

The Blue Mantis #8 - "Double Jeopardy"

Written by Steven Bland

In Stanley Stevens's underground laboratory, Leonard Larvan finished making upgrades to Mortimer, while Wesley Walker and Stanley himself watched.

"How are the upgrades to Mortimer progressing, Len?" Stanley asked.

"I'm almost done, Stanley," Leonard said as he put the finishing touches to the robot. "Soon, Mortimer will become more than just a sparring partner for Wesley. He will also become an ally."

Soon, Leonard was done.

"There," he said. "I just gave Mortimer flight jets, lasers, fire extinguisher foam sprayers, force field and force shield generators, a grappling grip, and a plasma blade."

"Pretty cool," an impressed Wesley said.

Suddenly, the television screen showed news footage of armed forces attacking all over America. The news footage was aired on other television sets everywhere.

"This is incredible, folks," one newscaster announced. "Soldiers from every branch of our armed forces have suddenly turned against us and our entire nation."

"Fighter jets from Edwards Air Force Base are firing upon and laying waste to downtown Los Angeles, California," a second newscaster reported.

"The U.S. Army is attacking the Capitol Building in Washington, DC," a third newscaster reported. "But this new superhero, Patriot Prime is on the scene, doing what he can to avert this catastrophe."

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"The Marines are attacking the United Nations Building in New York City," a fourth newscaster reported. "And, at the same time, Ellis Island is under attack by the Navy."

Stanley looked at his computer monitors. One showed the Techni-Crusader arriving via dimensional portal in Los Angeles. Another showed the Sprintress arriving at superhuman speed at the Capitol Building to assist Patriot Prime.

"What could have possibly caused our armed forces to suddenly turn against our country?" Leonard asked.

"I don't know. But, it's fortunate that we have all of these superheroes doing what they can to help us out," Stanley said.

"Including us," Wesley said.

"Yes, Wesley. Including you," Stanley said.

"Techni-Crusader is taking care of the Air Force, while the Sprintress is helping Patriot Prime deal with the Army," Stanley added.

"I'll take Mortimer with me to Ellis Island to deal with the Navy," Leonard said. "It will be a chance to test the additions I made to him. Plus, I'll also bring a few little friends."

"As soon as I suit up, I'll go to the United Nations building to face the Marines," Wesley told Stanley before going into a nearby room to change.

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Leonard immediately hopped on Mortimer's back and issued a technopathic command to activate the robot's boot jets. Soon, both flew out through the hidden exit. Accompanying them, was Leonard's swarm of robot bees.

Shortly, Wesley emerged from the room wearing his full Blue Mantis costume.

"I'm ready, but I *may* need some back-up," he told Stanley.

"I take it you mean Fire Opal, right?" Stanley asked.

"Yes," the Blue Mantis said as he grabbed his phone.

"Be careful, son," Stanley cautioned him.

"I will, Stanley," said the Blue Mantis as he sprouted his insectoid wings and flew off through the hidden exit.

Once he was up and out, the Blue Mantis dialed Liz Harrier's number on his cell phone.

"Liz? This is Wesley," he said. "Have you heard about what's happening all over the country?"

There was a pause.

"The Techni-Crusader is taking care of the Air Force, Patriot Prime and the Sprintress are taking care of the Army, and Leonard's taking care of the Navy," Wesley said.

"That leaves the Marines at the United Nations Building," he added. "Will you help me?"

"Yes," Liz said over the phone.

"Thank you," Wesley said with a smile. "I'll meet you there."

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Later, Blue Mantis and Fire Opal were flying toward and soon met at the United Nations Building.

"Thanks for coming, Opal," Blue Mantis said.

"No problem," Fire Opal said. "Now, let's stop those corrupted Marines before they do something they'll regret later."

"By all means," said the Blue Mantis as he and his ally fly in through the window. Upon entering, the superheroes were shocked to see the corrupted Marines attacking the delegates and everyone else inside.

At the same time, unbeknownst to the three heroes, they were watched from far away by Ruby Rage.

I can't let them interfere, she thought. They must be stopped.

Somewhere in Manhattan, three costumed mercenaries Tigereye, Ice Queen, and Magnetik received orders from a female voice over their high-tech headsets.

