

The first four chapters of
**EXPONENTIAL APOCALYPSE:
DEAD PRESIDENTS**

an excerpt from
a novel

by Eirik Gumeny



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EXPONENTIAL APOCALYPSE: DEAD PRESIDENTS

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This novel is a work of fiction. Any mention of business establishments and locations is done in whatever that legally protected manner is that doesn't get the author sued. Any resemblance to actual persons, living, dead, or otherwise, is entirely coincidental. Any resemblance to potential futures is... actually kind of disheartening, given the number of corpses it would take to accomplish that, but still, you know, pretty cool, if you think about it.

PROLOGUE

DEUS EX GIRLFRIEND DEUX: THE SEQUELING

Erin McCafferty and Jorge Reyes, hands clasped and hearts light, strolled through Sinatra Park, looking out over the Hudson River and the perpetually churning water above the remains of what was once New York City.

"Do you hear that?" Erin asked.

"Hear what?" said Jorge. "The water?"

"No," replied his wife. "That."

Jorge stood still. He listened intently. He didn't hear anything.

"I don't hear anything."

"Huh."

Erin shrugged, and she and Jorge resumed their lighthearted hand-holding.

For a moment, anyway.

"Seriously," she said, "you don't hear that? It's getting louder."

Jorge paused again and listened furiously.

"Sorry, babe. Nothing."

Erin put her finger in her ear, hoping to dislodge... something. A tiny gnat maybe.

"It's this weird, indistinct... sound," she explained.

"That's helpful," said Jorge, "but I still don't hear it."

"Is it getting dark?" added Erin, looking up at the purple sky.

"I honestly don't know," said Jorge, also looking up. "I'm not good with shades of purple."

"No, not dark dark, more like... shadow dark."

Jorge continued to scan the sky.

"Probably a cloud," he said. "Or, you know, that meteor." He pointed to the small black dot rapidly getting less small.

"That could be it, yeah," said Erin.

"I only see the one... That's weird."

"aa"

"Seriously," said Erin, putting her finger in her ear again and

wiggling it around violently, "you don't hear that?"

"No, nothing."

"aa"

"How can you not hear that? It's getting louder by the second."

"Are you all right, honey?"

"AA"

"What is that?!" yelled Erin, spastically turning in a circle, scouring the park for the offending noise. Jorge grabbed her by the shoulders.

"Calm down, Erin. We can figure out what it is in a second. Right now we should probably take a few steps to the left."

Jorge lifted his head slightly, indicating the patch of sky directly above them and the large black dot rapidly getting larger. Erin looked up.

"Oh, right, yeah."

Jorge and Erin rushed across the park as the large black dot revealed itself to be a small black sphere. The small black sphere, in turn, became a large black sphere, and then crashed into the model of the Manhattan skyline that had been built along the waterfront after the actual skyline had had the audacity to sink when the world had ended for the thirteenth time.

The impact of the sphere quite understandably created a small crater and sent a shockwave out along the ground, tripping up Erin and Jorge and irking the grass some too.

The husband and wife, face-first in the angry lawn, their backs to the impact, turned their heads awkwardly and peered at the smoking crater.

"Should we check it out?" asked Erin.

"I guess so," answered Jorge, rolling onto his back and scanning the sky. "I don't see any others."

"What do you think it is?"

"Stray meteor?" he said with a shrug.

Slowly, Erin and Jorge approached the crest of the hole.

"That's no meteor."

They stared at the melting ball of metal cradled in the center of the pit. At least eight feet in diameter, the outer layer appeared to be an ungainly cross-stitching of multiple sheets of steel, titanium, and machine guns, variously dripping, smoking, or outright burning.

"What the hell is that?" asked Erin. "A satellite?"

A square of smoking metal burst from the center of the ball,

sailing over the couple and across the park.

Erin stepped behind Jorge, saying, "Maybe we should –"

It was then that a small squirrel stepped from the wreckage and posed, dramatically, on its hind legs, its front paws on its hips. Its cape fluttered in the sudden and localized wind.

"hothothothothot"

The squirrel immediately scurried off the flaming orb and onto the grass near Jorge and Erin.

"Uh, hey, there," said the squirrel, looking up.

"That – That squirrel can talk," said Erin.

"Squirrels don't talk, honey..." replied Jorge, furrowing his brow.

