



# Supersaver Saves Christmas

by  
Jo Ramsey

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Joramsey34@hotmail.com

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## SUPERASER SAVES CHRISTMAS

Two days before Christmas, the last thing I wanted to do was wander through the local mall trying to find presents for the people on my shopping list. Especially my boyfriend Scott. He should have been easy to buy for. Any type of superhero comic book thing would make him jump for joy. But the comic book store was so packed I hadn't even bothered going in, and I was getting a little tired of Scott's superhero fixation anyway. Some days, it was all he talked about.

It probably wouldn't have annoyed me so much if I hadn't been a superhero myself.

Not that most people knew about that side of my life. Right now, at the mall, I looked like any other high school guy trying to do some last-minute shopping, which was exactly what I was.

I just had to figure out what to buy.

A scream pierced the air. A moment later, a herd of people ran past me, some almost knocking me over. I pressed against the wall and waited for the crowd to thin.

They'd come from the mall center. Where Santa sat surrounded by his elves while grubby, cranky little kids demanded everything they could think of for Christmas. Until a few years ago, I'd been one of those grubby, cranky kids.

I didn't exactly believe in Santa anymore. Definitely not in the mall Santas, who usually smelled like cigarettes and grumbled about the kids behind their backs. But if someone was threatening one of the most important Christmas traditions any mall could have, I had to do something.

While I waited for people to stop thundering past, I tapped the band on my left wrist. Two taps, a pause, then two more. The signal to the rest of the Super Group that there was trouble and I would need backup.

I couldn't wait for them to show up, though. Seeing a break in the crowd, I ran toward the mall center.

The chaos was worse there. Shrieking children in the middle of the floor with no parents in sight. Frantic adults running in circles, probably trying to locate their shrieking children.

A thick haze surrounded Santa's Workshop, but I could see clearly enough to know Santa and his elves weren't there. Neither were any of the fake presents the mall folks set up for decoration.

"Thaddeus! Where are you?" A woman in sweatpants, her hair in a messy ponytail, smacked into me. "Where's Thaddeus?"

I grabbed her shoulders to steady her and keep her from running off before I got some answers. "I don't know. Tell me what happened and I'll help you find him."

"They attacked!" Wailing, she put her hands over her face. "They attacked, and I can't find Thaddeus!"

That wasn't exactly helpful information, and I had no clue how to calm her down enough to get a real answer out of her. Comforting sobbing women wasn't exactly my strong point. I had enough trouble dealing with my little sister when she cried, and she was only seven.

Out of the corner of my eye, I caught a green flash. That was a good thing. It meant someone in the Super Group had seen my emergency signal and would send other superheroes to the mall to help me. Maybe one of them would be able to calm down this woman.

Meanwhile, all I could do was try to find out at least a little more about the situation. "Who attacked?"

"You said you'd help me find Thaddeus." She lowered her hands and glared at me. "You promised."

"I need to know who attacked." I took a deep breath. She was right. I'd promised to help her find whoever the heck Thaddeus was, and I couldn't break my promise. That wouldn't have been very heroic. But if other members of the Super Group were on their way, I needed something more specific to tell them than "They attacked."

We could multitask, though. There wasn't any point in just standing there when we could look for Thaddeus while we talked.

"Where was the last place you saw Thaddeus?" I asked.

"Here." She gestured toward Santa's Workshop. "We were in line for his turn to see Santa."

"Show me exactly where." I paused. I was so hung up on figuring out who'd caused the chaos that I hadn't even thought to ask about the kid I was looking for. "Describe Thaddeus so I'll know him if I spot him."

She took a couple of steps toward the workshop, and I followed. "He's five," she said. "Black curly hair. Brown eyes. About this tall." She held her hand palm down by her thigh. "Wearing a light blue jacket and black sweat pants. We were right here."

A few yards from the workshop, one of the tiles on the floor was a slightly darker shade of beige than the rest. That explained how the woman could be so definite about where she and Thaddeus were standing.

"Mommy!" a high-pitched voice shouted over the low roar of panic around us.

"Thaddeus!" Frantically, the woman looked around.

So did I, until I saw the kid standing beside the corner of the fence. I touched the woman's arm and pointed, and she ran over to the little boy. I followed as she scooped the kid into her arms. A happy ending for them, but I still needed to know what I was up against.

"Thank you." The woman looked at me with wet eyes.

"Mommy, where did the bad elves go?" Thaddeus said.

