



YESTERDAY AGAIN

by **BARRY LYGA**

ARCHVILAIN 3:

YESTERDAY AGAIN

by BARRY LYGA



SCHOLASTIC PRESS · NEW YORK

Praise for *Archvillain*:

“Good, snide fun.”

— *Kirkus Reviews*

“[Kyle] plays the antihero part with comic aplomb.”

— *Booklist*

“Lyga laces his story with ample humor.... Readers will find plenty to ponder, from guessing Mike’s true motivations to debating whether Kyle is a hero — or a villain in the making.”

— *Publishers Weekly*

“Who is the good guy and who is really the archvillain? Tune in next time....”

— *School Library Journal*

Praise for *The Mad Mask*:

“A fizzy mix of multilayered comedy and awesomely destructive battles, presented from an unusual narrative angle.”

— *Kirkus Reviews*

“Lyga packs the story with enough bombastic mayhem and light moral ambiguity to keep the pages flipping faster than a speeding you-know-what.”

— *Booklist*

For Jody, who saw it through

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Previously in
ARCHVILLAIN

Kyle Camden has superpowers!

(This is not as cool as you'd think.)

Kyle got his powers one night when a strange alien plasma storm hit the town of Bouring. The result? Kyle's intelligence (which was already pretty high to begin with) got boosted off the charts, and he discovered powers of flight, invulnerability, and superstrength. Not bad, eh?

But the same plasma storm that gave Kyle his powers also brought Mighty Mike to Earth.

Mighty Mike claims to be a good guy. He rescues kittens from trees and helps little old ladies cross the street and (oh, yeah) saves Kyle's best friend — Mairi — when she gets snatched up by a monster made out of dirt. (Kyle prefers to call it an "Animated Soil Entity," or ASE.) But there's something off about Mike, and only Kyle notices it. It's not just that Mike seems to have amnesia and a little bit of brain damage, and it's not just that he's become the most popular kid in Bouring (a role once filled by Kyle himself).

It's that he hasn't bothered to mention that he's an alien.

Only Kyle knows, and he can't tell — if he revealed that he'd seen Mighty Mike the night of the plasma storm, people would figure out that Kyle is the other superpowered kid in town, the mask-wearing, prank-playing Azure Avenger. (Unfortunately, the newspaper calls him the "Blue Freak" instead ... but what do newspapers know anyway?) Kyle realizes that Mike must have a reason for keeping his alien origins a secret ... and that reason is probably pretty evil. How could it not be?

As the Azure Avenger/Blue Freak, Kyle has tried any number of ways to force Mighty Mike to reveal his alien heritage, but they always seem to backfire. Like the time he tried to, er, vaporize Mike's pants with a high-powered laser. Pretty much every time Kyle tries to do something right, it gets misinterpreted as evil.

Recently, Kyle met the Mad Mask, a criminal genius who tricked Kyle into helping him build Ultitron, a ten-story-tall robot designed to destroy all that is beautiful in the world. As part of his evil master plan, the Mad Mask also kidnapped Mairi and tried to destroy the town of Bouring's landmark lighthouse. All of this after double-crossing Kyle. So, yeah, Kyle realized that maybe teaming up with a lunatic wasn't such a great idea after all.

Still, Kyle saved the day, rescuing Mairi and wrecking the Mad Mask's plans — but he did it underground, in the Mad Mask's sewer lair (gross!), while Mighty Mike was aboveground, making it look like he beat Ultitron single-handedly. So everyone still loves Mighty Mike, while the cops and the whole U.S. military want to get their hands on the poor Blue Freak....



CHAPTER ONE

There was a huge pothole in the middle of the road outside Mairi MacTaggart's house. Her mother said it had been caused by an errant Sidewinder missile fired by an Army helicopter three weeks ago when a giant robot tried to destroy the town of Bouring, but her father claimed it was from the Blue Freak, the local supervillain.

Mairi wasn't sure who was right, but she didn't really care. She just couldn't stop staring at the pothole every time she left the house. Whether the pothole had been caused by the good guys or the bad guys didn't matter to her. What mattered was that it was less than thirty feet from her front door. Thirty feet wasn't really that far. The Whatever that made the pothole could just as easily have come crashing through the roof of her house and ...

Well, it couldn't have done anything to *Mairi*. Because at the time the Army was blowing up the robot and the Blue Freak, Mairi was busy being a kidnap victim, unconscious and tied up somewhere in the grotesque sewer system running beneath Bouring, held captive by a lunatic called the Mad Mask.

