

SPR

S01E05

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NEWS ONE

28

INT. NEWS STUDIO

28

In the studio.

UNDERWRITER

This is SPR.

WENLING CHEN

The Super Hero PermaFrost, known for her epic confrontations with Poison Oak, is on the lookout for a new base of operations after her Antarctic Fortress of Isolation has succumbed to the effects of global warming. The glacier melt has done what ten years of Villainous League airstrikes failed to do, leaving PermaFrost temporarily out in the cold.

UNDERWRITER

That was Wenling Chen reporting from SPR, Anchorage.

STEPHEN SINGH

From SPR News in Washington, I'm Stephen Singh.

(then)

Legion Headquarters has been accused of harvesting data on extraordinary civilians. What degree of privacy should super-powered people expect to have when it comes to their genetic code?

(then)

Live from Washington, I'm Stephen Singh, joined by Brenna Flox, head of the Coalition for Empowerment.

BRENNA

Hello Steven.

STEPHEN SINGH

And Felix Brenner, author of "My Secret Identity."

FELIX

Thank you for having me.

STEPHEN SINGH

By asking candidate cities for their information on supers, has the Heroic Legion created a breach of public trust?

(then)

Brenna, we'll start with you.

BRENNNA

First of all, and this has not really been established: Is the Heroic Legion actually mining this data? Because really, we don't know for sure. We have the claims of a lone vigilante, and that's it.

(then)

Secondly, If they were, should they be allowed to? This isn't height or weight we're talking about, it's powers. This is uncharted territory, legally speaking. Now, what do we know for sure is that they've requested raw statistical data about supers from cities that have applied to host Tower Two. And until we have established whether the Heroic Legion collected more information than that, I don't see the point in speculating.

FELIX

If, if I could just jump in here. The fact that they've been asking cities for this information is a matter of record. It was part of the application process. Whether they have been keeping this information is beside the point. The question is, for the every day empowered person, what right to they have to opt out of this?

BRENNNA

This data is collected anonymously. The Legion has put the development of local talent high on its priority list. So how can it decide what city would be the best fit without knowing the scope of their potential pool? It'd be one thing if they were collecting personal data, but this is just census material, the base genetic data based on birth records.

FELIX

Even so, who consents to this? Back in the 1940s, it was suggested to have a super registry, and it was rejected. This collection of data make those of us who remember our history very nervous. Not to mention Quantum himself has suggested there may have been some mismanagement.

BRENNA

Is that true? Stephen?

STEPHEN SINGH

He has made inquiries and I believe is planning on making a public address later this week. The ultimate speedster's findings have been described as fairly serious. It does seem that there are discrepancies. He tells us that the Legion is collecting more than basic census data. And if that is the case, then an important question isn't "whether" but "why?"

FELIX

Exactly the concern. In fact, if you --

SFX: Hero Alert.

STEPHEN SINGH

I'm sorry we, I'm just getting breaking news from our press office and we'll have to cut our segment short. Brenna and Felix thanks for joining us today.

UNDERWRITER

That was Stephen Singh in Washington. It's 75 degrees here in Paradise City. Coming up next is 100 Percent Invisible...

**END NEWS ONE**

ACT ONE

29 INT. 100I STUDIO

29

In the studio.

ARES

This is 100% Invisible. I'm Ares Greco.

SFX: Science gizmos.

ARES (CONT'D)

The 1950s was the age of American innovation. In those ten years, three million patents were issued for products and mechanisms that would change the American landscape.

(then)

During the Golden Age, world powers wanted technology that could keep pace with an emerging generation of super heroes and villains.

(then)

To foster this generation of inventors, the United States government instituted a new grant program vested with almost half a billion dollars; the US Brain Power Allotment, or the USBPA.

(then)

Author Felicia Castri has written a book about how one man, wasted ten percent of that money. The story begins in 1951:

(then)

When Chicago trusted its safety to one hero.

SFX: Old Radio Drama Walla.

DICK WILLIAMS

When evil hides in the shadows, the shadows hide back. Nowhere is secret, from the sultan of sneak, the invisible man, he is...

(then)

The Wisp!

FELICIA

The Wisp was a surprisingly effective crimefighter, considering he really only had one trick: he could turn invisible.

(then)

But as the city continued expanding, he ran into a problem: How do you get around?

BRADLEY

Lester. Fielding. Now that's a name everyone in R&D would like to forget.

ARES

Bradley Evans is a research manager for Lockheed Martin.

BRADLEY

He's a legend in the industry the same way the Chupacabra is a legend. The boogie man of disaster. Something you tell your kids when they start inventing impractical gadgets.

(adding)

I suppose you want to talk about the Casper?

