

# Chapter Three

## New Brooklyn and the Neighborhood Down

Kazoo rode his hum-scooter over the border from The Junkyard into New Brooklyn. Along the way, security cameras shifted their heads towards him. He tried to ignore them, punching the gas-kick, going fast, trying to curl his body into some sort of an aerodynamic air slicer.

Rapunzel was monitoring every security camera up the street from 3rd Base's location and into New Brooklyn. When she finally found the image that she thought was Kazoo, the broadcasts she was monitoring began to fuzz. In some shots it appeared as if there was no one riding the scooter at all. She thought aloud,

“With this many kinds of disruption it can only be--”

Third Base, curious, said,

“*What?*”

Rapunzel gathered her senses. She realized,

“He's *jammed* the cameras. He's got to be *on* something... it cannot *merely* be a derivative...”

Then with more assurance, she added,

“He must have gotten hold of some *solid* milk. It could be *Similak* from the *Mall*, but I doubt that... perhaps *Lactosip*...”

Base was like,

“*Milk?* You sure?”

But Rapunzel grew icy,

“You *have* to capture him. You must bring him in!”

“You mean he's for real *super*? I haven't gone verse a brat like that in a while.”

“I don't think you understand Base. This isn't like other cases. He's flipping the sensors to nothing. This isn't like *any* of the others.”

3rd Base, bewildered, began a slow book after Kazoo. He relayed to the other Clubs,

“Clubs! Yo, those in the *Truck*, you'd better meet us three clicks up the boulevard.

It appears this Kazoo's got hold of some sort of Milk.”

Most Clubs were excited, many of them uttering,

“*Milk!! MILK!!!*”

Third Base shook his head, exasperated, and said,

“All units. Priority. Forget about the little girl or any of the merchandise. Descend upon *humscooter* traveling South on street coordinates *Junk Slip* and *Cherry Square*. Immediately. Out.”

Kazoo's bike finally choked out of gas near to a revamped subway/*Plug*-station. A Smoke Machine was hovering it's way down the southern block, the fake-fog hanging in the air. Hesitantly, Kazoo fumbled off his bike, knowing he'd be abandoning it forever. The

second he stepped off of it he turned a bit and was met by Stuffed Eddie. The Club member took Kazoo by the shirt and tossed him across the street. Kazoo landed hard on the building next to the Subway, spilling several of his supplies capped in candy machine plastic bubbles. The tape recorder choked out of the bottom of his pant leg. Stuffed Eddie, his opticals cutting infrared through the vapors, screamed, mugging it up like it was his big part in a movie,

“*Uncle, Juvenaut! Give me the tape recorder! Surrender now or be demented! Yield! Say me: give!*”

Looking up, Kazoo could see in the distance: the mad vision of a Club Pick Up truck: warbly looking Club members piled impossibly inside, in the back, on top, as well as hanging off the sides with baseball bats and rubber mallets in their mitts. The image seemed to wave in the distance, the combined Uhd-music crippling the air about it, a streak of Dark-pink following the truck.

Without thinking, Billy Kazoo grabbed the tape recorder, then stumbled, half falling down the concrete steps into the station’s dubious platforms.

Remodeled subway platforms were off-limits to any kid who was trying to avoid notoriety with the Electric Company. The subways herded the mass of adult Reconstruction Plastoids, workers enslaved to the task of Electro and Udvventure Design. Kazoo laid eyes on a set of these Plastoids immediately. They stood in a crowd of about thirty, across the tracks on the opposite platform. He had never seen them so close up before and he had always been curious as to what they were like.

It was known that they wore enhanced Electro-suits that increased their strength and controlled their minds with a spiderlike Audio plug; a “hearing aid” that clamped deep to their eardrums and spread circuitry into their ear canals and beyond to their nervous systems. This was the Ear Infection, which inevitably split electrodes into gray matter and allowed for remote synaptic control from WDEF. Plastoid’s skin had been turned into a thick sheen of plastic, and they were very sturdy as far as humans went, able to survive falls from the high stories of their drudge labor. Plastoid’s eyes were fully purple, and when they worked hard and breathed heavily, the Dark-pink Uhd would blow smokily from their nostrils.

