



THE DRUNKEN COMIC BOOK MONKEYS

VS.

THEMSELVES

Lightning streaked across the midnight sky, the originating storm clouds hiding the moon. Jeff watched nature's light show from an alley, the rain wetting his face. His trench coat offered little relief from the cold; the wind whipped it freely. Pulling his jacket tighter about him, he tried to bury his face between the lapels, hoping to escape even a modicum of the stench rising from the trash lining both walls of the alley. He paced, feet splashing through random puddles on the pavement.

His contact was late. Continuing to pace, he couldn't help but feel cliché since this was a late night rendezvous with a top government official in a clandestine back alley. Throw in a "dark and stormy" night and it was now a noir espionage story.

Jeff shuddered at the word "story," the reason for this meeting. Bad stories. Horrible stories. Juvenile stories. He could stand not one iota more of them! It must end! No matter the cost, the price! Tonight he gave the ball a push and nothing would stand up to its inertia. It started now.

"Jeff?" the approaching man asked, his voice possessing the timbre of a man attempting to be more menacing than his true nature.

"You have what I need?" Jeff replied, attempting to muster the same false bravado. He instead sounded just as fake and ridiculous

"Yeah. You have what I need?" the man asked, the forced gruffness of a poor silver screen Batman impression.

"Yeah. Where's what I need?" Jeff asked, his attempt at a disguise could only be more farcical had he worn Groucho Marx glasses with a plastic nose and moustache.

"Here." The man looked over both shoulders, paranoid about potential watchers, ready to jump from the shadows. He pulled a large

clasp envelope from his trench coat, the same color and style as Jeff's. "Where's what I need?"

"Here." Jeff took the envelope from the man and handed over one of his own, stuffed with green renderings of Benjamin Franklin. Jeff opened the envelope and peeked at the papers within using the strained light from a nearby street lamp. "These real?"

"Yeah," the man said. Thumbing through the hundred dollar bills, he asked, "These real?"

"Yeah," Jeff replied, his throat getting sore from doing the voice.

The men shoved their envelopes into their respective trench coats. They looked at each other and stared, unsure of what to do next. Hands in his pockets, the man offered, "Ummmmmm..."

"Okay, then," Jeff said, sans fake growl. "I guess I'll see you next week at the sci-fi reading group."

"Yep!" the man said as he waved while turning to walk away. "Bye, Jeff!"

"See ya!"

Jeff returned to his home, ready to put his plan in action, ready to rid the world of two giant hemorrhoids from its collective ass. He looked at the papers, read the instructions, and verified the math and science involved in the process. Everything he needed, he ordered from eBay. As he mixed and molded, fixed and folded, Jeff plotted his revenge. He knew exactly how he wanted this to occur. He wanted his creations to destroy his targets in their sanctuary, their home.

At Melons Bar & Grille, Brian and Chris sat at the bar. The bartender asked, "Another round?"

"Yep," Brian replied. "And I was thinking about trying the Chicken Caesar salad."

All activity in the restaurant ceased. All eyes focused on Brian. Patrons stopped eating, mid-bite. Silence consumed the restaurant except for the thin whistle of the wind outside and the chirping of a lone

cricket. No one was able to believe what Brian had said.

“Dude,” Chris whispered, afraid that if he broke the eerie silence the resulting noise would backlash against him. “Are you feeling okay?”

“Yeah. Why?” Brian asked, the obnoxious quality of his normally loud voice amplified against the backdrop of the complete and utter absence of sound.

“You ... you ordered a ... salad?”

“Naaah. Just messing with you.” Brian turned to the bartender and said, “I’d like 100 wings, please. And two orders of fried pickles.”

The typical restaurant noises restarted, as if unpausing a movie.

“Dude, don’t scare me like that!” Chris said, color returning to his ashen face. Well, as much color as his pigmentless skin would allow.

“Sorry. Just trying to elicit a chuckle.”

“By threatening to order a salad? Dude, that’s just sick. Even for you!”

“Oh, settle down!”

“That’s it! I’m telling on you! I’m telling our editor how mean you are!”

“Don’t you dare!”

“I dare! I’m so telling on you!”

“Tattle!”

“Your names don’t hurt me! I’m telling! And there he is now!”

Jeff entered the restaurant. No sooner did he set foot through the door, Brian and Chris jumped from their stools, knocking both over with a distracting clatter, and ran to their editor. A headache, an aneurysm or maybe a tumor, started to throb behind Jeff’s right eye as he was greeted with:

“Brian’s mean!”

