

The Super Villains and the Wall Street Bailout

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Introduction

The year is 2000. The Internet Bubble is bursting. The Bookkeeper has just arrived in Manhattan.

Part I: The Secret Society of Super Hoodlums

The Bookkeeper arrives early at *Iggy's Comix and Comics* on 32nd Street, not too far from the Empire State Building in Midtown Manhattan. The Bookkeeper is very tall, almost seven feet, with a pale complexion and no hair. His gaunt head is strangely misshapen. He wears a slightly worn long black suit in a 1920's style and carries a black laptop case and a computer projector case. He is hunched over as though carrying a large weight. He shuffles up to the counter.

"I am the Bookkeeper," says the Bookkeeper in a vaguely Hungarian accent reminiscent of Bela Lugosi or Andy Grove.

"Hey, Man," says the scruffy bearded teenager behind the counter. "You must be here for the monthly meeting of the Secret Society of Super Hoodlums!"

The Bookkeeper looks the teenager over like a snake deciding whether to swallow a small mouse.

"It doesn't sound very secret," comments the Bookkeeper.

"I'm sworn to secrecy!" explains the teenager.

"You are doing a great job," says the Bookkeeper.

"Look, man, they are meeting in the back room. Hey, are you the guy giving the presentation on creating a global financial crash?"

The Bookkeeper looks around the comic book shop but notices three nerdy teenagers debating whether Amazing Man actually flies or only jumps really high. The Bookkeeper turns back to the teenage clerk.

"Yes," says the Bookkeeper. "I'm giving a PowerPoint presentation. I have come early to set up my equipment. Where is the room?"

"Hey," says the teenager, motioning the Bookkeeper to follow him toward the back of the store. "Do you need some help setting up? Everybody has trouble connecting their laptop to our projector. Doomsday Man spent the entire meeting trying to get his Dell laptop to talk to our projector. Kind of embarrassing. He hasn't been invited back."

"I brought my own projector," explains the Bookkeeper.

"Wow, that's a great idea," says the teenager, leading the Bookkeeper into a medium sized conference room with a large rectangular table and a projection screen. "You must be a top super-villain."

"I'm new in town," explains the Bookkeeper.

"Yeah," says the teenager. "I haven't seen you before. You sure you don't need some help? I can get some coffee. You look like the coffee type."

The Bookkeeper looks coldly at the teenager. "I don't drink...coffee."

"OK, Man, I'll be out front. Just shout if you need anything!"

The teenager leaves. The Bookkeeper sets up his laptop and miniature projector on the tabletop. He launches PowerPoint and cycles quickly through his slides. He lays out a stack of oversized business cards:

The Bookkeeper
Diabolical Super Villain

While the Bookkeeper is rebooting his laptop after Windows crashes and grumbling under his breath "I wonder if that Linux operating system is better." The members of the Secret Society of Super Hoodlums begin arriving at *Iggy's*.

First to arrive is Viper Lady. She bears a suspicious resemblance to a well-known Victoria's Secret super-model except that she has green skin, a few scales, fangs, a forked tongue, and reptilian eyes. She wears a string bikini and a long flowing cape that seems to twist and turn in the air as though alive. She glides past the awe-struck

teenagers in the comic book shop.

"Are you the Bookkeeper?" asks Viper Lady, offering her hand.

"I am the Bookkeeper, Diabolical Super Villain," answers the Bookkeeper. "I don't shake hands. I have a rare skin disease."

Viper Lady nods. "I understand. Me too."

Viper Lady sits down at the table, glances at the first slide now projected on the screen "Great Depression 2.0, A Value Proposition", and starts reading a copy of *Cosmopolitan* that she has brought with her.

Next to arrive is The Crusher, a huge bald muscular man almost as tall as the Bookkeeper, wearing boots, heavy blue jeans, a T-shirt, and a 30's era hard hat. He leers at Viper Lady, who continues reading *Cosmo*, and plops down in an empty chair which groans under his 300+ pounds of weight, all muscle.

The Crusher is followed by the Cackler, a thin man with milk-white skin, orange hair, and a bright green suit. He keeps cackling and giggling. The Bookkeeper studies him like a bug under a microscope.

Next are the Pickpocket, the Malingerer, and the Card Shark. Last but not least, the Big Boss makes his usual entrance. A huge stretch limousine with smoked black windows pulls up in front of Iggy's. The door's open and the Big Boss's entourage of Tommy Gun toting thugs pour out. They surround the Big Boss as he walks into the comic book shop. Then, the stretch limousine takes off, circling, waiting to pick the Big Boss up at the end of the meeting. The Big Boss sits down at the end of the table facing the projector screen. His thugs wait behind him.

"You the Bookkeeper?" barks the Big Boss.

"I am the Bookkeeper, Diabolical Super Villain. Here is my card."