"Not talking," corrected the squirrel, communicating directly with Erin, "telepathy."

"Telepathy?" blurted the woman.

"Baby?" inquired her husband, reversing the angle of his eyebrows.

"Don't worry about it, boss," said the squirrel, this time to both of them. "She's fine. She's just a lot smarter than you. I picked up on her brainwaves first, figured there'd be a better chance of her hearing me. Granted, I spent the last few minutes screaming, but, you know, A for effort and all that."

"You've got quite the set of lungs on you," said Erin. "Or... in... your brain, I guess." She scrunched up her face slightly. "It was loud is what I'm saying."

"Atmospheric re-entry was a lot more terrifying than I had anticipated," explained the squirrel.

The man, the woman, and the squirrel stood silently for a moment. Then another moment. Jorge scratched his chin.

"So, uh, what exactly is your deal?" asked Erin.

"Should we be concerned?" continued Jorge. "'Cause we're not. But, I mean, we could be, if there's a planet of cape-wearing squirrels out there plotting against us or something."

"Or are you, like, a test animal?" suggested Erin. "Like those monkeys they tried to fling into space on giant catapults."

"I'm from here," answered the squirrel. "Scientists jammed a bunch of chemicals in my brain and then boiled it in radiation, giving me psychic powers. Then, not too long after that, an angry, reborn Aztec god threw me into space when I tried to stop him from taking over the

world."

Erin and Jorge stared at the tiny, caped squirrel, blinking with reckless abandon. Then Erin shrugged.

"I've heard stranger."

"I think I read about that, actually," added Jorge slowly. "No, wait. That was a reborn Hindu goddess who ate most of India."

"OK, sure," said the rodent, scratching the back of his tiny, furry neck. "Think you guys could point me in the direction of a good restaurant? I'm fucking starving."

CHAPTER ONE

THOR, GOD OF LOUSY CUSTOMER SERVICE

Hi, this is room 222, I ordered a sandwich about forty-five minutes ago and I still haven't received it."

"From where?"

"I'm sorry?"

"Where did you order your sandwich from? And why are you calling me?"

"I ordered room service. From the hotel. And you're the hotel. That's why I'm calling you."

"I don't think that's right. We don't do room service. We don't even have a kitchen."

"Are you sure? 'Cause they didn't mention that when I ordered my sandwich."

"Yeah, I'm pretty sure. The last time someone tried to use the stove it exploded. We never replaced it."

"You don't need a stove to make a sandwich..."

"But you do need sandwich materials. Which we don't have. Because we don't do room service. Because we don't have a kitchen. Because it blew up."

"They didn't say that before."

"Who is this 'they' you keep talking about?"

"I didn't get his name. But he answered the phone. Had a man's voice. Was it Bob? Do you have a Bob here?"

"We do not have a Bob here. We have a Thor and we have a Catrina."

"Well, it wasn't Catrina. And I don't think it was Thor. I'd remember a name like Thor."

"Are you sure you dialed the front desk?"

"Yeah, definitely. They said 'Renaissance Meadowlands front desk' and then I ordered my sandwich."

"This isn't the Renaissance Meadowlands."

"Really."

"Really."

"Huh."

"Yeah."

"The stationery on the desk here says 'Holiday Inn, Secaucus, New Jersey.' ... I'm not staying at the Renaissance, am I?"

"You are not, no."

"But I ordered my sandwich from them."

"Sounds like it."

"Do you think they'll deliver it here?"

"I highly doubt that."

"Huh."

"Yeah."

"Can I order a sandwich from you?"

"No. No, you can't."

"Why not?"

"There's no kitchen here, remember? No room service?"

"Oh, right."

"Can I go now?"

"Do you know where I can get a sandwich?"

"There's a Dunkin Donuts and a deli in the plaza."

"Do they deliver?"

"No. Not anymore."

"Anymore?"

"This is a surprisingly dangerous plaza."

"Can you go and get a sandwich for me?"

"No. No, I can't."

"Can't? Or won't?"

"Both."

"You're a really terrible hotel, you know that?"

"Yes. Yes, I do," said Thor, hanging up the phone and shaking his head. "How do these people keep finding me?"