“Am not!”

“Are too!”

“Nuh-uh! I’m the good one!”

“Are not!”

“Tell him, Jeff!”

“Jeff likes me more! Tell him, Jeff!”

Pinching the bridge of his nose in an attempt to keep his pulsing eyes from popping right out of his skull, Jeff said, “Can we just go to the bar so we can talk about your latest story?”

“But...” Brian pouted.

“But...” Chris whined.

“Now!” Jeff barked, pointing to the toppled bar stools.

Brian and Chris trudged back, heads hanging low, exchanging shoulder punches in between:

“Your fault.”

“Nuh-uh. Your fault.”

Once at the bar, Jeff commanded them to pick up and dust off their barstools as well as apologize to the neighboring patrons for their immature behavior. The kind patrons accepted the mumbled apologies, but the bartender rolled her eyes and brought each of the men a bottle of beer. The men remained sullen until a giant plate piled full of chicken wings found its way in front of Brian. It was as if the sun rose after 40 straight days of rain. Brian smiled – until Chris tried to take one. “Get your own damn wings!”

“Dude!” Chris reasoned.

“I’m serious! These are mine!”

“All 100? Are you kidding me?”

“Here,” Brian offered, sliding one of the plates of fried pickles to Chris. “Have one of these.”

“Tasty as they may be, they certainly aren’t as satisfying as wings!”

“If you want wings - order wings!”

“Jeff!”

“Jeff!”

“Fix it!”

Jeff sighed. He closed his eyes and dug deep within the quiet center of his soul. He reached for the solace of never having to deal with these two again. He would only find comfort in the execution of the plan. Now was the moment to begin.

“Miss...Miss...Yes, would you please get this knucklehead 100 wings, since he appears to be incapable of talking to a pretty, single woman. He wants those 911 hot, no celery or bleu cheese...he’s a guy. Or, at least that’s the story today. Also, please bring the open-mouthed gorilla a Guinness and the knuckle dragging, Elmer’s glue colored guy a Corona with *both* a lemon and a lime. Oh, also two shots of the hottest sauce you have for him, and I’d like a chicken sandwich. Thank you.” Without even a pause for breath, Jeff continued, his face flushed with the anger trapped under pressure for years uncountable. “Since you couldn’t even resolve this little difference on your own, you’ll both pay the penalty in beers that you hate. The hot sauce is just because I’m in charge, and I’ve recently embraced sadism. Do we have an understanding?”

“.....”

“.....Dude? They have chicken sandwiches?” Brian asked.

Jeff stood to address his audience of two in the manner of a man who wants the people across from him to know that they were not about to be treated as equals.

“Things are going to change, gentlemen, starting right now. The old me would have been happy to leave you both speechless. The new me? Well, I see the proverbial jugular and let’s just say I’m lunging like a rabid pit-bull. You think you can hang with that, meringue man? Thought not. How about the wooly mammoth? You think you can deal with 190 pounds of prime pit-bull hanging off your chops? Good.”

A smug and satisfied look stole across his face. Jeff sat and unfolded his napkin, before tucking in into his shirt collar. His coloring never looked better.

“Um, excuse me, sir...” ventured Chris, his hand partially raised as if he were in a classroom.

“You may speak. But,” hereupon Jeff shook his finger as if scolding a recalcitrant child, “keep it brief and poignant.”

“Where’s Jeff?” Chris asked.

“Dude!” Brian attempted to whisper, “Don’t push him. He frightens me.”

“Miss?” Jeff called to the bartender. “Would you please make

that two Coronas? They go in front of the guy who looks like cauliflower.”

“Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! DUDE! That’s great!” Brian said, wiping away tears with a swipe of his bearish hand.

“You think that’s funny, do you? Well, listen up, Bert and Ernie...”

“Dude, I’m Ernie...” Chris interrupted.

“What? Why?” Brian asked.

“It’s a head reference...He’s saying that your head is pointy...”

“SHUT UP!” Jeff yelled. “JUST SHUT UP! Speech is not required from either of you! Here, take these...”

“Dry erase boards?”

“NO TALKING! Write. Since this is what you’re both so ‘good’ at, that’s how you will communicate with me.”

“Dude...you look like Professor Peabody with that thing...” Brian said to Chris.

“You want slapped, Fozzy Bear?” Chris relied.

