

The Blue Mantis #1 - "Birth of the Blue Mantis"

Written by Steven Bland

The bell rang at Ditko High School, signalling the end of another school day on Friday.

Inside the school, Wesley Walker, a fifteen-year-old young man who is on the high end of the autism spectrum, exited a classroom, entered the hallway, and was soon walking through it. Wesley had auburn hair and a slight build and was wearing a green T-shirt with cargo pants and sneakers.

"HEY, FREAK," a male voice shouted from behind Wesley, causing him to mildly freak out and turn toward a big, strapping kid who was standing behind him.

"I have had to watch you *play* with your pencils in study hall *every single day*," the big, strapping kid angrily told Wesley, who was looking away. "And it's *really* getting on my nerves!"

"LOOK AT ME WHEN I'M TALKIN' T'YOU, FREAK," the big, strapping kid exclaimed as he shoved Wesley.

"MARK, LEAVE HIM ALONE," a female voice rang out.

Mark and Wesley turned their attention to the owner of the female voice, a beautiful girl with shoulder-length strawberry blond hair, who was giving Mark the evil eye.

"Fine," Mark grumbled before he left. The girl turned her attention to Wesley.

"You okay?" The girl asked.

"Yes, I'm okay," Wesley answered.

"What's your name?" The girl asked.

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"My name is Wesley," Wesley answered. "Wesley Walker."

"Nice to meet you, Wesley Walker," the girl said with a smile. "My name is Carly Connors."

"Hello, Carly," Wesley said as he smiled nervously. Carly smiled, thinking Wesley's reaction was cute.

"Wesley? I'm giving a party at my house tomorrow night, and I'd like for you to come," Carly said with a smile as she handed Wesley a written invitation in an envelope.

"I – I've never been to a party before," Wesley said nervously.

"Give it a chance, Wes," Carly said with a smile as Wesley opened the envelope which included, not only the invitation, but a slip of paper with Carly's phone number written on it.

"Feel free to give me a call sometime," Carly said with a smile before leaving.

Once Carly had gone, Wesley looked at the invitation and the slip of paper with Carly's phone number on it. Feeling like he just made a friend, Wesley smiled and clapped his hands with glee.

Later, after he arrived at his home, a two-story house in a Brooklyn neighborhood, Wesley saw his mother, Helen.

"Hi, honey. How was school?" Helen asked.

"It was nice," Wesley answered. "I just made a friend."

"Wesley, that's wonderful," Helen gushed. "What's his or her name?"

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"Carly. Carly Connors," Wesley answered, before reaching into his pocket to pull out the party invitation Carly gave him.

"She invited me to a party at her house tomorrow night," Wesley said as he showed the invitation to his mother. "Can I go, please?"

"I don't know," Helen replied hesitatingly. "I'm worried that the other kids would pick on you. Besides, I would want to know if there will be adults at the party to supervise everything."

"If you want, you can call Carly," Wesley said as he showed Carly's written phone number to his mother.

Helen got out a portable phone and dialed Carly's phone number. The phone rang and soon, Helen got an answer.

"Is your name, Carly? My name is Helen Walker, Wesley's mother," Helen said over the phone. She listened for a few minutes.

"Wesley told me that you invited him to a party at your house," Helen said. "But, I want to know something. Will you have adults there to chaperone?"

Helen listened and was soon relieved.

"Your *parents* will chaperone the party? *Wonderful*," a smiling Helen said. "Then, Wesley will be there."

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Helen hung up the phone. Smiling, she turned her attention to Wesley.

"You may go to Carly's party tomorrow night," Helen told her son.

Wesley clapped his hand in glee.

Later that night, Wesley was sleeping in his bed, when, suddenly, a big, strapping man with blond hair grabbed and chloroformed him. With Wesley unconscious, the big strapping man absconded with him.

Once he was outside with Wesley, the big, strapping man took him to a car belonging to the Orion Corporation that was parked in a secluded spot nearby, the agent put him in the back seat and locked the door behind him. The agent got into the driver's seat and drove off.

Later, the Orion Corporation car arrived at the company's headquarters at 42nd Street and Madison Avenue in Manhattan. After parking, the agent emerged from his car, bringing his newly-acquired victim to the entrance door with him.

Once inside, the agent took Wesley to a hidden laboratory in the basement underneath, where they were greeted by the Corporation's CEO, Tina Madison and four units of the lab's guards, who were each armed with energy rifles. Madison had bobbed black hair with gray streaks and was wearing a brown skirt, white shirt, and a brown blazer.

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"I have the Walker kid," the agent told Madison.