The Bookkeeper distributes his cards to the Big Boss and the other super villains. The Big Boss looks skeptically at the card.

"Well," says the Big Boss. "I've run all the rackets in New York City since the 30's. It takes a lot to impress me."

The Bookkeeper studies the Big Boss coldly. "You look about forty. The maximum human life span is slightly over 100 years by which time the normal human is usually gray and wrinkled."

"Back in the 20's, I was being pursued by G-men through a secret chemical laboratory and fell into a vat of experimental chemicals. I haven't aged a day since."

"It also gave him super-powers," added Viper Lady.

"Fascinating," says the Bookkeeper. "Well, I have a brief PowerPoint presentation. Then, we can discuss my proposition."

"What is a value proposition?" asks the Crusher.

"It's some business school gobbledygook," snorts the Big Boss. "You didn't go to Harvard, did you? I hate Harvard MBA's. I had the last one who annoyed me dumped in the East River."

"I am from out of town," explains the Bookkeeper.

"Alright," says the Big Boss. "Let's see the presentation."

The Bookkeeper gives a quick presentation with lots of snazzy graphics illustrating his scheme to steal trillions of dollars and devastate the world's economy. He finishes with a slide showing a montage of famous black and white pictures of the Dust Bowl during the Great Depression.

"Any questions?" asks the Bookkeeper.

There is stunned silence for about a minute.

"Was my presentation unclear?" asks the Bookkeeper, looking a little concerned.

The Cackler for once is completely silent. He hasn't cackled, laughed, giggled, or grinned insanely in over a minute.

Viper Lady looks around, surveying the other super villain's ashen expressions. "Look, I don't know about the guys, but I think that is the most selfish, despicable scheme I have heard in my life."

The Bookkeeper smiles. "Excellent, so you will help me do it?"

The super villains begin looking down at their papers, toes, glancing around, trying to avoid eye contact with the triumphant Bookkeeper.

"No. Absolutely not!" says Viper Lady.

The Bookkeeper is stunned. "Why not?"

"Look, " says Viper Lady. "I'm an art and rare collectibles thief. I scale tall buildings, cracks safes and vaults, stuff like that to steal priceless paintings and what not from spoiled millionaires and billionaires and snooty museums that have insurance and can afford to lose the money."

"Yeah," says the Crusher. "I steal money from banks."

"I lived through the Great Depression," says the Big Boss. "I had to set up soup kitchens in the Lower East Side with my ill-gotten gains. "

The Bookkeeper looks astounded. "What kind of super villains are you?"

"Look, "says Viper Lady. "We are the super villains who still have a shred of human decency. When something really bad happens, we grudgingly join forces with the super-heroes and help save the world."

The Bookkeeper studies the super villains. "You do?"

"Once," explains Viper Lady. "I was dating Matthew Morse, the billionaire playboy who is actually Thunder Man. Of course, although I was trying to kill him as Viper Lady and he was trying to put me away for life as Thunder Man, we had absolutely no idea that we were dating our arch enemy."

"Yeah, she punches him in the mouth during a battle on top of the Chrysler building and he shows up for dinner two hours later as Matthew Morse, with a split lip and bruises!" cackles the Cackler.

Viper Lady scowls at the Cackler. "Look, he was a spoiled billionaire playboy who only seemed interested in sleeping with yet another gold-digging super-model. I mean he still had a collection of stuffed animals, for God's sake. I thought he was a sissy."

"No super hero has ever pretended to be a dissolute playboy before!"

taunts the Cackler.

"Get back to the story," snaps the Big Boss.

"Right," says Viper Lady. "Anyway, we stop at this giant bank so he can do some billionaire banking. God, what a bunch of sniveling weasels. *How are you today Mr. Morse? What can we do for you today Mr. Morse? Excellent haircut Mr. Morse.* Anyway, so he is going over his billions with his personal banker while they are giving some kids from P.S. 182 a tour of the new high-tech super-villain proof bank vault."

"And guess what happens," sneers the Cackler.

"I have no idea," says the Bookkeeper.

"Oh, for Heavens sake," says the Cackler, "can't you guess? Haven't you read any comics? The new high tech vault malfunctions, closing and sealing the kids inside with a few hours of air left. All the geniuses from the bank and the police can't get the vault open."

Viper Lady grimaces at the Cackler. "Yes. So there I am with Matt and he keeps trying to make some wimpy excuse to slip away. *My Mom and Dad were murdered in front of my eyes! I can't take death. I need to run and hide. Boo hoo! Boo hoo!*"

"Of course," says the Big Boss. "He actually wants to slip away and turn into Thunder Man."

"You can imagine what I am thinking," says Viper Lady. "What a sissy! So anyway he runs off. By this time they have SWAT teams and top experts from the NYPD there. Nobody can get the vault open and the kids are running out of air. Thunder Man shows up and tries to open the vault with his super powers."