“Duuuuude? What does that even *mean*?”

“Head reference...”

“Oh, miss...miss...” Jeff said, pointing to Chris.

“Dammit!!!” Chris yelled. He then wrote, Dude, write him something.

You’re stupid! You took the time to write ME that, instead of just writing Jeff something? Brian wrote in reply.

Guh! Focus! I’m up to a six-pack of Corona here. My liver can’t handle that much citrus!

“You can’t even write on grease-boards without arguing, can you? Do either of you comprehend my misery yet?” Jeff asked.

We’re really sorry.

“How many ways have you complicated my life? You got me turned into a goat. You gave me a horrible disease...”

Guh! Did he have to pause on that one?

But you were the cool leader of a werewolf gang...

“Oh, sure...after you two made a deal with an evil power that spared you morons every agony! You can’t fathom my scars!”

Sir? Is old Jeff at home?

“You’re not funny!” Jeff screamed. His chest heaving as he gulped in air to keep the fire within stoked high. “You always think you’re ‘cute’, but the reality is that people only associate with you because you make them all look so much better - more educated, more mannered, more pleasant to work with.”

Preposition, sir.

“I’ll end my sentences with a preposition as often as I like, Mister ‘I’ll start sentences with **and** and **but** because I think it makes me cool.’ Well, it doesn’t make *you* cool. An ice bath couldn’t make you cool! If they coated you with ice cream and stuck a popsicle stick up your butt, you STILL couldn’t pass as cool! Do you get it? You ruin the ‘coolness’ of ice cream!” The smugness returned to Jeff’s face. With each eruption he was visibly changing the landscape that surrounded him.

Brian noticed Jeff’s sandwich getting cold in front of him. Invisible hands of scent tickled his nose, tantalizing his taste buds, making his tongue sweat until action became mandatory.

“You’ve cost me my immortal soul!” Jeff continued. “AND my social life! Not to mention any chance I’ve ever had at becoming a professional writer....”

Brian interrupted Jeff’s tirade with his white board, Excuse me, sir....

“What do you want?”

Are you going to eat that?

“I...can’t...believe...this...no, wait...yes, yes I can. Sure. You can have it. Just as soon as you do something nice for someone else. There. That table over there. Those two guys need ketchup. Take our bottle of ketchup to them. DO NOT spill anyone’s beer along the way. DO NOT talk to anyone. I’ve pulled your speaking plug. It’s been PULLED! You! BALDY! Stop writing your ridiculously juvenile comment about me ‘pulling his plug’! Now stop writing a retort to the bald comment! In fact, put the pen down! We’re having quiet time! Lay your head on the table until Brian gets back from taking ketchup to that table!”

Without a word, though still far from quietly, Brian clomped his way over to the table Jeff indicated. The noise of his size fifteen shoes pounding the ground provided all that was necessary to get the attention of the two patrons. Brian held the ketchup bottle up for them to view. In the back of his mind where his prima donna thoughts echoed incessant chants, Brian thought of himself as a modernized version of Vanna White. As a natural happenstance, his version was far more obscene even without intention.

After flashing a toothy grin, he spun around to head back towards his recently acquired victuals, only to fall in a heap. It was not, however, that the g-force achieved from his pirouette caused an imbalance in his grossly large frame. He was felled by recognition: the recognition of his own face. Impossibly, he was seated at the table which just received his gracious gift of ketchup. And so was Chris.

Confused, Brian ran back to the barstool from whence he came. He trembled and shook, sweated and stewed. He rubbed his eyes as if grinding corn to meal. Peeking one more time to make sure his eyes hadn't tricked him, he began to cry.

Satisfied by the reaction and confident that his plan was in full swing, Jeff got up from his barstool and slunk away to find a better point to observe the ensuing mayhem.

"Dude!" Chris said to Brian. "What is your problem?"

Brian tried to answer, but his mouth only opened and closed like a fish after its final flop on a hot beach. Transfixed, his eyes could only gaze upon the table behind his friend.

Chris frowned, disoriented by his friend's confusion. He waved his hand in front of Brian's face. No reaction. He snapped his fingers. Not even a flinch. He waved a chicken wing up and down. Nothing. Confounded, Chris finally turned to see what could possibly keep Brian from attacking food out of primal instinct. Squinting, Chris tried to get a clear a vision of the impossible. Sure enough, Chris saw a mirror image of Brian's vision – themselves.

TO BE CONTINUED