

# **Stormbringer:**

## **Haunted City**

written by  
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dedicated to  
**Alex, Claire and Olivia**

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Find confidence in your inspiration  
Inspire others with your confidence

special thanks to  
**Cam Reid**  
Your continued support has been a great inspiration

**Legends of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Century Volume 3**

## **Prologue: The New Girl**

A cloudless summer sky lay peacefully over Wilberforce Grammar School.

It was lunch time, and many of the children gathered in the dappled shade of the trees which dotted the school grounds. But not Amy Connors; it was her first day since being transferred from Northampton High, and the unfamiliar layout of the building had caused her to be late to all three of her morning lessons.

For Amy, the sky might as well have been throwing down a torrent of unforgiving raindrops.

Upon reaching the lunch hall she found herself at the back of the queue. Her mind wondered to the other schools she had attended, each of which had accused her of starting a fire.

It didn't seem fair. She hadn't meant to set the buildings ablaze. It just seemed to happen, particularly when she was upset or angry.

"Get a move on!" shouted a rather scrawny looking boy, who had joined the queue after her.

Amy slid her yellow tray along the counter and looked at the meals on offer. She was one of the last children to enter the dining hall that day, and all of the most appetising choices had sold out.

With a plate of cold, hard mashed potatoes and a fairly plain looking slice of pizza, she moved on to the desserts.

"Watch this," whispered the scrawny boy to his friend, as he pulled his tray back along the counter, then slammed it against the trays in front; a chain of collisions knocked Amy's bland lunch upwards and forced the plate up-side-down and onto the tray ahead.

"I'm sorry, I didn't-" she uttered as she glanced to her right. She looked up into the agitated glare of a tall, heavy-set boy. Again, she didn't know his name, but it didn't matter; she knew what was coming next.

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A wide-palmed slap knocked her to the floor. Something inside snapped and a sharp pain raced through her body from head to toe.

Water rained down from the sprinklers to quench the flames that had appeared while her eyes were closed, and everyone charged towards the nearest exit.

At least, that was what she was expecting.

“My dinner! I’ll kill you!” grunted the boy. He balled his fist and swung towards Amy, who instinctively closed her eyes; a few seconds passed, but the impact never came.

The sound of nervous whimpering drew her attention.

She looked up at where the monstrous boy had previously loomed above her, before looking down to see him on his knees, gasping for breath.

“Now, Martin. Is this any way to treat a new kid?” asked another boy, who stood with his finger on the bigger boy’s shoulder.

“Why - can’t - I - move?” wondered Martin, who struggled to get the words out. His body felt like it weighed a ton.

“I’m John,” said the boy with his finger on Martin’s shoulder.

He held out his left hand for Amy to shake, but she stood still, unsure of how to react to the strange sight before her.

John didn’t look very strong at all, and his wavy dark brown hair looked like it hadn’t been brushed for a while.

“How rude of me,” added John as he swapped his hands over.

Martin felt the weight leave his body for a split second and groaned when it returned.

“Amy,” said the girl. She smiled awkwardly while John looked her in the eye.

“Come on, Amy, sit with us,” suggested John, who waved to his two friends, a boy and a girl, who were sat eating at a nearby table.

The girl had a somewhat cold expression and her pale brown hair, which was tied into a bun, only made her look

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more serious. She held her head in her hands and mumbled, “He’s showing off again.”

“But it was funny,” whispered the boy playfully; his neatly trimmed red hair belied his light-hearted spirit.

Amy approached the table with her new friend, who introduced her to the others.

“Amy, Kay, Kay, Amy, Amy, Marc, Marc, Amy,” said John as quickly as he could.

“John, hand, hand, John!” said Kay.

“What?” uttered John before he felt a stinging slap strike him across his cheek.

“I was just trying to be polite,” explained John. He turned to Amy and said, “Eat with us, no need to be shy.”

“But my dinner’s over there,” said Amy. She looked over at Martin, who tried to stand, but slipped on the spilled mashed potatoes while the other children laughed at him.

“Why don’t you share ours?” suggested John.

Kay shook her head in disapproval, while Marc held his arms around his almost empty plate.

“Come on guys, I’ll make this up to you,” whispered John, hoping Amy wouldn’t hear.

“No, really, I’ll just go round again” she said with a small smile.

John grinned from ear to ear as he pulled a seat away from the table. “I haven’t touched my sundae. Why don’t you have it?”

