

“CRAPS IN VEGAS (A Tale of Joe Fixit)”

Who's the baddest: Mr. Fixit or the Kingpin?

Chapter 8 (of 8)

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NOTE: This story takes place before the events of PLANET HULK

CONCLUSION

The Kingpin stared, puzzled at the way Joe Fixit's body trembled while his gray flesh quivered, its hue sickly churning and changing. Fixit seemed to grow an extra layer of mass, but he did not turn green. He snarled until he regained control, and found the capacity to speak again.

“Interesting phenomenon with your skin tone, Fixit.”

“Joe grunted, “Blame it... on the sunburn you get in this town, fatso.”

“Be reasonable, sir. I abhor physical combat, and there's nothing to be gained by demeaning ourselves any further. Give me what I want, and you can go back to the life you love so much, the simple life you've made here for yourself. You're an extraordinary man willing to fight to the death for such ordinary pleasures, and I will not deny you those pleasures if you turn Tomaccino over to me now.”

Joe smirked and replied, “Fisk, I got my second wind. And you know what that means? Your coward tailor’s next masterpiece will be in doomsday black.”

The kingpin aimed his cane again, hitting Fixit in the chest with another destructive beam. Fixit was hurting, but able to stand up to it. Fisk aimed higher and caught Fixit right in the face. His hair caught on fire as he yelled out. He staggered back, covering his face with his hands. The burnt bald patches on his scalp could be seen filling in, growing back.

“You may be delighted to know that I haven’t used one of these in years, Fixit.” the Kingpin remarked, as he admired his deadly cane. “It’s powered by a miniature dynamo that channels a devastating nuclear current. Ahh, but I’m sure you have a sense of what it is by now.”

Outside the office, Ron Westmont paced in front of the elevators praying that the damage to his room was kept to a minimum. One of the elevator doors opened, and Bud Tomaccino rushed out carrying the briefcase of money. Ron was caught unaware.

“Bud? What are you doing?”

Bud rushed past him and began grabbing at the doorknob to the room where Fixit and Fisk were.

“No, stay out of there, Bud! Joe wants you safe!”

Not really wanting to hurt Bud, Ron grappled with him, but Bud shook him off then banged the briefcase against the lock until one hard hit forced the door open. Both Fisk and Fixit were momentarily startled by Tomaccino’s entrance.

“Fisk, stop what you’re doing!” he shouted. “I’ll go back with you and face whatever punishment you see fit! Just don’t do anymore damage here or hurt anybody!”

“No one else needs to get hurt now,” said Fisk, as he aimed his cane and blasted Tomaccino off his feet. His burning body was hurled back through the doorway where it dropped at Ron Westmont’s feet. Bud’s flesh was charred and his clothes burned. Westmont removed his jacket and used it to smother the flames. Inside the room, the briefcase had fallen to the floor, and a few bills fluttered about. The Kingpin half-smiled with a satisfied look on his face, his battle with Joe Fixit almost forgotten. Almost.

Joe sneered, “You scum! You bloated, bloodthirsty side of beef! No one does that to me! No one!”

Fixit tackled the Kingpin from behind. They hit the floor, tussling frantically. Fixit managed to snatch the laser-cane away. As both men got to their feet, Joe snapped the cane in two, and an explosive blowback effect caught the Kingpin squarely in the face. While Kingpin was momentarily dazed, Fixit rushed him with a hard right to the body, drawing a surprising shriek of pain from his massive foe.

“Gotcha with that shot to the ribs, huh? Let’s go for the other rib cage.”

Moving without pause, Fixit shot a powerful left into the other side of Kingpin’s body, feeling devilish delight as he heard more ribs crackling. Unable to stand straight, Kingpin crouched over, his face red and swollen in agony. Fixit rushed him, grabbed Fisk’s bald head and drove his opponent’s face down into his hard-as-steel knee. Fisk wavered, though he was still on his feet. The top half of his suit was ripped and dingy. He bled from his nose and his mouth.

