

Strikeforce

By David Meadows

Chapter One: Time Is

- ❖ Very few entities in this universe know the full story of the team of heroes that became known as Strikeforce. I am one of the few.
- ❖ I was there at the beginning and at the end. I am a model GM-1 Intelligence Matrix and I was their assistant and confidant from the start.
- ❖ This is our story.

- ❖ The year is 2350. Twelve billion human beings live on Earth in peace and comfort. No war. No hunger. Every basic need taken care of.
- ❖ For some, it is not enough.

The alley was dark and narrow, bounded by high, smooth walls. A plain door in one of those walls provided a back entrance into a pharmaceutical depository. The door was sealed by a sophisticated electronic alarm system, but that was no deterrent to the four furtive, black-clad individuals hugging the alley walls. The lead man knelt near the door and carefully inserted a computer probe into the door's locking panel. His fellows glanced up and down the alley nervously, fingering holstered pistols.

"C'mon hurry it up."

"These things are delicate. I don't want to trigger the—"

"—Alarm?" A voice from further down the alley finished the thief's sentence. Facing the quartet, and blocking their escape route, stood a wiry, athletic figure dressed in a close-fitting dark grey jumpsuit. A boyish grin played over the pale face beneath the tousled brown hair.

- ❖ Against the sophisticated criminals of the 24th century, a sophisticated response was required. Thus the formation of the Special Police. Or, as they are colloquially known:

"A supercop!"

The Special Police officer's approach had taken the thieves by complete surprise, but they recovered quickly, and as one they went for their guns. Though unarmed and apparently unprotected, the officer showed no concern over the four energy pistols that were suddenly facing him.

Even as the crooks opened fire, the officer was moving. In a blur of effortless motion, he leaped, twisting into the air, somehow avoiding every beam that criss-crossed the narrow alley. Covering the eight metres between him and the gunmen in a single leap, he landed among them with all four limbs striking, punches and kicks expertly and precisely rendering each villain unconscious.

Landing lightly on his feet, he paused, watching for movement. When there was none, he straightened and released a breath.

Raising his left wrist, he spoke in the general vicinity of his communicator bracelet.

“Prisoner transport requested at these co-ordinates.”

“Confirmed,” came the expressionless voice of the central police computer. “Officer Nightflyer, report for next assignment: University campus, Connor building.”

- ❖ Nightflyer.
- ❖ Special Police Operative / Patrol Division.
- ❖ Genetically-engineered human.
- ❖ Metahuman abilities: enhanced speed, agility and stamina; healing factor; enhanced intuitive ability.

At that moment, half way around the globe, the sun-bathed rooftop garden of a government tower block couldn't look more different from the darkened alley Nightflyer was standing in. And the well-dressed, well-groomed man who stumbled through the garden couldn't look more different from the crooks Nightflyer had subdued. But he was no less a crook.

“There's nowhere to run, Senator.”

The man started at the sound of the voice and threw a glance over his shoulder. At the sight of his pursuer, he clutched his data tablet closer to his chest in sudden fear.

His pursuer was dressed in a form-fitting black and green uniform that covered him completely but failed to hide his muscular build. A helmet concealed the upper half of his face, revealing only his grimly-set mouth and square, determined chin. At his hip hung a holstered blaster, and the silvered communicator on his left wrist marked him as a Special Police operative.

“You'll never take me in, detective,” blustered the senator. But he had reached the edge of the building. Over a low parapet was a dizzying plunge to the sidewalk a hundred stories below. The officer was right, there was nowhere to run. All he could do was ...

“This will ruin my career. I have nothing left to live for.”

“Don't be a fool, man. I'm the only one who has seen the evidence. We could come to an ... arrangement.”

The officer spoke his next words very softly, his lips barely moving but his communicator nevertheless detecting his words: “I need a teleport pick up. Six meters north of this position, stat.”

“Confirmed. Calculating,” came the police computer's voice in his ear.

“Yes, yes, said the senator eagerly. “I could really help you. I have a lot of influence on the Council—”

Whatever else the senator intended to say was lost as he was bathed in a beam of white light that apparently shot down from the heavens. His outline became hazy and wobbly, and in a moment he was gone, snatched by the 24th-century technological miracle of instantaneous teleportation. The officer stood alone on the roof.