Finally! Something I could work with to find the culprits. "Bad elves?" I asked.

Thaddeus nodded. "They was little like me. All in green. They said Santa's fake." He sniffled and looked at his mom. "He's not, right, Mommy?"

"Right." His mother pressed her lips together. "That's who you're looking for, I guess. About half a dozen of the so-called elves. We thought they were part of the show until they started saying all those things. And then this guy showed up wearing all black, even a black Santa hat. He went right up to the workshop and kicked, and then everything was smoky."

"Darn it." Now I knew who was behind this mess. Missile Toe. A supervillain who had decided the best way to fight his enemies was to shoot projectiles from a specially made shoe.

The Super Group hadn't run up against Missile Toe since before I joined the group, over a year ago, but Super Guy made sure all the new heroes knew everything about all the bad guys the group had ever fought. I had to wonder why Missile Toe had picked now to show up again. And why he and a bunch of "bad elves" had decided to mess with one of the most important holiday traditions in the city.

I didn't have time to figure it out right then, though. If I was going to be any use to the rest of the Super Group, I had to change into my secret identity of Superaser. Kind of a dumb name, in my opinion, but I wasn't the one who picked it. Super Guy named me for my ability to erase pieces of people's memories.

"Thanks for explaining," I said to Thaddeus and his mother. "I know some people who can make sure nothing like this ever happens again, so I'm going to talk to them."

"The bad elves made Santa go away," Thaddeus said. "After they said he's fake, they took him away. Are you going to bring him back?"

I started to say yes, but remembered just in time that Thaddeus and his mother, and anyone else nearby, couldn't find out I was a superhero. I had to keep pretending to be a normal teenage boy until I got somewhere private enough to change.

"I'm going to tell my friends," I said. "They'll make sure Santa's okay. But I have to go now. Happy holidays."

Before anyone asked me any more questions, I hurried to the nearby food court, which was nearly empty. No one at all was in the rest room, so I quickly changed into my super costume, which was made of a special fabric that could fold up small enough to fit into the pockets of any of my jeans.

When I left the rest room, Super Guy and Polarity were right outside. Super Guy glared at me. "You almost gave yourself away, according to Farsight. What did you say to the normies?"

Even though I hadn't done anything wrong, my stomach sank down to my shoes. The same sneakers I'd been wearing all day, because my costume didn't include footwear. Hopefully if anyone had seen me earlier, they wouldn't notice what I had on my feet. If Super Guy was already getting annoyed, I didn't want to do anything to make it worse.

I tried to cover up how guilty I felt. "All I told them was that I have friends who can take care of everything."

“Farsight is never wrong.” Super Guy folded his arms. “Are you sure you didn’t say anything else?”

“You said she told you I *almost* gave myself away.” I took a deep breath and pretended for a moment that I was Scott. He could out-argue any adult, and right now I had to make sure I didn’t trip myself up with Super Guy. Especially since we were wasting time on the debate while we should have been tracking down Missile Toe. “She isn’t wrong about that. But it was only almost. I caught myself before I actually said anything I shouldn’t. Look, I know I need to be more careful, and I will be. Right now, we have a super villain and a flock of angry elves to deal with.”

“Elves?” Polarity wrinkled his forehead. “People in elf costumes, right?”

I shrugged. “The little boy and his mother, the ones I was just helping, said there were bad elves. And they said the villain shot something out of his foot.”

“Missile Toe,” Super Guy and Polarity said together. They glared at each other for a second, then Super Guy cleared his throat and said, “Missile Toe hasn’t been active in years. You’re sure of what they told you?”

“Yes. He and his elves—or people, or whatever—took the mall Santa. I think that was their plan, but I don’t know why they would do something like that.”

If the elves were real, maybe they had a grudge against Santa for some reason. After all, he supposedly made his elves work around the clock making toys. That would explain why they were backing up Missile Toe.

I shook my head. I’d stopped believing in Santa when I was seven. Of course the elves weren’t real, just like there was no real jolly red-suited dude with a workshop at the North Pole.

“What’s wrong?” Polarity asked.

“Just thinking.” Quickly, I walked over to the workshop. “Missile Toe shot some kind of smoke bomb to cover up kidnapping Santa. Can Farsight tell us where he’s gone?”

“I’ll check in with her.” Polarity walked away.

“We need to move.” Super Guy glanced around and lowered his voice. “We’re attracting too much attention. Come on.”