“Fixit, y-you filthy, stinking animal! You can’t treat me like some common thug. I’m the king of an empire, ape! Every time I’ve been torn down, I’ve rebuilt myself again and again like the proverbial phoenix! I’m the Kingpin!” Fisk bellowed.

Fixit dug his hands into the desk and raised the redwood structure over his head. “You’re nothing but a pig living in a house of wood... And I’m the big bad wolf.” Fixit smashed the desk into the Kingpin as though it was the weight of the world. Wooden shards protruded from the Kingpin’s bald scalp and face. More blood flowed freely, staining what was left of his clothing. His eyes were clenched, and anyone could tell that he was in terrible pain, but he still wouldn’t fall. In fact, he staggered about, dragging himself away from the pile of wooden wreckage.

Fixit grabbed one half of the laser-cane he’d broken. He lunged low and, with his right hand, drove the jagged edge of the cane right into the side of the Kingpin’s right knee joint, drawing another shriek from the mountainous figure, and drawing more blood. The stabbing did what Fixit’s punches had not: it took the Kingpin of crime off his feet and landed him flat on his back.

Ron Westmont rushed by Fixit’s side and shouted, “Don’t kill him, Joe! Let’s be done with this and put this whole sad night behind us.”

“Don’t worry, Ron. This blob ain’t worth killing. How’s Bud?”

“Joe, don’t get mad, please... Bud’s dead, Joe. He was badly burned. I gotta call 911 and report the body, Joe. The cops are gonna be here asking questions.”

Fixit pointed at the Kingpin, who lay on the floor moaning and bleeding. “When they ask, blame it all on him. He’s the one who shot Bud, he’s the one who came here looking for trouble. If I didn’t respect your place, Ron, I’d kill him right here and now.”

Kingpin stopped moaning long enough to grin, just slightly. “Fixit, I’ll be glad to tell them I punished this man for stealing from me. It’s ironic really, because in the end, he was more man than you were, Fixit. He understood what had to be done to balance

things. This way, he escaped his own demons and he satisfied me. Rather poetic, you must admit.”

Fixit placed his foot in the Kingpin’s chest and said, “You know, people have called me a monster for years, and I admit I can be one sometimes, but I never felt satisfied after killing someone, and I hope I never do.”

“That’s because you’ve never been a leader, Fixit. You could never understand the kind of hard, cruel choices a leader has to make to keep order and balance around him. That’s why some are bred to be leaders while others are content working for those who lead. No shame in that, I suppose.”

The sound of sirens emerged. Ron had made the call. He looked at Fixit and said, “Joe, you better get gone.”

Joe took his foot off the Kingpin’s chest. Before he left, Kingpin said, “You stuck by your friend even though you knew he was wrong. You’re a strong-willed man with unwavering loyalties. You’re the kind of person who would never steal, never betray. Even more important, you’d never betray yourself. I could always use someone with your traits in my... enterprise. If you like, stop by my bodyguards outside and get one of my cards. Or just look me up in New York if you ever want to work for some real money.”

Joe Fixit didn’t feel anger or hatred or even sadness; he just felt sick, very sick. He took his leave of the Silver Cloud as only he could.

Afterward

Joe knew he’d be going away soon. Banner had been rattling around inside for hours now, but Joe’s onerous personality had held banner at bay, mostly out of

stubbornness. He'd beaten the Kingpin to a pulp, had beaten him to within an inch of his life, but he found himself unable to shake some of the Kingpin's taunts. A “leader of leaders,” the fat man had said. Accessing memories from the savage Hulk and the Professor, Fixit indulged sobering reflection upon his less-than-stellar group affiliations over the years: The Avengers, the Defenders, the Pantheon. He'd never really led any of those teams, not even the latter, with all the good they'd accomplished together. Let them all go to hell in a handbag together, he decided, along with the fat man and his “enterprise.” One day, it could happen. It could happen the way it did on Jarella's world. People could look up to him and call him *hero*. They could show loyalty and call him a great leader. Maybe they could even call him their *king*. Why not? Why the hell not?

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