FELICIA

Lester Fielding was running a small gadget store on the West Side of Chicago when the grant program started, and in a day that would change history, the Wisp came into his store asking what he knew about invisibility.

(then)

And as it happened, Lester knew a lot. With the Wisp's name recognition attached, they were able to secure three million dollars to create a prototype.

(then)

So Lester takes about three months in his workshop and then he unveils: The Casper. A completely functional, invisible car. Outfitted with an electric engine, it was totally silent. The Wisp could park outside a mafia hangout and no one would ever know.

(then)

(MORE)

FELICIA (CONT'D)

However, Fielding hadn't just made the car invisible on the outside, it was invisible on the inside as well. The Wisp spent three weeks in the country learning to how drive it. He felt really good about it, thinking had revolutionized the stake out.

ARES

But an invisible car? In Chicago? How would people avoid hitting it?

FELICIA

Well, the short answer is that they didn't. Virtually every red light was an invitation for a collision.

(then)

His first week in the city he managed to be in fifty seven traffic accidents, so Lester looked at this problem and gave it a solution: stronger bumpers. But the accidents kept happening and it was worse when it was parked.

(then)

Inevitably someone would try to take the space, and it wasn't long before the mafia associated the sounds of dents and confused cursing with their foe.

ARES

So what happened to it?

FELICIA

They lost it.

ARES

They lost it?

FELICIA

After a couple of weeks, the Wisp was admitted to the hospital with severe whiplash and so he told Lester to take it back. But the Wisp couldn't remember where it was parked and...

(then)

How do you find an invisible car? The military though, took an interest.

BRADLEY

They just threw money at him, so he adapted his technology and helped build an invisible jet.

(then)

There's not as much traffic at 35,000 feet. That's why a lot of very smart people expected the Casper Technology would be better applied at altitude. This allowed the military to discover a host of exciting, new problems. Especially:

(then)

Invisible jets are really hard to fly. Instruments help a pilot measure altitude, heading and attitude, but they only help a pilot if you can read them and the jet was, again, invisible on the inside.

FELICIA

Lester was a brilliant engineer, that was never the problem, the problem was he gave people what they asked for, instead of what they wanted.

BRADLEY

Lost a lot of good pilots before they closed the program down. They still have one of the birds in the Air and Space Museum. We think.

FELICIA

This was when Lester turned to a new field: Sonics. But that's another story.

ARES

Thanks to Felicia Castri, author of "The Invisible Car and Other Stupid Inventions from the World's Smartest Man." Available where-ever books are sold. And thank you to Bradley Evans. And to the whole 100% Invisible team. We will back next time with more stories of design.

End music.

**END ACT ONE**



NEWS TWO

30 INT. AD BREAK

30

In the studio.

ADS

Support for SPR comes from...

(then)

Dollar Shoe Club. If you're a speedster, we feel your pain. There's nothing more annoying than having to buy a new pair of shoes after you wear the rubber down on yours to nubs.

(then)

That's why we founded Dollar Shoe Club. For just a dollar a day, we'll send you a box of thirty pairs of running shoes, sourced from defunct shoe companies around the world. Why go for quality, when you can have quantity!

(then)

Dollar Shoe Club: Thirty pairs for thirty dollars.

(adding)

Shoes may not be matching size, brand or foot. All purchases are final. Dollar Shoe Club.

31 INT. NEWS STUDIO

31

In the studio.

DEIRDRE WILSON

Live from SPR news in Washington, I'm Deirdre Wilson sitting in for Stephen Singh.

(then)

Super villain Babylon has attacked the New Orleans Jazz Festival. SPR reporter...

(surprised)

Stephen Singh is on the scene. Stephen can you hear us?

STEPHEN SINGH

Yes!

SFX: Screaming. Gunfire. Instruments being dropped. Singh sounds like he's been running. All of this is from his PHONE.

STEPHEN SINGH (CONT'D)

The gunfire you are hearing is from local police that have responded en masse to the scene. But it appears that bullets can not penetrate Babylon's armor.

SFX: Gunfire.

STEPHEN SINGH (CONT'D)

Babylon has made the following demand, and I quote:

(then)

"Your grey haired leaders have prevented my old friend Cosmos from receiving the warriors death I owe him, and no other can hope to stand before me. Surrender your planet to me and some of you may yet live".

SFX: Explosion.

DEIRDRE WILSON

Has the Heroic Legion responded?  
The Southern Battalion?

STEPHEN SINGH

They are still en route but Quantum has arrived on the scene and is attempting to subdue him.

SFX: Singh is knocked to the ground.

DEIRDRE WILSON

Quantum is a DC based hero, what is he doing in New Orleans?

STEPHEN SINGH

(strained)

His best.

(then)

I will update you when I can, it is getting increasingly dangerous on the scene.

SFX: Hangs up.

