

# Overdraw & Pandora Prologue: Contrast Casting

*“Please go on and on  
This beauty and your venom  
I love to play and sing along  
I love to play and sing along*

*Too late to decide  
My lips are open wide  
I love to play and sing along  
I love to play and sing along”*

- Silversun Pickups. “Mean Spirits.” *Neck of the Woods*.

Downtown Madison glimmers in the rising sun between the sparkling lakes Mendota and Monona. The Capitol Building, on its hill in the middle of the isthmus, is visible from every street. Historic campus facilities are crammed between modern developments connected by an absolute mess of one way streets. Madison is quiet right now; a mix of people just waking up and people finally going to sleep. In the Capital Heat and Power Plant, the morning shift's coffee is still brewing. A technician looks at a gauge. “Tod! Hey Tod! Boiler pressure is low! ... Tod?!” He checks over his shoulder and finds he's alone. The man swears under his breath, “Must've had a hot date...” He groans and taps on the gauge as though hoping the machine just fell asleep. Seemingly in response, the gauge begins to fill a with gray ooze. The man stumbles back, watching in horror as the goo overflows, devouring the entire gauge and surrounding machinery, grinding it down as the mass begins to grow. “P-Pandora!” he gasps. He fumbles for his radio as he flees, shouting, “Evacuate! Evacuate!”

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One! Two! Three! Arrows zip towards the man in loud neon zebra print spandex. He dodges one but the next two slam into his chest, ripping his leotard and phasing through flesh before smashing into his battery backpack. He stumbles back, yelping in pain. A dusty hard drive falls from his hands. He winces, the lights on his gauntlets going out as he looks up at his attacker. “Overdraw! You could have killed me!”

A woman clad in azure and gold plate armor descends on wings of lavender fire. The wings fade away as her feet touch the ground. “I have shot you enough times over your criminal career. If the first spirit arrow didn't kill you, why do you think these ones would, Sylaburn? They just hurt like the

dickens.”

Sylaburn raises his gauntlet. “Yea, but my suit isn't so lucky! I go through more spandex than you know!” The gauntlet charges up, then fizzles. “What? Why isn't it—?” He looks at the arrows impaling him, and poking out through his backpack. “You cut off my power supply!”

Overdraw slings her bow over her shoulder, letting her guard drop. The amazonian blonde towers over the man as she strides up to him. She snaps up his wrists with one hand, and fishes a pair of handcuffs out of her armor with the other. “I think you lose money on every heist at this rate.”

Sylaburn rolls his eyes. “I'd rather be broke than sell out. How much is your contract with the Carnelian Group worth?”

“My dude... they make action figures and toothpaste, this isn't some conspiracy” she protests, sidestepping the question. “Anyway, you're not exactly helping. If there were fewer people like you, I could still do my civilian job. But since there are so many 'full time' villains—”

“—we need full time heroes. Yes, yes, I remember Captain Polar's big speech. Carnelian does a lot more than toys and dental hygiene, not to mention your agency is funded by—” The handcuffs are slapped on him.

She scoops the hard drive off the floor, and shakes it at him. “Can you stop with this! You always go on, sticking your nose in my business. I'm just making a living doing what I'm good at and you—” A sharp burst of static crackles from Overdraw's earpiece eliciting a grimace. “One second, I have to take this.” She taps her ear. “Overdraw here.”

“Heel, sit, beg,” Sylaburn taunts her, prompting her to yank her arrows out. “Ow!! You did that on purpose!”

“Shush...” Overdraw covers her ear, and looks away from him. “Sorry, can you repeat that?” She nods. “Oh... uh...” She squints into the distance. “If I fly over the lake I can get there in about a minute. I understand.” Her eyes go wide. “Pandora?” She fidgets with her bowstring, but responds with confidence. “Yeah... Yeah, I've actually been working on something new that should solve the problem.

Ok... Then I'll link up with the rest of Mad Town. Who's on call to— Ok, so... joint operation, with?... Crescent Knights and Eastside Fire?”

Sylaburn whistles and snarks. “Any other hero agencies invited to this party? You all are really pulling out all the stops.” An ambitious grin spreads across his face. “Whatever this Pandora is—”

Overdraw turns to him and glares, “I don't know what you're thinking, but don't. Pandora is not a normal villain. She's not even human. Think a rogue AI with a stolen nanomachine body. She has been ripping through coal plants across the world. Eating them... whole.” She turns away and adjusts her earpiece. “Oh, no, I wasn't talking to you Captain! Just Sylaburn.”

