It CAN Get Weirder!

by orphan_account

Summary

The Amazing Spider-Ham gets into a tussle with Doctor Octo-pussy Cat (oh yeah, THAT'S a real character) and finds himself transformed... into a Spider-Man? Come on, that pig thing was his whole shtick! According to a brand new map-goober combo device, the key to becoming his best (read: pig) self again is located in a strange, nearly-abandoned universe, quarantined from other universes by force. Spider-Ham--wait, no, Spider-Ham-Man? Is going to need some help from a few old friends--and a Private Eye who looks really cute under that mask.

Notes

Hey peeps! For context, this fic is alive because I have entered myself into a competition with my friends: we each chose a fandom, and were given two random characters from it (excluding anything reeeeally gross) and whoever writes the best fic about whatever horrible concoction they're given gets $50. You can, uh, probably guess which pairing I got. Stay
tuned.
Prologue: Cat-and-Piggy Show

Have you ever really looked at yourself in the mirror? Have you taken a gander at your own weird, fleshy oval of a face and spindly little monkey hands? What about your elbows? Why are they so crusty? And don't get me started on the back: no tail. No tail, just a smooth patch of hide, maybe an embarrassing tattoo you thought was a good idea when you were eighteen but only exists now to prove that you are too broke to fix it.

To clarify: that last paragraph was meant specifically for humans. Humans are reading this, right?

Let's take it from the top!

"You know, for a guy named after a James Bond movie, you aren't really bo--"

Peter Porker wheezed as the tentacle slammed him into the wall, knocking the breath from his lungs.

Doctor Octo-pussy Cat, a deranged scientist unjustly saddled with both the best and the worst name ever, loomed over him, cackling.

"Can't even get a good quip in," Peter wheezed, snorting a puff of plaster dust from his nose.

The lair wasn't one of the best he'd ever fought in, but it was serviceable: there was a kitchen, if the tuna smell wafting from one door was any indication, and the row of blinking buttons dominating the far wall cast a rainbow of gleaming light into an otherwise dark room. He'd even been able to stow an anvil in the ceiling, just in case. He snapped a hand out and yanked himself away just as another arm came smashing down where his head had been.

"This isn't your usual setup," Peter called, dodging and weaving across the ceiling. He pulled a mallet from his pocket and used it to knock one of the arms completely off with a BLAM. "What exactly are you doing in here, Doc?"

"You could barely comprehend it, Spider-Ham," mewed Doc Ock, licking his lips. "You embrace this universe like a fool, when there are so many ripe for the plucking!"

"News flash, Doc Ock, we can't go to other universes without a massive collider!" Peter said. His ears pricked; he didn't need his spidey sense to tell him that there was a monologue coming.

"But we can!" snarled Doc Ock, pushing himself upward. "Why would I settle for this Looney-Tunes ripoff when there are universes that make sense out there? Ones where my genius would be feared, not some gag from a Saturday morning kids' show!"

"Doc, you're a literal cartoon cat," Peter said, "but hey, if you want to branch out, you could always do some of those Tender Centers cat treats commercials--"

With a snarl, Doc Ock grabbed Peter's arm and threw him down, jarring the breath from his lungs. He groaned and shoved himself to the side, trying to catch his breath. Doc Ock was really playing to win, huh?

A clawed metal hand closed around his throat and pinned him to the floor. "I have no interest in you anymore, pig," the mad scientist said, scruffy black fur reeking of motor oil and sweat. "I will be a
god, entering every universe where I do not already exist at will. And you'll be nothing but a running gag. Get it? Gag? I can make jokes TOO, Spider-Ham!"

"HKKK--very funny!" Peter felt spots in his vision as he scrabbled at the floor. He heard a faint beeping, and an ominous whirring, like a fan ready to overheat. The lights of the control panel grew brighter. The floor began to shake--or maybe that was his body, quivering from the lack of oxygen. Either way, it was bad.

"Ksh--What's going on?" he gagged.

"Don't you mean what's up, Doc?" Ock laughed uproariously and threw a few switches. The hold on Peter's neck grew just a bit weaker; Peter's hand twitched. If he could just hit that red, glowing off switch--what, don't all machines have a red, glowing off switch?--with a web, he'd be out of here in minutes. As it was, he was trapped, and the freaky universe hopping machine Doc had come up with was about to woosh his arch nemesis into an alternate dimension, if Peter had heard that monologue correctly.

As Doc muttered to himself, Pete inched along the floor, peering up through his mask to ensure that the cat didn't notice. The hold became even lighter, and Peter had his senses back in full: he could now see that the dashboard had various labels, along with a diagram of some kind, and an interface spilling enough green-on-black code to make the Matrix blush.

_Geez, they oughta update their design_, Peter thought. He looked down at his hand. Did he have enough web fluid to even make the shot?

He hated long fights. It was always a %@!! of a lot more fun to drop a piano on a guy and call it a day.

It was his only shot, though. He leaned over and winced with pain, pulling up his hand to hit the button--

"I'd best stand back," Ock said, grinning like a madcat. Which he certainly was.

Peter bit his tongue, aimed, and called:

"That's all, folks!"

Ock whirled. Peter clicked, just as his arm was jostled by the motion. The doctor's expression turned from shock to horror as the glob sailed through the air--

And just to the left of the red button. Right onto the big, green ON button.

_Yikes._

The cat howled with laughter as Peter's eyes went wide. A muffled "whoops!" escaped his lips as the room began to really shake, jarring him from his stupor. He frantically fired a few more shots, all of which missed the mark and landed on the floor next to Doc, and scrabbled backward as Doc lifted his arms in celebration.

"What the h@#* did you do, Frankenstein?" Spider-Ham shouted, the kid-friendly censors barring him from using the only language appropriate for the situation. The machine crackled with blue electricity, the same sort of stuff that kid Miles had supposedly been able to use. He'd never gotten to see it, but he was sure it looked like that.

"I'll be a god!" Doc shouted, which, frankly, was not an answer at all, and was the sort of weird
gritty stuff that didn't belong in this universe.

The panels of lights slid apart, revealing a cylindrical compartment covered in small, circular sensors.

Doc began to enter just as Peter pushed himself to his feet.

"Goodbye, Peter!" Ock smiled, on the threshold of the machine. "I'm sorry to tell you this, but you're almost certainly going to die, standing where you are now. Or at least be knocked into a coma."

Ock's cackle tapered off as Peter got to his feet, peering up into the ceiling.

"Actually, Doc... what's your stance on head trauma?"

The anvil, unsettled by the shaking of the room, chose that exact moment to fall, raising a bump on the cat's head.

"Whuh?" Doc groaned. He met Peter's eyes with a look of bleary hate before collapsing in a heap. Peter might have found it funny if the machine weren't still VERY active and VERY evil sounding.

"Okay, now comes the hard part! Whoopee!" Peter threw himself to his feet and began skimming his hands over the machine. Oh, yeah! The off!

He took out the mallet and slammed it down on the red button. Nothing. He tried putting his hand over it. Nothing. He tried webbing it, yelling at it, seducing it--hey, it worked in DnD that one time--and generally harassing it, but it remained stoically red. The cylindrical compartment glowed a bright blue, and Peter winced as he remembered Doc's words about the whole dying business.

"Well, I guess--" a beam fell from the ceiling. Peter yelped.

"Alright, into the coffin we go! Woohoo!" Peter ducked into the cold of the compartment as a hunk of metal slammed down where he'd been standing. He covered his head and rocked back and forth: a strategy fit for dealing with many of life's issues. Alarms blared. Outside, someone shouted. What the #$@! was happening out there? The lights on the control panel REALLY weren't adequate, now that he thought about it.

He was relieved for just a moment when the door slammed, trapping him in the room. Then he realized that he was trapped in the room. He ran to the door and beat fists against it, yelling for help. Of course, knowing Doc, this thing was probably soundproof, to avoid anyone hearing anything embarrassing, like screams of agony (in case the experiment went horribly wrong) which it most certainly might.

He turned away from the door and noticed a tiny screen, flashing information like a wanton encyclopedia. Earth-something. Picture of Peter Parker--not Peter PORKER, but a Peter Parker, with brown hair and a general human-y look to him, along with a brief description of a world. So this was a dimensional gateway? How the #@##*& was it so tiny? He pushed against the screen, but it didn't react. Wherever this thing was going, he was going with it.

He looked back out, at Doc Ock's prone body, and winced. "Hasta le vista, kitty," he said, giving a nervous wave.

Then there was a loud noise, and after that, $l-l:t got really weird.
Chapter Summary

I'm planning to make this thing ten chapters, so stick around. Also, they'll be a lot longer as this goes on. You're in for a wild ride.

Have a great #&%^?& day!
Chapter One: Hey, Remember That Hobo Guy?

Chapter Summary

Peter Porker wakes up... changed. He meets an old friend and a new... "friend?"

Chapter Notes

Just a heads up, the "first" chapter was actually the prologue, in case you were confusion. Thanks for reading, kids, and remember to NEVER trust anyone named Wade!

Whatever that machine was, it needed some #@^& shock absorbers.
Through the tiny window, Peter could see flashes of neon light and pockets of shadow, slashed through with bright white. The machine whirled, sending him against another wall and sending his teeth skittering in his jaw. He could practically hear the comical cartoon birds that were flying around his head as he tried--and failed miserably--to push himself into a standing position.
“Okay. Okay. Okay. Okaaaaay--” he inhaled and exhaled rapidly, which did nothing to actually calm his panic. “Come on, Pete, think. Think! Controls, controls…”
His eyes snapped open. “The screen! Right!”
He struck out with a burst of web fluid and pulled, but the machine pulled forward, flinging him against the wall with enough G-Force to make him squeal in pain. He shoved himself onto his back and peered at the far wall, stretching out a hand. No use. D@^& his tiny, adorable arms!
The machine careened again, and he groaned as he skidded to the left wall of what he’d decided to call the MurderCoffin 2000. Well, he was getting somewhere. Shouldn’t tech this futuristic have more controls? A better handle? Or even--
Oh, that was a thought.
“Heya, doll! Computer, I mean? Where are we going?”
For a moment, all he could hear was the roar of the multiverse outside, then a voice like a cat being mashed through a telephone receiver responded:
“Earth, multiverse--” Peter didn’t catch that part. “ONE Peter B. Parker, alias Spider-Man. This universe’s Doc Ock is out of commission.”
“Out of whatnow?” Peter asked, before the MurderCoffin took a death spiral and sent Peter facefirst into the ceiling.
The computer didn’t respond, and Peter groaned.
“Thanks a little, buddy. You and I are gonna be friends.”
That time, he really didn’t expect a response, and really, what the Computer said next wasn’t a response at all, but it did say something:
“ENTERING TIME-SPACE LOCALITY. BEGIN COMPATIBILITY MODIFICATION.”
“Amigo, pal, you have to start explaining things sometime!” Peter said. He rolled toward the screen, extending a hand, and managed to brush a finger across the surface. Then he was jerked back.
“NOW this is getting old!” Peter shouted, despite the fact that it had been getting old for the past however-many-minutes he’d been hurtling through the multiverse. He cocked an eyebrow when he stopped before hitting the wall, suspended in the center of the pod.
The porous lights circling the capsule exploded with vibrant green pinpoints, circling his porcine
form like jade beetles. Some kind of science-magic probe? Probably.
“Something strange is afoot in the MurderCoffin, eh?” He called.
“ANALYSIS COMPLETE. MAY GOD HAVE MERCY ON YOUR SOUL.”
“Hey, uhh, Murder C.? What the actual--”
The feeling was like having an anvil slammed onto your head, but from the inside, and at every imaginable angle. He yelped and bit his tongue as a feeling somewhere between pain and agony ricocheted through his limbs like a ping-pong ball (or, rather, 50 ping pong balls, all attached to hornet swarms and tubes of Icy Hot).
He was aware of being spun around, up, down, but only dimly, through a haze of absolute confusion. He pinned his ears back to his head and tried to throw himself out of the middle of the MurderCoffin only to find himself unable to even twitch his finger. His atoms were losing their minds. Did atoms have minds?
His own thoughts burst out in spidery-fireworks, like someone had released a stick of dynamite in his head (and, knowing Doc Ock, that might have been the case).
Heeeey, what’d Doctor Octor put in this wacky multiversetimes device anyway? Flybrainium? Catamantium? Maybe it’s just full of beeiees. What’s up, Doc? Is this coffin full of beeieees? Did you get a good deal on it because there was a bee hive inside the warp core? A buncha bees just ready to beat the tar out of an unsuspecting pig? Where do bees go when they die? Bee heaven? Bird heaven? Wait, that’s birds and bees! Can’t have that on a Saturday morning funnymetime cartoon!
Hehe! Don’t listen to me, boys and girls! That’s a question to ask your mom and dad, or your dad and dad, or your mom and mom, alright? Don’t write into your local station to complain. The bees wouldn’t be jazzed about that. Oink oink! I’M GOING TO DIE.
All of the synapses in Peter’s brain decided to turn out the lights at once just as the pod jarred on something solid.
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Something was moving around outside.
“Five more minutes, Ma, I don’t wanna go to school,” Peter groaned. He rolled to his side with no effort of his own as something rolled whatever he was locked in--oh right, that MurderCoffin--over.
Outside, he could hear someone grunting with exertion, and he rolled directly onto his face to avoid the light. His snout didn’t get in his way, somehow. It was a minor relief in an otherwise terrible day.
“Don’t worry, buddy, we’re gonna get you the hell out of here,” the voice said.
The shock of the censor-less swear word was beaten only by the simultaneous shock of A) recognizing that slightly gruff, yet reassuring voice and B) hearing the door wrenched open as Hobo Peter B., as he’d so lovingly dubbed this particular universe’s Spider-Man, leaned into the pod.
Spider-Ham flipped himself onto his back and held up a hand, shielding his eyes from the sun. He heard PB whistle above him, and felt the tingle of his spider-senses reacting to the other, more human-y Petes.
“You’re like me,” PB breathed.
Peter Porker’s brow furrowed. “Of course I am! It’s me, as in the ONLY whimsical and wacky talking pig you know?”
There was a silence, and Peter finally met PB’s eyes.
“Woah,” he said, “Peter B., when did you learn to clean up so nice? Lookin’ sharp.”
It was true: PB had trimmed his beard so that the stubble was even and clean, and his skin no longer looked like a dermatologist’s sleep paralysis vision. Was this actually his PB? Maybe he’d fallen into a kinda-similar universe.
“What, Spider-Ham?” PB asked, confused.
“Ding ding di--” he coughed and wheezed. His chest felt odd. So did his whole body, really. He felt gawky and dazed.
PB laughed aloud. “No, no no. Come on, really, what universe are you from? What’s different there?” He peered at the pod, and rapped a hand against it. “And how did you make this?”
“I didn’t make it, and this IS me, Hobo Spider-Man!” Peter pushed himself up on his elbows.
“Ouch,” PB said, unimpressed. “So, what’s your universe’s, uh, thing?”
“I. Am. Spider. Ham.” It felt like repeating a lesson about grammar to a six year old. He kicked his legs—which, for some reason, felt gangly and disconnected—and tried to stand, only to collapse forward. PB put a steadying hand on his shoulder and started to help him out.

“Hey, woah, woah, woah. I got you. Look, dimensional warping is a weird thing. You’re probably delirious, for all I know. Let’s get you inside.”

Spider-Ham crossed his arms. He felt tall, and when he climbed out of the pod, he found that he really was a few heads taller, unless his memory was a little off. He went with the latter explanation and grumbled for a moment before launching into a rant:

“LOOK, PB. I don’t know if you need to get your weird little human eyes checked out by an ophthalmologist for humans—”

“We just call them ophthalmologists.” PB folded his arms.

“—but it IS me. I was there with lil’ Peni and that version of you that was all tall, grimdark and handsome and Gwen and Miles, and I beat the crap out of some bug guy who had very backwards ideas about cartoons, and I sat on Noir’s shoulders and I gave Miles my mallet when I left! It is ME, and you’re acting all whacko for no reason!”

For the second time since he’d started talking, PB was totally silent. Peter turned to find PB looking as though he’d just woken in the middle of the night to find that his home had been painted bright orange for no reason—or, to put it simply, generally distressed and baffled beyond measure.

“Ah, okay, I have my, uhh, phone here,” PB fumbled and reached into his well-concealed suit pocket, muttering useless jargon to himself. His eyes were wide beneath a furrowed brow. Peter Porker tapped his foot and put his hands on his hips as PB unlocked the phone, which had a picture of his ex-wife on the screen.

“Hey, how’s MJ doing, by the way?” Peter’s voice lost some of its irritated edge as he waited for PB to hand him the phone.

“We’re… working it out.” PB smiled, just for a moment, then his face dropped as he handed the phone to Peter.

It was open to the camera app. Porker brought it up, glaring at PB, and then stopped dead just as his eyes hit the camera.

There was a picture of a confused, brown-haired man on the screen. The man resembled PB just a bit, with a similar (though more upturned) nose, about the same pink-peach skin characteristic of a lot of “white” human-people, and brown eyes. Peter held the picture very still in his hands, wondering what to do.

Peter snorted through his nose. The picture snorted back.

“Whassah?” Peter tossed the phone away. PB swore and caught it with a web before it bounced on the concrete. Peter Porker barely noticed, feeling dread kicking up and down his spine like an overexcited salsa dancer.

He put a hand up to touch his head and reeled back. That was a five-fingered hand right there. Definitely five whole pokeroos. His arms were longer, and he fully slapped himself as he felt for a snout. Nope. Nose. A slightly upturned nose.

That “picture” had been PB’s open, front-facing IPhone camera.

“Woah, okay, calm down,” PB said, talking to himself as well as Peter Porker.

“CALM?!” Shouted Peter. It echoed. He whirled around to find that they were on the top of some sort of apartment building, high in the air. A flock of pigeons scattered from the place where his MurderCoffin had impacted.

“How am I supposed to be calm?!” Peter went on. He scrambled back, almost unbalancing. Taller. He felt like he was six $#@$& feet tall, even though humans would think he was short for one of them: he only came up to PB’s chest.

“Okay, so clearly something insane happened to you! Okay, great, just the kind of stuff I need after EVERYTHING ELSE that’s been going on lately.” PB said.

“This isn’t my fault! I was trying to stop Doc Ock in my universe and I sorta fell into this MurderCoffin and WHAM! I’m apparently one of YOU GUYS, now!” Peter shouted, spinning in place.
“And what do you mean, everything else?” Peter went on, “I thought you said you and MJ were doing okay, working stuff out?”

“Yeah, we are!” PB snapped. “But there’s someone—someone I knew a while ago—and he’s been getting into a lot of shit with villains lately, because he’s a dumbass, and I’ve been having to help hide him!”

“Well, sorry, but I’m not too concerned about your irresponsible superhero pals right now! I AM SUPPOSED TO BE A PIG.” Peter said, falling onto his back in defeat.

PB leaned over him, looking guilty. “Okay. Okay. I’ll focus on you. There’s got to be a way to get you back to normal, and back where you belong. Right? I’m sure this will be fine. Now can we please just go inside my apartment, talk about this? I don’t have the energy to keep YELLING!”

“THEN WHY ARE YOU—”

Another face leaned over Peter, right next to PB.

“Heya, shnookums!” The stranger said.

PB jumped back and into a defensive stance, and Peter slid backward. The newcomer laughed.

“How did you get here?” PB said, lowering his arms.

“I smelled a plot brewing,” said “Wade,” who was seeming more familiar to Spider-Ham by the second.

“Yeah, there’s something brewing, alright! Something that smells a lot like… I can’t think of a good simile, but I’m SUPPOSED TO BE A PIG.” Peter said, jumping to his feet. The newcomer wore a red hoodie, and his face looked a bit like someone had kicked it with a poker-hot steel-toed boot a few dozen times ten years back, but he was smiling broadly.

“Oh, I know!” Wade said. “You’re Spider-Ham!”

Peter Porker’s brain paused to collect itself. He turned to PB.

“How… does this guy know who I am before you do?”

“One of his many talents,” PB visibly sagged. Wade laughed.

“Sweet of you to say,” he said, wrapping an arm around his hobo pal. He extended a hand to Peter.

“I’m Wade. You can call me Deadpool.”

After a hesitant moment, Peter took the hand. He cringed. Shaking hands with five fingers felt wrong.

“Let’s check out that weird Pod People machine first,” Wade said, cracking his knuckles, “dibs on any and all laser guns found!”

Spider-Ham met PB’s eyes and was filled with the profound sense that this was his always-on-the-downside “buddy.”
Chapter Two: The Monochrome Brick Road

Chapter Summary

PB figures out that... pod... thing. The adventure begins. Hooraaaay?

Chapter Notes

I make a reference to The Thin Man at one point–he's a famous detective from some black and white movies I watched of my own volition, because I was a weird kid with no friends.
(Also sorry this one's a little shorter, I'm going to be busy tomorrow so I cranked this bad boy out NOW oof)

“So you can’t die?” Peter asked.

Wade stuffed another burrito into PB’s microwave, which looked as though it had seen better days, weeks, months, and decades. Peter got the feeling that this was mostly Wade’s fault, judging by the Kraft cheese and chili being rapidly dumped over the frozen delicacies.

“Yeah. Sick, right? I’m the world’s greatest unaliving machine.” Wade stuffed a burrito into his mouth absentmindedly, and then winced as he realized that it was still frigid, and crunchy with frozen beans. He swallowed it anyway.

“Wow, that’s, ah, dandy!” Peter used a string of webbing to yank the spoon Wade had left on the burrito plate out of the microwave just before its door shut. He breathed a sigh of relief, then carefully averted his eyes from his hand. He’d been holding out his pinky finger in a subconscious avoidance of it, so that he felt like he had four fingers--normal. Using his shooters was becoming an issue, though, because that fifth finger was beginning to assert its presence with a sore, throbbing feeling.

