

ABOVE AVERAGE MAN

By Christopher E. Engler

Copyright © MMXX by Christopher E. Engler All rights reserved.
Brooklyn Publishers LLC in association with Heuer Publishing LLC
ISBN: 978-1-61588-464-3

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that this Work is subject to a royalty. This Work is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations, whether through bilateral or multilateral treaties or otherwise, and including, but not limited to, all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention and the Berne Convention.

RIGHTS RESERVED: All rights to this Work are strictly reserved, including professional and amateur stage performance rights. Also reserved are: motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all forms of mechanical or electronic reproduction, such as CD-ROM, CD-I, DVD, information and storage retrieval systems and photocopying, and the rights of translation into non-English languages.

PERFORMANCE RIGHTS AND ROYALTY PAYMENTS: All amateur and stock performance rights to this Work are controlled exclusively by Brooklyn Publishers LLC. No amateur or stock production groups or individuals may perform this play without securing license and royalty arrangements in advance from Brooklyn Publishers LLC. Questions concerning other rights should be addressed to Brooklyn Publishers LLC. Royalty fees are subject to change without notice. Professional and stock fees will be set upon application in accordance with your producing circumstances. Any licensing requests and inquiries relating to amateur and stock (professional) performance rights should be addressed to Brooklyn Publishers LLC.

Royalty of the required amount must be paid, whether the play is presented for charity or profit and whether or not admission is charged.

AUTHOR CREDIT: All groups or individuals receiving permission to produce this Work must give the author(s) credit in any and all advertisement and publicity relating to the production of this Work. The author's billing must appear directly below the title on a separate line where no other written matter appears. The name of the author(s) must be at least 50% as large as the title of the Work. No person or entity may receive larger or more prominent credit than that which is given to the author(s).

PUBLISHER CREDIT: Whenever this Work is produced, all programs, advertisements, flyers or other printed material must include the following notice: ***Produced by special arrangement with Brooklyn Publishers LLC.***

COPYING: Any unauthorized copying of this Work or excerpts from this Work is strictly forbidden by law. No part of this Work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means now known or yet to be invented, including photocopying or scanning, without prior permission from Brooklyn Publishers LLC.

BROOKLYN PUBLISHERS LLC
P.O. BOX 248 • CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA 52406
TOLL FREE (888) 473-8521 • FAX (319) 368-8011

ABOVE AVERAGE MAN

By Christopher E. Engler

*Based on a web-series created by
Wyatt Elliott DeBoer & Steve McDevitt*

SYNOPSIS: With nods to radio show pastiche, this modern podcast style show opens with Max Best (AKA Captain Stupendous) once again keeping the streets of Populous safe from his arch enemy Nefarious. However, things get tricky when Piper Penbrooke, a smart upstart reporter, discovers an unknown truth. Captain Stupendous doesn't have any superpowers; he only *thinks* he does. Struggling with this new reality is only half of Max's battle, especially after Nefarious and his league of villainous rogues break out of jail. What's their plan? To kidnap the Captain, of course! While reassembling his self-identity, Max joins the fight as the new powerless superhero: Above Average Man!

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 females, 2 males, 5-25 either, 5+ extras)

MAX BEST/
CAPTAIN STUPENDOUS (m).....

A charismatic billionaire turned superhero whose dopey demeanor is both cute but also foolishly chauvinistic. He will evolve into our hero: Above Average Man!
(276 lines)

PIPER PENBROOKE (f)..... The Daily Gazette's newest reporter: smart, idealistic, headstrong, and fact-driven. *(205 lines)*

COMMISSIONER (m/f)..... Now more politician than street cop, this character mentors the Captain, often being his mouthpiece. *(91 lines)*

- JEEVES (m/f) Max's steward turned butler, now very old and still exceptionally kind and hospitable. (39 lines)
- EMCEE (m/f)..... The charming host and narrator of tonight's broadcast. (21 lines)
- PERKINS (m/f)..... Beat cops. (6 lines)
- JONES (m/f) Beat cops. (9 lines)
- WALLACE (m/f)..... Beat cops. (4 lines)
- DISPATCH (m/f)..... A 911 operator. (3 lines)
- NEFARIOUS/WEISS (m/f)..... The Captain's arch nemesis, a criminal mastermind who leads the city's League of Villainy. (92 lines)
- G. JAY GREEN (m/f)..... Piper's boss at the Daily Gazette, an executive with only money on the mind. (23 lines)
- MARY SUE (f)..... Member of the League of Villainy, this tough cat burglar has a prowess that is unmatched. (54 lines)
- THE PEACOCK (m/f)..... Member of the League of Villainy, this Eastern European heiress flaunts her money and her crime without shame. (23 lines)
- SOLOMON GRUNGY (m/f)..... Member of League of Villainy. A self-proclaimed master of disguises who fools no one because he always wears 90's grunge attire. (6 lines)
- TED TURKINGTON (m)..... A suave local TV news reporter with a Don Draper-meets-Anchorman demeanor. (22 lines)
- SHIRLEY BIGGLESBY (f) A radio news reporter. (2 lines)
- JOHNNY HANDSOME (m/f)..... The spokesperson for Besties Vitamins! (11 lines)
- JIMMY (m/f) A kid in the Besties Vitamins commercial. A bully. (1 line)
- DAVEY (m/f) A kid in the Besties Vitamins commercial. Davey is the kid who gets picked last in gym class. (3 lines)

JUDGE (m/f).....	(7 lines)
BAILIFF (m/f)	(1 line)
PRODUCER (m/f).....	Ted's news team. (3 lines)
MAKE-UP ARTIST (m/f)	Ted's news team. (Non-Speaking)
CAMERA OPERATOR (m/f)	Ted's news team. (Non-Speaking)
CARD DEALER (m/f).....	(1 line)
POKER PLAYER 1 (m/f).....	(1 line)
POKER PLAYER 2 (m/f).....	(1 line)
STERLING (m/f)	(6 lines)
BOARD MEMBER 1 (m/f)	(6 lines)
BOARD MEMBER 2 (m/f)	(4 lines)
DOCTOR (m/f).....	(10 lines)
NEWSPAPER BOY (m/f)	(5 lines)
HOSTAGE (m/f).....	(2 lines)
SCREAMER (m/f).....	Someone who yells loudly. (6 lines)
EFFECTS ENGINEERS (m/f).....	An onstage crew of three or four who produce the sound effects and cue the audience to applaud. (VISUAL F/X and SOUND F/X)
EXTRAS (m/f).....	CROWD, GUESTS, STAGE CREW, STAGEHAND, WAITSTAFF (Non-Speaking)

DURATION: 80 minutes.

SETTING: Populous, an everyday American mega-city.

TIME: Present Day.

PRODUCTION NOTES

SCENES: Scenes are not numbered but scene transitions are referenced. A quick lighting change will emphasize a different setting on one side of the stage while the other side of the stage prepares in dim light for the next scene transition. To maintain momentum, blackouts are rarely used.

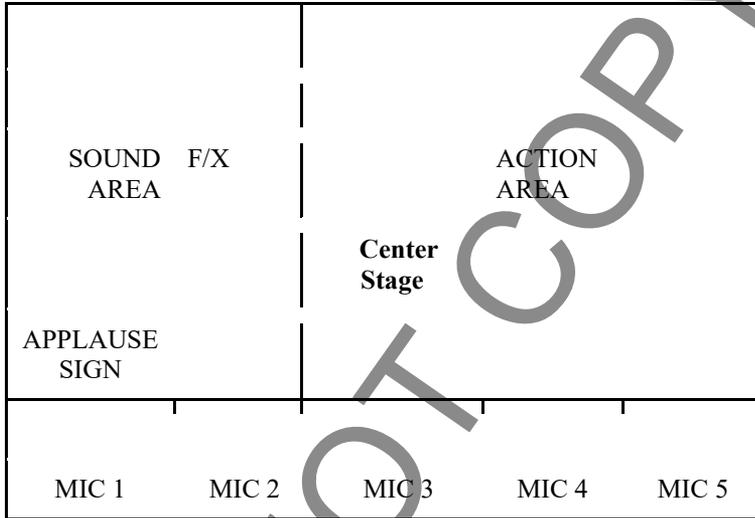
ACTING: Much of the acting in this play needs to be over-the-top. Think of an outlandish group of Ren Faire actors taking on a parody of a superhero movie. Except for a few key moments, most of this play DOES NOT take itself seriously. The bigger the actors go with the comedy, the more poignant the softer moments will seem.

