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opening extract from

Hero.com 4: Chaos Effect

written by

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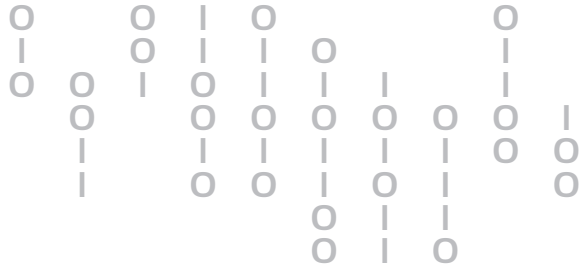
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The Arrival

Lord Destructo was, in a word, unbeatable.

An expert on causing chaos, he swung the battleaxe with such devastating force that he swiped three enemies in half with a single swing, laughing evilly as he did so.

'You're goin' down!' goaded a painfully thin robed man with a crooked, pointy nose. A cone of light erupted from his palms.

Destructo was fast; in the blink of an eye he deflected the blast with a hexagonal shield. The energy ricocheted back on the thin man and he vanished in a puff of smoke.

'I am invincible!' roared Destructo. He was thoroughly enjoying himself. It had taken a long time to rise to such power, and he was determined to make the most of it. Another wave of warriors raced towards him, swords raised.

'Get him!'

'I'm gonna lob your head off, dude!'

'Nobody messes with me!' bellowed Destructo. He

dropped his battleaxe and shield and jumped agilely to his right. Despite his massive bulk he moved with fluid grace, emulating moves of seasoned free-runners.

Destructo bounced from a wall, pirouetted gracefully over his opponents' heads, then landed and dealt a flurry of martial arts blows that were almost impossible to follow.

Two of his opponents vaporized into nothing, the third was sprawled on the ground, his weapon cast aside.

'No way, man! Gimme a break!'

Destructo retrieved his battleaxe and advanced menacingly. 'Lord Destructo gives no mercy!'

'Trevor!' The voice came out of nowhere. It threw Lord Destructo off his murderous rampage. For a moment he thought his secret name had been uttered and looked around for the culprit.

'Trevor!'

It was enough of a distraction for the guy on the floor to roll to his sword and stab it into Destructo's gut. The villain recoiled, dropping his axe.

'He shoots! He scores!' hollered the swordsman jubilantly. He raised the blade for another blow.

Destructo's hands suddenly glowed bright red—a shimmering heat-ray disintegrated the swordsman. For a second, there was nothing left but a charred skeleton holding a sword, then it vanished.

'Trevor! Your dinner's going cold!'

The Arrival

Lord Destructo froze as the console game was paused. Trevor Jones irritably threw the controller down. He yanked off his headset and glared at his closed bedroom door.

'In a minute! You nearly got me killed!' he bellowed at the top of his lungs. His mum's timing was typically bad. Why was it parents always knew the moment you were having the most fun, just so they could interrupt it?

'Now, Trevor! I won't tell you again!'

'Good! I'm not hungry anyway!' he muttered under his breath.

He looked at his alter ego on the screen. It represented months of playing online and missed homework. It was a work of art, but his mum wouldn't appreciate that; apparently eating with the family was much more important. Now he would surely die if his character didn't find a safe refuge.

Trevor sighed and picked the controller up to save his game play. Out of the corner of his eye, the character seemed to move. It was a subtle thing and impossible because the game was still paused.

He squinted at the screen . . . but nothing happened. His thumb hovered over the game pad, a click away from saving the game and giving up. Then he caught the movement again in his peripheral vision.

This time the movement continued when he stared

directly at it. The graphics were distorting, each pixel shimmering. Trevor was concerned; now was not the time for the game to crash. His thumbs danced across the controller—no response.

'Don't do this to me!' He punched every button on the pad, just in case it magically restored the game. 'Great!' he spat at the screen. Resetting the console would erase the entire day's worth of play. Weighed down with reluctance, he reached for the power button—

And the screen suddenly exploded! The television itself remained intact, but the room was filled with swirling pixels as though a swarm of miniature bees had entered the room.

Trevor swatted at them as they rolled across him. It was like being inside a sandstorm. He felt sharp tingles of electricity as pixels struck him in their thousands, forcing him to his knees.

A loud CLUMP made the floor shake.

Through tear-filled eyes, Trevor watched in horror as something stepped out of the screen—something huge and muscular and alarmingly familiar.

It was Lord Destructo!

