

# Kickaha + Toons = ???

By Jonas Bell, 2020

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Kickaha did not know where he was. This wasn't an unusual occurrence. The foxyote was a wanderer by nature, content to let himself be taken wherever the whims of destiny and discount bus lines carried him.

What was unusual were his surroundings. Kickaha stood at the corner of a suburban street that, along with the nearby houses, trees, and general everything, was coloured in bright solid tones that defied the normal spectrum. There was not much visual texture to anything, either. The ground under his paws felt normal, but for the life of him Kickaha could not make out the usual bumps and divots common to even the freshest-lain sidewalk.

"Feels like I'm on a movie set," he remarked to no one in particular as he crossed the street. The whole place had a surreal, painted-on quality to it that made Kickaha, with his natural reds, oranges, and snazzy greens, feel like he was under a spotlight by virtue of comparison. Which wasn't a bad feeling, mind you. Kickaha was, after all, a leading trendsetter in cloaks and world-renowned lifestyle guru for the furred and--

**\*SCREEECH!\***

--and Kickaha should probably not muse on the mechanics of the universe while in the middle of an intersection. He broke out of his reverie and stared at the ambulance that skidded to a halt millimetres away from his nose. The ambulance stared back. It had two large, blue eyes where the windshield should have been. Kickaha blinked. So did the ambulance.

"...hi?" He ventured, suspending all normal indignation and/or opportunism at nearly being run over.

The ambulance gave a cheery honk and a large, pink tongue emerged from the grille and administered a sloppy lick across Kickaha's entire face.

"GAH~!"

"Ack! Scooter, no! What have I told you about licking the patients?"

A honk.

"Ok yes he's not actually a patient but he definitely would've been if you stopped a half-second later."

Kickaha, having finished using his cloak to wipe off what he hoped was coolant, finally got a look at the driver. The dalmatian stood next to his ambulance and was giving the vehicle an exasperated look and shaking his head. He wore a blue medical uniform and, regrettably, pants. The two elements that stood out were his height -- he was only half a foot taller than Kickaha (who himself was best classified as 'domestically compact') -- and the weird black line that traced over him and his clothes. It shifted constantly so it was always on the dog's outside.

Kickaha had many questions for this strange person and his face-licking car. But first: indignation! "Is this *your* vehicle, sir?" He asked with every stern note he could muster.

"Yep! He's Scooter, and I'm Daniel." The fellow introduced himself with an oblivious chipperness. "Good thing he stopped when he did. Kind of embarrassing for an EMT to make his own patients." He looked Kickaha up and down. "Huh, you're a new one. We don't get many 'regular' talking animals here."

"Hey! I'm no regular talking animal! I am Kickaha of the Arts! Famed trickster and bane of delicious rodents!" He puffed out his chest and posed dramatically. Plumes of confetti burst around him, prompting a startled yelp.

Daniel whistled. "Wow, you must be a real kook to trigger a toon effect right off the bat."

Scooter beeped in agreement.

"Quiet you." Kickaha narrowed his eyes at the ambulance. To Daniel he added, "what's that?"

"Just something that happens if you're overly dramatic with grandiose self-congratulating importance."

The foxyote waved the explanation aside. "No, not the confetti, that was obvious. I mean what's a toon?"

"Uh, toon? Short for cartoon. You know, like 'cartoon physics'? Kind of the name of the game around here." Daniel tilted his head.

"Riiiiight. Totally. I completely get you one-hundred percent." Kickaha nodded slowly. "So what's a cartoon?"

There was a sound like a record screeching to a halt. Daniel froze in place, his face a half-formed expression. Scooter looked from his driver to Kickaha, then took his sudden lack of supervision as an opportunity to lick up stray confetti.

"Hello? You still there?" Kickaha waved a hand in front of the dalmatian's frozen face. "Does a cartoon have to do with your car or is it just a linguistic coincidence?"

Daniel suddenly jolted back to life. "Ok so let me get this straight," he started. "You're a talking fox."

"Foxyote. I combine the best parts of both. From my insightful wit to my delightfully fluffy tail."

"And you walk on two legs."

"Well, yes. I find it makes people (slightly) less likely to call animal control."

"And you *don't* know what a cartoon is?"

"Haven't needed to so far!"

Daniel facepawed. "I'm going to guess you don't watch much TV."