"Tigereye. Ice Queen. Magnetik," the female voice said. "I have need of your skills and your extraordinary mutant powers! The Blue Mantis and Fire Opal are at the United Nations Building to stop the Marines, while someone and a tall robot are heading for Ellis Island, no doubt to stop the Navy! You must *stop* them at *all costs!*"

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Tigereye was a big, strapping man and he wore an orange short-sleeved bodysuit with black tiger stripes, an orange tiger-head helmet that was molded to the contours of his head and exposed his mouth and chin, a white belt and boots, as well as white metallic high-tech glove-like gauntlets. Ice Queen wore a light blue bodysuit with white icicle patterns hanging from her shoulders, white gloves and boots with icicle cuffs, and a light blue eye mask. Magnetik wore a black bodysuit with a green chestplate across her chest and upper back and a green interior, as well as a green metallic headband.

"Tigereye, Ice Queen," the female voice said. "You will head to the United Nations Building to take care of Blue Mantis and Fire Opal!"

"And, Tigereye?" The female voice asked. "Are your high-tech gauntlet gloves working?"

Tigereye cybernetically activated the gloves through a cybernetic headband inside his helmet. Laser claws flashed on and out.

"Oh, yeeeahhh," he said with a fiendish smile. "Normal claws wouldn't get past the Blue Mantis's dermal armor, but these babies *will!* He's as good as *dead!*"

"He'd *better be,*" the female voice said. "I paid a *good sum of money* to buy those from Tina Madison and her Orion Corporation! "And I want my *money's worth!*"

"You got it," Tigereye said.

"Ice Queen," the female voice said. "Your mutant power of cryokinesis will be more than a match for Fire Opal! You must overcome her!"

"I will," Ice Queen said.

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"Magnetik," the female voice said again. "You must go to Ellis Island and intercept that stranger and his robot companion!"

"That robot will be no match for my magnetic powers," Magnetik said. "And once I've destroyed it, I will use my powers to manipulate the iron traces in its human companion's blood and destroy him as well!"

"You have your orders then," the female voice said. "Now, go!"

Tigereye and Ice Queen left for the United Nations Building while Magnetik flew to Ellis Island.

Arriving at Ellis Island, Leonard Larvan and Mortimer came across corrupted Navy soldiers laying waste to it with explosive shells, causing much of it to catch on fire. At Leonard's technopathic command, Mortimer put up a force-shield and used its lasers to vaporize more of the soldiers's shells.

Mortimer and I certainly don't want to risk hurting these soldiers, Leonard thought.

But, thankfully, we don't *have* to," he thought as he sent out a technopathic command to his swarm of robot bees to come to his aid and "sting" the soldiers.

The soldiers were successfully stung and rendered unconscious.

Because I loaded every single one of my robot bees with *tranquilizer fluid*, Leonard thought.

Leonard turned his attention to the inferno, then turned to Mortimer.

"Okay, Mortimer," Leonard said. "Let's put out those flames."

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Before Leonard could give the technopathic command to his robot ally to use its fire extinguisher sprays on the inferno, Magnetik arrived to stop Mortimer in his tracks.

"Your robot friend won't be doing anything," Magnetik said as she used her powers to crush Mortimer. "EXCEPT FALL APART! HA HA HA HAAA!!"

And she can do it, too, Leonard thought as he used his technopathic powers to help Mortimer resist. Unless I can help Mortimer find a way to overcome her.

"And once he's gone," Magnetik told Leonard. "YOU'RE NEXT!"

Inside the United Nations Building, the Blue Mantis and Fire Opal were fighting the corrupted Marine soldiers.

"We've got to stop these soldiers without hurting them," Blue Mantis said as he used judo to overpower some of the soldiers. "Something seems to have possessed them."

Suddenly, the remaining soldiers got out their guns and fired on the heroes. The Blue Mantis was protected by his dermal armor while Fire Opal melted the bullets before they could hit her.

"Yow! That was close," Fire Opal said. "I'd better do something about their guns."

Fire Opal used her pyrokinetic powers to melt the remaining soldiers's weapons while the Blue Mantis used judo to overpower the soldiers themselves.

"Nicely done, Opal," Blue Mantis told his ally. "It's over now!"

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Suddenly, Tigereye and Ice Queen arrived, via an ice bridge the latter provided.

"It ain't over, *yet*," Tigereye said as he activated his high-tech glove gauntlets, causing them to flash laser claws.

"UNTIL BOTH OF YOU ARE *DEAD*," Tigereye exclaimed as he used his laser claws to slash the Blue Mantis, delivering a massive jolt to the hero's central nervous system.

"AAAARRRRGGHHH," screamed the Blue Mantis.

"Soon, Blue Mantis," Tigereye said. "You're gonna fall before the claws of - - TIGEREYE!"

"MANTIS," Fire Opal cried out.

"Forget about your ally, Fire Opal," Ice Queen said as she turned her attention to Fire Opal.

"And who are you?" Fire Opal asked Ice Queen.