But her *parents* had been home.

Her parents had been thirty feet away from —

Mairi stared at the pothole and tried not to think about it, but it wasn't easy.

It was, after all, a really, really big pothole.

The school bus slowed a little more carefully than usual. The day before — the first day of school since the Siege of the Blue Freak — the bus had come careening down the road at its usual breakneck pace (Mairi's best friend, Kyle, once joked that their bus driver was a retired Indy 500 driver) and had made a sickeningly hollow *THWOMP* sound when it hit the pothole. Today, the driver was being a bit more careful.

With a last backward glance at the pothole — Thirty feet! Just thirty feet! — Mairi boarded the bus.

Toward the back was, as always, Kyle, slumped low in his seat, as though trying to hide.

Mairi sat down next to him.

"Hi, Kyle," she said.

Kyle cleared his throat and flicked his eyes in her direction, not lingering. "Hi," he said, then turned to stare out the window as the bus gently pulled away. *Uh-thump*, the wheels murmured as the

bus went over and through the pothole.

Mairi stared at Kyle, mentally urging him to speak, even just to turn and look at her. He had been like this since the Siege. Barely speaking to Mairi. The previous day, in school, he had hardly spoken at all, even when he had a chance to correct a teacher.

That just wasn't like Kyle. Not at all.

He had become sullen and withdrawn and quiet. He no longer played the pranks that had made him famous among kids and infamous among adults. (No one could ever prove that Kyle was the prankster, but everyone still knew it.) All he did now was listen to his iPod — custom painted with blue flames — and mutter to himself.

Mairi wanted her best friend. She needed him back. She had stuff to talk to him about. Important stuff. About being kidnapped. About her time underground with the Mad Mask. Three weeks later and she was still having strange dreams — her doctor said it was natural, that being kidnapped by the Mad Mask was very traumatic.

Mairi needed someone to talk to. Someone who would listen. But her parents were dealing with the ramifications of the attack on Bouring. Heck, *everyone* was dealing with that. Leaving Mairi on her own. With nothing but those dreams. Those dreams. That mask ...

Strangely, though, in her dreams, it wasn't the Mad Mask she was afraid of, even though he was the one who kidnapped her, who threatened her, who knocked her unconscious with some sort of poison gas.

In her dreams, she was *worried* about the Mad Mask, but her real fear was reserved for the Blue Freak.

She saw him in her dreams and she saw him take his mask off, but then ...

Nothing. Nothing there. Under the mask, she saw only a blank.

No face.

And yet ... And yet, she felt like she knew him anyway. As though even faceless he was familiar to her. But she just couldn't place ...

She sighed and looked over at Kyle, who was still doing his best emo impression, gazing moodily out the window, earbuds firmly fixed in his ears.

Her parents had no suggestions as to how to get through to Kyle. She even talked to Mighty Mike, Bouring's resident superpowered kid and the one who'd saved the town from Ultron and the Blue Freak. But even though Mike was capable of miraculous physical feats, he had no advice or insight into Kyle's problems.

Mairi didn't know what to do. She wanted her friend back.

For some reason, just then, she thought again of her dream. She didn't know why, but it was like she relived her dream in that moment. The plain nothing under the Blue Freak's mask.

She found herself pulling away from Kyle, without being sure why. Kyle was her friend. Even though he was being an idiot right now. He was still ...

Wasn't he?



CHAPTER TWO

“... reconfiguring the IPv6 tech specs to redirect folding processes,” Erasmus was saying, “which means that we can —”

“Knock it off,” Kyle mumbled under his breath, making certain that no one else could hear him. No one except for Erasmus, the artificial intelligence built into his iPod. Erasmus was developing some kind of scheme to divert something like a third of the Internet’s computing power to Kyle’s own computer so that — in one swift burst of computing — Kyle could launch a brute-force hack attack on the military computers holding Mighty Mike’s sealed medical tests. But Kyle had lost his taste for super-stuff. For crazy science. For being a “villain.”

The reason why sat right next to him on the bus, and Kyle couldn’t even look at her without feeling a now-too-familiar pang in his heart:

Guilt.

When Mairi had been kidnapped by the Mad Mask, Kyle had sworn to rescue her. Unlike the time she’d been threatened by the ASE (Animated Soil Entity), this time he wouldn’t put the well-being of the town above Mairi’s. This time, he let Mighty Mike and the Army distract Ultitron while he — Kyle — headed into the sewers to hit the problem at its source: the Mad Mask. And in defeating the Mad Mask, he also rescued Mairi. Double score.

