



Rogues Gallery #13
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I Am Scarecrow
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Arkham Asylum, outskirts of Gotham City, years ago.

It reminded him of *The Silence of the Lambs*. The movie, not the book.

Dr. Jonathan Crane peered through the iron-barred gate down the dank hallway where a small folding chair was placed before one of the patient's (inmate's) rooms (cells). This was the restricted area of the asylum where the most dangerous and psychotic Arkham patients were kept, and special clearance was needed to come down here. Crane had obtained his clearance from Jeremiah Arkham personally after an extended interview.

A loud buzzing noise sounded and the gate slid open slowly as Crane heard the guards distorted voice over the intercom. "Go ahead, Doc. We're watching you."

Crane took a breath and strode forward, past two rooms where the patients were sealed behind thick Plexiglas walls, and he again thought of *Silence of the Lambs*. Ignoring whoever was inside those rooms, Crane stopped at the folding chair and turned to look inside the room the chair faced. The room was brightly lit but sparse, with a bolted-down metal cot and a stainless steel toilet as the only furniture it contained. The room's occupant sat on the floor against the far wall, facing the Plexiglas, his head down and his arms constrained in a straitjacket. The "patient's" eyes turned up to view Crane standing before his room, and his ruby-red lips turned up to form a small, ugly smile, displaying impossibly large teeth.

This was the man known only as the Joker- the most infamous of all of Arkham's residents. In his relatively short criminal career the Joker had caused more mayhem, murder and destruction in Gotham City than any other lawbreaker in recent memory, by far. Bearing the hideous visage of

a twisted clown, the Joker had held Gotham in a tight grip of panic and fear for some time before finally being captured, but his homicidal reign still had a deeply negative effect on Gotham's denizens. And it was the Joker's ability to stir such dread that interested Jonathan Crane. In fact, it was why he had come to Arkham Asylum in the first place.

Crane chose to ignore the folding chair, so as not to physically place himself at the Joker's level. In a calm, authoritative voice he said, "Hello. I'm Doctor Crane."

The Joker slowly cocked his head sideways. "You're new." It was a high-pitched, yet somehow menacing voice.

"Yes, I've recently transferred in," Crane said. "I was hoping you would give me some of your time."

"Really?" The Joker chuckled, almost to himself, and nudged the strait-jacket with his chin. "Time's all I've got, these days. Come to unlock the secrets of my mind?"

"Not precisely," Crane said. "Actually, I thought you might be able to help me with my own personal research."

The Joker appeared interested. "Oh, you mean I'm gonna be the shrink? Well then, why don't you lie down and tell me about your mother."

Crane smirked. "No, no. I was wondering how it feels for you to create so much fear in others."

The Joker outright guffawed. "HA! Are you serious? How it feels? How does it feel to be scared, Ichabod?"

Crane's face dropped. "What did you say?"

"Ichabod Crane," the Joker sneered. "You look just like him."

Crane's brow furrowed as-

He was always extremely anxious when the middle school bell rang. Twelve year old Jonathan Crane routinely was the last one on the bus for

the ride home, and that meant he had to head towards the back of the bus, where the four bullies would be waiting for him. Tall but gangly and awkward as hell, with wire-rimmed spectacles that gave him a bookish appearance, Crane was constantly teased by the bullies, who called him 'Ichabod' after the doomed schoolmaster from *'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow'*. For the entire hellish thirty minute journey Crane was slapped, punched and insulted, while the other kids on the bus turned their heads away, pretending not to notice. Crane felt so powerless, so useless, as they pulled his hair and called him names and made him cry, much to the bullies' delight. But it was their laughter- their cruel, loud, sadistic laughter- that really affected the tormented youth the most. And when Crane finally arrived home, his hair matted down from the bullies' spit and his cheeks wet with tears, he quickly ran to his bedroom, silently weeping and burning with hate for not only the bullies, but also (and mostly) for himself. He refused to let his mother see him like this for fear she would find him weak, a sissy, and so he lay on his bed with the awful, mocking laughter ringing in his ears-

"Don't call me that," Crane ordered, pushing his spectacles up to the bridge of his nose.

The Joker's warped smile stretched even wider. "Struck a nerve?"

"I heard you had your own brush with fear." Crane clumsily tried to change the subject, but he sounded defensive. "I hear the Batman's pretty scary."

The Joker's eyes darkened slightly, and his grin altered, becoming more predatory. "I'm not afraid of him."

"But supposedly he caught you, when no one else could," Crane pressed. "Rumor has it he's not even human, that he's some kind of 'demon' invented to scare sick @\$%s like you. Maybe you made him up to hide your embarrassment of being caught."

The Joker laughed, a demented, horrific noise that unnerved Crane. "HAHAHA! You're funny, Ichabod! A laugh riot!" Then his voice dropped. "You really wanna know what fear is?"

