



Take It Off

Batman - All Media Types · Not Rated · 1563 words

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Contents

Take It Off 3

 Chapter 1: There's A Place Downtown 3

 Chapter 2: Where The Freaks All Come Around 5

 Chapter 3: It's A Hole In The Wall 6

 Chapter 4: Everybody Take It Off! 7

Take It Off

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The Iceberg Lounge is many things. To some, it's a silly theme club. To others, it's the center of a vast criminal organization. To Gotham's wealthy, it's a lovely place to bring a date or catch a show.

To Gotham's freaks, it's a haven.

(Points if you know which song I'm pulling the fic name and chapter titles from).

| Any mention of drinks are non-alcoholic.

Chapter 1: There's A Place Downtown

The Iceberg Lounge was, for all intents and purposes, an honest establishment. It catered to the rich and famous, offering delightfully (yet tastefully) bizarre entertainment from around the world.

All without including some of the more... Disturbing interests typical of such clientele. Oswald Cobblepot was many things, and rumored to be many more, but he had his limits.

For all its posh exuberance, the Lounge was located in a rougher part of Gotham. Not the roughest part, but a place that would be considered the bad side of town in most towns. Gotham, for better and worse, was hardly like most towns.

Among the decaying brown and grey buildings, the Lounge shines in blues and whites and silvers, like a literal iceberg dropped in the center of the filth, but with bright lights reflecting inside it to make it seem almost magical.

Inside you'll find tuxedoed waiters and waitresses rollerskating across the shiny floor, like iceskaters performing just for the patrons. In the center of its grand space is a moat with a mini island, kept nice and cold for the penguins who live there.

While watching the penguins and the waiters dance under the shining lights, feeling almost as if you're actually at the South Pole, you can eat and drink a variety of the best food and beverages the world over. There's so many options, you won't even notice that it's mostly seafood.

In fact, there's a lot of things you probably won't notice, if you know what's good for you. Pretend that all high-class places have bouncers covered in scales, with teeth like a crocodile's. Pretend that the man eating at the next table over wasn't on the news last night.

Pretend you can't see the red lights in a few of the penguins eyes. Pretend you don't know you're being watched. Pretend you have no idea why the owner and a woman who you'll pretend isn't the Cat just went to the back room with large duffel bags.

Pretend everything is as it should be, and you'll have a delightful evening, with prices that aren't too high but certainly aren't cheap. Mr Cobblepot is, at his core, a business man, after all.

Chapter 2: Where The Freaks All Come Around

In most cities, once you commit to Supervillainry, your social life is pretty much over. That's it, you will never have anything resembling normalcy again. Hanging out with friends in broad daylight, in costume or out? Entirely unheard of.

That's one of the things that's special about Gotham, and special about the Iceberg Lounge. For some, it is the dark jewel of Gotham, the shining heart of corruption no one can stamp out.

For the freaks, the weirdos, the Rogues? It's an oasis in a desert. A place where they can chat, eat, and just hang out like regular people. Catch a show and gossip with a buddy or two. Go on a date.

Harley's laugh rings across the dance floor, soon drowned out by Joker's own. Scarecrow scowls at a waitress, who only smirks in response. Riddler stands on a table and rants about something or other.

Of course, there is entertainment. Plays or skits by Clayface and Mad Hatter. Dramatic readings from Bookwurm. Comedy shows with a surprisingly nervous Joker. Music Meister just being himself.

Ivy coos over a plant in the corner, while Mr Freeze broods over some new schematics and an extra-cold drink. None of them care about the civilians around them, none of them have to hide.

Dancing and kisses and dumb challenges, birthdays and holidays and anniversaries, all the little things most people take for granted -- all the things the Rogues and the other freaks can't find anywhere else.

The other freaks. The Metas, the aliens, even the Bats. People who are deformed, people who dress weirdly, people who just don't fit in. The Lounge doesn't care, all are welcome.

Well, so long as you can pay your tab, of course.

Chapter 3: It's A Hole In The Wall

The Iceberg Lounge is popular, it's big-time, it's known in every corner of Gotham. Outside of Gotham, however, is a completely different story.

Empires that get too big fall. They can't keep the resources flowing, they can't keep their nasty sides hidden. They can't keep track of everything, can't coordinate, can't defend themselves.

