

Chapter Seven

Back to School

In no time, the puddle creature was standing before Kazoo, a slim figure in a fresh white Fluid Suit, not unlike the ones worn by Transistors. He was a man, and his head was a little bit large, his nose, the biggest Kazoo had ever seen. Kazoo squinted at the man's feet but they remained plain and un-sneaker-like. Sebastian Woofe barked for a bit then stopped, as the man seemed that he would speak.

He said, "Do not be afraid, youngster. I... am Adam Head."

"Uh--" Kazoo was dumbfounded.

"I shall not cause you harm, son. I am from the *School*. Have you heard of the Underground School? The School of *Siphons*."

Kazoo nodded.

"Good. I lead the Physical Education Department. I am, what our ancestors called, a gym teacher. Before there was Blackout, before the personal robot trainers."

Kazoo looked at him, still in horror. Then he relaxed a little bit, allowing himself to process the words that the man was saying.

Adam Head smiled and said, "Our monitors have intercepted several Electric Company reports on you in the recent months. You, are, I have assumed, Billy Kazoo, as you like to be called?"

Again, he nodded at Adam Head.

Head smiled, "From what I understand you rarely speak. Is that correct?"

Kazoo, still dumbstruck, nodded the affirmative. Adam Head continued,

"Can you talk?"

Indignant, Kazoo uttered, "Y-Yeah."

"Good. If you are wondering about my particular power, it is that I can turn my body into the very energy we have come to call *Milk*. I can manipulate it and glob myself all about as you have just seen. It is, as many things are in these times, rather unexplainable. C'mon, now. Get up. I'm sure Jim *will* be here shortly if we don't make off with quickness. And he will probably be with others. I think you've caused a real stir in the Company this day."

Kazoo stood. Adam Head approached him and held out his hand.

"It is good to meet you, youngster."

Kazoo, rather liking this guy, said, "Likewise, E-Elder."

Adam grinned, "Excellent. Call me Adam. And follow me, then. I think we can walk it without threat of interference. There's a slide module just up the way. Can't operate it without a key or a completely non-rememberable set of tricky passwords. I've got a key, luckily."

They walked a bit, Adam Head leaving traces of white liquid in his footsteps.

"It takes a while for me to really flesh up again. And I usually use my powers right away anyhow. Say there now Bill, if you don't mind that I should ask, how did you, uh, teach yourself to *bounce* like that anyhow? It's quite a strange sort of idea. Did you get it

from a Comic or--”

Kazoo shrugged, looking at his sneakers.

Head went on, “Have you been working on it for very long?”

Kazoo shook his head, *no*.

Adam said, “Well I’ve never seen anything quite like it before. And I’ve taught hundreds of kids with powers.”

Kazoo was startled by this.

He mumbled, “*Hundreds?*”

“Yes. The school is quite large, really. There are thousands of people present without *much* in the way of powers, as well. Surely though, everyone can be taught to do a little something. Telekinesis is quite natural to the ultra-brain, of course. And with the advent of Milk, so much is possible.”

“R-really?”

“Indeed, son.”

Adam Head stopped walking. He plunged his hand into his suddenly liquidlike chest and began looking for his *key*. He pulled it out, eventually, revealing it: a tennisball-sized half-sphere, it’s flat side laden with a circuit strewn mold. He walked to the wall that was just under the light, and, at his own face level, took his finger and drew a fantasy square on it. A *real* square emerged, and a bubble formed in it’s center. Head flipped the bubble up and placed the flat side of the half sphere on it. The sphere lit up blue, then yellow, then blue, then yellow, and then finally *green*.

The entire wall seemed to fade into itself. Adam said,

“Just step inside, you’ll be entering a tiny vehicular mat: a *Sled*. Then just be prepared to *slide*. It’ll be quite a long ride from all the way up here.” Kazoo couldn’t help himself from exclaiming,

“But I must’ve climbed down for at least a mile already!”

“Well the school’s *top* level is at least another 99 deep. So let’s hurry up and get on with it!”

Head pushed Kazoo in. Kazoo fell for maybe 6 feet, then, with a thump, he landed in a little circular raft, made especially for use on the slide. There were controls on a panel in front of him. His raft already was lurching forward as another was popping up behind him. Sebastian landed on the second one and jumped to Kazoo’s side. Kazoo turned to see Adam, who expertly landed in the raft behind him and pushed a button before *he* was off, bumping Kazoo ahead of him. And away they went.

The ride was tremendous fun for Kazoo, but even so, it began to get boring after 15 minutes, seeing as they were in the dark. He had looked back at Adam, whose original enthusiasm had now turned to slumber.