Trevor gasped in shock—a bad move as his mouth was suddenly filled with pixels, popping in his mouth like space candy and stifling his scream.

He fell on his back, scrambling away on all-fours

as Destructo pulled himself to his full height. Even through the swarm, Trevor could see the creature was not quite real. His features were angular, made from thousands of polygons, just like in the game. The textures on his body seemed flat and unconvincing when set against his bedroom. Trevor backed against his wardrobe—he could go no further.

Destructo flexed his arms, staring at them as if for the first time. He looked satisfied. Then he raised both fists to the ceiling and roared. The sound was a cross between a foghorn and an electronic warble.

'Trevor! I told you to turn that off!' came the distant voice of his mum from downstairs. Trevor tried to call for help, but his mouth was full of solid pixels. 'Now get down here, or you'll be in trouble!'

Destructo's gaze suddenly fell on the cowering boy. It was difficult to gauge a reaction on the polygon face, but Trevor thought it must be delight. The digital avatar leant forward and easily picked him up by the scruff of his shirt.

The monster spoke . . . or tried to. What came out was a garbled distortion that cycled through pitch and frequency until the sounds started to emulate words that sounded like a bad radio transmission.

'It has worked! I am free! Finally!'

Trevor lashed out. His knee clanged into the fiend's very solid private parts, a strike that would have felled

anyone else. Then Trevor had a stroke of luck. His shirt ripped at the seams and he dropped to the floor. For once, he was thankful he was overweight! He scrambled for his bedroom door and managed to open it—before the swarm of pixels slammed it shut, almost trapping his fingers.

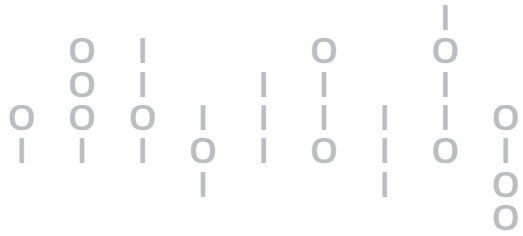
Destructo lunged forward and grabbed Trevor firmly around the neck, lifting the boy off his feet. The avatar's mouth hyperextended, like a snake's jaws, and Trevor caught sight of the dark tunnel beyond, stretching impossibly far. Electricity crackled in the yawning cyber-gullet.

It was the last thing he saw before he was consumed whole by the digital abnormality.

'Right!' screamed his mother from behind the closed door. 'I've had enough! I'm banning you from wasting your time on that computer!'

She swung the door open and looked around the empty room. The place was a mess, as if a hurricane had torn through it. That was normal. What was unusual was the fact that Trevor was missing. She had heard noises from the room seconds earlier, and the windows were all closed.

She peeked in the wardrobe, just in case he was hiding there. She didn't notice the console turning itself off; the green power light turned hostile red.



Cadet Training

Toby Wilkinson's concentration was starting to drift as he looked across the rooftop to the skyscraper opposite. He was standing fifty metres above the city and the biting cold wind was so relentless miniature icicles were forming on his runny nose. He had once been stranded in Antarctica, but somehow Toronto felt much colder. He sighed as his mind wandered.

Working with a team required trust between teammates, but he wasn't feeling very inspired with his choice of companions. He was used to saving the day with his sister, Lorna, and their friends Pete and Emily, but that had all gone wrong and friendships had been torn apart. Pete had drifted to the Council of Evil then found his way to lead a new group of rogues called Forge, created by Mr Grimm—a back-stabbing 'hero' Toby had once trusted.

Forge was originally created as the more neutral choice between the Foundation and the Council, but in truth their activities were just as self-serving and they appeared to vacillate between the two extremes in an

anarchic fashion. That was probably down to Pete; he had never possessed great leadership skills.

Toby's sister, Lorna, had dated Jake Hunter who was their school's toughest bully and one of the world's most lethal supervillains. To be fair, she hadn't known he was a villain at the time. But now she did know, she still seemed to like the creep and Toby couldn't figure out why. She was starting to turn into one of those freaky girls who wrote to serial killers on death row.

To top it all off, Emily, whom Toby had started to quite like, had begun pining for Pete and had gone on a mission to guide him away from the self-destructive path he had embarked upon.

Who said life was simple?

Eric Kirby, the head of the Foundation, had promised Toby that once the new cadets were trained, then the Foundation would gather its forces and attack the Council of Evil headquarters. Toby was one of the few superheroes that had been to the mysterious island complex and survived. He escaped with valuable details of the Council's top-secret location.

