

SCROLLS EPISODE ONE

Blake Moreno stood with his back against the building as he waited for a car to pass by. It was just past 3 a.m. and he was next to invisible in his head to toe black clothing. While the outfit suited his needs on this night it also served as his usual attire, perfectly matching his brooding attitude. There was a light rain falling and he swept his wet shoulder length black hair behind his ears and then turned his attention to the jewelry store in front of him. He held his hand out towards the locked doors and whispered a single word.

“Psuchros.”

A small stream of ice shot from his hand. He kept it trained directly over the large lock on the door. After a moment it was frozen solid and he ceased casting the spell. He kicked the door at the frozen point and the lock shattered inward. Blake pushed on the doors and they swung open. He stepped purposefully inside. He had become reluctantly proficient at the art of robbery and knew quite well that he had two minutes before the rent a cop that was employed by this area would be arriving in response to the silent alarm he had just triggered.

Blake made his way to the back of the store. He paused as he stood before the massive safe that housed the store’s rarest and most valuable pieces. He placed his hand against the safe and concentrated hard. The metal grew white with ice beneath his hand and it slowly spread across the rest of the surface. A minute later the white tendrils of ice had encompassed the entire door and Blake removed his hand. He stood for a moment and then kicked the safe hard, shattering the frozen door.

He hadn’t cared enough to bring a bag to carry any of the jewelry so he began stuffing it into his pockets. The value or beauty of the objects didn’t enter into his mind. Blake knew that none of it was his and that no matter how much it was all worth it wouldn’t be enough. It was never enough. He was shoving a pair of diamond earrings into his pocket when he heard someone coming into the store. He turned and saw the rent a cop.

“Freeze!” the man yelled.

A rare smile appeared on Blake’s face as he was unable to overlook the man’s choice of words. This wasn’t the first time he had seen this particular rent a cop and he knew it wouldn’t be the last. With a population around 100,000, Longview, Washington wasn’t a large town and there were only a select few areas in it with

stores profitable enough worth robbing. This man seemed to be the rent a cop of choice for most high end business owners and Blake was confident their paths would cross again.

He turned and ran out the fire exit. Once outside he pointed his hand downward and concentrated, sending a stream of ice onto the concrete sidewalk. He held it there until the ground was covered in a thin sheet of ice and then turned to run. The rent a cop came sprinting outside but when he stepped on the icy ground he slipped. The man went down hard, slamming into the concrete and then sliding out into the street. By the time he recovered Blake was long gone.



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ξύπνημα

(AWAKENING)

Marty Schultz was sitting in what had become his favorite place on Earth. He was in the backroom of the used bookstore The Seasoned Reader, hunched over his notebook drawing. There was very little light and even less sound, nothing to keep him company but overflowing shelves filled with dusty books. On the desk in front of him was a large scroll.

The Seasoned Reader had become something of a marketplace for the scrolls. Collectors sold them to the store and then others eventually came and bought them. Marty had been drawn to them the day he had started working there. They were old, some even fit to be called ancient, and while most of the text on them had long

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since faded there was always one part of the scrolls that remained strangely legible. At the very bottom of each of them there were two symbols. Sandwiched between the symbols was always a single word written in a foreign language. After doing some research Marty had found that the language was Greek.

He had just been starting his webcomic, *The Wizard's Quest*, when he had arrived in Longview two years ago. Once he got hired at the bookstore he started copying down the symbols and words from the scrolls and incorporating them into his comic. He posted them anonymously on the internet and had never bothered to check how many people read them, that was never the point in creating them.

Marty had just finished copying the scroll onto his notebook when he heard someone approaching.

“Marty? Someone wants to buy that scroll.”

He turned around to see Annabel Lee Gregory. Like him, she was a student at the nearby Barker State University. Marty pushed up his glasses as he looked at her. He saw ten girls that dressed just like her every day on campus but never recalled seeing any of them do it so well. Annabel was something of an alternative girl, she always seemed to have a patch on her jacket or a pair of bright stockings on or a colored streak in her hair. She also always seemed to have a genuine, warm smile on her face.

“Marty?”

He realized that he was staring and quickly looked away. He ran his hand through his slightly curly hair, which served as a reminder that he was long overdue for a haircut, and stood up.

“You just get lost in your own little world back here, don't ya?” Annabel asked playfully.