"Wonderful, Bruno," Madison told the agent. "Put him on the table."

The agent obeyed her command and Wesley was soon placed on the table.

Madison implanted a special chip in the lower back of the boy's neck.

Then, the CEO pulled out a hypodermic needle out of her jacket pocket. The needle was filled with a serum that contained mantis DNA. She injected the serum into Wesley's arm.

The chloroform wore off and Wesley woke up.

"Ah, young Wesley Walker. Coming around, I see?" Madison asked.

"Wh-what's going on?" Wesley asked. "Where *am* I?"

Soon, his body began to change and new power surged through him.

"What's happening to me?" Wesley asked.

"Why, you're here at the Orion Corporation, of course," Madison answered. "And I just gave you a shot of my super-soldier serum, which has transformed you into a literal one-man army who is now under my *complete control*."

"*NO*," Wesley said emphatically as he jumped off the table. "I *DON'T WANT TO BE CONTROLLED! I WON'T BE CONTROLLED!*"

Wesley prepared to flee, but a unit of Madison's guards soon got in his way. However, the autistic young man advanced toward them.

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The unit of guards aimed their energy rifles at Wesley and fired at him. The autistic young man's newfound superhuman speed and agility enabled him to easily evade the blasts. The blasts were soon doing serious damage to the equipment inside the room. Madison was furious.

"*NOOOO!!*" An angry Madison exclaimed.

Wesley attempted to escape, only to find a steel door in his way.

"*STOP HIM!*" An angry Madison exclaimed.

Desperately, the autistic young man grabbed the door and tried to pry it open. Soon, he ripped the steel door off its hinges, much to his surprise. Then, he set it aside, exited through the passage, and turned toward his right.

"*AFTER HIM! DON'T LET HIM ESCAPE!*" Madison exclaimed.

Obedying their employer, the guards ran out the door. Once they were through the door, they looked around for Wesley, but they were unable to see him. Unknown to them, Wesley was blending in with the surroundings like a chameleon and still fleeing.

"I don't *get* it," one of the guards said. "He was *here* a minute ago!"

"*Where* could he have disappeared to?" A second guard asked.

The guards went back to see Madison.

"Bad news, boss lady. The Walker kid somehow managed to escape," one of the guards said.

"*FOOLS! I WANT HIM BACK HERE,*" Madison exclaimed.

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"Even if we went after and *caught up* to him, we would be *no match* for him," another guard said.

"You *will* be. *Very soon*," Madison said as she led the guards to a hidden door. Once they approached the door, she placed her hand on the bio-rhythm scan device on the wall. Soon, the door slid open to reveal a hidden room. The lights inside it soon came on, revealing high-tech skinsuits and helmets, as well as tranquilizer dart guns and high-tech rifles. Madison led the guards into the room.

"These suits will amplify your strength, agility, and endurance to superhuman levels. And the helmets will give you enhanced vision and hearing," Madison said. "Each of you, grab a suit and helmet and put them on."

The guards did as Madison told them. Soon, they were all clad in the high-tech skinsuits and helmets.

"Wow! This is *amazing*," One of the guards said.

"I really *do* feel powerful," another guard said.

Then, Madison showed them the tranquilizer dart guns and the high-tech rifles.

"The tranquilizer dart guns are for subduing any civilian who may get in your way," she told them.

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"And each of these high-tech rifles can fire powerful armor-piercing shells, and the enhanced vision and hearing that your helmets provide will guarantee that you won't miss," she said.

"Wow," one of the impressed guards said.

"You said it," another impressed guard said.

"Take this with you," Madison said as she handed a small tracking device to one of the guards.

"What is it?" The guard asked.

"It's a tracking device," she answered. "Before I gave him the serum, I implanted a small tracer chip in the lower back of his neck. This device is designed to pick up the tracer chip's signals.

"But, now, if it isn't *too* much trouble, - - could you kindly *please* go after that teenaged brat and bring him back here?" Madison said in the nicest way she possibly could.

"Yes, ma'am," replied another guard, before he and the other guards each grabbed a high-tech rifle.

"And *do not fail me*," Madison warned.

Later, Wesley was on the streets of Manhattan. He nervously looked around to see if Madison's guards were still after him. He saw no one.

The coast is clear, a relieved Wesley thought. As he relaxed, his camouflage was dropped.

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Soon, Wesley heard a woman's scream.

"EEEEEEEEEEEE!!!"

Wesley went to where the woman was and found her in a nearby alley being mugged by two men. One of them, a big guy with black hair, jeans, sneakers, and a grey hoodie, pointed a gun at the woman. The other mugger was a slender guy with long, spiky, blond hair, with torn jeans, sneakers, and a black T-shirt with a skull on it.

