



“FLIGHT RISK”

A Short Story by
LANCE WOODS

Based on the podcast series
produced by



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Prologue

I wrote the script to “Flight Risk” for the second “season” of the *SuperHuman Times* podcast in 2009. At this writing, it remains unproduced, but as it’s one of my favorite stories featuring two of my favorite heroes, I wanted to give them their due.

If you’re one of the handful to read my 2012 *SuperHuman Times* novel *Heroic Park* (available from Firebringer Press and many other outlets), then you’ve already met Faraz Rastinpour and know how tough & brave this flying superhuman can be. “Flight Risk” predates *Heroic Park*, so there’s a summary of this story in that novel. My thinking was, in using those events to introduce Faraz and establish his character, readers might want to check out the “Flight Risk” podcast after reading *Heroic Park*.

But, like I said, no podcast. Yet, anyway. Sorry.

But here’s the story, just the same.

SuperHuman TimesTM

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“That’s him! That’s the man who was on the wing! Don’t let him leave!”

With that, Congresswoman Margaret Sackler pointed at me from across the terminal. She, her staff and the crowd of reporters had formed a large, disorganized, shouting cluster since their emergency landing at McCarran International Airport. Bunches of other air travelers were either watching the impromptu press conference, or making their way to their own departing flights or (hopefully) arriving luggage.

It was very embarrassing. I'd hoped to look more inconspicuous as I made my way through the terminal. My black flight suit and the helmet I carried looked like something a motorcyclist might wear, and I'd hoped to be taken as one, even at the age of sixty. Of course, the cat with faded orange and white fur riding in the helmet may have looked out of place to some. And the fact that I'm an American citizen who's clearly of Middle Eastern parentage didn't help.

Four members of airport security drew their weapons, none of which were Tasers or stun guns. I did not move.

They ordered me to drop the helmet.

I did not move. After the events that placed me in this position, I was ready to die for my cat.

Before I could utter my last words to the opposing forces, Congresswoman Sackler spoke again: "No! Don't hurt him.

"That man just saved our lives."

She stepped up to me and extended her hand, which I accepted. Our quiet moment was brief; the reporters regrouped around and started shouting questions while taking video and photos. Like a true pro, the congresswoman was camera-ready, standing formally beside us to give everyone a chance to record this meeting.

Concurrently, the reporters shouted out variations of the same questions: "What do you mean, Congresswoman?" "Who is he?" "Was he on the plane with you?"

The congresswoman caught that last one and chuckled. "Yes. He was on the plane.

"On the wing, to be specific."

That triggered even more loud questions, now directed at me, which made me more than slightly uncomfortable than when the security guards moved in. I took a chance and raised my palm, hoping for silence.

To my surprise, I got it.

"My name is Faraz Rastinpour," I said. "And I suppose I did save Congresswoman Sackler's life.

"But it wasn't my idea."

It was, in truth, the idea of a Homeland Security Agent named Richard Cable (according to his I.D.); rather, it was the idea of his superiors, and he was assigned to convey it to me. I remember the day because it was reasonably cool and clear that day; mid-spring highs tended to reach the 80s and I recall thinking how liberating it would be to walk out to one end of the asphalt strip behind my house, sprint as best I could toward the other end, jump up and take a leisurely flight over Mesa or Phoenix.

But I knew that would never happen.

Cable looked like one of the many sunglassed, dark-suited government agents I'd encountered in recent years — tall, well-groomed, no facial hair — and I treated him with courtesy, rather than deference, by inviting him into my home after he stated his purpose for visiting. I do not do this often because I have a rather unusual house. There are almost no walls separating the rooms. In fact, there are no rooms at all, except the large main area and the bathroom, which took some doing. Still, it is clean, with all of the necessary amenities, and Lawrence and I are content.

So, you can imagine my surprise when Lawrence remained content upon the agent's entrance. He brushed gently against the cuff of Cable's navy-blue slacks, mewing.

"Hush, Lawrence, you don't eat for another hour," I told him as I took a pitcher of water from the refrigerator and poured two glasses. "Agent Cable did not bring you food. Although you *are* acting rather peculiar."

"How so?" Cable asked.

"He hasn't hissed at you, Agent Cable. That's his standard greeting to visiting federal agents. He's always suspicious, always protective. It's his nature. I adopted him from Paws for Alarms."

"The shelter that finds security gigs for abandoned, super-powered animals? What's his power?"

