

Chapter Two

Send in the Club

Three hundred yards from Kazoo, radio communications were spraying in and out of an old rooftop of a rundown 6 story tenement. Electric Company opticams bobbed their heads to accommodate a recently received scout order. Lenses whirred with zoom and focus, depixelization, pan, and blink.

An insane and jangly Uhd-tune began to permeate the air on top of the building. Children's laughter (or was it the sped up laughter of crazy *men*) followed in melody. Then, the lone door atop the building suddenly swung open, nearly broke off it's hinges, revealing the deranged Club Character *Stuffed Animal*. Stuffed Animal, or *Stuffed Eddie* (as he was slanged by his fellow Clubs), was ranked *Listener*, but he'd been threatened several times with a demotion to Bouncer. All threats came from collections capitron Third Base.

Stuffed Eddie's *Phun Suit* most resembled something like a monkey-bear, but, again, not nearly so much as some sort of made-up bear-like monkey-coated creature with large goofy buck teeth. His uniform was simple, with a lot of red and blue in it. He was filthy. A speaker was installed on the left side of his chest, as it was on every Club. Static poured through the speaker. An equalizer readout was set underneath it. It moved in time when Stuffed Eddie, in his goofy voice, spoke,

"Third Base. Do you copy? *Yo. Third Base!*"

He checked his earpiece one time. Club uniforms were outfitted with video viewscreens in their interior. The human being wrapped underneath saw, not through holes, but through the Phun-suit's optical lenses. Suddenly, a small box wiped into the lower right hand corner of Stuffed Eddie's overall viewscreen. The image of Third Base greeted him, mockingly,

"Hey there... *Eddie*. We just found 2 more ultra-punks. They had a snare drum and some broke up Dolls on them. However, all the toys were absolute *inanimates*. No robotics, no chip implants, no plaz-technications. Come up zippo. We're sending the booty to *Alphastruct* now. Report on your site."

Stuffed Eddie walked the length of the roof to the edge, peering over it. His optical lenses zoomed in on the scurrying figure of Billy Kazoo, clutching his raggedy paper bag like it was a golden bucket.

Stuff relayed, "Right, Base, awaiting an *orbiscan*," as his computer accessed the I.D. files.

While he waited, Stuff said, "I got a nimbling Juvenaut in scope now. He's got a sack with him."

"What's on his feet?" asked Third Base.

"Looks... like... *Nukes*."

"Model?"

"Wait."

Stuffed Animal's computer processed quickly, as the words came up on his viewscreen:

**Ground cams unable to get full eyeball take.
Print obscured by mockrubber and Plastak.
Proceed with orbiscan of obscured image?**

"Please do," said Stuff. A blurry close-up of Kazoo's eyes suddenly wiped into Stuff's vid screen.

Estimate 88% probability of accuracy.

"Good enough," said Stuff, "Gimme the downloads." As the words were typed along the vid, Stuff read the info to Third Base,

"Name: William Kasofritz

"Aliases: Bill Casey, Dermolad, Billy Kazoo, Count Uggley

"Age: 16+

"Affiliates: AV Squad, Garbage Dumplings, S.N.A.C.K.

"Status: Truant, 5 months.

"Attitude: Shy, Disobedient, Impudent, Tart, *Inventive...*"

His computer assessed the information. Then Eddie read again,

"Has avoided twelve Club attacks.

"He is--*dangerous* to the Electric Company.

"Kazoo must be brought in at all costs."

Stuff paused, as if assimilating to the information.

Base was back, "What model Nukes for the sake of Noise!?"

"Oh, yeah... they're Punk-hi's."

"Well that's what we're looking for stupid. It's Kazoo alright."

"Okay, Capitron... I'm gonna try and get after him. Out to 3rd Base."

Third Base said sternly, "Check."

He paused, however, not clicking out,

"Stuff?"

"Y-Yeah?"

"Don't let him get away again."

Stuffed Eddie's readout screens displayed his emotions. They read:

Stuffed Eddie is embarrassed.

He is annoyed.

He is disdainful of his capitron.

Choked up, Stuff replied, "I won't, boss."

3rd Base clicked out.