CASTING: Although casting can be gender-fluid, gender stereotypes are explored in great detail. Roles like The Peacock or Grungy can be easily gender-switched with a name change, but some characters need to be viewed as male or female even if they aren't cast as such. Otherwise, many of the battle-of-the-sexes jokes won't land. For example, a female in the role of Above Average Man is a great idea as long as that female plays the role in a way that makes it evident to the audience that the character is supposed to be uber-male. If the script does not specify a gender, then pronouns and names can be changed in the script to accommodate your cast. Also, because this is radio, actors can take on several parts to adhere to your cast size (e.g. Emcee and Ted Turkington are easy to combine, so are the Emcee, Johnny Handsome, and Sterling.) Feel free to combine as needed in any way you see fit.

SCRIPT CHANGES: Lots of comedy is often contemporary, so feel free to update pop-cultural references.

STAGING: All the directions in this script reference the original staging of this show. That being said, feel free to play with it. Add or subtract whatever you need to help your cast. To make staging and memorization easier for your cast, this script can be produced as a live radio show, but ideally, the radio hour motif should be a pastiche utilized for its humorous shtick. As the play progresses, the radio element should disappear in favor of letting the story tell itself, only to be brought back for commercial breaks and occasional sound effects.

STAGE SET-UP: Five mics are spread downstage across the front of the stage. The sound effects station will house the various props needed to produce the sounds for the show. Their microphone will ALWAYS be mic 2 on the diagram below. It will also have the applause sign. The remaining four mics (1 & 3-5) are for the actors. The Action Area is an optional spot reserved for those productions who want to act occasional scenes when that radio hour veneer disappears, as it did in the original production.



SET: Three tables and chairs/stools are needed for the poker game scene.

CUES: Mic and lighting cues are given in the script to aid your cast and crew, but they can be changed at your discretion. For example, lighting cues can be replaced with freezes instead. Mic cues can be found after the actor's name within brackets (i.e. [1], [3], [4], [5]), see example cue below:

EMCEE: [5] Hello and welcome to...

SOUND EFFECTS: A list of sound effects can be found at the end of the script.

COSTUMES

MAX BEST/CAPTAIN STUPENDOUS – old-school superhero outfit: cape, tights, emblazoned “C” logo on chest; updated superhero outfit: jeans, Captain Stupendous T-shirt with C+ (the + is made out of masking tape), hoodie; tux, glasses.

PIPER PENBROOKE – business attire, hoodie.

COMMISSIONER – business suit.

JEEVES – butler attire.

EMCEE – talk show host attire.

BAILIFF, PERKINS, JONES, WALLACE – police uniforms.

DISPATCH – polo and khakis with headset.

NEFARIOUS/WEISS – 1930s gangster look, fedora, preferably in black.

MARY SUE – black jeans with black body suit and cat ears; little black dress.

THE PEACOCK – colorful/opulent dinner dress.

SOLOMON GRUNGY – 90s grunge attire, poor disguise.

TED TURKINGTON – business suit.

DAVEY, JIMMY – school attire.

JUDGE – judge’s robes.

MAKE-UP ARTIST – trendy/hip attire (muted colors.)

CAMERA OPERATOR – jeans and comic book t-shirt.

CARD DEALER – coat and tails.

STERLING, POKER PLAYERS 1 & 2 – formal attire.

GREEN, SHIRLEY, HANDSOME, PRODUCER, BOARD MEMBERS 1 & 2, HOSTAGE – business attire.

DOCTOR – lab coat.

NEWSPAPER BOY – traditional newsie attire: knickers, button-up shirt, cabbie hat.

SCREAMER, EFFECTS ENGINEERS, STAGEHAND, STAGE CREW – stagehand blacks

GUESTS – formal attire

CROWD – business or street attire

PROPS

- applause sign
- “POW” and/or “CRACK” sign (ala the 1960s television show *Batman*)
- four walkie-talkies
- Nerf Gun with soft bullets
- mirror
- camera
- huge key to city
- paper
- Stupendous business card
- chess board with pieces
- bottle of Besties Vitamins
- hors d’oevres
- drinks
- squirt guns
- four cell phones
- towel
- handcuffs
- vitamins
- chains
- bag
- whistle
- Groucho Marx fake mustache and glasses
- jump rope
- earbud
- ledger
- stopwatch
- wrapped gift, inside: Captain Stupendous t-shirt with c+
- check
- large (cardboard) hook
- rope
- trays with drinks
- heavy safe (cardboard box painted gray)
- gun
- megaphone

- wheelchair
- box of wings
- deck of playing cards

PREMIERE PRODUCTION

ABOVE AVERAGE MAN premiered at Harlem High School in Machesney Park, IL. Directed by Chris and Kelly Engler with the following cast and crew:

CAPTAIN STUPENDOUS/MAX BEST Michael Wilson
 THE COMMISSIONER Connor Davenport
 PIPER PENBROOK Cheyenne Speer
 NEFARIOUS/WEISS Dameon Palmer
 EMCEE Relena Anderson
 DONNA MAE Jada Lewis
 G. JAY GREEN/CARD PLAYER Alyssa Hanley/Jessica Spencer
 TED TURKINGTON Scott Bulliner
 JEEVES Samantha Snedigar
 DISPATCH/SHIRLEY BIGGLESBY/DOCTOR Dar Anderson
 JONES Olivia Jones
 PERKINS Seth Morris
 WALLACE Alyssa Kuehne
 HOSTAGE/THE PEACOCK Felicity Cowgill
 PRODUCER/CARD DEALER Luke Seymour
 CAMERA MAN/NEWSPAPER BOY/DAVEY Geneva Runyard
 JUDGE /JIMMY/BOARD MEMBER/CARD PLAYER Alex Jones
 BAILIFF/JOHNNY HANDSOME Emma McWilliams
 MAKE-UP ARTIST/BOARD MEMBER/CARD PLAYER..... Alyssa Morris
 STERLING/JOHNNY HANDSOME Matt Martin
 SOLOMON GRUNGY/SCREAMER Thomas Morris

Onstage Sound FX crew: Kayla Carlson & Rebecca Welch

Stage Manager: Grace Hahn-Varona

Props: Destiny Byers & Megan Hessong

Costumes: Genevieve Maltby

DEDICATION

To my wife, who is far more
than above average...

DO NOT COPY

ACT ONE

AT START: *Spotlight hits EMCEE who is standing at mic 5.*

EMCEE: [5] Hello and welcome to W ____ : _____
[Call letters and organization's name. I.e. WHHS: Harlem High School] Radio broadcasting live from the _____
[Your performance location] for tonight's very special Super Power Radio Hour! I'm your host with the most _____. [Insert name of actor.]

VISUAL FX: APPLAUSE SIGN.

EMCEE: Now for those of you joining us at home, you probably heard the applause, which means—yes—we have a live audience with us tonight.

VISUAL FX: APPLAUSE SIGN.

EMCEE: Whether live in-person or over-the-air, we're glad you've decided to join us. Now before we begin, you may be wondering why I'm reading from a script instead of having all of my lines memorized. Well, that is a convention of radio theater, which peaked in the 1940s. Radios did not have the ability to produce pictures, so much of the experience will live in your mind with the help from our very excellent sound effects engineers who are to my right. They are _____.
[Introduce the engineers and lead the audience in applause.] Voice actors also played several roles to make a cast sound bigger than they really were. Speaking of voice actors, let's meet our cast!

As the CAST enters, the EMCEE should introduce three or four major cast-members (at director discretion.) As each CAST member is introduced, the EMCEE and SOUND FX crew will lead the audience in applause.

EMCEE: Now every great superhero has a great origin story, and tonight's tale is no different. So, let us turn our mind's eye to the famed city of Populous and the origin story of the hero we all know as Above Average Man.

PIPER steps up to mic 3.

