

HERO FOR HIRE

by

Jerod Brennen

Based on the Marvel Comics character created by
Archie Goodwin and John Romita, Sr.

323.863.6398
jerod.brennen@gmail.com

FADE IN:

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

A crappy, one-bedroom apartment. Dishes piled high in the sink. Unopened stacks of mail on the counter.

LUKE CAGE (late thirties) opens the door, flips a switch. A light flickers to life.

He tosses a handful of bills with the other mail. The words PAST DUE stand out in bright red on the envelopes.

He reaches into the fridge, grabs the milk. He checks the cupboard. No clean glasses.

He finds a dirty glass in the sink, turns on the water, starts rinsing it out.

The faucet SHUDDERS, the pipes GROAN, the water STOPS.

He struggles to keep his anger in check, fails.

His FIST comes down on the counter, SPLINTERING the Formica. Dishes fall from the sink, SHATTER on the floor.

It's hard to believe, but the kitchen looks even worse than it did before.

CAGE
(under his breath)
Sweet Christmas.

A KNOCK at the door.

Cage answers the door. REVA (late thirties) stands in the hallway. She's a goddess, dressed way too nice for this part of town.

REVA
How've you been, Carl?

CAGE
It's Cage now. Luke Cage. What are you doing here, Reva?

REVA
Can I come in?

Cage looks over his shoulder, back to Reva.

(CONTINUED)

CAGE

No.

Reva hands Cage the folded newspaper she's holding. Cage reads the byline.

ONE DEAD IN DRUG-RELATED SHOOTING

The byline is accompanied by a photo of a body covered by a leather jacket. The name WILLIS STRYKER stands out in the print.

Cage looks up at Reva.

REVA

They killed him.

CAGE

Willis chose a thug's life. He killed himself.

Cage starts to shut the door. Reva pushes it open.

REVA

I want you to find the men who did this. Find them and hurt them.

CAGE

Not interested.

REVA

He was your friend.

CAGE

Friends don't plant drugs on each other.

Reva waves the paper in Cage's face.

REVA

You want these guys pushing drugs on kids right outside your window?

Cage considers, doesn't respond.

Reva looks past him at his mess of an apartment.

REVA (cont'd)

I'll pay you.

That gets his attention.

(CONTINUED)

REVA (cont'd)

He had money, Cage. You take care of the men who did this, I'll take care of you.

Cage gives it some thought before responding.

CAGE

Tell me what you know.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

A BLACK HUMMER stops at a gate. Two ARMED GUARDS stop the driver, ask questions, let him through.

Cage watches from a distance, obscured by shadows. He CRACKS his knuckles.

CAGE

Showtime.

INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

The black Hummer rolls to a stop by two others.

ARMED GUARDS are scattered throughout, watching every window, every door.

The Hummer doors open simultaneously and a group of ASIAN MEN exit each vehicle. TATTOOS seem to cover every inch of their exposed flesh.

One man stands at ease among the guards: GIDEON MACE (late fifties). His silver crew cut stands out against the dull greens and blacks of his outfit.

The leader of the Asian contingent, SHINGEN (early sixties), approaches Gideon. He nods in greeting.

SHINGEN

Gideon.

GIDEON

Shingen.

They regard one another. All eyes are on them. Tension.

Gideon flashes a hand signal, crisp, military. Four guards flank him, each one carrying TWO LARGE CASES.

One guard steps forward, places his cases on the floor in front of Shingen, opens one case.

(CONTINUED)

It's full of HEROIN.

The guard steps back.

Shingen motions to his right hand man. The man produces a BUTTERFLY KNIFE, bends down, SLICES into one of the packages.

He licks the powder from his blade, nods to Shingen.

Shingen smiles, nods in return.

Shingen's man moves to one of the Hummers, opens the back, returns with a METAL CASE.

He places the case on the floor in front of Gideon, opens it.

