

The Harder They Fall

by Erick Hogan

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Based on the comic Hero@Large

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FADE IN:

EXT. JUSTICE FIVE HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Daybreak. Sun gleams off the gigantic glass monolith.

INT. ALPHA'S BEDROOM

An alarm clock goes off. An unseen man drags himself out of bed.

He quickly showers, shaves, and brushes his teeth. All while humming a catchy jingle - his theme song. Sporting only a towel, he heads to

THE CLOSET

He places his hand on a biometric scanner. Light traces his palm.

COMPUTER

Identification confirmed. Good morning Alpha Major.

The racks of suits and slacks recedes, revealing a hidden niche. Inside a superhero costume: gloves, boots, utility belt, mask, cape ... the whole nine.

INT. BANK - DAY

A ringing alarm. Three masked robbers empty the vault. Captured hostages scream muffled cries for help.

AT THE DOOR

The first robber makes a break for the exit but pulls up short. ALPHA MAJOR, a buffed middle age superhero, blocks the exit.

ALPHA

I'm going to need to see a receipt for that transaction.

The crooks surround him. Alpha downs the two at either side with a gymnastic split kick.

The third wields a crowbar high overhead like a battle axe. He starts his downward swing when Alpha's wrist phone rings.

Caller ID shows "Barry".

Alpha raise a finger, the universal signal for "Hold please", the robber freezes in mid-strike.

ALPHA
 (to robber)
 I've got to take this.
 (into phone)
 Hello.

BARRY (V.O.)
 Alpie baby, how's my favorite client?

ALPHA
 Hey Barry. I'm kind of in the middle of something.

BARRY (V.O.)
 Of course, of course. I know you're a busy man so I'll cut to the chase. We need to talk shop. How about stopping by the office for a little chat -- say three-ish.

ALPHA
 I'll be there.

Alpha hangs up the phone and addresses the patient robber.

ALPHA
 Sorry. My agent. Where were we?

On cue, the robber continues his swing but Alpha smashes him in the face, dropping him like a bad habit.

LATER

Order has been restored: The police haul off the inept crooks, the bank tellers are free, and the stolen cash returned.

Alpha stands triumphantly, hands on hips, sporting a thousand watt smile.

ALPHA
 I guess crime doesn't pay.

An attractive FEMALE BANKER give him a hug. As she pulls away she slips him her card.

FEMALE BANKER
(sultry)
Call me.

Alpha grins, it's good to be king.

EXT. MEGA-TALENT MANAGEMENT - DAY

A skyscraper staked in the heart of a busy downtown.

INT. RECEPTION AREA - DAY

Alpha strolls into the lavish corporate spread. HELGA, a leggy Scandinavian stewardess, pilots the front desk.

ALPHA
Afternoon Helga. Is it hot in here
or is it just you?

Helga smiles so big it would put the Cheshire Cat to shame.

HELGA
Hi Alpha.
(into intercom)
Mr. Finklestein, Alpha Major is
here to see you.

The doors to the cavernous inner sanctum open. Out walks BARRY FINKLESTEIN, a shrunken emaciated man in Armani.

BARRY
Look what the cat dragged in. You
great, like a million bucks. How
are ya kid?

Barry and Alpha shakes hands.

ALPHA
If I was I was any better it would
be a crime.

They share a faux laugh.

BARRY
Good, good. Come in.

INSIDE BARRY'S OFFICE

They enter a shrine of advertising propaganda. The place read like a "Who's Who" of the superhero biz.

Barry sinks into a comfy leather throne behind a desk the size of Rhode Island. Alpha slides into a ergonomic chair that wraps around him like a lost child reunited with his mother.

BARRY

Alphie, we go back a long way, you and me. If it wasn't for you I'd still be selling neckties in Newark.

Alpha beams proudly.

BARRY

That's why it kills me to have to do this kid ... I'm dropping you?

Alpha's face drops. Shock. Awe. Disbelief.

ALPHA

(surprise)

You're dropping me?

