

Excerpts from Prologue of *As Iron Sharpens Iron*

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Sometimes, you never know what God has in mind until you get there.

Where do I begin? How about a little history?

My name's Perry Liston. Up until September of 1985, I was a street preacher who used to do ministry in the Skid Row area of Portland, Oregon. But then the Christian adventurers known as the Irons Alliance came into town to take care of a little problem ... okay, it was a little more than a little problem. It was a band of 30-foot tall animated statues bent on destruction. The media had given them the name, 'Red Golems', when they first showed up in Colorado. I don't know how they got to downtown Portland, but it didn't look good for the Rose City.

But then the Irons Alliance came in to save the day. That is, until *they* needed help.

The fighting was scattered, and I happened to witness Justin Badge – *Fireball* – getting blind-sided by a couple of the Golems. They knocked him out and left him trapped under a small pile of wrecked vehicles. I looked around; the others were occupied elsewhere. So I had to do something. I ran ten blocks west to a nearby construction site, and came back a few minutes later in a forklift. Moving as fast as I could, avoiding panicking people running through the streets and abandoned vehicles, I reached Fireball and carefully lifted and pushed the cars off of him. A few moments later, Justin's father, *Blue Steel*, showed up and saw what had happened. He asked me my name, thanked me, and took Fireball back to their transport.

Two weeks later, long after the Red Golems had been defeated and things had returned to normal, I got a personal visit from Captain Irons, Blue Steel and Fireball. They'd seen how I had risked my own life to save Fireball, and they wanted to show their gratitude. As amazing as it sounded, they wanted to bring me in as part of their team! I'd grown up around, and looked up to, this band of Christian adventurers for all my life, and this was akin to being asked to join the Apostles. How could I refuse? So my wife and I moved to Manta Island.

Like I said, that was 1985.

Since then, not a day goes by without something ... *interesting*.

Around noon today, people on both sides of Lake Michigan observed an airship descending through the cloud cover. At first it appeared to be nothing more than a curiosity, something for the lunch crowds to gawk at. But then it started drifting over Chicago and began punching holes into Buckingham Fountain and Millennium Park with some kind of high-powered pulse weapon. Then, like a lighter-than-air juggernaut, it sailed over downtown and started taking random shots at office buildings, causing massive chaos and panic.

By the time we arrived on the scene, two city blocks had been demolished, four more had been seriously damaged, and the airship was drifting in the direction of the Sears Tower.

After sharing a quick prayer over our communicators, we split into two groups: Captain Irons, Antibody, Ninja, and the Knights headed skyward to stop the airship, while the rest of us – Fireball, Blue Steel,

Stingray, and Thunderbird (me) worked with the local authorities to free the injured.

Blue Steel stayed on the ground to coordinate with the locals while I went in with Fireball and Stingray in exo suits to clear the rubble and locate the injured.

Next to the flight suits, the exo suits were the most fun to work with. Onboard sensors would locate the injured, and the augmented strength of the arms could carefully remove the debris from around them. Sometimes we'd extract the injured ourselves. Otherwise, we'd just clear the way for the EMT's to secure them and transport them to the Healing Centers.

Needless to say, there was a *lot* of praying going on.

While we rescued the injured below, the rest sought to stop the villain from causing any more. The Knights spearheaded the assault, their armored suits unstoppable as they penetrated the side of the airship and cleared the way for the others. While Ninja moved like a living shadow toward the engine room, Captain Irons and Antibody laid down a blanket of tranquilizer fire as they maneuvered towards the control room and the man behind the attack – a twisted megalomaniac who called himself the Ferbinator. Together they shut down the pulse weapon and forced the airship down on a side runway at O'Hare Airport, where the Federal police took the Ferbinator and his minions into custody.

With the threat alleviated, the rest of the afternoon was spent making sure the number of fatalities remained thankfully low. The only casualty on our side was Blue Steel. He had been rescuing some people caught in the path of a collapsing brick wall. They got out unscathed, but he suffered a broken leg. With Fireball assisting him, they boarded *Condor 1* – a midnight-blue *Frost-Avro D-17 Saucer* – as the rest of us finished things up with the locals and the media. As usual, we redirected the people's gratitude back towards the Lord Jesus Christ; they wouldn't have expected anything less from us.

Surrounded by a great cloud of fans, the familiar flying saucer went straight up as the weather began to turn overcast. But our job was done, and we were looking forward to an uneventful night highlighted by our weekly poker game. We knew Blue Steel – Carlin Badge – would be perfectly fine after a couple of hours in a healing machine under Dr. Jie Welch's capable hands, but the turbulence during our flight wasn't making things easy.

"Hold on, my friend," consoled Ninja – Malachi Tanaka. "Think about something else. Do you know what today is?"

"The seventeenth of March," Carlin grunted, trying to comply.

"Doesn't that date sound ... familiar?"

"*The anniversary of our first meeting!*" exclaimed Stingray – Annabelle – delightfully.

"Correct!" confirmed Malachi.

"This makes ... fifty-nine years, doesn't it?" Captain Jeremy Irons turned from the co-pilot's seat. "What say we get together later and have us a bit of a party?"

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"To the party, SHERLOC!"

The recreation room was a sanctuary of a sort, a place where this select club could let down our collective hair and just relax without having to be accountable for our every word and move. This was our playland, our decompression chamber from the pressures of the outside world that could summon us away at any moment to respond to a new danger or threat to life, limb, and property.

"So what's planned for this shindig?" asked Raymond Xavier Tempor.

Captain Irons said, "Actually, I was thinking that, for the benefit of Perry and Barbara, we could tell them the *real* story of how we got started."

"Wait a minute," I responded with surprise. "I thought we *had* heard the real story."

Tempor smiled. "You've heard the ... *pasteurized* ... version. That's the version the media's been aware of. But there are a few differences."

Mark Durant stepped forward; his expression was anxious. "Are you sure you want to do this?" He turned to me and Barb. "No offence intended, guys, but there are some things that should be left off ... untold."

"What, like Dad using you for target practice?" added Justin with a grin.

"Not that." Durant looked over at Annabelle.

Annabelle gave him a sensitive smile. "It's okay. They're family."

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Captain Irons began. "First, you have to understand the point in history when this all happened. It was the second half of the Twentieth Century. The world was recovering from the horrifying events of the Second World War. The loss of life had been beyond belief, not counting those who died in the atomic bomb attacks on Berlin and Tokyo. But it did what we hoped it would do – it brought the war to a swift end, and opened the doorway to peace."

Durant continued, "On the home front, however, peace was a scarce commodity. Descendants of some of the greatest criminal masterminds in United States history had put aside their infighting and joined hands to become a criminal organization known as the Syndicate. In a short time they had their ugly paws into almost every aspect of the American way of life."

"The people cried out to God for help," smiled Annabelle wistfully. "And God sent dreamers."



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