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Buttermilk, Guns, and Steel

by

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Gargoyles: City of the Phoenix
Season 1, Episode 6

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EXT. SCENE - PEGRAM HOME - JULY 6, 1995 (DREAM)

MATT is dressed in his pajamas and bathrobe. He is walking along the sidewalk in front of a typical middle-class suburban house: trim, white fence, hip roof, large front yard. No porch. The sun is shining, the birds are singing, and three girls are on the sidewalk ahead of him, jumping rope and singing (the voices are treated, lightly).

GIRLS

(singing)

Roseanne, Roseanne, second in command,
Doesn't know how to dance, so she did a
headstand;
From the crack of dawn 'til she went to
bed,
How many hours was she on her head?

One, two, three, (etc.)

MATT is familiar with this house. Somewhat against his will, he walks up to it and goes inside.

INT. SCENE - PEGRAM HOME - LIVING ROOM

Inside, MRS. (Arlene) PEGRAM sits at the coffee table. This is Matt's mother. She is working on the bills. We can see them over her shoulder: she is writing on each of them, "ACCEPTED FOR VALUE / REFUSED FOR CAUSE WITHOUT DISHONOR / UCC 1-308 / ALL RIGHTS RESERVED".

Across from her on the couch sits BENJAMIN PEGRAM, watching. He is sixteen, with close-cropped hair and vibrant green eyes. Beside him is LUKE PEGRAM, twelve, curled up and absorbed in a book.

MATT enters, and looks at his mother working. BENJAMIN looks up at him worriedly. MRS. PEGRAM finishes, and then looks up at MATT.

MRS. PEGRAM

You're late. Where have you been?

MATT

I've been out, Mom.

MRS. PEGRAM

Out. With your friends, I suppose?

MATT

Yeah, Mom, with my friends.

MRS. PEGRAM continues working on the bills.

MATT

Still at it, huh?

MRS. PEGRAM

Yes, I'm still at it.

MATT

It's nuts, Mom.

MRS. PEGRAM

Watch your mouth.

MATT

It is.

MRS. PEGRAM

And I suppose it's your friends telling you that.

MATT

No, Mom, it's just baloney.

MRS. PEGRAM

Well said. It's kept food on the table for you and your brothers, after all.

MATT

Not for much longer, it won't.

Suddenly, BROOKLYN enters the room and stands next to him.

BROOKLYN

Why is that?

MATT

Because the cops are coming in a couple of months to end it.

MRS. PEGRAM

You never did believe, did you? My own son.

MATT

There's nothing there to believe, Mom,
it's a silly idea.

MRS. PEGRAM

Stolen from me by the monsters.

She reaches into the couch and draws out a revolver.

MRS. PEGRAM

I accept you for value--

MATT

No, Mom, don't do this. It's not a
telephone bill. You can't just accept
and reject him.

MRS. PEGRAM raises her gun toward BROOKLYN. MATT is now
frightened.

MATT

Brooklyn, run.

BROOKLYN

What?

MATT

Run!

MRS. PEGRAM

I accept you for value, and reject you
for cause.

She shoots BROOKLYN, and he falls to the ground. There is a loud
noise as the door is broken down.

MATT

Who's--

INT. SCENE - MATT'S HOME - BEDROOM

MATT is in his bed, covers pulled up, lights out. The clock says
4:35 AM.

MATT

(yelling)
--there?

BROOKLYN (OFF)

Just us.

MATT opens his eyes and blinks a few times. He then sits up, and gets out of bed.

Caption: Chicago, Illinois. Saturday, December 1, 2012.

INT. SCENE - MATT'S HOUSE - KITCHEN

MATT, dressed in pajamas and bathrobe, opens the bedroom door and comes into the kitchen. BROOKLYN, BROADWAY, and LEXINGTON are there.

MATT

Hey, guys. Come in.

LEXINGTON

Thanks.

MATT

Everything all right?

BROOKLYN

Yeah, just a little dull out there for the past week. Been up and down the shore and nothing much is going on.

MATT

That's winter around here. You could hit up the light show at the zoo.

LEXINGTON

We did that. Twice. Would have been three times but they turned them off before we could come back around.

BROADWAY

What's for breakfast?

MATT

What? It's 4:30 in the morning. Nothing's for breakfast.

BROADWAY

Oh, come on.

MATT

No, it's Saturday. I never get up this early on Saturday.

BROADWAY

Not even for us?

MATT

Not even for the apocalypse. You want breakfast, make it yourself.

LEXINGTON

Uh oh.

BROADWAY

All right, I will.

MATT

What?

BROADWAY

You get the stuff, I'll make breakfast. Pancakes and bacon sound good?

LEXINGTON

Say yes.

MATT

What do you mean, make breakfast?

BROADWAY

I'll cook pancakes and bacon. What do you think?

BROOKLYN

Say yes.

MATT

What, from scratch?

BROOKLYN

The best you've ever had, I promise. Say yes.

LEXINGTON

Just say yes.

BROADWAY

Yeah. Why?

MATT

It's just, I don't know, maybe I'm still half asleep, but I just don't see you as a cook.

BROADWAY

You think we've got along on our own this long and I don't know how to make a meal?

LEXINGTON

He does pancakes really well. Say yes.

BROOKLYN

What do you say?

MATT

I say, throw in some hash browns and I'm all over that.

BROADWAY

You got it.

MATT

All right, this I gotta see. Yes.

LEXINGTON

Yeah!

MATT gets a pad and pen.

MATT

What do you need?

BROADWAY

I'm going to need flour, eggs, baking powder, baking soda, sugar, salt, and vegetable oil. And a quart of buttermilk.

MATT

(writing)

...oil, and buttermilk. And potatoes and bacon.

BROADWAY

Right.

MATT

All right, you're on. I'll pick up what we don't have today.

BROOKLYN

Makes the rain almost worth it.

MATT

You going to get the others?

LEXINGTON

When they hear he's cooking, they'll come. They're that good.

INT. SCENE - SUPER-SAVER - DAIRY SECTION

A CLERK is busy straightening the stock. MATT is scanning the dairy case. He comes to a label that reads, "FROINES BUTTERMILK 32 OZ \$3.98," in front of an empty shelf.