As far as the world's concerned, the Lounge and its owner aren't really anything special. A one-town act that's mostly unknown in a city that happens to have Batman in it.

As far as the world's concerned, Oswald Cobblepot is a little man in a little club with delusions of grandeur. And maybe, possibly, a crook who's been caught more than once.

As far as Gotham's concerned, he's a king. The Penguin has only been caught a few times, always managing to get himself out in a mostly-legal manner.

He runs the smuggling business in Gotham, has his flippers in every pie, has every Rogue and many cops on his payroll. Even the Bat can barely touch him. All while maintaining the legal side of everything.

Penguin, Oswald, Mr Cobblepot. Everyone knows he's one and the same, but not a damn thing can be done about it. He watches as mobsters shoot each other into oblivion and Rogues so foolishly get caught, being not really either and yet both.

Is he a criminal mastermind, a smuggler and a mob boss, just one that happens to be smart enough to stick around when all the others became obsolete? Or is he a Supervillain, flamboyant and in it for the game, just one that's calmer than most?

The answer is simple: yes and no, both and neither. Oswald Cobblepot is simply a business man who happens to have what it takes to make it in Gotham. Why should he need to label it further?

Chapter 4: Everybody Take It Off!

Corvin is my OC demon that is bonded to Jonathan.

Scarecrow. The King Of Screams. The Master Of Fear. The Lord Of Despair. The God Of Terror. That's what Gotham, what the world, knew him as. Which is precisely how he wanted it.

Mr Crane. Lunatic. Monster. Patient. Inmate. Scum. That's what's Arkham called him. The nurses, the guards, the therapists -- they whispered so much worse when they thought he couldn't hear.

Now he was out and about, burlap snugly over his face, entering through the back door of a place that was much too shiny and loud. A place that was always too cold and too crowded for his tastes. Home.

"Heya, Professah Crane!" Harley is the first to greet him, always, sneaking up for a hug he doesn't flinch from. "How's it been?"

"Very well, Child." The words sound strange in the raspy voice of his demonic form. Corvin notices his distress and Unbinds from him, trotting off to pilfer snacks. Jonathan stretches his human body, burlap barely muffling his voice "And you, Ms Quinn?"

She goes on and on about some heist she pulled with the Joker, Jonathan stops paying attention a few minutes in, but understands that the Clown was caught and couldn't make it tonight.

"A month and a half to escape? You're slipping, Jon." Ed smirks from where he's setting up a projector, in front of a long table. "Tsk tsk, perhaps you're getting too old for all of this?"

Jonathan rolls his eyes behind his mask, sitting down at the table just as the others arrive. Every month or two, whoever's on the outside meet up to schedule their plots, make sure no one gets in each other's way. Of course, no one really follows the schedule, but Oswald still insists on the meetings.

"Hello, Crane." Twoface smiles pleasantly, sitting in his regular chair. He scowls and adds "**Where've you been, Spooky?**"

"Arkham." Jonathan answers. He might say more, but he's interrupted by something tackling him out of his chair and onto the ground. He panics for only a second before he realizes what's happened and sighs. "Hello, Jervis."

"March Hare!" The short man hugs him tightly, barely letting him sit up. "I missed you. You haven't shown up for teatime in ages!"

"My apologies." Jonathan mutters and gets back into his chair, keeping half an ear on the other's ramblings. He doesn't think about how almost anyone else would've gotten a taste of his Fear Toxin for that stunt.

Ivy, Croc, Clayface, and Fries all file in soon enough. Oz and Selina are last. Oz spends a good three hours trying to get everyone to agree on a schedule, and they eventually do with the usual shenanigans.

Everyone knows they won't follow it, but they hardly care. They spread through the mostly-empty Lounge, laughing and chatting. Jonathan plans on finding Corvin and going home before-

Too late. Jervis drags him over to a table full of their colleagues and, before he really knows what's happened, Jonathan's mask is off his head. A drink's in his hand, he's rolling his eyes at someone, and he's trying not to let how much he's enjoying himself show.

Professor Crane. Jon. Spooky. March Hare. That is what the Iceberg Lounge, the Rogues, his colleagues, his friends, his family call him. Because only among them is he neither monster nor inmate.

Only around them can he take off his masks.

— end of "Take It Off" —