“Not any more you don't,” he said drily.

“Confirming suspect is in custody,” announced the computer voice. “Report for next assignment: University campus, Connor building.”

- ❖ Scorpio.
- ❖ Special Police Operative / Intelligence Division.
- ❖ Meta-human abilities: undisclosed.
- ❖ Equipment: spider-silk armour; environmental helmet; standard issue sidearm.

An aircar was not an unusual sight in the open skies above 24th-century cities. But even in the air, traffic laws apply, and reckless joyriding was an offence, as the three young offenders in one speeding open-topped sportster knew only too well.

“Faster! The cops are right on our tail!”

“I’m doing 105! You wanna drive?”

A flying figure pulled level with the car, and the three occupants looked across at him in terror. Not because he was flying—unaided human flight was not surprising in this century—but because he was apparently not human at all. Humanoid, certainly, his sleekly-muscled body having the requisite number of limbs, but not human. His smooth, naked skin was black, not the black of a human but the matt black of a lump of basalt. His head was that of a wolf, or possibly a jackal, complete with pointed teeth that were bared in a wild grin, and his eyes were glowing red slits. Around his neck hung a silver chain bearing a silver amulet in the shape of a five-pointed star inside a circle. The only other item on his body was the wrist communicator of a Special Police officer.

Despite his appearance, when the being spoke it was in a colloquial North-American accent.

“Can I drive?”

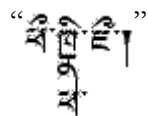
“Blast ’im!” screamed the driver, but his companions were already reaching for their weapons.

The flying officer put on a spurt of inhuman speed and swooped around in front of the vehicle even as blaster bolts burned through the air he had occupied an instant before. With no apparent effort, he punched down through the titanium hood of the aircar. Metal squealed and collapsed and smoke boiled from within.

“It’s always ‘blast him’ with you humans. Never anything original,” he complained.

Crippled, the aircar went into a downwards spin, trailing thick smoke. The occupants hung on for dear life, their weapons forgotten.

The flying being traced a complicated gesture in the air and spoke a stream of meaningless syllables.



The words were derived from ancient Atlantean, but their speaker neither knew nor cared about that fact. All he knew was that those particular syllables combined with that particular gesture were the key to producing a specific magical effect. He knew this instinctively, for magic was a part of this particular being’s very nature.

Streamers of white light poured from his fingertips as he completed the spell. The light wrapped itself around the three joyriders, forming physical bands that efficiently restrained them while binding them into the car.

The being swooped under the tumbling aircar and effortlessly caught it.

“You can relax. I won’t drop you.” Carrying the car, he leisurely flew over the city. “And just so you know—you are all under arrest.”

His communicator beeped for attention.

“Instruction: officer Avatar complete current assignment and report to University campus, Connor building.”

- ❖ Avatar.
- ❖ Special Police Operative / Patrol Division.
- ❖ Meta-human abilities: unexplained.
- ❖ Origin: unknown.

Half a continent away, a green-skinned, vaguely reptilian-looking man was climbing a monorail support pillar. Blaring sirens behind him drove him desperately upwards. There were no hand-holds; he

was clinging to the smooth metal by the attractive force generated from his bare hands and feet. He hissed in annoyance when an authoritative voice from below cut through the air.

“Police! Stop right there, Replicon!”

The criminal known as Replicon looked down and a snake-like tongue flickered between his thin lips. On the ground ten metres below stood a slim figure in a form-fitting blue costume bearing lightning-bolt motifs. A full-face mask concealed his features, but below the thin material Replicon could make out the shape of an amused smile.

“Chew you, cop,” he swore. “I ain’t going back to Titan!”

“Don’t make me hurt you,” the cop shouted.”

“Come up and try it,” snarled the reptilian villain, showing pointed teeth.

“You know I don’t need to come up,” said the cop, “But let me remind you why.”

The officer extended his right hand and an arc of lightning flashed from his fingertips, striking Replicon. The villain’s limbs convulsed and he let go of the support pillar. He fell the ten metres to the ground and landed, insensible, next to the cop.

“That should have jolted his memory,” the cop remarked to nobody in particular, smiling again at his own joke. He raised his communicator bracelet to his mouth.