Barry fires up a cigar.

BARRY

Afraid so kid.

Alpha jumps to feet. The chair, vacuumed sealed to his butt, goes with him.

ALPHA

But I'm Alpha Major, defender of liberty, champion of righteousness, bane of ...

Barry, cuts him off, he's heard enough.

BARRY

Save it kiddo, I know the spiel. I wrote the copy, remember. Nobody's buying your bit. You're old news. Yesterday's fish wrap.

Barry takes a long drag and exhales.

BARRY

You were Megalotropolis' biggest hero, past tense. You haven't made a magazine cover in over a year.

(puff his cigar)

Heck, I can't even book you on the Late, Late, Late, Late Show.

ALPHA
But I have toys ...

BARRY
Sitting in a warehouse in
Singapore. Customs wouldn't clear
'em. Something about tariff
violations.

ALPHA
What about the lunchboxes?

BARRY
Never hit the market. Turns out the
paint was toxic. Who knew?

ALPHA
The movie?

BARRY
The option expired six months ago.
Nobody's biting kid.

Alpha's shoulders hunch. The suction releases and the wily
chair falls back into place.

Barry drapes his arm around Alpha and ushers him through
reception, out into

INT. LOBBY - DAY

They wait for the elevator.

BARRY
Alphie baby, what can I say? The
well dried up. These things happen.
You had a good run.

ALPHA
But ...

BARRY
You'll be fine kid. You're a
survivor.

Ding. Out steps DIESEL, a hip hop inspired super beefcake,
and his entourage of hangers-on.

BARRY
Look I got to go. My three-thirty
is here.

Barry turns to greet Diesel.

BARRY
Diesel baby, looking good. You been
lifting?

DIESEL
Nah, dog.
(playfully jabs Barry)
Been working the heavy bag.

Barry ushers Diesel and company into his office.

BARRY
We've got studios throwing offers
at you. But I think we can press
them to commit to something big --
I'm thinking trilogy.

DIESEL
Word?

BARRY
You hear that sound?

DIESEL
What sound?

BARRY
The sound of cash registers baby.
Cha-ching!

Barry and Diesel share the hearty laughter of two old
friends. The doors close and Alpha stands dumbstruck.

EXT. JUSTICE FIVE HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Alpha stands at the front door. He swipes his badge --
Nothing -- Just an annoying buzz. Frustration setting in.

BEHIND ALPHA

A crowd gathers: HOT STUFF, fiery super-vixen; OLE IRONSIDES,
a robotic relic; STRETCH JENKINS, elastic Hendrix clone; and
INVISIBLE DUDE, unseen yet abrasive.

HOT STUFF
Oh no. You didn't tell him.

OLE IRONSIDES
I thought you were going to.

STRETCH JENKINS
Who's going to tell him?

INVISIBLE DUDE
Don't look at me.

HOT STUFF
(sighs)
Fine. I'll do it.

Alpha, realizing he has company, turns to greet them.

ALPHA
Ah, Hot Stuff. Glad you're here. My
I.D. card is malfunctioning.

Hot Stuff tries to explain the awkward situation.

HOT STUFF
Hey Alpha ... look we need to talk.

Alpha loves to talk, especially about himself.

ALPHA
Certainly my fiery maiden of
justice. Did I ever tell you about
the time I single-handedly saved
the Earth from an alien invasion?

She start the break-up speech.

HOT STUFF
Look Alpha, there's no easy way to
put this ...

Too late. Alpha is self-absorbed in his own tale.

ALPHA
So there I was. Surrounded by a mob
of bloodthirsty mutant cyborg
ninjas.

Alpha continues. Hot Stuff tries to interject.

ALPHA
They had me surrounded. Claws,
swords, and death rays everywhere.

HOT STUFF
Alpha ...

Alpha flexes his muscles like a pre-Hollywood Schwarzenegger.

ALPHA

They swarmed me but they were no match against my tightly chiseled physique and rugged good looks.

