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JUL. 19, 9108

IN A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY

Issue 1: Serial Fiction Sideshow

Liam Gibbs



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THE STORY SO FAR...

Issue 1: *Serial Fiction Sideshow*, available at <http://tiny.cc/iagffa1>, on inagalaxyfarfarawRy.com, and in the hearts of one and all

Issue 2: *Home Sweet Home Invasion*, available at <http://tiny.cc/iagffa2>, on inagalaxyfarfarawRy.com, and also in the hearts of one and all

Issue 3: *Technophobia*, available at <http://tiny.cc/iagffa3>, on inagalaxyfarfarawRy.com, an—you’re starting to see a pattern here, aren’t you?

Issue 4: *Armageddon Trigger Finger*, available at <http://tiny.cc/iagffa4>, on inagalaxyfarfarawRy.com, and... hey...your heart. And everyone else’s.

OTHER STUFF THE AUTHOR SPEWED OUT

Not So Superpowered, available at <http://tiny.cc/nssuperpowered>

Three Flash Fictions, available upon request from the author
Emergency broadcast warnings from your local television network. The annoying ones that whine really loud. Ha.

CHAPTER ONE

AND THE MAN BEHIND THE OPERATION WAS NO MORE THAN A WELL-PAID IDIOT

July 19, 9108. 12:54 a.m. (Galactic Standard Time).

Destruction. Wholesale, wanton, razing, galaxywide destruction. Master Asinine *loved* destruction. Especially the wholesale kind, because you could get that at a discount. And he was planning so much of it. Destruction, not discount, for the record.

And maybe a bit of pillaging. He needed to set aside time for his hobbies.

“You know I know you all know why I’ve called you here,” Master Asinine said. Wait. Was that right? I know...you know...

Aboard the titan-class, spacefaring vessel *The Mikazin Starship*, in a room hotly lit using a single overhead light panel, Asinine spoke those introductory words and circled the table at which sat the leaders of six other criminal organizations: Grestlix of the Houdin clan, Markiset of the Watercrest clan, Requiston of the Vobinsix clan, Sikth’nkphth of the R’zext’wixv clan, Wiltroh of the Hygring clan, and Convenient Victim of the Warmaunt clan. Asinine led the Mikazin clan, the most powerful

crime syndicate in the galaxy. His second-in-command, a Terran named Lieutenant IQ 23 in the media, and his personal bodyguard, a never-speaking Virillian media-named Braindead, followed him where he paced. He had no clue why they followed so closely. Wherever he walked, those two treated him like a mother duck at a road crossing. Go figure.

Asinine cleared his throat. “You see, we’ve wasted enough time fighting one another and freaking one another out. Wasted enough firepower. Wasted my Frog Factoid-a-Day desk calendar, thanks to a fluke explosion in my starship’s engine room. But now is the time to stop all that waste.”

Master Asinine halted. Lieutenant IQ 23 bumped into him from behind, shoving him a step farther.

The six other leaders scowled at each other, their most trusted guards standing vigil behind them in case of treachery. And with good reason: hostility baked this crowd. Feuds had raged for years among these organizations. But Asinine sought to end that hostility. To accomplish that, he had gathered them on his turf, in his starship. Now he had control. He rubbed his hands together maniacally. This was so thrilling it seeped out of his pores. Or maybe that was his skin wax.

Other than the spotlighted table and those surrounding it, nothing was visible. As pronounced as a blood moon, the light panel emitted a beam shrouding everything outside its sharp boundary, as if nothing existed in the blackness beyond. Master Asinine stepped toward the table, showing off his getup: a Mylar bodysuit decorated with yellow and navy-blue splotches

that winked in the spotlight when he resumed circling the table. A great and threatening color combination. What he loved most about it was the helmet that hid all but his Terran mouth and chin. Its best feature was a spike at its top. Anything landing on him would ignite in pain. He also used it for shish kebabs.

Wrath in the room oozed from those present like bacon grease from a frying pan. Also, Master Asinine had cranked the heat to give these suckers a reason to sweat. The air felt thick enough to be dissected in a high school lab. One of those household lasers that sliced through tin cans and shoes would work best, but an everyday kitchen laser could also do the trick. Or his nuclear nail clipper.