“So yeah, Pet-I mean, PB,” Wade grinned to himself at the nickname, “told me about his adventure with you guys, hopping universes and everything. Sounded pretty whacky. Say, can I come along this time?”

“What? No, there’s no adventure.” Peter shook his head. His hair scraped against it. Eurgh. “PB’s been looking at that thing for seven hours now. He’ll find a way to reverse-wire it or some shebang, send me back home in my rightful body, and call it a day. There’s no adventure.”

He wondered if he were reassuring Wade or himself. The mercenary turned back to him with a half-amused half-smile, and leaned against the counter.

“Come on, Porker,” Wade said. “You get thrown across the multiverse in a bootleg Tardis, crash at my best bud’s place in a brand new body, have ME show up, and expect this to be an over-and-done thing? Nooo way. There are gonna be, like, twenty more chapters of this.” Deadpool looked knowingly up at the ceiling and then beamed back at him again.
“Cha--what? No. No, you’re joking. Over and done.” Peter’s voice came more and more quickly, spilling over itself. “PB’s got a degree in chemical engineering!”

“That’s not, like, spaceship engineering, though.” Wade noticed that he’d been leaning against the burner and swore, shaking smoke from his fingers.

“Don’t even think about freaking me out, Deadschool!” Peter yelled, hands shaking and sweating from every pore. “This is going to be fine. There is no big, unsolveable problem.”

The back door creaked open. Wade leaned over to look, and Peter spun to face it as PB stepped in, looking sheepish.

“Hey, Peter. You okay?” PB smiled at him in a gentle, almost fatherly way, hands in his coat pockets. A dark shade of concern weighed heavy behind his eyes. Peter felt himself sink in his chair.

“I want to drop a piano on my own head.” He said. He gave a thumbs up to accompany it, and PB pursed his lips in sympathy and put his hands in his pockets, rocking back on his heels.

“Ooooh,” Wade said, biting a lip. “I’m guessing… yeah.”

“Someone please just tell me how to get home,” Peter said. It sounded like a gasp for air. PB sighed and held up a hand.

“There’s no direct route home, Ham.”

The old name was a bitter comfort against the crashing wave of hopelessness. Peter felt the slide whistle of his spirit sinking as he slowly fell forward onto his face on the couch. PB’s dog, who had been introduced to him a few hours earlier as only “Mr. Straydog,” licked his hand and tried to nudge him back up.

“So I’m doomed, then,” Peter said, wishing desperately for a lounge chair that he could have collapsed into instead of this loveseat, which smelled like pizza grease and despair. He turned to face the ceiling and its beige wash of water damage. Wade clicked his tongue behind him, and put a hand on his shoulder.

“Well…” PB began.

Peter all but leapt to his feet. “Oh, boy, there’s a well! Come on, what do I have to do to get back, and normal, and spry and adorable?”

“Woah, woah, slow down. I’ll explain.” PB said. Wade ran to the microwave and pulled the impenetrable mountain of burritos from within as PB sat across from Pete.

“So that thing is made of a substance that hasn’t yet been identified,” PB said, clearly fascinated but restraining himself for Pete’s sake (heheh, puns). “It’s a long story, but basically, it’s able to change its density by moving matter outside or inside of the capsule, and it can travel through the multiverse by… I think… creating a pod-sized hole in space-time and just dropping through. It pretty much goes to the closest available universe, and from what I can see, it has an itinerary.”

“Alright, travel plans, great! Where are they going?” Peter said. Wade mouthed “adventure” to him. Ham rolled his eyes.

“Well, it’s hard to say for sure, but I think they hop through a few and then end up at… a hub.” PB spread out his hands in an mysterious flourish.
“Hub?” Peter asked.

“Sounds like a cybercafe,” Wade offered. A burrito went into his mouth and was gone in seconds. Peter snuck one from the plate and fiddled with it, watching as Pete snatched a paper and scribbled something.

“Well, ah, see, multiverses are spread out, but some just happen to be close to a lot of them,” PB said. “There’s one in particular near us that’s kinda… the final destination on this pod’s journey. It links every nearby universe, and allows access back to each. Also, it’s apparently super high tech, so that’s a plus.” He showed the two of them a map, scrawled with coordinates, that appeared to show a ring of universes centered around a cluster of stars. Simple stuff… however…

“Uhh, PB? What are all of the skulls you’ve drawn around that Hub for?” asked Peter, fidgeting.

PB tapped a finger to them. “That’s the bad part. Those readings were hard to understand at first, but basically? They’re massive danger zones that are almost impossible to cross.”

“Wow, you got all of that from that Matrix-looking-ass screen?” Wade said, eyes wide with wonder. “Are you sure you didn’t get a degree in actual engineering, you little genius?”

PB’s ears turned pink. “Uh, well, I did make my web-shooters. I have experience. And hey,” the bashful look disappeared, replaced by an indignant one, “chemical engineering IS real engineering.”

“You know what I mean.”

“Hey, hey, focus, people! So how will we get in there?” Peter asked, nerves fraying and stitching back together in a dizzying pattern of stress.

“Well, uh, you’d need to go to someone with the skills to make a cloaking device strong enough to completely hide a pod from what-or-who-ever is guarding that Hub,” PB said. “And you’d need someone dealing in more of whatever THAT is made out of—” he jerked his head backward, toward the pod, “—to do it. Also probably some other people to help, in case we encounter… you know.”

“Baaaaaddiiiies.” Wade wiggled his fingers menacingly.

“So, a detective, and a tech whiz,” Peter said, “plus some scrappy young warriors, and a fearless leader (me) to guide them all. I have to hand it to Deadpool…”

“Yep, you do. Adventure!” Wade said.

“… this is definitely some YA Fiction b#!$%^%,”

“Woah, do you have actual censors? That’s goddamn adorable.” Wade said.

“Well, whatever you need… you’re in luck. Doc Ock’s itinerary was weird, but based on it?”

PB quickly scribbled a few faces next to the universes on the path. Peter laughed out loud.

“Holy Hamhocks, we’re getting the whole team back together!”

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New York City. Midnight. 1934.
A lone figure sat in a dive bar down in the less-savory than less-savory part of Brooklyn. It was a lousy night, streaked with grime and dirty looks. The kind of night no person with a clean conscience would be out on.

But the Big Apple was short on clean consciences, and high on every crime imaginable.

She was watching him, he could tell: his next dame, the kind of looker with a smile like a chopper through the chest. She’d done something dark. Hadn’t everyone? When you were in his business, you learned that everyone and everything had a dark underspot.

She sauntered up to the bar like a cat down an alley: proud, predatory, and careful to make no sound. He could see the curve of her leg underneath the fabric of a dress too short for the weather.

“What’s with the mask, flatfoot?” she said, barely glancing toward him.

Said mask hid any surprise in his eyes at being found out. He tipped his hat to her and ran a finger over the wood of the bar. “So you know I’m a Private Eye? Guess word gets around.” He took a sip of his egg cream. He wished it looked a little more like whiskey. She looked like the kind of doll who liked whiskey.

He was proven correct when she ordered a glass and sat down across from him. Her hair and eyes were dark, gray and gentle, like most women’s eyes. A flash of that color he’d seen the year before burst in his thoughts, and his mind strayed back to the cube sitting on his bedside table. He shook his head. Old memories.

“I’m not looking to bum drinks off you,” she said, eyes darting to the bartender. He was old, and good at pretending to not be listening. She leaned in.

“The truth is, Mister… I’m getting a little desperate for help.”

The way she said desperate was almost like a prayer. He’d heard a hundred women say it the same way. He turned and appraised her, one hand on the rim of his glass. A hundred monochrome women. He’d never wanted to know what their eye colors were before, but now he did. But they were gray. All gray, pale or dark or bright or dim.

“I don’t do things for free, even for dames,” he said. “It’ll have to be a good offer. Cash.”

“Good,” she said. “So my husband--”

The door to the bar exploded open. The woman next to him yelped, sultriness draining off of her like a cup full of milk tipping into a kitchen sink.

Spider-Man Noir whipped around and had to grab the counter to keep from falling off his barstool.

There was a man standing there. In full color.

He was a little on the husky side, and short, with a rain-slicked mess of blackish hair and a half-grin. His skin was pinkish-peach. And his eyes--damn, those were deep brown. He looked like an angel for just a moment, haloed by the dim light of the bar. The bartender, a graying man with a thick mustache, continued whistling to himself, unphased by the technicolor maybe-alien in what looks like a suit two sizes too large. There was a silence as rain gushed outside and the woman to his right gaping, wide-eyed.
“What—who are you?” It was half a shout, and half a breath. “You some kinda dream, boxcutter?”

The man panted for a moment, and coughed, loudly. The illusion of divinity was over, but damn if he wasn’t still colorful, and wild, and a welcome change of pace. Noir leapt off the barstool and pulled off his overcoat, throwing it to the man. It fell over him in one smooth wave, sending droplets scattering at the man’s feet.

“Hardly!” the man wheezed. He turned up toward Noir with a shaky smile. “PB and Wade will be reeeally glad I found you, Thin Man.”

The confusion on Noir’s face settled as he recognized the voice, and then redoubled as he RECOGNIZED the voice.

“Hold on,” Noir said, putting two fingers on the bridge of his nose, “wait a queen’s dime. You’re not… you can’t be…”

“Yep!” the man said, waving his hands like one of the floor alligators who danced at Rickaby’s every night.

“It’s me! Peter Porker!”

Noir felt as though he were glitching again.
Chapter Summary

Peter is out of web fluid, and soaked, and everything sucks. At least this coat is nice.

Chapter Notes

Woohoo~

ABOUT ONE HOUR AND THIRTEEN MINUTES AGO, NEW YORK, 1934:

The pod had crashed in an empty alleyway.

From the screeches outside, Peter could tell only that they’d scared a couple of alley cats, maybe made a small crater. No real damage, other than to PB’s pride.

Said hobo-father-figure was plastered to the wall beside him, looking dazed enough to put a malleted Doc Ock to shame. Wade, on the other hand, had recovered admirably, and was eating the only surviving burrito from the stash he’d shoved into the pockets of the vaguely-30’s suits PB had insisted that they wear.

“You really understated how funky this funky space-time rupturing device was going to get, Ham,” said PB, who rolled a crick out of his neck and made a sound like a distressed schnauzer dog.

“Be glad it didn’t make your atomic structure the wrong way.” Peter had no time for whining. They had a PI to find, and an adventure to go on.

“Well, anyway, uhh,” PB scratched the back of his neck and pushed open the pod door. “Sorry the suit Wade found for you was too big--”

“And also stolen from the donation bin of a Goodwill,” Wade said.

PB’s head jerked around. “Hey, you didn’t mention that!!”

“It’s for a good cause!” Wade protested. Wade’s own (almost certainly purloined) suit was covered in queso, and thus absolutely useless as a Good Nineteen-Thirties Disguise™. Or, at least, useless to do anything but sit in a gutter blackout drunk and be laughed at by late-night partygoers or depression-era apple salesmen.

“Fine, Dreadman, we’ll just return it when we get back” Peter said, holding up a hand to placate PB. Spider-Man frowned and folded his arms. Wade gave Ham a thumbs up.

“Great. Dandy. Do they say dandy in 1934?” Wade asked.

“I don’t know,” PB said, pushing out of the pod and into the street. He whistled. Peter peeked over his shoulder.
Wade slunk over to stand behind them. “Wow, that’s a hell of a storm.”

PB stumbled back into the car and shook the rain from his hair. New York’s weather had made up its mind to be even drearier than usual, and the bricks of the alleyway outside seemed to bubble and burst with flowing water. Had it not been for a slight raise on the threshold of the MurderCoffin, the water would have already flooded the compartment, dark as ink and shiny as molten silver.

“Alright, should’ve maybe brought an umbrella,” PB said. He put a hand to his chin to think. Peter frowned and began tapping his foot.

“Are we really going to let a little rain—” a massive thunderclap of pure white lightning turned the sky outside white for just a moment, before the world was cast in pewter gray again “—stop us from finding this guy?”

“We literally have all of New York to search for this guy, Ham,” said PB, looking antsy.

“Nah, I agree with the ex-pig. I’ve been shot by a tommy gun, but never in the rain.” Wade looked contemplative. “It might feel better, actually. Less blood to congeal.”

“Not my point, but you’re on my side, so I’ll take it!” Peter said. He turned to PB.

“Look, I’ll double check the street sign outside or around this alley so I know where we are. But I’m going out now, because we need a guy smart and sneaky enough to figure out where we can find someone with a supply of an undiscovered element is, and I gotta say, I trust this Dick Tracy knockoff for the job. So I’m gonna find him.” Peter said, leaning against the pod to look cool and stubborn. He missed the wall, and stumbled backward for a moment before regaining his balance.

PB paused for a moment, then gave a long, exasperated sigh.

“Fine,” he said, “okay. Okay. We’ll split up for now. Let’s meet back here in two hours, or about then, unless something goes wrong. Search the weird spots in town, or maybe ask about a PI named Peter Parker.” PB said.

“Yeah, yeah, great!” Pete said, relieved. He stepped out into the rain and kept smiling even as it beat his hair into a fibrous, wet mess.

“I’ll search the bars thoroughly, toots. No pub will be safe. Adios!” Wade said, doing an absolutely abysmal impression of a noir character. He pushed past PB and ran out into the night. PB sputtered and looked back and forth from the inside to Wade’s exuberant retreat.

“Okay, guess I’m on Wade duty!” PB said, throwing his arms in the air. He looked guiltily at Peter, and put his hands in his pockets.

“So, ah… you gonna be okay?” He asked it with a casual inflection, but concern pinched his brow. He didn’t just mean physically okay.

“Yep! Go after him. I’ll check around Brooklyn, do some detective work of my own, eh?” Peter said, smiling with enough force to make his distinctly human lips ache.

PB hesitated, then gave a tight nod. “Two hours,” he said.

Then he was gone, and Peter was swinging up to the nearest rooftop.
Noir’s coat was warm.

The detective had ushered him to the back entrance of the bar in a rush, mask-eyes wide and steps faster than his tongue.

“Allright, Porker, start talking railroad-fast, and I mean be quick about it!” Noir said, hands flying up in an agitated flurry of gray and black.

“Okay, so, err, talking cat—”

Noir gave a pained sigh and sunk down to a crouch to listen.

Under the silvery-wet awning, Peter gave him the best rundown he could under the circumstances, cutting out some of the more embarrassing bits and skimming over Wade as best he could. Noir looked jumpy, and more than once had to ask what a Hub was and adjust his hat.

After Peter finished, Noir stood, walked away, turned around and came back. He tapped his fingers against the side of his mask.

“Boy’s batches, this is why I don’t keep friends,” he finally said.

Peter put a hand to his hips. “Hey! What’s that supposedta mean?”

“No. No, big no. You’ve got a dame with a body like a Hollywood sellout and a quick brain, and you aren’t going to ditch that.” Noir said, all to himself. He kicked the ground multiple times and buried his fists in his pant pockets before spinning back around, in a pained, stilted way.

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“Every single guy and doll needs something from me! A lead, a bruiser, a quick one-night you-know, and now I gotta go help you get your moxie back? Hopscotch,” Noir said, gesticulating.

“I barely understood that, but I get that you’re thinking of bailing on me , buster!” Peter scowled. “Come on! We came across the multiverse to find a PI who can help us find a guy with an unknown element, and you’re the only guy I can trust for the job! Are you just gonna ditch me, your friend, in my hour of need?”

Peter was looking mostly at the ground, too tired and furious to stop fuming for a moment. When he finally did look up, he found Noir standing with his back to him. The taller man was muttering to himself, and pulling his hat down over his ears.

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“Alright, fine , thanks for making me ditch that lady.” Noir muttered.

Peter smiled a smile with a sharp backbone of pure smugness lining it. “I knew it! You wouldn’t ditch a friend, you goth &@$%@%#.”

“Allright, what the hell is that?” Noir asked, pointing at Peter’s mouth. “Do you ‘ave something that doesn’t let you swear? Cause it damn sure sounds like you want to.”

“Gotta keep it kid friendly, Detective!” Peter grinned, puffing out his chest. He liked being tall enough to look Noir in the eye (at least, while tilting back, and looking up at a pretty steep angle). But he obviously would rather be a pig, normal. He sagged. “But yeah, I really want to say £*#% right about now, and loudly.”

“I have no idea which word you meant just now,” Noir said. He took a step away. “Come on. We might’ve attracted some attention, catting like that.”
“Yeah, dandy!” Peter wanted to punch himself in his human nose. Did people say dandy? Did he sound like an idiot? He shook his head and tried to look casual. “Hey, uh, Noir? Thanks for the coat.”

Noir stiffened for a second, then relaxed.

“... Don’t mention it. It’s nothing.” Noir said, flicking a web from his shooters.

Peter scratched the back of his neck, feeling blood in his face. The feeling was very human, and somewhat unpleasant. He pulled his mask over his face and flicked out his own shooter--only to be left in the dust when no fluid came out. Oh, cr@p.

“Wait!” He called. The shout seemed lost to the rain, but only for a moment.

“What?” Came the reply. The Detective had spun on his tether and hung, looking gothic and windblown and pushed to the edge.

“I’m out of fluid! Do you have any spare?”

He heard a long sigh, even through the rain, and then:

“No, I’ve just got enough for me. And you won’t keep up by walkin’.”

“Well, what am I supposed to do, then?” Peter asked, just before he realized how much Noir probably wanted to throw him into a puddle. The detective dropped to the ground and stalked back, arms hanging at his sides, and gave Peter an appraising look.

“What?” Pete asked.

“You weigh how much?” Noir asked.

“Don’t know, ‘tective. Haven’t exactly stepped on a scale lately. Why is that relevant--”

“Ah, hell,” Noir said. He lost a wrestling match behind his eyes, and Peter had barely blinked before he was pushed into Noir’s chest like a damsel in distress and held with one arm.

“Alright, so you said the pod’s on the alley next to 8th and 31st?” Noir asked, clearing his throat. He tried to avoid direct eye contact. “We can get there in a split hair, but since it’s on the way, we can stop by one of my stashes for web fluid for ya.”

“Yeeeah? Wait, hold on, bucko, you aren’t planning on full-on Mary Janeing me, are you?” Peter said. G*%, this was embarrassing. “Really, pal, I think I can just wa--”

And then the wind was whipping across his skin, and he was clutching the dark leather of Noir’s coat with every one of his ten fingers, and muttering censored swear words to himself all the way.

——

Noir had carried a lot of women like this.

He cleared his throat and tried to be angry, brooding. He thought of that doll in that bar, clever and beautiful, but she seemed to wash away with the rain. His eyes kept darting to Pete, who was still staring ahead with his mouth in a little o, a blur of color against the darkness of the city, a dribble of light. Noir just had to make sure he’d be alright.

Well, he really didn’t. Not at all. The ex-pig had been the one who hadn’t brought enough web fluid.
He was having to pay for Pete’s mistakes and slip-ups.

Noir looked down with a biting word on his lips as he spun around the corner, hefting the man with one arm, and stopped.

Peter was smiling. He was nervous, and still clutching the fabric of the suit with all his might, but he was excited, eyes bright as the cats who dance at Mitzi’s Playhouse every evening. He looked jazzed just to be swinging through the air. And his eyes were brown. They were a shade of brown in the bark of the tall-topper trees Noir saw at central park when he landed in Miles’ world. And—wait, where the shoeshine sam was he going with this?

He cleared his throat to try to seem casual, then realized that he’d gotten Peter’s attention.

“Yeah?” The colorful man asked.

“You, uh, seemed excited. Anyway, we gotta move railwise” he quickly dropped the subject and tried to avoid Peter’s eyes, “we’re here.”

Peter watched him for another second when Noir swung into the balcony of a seedy hotel room, “closed for maintenance.”

“Put your mask on and roll in. Fluid’s on the dresser. I’m grabbin’ the rest of my rods and we’re burnin’ rubber out of here.” Noir said.

“Hey, woah, you’re grabbing your r-what nows?” Peter jumped where he stood.

Noir gave him a deadpan look from beneath his mask. ‘Guns.”

Peter looked embarrassed. “Oh, sorry—wait, what do you need guns for, Detective?! Not very Spider-Man of you!”

“I need these guns in my business. To protect me from the dark underbelly of this city, the mooks, the crooks, the angels with broken wings and haloes shiny as a gutter penny.” He tossed the web fluid containers to Peter and grabbed several of his favorite pistols.

“Okaaay, that’s a, uh, definitely a reason! Carry on.” Peter strapped the shooters to his arms and hefted them. “Say, these are good.”

“Oh, yeah. Top of the line.” Noir tried to keep the edge of pride out of his voice. He continued looking for his last gun, Caroline, which was seemingly misplaced.

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“Hey, you seen a gun around here? Pistol? Real shiny?”

The sound of a safety being removed behind him answered him. He rolled his eyes.

“Pete, a yes would be just daaaaan—“

He trailed off as he turned. Peter was standing stock-still, stiff as a board, as someone melted out of the shadows behind him.

“Hello, Detective Parker ,” the Prowler growled, his mask garbling his words as though they were coming from the radio in the back of the room. “My boss’d like a word.”

“I found your gun!” Pete squeaked, as Prowler pressed the barrel into his temple.
Chapter Four: First Blood

Chapter Summary

The Prowler has a gun to Ham's head. This can ONLY go well!

Chapter Notes

MEWWY CHRISTMAS YA FILTHY ANIMALS!
Also if you make art PLEASE tell me in the notes and send me an imgur link! I almost missed some that a friend made, my gf had to send it to me!! I am crying I cannot BELIEVE people have made art...

It was hard to think, lately. Peter found it hard to drop his thoughts into different places in his head, now that he was a human and taller and under quite a lot of stress. Thoughts tended to spill out at the seams, running over each other like mice loosed from a laboratory bent on giving them Boneitis or whatever new disease doctors were trying to beat into submission these days.

Yeesh, that was dark. It’s a little easy to be an absolute drag--and a basketcase--when you have a gun to your head.