Kazoo had always wondered if the adults could even have their own thoughts anymore; *did the Uhd muddle their minds permanently? Were they able to speak to each other about their awful predicament or anything else? Did they remember the old days?*

Stuffed Eddie and Fun Freddie came tumbling into the Platform. Kazoo started to make his way opposite them but soon the mob of Pick-up Clubs were filling in from a far staircase on that same side. Kazoo took a half step back, then with a bit of thought, made the incredible sneaker-leap from one platform to the other.

Before any of the Club could react, a metronic Shuttle transport came in, cutting between platforms at a blur speed. Third Base cursed on the other side,

“Get up the steps and circle over! He’s on Milk for Plug’s sake! Move!”

The others ran up the steps but Third Base himself waited and grabbed a hold of Stuffed Eddie.

“This is *your* mess you know. Muffinman’ll have your suit this time you brainsless clod. Not to mention *Jim* and the other Transistors.”

Stuffed Eddie pushed Base’s hand off his shoulder violently, shrugged stupidly, and ran after the others.

Base remained, making several computations, waiting for the Shuttle to pass.

Kazoo found himself in the middle of the grown-ups. He saw their faces then, several of them had their scratch-goggles up on their foreheads. They crowded around him, staring at his mask. They didn’t speak in English words any longer, but were muttering inconceivable phrases of electronic sound, that were emitted through two tiny speakers that had been implanted into their temples. Kazoo thought,

*They’ve been reprogrammed. Refurbished human beings. Plastoids.*

He winced, as he began to stare at them, and soon realized that many of them were *crying*. This struck him funny, and he found it more disconcerting than anything that had transpired yet that day. He was suddenly helpless to move.

The following details of Kazoo’s thoughts came from some of the personal logs of the staff of the Encyclopedia Komica. Some of these writers were telepathic *hypermentals*, of a subdivision known as the Nueral Alliance. They practiced a rather intrusive “thunkerwave” brand of reporting, that resulted in a million hours of digital thoughts for nosey readers to sift through.

It was then that he realized more than ever: this was his fate, unless he could make it underground and find safety with some Fuggagers who could teach him. He was already marked as a truant by the Club, not to mention the list of assaults he was gathering today. But the Fugs were elusive. And alliances were not easily made with anybody.

Electro City “Academies” were hi-schools run by upper echelon Ud-Venturists; Mid-Plastoid citizens who’d submitted to the rule of the Deejay while they were still minors and agreed to train the youth of the city. In return, they were given small domestic pleasures: an apartment, a variety of food, cigarettes, full TV Satellite privileges, etc... Above all, they had the right to marry, and any man or woman who made Mid-Plastoid could send for any (lower rank) woman or man they saw by the number on the back of their hood. And so, they were encouraged to have children, who would be immediately hauled off to one of the Norphidite Dormitories. For the most part, this is how babies were still born at all under-blanket.

By turning Truant, Kazoo had already rejected going to the Academy. So it was underground he’d go, and that, only if he could make it.

In the Deep, you were either a Fug, an Apprentice, a Schoolie, or a Criminal. Eventually most crooks surrendered to the Club recruitment units, in desire of the booty that the Stereo System advertised:

“It could all be yours”

The Schoolies, however, attended the great underground School, run by a staunch

rebel cast of scholarly type Fugs, elders who managed to remain free of the Muffinman and teach children who were deserving of their wisdoms.

The School was supposedly much looser in its concept of education than any facility before the Blackout. With the advent of Milk, there was an entire new league of humanity. Superhumans, or Siphons, who, like all humans, needed to be taught how to properly use the talents that were born unto them.

New Pseudosciences were based mostly on the study of the Electric Blanket, Milk, and the children born of the new age that found their very atoms to have special and fantastic properties.

Kazoo knew some kids who were supposed to be enrolled in the old School. There was Clarence who'd turned 18 not far before, who'd (hopefully) disappeared into their ranks. He'd told Kazoo how to find the school, but his directions were as close to a faerie tale as was a search for Kid America. Students all wore special sneakers. It was said that, it was in the sneakers that you could trust somebody in the underground. There were, of course, still scoundrels in the Deep, as much as the surface was controlled by villains and thugs.