Crane composed himself and stepped close to the Plexiglas, intrigued.

“Tell me.”

“Fear is holding a knife to someone’s throat, listening to him beg for his life, as he shakes and pisses his pants,” the Joker whispered, as if telling a ghost story. “You look in his eyes, and you know he knows- he knows he’s going to die tonight, and he can’t do anything about it. You make your first cut, and you feel his panic- he tries to fight but it’s no use- and you see the blood-”

The Joker paused. “Did I turn you on, Ichabod?”

Crane snapped back as if from out of a trance. “What?”

The Joker’s smile became even wider, all-consuming and all-knowing. “You got some crazy in you, don’tcha? I know crazy, and you’re about as psycho as they come. Am I right, Ichabod?”

Crane shook his head violently. “No! And I told you not to call me-”

The Joker rushed forward so abruptly and aggressively his face mashed against the Plexiglas, his eyes bulging insanely, his mouth open in vicious glee. “Maybe you’ll learn about fear when I kill YOU! HAHAAHAHAHA!”

Startled, Crane stumbled back and tripped over the folding chair, falling to the floor. It was then he heard it. The Joker’s crazed laughter inspired the other patients to begin calling and cackling as well, the resounding tones echoing throughout the entire hallway.

Crane looked up in horror at the Joker, whom the psychiatrist could now see clearly. The red lips, the green hair, the ghostly pale skin- he was a children’s nightmare come to life. His eyes were the eyes of madness. And that horrific, ghastly laughter-

Crane scrambled to his feet and ran back down the hallway to the iron gate, banging on the bars until it slid open. But as he departed the restricted section of Arkham Asylum, Crane swore he still could hear the Joker’s frenzied screaming.

“Run, Ichabod! HAHAAHA! The Horseman’s coming! The Horseman’s

coming to get you! HAHAAHAHAHA!"

Later that evening

The apartment was a simple, two-room dwelling within a plain, rather dilapidated building located in a seedier section of Gotham City. It was well below Jonathan Crane's means, but he liked the place because it allowed him to enter and exit his abode virtually unnoticed. The apartment was small but well-kept, and its living space held a large bookcase, a computer desk and a card table, along with an old loveseat situated in front of a small television with a movie-player. The bookcase contained many textbooks concerning human psychology and physiology, as well as a number of volumes on the subject of serial killers and true crime cases. There were also numerous violence-themed movies on the shelves, such as Halloween, Psycho, and of course, The Silence of the Lambs. Set up on the card table was a primitive chemistry set and makeshift laboratory, with a test tube rack, vials of various chemicals, and a Bunsen burner as well. Crane thought of himself as an amateur chemist, and over the years he had developed his own psychotropic drugs, though none of them ever received a patent or FDA approval.

Crane was sitting at his computer, typing his notes about his encounter with the Joker into a large document file that stored the research for what Crane hoped would eventually be regarded as his magnum opus, tentatively titled The Nature of Fear. He worked feverishly, and when he finished his forehead was damp with sweat. He reviewed what he had written, and closed the document file, stretching his long limbs and adjusting his spectacles. He stood up, walked over to the full length mirror hanging next to the TV, and stared into it.

Crane smiled ghoulishly, trying to stretch the corners of his mouth as wide as he could. "'You really wanna know what fear is?'" he said, aping the Joker's distinctive voice.

Fear. There were many feel-good, New Age philosophies that claimed love was the purest and strongest emotion in the universe, but Crane knew better. It was fear. Fear was what motivated the survival instinct of all living creatures on a most basic level and influenced its actions. Fear was what made the world go'round, and everyone bowed to its power.

For fear and power went hand in hand, and all of Crane's research supported this.

Crane pulled his shirt over his head and off. He stared at his own naked upper body once again in the mirror with sheer abhorrence and hatred. How skinny he was. How ugly and unattractive. No woman would ever give him the time of day, and most males thought of him only as a weakling, a wimp. He gritted his teeth as he came to a realization.

The Joker's body wasn't that dissimilar to his, yet the homicidal clown had achieved such power and notoriety through the use of fear. When news spread around Arkham that Crane wanted to interview the Joker, the looks of astonishment and bewilderment that met Crane were widespread, as if he were the crazy one. And he found that the Joker was an unsettling presence sure, but Crane wasn't afraid of him. The Joker didn't grasp the concept of fear, not like Crane did.

Or so Crane told himself.

Crane angrily removed his glasses and looked closely at his blurry reflection. The lines of his body seemed more intimidating, his angles more threatening. Excitedly he ran to the card table and then returned to the mirror with a small cutting knife in his hand. He brandished the knife and began slashing the air, making loud hissing noises as he did so.

Fear is holding a knife to someone's throat, listening to him beg for his life, as he shakes and pisses his pants.

