

Marty was crouched behind a tree, just a few feet away from the fence. His heart was pounding in his chest as he waited for Blake's attack on the front gate to begin. The seconds moved past at a crawl until finally a huge crash rang out from the area of the gate. The armed men around the building began shouting and rushing towards the commotion. Marty tried to get a look at the gate but couldn't see it from where he was.

Gunfire rang out and Marty wanted badly to go towards it, to help Blake. No matter what he thought of him he certainly didn't want him to die. He hesitated there for a moment, then returned his attention to

the fence. Seeing no more security guards beyond it Marty stood up and stepped forward. He concentrated on a spell and was launched upwards into the air.

As the spell propelled him up and over the fence, Marty looked at the gate. The van was crashed into the security booth and several men were moving towards it, pumping the vehicle full of bullets. Tasha was there, directing the men to continue firing. Blake was nowhere to be seen.

Marty returned his attention to his landing. He rolled as he hit and came up into a run. He moved quickly towards the building, wanting to get inside before anyone saw him. He reached the steps that

led to the door and paused. He looked back towards the gate. Blake was still out of sight but several large chunks of ice were falling through the air towards the security guards. Marty again had to fight a strong urge to go and help. He reminded himself that Sloan could be casting his spell at any moment. He then turned and rushed into the building.

The lobby was enormous and completely empty. Despite it's location in the medium sized town of Olympia, KCPQ also serviced Seattle and a large portion of the state of Washington. Being a big network brought in big money, something that was apparent from the marble tiles underfoot and the strange onyx aqueduct sculpture that ran for

twenty feet in the middle of the lobby. It was three foot high and had a stream of water that went down it. It cascaded off the end and disappeared into a grating in the floor.

Marty noticed the elevators at the far end of the lobby and he moved towards them. Each of his steps echoed loudly on the tile. He ran his hand along the fountain, surprised by how cold the water in it was. He wiped the water onto his shirt as he continued on. As he moved past a large directory he saw a row of oversized, overstuffed black leather chairs. Marty froze. Sitting in one of them was a man who was calmly reading the newspaper.

“Who are you?” Marty asked suspiciously.

Marty was tense and ready for a fight. He had his hand raised and aimed at the man, ready to cast a spell at a moment’s notice. The man slowly lowered the newspaper, revealing his face. He looked to be in his late forties and had well groomed short black hair that had traces of gray in it. He also had an immaculately kept goatee that also had bits of gray mixed in with the black. He nodded politely towards Marty.

“The name’s Kyle Larkin. You must be Marty.”

His voice was calm and kind.

“Listen, I don’t want any trouble. Just let me get to the elevators and you can go on reading your newspaper.”

The man frowned slightly and shook his head.

“I’m afraid it doesn’t work that way.”

Marty shook his outstretched hand.

“I’ll stop you if I have to,” Marty threatened.

Kyle slowly folded the newspaper and set it in his lap. He then spread his arms.

“Do what you must,” he said calmly.

Unsure of what to make of this man, Marty decided to use his ice spell. He called the symbols into his mind and focused on the word. Nothing happened.

Marty looked at his hand, confused. He called up the spell details again, but this time spoke the word instead of just thinking it.

“Psuchros.”

Again, nothing happened. Marty decided to try another spell. All the while the man sat completely still, calmly observing. Marty decided to use his air spell. He locked the symbols in his mind, taking an extra moment to be certain he had them right. Then he spoke the word.

“Aerios.”

Nothing. The man lowered his arms and rested them on the arms of the chair.

“Would you like to try another one?”

Kyle asked.

Marty looked from his hand to this mysterious person.

“How are you stopping me?”

Kyle stood up. His movement was quick and fluid.

“Simple. It is my spell.”

“Your spell makes spells stop working?”

Marty asked.

The man smiled and shrugged.

“The arcane arts are mysterious indeed,” he said pleasantly. “Our combat is to be physical in nature instead of mystical.”

Marty watched as the man removed his jacket and folded it carefully and placed it

on the chair. He then began stretching. Something about the way he moved unnerved Marty. Each of his movements had purpose and meaning.

His preparations complete, Kyle turned to face Marty fully.

“Ready?” Kyle asked.

Marty shook his head.

“It doesn’t have to go this way.”

“I’m afraid it does. Prepare yourself!” Kyle shouted.

The man flashed into action. He took two running steps and then leapt into the air. Marty hadn’t moved at all yet and already his opponent was flying towards him, leg outstretched in a picture perfect jump kick.

His foot caught Marty squared in the chest, sending him stumbling backwards. He slammed into the onyx aqueduct back first.

