, and dares to be vulnerable together.

What would the Rangers/Dr. Mortum or HG trio personally think makes one a hero or a villain?

I think they are all on the same page, it's just on what side of the law you are. Now, whether that matters a lot varies. For Mortum the difference is only official approval, while Herald put a lot of weight in the morals what you do.

When it comes to world-building, do you need to have every detail set to stone or are you comfortable with letting certain things to develop with the story?

Nothing is set in stone until it gets published in the story, there is no guarantee that past me had better ideas than future me. What matters is that the story becomes what I want it to, not the exact path I take to get there.

What do you consider important when creating and developing a character?

Their reason for existing. Why are they in the book at all? How will they affect the narrative? If there's no reason for their existence, or if it's shallow and uninteresting, I tend to fuse them with another character instead to get more weight. For the major characters, I want them to be able to work if the book was told from their perspective instead, because that's how I think when I write them. This story would be different, but still cool if Ortega was the main character (don't tell them they aren't), or Herald, or even Jake. Everybody I am interested in has an arc, some minor characters start out without them, but then grow them as I write.

Are there any particular scenes that have changed from the initial plans when started writing them?

80% or so. My initial plans are never as fun as what they become when I get there.

Have any of the Rangers, Dr. Mortum, or HG trio changed much since their initial design when it came to their personality/role/or motivations in the story?

The HG trio was the barest sketches, they have grown enough to have their own arcs and storylines now.

Chen grew a LOT when I added Spoon. It really fleshed out his character when I added him as an RO and needed to write more peaceful interactions. He got more layers, though the core is the same.

Argent is very much the same, but I had never thought that her secrets would start slipping out this fast thanks to the becoming the hardest RO. I didn't think that the readers would learn about her until a lot later.

Ortega is the same asshole, but I am very amused that people are starting to see through their bullshit.

Herald has not exactly changed, but I have spent a lot more time thinking of why he is the way he is. Like the other three, he had to grow a lot when he became a RO.

Dr. Mortum has got a lot more intense than I bargained for. I really like how they let me get into certain subjects. Can't wait for book three, and certain... things coming to light.

Were there any characters you ended up removing from the story?

Only when I turned it from novel to interactive fiction. I added Ortega and Chen, and removed Rick and Porphyry, which never quite worked for me. Some parts of Rick was kept for Ortega, who became a lot more complex as a result.

What have you found most enjoyable about writing *Fallen Hero* as an interactive novel?

People trying to figure out what the hell is going on and swearing when they realize that the truth was there in the text all along, they just didn't see it because they were sucked into Sidestep's point of view. The whole process of juggling paths and secrets and revelations, and how to pull everything together, and make different replays reveal different aspects of the truth.

What made you decide to write *Fallen Hero* as an interactive novel?

My job had moved, and I moved with it, and was stuck in a tiny apartment without anything to do in the evenings until we were able to get a new, bigger place so my partner and me could move here proper. Choice of Robots had gone viral on tumblr, and I liked the idea if not the book, and decided to try to write some interactive fiction since I was bored. I had a few possible books to transform, and after some research, I took an idea I suspected would sell, fused two character from another book, stole aspects from a third one, and it ended up becoming this. You could all be reading a viking novel, au bronze-punk, or an urban fantasy if I had gone a different path.

[Time for a new Lore Poll!](#)

[Sep 20, 2021](#)

Well, the World and the Rangers ended up on exactly the same vote during the last poll, but now that we have dealt with them, let's see what else you want to read about!

Law and Order in the Free Western territories.

7%

Lingering environmental effects of The Big One.

7%

Corporatism and Politics in Los Diablos.

5%

The technology of the FH world (compared to our own).

17%

The Free Western Territories compared to the rest of the US.

5%

How the boost drug changed society.

10%

Conspiracy theories and Urban legends of Los Diablos.

49%

Poll ended Sep 30, 2021 · 122 votes total.

[Time for new questions!](#)

[Sep 20, 2021](#)

Go ahead, post your questions here for next month! Story specific, process, design or anything else you're curious about.

Also, has it been a year already? Thank you everyone that's been sticking around, it's been one of my worst years since the late nineties, and I am so utterly grateful for the support I have got. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

[Bones of the Land \(chapter 1\).](#)

[Sep 18, 2021](#)

----- chapter 1 -----

1992, Southern California, the outskirts of San Diego.

Pain. Doesn't stop. Clawing arms, ants in his veins, everything burning, rubbing, shards of glass in open wounds and the ash invading everything.

Eyes. Lungs. Facedown in the dust, no breather, cement mouth dryness obsidian cough iron blood stop stop stop...

The ground twisting in response, wrapping, heavy blanket comfort, cave, out, out, ejecting choking mass, out, cleanse, away, breathe breathe breathe...

Earth shaking. Distant heat. An explosion and a glow remembered more than felt and...

"John?"

The crater, the crater, the burning footsteps melted into bedrock, ash fused to...

"John!"

Hands. Warm. Shaking him. Shaking the ground. No. He? He was shaking the ground.

"Shit." John didn't open his eyes, but he did hold his breath. One second. Two. Three. Then he hit his chest hard, right over his heart, so it would stop racing. Breathe out. Cough. Breathe in. And the world was quiet once more.

"Sorry." John rubbed his face, then finally looked up to be greeted by Sentinel's scowling face.

"You need to stop doing that." She let go of his shoulders, sitting back on the floor with an exhausted look on her face. "Next time, I'll blast you into the stratosphere, roof be damned."

"Not sure if that would stop it." His neck ached, as did every muscle in his body. It might have been a nightmare, but his body had still reacted as if the threat had been real. "I've got range, remember?"

"I do. Doubt it's as great as mine." She rose to her feet with easy agility. "Might wake you up faster anyway."

"Would also leave us with a hole in the roof," he pointed out, joining her at the table.

"I thought you weren't planning on staying?" She made an attempt to turn the stove on, but the electricity was out again. "Fuck."

"Let's head outside. I need some air anyway." Chase away the dust in his throat and the stench of death in his nostrils.

Outside, the sun was just skirting the horizon, pale pastel skies over rugged cliffs and dry shrubland. John stretched his stiff back, checking the walls of the house for cracks. It had been a bad one, but the

wooden walls had held up admirably, and there had been no major rockslides. Sentinel kept quiet as she lit the cooking fire, filling the coffee pot from the nearby well. It still annoyed him that he didn't know her real name, but she had shrugged and said she hated it when he had asked. So, Sentinel, it was, regardless of whether she was wearing her mask or not.

"So when are you leaving?" She didn't look at him. Instead, she kept playing with the smoke from the fire, practicing miniature whirlwinds and smoke rings while she waited for the water to boil.

"You sure you won't join me?" Maybe that had been the cause for the nightmare; he had been putting off the final leg of his journey for months now. He liked her. He liked the company.

"No. I'd rather take my chances here than in Mexico. You think they'd welcome more Americans there, let alone boosts?"

"You think we have any future here?" John reached out and pulled a rock over to sit on. Automatic. Easier than rolling it. He had ten years to get to grips with his considerable powers, and by now, it was second nature to him.

"Yeah." Her voice was as blunt as the look she shot him. "Just look at what we've done here. We've made people's lives better, and you know it."

"Shoring up cliffsides to avoid landslides and fixing roads is just first aid. It doesn't change the fact that we're still eating food donations dependent on WHO goodwill. Or that we have to live up here, so I don't accidentally knock over what we've built."

"So? It's the first step." She wrapped a rag around her hand and poured them each a cup of coffee. "Don't tell me you don't like how people look at you when you help them."

"As long as I keep my mask on." He ran his fingers over his face. It had felt like the natural choice at the time; the tattoos had meant he was one of them. Part of the family. Bikers. Raiders. Robbers. Bad men. Dead men.

"You're a hero, Hood. And I don't mind your face. Comes in handy at times."

"I know," he admitted. White. Brutal. Dangerous. Criminal. It made people assume things that might not be true but useful all the same. He could go places where she, a black woman, could not. And the other way around.

How many people he had helped here would be shocked if they saw him without his mask on? How many would shun him? No. That was the anxiety talking. He wasn't a victim. No need for self-pity. He was standing on a pile of dead, someone who had survived the boost drugs when most did not. He had a responsibility to the ones that had not been as lucky. To the dead. To his past bad decisions. And he was choosing to do what? Run away?

Going to Mexico had been Bernard's idea, was that why he had clung to it even as his pace slowed the closer he got to the border? Was he just loathe to give up the last tie to the man that had saved his life, even if he had been...

"Drink your coffee." Sentinel threw a pebble at him, and he caught and spun it effortlessly. He could feel her winds tear at it, but the surface was small and gave no purchase. He held it steady.

"You're right." He took a sip, the answer to a question she had not put into words yet. He could do something here. He could be someone here. What would change in Mexico? He never even finished high school. He had spent the last decade surviving in one of the more hostile places on the planet. Not the kind of life skills needed in a civilized country.

"Of course." She smiled at him over the rim of the cup, smile white and severe. "Does that mean you're staying?"

"No." He took another sip. "But I'm not heading to Mexico."

"Will I regret asking where and why?"

"This place..." He chewed his lip, trying to find the right words. "I can't stay here."

"Thunderhead said you were welcome." There was a moment of hesitation when he expected Sentinel to continue, but she didn't.

"I know. It's not her... it's this whole situation. It doesn't sit right with me."

John looked towards the distant smoke of the city. He wasn't sure that he could explain what was wrong, even to himself. San Diego was the most comfortable place he had stayed in during his long journey. Close to the border. Easy access to foreign aid. Food. Electricity. Doctors without borders. Maybe that was what was bothering him. The constant reminder of what they had turned into. Needing help. Begging for scraps. Dependent on outside assistance.

Was it Bernard's voice that kept whispering in his ear? Don't depend on anybody. Freedom was more important than anything else. Take what you want; if they are weak, they de... no. He didn't need old ghosts haunting him. Maybe he just didn't see a place for himself here. It was already organized. Up and running. He had helped make it safer, yes, but was that enough? For him? What did he want? Sentinel had been right. Helping people had felt good. Making something instead of breaking it. Maybe that's why the bad dreams had returned. Was he feeling trapped? Or had it been the discussion yesterday?

"I heard a rumor." He finally looked at her, hands steady around the cup. "The military is preparing to pull out."

"What?" She frowned deeply. "Thunderhead would have told me."

"Would she? Or would she think you'd go straight to the source and blow the whole thing open?"

"Of course I would," she snapped. "They can't pull out! This is US soil."

"Not for much longer." It had sounded improbable, but it took on a new reality when he spoke it out loud. "Callie told me that they had got the order to be out of here within the week. Something to do with those new security forces you clashed with yesterday."

"Oh my God." She rose to her feet, winds tearing at her clothes. "I thought they were just trying to rile me up."

"What?" John pulled up his bandanna to keep the dust out. Where had he put his mask and goggles?

"The asshole bragged that they owned this place now. That they had won the rights to this concession or whatever..."

"Sentinel..." he said, the warning bells too loud to ignore. "I don't think you should..."

But she was already gone.

John's bike was fast, and he handled it well. It was the fifth one he had owned, and at this point, most of the engine had been replaced and rebuilt into something that could stand the ashy environment. He knew he drove too fast. Despite the work he had put into them, the roads of San Diego were bad enough that there was no way he could keep up with Sentinel.

The first time he had met her, he had thought he had been hallucinating. A masked woman descending from the skies, wrapped in wind and dust, wasn't exactly something you saw every day. Not even him. They had fought, but he had forgiven her quickly for the bruises. He had looked like a raider; it was a fair assumption to make. He hoped he wouldn't have to fight her again. Skidding around a corner, he went headlong into a gust of wind that nearly sent him flying. Shit. Looked like he might be out of luck sooner than he hoped.

"What do you mean?" Sentinel snapped, bereft of mask but not authority. There was no mistaking her powers. The security forces that surrounded her were wary, but in that particular way that made John's teeth ache. Trigger happy. Sentinel might not be the one he had to worry about here.

"Guess they don't have a radio in whatever hut you live in." The officer was tall and arrogant, with the authority of someone who had seen combat and was used to being on the winning side. "It was announced today. California is no longer US soil. Parthion controls the border now."

"Bullshit." The wind picked up, but John could see Sentinel hesitating. And so could the officer.

"Stop!" John had seen the twitching hand and reacted instinctively. The stone hit the officer in the stomach with enough force to knock him over, but as he had assumed, there was body armor beneath the uniform.

"Don't move!" A dozen rifles were aimed at his chest, but the second in command was hesitating, just like John had hoped.

"I'm Mount Hood," he shouted, in his deepest voice, stepping off the bike as if the guns weren't there. Authority. Contained threat. The ground trembled underneath his feet, but he kept it under control. He would not let all his work go to waste. Not like this. "And this town is under my protection."

John could hear the whispers in the crowd, people backing away. They could feel the tremble and knew what it meant. He hoped that the security forces would get the right impression from the floating rocks surrounding him like a halo, effortlessly floating in the air. He refrained from tugging at his hood; he couldn't afford to look nervous.

"Stand down," the officer croaked as he was helped to his feet, Sentinel forgotten. Good, that was what John had hoped. Make himself the bigger target and betting that they would be less likely to fire at him, even though Sentinel was far more powerful.

"I only want an explanation." The stones kept hovering as he crossed his arms. "And no bloodshed."

"Everyone, calm down!" The voice descended with authoritative heaviness, and John could see the security forces lower their weapons.

"Thunderhead." He nodded in her direction and let the stones sink to the ground. At the corner of his eye, he saw Sentinel back away as well, shaking her head as if trying to clear it.

"What's going on here?" Thunderhead looked around, blue-gray cape flapping in the breeze. She wore no mask, but her hair was a tightly coiled cloud of gray curls, and the skinsuit more high-tech than anything else in this town. She had been a hero since before the Big One and was one reason why San Diego was in as good shape as it was.

"That's what I'm wondering." Sentinel's face had softened, but the worried wrinkle remained. "Did you know about this?"

"Yes, I did," Thunderhead admitted. "But people arrived ahead of schedule. I had hoped to inform everyone before they started setting up shop."

"Apologies, ma'am." The officer no longer looked angry, and John knew he should be more confused about that. "We thought it best to act fast before the competition."

"No harm done," she said, looking over in John's direction. Her dark eyes seemed to sink into his soul, and he suddenly felt sheepish.

"I'm sorry," he offered. "I shouldn't have hurt you." It was strange to say it out loud. He knew his reactions weren't always what he wanted them to be. You got results by threatening people; he wasn't the kind of man who could just talk rationally to them and expect results, let alone forgiveness.

"It's fine," the officer replied, straightening his back. "It's not like I wasn't wearing armor." There was no hostility in his stance. "Can we continue setting up our base?"

"Please do." Thunderhead smiled and inclined her head, and as one man, the entire squad turned to go back to the trucks.

"Thunderhead..." Sentinel shook her head again, her jaws tense. "We need to talk."

"Of course." She turned and started walking back to her office, not waiting to see if they followed.

John felt his feet moving and realized that perhaps it was best to deal with whatever it was behind closed doors. It was only logical.

Once out of the sun, John's head seemed to clear somewhat. He took a seat on one of the chairs in the generous office. Since this was Thunderhead's favorite meeting spot, he had been here before, and everything felt pleasantly familiar. Sentinel remained standing, then suddenly sat down as if she couldn't help herself. Thunderhead poured them each a glass of water, then sat down herself.

"You can't keep acting like that, girl." Thunderhead's voice was soft, but Sentinel looked like she had been slapped all the same. "We still have to live here, and now that the military is pulling out, we'll have to find some way to work with who comes instead."

"You knew and didn't tell us." John was surprised at how calm he felt about this whole business. Perhaps because it had ended well, though something felt slightly off about the way Sentinel was fidgeting.

"Only about a week." Thunderhead's voice was filled with regret. "I should have told you, but I wanted to wait until the contract was finalized. I was contacted to prepare for the transition of power. This can be a good thing for us. Parthion is willing to invest in the city. They want what we want. A working city. Food. Healthcare."

"Productive workers." Sentinel took a drink of water, but her shoulders didn't relax.

"Yes. And we need jobs, you know that. People need hope for the future. Do you think they want to stay refugees forever? They want jobs. Homes. School."

"I get it, I get it. I just didn't think it would happen like this." There was a bitter taste to the last word that didn't fit the situation. John wondered what Sentinel knew that he did not.

"You're young, girl. People in power always push others around. Doesn't matter who they are if they're what this place needs. Right now, we can't be picky."

"You're right People in power always end up being assholes." Sentinel shot Thunderhead an ugly glance. "You promised you wouldn't."

"You promised you would behave. I told you I won't risk what I've built here."

"We." Sentinel's knuckles were white around the glass.

"We," Thunderhead agreed, graciously.

"I can't stay," she said. "Not after this."

"That is fair." Thunderhead agreed once more.

"What is going on?" John finally gave voice to his unease. No, not unease. He felt calmer and more relaxed than he had felt in years, but Sentinel was acting odd.

"I'll fill in on the way back." Sentinel rose cautiously as if she expected something to happen. When it didn't, she almost breathed a sigh of relief.

"For what it's worth, I am sorry." Thunderhead rose as well. "I hope you understand."

"I do," Sentinel snapped, and John got to his feet as well. "But that doesn't mean I approve."

"Meet you back at the camp then? Do you want a ride?" John had questions, but he also knew with bone-deep surety that he should not stay here. He should leave. Now.

"No." Sentinel pushed past him, but not unkindly. "I need to clear my head. A flight will do me good."

"Sure." John watched her step out in the street, then be swept up by a whirlwind that sent dust in his face and the open door slamming against the wall.

"Try not to hold it against me." Thunderhead looked around her office, now with papers scattered everywhere. "You're not a bad man. You just have a bad temper."

"Thank... you?" John didn't know what to say to that, so he just turned and left. It felt like the best decision.

Maybe that should have cued him into the fact that something was wrong.

Back at the camp, Sentinel was already packing. The air had gone still, and John didn't know if that was a good or a bad sign, but it matched the unease that had been building during the drive back. The more he thought about what had happened, the less it made sense. His own reactions. What he had read from the officer. Everything had ended well, but it had left him feeling... foolish? Confused? Dirty?

He pushed the goggles up on his forehead, pulling down his hood and mask. The hood was heavy and armored, but right now, he needed fresh air. His head felt too tight for his skin all of a sudden, the headache an approaching distant thunderstorm. His mask was as familiar as his bike, covering his face, filtering out sand and ash, so why did he suddenly feel so weird? Like everything had changed?

"She played with your head." Sentinel was folding clothes, placing each item carefully in her backpack. "You'll feel weird for a while. I don't know how much she had to lean on you."

"She did what?" John dampened a rag in precious water and wiped his face.

"She's a telepath. Empath. Whatever." The winds picked up, but Sentinel took a deep breath, and they died down again. Quiet fury. "That's how she keeps order here. Why this place is so nice."

"I thought people were unusually cooperative." It hadn't been his usual experience with larger settlements, but it had felt like a nice change of pace. How things should be.

"She weeds out the bad ones. Adjusts the ones she can." Clipped words. Dry mouth. John offered her his canteen, and she took a drink before she continued. "She promised she wouldn't do it to me after I called her on it."

"You noticed?" John wondered if he would have, or if he would just have chalked up his unease to something else.

"Yeah." She flexed her hands. "Needs to keep a check on myself in order to control my powers. My feelings didn't match my thoughts enough times that I straight up asked her."

"I never thought about asking her what she could do..." That was unlike him enough that he could pinpoint it, even this long ago.

"She discourages questions. Make people uneasy enough, and they won't ask."

"Oh." John looked up at the pale skies, unsure how to react. Had he been manipulated into helping? No, he would have done that anyway, right?

Right?

Suddenly nauseous, he headed over to the shed turned improvised garage. What did he need to take with him? The smell of oil and metal was comfortingly familiar. Had he been... adjusted? How would he know? Was that why he had lingered? Why he hadn't crossed the border? Since when did he care about people?

No. He had cared long before he got here. He had helped people before he ever met Thunderhead. He'd picked a face and a name that people could trust. That wasn't new. That wasn't forced. But maybe it explained the unease he had felt, why he had chosen to stay out here, with Sentinel instead of the room above the bar he had been offered.

"It's a lot, I know." Sentinel gave him a clap on the shoulder. "And I might be pissed as hell at her, but she's not wrong. She's the reason this place exists like this. Why there's a school. And medical care."

"I've heard warlords saying the same thing." John finished putting away his tools, the necessary ones. He needed to prune again. "Order is preferable to chaos, no matter how it is enforced. At least there are no heads on stakes here."

"Are you going to take her out?" The question was as surprising as it was sharp.

"No." He paused, taking a moment before turning around. "I'm just going to leave."

"Good." Sentinel relaxed, and he could feel the gentle wind on his face once more as she let her control relax. "I wasn't sure how you would react. I don't like what she's doing, but if she wasn't there, more people would get hurt."

"Are you coming with me?"

"What?" She laughed with nervous relief. "I figured you'd want nothing more to do with me after this. Hell, I half thought I'd have to fight you again."

"Why?"

"I didn't warn you about her."

"Oh." John frowned, trying to parse his feelings about that. "That would have been better, but I can see why you didn't. You didn't know me back then."

"Hardly feel like I know you now. You're full of surprises."

"Life here makes for complicated people. Can you ride a bike?"

"What?" Sentinel crossed her arms over her chest. "Why?"

"Because flying is not practical long distance. And I think my pack will be large enough that I can't fit any passengers."

"I can fly longer than you think," she retorted. "But you have a point. And I can drive. You're giving me your fixer-upper?"

"Not going to do anybody any good if I leave it here. And it should last us to Los Diablos."

"That's where you're headed now?"

"You weren't wrong about Mexico. And the city was a mess last time I passed through. It could use someone to take care of it. Two someones."

"You don't figure it'll be overrun with company men as well if what those assholes said were true?"

"Maybe eventually." John grabbed the handles of the spare bike, easing it out into the sunshine. "But I doubt it's at the top of anybody's list. The quakes did a number on it."

"What the hell," she shrugged. "I'm in."

"Good," John said, pushing back the little sting of guilt that he didn't tell her the whole truth either.

There was more than one reason he wanted to return to Los Diablos.

[Rangers, why, where and who?](#)

[Sep 15, 2021](#)

In 1992, after several years of intense lobbying from various corporate organizations, the states most affected by the disasters of the early eighties were designated a Free Economic Zone. This was done to kickstart the rebuilding process. California, Washington, Oregon, and Nevada had started to recuperate from the worst of the quakes and volcanic eruptions, but a US government burdened by costly wars and internal refugees did not have the funds to rebuild the infrastructure needed for life to return to normal. After a short debate, the 40-year agreement was quickly ratified by the house of representatives and Congress. The deal essentially meant the withdrawal of law and regulation from the west. No taxation. No environmental regulation. No financial or ethical oversight. In short, it was paradise for the corporations that had pushed for it, and, as expected, they invested heavily in the less damaged areas.

However, the lack of rules also attracted people who didn't want to live in the increasingly repressive eastern states. While corporations rapidly invested in local security forces, they did not act outside their spheres of interest. With the lack of federal or local oversight, criminal enterprises popped up everywhere, and the addition of boosted and modded villains escalated the chaos. The mood turned sour when a local warlord, dubbed "King of the Hill" by the press, razed one of the early resettling efforts. Had the US government abandoned its citizens? Technically, the Free Western Territories were still a part of the US. Private armies run by companies were one thing, but one run by powerful boosts with a vague grasp of reality was a lot harder to swallow.

The newly elected President Ross, who had been one of the vocal opponents of the deal in Congress, tried to mobilize the national guard but to no avail. So, stymied by the deals of his predecessor, he took a different route. Ever since the disaster happened, small groups of remaining vigilantes and local forces had held the line against the chaos. Over time, these groups had gained both popular

acceptance and influence. Consisting of a mix of boosts, modded veterans, and unpowered idealists, they proved to be the blueprint for the Marshal system.

Ross instructed the justice department to identify which of these vigilantes could be trusted wielding authority and set up local support networks that could operate outside the normal US judicial system. Once the likely candidates had been vetted, he extended an offer and waited to see who would accept.

The deal was straightforward. The Marshals, if they accepted, would get the full backing of the US government in exchange for fighting threats to the lives of the US citizens living inside the Free Territories. They would get funding, staff, facilities, and a generous salary. All team members would be vetted to weed out criminals and foreign spies, but they would have full control of how they went about their mission. The justice department only held an advisory position; the Marshals were appointed directly by the President and answered only to him.

In a surprising and unprecedented move, President Ross traveled to Seattle to meet with the candidates in person. Washington state was the least affected by the disaster of the western states, having avoided the fallout of the Long Valley eruption. It had only been included in the FEZ after intense lobbying from local corporations, and it was deemed safe enough for a presidential visit as Mt. Rainer had entered a quiet phase. The result of this "Seattle Summit" was the launch of the Rangers Initiative in 1997.

Six Marshals were appointed, leading six very different Ranger teams.

The Seattle Rangers

Founding Marshal: Everett Langford (Mod)

Current Marshal: Rivergrass (Boost)

Notable members: Ensign (Mod), the official Canadian liaison to the team.

From the start, the Seattle Rangers were seen as the first among equals. They were operating in an area less damaged by the disasters, which attracted its own share of troubles. Much of their focus has been on the border to Canada and relations with the various powerful companies who make the city their home. As a result, their members operate more diplomatically than the norm and regularly travel outside the Free Territories.

If there is one team that could be described as old-fashioned comic book superheroes, this is the one. They hold themselves to the highest moral standard, which has led to increasing conflict with the Sea-Tac Corporate Council (which handles regular law enforcement), especially over environmental matters.

Portland

Founding Marshal: The Immovable Bear (Boost)

Current Marshal: Trailblazer (Boost)

Notable members: Captain Columbia (Boost) focused on cleaning up the Columbia River and connecting Portland to the ocean once more.

Isolated and largely depopulated, Portland had been hit hard by the quakes and the various disturbances of the Columbia River. Mount Hood and Mount St. Helens have been erupting regularly since the eighties, and much of the population moved north to the Sea-Tac area. Nevertheless, the Rangers team has always been local and close-knit, and that shows no sign of changing.

Reno

Founding Marshal: Dave (Boost)

Current Marshal: Dave (Boost)

Notable members: Jackrabbit, one of the most high-profile unpowered and unboosted heroes.

The smallest of the Rangers teams, it was only included to make sure that every state had its own Marshal. Dave, or Marshal Dave as he is now known, is the sole remaining original Marshal and shows no signs of slowing down. Dave and Jackrabbit are rarely at their Reno HQ; instead, they roam the Nevada countryside in Jackrabbit's kitted-out truck. As much of southern Nevada was hit hard by the Long Valley eruption, one can wonder why. There's little but ash and ruins remaining.

San Francisco

Founding Marshal: Armstrong (Mod)

Current Marshal: Kaleidoscope (Boost)

Notable members: Pyroclast (formerly Ashfall, Boost), a former Los Diablos vigilante, and rumored to be aiming for a Marshal spot.

The largest Rangers team operates in the larger region consisting of San Francisco, San Jose, Oakland, Stockton, and Sacramento. They have several sub-teams, and as the population has grown, there has been lobbying to form a new Rangers team and splitting the responsibilities between the bay area and the inland. Pyroclast has been one of the most vocal proponents of this plan, but the US government has been hesitant to act so far.

Los Diablos

Founding Marshal: Mount Hood (Boost)

Current Marshal: Captain Steel (Mod)

Notable members: Sentinel (retired, Boost), one of the most powerful boosts on the west coast. He is still active but focusing more on fighting/preventing natural disasters.

As Los Diablos has the highest population of powered villains, there has been a rotating cast of new members over the years. As a result, it is known as a volatile team, though the appointment of Marshal Steel has curbed its worst excesses.

San Diego

Founding Marshal: Thunderhead (Boost)

Current Marshal: Vaquera (Boost)

Notable members: The newest recruit, Dynamate (Mod), a reformed villain.

The San Diego area is, like Seattle, vitally important for the Free Territories. The gateway to Mexico, it provides a reliable land route for imports to Los Diablos in particular. The Los Diablos and San Diego teams have historically worked closely together to deal with various threats. The area surrounding the two cities is the main hotbed for would-be warlords and people out to run their own local empire, and some grow powerful enough to require both teams to deal with.

[Spoilers QnA August](#)

[Sep 13, 2021](#)

Sorry if this has been answered elsewhere and I just missed it, but If you end Retribution with enough suspicion from the Rangers to be revealed as a villain in the mc crash ending, but you end up puppet stuck (with Sidestep's body at the Rangers), will the Rangers still figure out that Sidestep is the villain and Sidestep himself just doesn't know yet that they've been caught?

Spoilers, but it seems likely. The clues are still there, but what the impostor might do is another thing.

Were regenes actively discouraged / warned against running away by the Farm staff, or was it assumed that none of them would get the idea to in the first place?

Very actively and sometimes painfully discouraged.

from the first fight with argent in retri we can see that she can turn her lower arm/hand into a sword, but how far can she stretch her limbs/change shape?

About twice the length of her normal limbs, so far Sidestep has seen lower leg and lower arm transform.

Since sidestep's nanovores eat inorganic things, could they eat argent's nanovores?

It would be a fiddly thing, but it is technically possible.

Is there anything other than like high stress/unconsciousness that could make argent lose cohesion? Electricity/heavy vibrations/that sort of thing?

That is very spoilery, you'll have to try and find out.

Was puppet found in San Francisco or Los Diablos? (I mean, Lord Ember and Shroud are operating in SF therefore Ace met Shroud there?)

No, the puppet was found in Los Diablos. The hospital there bid highest for the spare parts.

I don't quite understand regene chip vs regene brain situation. Is chip more like "training/education hub"/storage device? Do regenes (Sidestep in particular) mostly operate with their brain or chip? In what condition is Sidesteps chip? If a regene chip was destroyed would that affect them somehow?

You are right about the chip. It could be seen as a training/education hub, enabling quick insertion of memories and training, as well as easy access in case they needed to be scrubbed and re-programmed. The brain still does the processing, older ReGenes are less reliant on their chip since the knowledge has been "re-stored" in the proper memory pathways. As far as Sidestep knows, their chip is still working as intended, but they have no intention of letting anyone access it. Theoretically, destroying the chip should cripple the ReGene, but in practice, since it is located near the brain stem, that amount of damage would probably lead to death anyway.

Is somewhere in the chip any conditioning system regenes are not aware of? A code word, a combination of numbers, something to stun them in case some would resist their usual preventive measures?

You bet. Sidestep is terribly afraid of that, but also fairly confident that at this point, they would be able to resist. Things like that tends need to be reinforced to stay active. There was a tracking device, but Sidestep cut that out of their arm after the first escape. They found none after their second one, most likely because the Farm had never intended for them to leave their cell again.

Will it be possible for Step to have a cybernetic eye in case crazy mad (which is fair) Argent took their real one :(? I guess regenerator won't be able to grow one.

Yes, there is a cybernetic eye in some Sidestep's futures.

Is Dr. Halabi one of Mortum's informants?

Yes, that's a fair guess.

Guess that's a spoiler. Does Shroud have any will to blow up The Farm or she's okay where she is now/ doesn't care about Farm at all?

Everyone who has escaped from the Farm would probably like to see it destroyed. But whether they want to do anything about it, is a different story.

Hypothetically speaking, if one's a strong enough telepath is it possible for them to break regenes mental shields and control them (not directly but by telepathically giving them orders)?

Oh yes.

Was that HG or Rat King the one who helped Sidestep not to drown in HG's memory?

HG.

How come that Dr. Mortum recognizes Sidestep's face and their identity right away but HG doesn't? Rangers and everything associated with them are more important to Mortum than to HG?

Dr. Mortum is reliant on personal knowledge and information. HG has outsourced that, in most cases, Mitchell is the one who has the data at hand. HG doesn't have to worry about things like that in person.

What was HG's initial reaction when they realized what kind of powers they had gotten? Did they ever use their powers for more mundane or "lighthearted" things or did they immediately focus how to use their powers to further their goals?

Everyone who gets powers plays around with them at first, HG did the same. In fact, that's how they figured out what they were. But very soon they also realized they would be much more effective if kept secret...

How much did HG tell their family about what kind of powers they had gotten? Did HG prefer to stay vague or were they more open about the nature of their powers with their family?

HG has always been very vague and cagey about it. The only one who knows the full truth is Nocturne.

When Shroud uses her powers, can she choose what memories and information to take from her victims, or does she more or less devour everything? Can she choose what memories/information she wants to remember more clearly?

She takes everything, and then it fades over time. The stronger the mind, the longer it lasts, but eventually it will fade and she'll be hungry again. She only retains what she actively memorizes or writes down. She's got a little recorder she uses when she digests people, talking into it as she traverses their memories to help her with later information.

Could the red threads make someone boosted believe they are powerless? Or if someone took the hero drug and showed signs of being overwhelmed by their powers, could the red threads be able to make the person think they can survive it/take control over their powers? Or would the hero drug override the red threads influence?

They could make you believe you had no powers, but if they have a reflexive component they would still be there. A telepath would still read minds, a flier who fell off a cliff would still fly. And yes, the read threads can help mitigate the effects of the hero drug, that was Nocturne's theory, and she took the risk of taking them herself to test it. It worked.

Hollow Ground has hidden their existence and powers pretty well, but wondered how well are Jake's and Nocturne's existence or powers known in the villain/hero circles?

Jake is well known as one of the organization's most powerful lieutenant. However, most people think his powers are just strength and armor, he keeps the phasing bit as an ace in the hole.

Nocturne is known as HG's girlfriend to a select circle of people, people knows she has the power to blind people, but no details.

Was HG's mother's death related to the family's dangerous life? Was she much involved in HG's criminal organization after they became the kingpin or did she prefer to try and live a quieter life? Did she and HG meet often or were they more in contact through phone calls? Did they have any main topics they liked to talk about?

No, she died of a heart attack, she was quite old at the time and had a heart condition for years. She lived a more quiet life, aware, but not actively involved. They met often, HG liked a reminder of their normal life. I think their conversations mainly was about utterly normal things in life, like old memories of relatives, local gossip, what she had been up to lately. HG was probably well known in her neighborhood as her child, and they liked pretending to be normal. Before Nocturne, that was their pressure valve, where they could be themselves and not have to be a crime boss.

what was chen's motivation for lying about having destroyed the photos?

He didn't want anybody else to see them, they were utterly gruesome, and he didn't want those images in anybody else's head.

How were the documents found against the mayor used? Since they were obtained illegally, it is unlikely that they can be used to initiate criminal proceedings against her.

I haven't gone into that in detail, probably by scanning people close to her for clues, then following said clues until incriminating paperwork could be found. At this point, it's less about criminal proceedings, and more about gaining allies.

What does Hollow Ground and his minions think about the similarity of the MC and the puppet?

So far in the story it hasn't come up. HG will have their theories later, but that is spoilers.

Would dampeners have any effect on argent's talents talking to machines?

Less than on Sidestep, but they do affect her. However, that also makes it possible for her to tell them to blink off momentarily and then back on if she needs to do powerful stuff.

Are the Rangers aware that the local telepaths are going missing? Do they have any theories about the cause / who might be responsible for the disappearances? Are any of them worried that (known telepath) Step might be a target?

Dr. Mortum is aware a lot of telepaths have been going missing, but wondered have the Rangers or HG trio noticed telepaths have been going missing as well?

I don't think anyone has put together the clues quite as well as Mortum has.

How do argent and her nanovores communicate? Like pictures/words/images/something else? Is it "noisy" in her head all the time with so many of them? Or do they mostly act as one entity? Do the nanovores enhance her tech control or is it all her?

The tech control is all Argent, and the way she communicates with with the nanovores. I'm not going to spoil how they interact, that is something she might share in game.

Is argent still able differentiate similar textures with the nanovore skin? Like her mind being able to register how soft or coarse fur might be or are the sensations too muted? Same with flavors, are some too mild to pick up/strong to be enjoyable with them like regulating her nerves and receptors?

It is more of a conscious effort, and like with Chen's hands, it's not what it once was. Her taste is good though, that hasn't been very affected.

Did Argent's mindscape change because of the Nanosurge? And if yes, in what ways is it different now?

Yes, it did. But you have no idea what it was before, so that's spoilers! People's mindscapes do change over time.

When step first visits HQ in retri they can notice that Ortega has a slight limp (and also seems pretty tired iirc), can we ever find out what they've been up to exactly to cause that?

Maybe. It was mostly intended to show that Ortega has a life outside of what Sidestep knows.

[Q & A August!](#)

[Sep 13, 2021](#)

Better late than ever, excuse spelling errors please, I did not have time to run everything through the spellchecker so this is original.

How good are the RO with snow? And how good would they be in a snow fight?

Ortega loves snow. Not a bad off-pist skier and they would be lethal in a snowfight. Danny likes snow, but has never really skied much. These days I think he would have to relearn it from scratch since his floating would both save him from disasters, and mess up his balance. Could get surprisingly into a snowball fight. Chen doesn't like snow. At all. And his mods make it even worse. Would not join the snowball fight and claim his arm would give him an unfair advantage. Besides, Spoon needs another sweater on. Argent would be bundled up to her ears. She does not like the cold. Snow is fun, and if anyone steps to her she will bury them in a snowdrift, but indoors in front of the fire is better. Dr. Mortum thinks snow is weird, and rather fascinating. Would prefer building a fort, but has surprisingly good aim.

How was Canada able to keep British Columbia while the United states lost California? In fact, what is Canada's relationship with the new western states, as well as Canada's current political situation? Due to alt history shenanigans does Canada still have the maple leaf Canadian flag, or something like the "Pearson Pennant"?

The damage to British Columbia was mainly from the earthquake and the tsunami. It was heavy, but manageable. The US west coast got more damage due to the Long Valley eruption. It was the resulting ashfall that devastated the west, and which made the US establish the Free Territories as an incitement for private business to assist with resettlement. Canada still have the maple leaf flag. Canada's current political situation is similar to what it is today, but it has a much stronger position both in the Americas and internationally. They accepted many American refugees and migrants after the disaster, and most have stayed there and settled in.

Would it be spoilers to know anything about what Heartbreak's mindscape looks like? And how would you rank the ROs in terms of empathy? (From the most to least, for example) :)

What makes you think you don't already know a bit about Heartbreak's mindscape? ;)

I dislike the term empathy, but if we go with the empathy/sympathy combination it's like this: Herald-Argent-Chen-Ortega-Mortum.

Has Ortega dated other heroes?

Oh yes. I have not established who or how many, but there has been a few. Most likely were never really serious, and some invented by media. Nothing that would have lead to anything.

Do Regenes have a better chance of taking to mods and surviving being boosted?

Slightly. They are bred for compatibility, but mostly it is that the process is done early so losses are more acceptable.

Can we hear more about the Ortega blue hair incident?

I have not decided on any details, who knows if it will come up in the future?

Did the RO had an Emo phase?

Come to think of it, I don't think so. Chen would be the closest, but that was more grunge. Daniel was skirting close as well, but his parents would have disapproved too much.

Why did Ortega get the Marshal title after Hood's death instead of Sentinel?

Three reasons: 1) Ortega was charismatic and good with the media. They had already been seen as Hood's protege, so it was considered good PR. 2) Ortega was also seen as a bit of a fool and easily manipulated and inexperienced, which meant it would be easier to assume direct control by the people in charge (oh boy, they miscalculated). 3) Sentinel had always been headstrong and, since his transition, had not had a good relationship with the overarching Rangers bureaucracy and media team. He was considered to me not a good fit despite his leadership qualities and experience.

Is there a particular reason why the narration is in 2nd person while the text of the choices per se is in 1st person?

Yes, that is the house style of Choice of Games. I stuck to the standard there, since I had no experience of anything else.

Will we visit anethema's grave at some point? thank you for answering all these questions, they are the highlight of my month! I look forward to every email ^-^

Yes. At least you will be given the possibility in book three, whether Sidestep decides to go is a different question. And you're welcome! It's fun for me too, I have to think about things I enver considered before.

In terms of people with epilepsy/ other conditions that disrupt telepathy, is reading/affecting their minds completely impossible, or just extremely difficult?

Extremely difficult. But, as you have noticed with dampeners, nothing is impossible...

How do the LIs feels about their own identities/queerness? Does this change depending on their relationship with Sidestep?

OOoh interesting question!

Dr. Mortum: The good doctor is the one who is most at peace with their queerness. They have had to do a lot of soul-searching in their past, and has gone through some bad experiences. These days they are

at peace with who they are, and what they like. Sidestep changes them, but it is more a measure of letting someone in again, rather than opening their horizons.

Chen: He's gay. He's know that since his early teens, and he's paid the price for it in the relationship with his family. The complication that will come is if he's in a relationship with a nb/genderqueer Sidestep. He's got some issues to work out there, and there will be some interesting discussions regarding it in game (the whole nb section of the game is currently undergoing tweaking).

Argent: Argent knows she's pansexual, but she's never made a big thing of it. She prefers to keep her private life private, especially with how sexualized she gets by the media. Sidestep will have a big effect on her, but that is mostly because she might dare to allow herself to have a proper relationship and not just fake one for the cameras. If she's not in a Sidestep romance, she's not even thinking about that until she's dealt with her "issues". It's dangerous to want things too much.

Daniel: Daniel is confused. No. That's the wrong word. He's assumed so many things about himself, the biggest one that he's straight. I doubt he even formulated it like that, he just always assumed he was only interested in women and he never ahd issues getting a girlfriend. Sure, some guys are hot and nice and makes his stomach flutter but he just assumed he was lonely and sensitive and never really thought much about it. Until Sidestep. Especially with a male Sidestep, he will have to re-evaluate so many things about himself and his feelings. Like with many things, he'll go for it 100%, but it's a big change and it won't always be easy. If he's not in a relationship with a male/nb Sidestep, and if Ortega is male, he'll probably never realize that the flustered feeling in his stomach when he's around Ortega is more than admiration and friendship (it's lust, not a crush). He might get there eventually, there's also a character in book three that an unromanced Daniel might get a crush on. We'll see when I write it.

Ortega: Oh boy. First of all, Ortega is a lot more aware of their bi/pan urges than Sidestep gives them credit for. They are just very good at acting straight. There was a lot of thoughts even before they met Sidestep, but never anyone serious enough for them to break character. Unlike Daniel, a lot more of their identity has been built around who they are perceived as. If they romanced a same sex/nb Sidestep in the past, they were quite relieved that Sidestep was so private and secretive. It was a lot easier to just be themselves and not having to perform in front of the camera as well. A secret relationship, where they got the opportunity to explore that side of themselves without consequence. These days Ortega is more confident in who they are, and have no issues with taking a same-sex puppet to the gala for example. If there has been no Sidestep romance for Ricardo, Chen has definitely been on his mind. However, Ric doesn't think Chen likes men. Why? Because if so, why had Chen not been flirting with him already? Yes, I know. If Sidestep plays matchmaker, that will be a thing, if not, it might happen anyway depending on circumstances. Ricardo would be into it. Julia on the other hand thinks Argent is very hot, and has probably been at least slightly flirty, but Argent has strong boundaries.

Did Ortega have any theories on Sidestep's secrecy in terms of the media? Any particular reasons that they thought were more likely than others?

Yes. Ortega thinks they know exactly why. But so far that is a spoiler, thinking of adding it to the game though. We'll see.

In terms of the main characters, do they have any pet peeves? What about things that they pretend to be annoyed by (but not really)?

Pet peeve - pretend annoyance.

Ortega: Snooping people - people trying to take care of them.

Chen: Emotional manipulation - spoiling Spoon.

Argent: Belittling her - compliments.

Daniel: Babying him - people being rude.

Mortum: Disrespecting science - interrupting their research.

Someone has already commented this but I just had to - please tell us more about Ortega's Hair Decisions.

Haha maybe I will one day, I think I wrote a little fic about it, it's still probably on tumblr somewhere. We'll see if I find it and migrate it here.

Hi, hope you're doing well! What kinda music do the rangers/mortum like to listen to? 🥰❤️
thank you

Sadly I cannot answer any music questions! Why? I am a metalhead. I listen to metal, and that is all I know anything about. I will leave people's music taste to their headcanons.

Kinda random, but what Hogwarts houses would you put everyone in? (idk if you've read/seen Harry Potter though, so feel free to skip if you haven't haha)

I am vaguely aware due to being surrounded by media (it's kind of hard to miss), but since Rowling dove into the deep end of the Terf pool, I have no intention to interact with anything related to that. People are entitled to their fond memories and how much the stories have mattered to them (nobody can take that away, I still love art created by bastards), but I don't want to give her or what she has created the time of day.

I have another question. What is the prison system like? Who runs them? what happens to villains after they're arrested?

Okay, this is mostly Free Territories facts (though it is related to the rest of the US as well).

The prisons are private-run, for profit operations. Some of them have deals with neighboring US states to handle their inmates as well. Prisons have become part of a very lucrative prison-factory system, where prisoners have to work, and are paid in what amounts to company script to produce goods for the companies contracting the prisons for their service. This is one of the reasons why companies have

relocated to the Free Territories. It is the spiritual successor to slavery and cheap immigrant labor. The conditions vary widely depending on the prison complex.

While people back east might joke about the lawless west, the fact is that there are many laws there, decided and enforced by the local city councils and companies. It's laws for the poor, criminalizing behavior needed to survive, and aimed at producing the cheap labor the prisons need.

Villains, boosts and mods are both a resource and a danger. They can be extremely useful depending on powers, as long as they can be securely kept.

Given Hollow Ground's belief that they could run things better, what would their ideal system be? Furthermore how would they try to run things if they were to legally have the mayor's position?

Interesting. I don't think even HG knows that, it's like the dog chasing the car, what do you do when you catch it? Nocturne on the other hand, has plans. But those are spoilers and you might learn about them in game, so I'll refrain from answering in detail for now.

On neutral ground who would win more times than not between Anathema and Argent when they are just fighting generally and why? How would things change if they were fighting to the death, no holds barred? What are some external factors that could tip the scale if they weren't on neutral ground?

Anathema would win, 100%, all the time. The only way Argent would win is by blackmail, but even that would only end in a draw.

Telepathy is a pretty big field with many different types and complexities on what someone can do. Saying that, would you mind explaining the general transition in what telepaths can do as they go from delta's to alphas?

Delta telepaths are very close to just generally psi-sensitives. Hunches, reading auras, getting vague impressions. It's been theorized that this can happen in the general population, without the aid of the boost drugs.

Alpha telepaths, on the other hand, have clarity and range. There are no hunches, they know. Distance matters little, and they can affect/read many minds at once.

Generally, as you go up from Delta to Alpha, you get greater clarity and range, as well as flexibility. There are no strict boundaries, especially Beta level telepaths can be very diverse. You can have one who can read/influence many minds at range, but there are no details or fine control. Another might get great insight and clarity, but only at touch range, another one might have great range but an extremely specialized application.

Did Sidestep have an established home when they first arrived in Los Diablos from the farm? Or were they essentially homeless? Just how bad was their financial situation?

Essentially homeless. The first months were bad, sleeping rough, no money, scavenging for food. Eventually it got a little better, but it was only when the Rangers got involved (with Anathema and Ortega being both generous and pushy) that there was anything approaching comfort. That being said, at the time, Sidestep's views of what comfort was, was very skewed. They were alright with what they had compared to what they had before.

How close were anathema and step? Is Anathema still remembered or has her memory faded in the mind of Los Diablos since Heartbreak?

Anathema and Sidestep were friends, exactly how close is headcanon. Anathema is still remembered, but like with many things, whatever's not in the public eye fades over the years.

If the doctor would have power what would they be?

Who says they doesn't?

Did Ireland become a republic in the fallen hero universe? If so, is northern ireland still northern ireland, or is it part of the ROI? if not, did the troubles happen?

is the UK still a part of the EU?

Ireland is a republic, and northern ireland still exist. The troubles did happen much as it did in our world, but after the UK joined the EU, things settled down. The good friday agreement happened, and with the EU being more federalized than in our world, the technical difference between NI and I is mostly religious and cultural at this point. The border is open, and while wounds remain, the younger generation is moving away from past grievances.

how exactly was anathema's acid ability utilised by the rangers?

It was mainly used (together with invulnerability) against heavily armored foes or vehicles, to get into places, and against people the rest of the Rangers couldn't handle. For example, even the Catastrofiend avoided Anathema. Themmy was also the designated evil villain base destroyer. Anathema and Sentinel in particular had some very nasty and destructive combinations, though also dangerous to the surroundings. (acid tornado anyone?)

Nanosurge lore snippet made me wonder was it Ortega's fault that Sidestep were discovered? Anyone could see an obvious connection between "Allied telepath" and "vigilante associated with Rangers".

Not Ortega's exactly, it was the whole situation. Nobody had any good choices there.

Is (was) it possible to neutralize Anathema with sedatives? Were Charge able to use their electric powers on them or they would make no effect at all?

Sedatives works on Anathema, but massive doses are required. The electricity wouldn't hurt them, but their hair would stand on end.

Were Sidestep always masked in Heartbreak, Nanosurge etc moves or they made up movie Steps appearance and then showed their face?

Movie Sidestep's appearance is entirely made up. Very few people ever saw Sidestep's real face.

Does tia Ortega's ranch have decent protection?

Yes. Ortega is paranoid enough to have made sure of that, and if the normal measures would fail, there is always Snowball.

Have Chargestep relationship ever been implied in the movies or was that just fans/shippers territory?

It was in the movies too.

Do regenes have allergies?

Some of them do.

Are civilians aware that regenes are used in the war?

Yes, that's how they are seen. As weapons.

How would the Rangers/Dr. Mortum, or HG trio feel about going through a haunted house?

I think everyone would have a fun time, except Chen who would think it was a waste of time.

Had Heartbreak been aware of their telepathic powers before they were taken or did they only become aware after the experiments that were done to them? Were they even a telepath before they were taken?

Spoilers. BIG spoilers.

How often does Ortega see their mother? How long is the trip from Los Diablos to Ortega's mother's farm? What do Ortega and their mother like to do together?

When things are not too hectic at work, Ortega tries to visit every other weekend or so. Also, Elena visits Los Diablos regularly in return. The trip by car/bike is a couple of hours once you're clear of the Los Diablos traffic (which can take as long if you're unlucky), but Ortega tends to rely on Daniel to fly them. Much faster and easier, and Danny gets a home cooked meal out of it.

Ortega and their mother are similar in many ways. They like to talk, gossip and cook, and while at the ranch, ride, and sometimes camp out. Elena is no fan of hikes on foot anymore, but she's at home on a

horse. In Los Diablos, it's shopping, movies, theater and music.

How long had HB been missing until they arrived to Los Diablos?

Spoilers.

If Sidestep and HB had encountered each other at the very beginning of HB's journey, could Sidestep's telepathy helped HB or was HB's powers already by then too overwhelming? Could they have communicated with each other more clearly then or nope?'

Yes. Things got increasingly worse.

Ever since the HB incident and the strange "mind melt" HB and Sidestep seemed to have, wondered could Sidestep theoretically share or explore memories with any of the other telepaths Sidestep has possibly met (or heard about) in the story?

Yes, theoretically. If there was trust between them.

There are some points in the story where Sidestep implies they're living on borrowed time since they "know too much", and wondered did they find out something new after their recapture or were they already aware during their hero days that Farm might come after them?

Spoilers, but yes, they did learn something new. We'll get into that in book three.

Is there anything in particular the Rangers, Dr. Mortum, or HG trio like or dislike about their chosen careers?

I think they all like the freedom it gives them, they wouldn't be where they are if they didn't like the rush of adrenaline and uncertainty. Danny and Chen also very much likes to make a difference in the world, and this enables them to do that.

what kind of combat utility is chen working with these days, and how has that changed from the past?

It varies depending on the situation, in theory he has access to the full aspect of military armors. He's more versatile and powerful than in the past because he's the Marshal now, so they invest more money in keeping him up to date.

how strong are chen's different suits of armour in terms of lifting weight?

I have not specified that. They are as strong as they need to be for the story.

A lot of Ortega's relationship fell apart, were they more likely to dump their partners or be dumped?

About 70% doing the dumping, and 30% being dumped.

Would the nanovores in the nanosurge have been able to chew on anathema? Or would their skin/acid have made that impossible?

Anathema was immune, yes. However, they did not have suitable powers to save people, something which quietly traumatized them. They had volunteered to go into the affected zones to scout, and the things they saw was... not nice.

What is Ortega's core desire?

Good question. I'm not sure if they even know. Ortega's got goals, their desire have been playing second fiddle for far too long. In their own way, Ortega is as adept as Chen at ignoring what they feel are selfish desires in order to do what they feel is necessary.

How did Vitruvian die? Did Dr. Mortum have a hand in his untimely death?

How Vitruvian died is... unknown. But it is a fair bet to assume that Dr. Mortum had a hand in it, though they would deny it.

In the nanosurge scene mentioned on the beach in retribution, did ortega actually intend to mercy kill elyise or was it an accident due to their mods flaring?

Ortega did intend to kill Elyise. There is a ruthless side to Ortega that I don't think Sidestep fully realizes. There was no way to save her, so it was better to make her agony short.

Considering the separation between mind and body isn't as simple as it sounds if I'm reading the telepathy lore right, could Sidestep stop an epileptic seizure if they tried? Could their telepathy cure epileptic episodes entirely?

The first might be a possibility. The second, probably not.

How did Anathema join the Rangers? Did they go through the usual background check process, or was there a directer enrollment because of the double-boosting?

And would the regenerator work on them despite their invulnerable skin?

Anathema did go through the usual background checks. And the regenerator would not affect them at all.

Are nanomesh and skinsuit interchangeable? If there's differences, what are they?

Skinsuit is the garment, nanomesh is the material. Theoretically, a skinsuit can be everything from spandex, leather, latex to high tech solutions like nanomesh.

Your personal headcanons for Twintega au?

I try not to think too much because it's dangerous to become invested in my own AU's.

It's interesting that despite the "projecting", we still have no idea what Danny's mindscape actually is. Are the butterflies actually slippage, or do they act as a sort of shielding smokescreen (in a subtler sweeter way than the sharks and Steel's blocky walls)?

Hehehe good spot. They are very much shielding/chaff. Sidestep haven't needed to interact with Danny's mind at all since the thoughts and feelings slip out. What they will find when they go dig is so far unknown.

Did Lady Argent go by a different Hero name when she was still vigilante?

No, this is her first hero name.

Were any of the Rangers around to see Owl break Sidestep's nose? If not, how did they react when they heard about it?

Nope, but none of them were surprised. Ortega probably had an argument with Owl about it.

if the ranger ROs had a chance to study something to get a degree in it, what would they pick? (or alt phrasing: if the ROs were in a college/uni au what would they be studying?)

Daniel would study art, he argued with his parents about being able to do that in the future. Argent would probably be an engineer. Chen was planning to study medicine once upon a time, and sometimes still wonder what his life would have been like if he had stuck with it. Ortega... Hmmm. I honestly don't know. I could see them studying law, but not being too enthused. Dr. Mortum already went and would not want to repeat that experience very much thank you.

Are there other telepathic boosted animals out there? (Like the Rat King)

Has all the genetic experimentation produced any new species that got released into the wild changing the environment other than laser dolphins ?

Since they have the same issues with breeding as humans do, most of them die rather fast, and the ones that stick around are the species with longer lifespans. Apart from the dolphins, there are rumors of weird packs of dogs in the mountains, but it's become another version of cryptids.

How/when did Ortega figure out they were bi?

Probably back in high school, though they never really did anything about it.

For regene, could the incubation period be theoretically stopped for a time, like if they needed to perform some type of surgery on them, and then be put back in the tank and continue growing as normal? Or do they just cross their fingers and hope for the best?

Theoretically, yes, though some stages are fiddlier than others.

We know ortega likes to cook and is good at it but how are the other current rangers in the kitchen?

Daniel is actively learning how to cook, he didn't know anything when he left home, but now he's pretty good. Chen has never liked cooking, he eats out or at Ortega's when he feels like he can handle it. Argent is not a bad cook, but she doesn't show it off because it's such a typically housewife thing to do and she doesn't want people to get used to it. She also bakes.

I don't remember if it was ever asked: can body and facial hair grow over the regene markings?

No.

In the last QnA, it's mentioned Argent has two brothers. Where does she fall in the line up, oldest, middle or the baby of the bunch?

Argent is the baby.

How common are villains?

Depends on the area. The west coast has more than their fair share, but it's a lot about branding. The line between villain and criminal is very shifting, it's not just about power. It's also about stepping up and adopting the persona, the name and the suit. Technically, Jake wouldn't really count as a villain, that's why he's usually named as a henchman. The average citizen probably thinks they are a lot more common than they are since they get featured a lot in the media.

At the time of the story, where are Regina and her operation situated? Are they still based at the farm?

As far as Sidestep knows, yes.

Have the rangers noticed or find it strange how the MC always wears long sleeved clothing no matter what?

Yeah, they did that from the start, and there was a bit of teasing at first. Sentinel gave everyone a lecture when Sidestep was not around about not being dicks. Lots of people have modest/covering clothing for various reasons. It was none of their business.

[Real life news!](#)

[Sep 11, 2021](#)

As I am sure you have noticed, I am about a week late with my usual updates. The reason is, as always, real life. While I wish I could spend my life writing, I do work 40h a week at my day job, and there had been an emergency there and as I am the health and safety officer (I think that is the English term for Skyddsombud) it's been a hectic few weeks. But, all ended well, and no deaths or injuries because we acted swiftly. I had been hoping to step down in hours to focus more on my writing, but alas, the HR department said no. It's 100% work, or quit, and though you all are very generous, I am the sole income provider in the family, and I have a mortgage. So can't take that risk yet.

That being said, things should have calmed down now, so expect the usual patreon updates soon.

Thank you so much for your patience!

[Time to ask your questions for this month's FAQ!](#)

[Aug 21, 2021](#)

Just post them here, have fun!

[Bones of the Land \(prologue\)](#)

[Aug 17, 2021](#)

Prologue.

1982, Northern California, in the hills not far from Susanville, a year and a half after the Big One.

The dry landscape surrounding the cracked road stretched into an endless row of hills shaded gray and brown. Ash from the wildfires was at this point indistinguishable from ash formed by the eruption until you got it in your eyes. John adjusted his goggles, then dug his fingertips under the edge of the mask to scratch his irritated skin. Though the wind wasn't bad today, digging through wreckage always stirred up the bad stuff.

"Make sure your mask is on tightly, kid." Bernard gave John a clap on his shoulder that raised a cloud of dust. "Your lungs' gotta last you a long time."

"I know. It just itches." Like everyone else, John wore layers of cloth over the M95 to make it last longer. It also helped keep it on when driving. These days, a motorcycle was the best way to get around the frequent cracks and rockfalls. He might only be fifteen, but he was tall enough to handle one easily. Nobody cared if he hadn't got a license, it wasn't like the highway patrol had remained behind when everybody fled to safety.

"If you weren't so proud of that scruff you call a beard, it'd fit better." Stanley had pulled off his helmet, optional in the way that masks were not, but he'd always been the cautious one. "Where's Pablo? I'm getting worried."

"Think he's coming back." Bernard pointed at the approaching cloud of dust, the lone motorcycle carefully making its way downhill. "What are the odds that he's found something?"

"Pretty good," John said, trying to focus. "He's going fast; he's excited."

"Or running from something," Stanley muttered as the bike sped closer, but he made no attempt to reach for his gun. The blasted landscape was open enough that any pursuers should already have come into view.

They weren't alone here, but it had been weeks since the last time they encountered hostile locals. Still, they had decided on larger scouting parties for now. One or two people could be picked off; four was a force most people did not want to mess with. The tattoos and painted designs on their jackets and bikes helped. Looking like you were ready for violence meant that you didn't have to use it as often.

John made sure his shotgun was loaded all the same.

"Hey, I found something!" Pablo screeched to a halt, tires slipping in the ash. "Just up the road. Worth the gas to get there."

"Gonna hold you to that. We're running lower than I'd like." Bernard started up his bike, shaking his head at the sound of the engine. "Going to have to take this baby apart tonight from the sound."

"Five cars and a van." Pablo gestured up the road. "Untouched from the look. Gas in at least one of the tanks. Might be able to get some parts as well."

"Anything else in there?" Stanley pushed the visor down, hesitation shrugged off for now.

"Just smelled for gas," Pablo shrugged, "didn't give it a thorough search. Wanted some backup first."

"Any bodies?" John recognized the voice as his own though he hadn't planned to voice his misgivings out loud.

"You've seen bodies before, kid." Bernard's face wasn't visible under the goggles and wraps, but John could hear the smile in his voice.

"Doesn't mean I want to see more," he admitted with an embarrassed shrug.

It had been worse in the immediate aftermath, back when the bodies had been fresh and recognizable as people. Now they were skeletons and dried-out husks; even the fresh ones were marked by living in this desolate landscape. John could hardly remember how things used to be. It felt unreal, like a dream he had woken up from and desperately tried to recall. It couldn't have been real, could it? Days of warm sunshine and soft skin, of white smiles and football practice?

There was nothing soft about him now; you didn't last long here if you were. The days of unending California sun were long gone. These days it remained hidden behind unending clouds, the chill in the air unlike anything he remembered from before the eruption. But the biggest difference was the lack of people. No more throngs of shoppers, clogged highways, and voices screaming together in the audience. He wasn't sure how many people remained on the west coast these days. He wasn't even sure if he counted himself among them.

Some days he hardly felt human. You were supposed to have hopes and dreams and ambitions, and right now, his only ambition was to find enough food and water to get him through tomorrow. This was no life. What if he really had died? What if his body was just too stubborn to stop moving, like when he crawled from the wreckage of the bus?

Maybe he hadn't survived. Maybe he had just not realized he could stop yet.

The road removed those doubts like it always did. With the bike underneath him, John felt like he was going somewhere. Progress. Change. Even with much of the vegetation dead or burned, the bones of the landscape provided interest. A corpse could be beautiful in its own way as long as you didn't see the memories of the human that once occupied it. It was the same with the scenery. As long as he forgot about firs and grass, he could appreciate the stark beauty of his surroundings, the reddish soil exposed where the ash had been blown away, as beautiful as rust on sheet metal.

Flowers of a different sort.

Pablo had been right, as he usually was. Around the bend were a group of cars trapped by a landslide. There might have been more vehicles originally, but if so, they had been washed into the shallow ravine below and covered by the unforgiving mudflow that followed.

They parked their bikes, heading over to the cars. The van lay on its side. One of the cars had been smashed by a boulder, and the others looked like they had been trying to back away from the scene before the road behind became blocked by another slide. It was only thanks to their bikes that they had been able to edge around the rockfall.

"How long have they been there, you think?" Stanley carefully approached the edge of the ravine, making sure the ground wouldn't collapse under them. That happened more often than John wanted to think about, the roads were treacherous and undermined, and the hills filled with material that only required a rainstorm to turn into vast, all-devouring mudflows.

"Months?" Pablo suggested, struggling to pull open one of the dented doors. "A year? Hard to say. Maybe they've been here since the Big One."

"Most likely." Stanley headed back towards the car. "I doubt this road has been traversable by cars since the quake."

"Traversable?" Jake frowned. It sounded familiar in the way big words sometimes did.

"Being able to drive on, kid." Bernard had grabbed a crowbar and was prying the van open with Pablo's help. "That's why we've got the bikes."

"Thought that was because they were easier to fix?" It wasn't that he was stupid, John knew he had more thoughts than that were technically good for him, but he never even got to start high school before his world fell apart. And football had always been more fun than books.

"That too," Barnard grunted, muscles straining as he fought the doors. "Fucking ash. Gets in everything."

"I'll start siphoning the gas," Stanley said, getting the empty cans. "Check the engines, John. There might be something we can use."

"Sure." John carefully approached the cars, but there was no sign of bodies. The drivers had probably survived; other than the crushed car, the vehicles weren't badly damaged. Maybe they had tried to walk out of here. Maybe they had even made it. If the road had been blocked during the initial quake, they would have had time. If it had happened closer to the eruption, probably not. That's when things started to get really bad.

He didn't remember much. That was what he told himself. He'd been away over the weekend with the rest of the team when the quake had struck. An unfamiliar motel room, being jolted awake in the dead of night with drywall raining down on him. He had escaped outside in his jammies and spent the rest of the night in the bus with the others, watching distant fires spring up around them. It had felt like a nightmare, but the real one came the next day when the coach had told them they couldn't go back to Eureka.

That the town was gone.

John hadn't understood it at the time, how the ocean could destroy a whole city, but that didn't stop him from imagining it. The water creeping ashore in the darkness, swallowing people and houses. His house. His parents. It still didn't feel real. He had not even got to finish all his Halloween candy.

Maybe that had made the eruption easier to accept. Another nightmare of soot and ash, in the bus, on the way to one of the shelters. Black rain. Skidding tires. The world turned upside down, 'round, 'round, lights and flashes, and he crawled through a broken window and didn't listen to the screams. He had to get home. He had to find his house. His parents. His candy.

Instead, he had found Bernard's truck and spent the next few days coughing with eyes as swollen from ash as from tears. They had been together since.