"High-density claws. Can tear through anything. Took me a year to teach him the house wasn't a scratching post, which explains why I have so few interior walls now. But that was years ago. Like me, he is an old man now. We make a good team."

"I'm glad Lawrence doesn't consider me a threat."

"Are you here because our government no longer feels that way about me?"

"No one ever said you *were* a threat, sir."

"I mean, Homeland Security sent just one agent out here this time, instead of the usual pair or van-full of agents. Things must be improving."

Cable cleared his throat. "I know our agency wasn't exactly polite to you, or to any Americans of Middle Eastern descent during the superhuman terrorist surge all those years ago, but —"

"I'm lucky not to have spent 'all those years' in a cell," I said politely. "Sometimes I wish I had. My flying school closed down as a 'precaution'. My personal flight clearance revoked. The whispers of people wondering why I didn't do more to help the authorities stop those terrorists ..."

"Sir, there's something you can do *now*. That's why the agency hopes you'll consider our request."

Lawrence looked at me and mewed again.

"I think Lawrence, and I, want to hear more about this man you mentioned outside, this 'Fitzhugh.'"

"Spence Fitzhugh, age 28, civil engineer from Ann Arbor, Michigan. He's been associating with a small group of known anti-government activists."

"Ah, anti-government, so naturally you came to me. Lawrence, you may start hissing at the agent."

Lawrence mewed. Dumb old cat.

"We know you aren't associated with them," Cable said, "But they may try to associate with you. See, Fitzhugh's a low-level superhuman. He can fly. Not too far and not too well, but he has the ability. Our intel says his group wants to use it, if he can find a way to control it and share his knowledge."

"You think the guy may be shopping around for a flight instructor?"

"Back in the day, a lot of superhuman heroes called you the best. Many still do. That's why we think Fitzhugh's coming your way."

"And you want me to notify you when he does?"

"No, Mister Rastinpour," Cable said.

“That’s the last thing we want you to do.”

That was how I enrolled my first student in many years: a budding terrorist.

Spence Fitzhugh presented all of the documents required to take superhuman flight training, just as Cable said he would. They were completely false, provided by a Homeland Security agent who had infiltrated the activists. My “mission” was simple: Teach Fitzhugh everything he wanted to know about flying. Homeland Security would then monitor him via their mole and divine the group’s ultimate plan.

In exchange, the government allowed me to keep Fitzhugh’s enrollment fee as compensation for his time and trouble.

Most importantly, the government restored my flight clearances, with no restrictions at my insistence. The government agreed. This told me that the mission was, indeed, important, and that Fitzhugh was, indeed, potentially dangerous.

I must say that, for a devil, Mister Fitzhugh was a very nice man, and an attentive pupil. He followed my instructions precisely when we flew in tandem, asking questions when clarification or correction was needed. He frequently asked questions about how I trained various superhumans who went on to crimefighting careers, and even inquired about my Islamic faith, because he knew my history with the government. “If more people had asked about Islam years ago, instead of fearing or hating anyone who followed it, things might have been different.”

All the while, as I continued to question the sanity of what I was doing, a prayer from the Quran never left my head:

“Our Lord! Place us not among the people who have been guilty of evildoing.”

For an inexperienced flyer, Fitzhugh mastered basic low-altitude maneuvers quickly and was ready to solo in a matter of weeks. He was a thin man in his 20s, of a build and youth that allowed him the necessary energy for flight.

His first solo went quite well; he sounded calm and controlled when we spoke via radio.

"Looking good, Mister Fitzhugh," I said into my radio. He was a black speck over the horizon, growing quickly. "Maintain your descent angle and speed."

Fitzhugh replied via a similar unit in his helmet. "Thanks! When do I get to learn some serious acrobatic moves? You know, like they used in the old superhuman dogfights?"

"When I feel like teaching them to you. Time for your landing."

"Roger that." By now, Fitzhugh was close enough to be a humanoid figure in a protective black flight suit and helmet, flying unassisted through the sky face-down. As he closed in on the runway, he rapidly executed a controlled descent, pivoting his body at such an angle that his feet were aiming at the tarmac. When he was within inches of the surface, he shifted himself enough so that, once his feet touched the ground, he absorbed the shock of the impact by breaking into a short run that took him to the end of the runway, where I met him.

"Thirsty? I have water back at the house. We can toast the end of your basic training."

"Sounds good," Fitzhugh said. I remember him trying not to pant from excitement as he unlocked and removed his helmet. "So, when can we start the advanced lessons?"

"After you return to your home and rest for a day or two."

"A *day* or two?"