In an instant, Kyle was coming at him again. Marty dove underneath the aqueduct just in time to avoid being hit by a front kick. He jumped back to his feet and lashed out with his fist, hitting Kyle in the side of the head weakly. They were each on one side of the aqueduct, waiting for the other to make the next move. Marty hesitated for a moment and then tried to punch the man. Kyle grabbed his arm and twisted it. He then pulled, causing Marty to be pressed up against the fountain.

“Ahhh!” Marty yelled.

The man quickly reached with his other hand and grabbed Marty by the back of the head. He wrenched it downwards, plunging Marty's face into the ice cold water running down the aqueduct. It wasn't very deep, but plenty deep enough for him to drown in.

Marty's survival instincts kicked in and he began thrashing violently, trying to pull his face back above water. Kyle released his other arm so he could use both hands to keep a grip on his victim's head. With both of his hands free, Marty began clawing at his assailant's arms. His lungs were beginning to burn and he was dangerously close to going into a full panic. He got his hands around Kyle's wrists and pulled up as

hard as he could. The man was much stronger than he was but all Marty needed was a small window. He was leaning back with all of his strength and weight. If he could loosen Kyle's grip just a little bit he'd be able to slip out.

With the burning in his chest spreading through his torso and growing in intensity, Marty put everything he had into one last attempt. He dug his fingernails deep into Kyle's arms and wrenched upwards with all of his strength. It didn't help much, but it helped a little and with the pressure relieved slightly Marty's head slid out from underneath the grip of his would be murderer.

Marty fell backwards onto the marble floor. He gasped for air while keeping his eyes on Kyle, waiting to see what his next move would be. The man wiped the blood from his arms where the fingernails had cut him. Marty slowly got to his feet, not wanting to put himself at a further disadvantage by remaining on the floor. They stared at one another, the aqueduct acting as a barrier between them. This time Marty didn't make the foolish mistake of trying to attack. He instead turned towards the doors and ran.

Behind him, Kyle leapt over the onyx aqueduct and pursued. Marty had just reached a large security desk when he was

overtaken. Kyle kicked him in the back and Marty fell hard. He landed on the tile on his stomach and slid into the side of the desk. The air was knocked out of him and as he struggled to regain it Kyle grabbed the back of his shirt. He pulled Marty up off the floor and then flung him up and over the desk.

Marty flipped over the desk awkwardly, landing roughly on the back of his neck. He lay on the floor for a long moment, trying to push the pain out of his mind and think of a strategy to fight back instead. For just an instant, Marty was simply glad to be behind the massive desk. It encompassed him on all sides and made him feel safe.

Suddenly he realized that since it was a security desk maybe it would have some security equipment. The first drawer he pulled on was locked but the next one opened. Marty reached in and felt a large item. He pulled it out and saw that it was a long silver flashlight. It was heavy and he immediately felt better now that it was in his hand.

He could hear Kyle climbing onto the desk and Marty sprang into action. He jumped up and saw that Kyle was perched on the counter above him. Marty swung the flashlight upwards, catching his attacker just under the chin. This sent him toppling over

backwards, off the desk and down to the hard marble tile.

Marty climbed onto the counter just as Kyle was struggling back to his feet. The man was clutching one of his arms but hadn't been seriously injured in the fall. Knowing that this may be the only chance he had to end the fight, Marty leapt off the counter. He caught onto Kyle's back and clung there. He had one arm wrapped around the man's neck in an attempt to choke him. With his other hand Marty was swinging the flashlight rapidly, hitting Kyle in the head with it again and again.

Kyle stumbled and swayed wildly, almost losing his balance and falling to the

ground. Marty remained on his back, holding on as tightly as he could. Kyle regained his balance and reached up, trying to pull Marty off. He grabbed a handful of his hair and ripped upward, trying anything to get him off. Kyle spotted a large glass coffee table nearby and moved towards it swiftly. When he neared it he stopped suddenly while leaning down and wrenching up on Marty's hair as hard as he could. This sent Marty off of his back and into the air.

Marty went back first through the table. He slammed into the floor amidst a shower of broken glass. His back erupted in pain as he suffered hundreds of small cuts all at once.

Knowing that his opponent wouldn't be getting up any time soon, Kyle took a moment to compose himself. He rubbed his throat where Marty had been choking him. He almost felt bad fighting such an untrained opponent but he had been impressed with the amount of heart Marty had shown.

Marty stirred among the broking glass, turning onto his side. The shards were everywhere, he could feel them underneath his hand. Some were very small and as he moved his hand he found that some were larger. Kyle had recovered now and he stepped forward and leaned down. He

grabbed Marty's shirt and tried to pull him up.

"It's time for this to end," Kyle said.