"Hey!" Pablo's voice yanked John back to the present, and he blinked furiously behind his goggles until the stinging stopped.

"What?" Shouting back was a relief, his cracked voice no different than normal.

"I've found something! Cargo!"

"Cargo?" Bernard abandoned the trunk he had been working on. "Anything good?"

"I dunno. Help me drag the boxes out." Pablo coughed; whether it was cigarettes or ash, his lungs didn't work right. Few things did anymore.

It didn't take them long to unload the boxes between the four of them, several large ones filled with what looked like lab equipment. The fragile objects had been broken in the crash; they hadn't been stowed well. To John, it looked like the boxes had been packed in a hurry. Maybe whoever had been driving the van had been trying to evacuate. The final box was small, metal instead of wood, and this one was still intact.

"Huh." Stanley leaned down, pulling up a binder that he started to leaf through.

"This looks weird." Pablo picked up one of the plastic cases, revealing a row of glass ampules.

"Survived the crash, though."

"So what is it?" Bernard looked down into the box. More cases stacked on each other, encased in packing foam. "You getting anything from the paperwork, Stan?"

"I've never seen anything like this." Pablo held up one of the ampules against the overcast sky. The liquid was a pale yellowish color and slightly opaque. "It looks like piss. You think it's drugs?"

"Doesn't look like any I've ever seen." Bernard held out his hand, and Pablo handed over his price.

"Though I'll admit I'm no expert."

"Guys. Guys." Stanley's voice had gone hard, demanding obedience. "Step away from that. Right now."

"What?" Bernard put down the ampule and stepped back. John did the same. "Is it toxic?"

"You might say that." Stanley waved Pablo back as well before approaching cautiously. "Were any of them cracked?"

"I don't think so." Pablo wiped his fingers on his pants. "What is it?"

"I might be wrong, but I think this might be the Hero drug."

"What? Like that superpower shit? For real?" Pablo laughed, which led to a violent cough.

"Looks like a government contractor van." Bernard kicked the side of it. "Could track. Was probably doing secret experiments somewhere. Maybe they were coming from Area 51. The 395 is not far from here. Before things went to hell, you could get to Reno real easy, and then it's just south."

"It's a regular black van," Pablo groaned, "and if you wanted to check on aliens, you'd go from Vegas. Not from up here."

"I don't think I'm wrong, though." Stanley ignored their bickering and picked up the lid of the container. Numbers were stamped on the inside. "It looks like the hero drug. The shipping manifest matches the label."

"Who the hell would put documentation in an illegal drug shipment? You'd go to jail for that." Bernard shook his head.

"Someone who's not concerned about getting caught," Stanley said with a sigh.

"White people then," Pablo chuckled.

"The government?" John suggested cautiously.

"Or the military," Bernard said, unable to decide between his two favorite enemies.

"Should we grab it?" John couldn't read the mood. Was it valuable or dangerous? Maybe both.

"Of course." Bernard gave Stanley a hard look before he could protest. "But hurry up and finish searching this place. We have got to get back before the wind picks up. I don't like the look of those clouds."

Back at the garage, the wind had picked up, rattling the windows. It was their latest base, but the pickings had turned lean so they would have to move on before long. John would miss the place. It was the first time since the quake he had felt safe falling asleep. Solidly built, on high ground, all they had to fear was the wind or other people.

"Not a bad haul." Jude went through the collected parts; they had been added to what the others had been able to find. In total, the group counted eleven people, all men, all with various reasons to remain behind instead of attempting to evacuate.

"Have to think about moving on, though." Bernard was grunting over his bike, cleaning filters and checking for more damage. The abrasive ash destroyed engines fast if you didn't keep on top of things. "Pickings are getting slimmer, and we were lucky that the latest hiccup didn't blast any ash our way."

"If we want to keep heading south, we need to get closer to the shore if we want to avoid being coughed on." Pablo had lit up a cigarette, narrow face worn by the day's exertions. "The big bastard is between us and Mexico."

"I don't understand why you don't want to go to San Francisco." César was their latest addition, picked up two months ago on the side of the road. "I heard they have camps there for evacuees."

"I heard those closed months ago."

"If they even existed, the whole coastline sunk the way I heard it." Jude rolled his eyes, and John looked away and tried not to think of Eureka.

"None of us know shit." Pablo took another drag. "We just have to accept that."

"But they said on the radio..." César protested.

"I'm not going back to jail," Jude snapped. "Or get stuck in a refugee internment camp working for food and board."

"That's just rumors." But César sounded unsure. These days all they had were rumors.

"Is it?" Bernard looked up from his work. "You think they're not gonna use free labor when they've got it? How many got evacuated from here? How many died? You think they're gonna get a cozy housing unit in New York and not get stuck on a southern plantation somewhere raising crops they can't afford to eat?"

"You know they wouldn't..."

"Do I? You know the kind of shit the government gets up to." It was not a new argument. By now, nobody was contradicting Bernard on the subject. Those that did, didn't last long.

"Guys," Pablo interrupted, still nursing his cigarette. "I think we should take it."

"What?" Bernard snapped. "You were as dead set as we on remaining here?"

"I meant the hero drug." He gestured to the small box on the floor, resealed and innocent. They had explained what was in it when they returned, and it was almost a relief that someone finally brought up the elephant in the room.

"Oh." Bernard looked at it as if he only just remembered. That was a lie; John had seen him look. Just like everyone else.

"No way," Stanley protested. "You know what that shit does to people."

"Gives them superpowers." Pablo shrugged, smoke drifting through his nostrils.

"The ones they don't kill! You know how dangerous the boosts are. I can't let you kill yourself."

"You really believe that bullshit?" Pablo got off his chair, dropping the stub on the ground, grinding it out with a habitual motion of his boot. "Next, you'll tell me you believe that weed is the devil's lettuce and will turn you into a drug fiend."

"You know I don't, but..." Stanley gestured helplessly because, at this point, other people were paying attention, moving closer.

"But what? You really think that this shit kills nearly everyone that takes it just 'cause the government tells you so? You don't think that shit's in any way suspicious?"

"He's got a point." Bernard wiped his hands on a rag. "It ain't like they want us to have superpowers any more than machine guns. Just because someone shot the fucking president."

"But..." Stanley sounded like he was close to begging.

"And so what if it kills us?" Jude joined Pablo's side, and John could see others nod in agreement. "We're gambling with our lives every day. It ain't like there's some paradise even if we make it to the Mexican border. We'd be a bunch of refugees. We'd have no rights. At least here, we're in control."

"You're not wrong," Bernard agreed, picking up the mood of the room. "Is it really that lethal, Stan?"

"I... don't know for sure," Stanley admitted. "But if there's anybody in this room that knows anything about drugs, it's me, and I'm telling you I don't feel comfortable with taking the chance."

"You don't know anything about drugs," Jude groaned. "You worked at a Walgreens, for fuck's sake."

"I'm a licensed pharmacist, and if it wasn't for me, you would have lost your fucking arm months ago," Stanley snapped.

"Stop. Both of you." Bernard stood up. He didn't have to raise his voice for the others to recognize his authority. "Nobody is forcing anybody to do anything, and that goes both ways. That's how we've done things so far. That's what freedom means."

"Are you actually entertaining this idiotic idea?"

"I am. They've got a point." Bernard gestured to the room. Everyone was listening intently. "We're circling the drain here, we can only get so far by looting, and every time the big bastard belches, everything gets buried deeper. We've been lucky we've not been caught in it so far, but if he goes big, we're toast. We need to get out of here. We need an edge."

"I'm not arguing that." Stanley took a step closer, lowering his voice. "And I know it's slow going, but you know the ash makes a mess of the bikes. We can't push too hard, or they're toast. We need filters. We

need oil. We need masks. Pablo is coughing up blood as it is. We don't need unproven drugs to make everything worse."

"You don't have to take them," Bernard assured. "You just have to show us how."

"By injection, I think. But I'm not sure if it's intramuscular or intravenous..."

"Take a guess."

"I don't know! And I don't know the dose. Just because it's an ampule doesn't mean that's the intended dose. It might be packaged that way for transport. Even if it's not as lethal as rumored, you can overdose."

"That ain't no different from not knowing how pure your shit is," Jude added helpfully. "Just start small. Nothing happens, we'll up the dose until we feel the kick."

"I suppose that makes sense. Maybe subcutaneous, then? I've helped with enough insulin injections in my day. That'd give a nice slow uptake. Should help smooth things out."

"Better get your kit ready." Bernard gave Stanley a clap on the shoulder.

"We're doing it tonight?" César sounded scared but excited.

"I don't trust some people with waiting."

"What?" Jude took a step away from the box he had approached. "I'm curious?"

"I know you. Don't want you to sneak up in the middle of the night and chug the whole box. Or steal it. What we don't use now is valuable as hell. That could pay our way once we get to Mexico."

"Don't worry. I'll behave. I'll even wash my arm." That brought a laugh from the others.

"For the record, I am against this. I still think it's too risky." But Stanley had caved; even John could tell that. "Selling it is one thing, but..."

"If we're wrong, we'd get shot for selling bad shit. If it works, we're the best advertisement. And this is probably army shit, for super soldiers or some shit like that."

"It is fine if you don't take it. We need someone sober to keep an eye on things. Same goes for the kid." Bernard gave John a look.

"Hey, I want to be a hero too!" The wave of indignation was surprisingly strong, and John could feel himself take a step forward. He had never challenged Bernard's authority before, but he had thought he was one of the guys.

"If this works, maybe." Bernard stepped close, placing a hand on John's shoulder. They were the same height, but John felt dwarfed all the same. "Sorry, kid, it's for your own safety."

"I'm glad we agree there, at least." Stanley's voice was hard, but he had retrieved his bag. "Wish you'd have that consideration for your own life."

"We're all adults. Everyone here is responsible for their own safety. Nobody else can make that decision for us."

"I'm pretty much an adult," John muttered, but at this point, nobody was listening. Instead, they had started unpacking the box. There were five cases in it, with twenty ampules in each. Plenty for everyone. Except for him.

"Settle for the maybe," Pablo whispered, breath smelling of smoke and excitement. "That's all you're gonna get for now. You know how the booze discussion went."

"Yeah, and I won that one in the end." John wasn't sure it had been worth it, the whiskey had tasted terrible, but it meant he was one of the guys. This was different. This was superpowers.

"So be patient and find better arguments. Until then, make sure the doors are secure and keep an eye out, alright?" Pablo winked. "Since I'll be busy."

"Nobody left here but us," John grumbled, but he knew a lost argument by now. "But fine. I'll check the back. Just don't use it all."

"I'll keep an eye on Jude," he promised with a laugh. "Now get going."

There had been nothing out back, just like John knew there wouldn't. The wind was strong tonight; no survivor would poke their head out until it died down. It felt good to be behind solid, concrete walls. No creaking wood. No cracked plaster. He hadn't trusted buildings since the quake, and the many aftershocks were a constant reminder. They had been staying in a diner early on to keep out of the rain, and the ash collected on the flat roof became heavy enough to bring it down on them. Only luck that nobody got seriously injured.

Had they overstayed their welcome? John felt like the land itself was telling them to get the hell out, and still, they didn't listen. Bernard had saved his life, but he had also led them away from the ongoing evacuation efforts. Couldn't trust the government. Couldn't trust the military. Everything was their plan, the quake might have been a subterranean atomic bomb, and the eruption certainly was man-made to create... create what? John had never understood that. It felt like a waste. Who would willingly destroy the world?

Who wouldn't want to try to help rebuild it?

John hadn't protested at the time, but he felt uneasy about many things they had done. People they had taken stuff from. People that didn't fit their gang. Sheep, not wolves. Did they survive without their water? Their gas? He bit his lip and rolled over on the other side. Around him, the rest of the guys slept heavily, each in their own little secure corner. If there had been an effect from the injection, it hadn't been immediate. John could hear a quiet moan, but that was just César. He always had bad dreams.

He shifted again, unable to fall asleep. At the other end of the room, he could see a faint glow, was someone using their flashlight to read? That was stupid. Batteries were a limited resource like Stanley always reminded them. Or was someone changing? Turning luminescent? Getting superpowers? Unlike him.

Pulling off his blanket, John quietly crawled over towards Bernard. He was sleeping deeply, like the dead. No movement but the faintest twitching of his hand, caught in dreams he would never admit to. Next to him rested the box. John held his breath as he opened the lid, reaching down to remove an ampule. A groan escaped Bernard's lips, a low, horrible sound, and John froze, certain the man would wake up. One second, two, and then the twitching stopped, and Bernard seemed to sink in on himself, back to sleep. John quickly scurried back before he was noticed.

The ampule felt fragile in his hand as he got to his feet, heading for the back door. A glint of eyes shining in the dark caught him, wide and scared, and John whispered, "Just going for a piss," and escaped before he could be questioned.

What was he doing? He looked down at the ampule. The light through the dirty window was faint, the moon was full, but the clouds obscured everything. If he hadn't been used to the darkness, he wouldn't have been able to see anything, but the ampule almost seemed to glow with a faint light. Maybe he imagined things. Maybe he was dreaming.

The top cracked easily, as if it was made for breaking, made for his hand. It didn't smell much, a vaguely chemical odor, sharp and tickling his nose. Back in the main room, someone had started to cough and wouldn't stop. Shit. Pablo, most likely. If he had woken up, he might notice John was gone once he stopped coughing.

But he didn't. He kept going. It sounded bad. Wet. John almost moved to return, but the ampule was cracked open in his hand, and he couldn't just throw it away. So instead, he chugged it. Like the whiskey, it tasted bad, but this was the sweetness of flat soda gone rancid, with an undertone of turpentine and rotting meat that made him gag and... no. That wasn't the empty ampule. The stench came from the main room. Someone had started to scream, wet, bubbly, memories of corpses they had come across rose at the back of John's mind. Walking corpses, Bernard had called them, people who had breathed too much ash and were drowning in their own fluids.

Oh, Pablo, John muttered to himself, making his way back. The darkness wasn't as heavy. The glow that had been mild when he left was bright now, a sickly green emanating from a convulsing body on the floor. Someone was screaming in a corner, a shrill, desperate sound as what looked like long, sharp

needles erupted through his skin from the inside. Pablo lay in a pool of blood and pus, his body cracking with each breath. Was it... growing? Swelling?

"Bernard!" Stanley's shout tore John from his dreamlike fascination. He was trying to rouse their leader, shaking the body on the ground, but it was stiff and unresponsive. Not limp like a dead body, but hard, as if Bernard had been switched with a lifelike statue of himself.

John swallowed. The unfamiliar sweetness bubbled in his stomach like curdled candy. His skin was itching, and he scratched his arm absentmindedly as around him, the room descended into hell. They were all dead, weren't they? The screams were as familiar as nightmares, the smell of torn skin and fresh blood and offal. You weren't supposed to smell people's insides, and if you did, you were supposed to forget you ever had.

Forget. He had forgotten how it felt to crawl over someone broken, to hear their screams as he got tangled in their body. He should have helped. He could have helped.

But he didn't. He had crawled and ran and fled, and now he watched someone being turned inside out as the smell of burning flesh drifted through the room.

Helpless. Stanley was screaming at Bernard, then at John. At him. Screaming. Like everyone else. The light was intensifying, and he could feel the heat on his skin. See the skull through Stanley's face as he stared at him.

Oh. That wasn't good. They should go.

Decision made, John turned to run, Stanley coming to the same conclusion a second later.

A second is a long time.

It took them five to reach the door. Another six to run aimlessly into the ash, and then the ground heaved beneath their feet, and John felt himself falling.

Falling into the dark and the dirt.

Away from the screams.

[Patreon rewamp and new content coming!](#)

[Aug 10, 2021](#)

Alrighty!

After having slept on it, I think that I have managed to work out a new Patreon structure that will give people content and give me some much-needed brain boost.

You see, I am in editing hell. It's exhausting, slow, and meticulous. It's necessary, but it is also not what drew me to writing in the first place. Since I am recovering from my burnout, my brain is already more spongy than normal, so focus is hard.

I've missed just writing. Creating. Doing cool shit.

So, I will push forward a project I have planned because it actually fits very well into where Rebirth currently sits.

It's book time!

There are so many stories from the FH world that we won't ever get to in the game, and where a small lore post or some questions and answers only whets the appetite. I have long been tempted to write "origin stories", tales from other characters' viewpoints. I'm not sure what length they are going to be, novella or novel, but I do know that I really want to write them. It utilizes a different part of my brain so it won't take any energy from Retribution. In fact, it might get me pumped and back in shape again since it is creative. It also feels like it makes a difference, unlike fanfic. I've dipped my toe in that once or twice recently, but it doesn't feel the same once you've already created your own world.

So what will the first project be?

Marshal Hood's origin story. I picked this one because it will give me the opportunity to write the early aftermath of the disaster, something I've never got the chance to do before. It will give me the chance to deal with people taking boost drugs and how that change happens, how the Free Territories form, and the early days of Los Diablos. It will also feature Sentinel, and you'll be able to learn more about Psychopator before he was old, and I think there might be other surprise appearances.

What will my pace be?

I'm not sure yet. I think it will probably vary. At least one chapter per month, but there might be more in case I get inspired. I knew I did a chapter a week back when I did my DAII books, but I have editing to do as well so don't expect that.

Honestly, while it is disappointing and annoying that I can't keep providing what I did, this might have been the best thing that happened for my mental health. I had not realized how much I missed that first stage of creative writing until I woke up with this idea in the middle of the night. It's like something just relaxed in my brain.

It's going to be fun!

(I will be doing Patreon reformatting and rewriting the tiers over the coming days; I just wanted to inform you where I stood. You don't have to adjust anything to your pledge if you want to remain in the same tier, and nothing I add/remove should affect you tax-wise.)

[Important news about tiers!](#)

[Aug 9, 2021](#)

Well, I've got some bad news.

I am going to have to change this tier up due to licensing issues. I thought that I was following all the rules for Choicescript, but it turns out I had misunderstood part of it, and I can no longer provide access to the alpha I am working on.

This means that the reorganization of the tiers that I had planned for later needs to be implemented sooner than I had planned. Exactly what will be part of the new 10 euro tier I am not 100% decided on yet, but it will most likely be posts of the new content, not links to the full work. I will need a few days to work out exactly what this means, but do feel free to downgrade your membership in the meantime. No hard feelings, I promise.

Once again, sorry about this. I'll return with more info.

/Malin

[The World of Fallen Hero](#)

[Aug 8, 2021](#)

In order to understand the Fallen Hero world, I must first mention some of the changes that underpin it.

1. On average, Europe's colonial adventures collapsed faster. While in our world, many remained colonies into the sixties and seventies, that dynamic broke down in the twenties and thirties in the FH world.

2. WWI happened, with much the same results as today. However, due to various circumstances, the European nations were in worse shape afterward and lost most of their colonies instead of strengthening their hold. The massive loss of manpower coupled with the Spanish Flu meant that medical technology started to pull ahead of what we know in our world. The first crude, mechanical replacement limbs were crafted.
3. WWII happened, with a few important differences. Instead of focusing on V2 rockets and aerial bombardment, the research produced massive tanks, war engines, and walking armors. There was no atom bomb. There still is not. The research focused on fusion reactors instead of fission.
4. There was no space race. Mankind has not visited the moon. Thus satellites are a recent invention and were until very recently only available to the military.
5. NATO doesn't exist.

With those things out of the way, let's get on with it, continent by continent:

Europe

The European Union

While not every country in Europe is part of the European Union, those not are still connected to it by treaties. The EU was formed in the sixties to deal with the European countries' lessened global power, prevent another war in Europe, and face the growing threat of Soviet Russia. With the US weakening post the Big One, the EU has become more federalized and militarized to protect its interests. The EU army is dominated by German ground troops, French and British air-power, and the British Navy. Modded soldiers are common.

The EU is split into two major blocks, the south is dominated by France, and the north is dominated by Germany. This is balanced by an expansionist Britain pushing for increased militarization and the Nordic Union resisting further federalization. This internal power struggle occupies the organization whenever the threat from their larger neighbor to the east decreases. Since many of the member countries have their own diplomatic strategies, the EU has friends, allies, and enemies worldwide. They are considered one of the four major geopolitical powers.

Currently, they are maintaining strained but peaceful relations with the USSR, friendly relations with the US, and a growing conflict with China as their interest clashes in Africa and Southeast Asia. Boost drugs are illegal, but being boosted is not, and there are several famous heroes. Most of them are tied to various companies or employed as public servants. Mods exist and are quite popular in Northern Europe. There is a large transhumanist movement centered in Germany and unsettling rumors of eugenic research in Sweden.

The USSR

The Soviet Union is still a force to be reckoned with. Formed at the tail end of WWI, it took over Russia's role as a major political power in Europe. The various socialist satellite states serve as a buffer between

the EU and the USSR, and so far, it has not come to open conflict even with the waning US influence. It is one of the four major geopolitical powers.

The USSR leads the pack when it comes to mod research and use. It is seen as a national project, and modded heroes are popularized like western rock stars. Heroes are a big part of their PR, and they have found fame far beyond the communist sphere of influence. Since Glasnost, the country has become more open and welcoming to visitors, and many past policies have quietly been retired. The communist party is still in power, but how long that will last is the question.

It's a deeply militarized and industrialized nation but is increasingly focused on the growing danger to the east, as China goes from strength to strength. At this point in time, the USSR is a powder-keg, but if it will explode and in what way, nobody knows. They can just pray it won't happen on their watch.

Africa

While the Berlin Conference ensured that the colonization of Africa proceeded without major conflict between the European powers, WWI changed all that. At the start of the war, only Ethiopia had resisted colonization; at the end of it, things had already started falling apart. The reliance on African troops and production capacity for the war effort had lessened the technological gap, and the disease- and war-torn empires were weaker than they had previously been. One after the other, the colonies rebelled, and for each one that fell, the hope for the ones still fighting rose.

Most of Africa had freed itself from the colonial yoke by the thirties, though some countries remained close allies with their former masters, dependent on trade. Over the coming decades, several regional powers rose to prominence, the main ones detailed below.

The Republic of Nigeria

The strongest nation in West Africa, it took full advantage of its close ties to the British Empire, sending people to get educated abroad and focus on local industrialization and production rather than exporting. The most urbanized nation other than Egypt, it relies on "soft power," mainly its film and music industry, as well as several famous universities. It is one of the countries where the boost drugs are legal, and research is being done openly. Superhero movies are very popular.

United Kongo

The largest state in Central Africa and one of the first to gain independence after the atrocities of King Leopold II. Initially, the socialist state was plagued by collapsing rubber prices, but the economy recovered as WWI made the demand for copper soar. Fueled by several finds of valuable natural resources and support from the socialist anti-colonist sympathizers in Belgium who voted for their freedom, it stabilized and eventually expanded.

The presence of a stable, socialist state on their doorstep destabilized the entire region, and as civil war spread, it absorbed other neighboring colonies and grew to encompass the entire Congo Basin. The Portuguese colony of Angola, Northern Rhodesia, the Ashanti crown colony, and French Equatorial

Africa were some of the ones liberated, after which the name was changed to United Kongo. Kongo played a pivotal part in WWII by supporting the exiled Belgian government that had voted for its independence decades earlier. Post-WWII, its socialist government allied with the USSR, and the country's economy boomed. It is currently the largest socialist state in Africa but has so far resisted the lure of communism. Instead, they have aimed for third-way socialism and still have close ties to the EU. Their power is mercantile; many of the industries in the EU are dependent on their mineral wealth.

Ethiopia

The only African country untouched by European colonialism, they were one of the earliest modern states. Coming in conflict with Italy during WWII, they were briefly occupied, and the fact that the League of Nations voted to recognize the annexation hit hard. Post-WWII, they took the initiative to form the Organization of African Unity. The OAU became an important force in African stability, and their peacekeeping forces in their distinctive green and white helmets have taken part in many conflicts. Ethiopia is an important diplomatic voice in the world, and the legacy of Haile Selassie remains strong.

South Asia

The balance of power between Imperial Russia and the British Empire during the 19th century in Central and South Asia (nicknamed "The Great Game" by later generations) and the Middle East meant that neither power could make a move without being countered by the opposing side. Despite repeated attempts to come to an agreement about their respective spheres of influence, the mutual mistrust was too deep. This gave rise to powerful regional powers, which remain influential today.

South Asia, in particular, is the current hotbed of conflict, where three of the four major powers are pushing their interests. The US, China, and the USSR have interests there, as well as India. If a major war was to break out soon, it would most likely be here.

India

The War of Independence in 1857 gave rise to the fledgling nation of India. The initial military success broke the back of the East India Company, and after a short but brutal civil war, the separate states agreed to stand together rather than risk having the British Empire step in and take over. Thus the Indian Federation was born. The many independent states cover a massive area, ranging from the Republic of Afghanistan in the west to Burma in the east.

Over the years, they have gone from being dominated by their main trading partner, the British Empire, to becoming a major regional power. With several strong cultures and religions present, it can hardly be called a unified power. On the other hand, that diversity gives India influence far beyond its borders. The last major conflict they were involved in was in the Burmese conflict of the late nineties. As with the earlier Afghanistan and Nepal conflicts, India supported the local armies against encroaching superpowers (the USSR in Afghanistan, China in Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet, and the US and China in Burma) in order to keep buffer states between it and their more powerful neighbors. So far, it has proven to be a successful tactic.

While they have a strong and diverse military, they have invested heavily in boosting research and technology and are one of the countries outside the US with the highest boosted population.

East Asia

China

The third major geopolitical power, it is also the most expansive one. While communist in name, it has become increasingly mercantile in later years. Since the USSR blocks expansion to the north and India to the west, China has turned its eyes south. While the US has strong regional interests there, the navy has a limited reach. There has been a series of proxy wars and conflicts, with neither power wanting open war. Add skirmishes with the USSR, India, and their increasing efforts to influence African nations, and it's only a matter of time before another major conflict starts.

Both boosts and mods are seen as tools to use and are included in their armed forces. However, they are not hailed as heroes or used as propaganda. On the contrary, anything that could take the focus of the CCP is frowned upon. Several former heroes have fled and taken refuge in India, which has not lessened the diplomatic tensions.

Japan

Japan is a powerful mercantile power, and with the waning influence of the US, an increasingly militarized one. Like the USSR, they are among the world's foremost researchers of mods, and there are rumors of a thriving boosted underground. They have no regional aspirations, though there are territorial conflicts in the past that could erupt in the future.

The Middle East

After some unrest, the Middle East has now stabilized. The strong regional powers born from the English/Russian clash mentioned earlier are balancing each other, and for now, the major powers are looking towards Southeast Asia.

Persia

A constitutional monarchy since 1906, the country became rapidly modernized after the discovery of oil. Shrewdly straddling the line between British and Russian influence, they traded with both and remained neutral during WWI. They have remained fiercely independent, playing each superpower against each other, banking on the fact that nobody wants a major war. Boost drugs are strictly forbidden, and mods are frowned upon. The military is rather unusual, based around massive tanks and stationary defenses rather than the more common small mobile armored suits.

The Turkish Confederacy

While a scant fragment of the former Ottoman Empire, it managed to keep hold of much of its territory post-WWI, with the exception being Bulgaria. It holds a very tactical position in the middle east as well

as the Dardanelles. As one of the three major oil states (the others being Persia and Arabia), it is the most military aggressive. While it no longer has its holdings in Bulgaria and Greece, its relationship with the EU remains tense. Things are equally complex with the USSR over Armenia (which is still under Turkish control) and Arabia and Egypt. For its size, it has one of the largest and best trained military forces and has adopted both mods and boosts in its military tactics. Baghdad is considered to be one of the major scientific centers in the middle east.

The Americas

After the Big One in 1980, the balance of the continent has shifted. While the US used to dominate the region, other major powers have been moving in. This has led to several minor wars where forces and candidates have been backed by mainly EU and USSR money.

USA

The United States of America is much diminished after the Big One, turning much of its attention inward to rebuild. However, it is still counted as one of the four major geopolitical powers, and it certainly acts like one. While they have always pursued an aggressive foreign policy, they have increased their efforts since the disaster. More than once, conflicts have been escalated to avoid the perception of weakness. The current flashpoints are SE Asia and Panama, though battles have been small and waged by elite forces reinforced by mods and boosts.

The biggest problem facing the resurgent US is on its own home turf. The Free Territories have recovered beyond expectations, and much of the economic growth and innovation is currently happening out of reach of the US government. As the lease for the Free Territories comes to an end within the next decade, it looks like conflict might be inevitable. Granting freedoms is always easier than taking them away.

The US makes liberal use of boosts and mods in their armed forces, which is ironic as they are strictly controlled on US soil. Many recruits hail from the Free Territories, though the discussion remains whether the people there should be considered American citizens or not.

Mexico

While both Canada and Mexico accepted many refugees after the Big One, it is clear that Mexico has prospered most from the changed status quo. With their neighbor to the north in big trouble, Mexico stepped up to be a regional power. As they were not as affected as many other countries by the drop in temperature in the post-eruption years, they became a big exporter of food. In addition, they have kept an open and lucrative trade with the Free Territories, and no doubt many citizens there feel greater loyalty to Mexico than to the US at this point.

Lately, they have become a close ally of Costa Rica, which has alarmed the US due to the proximity to the vital Panama Canal. There were skirmishes between Mexican and US mercenaries, but it has not erupted in open conflict so far. Like the Free Territories, boost drugs are legal, and mods are frequently used. There are many high-profile heroes, taking their cues from the country's rich cultural heritage.

Brazil

The last regional power, Brazil, has one of the stronger economies on the continent. After serving as a base for the US during WWII, it became heavily involved in the UN peacekeeping forces. As their politics became less aligned with the US, a military coup was attempted with US support in 1964. The failure, and the subsequent revelation of how deep the US involvement was, caused a massive international scandal. Two decades of diplomatic cold war followed, where Brazil was forced to align itself with the USSR, though their political system survived.

After the Big One, the Brazilian economy has experienced a boom. Rich in both raw materials and agriculture, they have become the continent's manufacturing hub, and while environmental concerns have been raised, any protests have remained unheeded so far. The use and manufacture of boost drugs are strictly forbidden, and while mods are used, they are not common.

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how did HG experience the aquarium memory? Did their consciousness remain in the "real world" or did they also end up too deep into the memory, like Sidestep seemed to? Did they manage to catch glimpses of Sidestep's own memories or were they too hazy for HG to understand? How did that whole event look like to Nocturne and Jake, considering how much it seemed to affect HG?

They also slipped into the memory, but if it was the same one, or how deep will remain a secret for now. Neither Nocturne nor Jake saw anything out of the ordinary, it all went very fast.

How much had HG's mother been aware of HG's plan to get Marshal Hood killed? If she was aware, what did she think of the plan? Was she worried it might bring more trouble down on the line to HG or did she have confidence HG could handle it?

Hollow Ground's mother was not aware of that. If she had been, she would still have believed it was HG's call to make.

If Sidestep has the sui_tag and develops a close relationship with HG, would it maybe be possible to eventually ask HG to thread Sidestep similar to the way they threaded Nocturne to help her?

Yes. That might be an option.

Would Nocturne's powers work on someone like Lady Argent?

Nope.

What do Nocturne's and HG's normal work days look like? What duties do they have?

Like any self-employed business owner it's a flexible schedule with too long hours. Nocturne tends to deal with the paperwork, while HG prefers to deal with people. In a city and business like this there's never any clue what the day might bring.

If Sidestep refused to work with HG, is it possible for Sidestep to rethink and maybe end up working with HG in the future? Or vice versa if HG's little trick didn't work on Sidestep and they agreed to work with the kingpin, can they end up betraying HG?

Yes, it will be possible to change your mind.

Are there any songs you associate with Nocturne or Jake?

Not yet.

If Sidestep forms a friendly relationship with HG, would it also mean possibility to get to know Jake and Nocturne? Would friendship be a possibility or would it be more of a allies?

Dunno. Haven't written it yet. When it comes to character interaction I can't plan it beforehand, I need to write it to see if it works.

Is there possibly a bug should you decide to accept Herald's coffee invitation while training him to destroy his confidence? The dialogue during the coffee date didn't really seem to reflect that I actually tried to weaken him during my last playthrough, rather the opposite in fact.

I'll take a look, it's possible I need to add more polish and focus on that.

Are there any ending variants that surprised you (even if only because there's so many variables involved!), or were especially fun to write/plan out?

Not yet. I knew these endings when I started, but there's a lot of smaller things that has surprised and delighted me. Mortum's reactions has surprised me a lot, they are not behaving like I thought, which makes things... interesting.

There are a few moments (especially toward the end of Retribution) where Sidestep suspects the Rangers of setting a trap (notably not the case when Argent and Handyman actually *are* setting a trap early on). Since there are (I think) a few ways to end the game with suspicious Rangers but without getting officially unmasked, is that something that might actually materialize in the future?

That does indeed sound like something to worry about.

Sidestep said that the people at the Farm 'raided their mind' when they were taken back after Heartbreak. Was this done via another telepath or with some kind of technology?

The same kind of technology that the Farm uses to imprint memories in ReGenes.

In the last QnA, it was mentioned that Argent's nanos are easier to control with carbs but need meat to stay healthy. When Mortum neutered Step's little colony of nanovores, were they able to also alter the dietary requirements or will Step's colony eventually need to be replaced?

Currently Step's colony still needs carbs, a glucose solution keeps them healthy, and they do get nutrition from things like wood, plastic and rubber. However, they no longer have the ability to reproduce. That takes meat. So yes, if they would suffer major damage/loss they would need to be replaced, or Dr. Mortum would need to figure out another way to breed them.

how would the story's telepaths—sidestep, locus, hollow ground, shroud, & heartbreak—be classified under Ijungstrand's telepathy system?

Sidestep: T12345678

Locus: T2567

Hollow Ground: T34578

Shroud: T469

Heartbreak: T135678

Did Chen get threaded before or after becoming Marshal? If after, did he ever help Ortega with his HG crusade in the past?

Before, but it became more intense after. HG needed someone to keep Ortega distracted, and Steel was the one whose advice they trusted.

Could step still make argent's nanovores freeze in their tracks like during the nanosurge if need be or have they sort of evolved to be stronger than that being a cohesive unit with argent?

Maybe. It would be a harder fight, they've evolved a lot, and mixed with a human mind makes everything complicated.

If it's not left to headcanons, what were Sidestep's missions at the farm like?

We'll get into that eventually, there will be choices to make.

There's a mention of the tattoos feeling textured to Step, did you know that tattoos can become raised as a reaction to stress?

I did not! But it makes sense, mine occasionally itches.

Are the tattoos actually texturized or is it Step's imagination?

Sidestep's imagination.

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What were sunstream and ashfall like? how did they come off to the rest of the rangers/sidestep? I really like those two even though we don't really know much about them!

I would like to add Sentinel to this, please!

Sunstream: She always gave the impression of being slightly uptight. Very controlled. Aware of her role and how she came across. She and Chen were the most serious of the Rangers, and she really believed she was doing the right thing. Perhaps she felt a little too much, because failure to save people weighed heavily on her, and what she saw (and did) in the Nanosurge made her step down as a hero. She never gave herself enough credit. Sidestep always felt unsure around her, it was easy to get caught in her thought patterns.

Ashfall: He was never a full member of the Rangers, but like Sidestep, he was a very close associate. Unlike Sidestep he wanted membership, and worked himself up to that post Heartbreak. He was driven, ambitious and confident in his abilities (which grew stronger over the years). He and Sidestep got along, he respected Sidestep's need for secrecy and thought that as long as they got the job done, things like that didn't matter. It comes as no surprise that he's on the San Francisco Ranger team now (as Pyroclast) and rumor has it he's gunning for the top spot.

Sentinel: Older than the others, one of the founding members together with Hood. Originally he was a lot more high strung and out to prove himself, but over the years he mellowed a lot. He was the hothead to Hood's calmer influence. He likes to socialize, and never minded playing the mentor role to younger heroes. There was a lot of tension between him and Ortega after Hood's death, both of them blamed themselves (and each other) for letting it happen. That rift never really healed, and it is doubtful Sentinel respected Ortega as Marshal (even though they were friends). At the time, it was a surprise that Ortega got the role, most people would have bet on Sentinel. Sidestep and Sentinel got along, though they weren't very close.

Kind of a silly question but how much of the 'science' in fallen hero is actually rooted in genuine science? obviously some parts are 100% fiction but as someone who knows very little about science the descriptions of tech sound so believable!

I have a degree in chemistry, and I am very interested in science in general. That being said, all the science is completely bonkers, it's superhero stuff in complete opposition to the natural laws that we know. That being said, adding a dash of real facts amped to eleven, and using the right words gives it a semblance of believably.

I don't know if the question has been asked before, but can Re-Genes reproduce? I assumed not, but then you know what they say about making assumptions.

No, the use of the boost drugs tends to give massive issues with procreation. The genetic structure is too damaged to give viable offspring. There was a lot of experiments done with breeding superhuman traits at the start, it did not go well.

Before Fallen Hero became what it is today, it was to be a normal book with a more set main character. What was Og Sidestep like in the original book? Did they do anything in the books that Sidestep can't do now? How would Og Sidestep's stat sheet have looked by the end of book two?

Oh boy. The original Sidestep was definitely one of the darker murdersteps. Didn't get close with the Rangers either, other than through the puppet with Ortega (or "Rick" as he was called then). High villainy, high caution and high anonymity. Balanced telepathically. Mysterious armor. Speed and Strength armor with a cape. They couldn't do anything else, but the source of the disintegration powers were different (an alien artifact). No nanovores yet. [Got his playlist here.](#)

Would you mind giving clarification on Argent's body and how it should be looked at? Like are there certain parts of her body that are more sensitive like a normal humans? Or since enough trauma to the head can knock Argent out, could someone potentially cause cardiac arrest by hitting over her heart with enough force? Essentially, would it be more accurate to consider Argent's body human but made out of metal or should it be considered more like metallic playdoh with squishy bits inside?

Argent has soft bits that are still sensitive. Like the head, and as you say, the heart. You could see it as metallic playdoh with squishy bits inside. It's not a solid metal body.

If we refuse to see a shrink in both Rebirth and Retribution, will there be another chance to go later, or will those be the only chances?

There will be other chances, definitely in book three, not sure about four yet.

What makes Telepaths so feared? Like Sidestep can definitely do a lot of damage with it. But generally speaking Sidestep is someone who could be given any ability, and barring how this

would have effected their childhood, be someone to fear given enough time and practice. So What makes it so than even a Beta Telepath by itself is enough to make people tread lightly?

Privacy. Think of it like walking through one of those airplane scanners that shows the body outline. You're technically not naked, and yet people are very uncomfortable and scandalized. There are things that are so private that nobody is supposed to see them, and the most private thing is in our head. It's like someone with x-ray vision. Sure, they can't hurt you with it (maybe burns and long-term cancer) but few would be relaxed around them. Knowing they could just see you naked any time. It's a comfort thing, and once I don't think Sidestep really gets. They have never been allowed privacy.

During their hero days, did people speculate much about Sidestep? Like who they were, were they came from, what their powers were if they had any, etc

Oh yes. Anything unknown is interesting, there were tons of speculation. At the start, I think they tried guess if there were other heroes/famous people behind the mask and secrecy, but that petered out eventually.

It's possible for Argent to chase you into the sewers naked. Did the people/media above ground see this and if so how did they react? (If they saw and kept it under wraps out of respect they're the real MVPs) Have any other heroes or villains of prominence been in a similarly compromising position?

Not as far as Argent knows. If there was, they are very lucky they have kept their mouths shut.

And yes, that's bound to happen. The privacy laws are strong, but licensed paparazzi still exist. Vigilantes and villains can't exactly sue you...

This has been stuck in my mind for a bit. Regarding boundaries, how was Ortega pre-hb with a pursued sidestep? Considering how fast things can speed up now (which makes sense haha), I'm curious how Ortega was less 'skin touchy' if that makes sense?

Yeah. The Ortega we see today is the result of seven years of grief and then suddenly having a second chance and not wanting to slip through their fingers again. Ortega back then were much more laid back and patient. Especially with same-sex relationships, that was new ground for them as well.

What's the consensus on who the strongest single boost is / was in America? Are they still alive? Are / were they an active hero or villain?

It's always up for debate, but there are three people generally considered the strongest boosts in the US (the placing varies depending on who does the ranking.)

One of them is, as you might have guessed, the Catastrofiend. Active villain. Still... alive? The one everyone likes to pit imaginary heroes against. Powerful, but limited. Usually seen as number 3, unless you've seen footage of it in action.

Another one is actually stationed in Washington, and works directly for the White House. Her codename is Skybright, and she's a powerful telekinetic. Flight. Shields. Tossing tanks like toy cars. The works. Her names come from the glittering halo effect when she uses her shields. Usually seen as nr 2, though people point out that she's never really got to cut loose.

The top one, Cavalier, is believed dead, but rumors of his return are common. He was a military boost, one of the early ones. He served a lot overseas, and unlike many boosts, were involved in actual combat. There has been footage released of him in action, and if it hasn't been doctored, it points to massive destructive potential. It is rumored that Cavalier was a double boost. One part is classic boost powers, very strong, very durable, and very, very fast. Not flight capable. The other part was explosive. It seemed that he had the ability to induce explosions in objects (or people) at moderate range. A famous video shows him blowing up a tank by gesturing at it. He returned home a war hero, but turned villain almost immediately. He is believed to have been killed as he tried to blow up the pentagon twenty years ago. He only partly succeeded, but his actions led to boosted registration and banning on the east coast and the midwest.

What would Hood have thought about Sidestep?

Squirrely. Filled with secrets. Would probably have liked them a lot, he knows all about living life on the run when you're young.

Could Anathema have kept taking the boost drug repeatedly, or would something have eventually gone wrong?

Something would eventually have gone wrong, there's a limit to how much the body can be twisted. If that would have ended in death is a different question...

Taking trophy from Lady Argent in Rebirth made me wonder how does she cut her hair? If it's so durable that we can't take a sample without strength upgrade I assume regular scissors would be useless. Does her hair even grow? Can she somehow control it's length?

Argent can control the length, no cutting necessary.

Are there other free territories besides Los Diablos? If so what are they and how do they operate?

The Free Territories contains the entire west coast: Washington, Oregon, California and Nevada. The main cities are: Seattle, San Francisco, Los Diablos, San Diego and Portland. It could be considered a loose confederation of city-states, most of them company run. There's no communal governing, that's the point, instead each city operates according to their own charter. Los Diablos is the city who has broken most with their past and is home to the greatest number of boosts and heroes, San Francisco is trying to recapture the gold rush spirit, Seattle is the largest and most prosperous and very much a tech hub, San Diego is the gateway into the Free Territories and is a prosperous trade city, while Portland is the closest thing to democracy. There are many smaller towns and communities, each run according to what the populace wants.

In Argent's Valentine's Day snippet, there's a reference to A Shocking Valentine, an apparently controversial Charge-inspired film that was pulled from the markets. What's the story behind it? Like when was it made and what it's about? And how did Julia personally feel about/react to that? Did Ricardo also inspire similar, um... fan works?

It was very close to soft core porn, where the biggest controversy came from the fact that it showed the Rangers as corrupt, nearly villains, with the main character being a pure-hearted new recruit who uncovered the dirty secrets, while "Charge" tried to distract with sexy shenanigans. It was officially pulled because it diminished trust in the Ranger system, but some say it was because it also told the truth about company control of the city alluding to recent pollution scandals. Of course it might have been the bdsm-adjacent soft-core porn too...

And yes, Ricardo has had similar fan works.

How did the hero rankings look when Sidestep was still an active hero, especially considering their different reputation levels?

Sidestep was never very high on them. Even the Sidesteps with the Hero reputation had the drawback that nobody really knew what their powers were other than fighting and a gun.

How do the current villain rankings look during Retribution, especially for a Sidestep with a high fanclub value?

I haven't decided yet, might get into that in book three. Or... hmmm... We'll see. Might be fun with a stat.

Why is the option to discuss Chen's shoulder sometimes greyed out in the demo?

You can't have chosen to avoid the Rangers, if you did, then you haven't been around enough to spot the difference.

Will there be a softer option to kiss Ortega at the start or will Step always be a bit of a shit when it comes to accepting affection?

Sidestep is a bit of a shit. That never changes.

Will there ever be the option for Step say 'This was fun, but I really wanted X & not you' in a poly relationship?

I have planned to. Relationships change. People change.

Or the option to choose to not be in a poly relationship if/when you're presented with the choice between one or both but not the other? (Sorry if I am being too vague- I don't want to spoil things for the patrons that don't have access to the demo)

I am planning to have as many options as I can, you shouldn't be locked into anything.

What would the Rangers, Dr. Mortum, or HG trio consider their core value?

I had to google this, so take it with a grain of salt since most of the sites I found were very management oriented.

Ortega: Autonomy

Steel: Determination

Herald: Integrity

Argent: Adaptability

Dr. Mortum: Innovation

Hollow Ground: Stability

Nocturne: Tenacity

Jake: Loyalty

If Ortega doesn't suspect Sidestep being a villain, do they still have theories who the villain could be?

That depends. If the villain uses the Sidestep/Anathema/Heartbreak names, then Ortega suspects it must be someone from their past out to get them. Theories as to who shifts, but there's a lot of theories and they keep adding up the pros and cons of any scenario.

What is the significance when Sidestep's HB scar weakens or strengthens?

Much of it is spoilers, but part of it is whether Sidestep doubles down on their trauma, or starts to move on.

What would Ortega and Dr. Mortum have thought of Puppet before they ended up comatose?

Ortega would have liked them, Dr. Mortum would have been very wary.

If rest of the Rangers, Dr. Mortum, or HG trio would have had the power of telepathy similar to Sidestep's current level, how would they feel about it or use the power?

Last Q&A you dabbled a bit in how Ortega would cope with having telepathy, the consensus being not great. How about the other four ro's?

See, this is a question I don't know how to answer. Why? Because it's complicated, and in many cases I am not sure. Telepathy changes how you see the world and interact with people, and we wouldn't even be talking about the same characters anymore. Would Herald remain optimistic about human nature or

turn cynical? I don't know. Argent would probably deal with it best, she's got good control. Steel might be very prone to misuse, it is a great temptation, but on the other hand he might just keep eating meds to dampen himself. Dr. Mortum would find them very useful, but also stressful.

How would HG, Nocturne, and Jake managed themselves if they would have had to take the more traditional villain route (put on an armor and play the role of a villain lot more publicly)?

Hollow Ground: Would probably have managed well, they did take a more open role early in their career. Too exposed though.

Nocturne: Would have loathed it, but she would have been good if she had tried.

Jake: Every part of him resents it, but he would do a great job. But good luck putting him in a suit and codename...

How much age difference did Herald, Chen, or HG have with their siblings?

Herald's brother was just a year or so older, they were very close in age.

Chen's siblings were all younger, maybe a year or two between the four sisters, and then a jump to the brother. The brother is 14 years younger than Chen.

Hollow Ground's older brother was around two years older, their youngest a lot younger. Maybe ten to fifteen years.

Would the Rangers/Dr. Mortum or HG trio have any particular opinion on any of the motivations Sidestep can have?

You'll have to find that out in game.

Does Lady Argent have any siblings or is she an only child? What would Lady Argent have done with her life if she had lived a normal civilian life?

Argent has two siblings, both brothers. If she had the opportunity to have a civilian life she would most likely have become an engineer or movie director, at least those were her dreams at the time.

Does HG consider themselves to be in control over the system now or is that still "work in progress" in their mind?

Nothing is ever perfect, but it's pretty damn close.

What would the Rangers, Dr. Mortum, or HG trio consider their current motivations/goals to be?

Sorry, that is too many spoilers to start getting into. You just have to wonder.

What do the villains like HG trio, Psychopathor, or Dr. Mortum (when they were still an active villain) think of their status as villains? For example, which of them embrace their villainy, see it as a means to an end only, don't especially care etc?

Means to an end: Dr. Mortum. Nocturne.

It's a job like any other: Jake

Villain is a question of definition: Hollow Ground.

Hell yeah, villain for life: Psychopathor.

How comfortable are the Rangers, Dr. Mortum, or HG trio when it comes to getting to know other people? Which of them have easier or harder time forming friendships or opening up to people?

This should probably be obvious from the game:

Easy: Ortega, Herald, Jake.

Hard: Steel, Nocturne, Dr. Mortum.

It's complicated: Argent, Hollow Ground.

Which team does Ashfall like more his old team or his current team?

Current team.

Ashfall, is he keeping tabs/communicating with Diablo rangers, is he aware Sidestep is alive?

You have NO idea.

When Ashfall left the team, how did his fans react to it, was there any backlash and how did the team take it?

Since he was never an official part of the Rangers, it wasn't a very big thing. It was the Heartbreak aftermath, so most of the speculation was whether the whole team would be replaced or not.

Is there anyone in this universe who can shift into a dragon, is it possible?

Good question. Nobody yet, but who knows? There's some weird shapechanging out there, so it's not impossible.

Is there some friendly rivalry between henchmen, do they think BossStep has a favorite?

You'll have to find out, but probably. There's always things like that.

If BossStep has revealed their face to the team, do they find it attractive/have they any opinions on BossSteps looks?

No opinions, it's the boss. That is up to headcanon.

Henchmen play: marry, fuck and kill. Would someone include BossStep, will their answer change according to BossSteps reputation (friendly, leader or terrifying)?

I don't think anybody would include BossStep, not even as friendly. Would feel weird.

Since it's Summer if the ROs were packing their suitcases to go on holiday what unique item would each of them pack? Bonus question where would each RO want to go on holiday? (since their world is somewhat different from our's this can be generic destinations like a snowy mountain resort or a tropical beach etc.)

Ortega would pack a good bike, and hit up a mountain resort (no snow needed).

Chen would rent a cottage by a lake, and pack one of the books he never gets around reading.

Argent would pick a big city, and pack a pair of nice sunglasses.

Herald would pick the beach, probably Hawaii. He would pack diving equipment.

Dr. Mortum would pick a history town (like Savannah or New Orleans) and probably pack like five guidebooks.

How old is Elena?

59, but don't ask.

What did the Rangers, Dr. Mortum, or HG trio personally think of the Heroic Heritage Museum and reopening of it? How did they feel about its destruction?

Ortega didn't think much of it, that's just publicity and bad memories. They're used to it.

Herald was excited, it made him feel appreciated.

Argent was neutral. Publicity is publicity.

Steel was annoyed at the inaccuracies.

Dr. Mortum didn't care.

Nocturne thought it could be useful.

Hollow Ground found it amusing.

Jake was slightly envious.

How do the Rangers or Dr. Mortum feel about going to fancy events (such as the gala) and interacting with the people there? Have the HG trio ever been forced to attend such fancy events (and how would they feel about visiting such events or interacting with the people there?)

Ortega is at home at fancy events, and likes it.

Herald is used to fancy events, but it can be tiring.

Argent can do fancy events but they annoy her too.

Steel avoids them as much as he can.

Dr. Mortum likes fancy events, but also gets stressed beforehand.

Hollow Ground is very much at home at fancy events.

Nocturne avoids them if she can.

Jake usually has a good time.

Would Sidestep and Charge have gotten as close back in the day as they can be in certain paths if Sidestep could read their mind? Also, would Ortega be open and project like Herald or try to lock down their mind when Sidestep was around like Steel does?

Impossible to say. I really have no idea.

How long does a telepaths mental imprint or impression last after they use their abilities on someone? (Like how Argent remembers Steps conflicting feelings on possessing her that even they were apparently unaware of)

It varies widely depending on the telepath and the mind.

What happened to the old Hollywood sign? Was it destroyed during the Big One or is it still there?

It fell during the Big One, only a few letters remained standing. There was talk of restoring it, but it never happened.

What's the standard age for someone to be a hero, and also what age is considered too young?

There is no standard age, but most are in their twenties and thirties. Most people thinks teenagers are too young, but that has never stopped them, and they do sell papers. There's no law or age-limit.

How did you come up with the original Sidestep suit's main features (the hood, the gray/black/turquoise, the big-eyes-mask)? What symbolism or inspirations (if any) did you have in mind?

That was not me, that was [Polterink](#)

I just gave a bunch of various references and color suggestions, got a sheet of variants back, picked my favorite and then it was done. Some of the inspirations were Spiderman, I have always loved the eyes, as well as Spider-Gwen's hood. I knew I wanted a bodysuit that felt fragile, but also with a coat/jacket/hood for added bulk and anonymity. Big eyes gives an impression of youth and vulnerability that a helmet and armor wouldn't give. originally it was supposed to be a white/gray/black gradient, but that didn't work visually so I added turquoise/teal since it is one of my face colors (and it's the opposite of orange...)

Aside from telepathy, are there any specific abilities or powers the Rangers find particularly dangerous/difficult to deal with, combat or otherwise?

Anything sneaky and relating to control is always hard to find countermeasures to. The current team is not good at dealing with that.

Why did owl punch sidestep?

Because Sidestep is a sneaky little shit with their whole "don't notive me" thing, and Owl's got super senses and is NOT used to being snuck up on. It was a reflex, and she doubled down.

In the flashback variations where Ortega comes in to try and stop Sidestep, did they see Heartbreak at all? Did anyone besides Sidestep get a good look at Heartbreak?

We will get into that. Right now it's spoilers.

what constituted the human rights violations in Panama in 2004 with the regene project? What happened in Panama to spark the scandal?

To make a long story short, several ReGenes went out of control and pacified the enemy (the enemy in this case being innocent civilians) in a very public way in front of cameras, so there was no way to bury the incident. There was a big investigation into ReGenes, their creation and function and people were horrified.

Bit random, but would the HB scars ever have a more "positive" impact than they have for now, or will they remain drawback/mindfuck-machines? I'm thinking about puppetmasters drawing on the scar for better manipulation in conversation, or the possibilities that precog + specific scars could lead to, for example.

Oh yes. All the scars could have potentially beneficial effects.

What animals does Elena keep at the ranch?

Chickens, some goats, a dog, several horses and some cows. It's not much these days, she has leased much of the land to a neighbor.

If the POV took place from one of the rangers perspective then how apparent would the MC's villainy be?

Depends how many clues you assemble as a reader....

What kind of resources do the Rangers have outside of Los Diablos (safe houses, etc. things like that), if any at all?

They have a lot, but I haven't gone into detail.

Stupid question, but do mods come in a variety of colours? For instance, if Chen Hypothetically wanted a pair of flaming pink hands, would that be an option? Or do they usually come in more dark neutral colours?

They come on many colors, but good luck having Chen pick anything but neutrals.

If Sidestep and Ortega "had a thing" back in the day, how did the other Rangers at the time feel about their relationship?

Anathema was supportive, Chen very negative to it. Sentinel was certain it wouldn't last, Sunstream thought it was cute and Ashfall was convinced Ortega would mess it up and hurt Sidestep.

Going off of very vague pseudo-science here but... if we consider that static is "electricity at rest" while epileptic seizures are triggered by electricity imbalance / energy bursts / basically electricity moving, can Sidestep technically "feel" Ortega's mind when they have a seizure? Does the change register to them telepathically? Could they slip inside that way, while the static fortress is "moving"?

That is a very interesting theory, but I do think that it would be even harder to read at that time.

How good are the rangers and mortum at riding horses?

Ortega is very good. Chen used to be able to but haven't since his new legs. Argent has never tried, the same goes for Herald. Dr. Mortum is passable, but it was a long time ago.

Apologies for the rather clunky questions, but say someone is technically dead, in cardiac arrest, for a long while before being resuscitated. (An example would be Briton Audrey Schoeman who was in cardiac arrest for six hours before being 'revived'.)

Would that person still have a mind to read while temporarily flatlining? And if they do, what would said person's mind feel like to a telepath?

Finally, if the person couldn't be brought back to life, at what point would a telepath no longer be able to feel a flatlining patient's mind?

Yes, there is still a mind to read while flatlining. It would read much like any other unconscious mind, and then slowly break apart as the brain starts dying from lack of oxygen.

The point where Sidestep can no longer feel the mind is when braindeath has occurred. Like with the puppet.

How do the Rangers feel about Los Diablos as a whole? Yes, they work and live there, but do they like the city itself? Do they care about it? If not for their jobs, would they choose to stay there or find someplace new?

Ortega likes Los Diablos, they have grown fond of it.

Steel has lived in Los Diablos long enough that it's home now, for better or worse.

Herald is fascinated by Los Diablos and thinks the city has so much promise.

Argent is ambivalent. There are a lot of bad memories, she might have moved elsewhere if she had the chance.

Dr. Mortum likes Los Diablos because it's filled with opportunities. Sure, other places could work, but there's a nostalgia here.

In Rebirth, when Sidestep calls the Farm to send the regenes after Psychopath, they recognize the voice on the other line and seem to imply it was someone they were pretty familiar with. If it isn't too much of a spoiler, can we ask who that was (their handler?) or if this is a character we might meet later?

It was indeed Sidestep's old handler. We'll meet them later.

[Time to gather questions again!](#)

[Jul 22, 2021](#)

If you have any questions for next month's QnA, please add them here.

[Lore poll time!](#)

[Jul 16, 2021](#)

Well, since the Nanosurge and Telepathy was neck and neck in the last poll, let's see what you want to learn about next. If you have any suggestions for future polls, please add it in a comment, it might show up next time if it's not too spoilery.

The Rangers project, why, who and where?

39%

Law and Order in the Free Western territories.

0%

Lingering environmental effects of The Big One.

4%

Corporatism and Politics in Los Diablos.

5%

The world outside North America, an overview.

39%

The technology of the FH world (compared to our own)

10%

The Free Western Territories compared to the rest of the US

4%

Poll ended Jul 29, 2021 · 202 votes total

<https://dashingdon.com/play/malin/fhrnhjadontsharethislinkplz/mygame/>

[New link to Retribution is up!](#)

[Jul 16, 2021](#)

We are slowly working our way through editing/suggestion hell. Apart from various bug fixes, there have been many minor additions and variations you might stumble across, and proof and language polish is up to lvl 15. Been battling heatwave and Lyme disease, not the most productive of vacations so far, but we are progressing. Playable length is up to between 94 000 and 98 000 on the random testing. Next is the auction. Wish me luck.

[Lore: Telepathy and related fields.](#)

[Jul 5, 2021](#)

This month's lore dump is about telepathy, I will have a new vote up for subjects in a week or so! The nanosurge and telepathy had been at the top of the poll, so it's soon time to make your voices heard again.

Excerpt from a letter from Dr. F. Ljungstrand to Dr. A Jansen.

12 March 1978

Re: Psionic Classification Suggestions

I've amended your suggestions, please take note. We don't want to muddle the waters any further.

1: Replace Psionic with Telepathic. Psionic is too wide, we need to narrow the definition. And yes, I am aware that it's not technically correct considering empathic talents, but do you want to have that discussion every time some idiot in charge wants to push telekinesis in there as well? We know what we're talking about. This is for others.

2: Fuse categories 4-7 into "other." It will be a cleaner overview if we use the 4a, 4b system instead of adding numbers. It's too diverse to imagine we'll ever find an end to possible variations.

3: Rename "Empathy," "Telepathy," and "Intuitive," as suggested below. It makes for clearer classifications.

Amended classification below:

Stem: Telepathy

Roots: 1: Emotional 2: Rational 3: Subconscious 4: Other

Branches: 5: Project 6: Receive 7: Influence 8: Control 9: Other

The advantage of this system will be that we can easily define overall talents in shorthand or in words for the idiots that want results. For example, I am a T23567 or, as I would put it to others: A telepath able to project, receive and influence rational and subconscious thoughts.

Sidenote: I am still not happy with the term "rational," but my only alternative is "verbal," and that doesn't really give the right feel for what it is. If you have any suggestions, let me know. We have until Monday to figure out how to present this.

/Fredrik

Excerpt from a letter from Dr. A Jansen to Dr. F. Ljungstrand.

2 January 1979

Subject: I think I'm on to something big.

I need to pick your brain about something, but first, let me know if you think this title sounds too insecure? I know you always say we don't need to give the doubters ammunition, but I'm not comfortable giving an answer. There's still too much we don't know.

Psychic Sensitivity - An Attempt At An Explanation.

Anyway, I expect you to shoot me down, but please be gentle.

I'm thinking of rewriting the entire piece after the data you sent me. Yes, I know I can't use you as a reference, military secrets and all that, but you see it too, don't you? It's not just telepathic boosts, but other, unrelated powers. I've got a subject here with the ability to control electricity who can interface with the psionic control systems you designed for testing. No telepathic powers, but they can control the hand. I know what you're going to say, electricity can possibly be used in a similar manner if you've got a fine control, don't remind me of our argument about technopaths. I still think you're wrong there. But, yesterday, I had a subject who could interface directly with the hand, with near-perfect control. And his powers were regenerative in nature.

I am starting to see similarities to the direct neural connection used for powered armors and weapons. Yes, I know that's mods, but the C8 neural interface produces similar results on the brain scans. Could it be that certain boosts require a heightened neural load? And that a certain psionic sensitivity might be the result? It's worth looking into, but is it worth delaying the article for? I need that funding, and you know how much they look at published articles and citations before they approve.

In either case, I think we can say for certain that the psionic interface technology might have a lot wider applications than we originally envisioned. I'm tempted to put a few normal test subjects in the program

as well, as a control group, of course, but I do wonder if we might not start seeing results for them as well. What if this is something that's latent in many people? Not to be superstitious, but it would explain past stories of psychics and mediums.

Guess I won't put that in my official report though, they'd cut my funding faster than I could ruin their precious reputation.

Happy new year, and don't antagonize them, alright?

/Love, Anna

Excerpt of disciplinary hearings with Dr. F. Ljungstrand.

17 August 1989

Dr. Ljungstrand's final speech, right before his escape.

I think you misunderstand what I came here to do, gentlemen. I was tasked with solving your problem, that's all. You wanted me to make your soldiers better, smarter, and more suited to the modern battlefield. When I came here, your methods were crude and ill-suited to the task at hand. You lost 30% of your volunteers to Modification Dysmorphia, and now the figure stands at less than 5%. You were unable to perform majority body transplants without risking a full personality breakdown, and look at where we are now!

You train soldiers here. You break them down and build them up, mentally and physically. I've seen what happens in basic training, and some methods used there are inspired and far more "cruel" than anything I have done to them. You are just afraid because you don't understand what is happening, so I will try to explain one final time.

Memories are not real. They do not need to be connected to events that actually happened. If you went back to your own childhood, you might be surprised to find that between a third and half of your memories of those years have very little to do with reality. Please don't misunderstand me here. I am not saying they are not real. They are, to you. They informed what person you have become. They feel real. They are important.

What I do is simply take advantage of this process. If I implant a memory in the right way and let it take root, it can, together with some gentle reinforcement, become as real as any lived experience. The same goes for removing unwanted memories, or as you might call them, trauma. If I do it early enough in the process, they will not have had time to scar, and it is a simple, clean procedure much more efficient than therapy sessions. If the trauma is deeply embedded, there will be severe neural scarring, and I do acknowledge my mistake there. I went too far and underestimated how embedded pain could be inside a mind. That being said, if I had been able to continue working with Lieutenant Sharpe I am

sure it could have been overcome. Such a shame that he killed himself; death is something I have no cure for. Yet.

So yes, I am guilty of overconfidence and not seeing the signs that my patient was unstable. But to use one mistake as an excuse to shut down the entire program is simply scientific waste. Think of all the people I might be able to help in the future! Or do you truly think that this is as far as we are able to go? Do you think that now that you have my methods and programs in place, you don't need my expertise anymore? You still have no idea of what I am truly capable of.

And yes, with that, let me briefly touch on the accusations of reading people's minds without permission. I am no more guilty of that than overhearing conversations happening in the same room. Some people are loud, in thoughts as well as voices, and if anybody should complain about that, it's me. It's exhausting. Why do you think I prefer to do most of my work at night when there are fewer people around? If the staff was to go through the psychic defense training program that I designed, everybody would be happier. But for some reason, they don't trust me.

Trust. I had not planned on touching on the final allegations, as absurd as they are. Planting thoughts in non-volunteers' minds? Influencing their decision-making? Erasing their memories? Surely you see how absurd those accusations are. If I truly had done that, would I be standing here? No, I would be an employee of the month, and everybody would love me. This is simply fear, prejudice, and jealousy. Exactly what made me leave the Academic world. I had hoped that you, gentlemen, would have an open mind and see to results rather than rumors.

From what I can see of your thoughts, it seems I was mistaken, and thus I reject your authority to impose judgment on me. Goodbye, we won't meet again.

[The cameras show Dr. Ljungstrand leaving the hearing, the people present had fallen asleep.]

Excerpt of a lecture at MIT by Dr. A. Jansen.

8 October 1991

The full recording is missing; this is all we have managed to locate. I understand there was a fallout after this lecture series. Could they have scrubbed their records?

How can we define what we can't measure or understand?

What is a thought? Electric current? Neural signals? There are hundreds of lectures out there with people claiming to understand how the brain works, but the simple answer is that we have no idea. We can observe the effects of various stimuli, electrical currents, and chemical reactions in the brain, but in the end, we only understand what makes a mind work on the same basic level as our caveman ancestors understood that if you split rocks, you got tools.

