

The Town Drunk

Presents

SUPER HERO, UNCENSORED

KJ Kabza

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March 7.

Shitty day. I lost the keys to the Justice Mobile. How am I supposed to race down to crime scenes now? On a bicycle?

I turned Retribution HQ upside-down for over an hour, but I didn't find anything. And while I was digging between the couch cushions, I missed a call from the mayor about some damn crisis down at the wharf.

I called him back and told him about my keys. He was pretending to be nice about it and said that "these things happen to the best of us," but I could tell he was mad.

So now I feel angry and even worse, useless. Super Villains are running amok in Central City, and I can't do anything except bum about the house in my pajama bottoms and watch M*A*S*H* reruns.

Stupid.

March 12.

I checked my BlackBerry this morning and noticed that today is the day Mr. Mastermind gets out of prison. Him plus Doctor Paine, The Hunter, Shrapnel, Nightmare's Blessing, and Kill Fee equals me being outnumbered 6 to 1. Where are all the other Super Heroes??

Not that I blame them, I guess. Sometimes I wish I had a normal job. I could work in a pet store, for instance. Oh God, that would be so nice. I bet holding puppies all day would do wonders for my blood pressure.

Mr. Mastermind. Christ. He's gonna rebuild that stupid little crime ring of his. Mastermind my ass. He's as predictable as a game of Tic-Tac-Toe. In fact I think that's what I'll call him from now on.

6 to 1 odds is really pushing it; I need a sidekick. But has even *one* perky, fresh-faced Boy Scout knocked on my door and begged for the job? Of course not. They're all at home with their damn PlayStations and iPods.

I feel so unappreciated.

March 16.

I had my first showdown with ~~Mr. Masterm~~ Tic-Tac-Toe's henchmen today, at First Central City Bank. Just as I suspected, they showed up in force, blathering on about a Triumphant Return and a New Era of Evil and blah blah blah.

My body aches. It's 7 a.m. now; I got back a little after 4 a.m. and collapsed on the couch, but couldn't sleep because I hurt too much. So I've been awake, icing my injuries and eating SpaghettiO's because I'm starving and don't have anything else, since I haven't had time for a grocery run in weeks.

What I really want is a bottle of Jack Daniel's. Not so much to dull the pain, but more to disconnect myself from reality. But I can't afford to. What if I get a call? Can you imagine me driving the Justice Mobile while trashed? A normal car can do enough damage in the hands of a drunk. Just think of what a vehicle with a jet intake could do.

March 17

The day after is always worse. It hurts to even roll over in bed. Fucking Tic-Tac-Toe. How many henchmen were there last night? 40?

I called up my former sidekicks today, to see if anyone can lend a hand—just for a little while. Joe's in Spain, Dan's in jail, and Tim about bored me to death going on and on about his mortgage and second wife and alimony payments, so I just said “Uh-huh” and “Yeah” and figured he was too busy.

Sidekick number 4, then. If nobody's begging for the job, I'll just have to advertise.

March 19

My sidekick hunt is going badly. I can't place an ad in the paper, because kids don't read the newspaper these days, and I refuse to recruit another fresh-faced Boy Scout. Did I mention that Dan is in jail?

I tried putting an ad on Craigslist, saying that I wanted an athletic, limber youth to live with me and assist in secret encounters, but all the responses I got were unhelpful:

“LOL, srsly?”

“ROFL, r u j/k??”

“OMG no thx”

I got so frustrated that I decided to hit the streets and proposition a likely-looking kid. But since

I almost never go out during the day, everyone panicked at the sight of my Justice Mobile and assumed that something awful was going down, so I had to go back home, put on street clothes, and do this thing unmasked. And on my bike.

So I rode through the park, ringing my little bicycle bell, chasing kids and calling, “How old are you? What’s your name?” when one of them finally stopped and answered me. His name was Johnny, and he was 16. I asked him if he liked to wear spandex, when this old lady comes stomping up to me and screaming about how I had better get away from her grandson.

She started walloping me with her purse. I pulled my fist back on instinct, and before I could explain myself or apologize, she grabbed the kid and ran.

I was mortified and ready to give up for the day, when I noticed a collegiate-looking thug (backward hat, no neck, a tee-shirt with some fraternity’s letters on it) staring at me. “Dude,” he said, in awe. “You were about to deck that bitch.”

His eyes were shining in youthful admiration, so I introduced myself. He said his name was Pete.

Well, he’s better than nothing.

March 25.

While Pete and I were out patrolling Central City, I noticed a couple on the 7th Street Bridge. They were just standing there in the moonlight, holding each other. They didn’t even notice us.

Pete started whispering about how “on a scale of 1 to Tap, she’s a Hell Yeah,” and I got so depressed. I haven’t been with anyone since Cindy. But how can I? Where could I meet women—at all the crime scenes I bust, between the hours of 5 p.m. and 3 a.m.? Even if I did get a date, my BlackBerry would go off in the middle of dinner, or right after I picked her up, or even before I picked her up at all.