God, he was acting just like the Joker. And Crane couldn't have that. He wasn't a mere copycat of an inferior talent- he was a doctor, for crissakes! Still, the knife felt so good in his hand. It made him feel powerful. He was close. He needed something more, something distinctive-

Then he thought of something. "Nooo..." he said out loud to himself, "You think maybe..."

Crane went to his bedroom and retrieved an object from his the top of his dresser. It was a rubber latex mask of a human head that was covered with strips of burlap that Crane himself had glued to it. Inspired by some of the slasher horror films he enjoyed, Crane had constructed his own

variation of a serial killer mask similarly worn by countless movie maniacs. He hadn't even really intended to wear the thing- it was just homage to his fantasy "heroes", perhaps to be donned at Halloween or something like that.

Crane stood before the mirror and put the mask on. What he saw made his heart race- he looked like a monster, ready to pounce on his first victim. Forget about Michael Myers, Jason Vorhees, or even the Joker. Again Crane hacked at the air with the cutting knife, and a triumphant grin spread across his lips under the mask. He looked powerful. He looked scary. He looked like, like...

"I am Scarecrow!" Crane screamed. "I **AM** fear!"

Later

Gotham City was a dirty and ugly burg enough during daylight hours, but at night, it was far more sinister and foreboding. The shadows seemed to swallow the city whole, giving the streets an ominous, dangerous presence under a nigh-impenetrable shroud of blackness. And it was at night when the most depraved and outright disturbing of Gotham's inhabitants emerged from their hiding places to claim their nocturnal territories.

Jonathan Crane slowly walked along a dimly-lit avenue, his hands jammed into the pockets of a musty old navy peacoat, a fedora worn low over his eyes. His heart pounded with trepidation as he gripped both the cutting knife in one of his pockets, and his Scarecrow mask in the other. He felt a sense of wolfish euphoria, yet somehow in the recesses of his mind there was a twinge of uncertainty, a lagging self-doubt. But Crane was determined. This was the night when he would cross the line and experience firsthand what his years of painstaking research could not provide for him: to be a master of fear, and make it do his bidding.

Crane strolled along, eyes darting to and fro, oblivious to the varied sounds of the city around him, until he finally found what he was looking for. It was a wide, dark alley with no windows or doors facing into it and devoid of any homeless derelicts commonly found in places like these. Crane slipped into the alley and stayed in the shadows, silent and

virtually invisible, keeping a close watch on the sidewalk adjacent to the alley.

For quite some time Crane stood against the alley wall like a sentinel, his palms slick with sweat and his fingers tingling with nervousness. He saw people of all sorts pass by, lost in their own miseries and totally unaware of the tall, creepy man lurking in the alley. And after what seemed like an eternity, Crane observed a lady of the evening, who had unsuccessfully solicited a potential customer, sauntering in his direction, alone and unarmed. With trembling hands Crane pulled the mask from his pocket and put it on, stuffing the fedora under his peacoat and slinking back to the edge of the alley entrance.

She was coming closer. The Scarecrow's stomach was twisting into knots.

Almost there. No one else around. The Scarecrow didn't think he could do it-

He burst from the shadows and grabbed the hooker from behind, covering her mouth with his hand and dragging her a third of the way down the alley. She tried to struggle, but she was slightly built, and even the rail-thin Scarecrow had no trouble holding her.

The Scarecrow leaned close to the prostitute's ear. "Shut up. You scream and I'll kill you. Understand?" he whispered hoarsely.

The hooker nodded vigorously, and the Scarecrow released her, pushing her against the wall. She turned to look at her attacker, her eyes grew wide as saucers, and she let out a piercing scream that absolutely electrified The Scarecrow to the core. Then he realized his mistake, and savagely backhanded the young prostitute across the face, sending her reeling to the ground. She rolled over and stared up at the looming masked assailant, and she managed to forcefully stifle another scream.

The Scarecrow brought out the knife and yanked the hooker to her feet, backing her to the wall with his hand around her throat. He was disappointed to notice that her face was fairly unattractive; he'd wanted this to happen to a pretty girl. But her bottom lip quivered as tears stained her cheeks, ruining her gaudy make-up, and the Scarecrow could

practically taste the intense fright coming off her body. He maniacally waved the knife in her face, not speaking, while he could hear his own rapid breathing within his mask.

“No...p-please...” the hooker blubbered, vainly attempting to struggle out of the Scarecrow’s grasp.

Crane smiled demonically under the mask. “Yes...yes...”