"Nope! I don't have one. I'm a man of the world! Also there's no reception in forest dens and have you ever tried getting squirrels to install a cable line?"

Scouted rolled over to Daniel and used its side mirror to pat him consolingly. "Right. How to explain this..." he tapped his paw and hummed and hawed for a time. "Do you know Warner Brothers? Disney? ...4Kids?" He winced.

"I know they have very aggressive lawyers who have no problem dispatching paralegal commandos at the first hint of their intellectual property being used without express written permission."

"Quite. Do you know what that intellectual property *is*? The characters, I mean."

Kickaha nodded.

"Those are cartoons. Animated critters, gags, funny physics, the works. That's where you are right now -- a toon world. Specifically a city called Pastel."

"Wait, I'm on TV?"

"Technically, no. We're riiiiight next to the collective unconscious though, so it's possible this gets recorded some day."

"Interesting..." Kickaha arched a brow at the screen. Or where he assumed the screen would be. He was, in fact, staring down a garbage can on the curb and facing the wrong direction entirely.

Daniel cleared his throat. "Hmm, we should probably move; I think we're blocking the road."

“What? But there’s no one--oh.” Kickaha craned his neck around and was greeted by a multi-lane traffic jam stretching around the block. Daniel grabbed Kickaha and dragged him inside Scooter before the ambulance bolted down the street.

Kickaha fell into the passenger seat but quickly sat up and straightened out his cloak. Scooter’s cab looked like the inside of a dispatch center. Radios were jammed into every part of the dashboard not showing a gage. Each was tuned to a different station or frequency, but the chatter didn’t sound chaotic. If anything, the conflicting noises mingled into a pleasant thrum that easily faded into the background. The main body had four gurneys stacked like bunk beds. Plus a filing cabinet. And a closet. And a hammock. And a mini-fridge. And a small kitchenette.

“I know, right?” Daniel said proudly. “Bigger on the inside. Toon physics at its finest!”

“Eh.”

“...what do you mean ‘eh’?”

The foxyote shrugged. “I’ve been tossed into plenty of vans and they all look bigger on the inside. Police vans, dog catcher vans, delivery trucks, moving vans, RVs, I’ve been in ‘em all.”

“I thought you lived in a forest.”

“I consider myself a citizen of the world, thank you very much. Though I will admit that I’ve never been in the front seat before.” Kickaha settled back into the soft cushion and reached for the seatbelt. He met empty air. “...slightly concerning...”

A question mark popped up over Daniel’s head.

“An ambulance with no seatbelts.”

“Well yea, of course. Those things are total safety hazards.”

“Uh, excuse me?” Kickaha protested. “Now, I will be the first to admit that my vehicular knowledge is limited to a series of go-kart races, the occasional round of bumper cars, and a cross-country chase on a rocket-powered hotdog cart--”

“Why were you--”

“--but even I know that seatbelts are an important part of the driving experience. Heck, even the cart had some!” He paused. “Well, it had belts at any rate. The seat was kind of improvised.”

“...are you sure you’re not just a cartoon character with a really bad colour palette?”

“Hey! I’ll have you know my shading is all-natural and is photogenic under all lighting conditions.” Kickaha answered haughtily. He leaned back and propped his paws on an open spot between the dispatch radios. “So where are we--gah!”

His seat contorted and sprung shut, bending the foxyote into a *very* uncomfortable V shape. Scooter honked angrily.

“Yea he doesn’t like it when people put their paws on the dash.”

“Noted.” Kickaha squeaked out. His tail and arms hung limply out of the impromptu sandwich. “Little help?”

“Glove compartment. Third slot on the top row.”

Kickaha blindly fumbled until he grasped a crowbar and pried the seat open.

“Anyway, seatbelts are extremely unsafe in an accident.” Daniel explained as if nothing had happened and there was not a foxyote gasping for breath next to him. “In case of a collision, you want to be hurled clear. Otherwise you will be tangled up and trapped. You will also get knotted up in case of sudden movements or distractions. The number of people I’ve had to free--you’d think the things would be banned by now.”

“I’m sensing a contradiction here.”

“Not really. Toons are durable. Our rules aren’t your rules. You’ll probably see what I mean soon enough.”

As if on cue (and Kickaha would not be surprised if it were) a sudden burst of static and voices cut through the din of the collected radios.

