

## Harvesting

By Ben Trowbridge

*The lights come up to reveal Desmond, a slightly portly and shabbily dressed man of 52, standing just inside the open door of a wooden shed tucked away behind a fruit and vegetable warehouse. He speaks with a west country burr.*

**Desmond:** Good grief, look at all the dust and cobwebs. Ha. I shouldn't be surprised really should I, I think it's got to be thirty? No. Thirty three years since I was last here. When I closed up my secret lair for the last time, when I retired from super hero crime fighting at the tender age of 19. And I got a proper job just like Dad wanted me to. So, ever since then I've beavered away quietly in the background, only needed when someone can't reach the machine because they not approached the line properly or I have to actually leave my little booth and operate the barrier manually because it's broken down. *Again*. And I've been very happy as the barrier control man, not missing being a super hero at all because, let's be honest here, I was never in the top tier was I?

If you're in mortal danger you're going to want your Superman or your Iron Man to come swooping to the rescue aren't you. Or Thor, or Wonder Woman or, at the very least a Spiderman or a Green Lantern. Even a second tier goodie like Aquaman was preferable to me. I think it was the pitying looks and sideways glances to the other terrified innocent victims that it was me saving was what finally got to me. You could see them all silently thinking "Oh f...lip, we've got him". "Why couldn't we have been rescued by Superman. Or Iron Man. Or...." Yeah, blah, blah, blah. Sometimes I felt like saying "I don't *have* to save you you know. If you *want* to wait for one of the others...." But, no, they were grudgingly grateful. Usually because the building they were trapped in was about to collapse or the train was going to crash into the ravine or..., well, you get the picture.

What? Oh, yes, of course. I'm sorry, I keep forgetting that you were born after I'd retired so you never saw me in action. Who was I?!! Yes, well, you are very young I suppose. I was '*The Harvester*'. Criminals used to cower in terror at the mention of my name. Apparently. No, I couldn't fly, I didn't have X Ray vision, I couldn't lift and hurl around at will buses or tanks or have a special ring that could burn holes in things. My super power was that I could manipulate fruit to do my bidding! And I used to patrol the dark and desperate streets of various West Country villages on my push bike, cape blowing in the wind with wicker basket stuffed full of fruit. It was Mum's idea about the wicker basket so Dad found one and attached it to the front of the bike for me. And I carried spares in the zip up pockets of my suit. Mum made it. It looked really good but she forgot that I was still a growing lad and it started to get a bit snug and I think that's how I got my nickname. Funny at first but when you've had "Nice plums Fruity" shouted at you seventeen times it gets a bit galling. And from then on I was just known as Fruity! I always left a little note with the people I saved

that said 'You've been rescued by *The Harvester*'. But the headline in morning paper invariably read - Fruity to the rescue again. *(he sighs)*

I don't know where my special power came from. Dad used to run a fruit wholesalers and I was running around the warehouse from the moment I could walk and I thought it was normal that cherries formed intricate patterns and shapes in the air when I pointed at them. Or that bananas shot out of their skins and exploded on the ceiling thirty foot above my head when I touched them. Dad was always cross, "more fruit I can't sell" he'd mutter and stomp off as I made sixteen coconuts into a tower with the power of my mind. As I got older I learned how to control it and used my gift as a power for good. Many a villain, super or otherwise, has been brought down by a well placed ruby grapefruit from on high. And the clogging power of multiple watermelons hitting the exhaust pipes of getaway vehicles has to be seen to be believed. Of course I was always a bit hindered by seasonal fruit. Strawberries act as excellent listening devices but as soon as Wimbledon is over that's basically it. Of course nowadays you can get whatever fruit whenever you want it, not thirty odd years ago you couldn't. Many a time I've had to disable a shoplifter with tinned rhubarb. *Tinned!* That always felt like I wasn't giving it my all.

The end came when our family broke up. Mum left dad for the man with the big cucumber on the front of his lorry and Dad went into a depression and the warehouse went to rack and ruin. There was no money coming in and I had to work to keep me and Dad going. So I gave up being a superhero. No one seemed to notice. Thor sent a nice card though, a picture of his hammer, and inside the card he'd written "we're going to miss those plums Fruity". But now I've been made redundant. They've made the car park barrier fully automatic and here I am, back in my secret lair. In a shed behind Dad's warehouse dusting off my desk and chair, marshalling my fruit, and getting *The Harvester's* super suit out of the packing case. I'll ease myself in gently, I'll do an all-nighter in Ottery St Mary first and take it from there.

Now. Into the suit. Just *(anguished noise)* arm through here and *(another noise)* push my foot through there and, deep breath *(sound of a long inhale)* and up with the zip. *Come on. (in a slightly strangled voice)* There. Done it. Where's the mirror? *(delighted)* Oh yes, *very nice plums!*