For example, what is the difference between a thought and a feeling? Is there one? We instinctively feel that there is, and yet it's hard to prove in our current scientific paradigm. Feelings are easier to measure, particularly fear responses, due to the endocrine processes involved. However, with the emergent field of telepathic research, there does seem to be a distinction between telepaths and empaths, which is hard to justify if our current understanding is correct. It is tempting to blame this on the preferences of the boosted individuals themselves, but what if it is a sign that conscious thoughts are produced via different pathways in the brain than emotions?

In this lecture, I will attempt to map these differences and bear in mind that I will from now on use the term 'the mind' rather than 'the brain' to separate my reasoning from the physical vessel. As you will see, if my theory is correct, the mind might not be tied entirely to the brain. Now, let's move to the second slide; what you see here is...

An intercepted letter from Dr. Jansen to Dr. Ljungstrand

7 January 1992

Re: New opportunities

I'm not sure about this?

Yes, I'm in the freezer. They did not like the headlines about "university witchcraft" for sure. But upping my life to move to Nevada of all places? Is there even anything left out there? I know we just hear the horror stories, but living on a military base doesn't sound like a future I want.

You know very well that I think the limitations on boosts out here are ridiculous, and yes, of course, I would to continue this line of research because I truly think I'm on to something here, but not at any cost. What you're alluding to is...

I'm sorry, Fredrik, I really am. But I'll have to turn you down. Maybe I'll find my fortune elsewhere, I've had offers from GeniTech, but you need to find someone else.

Please believe that I wish you the best of luck.

/Anna

6 March 1998

Notes recovered from the body of an unknown agent, stolen from Dr. F's laboratory. Most were destroyed with the body, but the parts that are legible are included here. They don't always make sense,

I believe that Dr. F. made the notes to himself, not to anybody else. Should we schedule a meeting? I have concerns.

/Security Director Veer

The subconscious is the key. Of course. Communication without interference. Does the blood-brain barrier matter more than we thought? Implant beneath is dangerous. Might be worth it. Or could we use the NTS? Possibly SN? Worked before, but not for permanent implants.

I'm an idiot! Two halves. Two pathways. Competing and completing. It's not a whole, we were never whole. This explains everything.

The decision-making process is still an issue. Actions prepared before the conscious decision to take them registers in the brain. Something else is at work here, the brain is just another receptor, not the source. Where is the source?

Geometric resonance is bullshit, it has never worked outside of a test tube, proteins are not crystals. What am I missing? Running out of time.

It's the folding. We can only see in three dimensions but can simulate in more. Seeing is believing. They don't understand.

It could work. It WILL work.

[QnA for June \(spoiler version\)](#).

[Jul 2, 2021](#)

When and how did Ortega and Hollow Ground meet each other? Did Charge suspect (or was aware of) HG's real identity at the time? Does HG know why they couldn't thread Ortega? Did they feel something off (like the static for Step) while threading Charge, or they realized that their powers didn't work because of Ortega's behavior?

Ortega met HG a year or so before Hood's death, maybe 2006 or so? They had no idea who HG was. As for HG, they had no idea that it didn't work at first, and then why it didn't work. It was very infuriating, and ran the risk of ruining their plans.

If Ortega learns more about the farm and special directive can they end up hating it as much as Sidestep?

Depends on how much Sidestep hates it, but yeah. Sometimes even more I think.

If sidestep had told Ortega, Chen or Themmy they were ReGene back in pre-Heartbreak days, how would they have taken?

Not saying. Sidestep doesn't know that.

Do Argent's powers work on tech that normally requires psi-sensitivity/telepathy to use?

Yes.

If the regenerator worked for Argent, and she could return back to normal, would she continue being a ranger or go home?

Depends on the circumstances.

Does the special directive purposefully make "twins" or "triplets" for the purpose of seeing how the same physiology responds differently to training/the boost drug?

Yes, and sometimes even more.

What are some boost talents other than telepathy that the farm would consider ideal for their cuckoos?

Pheromones, enhanced senses, perfect memory, shapechanging.

If it's not too much of a spoiler, what's the motivation behind Hollow Ground letting a high infamy Sidestep's puppet live (beaten up, of course, but letting them go)/possibly letting high infamy Sidesteps go without a fight if Sidestep refuses to work with them? Are they at all intimidated by higher infamy Sidesteps, do they just not want to incite a more violent reaction from them, afraid of what they might do, etc?

This is spoilery, HG's motivations will be uncovered in book three.

Did Ortega actually learn how to be sneaky by watching Sidestep and mimicking them, their wardrobe, their habits, etc, or does Sidestep just think they did?

Sidestep mostly thinks they did, Ortega was always sneaky. That being said, Ortega did pick up some tricks, just like Sidestep got a few from Ortega.

Did argent always have a giant sweet tooth or have the nanovores influenced that?

Is argents appetite due to the nanovores, or was she always like that?

She's always liked sweet things, but the nanovores didn't help. Carbs makes them easier to control than meat, but they do need meat as well to remain healthy.

If it's not too much of a spoiler, if Shroud were to hypothetically touch Ortega and try to use her powers on them, what would happen?

Unknown. Shroud absorbs life energy as well as memories, that complicates things.

What kind of access does Ortega have to what's being said during Sidestep's therapy sessions? How are they aware that Dr. Finch's mind has been... politely... redirected?

Ortega pays the bills. Anything else is spoilers.

Can you tell us more about Dr. Vedard? How does Mortum know of them?

We will go more into detail in book three, but Dr. Vedard is well known in certain circles. It is a pseudonym, whoever was behind it was a scientist who used a pseudonym to publish due to the dubious ethics of their work. Rumor has it that the man behind it was a scientist originally working for the French military, but there is no definite proof. He is also rumored to be dead. Dr. Mortum is very familiar with his work. I will not detail what that work is...

Ortega sounds like he has some idea of what Argent would be like "unleashed" when you discuss the catastrofiend return with him, what happened that gave him that info (if something did) and does it have anything to do with why he said in an earlier scene that he trusts her with his life?

Ortega sees things and adds them up. Things that are better kept private, or talked about in hints.

Or is the trusting her with his life in reference to his generator and the hints that have been dropped about it?

That also ties into things.

Would you mind going in detail about some of the fallout of Sidestep succeeding in getting Harold to drop them? I can't imagine that would have been great for Harold or Ortega's mental

health. Not to mention a ranger potentially causing an accident from a body falling out of the sky.

Hmmm... Since that doesn't happen, it's all speculation, but I think that would have led to the collapse of the current Ranger team. There's no coming back from that. Herald would have quit being a hero, and would be utterly traumatized. Ortega would have been the same, and might have attacked Herald over it. The bad press would have meant it would be easier to fire everyone else and start from scratch. Too many failures and accidents.

When are we going to make lady argent and mortum meet?

Book three.

When we go show the doctor that we are a regene in her lab what would have happen if the puppet had woken up right at that time as we are talking to her?

Probably a similar thing to some epilogues.

I've noticed that when we're an art thief but also decide to take the contents of Carter's safe after grabbing the Rothko, we seem to leave without the painting and only the safe's contents. Is that meant to happen or is this simply an oversight?

A bug. I'll look into it, thanks for letting me know.

If Sidestep is suicidal and causes the crash, we can have a rather heartbreaking scene with Ortega after waking up again. Will it be possible for the other ROs to find out what exactly happened/caused the crash or will that stay between Sidestep and Ortega?

It depends. I imagine that it might be shared with others, if the relationships means it makes sense. We'll see.

I've decided to track some values during a Rebirth playthrough and got a negative value for puppet_individuality. Would that be a valid value for Retribution after the release or would it be reset to 0 in the end?

It is entirely valid, there are no maximum/minimum values for some stats. The only ones that have a 0-100 scale are the stats I use fairmath for, but some of the hidden stats don't use that. The one exception is the scar stat, which is fixed to 0-100, but doesn't use fairmath for reasons.

Will it be possible to reunite our suit nanovores with argent's nanovores?

Hehehehe or maybe the other way around?

How did the catastrofiend get into mortums gun, or will that be explained in book 3? Similarly, who was the catastrofiend before it become the way it was?

The Catastrofiend's origin is a mystery. So far, the most likely one seems to be a military experiment gone wrong. Since it seems to have the ability to regenerate and add modifications on its own, it's impossible to know what the starting configuration was. The taste for nibbling on boost drugs doesn't help either.

It was in Mortum's gun because someone owned that gun, got cornered and desperate and shot it. Probably died of their wounds afterwards, and the gun eventually got put up at the auction.

How many people does HG currently have threaded?

I don't have an exact number, many, but there are limits. Maybe three dozen or so?

If Hollow Ground had been at ground zero for Heartbreak's attack how would they have fared? Would they have been able to escape relatively unharmed or would they have been another causality?

Hollow Ground would most likely have gone down fast, too much baggage and not strong enough defenses.

What do the rangers' think of Argent and Sidestep's relationship provided Step is in good standing with all of them, and is relatively wholesome as a criminal?

Ortega: Good for them! (makes a note to keep an eye out so she doesn't jump ship and becomes a villain too)

Chen: Oh no. Double trouble. (same thoughts as Ortega above)

Herald: They look good together. (and a bit of wistful jealousy)

To activate Chen and Ortega's poly route, do you NEED to hang out with Chen both of those times in order to lock it in? Or will there be opportunities in the next Book for people to lock in the poly route if they decided to eat dinner with Ortega during one of those times instead? (I ask bc you made me LOVE both of their scenes so much; I would love to know what the requirements for the poly route are)

Will it be possible for the book 2 poly routes be triggered in book 3? For example, if my endgame is a Chen/Sidestep/Ortega poly relationship, and I date Ortega in book 2 but show no romantic interest in Chen throughout Retribution, will I still be able to trigger the start of the poly route in book 3 or later? Same with the other poly routes; if I "friendzone" Herald in book 2, would it still be possible to start a poly with him and Ortega later?

Romantic relationship, as well as friendships and poly romances will be able to be triggered on and off during book three and four as well. You won't get locked in or out of things, but depending on previous decisions, things can be easier or harder. All the polys can be started in book three (or four), the ones in book two are just gets the briefest head start. I don't like locking romance routes, life is rarely that

simple, especially not in this game. Some characters will reveal new sides of themselves that might make you change your mind too.

And will we find out who rahim thinks the villain is working for in book 3? any hints? :)

Yes, you might. I won't give any hints.

There's mention of Chen's new shoulder joint bothering him in the demo, that's he's still adjusting to it. How recent was the replacement/how long did he look for Step?

The shoulder was originally put in 2016, but there are continuous upgrades yearly, both due to wear, and due to technological advances. At the time, he had that particular joint for a few weeks. He looked for Sidestep for about two years or so, the first time after Heartbreak was rehab and trying to deal with the rest of the team.

How much, if anything, do the Rangers know about the farm and/or how Re-Genes are created? Did Sidestep ever tell anyone anything about their childhood/life at the farm in any context? If not what did they tell people, particularly Ortega with their unrelenting stubbornness when they want to know something, about their past?

I won't say for certain what the Rangers knows. Sidestep said nothing that could be incriminating, but some Sidesteps might have made comments that could be seen in a different light once the truth comes out. It is very much up to headcanon exactly how things were dealt with, might be given choices to elaborate on in book three.

Am I using the wrong link or is the scene at the beach where MC urges Ortega to choose between puppet and MC different? There used to be stat checks to determine whether they pick MC or puppet but now it seems like they automatically pick MC?

I removed that option recently. Why? Because I more and more realized that it was changing so much of later interactions that I either had to sit down and write a LOT of additional content to make it justice, or remove it altogether. I did not have time for the former (as it very rarely happened), and I was not satisfied with doing something halfway. So in the end, I opted to remove it. I have done the same with several scenes in the book that I felt I couldn't give the space they deserved at present.

How does Jake feel about the part of his role that includes playing the muscle and having to remove people on HG's bad side or making examples of them?

He's at ease with being seen as the muscle, he likes being underestimated. As for roughing people up/killing them, it's not something he particularly enjoys, but he'll do it. Most people he deals with are very far from innocent, it's a dog-eat-dog world as far as he's concerned. Sometimes he feels bad, though he's good at suppressing those feelings. he wouldn't have come this far if he wasn't.

Did Nocturne pick her current name after she got boosted or did she already go by the name Nocturne when she started her new life with HG?

It was after she was boosted.

How does it feel for Lady Argent when she loses cohesion? Does she remember what happened afterward or it just a blank spot? Does it depend on the situation?

It depends partly on the situation, but mostly it is a blank spot. Some things might resurface, as in a dream.

Do the telepathic boosters give better control over nanovores?

Yes.

Why did the nanovores listen to argent, but no one else?

Well, eventually they listened to Sidestep too. But for Argent, it was that she's a technopath, she can "talk to" machines and connect to them.

[QnA for June!](#)

[Jul 2, 2021](#)

There was a lot of questions this time, and some fun ones!

Are you more of an Architect or Gardener?

Hmmm I think I'm very much a Garden Architect. And by that, I mean that I have a central structure (which I need to have in order to be able to seed clues and misdirection) for where the series is going. However, the majority of the story is not tied directly to this structure, I am allowing myself great freedom in how the characters in the story acts and relates to things. I need that freedom in order to have fun, if I already knew everything I would be bored writing it.

I have also realized that while I need to know WHAT needs to happen at certain points, I don't need to know HOW. By the time I get to those points, anything I would have come up with at the start will probably be outdated and less fun.

To finish off the garden metaphor, I have built the walls around the garden, charted the paths and put the main beds and boundaries in. However, the plants are put in as I go along, and if I need to move some beds, or smash them together or make new ones, I will do so.

Is the Farm technically known as the farm, or is it just a colloquialism?

It is a colloquialism/nickname used by the people that work there.

Are there plans to bring up the Heartbreak movie in-game?

No plans, but it might happen. It's one of those things that might be used as a dialog bridge to get where I need to go.

How old is Locus by the time Retribution starts?

Locus was born in 1999, so she would be 22. She debuted as a vigilante in 2013, which was far, far too young for any kind of license or sponsorship, but since she wore a mask and hid her identity, people tended to assume she was older than she was, especially considering the fact that she was African American.

What's the standard age for someone to be a hero, and also what age is considered too young?

There is no standard age, especially since many of the more restrictive laws are nonexistent on the west coast. Boosts tend to be younger, because the odds of surviving the boost drugs are higher if taken in the early teens. Mods are older, because they either requires money or a sponsor.

There are teen heroes/vigilantes out there, and they are slightly controversial. Many people feel that they shouldn't do dangerous work like that, but they are also very popular with the media so they have an easy time getting sponsors. Luckily, many of the sponsorships mostly entail being corporate representatives that are cool and looks good and doesn't require going into actual combat. You can enlist at the age of 17, that's the age many companies use before they officially sponsor someone.

Okay, silly question, but I have to ask (and if it's been asked before, ignore me)... what was Ortega and Chen's reaction to finding out that Herald was a massive Sidestep fan?

Ortega was delighted, Chen probably rolled his eyes when Herald wasn't looking.

If it's not a too much of a spoiler: Does Ortega knows where Step lives (if not in the secret base)? If they do, How did they found out?

Not going to tell you that, you will have to keep being nervous and try to figure it out.

I think it was mentioned a while back that Rat King's abilities are getting stronger thanks to their interactions with MC. If that's the case, then is it possible for other telepaths to experience this sort of growth by interacting, in a similar fashion, with more powerful telepaths?

Yes. Like other powers, it grows stronger with training, and interacting with other telepaths enables people to learn faster and to pick up new tricks. We'll know more once this weeks lore dump goes live.

What types of pranks would the rangers pull on each other? Also do any of them have merch of each other?

Hmmm I don't think any of them are big pranksters, with the possible exception of Argent if she's mad about something. I'm not sure what she would do then. Argent has some Charge merch, as does Herald. Chen got various Ranger's merch for Spoon. Ortega has Charge merch as well, they make for great gifts (and Ortega is sometimes involved in the design).

If step sleeps in close enough proximity to the rat king, can they prevent nightmares and let step have a nice sleep?

To some extent. It has probably happened now and then, and Sidestep didn't notice.

What's the Rat King's opinion of the Rangers and Mortum if Sidestep has a high relationship with them? Are they "aware" of the dissonance when Sidestep is fighting them?

Yes, they are, but they trust Sidestep. Rats playfight a lot, that's what they see it as right now.

How did Ortega react to finding out that they were immune to telepathy, and how did they feel about it? Did they know for very long that Sidestep was a telepath without knowing Sidestep couldn't hear their thoughts?

In an earlier FAQ I said Ortega found out through Sidestep, but after some thinking, I realized that was unrealistic, thus this is now the correct answer: Ortega found out pretty early on in their Ranger's career, there are training programs people have to go through to help minimize leaks. They thought it was pretty neat, meant they didn't have to sit through all the boring stuff. It did take a long time before they knew Sidestep was a telepath at all, Sidestep kept that pretty close to their vest.

What does Ortega think about telepathy? How would they make use of it if they had telepathic powers?

Ortega thinks telepathy is pretty neat, but does not understand the implications or consequences at all. They'd be a terrible abuser of telepathy, would probably be considered a villain if they had them. They already have problems with boundaries.

The RO's from best to worst with kids and why?

Oh boy... I truly have no idea, going on instinct here: Ortega, Herald, Mortum, Chen, Argent. I know too little about kids myself to have an idea.

What is the Rangers and Mortum's worst nightmare?

Hmmm... for Mortum, it's stress ones, an experiment going wrong and trying to fix it, but everything they do make it worse.

For Ortega, it's a tie between the Nanosurge and Heartbreak. Often the two mix together in unsettling ways, but Sidestep dying tends to be at the heart of it.

Argent's are spoilers, but if you know her background, then you can guess.

Herald's is reliving the night he and his brother took the boost drugs, mixed with the hospital afterwards. Distant parents included.

Chen varies. It's what the current worries are, so they shift. But like with everyone who went through it, Heartbreak is present.

What is the RO's and tia Elena's best dream they had/have?

I don't know. Good dreams are seldom as memorable as bad ones, trauma leaves greater scars. I think the only ones who would vividly remember dreams like that are Herald and Mortum. Both their dreams were about being respected in their fields, Herald as a hero, Mortum as a scientist. They both crave recognition. Tia Elena probably had a few like that about the olympics she never went to. Good Chen ones tends to involve being whole, but they always leave him depressed when he wakes up. Good Ortega ones tend to be rerunning past memories, and they also are depressing once they realize it was all a dream. Argent sometimes dreams of life before her change. She doesn't like it.

Did the Rangers ever had in the past and/or the present a "spicy" dream about Step or each other and How did they felt/feel about it? Did They brush it away, or made them ponder/realize something about themselves or what they may feel for that person?

A resounding YES for Ortega and Herald. On both counts.

Do our little adorables Rat King, dream? If they do, they have singular/personal dreams or they dream together

They do dream, and they tend to intermingle. Some are separate, some are as a whole, and some are exploring other nearby minds. This is especially true if the villain has the tunnel base, or the old waterplant, because there are plenty of nearby rats to connect to.

Did Ortega meet the USA president in person when he became Marshal?

Yes, all Marshals do. It's a very official occasion, set in the White House itself. It's one of the ways that the US imposes power on the free territories.

Did he make awful jokes/tell puns if he did

No. Ortega was very taken by the gravity of the moment, wanting to make a good impression. This was right after Hood's death too, so they were stepping into some big shoes.

Can regenes be double boosted? If so what's that process like?

They can, but it is a risky process. If someone is picked out for a possible double boost, they go back in the tube post the first decanting and assessment, the process takes about an additional year. The ReGenes selected for this are either ones with powers deemed too weak, and the ones with powers the scientists think might help surviving the second dose. For the latter it's a gamble and they don't always get approval, because powers that boost durability and regeneration are very good for additional modding as well.

What's Chen's favorite thing to dress Spoon in?

He likes variation, but he's always been very fond of the little raincoats. He has one in the Ranger's colors, with the logo.

Do the olympics exist? Can people who are modded or boosted participate?

Yes, the Olympics are still running. The free western territories are not a recognized nation, but people from there can compete if they do well in the US trials. Mods and boosts are not allowed to compete, there are lots of tests done, but like with doping, there are always suspicions and the occasional scandal.

There are alternative competitions that do allow both boosts and mods, but they are controversial. The most famous one is the Uranium League, an offshoot of the Diamond League catering solely to boosted/modded athletes. It's become a way for various nations to compete and compare scientific and military progress in a safe setting. It started out close to traditional track and field events, but has evolved since then, in order to showcase what humanity is capable of.

What's the goat's name?

The goat's name is Snowball. She's a nigerian dwarf goat, and as the name suggests, mostly white, except some black and tan around the head and neck.

Owl and Sidestep don't appear to be on good terms. Was there a specific incident that caused this or was it the case of personalities clashing? If it was an incident, will we find out what it was in the future?

I will probably go into this incident in the future, Owl might play a part in some paths of book three. But essentially it was a combination of suspicion, and events. Let's just say that Owl does not appreciate someone being able to sneak up on her.

What's something unconventional each of the ro's find attractive?

I do not think I can answer this question, because I'm not sure what conventionally attractive is. Is it unconventional or not that Chen appreciates a good back? I have no idea. I know too little about how people and attraction are supposed to work, and I am not really interested in learning.

What would the rangers be like as villains?

If the Rangers, Mortum and HG trio were in Sidestep's role as the villain, what villain career, HB scar and motivation would they each have?

Ortega would probably be an infamous thief/troublemaker who does things for the headlines. Charming as hell, probably trying to paint themselves as more of a Robin Hood, but liking the lap of luxury way too much to ever make a difference. Thief/Friendless/Life.

Chen would run a crew, perhaps ex-military mercenaries. Just a few people he could trust, taking on tough jobs for good money. Would have some morals, but would keep compromising until there were few lines left to cross. Might eventually end up running a bigger organization if he gets the opportunity. Boss/Outside/Fate.

Herald would be after fame and respect. Might work with others, might clash with them. Probably a big rival to Ortega. Not that interested in money, more in the headlines. Would probably learn to like scaring the hell out of people. Lots of anger issues to resolve. Hunter/Puppetmaster/Anger

Argent would be a loner, and an assassin. Very strong moral code, but if she decides someone needs to die, they'd be gone. Working with nobody. Trusting nobody. Goes after the occasional villain as well. Hunter/Revenge/Revenge

And the ones who are already villains, just in Sidesteps role.

Dr. Mortum: Thief/Friendless/Anger

Hollow ground: Boss/Puppetmaster/Life

Nocturne: Anarchist/Outside/Justice

Jake: Hunter/Revenge/Life

Did sidestep's name ever become public knowledge? Or at least, known by more than a few people?

No, but it was known to people in the hero/vigilante world surrounding the Rangers, and some villains might have picked it up from there as well.

How bad does pain have to be to activate the pain gate? (like it seems like it didn't with Psychopathor leg injury.) How does the pain gate work in regards to shutting off again? Like will it stay active until treatment/painkillers are received or would it just sort of wear off over time regardless of treatment (or lack of)?

The pain gate does not remove pain completely. That would be counter productive, because pain is a good indicator to make sure you don't hurt yourself needlessly (and for punishment). What the pain gate does, is cut the volume down.

If we take the classic pain scale of 1-10 this is how lvl 7 is described: Make it difficult to concentrate, interferes with sleep, you can still function with effort.

This would be the top end of the scale with a functioning pain gate (and about where you are in the Psychopathor fight). This ensures that you will be able to get away from the situation at hand, won't pass out, and with effort and training, you will be able to treat your injuries.

A pain gate works well with painkillers, because they are designed to deal with mild and moderate pain that the pain gate won't affect. Someone who has had a pain gate implanted for a long time, might be able to lower the threshold when it kicks in, just like people can be trained in ignoring and withstanding pain.

What is Ortega's financial situation actually like? They have that debt, but they're also prone to giving money away, buying things for their friends, enjoy fancy and expensive clothes... are they actually somewhat well off, or just bad at not spending money?

The way Ortega sees it, they won't ever be able to pay off their debts, so they might as well have fun while they've still got a good salary. Money in a bank account does nobody any good, better to spend it on yourself or on other people. No use living like a pauper to pay off maybe 10% of a debt you never asked for in the first place.

If Ortega hadn't been in the accident what would they be doing now?

Would probably be a rather famous actor/actress. They have a good screen presence and likes the attention. Might have walked the path of other martial artists/body builders who became stars.

If Ortega had been boosted rather than modded (and survived) what powers might they have?

Hmmm. Could see something Spider-Man like with wall climbing and enhanced agility/reaction speed.

If Mortum hadn't pursued the sciences as a career path what would they have chosen instead?

Wouldn't have been much of a choice, but they would probably have ended up a teacher.

What are Mortum's favorite and least favorite branches of science?

Mortum loves building things, so physics, the more experimental the better. Quantum physics is endlessly fascinating. The least favorite would be geology, too boring and no applications on what they do. Both biology and chemistry can at least be useful.

Is there a branch of science Mortum is interested in but never pursued?

Computer science but more on the AI side, artificial intelligence is fascinating.

Silly little question: How would the Rangers + Mortum deal with a stray spider in their living space?

Mortum is by far the most freaked out, spiders are a big NO in their book. Kill it with spray, from a distance. Then disinfect the lab.

Argent has never found any, and would not be bothered unless they started making nets, that's not her aesthetic.

Ortega would check to see what kind, then remove it.

Herald would try to shoo it away or something, what do you do with spiders anyway?

Chen would squash it.

How much of Los Diablos is still messed up by the Big One and other earthquakes? Have most of the areas been cleared up and cleaned up, or are there many places within the city where the buildings are still messed up from the earthquakes? How about roads?

As of 2020, Los Diablos is about half the size that Los Angeles was at the time of the quake (1980). The central areas are all cleaned up and repaired/rebuilt, brighter and shinier than ever. This is where a lot of money has been pumped in, and for people visiting it probably looks like the city has recovered completely. However, if we leave the city center, many of the outlying areas still have issues.

Some are sponsored/owned by various companies and have nice houses and good infrastructure. Some are repurposed/rebuilt ruins, organized and run by various groups and cooperative organizations. Many of these might have a better quality of life than corporate run ones, but they rarely look as snazzy. Some are more like shantytowns, where it's everyone for themselves, building what houses they can but there's no central organization. And some, especially the areas hit the hardest which didn't have nice views, are just overgrown ruins half buried by mudslides and ash.

The road network is spotty, the city itself only maintains the central areas, and the companies are only interested in what's useful for them. There's no state that can take responsibility for the highways, so they are occasionally in bad shapes. People don't travel between communities to the extent that they used to, most people tend to work close to where they live. The bus transit system is functional as long as you go where the money is, and it's supplemented by private bus companies serving/run by the outlying communities. There is talk about refurbishing the coastal highways to make travel easier, but there are a lot of people who need to work together.

How many people died in the Big One? How much of the Cascadia subduction zone went off? (I watched a video recently on the whole of that and it got me thinking like Dang)

It's still hotly debated how many people actually died in the disaster. It depends a lot on whether people count just the initial events, or the months afterwards were ashfall made many parts unlivable. It is generally accepted that this was the first million+ fatality disaster since the China floods 1931, but the figures vary wildly. Most people died in the aftermath rather than the actual quakes and tsunamis due to respiratory damage, traffic, thirst, starvation, mudslides, exposure, fires, lack of medical care and diseases running rampant among the refugees.

The entire Cascadia subduction zone unzipped, the damage went partly into Canada as well (Vancouver was hit badly).

Also how did states like Oregon and Washington fair after the Big One? Are they considered part of the FEZ?

They were affected as well, thanks to the Cascadia subduction zone going off a few days later. They were spared most of the ashfall, so they were in better shape, but Mt. Rainier erupted, so the communities surrounding Seattle saw a lot of damage, as well as anything close to the shoreline as the tsunami hit. The definition of the FEZ includes Washington, Oregon, California and Nevada.

Does the government ever plan to “take back” the FEZ or are they going to be allowed to do their thing indefinitely?

The lease that formed the base for the FEZ was for 40 years, so it runs out 2032. With only a decade left, some people are starting to worry what will happen.

Just a few questions. What does Ortega think of Sidestep's self harm tendencies if not suicidal tag. Would they be worried it could get worse? Or worried Sidestep could become suicidal?

I don't think Ortega realizes how bad it is yet (it can vary between Sidesteps of course). It worries them for sure, especially with certain Heartbreak events, but surely it can't be that bad? Right?

If Sidesteps vice is alcohol does Ortega think Sidestep drinks too much, are they accepting of it or will it become an issue?

They think Sidestep drinks too much in the way that they themselves drinks too much. Should probably cut down, but it's a stressful life dammit. Might be an issue in the future.

Is it possible for boosts to stay inert for a long time after consumed? Is the effect always immediate?

How long does it take someone to go through the boost? What is the process like?

It varies. The drug usually starts to affect the body within an hour, but when those changed becomes known depends on what they are and how fast the process is. In general, a slow process means a greater chance of survivability, and there has been experiments with trying to slow it down. So, while it's not inert, with smaller effects it might take months or even years to notice that anything has changed, and sometimes a traumatic incident might be needed to trigger it.

Do dr. mortum and ortega know each other? or was mortum just worried about seeing them at the gala in rebirth because they're a ranger?

They have met, but I wouldn't say they know each other well.

Besides GeniTech and the US government, have any other corporations/government bodies attempted to create and utilize their own version of ReGenes? If so, how successful were they?

It is a patented process, but there are rumors, especially in other nations. No proof though.

What is the in universe answer to the question of who's the most powerful ranger past or present in general terms? What would you say is the actual answer to that question?

If we focus only on the Los Diablos Rangers, the online ranking has Sentinel as the most powerful one, partly because his powers are flashy. Someone that can create tornadoes with some effort will always be up there.

The actual answer depends on the definition. Sentinel is definitely up there, though his powers lacks precision if he wants power. Argent is up there, if she goes all out, but Sentinel could take her down in a fight. She's got more utility though. Steel can be very powerful if he starts using military hardware, but it all depends on his loadout and prep. Anathema was very hard to hurt, but acid lacks utility. Hood is up there, he had more utility than Sentinel, but never really cut loose because he feared what he could set in motion in this unstable seismic landscape. In a fight, I think Sentinel and Hood would be able to go toe to toe, neither being able to really hurt each other. So I would give this one to Hood.

Sorry if this has been asked before, but is it possible for a telepath to possess an animal? I was just thinking about how cool it would be to spy on someone as a bird or something lol

It would be possible, but not for all telepaths. It's a very different mindset/brain setup. Sidestep can't do it.

Is there anything unexplained about the fallen hero verse? Stuff like actual magic or aliens.

Some would say that the boost drug is unexplained, since there's no scientific explanation for why it can do the things it does. There are lots of esoteric explanations for those effects, including magic and aliens.

Kind of on the same vein as this question, since it made me wonder: are there any particularly outlandish conspiracy theories involving Boosts or heroes in general; is there any sort of cryptid lore like the laser dolphins that are actually real or just super out there and silly.

SO many. Seriously. I can't go into them all, but there are so much cryptid lore out there. Some of the most popular ones are that the Catastrofiend is an actual demon from hell, ReGenes are aliens bred at area 51, the boost drug is just a catalyst for the next step in human evolution, and cryptids of the past were just natural boosts, tying into the theory about human evolution.

What does space travel look like in this timeline e.g. SpaceX style plans to put people on other planets? (Sorry if any of these questions have been answered previously).

Was space exploration ever a thing in this reality? If so, who got to the moon first & when?

Space travel never happened in this world, instead of the focus on rocket science in WW2, the weapon of choice was power armors and walking tanks. Humanity has never gone to the moon, the space race did not happen, and the technological advances were focused on bio-mechanical interfaces rather than computers/spaceflight. The first satellites weren't launched until after the year 2000, and they were military and not civilian. Thus internet, gps, cellphones and everything that relies on satellites for ease of communications is a lot more primitive than in our world. It's cable TV, no satellite dishes, and while there now are civilian satellites for communication it's only just taking off. Think mid 90's for the online stuff.

What do the rangers and mortum hate the most in the world and what their fav thing to do?

Mortum: Dislikes buying clothes, loves driving (and science).

Ortega: Dislikes debriefings, loves hanging out with people.

Chen: Dislikes television interviews, loves walking Spoon.

Herald: Dislikes physical examinations, loves drawing.

Argent: Dislikes holidays, loves old movies.

Will we be able to have a pet later, even if only for good endings?

I had planned implementing pets in the game, but it's got too complicated in Retribution. We'll see, I'm still a fan of it, but if I'm gonna do it I want to do it right.

I recently tried a playthrough using sidestep as my villain's name, and I thought the extra bits of dialogue were really interesting. Will there be more unique dialogue for when we officially get ousted? Like, disbelief someone would have the gall to shove the truth out like that for so long? I think that would be interesting to see, but I'm not sure how complicated that would be to implement.

Oh yes. It's not complicated, and the different reactions are fun. There will be a lot more to come.

Whats the most common power people who survive the boost drug have? What are some of the rarest?

Statistically, the most common boosts are the simpler ones, that go together with basic human physiology and wishes. Be stronger, faster, more durable, have sharper senses or heal yourself.

The rarest ones are the ones that few people survive getting, that needs radical transformation of the body. Energy projecting ones are rare, shooting lasers from your eyes and similar.

Do regenes have names, or designations?

Designations. Handlers might give them nicknames, but that's discouraged.

Will we be learning more about anathema later on?

Yes.

What were the other rangers thoughts on Hood's death? were any of them hit as hard as Ortega?

Sentinel. He and Hood were the remaining founding members, and they had been friends for a very long time. Sadly, it's a dangerous life, and Hood was not the first Ranger that died on the job.

How did Ortega find out HG was the one who killed Marshal Hood?

How did Hood die?

He was shot in the back several times in broad daylight, while discussing a case with one of his police contact. His dying words, and the testimony of the witness was what convinced Ortega that Hollow Ground was behind it. Especially since that had been the subject they had been discussing...

Resident chentega stan here to ask what tía elena would think of ricardo and chen getting together after all these years 🥺

She would be very surprised, but think it was sweet.

What makes mortum and the rangers blush?

Mortum: Hard to spot, first of all, but unexpected compliments that are not about how smart they are.

Ortega: Good luck trying...

Chen: Having dirty thoughts in unwarranted circumstances.

Herald: Being taken off guard by affection, he blushes easily.

Argent: Treating her like she wants to be, not as what she is.

Where were all the Rangers born? Did any of them grow up inside Los Diablos?

Argent was born in Los Diablos, and grew up there.

Herald was born and grew up in Boston.

Chen was born and grew up in New York.

Ortega was born and grew up in Killeen, Texas.

Who is/was the biggest in-universe source of inspiration in the life of each of the Rangers + Mortum? For you, were there any particular sources of inspiration for each character, whether

from media or your personal life?

In universe:

Ortega: Marshal Hood was a big inspiration and eventual father figure.

Chen: I don't think he had a particular inspiration.

Herald: Sidestep, obviously.

Argent: Rita Hayworth I think is the closest thing.

Mortum: Alan Turing perhaps.

My inspiration:

I generally don't have outright inspirations for characters (or faceclaims), but I do like mixing various tropes. Have one or two classic that goes together, and then a third one that breaks with what you expect.

Since herald celebrates hanukah, i was wondering if he had a bar mitzvah too?

Yes, he did.

What was anathema doing before they became a ranger?

They never talked about that, so I won't either.

Just how "big" are the Rangers in pop culture in FHR? Are pop culture, media, and the entertainment industry very different in FHR, or is it about the same?

It is similar in style, but with the demise of Hollywood, a lot of the action moved eastward, split between Atlanta (studio space), New York and Miami (the glitz). There is also less social media, and more official outlets/stories.

The Rangers are big, but not the biggest. Think of them in terms of a popular sports team.

So Ortega just pretended to be surprised finding the mc alive? :o I was reading about him following the puppet early on in a previous post and now i'm confused. :s

Ortega did not pretend, they had NO IDEA Sidestep was alive. The puppet was tracked for different reasons, they had no idea that the puppet had anything to do with Sidestep.

Do Lady Argent, Herald, or Ortega have opinion on any of the possible armor combinations Sidestep's armor can have in terms of having to fight against them?

Lady Argent likes the Speed/Strength combos, it makes for a fun fight. Especially speed.

Herald is more scared of the ones with Strength, as is Ortega.

If pursuing romance or friendship with any of the Rangers or Dr. Mortum, what is the possible main quality they find attractive/enjoyable about Sidestep? With Dr. Mortum, would the quality be different from Puppet? (and if it were, what is the main quality Dr. Mortum is attracted/likes about Puppet?)

This is very hard to say, since Sidestep can be such a different person depending on the playthrough. I will try to pick some general things that most Sidesteps should have in common.

Ortega: Willing to call them on their bullshit, and being generally unimpressed with their persona.

Chen: Strength of character.

Herald: Honesty (ironically enough), and depth.

Argent: Drive.

Mortum (puppet): A genuinely intriguing individual who feels compatible.

Mortum (Sidestep): Who knows.

If the Rangers, Dr. Mortum, and HG trio had a psychological profile similar to Sidestep's (with exception of infamy/obscurity), where would they fall in the stat scales?

Dr. Mortum: Arrogance (45), Ruthlessness (70), Daring (15)

Hollow Ground: Arrogance (85), Ruthlessness (80), Daring (25)

Nocturne: Arrogance (25), Ruthlessness (60), Daring (30)

Jake: Arrogance (50), Ruthlessness (70), Daring (80)

Is Lady Argent aware if the new villain got a sample from her? How would she feel if she knew about it?

Nope, and she would be FURIOUS.

Do rest of the Rangers know about the different possible outcomes that occurred between Argent and the new villain in the sewers? Like whether Argent almost caught the new villain, managed to scar them, lost due to telepathy or because villain was superior fighter?

Good question. What Argent shared with the team is not something I'll say.

How old was HG when they took the boost drug? What was the motivation behind for choosing to take it? If they had not taken the boost drug, where would they be right now in life?

HG would have been in their teens, maybe fifteen? The motivation was power, and that youthful notion of immortality and that they were special enough to pull through. If they hadn't taken it, they'd most likely be dead, like the rest of their family. Crime is a dangerous business.

How do the Rangers, Dr. Mortum and the HG trio feel about the system they are living under? Do they feel it's the best it could be under the circumstances, don't especially care, or do they wish it to change?

At the start of Rebirth (before any doubts might be seeded):

Ortega: The world is unfair, but I can't do anything about it. Protect my friends, do the best I can under the circumstances.

Chen: The system isn't perfect, but it's better than chaos. Knows how to work within it, but sees the flaws.

Herald: Failures are more because of individuals abusing it than the actual system. Not very aware.

Argent: The system is what it is, all I can do is exist within it.

Mortum: It is what it has always been, a system for people with money, power and influence. The trick is to use it.

Hollow Ground: The system could be better if I run it.

Nocturne: The system is a system, prone to abuse. How to build a better one is a good question.

Jake: The world is big and complicated, gotta take care of my own.

How did the Big One affect Ortega's, Lady Argent's, and HG's families in terms of lives and livelihood? Were any of their families living in Los Diablos at the time?

Ortega: Ortega's father was stationed in Texas, and helped organize the first rescue operations. Was very busy with that. Their mother had family that owned land in the southern California countryside, there were deaths there, but some managed to evacuate, and were among the first to return once things had quieted down.

Lady Argent: Her family were LA locals, and lived through the Big One and the aftermath as children. Lots of stories there, they were a part of one of the neighborhoods that started to rebuild early on, as more of a cooperative community.

HG: Their family also lived on Los Angeles, and were part of the survivors who also organized their local communities, but in a more criminal manner.

I've understood the Rangers would have difficult time to find out anything real about Heartbreak disaster due to red tape, but was curious whether either HG or Dr. Mortum have ever considered or tried to dig deeper to find out what was behind the Heartbreak disaster? Could either of them find anything useful/interesting/suspicious if they wanted to or would it be futile endeavour?

All that is very much spoilers, but it is an interesting question. Book three might have answers.

If the Rangers and Dr. Mortum would have to choose armor similar to Sidestep's current villain armor and specialties for it, what armor design and armor combination each of them would have chosen (minus telepathic boosters)?

Ortega: Speed/Strength.

Argent: Speed/Strength.

Herald: Armor/Strength.

Chen: Armor/Strength.

Dr. Mortum: Armor/Speed.

If HG liked to take care of things behind the scenes, how did HG's siblings like to take care of things? Did HG and their siblings work together as a team?

They did, it was a family business. The eldest brother was the chosen successor, very much open and brash and out to make a name for himself to live up to dad. I think HG was the quiet, thoughtful one in the family.

[Angles](#)

[Jun 22, 2021](#)

(Cooldown writing, Locus and Porphyry, the prompt was 'angles'.)

Maybe she was coming at this from the wrong angle.

People might not be telepaths, but they are aware without being aware that they are aware. Walking. Groups. The seaside path is wide enough for people to wander. Wonder. See but not look, calculating the angles, unconsciously avoiding walking into each other. Peripheral vision. Hear but not listen.

Billiard balls following their own paths, put in motion by other balls around them, predictable until someone applies outside force.

Which she doesn't. But what if someone had?

Locus shakes her head free of the river of minds, seeking out her anchor instead. Solid. Dependable. Safe. Porphyry trusts her the way most people don't, letting her hide in the shadows of his mind. She's selfish, using him to shelter her from the rest of the world. Trust. So rare.

Telepaths don't have friends. Not for long. Nobody likes being known. Not like that.

Porphyry doesn't mind.

"You think they're gonna win?" She dangles her feet over the edge of the embankment, pretending to be a normal girl who could wonder about the world instead of knowing.

"The Clippers?" He mulls it over in his thorough, thoughtful way. "Maybe. Robert's injury worries me, though. Wouldn't bet money on it."

"Wanna go to the game?" She makes the suggestion as easily as the waves rush ashore. Long Beach is beautiful today, and she's in a good mood because everybody else is. She's not picking up anything weird here.

"You're up for that?" He looks down at her, twice her size in weight, if not height.

"I am. Nobody will look strangely at you." She pats his rocky arm, the thick craggy skin warm from the sun. "And I want to feel something."

"Not gonna be good feelings if we lose." But he's already agreed. She can feel it like the sun on her face and the wind at her back.

"That's fine. I just want to lose myself." Let her guard down. Let people in.

Nobody is alone in a crowd, she least of all. Nobody cares about privacy; it's all about the shared experience. Rings on the water, two teams in synch, trust, drive, the will to win carrying the crowd. The game. The audience. Sound and light and screams and touch and an organism that breathes and gasps and cheers and despairs to the beat of shoes and balls. She can just be, and not worry about breaching any privacy or see things she shouldn't. Nobody will know who she is.

Just a girl. With her 'uncle.'

"Was it Vince?" Porphyry's thoughts have completed their circuit, and Locus sighs because she knows what he wants to ask but is relieved that he doesn't mind that she does and just trusts her to pick up what she needs.

"He didn't mean it," she lies because he did, but she understands why. "And he's not wrong."

~The man's an ass.~ Porphyry shifts into private so they won't be overheard, enunciating thoughts as clearly as if he had spoken them. ~If it hadn't been for you, the Long Beach Heroes would still have played in the bush leagues.~

~I'm still a kid in his eyes,~ she admits, gently projecting her words back. ~And he was embarrassed.~

"About what?" The curiosity is there but not prodding. She doesn't have to answer.

"He was thinking about...." Locus kicks her legs back and forth, staring at the water. "You know. Asses."

"Kiara!" Porphyry doesn't look shocked, but she can feel it. He might treat her like a hero, but he was still aware of how young she was.

~Don't give him a hard time. I shouldn't have teased him about thinking about the Marshal.~ She had just thought it was cute. Thinking the Marshal was hot. "I'll be careful," she adds out loud. "And I'll apologize."

"It's not your fault," Porphyry sighs. "He's a grown man. He should be able to... control himself."

"Not everyone is you." She gives him a pat on the shoulder. ~Can't ask them to be. I'm the freak here; it's up to me to be careful.~

~You're not a freak. You're a hero.~

"I can be both." She gets to her feet, stretching. ~Come on, there's nothing here. Let's try a new spot.~

~You're sure you're not barking up the wrong tree?~ Porphyry rises as well, towering head and shoulders over her. ~Vince said...~

~Vince is weird about this, and I don't like it.~ She adjusts her sunglasses, looking inland. ~I don't know what it is. Something is off. Same with Penny.~

"I trust your instincts," he says, and she can feel his thoughts start circling the same target as hers. If something is off, who and why? "Where to, then?"

"Somewhere where we can get something to eat." She was hungry again. ~And it's easier looking for a needle in a haystack sitting down.~

[Ask your question here!](#)

[Jun 20, 2021](#)

So, getting close to the end of the month again, so here is a post to collect those burning questions you have about the game, background or my creative process.

Have fun!

<https://dashingdon.com/play/malin/fhrdhuewrdontspreadthislinkok/mygame/>

[New Retribution build is up!](#)

[Jun 12, 2021](#)

Okay. [There is a new build/link to Retribution.](#)

[Here is a link to the discord.](#) Hopefully it won't expire in a few days this time.

Now, let's talk the real talk. I did not have everything I wanted in this update, there are still reported bugs not fixed, and I have not added the copyediting suggestions. However, I felt forced to push an update because someone was spreading the old link on twitter as "the new demo".

Please, don't do that. Just don't. **Keep the link to yourself**, and if you do share it with your significant others and the like (not policing you, you do you), please DO make sure they understand that this is NOT the new open demo, and NOT something to go around spreading online like the open alpha was.

Be smart, and everything will keep running smoothly.

[Pursuit](#)

[Jun 11, 2021](#)

Well, I needed to do some cooldown writing, and the discord suggested Sentinel. Enjoy a snippet!

...

17 March - 2002

Mountain Mesa, South of Lake Isabella

"You should take her up there." Hood shaded his eyes, trying to pick out where Julia had disappeared up the trail. Light on her feet. Faster than the two of them, the eager spirit of youth compared to two old men. Well, relatively old.

"You told me we're supposed to stay out of sight," Sentinel reminded, voice cracking momentarily before he lowered it another notch and masked it with a cough.

"I didn't mean now. Later. Once we've rounded up the asshole. He's running out of places to hide."

"Don't think she's fond of flying." A cooling breeze whipped around them, tugging at Sentinel's poncho. They both wore camouflage over their skinsuits to help blend in. "Froze when we dropped down from the cooling tower, remember?"

"I do. Which is why you should take her flying. Have some fun. She used to do what you do for a living, you know? Wingsuits. Stunts."

"Not like me, John, and I don't do girl-to-girl bonding anymore, you know that."

"I know. Wasn't what I was talking about. She crashed, the wind hit her wingsuit wrong, and she'd be paralyzed if she hadn't been modded. What you did probably dragged up some trauma, though she'd hate to admit it."

"Shit. I didn't know. I just wanted to get us down fast."

"I know. And she didn't know about you either. So don't hold her big mouth against her." Hood started walking again, picking up the pace.

"If I held a grudge about everyone that's been misgendering me, I might as well become a villain right away." Sentinel followed, as did the wind, giving them a welcome boost. "It's cool," he lied. "Everyone's still getting used to it."

"You get in any more trouble, you just let me know." Hood shifted a few rocks, adding steps where Julia had climbed, limber as a mountain goat.

"I don't need you to take care of me, John." Sentinel followed, frowning at the empty skies. He should be up there.

"I know," Hood chuckled. "But I'm the Marshal; I get paid to yell at reporters. About the only times I get to be scary these days, don't begrudge me my fun."

"I know you are trying to care of the team. I get it." The path evened out, and they spotted Julia, now quite far ahead, dipping behind another rock. "Is that why you want me to take her?"

"She loved doing what she did." Hood shrugged and lengthened his step. "Must kill her that she can't do it anymore. That it's just bad memories. Maybe you can give her some new ones."

"Flying is pretty great..." The wind picked up once more, teasingly tugging at their clothes.

"We are still not flying." Hood gestured towards the slope. "We'd be sitting ducks against the clear sky, and I don't know the range of his rifle."

"I'm getting blisters." Sentinel grimaced; his skinsuit was not made for walking long distances. "Almost preferable to take my chances up there. Would help us spot him too."

"How fast can you get up high enough to be safe?" Hood shaded his eyes, trying to pick out good ambush spots.

"Faster than our newest member can dodge a bullet. You should call her back; I thought we weren't supposed to get separated." Sentinel stripped off the poncho, holding it awkwardly in front of him. Suits could be unforgiving, even if he was the only one who saw everything wrong with him.

"We weren't. I just wanted to get a word in with you first." Hood activated his radio. *"Julia, wait up. You're getting too far ahead. Let Sentinel scout first. Over."*

"No need," came the reply, her voice giddy with excitement. *"I've spotted them. If I'm careful, I can take them before they see me. I'll have this wrapped up before you get here, Charge, over and out."*

"Them? Shit." Hood looked over at Sentinel, who nodded.

"Guess whoever named her Charge knew what they were doing. I'll be right there."

And then the wind swooped down, leaving Hood alone to break into a swearing run. This bloody team would be the death of him.

[The Nanosurge](#)

[Jun 5, 2021](#)

[Excerpt from e-mail between FEMA representative Gustavo Avila and Marshal Charge. Subject: The Nanosurge, date Aug 15, 2011]

I included what I could find. Sorry, I can't do more, but they're clamping down on this hard, and since the threat is over, I have limited pull. You owe me a drink next time I'm out there, glad you lived through it. Do you figure the casualty estimations from the attack are anywhere near accurate, or is the city council fudging the numbers again?

Sorry for your loss

Gustavo

attached files

firstspot.pdf

naming.pdf

wishiknewmore.pdf

dontaskwhereigotthis.pdf

...

firstspot.pdf

[Excerpt from the debriefing of Sergeant John Hassel, Dec 21, 2001, UAE]

Look man, you can record this all you want, ain't gonna change shit. I saw what I saw and I ain't crazy. We were moving in on [REDACTED] according to orders, doing a sweep. I was in my tincan, providing rear support and scanners. Never fun in built-up areas, but what are you supposed to do. Place was deserted. Not evacuated, it had a different feel to it. Looked dead, but no bodies. Or animals. We got spooked, but the CBRN scans came back clear. No poison gas, at least nothing dumped recently. Still, I switched on the internal circulation, I could stand smelling my own sweaty pits for an hour or two to make sure I didn't get anything in the system. Only reason I am alive today.

We had reached the [REDACTED] when the screams started. Think it was Ortiz, kept flailing around like someone had doused him in napalm but nobody fired shit. Just kept screaming and tried to get the uniform off, and then the next guy started, and the third. It was like they were being scalded, and then there was blood and they were coughing up red and by now people were freaking out. The order came out to get protective gear on, but I think I was the only one who had engaged mine. The rest were... infected? Compromised?

I couldn't do shit. Turned off the radio so I wouldn't hear the screams, and when Ortiz fell over and started to melt I admit I ran. Should probably have shot them, would have been kinder, but it's hard to do that, you know? Even if you know you should. Some of them shot themselves. The rest... the rest screamed and died. You've got the transmission. I know you've got what my cams caught before I ran, even if you didn't find any bodies.

Quite frankly I don't care what you do with me. Desertion, sure, it was either that or die. Put me in jail if you want. I ain't going back out there. Not with that shit still out there.

...

[Excerpts from Professor Leah Wu's correspondence during the third quarter of 2002]

Look, I know what I said, but this is fascinating. Look at the attached scans. It's not a gas as much as a swarm of minuscule creatures attacking organic matter. I've included a video of the last experiment, the little buggers devoured that steak, and I think it's safe to say their performance is impressive. Tell Ben that he's wrong, it's not a chemical reaction they are using, but I'm not sure exactly how they break molecular bonds like that. There are bacterial traits in there, but the creatures are clearly mechanical. I propose the name "Nanovores," and if Harley wants to fight me for it, tell her she submitted her analysis two hours after mine. This is my win.

...

All the details will be in the attached report, but I wanted to flag two things immediately. First, the Nanovores (thanks for sticking up for me with that) needs to eat to survive. I separated a portion of the swarm and starved it, and after 4 days, they had turned inert and did not react to renewed feeding. Still, I'm going to keep isolating that sample just to make sure they haven't gone to spore. Perhaps there is some way of reactivating them...

The second is that if they get enough to eat, they breed. The sample was introduced to half a pig and devoured it in 52 minutes 31 seconds. Once they were done, we measured a marked increase in their mass. This is alarming; if they are released in a high population setting, they might breed exponentially until they run out of food. Thank god they've only been deployed on isolated targets so far; the desert is acting as a natural shield. I doubt an EMP blast would do anything; they are too small to sustain a charge. Heat or chemicals works best to destroy them so far, but dropping napalm on a suspected site is not the answer we are looking for, though it's served to contain attacks so far.

....

Tell them to get off my back; I'm moving as fast as I dare. The density of our sample has increased substantially, and I don't want to risk a leak. So far, they have shown some preference for what they choose to feed on. Meat is preferable over plant matter, fresh meat is preferable over cooked. [REDACTED] got me some human remains, but they did not discriminate between human, beef, pork, or chicken. I've included the videos of the test; sorry for the disturbing content. We need to crack this. Whoever is behind these attacks must have some way of controlling or deactivating them other than waiting for them to starve themselves out or razing the entire site. I knew Ben joked about it, but I don't think anybody would be that reckless. Or evil.

...

I agree with you, we've come as far as we can in these facilities. I don't like giving up the samples, but they've made me nervous lately. Think they've tried eating through the rubber in the seals, we've replaced them, but I can't shake the feeling that they're after me, personally. I know. I'm laughing at

myself too, but if you've seen how they move, it almost feels like they are following me around the lab. Not gonna lie; it will be nice to get them out of here. Let Jun and his team handle this. I need a vacation.

...

wishiknewmore.pdf

[Excerpts from Major Waterford's correspondence with Captain Jun Ninomiya, Nov 14, 2002]

Don't give me that kind of talk. You will obey orders; we are here to do a job. If you can't, then quit, but good luck finding anywhere else that wants to hire you. You were fine with feeding them pigs and cows, don't tell me that apes got your knickers in a bunch? If the screaming bothers you, turn off the sound. I need results. There have been two more attacks. I value my men more than your scruples. I need a way to neutralize them, preferably yesterday.

If operation [REST OF THE DOCUMENT REDACTED]

...

dontaskwhereigotthis.pdf

[Excerpt from Jun Ninomiya's diary (translated). First entry Jan 02, 2003. Last entry Mar 17, 2003]

Bad day again in the lab, I know it's needed, but live testing never sat well with me. The nanovores clearly prefer live meat, but I still can't understand how they are capable of making that distinction. They are too small to be programmable, and there is nothing in our 'dissections' that indicated that there should be any preference for anything other than protein content.

...

Human testing. Did not ask about the subject, which was heavily sedated and unresponsive. We left the hood on. The activity level was markedly higher. The subject weighed 67kg but was devoured in half the time a monkey or pig of a similar size would have been. More and more, I am becoming convinced that this is a weapon intentionally made to target humans.

...

Human testing phase II. Smaller subject, heavily wounded but not sedated. Restrained, left the hood on. Even higher activity levels from the nanovores, do they want victims that are awake? I know it's foolish to assign them mind or intention, but I have begun to think of them as evil. And hungry.

...

I should quit. I should have quit last year.

...

I can't do this anymore. I keep dreaming about them. Walking into their container. Embracing them. Letting them strip me bare. Breathing in them is the quickest death; subjects with CBRN classed gas masks lived on average 175% longer.

...

Where does he keep getting the PEOPLE?

...

Rumors that we are pulling out of the UAE. Will they shut us down? I hope so. We're not making any progress, we just keep feeding them in the vain hope of finding some means of control. Wa keeps pushing for more, but I can only tell him the facts. Not what I feel. It's not scientific, but I can't help but think I'm right.

The nanovores are evil. They selectively choose and hunt humans. Fear and strong emotions attract them, sedated subjects are less interesting, and dead ones are just meat. I've identified three modes: Feeding, Breeding, and Hunting.

Feeding is the base level activity. Their hover and movement abilities are subdued. They stay low to the ground and clings to surfaces. Conserving energy?

Breeding is induced when the protein-based food supply is enough to trigger population growth. The swarm can increase exponentially, and they keep the activity level even when the food supply decreases. Their hovering ability is much stronger, reaching a height of a few feet depending on winds. This mode seems to be more reliant on the wind to help them reach new food sources.

Hunting is... I don't have words for it. It is an elevated state of activity like breeding, but they actively seek out human victims, even going against the wind if needed. I'm not sure what they use to locate their victims. Scent and visual seem irrelevant. Sound could be a candidate, but I'm not entirely convinced. There's something else, something I'm missing. It's almost as if they feel us. Wa would call that superstitious nonsense, and he would be right.

...

[Excerpt from e-mail between Marshal Charge and FEMA representative Gustavo Avila. Subject: The Nanosurge, Aug 16, 2011]

Is this it? Sorry to sound needy, but the military is clamming the fuck up. Chen's contacts are giving him the runaround. Or they don't know, which is somehow scarier.

That last diary excerpt explains a few things, and maybe I can fill in some more blanks. I need someone out there to know what I know in case there's another strike.

My theory is that whoever created the nanovores was controlling them telepathically. As always, this is off the record, but that's how we stopped them. Had an allied telepath, and no, not naming names, don't trust the news on this. They're not telling the truth. The individual is not important; what they did is. Reading what you sent, I think the telepath might have shunted them back into the feeding cycle or whatever that scientist called it? Calmed them down until we could get a CBNR team in and wipe the beach. Can still smell the chemicals.

I don't like the mention of spores, but since it doesn't come up again, that didn't seem to be a thing? I hope. Been four weeks since it happened, and it's been calm. Don't know what would have happened if they made it into the city. It would have been worse. Chen said the military had been prepared to bomb the city. Nuclear. Too many solid buildings for napalm. Yeah. You see why I want the facts out there? I'll include everything I know and saw from my end.

If you learn anything about who might have done this, contact me. There are eight years between your last files and this attack. What happened? Where were they kept? Who did this?

I want them to pay. And I want to make sure it never happens again.

Probably best to stay away from here a few more months, but if you make it here by new years, I can get you into all the good parties. I owe you that.

O.

[QnA June \(spoiler version\)](#)

[Jun 5, 2021](#)

Could Step technically cover up the tattoos with latex and/or body paint/makeup?

Not for long, it flakes off, a lot more so than on the surrounding skin. But for very short occasions, it can be done.

Considering they're unaware of Chen's sexuality, how much does Ortega know about Chen's background / reasons for leaving home? What did Chen tell them?

Chen simply said that he had an argument with his parents and left to join the army. That sounded relatable enough to Ortega not to ask further.

In regards to all their home surgery, would sidestep (or re-genes in general) be resistant/immune to infection?

More than the regular person for sure.

How recognizable are regene tattoos outside of people who have actually interacted with the Special Directive and other regenes?

Not as many as Sidestep thinks would have the first clue what they are.

can we reasonably assume there are at least a couple other identical (or close) clones of sidestep around, from their batch or ones that share DNA?

There were some that survived the decanting, but as far as Sidestep knows, they are the only one who wasn't recycled pretty fast.

Was Ortega conscious at all throughout the accident at the end of Retribution, or were they knocked out on impact like Sidestep?

Briefly unconscious, but came to before the ambulance arrived.

Sorry if this has been answered before, but will we have a choice to set the kill variable again in Revelations? as in, going from saving/no killing to agentkill?

Yes, this is a thing that can and will change during the books.

Considering the fact that HG's threading has no effect on Ortega, does that mean they're unaware of it? Do they still think HG is able to control earthquakes or do they have their own theories as usual?

Ortega's theories stay with Ortega. Maybe they will trust you enough to talk one day.

Are all ReGene implanted with knowledge of languages or just cuckoos? If yes, do the languages they learn differ?

Yes, and yes. It varies depending in which theater they will be deployed and what languages might be useful to know.

Will we ever have an opportunity to interact with non-cuckoo ReGene?

Yes.

If that's not too much of a spoiler, do you mind sharing a few details about the cuckoos facilities, like, accommodation, training, schedule?

First part of training is similar as other Re-Genes. Think very lab-oriented, separate cells, little communication between individuals other than during meals or communal training. No free time. In fact, talking to other Re-Genes is forbidden, silence should be observed unless conversation is initiated by a handler.

Second half starts to differ, everyone still has cells (no unsupervised Re-Gene interactions), but Cuckoos starts to operate in surroundings that looks like where people live. Houses. Parties. Stores. They receive training in human culture and interaction.

Will we ever get to meet Mitchell within the story or even see any of the info Mitchell has collected about our villain Sidestep?

If you start working with HG it is very likely. If not, we'll see.

hey yeah actually does HG know you've swapped bodies if you get threaded? is their threading more like a conscious effort, something they're aware of?

The exact limits of HG's threading is BIG spoilers, so you won't get an answer to that.

How much did HG keep an eye on the Nanosurge and Heartbreak incidents? What did they think of the disasters? Did they make any plans in case things went from bad to worse? Were Nocturne and Jake already in the picture when the Nanosurge or HB happened? If they were, what thoughts did they have?

The Nanosurge: Yeah, that was bad, and like most disasters, a complete surprise. Once the seriousness of the situation was apparent (and HG would have got that way ahead of the public), the immediate reaction would have been to prepare for evacuation. There was nothing in HG's or associates bag of tricks that could have done anything to a strike of that magnitude, so spreading the word and getting the hell out of town as fast as possible would have been the only recourse (apart from sealed armors/suits, but they are in short supply). Luckily, the heroes came through on this one.

Heartbreak: This was different. It took some time before HG realized the danger, because let's be honest here, a rampaging, power-mad boost is not exactly uncommon. It was treated as something the heroes would clean up, and once it had stopped moving and buried down in one area (albeit with an expanding radius), it was just something to keep an eye on. HG is suspicious of the cause, it didn't line up with a chemical attack (wind direction) but even if there was a cover-up, the threat was ended before it became something they had to deal with.

Nocturne or Jake was not in the picture for the Nanosurge, though ironically it indirectly led to Nocturne and HG meeting. After that scare, HG decided to focus more on setting up a secondary base of operations outside of Los Diablos in case anything like this ever happened again. There were already some good investments in Chicago, and as more money was funneled into those schemes it got Nocturne's (who was working as an IRS agent at the time) attention.

Nocturne was in Los Diablos for the Heartbreak incident, but had not been living there for long. The whole thing unnerved her, and she wondered whether she had made the right choice to take this risk, but HG assured her that this was not exactly common. She took the decision to use the boost drugs maybe half a year afterwards, and the incident was an influence in her decision.

How would it affect Sidestep to know there are other Re-gene runaways? (especially if they are non-telepaths or fighter Re-genes).

It would depend on the Sidestep, there are runaways, and you will be allowed to have an opinion on them later in the story.

Do Jake, Nocturne, or HG have any recurring dreams?

HG has a many. They have a very vivid dream-life, and most of them are variant reruns of things that happened in their past, with family and friends.

How do Nocturne, Jake, and HG like to spend their mornings?

HG: Long mornings. Anything before noon is too early. They might be awake, but they won't get anything done. A few laps in the pool, a leisurely breakfast and some meditation and then maybe they can start the day. Oh, and a drink is never wrong.

Nocturne: Up early. Gets most of her work done before HG even wakes up, but she likes the quiet of the early morning. Needs coffee. Used to need cigarettes, these days she has quit, but occasionally relapses when she's stressed. Probably has her first meal of the day when HG wakes up.

Jake: Tends to get up late, as most of his work is done at night. His routine depends on whether he's stayed over with HG and Nocturne or not. If he has, he's up a couple of hours before HG stirs, checking in with Nocturne if she needs anything taken care of, probably fixes her breakfast since she's not a big eater. Maybe even something from home if he's in a good mood. If he's not staying over, it's a very cursory shower and cigarette, picking up coffee and a lunch on the way to work.

If the mob boss crew already know Sidestep's face, how did they first react (or felt) when they heard their boss would introduce himself out of their armor? What were their initial impressions on Sidestep?

Since they already knew Sidestep's face, I don't think their main worry about their boss introducing themselves out of their armor was revealing their identity. Rather, the worry was that without the armor (or the backup), their boss was walking into enemy turf essentially unarmed. Even if they knew their boss was a telepath, dampeners exist. Depending on the relationship, they might have argued strongly against that.

The initial reactions depends very much on the Sidestep, for example for a Sidestep with a terrifying armor (and maybe also relationship) the reaction might have been surprise that they looked so ordinary. For short Sidesteps with imposing armors, the reaction would have been that they were shorter than they thought. None of them knows what Sidestep looked like, so there would have been no recognition or worry in that regard.

What kind of dynamic do HG and Dr. Mortum have these days? Dr. Mortum doesn't seem to trust HG, but what does the kingpin think of the good doctor?

Dr. Mortum is very much aware that he operates in Los Diablos under HG's good will. If he's useful and polite and doesn't rock the boat he will be allowed to remain a free agent. However, there is something about HG that thoroughly unnerves Dr. Mortum, and in fact, it's an after effect of some light threading.

