

The Blue Mantis #6 - "The Beekeeper Returns"

Written by Steven Bland

At night, in her hidden underground laboratory, a mysterious woman placed all of the improved robot bees she had created into a box and closed it. She donned a trenchcoat and put on her cybernetic headband. A fedora was used to complete the disguise and to hide the high-tech headband. Ready, she left the laboratory.

Later, she arrived at the New York City Department of Corrections. After opening the box, she commanded the robot bees to enter the building and to seek out Leonard Larvan. In minutes, the bees found Larvan who was in his room and had sensed their approach. He also sensed the mind of the mysterious woman who was outside and was beginning to telepathically communicate with him through the robot bees and her cybernetic headband.

"Leonard Larvan," the mysterious woman communicated telepathically. "The Blue Mantis destroyed your robot bees, but I have replaced and improved them."

"The new robot bees are yours to command," the mysterious woman added. "All I ask is that you *hunt down* the Blue Mantis and *immobilize* him. I don't want him dead. And after you have immobilized him, contact me telepathically and I will come to your location. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Leonard replied with an evil smile.

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At a mental command from Leonard, the new robot bees flew toward a nearby wall and attached themselves to it. At another mental command, the robot bees vibrated their wings, shaking the wall until it crumbled. Once it did, Larvan mentally commanded the robot bees to form wings on him. He flew out of the hole in the wall and escaped.

Later, in the Larvan household, Mr. and Mrs. Larvan were in their living room, watching the television news.

"Leonard Larvan, who called himself the Beekeeper and fought the Blue Mantis a few days ago, has escaped from the New York City Department of Corrections, where he was detained," the TV reporter said.

Mrs. Larvan immediately jumped out of her seat.

"Where are you going?" Mr. Larvan asked.

"To find my son," Mrs. Larvan responded. "You obviously don't care about him, but *I do!*"

Mr. Larvan was absolutely stunned as he watched his wife storm out of the house.

Outside, Mrs. Larvan got into her car and drove off.

As she drove, Mrs. Larvan turned on the police band radio.

Maybe I'll find out where Leonard is, this way, she thought.

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Meanwhile, at Kelvin Biotechnics, a mysterious man stealthily entered the building and headed for the main office. Upon reaching his destination, he accessed the office's computer system and downloaded all of the company's research files to a USB flash drive. Then, he deleted all of the research from the computers. With his mission accomplished, the mystery man made a stealthy exit.

Elsewhere, Wesley Walker's encrypted cell phone started ringing. He answered it.

"Hello, Stanley," Wesley replied.

"Wesley, suit up," Stanley said. "Leonard Larvan, the Beekeeper, has just escaped from the New York City Department of Corrections."

"I'm on it," Wesley said.

Upon ending the call, Wesley looked for a secluded spot where he could change into costume. Upon finding one, he entered it. Minutes later, the Blue Mantis emerged and flew off.

The Blue Mantis found Larvan as he flew through Mid-Manhattan.

"THE BLUE MANTIS!" Larvan exclaimed. "AT LAST, I HAVE *FOUND* YOU!"

At his mental command, the robot bees formed themselves into an armored exoskeleton with wings around Larvan. Soon, a tense battle between Larvan and the Blue Mantis ensued.

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As they fought, the superhero found himself outmatched.

He's gotten stronger since the last time, the Blue Mantis thought. I've got to get out of here.

The superhero tried to use his camouflage power, but Larvan easily detected him, thanks to the newly enhanced mechanical sensors of his robot bees. The Beekeeper soon overpowered the Blue Mantis and rendered him unconscious.

The Blue Mantis is down, Larvan telepathically communicated with the mysterious woman.

In minutes, the mysterious woman, who was still wearing the cybernetic headband, arrived via a glider.

"You have done well, Larvan," she told him. "Very well, indeed."

"Now that you have the Blue Mantis," Larvan said. "What do you plan to do with him?"

"That's none of your concern," the mysterious woman answered as she collected the superhero.