“Escaped prisoner has been stopped near the—”

“Sensors have confirmed location,” cut in the computer voice. “Hold position for teleport to University campus, Connor building.”

- ❖ Electron.
- ❖ Special Police Operative / Patrol Division.
- ❖ Meta-human abilities: electrostatic energy projection, matter transmutation, telekinetic manipulation, short-range personal teleportation, telepathic communication.

In a small, sealed, steel-lined room, a woman hovered, silent and motionless, a few centimetres above the floor. The plain white of her one-piece bodysuit made a stark contrast with the dark skin of her face and her close-cropped black hair. Her grey, ankle-length cape stirred slightly in the circulating air.

Surrounding her, also hovering, were four small metal globes, each about the size of a baseball and showing a number of small round apertures for sensors and weapons.

The woman spoke.

“Computer, on my mark—Go.”

As one, all four globes began zipping around the room and firing beams of energy at the woman. With graceful movements, seemingly slow yet perfectly precise, she absorbed two of the beams with the palm of one hand. With her other palm, she deflected a third beam back at one of the globes, knocking it out of the air. Simultaneously, her body bent back into an aerial somersault, gracefully avoiding the fourth beam. The action was silent but for the slight zipping sound of the globes’ impeller units as they darted around the room.

The woman went on the offensive, beams of black light darting from each palm to nail a pair of spheres. The impact was silent, but each sphere dropped inertly to the floor, its motive energy drained by her power.

She faced the last remaining sphere. She and it unleashed beams at the same time. It evaded hers, but she was a fraction slow in her response and its bolt struck her leg, leaving no mark on the material of the costume but evidently stinging.

“Ow! Chew!” she swore. Anger twisted her mouth. Raising her palm she unleashed a torrent of energy at her attacker. This sphere didn’t drop harmlessly to the floor, it exploded in spectacular fashion. She landed gracefully, breathing hard from her exercise. A computer voice broke the silence of the room.

“Information for officer Black Swan. Headquarters requires you to report to University campus for mission assignment.”

“Chew that, I’ve got work to do. Relay the exercise results to my workstation.”

- ❖ Black Swan.
- ❖ Special Police Operative / Science Division.
- ❖ Meta-human abilities: controls fundamental attributes of mass, energy and gravity.

The University of North America campus covered an area comparable to that of a 20th-century city. The Conner building, however, was not large, only two storeys tall and covering a hectare of ground. In front of it was a wide concrete plaza, bordered on all sides by taller buildings and elevated highways and, further back, the gleaming spires of city blocks. The centrepiece of the plaza was a massive concrete and glass sculpture of a working hourglass. Beneath this was a discrete chrome sign:

**UNIVERSITY OF NORTH AMERICA
INSTITUTE FOR TEMPORAL STUDIES**

It was mid-morning and small groups of students and faculty staff crossed on foot from building to building or simply lounged in the sunshine, making use of the plaza’s snack and drink vending machines. Most of them reacted with interest, though not surprise, when the white fingers of four separate teleport beams flashed down and simultaneously materialised four Special Police officers near the sculpture.

“Information: teleport complete,” announced the police computer, unnecessarily, from four wrist communicators.

Avatar, Electron, Nightflyer and Scorpio eyed one another. None of them had been briefed on the assignment before teleport, and they had not realised other officers would be working the same case. These four had never before worked together, but each knew of the others vaguely, so with nods of greeting and a minimum of conversation, they strode towards the signposted Conner building.

Wide steps ran up to the building’s closed doors. Flanking the doors were two identically-uniformed armed guards.

“Something’s wrong here,” said Nightflyer in a conversational tone. “Those two guards ...”

“You’ve also noticed that their uniforms don't fit, their firearms are non-reg, and the one on the left needs a haircut?” asked Scorpio.

Nightflyer looked sideways at him, startled.

“Oh. No, I just get a feeling about these things.”

The two officers sized each other up for a long moment.

“Play it cool until we get next to them. We don't want civilians caught in a gunfight,” said Scorpio.

The four officers climbed the steps, Scorpio striding a few steps ahead of the others.

“Officer Scorpio, Special Police. Can I see some ID?”

