WARNING: Masters of Doom is a rated MA series. Reader discretion is advised.

AND THERE CAME A DAY, A DAY UNLIKE ANY OTHER. A DAY WHEN FOUR VILLAINS CAME TOGETHER TO SAVE THE WORLD FROM GALACTUS. ON THAT DAY, THE MASTERS OF DOOM DISBANDED. OR DID THEY?

MASTERS OF DOOM

The World's Most Dangerous Villains

-Episode 23-

Vengeance and Punishment

Tommy sat behind a desk looking at a laptop. Deborah walked into his room and he quickly closed it.

“Don’t you knock?” He groaned.

“Nope.” Deborah confirmed. “I’m bored. Let’s go do something.”

“Go bother Julian or Cylus.”

“They’re gone! Come on! I’ve got a few hours left, the night is young!”

“What would we do?”

“I don’t know! Blow something up! Hit a bar! Have sex! Can you… still do that? Or is your dick all… you know…” She waved her hand around. “Made of metal?”

“Okay!” Tommy said, standing up. “You know what? There is something we can do. I was gonna do it alone but since you’re here, there’s a Cybertek warehouse downtown that needs to be shut down. You in?”

“Hells yes!” Deborah cheered. “Finally! Some action!” They walked out and into a garage, where they got into Deborah’s Beetle and drove off.

* * *

Downtown, a warehouse that read Centipede Labs stood tall.

“This says Centipede.” Darkstream pointed out.

“It’s a front.” Deathlok replied. “They kidnap and experiment on people here. This is one of the places I was cycled through. It’s going down tonight.” He walked up to the door and was about to kick it down when suddenly it fell off the hinges.

“What the?” Darkstream asked. They both walked in. The place was ransacked. Dead bodies were strewn about, riddled with bullets or singed to a crisp. Equipment was destroyed, machines were on fire. It was chaos.

“No fair, someone beat us here!” Darkstream complained.

“I’m scanning the area.” Deathlok stated, initiating a scan. “Two heat signatures. Well, one heat signature, and one fireball! This thing is emitting extraordinary levels of body heat.”

“Where?”

“Upstairs.”

“Then let’s introduce ourselves.” She grabbed him by the arm.

“Wait, we should assess the situaaaaaahhhh!” He screamed as she flew up, through the ceiling, and to the second floor. They landed in a dark room. Darkstream lit up her hands, illuminating the area around them.

“Hello?” She called. “Who’s here? And why did you kill all the guys before us?”

“One batch.” Someone said in a low, growling voice.

“What did he say?” Darkstream asked.

“Match? I think?” Deathlok replied.

“Two batch.”

“Who’s there!” Deathlok asked, readying his wrist guns.

“Penny and dime.”

BANG!

From nowhere, a bullet hit Darkstream square between the eyes and she fell to the ground, dead.

“S**t!” Deathlok swore, sliding behind cover. He activated his scanners, and looked around the room. Perched on the rafters above was a man, armed with a sniper rifle. Deathlok leaned out and opened fire.

“AAAAAHHHHHHH!!!!!” He screamed, unleashing an array of bullets. He activated his scanners again, but the man was gone.

“Where did he-”

BANG!

A bullet grazed the robot side of his head.

“Ah! Damn it!” Deathlok shouted, as his scanners began to glitch out. He ran and slid for cover, firing as he went. Two more shots were fired, barely missing as he got behind a large machine.

“Come out and fight like a man!” He yelled. A grenade suddenly rolled between his legs.

“NO!” Deathlok took a dive and was blown across the room. He slammed into the wall. “Unnnhhh…” He slowly looked up, and saw the blurry figure of a man in black stalking towards him. The one thing he saw clearly, was a distinct white skull spray-painted onto his chest. Deathlok’s facial recognition pulled up an ID match:

Name: Castle, Frank.

Alias: The Punisher.

Punisher dropped the sniper and picked up an automatic rifle.

“You’re dead machine man.” He growled. Thinking fast, Deathlok launched a flare from his leg, letting out a blinding light.

“Ah!” Punisher cried, as Deathlok tumbled into a nearby lab.

“Activate self-repair.” He ordered, as his machine parts began to repair themselves. Out of the corner of his eye he caught a light deep in the shadows. It looked like a small fire. Suddenly a Cybertek scientist grabbed his leg.

“Help me!” He cried. Before Deathlok could react, a chain wrapped around the scientist’s leg, and he was dragged into the shadows. “NOOOOO!!!!” He screamed. There was a swell of flame and his charred body rolled out. Clanking could be heard, as the figure slowly moved towards Deathlok. A man in black, spiky leather, whose skull was on fire.

Name: Blaze, Johnathan.

Alias: Ghost Rider.