The Joker’s words came to him again. You make your first cut, and you feel his panic- he tries to fight but it’s no use- and you see the blood- The Scarecrow squeezed the hooker’s throat tighter, and brought the knife closer-

The Scarecrow hesitated, as the hooker’s wide, teary eyes seemed to no longer focus on him, and he suddenly sensed something coming from behind him. Before he could turn around, the Scarecrow was slammed into from above and driven hard into the ground, his nose exploding on the pavement and crushed inside his mask. Dazed, the Scarecrow rolled around, his knife dropped and forgotten, as he heard a rough, guttural voice bark above him.

“Go. NOW!”

The Scarecrow realized the voice wasn’t addressing him and so he felt around the ground for the knife, locating it quickly. He staggered to his feet and swayed as he faced his new adversary. He was shocked at the sight.

It was dressed head to toe in black and dark gray, possessing a large, powerful frame. The shadows of the alley and the Scarecrow’s own wooziness made his visual perception difficult, but to the Scarecrow the newcomer seemed to have large pointy ears and huge, black...wings? The aura of invincibility the thing emanated was unmistakable, and the Scarecrow recognized with horror that he was facing the dread Batman himself.

Panicking, the Scarecrow swung the knife in wide, wild arcs, but he had no fighting experience or skills, and his swings came nowhere near their target. The Batman kicked the Scarecrow in the ribs, causing a sharp

CRACK!, and his black-gloved fist crashed into the Scarecrow's jaw, dropping the would-be master of fear again. Searing pain erupted throughout the Scarecrow's body as he lost the knife once more, but he had no time to think about it as he was dragged up by his coat to meet the Batman face to face. The vigilante's eyes were hard, white, pupil-less, and positively terrifying. The Scarecrow helplessly wet his pants.

"Listen, punk," the Batman snarled intimidatingly, "I ever catch you on my streets again--"

A brilliantly bright light shined on them and the Scarecrow heard someone yell, "FREEZE!" Distracted, the Batman let go of his prey and spun around, and the Scarecrow heard the same voice shout, "Holy @\$%, it's him! Murphy!"

The Scarecrow had fallen out of the spotlight glare back into the shadows and knew this would be his only opportunity. Though his pain-wracked body screamed in protest, the Scarecrow found his knife and lurched to his feet. He scrambled out of the alley like a drunken rag doll, passing by the second policeman, Murphy, who shouted at him to stop but to no avail. Officer Murphy decided to let the Scarecrow go, swearing under his breath, and then he continued down into the alley to assist his partner with the apprehension of the infamous masked vigilante known as the Batman.

His body broken and terrified out of his mind, the Scarecrow hobbled down the street away from the alley as fast as his weakening legs could carry him.

Later

Somehow the Scarecrow had made it back to his apartment, largely by sticking to the shadows and keeping a watchful eye on the sky for any sign of the Batman. Inside the apartment, the bloody Scarecrow mask, the knife, the peacoat, fedora, and urine-soaked pants were strewn about the room as Dr. Jonathan Crane examined himself in the mirror. Both his eyes were blackening, his nose was practically crushed flat, and his breathing came in labored wheezes. His ribs felt like daggers- a few of them were most likely broken. Crane gazed upon the pathetic, scrawny,

quaking figure in the mirror and nearly vomited from pure revulsion.

He had failed. He hadn't applied the lessons he had learned about the manipulation of fear into useful practice. Instead it had been he who had been shown what fear felt like, both in his face-off with the Joker and his skirmish with the Batman. Those two had such a command of themselves and their environment that they could project fear out and instill it in others. Crane was lacking that intangible core component. Something was missing. Something more.

The entire events of the day bubbled up to the forefront of Crane's mind as he continued to gape into the mirror. He was no different than that feeble little boy who was continually picked on in middle school. He was the same coward that was too shy and awkward in college to ask a pretty girl out on a date. He was still that same weakling who was fired from his teaching position at Gotham University, ostensibly for "questionable ethics" concerning his experiments with psychotropic drugs on "unsuspecting" test subjects. He was the same pitiful, skeletal egghead who had advanced very little in his station in life, despite his achievements in academics and professional stature. He was what he had always been. A nothing. A nobody. An inadequate, weak-willed, sickening **LOSER-**

Crane punched the center of the mirror, shattering it and leaving a maze of cracks snaking out from the point of impact. Crane breathed heavily, with great effort, and stood shaking with fury at the distorted image of himself in the damaged mirror as his hand throbbed and bled with tiny shards of glass sticking out of it. Crane felt the hot sting of tears burning in his eyes-

And then he saw it.

In the spider web of the mirror cracks Crane saw the chemistry set and vials of chemicals on the card table behind him. He blinked his eyes and forced back the tears as a new, heinous idea came to him. And then Jonathan Crane smiled- a wicked, evil smile to perhaps rival even the Joker.

The chemicals. Something more.

“I’ll **MAKE** them fear me!” Crane shrieked at the fractured mirror. “I’ll make them **ALL** afraid!”

THE END

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