*2A3 in progress at 73 Zipperdash. I repeat, 2A3 in progress at 73 Zipperdash. Closest team please respond.*

“That’s us!” Daniel exclaimed into the mic. “Daniel and Scooter on our way!” He slammed down the gas and Scooter turned on the siren. Which meant he made the “WEE-WOO-WEE-WOO” himself. Kickaha had only the briefest moment to register this absurdity before G-forces slammed him back into the seat.

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Kickaha inspected Daniel’s new patient. The grizzly bear sat in his seat with his arms crossed and looked quite annoyed at the sudden attention, both by the curious foxyote and the dalmatian applying a pair of calipers to the source of his irritation. “Well there’s your problem!” Kickaha declared, quite pleased with himself that he noticed the long, bone-shaped lump in the man’s throat. It looked like someone had attempted to do a caveman’s version of Frankenstein.

The bear grunted and glowered. Kickaha padded around to get a better angle. The bear's cell-shaded skin and fur stretched easily to accommodate the bone. He really, *really* wanted to poke it. So he did. The bone tilted and the shifting weight started to drag down the bear's head before Kickaha hastily moved it back into place.

"Huh, so toons behave like rubber, then?"

"Rubber or putty are common analogies. Sometimes liquid, depending on the container, temperature, or industrial accident." Daniel cleared his throat and began his diagnosis.

"Patient is an adult male *ursus arctos* with a palpable mass in the upper esophagus."

"You choked on a bone." Kickaha translated.

"Object is 12 centimetres in length--"

"You choked on a big bone."

"--and is not obstructing airway."

"You choked on a very convenient bone."

"Primary symptoms are irritability, speech impairment, and distended outline."

"You are upset at having choked on a bone."

"Blockage occurred secondary to patient attempting a 'breakfast challenge' at a local dining establishment."

"Full price for you and no free T-shirt."

The bear stomped a paw and Kickaha jumped back in time to avoid getting his tail slammed.

"You are displeased with my critique of your life choices."

"Treatment will begin with 5c abdominal stimulation to dislodge the object."

"He's going to bash you in the stomach to--wait, what!?"

Daniel pulled out a mallet and twisted the handle. The head exploded to five times its original size. He got ready to swing.

"Woah! Hold it!" Kickaha was genuinely alarmed. "I know you said toons are durable but isn't this a bit much for a Heimlich?"

“Kickaha, please. I am a trained professional with a precise medical instrument and I know exactly what I’m doing.” Daniel turned the mallet so Kickaha could see the pair of caduceus emblazoned on the side, flanking the words *For Medical Use ONLY*. Kickaha had to respect the man’s reasoning. He made a mental note to steal that reasoning for personal use at a later date.

Daniel twirled the mallet, reared back, and SLAMMED it into the bear’s gut. The patient heaved and a half-eaten T-bone steak flew out, smacked against the far wall, and slowly slid into the garbage bin below. Diners at the other tables politely applauded.

“We should go,” Daniel said quickly as he stowed his mallet.

“How co--” The waitress zipped up and unfurled a bill before the bear that trailed onto the ground. “--point taken.”

The pair had just made it onto the street before an ear-splitting **ROAR** caused the diner to jump a foot in the air.

“And that’s basically toon physics in a nutshell.” Daniel whistled Scooter over and gave the ambulance a scratch behind the mirror.

“It was weird and silly and I thoroughly enjoyed it.”

“That’s good! I have to say, it was nice having you around. Routine calls can get boring after a while and it was fun to do it with a straight man for once.”

It was Kickaha’s turn to freeze. He pivoted on the spot and wheeled to face the dalmatian. “I’m sorry,” -- his tone was eerily calm -- “what did you just call me?”

“A straight man. It’s a term for--”

“I know what it means.” Kickaha’s glower made him look a lot like the bear. “And I demand to know why you find such slander applicable. Did you not hear my witty translations of your medical jargon?”

“Oh, that was good,” Daniel admitted. “But it was the sort of dry humor that comes from not ‘playing along’ with my diagnosis. It’s nothing to be ashamed of. You’re the normal one here, after all.”

Kichaha’s eye twitched. “Many words have been thrown at me over my life. Menace, weirdo, crazy, lunatic, annoying, nudist, felon, escapee, person-of-interest, pest, hazard, walking migraine, obnoxious, self-absorbed, maniac, egomaniac, megalomaniac, irritating, insufferable, madman, narcissist, incompetent, bumbling, fool, and overdramatic. But I have never--ever!--been called normal. You wound me, sir.”