MATT

Huh. Uh, excuse me, sir?

CLERK

Yes, can I help you?

MATT

Any buttermilk?

CLERK

No, sir, we're fresh out of stock.

MATT

They having a problem down at the dairy?

CLERK

No, why do you ask?

MATT

This is the fourth place I've checked, and the fourth place out of stock.

CLERK

I don't know. We're just out. Ran out earlier this morning.

MATT

That's no good. Have you got any idea
who might have some?

CLERK

(conspiratorially)

Oh, I might.

MATT

Eh?

CLERK

Did Wilma ever fix the cream separator?

MATT

Uh...

CLERK

Well?

MATT

(hesitantly)

No?

CLERK

Come this way.

The CLERK leads MATT through the nearest stockroom doors.

INT. SCENE - SUPER-SAVER - STOCKROOM

CLERK

You should learn your countersigns
better.

MATT

Uh, yeah.

CLERK

Only, we have to be careful.

MATT

If you say so.

CLERK

Don't you think so?

MATT

Well, I don't know.

CLERK

Come on, man. If we're not careful, we could run out, and then where would we be?

MATT

Out of buttermilk?

CLERK

Absolutely right. You see?

MATT

I suppose.

CLERK

It's right this way.

CLERK opens the milk cooler and pulls out a case of buttermilk.

CLERK

You understand that, even for the Brotherhood, there are certain handling charges involved.

MATT

Are there?

CLERK

It'll be ten bucks a quart.

MATT

Ten dollars? Are you serious?

CLERK

Things cost what they cost. You wouldn't want to break diet, would you?

MATT

Um, no, I suppose not.

CLERK

No, of course not. So, come on, how many?

MATT

Well, one, I guess.

CLERK

One? Is that all?

MATT

Yes. Why?

CLERK

You been cheating?

MATT

Cheating?

CLERK

No way are you getting along on one quart. Level up: who else are you working with?

MATT

Well, first, I went to the Tony's Foods over on Grand, and then there was the Leche Dulce over on Harlem--

CLERK

Oh, come on. You know what I mean.

MATT

No, I really don't.

CLERK

What org are you splitting time with?

MATT

Um...

The stockroom doors suddenly fly open, and a man enters.

MAN

You! Ozar for brains! Where have you been?

CLERK

Who are you?

MAN

You were supposed to be waiting for me at 11. What are you kibitzing back here for?

CLERK

What? Wait. Did Wilma ever fix the cream separator?

MAN

You know damn well that she didn't.
Now, where's my buttermilk?

CLERK

(to MATT)

So who are you?

MATT

Well, I'm a preferred savings member,
if that helps, but--

CLERK

Get him!

CLERK and MAN grab MATT and hold him.

MATT

Hey, now, wait!

MAN

You think that you can trifle with the
Brotherhood of the Whole Body? By the
twin pillars of health and wholeness,
you shall not leave this place alive.

CLERK

No, no! You can't kill him.

MAN

And what concern is this infidel's life
to you, neophyte?

CLERK

Well, I'm on mop duty until noon.

MAN

Oh.

CLERK

Sorry.

MAN

No. Perhaps it is for the best. Let us
remove this creature to the temple. The
elders shall decide his fate.

CLERK

Yes, commissaire.

MATT

Now, wait, just a minute. You really don't want to do that.

MAN

Is that so, infidel?

MATT

You don't.

MAN

And why is that?

MATT

Well, uh...because, I have, uh, eggs out in my car, and if you don't release me, they could go bad.

MAN

How is this my concern?

MATT

Well, think of the smell!

MAN

Start walking. And as for you, neophyte: that buttermilk is mine, and nobody else's. You will not dissipate it among the unworthy, or your next mop duty shall be to dislodge it from where even the purification rites cannot reach. I shall return.

MAN and MATT exit the stockroom.

INT. SCENE - GOLDEN NUGGET - DINING ROOM

MATT and MAN enter the Golden Nugget Pancake House and approach the register. It is lunchtime, and the lunch rush is on.

HOSTESS

Table for two?

MAN

No, ma'am. We will be dining in the conference center.

HOSTESS

Right this way.

She leads them toward the back of the restaurant, where there is a doorway with a curtain across it.

MATT

I thought that we were going to visit the elders of the Brotherhood.

MAN

That is correct.

MATT

In a Golden Nugget?

MAN

You are not yet enlightened, but you shall be. Our spirits are brought to perfection in this place.

MATT

The hash browns are good, I give you that.

MAN

Cease, infidel.

MATT

I didn't even know Golden Nugget had a conference center.

The HOSTESS draws aside the curtain.

HOSTESS

Through here, please.

MAN

May the twin pillars of health and wellness bring you to spiritual perfection, sister.

HOSTESS

May your bowels always churn in synchronism with the rhythms of the universe, brother.

MATT

What he said.

They go through the doorway, and the HOSTESS closes the curtain behind them.

INT. SCENE - GOLDEN NUGGET - BROTHERHOOD TEMPLE

MATT and the MAN enter a temple of unparalleled opulence in the history of pancake houses. It is a room, approximately two hundred feet long and fifty wide, gleaming in ivory and whitewash. At the far end is a small dais, flanked by two columns, one carved with "HEALTH" upon the base, the other with "WELLNESS". Between the columns are three thrones, and seated upon the throne are three pale people in velvet robes and hoods. A rich red and purple carpet leads from the door of the conference center to the foot of the dais. Around the room are various friezes and murals depicting healthy lives: men jumping, throwing javelins, wrestling, and so on. MATT is astonished.

MAN

Welcome to the Temple of the
Brotherhood of the Whole Body, infidel.

MATT

Whoa. You guys rent out for events?
Because we've got a Chicago Society of
Engineers meeting coming up--

MAN

Cease.

MATT

Ceasing.

MAN

Come, let us present you to the elders,
where your death may be sanctioned
according to the pillars of Health and
Wellness.

MATT

Er. Yes.

They proceed down the carpet and approach the dais. At the foot of the dais, MAN stops and kneels, bowing his head. MATT, seeing this, kneels as well.