Dr. Mortum did meet with HG, early on, for a similar interview as Sidestep was offered, and they did shake hands. After a few months, HG decided that the good doctor was safe on their own, and didn't need close handling. So, HG had a final meeting and added some new threads to make Dr. Mortum forget they had ever met in person, and let their influence drop to the lowest level in order to save energy.

This have left some discrepancies in Dr. Mortum's memory, and while they are not big enough to be actively noticed, there is an unease when thinking about HG. Like having forgot something important, but Dr. Mortum is not prone to forgetting things...

What were HG, Nocturne, and Jake like as kids?

HG was daddy's favorite. They were a middle child, but they were the smartest of the bunch. Ambitious. Studious. At the time, school wasn't really a thing, but their mother did the best she could, and HG soon found others to learn from. They were perfectly happy with their oldest brother taking over daddy's business, because running things behind the scenes suited them.

Nocturne was pretty much a shut-in. Severely agoraphobic and bullied, she was homeschooled, but had her mind set on getting a degree anyway. She was smart, but had no friends, and she didn't think she needed any. Read a lot and played games, especially puzzle-games. Could have joined MENSA (she liked the tests) but then you would have to meet people.

Jake had to be a hustler. He came from a big and loving family, but they weren't rich, so every penny counted. That's how he ended up working for the local criminal gangs, it was simply the best opportunity at the time. He was never a bruiser, but he could fight, didn't mind taking risks, and he was good at reading people.

How does it feel for Re-genes when they are in the tanks? Is it like dreaming? Did it feel different for Sidestep due to their telepathy (or did their powers awaken only after they were decanted)?

I think the best description would be like dreaming. They are implanted with most of their base knowledge during this time, so their minds would be filled with vivid dreams of the latest 'lesson'. This is also when individuality happens, because while all Re-Genes gets the same base memory/training, how their minds adapt it and internalize it as their own experiences varies wildly. Most Re-Genes remember nothing of their experiences, just like few people have memories from their early years. Partly into this process, the boost drug is injected, at which point or how much varies. The Farm is still trying to perfect the process to get more surviving Re-Genes.

Sidestep is an exception, because of their telepathy, they were partially aware of their surroundings during the last steps of the process. This caused them to remember more of their last year in the tank than others.

How does HG feel about using their powers on someone they share a personal connection with, without the other person knowing anything? Still unrepentant or more complicated than that?

It's complicated and depends on the personal connection. For most people, HG can justify it. It is for everyone's good, it keeps people safe, their jobs secure, and there's no harm inflicted. Just a bit of security. In their mind it's not much different than having a surveillance system at work, or secretly hiring security to keep an eye on a possibly dangerous element. The people in question might even be called friends, but this is a cutthroat business, and they need to be sure. It's best for everyone to remove any temptation of betrayal.

Nocturne on the other hand is aware of the threads and what they do, and often suggests modifications to her own. There are no secrets between them.

Where it gets complicated is Jake, because there the relationship has turned from trusted henchman to... well... lovers? And all of a sudden there's that hint of guilt and a bad conscience and maybe Jake deserves to know the truth but how do you explain something like that and not just make it worse? Nocturne keeps telling HG to reveal the truth, but HG is scared as hell of the consequences.

Do any of the mob boss henchmen have any thoughts on the Rangers? Do any of them know Dr. Mortum personally or through reputation?

I mean they have heard of the Rangers, but until now they have all moved in circles below what the Rangers would have been interested in. Pelayo and Ward did work for the Wolf Pack, who occasionally hired out to big league villains like Psychopathor, but they have never fought the Rangers. At this point they are just like any other big-name heroes.

However, if either their boss or the puppet has an open relationship with Ortega that they know about, there's personal investment. And sure, Ortega is indeed hot (as Nehal would put it), but what the hell are they thinking? That's too risky.

None of them has met Dr. Mortum, they only know them by reputation.

How did Vernon and Mia first meet?

When she was studying to be a journalist, she was the one who sought him out for a project, and he became a mentor of sort.

What was the main quality that HG and Nocturne found attractive in each other? How long have they been together? Which one of them said "I love you" first? How did the other one react?

They have been together since 2012, and they first were attracted to each other's intellect. It was very much a game of cat and also cat when Nocturne (then with the IRS) tried to bring down HG, and they were in contact online for a year or so before they actually met in person. This was very much out of character for Nocturne, and HG never got the ability to touch her, but they did keep meeting and eventually it became more for their own sake than their jobs. Nocturne quit her job and moved to LD in

2013, destroying all her evidence in a faked attack before she did so. HG had revealed their powers before then, and she had suggested using them on her to help with some of her issues. HG said "I love you" first, during an argument about Nocturne's wish to use the boost drugs. Her reply was simply "Then don't mess this up. I trust you." She said the words too, later.

What kind of mask/persona do Nocturne, Jake, and HG prefer to show in public?

HG: Eccentric. Charming. Utterly in control.

Nocturne: Silent, pretty and not very smart. Very much just a decoration on HG's (or occasionally Jake's) arm.

Jake: Confident, brash, might fuck you up or have a drink with you, which it is, is on you. Doesn't mind playing the muscle.

How does Nehal feel about being the youngest in the team? Is she confident in her place in the team or slightly worried how useful she is?

Nehal has that particular kind of confidence that comes with youth. What will happen once she has her first big setback is a very big question.

What do Jake, HG, and Nocturne fear losing?

HG: Control. They have got a good life now, everything is working the way they want it to. No rocking the boat please.

Nocturne: Her new life. She can't go back to who she was, that wasn't life, that was just passing time.

Jake: The connection to his family back home. He's very aware that they could possibly be used against him, and also that the longer he stays in the US, the more they drift apart.

And yes, all three of them also fear losing each other.

What did Nocturne, HG, and Jake thought of Sidestep who had a hero reputation? Were they aware of Sidestep who had a vigilante or sidekick reputation?

They didn't have any real thoughts of Sidestep as a hero, other than they were just another vigilante. Stopping the Nanosurge was impressive, but most of the details about that were hidden. They weren't aware of a vigilante or sidekick Sidestep. Mitchell is the one keeping track of things, there are too many heroes to bother remembering them.

Do HG, Nocturne, or Jake have any memories they like to remember during difficult/complicated times or would any of them rather focus on the present and do something?

Nocturne prefers to distract herself by working. HG has a lot of good memories, mostly childhood focused that they like to drift off into. Biggest daydreamer of the bunch. Jake occasionally lets himself

think wistfully of home, but tends to prefer to pick a fight.

If Sidestep and Lady Argent end up becoming friends or romantic partners, would Argent be comfortable with letting Sidestep call her by her name or would she prefer if Sidestep used her nickname Angie?

She might get to the point where her real name might be preferred, but it would take a while. Too many memories.

If the Puppet exhibits their own emotions beyond Sidestep's control are the mob boss henchmen aware or noticed Puppet's fear toward their boss? Do they have any thoughts on it?

It depends on the relationship between the boss and the henchmen. If it's a friendly relationship, that's seen as a worrying thing, but nobody has wanted to bring up the subject. In the other cases, I don't think it's been spotted yet.

How serious did Lady Argent think the new villain was being if they said to her they wanted her by their side as an ally?

Not very, it's the same kind of fight and flirt talk that Ortega uses. That doesn't mean it doesn't feel nice.

Are Nocturne, HG, or Jake in a habit of making New Year promises? What kind of promises would they make?

I don't think either of them would do that.

Dr. Mortum seems to be very protective over their friends/romantic partners and wondered would they appreciate of Sidestep/Puppet was equally protective of them?

Very much so, even if they might protest. It's always nice to be cared for, and they are aware that they are not the strongest fighter.

Did Ortega make the connection between Sidestep and Hollow Ground immediately after seeing Sidestep's face or did it take a while (and other misinterpreted pieces of information) for them to reach that conclusion?

The initial reaction was a "huh, they remind me of someone", but it took some time and research before Ortega was sure. Too many things added up for it to be anything else in their view.

Will we be able to speak personally to Vernon at some point about his theories?

At least in some paths. A meeting is long overdue.

Would the Ratking have tried to intervene if Argent had gone for the kill in the Auction? If not, what would the Ratking do in the event of Sidestep's death?

Yes. Yes they would have. They are very defensive of Sidestep, as can be seen in some paths. No dying on their watch.

I'm sorry if this has been answered a million times before or is already explained in the story, I tend to replay the same route over and over, and the lore still feels very overwhelming at times to me, but: Why was it necessary for the MC to have all those tattoos at all? From my understanding, MC was specifically designed and trained not to raise suspicion and be able to blend in on stealth missions, so wouldn't it have been possible to give them just a subtle chip or barcode for ID purposes like the one Agent 47 has?

For one very simple reason: dehumanization. Since there is not much of an outward difference between a normal human and a cuckoo, there was a need to drive home the fact that cuckoos are just Re-Genes. A Re-Gene is a tool, and letting one act and look like a human is already dangerous, so it was important to make sure that both handlers and Re-Genes never forgot what they were. Whether there are some infiltration models with more subtle markings made to get naked with people is unknown. That might be the case, but Sidestep has never seen one.

[QnA for June!](#)

[Jun 5, 2021](#)

Are there boosts that took the hero drug and gained notable powers from it, but didn't choose to become a hero? do they live their lives normally, but with added superpowers?

Some do. There are powers that are useful for a career out of costume, which would give you great advantages in real life. Unfortunately many of the people desperate enough to chance the boost drugs did not start with having a normal life, so it would be hard to go back to one.

If telepathy is a relatively rare power, how rare is telekinesis?

It's more common, but it's rare to have it on a level stronger than what you could lift normally. Might run into a user in book three...

Does the hero drug work on animals?

Oh yes. Animal testing is very common, and there has been some very dangerous creations that has escaped in the past. The most well known is the laser dolphin who is making shipping uncertain on the Los Diablos coastline. This was also how the Rat King was created.

How much of a strain would it be on Sidestep to connect to the mind of someone with an incredibly active mind, such as someone with OCD or Schizophrenia?

Not much of a difference, honestly. Just like switching to a different station on the radio.

If you are mob boss can you control your crew like you controlled the wolfpack when they fought the Regenes?

Potentially, yes. So far it hasn't been necessary.

What does Steel think of the possible armor combinations as both a user and something he is going against? As a part of this, are the telepathic boosters something that people can notice in general?

The telepathic boosters are not something most people would notice, you would have to do a thorough technical scan to pick them up.

As for Steel's views:

Armor/Strength: Standard military bruiser, dangerous but straightforward. Deploying heavier weaponry should deal with them, preferably at a distance.

Speed/Strength: Dangerous glass-cannon. The one with the potential to inflict the most damage. Area attacks should work, collateral damage is acceptable.

Speed/Telepathy: Annoying. Very hard to hit. Almost as if they've got eyes in the back of their neck. Slowing them down would be a priority.

Armor/Telepathy: Defensive. Manipulative. Make sure to plan for anything.

How big of a deal would it be if the entirety of The Guardians were wiped? Would this reflect poorly on the major? Can this come to pass if Sidestep plays their cards right?

It would be a big deal, and it would affect the Mayor. Perhaps not reflect poorly on her, but she would lose a strong asset. And yes, Sidestep might be able to do that.

In Rebirth, when you meet Ortega again (and "had a thing" in the past) they say "But you were the one I was..." Could you finish that sentence please?

"But you were the one that I was in love with." Yep. Indeed.

Did Ortega find Sidestep by following the Puppet that early on? It was said that the Puppet had found the bland café first, but it better suited Sidestep, so they began to go there....

Yes, that is entirely correct.

If it isn't too much of a spoiler, can you tell us a little bit about what Ortega's intentions are with Hollow Ground if they were to ever catch them? Do they plan to turn them over to the authorities?

Oh boy. I'm not even sure Ortega knows. The problem here is that the authorities might just not care at this point, Ortega's turned rather paranoid. More... permanent measures might be needed.

How exactly did Sidestep escape from the Farm, especially the second time? Is this headcanon territory, or will there be any choices regarding this?

It will most likely remain headcanon territory for the first escape. The second one we will get into at one point, and yes, there will be choices involved.

Would we be able to give ratking a body device that they can control?

In most paths, yes.

Can we add something more to our suit or it stay the same since the start?

I am not sure yet, it is possible. We'll see if I want to deal with the coding.

Why didn't Elena get into the Olympics?

She had problems with injuries, which eventually put an end to her career.

Was Ortega raised Catholic? If so, does that at all influence them in present time?

Yes, but it was not a deeply religious household. I think they are more culturally catholic than religious. The influences are mostly there on holy days and celebrations.

When Sidestep says they have "an extensive education", what does that entail?

Several languages, a solid basis in history and politics, a general knowledge of the arts and culture.

Is there anything you can tell us about Regina and her relationship to Sidestep? Just how much of a hand did she personally have in creating the mess that is our beloved protagonist?

I won't give many details yet, but she did have a big hand in creating the Sidestep mess. She's driven, manipulative, competitive, competent and ruthless.

How old was Anathema at the time of their death?

28 years old.

Just how much do the Rangers + Mortum trust their intuition? Neither of them strike me as superstitious, but are they? How much do they believe in fate?

Hmmm I think the one who trusts their intuition the most, is Ortega. The second one is Herald. Argent and Chen are more skeptical, as is Mortum. None of them are truly superstitious. In a way, I think Mortum would be the most superstitious of them, but about weird lab things. I've yet to meet a scientist who wasn't.

It's been mentioned a couple of times that Ricardo's relationship with his father and Julia's relationship with him differs somewhat. I was curious if there are also some nuances in their relationship with Elena? Or is that relationship essentially the same?

The relationship is essentially the same with Elena, I don't see any difference there. Well, I think perhaps that Ricardo gets more praise for helping with the housework, but life is unfair like that.

What happens to Sidestep's body when they go to another person's mind? (like they can do if they agree to "help" Lady Argent). Does their body go comatose/unconscious like it does if Sidestep takes possession of other people?

In short, there are four stages of telepathic contact. The first one is the subconscious one, what Sidestep uses all the time to pick up on threats and keep track of where people are. Think of it like peripheral vision but for telepathy. The second one is reading thoughts, it can be shallow scans, or deep readings, but Sidestep is still in their body, and though they might get distracted, they are aware of their surroundings. The third one is where things gets tricky (and most telepaths never get here).

To go into someone's mind is essentially leaving your body on autopilot. Sidestep is still somewhat aware, their body remains in what position they left it (at least if sitting, standing can have balance issues), and if they are hurt, they would feel it. In other ways they are blind and deaf to the world, sees nothing, hears nothing. Pain is the one thing that breaks through, a final safeguard to stop getting lost. This is what was used when 'helping' Argent.

The fourth step is possession, fully taking control of the host body and not just influencing it. Then Sidestep's body is entirely abandoned. It collapses to the ground, seemingly comatose. It is unknown whether there are any brain activity that would show up on scans, Sidestep has not exactly explored that. Nothing that happens to the abandoned body registers, it is unknown whether enough damage would trigger an instinctual return.

How old was Marshal Hood when he took the boost drug? Why did he take the drug?

Marshal Hood was fifteen. And, as he would have put it, he took it because he was a damn stupid kid who thought he was immortal and that it would have been a kick to have superpowers. He is a west coast native, and was twelve when the big one hit. He never was one of the ones lucky enough to be evacuated, and lived through the worst parts of the disaster. He didn't feel he had much to lose, and when the biker gang he was part of at the time got hold of a cache of the drugs, he was all too eager to take the chance. Let's put it this way, it was not a coincidence that he got geokinesis powers.

Do any of the Rangers or Dr. Mortum have any recurring dreams?

Ortega has them, especially when stress (which is most of the time lately). There are two common ones, one a true nightmare which is a mixture of Sidestep's death during Heartbreak, and their own fall. The details might change, the terror does not. There is also one which is more of a stressmare, walking around a big party filled with faceless people looking for someone but being worried about what to do when they find them.

Herald has nightmares about his brother's death on a regular basis.

Argent doesn't remember her dreams.

Chen doesn't have any recurring ones, they tend to vary, working out what's been stressing him during the week.

Dr. Mortum used to have a recurring dream, an academic version of being naked in front of your audience, stripped down so everyone could see the truth. But it was a long time since they had them now, some wounds time does heal.

What kind of morning routine do Dr. Mortum and the Rangers have?

Ortega: Proper breakfast, shower and coffee, or they will be grumpy all day.

Herald: Bagel on the go, often eaten while flying, but a shower is a must.

Chen: Cybernetic cleaning and self-care and something to drink, then walking spoon before work. He's up the earliest of all of them.

Argent: Leisurely breakfast. Possibly takeaway from the night before, she always orders extra for the next day. Then picking up fresh baked goods on the way to work for a second breakfast there. On good days, physical therapy.

Dr. Mortum: Leftovers, coffee and reading up the latest science news. Tends to spend an hour or two each morning reading before work, it's easier to find the time to do that before they gets wrapped up in something. The last one of them to wake up, they are a night owl.

How did villain days Mortum feel about their monologues and their act as a villain?

Villain days Mortum was acting the part. If they wanted respect as a villain, they needed to act like one. It was fun at times, sure, but their heart wasn't really in it. It was for show more than anything, but at the time they were very used to playing a role.

Friendship wise, how different is Ortega's dynamic with Chen and Lady Argent?

They are both good friends, but the dynamic is very different.

With Chen: There's always been a straight shooter/wildcard dynamic with Chen. While they superficially might seem different, they do have a lot of things in common. If anything, they tend to exaggerate

certain parts of themselves because they trust their friend to shoot down their worst ideas. Theirs is a relaxed friendship, they know each other well, and though they do argue, it's always with the knowledge that they also rely on that.

With Argent: This is a different dynamic. Angie reminds Ortega of themselves, they have many similar urges and habits. Here, Ortega gets to be the more mature one, calming down situations Argent might have exacerbated.

Is there specific reason why Sidestep became a hero?

I am leaving that one up to headcanons, but I think it is safe to say that Ortega at least had a lot to do with them remaining one.

What was HB trying to convey to Sidestep if they made Sidestep see the vision of the experiment?

It might not have been a voluntary act, but catastrophic bleedover, powers and memories mixing. At the time, Heartbreak was hardly coherent, so it was unclear if they were attempting to convey a message. But if they were... what would it be? (No answers from me... yet)

How was Sidestep doing money-wise back in their hero days?

Not good. Whatever money they got was burned through quickly, and Ortega and Anathema worried a lot about their finances. Signing on with the Rangers would have brought some stability to their live.

What happened to the apartment building where the Heartbreak occurred? Is it still in use?

It collapsed in an explosion. The rubble was cleared away, making space for a new building, but the project was abandoned halfway through. The building, and the surrounding block, is all but deserted. It has a very bad reputation for disappearances, and the current consensus is that it's haunted. The people who've stayed in the neighborhood are the ones too desperate to move or care. It's become an urban legend, covered in graffiti. It is a common challenge to go there, tag it, and take a pick to prove you were there. Not everyone returns.

What kind of mask/persona do Dr. Mortum and the Rangers prefer to show in public? Do any of them act lot differently with people they don't know well compared to people they are close with?

Ortega: You know that mask, the charming, confident, flirty hero. A bit of a swashbuckler, not too smart, but with sharp enough wit to gut you if you let your guard down.

Chen: Retreats to military training. All business. Short with people he has no patience for. Goes full officer when he has to deal with politicians.

Argent: Fickle, sexy, dangerous. Can walk away from interviews. Implies threats now and then. The Rangers media team has a handful with her, but they've learned to work with it.

Herald: Considerate. Soft-spoken. Can project authority when he need to. Gives people he talks with the feeling that he actually wants to talk with them.

Dr. Mortum: Flamboyant. Confident. Professional. Always in control.

If Sidestep would have been forced to meet Dr. Mortum from the very beginning how different would Mortum have been toward them compared to Puppet? Would Mortum have dared to accept their job offer (let alone deepen the relationship from mere business to friendship or romance) or would they have been too wary? Would Sidestep even dared to approach the good doctor?

Dr. Mortum would never have accepted that offer. They do research on prospective clients, and they would have spotted the Sidestep connection. Not worth the risk, a telepath and former (they say) hero is dangerous. Sidestep would not have dared to approach Dr. Mortum in person for the same reasons. Being recognized would be bad.

What do Herald and Lady Argent think of Ortega's lonely crusade against HG?

In this they agree, they are worried Ortega is taking it too far. But, on the other hand, it keeps Ortega busy, and it's better to be busy than depressed.

Considering Dr. Mortum's curiosity on the strange and unknown, what did the good doctor think if Sidestep managed acquire a sample from Lady Argent?

Fascinating. Dr. Mortum would have loved a larger one, perhaps with flesh attached.

what is a memory (or memories) the Rangers and Dr. Mortum like to think/remember when life around them feels too difficult or complicated? Would any of them rather distract themselves by doing something rather than dwelling on memories?

Honestly, they are all prone to distract themselves by doing something rather than think or get lost in memories. They wouldn't have ended up in the positions they are otherwise.

Do any of the Rangers or Dr. Mortum have a memory they would consider their "happiest"?

Herald: When he was accepted into the Rangers, that was a dream come true.

Argent: Probably a childhood one, but she'd be hard pressed to pick one.

Chen: The latest time Spoon did something cute.

Ortega: Too many. Would not be able to pick one. Lots of them are Sidestep and Hood related.

At what point of Re-genes development is the boost drug given to them?

At what stage of their physical development are ReGenes administered the boost drug? (e.g. when they're embryos, toddlers, etc.)

It varies. The Farm is still working on perfecting the process. Sometimes it is added early, sometimes late. Sometimes in a big gose, or several smaller ones, or a constant drip during development They are trying to perfect the process. In general, it is around the midpoint of the growing process, as losses then are less expensive than at the end stage.

If Puppet is friends with Ortega, is Dr. Mortum aware of it? If yes, is Mortum aware whether the friendship is genuine or just trying to get information?

In some cases, if you haven't had the talk yet, I'm not going to divulge the information yet.

Were Anathema, Sentinel, or Sunstream aware of Ortega's crusade against HG? Did they have any thoughts on it?

Anathema understood, and was probably the most supportive one (if not much help). Sentinel and Sunstream shared Chen's views and thought it had become an obsession. Cant bring back the dead.

Where would fighter Sidestep, tactician Sidestep, Ortega, Chen, and Lady Argent fall in the terms of fighting skills if there were no powers involved, just pure skill? Also, would any of the mentioned characters be aware of their ranking or would any of them think they are actually better or worse?

Oh, pure skills. Hmmm... some of them rely on their powers so much but I will make an attempt, and arguments can be made for a different ranking. From best to worst.

Ortega. Lost of experience, training, and very good body control even without (and before) powers. Very fast natural reflexes and strength.

Fighter Sidestep. Same as for Ortega, but I would rank Ortega slightly higher. They would argue about it forever though, each claiming they were better than the other. If I should specify, I would say a tall Sidestep might rank higher than Ortega, the others would lose out due to reach.

Chen: Solid foundation, much experience, good reflexes and high strength. Falls short because he's not as unpredictable as the other two.

Tactician Sidestep: Same as Chen, but not as strong.

Lady Argent: She's the one relying on her powers the most, not at all the same base in training and skill as the others.

Have rest of the Rangers met Spoon much?

Yes, he's often spending time in Chen's office when he knows he has to do a lot of paperwork. Ortega spoils him silly, Herald tends to dogsit when meetings pop up, and Argent keeps a respectful distance.

What differences and similarities do infiltration Re-genes and fighter Re-genes training have? Are infiltration and fighter Re-genes allowed to interact with each other or are they kept separate due to their different purposes?

I won't go into detail, but there are difference. Infiltration units learn more about human culture in order to fit in, they never bother with that for the fighter ones. On the other hand, the fighters recieve a lot more tactical and weapons training. They are allowed to interact, but much of the training is separate, so there is a noticeable divider between the two groups.

Is Hollow Ground aware/suspecting that Sidestep's villain armor was made by Dr. Mortum?

Yes, very much so.

Without saying who, are there going to be deaths that are completely unavoidable?

No.

Hollow Ground claims to have kept their hands clean the entire time they've been working under the alias. Ortega at the very least Knows that they are the one who sent the kill order for Hood, but are they aware that, assuming HG is being truthful, they weren't the one who directly killed Hood? If yes, what happened to the person who did pull the assassination of? Is Ortega aware of their identity and if so what they do with them? Alternatively, are they still working under Hollow Ground/are they even still alive?

Ortega equals sending the kill order with actually pulling the trigger. No difference. In fact, they are less obsessed with the actual assassin than the one who sent them. Ortega has an idea who it was, and they are still alive and working for HG. Ortega is biding their time...

What would the Rangers + Mortum each list as their biggest flaw and their biggest merit? What do you consider their actual biggest flaw/merit?

Ortega: impatient/clever (actually stubborn/loyal)

Chen: hesitant/thorough (kinda agrees on that)

Argent: harsh/controlled (actually overconfident/protective)

Herald: insecure/empathic (actually insecure/inspiring)

Mortum: reckless/brilliant (actually insular/brilliant)

Roughly, how many regene are currently known to be alive?

I honestly have no idea. Perhaps a hundred, more if we count ones under development.

After this series is finished will you be making more choice games? If so, would they also be superhero based or something else?

Yes. I have fallen in love with interactive fiction. Would be hard to go back to books. I think I want to switch tracks, I've got way too many ideas for stories, in wildly different genres. I think I will have said what I wanted to say with superheroes by then.

Would Julia have had a quinceañera?

Yes. And there probably hangs a picture on Elena's wall of the most pained looking Julia in a pretty ballgown trying to smile for the camera. She was deep in her rebellious teens then, no belle of the ball there.

Other than their mother are there any other relatives Ortega is/was quite close to?

Not super close as seeing them often and talking to them all the time, but there's probably some aunts and cousins they keep in contact with outside the times they meet during holidays and family get-togethers. I haven't detailed any of them though, so I can't name names.

How does ortegas family feel about them being modded/being a ranger?

Elena has made her peace with it, the rest of the relatives range between slightly horrified, impressed, and bragging about my cousing the Ranger all the time.

What is Tia Elena's opinion on Ricardo's moustache?

His father would have hated it.

Does she prefer he have one facial hair style over another?

Not really her son is handsome no matter what.

If Ricardo shaved off the moustache or started growing a beard, does she wonder what prompted the change?

No, Ortega tends to do things like that on a regular basis, at least the hair is not blue this time.

Is the rival variable something that's planned to evolve in the next two books, either with new rivals added to the list or by disappearing altogether as relationships and Sidestep's self-perception evolve?

I'll have to see, it is planned to evolve, but in exactly what way I don't know yet.

Oh and actually..... could you spare a teeny-tiny detail or two about Ortega's mindscape?

Noooooope.

I'm curious, What actually happened between Riley and Ortega

Basically, Riley and Ortega had a fling. Or rather, Ortega saw it as a fling, but Riley saw it as something a lot deeper and when Ortega started to pull back, things turned bad. Lots of passive-aggressiveness, threats of self-harm, and from Ortega's view, Riley was on the verge of a proper breakdown. They got cold feet, and thought that Sidestep might help to fix it, break the fixation. Taking the easy way out so to speak, better for both of them.

Bit of a silly question, but now that Sidestep's back in her life, would Julia ever consider growing her hair back out again?

Possibly, but it will take some time.

For the un-Boosted ROs: Who would survive getting boosted? And for the ones who do, what sort of powers do you see them manifesting?

Hmmm rolled the die to check, neither would survive.

Unique powers notwithstanding, how tech-savvy are the ROs + the Hollow Ground trio? How would you rank them in terms of their knowledge?

From most to least: Dr. Mortum-Lady Argent-Chen-Nocturne-Ortega-HG-Herald-Jake.

What sort of relationship would Anathema have with Herald and Lady Argent, had they survived?

Anathema would have liked them both! Would have become best friends with Lady Argent.

Is tia elena aware of sidestep's abilities?

To some extent, yes.

I couldn't help but notice Lady Argent doesn't make an appearance in the Villain AU. This surprised me a bit because Dr. Mortum and even Ace are briefly mentioned. So I was wondering, what's she up to in that AU?

Still with her family, never became a hero.

What would happen if you were to put a virus on a Re-genes chip?

Probably leading to them getting purged before the process was complete. They have good quality control.

What happens if for some reason they can't tattoo a Re-gene? Like if their boost were to give them skin similar to Argents.

So far, that has not been an issue. The method they use is very powerful.

Does Hollow Ground have an armored suit? Or has he never really needed one before?

Nope, never needed one.

Are any of the Rangers or Dr. Mortum going to watch that Heartbreak movie?

Argent would, and probably Herald.

Would Ortega have reacted differently to a Puppet that looks like Sidestep if he had never run into Sidestep at the diner?

Perhaps, it is hard to say. I am honestly not sure here.

Okay, silly question, but how are the Rangers as drivers, ranked from best to worst?

Ortega-Chen-Lady Argent-Herald. Dr. Mortum might give Ortega a run for the title depending on whether it's car or bike.

[Better late than never,.pls ask questions for next month!](#)

[May 30, 2021](#)

Ooops, it slipped my mind, but here it is. Ask your questions now and I'll answer them the coming weekend!

Real life is incredibly complicated (but in a good way) right now, so things keep slipping my mind.

[Lore poll! Make your voice heard.](#)

[May 22, 2021](#)

So, according to the last poll, the majority of people wanted more posts about the Fallen Hero world. I love that, I am filled with useless trivial facts and details that will probably never make it into the game. Some things I know everyone wants are slightly spoilerish until Retribution comes out, so let's start with some options that won't ruin anybody's fun.

Some of these might also be considered history, but since they are recent events I felt they were more suited in this category.

The Rangers project, why, who and where?

12%

The Nanosurge and afterwards.

48%

Law and Order in the Free Western territories.

2%

Lingering environmental effects of The Big One.

2%

Corporatism and Politics in Los Diablos.

5%

Telepaths and related boosts, an overview.

31%

Poll ended May 29, 2021 · 177 votes total

[New Fallen Hero Retribution update!](#)

[May 15, 2021](#)

So, a new update here. Bugfixes, some path changes, added content in places and more grammar and language fixes. I've been poorly lately, hopefully that's been resolved now after an emergency visit to the doc. If only the birches can be done procreating I might get back on track.

[Here is the new link.](#)

EDIT: Please avoid posting spoilers to social media! It really ruins things for people who haven't played it yet. Be kind to others.

[Dashingdon link is currently down!](#)

[May 14, 2021](#)

I will be posting an updated one in a few hours, sorry for the disturbance!

[Lore poll time!](#)

[May 10, 2021](#)

Well, now that I am done with the most obvious choice for character profiles, I thought I'd see what you want me to delve into more. This one will be more general themes and focus, will put up another one closer to the end of the month with things to pick from in the winning category. Please feel free to elaborate in the comments in case you have specific suggestions.

So what should I go for next?

More character profiles.

19%

World history, what has gone before.

8%

World lore, deep dives in various parts of the FH world.

72%

Poll ended May 17, 2021 · 144 votes total

[Mitchell's Guide to Villains entry 173: Boris Pavlenko](#)

[May 8, 2021](#)

Mitchell's Guide to Villains entry 173.

Subject: No villain identity.

Civilian identity: Boris Pavlenko.

Birthdate: 14th August 1987

Birthplace: Seattle, USA.

Height: 5'10" 178cm

Weight: 143lb/65kg

Classification: Type E Mod. Sensory and interface enhancements, focused on driving and connection to vehicles.

Status: Mercenary.

Notes: Ex-wife: Myra Pavlenko. Daughter: Jessica, aged 6.

Transcript of tapes obtained during the Tina Broucek surveillance (See entry 28: Psychopathor).

[Landfall, a newly built bar/restaurant at the Los Diablos seaside. Note: Look into the owner; something's off. Present: Tina Broucek, director of the Los Diablos Aquarium, and Boris Pavlenko having dinner.]

Boris: Look, I don't know how to put this.

Tina: You don't have to be nervous. I wouldn't invite you to a restaurant to have you killed. At least not a good one.

Boris: [nervous laughter] Yeah...

Tina: And I do realize that you need to think of your future.

Boris: You know I do.

Tina: That's what I just said.

Boris: And your husband...

Tina: If I knew something, you would too. Because the moment I do, I will need your help. Or rather...

Boris: I'm not... Look. I will help you get Kurt out once you find out where they're holding him, but it will be as a driver. Nothing else. I don't do that shit anymore.

Tina: She divorced you anyway.

Boris: That's a low blow. And you know I didn't quit because of her.

Tina: Actually, I didn't. I always thought she was putting pressure on you.

Boris: No, she just thought I was a shitty dad. I can't say she was wrong.

Tina: So what's the problem then?

Boris: Maybe I just wanted to stop. I couldn't keep doing what I did. It's better this way. Cars are nice. Cars are relaxing. People don't shoot at you quite as often.

Tina: And you can't shoot back.

Boris: I don't miss that bit.

Tina: It wasn't your fault. Collateral damage happens.

Boris: Doesn't mean I want to remember. I'm through. I don't even think about those days anymore; I like who I am now.

Tina: Really?

Boris: Well, more, anyway.

Tina: And here I thought you were even more driven than I am.

Boris: Yours is a bigger cause.

Tina: True. You know I'm going to try to talk you into joining when the time comes.

Boris: Yeah. Don't think things will have changed, but you never know.

Tina: Things change all the time. You've got a daughter. Eventually, she'll want to go to college.

Boris: Many years in the future.

Tina: So you're planning to stick to being a driver for hire and pretend you're nobody special?

Boris: I am nobody special. I like it.

Tina: Bullshit. Nobody likes being broke. Are you doing this to punish yourself? Let your enhancements go to waste?

Boris: Upkeep is expensive. I couldn't afford to keep them all running. Hell, I don't need them all. I'm through.

Tina: It's just such a waste of time and talent.

Boris: At least I'm here having dinner with you, unlike Kurt.

Tina: You're lucky it's a nice restaurant.

Boris: I know. I'm sorry. I hope you find him soon.

Tina: I will. It's the government; someone will leak eventually.

Boris: If I hear anything, you'll be the first to know.

Tina: Thank you.

Boris: I've been meaning to ask you, did you ever find out anything about that liaison I asked you about?

Tina: The one who's been hanging out at Joes? Not much. Not local anyway. Got a possible hit with a contact in San Francisco; we'll see if anything comes up. Are you still thinking about signing on?

Boris: It would be steady work, with good pay, and all I have to do is drive and be the occasional backup. Still haven't met their mysterious employer, but it sounds like they're coming to town soon.

Tina: I don't like it. Something smells weird.

Boris: You don't like that I go to work for someone that's not your husband.

Tina: Damn right. But I won't stop you.

Boris: What are you worried about? If it's a new villain, chances are the gig will be short.

Tina: And if it's not a new one?

Boris: Then why keep the name sec... oh. Yeah. If they're afraid it would be recognized.

Tina: We'll see. It's probably nothing. Just don't let your guard down. You don't want to be caught in the wrong war.

Boris: No more war. That's why I'm doing this. If it gets too intense, I'm out.

Tina: If it's someone I need to know is back in town, you will tell me.

Boris: Of course. I still owe you.

Tina: You do. But I won't be petty about it.

Boris: Thank you. And thank you for keeping Myra on. It's a stone off my back.

Tina: She's a good worker. I see no reason to fire her.

Boris: You could have threatened to. To get to me.

Tina: You think I would do that?

Boris: In a heartbeat. If you thought it would make me change my mind.

Tina: Would it?

Boris: Let's hope we never find out. I'd much rather like you than hate you.

Tina: And we both know what happens to people you hate. I've been meaning to ask you, though...

Boris: Why I didn't just move my family back to Seattle? Or why I didn't?

Tina: Them. I know why you didn't.

Boris: Myra wouldn't move. And I told you. I just drive a car these days.

Tina: Sure. I watch the news.

Boris: You know as well as I do they're not always telling the truth. You just see what you want to see.

Tina: Instead of seeing what you want me to see.

Boris: I'm telling the truth.

Tina: I don't care. You're the only one that does. Play your little games. Be a nobody. When the time comes, I will still be counting on you.

Boris: That's unwise.

Tina: Really? The LDPD might be the one to blame here.

Boris: For once, they're not responsible. If that was the case, I'd know. I think this might be military. And before you ask, my contacts know nothing.

Tina: Shit. That would explain why I'm getting nothing.

Boris: Give it time. Someone will talk. Or maybe Kurt will escape on his own. It wouldn't be the first time.

Tina: That's true. I wish he'd do it soon. I miss him.

Boris: I know, Tina. I know.

[QnA May!](#)

[May 4, 2021](#)

Well, it's a little late because life has been very much a... thing lately. Lore will come later in the week, I promise!

For now, enjoy!

Will we ever get to get sexy with Ortega as the puppet or is that too fucked up even for this game



Honestly, I don't know yet. I do know there was a scene like that in the original book, though Sidestep got cold feet and bailed. We'll see how I feel once I get to it.

Will we get to introduce ourselves as our actual MC to Bo?

Yes. Book three (or in book two if you pick a certain mob boss path).

Will Sidestep/Puppet ever get close enough to Mortum to be able to call them by their name or is Mortum averse to that? And if Puppet is close with Mortum at the end of Retribution, do they even know their name?

Nobody knows Mortum's real name in Retribution. But you can get to that position of trust once all the cards are on the table in book three.

Does being called by their name (Julia/Ricardo) come off as more intimate or more formal to Ortega? Since some people find the use of their nickname to mean familiarity while others use their nickname for so many contexts that it's the use of their actual name that means such.

It comes off as more intimate. Ortega has been their identity/stage name for so long, only their close family calls them by their first name.

Do they actually prefer to go by Ortega? Is Ortega the name they identify with the most or is it a bit of a persona, like Charge is?

They prefer Ortega, but it's mainly from habit. It's been their nickname/stage name since high school and by now it's what they are used to. And yes, there definitely is a persona involved, like with most

things they do.

Do they even perceive Ortega and Charge as all that different? And how much?

Not very different. Charge is pretty much the 'hero' upgrade of who they used to be for their old daredevil videos. What gets cut out as Charge are the tiredness, the annoyance, the doubts... anything that's not confident and outgoing.

What's the dynamic between Herald and Ortega like?

Interesting. Herald had a lot of respect for Ortega, it was probably close to hero worship when he first joined the Rangers. Over time, this faded since he got to see the bad sides of Ortega, and they became human. He's also rather worried, he doesn't think Ortega takes care of themselves and is heading for another crash, but nobody else seems to worry or notice. And Ortega won't listen.

Ortega on the other hand likes Herald a lot, they work well together. They don't exactly respect them, there's not enough friction there for that, and Herald is too soft spoken and considerate to make Ortega sit up and take notice.

If the relationship between Ortega and the villain is sympathetic, will it be possible to convince them to join the dark side? 🙄 Or is Ortega unlikely to cross that line?

It's Ortega... let's just say that given the right motivation, that's not impossible. They have few illusions about how things are run here left.

In fact, which of the Rangers is most to least likely to cross that line?

Most to least: Ortega, Chen, Lady Argent, Herald.

However, what would motivate them to make that switch is very different for each one of them, and I am not going to say what. Romance is not needed.

What's Locus like in personality? What's her public reputation?

Locus had a good reputation back when she was part of the Long Beach Heroes, but like most telepaths, she was seen as rather aloof. After they broke apart her reputation tanked, and she got blamed for the breakup. She did not join the Guardians, but instead went solo. She worked mostly with other heroes, training them in telepathic defense and joining them when her powers were needed.

As for her personality, Locus started working as a hero/vigilante in her early teens, though people at the time had no idea. She's always been the quiet and thoughtful one, preferring to stay out of the limelight. She didn't have many friends, and the heroes who worked with her found her rather weird and easily distracted, though not in a bad way. She was just hard getting close to.

What do the Rangers and Dr. Mortum regret the most?

Dr. Mortum regrets trusting certain people, being stabbed in the back is never fun. (No, this is not Sidestep)

Ortega: Not being quick enough to stop Sidestep.

Herald: Not speaking up sooner, maybe then everything would be different.

Lady Argent: Being weak. Losing control.

Steel: Not going against regulations, he should have trusted his gut.

Will there be more opportunities to change our rival in the future?

I plan at least one instance for each book.

Concerning poly relationships, would one with Steel and Julia be possible, with Sidestep in the middle and both attracted only to them of course? Or would Steel feel too uncomfortable with that?

Yes, the tag for the buildup for that is already in book two.

During the scene with Steel and Spoon in the dog park, we can choose to be wary of dogs. Will that be reflected in future interactions with them?

Hmmm... I had no tag for it, but I will add one now. Good idea.

Where do the Rangers draw the line when it comes to redemption and forgiveness?

Oh I am NOT going to tell you that, you'll have to wait and see.

What kind of facial hair styles has Ricardo tried before? If he hasn't tried any, did he just like the thought of the mustache or did he base it off some external factor?

He was mostly clean shaven (or with stubble/scruff) when Sidestep knew him, but I think he's played around with various styles of facial hair/hairstyles over the years. It depends on what's popular at the time.

What do the mob boss crew or Bo/Rosie like to do on their free time?

Nehal likes to party, as does ZaZa. Not in the same places though, he's too old and crusty for her scene, and that annoys him to no end because he's not even thirty yet! Pelayo likes to play pool, he's also a wrestling fan. Voted most likely to be found in a sports bar. Ward has not yet managed to make him like Hockey tho. Ward is also a sports fan, and watches a lot of movies.

There's a strange shark memory/dream Sidestep can have if they visit the gala alone in Rebirth and wondered if that memory or dream was Sidestep's or someone else's?

Good question. You're not getting an answer.

How did Ortega's and Sidestep's final fight against Void went? Is Void still alive?

I won't go into detail there, there might be a flashback of that in book three and I don't want to spoil things. Void is thought to be dead.

If Sidestep doesn't bother to hide the fact they possibly have a lot of money right now and Ortega doesn't suspect them being the villain, how or from where does Ortega think Sidestep gets the money?

Oh Ortega knows EXACTLY where Sidestep is getting the money (and they are dead wrong). You'll learn about that later, so no spoilers.

How did Anathema and Sunstream end up as Rangers?

Sunstream was recruited, she was a corporate hero, but she wanted to do something more with her life, so when she got the offer she took it. Sentinel was the one who recommended her.

Anathema got brought in by Hood, they had no previous hero experience and Hood must have done some serious work behind the scenes to make that go through.

How did Lady Argent enjoy spending her birthdays when she was still living a normal civilian life?

Presents! Cake! This is my birthday so everyone has to cater to me for once. Not doing the dishes.

The Special Directive Re-gene Sidestep possibly saved in Rebirth, how are they doing?

Alive. Working.

How old was Marshal Hood when he died?

In his fifties.

After reading Sidestep's reaction to zoos, wondered how would places like wildlife parks or aquariums make them feel?

Aquariums are nice. Fish don't register much, and there's something calming about their movements. Wildlife parks are neutral, like the countryside. Not much to pick up there. Zoos are special because the animals are so focused on the people, and hard to shut out.

How did each Ranger (and Dr. Mortum during their villain career) feel during their first day as vigilante, hero, or villain? How did their first mission go?

Dr. Mortum was nervous as hell, nearly called it off five times and only went through with it because they needed the money. It went well.

Ortega was in their element, this was the life they were made for! It went very well!

Steel didn't think much of it, it was just another job. Less dangerous than the army. He think it went passable, but there were a lot of mistakes made. (He was on the same one as Ortega.)

Herald was nervous, but also excited. It went okay, but he was glad nobody was watching.

Lady Argent was terrified, but did it anyway. It went surprisingly easy.

Before getting to work on nanovores and Sidestep's villain armor, what had been Dr. Mortum's favorite project before that? Or their last big project?

Their holy grail is workable teleportation technology, but so far it has eluded them. That's their big background project that just eats resources. Their last big project is a massive spoiler.

Did Dr. Mortum have any particular thoughts on the Rangers of the past like Sentinel, Sunstream or Anathema?

Not exactly, heroes are heroes, and as long as they stay out of their way there's not much to be concerned with.

How long had HB been traveling before they got to the apartment 412? Also how aware or conscious they were at the beginning of their journey compared to when Sidestep entered into the apartment?

A long, long way, and they deteriorated as they went. The person who started that journey was very different from the one that Sidestep encountered.

What do the Rangers and Dr. Mortum would like to tell their younger selves?

Dr. Mortum: It gets better, and don't trust anyone in academia.

Ortega: Always double-check your equipment.

Steel: Don't make rash decisions, you'll regret them later.

Lady Argent: Move to San Francisco.

Herald: You don't have to, if you don't want to.

What were the Rangers and Dr. Mortum like when they were kids?

Dr. Mortum was quiet, smart, and very precocious.

Ortega was a little shit always getting into trouble and never sitting still.

Steel was saddled with responsibility he didn't want, and had a secret life on the side.

Lady Argent was a quiet nerd who loved movies and games.

Herald was polite and sensitive, trying his best to be a good kid.

What does each Ranger think if the new villain has a name like Heartbreak, Anathema or Sidestep? Does Dr. Mortum have any thoughts on any of the names?

Dr. Mortum has no views, it's not uncommon that names gets recycled. Heartbreak is a bit edgy, though.

Lady Argent doesn't care, it's not personal to her.

Herald reacts very strongly to Sidestep, how dare they!

Steel is quietly upset, but since the villain want a reaction, he won't give it.

Ortega is furious about Sidestep, really mad about Anathema and quietly worried about Heartbreak.

Did Dr. Mortum follow the events or news on Nanosurge and Heartbreak at all? Did they have any thoughts on the incidents?

Of course they did! They were disasters in the city where they lived. Heartbreak was a cause for concern, they did consider evacuating in case things did go out of hand. The nanovores were terrifying and... an opportunity. Sadly, they did not manage to adequately seal their armor in time to dare to take the risk of getting a sample.

Who was HB before they were taken and used as experiment? Did they have any friends or family who looked for them after their disappeared?

Spoilers!

If Sidestep admitted lying about losing their powers after meeting rest of the Rangers in Rebirth, what did the Rangers think of that?

Herald was confused, and a little upset. Ortega was slightly bemused, as if they'd fall for that. Steel figured that they just wanted to avoid getting dragged in, and Lady Argent didn't care.

Not sure if it is planned yet, but if it is possible to answer, what kind of relationships Sidestep could have with Sentinel in the past?

I think I will probably put that to a choice for the reader if it comes up.

Music related, but wondered if there are any song recommendations that would fit for any of the Rangers, Puppet, or HG?

[Sidestep: Veteran of the psychic wars - Blue Öyster Cult](#)

[Puppet: Coma - Guns and Roses.](#)

[Hollow Ground: I want it all - Queen](#)

[Ortega: All Star - Smash Mouth](#)

[Steel: I don't believe a word - Motorhead](#)

[Lady Argent: Wish - Nine Inch Nails](#)

[Herald: Running down a dream - Tom Petty](#)

[Dr. Mortum: In my world - Anthrax](#)

Can Sidestep's motivation change in book 3 as well?

Yes, it can. Lots of things happens after all.

Can Lady Argent shed tears?

No.

I remember you saying after Rebirth came out that you ended it earlier than you originally planned; now that we've seen most of Retribution, could you tell us what that original endpoint was?

Ahahaha I was so naive. Originally I had thought I would end it just after the point where the open alpha for Retribution ends. I did not foresee how much a story grows when you turn it from book to interactive fiction.

What are the Rangers and Dr. Mortum's favorite animal, if they have any?

Huh. Never thought of that, going with my guts here:

Dr. Mortum: Birds.

Ortega: Horses.

Steel: Dogs (duh)

Herald: Cats.

Lady Argent: Rabbits.

Do any of the Rangers or Dr. Mortum like to cook?

Likes it: Ortega, Herald.

Can do it: Lady Argent.

No: Steel, Dr. Mortum.

Would any of the Rangers and Dr. Mortum want to live together with a friend(s) or romantic partner(s)? Or do they prefer to live alone and have a space for themselves?

Dr. Mortum was convinced they preferred to live alone, now they are not sure.

Lady Argent: Doesn't matter what she wants, she lives alone. That's it.

Ortega: Would love to live together, but will probably have more issues with it than they initially thought.

Steel: Is very used to living alone, but it would be nice to love together.

Herald: Live together. Of course.

From the mob boss route there is a quick comment on ZaZa's housing situation that seems to imply he's used to abandoning whatever place he's staying, but how is rest of the crew's housing situation?

Nehal has a tiny flat, is rarely home. ZaZa tends to live out of hotels or cheap one room flats. Pelayo probably has the nicest apartment, several rooms, slightly on the outskirts of Los Diablos. Ward rents a room above a bar, the owner is an old friend.

What kind of business have Dr. Mortum and HG done? Has Dr. Mortum build or invented anything interesting for HG or have HG's job offers been more standard/mundane, like better security or something along those lines?

Dr. Mortum has built some things for Hollow Ground, nothing major. They haven't met in person (as far as Dr. Mortum knows), but Dr. Mortum owes some favors and doesn't like that very much.

Did anyone else hear or find out what Vernon said to Ortega before they punched him? Would Chen or Sentinel know since they were also present?

No, Sentinel was talking with Herald on a rooftop, and Steel was elsewhere. There was live television from the event, but it was doubtful the camera picked out the words.

What was Lady Argent thinking if new villain turned her down romantically because they were already "spoken for"?

Hope their special someone won't be too sad if I beat them up then.

On the mob boss route ZaZa is mentioned to be "tall and lanky", but wondered what height are rest of the mob boss henchmen around?

Hmmm on the Sidestep scale: ZaZa is tall, Nehal is short, Pelayo and Ward are medium. Bo is medium and Rosie is short.

How did the Nanosurge affect Sidestep's powers? And how long did it take for Sidestep's powers to recover? Did their powers manage to fully recover before the Heartbreak incident happened?

It was like spraining a muscle, almost a minor stroke. Sidestep suffered from headaches and migraines for weeks afterward, slowly fading after a few months. Nosebleeds. Bloodshot eyes. Tremor in their hands. Wonky reflexes. It took three weeks before they were back to working as a hero, probably a month and a half until they were somewhat back to normal. But even after that, everything was more intense. Bright. Painful. Easier to get overwhelmed.

It could be argued, this was one reason why Heartbreak hit as badly as it did, it might have been different if the Nanosurge had never happened.

From the mob boss route there is a quick comment on ZaZa's housing situation that seems to imply he's used to abandoning whatever place he's staying, but how is rest of the crew's housing situation?

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For the gala, did sidestep make or buy their bomb? Does it depend on whether you're tech savvy/have contacts or something else?

Sidestep bought the bombs from Dr. Mortum, it is mentioned in the text I think.

[QnA for May_\(spoiler version\)](#)

[May 4, 2021](#)

Sorry for the delay, real life is intense as always.

How old are Nocturne and HG?

Haven't finalized it yet. HG late forties, Nocturne mid thirties.

Do Nocturne, HG, and Jake have any thoughts on the different villain careers Sidestep can have? Like which career they find most or least interesting or useful?

All of them think that the Mob Boss is the most dangerous one. Rivals are a threat unless they can be brought into the fold.

Hero hunters can be useful, they all agree on that. Jake is a bit envious. Looks fun.

Thieves are very basic villains, live and let live. Jake looks down on them.

Anarchists are a big divider. Nocturne finds them very dangerous and risky, HG is bemused, and Jake is not interested in politics.

Given how their past encounters played out, what was going through Ortega head while Jakestep started to give them a run for their money?

Huh. This feels familiar.

How did HG enter into the criminal underworld? Did they start off as henchmen or did they already have their powers they could use to get ahead faster? When did they start making plans to become the kingpin in Los Diablos?

Their father was already in the criminal business, and HG and their siblings went into it as soon as they were able to. It wasn't until they started to realize what their powers were (after their father's death) that they started thinking big.

What kind of person was HG's mother? Was she aware HG had taken the boost drug?

She was driven and ambitious, and she was not aware before (she would have shot it down), but was told afterwards. She and HG had a good relationship up to her death. Family first.

Depending on the relationship between Sidestep and Argent, Argent can potentially meet up with Sidestep in a Sidestep Hoodie and a message in mind. What message was Argent trying to convey?

Oh it was absolutely a dig at who Sidestep used to be. Just a little teasing between friends who likes to kiss.

How would Hollow Ground's operation change if instead of a Mental Manipulation power they actually were a boost with geokinesis on a scale they claim?

Would have collapsed ten years ago.

Do Nocturne, Jake, or HG have any particular regrets?

Nocturne doesn't do regrets.

Jake kind of wishes he hadn't pissed off his former boss, it might have been nice to go home now and then.

Hollow Ground has a lot of regrets, the chief one is not protecting their family enough.

My friend while playing the alpha for book 2 said that it's possible for Sidestep to notice HG's telepathic powers. I was just wondering what mechanic is this based on? Does HG always use their power on you, and thus noticing is a matter of skill, or is their usage dependent upon how your villain persona has behaved?

Sidestep needs to be skilled enough in telepathic manipulation to notice something. HG won't always use their power on them though, it all depends on how Sidestep acts.

Does a suspicious Ortega actually mean it when they say they'd do anything they can to save Sidestep even when Step already caused a massacre at that time?

Yes. 100%. Sidestep and Ortega might disagree on the definition of 'saving' though.

Have Nocturne and HG ever thought about telling the whole truth to Jake or no?

Oh yes. Pretty much every week. HG would have done it already, but Nocturne is more cautious. Wants to find the right time.

How satisfied is Deadeye still with HG or her place in the organization after losing her former position? What mistake did she do that made her lose her position and be replaced? What's her job in the organization now?

She's still highly placed, but she is very aware that she's been demoted. She's not happy about it. Her job description would be security/assassin. HG didn't like certain initiatives she was taking, and the way she tried to make decisions without asking first.

What was Jake's reaction when he heard he would be taking over Deadeye's former position?

Went out and celebrated, this was one hell of a promotion! He had worked hard for it.

How do Jake, HG, and Nocturne like to spend their birthdays?

HG and Nocturne is not much in the birthday business, just private celebrations. Jake gets his crew out to party all night.

How did HG react to their siblings deaths?

Grief. Massive. They loved their siblings.

Does Jake live alone or with someone? Also since he seems to be the social butterfly of the group, does he live more in the central part of the city than Nocturne and HG or does he also live more remote part of the city?

Jake lives alone, he has a big flat centrally in Los Diablos. The other two occasionally stays over.

What are the chances Sidestep can try and manipulate HG in the future?

It will be an interesting game of cat and also cat, that's for sure.

If Sidestep saw the memory in HG's mind, how much can it affect Sidestep's opinion or thoughts on HG? Is there maybe going to be an option to choose how it affects Sidestep?

We will get into that in book three.

What's some (spoiler free) things you can tell us about Ace before they...died

Ace was a rather solitary and not very nice person. Life was pretty shitty to them, you don't boost yourself if you're happy with your lot in life. Very much used to avoiding trouble rather than trying to solve things, especially in personal relationships. Restless. Prone to moving on instead of working things out.

How does the MC feel about the public's willful ignorance and detachment towards the treatment of Re-gene's?

It depends, we will probably get into that later and you'll have a few choices.

Since Vernon is aware that the MC can control the media, I'm also assuming that the "Conspiracy nonsense" that he told Ortega at the funeral has some merit?

You can assume your assumptions are correct.

If the goal is to create Re-Genes who are docile and unquestioningly loyal then why does the Special Directive project manager lady still consider Sidestep to be her 'prize project'? Going off that it seems she'd consider them a failure on her end.

Sure would seem so, right? Makes one wonder what her plans for Sidestep are...

hey yeah actually does HG know you've swapped bodies if you get threaded? is their threading more like a conscious effort, something they're aware of?

It is very doubtful that HG knows. It is a conscious effort, but not to that extent.

[Got any questions for this month's QnA?](#)

[Apr 20, 2021](#)

Submit them here! This month's lore will focus on Boris.

[Retribution is submitted and will be released 2/2 2023!](#)

[Apr 20, 2021](#)

I got enough questions about this that I realized I might as well make a proper post about it.

First, some facts. I am working a full time (40h week) day job, so this is done in my spare time. I have also had health issues and other real life problems last year and a half which has slowed the pace some (not to mention general 2020 shenanigans). Unfortunately the plant I'm working in is closing (the production moving to India/France in 2023), so there will be some chaos and adjustments.

Luckily I have submitted now! It is in CoG's hands, and the preliminary release date is 2 February 2023

2022 20th October

[DONE] The game is finished, all chapters and epilogues are written. The closed alpha is around 1 360 000 words, so it's around three times as large as the last one. The average playthrough is around 94 000 - 98 000 words but can vary greatly. (this is what you can explore in the VIP section here on Patreon).

[DONE] Cover, graphic and text assets for release.

[DONE] Bug fixing and playtesting, additional content and variables. (mostly done, but new ones are always discovered)

[DONE] Editing, rewrites, copyediting, spelling and grammar. This is where the story actually gets good, and also even longer... It is past 1,4 million words now.

[DONE] Final Beta testing with a new testing group. Save system and achievements added. Final bug and language fix.

[DONE] Submitting the finished game to Hosted Games.

[PENDING] Hosted Games editors makes the game ready for release on various platforms and systems.

[New link to the discord!](#)

[Apr 10, 2021](#)

Forgot to add it to the latest Retribution build, but if you need a place to talk about your experiences, here is the new link to the discord. Don't forget to read the rules, and remember, that the entire place is filled with spoilers.

[Click here.](#)

[Mitchell's Guide to Villains entry 172: Rosie the Riveter.](#)

[Apr 10, 2021](#)

Mitchell's Guide to Villains entry 172.

Subject: Rosie the Riveter.

Civilian identity: Rosie Rae Brown.

Birthdate: 25th October 1997

Birthplace: El Paso, USA.

Height: 5'5" 165cm

Weight: 132lb/60kg

Classification: Strong Gamma level boost. Increased strength and durability, but not enough to be classified as Beta level. Immune to standard small arms fire, able to lift a car with some effort.

Status: Retired. Currently working as a bouncer at Joes Bar (see entry 121: Joe Average).

Notes: Might have to reclassify this one; see attached Joes surveillance tapes.

Transcript of surveillance tapes obtained from Joes Bar, the subject was not the center of the investigation, but the information was amended to this file for completeness.

[Joes Bar. Present: Joe Average, the owner, behind the bar. Rosie Rae Brown, the bouncer, currently off-shift and drinking.]

Rosie: So, I've got a job.

Joe: You already have a job, Rosie Rae. Don't tell me you're going to quit on me?

Rosie: Sorry, but we both know I wasn't going to stick around forever.

Joe: Sad to hear it, you were a good bouncer.

Rosie: We both know that's a lie. Not big enough and don't look scary enough. I was good at breaking up fights and breaking people, less good at staring them down so they don't start anything in the first place.

Joe: You smile too much.

Rosie: I'm 5'5! I'm not even modded enough to be scary and too tough to get scarred so I can be intimidating.

Joe: That truly is a problem.

Rosie: When you're a bouncer, it is. Sure, I can dress like a badass, color my hair, get some piercings and tattoos, and at the end of the day, I'm still that somewhat hot girl you want to make out with after half a bottle, not the one that you're gonna listen to that it's time to go the hell home after drinking a whole one.

Joe: Well, I am going to miss you. Is that better?

Rosie: That's sweet, but I'm still going to come here to get drunk, so I'll be your problem and not your solution.

Joe: Just don't slip back. You've been doing so well.

Rosie: Not going to. I'm getting too old for hangovers.

Joe: I've seen your ID; I know you're not old.

Rosie: Tell that to my gut.

Joe: So what's the new gig? Getting back in costume?

Rosie: Don't think so. The job description was a bit vague on that front, but I got the feeling that for now, I'm just a henchman. She needed some muscle to back her up.

Joe: Can I ask for details, or is it one of those I'll have to kill you if I tell you deals?

Rosie: As if I could. But I can save myself the embarrassment of trying. I don't know many details myself. Safer that way. The first check didn't bounce, and that's good enough for me.

Joe: Wait a minute... is it that broad that's been in here for the past month? The hot one?

Rosie: Don't call my boss hot, asshole. But yeah, that's her. Think she's been scouting the place for crew, and she picked me.

Joe: Makes sense. She asked me about you, thought she had the hots.

Rosie: Don't make it weird.

Joe: Look, it's just that she has this feel, you know? Like she's hunting for something. Or someone.

Rosie: Or for someone. She's not running this show, but I haven't met her boss yet.

Joe: Still taking the job?

Rosie: The check was that big, and I need the money. You know that.

Joe: I know. And you're not getting back in costume?

Rosie: Couldn't fit in it if I tried. Rosie the Riveter is dead, and that mask smelled like old feet.

Joe: Shame.

Rosie: Too late for flattery, and you can't match her bid.

Joe: I know. It's just...

Rosie: What?

Joe: I just get a feeling I've seen her before.

Rosie: A good or bad feeling?

Joe: Neither. It's just nagging my brain; I hate when I can't remember things.

Rosie: You shouldn't split so often then. You know things get lost in transit.

Joe: Couldn't run this bar without a few more hands. There's a lot of travel if you want to get the good shit cheaper than the prices they charge in this hellhole... wait, that's it!

Rosie: What?

Joe: San Francisco. That's where.

Rosie: Don't hold me in suspense; give me the dirt. I know nothing except her name and the fact that she's got money.

Joe: Can't swear it's the same woman. Not like I know her. She stayed at the same hotel, there on business, same as I. Told me to stay away from the roulette table, 'cause it was rigged as hell.

Rosie: Were you trying to pick her up? That sounds like weird first words for someone just making conversation.

Joe: I might have bought her a drink, but I don't think she remembers me. Hell, I didn't remember her until you brought her up. Don't think she even told me her name.

Rosie: So? Anything else? Should I drop out of this before I've spent the cash?

Joe: Not on account of anything I know. She was a bit of an ass, but it looks like she's calmed down and grown up. It's just...

Rosie: Just what? Come on, spill the beans.

Joe: She told me not to stay the night. At the hotel. Said it was a fire hazard.

Rosie: And?

Joe: Didn't listen. Of course. Woke up in the middle of the night with smoke everywhere. The whole place burned down. Lost my best suit, had to get out the window in my pajamas. Not my proudest moment.

Rosie: Could be worse; you could have slept in the nude. You think she set it?

Joe: Maybe. I thought so at the time. Certainly sounded capable of it.

Rosie: Well, I'll keep that in mind. Not like neither of us haven't done worse than a bit of light arson.

Joe: You ever regret it?

Rosie: Getting into this business? No. I've seen how life's been treating my sister; that's not for me. I'd rather be bad than have bad things done to me.

Joe: You should talk to Gemma.

Rosie: She told me she never wanted to see me again after I punched that asshole she married. She meant it.

Joe: She's in a bad spot. She's going to need family to get her out of it.

Rosie: Mom already disowned me. Gemma pretty much did the same. Don't think I'm family to her anymore.

Joe: You know best.

Rosie: You know that's a goddamn lie. But I can't just call her.

Joe: All she can do is hang up.

Rosie: Maybe. We'll see.

Joe: Could send someone down there to check things out?

Rosie: That's what got me in trouble in the first place. No. They're better off without me.

Joe: Rosie Rae...

Rosie: Don't you Rosie Rae me, you know we're fucked, the whole lot of us. Can't go back. I'm a spawn of the devil now, not family. Not even human.

Joe: You know she doesn't mean that.

Rosie: She does. And she's not alone. We took the drugs, shot up the devil's juice, and now we're nothing but monsters. You know how that works.

Joe: I do. Sadly. I just thought Gemma...

Rosie: She doesn't buy it. But she lives there. She's married. She's got a kid. Tough or not, she knows which side to pick. And it's not going to be mine.

Joe: Shame, I liked her.

Rosie: So did I. But she went back to him. Couldn't stop her. If I called her, all I would do is to get her in trouble.

Joe: So what's your plan then?

Rosie: I don't have one. That's why I'm not a villain anymore. I suck at plans.

Joe: So what's your plan?

Rosie: -sigh- Get enough money to get her and the kid out and far enough away. Get enough to get them a good life. Keep my head down and do my job until then. Stay out of jail.

Joe: Sounds like a good plan. You're too hard on yourself.

Rosie: Shut up and pour me another drink.

<https://dashingdon.com/play/malin/fhrproof12hkjaer/mygame/>

[New build of Retribution up!](#)

[Apr 4, 2021](#)

The latest build of retribution is up, and now the first chapter (12) is proofread and done! There are a lot of bugfixes and some additional content.

The old build will stay up for a few more days in case you are in the middle of a playthrough, the new one you can find [HERE](#).

As always OLD SAVES WILL MOST LIKELY BUG OUT. You need to start from scratch.

This also means that I am ready for other people to dig into my text and see if I've messed up too much with grammar and the like. I'll get most of them from other sites, but in case anyone wants to be a proofreader, this is what you need to know:

It will be handled on a discord, so I need to know your username.

- I prefer people who have English as their native language, but if you are educated/skilled enough to know English on a professional level I will not stop you.
- You need to have a good eye for detail and be able to read and not just skim text.
- Any other instructions will be given in the discord.

Please dm me if you are interested.

[QnA for April](#)

[Apr 2, 2021](#)

Does Los Diablos have a zoo, and if so what do different animals like lions,bears, monkeys etc "feel" like to sidestep?