And even if she put up with me cutting out on her, she’d never accept the fact that I can’t tell her what I do for a living. What would *you* think if your boyfriend slept all day and never told you where he went at night?

I bet I’d meet women if I worked in a pet store.

March 27.

Two bad things. First, Pete and I got into a fight about our costumes; he says we look like “yellow and silver turds” and that he’s not “putting on that gay shit anymore.” He demanded that we get a redesign. I told him that since Bailey’s Costume went out of business, I’d have to find another store and reveal our secret identities to yet another gushing, misanthropic, starry-eyed fanboy so he could sew us other outfits that will probably look equally stupid.

Second, while I stepped out onto the Halley Bridge to negotiate a hostage situation with Doctor Paine, Pete seduced the Channel 3 news reporter in the back of the Justice Mobile.

Lucky little asshole.

March 30.

We went to Mali's Masquerade to get our costumes redesigned. Here we fucking go.

The girl doing my outfit is a mousy-looking kid who will probably sew her hand to the pattern. She's got that space-cadet look. And a lot of band-aids on her fingers.

She took my measurements and asked what I wanted. It doesn't matter, really. Like I tried to tell Pete, all Super Hero costumes suck. Capes, upturned collars, elf booties, tights, hot pants, top hats—come on. Muscle shirts with bowties? Who comes up with this shit?

I asked for what I have now, but in a different color scheme, with more military-looking boots. And a subtle, yet compelling, codpiece. Let the ladies know what they're missing.

April 1.

Tic-Tac-Toe sent me a mail bomb. Almost blew my fucking eyebrows off. I'm going to kill that son-of-a-bitch the next time I see him, ethical issues be damned.

April 6.

We picked up our new, God-awful costumes today. My seamstress didn't do what I asked. I wound up paying 600 dollars for a disco shirt with epaulettes.

Pete won't stop laughing at me.

April 7.

I didn't want to leave the house in my new idiot suit, but of course I got a tip called in and had to race down to the abandoned warehouse on Paulina Street. Three guesses as to who Pete and I caught illegally storing smuggled electronics.

And what was the first thing Tic-Tac-Toe said to me?

“What's with the epaulettes?”

So I said, “What's with the fucking brain print all over your shitty polyester suit?”

That's why I'm icing the injuries from 25 henchmen right now.

And Pete's still laughing at me.

April 10.

Pete's busy with school for a few days, so I went down to Get-a-Pet on 15th Street to play with the kittens for awhile before they closed. This makes me feel better, sometimes.

I was fantasizing that someone would notice my loving attention to the animals and say "Did you notice our Help Wanted Sign in the window?" when a woman—a pretty woman—suddenly came up to me and asked me if I worked there.

I lied. I said I did. She asked me what breed of cat I'd recommend for her daughter. I was ready to launch into this whole big thing, but I barely said four sentences to her before my BlackBerry went off.

I stepped outside, picked up, and told the mayor that the President's mother had better be getting murdered in an alley, for what he had just interrupted. Nope. He said I had to rush home and change into my tux, so I could go shadow some geriatric senator at a charity ball to make sure he didn't accept any shady bribes, because the cop who was supposed to shadow him called in sick, and the CCPD can't send anyone else right now.

Central City has 10,000 police officers. Are you fucking kidding me?

I went back inside to try to talk to the woman again, but she'd moved on and was flirting with someone who actually worked there—some fat, beardy guy with a wedding band on his hand.

I hate everyone.

So I went to the charity ball in the worst mood of my life and didn't know anyone and didn't feel like socializing, so I went up to the bar to get a Coke, even though I was dying to drink myself into a numb stupor, when wouldn't you know it—there by the bar, trying to tell a joke to a girl and fucking up the punch line, was Tic-Tac-Toe.

"I like your tux," I said loudly, without thinking. "What *haute couture*. Is that real rayon?"

The girl looked uncomfortable and turned away. Because I was unmasked, Tic-Tac-Toe didn't recognize me and just looked at me funny.

"I'll bet you anything that you're why I'm here," I said. "You cost me that woman in the pet store, you son-of-a-bitch."

Then I poured my Coke on his head.

Before I said or did anything worse, I stormed out.

April 11.

The mayor called me on my land line to yell at me for last night. I didn't want to hear it, so I

dropped the phone into the toilet.

April 15.

I am stalking Tic-Tac-Toe. The pet store incident has made it personal, and I need to do something more constructive with my anger instead of fantasize about what I should've done to his head that night instead of drench it in Coke.

April 21

I ripped off those fucking epaulettes.

April 27.

Pete is apparently still busy with school, but that's OK. Today, while hiding in the Forsythia bushes by Tic-Tac-Toe's driveway, I noticed the maid pull out a spare key from under a loose brick in the walk. Tomorrow I'm going to break into his house and ruin his life.