But something went wrong. One of the Mad Mask’s MadDroids ripped off Kyle’s mask and Mairi saw that her best friend and the “evil,” “villainous” “national security risk” — the Blue Freak — were one and the same.

Kyle had no choice. He couldn’t put Mairi in the position of knowing that Kyle was the Blue Freak. She would have been questioned by the government and would have to lie about his true identity. She would have to live with a horrible secret.

So he erased her memory, using the brain-wave manipulator he’d built.

The brain-wave manipulator was gone now, crushed into useless scrap metal when the enormity of what he’d done had hit Kyle. He had erased Mairi’s memory! He played with his best friend’s *brain*.

Sure, he’d done the same to his parents, but somehow that didn’t seem serious. They were adults, and they had plenty of boring adult stuff in their lives, so who cared if they forgot a few convenient facts?

But Mairi was his best friend.

Kyle couldn't look at her. Couldn't talk to her. Didn't even want to think about her, though that was impossible, of course. And meanwhile — when all he wanted to do was to wallow in his guilt and self-pity — Erasmus kept chattering away.

Like now. Even though Kyle had told him to shut up, Erasmus just kept prattling on, now indignant.

“Who are you to tell me to stop talking?” Erasmus demanded. “At least I'm still using my brain for something other than pointless, moody emotionalism. Unlike someone I could mention, using no names, but his initials are *Kyle Camden*.”

Erasmus was smart — he was beyond smart, actually, having been patterned on Kyle's own brain waves and personality — but he didn't possess much in the way of sympathy. Kyle sighed and removed his earbuds. Erasmus could blather on as much as he wanted, but there was no way he could force Kyle to listen.

After school, Kyle once again curled up in his seat on the bus and ignored the world on the way home. When Mairi tried to say good-bye to him, he just shrugged and mumbled something to her as she got up and made her way down the bus aisle. All he wanted was to be home, inside, away from the world.

As he walked to his front door, a neighbor gasped and pointed to the sky. Without thinking, Kyle looked up ...

... and saw Mighty Mike. Just for a lingering moment, his green-and-gold costume sparkling against a cottony white cloud.

Kyle ground his teeth. He knew things about Mighty Mike that no one else knew, things no one else could be bothered to find out. Mike claimed to have amnesia. He claimed just to be a kid with superpowers, a kid living with his foster parents on the other side of Bouring. But Kyle had been there that night. The night of the plasma storm that gave him his own powers. And he'd seen Mighty Mike awash in the plasma, emerging from it....

An alien.

A liar.

And yet as angry as the mere sight of Mighty Mike made Kyle, he just couldn't get worked up enough to do anything about it. Not now. Not since ...

He squeezed his eyes shut tight, but all he could see was the dreamy, dazed look on Mairi's face as the brain-wave manipulator selectively rearranged her neurons....

He growled and kicked at one of the heavy, concrete planters his mother had placed along the front of the house. It instantly shattered into a million pieces. Oops! Kyle looked around furtively. Whew. No one had been watching. He quickly scooped up the pieces.

And the plants.

And the dirt.

He didn't know what to do with it, so he just zipped around to the backyard and dumped it all in the woods. But when he came back around to the front, he saw that the planters were uneven now — Mom had put four on each side of the door and now it was lopsided. So Kyle grabbed up another one

and buried it in the woods. There. Now everything was even.

Biggest intellect on the planet. Superstrength and superspeed and all that. And what was he?

He was a landscaper!

Sheesh.

Things couldn't get any worse, could they?

Inside, he tossed his books and his backpack on the floor and went down to the basement. His parents never used the basement, so Kyle had turned it into a lab/workshop for himself.

He hadn't gone down there since the night Ultitron and the Mad Mask were defeated.

"Oh, finally returning to the basement," Erasmus said as soon as Kyle slipped his earbuds back in. "Good. There's work to be done. Mighty Mike won't destroy himself, you know."

"Not now, Erasmus. Please."

Erasmus simulated a sort of *harrumph!* sound, but fell silent. Kyle didn't want to listen to the A — he had put the earbuds in to listen to music. He fired up a play-list and roamed the basement.

In one corner: the remains of his biochemical forge, which had once churned away to create a bacterium that would remove Mighty Mike's powers. Now it was a heap of junk, disassembled at the order of the Mad Mask, to be used as parts for Ultitron.

And over here: the workbench where Kyle had worked tirelessly and feverishly to assemble Ultitron's "motivational engine."