Los Diablos does indeed have a Zoo. It's not as impressive as the aquarium, but it gets expanded a little more each season. It's been a bit of a bragging project for the Mayor, one of her many ways of showing that Los Diablos is more than just a capitalistic hellscape. Sidestep has visited once, but never again. Hit too close to home, all the animals in cages unable to get free. They never told Anathema why they ran out of there.

Question about the ending where it's revealed to the Rangers who Sidestep really is- I know how they take it varies depending on the relationship, but I'm very intrigued on how potential conflicts between them and Sidestep will go from now on. Any tidbits you can share?

Sadly, this is something I will NOT share. You're going to have to wait for the first book 3 demo to explore that. It's going to be... interesting. The first chapter is going to be focused on that.

Any chance we can get the Rat King and its controlled associates to meet Lady Argent's sharks?

If you're friendly with her, that is something that will happen. Let's hope they get along, for everyone's sake.

So...why would the Special Directive even care about getting Psychopathor in Rebirth, anyway? Isn't taking down Psychopathor Rangers' business?

I will give you a clue. Where do you think Psychopathor got the Rat-King?

I apologize if something of this vein has already been asked previously (I am still a fairly new supporter!) But is/was there any particular villain that is considered in the public eye to be the "worst"? A sort of legacy/arch villain archetype at least according to in-game popular perception regardless of whether or not they might be the most powerful/dangerous etc in practice?

Like with many things, powerful villains seldom last long. There have been four major villains in the past, but none of them are currently active on the level where they would be considered the worst.

The Catastrofiend: Insane experimental military mod/hired killer. Disappeared five years ago after breaking out of their holding cell. Believed to not currently be in Los Diablos. If it returned, it would be on top of the list.

Arsenaux: 'Ruler' of her own little kingdom in the hills to the east and south, just outside Los Diablos influence. She was the lieutenant of Void, and took over the remains of their empire when they were killed in a conflict with Charge and Sidestep. Rumored to have the backing of a few major corporations and to be heavily involved in human trafficking/experimentation. A boost with pyrokinetic powers. Still active, but technically only Los Diablos adjacent.

The Crack: Another semi-legendary villain, famous for singled-handedly waging war with the LDPD and killing the last Mayor. Gender uncertain. Powers uncertain. Used high-tech weaponry, but most famous for their ability to disappear from the scene. Still at large, but a lot less active.

Sorry if this has been answered before, but how human are regenes? Are they just vat-grown superhumans or do they have metal parts strewn about them?

It varies. Some are heavily modded, some have no mods. It all depends on what would make them the most efficient without adding too much to their cost.

Sorry if this has been asked before! But, it's been pointed out that electricity/lightning is a dangerous ability that can be imprecise - so, has Ortega ever accidentally electrocuted or hurt themselves while using their powers? Or would their mods keep that from happening somehow? and how would Ortega face up against someone else with electricity as an ability? Could they get hurt by it, or would they... absorb the energy somehow? How would they deal with a situation where their powers might actually be a hindrance than a help (like a hostage situation?)

Technically, the mods should protect Ortega. They have a high capacity to absorb electricity, but like everything else, they are susceptible to overload. It has been an issue when fighting other electricity users; I wrote a fic about it a while back, it's "... may break my bones", posted back on October 22. Ortega is very aware that their powers can be a hindrance, that's one reason why they train so hard, so they don't have to rely on them except against the bigger threat.

During the Heartbreak incident, Sidestep can potentially give Heartbreak a parting gift(or a few depending on the choices) how did this affect things? Was there any effect other than a last hurrah for Sidestep? Are the rangers aware of this if it occurred? There thoughts?

Yes. It affected things. We will get into what happened and who knows what in book three, it's not called Revelations for nothing.

Since it was after the Nanosurge Sidestep's powers started to ebb and flow, is this to mean that any Beta telepath could have pulled off a similar stunt if they were willing and able to suffer the backlash? Did Sidestep's willingness to interact with minds they didn't know a factor in events?

Not everybody could have pulled that off. Not on that scale. Sidestep's training and willingness to interface with non-human minds made the difference.

Looking for clarification on power classification. Are boosts classified by the power itself or is the user's ability also factored? Like could Jake go from Beta brushing Alpha to full on Alpha or

would he always be a beta, just really skilled with his power?

It is a combination of power and ability. The power sets the upper ceiling, but if the person wielding it can't use the potential, it drops down. Jake has the potential to go Alpha if he starts experimenting more with what he's capable of.

It's not directly relevant to the game, but I'm curious: do you like and currently read/watch superhero stuff, like Marvel or DC comics and movies? Anything you particularly love and recommend?

I grew up reading superhero comics (big surprise I'm sure, especially Legion of Superheroes and X-men). I've dropped out of it lately though, I quit DC when the new 52 didn't work for me, and my last X-men title when Kieron Gillen left. More and more, I felt that things were getting increasingly reliant on events and crossovers, creators switching around too fast to be able to tell their story. Every comic I loved got canceled too soon, so eventually I just stopped keeping up. It didn't feel fun to start something cool, knowing it might get canceled before you got anywhere. Since then I have focused on tpbs and getting order and collected stuff.

Some things I love, and from which I have drawn inspiration from for Fallen Hero (I have to focus on a theme somehow):

Comics:

Legion of Superheroes: 5 years later (Keith Giffen)

Captain Britain (Alan Moore run and the Jamie Delano run)

Zenith (Grant Morrison)

X-Force/X-Statix (Milligan/Allered)

Marshal Law (Pat Mills)

Locas (and many more) (Jamie Hernandez)

Grimjack (John Ostrander)

Battle Angel Alita (especially the second series) (Yukito Kishiro)

Pluto (Naoki Urasawa)

Transformers: Lost Light (James Roberts)

Thunderbolts (Kurt Busiek)

Suicide Squad (John Ostrander)

Doom Patrol (Grant Morrison)

TV:

Doom Patrol

Legion

Movies:

Saviour of the Soul (HK)

Heroic Trio (HK)

Chronicle (USA)

Tetsuo (Japan)

Paprika (Japan)

What is your favorite part about writing Sidestep? Along with that, is there a specific kind of Sidestep you like to write?

Immersing myself in their mindscape. It's very cathartic and cleansing for me to just write a complete trainwreck. There is no specific flavor I like the most; I enjoy the full range of chaos.

What happened to Locus?

You might get to know in book three.

Will it be possible for say, Ortega, to find out the mc is trans without telling them?

No. At least not that will be dealt with in game. That's not a scene I'd enjoy writing.

What did the Rangers think of sidesteps reluctance to show their face prior to heartbreak?

It's not uncommon for vigilantes to be private and keep their identity a secret, so it didn't arouse much suspicion. Just some gentle ribbing from Ortega, because they are way too curious.

You mentioned that Ortega isn't close to their father, but does he know about the relationship with MC? And if not, how would they react to it?

Ortega's father is dead, so that is one hurdle cleared. If he had been alive, he would not have approved.

Ortega has issues with their father, but how did Julia's experience with him differ from Ricardo's? I imagine old Mr. García would have different expectations for his son vs. his

daughter.

Julia's conflict would have been a lot more simple and clear-cut. She had no interest in fitting into the role as daughter; she made that clear early on. They argued a lot, and he did not approve of her (lack of) career choices, but she was a woman, and he was always unsure how to connect with her. If he had lived, they would probably have an easier time coming to an understanding.

Ricardo, on the other hand, got the bulk of the expectations on his shoulders, and he didn't like that one bit. His father was a lot more controlling because he felt that he knew what was best for his son. Discipline and Ricardo didn't really go hand in hand, and even if his father had lived, I very much doubt that they would ever have reconciled.

Speaking of old Mr. García, what was he like? And what was his relationship with Elena like?

He was very driven. His father and grandfather had been in the military, and that was the path he picked very early on in life. Ambitious. Competent. Smart as a whip. Charismatic. Very, very convinced that he knew what was best for everyone. Used to taking command. Elena was no stranger to people like that, she'd been working on getting to the Olympics since childhood, she knew what drive and discipline were. They had a loving marriage, made possible by both of their willingness to keep to their own spheres of influence. Elena is a very feminine woman; she wouldn't have challenged him as long as he stayed out of things he had no business talking about. They did argue, and it could be rather volatile, but on the whole, it was a happy marriage. Elena's biggest regret is that she never figured out how to reconcile Ortega with their father.

Aside from Vitruvian, is there anyone else Mortum has worked with/for?

Not for long, there have been many short partnerships, but that has been just for a heist or some other short-term deal.

Was Mortum lonely before meeting Sidestep/Puppet?

They would not admit it, but yes. Very.

Is there an estimated release date for book 2?

No. There are so many stages in writing a book like this, and the last ones are out of my hands. We have reached the proofreading/grammar stage now, and once that is done, it will be the final beta where people can play what it would look like at release. After that, I submit it, and then it has to pass through Hosted Games quality control and then fit into their release schedule. The last time the Hosted Games step took four months; it might take longer now since the game is huge.

I noticed that Heartbreak shares the same gender as your puppet but the same eye color as Sidestep. Will we be learning more about the possible connection?

You will learn some things in book three, yes.

Sorry, one more question! And sorry if this has been answered in the past, but- did Ortega know they were immune to telepathy before meeting Sidestep? or is that something they found out after meeting Sidestep?

Ortega had no idea; they learned this from talking with Sidestep.

What would happen if a boosted individual takes the drug again? Is there more risk involved?

Yes and no. Taking it again means pushing the odds, the body is already changed, but if the first boost power increased durability, the risk would be less. This is why Anathema survived the second dose.

How does it affect HG when they use their powers? Also, does it vary how much they are affected when they use their powers?

Every use of HG's powers is a continuous effort. The biggest limit is their stamina, both mental and physical.

What shapes peoples mindscapes to look certain way?

Life, imagination and experiences. It's not unlike dreams.

When it comes to former ally past and old friend past, how different Ortega's behavior or thoughts toward Sidestep were? Were they any different? Was Ortega aware in former ally relationship that Sidestep kept them at arm's length? If yes, how did Ortega feel about it?

Ironically, that is mostly how Sidestep saw their relationship. Ortega might not have seen as big a difference between them. Ortega thought Sidestep was their friend, even if the feelings weren't returned in the same way.

How did Ortega find out about Marshal Hood's death?

From the LDPD.

Who was Catastrofiend before they became villain? Were they modded or boosted first?

That is the scary part. Nobody knows, and every story is worse than the last. Modded military experiment? Self-mutilating/modded villain? Someone gone mad from the boost drugs? Reanimated body?

So what do villains like Psychopathor and Catastrofiend like to do when not busy being villains and just enjoying their free time?

Psychopathor is married, so he's got a relaxing home life. The Catastrofiend has no free time, at least not that anybody has seen.

Who do each Ranger consider to have been their worst enemy to fight against? What kind of feelings or thoughts each of them possibly had after such event?

Ortega: The Catastrofiend. They don't want to go through that again, electricity does very little, and there are too many sharp blades for close combat. Probably the only creature to truly unnerve Ortega.

Argent: Lord Ember. Fire sucks. On all levels. One of the reasons she left San Francisco, but she would never admit it.

Steel: Heartbreak. Mental attacks mess him up; he has no defense. He still has nightmares about that day.

Herald: Deadeye. He just felt so helpless. How is he supposed to deal with a sniper that will never let him get close? The worst he got injured, worse than what the new villain might have done.

Since Mortum was probably forced to throw a punch or two during their villain career, what kind of fighting style did Mortum have? Did they rely a lot on their tech? What kind of armor did they have? Was it just as well made as Sidestep's villain armor or even better?

Mortum is not good at throwing punches; they never were. They relied on shooting things or tech, and that was why they worked together with others. Sometimes you need a bit of muscle. The armor would have been similar to Sidestep's functional/mysterious armor, but with a lot more tech integrated.

Besides possibly Sidestep, who has been Lady Argent's favorite enemy to fight against before that? Or favorite fight she's been in?

Her first big fight after joining the Rangers, which was against the Crack. She won, but it was a massive brawl and made for very good television.

If Lady Argent only had the claws but no silver body to armor her, how different would her fighting style been?

A lot less daring; if she can't rely on armor to protect her, she has to play smart.

I remember mention that Mortum's playlist is more or less their origin story so wondered does the Mortumstep puppet playlist also have some kind of storyline?

I always try to have a general timing flow to it, from the start and then onward.

Will Black Sidesteps be able to choose braids as one of the new hairstyles in book 2?

Oh, nice suggestion! I should add that!

Will Shroud play an important role in book 3?

She will play A role. How big depends on path.

What was the long beach heroes attack in 2015? Were the rangers involved? what role did Locus play?

It was the last big attempt to root out Hollow Ground and not done by all of the Long Beach Heroes, just Locus, and Porphyry. Locus got the intel. The bar that was the current headquarter was razed to the ground, but nobody important was captured. The controversy had the Long Beach Heroes dissolved; they were deemed dangerous mavericks. Locus became a solo hero, working with various teams as a telepathic consultant. Porphyry dropped out of sight; rumors have it they moved to Mexico. The members who weren't present for the attack fared better. Both Zephyr and Blaze were recruited for the Guardians.

What does the rangers' work schedule look like? Especially since there's only like four of them

They do have the perk of being on top of the food chain. In general, they are reactive rather than proactive. The main schedule comes with dealing with the city and the media. Lots of meetings. Herald and Ortega tend to do the most patrolling; it never hurts stopping smaller crimes just to remind the city they exist. Lady Argent is the most proactive one, and she's also the one who prefers to hunt down villains before they become a problem. Steel gets stuck with the politicians.

If Ortega could ask Step one question that step promised to answer honestly, what would the question be?

When the fuck is your birthday?

How do the ROs celebrate their birthdays and does this line up with how they would want to celebrate?

Ortega always throws a big party; it includes a mix of people who knows who they are, both from the hero business and civilians. They are pretty pleased with that, but not with how the years add up.

Chen is usually dragged out to dinner by Ortega but would prefer if it was just ignored.

Daniel has a small party; it tends to be friends outside the hero community. It's always a juggle to make sure Ortega doesn't invite themselves along. He usually has to have a separate one with that side of his life.

Argent has a small thing, generally at Hoots. It always makes her look sad, for some reason.

Dr. Mortum has not had one in years, it's too personal.

How much, if any, focus has been placed on robotics/ artificial intelligence as a field of science? Outside of ReGenes, of course. Are artificially intelligent/ self-operating robots in the traditional sci-fi sense of the term something that exist already, or are close to existing?

It is a major focus, and the FH world has come further in that regard than our own. There are artificially intelligent/self-operating robots, but they are limited in scope due to their size and limited to military use. After some public incidences, they were banned on American soil. The EU is the one who employs them the most; they are more common in Europe. The flexibility/storage capacity is the major issue, which is something that Re-Genes were created to circumvent. By using the brain as wetware, it's got a lot faster processing speed than 'pure' robots. It has proven to be more cost-effective to use mods or exo-armors with human pilots to get the best of both worlds.

And on a similar token, are robots something the general population has any interest in? Do they feature much in fiction, or did the subject kind of lose its shine with how much advancement there's been in similar science & tech?

Robots used to be a lot more popular maybe thirty years ago when a massive breakthrough seemed to be just around the corner. These days it is more mundane and thus not really as fun. The big SF craze right now is space travel! There are rumors that there might be plans to go beyond earth's orbit, maybe even towards the moon.

[QnA for April \(spoiler version\)](#)

[Apr 2, 2021](#)

The spoiler-filled version of the questions asked.

Does the MC apply different moral standards from humans and Re-Gene's? Kind of like how even a mass murderer MC would never harm a dog, we can see a clear moral distinction between human and dog. I would imagine the MC would feel an even greater moral distinction between their own kind and the humans that oppress them.

It will vary from Sidestep to Sidestep. Some might apply different standards in both directions. Some might value Re-Genes more; some might value humans, having internalized their training into self-hatred.

Where do Re-Gene's get their consciousness? From their vat-grown brain or chip?

A combination. The chip provides training, control, and a starting point, but future memories are stored in the brain as normal.

The AI chips are there in order to assist the regene brain is being developed at the same rate the body is, as far as we're aware. Assuming this is true, if the chip is removed in the present-day,

would the person keep their thoughts, personality, and knowledge, or would it be fragmented/revert to its original state?

The person should keep most of their thoughts and personality. Some knowledge might be lost if it was never used and integrated with the wetware.

Since Steel saw the autopsy photos do they know the MC is a Re-Gene or does he believe the photos were faked?

If you talk to him, you might learn. It's in the book. :)

Will we ever return to the Farm? Whether it's as the Villain, being recaptured, or within a flashback?

There will be flashbacks in book three, and the Farm will be a big focus in book four.

A play-through question here: Are there any specific factors that influence whether certain characters help you to escape from the Rangers HQ? (In the circumstance that you are captured and have your identity revealed)

Yes, there are a lot of them, but you'll have to code-dive to find out!

If Sidestep uses the regenerator, it should remove all scars, right? So there would be nothing to prove they are the real Sidestep?

It is an interesting question. Once the time comes, there will be quite a few things to consider. I suspect some Sidesteps might not want to go through with it.

What boosts/mods do cuckoos typically have? Or are they strictly telepaths/psy sensitive?

It varies. They have powers that are useful for information gathering and infiltration. Some are pure information extractors, some are good at various forms of people manipulation, some are good at stealing things, and some are quiet and discrete assassins. What they have in common is working by infiltrating civilian society.

What does the Farm think of Sidestep's vice? I can't imagine them being happy about Sidestep putting stuff into their bodies. Also for vices like alcohol and cigarettes did Sidestep ever have bad withdrawal when they were recaptured by the Farm?

At that time, withdrawal was the least of their worries. Sidestep's vice is inconsequential to them; it doesn't factor into anything but possible blackmail material.

Are the nine gates specifically tied to Sidestep or do all Re-genes have it?

Sidestep only.

What kind of relationship did HG have with their siblings? Was HG aware one of their siblings took the boost drug?

A good one, HG loved their family. And they were aware of boost use.

Do Nocturne, Jake and HG have any thoughts if Rangers reputation is suffering?

Bit of schadenfreude, it's always fun when the heroes struggle.

In a sense of emotional connection and intimacy, how close are Nocturne and Jake nowadays?

Very close. Jake is caught in both her and HG's orbit and doesn't want to break free.

If Jake found out about HG's powers, how does he feel about Nocturne now? Has his thoughts toward her changed as well? Or is he still unsure how much she's aware of?

He is not sure of anything anymore; everything has changed. The worst part is that his feelings haven't. It would have been easier if everything was fake.

Is Argent aware you used her to steal a colony of nanovores yet? Kind of funny/ironic when you think about it.

As far as you know, Argent is not aware of exactly what was stolen. She was not aware until at the very end. If she has connected the dots are a different story, it's not impossible.

[Have any questions? It's that time of the month again.](#)

[Mar 22, 2021](#)

So, it's that time of the month again, please submit any questions for the QnA here!

<https://dashingdon.com/play/malin/fhrqwed22sp/mygame/>

[The Retribution build is back up!](#)

[Mar 14, 2021](#)

The Retribution playtester build is back up, sorry for the inconvenience! There's some new tweaks here and there as well. Enjoy!

Clarification since many missed the link on top: [CLICK HERE FOR NEW BUILD!](#)

[A slight interruption of service](#)

[Mar 14, 2021](#)

Due to unforeseen circumstances, the demo will be down today, a new build will be up later, hopefully tonight. Thank you for your patience!

<https://dashingdon.com/play/malin/fhrqjweiq22sug/mygame/>

[March Retribution link! \(new build\)](#)

[Mar 7, 2021](#)

So, a week late but here it is, the new build of Fallen Hero: Retribution. This time around it is bugfixes and suggestions. I've worked through a massive load of the suggestions folder, so there's a lot of small content bits everywhere. Going to work through the rest during March I hope, and then go for grammar and spelling.

[Here is the new link.](#)

Note that your old saves might bug out, there are some new variables there so don't trust them. I will leave the old link up for a few days so you can finish any playthroughs you are in the middle of.

Have fun!

[Mitchell's Guide to Villains entry 311: Jake Manalo](#)

[Mar 3, 2021](#)

Mitchell's Guide to Villains entry 311. [OFF THE RECORD]

Subject: Has so far resisted adopting any form of codename despite suggestions being offered.

Civilian identity: Jake Manalo.

Birthdate: 23rd December 1994

Birthplace: Puerto Princesa, Philippines.

Height: 5'7" 170cm

Weight: 154lb/70kg

Classification: Strong Beta level boost. Personal density shifting, able to become a ghost capable of passing through solid objects, as well as turning heavy and solid. In that state, he has increased strength and greatly increased durability.

Status: Officially, just another lieutenant. Unofficially, a lot more due to personal connections with Hollow Ground and Nocturne. A former bodyguard to Nocturne.

Notes: I have not submitted this into the system, for personal use only. Would be scrubbed of anything interesting if Nocturne got her hands on it. Jake is her former bodyguard, and if the rumors are true more than that. Not exactly sure how Hollow Ground fits into things, but he must be aware of it.

Transcript of one surveillance camera in the old base saferoom during the Long Beach Heroes attack 2015. Managed to get hold of the footage before the place was demolished.

[distant fighting, occasional audio issues]

Nocturne: You never told me how you ended up here in Los Diablos.

Jake: Heh. Is that something you ask all your bodyguards?

Nocturne: What's that supposed to mean?

Jake: Sounded more like a pickup line in a bar, and you do have a reputation for being... aloof? Not exactly someone who enjoys small talk.

Nocturne: That's true, but this is not exactly normal circumstances. We can't leave this room until things calm down. I'm growing antsy just listening to the noise. Sounds like they're tearing the place apart.

Jake: Probably what is happening; I don't think there's going to be much left of the bar once they're done. Pity, I liked it.

Nocturne: So did I. Even if the neighborhood isn't the best.

Jake: Probably why they can let loose like this. Heroes don't care as much when there's no money involved.

Nocturne: You've got a point. It would not be a bad idea to relocate to the city center.

Jake: If we get out of this mess. I should be out there. I'm not afraid of Porphyry. I can take them.

Nocturne: Be patient. They're not the only one out there. Locus is there too.

Jake: Locus is a kid. She's what? Fifteen or something?

Nocturne: She's an alpha-level telepath, my powers don't affect her, and I don't trust the numbers to be enough to shield us.

Jake: I still think I should...

Nocturne: Are you that willing to abandon me?

Jake: You know that's not true. I'll keep you safe. I just can't stand feeling this helpless.

Nocturne: Is that why you did it? Took the boosts?

Jake: Well, yes. And no. I'm not stupid. I know the odds. I wouldn't have done it just for a chance at power. Not worth the risk. But, you know how it is. Sometimes you've got no choice but to roll the dice and pray for sevens. I'd be dead if I didn't do it.

Nocturne: At the hands of your former boss.

Jake: You know about that?

Nocturne: Only in passing. There were negotiations to let you stay here; they wanted you back badly enough to make demands. Taong Ulupong really wasn't happy, but he tried to throw his weight around. No way we could let you go after that.

Jake: I didn't know you were involved in that.

Nocturne: I wasn't, at the time, but I found the documents. What did you do to him?

Jake: Got greedy. Needed the money but got found out. Then dipped into the supply to save my life. Think mostly he was mad someone dared to disobey orders.

Nocturne: Disloyalty. Not the most attractive trait.

Jake: Hey, I didn't hide anything when I signed on, you know that. He was an asshole who treated people like shit, didn't deserve my loyalty. It's different here; I'm loyal to Hollow Ground. And you.

Nocturne: He didn't ask you for that, did he?

Jake: Huh? No. Just to watch your back. Which I am doing.

Nocturne: Even though you'd rather be out there, fighting?

Jake: I'm good in a fight.

Nocturne: Very good. You're the first density shifter I've met. Didn't know your powers could be so versatile.

Jake: I've worked hard. It was just ghosting at first; I wouldn't have been able to get on the ship and escape otherwise. The hardening came later, but it's useful in a fight.

[distant rumbling, rubble falling from the ceiling. Jake moving to protect Nocturne, holding her close until it subsides]

Nocturne: And for protecting people I see.

Jake: I'm not used to that. Protecting people.

Nocturne: Liar. I know you've got family back in the Philippines. You send them money every month.

Jake: How...

Nocturne: That's what I do. Follow the money. Helps keep one step ahead of any possible disloyalty.

Jake: I am loyal.

Nocturne: I know that. I'm trusting you with my life, aren't I? But old habits die hard. I used to work for the IRS, you know.

Jake: What? You used to be a bureaucrat?

Nocturne: Hard to believe now, but things were different then. I was different.

Jake: He does that, doesn't he? Changes things. Changes people.

Nocturne: He does. I like myself a whole lot more these days.

Jake: So do I. I mean... uh...

Nocturne: Oh. So that's what it is. I was wondering.

Jake: I didn't... oh shit... it's not...

Nocturne: I'm not going to say anything.

Jake: Oh come on, this place is rigged with cameras, you know that. Fuck. I'm fucked.

Nocturne: For having a crush on the boss's girlfriend?

Jake: Yeah. That's not exactly my job.

Nocturne: Just protecting me.

Jake: And I plan to do that. Doesn't sound like the fight's going well out there. What are they even doing? I thought the boss had bribed the heroes to leave this place alone.

Nocturne: Not everyone is susceptible to... bribes. But you're right, this is bad.

Jake: Porphyry's capable of breaching this saferoom if they find it. I've seen that hunk of rock tear through reinforced concrete without breaking a sweat. If they even sweat.

Nocturne: They don't. It's fascinating, isn't it? What the boost drugs can do. Turning someone into a living rock.

Jake: Or into me. I can beat them. If I'm fast enough, the numbers should still hold. Without her backup, that little girl is nothing.

Nocturne: She's an alpha-level telepath.

Jake: Which is why I need to move while she's still distracted.

Nocturne: You're supposed to protect me.

Jake: And this is how I'm choosing to do it. The door stays sealed; I'll just shift through the ground; they won't know where I came from.

Nocturne: You can't fight two alpha-level heroes at the same time.

Jake: Just watch me.

Nocturne: You don't have to do this. Is this because you said...

Jake: It's not stupid heroics so the boss won't off me. I really can do this.

Nocturne: Fine. Do your thing. Just promise me one thing.

Jake: Anything. You know that.

Nocturne: Come back alive.

[February Spoilers QnA](#)

[Mar 3, 2021](#)

In every Mortum's ending in which the Puppet is involved in the accident and MC is in their own body, Dr. Mortum will think that MC lied to them and will take sides with the Puppet?

That is Mortum's initial reaction, yes.

In some endings, depending on which body we stuck at the end, the other body will gain consciousness. How important will they be in the future? Do we lose that body for the whole book 3, or can we take it back? If we stuck in Sidestep's body, could we influence the Puppet to start a romance with Mortum? Just curious because having the other body controlled by someone else makes the possibilities become a lot bigger.

Oh, that is the first half of book three, not going to reveal that here; you will have to wait until the first demo for that comes out. But yes, it might be a bit of a game-changer for some.

In some endings in which MC is inside the Puppet and in Dr. Mortum's lab, MC's body wakes up; in others, it's not shown if it wakes up or not. In both cases, the impostor takes control of the MC body? Is the same impostor that can take control of the Puppet or the MC? Dr. Mortum and MC will be able to keep MC's body, in which inside there is the impostor, safe/contained until they figure it out who this mind controller is?

Oh, that is very much something I won't reveal, that's for you to experience and figure out in book three, it's the central mystery of the first half.

Was it actually Sentinel/the flyer who shoot to the car with MC/the Puppet and Ortega?

That will be interesting to find out, won't it?

What did Ortega think when he saw MC in the diner, in Rebirth, finding out they were alive? And what after Chen told him about the autopsy photos (something changes if the MC is believed innocent or guilty or is just being suspected of being guilty)?

Ortega thought they saw a ghost. And after that, it was just a rollercoaster of panicked feelings; I don't think they've really had time to sit down and think things through yet. They are still processing. As for the latter, I won't tell; that will be revealed in the story.

If MC goes with their body to the meeting with Hollow Ground but then jumps in the Puppet and rescues their body, do the Rangers (apart from steel that already knows and supposing we didn't tell anyone) know that MC is a re-gene? And what the RO's think about MC being Retribution? It depends on the stats, or in that moment, no one thinks about it, but only to find MC?

Yes, they do know. The truth will have come out by then. The RO's reactions will be very dependent on stats and actions and thus will vary quite a bit.

Is Ortega aware of the budding romance between Herald/Sidestep? Or do they think it's just Herald having a crush?

It depends on the path; in some, Herald actually has a talk with Ortega about it.

Is there any other route where we get to meet mamma Ortega, or is breaking their legs a must?

The legs are the earliest; I think there will be other chances.

It looks like Chen has a chance with Ortega now, but what would have happened had he actually told Ortega how he felt back when those feelings first developed? Would it have triggered Ortega's bi crisis earlier or simply have been super awkward?

Super awkward.

What is the reason Blaze doesn't like Ortega? Is it personal or job-related?

Mostly personal, their personalities clash, and Blaze thinks Ortega is a bit of a shit to Chen.

Daniels's parents did they really disown him, or was it self-inflicted?

Mostly self-inflicted.

Did Daniels's parents love him and his brother, and what do they think of him now?

Daniel hopes so, but he's not sure. And he's quite certain they dislike what he has become; heroes weren't exactly something they liked.

Why was it difficult for Mortum to focus on what they wanted to say during the conversation about the disintegration ray? Was that because of the Puppet? Because they weren't sure how

much they can reveal? Or was it just difficult to speak of their past?

A bit of both. It's a sore spot, and it takes trust to reveal things.

If Sidestep was to get a brain scan, would the chip that the farm plants in regene brains be visible? There at all???

It should be, yes.

If choosing the option to try and get Herald to drop you, what does sidestep see/hear that makes them almost cry and pull back out of his mind instantly?

It's a combination of being surrounded by a very open and intense mind with few boundaries and a bubbling need to keep Sidestep safe at all costs, tied into watching his brother die and not being able to save him.

If Hollow Ground used their power on the Puppet, would it still have an effect once the MC returns to their original body?

That is a very good question, and one I will not answer.

Since HG likes aquariums, do they ever visit the aquarium Psychopthor's wife is in charge of? Or would that be too public for them?

They have, on occasion.

If Sidestep has people back on the Farm they care about, what kind of relationship does Sidestep have with them? Are they like teammates, friends, or family? Or is the relationship not that clear-cut?

It will vary; you will be able to pick several variants once it is time for that.

Will other Re-Genes, other than Shroud, appear in the future books, and if so, would they be playing an important role to the story?

Yes, and it would depend on your definition of importance. I can guarantee that there's some interesting ones in book four, we'll see what makes it into book three, still on the fence there.

Also, will we get the chance to kindly "shut up" Zephyr in the future books

Oh yes.

If you end Retribution with a low HG relationship and do not join them, can you still become good allies?

Well, good and good, but I imagine you might find ways to work together.

During the Chapter 15 coffee date with the Puppet, Ortega remarks that clothes make a huge difference in being noticed. We then see this put to work during the auction, where there's a huge chance of straight-up never knowing they were there. Have they ever trailed Sidestep without them/the player knowing it?

Ehehe, oh, that is one question I will NOT answer. Just keep looking over your shoulder.

So we already know that Lord Ember and Shroud had it out for Ace, but that begs the question: Are there any other SF players that they managed to piss off before their luck, ah, ran out? Or is Lord Ember the only one they had to worry about?

I don't know yet, none that I have decided on. But there might be more of Ace's part popping up once I start to detail book three.

You've said a few times that the Puppet will lose their plot armor in book three. You've not been clear whether that's the puppet body or the puppet mind, so my question is: will we be able to get Sidestep's original body killed?

Not in book three.

We know that telepathy is an exceedingly rare power, with psi sensitivity being the slightest bit more common. After seeing two psi sensitive ReGene operatives, one of them being a telepath, what I'm wondering is whether the Farm has psi sensitive people/telepaths in their staff, thus preventing ReGene from ever being truly alone with their thoughts due to the constant threat of being recycled over a stray thought?

Yes, but they used to have a lot more, at least from what Sidestep remembers.

If mob boss Sidestep remained stuck in the Rangers headquarters after their possible crash, are their henchmen aware (or suspect) that their boss was involved in the crash or that Rangers have them?

They will find out... and that will be interesting.

Will Lady Argent ever acknowledge that Sidestep saved her during the Nanosurge to Sidestep herself?

Perhaps. If they get close, she might bring it up.

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You mentioned that Ortega was relieved that everyone could see Sidestep when they brought them back to the HQ. Does that mean that it's happened before where Ortega saw Sidestep while they weren't there, and if yes does anyone know about it?

Oh yes. It happened more than once, passing someone on the street, doing a double-take, and running after them. Or being drunk in a bar and spotting a familiar profile. They never stood up to scrutiny, but Ortega was worried that they'd finally snapped.

Has Mortum (for science, of course) ever decided to modify a Roomba? Were any Roombas sacrificed in the name of science by our dear doctor?

Yes. Mortum is not fond of them, they are surprisingly inefficient, so there's been a lot of tinkering. So far, nothing successful, there's probably a box of broken/half-finished ones in a box dumped in a closet in the lab.

Will we have more sessions with Dr. Finch in book 3?

I have plans for one, yes.

How are the AI chips actually implanted in regenes' brains? How is the AI tech supposed to work with organic brain matter? does GeniTech have an established answer to this question for the public?

The AI chip is inserted through the back of the neck, connecting to nerves in the medulla oblongata, which is outside the blood-brain barrier. This also means that the cranium does not have to be breached. Exactly how they work are protected by layers of patents.

Can you willing reveal yourself as the villain in book 3?

That is my plan, yes.

I'm might be getting too excited here and thus be getting ahead of myself, but how much work have you already done on book 3. Have you already planned it out

I know what happened in the novel, so I know the general direction, and I know certain paths and outcomes in great detail. However, I have not sat down and planned, or detail planned it yet, and there's a lot of content that needs to be shoved in there.

I think you may have covered this before, but how do the skinsuits work in terms of like 'how do people get in and out of the suits?

They are loose and limp when you pull them on, but once a weak electrical current is run through the suit, the fibers activate and tighten to adjust to the wearer's body.

Will Sidestep ever get a good ending, or are you going to keep pulling at our heartstrings?

There will be good endings, but it looks like a lot of readers are set on avoiding those...

When it comes to art, what are Danny's favorite subjects and his favorite mediums? Is there a type of art he'd like to do but hasn't had a chance to?

He likes architecture and buildings, landscapes and plants. Too many people want their portrait, and a house doesn't get disappointed in the result. He likes charcoal and pencil but would love to work more with oil paints, but they take a lot more time.

Will there be a separate kill variable for just killing human farm agents and scientists, or would that be tossed into agentkill?

So far, that is in agentkill, can't promise what the next book will bring.

Will drive have as much impact as scar?

Hmmm. It is a different kind of thing, but the impact is less dire if I had to say.

Does the Rat King recognize Sidestep from when they fought Psychopathor?

Yes, the Rat King had great fun playing tag. So few could put up a fight.

How big is Ortega's extended family?

On their mother's side on both sides of the Mexican border: Two aunts (Elena's older sisters), their husbands (and one ex-husband), six cousins, and a ton of more distant relatives that also tends to be folded into the aunt/uncle/cousin area. Probably a couple of nieces and nephews too.

On their father's side back in Texas, there's an aunt (married) and an uncle (unmarried), and two cousins. They are less close and don't see each other often.

There were a lot of cameras present at the gala night. If Step triggered Ortega's epilepsy, is that less of a secret now, or was that somehow covered up by the media team?

It was covered up; the public thinks it was poison gas.

During the puppet coffee date, Ortega can mention being a bit farsighted. Was that the truth, or just an excuse for the glasses?

Ortega does need reading glasses. They do not like it and tries to keep it under wraps.

So obviously, within the story Step's armor does take a range of damage depending on the choices we make. Will there be a point within the later books where the armor takes enough damage to the point where it gets destroyed, having us lose both the armor and the Rat King?

It can happen, but if so, the Rat King will be okay.

Is it going to be possible for Sidestep to go the distance and go all 4 books without anyone finding out their secret villain identity, special birth status, and their connection to the Puppet?

Yes, that is my goal, and I bet there will be some people who manage to pull that off.

Would you mind giving an in-depth explanation of how Jake's powers work? Like what stops him from going through the floor, what makes him tougher when he can hit, how does his ability affect his mind. Stuff like that.

Well, everything is superhero science, so it's all very vague, but essentially he can manipulate his density/cohesion/atomic bonds. When he's dispersed, blows go through him; he can pass through walls and the like. He doesn't fall through floors because he's also very light in that form, meaning that wind powers are a big issue. His mind also gets a lot harder to read. When he's solid/heavy, his body is a lot more durable, and he's also stronger.

What do the Rangers and Mortum think of the different Villain occupations for Sidestep's that have shown that they mean business? (Really high infamy). How does this change when they figure who is under the mask?

For Mortum, I don't think it matters which path. Chen is a lot more tolerant to thieves or anarchists; a mob boss and especially hero hunters are a danger (unless it's a prepare_them hero hunter, which is probably the one he gets the most). Ortega doesn't really discriminate; there things like killing matters more. Daniel dislikes non-prepare them hero hunters the most; with the others, it would depend on the number of deaths. Argent is the most suspicious of the Mob Boss and the Anarchist ones, too much of a dangerous agenda.

Does Nocturne have a nickname for HG?

Oh yes. But I haven't come up with one yet.

What was your favorite scene to write in Rebirth? Redemption if it's not too spoilery?

In Rebirth, Ortega's argument in the park was my first complex scene, and it was so fun. It's harder to say in Retribution since I am editing, I sort of hate them all right now, but I am proud of the session with Dr. Finch. That one was fun to chat and try to pull off.

If this is too spoilery, ignore it, but I'm kinda curious as to what Ortega was thinking when Herald talked to him about the whole kissing the MC thing, especially if the mc and Herald did more than kiss.

I think I might write a fic about that it would be fun to explore in the future. But it would depend a lot on what relationship Ortega had to Sidestep.

If this is spoiler territory, apologies. Will it be possible in a future book to redeem ourselves for what we did to the Rangers at the gala in Rebirth? Like, instead of wiping the floor with them, could we maybe this time save them? Or at the very least help them?

There might be opportunities for that, yes.

Does it ever happen that the hero's drug gives completely useless powers?

Oh yes. There's a lot of weird things out there.

Note: This question is rewritten slightly due to heavy subject matter.

What was the purpose of growing cuckoos with sexual characteristics if they are still tattooed? Can they have children?

Sexual characteristics come with the territory. Re-Genes are essentially clone bodies with AI chips, and thus their bodies function like human bodies, with all that entails. So they do have functioning genitals. However, like almost all users of the boost drugs, they are infertile and can't have children. What went on at the Farm will be up to the player to decide later in the story once it comes up. It's not something that everyone has gone through.

What gift would make each RO melt from happiness?

I... honestly have no idea. I am SO bad at gifts. And since Sidestep is who they are, probably something that involves spending time with them. That's precious.

What kind of Valentine's date would each Ro enjoy? Or would some of them ignore the holiday completely?

I sort of answered that with the Valentine's day stories, I think.

Would Dr.Mortum ever date Sidestep if they revealed themselves to begin with? Would they even date their own client?

It's not the client thing that's the issue, it's the risk. An ex-hero telepath is not someone Mortum would get close to in a hurry; their guard would be up too much to ever relax.

What is each RO's love language?

Ortega: Touch. Chen: Quality time. Daniel: Words of affirmation. Argent: Quality time. Mortum: Acts of service.

Most of us look back on our teenage years and think, "damn, was I an edgy kid". Does Dr.Mortum look back at their life until their 30's same way? I think it was mentioned that they are a bit embarrassed about some things they did as a villain.

Oh yes. Mortum certainly does. And yet the armor is there, tucked away in storage...

Would Dr.Mortum agree to adopt animals with their partner? What kind of animal would they want, if at all?

Mortum would NOT trust themselves with keeping an animal alive and finding time for them, if there is one, it will be a complete accident, and they'd stumble into caring way too much and not knowing how to deal.

Was it normal for Dr.Mortum to call someone they were hitting on "ma/mon Cheri"? Or was Puppet special?'

It was an affectation used on others, but the Puppet made it special.

How many people does Dr.Mortum currently consider their friends?

Maybe three, not counting the Puppet.

What kind of adventures did anathema ever take a befriended sidestep on?

Fun and wacky ones. Exploring things like amusement parks, weird stores and snack places, and other things that Sidestep hadn't seen. Anathema had been a bit of a shut-in as well, so showing Sidestep new things made them bloom as well.

Do any of the mob boss henchmen have any family?

No close family, Pelayo has a cousin working for the LDPD, but none of them are close to their families.

Since Lady Argent isn't used to being on the losing side when it comes to fighting, how exactly did she feel if she lost against the new villain in a fair fight?

Infuriated and impressed. She'll do better next time.

How did Sentinel and Sunstream get along with other Rangers?

Sentinel was the dad on the team; Sunstream was more of an outsider, never really comfortable with her role.

What was Jake's first impression on Nocturne and HG?

HG: Huh. Flashy fucker, I can take them in a fight.

Nocturne: Wow. Beautiful.

Has Jake fought against Ortega much? If yes, how did those fights go?

Not much, but it has happened. It generally ended in a draw, and by that, I mean Jake running for it...

What did Vernon say to Ortega that made them punch him?

You will learn that in book three.

If Sidestep left people behind when they escaped from the Farm, is there maybe going to be a possibility of getting into the subject of how Sidestep might feel about it?

Yes, I plan to have that added in once we start dealing with that.

If Lady Argent and Jake fought against each other, which one of them would have the upper hand? Also, considering their opponent's powers (Jake being able to turn intangible and Lady Argent's claws and armor), how would they feel about fighting each other?

Probably Lady Argent, but it would be an interesting match. Jake's reaction speed is the key here.

Does Mia Ochoa have any particular opinion on the Rangers as a whole or any of the members?

She's a bit cynical about them, especially Ortega.

What did Lady Argent think if, during the bridge fight, the new villain turned her down when it came to romantic interest but admitted they wanted her as an ally and by their side?

That was a surprise, she's used to being flirted with so she normally rolls with it. It was a breath of fresh air.

What kind of relationship did HG have with their parents? Did HG see their mother before she died, or had they cut ties with their past by then?

A good relationship, their father died when they were a teenager, but their mother died just a decade ago, and they were in contact often. She was well taken care of.

Bit morbid question, but how did HG's siblings die? Were they part of HG's criminal organization? Did any of them have powers or mods?

One was killed by rivals, one died from boost drugs, and the third died in police custody. HG was the one with the powers; neither of them had major mods.

What does low Rangers' reputation signify?

The public sees them less favorably, and they don't get good press, even if the media team tries to scrub things.

What is Psychopathor's goal as a villain?

Money and power.

What would Mortum think if Sidestep/Puppet admitted they only chose the cape for the villain armor because Mortum likes capes?

A bit flattered, and then try to explain that no, capes really are cool.

What are the Rangers and Dr. Mortum most afraid of losing?

Mortum: Their lab. Even more than their freedom. Ortega, Sidestep again. Chen Spoon. Daniel, any of his friends. Argent control

Just how close were Anathema and Sidestep? What did they like and/or dislike about each other?

They were friends, but exactly why I will leave to people's headcanons.

(Pre-heartbreak) We know that Sunstream shied away from the media spotlight, Steel didn't/does/don't care for it, and Ortega was a bit of a darling of the press. But how did Sentinel and Anathema feel about it? And just what personas did they all have to play up for the cameras?

Anathema didn't like it, Sentinel loathed it after all the things he went through during his transition in the public eye, but he was nothing if not professional with them. Don't show weakness. Probably the one who interacted the most with the press after Ortega.

What are the current Rangers' (and Mortum's) biggest fears and deepest desires?

I honestly don't know yet. Maybe we'll find out.

Apologies if this has already been stated elsewhere, but was Herald the older or younger brother?

The younger.

Okay, I'm having soft Mortum thoughts, you don't have to indulge me on this, but it would be appreciated if you did. Dr.Mortum seems like they forget to take care of their basic human needs like food, drinking, resting. Would they appreciate a partner who would take care of them? I know FH is a story with darker themes, but the idea of domestic life with our beloved genius makes me so happy.

Oh yes. That would be brilliant. Mortum truly appreciates things like that.

Would you consider making a Mortum romance playlist? I keep listening to their origin one, but I would love to listen to their love/current day vibes.

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6nSJoQmqWI51BI10GBvym5?si=VfgMQEXzQq2gM26bB6nk1g>

Will we get a flashback to the decisive moment the MC decides to become a villain?

We'll be revealing more of the post-farm escape time that led up to that discussion in book three; it should come up there.

Is a ruthless MC basically a misanthropist?

Up to you how you define it; it is a game stat that might mean different things for different people.

Can we blackmail Argent with civilian lives to give back cape?

That is actually a good idea, I'll see what I can do.

What does "Individuality" mean?

Another game stat, it will vary a little, but essentially how much the mc sees the Puppet as their own person vs. just a tool and Puppet.

How often does Ortega call his/her mom, and what do they usually talk about?

At least once a week, and they talk about family, work, politics.

Has mama Ortega noticed a difference in Ortega (if there is any) after Sidestep showed up?

Probably. Ortega thinks they are very sneaky.

Why did Ortega end up coming back to the Rangers after Heartbreak? It feels more complex than the fact that they got bored + from what little the other characters have mentioned about those days.

It is more complex. I think at the heart of it, Ortega realized that they needed direction, or they would end up dead. And, for better or worse, the Rangers gave them that. They have a lot of unfinished business that being a Ranger helps with, and then there are the money issues.

Does Argent still surf?

No.

The picture of Sidestep that Ortega has is it something funny like Step slobbering on his/her couch when sleeping? And how did Ortega get one?

I have not decided that, but it was definitely taken when Sidestep didn't notice, so it might very well be funny.

Does Ortega know where Sidestep lives? If yes, did Ortega follow Sidestep home, and when did it happen?

Not telling you that. Ortega has their secrets.

If it's not a secret, what is the goat's power?

Let's just put it this way, there have been more than one dismembered body surrounding that goat; they look explosive in nature...

How did the rest of the active team (during the Heartbreak incident) find out about it (in the news, someone called them e.c) and the deaths of Sidestep and Anathema? How did they react?

News, it was like on camera. Someone called Sentinel; he was working. It was a shock to everybody; nobody came out of that unscathed.

Is there ever a scenario where Ortega would (romantically) pick someone else over Sidestep, or is it that as long as Sidestep is an option, no one else compares?

There technically already is (if you count the Puppet), but yes, it can happen if you're shitty.

How long had Ortega been practicing what they said to Sidestep in the apartment scene?

Too many times.

Was a romanced Sidestep Ortega's first love, or was there one before in their string of romances?

Probably were earlier ones in their teens.

I've read that if Ortega falls in love with MC in the present, but in the past, they were just friends, he realizes now that he had a crush on MC, so if in Rebirth we choose to have a secret crush on Ortega, she/he would have had a secret/not realized crush on MC too?

Well, memories are always a bit unreliable. When Ortega thinks back with romance-colored glasses on, it is very easy in hindsight to imagine that there had been feelings there they just hadn't recognized as romantic. Whether that really is the truth is hard to say, but Ortega certainly thinks so.

In the beginning, did Argent reminded Ortega of Sidestep?

Yes, there were certainly aspects there that reminded Ortega, which is why they kept their distance at first.

Would it be possible to have a relationship with Steel with a F!MC or NB!MC? Or will this stay as a kinship relationship?

NB is already possible as long as you have the right conversations. Not F!Mc, that will remain as a deep friendship.

Between who are possible the Poly-routes? And there will be some jealousy or possible break up/one of the three to leave the relationship?

The ones being seeded in Retribution are: Ortega/Sidestep/Herald, Ortega/Sidestep/Argent, and Ortega/Sidestep/Steel. There are more planned in Revelations. I know Ortega/Sidestep/Mortum and Argent/Sidestep/Mortum would work well together. There might be other options in the future, but I need to explore the characters first.

There might be some jealousy from some parties; there might be breakups or other changes. I don't know where the story will lead there; I explore the characters as I write them.

Do the Rat King truly care for MC? And they will be able to find/help the MC in the ending in which we have their POV, and they are separated from MC?

Oh yes, the Rat King does. In a way, Sidestep is the closest one they have found to them, half friend, half family. And I don't think you have to worry; the Rat King is a lot more capable than Sidestep might realize...

Will Ortega realize/have realized to be bisexual if MC is of the opposite sex and romantically involved only with them (or Herald if MC is female and not in a poly)?

I plan to have that talk eventually, yeah, because Ortega is bisexual regardless of path, and I want that to be shown in the book.

Will there be other POV during the new book other than the Epilogues? Or other Patreon snippets from RO's POV of Rebirth, Retribution, future books, scenes?

No POV changes (apart from epilogues) in the actual game, but I will explore the other viewpoints through stories on Patreon. Honestly, it's the perfect vehicle for exploring that.

In Herald/Ortega poly rout. Is it possible to make them only attract to Sidestep but not at each other? I just experimenting with this poly route for fun but end up depressed for days when the epilogue state that Ortega has both Sidestep and Danny in his mind(yes, I'm super jealous). Just imagine they share a kiss, give me anxiety left alone having them interact with each other in the steaming scene in later books. Seem like I just realize that I love Danny so much that I can't bear the thought of sharing him with anyone(don't mind sharing Ortega with Chen or Mortum, though, lol). This is really important to me cause I don't wanna hurt my own feeling when seeing them interacting in that way, so knowing this makes it easier for me to choose if I want to go this route.

I am still experimenting with how I want to handle the polys. It's a bit of a new ground for me. Originally, I intended that all the polys would be triads, where all parties would be active and interacting. But I may

go for variants where it's one person in the middle, and the other two parties don't connect that way. It wouldn't be hard to code, so thank you for giving me that insight, I'll see what I can do with it.

Will we ever have a chance to meet each RO family in the future? Especially Danny's family. Just noticed that his family seems like a well-known one and might have a big part to play in the future(at least in Herald's subplot), and we kinda know about Chen's and Ortega's family, too, so I'm just curious if we will ever meet them.

I don't know. Both Chen's and Daniel's families are on the east coast, so that is an issue. Ortega's and Argent's are planned, you will be able to meet them. Mortum's is way too distant.

Could we have more upgrades for our armor in the future?

I am considering it, not sure yet.

Aside from our minions in the crime boss path, does the path we choose affect the character we will meet in the future? Will hero hunter path would make us meet more hero in the later book, or it just affects how we could interact with them like with Blaze.

It will affect things to some extent. Not sure how much I am trying to avoid writing extremely different paths for the different villain careers. The game is already so long. But I do want at least one specific thing for each career.

[Valentine's Day Snippets](#)

[Feb 13, 2021](#)

Dr. Mortum. Yasmin.

"I can't believe this." Yasmin's laugh is a pearly river, and Dr. Mortum can't help but turn and stare. She's beautiful in all the ways that don't belong here, a rose in a beaker able to survive the acid. "You're going to spend Valentine's Day locked in your lab eating reheated pizza?"

"Yes?" he answers, acutely aware of his stained lab coat while she smelled like she had just stepped out of the shower.

"No," she corrects, placing a finger against his lips, and he fights against the urge to kiss it. "We are."

"We are?" He blinks, trying to catch up. "I thought you were going to order me into the shower and drag me to a restaurant."

"You're working on something, aren't you?"

"I am," he admits. "I hadn't even thought about what day it is."

"So we're staying in. I'll get some better takeaway while you're finishing up whatever you're soldering, and then maybe we can take that shower. Together."

Not for the first time, Dr. Mortum wonders what he has done to deserve this. He can't call himself a believer in Karma, but at this point, he's reached the conclusion that his past life must have been one hell of a man.

Certainly a better one than he currently is.

Daniel. Chris.

"This is the dorkiest thing yet." Chris shakes their head, staring down at the tartan blanket. "A picnic?"

"Last time we went out, you complained of a headache the whole time," Daniel says, opening the basket. They were far enough away from everything that nobody would disturb them. Far enough away that even Chris's shoulders relaxed a notch. Did they even notice how tense they had become?

"Maybe you were the cause," they tease but sits down on the blanket all the same.

"I'm trying to keep my thoughts to myself, you know that." Ever since he realized that maybe they were hurting. That people could be too much. Too close. Too intense.

"Not many people here, flyboy," Chris replies, and Daniel knew he had failed to guard his thoughts. Again. "And you're getting better. It's just quiet enough out here to hear a whisper."

"I thought you might need a break from people." He kept unpacking the food, trying not to notice how Chris reached for a beer first of all. "Besides, everything good is always booked on Valentine's day."

"Is this a romance thing?" The sneer might be called a smile if you were generous, and Daniel liked to think that he was.

"It doesn't have to be," he starts, reaching over to pick up the plates when he suddenly found himself face to face with something red. Unexpected. He blinks, eyes focusing on the single rose hovering an inch in front of his face. "Oh."

"Wasn't about to stuff a bouquet in my coat," Chris looks as pleased with themselves as if they had knocked Daniel flat in training. "So a single rose will have to do."

"What." Daniel didn't know what to say, the heat rising on his face entirely uncalled for. "I didn't think..."

"... I could be smooth?" Chris fills in, too satisfied with the reaction to hide it. "Get used to being surprised."

Daniel accepts the rose, trying desperately not to hover. No matter how close he got to them, he couldn't begin to predict what would happen next. Sidestep might be retired, but Chris was still one step ahead.

Not that he minded. Not at all.

Chen. Cyrus.

"Are you sure you don't want to do anything?" Chen knows he shouldn't be surprised, but it still felt like something that should be asked.

"I'm not exactly Mr. Romantic," Cyrus admits. "This whole relationship thing is hard. You're the one with experience."

"It's been decades since I had someone I wanted to spoil for Valentine's Day. I'm not exactly Ortega."

"One of your better qualities." A thoughtful huff, as if he wasn't sure how to continue. "I just don't know how to deal with this."

"This?"

"You. Me. Having a thing. What would you do if I wasn't here?" The innocence of Cyrus' question tore a laugh from Chen.

"Oh, you really don't want to know."

"Wouldn't have asked if I didn't." His eyes narrow. "And now you're making me curious."

"Probably would have ended up downtown just in case there were any other disappointed singles open to forgetting what a day it was." Chen was proud of both of them. Cyrus for not snooping because the way his cheeks colored spoke of true surprise. And himself for keeping a straight face through it all.

"Huh." There was a small twitch to Cyrus' mouth, which might have been a smile. "I really didn't know you at all, did I?"

"Most people still don't," Chen admits. "There's certain parts of my life I like to keep separate from work."

"You're not working now," there is the smile, the real one. "And you're not a disappointed single anymore."

"Looks like I have no reason to leave the apartment then," Chen retorts with a straight face. "Do you?"

"Hell no," comes the enthusiastic reply.

Looks like they'd better feed Spoon the good food and hope he goes to sleep fast.

Angie. Cynthia.

"I thought we were going to have a Valentine's movie night?" Cynthia sounds disappointed, which Argent suspects might be faked.

"There are no good Valentine's Day movies," she admits reluctantly. "Even the horror ones are... unimaginative." Something about that day brought out the worst in creatives, and she didn't know why.

"Oh? So the Friday the 13th ones are good?" Cynthia puts down the bags on the living room table, the smell of freshly baked goods impossible to miss. "Could have fooled me."

"Some are." Argent starts unpacking the bags, putting the contents on plates, arranging them nicely. Not dinner this time, just desert and snacks. Less official. "But don't you dare to pick on the Christmas movies; there are some real gems there."

"Black Christmas wasn't bad, I suppose," Cynthia's breath quickens, and the last bag feels odd in Argent's hand.

"What's this?" She pulls out a videotape, old-school, well worn, an ex-rental and... "Oh no. Oh no, you didn't."

"You better believe I did." Cynthia sounds as pleased as if she'd just robbed another bank. "For you."

"A Shocking Valentine..." She eyes the lurid cover; it's not the real Julia, obviously, but close enough that the producer had been sued and the movie pulled from the market, the contents had been... spicy and controversial. "I didn't think there were any copies left out there; the collector's price is through the roof."

"You're dating the best thief in Los Diablos, and don't you forget it." Cynthia chuckles. "Let's see what's all the fuss is about. Isn't this one supposed to have real tits?"

"Not sure if 'real' is the word you're looking for here." She could feel her cheeks getting warm. It was a stupid, indulgent, thoughtful gift. "But let's see how they measure up to Julia's."

That was something they both could appreciate, after all.

Julia. Cyrus.

"I'm trusting you here," Julia cautions, leaning back on the kitchen chair. "Please don't break my kitchen."

"I won't." Cyrus stands awkward at the stove, the borrowed apron making him look even more out of place than he usually did. "It was an accident last time. And it was years ago."

"I know," she admits, smiling softly at his back when he has turned away to start cutting onions. "Do you mind?"

"Mind what? Cooking dinner for you?" He always got more talkative when they weren't looking at each other. "You don't have a date for Valentine's, do you? I don't want you to spend the day alone."

"Thank you." Oh boy, that wasn't the answer she had expected, to a question she hadn't asked. "You're a good friend."

"I try to be." A small sound that might have been a laugh or a huff.

"I was..." why is it so hard to talk all of a sudden? "I was actually talking about me teasing you before. I know I can be an ass." Perhaps not a better subject but safer. "I don't know how you put up with me at times."

"You're not as bad as you think." The sound of frying almost drowns the whispered words. "And I probably deserve it. Most of the time."

"You don't," she snaps, on her feet now because sitting down has never been her thing. She needs to keep busy. "You know that, right?"

"Sure," he says in that particular way that he had where she knows he disagrees with her all the same.

"Move over," she elbows him lightly, warm body, real in a way that his ghost had never been. "Let me help."

"You'll get your clothes dirty," he protests but makes room all the same.

"I'll chop, you fry, deal?" She places her hand over his until he lets go of the knife, reluctantly.

"Deal," he agrees, slightly breathless.

"That's what I like to hear," she grabs a chile pepper, her arm brushing his. "We're a team, aren't we? We work better together."

"Just remove the seeds," he cautions but doesn't move away. The kitchen wasn't large enough that they had much room. "We want the flavor, not all the heat."

"Chicken," she teases. "Why don't you live a little?"

Maybe that went for both of them. When was the last time she had this much fun on Valentine's Day?

At this point, she couldn't even remember.

Dr. Mortum. Chris.

Everything is new. Everything is fragile. A smile that won't fit quite right. The voice of a stranger. Eyes that avoid contact.

She could work with that. She's Dr. Mortum; doing the impossible is what she's known for. This can't be that different, just a new kind of chemistry. All she needs to do is find the right catalyst.

"This was a bad idea." Shoulders forward. Making themselves smaller. So unlike... no. Better not think of Eden right now. It's Chris.

"We've both had worse ones." The words are out of her mouth before she has time to plan them, the slight headache of the Numbers feeling very much like intoxication. "Please."

"You know, at this point, I would do pretty much whatever you ask. No need to say please." Guilt? Well-deserved? Maybe, but they both had enough of that as well.

"It's dinner," she says, and this time the smile sticks. "A chance to get to know each other once more."

"On Valentine's Day. Is that supposed to mean anything?" Chris does look at her then, a suspicious look, as if this was a trap. Maybe it is.

"I don't know," Dr. Mortum admits, looking for gestures she remembers, the ghost of someone else in a stranger's body. "Maybe it doesn't. Maybe it will."

"Things really have changed," and there is an echo there, the teasing look, the shadow of Eden's smile. "You admitting you don't know something."

"Well," she chuckles, and it's as real as it gets. "I've had to reevaluate a lot lately. As have you, I think."

"I guess there are limits to how many times I can apologize."

"Regret is not a flattering look."

"Neither is this one." Chris gestures to their scarred face. "Compared to what you're used to, this is a downgrade. I mean..."

"Don't," Dr. Mortum snaps, pulling her temper back before it gets out of control. "Can't we just treat this as something new? Pretend there's no baggage here for one evening? One dinner?"

"You're the aggrieved party here. You make the rules."

"Oh, I think after... well... the scales are a bit more even now." She wasn't proud of what she had done, even if she had reasons for it. That went for both of them, she supposed. Reasonable actions could still hurt.

"You asked me out then. You make the rules." There's a hint of something in Chris's eyes, but at least they are looking at her. Fear? Of making the wrong decision? Of ruining this once more?

"On Valentine's Day." Take charge. Not something she's used to. Eden was usually the one pulling the strings. "I wouldn't have done this if I didn't want it to mean something."

"To a proper dinner even. How many badly heated pizza slices did you subject me to back then? Should I be envious of myself?"

"I kept expecting you to leave," she admits, to both of them at the same time, because these are things she doesn't like dwelling on. "If I didn't make a production out of our relationship, it would hurt less when it fell apart."

"But you made such a production of things at the start. The flirting, the nicknames..."

"You know that was an act. A mask. Just like..."

"Not exactly."

"No. Not exactly. But close enough."

"Will this be?" Chris rubs their forehead. "Close enough?"

"It doesn't need to be," Dr. Mortum admits, to herself most of all. "Things have changed; there's no turning back time. What I'm interested in is what comes next."

For both of them.

[New Lore Poll!](#)

[Feb 6, 2021](#)

So, time to vote on who will be in the next lore segment! This time it's henchmen time!

Boris!

19%

Rosie!

38%

Jake!

42%

Poll ended Feb 27, 2021 · 175 votes total

[Questions for next month's QnA!](#)

[Feb 6, 2021](#)

Just ask them in the comments!

<https://dashingdon.com/play/malin/fhrhghwgr22/mygame/>

[Fallen Hero: Retribution latest build](#)

[Feb 1, 2021](#)

[Okay, the latest build of Retribution is now updated.](#)

- Note that NO OLD SAVES work even if they might seem to at first.
- Do NOT set any stat to 0 or 100, that can bug the game.
- The game is now complete, Chapter 22 is filled in, and all epilogues added.
- Both Herald's path and Ortega's path has undergone adjustments for tone and relationship content.
- Choices have been added to many situations that needed more elaboration.
- Tons of bugfixes.

Next on the schedule is more bugfixes, and working through the suggestions folder to see what more needs to be added.

Current word count: 1 329 494 words with code, 1 216 885 without code.

Playthroughs around 85 000 - 90 000 words but it varies a LOT.

[Mitchell's Guide to Heroes entry 215: Lady Argent.](#)

[Feb 1, 2021](#)

Mitchell's Guide to Heroes entry 215.

Subject: Lady Argent

Civilian identity: Angela Smith (official documents), Ximena Vega Ruiz (potential alias?).

Birthdate: 24th July 1993

Birthplace: Presumably California going by accent.

Height: 5'3" 160cm

Weight: 132lb/60kg

Classification: Beta level boost. Mainly armor and adaptive weaponry.

Status: Active Ranger, assigned to the Los Diablos team.

Notes: Hard to get a clear answer regarding her civilian identity; there are layers of obfuscation there. Angela Smith is not the whole story. Military involvement seems likely with the quality of the forgeries. Is it a manufactured identity? If so, why? It goes beyond the normal levels of obfuscation, even when it comes to the Rangers. A name popped up with very early sightings of a similar boost, Ximena Vega Ruiz, but she's listed as deceased, a victim of the nanosurge. A little too convenient, that event has been used to disappear people in the past since there is no need for a body.

Threat assessment: She's a beta-level boost but fairly useless at range. Don't get caught up in a hand-to-hand fight. Protective armor is of limited use against her claws. Unclear on the upper limits of her regenerative/armor capabilities, treat as still dangerous even if down, and retreat at speed. Can operate without oxygen, at least during a limited timeframe, so gas is useless. Massive shock/fire/heat seems to be a viable tactic; see enclosed file LALE-03 for footage of the last fight with Lord Ember.

A final warning. Treat Lady Argent with extreme caution. There is something fishy going on here, but I'm not sure what yet. There are numerous disappearances in her past fights, no bodies recovered but assume that she is willing and able to kill. Avoid at all costs.

Transcript of one of the few successful recordings, the subject was Charge, Lady Argent was a pleasant surprise. Recorded within 2 weeks of her joining the Rangers, post-attack on Marshal Steel.

Argent: So this is where you're spending your afternoons. Quaint.

Charge: Go away. I'm off duty and intending to get drunk.

Argent: In a villain bar?

Charge: It's empty now.

Argent: I can see that. At least you left some furniture intact to sit on.

Charge: I didn't ask for company.

Argent: Tough luck.

Charge: If you want a drink, get it yourself.

Argent: I don't. Looks like you're drinking for two already.

Charge: I've got practice.

Argent: Don't you think it's time to shape up now? Your best friend is in the hospital.

Charge: My best friend is dead.

Argent: I were warned you were an asshole, but I didn't think it was this bad. The Marshal will probably lose his arm, you know.

Charge: I can't do anything about that.

Argent: If you're acting like this, you sure as hell can't.

Charge: [indistinct]

Argent: What was that?

Charge: I'm sorry. I think I'm drunk. I shouldn't take it out on you.