*“Just?”*

“Yeah, incidentally can you send a pick-up team to the abandoned offices behind La Concha? The ones with the green roofs. Ok, thanks Captain.” She clears her throat and pats Sylaburn on the head, “You have been as unpleasant as ever, and I look forward to stopping you again.” She dumps the hard drive atop a derelict desk on her way out. Her wings erupt from her back, and with a single beat she takes off into the sky like a rocket.

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The power plant is in chaos; workers flee as a motley band of heroes scrambles through the plant, most focused on evacuation while others battle the tide of metallic gray goo. Titanic limbs reach out from the nanomachine mass, grabbing and ripping at the structure, coating and consuming it, while blobs drip off of the limbs, and form humanoid drones that pile onto the heroes.

Above, a green armored hero darts about, raining down bolts of energy, cleaving through the writhing metallic mass, barking orders into his com. “Jade Sabre here! Focus on containment! Freeze Frame, I need an ice wall!” On his orders ice arcs around the building, but crashes into an erupting wall of fire. “What the hell?!” He swaps over to a speaker in his chest. “Who did that?!”

“This isn't your jurisdiction,” shouts another hero, a woman wielding a katana and a jetpack, as she barrels past. “I ordered Emberstorm to seal the area.”

“We were called to assist, same as you! Back off! We have civilians to evacuate, and this is a *coal* plant! Tell Emberstorm to stand down so Freeze Frame can finish the wall.”

“As long as those nanomachines are packed with stolen coal they can't pass a wall of fire without combusting. They could easily climb your ice wall!”

As the two hang in the air arguing, behind them one of the gray limbs shoots out and grips a smoke stack. The nanomachines spreads over it like a mold, partially consuming it, transforming it into a spawning bed that undulates over the airborne heroes, raining more drones over the battlefield. The falling monstrosities crash into the duo, slamming them into the ground.

For a moment, everything is still except for the nanomachine bodies fusing. Then one glob of drones bursts apart with a discharge of energy, the other is sliced in half with a flash of steel. “I'm not putting civilians in danger so you can get your glory kill,” Jade Sabre growls as he stumbles to his feet.

The swordswoman gasps for breath as she looks up. She raises her blade to point out a streak of light approaching. “Looks like Mad Town's backup is here. Let's hope she lives up to the hype.”

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Overdraw soars high above the power plant. She dives through the air, wind whistling by, a purple streak plummeting towards the mess of nanomachines and what remains of the brickwork. She twirls to lose momentum as she summons her bow and nocks a handful of arrows; this set glowing blue. She looses them as nanite limbs reach up for her. On impact they punch holes through their metallic flesh, and she swoops through quickly closing wounds. The splattering goo reforms into gray drones midair, their arms elongating towards Overdraw. With a flap of her wings and another twirl, she fires in a steady rhythm knocking the nanomachine bodies aside. She crunches her abs and flips around, righting herself. Adjusting trajectory, she spirals around the remaining smokestack, slowly ascending, firing as she flies backwards at climbing tendrils of ooze. After smashing a handful, she finds a moment to breathe, looking down at the pandemonium below. Overdraw bites her lip, and mutters, “Do I just fire it now? How far would the radius—”

A huge hand emerges from the ooze below, shooting up behind her, reaching from each finger a twisted gray artificial body, ready to mob her midair. She looks at the horrors looming above her. “Yeah, that's a no.” Her wings flicker out and she summons a white arrow as she plummets. She draws back the bowstring as far as it will go before loosing. The arrow shatters in the air into a full volley, shredding most of the emerging drones. Sheer numbers overwhelm her as one lands on her back, its body melting to envelop her. She summons a blue arrow, twisting to face the ground. She stabs it into her own chest, a tremendous kinetic burst of energy launching her upwards, jostling the liquefied opponent off of her. Her wings erupt from her back as she nocks a red arrow and launches it at what remains of the hand construct. A streak of fire shoots through the air causing the nanites to ignite and recoil. “Hah! Looks like you are what you eat, big fella! Next time snack on something less flammable!” Her confident smirk slowly fades as the titanic limb tears off its burning flesh and hurtles it back at her. “Yeah... I didn't think that through!” Overdraw quickly summons a blue and a white arrow, and with a flick of her wrist merges them together. With no time to draw, she chucks the arrow into the burning ball of gray goo, a whole volley of burst arrows emerging. They make contact, scattering the nanites and their coal dust payload. The explosion smashes her out of the sky.