Peter tried to shift his weight forward, only for the barrel to press closer to the side of his head. Whoever this guy was, he wasn’t playing nice. A small snarl escaped the ham-radio (hehe! Ham! Wait, no, he was about to be shot, no jokes, buster!) distortion of the gunman’s mask.

“Slow down, now, no need to hurt my friend here,” Noir said, hand flicking almost imperceptibly to his waist. Peter could feel the barrel of the gun--”Caroline”--leaving an impression on his face.

D@&n, what he wouldn’t do for another anvil.

“Let’s talk. Your boss knows who I am, right? He can find me. He’s a smart guy,” Noir said, eyes flicking from Peter to the enemy, who sounded a hell of a lot like Prowler. He probably was, knowing how weird these universe thingies got. Oh, joy!

“ He still doesn’t know.” There was an edge of something like disgust in the Prowler’s voice. “He told me to track you down, Spider-Man. And I don’t stop until I’ve won.”

Prowler’s hold on Peter’s shoulder tightened, sharp gloves digging into the flesh hard enough to cut through the fabric. Prowler seemed to look at him for the first time.

“Who’s this?” the question was asked in a bored, idle way, like your mother asking about a girlfriend she didn’t particularly like. Prowler tugged a bit at the mask Peter still wore and hmmm-ed.

“A fan?”

“Partner,” Noir said. Prowler’s grip on the gun had slackened just slightly, and Noir had noticed: he was reaching to his back, slowly easing a pistol from behind his back.
“Partner? Didn’t think you were a gaycat,” Prowler’s voice finally twisted into something less formal, less rigid, and more purely malicious.

“Wh–no! He, ah, helps me on the job.” Noir’s hand faltered for only a moment before he was drawing the gun forward, smooth as the shadows themselves behind him. If he could lift it quickly, fire off a shot, then maybe Peter could twist free--

A glimmer of hope in Peter’s chest faded as the pistol caught the light and reflected it just south of the Prowler’s face. The Prowler whipped forward, and the gun safety flipped off and on like a rattlesnake’s dry warning.

“Don’t try any monkeysocks, Dick!” Prowler spat. “I’ll blip off your friend here if you don’t drop that pistol and come with me, right now, nice and quiet!”

Noir froze and jerked back, the gun tight in his hands. His face seemed twisted under the mask, in absolute indecision. Peter felt his own heart rate slow at the thought. He saw one of Noir’s fingers detach from the gun, hesitant, and then another, and then--

“Heya, uhh, Prowler? How’s life?” Peter called.

It came out with the confidence of Bugs himself, shocking even Peter. Prowler leaned back for a moment, then laughed.

“We’re past that.” The amusement was gone from his voice as quickly as it arrived. “No distractions.”

“Hey, that’s fine, but I have a better deal,” Peter said, looking to Noir. “How’d you like to hear it?”

Prowler paused, then readjusted the pistol and looked down.

Peter swallowed hard. This could end poorly.

“So, say, howsabout we make a deal. YOU drop the gun and let us leave unharmed and just dan-fine. WE walk away and never cross paths with you again. Kapiche?”

“No.” Prowler said. “Here’s the deal, actually. I take you both back to Kingpin, and after that I never have to see you again.” Malice lined the final words like molding velvet.

“No thanks. I say you drop the gun.” Peter said. Noir looked on in silent panic.

“You’re coming with me.” Prowler began to pull him back toward the window. Peter dug his heels in, heart beating faster, eyes growing more dilated as the space between him and Noir grew.

“I say drop the gun!” Peter’s voice was higher pitched, “Please!”

“You’re coming with me!” Prowler jerked his head, beckoning Noir to follow. His time was clearly growing shorter. Kingpin made deadlines.

“Drop the gun!” Peter caught one foot on a discarded Spare Hat™ and managed to slow his travel for a few inches.

“You’re coming with me!” The Prowler was growing really angry. Sheesh. Most villains in Peter’s universe only got mildly frustrated if Peter was this annoying.

“Drop the gun!” This one came out as a wheeze as he neared the windowsill. He reached a hand out toward Noir, but was too far.
“You’re coming with me!” Prowler had begun repeating it as a reflex. Peter could hear the blind anger in his words.

He inhaled, and called, “You’re coming with me!”

“Drop the gun!” Prowler replied, his hold on the pistol slackening substantially before he realized his mistake.

Noir’s hand was up in a flash, and the blast was enough to make Peter hit the floor with his hands over his ears. Only, he miscalculated his ear placement, being a human and all, and ended up hearing the whole of the shot just above his head. He screamed and shoved himself away as the Prowler crashed into the alleyway below, metal claws scraping the wall outside for just a moment before he went slack.

The gun was still smoking when Peter looked up, and Noir’s breathing made the sides of his shirt jerk up and down in staccato beats. It would have been funny if there weren’t flecks of blood on Peter’s face.

Prowler’s blood.

Guns. Rhymed with fun. Definitely were not. Had he ever really seen one work before, outside of his universe? He’d heard they were far more fatal in other worlds, but he couldn’t hear Prowler moving in the alleyway. Peter almost said something, then stopped.

No. Noir looked scattered, too, and he’d had to do it. Peter ripped off his own mask and wheezed, cold air heavy in his lungs, and stood as Noir lowered the pistol and stared at the window.

“That… was close.” Peter said.

“Closer than a bruno’s bracelets,” Noir said. Peter snorted through his nose, adrenaline still bursting through him. That was funny. Unlike guns.

Noir took a step forward and put a hand on Peter’s shoulder. “Are you a--aaahh, you got somethin’ there.” He wiped the few blood flecks from Peter’s face and stepped ahead to lean down into the alley.

Peter watched him examine the alley for a moment, leaning over the edge with the grace of a cat. From this distance, he looked like an ordinary, lonely man looking into the night. It almost made Peter’s heart ache. How many people had Noir done that to? Ten? Fifty? Had they all been like Prowler, falling quietly? Had any of them--

Peter shook off the thoughts and shuddered. Not kid appropriate.

Noir was tense, now, at the window, and any illusion of his ordinary nature was gone. His muscles were tight.

“No sign of ‘im. Best case is that he slunk off to lick his wounds. Worst case says he’s waitin’ for me.” Noir stood at the edge of the windowsill and flicked a web to the far side of the wall, then released it without swinging.

“What?” Peter asked.

“Bait. For a Prowler trap.”

The web was ignored, and nothing appeared to leap for the window. Noir hung back for a moment
more, then nodded.

“Coast’s probably clear. I see your ‘verse-room on the ground a few feet away, on the flip side. We were close, I toldja.”

“Be careful,” Peter said, as Noir prepared to jump into the alley.

Noir started and then turned back. Was he smiling beneath his mask?

“I’m always careful, except when it suits me.” Noir saluted, half-joking, and jumped into the alley.

Peter heard a low whistle and followed.

He landed next to Noir with a thwip and saw it: a trail of blood, leading out of the alleyway. It petered out near the exit; perhaps Prowler had been able to staunch his bleeding long enough to get home. Peter felt ill. The fluid was black in this universe, viscous as Hitchcock special effects and just as bad-smelling.

“Stay sharp. Can’t be caught topdown.” Noir strode toward the pod. His eyebrow cocked as it hummed in the air slightly the machinery inside sensing a new presence.

“Metal kimono,” Noir said, as though he’d made a very amusing joke. He turned to Peter for a smile and Peter gave it, despite having no idea what weird Noir-ian reference the detective was making.

“Damn right it is.” Peter said.

Noir stopped dead in his tracks at the exact same moment Peter did.

“Sorry?” Noir asked. “Thoughcha couldn’t swear. Looney Tunes and all that.”

“Me too!” Peter said, half panicked, half pleased. Was he becoming too human? Or was this just Noir’s universe’s influence on him.

“Okay, let me--” Peter inhaled. “@#$%^&*#@&. Not working.”

“Maybe it was a fluke,” Noir shrugged.

“FUCK!” Peter shouted Noir jumped back, looking frightened, then saw Peter standing proudly, wearing his coat, having just said “that word” with no censors for the first time in his life, and laughed.

“Don’t get too excited, Ham,” he said.

Peter felt a flicker of anxiety in his chest. “I’ll try!” he joked, hands in his pockets.

The door to the MurderCoffin creaked open. Noir put a hand to his waistband and Peter dashed over, half-ready to give PB a high-four—oh, wait—and also half ready to have to fight the Prowler again, only to see Wade peering out into the night with all of the childlike wonder of a kid getting a bicycle for Christmas.

“Hey, man,” Deadpool gave Noir a casual wave, then beamed at Peter. “Pete, my boy, my guy, did you just SCREAM an uncensored swear word?”

“That was Noir!” Peter said, quickly, before Noir gave him a look of utter disappointment.

Wade wasn’t fooled so easily, it seemed. “No, no, it was you. That was a big old f-bomb. A real no-
no word. How do you feel? You’re becoming a real man now. This is great.”

“It was just once! I’m still mostly censored, I think it was a glitch. We just had a run-in with the 1930’s Prowler!” Peter changed the subject, throwing his arms in the air.

“Woah, woah, woah. The Prowler?!” PB asked, looking half-exhausted and half-excited.

“It was crazy! He’s not as smart as he thinks he is, but @#&$ if he isn’t scary.” Peter said.

“You got to see the Prowler without me? No faair.” Wade finally opened the door all the way. Peter pulled Noir inside as the man gave Wade a strange look, and then brightened when he saw PB tapping the screen of the pod.

“Other Pete!” he said, clapping PB on the back. “How’s the missus?”

“Uhh, we’re, hmm, friends,” PB said, a pained smile on his face. “And you can call me PB, if you want. Good for keeping track, with all of the Peters running around.”

“Yeah, you don’t want to smooch the wrong one.” Wade said. There was a silence as each Peter turned to stare, and Wade gave them an exaggerated shrug.

“What? We’re not allowed to share manly, platonic kisses anymore?” Wade said. “Come on, now. I thought we were all braver than this.”

“Did you know that every time you speak I feel as if I’m talking to some long-lost immortal Sumerian trickster god? Because I feel like you should know that, bud,” Peter said.

“That’s the nicest thing anyone has ever said to me,” Wade said, sounding like he meant it.

“So you’re the bruiser with the healing? Slick city,” Noir said, looking him up and down, “you don’t look like you’re healed all the way, yet.”

“Oh, no, my body just looks traumatically burned for funsies!” Wade said. Noir put up a hand, then put it down again.

“It’s just how he looks,” PB said, “it grows on you.”

“I grew on you?” Wade batted his eyelashes.

“Yes. A lot like a weed.” PB said. Wade ignored him and sighed like a princess being wooed.

“Oh. Scotts, I didn’t mean to be--well.” Noir said. It was the closest to an apology he seemed to get. He put his hands in his pockets and looked pretty uncomfortable for someone whose face was completely hidden by a mask.

“It’s cool,” Wade said, picking his teeth with a 3-foot katana, which sounded much more impressive than it looked.

Noir turned back to PB and peered at the screen. “Alright, Porker here explained the rundown-updown to me. Which hotspot are we poppin’ down to next?”

“Something pretty different,” PB said. The machine began to hum more loudly. “Reeeeally wishing I brought more than just suits.”

“Oh, I brought a bunch of stuff!” Wade said. He yanked a previously-unseen trunk out from what appeared to be nowhere--hey, that was a Spider-Ham thing! No fair!--and threw the top up,
revealing multiple sets of highly questionable clothing and a pirate costume, because apparently Wade focused all clothes-finding efforts on abandoned Goodwills and Spirit Halloweens.

PB stared for a minute. “Yeah. Okay. Sure.” He said, then kept fiddling with the machine.

“I guess we oughta change, or put something over our costumes like we did with the 30’s suits,” Peter said. “Blend in with whatever crowd we’re in.”

“In that case, grab the most Back-to-the-Future crap you can, preferably stuff with bright colors,” PB said. Noir put a hand on his hip, and squinted at the box.

“We’re visiting a young prodigy robotics engineer, next. In a galaxy far, far away.”

“Oh, Peni! She’s a good kid,” Noir said. He pulled off his mask and grabbed the nearest tri-color shirt, then turned and met Peter’s eyes.

Peter’s brain short-circuited a little bit.
Chapter Five: We Broke Ham

Chapter Summary

This entire chapter is just Ham having a crisis. Also, neon clothing.

Chapter Notes

HHHHH I thought Peni would appear in this chapter but she's actually appearing NEXT chapter... sorry folks! Happy Kwanzaa btw, if you celebrate it!

Train whistle sound.

He muffled it by coughing, very loudly, and looking away, but Wade still gave him a raised eyebrow. $#!^. A train whistle? A full on awoooga? His comedic timing reflexes were too smooth and well-polished from years of use. It was just reflex, really, when seeing someone attractive. Of course, the only other person he’d ever done that in front of was Mary Crane, but it probably only happened now because of stress, and from being saved by Noir, and not because Noir was incredibly handsome to the average human.

“Hey, was that an--” Wade stopped, mouth half-open, when Peter gave him a look of sheer desperation. Peter’s cheeks were burning hot, and he thanked his lucky stars that Noir, with his colorblindness and all, probably wouldn’t be able to tell.

~Wooo, Mama! Didn’t he just carry you like a prince? Wonder what it’s like under the suit...~ said part of his mind, filing its nails and ogling the detective.

“Shut up,” he whispered.

“You alright, trotter?” Noir asked, and then Peter HAD to look up again.

Scars. The first things that stood out were the scars, patched around his face, lines of pale whitish-gray stark against the rest of the skin. His eyes were the color of iron shavings, dark and clear, and Peter got the feeling that they’d still be that silvery-darkness even if Noir were in total technicolor.

But the scars were just flecks on the skin, and the biggest shock of all was that Noir looked like an absolute sweetheart.

“Nothing!” Peter yelped. It was Noir’s mouth, really, the way it quirked at the middle, slightly confused. Noir looked younger than Peter had expected, with a slightly downturned nose and a burst of black-and-gray freckles. He looked like a cat, gray and curious, with black hair that grayed at the temples and seemed too fluffy to possibly fit in the mask.

Then Noir put on a pair of glasses. A round, completely adorable pair of glasses, which made his eyes look even wider. He blinked twice, as his eyes focused, and pushed them up his nose.

Aaaand Peter had been staring. For a while now. Whoopdeedoo, he was a creep.
Pete turned and walked to another side of the pod, acting natural (by whistling loudly and sweating, obviously) and quickly folding his arms over his chest in case a cartoon heart decided to pop out. He’d never realized how much he would hate those until he was in the presence of someone who was just objectively attractive, definitely not subjectively sexy in a strange, gumshoe, saved-me-from-a-mob-enforcer, secretly-a-softie way.

“Was that a train whistle?”

Peter jumped, and found Wade standing right next to him, whispering. D@#$$. For a guy with such a loudmouth, he was really good at sneaking. Probably had something to do with the whole mercenary thing. Peter wiped sweat from his forehead and tugged at his collar.

“Nooo, I, uh, dropped some web fluid. That was a slider whistle sound.” Peter said, leaning back against the wall. Good excuse. Now, if he could just sink into the floor and vanish forever, his plan would be complete.

“Sure, okay, Mr. Awooga Man,” Wade said, eating another burrito, which seemed to have been drawn from the ether. “I always have that reaction when looking at people like him, y’know, with the younger monochrome lost-a-fight-with-a-broken-bottle Jeff Goldblum look.”

“It’s got character!” Peter said, then shrank back. Oops.

“Oh, character! Of course. Yeah. Sounds legitimate.”

“I am going to stuff you into a tiny bag and throw you out of the airlock,” Peter said. “Looney Tunes physics allows this. Don’t test me.”

The machine hummed, as though in agreement, as it started to move.

“Alright alright, we have liftoff,” PB said, clapping slowly. Noir looked around with wide eyes.

“This thing’s off the highballs,” Noir said, poking a wall. He prodded it again, and when the machine began to move, he looked frightened.

“Oh, no need to threaten. I get it. He’s just cute to you.” Wade said. Peter looked to him, expecting a smirk, but he didn’t seem as though he were joking at all.

And then he’d slammed into the other wall as the pod moved forward.

“Huh?” Peter hadn’t moved yet, but still made the mistake of looking toward the far wall.

Rule One of Looney Physics: If you don’t want to fall, don’t look down OR toward whichever direction you’re falling.

Peter closed his eyes and coughed as he hit the wall, bruises crying in outrage. His chest was going to be twenty shades of purple tonight. He laid on his side, and opened his eyes to find Noir looking absolutely terrified next to him.

“Faster than railroad hoppers,” Noir said, knuckles white. He tried to push himself up once or twice, then gave in, sinking into the wall.

“Nothing to fear but fear--” the MurderCoffin jostled. Noir looked ill.

“It’s going to be just--”
The pod spun, and Noir cried out as PB pinched the bridge of his nose and Wade let out a genuinely excited “Woohoo!”

“Hey, Noir!” Peter called.

Noir looked to him, surprised. Peter cleared his throat.

“What do you call—” the pod screeched metal-on-multiverse and took a nosedive. Peter hit the ceiling and ignored the pain as PB’s foot hit his leg.

“What do you call a pig with no legs?”

“Please don’t answer that—” Wade began, before PB put a hand over Wade’s mouth. The shadows under his eyes were deep, as though he were carrying the weight of all of his friend’s terrible decisions in the sockets.

Noir paused, shivering a little bit, and trying to hide it. “Wh-what is it?”

“A groundhog!” A faint buh-dumm-tss could be heard above the roar of the warp-engine-whatever.

Noir stared, then, after a taut moment, his knuckle-whitening grip on the shuttle side relaxed. A smile pulled one corner of his mouth northward.

“That’s worse than the ones at Rickaby’s Comedy Night,” Noir said, looking relieved.

“Alright, we’re nearing the destination, so get ready to get dressed in whatever the hell Wade packed!” PB said, a note of dread in his voice. “Let’s go, team!”

Noir chuckled, and Peter continued watching for another moment, before the pod took a final turn and sent Noir’s spidey-squiggles back into a panic.

They fell toward the screen-wall, and as Noir scrabbled at the side, Peter made a decision that made every bruise on his back vow vengeance: he grabbed Noir by the waist and took the blow for him.

“Ksfdfs!” He coughed. His eyes became spirals for a moment, then he shook his head, and his thoughts jumped back onto their track. The speed of the pod had both slammed them into the wall and crushed them together. Noir’s chest was to Peter’s chest, their eyes were even, and their noses would have touched if Peter hadn’t shrunk even further against the wall, flushed.

“Thanks,” Noir said. His gray cheeks turned a darker shade of gray. Was he embarrassed about Peter saving him from hitting the wall? Yeah, that was probably it. “Didn’t need to do that. I’m made of strong stuff, pig.”

Well. That confirmed it—and there was something strangely comforting about being called “pig” again. Even if it was just because Toughman Detectivéguy was embarrassed that a pig had broken his fall.

The pod stopped. Peter began to slide down the wall. Noir stepped back and lowered him to the ground, looking not at him but at the clothing chest, where Wade had completely submerged himself from the chest up.

“Wade,” PB said, “this isn’t necessary.”

“Okay, okay. Gold sneakers or stilettos?”

“Sneakers. Why did you bring golden stilettos?” Peter ruffled through some of the clothes and pulled
out a neon orange wifebeater, looked as though he were briefly considering it, then remembered that he was supposed to have dignity and picked a bright blue jersey of indeterminate team allegiance.

“Flavor!” Wade said, picking the golden stilettos anyway. “It’s the future. I’m pretty sure no one cares any more.”

“Men wear heels in the future? Horseknickers.” Noir said.

Peter cleared his throat and indicated the inch-high heels on Noir’s sleek black boots.


With that thought, Peter decided that he’d keep all of his emotions in the center of his chest until he died, and pulled a sweatshirt, pants, and a pair of Hello Kitty sunglasses out of the box without looking.

They were on in a whirl of motion blur—another perk of being from a universe unhindered by the laws of physics was that you never needed a changing room, only enough inertia to make a tornado-shaped blur. He now wore a completely respectable outfit not at all reminiscent of the bullies from Back to the Future: a pair of lime green pants, the glasses, sneakers with Japanese symbols and uwu-ing anime girls on them, and a sweatshirt that mysteriously depicted both the logo for the band “Thrasher” and Peppa Pig. They covered his Spider-Ham (Man) suit pretty well, and his mask fit in a pocket.

It’d be fine.

“You look like Noir colored you in,” PB joked, oblivious to the fact that he had slipped on a blue denim jacket with bright yellow leather capri pants that Wade had chosen “especially for him.” Wade himself wore, along with the stilettos, a heavily mistranslated shirt in English (red letters on a purple background screamed “Your existence owned by you, do what you like eat egg!”) and a pair of black pants with random silver studs in them.

“I don’t like your tone, railrunner.” Noir said, peering at the box. He managed to pick out by far the worst outfit of them all: bright pink dress shirt, silver pants, a new white hat that looked like its own but for the “1 800 ¿Estás abofeteando?” emblazoned in black on the side.

Wade stared for a long moment, then turned away, shaking with quiet laughter. Peter decided not to press the issue. PB looked deeply disappointed in himself and the world.

Then again, what else was new?

“Okaaay, so, splitting up last time was a bad idea, seeing as how I almost got—” Peter coughed loudly and tugged at his collar again. “Y’know. This time, let’s stay together.”

“Bingo,” Noir said, waving his hands up. Oh, god, he’d put silver gloves on over his costume gloves. He looked like Michael Jackson in his final days. Peter suddenly wished for a camera, desperately.

“I can take the lead,” Noir said, “I might be in little Peni’s weird science world, but I’m still the best damn PI there is. I’ll find our girl.”

“Aww, that’s sweet,” PB said. He peered out the viewport. “You sure you don’t want one of us to go out first? It’s pretty bright.”
“I’ll be alright.” Noir strode to the front of the pod. “I’m used to color, now.” Was it Peter’s imagination, or did his eyes dart toward him when he said that?