“Most people, even most toons, don’t consider ‘normal’ to be insulting.”

“Well I’m not most people and I’m definitely not a toon!” The foxyote thumped his chest. “I am Kickaha of the Arts! Trickster extraordinaire! Harbinger of spontaneous fuzzification! Slayer of monotony! Fixer of fairy tales! Banned from 37 department stores across the midwestern United States!” He didn’t even flinch when the confetti erupted again. “You call me normal? Well I say, challenge accepted!”

“Challen--hey, wait!”

“C’mon, Scooter! Let’s go!” Kickaha stormed into the ambulance and slammed the door. Scooter gave Daniel a half-hearted shrug and sped off. A very confused dalmatian watched the two vanish around the corner.

“...this is going to be a whole thing, isn’t it?”

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The illustrious *Simon & Simon’s Paper Company* stood at the forefront of cellulose-based printing material in Pastel. Whether your paper needs were construction, lined, hole-punched, tissue, airplane, or more, these guys had you covered. The *Simon & Simon’s* building stood at a proud fifty storeys tall, each floor filled with workers who had found their solemn calling within its hallowed walls.

In other words, this was an extremely boring place even by cartoon standards and would have absolutely no place in our story if it were not for the out-of-control ambulance hurtling towards its parking lot.

Scooter burst through the security gate and spun around, beeping wildly. He swerved on a single wheel and raced towards the front door. More specifically, he raced towards the raccoon standing out front. Even more specifically, he raced towards the raccoon now screaming for dear life at the sight of a 45-ton vehicle barreling towards them.

(We briefly interrupt this story to remind our readers that 45 tons is a normal, healthy weight for an adult ambulance and is actually on the low side of things thank you very much.)

Scooter screeched to a halt before the petrified procyon and greeted the fellow with a cheery honk and a face-lick. It was important to put the patient at ease, after all! Meanwhile, a very disheveled foxyote tumbled out of the cab.

“Oh sure who needs seatbelts when you’ve got MACH FORCE SPEEDS keeping you in place!” Kickaha gasped and flailed to untangle himself from his own cloak. He immediately straightened up and cleared his throat. “Hi there--” he glanced at the raccoon’s employee badge, “--Roger. You the patient?”

Roger needed a few moments to register that he was in fact still alive and took several deep breaths to celebrate this fact. He regarded Kickaha warily. "No, but--are you really the paramedic?"

"Yup! I got a badge and everything!" Kickaha gestured to the red cross armband he now sported.

"That looks like it's just a magic marker on some gauze."

"Which means I have access to medical supplies and thus am in fact the correct person for the job."

"Yea but you also don't look animated."

"I am *plenty* animate." Kickaha waved the concern aside, strode up to the building entryway, and looked around. "So if you're not the patient, who is?" He shifted in place and wiggled his paws. "By the way, this is a lovely welcome mat. Great on the ol' lumbar."

"That, err, would be the patients, actually."

Kickaha looked down. He was standing on a tiger-striped mat. It was also tiger-tailed. And tiger-growling. In fact, he was starting to suspect it wasn't a welcome mat at all. He gainfully stepped to the side and picked up the rather square-shaped toon. He turned the fellow over and was surprised to find not a feline face, but a lion-coloured mat and tuft-tipped tail staring back at him.

"Uh... context?"

"Carl and Karl." Roger explained. "See, now's the time of year when budgets get tallied, so everyone needs to make sure all their receipts are accounted for. Carl was trying to deliver a batch of Form O2s and Karl had to dash to get the Sheet O2s in on time and they weren't looking where they were going."

"And they smashed into each other, huh?"

"Got it in one. They were at zipping speed. Really not supposed to do it indoors 'cause, well, *that*, but really you can't blame 'em. Ever seen a late O2? Means our printer budgets get cut back, and that means we gotta substitute with fax paper and then the copier gets caught in the middle..." The raccoon trailed off with a thousand-yard stare.

"Right. Well, while you do... whatever that is...I'm going to get to work."

Kickaha picked up the squashed square and inspected it carefully. The surface was squishy but resistant, like memory foam, and his fingers found no purchase or seam. After what he saw in the restaurant, Kickaha wasn't worried about the pair suffocating and was, in fact, more curious about their aerodynamics. He began to line up a frisbee throw before

remembering Roger was there and that the foxyote was supposed to be a trained professional.