Amy looked at the half melted scoop of vanilla ice cream. It could hardly be described as a “sundae”, but she was quite hungry and didn’t really fancy going through the queue again.

“Do you think he’s trying to make you jealous?” asked Marc.

“It’s not working,” whispered Kay in an annoyed tone.

“I think it is!” teased Marc.

“Don’t make me hide your bag again!” growled Kay.

“You wouldn’t dare!” said Marc.

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“Now guys, play nice!” insisted John. He looked over at Amy, who brushed aside her copper blonde hair before she soothed her temper with his ice cream.

John stood between his friends and asked, “Well, what do you think?”

“I think you wouldn’t have stood a chance without that ice cream,” whispered Marc.

Kay shovelled a fork full of mushy peas into her mouth. If she’d said what she was thinking, she would have ended up with a detention the next day.



The following morning during break time Amy approached John, Kay and Marc, who were sat under the drooping foliage of a weeping willow tree.

Amy looked around at the other trees, beneath which large groups of the other children clamoured for shade.

“If you want a spot under our tree, you’ve earned it,” admitted Kay with a pout.

“Why do the other kids stay away from you?” asked Amy, innocently.

“Marc saw the whole thing,” said John, changing the subject.

“Like slow motion. There was a spark when Rob bumped your tray into Martin’s,” explained Marc.

“I must have blinked and missed it,” said Kay, sceptically.

“I know, I hope I didn’t hurt him,” sighed Amy.

“Eh, he likes beating up the year sevens. I’ve been waiting for an excuse to put him in his place,” said John with a laugh, “but to answer your question, the other kids think we’re weird. Marc has super speed, Kay makes portals and I can make things heavier or lighter.”

Amy thought for a moment. Could she believe such a crazy statement from three people she’d known for less than

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a day? “Is that why you stepped in? Because you think we have super powers?”

“Well, not really. I just saw a chance to make Martin look silly and impress you at the same time,” said John.

“Yeah, I didn’t tell the others about the sparks until after you’d gone home,” explained Marc.

“Oh, so you know about the fires,” said Amy, shyly.

“You mean at the other schools? That was you?” cheered Kay.

Amy didn’t like the look of Kay’s smile. “I’m sorry, this was a mistake,” she said, glumly.

John jumped to his feet, ran ahead of his new friend and said, “I’m not letting you out there on your own.”

“I’m not stupid! You think I’m going to join your little gang just because you say you’ve got powers to make me trust you? Forget it!”

John knew he had to choose his next words quickly and carefully. “Give us ten seconds to prove it. Hold my hands,” he suggested while holding his palms upwards at waist height.

“Fine,” said Amy, who looked even more annoyed.

John gripped her soft hands gently and said, “Now jump as high as you can.”

Amy paused for a moment. If they were planning to make a fool out of her, they’d be doing this out in the open.

After bending her knees a little, Amy kicked away from the ground, expecting to reach a height of barely a few inches; instead she found herself lifting several feet into the branches.

If John hadn’t kept hold of her she would have ended up tangled in the boughs of the tree.

Finding herself looking down at John, and with her feet above and behind her head at a steep angle, she let out an excited squeal while floating back down to the ground.

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After landing gently on her front, Amy found herself laughing. For the first time in over a year she was truly happy.

“Believe us now?” asked Marc.

John helped Amy to her feet, before she nodded and quietly uttered “Yep.”

“Good, because we’ve got one question,” said Kay.

“It’s about the fires at the other schools, isn’t it?” asked Amy, nervously.

“Don’t worry, it won’t happen here,” promised John.

Kay rolled her eyes; she knew he wouldn’t be able to fulfill that vow, but she had to know the answer.

“When’s your birthday?” asked Marc, Kay and John in unison.

“That was scary. Next Wednesday, but-”

“Ha, you’re still the oldest,” said Marc with his hand on Kay’s shoulder.

Kay glared back at him, prompting Marc to back away slowly.

“Mine’s on Saturday, Marc’s is on Monday and Kay’s was yesterday,” explained John.

“Really?” asked Amy.

Kay and Marc nodded.

“And we’re trying to find out what happened fourteen years ago,” explained John.

“Welcome to the team, Amy,” said Kay, holding her hand out.

Amy shook her hand. She had more questions than she could keep track of, but she was interrupted by the sound of a loud bell.