There was something in her voice that Marty enjoyed. That smile was there again as she looked at him, waiting for his response. He thought of several things to say but shelved each of them, instead choosing to remain quiet and reserved. Always quiet and reserved.

“I'll bring it out in a second,” Marty said.

The smile on her face faded slightly and she nodded. Marty watched her go and then turned back to the desk. He compared the symbols and the word on the

scroll with the ones he had copied down. Once he was confident that he had them perfect he rolled the scroll back up and then carried it out into the store.

The Seasoned Reader was a holdover from a different age. It wasn't a large store and what space there was stayed filled with books. Shelves were everywhere and books overflowed from them, also taking up residence in piles and in any other place where they could fit them. Books rarely had a price tag on them and the kindly manager would often sell them for whatever price the customer wanted to pay. This went for everything except the scrolls. The store bought them for fifty dollars and sold them for fifty dollars, never turning a profit on them. This was a policy put into place by the original owner of the store, Clifton Prince, who had long since passed away.

Marty recognized the man who was there to buy the scroll. The collectors always stood out, seeming slightly less normal than most people. This particular collector was one that Marty had seen in the store on many occasions. He was a talkative man who came in once a month and bought any scrolls on hand and then every six months he'd return and sell them back.

They met at the front counter and Marty laid the scroll out for the man to see. He ran a hand across his thick gray mustache as he inspected it.

"Got a good one for me today?" the man asked.

Marty didn't respond. After a moment the man rolled the scroll back up and then pulled out his wallet.

"Of course you know I'll take it," he said.

He placed a fifty dollar bill on the counter and Marty picked it up and placed it into the register.

"Don't take too much joy out of life Marty, you just might hurt yourself," the man said with a smile as he turned to leave.

As Marty watched him go he realized that it was now dark outside. He glanced at the clock on the wall and saw that it was 7:15 p.m., fifteen minutes past when his shift had ended. He returned to the back room and packed his notebook into his backpack and then slung it over his shoulder. As he stepped back out into the store Annabel was standing there waiting for him, the smile back on her face.

"Heading home?"

Marty just nodded and stepped around her.

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“I guess I’ll see you tomorrow. I had to trade shifts with Kathleen so it looks like we’ll be working together all week,” Annabel called out to him.

Marty raised his arm slightly in the air and waved goodbye without turning around. He pushed the door open and stepped out into the cool nighttime air. There was a light drizzle falling. In the distance he could see the looming structures of Barker State University and he began walking towards it. After just a few minutes a member of the Campus Bike Patrol came riding up towards him.

“Marty Schultz! Stop right there!” the man yelled.

He ignored the calls and kept walking. The man on the bike came closer to him, the bike wobbling beneath him as he struggled to keep it steady.

“You’ve been selected for a random bag search this evening.”

Marty still ignored him and continued walking. Finally the man rode in front of him, bringing the bike to a jerky stop.

“Marty, you’re holding out on me aren’t you?”

After letting out a long sigh Marty looked up at the person who was the closest thing to a friend he had. His name was Ken, he was a 28 year old Japanese man who sported the world’s worst beard. It was patchy and uneven and yet Ken seemed to be quite proud of it, often stroking it or calling attention to it when in the company of others. He was strangely awful at bike riding for someone whose job relied on riding a bike and he was an avid reader of comic books. He was slightly overweight and he further puffed his cheeks out and made a sad face as he stared at Marty.

“Why would you do this to me? Why would you intentionally hurt me this way?” he asked dramatically.

Finally, Marty reached into his bag and pulled out a comic book that had been traded in at the store that day. It was the *Essential X-Men Volume 3*, a hefty book that collected many of the early issues of the comic. Ken smiled wide as Marty handed it to him. After reading the title he laughed and slapped Marty hard on the arm.

“I knew you wouldn’t let me down!”

Marty stepped around Ken’s stopped bike and continued walking towards the campus. Ken followed along, his bike riding skills diminished dangerously further as he held the handlebars with only one hand so he could hold the comic in the

other. After spending a few perilous minutes focused on the book Ken returned his attention to pestering Marty as they continued to walk towards the campus.

“Was Annabel working tonight?” he asked.

In over a year of being around Marty, Ken had learned not to expect many answers so he followed quickly with another comment.

“She likes you. You should ask her out.”