Argent: Why not? I don't care about your theatrics; there's nothing you can do to hurt me.

Charge: Heh. Famous last words. You're not invulnerable. Nobody is.

Argent: I'm not. I'm just enough of a bitch to not take your shit.

Charge: Really?

Argent: Do I look like I care what you think? All you are right now is a drunk has-been who would have been kicked off the team if it had more than four members.

Charge: Sentinel is planning on retiring. We'll be down to three soon.

Argent: I can't say I blame him. I've been here two weeks and I'm already thinking of doing the same.

Charge: [indistinct]

Argent: Please don't what?

Charge: Please don't leave. The team needs you.

Argent: That's obvious. And I won't. I don't back down from a challenge.

Charge: I used to say the same. And then [indistinct]

Argent: Look. Charge. I don't want to hear about your tragic past; your tragic present is enough for me.

Charge: Do I look like that much of a mess?

Argent: Yes.

Charge: You could have lied, you know?

Argent: Why? To save your ego?

Charge: When you put it that way...

Argent: You know exactly how much of a mess you are, you don't need me to rub that in, but that doesn't mean I won't if you give me openings like that.

Charge: Fair.

Argent: What I don't get is how you do it.

Charge: How I do what?

Argent: Stay alive. I saw that fight with the Catastrofiend two months back. That's what convinced me to join the team.

Charge: Really?

Argent: Don't aim that smile in my direction.

Charge: So why did that convince you?

Argent: Because the way you fought was absolutely reckless. And yet you pulled it off. Saved the day.

Charge: Sentinel saved the day by bringing the building down. We didn't stop it; it ran away.

Argent: Haven't been seen since. And you fought it hand to hand for two minutes and ten seconds.

Charge: They didn't air that much footage.

Argent: There were security cameras. I've got contacts.

Charge: And you liked the way I fought.

Argent: I did. Thought I might learn a thing or two. Have a bit of fun—someone who might keep up with me.

Charge: Keep up with you? Don't you mean to keep up with me?

Argent: No. You're drunk. I don't drink.

Charge: I meant in a fight.

Argent: You took out a bar of henchmen. You couldn't take me even when you're sober.

Charge: Going to take you up on that.

Argent: Going to have to sober up first.

Charge: Fine. No more drink.

Argent: Just like that?

Charge: Yeah. You think I can't just quit when I want to?

Argent: No.

Charge: You do know I was the one who recommended you for the team, right?

Argent: And I am supposed to be what? Grateful? I know I'm good; I'm a natural choice for a Ranger. A proper hero.

Charge: Oh, you are so full of shit.

Argent: So what? That's not what everybody else thinks.

Charge: Am I supposed to be flattered that you're showing me your real self?

Argent: No. Maybe a little bit afraid.

Charge: I don't do fear.

Argent: Normally, I would call bullshit, but...

Charge: Why pick this team? You were listed for San Francisco; that's where you've been a vigilante.

Argent: You want the truth? I wanted a challenge.

Charge: I call bullshit on that. And I don't think you're afraid of Lord Ember either.

Argent: Maybe it was because of you.

Charge: Don't think so. I think it's Los Diablos.

Argent: One city is as good as another.

Charge: Is it?

Argent: You're better off pretending to be drunk than prying.

Charge: Hey, if you had waited a while showing up, I would have actually been drunk and not just tipsy. You're from here, aren't you?

Argent: How do you figure?

Charge: You looked annoyed when Steel suggested showing you around, but you didn't protest.

Argent: I thought you were too hungover to notice.

Charge: I wish alcohol could shut up my brain. It never works.

Argent: Fine. I am from here. I left for reasons. I came back for other reasons. Don't ask about my family.

Charge: I wasn't about to.

Argent: Liar.

Charge: Takes one to know one. But I won't push. I don't mind a few secrets within the team as long as you get the job done.

Argent: Why don't you try me?

Charge: I plan to. Tomorrow. And thank you. For saving Steel's life. I don't think I said that.

Argent: You didn't.

Charge: So, being bulletproof is a handy power to have.

Argent: It still hurts. It's not something I do for the fun of it.

Charge: Good to know. How sensitive are you to electricity?

Argent: I don't like it, but it won't kill me. Just don't push your luck, and I won't have to use my claws.

Charge: Good. I don't need those Catastrofiend flashbacks. We're going to have to work together, you know? We're both frontline fighters.

Argent: I know. You're used to that, though, aren't you? You had a partner, right? Sidestep.

Charge: I did.

Argent: Ah, this is the baggage.

Charge: Lay off and eat your peanuts, okay? That's private.

Argent: I've lost people too.

Charge: Hazard of the trade. Doesn't get easier.

Argent: Hero of the Nanosurge. The one who stopped them.

Charge: You heard about that? I thought they kept that bit out of the news. Didn't want to compromise their powers.

Argent: Like I said. I've got contacts. And I'm grateful. I wouldn't be here otherwise.

Charge: You were there?

Argent: Not as a hero. Sidestep saved my life.

Charge: Mine too. So close to being eaten. Skin still itches on bad days.

Argent: I know what you mean.

Charge: Are you okay?

Argent: I will be. Just bad memories. Are there more peanuts?

Charge: You sure you don't want a drink with them?

Argent: I don't drink. I like being in control of myself.

Charge: Ugh. I should be thinking the same, shouldn't I?

Argent: Unless you plan to retire again.

Charge: I won't.

Argent: Good. It would be a disappointment if you did before I fought you.

Charge: Don't you mean fought with?

Argent: Technicalities.

Charge: Oh, I think I am going to like you.

Argent: We'll see if you still think that once I wipe the floor with you tomorrow.

Charge: Deal.

Argent: I won't shake your hand.

Charge: Why? It's just a bit of blood.

Argent: I don't like skin contact.

Charge: You really are a trip down memory lane, aren't you?

Argent: Good or bad?

Charge: Good. Mostly.

Argent: I guess I have to work harder then. Tomorrow in the gym?

Charge: I'll be there.

Argent: Good. Don't be hungover; you need all the help you can get.

[January Spoiler QnA](#)

[Feb 1, 2021](#)

If Sidestep got captured by Hollow Ground, why didn't HG use their powers on Sidestep before letting Nocturne give Sidestep their sight back? Was HG just that sure their powers would work?

Yes, HG was that sure. Also, using their power takes effort and is not something done lightly. If Sidestep was deemed useless, there was no reason to expend that energy on someone soon dead.

Before Sidestep's first escape from the Farm, was Sidestep a lone operator, or did they work in a team when it came to missions?

I am planning to let people have a choice there.

If Sidestep saw the memory in HG's mind, can their relationship still change with HG in book 3 to a kinda friendly one?

Yes, it can.

What would happen to all of HG's red strings if they died?

They would dissolve on their own over the course of a day or two.

What did Ortega think was wrong with Sidestep before they discovered that they were a Re-Gene?

We will get into that in book three, but there are clues in book two. Ortega seems to speculate on some connection to Hollow Ground.

Sidestep knows many languages; were they programmed like this, or did they learn them organically? What accents do they have for the languages they speak? (If Sides is good at copying things, would they adopt a Mexican accent while being in Cali even if they had a non-Mexican accent?)

I have, once upon a time, made a long list of languages that Sidestep knows but has since then realized that would paint me into a corner if I needed more for future encounters, so this is NOT an exhaustive list, just things that I am certain of.

Sidestep knows many languages, probably fluent in around six or seven, and with working knowledge of more. It was a combination of 'programming' and practice, you can get core knowledge in there, but it needs to be used. Languages were taught on a need to know basis; if the mission required reading/scanning minds that might think in a different language, the effort was made to make Sidestep as efficient as possible. This also reflects some of the languages learned since they belonged to people the Farm was interested in.

A non-exhaustive list of languages Sidestep understands would be English, Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, Russian, Farsi, Arabic, and many more to various extents (feel free to have your Sidestep speak any language). Of these, English and Spanish are known to the Rangers, as Sidestep uses them frequently.

As for accents, that wasn't really part of the training, but as you say, Sidestep is good at mimicking, so they would probably adopt their accent to the people around them unless they found one they particularly liked. That I leave to headcanons.

What was the puppet-like before they turned into a vegetable?

You can learn some things in book two and might learn a lot in book three. So far, it is known that the Puppet went by the nickname "Ace" and was by all accounts a loner who didn't get close to people. Personality-wise they seemed quite abrasive, but I don't want to spoil things too much because it is a big part of book three.

Is Shroud able to eat regene's mind, or does it only works on humans? If she can, is there any "taste" difference? Does feeding on Re-Gene is uhhh less nutritious than feeding on an organic brain?

Shroud can eat ReGene minds. And yes, there is a taste difference. She would call them blander and less nutritious. Not at all as filling as what she prefers.

[January QnA \(updated\)](#)

[Feb 1, 2021](#)

Updated the QnA since I missed a bunch of questions the first time, they are at the end!

If romanced, how lasting were the effects of Sidestep's 'death' on Ortega's dating life? For instance, during the apartment scene, Ortega admits that they were in love with Sidestep in the past. Also, during the past, Ortega appears to have been quite promiscuous. Post heartbreak, say by a few years but before Rebirth, had Ortega moved on and found someone to replace the MC, or was the baggage from everything that had happened still very much there?

A romanced Sidestep's death pretty much broke Ortega. There were no real relationships after that, not even attempts. And, as Sidestep might find out, Ortega wasn't quite as free with their favors in the past as Sidestep might have thought. At least the way Ortega sees it.

I have a Sidestep that's romancing everyone possible (aside from Chen) just for the chaos of it. Will that inevitably blow up in their face.

I find it very hard to imagine it won't. But, since I haven't written it yet, who knows?

A more lighthearted question: who has the best handwriting, and who has the worst?

Best to worst: Daniel, Ortega, Argent, Chen, Mortum.

If he meets with Ortega, he says that he has long been in love with Sidestep, the question is whether romantic Ortega's feelings for Sidestep depend on our past relationships? For example, if we were just friends with him and were not secretly infatuated?

It should depend on your past relationships; if you were old friends and allies, there were no romantic feelings at that point. Ortega had no secret infatuation at the time; they would have acted on it. Ortega is not patient enough for long-time sustained pining.

However, if Ortega did fall in love with Sidestep in the present day, they might think back and kick themselves for being an idiot and not realize that they had a crush. Hindsight is always 2020 (do we need to retire that expression now?), but that's a lot of construction on their part.

One final caveat, there might be a bug somewhere where I simply forgot to have Ortega's comments variable depending on if you had a thing in the past or not. I'll go through and check out, so I'm not implying anything I'm not intending to.

Who was Anathemas favorite Ranger, or who was he closest to? Was it the same person?

Anathema was closest to Ortega, but I think they liked Sunstream more. Ortega can be a bit of an asshole, but that part was also why they managed to get close to Anathema, not exactly under the skin, but as close as anybody got. Sunstream kept to herself and was more of an introvert, which was relaxing to Anathema to be around. No questions, they could just hang out. (Note that Sidestep wasn't a Ranger, so it is not included in this).

Hollow grounds family, are they alive and well?

No. HG's father died when they were a teenager, their mother a decade or so ago. No surviving siblings either. Right now, their crime family is their family.

Does Ortega ever think about the first meeting in the cafe? Does he ever wonder that he could have never run into Sidestep?

All the time. Probably a few nightmares there.

If Sidestep was able to read Ortega's mind, would it change his perception of Ortega, how different he would be from Ortega Sidestep has conjured in his mind?

Quite different. It can vary depending on the Sidestep, but Ortega has parts they don't show anybody. Chen has seen some of them, Sentinel and Anathema might have spotted others. Sidestep has probably seen parts that neither of the others has. Ortega can wear very different masks depending on the circumstances.

What would be the Rangers' favorite TV shows?

Ortega likes to travel, sports and adventure. They don't really do either of those much anymore, so it's nice to live through others. Not that they watch much television, other than when injured or depressed. Voted most likely to shout "advice" at the screen during sports.

Chen likes nature shows. Lowkey, charming, preferably with British narrators. Or documentaries. He watched a lot of those when out of action. Has most likely watched everything Attenborough narrated.

Daniel is a fan of those reality competitions shows, cooking, fashion, baking, whatever. His guilty pleasure is those reality interaction dramas where people date, get drunk, and makes bad decisions. Has probably watched Bridezillas.

Argent likes drama shows, and she consumes a lot of them. She's quite the genre hopper, but has a sweet spot for horror/supernatural things with personal drama. Or detective stories. Owns all the X-files on DVD.

Did Ortega originally want a different hero name than the one they ended up getting? If so, why?

Ortega was fine with the name; they feel it suits both their powers and their nature. Besides, a lot of the cool lightning names were taken.

I think I remember reading somewhere that Lord Ember's used to go by Ember Fall. Why did he change it? (If he did, I think I'm remembering wrong and mixing that up with Ashfall changing his hero name.)

No, you are right, I think I might have mentioned that in an old AMA. Lord Ember ditched his old name when he got to the position he is in the San Francisco underworld. He wanted something more impressive, especially with Ashfall becoming a full Ranger up in Seattle and gaining more fame. Didn't want any more confusion. And then Ashfall changed it, which was another slap in the face.

During the questions, you answered around Christmas a couple years back, about who The Rangers' favorite hero's were, Argent's response was Ashfall. Ashfall seems pretty close to Emberfall. Are they connected in any way? (Again, if I'm not messing that up. XD)

Lord Ember was truly annoyed that Ashfall had, in his opinion, copied his name back before he changed it. In fact, it is a very one-sided rivalry. Lord Ember cares far too much about what Ashfall does and has at this point become convinced that many completely unrelated acts are, in fact, a slight against him personally. He really loathes Ashfall, who is completely unaware of this fact.

All of FH playlists seem to follow the order of events in books. What about Mortum's playlist? Are the songs just their themes with no specific time frame? Do they represent a time when Mortum just arrived at Los Diablos? Or are they to be taken in the current time since the start of book 1?

Mortum's list is also in order. It starts with them arriving in the US and ends with them being a villain. Approximately. It's an origin story.

It's not such a big deal since both of them are, of course, consenting adults, but how does Mortum feel about their age gap with the Puppet before the reveal? By the time they start flirting, Mortum is in their 40's and Puppet is in their 20's. I know that Sidestep is supposed to be older in mind, but damn, Mortum has some self-confidence to hit on Puppet like this.

Mortum is a little self-conscious about it; they are very aware of the age difference. But it's also a very flattering thing, even if they thought the Puppet might just be a gold digger at the start. Honestly, Mortum never thought the flirting would work; that was just a part of their persona. They have no idea how to properly handle it.

Has Mortum been in any serious relationship since their transition? Or have they been straying from any serious entanglements and had casual flings? Or did they opt out of being close and intimate with people overall?

No serious relationships. The last one they had ended during transition and that left a scar. There have been one or two casual flings, but in general, Mortum's true love has been science.

Will the Rat King get their own body? And, what is their relationship with Psychopathor****

They might, I have the option planned at least. Can't promise for all paths yet. They liked Psychopathor enough, but since he was only psi-sensitive and not a telepath, there was no communication the same way. They don't exactly miss him, but there's no hard feelings.

I read that environmental changes in the womb are what create differences in fingerprints. So my question is, do ReGenes all have the same fingerprint because they all have a controlled environment during decanting? Or is it possible they just have no fingerprints, and if they are all different, is there a reason why?

They do not have the same fingerprints. The conditions are not the same when they are grown; they are varied extensively as part of the process to provoke different reactions to the Boost drugs.

How many handlers are there, and how many Re-Genes is there per one handler?

It varies. I have not decided on a set number of handlers, but it is a specialized role. There are two variants of handlers, field operatives, and research staff. A field operative handler is in charge of a team of ReGenes, usually between one to five individuals, depending on the purpose.

Cuckoos usually work solo, so there a handler works with a single gene.

Infiltration teams (with or without cuckoos) are small, two or three specialized ReGenes run by a handler.

Combat teams are larger; four or five ReGenes used to work together, with the handler as the commander. These handlers are often heavily modded to keep up.

Research staff handlers don't work off-site; they are in charge of training ReGenes, and can, depending on their skill set, have between one and ten ReGenes in their care.

If the RO's could pick anywhere to take a holiday, where would they go?

Ortega: Hawaii

Chen: Macao

Daniel: Paris

Argent: Venice

Mortum: New York

Do any of the ROs have tattoos?

Not that I have decided, this is a headcanon thing. However, Chen did use to have one before he lost his arm. From his army days.

What was Mortum like in college?

Not well-liked. Too intense, bordering on being an obnoxious know-it-all but with the genius to back it up. Probably got along with exactly one teacher and despised the rest. It took a while before they grew into their skin and could start being charming; that was long after college. Sometimes you need a bit of villainy to let the anger out first.

Does spoon ever sleep in Chen's bed?

He's not supposed to, but yes. Often. Since Chen detaches his legs before sleep, there's plenty of room.

What's the ballpark number for how much Step personally has cost Genentech & the special directive.

Oh boy. A LOT. I have no idea of how much the dollar is worth in this world with economic collapse and deflation in the eighties, but probably in the range of a fighter jet or three.

Who designed/made Sidestep's suit? or where did they get it, in general?

Sidestep got the suit through Ortega, it was made by the same company that manufactured the Ranger suits, so it was high quality. As for the design, that is headcanon. It was finalized by a professional designer, but how much input Sidestep had on the process varies. It might have been based on a homemade suit Sidestep had, or on sketches, or without input at all.

Is it common for telepaths to be able to connect with animals' minds? or is Sidestep a rare/unique case?

It is not universal by any means. It would be rare; many telepaths have a natural aversion to things that operates on wavelengths they don't understand. Sidestep is used to that.

Between the five ro's, most to least jealous ranked.

Most to least: Argent, Mortum, Chen, Daniel, Ortega.

Why does Ortega have three names?

Because of a fight between their respective grandmothers on their fathers and their mother's side, they got three names instead of the more common two to keep the family peace. It was simply the easiest way to keep everybody happy, and carry on names that were seen as traditional on their sides of the family. (I stole that backstory from what happened when I was named, and that is the reason why my younger brother has so many names)

If I'm not mistaken, it looks like Ortega's surnames are García Ortega, implying they go by their mother's maiden name. Is this true? And if so, why?

This is indeed true. Ortega was never fond of their father, and when they started out recording daredevil videos with their group of friends, they choose to use the name Ortega as an alias in the videos. They hoped their father would not find out and complain about dragging the family name in the mud. That failed, but the name stuck, and Ortega's been the name they have used ever since.

In the demo for book 2, when they have dinner with Ortega, Sidestep thinks about "that paper in the office, the front page showing everything you feared", what was on that paper exactly?

The headline was something in the vein of "Former Marshal living it up on the town with their new girl/boyfriend." It had pictures of Ortega making out with a pretty man/woman, and the article talked about how Ortega had moved on after resigning and living their best life. Not really the truth, but it helped make Sidestep think that everyone had moved on and forgotten about them.

If Re-Genes all have diff blood types, are they reg blood types humans have, or would they have even more diff types?

They are regular blood types, but the proportions might vary from the general norm, just like in other isolated populations.

Maybe kind of a weird question, but what types of weather do the rangers + Mortum like? Are they all warm and sunny types, or do any of them prefer cold and dreary and rainy, or maybe snowy, or what?

Ortega loves snow and tries to take the time to get to the mountains for some skiing now and then. It's harder lately without Sentinel around for a quick lift. Argent likes warm weather, but overcast. Full sun makes her too shiny. Daniel loves the sun; the California weather is so much nicer than Boston. Chen prefers cooler climates, but this is where he lives now. He's fond of rain. Mortum likes heat; they get cold easily.

How well does Ortega think they actually know Sidestep?

Depends. Some days they are sure they have them pegged. Other days they are a complete mystery. I think it's safe to say that Ortega THINKS they know Sidestep better than they actually do.

What did each Ranger think when they first saw Sidestep at the Rangers headquarters in Rebirth?

Argent: Wow. This is Sidestep? What a letdown. Daniel: I can't believe it! They don't look anything like in the movies. Chen: Oh no. This complicates things. Ortega: Oh boy, they actually can see Sidestep. What a relief.

How do Re-genes minds feel like for Sidestep? Do they feel different from humans?

Less variation. More order. Less circular, if that makes sense. Easier to read and predict.

What was Nocturne like before she reinvented herself? Did she leave any people behind when she started her new life?

Nocturne was an introvert and a shut-in due to her severe agoraphobia; she preferred to not meet people in person if she could help it. She worked for IRS and did most of her work online, and while she was very good at it, she didn't have any close friends or family that she cared about.

How does Shroud feel about Re-genes?

She has no real feelings about them; she tries to avoid them if she can.

How did the Special Directive Re-gene team in Rebirth view each other? Tools working in the same unit or something more?

Tools in the same unit would be the best description. Close bonds are not encouraged.

Before HG had Nocturne and Jake to take care of the troublemakers, how did HG deal with meetings that turned violent? Or did their meetings always end well?

Oh, their meetings generally ended well, but HG had other enforcers before Jake. In fact, Deadeye used to have a similar bodyguard position before Jake got promoted.

Were Lord Ember and Lady Argent enemies/nemesis, or is there something more to their history? Does he know Lady Argent's weakness?

They were enemies and might even be considered nemesis. Of course, there's also more to that story, but not all truths will be revealed yet. And yes, he knows Lady Argent's weakness.

How do each Ranger and Dr. Mortum like to spend their birthday? Do any of them do anything special or prefer not to make a big deal out of it?

Ortega always throws a party, it used to be at expensive clubs with lots of people, they are smaller affairs these days. They are also the one that makes sure Chen gets a birthday party, and Daniel (neither of them wants to make a big thing out of it). Argent likes smaller celebrations but always makes sure there is cake. Mortum likes to throw a party too but used to be more into it in the past. Not as fun when you get older.

Why did Hollow Ground choose that name as their villain name?

It is an allusion to their earthquake powers, but mostly they just like the sound of it. Sounds vaguely sinister, a play on Hallowed Ground. (Honestly, I don't even know where the name came from. It was there at the start and I never questioned it).

Besides the money, did any of the mob boss henchmen have any other reasons for being willing to sign up with the new villain whose plan is to against the mysterious kingpin of LD?

Nope. Sidestep made very sure to get people who didn't have any other, complicating goals when they recruited them.

What do Jake, Nocturne, and Hollow Ground like to do in their free time?

Jake likes to go clubbing, play pool and generally be around people. He's a social butterfly. Nocturne likes to read and spend time on her own. HG likes to laze around, sleep or work on their aquariums.

Does Rat King have any opinion on Rangers and Dr. Mortum?

Not any solid ones on their own yet; they are mirroring what Sidestep feels right now.

Are the powers from Hero drug completely random, or is there something specific that affects what kind of powers a person gets?

They are not completely random. Current theories favored are that they are reflected on very strong feelings in the boost around the moment of change, but the exact nature varies. Someone angry might get strong, or fire powers, someone scared might get armor, or go invisible and things like that. The Farm works on trying to perfect what stimulus gives what reaction.

It has been mentioned throughout the story that Mortum could have potentially made a better suit if Sidestep was willing to wait and pay more. If Sidestep did take the approach of time and money being no issue, what would the suit look like? Especially in comparison to what Sidestep can have now?

It would most likely have included all the options available, and possibly some sort of distance weapon. The powercore would be the key there.

In book 1 and 2, Sidestep can potentially lay a beatdown to Argent and Jake respectively. How many times has this happened to them after they truly grew into their abilities? Also how did they feel about that possible situation?(To be clear, I'm asking about the strength beatdown for Jake and either of the physicals for Argent)

Not often, they are both powerful fighters. Maybe once, or twice, not more. What Sidestep did left marks on them, and not just physical ones. They are not used to losing like that.

Sidestep can have a different legacy as a hero depending on their actions, with the acknowledged being a known hero with thirty points. However Sidesteps could potentially get more points than that. What would a hypothetical Sidestep with "max hero points" have been known as in the past?

I don't differentiate between max points, and enough to be a hero. That's the top, they wouldn't allow enough press to get close to get more famous than that.

Will there be any possible polyam options for Mortum, or are they too far removed from the other LIs?

Yes, I do have ones planned for book three, the ones I know are with Ortega or Argent, the rest we'll see.

I recently replayed Rebirth, and when you're first going into the new Rangers HQ and you're nervous, Ortega jokingly promises they won't bite. You respond "I'll hold you to that promise." Argent bit me. Will I be able to jokingly hold Ortega to their promise?

Oh good spot! I'll have a look, that would be a fun addition.

I totally understand if this would be impossible but is the MC ever going to be able to go to the hero side again and stop being a villain (not necessarily become a hero again but be on the good side if that makes sense).

Depends on your definition of what a villain is, it might not be as simple as right or wrong. There will definitely be options to move closer to that side at the very least.

[Time for a new QnA!](#)

[Jan 25, 2021](#)

Getting to be that time of the month again, please ask whatever questions you want in this thread! I've already got some from discord and elsewhere, but the more the merrier.

[Mitchell's Guide to Villains entry 145: Dr. Mortum](#)

[Jan 2, 2021](#)

Mitchell's Guide to Villains entry 145.

Subject: Dr. Mortum

Civilian identity: Merle/Mirlene Abelard. [redacted].

Birthdate: 26th November 1980

Birthplace: Haiti. Naturalized American citizen.

Height: 5'7" 170cm

Weight: 125lb/57kg

Classification: Type E mod.

Known enhancements: Prefers using external tools and weapons, internal armor interface inferred.

Status: Retired, unaffiliated, but subservient.

Notes: Redacted other identities, no use making enemies. Confirmation of Type E mods received but not documented. For equipment used, see cross-reference to Mitchell Item File 122 on the Mortum Armor (non-flight capable compact body armor, believed destroyed?) as well as the MFI131 Disintregun

(recently stolen). For verified items built, see entries MIF 547, MIF128, MIF148, and MIF341, as well as section 24 for possible indexation.

Transcript of Evaluation Interview, original destroyed as always.

Location: Heaven's Gate Sky-bar, 10th December 2012.

[Soft Jazz playing in the background. Dr. Mortum and Hollow Ground present, private lounge.]

Dr. Mortum: I have to admit I never expected to be invited here.

Hollow Ground: Why not? Someone with your talents...

Dr. Mortum: Don't flatter me; I know exactly what I am. And what you are.

Hollow Ground: So what am I then?

Dr. Mortum: The Kingpin of Los Diablos, if this city has such a thing. Someone who never meets people in person. I've heard the rumors, people walk in here, and then they disappear. Or starts working for you. And I don't work for people. Not anymore.

Hollow Ground: Not all rumors are correct; the occasional fall from up here has been people that were working against me, nothing more. Rest assured, I have nothing against you being a free agent, as long as we make a few ground rules.

Dr. Mortum: Ah, here comes the threats.

Hollow Ground: I don't think I need threats with you, Doctor. You're smart enough to understand what is going on here.

Dr. Mortum: Again with the flattery.

Hollow Ground: All I am asking for is a conversation. Our interests might align quite nicely.

Dr. Mortum: A conversation? Nothing more?

Hollow Ground: You have my word. And, if you don't trust a promise and a handshake, consider my side of this. If we can find common ground, I might end up being one of your best customers,

Dr. Mortum: Fine. I can trust in self-interest if nothing else. I'll shake to that.

Hollow Ground: I thought you might. All I am asking for is a conversation.

Dr. Mortum: I don't usually talk to people.

Hollow Ground: You were quite talkative when you were an active villain.

Dr. Mortum: That was bluster, nothing more. I guess it feels liberating to be larger than life for once. It is easier to be looked at through a mask.

Hollow Ground: Trust me, I know what you are talking about.

Dr. Mortum: Really? Is there some secret life of yours I should know about? Do you dress up in armor on the weekends fighting heroes?

Hollow Ground: Not exactly. But this is as much theatrics as your armor ever was.

Dr. Mortum: I guessed as much. Nobody is as flamboyant as this out of purely personal taste.

Hollow Ground: Why did you give it up? If being a villain gave you that much freedom?

Dr. Mortum: A dragonfly can't stay in its cocoon forever. My transformation was done; I don't need to hide anymore.

Hollow Ground: And Vitruvian's death had nothing to do with it?

Dr. Mortum: We had parted ways before his ill-timed accident. And, I must admit, I never liked him.

Hollow Ground: From what I have heard, he was not a likable man.

Dr. Mortum: But a brilliant one.

Hollow Ground: I am surprised to hear you admit that, considering he took credit for several of your inventions.

Dr. Mortum: How did you hear about that?

Hollow Ground: I've got my sources. Looks like they were right.

Dr. Mortum: I am a scientist and a realist. This is how it works in academia. I am used to senior staff taking credit for things they haven't created. They are the ones procuring the funding; without their reputation, the project would never have existed. It is understood that once you have reached their position, you can reap the benefits. All you need is patience.

Hollow Ground: Sounds like the criminal world.

Dr. Mortum: Really? I wouldn't know.

Hollow Ground: That is true; you did enter the scene with a splash—no working yourself up.

Dr. Mortum: My one failing as a scientist. I lack patience. As do you, I suspect.

Hollow Ground: What makes you say that?

Dr. Mortum: What little I could glean from your records tells me you rose to power fast, at a young age.

Hollow Ground: Did you research me, Doctor?

Dr. Mortum: Of course, I did. I am a scientist; I am not about to enter the lion's den unprepared.

Hollow Ground: Apparently, you did not find enough for it to be a deal-breaker.

Dr. Mortum: I like this town. If I want to work here, I need to deal with you somehow.

Hollow Ground: Calm down, Doctor, no need to worry. I meant what I said. All I want to do is talk—no need for more extreme measures.

Dr. Mortum: What are you implying?

Hollow Ground: Vitruvian's death wasn't an accident, was it?

Dr. Mortum: If he had been more careful, he would still be alive. But he always was too sure of himself.

Hollow Ground: That goes for most villains.

Dr. Mortum: And what about you?

Hollow Ground: Me? I am careful, but sometimes you need to take risks like meeting you in person.

Dr. Mortum: Me? Am I a risk?

Hollow Ground: Of course you are. Even with the security check, there's no guarantee you're not armed. Someone with your reputation is not to be taken lightly, and as you said, you did your research,

Dr. Mortum: That flattery I will accept. But, as you said, this is a conversation, no need for things to turn violent. It would be mutually assured destruction in the best of cases.

Hollow Ground: I'm glad you're reasonable.

Dr. Mortum: I wouldn't have got this far otherwise.

Hollow Ground: True, you are a long way from Port-au-Prince.

Dr. Mortum: How did you—? Never mind, I don't want to know.

Hollow Ground: You do have a legitimate degree, Doctor, and once we adjusted for your recent changes in appearance, it was easy enough to find out your real name.

Dr. Mortum: It was never my real name.

Hollow Ground: Calm down; I understand the need to reinvent yourself.

Dr. Mortum: You don't. You think my deadname ever mattered to me? Or that it even was what my mother named me?

Hollow Ground: I stand corrected. Those early parts are somewhat devoid of details.

Dr. Mortum: It's Haiti. I wasn't born to wealth, just to genius. My mother was smart enough to want what was best for me and gave me up to a family in the city so I could get an education. Help me realize my potential. Of a sort.

Hollow Ground: Is that true or just what you tell yourself?

Dr. Mortum: I have very few memories of her, and I am not the sentimental type. No matter her reasons, it gave me opportunities, and once I left, I never looked back.

Hollow Ground: Do you really mean that?

Dr. Mortum: Is that so hard to understand?

Hollow Ground: I guess I am the sentimental type. Perhaps more than is wise, or so people tell me.

Dr. Mortum: An unusual sentiment for a crimelord.

Hollow Ground: Is it? You can't run an organization and expect people to obey you out of fear. Not if you want to last.

Dr. Mortum: A rat backed into a corner will bite.

Hollow Ground: Exactly. I hope you understand my approach a bit better now.

Dr. Mortum: What I don't understand is why I am sharing these things with you.

Hollow Ground: Give and take. We're just having a conversation; none of this information will leave this room.

Dr. Mortum: You are not what I expected.

Hollow Ground: Likewise, Doctor. You were far more bombastic when you were in your armor. Do you ever miss it?

Dr. Mortum: Sometimes. But I was never good at punching things out, and after Owl skewered me, it felt... unsafe.

Hollow Ground: Ah yes, she is a feisty one—more brains than you'd think for a brawler.

Dr. Mortum: I will admit that I underestimated her. I didn't think her sword would be able to penetrate my armor. Still not entirely sure how she...

Hollow Ground: Really?

Dr. Mortum: I mean, I have my theories, but... wait, do you know?

Hollow Ground: I do. See, this is what our relationship can be. Sharing information over a drink.

Dr. Mortum: I don't need to know that badly. Hopefully, I will never see her again, at least if she doesn't pick up a pair of modded legs somewhere and comes back on active duty.

Hollow Ground: I doubt it; my sources have her as a lush now. But regardless, are you sure you don't need to know?

Dr. Mortum: Fine, I am curious. But not enough to go into debt.

Hollow Ground: There are no debts here, nor a hidden agenda. We're talking, finding common ground. I get it.

Dr. Mortum: So, what's the trick? It's not heat, I was pondering vibrations.

Hollow Ground: You're not wrong. It's an adaption of Geistcarver's glaive.

Dr. Mortum: In a sword? But the power... aah, of course. Creative. Inert until the exact moment needed, then nobody will be prepared. I thought her scabbard looked needlessly complex. That has to be the charger. No wonder I wasn't able to analyze it mid-battle.

Hollow Ground: Subterfuge. Something you understand as well.

Dr. Mortum: Do I pass muster? I'm not sure what you are looking for, and I will admit that's making me nervous.

Hollow Ground: No need to be. I've made my decision, and I do think we can work together.

Dr. Mortum: Surely there are rules.

Hollow Ground: Of course. Don't work with Ember or his associates. Don't say no to jobs from me.

Dr. Mortum: I assume you will pay full price?

Hollow Ground: Of course, I am generous to the people I work with. Money is no object; I just want priority access.

Dr. Mortum: As long as you don't abuse that privilege. I have my own research; I didn't choose this life to be an assistant once more.

Hollow Ground: I won't waste your time. Shake on it?

Dr. Mortum: Fine. I'd rather be on your side than your enemy.

Hollow Ground: I was hoping you'd come to that conclusion. Oh, and one final thing?

Dr. Mortum: Yes?

Hollow Ground: Please, forget my face.

[Transcript Ended]

[Cursed Facts](#)

[Jan 2, 2021](#)

Had some fun in the Discord on New Year's Eve, and here are some cursed facts I shared:

Ortega would wear white to someone's wedding if they didn't like the bride.

There was a long-running betting pool in the Ranger's staff about who Ortega would date next until they found out and started gaming the system with the help of spies.

Argent regularly steals people's food. She doesn't blame anyone else, she just does it.

Daniel has been planning to make portraits for everyone of the Rangers as a gift for like two christmases running but keeps chickening out.

Chen has a hidden snack stash. Yes it is bad for him. Sometimes he doesn't care.

Mortum would love to run a villain gossip column, but they have a sense of self-preservation

Mortum has also built and exploded five roombas. They don't survive the lab long.

Daniel has tried growing facial hair. Twice.

Daniel secretly loved hitchhiking from Boston to Los Diablos, and would love to just spend time on the road.

Argent has had a lot of offers recording music, she's a good singer but freezes up in front of people. Ortega is secretly jealous of that.

Come to think of it, Ortega has probably recorded a cursed Rangers christmas album in the past.

Ortega is pretty good at playing guitar, but only an average singer. Very good live because of charisma, not so good on recordings.

Chen wouldn't sing. It's unknown if he's any good.

Danny however, can't sing. Doesn't stop him from karaoke though, it's all in good fun.

Chen was annoyed that the feet with his new legs were smaller than his own.

Ortega and Anathema used to play a lot of pool. Sentinel didn't get to play, he cheated.

One might think Ortega would be the one most likely to cheat at games and such, but nope, that was Sentinel. Ortega loves a honest challenge. Sentinel always thought that was very stupid of them.

Sunstream was always the shy one, she never really settled into life as a Ranger.

Anathema has melted at least five toilets. Don't ask.

Dr. Mortum could probably beat Ortega in a car race. Probably.

Ortega would never admit to not being 20 anymore when it comes to physical prowess.

Boris and Rosie both exist, and knows each other. It's just up to you who you recruit.

If not recruited, Rosie is working part time as a bouncer at Joes, part time taking merc work. Bo keeps busy as a getaway driver/coureer.

Bo has an ex-wife he's still having a torch for.

Sentinel almost didn't ask his future wife out because he was convinced that she was flirting with Ortega.

Chen has dreamt that he drunkenly confessed to an equally drunk Ricardo and spent like a week trying to find out if that happened or not.

Sidestep is one of the few people that has seen Ortega truly scared.

Ortega really doesn't like spiders. Not that they'd admit it.

Argent's physical therapist is also her friend, and they often watch movies together.

The Rat King would love having wings. They're envious of Herald.

Jake is a bit superstitious and reads his horoscope.

Jake called Nocturne "Nocky" once. Never again.

Psychopathor's real name is Teddy. And he's married to the woman in charge of the Los Diablos aquarium no less (she's also secretly a bio-terrorist allied with the laser dolphins)

Hollow Ground loves aquariums and aquascaping. Nocturne thinks it's the most ridiculous hobby. You eat fish. Their arguments tends to be either about fish or bookkeeping.

[December Spoiler QnA](#)

[Jan 2, 2021](#)

In the Ortega apartment scene, step mentions seeing a newspaper with a headline that effected them a lot. What was that headline?

If you are talking about the newspaper they spotted back at the farm, the headline was something like "Former Marshal living it up on the town with their new girl/boyfriend." It had pictures of Ortega making out with a pretty man/woman and the article talked about how Ortega had moved on after resigning, and living their best life. A VERY curated lie/version of the truth, all meant to make Sidestep think that everyone had moved on and forgotten about them.

If mob boss Sidestep remained in their own body after crash, is it maybe possible to reveal in the future to their henchmen their identity as Re-gene/former hero?

Yes, there will be a lot of options for various reveals in book three.

Is Dr. Mortum aware Sidestep shares slight resemblance with Hollow Ground?

No, Mortum doesn't have a clue.

Is Sidestep secretly a human?

Nope, but Ortega might not agree with that assessment.

Did you get some of your inspiration of sidestep being a tool? From genetically altered plants where big corporations copyright genes.

Not gonna lie, Monsanto's assholery has influenced a lot of things going on at the Farm. So yes, yes I did.

If the puppet managed to convince Ortega that they are not a criminal, what does Ortega think of this?

Wouldn't be the first time someone got dragged into things they weren't a part of. Ortega is aware that sometimes their hunches are wrong, and they might be reluctant to change their mind, but they will. It's a messy situation, and they don't know exactly what's going on yet. Only that something clearly is.

Disregarding any other facts of the matter, how would Ortega feel if they found out that Sidestep introduced their foot to Hollow Ground's face?

That calls for a round of drinks. Too bad there were no pictures.

How does mortum know sidesteps real identity (at least their chosen name) despite that not being non rangers knowledge? /also spoilery so fully understand ignoring this one.

Dr. Mortum has contacts, and not all Rangers knows how to keep their mouths shut around people they trust. You might find out in book three (or put the pieces of the puzzle together in book two).

Feel free to ignore if too spoilery, but during the HG meeting, what was going through HG's mind when they allowed Sidestep to leave unharmed if Sidestep saw the aquarium memory?

Yeeeah that one is too spoilery, but they were as confused and shaken as Sidestep, probably more.

Is the story Hollow Ground can tell Sidestep how they chose their villain name true or a false?

So much bullshit.

What kind of relationship do the mob boss henchmen have with each other?

Pelayo and Ward used to work together, and are ex-friends with benefits, but there's still a spark there and things might happen. Nehal is everyone's adopted little sister. ZaZa is the odd man out so far, but he's getting better. So far they like each other (and Bo/Rosie), and Sidestep did take that into consideration when putting together their team.

[December QnA](#)

[Jan 2, 2021](#)

How do the Rangers + Mortum go about their holiday shopping?

Mortum is the most prepared one, it's been a year long project, probably mostly done before December begins.

Argent has surprisingly personal gifts, but how she figures it out, nobody knows. Gets them all in one, well-planned spree.

Ortega is not above abusing the contacts of their personal shopper. Always gives out way too expensive gifts.

Herald has that last panic shopping spree, always making sure to keep the receipt if people don't like it.

Steel vainly tries to stop everyone giving him gifts, but will accept them for Spoon. Not above giving away gift cards.

Is there an equivalent to numbers that psy sensitive people can take to lessen Their powers rather except for dampeners?

Yes, it's called Talodine, and various variants thereof.

Does Ortega need to be touching something to conduct electricity, or is it more of an area effect?

Touching. However, if they are suited up, they have access to equipment to help them use their powers at a distance, not unlike what a taser does. Shoot small metal projectile with a conductive cord. Or, like Sidestep used to say, low-budget lightning. Ortega was always quick to point out that their budget was very high.

How many siblings does Chen have (himself excluded)?

Four. Three sisters, one brother. All younger.

Do any of the rangers have drinks named after them?

Quite a few of them. Think the most widespread is 'the Charge', but I know too little about booze to make up recipes.

Theoretically what would happen if Ortega anyone with mods in that vein was hit by something like a taser?

No effect. Mods like that tends to include failsafes against overloads that would work against tasers as well. For Ortega, it might also means a quick topping up, they have limited ability to absorb current.

Is it super dangerous for telepaths to touch minds, or was heartbreak special with how they effected step?

Heartbreak was special. It's not inherently dangerous for telepaths to touch minds, but the potential for things going wrong is bigger. Most of the time it won't be an issue smoking at the gas station, but the signs are there for a reasons. Huge consequences.

What would be the New Years Resolution that the Ranger and our favorite scientist would make, and would they follow through with it?

Mortum doesn't give new years resolutions often, but they would 100% follow through on them.

Ortega does a lot of the classics, like drinking less, or start reading more, and always fails come February.

Argent makes snarky ones that can't fail, like "keep being perfect".

Steel always makes a promise trying to hold Ortega to their promise, and gives up around February.

Herald honestly tries to better himself with making a promise like "will do a drawing every week", but bites off too much and realizes he doesn't have the time to follow through sometime late spring.

Do re-gene tattoos get done by an individual tattooer or a machine? Are they all the same, or specific to each re-gene (except for the barcode)? Are they done before or after the re-gene is decanted?

The tattoos are done by an individual, and each are unique and specific to the Re-Gene in question. They are done after they are decanted and their powers have been classified, since some of the designs and color choices are affected by that.

What kind of jurisdiction do corporate sponsored heroes have? Do they operate more as fancy private security for said corporations' interests, or do they have some kind of actual legal/policing authority?

The Free West Territories have a different approach to law enforcement than the US. The actual jurisdiction varies. On one end, some are nothing more than fancy private security/bodyguards for corporate interest, but you can buy much wider licenses by investing in the City Council system.

In essence, a company can buy a license to operate as a law-enforcing entity. The LDPD and the Guardians can be seen as a communal effort from the ruling companies to pool their risks and resources. Some companies buy licenses for their heroes/teams, and have lucrative deals with the private prisons to make sure they have access to cheap labor. The legal system, while in theory similar to the US one, puts a lot more focus on monetary assets, and there is no jury system. Money talks, in more ways than one.

It's not corruption if the law is on your side.

When it comes to the villain armor designs Sidestep can have, did Dr. Mortum have any favorite design among them?

I think Mortum would be most fond of the mysterious armor with a cape, there's a certain flare that that they would be proud of.

At the Farm how are Re-genes taught to view each other?

Like tools in the same set, working together but not forming close bonds. It's not always successful.

Do fighter/military Re-genes already have their blue-gray skin when they are decanted or is that something that comes afterward?

That is something that is added in the second round of processing, once they have had their powers classified and their tattoos added. It's a gradual shift, building up over time.

When is it decided whether Re-gene will be tasked for infiltration or fighting? Is it decided before they are decanted or after they know what kind of powers the Re-gene has?

After decanting and the initial round of power assessment.

What's every RO's favourite holiday classic?

I know too little about holiday classics to say that, we have our own Swedish variants so I have no clue.

How many vehicles has Ortega wrecked over the years?

Oh shit. Quite a few. Maybe between ten and thirty?

Assuming Ortega wasn't dating a same gender/nb step in the past, are they out to anyone?

Yes. At this point Owl knows pretty much all their darkest secrets.

What's Ortega's favorite meal that tía Elena makes?

Chicken Mole.

What's Danny's preferred drawing medium?

Pencils and charcoal, he likes the simplicity of it, he doesn't freeze up and double-check himself like with acrylics. He would love to get better at watercolors, probably one of his many new years resolutions.

This might be kind of random, but do you have any headcanon voices (or I suppose canon in this case) for the characters?

I am so bad at headcanon anything, so sadly I don't.

Would you mind explaining some of the energy aspects of the armor. Like how long can it be used, how is it recharged, how well it functions with no power. Stuff like that.

It varies slightly depending on the build, but here are some general facts:

The armor can be recharged off the grid, plugging it in and leaving it overnight will get it back into shape. There are options for fast-charging, and every base has one of those hookups. If done there, it takes about an hour from completely empty to full.

The armor will work and be mobile with no power, but the Armored variant will be harder to move in. The helmet has to be opened, since the air circulation and the HUD will be down. This doesn't affect/hurt the Rat King.

If the armor is running on low power, the air filter, HUD and general movement aids will work, but the special effects won't. No extra strength, no cooled telepathic coils, no jump-jets and the extra armor will still make it clumsier than normal. It can run on low power for around a week, it's not a draining setting.

Normal power output enables all outputs and maximum fighting capacity. Depending on how recklessly it's used, it will last for two or three fights, or a day or two of full activity. I have not tracked energy expenditure yet since there has been no reason to, but if you end up in a situation where you can't slink away to reload it might become an issue.

What do Rangers and Dr. Mortum like to do on their free time?

Mortum laughs at the concept of free time, but working on their car/driving it might be the closest thing they have to a hobby.

Ortega spends a lot of time on the streets, riding their bike, going to parties/clubs and hanging out with people. Less partying than they used to, which might be a sign of something. Maybe even growth.

Argent likes to watch movies. She also bakes.

Herald likes to explore the city and its surroundings, mostly from the air, but he's not above hiking (or at least he used to, before his leg got messed up). He loves the hills and the forests.

Steel likes spending time with Spoon, and talking to people who are not Rangers, and preferably don't know/care that he's the Marshal.

Among Rangers and Dr. Mortum which of them are more focused on fixing the mistakes of the past and which of them are more focused on the present possibilities?

Mortum and Steel are focused on the present. Argent is focused solely on the future. Ortega and Herald are still dragging too much past baggage to be truly free.

Does Dr. Mortum have any particular thoughts or opinions on any of the Rangers?

Mortum has a scientific interest in Ortega, and is quite fond of the ex-Marshal. They never fought, but Charge is an easy hero to be enamored of, even as a villain.

They have no specific views on Herald other than that he's a hero, sure. Steel is of professional interest, but military men tends to be boring, and that kind of mods are just crude. Argent is the enigma, Mortum has some theories, but they all seem very implausible. Would be a nice test subject if they ever had time.

Did Hollow Ground ever arrange a meeting with Psychopathor or Catastrofiend when they became the kingpin?

Of course. It went well with Psychopathor, and was a very expensive one with the Catastrofiend. Still, HG could outbid mostly everyone for their services, so...

Did Sidestep have the power to possess people before the heartbreak incident?

Nope. Wasn't even on their radar.

Not story related, but what happens to the dashingdon game once you submit the final draft to COG? I may or may not be writing my thesis on this series and I'd like to know if/when Retribution is going to disappear on me 😊

It will go down eventually, but I am not sure when. But, rest assured that we can arrange for you to have access for your thesis, so nothing to worry about there.

Do you listen to music while you're writing and if so, what?

Almost always (right now it's Motörhead). I am a metalhead, so it's usually in the thrash-death area, but sometimes I go softer. Beethoven is my goto when I can't have lyrics, and I had a period when I was super into vietnam-era rock. Going to link some spotify playlists here. Most are curated for the order you need to play them in, no randoms:

[New Year's Eve, 2016](#)

[Dec 31, 2020](#)

Funny how the skies look. Dark. Overcast. Spattered with fire.

Good fire. Fireworks. Celebrations.

Your laugh hurts, but your ribs are better. Can take full breaths now without choking down a cry. Never thought you'd miss the pain-gate, but here you are. No longer numb.

Pain is a bit like fireworks. Loud and bright, commanding attention, leaving no room for anything else. And then, smoldering ashes, sticks falling from the skies, the afterimage still glowing on your retina.

So many people get maimed by fireworks every year, and yet people keep shooting them. Willful ignorance. Something bright and cheerful to help them ignore the world.

You can't do that anymore. No longer numb. No longer lost.

Or maybe more lost than ever.

Los Diablos never looked prettier than at night. More people sleeping. Calmer. Fewer thoughts. Are you really going back down there? Putting yourself through what you're going to feel? What you're going to remember?

Nothing. You lean against the roof of your stolen car, watching the fireworks below. You are going to feel nothing. You are going to remember nothing. It's a mantra you keep repeating, warding off the shadows, narrowing your focus to a pinprick.

Having a mission is a bit like drowning. Peripheral vision lost, everything unimportant forgotten, all in the service of one, single goal.

Can you do it?

The lights are pretty, but the background rattle still sounds like war. Gunfire. How many people are terrified down there? Flinching at every blast. Remembering things they'd rather not. You know the dogs hate it. You used to think it was magical.

You used to be an idiot.

You don't think you are one now.

If you were, you would be running the other way. Pretend you can hide. Pretend you can change. But you know the truth now. You've made your decision. For better or worse.

Probably worse.

You take a sip of the bottle, resting on the roof of the car. Lukewarm. Not champagne. Chocolate instead of lobster. You rub your forehead as you light up another cigarette. You ate lobster once. At New Years'. Five years ago? Four? Was it even you?

It feels fake, like a photograph left in the rain. Trying to work out the cutlery. Ortega laughing, trying to give hints. You never got them, but you were good at pretending.

Can't do that anymore. Can't be that anymore. Can't think about the past without your head hurting. Nothing fits together, not after...

Not Heartbreak. You suck down smoke as if it could heal your ribs. After. They. They. They.

They finally took you down there. To the Core.

Oh, those stupid, blind idiots, they really have no idea. None at all, like those idiots down there playing with fire heedless of what fingers will be lost by morning. Need to forget. Can't remember.

Don't think about it. Don't. Memories are dangerous and thoughts are poison. Smoke the cigarette. Focus on the pain. Focus on the anger. Bury yourself, breathe dirt, never mind the cough.

You're supposed to be dead, but you will live. Spite is stronger than desperation. You are stronger than your desperation. Strong enough to reinvent yourself. Strong enough to cut away and bury, your brain is as malleable as anybody else's, and it's your hand that holds the knife now.

Cut, you cowardly bastard, don't hesitate. Nothing gets better if you do. Nothing changes unless you force it to.

2017. The sky explodes in sponsored fireworks. A distraction. A celebration.

The cigarette is a smaller light in the darkness. You focus on that. Soon it will be short enough to burn your fingers. It lasted longer than the year, but when it's gone, so will this moment.

A new beginning. Shed the past. Reinvent yourself. Forget what's not needed. Forget what would destroy you.

Focus on the light. On the smoke. On the future.

On your goal.

You take another pull, listening to the distant war of the city below—a distance you need. A distance you will steal. Don't let it touch you. Slide it off like distant thunder. Only the lightning hurts; the rest is a distraction.

You can't afford that now. Distractions or lightning.

(now)

You swear loudly as the cigarette burns your fingers, too lost in thought to notice. Rubbing them together, you drain the last of the bottle. In an hour or two, Los Diablos will have quieted down.

Time to go to the only place you've ever called home.

You've got work to do.

[QnA reminder!](#)

[Dec 28, 2020](#)

The lore poll has narrowly decided that you will get to learn more about Dr. Mortum, so look forward to that in a day or so. Also, I have a bunch of questions from discord and dms, but please feel free to add any questions you want answered to this post!

Hope the holidays have treated you nicely, it's a stressful time.

<https://dashingdon.com/play/malin/fhr21bugfixed/mygame/>

[Mini update!](#)

[Dec 24, 2020](#)

God Jul and happy holidays everybody!

While I have not finished updating Chapter 22 yet, I have made many bugfixes and small updates to the game, as well as adding the first steps of the more aspec/demi sides of the romances. Haven't adjusted the puppet romance scenes yet, but I will get around to it later. [Old saves won't work, there's new variables here.](#)

Just wanted to give you a bit of a distraction, this can be a stressful time of the year, please try to be kind to yourselves, especially this year.

The real update will hopefully be on track for new years!

[**Saint Valentine's Game Jam starts now!**](#)

[Welcome ladies, gentlemen 'n gentlepeople! it 's time ta dance 'n roar with da new swin'. Maybe 'ave some cocktails in da nearby drum. Find love, scandal or take on some shells ta yer pump in a bloody valentine. Yes, the theme is the 1920s style and flair.](#)

<https://forum.choiceofgames.com/t/saint-valentines-game-jam-starts-now/90881>

[I had a small interview about game writing](#)

[Dec 20, 2020](#)

There's some writing advice and other stuff that might be of interest to people.

The link can be found above, together with other interviews from more creators. Mine is in post no. 16 in case you get lost.

[New Lore poll!](#)

[Dec 5, 2020](#)

So, with the first three done, who do you want to know about next? Let me know.

Lady Argent

48%

Dr. Mortum

52%

Poll ended Dec 30, 2020 · 191 votes total

[Surveillance Records Transcript - Daniel Sullivan](#)

[Dec 5, 2020](#)

Subject: Daniel Sullivan

Registration ID: Herald

Defunct RID entries: Kestrel, Kinetik

Birthdate: 11th July 1996

Blood type: O+

Height: 5'9" 175cm

Weight: 150lb/68kg

Classification: Class Beta boost.

Power: Non-assisted flight, full aerial capabilities. Maximum speed; 200 mph (320 km/h). Maximum lifting weight; 38 000 lbs (17200 kg) under optimum (not reliably repeatable) circumstances. Limited resistance to physical damage.

Transcript of a private conversation - prospect Daniel Sullivan

27th February 2018, Rooftop in Bunker Hill, Los Diablos.

Other party: Luis Adames y Pasamonte, RID Sentinel.

Procured from KNTK Ltd. Internal suit recording.

Adames: So you finally did it, kid. Or should I call you Kinetik?

[Kinetik removes his helmet, sits down next to Sentinel on the rooftop]

Sullivan: Please don't. Daniel is still fine, Luis. Or kid, if you must. Though I'm almost 22...

Adames: Still self-conscious about it?

Sullivan: What? My age or being Kinetik?

Adames: Being Kinetik, you'll always be a kid to me.

Sullivan: Thanks a lot. But I guess I am. It's hard not to be with the ads running. I'm named for a car, Luis; being a corporate hero is not exactly how I pictured it.

Adames: You're doing better than the last Kinetik, though the helmet doesn't really suit you.

Sullivan: I think it's because they want to evoke the lines of the car.

Adames: And because whoever is in the suit is replaceable.

Sullivan: Yeah, that too. And since you asked, I did apply. If the Rangers will have me. I wouldn't have tried if you hadn't been encouraging me. Thank you for that.

Adames: Well, you pulling off that stunt with the bus convinced me you were ready for the big leagues. You're wasted in corporate.

Sullivan: I couldn't just let them die.

Adames: I know. It was just surprising. I had no idea you could lift that much.

Sullivan: Honestly? Me neither. Luckily I didn't stop to think. Haven't been able to since; I think I sprained something.

[Sentinel hands Kinetik a bottle. Likely soda.]

Adames: That's how we boosts work. Can't know until we try. You've got good instincts, kid.

Sullivan: Do you really think I have a shot?

Adames: Yeah. And not just because we've been shorthanded since Heartbreak. You're exactly what we need right now.

Sullivan: Thank you?

Adames: As long as you pass the vetting process and nothing spooks security.

Sullivan: Hopefully, that won't be an issue. I don't think I've done anything illegal. My family is reputable.

Adames: It's not just that. The psychological profiling is the hardest part. Which is why I asked you to come here.

Sullivan: Oh.

Adames: Disappointed that I had an ulterior motive?

Sullivan: No, just a little confused.

Adames: You're a boost.

Sullivan: Yes?

Adames: Nobody becomes a boost without some heavy baggage in their past.

Sullivan: Are you suggesting I will have to bring that up?

Adames: They'll ask. Trust me, they had dug up shit about me I had spent a long time repressing.

Sullivan: But you passed.

Adames: Yeah. But that was back when the team was first founded. They were more interested in power than stability. Think they changed their mind when people started cracking under pressure.

Sullivan: I won't crack.

Adames: Not in a fight, you've proven that enough, but you still freeze up every time you talk about your family.

Sullivan: I told you about my brother.

Adames: And you nearly had a breakdown. Can't afford one in there.

Sullivan: It's hard.

Adames: They're going to ask. You should be prepared for that. And they're going to ask why.

Sullivan: I don't...

Adames: I know you don't want to talk about it. I didn't either. But you are going to have to come up with an answer you can stomach.

Sullivan: You mean, lie?

Adames: I mean, find a version of the truth you're comfortable sharing.

Sullivan: While keeping some things private...

Adames: You're going to have to be smart about your privacy if you go through with this. You won't have much of it once you're accepted.

Sullivan: I don't have many secrets.

Adames: We both know that's a lie, kid.

Sullivan: What do you want me to say, Luis?

Adames: I don't want you to say anything. I want you to figure out how to feel.

Sullivan: I don't get it.

Adames: Your brother is dead. No changing that.

Sullivan: Believe me, I know.

Adames: But it's up to you how you remember him. You're going to carry his ghost no matter what; you don't have to bring the worst parts with you.

Sullivan: They are easier to remember.

Adames: I know. But also easier to forget in time.

Sullivan: Sounds like you've made this speech before. Charge?

Adames: Yeah.

Sullivan: Did it work?

Adames: Punched me for it.

Sullivan: Why would...?

Adames: Some people don't want to heal. The pain is just too comfortable. Familiar.

Sullivan: And you don't want me to end up the same.

Adames: You're young. Hopefully less stubborn. Try to forgive yourself.

Sullivan: For what? For not blaming myself enough? I think I dealt with that part of myself years ago at his funeral.

Adames: Well, I'm not going to ask you to forgive him. You told me what happened.

Sullivan: I know I should. I know he's my brother. He's dead. I'm just not sure I can.

Adames: Then learn to pretend. That will go a long way. You went west, didn't you? That's where people go to reinvent themselves.

Sullivan: I've been doing my best. Maybe you're right. Perhaps this is another step.

Adames: Joining the Rangers?

Sullivan: I meant what I said, Luis. I want to be better. I want to do better. I know I can't do that if I stay corporate. I learned that I can't do it in the LDPD; I saw too much of what they did back when I was Kestrel. And going back to being a vigilante... I guess I could, but I don't really matter there—just another person on the streets. I want to be more. Do more.

Adames: See, that's the speech you should give in your interview. Be the person they should beg to be on the team.

Sullivan: Stop it...

Adames: What? Am I embarrassing you? I mean it. You've got the spirit. Just don't let it break you.

Sullivan: I won't. I'm not as fragile as I look.

Adames: Oh, I know you're not, kid. Come on, let's do a lap of the city, and you can try out your best lines on me.

[Sentinel rises, Kinetik puts on his helmet. Quality of recording decreased due to wind interference.]

Sullivan: You make it sound ... sordid. It's not...

Adames: I'm ... married in a month... Don't worry, ... best smile ... affect me.

[Transcript ended due to sound issues. Original audio unavailable, possibly destroyed.]

<https://dashingdon.com/play/malin/fhrhghwgr22/mygame/>

[New build and link for the Alpha!](#)

[Dec 2, 2020](#)

I've fleshed out chapter 21, now there is only chapter 22 and epilogues left. Fixed a lot of bugs. Added some earlier stuff too.

We're up to 1 290 418 words including code (1 181 827 without code). Random playthroughs range between 85 000 - 100 000 words.

No old saves will work okay, there are new variables added.

As always, the new link is in the headline above, I will be taking down the old one tomorrow.

Can't wait for proofreading and grammar...

[November QnA](#)

[Dec 2, 2020](#)

Will we learn about the rest of the world? While there are few passing mentions, I'd be curious to see what the hero/political situation is in, say, Europe or Asia?

I will probably not go into detail in the books since it's not the focus of the story. There's another project on the backburner that might go into politics in detail, but the timing of that is uncertain.

To sum things up, the world is in the grip of a cold/proxy war, but between four loosely affiliated/competing sides instead of two.

The Soviet Union still exists, with a massive influence on most of eastern Europe. The Berlin wall never fell, but it's softened. Communism is still a thing, but it's not as hardline as it used to be. There are plenty of famous Heroes there, almost entirely mod-based, and sponsored and put in service by the state. It's a big propaganda project, and the USSR leads the world in mods and mobile armor tech.

China is dominating eastern Asia, but their communism has diverged vastly from what's in the USSR. Nominally they are allies, but the rivalry is great, and they have been on opposing sides in proxy wars where their spheres of influence overlap. There is less focus on Heroes here, boosts and mods exist and are used, but they aren't really something that ends up in the headlines with codenames or suits.

The EU is the weakest of the four superpowers but has been growing in influence. As they are a union between independent nations, they can be fractured, which also enables them to switch positions fast. They walk the fine line between working with the USSR in Eastern Europe and having traditionally friendly relationships with the US. Their biggest rival is China, as they both are ambitiously extending their influence in the various African nations. Heroes exist, but like in China, most of them are not as ostentatious as their USSR and US counterparts. Most end up in public service or working for various multinational companies.

The US still has a powerful influence in south and central America and is vying with China over southeast Asia. The Free Territories are the hotbed of Heroes (and villains), but they are prevalent in all parts of society. They have a more significant proportion of boosted Heroes than the other superpowers and more independent operators than is typical.

Of course, the rest of the world doesn't neatly fit into the various spheres of influence. There are strong regional powers, like India, Nigeria, Japan, and Turkey, which walk their own paths, independent of the superpowers.

Will there be more Vernon in the future?

Yes, you might get to meet him in book three.

If the Rangers + Mortum were mythical creatures/monsters/etc, what would they be?

I am so bad at things like that, I honestly have no idea. The only thing I suspect is that Sidestep might be a chupacabra...

When Ortega and Sidestep first met, did sidestep immediately assume/know that they are epileptic, or did Sidestep come to a different conclusion (that Ortega was taking numbers/something else entirely)?

Sidestep's first reaction was that they must be taking numbers; that was what they had experience with. It took some time before the secret slipped out.

Speaking of numbers, does it do anything fun if a telepath takes it, or does it just make them harder to read to other telepaths?

The latter, it doesn't affect the outgoing power.

Since Marshal Hood's powers seemed to be about controlling earth, did his powers cause any damage or accidental deaths when they first activated?

Yes, it did cause damage. Quite a bit of it. No accidental deaths, but there were injuries.

What was HG's childhood/youth like?

You might find out in book three, but they had a large family with several siblings; they were the second oldest. Single mom, no dad. No money either, but ambition. The crime empire was a sibling affair from the start; their oldest brother got it started.

Did Jake leave any family or friends behind in the Philippines? If yes, Is he still in contact with them?

Yes, he did. He was in his teens when he left, but he still sends money back to his family. He haven't been back though, it's all letters and phones.

Is Lord Ember aware of Shroud's hidden identity?

Lord Ember is aware of a lot of things.

What on earth is going down in texas?

Business as usual. Texas wasn't severely affected by the big one, and the oil business is booming. One of the most influential states in the union.

Does Sidestep memory control people into thinking they show up at work at their cover job?

That depends on how ruthless they are, but it's probably happened.

What type of music do the rangers + Mortum like?

Once again, don't ask me about music; all I know is metal. That's for your headcanons.

Which December holiday do each of the 5 ros primarily take part in?

Christmas is a significant cultural event, so they're all involved in that. There's a lot of PR work that goes on around that time, so they are kept busy. Especially Daniel. Ortega tries to drag the willing ones to Christmas with their mom and various other relatives at the ranch, and that's usually Chen, and sometimes Daniel. Argent always volunteers for duty around the holidays; she grows wistful and moody at that time and prefers to drown herself in work. Daniel celebrates Hanukkah, but he tries to not make a big thing of it, it's a melancholy time of the year for him. Like Argent, he's got nothing against drowning himself in work, though it tends to be more of the volunteer kind. Often at hospitals. Dr. Mortum is one of the organizers of the unaffiliated underground villains' Christmas party, so they are busy that season.

How is Julia's name typically pronounced?

The Spanish way is the right way, but the English form is typically used in English speaking media. She's gotten used to it over the years.

When people make movies based on real superheroes, how much input does the superhero have? does the hero get any royalties off the use of their image? (and a follow-up - if royalties and image licensing is a thing, does that mean that Sidestep could theoretically have got money off movies based off them that's just accumulating somewhere)

It varies. If it's a corporate-sponsored hero, the corporation is often part of funding the movie, and they veto everything they don't approve of. In those cases, it's not even the hero that owns the trademark, that's all corporate. If it's government based (like the Rangers), then there might be royalties for image use and the like. Same with famous enough vigilantes that have a real name they can use to collect them.

