

The Sprintress #5 - "The Devil's Empire"

Written by Steven Bland

On an early Friday afternoon in Queens, a gang of four tough guys in jeans and leather jackets, walked into Benson's Bakery. The customers inside the store recoiled in fear of the gang as they walked up to the store's owners, John Benson and his wife, Martha.

"Hello. Can I help you?" John asked.

"Actually, Mr. Benson, I'd like to think we can help you," the leader of the gang told John.

"We?" John asked suspiciously.

"Yeah. Us and our boss, Joe De Ablo," the gang leader said. "You pay us a *small fee*, and Mr. De Ablo will provide you with *protection*."

"Protection? I'm not sure I understand *why* we'd need your - - or *his* - - protection," John said.

"Perhaps a *little demonstration* is in order," said the gang leader as he turned toward his gang and walked toward them. The gang started smashing everything in sight and destroying every pie, cookie, cake, and other baked goods that were on sale. As they did this, a few customers recorded the incident on their smart-phones.

"N-NOOOOO," Martha cried out.

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"THAT'S IT," John exclaimed as he leaped over the counter and ran toward the gang leader.

"NO ONE TRASHES OUR BAKERY! NOT EVEN PUNKS LIKE YOU!"

"You just made a *big mistake*, old man," the gang leader said as he easily swatted John aside.

"And for *that*, we're gonna *increase* our fee!"

"From now on, you gotta pay us ten times what you make in profits, or we make an example out of you," the gang leader told John before getting into his face. "GOT IT?!!"

"Actually, buddy, *you're* the one who's going to get it," a female voice said from behind the gang leader, who quickly turned around and saw the source of the female voice: the Sprintress.

"THE SPRINTRESS! YOU'RE *DEAD MEAT!*" the gang leader exclaimed as he threw a punch at the superheroine.

With her speed, the Sprintress easily avoided the punch. Then, she punched out the criminal and his gang as well.

The Sprintress then turned her attention to John and Martha.

"Are you folks all right?" The superheroine asked them.

"We are *now*. Thanks to you," Martha told the Sprintress.

"Glad I could help," the Sprintress said with a smile.

"Those punks worked for a crime boss named Joe De Ablo," John added. "They were trying to extort money from us."

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"De Ablo will be number one on my list," the superheroine assured him. "In the meantime, call the police and have them pick these men up."

"You got it," John replied as he picked up his phone.

The Sprintress then zoomed out of the store, as John and Martha watched and smiled.

"There goes a *fine* young lady," John said, before dialing the number for the police.

Elsewhere, in Manhattan, a truck carrying electronic equipment was suddenly hijacked by a couple of thieves.

"GET *OUTTA* THERE," one of the thieves exclaimed as he and his accomplice held their guns at the driver's head. "*NOW!!*"

"YEAH, JOE DE ABLO NEEDS THIS TRUCK MORE THAN YOU DO! AND WHAT HE *NEEDS*, HE *GETS*," the other thief said. "*NOW GET OUT!!*"

"Okay, okay," the driver said as he fearfully complied and stepped out of the truck. Once the driver was out of his vehicle, the thieves quickly got in. Once they closed the door behind them, they stepped on the accelerator.

"YOU WON'T GET AWAY WITH THIS," the truck driver shouted angrily as he watched the thieves drive off.

Inside the truck, the two hijackers congratulated each other.

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"JOE DE ABLO IS A *GENIUS*," one of the hijackers exclaimed.

"YEAH, WE HIJACKED THIS TRUCK WITHOUT A HITCH," the other hijacker exclaimed.

Suddenly, the truck wasn't going anywhere.

"WHAT HAPPENED, MAN?" The second hijacker asked. "WHY'D YOU STOP?"

"IT WASN'T ME! I SWEAR," the first hijacker answered.

The hijackers got out of the truck to look it over. They saw that all four of the radials were taken off.

"THE TRUCK IS ON BARE RIMS," the first hijacker said.

"HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?" The second hijacker asked.

"Actually, boys," a female voice said.

"That would be me," the Sprintress said as she arrived at superhuman speed.

This is one truck Joe De Ablo won't be getting, the superheroine thought as she punched out the hijackers. Then, she put the radials back on the stolen truck in seconds.

Soon, she heard police sirens approaching.

Ah, the boys in blue. Right on schedule, the Sprintress thought.

They can handle things from here. I've got other matters that need my attention, the superheroine thought as she zoomed off.