“Okay, if you’re sure.” PB elbowed Wade, who was still cackling in the corner.

Noir nodded, nudged the doors, and opened the gates of the first circle of neon anime hell.
Chapter Six: Neon Genesis Evang-Hell-ion

Chapter Summary

Peni notices something fishy on her radar. The "B" in Peter B. Parker stands for Bepression. Wade points something that probably should have been obvious out. Noir... *feels* things.

Chapter Notes

THE GIRL HAS ARRIVED! EXPECT SOME UWUS!

“Something’s definitely out of order.”

Peni skidded across the floor on her hover-heelies with the grace of a cat on a tightwire. Her SP//dr suit hummed behind her, at attention, and swivelled its hyperLED dome of a head in her direction.

The screen that dominated the far wall was a mixture of soft, paint-powder blue light, which dimmed and brightened depending on when she looked at them, and a swath of rainbow light depicting what looked to be the inside of a cobwebbed, black-lit cupboard. She could catch her reflection in it: pale, miniscule, lips drawn into a bow and hands skimming the waxy surface of the screen, spinning diagrams left and right and off the port entirely.

At a closer glance--at least, if you were tech genius Peni Parker and not a random layperson--it was clear that the image of a “cobwebbed cupboard” was not a scattered collection of holographic webbing and pinpricks, but a map: one depicting the multiverse in striking detail. Smiley-face emoticons marked the universes that housed her friends, gleaming yellow in the clusters between web-strands.

SP//dr purred, and tapped at the screen. The pocket of universes nearest to her own warped, like a collection of mutated cells just waiting to multiply, twisted and pinched at the fulcrums. An ominous red line streaked between three in a jagged curve, and as of now, another line was solidifying between Noir’s and hers.

According to every well-guarded paper she’d read, Autonomous Dimensional Transport Devices had been invented (and subsequently banned) in her universe in the year 2100, due to the dangers of using them to affect other universes. Even now, only elite scientists knew that they had ever come into existence. The general public was often satisfied by hand-wavy stuff when learning about multiverses. She wasn’t.

And now, with only her to witness it, something was crossing into her universe. Something with a flight path, not just blips from dimensional hoppers. It had to be big.

SP//dr’s eyes turned to question marks, then to X-symbols. //Is it dangerous?// They asked.

“I don’t know. It could be a villain with crazy tech skills. Or maybe… no,” Peni winced, and didn’t
let herself entertain the thought. “It’s not them.”

That always happened, didn’t it? Everyone left. She became attached to people more easily than she detached. She always burrowed into other people’s good intentions and didn’t let go until she was ripped out--

She stood up, sucked in a breath, and jumped into SP//dr’s dome. The machine glowed. Her spider’s psychic link buzzed against hers, and she leaned away. She didn’t want it to listen in right now. It was time for a job, not therapy. She was strong.

Peni’s eyes lost any sparkle they’d had before, the shadow of her tufty bangs concealing them from the overhead light. Whoever had come to her universe had ripped a hole straight through the lines connecting them, like a needle punching through cloth at random. This wasn’t the work of a normal hopper. This was a job done by a villain, and SP//dr--both Peni and her bot--couldn’t stand villains.

A flick of her eye and a brush of her finger opened the skylight exit above her head. She reminded herself to call May and Ben to tell them she’d be busy for a few hours. They’d understand.

In a streak of magnet-red and royal blue, SP//dr shot out and into the covered alleyway, blazing in the afternoon light. The device had beeped to a stop on top of the Algren, a multi-story mega-restaurant known for its stellar service and absolutely astronomical prices.

No more villains. Not in her universe. Not in any universe.

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“Right, see, the first step in being a flatfoot, is, to, scope out your… ah, shit.” Noir gave up on gesticulating wildly and contented himself with staring at the expanse of raw, unbridled human innovation.

And, goddamn, was it bright as a nun’s penny.

The colors were enough to make his world tilt back on its hinges--or maybe that was just him craning his neck up to look as far as they could. They’d impacted on top of a medium-tall building, meaning that they were at least 10 stories above ground level in this candy-tone, paint-splatter version of New York. Every color he couldn’t possibly name burned in every corner of what he could see, from office windows across from him and on airships half the size of dirigibles that blared music in another language and flivvers faster than comets on the street below.

He’d been holding his breath. In reverence? In fear? Whichever it was, it was overwhelming--he’d tried for so long to feel things, and he didn’t know if it was the best idea anymore. Not in the least.

I shot a guy for him.

What? What, no. He’d shot a guy for every broad he’d ever solved a case with. Sometimes multiple guys. Sometimes he’d even have to shoot a dame, if she was the type to send him to the Big Sleep. The laws of chivalry took a backward kick out the window when the cards were down and the knives were up.

Why am I comparing him to an attractive woman? He’s a man, and also a cartoon, the kind kids see at the picture show. I’m losing it.

And, caught between two extremes: blank-minded awe of the explosion of color and one he’d chosen to dub “bare-bones panic,” and settled on the former.
“Okay.” PB said, face falling. “I’m adding this place to my own, personal blacklist.”

“You’re no fun, Parker-Chan,” Wade said. Noir turned and watched, detached from his own actions.

“If you ever say anything like that to me again, I will call the police.” PB said. Noir’s eyes, honed by years of detective work, weren’t blind to the subtler parts of his threat: the leftwards-dart of the eyes, the vanished upward twist of the lip, and an outward breath to hide a real laugh. PB liked this guy, clearly. All the talk Peter had spilled about PB being annoyed with him was only half true.

Click-click. Footsteps. Now Peter was standing next to him, looking toward him. He felt a hand on his arm.

“Hey, hey, we’re all here. Crazy city, huh?” Peter said. The hand was like the Hoover Dam for his pulse: it slowed things, steadied him enough to tear his eyes away from the goddamn mess of a skyline and look down.

“Hell yeah, it is,” Noir said. “It’s like a plane full’a paint slammed straight into my eyelids. Does the future just keep getting more and more… bright?” he asked, rubbing his temples.

“Honestly? #@%& if I know.” Peter looked disappointed for a moment as the censor did its job. “My own universe is pretty, y’know, bright and colorful, because it’s governed by Tunes laws and… hey, does someone draw us? I mean, the people in my universe?”

“What do you mean?” Noir asked. “If you think about it, whoever animates my universe is basically god. That is, if someone DOES animate my universe.” Peter took a step away, his face comically pinched as he concentrated.

“This isn’t comforting any more, Porker,” Noir warned. Peter held up a hand.

“But if there IS no animator, and my universe is just… like that, then why do we run on Looney Tunes laws? Hey, if you think about it, how do I know what Looney Tunes are?”

“I--say, that’s a good question.” Noir hadn’t thought about that. His head began to ache again.

“I think we’re getting off track…” PB warned, uselessly.

“And why do I still do tunes stuff, then? Or have censors?”

“Evidence for no animator. No god.” Noir said, staring off into the middle distance. It was a practiced empty stare. Good for staying alert, while still contemplating the meaning of a short and brutal existence.

“Hey, why haven’t any of us glitched?” asked Wade.

“Not now, Wade,” Peter said, then snapped to alertness. An exclamation point appeared above his head, and Noir swiped for it without thinking. It vanished just before his fingers touched it, and they scraped Peter’s hair as they missed. Soft hair.

Shut your mouth, brain. Shut your monkey-fighting mouth, right now. He watched as Peter remained oblivious and turned to Wade, one finger raised.

“Wait! No, not now, right now! You’re right. We haven’t glitched.” Peter began to pace.

“Yeah, probably should have noticed that our atoms aren’t snapping themselves into tiny pieces every few minutes by now,” PB said, scratching his stubble.
“So we got out scott free, ‘s that what you’re saying?” Noir asked. He looked to Porker for support and found that the man—pig? Cartoon?—was staring at Wade, mouth partially open.

“No need to thank the stopped clock, amigos,” Wade said, sounding very much like he wanted to be thanked. “I just remember how much PB whined about it—”

“Thanks.” PB said, deadpan.

“You’re welcome. And it hasn’t happened to any of us, unless it happened while we were split.”

“Nope,” Peter said. “I was smooth-sailing. Like a duckling.”

“Now, hold on. We may’ve just gotten, I don’t know, crazy lucky for a change. Be prepared to glitch during a battle, guys. Don’t leave me with all of the work.”

“Hey, now, I pulled my weight during that fight, no matter how much static crossed my atoms,” Noir said, standing taller. He’d defended those kids damn well. “And Peter Porker here saved that little doll Peni’s life. Didn’ you stop by that whiskey-hole to get food before we went into the collider?”

“It’s called a bar and grill, and the burger was delicious. But you’re right, I’m sorry. If there’s anyone who’d be a drain, it’s me.” PB smiled with heavy-lidded eyes. Noir had seen the expression on himself in the mirror some mornings, when he tried to remember what it had been like before… well, everything, really.

An uncomfortable silence dribbled over the four of them. Wade opened his mouth, then shut it again, placing a hand on PB’s shoulder. The man looked surprised, then laughed.

“Hey, hey, it’s a joke,” PB said, laughing at himself in the same way the bombing comics at Rickaby’s did every Friday night. He lifted his hands to placate the others, and Noir decided to let the matter slide for the moment.

“Now, we’ll think about that later. But for now, we need to find a guy with cloaking technology, and a certain cybernetics expert with sparkly anime eyes. Noir? Do your thing.” PB said. Wade passed a burrito to him. PB looked momentarily thrown, then decided to eat it anyway.

Wade and Peter looked to him, and seemed to be waiting for something.

“What, d’ya think I’m psychic? We’ve at least gotta start looking around, first. Now come on. We’ll try wherever this is, first.”

“Why’s that?” asked Peter.

“Because I have no goddamn idea where anything in this future-York is, trotter,” Noir said, “so we’re going to start where we landed, and I’ll find our tech-catchers no matter what, alright?”

“Okay, okay! Fair enough!” Peter said. He walked to the roof’s edge and thwipped a strand onto the side of another, even-taller building, and saluted the others.

“Pretty sure we can drop down here, between these two, and go into… whatever this is. I’ll go first.”

Peter took a moment to close his eyes, then dropped with a slow slide whistle. Where did those come from? Noir decided to save it for the maker and followed PB over the edge, as the other man held Wade and Wade pantomimed a ladylike swoon. It was the same way he’d held Peter—well, sans the Romeo-and-Juliet theatrics. Strange. His own reflection in the side of the building caught his eye as he slid down the length of his web and touched down on the street, leaving a sinuous string behind.
Peter dusted himself off and whistled as PB attempted to remove Wade with little success.

“Getting clingy, there, Wade?” Peter asked.

“You can’t make me let go. I know my rights.”

“Your rights have literally nothing to do with this,” PB said, lurching awkwardly under his friend’s weight. Noir felt something odd kick at his chest. Was that what an almost-laugh felt like? He wouldn’t really know, but dammit if it didn’t feel good.

“Right, let’s make a plan for going into the--” Noir broke off and strode to the front of the building, peering up. “Algren Restaurant. Alright, looks fancy-ish.” He watched as a couple dressed in striking, low-cut clothing entered, smiling. Good, their group wouldn’t stand out all that much.

“What’s the idea?” PB asked.

“Well, first, some of us need to get to the kitchen.” Noir began. “If we want to keep an eye everywhere. The other… two, I guess, can try to get into the restaurant as clients.”

“Me. And Peter B. There is NO way I’m passing up on snagging some future food from the fridge, buddy,” Wade said. PB looked as though he were about to protest, then considered the matter further, and nodded.

“Yeah, okay. We’ll see if we can pose as waiters, get some uniforms.” PB said.

“On it.” Wade finally released his hold on Peter B. and vanished into a side door. PB swiped at him and groaned as the man slipped through, bouncing on his toes.

“Right, and we’ll be, ah, friends going out to lunch, as friends do.” Noir said. He put his hands in the pockets of his pants, which were very tight over his uniform, and tried not to look at Peter.

“Just like pals!” Peter said, very quick. PB bit his tongue and looked between the two, then nodded, and took off after Wade.

“Thank god they left the side door unlocked. Shall we?” asked Noir.

“After you,” Peter mock-bowed. Noir strode out with purpose, boots hitting the concrete with muffled thumps. Peter followed just afterward, and they opened the restaurant doors to the next circle of hell.

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“What is this thing?”

Peni used her robot to open the doors of the pod. It was dulled by smoke and burn damage, and she could just barely see her face in its side. Green light flickered from within as she opened it, revealing a screen scrolling code in a language that probably hadn’t been used since the dark ages.

Good. A leg up on whoever this person was--or whoever these people were.

Her robot scanned it in a millisecond and returned the data. It was a rough-travel micro-collider, one that could only travel one way, unless there were a hub involved. Primitive, but useful. Someone with the right skills could wreak havoc on her dimension with it.

Her robot stood and backed away from it, scanning along the ground for a travel path. Nothing obvious--and then, a footprint! One footprint, a large, human shoe, pointed out toward the city.
“He could be in a lot of places,” Peni said, apprehensive. Her robot hummed in agreement, then tensed, its scanners picking something up.

“What is it?” she asked. SP//dr leaned down and plucked a hair from the wall of the pod, holding it up to analyze. The DNA match-finder clicked throughout the nearby block, searching and then beeped just below her feet.

“We did it!” she said, victorious. The man was entering the restaurant now, alongside another, if the heat signature was correct. They were arm-in-arm. A couple? Did two villains enter her universe?

Whatever the case, she’d take them down. Now it was just a matter of sneaking into a fancy, hip, and well-staffed establishment, in broad daylight, with a large robot.

This would be easy as rewiring a mainframe while being shot at.

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Noir clutched Peter’s arm and smiled wider as the receptionist gave them a welcoming smile.

“Why, yes! We ARE the Parker couple reservation!” Porker said. “How did you guess? We as legitimate patrons of this establishment would very much like to know.”

“Oh, of course we’d know you!” the woman at the desk laughed. “You’re New York’s favorite couple!”

Noir suddenly wanted to know, very keenly, what exactly the Hell was going on.
Chapter Seven: Billionaire Philanthropists

Chapter Summary

Noir and Ham get into a sticky situation with the paparazzi. Peni crawls around in some vents, action-movie style. Things are coming to a head.

Chapter Notes

Ah, kissy-kissy? :3

“Are you hearing this?” Peter asked, the general sense of confusion and panic rising further in his chest.

“They think we’re… a couple?” Noir asked, simultaneously confirming Peter’s fears and making him want to burst through the wall. Well, he could do that. Looney Physics allowed it. But, then again, they were in a pretty good vantage point to look around for someone with cloaking tech to get them to the hub, and for Peni.

Because they were in the @#$% top floor, overlooking the entire restaurant.

“Yeaaah.” Peter said. He hadn’t even thought about how Noir was going to take it. The man was from the 30’s, and Peter didn’t remember those times being kind to gay people. Or anyone, really. The 30’s generally sucked, especially if you weren’t white, male, and demonstrably straight.

“Okay. As long as the real… ah… Parker couple doesn’t arrive soon, that buys us time.” Noir said.

Peter blinked. Well, maybe he’d hoped that Noir would be a little more flustered… no. Stop. Job to do. Peter looked out the window to their left, a vast view of the city, and his fingers tightened on the tablecloth.

Holy $#!.&.

Peter poked Noir’s leg with his own, smiling to hide the icicle of nerves now buried in his cerebellum. His eyes remained glued on the poster—no, movie billboard outside of the window, massive and burning reds and silvers as it hovered in the air. He heard Noir suck in a breath beside him and saw the other man’s gray skin pale.

(Oh, right. And they also hadn’t really thought about the whole “gray skin” thing. Peter wished he knew how to use foundation.)

The billboard was large enough to read at the distance, and large enough to see. It moved, slightly, a screen showcasing a preview of the film it advertised, like a constantly looping trailer. He watched the main male lead—himself, just looking a bit less tired and a h3$# of a lot more comfortable in his skin—wink at the other male lead, who blushed and tried to hide his face in his collar.

The other male lead was clearly Noir. In color, but still Noir. Peter missed the title of the movie
completely and stifled a yelp as the actors--this universe’s version of him and Noir--leaned toward each other and--well--

Noir cleared his throat. Peter finally pulled his eyes away to find Noir just across from him, looking away from the screen. “Yeah, okay, I’m an actor. You’re an actor. We’re both actors. My name’s Benjamin, yours is William.”

“Wait, what? Why?” Peter’s mind was glad to shake itself out of seeing himself… ah… kissy-kissy.

“Caught it on the poster. I’m a flatfoot. I notice things. I guess the guys in this universe who look like us have different names, or go by ‘em. Actors,” Noir offered it as explanation. Peter “William” Porker sank in his seat. How long had it been since he last slept? Everything about this place was designed to exhaust him.

“Hello, welcome to the Algren. Can I take your order?”

Peter jumped as Noir turned smoothly to the waitress. Well, any concerns about Noir’s skin took a swan dive out the window. The waitress had colored her skin bright blue, with Japanese characters on each cheek and a heart drawn on her cupid’s-bow lips.

“Yeah, ah, I’ll have… water.” Peter said. The waitress beamed when he spoke and wrote it, glancing up at him from beneath a layer of false eyelashes.

“Egg cream,” Noir said. There was a moment of silence, in which Noir seemed to realize that egg creams were not to be found in this establishment.

“Sorry?” she asked. Her smile faltered.

“He’s kidding! Water for both of us.” Peter said, taking Noir’s hand across the table before he realized what he’d done. Noir forced a smile in response, and now they were trapped. He hoped that Noir’s gloves blocked him from feeling the sweat on his palms.

“Got it! I’ll be back soon to take your order,” she said. She began to walk away, then stopped. “Oh, um, by the way, I know you get this all the time, but that movie… oh my god, I’m going to cry--”

Peter and Noir shared a glance as the waitress composed herself.

“It was just so inspirational to me. I asked my partner out by using the speech you make when you tell him you thought he was an angel the first time you saw him. They were so happy, and now we’re together, and I just can’t thank you enough.” She directed it to Noir, who froze completely under her gaze.

“Nooo problem! Glad we inspired you!” Peter said. Noir was blinking slowly, as though there were too many tabs open in his brain.

The waitress smiled, and walked away to the hover-vator to get to the kitchen. Peter stared after her as she left.

“Wooow, okay. Pretty cool that our alternate-universe doppelgangers are famous, right?” Peter said, not feeling cool at all. He felt uncomfortable, on many, interlocking levels, that he was supposedly in a relationship with Noir, a human, and that he WAS a human in this universe, and that, apparently, the both of them were stealing the identities of cinematic masters.

Noir stiffened, and for a moment, Peter thought that his words had offended Noir. But Noir had turned away; he was staring at someone on the floor below them, visible over the balcony, wearing a lab coat and drinking tea. Peter’s eyes widened as the man (or maybe woman?) showed their date a
cup, clicked a button on a wrist monitor, and grinned as the cup vanished.

“Woah, that’s cloaking tech!” Peter said. Noir shushed him, but nodded.

“Invisible stuff? Definitely. We need to talk to that guy.” Noir said. The two watched (they were still holding hands. Peter could feel that they were still holding hands) as the man(?) stood up from the table and gave a mock-bow, then excused himself and made his way toward the hover-vator.

“Where’s he going?” Peter asked.

“Restroom’s the best guess. Only one way to find out.” Noir stood, and then realized that he was still holding Peter’s hand. He cleared his throat and let go, allowing Peter to get up on his own.

A few diners turned to look at them, smiling. Peter felt the sweat on the back of his neck slither down. Oh, no. They were expecting cute stuff.

Noir took his arm abruptly, just as Peter heard the first click of the shutters.

Cameras. Of course there were paparazzi here.

Peter kept a fixed smile on as he and Peter stepped into the elevator. The shutter sounds multiplied by the second. Were there paparazzo on other floors?

As soon as the doors shut and the hover-mechanisms began to lower them, Noir exhaled.

“I can’t. I don’t like people looking at me. How do we get them to stop looking?”

“I think they’re trying to get the scoop,” Peter said. “And, for the record, as a reporter? I’d never do this. Yeesh, can’t they leave people alone?”

“The scoop, huh? The business? Alright, alright. I get that it’s a living for ‘em, but still. We need to be able to follow that guy. Restrooms are on the bottom floor. I saw ‘em when we came in.”

“Oh, we’re almost there…” Peter said. He was breathing too quickly. How did these hover-vators move so fast?

“Okay, okay, don’t panic. I’m sure we’ll be--”


“Good. We made it out with no bulb-hawkers,” Noir said. He stepped out.

“Wait!” Peter said, as the Second Law of Comedic Timing was invoked before his eyes. “Don’t--”

And the feeding frenzy began.

Shutters snapped in every direction as paparazzo closed in, some with microphones. “CAN I HAVE A MINUTE?” leaped over “About your latest film, The Watchman’s Calling, what did you do to prepare--”

Noir covered his eyes with a hand, and Peter grabbed for his arm to steady himself. They were being completely blocked from the restroom, where Peter could see the science guy entering, oblivious to the storm of cameras behind him. They needed to get out. They needed to get out, somehow. Maybe if he just started walking? What did celebrities do? He was going to scream. This was too much. Every flash of a camera left a burn on his retinas that remained for at least five seconds, and his vision was mottled by darkness and light.
“All right, put this on your front page!”

Peter barely registered what Noir had said before the other man kissed him on the cheek. The paparazzo crescendoed for a moment—then slowed, as the so-called reporters aww-ed and oo-ed.

“Adorable,” one said into a microphone. Peter’s brain was so cross-wired that it took a moment for him to realize that she meant… the kiss. Noir had kissed him on the cheek, and now he was pulling him by the arm through a crowd of people scribbling on notepads and calling their companies.

Ah. Kissy-kissy.

The restroom door shut behind him, and Noir stumbled in, splashing his face with water from the sink. Noir was a deeper shade of gray, as though he were flushing.

