

Chu!
Part 4
Condí-Master

Casey drove quickly from The “Waster”’s Leawood house to the SouthGlen parking lot. To not be spotted following him, I kept the Condiment Mobile a safe distance behind.

When we arrived, he parked behind the building in his usual spot, and I parked in the southern Fizoli’s lot. Casey emerged from his car, slammed the door, and walked around to the front of the building. As he turned the corner, I fired the Condiment Mobile back up, and drove to the front parking lot of the theater.

After parking near the hill, I leaped from the Mobile, and let my cape blow in the breeze. There really is nothing better than a good cape day. Time to get serious. I jumped behind the SUV parked next to my spot, scouted my next move, and ran to the nearby green car. With my back against the driver’s door, I looked into the mirror to get a better view of the terrain ahead. All I could see was the glass tower above the entrance. I adjusted it down, and gasped.

“Under new ownership,” I whispered. I adjusted the mirror again, and below that sign was the title of this new establishment, 24 hr Training. What an odd name for a theater. The mirror was moved again, and I scouted the area ahead. This was the closest car. It would be an all-out sprint to the front stairs.

“Did you just adjust my mirror?” said a girly voice. I looked toward it, and found Leprechaun in its place. In her hand was the long been stolen clone of Condiment Cow. It had been so long since I had last seen the other cow I had forgotten he even existed until this very moment. Interesting how he would happen back into my life just at a time where I would need a sidekick.

Leprechaun continued to stare at me, which at first seemed a bit weird that she had nothing better to do than burn a hole in my forehead with those Leprechaun eyes in the middle of the under new ownership SouthGlen parking lot, when I realized she was still in search to an answer to her previous question about mirrors or some such nonsense. Doesn’t she see I have condiment wasters to defeat, and don’t have time to play twenty questions?

“Uhh... So this place is under new ownership?”

“Oh,” she said, coming back to life. “Yeah, the place got bought out a few months ago, employees and all. Which is kinda weird, since it’s now a gym, but it’s a job.”

“So Casey still works here?”

“Unfortunately,” she muttered. “He just got promoted to be in charge of Condíment training now that he’s a Condí-Master and everything.”

Condíment training! This whole Condí-business has gone way too far. It’s time to shut down the final piece of this terrible condiment wasting scheme. I adjusted the mirror to see the entrance door, no movement. No customers. “I’m sorry Leprechaun, but Casey is about to realize condiments are not pets.”

“Here,” said Leprechaun with a giddiness in her voice, “I know you used to carry a stuffed cow into battle with you, so you can have this.”

I took the clone of Condiment Cow, and looked into his blank eyes.

“I stole it from Josh a while ago, so it would really tick him off if I gave it to you. Plus, I should give you something if your going to go beat up Casey. I know you guys know each other or something, but to be honest, he really gets on my nerves.”

Well, she said something like that. I wasn’t really listening to her. I knew she stole the cow from Hoj’s secret identity, Josh, and I was busy coming up with a plan to get into the building.

“Do you want to be my sidekick?”

“Uhh... Sure, I’d love to!”

“Shhh! Leprechaun, the clone of Condiment Cow is talking!”

“...,” said the cow.

“Well, sure. I’ll call you Condiment the Cow. So you’ll be my sidekick?”

“...,” said Condiment the Cow.

“Alright, let’s roll.” With Condiment the Cow in hand, I stood, jumped onto the hood of Leprechaun’s car, and charged across the parking lot. The stairs were taken in a single leap, which ended in a somersault, then back to my feet for two steps across the entry way before pausing at the glass door. I took a deep breath while grasping the handle, then pulling the door open.

A cool breeze rushed past as I walked through the door and entered the lobby. Ahead of me stood a membership desk where the box office had been, staffed with two well built employees in red tank tops and black spandex pants. Also part of the uniform was black sweatbands at the top of their foreheads with the 24 hr Training logo sewn on. The employees smiled readied some papers as I moved toward them.

Directly behind them stood a scrawnier guy in black wind breaker pants, red sweatshirt, and a black helmet with a visor concealing his face. Something that looked like a PDA had been strapped to his wrist, and a futuristic gun strapped to his waist.

Behind him on the opposite side of the room, where the fish tank had been, now stood a line of Stairmasters with two fat guys trying to acquire rock hard legs. The guys working out looked familiar, but I couldn't place them.