The case is full of BLACK SEMI-AUTOMATIC PISTOLS. One glance is enough to indicate that these hi-tech killing machines are anything but street legal.

Gideon removes a pistol, runs it through the paces. He targets a crate in one corner of the warehouse, pulls the trigger.

The VIOLENCE that EXPLODES from the gun is brilliant. The crate is decimated, nothing but splinters and smoke.

Gideon's smile widens.

SHINGEN

You approve.

GIDEON

Oh, absolutely. I most definitely approve.

Shingen signals for his men to remove similar cases from the other Hummers.

SHINGEN

If I may ask, Mr. Mace, why guns?
Are you hoping to start a war?

GIDEON

In time, Shingen. In time.

CRASH!

The LIMP BODY of one of the gate guards FLIES through a broken window, lands with a THUD at Gideon's feet.

All guards are instantly on alert.

(CONTINUED)

Shingen and Gideon remain placid.

Cage BURSTS through a closed door, using the body of the other guard as a battering ram.

He tosses the unconscious guard aside.

Cage takes in the room with an unnerving calm.

Every GUN in the warehouse is trained on him. Those men not holding guns are brandishing KNIVES and CLUBS.

Gideon holds up one fist, a signal for his men to hold their fire. Whoever this newcomer is, he's earned Gideon's attention.

CAGE

I'm looking for the guy who killed
Willis Stryker.

Cage's wears jeans and a tight yellow t-shirt. Nowhere to hide a gun. He's got no weapon except his bare fists.

SHINGEN

A problem, Mr. Mace?

GIDEON

Easily rectified.

Gideon flashes another signal. The guard that responds is a HULK of a man, nearly seven feet tall, all muscle.

GIDEON (cont'd)

Kill him.

The hulk nods, lumbers toward Cage.

The hulk stops inches from his mark, confused. He doesn't understand why Cage isn't running or crying. Or both.

Cage stands his ground.

The hulk throws a RIGHT HOOK that would tear a normal man's head from his body.

CRUNCH! The bones in the hulk's hand SHATTER.

Cage doesn't budge.

The hulk throws a LEFT HOOK.

CRUNCH! More broken bones.

The hulk falls to his knees, staring at his useless hands.

(CONTINUED)

Gideon raises his new gun, aims at Cage, FIRES.

A burst of bullets hits Cage's chest, dead center.

Cage staggers back, looks down at his tattered shirt, then glowers at Gideon.

CAGE

Ouch.

Gideon SCREAMS at his guards.

GIDEON

What are you waiting for? Kill him!

All of Gideon's men open fire on Cage at once.

Cage moves, lightning fast. The fraction of bullets that actually hit him just bounce off his impenetrable skin.

Cage PLOWS into a group of guards. They go FLYING in every direction.

THREE GUARDS cluster together, concentrating their fire on Cage, forcing him back behind a support pillar.

Cage scans the area, spots an OIL DRUM.

Cage tucks one shoulder and rolls toward the oil drum. He spins as he stands, grabs the drum, tosses it through the air.

Gunfire hits the barrel. It EXPLODES. The shockwave puts all three guards on their asses.

Cage rushes them while they're still stunned.

The first guard staggers to his feet. Cage hits him hard, sends him sprawling through the air.

The second guard stands. Cage plants a sidekick in the man's midsection. He goes back down.

Cage picks the third guard up, presses the man over his head. He turns, throws the man into another group of guards running toward him, bowling them over.

Those guards who are still able to stand on their own get the hell out of there.

Shingen signals to his men. They duck into the Hummers and emerge brandishing KATANAS.

(CONTINUED)

CAGE
Seriously?

One of Shingen's men presses the attack. He BELLOWS a war cry as he charges Cage, waving his sword.

Shingen's man SLASHES, Cage dodges. The blade comes down hard on Cage's forearm. CLANG!

Shingen's man steps back, the blade vibrating in his hand.