"Yeah," giggles the Cackler. "But his thunder-blasts aren't strong enough to even dent the titanium-steel super-vault built for billionaires like Matt Morse."

Viper Lady glares at the Cackler. "By this time, everybody is pretty upset and Matt makes this comment that only his arch-nemesis Viper Lady might have the skill to open the vault using this quirky facial expression that he has."

"Yeah!" sneers the Cackler. "Then she gets it. She realizes that Thunder Man is really Matt Morse -- after sleeping with the guy how many times?"

"One-hundred and eighty-two," says Viper Lady. "Look he wears this goofy black mask as Thunder Man. More importantly I realize that I can use my high tech vault cracking kit, which I always keep with me just in case an opportunity to steal something comes up. Except, well, I have to reveal my secret identity to save the kids."

The Bookkeeper studies Viper Lady. "Surely you let them suffocate."

"No!" scoffs the Cackler. "What does she do, she goes out to her Ferrari and gets the vault cracking kit and with Thunder Man and about fifty of New York City's finest watching, manages to open the vault."

"So they threw you in prison," says the Bookkeeper.

"No. Everyone claimed they couldn't identify the mystery Good Samaritan who saved the kids. Matt and I broke up and I stopped trying to kill him."

"See," says the Cackler. "She's secretly still in love with Thunder Man."

"I am not."

"Yeah, right," says the Cackler. "Well, I am the worst of the Secret Society of Super Hoodlums and I would never reveal my secret identity to save a bunch of kids trapped in a bank vault."

"What about that time you joined forces with the Living Hologram to prevent the psycho terrorists from unleashing the mutated bubonic plague on New York?" asks the Crusher.

The Cackler looks down at his milky white hands. "Well, er, um, they were going to kill most of the city. So, ... look ok, I had a moment of weakness. We all have stories like that. You saved that school bus that drove off the Brooklyn bridge into the East River."

"Yeah!" says the Crusher fondly. "What a headline! Super Villain Crusher Saves Day! I still have the front page of The New York Post on my wall."

The Bookkeeper begins shutting down his laptop. "Look, you just aren't the kind of super villains that I am looking for. I need super villains without a shred of human decency to implement my diabolical plan."

"You could try the League of Evil," quips the Cackler. Everyone else glares at the Cackler.

"League of Evil," says the Bookkeeper. "How do I contact them?"

"We're not going to tell you that," snaps the Big Boss, glaring at the Cackler.

The Bookkeeper gathers up his laptop and projector and leaves. After he has left Viper Lady shouts at the Cackler.

"Why did you tell him about the League of Evil?"

The Cackler smiles mischievously. "Just think about it. We are talking about the League of Evil here."

"Those are super villains who will do anything if it is in their own self-interest."

"Exactly!"

"Oh."

Part II The League of Evil

After months of searching high and low throughout Manhattan and the surrounding boroughs, the Bookkeeper finally locates and secures an invitation to present to the monthly meeting of the League of Evil in an upstairs room above Nightmare Comics in Greenwich Village, not too far from New York University. As before, the Bookkeeper arrives early at Nightmare Comics with his laptop and portable projector. A creepy looking teenager dressed entirely in black with an astonishing number of body-piercings and tattoos greets him.

"You must be the Bookkeeper," says the teenage clerk. "I'm Damien. I take care of the shop for the owners."

The clerk offers a pale hand with unusually long sharp nails.

"I never shake hands," demurs the Bookkeeper. "I have a rare skin disease."

"That sounds cool," says the clerk, glancing around nervously. "Look, you look new in town."

"I'm new in town."

"Look, are you sure you want to meet the League of Evil? I mean they are some of the most evil bastards in New York City. That's pretty evil."

"That is what I am looking for," explains the Bookkeeper, studying Damien like he might be something to eat. "How evil are you? I'm looking for completely unprincipled people who will do anything for money."

Damien looks around nervously. "Well, look, don't tell them, but I am not in it for the money."

"You're not?" asks the Bookkeeper, incredulous. "Why ever would you get involved with the League of Evil if not for money?"

"Well, I want to live forever. I am trying to find an authentic vampire to turn me into a real vampire. I figured the League of Evil might know some real vampires."

"Hmmm," says the Bookkeeper. "That sounds quite rational. Do they know any real vampires?"

"Well, Dracula came to a meeting last year," answers the clerk.

"Hmmm. Did you talk to this ...Dracula about becoming a real vampire?"

"Well, he is kind of a jerk and he only turns beautiful twenty-something babes into vampires."

The Bookkeeper nods. "I can see that might be a problem. Which way to the meeting room?"