Marty pulled away and Kyle lost his grip on his shirt. He stepped closer and was about to lean down again when Marty quickly rolled over onto his back. Kyle was surprised by his speed and even more surprised by the large shard of glass in his hand. Marty sunk it deep into Kyle's thigh, causing the man to yell out in pain.

Kyle stumbled backwards but didn't fall. He stared down at the vicious wound as blood began to pour out from the embedded glass. Marty's body was screaming at him to stay down, to stop moving, but he ignored

it. The flashlight was just a few feet away and he got to his hands and knees and crawled towards it. Glass cut into him but a moment later he once again clutched the weighty flashlight in his hand.

Even though he had yet to fall down, Kyle was immobilized by his wound. He knew that if he put any weight on the leg or moved it wrong it could make things much worse. Instead he tried to stand completely still. Marty got to his feet and stepped closer.

“This doesn’t have to go any further,” Marty said.

Kyle looked up at him. After judging the distance between them he lashed out

with a right jab, punching Marty hard in the face. Marty stumbled backwards. Anger flashed in his eyes and he raised the flashlight high. He charged. Kyle did his best to sidestep but could barely move due to the wound in his leg. The flashlight caught him hard on the side of the head and he collapsed to the tile.

Marty stood over his fallen opponent. He was breathing heavily and was surprised by the amount of power he had been able to summon into the blow. His anger subsided as he looked down upon the man. Kyle appeared to be unconscious.

Movement at the other end of the lobby caught his attention and Marty raised the

flashlight up. Blake had just come through the front door. They stared at one another for a long moment, each noting the shape the other was in. Blake was bleeding from his hairline and he had dirt all over him. He strode across the lobby purposefully, only briefly glancing down at the man Marty had just done battle with.

“We need to get to the roof,” Blake said as he passed.

Marty followed him as they made their way to the bank of elevators. Blake pressed the up button but it didn't light up. They tried every one of the up buttons but none of them worked. There was a door marked “stairwell access” nearby. The two of them

looked at it and then they looked at one another. Neither of them was too keen on climbing that many stairs, but it was apparent that the elevators had been shut down.

Looking down, Marty saw that Blake was holding one of Tasha's curved daggers in his hand. There was fresh blood on it.

“Did you...?”

Marty's voice trailed off and he just pointed at the dagger. Blake slowly lifted it up, looking surprised to see that he was still carrying it.

“Let's just say that she and I got to know one another a little better,” Blake said.

There was a momentary look of madness in his eyes and a chill ran through Marty as he saw it. A second later Blake released the dagger and let it clatter onto the floor. He then returned his attention to the problem at hand.

After trying once more to press the up buttons on the elevators, Blake sighed and moved towards the stairwell. Marty was hurting all over but he followed and the two began the long climb towards the roof.



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EPISODE TWELVE

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(APEX)

“What’s taking them so long?” Keiko asked as she looked around anxiously.

They were parked down the street from the house where Rain Man was holding Tammy. Ken had snuck up to the side of the house and looked in. He saw Rain Man but not Tammy. Once he returned to the car they decided to call the police and report the kidnapping. Ken was in rough shape from getting beaten up at the bar and was in no condition to face yet another villain. Both

of them felt that it was best to leave this one to the professionals.

“Here they come,” Ken said.

A cop car drove past them and stopped in front of Rain Man’s house. Ken sat up and rubbed his hands together as two officers stepped out.

“You’re in trouble now, boy!” he said with a smile.

The two officers talked for a moment before approaching the front door.

“Shouldn’t they have their guns out?” Keiko asked.

She had made the situation sound very dire to the operator but the nonchalant way in which these cops were moving caused a

bad feeling to start spreading through her. They watched in silence as one of the officers knocked on the door. A minute later the door opened and Rain Man stepped out. He was wearing a dirty white tank top and a pair of boxer shorts. Even from this far away, Keiko was revolted by the man's appearance.

“That's right! It's the po-lice,” Ken said with a smile as he watched.

Keiko didn't share his enthusiasm. She felt she knew exactly what was about to happen. After observing the casual conversation going on between Rain Man and the two officers she shook her head and scoffed.

“They’re not going to do anything.”

Ken shot her a confused look.

“Of course they are. He’s got someone held hostage in there.”

She pointed back towards the house.

“Look, Kenshin. They’re just talking to him and then they’re going to leave.”

His spirits dropped as he continued to watch. After a few more minutes the two officers turned and started walking back towards their car.

“No!” Ken shouted.

They got in and drove away.

“No!” he yelled again.

Rain Man stood on the porch for a moment, nervously looking up and down the

street. He then stepped back inside and closed the door. Ken immediately took off his seatbelt.