Toby had unexpectedly found himself promoted as one of the Foundation's most trusted assets, and as such he was starting to be too valuable to use in dangerous situations. That meant he was now forced to train the newbies. The only perk of the job was that he was working with Jen, a rather attractive sixteen-year-old

Japanese American, whom he had met when they were fighting one another. She looked more mature, easily passing for eighteen, and she was yet another complication in his chaotic life.

'See anything new, shrimp?' asked Jen over his headset.

Toby was brought back to the situation in Toronto. As much as he liked Jen, he hated her nickname for him. He was sure she did it to wind him up. Toby squinted and felt a rush of dizziness as his vision zoomed in on the windows of the tower across the street.

'Nothing's changed. The hostages are still in place.'

Twenty hostages were pressed against the windows on the penultimate floor of the skyscraper. They were leaning forwards with all their weight on their hands. The idea was that if somebody tried to come in through the window then the hostages would fall as the glass broke. Toby had to admit it was an effective solution. Nothing had changed for the last three hours and that was worrying Toby because he had no idea how long his three downloaded powers would last.

He'd selected them from the Hero.com website at home before leaving. The Foundation had given him a cool touchscreen mobile phone that had several raw powers preloaded in tiny cylinders built into the body, teleportation being the one he used to get to the crisis scene.

He had pleaded with Kirby to have access to more than three powers, but the bar was firmly set after everybody witnessed the mutating effects over-consumption had on Pete.

Toby shivered, that had been a bad day. They had been on the Foundation's floating headquarters when a supervillain called Basilisk had attacked. Pete had bravely tackled the fiend, but the resulting fight saw Pete hurled through multiple vats of raw superpowers. Nobody had ever absorbed so many different powers in such vast quantities and it had imbued him with the gift to combine powers into new ones. The side affect was that his body and mind had been twisted. That's when Toby truly lost his best friend.

The unreliable duration of the powers was another factor Kirby refused to address for the same reasons—a longer duration would require a greater dosage. The only way round it was by downloading 'one use' powers from the Bluetooth headset cupped against his ear. That was voice controlled, and one of the Foundation's cooler new inventions.

Another factor bothering Toby was that he was supposed to get back home to attend a family party. He knew Lorna would cover for him if he was late, but if he didn't show then he would be in trouble. His parents had already hinted at confiscating his computer if he didn't buck his ideas up.

Cadet Training

'We've got to get in there and do something,' said Toby restlessly.

'You heard what the boss said. We observe and wait,' replied Jen over the headset.

The 'boss', in this case, was a superhero called Chameleon. He was a Prime, somebody born with latent superpowers rather than a Downloader like Toby. Chameleon wanted the authorities to handle the situation because the gunmen didn't appear to be wielding any superpowers. Toby's team was only on standby in case anything went wrong. The world had had too many close calls recently due to warring heroes and villains and it was becoming a strain to keep the existence of superpowers from the Press, and each event made it more difficult. Chameleon felt that if the authorities could cope, then so much the better.

Toby shivered as he scanned the windows. He stopped and backtracked as he noticed movement behind the hostages. Several masked men were unrolling coils of coloured wires. Toby watched as the gunmen strung the wires to blocks of putty-like C4 plastic explosive and attached them to the walls behind the hostages.

'Uh, Jen? We've got a big problem.'

'You need to go to the toilet again?' she fired back.

'No. This is a little more serious . . . although I really needed to go then. I was bursting,' he added

defensively. Even superheroes had to answer the call of nature.

'You're rambling, shrimp.'

That was the problem with talking to Jen, he liked the sound of her voice. She was a distraction he didn't need right now.

'The hostage takers are wiring the floor with explosives.'

'That's so not good,' replied Jen, the master of understatement.

Toby switched his gaze to the streets below. The police had cordoned off the area, although a huge crowd of media and thrill-hungry spectators watched from behind barriers.

Vans had started to arrive carrying more cops. Toby had been hoping to see some of the bright red jackets of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, but was disappointed to see they looked just like ordinary officers.

Some heavily armed SWAT-like guys had pulled up in a van and slowly advanced on the front entrance.

'ETF has joined the party,' commented Jen. Toby had been told to expect them. The Emergency Task Force was a team of tactically trained police officers who specialized in exactly these types of circumstances. Toby had hoped they would turn up earlier, now it was looking a little too late.

Cadet Training

'They have no idea what they're running into. Maybe it's time to deploy Dumb and Dumber?'

Jen chuckled. 'You're terrible. They're lovely guys.'