Why’d he have to go and do that? Peter groaned, internally, while standing perfectly still and dumbstruck in the middle of the restroom.

“You understand, that was, ah,—”

Kissy-kissy? Yeah, what WAS that?

“—a diversion, to satisfy them.” Noir said. Peter exhaled, slowly, then slapped himself in the face with a doing.

“Woah, woah, trotter! You alright?” Noir asked. The water from his face ran down to his horrible pink shirt and gathered at his collar.

“Yeah! Fine! Just freaked out, that’s all! Man, how do famous people deal?” he asked, voice several pitches higher than usual.

“Hell if I know,” Noir said. The restroom, large as it was, was relatively empty—light bounced unhindered from one wall to another, casting the room in pale amber, and a toilet flushed at the far end. Noir and Peter immediately pretended to be washing their hands as Science Person came out of the backmost stall, whistling to themself.

The person was short, with cropped, deep blue hair and warm brown skin. Their eyes were gold, and looked almost mechanized. The person’s fingernails were painted the same tone.

“Excuse me,” the man(?) said, moving between the two to use the sink. Noir and Peter glanced at each other, and Peter cleared his throat.

“Hey, ah, we’re… Ben and William Parker,” Peter said, as Noir mouthed the names to him. The scientist lit up, turning to face him with an outstretched hand.

“Wow, I knew I recognized you two! I’m Vieve Kerrickson.” they said, shaking Peter’s hand and then Noir’s with great enthusiasm.

“Thanks. We have to say, we noticed you using a device earlier that interested us a lot…”

“Oh, yeah, this?” Vieve said, proudly displaying a wrist-watch like device that whirred and spun beneath a white casing. “Light and energy refractor, best of its kind. It can make a five-story house totally invisible to scanners and radar. I’ve worked on it for years.”

“Great. How much?” Noir asked.

Vieve paused for a moment, then began to laugh.
Noir and Peter did not laugh.

“Wait, you’re serious?” They said, biting their lip. Peter and Noir nodded in unison.

“Why would you want it?” Vieve asked. They were growing defensive, and Peter scrambled for an excuse.

“Easy. The paparazzi,” Noir said, raising one eyebrow. Vieve clicked their tongue in sympathy, and Peter relaxed.

“Totally get it, Mr. Parker,” Vieve said, “but it’s not for sale.”

“Please,” Peter said, holding up a hand, “you’d really be helping us. It’s out of control.”

“Can’t you involve the police?” Vieve asked, covering their device with a sleeve. Peter looked to Noir for help.

“The paparazzi are real pipe-snakes. The police can only do so much to keep ‘em away. We need more,” Noir said. Vieve looked indecisive.

“Well, I might have something…” Vieve pulled another watch-device out of their pocket and held it out. Peter and Noir leaned over to look.

“This is my second one. It’s a little buggy, but…”
She strapped it on and angled her hand toward a faucet. Noir jumped back as it vanished.

“It works.”

Peter grinned. “Looks good! How much?”

“You can have it,” Vieve said. Noir’s mouth dropped open behind her.

“Wait, really?” Peter said, as it was dropped into his hands. He held it with care, as though afraid a sudden movement might make it snap in two.

“Yeah. Your movies really changed my life. Just make sure people know that I’m the one who made it, if anyone asks.” Vieve grinned.

Well, that was one way to make Peter feel like a total piece of garbage. He smiled back with far less enthusiasm—though he hoped his guilt didn’t show—and strapped it on, before giving Vieve a hug that held every apology he wanted to give them.

“You mind showing us the ropes?” asked Noir. Vieve’s face became even brighter, and Peter could have sworn that the blue hair changed color.

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SP//dr scuttled through the Algren’s vents, subtle clicks matching the whirr of the microfans hidden in every nook. Even with the spaciousness of these ducts, the robot had to scuttle in a compact ball down the length, following the signals on the display of her bot.

Four of them. There were four people in the pod, if the readings that were growing stronger by the second were any indication. Two were in the kitchen, and two were in the restrooms. Not the ideal places to throw down.
“We don’t pick the ballroom. We just dance.” Peni said, chest tightening as she remembered Noir.

Her robot bobbed slightly—a nod of agreement—and Peni tapped at the controls, stuffing a KitKat in her mouth. The restrooms it was. She hoped that they were pretty empty; things could become pretty hectic if civilians were involved.

Her bot maneuvered itself down, into the shafts just above the first floor. Bars of light, broken by vent lines, burned ahead, and through it she could hear a voice:

“You tap it twice to activate it. Uh, this one’s a little buggy, so you may need to tap it more than that—”

What was the person talking about? A weapon? Peni felt herself slip backward for a moment.

_The Scorpion’s tail. Sharp enough to break bulletproof glass. SP//dr had saved her. She would have died._

Her robot stopped, sensing the lack of motion from her hands, and before it could warm the seats or purr to her or otherwise calm her down, she was directing it to spy through the vents.

There. A man—or woman—in a long white coat, fiddling with the buttons on a band around another man’s wrist.

And on either side—hold on, were those guys _William and Benjamin Parker?_ As in, _The Watchman’s Calling_ William and Benjamin Parker? As in, the Benjamin Parker she lied to kids at school about being related to that one time in fifth grade so that Kaori would sit with her at lunch because she was desperate for her crush to notice her?

She checked her screen again in disbelief. They were the ones giving the signals.

Maybe she shifted her weight too suddenly. Maybe not quickly enough. But a few moments later, a screw from the ceiling vent came loose under the weight of one of SP//dr’s feet—and bounced off of the scientist’s head.
Chapter Eight: We've Got Company

Chapter Summary

Wade and Peter deal with some feelings—sorta. The throwdown begins.

Chapter Notes

GET READY FOR MILES AND GWEN NEXT CHAPTER! Also, sorry this one is short. I started to lose motivation, so I had to kinda finish it at a decent stopping point, oof, owie.

TEN MINUTES EARLIER

THE KITCHENS AT THE ALGREN

“You get that this isn’t personal at all?” PB asked.

The waiter squirmed in the webbing that wrapped him to the wall and gnawed at his webbing, like a mouse in a net. The other employee shrugged, leaned back against the wall, and surrendered himself to his fate. The strands squeaked slightly as he sagged, and closed his eyes as if ready to fall asleep. The angry one, who PB had chosen to call Taz (after the Tasmanian Devil—hey, Looney Tunes were on his mind, alright?), glared at him in sullen, barely-tempered rage. The calmer one appeared oblivious, and possibly asleep.

“Let’s hope that’s soundproof,” PB said, and shut the door of the bonus pantry.

He turned to find Wade already struggling into a pair of black pants they’d snagged from the innocent workers. They’d ditched their colorful “future clothes” in the closet with the two waiters, which Wade called “a tragedy.” PB, however, thought it was a relief that the damn stilettos were gone.

“Wow, whoever’s reading this is probably PISSED that we cut away from the fight,” Wade muttered to himself. PB brushed it away and tapped his friend on the shoulder, adjusting his collar. Uniforms still sucked, even in the 3100-somethings.

“Yeah, yeah, I--YIPE! Got it,” Wade yanked his pants up at the last moment and tucked in his dress shirt, through which PB could almost see the red of his outfit.

The fabric of the shirt was slightly reflective, and PB got the feeling that it was a fabric that hadn’t been invented yet. That would be cool, if he weren’t sweating through it.

“Like what you see?” Wade asked, winking.

“Yeah, I’m definitely asking Peni what these shirts are made out of,” PB said, “they’re shiny.”

Wade pressed his mouth into a thin line and folded his arms over his chest. PB realized that he hadn’t
meant the fashion a second too late, and Wade sighed loudly as PB’s mouth opened.

“Well, I meant the shirt. The shirt that is literally identical to a normal dress shirt, except shiny. Not that I’m not in love with the shiny, but *come on*, Peanut Butter.”

“It’s PB,” he said, without thinking. Wade snorted, pleased with himself, and PB swatted him on the head.

It was an odd thought, but in a way, Wade reminded him of MJ. He was cruder, yes, uglier, definitely, and by god, he ate more burritos, but he was just as funny, and under that hood he’d been wearing earlier, he had ironically good hair. For a moment, he saw a ghost of MJ superimposed over Wade, in the glint of the smile Wade almost constantly plastered to his face.

Holy shit, he was messed up. And probably staring.

“You okay?” asked Wade. His smile twitched down, just barely, but enough to make PB feel like he were about to break down about The Seahorses again.

“I’m great!” PB said, his voice cracking on the end. Wade’s smile dropped into a line.

“I don’t think you’re telling the truth.” The mercenary said. He fell into an uncharacteristic quiet, hands in his pockets.

PB met his eyes, held them for a few moments, and then walked past him into the kitchen proper. Dinner-rush-hour chaos would do a lot to calm his nerves, right?

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THE PRESENT

THE RESTROOM

There’s a brief calm in the air before the lugs start flying. Noir had come to know it and cherish it: the stillness before a thunderclap, when you didn’t know if you’d be swinging out with a dame on your arm or fast asleep in a Chicago overcoat before five minutes were up. It was the calm as the screw bounced off Vieve’s head and rolled with a low growl to the edge of the sink and dropped in, bouncing back and forth on the surface.

The scientist’s head ticked up degree by degree and met the vent. Noir’s hand darted to his waist, then remembered that he’d had to ditch his pistol with this disguise. Peter, next to him, concentrated for a second, then pulled a mallet from behind his back with a flourish. Lucky bastard.

“Trouble,” Vieve said, in a voice completely unlike the one they’d been using earlier. It was darker, with a shade of real malice to it. Noir wondered if the whiz was really a right gee after all, just before the vent was pulled away and a certain red-and-purple (was it red-and-blue?) robot dropped down, the blinking lights on its surface bursting with angry sparkles. He and Peter both paused at the same time, and then began to back away, confused.

“Pen--” Noir started, hope in his chest.

“SP//dr,” Vieve said, “I thought we wouldn’t meet again.”

“Ah-GAIN?” Peter Porker asked. Shit. They’d been taken for saps by this “Vieve” guy (or doll?), and now they were gonna pay for it.
“Peni, it’s us!” Peter said, but he was drowned out by a whirring coming from Vieve’s cloaking device.

“Who are you, and why’d you come to my dimension?” Peni asked, loudly enough to be heard over the din of whatever Vieve was doing as they backed away. The lights on the dome of the future-tech robot solidified into two squinted eyes and a frown with a point at the top.

“Peni! It’s! Me!” Peter called.

“How--” the robot’s eyes became wide, with small pupils. It was on a metal, clankin’ machine, sure, but Noir knew shock and fear when he saw it. “I don’t know you!” the robot said, again, and Peter flinched. Right. The human body. Noir felt sympathy for him in the second before Vieve clicked a button and vanished into thin air.

“Have you ever heard of the itsy bitsy spider?” asked Vieve, from somewhere in the air next to Noir. Noir flinched and cocked a fist back, sweat beading on his neck. This was going wrong.

“Yeah. Nursery rhyme from the 20th century. Now fight me face to face!” Peni yelled. Noir would have been prouder if she hadn’t begun to advance on him. Right. He was out of his mask.

The robot clicked across the floor on the points of its legs, humming a warning. Noir ignored every instinct he had and put up his hands in surrender, like a crook caught by the buttons. Vieve whistled the song in the air, unseen.

“Kid, it’s me. It’s Peter! Well, ah, the other Peter. From, you know--”

Peni’s robot took a few more steps, then came to a stop just above his face.

“Hold on… Noir Peter! Is that you--”

A glint, and a sound like a bullet ping off metal off a pair of gold-coated nails was the only warning Vieve gave before they appeared, just above Peni’s head, and carved three impossible white lines in the air as they gouged the robot’s dome.

Peni swore in Japanese and backed away. The dome flared blue where Vieve had scratched it, sparking. SP/dr’s arm snapped up and struck Vieve a glancing blow before the scientist disappeared again.

“You should go, Parkers. This isn’t about you!” Vieve appeared long enough to give them an apologetic smile and flip onto the dome before vanishing in time for SP/dr’s arms to pass where they’d just been.

“Who the hell is this, Peni?” Noir asked. He dropped down and grimaced. Of course they couldn’t trust a shmuck in a clean lab coat. No one was ever trustworthy.

“V.I.! They’re an AI technician who released a virus into New York a few months back and almost destroyed our entire banking system. Why the Hell were you talking to her?!” Peni said, her voice distorted through the suit.

“Language!” Noir said, on instinct. SP/dr gave him a sour, pixelated glare and twisted just in time to dodge a swipe from Vieve. The scientist groaned and vanished just before Peni could snatch them from the air.

“You need help?!” Ham asked. He spun and thrust the mallet out, found nothing, and stumbled.
“Who are you? Another Spider-Man?” Peni asked.

“No, I’m kinda—weeeell,” Ham listened, one ear larger than the other (how the Hell did he do that?) and lunged. Vieve yelped as the mallet caught their side. “Dammit, Vieve, you seemed like a nice guy!”

The word wasn’t censored, but Ham didn’t seem to notice. Noir quickly slipped the band Vieve had given then into his pocket, just as an invisible hand closed over his wrist.

“You aren’t who you said you were, either!” Vieve yelled. Noir grasped for them, and his fingers caught—before a glint of gold slashed down. The blood on his skin mingled with sweat and washed down his arm as Vieve threw him off.

“You aren’t Ben and William. So who are you?” It was reflex to go back-to-back with Peni. He could hear her furiously clacking something on her electro-gizmo and muttering to herself.

“V.I. jammed it, but I can get a heat signal—GOT IT! New Guy, on your left!” Peni shouted. Noir had to duck as her robot pivoted, blades spinning. New Guy. She meant Ham.

“You mean me—” Peter Porker took an invisible fist to the face. Noir groaned as birds appeared around Peter’s head, twittering and flapping. Peni stopped for a moment and watched the birds as Vieve took another kick. Whatever else could be said about the two-faced egghead, they had fancy footwork.

“We’re the Parker cou—the Parkers,” Noir said. If he could tempt the flash-slasher out, he could roundhouse them and lay them flat in a few seconds. “But not your universe’s Parkers.”

“Porker!” Peter called.

“Yeah, yeah,” Noir said. He caught a shimmer in the air in the corner of the room and twisted, but it was gone when he looked at it.

“Another dimension…” Vieve began, fascination making their voice sound more like the guy he’d met coming into the room and not a villain. “You’re telling the truth? That’s—”

Peter saw something Noir didn’t (impressive) and spiked his mallet into the ground, where it bounced with an improbably squeaking noise and hit Vieve with enough force to jar them into visibility. Peni leapt over, robotics clacking as she held Vieve’s arms back, restraining the scientist. Vieve struggled, heels scrabbling at the floor.

SP//dr’s face turned into a scoreboard: 1 to 0. Noir chuckled.

“Nice work,” he said, stalking to stand in front of the bound scientist, who looked pitiful and small when they weren’t blinking through the air.

Peni’s robot smiled with a gap in its teeth and gave what looked like a thumbs-up, and noir felt warmth in his chest. The same warmth he’d been feeling a hell of a lot more of lately.

“If you’re going to take my stuff, Fake Parkers” Vieve said, going limp in SP//dr’s arm-hold, “I just want to ask some questions.”

“You don’t get to,” Peni said. Pride. That’s what Noir felt, he realized. Peni’s robot swivelled its dome away from him and looked to Ham, its face a line of question marks, then an explanation point.

“Oh, wow. Something went reeeeeally wrong with your DNA there, huh?” Peni asked.
“You could say that!” The former cartoon pig said, voice crackly. As it turned out, Porker’s thousand yard stare rivalled even Noir’s.
Chapter Nine: Sleep Deprivation - Fun for the Whole Spiderfamily

Chapter Summary

Miles and Gwen join the team. Peni, PB, and Wade find out what happened to Peter and Noir while they were occupied.

Chapter Notes

LONG CHAPTER BAYBEY!

“This is CRAZY. It looks like it was wired by a team of dedicated puppies,” Peni said. She and SP//dr rummaged through the wires with matching grimaces, as their bright rubber casings wriggled around them. Exposed copper shone with a menacing light to Peni’s right, and she beckoned SP//dr over so that they could cover it.

“Agreed! Now do you know how to hack it? Please tell me you can hack it in five seconds. Try saying ‘I’m in.’ That usually works.” Peter said. Peni rolled her eyes and continued tapping at the screen, grumbling about ancient tech.

“Our worlds aren’t governed by the same laws, Peter-chan. We’re gonna have to follow this things’ itinerary and get to the Hub.” she said. Wade snickered in the background, struggling to take off his waiter shirt, and PB poked him in the gut to shut him up.

“Right. Fine. Great!” Peter snapped, pacing the pod. Noir gave him a disapproving look and replaced his questionable white hat with his classic gray one.

“I can’t believe we haven’t gotten to fight, like, at all. Even anime over here got to beat the shit out of a scientist and hand them over to the cops.” Wade said.

“Don’t use that sort of language in fronta the kid, Wade.” Noir admonished. The scar above his lip twitched. Peter Porker remembered what those lips had done to get them away from the press and decided to concentrate on Being Angry about Being Human for the time being.

“Trust me, you’ll get to fight. Every one of the… things guarding the Hub is a bad chikushou, and our cloaking tech won’t get us past all of them unseen.” Peni warned. Wade pumped his fist in the background, having mentally checked out after hearing the word “fight.”

“I feel like that word’s one of the things you shouldn’t be using,” Noir warned. He put up his hands as Peni glared at him.

“The pod’s material is called Latverium, and it’s protecting us from glitching.” Peni said. “It’s basically rewriting our DNA to fit whichever universe we visit.” Peni pulled out a dead moth from the carapace of the MurderCoffin and studied it with a scientist’s intrigue.

“Then why am I the only one who got a total overhaul? The works, if you will?” Peter said. PB put a
hand on his shoulder.

“It was programmed in to just work once. Whatever—who was it? Doctor Octopussy-Cat wanted to do, he only had the tech to do a total DNA rewrite once. Cute name for a villain, by the way.” Peni held out a hand, and PB placed a piece of candy in it. It was gone in a moment.

“Not cute! Don’t give him the satisfaction of being considered cute!” Peter could feel steam preparing to come out of his ears. PB massaged his temples.

“I’m helping you, Ham!” Peni said, crossing her arms. Cartoon vein-lines appeared on her forehead. Noir’s eyes widened, and he almost reached out to poke one before thinking better of it and crossing his arms behind his back. Peter winced and pressed his lips together as Peni calmed herself, breathing in and out a few times.

“Sorry I can’t change you back right now,” Peni said, “and I know this is pretty… ahh… unusual. But we can get through this. This pod’s punching its way through universes one at a time, and we’ll be at the Hub quickly if we just move fast. We’ll have the tech there to get back to normal.”

“Yes,” Peter said, “okay. Sounds good. Sorry about that. It’s been a strange few days.”

“Yeah, what the Hell happened?” PB finally asked, hands in the air. “We got the tech from the scientist, I know that. But there was a fight, and that scientist was a supervillain, and apparently you guys got a table at this place?”

“Yeah. Apparently, our body doubles in this universe are… frieeennds.” Peter looked to Noir, who resolutely did not make eye contact.

“Friends? They’re married.” Peni said. She slammed the control panel door. “I did fiddle with it. The ride to Gwen’s and Miles’ universes should be smoother.”

“Thanks, and—wait. Wait. Slow down.” PB said, blinking as though he were encountering a difficult calculus problem. “You and Noir are married in Peni’s universe?”

Peni gave Peter and Noir a guilty smile and shrugged as Noir did his best to melt into the shadows and Ham’s sound effects played a record scratch. Thanks, sound effects. How generous of you to call even more attention to a mortifying situation.

“Yeeehah, well, um. Okay, you know what? I’m going to sprint through the wall of this pod,” Peter said. Wade threw an arm around him and held on, grinning like a fool.


“They’re hologram stars.” Peni said, her smile shifting from apologetic to mischievous.

“Picture show stuff,” muttered Noir, “now can we—”

“No, for once, I agree with Wade. This is crazy.” PB said. “So you impersonated movie stars to get a table? God, I wish I could get tables for being famous.”

“But you’re Spider-Man!” Peni said. PB gave her a look that said almost everything.

“What happened? Did you hold haaands? Aww, Noir, don’t blush, it’s adorable!” Wade said. Peter looked over to find that Noir was, indeed, blushing a warm shade of gray and trying to bury his face in his collar. Noir fumbled for his mask and shoved it on, further incriminating himself.
“Come on, guys, lay off! It’s not a big deal. All we did was hold hands over the table while our waitress was there, and Noir also kissed me so that the paparazzi would get off our back and oh no.” Peter slapped a hand over his mouth with a cymbal-crash sound. “Oh, no, I got ahead of myself. Way ahead. Please pay no heed to anything I said.”

Wade, paying very close heed, was the least open-mouthed and shocked of the other three. His chest began to shake silently, with laughter, as he released his hold on Porker’s shoulders to lean back against the wall. Noir gave Wade a glare—if looks could kill, this one would’ve taken Wade weeks to regenerate from.

“You didn’t have to say that, trotter,” warned Noir. PB blinked a few times and tried to shrug it off, failing, as he opened and closed his mouth a few times.

“That’s kawaii!” Peni gasped. Her eyes grew in size and sparkled, starling Noir. Wade finally lost it and slumped against the wall completely, cackling.

“Okay, fine, laugh it up! He did what he had to do,” Peter said. He and Noir began speaking over each other, explaining:

“Well, y’see, it’s like this, a few flash-bulb hawkers--”

“--and it was the only way to get them off our backs--”

“--it was a mob house, lemme tell ya, a real toe-kicking--”

“--on the cheek! What’s wrong with an on-the-cheek kiss?”

Wade jumped up from the floor with the agility of a trained mercenary—which made a lot of sense, considering he was one—and composed himself as PB continued to almost ask a question and then think better of it. Peni smiled like a tiny, adorable, and all-too-proud of herself cat and pretended to fiddle with the screen as the pod moved into motion, much less rockily. Peter wished she’d made it more rocky. That would be a wonderful distraction.

