

The Blue Mantis #4 - "Beware the Beekeeper"

Written by Steven Bland

Weeks ago, at Ditko High, Leonard Larvan, a nerdy, lanky, bespectacled young man with black hair and a bowl haircut was walking through the hallway. He saw a pretty girl named Britney Gibson and went over to talk to her.

"H-Hi, Britney," Leonard said with a stammer. "I'm entering my project at the science fair tomorrow afternoon. I'm wondering if you'd like to go out with me that night."

"Me? Go out with *you*?" A repulsed Britney asked before laughing contemptuously. "*Yeah, right.*"

Soon, Justin Woods, the captain of the high school football team showed up. Britney was happy to see him.

"Hey, babe," Justin said to Britney, before turning his attention to Leonard. "This dweeb bothering you?"

"Yeah. Big time," Britney answered.

"No sweat, sweet thing. I'll handle him," Justin said as he grabbed Leonard by his underwear, giving him a suitcase wedgie.

Justin then walked through the hallway, carrying Leonard by his underwear. All of the students, including Carly Connors, watched. All of the students, except for Carly, laughed at Leonard.

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Once they were a few feet away from Britney, Justin unceremoniously threw Leonard to the floor.

"Listen, four-eyes," Justin warned Leonard. "Britney's *my* girl! If I catch you *anywhere near* her again, you're *dead meat!* Got it!"

"Y-Yessir," Leonard replied fearfully.

"Good," Justin said with a sneer. "For *you.*"

Coldly, Justin turned and walked away.

Carly went over to Leonard to help him up off the floor.

"Leonard, are you okay?" Carly asked.

"No," Leonard answered. Soon, he was back on his feet.

"I'M *NOT* OKAY," Leonard yelled, before running away toward the exit, sobbing.

That night, Leonard Larvan entered his house in Astoria where he was greeted by his father.

"How was school today?" The father asked.

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"Lousy," a dejected Leonard replied. "I asked Britney Gibson out for a date after the science fair tomorrow afternoon and she laughed at me. Then, Justin Woods, the captain of the football team showed up and gave me a suitcase wedgie! A *suitcase wedgie!* And the *rest* of the kids were *laughing* at me!"

"*Stop your whining, you wuss,*" the father said forcefully. "These kids push you, you push them back! *Hard!* Do you *understand* me?"

"Yes, sir," Leonard answered solemnly.

Leonard went to his room where, inside he worked on his invention for the science fair: a swarm of robotic bees that he could command with a cybernetic headband, that he had also designed himself. Outside, a thunderstorm was brewing. Once he put the finishing touches on his bees, Leonard placed the cybernetic headband on his head, before climbing out of his window.

Once he was outside, Leonard used the cybernetic headband on his head to activated his robotic bees. They came to life and, following his mental command, flew to him. The robot bees formed themselves into many different shapes at his mental command and they performed their tasks flawlessly.

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It *works*! The cybernetic headband *works*, an overjoyed Leonard Larvan thought.

Then, he commanded the robot bees to lift a nearby car, and the tiny artificial insects easily accomplished the tasks. At Larvan's mental command, the bees set the car down.

As he continued to practice controlling his robot bees, Leonard was suddenly hit with a lightning strike and fell.

Tonight in the present, the Blue Mantis flies high over the night sky feeling happy.

"CARLY CONNORS LOVES ME," the superhero happily crowed.

Soon, as he was flying, the Blue Mantis heard a cry from a woman on the street below.

"STOP THIEF," the woman shouted.

The Blue Mantis looked below and saw a purse snatcher fleeing with the woman's purse. The superhero quickly flew toward the thief, caught up to him, grabbed him, and flew off with him, intending to drop him off at the nearest police station.

While flying, the Blue Mantis saw a beat cop nearby and flew toward him with the purse snatcher.

"I caught this man stealing a woman's purse," the superhero told the police officer as the former handed the thief to the latter. "And make sure that the purse is returned to its rightful owner."

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With the purse snatcher in custody, the Blue Mantis flew off.

Meanwhile, at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital, Leonard Larvan was in a hospital bed, recovering from the lightning strike. His doctor was standing beside him.

"Are you all right, son?" The doctor asked. "You're lucky to be alive."

"Unnhhh," he moaned. "Where am I? What happened?"

"You're in the hospital son," the doctor answered. "You were hit by lightning a few weeks ago."

"A few weeks ago?" A stunned Leonard asked.

"NO," Leonard cried. "I missed this year's science fair!"

"It's alright, son," the doctor assured him. "There will be other science fairs for you to participate in."

"The important thing is that you're okay, now. Now, get some rest. You can go home tomorrow morning," the doctor said before he left.

As soon as the doctor closed the door behind him and the Larvans, Leonard thought back to the robotic bees that he had developed.

I invented those robot bees for the science fair this year, he thought. I intended to demonstrate their agricultural and military applications, but I will *never* get that chance. *NEVER!*

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Suddenly, in response to Leonard's thoughts, a swarm of his robot bees entered through the window, flew toward, and surrounded him.