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Then, on the streets of Brooklyn, a couple of thieves ran off carrying satchels of money.

"Everything went *perfectly*. Just like Mr. De Ablo *planned* it," said the first thief.

"Yeah. Extortin' all that protection money from that string of convenience stores was like takin' candy from a baby," the second thief said with a crooked smile. "When Joe De Ablo plans something, he doesn't kid around!"

"Well, De Ablo's plans have just gone up in smoke," the Sprintress said as she appeared before them.

"THE SPRINTRESS," exclaimed the two crooks in unison as they each reached for their guns.

"SHOOT HER," said the first crook before he and his cohort shot at the Sprintress. However, the superheroine plucked each of the bullets out of the air.

"You really shouldn't play with guns," the Sprintress said as she let the bullets she caught drop to the ground. After seizing the guns from the crooks, the superheroine punched them out.

Now, to get these perps to jail, the Sprintress thought as she grabbed each crook in one arm and zoomed off with both of them.

Later, at a news building in downtown Manhattan, an anchorwoman named Ann Jennings was inside broadcasting the news on the crime-wave. Every television set in the city was tuned in to the broadcast.

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"Crime, an everyday fact of life, is usually something we city dwellers take for granted," the anchorwoman said. "But the crime-wave that has erupted in our city is cause for great concern."

"And the man behind the crime-wave is a wealthy and reputed mob boss named Joe De Ablo, who has organized all of the underworld mobs to be run like a business. Criminals are striking everywhere at once, committing perfectly planned crimes ranging from extortion to hijacking. The police, the only ones available to combat this crime-wave, are unable to keep up," Ann continued. "But, thankfully, our local superheroine, the Sprintress is. This is Ann Jennings, reporting to you live from Fox News."

At the offices of the New York Sentinel.com building, Nathan West was at his desk working. Soon, he received a call on the phone and he answered it.

"Hello," he asked.

"Nathan, it's me," Sprintress said over the phone. "I need you to follow De Ablo's money trail."

"I'm already doing it and I'm getting close. *Real close*," Nathan promised. "I hear you're managing to keep up with as many of his crimes."

"I may not be able to keep that up forever," Sprintress said. "Once you find that money trail, make sure that all of De Ablo's financial records are published."

"I will," Nathan promised. "Good luck."

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"Thanks," Sprintress replied. "You too."

Sprintress hung up.

That night, inside his skyscraper office overlooking the city, mob boss Joe De Ablo loomed over a tabletop scale model of New York City that he had built himself. De Ablo, who had slicked-back dark hair, was a physically fit young man who was thirty-two years old. His shirt was black and his pants, blazer, and tie were colored dark red.

"*BLAST THAT SPRINTRESS,*" Joe De Ablo exclaimed as he smashed the model. "*SHE IS POSING A SERIOUS THREAT TO MY ORGANIZATION!! SHE MUST BE DEALT WITH!!*"

Soon, the crime-lord regained his composure.

"And she will be. Soon, very soon," De Ablo said as he walked away from the destroyed tabletop scale model and into the next room, where a criminal scientist had just arrived with syringes each filled with a special serum and was greeted by all four of De Ablo's enforcers, Steve, Danny, Zeke, and Rocko who were all tall and strapping. Steve was bald and wore a black tank top, fatigues, and combat boots. Danny had a buzz cut and a tattoo of a dragon on his right arm. Danny also wore a striped red T-shirt, black jeans, and sneakers. Zeke had spiked hair and a pierced right ear, and wore a black T-shirt with a skull and crossbones on the front, cargo pants, leather boots, and a bomber jacket. Rocko wore a green hoodie, baggy pants, sneakers, and gold chains around his neck.

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"Dr. Zellman, is your super-serum ready?" De Ablo asked. "I want them to be able to match and overpower the Sprintress should she interfere with them."

"Of course, Mr. De Ablo," Dr. Zellman said. "With your permission, I would like to administer it to all four of your enforcers."

"By all means," De Ablo told him.

Dr. Zellman injected Steve, Dan, Zeke, and Rocko, each with the super-serum. All four of these men soon felt incredible power coursing through their bodies.

"The serum which I injected into each of you, will enhance your strength, durability, and reflexes to superhuman levels," Dr. Zellman told De Ablo's enforcers. "But *only* for *twelve* hours."

"How do you feel now, men?" De Ablo asked his lieutenants.

