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I fight crime in my sleep

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When you fight crime you're never really asleep and you can never fully awaken

Mary Green and Ronald S. Green

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Man sent to Arkham after Two Face-like Altercation over Buddhism

GOTHAM CITY, IL/NY. Police escorted a self-proclaimed “crime fighter” to Arkham Asylum yesterday after responding to a domestic disturbance call. Upon arrival at the scene they discovered only one man in a superhero costume rolling down stairs and whipping himself with a broken car antenna. Officer James Gordon told reporters that the man was ranting about whether Buddhism favored Superman or Batman. Gordon said, “As we led him away he kept asking frantically ‘Which of the two is closer to awakening; what superpower is best for becoming enlightened; who is more able to see reality like the Buddha; what is the karmic connection and interconnectivity of Superman, Batman, and the criminals they fight?’” Upon admission to the asylum, the man was entrusted to the care of a resident psychiatrist who also understands Buddhism.

“With a Batarang Between Your Teeth, You Speak Only in Vowels. Its tip jabs at the back of your tongue as the serrated point of its wing presses into your palate. There are one hundred varieties of batarangs, the sonic batarang, the siren, the smoke emitting, the exploding, and the magnetic batarang made to disarm a criminal. I know this because he knows this. Superman knows this because Batman knows this and vice versa. Be glad this one wasn’t Batarang X.

People say you always hurt the one you love. Well, it works both ways. But it hadn’t always been like this between us. For the longest time we had been super friends and the things

we did together helped me sleep. Before that I was lost to night terrors about the orphaned children of murdered parents. This had made me as cold as the Joker's laugh.

If you asked me now, I couldn't tell you why I called him or even how. It seems to me now that I just called out and he was there. Maybe he was waiting for that and shortly after arriving he said, 'I want you to do something for me. I want you to hit me as hard as you can.' I said, 'You just want me to hit you?' and he replied 'C'mon, do me this one favor.' When I hesitated at this absurd suggestion, he continued, 'I don't want to die without any scars.'

Let me tell you about my extraordinary associate. He took a job as a book editor at a prominent company under the alias of Nicolas Michaud so he could remove lewd and lascivious scenarios from manuscripts. He also works as a waiter, whipping out his thermometer and plopping it into soup bowls before serving, cooling it with his breath to make sure no citizen gets burnt."

[The doctor interrupts this narration.]

"It sounds to me like your call was actually a cry for help, an attempt to escape from the fears that have always plagued humanity, those surrounding old age, sickness, and death. Even the Buddha said this around the sixth century BCE. Your friend's behavior amounts to attempts at imposing order on the world. That might make you feel better for a moment, but it won't last, as the Buddha said, because all things are impermanent and constantly changing. He called this one of the three marks of existence and said we have to come to grips with this if we're ever going to be happy."

"Maybe so, but quite to the contrary of trying to arrange orderliness like my friend, I was working at LexCorp and let me tell you, that wasn't helping me sleep either. But my friend brought me to something that changed all of that.

If you punch someone as hard as you can in the skull you'll probably get a boxer's fracture and be turned in to the authorities by the x-raying doctor. I don't punch as hard as I can. It could kill someone. Still, I let go with a pretty good one and my friend took it better than I'd seen any man do before and then returned one that was at least equal to my own. Catching me by surprise, I almost tripped over my own feet. Slowly, we traded blows like this until we began to attract onlookers. One, a brawny blond man who smelled like fish, asked, 'Can I be next?'. Without hesitation my friend answered, 'Lose the trident.'

He secretly rented the Hall of Justice with my credit card.

I don't know how he found that house but it looked like it was waiting to be torn down. Most of the windows were boarded up and none of the locks worked. 'What are you reading?' he asked.

'Listen to this, there's a whole set of the Mad Monk series create by Bob Kane. The Mad Monk, wearing a red hood, is a vampire. He feeds blood to his assistant, Dala. She in turn lures other women to his lyre.'

'What is that, *Dracula and Philosophy*?'

'I am Bob Kane's bizarre creation...'

'...as penned by others.'