Ghost Rider pointed at Deathlok.

“You.” He roared. “Guilty.”

“Welp, this is the team-up from hell.” Deathlok groaned. He rushed out of the room and barely avoided a stream of bullets from the Punisher.

“Stay still!” Punisher yelled, opening fire. Deathlok slid over a conveyer belt and knocked over some equipment. He ran past where Darkstream should have been; to his surprise, she was gone. He kicked a lab door open and slammed it shut, grabbing a large computer server and dragging it in front of the door. He activated his comms.

“Smythe? Come in you moron!” He shouted. “I’m trapped in a Cybertek lab with two lunatics, Deb is MIA, possibly KIA, I need backup now! Tell Julian and Cylus to get their asses back here!”

Ghost Rider’s fist punched through the door and the server. Punisher stuck his gun through the hole and opened fire.

“Raaahhhhh!!!!” He screamed as he littered the room with bullets, shells hitting the ground. Deathlok crawled to the back of the room, where he found Darkstream sitting against the wall, eyes closed, breathing slowly, and a bullet hole in her head.

“Deb?” He asked.

“Shut up.” She groaned. The bullet inched out of her head and fell to the floor, and her wound healed.

“Holy s**t.” Deathlok said.

“Who’s the asshole that shot me?” She asked.

“Punisher. He’s with Ghost Rider.” Deathlok answered. Darkstream’s shoulders slumped.

“Well, that’s pretty much the team-up from hell.”

“That’s what I said!” The door blew down, and they both walked in.

“I got Rider,” Darkstream said. “You take Punisher. You know, since he doesn’t have any powers.”

“Yeah, I got it.” They both charged forward. Darkstream collided with Ghost Rider, and they locked hands in a confrontation.

“Eileen?” Ghost Rider asked in confusion. “Innocent.”

“Yeah, sorry hon. I’m not her.” Darkstream fired a blast of red energy and launched Ghost Rider into the wall. He slowly looked up, the fire on his skull flaring with his anger.

“Then… BURN!” He shouted, spewing hellfire from his mouth.

“Ah!” Deborah shrieked, attempting to shield herself from the flames.

Deathlok pressed his assault, opening fire on the Punisher. Punisher tumbled over a metal crate and began to return fire. Deathlok took cover behind a wall.

“What’s your deal man?” He called. “I’m trying to take out the same guys you just did!”

“That why you look like you’re fresh off their assembly line?” Punisher called back, continuing to fire.

“I’m not what you think I am! I lost everything to these guys!”

“Don’t talk to me about loss! Not until you’ve watched everything you’ve ever loved taken away from you in an instant. Then, and only then dirtbag, can you tell me you’ve lost everything! Aaaaahhhhh!!!!” Punisher continued to open fire. Deathlok activated a homing missile on his leg and fired it. Punisher slid out of the way and behind a metal table.

“Give it up Castle!” Deathlok called. “I’m more advanced than you in every way.”

“Advance this.” Punisher yelled back, pulling out an RPG.

“Where is he getting all of these guns!” Deathlok cried. Punisher fired a rocket, and Deathlok shot it with his wrist gun, blowing it up midair, but the backdraft knocked him through a glass wall and back down to the first floor.

“Tommy? You okay?” Darkstream cried. Suddenly she was wrapped in Ghost Rider’s chain. “Ah! Let go of me!”

“Get over here!” Ghost Rider hissed, yanking her onto the ground, then slowly reeling her in.

“I… said… off!” Darkstream grabbed the chain and electrocuted it. The charge travelled up the chain and shocked Ghost Rider.

“Graaaahhhhhh!!!!!” He roared, while Darkstream scrambled free and flew down to Deathlok.

“Hey man, we’re getting our asses handed to us.” She noted.

“Gee, what was your first clue?” Deathlok retorted. Punisher leaned over the rail and began littering the ground with bullets.

“Aaaaahhhhhhhhh!!!!!” He shouted, firing every which way. “Come out and fight cowards!”

“Give me that.” Ghost Rider insisted. He took Punisher’s gun and set it ablaze. It transformed into a demonic rifle, flaming at the sides. Punisher took it, leaned back over, and began rapid firing flaming, exploding bullets.

“Team-up. From. Hell!” Darkstream complained.

“We gotta get out of here!” Deathlok cried. They pushed out of the warehouse and got into Deborah’s Beetle. She hit the ignition three times before it finally started and took off as fast as the beater would allow.

“Are they following us?” She asked. Deathlok looked out the window. Over the overpass came a giant, black, armored van with the Punisher’s skull spray-painted onto the side, and Ghost Rider, riding his flaming motorcycle and swinging his chain around.

“Yep.” Deathlok sighed.

