



BWL Development
Epically Awesome in Every Way



|---| Chapter 1 |---|

Suspicion

by The Wildcat

A shimmer of light and nothing more. With a new moon and a light cloud cover to steal the stars, the gray rooftop was bathed in darkness. A weak light above a maintenance hatch merely pretended to offer fresh illumination.

The street below, Clifton Boulevard, was dimly lit by street lamps and traffic signals. The nine o'clock curfew had already cleared the streets of life and darkened the neighboring buildings.

Absence of life and light gave the city an abandoned feel. It was a notion that pleased the black suited vigilante.

The silent figure strolled across the roof of a five-story building. Barely a sparkle of glint from his colorless armor gave the silhouette shape. Matching back swept ears crested his helmet. The chrome of his face mask and fingertip claws was barely discernible.

His gait was deliberate. With each step, he concealed the lengthy 36-inch barrel of a rifle in his own infinitesimal outline. He preferred caution and never revealed all of his strengths to would-be combatants.

It was the vigilante's eyes that truly revealed his presence. Back lit night-vision lenses gave him the glowing crimson eyes of a phantom.

He stopped abruptly. He listened intently as his suit amplified the ambiance. The maintenance access began to open lazily. A pittance of light filtered through the opening. Beyond the hatch, a gawky, well-dressed man ducked into

view. The new figure crawled through the hatch in an ungainly manner.

Somewhat amused by the sight, the crime fighter lowered his rifle. With the booming growl of his synthetic voice, he called out to the little man. *"What are you doing there?"*

The new man stumbled and turned to face the vigilante. "I had a report of a man on a roof over here. I'm Agent North... Perhaps I should ask YOU what YOU'RE doing here." North leveled a small side arm at the vigilante as to accent his statement. His actions drew a slight snicker.

"The Wildcat," the armored figure said with a nod. *"I'm on patrol."*

Agent North pointed to the long rifle and asked, "With that?"

"Absolutely, something bad is going on tonight. I can feel it."

"I think you need to put down the gun and come with me sir. NOW."

"Afraid not agent, I have a job to do."

Before the agent could react, Wildcat whirled to face the edge of the building and stepped into space.

Inaudible outside of the stylized helmet, he spoke a command into his microphone. In less than a second, the computer analyzed the command, removed it from its output queue, and executed the instructions. As the ground rushed up to meet him, a burst of super-compressed gas surged from beneath the back panel of Wildcat's armor.

When the dust of the pavement began to stir beneath him, the vigilante barked a second silent order. The hidden micro-

thrusters silenced, and he struck the boulevard with minimal force.

After a quick glance at the dumbfounded Agent North, Wildcat continued his patrol. He used a scanner function to monitor the police and military communication channels. Yet, only a single police band was active.

Reports of curfew violations and an occasional bum dominated the transmissions. Wildcat had listened to the same signals every night for the entirety of his two-week stay. It was a remarkably quiet, boring city considering the circumstances.

The crime fighter had been conducting his typical efforts and monitoring his alter ego's investments when the first national newscasts aired. The reporters had indicated that a terrorist effort had been thwarted and that a so-called "dirty bomb" had been safely detonated in the deserts of New Mexico.

Naturally, questions arose surrounding the decision to detonate rather than dismantle the bomb. Later, reports emerged that identified the blast as a full nuclear surface detonation, a practice that had been prohibited on a governmental and international level for decades.

New rumors arose, but every question seemed to have an answer. Even so, The Wildcat's mind was dissatisfied. The entire matter felt empty. He never could explain his decision to visit the site, but experience had taught him to trust his instincts.

After a brief aerial search, he had found the blast site among several devastated ruins on the edge of a canyon. Strangely, the canyon did not appear on any of his maps. Wildcat also stumbled across a city nearly 60 miles to the east.

Perhaps the most striking discrepancy was the complete lack of a military presence in the area. Under normal

circumstances, an unidentified aircraft such as Wildcat's custom-built Cougar 10 would draw a fighter escort and demands to land. Instead, the vigilante had found only silence.

He had landed outside of the city and walked confidently into town. Two police officers and a man that identified himself as a federal agent awaited Wildcat at the outskirts. Their weapons drawn, the three men welcomed the armored stranger with demands that he should surrender. A pair of police choppers had already secured the Cougar 10, and reinforcements were en route.

In the two weeks that followed, the vigilante had eluded the "authorities" and patrolled the city by night. He also selected several sites for possible field bases and observed the populace.

At that moment, The Wildcat stopped in the middle of the street. One of the police communications had captured his attention.

"-...suspect is armed with long rifle. Suspect is wearing a... an expensive Halloween costume."

Deep rumbling laughter escaped the black helmet. The vigilante muted the police band and examined his rifle. While he waited, the flickering and dim streetlamps caught his attention. Something was draining the city's main power plant for the third time in one week.

"HOLD IT FREAK!"