Character Costumes, aka Phun Suits, are equipped with the finest gadgets. Stuffed Animal, with no hesitation, hopped over the rail of the building, and began scaling down it's length, utilizing a vacuum/suction-cup function installed into his mitts, knees, and boots. As he descended, Fun Freddie, an over-gregarious Underbouncer on the mission, relayed to him,

appearing on Stuff's vidscreen. Fun Freddie's Character was modeled after a cartoon madman, with scraggly blue fur, huge teeth, and big crazy spiral eyes. He was a frightful looking Club, reminiscent of a Sendackian *wild thing*.

"Yo, Stuff. I'm picking up movement down here."

"Fun Freddie. He should be in sight in 3... 2... 1. Do you see him?"

Kazoo was jogging lightly now. He turned a corner.

Fun Freddie, several blocks ahead, adjusted his lenses, beaming the image he saw to Stuffed Eddie's viewscreen,

"Got him."

Then, with a deliberate and rapid right turn Kazoo disappeared from sight. Stuffed Eddie exclaimed in horror,

"Where did he go!?"

Fun Freddie retorted, stupidlike,

"I don't know, man!"

"Rewind the footage you imbecile!" shouted Stuffed Animal.

Fred commanded his playback module by saying,

"Instant Replay!"

The footage was assessed, Stuff viewing in transmitted unison.

Fred ordered,

"Any and all available units follow by tracing my beacon. Descend upon *hidden* alleyway located between Metrocrest Ave. and 261st Street!"

It was only the Clubs Fun Freddie and Stuffed Animal who were close to the location.

* *

Kazoo lived with a couple other Juvenauts on the outskirts of Punkyard. It was a ten block stretch of green Garages that had been built long before, behind a community housing project that was destroyed several threads back. Now there were all types of Juvenauts living in the garages, forming mini-alliances with their friends. These little groups were known as The Garage Bands, not so much in that they tried to make music, but because the roommates of every garage forged a unit that was the closest thing to a family that the hyper-kids might have known. The Garage Bands were not kept under the most intense scrutiny by the Company because they lived too close to the Dump sector. And this is exactly why they lived there.

They all took band names. There were ones like, *The Creeps*, *The New Monkeys*, *Poverty Kids*, *The Boogers*, *Dumdy Dum*, *The Whackers*, etc.

Kazoo arrived at his garage, breathing quite heavily, sweat streaming into his eyes. He climbed to the top of a 10 foot fence, then awkwardly tossed his legs over the rim and fell to the ground on the other side. He jogged his head and rose from his posterior to be standing in the small concrete platform that he and his friends called their patio. Next to it sat their dilapidated garage, with a hole blown out of one of its thick concrete walls. A broken sheet of plexiglass had been leaned up over the hole, and it looked like a sort of hobbit's window.

A picnic table was set up in the patio. At it sat a younger boy, Roger Nameth, 15 years old, and a girl, Gwendolin Dot, age 13, huddled next to each other in front of an old small black and white TV set.

Nameth, who liked to go by the handle *Jabberboy*, wore a stretch exo-hoodie which clung to his head and gripped his chin, allowing only his eyes, nose, and mouth to show. Scratched up swim goggles hung below his neck. He glanced up at Kazoo when he entered, but paid him little more than a nod, as he was trying to adjust a TV antenna made out of old kitchen utensils.

Dot wore a slender little eyemask, and had her hair was done up in haphazard pigtails. She had a couple of missing teeth. Since she'd known Kazoo she'd been through a flurry of alter egos. Most recently, Kazoo had been calling her *Dot Penguin*, and she seemed to like that one, for whatever reason. She squinted her face at Kazoo as he entered, then readied herself to speak by twisting her mouth in three different directions. She looked like she might yell, but it was just her way of talking.

"Hi," she said.

She was, by all means, *mad*. She strained out a few more words,

"We're trying... to pick up some... uh... *cartoons!*"

She exaggerated the word *cartoooons* and scrunched up her face. She pointed her finger in the air as she spoke, as if teaching him an important lesson. Although Billy Kazoo was very fond of Dot (she was like his kid sister), he had always been a little bit scared of her. She was not handling her delinquency well at all. She was always bothered by this or that, seeming very annoyed at trivial things, yet ignorant of the overall situation. Billy would catch her screaming at her small collection of doll parts, then listen to her cry and beg their forgiveness as she tried to overcome her ongoing battle with insomnia. She was mentally unkempt, yet still sharp when it came to dodging the Club. Although he enjoyed her company, and happy to have her in his band, Kazoo thought her frantic and *ill*.