"Look," says Damien. "Are you sure you know what you are doing? I

mean we have a lot of weird people who use that room: the Young Satanists, Lesbians for Global Peace, the John Wilkes Booth Fan Club, the Greater Manhattan UFO Abduction Support Group, the SS Alumni Society of New York City, you get the idea. The League of Evil is the absolutely weirdest and most utterly evil."

"Are the Lesbians for Global Peace evil?" asks the Bookkeeper, puzzled. "I thought that was narrow-minded conservative propaganda."

"Well, some of them are evil," says Damien. "They have no clue what goes on here. They have this one hot lesbian chick who wears a skin tight black leather outfit. You should see her."

"Is she evil?"

"Nah. She wants to abolish nuclear weapons and foster greater understanding between different cultures. You know the usual unrealistic stuff: Jews and Christians, Israelis and Palestinians, Hindus and Muslims."

"I'm not interested in her if she is not evil. Look, I'm sorry but my diabolical plan doesn't involve vampires and immortality. I don't think I can use you."

"I understand," says Damien. "But, look, give me a call if you find a real vampire, ok?"

"So, which way to the meeting room?"

"You're sure. You can still back out. I can tell them you cancelled at the last moment. They won't kill you for canceling...one time."

"I'm sure."

"Go to the back of this room. There is a door next to the 1940's pre-code horror comics. Open the door and go up the stairs. The meeting room is at the top to your right."

"Here is my card in case you change your mind and just want money."

The Bookkeeper hands Damien his new business card:

The Bookkeeper

Diabolical Super Villain
Without a Shred of Human Decency

The Bookkeeper is waiting for Windows to reboot when the League of Evil starts to arrive. First is Dr. Death wearing a white lab coat and a shiny black steel mask that appears bonded to his head. He nods to the Bookkeeper and sits down. He is joined by a young foxy looking man with electronics sprouting from his forehead: The Randroid. The Randroid coldy ignores the Bookkeeper and starts reading a heavily worn paperback copy of *Atlas Shrugged*. A tall woman dressed entirely in black with glowing green eyes enters next. She sits down on the other side of the table from Dr. Death and the Randroid.

"I'm the Bookkeeper," explains the Bookkeeper, still waiting for his laptop to finish rebooting. He distributes his new business cards to the three super villains.

"I'm the Ebony Witch," says the woman, looking disdainfully at the Bookkeeper's business card. "Are you new in town?"

"I arrived about six months ago," says the Bookkeeper, finally able to logon to Windows. "Are you a genuine witch in league with the Devil?"

"What superstitious nonsense!" says the Ebony Witch. "I'm an evil scientist from Columbia University."

"I heard you had a real vampire...Dracula, I believe is the name, who gave you a presentation?"

"A total nut case," said the Ebony Witch. "Obviously a pathetic victim of some rare retrovirus who convinced himself that he was an authentic supernatural vampire."

"I think he was genuine," says the Mad Scholar, entering with a flourish of his 19th century cane.

"Rubbish!" says the Ebony Witch.

"Let's not have a debate over the existence of the Devil...again," snaps Dr. Death. "You know what happened the last time."

The Mad Scholar, dressed as a 19th century Victorian professor, sits down facing the Bookkeeper. He also looks disdainfully at the

Bookkeeper's business card.

The Bookkeeper finally launches PowerPoint displaying the new revised first slide: "Great Depression 2.0: Profiting from Mass Misery"

"What happened the last time?" asks the Bookkeeper.

"Ebony tried to kill me with her death ray," explains the Mad Scholar.

"And accidentally incinerated one of the Nightmare Comics clerks who was delivering a tray of coffee and Diet Coke," says Dr. Death, completing the Mad Scholars thought.

"It was an absolute mess," interjects the Randroid petulantly. "First, we had to clean up the ashes, eliminate all forensic evidence of a crime."

"Then we had to come up with a cover story," adds Dr. Death. "We had to spend a half hour with that dimwit downstairs -- Damien, I think it is -- rehearsing his story that this other guy --- what was his name -- left at 10 pm like always for home."

"I think his name was Othello," says the Mad Scholar.

"I don't think that was his real name," adds Ebony.

"Then his family kept coming around asking questions and acting all suspicious," complained the Randroid.

"Yes," agrees Dr. Death. "After a couple of months of this, I had to have them all killed in a fake automobile accident: Mom, Dad, two brothers, a sister, and a dog."

"Then," accuses the Randroid, glaring at Dr. Death. "The police started asking questions about the car crash."

"Yes," snapped Dr. Death. "We had to spend \$100 K in campaign contributions to have the investigation *into the car crash* killed."

"OK, OK," says Ebony. "You're right. You don't have to rub it in. No more debates about the existence of the Devil."

Finally, the Mega Brain is rolled into the room in his giant liquid filled cylindrical container. The Mega Brain resembles a giant disembodied

brain with dozens of white and gray tentacles writhing beneath him. He is accompanied by several apparently mindless drooling young men in black uniforms who position the container at the front of the table facing the Bookkeeper and the projection screen.