The leaders evil-eyed Asinine, who paced on heels that thumped in the otherwise soundless room. The time and interest of the criminal leaders sitting here were things few ever obtained. These leaders represented the nastiest crime families in the planetary system of Renovodomus, perhaps even in the whole galaxy of Stratus Cloud. Master Asinine had chosen only the greatest to attend this meeting because he kept all his coolest stuff on this starship. His collection of coolness was meant for the eyes of only a select few.

Or maybe a surgical laser would do it. Those things worked freaky magic.

Asinine read the stone-frozen expressions on the other leaders as though reading nostalgia-store newspaper print with ink that smeared all over your fingers. He reveled in their uneasiness. And these pathetic weasels would soon cower in

fear, for none of them had anything as super awesome as a new mind-swap ray. Whatever it did. One hid in his back pocket, and he quivered to refrain from pressing its shiny button marked “Identity Crises for Everybody.”

“The crime syndicates represented here attempt to beat the military forces of Renovodomus, but each attempts it alone. Everyone, to be so eloquent, I have the newest, best, most wicked-slickiest domination plan of all time. Here, today, aboard *The Mikazin Starship*, I will create history. And not the kind of history told in classrooms but the kind of history that does cool stuff to other stuff.”

Around the table, the leaders eyed each other and snarled silently. Grestlix, the only other Terran leader, squared her jaw at Asinine, who began strolling again with Lieutenant IQ 23 and Braindead following. Braindead’s breathing hissed underneath the headgear that revealed his scaly green skin through only an eye slit. He watched everything with the vigilance of a bug-eyed painting.

Asinine drummed his fingers on the table on his next pass. “I’m here to propose something I think you’ll all find of interest. I’ve thought this through, spent many sleepless nights planning, pondering, banging my head against an electrified wall, recovering, wondering if this is really the right thing. And, after several discussions with my lieutenant about having better judgment, I’m going ahead with it, anyway.”

He spun around to face them so dramatically that Requiston swiped for his pistol but kept it in its holster.

Convenient Victim recoiled with his wiry tail slapped protectively across his chest. If it weren't for the fact that he'd destroyed a stadium with football-shaped bombs, Asinine would wonder how he rose to power.

"If I may be so italicized, I propose *this*." He stabbed the air with a finger. "I would like our seven crime families, the seven largest in this galaxy, to merge into one." He cocked his head at Lieutenant IQ 23. "How am I doing, Lieutenant?"

"Excellent, sir, but the expression is 'be so bold.'"

"A man can be both. And superscripted, too. My posture okay?"

"Great. Those instructional videos really helped." In his white-and-gray plastic armor, IQ 23 smiled and gave a thumbs-up. The head-sized question marks at the temples of his headgear bobbed.

Master Asinine turned back to the others. "How's my plan sound?"

"It sounds crazy!" Grestlix snapped forward in her chair. "Have you gone mad?"

"Only slightly! But maybe this is so crazy it *just—might—work*...even though things rarely work out that way."

"Think about it! The police, Intergalactic Protection, your mothers-in-law. They can all wipe us out easily as it stands right now. Even Grestlix, who is as merciless as gonorrhea, was stopped rather easily at last week's flea market raid."

Grestlix yanked at her short-cut hair. "It's called a stock market invasion, you mindless brute!"

“But imagine if we united. Our power, our control. We won’t have to worry about these stupid territorial disputes or useless skirmishes. We’ll wipe out the smaller crime families. Together, we’ll be so indestructible that no one will destroy us. Not even my old friend, Matross Legion, stands a chance. And we’ll work under the thin guise of a business so unlike crime, it’s as ironic as a man being beaten to death by his own detached arm. Which reminds me: happy birthday, Requiston.”

“You’re going at this totally unprepared!” Markiset almost launched out of her chair, her fuchsia Haralsian skin reflecting in the light. “That isn’t ironic, you’re using grotesque comparisons, and you’re being redundant.”

“Am I really? Or am I just being so repetitive as to only appear to be redundant?” Master Asinine high-fived IQ 23. “Comeback, dispatched.” To Markiset, he said, “This idea is so perfect, it’s almost as good as Girl Pop Grenade’s newest album.”

Grestlix covered her ears and sneered at the nearby speaker that played the album. “Newest? It is seven thousand years old.”