HOT STUFF

Alpha ...

ALPHA

Once again the Earth was saved.
Thanks to me.

Hot Stuff's attempts at letting him down gently have failed. She's forced to burst his bubble.

HOT STUFF

(screams)

You're off the team!

Silence amid the long faces. Alpha looks confused then quickly rebounds with a grin.

ALPHA

You had me going there. This is a joke right? There's a hidden camera over there in the bushes. Right?

Alpha searches for hidden cameras but there are none. The others avoid eye contact. This isn't a joke. Reality hits. Step one - denial.

ALPHA

But I'm the leader. The captain. The chief. The head honcho. The big Kahuna.

HOT STUFF

Market research showed you weren't connecting with the 18 - 36 demographics, so we decided to go in a new direction. You understand.

OLE IRONSIDES

Don't take it personal.

STRETCH JENKINS

It's just business.

INVISIBLE DUDE

Dude you suck!

The team cuts Invisible Dude a look that could kill.

INVISIBLE DUDE

What?

ALPHA

But we're the Justice Five.
 (counts his fingers)
 One, two, three, four, five. You
 need a fifth member.

A tricked out SUV pulls up, chrome rims still spinning. Out
 steps Diesel.

DIESEL

Yo, sorry I'm late. I ran into this
 honey and one thing lead to
 another. Know what I'm saying?
 (points at Alpha)
 Who's this busta?

ALPHA

This busta is ... I'm Alpha Major.
 Leader of the Justice Five.

DIESEL

I don't think so playboy. I'm the
 leader of the Justice Five.

Alpha is stunned.

ALPHA

What?
 (looks at the others)
 What is he talking about?

Silence from the others. Diesel drops some knowledge.

DIESEL

It's like this playa. The network
 wanted a fresh face on the team and
 it don't get no fresher than me --
 ya dig?

Alpha jabs a finger into Diesel's chest.

ALPHA

No. I do not dig. Now you listen
 here mister ...

Diesel's cell phone chirps, he silences Alpha with an
 outstretched hand, then answers.

DIESEL
 Slow your roll homie.
 (into phone)
 Holla -- For real? -- we're on the
 way.

Diesel addresses the team.

DIESEL
 Yo, listen up. There is a giant
 meteor headed for Earth. The impact
 will make Hiroshima look like a
 backyard barbecue. Let's roll.

Diesel snatches Alpha's I.D. badge.

ALPHA
 What are you doing?

Diesel grins, then rips it in half.

DIESEL
 Members only.

Alpha stands looking dumbfounded as the team walks away.

The sky grays. A crack of thunder. A flash of lighting. Then
 a downpour of torrential rain.

Alpha is instantly soaked to bone. He trudges off. Shoulders
 hunched. Head bowed. Ego obliterated.

EXT. HARRY'S BAR - NIGHT

A crumbling brick building, "Harry's" glows in green neon.

INT. HARRY'S BAR

A dive bar full of forgotten icons. Obscure Golden Age heroes
 numb the memories of their faded glory with booze.

Alpha reminisces incoherently.

ALPHA
 (slurring)
 They didn't come no bigger than me.
 I tell you that. I -- I -- was big.
 Huge even!

HARRY, a sexy Valkyrie bartender, polishes a mug clean.

HARRY

Alphie, don't you think you've had enough. Let me call you a cab.

ALPHA

Okay. I'm a cab.

Alpha laughs. He's a drunken Benny Hill.

ALPHA

What say me and you go back to my place and play secret identity?

Harry backhands him but Alpha's too drunk to feel anything.

ALPHA

I'll take that as a definite maybe.

REPORTER (V.O.)

... diverted an incoming meteorite into the sun ...

Alpha looks up at the television mounted above the bar.

ON THE TV

The Justice League free floating in space.

REPORTER

... the bravery of the Justice Five prevented the extinction of the human race.

Diesel hams it up in front of the camera.

DIESEL

I don't consider it bravery. We're just doing our jobs. We're here to keep this great city safe.