“Just so you know, I’m never not going to hold this over your heads.” Wade said.


“Accept me for who I am, Peanut Butter: a petty asshole.” Wade mock-bowed and then, mercifully, shut his mouth.

“Just hold it over our heads quietly.” Peter begged. Wade shrugged. Noir sighed.

“So, where are we going next?” the detective asked, coughing to hide his embarrassment.

“Our friendly neighborhood Spider-Woman.” PB said, lip quirking.

“Ooh! Montage time! Please say montage time. It’s been ten chapters.” Wade begged.

“What do you mean, ten chap--” PB was cut off as the universe decided to cut Wade a break, and the pod sped up.

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“Okay. Please explain. Again.” Gwen said, hanging upside down in the middle of her room with the look of a mother who has found her children elbows-deep in a cookie jar.
Peter held up a hand and pointed to his fingers. “One. Two. Three. Four. Fi--”

“But how?” She dropped to the floor of her room and threw her hands in the air, her hair flopping to the wrong side before settling into her half-shave.

Gwen’s room was messy—surprisingly so. For someone with that much grace on the battlefield, she lacked the tidiness Peter would have expected. Her room was a mix of hoodies draped over chairs, little doodles on scattered papers, homework, dust that she kept calling “dance rosin” and explosive neon posters tacked to the wall with pins. Heck, even his room was a LOT cleaner than this.

“Basically, this thing rewrites you when you use it so that you’re... formatted for the universe you’re going to.” Peni hopped down from her perch on SP//dr’s dome to gesture with her hands. “It just went overboard the first time. My guess is that Doc Octopus-Cat--”

“Sorry, who?” Gwen said, putting a hand to her head. PB put a hand on her shoulder.

“As I was saying...” Peni’s mouth became an irritated, unnaturally straight line. Boy, anime was weird. “My guess is that Porker’s Doc Ock wanted to become human, for his conquest.”

“So he targeted universes where the Doc Ock is out of commission, or in the slammer, or taking the big sleep,” Noir said, snapping his fingers. Peni beamed at him, nodding.

“Yup! Glad someone figured it out.” Peni said. “Only, Porker accidentally fell into the machine instead, and now...”

“Five fingers.” Peter finally finished, slumping.

Gwen’s hand shifted to her chin, and she stared at Peter long enough to make him fidget. She buried her face in the crook of her elbow and groaned, turning away.


“Sorry about this.” Noir said. “We’d just appreciate the help, for someone we could trust. He’s our friend.”

“Aww, adorable!” Wade said. He put up his hands as Noir gave him a look strong and sharp enough to crack steel. Peter felt that Noir was going to have to do that a lot, now. He went pink. Gwen lifted her head and looked between the two of them, and Peter began whistling, his go-to Acting Casual Activity that, honestly, didn’t work well.

“Is there... anything else I should know?” She asked, as she grabbed a few items and tossed them into a bag. She grabbed her suit and started to duck into her bathroom, in order to change.

“No.” Noir said.

“No!” Peter said.

“Yeah, just go ahead and change. We’re going to Miles’ place next.” PB said, in a blessed display of absolute apathy.

“Thanks,” Gwen said. It took her about a minute--Peter could change in ten seconds, thanks to Toon Laws--but she came out suited, mask in hand.
“Let’s go,” she said. “You said the pod was on 8th and 31st?”

---

“Ok. Please explain. Again.” Miles Morales lowered a web shooter and stared at his friends as they indicated the pod, and then Peter. Peni held up Peter’s hand and poked it. Peter didn’t know how to feel about that.

“Alright, so the first thing you need to know is that Doctor Octop--Doc Ock…” Peni began.

The explanation was faster this time, and no less confusing for Miles, who clearly hadn’t expected to be drafted for The Spider Gang’s Big Adventure while out web-swinging.

“So, can ya help?” Noir asked. Peter gave Miles his best puppy eyes. They were much less effective now that he wasn’t a cartoon pig, which was a lot more puppy-adjacent than a human. Miles hesitated, then gave a firm nod.

“You better be glad it’s winter break at Visions. I’m already supposed to spend the holidays with Gangke--”

“Oh?” Gwen prodded. Miles blushed.

“Hey, come on! It’s not like that.” Miles said. “Okay, it-well-I-anyway. I’ll tell him to cover for me. How long do you think this whole thing will last?”

“A few days, if this cloaking device works,” Peni said, with a shrug. “We should be fine.”

“Got it. Then I’m in.” Miles stood up straighter, looking as strong as he could. It made Peter uncomfortable that he was now almost taller than the kid. Stupid realistic human height.

“Great!” Peter said. “You need anything?”

“I got everything packed up at my dorm,” Miles said. “We can run by there. Come on.”

“Running by,” in this case, actually meant “swinging in as sneakily as possible,” as they alighted in Miles’ room so that he could snatch up his things. A call to Gangke, during which Miles stuttered three times, and then Miles had his stuff, a duffel bag with his own logo on it.

“You don’t think that’s suspicious? Just having that?” PB asked.

“Hey, whoever heard of a spider who wore his own merch?” Miles smirked. PB looked at Miles like a proud uncle watching his nephew pull off a damn successful prank. Peter noticed the way Wade looked at PB when the Spider-Man looked away: softer, kinder, appreciative of the guy. Oh, crap. Was that how he looked at Noir?

*What do you mean? You don’t look at Noir like that. He’s cute, that’s all. You don’t have a crush, like Wade--*

Ooooh. That explained it. Wade was in love with PB, wasn’t he? Peter looked away, embarrassed, as though he’d lifted up a rock and found someone else’s treasure underneath. His eyes caught on the bunk bed, and he realized just how long he’d been awake. The bed. The glorious sleep-zone. Oh, it looked so nice--

Peni swatted his hand as he began to extend it to touch the covers. “What are you doing?” She snickered, then paused as she looked him over.”
“You look exhausted! How long have you been awake?” Peni said. Her voice alerted Gwen, who peeked over and winced.

“Yikes. Yeah, you look tired, Ham.” said Spider-Woman, biting her lip.

“I was up all night, too actually,” Miles admitted, earning a stern frown from PB. “Painting.”

“Seriously, kid? Get some rest!” PB admonished, ignorant to the fact that he looked like absolute garbage.

“Hey, you’re one to talk!” Miles protested. Peter looked to Noir, again, and noted the dark gray beneath his friend’s eyes. Hadn’t those always been there? And Peni, too, looked tired. She’d probably been up for a while in her lab before they even showed up. She’d mentioned tracking their pod. Regardless, they’d all been up for… a while, clearly. Except maybe Gwen. She was the only responsible one.

“We don’t have time to take a wink, everyone.” Noir said, crossing his arms.

“Have to disagree. Almost everyone has already left for the holidays. We can stay in here.” Miles waved his hands around his tiny dorm room. He looked as though he were trying to stretch it to a realistic size with his energy.

Wade stared, then shook his head. “Okay. No. Who here brought money? We need hotel rooms, at least. I can’t get beauty sleep in something that reminds me this much of college.”

“Did you even go to college?” Asked PB. Wade ignored him.

Gwen offered the $10 she’d had in her back pocket. Noir looked as though he were about to collapse, before Miles gently reminded him that money was worth a hell of a lot less, now. Peni mumbled something about future currency being telepathic, which made Noir look baffled in a cute-- no, objectively charming and humorous way.

Stop thinking about Noir.

PB explained that he’d left his wallet in their universe. Wade had zip. Miles scrounged up about $20, and Wade looked over the combined money hopelessly before turning to Peter, hand outstretched.

Peter reached into his pocket and pulled out a penny.

“Seriously?!” Wade shouted. Miles shushed him and peeked into the hall, looking for a security guard who didn’t come, thankfully.

“The amount of money I have with me is directly proportional to the amount of humor it causes.” Peter said, gesturing to an invisible chalkboard. Wade pouted.

“Doesn’t seem very funny to me. Hope the reader’s happy. Hey, give me one sec. I’m going to take a peek into next chapter.” Wade griped.

He walked out into the hallway, and Miles yelped, about to chase after him. PB stopped him with a hand.

“So, guess we’ll take a pit stop here. Who wants to play Uno?” PB said. Gwen rolled her eyes, but nodded. Peni asked what Uno was. Peter prepared for the inevitable battle when someone drew a +4.

“Is this gamblin’?” Noir asked, looking to Peni.
“No, but it causes just as many fights,” PB said. Noir sat patiently as the play order was explained.

Wade came back into the room a second later, still grumbling.

“So I just looked at next chapter, and yeah, the readers will be happy,” he said. “But this still blows.”

“Play Uno with us.” Noir said. “It’s a future game.”

“Whaddya mean, readers?” Peter asked, shuffling the deck as PB handed it to him. He fumbled it with his extra finger and sheepishly handed it to Noir.

“Ignore him. He says weird stuff all the time.” PB said, laying down the first card. Green +2. $%!#.
Chapter Ten: U-NOPE.

Chapter Summary

The gang plays Uno. Slang doesn't always translate between decades. Peter Porker dies of embarrassment--twice.

Chapter Notes

Sherlock (clapping emojis) HOTS

“You tryna chisel me out of my money?” Noir said.

“Rules are rules,” PB said, nudging the +2 into the center of the pile.

Peni snickered as Noir wrinkled his lip, pulling two cards into his hand. He plunked a “skip turn” into the center and squinted. Judging by how Peni’s face fell, it was the correct color. He turned to her and gave her a pat on the head as she flopped down, irritated. She only had two cards. He had to take what he could, even from a good kid.

“You all suck,” Gwen said, drawing until she was able to plunk a blue into the center.

“Yeah, you Peters are brutal,” Wade said, then played a +4 on Miles. Miles was holding enough cards to stitch together a fan. He pouted, but drew them. This game kept people honest. Noir liked that.

Miles flicked a blue into the center and nodded to Ham. Noir looked to the ex-pig, who looked like the happiest joe in town. God, he’d be bad at poker. Adorable, yeah, but bad at poker. Wait. Shit.

“Didn’t take you for a gaycat.” That’s what the Prowler had said. Why’d he have to go and say that? It was messing his flow up, big time. He liked dames, he knew that, and he was able to ignore other feelings when he was with a doll. But he remembered how he’d felt the first time he’d heard one of the smooth-jazz singers at Rickaby’s say a few words into the mic.

Also, Peter Porker was a pig. Good thing to remember. He shouldn’t be having thoughts like this in the first place.

Noir shook his head and snapped back as Ham ruffled through his cards, humming to himself. The game was distraction for him. He could kick himself for that boneheaded kiss earlier.

“You’ve got a bad straight face, Ham,” Noir said. Wade snickered.

“Cut me some slack! I’m only human.” Peter joked. It was the first time Noir had seen him really joke about his… circumstance. He smiled.

“Come on, pally. You’ve clearly got the big bulge, here.” Noir answered, trying to sort his greens from his blues
Ham stopped. Gwen stopped. Wade stopped. PB stopped. Peni stopped. SP//dr rebooted. A few cards fell to the floor as Miles stopped, loosening his hold on his bouquet of bad luck.

Ham’s eyes ticked up from his hands with a xylophone tapping sound and met Noir’s eyes.

“Whaat do you mean?” Peter asked. He was petrified.

“That’s slang. That’s slang, right?” Gwen asked.

Noir felt that he’d said something very, very wrong. Damn. Was he supposed to know future language from the get-go? Why couldn’t they cut him some slack?

“There’s absolutely nothing wrong with it. Nothing at all.” Wade said, composing himself. PB set his hand down and put his hands to his face, groaning. Miles managed to close his open mouth long enough to collect his fallen cards and shut his mouth, tightly.

“Yeah! Let’s keep playing!” Peni said, nudging SP//dr.

“I meant that he has the advantage! What’s so crazy ‘bout that?” Noir threw his hands up, irritated.

“Oh, thank god. I mean, we probably should have known, but, that’s a relief.” Gwen said. The atmosphere of the room began to return. Ham threw a wildcard down without looking and yipped out “Blue!”

“But it was already blue,” Peni said. Ham ignored her and put his cards up in front of his face. Noir decided to ask PB what that whole shebang was about when the game was over. It was nearing 9 in the night, according to the clock--in his world, this was when he’d start working. Here, it apparently meant it was almost time for bed.

“Noo,” PB said, tossing down a blue 5. Noir followed with a yellow 5. He knew it was yellow, because it was so different from the others. Peni gave him a murderous look and drew until she plopped down a yellow “skip turn.” Gwen huffed as Wade dropped another +4 into the center, making Miles deflate.

“Can I give up?” the kid asked. PB shook his head.

“We always get back up,” he joked. His eyes were more melancholy than his words. Miles sighed and tossed a green 6 into the middle with the enthusiasm of a lame dog. There was a pause as Ham sat, completely still, not shuffling through his cards or considering.

Gwen looked from side to side, then leaned over and poked him. He swayed with the motion, mumbling a reply.

“Hey, Porker? Your turn.” Gwen said.

“What? Oh. Yeah. My turn.” He said. Peter tossed a wildcard into the center and tried to cover his face again, but, as he was down to only two cards, just succeeded in covering the center.

“Color?” PB asked.

“Bright red,” Wade joked. Miles looked to Peter and lifted an eyebrow.

Damn. Peter Porker was blushing. Was it the word he’d used? He hoped not. If he didn’t know better, he’d think the guy’d just had a hot dame get real close.

“Red!” Peter echoed. It was more of a yip than a word.
“Gotcha. I win,” PB said, stretching. He placed a red +2 in the center and stood up, mock-bowing, as Peni grumbled and Gwen congratulated him through gritted teeth.

“Noir was the real winner.” Wade wiggled his eyebrows.

“I’ll mallet you,” Peter muttered, stealing Miles’ hand to add cards to the face-shield. A few moments later and he dropped them, all trace of a blush fading like a New York summer storm left.

Gwen yawned, and stared at the top and bottom bunk with distaste. “Yikes. Those look uncomfortable.”

“They’re okay!” Miles defended. He nodded toward the bathroom and rolled the cricks from his neck. “We can change for bed in there.”

“I don’t have a change,” Noir said.

“We do, though! While I was peeking into next chapter, I had the luxury of… acquiring these through pseudo-legal means.” Wade said. He, inexplicably, reached under the bed and pulled out the trunk of clothes he’d had in the dimension hopper, yanking some loose-fitting things out with great gusto.

“How the Hell? You know what, don’t answer that,” PB said. “But… thanks.”

“Anything for you, hero,” Wade said. He dusted his suit off and yanked a pair of shockingly plain pajamas from the bin—until he turned them around to reveal the dabbing Spider-man emblazoned on the back. He snickered and waved them at PB before whirling into the bathroom to change.

“Yeah, hero. Sure.” PB said. He grabbed a loose shirt and sweatpants from the bin and yawned. “These look good.”

“Alright, I have my stuff,” Gwen nodded to the backpack she’d brought. “And so does Miles. I call the hammock to sleep in.”

“There’s no hammock,” PB said. Gwen smirked, then webbed the wall corner to corner and jumped in.

“Yeah, there is.”

“Touché.” PB tried the same, and only managed to stick one string to the wall, he tried a few more times before Wade came out of the bathroom, saw the strands, and gave PB a sympathetic smirk. The Spider-Man huffed and stepped into the bathroom to change.

“We’ll take the floor. Peni gets one of the beds, Ham gets the other.” Wade said, in a display of altruism that Noir thought uncharacteristic of the guy. Peni began to open her mouth, in protest, and Wade put a finger up.

“No. You’re a kiddo. Get some sleep. Don’t be irresponsible like me.” Wade said. He rolled an inexplicable set of sleeping bags onto the ground with gusto and mock-bowed to PB, indicating them.

“I’m not a kid,” Peni said. But she hopped onto the top bunk anyway, as SP//dr nestled itself into the corner.

“I got a sleeping bag, too. I thought some of my friends might like to stay over some time, so I packed it when I came. You guys probably need the bed more than I do.” Miles said. PB stepped out
of the bathroom, looking even more dishevelled than usual in his baggy tunic of a shirt, and flopped onto the floor with a happy sigh. Noir went in afterward, snagging a black shirt and some color (purple?) of short-pants to wear. His eyes caught on his own reflection as he stepped into the bathroom before he pulled away, uncomfortable. Scars. Maybe he’d have the guts to look himself in the mirror if the scars didn’t run up his face like sloppy welds in silver.

When he emerged, the room was quiet. Ham’s spider suit was folded neatly under the bunk bed—the guy could do that spinnny tornado, like a cartoon character, when he was changing. That was probably handy.

Then he realized that every inch of the floor, every bed, and the only Prime Hammock Making Spot had already been colonized.

Noir looked to the left and right, frantic. Shit. Could he make one of those hammocks, like Gwen had?

No. He could already tell it was a no. Whatever she’d whipped together, she’d done it with practice, and she’d already popped what Miles called “head-phones” on, to drown out noise. Tinnitus—what she’d said she had. He decided not to disturb her, which left a small patch of floor. He’d been unconscious on worse.

Wade, still clearly awake, made eye contact with him for only a split second before he flopped onto his stomach, starfishing away the last nudge of space on the floor. What a pill of a guy. Noir tried to nudge him, but Wade feigned loud snoring, with a smile on his burn-marked face. PB shrugged and shut his eyes as Miles scribbled. Peni was already nodding off.

That left sharing a bed with someone.

Peni? No. She was sprawled like a dancer across her whole bunk, too. Little Japanese characters floated above her head as she slept. He’d never understand those. No hammock, no floor space, no top bunk.

That meant—oh. Oh.

Little Z’s floated above the bottom bunk, tapping the bed above and popping into nothing. His eyes followed them down to the lower bunk, to a lump under the covers, a tuft of dark brown hair peeking out of the top. Man, Peter’d gone out like a light.

Noir considered the other options again. Kick Wade aside. Figure out that hammock set up. Either one would do, wouldn’t it?

The bed looked warm, though, and he’d nudged the blanket aside before he could think it over a thousand times he’d slipped in,

Peter tensed next to him. Great. He’d woken him.


“Uh, yeah. But there’s no other space.” Noir could swear he heard Wade giggle, all too faintly from the ground.

“Oh! Alllrighty. That’s fine. We’ll just…” Peter trailed off.

“… doss in the same bed. Don’t worry, I don’t kick.” Noir said. He heard a chuckle from beside him, and his mouth quirked in the dark.
“Was that you trying a joke, Sherlock?” Peter whispered.

“Maybe.” Noir said. He turned to face away from Peter and tried to ignore the warmth at his back. “Goodnight, trotter.”

There was a pause, then a quiet “See ya tomorrow, Noir. Stay on your side of the bed.”

---

Noir didn’t dream. Or, rather, he didn’t have any dreams worth remembering. Every snippet he caught was just gray on gray, with rainfall snippets between.

For a little while after meeting the others (Ham), he’d had good moments in his dreams. Friends appeared in half-remembered colors to wave hello, until they were extinguished by the torrent of his subconscious like a dead firework, sopping in a gutter.

Maybe it was the result of sleep deprivation, or the fact that all of these universes were so damn bright, but he was having a REAL weird dream now. One strange enough to grab his full attention and hold it, catching him, keeping him from jolting into wakefulness.

He was falling through the multi-verse, arms out, half-floating. Japanese writing scrawled its way around him in white and settled into cartoon censors and then into English typewriter-text, blurring as he rushed past.

_You’re a good kid. Don’t screw it up. You got an eye for guys? Be a gumshoe and put it to good use._ A teacher at his school. He hadn’t even been caught doing anything wrong. The teacher had just assumed (or maybe caught something that Noir thought he’d hidden better).

_You okay? C’mon, let’s go._ Those were his own words, to Peni. A vision of her, thin and transparent against the starry background, and he reached for it, and then was ripped away, spinning around. His head heart, and he reached out, but found no tether.

_I see you eyeing that canary._ It was the bartender, now, the bartender at one of his favorite dives. He’d been looking up at the stage, with a singer stalking up and down it, rapt, and he nodded, just to get the guy off his back and handing him egg creams.

_Nah, he’s lookin’ at the piano man! Gunsel Parker, that’s him._ Those words came from the drunk, whose face blurred into his cup, fractured by the bizarre lens of Noir’s dream. And he was right. Noir HAD been looking at the man who was playing the piano, eyes down, skin shiny in the light. He remembered punching the guy, later, probably for other reasons entirely. He punched a lotta people.

_Gunsel Parker. Gaycat. Guy with a private eye for guys._ The words laced together around him, and the field was white, and his molecules felt like they were being coaxed apart by the lines, and then—an anchor. Warmth. The words stopped.

Noir brought himself closer to the rock in the current of the dream, a soft place in a storm. He was numb, and his mind was fuzzy with exhaustion, but he could tell he was safe, wrapped in something gentle, holding tight.

The dream ended with him in New York, but it was in color, and it was a bright blue morning.

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Oh god. Oh #@$%. Peter was going to die of mortification.
It was dark all around, and quiet as the grave—other than PB’s snoring—and Noir was wrapped around him, his arm around his chest. Oh no. This. Yeah. Mmhmm. Okay. Okay. Alright.

Ham tried to turn, to extricate himself from the taller man’s grasp. He felt an arm detach the slightest bit as he pulled, breath held.

Noir grabbed on tighter. Warmer. Man, the guy was a furnace. It was a surprise. He wouldn’t expect him to be warm, knowing the guy, how he stared off into space with all the drama of an actor in an Indie movie realizing that his father had died—hey, maybe THAT was why Noir and Peter were Big Name Actors in Peni’s universe. Okay, Peter, maybe DON’T think about how you’re married in another universe when you are being snuggled Mr. Sherlock Hots.

_Sherlock HOTS? Is that the best pun you can come up with, Peter? You sad, sad dude._ Peter exhaled, trying to clear his head. One of his legs was caught between the other guy. Great.