MAN

Elders of the most high Brotherhood of
the Whole Body, I bring you greetings
in the name of the twin pillars of
Health and Wellness.

ELDER 2

Greetings. May spiritual perfection
prefer you, commissaire.

MAN

I bring this infidel before you and
beseech your most healthful judgment of
his fate.

ELDER 1

An infidel?

MATT

Hello.

ELDER 3

What is your charge, brother?

MAN

Elders, this man has sought to take for
his own account buttermilk that was
consecrated to the most sacred use of
the elders of the Brotherhood, while it
was in the custody of the dairy clerk
at Super-Saver.

ELDER 2

And how plead you to this charge,
infidel?

MATT

Elders, so please you, I am just trying
to help my friend make breakfast.

ELDER 1

Is your friend a brother of ours?

MATT

No, sir, I don't think he is.

ELDER 3

On what ground, then, did you seek to
take consecrated goods?

MATT

The clerk said they were out of stock,
m'lord.

ELDER 2

Commissaire, is this true?

MAN

Elders, it is true. The acts of the infidels are forcing us to take special measures to secure the holy and appropriate supplies needed by the Brotherhood.

ELDER 3

But is it secure?

MAN

Elders, it is.

ELDER 2

I see. Let us confer.

The ELDERS confer, inaudibly. After a moment, they resume their positions.

ELDER 2

Let the judgment be recorded thus: this man is no infidel, but a stranger to our order, and no guilt shall lie upon him. He has done no harm, and no harm shall be done to him. We proclaim this by the powers of Health and Wellness.

ELDERS

Let it be done according to judgment.

MATT

Thank you. (stands) Sorry for the inconvenience. I'll let you get on with it.

ELDER 2

Stay, candidate.

MATT

Hum?

ELDER 1

We cannot let you leave this place without an initiation to our order.

MATT

Oh, thank you all the same, but it's quite all right.

ELDER 2

But you cannot leave. The penalty for defiling the temple is death by parboiling.

MATT

Eek. (kneeling) All right, initiate me.

ELDER 2

Very good.

ELDER 2 stands and begins to pace the dais in full lecture mode.

ELDER 2

The Brotherhood of the Whole Body was established countless years ago by the blessed Brother Douglas, who devoted his life to the pursuit of spiritual oneness through the worship of the twin pillars of the spirit, Health and Wellness. We of the Brotherhood has perpetuated his truth down through the years: that true wisdom comes through fitness of the whole body, that the fit body moves in the rhythm of the cosmos, and that true oneness comes from the excision of ozar from the body and doubt from the mind.

MATT

Where does the buttermilk come in?

ELDER 1

A command from the angel to Brother Douglas himself.

ELDER 2

"The angel commanded me thus: ye must excise the dreaded ozar from your body as you excise the doubt from your mind, and this is the command: that ye drink two cups of buttermilk each day, and contemplate the whole spirit two hours of each day. Thus may ye be fit to

align with the songs of the cosmos and to find pure strength of the body and the spirit."

ELDERS AND MAN

So may it ever be.

MATT

What exactly is ozar?

ELDER 2

It is the dreaded polluter of the body, the cause of all illness, of the body, mind, and the spirit. It is the fate of man to act as receptacle for ozar, collected, by a sad trick of the fates, from his environment.

ELDER 3

You see, we expel our ozar, and in so doing, we restore the state of spiritual perfection into which man is so rightly born.

ELDER 2

And having reached that state of spiritual perfection, we find no need of false medicine, with which the world pollutes itself.

MATT

Are there many of your order?

ELDER 2

Alas, no. We are but a small order, but we are devoted to preservation of Brother Douglas's command.

ELDER 1

Our numbers have been depleted by the ranks of the infidels, rank cesspools of ozar that they are. They have been corrupted absolutely by wrong ideas. They cannot see the truth.

ELDER 3

They are not supported by the pillars of Health and Wellness.

ELDER 2

No. They are the irredeemable, and we must defend ourselves from them as much as we may pity them.

ELDER 2 sits.

ELDER 2

But, so much for history. Now it is time for you to be initiated by the purging of your own ozar. (claps)
Deacon?

A man in white robes approaches the dais from the side, and kneels.

ELDER 2

Bring forth the irons.

DEACON

At once, elders.

He leaves, briskly.

MATT

Irons?

ELDER 1

We must be certain that your spirit is one with ours.

ELDER 3

And your brothers and sisters must know that you are one with theirs.

MATT

But what does an iron have to do with...

DEACON returns, accompanied by BROTHER HOWARD. He is carrying a bucket containing several long branding irons. The bucket is flaming, and the irons are plainly red hot. He sets it on an iron stand to one side of the dais.

MATT

Oh, you must be joking.

ELDER 2

Seize him.

DEACON and BROTHER HOWARD grab MATT and hold him down. DEACON grabs his arm and extends it.

ELDER 3

No, initiate, this is no joke. You will be one with the temple, and your brothers and your sisters will sing of your purity before the Twin Columns.

ELDER 1

Expose his arm.

DEACON grasps MATT's shirt sleeve in his other hand and rips it away, exposing his bicep. ELDER 2 takes up an iron and extends it. It bears a simple design of linked rings.

ELDERS

(solemnly)

By the twin virtues of Health and Wellness, by the power vested in the Holy Fire of the Brotherhood, we join your flesh to our flesh, your spirit to our spirit...

MATT

Now, wait, wait a minute!

The ELDERS continue to chant, and ELDER 2 continues to bring the iron closer and closer to MATT's arm as he struggles and protests.

ELDERS

...expelling our ozar, binding ourselves wholly and eternally to the worship of the virtues, conversion of the innocent, and the subjugation of our enemies.

MATT

How can you be worshipping health with a branding iron? This has gone on far enough! Let me go!

ELDERS

Accept this initiate, bind him to our holy and eternal order, keep him pure and true--

The iron is now inches from MATT's arm, and ELDER 2 is lining up to place the final drive squarely and make a good, solid brand. Suddenly, BROTHER HOWARD speaks up.

HOWARD
Elders, so please you!

ELDER 2
What have you, Brother Howard?