Sidestep wouldn't get any royalties; they have a secret identity and thus no way to collect or challenge in court. Vigilantes are fair game for moviemakers, though there's always a danger of a nightly visit if the subject in question is unhappy with the result.

Many movies tend to avoid real (living) heroes, it's easier and cheaper to do knock-off stuff that's similar to but legally distinct from the real deal.

Oh! Also, I was curious - how exactly are hero costumes designed and produced? Is it in house designers / do they get a marketing or branding agency or anything like that? And do the rangers have a social media manager?

ALSO, more marketing related questions, do the rangers (or other superhero teams) have in-house marketing or PR management, or do they engage an external agency? And what's the process of onboarding a new team member / creating a new superhero identity like?

The Rangers have a big media team that handles their image and that of the various members. It's personal assistants, voice coaches, stylists, personal shoppers, and everything you can think of. This is where most scandals are stopped or mitigated before (and sometimes after) they reach the media.

Hero costumes are made and designed in many ways. There are several famous manufacturers (who also use the tech for advanced sportswear and the like) and many independent designers. There are marketing agencies, too; every part of the process has been monetized.

Whether it's in-house or independent consultants vary. Most of the Rangers stuff is in-house since there are several Ranger teams, and they all use the same core organization.

The most crucial part of bringing in a new member is the security vetting and psychological/power profiling. Once that has been okayed, then it depends on the former identity of the hero. Some just need an update and a new costume; others require a complete reinvention (a corporation might own their trademark, for example). It's a process, and one in which the hero in question only has limited input.

Are the skinsuits worn by heroes bulletproof? If so, how damaging are bullets when in one? If not, how do heroes avoid being shot since guns seem somewhat available?

Skinsuits are bulletproof, to a point. A standard skinsuit can handle small arms fire and edged weapons. Bruising might still happen. Rifles and high-velocity weapons pose a problem, and most skinsuits have increased protection and armor over vital areas to help protect against that.

Pelayo and Ward were part of WolfPack, but what were Nehal and ZaZa doing before they joined mob boss Sidestep's crew?

Nehal was a driver for a group of robbers, who had an unfortunate encounter with the law before she was recruited.

ZaZa was a merc/assassin for hire.

Is there any connection with Lord Ember and Lady Argent having rather similar name beginnings, or is it just coincidence?

It's no coincidence.

What kind of kingpin is Lord Ember? Does he stay in the shadows as much as HG does?

Lord Ember is a lot more flamboyant; he does not stay in the shadows. He relies more on brute force and personal presence to get his will across.

Do nanovores have any weaknesses?

Their "hover" system, if we call it that, don't let them reach great heights, maybe ten feet at the most. They are most efficient in high concentrations; thus, things like a strong wind can limit them (but also spread them). They can be damaged by things like acid, electricity, and heat, but if they have access to organic matter, they can heal/regrow/multiply the swarm fast if you don't get them all. They are not hurt by water, but they don't penetrate to any great depths, just the top few inches at the most.

Is there anyone Spoon could be introduced to that he instinctively may not like/would instantly make Chen dislike the person if Spoon doesn't?

The Catastrofiend. Spoon would be five blocks away the moment he catches a whiff.

How do the rangers + Mortum drive?

Ortega drives fast and reckless but is good enough to pull it off. Especially on a bike. Chen drives carefully, but if need be, he can do as wild shit as Ortega. Argent drives, but to get from point A to point B, and prefers if someone else does. Daniel can't drive. Mortum loves to drive and have the best quality/most tinkered with vehicles of everyone.

How are the people working at the Farm (not the people running the show, but handlers/ trainers and scientists and such) taught to think about regenes? Are most of them unaware that regenes are sapient on any level?

Like tools and lab animals, the staff is carefully vetted for empathy before being assigned to the Farm, and every aspect of life there is focused on making sure that nobody mistakes Re-Genes for real people. People are reassigned if they have shown signs of bonding with their subjects. They are aware that Re-Genes are intelligent, but it's just a program, like an AI.

Where is the Farm located?

Nevada.

What are the different tattoo colors for Re-genes, and what do they mean?

I haven't made a full system yet, but in general, the colors are there to give an indication of what you might expect from the Re-Gene. Color and pattern type are not fully standardized though, every single Re-Gene has a different set, another way to quickly identify them.

Also, what do they do when they aren't on missions? (Like leisure time and so on.)

What is the Farm culture like with the regenes who aren't at work?

It's a boring life. Training. Experiments. Recuperation. More training. Think lab animals, there's not much enrichment there.

Does Chen have feeling in his prosthetics?

It depends on which kind. In theory, prosthetics can be hooked up to remaining nerves to give an approximation of sensation. This is seldom done in practice because it's expensive and can be taxing on the body. You have several different types of sensation. Hard touch/deep tissue awareness, gentle touch/skin awareness, hot/cold temperature awareness.

For Chen personally, it varies. His shoulder/arm only has deep tissue hookups. He can feel pressure, which helps with spatial awareness. No pain, no gentle touches, no hot or cold. His legs vary. The simple runners have very few sensory hookups, like his arm; it's mostly to enable him to better react to his surroundings. His 'work' legs have more; there are limited hot/cold sensations there to help him avoid damage. No finetuning, just working in the same way pain does for ordinary flesh. Knowing when things might start going wrong. The most advanced parts are his hands since they are what interact the most. His work hands have the same awareness as his legs, nothing subtle but enough to know when things might damage them. He can feel Spoon chew on them, but it doesn't hurt. His civilian hands are truly state of the art, they have the best sensory weave in the business, and while they can't match real skin, they get the job done. Here he can feel soft touches and gentle heat.

Was HG assassinating Marshal Hood just business, or was there a personal motive tied to it?

Both.

If the Rangers' reputation is now bad, what does each Ranger think of it? Do any of them care about their reputation getting hit?

Chen cares because it makes his job harder, and he doesn't like feeling like he's doing a bad job. Ortega cares a bit but also knows it will blow over. It's been worse. Argent doesn't care? Daniel cares a lot; they are trying their best, that should count for something (he might also blame himself).

Does Dr. Mortum have any particular thoughts if the Rangers' reputation is suffering?

Maybe a chuckle or two.

Back when Dr. Mortum was a villain, what kind of villain were they? Did they give any monologues or speeches, or did they just do their work and go home? Did they have fans, or were they too inconspicuous?

They had a flamboyant streak they're a bit embarrassed by today. There's probably some monologue footage that would leave them groaning in embarrassment. They might still have some fans, but they were never in the top league.

Were Dr. Mortum and Vitruvian already working together when they started their villain careers, or did they meet each other after becoming villains and decided to team up?

They met as villains and decided to team up and pool their resources. They had different skill sets but were both focused on science and thus complemented each other.

[November Spoiler QnA](#)

[Dec 2, 2020](#)

These are spoilers if you haven't played the full alpha, thus they go in their own section. Enjoy.

Did Regina know Sidestep's powers had the potential to grow so strong?

She hoped.

Does hollow ground know/feel when their powers haven't worked properly/someone cut their strings (like it might happen with step, Jake, Chen)?

Not going into detail there because you will need to find out, but it didn't look like it so far. Or they've got a good poker face.

Will we get an explanation of what Ortega means when she says, "blood is thicker than water."

Yes, the big talk will be in book three, early on.

Why did Nocturne take the hero drug? Was she already a boost when she met HG?

She was not a boost when she met HG; she took the drugs because she was tired of being who she was and wanted to reinvent herself.

How did Nocturne and HG first meet each other?

She worked for the IRS in Chicago, and he was setting up a business there as a money laundering/safety measure. They were rivals by mail/internet/litigation for years before they finally met.

Does Sidestep know there are blue-gray runaway Re-genes, or do they think only cuckoos have managed to escape?

The notion that there might be other runaways is alien to Sidestep, it's hard for them to imagine anyone else escaping that net.

Since the farm regenes have their own version of community do the regenes give each other nicknames at all?

Yes.

Also do the cuckoos have real names or do they get assigned names depending on the mission?

They get assigned names depending on the mission.

Where did sidesteps with <25 presentability get the mystery outfit they can wear to meet HG?

Good question.

How does it affect Hollow Ground when they have too many people red-threaded?

There's an upper limit; the bigger the net, the weaker it gets.

Not sure if this has been asked, but is there any significance to the red threads being, well, red?

It's from a Swedish expression. The red thread (den röda tråden) is the central point of an argument, the connective tissue that holds everything together. If you find it, everything makes sense.

How long ago did Chen and Blaze date? For how long?

About three years ago or so. It was about six months of on and off, never turned into a proper relationship for many reasons. Mostly hookups.

[Info about future updates](#)

[Nov 27, 2020](#)

So, December is getting closer, and that's a scary sentence if I ever saw one. How can 2020 both have lasted forever, and be over so quickly? By far the weirdest year I've lived through, for so many reasons.

If everything goes to plan I'll have a new December update for Retribution ready for the VIP Patrons (I know, I should make a funny name for the tiers, but I am terrible with names) because I am soon done with the chapter 21 update and there will be a lot of bugfixes taken care of as well. After that we only have one chapter left to polish and then it's grammar and spelling time.

December lore will be focused on Herald, and after that I will put up a new poll of who's next.

The QnA will be up as normal, we have a lot of questions from the discord, but feel free to add more here, If it's too spoilery I will simply be vague or not answer.

I'll do some thinking and see where this Patreon will go in the next year, it's been a few months and now I have more to go on, once my head calms down.

Please take care of yourself out there, we're entering a season that adds even more stress to everybody's lives and that's not even counting the pandemic. Remember that it's not your job to make

everything perfect, just try your best to survive. Really, in 2020 that's all any of us can do.

[Everything's Fine.](#)

[Nov 21, 2020](#)

So, here's the first little 200 patron ficlet, Anathema ended up in the lead. Bit of a November mood going on here, be warned.

Hoots should have closed an hour ago, but it's a special night, so while the doors are locked, the lights are on. Dim, private, the table near the back out of sight and out of mind.

Only three guests, Owl is doing bookkeeping behind the bar, or, as everybody present knows, probably preparing her next strike. Running a business is secondary to being a vigilante; that's why she keeps the bar open late, just for them.

You never know when you might need a favor from the Rangers.

"So what would you do if you weren't a hero?" Sidestep, also a vigilante, tucked into a corner with his mask rolled up, skin and bones under the oversized coat, all legs and elbows.

"Hell, I don't know," Anathema pushes his leftover chicken towards him and watches as he digs in with all the hunger of a growing teenager. Hard to peg down the age on that one. One moment it's little brother vibes; the next, he takes down a murderer as brutally as if he'd been doing it for decades.

"Could be a firefighter," Julia suggests, by far the drunkest of the three, alcohol not mixing well with exhaustion. "Not like you'd get hurt." Most of the bottles on the table are hers, though Anathema suspects Sidestep is equally sloshed. Just more jittery about it.

"Pays shit," Sidestep chimes in, mouth filled with chicken. "Unless you go corporate."

"I could get my own television show," Anathema says, lightening the mood before it turns sour. This should be a celebration; they beat the bad guys. "I could taste-test all the things people want to eat but can't because it would kill them."

"You mean like poisonous plants?" Sidestep frowns; this is too weird for him to contemplate.

"No, like which industrial grade cleaner has the nicest bite. Or which acid is the sourest. Like people do with those lethally hot chilies."

"Chili doesn't kill people," Julia mumbles, eyes simmery in that particular way that tells him that he'll have to help Owl cart her out and call a cab before long. "I know they keep talking them up, but seriously, people here are just wimps." She rests her head on her arms, half-draped over the table. Sidestep deftly grabs one of the bottles threatening to fall over.

"Nothing kills me 'tega, that's the problem." The words are out before he can stop them, and he hides the grimace by finishing off his drink.

"Hey, what do you mean, problem?" Trust Sidestep to notice, hard to know what those eyes see behind the mask.

"Nothing, you're drunk." A short laugh, looking at the bottles. "You both are."

"And you're not," Sidestep points out.

"I can't be, remember?" Such an easy thing for people to forget.

"You're right, that does suck." He looks down at Julia, whose breathing has evened out. There's an awkward twitch to his mouth, and for a moment, Anathema thinks he's about to reach out and pat her back. Instead, he takes a sip from the rescued bottle.

"Guess she was more tired than she thought," Anathema rubs his face, still feeling too alert.

"She spent last night staking out the alley, remember? Even her batteries gonna run dry eventually."

"So did you." It's hard to judge exhaustion with half the face covered, but Sidestep doesn't look like he's about to collapse.

"I'm used to functioning on little sleep," he says evasively.

"Comes with the territory, I suppose." Is he on something? Anathema is not sure, he hasn't got that impression, but it would explain a few things. Taking another sip of tequila, he tries to remember the signs, what to look for. How it felt. It's increasingly hard to recall. Like bad dreams, forgotten.

"They shot you in the head." Sidestep bites his lip, a familiar gesture. "Did it hurt?"

"It didn't feel nice." Pain. It was getting harder to remember what it felt like; his body was getting more used to muting the warning signals. No use for them, other than as remembered traumas. "I guess I should have been more careful."

"It's hard remembering I don't have to save you." A frustrated gesture, is he angry at himself for something? Did he think he had failed when the shot hit home?

"Nobody needs to save me anymore." Anathema laughs, but there's no mirth there.

"You wanted that." The words are too sure of themselves, Sidestep once more picking up what everybody else is missing. "Someone to save you."

"Life doesn't work like that." Maybe he could get drunk if he really tried. But he knows it won't happen. Quitting everything cold turkey once the boost drugs had stopped ravaging his system had been hell.

"I know," he says, scratching his arm, is there a half-healed wound under there? Impossible to tell through the skinsuit. "Why do you let people do that?"

"Do what?" Anathema frowns; once again, Sidestep is half a step ahead of him in their conversation. Maybe that's why he likes him.

"Think everything is perfect. That you got what you wanted when you got boosted."

"It's easier that way. Who wouldn't want to be invulnerable?" That was the problem with having powers everybody wanted. Nobody saw them as a problem. Nothing could hurt him. Didn't need to eat. Didn't need to breathe. Or drink. Didn't get sick. Couldn't be poisoned. Skin that couldn't be cut. Bones that wouldn't break.

Lucked out. Beat the house. Won the lottery when it came to being boosted.

Yeah. Right.

"I wouldn't." Sidestep shifts in his seat, careful not to wake Julia. "People could do anything to you."

"Yeah." No, that is why Anathema is so fond of Sidestep. Because he gets it on a level that nobody else does. The ugliness of people. "But not anymore." He picks up a chicken bone, cradling it in his hand as it starts dissolving. The acrid smell is horribly familiar yet soothing.

"Hey!" Owl's distant voice, raised enough that they can hear the annoyance. "No stinking up the bar, Themmy!"

"Sorry!" Anathema waits until the remains are inert once more before wiping his hands with a napkin. It goes faintly yellow as if it had got too close to a flame, but that's all. He's got excellent control these days.

"You took it twice, didn't you? The boost drugs?" Sidestep takes another guess, too close to home.

"I did," he admits. "Nothing could hurt me, had nothing to lose."

"Did it help?"

"Yeah."

They both fall silent after that, a comfortable feeling. Grounding. It's a weird friendship this has turned out to be, but to Anathema, it feels almost effortless. Like there's no need to explain or hide. On some level, Sidestep gets it in ways that Julia, bless her heart, doesn't. And, he hopes that whatever Sidestep gets from this in return is equally valuable. Even if it's just a surprised laugh now and then, taken off guard by his own capacity for mirth.

"I would," Sidestep mutters, not looking directly at Anathema.

"What?" Once again, he's got no idea what the subject switched to.

"I would save you." He bites his lip hard as if expecting to be laughed at.

"There's no need to anymore," Anathema says, hoping his smile comes off as grateful. What a thing to tear up over, but there's no mistaking the sincerity. "But thank you."

[Interest check](#)

[Nov 16, 2020](#)

We are closing in on 200 patrons, which one, is not something I expected, but two, needs some celebration when we get there. So I was thinking I'd write a fic or two about some of the minor characters that haven't got much exposition yet, I know some of you are curious. I have no idea which ones you'd prefer to get a spotlight, so I thought you could help me out there.

Which minor character would you like to get a fic for?

PICK YOUR **THREE** FAVORITES.

EDIT: Poll over, Anathema won by a landslide, followed by Hollow Ground and Sentinel. Guess it's time for me to write!

Mia Ochoa

32

Jake

32

Hollow Ground

47

Nocturne

7

Marshal Hood

20

Sentinel

39

Ashfall

5

Sunstream

11

Owl

5

The Handyman

3

Pelayo

5

Ward

0

ZaZa

1

Nehal

2

Anathema

73

Captain Blaze

5

Shroud

10

Psychopathor

9

The Catastrofiend

26

Poll ended Nov 19, 2020 · 332 votes total

[Canyons](#)

[Nov 14, 2020](#)

Was a bit tired, so I cleaned up another, older snippet for consumption. If anyone spotted it on AO3 you will notice that I switched it into third person. I plan to leave second person strictly for Sidestep stories. To avoid confusion, I also genderswapped Sidestep to female, otherwise the pronouns became too confusing. I do miss the way we handle pronouns in Swedish, it makes it so much easier writing same-sex interactions. Regardless, enjoy!

There's a weight to the world beneath Daniel that doesn't bind him anymore but which he is desperate to capture. A sense of importance worthy of coal, harsh lines and deep smudges that leave his fingers coal-black, and the edges of the paper marked with fingerprints.

Leave your mark on the world, his father always used to say, but he knows he didn't mean it this way.

Art is something you buy. A sound investment. A thing to show off.

You can't buy a city, or perhaps you can, but not this one. Too broken, too disjointed, without rules, and real in a way that borders on the fantastic. Ugly. Sprawling. Beautiful. Painful.

There's a slight wind, and he has to readjust his position, drifting back to the edge of the roof to get the angle right. He never quite does, there's a dip between the skyscrapers, the black shadows of the streets like scars into the earth, and he wants to capture their depth, but something is lacking. So he keeps trying.

Maybe that's it, maybe that's the beauty of it; he can't capture it like his father wanted him to. He just wants to watch and hold and kiss, and there's a face in his mind, smile like a crack, like the grand canyon, crooked and filled with mysteries and secrets. Water is soft, but it erodes the hardest stone, leaves scars bumpy and smooth for kissing. There's a new page now, the city abandoned for the darkness of a remembered face, and here the coal slides easily, touch-memory, sharp cheekbones, sunken eyes, too tired, fingers rubbing shadows in too-bright eyes, the eraser bringing highlights to the skin, sharp, white lines tracing scars, thin, hard pencil filling in the details from memory.

"What are you doing?" A voice drifting through the wind, from the rooftop below, an anchor, a string to his balloon, and he drifts down, his smile growing wider.

"How did you know I was up here?" He doesn't question the happy tumble his gut makes; the time for second-guessing is over. He's in love, and if he wasn't already familiar with how cold and wet the clouds truly are, he would have been on cloud nine. Instead, he lands next to Sidestep, feet touching lightly, then the weight of her body grounds him once more. A small indulgence, still thinking of her as Sidestep though she shed that skin long ago. Scorpion to his butterfly, they've both left things behind.

"Lucky guess," she evades, like always. Sidestep still in action, if not in name. "Hope you don't mind I let myself in."

"I gave you a key for a reason," Daniel notes that he got one of the scars wrong; it's above that little bump on the nose, a telltale sign of it having been broken once and not correctly set. Not below. He chides himself for forgetting, then kisses said nose, then the smile that's started to grow, welcoming the anchor her arms provide. "Thank you for coming up here," he whispers. "I know you don't like heights."

"Eh," she says with a shrug, a noncommittal sound that could mean anything. "What were you drawing?"

"The city," he admits with a sheepish grin, showing her the picture, not bothering to mention the face hiding on the next page. "I just never seem to get it right."

"Huh." Another little word that could mean a dozen things, but she wraps an arm around him like a cat draping itself across his shoulder, looking down at the smudged paper. "Looks good to me."

"That's the problem," he admits, leaning into her touch. "It's too clean."

"Of course, it is." An amused laugh, and she kisses his cheek. "What do you think you can see from up here? Fucking architecture, that's what."

"That's not true." He wipes his cheek, giving it another black smudge, and he sees the way her eyes go soft there for a moment, an unguarded thought, a genuine smile, and he lets his own go wider and "Let me show you!"

"Up there?" The smile fades, and her eyes narrow, but he doesn't let her pull away. She's dragged him down and shown him the streets; it's only fair that he gets to show her how the other half lives.

"I won't drop you," he assures, putting down the sketchpad to have both hands free. "I promise."

"Fine," she acquiesces, wrapping her arms around his neck.

"Really?" He knows his smile is too broad, too bright, but he doesn't care to tone it down around her. What's the use of being happy if he can't show it?

"Don't rub it in." There's the faintest of gasps as he leans down to sweep her up in his arms, something that always seems to surprise her. Maybe he doesn't come across as strong, but she feels light as a feather in his arms. He drifts upwards slower than usual, making sure that there are no sudden movements.

He notices that she doesn't look down; instead, her eyes are fixed on his face. He can't help the faint blush; he's never really gotten used to the way she looks at him, like the Sistine chapel on a sunny day, like seeing the ocean for the first time. A look of wonder and disbelief in equal measure.

"You're going to have to look down," he chides gently, making sure to position himself with the wind at his back, tugging at his hair. Scant protection, but it's all he can do.

"Fine," another sigh, her grip tightening as she stares down at the city as if challenging it to a fight. Maybe that's what this is, holding her hand in the candle flame because he can feel her heart speed up. "What am I looking at?"

"Life," he says, following her gaze. "It's not architecture; it's people. Nobody made plans here, at least not many." The city is filled with scars, surviving pre-quake neighborhoods intersecting with newly built ones, spiraling out into ruins and slum, massive scars still not healed. Since he moved here almost ten years ago, the scars have shrunk, the city healing before his eyes.

"It's a fucking trainwreck, that's what it is." She sounds more thoughtful than dismissive. "Disjointed. Wrong."

"Beautiful," he counters with. "Fascinating."

"The sky's beautiful." She looks upwards instead, face unreadable even to him. "And the clouds."

"But the sky is empty." He starts drifting back towards the rooftop. "And the clouds are wet. There are no people up there."

"That's not a bad thing."

"You know something?" He lands on the roof, still holding her in his arms, feeling her weight assert itself, fighting hard not to drop her. "Dress warmly, and I'll take you up there one day when it's cloudy. Up above the clouds. Up above the smog. So there's just us and the sun."

"I... might take you up on that." She wriggles out of his arms, and he pretends he's not grateful for it; she was getting heavy. "I like the sun."

"It's a date then," he smiles widely at her and gets rewarded with a reflected smirk and the faintest of blushes. Does she know how cute she is? How much she makes his body tingle just by being near? Her color deepens, so he gives her a wink. "Wanna go inside?"

"Let's." She takes a decisive grip on his hand, pulling him towards the stairs. There's a strength in her hand that's downright thrilling; he's never really gotten over how this makes him feel.

It's not like the girlfriends he's had before; they were soft, friendly, pliable. There's nothing soft about her, angular and hard, scarred in ways he can't understand, only try to empathize with. What is it inside him that makes him crave this? Crave her hands on his body, the way she looks at him like he was holding the rifle at her execution. It shouldn't be this dangerous to fall in love, but for her, it is. She's dooming herself anyway.

Can he do any less?

Three kisses in the stairwell, almost stumbling over each other before the door slides open, depositing them both inside.

"Get the blinds," she mumbles, nipping at his lips, sending shivers down his spine.

He frees himself reluctantly, walking over to the panel, dragging his finger over it until the windows are opaque like milk. Only then does he turn around and see her watching him, arms crossed, like...

...there's a thrill of desire running through his body, twined with one of fear.

A predator. That's what she looks like. Instinctively his hands go up in defense, and then she steps closer, and he uses those same hands to pull her into a hug. What does it say about him that he likes the way she makes him feel? The way she knows what he wants? What he thinks about her? No pretensions. No masks. He doesn't have to be Herald. Doesn't have to be a hero. Not even a Sullivan. Just a man.

What a relief that is.

<https://dashingdon.com/play/malin/fhrhewy20/mygame/>

[New Retribution build up! With a new link!](#)

[Nov 13, 2020](#)

Well, almost two weeks later than I planned, but sometimes you can't fight the brain worms. It looks like I am slowly crawling back to becoming a functioning human being, at least to the point that I managed to finish off the updates for Retribution. The link is above, just click the 'Dashingdon' and it should show.

I have now filled out, bugfixed and added content to chapter 19 and 20 as well, that means that there's only two chapters left before it is time to start working on grammar and language. And bugs. There will always be more bugs, even after release. That's just how these things go.

The biggest addition are extended endings for the innocent path in the hospital, it ended too abruptly before. Hopefully things flow better now. I also tweaked the post auction character creator to flow a little better. The randomtests are showing runs of up to 95 000+ words, so it's a beefy read.

I will take down the old build of the game tomorrow, so if you have any almost finished playthroughs there, make sure to finish them up quick. Or go play the new one instead with fresh content :). Be warned, that if my playtesters pick up any big, gamebreaking bugs, I might need to re-upload, and that can cause disruptions while playing. So if you're experiencing shenanigans, just wait little and it should stabilize.

Once again, thank you for your support, I am continuously blown away by this, and with both brain and economy shaky as hell, it has really helped a lot.

[Voyeur](#)

[Nov 11, 2020](#)

Been in a very bad headspace lately, trying to get back to writing, so here have a cleaned up old snippet.

Los Diablos felt smaller than he expected.

Daniel wasn't sure what he had imagined when he moved west, an endless cross-country journey of flights and hitch-hikes that had left him tanned and peeling. Not straight west, of course, deep south first, as far as he could, avoiding the desolate midwest where the ashes blew too thick. It was getting better, that's what they'd been saying on the news, but he didn't trust that narrative anymore. Once he had left Boston, the real world was little like what he had been told it was.

Bleaker. Tired somehow. And at the same time, kinder than he'd thought, taking mercy on a spoiled kid who didn't know how the world worked.

Who had only watched the movies.

Maybe that was the problem. Daniel kept expecting Los Angeles, but the Los Diablos that had replaced it was so different. The Hollywood glamor was gone; the city irrevocably changed. Broken apart and put back together again, like cutout poetry. Boston had been old and cramped, the people having outgrown it like an old overcoat, spilling out the sides. Ugly. Not where he lived, protected, guarded, kept safe from everything but the monsters that lurked within the walls.

That's what flight gave him. Freedom.

The freedom to run away.

Or run towards.

Los Diablos had monsters of a different sort, but also heroes that hunted them. Kept the city safe. He'd been doing that since he got here. Tried his best. The last mugger had struggled so much he'd almost dropped him.

Maybe he wasn't cut out for that kind of thing, but anything else felt like cheating. He still had money, Josh had tucked away some, and not everything had gone to buy what was supposed to be their freedom. Not just his.

The wrong people died, and he just kept on living.

Maybe that's why he's here. On a rooftop, not too high. Too high and things go small. Insignificant. Los Diablos just another broken suburb, the people below unimportant and nameless. Too high, and it's so easy to get detached.

He promised himself that wouldn't happen to him. That he'd remember. Even if it hurt.

The funeral is not as big as it should be. Heroes should be treated better. A parade, or a salute. Not just people in black staring at two coffins. Sidestep. Anathema. Heroes. Dead.

He's not supposed to be there, of course; he's just a scrawny seventeen-year-old vigilante, and the people down there are real heroes. If he had pulled up his binoculars, he would have been able to recognize them, but it seemed rude somehow. Like he's not supposed to look too closely at their grief.

"That's better not be a camera." The voice is deep, and makes Daniel jump, not landing on the roof, but hovering an inch or two above it. The winds nearly sweep him off the edge, but he holds steady with some effort.

"It's not," he says, defending himself, trying to ignore the fact that he's standing face to face with Sentinel. In a black suit and tie, like the others. "And I wasn't about to use the binoculars. I..."

"Calm down, kid." Sentinel lands heavily on the roof, the winds dying down. He takes a moment to straighten his suit out. "I recognize you. You're the one that's been taking on the Snakeheads recently?"

"Not exactly, they just..." Daniel tries to land, fails. "I guess I just don't like the fact that they keep robbing people."

"That they do. You got a name yet?"

"Daniel," he offers, together with his hand, even though his palms are clammy with nervousness.

"I meant your hero name," Sentinel laughs but shakes his hand all the same. Strong grip. His presence larger than his hands.

"No, I... it's hard coming up with something that doesn't sound stupid." He pulls back his hand. Opens and closes it.

"That it is." A pause and he narrows his eyes. "How old are you anyway?"

"Seventeen." Daniel finally manages to land, looking away. Down below, people are singing. It sounds beautiful in a way that death is not. "What are you doing up here anyway? The funeral is..."

"I spotted someone suspicious." Sentinel looks down as well. "And honestly, maybe it's better that I'm not."

"They were your teammates, your... friends?" He doesn't quite bring himself to say the last with any surety.

"They were. And I should have been there. If I had..." A twitch of his face, maybe pain, maybe shame. "I could have done something. Saved someone."

"It's not..."

"I couldn't have known, I know. I wasn't even in town." A hollow laugh. "Doesn't make it hurt less. Doesn't make Charge any easier to deal with."

"The Marshal?" Daniel has read all about the exploits of Marshal Charge. Probably half lies. More than that.

"Yeah." Sentinel runs a hand over his tightly coiled hair. "Guilt is harder to deal with when others add to it daily. I think I'll steer clear for a while. Until the worst settles."

"Maybe that's why I'm here too."

"Guilt? You're too young for that."

"Sidestep was my hero." Daniel feels his face grow hot; it sounds stupid now that he said it out loud.

"That's why you're doing your vigilante thing? To be like them?"

"No." Don't float. Don't float. "My brother and I took the hero drugs together. He didn't make it."

"So now it's up to you." Sentinel sighs, but not unfriendly. "I get that."

"Aren't you gonna ask me why?" Daniel was used to that particular interrogation. Why. How. He had a good life, good parents, everything to live for. How could he have been so stupid?

"No." He turns back from the funeral and looks directly at Daniel. "You don't do that here. You don't ask."

"I didn't know." He feels his toes scrape the roof as a last resort. "Why?"

"It's always a painful answer. People know that here. It's not like back east."

"Oh, you know." Daniel tries to pretend that he's not hovering fully now.

"You're still got the accent," an almost kindly smile. "Though I take it you've been working on it?"

"I have." For so many reasons. "I'm not going back."

"People who come here seldom have anything to go back to."

"It's not fair." Daniel looks down at the funeral again; the coffins are being lowered into the ground.

"Heroes shouldn't die."

"You know the saying." Sentinel looks down as well. "You either die a hero or live long enough to see yourself become the villain."

"What are you going to do?"

"Retire before either of those happen." The laugh is cynical. "Eventually. Once this settles down, and we've got a new team. I've seen too many kids die."

"I'm not going to. Not yet."

"Flying doesn't make you immortal. The closest thing we had to that in this town is down there in a box."

"I'm sorry." The reflex is immediate, words tumbling over Daniel's tongue. "I didn't mean..."

"It's fine. It's just..."

"Hard."

"Yeah." Sentinel falls silent. Below, the crowd starts to break up, slowly, unwillingly. "Tell you what, kid. Meet me back here tomorrow, and let's see how good you can handle yourself in the air."

"Really?" It's not right to sound excited, not at a funeral, but his tongue betrays him all the same.

"If you're gonna do this, might as well learn the ropes. And if you can't handle yourself, it's better you learn it from me."

"I can..." Daniel starts but is interrupted by a scuffle below. Looks like a fight, looks like...

"Fuck. Got to go and clear this up before someone gets killed." The wind sweeps Sentinel off the roof, nearly taking Daniel with it until he manages to adjust.

Adjust and land, slightly breathless, slightly horrified.

He brings his binoculars up to see what's going on there. Who's on the ground. Who's on top. Who...

Oh.

That's not good. It looks like Marshal Charge just snapped.

[Free-Range](#)

[Nov 6, 2020](#)

Cleaned up one of my old snippets since the last one made me remember it, Sidestep trying to deal with life after the escape from the Farm.

You can't be yourself. You can't.

You don't even know who yourself is. You know who you are supposed to be, the face to check for in the mirror, the right expression, the blank look, the faint smile only there because it makes you look non-

threatening.

You can look threatening. You know that. You saw it on your handlers' faces as you escaped, as they...

No. Bad memory. That's beyond you now. You're out. You're free. You've got decisions to make.

Decisions. You didn't think it would be this hard. How do people do it? How do people just walk down the streets and pick a store and go inside? Make a choice? What to eat? What to wear?

You've stuck to copying people. For now. You know how to do that. Be safe. Be the same. Don't stand out. Just one in the crowd. Don't bother to choose what to eat; pick the daily special. It's there for a reason. Someone else made that choice. Easier for you to obey.

Everything is delicious out here anyway.

That first carton of fries you stuffed down your throat, salty and fried, carbs and oil and no vitamins but good enough to make you tear up. Crying into your hamburger. People stared. You took it and ran.

Ran and ate. Coughed. Had the taste in your mouth for hours afterward.

This city makes you cry as often as the Farm does. But for different reasons.

Everything is magic here. Too loud. Too brash. No dampeners. No Talodine. You can feel everything, brilliant, overpowering, so very... human.

Is it rubbing off on you? People look at you in the street and see a person. Some smile at you. Some... think about you. Bad thoughts. That's not new. They're predators, but you're not prey. Not anymore. Not to them.

There's only one person you're running from, and she has no idea you're in Los Diablos. Hiding in a sea of humanity that just doesn't care on a level so deep you're envious. You try to be like them.

You really do.

But then some are different, and you can't help smiling back at them, an echo becoming real. A diner that becomes a habit, even though habits are bad, but the fries are so good.

Some people do care. Care enough to ask you if you have somewhere to sleep, and polite enough to pretend to believe you when you say yes. An alley does count, and a dumpster makes a decent shelter if you angle the lid just right.

You shouldn't care back. Not enough to risk yourself. Not enough to knock the robber out, with moves too smooth for the person they thought you were, and you turn and run because there would be questions.

And you are afraid of the answers.

Afraid of the feeling that came with saving them. You made a difference in their lives. You mattered. Just a little. They'll remember you, not the cuckoo, but the person, and that is dangerous but also...

Nice.

Are you getting greedy? You never needed nice before, but now you crave it. The next time you wear a scarf wrapped around your face and your hood up. You break the assailant's arm and takes his gun. Accepts the stuttered words of gratitude before disappearing back into the shadows.

A drug dealer gets you the money you need. It's a crime, but your existence is a bigger one, so you upgrade. Sports equipment. Microfiber. Some protection. Mostly mobility. The gun is a backup. The mask stays. Goggles too.

Are you selfish? Maybe. The little bursts of terrified gratitude when you save people are nice. Not a lie. They see you. A hero. Their hero. Someone. They make you want to be someone. Someone new. Someone good. Someone the Farm would never let exist.

Making your own decisions. Your own mistakes. Every single one leaves a scar. You sew them up, the pain a distant, numb thing—a lesson to remember. A mistake you won't make again.

Though you think you've already made the biggest one. Picking a name. Thinking you matter.

Being someone.

Being someone new.

Oh well. It's better than being nothing. You'll never be nothing again.

[The Farm.](#)

[Nov 6, 2020](#)

Well, 150 patrons and a bad brain day means you get a new venting fic. Enjoy! Farm days Sidestep, from before the first escape.

There's a taste to despair. Slow. Suffocating. It drags you out like a rubber band, the tension increasing with no relief in sight. It's slow, pressure building until days bleed into nights, and there's nothing in here to mark the passage of time.

The lack of daylight doesn't help.

Will you snap? When? What if you don't? Will that be worse? Held at high tension until you grow brittle. Cracks. Filling up the gaps with mortar and pretending that this house is livable. Ordinary.

You're not special. They told you. Repeatedly. Didn't even score that high on the tests. Average at best. At best.

There's a whisper inside you that makes you doubt them.

What if they're wrong? What if they lied to you? You know they did, about other things. You know they lie every day. You can feel it even when you're not supposed to. See the mouth say words that the mind knows are wrong. They are laughing at you.

They are scared of you.

Everything used to make sense, but there are too many voices whispering now, and you can see the cracks. You keep plastering over them so they won't show. Don't smile. Don't frown. Don't even practice in the dark.

You know they're watching.

Every time you've been taken into the light, it's a new scene. A new place. A new situation. Your handler is the one constant, your team your only reassurance. Focus. Do the thing. Act the part. Be the doll they dressed you up as. You're an extension of their will. Don't bother to think.

But you do.

In the light, there are so many things to look at, and you do it out of the corner of your eye. Don't stare. Don't react. Do the job. Listen to the voice. Remember your training. Remember your programming.

But you hear them.

Like the birds they can't get rid of, singing in the background when it's quiet. Brittle bubble minds, projecting, strong, unprotected. New thoughts. Strange words. You focus on your duty, but you listen. They don't want you to hear. They don't want you to remember.

They can't stop you.

Make a shell. Put everything in there. Can't crush an egg if you squeeze it in one hand. Need to focus. Be sharp. They're not. They're blunt and clumsy and you don't smile and pass the checkups, your training intact.

On the inside, you are filling up with words. Concepts. Thoughts.

Not your own. No. That's new. Your own. Owning. Being you. Separate. Unique. The you they made. The you that you are remaking. Stealing words. Ideas. Thoughts. They are yours now. Brilliant and sharp, and they make everything hurt more than ever. It would be easier to crack that shell and let it drain away when they process you, but you keep it hidden. Hard.

Yours.

You. A you. Singular. Unique. Nobody else has your memories now, training flaking off like old paint, not sticking to the facade. Who gave you those ideas? Who liked buildings enough to provide them with name and function sufficient to stick inside you? Who gave you the idea of walls?

Who gave you the idea to break them?

You don't know. You don't remember. Things still slip. You're always kept in the dark. They don't trust you. They are afraid of you. They need you.

She needs you.

You hate her, but she gave you that. You're needed. You're special. Prize project. Words unsaid, but you stole them from a room down the hall when she wasn't looking. Wasn't shielding. You're not supposed to be this strong, that you know, so you pretend that you're not.

Lies. She taught you how to lie.

Everyone else taught you how to hide it.

Now you're nothing special. Ordinary. A good tool. Pliable. But you're also waiting. Biding your time. Keeping your head down because there's another word you've learned. Another concept. It's strange, and you're not sure what you're going to do about it. What it really is.

Freedom.

It doesn't apply to you, but could it? You keep that concept close in the dark as you practice imagining what it would mean for you, training yourself to act. Not just react. What do you do when you don't follow orders? What would you do if you weren't punished for it?

Maybe one day you'll find out.

[Transcript of preliminary interview - prospect Wěi Chen](#)

[Nov 2, 2020](#)

Subject: Wěi Chen (western naming order)

Registration ID: Marshal Steel

Defunct RID entries: Arc 4 (classified), Sergeant Steel

Military rank: Captain (holds no active command)

Birthdate: 28th April, 1979

Blood type: A+

Height: 6'1"/185cm (post mods, 5'9"/175cm pre-op)

Weight: variable

Classification: Type C modified human

Modifications: Neural interface port, osseointegrated modular options for full hand prostheses, osseointegrated modular options for transfemoral prostheses, osseointegrated shoulder, and arm prosthesis (left side).

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Transcript of the preliminary interview - prospect Wěi Chen

12th June 2001, Ft. Bragg, North Carolina.

Analyst: E.B Acker

Original video destroyed as instructed.

Acker: Ah, good afternoon, Mr. Chen. I don't believe we've met before. That's the correct name, right?

Chen: It is. Why do you ask?

Acker: I just thought you looked disturbed; I wondered if the forms were faulty. It sometimes happens with...

Chen: With names like mine? It's fine. It was the Mr. that threw me; it's been a while since someone called me that. You're not military then Mr...? Ma'am?

Acker: E.B Acker will be enough. And no, I'm not military, but don't worry, I've got security clearance enough to handle what you might tell me. If you feel the need to be polite, you can call me Dr. Acker; that's delightfully neutral.

Chen: Understood.

Acker: Let me just check some formalities before we begin. According to your service record, you enlisted into the army in 1997, deployed to SEA as a helicopter pilot in 1998 during the withdrawal from Burma, awarded the purple heart in 1999, deployed to Yemen as an MBA pilot in 2000 and ongoing.

Chen: That's correct.

Acker: Currently Sergeant, probably in line for another promotion soon.

Chen: I doubt it. I didn't even finish high school. They'll just hand out another medal and a pat on the back.

Acker: Is that bitterness I hear?

Chen: You tell me.

Acker: I'm the therapist; my job is to ask the questions, not tell you the answer.

Chen: Huh. You're not like the other therapists I've worked with.

Acker: If I may be frank for a moment, have you had a fruitful relationship with your other therapists?

Chen: I haven't been looking for a relationship, just clearance to get back to active duty.

Acker: And that's what you want from me?

Chen: If you think I can still do my job and am not a danger to myself or my friends.

Acker: Are you?

Chen: No.

Acker: Do you know why you are here?

Chen: Because of what happened at Aden. It's regulation.

Acker: I wasn't talking about regulations. I'm talking about what you and your unit went through. I'm talking about what you did.

Chen: What was needed.

Acker: Is that what you think? I've seen the footage.

Chen: You have? That's new.

Acker: I'm not here to clear you for active duty; I take this seriously. I'm here to find out how it has affected you. That's why I'm not military. An outsider. Nobody will know what you tell me.

Chen: You know confidentiality doesn't apply to us.

Acker: I wouldn't be here if I didn't believe I could do my job undisturbed. Trust me when I say that your superiors won't get word of this discussion. Just a clean bill of health... if that's what you want.

Chen: I don't even know anymore. And I don't know if I want to play along without knowing your agenda.

Acker: But I do think you want to talk to someone.

Chen: You're not wrong. I suppose there's nothing people in charge don't already know. Or suspect. You've seen the footage?

Acker: I have. But that only tells one side of the story.

Chen: Not sure if there's another one to tell. We got shaky intel. We acted upon it anyway. Things went bad. People died—people who weren't supposed to be in the line of fire.

Acker: What do you think went wrong?

Chen: Like I said. Shaky intel. Quick decisions. Not mine. But I didn't protest. I should have; it didn't feel right, but not acting would have been bad if the information had been correct. Would have risked our position. It's always better to strike first, strike hard, and then sort out the aftermath.

Acker: Is that your motto?

Chen: Might as well be. We're not sent in when you need a soft touch; we're a spearhead. We were expecting armored resistance. Not... soft targets.

Acker: Soft targets. Civilians.

Chen: Yes.

Acker: You shot a member of your squad.

Chen: Ah, that's why you're here; I should have known. Yes, I shot Kelley, he wouldn't stop firing, and I knew his armor would protect him. Mostly. I don't think he's badly injured.

Acker: He's not. But shouldn't the IFF systems prevent that?

Chen: Oh, those? We disconnect them when we take to the field. Slows down reaction time; out there, you need every second you can get if you want to stay alive.

Acker: How do you feel about that?

Chen: I like being alive. I try to be careful. Mistakes happen. I can't afford to dwell on them or...

Acker: Or you end up here. With me.

Chen: Yes. With you. I don't think you're a therapist. At least that's not all you are. You're trying to lead me somewhere, and it would be easier for both of us if you just told me where. I don't take well to subterfuge.

Acker: They told me you were sharp. Looks like they didn't exaggerate.

Chen: Then they should have told you I can take you out if need be, even without a gun. If I deemed you untrustworthy, nobody would question me.

Acker: Are you sure? You've started making waves. I might be here to make sure you don't drown.

Chen: Why?

Acker: You've grown disillusioned with your line of work, and I am here to see if maybe a change of position might be in order. Let's think of it as a job interview.

Chen: For what?

Acker: A non-military US government position, that's all I can currently say.

Chen: So you don't have to wipe my mind afterward. I know how your kind operates.

Acker: My kind? Ah, I see, no, no, you are wrong. I am not involved with -that- side of things; this an entirely different department.

Chen: Secrecy is secrecy.

Acker: It is, but right now, we are the ones holding all the secrets. You know nothing but a fake name and a friendly face. Why not give me a chance before you start dreading brainwashing?

Chen: Talk then. You seem to be fond of it.

Acker: Have you been witness to brainwashing then? Considering that was your first reaction?

Chen: You wouldn't be here if you didn't know who I was, don't play coy with me. And yes, I have seen it done. Back in [REDACTED]

Acker: [REDACTED]

Chen: [REDACTED]

Acker: [REDACTED]

Chen: [REDACTED]

Acker: So you gave the order?

Chen: I don't give orders.

Acker: Anymore.

Chen: Those were exceptional circumstances. Lieutenant Powell had been killed; we had lost contact with command. Someone had to take charge.

Acker: And you did. Quite well, in fact. A Purple Heart and Distinguished Service Cross. Only the first one shows up in your official records.

Chen: I assume you have access to the unofficial one since you are making that point.

Acker: I do. Sergeant Wěi Chen, Special Forces, I'm told you don't like the term 'Green Beret.' Deployed as part of Task Force Trident from 1998 to 1999. Lost your hands during the Dawei massacre.

Chen: Lucky I didn't lose more.

Acker: Indeed. Underwent cybernetic modifications at the JBLM facilities in 1999 and was handpicked to be a part of Task Force Arc when it was formed. Current codename 'Arc 4'. An impressive career for someone that young.

Chen: Young bodies adapt easier to extensive modification, and I am very good at my job.

Acker: You are indeed. That's why we're talking. Very good at almost everything you've done. President of your local chess club. Quite successful on the Lacrosse team. Your high school records were impeccable; why drop out so close to graduation?

Chen: Family troubles, let's leave it at that.

Acker: You know we can't. We need to see if there's anything that can be used against you.

Chen: My parents disapproved of my... choice in partners. It's not something I'm proud of, but it's not some big secret. People back there know.

Acker: You look uncomfortable. What about people here? Do they mind you being gay?

Chen: I had a boyfriend before Dawei. He's dead. I try not to get attached anymore, but it's not something I'm ashamed of. Or make a production out of. I don't care what people think. Will that be an issue for you?

Acker: No. What your tastes are is no concern of ours.

Chen: Good, then drop the subject.

Acker: It can't have been easy leaving home that young. No high school diploma. New York isn't friendly to people without money.

Chen: It wasn't. That's why I joined the army.

Acker: After almost a year on the streets.

Chen: Yes. It's not like I was the only one. You know the housing problems with the Midwest refugees.

Acker: How did you keep out of jail? You were arrested for...

Chen: Because I knew how to handle authority, okay? The judge just saw a bright teenager from a good family who made a mistake. Stole some things on a dare.

Acker: You had money to post bond?

Chen: My friends had. I didn't want to get my family involved. It resolved itself.

Acker: Really?

Chen: What do you want me to say? That I've committed crimes? I have, but the biggest ones have been in the service of this government; I really think having been a teenage delinquent is irrelevant compared to that.

Acker: You have a point. Never been tempted to go back and get your diploma? According to my records, you were planning on becoming an engineer like your father?

Chen: I doubt civilian life would work out for me anymore.

Acker: I suppose that makes sense. You were seeing a therapist for a reason.

Chen: For all the good that does. But, it's regulation. And I do follow orders.

Acker: When it suits you.

Chen: That sounds like an accusation.

Acker: Believe me, it's not. We are not a military outfit, but we do like to take advantage of military training. It speeds things up but can stunt independent thinking. We prefer people that can think for themselves.

Chen: Speeds what up?

Acker: How do you like the new MBA-80? I've heard impressive things.

Chen: Doesn't handle sand well. And you were changing the subject.

Acker: I was.

Chen: I suppose I won't get an answer to why?

Acker: The MBA-80 wasn't built for the desert; it is designed for urban environments. Compact. Flexible.

Chen: I know the loadout of my own armor.

Acker: Ah, I forgot. Future engineer. Here, take a look at this.

Chen: What is this? Mobile Armor specs? Not the MBT-80...

Acker: Not quite. It's a prototype, quite a bit more lightly armed, but...

Chen: I can see that. Doesn't look like a battlefield design. Rescue work?

Acker: In a way. How would you like to pilot one?

Chen: I pilot what they assign me, you know that.

Acker: I do. I also know that you are not happy with your situation here, and I am offering you a chance to change it. Have you ever heard of the Rangers Initiative?

Chen: I do watch the news.

Acker: You are going back to Lewis–McChord tomorrow for scheduled upgrades to your neural interface. There you will be met by one of my colleagues in a more official capacity. If you are interested, you will begin the process of applying for the Rangers, starting with a formal interview.

Chen: And this is?

Acker: This is just me verifying that it's worth approaching you. Your background is just what we are looking for, but the more human element can sometimes be lacking when dealing with military personnel.

Chen: And you are to be the judge of that?

Acker: I am a therapist.

Chen: I get the feeling that's not all you are. Telepath?

Acker: You are sharp, but no, I'm not. I would call myself a good judge of character. Perhaps an empath if we're being generous.

Chen: I thought something was off.

Acker: What I do is not harmful; I'm just reading the signals you send out.

Chen: That doesn't make me more comfortable; I like my privacy.

Acker: I assure you, so do we. If it's any consolation, you are quite hard to read, but I don't get the feeling you have been dishonest with me.

Chen: What would be the use?

Acker: Quite right. Now, use the flight to think about what I've said. I can't provide you with any reading material yet, since I am here strictly in an unofficial capacity.

Chen: I gather my superiors would not take kindly to you trying to poach me.

Acker: Correct. You might have made some enemies with your latest stunt, but you have your staunch defenders too. People that would hate to lose you. So let's keep it between the two of us, okay?

Chen: Will you be involved, or is your part in this concluded?

Acker: Oh, we will meet again. My job is team composition as well as recruitment. Anything that needs the human touch.

Chen: You mean the superhuman touch.

Acker: If you wish. Now, get packing. And if anybody asks...

Chen: They won't. Nobody likes to talk about therapy.

Acker: That's what I thought. See you soon... hopefully.

[interview concluded]

[October QnA - VIP spoilers](#)

[Nov 2, 2020](#)

Some questions dealt with spoilery materials from the closed alpha, so they have their own little section here. Be warned if you haven't played it.

Are the other regenes aware of Steps two escapes? If so how do they feel about it?

The first escape was not very public, so that one I think only a few were aware of. The second one however... was rather had to miss. That made a splash, and even though the Farm tried to put the lid back on, the truth was out already. As to how they feel about it, it varies a lot. Some might be envious, some might think they are a traitor, some might be angry because they paid the price as security increased, and some might see them as a hero. Regardless of what the farm likes to think, Re-Genes are individuals, and they are very good at hiding their feelings.

Do other regenes feel and think like Step does or is Step special because they are a telepath?

Sidestep is special because they are a telepath. It is hard to keep up programming when you can pick up thoughts and feelings you are technically not allowed to have access to. That being said, Re-Genes have more of an inner life than the Farm likes to acknowledge.

Was Hood's powers related to why Hollow Ground killed him?

Not the whole reason, but they were related, yes.

Could Lady Argent reunite with her family if the Regenerator works for her?

Theoretically, yes. That is the major thing that's keeping her from doing it. But will she have the courage to take that step?

[October QnA](#)

[Nov 2, 2020](#)

Exactly how many people has Ortega punched over Sidestep?

Oh boy. More than they'd like to admit. Ortega is quick to punch people. If I should hazard a guess... seven, not counting Sidestep themselves.

Does Ortega have any "dead" spots in their body where they don't have any feeling, even post mods?

Yes, but they are caused by scarring, not the mods. The spinal nerves are working as intended. The biggest area is on the arm the nanovores attacked, there are patches there where the skin feels numb and have issues registering temperature especially.

Has anyone (public figures or groups/ movements) raised a fuss over the ethics of creating/ 'utilizing' regenes before?

Yes, but there's never been a huge movement, Re-Genes are too rare for their plight to really register with the public. Mostly it's a fringe thing, often picked up by religious groups looking to score points about men playing gods rather than concern over the subjects.

What was Marshal Hood like?

Calm. Patient. Slow to anger, some would call him slow to act. Like many tattooed big guys, his looks tended to let him avoid trouble. More clever than he let on. Ace, wasn't really interested in relationships. Easy to make friends though. Had a nasty streak he was not fond of, liked scaring people he didn't like to force them to show respect. Mellowed out a lot with age. Liked bikes, was a good mechanic.

When diving through Argent's memories in rebirth, there was a line where she implied Ortega was a liability while glancing at their mods. Was there already something wrong with Ortega's mods? (And if so, what?)

Not something wrong exactly. Let's put it this way, the potential for something to go wrong however, is way too high for her liking. As for what... hehehe maybe you'll learn.

Do regenes all have a certain blood type or are they all different?

They vary.

You mentioned that Steel went a different direction than you originally intended him when you started Fallen Hero; what's the difference between his original concept and how he turned out?

The biggest difference? Spoon. Making him a dog dad just made everything escalate. I didn't really see his softer sides before the dog showed up.

Does Sidestep know Anathema's real name? And a follow up, will the players ever learn it?

Sidestep doesn't. The players might.

Will we get more of interacting with Shroud in book 3?

It is very likely, yes.

Would the regenerator be able to reverse the regene blue skin?

Technically, yes.

What's the cons for using the regenerator? (As in the bad stuff that might happen)

Well, baby soft fresh skin is super sensitive, don't go out in the sun any time soon.

What's Herald's favorite art movement?

Expressionism or Modernism, it's a tie.

Will regenerator (working/not working) be in book 3 or 4? and will there be the possibility of regenerator not working at all?

Book 3. And yes, you can mess it up (or just avoid that tangent entirely, not everyone is interested)

How fast can Herald fly? Asking cuz I don't think we've seen him wear goggles. So if it's v fast are his eyes just... Idk better than average peoples

Herald's max speed is slightly over 300 km/h (200 mph or so). And yes, his eyes rarely tears up, and he doesn't have any problems breathing at those speeds. However, he tends to wear goggles and headgear when flying higher or faster, because bugs can really hurt. It's just not something he tends to use around the city, the media team think it covers his best features.

Does Regenes have belly buttons?

Yes. That's where they are connected to the artificial placenta.

What is the effect of having the initials CB for step?

I will not tell you, but there are some things that will come into play later.

Does hollow ground have a limit to how many people they can web?

Yes, every single one is an increasing load.

What gifts would all the RO's want/appreciate most for their birthdays? (if all of them is too much you can just choose one!)

Oh I am the worst at imagining presents for myself, let alone other people. It's one of my failings, I really don't get it. What makes you want something in particular? My aspie brain just short circuits, how could you just name a thing? There's so much variation there? That being said, I will make an attempt:

Ortega always likes rare alcohol, Chen would be happy about stuff for Spoon, Argent weird movies, Daniel artbooks or art and Mortum books (fiction).

If the rangers had to dress up for Halloween. How would they dress?

Ortega would dress as anything, as long as it is preceded by the word 'sexy' (sexy pirate is a classic), Chen would take the chance to look cool and suave (like James Bond, or Dracula), Argent would go full Heidi Klum (ambitious as hell) and Daniel would be conceptual and take advantage of his powers (Angie made him dress as an Angel once because she had the coolest devil costume).

If you had to describe each ranger as a cookie flavor, what would they each be?

Oh cookies, not as international as you might think. So be prepared to google swedish cookies (småkakor).

Ortega - Pepparkaka, Chen - Hallongrotta, Argent - Brysselkex, Daniel - Drömmar

Which one of the rangers is most likely to regift something on Christmas?

Daniel, hands down. If he doesn't need it, someone else might have better use of it.

About Steel: does he still harbor a lot of guilt about Heartbreak and how the rangers turned out, or has he put that behind him?

Steel has a lot of guilt, yes. But he doesn't dwell. It does however inform his current choices, he does not want to go through that again.

If it's non-spoilerish, how did Jake end up working for Hollow Ground?

Jake was working for an affiliate of Hollow Ground's in the Philippines when he was a kid, did minor crimes, drug running and the like. He ended up in trouble enough with his boss to use some of the Boost drugs they were making, lucked out with his powers and snuck aboard a ship headed for Los Diablos. There he started doing grunt work for Hollow Ground's organization since he had some names and contacts, and worked his way up.

How did Ortega and Sidestep meet?

I will not say a canon way, I leave that for the reader.

What drew Ortega to Sidestep when he/she first met them?

Ortega had never met anyone like them. Refreshingly weird, weren't impressed by Ortega, or wanted to sleep with them. The mystery was also a draw.

Does anyone, besides probably Nocturne, know about Hollow Ground's powers?

No.

How did Hollow Ground first find out about their powers?

It took a while, it's a subtle thing. For the longest time things were just easier.

Does Nocturne's power have limit how many peoples sight she can take?

Probably, but she hasn't found one yet.

Does Jake ever use his ability to go through walls just to scare people for laughs or only when he's working/fighting?

Only when working/fighting, he tries to keep it from being common knowledge.

How long can Shroud go without feeding before she starts to...wither?

Depends on the strength of her last victim, boosts are juicier, can last her a couple of weeks or more, normal people a week tops.

If Sidestep saved the Re-gene in Rebirth, are rest of the Re-genes in the Special Directive team aware someone saved him or in dark about it?

It is a variable that is tracked, what I do with it are spoilers.

If Hollow Ground and Shroud used their powers on each other, whose powers would work faster?

Oh that's an interesting quickdraw. Hollow Ground would be faster.

Are Hollow Ground's rings and earrings just for aesthetic or do they serve some kind purpose?

There is a purpose.

Is Shroud content working for Lord Ember or does she have her own hidden plans?

Shroud is too powerful not to have her own agenda.

Does Regina have some kind of powers or mods?

Nothing major.

Does Sidestep only have enemies at the Farm or can they have people they care about still back there?

There will be an option to have that once it comes up in the story, yes. It will be a choice for the reader.

Was Hollow Ground behind the explosion on Carter's place?

You might find out in book three.

Are there any blue-gray Re-genes runaways? If yes, how are they surviving? Are they lonely?

Yes there are. They survive by keeping off the radar, some of them have powers to help with that. There's a lot of deserted land still, it is possible to lay low. But yes, they would be lonely.

[...May Break my Bones.](#)

[Oct 22, 2020](#)

A hospital waiting room. Calm. Professional. Comfortable chairs and magazines for people with more money than sense. Private, like everything here.

But private doesn't always mean privacy.

The sound of angry heels, a staccato against the polished floor, and Hood looks up from where he sits, perched awkwardly on the soft couch, leafing through a magazine just to keep his hands busy.

"So, are you to blame for this." A short woman, half his height with twice his energy, eyes narrowing into cracks, thick, black hair piled up in a messy bun. She holds her handbag like a weapon. Does it contain one? Maybe.

"Now, ma'am..." he starts, the magazine he's holding a flimsy shield of home decorations, because this waiting room is not made for Marshals, just worried mothers, and it's not hard to connect the dots.

"Don't ma'am me." Sitting down, he's shorter than her, and she takes advantage of every inch. "That's my daughter in there being operated on." Elena Ortega. That makes sense; he's read the bio, seen the pictures. She's shorter than he thought, harder than he pictured.

"She's going to be fine." He carefully closes the magazine, putting it back in the rack. He always moves slowly around civilians, aware of his size, aware of how he looks without his helmet. A little more threatening than the regular joe is prepared for, but it doesn't seem to faze her.

"I hope so, for your sake." She looks him over, then relents and sits down next to him, sparing his face from her scrutiny.

"Hmmm," he muses. "I can see where she gets her temper." Julia's eyes, without Julia's smile, but maybe the occasion didn't demand it.

"Don't condescend me, Marshal, just tell me how she is." She takes off her shoes, flexing her feet, heedless of propriety. A small gesture that makes him smile.

"She'll be fine," he assures, trying to remember her bio. Had she been a gymnast? Set on the Olympics before her wedding? He could see it; there's a careful control of her movements that's familiar. "It was mostly mod damage; she cracked the emitters."

"That is in her hands." A small shiver and she flexes her own hands, carefully manicured.

"Her hands are fine," he assures again because he saw them afterward. All fingers were still connected.

"Gracias a Dios," she mumbles, crossing herself. "I mean, Wei is a darling, but I wouldn't want..."

"She'll be fine." Another thing he can't promise, but you learn to lie well in this business. And he has enough faith in Julia's usefulness to know the surgeons will do their very best. "Good as new. Even better." There had been talks of upgrades, the things Julia did with her mods weren't within the specifications, but maybe they should be. One of the techs had been very excited about the possibilities. Scientists. They always were.

"As always." The sigh is bitter, filled with knowledge. "What happened?"

"Pushed the system too hard," he says, very carefully. "It wasn't made to redirect that much power."

The internal generators could only hold that big a charge; the system wasn't built for the kind of pressures Julia had put it under. If he hadn't been busy elsewhere, if the rest of the team hadn't had their own problems, if... what a useless word that was. Team fights could be chaotic, something they needed to get better at.

"Don't tell me she just plugged herself into an outlet?" Mrs. Ortega's voice interrupts his thoughts, and he can't help but chuckle.

"Then, I won't."

"Dios mio," she mumbles. "She did, didn't she?"

He had seen her, grabbing the live wire, gambling that her systems would shield her from the worst of the feedback, the lightning bolt she generated blasting both her emitters and her enemy.

"Won the day," he said, quite simply, because it had. Looked good on camera too. She always did.

"Fried Flashback."

"Oh, the pretender?" Her amused chuckle is a surprise.

"Is that what she calls him?" He turns to look at her; she's getting her shoes back on.

"She was a bit upset," she admits. "I told her she didn't have a monopoly on electric powers."

"She can be a bit competitive." Quite possibly the biggest understatement he had said today, he learned too late that the best way to get Julia to do something ridiculous was to tell her not to.

"A little bit," she agrees, with the same look on her face. "She likes you, though."

"Oh?"

"Otherwise, I would have given you a harder time." The look in her dark eyes is stern but calm.

"I'm... pleased?" He's seen those kinds of looks before, in the eyes of people who weren't afraid of him. Small people could be frightening; they knew they had no chance in a fair fight and would escalate things too quickly for him to keep up. He had never thought of Elena Ortega as the dangerous one in the family. Looks like he was going to have to reevaluate.

"She doesn't do well with authority figures," she admits, a fact that is not news to either of them, "but whatever you do, keep doing it."

"I'm doing my job." The chuckle is fond; he likes this tiny dangerous woman.

"I know the business as well as you do, Marshal," she chides. "It's not your job making her feel good about herself."

"Well, someone should." It's not an accusation at her, and luckily she doesn't take it as such.

"How long do you think it will take until we get news?"

"Probably another hour."

"Good, then you have plenty of time to tell me everything about my daughter that I have missed out on."

[FAQ reminder and update info](#)

[Oct 22, 2020](#)

Do you have any questions you want answered once November happens? if so, just add them here in the comments. I've already got a bunch from the discord, but the more, the merrier.

This month's story focus will be on Marshal Steel since he came in second in the polls.

I am also polishing up some older story snippets and posting them for everyone, they might be considered canon adjacent. Genders and relationship specifics might vary, but they're as close as they're gonna get while not being in the actual game.

[Oct 21, 2020](#)

Running forward tap tap tap three steps, over the wall, land in a roll, leaving gravel stuck to your back, your braid a black streak behind you.

"You should cut your hair, Julia." A creak, a crack, and the wall crumble, shards a hailstorm at the spot you were a moment ago.

"Not likely," you shout back, glad for your goggles, glad for your reinforced skinsuit, glad that the Marshal isn't out to hurt you.

You know that he could. You've seen the footage; Marshal Hood is not to be trifled with, controlling dirt he calls it jokingly, but you've seen him crack the ground and bring down buildings, and he wasn't called Mount Hood for nothing back in the day.

"It's just begging to get grabbed," he advises, and you sprint around the corner just in time to have the shrapnel smack into the wall instead of you.

"Then they have to get within my reach, the idiots." You leap up, grabs the overhang, pulling yourself up on the half-ruined roof. It's as close to a training area as you have out here, ruins nobody minds being demolished.

Keep on the move, never stopping to think, keep your body going from one moment to the next because that's Hood's disadvantage. He's slow, his powers take a moment to charge, and if you are elsewhere after that moment, you can stay ahead. Stay safe. Don't think, just move, and oh boy, you love moving more than anything in the world. Feeling your heart pump, your muscles tense, everything working together with strength and grace you didn't have pre-accident. Faster. Better. Broken and rebuilt, and sure there are trademarks branded into your joints, but you wore them on your chest before, sponsored equipment, companies wanting to cash in on your guts.

You laugh as you fling yourself over the edge of the roof, too high, too fast, but there's just an open space there, dirt and gravel, no walls, and you land heavy, land hard, but close enough to bring your palm to his gut, jolting him hard enough to throw him to the ground.

"Shit, shit, are you okay?" You're leaning over him a moment later, 'cause Hood is not getting any younger, and you might have left your dad in the grave with an unresolved argument, but there's nothing to do against a bad heart, bad luck, a bad call, and you laugh in relief when he gives you a thumbs up. Bigger than your dad. More grizzled. Older. Whiter.