There had been twenty-five apocalypses to date. The planet's surface had changed so drastically and so often that maps were now filed under History or Fiction in the one library that still existed. Words like "earth-shattering," "cataclysm," and "forever" were commonplace in weather forecasts, and an eighty percent chance of widespread fire tornados simply meant "wear shorts." People barely noticed the end of the world

anymore unless they were directly involved.

The last apocalypse that Thor, former Norse God of Thunder, was even remotely aware of was just over a year ago, when he killed Quetzalcoatl, a resurrected Aztec snake-god, with stolen demolition tools and accidentally cracked open the sky. Even then, he was fuzzy on the details. The two apocalypses since that one? He'd be humped if he knew.

Thor did have a Google alert set for "Ragnarok," but, seeing as how his mortality stemmed directly from science disproving religion, news about the Nordic Twilight of the Gods was few and far between. His friends had tried to convince the fallen deity to broaden his definitions, but he adamantly refused to acknowledge any lesser armageddon. Partly out of arrogance, partly out of the indifference needed to survive in a world where restaurants regularly had a section roped off for the living dead, but, mostly, out of spite. Thor was still pretty pissed being the God of Thunder didn't get him farther with the ladies.

"Who was that?" asked Mark Hughes – cyborg, veteran of the Robot Wars, and manager and proprietor of the Secaucus Holiday Inn.

Thor, not aware that his boss had been standing behind him, hastily replied, "Wrong number."

"Didn't sound like a wrong number."

"There was a wrong number involved..."

"Was that one of our guests?"

"Maybe."

"What did they want, Thor?"

"A sandwich."

"And you said...?"

"That they could get their own sandwich."

"Does that sound like good customer service to you?"

"Not even a little."

Mark crossed his arms over his chest. He stared sternly at Thor, his ocular implant whirring. Sternly.

"Go get them a sandwich, Thor."

"No way, man. I'm off in..." He looked at the wireless handset's clock. "...now. I'm not getting sandwiches for anyone but me."

"One, you're not off until Catrina shows up, and she's still upstairs. Two – and this is the important one, Thor – were you going to

go to the deli and get a sandwich, for yourself, right now, like you do every day?"

"Uh..."

"That's what I thought," said Mark. "Get the guy a sandwich. *After* Catrina comes down."

"Oh, come on," contended Thor. "This is bullshit."

"Yeah, well, I let you and your friends live here for free, so you're pretty much my bitch."

"Ha," yipped Catrina Dalisay, tying back her long black hair as she crossed the lobby from the elevator. "Mark called you his bitch."

"You're his bitch, too," countered Thor.

"Yeah, but he can't actually call me that 'cause I have lady parts."

"Seriously? How does that work?"

"Nobody knows, Thor, but it's true," explained Mark. "Now call back our guest and find out what kind of sandwich he wants. And get me a number four while you're there."

"And I want a turkey on a roll, no mayo," added Catrina. She began typing into her mobile phone.

"What?" said Thor. "How is tha— Who are you texting?"

"Vicky wants a number two," Catrina replied, reading the incoming message.

"Oh, come on!"

"And Charlie says he wants a chicken parm."

"I hate you all," murmured the thunder god.

CHAPTER TWO

THE BAD KIND OF ROBOT

Timmy – the telepathic, telekinetic, cape-wearing, space-faring super-squirrel – scampered along the cracked, weed-ridden shoulder of an abandoned highway, wandering in the general direction of west and trying to figure out how to get back to his family.

The relationship between Timmy and his wife had become tense enough after he was kidnapped, gained psychic powers, and became a freelance superhero. A thirteen month disappearance wasn't going to help any. Especially not since getting hurled off the planet by an angry god was exactly the kind of thing she had warned him about.

How was he going to apologize for this one, Timmy wondered. Flowers? No, his wife was allergic to some kinds of flowers. He could never remember which. Was it orchids? Dandelions? Or was she allergic to flour? Maybe he'd grab whatever he could find and take his chances. Or maybe nuts. Timmy's wife did love nuts. Surely she'd understand that it wasn't his intention to nearly die.

Timmy sighed. Maybe he'd just say he loved her and he missed her and swear off saving the world for a while.

And then there were the kids...