Unknown to the mystery woman, Larvan, due to the technopathic link via her headband, was able to read her mind. He learned that she had a secret passage to an underground laboratory she owned. After learning the way to her underground laboratory, he caught a glimpse of it.

With her human prize, the mystery woman flew off with him.

Police cars arrived on the scene and officers got out of their cars.

"Leonard Larvan! *Stand down*," an officer ordered through his bullhorn.

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Soon, Mrs. Larvan's car also arrived on the scene, got out of her car, and walked toward the officer with the bullhorn.

"Officer, please," Mrs. Larvan told the officer. "I'm Leonard's mother. Let me borrow your bullhorn so that I can talk to him."

The officer agreed and handed his bullhorn to Mrs. Larvan.

"Leonard? It's Mom," Mrs. Larvan said over the bullhorn.

"Mom?" Leonard asked.

"Yes," Mrs. Larvan answered. "Please come down so that we can talk. Okay?"

"Okay," Leonard answered as he descended toward the ground and toward his mother.

"Why isn't Dad with you?" Leonard asked.

Mrs. Larvan paused for a minute.

"I don't know how to tell you this," Mrs. Larvan told her son. "Your father doesn't really care about you. He never did. That's why he's not here."

"I – I don't understand," Leonard said.

"When you were sent to the Department of Corrections for the trouble you caused, he wasn't concerned that you did something wrong. He was proud that you were no longer the 'wuss' he felt you were," Mrs. Larvan said. "That was the only thing he really cared about. And *that* made me angry."

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"I came here, because I *love* you. I *care* about you," Mrs. Larvan told her son. "And I *won't* give up on you. *Ever.*"

"Thanks, Mom," Leonard said tearfully. He and his mother hugged each other.

"Where will we go now?" Leonard asked.

"We'll go to your Aunt Helen's house in Rego Park," Mrs. Larvan answered. "I plan to file for divorce from your father."

Leonard and his mother walked away.

The next day, at a safehouse in Manhattan, Theo, Vivian, and Liz Harrier were watching the news on WPIX-TV about the Blue Mantis's fight with the escaped Beekeeper.

"Last night, Leonard Larvan, the Beekeeper, who had escaped the New York City Department of Corrections, engaged in a fight with the Blue Mantis, which ended with the latter unconscious," the newscaster said.

"Then, a mysterious woman on a glider arrived and absconded with the Blue Mantis," he continued.

Oh no, Liz thought. I wish I could help, but I can't leave the safehouse until the people who made me and want to clone me have been captured and brought to justice. And *that's* going to take a *long* time.

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Soon, the Harrier family heard a knock on their door and went to answer it. Standing at the door, was a strapping, mysterious gentleman wearing an overcoat.

"Drs. Harrier," the mystery man told them. "My name is Matthew Steele, director of S.C.R.E.E.N, the Strategic Crisis Response, Espionage and Enforcement Network. We have found and caught the men who were after your daughter, Elizabeth."

"Really?" A happy Liz asked. "We don't have to hide anymore?"

"You don't have to hide anymore," a smiling Steele answered. "Kelvin Biotechnics has been shut down, permanently."

"That's *wonderful* news," an elated Theo said.

"It certainly *is*," an equally elated Vivian added. "Thank you."

"You're more than welcome," Matthew Steele said, before leaving. The door was closed.

Liz immediately headed for her room.

"Where are you going?" Vivian asked her daughter.

"Wesley's in trouble," Liz answered. "I've got to help him."

"But you don't know where he was taken," Theo told her.

"I have a way to find out," Liz told them.

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Meanwhile, the Blue Mantis was regaining consciousness.

"Unnhh," he moaned as he was slowly opening his eyes. He soon found himself shackled to a table he was lying on. A cybernetic helmet, which was connected to a machine, was placed on his head.

"Coming around, I see?" A familiar female voice asked.

The Blue Mantis turned his attention to the owner of the female voice and saw Tina Madison standing beside and over him. She was also holding the devices that were his wrist vambraces.