How could this guy be bad? thought Kazoo. Kazoo rooted around in his bag and pulled out another issue of *Here Comes... Kid America*, #284, and read through it with one of his flashlights.

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Here Comes... Kid America #284 is the last to bear the “Here Comes...” in the comic’s logo. This entire issue, entitled, “Trick or Treat”, is split between the

frustrating search our heroes are having in looking for the Supercandy (they have no luck), and the way in which Suckerboy Creamcoloured finds *his* first piece of Supercandy. On a routine harassment call to the local candyshop, Suckerboy notices a crop of strange lollypops behind the frightened clerk. Dispensing with formality, Suckerboy leaps over the counter, strikes the proprietor, and grabs the entire box of this Supercandy, called Gollypops. Met outside by flunky Puncho, and newer member to their crew, Illy Ocula, Suckerboy and crew head towards the Abandoned Junior High school that they call their hideout. It is there that they realize, that so long as they are sucking on the Gollypop, they have *telekinetic* powers. That is, they can move things off the floor just by thinking of it. Suckerboy is best at it, and he finds that with concentration, he can fly. Vowing to get more of the candy, the three of them decide to call their crew Tricketreaters. It is in this issue that Suckerboy really proves to his thugs that he is the most powerful brat in the city, and from here on out he sets to prove it to everyone else, especially Kid America.

On the side of our heroes, we are left with Jumpus making the suggestion, that if they split up they will have more luck. The last page of the comic pictures a very nervous Kid America, waiting on the street corner near to his house, with a thought bubble above his head that reads, "I wonder what has happened to the Icecream-Man?!"

-Bodey Fluger
Encyclopedia Komica
synopsis of Here Comes... Kid America #284

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Finally, they arrived at the end of the slip, met by no one. Adam Head lazily got out of his raft, lifting both Kazoo's and his own, placing them back into two shafts on a conveyor belt right to the side of the Slide exit. Adam Head beckoned Kazoo and Sebastian Woofe to follow him,

"The thing about using your powers is you get tired two times as quick as if you were running or doing something more *regular*, you know. I mean you get really *sleepy*. It's dangerous if you don't take care to get the proper rest, because you could just konk out in the middle of something *important*."

Head continued, "From here on out the School's pretty normal. We use elevators and escalators and stairs. The Science department is kind of wild, and the Gymnasium is weird, because that's where students train. That's where we're going now. I've got a class to teach in a little while, but when I'm done I'll bring you before the Sub Principal, and we'll see what's to become of you."

They were in the elevator for a little while, descending an *additional* near 50 floors.

Kazoo *had* to speak up a little bit. He didn't understand,

"Mister, um... Adam? Adam Head?"

"Yes?"

The words just started popping out of him, "I-I didn't know the S-school was an entire, like, um... a full *installation* like this. I thought it was much more, like, *awful* down here, you know? Homemade. Makeshift. Um... *busted*. How is it possible that you've built this place without the Electric Company..." He trailed off.

As Kazoo spoke the words, he became more and more suspicious. Adam was nodding, then trying to smile. Kazoo thought he looked a bit pained to talk about it.

“Yes well, they started out like that, *busted*, as you said, you can believe *that*. But the Siphons that started this school, wanted to make a *real* place of sanctuary. A place where people could really go, and *live*, without fear. In some years time, and with the aid of a great deal of Milk, the School was built up.”

“But where did all the power come from?”

“The original Siphons. They stole it. They were vigilantes against the Blanket’s rule. They made rebellion. This School was supposed to represent the hope of our people. A great place to train Siphons who would be more powerful than the originals.”

Adam Head sort of turned his face away. He wasn’t smiling at all.

He said, “The problem, Kazoo, is that too many people around here are now content to *stay*. Most everybody’s forgot the reason why we became Schoolies in the first place. The rebellion that this place was built upon is *dying*, Bill.”

“It is?”

“For the most part. Anyone that actually makes it down here never wants to leave. It’s *good* here. We grow our own food. We’re free within our own perimeters. The DJ, for the most part, cannot do us harm. He uses milk to power *machines*. We’re an entire *people* powered on it. But so few want to go back. So few have any hope at all.”

“Even *here*? Even with all your powers?”

“I’m afraid so. I can’t say I much want to go fighting on the surface, and whatever else that lunatic’s got going on above. I get nauseous at the level I met *you* at. The thought of actually being *outside*. It’s chilling to my spine.”