The Wildcat glanced over his shoulder at the officer.
"Freak? Oh, that hurts."

A second, older officer trained an assault shotgun on the vigilante. "Drop the weapon, put your hands on your head!"

“One way or another, you’re not staying on the street tonight,” the first officer added.

Wildcat turned to face the officers. “*What IS with you people?*” He then uttered a silenced command.

A simple chime and synthetic female voice conveyed a warning. “Stand clear... Stand clear.”

In a gush of activity, the micro-thrusters engaged and a cloud of dirt and rock encircled the suited figure. He rocketed toward a neighboring building and left a freshly worn pothole in the street.

Once above the edifice, the stream of gas silenced. The vigilante dropped onto the structure with a hollow thud. For a single taunting moment, he peered down at the officers. “*Well... At least I’m off the street.*”

The Wildcat preferred the rooftops to street travel. Fewer people interfered and he had a better view of the city skyline.

He returned to his original course and resumed his efforts to monitor the police band. Shortly, his thoughts returned to the strange events that originally drew him to New Mexico.

The situation was obviously not a simple matter of political maneuvering or a show of anti-terrorist muscle. The president and his administration suffered politically for allowing a *dirty bomb* to enter the US. And the revelation of detonating an atomic device in such a grandstanding manner had served only to outrage activist groups around the globe.

Even the local infrastructure had been adversely affected. The power plant regularly suffered from power drains. Local communications networks had only limited capacity, and no phone or internet connections could be established beyond the city limits.

More disturbing however, was the lack of interest by the locals. In fact, no one even discussed the city's problems or the supposed terrorist effort. Of course, a National Guard unit or some other military force should have been present to help keep the peace, but the streets were patrolled by local law enforcement alone.

Not that crime was a problem. The people were ever obedient and orderly. It was as though the entire city were removed from reality.

The Wildcat hesitated for a moment as a new police report crossed his headset. Apparently, the alarm system at the laboratory complex east of the city had been triggered. Every night the alarms sounded at the Chamberlain Research Institute.

At first, the vigilante had responded to the alarms with fervor. Yet each night he arrived to find a security team reassuring the local police force of a false alarm. After two weeks, the alarms seemed more like the proverbial boy who cried wolf.

Still, the police message left an uneasy sensation in Wildcat's gut. After all, in the children's tale the boy encountered a real wolf but received no aid as his people became too accustomed to the repeated hoax. The crime fighter resolved to investigate after his standard patrol, if for no other reason than his own peace of mind.

Suddenly, the night air was cut by a shriek. The woman's voice was shrill and filled with deathly fear. Her voice echoed among the buildings.

Wildcat charged to the edge of the rooftop and peered down into an alley below. A door in the side of the opposing building stood open. Two grungy middle-aged men slowly pried a struggling woman from the apartment.

The first man menaced the girl with a double-barrel shotgun. Wielding a long knife, the second man restrained the victim. Blood spattered both men and smeared the girl's long sleep dress.

Tears streamed down the young woman's face. The shotgun carelessly waved to and fro before her. Abruptly, the knife's blade found the straps of her garment. The silky fabric fell away exposing soft skin to gruff, perverted hands.

The Wildcat placed his rifle aside and opened a small holster on his belt. He focused his aim on the thug that caressed the girl with his shotgun.

With a soft buzz, the dart bored into the man's throat. Stunned, he clutched the wound and lowered his weapon. The tranquilizer took affect quickly as the man stumbled about at random.

The second man, startled by his friend's erratic behavior, lowered his guard. His grip on the topless girl loosened. "What? What's wrong?"

At last, the shotgun wielding man succumbed to the chemicals and slumped to the cold alley's pavement. Realizing the opportunity, the girl ran screaming toward the nearest street.

In a single motion, The Wildcat holstered the dart gun, snatched up his rifle, and leapt over the ledge. He activated the micro-thrusters for a split second to slow his six-story fall. The vigilante dropped between the young victim and her attackers.

The remaining thug reacted instinctively and lunged at Wildcat's abdomen. Pain and fear were visible in the criminal's grimace. He stood shocked, astonished to find that his blade had not penetrated the fabric of Wildcat's

suit. The man's hand had slipped over the blade and blood began to seep from the fresh cut.

The man dove for his partner's shotgun, rolled, and blasted both barrels into the vigilante at point blank range. Wildcat slammed into the neighboring wall with a thunderous crack. He let his rifle drop to the ground and growled.

The vigilante kicked the shotgun aside and pounded the man in the chest. With fierce vigor, he ripped the thug off the ground and flung him against a nearby dumpster. As the man slowly regained his senses and turned, the vigilante plucked the 12-gauge from the ground. Wielding the weapon as a club, Wildcat whipped the man across the face and watched him collapse into a pool of blood.

"You should have surrendered when the knife idea didn't work," The Wildcat muttered as he retrieved the knife and placed both weapons next to the victim's door. Evidence. *"And where are those cops when you need them?"*