PIPER: [3] I'm Piper Penbrook, and I write for Populous's number one news source, the Daily Gazette. As a journalist, it's my duty to piece together facts, assembling them together into a story my readers can follow. This is my attempt to do just that. The hero you all know as Above Average Man is the man I know as Max Best, and he didn't start out above average; he started out stupendous.

Blackout. EMCEE and PIPER exit in the blackout. Police lights fill the room. DISPATCH steps up to mic 1.

SOUND FX: POLICE SIREN.

DISPATCH: [1] *(Into walkie-talkie.)* Calling all units. Calling all units. We have a 221A at the corner of 5th and Gardener. Bank robbery in progress. Use extreme caution. It's Nefarious. I repeat. Use extreme caution. It's Nefarious! Over.

Lights up. PERKINS, WALLACE, and JONES share mic 5.

PERKINS: [5] *(Into walkie-talkie, scared.)* Ah, we have the guy's car cornered in an alleyway behind the minimart, but he hasn't made a move. Are you sure it's Nefarious? Over.

DISPATCH: *(Into walkie-talkie.)* A Nefarious sighting has been confirmed. Over.

JONES: [5] *(Into walkie-talkie.)* Do you think you could call the Captain out here? Over.

DISPATCH: *(Into walkie-talkie.)* The Stupendous beacon has been lit, but you're on your own until he gets there. Over.

JONES: *(Scared.)* This is not good. This is not good!

PERKINS: Stay focused, Jones. Wallace, follow my lead!

WALLACE: [5] On it!

JONES: There's no reason to be a hero. Besides the Captain is on his way.

SOUND FX: CAR DOOR OPENS.

NEFARIOUS and HOSTAGE enter and share mic 3. (Note: NEFARIOUS and HOSTAGE can be "hidden" behind the applause sign until their entrance.)

NEFARIOUS: [3] Hello, boys, I want you to meet my new friend. Get out here!

SOUND F/X: HOSTAGE STRUGGLES.

HOSTAGE: [3] (*Cartoony.*) Help! Help me!

JONES: (*Panicked.*) Oh no. He has a hostage. He has a hostage.

PERKINS: I know! I know!

WALLACE: (*Into walkie-talkie.*) Dispatch, we now have a 207 on our hands...

JONES: And a gun! He also has a gun!

WALLACE: (*Into walkie-talkie, urgent.*) Make that a 207 and a 417.

NEFARIOUS: You didn't think I'd leave that bank without a little insurance policy, did you? Follow me and the hostage gets it!

WALLACE: I have him in my sights, but I don't have a clean shot.

PERKINS: He's getting away. What are we supposed to do now?!

JONES: Curse you, Nefarious!!!

SOUND F/X: LOUD CRASH.

CAPTAIN STUPENDOUS enters with a ridiculous, old-school superhero outfit: cape, tights, emblazoned "C" logo on chest, etc. He joins mic 5 with triumphant swagger.

SOUND F/X: SUPERHERO TRUMPET!

CAPTAIN: [5] Stop in the name of justice!

HOSTAGE: (*Happily.*) Captain Stupendous is here! I'm saved!

NEFARIOUS: Captain Stupendous, I knew you'd be lurking somewhere.

CAPTAIN: You picked a bad day to be a bad guy, Nefarious. Hand over the money!

PERKINS: Uh, Captain, he has a hostage, too.

CAPTAIN: Oh, right. Hand over the hostage... and the money... preferably in that order.

NEFARIOUS: Or what?

CAPTAIN: (*Arrogant.*) Or else I'll spank you in front of the whole city again.

NEFARIOUS: Is that an ultimatum, Captain?

CAPTAIN: An ulti—what?

NEFARIOUS: An ultimatum.

CAPTAIN: I'm sorry. You lost me.

NEFARIOUS: You know, an uncompromising demand someone places on another.

CAPTAIN: I'm still not following.

NEFARIOUS: Forget it. I don't take ultimatums anyway!

SOUND FIX: FOOTSTEPS.

CAPTAIN inches towards NEFARIOUS by taking mic 4.

NEFARIOUS: Wait, what are you doing? Stop right there.

CAPTAIN: [4] You know I can't do that, Nefarious.

NEFARIOUS: Why not?

SOUND FIX: FOOTSTEPS.

CAPTAIN: Because I have to stand up for what's right!

NEFARIOUS: Fine. Then stand up to this!

NEFARIOUS pulls out a Nerf Gun and shoots a series of soft bullets at the CAPTAIN'S chest which ricochet with ease. (Note: Please stage this with safety as a priority.)

SOUND FIX: SEVERAL GUNSHOTS.

CAPTAIN: Oh Nefarious, how quickly you forget. Bullets can't hurt me. I'm stupendous! Now it's my turn.

SOUND FIX: SUPERHERO MUSIC!

In a big, pantomimed punch, the CAPTAIN swings and lands a whopper on NEFARIOUS'S jaw. More cartoony punches follow until the news bulletin below.

SOUND FIX: HITS AND PUNCHES. (NEFARIOUS "ou's" and "ouches" in pain.)

JONES: (Over the fighting.) I've never seen anything like it. He's amazing.

PERKINS: (Over the fighting.) He's not amazing. He's stupendous! Captain Stupendous.

VISUAL FIX: APPLAUSE SIGN.

SCENE TRANSITION

SOUND FX: NEWS BULLETIN SOUND.

The stage goes black except for a spotlight at mic 1 where TED TURKINGTON enters in a business suit with his small film crew: PRODUCER, MAKE-UP ARTIST, and CAMERA OPERATOR. MAX stays at mic 3. PERKINS, WALLACE, and JONES stand proudly with him. HOSTAGE, NEFARIOUS, and DISPATCH exit.

PRODUCER: [1] We're on in five, four, three, two, one...

Loving his own image, TED adjusts his hair in a mirror and gives himself a nod. When the countdown ends, he flips on a dime to the competent reporter as he stares down the camera.

TED: [1] Tonight's top story: Captain Stupendous thwarts the evil Nefarious once again. Is there nothing this man can't do? Full details at five, six, and ten.

Spotlight switches to PIPER who is at mic 5. Note: during this next monologue, the cast should get into position for the next scene. The COMMISSIONER and CAPTAIN STUPENDOUS share mic 3. The COMMISSIONER holds a huge key to the city. ALL REPORTERS huddle into the Action Area as if they're waiting for a big press announcement. TED moves to mic 4 with ALL REPORTERS. TED'S crew (PRODUCER, MAKE-UP ARTIST, and CAMERA OPERATOR stay at mic 1 and "film" the new conference.

PIPER: [5] I first met Max, I mean Above Average Man, when people still called him the Captain... and we didn't hit it off very well. It was at a press conference in early summer of last year, and he was standing with his best friend, the Commissioner.

Lights up.

COMMISSIONER: [3] When my good friend the mayor asked me to speak today to honor the Captain, I was honored. I've known Captain Stupendous for most of his adult life, and he has proven time and time again to be our city's savior. Not only is he a great cop and a great superhero, he's also my best friend. So, without further ado: I'd like to give Captain Stupendous the key to the city!

COMMISSIONER hands the big key over to the CAPTAIN. The CROWD in the Action Area claps.

CAPTAIN: [3] Wow. This is an awfully big key. I wonder what it fits. This should come in handy. Thank you. Thank you. Although being stupendous is its own reward, if we're all honest with ourselves, we all know I deserve this. But thank you for finally realizing it. I don't know what else to say other than: it's about time.

The CROWD in the Action Area claps. The REPORTERS don't seem to pick up on the insult, taking in everything CAPTAIN says as if he were Moses.

COMMISSIONER: At this time we'd like to open the floor to questions.

The CROWD in the Action Area shuffles as they improvise: "Pick me," "I have a question," and "Right here!"

COMMISSIONER: Um... Ted.

TED: [4] (*Stepping up, overly official.*) Ted Turkington with Channel Two News—traffic, weather, and crime all the time.

CAPTAIN: Good to see you, Ted. What's your question?

TED: (*No longer official.*) Good to see you too, Captain! When are you going to appear on the Meat-e-Ohs box again? My kid loves collecting all the poses.

