

Exposing Evil

By Reg P. Wydeven
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As a nerd, I like to think of myself as a bit of a Renaissance Man. While I love ‘Star Wars’ and ‘Star Trek,’ I don’t like to pigeon-hole myself into only being a sci-fi nerd. I also like fantasy fiction, like ‘The Lord of the Rings’ and ‘Harry Potter,’ and video games. Of course, I also love comic books.

By extension, I also love movies based on comic books. These movies have become their own genre, and many have received critical acclaim, such as ‘The Avengers’ and Christopher Nolan’s ‘Batman’ trilogy. ‘Green Lantern’ was one such movie, starring Ryan Reynolds as the title hero.

The movie starts with Reynolds portraying Hal Jordan, an experimental aircraft pilot and soon-to-be alter ego of the Green Lantern. Jordan witnesses a spaceship crashing and finds the dying pilot inside, who is a purple skinned alien donning green tights. The alien is Abin Sur, a member of the Green Lantern Corps, which is an intergalactic police force that protects and serves the universe.

Like all members of the Corps, Sur has a green lantern and power ring he can use to create solid objects out of thin air to combat evil. As he dies, Sur’s ring is passed to Jordan, who becomes the next Green Lantern. As he assumes his mantle, Jordan swears the oath of all members of the Corps:

*In brightest day, in blackest night,
No evil shall escape my sight.
Let those who worship evil’s might,
Beware my power, Green Lantern’s light!!!*

But what if the wielder of the brightest light is not the hero, but rather the villain?

Earlier this month, the Federal Trade Commission reached a settlement with Goldenshores Technologies L.L.C., manufacturer of the Brightest Flashlight Free app for Android smartphones. According to the Google Play website, the app has been downloaded at least 50 million times since being introduced in 2011.

The app is extremely handy, as it converts the flash on your smartphone into a flashlight. Perhaps the brightest flashlight also blinds users from its other functions. In a complaint brought by the FTC, Brightest Flashlight “also transmits, or allows the transmission of, data from the mobile device to various third parties, including advertising networks. The types of data transmitted include, among other things, the device’s precise geolocation along with persistent device identifiers that can be used to track a user’s location over time.”

According to the FTC, the Moscow, Idaho, company “deceived consumers with a privacy policy that did not reflect the app’s use of personal data and presented consumers with a false choice on whether to share their information.” The settlement requires Goldenshores to delete personal information Brightest Flashlight has collected from consumers. In addition, the company must obtain users’ “express consent” before collecting and using their geolocation and inform them fully of when, how, and why it’s being collected.

A recurring theme in comic books is a super hero falling from grace, such as when Hal Jordan abuses his Green Lantern power and becomes the super villain Parallax. The Goldenshores case is a matter of life imitating art, as their app used The Flash of smartphones for evil purposes.

I’m such a nerd.

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