To my right was now a hallway full of offices with glass walls. Buff people in too small tuxes to show off their rock hard figures talked with future clients, apparently signing them up for membership plans.

To the left where the arcade area had been in the SoughGlen days, now stood a smoothie bar. A lady traded cash for a tofu burger and a red smoothie with the attendant.

I looked back to the smiling employees in front of me, approaching them as casually heroic as I could muster. A smile crossed my mouth as I rested my arms on the counter and prepared to greet the employees. The second before I was going to tell them my reason for being here, the scrawny helmeted guy looked to my left and started to laugh. My Condiment Sense went off. It was the lady at the smoothie bar.

I looked over to her, and watched as she held the burger in one hand while attempting to shake the last bit of ketchup from the bottle to her flavorless hunk of fake meat. Instinctively, my hand went for the ketchup compartment of the Condiment Belt as I ran toward the woman. Her face reflected her agony as she struggled for that last bit of tasty condiment that I knew would never come. As I neared, she looked up, and then toward the ketchup and mustard clutched in my outstretched hand. When she was in reach, I stopped and smiled as she took the packets.

Pain ripped through my right side which knocked me to my knees. It was then I heard the high pitched whirr of the helmeted man's gun in action. He stopped, and I watched as dime sized yellow balls rolled around on the floor. Fighting back the pain, I smiled up at the woman to watch her enjoy her condiments to make being shot worth it.

The woman looked me over, then at her new condiments. Happiness was not what filled her face, but anger. "I remember you," she whispered, then squeezed the condiment packets.

"Noooo!" I cried. But my cry was unable to stop her. The packets exploded with drops of precious ketchup flying into the air, splattering on my face, and the majority flowing from her palm down her outstretched forearm in an orange ketchup mustard mixture.

The woman smiled before raising her arm, "I fell for your condiment trick once, never again. Your old, disgusting condiments will never enter my stomach again!" She flicked the condiment packets into my face and walked back toward the smoothie bar.

"I would never-" A hand grabbed the back of my neck, lifted me, and flung me backwards across the lobby. My shoulders hit the tile, and I slid until my feet hit the entrance door. Slowly, I sat up to see the masked man shaking his head in my direction.

"Crappy Mint Man, you still haven't learned. You cannot pass from the lobby to the exercise floor without a membership card." He walked toward me as the buff guys behind the membership desk shook their heads in unison while gathering some papers. "I've gotten some additional gear to thwart the likes of you since my days preventing people from sneaking into the movie theater. Armed with a new employer, new equipment, and new training, you will never be able to make it past, Training Guy!"

"That may have worked a few years ago, but that's a pretty generic name by today's standards."

"Well, that's the best I could come up with on the spot, but even more important is how stupid you will look when you have to explain why you lost to such a generically named villain!" Training Guy laughed maniacally under his helmet.

There is no time for this. We need to get past the condiment wasting woman and Training Guy before Casey does something to one of those condiments. I looked Condiment the Cow in his cold eyes, and laughed him at the wasting woman.

"Go Condiment the Cow!" I screamed as he flew through the air.

Training Guy went for his gun, and started firing in the direction of my sidekick. Condiment the Cow flipped through the air dodging Training Guy's from the hip shots to perform an all fours kick to the

wasting woman's head before jumping out of the way of Training Guy's shots which put the finishing touch in knocking the wasting woman to the ground.

With Training Guy watching Condiment hop along the training area, I snuck behind him to the stairs in the right hand side of the room where Condiment the Cow eventually bounced.

"Good job Condiment, we're almost there," I whispered, looking toward the fat guys working out to my left.

Training Guy came between the fat guys and us looking for Condiment the Cow. I held my breath for extra sneakiness, while circling to the opposite side of the staircase. As Training Guy walked into our old hiding place, we pounced on the fat guy's workout bags, quickly pulling their membership cards from within.

Training Guy jumped back out staring at the four of us. The fat guys stopped climbing stairs, and allowed the sweat to run from their chins.

Condiment the Cow and I held up our membership cards, unfortunately the fat guys couldn't find theirs.

"If you would have asked, we would have shown them to you," I said.

Training Guy's helmet hardly hid his anger, "Get off of those Stairmasters, and get out, now!"

"This will not be the last you hear of us," said one fat guy to Training Guy.

"Oh yes!" said the other fat guy, "This walk of shame you mistakenly force us to travel shall not be forgotten. You will soon find your powers as non-existent as Sprint service behind their World Headquarters!"

