

# *Metamediocrity: Shrinkage*

by  
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Revised, 2013

*Some are born great,  
some achieve greatness,  
and some just want to make it to payday.*

## *Issue 1: Origin Stories*

You ever read comic books? I don't. I mean, what's the point with all the capes we have flying around these days? I don't really understand the appeal of romanticized make-believe stories about heroes and villains when you can see the same thing on the evening news. It's all there – triumph, tragedy, good versus evil – the whole ball of wax. In a world where truth is stranger than fiction, how can those guys even make a living?

Anyway – comic books. Every hero worth his salt has a cool Origin Story, right? You know how the “Origin Story” is always really cool, or inspiring? Well, that's a load of crap. Maybe it happens sometimes to those headline heroes, the last survivor from a dying planet, the good scientist struck by lightning, but not the metahumans I know. Most of us feel like we were gang raped by cosmic freight trains with a twisted sense of humor.

I wasn't born with mine. In fact, I was already in my thirties when I was honored with this gift from the stars. According to some of the official reports I've seen since then, I was apparently targeted at random by some extraterrestrial juvenile delinquents. Essentially, I was blanket rolled by a couple of punk kids, out for a joy ride in a stolen space ship. They had managed to strong-arm their way through several star systems, thieving whatever they could get their hands on. Unfortunately for me, they had also managed to put their hands on a piece of equipment called a biomutagenic reactor. As you can guess, the words mutagenic and reactor do not imply safe and happy technology. Not only are these things highly illegal, but also highly unstable. They're capable of rewriting your DNA from the ground up, which can offer the lucky lab rat some pretty extraordinary powers if you can work around two very important obstacles. First, the lab rat has to survive the process, which is unlikely at best. Second, the biomutagenic reactor itself has to be lucky to survive the process. If not, then the operator will find themselves smeared across the sky in a spectacular explosion of light and shrapnel. In this case, I suppose one out of two isn't bad. The space punks got the spectacular explosion of light and shrapnel, finding themselves reduced to tiny particles drifting out into space. I, on the other hand, found myself on my kitchen floor, covered in my own vomit, screaming at the pain in my head, and hoping to die. Instead, I did the next best thing. I passed out again.

The second time I awoke, my head was still ringing. No. Maybe it wasn't my head that was ringing. It was the phone. I took a second to do a personal inventory. Aside from being filthy and sore, I seemed to be in one piece. My head didn't hurt and I felt as good as one can expect after sleeping on the kitchen floor. I stood up and glanced at the clock. It was 10AM. I should have been at work an hour ago. Knowing who was on the phone, I picked up the receiver.

“Hello?”

“Cliff? It's Steve. Are you planning on gracing us with your presence today or what?”

“Yeah, Steve, I'm sorry.” I said. “I must have come down with something. I just woke up.”

“Well, I figured you must be dying or something to miss a whole day's work. You could have called, you know.”

It took me a second to process what he was saying. “A whole day? What are you talking about? It's only 10 o'clock.”

“Yeah, it's 10 o'clock,” he said. “on THURSDAY. Where the hell were you yesterday?”

“Yesterday?” I asked. “What are you talking about? Today's Wednesday!” I went over to the counter where I had tossed my keys and watch the night before. My watch said the same thing. It was Thursday. I had lost a whole day. The last thing I remembered was coming into the kitchen to make my morning coffee. The problem was, it was yesterday morning's coffee.

“Oh crap.” I muttered.

“Yeah.” said Steve. “Look, it’s no big deal if you need to stay home another day. I can get someone to cover for you again. You’ve got some sick days that you haven’t used.”

“No. That’s OK.” I said. “I think I must have slept it off. I can come in today. I’ll just be late.”

“Suit yourself. Just don’t bring anything contagious. I’ll see you in a while.”

“Thanks, Steve. Bye.”

I hung up the phone and just stood there, stunned, for a few minutes. Apparently, I had picked up some vicious 24 hour bug that came out of nowhere, knocked me for a loop and left just as quickly. Having already lost a whole day, I guess I was pretty lucky. Being a bank teller wasn’t rocket science, and I could have easily lost my job for not calling in yesterday. Steve was a nice enough boss, however, and he usually tried to look out for his employees.”

I tried to think back over the last day. All I had was a dim memory of becoming violently ill and falling to the floor, but the rest of it was lost in bizarre images from strange and quickly fading dreams. Already the kinks in my back were beginning to work themselves out and I was feeling a bit better. In fact, I was feeling famished. Not eating for a day and a half will do that to you. My only complaint was an oncoming headache, but I realized that I had missed the morning caffeine I was after when it all started. Both food and caffeine could be easily rectified.