DEIRDRE WILSON

Stay safe Stephen. We will update the story as it develops. Now back to the scheduled program.

## UNDERWRITER

That was Deirdre Wilson in  
Washington. It's 74 degrees here  
in Paradise City. Coming up next is  
These American Supers...

**END NEWS TWO**

ACT TWO

32 INT. TAS STUDIO

32

In the studio.

ETHAN

From QSPZ Baltimore, It's These  
American Supers, I'm Ethan  
Schwartz. When we think of a super  
villain, what do we picture?

SFX: Wax recording.

YELLOW BELLY

If you don't supply me with 10  
metric tonnes of gold, I will  
destroy your precious moon!  
(then)  
\*Cackling laughter.\*

ETHAN

Do you imagine black rubber gloves?  
Horns? Red Glowing eyes? They say  
not all heroes wear capes, but what  
about villains? Well, that's what  
our segment today, "The Question,"  
is all about.

CARTER

1987 and The Green Thumb had just  
stopped Dr. Riot from destroying  
the Amazon Rainforest.  
(then)  
Two months later, we were there  
doing pretty much the same thing.  
That's when I first asked the  
question.

ETHAN

Carter is retired now, but for  
three decades he worked his way up  
to become a VP of for one of the  
largest multinational corporations  
on Earth.  
(then)  
Eco Enterprises.

CARTER

We had been in negotiations with  
the locals for just over two years  
to give us access to...

(MORE)

CARTER (CONT'D)

(then)

"Develop" the area, which in those days meant clearcutting our way across, selling off the lumber, and setting up mining operations.

(then)

It was a win/win. A couple weeks later a bunch of the execs got a helicopter tour of the area. Mostly an excuse to take a vacation to Brazil, drink caipirinhas and hang out on the beach.

(then)

So we're in the 'copter tour over the heart of the jungle and then we get to the site. And it was just brown, this long, dead plain...

(then)

For miles. The only thing moving were the fellers driving up and down, tearing into old growth trees and loading up trucks. And one of my colleagues leans over and says "Thank god for the Green Thumb." And then the question came to me and I couldn't get this thought out of my head.

(then)

Are we super-villains?

Music changes.

ETHAN

Carter decided to cut his trip short after that.

CARTER

I didn't think any person at the company wanted to hold the world hostage or blow up Liechtenstein, or anything like that.

(then)

But thinking about some of the things the company as a whole would do, the "incidentals" we'd call them.

(then)

Taken together it started to feel like the company itself had this secret evil agenda, and we were just its henchmen carrying it out.

ETHAN

Carter does not have any special powers per se, but he does have a gift for negotiating.

(then)

In his time with the company he was responsible for some 15 billion in asset acquisitions. Or according to him:

CARTER

Acquisitions means a lot of things.

(then)

Sometimes it's a start up, sometimes it's patents, or a company we've flagged as a competitor for a market.

(then)

A lot of times it was resources. There's only so much tantalum for instance and most of it's in Rwanda and the Congo.

(the)

Not super business friendly places. But when most smart devices need it to work, the company that has the supply chain is going to be the one to meet the demand.

(then)

So they'd send me in to lay the groundwork. I'd talk to actual warlords and be working out deals that were basically saying "hey, that's a nice mine you have there." And of course we couldn't sell them weapons because of treaties, but we could build a factory that made weapons. And it was all very legal. Still is.

ETHAN

Now how is it that you can talk to us about this? Didn't you sign an NDA?

CARTER

There doesn't need to be one. This is all public information.

(then)

You call their PR team and they'll tell you about it. People just forget.

(MORE)

CARTER (CONT'D)

At this point I think they probably could blow up Liechtenstein and the stock would level out after a few days. Remember the pipeline explosion in ANWAR? Killed 65 people and destroyed the whole region's ecosystem.

(then)

Let's see Dr. Riot do that. Three weeks of bad press, then, nothing. But the question came up again and again.

ETHAN

Did thinking about that take a toll on you?

CARTER

Every time I spent money on anything I felt dirty. Like it was blood money, you know?

ETHAN

But then you kept going back to work.

(then)

For another 15 years.

CARTER

I had a family and... Well, it's kind of hard to find a successful corporation that isn't at least a little evil.

(then)

When the feeling was really bad, I started to talk to people about it. I had to be careful. I asked old college friends, colleagues, The ones working for investment banks and Fortune 500 companies, and it started to seem like they were asking the same thing.

(then)

Eventually it was almost like we were forming our own little support group. It's not something you want to discuss openly. One of my friends punched me in the mouth when I asked him about it. He said; "Great, now I'm going to be thinking about that for the rest of my life."