If Annabel really did like Marty he sure hadn’t ever noticed. Then again, he had spent his time in Longview intentionally not noticing things like that. The two moved in silence for a moment before Ken spoke again.

“You going to finish a new Wizard’s Quest tonight?”

Marty published the web comic anonymously but one night he had dropped his notebook and Ken had picked it up, seeing the comic artwork inside. He had since become an avid fan of the series and harassed Marty constantly about when the new ones would be posted on the website.

“Yeah, probably,” Marty answered quietly.

The two fell into a quiet rhythm after that. Even though Marty never told him Ken always seemed to know when he was working and always seemed to be around to accompany him on his walk from the bookstore to the campus. At first Marty had been annoyed by this but slowly came to find it comforting. He had no doubt that in a different life he and Ken would’ve been great friends.

They were back on campus now but there wasn’t much activity at this time on a Monday night. A young woman went jogging past wearing only a sports bra and tight fitting running pants.

“Don’t forget to hydrate!” Ken yelled out after her.

She twisted around and flipped him off.

“That’s alright, she’ll eventually come around,” Ken said as he watched her jog away. “Chicks always end up with the funny guys. Wait and see, once I finish my stand up routine and start working the comedy clubs I’m going to have my pick of any girl on campus.”

Marty smiled slightly. Ken often talked about his long in development standup routine and had even tried out a few jokes on Marty on occasion. Much like his beard they were horrible.

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A few more silent minutes passed and then they reached the student apartments where Marty lived. The housing situation on the BSU campus was always dire and instead of ending up in a dorm Marty had been lucky enough to get one of these apartments. This was the point when their hanging out always ended and Ken stopped and watched Marty unlock the door.

“I’ll just be sitting on a bench somewhere out here reading this comic until my shift ends so if you get bored come out and hang,” Ken said.

Marty offered him a wave and then went inside. He let out a long sigh. He loved being home. There was no need to keep anyone at arm’s length here. Just himself, alone, how he needed it to be. He pulled his notebook out of his bag and took it over to his drawing table.

He already had the latest installment of *The Wizard’s Quest* half finished and he looked it over. The title character, the white bearded wizard Jean Marco, was again running into trouble on his worldwide quest to find a magical spell that could cure the virus slowly sweeping through his hometown. This time it was a dragon man attacking Jean Marco and the wizard was blasting him with a bolt of lightning. There was a large white word bubble where Jean Marco would be yelling the command to cast the spell but it was currently empty.

Marty flipped through his notebook until he came upon the scroll he had copied down earlier at the store. He then pulled out his reference books and took a minute to translate the Greek word. Written in English it was “phainomai” and Marty wrote that into the word bubble. He then surrounded it by the symbols that he had copied from the scroll. Any time that Jean Marco cast a spell Marty always added in the word and symbols from scrolls he had seen at the bookstore. He felt it gave the comic a unique quality.

A panicked knocking at his door grabbed his attention and he stared over at it. He never had visitors. Aside from Ken nobody even knew where he lived. When the knock came again this time it was accompanied with a voice.

“Marty! Hurry up, you gotta let me in!”

It was Ken and it sounded like he was in trouble. Marty walked over to the door and looked out the peephole. Ken was there, a panicked look on his face. Marty put his hand on the door knob and then hesitated. He had never let anyone

into his apartment and had hoped to leave it that way. After another series of knocks Marty opened the door.

“You’ve got to hide me!” Ken said as he rushed inside.

Marty quickly closed and locked the door and then turned to face his unwelcome guest.

“What’s going on?”

Ken was searching around for a hiding place.

“It’s my sister! For some reason she’s here on campus and I saw her and I’m pretty sure she saw me and now you need to help me hide.”

After trying and failing to fit into the hallway cupboard Ken started turning in a circle, looking for another place to hide.

“Why don’t you just talk to her?” Marty asked.

Ken paused for a moment and gave him a serious look.

“I haven’t seen or talked to my sister in ten years. It’s best if it stays that way.”

Marty was about to ask another question but was interrupted by a knock at the door.

“Oh no!” Ken groaned.

He ran into the living room and dove over the couch, landing with a thud behind it. After a second his head slowly popped up above the back of the couch.

“Don’t answer it,” he whispered.

There was another knock.

“I’m not going to leave her out there. I’ll just say I haven’t seen you,” Marty said.