CAPTAIN: (*Chuckling.*) Oh... my sponsorship with Meat-e-Oh's expired, but I have a new venture: Besties Vitamins. If you want to be the best, you have to eat the best... and take vitamins... because they're good for you. So, keep an eye out for that.

TED: I will.

COMMISSIONER: Next question.

The CROWD in the Action Area shuffles.

SHIRLEY: [4] (*Stepping up.*) Shirley Bigglesby: Populous Radio 760—where if it bleeds, it leads. I have a question for you, Cap. The Commissioner calls you the savior of the city. That's a pretty loaded term, don't you think?

CAPTAIN: Loaded term. Let's be honest. I've saved this city more times than I can count... (*Boasting.*) and I can count really high. So, no it's not loaded. Calling me the savior of Populous would be like me calling Ted the best journalist in this town. There are opinions and there are facts, and a fact is a fact. I'm awesome, Ted's awesome, and there's a reason you're on radio, so yeah...

As disparaging as it is, the brainwashed crowd loves every word CAPTAIN says.

TED: Thanks, Cap!

COMMISSIONER: Next question.

The CROWD in the Action Area shuffles.

PIPER: [5] (*All business.*) Piper Penbrook with the Daily Gazette.

CAPTAIN: (*Flirty.*) Ooo, Piper. You must be new to town. Have we met?

PIPER: It's Ms. Penbrook. And no we haven't.

CAPTAIN: Well, we should. I know this little place on the lower-East side. They have everything: beer, wings, sports.

PIPER: (*Under her breath.*) Oh dear...

CAPTAIN: And like 70 television screens. Perfect for a quiet, romantic evening...

PIPER: With all due respect, Captain... if that's even your real name... my question is for the Commissioner.

The CROWD in the Action Area shuffles lightly.

COMMISSIONER: Yes, ma'am.

PIPER: When is this city going to get real with crime?

CAPTAIN: *(Interrupting.)* Hey, I get real with crime every day!

COMMISSIONER: *(Calming the CAPTAIN.)* I got this. *(To PIPER.)*

Could you please be a bit more specific?

PIPER: Sure. Our violent crime rate is five times higher than the national average. Even after all of the Captain's efforts, the citizens of Populous still have a one-in-ten chance of being a victim of a crime every time they step out their doors. Only four percent of U.S. cities are more dangerous than ours. When are we going to stop pretending that our city isn't falling apart? When is the city going to examine the causes of these crimes so we can stop them before they happen?

COMMISSIONER: Wow, that's a lot to unpack. I have to hand it to you. You obviously know your facts, little lady...

PIPER: *(Protesting.)* Little lady?!

COMMISSIONER: The Gazette is lucky to have you... and Populous is lucky to have a hero like Captain Stupendous.

The CROWD doesn't notice how COMMISSIONER changed the topic. They just clap and cheer like dopey sheep. The CROWD in the Action Area claps and cheers.

PIPER: Seriously? You're not even going to try and answer my question?

CAPTAIN: I got this one. *(Taking over the mic.)* Let me try and mansplain something to you. If these guys stopped all the crime in the city... then they wouldn't need me.

PIPER: Uh yeah... that's kinda my point.

CAPTAIN: But the city loves me.

PIPER: Because you fight criminals, yes.

CAPTAIN: Which I wouldn't be able to do if there wasn't any more crime.

PIPER: Which would be a good thing.

CAPTAIN: But then they wouldn't have me, so also kind of a bad thing when you think about it.

PIPER: *(Confused.)* It would be a bad thing if we had less crime?!

CAPTAIN: Lady, less of me equals more crime.

PIPER: Unless we prevent it!

CAPTAIN: Then you prevent me! It's sort of like the whole chicken and the egg thing. *(Beat.)* If the chicken eats the egg, then what's he going to have for breakfast tomorrow?

PIPER: That's not what the chicken and egg thing is about at all.

CAPTAIN: It's very complicated and sciencey. I'm not sure even I understand it.

PIPER: That's obvious.

CAPTAIN: Exactly.

COMMISSIONER steps in.

COMMISSIONER: Uh... next question.

PIPER: I have a follow-up.

COMMISSIONER: *(Stern.)* Next question.

The CROWD shuffling in the Action Area turns to shoving.

PIPER: *(More stern.)* I have a follow-up!

COMMISSIONER: Fine. What's your question?

PIPER: *(After a beat.)* What are you doing about Nefarious?

The CROWD responds in comic, cartoony fear at the very mention of NEFARIOUS'S name.

COMMISSIONER: Nefarious is public enemy number one, and we have brought him to stand trial on seven different occasions.

PIPER: So I've heard. We all know the drill. Captain Stupendous arrests him, and then the case falls apart. Whether it be some sort of evidence tampering or bribery scandal or change at the D.A.'s office, something always causes his case to crumble. Why is that?

COMMISSIONER: I give this city my word: this time... *(Sternly.)* Nefarious will stand trial. *(Beat.)* I believe that is all the time we have for today. If you have any other questions, feel free to contact my office.

COMMISSIONER exits. As the CROWD and REPORTERS disperse, the CAPTAIN makes his way to mic 4 in hopes to meet PIPER.

SOUND FX: CROWDED ROOM. FEET SCURRING.

CAPTAIN: [4] Excuse me.... Hey, Ted, excuse me.... Martha, excuse me.... Hey Gazette lady, wait up! Wait up! It's Piper, right? Ms. Penbrook! Ms. Penbrook!!!

SOUND FX: FEET SCURRYING STOPS.

PIPER: (*Annoyed.*) What do you want?

CAPTAIN: I wanted to meet you... welcome you to our city.

PIPER: (*Suspicious.*) Okay...

CAPTAIN slides over to mic 5 next to PIPER.

CAPTAIN: [5] (*Beat.*) So, do you like wings?

PIPER: (*Disappointed.*) Oh great, you're asking me out again. Can't you take the hint? I just shot you down like two minutes ago.

CAPTAIN: (*Stammering.*) Wait. What? No. Me asking you out? Pssshh... I just thought that you seemed like the kind of person who eats. It just so happens that I eat stuff too, so I thought we could maybe do some eating together sometime.

PIPER: Yeah, that's called a date. So, no.

CAPTAIN: Or is it just called eating with someone you just met in hopes of getting to know them better?

PIPER: You don't give up, do you?

CAPTAIN: I never give up. (*Dramatic pose.*) I'm a Superhero.

PIPER: Fine, if I give you a fake number, will you go away?

CAPTAIN: (*Thinks.*) Yes... because it's the 21st century, and I respect a woman's space.

SOUND FX: PEN WRITING ON PAPER.

PIPER: Then... here you go.

Paper is exchanged.

CAPTAIN: Great. And here you go. It's my Stupendous business card. It has all of my Stupendous contact information. If I'm not in, that means I'm...

PIPER: Fighting crime?

CAPTAIN: See that? We're already sharing a wavelength here... finishing each other's—

PIPER: (*Direct.*) Go away, now.

CAPTAIN: Yes, ma'am. (*Exits.*)

SCENE TRANSITION

SOUND FX: TYPING AT A KEYBOARD.

PIPER: I didn't like the Captain, but if I wanted to keep my job, I had to hide that fact, a condition of employment my new boss made very clear.

SOUND FX: KNOCKING.

GREEN enters, taking mic 3.

GREEN: [3] Excuse me.

PIPER: Yes?

GREEN: You're the new beat reporter, Piper Penbrook, aren't you?

PIPER: Yes.

SOUND FX: FOOTSTEPS.

GREEN meets PIPER at mic 5 for a handshake.

GREEN: [5] (*Shakes PIPER'S hand.*) I'm G. Jay Green. Glad to have you onboard.

PIPER: It's good to be here, boss.

GREEN: I was wondering if I could talk to you about your display at city hall today.

PIPER: My display?

GREEN: We've had some complaints. It seems your line of questioning put the Commissioner in an awkward position, which puts us in an awkward position.

PIPER: (*Hesitant.*) I'm not sure I follow. All I did was ask why the city can't make a case against Nefarious.

GREEN: That's exactly what makes the Commissioner so uncomfortable. He's fine with you investigating Nefarious, but he's asking us to lay off his team. They're public servants just like us.

PIPER: (*Principled.*) I go where the story takes me.

