



The Accountant Kings

PJ Lyon

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The Accountant Kings

‘This,’ Norman said, ‘is going to be the best night of my life.’

They were sat in the big room, the room that sang with the sound of adding computers. This was far away from any great night.

Jarvis leaned across his machine, checked for any floor bosses and said; ‘And what is it you’re going to do on this great night of yours?’

‘What does any man do on a great night?’

Jarvis shrugged.

‘How should I know? Can’t say I’ve ever had one. Too busy,’ he said, motioning toward the machines. ‘And so are you. Where are you finding the time to have this great night of yours?’

Norman looked down the aisles, saw no enemies, then did a drum roll on the top of the nearest machine.

‘Right here,’ he said as a finale.

‘Right here?’

Norman tapped the machine again. ‘Here, in the machine. That’s where I’m finding the time. That’s how I’m going to make myself a king.’

‘What?’ Jarvis said, and clasped his hands over his mouth to silence any

echoes. 'What do you mean, king?' he whispered through his fingers.

Norman leaned over.

'It's what any man wants, just once in his life, just for an hour or two.'

'To be a king?'

'Exactly.'

Jarvis twisted and leaned just enough to hide himself behind his machine.

'You know you can't just become a king, don't you? You have to be born that way.'

Norman copied Jarvis's lean.

'I was,' he said.

'You were born a king.'

'Born to be a king,' he corrected.

They both resumed positions in front of their machines.

‘It’s madness,’ Jarvis said from the corner of his mouth as he punched and tallied and instructed the machine to mimic his actions.

And from the corner of Norman’s mouth came the words; ‘It’s a reality, tonight.’

‘Impossible,’ Jarvis said, using the other corner of his mouth.

And Norman, dropping an invisible pencil to the ground, said; ‘Totally possible. I’ve done it.’ He scooped up the invisible pencil.

Faking a yawn, Jarvis let out some words instead of a sigh; ‘How did you do it?’

Norman smiled.

It was the only smile in the building.

‘Wouldn’t you like to know,’ he mouthed.

And being proficient in the business of lip-reading, as everyone who worked around the machines, Jarvis understood every word.

If not the motivation.

‘You’re going to keep it a secret?’ he mouthed back.

‘Might do.’

‘From me, your oldest friend?’

‘From you, my oldest friend.’

The machines whirred, the numbers were crunched and still the secret of being a king was hidden.

‘You know,’ Jarvis mouthed, ‘that you’ll tell me eventually.’

‘That’s as maybe, but I think you’re going to wait just a little longer.’

‘Why the tease? Why the torture?’

More numbers were placed, dropped, collated and spat out to some far away unknown place as Norman turned and winked.

‘What else is there to look forward to?’ he said.

‘What is that supposed to mean?’ Jarvis said.

‘We, you, I and the rest of the number crunchers in here spend every day in front of these damn machines and what do we show for it in the end?’

‘A pay cheque?’ Jarvis answered.

‘No, no, not at all. We have bad backs, mortgages, lives that aren’t much different from one year to the next. But it would be so easy to change all that.’

‘It would?’

‘It is,’ Norman said, ‘I’ve done it.’

‘You still haven’t told me how.’

‘I’m getting there, aren’t you excited?’

Jarvis took a peek out into the aisles. 'I'm nervous, that's what. We won't be able to keep talking for long.'

'Don't you worry now, we've got enough time. More than you think.'

'I'm glad someone thinks we have.'

Norman leaned back in his chair, hands resting behind his head.

'What are you doing?' Jarvis said.

'Preparing,' Norman said, completely at ease.

'For what?'

'Being a king,' he said.

'Are all king's insane, is that what it is?'

Norman wagged a finger at his desk buddy. 'Every kind is without doubt, that's why they're so regal and poised. They have everything covered.'

'How? How have you got everything covered?' Jarvis said, losing some of the little patience he'd had so far.

Still the aisles were clear, but that wasn't the only concern. There were cameras watching at all times, monitoring the lowly employees. Surely someone had seen them talking by now? But no, nobody had come to dock their pay or haul them off to the big office where they could be talked at about loyalty and performance.

‘You really want to know?’ Norman said.

‘I think if I don’t find out now, I’ll probably explode,’ he said.

Still relaxed, still comfortable in his kingly lean, Norman said; ‘Numbers.’