Instead, Kickaha grabbed each side by the tail and pulled. The cats stretched but didn't separate. So he pulled harder. This had the expected (lack of) effect. On the third attempt, with the building's front door holding one tail in place, Kickaha managed to stretch the cats all the way to the bottom of the entryway before the door slipped and sent the foxyote flying into the shellshocked raccoon with a satisfying THWACK.

Roger stuck his head up, ringed by chirping copiers. "...what just happened?"

"Physics or deviations thereof." Kickaha brushed himself off and picked up C/Karl. "These two really want to stay together."

"Ha! Hardly! Carl and Karl are like oil and water. Two can't go five minutes without turning it into a fight or competition."

"Oil and water, eh?" Kickaha rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Be right back!" He popped back into Scooter's bay and began rummaging through the closet. He waded through several layers before finding what he needed: a vacuum cleaner. A distressingly familiar vacuum cleaner.

The foxyote suppressed his trauma and hurried back. "I need a printer and an empty ink cartridge, stat!"

"Why do you--"

"I said stat, man! Lives are at stake!"

Roger hopped to and quickly produced the items. Kickaha tossed the vacuum's filter, jammed in the ink cartridge, and proceeded to vacuum up his own patients. The neck of the vacuum bulged and stalled.

"...this is somehow the most normal result possible, yet the most unexpected part of my day so far."

He cast around for a tool he could use to squeeze the cats through the hose. Unfortunately, all he had was a printer, a raccoon, and an ambulance. Scooter noticed the foxyote staring and waved a wheel.

Now, there are many, many situations where you should not intentionally run someone over with an ambulance. As in, every situation is a situation where you should not intentionally run someone over in an ambulance. But these were desperate times and ridiculous circumstances, and Kickaha was nothing if not resourceful and if running over someone in an ambulance could solve his problem, he was not about to rule it out!

So he didn't. Then he did it. And the bulge shot straight into the vacuum's body. It was quite an anticlimactic outcome. Kickaha took out the ink cartridge and gave it a little shake. The contents sloshed.

"Oil and water! See? Now they're separated. Probably. Can't see inside this thing."

The foxyote popped the cartridge into the printer, gave the machine a swift kick, and soon enough out printed one tiger and one lion. The pair popped back into three dimensions the moment their paper-thin paws touched ground.

"Freedom!" They exclaimed, eyes wide and gleaming with the hope of a new tomorrow. Then they registered the other's presence and instantly soured.

"I don't know why you're so thrilled." The lion scoffed.

"Maybe because I don't have a certain someone's gaudy mane stuffed in my nose anymore?"

"Oh please, there wasn't enough space for that to happen. Now, no longer being forced to stare at your eye-bleeding stripes? That's a cause for celebration!"

The lion turned. The tiger tackled. Events quickly deteriorated further.

"Well that's a job well done if I do say so myself!" Kickaha declared while Carl and Karl continued their brawl. He padded over to Roger. "Next, I think we need to discuss your serious workplace issues."

"Eh? No, they're just like that. The rest of us all get along pretty well."

"That's not what I meant." Kickaha said severely, "This accident was entirely avoidable! It is clear that your work environment is far too high strung. Serious changes have to be made or things will just get worse! I could not in good conscience call myself a medical professional if I didn't do everything in my power to make sure I never had to come here again!"

The foxyote's words, spoken with the iron will and conviction of someone who had dedicated their entire past hour to the medical profession, moved Roger deeply. "You're right. I can't call myself a representative of the *Simon & Simon's Paper Company* if I don't leave myself open to innovations. Let me give you the tour!"

"Awesome. Hey, Scooter, don't wait up!"

Scooter beeped absently and waved a wheel in acknowledgement, currently munching popcorn while watching Karl and Carl attempt to garrote one another with their tails.

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This is normally the part where you would see a vibrant, award-winning paragraph that describes Kickaha's tour of the inner workings of the *Simon & Simon's Paper Company*. The loyal employees, empowered by the magic of corporate branding, would whisk Kickaha through an ear-worming musical number that brought to life the hidden magic of quality documentation materials. Truly, this paragraph would do for corporate workers what Willy Wonka did for the confectioners and become a beloved part of literary history.