HOWARD
Is it not written, that before any candidate is initiated, he should first have his ozar purged?

ELDER 2
That he should be pure.

ELDER 3
That he should be acceptable to the order.

HOWARD
Indeed.

ELDER 2 withdraws the iron.

ELDER 2
Brother, you are wise indeed. Elders, I fear we have been hasty. Brother Howard?

HOWARD
Yes, elders?

ELDER 2
Take this initiate to the chamber for purification.

HOWARD
At once, elders. (to MATT) Rise and follow me.

MATT stands, uneasily, and follows as HOWARD rises and walks reverently toward the back of the temple. ELDER 2, meanwhile, returns the branding iron to the bucket, and all three sit. As they reach the back of the temple, MATT speaks again.

MATT

I'm not really a good candidate, you know, full of ozar, I get it by eating so much bacon--

HOWARD

(through his teeth)

Shut up, mister, and just follow me.

MATT shuts up and follows. HOWARD reaches the back of the temple, and looks over his shoulder. The ELDERS are talking among themselves and looking away. HOWARD draws aside the curtain and exits the temple, as MATT follows him.

INT. SCENE - GOLDEN NUGGET - DINING ROOM

HOWARD exits into the dining room, followed by MATT. He removes his robe and hangs it on a coat hook.

HOWARD

Come on, let's get out of here.

MATT

Why? Is the initiation chamber in the sandwich shop across the street?

HOWARD

Shut up and move. I'm getting you out.

MATT

(uncertainly)

Okay.

They walk casually through the dining room and out the front door.

INT. SCENE - HOWARD'S CAR

HOWARD gets into his car, a small and ratty hatchback, and MATT gets in the passenger side. HOWARD starts the car, backs out, and begins driving.

HOWARD

I'm Walt Howard, BLA. And you are?

MATT

Matt Pegram. BLA?

HOWARD
Buttermilk Liberation Army.

MATT
I was afraid you were going to say
that.

HOWARD
I've been working deep cover in the
Brotherhood for six months now. We got
you out just in time.

MATT
Just in time for what? Maybe I could
stand to get my ozar flushed out.

HOWARD
With a stomach pump?

MATT
Oh.

HOWARD
Yeah, that's what they call
purification.

MATT
All right. So where are we going? Not
another pancake house, I hope?

HOWARD
No, of course not.

INT. SCENE - SUBWAY STATION

HOWARD and MATT descend the stairs into a working subway station. HOWARD pays MATT's fare, then his own, and they walk in. HOWARD knocks a secret pattern on an unmarked door, it opens from inside, and they enter.

INT. SCENE - BLA WAR ROOM

HOWARD and MATT enter a dark space, filled with electronic monitoring equipment, computers, radios, and the like. Several agents sit in front of the equipment, tracking various things. Agent WALKER is behind the door, having opened it for them; he closes it behind HOWARD and MATT.

WALKER

I did not expect you back so soon,
Agent Howard.

HOWARD

No, I didn't expect to be back so soon,
but this man was in trouble.

MATT

How do you do? I'm Matt Pegram.

WALKER

Agent Joseph Walker, BLA.

MATT

For an organization dedicated to
liberating buttermilk, you seem to have
a very advanced operation.

WALKER

Thanks, but it's gone far beyond mere
dairy products at this point.

MATT

So I see.

HOWARD

The BLA's moved on to tracking the
movements of the Brotherhood. We think
they're the prime movers in the capture
of the buttermilk market.

WALKER

We're trying to stay a step ahead of
them, keep track of their movements.

MATT

But why buttermilk?

HOWARD

Our founders were inveterate buttermilk
drinkers, and they were vexed by
constant supply shortages. They
established the BLA many years ago to
ensure a steady supply, whatever the
challenges.

WALKER

So when the Brotherhood began recruiting, one of the tasks we had was to get the buttermilk before they could, and make sure it stayed in free hands. As you can imagine, that didn't sit well with the elders.

HOWARD

As they've gotten more advanced, so have we. It's been a constant fight between us for control.

MATT

So, who's got the edge today?

HOWARD

They do.

WALKER

For now, anyway, but we'll beat them yet.

HOWARD

But what about you? How did you wind up in front of the elders of the Brotherhood? I wouldn't think of you as an applicant.

MATT

Not a voluntary one, anyway. No, I was just trying to buy buttermilk at the store, and things got out of hand.

WALKER

Which store?

MATT

The Super-Saver.

WALKER

(triumphantly)

I knew it! Oh, the Super-Saver, didn't I tell you? Center of it all!

HOWARD

(growling)

I suppose it is, then.

WALKER

What exactly did you see? What happened?

MATT

Well, I asked if they had any buttermilk, and the clerk took me in back and offered it to me for ten bucks a quart.

HOWARD

Animals!

WALKER

Would you recognize this clerk again if you saw him?

MATT

I suppose so, yeah.

HOWARD

Excellent. Then we have him.

WALKER

Agent Howard, you and Mr. Pegram go to the Super-Saver, and see if you can get anything out of this clerk.

HOWARD

Yes, sir.

MATT

Now, wait just a minute. Can't you just liberate me a quart and let me go home?

WALKER

But we need your help.

MATT

Why?

HOWARD

You've seen the inner working of the Brotherhood. None of our agents have ever reached the depths that you have. You hold the connection between the Brotherhood and its suppliers.

WALKER

You, Mr. Pegram, and only you, stand
with the fate of the free world's
buttermilk supply in your hands.

MATT looks at them, irritably. He's had just about enough of
this nonsense. But at last, he realizes that he's not likely to
get home on his own, so he sighs and shakes his head.

MATT

Oh, all right, lead on.

WALKER

Spoken like a true hero. Your name will
be remembered to posterity, Agent
Pegram.

MATT

I hope not. I just want my pancakes.
Let's go.

HOWARD rushes to the door and leaves, followed by MATT, still
shaking his head.

WALKER

Pancakes?

WALKER, with a suspicious look on his face, turns to one of the
men on the consoles.

WALKER

Punch up sector six alpha three. Give
me full motion for the last six hours.