“What are you doing?” Keiko asked.

“I’m going in. I’ll get Tammy myself.”

Keiko studied her brother’s face. He had been severely beaten tonight and was in no shape for another fight.

“Ken, you can’t. There’s got to be another way.”

He shook his head and opened his door.

“I told Marty I was going to save his sister.”

Even though she admired her brother’s loyalty and bravery she was still very worried. After a moment of hesitation she

removed her own seatbelt and stepped out of the car. Ken turned around and looked at her.

“What are you doing?”

She did her best to appear brave as she answered.

“I’m coming with you.”

She didn’t wait for him to answer, and instead moved past him towards the house.

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“It has to be here somewhere!” Blake yelled.

The climb up the 40 stories of stairs had been beyond grueling. Marty and Blake

were drenched in sweat and their bodies were screaming out with pain. But upon reaching the top they found no access to the roof. Instead of continuing on, the stairwell just ended at the 40th floor.

Marty stepped through the door that took him out of the stairwell and onto the 40th floor. Even though they had checked it once already he would rather do it again than stand around and listen to Blake complain. His legs were killing him and each step was an ordeal as he started examining the area again. This was the executive level and it showed. There were only four offices, set up in the four corners of the floor, and each of them was bigger than most apartments

Marty had ever been in. In the middle of the floor there were two cubicle areas connected by a hallway. Marty was just passing one of them when movement caught his eye.

It was brief, but he thought he saw something moving towards the back row of cubicles.

“Marty? What are you doing, we need to keep checking the stairwell?” Blake called out.

As soon as Blake came into view Marty shushed him. He pointed out towards the cubicles, trying to signal to him that he saw something. Blake held up his hand and shrugged, silently asking Marty if he wanted

him to try to freeze out whoever it was.

Marty nodded.

Blake began pouring ice all over the area. Marty raised his own hand and concentrated on his air spell. He shaped the air and caused it to swirl about the area. Before long the two of their spells were working together to bring about a localized blizzard, dropping the temperature in the room at a rapid and dangerous pace. Just as Marty was beginning to think he had been mistaken and there wasn't anyone there after all, a man leapt up from behind a cubicle and took off running. He exited the cubicle area and was moving towards one of the offices.

The two of them fell in after the man. Neither of them was able to run very quickly, their legs still shot from the brutal climb up the stairs. In the distance they could see the man running. He had a very slight frame and was much faster than they were. He also didn't seem to be too interested in escaping. Several times he looped around the area, passing by the door into the stairwell. Instead of fleeing down the stairs he just continued on, content to keep the chase alive.

The third time they passed the stairwell door Marty stopped. Blake stopped too. They were both gasping for air.

“He’s just trying to distract us,” Marty said.

Blake looked confused.

“He’s not trying to get away. He’s just buying time for Sloan,” Marty explained.

“Then he must know how to get to the roof,” Blake said.

A noise in one of the offices caught their attention. They both ran towards it. There was only one door into the office and they went in slowly. With many places to hide they stayed on their guard and crept carefully forward. Blake pulled open a large storage cabinet, but Marty was moving towards the oldest hiding place there was; underneath the desk. He leapt around the

side of the massive oak desk and saw the man crouched below.

He didn't try to attack, he just tried to scoot away. Marty reached down and grabbed him by his shirt. He pulled him to his feet and couldn't help but notice that the man appeared to be terrified.

“How do we get to the roof?” Marty asked.

Blake stalked over and tore the man away from Marty. He grabbed him roughly and wrenched him towards the door.

“What are you doing?” Marty asked as he followed.

“Guys like these only respond to one thing. Pain.”

Blake dragged the man back to the stairwell door. He opened it and forced the man through. The man tripped and fell hard onto the concrete landing. Blake quickly knelt on top of him, his knee planted firmly in the man's chest.

“You're going to tell us how to get to the roof or you're going to die,” Blake said menacingly.

“That's not necessary,” Marty shouted.

Blake ignored him. He held out his hand and slowly a wicked knife made of ice formed. He touched his finger to the tip of it and it cut him. Blake allowed the blood to run down the icy blade, sure to hold it so that the man could see it. He then lowered

the knife until it was right in front of the man's face.

Marty could tell that the man wasn't going to say anything. His eyes were wide with panic and he was shaking. This wasn't one of Sloan's usual hardened thugs. This was just a useful person. Marty looked up slightly, to where the stairs to the roof should've been but weren't. There was just a brick wall there, a dead-end, but after a moment he realized what was really happening. He looked back down at the man. A useful person, with a useful spell.

The knife was almost touching the man's eyeball now and Marty grabbed Blake's arm and pulled it upwards.

“Get off of him.”