"I am here," says a buzzing mechanical voice from a set of speakers attached to the container. "Present your diabolical scheme."

The Bookkeeper launches into his new and improved presentation emphasizing the huge profit potential of ruining the entire world's economy in a colossal housing bubble combined with an energy cartel and massive destruction of the manufacturing base of all industrial nations. He also spends several minutes on a plan to corner the world rice market.

"That is absolutely despicable," congratulates Dr. Death.

"Genius!" shouts the Randroid.

"I..I..I have to admit I could not have thought of something so totally underhanded and yet preying on every human weakness," agrees the Mad Scholar.

"Breathtaking!" gasps the Ebony Witch.

The League members stare at the Bookkeeper, waiting for the Mega Brain to speak.

"No," says the Mega Brain.

"What is your problem with *this* scheme?" asks the Randroid petulantly.

"We want to rule the world, not destroy it," says the Mega Brain. "This plan involves ruining the world's economy and then spending the money needed to fix the mess to further enrich the monsters responsible for the global economic collapse."

"Exactly!" says the Randroid. "That would be us!"

"No," booms the Mega Brain. "This involves recreating the economic and social conditions that led to World War II."

"So?" sneers the Randroid. "What do we care?"

"World War III will destroy the world," explains the Mega Brain. "I estimate a 68% probability that this scheme will end in a thermonuclear holocaust as extremist regimes battle for control of the world's dwindling resources."

"You know," says Dr. Death. "He may be right."

"He is always right," says the Ebony Witch, looking up at the Bookkeeper. "The Mega Brain was once Professor James Hanbury at New York University. He was researching ways to accelerate evolution and well he accidentally accelerated himself into a super-intelligent disembodied brain with no emotion."

"And no conscience!" adds the Mad Scholar.

The Bookkeeper studies the Mega Brain.

"Look," pouts the Randroid. "It sounds great to me! I am totally logical."

"You are not!" booms the Mega Brain.

"Look, I always ask what would Ayn Rand do? Ayn was totally logical and she would love this scheme!"

"Ayn Rand was blinded by her petty emotions and lust for Nathaniel Branden," intones the Mega Brain.

"That is a lie!" shouts the Randroid.

"Oh, no," says the Mad Scholar, shaking his head. "They are at it again."

"I don't understand," says the Bookkeeper. "Who or what is Ayn Rand and why do you care about her?"

"I don't care about her!" shouts the Randroid. "I am completely logical."

The Ebony Witch leans over to the Bookkeeper. "You need to understand. Twenty years ago the Randroid was just another bright nerdy Jewish kid in the Bronx. Then at age fifteen he discovered *The Fountainhead*."

"And *Atlas Shrugged* and all of Ayn Rand's brilliant works!" shouts the Randroid. "I read them over and over again."

"At least a thousand times each," adds the Mad Scholar.

"After reading and rereading Ayn Rand more than anyone else on Earth, I transformed into the totally logical, totally selfish Randroid. No more going to Temple. No more reading the idiot Torah, the Talmud, none of that superstitious nonsense. It is all reason, science, and free enterprise!"

"Logically," booms the Mega Brain, "one wants to rule the world and not destroy it. When I conquer the world I plan to reorganize it along sustainable green eco-friendly lines. I am immortal and I want to keep the world in good shape as long as I live."

"That's it!" snarls the Randroid. "Show off again, how smart you are, how logical you are, how you don't have a shred of human emotion or conscience. I've had enough!"

Near tears, the Randroid storms out of the meeting room.

"It's ok," says the Ebony Witch. "This happens a lot. Once he calms down he will grudgingly agree with the Mega Brain."

The Bookkeeper looks around at the remaining super villains.

"We cannot help you," booms the Mega Brain. "We act in our own self-interest and it would be illogical to pursue such a short-sighted, greedy, and destructive scheme. You may leave."

"Where could I find someone that short-sighted and greedy?" asks the Bookkeeper.

"Try the Physicist," says the Mega Brain. "He is the most vain and arrogant of all the super villains."

"Alright."

The Bookkeeper packs up his laptop and projector and leaves.

"Why did you tell him about the Physicist?" asks Dr. Death after the Bookkeeper has left. "We don't want his plan to succeed."

"Exactly. You know how the Physicist thinks?" booms the Mega Brain.

"Oh!"

Part III The Physicist

After several more months of searching, the Bookkeeper finally locates and schedules a meeting with the Physicist at his secret laboratory also near New York University. The Physicist is a handsome man with a strong resemblance to William Atherton in the 1980's classic nerd movie *Real Genius* but with a touch of gray around the temples. Seemingly charming if a little aloof, he greets the Bookkeeper at the door to his lab.