Once a week we would meet with the other aspiring heroes we were attracting to trade blows. Six days a week we were plagued by our own silent fears of old age, sickness, and death. But on that one day a week, we were titans. At our gatherings he started by giving talks about what we were all after, talking about 'truth, justice, and the American way.' Later he asked me, 'If you could fight any philosopher, who would it be?'

‘Descartes,’ I said, ‘for cutting cats in front of students to demonstrate they have no souls. You?’

‘I’d fight Buddha.’”

[The doctor interrupts the narration again.]

“Okay, fair enough if you want to make fun of my previous suggestion. But since you brought it up along with justice and the American way, Buddhism defines truth, the provisional and the ultimate. The provisional truth has the three marks of existence as I mentioned, impermanence or *anicca* is one of them. The others are no self or *anatta* and perpetual dissatisfaction or *dukkha*. The ultimate truth is *nirvāṇa*. I’ve already describe how your buddy can’t deal with the truth of impermanence.

Now let me suggest that he also fails to understand that the individualism he conceives among the fighters is a construction, a “self” narrated by the brain and imposed on experience in terms of likes and dislikes, that is, desires for the world to be different. This is what perpetuates the third of these marks, dissatisfaction. As long as you and your friends engage the world with an ‘us and them’ attitude of conflict, you will always perpetuate dissatisfaction. The Buddha said that hostility is never appeased by hostility but only by the absence of hostility is it appeased. Buddhism holds non-hurting, *ahimsa*, as one of its highest qualities. Resist not evil. This is an essential part of the path to awakening and awakening others. Buddhism defines justice as karma. In order to awakening to the truth of the world, one must understand karma and take responsibility for action. Karma is at work in *anicca*, *anatta*, and *dukkha*. When dualistic illusions about reality are overcome, there can be no ‘verses’ in the scenario.”

“You have more Zen tricks than a Palahniuk novel, doctor. Soon the others wanted to move into the dilapidated house with us so that they could continue their once-a-week

experience...perpetually, as you say. But he wanted to test them first, to make sure they were serious and worthy. To do this, when one came to our front door, he'd make them stand outside for days, occasionally shouting something at them like...

‘Your Ring is too Gaudy! Get your Lantern off my Porch!’

‘Bad news friend. It’s not gonna happen. Your wings are too big!’ or ‘Do you think this is a game? You’re too green, Manhunter! I’m going inside to get some fire!’ Finally, after three days of putting up with this, he walked up to the emerald knight and said, ‘Do you have two skintight computer generated imagery suits?’

‘Projected only by my ring, sir!’

‘Two green masks with no visible means of support?’

‘Supported by my headstrong personality, sir!’

‘Are you Parallax free?’ Silence.

Then, ‘That hurt, sir!’

‘Go inside.’

Inside he began to hand out homework assignments in sealed envelopes and started referring to the house as The Hall of Justice. He called the team he had assembled Project Justice. He sent Arthur Curry on assignment to protect the seven seas, Hal Jordon to patrol the American western coastline with Ferris Air, and we were to take the ground in our city. Each of us was to be vigilant in our watch for crime and break it up should we witness one. Some were sent to spawn branches of Project Justice like franchises not only in Metropolis and Gotham, but in Coast City, Central City, Midway City and even to the far reaches of Leesburg, South Carolina.

But I also heard that LexCorp was setting up Project Injustice at every one of these turns and more.

Living in our neighborhood, it wasn't long before the two of us stumbled upon what our assignment called for, an armed robbery in progress at the local convenient store. We didn't even break stride but walked in saying, 'Put that gun down' and 'It's all over now.'

He swung the gun around at us and laughed, saying, 'What are you cosplay geeks doing here, take a wrong turn to Comic-Con?'

'You need to call a doctor about that ulcer. I can see it throbbing and about to burst from here. Hmmm, let's see what else we have here...David Hume. 1739 Empirical Ave.'

'Whha? How'd you know all that? Do I know you?'

'I can see it in your wallet.'

'Since you know who I am, you must also know I don't back down from an argument that easy.'