Blake shot him a dirty look but did as he was told. Marty then held his hand out to the man. After a long moment of hesitation the man reached up and took it. Marty helped him to his feet. The man stood, staring at him fearfully.

“I’m not going to hurt you.”

The man looked quickly over to Blake.

“And I’m not going to let him hurt you,” Marty said quickly. “We just need you to stop casting your spell.”

The man looked at him again. He was still unsure if he could trust what he was hearing. He looked at the brick wall and then back to Marty.

“Just stop casting it and you’re free to go. I promise.”

After a long moment the man nodded. Immediately the brick wall disappeared and a set of stairs leading up to the roof access door appeared. Marty shook his head, thinking about how much he hated magic. He then turned back to the man and gestured down the stairs.

“Thank you,” Marty said.

The man stepped away slowly, not turning his back to them.

“You’re really going to let him go?” Blake asked angrily, still clutching the ice knife.

Marty nodded.

“Yes, let him go.”

The man nodded his appreciation to Marty and then began sprinting down the stairs. Marty and Blake turned their attention to the last set of stairs that led to the roof.

“This is it,” Marty said.

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There were no lights on in the back of the house and Ken and Keiko silently snuck over the fence and into the backyard. She stayed crouched in the shadows and watched anxiously as her brother slowly crawled towards the back door. Ken slowly pulled

open the screen, pausing for a moment when it creaked. He then reached up and gripped the door knob. It turned but the door didn't open. The house was old and in disrepair and the wood frame around the door appeared to be swollen.

Ken shifted his weight and pressed hard on the door, trying to get it to open. He pushed harder and harder, afraid that if it did open it was going to fling open and alert Rain Man. Finally he felt it give a little. He was pressing and pulling at the same time in an attempt to control the door once it opened all the way. He took a deep breath and pushed hard. This time it came free, swinging open quickly. Ken leaned forward

into the house, still gripping the doorknob. He almost fell onto his face but was able to keep the door from slamming open loudly.

The door opened into the kitchen. The light was off and the only sound in the house came from the television in the living room. Ken held the screen door open and motioned for Keiko to come up. She moved quickly and quietly and within moments was crouched beside her brother in the dark kitchen. Ken carefully closed the door and then turned his attention to the task at hand.

Light was streaming down the hallway and it seemed to be coming from the living room. They stayed crouched there in the kitchen until finally they heard Rain Man

laughing loudly at the television. Ken nodded to his sister and then slowly crept down the hall. She was about to follow when she noticed a drawer that was partially open. She looked in and saw there was silverware inside. She reached in and pulled out a knife. It wasn't very long or sharp, but she felt better now that she had it. She moved quickly out into the hall and caught up to Ken just as he was nearing the living room. The closer they got the worse the smell in the house became. A heavy air of urine, body odor and leftover food mixed to make a toxic atmosphere and Keiko covered her nose as they reached the end of the hallway.

They peered in at the setup of the living room. Rain Man was sitting in a recliner. It was facing away from them, positioned directly in front of a big screen television. The room was full of trash and clutter. An end table beside the recliner was overflowing with beer cans, empty fast food bags and other pieces of garbage. There was also a couch in the room, but it was buried beneath garbage bags and piles of old clothes. Keiko noticed something else and hit Ken in the arm to get his attention. She pointed towards it and he nodded. On the far side of the room was what appeared to be a closet. There was a large padlock on the outside of it. Keiko's heart pounded in her

chest as she realized that Tammy was probably being held captive in there.

Ken stepped slowly out into the living room. The brown carpet matched the outdated brown paneling on the walls, but it was thick and covered the sound of his footsteps. Rain Man was watching a show about practical jokes. He was totally oblivious to the two trespassers.

An empty liquor bottle was in the floor behind the chair and Ken leaned down and picked it up. It was heavy and he gripped it like a club. He looked back at his sister. She nodded, a nervous expression on her face. Ken turned back towards Rain Man and lifted the bottle high above his head.

Rain Man burst into a fit of laughter over something that happened on the show. He leaned forward as he continued to cackle. Once he finally caught his breath he leaned back and Ken struck. He brought the bottle down as hard as he could, shattering it on top of the man's head.

Rain Man fell forward out of the chair. Ken dove on top of him. The man was hurt but not unconscious and he thrashed beneath the weight of his attacker. Ken rained down punches on the back of the man's head, trying to end the fight quickly. The man's large stomach made it hard to keep him pinned to the floor and as he rolled back and forth Ken began to lose his balance. Finally

the man was able to roll all the way over, causing Ken to fall off of his back.