I’d barely even noticed the crowd gathering around us, but sure enough, plenty of people had returned to the workshop area, and most of them were gawking at the superheroes. No big surprise there. People wearing form-fitting costumes and masks were pretty noticeable. But Super Guy didn’t like it when normies stared and asked questions. I wasn’t a big fan of it myself, especially since Super Guy had forbidden me to use my memory-erasing power to make the normies forget about us if they got too curious.

We hurried outside without letting Polarity know where we were going. For a couple of seconds, I thought we were leaving him behind, but then I remembered he was talking to Farsight. She would let him know where we were.

Out in the parking lot, Super Guy led me to a far corner. “No one should disturb us here. Are you prepared to fight Missile Toe? You’ve never run up against him before.”

“I’ll be fine.” If Missile Toe tried to attack me, I could make him forget I was there. Long before the Super Group had tracked me down and talked me into joining them, I’d taught myself to focus my memory erasing power to only remove specific memories. Not having to worry about completely destroying someone’s memory of everything in their entire life made things a lot easier, and it helped in fighting bad guys.

“As long as you’re sure.” He looked toward the building. “Here comes Polarity. We’ll probably have to fly.”

I gulped. Flying was one of my powers too, thanks to Polarity teaching me how to manipulate air currents, but I hated doing it and avoided it whenever I could. The rest of the group didn’t know I was afraid of heights, and I planned to keep it that way.

Polarity ran over to us. “Farsight says Missile Toe and his minions took the mall Santa to the abandoned warehouse down by the river. And the Santa from this mall isn’t the only one there.”

“Let’s go,” Super Guy said. “It isn’t far.”

“Farsight also said to fly. Traffic’s crazy today.” Polarity glanced up. “Favorable winds. Just follow me.”

All three of us looked around to make sure none of the normies were watching, then took off. Not that it would have mattered if someone had seen us. Normies thought all superheroes could fly anyway, so it wouldn’t have given anything away if they’d watched us take off. But as usual, we had to follow Super Guy’s rules. He was the most powerful hero, so he got to boss the rest of us around. Except for his wife, Incredawoman. *She* bossed *him* around.

I managed not to close my eyes during the minute or two it took to fly to the warehouse. If I’d closed them, I wouldn’t have been able to see the ground way below me, but I also wouldn’t have been able to see Polarity, which would have made it kind of hard to follow him.

We landed outside one of the warehouse doors. Right away, I knew we were in the right place. The loud Christmas rock song blaring from the building gave it away.

“We’ll have to split up to take Missile Toe by surprise,” Super Guy said. “Polarity, go in through the broken window up there. Superaser, go in here. I’ll use the door on the other side of the building.”

Polarity flew up to the second floor window without saying a word. Of course. He always did what Super Guy said. But I wasn’t so obedient, especially when going through the door we stood beside meant I would be the first one to face Missile Toe. Which meant I would probably get clobbered before the other two got in.

Before I could point that out to Super Guy, he took off to fly over the building to the other door.

Muttering inappropriate words under my breath, I opened the door and walked into a wall of too-loud Christmas cacophony. Just my luck, the bad guys and half a dozen or so captive Santas were right in front of me. A group of short people in green costumes, most of

them with bells on their hats, surrounded the Santas. Missile Toe, looking like an older and pudgier version of his picture in the villains' gallery at Super Group headquarters, was facing the door.

Which meant he was facing me. So much for taking him by surprise.

"How cute. A hero." He sauntered over. "At least you look like a hero. I haven't seen you before, have I?"

"Release the Santas." My voice cracked on the final word. Nothing like losing my voice to intimidate a villain. Note the sarcasm. I cleared my throat. "Other members of the Super Group are on their way. This is your chance to surrender."

"To you?" He snorted. "Elves, deal with this little boy. I have more important things to do."

"He's trying to destroy the real Santa!" one of the Santas shouted.

"Huh? Real Santa?" I looked around at the short people in green clothes. Most of them had bells on their hats. They couldn't have been real elves, because those didn't exist, but they definitely looked like them.

If there were real elves, maybe there was a real Santa.

"Shut up." One of the elves bopped the Santa over the head with a stuffed reindeer. "That jolly old sap completely screwed us over this year, and he's going to pay for it."

"That's right." Missile Toe bared his teeth at me. "We're going to expose all these Santas for the frauds they are, and then the entire world will believe Santa Claus doesn't exist! Mwahahaha!"

"An evil laugh? Really?" I raised an eyebrow. "What year did you graduate from supervillain school?"