The “guards” weren’t the sharpest tools in the criminal fraternity. They stared at Scorpio. Then they looked at each other and a silent agreement seemed to pass between them, and they both went for their guns.

Before the pistols had even cleared their holsters, Scorpio and Nightflyer reacted. Nightflyer knocked out one guard with a spinning kick to the head, while Scorpio employed a less flamboyant, but just as effective, right uppercut to deal with the other.

“What’s happening?” demanded Avatar, who hadn’t heard their previous conversation.

“We don’t know yet,” said Scorpio, “But everybody be ready to—”

“Duck!” yelled Nightflyer.

The officers reacted instinctively to his shouted warning, ducking and shielding themselves, and that probably saved them all from serious injury as the doors burst open with massive force, smashed literally to pieces and showering them with debris. When the debris cleared, the cause became apparent: a massive, muscular man, easily two metres tall and almost as wide! He was stripped to the waist, with a belt of metal chain links holding up his pants. But the feature that drew their gaze was his weirdly deformed bald head, unnaturally flat and sloping forwards, leaving him with no real forehead, as if somebody had dropped an anvil on him at some point in the past.

- ❖ Blockhead.
- ❖ Legal status: wanted for multiple violent crimes.
- ❖ Metahuman abilities: vastly enhanced strength and resistance to injury.

Before the officers had recovered their equilibrium in the wake of the blast, Blockhead stepped forwards and punched the nearest target—who just happened to be Avatar. Such was the villain’s strength that Avatar was bodily thrown back several dozen metres, crashing to the ground.

“Ey, Killervolt, der’s chewin’ cops ’ere.”

A second man emerged from the gaping doorway. This man was encased from head-to-toe in a bronze-coloured suit of metallic battle armour.

- ❖ Killervolt.
- ❖ Legal status: wanted for multiple tech crimes.
- ❖ Restricted technology: armoured flight suit with electrostatic weaponry.

“You keep them busy, Blockhead, I’ll get the goods to safety.”

The armoured Killervolt took to the air, flying clear over his partner’s head. But before he had gained more than a dozen metres of height, he came to a dead stop. His suit’s sensors indicated the cause was an intense telekinetic field, projected by the officer in the blue suit.

“Telekinesis, cop? Well TK this!”

From his suit’s gauntlets, he fired a massive charge of electricity. It struck Electron squarely, but the officer merely laughed.

“Voltage, Killervolt? Sorry—the only thing that shocks me is strong language,” he quipped.

Electron responded with a lightning bolt of his own, but Killervolt’s suit was naturally insulated.

Meanwhile, Avatar had regained his feet and closed with Blockhead. The plaza echoed with the crashes of their punches, but they appeared evenly matched and neither gave an inch.

Nightflyer and Scorpio were more interested in what was still inside the building. They slipped through the open door to find a wide and high, but empty, entrance hall, with a corridor leading to the left and a wide staircase to the upper level. Scorpio gestured at Nightflyer: you go that way, I’ll go up here. Nightflyer made a circle of his thumb and forefinger: ok.

Down the corridor, Nightflyer turned a corner and was struck squarely by two beams of green energy.

“Surprise!” gloated the attacker, a man in a green costume with compact energy weapons mounted on the backs of his wrists.

- ❖ Viper.
- ❖ Legal status: wanted for multiple violent crimes.
- ❖ Metahuman abilities: enhanced speed and agility.

❖ Restricted technology: neural stunners.

"I'm never surprised," said Nightflyer truthfully. "I just needed to get closer to you."

"You—you're still standing?"

"I'm tougher than I look"

Nightflyer launched himself towards the Viper, cartwheeling to avoid the barrage of energy the criminal sent in his direction.

In another part of the building, Scorpio had found trouble of his own. A low frequency hum warned him, and he dodged a beam of concentrated sound that disintegrated a chunk of wall where his head had been a second before. Scorpio turned to confront his attacker. The man was ostentatiously dressed in a ruffled dress shirt open to the waist, and trousers that were far too tight to be practical. He sported a head of tight blonde curls and a conspicuous moustache. Scorpio didn't know of the 20th-century trend known as "disco", but if he had then that's what would have been in his mind!

❖ Discord.

❖ Legal status: wanted for multiple violent crimes.