For a man his size, Rain Man moved with surprising speed as he got to his feet. Ken also jumped up and he rushed his opponent. He speared the large man in the stomach but it wasn't enough to knock him over. Rain Man elbowed Ken hard in the back again and again, trying to get him to release his grip around his waist. Ken held on tight and continued driving his legs, trying to push the man back. His efforts paid off as Rain Man lost his balance and Ken was able to slam him hard into the wall.

Ken pressed his advantage and began punching Rain Man in the face as hard as he

could. He hit him once, twice, and a third time, rocking the stunned man. Ken reached back and swung again but this time Rain Man was ready. He reached up and gripped Ken around the neck. He squeezed hard, cutting off his ability to breathe.

His eyes went wide and Ken gripped at the man's arm, trying to break the choke hold. Rain Man had blood and sweat running down his face and he smiled as he continued to squeeze harder. Ken collapsed to his knees. He weakly hit at Rain Man but it did no good. His insides were burning and blackness was clawing at the edge of his vision.

Keiko rushed into the room. Rain Man was too focused on choking Ken to see her. She held the knife up and plunged it into the man's back. It didn't go in very deep but it was enough to get him to release the choke hold. Ken collapsed to the floor and gasped for air.

“Ahhhh!” Rain Man yelled.

He flailed wildly as he tried to reach the knife in his back. Keiko jumped away, tensely watching the man. She looked around for anything else to use as a weapon but didn't see anything. Rain Man found a grip on the knife and pulled it out. He screamed again as he removed it. He dropped it to the floor and then turned

towards Keiko. The look on his face sent chills through her. It was the most evil thing she had ever seen.

“You’re gonna regret that,” he said.

The big man rushed her, murder and worse intentions glinting in his eyes. Keiko leapt out of his reach and then ran around the recliner. Rain Man lunged over it and grabbed her by the hair. She shrieked and tried to pull free but he had handfuls of it. He yanked back on it hard and swung her into the nearby wall. Keiko slammed into it and then crumpled to the floor.

Ken was back on his feet now and he tackled Rain Man. The two of them crashed to the ground, grappling, punching and

scratching. There was no strategy, nothing but brutality. They rolled, each fighting for position.

Keiko's back was in agony but she slowly got to her feet. She was watching the brutal fight, trying to think of some way that she could help. Each deep breath she took sent pain shooting through her.

Rain Man had gained the upper hand and was now straddling Ken. He punched him hard in the face. Keiko knew her brother couldn't take many hits like that to his already battered head. She rushed forward but Rain Man saw her coming. The man shoved her hard backwards. She was off balance and again slammed into the wall.

With both of his opponents temporarily subdued, Rain Man slowly got to his feet. He looked at both of them as they writhed in pain on the floor. He laughed, softly at first, then harder. The man bellowed for some time, overcome with glee. Ken looked to be recovering and was on his hands and knees. Rain Man grabbed him by his shirt and pants and flung him forward like a missile, right into the television. Ken smashed through it amidst an explosion of sparks and plexi-glass.

“Ken!” Keiko shouted.

He was unconscious, draped awkwardly over the TV stand, his upper body hanging off the back along with the wreckage of the

television. Rain Man turned towards her and smiled wickedly. She couldn't get to her feet but she scrambled away along the floor. He stalked after her slowly, in no hurry. Her eyes darted all around the room but still she saw nothing that could help her fight back. She looked at her brother, hoping to see some indication that he would be getting up and rejoining the fight. He was still motionless.

It was then that Keiko made her decision. In the back of her mind she hadn't been sure if she would ever do this, but now she knew there was no choice. She stopped moving away from Rain Man and raised her hand, just like she had seen Marty do when

casting a spell. She had never shown the scroll she had gotten from Annabel to Marty, even though she had indicated that she would. She wanted it for herself, wanted to further understand the world that Marty was now embroiled in.

She began calling the symbols from the scroll into her mind. Even though the ones in Marty's comic always only had two symbols, her scroll had six. They were terribly intricate and she worked hard to recall each one perfectly. Keiko had no idea what was about to happen. She had never summoned up the courage to test the spell. She didn't even know if anything was going

to happen at all, maybe she couldn't even cast it.

Rain Man was standing over her, smiling, as she locked the final symbol into her mind. She found it difficult to keep all six in her head at once. It took all of her focus to keep them there together. She shook with the effort as she concentrated harder than she ever had before. It felt like every bit of her energy was being burned up in order to focus on the symbols. Rain Man leaned down and she spoke the word.

“Goeteia,” she said through clenched teeth.

Keiko immediately passed out, the strain of casting the spell draining her too far.