"I'm the Ice Queen, Fire Opal," the cryokinetic mercenary said. "And I'm going to put *you* on ice!"

"*LITERALLY*," Ice Queen exclaimed as she fired an ice beam at Fire Opal, who instinctively shot her fire beam at the mercenary. The two beams slammed against each other in the middle and began pushing back and forth.

"You can't keep this up forever, Fire Opal," Ice Queen said. "Sooner or later, I *will* beat you! So you may as well give up now!"

"*NEVER*," Fire Opal exclaimed as she continued to use her fire beam to push against her opponent's ice beam. "I'LL KEEP GOING FOR AS LONG AS I *HAVE TO!*"

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At the same time, Tigereye moved in toward the mantis-powered superhero, who was still in pain.

He's – coming toward me, but - the *pain!* I-It's *excruciating*, the Blue Mantis thought. Maybe if I camouflaged myself.

The Blue Mantis used his camouflage power, hoping it would hide him from Tigereye. Unfortunately, the tiger-powered mercenary's enhanced senses easily located the superhero.

"No use hiding, Blue Mantis," Tigereye said as he released his energy claws and, with the enhanced speed and ferocity of his namesake, moved toward his quarry. "I picked up your scent and detected your heartbeat!"

He's right, the Blue Mantis thought. He was able to see through my camouflage.

And now, he thought. He's going to use those laser claws of his to attack me again. I'M A *GONER!*

Meanwhile, at Ellis Island, Leonard was still trying to help Mortimer as Magnetik continued to use her power to try and crush the robot.

I've got to free Mortimer somehow, so that I can use him to put out this inferno, he thought. Luckily, Stanley convinced me to make my new swarm of robot bees out of plastic instead of metal.

Leonard sent out a technopathic command to his robot bees to attack and sting Magnetik.

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However, I had them use most of the tranquilizer fluid to render the corrupted Navy soldiers unconscious, he thought. I'll just have to hope that at least *one* of the robot bees still has some of the tranquilizer fluid left.

"I CAN'T GET THEM OFF OF ME," Magnetik exclaimed. "THEY'RE NOT MADE OF METAL!"

Eventually, the last of the robot bees did have some tranquilizer fluid left and its "sting" put Magnetik down for the count, causing her to release her hold over Mortimer.

Yes! Mortimer's free, Leonard thought. Now, I've got to act quickly and hope it's not too late to put out those fires.

At Leonard's technopathic command, Mortimer activated his fire extinguisher spray guns and used them to put out the raging inferno.

Meanwhile, back at the United Nations Building, Fire Opal and the Ice Queen were still engaged in their beam of war while the Blue Mantis was fighting Tigereye.

I just hope I'm agile enough to avoid being cut by his laser claws again, he thought.

Tigereye lunged toward the Blue Mantis and thrust his energy claws at him, but the superhero managed to use his mantis-like agility to evade the laser blades.

Whew! *That* was close, the Blue Mantis thought. But I can't dodge him forever.

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I've got to find a way to stop him, he thought.

At the same time, in their beam of war, Ice Queen started gaining ground over Fire Opal.

She's almost got me beat. I'm going to lose, Fire Opal thought. Unless...

Abandoning the beam strategy, Fire Opal sheathed herself in flames.

"WHAT?" Ice Queen exclaimed. "WHAT ARE YOU *DOING*!?"

Fire Opal didn't answer as her flaming sheath allowed her to walk over to Ice Queen

Soon, the pyrokinetic superheroine was closer to her opponent.

"LIGHTS OUT," Fire Opal said as she took down Ice Queen with one punch.

With Ice Queen unconscious, Fire Opal turned her attention to the Blue Mantis who was busy dodging Tigereye's laser claws.

Tigereye's trying to hurt the Mantis with those laser claws of his, Fire Opal thought. I've got to do something.

She got a good look at Tigereye's laser claws and saw where they were generated.

Those laser claws are being generated by his high-tech gauntleted gloves, she thought. If they were able to penetrate Mantis's dermal armor, they must've been designed by Tina Madison and the Orion Corporation

Fire Opal used her flame powers to gently melt Tigereye's gauntlet gloves, and the laser claws disappeared.

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"AAARRRGGGHHHH," Tigereye cried out as he looked at his hands. "IT *BURNS!* IT *BURNS!!*"

Now that Tigereye's gauntlets have been turned to slag, Fire Opal thought. The Mantis should have no trouble with him now.

His laser claws are gone, the Blue Mantis thought. Now's my chance.

The mantis-powered superhero, using his superhuman strength and dermal armor, threw a powerful punch at Tigereye knocking him unconscious.