Kazoo’s face twisted in utter horror. He was glad he had his mask on. Such good news was his meeting of Head and his tour of the School, then such *awful* news. He didn’t feel safe at all. The Tape Recorder suddenly felt *hot*, and he hoped that it would not be revealed. Fleeting, he thought to himself,

It’s the music. He’s got everyone all froze up with the music. How does he do it?

Sebastian was barking at him, seeming to nod again, as if he agreed with what Kazoo was thinking.

But that can’t be, thought Kazoo.

They walked the length of some perfectly clean, round tubelike corridors, until they stopped in front of a set of double doors marked *Gymnasium*. Adam stepped into the doors and they flung aside automatically, as Kazoo was left gawking, not believing his eyes.

It was a gigantic futuristic room, full up of kids, teenagers, and young adults, using their powers in a dizzying set of incredible contraptions. Most of the students were wearing *Fluid Suits* in the color of their particular year of training. Some kids were levitating, others were really flying, with thrust. Some kids were practicing *telekinetics*, floating objects in the air. Kazoo thought about the Trickertreaters.

One girl seemed to be made of plants. One little boy had a tiny little head and seemed to glide about the room, one inch off the floor. Another girl was tall, like 10 feet, but as slender as a flagpole. Another kid had absolutely no face, but for two glowing eyes that looked like buttons. A boy streaked past Kazoo, whizzing right by him, and floating near the rafters, a bright orange aura glowing about his body. A little girl was crying, her arm seemed stretched beyond six feet and lay limp at her feet. Two tiny 12 inch kids grew

themselves back to their full six-foot+ heights and ran by Adam Head, saying,
“Hello Professor Head!”

Many people were running the track at supersonic speeds.

There were others performing more humanic feats, gymnastics, basketball, handball, dance.

Kazoo lingered, perhaps too long, on a futuristic wrestling ring. There were some people *inflicted* (that’s how Kazoo saw it, rather than, say, *gifted*) with some crazy physical mutations, some indeed quite scary, others, with logical usefully evolved attributes. *D-forms*. They were battling. Many seemed gifted with superstrength, others were stretchy, some were slippery. Then he realized the worst thing. They were all of them weaing Voltors. All of them.

Voltors!

Adam Head called Kazoo on,

“Come to the pools. I’m going to introduce you to my *daughter*.”

“What? *Daughter*? But--how? How *old* are you?”

“Well how old did you think?”

“25?”

Adam Head smiled.

“I am 53 threads old, youngster. Our time here in Electro City moves quite slow. The Blanket, and the dimensional disruptions and all that. Nobody is sure what year it really is. No one knows when the sun sets. We keep our own calendar based on the original, and we still follow our traditional clocks which seem to obey the Blanket threads. We have the ability to live much longer under the Blanket, or at least, it seems, within our allotted lifespans, we’re able to jam much more living. Days are as weeks. It is not explainable. This is another reason why some do not wish rebellion.

“In fact, there’s a chance that something like, say, only a year has passed on Earth, since the Blanket covered us.”

“No!”

“It is unlikely, but--well, it could even be a *day*. Who knows?”

A girl, seemingly 18 years old (now Kazoo could not be sure), slid up to the two of them. She said,

“Or a *second*.”

She was a bit taller than Kazoo, and he saw for a moment, her stomach ripple like it actually *was* the water out of which she had just stepped. Head’s daughter, no doubt.

“Hello,” she said, a note of sarcasm in her voice.

“I’m Aquapuss, *the liquid girl*.”

She talked like old funny papers. Kazoo noted that she had a cute face, though it seemed devoid of something rather essential. *She’s bored*, thought Kazoo.

Adam interjected, “That’s her moniker *this* week, mind you,” he turned to her, “I thought you were going to stick with Watergun. I rather liked that one.”

Then he turned back to Kazoo and said with a proud smile, “Bill, I’d like you to meet Janet Head, my daughter.”

“Janet *Gelica*, thank you. I’m taking my *Mom*’s last name. Or you could call me

Pusshead,” she smirked, “Just call me Gel, okay?”

Kazoo nodded, then stammering, said, “I’m Kaz-uh, Kazoo. ”

She wrinkled her face at him, as if he were weird.

She said, mockingly, “OK, kid.”

Kazoo thought perhaps she thought his moniker wasn’t any good.

Gel turned to Adam, saying, “Uh, Mom said you have to get me dinner tonight.”

“Oh. Well, I have class. I’ll give you my Fee Tab and you can take Bill to the cafeteria and get him some good nutrition. I don’t think he’s had any for most of his life. When you’re done show him the locker rooms, let him shower, then bring him to my quarters. Okay, Gelica?”