He nodded approvingly at the idea of cartoon reception. Most Juvenauts tried to pick up TV from beyond the Blanket. It was rare, but sometimes they managed it, rigging busted TV's, and Holo-generators made a century past. Back in the day, Clarence would always claim that he had once seen one of the old *Kid America Cartoons*. Kazoo always hoped, rather desperately, that Roger (a dedicated reception-addict) might pick up one of those again.

Dot was looking at Kazoo, smiling and proud.

She said, "Hey, man, you know what? You never talk hardly. Never *talk!*" She pointed at him, smiled again, and asked,

"*Right?*"

Kazoo was nodding, but she answered herself anyway, screaming

"Right!!! Remember Clarence used to talk all the time?"

Kazoo remembered. Clarence had been the leader of their garage, the one boy Kazoo looked up to. But Clarence had come of age and disappeared underground. Since he'd been gone, it'd been up to Kazoo to run the band. It was one of the main reasons why, since he'd gone truant, that *he* hadn't tried to go deep yet himself. He didn't want to leave Dot and Roger alone. Directly across the alleyway, there lived four other ultra-punks

in another garage, and they were always messing with the younger kids. It ate at Kazoo's gut, though, that this was mostly an excuse. Although his life was in constant danger at ground level, he was even more scared to go down.

Dot was staring at him, then abruptly, she returned her focus to Roger and the television.

Kazoo was thinking back. *One night, Clarence had come upon Kazoo in the Junkyard with a small little sack over his shoulder. He wished Kazoo good bye and said he was going to try and make it underground. For his journey he had taken a stash of batteries that he'd collected during the course of his entire delinquency, some makeshift flashlights, and a little food. Kazoo offered him all the beef jerky he had but Clarence had refused all but one piece. He bid Kazoo good night, turned, and had trotted off, never to be heard from again. Several Clubs had questioned Kazoo and the other Juvenauts as to Clarence's whereabouts but came up with nothing. Kazoo sighed, and hoped old Clarence was alright and safe somewhere underneath the Ultra-earth.*

As he thought of this, Billy emptied the contents of his bag on the table. This caught the attention of Roger, who eyed several hunks of candybar. Roger said,

"You *owe* me for that tip on the old Radio Shanty, Bill. Debt still lingers from two weeks ago, man. *Pay up.*"

Kazoo nodded and threw the Jabberboy several pieces of warped chocolate. He gave one to Dot, just to be nice. They both devoured what they got, with nothing in the way of civility or a thank you. They were oblivious to Kazoo as he began once again fiddling with the Tape Recorder. He took it into the garage, keeping one eye on the scrambled telecasts Roger kept trying to tune.

Four little makeshift cots, set up with dirty blankets, filled up most of the room. Kazoo yanked his cot to the side, exposing a large wood board lying on the floor. He pulled the board away, revealing a haphazard concrete hole just big enough for him to squeeze into. He probably wouldn't fit in there too easily within a thread or two. Before he dropped in, he leaned over his cot watching the progress of the Scramblecast. Dot was saying,

"Did you find them yet?"

Roger, annoyed, didn't answer. He kept trying to adjust his antennas, feeling that he almost *did* have something.

Some audio cut through the static, and Kazoo could make out some distinct music. From what it sounded like, it was not Plug-made. It was something quite new, in fact, non-Uhd, and, well... *happy*. Delicious *horns* tried to cut through the awful static, with a majesty Kazoo had never heard before.

Dot whispered,

"*Look...*"

Kazoo moved a little closer and the picture began to come in at 50% quality. A room, brightly lit, could be made out. A *man*, with a large head maybe, lots of clutter behind him, little flashing lights, many different colors, and then a much huger man. The huge man could maybe have been a Club. Were the two guys *dancing*? Then the one with the big head said clearly to the other one,

“Do you think we’re getting through? Hello? Can anybody hear this?”