❖ Metahuman abilities: personal resonance field; sonic manipulation.

Taking no chances after Discord's lethal attack, Scorpio drew his blaster and fired back. But the bolt dissipated in mid-air, a few centimetres away from the villain's body. The sub-sonic hum pervading the room intensified as it did so.

"You'll need more than that to get through my harmonic force field," gloated the flamboyant villain.

Scorpio glanced downwards at the floor.

"Ok," he said.

Then he dropped the barrel of his pistol and blasted a hole beneath Discord's feet. With a cry of surprise, the villain plunged through the hole and Scorpio heard a satisfying thud on the floor below. Even more satisfying was the cessation of the humming effect.

Nightflyer's voice came from his communicator.

"It was the Viper. He's taken care of."

"Discord too. Funny ... in a university building, what could there possibly be to interest four super villains?"

"Let's find out," came from the communicator.

Back outside, Electron and Killervolt exchanged energy blasts even as Avatar and Blockhead traded punches. It was a stalemate, but one that Electron had already seen the obvious solution to. He directed a telepathic transmission to his fellow officer.

"Avatar! Switch targets."

Avatar understood immediately, and took to the air, streaking towards Killervolt so fast he appeared to blur. Electron instantly switched to cover him, throwing electrical arcs at Blockhead. Both villains were down in seconds.

The two officers moved into the building, Electron activating his communicator.

"Prisoner transport and clean-up crew required, this location."

In the entrance hall, they met Scorpio and Nightflyer accompanied by a third man in an immaculate grey uniform. Electron immediately recognised him. He straightened and saluted.

"Chief!"

"At ease, officer."

❖ Chief Kadnez.

❖ Executive Head of Operations, Special Police.

Kadnez led them back into the building.

“Good work, officers. Those men had stolen data vital to the security of Earth.”

“With respect, sir, what kind of vital information is found in a university history department?” asked Scorpio.

“Oh, this is far more than a history department. But while we're waiting for the fifth member of your team to arrive, I'll introduce you to the man who will explain—”

Kadnez led them into a conference room as he spoke, and his sentence was finished by the grey-haired academic who sat within.

“—That the world is ending!”

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Professor Carl Zod.❖ Senior Councillor, Council of Science. |
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“Unless you can stop it,” Kadnez amended.

Despite the officers' questions, further explanations were delayed until Black Swan finally deigned to appear. Then they sat down while Zod stood in front of the room's wall screen and adopted a lecturing tone.

“The images I am about to show you have been gathered with my Time Viewer—a device which allows me to record events occurring in the past.

“You realize, officers, that this is strictly classified information,” Kadnez warned them.

“Behold!” said Zod dramatically.

The wall sprang to life and showed what was obviously a timeline of historical images. They flickered past at a dizzying rate. Scorpio, trained observer though he was, couldn't take in a fraction of it. He thought he saw dinosaurs, pyramids being constructed, marching legions. What is the point of this? he wondered. The images flickered on, centuries compressed into seconds, the Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution, the Great Wars, the space age, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Californian land slip, the—

“Wait!” said Nightflyer. His brain subconsciously processed input at a prodigious rate—the source of his uncanny danger sense—and it had registered something the others had not consciously noticed.

“Back up. What was that?”

The view went into reverse, more slowly, halting at a completely black screen. Zod pointed at it emphatically.

“That, officers, was 1987.”

“Boring year, then?” said Electron.

“Data glitch?” suggested Black Swan more seriously.

“We wouldn't be here if it was just a data glitch. Am I right?”

“On the button, officer Scorpio,” confirmed the Chief.

Zod faced the five officers, his face grave.

“There is a hole in time. And it's getting bigger.” He allowed a few seconds for that to sink in. “Somebody has to go back in time to the point this hole originated and stop it from forming. If it is not stopped, it will continue to expand until it engulfs our own century.” He paused again, this time for emphasis. “The end of all existence,” he said slowly.

“Actual time travel has never been attempted before. This is a volunteers-only mission, officers,” said Kadnez.

The officers looked at one another. Each saw resolve and a complete lack of fear in the others' faces. No discussion was necessary.

“When do we leave?” asked Scorpio.

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|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ I have a bad feeling about this. |
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To be continued ...