(then)

(MORE)

CARTER (CONT'D)

But most people just had this big exhale, like they'd been holding it in for so long and were finally getting to let it out. So once a month or so, a bunch of us would get together and have these sessions where we would basically just ask ourselves, is this, okay? We'd tell each other it's legal and if we were really doing something wrong, wouldn't someone, try to stop us? Like wouldn't we get a visit from the league? That's how we would rationalize it. If we were working for the villains, where were the heroes?

(then)

A lot of our companies were sponsors of the Heroic Legion. We hosted their softball league (before they lost their insurance for it.) But it didn't feel like we were innocent, it just felt like we hadn't been caught.

Music break.

ETHAN

Then in the winter of 2012 things changed.

CARTER

The world is still recovering from Echnaton the Lich, and all we can think; is how can we profit from this? That's when the Heroic Legion raided Onette Industries.

ETHAN

Onette Industries was an investment firm that was run by Victor Ellis. In 2012, the Heroic Legion discovered that Victor Ellis was also known as The Puppeteer. One of Goatman's main adversaries.

CARTER

No one got away clean. Onette had business with everyone. I guess that's why the Puppeteer was always going on about his strings connecting the world. I had done deals with them.

(MORE)



CARTER (CONT'D)

We were cosponsors for the NYC marathon back before 7/20.

(then)

The point is they were everywhere, and I think for those of us asking the question, it was - it was just weird to see what an actual super villain does. And the thing is, it was a lot like what we were doing too. Six board members were sent to jail, two others were frozen into a glacier when Ellis was escaping.

(then)

My friend worked for Onette, he was a junior partner. A great job, a great life and then one day later he is suddenly a real-life henchmen. He was devastated. He didn't go to jail, 6 months probation, but that was it for him. No one wanted to mess with the Legion and he was marked. It's like he had "bad guy" stamped on his resume.

ETHAN

This was the friend who had punched Carter in the mouth.

CARTER

It was then that I think a lot of us decided that maybe it wasn't worth taking the chance. A lot of people at my level retired around then. Some of us changed careers.

ETHAN

Did you think that Eco Enterprises had some dark secrets too?

CARTER

No more than I did. I still don't think anyone there is a Puppeteer-style bad-guy. They all mostly just want to do what's good for the corporation. I just decided I had done enough, saved enough that I didn't need to be doing it anymore. So now I get to spend time with my kids, who are starting to have kids of their own. I'm volunteering at a youth shelter on weekends.

ETHAN

Are you sleeping better?

CARTER

I get to bed early enough. But right before I drift off I can almost feel the question hovering over me and it feels like I'm only a free man now because I was just a little more lucky than good.

ETHAN

Carter's support group still meets regularly. Carter stops by to help people who are asking the question, but he warns them, they might not like the answer.

(then)

If you believe that you are working for a super villain, the Heroic Legion has a tip line you can call toll free, at anytime.

Music.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

That's our show for today. Thanks to everyone who helped put it together including whoever keeps eating my lunch out of the staff fridge:

CARTER

"It didn't feel like we were innocent, it just felt like we hadn't been caught."

ETHAN

We'll be back soon with more of These American Supers.

**END ACT TWO**

NEWS THREE

33 INT. NEWS STUDIO

33

In the studio.

DEIRDRE WILSON

Live from SPR news in Washington  
I'm Deirdre Wilson.

(then)

The situation in New Orleans has  
been resolved. The Supervillian  
Babylon has been apprehended by  
Iron Barracuda and the main force  
of the Heroic Legion.

(then)

We have early reports that while  
many are wounded, there are no  
civilian casualties on site, thanks  
to the heroic efforts of Quantum.  
Quantum was instrumental in the  
apprehension of Babylon, but has  
been severely injured in the  
encounter. He is currently at  
Tulane Medical Center in critical  
condition.

(then)

SPR reporter Stephen Singh has also  
been reported missing while  
covering the event on site. We hope  
for his swift and safe return.

(knowing)

We will update you as this story  
develops.

UNDERWRITER

That was Deirdre Wilson reporting  
from Washington.

(then)

UNDERWRITER (CONT'D)

Today's show was written and  
produced by John Dorsey and  
Maximilian Clark. Additional  
producing by Brendan Sokler and  
Carla Lerner, This episode's cast  
include (see website). With special  
thanks to Brenna Killeen.

(then)

SPR is supported by listeners like  
you.

(MORE)

UNDERWRITER (CONT'D)

Make sure to subscribe on your favorite podcast app and leave a review.

(then)

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(then)

For more. Head to SuperhumanPublicRadio.com

Outro:

UNDERWRITER (CONT'D)

Coming up next, brain slug extermination music. If you cannot hear anything, that means the previous treatment worked...

SFX: Music and fade out.

UNDERWRITER (CONT'D)

This is SPR.

**END NEWS THREE**

END EPISODE FIVE