“See you at lunch?” asked John.

Without thinking about it, Amy said “Yes!”

See you in an hour,” suggested Marc as he left the shade of the tree with Kay and John.

As the rest of the children streamed into the open doors, Amy stood still for a moment.

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The summer holiday would start at the end of the day; she'd been waiting for it impatiently for the last three months, but now she didn't want it to come at all if it meant being away from her new friends for six weeks.

Without hesitation she ran to catch up with the others.

Knowing that she wasn't alone was both reassuring and calming; she vowed to make the most of the next few hours.

A detention for being late to the next lesson was not an option!

## Chapter 1: Home of the Witch

It was after eleven o'clock at night and darkness shrouded Northampton.

The empty sky which had bathed the city in warm sunlight during the day now bestowed a refreshing chill.

Deep within a residential area in the Kingsthorpe suburb, a small, shabby looking white van parked itself in front of a dilapidated building.

Two young men stepped out of the vehicle. Neither of them looked quite old enough to be legally allowed drive, but they didn't let that stop them.

They stepped cautiously between the gate-posts; the gate itself had long since been torn from its hinges, and now lay in pieces on the overgrown path which led to the front door.

One of them stopped to look at the building. It was dimly lit from the outside, but he could tell there were quite a few holes in the roof. "Hey, Phil, what happens if it rains?"

"Water falls from the sky," muttered Phil.

"No, look at the roof."

"We'll get it sorted," explained Phil as he reached the front door.

The tattered edges of a faded demolition notice which had been stapled to the door fluttered in the gentle breeze; it was dated October 2204.

"If they can't be bothered to knock this place down after all these years, we'll gladly move in!" said Phil with a confident laugh. While he turned the door handle, his associate ran to catch up with him.

As though there was someone on the other side, the door opened by itself.

"I thought they said this place was empty," whispered Phil's colleague.

"Man-up, Paul! The hinges must be wonky, that's all."

"Something doesn't feel right. What if this place comes down on us?"

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“It won’t. We just need to secure this place and they’ll let us into the gang.” Phil clicked the button on his torch, which brightly illuminated a section of the floor.

Paul did the same and followed him into the building.

Cautiously, they crept through the abandoned house. The property was quite large, and had previously been the site of a home for children in state care; those days were a distant memory for the people who had once lived there.

Phil shone his torch at the wall in search of a light switch. As he swept the beam, he heard the sound of footsteps further down the hallway.

“Did you hear that?” asked Paul, nervously.

“Probably just a stray dog or something. We’ll take care of it.”

After a few seconds they heard more footsteps, this time from the front door.

Paul set his torch beam on the entrance; the presence of a dishevelled young woman startled him for a moment.

“Welcome to Lime Grove House. Looking for something?” she asked innocently. Her long, unkempt blonde hair and shabby looking night gown told them she was a runaway.

However, they were unsure why she was wearing sun glasses in the middle of the night in a house with no lights on.

“A light switch,” said Phil with a confident grin.

“That won’t help you,” said the girl in a threatening tone, before cheerfully adding, “Nobody’s paid the bills in five years.”

Both intruders immediately noticed something stranger than her sunglasses - her mouth didn’t open when she talked.

Then something stirred in her hair; two small green eyes stared at the young men before a quiet “meow” gave away the creature’s identity.

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“You don’t live here, do you?” asked Paul. He didn’t like the idea of somebody living in conditions like these, and was starting to feel sorry for the girl.

“For as long as I can remember. I can’t imagine why everyone else left,” said the girl, again without moving her mouth.

“Not for much longer!” shouted Phil, who produced a flip-knife from his jacket.

As the shiny metal blade swung into position, a quiet click was heard before it separated from the wooden handle and embedded itself into the exposed wooden floor boards.

Paul tried not to laugh. He wasn’t sure why he wanted to be a gang member any more, but he also didn’t want Phil to be angry with him.

“You brought me a shiny gift, how thoughtful. It is my birthday soon,” said the girl cheerily before shouting, “IT’S BROKEN!”

Phil looked down at his blade before hurling the handle at the girl, who caught it between her thumb and forefinger.

“She’s good,” muttered Paul.

Phil wasn’t so impressed. He kicked the blade aside and swung at her with his right fist.

The girl dropped the handle and caught his balled-up hand in her left, forcing him to lose his balance in the process. “You wouldn’t hit a girl with glasses, would you?” she said innocently.