The fat guys were led to the door as I gathered my sidekick and headed to the right, down the old 7-12 hallway, looking for Casey. When I turned the corner, he was at the end of the hallway. "Casey!" I yelled, pausing in the middle of the hall.

He halted, one foot on the stairs, the other prepared to follow, and turned toward me. Casey stepped down, moving to the center of the hallway before calling out, "Tom!"

Puzzled, I took a few cautious steps toward him with Condiment the Cow in tow, "Casey! It's Condiment Man!"

A door halfway down the hall opened into the corridor. Out popped Tom's head, clad in a black sweatband. He looked at Casey, who pointed to me. Tom stepped from the doorway pausing for a moment to motion into the room for others to follow.

About thirty people filed from the room, each wearing a white sweatband, tee-shirt, and basketball shorts. They stood together behind him, nearly filling the hallway. The last to exit held a boom box, which he set on the floor next to Tom.

Tom gracefully slid off his jacket, tossing it to the floor. He then tore away his tear away pants as only an expert could, setting them on top of his jacket. He strutted around, shaking out his limbs in his black shorts and tank top. Once sufficiently loose, he affixed a rear view mirror bikers usually wear, "Ready!"

The group behind him snapped to attention, lining up in six columns, four rows deep, facing away from me. Tom shook his head at me as he lifted the boom box from the floor, then walked through to the front of the group and spun on his heel to face his class. He looked his class over, nodded to them, and hit play on the boom box.

The hallway filled with a loud hiss as the cassette played through blank tape, then a few popping sounds until a generic electronic keyboardish rhythm spewed from the speakers. Tom and his class bobbed their heads in unison with the loud thumping beat of an electronic bass drum. Tom shouted, "Everybody ready!?"

The entire class clapped with the drum to show they were, indeed, ready.

"We have a special guest with us today," shouted Tom, "and I want you all to put your all into every move you do. Work it hard today, feel the good burn, and tone those flabby love handles." Tom spun, putting his back to his class. His eyes focused on me in his rear view mirror.

Thump, thump, thump called the boom box.

"Side to side," Tom yelled, and the class began taking two steps left, clapping, then two steps right, clapping, and repeating the process.

"Enough of this Tom! Your puny aerobics class can't stop me!" I walked to the right of the class to walk around this pathetic obstacle.

"Right kick!"

A foot connected with my left side, pushing me into the wall.

“We do Tae Bo!”

I slumped backwards to get back behind the class, barely dodging another kick. This is going to be more difficult than I had expected. I brushed myself off, deciding to attempt a run up the middle. I took a few steps back to gain some speed, then charged between columns three and four.

“Back kick!”

The class's legs flew back, but it was expected this time. Spinning to the left and planting my foot, I dodged and continued through the class.

“Arms back!”

The arms of the class members flew back from in front to their sides filling the gaps between columns. At full speed I collided with the fist of an overweight woman and landed on the floor with my back.

“Foot stomps! Remember to drive your foot into the ground.”

I looked back, and the fat lady came stomping toward me. Up front, Tom was admiring the stomping form of a class member in the front row. “Look at John’s form. Watch how he plants his foot.”

I rolled to a kneeling position, jumped, and let loose with a kick to the woman’s head. It connected. She wobbled and her eyes rolled back into her head. She toppled backward into the woman who had kicked me earlier. Those in the back few rows tripped over their fallen classmates, knocking those around them over like dominoes as they fell, but quickly regained their composure and sprung back into formation. With no way to retreat, I had no choice but to continue toward Tom.

“Punch left!”

A right handed punch landed on my right shoulder, shoving me toward a balding man.

“Punch right!”

The balding man’s fist connected with my back.

“Front kick!”

Someone’s shoe collided with my right side, knocking me to the ground. I stayed down, crawling my way around the pillars of bouncing bodies toward the front.

“Sweep kick!”

A leg knocked my arms from under me, and I went face down into the carpet. Rolling to the left to get away from the guy who kicked me, I bumped into the lady’s leg on my right. She lost her balance and fell across me slamming her head into the guy’s waist. I jumped once again to my feet, sprinting through the last two rows of class members to confront Tom himself.

Thump, thump, thump screamed the boom box.

Tom turned to face me, “Palm strike!” He gave me a hand to the chest and took my wind in return. I fell backward gasping for air. He again put his back to the class, “Forward run!”