GREEN: (*Annoyed.*) Listen, toots!

PIPER: Toots? What is this? 1950?

GREEN: My great, great-grandfather started this paper over a hundred year ago, and for generations it was a beacon for journalistic excellence... but those days are long over. Now we need content. Do you know what content is? Social media, pictures, gossip, likes, shares! And in this town everyone likes, shares, and gossips about one man: Captain Stupendous. So, unless your inquiries can get me pictures of him, then it's a dead story. Got it?

PIPER: Why is the Commissioner off limits?

GREEN: *(More annoyed.)* He's not off limits. He's just an old guy that doesn't generate revenue.

PIPER: But there's a story here. I know it!

GREEN: *(Calming.)* You're idealistic. I respect that, but you're not going to save the world writin' stories no one's gonna read.

PIPER: Fine...

GREEN: Now, as penance, I'm sending you to the affluenza benefit tomorrow night at Best Manor.

PIPER: Best Manor? Is hob-knobbing with millionaire elites really the best use of my time?

GREEN: Yes, it is because I say it is. Maxwell Best is the wealthiest man in this town. If he wants Gazette coverage, he gets Gazette coverage. Got it?

PIPER: *(Defeated.)* Yes... *(Narrating to audience.)* So, I was stuck on covering this party at the manor of Maxwell Best. Who is this guy anyway?

SCENE TRANSITION

PIPER and GREEN exit. The actor playing CAPTAIN STUPENDOUS is now MAX BEST, an alter-ego. He is no longer in his superhero costume. Instead, he is relaxing by playing chess with JEEVES, his butler, at mic 3. MAX is also wearing glasses.

MAX: [3] Has the Commissioner called?

JEEVES: [3] No, Master Best. It appears he doesn't need your services tonight. Pawn to G4.

SOUND FIX: CHESS PIECES SLIDING. *(Continue throughout this scene.)*

MAX: How about the Stupendous signal? Is it doing that whole movie premiere thing in the sky?

JEEVES: No, sir. Not tonight.

MAX: No Stupendous texts on the Stupendous cell phone?

JEEVES: No, sir.

MAX: The Stupendous landline?

JEEVES: No, sir. No Stupendous shout outs, Snapchats, or Instagrams for online aid either. All is well in the city, it seems. *(Beat.)* It's your turn.

MAX: Oh yeah. *(Beat.)* Bishop to E7.

JEEVES: Well done, sir.

MAX: So, this is what the world looks like without Nefarious on the streets. No cruising around in the Stupendous-mobile, fighting petty criminals with my over-powered Stupendous suit.

JEEVES: *(Aside.)* No taking your sweaty spandex out of the washer. *(Beat.)* Knight takes bishop at E7, sir. By the way, the sprinkler system is done for. I'd call someone, but the hub is near the south lawn... and we don't need people snooping around there.

MAX: Why not? Queen to H4.

JEEVES: Subtlety was never your forte, was it? The south lawn is where one must go to fix the sprinkler system.

MAX: That's what you just said.

JEEVES: And what else is in the south lawn, Master Best?

MAX: *(Guessing.)* My fountain dedicated to the cast of Lord of the Rings, the 70's cartoon version obviously.

JEEVES: *(Trying.)* Yes, there's the fountain, but what else is there, sir?

MAX: *(Guessing.)* The world's biggest, tiny house?

JEEVES: *(Growing annoyed.)* No.

MAX: *(Guessing.)* My three acre Popsicle stick forest.

JEEVES: *(Losing patience.)* No, no, no! The south lawn also houses the entrance to the Stupendous cave. If anyone finds the Captain's secret lair on your estate.... *(Leads but MAX still doesn't understand. Beat.)* They'd discover that you're the Captain.

MAX: *(Realizing.)* Ah, of course. That's why I wear these glasses, so people don't discover... *(Whispers.)* my secret identity.

JEEVES: Exactly. *(Continuing.)* Bishop to queen, H4. Check!

MAX: Gaaa! *(After calming.)* Let me see. *(Epiphany.)* Aha!

SOUND FIX: NUMEROUS QUICK CHESS PIECES SLIDING.

MAX: King to C3, D5, G7, back to G5, and settles onto D7 with a flying kick move. Check mate!

JEEVES: Well Master Best, in all my years of playing chess, I can honestly say I've never seen anything quite like that before.

MAX: Well, don't blame yourself. Not everyone can be a chess wizard.

SOUND FIX: CELL PHONE ALARM.

MAX: *(Reminded.)* Oh, it's time.

SOUND FIX: MEDICINE BOTTLE RATTLES.

SOUND FIX: WATER POURED.

MAX shows JEEVES a bottle of Besties Vitamins.

MAX: *(Toasting.)* This is how we save this generation, Jeeves. Bestie Vitamins: this is how we'll keep them safe.

JEEVES: *(Unimpressed.)* Yes, sir. Excellent idea, sir.

SOUND FIX: MAX SWALLOWS.

SOUND FIX: CUP SET DOWN.

MAX: Wanna play again?

JEEVES: No, sir. I think I shall retire... as should you. You have big day tomorrow.

MAX: *(Like a child.)* Oh c'mon! Let me stay up for just one more hour. Please!

JEEVES: Very well. Very well. Just don't come to me if you see something scary on the tellie again.

SCENE TRANSITION

GUESTS including PIPER and GREEN enter in the Action Area as MAX exits. JEEVES greets the GUESTS with hors d'oeuvres and drinks. PIPER stops JEEVES at mic 4.

SOUND FIX: FANCY VIOLIN MUSIC. RANDOM GUEST CHATTER.

PIPER: [4] *(To JEEVES.)* Excuse me. I'm with the Daily Gazette, and I'm looking for a Mr. Maxwell Best. Do you know where I can find him?

JEEVES: [4] He should be here shortly. I'm Jeeves, Master Best's steward. At least I was when he was a child.

PIPER: Well, I'm Piper Penbrook.

JEEVES: It's a pleasure to meet you, Ms. Penbrook. Can I get you some refreshment? Some tea, perhaps.

PIPER: No, I'm fine. Thank you.

Now in a tux, MAX enters with the COMMISSIONER. They take mic 3.

SOUND FIX: GLASS CLINKS. (*Signifying a speech.*)

SOUND FIX: MUSIC FADES.

MAX: [3] All right. All right. Settle down everyone.

PIPER: (*To JEEVES.*) Who is that? He looks a little familiar, but I can't quite place it.

JEEVES: That, milady, is Maxwell Best.

MAX: Thank you. Thank you all for coming. If you could give me the room for just a moment, I'd like to introduce you to the brainchild behind tonight's fundraiser. You know him as this city's first cop, but I'm lucky enough to know him as a friend. Without further ado: the Commissioner!

SOUND FIX: APPLAUSE.

MAX exits.

COMMISSIONER: [3] Thank you, thank you. Now let's talk about the cause that brings us all together tonight: affluenza. The struggle is real, my friends. Our kids with privilege have it tough these days. As a victim of affluenza myself, I can speak first-hand about the stresses that come from having an obscene amount of money. Luxury cars, vacation homes, a great education, and high paying job given to you through nepotism can only do so much for our kids. That's why this organization is so important. It's not their fault they were born with a silver spoon in their mouths. Affluenza is a real problem... and it needs a champion. That champion is Best Enterprises. (*Retreats to the Action Area.*)

The GUESTS react favorably with golf claps. Improvised "Here, here!" and more applause is heard. Improvised conversation begins.

SOUND FX: FANCY VIOLIN MUSIC.

JEEVES: Ms. Penbrook, Ms. Green informed Master Best of your attendance here tonight, and he would like to invite you on a tour of the greenhouses...

PIPER: Oh, uh, sure. Lead the way.

SOUND FX: FOOTSTEPS. (*Two sets.*)

SOUND FX: FANCY VIOLIN MUSIC and RANDOM GUEST CHATTER FADES SLOWLY.

Lights dim in the Action Area. ALL freeze except PIPER and JEEVES.

PIPER: This estate is beautiful.

JEEVES: Yes, Master Best inherited the grounds upon his parents' untimely demise, along with Best Enterprises. He has done his best to carry on the family legacy.

SOUND FX: DOOR OPENS.