Toby was referring to the two new Downloaders they were charged with training. Chameleon had told him they were the best, but if that was the case, then there was no hope for the Foundation.

'Well?' prompted Toby. He looked across to the building on the opposite side of the hostage situation where he knew Jen was watching. He couldn't see her though.

Below, the ETF had forced their way into the lobby. That single action had violated the hostage takers' list of demands. The elevators were out, so the ETF would be forced to make their way laboriously up the staircase.

'Jen? Can you hear me?'

'I'm thinking,' she snapped back. She always got tetchy with him under pressure. 'I don't see that we have any choice.'

'Well . . . we could always go in instead.'

'Right, and what have you downloaded that would help?'

Toby didn't reply: she was right. They had both selected powers suited to observing the situation. Neither possessed any combat powers to take the gunmen out. If things went badly, then they could only hope that Chameleon turned up with reinforcements; but he wasn't even in the same country.

'Toby, send them in.'

Toby grunted in reply and pulled out his mobile phone. He hit a button to initiate a video chat. Almost twenty seconds passed before a cheerful face appeared with a slice of pizza halfway to his mouth.

'Yo!'

Toby inwardly groaned. Dumber had answered the phone.

'Hayden? What took you so long answering? You're supposed to be on stand by!'

'I had to pay the pizza guy, man. Chill!' Hayden's surf-boy looks perfectly matched his voice.

Toby wished he could punch the screen so his fist would come out on the other end of the line and chin Hayden.

'We need you and Moron Two to get in there and rescue the hostages.'

Hayden grinned his dazzling smile. 'Far out!'

'Be warned, there is a police team in the building and the gunmen have planted explosives . . . ' Toby drifted off as he was talking to an anchovy. Hayden had thrown his pizza close to his camera and run out, not even bothering to terminate the call.

Toby glanced at his watch. If they could resolve things in the next fifteen minutes he could still make it home without getting into trouble.

Somehow he doubted it would be that easy.

Cadet Training

* * *

Arid Larkin was a small-time crook with big plans. This was the most daring job he had ever taken on, and he was pleased it was going so smoothly. Their employer had planned every aspect of the raid with minute precision, and it had paid off. There had been no casualties, the police had behaved exactly as expected and they had broken into the vault on the fiftieth floor with relative ease. Now their satchels had been emptied of their explosives and filled with plans and prototypes of a new generation of computer processor that would see all twelve men rich beyond their wildest dreams once they had delivered them to their employer. All they had to do was get them out.

A silent alarm flashed on the netbook computer sitting on one gunman's lap. It was linked to sensors they had placed across their building to detect forced entry. The men were too well trained to have to speak. A series of complex hand signals told his companions that fifteen armed police had stormed the lobby and were ascending on the north staircase.

Larkin glanced through the window searching for the helicopter he knew was coming. They had issued lengthy ransom demands to the police; not that he cared about results, it was only a stalling tactic. When their own helicopter arrived they would blow up the

top floor—hostages and all. That would keep the emergency services busy.

Then he saw the fast-moving chopper approaching them. He turned and signalled to his men to get ready. When he looked back the helicopter had vanished.

He squinted, certain he had seen it. He pulled the heavy facemask off; the hostages were all pressed against the window so they wouldn't see his face. Even if they did, they would be blown into very small chunks soon.

He shielded his eyes against the sun and stared through the window. He spotted the helicopter again—but there was something seriously wrong. The aircraft was rushing towards him—rotor first, as if thrown by a mighty hand.

A gust of wind suddenly blew through the office block—and the hostages vanished from their positions against the windows.

'What is going on?' he bellowed.

His companions looked round in shock—they had all seen their hostages vanish in front of their eyes. They stared out of the window as—

The helicopter smashed through the floor-to-ceiling windows. Gnashing rotor blades tore up the floor, ceiling, and any furniture in the way.

Larkin ran for his life as the wall of swirling rotor blades advanced metres behind him. He threw himself

over a bank of metal filing cabinets, just in time, as the C4 explosives, caught in the blades, detonated.

Toby watched from the rooftop opposite, his mouth slack as the entire top corner section of the building erupted in a massive fireball. The explosives had been wired together, but the whirling rotor had reeled them all in, resulting in the focused blast and ensuing mass devastation.

The hostages had been whisked to 'safety'. In this case they were all on the rooftop and screaming as the building shook around them and flames punched up from the corner office.

