

# Chapter One

## The Importance of Sneakers

**Our story picks up one thread after the capture of fuggager Nono-Goose Pandaghast.**

The plot thickened so that it was soon a great stew of unbelievable legend, impossible technology, and irrevocable confusion. Kids were suitably dumbfounded, and they walked the streets with their mouths hanging open; their eyelids thick with a droop at half-mast.

It had been eleven threads, plus several stitches, since the teenager Billy Kazoo had been taken into the mechanical laboratories of the Graph Zeppelin. He'd been cast out into the streets, a fully monitored, antenna-plugged *Juvenaut*. When the call to Electro-academy inevitably came, he did not respond as he was ordered, and so he was as well a *truant*, which was no little thing. He was in a trouble most grim.

He was sixteen threads grown. He had matured a lot in the alter-time of *blanketivity*, albeit his growth was very strange. He'd always been considered somewhat puny by his fellows, but now he was at least five feet tall. It was only in these last few stitches that he had really begun to shoot up, during the course of his dangerous truancy.

He was rigged, as always, in his trademark outfit; a blue jumpsuit with pockets all over the legs, under a raggedy red zip-up sweatshirt that was worn at the elbows, hood up, his feet stuck in battle-weary hi-top sneakers that bore little *whizzes* of air on their sides. Like dustclouds left in the wake of a really fast cartoon; they were a symbol for a forgotten day of liberty and privilege.

The label on the sneaker's heel bore the name **NUKE**<sup>®</sup>, while the tongue read the model moniker--**PUNK-hi**. These were a pair of Nuke sneakers that were manufactured well before the Blanket splat, designed specifically for a sport called *Grav*, which was played in a zero-gee stadium chamber, with a tool not unlike a frisbee.

Kazoo had copped the rubbery hi-tops off of a mannequin out in the remains of a New Brooklyn shopping center, a few years previous. He'd had to fight another *Juvenaut* for them, a nasty seventeen-ager who was ready to go end-Smash for them, (that is, Smash till death), seeing as the Nukes were then practically brand new. On the streets, most Nukes were a status symbol, but the model *Punk-hi* was considered greater than any sneaker one could have on their feet. The popularity of Nukes were the *Juvenaut*'s counter-attack on the **VOLTOR**<sup>®</sup> kicks that the Electric Company wore (this included Plastoids, Clubs, Transistors, Norphidites, and well, even the Muffinman himself). In Electro City, you wore the mark of your allegiance upon your shoe.

Thinking back on the little skirmish, Kazoo couldn't quite remember how he was able defeat the other kid, who was certainly much larger than he. Nevertheless, he had done it quickly: distracting his foe; even managing a clever way to tie the hoodlum up with his own shoelaces. He'd been relieved that neither of them really had to get hurt, even though he'd received a nasty fatlip, and he was delighted that he'd never seen the boy

again. He must've become a Plastoid long ago.

*NOTE: From this we can gather: this kid who wore the Punk-hi's was a dogooder from the very start.*

Back then, the sneakers had been oversized, but Kazoo'd almost grown into them now that they were very nearing their disintegration. The soles were rubbed nearly to the sock, as pinky toes peeked out of the tiptops of either whiz.

*They've got one adventure left in them, thought Kazoo, they can, at least, get me underground.* For this was his stratagem.

The sneakers were by far his most favorite thing, and he often liked to pretend that they were magic, helping him to jump higher, run faster, and get out of any situation. What was probably true about them, however, was that, among Juvenauts, Kazoo was given a great respect because he wore them. Sometimes they'd tease him, calling him "The High Punk of all Ultra Hyperdom," for it was so that the twisted little Juvenauts liked to call themselves *ultra-punks, hyper-kids, even superheros...* and their cartoon society was known even to the Company as *Ultra Hyperdom*. They were scandalous for make believe, and it was difficult for the Electric Company to decipher what they were monitoring most of the time. The fact was, however, that the Plug was scanning *desperately* for *something*.

Something that must have been very special.

Indeed, in his eleven threads at ground level, Kazoo had learned a lot about survival. He knew the Junkyard (which most residents called *Punkyard*) like the back of his hand, and he enjoyed his escapades about the city, no matter how harrowing they ever became. Although he was smart to avoid the Electric Company whenever possible, he *was* famous for outwitting his Juvenaut rivals, whom he faced with great valor. For there were always those kids willing to take the helm of *bully* and *bad-guy*. As Kazoo grew older, he often found himself thinking that some of these kids were more accurately labelled: *supervillains*.