'You're not going to win this one David. Put that gun down. Now there's no need for the police either. This is all just a huge misunderstanding we can figure out according to natural law. Let's give you a little guidance, using gravity.' The would-be robber was dragged by the arm from the store, his gun crushed underfoot, destroying a piece of sidewalk public property in the process. Then, with David Hume over one shoulder, we flew up the fire escape ladder to the top of the building across the street and stood on the ledge holding him there. 'So, David, I doubt you wanted to grow up to be a small time convenience store robber. What *did* you want to be?'

'Ahh, ahh, let me down!'

'I don't think you want me to do that. It's what, four stories down?'

'Answer him David!'

‘Let me down! Your idea of law and order isn’t grounded on what is, but on what you think it ought to be.’

‘Who are the people in those pictures in your wallet, your mom and dad? I hope they won’t have to call up kindly doctor so-and-so to dig up your dental records, because there won’t be much left of your face if I have to drop you down there. Then the details of my idea of law and order aren’t going to matter so much to you.’

‘Hey! Hold up. This wasn’t a part of our plan. Answer him David!’

‘A, a philosopher.’

‘Ahhh, hence the college ID and the attitude.’

David looked over the side of the building, then said, ‘Just going along with accepted values is legal positivism!’

‘Going along with accepted values is exactly what makes you the pale criminal you are, as Nietzsche said to your fellow philosophers. This separates you from the super criminals we usually deal with; you have a sense of guilt. That’s why I’m giving an option I don’t give them. If you’re not back in school studying philosophy in six months from now, I’m going to revisit this ledge with you and your sophist smarts.’

‘Okay, okay. I was planning to go back anyway, but I owe so much in student loans as it is...and bankruptcy won’t help, you know! Hey, since it’s illegal to torture prisoners, aren’t you being a little Machiavellian yourself?’

‘You don’t want to stick around to find out the extent of it. Now, get out of here before the police arrive. Run David, run!’

As David ran off I said, ‘Come on! What are we doing here? I know we want to stop crime but I never knew what a jerk you could be.’

‘Then you haven’t been keeping up with the New 52. Listen, all this is just Smallville. What I’m really after is the big global extorters and murders. I’m just assembling the crew now, and training you. Soon we’ll be ready to bring down the largest evil in the world, LexCorp.’”
[The doctor interrupts.]

“Sooo, I’m going to entertain for a few moments that you actually believe as least some of these Action Comics stories you’re telling and try to help you through them. But I really have my work cut out for me. Let me start with these superpowers you’re so fixated on.

Buddhism has what’s called the Wheel of Life. It’s a drawing illustrating six types of existence. Among these we find one called the “realm of the titans.”

“That’s appropriate.”

“I thought so. Those in the realm of the titans are not human, but possess superhuman powers. Unfortunately, these demi-gods are constantly fighting. They can’t seem to help themselves; it’s their nature to kill and be killed in wars. Some say there are six types of humanoid existences in the universe and others interpret the six as psychological states. According to any of the interpretations, the Buddha specified that it is far better to be human. Only as humans are we capable of reaching the ultimate, which is Buddhahood. Thus, in this view, Batman has an advantage over Superman because Superman is far more distracted by and is a slave to his own superpowers. For example, his “super-intellect” is self-defeating. According to the Buddha’s Four Noble Truths, intellect is causing us perpetual dissatisfaction, *dukkha*, because it’s through the intellect that we impose a self-identity and judgments on the world instead of just experiencing life.

In addition to self-identity being manufactured and imposed on experiences, the superheroes you seem to idolize have manufactured a second secret identity, twice removing

themselves from the reality of pure experience. But this truth about their identities, that they are manufactured, is even secret from themselves. So, even though Superman seems to be able to experience various realms of space and various time periods, past, present and future, his understanding of ultimate reality is thereby reduced because all of these experiences are in the context of false perception, taking the illusion created in his mind as reality. I might even go as far as saying that because Superman has a self-defeating super-intellect, Bizzaro may even be more capable of enlightenment than either Superman or Batman, like a Zen lunatic of sorts.”

“Oh yeah? What about the power to fly?”