But still, try as he might to avoid it, Kazoo could not help but believe in the legends, thus he put his faith into the Comic-books. It was as if it must be true. And so, now he must try and get this tape recorder to Kid America. He'd always thought Kid America was just a legend. Something to keep hopes up. Someone that little kids talked about. Barely anybody really believed in such nonsense.

Kid America and the Action Figures. Some great Band that would rise to defeat the twisted king DJ. That had to be phony. It couldn't be a band that would do it. An army was surely needed. Battalions of siphonic warriors in Plastech armor, whirring with artificial auras of key-harmonic deflection.

Music?

But perhaps it was music.

He really wasn't sure what he believed. Well, he'd have to leave it to chance. Whichever he found first (or found him). If he got to the School he could just ask them about Kid America, to which they'd probably laugh. But he'd be safe there and Clarence could help him get started up. Or maybe he'd find them first--

He didn't know if he was trapped. The Plastoids kept the huddle tight around him as they began to move toward the other adults who were working in the third set of tracks. These Plastoids lifted Kazoo and passed him down to these other Plastoids. Kazoo allowed them to do as they would. He trusted that they were, indeed, still good people. He had no choice but to accept their help.

Fun Freddie was the first to enter the second platform, screaming at the workers, "Disperse Plastoids! A Truant is in your midst. Disperse or suffer punishment!" But the Plastoids did not reveal Kazoo.

Instead, they kept him hidden, swaddling him, moving their entire number close to a small shaft in the concrete of the platform. They opened the door and helped Kazoo to crawl inside. The other Club members were on the platform at that point and from a view at the top of the stairs Stuffed Eddie caught a last glimpse of the mask of Kazoo and a female Plastoid kissing it on the cheek. Then, the Juvenaut's sneakers disappeared through

a tunnel into which no Club Member could fit. (Except one, perhaps, who we shall hear about later.) Stuffed Eddie rushed to the hole, pushing the workers out of the way.

Kazoo checked over his shoulder, and thought that his eyes must've gone screwy. If he *wasn't* mistaken, however, Stuffed Eddie had just *conjured* a little puppy dog in the tunnel behind him; a chocolate brown little mutt. Kazoo began to crawl with all his speed.

Stuff grabbed the dog and pet it once, rather lovingly, then affixed something: a blue sticky dot, underneath the dog's left ear. The blueness of the dot disappeared and it blended chameleon-like into the brown of his fur. The puppydog was then cast into the hole after Kazoo. The dog happily scurried on, in pursuit of the boy. Stuffed Eddie watched them both disappear from sight.

Suddenly, the Shuttle was past as Third Base made the leap into the Plastoids, clobbering the lot of them in a fury. He twisted their arms, cracking them, and punched their faces, milking them. He made his way to the slim shaft in the third set of tracks, pushing Stuffed Eddie out of the way. He was crazed. He barked down the little tunnel, in a corny rage,

*"I'll get you Kazoo!! I'll get you!"*

\* \*

Kazoo slid through the tunnel on his hands and knees until it opened up a bit, and he was able to stand, though stooping over, and sort of scurry for about thirty yards. The dog was on his trail, following cautiously and slow, staying several yards behind him. Kazoo kept his mind on keeping his head down and continuing with a steady pace. He figured he'd deal with the dog when and if he were to attack. He felt nervous; unsure of the dog's size.

Finally, he could go no more, as the only direction presented to him was down. A rusty rung ladder drooped before him, laden into the concrete. The ladder led perilously into (what Kazoo thought was) the blackest pitch of dark he'd ever witnessed. It was almost like a black *mist*, or to put it more like he thought it, a *cartoon* dark that had been released to swallow trespassers in the Deep. He wondered if things like that could really exist. A stuff-munching protoplasm--dispatched by the Company to swallow those that tried to go down--perhaps their was no where to go but *dead*. He paused, considering a turn-back.

The puppy was barking. Kazoo's thoughts turned to his fallen comrade Roger Nameth and, instantly, he decided to take his chances in the dark--he started down the ladder a few steps, then paused again, unsure if he could make it. At least it was not Far-purple he was dipping into, in fact, he already felt the Uhd receding down here.