“*Fine.*”

“Here, then. Good luck Bill. I’ll see you in a few hours.”

“Thank you Mister Head.”

Gel rolled her eyes,

“C’mon, *Kazoo*, let’s go eat. Is that your *dog*?”

The cafeteria was packed with people. It wasn’t nearly as futuristic as Kazoo had thought it would be. Gel had gotten them soymush pseudo burgers, and, although Kazoo thought that perhaps he was going to get a legendary turkey dinner, or something resembling a storybook Thanksgiving, he did enjoy his meal. He was pleased when Gel said,

“I bet you’re hungry. He’ll have *three*. And get me something for the dog.”

It was certainly filling him up and the food made him feel better than any he’d eaten since he was very little, or maybe ever.

Gel had gone over to talk to a girlfriend of hers. The two of them kept looking over at Kazoo, and her friend kept giggling. Kazoo was very nervous, so he pulled out another Comic Book and began to read as he ate.

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Kid America and Friends #285 suffered no trouble due it’s name change. Sales of this giant-sized issue doubled. In this one, entitled, “They Call Her Rollerskate,” Kid America strikes out on his own in order to find some Supercandy. At first, all he finds are the Trickertreaters, who, while sucking on their newfound Gollypops, telekinetically harass him and throw him into a garbage dumpster. He narrowly escapes what is fast becoming a rather viscious attack, by sneaking into the back exit of a movie theatre. Kid America settles into his seat, and prepares to watch a matinee anthology of old cartoons. Soon, he can’t help but notice a disturbance across the aisle. A little boy (age 5) is bothering a rather beautiful girl (age 16) that is sitting in front of him. Kid America recognizes the little brat as Copernicus Creamcoloured, younger brother to Suckerboy. Kid America decides to intervene, and he chases Copernicus out of the theatre.

In the lobby, Kid America is met by Rollerskatie, a wonderfully intelligent and inventive girl, and the first female to become a regular in the comic. She thanks Kid America, although she warns him that she can take care of herself. She reveals that she used to be the babysitter of Copernicus, but he was just too badly behaved. (We also learn that the rich parents of the Creamcoloured boys have abandoned them, leaving them trust funds and an evil fatcat lawyer to watch over them.) Just as Kid America is about to leave with Rollerskatie, he notices something very strange in the concession stand, a Supercandy called Atomic Gum. He purchases all that he can

afford, when a word bubble from Rollerskatie's head reads, "It's the Trickertreaters!" Copernicus has brought Suckerboy and his crew back in order to take care of Kid America.

Kid America and Rollerskatie high tail it up the many escalators of the multiplex, finally arriving on the roof. The Trickertreaters are quickly after them, as Kid America gives Skatie a piece of the Atomic Gum that he just aquired. They chew it quickly. Kid America tries to blow a bubble, and suddenly, it grows enormously and begins to pull him off of the ground. Skatie follows suit and they quickly float into the distance, as Suckerboy is stopped at the edge of the roof, his Gollypop down to the stick; finished. He curses them, as he and his little brother promise vengeance.

A visit from Sam finally lets us all know that the Kid America saga is in high gear. He is obviously upset, and even angry. He badgers Kid America about what he has been up to, and Kid America tells him about the Supercandy. Icecream-Man is not sure what to make of it, asking Kid for more information than our hero has. "If I were you," reads a word bubble above the Icecream-Man's head, "I would be careful what I eat. Now, Kid America, I must head north. It shall be some time before we see each other again. I may send someone to contact you. Take this." Sam gives Kid America a Decoder Ring, that bears the symbol of a tricycle on it. Kid America asks, "What do I do with this?" "One day you will know, young hero. I have entrusted to you, now, the fate of our world, for regardless of your foolishness, I believe you to be *good*. You must protect the Bike." Kid America asks, "But Sam, where are you going?" "To the Ice Cream Wars." replies the Ice Cream-Man, in full telepathic contact with the boy. The Ice Cream Truck is already down the block. To make matters more grave, Kid America arrives back at his apartment, only to realize that his bike has been stolen. Thought bubbles above his head read, "Think, Kid, think! In all this excitement over the candy this month, I haven't used my bike for weeks! Who took it, and how long has it been gone?!" And thus, the insane adventures of Supercandy are truly begun.

-Bodey Fluger

Encyclopedia Komica

synopsis of Kid America and Friends #285

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In order to eat, Kazoo stretched his mask just over his mouth. He hadn't noticed Gel come over and sit beside him. She was staring at him like he was silly, as he looked down at the Comic and fumbled with a bit of his food. He almost dropped everything when he noticed her. She was shaking her head as she pet Sebastian.