"You're scaring her," Wesley told the mugger with the hoodie.

"That's the general idea, pal," the hoodie-wearing mugger told Wesley as the former continued to hold his gun at his victim. "Until she forks over her cash and valuables!"

"STOP IT," Wesley ordered. The hoodie-wearing mugger didn't listen.

Wesley ran toward the hoodie-wearing mugger and firmly grabbed his wrist.

"YOW!" The hoodie-wearing mugger shouted.

"I SAID, STOP IT," Wesley exclaimed as he held the mugger's wrist in a firm, vise-like grip. The mugger tried to break free, but was unable to do so.

Behind Wesley, the blond mugger tried to stab him in the back, but the blade was soon bent.

The blond mugger looked at his damaged knife and freaked out.

"Homina, homina, homina," the blond mugger muttered before dropping his knife. Terrified, he ran off, only to find a police officer in his way.

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"Officer! Oh, thank God," the blond mugger said as he put his hands forth for the handcuffs.

"*Take me to jail! Get me away from that freak in the alley! Please!*"

"Well, what d'ya know?" The police officer wondered. "A mugger who actually *wants* to go to jail!"

The officer immediately got out his handcuffs.

"You have the right to remain silent," the officer said as he put the handcuffs on the mugger.

Meanwhile, back at the alley, Wesley still had a firm vise-like grip on the hoodie-clad mugger's hand.

"AAAAAAHHHHHH," the mugger cried out as he writhed in pain. "YOUR GRIP IS SO *STRONG!* LET ME GO, *PLEASE!*"

"Will you let the woman go?" Wesley asked the mugger.

"Y-YES. *YES!* I'LL LET HER GO," the mugger fearfully promised. "NOW PLEASE, *LET ME GO!*"

"Okay," Wesley said as he let go of the mugger's wrist.

"Y-You ain't *human*," the mugger told Wesley as the former massaged his wrist. "*No one* can do that!"

Wesley turned his attention to the erstwhile victim.

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"You're safe now," Wesley told her.

As Wesley was about to leave, the officer who had arrested the blond mugger arrived to arrest the mugger in the gray hoodie.

"Your pal told me I'd find you here," the cop told the mugger in the gray hoodie. "I have him in custody, and you're going to join him."

The cop cuffed the gray hoodie clad mugger and took him to a squad car, where the blond mugger was cuffed, sitting, and waiting in the back seat. After putting the gray hoodie clad mugger in the backseat with his partner in crime, the officer closed the door shut.

Then, the cop walked over to Wesley.

"Hold it, son," the officer told the autistic teenager. "I'd like to ask you a few questions."

Suddenly, Wesley, without turning his head, was getting a panoramic view of Madison's guards, who were clad in their super-suits and armed with high-tech rifles and tranquilizer dart guns, coming at him from every direction at once to challenge him.

I - - can't *believe* it, a stunned Wesley thought. I'm able to see in *all directions at once!*

One of Madison's supersuit-clad guards fired a tranquilizer dart at the police officer's neck, rendering him unconscious. Another did the same to the woman Wesley had saved from being mugged.

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"Now, it's just you and us," one of Madison's guards told Wesley, who was suddenly experiencing a strong itching sensation beneath his shoulder blades.

Wesley, despite the itching sensation, tried to fight them off, but, thanks to their super-suits, Madison's guards were able to match and overpower him.

"He's ours," one of the guards said.

If only I could get away, Wesley thought as the itching sensation grew.

Suddenly, large insect wings sprouted from Wesley's back, tearing through the back of his shirt. As he thought of escape, his wings vibrated and flapped. Soon, he was off the ground, much to the surprise of his captors.

"WHAT THE - - ?" One of the guards said. "HE CAN FLY!"

I - - I can *fly*? A stunned Wesley wondered.

Soon Wesley's puzzlement soon became elation.

Yes! I can *fly*, Wesley said. Now, I can get away to *safety!*

"QUICK! FIRE AT HIM," another guard said. "DON'T LET HIM ESCAPE!"

As Wesley tried to escape by flying off, Madison's guards fired their high-tech rifles at him. Wesley was barely managing to avoid the armor-piercing shells. Unfortunately, one of the shells managed to hit him, causing him to plummet to the ground and being rendered unconscious. Wesley's wing insectoid s folded back into his shoulder blades.

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"He's ours," one of the guards said as he and they prepared to capture him.

Suddenly, the guards' helmets were malfunctioning.

"Wh-What's happening to our helmets?" One of the guards said.