"YOU?" The superhero asked.

"Why so surprised, dear Wesley?" Madison asked. "You must know, and have known, that I will stop at *nothing* to have you at my side."

"As you can see, I have taken the liberty of removing your wrist vambraces while you were unconscious," she added.

The Blue Mantis struggled to break free of his shackles with his superhuman strength but couldn't.

"Don't bother trying to break through the shackles," Madison said. "They, and the table you're shackled to, are made of a promethium alloy. And the electronic locking mechanisms of the shackles are the best I have ever made."

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"H-How did you survive after our last encounter?" The Blue Mantis asked.

"I simply escaped through a secret passage known *only* to me," Madison asked. "And now that I have you, you won't escape me *ever again*."

"Now, I will attempt to reprogram your brain once again," she added, before activating the machine that the Blue Mantis's cybernetic helmet was connected to.

The superhero was using his willpower to try to resist the helmet's power.

Later, Fire Opal flew to the WPIX-TV station. Once she arrived, she entered and made her way to the manager's office.

"I want to air a special message to Leonard Larvan, the Beekeeper," Fire Opal told the manager. "It's *urgent*."

Soon, a special TV message from Fire Opal was airing on everyone's set.

"Leonard Larvan, this is Fire Opal," the pyrokinetic superheroine said. "I know that you most recently fought the Blue Mantis and overpowered him. I also know that shortly afterwards, the Blue Mantis was abducted by an armored woman on a glider. And that woman probably intends to do him serious harm, to hold him for ransom, to control him, or to dissect him."

"I *can't* - - *won't* let that happen. The Blue Mantis is my friend - - and he's in trouble, but I don't know where he is and I hope that you can - - and *will* help me," she continued.

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Watching Fire Opal's televised message were Leonard Larvan, his mother, and his Aunt Helen at the latter's home in Rego Park.

Moved, Leonard Larvan picked up the phone and dialed the station's number.

"Hello? Is Fire Opal still there?" Larvan asked.

"Why, yes," the station manager answered. "She is. May I ask who's calling?"

"This is Leonard Larvan, the Beekeeper," Larvan responded. "Can I talk to her, please?"

The station manager turned to Fire Opal.

"It's Leonard Larvan, the Beekeeper," the manager told the pyrokinetic superheroine. "And he wants to talk to you."

Fire Opal walked up to the station manager and took the phone, which she placed to her ear.

"Hello, Leonard," she said.

"Fire Opal?" Larvan asked. "I just wanted to let you know that I have listened to your message and have decided to help you. I know where the Blue Mantis is."

"You know that lady who took him away?" Larvan asked. "I caught a telepathic glimpse of her secret underground laboratory."

"How did you get that telepathic image?" Fire Opal asked.

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"When she rebuilt and improved upon my robot bees, she developed a cybernetic headband that allowed her to control them as well," Larvan answered. "While she wore the headband, she and I developed a telepathic link with each other and I was able to look into her mind."

"I also learned the path to her secret laboratory," he added. "I'll take you there. Meet me at the entrance to the 50 Street Subway Station."

"Thanks, Leonard," Fire Opal said.



Later, Fire Opal met Larvan at the entrance to the 50 Street Subway Station.

"I'm here," the pyrokinetic superheroine told Larvan. "Lead the way."

Fire Opal followed Larvan as he lead her into the entrance and through the underground system.

I just hope I - - we're - - not too late to save Wesley, the pyrokinetic superheroine prayed.

In minutes, Fire Opal and Larvan found the Blue Mantis and Madison.

"BLUE MANTIS," Fire Opal shouted. "WE'RE HERE TO SAVE YOU!"

"TOO LATE, FOOLS," Madison told Fire Opal and Larvan.

"We'll see about *that*," Larvan said as he sent his robot bees to attack Madison. However, she was still wearing her cybernetic headband and she mentally commanded the robot bees to attack Larvan and Fire Opal instead.

