

# Red Tape

By Shayne Terry <byron212@yahoo.com>

Rated PG-13

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Summary: In a bureaucratic world, what is a superhero supposed to do?

DISCLAIMER: I don't own Lois and Clark or any other recognizable characters.

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"What am I, Superman's secretary?" Clark asked irritably. The certified letter sat on his desk, waiting for him to open it.

"You always seem to be able to get hold of him," Lois said. "Now if you were to give me his number, I might be willing to take some of this off your hands."

Clark shook his head. "He doesn't have a telephone."

As Lois headed for the coffee machine, Clark reluctantly slit the envelope with his fingernail. After having seen several of these over the past month, he had come to dread them.

It had all started with the city government demanding that he be licensed to transport individuals, despite his protestations that he wasn't being paid and that he should be covered by Good Samaritan laws.

Then they'd demanded that he take a first aid course. This wasn't an unreasonable suggestion, actually, but he'd been unable to produce Clark Kent's first aid certificate to prove that he'd already taken the course.

He had a court case pending now with Immigration and Naturalization. Apparently they were taking the phrase illegal alien literally, although it was acknowledged that it would be difficult to capture Superman and keep him outside the borders.

The Internal Revenue Service had called demanding an audit. Superman's claims that he didn't earn any money and didn't in fact need to eat didn't phase the service, which seemed to believe that he was concealing untold millions in an account in the Cayman Islands.

The Federal Government had sent agents quoting an old law; apparently it wasn't illegal for Americans to have contact with aliens or NASA space artifacts, but the government could impose a quarantine on both the item or alien in question and the people who had been in contact with it. Clark hadn't contacted them back yet, but he was worried that they might try to impose a quarantine on Lois, who was widely reputed as being the person most often in close personal contact with Superman.

As he opened the letter, he stared, flabbergasted.

The filing of flight plans demand earlier in the week had been bad enough. This was ridiculous.

"What is it?" Lois asked.

"They are demanding that Superman get flight training..." Clark said. "In a plane."

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"I'm sorry. The law is the law, and it says that if you are going to fly in New Troy you have to log at least fifteen hundred flight hours with a trainer."

"Superman doesn't fly in a plane!" Lois protested.

"The law wasn't written with the idea that a man could fly on his own."

"Why can't he fall under the rules for non-powered gliders?" Clark said, staring at the manual. "All he'd have to have would be ten hours of flight time in at least thirty flights and take the test about weather, aircraft operation, aerodynamics and applicable laws."

"Does he look unpowered to you?" The FAA man shook his

head. "I'm surprised he got away with it for this long. He's going to have a hard time getting the license anyway."

"Why?" Lois asked? "He flies perfectly well."

"He'd have to have a medical examination, a valid U.S. Driver's license, and proof that he's at least seventeen years of age. If he gets a sports license, he'll be restricted to flying under 10,000 feet above sea level, only be able to fly during the day and he won't be able to carry more than one passenger...no more carrying space shuttles without a license."

"If he gets a private license he won't have to deal with most of that and he'll only have to have forty hours of flight time," Clark said.

Half the time would require an instructor and the thought of twenty hours stuck in the tiny cockpit of an airplane made him shudder.

"If he intends to fly any more big airplanes, commercial jets, space shuttles, things like that, he's going to have to be instrument rated and get the full license...1500 hours of flight time and 500 hours of cross country time."

"He won't even be looking at the instruments!" Lois protested.

No matter how many arguments they made, the FAA wouldn't budge.

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The first of the new letters was a shock. Clark had begun to flinch whenever another letter was dropped at his desk, but at this one he found himself staring.

"What is it this time?" Lois asked. "Do they want him to buy liability insurance now, like he's a car or something?"

Clark's head snapped around. "Shhhhhh...don't give them any ideas."

She stared at him for a moment and he sighed and handed her the letter.

She stared at it for a moment then said, "It's been a while since my French courses in college."

"I guess someone has been reading our articles about this whole debacle. The city of Paris in France wants to bid for Superman's services."

"Bid for his services?"

"Cities give tax breaks to big businesses as a lure to bring them and their business in. They sometimes give them other benefits as well. Why should Superman be any different?"

Lois was quiet for a long while. "He wouldn't leave Metropolis, would he?"

"What choice does he have?"

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As it turned out, he had more choices than he ever would have thought possible. The second letter arrived within the hour, followed by a third and a fourth and a fifth. London, Sydney, Brussels, Oslo...even Toronto, Mexico city and Moscow began putting their bids in.

The offers were first made by individual cities and were soon followed by offers from national governments including South Korea and the Vatican City.

Some of the offers weren't genuine; Clark was sure, simply being made in an attempt to embarrass the United States. Yet the pressure was being felt on a national level. Superman's entire image had been crafted around truth and justice. The American population had come to associate him with the American way.

Within a week an act of Congress had made him an honorary citizen. Some of the other agencies began to relent, backing down at least temporarily.

The FAA refused to do so despite public pressure.

"The man violates a hundred different air regulations every day," the new representative explained. "The very least he can do is learn what the laws are that he's breaking."

Superman agreed to both a written and an oral exam, but the

driver's license requirement was a problem. No one wanted to give him a driver's license without a birth certificate. No one was sure whether Krypton had even issued birth certificates, and the people involved weren't sure whether a certificate written in a dead language written by a people long since dead would be accepted by the world court.

In the end, there wasn't any choice at all.

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"I am a citizen of the world," Superman said. "More so now than ever before." He stared out at the sea of faces in front of him.

In an effort to gain his patronage, more than fifty countries had voted him in as an honorary citizen. This placed him in the Guinness Book of World Records. Lois already had an entry in the most kidnapped category.

"However, I find myself forced to move to Mexico City for the immediate future."

The Mexican government had been willing to waive the birth certificate requirement for a driver's license in return for his promise to help on certain public works projects. Once he had his driver's license he could apply for resident alien status and then for an American driver's license.

One scientist's claim that he could determine Superman's age by carbon dating his toenails seemed somewhat specious, but if the United States government accepted it, Clark wouldn't argue. He'd take the flight training and one day he'd be free to fly openly again.

He blinked for a moment, and then said, "I love this city."

Allowing his gaze to rest on Lois for a fraction of a second, Superman said, "One day, I'll be back."

As he turned to step off the stage, he was handed a stack of papers. He'd grown less cautious since the flow of paperwork from the US government had slowed to a trickle, but he stiffened as he saw what he held in his hands.

Apparently he was now expected to file fifty separate tax returns, one for each nation that had inducted him as a citizen.

THE END