‘Numbers?’

‘Everything is numbers, you should know that by now. What do we do here, Jarvis? No, you don’t have to answer that. We crunch numbers, we put them together, take them apart, and we have no idea what they become at the end of all this.’

‘Of course we don’t. We’re only on the sixth floor, if we were up on the nineteenth then we’d know. But

what has that got to do with being a king?’

‘Everything. Those numbers, where they go, what they become, it’s the door to the whole world.’

Jarvis glanced at his screen.

It was filled with numbers, columns, additions, subtractions, and none of them made sense.

‘They are?’ Jarvis said.

‘Yes, numbers makes lives my friend. One number means a birthday, but that birthday is the difference between a pension and nothing at all. Don’t you see?’

Jarvis glanced at the screen.

‘All I ever see is the numbers, so do you, Norman.’

‘Not since last week, oh no. I programmed something that makes sense of it all. All this nonsense becomes plain sense after the program is run, but there’s more.’

‘More?’

‘Once you know what the numbers do, then you can make the numbers do whatever you want? I want a jet plane to be waiting for me, well, it’s as simple as two plus two. I want my bank account fit to bust, well that’s a number here and a number there. Once you control the numbers, well, you control life itself.’

‘And becoming a king, how does that fit in?’

‘Like I said; numbers. Once you get the hang of it, it’s easy. What I want I can have. Whoever I want to be, I can be as long as I add all the numbers up right. Tonight a king, tomorrow a sheik, the day after a prince, it doesn’t matter as long as the numbers come out the way I want them to.’

Jarvis turned back to his machine, he tapped in a few more numbers, watched the columns fill then disappear into the great big machine far away. Then he turned back to Norman.

‘And where is this new king going to be crowned?’ he said.

Norman rolled his hand. ‘Why tonight, serf. Find me at the Silhouette Dance Club, where I will hold court.’

‘And will there be a time your Royal Highness?’

‘Eight O’clock on the dot. Come see the king in all his glory.’

Come see him fall, Jarvis thought. Come see him make a fool of himself.

‘I’ll be there,’ he said.

‘ID,’ the big man at the door said.

Jarvis pulled out his bio-card and handed it over for the big man to scan.

‘Okay, you can go in, but be on your best behaviour,’ the big man said.

‘Of course.’

The big man leaned forward. ‘Don’t spread it around but there’s someone real important coming tonight, you’re real lucky, he’s a king or something.’

‘Oh really,’ Jarvis said.

‘Yep. Don’t know where he’s from, but the security is really tight. Actually,’ he looked over Jarvis’s bio-card, ‘I’m surprised someone with your level would have been cleared.’

Jarvis wasn't surprised.

Norman had tweaked the numbers alright, made himself a king it seemed, and let people in who would have been stood out in the cold any other night.

‘Well, I can't argue with the card,’ the big man said, ‘enjoy your night.’ He added wink, but Jarvis was already beyond him before he could acknowledge that wink.

Inside a crowd waited, a banner had been hung, drinks were flowing and there was a buzz in the air about the visit of the mysterious VIP.

Jarvis took a seat at the bar, ordered something cheap, and nursed it in anticipation of the big event.

Norman couldn't possibly get away with this, could he?

Sure, he tweaked the numbers, he'd even allowed Jarvis to get into a club that usually would have barred him entry. But something had to go wrong. There was no way this could run smoothly.

But what if it did? What if he was right and all those numbers they crunched each and every day actually did mean something out here in the real world?

If that was true then they could have anything they wanted. They could grant wishes, if they so wanted.

Yeah, if he lets you in on the secret. You think a man with the

world in his hands wants anybody else to get hold? He'll keep this secret with him until he dies.

Or until someone steals it from him.

Oh, you're going to be a thief now, is that it? This morning you were just happily plodding along and now you're the master criminal.

But if it was true, if it was...

The drink he'd had at his lips was spilled as horns sounded and two big plush purple curtains parted.

And there was the king.

King Norman I, self-proclaimed, the greatest accountant of all time.

The crowd went wild.

And wilder still.

How was this possible? It was still just Norman up there waving at the crowd. The same man who sat across from Jarvis, the man who'd talked silly and made that silly a reality.

How could they not see beyond this less than subtle deception?

Numbers.

That was it.