The puppy-dog arrived at the top of the ladder, barking at Kazoo. Kazoo got a good look at him finally; he was a small, rather unferocious pup, probably a bit frightened himself. He had been nervous at the dog's approach, but now, it appeared to be a very *young* puppy, yapping and quivering. And Kazoo could not help but trust the dog. In fact, in that small moment, they were instant friends.

Looking at the dog, Kazoo remembered his earlier feat of escape--when the odds had really stacked, and through sheer imagination--he'd *bounced*. His body had relented to it's natural form and squeezed together, as if his gravity had multiplied tenfold, then jerked the opposite, springing him upwards as if he were lighter than air. He'd not done *that*

before. Well, maybe he had, *a little*, during street games of tag, ringalevio, and grav. He hadn't been so sure it was anything so pulpish. Nor was it so mighty--perhaps he'd sprung up a few extra inches, whatever he needed to win. But to escape Third Base--he had needed feet. And he leaped about 20 of them if he wasn't mistaken.

*It's the sneakers*, he thought.

He knew of such things, of course. *Kids with powers.*

*Siphons.*

Clarence Pocket had always claimed to be telekinetic. But that was chicanery--he could only make his patched-up dodgeball float briefly in the air. It seemed to be a cheap sort of trick. Surely if somebody were really telekinetic they could *fly*. There were all sorts of "impostors" out there. Most Juvenauts had adopted some kind of comic book persona with which they could more safely march about the dangerous city. Lots wore masks and silly looking ragtag costumes put together from old clothes and sports equipment. Anyone, though, who was even close to a worthy adversary, a *true* hyper-kid--wore sneakers.

But mostly, it was all a front. Just cause you made a suit out of pillowcases and wristbands--and you adopted a moniker, and took to sarcastic quipping... it didn't mean anything if you couldn't *do* anything really *special*. But there had been times when he'd seen... the impossible. *Indeed*, he thought.

It occurred to him, then, that *anyone he'd ever known who had even a hint of suprado, that is, that stuff of legend, eventually disappeared. Clarence had gone underground. Others were taken by the Truant Officers. One kid named Trap Kitt alleged he could blow his body up like a balloon and float. Kazoo had never seen him do it, but soon he'd heard that Trap had joined the Ghettoblasters, another underground "band" of rebels.*

Suddenly, the puppy jumped and landed on Kazoo's back and crawled onto his head. Kazoo grabbed the dog and looked him in the eyes. The dog made to lick him and barked in the boy's favor. Kazoo could not resist taking him along, although the very idea of the dog was obviously dangerous.

*He was sent after me by that Club, wasn't he?*

*I'll move ahead*, he decided. *In this case, down. Into the cartoon void.* He put the puppy into his bag. The dog kept barking and growling.

As Kazoo began to climb downwards, it struck him that a sort of adventure was beginning for himself and he was not so sure he was absolutely ready for such things as adventures may require. He still had his sneakers on his feet, at least.

As he descended into the hole, he was engulfed by the dark.

He thought, *maybe this is what it's like for a drawing to be erased.*

He saw nothing, carefully feeling with his feet for the next rung of the ladder.

Yards upon yards were taken, as he began to think he saw thin lines of red light shoot up through the dark from below. *Laserbeams*, he thought. They seemed harmless enough. *They must be scans. I'm approaching somewhere. A place. I am somewhere.*

But as he doubled his steps, he still wondered if he was really seeing these laser

lights at all. The dog kept barking, and this soothed Kazoo, as if he were saying, *it's OK, it'll be alright, just keep going.*

He continued climbing, wondering how long one could really stay hidden in the deep rock. Surely you'd get caught eventually. Club, or worse, *Transistors* would find you, and take you before the DJ. There you'd be judged, sentenced to Reconstruction, killed, or (could it really be so bad?) *unleashed as a guinea pig into the Stereo System.*

\* \*

Third Base put in his call to the Alphastruct Lobby. This time, he was immediately patched in, direct to Rapunzel.

Rapunzel said, "Report, Base."

"He... got away, Miss Rapunzel."

"*Again, Base. Please. This is a report, you are being recorded for the record. Use full names and proper sentences, please.*"

"Right, m'aam. 'Scuse me, please. Things are a little erratic down here right now, um... Uh... Let's see..."