Kazoo began to really feel how the Underground wasn't like the street above at all. It wasn't *truly* crazy down here. It was civilized. No matter how much they may have studied them, these kids hadn't grown up with the Comic Books as their ultimate guides. Some kids actually had parents. And there were teachers. Hence, Gel was down-voiced and skeptical as she said,

"Why are you reading *that*?"

"Huh? It's... it's a good guide, there's a lot of..."

"No, no, I'm not saying that Comic Books are no good, just, why read the actual thing. Why not read the Encyclopedia Komica? I mean, all the really important issues, the historic comics, I mean, have already been analyzed by the greatest Siphon minds. The great Bodey Fluger, of the InfoKomica, probably has written something about those that your, reading."

"Well--I mean, I like the pictures, *and*, he could have missed something, I mean you

never know.”

“Suit yourself.”

Again, Kazoo struggled to lift his mask, as he took a final bite of his last mushburger.

Gel looked like she was dying to ask, “Why do you wear that mask, *anyway?*”

Kazoo shrugged. Whereas Adam Head had helped him find his voice, Gel made him feel more shy than he *ever* had before. Gel, in turn, took his behavior in stride. She didn’t seem to care. Perhaps she liked it, poking fun at the new kid. Still, he had to admit that he kind of liked her, in a roundabout way. Gel fed Woofe most of her food. She then said, a little more brightly,

“So can you *do* anything?”

Kazoo figured she meant like with powers and Milk.

He managed, through a swallow, “I can *bounce.*”

Gel laughed like it was really funny.

“Bounce?” she asked.

Kazoo didn’t know what to make of her. Then she said, in a gossipy sort of way, “That guy there, *he* can jump real high. But it’s in his muscles. He’s strong. Like he worked out and made his thighs all *strong*. So he’s more like just really strong, as opposed to having strange jump-prone molecules in his legs. Like you must have... ”

“It’s my sneakers,” he said, as under his mask he cursed himself for saying it.

“*Right,*” she said, rolling her eyes and smiling.

She pointed at an athletic looking girl whose hair was meticulously done in tight cornrows. Gel said, “And her, she like can do these flips, and she goes all high. Her molecules are definitely milked up. But she’s so conceded.”

She looked at Kazoo closely, grinning sardonically. Then, with a bit more respect than she’d shown him just yet, she asked,

“So what’s it’s like up there, *anyway?*”

Kazoo was a little surprised, and said,

“You’ve *never* been?”

She acted defensive, “*Nope.* I was born Deep. And my parents won’t let me go anywhere.”

“Where’s--” he hesitated. He wondered if he had ever uttered the phrase before,

“Where’s your mother?”

She looked sad, “My parents are divorced. Can you believe that? We’re in the one place in the city where people can be together, and they can’t work it out! My mom works in the Science department. I barely see *her*. They won’t let me do anything. I’m not even allowed to take a pseudonym. They just want us all to be as normal as possible down here. The adults try to recapture their younger days or something, before the Blanket. They want to pretend everything’s fine or something. They always try to say that we’ve got it *good.*”

Kazoo thought then, that The School seemed to want to believe there was nothing wrong upstairs. At least not something they could do anything about. Maybe if he could find Clarence, they could get out of there and find--then he remembered his *mission*--and he almost blurted it all out at once. Failing miserably, he tried to be nonchalant as he said,

“Hey Gel.”

Gel was suddenly busy watching some guy stretch his mouth open till it was two times bigger than his head. Then he shoveled all this food into it, and swallowed. Gel laughed really loud again.

Kazoo said, “Uhh, Gel?”

She said, “Now *that’s* funny.”

“GEL!” cried Kazoo.

“*What?*”

Kazoo gulped, and whispered, “So do, uh, do *you* know anything about Kid America?”

“Huh? Oh... *yeah*. I suppose. Why?”

She sounded uninterested.

“What do you know?”

“I don’t *know*.” She glanced around the room but there was nothing that she could really distract herself with.

She went on, “He’s a Comic Book guy. A Superhero. All these dumb kids at the gym really love him. They all took names like Kid Fast, Kid Robot, Kid Electric, Kiddy Googoo. They are *so* unoriginal, don’t you think? You have a pretty good name.”

Kazoo was surprised. “You think so?”

“Well, it’s pretty weird.”

Kazoo felt a little more reassured to move on.

He said, “What I mean, is, do you know anything about the *real* Kid America?”

