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**First Printing, 2007**

# ***AMERICAN WAY***

***BY JEREMY GABLE***

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

Crescent Wonder, late 50's

Firebang, late 20's

Mandible Maiden, mid 30's

Pungent Humboldt, late teens

- ✎ -

The action throughout takes place at a secluded café, exclusive to superheroes.

- ✎ -

Time: Autumn morning, present year.

- ✎ -

“AMERICAN WAY” premiered on October 1, 2004 at the Blank Theatre Company’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage Theatre in Los Angeles, CA (Daniel Henning, artistic director). The director was Darin Anthony. The producer was Stacy Reed. The set design was by Aaron Francis. The lighting design was by Daniel Henning. The costume design was by JJ. Pyle. The sound design was by K.C. Braunschweig. The cast was as follows:

CRESCENT WONDER - Bill Dempsey

FIREBANG - J. Richey Nash

MANDIBLE MAIDEN - Johanna McKay

PUNGENT HUMBOLDT - Mark L. Young

# AMERICAN WAY

TIME: Autumn morning, present year.

PLACE: A near-empty cafe.

AT RISE: *Two support columns stand on either side of the stage, holding up the roof of the café. In between the columns, a table sits C, with a steaming cup of tea, a tall glass of water, and four chairs. CRESCENT WONDER enters, holding a beer. He wears a mask with cut-out eyeholes, a cape, and a spandex suit with a crescent moon on his chest. He is a retired superhero. He raises his glass and shouts:*

CRESCENT: I'd like to propose a...

*(He stops and looks around. Spotting no one, he sits in one of the chairs and sighs)*

Here's to retirement.

*(He lifts his glass, clinks with an imaginary glass, and takes a swig. Pause. He stares into his beer and starts SINGING his theme song)*

When the day turns to night/Evildoers run in fright/ For they know  
that if they/Make the slightest blunder/By the power of the moon/He  
will be approaching soon/For he's the greatest!/He's the Crescent  
Wonder!

*(He raises his beer in triumph on the last part of the song. Pause. He looks at his beer and quietly repeats:)*

To retirement.

*(As CRESCENT takes another drink, FIREBANG ENTERS, wearing bright orange tights, boots, thick rubber gloves, and a mask, but with an undershirt. His entrance is frenzied and abrupt as his name would imply.)*

FIREBANG: That's it!

*(He pounds the table, slightly startling CRESCENT)*

I'm done! I can't take it anymore!

CRESCENT: Good morning, Firebang.

FIREBANG: Yeah, that's debatable.

CRESCENT: Is everything okay?

FIREBANG: No, C.W., everything is not okay. Everything is pretty far from okay. What, what's the opposite of okay?

*(CRESCENT shrugs)*

CRESCENT: Not okay?

FIREBANG: Exactly! I'm not okay. Everything's not okay.

CRESCENT: What's the problem, son?

FIREBANG: *(Overlapping)* Jesus Christ, Jesus Tickle Me Christ! I can't believe it. The worst possible time...

CRESCENT: Well, what's the matter? Did the evening news pronounce your name wrong again?

*(FIREBANG blows up further)*

FIREBANG: C'mon, did you have to bring that up?

CRESCENT: Oh, you can't laugh about that?

FIREBANG: Hey, you have Action Four News call you "FireBONG", and see how you like it. Did you really have to bring that up? *(He starts pacing)*

CRESCENT: Now, settle down. Take it easy. What's wrong?

FIREBANG: You wanna know what's wrong? I'll tell you what's wrong. I'm finished.

CRESCENT: How so?

FIREBANG: I just got a phone call.

CRESCENT: The commissioner?

FIREBANG: Oh, don't I wish. My agent. My comic book is in negotiations.

CRESCENT: You're not serious.

FIREBANG: Look at me, look at me. Am I joking? Defensive Comics is thinking of pulling it in May.

CRESCENT: Really?