I didn't feel nearly as brave as I sounded, but covering fear was one of the first lessons I'd learned after joining the Super Group. After all, we couldn't exactly let the bad guys know if we were scared, and it wasn't usually a good idea to let the general public realize it either.

Missile Toe raised one foot, and before I could react, a sharp spike flew toward me. I ducked just in time, and Missile Toe did that stupid laugh again. "Don't mock me, boy hero."

"Got it. No mocking." *Where the blink are Polarity and Super Guy?* There was no way I could take on Missile Toe alone, not when he had all those disgruntled elves backing him up. I didn't know what they could do to me, and I wasn't exactly keen on finding out.

Then I had an idea. All I really needed to do was stall these guys until the senior heroes reached us. Which would hopefully be within the next few seconds, because I was getting seriously annoyed. "Hey, elves, what's this guy getting out of helping you?"

"What do you mean?" The elf who'd weaponized the stuffed reindeer stalked over to me, hands on his hips like one of the Munchkins in the *Wizard of Oz* movie. "He's furthering our mission."



“But why? He’s a villain. He wouldn’t do anything just out of the kindness of his heart.” I looked at Missile Toe. “What are you getting from them?”

“I told you to shut up!” He raised his foot again.

This time, I didn’t wait to see what he fired. I reached out to his brain, found the idea I was looking for, and erased it.

With a wrinkled forehead, he lowered his foot. “What was I going to do?”

“You were going to answer his question.” The elf narrowed his eyes and whirled around. “We came to you because you’re the only supervillain who advertises on that list site. You said you’d help us free of charge, but nothing really comes free in this world, right? Isn’t that what people always say? So what are you getting out of this?”

I grinned. Now I didn’t even have to stall them. They would keep themselves occupied for a few minutes, and then Super Guy and Polarity could sort them out.

The rest of the elves gathered around the one I figured was their leader. I wouldn’t have thought a bunch of elves who were no taller than preschoolers would appear menacing, but they did. And judging from the way Missile Toe cringed, he definitely felt menaced.

“Well?” the lead elf snapped.

Missile Toe looked at me, wide-eyed. “Do something!”

“Let the Santas go,” I said again. “And answer the question.”

“Fine!” Missile Toe gestured at the Santas. “Untie them.”

“We don’t do what you say,” the elf said. “We’re going through with our plan. And you’re going to be tied up right along with them if you don’t tell us why you’re helping us.”

“Because Santa never brought me the toys I wanted!” Missile Toe kicked. If anything shot out of his shoe, I couldn’t see it through all the elves. “Every single year, he let me down. I’m just trying to get my revenge. That’s all. Same as you. We really are on the same side.”

“Stop!” a voice boomed from the far side of the room.

Super Guy. It was about time he showed up.

“It’s another hero!” one of the elves shouted.

While their attention was on Super Guy, I ran to the Santas and untied them. They didn’t wait around for me to tell them to get out of there. They just ran.

Polarity rushed into the room, and he and Super Guy started corralling the elves. Missile Toe kept firing things at them, but nothing hit either of the other superheroes.

While the bad guys were busy with my colleagues, I poked into their brains and erased their sinister plan. Whether Santa was real or not, I wasn’t about to let them ruin Christmas for millions of children who believed in the red-suited present-giver.

Sirens wailed outside, and a few moments later, a bunch of police officers ran in and started gathering the elves. Super Guy personally handed a very confused-looking Missile Toe over to one of the officers, then came to the side of the room where I was standing.

“You did a good job,” he said. “They’ve forgotten why they’re even here.”

“They wanted to out Santa as a fake,” I said. “I couldn’t let that happen.”

“Of course not. Children have to believe in something.” Super Guy smiled. “Well done, Superaser. It looks like everything’s under control now, so you can get back to what you were doing. Thanks for your help.”

“You’re welcome.” I bit my tongue. I didn’t *help*. I was the one who’d gotten the situation under control. At least I’d started to. The Super Group wouldn’t have even known about the kidnapped Santas if it hadn’t been for me.

But being a superhero meant not being bitter when I didn’t get credit for things I’d done. At least Super Guy had complimented me. That didn’t always happen.

Super Guy went back to the police and bad guys, and I ducked around a doorway to change back into my normie clothes, which were in a convenient pocket in my cape. It wasn’t until after I walked out of the warehouse to return to the mall that I realized I’d forgotten what I wanted to buy.