A giant slab of polished metal planted itself in front of Timmy, pulverizing what was left of the shattered highway. Timmy skittered to a stop, staring at the block of steel through the rising dust. It appeared to be a gigantic foot, attached to a gigantic leg, attached to an even more gigantic robot. The machine was at least twenty-feet tall and vaguely humanoid in shape, with two monstrous hydraulic thighs, colossal spring-loaded forearms, clamps for hands, a metric crapload of rockets mounted to the shoulders, and a large, clear dome for a head. A dome that had a two-hundred-year-old man laughing maniacally inside of it.

"God damn it."



Timmy followed the robot down the highway. Despite the terrifying hardware and the crazy old man, the squirrel needed to know for sure that this thing's intentions were evil. Timmy was, admittedly, not the best at reading human emotions and had been overzealous before. There was an entire troop of Girl Scouts that would never forgive him for what he had done.

The super-squirrel had been trailing the mechanical man for the better part of an hour when they came upon a small town, nestled at the base of an even smaller hill. Immediately, the robot jumped down the road's embankment. The machine crashed through a building, exposed a flamethrower from its arm, set a group of tents and fleeing people on fire, and then made its way across the town toward the bank, violently squashing everything it could find along the way.

This was definitely the bad kind of robot.

Timmy bounded after the mechanical man, jumping from hill to screaming pedestrian to car roof.

"Hey, asshole!" he thought, as loudly as he could.

The old man in the dome didn't show any signs of hearing the squirrel. Instead, the robot punched a hole into the side of the bank.

"I'm talking to you, old man!"

Still nothing. Timmy tried to read the man's thoughts, but couldn't find them. The dome appeared to shield the old man from Timmy's mental powers.

Timmy raised a furry eyebrow. This was new.

Still, Timmy was more than a one-trick pony. He was more than several well-trained ponies, actually, as ponies were kind of useless in high-stress situations, always whinnying and pooping instead of helping. The super-squirrel lifted a car with his mind and threw it at the robot.

The car collided with a mechanical arm before falling to the street. The dome spun, the old man looking from side to side, trying to identify his assailant but finding only panicking townsfolk.

"OK," he said through a loudspeaker in the robot's chest, "who did that?"

Timmy hurled another car into the old man's mechanical suit. The automobile clanged against the robot, the windshield shattering. The dome continued to spin.

"Right. Got that. But where are you?"

Clang. Shatter. Spin.

"In all seriousness now," continued the old man, "who is doing that? I cannot see you. Are you a ghost? Edison? Is that you?"

Timmy sighed. Then he tossed the car he was standing on into the robot's chest, jumping off and onto the dome as the automobile smashed against the mechanical torso.

"What's this now? A squirrel? Who the dickens is throwing squirrels at me?"

Timmy sighed again. Then he tapped on the glass with one of his tiny claws. He pointed at himself, then at the old man, and then brought his claw across his neck in a slicing gesture.

"I am not following."

Timmy raised his middle claw to the old man.

"Oh, OK," said the man. "I believe I understand now. You. You are the one throwing cars at me."

Timmy nodded.

"How?"

Timmy pointed to his head. Then he pointed to one of the robot's shoulder-mounted arsenals. Then he crushed it with his brain.

"Ah, I see," said the old man. "Psychokinesis." He shook his head inside the dome. "That will not do at all."

The robot crackled with purple electricity. Timmy's fur stood on end.

"This isn't good," thought the squirrel.

There was a sound, like a dull electronic *plunk*, and then a sphere of black energy exploded from the robot. Timmy was sent flying. Car radios and hot plates and any other electronics unfortunate enough to find themselves in its wake exploded as the sphere crossed over them. Lightning began to leap from the marauding mechanical man. From inside his dome the senior citizen laughed.

Timmy landed awkwardly against a fire hydrant, dazed but physically unharmed. Mostly he was angry. The squirrel grabbed a car with his mind... only nothing happened. He tried again. Still nothing. He tried to pick up a small chunk of debris lying in the street. It didn't do anything except continue to lie in the street.

"Well, shit," thought Timmy.

The robot stomped away from the bank, slowly approaching the

squirrel, lightning sparking every which way and rockets aimed squarely at Timmy. The super-squirrel ducked behind the fire hydrant.

"Not so bold, are we now?" boomed the loudspeaker. "Given the dearth of automobiles being launched in my direction, I can only surmise that the electromagnetic pulse had the intended effects on your tertiary motor cortex."

