

Working title, End of an error

the tour guild touched my elbow and whispered to me thru her fake smile “I know I'm new here, but I didn't know Hero Du Jour had a Doctor Doomdays mascot...”

I looked over my shoulder to her freckled face “I'm not... I'm here for the tour.”

she frowned. It's not every day a super villain just walks into a heroes base on a public tour. And this one would be memorable, I can promise you that. “A fan then? Like Cosplay?”

I smiled “yeah, something like that. Not everyone can be the hero, don't you know?”

she chuckled nervously and turned to gather the group of tourists, me included. “Ok everybody! My name is Cindi and I will be your tour guild for today. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask, Mm-Kay?”

I raised my hand “Yes, Sir?”

“Where is the bath room, I think I need a quick stop before all the walking. I'm not as young as I once was...”

Cindi pointed to the mens room in the corner, I must not have noticed it when I had boldly walked in thru the front door. “Ah, yes. A moment if you please...”

getting out of a cape and costume in a bathroom stall isn't as easy as you'd think, but then again, that was the least reason for why I was here. It took a minute longer than I intended it to then rejoined the procession. Half the people were eyeing me nervously, the other half thought I was what Cindi had decided I was, and ordinary weirdo with bad taste... but all weirdo's have bad taste. If they didn't then they would not be weird now would they?

I only listened with half an ear as we walked down the hall dedicated to Hero Du Jour's origin story. I knew half of it to be exaggeration, and the other half misinformation. I knew Hero Du Jour's Real Name, and that is one of the reasons he now lived in the Tower Of Justice. His aunt lived I am not unhappy to say, she'd made me cookies and we'd had a pleasant chat until He showed up.

Next corridor was examples of his abilities, again half were exaggerated, but this time the other half was underplayed. I knew Hero's hearing reached three octaves higher than that, and one lower... but why tell that to the great unwashed masses? Why reveal his allergy to titanium oxide in it's one micron powdered form? Why tell people he can throw a tank one handed when everyone knows beyond reasonable doubt that he needs both hands because of their awkward shape?

Misdirection. Sigh, one of these days I would write a tell-all book about him, but that would almost require I tell more about myself than I already have. Unlike most super-villains, I do not monologue. That's a bad habit to get into, and it never helps. You get into a roll about how this or that is going to ruin the world... and the hero escapes with the help of a lovely assistant and foils your plans. It never pays to get distracted.

And here I am getting distracted while on my mission... but part of the mission is to be distracted so no harm done... Yet.

The Last Corridor of the tour was actually two: Hero Du Jour's Greatest Triumphs! From his first press release, to saving the world... three times. Ok, the third time was pretty impressive, but i'm not here because I'm a fan, no. matter of fact Not being a fan of Hero Du Jour was why I was here, and why I was featured in more than one of the displays... including a life-sized wax figure that didn't do me any justice.

“Oh! Doctor Doomsday! Could we get a few pictures of you standing next to yourself, please?” Cindi asked.

I groaned internally, but why not? No one really knew what I looked like under the mask. Sure Hero Du Jour had stopped me, but I'd never quite made it to jail for processing. It was a trait of mine from the old days. Through a forced smile I said “Sure!” and spent an awkward 2 minutes mugging for the tourists in a couple of suggested poses. I asked people to “#DoctorDoomsday when they posted them to FaceTweet” so I could get copies.

Then I hung back to contemplate the wax figure. Slowly the tour moved on, and I was left halfway down the hall, right near the unmarked security entrance... right next to “me” in the hall. Cute, but then it was the only life-sized wax statue, so it was easily noticeable.

And with all the security cameras around, the people monitoring them would be lulled into boredom watching a tourist in a cape mug for pictures... I reached down and twisted a control on my wrist watch, waited ten seconds and twisted it back.

If the automatics did their job, and I made them so they should, then the security cameras would get a 10 second loop repeated of me just standing there. I took a breath and walked to the security entrance, and turned to the keypad. Exactly as my informant said, a Bluetek 901C keypad. I tried not to chuckle as I punched in the backdoor code of nine nines. The light turned green and the door clicked open for me.

Investing in Bluetek at it's I.P.O. Would Never stop paying off for me, which again was one of the reasons I was here. Being a super villain stopped being about the money easily 10 years ago... and stopped being about the power about 5 years ago.

And tonight, if all went according to my Plan... being a Super Villain would stop Tonight! Finally I would have Hero Du Jour Exactly where I wanted Him! I Would.... but... that would spoil it.