"All of a sudden, mine isn't working anymore," a second guard said.

"Neither is mine," a third guard said.

Suddenly, an armored high-tech van arrived on the scene and the door of the vehicle slid open to reveal its driver, a forty-something year old man with tinted glasses and a gas mask who launched a gas grenade at Madison's guards.

The gas knocked them out and the driver jumped out of the van and ran toward Wesley.

"Hang in there, fella," the driver told Wesley as the former picked up the latter. While he picked up Wesley, the driver secretly placed a special miniature disc on the autistic young man.

The driver then took the young mantis DNA-enhanced man to the van. With Wesley inside, the driver went in as well and slid the vehicle's door shut behind them. Once he got back into the driver's seat, the driver drove off.

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Meanwhile, back at the Orion Corporation, Tina Madison, who had been monitoring the guards through her computer systems, was frustrated and furious.

"NO," she shouted. "THEY'VE *FAILED!* AND I'M NOT GETTING A SIGNAL FROM THE TRACER CHIP! BUT, I *MUST* HAVE HIM BACK! I *MUST!*"

Minutes later, as the high-tech van was driving through the street, Wesley stirred and regained consciousness. Soon, he found himself inside the van, which was bedecked with high-tech equipment and communications systems.

"Unnhhh," Wesley moaned.

"Coming around, Wesley?" The driver asked. "Good. And don't worry about Madison's guards following you. They can't follow the signal from the tracer chip in the lower back of your neck while you're inside this van. It's like a fortress on wheels."

Wesley turned his attention to the driver.

"A tracer chip - - in the lower back of my neck?" Wesley asked. "How?"

"I detected it with the instruments in this van," the driver answered. "But, don't worry, we'll get it taken care of."

"Who are you?" Wesley asked. "And, how did you know my name?"

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"It's okay, fella. I'm a friend," the driver replied reassuringly. "My name's Stanley Stevens. I've worked with your father."

"My father?" Wesley asked.

"Yes. Y'see, I was his colleague. Your father was a scientist who was tasked with creating a mantis DNA-based super-soldier serum for Tina Madison," Stanley answered. "However, your father suspected Madison of having shady deals with the government, but couldn't prove it. Feeling that he couldn't trust her, he merged his own DNA with the mantis DNA in the serum, rendering it useless to Madison, as it would bestow the powers of a mantis only to himself or to anyone who shared his genetic structure, like you. However, Madison found out about your father's deception from the men she had spy on him. She had you kidnapped, so that she could use the serum on you. And since you would be the only one enhanced by the serum, she implanted you with the tracer chip so that she could find you - - and control, or *try to* control you."

"What happened to my father?" Wesley asked.

"I don't know how to tell you this, son," a somber Stanley answered. "After she found out about your father's deception, Madison arranged for his death."

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Soon, the van arrived at and entered a garage where it parked on a secret platform which lowered the vehicle to a secret underground lair that was built like a fortress. Once it was at the lair, the van entered its docking area.

Stanley exited the van and soon let Wesley out.

"Welcome to my secret underground lab," Stanley told Wesley. "Don't worry, it's *also* built like a fortress."

"Now, let's get that tracer chip out of your neck, shall we?" Stanley asked with a smile. Wesley agreed.

Stanley led Wesley to an examination table.

"Lie down on the table, my friend," Stanley told him. Wesley obeyed.

Then, Stanley administered a sedative to the autistic young man, which put him under for a few hours. Stanley rolled Wesley over on his front.

With the autistic young man lying face down, Stanley began a surgical procedure on the lower back of the teenager's neck.

Hours later, Wesley woke up and saw Stanley's face.

"Stanley, was the operation successful?" Wesley asked. "Did you get the tracer chip out of me?"

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"See for yourself," Stanley said with a smile as he showed the tracer chip he successfully removed.

After he got off the examination table, Wesley looked around and saw an awesome array of high-tech equipment. He saw a table which had fish-eye goggles laying on top of it. Then, he saw a blue skinsuit in a special chamber.

"What are those goggles for?" Wesley asks.

"Well, I designed these goggles to have infrared, telescopic, and night vision capabilities," Stanley answered.

"And the blue suit?" Wesley asks.

"It's a special environmental suit that I designed with Protean Molecule Fabric," Stanley answered.

"Protean Molecule Fabric?" Wesley asked.

"It's a special fabric of my own design," Stanley explained. "It can be altered easily and adapt to *any* environment. This means that the fabric is incredibly resilient to drastic changes in heat, cold, pressure, density, dirt, etc. It's also resistant to being torn."

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But then, a news bulletin came on the television.