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Larvan tried to use his own technopathic abilities to hold the robot bees at bay.

"Fire Opal, she's turned my bees against us," Larvan warned the pyrokinetic superheroine.

"Naturally," Madison told Larvan. "I rebuilt them for you so that you could capture the Blue Mantis for me, remember?"

Madison rebuilt Larvan's robot bees so that she could use him - - and them - - to *capture* me?
The Blue Mantis thought as he continued to resist the helmet's power.

"Well, I'm turning them into *slag*," Fire Opal said as she used her flames to melt the robot bees.

"Hope you didn't mind," the pyrokinetic superheroine told Larvan.

"It's cool, Fire Opal. And, thanks," Larvan said. "Now, let's see about freeing the Blue Mantis."

"That's unlikely, his shackles and the table he's lying on are made of promethium," Madison said. "And the electronic locking mechanisms for the shackles are the *best* there are."

"The locks to the shackles are electronic, just like the cybernetic helmet on the Blue Mantis's head, eh?" Larvan asked. "Good to know."

Larvan attempted to use his technopathic powers on the locking mechanisms of the Blue Mantis's shackles and the cybernetic helmet on the superhero's head, but Madison telepathically attacked the former Beekeeper, engaging him in a battle of willpower.

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"AARRGGHHHH!" Larvan screamed in agony

"You *fool*," Madison told Larvan. "You forgot about our telepathic link."

"Telepathic link, huh?" Fire Opal asked. "Thanks for telling me!"

The pyrokinetic superheroine shot blasts of flame at Madison, distracting her. Larvan was free to use his technopathic powers to deactivate the cybernetic helmet on the Blue Mantis's head as well as to unlock his shackles, freeing him.

Leonard Larvan, the Beekeeper - - is actually *helping* me? The superhero wondered.

The Blue Mantis used his superhuman speed and agility to leap off the table he was on and head for Madison, taking the cybernetic headband off her head and crushing the device with his superhuman strength, saving Larvan.

After seizing his devices from Madison, The Blue Mantis placed one of them on his left forearm. It quickly assembled itself. He placed the other device on his right forearm. It, too, quickly assembled itself.

"It's over, Madison," The Blue Mantis told her.

"*NO! I WON'T GIVE UP UNTIL YOU'RE MINE, DO YOU HEAR ME?*" Madison asked. "*I GAVE YOU YOUR POWERS! I CREATED YOU!*"

"Yes, in a way, you *did* give me my powers, but my *father* also gave them to me" the superhero said. "You remember my father, dont you? The man you *arranged* to have killed! "

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Fire Opal and Larvan were absolutely stunned by the revelation.

"You took him away from me," the Blue Mantis continued. "I ought to kill you for that, but I won't. My father wouldn't approve."

"And neither would another good man I've met. He told me to always use my powers for the greater good, something you could, and *never will*, understand!"

"I'm sure you must hate me now," Madison said.

"I ought to, for what you did to me, and for trying to manipulate me," the Blue Mantis told her. "But I don't. By not hating you, I keep my father's memory alive and I don't let you control me."

"If you go after my family and friends, you will only strengthen my resolve to do what's right," the superhero continued. "In other words, you can't win."

The Blue Mantis, Fire Opal, and Leonard Larvan turned and walked away from Madison, leaving her alone.

Minutes later, topside, Blue Mantis, Fire Opal, and Leonard Larvan talk.

"I'm happy to see you again, Fire Opal," Blue Mantis told the pyrokinetic superheroine. "But I thought you had to lay low for a while. What happened?"

"Some people from an agency called SCREEN found and caught the men from Kelvin Biotechnics," Fire Opal answered. "Not only that, SCREEN shut down the company completely."

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"That's wonderful," the Blue Mantis answered, before turning his attention to Larvan.

"Why did you come here to help me?" the superhero asked his former enemy.

"I recently had a change of heart," Larvan answered. "I was constantly bullied by every kid in school. When I tried to talk to my father about it, he verbally and emotionally abused me. He called me a wuss. He told me that if I was bullied, I needed to push back, and push back *hard*."