“What?” said Gel, “Are you crazy?”

“You don’t believe he exists?”

“Well...” She grew thoughtful. She was blushing!

She said, “It’s not... It’s not really *that*.”

“So you know about him?”

“We’re not supposed to talk about that. It’s supposed to be a fantasy. Teachers tell us, that’s what kids upstairs run around believing, and that’s why they wind up Plastoid, cuz they just wait around for this *Kid America* to come save them. It’s the same as that ancient guy--um...*Santa Claus*.”

“Oh,” sighed Kazoo, thinking again, *who is Santa Claus?* (The Electric Blanket, apparently, was blocked even to the great old man.)

“But...” she hesitated.

“Yes,” urged Kazoo.

“Well, my father--it’s just that, my father says that there really was once a guy who went by that name.”

“Adam Head *knew* him?”

He had her. She wasn’t acting so skeptical now. They were really talking.

“Oh, I don’t *know*, Kazoo.”

“Please tell me if you know something.”

“Well this guy, nobody’s sure that he really *was* Kid America, you know? He, uh, used to be a teacher here I think. A long while ago. He was with the A/V Squad. He *left*.”

Threads ago. Some of the faculty went with him. Like three or four people or something.”

“Where did he go?”

“I don’t know. Back upstairs? How should I know?”

“But--”

“Well, later, he was supposed to be responsible for, like this band or something. ‘Bandy and the Action Figures’ or some nonsense. But it wasn’t like a *real band* cause they wouldn’t ever like play anywhere. For years they never let anybody hear any of their music. Then, one day, they put out this one (Stupid)Cube. A bunch of the Cubes just came to the School one day when I was little. I mean it was a *good* Cube, but then--nothing. I mean I thought it was good--but you know--I was little, and it was just for kids.”

“Do you have it?”

“Huh?”

“Do you have the Cube!?”

“No, mine’s lost. If you ask me, I think that they were confiscated. School security didn’t want any interference from the Company, so you know how it goes... I mean no one seems to really care about *that* anymore.”

“Why not?”

“Well, don’t tell my father, but me and my friends, we use our communicators to pick up the radio signals from above. *Most* kids listen to WDEF. The *Plug*.”

“What!?”

Gel was enthused, “The DJ’s stuff is *hot*. It gets you all, like, *spooked* out. I mean it’s really like, an *experience*. Sometimes you forget where you are. For *hours*. You just zone out and it’s like all *crazy*... Oh, it’s great.”

Kazoo could not *believe* his ears. Utter *ignorance*. No wonder she seemed so nonchalant. She was already being conditioned.

Gel continued, whispering, “I know some people that went *above*. Tried to pledge allegiance so they could jack into the *Stereo System*. Have *you* been *there*?”

“No!” he cried, outraged.

This was crazy. Anyone who dared offer themselves for early entry into Stereo surely never came back! No wonder the School was allowed to exist, to thrive even. *The DJ controlled it!*

Beneath his mask, Kazoo felt himself near tears. Finally, he asked, disappointed, “May I go see Adam Head now?”

Sebastian Woofe sort of moaned. Gel seemed mildly amused, but you could tell that she felt a bit unsure of herself.

“What’s wrong?” she asked, grimacing.

“The DJ is death itself. I have to go. I have a mission to complete. Please take me to see your dad.”

“Okay,” she said. For the first time in her life, she felt embarrassed. She wondered, then, about ‘right and wrong’. She said, “He’s still got class, but I can take you to the Locker Room, so you can shower and change, alright?”

Kazoo nodded. It dawned on him that he must stink. He had rarely taken regular

showers his whole life, and mostly he'd washed in the drainpipe spill out in the Junkyard, which was filthy in itself.

When they arrived, Gel presented him with a beginner's Fluid Suit (it came as a belt). Gel said,

“When you want to change into the Fluidsuit, just say ‘Come on’ and it'll cover your body. It'll probably take some getting used to for you. You've really got to get the hang of it, but if you're smart about it, the suit will follow your *thoughts*. I'll meet you back here after you're done.”

Sebastian Woofe waited with the girl.

Kazoo had nodded to her and took his leave. He began to feel bad that he was angry towards her, and thought that it was probably true that Gel just didn't know any better. Kazoo showered, and when the water ceased flowing, he was dried by a blast of steam. He took his mask off for only a moment during the whole time. He put the Fluid belt on, and said, “Come on!” and the rest of the suit glooped onto his body. Then it sort of bagged itself like it was any jumpsuit he'd ever worn. Within moments it was suddenly, *very baggy*, and he couldn't really adjust it like Gel had warned. Allegedly, the Fluid Suit, made out of microcircuitry fibers, could mold on to the body at the cry of a command. With the proper verbal commands, a good Fluid Suit could masquerade as a tuxedo or a pair of pajamas or a bathing suit. Whatever it had been designed to handle. Roger and Dot had occasionally picked up Electric Company Fluid Suit commercials when they were watching TV.