I hurried to get out some cleaning supplies and clean up the kitchen. I threw my filthy clothes directly into the washer and went to make a phone call before I got myself washed and dressed. I usually took the bus to work, but that was at 8:30 in the morning. I needed to arrange some transportation.

Adam Haute was a friend of mine from back when we were in middle school. We had lived near each other for a while, and our moms traded driving duty, delivering us to school in the morning. It wasn’t the coolest thing in the world to be dropped off to school by your mom, but it was better than riding the bus. That thing was like an asylum on wheels.

Adam is one of the smartest people I have ever known. He is also one of the laziest people I have ever known. While he has the brains to be a top notch engineer, programmer, designer, or scientist, he is content to live in a tiny little rathole of an apartment, spending his days and nights playing video games, watching TV, and getting stoned. He works as a programmer for a small web development company. It’s a good arrangement for him, since the company just sends him assignments via phone or e-mail and he works on them at home. All of the face to face client work is handled by someone with real social skills, which is a plus because Adam has absolutely zero in that department. He does his day’s work in about an hour, which means he has plenty of free time. That’s good news for me, because he also has a car.

Adam picked up the phone after the second ring. “Hello... Norman.” he said and then giggled at his own joke. He was in a Seinfeld mood lately, and most of his jokes were bad clichés from television and movies.

“How’d you know it was me?” I asked.

“Hello! McFly! it’s called caller ID, dumbass. Dude, how much trouble do you think I would get in for tracking down and beating the hell out of some spoiled little rich kid?”

“What? Why would you want to do that?”

“Cause he’s kicking my online ass playing this stupid game and then talking trash about it. Not all of us have rich parents that allow us to skip school and just sit around playing video games all day. Some of us have lives, you know.”

I didn't bother to point out the obvious comparison here. I just ignored his rant and continued.

"Look man, can you give me a ride to work? I missed the bus."

He drew in a long breath as if smoking something and looked at me with half-lidded eyes. I think he was trying to do some sort of Godfather impersonation or something. "So... you come to me for help. That's very interesting. So... I must ask... What's in it for me?"

"Come on," I said. "Can I just have a ride to work?"

"OK, fine," he said. "I need to pick up my new TV anyway. The store called, and they said it was in, and I said 'saweeet!' Do I have time to do it on the way to your place?"

"Yeah. I need to shower anyway. I'll see you in a few."

I was just about dressed when Adam arrived. I saw him pull up outside my townhouse while I was putting on my shoes. He drives one of those little mini sized pickup trucks with about as much rust as paint on it, but it ran well enough to get him around town, and today I was grateful for it. It was just starting to rain, a slow, misty rain, and that was likely to make the chilly Fall day even colder. I grabbed my coat and opened the front door. Adam was trying to load a huge box into the cab of the truck. He beamed when he saw me coming.

"Yo, Cliff Daddy, you'll have to share the ride with my new baby! Check it out. It's like a whole wall of pure television goodness."

"How do you expect to fit that in there? The box is wider than the whole truck!" I pointed out.

"It's raining man, and I'm not getting this bad boy wet. It cost nearly eight grand! Just come help me get it in. Maybe we can sit in front of it and you can hold your door open."

"Are you crazy?" I said. "Let's put it in my place and you can pick it up tonight when it's not raining. There's no way that thing is going in your truck"

Adam stood staring at the ridiculously large box protruding from the cab of his truck for a long moment, then he cursed loudly. "Man, that just sucks," he said. "It just sucks ass!" He kicked the side of his truck and cursed again. "Well fine," he said and grabbed the box and pulled it out of the truck.

The thing was too heavy for him to manage effectively and he teetered unsteadily with the television balanced on his knees, so I rushed over to help him. As soon as I grabbed the box, Adam allowed most of the weight to shift to me. It was heavier than I imagined and I almost dropped the thing.

"Geez, man. What do you need such a big ass TV for anyway?" I grunted.

"Just because you don't appreciate fine entertainment doesn't mean that I can't." He glanced back at his truck as we inched our way towards the house. "Know what I think I need? I think I need a bigger truck."

It was taking all of my concentration to keep the large box from getting unbalanced and crashing to the ground, and I was focused intently on it when I replied.

"What you need, my friend, is a much smaller TV."

