

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

Chapter 2

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

The trio of triggermen exhibited flawless coordination as they pranced and darted about like a unit very accustomed to working together. They fired their weapons in a wide spraying formation, but Fixit's body blocked most of the shots from striking Bud Tomaccino. Bud darted into the elevator behind Fixit. As the doors closed, Fixit lunged toward the gunman nearest to him. The well-trained soldier tucked his weapon under his right arm and sprang off his feet. He leap-frogged right over Joe's charging form and landed, catlike, on his feet while Fixit lunged into the wall, severely damaging it. The men repositioned themselves behind Fixit and opened fire again. As Fixit turned toward them, the shooters each focused their attack upon his face.

Fixit roared like an enraged grizzly as the concentrated assault of automatic firepower tore relentlessly into his face. Ninety-nine percent of Joe's body was practically bulletproof, but his eyes were not. He rarely had to worry about eye injuries, except when tangling with clawed foes like the Wendigo, and the psycho-midget from the X-Men who thought he was so tough. But as the gunfire ripped through his eyes, blinding him, aching bolts shot through his head as he staggered back and wailed again. His roar shattered the remaining windows.

Joe Fixit lashed out with a familiar tactic: He brought both of his massive fists to the floor, causing just enough of a shockwave to knock all three gunmen off their feet. The interior of the lobby was damaged but still intact. The structure wasn't crumbling around them. Joe's eyesight was repairing itself, but so far, all he could make out was brilliance and shadow, nothing more. He moved quickly to catch the shooters while they were still off-balance. He covered the length of the lobby with both arms outspread, gathering the men the way one might snatch up discarded clothing. Fixit rushed outside, where his eyesight had fine-tuned the brilliance into blurred shapes. The men he held were squirming to get loose.

“This town is all about high stakes, ya bums! Let me show you how high!”

Having growled the pun through gritted teeth, Fixit exerted maximum force, and the most powerful arms on the planet flung the three gunmen straight up into the air, the screaming voices growing faint the higher they flew. As Fixit’s blurred sight continued to fine-tune itself, Tomaccino joined him outside, in front of the gaming club. Some bystanders stood around gaping while others fled without hesitation. Sirens could be heard in the distance, and each second brought them closer. Tomaccino watched Joe’s face, the blood from his eye wounds streaming down his jaws and thickening as the sun dried it. And the eyes themselves were reforming, growing back.

“Joe, we need to get gone from here! What are you waiting on?” asked Tomaccino.

Joe replied matter-of-factly, “Pennies from heaven.”

The first of the gunmen dropped from the sky, crashing into the roof of a parked car, shattering a couple of its windows. A second gunman’s body struck a traffic signal first, shattering all three traffic lights before hitting the ground, and the third landed in the middle of the street, his body unmoving and miserably contorted.

“My God, Joe! Are they dead?” asked Tomaccino.

“Wishful thinking, Bud, but they probably ain’t. Just hurt bad.”

“Joe!” shouted Ron Westmont, who’d just made it outside. “What the hell did you do to my lobby, Joe?”

“Go up and get my winnings from the girls, Ron. That should cover it. If it don’t, you know you’ll see me again. I’ll do you a solid.”

Joe’s clothing was shredded, but he allowed the tatters to continue covering him as best they could. He didn’t need anyone recognizing his physique as that of the Incredible Hulk.

“You’re right Bud, we need to ghost,” Joe grunted.

“I--know a place,” Tomaccino replied nervously.

Fixit snatched his friend off the ground just as two police cars rounded the corner with their blaring sirens. “They got girls at this place?” he asked.

“Whaa? I uhh, I doubt there’d be anything of your caliber, Joe. This is more of a dive I’m talking about, the kinda place losers go after they crap out, y’know?”

“Hmph, it’s just as well. You point left or right, I’ll do the running because you owe me some answers, Bud.”

With that, Joe’s titanic legs carried him from the scene in an unstoppable sprint that would remain solid and steady even through an earthquake.

TO BE CONTINUED...