Understand, in Electro City, it was rumor that kids were doing the *impossible*. It was just difficult to *see*. Anyone who did anything out of the ordinary, of course, had better be ready to tangle with the Electric Company. That was a given. If a teen wielded something close to a superpower--if even the slightest Milk happening were to be reported to the Radio Station--the Club was in immediate snoop of the alleged suspect.

Hence, burgeoning superpowers were kept very hush, and that was all, of course, if anyone really had such abilities at *all*. Such was the extent of the secrecy, that there was ample debate as to whether or not true Siphonage even existed among the tattered costumes of the ultra-punks. Most Club members had never seen such feats. It was only the elite Characters that knew the truth... or those that were in the right place at the right time.

Thus, Kazoo progressed like most Juvenauts, striving to be a self-made superhero, doing his best to dress in uniforms like those they worshipped from old Comic-books.

Most important to this part of his outfit was the old rubber Halloween mask that Kazoo wore upon his rather big head. The mask was sculpted to resemble some sort of wacky cartoon character... a *wisenheimer* that smiled crazily, with buck teeth, freckles, and

squinty smiling eyes. This was the disguise that Kazoo wore to “hide his secret identity”, always with his little red riding hood ever pulled up, the drawstring taught and doubleknotted under his neck.

Today, Kazoo was carrying a large paper bag in his hand, and he wore a knapsack on his back. He had been on the run for the past few stitches, because, as promised by the Transistor Jim, the CLUB had come looking for him many, *many* times.

Kazoo had done his best to destroy the 1 inch square *fleshscreen* that was imbedded into his wrist (where a watch might otherwise be strapped). He’d picked out the shards of the plastic screen, and yanked out several wires. He fashioned a plastic cover for the screen and painted it orange, the only color close to his skin tone that he could find (he was sort of a dark tan, if you want to know). He was still wearing a bandage around the exploded area, and it hurt quite a bit.

But even after that, the Club had been able to trace him through his antenna’s Uhd-beacon. It took him a week of close-call captures to face up to the fact that he *had to* snap off his mono-antenna. He didn’t want to do this, because he knew he was going to have to pull out the thin Milk-tube that ran from the antenna, and through his body, to his fleshscreen. When he finally snapped it, it hurt something awful as if the antenna was a part of him. Pulling out the tube felt worse, and he had imagined that he might die from the operation.

Since then, he was paranoid there were some other kinds of wiring inside of him, as through the little hole in his head, he could still sometimes hear strains of Uhd-signals bubbling in the quivering subether. Or rather, he could *feel* the Uhd.

Since he’d come of age, he’d stopped getting the mandatory Milk replacements for his Uhd-screen/antenna setup. Milk was supplied by the Company at McDonald’s depots, so that meant he wasn’t eating any of the *sleepy* food anymore. He felt better than he ever had, except that he desperately needed *all* of his energy now, in order to evade the Club... and he was eating next to nothing; merely *old* food that he could scavenge from the sites of ancient delicatessens.

Kazoo was in the vast Quodestran *Punkyard* now, crouched in a small cave of garbage, made out of the hull of an old Floto-bus. He was studying *the* Comic Book that had taken on a rather mysterious air among many Juvenauts. It was “*Extraordinary Adventure*” #568”, the first appearance of the rather legendary superhero... *Kid America*.

Kazoo had been mulling over the much debated rumor that had been going on for *decades*; a much scribbled piece of Juvenaut graffiti... a bedtime story that said there was a *real* Kid America lurking somewhere under the streets,

“*A kid America who will one day rise and defeat the DJ,*”

...to quote many a hopeful Juvenaut, including Kazoo’s older friend Clarence Pocket, who had taught him how to read... Clarence was the boy who originally teased him with the dub of High Punk.

“It’s all up to you Kazoo,” Clarence would say,

“Somebody’s got to do it. *Why not you?*”

Kazoo held the much coveted *E.A.#568* carefully in his hands. The truth was that he had read it many times before, as he had re-read most of the comic books he was able to collect. There were some integral issues that he could never locate, and he had barely found any of the later Kid America series, like *Supercandy*, or *Tricycle City*, or any of that good stuff. Now, he was reading *this* one over again, just to see if there was anything important that he might have missed. Any vital tips on being a superhero.

For he was a Truant now, and he needed all the help he could get.

**Note to Reader:** As Juvenaut Billy Kazoo explores certain crucial Comic Books in the ‘Kid America Saga’, we will print the ‘synopses’ of these issues, as they were written by Editor-in-Chief *Bodey Protonicus Flugger*, the *Memory Man* of the underground digizette; the Info Komica. These synopses were later collected in the much revered “**Encyclopedia Komica**”, a computer text of prolific scope and length. In addition to these digests (which comprise nearly 25 volumes of the Komica), the Encyclopedia held a vast array of articles, instructions, and scientific essays on Milk, and it’s human counterpart, the Siphon.