Kazoo had found several laundry boxes to wash his old clothes in. Regardless, he would not remove his sneakers, which he had showered in as well. Once his clothes were dried, he attempted to fold them, when, out of the corner of his eye, he saw him. It was his friend, *Clarence Pocket*.

He was about six inches taller than when Kazoo had last seen him, but he could *hear* him talking to some of the other students. Kazoo got a peek at him and noted that he was still ridden with acne, and his dirty blonde hair was now cut in tapered layers, looking very *fancy*. Then, for some reason, Kazoo grew frightened, grabbed his clothes, and dove behind one of the laundry boxes. Clarence and his friends lingered, talking about classes and girls.

Then one boy, with a squeaky little voice, tried his best to whisper,

“*Say, did any of you guys see the new Ghattoblasters video?*”

Affirmative mutters. Another, a larger guy, said,

“It was amazing! I heard the DJ captured them and tortured them before they signed to the Plug.”

Clarence then included, “Edward Tedd says he saw the *nueralcast*. They fought the Transistors right before the first concert! He said it was one of the best clips he'd ever viewed.”

“He's lucky his father's got vid-receivers.”

The larger guy said, “Yeah. Well the song I heard on the Earwave was an explosion. DJ produced it. It's got these Uhddy sweeps in the background, make your

eyes well up. Ghattoblasters are the perfect group to adopt heavy kablamemics to. I couldn't see straight for a half hour after I'd listened to it."

Clarence said, "I'm sure they sound better than they ever used to. Ghattoblasters in concert all weekend on the Earwave, I heard."

"I'll be listening."

"*Word*," said Clarence.

Kazoo thought about it momentarily, then realized saying *Word* was a sort of archaic way of expressing agreement. *Had Clarence crossed sides too?*

He didn't want to risk being seen by Clarence now, he was too startled. Plus he was with all those different students. It appeared Clarence was in a *clique*. Kazoo thought of old hologram movies he'd seen about teenagers in pre-Blanket high schools. It looked like Clarence was going to a trendy little prep school somewhere in the suburbs (As he thought about it, the underground was the only possible 'sub-urb' in Electro City). Kazoo thought him quite different than when last they met. He was prissy now. He seemed phony. The pressure to remain rebellious must have been too great for him.

Kazoo toyed with the idea of escaping the School right then and there. How long would he have before he too was worn down, turned into a fan of the DJ, and made stupid by the brain wear of *kablamemics*, *dephikuzz*, *alloy* and at age 18, *Knoizak*?

He figured he owed something to the Heads, if not at least some thanks. He decided he'd give Adam a chance to explain it to him.

Just then, however, the squeaky voiced student was *behind* Kazoo.

"Well, hello there!"

Kazoo was frozen.

"I think it's a new surface dweller. Come on out of there, sacky!"

Kazoo drew himself up and was met by Clarence. Kazoo muttered,

"*Hello Clarence.*"

Clarence sort of smiled, and looked nervously at the others.

He said, "It's *Charlie*, now." The others chortled. Some quipped, *Clar-ence!*

"Welcome, William. You made it deep, I see."

Kazoo nodded. Clarence seemed to glare at his old friend, saying,

"The High Punk has arrived, ey? Yeah, well, things are different than the way I thought when I came. You've got to keep an open mind if you're gonna make it down here, y'know."

"But Clarence--"

The squeaky kid put in, hinting,

"*DJ!*"

The oldest boy then stepped to Kazoo. His Fluid Suit was red, and he was a redhead. He said,

"Come, come, boys. Listen, man. Newcomers have to listen to what we say. I'm Elroy Matheson. There's no need to fret, boy. Just *listen...*"

The squeaky kid added, "He's *our* DJ! DJ Plus Nice."

"Plus Nice will be fine, thank you. There really is only *one* DJ. Now, all you've

got to do is *listen*. That's all the initiation required into this great underground *school*. We can work together, once we're through this very simple preliminary."

The others were laughing. A fatter kid named Dobbo grabbed one of Kazoo's arms. The kid's fingers each went cold and solid like metal, and secured their grip on Kazoo. Kazoo had almost forgotten that most of these kids were now trained Siphons.