Kinder.

"That was a stupid move," he grumbles, rubbing his stomach. "If you had missed, you'd be caught right in the open."

"That's not a bad space to be against you, though." You offer him a hand up, bracing yourself. You're tall for a girl, tall enough to annoy most men, but he's not small, and he's heavy; his hand makes yours feel small and fragile even with the mods.

"True," he admits, brushing himself off as you push up the goggles on your forehead. "Good job anyway, Charge."

"Just fun to get a workout; I was getting bored." You stretch towards the skies, annoyingly blue, the darker blue of both your skinsuits covered in dust. You peel off your goggles entirely, wiping your sweaty forehead. "Sentinel better find something soon."

"s... he will." Marshal Hood looks up at the skies as well, still stumbling over the new pronouns. So many changes to get used to. "You should keep the goggles. Eye protection is useful. Especially with your condition."

"Not my call," you say, patting him on the shoulder, too worried, you should wear goggles and a helmet and kneepads, and in the end, you should be annoyed, but it's hard to be. Just a different kind of feeling, a different vibe, not disapproval but caution, a way of looking at you that makes you want to be someone. Better. Smarter. Part of a team, and that is new because you hate people bossing you around. I'm not gonna call you 'Sir,' the first words thrown in his face, and he had chuckled and told you to call him asshole if that made you feel better.

"I know." The sigh is deep; he knows it, uniforms are picked, and you look far too good to be covered up in armor, face out in the open, no mask, bright smile for the camera. They didn't give you first-class dental work for nothing.

"Don't look so grumpy," you bend down and pick up a rock, throwing it at a distant sign, leaning askew among the ruins. Bullseye. "I can move better this way; no need for heavy armor if they won't hit me."

"And if they do?" Another rock rises from the ground on its own, flying towards the same sign.

"Not gonna happen," you say, throwing yourself flat on the ground, and the other rock he had levitated flies harmlessly over your head. "And I thought we were done training, cheater."

"How did you know?" He looks amused, offering you a hand this time, but you tense your body and jump back to your feet on your own, look, dad, no hands, and you slap your brain into shape because he's not your dad—just your team leader. Maybe mentor, but no way you're going to tell him that.

"It fit the moment." There's a flow to the world around you, to the movement of your body, the effect of gravity, the friction of your limbs. You can't overthink, better to just go with it; thinking is for Chen,

analyzing, planning, you don't put words to it the same way. Same results, though. Still five to five in your fights, someday one of you will get the upper hand. You're two to ten with Hood, but you're getting faster. Better.

"You've got good instincts," he admits. "You just need to be able to describe them."

"Why?" You flex your hands, feeling your emitters charge and release. They still feel awkward after the last upgrade, but the increased output should be worth it.

"Because you're going to need to teach someone else how to do that one day." Straight face, a furrowed brow, and you look up at him with a surprised laugh.

"Yeah, that's not gonna happen; I'm not a teacher." You're responsible for yourself, and only you, and maybe your team, your group, and oh boy, that's escalated. Being a Ranger. You're glad you're not the one holding the reins here; the stakes are higher. You never even ran your own group back in the day; you just starred in the videos. Marek did the heavy lifting when it came to planning.

"We'll see," he says, cryptically, giving you another one of those looks.

"Don't you even think about it," you mutter, starting to pace, the pace turning into a walk as he follows, because standing still hurts in ways that movement doesn't. "I'm here because Chen talked me into it, that's all." Another lie, and yeah, he knows it because he knows the amount of money invested in your body—more than needed for a dull, everyday life.

"You're born to this Julia, why not admit it?"

"Because that would mean my father was right, and he was an asshole about it, so that's never gonna happen." You jump up on the wall, balancing on it as you keep walking.

"The man is dead."

"Damn right, he is."

"You do know that he can't tell you what to do anymore?" The wall starts disintegrating beneath your feet, slowly, bricks torn apart, but you keep your balance, little stepping stones floating in front of you. Show-offs, both of you. Maybe that's why you like him.

"So why do I still hear his voice in my head?"

"You're the only one that can tell you that."

"You suck at this, you know?" You give him a glare, leaping to another stone, landing on one foot, as elegant as if you had done the ballet they wanted you to. "You're supposed to tell me that maybe that was because he had a point, and maybe it was time for me to listen to it. You know, be all responsible and shit."

"Hmmm..." He ponders it for a while, rubbing his chin, all covered in black scruff because there are no cameras out here to disapprove. "That doesn't sound like me. I think you came up with that on your own."

"And that's because you suck." You land on the ground, giving him an exasperated smile. "I don't like being responsible. Why do you keep making me do it?"

"Because you're better at it than you know." A fond chuckle as he puts a big hand on your shoulder. Heavy. Warm. Covered in faded, black tattoos, kin to the ones that are snaking up his neck and into his hairline. "As long as nobody pushes you into it."

"Guess I have Chen for that. Fucking duty and shit."

"Chen needs to lighten up," he agrees.

"I bet you tell him that I need to be more responsible." You shoot him a suspicious glance.

"Now, does that sound like something I would do?"

"You're nothing but a dirty manipulator," you say the words with your brightest smile, shrugging away from his hand, pulling your goggles back on. "You're lucky I like you."

"You need another run-through?" He wipes his sweaty forehead, shaking his head.

"I'm bored," you whine, "and you keep saying I need to stay sharp."

"Fine, girl, I won't go easy on you this time."

"Good." You smile your wickedest smile, throwing yourself backward, recklessly, stones hitting empty air, and this is the life. The adrenaline. The thrill.

The companionship.

[Eulogies](#)

[Oct 21, 2020](#)

The good ones always die young.

That's a line of bullshit Chen is intimately familiar with, something said again and again, though he knows it has nothing to do with being good. Or bad. People die, for various reasons, in various ways.

In various numbers.

Six hundred and eighty-five casualties so far, who knows how high it will go, how far the Mayor will let it before they stop reporting the numbers. Heartbreak was a horrible accident, as the media put it, a calamity like an earthquake or a brushfire.

It was no accident; that's a fact that Chen is comfortable with.

Six hundred and eighty-five dead, but only two matter. That's less comfortable.

He doesn't share that thought, doesn't share the fact that people die, they always die; he was in the war when it still was a war and not this simmering aftermath eating people but with none of the glory. People died there, enough that it made life cheap, his own most of all, and then there was a death, one that mattered.

Not one. None. A long time ago, nothing mattered then, it's the past, and this is the present, and he has a funeral to plan. Documents to sign. A team to hold together.

It won't be one for long; he can already see the signs, people cracking from the strain.

How long can you live with your heart cut out?

How long can a team?

Anathema's absence means an emptiness none of them can fill. Sentinel was already talking about retiring; it's only a matter of time, Chen knows that, but he'll last long enough to find some new blood.

Julia won't.

She'll snap; he can see it, doesn't know what to do about it. He doesn't know how to help his best friend; it wasn't supposed to be like this.

Sidestep wasn't supposed to matter.

Not this much.

Not to all of them.

Maybe to Julia. Maybe to Anathema, and Sentinel but...

Not to him.

Chen looks down at the piece of crumpled metal in his hand; the chair's armrest came off, reinforced metal twisting like flesh. Like a body.

His fault.

Julia had thrown it in his face while drunk, and he had let her because she wasn't wrong. He had failed, he had cracked, and he had been late. Had delayed Julia.

Had told them that they didn't matter—too many times. Sidestep, because that is the safer name, the mask, the hood, not the face that hid behind it, too young, too goddamn soft, reminding Chen of other faces.

Now dead. Buried.

There's a name that he ignores, but it slips in all the same, slits his wrist, but his hands are steel, like his name, and he won't let himself crack. It doesn't matter; Sidestep is dead, and he has a funeral to arrange.

Morgues to contact. Bodies to identify.

Or he would if this had been a normal family, no... friends. Normal friends, but nothing here is normal, and the bodies were cremated before they could be picked up, and he still has a funeral to arrange, and he won't tell Julia because she needs to grieve.

He can do this.

He has to do this.

He can sit down and write some soft, nice words about Sidestep because that should not be left to the staff writers, should not be another line of bullshit, and he already did Anathema's.

They will rewrite them anyway. Chen is not stupid; he knows that. But maybe a line or two will stay and make it less than awful. He already did Anathema, and he's been trying with Sidestep, but there are three pens broken and ink smudged across his cheek where he wiped it.

He wasn't crying. He doesn't have the time.

He certainly doesn't have the time to think about all the things that don't add up because that means hope, and hope is a dangerous beast he tries to avoid. Maybe that's why Sidestep beat him so often, playing chess like war, black versus white, smiling every time Chen took the careful way out.

"You can't react when you play white," They would say, soft voice too cultured, and why did they become a hero? They should have been an artist. "You need to take the initiative."

Is that what this is? Another game, like war, but with two pieces of his team already down because he played too passively?

Who's on the other side?

Why was the ambulance there?

Where did Heartbreak originate?

Why did they want to die?

What was Sidestep hiding?

Why did they die?

Anathema?

Sighing to himself, Chen picks up another pen and try to find words he's not built for. He's not like Sidestep in that way, but maybe he needs to be.

But first, he has a funeral to plan.

[Truths \(100 patrons story\)](#)

[Oct 11, 2020](#)

The first hint of dawn, sunlight not quite breaking the horizon yet, the wind smelling of salt and seaweed. The party has died down like all parties do once the steam runs out. Some have stayed, half asleep by the fire, others have already left for more comfortable beds.

Julia never minded the sand.

Anathema is watching the fire, feeding it the odd stick when it threatens to go out. It's still fascinating, watching them stick their hand into the flames to rearrange the charred logs, impervious to the fire. Does it take some of the fun out of it? Julia has never asked, but it seems like it would. Without danger, is anything real?

Chen is lounging on the blanket, bare, sandaled feet close enough to the flames that the soles would be at risk of melting if the flames were higher. He's probably cold, the blanket draped around him, face distant and sleepy. His fingers keep twitching; it's an old pair of hands, which he doesn't mind if sand gets into the joints to ruin them.

Sentinel is asleep. Soundly. Occasionally Chen gives him a companionable shove, which shuts him up for a few minutes before the snoring starts once more. Every time it happens, Sidestep picks up something to throw, but Chen always beats them to it.

At this point, it has turned into a game.

"Let him sleep," Julia says, breaking the silence.

"He won't let us sleep," Sunstream complains, wrapped in a blanket as well. This early, the faint glow of her eyes make her look otherworldly, like a goddess trapped in human form, and that was a thought that Julia would never articulate out loud.

"So don't," Julia suggests with a smile.

"Some of us need our beauty sleep," she retorts, but sits back up, trying to untangle her ruffled hair. Like Julia's, it's long and fit for magazine covers.

"Should have left when Ashfall drove the rest back then," Sidestep says, mask off but hood up. Unlike the rest, their attempt at civilian clothes is a tracksuit Julia knows she bought them months ago. Still looks new. There's a skinsuit underneath; she can see it every time they move when the sleeves slide up.

"Don't be an ass, 'step," Julia says, hiding a yawn as she slides deeper into the sand. The sky is impossibly vast above, painted with the deep blues of approaching sunrise.

"People never like a truth-teller." They turn to look at Julia, only the smile visible under the edge of the hood. White. Thin. Predatory.

But Julia had always been fond of danger.

"Really?" she asks, her smile widening as Sidestep's fades. A mistake has been made, they realize that now. "How about a game?"

"It's late," Sunstream complains. "Or early, I suppose. Anyway, I'm not going to move, Jules."

"Not truth and dare again," Chen mutters. "We're all hurt, this is supposed to be us recuperating. The Void left you a mess; you shouldn't even be out of the hospital."

"No dare then," Julia suggests amiably, flexing her leg. As if a broken bone would stop her. "Just the truth."

"Forget that," Sidestep protests, at the same time as Chen. They glare at each other a moment before Anathema chimes in:

"I'm in." They put on a few more sticks, and the flames leap to life, Chen scooting back to save his sandals.

"Can't spin a bottle in the sand," Chen points out, looking too pleased with himself.

"Here's the rules then," Julia tosses an empty bottle in the air, it lands, pointing approximately at Sunstream. "We each ask a question the others have to answer truthfully."

"Like hell," Sidestep mutters. "You're the oversharer here; the rest of us likes our secrets very much, thank you."

"Think of it as a team-building exercise," Julia chuckles. "You first Sunny, but don't be mean."

"Don't we have anything to say in this?" Chen's protest is quiet, once again finding himself allied with Sidestep. Funny how they dislike each other.

"No," Anathema says. "And wake up Luis."

"I'm awake," Sentinel mumbles, clearly half asleep.

"Come on, Sunny," Julia goads, and Sunstream sighs and picks up the bottle.

"I don't have to answer it, right?"

"No, but don't be a dick," Anathema grins.

"I'm not the one you have to worry about," a pointed look at Julia, "but okay. Here we go. Who would you least want to fight on the team? If it was serious, like they were under the influence of Dreamweaver or something?"

"Suited up?" Chen asks, always a stickler for details.

"Yes, and associates included."

"Hmph," he says, pulling the blankets tighter. "Ashfall, nothing I could do to hurt him, and I think he could probably shred my filters if he tried."

"Not me?" Anathema exclaims. "I'm hurt."

"I can stay at a distance from you," Chen says. "Blow a hole in the ground, trap you there."

"It was once," they protest. "But fine, I would pick Luis. For the same reason. Couldn't reach, and his winds could toss me into the ocean."

"I wouldn't do that, sweetie," Sentinel chuckles, eyes half-open, stifling a yawn. "I'd pick Sunny, winds don't affect lasers. That would be annoying."

"I would pick Themmy," Julia says with a wince. "Nothing I could do but hurt myself. What about you, 'step?"

"You," Sidestep says, a quiet grumble. "You never shut up when you fight, it's the worst."

"My secret weapon," Julia smiles, gesturing to Sunstream. "Come on, make a toss."

The bottle flies into the air, a good rotation, and comes down, pointing at Sentinel.

"Good," he mumbles. easing himself up on one elbow. "What do you children want for Christmas?"

"That's not fair," Anathema protests. "It's three months 'til Christmas."

"I like to get my shopping done early."

"Fine," they say with a resigned look on their face. "I need a new frier since the other one gave up the ghost."

"Some of your girlfriend's cookies," Sunstream says with a dreamy look. "They're addictive."

"You're going to give me something stupid anyway," Chen sighs. "I still haven't used last year's tickets."

"Really? Come on, man," Sentinel gives Chen a punch in the leg. "The show was excellent, just get a date and check it out. Stop being a chicken."

"I'm not. It's just..."

"I know you're bad at the whole dating thing, but you need to put yourself out there. Don't make me sign you up for a dating service; there's a lot of girls out there that would love you."

"Fine," Chen groans. "Just give me some new tickets. At least I don't have to figure out where to go then."

"No tickets for me?" Julia jokes, inwardly sighing because no way Chen will ever use those tickets. What a waste.

"You get them for free, little miss best dressed 2005."

"Fair," she admits. "Just give me a bottle then. Something old and weird. Possibly illegal."

"Oh, you shouldn't have challenged me," Sentinel chuckles. "How about you, Sidestep?"

"Me?" They look surprised.

"Yeah, you're getting a Christmas present too. What do you want?"

"Don't be weird." They pull the hood down deeper. "You don't have to give me a present."

"But I want to."

"Isn't it supposed to be a surprise?"

"You're supposed to write a list to Santa. I just decided to sidestep the process."

"Ha. Ha. You're a funny old man."

"And you're a bratty vigilante who is getting a Christmas present."

"Gum."

"Gum? You can't pick gum, that's not..."

"I just did. I want gum. Now throw that fucking bottle."

"Fine, fine," Sentinel picks up the bottle, still looking bemused at Sidestep. He throws it into the air, it spins faster than it should as the wind picks up, and when it lands, it points straight at Sidestep.

"Cheater, " they mutter.

"Thought you'd like to ask questions instead of answering them." Sentinel's smile is bright.

"Why are you so annoying," Sidestep groans, only realizing too late what they said.

"It's part of my charm," Julia pipes up, quickly followed by Anathema:

"I am just friendly, and you can't handle that."

"You don't like the things I have to say," Chen mutters, trying to hide his amusement.

"You like the shadows, not the light," Sunstream catches on.

"And I am way too clever even this early in the morning." Sentinel winks, and Sidestep groans again, pulling the hood deeper.

"Fine, fine, it's national drag-a-Sidestep day. I get it." They pick up the bottle and throws it; it lands in the fire, scattering sand and sparks.

"Guess that's me," Anathema says, leaning in to grab it from the flames. "I'm not going to be silly about this, I actually do want to know. Why did you become a hero?" A quick glance at Sidestep. "Or a vigilante, I could see that protest coming a mile off."

"Wow," Sunstream says. "You're playing hardball here."

"It's too early, and most of you are drunk." A sweet smile. "And I'm feeling sentimental."

"It's a job," Chen says abruptly. "And it's better than the military. I feel like I can make a difference here."

"Isn't that why we all started?" Sentinel looks around the fire, slow words, slow blinks. "Because we wanted to change things. Maybe change ourselves. Become something new."

"I just didn't want to be bored," Julia lies, as effortlessly as always. "I get paid for being a reckless idiot. A good deal if you ask me."

"I want to matter," Sunstream says, face sharp, eyes burning. "That's all."

"I don't know what else I would do," Sidestep admits, looking uncharacteristically disturbed. "It makes sense."

"How do you mean?" Anathema asks, in the way that only they could. A way that might get an answer.

"I've got the skills. And I won't be useless." Sidestep's voice is sharp, and Julia knows there's more there, but it's not the time to prod. Maybe later. Useless is a weird word to use.

"Fine, Julia or Chen then," Anathema grins, another nugget extracted from the black hole that is Sidestep. "I can't throw it perfectly."

"I'll go," Chen says, eyes uncharacteristically shifty. "Have you ever done anything illegal?"

"Asshole," Julia laughs. "You know I have. Trespassing and breaking the speed limit if nothing else."

"I don't think so," Sentinel ponders. "I mean nothing big anyway. And to be fair, a lot of things become legal when you're a Ranger."

"Yes, I have," Anathema admits with a cringe. "But that was before I got boosted. That doesn't count."

"No," Sunstream says, decisively. "I try to be good."

"Me neither," Sidestep says, looking straight at Chen. "I haven't done anything illegal. Ever."

"But you..." Julia protests, thinking back to how they met, but... there's something strangely earnest about the proclamation. They really mean it, in a sharp and twisted way she doesn't quite get. Not yet. She can see Chen coming to the same conclusion, so she decides to distract. "My turn now."

"Oh no," Sidestep drawls. "It sure would be helpful if a villain attacked right now."

"Villains aren't helpful," Anathema giggles. "Just suck it up."

"Your biggest regret," Julia spits out, fast before her brain has time to engage. It's too heavy a question for the mood, and it lands quietly among the group; nobody eager to speak up first.

"Should have done it sooner," Sentinel speaks first, trust Luis to breach the challenging subjects.

"Would have been a hell of a lot simpler if I had stopped doubting myself early on instead of transitioning when I was already in the media limelight."

"You can't..." Chen starts but stops himself before it turns into a discussion. That's not the point of this, and he knows it. "I've got a lot of regrets," he haltingly continues now that all eyes are on him. He was always uncomfortable with that. "Hard to pick one. Hard to know who I would be without them."

"I know what you mean," Anathema says. "But I trusted someone I shouldn't have, and even if it led me to this point, I wish I hadn't. I wouldn't be me, but maybe I would be happier."

"You're not happy?" Sidestep pipes up.

"I can't complain now," the shrug is noncommittal. "I wish I could forget certain things, though."

"Don't we all," Sidestep mutters, looking at the flames. Julia looks on, fascinated at how their face shifts under the hood, open and unreadable at the same time.

"What do you regret?" Anathema prods gently.

"Chen first," they retort. "I know a dodge when I hear one."

"Overreacting," Chen says, sharply. "I walked out of a situation I could have talked my way through, just because I lost my temper. It all escalated from there."

"You, losing your temper?" Julia can't stop her smile. It happens rarely, but the blowouts are magnificent. "And didn't apologize afterward?"

"I was right, I had nothing to apologize for." A helpless shrug. "And then things had gone too far to walk anything back. It was easier to just continue forward."

"I know what you mean," Sunstream says, warming her hands near the fire. "Being right doesn't mean it hurts any less. I wish I could have said sorry to my mother before she died. Maybe I would have got her out of my head then."

"She would be proud, " Sentinel mumbles, still comfortably slouched.

"No, she'd be horrified at what I am." The words are lighter than they should, her eyes glowing faintly. "But I still shouldn't have said what I said to her."

"What about you, 'step?" Sentinel shifts to look over at Sidestep, who has drawn in on themselves, knees pulled up, arms around them.

"I left someone behind." Quick words, sharp as a razor. "I had no choice. But I wish I hadn't done it. I should have..."

"Hey," Anathema shifts closer. "We all should have, that's the point of regrets. But we didn't. And maybe that's why we're here. Trying to make things better."

"You're such an optimist," Sidestep grumbles, but their shoulders sag slightly, accepting the inevitable.

"Gotta be, in this gloomy team. It's just Luis and me holding the fort."

"Hey, I'm not gloomy," Sunstream protests.

"No, just serious."

"And me?" Julia knows she's smiling, so she plays it up, like always. "I'm a regular bundle of joy."

"You just play the part," Anathema teases, and Julia is too kind to point out that out of the two of them, the one that does that is Anathema. Invulnerability is not invisibility.

Nobody becomes a hero without baggage—especially not one determined enough to climb to the top.

She should know.

Later, people have finally drifted off to sleep in the shadows of the dunes, the early morning sun warming the air. Julia is sitting on a dune, hair loose in the breeze, trying to pretend she doesn't hear Sidestep sneaking up behind her.

She tenses, but there's no surprise attack, just a resigned sigh as the vigilante sinks down into the sand next to her.

"So, what's yours?" The question is direct, without any polite preamble.

"My what?" Julia turns, trying to catch a glimpse of their face, but it's hidden in shadow.

"Biggest regret. Don't think I didn't notice, people asked the things they were afraid of answering themselves. So what's yours?"

"Maybe making the jump that day, even though the winds were treacherous."

"Bullshit. You broke your back, sure, but you love what you do now, and you wouldn't have become modded otherwise. I was serious for once; you owe me a reply."

"I do, don't I." Julia sighs, looking at the waves. "I should have gone with Hood to make the pickup. I shouldn't have let him go alone; I knew something was wrong." She doesn't look at Sidestep, and they don't look at her in return. "I should have snuck after him. Or talked him into taking me. I should have trusted my instincts."

"To be fair, your instincts are crap." The comment is brutal and surprising, and Julia can't stop the laugh.

"They are a bit, aren't they?" She lies back, feeling Sidestep do the same beside her. "But they're all I've got."

"So, what are they saying about me?"

"That I like you."

"See, they're shitty."

"You wanna take a nap?" Julia rolls over, watching Sidestep watching the skies. Sleep is napping at her heels, but as usual, they don't seem too bothered.

"No. You grab one. I'll keep an eye out for anything suspicious."

"Like always." She hides the smile at the annoyed huff. No use getting into an argument on the edge of sleep. Not over something she knows she'd lose.

Better to just enjoy the moment.

[It's #WorldMentalHealthDay](#)

[Oct 10, 2020](#)

Reposted from [my twitter](#).

-

So it's #WorldMentalHealthDay and I'm smack in the middle of a bad stretch. Not gonna wallow, but I am going to talk about something I've only realized recently: I'm not as alone as I thought.

First, let me preface this with that I'm not talking about being lonely. I've got people that I care about, and they care about me. Not many, but I don't like most people, so that's fair. That's not what this is about

No, this is about the idea in my head that my pain and my thoughts were somehow unique. It's an easy trap to fall into; the rest of the world looks happy and neurotypical, while only I know the mess that's the inside of my head.

I'm a writer, but I never thought I would be read. I was under the illusion that my choice was to either try to appeal and be normal or be ignored and forgotten. I wasn't good at the first, so I went for the second.

I wrote an interactive novel in which I poured a lot of my nastier sides. My insecurities. My anger with the world. Not fitting in. Body issues. Gender issues. Autism issues. Sweet revenge

I still tried to curate it. Hide it beneath a supervillain coat of paint, trying to entice people out for the power trip. That wanted to go bad. I was convinced that's how to get read

I was wrong. So wrong. After publishing *Fallen Hero: Rebirth*, one single constant has been the number of people reaching out to thank me. Thank me for what?

It varies. That the story helped them get an outlet for their anger. Helped them realize their sexuality or their gender. Helped them find words to describe their perspective. I've had people write to me and pour their hearts out.

And it's been my heart too. My feelings. My pain. It wasn't unique. It wasn't special. It was so common, and it makes me so fucking angry that we all thought we were alone. That nobody else felt this way.

The world lied to us. It said we were wrong. That we needed to change. That nobody would like us as we were. The world lied, and we believed it. I believed it.

Publishing *Fallen Hero* has changed my world. Not because I get read or liked, but because I finally realized that I'm not alone. That I write for people, not despite them.

Interactive fiction has been a revelation to me. It has enabled me to explore things I would have shied away from. I am grateful to everyone that reached out. That made connections, not just to me, but with each other.

I hope it's made us all feel a little bit less alone and a little more hopeful. Take care of yourself, even if nobody else will.

[So I've reached 100 patreons apparently!](#)

[Oct 8, 2020](#)

First of all, thank you.

Second of all, I am blown away and not entirely sure how to handle it. Life and health is a wee bit chaotic at the moment, decisions are hard.

So, I thought I'd leave it in your hands. What do you want me to write for you this weekend to celebrate? (I'll be fasting due to x-rays on monday, so there probably won't be any serious game fixing anyway).

I want a short story! (feel free to suggest people or subjects in comments)

56%

I want character lore (feel free to suggest in comments)

36%

I want world lore (feel free to suggest in comments)

8%

Poll ended Oct 10, 2020 · 77 votes total

[Four Funerals and a Wake](#)

[Oct 2, 2020](#)

Eight years ago.

The tie is too tight. The shirt too buttoned. The suit too black and too new, and your eyes are too old.

No tears. Boys don't cry, and right now, you get why.

It would be too easy to crack completely if you started, and Ricardo Ortega doesn't crack. Can't. Won't.

Can't smile, but you try it anyway, the grimace in the mirror nothing like mirth or kindness or hope for a future.

You feel nothing like yourself, so instead, you school yourself into neutrality, into quiet, stony anger at the unfairness of life.

It's never easy to bury people you love.

...

Ten years ago.

The skinsuit is new, but it still smells like blood and rust, like nanovores. You wonder if the cameras can make out the slight thickness to your right arm where the swarm stripped skin and flesh faster than your discharge could destroy them. The grafts itch, the skinsuit's pressure doesn't help the bandages, but the funeral is in-suit, and the Marshal has to be there.

So many others are not.

At least you're not alone, Sidestep hovering nearby, hood down far enough to cover his mask, with enough restless energy to make you feel calm in comparison.

The hero of the hour wanting to be nothing of the sort. You see him hunch over, pull in on himself, hands making fists as if expecting a fight, your clap on his shoulder gives you an angry hiss and an averted blow, but the cameras are on the caskets carried forward, giving you some privacy.

Empty. The swarm left nothing behind.

They still look heavy, with grief, with memories.

Seven heroes dead. An in-suit funeral to remind the people that they are protected.

Protected. God knows how many civilians died before Sidestep pulled that trick; it was a miracle that...

No. Not trick. Not a miracle. An act of will. Of sacrifice.

He's still holding himself wrong, head moving as if his neck is filled with gravel, body fitting not quite right. Like he sprained something, pushed too hard, too fast, and you know that feeling.

Things break, and sometimes there's no putting them back together again.

All you can do is move on.

...

Fourteen years ago.

You're not wearing a suit. Hood hated suits and wouldn't have been caught dead in one if he had a choice.

Now he's dead and in a suit. No choice. You're the Marshal now, so you're not in one.

Making a scene at a funeral in black jeans and a t-shirt.

Not caring.

Grief is good like that, making everything a chalky drawing you can wipe off with your hand. Makes things distant—even death.

An open-casket funeral, you know you're supposed to say he looks just like if he was alive, but they covered up his tattoos, and when you lean down to kiss his forehead, he's cold to the touch.

There's going to be pictures of that.

The handover.

The new Marshal promising the old one that he'll find his killer. Telling it to the press, who is eating it up, talking to the face behind the camera that you know is watching.

The spider in his web.

You tell him that you're coming for him.

...

Nineteen years ago.

You're in the wheelchair again after the latest operation, but at least that gets you out of carrying the casket later. The house is filled with voices, with tears, and with laughs. Too many relatives. Too many memories. Good ones.

You cling to your anger all the same.

It's expected. A man losing his father has the right to rage against the heavens.

Not the right to rage against the dead, so you hold your words, you build your walls and let your mother remember the man she loved. Emilio has left to get you your third beer, and maybe that will be enough to give you the strength to get through the night.

If not, you know where the good whiskey is hidden. Not like your father's going to care anymore.

It must be nice. Not caring.

Maybe one day you'll learn to be like him.

...

Thirty years ago.

Your suit is too tight, and you keep fidgeting on the church bench. You hit a growth spurt last semester, and now it feels like your shoulders are trapped, and you imagine that you can turn into a monster like Armordillo, flex your arms and shred the fabric, and stomp all over the pews. Roar at the audience. Make the priest run, make people flee. Fear you.

You shoot a glance at your father next to you, but he's not noticing your clenched fists. He's staring straight ahead, and you should too, but you keep fidgeting, and your good shoes are too hard, not like sneakers, and the clip-on tie should make you feel adult, but everyone is weird.

Death is. Weird.

Grandpa is gone. Really gone. Your eyes start stinging again, and you blink them hard because you're not supposed to cry, you're a big boy now, and boys don't cry, and monsters certainly don't. Armordillo

wouldn't cry; he'd laugh and make others cry instead.

Father didn't like it when you did that either. Hitting people. Even though it was their fault, picking on people who wouldn't hit back. So you did it for them. That's good, right?

But you shouldn't hit people—another rule that's for kids and not adults.

You'll get it one day. He keeps saying that.

You'll grow up one day.

Learn some discipline.

Armordillo cares nothing for discipline, and you keep your face straight and your hands still and squirm quietly in your shoes as you imagine the church falling apart around you. Nobody will ever know what goes on inside your head, and what people don't know doesn't get you punished.

Maybe that's what discipline is all about.

...

Eight years ago, reprised.

Your knuckles hurt, and you don't recognize your own voice, but you hear your father's clear as day.

Telling you.

What you already know.

You failed.

You messed up.

The reporter at your feet is out cold, a civilian, and thank god you had disconnected your emitters before the funeral; otherwise, he might be dead.

Instead of your career.

If only you had learned some discipline. Become the leader he knew you could be. Taken care of your team. Made them fucking obey your orders. Stay close. Stay behind.

And now he's dead.

And now you're lost.

And your father was right all along.

Your worst enemy was always yourself.

[A conversation with ortega](#)

[Oct 2, 2020](#)

Subject: Ricardo Felipe José García Ortega

Registration ID: Charge

Defunct RID entries: Marshal Charge

Birthdate: 26th of May, 1982

Blood type: B+

Height: 6ft/183cm

Weight: 190lb/86kg

Classification: Type B modified human

Modifications: Neural weave, enhanced joint/bone structure, electricity generation.

Subject: Julia Esperanza Maria García Ortega

Registration ID: Charge

Defunct RID entries: Marshal Charge

Birthdate: 26th of May, 1982

Blood type: B+

Height: 6ft/183cm

Weight: 163lb/74kg

Classification: Type B modified human

Modifications: Neural weave, enhanced joint/bone structure, electricity generation.

Below are attached documents, depending on whether Ricardo or Julia is the Ortega in question.

(since some people had issues downloading, I am amending this post with the interviews. First Julia, after that Ricardo).

--- JULIA---

Transcript of A Night With The Stars, 02x09 - unaired.

[Pre-Show sound test, not for broadcast. Julia Ortega and Marcus Campbell on set]

Ortega: "Ah, Mr. Campbell, it's been a while. They didn't tell me you would be doing the interview."

Campbell: "If they had, would you have agreed?"

Ortega: "Of course. You're a consummate professional and I am sure you will write an article that won't get you sued this time."

Campbell: "Oh please, we only know you are agreeing to this because of all the bad press lately."

Ortega: "Maybe I was bored."

Campbell: "That is true, you were injured. I hear you don't heal as well as you used to."

Ortega: "I thought we were saving this for the cameras?"

Campbell: "I thought we were being polite on camera? I've got strict instructions."

Ortega: "Ah, instructions. The one thing both of us are so fond of."

Campbell: "Your charm won't work on me, Julia."

Ortega: "It will on your viewers."

A1: "The sound is fine, Mr. Campbell, we are picking up both of you perfectly. No interference from Ms. Ortega's mods."

Campbell: "Good, we're ready when you are Davies."

[Music plays]

Campbell: "Welcome to 'A Night With The Stars', I'm your host, Marcus Campbell, and tonight I am sitting down for a conversation with none other than the former Marshal of Los Diablos herself, the famous Charge."

Ortega: "Thank you, Marcus, it's certainly been a while. I do have to say, I love your new studio."

Campbell: "So the question on everyone's lips right now is your decision to call off your upcoming thirty-ninth birthday party. Any comments what lies behind that decision?"

Ortega: "With events recently, it didn't feel like it was the best time for another public gathering. Besides, I already got the best birthday present any woman can hope for, so I'm good."

[studio laughter]

Campbell: "So it had nothing to do with worries about approaching forty?"

Ortega: "I still have another year to go before I'll wrestle that particular beast. It really was just unfortunate timing."

Campbell: "No thoughts about settling down and start a family? I am sure that enough people have reminded you that the clock is ticking."

Ortega: "They certainly do. And they have nothing to do with my choices in life, and whether I start a family or not."

Campbell: "If I may strike a more serious tone here, you did retire once, what made you come back to active service?"

Ortega: "I resigned as Marshal after a terrible event that I know many people in this city remember with me. The Heartbreak attack cost me two of my closest friends. They died in the line of duty, to stop things from becoming even worse than they were. I might have succeeded in stopping the threat and keeping the city safe, but I failed as Marshal. I failed as a friend."

Campbell: "But you reconsidered?"

Ortega: "I did. Grief didn't mean that the city had become any safer, the team was short-handed as it were, so I returned to active duty. "

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Campbell: "That is true, and if I am not mistaken, Charge was your nickname back in your youth as well?"

[video footage of a young Julia and four other youths roll on the screen, they are waving at the camera, wearing climbing gear]

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Campbell: "I got in contact with an old friend of yours that still had the originals."

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Ortega: "It was staged as a rehearsal yes, that's what we sold the footage as. But between you and me, once we got up, we had to call off that idea. Too risky."

Campbell: "Too risky for Charge?"

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Campbell: "That is true, your next project was the one that..."

Ortega: "That ended with my accident yes. We split up after that."

Campbell: "Did you know Marek sold the footage of the accident?"

Ortega: "I did tell you we split up. That was one of the reasons."

Campbell: "He told me he did it to pay for the hospital bills. You were not the only one that was injured."

Ortega: "True, I have no hard feelings these days."

Campbell: "Back then?"

Ortega: "I was furious, of course. I blamed him for it. I also blamed God, the weather forecast, fate... and eventually myself."

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Campbell: "Why don't you? Wear the uniform? Most Mods that the military invest in do get sent abroad."

Ortega: "For the same reason that Steel doesn't. The initial investment might have been US Army, but it's the Ranger's project that's footing the bill now."

Campbell: "Do you think your father would have wished you to? To my knowledge, he was instrumental in you getting chosen to get Enhanced after your accident."

Ortega: "My father is dead."

Campbell: "That is true. I take it that's no comment then?"

Ortega: "I can't speak with the dead."

Campbell: "And your mother then? She was a promising gymnast before settling down after she married. Do you think she would rather have had you follow in her footsteps and become an athlete rather than this risky a career?"

Ortega: "I am sure you already tried to ask her that before this show, didn't you?"

Campbell: "We do our research. Alas, she declined to comment."

Ortega: "As she should. You're skirting close to making this episode unairable, you know."

Campbell: "You have to take risks to make good television. If I wanted a polite interview about approved subjects I would have stayed with my old employers."

Ortega: "I can't argue with that. Let's see how this goes then, that particular call is out of our hands."

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Ortega: "You know I can't answer those speculations, Marcus."

Campbell: "I know Sentinel technically is retired, but he has been helping out with disaster management so maybe he is getting restless?"

[footage of Sentinel in action, a stocky black man in an armored skinsuit, blue cape whipped by winds as he's taking off]

Ortega: "He also has a family, and being a Ranger is a different kind of commitment than helping out."

Campbell: "Fair, and I suppose there still has been no sign of Sunstream?"

Ortega: "It's almost been a decade. Let her nurse her wounds in peace."

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Campbell: "Ashfall was one of the most promising associates, any comment about the fact that he chose to join the San Francisco Rangers instead of Los Diablos' once he got accepted?"

[footage of a masked young man in a grey skinsuit, fighting modded henchmen]

Ortega: "Ashfall... no, I'm sorry. It's Pyrocblast now I suppose. I can't blame him for wanting to leave town, we were all hurt by what happened."

Campbell: "There are rumors of an argument between you and him?"

Ortega: "There are a lot of rumors about me, and I had stepped down as Marshal at the time. I doubt I was the deciding factor."

Campbell: "You do seem to be having a string of bad luck with potential members though. Wasn't there talk about Locus being considered?"

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Ortega: "I can't comment on that, but the point is moot after her disappearance."

Campbell: "As I said, a string of bad luck."

Ortega: "We'll manage."

Campbell: "I am sure. Oh, and before our time runs out tonight, I wanted to hear your views on the planned movie."

"Movie?"

Campbell: "The one chronicling the Heartbreak terrorist attack? I hear they have started the casting process over in Atlanta. Any thoughts on who you would like to star as your younger self? I hear that

Sidestep will be....kzzhzzz..."

[recording ends abruptly]

--- RICARDO---

Transcript of A Night With The Stars, 02x09 - unaired.

[Pre-Show sound test, not for broadcast. Ricardo Ortega and Marcus Campbell on set]

Ortega: "Ah, Mr. Campbell, it's been a while. They didn't tell me you would be doing the interview."

Campbell: "If they had, would you have agreed?"

Ortega: "Of course. You're a consummate professional and I am sure you will write an article that won't get you sued this time."

Campbell: "Oh please, we only know you are agreeing to this because of all the bad press lately."

Ortega: "Maybe I was bored."

Campbell: "That is true, you were injured. I hear you don't heal as well as you used to."

Ortega: "I thought we were saving this for the cameras?"

Campbell: "I thought we were being polite on camera? I've got strict instructions."

Ortega: "Ah, instructions. The one thing both of us are so fond of."

Campbell: "Your charm won't work on me, Ricardo."

Ortega: "It will on your viewers."

A1: "The sound is fine, Mr. Campbell, we are picking up both of you perfectly. No interference from Mr. Ortega's mods."

Campbell: "Good, we're ready when you are Davies."

[Music plays]

Campbell: "Welcome to 'A Night With The Stars', I'm your host, Marcus Campbell, and tonight I am sitting down for a conversation with none other than the former Marshal of Los Diablos himself, the famous Charge."

Ortega: "Thank you, Marcus, it's certainly been a while. I do have to say, I love your new studio."

Campbell: "So the question on everyone's lips right now is your decision to call off your upcoming thirty-ninth birthday party. Any comments what lies behind that decision?"

Ortega: "With events recently, it didn't feel like it was the best time for another public gathering. Besides, I already got the best birthday present any man can hope for, so I'm good."

[studio laughter]

Campbell: "So it had nothing to do with worries about approaching forty?"

Ortega: "I still have another year to go before I'll wrestle that particular beast. It really was just unfortunate timing."

Campbell: "You have been showing off your graying temples lately, a less confident man might have done something about that. Aren't you afraid that people will look at you and see a has-been? A hero that should have retired years ago?"

Ortega: "First, Marcus, my powers are not in my hair. And second, I would like to think that with age comes experience."

Campbell: "I am sure we would all like to think that. But, if I may strike a more serious tone here, you did retire once, what made you come back to active service?"

Ortega: "I resigned as Marshal after a terrible event that I know many people in this city remember with me. The Heartbreak attack cost me two of my closest friends. They died in the line of duty, to stop things from becoming even worse than they were. I might have succeeded in stopping the threat and keeping the city safe, but I failed as Marshal. I failed as a friend."

Campbell: "But you reconsidered?"

Ortega: "I did. Grief didn't mean that the city had become any safer, the team was short-handed as it were, so I returned to active duty. With a few more gray hairs."

Campbell: "As an ordinary Ranger."

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Campbell: "Was that the reason why the attack on the benefit gala was that badly handled? Because the Marshal was not present?"

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[recording ends abruptly]

[Oct 1, 2020](#)

Quick questions, quick answers. Some are from here, some are from the Patreon discord, and some are from older sources:

How do you take care of the Rat-King? Are they comfortable like they are?

The filters for Rat King's liquid bath needs to be changed once a week for comfort but can last a lot longer if needed. Nutrition is added monthly, and comes prepared in tablet form. The housing is made to be self-sufficient and is very durable. The Rat-King is comfortable and they do not remember any other existence. All their senses are telepathic in nature.

Why did you decide to write Fallen hero?

I came up with the story because I was interested in the question of how telepathy would affect a person's sense of self, and wanted to explore identity, gender and what makes people do bad things for reasons they deem good. I might get into this in more detail later if people are interested in process talk.

What is one thing that was supposed to go one way but you started writing and now it's completely different?

Herald's entire arc. Also, Chen.

What happened to the former Rangers?

There are several heroes who used to be Rangers in the past. While I won't go into detail of all of them, here are the fates of some that Sidestep worked with/knew about:

Marshal Hood: Deceased 2007. He was an Alpha level boost with petrokinetic (earth manipulation) powers.

Sentinel: Retired 2013 and is happily married. He and his family live in a small town in the mountains. While he is retired, he still helps out with rescue work, and during emergencies in the local communities. He's an Alpha level boost with wind control powers and flight.

Anathema: Deceased 2013. An Alpha level double boost with invulnerability and acid generation.

Sunstream: Resigned 2011, about six months after the nanosurge and disappeared soon afterwards. Sidestep didn't know the details. She wrote Ortega a resignation letter, and Ortega never spoke about

what was in it. Sunstream was a Beta level boost with light-based powers. She could illuminate, cause blackouts, and with concentration even create lasers, though that took a lot out of her.

Ashfall: During Sidesteps active years, Ashfall was another close associate of the Rangers. He had the goal of eventually proving himself and becoming one. After Heartbreak, he moved away from Los Diablos, and is now a Ranger in San Francisco going under the name Pyroclast. He's a Beta level boost with the power to turn himself into an ash/dust cloud. In that form he is capable of flight, and able to raise his internal temperature to a substantial degree.

Who is the best liar of the Rangers?

Ortega, but nobody thinks that.

Whose the worst roommate of all the rangers? Include sidestep era rangers if possible

Argent, hands down. There are reasons why she lives alone.

Is Steel able to swim with all those prosthetics or do they weight him down in water?

It would depend on the loadout, but generally, no. He would have to take measures to stop that.

If Sidestep revealed how ReGenes are treated, would the public care?

Depends on how it is revealed. You may have the chance to find out. It might also be part of the plans for some characters.

Did Charge and Dr. Mortum ever fight?

Not directly. Dr. Mortum tried to avoid being a Rangers level issue, they were aware of each other, but didn't come in direct conflict.

What was Sidestep's relationship with Sentinel?

You will be able to detail that later, it can vary.

Who gives Ortega his tip-offs about Hollow Ground?

Ortega has a contact in the staff, one who is very good at keeping their head down and their eyes open. Said staff has not personally met HG, but deduce when they are there from the amount of fuss created.

Has Hollow Ground and Dr. Mortum met?

Dr. Mortum does some work for Hollow ground, and yes, they have met in person.

How does the Los Diablos Rangers rank when it comes to power?

The Los Diablos Rangers cell is one of the top 3 in the country. Exact ranking varies depending on the views of the ranker. Seattle and San Francisco are the other two contenders.

Does Herald own Sidestep merch?

Yes he does. Not a massive collection, but a few choice pieces.

When Sidestep has nightmares, are their neighbors okay?

Sidesteps neighbors are not okay. A lot of them have moved out. The nightmares can leak, and yes, this might happen to RO's if Sidestep spends a bad night there.

Can we get to take care of Ortega?

Ortega is VERY hard to take care of. Do your best. Might not work.

What kind of drunks are the Rangers?

Ortega can be many types of drunk, mostly volatile. Chen is a lightweight when it comes to alcohol. Herald only drinks socially and Argent stays clear of the stuff.

Is the ReGene tattoo process instantaneous and painless? Does the colors matter? Why do they have blue skin?

Yes, it is painless and quick, ReGenes don't remember getting them, there is no healing afterwards. The color is tied to their powers, as are certain themes in the patterns. The blue skin of the ReGenes is due to the farm adding colloidal silver to their food. It is an essential step to reinforce their inhumanity since it is a permanent change. It helps assuring they do not see themselves as people, and that the rest of the staff doesn't either.

Will the barcode be read eventually?

Yes, but reading is not the hard part. Decoding the code is.

Do all ReGenes ultimately look the same? Aside from the skin, but like hair and eye color, face structure, body structure?

No, they vary very much. There's a diverse genetic pool the Farm is playing around with in the vain hope of finding the ones that can handle the boost drug the best.

What will the consequence of killing Blaze be? Will his team have a serious vendetta against villain Step?

There will be consequences (I won't tell them all), and if you do kill Blaze it is likely you will have to face the rest of his team in book three. Not to mention the fallout it might cause with Steel if he finds out.

So, this was the September QnA, feel free to add questions in the comments here, and I will get around to answering them in October. That is unless they are interesting enough that I want to make an entire post, then they might pop up earlier. Note that not all questions were answered, certain ones were very spoilery and will be in a post of their own for the ones that have access to said spoilers.

<https://dashingdon.com/play/malin/fhr21bugfixed/mygame/>

[Updated closed alpha and new link!](#)

[Oct 1, 2020](#)

Chapter 18 is now updated with new RO interactions, poly content, secret crushes and other complications. I also extended the Blaze fight, and fixed some bugs.

IMPORTANT**:** [note that it is a new link](#), I will take down the old one on Saturday. This means that no old saves will work, but there would have been too many new variables added to make it work anyway.

Have fun, and I will now start working on ch 19. HG time!

[September spoiler QnA](#)

[Oct 1, 2020](#)

Well, here we go with the questions that have too many spoilers for the closed Beta to answer more openly. Please understand the lack of detail in some answers, I can't spoil too big storybeats.

How did Steel get red-threaded by Hollow Ground?

At a function Steel had to attend. It was a crowded room, someone brushing against him, touching his neck. A bit creepy, awkward, Steel felt weirded out but then thought nothing of it. It was annoying for HG not to be able to solve it with a handshake.

Does Ortega know about Hollow Ground's red-thread ability?

Nope. But they suspect something weird is going on.

How does Sidestep's age work?

In general, people assume that Sidestep was born in the late eighties, and thus are around 30 years old.

But in practice it is more complicated than that.

Sidestep was decanted in the year 2002, the sole survivor of their batch. Like all ReGenes, they were decanted when their body was in its early teens, and had spent between 2-4 years in the tank, developing. During the time in the tank, they were fed a basic obedience/training program which meant that at the time of decanting, they had basically the same skills as a high school graduate.

Once they were decanted and processed, they went under for a shorter while and programmed with skills relevant to their chosen role before real training begun to set the memories and make them physical. There were contextual memories in these programs, mostly taken from suitable soldiers and agents, and remixed in order to try to create suitably malleable minds that could be trained. Most ReGenes shed those memories fast once they started making ones of their own, but now and again, a ReGene clings so hard to them that they need to be scrubbed and reset in order not to get any delusions about what they are.

So physically Sidestep is in their thirties, time-wise a lot younger, but experience and training wise, a lot older.

What are the gates that open during specific events with Sidestep?

The gates are a way for me to keep track of certain, let's call them traumatic, telepathic events that Sidestep experiences or causes. This is a stat that is only visible now for playtesting purposes, be happy that you get a peek. Otherwise you would have had no idea they were there. What will I use it for? Only time will tell, just make sure you don't get to nine...

WHO took control of the puppet??

That will be one of the big mysteries of book three, there are many possible culprits.

[Boosts and Mods](#)

[Oct 1, 2020](#)

I got some questions about mods and boosts, and I decided to break them out and talk about them in more detail:

There's been talk about alpha level boosts, what does that mean? Are there any other classifications? Do modded people have classifications too? How many alpha-level boosts are there in Los Diablos?

There are four general categories of Boosts. Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta.

Delta: Boosts at this level have small extra-human powers, but not enough to be military or commercially viable. It can be things like generating enough heat/fire to light a cigarette, changing the color of their hair or other, essentially harmless tricks.

Gamma: These boosts have useful, but still limited powers. In general, they are utilitarian rather than dangerous. They are things like having sense of smell as good as a dog. Being able to hear radio waves. Seeing in the dark. They are enough to give the boost a legit advantage, and can, within certain contexts be commercially viable. Villains or Heroes that are gamma level boosts will still need to rely on mods or gadgets in order to make a career out of it.

Beta: This is what most people think of when they hear that someone is boosted. It is a strong, functional, but still somewhat limited power offensively. Most boosted heroes and villains in Los Diablos would fall into this category.

Alpha: These are the most dangerous, offensive boosts.

???: There are rumors of a classification above alpha, but what it entails or who would be need to have a separate category is unclear.

As for mods, it's a slightly different system.

They run from Type A to Type F. In general, Type A-C are combat related, while D-F are civilian/medical or aesthetic. Most Mods usually have several modifications done, they are classified according to the most powerful one. Type A-C are often called military grade mods for short.

Type F: Minor adjustments and corrections, mostly of the medical or aesthetic nature. Hearing aids would be a type F mod, as would light-up tattoos.

Type E: Minor enhancements, mostly utilitarian. Implants picking up or transmitting radio waves is an example.

Type D: Civilian enhancements of a larger nature. These can be eye replacements or modifications or limb replacements that offers no additional utility.

Type C: Physical enhancements of the passive or protective variety. This can include armor and skinweave and prosthetic limbs more powerful than normal flesh. It also includes neural interface systems to connect to external armor or weapons. The mods have no inherent offensive capabilities. Military mods are often Type C, as it provides more tactical flexibility and easier to repair on the battlefield.

Type B: A similar type of mods as in type C, but it also includes internal weaponry. Guns replacements for limbs, the ability to eject flames or gas or extendable blades are common picks. In general, type B is favored by villains, because the weapons are always within reach.

Type A: These are war machines seldom seen on civilian soil. It can be seen as the endpoint for mods, both villains and military, when they have gone through enough replacements that they have a hard time functioning in civilian life.

Some examples from the book of how various heroes and villains would be classified:

- Marshal Steel: Type C mod, relies on external armor and weapons.
- Charge: Type B mod. Electricity generation bumps it up from a Type C.
- Herald: Beta boost, flight.
- Lady Argent: Beta boost armor and adaptive weaponry.
- Rosie: Gamma level boost, heightened strength and durability.
- Boris: Type E mod, mostly of the sensory and connective variety.
- Hollow Ground: Beta boost, powerful but has a range limitation.
- Nocturne: Beta boost.
- Jake: Beta boost, brushing up on Alpha.

Finally, there are about a dozen Alpha level boosts in Los Diablos, here are some examples:

- The MC: Alpha level telepath and bodysnatcher.
- Locus: Alpha level telepath.
- Sentinel: Alpha level wind manipulation and control.
- Catastrofiend: Alpha level boost and Type A mod.

[Update info](#)

[Sep 26, 2020](#)

According to the polls, you overwhelmingly wanted the Questions and Answers info to be provided as a document, and not a live chat. I have already received some questions on the discord and here, feel free to add more. For this first one I will also go back and dig up some older questions that I want to revisit, and share with people who did not have access to the forums where I answered them in. The questions will be separated per patreon level, since some will spoil the full alpha build which the VIP patrons have access to.

As for the in depth lore profile, the voting is not finished yet, but looking at the result, I'll start typing up Ortega already. That will also go up next week.

There will be a new alpha build next week as well, since I have filled out and extended chapter 18, which means it's expanded romance options and scenes. I also extended the Blaze fight for those who wants to have a proper fight. It just has to pass testing to make sure there's no major bugs first.

May I also say that I am slightly shocked at the interest of this Patreon, I am very new at this, and learning as I go. If anybody has any suggestions what they would like to see on here, feel free to suggest it to me. As I said, this is still in it's infancy.

[Join the Fallen Hero Patreon Discord Server!](#)

[Check out the Fallen Hero Patreon community on Discord - hang out with 1 other members and enjoy free voice and text chat.](#)

<https://discord.com/invite/64CdrVh>

[There is now a spoiler discord](#)

[Sep 18, 2020](#)

For people who have read the full alpha and needs to vent.

It came to my attention that people might want to vent about what they read without exploding, so here is the smallest discord for your screaming needs. It will get expanded on as we go, but I just wanted to get something off the ground right away.

Edit: The open invitation is currently on hold, will be back in a while. For now, message me personally for an invite.

[Future functionality](#)

[Sep 17, 2020](#)

Since this is all very new to me and people are actually signing up, I have a few things I want to ask people if they are interested in. This is open to everyone, not just patrons, so feel free to weigh in if you are considering becoming one but there might be other things you would like.

(Clarification: Choice 1 is not live. Choice 2 is live.)

Would you like...

Q&A via comments on a post, then edited into a proper document.

94%

Q&A live via a locked discord channel.

6%

Poll ended Sep 30, 2020 · 54 votes total

[So how about those spoilers.](#)

[Sep 17, 2020](#)

For people who hung around on the discord while I still frequented the place, this is familiar to you. You see, on people's birthdays, if I happened to be online, I would answer truthfully one of their spoiler questions.

And I'm not talking minor spoilers here, I am talking major mysteries that you won't get the answers to until book three at the earliest. I am not going to give you a poll here yet.

No, what I want here are questions and suggestions. Ask what secrets you would most like to learn here, and at the start of October I will put them together in a poll, and then you can vote which one I will reveal and write about.

Also, don't worry about asking things I won't answer, if I don't want to, I just won't add it to the poll. There are secrets out there nobody knows the answer to, and I intend to keep it that way.

[Q&A thoughts and info](#)

[Sep 17, 2020](#)

So, still not sure exactly how I will set up a Q &A session on Patreon. The video livechat feels like a nightmare for someone like me that freezes up even in voicechat.

So far I am not sure if I want to run it through a discord, or some other way. We'll see. Rome wasn't built in a day. If anyone knows how it usually is done, feel free to let me know.

Maybe I should just make a Q&A post and you can ask your questions as comments, and I'll take some time later to answer them and put them up in a nicely readable format.

EDIT: On second thought (and after some comments) I decided to make this post open to everybody, because it contains info that might be good to know if you are considering becoming a patreon. I just locked it at first to test the functionality.

<https://dashingdon.com/play/malin/fhrhghwgr22/mygame/>

[Current closed alpha build of Retribution](#)

[Sep 17, 2020](#)

So here it is. **Click the Dashingdon link above for access.**

I am currently doing a major overhaul, and have finished and posted that up to chapter 17. The game is finished, but chapter 18 - 22 is in a much rougher state. No, no proofreading yet. Sorry about that.

The current length is around 1 200 000 words including code. It's a big one. Average playthroughs varies a lot, maybe 75 000 to 85 000 words.

PLEASE DON'T DISCUSS WHAT HAPPENS IN THE GAME ELSEWHERE. I really want to preserve the surprise for people who don't want spoilers.

- Bear in mind, this is not a finished product, it is undergoing playtesting, balancing and rewriting for grammar and style.
- The character creator is not made to exactly recreate your Rebirth experience. There are named characters in the character creator, they belong to the playtesters for ease of play.

- The game will contain playtesting options and links. I suggest you ignore those, as they are there for testing purposes only.
- Each new build will mean a new link, and I will post here once the update happens. It will most likely also mean that your old saves will break.
- This is **not** for playtesting purposes, I have a team of playtesters working on that already, it will simply give you a peek behind the scenes as the process progress.
- It is also **not** for people who are sticklers for grammar and spelling, as it has not been proofread yet. That is the last item on the agenda.

Please, refrain from discussing what you learn in here, nobody likes people that spoil things.

[First Lore poll](#)

[Sep 17, 2020](#)

Well, we need to start somewhere, so might as well start here. I have been planning on doing a series of longer, more in-depth posts about the characters and the world of Fallen Hero. But knowing where to start is always an issue. That's where you come in. I've added a few not too spoilery options to choose between, but feel free to make suggestions in the comments for future polls. (Will I have patreons by then? Are you able to comment? Who knows, this is new).

I will be leaving this active until Friday October 2:nd.

Character profile on Ortega

64%

Character profile on Herald

11%

Character profile on Steel

26%

Poll ended Oct 2, 2020 · 47 votes total

[The Drag.](#)

[Sep 17, 2020](#)

Since I am currently home sick and procrastinating, let's talk about one of the hardest things in writing any lengthy project, and one which tends to take people by surprise.

Actually finishing it.

You see, it's not like a book or a game is done once you write that last chapter, and tack on the final epilogue. Oh no, now you have to edit and polish the beast. All those times you sat around thinking 'Oh I'll fix this later', or 'this needs a rewrite eventually' now has to be dealt with. Past you is always an asshole.

Don't get me wrong, those decisions are still vitally important to get the project done at all. You cannot edit as you go, because you don't know exactly where you are going. You might have a plan, even a detailed one, but until the ending is written you can't be sure what's needed to get there.

That is when the drag begins.

At first, it is easy, even fun. You get to switch sections around, maybe cut some, rewrite the start, add some subplots you didn't see coming until the second half of the book. It's cool, creative, and new, but then it starts to slow down. Every change needed cascades through the story and needs to be hunted down and changed. Some sections you added that really do make the story better, need more changes and additions later. It grows and grows and grows...

And then it hits you. That quick editing job won't be quick after all. Just because your book/game is finished doesn't mean it's done. It will still take time to fix and polish, and it will be harder. Need more thought. And, at the back of your head, there's a voice that screams "to hell with this, I was done!" and just wants to get it over with fast...

I think we have all read those stories. Played those games. Where the first 80% was cool, and then everything just finishes too fast and the ending feels rushed. I talked about it before, and indeed, I was guilty of it as well. In *Fallen Hero: Rebirth* there were more things I should have done in retrospect, but at the time I just wanted to be done, I didn't even know if people would like it, it wouldn't matter and all those other things I kept telling myself.

Maybe that's why I am writing this. Because I am sitting in that spot with *Fallen Hero: Retribution*, where things start to drag and I just want to be finished, but more tangents and issues pop up. And every time I go... "maybe I should just ignore this, and..." but I try not to. Because this game is already a bloated beast made for my own pride's sake, and to ruin all that extra effort just to get it done a month or two sooner would be like shooting myself in the foot near the finishing line.

2020 already messed up my personal deadlines. No, let's be fair here. My own ambitions messed them up long before that.

I am so bloody grateful that I have editors that won't let me get away with skimping on the quality.

I guess what I am trying to say here, is that finishing a book is only the first step to make it good. Don't make the mistake of thinking it is as good as it can get. Be prepared to be brutal. Be prepared for it to take time.

It will be worth it in the end.

[Getting to the End](#)

[Sep 17, 2020](#)

Today we are going to talk about endings.

No, not endings as in how you actually construct a story and make it end in a satisfactory way, there's enough advice for that online and at least half of it is bullshit. No, what we are going to talk about is how getting to the end of a story can make you **feel**.

As always, these are just my own personal musings, but there are not that many people out there talking about how working through a long project takes an emotional toll, you know?

Many people know the thrill of starting something, that breathtaking romance with your own idea before it runs headlong into the gray slog of actually putting it on paper.

A lot of people know about the tough middle, where it's just grey slog and hard work, and where most projects get stranded and abandoned for various reasons. But say you get past that, say that the ending is in sight...

For me, that's the hardest bit.

That's when the doubts come...

To get through the slog, I always tell myself to edit later. Rewrite later. Fix things once the ending is done, but now that the ending is fast approaching?

Shit. That's terrifying.

It's waking up at 4 am, moving from couch to bed, and catching a glimpse of yourself in the mirror. Is that really the state of your story? All the ugly and disjointed bits, hazy and indistinct? How are you going to make that into a presentable whole once the alarm goes off in the morning?

It's telling a funny story while drunk, not being able to tell if the crowd that surrounds you is listening in rapt attention or annoyed horror, and feeling your tongue start to falter.

It's second-guessing all of your ideas at once, because the payoffs need to be there, but are they? Are they really?

And above all, everything feels so boring and trite.

At this point, it's a project you've lived with for months, probably years, and it's lost all its luster. All the cool ideas you had when you started, now sounds dull and bland because you've turned them over and over in your hands until the shine wore off. It's like glasses you've kept touching, grimy and dull but if you take them off you can't see anything.

At this point, your ending sucks. So your book/game/comic/art sucks. You're so tired you don't want to see it ever again. You just want it done so you can start that fresh romance with a new project.

You ever play a game/read a book that's fine, and then in the last chapter everything happens so fast it's over before you know what happened? It's probably at least partly due to this. Approaching the end, the writer probably realized that they had two choices: Add more content/time/energy that they don't have or stick to the plan and just get to the end as originally plotted.

At that point, it is REALLY hard as a writer to know whether your lackluster feelings about the finale is because it truly is lackluster, or whether you're just so tired of it that you can't see the shine.

In a perfect world, they say that you should leave your manuscript alone for a few months before you start editing for these reasons, but we're living in the real world, and we all need money. There might just not be time to do that, there are deadlines.

And so, all we can do is to try to work through these complicated feelings. Which is why I am writing this post.

There's a sense of grief that comes with wrapping up a story that I think we need to acknowledge. A fear that it won't be enough. That you've made a mistake along the way that's too hard to fix now. This is where a good editor comes in with fresh eyes to tell you what they think, but hey, we're all broke and a professional editor is seldom an option.

All you have is yourself, and sometimes invested friends or fans.

It might not feel like it will be enough. But it will. You got this far so you will make it the rest of the way as well. Just be aware of the things I've talked about above. It's not just you. No need for imposter syndrome. This is all of us. It's hard finishing things.

We're all afraid of endings.

[Sep 17, 2020](#)

The first in my series of slightly rewritten posts on other forums. This one came about after I was asked for advice on how to do world building.

So here are my quick thoughts on the matter:

You don't need half as much world building as you think you do and if you, like me, are a researcher, it can paralyze you.

You only need enough world to surround the story and make it internally cohesive, but on the other hand, the world can also make the story grow cooler and better so it's a balance.

The most important thing will be cool names and concepts. That's what people will remember, not how they work. Calling magic users 'smoke eaters' is more important than the rules that govern their magic. The right words are important, it's all in the name.

If the world stands in the way of your story, change the world *or* the story. Whichever is coolest. A lot of cool twists can come from trying to work around what you said five chapters previously.

If your story is not about politics, don't bother with politics. If it takes place in a city, don't bother too much with the ecology. Focus on the story.

Remember to show the world from the character's point of view. A farmer from hicksville will describe the foreign relations of the USA different than a career diplomat.

The characters can be wrong, or biased about the world. If they are, try to work out how to show that they might not know what they are talking about, without saying it straight out.

In a familiar world, you need to add strange concepts. Like being a cab driver for ghosts in NY city.

In a strange world, you need to add familiar routines. Weird dragon sorcerers handling public transport via teleport circles.

Your world will change as you write, it's never finished.

Start the story even if you're not sure about the world, it is perfectly fine for the world to be birthed around the story and then hammered into shape in future edits.

You don't have to kill your darlings, just make them fit.

Stick to a cohesive naming scheme, that way you can introduce foreign concepts just by switching to another type of names. If you have Sven, son of Sven, and Jarl One-Eye, then introducing something called Issh'th'anthiar then that, by definition, is weird to the world of your characters as well as to the reader.

Above all, have fun. If you don't have fun in your world, then you might need a new one. I've had stories that grew a lot better just by shifting words or characters. Move that dragon age rip off to the wild west. Maybe set that stale noir detective story under the sea. Have your buddy cop drama be about two demons in hell. Switch it up and have fun!



[Fun in the sun](#)

[Sep 17, 2020](#)

The cover for Fallen Hero: Retribution is finalized, and I love what [Polterink](#) did with it. My style wish essentially boiled down to 'toxic crayons' and I think she really pulled it off.

Looking at the image now in mid September, with the pictures coming from the west coast, makes me feel slightly queasy. I always pictured the ashy Los Diablos skies that way, but seeing it in real life was

something I had hoped to avoid. I have family over there, and while they are safe so far, it's not been fun for anybody.

2020 has been a nightmare for so many reasons, please stay safe everyone.