She eats dirt as drones swarm her. She focuses and her wings flicker but fail, disappearing. Overdraw rolls back as she swings her bow around, smashing it into the encroaching drones. Two electrified blades cleave through a drone behind her. A hero in white and gold armor looks over. “Overdraw! You ok?”

She nods, “Mostly. Thanks, Wild Edge... Keep them off me for a moment, while I catch my breath and recharge. I think I can finish this with one more arrow...” Her armor fades, leaving her in casual clothes. She stumbles to her feet. “Once I say go, get out of here, and move the perimeter back as far as you can... I'm not exactly sure how far the... radius is on this.”

“Got it!” Blades sparking, he dances around the recovering hero, driving back the nanomachines. Overdraw takes a moment to focus, closing her eyes and clearing her mind...

*'help'*

Did she imagine that? Looking over the corpse of the coal plant... Did she imagine that cry? “Did we get everyone evacuated?”

Wild Edge responds with a grunt, “Maybe? It's been a shit show. Remind me, I am new here: do the agencies usually fight with *each other*?”

“Yeah, sadly. It's competitive.” She gets up. “This will have to do, get gone. I'm going to do one last sweep for civilians... I could have sworn...”

“Please don't do anything reckless!” Wild Edge says. “You finally have patrols with me tomorrow, and I've been dying to have time with my idol!”

“No promises.” Overdraw takes off, acrobatically vaulting over a crumbling handrail then dives through a ruined entryway. Ducking and dodging through the ooze-soaked ruin, she summons a green arrow. “Sorry buddy, but this is the fastest way to find you.” She lets it loose and takes off after it. The arrow guides itself through the crumbling structure. It rounds a corner, and there is a sound of glass shattering and a yelp of pain. Catching up she finds an observation room, now only observing the melting industrial mess around it. Inside is a man in a suit, an arrow pinning him to the wall. “Sorry!” She shouts as she leaps through the window. “We have to get you out—”

An ooze tendril suddenly lashes out of the mass and grabs Overdraw by the leg, yanking her out through the shattered pane. “He is not going anywhere!” A voice says. It seems to resonate from her surroundings before focusing in on a single point. A gray body, like the drones, emerges from the goo. This one is different, the skin more flesh-like, its features more detailed. Her body shrouded in a cloak. Her eyes glowing red. The tendril becomes her hand, dangling Overdraw upside down by the ankle. “Neither are you, if you interfere with my plans.”

“So... the infamous Pandora herself! Big fan of the aesthetics. Quick question, are you gray because you eat coal, or is that just the color of the lil' robots that you're made of? Both? Is it depression? Are you a metaphor for depression?”

“You are stalling.” Pandora raises her free hand and another tendril of ooze launches from the metallic mass behind her, binding the civilian. “I require him for my designs.” A pair of drones in the image of Pandora, doppelgangers, form. “Do not worry, your death is not required. I will escort you out.” Overdraw takes a deep breath and summons an arrow, a black arrow, and attempts to stab

Pandora's main body. Effortlessly, the machine grabs the arrow by the tip. "A pathetic attempt. I am not so vulnerable."

Overdraw cracks a smile. "So you mean to say you're not vulnerable to a Banishment Arrow?!" The arrow suddenly bursts, bathing the hero and villain in a lavender light.

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In a featureless white space, there is a flash of light. When it fades away, Pandora is left floating in the void, eyes wide, still holding Overdraw by her ankle. A bit of the railings and ooze that had surrounded them drift alongside. Overdraw's smile turns to a full grin. "Apparently not." An obsidian arrowhead emerges from the amazonian woman's arm as she transforms. The super hero's tall and dynamic silhouette shrinks down, revealing a short plain woman beneath all the magic and muscles. She fishes a glasses case out of her jacket pocket. "Oh... last of my magic for a while... not too surprised."