SOUND FX: FOOTSTEPS. (*Walking in.*)

MAX enters stage left and takes mic 5.

JEEVES: Master Best? Meet Ms. Penbrook. I'll leave you two some privacy. (*Walks to mic 1 and freezes.*)

SOUND FX: FOOTSTEPS. (*Walking out.*)

SOUND FX: DOOR CLOSSES.

SOUND FX: FANCY VIOLIN MUSIC and RANDOM GUEST CHATTER STOPS.

Spotlights hit PIPER and MAX.

PIPER: (*Hesitant.*) Your butler seems nice.

MAX: [5] Don't let him fool you. He's just an old man trying to get into heaven. How can I help you, Ms. Penbrook? I assume the Gazette has some questions.

PIPER: Uh, yes. So, your benefit here tonight is designed to help those with affluenza. Why affluenza?

MAX: Because I love kids.

PIPER: But affluent kids are, by definition, already pretty privileged, so why not help those who are less fortunate, like inner-city kids or the working poor?

MAX: Don't all kids matter, Ms. Penbrook?

PIPER: Well, yes, but—

MAX: (*Finishing his thought.*) Plus, I don't really know any poor people, so...

PIPER: All right, I'm just going to ignore that. Second question. How much money have you raised here tonight?

MAX: Three million dollars.

PIPER: (*Spit-take.*) Three million dollars? (*Under her breath.*) Dear God, help us.

MAX: Not as much as last year, but the night is still young.

PIPER: (*Maintaining professionalism.*) And what will the money be used for?

MAX: The funds raised here tonight will ease the suffering felt by those with excessive wealth.

PIPER: (*Working this out.*) So, you're going to give money to wealthy people to ease the discomfort that comes from having too much money?

MAX: Not exactly. That's what we used to do, but this time we're trying something different.

PIPER: Something different? I'm almost afraid to ask.

MAX: Every dime we raise this year is going to be dropped into a new initiative. And if this initiative works, we're going to roll it out city-wide for all kids: rich or poor.

PIPER: (*Now very suspicious.*) And what is this new initiative?

MAX: It's top secret. I can't tell anyone, especially a member of the press.

PIPER: Hey, I know I work for a newspaper, but no one reads the newspaper anymore. So, if you think about it, telling me is kinda like not telling anybody.

MAX: Good point. (*Thinks.*) Hmm... all right. The secret is—

SOUND FIX: SPRINKLER SYSTEM TURNS ON.

PIPER and MAX get sprayed with squirt guns by the STAGE CREW.

MAX: Oh, my gosh. What is that?

PIPER: I think it's your sprinkler system.

MAX: Not again. Let's head outside. Maybe it's only a problem here in the greenhouse.

SOUND FX: FOOTSTEPS.

SOUND FX: DOOR OPENS.

SOUND FX: CROWD OF PEOPLE LEAVING.

The GUESTS exit, trying to avoid the "sprinklers" as PIPER and MAX take mic 3.

PIPER: [3] Nope, same problem here.

MAX: [3] Here, take my jacket.

MAX covers PIPER as he pulls out his phone.

MAX: Let me make a quick call. *(Beat. Into phone.)* Jeeves, turn off the main valve.

A quick spotlight on mic 1 shows JEEVES.

JEEVES: [1] *(Into phone.)* Working on it, sir.

MAX and PIPER wait, continuing to get sprayed with squirt guns.

MAX: *(Waiting.)* Sorry. I was supposed to fix this today, but time got away from me.

PIPER: It's all right. This jacket is doing wonders.

MAX: We just have to wait a minute.

SOUND FX: SPRINKLER SYSTEM TURNS OFF.

MAX: There we go. I think it's done.

PIPER: Can I get a towel?

MAX: Sure, here you go.

A STAGEHAND gives a towel to PIPER.

MAX: Man, I can't see a thing with all this water on my glasses.

PIPER: Here, let me dry them for you.

PIPER wipes off MAX'S glasses, but as she goes to hand them back, she stops, realizing something.

PIPER: *(Realizing.)* Mr. Best, now that I see you without specs, I feel like I know you.

MAX: You feel it too, huh? *(Flirty.)* I believe it's called mutual, physical attraction. It happens all the time in my line of work.

PIPER: No, it's definitely something else. I think I know the other you.

MAX: *(Flirty.)* The other me? *(Realizing, then panicked.)* The other me?! You mean, you think I'm Captain Stupendous?

PIPER: I didn't say anything about the Captain, but without the glasses, it's kind of obvious.

MAX: Give me those. *(Put them back on.)* How about now?

PIPER: How about what? What are you doing?

MAX: I'm proving to you I'm not who you think I am.

PIPER: How?

MAX: You still recognize me?

PIPER: Why wouldn't I? I'm not an idiot. You think because you put your glasses back on I suddenly can't tell your Captain Stupendous? I feel kinda foolish for not seeing it before now.

MAX: *(Waves hand over her face like a magic trick.)* I'm not the superhero you're looking for.

PIPER: Are you trying to Jedi mind trick me?

MAX: What? No. But mind control is one of my super-powers... *(Correcting himself.)* I mean if I was a superhero in the first place, which I'm not. See, now you got me all confused, and that's bad because you're a journalist and now the whole world will know my secret identity.

PIPER: Look, Mr. Best. Were we on the record?

MAX: What? No, there's not vinyl in here. When I go old-school, I go eight track.

PIPER: No, the official record. Let me explain. There are two ways you can talk to a journalist: on the record or off the record. If you want to tell a journalist something but don't want it printed, tell them *(Uses finger quotes.)* "off the record." But if you want to tell them something officially, then you tell *(Uses finger quotes.)* "on the record." So, do you want to tell me something "off the record?"

MAX: Do I have to use those finger quotes?

PIPER: You can, but no.

MAX: When I told you I was that other guy, I need that to stay “off the record.”

PIPER: Okay. That’s fair.

SOUND FX: CELL PHONE RINGS.

MAX: Give me a moment. *(Into phone.)* Hello.

Quick spotlight on JEEVES again.

JEEVES: *(Into phone.)* Sorry to bother you, sir, but your guests are leaving.

MAX: *(Into phone.)* Be there in a minute. *(To PIPER.)* I’m sorry, Ms. Penbrook, but I’m afraid the private tour is over.

PIPER: Yes, of course. *(Beat.)* Say, what are you doing tomorrow?

MAX: Why? Reconsidering the whole wing thing?

PIPER: Not exactly. My boss needs me to get pictures of the Captain.

MAX: A photoshoot? That would be stupendous. I love pictures of me.

PIPER: Great. Meet me at Memorial Park at noon?

MAX: I’ll be there... *(Correcting.)* I mean, the Captain will be there.

ALL exit, except PIPER.

SCENE TRANSITION

PIPER: [3] *(Narrating.)* In only my first week on the job, I had a major breakthrough: the chauvinist Superhero Captain Stupendous was actually the chauvinist elitist Maxwell Best, but something still wasn’t adding up. How can a guy so dumb be this city’s savior? I couldn’t shake the feeling that I was somehow being hoodwinked. Then a thought occurred to me. Maybe the Captain wasn’t stupendous after all. I needed to test my theory.

Blackout.

VISUAL FX: Applause sign.

SOUND FX: EURO-DISCO MUSIC. *(In the vein of “I’m Too Sexy.”)*

SOUND FX: CAMERA SHUDDER CLICKING.

Lights come up on mic 5 where PIPER and the CAPTAIN, now in full superhero costume, stand. The CAPTAIN poses for various over-heroic shots. PIPER captures the moments with her camera phone.

MAX: [5] (*As CAPTIAN.*) Hey Piper, check out this pose. (*Poses and snap.*) Now this. (*Poses and snap.*) Would you like the time? (*Poses and snap.*) City Hall is that way. (*Poses and snap.*) I call this my “sad glare in the distance” stare. (*Poses and snaps.*)

SOUND FX: EURO-DISCO MUSIC ENDS.

MAX: (*As CAPTAIN.*) Hey, how about we get a cat and put it in a tree? Then I can save it. That’d make a stupendous picture.

PIPER: [5] No, these are great. Thanks.