INT. SCENE - SUPER-SAVER - STOCK ROOM

The CLERK is humming to himself while cleaning the floor.
Suddenly the door bursts open as HOWARD kicks it in; the door,
however, being neither latched nor locked, flies around and
smashes into the wall. HOWARD charges in, in full tactical
dress, followed (somewhat sheepishly) by MATT. The CLERK doesn't
even look up. The door sort of limply waggles closed again.

HOWARD

Nobody move!

CLERK

(bored)

Customer washrooms are in front by the register, thanks for saving at Super-Saver.

HOWARD marches forward to the CLERK and seizes him.

CLERK

Hey!

HOWARD

Is this the one?

MATT

Uh, yes. Hello again!

CLERK

You! I thought that the Brotherhood had you! How did you escape?

MATT

Silly Team Six showed up and rescued me.

CLERK

Impossible! The temple is impregnable!

MATT

Well, what can I say, it's been a really weird day.

HOWARD

Enough of your groveling, Brotherhood shill. Where is it?

CLERK

What?

HOWARD

You know well what I mean.

CLERK

If you mean the yogurt, it's in aisle 17, next to the cheeses--

HOWARD backhands the CLERK.

MATT

Hey!

HOWARD

Don't try to play games with me. We're on to you. We know you've been hoarding the buttermilk. Now, where is it?

CLERK

I don't know what you're talking about. Oh, my jaw!

HOWARD slaps him again.

CLERK

Augh!

HOWARD

Do you remember now?

MATT

Well, maybe he doesn't.

HOWARD

You said this was the guy.

MATT

Well, it is, but--

HOWARD

You see? The BLA is on to you. Now, talk.

CLERK

Never. I shall never betray--

HOWARD slaps him two or three times more as the CLERK protests.

CLERK

Never! ... No, never! ... I shall never betray my brothers and sisters!

MATT

Now, wait, Agent, hold on. Why don't you look in the dairy case?

HOWARD

Why should I?

MATT

Well, I mean, if he's hiding
buttermilk, wouldn't he hide it
somewhere cold?

HOWARD

Ah, excellent deductive work, Agent.
You'll make a great addition to our
team. Here, hold this.

HOWARD throws the CLERK to MATT, who grabs him. HOWARD then
opens the dairy case door and begins searching.

CLERK

May the twin pillars of Health and
Wellness spit in your eye. May your
entire army drown in its own ozar!

MATT

I'm not in the army. I'm just...I don't
know, I got drafted, or something. (to
HOWARD) Any luck?

HOWARD

Yes!

HOWARD exits the case triumphantly, carrying the case of
buttermilk over his head.

HOWARD

A successful raid!

CLERK

You swine! Take your ozar-stained hands
off of that!

HOWARD

Hah! Or you'll do what?

MATT

Good work. Can I get a quart off of
you?

HOWARD

For what?

Suddenly the stockroom door bursts open again. Agent WALKER
enters, followed by two or three other BLA Agents, their guns
drawn.

WALKER

A good question, Agent Howard. An excellent question. What does this man want with buttermilk? Seize him.

One agent seizes the CLERK and draws him off to the side. Another seizes MATT and pins his arms behind his back.

MATT

Hey! Now, wait, hold on a minute.

WALKER

You think that you could fool us so easily? With a cover that thin? It is to laugh. (flatly) Ha. Ha. Ha.

MATT

Oh, for...fine. What are you talking about?

WALKER

It is to laugh.

MATT

I got that part.

WALKER

A shoddy attempt at a faked forced induction? Pure bait to draw out any BLA agents working behind the scenes. Textbook counterintelligence work if ever I saw it. But you forgot one thing, my young friend.

MATT

(after a pause)

Oh, me? Okay. What was that?

WALKER

Pancakes.

MATT

Pancakes?

WALKER

Pancakes. Of course, we should have suspected you from the start. Awfully convenient that you would just happen into the one market which has been

under our surveillance for six months. Awfully good coincidence that you should be captured by the Brotherhood and taken directly to their temple, at exactly the same time as our best agent was working there. But you mentioned pancakes, my friend, and that was your worst slip-up, for nobody buys buttermilk by the quart in order to make pancakes.

MATT

What?

WALKER

And you knew exactly where the buttermilk was being hoarded here.

HOWARD

You're right. He did. How could you know that?

MATT

Is the crazy especially thick today? Of course I knew where it was! I told you! I asked the clerk for some, and he pulled it out and offered it to me for ten dollars a quart.

WALKER

Enough of your lies! You will not leave this place alive, Brotherhood dog. Kneel.

MATT is forced to his knees by the agent holding him. He bows his head.

WALKER

By the power vested in me by virtue of the charter of the Buttermilk Liberation Army, I judge you to be an enemy of the people, and I sentence you to immediate death.

MATT

Death in the Super-Saver. Yeah, the crazy's especially thick today.

CLERK

But you can't! I'm still on mop duty!

WALKER

Quiet!

MATT

No. It's all right. I accept your judgment.

WALKER

A brave move. I am touched. Agent.

An agent raises his weapon toward MATT. MATT grits his teeth. His voice is calm and level, with just enough of an edge to make it sound crazy.

MATT

I accept your judgment for value. And I reject it for cause.

WALKER

What?

MATT

(looking up)
Under UCC 1-308, all rights reserved,
without prejudice.

HOWARD

What does he mean?

WALKER

(aghast)
How do you know about that?

MATT

I know a great deal that you wouldn't believe, Agent. Release me.

WALKER

Do it.

The agent releases MATT, who stands and brushes off his pants.

MATT

(to CLERK) Never mind mopping, you need to work on your sweeping. (to WALKER) Now. About my quart.

WALKER

The Uniform Commercial Code is strictly classified. How do you know about that?

MATT

I said, I know a great deal more than you think. Beyond that, you don't need to know.

WALKER

Are you...are you from Central Command?

MATT

I could be. What's your clearance?

WALKER

Red 17 Bravo Alpha.

MATT

Sorry. Red 21 or higher only.

WALKER

Impossible!

MATT

Tell that to Central. But do it later. We have bigger fish to fry, Agent.

WALKER

Indeed? Indeed! Yes! Howard!