Inside of his van, Punisher locked on to the Beetle.

“Battle Van, homing rockets.” He ordered. Two panels folded out of the sides of the van and fired rockets.

“Swerve!” Deathlok cried. Darkstream whipped it, while Deathlok fired two wrist rockets, barely intercepting Punisher’s. Ghost Rider rode up behind them and flung his chain, snagging the bumper. The car began to skid, sparks flying from the wheels.

“Get him off!” Darkstream cried. Deathlok fired at the chain, but it was no good.

“Battle Van, rail-gun.” Punisher ordered. A rail-gun folded out of the top of the van and opened fire. Thinking quickly, Deathlok shot the bumper off, just as Darkstream took a sharp right. Ghost Rider missed the turn, but Punisher banked it, hitting the wall in the process, and continued to fire on them.

“Well, at least we lost Ghost Rider.” Darkstream said.

“Um.” Deathlok pointed up, as Ghost Rider’s motorcycle jumped from one roof to the next.

“Typical.” Darkstream complained.

“Battle Van, grenade launcher.” Punisher said. Two grenades fired out and blew the back of the Beetle off.

“Aaaahhhhh!” Darkstream and Deathlok screamed, as the car spiraled out of control. Ghost Rider suddenly sped out of an alley and slammed into the side of the Beetle, flipping it over and over, throwing Deathlok out of the car, until it hit a wall and exploded.

Ghost Rider sped towards the wreckage, just as Darkstream tumbled out, coughing. He grabbed her by the collar and slammed her against the wall.

“Come on man!” Darkstream complained. “Give me a break!”

“Not until you’ve felt the pain of the innocents whose blood you spilled. Look into my eyes!”

Darkstream glanced at a clock on the side of a building, reading 9:00 pm.

“Damn it. I still had three hours left.” She closed her eyes, and opened them again, only they were blue and green.

“Wha- Aaaahhhh!!” Eileen shrieked.

“Look into my eyes and feel their pain!” Ghost Rider shouted.

“Johnny! Ghost Rider! Stop! It’s me! It’s me! Eileen!”

“Liar!”

“You look into *my* eyes! They’re different! I’m not her!” Ghost Rider paused.

“Eileen… innocent.”

“Yep, that’s what you said, years ago on Mother Egg. Innocent. I still am. Please put me down.” Ghost Rider dropped her.

“Another side. A demon resides within you.”

“Well, you know a little something about that, don’t you?” Eileen asked. Ghost Rider looked off in contemplation. “I’m working on it. She can be redeemed.”

“See that she is. Or she, and you, will burn.” Ghost Rider turned and stalked off.

“Deborah, what, the actual shell!”

Eileen’s eyes flashed red.

“Sorry, long story. Hey, so I kinda got three hours left, and I actually have to go check on somebody…”

“No! No! I was about to be incinerated by Ghost Rider! We’re going home! Now!” Eileen took off into the night sky.

Across the way, Deathlok crawled on the ground, his robotic joints sparking. He heard the screech of the Battle Van, the slam of a car door, and footsteps clogging closer to him.

He tried to activate his wrist guns, but his HUD said all systems were offline. He turned around on the ground, Punisher’s skull logo emerging from the shadows.

“It’s over machine man.” Punisher said. Deathlok scooted back.

“I’m not… going down… without a fight…” He pulled out a pocketknife, and tried to stand, but his robotic leg sparked and his human leg was bleeding.

“Good luck with that.” Punisher aimed his rifle, when suddenly he stepped on something. He looked down and picked up a pair of dog tags that read ‘Ritz, Tommy’. He looked back at him.

“You a vet?” He asked. Tommy paused, a tad confused.

“Army.”

“You see any action?”

“Afghanistan. Two tours.”

“Psh, s**t show over there.”

“Yeah, well, I did the job.”

“Ain’t that the truth. You get hit over there?”

“Took a frag to half my body. Some bad people put me back together. Felt I… owed them. Did a lot bad things to not so bad guys… They used me man. That’s what I was trying to tell you. I want to get back at them. This is the only way I know how.”

Punisher approached Tommy, then lowered his gun and held out his hand.

“On your feet soldier.” He ordered. Tommy took Punisher’s hand and he pulled him up, handing him back the dog tags. “Too often scumbags up top take advantage of people like us. You get those sons of b**ches. You get every last one of them and don’t you stop until they’re dead or you are. We clear.”

“Sir, yes sir.” Tommy replied. Ghost Rider approached.

“He lives?” He asked.

“Not him Rider. Not tonight.”

“Bah. Machine. No soul to burn anyhow.”

“You’re wrong Rider.” Punisher said. He looked back at Tommy, who walked off into the night. “He’s got a soul. He just has to get it back.”

The End