Then he seemed to laugh, and they were dancing again. The music, though Kazoo didn’t realize it at the time, made his heart leap. He heard a tune which would stay with him for a very long time. A rhyme came through--

*Tape decks pause
\$*!@ in your drawers
Comin to your town like Santa Claus*

Then the audio cut, and static overtook the entire screen.

Who in Ultra was Santa Claus?

The static on the old TV was quickly followed by the oft broadcast commercial for the Stereo System, that world of amusement platforms that existed above the city, in the sky, and beyond.

In repulsion of the commercial, Roger let go of his breath, and a gust of Uhd-noise flowed from his throat. Roger was one of many Juvenauts that had a habit of letting out cursewords, although it made no sense to even try. Dot cowered, thinking the Club were going to teleport instantly to the scene. She said,

“Shouldn’t talk such things, Roger Nameth.”

Roger shook his head. Not worried, he said,

“They just sent the Uhd bullets through. We’ll have to wait till tomorrow to pick up anything *good* again.”

Dot asked, “What *was* that we were watching?”

Roger Nameth shrugged, as he often did. He was a Juvenaut that was fed up. He was quite unhappy.

The Stereo commercial was about a minute long in this version, but there were all sorts of different versions, including a very popular half-hour infomercial. There was talk of a movie coming out all about some Norphidites who behaved properly and got to go to Stereo and had a grand old time.

In the commercial they were now watching, a sexy woman’s voice described what Stereo was like, as sweeping panoramic shots of the Amusement Platforms were intercut with people having good times in impossible cartoon-like atmospheres. A deep computer voice backed up everything the girl said, as she giggled at this robotic reiteration. The computer voice finished the spot, saying,

**“In Stereo, you shall be transformed
into a digital cartoon. Stereo is a
fantastic place. Everybody wants to
go there. Please come visit us,
In-Stereo,
Where anything is possible.”**

* * *

Kazoo, now thoughtful over both of these telecasts, squiggled himself feet first into the hole underneath his bed. He stooped through a small crawl space, (which appeared to have

been personally dug), that led into a basement room, which must have belonged to the long demolished house that had previously sat in front of the garage. There were three rooms to the weird basement, and Kazoo had filled up a lot of them with his collections of broken toys, electronics, Stupid Cubes, comic books, and *batteries*. Once Clarence had gone, Kazoo had made sure to stock as many batteries as he could find. Unlike Milk, battery use was unrestricted.

Kazoo jimmied some wires out of the Tape Recorder's battery port and began to attach them to some batteries he had. The small ones didn't work. Finally, he attached the wires to a rigged up set of four *Lil' Zap* D-size batteries.

Unmistakably, the tape-recorder turned *on*.

Was it the tape inside moving, cranking... trying to play?

Other inner mechanisms seemed to take over. Then, without further delay, it was Robotski's *voice* that rattled through the little speakers,

"Batteries have... died. Must find Kid America and the Action Figures. We need help. Goose has ventured in--"

Kazoo dropped the Corder on the floor. He stepped back a few inches and pulled up his mask over his mouth so that he could take a deep breath. But the robot's voice played through, finishing his sentence,

"--in Stereo...eo...eo...eo..."

Then the entire bite played again. And again. It looped continuously.

Kazoo listened closely.

"Goose has ventured in Stereo."

Kazoo thought, *what does that mean? It must be some kind of joke. "Must find Kid America", well, wouldn't we all like to do that?*

He shook his head, lamenting fantasy.

But Kid America just isn't real, he thought. *If things are gonna change, we gotta do it ourselves.*

But maybe... just maybe...

His heart was beating fast. Too fast.

After pacing the length of the basement several times, he decided to relax himself and read a Comic Book. He went looking through his stuff, tossing several copies into his knapsack. Finally, he found the issue he'd been looking for, *Here Comes... Kid America* #32. The cover pictured a roly poly little kid, maybe he was 13 years old, running down an alley, with a bunch of fireworks going off behind him.