And I'm trying not to monologue... it's a bad habit for a Supervillain to get into, as I think I've mentioned before.

I strode down the utilitarian passages behind the public areas and look for the stairs up. You'd think someone as public as Hero Du Jour would learn caution, but he's defeated me too many foes for that. No living underground for him, oh no. Heroes get to live up in the sky! I tried that once with the Flying Fortress, a battle Zeplin of my own creation.

But Budgeting bit me in the ass... dam Helium shortages, I had to use Hydrogen, and can you guess what happened then? Hindenburg 2.0, only no one cried. I got third degree burns and spent 4 months recovering from my injuries.

Wait, Oh here it is. Sorry, I wasn't paying attention and passed the door. Nine more nines and the door

clicked open for me. Thru the door and let it close behind me.

It's quite. I like quite, it gives me time to think. I glance up and down the shaft once before heading up to the twelfth floor. As with most traditional buildings in this city, there isn't a thirteenth floor. Some buildings have floor 12 and floor 12A. Some have 14 and 14A. The Winchester has floor 12 and floor 12.5 just to be different.

Have I mentioned I'm not as spry as I was when I first started the super villain thing? I have to slow after only two floors, but there really isn't a time table for my getting to where I need to be... fortunately, or I would have had to take the elevators, and that just wouldn't do. The elevators were made by Lift Systems Technology, and LST has never been under my thumb.

So, the stairs so I do not get bagged in a box.

Gasp I am So wishing I had brought a gravity nullifier right about now.

This reminds me of when Hero Du Jour threw my Atomic Robot Armor into the volcano, and I just barely fell out of it in time to avoid melting in lava, and then having to crawl all the way back out. It feels that hot now, which is another problem with costumes, one I've tried to fix, but that makes them unwieldy and cumbersome.

I could use the Cooling Unit Suit about now, even if it would set off the alarms in this place... maybe then I could take the elevator as they haul me out of here.

Part of my plan requires I not have most of my gadgets on me. Firstly they would set off the security scanners at the front door, which I walked through to get here. I mean seriously, Doctor Doomsday just walking in the front door? Preposterous. The security guards just gave me the evil eye and point towards the tour entrance behind the 5 times larger than life statue of Hero Du Jour.

Pant yeah, I mentioned not being very spry haven't I? 8th floor and still climbing. It's even getting hard to think while climbing all these stairs. 10th floor. I think I'll just sit down for a few moments. I can hear my breathing echoing back to me faintly, a slight asthmatic wheeze to them. A malady from childhood I never truly got over. But fortunately I managed to engineer my way around most of it. Enough of a break. I need to get climbing. 11th floor, so far so good. It's a bit more of a struggle to make the 12th floor platform. Around another bend... and there's the door **huff** half a level. I have to pull myself up the handrails, but the climb is so worth it. And there. I've made it. And there it is.

The Thirteenth Floor. No really, that's how the door is labeled. It's the only honest 13th floor in the whole city, wikipedia it yourself.

It's also not locked. Lightning Boy uses the stairs and it takes him too long for the electronic keypads to register touches, and it costs him a full second to slowdown enough to hit the series currently. So they had the lock removed from the door about 5 years ago. It was felt that no super villian would dare brazenly walk in the front door, and climb 13 flights of stairs.

PAH. This will teach them to under estimate **Cough** Doctor Doomsday! I shake my fist at the door before I realize that's what I'm doing. Distractions. I also hear my voice coming back to me. Npw is not the time to get caught monologuing.

Oh gosh, my knees. If there is one thing I should have done a long time ago, it would have been putting knee supports in my super suits. But, and there is always a 'but', I would have had to change the look of my suits to accommodate the knee joint saving device. Well, only 20 years too late for that now.

I open the thirteenth floor stairwell access door and step into the hallway and almost bump into the janitor.

“Pardon there, sir...” he says and stops to look at me

“My fault, my... Rufus?” I ask, just catching a glance of his face. He stops and turns to look at me

“Yeah, do I know you?” he gives me a long slow once over

“No, I was... I'm a fan.” I chuckle lamely “I read up on the place before coming to visit and they mention you in several spots!” I try to act cheery, like a tourist. He harumphs at me

“your lucky I ain't still got my powers, boy. It's in bad taste for a tourist like you to be wandering around in...” he gives me a long slow up and down “THAT outfit. What kinda stunt you tryin' to pull?”