Toby's gaze switched to Hayden who was hovering several hundred metres away. The grin had slipped from the cadet's face. He was the one who had intercepted the chopper and thought it would be an awesome idea to throw it at the bad guys.

Larkin poked his head up from behind the dented filing cabinets. The floor ended centimetres away and the corner of the building was missing as though some giant monster had bitten it off. Jagged metal girders hung limply out of the floor and walls. The explosion had taken out the floor above, but not the roof above that—which was the very top of the building where the hostages stood. Everything seemed on fire, and the suspended quarter creaked as it wobbled over the drop, fuelling the screams of the hostages above.

Larkin had no idea what had gone wrong, and he didn't want to wait to find out. He careered further into the building; he knew he had to find another means of escape.

A blond boy suddenly landed in the hallway blocking his path. Larkin looked frantically around, the kid must have jumped down from the floor above, that was the only explanation. What troubled him was the fact that the boy wasn't more than sixteen and he was smiling.

'Man, that was, like, impressive! But we've got your number now, dude. You're under arrest.'

Larkin went for the pistol in his thigh holster—but it wasn't there. It must have fallen out when the helicopter crashed. He doubled-back. There was something about the boy that made him not want to start a fight. It was the way he was grinning inanely. Larkin bumped into two of his men as they raced down the corridor. He didn't care where the others had gone, they were only hired muscle.

They rounded another corner—and the boy was standing there, blocking his path! Impossible!

'*Guten Tag!*' said the smiling boy. Larkin hesitated—it was impossible that he had overtaken them, and his accent was distinctively German. 'The hostages are safe and you are going nowhere, *ja?*'

'Get him!' Larkin screamed at his two companions. They went for their firearms. The kid swept both his

hands apart and the two men were plucked off their feet and thrown through the thin corridor walls—crashing into the offices beyond.

'That's impossible!' screamed Larkin in terror. He turned and fled the way he had come.

He hurtled back into the partially demolished office and was brought up short by the sight of his team bound together with the detonation cord they had primed the explosives with. The kid was there, tying the knot. He looked up nonchalantly.

'Hey. You giving up already?'

'How do you do that?' demanded Larkin. He was looking around for any weapon he could use.

'Do what?'

Larkin's eyes fell on an explosive satchel that miraculously hadn't detonated. He ran for it, sliding along the paper-strewn floor to scoop it up. He jammed a detonator into the explosive and held it aloft.

'Touch me and we all blow up!' he yelled.

'Man, you're crazy, you'll die too.'

'It's better than going to jail!'

Larkin suddenly noticed the boy's double run into the office. He stopped, assessing the scene.

'Two of you? How can there be two of you?'

'Jurgen's my identical twin, bro.'

For a second, the bizarreness of the situation was overriding the danger. 'But you don't sound the same.'

Jurgen snorted a laugh. 'Duh! Identical in looks. Father took Hayden to America, I lived in Germany with mother,' he explained in his thick Germanic accent.

'Easier to tell us apart,' laughed Hayden. Neither seemed fazed by the bomb. 'Now why don't you give in, man? The hostages are safe on the roof,' a chorus of screams from the rooftop didn't seem to worry him, 'thanks to Jurgen's super-bad speed, and the rest of your buddies ain't going nowhere.'

Larkin hesitated. It suddenly made sense why his employer hadn't attempted the theft himself when Larkin was faced with an army of supermen. He lowered the explosive satchel.

Hayden nodded. 'Cool. You're a smart dude after all.' He unhooked a phone from his belt and thumbed a digit. 'Yo, Tobe, Jen. Bad guys are nabbed, good guys are saved.'

'Who are you?' asked Larkin, completely out of his depth.

'Ain't it obvious?' Hayden extended his arms like a showman, he was enjoying every moment of showing off. 'We're superheroes, dude.'

Toby and Jen flew in through the gouge in the corner of the ceiling. Larkin's mouth fell open in shock.

'You can fly?'

Toby ignored him, instead he rounded on the twins, pointing at the destruction. 'Look what you did!'

Jurgen's bottom lip stuck out defiantly. 'We finished the mission, did we not?'

'Have you ever heard of "collateral damage"?' shrieked Toby.

'Go easy on them, Tobe,' said Jen in a measured voice. 'I'm sure your first time in the field wasn't plain sailing?'

Toby bit his lip. His first time was a story he didn't want to get into right now.

Larkin held up his hand, he felt as if he was suddenly back at school. 'Excuse me?'

Nobody was listening.

'Don't side with them, Jen,' groaned Toby. 'You can't seriously expect this to be classed as a successful mission?'