Timmy furrowed his brow. He leaned out from behind the hydrant, shaking his tiny head and shrugging at the old man.

"You have lost your powers, rodent."

The robot fired a rocket toward Timmy. It sailed over the squirrel and exploded fifteen feet behind him.

"I, however," continued the old man, "have all kinds of newfangled artillery loaded into this mechanical exoskeleton of mine."

He fired another rocket. Timmy jumped to the side as the fire hydrant detonated in a burst of steam and metal. The squirrel scurried underneath the nearest car.

The nearest car promptly exploded.

Timmy rolled from the fireball and ducked into the doorway of an abandoned storefront.

"I applaud your speed and agility," said the man in the mechanical suit, bringing his robot closer and smashing an arm into the building, shattering glass and raining down bricks, "but what are you going to do when you use up all of your hiding places, squirrel?"

The squirrel, Timmy decided, was going to run.

CHAPTER THREE

THE NORTH AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES

ACT OF 2026

Thor sauntered into the hotel lobby, his powerful yet poorly defined arms full of wax paper and cold cuts. With his long, scraggly hair, ratty red t-shirt draped over an even rattier grey thermal, and jeans with giant holes for knees, the former God of Thunder looked remarkably like a homeless man who had just looted a deli.

"Here are your damn sandwiches," he announced. "I hope you all choke."

"Which one's mine?" asked Catrina as she approached.

"Armpit," Thor replied, gesturing with a shoulder.

"You're carrying my sandwich in your armpit."

"Technically it's slightly under it," he explained. "They didn't have any bags and you made me get a lot of sandwiches."

"Why my sandwich?" asked his tiny Filipina coworker, freeing her turkey sandwich from Thor's upper arm.

"Luck of the draw?"

"You are so full of crap."

The elevator dinged, the doors slid open, and Queen Victoria XXX – the thirtieth and only surviving clone of the original, long-dead Queen Victoria, albeit taller, darker, and with shinier, wavier hair – stepped into the lobby. She was dressed for an uneventful day at home, in a Kevlar corset; two wide, black pouch-belts crisscrossed over one another; a frayed, grey petticoat over slightly torn leggings; black riding boots; and surprisingly little weaponry.

She began walking toward Thor and Catrina straightaway.

"You better not be keeping my sandwich in your pants again," ordered the reconstituted royal. "I'm never going to fall for that."

"Left elbow," said Thor, flapping slightly.

Catrina huffed loudly, then sank into one of the lobby's armchairs and began eating.

"Where's Charlie?" asked Thor, holding out a chicken parmesan sandwich.

"He was out doing... something," returned Queen Victoria XXX. "I don't know."

"Well, if you see him, tell him he's got until I finish my sandwich to get his," said Thor. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I've apparently got more deliveries to make."

Thor walked past the front desk and into Mark's office. Queen Victoria XXX flopped down into the chair next to Catrina and unwrapped her lunch.

"Huh. He actually got my order right."

"I know, right?" said Catrina. "I think we're finally breaking him."

After the world ended for the twenty-third time, Thor and Chester A. Arthur XVII teamed up to exploit the former Norse god's newly rediscovered, if limited, powers for fame and profit. While this did occasionally entail the violent quelling of some kind of uprising and a nice government paycheck, the endeavor was mostly a lot of getting kittens out of trees, being the entertainment at children's birthday parties, and proving heated theological debates.

The fame and profit likewise failed to live up to the duo's expectations, manifesting almost entirely as infamy and lawsuits. This was in no small part due to the fact that Thor's solution to a cat up a tree was usually to level the tree with lightning. He also really enjoyed punching theologians. And anyone they were arguing with.

There was a brief moment when it appeared that things might be turning around. William H. Taft XLII — old friend of Charlie's and newly crowned mayor-king of Las Vegas — hired Thor as the sole bouncer for the city-state and appointed Chester A. Arthur XVII as the security director for the casino syndicate. They were let go in short order, however, as Charlie wasn't so much looking out for card sharks as he was learning from them. It also didn't help that Thor slept with one of William H. Taft XLII's ex-hooker wives.