“Buddha told his followers that if they happened to develop the ability to levitate through meditation, they should ignore it because it would only distract them from achieving the real goal.”

“Well, what about heat vision?”

“External heat vision is not as good as internal ascetic heat, called *tapas*.”

“What about x-ray vision?”

“X-ray vision is not as good as the Buddha-eye. The Buddha is able to see what people truly need and prescribe “medicines” according to their capacities. Superman and Batman are only able to beat people. But I’m intrigued. How has this story of yours played out so far?”

“Did I ever tell you about the time he burnt this kiss-shaped scar on the back of my hand with his heat vision and then cooled it with his Ice Breath Those cold lips felt as good as his hot eyes had felt bad.

My God! I haven't been kissed like that since Robin.

That aside, by the time I had figured out what he was ultimately up to and our real interconnection became clear to me, it was too late. He had already taken the Phantom Zone projector to the Fortress of Solitude, rewired it not as an arrow this time, but with an explosive charge that could propel an entire floor of a building into oblivion. He planted this charge over the ceiling tiles in one of the bathrooms of LexCorp's corporate office. Once I figured it out, I pleaded with him to stop. 'Listen Blue, I'm truly grateful for everything that you've done for me, but this is way, way too far. I'm begging you, I don't want this. Please, you can't even send one person to the Phantom Zone, much less every senior employee of the LexCorp and anyone else who happens to be in the area. It's not ethical!'

'Not ethical?! You wanna lecture me on ethics now? Setting aside the fact that you're in no position to do so, Masked Manhunter, you have to admit that these people are horrible global terrorists and their minion is Project Injustice.'

'You're not judge, jury, and executioner! Let the legal system sort them out.'

'I know what I'm doing. Haven't I brought us this far with super-intellect? No one dies; we're sticking to our vow.'

'It's worse than death! They'll become disembodied spirits. They don't age, they can't touch anyone, they can only watch and communicate telepathically. It is a living hell and you don't have the right to do that to any being, not even the vilest murderer.'

'What do you want?! Do you want to go back to insomnia, to reading Marvel to help you doze off? Forget it. I won't do it. So shut up. 60 seconds. Can you see alright, Caped Crusader?'

'Just wait! I can figure this out. This isn't even real, just like Buddha says. You're not real. You're like my extreme superego unleashed. No one can fly around the world and spin it backwards to reverse time. Time isn't even like that. I'm just taking my own ambition to stop the

crimes that killed my parents and supercharging them. You hear like I want to hear, you see like I want to see, you're fast like I want to be fast...'

'How do you know I'm not just projecting my desire to fit in as a human as the *you* that I'm creating in *my* mind. Maybe *you're* the one who's not real. If you're really convinced that I'm not real, then what are you so afraid of? But, if I *am* real, well, I'd like to see the world's greatest detective try to stop the Man of Steel. 45 seconds. What's that? A batarang? I wouldn't care if you affixed a nuclear warhead to it. Which of the one hundred is it?'

'It's none of them. You don't know it because I didn't know it. I know that you know at least everything I do. But this one I wouldn't even acknowledge to myself. I kept it out of my head with mindfulness meditation just in case you *were* a figment of my imagination, concentrating only on my breaths, I'm breathing in...I'm breathing out.' [He opens one eye after giving this meditation demonstration and said to the doctor] Okay, just hear me out.

'Whichever batarang it is, don't make me stick it...'

Before he could finish his sentence, I stepped forward and saw Kal-El's right leg quiver slightly. It was working and that was my cue to clock him fully in the square of his jaw with the same fist I held the batarang. He fell back on one knee and was quickly back up, but humanly quick this time. He swung, I parried; he kicked, I deflected. Maybe on the sun or moon I'd be finished. But we both knew what was going to happen given equal footing in my city. My fists and elbows went around every swing and block he tried until I straddled him and forced it into his mouth panting, 'Say hello to the Kryptonite batarang. It's number 101 and is soon to become number 1002 of the *1001 Ideas That Changed the Way We Think*.'

I think this is about where we came in. He asked in a muffled voice, 'Where did you go, psycho boy?'