"So you are the Bookkeeper?" asks the Physicist, somehow looking down his nose at the Bookkeeper even though the Bookkeeper is nearly seven feet towers over him.

"I am indeed," says the Bookkeeper, lugging his laptop and projector into the lab.

The Physicist leads him past a large collection of photographs: The Physicist with Ronald Reagan, The Physicist with George Bush I, The Physicist with Mikhail Gorbachev, The Physicist with Bill Clinton, The Physicist playing bongo drums, The Physicist on the Tonight Show, The Physicist on Conan O'Brien, the Physicist on the cover of his Pulitzer Prize winning book *It's All About Me*, the Physicist on the cover of the sequel *Me, Myself, and I*, the Physicist lecturing to a class at Columbia, the Physicist receiving his first Nobel Prize, etc. etc. etc.

"You seem to be in every picture," comments the Bookkeeper.

"I am the greatest scientist who ever lived," says the Physicist. "Why shouldn't I have pictures of me?"

"That seems logical. Are you sure you are the greatest scientist who ever lived? What about Einstein?"

"Einstein was a mediocre mathematician who couldn't keep up with the demanding field of quantum physics," sneers the Physicist. "I went to *Göttingen* and he didn't!"

"I see," says the Bookkeeper. "Where should I set up?"

The Physicist looks around. The room is filled with dozens of strange giant gadgets. He points past the gadgets to a door.

"Let's use the Hiroshima room."

"Sounds good," says the Bookkeeper.

The Bookkeeper follows the Physicist into a large conference room. The walls are decorated with pictures of the Physicist at Hiroshima just after the atomic bombing in 1945. The Bookkeeper studies a picture of the Physicist examining a radiation burn victim at a crowded hospital.

"You don't look much older."

"I invented the atomic bomb," explains the Physicist. "I was accidentally exposed to radiation from the Trinity test which gave me superpowers and retarded the aging process."

"I thought it was a team effort," says the Bookkeeper. "A lot of books glorify Oppenheimer as the inspiring pacifist team leader."

"Government propaganda," explains the Physicist as the Bookkeeper sets up his laptop and projector. "I did it all. The government couldn't admit the whole story about how I did it."

"You didn't make a deal with that...Devil character, did you?" asks the Bookkeeper absently, plugging power cables into a power strip.

The Physicist looks around nervously and clears his throat. "No, of course not. That is mystical nonsense! You have to have the stratospheric Z clearance and a clear need-to-know to hear the real story. Do you have the Z clearance?"

"I've never heard of it," says the Bookkeeper, plugging the projector video cable into his laptop. "I don't really need to hear how you invented the atomic bomb. It's pretty primitive technology from my point of view."

"What?" shouts the Physicist. "The atomic bomb was the crowning achievement of my career. I have been living off the glory from it ever since! No lesser mortal could ever have invented the damned thing! Primitive! Only 25 nations, three terrorist organizations, and

one eccentric billionaire have duplicated my feat since 1945, all using stolen data from *my* lab!"

The Bookkeeper starts booting Windows. "This will take a while. Now, what did the evil scheme broker tell you about my scheme."

"He said that it was a diabolical scheme that could make me the world's first trillionaire."

"More or less. Now, you don't have a shred of human decency do you?"

"Good Heavens! No! I am a realist and recognize that science shows that life is a brutal Darwinian struggle. Might makes right. The strong survive. The weak perish."

"Well, I was just wondering with all those disarmament articles that you write."

"Public relations. Publicly I denounce nuclear war while working privately to provide the government with ever more destructive weapons of mass destruction."

"You sound like my kind of guy." The laptop finally is ready.

The Bookkeeper gives the Physicist his new and improved presentation "Great Depresson 2.0: Opportunities for Rape and Pillage in a New Dark Age". The Physicist watches with apparent interest, nodding in several places.

"So what do you think?" asks the Bookkeeper.

"Well, it is the most despicable scheme that I have heard in twenty years."

"Excellent. Are you concerned about any long term consequences?"

"Long term? Consequences? I don't get it."

"Er, well, great. Don't worry about it. So, will you help me?"

"Well, there is one major problem."

"What?"

"It won't work."

"It will. Do you need to see my more detailed operational plan with all the heinous details. You will need to sign an NDA."

"No. I know it won't work!"

"Why?"

"It is your idea. If it is not my idea, it must be wrong!"

"Hunh?" The Bookkeeper is briefly stunned.

"Look, you are obviously an *amateur*. I am a *professional*. You have wasted enough of my time."

The Physicist points to the door. The Bookkeeper hastily gathers up his laptop and projector and shuffles out of the Hiroshima room with the Physicist in pursuit, yelling and sneering at him. The Physicist hounds him to the laboratory door.

"Don't come back!" shouts the Physicist, slamming the lab door behind the Bookkeeper.