The former God of Thunder's notoriety, meanwhile, was spreading through what was left of society faster than lice in a homeless shelter. Other erstwhile immortals were beginning to realize that they too could tell science to go fuck itself and reclaim at least some of their powers. While this should have created a significant increase in the

demand for deity-on-deity fisticuffs, it ended up meaning that Thor and Chester A. Arthur XVII spent most of their time drinking and playing cards in the hotel lobby. It was proving nearly impossible to be a profitable god-for-hire when all your god did was toss around lightning and insults.

Jesus, however, was making an absolute killing.

Eventually, Chester A. Arthur XVII returned his attentions to a variety of other money-making schemes – among them his ongoing zombie rental business and a newly incorporated "no questions asked" courier service – while Thor began to brood and resent humanity on a level unseen since he first began working at the Secaucus Holiday Inn.

Thor exited Mark's office and trudged across the lobby to the elevator, mumbling softly the entire time. By the time the doors closed, he appeared to be having an entire conversation with himself, complete with hand gestures.

"Or maybe we just broke him," said Queen Victoria XXX.

"As long as he keeps getting us sandwiches," responded Catrina, her mouth full of turkey, "I'm counting it as a win."



Thor was sitting on the floor, between the armchairs of Vicky and Catrina, when Chester A. Arthur XVII – the well-built, square-jawed, impressively sideburned, roguishly crooked-nosed clone of the twenty-first president of the United States of America – walked into the hotel lobby, arm-in-arm with a pretty blonde woman wearing sunglasses. They were both covered head-to-toe in mud and what appeared to be various parts of various frogs.

"Yo, Charlie," said Thor, lifting a wrapped chicken parmesan sandwich above his head. "Sandwi–"

"Who the hell is that?" asked Queen Victoria XXX, emphatically setting down her eggplant and mozzarella panini.

"This is Heather," began Chester A. Arthur XVII, guiding the girl toward his friends. "I found her on the other side of the plaza, she was lost in the swamp behind that abandoned supermarket all those English majors live in."

"He saved me from a pack of undead frogs," said Heather, smiling

and squeezing Chester's arm.

"We have zombie frogs now?" asked Thor.

"What is she doing *here*?" asked Queen Victoria XXX, standing suddenly.

"I figured she could stay here," Chester A. Arthur XVII answered with a shrug. "I didn't see why she couldn't grab a shower and spend a couple nights in one of the beds. We've got enough. Have you seen what those English majors have done to the swamp? It's disgus--"

"Whose bed?"

"What?"

"Whose bed? Yours?"

"No. I'm not going to sleep with her."

"What?! Why the hell not?" cried Heather. "Is it because I'm blind? 'Cause if it is and you *don't* sleep with me, it's discrimination."

"I don't think that's how discrimination works."

"I'm pretty sure it is."

Queen Victoria XXX growled slightly.

"Yeah, whatever, lady. You're seriously mad at me for trying to hit this?" posited the vision-impaired girl, sliding her hand down the arm of Chester A. Arthur XVII and then over to and up his thigh. She dropped her voice. "I am going to do so many, many things to this body."

"You are aware that we are all, like, *right here*, right?" asked Catrina, her mouth again full of turkey.

"Like you haven't thought that yourself. I mean, Jesus, have you felt these biceps? Guys like this are in sho--"

Heather didn't finish, however, as Queen Victoria XXX stormed over and punched her in the face. The blind girl dropped to the floor like a sack of wet steaks.

"Vicky?" asked Chester A. Arthur XVII, raising an eyebrow.

"She wasn't good enough," Queen Victoria XXX stated flatly, before tilting her head and looking at the unconscious girl. "I mean, she can't even take a punch. She was bringing the whole team down."

"She was *blind*, Vicky."

"Then I guess my point was already proven," said Queen Victoria XXX with a shrug. "You know our rules, Charlie. I was simply expressing my veto in the form of a right cross."

"I honestly had no intention of sleeping with her."

"You say that now."

"No, I'm serious, Vicky, I –"

"You know, I've been punched by Vicky," said Thor. "That girl might be dead."

Chester A. Arthur XVII tapped her with his foot. The blind woman didn't move.

"That's... that's actually a very real possibility."

"I'll go get Mark," Catrina said with a sigh.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE TINY SHAMPOO SHOULD LAST HIM A MONTH

A squirrel in a cape ran into the lobby of the Secaucus Holiday Inn, his claws clacking against the tiled floor.

"Timmy!" squealed Catrina from behind the front desk.