“And yet still the newest. It’s catchy like a plague.” Asinine bopped to the beat, menacing them with his angry-chicken head strut. “Anyway, I’ve thought this plan through. We can pool our resources, weapons, manpower, collections of *Cosmonaut Chimp* comic books. You see, Renovodomus isn’t crazy bonkers enough. It’s boring. No overabundance of gadgets, no market saturation of doodads. It’ll be our job to take

over Renovodomus and grace it with enough mad cool stuff to choke the tedium out of it.

“We’ll work together instead of apart. We’ll function as a business, perform transactions, buy and sell acquisitions, share earnings as if salaried, relocate to an undisclosed party base, and hold rampant, all-night company picnics. We’ll operate with the efficiency and power of an organized corporation yet with the lack of conscience of a seal clubber. No law enforcement agency or military will match us. We’ll have the resources to barter for the things we need to conquer Renovodomus, and if we can’t barter for those things, we’ll have the power to take them. This is no matter, though, since we’ll make a lot of these.” He tossed a few moolah tablets on the table. Currency symbols cha-chinged over his eyes. “Man, I love myself.”

Grestlix scrutinized the transparent, blue-glowing tablets. What? No cha-ching? The Houdin leader flicked a tablet away. “Money went electronic centuries ago, caveman. We use thumbprints to transact, remember? And use higher denominations. Five-moolah tablets don’t impress anybody.”

“From where shall we launch our operations?” Requiston asked.

Asinine forgot the money. “We’ll use this great *Mikazin Starship* as our headquarters because it has the funniest bumper stickers. And we’ll come up with flashy media names for ourselves. I, my bodyguard, and my lieutenant are now Master Asinine, Braindead, and my lieutenant.”

“Braindead?” Wiltroh tried the word out on his mouth, looking as if it tasted like spoiled fish.

“Yes, Braindead. All one word, because he’s all one type of special.”

Wiltroh chortled. His gray Logistican flab poured off his weakening chair. He shoved a slice of lard cake into his mouth. “That media name is unsound for those who wish to spread fear.”

“Those media names sound like Scrabble mishaps,” Grestlix said.

“We’ve been playing with a random insult generator.” Lieutenant IQ 23’s voice perked. “Braindead’s media name was longer, but we cut it down when we found out no one knew what a slackened blow-chunk was.”

“And don’t forget my name.” Master Asinine beamed a smile so wide he let it be his umbrella. “Someone gave me that prestigious title—”

“I’m unconditionally positive it wasn’t a compliment,” Grestlix said.

“—because I’m the master of the asinine. We’ve also come up with a secret handshake. We’ll show you later. Right now, we will engage in a short Q-and-A session.”

Requiston scoffed and searched the faces of the other leaders. His high-pitched Gharalgian voice tittered, scratching fingernails against the chalkboard in Asinine’s brain. “So what is your proposed plan to eliminate these other crime families?

Shall we simply lay waste to them, annihilating their resources and murdering their underlings?"

"If, by that, you mean demolishing their headquarters, then no. Instead we'll simply lay waste to them, annihilating their resources and murdering their underlings."

"And where have you been lately?" Requiston launched forward in his chair. "As a criminal leader, you've been missing for quite some months. We've seldom heard of you other than incidental skirmishes in locations that barely matter. You went off the grid!"

"Biding my time. Gathering resources. Catching up on my soaps."

"And what is with your atrocious garb?" Grestlix averted her eyes from Master Asinine's outfit. "It blinds even the healthiest of people!"

Master Asinine puffed his chest forward. "Homemade and tailored. Be threatened by its color coordination."

"This sounds suspiciously like your plot to rule the universe using a pickle-powered time machine," Markiset said. "Will this be another doomed failure at which we can laugh from afar?"

"No. You'll join me as partners. You can laugh from anear!"

"This is why you deserted Intergalactic Protection? This is what your disavowal of the military has led to?" Grestlix stood and bumped Asinine back.

“I told them.” Asinine stepped forward and sized up Grestlix. Ire churned behind each heavy exhalation. “They abused me, stuffed me into the bottom of the social chain for far too long. Nobody beats me down, least of all the people beating me down.”

Requiston grunted in his helium-sucking voice. “And what would we call this amalgamated clan?”

“Ha. This is the best part. We will be...the Bad Guys!” He outstretched his arms and surveyed his visitors. “Eh? Eh? Clever?”

“The Bad Guys?” Wiltroh said. Asinine considered giving him a treadmill. The tub of blubber looked as if nine or ten of his chins would jiggle off whenever he spoke. “What does that mean?”