He went to the door and pulled it open.

“Is there something I can...”

His voice trailed off as he saw who was standing before him. Her name was Keiko Ochi and she was his soul mate. It had been two years since he had seen her. Her mouth hung open as she stared at him, not believing her eyes. She was just as beautiful as he remembered. She was about five foot, two inches tall and had long, straight black hair. Her face was impossibly cute but he was distressed to see that she wasn’t wearing her glasses.

Finally she was able to close her mouth. She opened it again to speak and then closed it, unable to find the words. She swallowed hard and then tried again.

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“Marty,” was all that came out.

He felt frozen there in front of her. The reason he had chosen to live in Longview, Washington was because it was over three thousand miles away from his hometown of Winter Haven, Florida, the place where he and Keiko had met and fallen in love. And yet here she was, at his front door.

“Keiko,” he said, completely at a loss for what other words to speak.

They stood like that for several moments, both of them shocked to see the other.

“I go to school here,” Marty said, desperate for anything to break the silence.

“Me too, now. I just transferred.”

She looked down at the ground. Marty knew that she did this when she was upset and instinctively he reached out to put his hand on her shoulder to reassure her. He stopped himself halfway, then forced his hand back to his side.

“I...” he started.

“Don’t,” she interrupted.

Keiko looked up. Tears were streaming down her face.

“Don’t.”

She stepped back and looked at him for another moment, then turned and walked away. He watched as she disappeared into the night.

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There weren’t many people in John’s Tavern this late on a Monday night and Ken and Marty were sitting at the bar having a drink. There were no decorations or neon signs inside the tavern, just a series of tables, a bar, cheap prices and a liberal approach to checking id’s. The owner, a man named John whose appearance was as plain as the name of his tavern, walked over and refilled their drinks. More beer for Ken, more soda for Marty. They had been there for ten minutes and hadn’t said a word. Ken took a long drink of the cheap, watered down beer and then turned towards Marty.

“So how exactly do you know my sister?”

Marty stared down at the bar for a long moment before answering.

“We were engaged.”

Ken nearly spit out his beer.

“You were engaged? To my sister?”

Marty nodded.

“We met when we were twelve. Fell in love. We were on a school trip five years ago, when we were both seventeen, and I proposed.”

After waiting for a moment for the story to continue Ken realized that Marty was done sharing.

“Oookay. So if you were engaged then why is it that you’re here in Washington and she’s been back in Winter Haven?” Ken asked.

Marty’s gaze returned to the bar. He stared at it for a long time before speaking.

“She mentioned her brother once or twice but it was a sore subject with your family. I never even saw a picture,” Marty said, changing the subject.

Ken turned toward him and smiled.

“Kenshin Ochi, at your service,” he announced with a bow.

“What happened between you and your family?” Marty asked.

Before now he had never seen it happen but Marty watched as Ken’s mood darkened. Now it was his turn to stare down at the bar. He drained the rest of his beer and then answered.

“I dishonored them.”

Ken paused as John refilled his beer. Once the bartender walked away he continued.

“For seven generations my family has owned and operated Imperial Chemicals. I wasn’t exactly stoked to be generation number eight and I told my father.”

He shrugged.

“That was that. Tradition and honor, you just don’t screw with them apparently,” Ken added, his voice full of sadness.

They sat in silence for several minutes, each lost in their thoughts. Finally it was Marty who spoke.

“What was it that you wanted to do?” he asked. “Besides running a chemical company, I mean.”

Ken sat up straight and smiled.

“Minor league baseball player,” he announced proudly.

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“Just minor league?”

“Yup, just the minors. I was never going to get good enough to get into the majors but I could’ve owned in the minors. The idea of being a small town superstar was just fine with me, I didn’t need millions of dollars. Just a few thousand from playing baseball would’ve been more than enough.”

He took a drink and then continued.

“That’s why I ended up here, actually. I was on a team, the Tacoma Rainiers. It didn’t last though. I had the physical skills but not the mental focus, at least according to the coaches.”

Another stretch of silence fell upon them. After draining another beer Ken smiled and slapped the bar.

“This is nice, right? This is a nice night,” he said.

Marty shook his head.

“This is one of the worst nights of my life.”

Ken laughed.

“Well yeah, obviously, but I mean this,” Ken said, gesturing to the two of them. “This is nice.”