Dark images assaulted her unconscious mind. She saw terrible things. Fire, agony, and torture. There were flashes of other things. Screams so horribly piercing that even unconscious she knew she'd never forget them. But mostly there was the fire. It enveloped her. It enveloped everything. It was hot, unforgiving, and perhaps most terrifying, alive. It swirled around her, lashing out with teasing tendrils, before crashing over her again and again.

She felt something wet splash onto her face and the sensation pulled her awake. She blinked slowly, thankful to be away from the nightmare visions of her dream.

Keiko wiped her face and then looked at her hand. It was covered in blood.

Her heart began to pound in her chest as she felt more wetness beneath her. She looked down at the floor and saw that she was lying in blood. Keiko screamed and got to her knees. Rain Man was nowhere to be seen but the living room was covered in blood and gore. It was splattered everywhere, the walls, the furniture, even the ceiling. She shook as she looked down at herself. Her clothes were soaked with blood and she screamed again.

Ken stirred. He groaned, every movement causing terrible pain as he removed himself from the wreckage of the

television. He stood up and looked around. His mouth dropped open as he saw the horrific gore all around him.

“Keiko?” he yelled.

He turned quickly around and saw her crouched in a large pool of blood. Ken rushed towards her, afraid she was hurt, but he stopped suddenly when he saw the look on her face. Years later when he would think about this awful night, it wouldn't be the endless amounts of gore spread about the room that haunted him most. It would be the expression he saw on his sister's face. It took him several moments to compose himself and he stepped closer and leaned down.

“Keiko? Are you okay?”

Her eyes were unfocused and tears streaked down her face.

“Keiko!”

She looked up at him. He reached down for her and she wrapped her arms around his neck. He picked her up as she sobbed into his shoulder. Ken held her for several minutes, trying to calm her down. Finally she came back from the brink of having a complete breakdown and he looked down at her.

“What happened here?” he asked softly.

“Did you do this?”

She grew silent for a long moment before answering.

“I... don’t know.”

Ken did a quick search of the house. There was no sign of Rain Man’s body. There was a trail of blood running down the hall and it looked like someone had been dragged. Ken found the tattered, blood soaked remains of Rain Man’s tank top in a pool of blood in the bedroom. He wanted badly to be gone from this place and looked around until he found a crowbar. Ken couldn’t help but cast a glance over at his sister as he re-emerged into the living room. He wondered what could’ve happened to cause such a horrifying scene. He wondered if Keiko had been the one that somehow did

it. She noticed him staring and he quickly looked away.

He had to struggle for several minutes but he was able to pry the lock off of the closet door. He flung it open and saw Tammy. She was blindfolded, gagged and tied to a chair, but she was alive. Ken rushed forward.

“Tammy, it’s me, Ken, your brother’s friend. You’re safe now.”

He pulled the gag off and then started untying her from the chair.

“Ken?” she asked weakly. “What’s going on?”

He didn’t have the first clue of how to answer that question.

“Marty sent me here to save you.
Keiko’s here too.”

Tammy was trying to stay calm but she was struggling to hold back her tears.

“I heard them talking about my brother. Why would they want to hurt him?”

These were things that Ken did not want to get into. He finished untying her from the chair and then helped her up.

“Right now we just need to get out of here,” Ken said.

Tammy reached for the blindfold as Ken led her out into the living room.

“You might want to leave that on,” Ken said.

She shook her head as she pulled at it.

“No, no way.”

She got it off and then stopped as she saw the state of the room. She gagged and for a moment Ken thought she was going to vomit. Tammy’s eyes were wide in horror as she slowly looked around. She saw Keiko and cried out seeing how much blood was on her.

“Are you hurt?”

Keiko just shook her head.

“What is all of this? What’s happened here?” Tammy asked hysterically.

Ken had her by the arm and urged her towards the back door. As they passed Keiko he grabbed her arm and led her as well.

“Just try to calm down. You’re safe now, that’s all that matters,” Ken said.

He ushered them out the back door and into the darkness beyond.

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A cool blast of night air washed over Marty and Blake as they emerged onto the roof. There was a tall antennae array in the middle of the roof and beyond that Sloan was perched near the edge, already in the middle of casting his spell. The black sphere was floating above him, about the size of a bus.

Marty wasted no time. He rushed around the antennae and as soon as he had a clear shot he began forming a fireball in his hand. He launched it, hitting Sloan in the back. The man didn't even flinch. Marty concentrated hard as he formed another, making this one bigger than the first. He let it fly and again Sloan barely registered the impact.

“Marty!” Blake shouted.

Turning around he saw that Blake was approaching the man in the wheelchair. The man was focused completely on Sloan. Just like Blake had speculated, it seemed that his only job was to continually cast a shield around Sloan. The black sphere was bigger

now, the size of a small building, and it was slowly floating outwards in the direction of Olympia.