Phil let out an enraged grunt.

“Because it’d be a shame to break them,” she added before removing her eye-wear with her right hand.

The intruders stared at her eyes, which appeared to be quite dull and lifeless.

“How are you doing this?” shouted Phil impatiently as he swung his torch towards her in his left hand.

This time she grabbed his wrist, causing him to yell in pain as her overgrown nails pinched into his arm.

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“You’d make a good fighter. If you joined us and let them use this place as a base, they’d let us join for sure!” said Paul, hopefully. “What’s your name?”

“Alexandra Estival, but my friends call me Lexa,” explained the girl.

“STOP MAKING SMALL TALK AND KNOCK HER OUT!” yelled Phil. His arms and legs felt weak.

He dropped his torch, which rolled upon impact with the floor and cast a series of menacing shadows on the wall.

“Such a temper! I think you’re ill,” said Lexa, playfully. “I think it’s catching.” She turned to face Paul and added in a threatening tone, “You should leave before you catch it!”

Phil tried to pull his fists away, but found Lexa’s grip too strong to escape. He tried to rationalise the situation, “I’ve never felt better! You’re just stronger than you look!”

“You must be ill. A big strong man like you shouldn’t be struggling with little old me.”

Paul looked on; Lexa was right. He wondered why his friend would be working so hard against such a small opponent.

“DON’T JUST STAND THERE! Bash her with the torch!” ordered Phil.

Paul looked on. Lexa was beginning to scare him. He wanted to run, but he also didn’t want to abandon his friend.

“I’m not ill!” insisted Phil, still caught in Lexa’s unrelenting grasp.

“Oh, but you are ill! I don’t know what it’s called, but you’re sick enough to imagine this,” stated Lexa, who suddenly started to grow taller.

In the blink of an eye, she towered over the young men. Her fingernails grew into foot-long razor sharp looking blades while her hair burst into flames. Her faded eyes glowed with a fearsome red light, and long, needle-like teeth filled her mouth, which gaped open in a wide grin. “I’m hungry!” she announced in a deep, menacing voice.

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Paul had seen enough! He dropped his torch and ran towards the back of the house, hoping desperately to find a door or window.

Phil tried to follow, but found his right hand still lodged in her iron grip.

Her lethal looking talons pressed up against the sleeve of his leather jacket.

“Feeding time, Muffin,” she boomed, prompting the cat which was still perched on her blazing scalp to leap over Phil.

A deep, rumbling growl could be heard.

Phil turned to face the cat, which was now a menacing looking lioness; she pawed curiously at his leather jacket.

With a quiver in his voice, Phil begged, “Please let me go. I - I promise we won’t bother you again!”

Holding her terrifying mouth still, Lexa said, “Take a message to your boss. Tell him I was here first!”

Phil nodded. A pitiful whimper escaped his trembling lips. Before he knew it, he felt her hand loosen its grip.

Lexa stood aside as Muffin roared commandingly.

With the front door clearly in his sights, Phil felt the strength return to his legs. Without a second thought he sprinted out of the house with Muffin barely an inch behind.

The safety of his van was the light at the end of the tunnel; its squealing tyres shattered his hopes. Fuelled by fear, he followed the van down the road without slowing down.

Lexa stood in the doorway of her abandoned house; she looked completely normal once again.

Muffin, whose appearance had reverted to that of a small black cat, rubbed herself against the girl’s ankle.

“They think they’re so strong. How pathetic!” said Lexa, who kneeled down to let Muffin leap onto her hand.

As she turned to face the inside of the house, Lexa yawned and tossed Phil’s knife over her shoulder.

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The dangerous weapon was in one piece, but it landed harmlessly in the deep, overgrown grass by the path.

“Good Muffin,” said Lexa as she locked the door.

The cat purred contently, warmly curled up in her mistress’ dull blonde hair.

Lexa climbed the stairs to her room, wrapped herself in her bed sheets and threw herself down onto the bare mattress.

As she fell, Muffin leapt off and took her position under the pillow.

Alone together, the pair of them fell asleep at the same time.

## **Chapter 2: Consumed by Revenge**

“She’s over there!” yelled a shaven-headed thug as he charged down a dark alley.

The gap between the buildings was narrow, but a fearsome crowd of angry sounding gang members flooded the area.

Like a swarm of moths drawn to a spotlight, they closed in on the unmistakable purple glow of a Storm.