It was by far the longest conversation they had ever had. In fact, it was the first real conversation Marty had been involved in with anyone since he had moved here two years ago. He nodded his approval to Ken, who laughed again and slapped the bar harder this time.

“Another beer please! And another soda for my young friend here!” he yelled.

Ken’s spirits seemed raised now and he turned to face Marty.

“Okay, you gotta tell me what happened between you and Keiko. Did you find another girl or something? She find another guy?”

Marty shook his head.

“Nothing like that.”

After realizing he wasn’t going to elaborate Ken pressed the issue.

“So, what then? You said you guys were in love, you were engaged. Why’d you up and leave and move across the country?”

Marty drank the last of his soda and then stood up.

“I’m going to take off,” he announced.

Ken threw up his hands.

“Oh come on, don’t leave. I was just wondering what happened between you two, that’s all.”

After placing some money on the bar Marty turned and walked towards the exit.

“Don’t be like that, Marty!” Ken called out after him.

Marty didn’t stop and Ken watched helplessly as he left.

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There was a chilly rain falling and Blake pulled his black button up shirt tighter around himself as he walked down the dark street. He was in downtown Longview, walking towards the Double S, a bar owned by Sloan Scott. He rounded a corner and saw the bar. He passed the doors that led into the popular business and instead went in the unmarked door on the next building.

Scott owned both buildings, actually he owned a majority of the buildings in the neighborhood. Inside there was just a stairwell and Blake walked up it to the third floor. There was a heavy metal door there and he knocked on it and waited. He glared up at the large peephole on the door, knowing full well that someone was standing behind it checking him out. The sound of several locks opening signaled that his entrance had been granted. After a moment the large door swung open and Blake stepped inside.

The man working the door gave him a dirty look that Blake gladly returned. The man had been ill tempered since birth and while it made him well suited to guard the door it also made him rather unpleasant company. The third floor of the building was a large, open space. There were couches, televisions, a refrigerator, but the main attraction was the huge office area where Sloan Scott did most of his work. Before Blake had met Scott he had admired everything about him. He was a self made business man, someone who had risen from nothing to something all on his own, no help from anyone. Once the two had become acquainted Blake had admired him even more. He had also almost immediately wanted to kill him.

The usual cast of unruly characters were scattered around the room. Sloan Scott took a special interest in people who could cast spells. He took them in, trained them, helped them get powerful. But Blake knew all too well that

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assistance from Sloan Scott came with a high price. He had the jewels from the previous night's robbery in his pocket, certain that he'd be told that it still wasn't enough to repay his debt.

A new individual caught Blake's eye. He was a small guy, maybe just a little over five feet, but he was slowly floating up into the air. He was concentrating hard, trying to raise himself higher. After a few moments of struggle he fell back to the floor, unable to sustain the spell.

Blake also saw a man that most of them referred to as Rain Man. He was the definition of a slob. Overweight, always wore dirty, stained clothes, going bald in a hurry. The man was sitting in the corner with his eyes closed. Blake walked over to him and kicked him hard in the side. The man's eyes shot open and immediately it stopped raining outside.

"Cut that out, you're really making life miserable for people around here," Blake said angrily.

Rain Man smiled. His teeth were yellow.

"Kick me again and I'll cut off your leg."

Blake laughed.

"Any time you want to try it," Blake shot back.

Feeling someone standing behind him Blake turned around. Tasha Murphy was Sloan Scott's personal everything. Accountant, assistant, secretary, receptionist, lawyer, masseuse, you name it she did it. Even though she was the only person in the room who didn't possess the ability cast a spell she was the most feared person in the building. Her hair was pulled back into a bun and she had on a power suit. Blake thought that she probably looked good in regular clothes but had never seen her wearing anything but this exact outfit.

"Mr. Scott isn't in right now," Tasha said. "He was expecting your delivery and you can leave the jewels with me."

Rain Man was back in his trance like state and the rain resumed falling outside.

"Where's he at?" Blake asked.

"Mr. Scott is out on business this evening but I assure you he will receive anything you leave in my care."

Blake took a step back and looked around the room. It wasn't exactly the crowd you wanted to leave in charge of tens of thousands of dollars worth of

merchandise. Blake didn't want to take any chances of the jewels not getting to Scott. He had seen firsthand what happened to people who didn't deliver on the things Scott expected from them and it hadn't been pretty.