"You're in a hurry?"

“Well ... frankly, yes, Mister Rastinpour. See, there’s a business opportunity, a delivery service looking for franchisees immediately. But I need to be certified before I can join their training program.”

“You’ll have stiff competition, Mister Fitzhugh. Lot of superhuman courier services out there.”

“Weren’t there a lot of superhuman flight instructors around when *you* started out?”

“I didn’t exactly ‘start out’ as an instructor,” I said. “I managed a movie theatre in my youth. Every now and then, I’d fly through town carrying banners to advertise the movie, special promotions, that kind of thing. Sometimes I’d do some stunts, acrobatics to get attention. One day, some kid asked me to show him how to do them, I did, and a couple years later ... Fly-by Knight.”

“*You* trained the Fly-by Knight? No way!”

“Other superhumans asked him where he learned to fly, he sent them to me, and the rest is ancient history.”

“Not to your students. I read an interview with some ex-hero in *The SuperHuman Times* who mentioned your name. That’s what got me to look you up on the registry.”

“Ah, yes, the national superhuman registry. Once you go public with your powers and start flying professionally, you’ll probably have to sign on, too.”

“I thought it was voluntary. At least, until that congresswoman, Sackler, gets into the White House.”

“Allah, protect us,” I muttered to myself, “if she runs.”

“You don’t like the Superhuman Surveillance Act, either, huh?” Fitzhugh asked.

"I disagree with it," I said. "She thinks the government should know who and where the most powerful people on the planet are at all times. 'Makes them easier to find in an emergency,' she says. I find that idea to be somewhat intrusive. Plus, I don't like the idea of potentially being on call just for being different. She's met with considerable resistance in Congress now, but if she wins the White House ..."

"So, if something kept her from making her formal announcement in L.A. in a few weeks, you wouldn't be disappointed?"

"Well, I wouldn't want her to die. That would just make her a martyr and possibly encourage someone else to take up the fight, someone worse. I just wish she could be, I don't know, enlightened. Maybe by a member of her family, or a colleague she respects. Maybe if she fell down the Capitol steps and got treated by a superhuman doctor while she was in a full body cast, she would reconsider her position, and people like us."

"Guess it all depends on who can get to her first," Fitzhugh said.

Our lessons continued. Now that the training was focused on higher altitudes — to better outfly other couriers on longer routes between cities, Fitzhugh claimed — I flew with him at all times, staying in constant contact via our helmet radios. I provided upgraded flight suits with thick linings and a special, non-reflective coating to keep them from interfering with aircraft radar. These were augmented by compact oxygen tanks and breathing equipment, as required by the FAA of aircraft, and superhumans without the ability to compensate for the conditions, flying at 12,000-14,000 feet. Once Fitzhugh was accustomed to the higher climes, I showed him how to fly with packages of various weights so that he would be able to manage his deliveries.

At Fitzhugh’s insistence, I also taught him several “dogfighting” maneuvers that he’d researched, moves that he used to teach the heroes who studied with him. Some were widely used by military aircraft — the pitchback, the yo-yo, the defensive split — and, I assumed, could be easily countered by skilled pilots if Fitzhugh was caught using the moves in the service of the activists.

Cautiously, I taught Fitzhugh some maneuvers I previously reserved for his more heroic superhuman customers: the Busiek Spiral, the Hudson Power Dive Recovery, the Vandamm Split. While Fitzhugh might employ these moves for purposes unknown, I could not help but be pleased that he was able to complete each one.

And, to be honest, I was pleased because, at my age, I could still perform them myself.

After each lesson, I contacted Agent Cable to report on Fitzhugh’s progress, and every night, despite any misgivings I expressed, Cable reassured me the same way:

“Where our people are concerned, this plan is going perfectly.”

“Mister Rastinpour? Agent Charlotte Mattingly, Homeland Security.” She was a woman in her thirties with short blonde hair, a deep tan and plain features. She presented her identification. “That’s Agent Hubbard over there by the car,” she said of a tall, stocky man standing next to the driver’s side door. Both wore dark suits, but that probably goes without saying.

Roughly two months had passed since I signed Fitzhugh’s final certification and sent him off with good wishes for his delivery venture. I assumed this was some kind of follow-up visit, but wondered why Agent Cable hadn’t returned.