“The Bad Guys. It’s an old Terran expression. *Bad*, defined as ‘faulty, unfavorable, worthless.’ *Guy*, defined as ‘a male, usually Terran.’”

“So we would be worthless male Terrans?” Wiltroh asked. Beside him, Sikth’nkphth hissed, his Virillian forked tongue hanging lazily from his scaly lips.

Master Asinine repeated the expression in his brain, lips moving as he did. “No. Not quite.” He shook his head to clear the thought. “Look, just trust me on this.”

“What if we *don’t* trust you? What happens if we don’t want to join?” Grestlix slammed a fist onto the table. Convenient Victim shrieked and threw his arms in front of his face. His teal Trioxidillian skin rippled with a twitching gasp.

Heh. Convenient Victim. Master Asinine inwardly scoffed at that name as he had so many times before. He wasn't about to tell the gutless wonder what the English translation meant.

Master Asinine craned his neck forward. "What will happen if you refuse my offer? I've planned for that. I know this proposition intrigues you all. I can tell by your completely indecipherable poker faces. Hypothetically, we will destroy those who refuse to join us in our mad quest for domination. Same with the smaller, more inconsequential crime gangs not represented here today."

"By refusing to join, you become a liability. And we will deal with liabilities...decisively." Asinine reached into his holster and displayed the weapon it gave up with a leathery squeak. "Ladies, gentlemen, and Wiltroh, this is my newest crowd pleaser, the Face Blitzkrieg, cobbled together from bits and pieces I picked up at the thing store." He shifted in a semicircle to display it to everyone. "It was formerly called the Cake Baker until my lieutenant reminded me it doesn't bake cakes. Shame, since Wiltroh and I could really go for a slice right about now."

Wiltroh stammered over his words before producing, "How did you—"

"And that spectacle of technology will do *what* to a target's face?" Grestlix asked.

"With the click of the trigger, whoever you aim at will find out what it's like to have their face blitzkrieged off in painful agony. And that's not all. My tech department is right

now working on a satellite superlaser. If the masses don't submit to our new order, we will blitzkrieg the faces off everybody in Renovodomus, one planet at a time. Imagine blitzkrieg on a level bordering on interplanetary.”

Asinine studied the crowd from one end of the table to the other. “Everyone, with the four-day, low-carb plan for domination I stole from this month’s issue of *Megalomaniac*, we will own crime in Renovodomus. And, with crime, we will own Renovodomus itself.” He didn’t mention his secret weapon. Not even these leaders would be privy to that. He laughed in his head at their ignorance.

“Four days, everyone. Do we have a deal?” He let those words sink into the resulting silence. His visitors had been snagged like elephants on hooks. Or did the idiom say it was a fish? Whatever. His new electrified nets could fry both those animals.

To be continued...

The buck don't stop there! The full version of this tall take can be yours! Grab it yonder at <http://tiny.cc/iagffa1> in the U.S. or http://tiny.cc/iagffa1_canada in Canada.

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for everything you do. It's a long chain of cause and effect
that ends with rainbows and sunshine for everyone.

And call your mother more often. She worries, you know.

Nothing is more dangerous...

He calls himself Master Asinine. Don't laugh.

...than a halfwit...

With the might of the underworld at his back, Asinine plans to rule the—well, pretty much everything. He's got a planet-destroying laser and just bullied the galaxy's major criminal organizations into forming an unstoppable force he calls "The Bad Guys."

...who controls...

Standing against him is his one-time comrade-in-arms Matross Legion, a somewhat neurotic green-skinned Trioxidillian. He and Asinine haven't spoken since Asinine killed their best friend, which, as you can imagine, somewhat soured their relationship.

...all crime!

Gathering a small team of people with hyperabilities, Matross prepares to confront his old enemy. Trouble is, Asinine is also getting ready, and he has all the usual evil mastermind tricks up his sleeve—and a few surprises for an old friend. So don't laugh at Master Asinine. At least, not to his face.

"This lyrical masterpiece of whimsy employs hints of Shakespeare married with elements of Keats and Orwell. Superb, my good man!"

— RANDOM VAGRANT WHO THEN HAD AN ARGUMENT WITH A PARK BENCH

"A half-step up from a TV guide."

— A GUY THE AUTHOR PAID FIVE BUCKS TO SAY SOMETHING NICE

"Bukaaawwwwkkk!"

— A CHICKEN

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