"One night, I designed my robot bees, which were originally for a science fair I planned to enter, with the intention of demonstrating their agricultural and military applications," he continued. "I also developed a cybernetic headband which allowed me to control my bees mentally. While practicing my cybernetic control, I was suddenly hit by lightning."

"I ended up in the hospital where I recovered," he added. "Because of the accident, I missed my chance to enter the science, but I discovered I could control my robot bees, and much later, any other form of technology, without the aid of my headband. When I returned home from the hospital, my father reminded me to hurt the people who hurt me. And I used my new technopathic powers to do just that."

"After Madison had absconded with you last night, the police came to arrest me. But then, my mother arrived and talked to me, comforted me," Larvan said. "She told me she loves me, and that she won't give up on me. *Ever*."

"And I won't give up on you," the Blue Mantis told Larvan.

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"And neither will I," Fire Opal told Larvan.

Blue Mantis and Fire Opal took off their masks, revealing their faces to Larvan, trusting him.

"My real name is Wesley Walker," the Blue Mantis said.

"And my real name is Elizabeth Harrier," Fire Opal said. "But you can call me 'Liz'."

"And we would like, very much to be your friends," Blue Mantis told Larvan.

"Sounds great to me," Larvan said with tears of joy in his eyes.

Blue Mantis and Fire Opal took turns hugging Larvan, who hugged each of them back. The hugs were much needed because of what Larvan had been through.

Blue Mantis and Fire Opal put their masks back on.

"Well, I have to be going now," Fire Opal told Blue Mantis and Larvan. "I'll see you later."

Fire Opal flew off as Blue Mantis and Larvan waved at her.

The Blue Mantis turned his attention to Larvan.

"Why don't you come with me?" The superhero asked the former Beekeeper. "There's someone I'd like for you to meet. And I think you'll really like him."

"Okay," Larvan agreed.

The Blue Mantis sprouted his wings from his shoulder blades, grabbed Larvan, and flew off.

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The Blue Mantis took Larvan to a garage that was well known only to the superhero. Once they were inside, the blue-suited superhero folded his insectoid wings back into his shoulder blades, before they stood on a secret platform that only the Blue Mantis himself knew about. The platform lowered the two individuals to Stanley Stevens's secret underground lair, where they found Stanley himself.

"Stanley, it's okay," the Blue Mantis assured him. "He's on our side. His name is Leonard Larvan."

"But, Wesley," Stanley warned. "This young man is the Beekeeper. He escaped from the Department of Corrections and fought you."

"And I had captured him for Tina Madison, I'm sorry to say," Larvan said.

"But, in the end, you freed me from her," the Blue Mantis told Larvan. "And stopped her from trying to control me again."

The Blue Mantis turned his attention to Stanley.

"Stanley, Leonard is my friend. I trust him," the superhero told Stanley. "I'm giving him a chance and I hope you will, too."

Stanley thought for a minute. Then, he smiled.

"Aw, what the heck?" He asked with a smile before proffering his hand to Leonard. "Put 'er there, Leonard."

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Leonard and Stanley shook hands as Wesley watched and smiled.

Soon, Mortimer, the robot showed up, attracting Leonard's attention.

"Hello," Leonard said.

"Leonard, this is Mortimer," Stanley said as he introduced the former Beekeeper to the humanoid robot.

"Hello, Mortimer," Leonard said warmly.

"Hello," Mortimer responded.

"So, Leonard," Stanley told Larvan. "How would you like to be my helper?"

"I would like that very much," Leonard responded with a smile.

"Splendid," Stanley said. "Now, how would you like a personal tour of this place?"

"Sounds great," Leonard said with a smile.

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"I'd better get going," said the Blue Mantis before sprouting his wings. "Good luck, Leonard."

As the Blue Mantis flew off, Stanley started giving Leonard a tour of the secret underground


lab.

THE END

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