Part IV: The Professor

The Bookkeeper wanders the streets near New York University for several minutes. He eventually stops in a 1950's style hamburger and milkshake shop frequented by NYU undergrads and sits down despondently. At first, he doesn't notice the sleek bearded NYU faculty member seated next to him chatting on a cell phone and scoping out the NYU coeds.

The Bookkeeper takes out his laptop, boots it up which takes a while, and looks at his presentation. He hangs his oddly misshapen head in his hands and shakes his head. "How am I ever going to find someone greedy and short-sighted enough to implement my diabolical scheme?"

The Bookkeeper cycles blindly through his slides in despair. "I'm never going to succeed. You know, I think those super villains were sending me on a wild goose chase."

The professor starts watching the slide show as he chats on the cell

phone when a cute coed in a mini-skirt saunters past the Bookkeeper's laptop: "Yes, Benny, I know the Internet is over. We can't sell stock in companies that sell pet food from a web site anymore. Yes, I agree. We need a new bubble. Everybody knows that! Uh, Benny, I need to call you back. I see a growth opportunity right next to me."

The Professor sidles over to the Bookkeeper. "Hello, my name is Professor Marvin Goldenstein, NYU business school. I couldn't help but see the evil scheme on your laptop."

The Bookkeeper looks up and makes a brief frantic attempt to switch to Windows Explorer. "What evil scheme?"

"Now, now. Don't worry. I'm not shocked. I deal in evil schemes all the time."

"You do. Do you have a shred of human decency?"

"Absolutely not."

"Well, are you worried about long term consequences?"

"Absolutely not."

"It's ok if it is not your idea?"

"So long as I can take credit."

"I don't want any credit. I don't want my name ever mentioned."

"Excellent. Now, why are you having trouble selling your evil scheme. I know dozens of people who would jump at the opportunity to bring it to reality!"

"You do? I've talked to every super villain in Manhattan."

"Super villains!"

"Yes."

"Oh, dear. You are new in town, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am from out of town."

"Look, no super villain would ever try to execute such a dastardly scheme. They are either too nice or too smart or both. The only place that you can find people that selfish and short-sighted is in real life."

"Real life?"

"Exactly! Look, I need to make a few calls. Look, would you be open to making a presentation to the Wolves of Wall Street next week?"

"Sure. I've never heard of them. Are they super villains?"

"No. They are much worse."

The Bookkeeper smiles.

Part V: The Wolves of Wall Street

The next week the Bookkeeper arrives early for his presentation at the Harvard Club. The doorman looks down his nose at him.

"*You* are a Harvard alumni?"

"No, University of Zet..." the Bookkeeper stops himself. "Professor Marvin Goldenstein of NYU arranged my presentation to something called the Wolves of Wall Street."

The doorman looks down a guest list. "Oh, yes. Marv. Yes, it's right here. New Business Opportunity for the Wall Street Steering Committee."

"That's the Wolves?"

"Wolves is a nickname. They never use that in writing."

"Oh, very prudent."

The Bookkeeper is escorted to the presentation room, a beautiful oak paneled room with old books and giant oil paintings of dead Wall Street tycoons. The Bookkeeper sets up again while the Harvard Club staff watch suspiciously. As he puts up the first slide "Great Depression 2.0: Profiting from the Collapse of Civilization" the Wolves file in with their entourages. They are all dressed in extremely expensive black suits, red ties, and occasional long black overcoats.

The Professor rushes up to the Bookkeeper. "It's all ready."

"Absolutely. Who are they?"

"Let me introduce. Jack "The Terminator" Glicksman, Colossal Megabank. James "Jim" Wolf of Wolfe and Townsend, Paul "Tim" Wiggins of UberBank, Richard "Dick" Flutz of Folden Brothers,..."

The Professor drones on for several minutes, introducing the bewildered Bookkeeper to the Wolves of Wall Street. Each Wolf is accompanied by five to ten younger men who look suspiciously like their Wolf, all dressed in the same immaculate black suits and narrow red ties. The Bookkeeper distributes his new and improved business cards.

The Bookkeeper
Diabolical Super Villain
Without a Shred of Human Decency
Greedy and Short-Sighted

The Wolves look skeptically at the oversized business cards.

The Bookkeeper makes his presentation, ending as usual with his signature slides of the Great Depression. The Wolves watch coldly without apparent emotion.

"Any questions?" asks the Bookkeeper.

Dick Flutz gets up and shouts "That is the biggest crock of @\$% that I have ever heard. This is absolutely ridiculous. Look at your suit. 1920's style! What happened to your hair? That tie wasn't even in style in the 1920's! Marv, you have completely cracked with this guy."

The other Wolves are shaking their heads, making unpleasant sounds, and some start to get up. The Professor looks worried. He glances at the Bookkeeper.