The light of the almost full moon was enough for the Stormbringer to see what she needed from her perch on the rooftop. She estimated at least a hundred and fifty men had chased her into the dead end.

After closing the violet foggy portal she had used as bait, she opened another pair of them.

With a single leap she found herself on the other side of a steel gate which she could use to pen-in the crowd.

“She’s at the gate!” yelled the self-appointed leader of the group.

At his commend, the men ran for the exit, only to be stopped in their tracks by another Storm. Not one of them wanted to touch it; the danger of what happened to anyone who dared to go through was a legend in their gang.

With a thud, the eight-foot tall metal barrier was latched shut.

Upon closing the Storm, the young super heroine heard someone shout, “Find something to use as a ram!”

The Stormbringer knew the gate wouldn’t hold them in for long, but she was sure it would buy her enough time.

As she ran towards a shuttered garage door, the Stormbringer was about to open one of her portals.

Nothing was going to stop her tonight; that was until a car burst out through the door.

She leapt through the Storm as it opened, but found herself behind the vehicle upon exiting the portal.

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She turned to face the retreating car, which slowed only to take a corner safely.

With another Storm, the girl made her way to the top of a nearby building. She looked down to find the vehicle; it was right where she expected it to be, but right behind it was a convoy of three more identical estate cars.

“You coward!” she screamed at the escapees, which split up upon reaching the main street.

There was no way she could stop and search all of them before she lost track.

With an exasperated grunt, the Stormbringer admitted defeat before opening a Storm just off the edge of the roof and stepping through.



As she dropped down from her purple portal, the Stormbringer looked around; the white, square wall panels of Storm Central confirmed she had arrived in her sanctuary.

“June! Thank goodness you’re back safe,” cheered Stuart Graves, who had been waiting for his young apprentice to return.

The Stormbringer didn’t answer; instead she removed the blindfold-like mask from around her head and threw it against the floor. Its armour scales rattled on impact with the ground; some of them were cracked and a few were missing altogether.

“What’s wrong?” asked Stuart, quietly.

“HE GOT AWAY AGAIN!” ranted June.

The anger in her voice worried Stuart; this wasn’t the happy little girl he’d raised. “Maybe it’s time to give up the chase,” he suggested.

“No! He killed you, and my Mum, and Simon. Now he’s going to pay!”

Stuart was at a loss. She was almost right; Doctor Robert Douglas, the man who had killed Stuart and brought him

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back as a computer program, was long dead. But Victor Foster, the gang leader who had delivered Stuart to Douglas and led his thugs on a raid against June's family, was still at large.

"You don't have to be the one to make him pay. This road you're on; it's going to get you killed!"

"What, and who's going to catch him? The cops?"

"OK, so they haven't caught him in a year and a half. They'll get him one day. But I think we need to try something different."

"Any ideas?" she snapped.

Stuart didn't like June's tone, but he knew getting angry with her would only make things worse. Swallowing his pride, he said, "Tomorrow's your birthday party. Now, I know you don't have school for six weeks, but try to get some rest."

"Maybe that's what he's waiting for. The second I lower my guard, he sends his gang in to finish me off!"

"He doesn't know where you live!" insisted Stuart.

"That's right," said a female voice. Astra Stevens appeared from thin air; she too had been killed and turned into a hologram by Doctor Douglas.

"What do you want?" muttered June.

"I've had just about enough of your attitude, young lady!" snapped Stuart.

"I came to wish you a happy birthday, and to let you know that I've traced Vee's hacking team. I changed their research to make it look like you've moved to Scotland with your Dad!"

"That'll keep them busy," said June with a smile.

Stuart was surprised; he hadn't seen June look happy for months. After contemplating her better mood, he suggested, "Have you considered forgiveness?"

"Did I miss something?" asked Astra, who was surprised at the sudden change of subject.

"Why do you keep going on about that?" asked June, wearily.

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“Because it’s the right thing to do. At least for one day,” said Stuart.

An awkward silence seemed to fill the chamber.

“Oh, one more thing,” added Astra, “Trev was digging around some of Douglas’ old data, and he figured out what those pylons were for.”

“What pylons?” asked June.

“The three-pronged pylons on the roofs of Douglas’ buildings. They’re tuned to the radio frequencies given off by Storms. That’s how he was able to track you.”

“Oh, but aren’t they useless, now that he’s gone?” asked June.