HOWARD

Yes, sir.

WALKER

What dairy is that case from?

HOWARD

Froines Dairy, sir.

WALKER

It figures, it really does.

MATT

You know about Froines Dairy, then?

WALKER

Of course. Don't you?

MATT

Red 21, again. But tell me what you've got.

WALKER

Oh, of course. Well. We've had several agents working behind the scenes there over the years, but they always seem to be spotted too quickly, before they can get anything useful. All we know is that the Brotherhood's supporters are tied into it somehow.

MATT

And you think they're contracting the supply of buttermilk in support of the Brotherhood?

WALKER

Yes, something along those lines.

MATT

A challenging situation, then.

WALKER

Sir?

MATT

Well, I mean, how do you expect to get into the dairy?

HOWARD

Sir, I can lead the primary strike force, and Mullings and Fabinski can lead the flanking companies.

MATT

Oh, a strike force, of course.

WALKER

An excellent idea, Agent. Agent Thompson! Muster the strike forces. Tell them we're going ahead with Operation Rennet at 1500 hours. The buttermilk will flow freely by nightfall!

AGENTS

Yeah!

MATT

Great! Well, if that's all settled,
Central probably wants me back in time
to fill out my time sheet, so if you'll
excuse me--

He starts to leave.

WALKER

Wait! We need an advance squad, too.

MATT stops, and brings one hand to his face briefly.

MATT

I should have known. Okay, who else?

WALKER

You and I, and Agent Thompson. And our
prisoner, of course.

MATT

Of course.

CLERK

What do you mean?

WALKER

Come on, worm. We're going on a dairy
tour.

INT. SCENE - WALKER'S CAR

WALKER and AGENT THOMPSON are in the front seats of a reasonable base-line mid-size coupe, while MATT and the CLERK are in the back. They are driving down the highway toward the dairy. THOMPSON is driving, while WALKER fiddles with his radio headset.

WALKER

Gray Dog to Guernsey, radio check, come
in, Guernsey...Roger, loud and clear.
Out. Gray Dog to Holstein, come in
Holstein, radio check...

CLERK

(quietly)

So what was all that accepting for
value stuff?

MATT

Hm? Oh. Well, you know, momma always said the best way to fight crazy is with crazy.

CLERK

I thought you said you were with Central Command.

MATT

Did I ever say that?

CLERK

Well, no, not strictly. But where did you pick all of that up, then?

MATT

Red 21.

He places one finger aside his nose, and winks.

MATT

Got to keep a few secrets.

EXT. SCENE - FROINES DAIRY - PARKING LOT

An industrial brick building sits adjacent to a large parking lot on the outskirts of Chicago, with a large "Froines Dairy" sign on the front. Across the front is a large banner, with several pictures of smiling dairy products (butter, cheese, milk), reading, "Froines is for Friends!" Another banner hangs near the door, reading, "Tours Daily: 10:30, 12:30, 2:30." Agent WALKER's car pulls into the lot.

INT. SCENE - FROINES DAIRY

A cheerfully dressed tour guide leads a group of tourists, including WALKER, CLERK, MATT, THOMPSON, and a few others through the dairy.

GUIDE

Now, here is the curdling tank. Here we add the enzymes that begin the process of converting the milk into curds and whey. In a little while, we will drain off the whey, leaving the curds behind, and they'll be passed along to the pressing line. And, yes, if you're wondering, this is the same curds and

why that Little Miss Muffett was reported to be eating when the spider scared her so.

There is a smattering of laughter from the group.

WALKER

What time do you have?

MATT

2--uh, 14:58.

WALKER

It's almost time, then. (into radio) This is Gray Dog, to all teams, two minutes, go in two minutes. Out.

MATT

I don't suppose you'd prefer a negotiated solution, would you, Agent?

WALKER

No. Why?

The GUIDE points out a small room, elevated above the dairy floor, with glass walls, revealing a massive cache of automatic rifles, pistols, and several rocket launchers.

GUIDE

And to your left, you will see our extensive armory. As you can imagine, a dairy as successful as Froines has many enemies, which our elite security forces must be prepared to meet and defeat utterly.

MATT

Oh, no reason. Just didn't feel much like being slaughtered today.

WALKER

My God. (into radio) All teams, Gray Dog, prepare for extreme combat, extreme combat, all teams. Out.

MATT

This is the most violent dairy-based conspiracy I've ever known.

WALKER

I know. Wonderful, isn't it?

MATT

Yeah, swell. All right, agent, so what's your plan?

WALKER

We take that armory before they can get to it.

WALKER leaves it there. After a moment, MATT realizes that is the entire plan.

MATT

Not much of a plan, is it?

WALKER

What was your idea?

MATT

To be honest, I'd expected to be home watching the races on TV.

WALKER

Racing is for winners, Agent. Get ready. What time have you got?

MATT

14:59 and thirty seconds.

WALKER

Showtime. Watch the stairs, I'm going to make a try for it.

WALKER looks around, and bounds up the stairs toward the armory. He tries the door, but it is locked. Failing that, he reaches into his belt and draws out a small cylinder. Adhering it to the door, he twists the top, and then bounds down the stairs toward the group.

WALKER

Down!

The four of them duck, as a small explosion rips the armory door open and shatters the glass walls. At the same time, there are bursts of automatic gunfire from all sides of the dairy as the strike forces advance. The tour guide ducks at this; the remainder of the tour group remains standing, pleased at the

sudden show of light and sound. WALKER flings himself up the stairs and into the armory. Grabbing four rifles and several clips of ammunition, he then leaps out and down the stairs, passing a rifle to THOMPSON. He then thrusts one into MATT's hands.

WALKER

Take this!

MATT

And do what?

WALKER

Seize the dairy! What do you think this is? And you!

WALKER grabs the CLERK.

WALKER

Whose side are you on?

CLERK

I've just decided to be on your side, sir.

WALKER

Welcome aboard. Take a rifle. Now, let's move out!

They join the melee developing around them as the Froines security forces move in. The tourists continue to watch, enraptured.

MATT

Get under cover!

The tourists continue to watch, so MATT fires a volley of shots over their heads. They duck, suddenly out of their rapture.