And I guess that was the beginning of the end for me. One minute I was holding this giant television set, wishing it was smaller, and the next minute the weight was gone. That threw me off balance and I fell forward onto my front steps. I turned and looked back to see what had happened. Adam was standing there in stunned silence, staring at the ground. I followed his gaze and looked down. There, lying on the ground, was his new, very heavy, bigassed TV. The problem was, it was no longer very heavy or bigassed. It was now three inches wide; not much

larger than a pack of cigarettes, and small enough to crush with one foot. We looked at each other and then back down at the tiny box.

“Whoa.” said Adam.

“Yeah.” I agreed.

For a long moment, we stood there outside my townhouse in a chilly Autumn mist staring at what was left of his giant TV. Well, not what was left, because it was all there. In fact it was still in its box. It was just very, very small. The large box containing a very heavy, giant TV was now about 3 inches long, and lying between us on the ground.

We stood there stunned for a long moment. In retrospect, I guess it was a good thing that none of the neighbors were out and about, wondering what a couple of idiots were doing staring at a tiny box on the sidewalk. Finally, Adam broke the silence.

“Dude, did you do that?” he asked.

“What do you mean ‘did I do that’? How the hell could I shrink a giant screen TV?”

“Well, I didn’t do it, and you said I needed a smaller TV, and then BAM, the TV was smaller.”

I didn’t respond. He was right about that at least. I was concentrating on the TV, wishing it was smaller, and then suddenly it was just that.

“Maybe we should get it inside.” he said. “Besides, it’s still getting wet out here, and I want my damned TV back, dry if possible.”

Neither of us moved. Adam looked at me, then at the tiny box on the sidewalk, then back to me.

“What?” I asked.

“What ‘what?’ You shrunk it, you carry it inside. Besides, it might be radioactive or something.”

“Look, I don’t have time for this. I have to get to work. I missed an entire day of work lying on my kitchen floor being sick.”

Adam missed a bit for a second, then he looked like he had just won the lottery. “What?! Why didn’t you tell me you had been sick, dude? Was it a spider bite? A chemical accident? Maybe it was a close encounter. Did you see the aliens?”

“I’ve seen only one alien nutjob, and he’s standing in front of me. What the hell are you talking about? All I said was that I was sick.”

“This is so awesome! Don’t you get it?! You were laid up sick while your DNA was being rewritten after your chance encounter with some radioactive spider and now you can shrink stuff! You’re a feakin’ superhero, Cliff! Can you climb walls or lift cars? Come on, let’s go inside and test your abilities.” He grabbed the tiny box, his fear of possible radiation gone, and ran up the steps to my place. I shook my head, sighed, and followed him into the house.

Adam had already pulled the coffee table in my living room away to rest against the wall. The now tiny television was sitting on the floor in the middle of the room, looking just like a pack of skinny cigars. Adam was standing against the opposite wall, as far away from me as possible.

“Look, man. I need to get to work, OK?”

“Make my TV big again first.”

“I didn’t make it small! How can I make it big?!”

“How do you know you didn’t make it small?” I just stared at him. He took a moment and took a long breath. “OK. maybe you didn’t get bitten by a radioactive spider and maybe you can’t climb walls or anything...”

“Damn right I can’t and I didn’t shrink your bigassed TV either.”

“Well, I think maybe you did. Maybe I was right about the being sick and rewriting your DNA stuff after all. All I know is that somehow, my big, fat, expensive TV is now smaller than a sandwich, I want it back, and I think you can do it. Come on Cliff, at least try it, just for the sake of proving me wrong if nothing else.”

I weighed the options in my head. If I stood here arguing with him, it would take forever to get to work. If I at least pretended to listen to him, I might have a chance of getting to work in the next decade. Better to just indulge his childish fantasies and move on.

“If I honestly try to make your TV big again, will you shut up and take me to work?”

“Scouts honor, dude.”

“Fine.” I said, not believing I was even having this conversation. I looked down at the little cigar box television and felt even more foolish. “Do you think I need to wave my hands or say something?”

Adam shrugged. “Beats me. Just think it first. We can add stuff to it if that doesn’t work.”

I shook my head, thinking this ranked pretty high on my list of stupid things I willingly did to appease my friend. With no way out, I let out a deep breath, looked down at the tiny box on the floor and just thought “bigger.”

The result was instantaneous, and it scared the crap out of me. Almost faster than the eye could follow, the box grew back to normal size. There it was, Adam’s bigassed, very expensive TV in the middle of my living room floor. We just stood there for a long moment, both of us amazed at what had just happened.

“This can’t be good.” I whispered.

Adam just grinned.