I knelt coughing, looking up to see Tom grab the boom box and run further down the hallway. The aerobics class followed past me, all except the woman who was knocked out after falling onto the sweep kicker. Once again Tom had the class between himself and I.

“Time to pick up the pace! Kick it into high gear!” shouted Tom.

Thump thump thump thump thump thump echoed the boom box at double speed.

With my wind back, I gathered my courage and charged into the middle of the class.

As I passed the back row, Tom called out, “Right punch, left punch!”

The fists whooshed past in both directions, but a spin kick landed squarely on my shoulder. I fell backward out of the group, looking back in time to see the class recover to a ready position.

“...” said Condiment the Cow.

“You can jump that far?”

“...” said Condiment the Cow.

“I really wish you would have said something sooner.”

Following Condiment the Cow’s plan, I ran toward the back of the class, Condiment the Cow leaping from my hand before I stopped short of entering the class. Condiment flipped through the air toward the class leader. The reflection of Tom’s eye widened in the mirror when he first saw a cow flying toward him.

At the last moment, Condiment flipped into perfect all fours kick form, knocking Tom’s mirror from his head. Condiment and the mirror dropped to the ground, and the Tae Bo class stood at ease with their leader scrambling after his mirror to guide the class. This time would be short lived. In full sprint, I tore through the leaderless class, shoving those aside who stood in my way to the side.

“Condiment Kick!” roared from my lungs while by my foot hurled into the cassette cover of the thumping boom box. The radio made a few crackling sounds before hitting the wall spinning to a stop down the hall. The silence from the broken boom box was deafening. With no music and no leader, the Tae Bo students dispersed behind me.

Tom gathered his mirror from the ground, rising to face me standing over plastic bits of his destroyed boom box and in front of the remains of a Tae Bo class he can no longer lead. He clenched the mirror and crushed it in his palm. The bent plastic and glass piece was tossed to the ground behind him. As he walked toward me, blood dripped slowly from his finger tips to the carpet below. “Just you wait,” he shook his bloody hand at me, “When I find a new boom box, we’re going to come looking for you. Just you wait.” Tom walked past me into the room he exited from, a few lost looking members of the class followed.

“Come on Condiment!” I picked him up, and ran up the stairs for Casey.

The stairs spiraled around, then opened up to the old projection booth, now open to the lobby to with a railing to the left, and windows to look into the workout rooms to the right. People ran on treadmills lined up against the right walls toward a TV hanging from the wall. Free weights and weight machines filled the floor in front of me. Most occupied by a ripped guy becoming more ripped, and near each one a scrawny guy looking on in awe.

Casey! He stood on the far side of the room surrounded by children. He held up a packet of ketchup, then passed it around for the kids to see.

“Casey!” I screamed as I ran across the weight room.

He saw me and said something to the kids. The kids turned to watch me close the distance by rolling through a squat machine, and each pulled a condiment from his holster, ready to be wasted.

“Casey, it’s me, Condiment Man.”

“I know who you are,” said Casey, “Team Red Evil.”

“Yeah. You suck!” said a blonde kid holding mustard.

“No, Casey, I’m Condiment Man. Remember? I was at your Halloween Party?”

“That party was what? Three years ago? I remember Hoj going as you. Man, that was a terrible costume he had.”

“Casey, you and these kids must stop wasting condiments. To make sure you don’t, give me the condiments you have and no one will be kicked today.”

“No! You just wanna be a Condi-Master like Casey. You can’t have my Condiments!” said a brown haired kid holding two ketchup and one barbeque packet.

“You’re a Condi-Master?”

“Yeah, I collected tons of condiments, so the professor made me one this afternoon,” said Casey.

“Condiment hoarding, condiment wasting. The ‘Waster’ tricked you all into doing all of this,” I explained, making air quotes for Waster, “but the show’s cancelled, for good.”

Blonde kid, mustard packet. I dove at him, driving my elbow into his face then spinning to recover the torn condiment packet before any spilled. I landed on top of the kid with the packet on my chest, torn open, but not wasted.

“I choose you! Ke-tchup!” screamed the brown haired kid.

“I choose you! Mildsaucechu!” cried another of the kids.

Ketchup and mild sauce spilled from the packet to the ground in puddles of waste.

“Wasters!”

“Wait,” Casey stepped in front of me, blocking me from the wasters.