So he was definitely attracted to the guy. What was so wrong about that? Just thinking a friend was attractive? It wasn’t like he wanted to date the guy, or hold his hand, or show him a book of colors so that he stopped calling green yellow and blue purple and whatever else or k-- nope, didn’t want to do that!

He relaxed downward, making peace with it. It was just a standard-issue attraction.

Nothing else.

As if sensing an opening, Noir rolled over onto his stomach, one arm rolled over, and murmured something about guns. Ham concentrated on staying very still, willing himself to be quiet. Then Noir buried his face in the pillow just next to him, his (damn soft) hair scraping his face.

A snap in the air above. A light. Noir stirred, but stayed still.

Ham’s eyes pulled up to find Wade, standing over them, with a phone camera.

Peter’s blood stopped dead in his veins.

“Blackmail,” whispered Wade, winking.

“I. Will kill y--” Peter began. Noir cuddled in again, and the words died on his lips. Man, the guy was warm.

Wade dropped back down in a flash, and Peter was back where he started. Trapped. And sleepy.

If he was lucky, Noir would roll back over by tomorrow. If he wasn’t?

Peter Porker would die, stricken down by embarrassment.
Chapter Eleven: Do, a Deer

Chapter Summary

Noir internalizes some bad things. Wade is irritated with his own emotions, and also annoyed by the author, who's been listening to The Book of Mormon on repeat for six hours.

Chapter Notes

TW: Some mentions of period-specific homophobia.

“So you’re saying, That Peter--Ham--” Noir heard the voice, faint as anything. Miles.

“I’m telling you! He’s totally into--mmf!” Wade said, before something (probably a hand) cut him off.

“Wade. Stop. They’re gonna wake up any second now.” PB said. That was PB, voice barely audible. “We at least need to whisper.”

Noir roused from slumber slowly, warm and limp on the bed. The covers felt heavy, too heavy, too warm. He was just feeling warm, in general, and still sleepy. In fact, he could probably fall back asleep if he stopped thinking for even a second.

The bed stirred beneath him. No. Someone stirred beneath him.

So out there, he could hear Miles, and Wade, and PB, and Gwen was in the hammock, and Peni had taken the top bunk. He had to be next to… oh. Oh, hand of god.

He pulled his eyes open in a flash, sleep still blurring his vision. Peter was less than an inch from his face, fast asleep, dark brown hair splayed out across the pillow. His eyes were shut, and his breath fell even from his lips. The light from the window beside him streamed over in slats. Shit. Shit, shit, shit. Had the guy rolled over onto him when they were asleep?

Noir tried to pull away, and found that he was on his stomach, pressed into the pillow. No. It wasn’t Peter who had rolled over.

Noir was the one who’d fallen over in his sleep. His dreams were vague, frayed at the edges, but he could almost remember reaching out for something. Only it was some one. Crikes. He’d cuddled the guy.

And now, if he wasn’t REALLY still and quiet, everyone would know he was awake. And they’d know he knew that they knew that he was nestling up to a Looney Tunes side-gag like an alley cat to a passed-out drunk.

“Don’t wake them. Or me. I need a hundred more hours of sleep.” A creak, as Gwen rolled over in her hammock behind him.
“Amen, sister,” Wade said. “But, really. I think that maybe Peter likes --”

Noir didn’t hear the rest, because, in a burst of adrenaline he’d never experienced before, he’d untangled himself and jumped to his feet, dusting himself off (despite the lack of dust on his person). PB scooted out of the way and stared up at him, one eyebrow raised, as Noir crossed his arms and leaned back against the bed, trying to seem casual.

Oh, they were all looking at him. Yep. Peepers at full capacity.

“Mornin’,” he said.

“Oh, hey! You’re up.” Miles said, trying to seem casual. He leaned conspicuously over to try to peek at Porker, still snuffling on the bed. Noir coughed and pulled his suit out from where he stored it under the bed, keeping his head high.

“I’ll get dressed first. See you in a second.”

He took quick strides toward the bathroom, back stiff, the exact posture a criminal with diamonds in his pockets would take when the cops arrived.

“Cooold,” muttered Peter, from the bed. Noir paused, mid-step, and contemplated taking a quick dive out of the window.

Noir’s face was hot. He regretted wanting to ever feel emotions in his life. Wade began whistling something behind him, something with a teasing lilt to it. A swatting sound--PB, probably--and Wade cursed and shut up, snickering.

The detective started to say something, thought better of it, and dove into the bathroom to change out of the purloined pajamas.

The bathroom was cramped, designed for a single-bedroom apartment, and, thank god, pretty soundproof. The faucet covered the sound of Noir groaning into his hands, his skin ashy (it was probably the gray) in the futuristic “fluorescent” lighting. A Spider-Man toothbrush sat on the counter. Miles. Good kid.

And that kid almost definitely knew that he’d just been snuggling Ham. Great. Hotcakes. Absolutely-

What was he doing? Noir made eye contact with himself in the bathroom mirror, eyes sparking with irritation and confusion. Peter Porker was a goddamn cartoon guy who TECHNICALLY wasn’t even human. And Noir, himself, was into dames. He knew that. He’d loved MJ, when she’d still look his direction without a hundred regrets in her eyes, and he’d loved every dame and doll he’d held against a wall or a bed, at least for a second.

And yet he’d also loved the way the light caught the eyes of that jazz pianist at Rickaby’s, and the man who’d lent him his coat when his own had been stolen in a crowded bar, and that guy who he’d made eye contact with while walking in the street, soft and lined in lamplight, before the man had shut his bedroom window and gone back in, to a wife, to a family.

There were two types of people, if everyone he’d listened to told the truth: normal people, women doing their best to support their men during the business slump, men who went home and kissed their flames on the forehead and made up pet names like Sugar and Darlin’. And then there were the few ( him, like him ) who wanted something else, something faster or better or just different.

He’d seen the future. It was inevitable that someday, it was going to be alright and dandy for two men or two women to walk down the street arm-in-arm. But not where he lived. Where he lived it
was black as pitch in the shadows and if you wanted a partner, you’d better plan on keeping them forever, no matter if they yelled or hit you.

Noir pulled himself back from the brink and made eye contact with himself in the mirror again. His face had no expression.

He’d been clutching the faucet without thinking. Running the hot tap. His fingertips were numb, just slightly singed by the metallic heat. He pressed them, relishing the sting, and started to change in the movements he’d practiced, while in his head, he was still in bed, with Peter, looking at all of the colors that made up his “brown” hair.

*It was so much more than brown. It was red and brown and even black toward the middle.*

Noir took a breath in, and a breath out.

In the future, queer people could find their place. He was glad of that.

But he had to go home to the one where that jazz pianist was clapped in bracelets and taken away by the police for meeting a guy backstage. It, like everything else in his life, wasn’t fair.

So he did what he always did: accepted it, and put it out of his head.

---

“This is the TARDIS,” Wade said, waving to indicate the pod and sliding along the edge.

“MurderCoffin.” Peter corrected, leaning against the wall and thumping it with a fist. Wade rolled his eyes and blew a raspberry with his tongue as PB and Miles entered the pod, feet padding on the metallic floor.

“I say we just call it the Pod. Keep it simple, people,” Gwen said. Peni, who’d woken up latest and brightest, was already fiddling with the screen, peering at it, hands blurring with rapid motion lines.

“Crazy. Who knew a cartoon cat could make something this tech-y?” Miles said. Wade watched, amused, as the boy poked the wall with a ginger foot. “It’s cool.”

“No, it isn’t.” Peter said. Miles looked guilty and put his hands in the pockets of his hoodie, slung over his suit in stark contrast to the sleek black fabric. Wade had to admit that he was… kinda jealous of the kid’s look. Man, that whole spray-paint thing was cool. Maybe he’d commission the guy before he and PB hitched a pod ride back to their own universe from the Hub.

Speaking of which, the guy still looked down. Like, really down. Down in a way that no man who had just recently crushed six other people at Uno should look. Wade fondly remembered the time he’d beaten Juggernaut in Uno. It was probably his greatest achievement, and Peanut Butter Parker had been kind enough to come over and get him some soup while the eighteen shattered bones courtesy of Jugs un-powdered.

“Just glad to be able to help someone,” PB had joked. He’d looked tired, then, spreading a blanket over, weighed down by his marital issues and something Wade wished he could place. The mercenary found himself wishing he’d actually bothered to talk to the guy, to do something other that joke and distract him. Poor Spidey needed a therapist. And, speaking of Spider-Men who needed therapists…

Noir entered the pod last, and gave Peni a wan smile. He crossed to a corner and stood stiff, almost blending into the shadows on the wall. Yeesh. The man was dripping angst like a Sham-Wow towel
dropped into an inkwell. An inkwell infused with pure depression.

The retro Spidey yanked the brim of his hat down over his eyes and muttered to himself. Wade’s eyes snapped to Peter Porker, and it was as he’d guessed: the ex-cartoon pig was looking at his friend with hesitation, and possibly longing.

*Make your move, you funky little man*, Wade thought. The pod lurched forward, and he fell with it, whooping. Miles yelped and tried to web himself to the wall; Gwen shielded him as they hit the wall with a unified yelp. Peter fell against the wall closest to Noir, just a few feet away, and asked something Wade couldn’t hear.

“Mind turning up the volume on their convo, author?” Wade shouted at the ceiling.

“What?” Peni asked. SP//dr’s dome was shining against the wall, rolling side to side in a dizzying arc. How the tech whiz managed to keep her candy down, Wade would never guess.

No reply came from the so-called “omnipotent being” Wade knew for a fact was chowing down on Slim Jims at this very moment, ignoring his question. He sighed and sank into the wall, peering at the grayscale man and his cartoon friend talking, muffled and slow. Dammit! Wade DEMANDED that he be included in their heart-to-heart.

A hand thumped across his chest. He turned to see PB, slumped against the wall, trying to shift his arm off. Wade wiggled his eyebrows.

“Pulling a Noir on me, huh?” he asked.

PB snort-laughed (god that was cute) and rolled himself onto his back. “Shut up. And don’t bring that up again.”

“They can’t hear us. It’s REALLY LOUD IN HERE!” Wade called. Peter B nodded and scrunched his face against the force of the travel.

“Hey, Peni! What’s the next universe on the agenda?” Miles shouted. He tried to push himself up on one arm and failed with an “oof.”

“IT LOOKS LIKE A NORMAL UNIVERSE!” Peni called. She was trying to read the screen through SP//dr’s dome, double-fisting two lollipops. “When we get there, there’ll be a 20-minute cooldown time, and then we can go to the next ‘verse! It’ll be fast!”

“This feels so science-fictiony! ADVENTURE!” Wade cheered. PB gave him a smile that made him feel like he’d been stabbed in the dopamine-producing part of the brain. Shit. He really liked this guy. Like, as-much-as-Cable liked this guy. Why couldn’t he get with the Chris Pine Spider-Man?

No, he had to blush like a schoolgirl about Spidey-Mickey-D’s.

“We’re slowing down!” Gwen called. She was right; they were speeding like a comet, sure, but it felt less like a NASA g-force test and more like a carnival ride. The pod touched after a few more moments of shrill beeps and flashing neon-green that illuminated every Spider in a villainous glow.

Wade gritted his teeth, but the impact had lessened. The Pod skidded more than it crashed, and they came to a stop with only a soft screech over concrete. A cat yowled from outside. They were probably in an alleyway.

Every Spider slumped to the ground. Wade hopped to his feet and extended a hand to PB, as SP//dr righted itself and Miles laid on the floor, dizzied.

“Okay. So should we just stay here for 20 minutes? Because that seems like the option that’ll be least
likely to get us killed.” Gwen said, readjusting her mask.
“Good call, kid. We oughta just wait for the cooldown and high-tail it past each universe.”

“Whaaat?” Wade asked, pouting. “There’s a whole other universe out there!”

“I don’t want to get lost in it,” PB said. Damn his occasional reasonability. Wade turned to Peni, Ham, and Miles, and found them equally as unsympathetic. He huffed.

“Fiiine. Whatever. I’ll just sit here for twenty WHOLE minutes--”

“That’s not that long.” Gwen deadpanned.

“--doing NOTHING. Just sitting here, in the dark, whining.”

“Oh, please, don’t do that.” Peni cringed. Wade glared.

“We could play Uno…” PB began.

“I have a Monopoly board.” Peter said, producing a Monopoly board from nowhere. Tune logic. Right.

“Oh, no. I don’t want to be cleaned out. You know what? I’ll meet you guys back here. I’m out,” Wade flashed a peace sign and opened the pod door, blinking in the sunlight as it strained through an alleyway.

“What? WADE!” PB began, before Wade slammed the door and stepped out into the street. He could hear distant music, and a whole lot of singing. Man, it was loud. He bounced on his toes, and didn’t look back as he heard the Pod door open, and the Spideys call after him.

“Wade, you idiot--” PB caught up to him and put a hand on his shoulder. Wade waved him away and sniffed like a pompous Frenchman, continuing on.

“Don’t talk to me. You don’t have any sense of adventure.” Wade said. PB rolled his eyes.

“Look, pal,” Ham was on Wade’s left, gesticulating. “I get it. It’s boring there. But come on! I need to get to the Hub and GET MY NORMAL BODY BACK. Can we just play it safe?”

“Nope! Guess you don’t have any sense of adventure, either, man.”

“I’m a pi--oh. Right. See! I need my LIFE back!” Peter said. Wade felt only slight guilt before he pushed it away, hands on his hips. The other spider-people were watching, dubious.

“I’m going to check out that singing, guys. There’s nothing on god’s green earth you can do to stop me.” Wade strutted forward, ears open. There was a silence behind him, a collective sigh, and then a muttering: Wade caught the words “dumbass” and “how long?” in the quiet conversation.

A pattering behind him, and the Spideys had caught up once more. “Okay. TWENTY minutes, got it? Then we’re out.” Peter said.

“Sounds good! Glad to see someone with a sense of y’know.” Wade smiled. He felt a strange tickle in his throat for a moment, and decided to ignore it. He turned out of the alley and saw a group in the middle of the park, dancing. Flash mob? Didn’t those go out of style in, like, 2013?

“Weird,” Gwen commented, peering. “Maybe it’s an outdoor musical performance?”

A pedestrian walked by, singing to himself. It was some quiet, familiar song, the kind that would
play in a commercial involving kids. “What a Wonderful World.” Wade watched, fascinated, as the man performed a perfect heel pivot in the middle of the street and did a backflip. Miles clapped politely, but the guy ignored him and moved on.

“Everyone’s singin’.” Noir said.

He was right: every pedestrian, young or old, mothers pushing baby strollers and men in business suits with apple watches and phones pressed to their ears, kids with tall-stacked ice-cream cones. All of them were singing, all different songs, all with perfect pitch. Some performed random dance moves while doing their normal routines; others did fully choreographed dance numbers, with props, and other things found in the bowels of theater back-stages.

“Oh, my god. The universe is one giant _musical_.” PB’s lip curled back, and he put his hands over his ears.

“Oh, my god. This universe is one giant _musical_!” Wade repeated, absolutely ecstatic. The tickle at the back of his throat grew stronger. Again, he decided to ignore it. It would prove to be a mistake.
Chapter Twelve: PB Hates ABBA

Chapter Summary

Gwen and Miles deal with the situation in the park. A member of the team makes a mysterious exit stage right.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Right, we’re going back. This is terrible. C’mon, gang, let’s blow this universe.”

Noir started to turn back to the Pod, to stalk off with his hands in his pockets and his head down, when he heard PB call out again. Shit. Wade.

“They’re singing ‘We’re All in This Together,’ Peanut Butter! My dream of a theater career is coming true!” Wade spun down the street and Gwen snorted, putting a hand on her hips. She turned to Miles and Peni and shared a look he’d seen on amused kids’ faces when a boozehound started dancing around in the middle of the road, drunk as hell. Except, unfortunately, Deadpool was sober as could be, and was currently moving toward a huge mob of guys and dames in the middle of the park.

“Should we… follow him?” Peter Porker asked, dejected. Noir could tell by the tone that the cartoon had resigned himself to the fact that he was about to have to drag an overexcited mercenary back like a kid from a candy store. Noir gave the alleyway a final, fond look, then turned and stormed into the sunlight, cursing under his breath.

“Better keep ‘im from killing himself.” Noir muttered. Toward the end, something tickled at his throat. He coughed to shake it. Spades, it was hot out here. He expected some of the singers to give them the side-eye, as they were all in Spider-suits in broad daylight, but not one of them turned as the posse hurried down the street, conspicuous as a couple of mob bruisers at the mayor’s gala.

Noir fell into step beside Peter without realizing it, speeding up in synchronization as Wade dragged PB into the open, ecstatic. He tried not to look at the short man on his left and scanned around for danger, checking the kids, the roads, even the air. It was spooky how oblivious everyone in this universe seemed, now that he thought about it.

Each and every person singing was off in their own little world, jazz or showtunes or whole other types of music Noir couldn’t place. One was even singing a song Noir recognized from his own time: “Over the Rainbow,” a real nice song from a picture show. It was sung by Dorothy, right?

Somethin’ like that. He wondered if anyone in the future remembered that movie. It was nice. He’d only seen a part of it, but it was nice.

Pretty ironic that it was about rainbows, in his colorless world.

He stumbled, and a hand to his chest helped him up.

“Woah, Pinkerton! Watch out for the curb!” Peter said, looking up with a half-smile. It made a dimple on his cheek stand out. Noir nodded, grateful for the mask that hid his expression, and
“Pinkerton?” he asked, amused.

“Nevermind. It’s a reference. A detective.” Peter explained. They were almost at the park, now, and Wade was giving the dance routine his damnedest, that was for sure. And Noir knew damn well what Pinkerton was—a buncha assholes. He was going to give Ham a history lesson once this was over.

“Focus! We’ve got a theater geek to… extract.” Gwen said. She caught up to Noir and Peter and folded her arms as she watched Wade perform a kick flip and spin an irritated PB.

“You think we should just… let him? We can wait until the song is over.” Miles said. He was humming along to whatever it was, eyes focused on the posse of dancers gathered, executing moves in perfect unison. 
Really perfect unison.

Despite the fact that the crowd in the park was full of different people, different heights and sizes and colors (so many colors), it was almost hard to tell them apart. Wade, despite all of his flexibility and skill, stuck out like a sore thumb. Unease scratched at the inside of Noir’s head and he tapped Peter on the shoulder.

“Huh?” Peter asked. He’d been watching, too, his eyes slightly glazed. The ex-pig shook his head and coughed, as though clearing a puff of dust from it, and blinked.

“I was about to say, the dancers over there are kinda putting my… ah… Spidey-senses on alert. Something’s weird about ‘em.” Noir said.

“I think you’re right.” Peter shivered a little beneath his hand, which still rested on the man’s shoulder. “Something’s out of whack. We should get Wade out.”

“The song has a good beat. I never noticed that before.” Gwen said. She started to take a step toward the dancers, drumming her fingers on her leg, then jerked back so quickly that Noir had to reach out and steady her.

“I didn’t mean to say that!” It was almost a shout, and both of the Peters pulled away from her in surprise. Gwen looked angry, and frightened, even under her mask. She shook her head out and breathed heavily, hands on her knees.

“Whaddy mean? Are you alright?” Peter asked. He rushed to steady her, twitching as he helped her to a stable position. Still unused to being a human, probably. His mask was slightly askew.

“Fine. But I didn’t mean to say that. There’s something weird about this universe.”

The three turned to find Miles and found him stepping toward the group, openmouthed and smiling. Gwen swore in a way that would make ladies in Noir’s time faint and pulled him back, shaking him slightly. His eyes took longer to clear than Gwen’s, and he looked woozy, as though awakened abruptly from a deep sleep.

“‘We’re aaaaallll in thiiis to-- wait, what?” he said. He snapped awake a moment later and put a hand to his throat, horrified. “What was that? I don’t even know the words to that song!”

“Bad things are out here.” Noir turned to the park, and his stomach dropped. Wade and PB were in perfect sync with the other dancers, now, and singing a hell of a lot better than they had before. It was a proximity thing, he guessed. Hearing the singers made you one of ‘em.
“Peni, got any more info on—Peni?” Noir asked, spinning around. Neither she nor her robot were behind him. Peter turned next to him while Gwen spoke to Miles, and Noir heard the other man groan.

“This is bad. Can we agree that this is bad?” Peter said. Noir didn’t even have time to nod before he was scanning every street, every alleyway. A flash of red vanished around a corner and he started out, only to be jerked back by his coat. *Peni. She was in trouble.*

“Lemme go!” he called. He turned to find Peter with a hand on his coat.

“Hey, hey, what about the kids? And PB and Wade?” Peter asked, eyes darting to the park. Another song was starting up.

“*You guys find Peni!*” Gwen called, putting a hand on Miles’ arm. “*We’ll get Wade and PB out. I have earbuds I use for tinnitus that I can use to blast white noise and drown stuff out. I can be immune.*”

“I’ll just, uhh, stuff something in my ears. That’ll work, right?” Miles asked. Gwen shrugged.

“Alright, solid. Now come on, Peter,” *Why’d he invite Peter? What possessed him to do that? The moment on the pod earlier? With the hand-holding and all?* “*We’ve got a kid to catch.*” Noir pulled his coat away and beckoned the man on, eyes narrow beneath his mask.

“Alright!” Peter said, satisfied. “*B Team’s back!*”

The two of them set pace and ran off, around the corner, leaving Gwen and Miles at the threshold of the park.

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Static. That was all Gwen could hear.

She gave Miles a thumbs-up and watched him give one back, small pieces of fabric torn from his hoodie making lumps in his ears under the mask. Not a perfect solution, but a decent one. They’d have to be in and out.

The music from the park was “Mamma Mia.” Gwen vowed to burn all copies of that song back in her universe. A few of the louder notes occasionally managed to needle their way through her blasting scratch of white noise, burrowing high and saccharine. She wasn’t a fan of disco.

