

## Mental Man

I am Mental Man. I have acquired powers beyond the ken of mortal men. I can read thought balloons, the primary means of comic strip communication.

It happened this way. One day when I was a very young man, I happened to accidentally stumble upon a deserted spur of the Eighth Avenue Subway line in New York. I remember being distracted by the particularly well constructed anterior anatomy of a young lady and probably made a wrong turn. But there I was, dust, rubble, musty smell. I was lost. After walking for some time, I came into a large chamber where, to my amazement, sat a very old man with a beard almost waist long sitting on a large, throne-like chair. I introduced myself politely and asked him how to get back to my original destination.

“I am Mazahs, my son. My name is descendent from the ancient times of Moses,” he intoned. “I have chosen you to have a special gift, a power to fight evildoers and foil wicked plottings of the underworld.”

“Right,” I thought, “and camels can solve partial differential equations in their heads.”

“No, camels, while being adept geometers, are not very good at mathematics, and perhaps you already have a super power” he informed me, evidently reading my mind. “Maybe you should call yourself ‘Sarcasm Man.’ “

“Sorry,” I apologized. “I didn’t know you could read my mind. I seem to come by it naturally.”

“Then save it for evildoers. Now listen to me carefully. From now on, when you say my name aloud, you will be able to read the thought balloons of every living creature.”

“I will be able to do WHAT?” I blurted, barely avoiding a huge belly laugh. But I did what he said and yelled, “Mazahs” .....BLAM!!!.....There was a blinding light and a thunderclap. When I picked myself up from the floor, I said, “Holy s\*\*t!! What the hell was that?”

Then, looking at Mazahs, I saw a fuzzy white balloon above him with writing and little bubbles pointing down towards his head. It said, “Oh ye of little faith.”

Aloud, I said, "Gee, what an original comment, Mazahs." The blast of ear splitting noise with lightening happened again when I said his name...and I could no longer see his thoughts.

"It was meant to be humorous, Sarcasm Man. And accidentally saying my name is inadvisable," he intoned portentously. "Every time you say it the metamorphosis will occur, accompanied by the meteorological phenomena you....and every other creature within thunder distance....will notice."

I was thunderstruck, so to speak. I now had a power I could use to foil the nefarious plans of malevolent perpetrators of iniquity. "Repeat my name again," he said. I did so to the ensuing, deafening thunderclap. I could see his thoughts again. "Holy Moley," I thought. "This is great."

Pointing to the ceiling, his thought balloon said, "Look at the cockroach you frightened half to death."

I did. The poor little thing was hanging from the ceiling holding its diminutive ears with its front legs. The tiny thought balloon read, "Holy s\*\*t!! What the hell was that?"

Mazahs said I must never misuse my great power for foolish things, like trying to find out what my girlfriend really thought of me. "Just as Superduperman never uses his x-ray vision for disreputable purposes," he explained.

"Like what?" I asked.

"Well, for example, adjusting his x-ray vision to see just beneath female clothing," he said.

"Suffering catfish," I thought. "I didn't know he could do that. How cool would that be?"

When our discussion was finished, and I had transformed myself back to my normal persona, I asked Mazahs how to get back to the Eighth Avenue line. He put his hand on my head and told me to close my eyes, click the heels of my Nike's.... and there I was, suddenly back on the platform. I looked at the crowd and wondered if I had been dreaming. So I shouted, "Mazahs". A huge thunder and a lightning bolt happened simultaneously, and around two hundred people flattened themselves on the cement platform in alarm. I could

see two hundred thought balloons. They all said the same thing in big, bold letters. “Holy s\*\*t!!!! What the hell was that?”

I finally understood I must be careful about my new found power, perhaps say the word only in a soundproof phone booth or something.

Walking through the Village to my apartment I spotted a neighbor’s dog, tail wagging at about forty RPMs. Sure enough, he had a thought balloon. It read, “FOOD!” A cat on the first branch of a small tree looked at me. It’s thought balloon said, “Whatever.”

So when I was sure I wasn’t being seen, standing in the foyer of my apartment building, I changed back to my normal self. The damn noise and lightening was beginning to get on my nerves. Every door in the apartment building opened up. My neighbors all yelled the same thing the roach and subway folks had said.

Sitting down in my front room contemplating the day’s happenings I realized I must take Mazahs’ admonition seriously. But how in the world could I use my great power for championing good and fighting evil? My dog, Fred, was hanging around, tail going and going. I couldn’t read his thoughts in my present guise, but I suspected it was “Food.” I patted his head and gave him a treat. His tail wagging acceleration confirmed my guess. Then the phone rang.

“Hi,” the voice said. “I’m Captain Marbles.”

“You’re who?” I asked, dumbfounded.

“Captain Marbles....the super hero.... and one of the Justice League. You know... with Superduper Man, Woman Wonder, Chiroptera Man, The Flush, Arachnid Man, Cat Babe...the whole super crew”

“Wait a minute,” I interrupted him. “You are THE Captain Marbles? The Big Red Cheese?”