* * *

Here Comes... Kid America #32, entitled "When the Fatboy Strikes" marked the first full fledged appearance of Kid America's sidekick. By issue #32, Kid America had already matured to his 18-year old body, which is pretty much the age and figure that his creators stuck with over the course of his career as a superhero. We had already seen glimpses of the annoying fat kid that always hassled Kid America about where he was going, and what he was up to. However, it wasn't until #32 that Fatboy followed Kid America home to his apartment (he watched him climb up the fire escape and enter his bedroom window) and found out that Kid America's real identity was Frederick K. *something* (I don't think the creators ever told us his last name). Kid America might have been sore about it, especially when Fatboy proposed that he

should be his partner, but a few days later, when Kid America is stuck in a jam fighting Suckerboy Creamcoloured (his longtime nemesis) and is being held down by Puncho, his flunky, Fatboy comes to the rescue, shooting Roman Candles at the little villains. He assists Kid in re-acquiring his bicycle (Suckerboy was consistently bent on stealing it) and they have the evil boys sent off to reform school. From then on, Fatboy was ever at the side of Kid America, that is, perhaps, until the Supercandy series when the hero meets Rollerskatie, his long time lover.

Near to the end, the Icecream-Man visits Kid America and is typically cryptic. He asks Kid America if he has seen or heard of anything extra-peculiar. When Kid America asks Sam to give him with an ice cream cone, the old man refuses him, claiming to be in a hurry. He rushes to the driver's seat and says, "Beware that which is too sweet, my friend!" and drives off. It is the first allusion to *Supercandy* that this editor can find, but it is written off to the many "good guy" suggestions that Sam usually offers, a common Comic Book practice in teaching kids the ways of good manners and a proper diet.

As far as his powers are concerned, almost the entire run of 'Here Comes... Kid America' sees the hero fighting the bad guys using only his wits and several ingenious contraptions (such as his Bike, which can go incredibly *fast*. It isn't until issue #65, however, that the Bike proves that it can fly). It is also important to understand that, although the comic was popular, it wasn't nearly so lauded as the *Supercandy* series, which was produced in an amount ten times that of *Here Comes...*

-Bodey Flugel

Encyclopedia Komica

synopsis of Here Comes... Kid America #32

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Kazoo mulled the story over rather briefly, feeling sad about the disappearance of his friend Clarence. The Tape Recorder soon began to invade his consciousness, and he couldn't shake the curiosity.

What if there is a Kid America? he thought.

He listened to the Robotski loop again, when he was suddenly startled by a loud noise from above. He ran through the basement, and poked his head out of the hole.

* * * *

If it is at all unexpected to those who have joined us in this adventure, know it now:

The Club was extraordinarily *violent*. Indeed, they were the smashiest bunch of brawlers underneath the Electric Blanket.

Stuffed Animal came in carrying an aluminum baseball bat, being met at nearly the same time by Fun Freddie, wielding a 2-by-4 with a nail sticking out of it. They both had extreme and utter poise, readying a highly professional chop-sock attack on Kazoo's two friends.

Most enlisted Club Characters were convicts or uncaptured criminals from the days before the Blackout. They, above all other Company loyalists, really *meant* it when they pledged their allegiance to the DJ. They were all aberrant psychotic misfits, malcontents looking for an *official* conduit for their smashiphist temperaments. The institution of the Club probably resembled what many of the members always wanted out of life. It was

there, in Electro City, that they were legitimate, and gifted with incredible power. At street level, they were the law.

Kazoo saw Stuffed Eddie swing his bat madly about his head, then peel off a few whiffs at Roger. The Jabberboy dodged them, but was quickly thrown off balance as the swings kept coming. Roger leaped into the air, intent to strike Stuffed Eddie in the head. Brave Roger.

It was then, that Kazoo began to understand a bit more about the powers of the Radio Station, even if he didn't realize it just then. He watched Stuffed Eddie swing his bat awkwardly, but, as if the fat stick were commanded by a force greater than the character himself, the swing *re-directed* itself, and immediately caught a piece of Roger Nameth's head. A streak of Far-purple cut the air after the bat's path, as the thick of the aluminum sent Roger flying hard into Fun Freddie.