And piled on a chair: the shredded remains of Kyle's Azure Avenger costume, ripped by MadDroids and then perforated by Army ordnance when Kyle tried to save the town of Bouring and got shot at for his efforts and his bravery.

And on a shelf against one wall, next to a leaden jug of radioactive dirt from Mighty Mike's "landing site," the Mad Mask's mask, a heavy piece of ebony wood with two eyeholes and a single inlaid tear made out of ivory.

Everywhere Kyle looked, he was reminded of the Mad Mask. And Ultitron. And the lair in the sewers.

And the look on Mairi's face ...

It was almost Thanksgiving. Kyle had nothing to be thankful for.

By the time his parents got home from work, Kyle had already done his homework (a superbrain made homework a snap) and now lay on his bed, the bedroom door closed. This was what he did every day and had done every day since Ultitron's defeat: come home, do homework, chill out until dinner, shovel dinner in, then retreat to his bedroom for privacy until bedtime.

Today, something changed. There was a knock at his door. Lefty — the fat white rabbit who lived in a cage in Kyle's room — jumped in surprise.

"Come in," Kyle said reluctantly.

His father poked his head in the room. "How — how you doing, kiddo?"

Kyle winced at the stutter. His father stuttered on the words "how" and "why" — a side effect of the brain-wave manipulator. Another reminder of what Kyle had done.

"I'm fine," Kyle lied, shrugging.

"You sure?" Dad came into the room and leaned against the wall, trying to look casual. But Kyle

could tell there was something on his mind.

“I’m fine, Dad. Really.” Kyle said it with all the earnestness he could project. He really didn’t want to talk to anyone.

“I have to be honest ...”

Why? Is someone holding a gun to your head?

“Mom and I are sort of worried about you.”

“I’m fine,” Kyle said for the third time, annoyance beginning to creep in. He hated repeating himself. He especially hated repeating *lies*; why couldn’t people just believe him the first time? Then he wouldn’t have to lie so often.

“You haven’t been talking much. At all, really,” Dad said, speaking as though Kyle hadn’t just served up a perfectly believable lie to end the conversation. “What about your new friend? Theodore? He hasn’t been around for a long time.”

Kyle froze. “Theodore” was the name he’d given his parents for the Mad Mask, since the Mad Mask was hanging around the house a lot while they worked on Ultitron. Just hearing the name made Kyle depressed.

“You’re quiet,” Dad went on. “You’re sullen. And you just spend all of your time alone in your room. You haven’t even seen Mairi in weeks.”

Dad stopped talking and gazed at Kyle. Kyle realized that he was supposed to say something at this point.

But he had nothing to say. So he just shrugged.

“Look, did you guys have a fight or —?”

“No, Dad.”

“Did you disagree about something? Did you —?”

“Dad, really — everything’s fine. Just leave me alone. I’ll come down for dinner when it’s ready.” Kyle flipped over onto his belly so that he didn’t have to look at his father anymore.

“You’re not ... you’re not coming to the time capsule burial with us?” Dad sounded shocked. Kyle didn’t care, and he showed it by not answering.

“We’re worried about you,” Dad pressed. “Is there something else going on? Sometimes when, uh, when boys and girls get to be your age, um ... things can get ... complicated, you know?” Dad started stuttering; it had nothing to do with the brain-wave manipulator. “We just — your mom and I mean — we just want you to know that we’re here for you and if you’re having, you know, if you’re having, well, um, *new* feelings about Mairi or *complicated* feelings, well, Mom and I, we’re here for you...”

“Please stop it,” Kyle groaned into his pillow. “Just. Stop. It.”

“You probably think you’re alone in this. You probably think you have to handle it on your own. But Mom and I can help. We can teach you —”

And that was it. Kyle couldn’t take any more. Teach? His parents, with their merely mortal brains, were going to teach *him*? Teach him what? How to waste six hours a night on the couch watching stupid TV shows?

“Stop it,” he told his father again.

“We’ve been there before. We know what you’re going through and —”

Kyle rolled over and sat up so quickly that he was a blur. “Stop it!” he yelled at his father. “Just stop it! There’s nothing you can teach me!”

Lefty scampered into a corner of his cage and cowered there, shocked.

Dad swallowed, his Adam’s apple bobbing. He stared at Kyle for a long moment. Kyle returned the stare and didn’t back down.

“It’s almost time for the time capsule burial —”

“Go without me.”

Dad mumbled something about money for pizza being on the kitchen counter and backed out of the room, shutting the door as he left.

Good.

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