I answered, 'I wanted to destroy something beautiful, our relationship.'

'H-ow...?'

'I have always kept a vile of Kryptonite for just this occasion. Knowing it would inevitably arrive, I just planted it in a batarang.'

'Ahmfff.'

'I didn't catch that, Man of Tomorrow. Would you like to say a few words to mark the occasion?' I withdrew the batarang and saw a tiny stream of alien blood trickle from its tip as I helped him to his feet with my left hand. For all of his obsession and dictatorial insinuations, I still could not help but love my longtime fellow legionnaire. But as Gandhi said, there is no people on earth who would not prefer their own bad government to the good government of an alien power.

As he stood swaying still under the influence of the Kryptonite and my fists, he smiled and managed in a hoarse whisper, 'One second,' collapsing into me fully. Suddenly there was a silent blast like at ground zero of the apocalypse. A ghastly flash of light spread from the center with a color I'd never witnessed, somehow sucking away all the oxygen in its wake. The last thing I saw out the window before losing consciousness was the top floor of the Daily Planet turning into an outline of itself, then dissolving completely, taking with it in the radiance the Metropolis Marvel, who had fallen over my body like an invulnerable shield.'"

[The doctor was silent for a moment with the blunt tip of her pen touching her lips, as if still taking in the fantastic details of the story. Then she said the following.]

"Well, I *was* hesitant to bring this up, but you said it all for me. Like Superman, because Batman's mind is always engaged in conflict, he is barely capable of awakening and never will as long as he keeps up that lifestyle. But it's more, much more than that. Batman's

mind is actually damaged. In short, as you say, he's a psycho boy. The combination of the two, the psychosis and the violence, inevitably leads here to Arkham Asylum. Just as Superman's super-intellect is matched with that of Lex Luthor's brain power, Batman is matched with the Joker in terms of insanity.

If anyone ever portrays your Batman in a movie, it should be Christian Bale because he characterized Batman perfectly when he previously starred as Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho*. Ironically, not only is Bateman one letter away from Batman, but Batman is only one step away from being Bateman. Like Batman, Bateman wears a mask. But after peeling it off he still does not know who is behind it. Like Bruce Wayne, Patrick Bateman is an economically privileged, white, well educated, urban American male who refuses to let anyone become close to him. Much more tragic for both, they refuse to be mindful of themselves and are unaware of the interconnectedness of their personalities with those of their perceived antagonists. Both entertain as socialites who maintain a façade of affability while hiding a dark secret behind cold eyes.

Like Batman, Bateman's inability to know the truth of himself or what he has done is not due to a failure in his memory. In fact, the memories and intellectual capacities of Bateman and Batman are greater than their peers. But in both cases their failure to know is a problem of false perception. This has always been the case with humanity, just as the Buddha explained. This trait manifests according to historic circumstances in different times. In our time and place, the personality manifests in post industrial America as Bateman's obsession with Whitney Huston, horror porn, business cards, and cocaine, all of which shapes his view of others as meat and bones. Batman's worldview is no less degenerate.

Again, the Buddha says in the *Dhammapada* that as long as we are led around by desires for something we don't have and desires to get rid of things we do have, we are not in control of ourselves but are like zombies, as good as dead. I'm afraid Bateman and Batman both demonstrate that theirs is just the American way, which, by the way, is the third element in the Boy Scout's trinity formula, along with truth and justice.

In general, Superman and Batman are both victims of Mara, one's own internal deceiver and the greatest super villain in all history. Only a true conquer can defeat Mara; everyone else is conquered in all they do. This is the only superpower worth having for oneself and for all humanity, far better than fighting and winning wars, wouldn't you agree?"

"What's that old saying about you always kill the one you love? Well that one works both ways too. Okay, okay. It's not that I completely disagree with everything about your Buddhist analysis of my situation, it's just that I can't help getting a strong impression that somehow you *personally* don't want to see me or the other members of Project Justice fighting crime anymore. Am I right, Dr. Quinzel?"

She leaned forward and whispered, "We look forward to getting you back. It's all going according to the plan, Mr. Kent."