FIREBANG: Can you believe it? Can you believe it? I can't believe it!

CRESCENT: I thought it was doing well.

FIREBANG: Yeah, it is.

CRESCENT: Why would they cancel it?

FIREBANG: You wanna know what they're saying? Get this, get this. Not enough variety. They said there's not enough variety. I don't *do* enough, apparently.

CRESCENT: You don't do enough?

FIREBANG: I guess one super power and striking good looks aren't good enough for them anymore.

CRESCENT: Huh.

FIREBANG: Not enough variety? I shoot...freaking fireballs out of my...freaking hands. What more do they want, FLAMING PISS?

CRESCENT: That's a horrible break.

FIREBANG: Yeah, that's a horrible break. I'll show Defensive Comics a horrible break, I'll show them a break in their spines. I'm serious, man, anybody who crosses my path today, I swear, anyone who gets in my way, they're getting it. I'm taking off the gloves, I swear to god, I'll take off the gloves.

CRESCENT: You need to relax, son. Let me get you a nice, cold beer.

FIREBANG: Oh, screw you. What is that, supposed to be a joke? That supposed to be funny?

*(CRESCENT chuckles)*

Oh, I'm glad you're laughing, you callous prick.

CRESCENT: Hey, hey, hey, I'm only joking. C'mon, Rule One.

FIREBANG: Okay.

CRESCENT: What is it?

FIREBANG: Control. You're right. I'm sorry.

CRESCENT: Okay, then. Here, look, I got you some tea.

FIREBANG: Chamomile?

CRESCENT: Spiced with orange peels.

FIREBANG: Good, is it hot?

CRESCENT: Yeah, it's hot.

FIREBANG: Hot hot? Like boiling hot?

CRESCENT: Hot as the fires of Hell.

FIREBANG: Oh, you're a saint, C.W.  
*(He quickly sits down and takes a huge gulp from the tea)*

CRESCENT: Take it easy, now.

*(FIREBANG slams the cup down)*

FIREBANG: Yeah, that's hot.

CRESCENT: I got us the patio seating, too. I know how you feel about the air conditioning inside.

FIREBANG: Thanks.

CRESCENT: Well, there was no one else here, so I took it.

*(FIREBANG gives a deep angst-ridden sigh, as he calms down again)*

FIREBANG: I can't believe it. My life is ending.

CRESCENT: Your life isn't ending.

FIREBANG: (*Overlapping*) I'm on a decline.

CRESCENT: You're not on a decline.

FIREBANG: Ohhhh, but I am. I mean, the criminals, yeah, they still fear me, but you know, the kids? They don't love me anymore.

CRESCENT: Oh, now, that's not true.

FIREBANG: No, no, it's true. They don't. I can't remember the last time someone asked me for an autograph. Thinking, thinking, can't remember.

CRESCENT: Kids are more shy these days. Everyone's just so scared. Wait until Halloween.

FIREBANG: Yeah, exactly! Halloween's next month, right? Yesterday, I'm walking around as my alter ego, I go into a costume shop. Not one, not...ONE...Firebang costume in the building, not one. It's not popular anymore.

CRESCENT: Really? Didn't Consumer Reports name that the safest Halloween costume?

FIREBANG: Three years in a row. Three years! It's bright orange, you can see it for miles. Kids loved it, parents loved it. They were huge. Now, not one.

CRESCENT: Maybe they were sold out.

FIREBANG: No, no one's buying them. I haven't seen a royalty check in months.

CRESCENT: Well, the economy being what it is, costumes are expensive. By the way, where's yours?

FIREBANG: Oh, I left it at cape check, I'm on break. And I got a run in my costume.

CRESCENT: I hate that.

FIREBANG: I might as well just leave my cape there when I go.

CRESCENT: Look, you're going through a bad year, but you'll--

FIREBANG: Oh, no, not "year". No, no, no. Last December, I was at the Toronto Convention, promoting the comic book.