'Excuse me?'

Jen brushed her long jet-black hair over one shoulder and crossed her arms, a sure sign the conversation was over.

'Yes I do. The hostages are all safe, these bozos have been stopped.'

'EXCUSE ME!' bellowed Larkin. Now everybody looked at him. He raised the explosive satchel high. 'Now I have your attention, maybe you'll want to listen to me. This ain't over.'

'I'm pretty sure it is, bro,' said Hayden flippantly.

'Shut up!' Toby hissed at him. Then he turned to

Larkin and spoke in a much calmer voice. 'It is over. Put the explosives down.'

Larkin laughed. Some of his arrogance was returning. His employer had prepared a back-up plan; Larkin had thought there would be no need to implement it.

He edged over to his tied-up men. The heroes gave him a wide berth. They had several powers between them, but none of them had the power to survive an explosion.

'You're not going anywhere,' said Jen defiantly.

Larkin reached his men, but rather than try to undo the knot, he picked up a bulky backpack and slipped it on.

'I think you'll find that I am leaving you. Blondie put the hostages on the roof.' He nodded at Jurgen and smiled evilly. 'Excellent.'

Then he threw the satchel across the office, towards the ceiling. The four heroes instinctively tracked the satchel as Larkin charged for the edge of the building and leapt outside.

Hayden shoved Jen out of his line of sight and craned his neck forward.

'NO!' screamed Toby.

But it was too late. Fine laser beams shot from Hayden's eyes and detonated the satchel. Toby only had time to tackle Jen to the floor as the C4 explosives

inside exploded, taking out a massive chunk of the ceiling overhead.

The corner of the roof groaned as support beams were obliterated and dropped down into their office, forming a forty-five-degree slide off the skyscraper.

The office was choked with smoke and dust. Toby could just see the hostages sliding down the inclined roof and plummeting to their doom.

Toby and Jen acted as one. They aimed for a smashed section of wall and jumped out. They took flight and in a split-second had assessed what was happening.

The majority of the hostages were still on the roof. Eight had been standing on the slab of roof that angled down and they had slid off the edge. Six dangled from steel supports poking from the concrete while two fell like stones.

Jen and Toby dived for the falling hostages. Toby noticed Larkin out of the corner of his eye—the criminal's backpack opened and a compact parachute blossomed out.

Toby couldn't spare the time to pursue him. He zeroed in on a falling woman and grabbed hold of her. Her wild screams suddenly stopped as she stared at Toby, who was covered in dirty dust and debris as if he had been used to sweep a chimney.

'I've got you!' he said in the most reassuring voice he could in the circumstances.

'Yeah . . . but who has got *you*?' squeaked the girl.

It was a fair point. Toby's flight powers were not strong enough to support the two of them and stop her from falling, but he could at least slow her descent. He aimed for the top of an ambulance; it was the most appropriate landing pad he could think of.

They crunched down on the roof, buckling the metal. Toby noticed Jen had made a more elegant landing on a patch of grass. Toby shot back into the sky before the saved girl could thank him.

Jen joined him racing back to the dangling figures on top of the tower—just as one lost his grip and plummeted past.

'Mine!' yelled Jen and suddenly peeled away to save the guy.

Toby managed to drag the five hanging office workers back up the inclined section of roof, and to safety. Jurgen, Hayden, and Jen joined him as he pulled the last woman up.

Toby was boiling with anger. He stabbed a finger at the twins, who had the good sense to look abashed.

'You idiots! What happened to stealth? What happened to playing it cool and using minimum force?'

'We used hardly any powers to attack them.'

Toby gaped, looking between the ragged missing corner of the building and the twins.

'No force?' Toby spluttered indignantly. 'Hayden, you chucked a helicopter through a window!'

'Tobe, you were awesome,' said Jen with wide appreciative eyes. The effect of her smile immediately threw Toby off his rant.

Hayden nodded. 'She's right, man, that was quick thinkin'. I hope we're like you someday.'

Toby listened for a hint of sarcasm, but there was none. Then his phone beeped for attention—he had to leave to make it to the family party.

'Fine. You guys can sort out this mess. I have to go.' He hit the teleporter on his phone and vanished in a clap of thunder.

The twins looked at Jen, who simply held up her finger to silence them.

'Don't say a word. Let's just get out of here and we can discuss how we could've approached this situation a little more delicately.'

The bewildered hostages watched as their three arguing saviours instantly vanished with a bang. They couldn't fathom what had just happened to them.