"Great, boss," Steve said. "I feel like *nothing* can stop us now! Not even that Sprintress!"

"Good," De Ablo said with a cruel smile.

"So, what job do you have planned for us, boss?" Danny asked.

"I want you to go to the Diamond District and rob it," De Ablo replied. "And, if the Sprintress gets in your way, subdue her and bring her to me. I want the pleasure of disposing of her *myself*."

"You got it, boss," said Zeke. Soon, he, and the three other super-thugs left.

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A few hours later, Danny, Steve, Zeke, and Rocko arrived at AA Pearls and Gems Company at 10 West 47th Street and forced their way inside.

"Alright, let's do some 'shopping', heh heh," Steve told the other thugs. They immediately opened up every drawer in every cabinet and emptied its valuable contents into their bags. Soon, they were finished.

"Like taking candy from a baby, eh?" Danny asked.

"Yeah," Steve answered with a devilish smile.

Suddenly, a security guard arrived and saw the four thugs. The security guard, who had blond hair and blue eyes, was in his mid-twenties and physically fit.

"HEY! WHAT DO YA THINK YOU'RE DOIN'?!!" The guard asked as he immediately drew his gun.

Steve immediately swung his bag of diamonds at the guard's gun, knocking it out of his hand.

"I won't need my gun to stop you," the guard said as he delivered a right hook to Steve.

However, the guard only ended up bruising his knuckles.

"OWWW," the guard cried out in pain as he favored his bruised hand.

"Hurt your hand, punk?" Steve asked with a cruel smile. "Too bad. Y'see, I can't feel pain!

None of us can!"

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"But *you*," Steve continued as Danny, Zeke, and Rocko joined him.

"You're gonna feel *plenty*," Steve added as he and the other thugs proceeded to beat him up.

"NOOOO," the guard cried out.

Soon, the Sprintress arrived on the scene.

"Leave him alone," the Sprintress told the super-thugs, who soon turned their attention from the security guard and toward the superheroine.

"THE SPRINTRESS," exclaimed the super-thugs in unison as the Sprintress turned her attention to the security guard and tended to him.

"Are you all right, sir?" The superheroine asked the guard.

"Aside from my bruised hand? Yeah, I'm fine," the guard answered.

"Good. Now, get out of here and go to a doctor to get that hand treated. And, don't worry, sir," the Sprintress told the security guard. "I'll deal with your unwanted guests."

"Thanks," the guard said before he left. Once the guard was safely gone, the superheroine turned her attention to the four super-thugs.

The Sprintress delivered some punches to Danny, Steve, Zeke, and Rocko at superhuman speed, but they withstood them.

I don't *believe* it, the surprised superheroine thought. My punches had no *effect* on either of them. They just *shrugged* them off.

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"Not so tough *now, are ya?*" Zeke smugly asked the Sprintress.

"ALL RIGHT, GUYS," Zeke told Danny, Steve, and Rocko. "LET'S *RUSH* HER!"

I can't - - I *won't* - - give up! I've got to *keep fighting*, the Sprintress thought. And she did, but Danny, Steve, Zeke, and Rocko each withstood every punch and kick that the superheroine gave them. The super-thugs soon overwhelmed the Sprintress by their sheer numbers and overpowered her. Soon, the four super-thugs were towering over the superheroine's unconscious body.

"Hah! The fight's been knocked outta her," a sneering Rocko said.

"Yeah," Steve said with a cruel smile. "Now, let's take her to the boss. He said he wanted to deal with her personally."

Danny, Steve, Zeke, and Rocko then picked up the superheroine's limp body and carried it out with them.

Later, in his skyscraper office, Joe De Ablo looked through his office window as he waited for Danny, Steve, Zeke, and Rocko to return.

"Mr. De Ablo," Steve's voice called out, attracting De Ablo's attention. De Ablo saw Danny, Steve, Zeke, and Rocko holding the Sprintress's unconscious body before him.

"We captured the Sprintress and brought her here like ya said," Steve told De Ablo.

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"Good," De Ablo said with a devilish smile. "Now, leave her with me."

"With pleasure," Steve said as he, Danny, Zeke, and Rocko unceremoniously dumped the superheroine at De Ablo's feet. Then, all four of the super-thugs left.

A few minutes later, the Sprintress started regaining consciousness.

"Oooohhh," the superheroine groggily moaned as she was slowly getting up.