Norman had been right. Numbers controlled everything, they controlled how people behaved, how they reacted, numbers added in the right way became information, and everyone knew how quickly information spread.

I could have the same, Jarvis thought.

I could be just like that.

And he knew how to do it. Wasn't so hard now he came to think of it. He'd spend enough time across the desk from the self-proclaimed king to know the mind and the habits.

Should have thought of it before, Jarvis thought. Should have known how he would work this, his mode of operation.

Before King Norman I managed to see him, Jarvis slipped out of the club. He took a cross-town taxi to the offices, and then making his excuses he was escorted to the fourth floor by a suspicious security guard.

‘Hurry it up,’ the guard said. ‘I’m due off shift in ten minutes.’

‘I’ll be quick, I just need to get some personal stuff.’

He wasn’t worried about the camera’s anymore, Norman had showed him earlier that they were as easy to deal with as was becoming a king.

He moved quickly over to Norman’s desk and ducked down.

Okay, so where would it be? Where had he hid this kingmaker of his?

He wouldn’t hide it, you fool. It would be on show. He would have it out so that everybody could pass it by and not know what it was. He’d love that.

On the desk there wasn't much that begged attention, except...

Norman picked up the small glass cube.

He turned it over in his hands.

Beneath it was a sliding drawer, and in that drawer a chip.

Got you!

He pocketed the chip and ran over to his own station, just as he heard the footsteps of the guard coming up toward him.

'Just checking my roster,' Jarvis said and tapped in his id on the computer. Before the guard could get to him, he placed the chip inside a reader and uploaded the program.

The guard leaned against the top of the screen.

‘You people,’ he said, ‘I swear, this job means more to you than any real life. You’re all the same. Sometimes I can’t tell one of you from the other.’

‘You will,’ Jarvis said as the program loaded and the interface appeared on the screen.

The interface was simple, columns, checkboxes and numbers, but the text, oh, the text was completely different.

A little input here, a shifting of numbers there, and bang! Jarvis had just had full cable credited to him. He dug further, he ticked, he

checked, he made as many changes as his fingers could keep up with.

And then he came to the motherload.

The Kingmaker.

Well there was a Norman I already, so he would be....

He hit the button.

And so was born Jarvis I.

He switched of the computer.

‘Done?’ the guard asked.

‘Certainly am,’ he said.

‘And you’ll be back tomorrow for more punishment, I guess?’ the guard asked as they walked back along the lines.

‘You know what,’ Jarvis said, a big smile on his face. ‘Tomorrow is my retirement day.’

They came in the morning, not the expected gifts, or the mail he’d sent himself to say that he’d won the biggest lottery, but the police.

He opened the door to them.

‘Jarvis Dodd?’ the officer asked.

‘Yes, what is it?’

‘You’re being arrested for computer fraud, embezzlement, identity theft and impersonating a member of the crown.’

‘What?’

‘Don’t struggle, sir, we have all the evidence we need.’

They grabbed him, cuffed him and dragged him from the house toward a waiting car.

No, not a car, a white stretch limousine.

And when the window rolled down, the face of a king looked back. King Norman the First.

‘You?’ Jarvis said.

‘You can address me as Your Majesty.’

‘But...how?’

Norman rolled his eyes.

‘You can’t just become a king because you want to,’ he said.

‘You did,’ Jarvis protested, as the guards shackled him.

Norman smiled.

‘Whatever do you mean, serf?’

‘You were the one who—’

‘Take him away,’ King Norman the First said, waving his hand. ‘I’ve had enough of this peasant.’

‘But—’ Jarvis said.

Norman held up his hand, ‘Wait,’ he said to the officers, let me have a word with this criminal in private.’

The police stepped away and cuffed, Jarvis shuffled forward.

‘Why are you doing this to me?’ he asked.

‘Because you tried to be King, Jarvis.’

‘But you said it was all in the numbers, that anybody could be—’

‘Anybody that was me,’ Norman said. ‘You think I’d just let you take over, is that it?’

‘No, but—’

‘I had to put in some security,’ Norman said, ‘I am a king you know.’

‘No you’re not,’ Jarvis said.

‘Yes, I am. Remember, Jarvis....the numbers never lie.’

And the window rolled up, the limousine pulled away with the King inside.

And that other King, the first in the house of Dodd, was pulled away by the police to a station where more numbers were calculated and given out.

Twenty Years.

No parole.

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