"Where's Thor?" the squirrel asked telepathically. Then he spotted the unconscious girl in the middle of the floor. "Am I ignoring this? Or do you need help burying her?"

"Mark said she was fine," replied Catrina, with a half-hearted wave of her hand. "Just needs to sleep it off."

"OK, sure," said the squirrel, shrugging his tiny furry shoulders. "Is Thor around? I need his help."

"Thor's help?"

"Yes."

"Seriously?"

"Yes."

"You sure you don't mean Charlie?"

"I'm sure," replied Timmy. "There is a very large and very dangerous robot robbing a bank."

"Charlie could probably handle that."

"Yeah, no. This thing's got rockets and purple lightning and shit."

"Hold on," said Catrina. "It's robbing a bank? Nobody's bothered to rob a bank in years. Physical money's useful in, like, three states. And this isn't one of them."

"If you say so," responded the squirrel. "But that's what it's doing. It's also murdering people."

"Oh, well, yeah, that's a problem," she said, nodding solemnly. "Shouldn't you have been able to just, you know, stop him yourself?"

"He hit me with a wall of electromagnetic energy or something, I didn't really understand what he was saying. It reversed whatever the scientists did to me and took away my telekinesis."

"But you can still talk with your brain?"

"Yes."

"How does that work?"

"I don't know, Catrina."

"How did you even find us?"

"I got a whiff of your thoughts while I was fleeing from the killer robot. I can't seem to find Thor, though. He is here, right? Maybe being a god messes with his brain waves."

"Yeah, I don't think that's it," replied the hotel clerk. "When did you come back down from space? We figured you were dead."

"Where's Thor, Catrina?"

Catrina glowered at the squirrel. "It was nice seeing you again, too," she pouted, picking up the phone.



"And it's robbing a bank?" asked Thor, kneeling beside the cape-wearing squirrel.

"Yes," replied Timmy.

"Couldn't you have just, you know, stopped him yourself?"

"No, damn it. The crazy-ass black electricity took away my telekinesis."

"But you can still talk to us?"

"You people are dense."

"Where's the old man in the robot, Timmy?" asked Chester A. Arthur XVII, showered, wearing a freshly-ironed bullet-proof vest, and likewise kneeling next to the cape-wearing squirrel.

"About an hour west of here. But I've got very tiny legs and I wasn't entirely sure where I was going. It might not be that far."

"All right. I doubt it'll be too hard to find a giant rampaging mechanical man."

"Unless the Ultimate Robot Kickboxing League is holding another tournament at the stadium," added Catrina, also kneeling near the cape-wearing squirrel.

"Oh, right," said Chester A. Arthur XVII. "Are they?"

"Not for another couple months," said Thor. "I already got us tickets."

"What do I owe you?"

"Two hundred. You can add it to what you still owe me for that thing."

"Oh, right, when we..."

"Yeah, and then the walrus..."

"That was one difficult buffet."

"Verily."

"Guys," scolded the super-squirrel.

"Right, right, killer robot. We're on it," said Thor.

"We should probably get Vicky," said Chester A. Arthur XVII, standing and pulling his mobile phone from the pocket of his jeans. "She gets mad if there's an opportunity to use violence in a productive way and she's not invited."

Chester A. Arthur XVII and Thor began walking toward the hotel doors. Timmy scurried up onto the arm of the unconscious girl still sprawled sideways on the lobby floor.

"Have fun," said Timmy, waving a tiny paw. "Try not to die."

"You're not coming?" asked Thor.

"Fuck no," said Timmy. "Last time I helped you guys I was hurled into *outer space*. Took me over a year to figure out how to get back and then, almost immediately, I was electrocuted by a crazy old man in a robot and lost my powers.

"I'm tired, I'm cranky, and, quite frankly, I'm no good in a fight anymore. I've got a family I've got to find and apologize to, and, I mean, I'm almost four. I'm getting too old for this shit. So, no. I'm not going with you. The only place I'm going is upstairs to take a nap."

"But, the cape..." began Catrina.

"It's time to hang it up."

"Will – Will we ever see you again?" she sniffled.

"Well, yeah," said the squirrel. "I'm going upstairs. To take a nap. And then I'll probably use your internet, maybe get something to eat..."

"Oh, right, yeah," said Catrina, running her hand under her nose.

"Let me get you a room."