Fun Freddie, as his maniacal smile might have shown, was one of the greatest Smashifists in the last 100 threads. He took his 2x4 and proceeded to beat Roger as if the kid were unbreakable. Remember, Roger had done nothing except use a bit of profanity, mind you. He was still underage, and not a Truant yet. This was how the Club did their jobs. If it was loosely possible under any particular order from the Muffinman, they were out to slaughter whoever they could. The Club members were all of the illest possible demeanor, cruel, and out for torture.

In the next moment, Stuffed Eddie caught a glimpse of Kazoo's petrified stare through the hobbit window. Stuffed Eddie was immediate in trying to obtain possession of Billy, putting his hands right through the plexiglass. This triggered a boobytrap the Juvenauts had set, which brought down a guillotine-like set of hacksaws and rotorblades into Eddie's arms. A shelf of strung up paintbuckets fell on top of these. Stuff wuz suddenly stuck, screaming not wanting to allow the blades to cut any further into his Phun Suit than they already were. For the moment he was stymied.

Kazoo quickly disconnected the batteries from the tape recorder and shoved it, now silent, into his underwear, then threw his backpack over his arms. He came quickly out of the hole, advancing towards Stuffed Eddie's arms. Stuff was screaming like a cartoon scaredycat.

Fun Freddie, satisfied that Roger was knocked out, turned his attention to Dot. The young girl shrieked in terror (for Roger was surely dead), then regained some of the abnormality she casually possessed as the Club lumbered towards her. He swung his stick at her, as she dodged him rather skillfully. Dot leapt to the top of the picnic table, then climbed over Stuffed Eddie, stepping right on his head, and began running at full speed up the alleyway. Stuffed Eddie struggled, saying to Fred,

"Help me out of this!" Fred tried to pull him free, as on the other side Kazoo dragged several rusty bicycle U-locks, and fixed them on Animal's arms, chaining them together around a beam that was attached to the ceiling. Kazoo disappeared around a pile of junk, with the cog he'd found in the old automobile, gripped tightly in his hand.

Ridiculously, Freddie cried,

"I've gotta go get that girl, man!"

Stuff shrieked after him, "The girl don't matter! She's done nothing wrong!" but

Fred was already gone, giddily on her trail.

Stuff cursed to himself, then with a great deal of effort he twisted his torso and braced both of his feet onto the garage wall, then pulled, utilizing all his uniform's strength enhancements. Just as he was free, he took a few steps back, then threw his full weight *into* the garage, somersaulting inside, smashing the wall to pieces. As he rose, he snapped the bike locks that bound his wrists together. He turned, and was startled by the sound of a *Motor*.

Is that what it is? he thought to himself, trying to place the old sound in his memory. Then, as if to confirm his suspicion, Kazoo went busters out the garage on a little rusty looking *hum-scooter*. The humscooter was something from the *21st* century, no doubt, maybe even before that. Stuffed Eddie made a lunge for the vehicle as it skid a fraction wide of his reach. Kazoo leaned in and was up and out of the driveway.

Stuffed Eddie watched him drive off, then turned his attention to the garage, which was full of all sorts of illegal artifacts. Stuff relayed to Base,

"Yo, Base. Come in. *Yo. 3rd Base.*" Third Base's vid screen wiped into Stuff's view.

"Go 'head."

"We got some junk food in here, a TV, some busted toy parts. *Wait.*"

Stuff got down on his knees, kneeling near to the hole that led into the basement. He removed one of his eyeball lenses, and keeping hold of it, thrust his arm into the hole. Both he and Third Base gasped at the image it transmitted: a real stockload of electronics and plastic parts scattered about the hidden basement.

Stuff continued, "*And Base, he's riding some sort of motor-scooter. I couldn't place the make. It's obviously refurbished. He's tech-minded... an inventor-type.*"

Third Base nodded, still sort of shocked by the sight of all the loot in the basement (he was head of the Junk Collectors, remember).

Finally, he said, "Got it. What happened over there?"

Animal remained brief, "Never mind. He's heading *your* way."

"*What?! Where'd Fred go?*"

"He got a *smash*, now he's after another 'easy'."

Third Base growled. He hated Underbouncers. If he had to admit it, they were maniacs; thirsty for blood. He knew he was mean, but he never thought himself a loon like the rest. He really believed in the *cause*. But the others, they were just into the perks.

He said, "Alright, Eddie. I'll get him. But get over here! Throw a tracer in the garage and make time. Out."