"We just wanted to let you know we were in the area, sir," Mattingly said. "As a flyer, I'm assuming you received the aviation bulletin that went out in this region a month or so ago. About the campaign flight that would be —"

"Ah, yes, Congresswoman Sackler's presidential campaign fundraiser in Los Angeles." I had to smile. "And you're here to make sure her plane isn't bothered by a known flying superhuman of Iranian-American origin who might object to the SSA?"

She permitted herself a tight, regulation smile. "Just a precaution, sir."

"No offense taken, Agent Mattingly. Despite my feelings toward the congresswoman and her policies, I have no intention of harming her."

I didn't pay attention when Lawrence decided to poke his head between my legs to see our latest visitor. But that old cat got everyone's attention when he suddenly jumped backward into the house, fixed his eyes on Mattingly, and let out a long and nasty hiss.

Mattingly smiled again, slightly more relaxed. "It's okay. Lawrence has his own dossier. We figured he might react this way."

"Strange. He didn't react that way to Agent Cable."

"Who, sir?"

"Richard Cable. From your Phoenix bureau? He's on the Fitzhugh case?"

"Mister Rastinpour, I've been with the Phoenix bureau for three years now and I don't know of any 'Fitzhugh case' or any agents named Cable. Can you describe him?"

"Easily. Tall, conservative hair, dark suit. You know, standard issue for your male agents, right down to the holographic seal on the I.D. He didn't really stand out to me, either."

"Would you have some record of this agent? Maybe some video from a home security camera?"

I gestured to the surrounding desert. “I’m sorry, Agent Mattingly, but intruders really aren’t a problem for me. No cameras. And you’re beginning to scare me.”

“Handwriting, perhaps?”

“No, he was only here once and didn’t write or sign anything. I did speak with him several times by phone, though.”

“You have his number?”

I nodded and gestured for her to follow me into the house. She did the same for Agent Hubbard. I led them to my phone stand — Lawrence continued to hiss quietly from across the room — and showed them the business card that Cable left with me.

Mattingly blinked in reserved surprise. “Hubbard, you got a card handy?”

“Sure.” The big agent reached into his jacket and produced one of his own business cards. Mattingly held Cable’s up beside it. I moved into a position where I could see both cards.

They looked identical to me ... until I read the phone number that each card had for the Phoenix HSA bureau.

They didn’t match.

Mattingly passed Cable’s card to Hubbard. “Call it in,” she said. Hubbard fished a cell phone out of his suit jacket and hit a speed dial key.

“Mister Rastinpour,” Mattingly said, “I need to ask you some questions about this man Cable, and this other person you mentioned — ‘Fitzhugh’, was it?”

“Yes, ma’am, Spence Fitzhugh. Agent Cable sent him to me for —”

Something in my brain told me to stop talking. If Cable wasn’t a real agent, then neither was my authorization to fly, much less teach Fitzhugh.

And if Cable wasn’t a real agent, Fitzhugh might not be a real entrepreneur.

His words came back to me: *“If something kept her from making her formal announcement in L.A. in a few weeks, you wouldn’t be disappointed?”*

“Guess it all depends on who can get to her first.”

“Number’s dead,” Hubbard said, replacing his phone.

Although that news troubled me, I fought to keep my voice steady and neutral. “I have much to tell you, Agent Mattingly,” I said. “We may be a while. I will need to use the bathroom first. I’ll be just a second.”

“That’s fine, Mister Rastinpour, but —”

I walked to the bathroom as casually as I could. “There’s ice water in the refrigerator and clean glasses in the cabinet above the sink. Feel free to help yourselves.” I turned the doorknob, opened the door and stepped in, pausing only briefly to yell behind me, “Lawrence, stay!”

Lawrence did. Since I closed the door behind me, I have no idea if he did any more hissing.

My flight suit and helmet hung from pegs above the inside of the bathroom doorway, where I hung them after cleaning and checking them after Fitzhugh’s lessons. Since I had years of practice in the event Lawrence and I needed to evacuate due to weather or some other kind of emergency, I was able to get into my rig without making undue noise. Then I strapped on a small, emergency tank of oxygen that I kept under the bathroom sink, prayed that I was still thin enough to climb out of my small, square bathroom window, then rejoiced once I landed on the other side.

I knew the agents would quickly realize I was gone, so I didn’t bother using my runway. I just ran as fast as I could, jumped and launched myself into the sky. I may not have had the thrust

of a younger flyer, but I hoped that the past few months of training Fitzhugh had retrained me. Once I was airborne, I activated the heads-up display that framed the view through my visor. Among the displays it provides is radar for a three-hundred-mile radius. I’ve known the commercial air routes for years in order to avoid them. Now, that knowledge was helping me to compute the course of the congresswoman’s plane. Phoenix is just under four hundred miles from L.A., for which I was thankful; the plane would likely be starting its descent and no longer be at a higher cruising altitude. That would put less stress on me as I tried to catch the plane — or, rather, to catch Fitzhugh, if he was chasing it.

