

## VOODOO REVENGE

by Stan Jankaitis

John stared into the monitor with revenge in his eyes. Impatiently, his hand drummed the mouse while the computer loaded the Voodoo Revenge program, a program hyped as “The humane way to vindicate frustrations caused by others.” The user scanned a photo of himself and became the Voodoo Master. He then scanned a photo of his adversary and performed voodoo on the subject. The curses ranged from a mild pinch to deletion of virtual existence. Then with blazing colors the screen flashed "Installation Successful." And with an insane grin, John snarled, "Now Eddie, after all these years of your pushing me around...I'll have my revenge."

Ed was a burly kid who had bullied John since kindergarten, and twelve grades later it still continued. Ed was your stereotypical bully. He was a jackhammer as you tried to sleep. He stole your money then hit you for giving him coins instead of bills. But like all bullies, Ed was tough only to those smaller than him. And if Ed was an oak tree, John was a seedling. But as the Voodoo Master, John was the mountain and Ed the pebble. It mattered not to John that this reality existed only in cyberspace: for John it was as close to reality as he could get.

When John scanned his photo, the screen began flashing colors unknown to the artist. The speakers roared like thunder as a voice proclaimed, "Hail, Voodoo Master." The screen showed John dressed in a hooded robe covered with skulls. Each skull was a different curse. His eyes were like blood, his lips like coal. His flesh was like death and his hands were fire.

John was pleased with his virtual image and wasted no time scanning a photo of Ed. The program responded, "Ready to place the curse, Master?"

"YES!" shouted John. Then, with an evil growl, the electric voice commanded, "Choose the curse and place it upon the victim." But before John had the chance to engage his revenge, a bus horn signaled his lateness for school. Still, he wanted to begin the program and before hurrying to the bus, randomly placed a skull on Ed's image. "I'll see what it does later," he mumbled.

Knowing Ed would be on the bus, John entered it as he always did – looking at the floor. His thinking was if he doesn't look at Ed, the boy might leave him alone. This was the exception not the rule. It wasn't until John was seated that he found today was the exception. Unknowingly, he sat *next* to Ed, but the expected slap or Ed's allegation of "You're dead," never came. Ed paid no attention to John. He only stared into his own windowed reflection. Another oddity was the bandanna covering Ed's head. Proud of his long surfer boy locks, Ed never covered them. John didn't question this; he was only to happy Ed didn't hit him.

At school John found the reason for Ed's obscurity toward him. Talking to Ed's sister whom he got along with quite well, John said, "I'm not knocking it, Tani, but this is the first day your brother didn't belt me." Now more than once, Tani tried talking Ed out of bullying John, but he'd say, "Stay out of it. This is guy stuff." Well, Tani's fondness for John caused her to reveal a secret she promised Ed she wouldn't disclose. "I don't think Ed bothered you because he was pre-occupied with a little problem." Then speaking as if she heard a joke, Tani snickered, "He used a new shampoo and it turned his hair pink.

It wasn't until John was at his computer that he questioned if shampoo really was the

source of Ed's dilemma. "Can't be," John said, seeing that the skull he hastily placed upon Ed this morning was the pink hair curse. John had to find out.

He placed the failed exam curse on Ed but moved it back before activating it. "No use using this one," he snickered. "Ed never passed a test in his life." John decided on a curse he thought fit for all bullies. He didn't know what it would do but he liked the name...The Sissy Curse.

Entering the bus the following morning, John saw that the bandanna had fallen off Ed's head, exposing his pink hair. Everyone was taunting him. John was bewildered. "The Voodoo program works," he murmured. "He'll never pick on me again." But John would soon discover that a breeze can promptly manifest into a tornado.

Arriving home, John saw his kid brother, Gary, working the computer. "What program are you using?" shouted John. Proud as a peacock, Gary answered, "This voodoo one with you and that guy you don't like in it. I'm gonna delete him."

"No!" screamed John, "You don't know what you're doing." Pushing Gary away, John tried removing the skull from Ed's image, but the program didn't respond. "What's going to happen to him?" shouted John.

"What's the big deal?" whined Gary. "It's only a game."

Near panic, John grabbed Gary and screamed, "It's not only a game."

"What's going to happen?" Breaking away from John's grip Gary whimpered, "He's getting hit by the school bus. Now leave me alone."

Like one fleeing an inferno, John ran from the house and to the school. He knew Ed was leaving school an hour late because of a detention punishment, the same time the buses returned. But the flashing lights and screaming sirens told John he was too late. Ed was lying on a stretcher next to a bus. John embraced Ed saying, "I'm sorry. This wasn't supposed to happen."

But Ed pushed John away. "Get off me, or you'll be lying here." shouted Ed. "And it'll be real, not fake."

John was relieved when he discovered Ed's punishment was to participate in a simulated disaster drill. Ed's simulation? Being hit by a bus. As for Ed's bullying of John, his preoccupation with his pink hair ended that. The Voodoo program? John destroyed it.

Besides, voodoo doesn't work...does it?