CRESCENT: Right.

FIREBANG: This little kid comes up to me, saying that he wants to be me when he grows up.

CRESCENT: Oh, now, that's sweet.

FIREBANG: *(Holding up a finger)* BUT...But I tell him to stay in school, of course, and he says, "Thanks, Bolt Boy." He thought I was Bolt Boy!

CRESCENT: Well, your costumes are similar.

FIREBANG: Bolt Boy??? That hyperactive so-called "crime fighter". Guy couldn't stop a mutant if he had laser beam eyes.

CRESCENT: That happens to the best of us every now and then.

FIREBANG: I know. Believe me, if it was just one of those things, I'd be okay. But the fact that...

*(He counts on his fingers:)* ...one, no one buys my Halloween costume, B, no one asks for my autograph, and thirdly, those that do think I'm someone else...It...

*(Another deep sigh)*

...sucks, ya know?

*(Pause)*

I should just go back to Pyro.

CRESCENT: No. Why would you want to go back to your home planet? You know you've got nothing there.

FIREBANG: Respect. Dignity.

CRESCENT: You're just a face there. No comic book, no costume. Here, you're something.

FIREBANG: Yeah, used to be.

CRESCENT: C'mon, this is just a phase that kids go through. It comes and goes and comes back again, I've seen it many times before. One day you're the top-selling action figure. Then it's baseball players, then monsters, then wizards. They'll come back to you. You have my word.

FIREBANG: Yeah, maybe.  
*(He looks up at CRESCENT)*  
Thanks, old man.  
*(He pats CRESCENT on the back and notices his beer)*  
So, how's the retired life treating you?

CRESCENT: Well, it's good to take a rest. Look at the world. Especially days like today. The smog is clearing, the people are smiling at each other. It's beautiful.

FIREBANG: Yeah.

*(Pause)*

CRESCENT: How's the Alliance doing without me?

FIREBANG: Well, it ain't the same without good ol' Crescent Wonder. Greatest superhero of them all. Harnessing his power from the moon.

*(CRESCENT smiles)*

CRESCENT: Seriously, though.

FIREBANG: It's...Well, you know, it's the Alliance. It's fine.

CRESCENT: How's that new guy, that...Lone Tornado? How's he working out on the Council?

FIREBANG: Lone Tornado is...well, he's no Crescent Wonder. But I'm sure he'll be whipped into shape by the other members in no time.

CRESCENT: *(Disappointed)* Good to know.

FIREBANG: What's wrong, C.W.?

*(CRESCENT looks into his beer, hesitating)*

CRESCENT: You worry about your problems, son, I'll worry about mine.

FIREBANG: Uh-uh. Not happening. C'mon, out with it.

*(Pause)*

CRESCENT: Just this feeling.

FIREBANG: What feeling?

CRESCENT: Being retired. You know, you fight the good fight for over forty years, you save the world Lord knows how many times, and at the end of the journey, they reward you by throwing you out. You've served your time.

FIREBANG: Huh, you make it sound like a prison sentence.

CRESCENT: Yeah, a prison you actually want to go back to.  
*(FIREBANG smiles)*

But I know if I go back to the job, I'll go back to hating the job.

FIREBANG: Oh, join the club. What's your reason?

CRESCENT: It wasn't like it used to be. It was changing. It was hard to keep up, it was changing so fast. Guys like the Lone Tornado, cocky kids like that, we would've run them out of the Alliance twenty years ago. Now he's helping run the place. It just seems dangerous to me. But I guess he's "new blood".

FIREBANG: Well, the times they are a-changin'.

CRESCENT: Tell me about it. I keep thinking of my last street job.

FIREBANG: Oh, that's right, that woman that accidentally got cut by the Luna-Rang?

CRESCENT: That's the one.

FIREBANG: Doesn't matter that guy had a knife to her throat.

CRESCENT: I know.