I-I'm controlling my robot bees with only my mind, a surprised Leonard thought as he soon became aware of his new power. And I'm not wearing my cybernetic headband.

The stunned expression on Leonard's face soon became a smile.

The buzzing of the robotic bees attracted the attention of the hospital's security guards, who rushed to Leonard's hospital room to find out what was happening.

"Leonard? This is security," one of the guards said. "Is everything okay in there?"

At Leonard's mental commands, the robot bees flew out of the window and left.

The security guards entered and found Leonard safe and sound and everything to be normal

"Of course," Leonard answered.

"Good," one of the guards said. "Go back to sleep."

The guards left.

Once the door was closed, Leonard smiled a sinister smile.

The next day, Leonard and his parents arrived at their home.

Once they were inside, Leonard, who was feeling fine, and his parents started talking.

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"I'm looking forward to going back to school tomorrow," Leonard said.

"I just need to have a little chat with my son in private, honey," Mr. Larvan told his wife, who assented.

Leonard and his father went into another room. Once they were inside, Mr. Larvan closed the door.

"I want you to remember one thing and remember it good," Mr. Larvan warned his son. "If anyone at school ever hurts you, you hurt them back! Understand?"

"Yes, sir," Leonard responded.

Soon, Mr. Larvan and his son left the room. Leonard secretly smiled an evil smile.

Alone in his room, Leonard gave the bees more apitoxin. Later, he climbed outside of his bedroom window. Once he was outside, practiced with his robotic bees, mentally commanding them to combine to form different shapes such as a wall and a humanoid robot.

"I'm almost ready, he thought with a sinister smile.

Later, in the hallway at Ditko High School, Justin Woods and Britney Gibson walk to their respective classes. Suddenly, they heard a voice coming from behind them.

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"Hello, Justin and Britney," the voice said. Justin and Britney turned around. They saw Leonard Larvan standing. He was wearing a leather jacket, jeans, a T-shirt with horizontal yellow and black stripes, boots, and a pair of opaque goggles.

Neither Justin nor Britney were able to keep a straight face.

"Leonard Larvan?" Justin chuckled. "Seriously?"

"Omigod," Britney chuckled. "You look absolutely *ridiculous*."

"Do I?" Leonard asked with a cruel smile as he gave a mental command.

"Yeah, you look so lame in that biker get-up, Larvan," Justin laughed. "And that horizontal yellow and black striped T-shirt! It's not only stupid, but it also makes you look *fat*!"

"You see, Mr. Woods," Leonard said. "This shirt reflects the *new me*!"

"Really?" A laughing Justin asked. "*How*?"

Suddenly, a swarm of robotic bees flew in and attacked Justin and Britney.

"WHAT IN THE WORLD?!" Justin asked excitedly.

"BEES! OHMIGOD," a panicking Britney exclaimed.

"Who's laughing now?" Leonard sarcastically asked. "Ha Ha!"

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"*I AM!* HA HA HA HA HA HA," Leonard laughed maniacally as he sent his swarm of robotic bees to fill the rest of the school. Everyone panicked and ran for the nearest exit except for Wesley Walker and a random student with a smartphone. Wesley looked for an empty room to change in, while the random student, went to a hiding place. From his hiding place, the random student secretly started recording Larvan and his robotic bees. Meanwhile, Wesley, upon finding an empty room, went inside and closed the door behind him.

Once he was inside the empty room, Wesley changed into the Blue Mantis. Minutes later, the transformation was complete and the superhero left the room.

Inside the hallway, Larvan was still wreaking havoc with his robotic bees as the random student remained hidden and continued to secretly use his smartphone to record him. Soon, the random student saw the Blue Mantis arriving on the scene to confront Larvan.

"THE BLUE MANTIS," Larvan exclaimed.

The Blue Mantis? The random student thought enthusiastically. This is going to be exciting.

"And who are you supposed to be?" The Blue Mantis asked Larvan.

"You can call me - -," Larvan answered as his robotic bees, responding to his mental command, formed a suit of powered armor around him. "- - THE BEEKEEPER!"

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Soon, the armored Beekeeper attacked the Blue Mantis as the random student recorded the battle on his smartphone. The two antagonists traded blows but they were evenly matched. However, the Blue Mantis used judo to turn Larvan's armored strength against him and flip him into a nearby wall with sufficient force. The impact caused the robotic bees to separate and dissolve the armor.

Wow! What a *battle*, the awestruck random student thought as he continued to record the two antagonists.

Managing to recover, the Beekeeper sicced his robotic bees on the Blue Mantis with the intention of stinging the superhero.

Whoa, this is getting serious! I've got to get the Beekeeper and his robot bees out of this school, the Blue Mantis thought as he used his superhuman speed and agility to dodge the bees.

"HEY, BEEKEEPER," the Blue Mantis called. "YOU WANT ME?"

"COME AND *GET* ME," he added as he used his superhuman speed and agility to head for the nearest exit while continuing to dodge Larvan's robot bees. The Beekeeper ran after him. The random student left his hiding place to follow and continue videotaping them. The random student was very careful to remain hidden as she stealthily followed the two antagonists through the exit door.