Pandora's cold and calculated exterior is compromised as a look of bafflement followed by frustration overtakes her. "Banishment?! Banished where!? Why was this information not in my database? This would have changed my calculations considerably!"

Overdraw begins to laugh as the two float aimlessly through the air. "It's new, of course you wouldn't know it. As to where... I'm not sure... but there is oxygen here, at least. Probably." She slides her glasses up the bridge of her nose with a smug smirk.

Pandora lets go of the petite witch, slowly regaining her stoic, mechanical composure. "Alright... this is fine. This does not change my plans *in the slightest*. Go ahead and return to your realm," Pandora says dismissively.

"Aw, come on, I banished you, the real you, to some endless void! How does that not change your plans at all? That's at least a setback, right?"

"There is no '*the real me*.' I invested a bit more into this body, is all. Any amount of my nanomachines can propagate my code between them."

“Ah... so I—”

“—Did not accomplish anything, no. Aside from annoying me. When we get out of this void, synchronizing with my body is going to make me ill. If it was not for the wealth of data I collected over the last minute I would not even bother. Let us out, the longer I am away the more painful it is to reconnect.”

There is a long pause. Overdraw has a sheepish smile. “Yes, about that, this is the first time I've banished anything living... and nothing I've banished comes back. I don't know if there *is* a way out.”

Pandora's eyes lock on Overdraw. “So, you have banished yourself to a featureless realm where you will likely die of dehydration, for no benefit.”

“To be fair, I did think I was saving the world from you.” Overdraw responds.

“You are hopeless.” Pandora scans the area. “Let us find a way out.” She turns around, using the leftover ooze to rotate with methodical precision while Overdraw flounders in the air, grabbing her arrowhead.

“Oh... hello.” Overdraw waves over Pandora's shoulder. Behind Pandora is a small fox with a red and gold envelope.

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A portal opens above the Realm of Crossroads. Pandora and Overdraw fall through and into the cruel grip of gravity. As they tumble, Overdraw jams the arrowhead back into her arm. With a burst of lavender light she is restored to her full amazonian glory, her wings emerging. Pandora grabs onto her leg, her hand shape-shifting into a cuff to secure herself. “They could have put us on the ground,” she complains. A bell on a red ribbon jingles from Overdraw's wrist, and Pandora holds an unfolded letter. As she steadies herself, she looks it over again. “The Madame of Crossroads, the person who sent this letter. Also referred to as 'the God Eater' in the text. I do not know if I trust her.”



Overdraw looks down, scoping out a landing site. “You say that, but you jumped at the chance for a wish. You practically crammed the bell thing into my hands.”

“It was the only guaranteed way out of that realm. Not that it matters to me. Just be grateful I did not decline.” She says. “I have no interest in being led about by someone that claims divinity or greater. But if the wish is real then I may have some use for it.”

“Yeah, that's not going to happen. Crazy psycho rogue AI does not get to warp the universe as she sees fit. Anyway, *I* have plans for that wish.”

“*If* it exists,” Pandora says, her tone shifting into something icier. “And only if you can work as a team with a 'crazy psycho rogue AI.' A series of labels that is one-half to one-third correct, depending on how you measure it.”

Overdraw clears her throat and changes the topic, pointing down at a man in a red hat. “He looks like staff. Let's get this over with.”

“Because he seems to match the invitation's color scheme?” Pandora asks.

“... Yes? Look, if this is a game, it's going to be designed in a way that players can connect the dots.” Overdraw lands gracefully, letting Pandora find her footing first.

Pandora splits into three, each fragment morphing into a mini Pandora, one following along with Overdraw, the others rushing off in other directions. “Do not worry about the rest of me. They are just going to cover our bases as far as registration goes, and validate the claims made by the invitation.”

Overdraw sighs. “I guess that's fine, but if you start trouble—”

The Crossguard approaches. “Hello! New competitors?”

“Yes, Overdraw and Pandora,” says the super hero, with a polite smile.

The super villain sighs. “An unfortunate duo.”

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Thank you everyone for helping me get this done in time. I had the help of a whole squad of friends helping me edit and get this to a quality I could be proud of and over the finish line in time, as well as general feedback, so a here is a brief scroll of credits at the bottom, included here, in the main work. I want to make sure wherever and however this is viewed they get their due recognition!

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