Tasha was growing impatient.

"You know that he expects this from you, Blake. His delivery dates are law here."

"I am law only for my kind, I am no law for all," Blake said as he took another step away from her.

She had heard him spout his quotations before. It had annoyed her then and it annoyed her now.

"I'll come back in a few days when I can personally hand this to Sloan Scott. Please inform him that I tried to deliver tonight," Blake said.

Without waiting for a reply he turned and walked back towards the door. He looked around, taking in everything going on. Powerful people were growing more powerful as they mastered their spells, huge amounts of money were being made. It was quite an empire that Sloan Scott had built here, but Blake knew that it wasn't even close to realizing its potential. He knew it needed a man of a broader vision at the helm. He smiled slightly as he passed a mirror.

He knew just the man for the job.

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Marty sat at his drawing desk, his pencil resting in the same spot it had been for the past hour. He was trying to recall how he had felt four hours ago, four days ago, four weeks ago, four months ago. His perfect bubble of solitude was gone. His very specific goals for living where he did and how he did meant very little now that Keiko had returned to his life.

He was pulled out of his deep thought by a knock on the door. His heart started pounding as he wondered if it was Keiko, coming back to have a conversation. He knew she had questions, he just didn't want to give her any of the answers.

When the knock repeated Marty got up and slowly approached the front door. He eyed it suspiciously, afraid of what he would find when he opened up. He took

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a deep breath and unlocked it and then pulled it open. Keiko was nowhere to be seen. Instead there was a bald African American man sitting in a wheelchair. A red blanket was draped over his legs and he stared forward blankly, his eyes focused on nothing.

“Can I help you?” Marty asked, completely perplexed by the situation.

A second man who had been standing just out of sight stepped into view. Even though it was well past midnight he wore sunglasses. He had short hair and wore a tight shirt that accentuated his muscled torso.

“Whoa, what is this?” Marty asked.

The man raised his hand and spoke.

“Aerios.”

A blast of air hit Marty hard, sending him flying back into his apartment. He slammed hard into a wall, cracking the dry wall. He fell to the ground and tried to regain his wits. He had recognized the word the man had spoken. It was from a scroll he had seen once, one he had used in his comic.

The man in the sunglasses was on top of him now. Marty kicked at him but the man easily brushed the blow aside. He reached down and picked Marty up and then slammed him down hard in a nearby chair.

“Help! Somebody help!” Marty yelled.

The man tied Marty to the chair and then reached into his pocket and pulled out a long strip of duct tape and placed it over his mouth. The man in the wheelchair was inside as well and they both turned to wait for something. A moment later a third man stepped into view. He had a powerful, imposing presence and Marty stopped struggling against his bindings when he saw him. His hair was very short and had a prominent widow’s peak. He had hawkish features, fierce cheekbones and a slightly crooked nose. He wore an expensive looking business suit and a ten thousand dollar watch.

“Marty Schultz, I presume,” the man said as he walked closer. “My name is Sloan Scott. It’s a real pleasure to meet you, I’m a big fan of your work.”

Marty watched him with wide eyes. Despite his pleasant voice and manner of speaking there was a world of malice behind every word.

“The Wizard’s Quest,” Sloan said in awe, waving his hands through the air for effect. “It’s quite a tale, very interesting. I’m especially interested in the spells that he casts.”

The in progress comic that Marty had been working on caught Sloan’s eye and he walked over to it and picked it up. He examined it.

“Interesting. Seems like Jean Marco learned a new spell.”

Sloan folded up the paper and slid it into his pocket. He then walked back over to Marty.

“I’m going to remove the tape. If you scream I’m going to have my friend Crosby here break your neck. Is that understood?”

Marty glanced over at the man in sunglasses and then nodded quickly. Sloan removed the tape.

“How did you find me?” Marty asked.

Sloan laughed.

“You post the comic from your home computer. It took me less than fifteen minutes of real effort to have the comic traced back to your location.”

Sloan knelt down and placed his hands on Marty’s knees.

“Now I have one question and one question only. You better hope you have the answer I’m looking for,” Sloan said menacingly.

After pausing to let his threat sink in he continued.

“How have you been getting information on so many different spells? Do you have scroll collectors working for you?”