MAX: (*As CAPTAIN.*) How about me helping an old lady with her groceries?

PIPER: No, I have plenty. Thank you. (*Beat.*) Give me a minute. I need to send them to my boss. She’s going to love these.

MAX: (*As CAPTAIN.*) They are pretty sweet, but then again, why wouldn’t they be... they’re of me.

PIPER: Hey, can we have a conversation (*Uses finger quotes.*) “off the record?”

MAX: Oh, it’s the finger quote thing again. Let’s see. How do we do that? Long, slow finger quotes throughout the conversation or quick quotes around everything we say?

PIPER: Let’s just say everything from here on out is “off the record” until we say “on the record.”

MAX: Oh, your way sounds way easier.

PIPER: So, off the record, let’s talk about... Nefarious.

MAX: How dare you say that name in my presence!

PIPER: Settle down. Let me rephrase my question: don’t you find it odd that he who shall not be named—

MAX: Voldemort?

PIPER: No, you just told me to not say his name. (*MAX is confused.*) Nefarious?

MAX: How dare you say that name in my presence!

PIPER: All right. Don’t you find it odd that your arch enemy—

MAX: (*Filling in.*) Nefarious?

PIPER: (*Annoyed.*) Yes.

MAX: Just checking...

PIPER: Isn't it weird he's never gone to jail?

MAX: (*Mansplaining.*) Well, you're new to this town, so I'm going to assume you're not from here. Things are different in Populous.

Criminals get these things called trials where they are presumed—

PIPER: I know what a trial is; I'm from Des Moines... not Neptune.

MAX: Des Moines, aye? Exotic. I've never been to France myself, but I hear it's lovely.

PIPER: Des Moines is in Iowa.

MAX: Iowa? Is that near Austria, that continent where they sent all the prisoners from England?

PIPER: Let's just move on. How many times have you captured your arch enemy?

MAX: I'm estimating here, but about once a month for the past ten years.

PIPER: And he's never been convicted of a crime?

MAX: (*Agreeing.*) That is odd, but I'm not a lawyer.

PIPER: How about his thugs. Like Mary Sue?

Spots hit the LEAGUE OF VILLAINY (MARY SUE, THE PEACOCK, and GRUNGY.) who are now center stage; they are posed in a tableau. MARY SUE steps forward.

MAX: Miss Trix. Yes, I remember her. Master thief. Has a thing for cats.

PIPER: She was let out of jail three days after she stole the entire city's security codes. Why?

MAX: That's easy. Her psychiatrist deemed separation anxiety from her pets made her unsuitable for trial.

PIPER: And you believe that?

MAX: It's a serious condition.

THE PEACOCK steps forward with the poise of an aristocrat. She's dressed in a colorful, almost opulent dinner dress.

PIPER: Then what about the Peacock: Grizelda Biesterfield Cobblestone.

MAX: The Polish princess? She has diplomatic immunity.

PIPER: Poland hasn't had a monarchy since 1918, Max!

MAX: So.

PIPER: (*Beat.*) Then take Solomon Grungy...

GRUNGY steps forward dressed in 90's grunge attire.

MAX: Big guy? Wardrobe says he's trapped in 1995?

PIPER: Exactly. After a kidnapping plot, he was given six months probations provided he attends karaoke with the judge twice a week?

MAX: He does sing a sweet tune.

PIPER: Don't you see where I'm going with this? You keep catching them, and someone else keeps letting them go.

MAX: Well, that's just about the dumbest thing I've ever heard.

PIPER: (*Exploring.*) You're a superhero, right?

MAX: Obviously.

PIPER: No, honestly... off the record, are you really a superhero?

MAX: (*Scoffing.*) Pfft... you're talking crazy. Of course I'm a superhero.

PIPER: Has anyone ever bested you?

MAX: No. Stupendous. Hello!

PIPER: Have you ever been shot?

MAX: Yes, but I'm immune to bullets. They bounce right off. It's one of the gifts.

PIPER: So you've been at this for ten years, and no one has ever hurt you?

MAX: (*Smug.*) My pain tolerance is incredibly high. You can test it. Here, punch me. (*Leans his face in.*)

PIPER: I don't think—

MAX: No, it's okay. I won't even feel it.

PIPER: That's not necessary.

MAX: No, seriously. Mortals can't hurt me. Give it everything you got.

PIPER: I don't want to hurt you.

MAX: Oh, don't insult me. Just hit me!

PIPER: Okay, but I apologize ahead of time.

SOUND FIX: SWOOSH, THUD, and CRACK.

PIPER takes a swing. MAX buckles.

MAX: Ow!!! Oh my God, that hurt. Is this is what pain feels like? No wonder you mortals complain about it all the time.

PIPER: I'm sorry. I'm sorry. But you know what this means?

MAX: (*Beat to recover, then realizing.*) Yes, I think I do. You must be a superhero, too!

PIPER: No, no, no.

MAX: That's the only logical explanation.

PIPER: No, it's not, Max. Think. (*Beat.*) If I can hurt you, then maybe you're not—

SOUND FX: CELL PHONE RINGS.

PIPER: It's my boss. Give me a second. (*Into phone.*) Hello?

Quick spot on GREEN at mic 1.

GREEN: [1] (*Into phone.*) Ah, there she is. My new star reporter. Thanks for the pictures, kid. I like them so much that I'm promoting you to the criminal division.

PIPER: Wow. Really? That's fantastic. Wait, does it come with a raise?

GREEN: Of course not. There's been a development in the Nefarious case, so get your little legs over to the courthouse, and get me that story. (*Exits.*)

PIPER: Yes, sir. I'm on it. (*Beat, to MAX.*) We gotta go, Max. Nefarious is up to something.

SCENE TRANSITION

COMMISSIONER joins the CAPTAIN and PIPER at mic 5 as the REPORTERS fill the Action Area. GRUNGY, THE PEACOCK, and MARY SUE are also there. The JUDGE and the BAILIFF enter and take mic 3. Optional: a brick wall that separates stands behind the cast.

BAILIFF: [3] All rise for the honorable Judge Nelson.

The CROWD speaks until the gavel repeatedly hits wood.

SOUND FX: GAVEL HITTING WOOD.

JUDGE: [3] Order in the court. Order in the court. Would the bailiff please bring in the defendant?

JONES, PERKINS, and WALLACE walk a handcuffed NEFARIOUS into the courtroom. NEFARIOUS stands at mic 4. JONES, PERKINS, and WALLACE retreat to the Action Area. The CROWD scurries.

CAPTAIN: *(In a whisper.)* There he is.

COMMISSIONER: Look at that smug face.

PIPER: *(In a whisper.)* Look who else is here. *(Looking around.)* Mary Sue, Solomon Grungy, the Peacock.

CAPTAIN: His whole gang is here. What's going on, Commissioner?

COMMISSIONER: *(In a whisper.)* I don't know, but let's be ready for anything.

JUDGE: Mr. Nefarious, you understand the weight of the charges against you?

NEFARIOUS: [4] Yes, I do.

JUDGE: And how do you plea?

NEFARIOUS: Can I have a moment of the court's time, your honor?

JUDGE: No, you may not. How do you plea?

NEFARIOUS: Your honor, I don't think you understand—

JUDGE: Nefarious, my courtroom is not your soapbox. What is your plea?

NEFARIOUS: That's not really the important issue at the moment.

SOUND FIX: GAVEL HITTING WOOD.

JUDGE: *(Stern.)* Nefarious, before I hold you in contempt, I need your plea.

NEFARIOUS: Your honor, I just need—

SOUND FIX: GAVEL HITTING WOOD.

JUDGE: What did I just say?

NEFARIOUS: *(Commands.)* Everyone hit the floor, now!!

SOUND FIX: GAVEL HITTING WOOD. *(Now at a slower pace.)*

ALL start to shuffle anxiously, but their shuffle slows. Some stand confused while others (in slow-motion) hit the floor. The wall separates creating a shattered pattern, making it look as if the wall has been split open.

PIPER: *(Narrating.)* It's hard to describe what happens when a bomb is detonated. The cliché is everything turns to slow motion, and that's sort of true.