“The one and only,” he answered. “But only my nemesis, the evil genius Savannah can call me that name. It’s ‘Marbles’ to you. I heard from the old man you now have super powers, so you are a candidate for membership in the Justice League. Come on over to our clubhouse and we can talk.”

After he gave me directions I said I'd be there in a half hour. Better get into my super hero mode before I go, I decided, as the thunder and lightning resounded in my apartment. The man who owned the apartment below started pounding on his ceiling with a broomstick in protest while Fred jumped thirty feet in the air, holding his ears with his front paws, howling his displeasure. I knew what his thought balloon said without even looking. "Sorry, Fred," as I went out my apartment door.

So back to the subway. Forty minutes later I walked into the Castle, a pool bar in the Village where they apparently have their planning sessions. There they all were in their costumes, hands on hips super hero style. Of course I could read all their thought balloons.

Captain Marbles came over and shook my hand. "So, did you fly over here?" he asked.

"No. I can't fly," I said.

Cat Babe asked, "Did you bound from building to building?"

"No," I said. "I'm afraid of heights."

The Flush asked me, "So you ran over here at super speed?"

"No. I can't run worth beans," I said.

Arachnid Man looked at me. "So you swung over here on some super strength web stuff?" he asked.

"No. I took the subway," I said.

The guy in the bat costume, Chiroptera Man, asked, "Well what kind of super power do you have, for God's sake,"

"I can read thought balloons of real people and animals, like in the comics," I answered truthfully.

"You can do WHAT?" Marbles asked, disbelief in his great masculine baritone voice.

When the entire group finally got their breath after ten minutes of rolling on the floor with laughter, Arachnid Man said, “Go ahead. Tell us again what your super power is.” I did and there was ten more minutes of super hero guffaws, whacking of sides. Woman Wonder was doubled up. Nice cleavage, I thought. Tears were running down Superduper Man’s cheeks.

“I can read thought balloons,” I repeated. “For instance, Flush is thinking, ‘I’d like to jump Woman Wonder’s bones.’ Flush turned away from the Amazon’s hooters, face red. “Cat Babe is thinking, ‘Whatever.’ And Superduperman is thinking, ‘what a bunch of maroons.’ I think he stole that from Bugs Bunny.” I finished solemnly. I noticed that Superduper Man had stopped laughing.

“Ok,” Captain Marbles finally gasped. “It’s a superhero thing alright, but I can’t figure how the hell you would use it to fight evildoers. Where’s your costume.”

“Costume?” I asked.

“Sure. Every super hero has to have a costume,” Marbles intoned majestically. “Didn’t the old man tell you that? I get mine automatically when I say the word. You probably do too.”

Superduper Man suggested, “Look under your clothes. Maybe the old guy provided one when he gave you your super power.”

Now I was really worried. What if my costume was a pink pajama thing with fuzzy bunny slippers and a picture of a giant brain on my chest? Apprehensively I slowly undid the buttons on my shirt. Nothing there. Relieved, I took off my Mets hat.

A huge amount of grey hair sprung out, my eyebrows turned bushy and a walrus mustache appeared. All the Justice Leaguers gasped. Cat Babe pointed at my head. “You look just like Albert Einstein,” she meowed, and cracked her sexy whip.

“Holy moley. The old man really outdid himself this time,” Captain Marbles said.

Arachnid Man, now suspended from the ceiling, his spider senses tingling, I presumed, turned to The Flush and said, “Nobody would mess with a genius.

I'll bet he's even smarter than Savannah," he said to Marbles. "Do you know stuff about relativity? And what are you going to call yourself?"

I went over to the mirror above the bar and looked at myself. The genius looked back at me. "Holy moley," I shouted.

"I flunked physics in high school. And I can't fly or go through walls. All I can do is read thought balloons. By the way, Arachnid Man...you shouldn't be afraid of Chiroptera Man like it says in your thought balloon. He's not a real bat, so he won't eat you. Besides, you aren't a real spider." .

Arachnid Man glared at me. Chiroptera Man collapsed in laughter.

"And I'm called, 'Mental Man.' I can find out the nefarious plots of evildoers before they even start to carry them out. No, Marbles, never fear. I can't put you guys with all the muscles and weird paraphernalia out of business. Sometimes walls need to be busted down and don't worry, Superduper Man. Girls won't have to wear lead bras."

Superduper Man's face turned red. Maybe Mazahs was wrong about him. Then there appeared a huge collective thought balloon, 35 point font size in bold, from the entire group. It said, "This guy is a real pain in the ass."

I smiled a smug, know-it-all Einstein smile as I put my hands on my hips, superhero style. "At last they take me seriously," I thought. "And the best part is...they can't read **my** thoughts."

Then I turned my head towards the beautiful Woman Wonder with her hot, skimpy costume and smiled. Now that I was a full fledged super hero, I began to wonder if jumping her bones myself might be possible.

Her thought balloon appeared as she smiled back at me.. It said, "Holy Aphrodite!...I wonder what a roll in the hay with Einstein would be like?," and smiled back at me.

"Who needs muscles?," my thought balloon probably said.