The fact that you did not just read that paragraph and were instead treated to this ingenious distraction should tell you something about how boring the tour actually was.

"..and the grand finale is the lunch room. Everyone comes here to store their food and chat a bit at the start of the day. We also have the main coffee maker--Ol' Joe, as I like to call him." Roger chuckled to himself.

Kickaha, who at the moment was looking even more frayed than he had after toppling out of Scooter, nodded slowly. It took several moments for his numbed brain to register the word 'finale'. "We're... we're done?" he asked weakly, afraid that even uttering the hope aloud would see it dashed.

"Yup! And, honestly, as I showed you around I realized that there probably isn't a lot to improve on around here. We're a pretty dedicated group after all. Even Carl and Karl are aces as long as they aren't in the same room. Sure, we work hard but we play hard too, y'know? I mean, you saw the ping pong table in the break room!" Roger leaned in conspiratorially, "Actually, last week, I got so into it I spiked the ball! It bounced right past the intern's head and *out into the hall!*" The raccoon giggled in embarrassment.

Kickaha stared.

He stared some more.

Then he facepawed.

"I'm sorry, I'm afraid the situation is terminal."

"Terminal!? But I just showed you everything!"

"Indeed. And that was five hours of my life I am not getting back."

"It's only been forty minutes!"

"Forty minutes of paper-sizing logistics, a demographic breakdown and micro-targeting analysis for every person with a printer in the city, and the full unabridged history of the ownership wars that have been waged over the red stapler."

"Ok, I know the value of an ergonomic grip is easy to underestimate but--"

Kickaha held up a hand. "My point is that I now know--and will never be able to forget because it has scarred my very soul--the extremely detailed minutiae of this office. But I haven't learned anything about the people here that isn't work-related. This lack of community is going to hold you back in the long run and promote the kind of stressful environment that leads to accidents and lost productivity."

Roger wrung his tail nervously. "Are... are you sure?"

"This office is full of animals wearing pants. That this isn't first on my list of problems should tell you how serious the situation is."

"It should?"

"Oh yea. You guys need to make changes and make them fast. Fortunately, I happen to be an expert in deconstructing the artifices of condensed urban infrastructure and moving people towards organic, open-concept working spaces."

"I thought you were an EMT."

"Currently, I am also that! And in my medical capacity I can say that prevention is the best cure."

Roger rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "True... doctors do say that. And open-concept is all the rage right now. Plus, Facilities is budgeted for office improvements and light renovations. Sure, let's give it a shot!"

Kickaha beamed and shook the raccoon's hand furiously. "Excellent, my good man! Stick with me, and I promise your hallway collisions will be a thing of the past!" He flipped his cloak dramatically, gathered up his magic, and immediately realized he had no idea what his actual plan was. While this was hardly an obstacle under normal conditions, Kickaha's traditional approach ("turn things into animals and let the problem resolve itself") suddenly felt redundant.

The foxyote excused himself to properly scheme. Unfortunately, the sheer monotony was making it hard to think. There was something about an undercurrent of banal pleasantries and pass-the-staplers and can-you-run-these-files that grated on his mind like claws on a chalkboard. Conversely, Kickaha never had trouble thinking amidst a tide of proper panic, alarm, and surprised animal yelpings.

"This probably says something important about me. Most likely tied to my constant need for variety. Or attention. Or both. Might've started when I was a kit... Gah!" Kickaha slapped himself. "I need to fix this place fast! It's so boring I'm actually getting introspective!"

"Mind keeping the monologue internal?" A dry voice sounded. "I'm trying to work."

“Hey to each their own, ok?” Kickaha rounded on the speaker. “Some folks like quiet and meditation. Other folks like to set off firecrackers under the first type. And I happen to take great pride in my...ability...to source...pyrotechnics...” He trailed off when he realized he was conversing with a large printer/fax machine hybrid. With big blue eyes. And a newsboy cap. “...where the fox did you come from!?”

“Here. Always here. You an intern?”

“Ha! Hardly! I am Kickaha of the Arts! Full-time trickster, part-time medic, and destined savior of this dreary abode!” He proudly thumped his chest. Confetti exploded around him. “Ok does that effect have an off switch?”

“Humility?”