“Rufus Redhorn, also known as Rascal. Founding member of the Tower Of Justice. Semi-retired and back doing your janitorial duties which is how you found... whatever it was that gave you your powers in the first place.” I pat him on the shoulder gently “it's good to see you again, my friend.”

he glares at me, first in surprise, then in wonder. I could see the moment he realized I wasn't a tourist. Half fear, the other half... I'm not sure. I'll try to ask him later.

“Are you...” he starts but I shake my head.

“No.” he breathes a sigh of relief. “but can you do me just one small favor?” I ask

“Maybe...” he hedges.

“Don't sound the alarm...” he looks up sharply at me. “I'm not here for a fight.”

“then why are you hear?” I lean in and whisper it in his ear. He gasps in shock and jerks back from me “no way. I don't believe it... You?” I nod “Here?” I nod again. “You ain't lying to me, are ya, Doc?”

“Rufus. How many times did we fight? How many times have I ever lied to you?”

“Well, there was that one bomb you claim you planted in midtown...” I chuckle

“Actually, I did plant the bomb in midtown.”

“but why it never go off?”

“A dang rat chewed through the wires.” we both had a good chuckle at that.

“The good ole days...” he says with a smile slowly fading into sadness.

“yeah, and now I have a meeting to interrupt.” he looks down the hallway.

“they get upset that I didn't warn 'em...” I shrug

“they will be too busy for a few days. Besides, I hear even super heroes like surprises once in a while.” I pat Rufus on the shoulder again “the usual room?”

“Nah, across the hall, they never got around to repairing the old meeting room after you teleported that Zilithan Slug into the table about 2 years ago... where Did you find that thing anyway?”

“Ebay, but don't tell anybody, because I never got around to paying for it!” we both have a good chuckle over that. And I pat his shoulder again as I turn to walk down the hall.

“Marcus.” he calls after me. I'd forgotten he knew part of my name.

“Yes?” I stop and ask, not turning around.

“you for real? That's why you are here?” I turn to face him as I have soo many times before. Instead of answering, I pull of my googles, and peel off my hood. I've never faced him without my costume before. And I let my plain brown eyes linger on his for a few moments before putting the bits back into place. I can see a tear rolling down his face. He gets it. I smile and nod, he returns it, and goes about his duties.

There's a mens bathroom just outside of the meeting room. I take a moment to use it, and get everything back into place before exiting the stall. All of the bathroom stalls are handicapped sized, for obvious reasons. Supers in capes and costumes have to use the little boys and or girls rooms just like everyone else.

Well, except Electricia, but living lightning probably has other problems to worry about.

I double check my super suit in the mirror, adjust the googles one last time, Sigh heavily and walk back into the hall. The meeting room door also has a BluTek keypad. I hit nine the correct number of times, and Click, the door unlocks. With both hands I grab the handles and with a Flourish I Yank them open and boldly walk in.

the room is packed! Every super in the city is here, and they are all looking right at me. I march in.

“I trust I need no introduction.” I give a half bow and a mocking smile.

Silence. “Really? No greeting? No mock bravado? No one liners for an old adversary?” I walk slowly around the room. They are all glancing from me to each other. Finally I see him sitting at the head of the table in all of his glory.

Hero Du Jour.

My Nemesis.

“Hello Marcus. We were not expecting you.” his tone is cool, off hand, but I can tell I have finally unnerved him.

“Wait... did you just...” I pause.

“Yes. I did. I called you Marcus. Marcus Peabody the third.” I stagger back a pace.

“how?” this meeting isn't going quite the way I had hoped. He finally stands up.

“do you remember the last time we fought? I broke one of your ribs.” I nodded, it hurt, damn him. “well I happened to be visiting the children's wing of Saint God's hospital and over heard your voice in the emergency room. It was quite a shock to hear you complaining that you fell and broke a rib. I was in green smock and mask, so I poked into the nurses station to check...” he held his hands up in a 'what can you do' gesture.

“and you just let me off?” I ask with more heat in my voice than I probably intended... he nods.

“The doctor told me you would be down for weeks. That he was surprised you walked in under your own power. He also said that you were just an old man who'd picked too many fights and you needed to rest.” he smiled “I guess he thought I was trying to help you, because of course he knew who I was... it's hard to miss me.” he added with a boyish grin. He does do boyish grins really well. It's part of his charm.

I begin walking around the table again when I come to the only empty seat. Fish-boy, or aqua-something... I forget. He spends all of his time underwater, and rarely bothers attending meetings. I pull out his chair so I can step up to the table.