He was, and he wasn’t alone. When I spotted him, he flew about a mile behind the 737 carrying the congresswoman and, presumably, many other innocent people. Another man flew beside him, in formation. Both of them wore flight suits and helmets similar to mine, but colored in dark green. Each wore a small oxygen tank, which told me they planned to act soon. We all stood out against the clear blue sky, which I knew would be helpful to any jet fighters sent in by Mattingly and Hubbard to shoot us down.

I stayed behind and above them to avoid detection and verbally activated the scanner in my helmet radio. It’s a nice option that keeps me apprised of air traffic in the vicinity so that I don’t get sucked into a turbine. It zeroed in on the frequency of Fitzhugh’s radio in no time.

But the first voice wasn’t Fitzhugh’s. “Didn’t that old man teach you to go faster than this?”

Cable.

I was starting to look forward to this encounter.

“What were we paying for all this time?” Cable asked.

“I thought we were paying him to teach me so I could teach you how to do this,” Fitzhugh said. “We don’t want to get *too* close. These suits shouldn’t get picked up on their radar, but why take chances now?”

“Old man Rastinpour teach you that little trick, too? Sounds like something a terrorist would come up with.”

“Maybe you should deport his sad old ass back to Iran, Homeland Security.”

They laughed. I didn’t.

“You ready?” Fitzhugh said. “We should make our move before we get too close to LAX.”

Cable flashed a thumbs-up. “Going on radio silence.”

Fitzhugh returned the gesture. They began to accelerate toward the plane, their helmets facing forward as they flew in a straight line, closing in on their target.

They should have looked up.

While they congratulated themselves, I was able to gain altitude and catch up to them, then I angled my body, slapped my hands against my sides and dropped like a missile through the sky, aiming to split them apart.

I miscalculated my angle slightly and ended up slamming into one of them, knocking him downward and away from the other. I couldn’t see either face through their tinted visors, so I didn’t know which one I’d hit, and was holding on to, until I heard him over the radio.

“Dammit, what the —” It was Cable. “*You!*”

“Yeah! Let’s see you deport my sad old ass back to Iran now!” I think it was when I said “Iran” that I realized how angry I was about his deception. I’d punctuated my greeting with several punches into the center of his visor. Those things are very strong, but I was mad enough

to shatter it, and knock him out in the process. His oxygen mask was intact, though. As much as I hated him, I couldn't just let him fall, so I felt around his suit, pulled what I thought might be a parachute ripcord.

As I held us aloft and felt along his flight suit for a ripcord, I had to remind myself that it would be fruitless: he wouldn't think he needed a parachute because he could fly.

But I found something more interesting than a ripcord: a cell phone attached with Velcro to a vest that he wore over the flight suit. The outside of the vest was lined with pouches. I opened one and pulled out a three-inch square, flat block of a malleable substance with what looked like a small electronic device embedded in it.

Cable was a bomb. The vest held the explosives, and the cell phone was the detonator.

This was a suicide mission.

And Fitzhugh wasn't coming after him, so the mission was probably still on.

I looked up as the jet pulled away. Fitzhugh closed in on it.

I had to let go of Cable. For a second that seemed like an hour, I watched him drop away. I wanted to help him, fly him back to my house and the agents, or just *wake him up*, but Fitzhugh was approaching the tail assembly, and there was no time.

I aimed myself at Fitzhugh and hurled myself upwards. (In case you ever wondered how flying superhumans are able to thrust and brake in mid-air, I refer you to the many texts available that discuss the physics of superhuman abilities. Dr. Whitman Wheeler's *Superhumans and What Makes Them Go* is my favorite.) My intention was to charge him from below and to one side so that I could knock him clear of the jet and avoid striking any of its control surfaces.

The element of surprise wasn't with me this time. When I was a second away from him, Fitzhugh turned, saw me, and evaded me with one of the acrobatic moves I taught him, the Busiek Maneuver.

Fortunately, I never taught him the counter-maneuver. I calculated where he would complete the maneuver and reached that point just as he did. I guessed that his cell phone would be located similarly to Cable's; judging from the way Fitzhugh struggled when I reached for that spot, it seemed like a good guess. We wrestled and spun around madly for a minute, rolling in midair rather than flying, and forgetting about the plane until we found ourselves clearing the horizontal stabilizer and tumbling down onto the wing.