Then, Base relayed to all the High Characters that were directly under his command. His vid screen wiped into sixteen different little squares, each the vid screen of a different Club. There was Chicken Pox, Bloody Bones, Orange Banana, Eeven Iphet, Grill Cheese, Slomo, Larry Murphy and Scary Mary (a team), New Santaclaus, Old Farty Barnaby, Chinese Food, Fun Freddie, Stuffed Eddie, Gaylord Perry, Hildegard Crumpet, and his own self, MC Third Base.

"Nearest Club Collection Unit follow Stuff's tracer and go in there to pick up that booty. Now the rest of you follow my own tracer. Those of you who can, come in the

truck. We've got a truant, a really bad one, if we're not mistaken. He's probably gonna try and go *deep*, so... Um, O.K. Clubs. Converge. Base, out."

With that, Third Base tucked, balled himself up, and rolled over to the scene.

Three blocks out Kazoo found Fun Freddie. The Club was obviously frustrated, tearing the blue fur out of his own costume,

"Where *are* you, prissy little miss cuckoo!? Where'd you go lil' thing!?"

Kazoo grinned, knowing Dot must've gotten away. It was a shame about Roger though, a real sacrilege. Kazoo bore down on his bike and zipped up behind Fred's back, crashing into him and skidding out several yards later himself. Fred tried to get his bearings, but was shaken, as Kazoo got back on his bike, revved it, and went. Fred got it together and began to chase at full speed. He was able to keep up with him for the most part, keeping a close tail on the scooter. Block after block, *opticams* tracked their movement. Fred contacted Third Base, breathing erratically,

"Base, I've got him, I'm in pursuit. He... should be crossing the border... into... New Brooklyn... in... 3 minutes. Approximately."

"Stay with him, Fred."

"I'm on him, Base, but I'm starting to trail hard. Anyway..."

"Anyway, what?"

"He's heading right for *you*."

"Okay, then," Third Base guffawed.

Kazoo rode for another few blocks, eventually losing sight of Fun Freddie in his rear view.

Then--*music*. Uhd music.

The sickening theme of the Clubs ruptured the air. Each Character possessed a slightly different variation to the main Uhd-melody. Third Base's theme had lots of low end and shook the ground as he approached. And that mad *jingle*--the words would always play out at some point in every mix, no matter the Character:

Kids!
Pay attention
If you wanna join up
The real adventure begins
When you're a part of the Club

The music was so thick, Kazoo thought he could see it rippling the air, the way heat does. Ultra-violet Uhd-Noise drew a scary haze about him. His bike began to sputter as Kazoo slowed it down, searching his pocket for earplugs. Since he'd turned 16, Noise had begun to get to him, shaking him up, making him doubt his senses. The music grew louder as Kazoo became noticeably wary, even disoriented. And as his bike froze, what seemed like a giant *boulder*, came hurtling from above, then landed in front of Kazoo:

A full figure, not quite human--Third Base.

Base dove at the boy and they spilled out about the concrete like a fallen beverage.

Kazoo struggled to freedom several feet from Base. Base got into a Spiderman squat and spoke,

“Ahh. The fresh air. How I love *it*. Now what’s all the ruckus’ about anyway!? Hah? Billy Kazoo, right? Or is it Dermolad today, little superhero?”

Kazoo shook his head.

Base said, “You’re just a *nerd*. I could tell. Why you make all this fuss for? You’re no Hyper-kid. Not barely an ultra-punk, even. *C’mon*. Let’s just go to the Alphastruct where it’s cuddly and *nice*. I could show you around... we could listen to some records--”

Kazoo glared at the Club. 3rd Base began to cackle,

“Them other Clubs might be stupid. I mean we’re all of us a little bit off balance, *psychotic* I suppose you’d say, but I’m a little different.”

Kazoo remembered his Comic Books. Why did the villains always have to say so much stuff? It was Uhd-chatter, meant to confuse and disorient. No matter what, they talked a load of nonsense, which always gave the heroes a *chance*.

“Are you listening?” said Base, as he stepped closer, his theme music rising, the air vibrating with Ultra-violet warps.