SOUND FIX: TIMPANI ROLL. *(Soft, swelling.)*

PIPER: During those first moments of chaos, adrenaline makes the mind accelerate so fast that you start processing everything around with an almost super-hero-like perception. I felt the tension of fear in the room before I felt the boom.

SOUND FIX: TIMPANI "BOOM."

ALL are jolted (in slow-motion) by the "BOOM."

PIPER: Then walls crumbled, people panicked, Nefarious and his men, ran... and out of the corner of my eye... I saw Max run towards it all... when all I wanted to do was run away.

NEFARIOUS and his LEAGUE OF VILLAINY make a slow-mo exit as the CAPTAIN follows. Slow blackout, ALL exit.

SOUND FIX: POLICE SIRENS.

Spotlight comes up on mic 1 where TED and his team (PRODUCER, CAMERA OPERATOR, and MAKE-UP ARTIST) are about to go on. The MAKE-UP ARTIST tries to adjust TED'S hair.

TED: [1] *(Simultaneously with PRODUCER. Snippy, diva-like.)* How's my hair? Does it look all right? Nevermind. Forget it!

PRODUCER: [1] *(Simultaneously with TED.)* We're live in five, four, three, two, one...

TED: [1] *(A bit panicked.)* This is Ted Turkington with Channel Two News—traffic, weather, and crime all the time. I'm live downtown just outside the Populous County Courthouse where Nefarious and his gang have just escaped by detonating a bomb from inside the courtroom. That's right. Nefarious is again on the loose. So far we have no word on casualties.

PRODUCER leans in and whispers in TED'S ear.

TED: *(Breathes a sigh of relief.)* Oh, I'm just receiving word now that Captain Stupendous is on the scene, so we can all breathe a little easier. Let's check in.

NEFARIOUS, MARY SUE, THE PEACOCK, and GRUNGY enter stage left and take mic 3. They are followed by the CAPTAIN, who takes mic 5.

NEFARIOUS: [3] *(To his gang.)* It's working! He's following us.

CAPTAIN: [5] Stop in the name of justice!

NEFARIOUS: Come and get us, Captain!

TED: Now it appears that the Captain has cornered Nefarious.

CAPTAIN moves to mic 4.

CAPTAIN: [4] It's always a bad day to be a bad guy.

NEFARIOUS: Now!!

SOUND FIX: PUNCHES. *(CAPTAIN "ou's" and "ouches" in pain.)*

A silly, Three Stooges-style fight commences between the LEAGUE OF VILLAINY and the CAPTAIN: pokes to the eye, kicks to the shin, collective slaps to multiple faces at once, etc. With each hit a VISUAL F/X reveals a cardboard "POW" or "CRACK" sign ala the 1960s television show Batman. A Karate Kid crane pose and "sweep the leg, Johnny" can be thrown in. The fight ends with a Mortal Kombat "Finish Him" line ending with NEFARIOUS slow-mo punching the CAPTAIN into unconsciousness.

NEFARIOUS: I'm sorry, Cap. This is for your own good.

TED: I can't believe it. Woods, are you getting this? *(Growing scared.)*

It appears the Captain has been beaten by Nefarious and his League of Villainy... *(Beat.)* and now they're placing him in the back of a car... and driving this way.

SOUND FIX: CAR ENGINE. *(Growing in volume.)*

MARY SUE: [3] Hey newsman, tell the world we have the Captain.

PEACOCK: [3] And Populous hasn't seen anything yet! *(Laughs evilly.)*

Victorious, NEFARIOUS and the LEAGUE OF VILLAINY laugh as they carry the unconscious CAPTAIN offstage.

TED: Wait, where are you taking him?

SOUND FIX: CAR ENGINE. (*Speeding off.*)

TED: (*Now afraid and uncomposed.*) Well, there you have it, folks. Captain Stupendous has been kidnapped, and Nefarious is on the loose. The city has never been in such peril. God help us all.

Blackout. In the blackout: EMCEE enters and takes mic 1, JOHNNY HANDSOME enters and takes mic 3, and DAVEY and JIMMY enter and take mic 4. TED, PRODUCER, CAMERA OPERATOR, and MAKE-UP ARTIST exit.

VISUAL FIX: Applause sign.

EMCEE: [1] (*During the blackout.*) The Super Power Radio Hour will return in a minute, after these words from our sponsors.

Lights up on JOHNNY HANDSOME, a spokesperson with a gameshow-host smile, and DAVEY and JIMMY, two small kids.

HANDSOME: [3] (*Beat.*) Are you awkward, insecure, and weak? Meet little Davey.

DAVEY: [4] I'm not as strong as the other kids.

HANDSOME: Do the other kids find you repulsive and treat you like you have the plague?

JIMMY: [4] Ah man! Why does Davey have to be on our team? He stinks!

HANDSOME: Do you ever have those days when you're feeling less than stupendous? (*To DAVEY.*) Come here, Davey.

DAVEY reluctantly walks over to mic 3.

HANDSOME: What if I told you that everything you hate about yourself can be changed?

DAVEY: [3] But I kinda like being me.

HANDSOME: Oh Davey, that can't possibly be true. *(To audience.)*
But we can help. Thanks to new science, weird kids like Davey now have a chance to be stupendous... just like the popular kids. Thanks to Besties Vitamins. Here Davey. Take one of these. They're guaranteed to make you the fastest kid on the block and add muscle to your scrawny frame

HANDSOME gives DAVEY a vitamin.

DAVEY: But I'm not supposed to take candy from strangers.

HANDSOME: I'm not a stranger, Davey. I'm radio personality Johnny Handsome. You can trust me because I'm being paid lots of money for my very biased opinion. Now run along. I'm sure you'll grow big and strong with Besties. Disclaimer: Besties Vitamins are not recommended for everyone. If you genuinely believe self-worth comes from the inside, then Besties Vitamins may not be for you.

CAPTAIN returns in his superhero costume and takes mic 4.

CAPTAIN: [4] Hi, I'm Captain Stupendous, and I take Besties Vitamins every day. This special mix of anabolic steroid and highly-caffeinated energy drink work together to produce a faster, stronger, more perfect you... and they're 100% safe... unless ingested. I don't know what any of those words mean, but I memorized them thanks to Besties.

HANDSOME: So why settle on average when you can be Stupendous with Besties?

EMCEE: Thanks Johnny. The Super Power Radio Hour will return after a short break!

Blackout.

VISUAL FIX: Applause sign.

INTERMISSION

ACT TWO

AT START: *EMCEE* is at mic 1. *CAPTAIN* sits chained to a stool at mic 4, he has a bag over his head to keep him blindfolded. Lights up at mic 1.

EMCEE: [1] Now back to our Super Power Radio Hour with the origins of Above Average Man!

VISUAL FIX: Applause sign.

EMCEE: When we last left our hero, he had just been kidnapped by his arch enemy Nefarious who took him to his secret hideout. Now the Captain sits in a dark room chained to a chair with a bag over his head. (*Exits.*)

Lights up at mic 4.

CAPTAIN: [4] Hello...

SOUND FIX: CHAINS and BAG RATTLING.

CAPTAIN: Hello... hello?

SOUND FIX: CHAINS and BAG RATTLING.

NEFARIOUS and the *LEAGUE OF VILLAINY* enter. *NAFARIOUS* takes mic 3. The *LEAGUE OF VILLAINY* takes mic 5.

NEFARIOUS: [3] Here, let me help you with that bag.

SOUND FIX: PAPER BAG SHUFFLING.

NEFARIOUS removes the bag from *CAPTAIN'S* head, then returns to mic 3.

CAPTAIN: Thank you. (*Looks around the room, realizing...*) Nefarious! Mary Sue! The Peacock! Solomon Grungy! All my greatest villains in one place.

SOUND FIX: CHAINS RATTLING.

CAPTAIN: (*Struggling.*) You guys picked a really bad day to be really bad guys! Just wait until—

NEFARIOUS: You're not going to break out of those chains.

***Thank you for reading this free excerpt from ABOVE AVERAGE
MAN by Christopher E. Engler. For performance rights and/or a
complete copy of the script, please contact us at:***

Brooklyn Publishers, LLC

P.O. Box 248 • Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52406

Toll Free: 1-888-473-8521 • Fax (319) 368-8011

www.brookpub.com