

The Messenger, Chapter 1

by Hannibal Tabu

MAKING A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION

A fairly large crowd had gathered at the end of the Santa Monica Pier, and Mayor Herb Katz looked nervously at his watch while his subordinates fluttered around and the bright sunshine reflected off of his receding hairline. A light breeze blew in off the brackish grey-brown water of the Pacific Ocean, and the voluminous throngs of onlookers buzzed with anticipation.

It's hard to say who was the first to point a finger towards the sky. Maybe it was the cherubic overall-clad toddler perched on the shoulders of his father's worn brown leather jacket. Maybe it was one of the teenaged girls, their long straight hair whipping in the wind as the glint from their oversized sunglasses mirrored the sunlight. In any case, within seconds, hundreds of hands pointed skywards towards a solitary black dot, moving towards them from the horizon. From perhaps that same indistinct place, the chant began, and was deafening by the time that dot resolved itself into the shape of a cape-wearing man, floating closer and closer still.

"MES-SEN-GER! MES-SEN-GER! MES-SEN-GER! MES-SEN-GER!"

Within moments, the white clad figure floated above the stage, placed above the now-emptied fishing balcony. The cape dithered congruent to the flow of gusty air from the sea, and thickly gloved hands were held out in a gesture of calm. The assembled mass applauded with enthusiasm, cheering him on.

Just remember, smiling doesn't matter under your helmet, a voice in his ear said, and that you've gotta stay focused with your magnetism or you'll screw up every cell phone and media card around.

I know, I know already, The Messenger said in his mind. Shut up and let me enjoy this!

Says the guy who wanted to wear khakis, the voice continued. Just keep your senses attuned for ill intent, and don't let anybody get too close to that motorcycle jumpsuit. Any show of skin or hair and you could be history!

Waiting near the podium was Lieutenant Dana O'Leary, a gorgeous but lethal bit of police work in a smartly tailored pantsuit, the jacket hitched back to showcase the badge and sidearm on her belt. The Messenger came to rest near her and she held out her hand grudgingly, brushing her short red hair out of her eyes with the other. Shaking off the warning he'd just gotten, he returned the gesture and shook her hand with enthusiasm.

"Good to see you again, Lieutenant O'Leary!" The Messenger said pleasantly.

"I hate you," she said, smiling. "Come on, the commissioner and the mayor are waiting."

The policeman and the gaudily dressed man walked over to the two politicians, who also shook hands as camera flashes popped around them. The Messenger glanced around, watching the crowd and sensing nothing more than interest and adulation. Happily, he raised a hand and waved, and the crowd roared with great vigor.

Mayor Katz led the flying man over to the podium, and spoke into the microphone. "Citizens of Santa Monica," Katz said as he gripped the sides of the podium. "thank you for your patience!" The Messenger noted the index cards laid out there and held in place by transparent tape. "In the last few weeks, we've seen a streak of extraordinary crime strike our city and endanger both citizens and visitors alike. But today, people once again feel safe walking along

our world famous promenade, they're returning to our historic pier and they're patronizing our shops and restaurants. On one hand, we have the heroic work of the Santa Monica Police Department, ably administered by Commissioner Charles Ramsey. But we also have another man to thank, today. The man who stopped the Santa Monica Boulevard Rampage, the man who saved the life of Officer Kurtis Calhoun by stopping a dangerous gunfight and getting Officer Calhoun to medical care faster than anyone could expect. That's why today, we're here to present the key to the city to The Messenger, and convey upon him the status as an official special officer of the Santa Monica Police Department!"

The audience had started cheering at "key" and only got louder until he finished, a solid wall of sound applauding him. Again the Messenger shook the mayor's hand and approached the microphone.

Can you see this? Are you TiVoing it? he asked in his mind.

I told you, it's live on Channel Nine, the voice in his head returned. *We could practically stream it live on your phone.*

"Thank you, Mayor Katz, Commissioner Ramsey, and thank you Santa Monica," The Messenger said calmly into the mic. More cheers greeted him, and he waved his hand humbly. "I was not always the best person for this job, and I made some mistakes along the way. I appreciate the forgiveness of the Apple Store, and I hope that I've done something to make amends, as I love their products ..."

Free ad ... the voice said in the Messenger's mind.

*Shut **up!*** he thought back hard before continuing.

"Anyway, I appreciate the support I've gotten from the city of Santa

Monica -- my city -- and I'm gonna keep doing my best to protect its citizens. Uh, I guess that's it, thank you!"

Uh, smooth, the voice in his head said.

Waving pleasantly and holding the key and the badge he'd been given, The Messenger rose from the podium and flew slowly east over the multitude, while the mayor raised his hands in protest. Within moments he'd made his way down Colorado before hovering at Lincoln Boulevard and rocketing straight up into the sky.