BACK TO SCENE

Alpha rips the television down from its perch and smashes it to pieces. Then stomps the broken bits for good measure.

Silence. Everybody in the bar stares at Alpha, who looks around defiantly.

ALPHA

What?

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

The rain falls heavier. The back door of Harry's Bar slams open and out flies Alpha into the open dumpster.

He claws his way out. Splashes into a puddle. He lies spread eagle on his back. Looking up towards a

BILLBOARD

A fifty foot tall cut-out of Diesel. Despite it being an inanimate object it appears to be laughing at Alpha.

Alpha lies catatonic. A filthy, wet, gingerbread man splayed out on the pavement.

EXT. SKID ROW APARTMENTS - NIGHT

SUPER: Three weeks later

A sleazy apartment in the bad part of town.

INT. ALPHA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Alpha's reached a new low. He's hasn't shaved or showered in a week. His apartment is a hovel: beer cans and fast food wrappers everywhere. His only company is day time talk shows.

His stomach grumbles. He shuffles over to the

REFRIGERATOR

A solitary light bulb stares back.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Alpha walks out his front door into the hallway.

RICKY, an energetic seven year old, sits outside the apartment opposite Alpha's. He's been crying.

RICKY

Hi.

Alpha, unresponsive, staggers down the hall.

RICKY

Hey mister are you a superhero?

Alpha turns around, he ponders the question for a second.

ALPHA
I used to be.

RICKY
(wipes tears away)
Superheroes help people right?

ALPHA
Yeah ... I guess so.

Alpha starts back down the hall but stops. Despite his battered pride and bruised ego, he's still a hero, he can't ignore this.

ALPHA
What's your name?

RICKY
Ricky.

ALPHA
(offers his hand)
I'm Alpha -- Alpha Major.

Ricky shakes with one hand while wiping away tears with the other.

RICKY
I know. I saw you on TV.

Now closer Alpha sees Ricky's black eye. He grasps the battered side of Ricky's face.

ALPHA
Who did this?

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - DAY

A functional yet modest apartment. MARIA, a young single mother, argues with her jealous gang banger wannabe boyfriend, HECTOR.

HECTOR
I turn my back for one minute and you're flirting with another guy.

MARIA
It was the mailman, Hector. I was just saying hello.

HECTOR

I don't care if it was freaking
President.

Maria walks away carrying a basket of laundry but Hector
grabs her wrist, pulling her towards him.

MARIA

Stop it!

She slaps away the unwanted appendage. Storming out into

THE KITCHEN

Hector follows, not backing off. He grabs her again.

HECTOR

Where you going? I'm talking to
you!

Hector cocks his hand back like a coiled snake ready to
strike. Maria braces for impact, she's an old pro at this.

HECTOR

You're forgetting your place. I'm
gonna have to teach you some
manners!

He swings but his arm stop short Maria's face. Alpha's
clutches his wrist. Angry stares on both sides.

ALPHA

That's no way to talk to a lady
pal. Looks like I'm going to have
to teach you a lesson.

Alpha tightens his grip. Bone crunches. Hector drops to his
knees.

ALPHA

There are two hundred and six bones
in the human body. If you ever
touch either one of them again. I
will break every single one of
yours. Comprende?

Hector painfully nods. Alpha releases. Hector scurries out of
the apartment.

Ricky and Maria look on in awe. Maria cries tears of joy.
Ricky wraps himself around Alpha's leg.

MARIA

Thank you. Thank you so much.

RICKY

That was so cool. You're my hero.

Alpha reverts to sulking. The momentary euphoria has past.

ALPHA

I'm no hero, not anymore.

Alpha plods across the hall to his apartment.

EXT. ALPHA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A knock on the door. No answer. Then another. Alpha opens the door, bottle of booze in hand. He's drunk and disorderly.

Outside stand Maria and Ricky. Ricky holds a brightly colored box.

MARIA

Hi. We got you a little something.