MATT

I said, get under cover!

The tourists run for cover, as does MATT. He clutches his rifle and rolls from machine, to vat, to machine, picking up debris from the floor on his clothes, watching out for enemy forces around him. The battle rages, mass chaos around him. A Froines agent, looking from a catwalk, takes aim at MATT's back, but just as he's about to fire, a pair of shots from behind him startle him, and he falls from the catwalk into a vat of cream.

MATT, in turn, is startled by the scream and splattered by cream, and jumps ahead, his pace increased.

Another volley of shots drives him to take cover under a bottling line, which rattles along above him. He crouches and turns back to see who's shooting at him. It is Annabelle the Cow, mascot of the dairy--or, rather, the poor employee who's in the Annabelle costume, who's firing at Matt with an assault rifle. Another volley of shots come in and shatter the bottles rattling along over MATT's head, raining milk and broken glass down on him. He raises his rifle and aims at Annabelle.

INT. SCENE - PEGRAM HOME - LIVING ROOM. (FLASHBACK)

September 17, 1995. The house, though still recognizable, is a disaster area. The room is dark and smoke-filled, the front windows have been shot out, blue lights flash from the front yard, and the living room floor is covered in debris and shell casings. Young BENJAMIN and MATT, dressed in fatigues, shelter behind the couch and a bank of sandbags across the front of the room, taking cover. BENJAMIN holds a rifle in his hands. He is leaning back against the barricade, breathing heavily. He snaps off the clip and throws it toward MATT. MATT is fumbling to feed bullets into a fresh clip. He is breathing hard, and the tears are streaking down his face. BENJAMIN yells silently at MATT, urging him to hurry. A volley of gunfire streaks by overhead, burying itself in the barricade and smashing into the plaster walls around them as both boys duck further down.

INT. SCENE - FROINES DAIRY

MATT lowers his rifle. For once, he actually looks shocked.

MATT

No. No more crazy today.

As he hesitates, another round of shots rattle by over him. He raises the rifle again, looks up through the sight. Annabelle is standing near a pallet rack, and above her is a bale of folded milk cartons. MATT fires two shots, breaking the two bands on the bale and sending them tumbling down onto Annabelle, who is knocked to the ground. MATT lowers the rifle, then turns and begins crawling along the floor.

As he goes, the chaos continues around him. He makes it to one wall of the dairy, a hammered steel wall with a thick door set in it. A cooler. Next to the door is a barrel marked,

"INEDIBLE." MATT opens the door and looks in, then tosses his rifle into the barrel, goes inside, and slams the door shut.

Inside, in darkness, he walks along, but runs into a set of metal racks. He follows them along, briefly, finding several different kinds of dairy products stacked upon them. Behind him, the door opens. MATT ducks to the floor, and begins crawling along under the racks; it is barely high enough for him to move, but he does. As he goes, light hits his face, and begins to get brighter. The hum of the cooler gets louder and the sounds of battle die off in the distance. He finally reaches the light, and behind it, glass. He shoves on the glass, and after a couple of tries, it opens, and he crawls out.

INT. SCENE - FROINES DAIRY - OUTLET STORE

The Outlet Store is an oasis of peace and quiet, with no sign of the deadly combat taking place on the other side of the wall. A couple of customers are browsing the wares or ordering ice cream at the counter.

MATT clambers out of the cooler. He is covered in milk and broken glass, and filth from the floor of the cooler, and still missing one sleeve from his shirt. MATT looks around, then goes to the packaged goods case and pulls out a quart bottle of buttermilk. He takes it to the register and sets it on the counter, where the cashier, oblivious to his appearance, rings it up.

CASHIER

That's \$3.50, please.

MATT

What a deal. Thanks. And do you know when the next bus into town is?

INT. SCENE - MATT'S HOUSE - KITCHEN

It is dark outside. BROOKLYN, BROADWAY, and LEXINGTON are waiting in the kitchen, looking a little worried.

BROADWAY

So where is everything? He's had all day.

BROOKLYN

It's not like he's working for us, you know. Maybe he had something else going on.

BROADWAY

Like what?

BROOKLYN

Like...I don't know. Human stuff.

LEXINGTON

Should we go look for him?

BROOKLYN

Give him another half an hour. Then we'll go look for him.

There is the sound of the front door opening and closing. MATT enters, still covered in (now sour) milk, glass, and filth, still missing one sleeve, and limping slightly, carrying a paper bag from the dairy.

BROOKLYN

There you...are. What happened?

MATT walks into the kitchen, silently. He pulls out the buttermilk, shows it to BROADWAY, and puts it in the refrigerator.

LEXINGTON

Matt, are you all right?

BROADWAY

What's happened?

MATT

I had a little trouble finding buttermilk.

BROOKLYN

What kind of trouble?

MATT

Well, I found myself in the Brotherhood Temple at the Golden Nugget, for one thing.

They look at him, perplexed.

BROOKLYN

Uh, okay.

MATT

Oh, never mind. The rest of it's in the truck. I have to go get it.

BROADWAY

Let me help.

MATT

No, I got it. It's just...at the Super-Saver. On second thought, actually, yeah, you mind shadowing me over there?

BROADWAY

No, not at all.

MATT

Thank you. You really don't know how much I appreciate that right now. Let me go clean up and we'll head right over.

BROADWAY

Sure.

MATT goes into his bedroom and closes the door.

LEXINGTON

Did he say, "temple"?

BROADWAY, BROOKLYN, and LEXINGTON look at each other.

BROOKLYN

You know, I think I'd better go with you, too.

LEXINGTON

Yes.

BROADWAY

Better with three, right.

INT. SCENE - FROINES DAIRY - OFFICE

The office is a shambles, as though a paramilitary force had swept through, guns firing. The manager of the dairy is viewing surveillance tapes to one side. Next to him is a woman dressed cheerily and casually. This is DR. COTTER.

COTTER

So you finally had a raid by the BLA,
is that it?

MANAGER

Yes, doctor.

COTTER

So why call me? That is a "you"
problem. It has been a "you" problem
for twenty years.

MANAGER

You remember mentioning that one guy
who busted Sidney Harding?