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The first appearance of Kid America in **Extraordinary Adventure #568** pictures the teenage hero on it’s cover, leaping across a rooftop, above his native city of New York. He is fully costumed and very skinny, not yet wearing the large 3D style goggle supplements to his ‘Curlylock’ mask that later became his hallmark and one of the great symbols in the annals of Komica.

The 8-page story within (although it made the cover, it was split with a 16-page *Wizards of Space* story), was entitled “What Does it Take to be a Superhero?” The gist of the story is the first meeting between the all powerful Icecream-Man and a little boy who is merely “playing” at being a superhero. On a routine mission to deliver frozen treats, the Icecream-Man asks the soon-to-be famous youngster his name, and the boy (dressed in a homemade superhero mask) replies, “Kid America.” Immediately, a warning light goes off in the old man’s head. He is pictured with a thought bubble next to his face, that reads, “It *must* be him. I have searched for so long.” This is the first hint that the Icecream-Man is really much more than he appears to be. The Icecream-Man gets out of the truck and introduces himself, “I am Sam,” as the youngster is wary at the possibility that he has encountered a pervert. Sam thinks to the boy (using trademark telepathic word bubbles), “Do not be frightened, for I am your friend.” With that, Kid America appears at ease. (Parents everywhere, however, wondered at the message this was sending to young readers.)

From the back of his truck, Sam then unloads a beautiful, glowing BMX bicycle of a rather futuristic design. Stupidly, the boy asks, “What is it?” and Sam says, “It is a bike. I have brought it from very far away, from very long ago. You must protect it at all costs, for one day, it shall save us all.” The boy merely replies, “Wow.”

Sam promises that he’ll be back to check on the boy from time to time, and urges him to always try to do the right thing. The boy grins mischievously, and the Icecream-Man grows nervous that he might have chosen the wrong child.

The promotional text at the end of the story reads, “And so, a new hero is born. But—who is the Icecream-Man? How could a bicycle save the world? What did Sam mean when he said, “I have searched for so long”? If you want to find out the exciting answers to these baffling questions, join us next month for the premiere issue of ‘*Here Comes... Kid America!*’”

**-Bodey Flugger**

**Encyclopedia Komica**  
**synopsis of Extraordinary Adventure #568**

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“What *does* it take to be a superhero?” thought Kazoo, admittedly feeling more confused than ever. He found himself thinking that the much revered story was, well, *corny*. But so many superhero stories of that time were just written in this fashion. In the legend of Kid America, however, the stories got a lot better, and much more frightening. Kazoo decided that when he got back to his *hole*, he’d check out a later issue, perhaps the one when Kid America joins forces with his greatest of sidekicks, the bumbling junior high student, *Fatboy*.

Kazoo looked up at the Electric Blanket. You could always know the time by looking up at the Blanket, for it literally bore a digital readout clock just south of the blinking neon emblem, in a series of dots that only Electricans understood. Now, Kazoo knew it wouldn’t be long before a patrol would come through the area, so he stood up, put the comic book in his back pocket and marched on in his Nukes, finishing his rounds.

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The ultra-punk kept his eyes peeled, as he kicked through some garbage, looking for treasures. You could see Kazoo’s real eyes in the two small slits of his mask’s ‘squints’. They widened as he crouched quickly and dug through some metal scraps.

*There, almost there... he saw the colorful wrapper.*

*I can smell it... it’s good...*

He grabbed it intently and picked it up. Gently, he peeled back the already opened wrapper to reveal nearly 1/2 of an ancient chocolate bar, adorned with brown looking nuts.

This was Kazoo’s plunder. He *always* collected. He found stuff all the time. It was a knack, he thought; he had a good sense for high-profile junk and where it might be located. He just *knew*, he could almost *see* the stuff, *imagine* it, and there it would be.

This was the kind of stuff he looked for: things he could *eat*, like *aged candy* (luckily packed with preservatives); metallo *parts* that he could tinker with, like *electronics*; or plastics he could trade, like *toys*. He scuffed a few mech-ants off of the choco-wrapper, and nibbled at the dirty chocolate. He rolled the bit around with his tongue, and nodded, for it was still quite a good edible piece. He chucked the rest into his backpack, which was already full of some stale snackcakes and an entire box of water-damaged sugar packets.

He continued over the grounds, which stretched out in swoops of garbage and dirt. He was looking to reach the Metallic Mountains by nightfall, these being the great hills of Floto-cars that made up the Eastern border of Quodestran. With intense scrutiny, he scanned the plane, humming gently to himself: a made up melody.