"Coming around, I see," a sneering De Ablo said. "Good."

Soon, the Sprintress was back on her feet.

"Do you know who I am?" De Ablo asked the superheroine.

"Yes," the Sprintress answered. "You're Joe De Ablo, New York City's most powerful crime-lord."

"Very good," De Ablo said. "And you have become a constant thorn in my side."

"But, that's going to end tonight," a sneering De Ablo said as he cocked his fist back. Then, he threw a punch at the Sprintress. The punch sent the superheroine flying clear across the room, colliding into a nearby wall.

"OOOFFF," the Sprintress exclaimed as she fell to the floor. As the superheroine slowly got back up on her feet, De Ablo moved toward her with incredible speed.

"H-how?" The stunned superheroine asked as she looked at De Ablo.

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"You *really* want to know? Very well," De Ablo said as he lifted the Sprintress by her neck.

"I'll tell you," De Ablo told the superheroine. "But, you won't live long enough to tell *anyone else.*"

"I was a small-time hood who aspired to become a member of the mob. I was smart. I had great dreams, but nothing went my way," De Ablo continued. "During one business pursuit, I was caught by the police and sent to prison. There, I was intimidated by the other inmates who were all stronger than I was. I knew that, in order to survive, I had to be stronger *and* smarter."

"So I used the exercise equipment that was available in the prison gym to build myself up physically. I worked out obsessively until my mass was all muscle. I also took full advantage of every book in the prison library to develop my mind to its fullest potential. Soon, I learned all the valuable skills that I needed. Skills that would help me build a thriving criminal empire. After I had served my time, I was released. Using the technological skills I had previously learned, I hacked into the law enforcement computer systems and erased all of my criminal records. And so, with my criminal records erased, I was free to begin my new career as New York's top criminal mastermind," De Ablo added. "And, as you've no doubt guessed my dear Sprintress, I have succeeded, *admirably.*"

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"Oh, I'm sorry," De Ablo added. "You wanted to know how I'm able to perform feats of superhuman strength and speed, correct? Fair enough. During my long reign as New York City's biggest crimelord, I have made many enemies. One of them actually succeeded in destroying my body. But I was not one to give up. No. I had the best surgeons operate on me, to give me bionic enhancements. Soon, I was able to perform feats of superhuman strength and speed with ease."

"And *that*, my dear Sprintress - - ," De Ablo told the superheroine. "- - is the end of my story."

"And the end of you," De Ablo exclaimed as he started to choke the Sprintress.

He's choking me, crushing my throat, the superheroine thought. But I *can't* - - *won't* - - give up. He may crush my *body*, but he can't crush my *spirit*.

Struggling, the Sprintress soon mustered up all the strength to vibrate rapidly at superhuman speed, causing the crime-lord to release her.

Aaahh, thought the superheroine. I can breathe again.

"I'LL KILL YOU," a raging De Ablo shouted as he lunged toward the Sprintress.

Have to end this. Now! The superheroine thought as she quickly readied herself. Using judo, she threw the crime-lord into a nearby wall, rendering him unconscious.

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I just need to make a quick stop, and then I'll get De Ablo behind bars, the superheroine thought as she grabbed the crime boss and picked him up.

I just hope Nathan succeeded in doing his job, Sprintress thought as she raced out of the the building with her passenger.

The superheroine arrived at and entered a cryogenics laboratory, where she quickly placed De Ablo in a cryogenic chamber and turned it on.

I just need to use enough of this coolant to neutralize De Ablo's bionic parts, the Sprintress thought. After a few minutes, the superheroine turned off the chamber and took the crime-lord out of it.

Now that I've taken De Ablo out of *one* cooler, I'm going to put him in *another* one, the Sprintress thought before racing out of the laboratory.

In minutes, the Sprintress arrived at her destination: the 57th Precinct House with De Ablo and entered the building. Once inside, the superheroine walked up to the police sergeant, who was at his desk.

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"The, Sprintress," the overjoyed sergeant said. "And you've brought in Joe De Ablo! Your timing couldn't have been *better*. Someone from the New York Sentinel.com had been following De Ablo's money trail and had just published his financial records on its website. De Ablo's empire is *finished*."

Nathan came through, the Sprintress thought with a smile as she handed De Ablo over to the sergeant. "He won't be any trouble, now. I saw to that, personally."

"Many thanks, Sprintress," the sergeant told the superheroine, who turned around to leave the building.

THE END

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