

I Hate Upper City

A Public City story

“I fucking hate Upper City.”

Drake paused after he spoke, glaring out the car window as he and his newly appointed sidekick crossed over the bridge into Upper City, which he fucking hated. His small claws gripped the steering wheel, a kaleidoscopic mix of warm colours flushing their way through his lizard-like muzzle, up towards his yellow eyes, drowning out the usual green of his scaly hide. His small, slender lizard-like frame looked out of place in his cheap car.

“What?! Why?! Look at it, it’s amazing!” his sidekick yelled in reply. He was twice the size of Drake and dressed in a ridiculous ‘villain outfit’ that was supposed to look fearsome, but instead was about as fearsome as a children’s show mascot. Giant orange spikes protruding from his shoulders prodded and poked Drake whenever there was a bump in the road, much to his disgust. The kid’s name was Matthew Simmonds, the son of a high ranking member in the Lower City Dragons gang, though tonight he was calling himself ‘Matchstick’.

“It’s a multi-story, neon-lit hive of wealth and ignorance where the rich flounce about with their skin-tight heroes and cackling villains, living out a golden-age dream they’ll never fucking wake up from while the rest of us struggle and starve in a shit-stained public toilet less than a mile away.” Drake paused again. “Public Toilet, fuck, that would have been a better name for the city.”

Matchstick was in a grump of his own. He wasn’t happy that he’d been forced to partner with Drake to learn about the gang before being allowed a higher rank, and he didn’t mind letting the lizard know about it.

“Hey asshole, if you hate Public City so much why don’t you move out and stop complaining?” he spat back.

“Sound advice from someone who grew up in a mansion. Tell me, how is your father these days? I presume you still live off him.”

“Don’t you even think about talking shit about my father!”

“Why, what’s he going to do, send his thugs after me? I manage his thugs, dip-shit”

Soon the bright white lights of Bridge Street passed over the rusting car as though they were paying it no attention. Around, hundreds of well-dressed, smiling people danced their way through high-fashion shops and overly-expensive restaurants. Nobody seemed to care – or even notice – that there was a skinny lizard in a grubby jacket and a hulking jock in a skin-tight leotard driving slowly through their territory.

After a few more blocks, the pair arrived at a dark-looking multi-storey car park. Someone had opened the security barrier for their arrival, so Drake drove straight in and up to the third floor. It was even darker up there, and the lizard-man looked uncomfortable.

“Why a secluded area? How many bugs could be in this building, how many cameras? We should be meeting in a busy mall or on a wharf or something! Somewhere public,” he said in his grumbling tone.

“You do drug deals in public places? No wonder they won’t promote you!” his sidekick mocked, a sly grin on his face.

“We’re not doing a drug deal you moron. We’re just negotiating some terms with this guy before the Russians get in first.”

Matchstick opened his mouth to speak but decided against it, slumping back into his seat, a bored and angry look on his face.

Drake parked the car at the south side of the building and stepped out, stretching his arms, his head barely coming to the top of the car. Matchstick stepped out second, pulling a large, floppy mask delicately over his face. When it was on properly, four giant orange spikes stood up proudly on top, like a fiery Mohawk.

“You’re seriously going to wear that?” asked Drake, rolling his eyes.

“Damn straight,” the ‘villain’ replied.

Drake shook his head. ‘*What did I do to deserve this?*’ he thought to himself, trudging now towards the other end of the floor.

As a duo they began looking around for their contact, but nobody else was there. Drake's eyes narrowed as he sniffed the air.

In the distance there a figure lay on the ground, hands bound behind his back. He barely moved. Cursing, Drake took off in a sprint towards him, Matchstick in tow, scanning their surroundings for trouble. Before they got to him, however, they were stopped by a confident, masculine sounding voice from behind: "Sorry about your friend, he's a little tied up at the moment!"

Drake and Matchstick spun round to see a large, muscular man standing with his fists pressed firmly into his waist, chest puffed out. He wore a skin-tight yellow suit with the insignia 'JJ' embossed in the centre. "Little late to be parking here, wouldn't you say?" he grinned.

"Who the hell are you?" Drake replied, uninterested in pointless banter.

"You haven't heard of me? How embarrassing for you! They call me Jumping Jack; I'm the hero of these parts!"

Matchstick stepped forwards, adopting an equally ridiculous 'villain pose'. "Well guess what, hero! There's two of us and only one of you! Now I'm not great at math, but that sounds like good odds to me!" Grinning an evil grin, he pulled out long metal pole with a strange bulge on the end from his back. After rubbing the bulge with his hand, sparks shot out and it lit on fire with a loud and sudden roar.

Drake stepped away from his cackling sidekick, looking a little embarrassed to be there with him. '*Where the hell was he storing that thing?*' he asked himself.

The hero grinned again, his teeth practically sparkling, "So it's a fight you want, eh? You criminals will never learn! This suit is perfectly flame retardant and you couldn't hope to hit me, even if you tried! Give up now before you embarrass yourselves!"

Matchstick looked ecstatic. "Never! Come on, Drake! Let's take this fucking hero down!"

The grumpy lizard rubbed his face. "This is so unnecessary..."

Matchstick charged in first, flaming pole raised high. Jumping Jack took a breath, his handsome face smiling even wider. Then, he sprang! In an instant, the hero was above Matchstick, pouncing effortlessly over his head. Before the 'villain' had a chance to regain his footing, Jack

booted him hard between the shoulders, sending him tumbling forwards.

“That’s a nice matchstick you’ve got there,” the hero gloated. “It’s a shame it’s no *match* for me!” With that, Jumping Jack burst out in a mighty bellow of a laugh, his fists readopting their heroic position. Drake grimaced and pulled a cigarette from his jacket pocket, holding it to his mouth, a small, harmless flame spilling out from between his teeth and lighting it in silence.

“If he says one more fucking pun...” he muttered under his breath.

Matchstick sprang up from the ground and sprinted at the hero again. Drake couldn’t tell if he knew it or not, but he was yelling quite the battle cry. He swung his pole again, but again he just met thin air as Jumping Jack leapt gracefully out of harm’s way.

“Not giving up yet? Well, how about we turn up the heat!” he mocked, reaching around his back to pull out a stun-baton.

But he never got a chance to use it.

Whatever the hero was about to say next was cut off when a loud bang pierced through the car park, echoing away into the distance and causing Matchstick to wince. Jack’s face paled and he glanced down at the insignia on his chest to see blood gushing from a new hole blown clean through the first J. Moments later, he slumped to the ground in a heap.

Matchstick spun, his eyes big Os and his mouth hanging open, to see Drake lowering a smoking revolver, reds and oranges flushing their way up his muzzle again past the disgusted look on his face.

“Drake, what the fuck man?!” Matchstick yelled.

“I don’t have the patience for this place. Grab our guy and get back in the car. We’ll take him home with us and patch him up. I’m fucking done here.”

Matchstick – Matthew – tried to respond, but Drake met him with a furious stare that he could not possibly stand up to. Like a pissed off teenager he stomped over to the tied-up figure to help him up, making sure to look as unwilling as possible with each step. Meanwhile, Drake wandered over to Jumping Jack’s corpse, cigarette dangling between his scaly lips, sneering at the lifeless body.

“I fucking hate Upper City...”