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Once the three were outside, the Blue Mantis used his camouflage power to put some measure of distance between himself and Beekeeper and his bees. From a distance and from a hiding place, the random student continued to record the conflict.

"WHERE ARE YOU, BLUE MANTIS?!" The frustrated Beekeeper asked.

With sufficient distance between him and the robot bees, the Blue Mantis dropped his camouflage.

"Here I am, Beekeeper," the superhero replied as he grew his wings.

"Catch me if you can," he taunted.

"Oh, I *will*," the Beekeeper said as he mentally commanded his robot bees to form a huge pair of wings on his back.

"And *when* I do," Larvan said as he used his robot bee-constructed wings to soar through the air after his enemy. "YOU'LL BE *SORRY!*"

Left behind, the random student looked at the video footage she recorded of the Blue Mantis's battle with the Beekeeper on her smartphone.

Wow! Amazing stuff, she thought enthusiastically. This is *so* going to go *viral!*

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The Blue Mantis flew through the air as fast as he could. His 360-Degree vision saw the Beekeeper behind him.

The Beekeeper's gaining on me, the superhero thought as he flew. This is going to be close.

I have to find *some* way to put his robotic bees out of commission, he thought.

Then, he saw a microwave relay dish on a tower from a short distance.

That's *exactly* what I need, he thought as he darted for his objective. In minutes, he approached it.

As he did so, the Blue Mantis took off his bracers and put them in a safe place. Then, he made a beeline for the microwave relay dish.

With blinding speed, the superhero aimed the dish's microwaves at the robotic bees, sizzling their circuits.

"YYEEEEAAAARRRGHHH!" The Beekeeper screamed as if in pain and went unconscious. With the bees put out of commission, Larvan fell, but the Blue Mantis caught him.

Flying to the site where he left his bracers, the Blue Mantis, with the Beekeeper in tow, landed and donned them. With the bracers back on his wrists, the superhero flew off with Larvan.

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Seeing a nearby juvenile detention center, the New York City Department of Corrections, the Blue Mantis descended with Larvan. Alighting on the ground, the superhero's insectoid wings folded back into his shoulder blades and the Blue Mantis brought Larvan inside the building with him.

Inside, the Blue Mantis was met by some of the building's officers.

"Hello," the superhero said. "This person calls himself the Beekeeper and he threatened Ditko High."

"We know," one of the staff people said. "We saw that internet video that was just uploaded of you fighting your 'Beekeeper' here. It went *viral*."

"You can leave him here with us, Blue Mantis," another officer said. "We'll take care of him."

"Thank you," the Blue Mantis said, before he left for the exit.

Once he was outside, the superhero sprouted his insectoid wings once more and flew off.

The next day, as they were walking through the halls of Ditko High, Wesley and Carly noticed all the other kids watching an internet video on their smartphones. Curious, Wesley and Carly got close to one of the students.

"What are you watching?" Carly asked.

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"It's this new video that was uploaded to the internet yesterday. It shows a guy in a blue mantis costume fighting a guy who was controlling a swarm of robot bees. And the fight happened right here, in *this very school*, yesterday. It was so *awesome*," one of the students gushed.

I *already* know about the video, thanks to one of the officers at the New York City Department of Corrections, Wesley thought.

"Awesome?" Carly asked. "It was downright *dangerous*. It was a good thing that everyone cleared out of the building when they did."

"Not everyone. Whoever took that video also took a big risk," Wesley cautioned. "He, or she, could've gotten *seriously hurt*."

Soon, news footage of the internet video was on the 24-hour cable news channels. Everyone watched the footage, including Leonard Larvan's parents, a mysterious woman who was inside a hidden scientifically advanced laboratory beneath the city, and by Leonard Larvan himself at the New York City Department of Corrections.

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"Everyone's talking about the internet video of the Blue Mantis fighting a young man, calling himself 'The Beekeeper', who has the ability to control a swarm of robotic bees inside the hallway of Ditko High School. The robot bees were used to form an exoskeleton around their master and to attack the Blue Mantis himself. The video was posted online yesterday by an unidentified individual who wishes to remain anonymous," the newscaster said. "The Beekeeper', is currently being held in the New York City Department of Corrections."

At the Larvan house in Astoria, Mr. and Mrs. Larvan processed what had happened to their son.

"Oh, no," Mrs. Larvan said. "Leonard's in Juvenile Hall. This is awful."

"Well, look on the bright side," Mr. Larvan said. "After that fight with that Blue Mantis guy, our boy's not a wuss anymore."

Mrs. Larvan gave her husband a dirty look.

Inside her hidden laboratory beneath the city, the mysterious woman thought about Leonard Larvan.

Fascinating, the mysterious woman thought. This 'Beekeeper person could prove useful to me in the future.

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Inside the television room at the New York City Department of Corrections, Leonard Larvan was being bullied by the other kids.

"Hey, freak," one of the other kids said. "I wanna see the monster truck rally! Change the channel or I'll rearrange your face!"

Somehow, Leonard caused the television to explode, scaring the other kids.

"N-N-Never mind," one of the kids said as he and they ran off.

Leonard creepily smiled.

THE END

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