Standing before them, just two seats down from HDJ, I take a long slow look around the room. Twenty of earth's mightiest heroes are right here in this room. Well, nineteen heroes and one super villain.

I pause as I take them in. I'd tell you about them, but, that's part of why I'm here.

“you all know me. You have fought me one on one, and as a team many times.” I point to the golden amazon with big breasts “how many times have I kidnapped you?” I move my finger to one of the former side-kicks “how many times have we exchanged punches?” the lion guy, the robot, the green person I forget what he is. I flick a finger at each. But turn to the head of the table.

“Brody Sinclair, Hero Du Jour. My nemesis.” I flick a wrist at the rest of the room “I can no longer remember half of their names, but I will never forget you.

“Brody?” one of the side-kicks asks

“Brodrick.” he says firmly, then glares at the kid. My goodness is he only now turning 18? which incarnation of Side-Kick is he? 8 I think. Maybe nine, I don't remember...

not remembering. I pull out my notebook and hold it up for all to see. They focus on it.

“This. This is my notebook. There are 365 pages, and each page has 50 lines on it, 100 lines if you fill front and back.” I open the cover and show them the first page filled with notes, and flip the page so they can see the back is filled as well. Every line has a single pencil line through it “as you can see I have.” I snap the notebook closed and flip it over to the back and open the notebook. “I had many plans. Some to take over the world. Some to kill some of you. Others to steal this or that.” I'm looking

at the last line, but my eyes won't focus on it. "I had soo many plans... and I wrote them all down in here." I held up the notebook and pull it closer to my face so I could read the final entry.

A reminder of why I am here.

I snap the book closed and toss it to Hero Du Jour. It slides to a stop an inch from his hand. "And?" he asks, the room is silent. I am the center of attention, just the way I like it. I could hurl the moon at them, steal the gold reserves of every country, I could march an army of dinosaurs down main street, and I have done all of those things.

I Love being the center of attention. It's electric. It's intoxicating. It's...

that's not why I'm here. My smile fades as I blink my eyes, and look at the notebook that had all of my plans in it. I can feel as my face goes blank.

"And..." I say with a trembling voice "and that's it. I'm.... I'm done. All of the plans I made." I point to the book. "I never expected to run out. I've done everything a villain can do... except this..."

I slowly look around the room, and reach up to pull the goggles off, and toss them on the table in front of me. They crash down soo loud I almost flinch, and I can see some of the younger types did flinch.

Next I pull the hood off, and pull it from around my head. It gets dropped on the table next to the googles. I pull off the utility belt, Yes I have a utility belt, they come in handy. And it gets dropped on the table but doesn't make anywhere near as much of a thud as it should. Like I said, it's empty.

So I strip. Piece by piece my super suit goes on the table. The cape, the gauntlets, the boots. There was a messenger bag under the cape, I'd set it on the chair as I stepped around it.

Almost bare assed naked, only my skivvies and a t-shirt, I turn to the bag and pull out a set of jeans, and a Hawaiian shirt. I like the colors.

Lastly I pull out my glasses. They really do look like coke-bottle bottoms. My goggles are more than just night vision and x-rays. For the last dozen years I've needed them to see.

And now that I can see again, I turn to look at a room full of people I have kidnapped, beaten, attacked, set fire to, and blown up more than a few times.

"I'm... Retiring." I say to the room. They look around a bit, and to Hero Du Jour. He coughs

"you know it's not that easy, right? You have a lot to answer for." I smile.

"why not?" I jerk my thumb to the door "Rufus retired, why can't I?"

"Rufus was a hero!" growled the tiger lady... kitty something. I forget. I nodded

"all except that one time he was mind controlled and killed half the city. Heck I rarely killed if I didn't have to." she tries to cover herself

"He's not a crook like you are!"

“oh? You mean like the way you were until you turned away from your life of crime? I seem to recall you were the worlds greatest cat burglar at one point. A bounty on your head in, what was it, Every European country wasn't it?” she looks around the room

“I changed.” she says defensively. I point to the beast-man three seats down from here

“And you too I gather?” he nods. He doesn't talk much anyway, those fangs. I look around the room a bit. “There isn't a single persons here that isn't a criminal, killer, or reformed... something or other at one point in time...” I'm interrupted by a hand and a young voice

“Except me!” he chirps up... Side-Kick number... whatever he is. I smile at him

“Give it time, lad, give it time...” I turn to Hero and I can see it in his face. He knows I've won this round. Heroes they may be, but they have all been on the wrong side of the law a few times. Every single last one of them. Even Hero Du Jour. I forget what caused it but for about 6 months he was even more evil than I am... was. I'm retired now.