We rolled briefly, toward the fuselage, and I was vaguely aware of faces crowding against the windows, watching us. By the time we stopped rolling at the juncture of the wing and the fuselage, Fitzhugh wasn't going for his detonator, but for a small pistol that he produced from the flight suit and began to press towards my helmet visor, determined that his shot would not be carried off by the winds around us.

I stopped searching his vest for a cell phone and grabbed his arm. This was the worst possible time to feel like an old man but, after all of this activity, I could offer very little resistance.

That's when I heard the hiss, and a large, orange and white blur of fuzz landed on the back of Fitzhugh's vest and flight suit and began tearing into him. You may recall that I told Cable how Lawrence tended to be protective of me. And that he used to be a security cat. And that he had super-dense, and super-sharp, claws.

What I did *not* tell him was that Lawrence could also fly and that — thankfully — he also didn't know the meaning of the word “stay”.

In any event, Lawrence gave me, and the folks aboard the jet, an amazing show. When he first sank his claws into Fitzhugh’s back, I could hear my former student shriek through his visor and over the air rushing past us. He dropped his gun and flailed as he tried to reach behind him to unset Lawrence, but feline determination prevailed. He shredded the back of Fitzhugh’s rig, then sailed around to the front and slashed across his chest, then swooped around and began smashing his helmet.

I used Lawrence’s distraction to finally tear Fitzhugh’s cell phone off his vest, then — satisfied that he was suitably dazed — kicked him squarely in the visor and away from the plane. He dropped away quickly. I don’t know if he was conscious, or if he survived the fall, and I didn’t care. He and Cable wouldn’t be blowing anyone up.

Thanks to my brave cat, who stared back at the passengers on the jet until I scooped him up into my arms and flew off.

Seeing as I was exhausted, and I was within sight of LAX, my plan was simple: find the terminal’s shuttles to its rental car facilities, rent a car, drive to a pet-friendly hotel (I used Cable’s cell phone to locate one nearby), recuperate overnight, and drive home. I was very tired, so flying to the airport’s offsite car rental car facility under my own power did not even occur to me. I simply touched down, removed my helmet, let Lawrence curl up inside it, and entered the terminal in search of a quiet area. I hoped that the boarding area to the shuttles would be nowhere near whatever gate would be accommodating Congresswoman Sackler, her staff, and the other passengers of that jet.

Instead, I miscalculated, which is how I became — in her words — “that man”.

There were, of course, many questions from many people — Homeland Security, the FAA, the press, neighbors, and even superhuman former students I’d not heard from in years. I answered all of them truthfully, knowing that several dozen witnesses with their noses against the windows of that threatened jet could, and did, corroborate my story, as did the remains of Cable and Fitzhugh upon their recovery.

Speaking of those two: it seems like Congresswoman Sackler’s presidential bid has hit a bit of a bump. In addition to my statement about the events, I gave the authorities the cell phones that I took from Cable and Fitzhugh. Since they figured on blowing themselves up with the jet, they didn’t bother to wipe any phone numbers from their call histories. I guess they figured that evidence would get blown up with them.

The authorities traced one of those numbers to a senior member of the Sackler campaign — her campaign manager, in fact. Seems he has a few superhumans in his family tree that he’s never told her about, probably because he wanted to get close enough to disrupt her anti-superhuman agenda. He’s charged with conspiring with the activists by providing them with a flight plan and itinerary. He was willing to die alongside her, and them, for the cause. I would imagine that he will die in federal prison instead.

And the congresswoman has announced a “temporary suspension” to her campaign while she finds a replacement. She confided to me that the pause should give her time to “revisit the legislation”, as she promised me she would after we saved her life.

For now, however, Lawrence and I have been invited to Washington by the department Secretary so that he can congratulate us personally and issue an official proclamation restoring

my flight clearance. Agent Mattingly has told me that she’s heard “chatter” about some kind of Presidential medal, proposed by none other than Congresswoman Sackler, but the knowledge that the woman behind the Superhuman Surveillance Act was saved by a superhuman is thanks enough.

One thing that was made quite clear to me from this misadventure: I am no longer in any condition for long-distance flying. Therefore, I — and my “emotional support animal”, Lawrence — will utilize more conventional means to travel from Phoenix to Washington, which departs momentarily.

In other words, once again, we have a plane to catch.

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