Soon he arrived at the rusted remains of an old six *wheeled* Motorcar. Most cars before the Blanket were either hovercrafts or jet propelled, but *this* was a throwback to a simpler day.

*Maybe there’ll be some parts for my hum-scooter,* he thought.

He began inspecting the trunk, and found a large cog he thought he might be able to use.

*This might just do it.*

Something strange caught his attention as he made his way over to the driver's side of the car. He caught sight of it in a shard of the rearview mirror left on the passenger's side. Quickly, he climbed through the window, and adjusted the mirror appropriately. Again he saw it: *a small, slow, blinking, blue light*. He was sure it was blue, not at all in the wretched purple spectrum of Uhd. Then, he turned his head 180 degrees and tried to lay his eyes upon it.

He stared for awhile, until his eyes went dry. And the blue light blinked again.

*Perhaps it's a lightning bug*, he thought.

*But fireflies don't generate blue neon. Besides, no one's ever seen one of those down in the ground levels. Not for fifty threads at least. Perhaps it's a new Opticam...*

He stared at it. He was sure it was artificial. But he could feel it. It was non-Uhd.

With this, he launched into a run, far cross the plane, then up an incline of loose junk that was difficult to ascend. He began to sort of climb, picking through rubble in his way, stepping on unsecured garbage and falling back several feet, every few yards. Within moments, he'd broke into heavy breath, struggling as if he was on a conveyor belt that was heading in the opposite direction.

Just as it seemed he was stymied for good, he was standing above the blue light, which came from underneath a pile of bricks, balled up papers, and broken bottles... He began to tear away at the junk so that he could obtain his prize. He acted fast, because at anytime, *anyone could come along*; a rival Juvenaut, a Club, an ornery Fug scavenger. He cleared the space quickly, and finally, in an amazing feat of strength, he lifted a white porcelain toilet bowl and threw it ten feet to the side. But he had no time to ponder this sudden muscle uppage. He didn't notice, for his mind was racing with the alternate possibilities as to the light's origin.

With no doubt in his mind, he saw it.

*Was it called a Music Box? No, no... some kind of a radio...*

*A Tape Recorder... that's it...*

The kind that was used in movies he'd seen from early in the 21st Century. It looked as if it were in good shape. It was whole, for one thing, which was utterly rare in Punkyard, where everything was chopped to itsy bits.

*Could it possibly be functional?*

A feeling of hope rocked Kazoo's stomach for a moment... he felt queasy as he bent to dig out the thing...

He lifted it gently and tapped the tape slot. He tried to press the Play button but it wouldn't go down. The light blinked faster, then died. Kazoo shook it a bit, and opened the battery port. Battery acid spilled on his pants.

He thought, *if the acid isn't dried up yet, it could not have been here for very long*. He tried to eject the tape but it didn't budge. Not nearly in as good a shape as he had hoped, the old 'Corder seemed to have seen some... *battle*.

Kazoo pondered this momentarily, when a beep came from within the Recorder's belly.

Then another.

He put it to his ear, and distinctly, he could hear *a tune*. A melody composed of 5

notes, playing over and over again. He would swear forever that it was the same tune he was just humming, only just a few seconds ago, several yards away. Out of excitement, he nearly dropped the little machine, and as a clown may bumble, he bounced it off his knee and caught it in mid-air. Audiences would have applauded him, but what he heard instead, from within the module, made him jump back. It was distinct, like an exclamation of surprise.

“Oh!”

Kazoo checked the horizons for onlookers, then quickly stomped off in the opposite direction. Soon, he broke into a full run, desperately trying to get back to the garage he called home. Importance gripped at him, perhaps, as he had never felt it before.

Kazoo wasn't really sure if the garage was located in the Quodestran or New Brooklyn. He knew the fanatic ultra-kids from New Brooklyn didn't try to enlist anybody anywhere near to his block, so he figured it must be located in the last few remaining non *dump* streets in the horrible Punk sector of Electro City.

stitch: a month-like increment of Electro-time

Nuke: pronounced Nukie

To view Kazoo on Earth-3 you might say that his mask looked like Alfred E. Neuman from the pages of Mad Magazine.

mech-ants: Insects and vermin of the day were largely spawned from the biomechanical remains of the fallen Hum Sim Tech factories. Mech-ants, as well as spidertrons, crackrats, and robo-monkeys were littered about Electro City, as these bionic species survived much better than any real animals could under the malnourishment of the Blanket. The reason was this: they could eat garbage to survive.