“Casey, step aside.”

“They cancelled the show?”

“Yeah, now out of my way!” I pushed against him, “These kids need to be taught a lesson about condiments!”

“No, you get outa my way!” Casey looked back at the kids, “We need to get some Yu-Gi-Oh cards.”

Casey and the kids unloaded their condiment packets and ran past me toward the stairs.

“Condiment Kick!” I cried while kicking the brown haired condiment waster in the face. I spun to face the other kid, “Condiment Kick!”

He was hit in the shoulder, stumbled backward, and tripped over a workout bench.

I let out a sigh, “my work here is done.”

Condiment and I gathered the huge pile of condiments Casey and the kids abandoned into my cape, then scurried down the spiral stairs to the lobby to get these condiments to those who need them.

“Condiment Man!” was yelled from the balcony as I began crossing the lobby. Pausing to look where the voice had come, The “Waster” stood leaning on the railing, laughing.

I spun back around. Before me stood Training Guy, gun held across his chest. “You’re not leaving here Crappy Mint Man. I checked out those membership cards with my visor computer, and they were stolen. I’ll need you to pay for a one day pass, Tae Bo class, and Condiment training before you can leave.”

“Your right,” I pulled the membership passes from my belt, “Here, you can have the passes back, and how much do I owe you?”

“Glad to see you’re being reasonable about this,” he holstered his gun and walked toward me to the membership desk. “Looks like it will be...”

Two large men burst through the front doors in sidekick clothes.

“I’m in charge here! Guy who enforces memberships, turn around and face us!” screamed Large and In Charge.

“Your excessive force used in rule enforcement has come back to haunt you in the form of two sidekicks full of fury!” shouted Sir Battle Cry, “Prepare to meet the swift justice only two men of our girth can bestow!”

Training Guy looked up at me, “Did you call these losers?”

I shook my head, “No.”

Training Guy turned to the sidekicks, “Where’s your superhero?”

“We have no need for a superhero on this occasion,” replied Sir Battle Cry, “Our combined fury has propelled us into action simultaneously. On this day, I am his sidekick, and he is mine.”

“But I’m still in charge!” screamed Large and in Charge.

I dumped the condiments from my cape to the floor, placing Condiment in the middle, “Guard these with your life.”

“...” said Condiment the Cow.

I nodded.

Our opponent stepped from behind the membership desk facing me. Large and in Charge and Sir Battle Cry crept in behind Training Guy.

“You better watch out,” I said, watching the sidekicks move silently into position. “I think that monkey’s escaped the scientist’s lair again.”

Large and in Charge raised his fist, taking the last step to be in position.

“Yeah, I’m sure it did,” laughed Training Guy.

Large and in Charge’s face contorted to show his concentration on this blow as he brought his heavy hand down on Training Guy’s head.

Without looking back, Training Guy stepped casually to his right, dodging the blow, then countered with an elbow to the gut. Training Guy faced his attacker with gun drawn, and unloaded a clip of pellets on the sidekick hut sidekicks.

Large and in Charge fell to his back. He quickly rolled to his stomach and crawled behind the membership desk as Training Guy reloaded and fired another clip into his back. Sir Battle Cry ran at the villain taking pellets to the chest, screaming, “Pellets may welt my exterior, but shall never slow the momentum of justice running in your direction!” Sir Battle Cry leapt, tackling Training Guy to the ground before my feet.

“Condiment Kick!” I screamed, letting loose my foot on Training Guy’s helmeted head.

Condiment rolled into my non-kicking leg from the pile of condiments, an arrow protruding from his head. The “Waster”, his legs hidden behind the upstairs railing, shrugged and tossed a crossbow to the ground. “You are lucky CM, you only lost a sidekick today. Next time, you will lose you precious condiments as well.” He laughed a hearty laugh as he walked away from the railing, toward the work out equipment.

Condiment lay by my right foot, the life draining from his eyes. A muffled beep came from his forehead before he exploded. Chunks of fabric and burnt stuffing scattered across the lobby and clung to my costume.

As I brushed burnt bits of my sidekick from my shirt, Sir Battle Cry placed his hand upon my shoulder, “The loss of your sidekick saddens me more than a three legged puppy.”

“Thank you,” I said, looking from where Condiment had been seconds before to my one time rented sidekick, “but he was only a clone.” I gathered the condiments into my cape, and headed for the Condiment Mobile.