She gave Miles a fist bump of solidarity and moved into the park, where there were no obvious speakers despite the music clearly playing at max volume. PB executed a perfect grand jete, which Gwen knew very well wasn’t possible for him ordinarily. Wade did the same—granted, he *could* probably do that ordinarily. She was almost jealous of their form, but it had to be a result of this weird happytime universe.

At least she wasn’t hypnotized.

The fact that she was still totally lucid made it clear that disco fever was contracted by noise—somehow. Maybe it was subliminal messaging? Whatever the cause, fighting her way toward Wade and PB was proving difficult. The dancers moved to block her path as she went, smiling down at her with half-empty expressions. Had this planet been normal at one point?
It was downright eerie, watching them sing to a song she couldn’t hear. She looked to Miles and found him in the middle of a circle, trying to dart out. A flash of invisibility, and he was through, catching up to her in a rush of speed.

He started to say something, then remembered her headphones were in, and simply pointed. Wade and PB were just in front of them, hands together, arms outstretched. Her heart ached. PB might’ve been hypnotized, but man, he looked happy. She shoved thoughts of her own Peter, the one who’d died fighting her, from her head, and moved on.

She could tell by the sudden change in movement that the music had changed again. Wade spun PB around effortlessly and carried him for a moment, smooth as a Broadway troupe. Miles tried to tap Wade on the shoulder and failed, ducking as the man’s elbow soared over his head.

Gwen stretched a hand out to web PB’s hands together, and an arm came down on her head. An earbud fell loose.

“\textit{I CAN’T SEE ME LOVIN’ NOBOODY BUT YOU--}” PB crooned. Gwen felt her toe point unbidden and slammed the earbud back in, frantic. Her fingers started to splay and rebel in time to the music until the white noise was back completely. Spidey-sense warned her and she ducked as another arm lashed out in the place her head had been.

She spun and saw a crowd of dancers growing thicker, hemming them toward the center, with PB and Wade oblivious. Gwen felt sick in the pit of her stomach.

It wasn’t just dance fever. It was some kind of dance… zombie virus, and her friends were falling victim. The people in this universe \textit{wanted} to spread it.

Man, that sounded stupid when she really thought about it.

“There has to be a speaker,” she said, to herself. A man did a flying leap toward her and she grabbed his leg, bringing him to the ground in an ungraceful arc. He looked dazed, and momentarily lucid, before the music took hold again.

She caught a flash of dark mechanics and spun, peering into the throng.

The woman just behind that man. She had a black box wired to her chest, blaring the music for all to hear. It seemed to echo from every surface, charging the air. The woman herself looked entranced, unaware of her actions. She began to melt into the crowd.

“MILES!” Gwen shouted. She turned to find her friend fending off a tap-dancing child, who snatched at his mask with glee. She swept by and webbed the child to the floor. The girl began to wail, and Gwen was especially glad for her earbuds, which swept away the cries on a torrent of noise.

“MILES!” She called again. It was just loud enough for him to hear in close quarters. He looked confused, and frightened.

“ZAP--” Gwen made a twitching motion with her hands to illustrate. “--HER!” She pointed to the speaker-woman, whose face was still stretched into a paper-doll stiff grin.

It was only a moment before Miles understood. He started to run, before a flying spin took him to the ground. Gwen pulled him up by the arms just before a heel came down on his head and pulled him close as he tried to move toward the woman, movements jerky and desperate.

“CAN’T MAKE IT OVER THERE! THERE’S NO WAY I CAN GET OVER THESE
“PEOPLE’S HEADS! THERE ARE NO BUILDINGS TO SWING FROM!” his voice was barely audible above the headphone static. Gwen gritted her teeth and glared at the speaker woman, a plan bubbling in her mind.

“MILES, CHARGE UP! I’M GOING TO THROW YOU!” she said.

“What?” he said, incredulous. Gwen had already hoisted him over her head before he could protest, and his eyes sparkled with blue lightning, more out of bemusement than preparation.

“ON THREE. ONE--” Gwen saw PB stumbling toward her from the corner of her eye and felt ice in her chest.

“THREE! JUST SAY THREE!” Miles yelled.

“THREE!”

And she threw him, just as PB pulled off her headphones. A calm washed over her mind and she lifted her hands, pulling into third position--

A deafening crackle. Miles shouting “I’M SORRY!” A sudden silence and sputtering. The feeling of warm numbness leaving Gwen’s brain in a rush, leaving her clear-headed but cold.

Other people fell out of step, stumbling over their own feet, confused. Wade jolted out in the middle of a backflip and landed on his face with all the skill of a wingless duck. PB was, ironically, one of the last to go, and was still looking at Wade with heart-eyes for almost ten seconds after. Gwen didn’t give herself time to wonder what that was about, and instead snatched up her headphones, switching them off and sprinting over to Miles.

The woman he’d zapped was looking around, eyes blurry, muttering “whuh?” and “who?” to the crowd.

As Miles apologized on repeat, Gwen picked up the speaker and slammed it to the ground, dropping heels on it until it shattered. The dancers from the park all murmured, frightened and worried. So this was a normal universe, like Peni had said. They’d just been a victim of some kind of… music… attack.

That sounded incredibly stupid. Even for a hokey villain-of-the-week. She snorted to herself and shook her head, then felt guilty. Peni could be hurt. Heck, Wade or Peter could have torn something on those ballet moves. There were more people out there, probably with their own personal speakers. Maybe the villain had wired into the local radio station and requested it. Who the hell knew?

People began to move back from the wreck. Some called people, worried, and were sent to voicemail. A man shouted a warning as one person got a reply: her friend, singing into the phone. Someone swatted it to the ground before it could infect anyone else.

“Wow, alright! Wasn’t expecting a dance virus. Can you blame me?” Wade said, pushing himself up so that he could meet the spider-peoples’ eyes.

“Yes. Yes, we can.” PB said, pinching the bridge of his nose. He’d recovered, and was currently helping a sheepish mercenary to his feet. “I am completely going to blame you for dragging me into a forced rendition of an ABBA song.”

“Focus, people. We’ve got a B-Team to find.” Gwen said. She lifted an eyebrow beneath her mask as PB quickly released Wade, looking embarrassed about something. What had he been singing to the guy, again?
“Right. Again, ma’am, I’m so sorry. Please be careful!” Miles said to the woman he’d zapped, who assured him that she was alright a few times before asking “Are you guys new Spider-Men?”

“Gotta go!” Gwen said, leading the others away and breaking into a run.

Chapter End Notes

Ham and Noir's shining moment comes next chapter. Pray for Peni.
Apologies for the lack of an update...

Chapter Summary

I've been really busy, but the next chapter will be up by the end of this week at most! Thanks for bearing with me. Here's an excerpt from the next part!

“Don’t need ‘em. I’ve never danced, and I’m not going to start now.” Noir was distracted, completely. He seemed almost desperate.

*Is he afraid of losing someone else?*

Peter started to say something, but the detective had moved on, scanning the streets and rooftops. Ham put the cork back in and prayed that the guy was right, following just behind him, ready for a possible fight. His senses were on high alert, weak as they were in a human body. He put a hand to his mask and felt his nose through his mask. It was so *weird* and pointy-yet-snub. He shook his head to clear his thoughts and jumped as he saw a small figure spinning in a circle, arms outstretched, singing with the passion of Lil’ Orphan Annie.

A notably black-haired schoolgirl-skirted girl, with a futuristic robot. Bingo.
Ham and Noir try to track down their missing kid. John Mulaney makes a very special appearance. No cats were harmed in the making of this chapter.

Chapter Notes

To my pal Seymour: I'D LIKE TO SEE YOU *TRY* TO KILL ME

“Hey, hello! Howdy! Have you seen my, um... daughter? She’s yay big!”

Peter Porker had to correct his hand-height-estimate. He was taller now—he kept having to remind himself of that. He stopped a passer-by who sang loudly in his face and pulled back, wincing.

“Ohaaay. Thanks!” He said. The person ignored him and pushed their earbuds further into their ears as they danced. Another person nearby played a ragtime tune from a speaker, and Peter could have sworn that his own foot started tapping to the beat. It must’ve been because he was close to it, or something. Maybe because he touched the guy?

Oh, $%!#. He realized, all too terribly, how the dance virus was transferred.

Sound. It probably should’ve been obvious from the start.

“Hey, Noir! Cover your ears!” Peter’s feet scrabbled on the road in a pinwheel of animated blur, before he gained traction and ran to catch up to his monochrome friend, who was outpacing him by leaps and bounds. The man seemed more tightly drawn than a dress on Jessica Rabbit—all tension and panting beneath his mask.

“What? I can’t do that. I gotta keep sharp. Can’t be too careful with kids. She could be lost, or hur--or worse.” Noir huffed, slowing just enough to allow Peter to cut him off. Peter produced two corks out of thin air—toon logic smiled down upon him, apparently—and poked them into his ears.

“We NEED TO BE CAREFUL. I THINK THE MUSIC HAS SOME KINDA… SUMLIMINAL MESSAGE THAT MAKES YOU A BROADWAY WANNABE.” Pete yelled, through the wall of quiet created by the corks. He pulled another pair out and offered them to Noir.

The man pulled one of Ham’s out and called into his ear, voice irritated and low.

“Don’t need ‘em. I’ve never danced, and I’m not going to start now.” Noir was distracted, completely. He seemed almost desperate.

Is he afraid of losing someone else?

Peter started to say something, but the detective had moved on, scanning the streets and rooftops. Ham put the cork back in and prayed that the guy was right, following just behind him, ready for a
possible fight. His senses were on high alert, weak as they were in a human body. He put a hand to his mask and felt his nose through his mask. It was so weird and pointy-yet-snub. He shook his head to clear his thoughts and jumped as he saw a small figure spinning in a circle, arms outstretched, singing with the passion of Lil’ Orphan Annie.

A notably black-haired schoolgirl-skirted girl, with a futuristic robot. Bingo. It sounded like some kind of Disney song, loud and exuberant. It was downright adorable, actually, except that Peni was clearly hypnotized, eyes glassy and void of any ordinary rhythms of thought.

The music—oh, greeeat. It was playing from a speaker attached to SP//dr itself. Didn’t that thing have SPINNING SAWS on its arms in attack mode? Yeesh. Maybe if he jumped onto it—good thing he had plugs for his ears—he took one of his corks out to try to yell something to her, cringing as the music tried to wheedle its way into his ear.

And then Noir jumped out ahead of him, arms outstretched, right toward Peni.

“Hey, kid! Kid! It’s me. You’re still in there, right?” Noir said. Peni turned, beaming, and did a perfect… jazz… move… thingy. Gwen would probably know what it was called. And they had way more pressing issues.

“Yeeees!” Peni said, in a voice close to singing. Ham took a step back. That didn’t sound promising. In fact, it sounded pretty ominous, in a happy-go-lucky teen movie protagonist way. She blinked placidly and took a step toward Noir as the music carried on behind her. Peter came to stand next to Noir and resisted the lull of the dance with a quiet grunt. It felt like it was whispering to him, telling him to bust a move and lah-dee-dah.

He might have been a ‘tune, but he only sang on his own terms.

“Come on, Peni, let’s go. This is—” Noir’s brow furrowed, and his lips twitched. Peter looked between the smiling Peni and the silenced Noir, sweat on his forehead below his mask. It was hot out, and this situation wasn’t helping. Why couldn’t this be a normal multi-genre jukebox of a universe? Nooo, it had to be infectious. Noir squeezed his lips shut and pushed on, and Peter slumped with relief.

“This isn’t our scene, huh?” Noir said, trying to pull Peni away.

“I’m havin’ a good time! I’m havin’ a ball!” Peni said. Her left eye twitched for only a moment after she performed the heel turn, but it was a spark of hope in a dark pit of musical hell. Woah. His brain hadn’t even censored that curse word. Things were getting dire.

“Okay, that’s enough! This world’s crazy Peni, come on, snap outta this.” Noir put a hand on Peni’s shoulder. She jerked back as he stopped her in mid-spin and blinked, confused, her singing straying off-key as her hands continued to jazz.

She stopped, slowly, and put her hands down with noticeable effort. Her singing became louder for a moment, then trickled out as she clamped her jaw shut, balling her tiny hands into fists.

“Noir? Where… did I just…” Peni swayed on her feet and winced, groaning. SP//dr continued shimmying beside her, somehow. Peter wasn’t really sure how that worked, but who was he to question it? It was pretty catchy…

NOPE! He wasn’t going to fall for that song-and-dance. (Heh.) He pushed the cork back into his ear, blocking the sound. Peni looked distressed, and it made his heart twinge to see her. He had to destroy that speaker. Noir reassured Peni with quiet words that Ham couldn’t quite here as the girl came to,
looking around with confusion in her eyes.

“It’s gonna be okay!” Peter called. Peni looked to him with an expression of lucid, bemused fear.

And then Peter Porker watched with growing apprehension as Peni smiled.

She mouthed something, eyes growing glassy again. Sh!t! He should’ve given her cork-plugs as soon as they got there. He rushed toward her as Noir tried to hold her and she leapt into SP//dr’s dome, shutting the hatch.

The words floated in the air above her in Japanese before squirming into English text: “CATCH ME IF YOU CAN!”

Then she was off like a shot in her bot. Peter couldn’t hear through cork, but he could tell that Noir had just said a word that would make a sailor pinker than a cartoon pig. The two set off in unison, Ham wiping sweat from his brow with a groan of resignation. If this universe didn’t make musical zombies out of all of them first, he was going to kill Wade.

---

The machine was leaping from rooftop to rooftop, and Noir’s arms were getting damn tired of it.

He’d had a long past few days. Hopping universes like an alley-cat hops on hot pavement. Wearing a dumb outfit. Kissing another guy, even if it was just on the cheek. Eating something called “Wade’s Very Special Imperishable Burrito” that was both the best and most destructive chow he’d ever tried.

Now he had to chase some poor kid around the rooftops while she played “Fly Me to the Moon” by Frank Sinatra from a speaker. The tickle at the back of his throat grew strong, but he was stronger. He’d lived through a hell of a lot, and some “musical disease” wasn’t going to be the thing that made him push daisies.

A cat screeched from an alleyway below as his boot barely missed in, swinging above its head in a quick arc. Where the hell was the kid going?

“NOIR, YOUR LEFT!” Peter yelled.

Noir turned just in time to see a man, smiling broadly, kick foot-first through the window of the building beside him and leap into the air. The air burst from his lungs as his attacker—who was singing something loud and high right into his ear—squeezed him, trying to grab for his web-shooters. Shit.

“Geddoffa me!” Noir yelled. It wouldn’t work. The guy was wearing “headphones,” the kinda things Miles had in his future. They were the same dark black as Peni’s bot’s speaker, and for a second, he thought he could see something carved into the side--

And then the bastard clocked him in the jaw.

The web snapped away, and Noir was barely able to shoot another one out before he plummeted toward the ground, jerking himself back just in time. He heard a panicked shout of “NOIR!” and a thwip just above his head as Peter Porker swung in front of him, eyes wide beneath the mask.

“Noir, I’m gonna need ya to let go! Stop swinging!” Peter said. For a pig who’d turned into a human, he was damn good at maneuvering with his web-shooters. And also crazy if he thought that Noir was going to let go with a ragtime nutcase on his back.
“Are you tryna get me killed? He’s already trying to pin my arms!” Noir jerked down in an attempt to throw the man, but he held on, drawing something white and small from his pocket.

“OH MY GOD, HE HAS AIRPODS!” Peter shouted. Noir, who understood none of what the toon had said, cocked his head forward and jerked it back, slamming it into the bridge of his piggy-backer’s nose. The man didn’t even stop singing. He nearly managed to shove a bud into Noir’s ear, before a blessedly well-shot piece of web knocked his hand away.

“You got any other ideas?” Noir called, panic rising up. Peni was starting to really outpace them, heading toward a main thoroughfare on robotic legs, shingles falling and pattering to the road behind her.

“I can’t hear you!” Peter yelled, pointing to the corks in his ears, which somehow worked even through his mask. “Please, trust me!”

Noir had to throw a leg out to prevent himself from slamming into a building as the man squeezed his arm and hit a high note. Christ, what the hell was happening?

He met Peter’s eyes, and imagined them below the mask, brown and bright and probably desperate as all hell—and nodded.

“This’d better work!” he yelled, releasing his web long enough for the other guy to grab him. He growled as he felt the guy box at his ears, and pressed his eyes shut as the two started to fall.

---

“Trust me. This is normal.”

1931. He’d taken a case for a radio host, who went by John. Friendly, a little Irish, slim and pale. They’d found the guy’s brother. He’d gone missing in what they’d thought might be foul play, but, as it had turned out, the guy had just skipped town with an old flame to start a new life. It was one of the rare cases in which his suspicions had been proven wrong, and everyone was relieved for it. They’d been drinking scotch, together, in the guy’s apartment in south Brooklyn. The stars were cold and distant, wintry, dim.

John’s hand was on his shoulder, and the man was smiling, looking like any normal guy would seeing a pretty doll in the street. And Noir had his hand on John’s hand.

“I-I like women.” Noir said.

“That’s alright! You can like guys, gals… everyone’s pretty, really, it’s not fair to average joes like me.” the man smiled, hand trailing down his arm. Noir shivered.

You’re not average. You’re witty, and fantastic, and great. Noir almost said it, but something kicked inside him that shattered any illusions he might have had.

“I don’t understand. I-I should--” Noir stood too quickly, causing the glasses to jitter on the side table.

“Wait--” John said, face dropping in surprise. “I’m sorry, I thought you liked men like that.”

“I don’t… I don’t know.” Noir said. He paused, hand halfway to his hat on the hook. “I don’t know what I like. I don’t know if I’m capable of it.”

One of the scotch cups had overturned. The liquid dripped onto the rug and bled down, deepening
gray in the half-light of the window. Somewhere outside, a pigeon cooed. John retracted into his chair and picked up the glass, slowly, as Noir pulled his coat over his arms. It felt as though he were locking himself in a cage. He crossed the room in three strides and turned back, for just a moment.

John looked up at him, head still downcast. He laughed, quietly and humorlessly.

“Don’t tell anyone that the babyfaced, skinny, flower-loving radio host is queer, alright?” He joked. His humor couldn’t hide his real fear. “Wouldn’t want that getting out. No one suspects!”

Noir nodded, silent. An image crossed his mind: walking over, taking John’s face in his hands, wiping the guy’s tears. Trusting him.

Then he turned and walked out into the night. It was cold, and the distance between him and John grew quickly.

---

Noir opened his eyes with a gasp as someone grabbed him, groaning with exertion.

Peter Porker had really saved him. He almost couldn’t believe it.

The confused man, nose bloody, was webbed to the wall near him. Ham ripped the headphones off with a line of fluid and smashed them with a mallet as they flew by, all while still holding Noir with one arm.

Shit. The guy had more skill than Noir gave him credit for.

“What happened?” the man asked. He looked afraid, as though he’d been possessed—and really, he kinda had been, if this “subliminal message” stuff was as powerful as all that.

“A hell of a lot!” Peter said. Noir’s eyebrow quirked. No censor, huh? “Musical shenanigans, yadda yadda. Sorry we had to web you!”

“It’s… okay? Are you bonus Spider-Men? I thought there was just one.” The civilian said.

“Uhh, yeah. We’re volunteer Spiders.” Noir said. He leaned in to Peter and muttered a quick “Let’s scram before he asks too much.”

The ex-pig nodded, gave the civilian a salute, and swung away, still holding Noir like Robin Hood holding Maid Marian. Noir opened his mouth to protest, then decided not to, then scrutinized himself very closely for deciding not to. Man, the guy was strong. And kind of sweaty. But mostly strong.

Peter finally noticed what he’d been doing, and his eyes widened. Noir cleared his throat.

“Oh! I forgot. There’s. Yeah!” Porker stuttered. Noir stuck out a shooter and disconnected from Peter, pink beneath his mask. It took him a moment to find his stride as they swung together, side by side.

To catch him and web the guy, Pete would’ve had to drop his own web, knock the attacker aside, web him to the wall, catch Noir with one arm, and swing to a stop all before they hit the ground. Pretty damn good for a gag character from a rubber-hose world. Noir swerved to avoid a pigeon–lots of birds could fly into you if you were staring at someone else.

Peter skidded onto the street ahead, and Noir joined, grateful for the rock beneath his feet. The red of Peni’s bot dissapeared into a building just ahead, and the door, which opened to absolute darkness, loomed ahead.
“Peni?” Noir called. His hand strayed to his gun, which was finally with him, then stopped. These people didn’t know what they were doing. Anyhow, it wouldn’t be that hard to stop a dancer. The web situation was an, uh, outlier.

Peter panted beside him, hands on his knees. Noir turned to ask if he was doing alright, then remembered the corks. This was gonna make things harder. No communication. No chance.

“Hey, Noir?” Peter Porker said. “Thanks… thanks for trusting me.”

Noir’s heart twitched like a fly in a web. He swallowed nothing, then nodded, hesitantly offering a smile under his mask.

“You’re a hell of a fighter. Now let’s find a lucky Peni.” Noir said.

Another flash of brilliant red, just in his peripheral vision. But this wasn’t metallic—it was matte. Ham’s eyes widened as he turned.

Spider-Man stood there. Judging by the lack of a gut, and the lack of an irritated expression, and the headphones, this wasn’t PB. And the situation didn’t seem promising.

“Hello, hello!” The man sang. Noir threw up a hand, and Ham shot out a string, too late.

The man vaulted over his head, using his shoulders as a pivot point, and slammed a pair of “headphones” over Noir’s ears. The detective swore as Ham jumped out of Musical Spider-Man’s way and started to remove the headphones--

“NOIR!” Porker called out, panicked.

The detective’s hand stopped halfway to his head, and he suddenly felt as though he’d drunk a few too many pints down at Rickaby’s. In a good way. A reeeal good way.

He lifted his hand, on instinct, and snapped his fingers. Let the show begin.

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