COTTER

Yes, I do. What about him?

MANAGER

Guess who turned up on this afternoon's
tour.

He freezes the surveillance video, and points to the monitor. It shows MATT, HOWARD, the CLERK, and THOMPSON entering through the tour gates.

MANAGER

We're pretty sure they were the
instigators. (indicates HOWARD) This is
the one who blew the door to the
armory, just as the advance force was
striking.

COTTER

Which one's the hero?

MANAGER

(indicating)
This one's Pegram.

COTTER

That doesn't make sense, though. Our
intelligence says that he's an engineer
at Edison. Not the type to hook up with
those BLA meatheads.

MANAGER

There's more. Atkinson says the same guy got brought into the temple earlier today.

COTTER

What? What did he say?

MANAGER

Said he was accused of pilfering the Brotherhood's sanctified buttermilk.

COTTER

Brotherhood and BLA, huh? Interesting. Do you suppose he knows what's going on?

MANAGER

Maybe. At any rate, he disappeared during the skirmish, and we haven't been able to locate him since.

COTTER

Leave that to me. I'd thought he was just a nuisance, but now it looks like he may be more significant than we thought.

MANAGER

There was one other thing, Doctor Cotter.

COTTER

Yes, what is it?

MANAGER

Well, I'm not entirely sure that my insurance covers raids by paramilitary organizations, and I was wondering--

COTTER

Yes, yes, yes, yes, of course. Turn it in on your invoice. Business expenses and all.

MANAGER

Thank you, ma'am.

COTTER's phone rings.

COTTER

Excuse me. (answers) Cotter. Yes, ma'am, just cleaning up at Project Froines. Yes. No, but we've got evidence that Pegram is involved here, too. Understood. No, no sign of them. Hold on. (covering handset) This was a daylight raid, correct?

MANAGER

Yes.

COTTER

(into phone)

No, ma'am, it was daylight. I don't think they could be involved. No, ma'am. (covers handset) Anything new on your roof in the last couple of days?

MANAGER

What do you mean?

COTTER

Any unexpected, ah, architectural enhancements?

MANAGER

No, I really don't think so.

COTTER

Have you checked?

MANAGER

Custodial's up there all the time fixing the air conditioning. They haven't mentioned anything.

COTTER

Fair enough. (into phone) No, ma'am, no sign. All right. Thank you, ma'am. (hangs up) Thank you for your cooperation. Be sure to invoice for those damages.

MANAGER

Of course I will.

COTTER

We'll talk later.

INT. SCENE - MATT'S HOME - DINING ROOM

BROADWAY is finishing making pancakes. MATT and the gargoyles (except BRONX) are variously seated or standing around the table, eating a breakfast of bacon, hash browns, and lots of pancakes. BROADWAY enters with the last batch.

BROOKLYN

So what do you think?

MATT

I have to admit, that's pretty good.

BROADWAY sits at the table.

BROADWAY

Told you.

MATT

Absolutely worth the work.

BROOKLYN

Yeah, so what happened?

MATT

Well, I got solicited by a black marketeer in buttermilk.

BROOKLYN

Oh?

MATT

Yeah. And then it turns out he was holding it for the Brotherhood of the Whole Body, which wanted to initiate me. Branding irons were involved, but I was saved by an agent of the Buttermilk Liberation Army.

LEXINGTON

Um.

MATT

Then they took me back to interrogate the clerk, but accused me of being a double agent. Well, after I got out of that, they took me with them to help with the raid on the dairy, only I

snuck out, and picked up the buttermilk
on the way out of the place.

BROADWAY

Uh-huh.

They have, by this point, stopped eating and are staring at him
warily.

HUDSON

Matt, by any chance, have you been
drinking something stronger than
buttermilk?

MATT

Scout's honor, that's what happened.

BROOKLYN

Bit of a crazy story.

MATT

Yeah. Sure. I made up a crazy story, so
I could bring it home and tell it to
the gargoyles who are making me
pancakes for breakfast, which are
excellent, by the way.

GOLIATH

Your point is well taken. But assuming
it's all true, why didn't you just run
off?

MATT

Some days...some days, you just have to
roll with the crazy and see where it
goes.

BROOKLYN

(dubiously)

Really?

MATT

Of course. If I didn't, you wouldn't be
sitting here, for one thing.

LEXINGTON

I wouldn't say we were crazy.

MATT

No, I didn't mean that. But I mean, hurricanes and exploding manholes and self-aiming guns, and now a buttermilk cult is the crazy part?

BROOKLYN

Well, yes.

MATT

Well...I mean, yeah, but...

BROOKLYN

One of these things is not like the others, Matt.

GOLIATH

But the world is not straightforward. Our own lives have shown that much, and not to follow life where it goes is not to live at all.

MATT

Yes, exactly, thank you.

BROOKLYN

I guess not. I don't suppose I'd trade the Timedance for anything.

MATT

What's a Timedance?

BROOKLYN

Long, long story. Some other time, maybe.

MATT

I'd like to hear it, I think.

GOLIATH

You will have your chance.

BROADWAY AND MATT

(simultaneously)

Really?

GOLIATH

Yes. You have been gracious to us, and I thank you for that. But you also rose

to your own challenges and managed them capably. It is a rare thing. I would be sorry to lose track of a friend now.

BROADWAY

Congratulations, you just made the grade.

MATT

Oh, all right!

MATT and BROADWAY bump fists.

MATT

That's a thrill. Thanks.

HUDSON

We have not found friends easily in the past. Thank you for that.

MATT

As much as I'd like to keep gushing over this, though, I do notice it's about five minutes to sunrise.

MATT stands.

MATT

I'll wash. Thanks for breakfast. It really was outstanding.

BROADWAY

Hey, no problem. My pleasure. Thanks for getting it together.

MATT

You guys will be back tonight?

LEXINGTON

Absolutely.

MATT

I look forward to it. Sleep well. I'll see you then.

They get up and exit through the back door.

MATT

Ah. Accepted for Value, though. Oldie
but a moldy.

He looks out the back window, pensively.

MATT

For you, Benjy. That one was for you.

=END=