Ricky shoves the box into Alpha's hands.

ALPHA

Thanks.

Alpha slams the door shut in their faces.

More knocking. The door opens. Alpha looks at them, puzzled as to why they are still here.

MARIA

Aren't you going to open it?

Alpha rips the box open, revealing a birthday cake that reads "Thank You".

MARIA

I made it myself.

RICKY

I helped. Taste it.

ALPHA

Maybe later.

The door slams again.

INT. ALPHA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Alpha sits, box in his lap. He jams a fistful of cake his mouth. Chewing like a grazing cow.

A homemade card lies in the box. He reads it.

RICKY'S CARD

Crude crayon sketches drawn on folded construction paper. A kid's mini-comic.

RICKY (V.O.)

Dear Mister Alpha. Thank you for helping my mom and me yesterday.

A picture of Alpha socking Hector.

RICKY (V.O.)

You are my hero. I want to be just like you when I grow up.

A picture of Ricky dressed as Alpha.

RICKY (V.O.)

Maybe we could be friends. My mom says it looks like you could use a friend.

A picture of Alpha and Ricky fishing.

RICKY (V.O.)

Maybe one day we could go fishing. Like I did with my dad before he died. One time I caught a big trout. Have you ever caught a fish? That's all -- Your best friend, Ricky.

Alpha's lips quivers and his eyes tear up. The young boy's note tugged at his heart strings.

EXT. MARIA APARTMENT

There's knock on the door. Ricky opens it to find Alpha standing there. Alpha stoops, meeting him at eye level.

ALPHA

Thank you.

Ricky shrugs his shoulders.

RICKY
For what?

ALPHA
(rustles Ricky's hair)
For reminding me what it means to
be a hero.

RICKY
Really?

ALPHA
You betcha ...

Alpha snaps to attention and whips out his trademark
patriotic salute.

ALPHA
... Alpha Major, defender of liberty,
champion of righteousness, bane of
evil-doers, guardian of all that's
good, noble, and just reporting for
duty.

Ricky smiles. Maria approaches the door.

ALPHA
There's a big world out there that
needs saving and I'm just the hero
for the job.

Maria points out one of many holes in his uniform.

MARIA
That's wonderful but first we need
to do something about your costume.
It's a getting a little ratty.

Ricky chimes in, holding his nose.

RICKY
And stinky.

Alpha sniffs his armpits -- yuck.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT. - NIGHT

Alpha, in his skives, and Ricky play cards at the kitchen
table. Maria works feverishly at the sewing machine.

RICKY
You got any tens?

ALPHA
Go fish.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT - LATER

Maria and Ricky wait outside the bathroom door.

MARIA
Are you ready yet?

Alpha responds from behind the closed door.

ALPHA
Just a minute.

RICKY
He takes longer to get dressed than
you do mom.

Alpha makes his grand entrance, revealing his new costume, a slick and futuristic number.

ALPHA
So how do I look?

Maria and Ricky look on approvingly.

RICKY
Cool!

MARIA
Very nice.

Alpha adjusts himself.

ALPHA
It's a little snug in the crotch.

Maria shoots Alpha a look. He blushes.

ALPHA
It's wonderful, thank you.

Alpha heads towards the open window.

ALPHA
Now if you'll excuse me. I'm off to
save the day.

MARIA
One last thing.

She gives Alpha a big kiss on the cheek

MARIA
For good luck.

Alpha blushes. He climbs out the window.

Ricky examines a piece of square shaped piece of cloth left behind on the table.

RICKY
Mom, I think you forgot a piece.

Maria covers her mouth in shock. She realizes she's made a big mistake.

EXT. FIRE ESCAPE - NIGHT

Alpha overlooks the city. His hands on his hips, he's proud, noble, and pretty spiffy in his new costume. Except for one minor detail. The missing piece was the butt flap. Alpha's pale hairy ass is exposed for the world to see.

ALPHA
Megalotropolis, get ready for the new and improved Alpha Major.