Plus Nice ordered, "Charlie, grab his other arm."

Clarence did so. Kazoo struggled. Clarence was uneasy. Kazoo didn't say anything. Plus Nice called to the squeaky kid,

"Nugent, Bring me the headphones."

Some rather large silver headphones were produced, but when Plus Nice tried to put them on Kazoo's head, he realized the sound would be muffled.

"Take off his mask."

Clarence wouldn't do it, but Nugent, the squeaky kid, had no problems. Kazoo glared at Clarence. Charlie winced, looking away.

With Kazoo's mask removed, even Plus Nice took a step back. He was nodding in approval. Nugent was laughing uncontrollably. Clarence whispered,

"God, Kazoo. I didn't realize--"

Plus Nice said, "It is obvious you are Siphon, so once we get this out of the way, we shall all be friends."

He placed the wireless headphones on Kazoo's ears. Kazoo was trying to lean into a crouch, so he could get off another *bounce*. But he couldn't maneuver. Plus Nice, aka *Elroy Matheson*, then pulled a strange little ball from his pocket,

"This is my Radiorb, little Siphon. Just relax. Listen closely. It's quite an experience. Really. No need for struggle. You *will* like it, or learn to, at least."

Plus Nice squeezed the 'Orb and it squashed, clicking into a long ovaloid. Silence for 1 second, 2, 3, then a voluminous blow of Muffinman's early Alloy stuff blasted into Kazoo's head. The Ovaloid glowed as it played, mixing into later issue music from *Mad Popcorns and the Fuzzy Warbles*. Kazoo could *feel* the music in his body. The *dephikuzz* grinded on, rippling his thoughts, breaking them down into gibberish. If it was possible, he thought, the music made him aware of his atoms, and shook them. That was the work of *Uhd. Kablammics* vibrated his brain, and made him lose any focus on the reality of the situation. It was a journey, in and out, again and again, following a dense program meant to tear at the synapses. It made him wooze. His mind wandered through never before used paths of grey matter. Moldable matter. For a second he was utterly lost in the blankness of this region in his brain. *Knoizak* chipped away at him, spreading confusion.

He couldn't see. His eyes were open, and he tried to focus, but he could not see anything that was actually inside the locker room, only terrifying *thought casts* that the music was *injecting*, pummeling mad orchestrations into the depths of his young skull.

Clarence, his conscience possibly getting the better of him, suddenly let go of Kazoo's arm. Kazoo turned to him and saw it. His old friend had tears in his eyes. Without further ado, Kazoo bent lower now, and, in rather spectacular fashion, his eyes dripped with lustrous and milky tears. He bounced free, hit the ceiling and landed back behind the showers, sobbing. The Clique ran after him, Nugent shouting to him,

“Do you see? Did you see!?”

Gel was waiting right in front of the locker room door, trying to catch peeks inside as boys came in and out. Sebastian Woofe started barking like crazy and took his chance to dart into the locker room. Gel then saw the streak of Milk Kazoo left in the wake of his bounce, and heard him shriek. She busted into the room, already turning her body to its liquid-like form.

When the Clique saw her, they ran, only Plus Nice hesitating momentarily to deliver a final blow to Kazoo’s stomach. He gestured toward the liquid girl and finally said to Kazoo,

“Say nothing.”

Then, Plus Nice seemed to vanish, feet first.

Kazoo shivered in the corner as Gel collected her body splashes. He faced the wall and demanded his mask from her. She grabbed it and flung it over at him. As he bent to pick it up from the floor, she could barely note what he looked like. She merely imagined him in his mask, and allowed him his weirdness.

Kazoo marched passed her. Gel shouted after him,

“Hey, Kazoo! C’mon, I’m supposed to take you to see *Head*.”

Kazoo grabbed her hand and pulled her along. She was a bit surprised that he actually touched her (he seemed so shy) but she allowed him to drag her out of the gym. She said,

“Don’t worry about those guys. They think they’re a gang or something. They’re always causing problems. They always give new kids a hard time.”

Kazoo shook his head. Even though he wore a mask, Jane could see he was really shaken up.

Gel said, “Look, don’t worry, Kazoo. I’ll tell everybody what happened. You won’t be in *trouble* or anything.”

Kazoo was brooding. *The music*, he thought. *It was in my head. But like for real. Like a bug had crawled inside my ear or something.*

Gel shrugged, “Well, follow me. I think you’re going before Sub-Principal Milkrates in just a little while.”

Kazoo remained silent and marched beside her.

MILL-kruh-tees, Pronounced like Socrates