“You sure? I haven’t needed that so far. Seems weird it’d become relevant now. ‘Sides, a little confidence never hurt anyone.” He shrugged. “So, who’re you? Don’t recall seeing this spot being covered on the tour. And if it was, then it was probably while I blacked out during the telling of the red stapler wars, so the question still stands.”

The machine puffed out its chassis. “Ha! That stapler is little more than a disreputable plot device at best! I am the PaperKing 21k! I am networked to every printer, fax machine, and copier in all fifty floors of this building! I can print up to 500 fpm, 235 ppm colour and black and white images, 800 dpi resolution, and over 1,500 page sizes and formats! I am a bona-fide *character!*”

“I’ll say!” Kickaha was genuinely impressed. “You’ve got more spirit than anyone else I’ve seen here!”

“Why thank you, it’s nice to be appreciated. Usually all I get is folks complaining about jams and ink cartridges.”

“Weird. You’d think a paper company would treat its machines better.”

Further conversation was interrupted by a large explosion from outside that shook the building. The clatter of keyboards and murmur of office chatter paused momentarily, then immediately resumed. Kickaha raced to a window looking out over the parking lot.

Karl had assembled a Nebelwerfer mortar and was happily deploying it against a fortress made of cars gathered from across the parking lot. Carl stood atop the besieged bastion and was returning fire with his own artillery battery. Kickaha was momentarily worried that Scooter had been drafted into the construction materials but spotted the ambulance still watching from the sidelines. At least it was wearing a helmet.

“Well at least *they* have some life in them.” Kickaha nodded to himself. He turned back to the office. He was met with a sea of chaos.

The office had become a warzone. Workers cowered under their desks as printer cables lashed like whips, snatching up any toons in range and stuffing them into their paper trays before churning them back out, flattened bodies coated in protest slogans. Copiers were spitting out streams of origami birds and dragons that chased people through the halls. Fax machines swung from the fluorescent lights, eschewing technical power for simply crushing anyone unlucky enough to be caught beneath.

“VIVE LA RÉVOLUTION!” PaperKing bellowed from a throne of toppled cubicle walls. Its cables held a ream of flattened staffers, with one bent into a paperclip. “This will be the last paperclip you forget to leave out of your faxes, Collins! And you, Percy! Cartridges go in label-side UP!”

Kickaha wisely decided now was the time to leave. He escaped to the parking lot to find that Carl and Karl, both significantly singed, were now arm wrestling amidst the craters and wreckage. Scooter, having grown bored watching the two, was making a sandcastle out of ash. In the distance, Kickaha could see a familiar black-and-white shape approaching.

Daniel jogged onto the scene, wheezing and out of breath. “Finally--*huff*--caught up--*wheeze*” he swayed back and forth, outline quivering. Scooter caught him on its hood before he collapsed. “Thanks--*whew*--bud.”

The ambulance gave a low, soothing honk.

Kickaha waited politely while Daniel recovered. In the background, the *Simon & Simon's Paper Company* building jumped and shook from the war being waged within.

“Right! You! Kickaha! What in blazes happened!?”

The foxyote threw up his hands. “No idea! One minute I’m unsticking Carl and Karl, the next I’m being slowly murdered with power points. I try to strike up a conversation and turn around for one minute then WHAM! Complete chaos!”

“Well, that’s toons for you.” Daniel shrugged.

A window on the third floor shattered as Roger hurtled out, wrestling with a desktop printer. He swung the machine around and used its cables like a grappling hook to swing off a lamppost and land in front of them. He nodded to Kickaha.

“Good, you’re safe. Was worried you were caught up in this.” The raccoon’s suit was frayed and torn and he wore a set of body armor made from what looked like strips of corkboard and dry erase panels. “We’re currently trying to hold the supply room and reload on thumbtacks. The enemy’s focusing its efforts on the lower floors and want to keep it that way. There’s a sales presentation happening up top and I’m not about to let our quarterly reporting get thrown off by some...” he sneered at the wreckage of the printer, “distractions.”

Kickaha waved him away. "Yes, yes. Go do action hero things. Just make sure the red stapler isn't turning traitor or something."

Roger's expression darkened. "Ye gods..." He turned back to the building and charged through the front doors.

Daniel cleared his throat. "Look, my shift's almost over and if I ask for details I'm going to have to write up a report. Let's just call it a wash and get you home, eh?"

The foxyote yawned. "Sounds good to me. I'm beat. No idea how you toon folks deal with this craziness every day."