April 29

I found Tic-Tac-Toe's income tax records, medical records, bank records, high-school yearbook, college diploma, address book, and various incriminating personal materials.

His home-made fetish tapes are now up on YouTube.

The next move is his.

April 30.

The mayor unexpectedly showed up at Retribution HQ, by himself. He was pretty pissed. He launched into this lecture about how being a Super Hero meant noble and honorable comportment, and that he was 99% positive that all the bad press Malcolm Mastermind had been getting in the gossip columns lately had something to do with me putting his sex life all over the Internet. I tried to deny that I had done it, but I forgot that I'd friended the mayor on MySpace, and I had just written a blog entry on there about "pwning that Mastermind asshat."

Also, the mayor's cousin is apparently married to the Channel 3 reporter that Pete seduced in my car.

When the mayor left, I called up Pete, but he wouldn't answer. I left him a message and told him that it was urgent that he call me back, but that was hours ago.

May 1.

Fuck me.

First: Tic-Tac-Toe sent an open letter to the Central City Reporter, which they printed. In it, he claims that the video footage I posted was from his sordid past and he's now a reformed, repentant, well-adjusted citizen, so wouldn't Justice like to meet him tomorrow, where they first fought all those years ago, to work this out?

I know what *that* means.

Second: Pete still won't return my calls.

May 2.

Good God! All the shit in my world has hit the fan.

I went out to look for Pete. I finally found him at his frat house, ten minutes before we were supposed to show up for Tic-Tac-Toe's challenge. He was hiding in his bedroom closet. I dragged him out and threw him into the Justice Mobile, and I locked the doors so he couldn't escape when we stopped for red lights. As I drove, he kept yelling that he didn't want to be a part of something "that nobody gives half a fuck about" and that I had no right to make him come back. I told him he had no right to sneak off instead of actually quit. He said he was too embarrassed to be anywhere near me, citing the garbage cans I'd run over in front of his frat house lawn as a case in point.

Then something hit our car—or rather, dozens of somethings, armed with crowbars and metal pipes. A steroid-injected goon smashed a window, and I heard Tic-Tac-Toe bawling through a megaphone, "Who's here to help you now, citizens?"

We fought our way out of the car, and Tic-Tac-Toe held up his hands for his goons to stop. On either side of the street, terrified people hid inside and peeped out through blinds.

Tic-Tac-Toe said that he had no patience for a man who wouldn't accept his invitations, especially one who had to go and fight dirty with those YouTube videos.

I told him that he had started it.

He said he had no idea what I was talking about.

I said he had no idea about anything, because he was an ineffectual moron with a funny-shaped head and the fashion sense of a blind pimp.

He said speaking of which, what had happened to my epaulettes?

And next to me, Pete started to laugh.

I felt my face heat up. Tic-Tac-Toe grinned. His henchmen started to laugh, too.

It's not funny, I said.

You can totally see where he ripped them off, said Pete.

What I am is NOT funny, I said. What I do with my life is NOT A JOKE.

But you're wearing a string tie, said Tic-Tac-Toe.

That doesn't matter!

Even your sidekick mocks you.

That doesn't matter either!

My loyal minions are falling over laughing. What's the point, man? Why do you even bother?

And as I reached into the depths of my belittled, humiliated spirit for the answer, I had a moment of Zen.

"Do you know the true meaning of being a Super Hero?" I asked him.

He said he didn't.

I said, "It means having a guaranteed, guilt-free, socially sanctioned excuse to break shit."

Pete suddenly stopped laughing and cocked his head in interest.

I coldcocked Tic-Tac-Toe.

I roared "Break shit, break shit, break shit!" and plowed my way through the surprised goons. Delighted, Pete snatched up Tic-Tac-Toe's dropped megaphone and took up the chant.

A few guys peeping out through their blinds dared to open their windows and look down. And then some ambitious ex-cop or ex-military or restless kid, like it matters, came outside and began to wallop one of Tic-Tac-Toe's goons, chanting something about taking back the neighborhood, which made another guy come charging out of his apartment with a hockey stick. Before you know it, the streets are packed with a hostile neighborhood mob.

In the chaos, rioting, looting, pillaging, burning, destruction, and massive police/SWAT/Coast Guard response that followed over the course of the next 4 hours over a radius of 11 blocks, Tic-Tac-Toe hopefully got arrested. Because if he didn't, the poor bastard probably got trampled.

When I finally got home, there were 17 messages on my machine, all from the mayor.

But strangely, I feel pretty good.

KJ Kabza writes fantasy, horror, and science fiction (but mostly fantasy, because he experiences enough horror and science at his day job). You can find some of his recent work archived on the web at *Every Day Fiction*, *The Ranfurly Review*, and *Quantum Kiss*, or you can buy the dead-tree anthology *Fried! Fast Food, Slow Deaths* from Graveside Tales. Someday, you will be able to visit his website. Until then, he invites you to enjoy the insipid “Coming Soon” notice at kjkabza.com.