"Our breaking story," the anchorman on the television said. "A fire at an apartment building in Midtown Manhattan, is spreading out of control. According to police officers, it was recently started by a couple of wanted criminals using high-tech equipment as a diversion to rob a diamond exchange. The high-tech criminals are still at large."

Wesley, who was watching the newscast, was filled with a desire to do something.

"No, Wesley," Stanley cautioned. "If you're seen on the news, you're basically advertising your presence to Tina Madison."

"Can you make a costume for me out of that blue environmental suit that you made with your Protean Molecule Fabric?" Wesley asked. "With gloves and a mask?"

"Give me a few minutes," Stanley answered.

Minutes later, Stanley gave Wesley his costume. The costume was the special environmental Protean Molecule Fabric suit which now had big yellow mantis motifs on the chest and back and yellow soles. The full head mask was also solid blue, except for the fish-eye goggles and the fake forehead antenna which were yellow.

Wesley took the costume and went into the next room to try it on. Minutes later, he was completely clad in the costume.

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"How do I look?" Wesley asked.

"You look *amazing*," a gushing Stanley answered. "Now, get out there and *save* those people."

Smiling under his full head mask, Wesley immediately took off.

Minutes later, Wesley arrived the burning apartment building in Midtown Manhattan and saw people out on the streets speculating the view.

"What's happening?" Wesley asked one of the speculators.

"There's a woman and her child still inside the building," one of the speculators replied.

"I'll get them out," Wesley said.

"Who are you?" another speculator asked Wesley.

"Just call me - - the BLUE MANTIS," Wesley answered as he ran into the burning building.

Once he was inside the burning building, the Blue Mantis searched for the mother and her child, but he soon found them. The hero looked up and saw the ceiling about to collapse onto them. The mother and her child braced for impact.

"Oh, no! Those two are gonna be *crushed*," Blue Mantis said as he rushed to catch the fallen section of the roof. He was successful. Then, he tossed the section aside.

"It's okay," the new superhero told them. "I'm here to help."

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The Blue Mantis grabbed the mother and her child, sprouted his wings and flew them out of the building and to safety.

Soon, fire fighters arrived on the scene to put out the fire. Some of them provided fresh oxygen to the mother and her child and, then, to the Blue Mantis as well. Soon, all three were fully recovered from the smoke inhalation. Then, the Blue Mantis flew off.

In minutes, the Blue Mantis soon caught up to the criminals. One of them, the driver, saw the superhero in the car's rear view.

"AH, GEEZ," he exclaimed. "WHERE'D THIS COSTUMED WEIRDO COME FROM?"

"I DUNNO," the passenger-side criminal answered as he took out a high-tech blaster. "BUT, HE'S *TOAST!*"

The passenger side criminal fired the blaster at the Blue Mantis, but the superhero flitted out of the shot's path. The passenger side criminal continued to fire and the new mystery man continued to dodge.

The Blue Mantis flew downward until he was out of their sight.

"Hah," the passenger side criminal said. "I sure showed *him!*"

Suddenly, the criminals' car was rising up in the air.

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"WHAT THE - - ?" The criminal driver exclaimed. "WHAT'S HAPPENING?!"

"W-We seem to be flying," the passenger side criminal answered.

"GEE, YA THINK?" The driver sarcastically exclaimed.

Underneath the car, was the Blue Mantis who was using his superhuman strength to carry the car and his wings to carry the vehicle.

In minutes, the superhero, carrying the getaway car containing the two thieves, returned to the site of the burned down building in midtown Manhattan, where the police have been waiting.

The Blue Mantis released the two criminals to the officers, who promptly booked them.

"Many thanks, fella," one of the cops told the Blue Mantis.

Suddenly, a female TV reporter arrived.

"Blue Mantis, I'm Jan Nocenti, from WPIX News," the female TV reporter told the new superhero. "Can I get an interview? Our viewers would like to know who you are, where you came from, why you're here, everything."

The Blue Mantis felt nervous and was slightly panicky.

"I can't talk right now," the superhero said as he flew off as the officers took the thieves into custody.

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"And there you have it, folks," the female newscaster said. "Lives were saved and criminals were brought to justice by a new superhero calling himself the Blue Mantis, whose true identity is a mystery and, will most likely *remain* that way. This is Jan Nocenti, for WPIX News."

Soon, this newscast was heard everywhere, even by Tina Madison, herself.

"But this Blue Mantis's true identity *is not* a mystery to me! *I* created him! He is *mine*," Madison said. "After my guards failed in their mission to bring him *back* to me, I will go after him, *myself*!"

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