FIREBANG: That's when they took you off street jobs, right?

CRESCENT: Yep. I sat behind my desk until the day I retired.

FIREBANG: That's horrible, you saved her life!

CRESCENT: Oh, but what good is life when you're wearing a Band-Aid?

FIREBANG: People take any opportunity they can, no matter how trivial. Did she even give you a thank you kiss?

CRESCENT: Nope. The only people who kiss wrinkled faces are granddaughters and gold-diggers. I lost my sex appeal long ago.

FIREBANG: Well I don't get thank you kisses, either.

CRESCENT: Really?

*(FIREBANG shrugs)*

FIREBANG: I get thank you sex every so often.

CRESCENT: You're not serious.

FIREBANG: Well, with a name like Firebang, it sorta comes with the territory.

*(CRESCENT sighs)*

CRESCENT: So much change.

FIREBANG: C'mon, what are you worrying about? You're retired! Act like it! Quit thinking about the past.

CRESCENT: When you've got nothing to look forward to, you can't help but look back. Hell, I once stopped thirty-seven unrelated crimes in one day. That record still hasn't been broken! That means nothing to them now!

FIREBANG: See, that's what I mean. All of this...philosophalizing you're doing. That's gotta be unhealthy. You need to get away. Pack your alter ego and go to Europe. Travel the world under the name of Mr., uh, What's-His-Name?

CRESCENT: Pro...  
*(He stops himself)*  
Nice try.

FIREBANG: Oooh, I got close that time. You're getting slow, old man.

CRESCENT: That was good.

FIREBANG: One of these days I'll find out your secret identity.

CRESCENT: Not in this lifetime, kiddo.  
*(Pause)*  
Maybe you're right. I should just leave it all behind.

FIREBANG: Yeah. Forget about the Alliance and the International Federation for the Liberation of the Idiosyncratic.

CRESCENT: Oh, there's something I definitely don't miss.

FIREBANG: *(Pronounced "eye-fly")* IFLI?

CRESCENT: No. Him. The other fellows at IFLI I could handle...but he was different. Rogue De Sprado!

FIREBANG: We've shut him down a lot of times.

CRESCENT: But he always comes back. It's not easy to defeat a guy with the power to turn invisible. I've never even had a look at him.

FIREBANG: Who has?

*(A RINGING is heard)*

CRESCENT: What--?

FIREBANG: Oh, hold on.

*(From his utility belt, FIREBANG produces a cell phone. He holds it up to his ear.)*

Yeah?

*(To CRESCENT)*

Excuse me.

*(To phone. During the conversation, CRESCENT drinks his beer and hums his theme song to himself.)*

Yeah?...Hey, Alan, tell me some good...Well, Defensive Comics can kiss...Look, Alan, do they have the demographics...Look, Alan, we've got the eighteen to thirty-five demographic, that's not anything to sneeze at...That's only TV?...Well, males six to nineteen read my book all the...Yeah, a bunch, I see them all the time...All I'm saying is you cancel it, you're gonna get letters... Look, Alan, aren't you supposed to be helping me here?... Alright, call me back.

*(He hangs up the phone)*

Sorry about that.

CRESCENT: Not looking good?

FIREBANG: It's still a popular title. I mean, it makes a lot of money. But not enough variety. Of course, of COURSE, I get the publishers with artistic integrity.

CRESCENT: Look, son, if they cancel the book, another company will pick it up, I'm sure.

FIREBANG: But Defensive is the best. Best artists, best publicity, best circulation. I don't want anybody else.

CRESCENT: *(Sighing, clipped)* Well, your decisions are your own now, I can't tell you what to do. I'm retired.

*(Pause)*

FIREBANG: I'm sorry, this was supposed to be a nice get together. Instead I'm--

CRESCENT: *(Overlapping)* No.

FIREBANG: I'm ruining it.

CRESCENT: No, it's good to get these things out, give them some air.