“Not entirely. We’ve detected Storm activity, and it doesn’t match up to any of your chases,” explained Astra.

“Wait, you mean...” wondered June.

Astra nodded.

“More Stormbringers?” asked Stuart.

“Most likely, but all the readings were confined to Northampton. Unfortunately the resolution of the pylons isn’t very good, so we can’t narrow it down much further.”

“Stormbringers? In Northampton? I have to find them!” cheered June.

“Not tonight!” insisted Stuart. “It’s way past your bed time!”

“But you don’t have to sleep!” said June.

“I’m a hologram. Besides, your Dad’s probably worried sick; that is if he knows you’re out.”

June paused for a moment before asking, “What time is it?”

“Eleven thirty-two. If we were to construct additional pylons, we could see exactly where the Stormbringers are!” explained Astra.

“More Stormbringers! Maybe they can help me catch Vee!” said June.

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Stuart held his head in his hands and muttered, “This again?” He looked up and preached, “If you kill him, how does that make you better than him?”

“He can’t kill anyone else if he’s dead!” stated June.

“I didn’t raise a murderer!” yelled Stuart.

“Every day, the same thing! Can’t you just let it go?”

“Not until you do. I know I can’t stop you going after him, but you have to promise to hand him in to the police.”

Tears filled June’s eyes.

Stuart knew he had finally gotten through to her.

“I don’t know if I can,” she sniffed.

“Look at the state of your costume,” said Stuart, pressing on with his advantage, “the scales are breaking, and you’ve just about grown out of it.”

“Anyway, I can set a trap for him,” added Astra.

“Alright, you win,” sighed June. She was too tired to argue, and the height she’d gained in the last nineteen months was stretching her purple scale armour to its limit.

“Get some rest. Enjoy your birthday. We’ve got six weeks with no school to look for Stormbringers,” said Stuart softly.

June jumped up and gave Stuart a big hug. Had he been real, she would probably have knocked him over. “I’m sorry,” she admitted.

“You’ve been through too much,” said Stuart, “but I’m glad you can see sense. Now get some sleep.”

June wiped the tears from her eyes. “You won’t tell Dad, will you?”

“It’d only ruin your party. Now go on, before he checks up on you!” insisted the old man as he waved her away.

June released him, picked her mask up from the floor and left Storm Central the same way she’d arrived.

With the Storm closed, Astra put her hand on Stuart’s shoulder.

“Is the surprise ready?” asked Stuart.

“Half ready. Boris is a bit of a perfectionist.”

“I’d noticed. But why Northampton?” wondered Stuart.

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“I know your memory was messed up, so I did some digging and found this,” said Astra, before she turned to the wall and said, “J.O.N.E.S, play holovid C27.”

“File found, opening,” stated J.O.N.E.S, the AI which ran Storm Central.

A night-time scene filled the room; the sight of what appeared to be a meteorite streaked through the sky before a parachute opened out behind it, slowing it down.

The holographic view followed the UFO as it cooled from a blazing white to a dull red.

The vehicle drifted down towards a road in the heart of the city of Northampton.

Self-driving cars immediately slowed and stopped to avoid colliding with the craft, which set down landing struts upon touching the ground.

The drivers and passengers hurried out of their road vehicles, some flocking towards the UFO, others fleeing from it in terror.

After a moment of waiting, a hatch lowered from the side of the space craft.

A young woman wearing a costume almost identical to the one June was wearing earlier peered out from the doorway before she ran into the crowd. Her mask had been pushed up onto her forehead.

“When was this recorded?” asked Stuart.

“Fourteen years ago,” explained Astra.

The woman from the UFO called out for a doctor before an old man stepped carefully down the steps from the door of the space craft.

“Pause!” called out Astra.

“It’s me! That’s me!” gasped Stuart, “But I still don’t remember.”

“Don’t worry, Stu. We’re still looking through the archives to see where you went next, but most of the CCTV footage from back then was deleted.”

“We have to tell June!” insisted Stuart.

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“She needs rest. We’ll tell her after the party,” suggested Astra.

Stuart looked deep into the eyes of his recorded counterpart. He knew there was something important going on, but he couldn’t remember what it was.

“I’ll leave you two alone,” said Astra, before she faded back into nothing.

Stuart watched the recording back from the beginning. Maybe if he watched it enough times it would trigger his memory, he thought.

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