Cage doesn't bleed, but that hurt. He shakes it off.

Shingen's other men surround Cage, swords at the ready.

Cage smirks. Not impressed.

CAGE (cont'd)
Bring it.

Shingen's men attack Cage all at once. Cage ducks and weaves, throwing punches as he dodges blades.

Every punch he lands puts one of Shingen's men on the ground.

Cage draws back to punch the last man in the face. The man's eyes go wide. He turns and runs.

An engine ROARS behind Cage. HEADLIGHTS!

Cage turns just in time to catch the grill of a Hummer with his chest.

Cage FLIES through the air, CRASHES to the floor.

Gideon sits behind the wheel of the Hummer, a grim smile on his face. He revs the engine.

Cage staggers to his feet.

Gideon punches the accelerator. The Hummer races across the open space.

Cage runs to meet it head on. He's ready this time.

With just a few feet between him and the Hummer, Cage JUMPS, DIVES through the air.

Gideon realizes what's about to happen, ducks.

Cage CRASHES through the Hummer's windshield.

Gideon opens the door and ROLLS out onto the floor.

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The Hummer CRASHES into a wall.

Gideon stands. He looks back to see Shingen and his men gathering the drugs into the two remaining Hummers.

The scowl on Shingen's face makes it clear that he's not happy with this turn of events.

Shingen disappears into a Hummer. Tires SQUEAL as the remaining Hummers tear out of the warehouse.

Gideon glances at his cases. At least Shingen had the decency to leave the guns.

Gideon turns back to the crashed Hummer.

Cage BURSTS through the roof of the Hummer, muscles rippling beneath his tattered shirt. Undeterred, unbeatable... THIS is what a HERO looks like.

Gideon scans the warehouse. Shingen is gone. Gideon's men have abandoned him.

He's all alone with Cage.

GIDEON

Who the hell are you?

CAGE

I'm just a guy with bills to pay.

Gideon glances again at the cases of guns.

CAGE (cont'd)

Please. Try it.

GIDEON

This isn't over.

Gideon reaches beneath his jacket, produces a GRENADE. He pulls the pin, tosses the grenade at Cage.

Gideon bolts for the nearest door.

The grenade lands on the roof of the Hummer, rolls through the opening in the roof.

CAGE

Aw, man.

BOOM!

The gas tank of the Hummer catches fire. SHRAPNEL flies in every direction. Nothing stirs except the flames.

(CONTINUED)

Then, a SILHOUETTE.

Cage emerges from the flames, unscathed. His clothes, however, have seen better days.

Cage scans the area, realizes he's alone, then squats down. No need for a show now. That hurt, and he's feeling it.

Cage spies the cases of guns left by Gideon.

He walks to the cases, opens one, removes one of the guns.

Cage CRUSHES the gun with one hand.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

Reva sits alone at a table, sipping her coffee. A newspaper sits on the table before her.

Cage walks in. He's cleaned himself up. He carries one of Gideon's cases.

REVA

Well?

CAGE

He got away.

Reva looks distraught.

CAGE (cont'd)

But I hurt him.

Cage puts the case on the table, opens it. It's full of CRUSHED GUNS.

CAGE (cont'd)

These were his. Now they're not.
That's gotta be worth something.

Reva stands. She reaches into her purse, produces an ENVELOPE. She lays on the table in front of Cage.

Cage opens the envelope. It's full of HUNDRED DOLLAR BILLS.

REVA

Yeah. That's worth something.

She walks a few steps, stops, turns back to Cage.

(CONTINUED)

REVA (cont'd)
You could make a living doing this,
you know?

CAGE
What? Hero for hire?

Reva smiles. She turns and leaves.

Cage picks up the paper. Reads the headline.

BLIND LAWYER OF HELL'S KITCHEN MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Cage smiles, considering.

CAGE (cont'd)
Wonder if he needs a bodyguard?

FADE TO BLACK