A flash twinkled faintly from Kazoo’s eyes. Then, as he blinked, an electric liquid splashed out of them. 3rd Base, confused, flung himself, ball-like, at the boy, but Kazoo, setting himself into a tight crouch, almost squashed his entire body down to within a foot of the ground. It was as if he was suddenly trapped in a funhouse fat-making mirror. And for a moment, Base would tell it again and again, the kid was all *sneaker*, just his hi-tops, and nothing else.

Then, with a burst of energy, Kazoo *bounced* a good twenty feet high into the air, avoiding Base and landing rather distantly behind the Club. Base, still rolling, gargled,

“What the--!?” but made contact with nothing but a wall.

Kazoo bounced the same incredible way again, got on his scooter, and motored off. Base got up but found himself hobbling.

He whispered, “*This is bad.*”

He pulled an antenna up from behind his left ear. It continued to rise till it extended three feet high.

“This is 3rd Base to Alphastructure Supreme. We’ve got some trouble out here.”

The Operator on the other end responded, the voice feminine under a robotic effect, “You’ve got the lobby, Base. What can I do for you?”

“You’re gonna have to plug me in upstairs. I need to talk to Jim.”

“He’s off turf. I’ll get you *Rapunzel*.” Pause.

Base uttered, “Wait--,” but he was already on hold. He punched the wall.

The operator returned, saying, “Okay Base. You’re in.”

Rapunzel’s voice came in much crisper, and Third Base thought she probably had the most perfect voice a woman could have. And she probably *did*. She was, after all, constructed by the Electric Company, the culmination of genetic engineering and robotics; the much exalted seventh Transistor, given the honor, however, of wearing the number 1. Rapunzel was first in Transistor command, only under the DJ himself. She was

head to the Electric Company when the DJ had other business to attend to. Third Base was one of few Company Reps that could even get into contact with her. She was, however, cruel, and always curt with him. He preferred dealing with Jim, because he could push the Transistor 5 around a bit.

Rapunzel was tight lipped, “Yes Base, what’s the situation *this* time? The Muffinman won’t appreciate a false alert. I know I do not.”

“I got a kid on the loose who’s just jumped 15, 20 feet into the bubble-air! Right through some Ultraviolet for the sake of Uhd. You got projectors this far out now?! Uhd’s sake! Crying out Uhd! I couldn’t believe my vid!”

Rapunzel’s control deck was a massive round room, full of equipment: computer screens, pogram receivers, levers, buttons, plugs, outlets, microphones, mad Stereo components, and even more buttons. There was not an inch of surface allotted to emptiness. Her chair swiveled on a gyroscope and could suspend her at any angle in the anti-gravitic computer chamber.

She was dressed in a tight purple jumpsuit. Her figure was abnormally slim. Her face was quite pretty but she rarely smiled or even smirked. She wore a pink belt adorned with multitudinous communicators. A sort of gun that looked like a small travel hairdryer rested at her hip. Microphones were attached to both her right and left headphones, swiveling before her mouth as she willed it. A large number 1 sparkled in the middle of her chest. Her suit was an electro-organic super outfit, known citywide as a Molecular Fluidsuit. It could be made to perform all sorts of tricks, including inversion into her belt buckle, or transformation into any type of clothing Rapunzel wanted to wear.

Rapunzel barely cared for these functions, but she had to meet the DJ for dinner on a nightly basis. At these dinners, he demanded she exercise her creativity and enchant him with outrageously designed evening wear.

Rapunzel punched up a holographic image of Third Base and his location.

“Play me the videos, Club.”

The surrounding viewscreens around Base’s hologram began playing the day’s activities. Many shots of Kazoo played around a central screen, and eventually displayed his *bounce* in slow motion. Base’s hologram spoke directly to her,

“So are there projectors out here? I thought the System was confined to the amplitude of the Spread generators.?”

“Negative Base. That’s a definite negative. There are no projectors even close to your location. Are you positive what you saw was not an illusion?”

Rapunzel hacked at her keyboard, scanning the area.

“Yeah,” said Base, “I mean: *Yes*. I mean did you see his *sneakers*?””

She paused, then asked,

“Where is he now?”

Base pointed behind him.

“That way. To New Brooklyn.”