"Well, um, *I, Third Base*, dispatched sixteen Club Members to New Brooklyn in order to capture a *possibly* milkridden teenager named William Kasofritz, better known to our computers as the infamous twerp: Billy Kazoo. Kazoo has been a problem since earlier this year when he did not report to his sector Academy. He has troubled truant officers since. Today he was spotted with an unregistered *tape recorder*, riding an old humbike, and hording an entire hideout full of junk food, electronics, and busted toy plastics. Our character computers have identified him as *very dangerous*. Stuffed Eddie lost him the first time today, then, with fifteen of us in plain sight, Kazoo scrambled into a Plastoid team, where he disappeared, quite deftly, into the undergrounds of Electro City. If he is bold he'll reach the Deep Cracks before sundown. By dawn he'll be lost to us. I suggest employing any and all of ye mighty Transistors."

"One minute Base, your report is being directly beamed to the Muffinman. He's taken an interest in this Kazoo, since he heard there is a possible Milk leak. Please hold, character."

Base sweat in his suit. It was one of the few times he wished he could get out of his costume. *The Muffinman*. The very thought of the DJ scared the bejeezus out of him. He could barely take it. He thought back to when he got his first hearing aid. The music vibrated through his whole body. It was *fantastic*.

*The Muffinman*. Such a stupid name for a DJ, and yet, the music, Third Base loved the music of Muffinman. Why not call himself DJ Nemesis or something else. Something cool. Something sleek. Like Scorpion or Demon or Mecron-necron. The Muffinman, after all, was a *bad DJ*. That's what Base liked so much. The DJ was scary. He was of worse demeanor than any heavy metal band. Even those Norwegians signed to Plug (who murdered the members of their own bands), couldn't touch him. He was *evil*. A real mad scientist. It came simple to him to do that which was ill. For the DJ, nefariousness... was... *elegant*. Third Base winced at the word. Was it *too pansy* to be elegant? He supposed not. It was true after all. The Muffinman had grace. He was regal. A new sort of King. He had full command over his domain. Supernatural control over music. Sounds that were...

*addictive.*

Uhd. *Delicious.*

And the Stereo. The few times Base had actually been *in Stereo*, his brain was never the same. The way it *was* there. As if it were a fantasy. But real. Even more than real.

“Base.”

No response.

“Base are you still with me?” radio’d Rapunzel.

“Uh...yeah.”

“Your presence is desired in the Cylinder. Please bring Stuffed Eddie and one other Character for story corroboration out of today’s squad to escort you. You have 5 minutes to arrive. Use the nearest Boombox Terminal, plug in, and *vibracast* to Alphastructure Supreme. Please be prompt. All executives are being called to this special meeting. Please conduct yourself with aplomb. Thank you.”

Third Base relayed to Fun Freddie,

“Bring down the Boombox out of the Truck. We’re plugging and goin’ to the Cylinder.”

Fun Freddie came hobbling back down the platform steps pushing Stuffed Eddie in front of him. In his right hand, Fred carried a large sized futuristic looking Boombox.

“The plug is at the opposite end, Fred. Use the Station codes to open her up. Here’s the key.”

Base tossed it to Freddie.

“Where we headed?”

“We’re ‘casting directly to the Cylinder. I think we’re in trouble.”

Fun Freddie moaned, “I can’t take going through the Box. I always throw up.”

But Third Base paid him no attention. Instead, he was glaring at Stuffed Eddie, who stood there, looking really dumb, scratching his armpits. Base shook his head in utter disgust for the Character. As they walked the platforms length Base spoke in a low whisper,

*“If we survive this meeting, Stuff, remember, you’re on my list. I’ll smash you for this trouble you’ve caused me and this whole unit. You’ll be scrapped for this. Heed me well, ye teddybear retard.”*

Before Stuff could respond, the Gate was open and Base was pushing him through. Within seconds, they’d be in the Radio Station.

Vibracast: teleport technology achieved through sonic manipulation of inter-dimensional space. Using a Boombox Gate, a vibrational bridge is established that can bring two coordinates, usually miles apart, directly next to one another.