Marty blinked several times, trying desperately to make sense of what was happening.

“I want the scrolls. You use them like toys in your ridiculous comic when they should be wielded by my people instead. Where are they?” Sloan asked.

“I don’t have any scrolls, I swear,” Marty said.

Sloan quickly put the tape back over Marty’s mouth.

“Wrong answer.”

Marty rocked back and forth, trying to find a way to free himself. Sloan stood up and gestured towards Crosby.

“Tear this place apart. I want to see what scrolls he’s hiding.”

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As much as he wanted to tell himself that his mind was playing tricks on him, that this was just a bad dream, Marty was slowly beginning to understand what was happening. Crosby tore the room apart, not with his hands, but by using and manipulating air. Just as he had used it to knock Marty back, he would raise his hand and then use it to smash open drawers, flip over furniture. This combined with their obsession with uncovering scrolls left one and only one explanation open to Marty as to the truth of the matter. His mind raged against it, wanting badly not to admit this, but finally the thought broke through.

Magic was real. The scrolls held some sort of power and these men wanted more of it.

The realization dumbfounded Marty and he watched with a strange sense of detached awe as Crosby used his air spell to demolish the apartment in search of scrolls that he wasn't going to find. Deep down Marty knew his life was in grave danger but he couldn't stop thinking about the scrolls. He had seen so many, copied them all down. What power did they really hold? And what of the many scroll collectors? Did they all know the true purpose of the scrolls? Were they able to cast the spells written on them just like this man could?

Marty grappled with all these things as he sat helpless. A few minutes later Crosby announced that there were no scrolls in the apartment. Sloan returned his attention to Marty.

"I'm disappointed kid. I expected to come here and find a powerful man well versed in spells and with a treasure trove of scrolls for me to steal. Instead I just find a poor boy who stumbled upon something he didn't understand and decided to incorporate it into his comic."

He paused for a moment, his cruel eyes fixed on Marty.

"Scrolls have been treasured and guarded for thousands of years and yet you post them on the internet as if they mean nothing. You must realize that this is something that I simply cannot allow. This world can't know the power that the scrolls hold."

Sloan gestured for his two men to exit the apartment. He then pulled the unfinished comic out of his pocket and looked at it. He shook his head and then threw it on the floor in front of Marty.

“All this because you put spell information into your comic series. Seems like a silly reason to die, doesn’t it?”

Marty fought with all of his strength against the bindings. Sloan left the room and moved to the front door. He then turned back around to face inside the apartment. His hand was outstretched, palm facing upwards.

“Aster,” Sloan called out.

A black sphere appeared, hovering just above his palm. It was small at first but started to grow. Sloan was staring down at it intensely, concentrating his will on it. Marty could feel the energy emanating from it. It felt like destruction brought to life. He redoubled his attempts to break his bindings, slamming back and forth in the chair. The sphere was the size of a basketball now and the dark emanations were growing more intense. Something bad was about to happen very soon, of this Marty had no doubt.

All of a sudden he stopped struggling. If magic was real, if the scrolls did hold true power, then why couldn’t he cast one of his own? He had seen more than fifty during his time at the bookstore. He closed his eyes and tried to recall one, any of them, but his mind was completely blank. Marty cursed himself and tried harder but still came up empty. He had always been very good at recalling things in the past but then again his life had never been on the line at the time either.

As the waves of energy from the sphere grew in intensity and speed Marty opened his eyes, resigning himself to his fate. His gaze fell upon the piece of paper that Sloan had thrown in the floor, the unfinished comic. In particular they fell upon the word bubble he had filled in earlier with the information from the new scroll he had seen at the store. The word was phainomai and Marty repeated it again and again in his head. He also concentrated on the two symbols that surrounded the word, but nothing was happening. As Sloane’s dark sphere exploded, sending a targeted wave of pure destruction ripping through the apartment, Marty closed his eyes and repeated the word one more time. Phainomai. He took special care to recall the symbols as well.

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Marty had no clue if he was alive or dead. All he knew was that his eyes were still closed and for now he was comfortable with just that. After several minutes passed he realized that he was no longer sitting on the chair in his apartment but instead was sitting in what felt to be grass. He took a moment to gather his courage and then opened his eyes.

He was sitting in the middle of a wooded area at the base of a hill.

END OF EPISODE 1

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