"Nice work, Mantis," a smiling Fire Opal told her fellow superhero.

The Blue Mantis turned his attention to Fire Opal and saw that she took care of Ice Queen.

"You too, Opal," he said as they fist-bumped each other.

Soon, the two superheroes heard the Marine soldiers moaning.

"UNNNHHHHH."

Blue Mantis and Fire Opal turned their attention to the soldiers and saw them regaining consciousness.

"Are you people okay?" The Blue Mantis asked.

"Yeah," one of the Marines said.

"What happened to you?" Fire Opal asked.

"We know this sounds crazy, but some strange unknown force somehow took control of our brains and compelled us to attack this building," the Marine explained.

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"From what we've heard, that strange unknown force you just mentioned was the same force that compelled the Air Force to fire down upon downtown Los Angeles, compelled the Army to attack the Capitol Building in Washington, DC, and compelled the Navy to attack Ellis Island," Blue Mantis said.

"We hope we didn't hurt anyone," another Marine said.

"Don't worry. No one was hurt," Fire Opal told them. "Everything's okay now. The crisis is over."

"I'd say our work here is done, Fire Opal," Blue Mantis told his fellow superhero. "Wouldn't you agree?"

"Absolutely," Fire Opal answered. "So let's get going."

Once the Blue Mantis sprouted his insectoid wings, he and Fire Opal flew out through the nearest window and flew off.

"I'm heading back to Stanley's secret lab," the mantis-powered superhero told the pyrokinetic superheroine. "Want to join me?"

"Nah, I think I'll head home," Fire Opal said. "But, say hello to Stanley and Leonard for me."

"I will," Blue Mantis said.

"Mantis, I think you should know something," Fire Opal said. "Tigereye's high-tech glove gauntlets were made by Tina Madison and the Orion Corporation."

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"Why am I not surprised?" The Blue Mantis said. "Well, thanks again for your help."

"Anytime," Fire Opal said right before she flew off.

Soon, the Blue Mantis arrived at Stanley's hidden underground laboratory through its secret entrance which only he, Stanley, and, now, Leonard knew about.

Landing on the floor, the mantis-powered superhero retracted his wings and saw Stanley watching the news reports on television and smiling. Leonard soon arrived as well and he and Wesley were soon watching the news reports with Stanley.

"All of America can rest easy now," the television reporter said. "The Army, Air Force, Marines, and Navy are all back to normal. It was revealed that they were all under some strange spell. Thankfully, that spell is now broken. The country is safe, thanks to superheroes like the Techni-Crusader, the Sprintress, Patriot Prime, the Blue Mantis, Fire Opal, the unnamed man with the robot and the robot bees, and Gale-Force, who was accompanied and aided by a hulking green-skinned human-elephant hybrid."

"Were you able to take care of those corrupted Marine soldiers?" Leonard asked Wesley.

"Yes, with Fire Opal's help," Wesley answered. "As we were fighting them, we were attacked by two super-mercenaries named Tigereye and Ice Queen."

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"Tigereye had the strength, speed, agility, and senses of a tiger, as well as laser claws that came out of the metallic high-tech glove gauntlets he wore. And Ice Queen had cryokinetic powers," he continued.

"I managed to take care of the corrupted Navy soldiers at Ellis Island by using my swarm of robot bees to "sting" them with tranquilizer fluid," Leonard said. "But, before I did so, they had Ellis Island completely in flames."

"With the Navy soldiers unconscious, I attempted to give a technopathic command to Mortimer to use his new fire extinguisher spray units to put out the inferno," Leonard said. "Before I could do so, he was rendered helpless by a costumed lady mercenary named Magnetik, who had magnetic powers."

"I technopathically commanded my robot bees to attack Magnetik," Leonard said. "I used up most of the tranquilizer fluid on those corrupted Navy soldiers, but, luckily, one of the bees still had some of the fluid left over. And it was enough to put my super-powered opponent down for the count."

"Did you and Fire Opal deal with Tigereye and Ice Queen?" Leonard asked.

"Yes," Wesley answered. "Fire Opal managed to overcome Ice Queen and succeeded. Then, Fire Opal slagged Tigereye's weapon, which had me at a disadvantage. With his weapon destroyed, I was able to use my mantis-strength and dermal armor to knock him unconscious."

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"After the two mercenaries were defeated," Wesley added. "The Marine soldiers at the United Nations Building returned to normal."

"As did the Navy officers I dealt with at Ellis Island," Leonard said. "So, it looks like all's well that ends well."

"Definitely," Wesley agreed.



THE END



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