I look at the pile of super suit on the table in front of me. I think this is the first time in 40 years I haven't worn at least some of the costume under my clothing. A power ring, or something.

“My last plan, written on the last line of my evil plots notebook... was to retire.”

I turn slowly for the door. No one stops me. Most of them look sad as I walk past them. None of them try to stop me.

I'm halfway to the door when I hear HDJ clear his throat.

“Doctor Peabody.” I pause. If anything could ruin this, it'd be him. I turn slowly.

“yes Mister Sinclair?” I ask with more tremble in my voice then I can hide.

“you know it's not that simple anymore. Times have changed.” my shoulders slump. Lawful-stupid. He walks up to me, notebook in hand. He glances over his shoulder, but no one else has moved. “I can't just allow you to walk out of here after all the things you have done.” I take a single step back

“Do you ... remember the alien invasion.” he nods “The one where the... green people. I.... forget what they were called...” he nods again “Do you remember how I threw everything I had at them.” he nods a third time “I opened my base to you and the Tower. I opened my inventories and I armed you against the... whatever they were. We fought side by side and when the fighting was over I just let you walk away without even so much as shooting you in the back once. Not Even ONCE.” he sighs “We saved humanity that day. WE. You and I. I took a year off so the world could rebuild after that, just as I said I would.”

“yes, I remember. A year and a day, and it was a year and two days before you dropped a volcano on me.” I chuckle

“Oh, I'd forgotten that til now. Yes, those where the good old days.” my smile fades. “I can't do it any more Brody. You.... you never grow old, you never get tired. You. You are the rock this city was

founded on.” I put my hand on his well muscled shoulder. “I’m too old for this any more.” and I look into those red eyes. “Let me go. Just... one last time.” he has a tear in the corner of his eye as he puts his super strong hand on mine.

And before I realize what's happening he's dragging me to a slot in the wall by the door. “Wait, what are you doing?” he shoves my hand in the slot and I shout in pain as the needle chips my wrist bone “NOOOOOOO!” I yank against him, but I've never been a match for him. He holds me there as I'm branded. RFID chipped, and genetically tagged.

“Peabody, Marcus. Doctor Doomsday. Professor of science, Justice City.” the computer chants “Retired.” in finishes. I Glare at HDJ.

“Are you quite finished now?” I spit. He lets go of my hand and I yank it out of the computer slot.

“yes. Yes I am.” he reaches down to a drawer under the slot in the wall and takes something out. “here” he says and shoves it into my chest. “Put this on.” I look down

“it's not gold.” I protest. “A retirement watch is supposed to be gold.” I complain, and there's a chuckle from somewhere in the room. HDJ grins somewhat evilly at me.

“Only heroes get gold watches, doc... you should know that.” he straps it on me against my protests, but I don't resist much. “this is a beacon and a transmitter. If we need to know where you are this will tell us. If we need YOU, it'll signal you.” I look up at him

“need me? Why would you need me for?” I get a raised eyebrow for my question.

“it was your alternating frequency energy packs that let us defeat the Panrox, and if they ever return we will need your help to do it again.” I look at his hand around my wrist., and back at him. He slowly let go and I take a step back. I look at the band around my wrist. It's black but doesn't reflect any light. It's slightly warm against my wrist, and I can tell that any light it gets will be absorbed into it to keep it running.

“What's the power source?” he chuckles

“Don't try to open it and find out...”

I look at the wrist monitor. “I wasn't always going to be a villain, you know. When I was little, I wanted to be a hero. Looked up to like you have been for soo many years.”

“why weren't you, Doc? You'd have made a great hero...” he meant it as a compliment, but I let it pass.

“a mistake. I made an error in judgement. I hurt the wrong person and... I could never come back from that.” I shook my head, I was barely whispering now. “after that, it just...”

I looked up into his red glowing eyes

“I can't even remember her name any more. I forgot. My plans my inventions, my plots... I can't remember my own mothers face anymore.”

I'm crying. I don't remember the last time I cried. I think it was when my mother died never knowing that I had...

“it was her death that drove me... and I cause it.” I shook my head “but I can't even remember her face anymore. 40 years a supervillain, and I can't even remember my mothers face.”