"Have you ever worked on Wall Street, you freak?" shouts Dick Flutz, sticking his face about an inch from the Bookkeeper's oddly flat nose.

The Bookkeeper scowls slightly and shakes Dick's hand. Dick stops shouting. He begins to gurgle and make funny sounds. Then, in front of all of the other Wolves, he wastes away to a yellowed skeleton in seconds, his skin peeling off and crumbling into dust. The skeleton

collapses inside his designer gabardine cloth suit. The Bookkeeper is left standing holding what is left of Dick's hand. The Bookkeeper wipes off his hands, splattering yellowed bone fragments on the carpeted floor. Everyone is stunned.

"Any questions?" repeats the Bookkeeper.

There is a long pause. Then, "Tim" Wiggins of UberBank timidly holds up his hand.

"Yes?" says the Bookkeeper.

"Did I hear right, we will each net \$1 trillion?"

"The principals will get \$1 trillion each," explains the Bookkeeper. "The basic principle is very simple. First, you ruin the world's economy in a frenzy of wild speculation. Then, you get the world's governments to pay you for screwing up instead of fixing the problems."

"And you think it will actually work?" ventures Jim Wolf.

"Absolutely," says the Bookkeeper.

"Where can I sign up?" shouts Jack Glicksman.

Within a few minutes, the Wolves have signed on to the Bookkeeper's diabolical scheme. The Harvard Club special cleanup unit is summoned to remove the moldering remains of Dick Flutz.

Afterwards, the Bookkeeper and the Professor are the only two remaining in the room. The Bookkeeper is puzzled.

"I just don't understand," says the Bookkeeper. "That Dick what-was-his-name and the rest of them didn't seem to understand that I am a super villain."

"Of course not. They live in a sheltered world protected by the rule of law, pliable politicians, armies of attorneys, and the occasional slimy 'security consultant' who does the really dirty stuff for them. Unlike me, they couldn't see past your cheap out of style suit. But you won them over. Brilliant!"

"I find people very odd."

"Look, you had them when you murdered Dick Flutz. Seeing another Wolf horribly murdered using your super powers established your dominant position in the wolf pack."

"It did? I'm used to super heroes. They always fight back when I do stuff like that."

"No. These guys are different. You've got them eating out of your hand. One word to the wise, though."

"What?"

"Never turn your back on them, not even for a second."

Conclusion

Later that evening, a tired but triumphant Bookkeeper returns to his small grimy apartment in the East Village. Even in the East Village he looks a bit odd, but no one seems to object. He stops briefly to look at a newspaper headline in a newspaper vending machine in front of his apartment:

WALL STREET CEO HAS HEART ATTACK AT HARVARD CLUB

Earlier today, Wall Street CEO Richard "Dick" Flutz died of an apparent heart-attack at the Harvard Club. Flutz, 53, was widely credited with building Folden Brothers into the fourth largest investment bank on Wall Street. Flutz, a champion racquetball player and jogging companion of several other CEO's, was widely thought to be in excellent health. Folden Brothers stock dropped 2% in late market trading on news of the CEO's untimely death. Flutz was widely known for his confrontational "in your face" management style.

The Bookkeeper scowls and climbs a short flight of stairs to his apartment. He fumbles with his keys and opens the door. He closes the door behind him and sits down in front of an odd looking giant TV set. He picks up the remote and turns on the set. He begins to pick at his neck as weird lights play across the TV tube.

"Agent 4512" says a voice from the TV set.

The Bookkeeper pulls the skin from the base of his neck up and then in a single fluid motion pulls his face and all the skin of his oddly misshapen head off. He tosses the living mask onto a table top,

revealing a mass of writhing tentacles and purple eyeballs.

"This is Agent 4512" says the Bookkeeper, pulling off the stretchable skin on his gaunt white hands, revealing even more tentacles.

"Status report."

"I've done it. I've finally found humans short-sighted and greedy enough to implement our plan."

"Excellent. How long before the global thermonuclear war?"

"Maybe ten years. I will need to work extra hard to produce a large enough global economic collapse to get them to start nuking each other. I am also working on spreading fear and hatred. I just saw these giant skyscrapers, something called the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan, that we can blow up to panic them into some rash decisions."

"Understood. Any problems?"

"Well, the super villains, a lot of them, know about my plans. I made a lot of failed presentations."

"Eliminate them."

"Absolutely."

"Eliminate the super heroes also. Just in case."

"Absolutely."

"Any other potential problems?"

The Bookkeeper considers for a while.

"No, humans seem pretty dumb."

"Excellent. The benevolent Galactic Federation with their silly non-intervention policy will think they have wiped themselves out on their own. Then, we can take over the precious *drubinium* in the asteroid belt that the Federation has been holding in trust for the humans until they grow up. Zeta Reticuli Prime over and out."

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