“We need to bring down the shield,” Marty said.

Blake smiled and raised his hand.

“Leave it to me.”

He began casting a stream of ice at the man in the wheelchair. The man shuddered as the ice hit him. Blake moved it slowly, freezing the man’s arm to his chair.

“Let’s see how long he stays loyal and keeps the shield on his boss instead of using it to save himself.”

Marty didn’t like seeing anyone get tortured but with Sloan less than a minute

away from destroying the city he saw no other options. His stomach turned as he watched Blake slowly freeze the man to death. Finally, as the ice moved up the man's neck towards his face, a shield appeared around him. Blake didn't stop casting his spell. Even though he now couldn't directly hit the man, he could still cast ice around him. He poured tons of energy into the spell, quickly freezing the man in a prison of ice. The man was still alive inside, protected by his shield, but now if he stopped casting it and tried to again help Sloan with it he'd be crushed to death immediately.

“Now, Marty! Hit Sloan!” Blake yelled.

Turning back to Sloan, Marty again formed a fireball. He concentrated on it hard, getting it as big as a beach ball before releasing it. At the last second Sloan turned towards him. His enormous black sphere disappeared from the sky as the fireball hit him right in the chest. It caused him to take a step back, but beyond that it did no damage.

“Impossible,” Marty said.

Blake fired a stream of ice but it too had no effect on Sloan. The man stood and regarded them coldly.

“Do you really think I’d leave my safety in the hands of a cripple? Do you really think that I only know one spell?”

Marty and Blake looked at one another as they realized what this meant. All along the man had a shield spell of his own as backup. Marty was glad that at least Sloan had been forced to stop casting his destructive spell in order to shield himself, but he wasn't going to be satisfied just delaying the madman. A rage overcame Marty and he raised his hand and yelled.

“Thermos!”

A huge jet of fire shot out from his hand at Sloan. The man stood tall, a smile on his face, as it hit him.

“It's no use, Marty! You've lost!”

Marty concentrated harder, doubling the power of his spell. Even with that much fire

hitting him Sloan looked completely unfazed.

Blake joined in, shooting out a stream of ice at Sloan. The man looked from the ice to the fire and let out a long, menacing laugh.

“Even combined your spells aren’t enough to break through my shield!”

The ice spell grew in size as Blake poured all of his remaining strength into it. Sloan stood completely still. He was concentrating hard to keep them at bay but looked like he could keep it up for hours. Meanwhile both Marty and Blake felt like they were about to drop after everything

they had been through over the course of the day.

“My men are on their way up here. They will put a bullet in the backs of your heads and then I will destroy Olympia!”

His taunting had no effect on them. Each continued to give all they had to their spells, pouring them on endlessly. Again, Sloan let out a laugh.

“Your two spells will never overpower me.”

Marty slowly raised his other hand and pointed it at Sloan.

“Let’s try three then,” Marty said through clenched teeth.

Sloan shook his head and scoffed.

“Multi-casting is impossible you fool.”

Marty ignored him. While maintaining a focus on his fire spell he also called two more symbols into his mind. They wouldn't fully stick at first, and he fought to get them to lock into focus.

“You're nothing but a child, I will...”

Sloan's words trailed off as a tiny blue arc of lightning shot up from Marty's other hand. It faltered, but after a moment his hand was enveloped in electricity.

“Impossible!” Sloan screamed.

Marty focused and a continuous bolt of electricity shot out. Sweat was pouring down his face as he fought to maintain both spells. Fire continued to pour from his right

hand while the electricity now came from his left. With Blake still hitting him with the ice it appeared that Sloan was now struggling to keep the shield intact.

“No! No one can cast two spells at once!”

Sloan dropped down to one knee. He was trembling under the power of the three spells. Marty could feel his grip on the symbols in his mind slipping. He summoned up everything within himself and focused it on keeping both spells going. Every bit of his energy, power, courage, and heart. Everything he had.

“No!” Sloan screamed. “NO!”

Marty was on the verge of collapsing. He knew he only had a few more seconds in him and so he pushed out the last of his energy, trying to give the spells one final boost.

“NOOOOOOOO!” Sloan wailed.

In a flash of brilliant white light, his shield collapsed. Sloan was thrown backwards. He tumbled awkwardly across the roof and went over the side. At the last moment he reached up and grabbed the edge, barely hanging on, the ground some 400 feet below. Marty dropped to the ground, so drained that he was unable to stand. He landed on his stomach. As he

fought to remain conscious he could see Sloan's fingertips gripping the edge.

Blake was on his hands and knees, breathing heavily. He swept his sweat soaked hair out of his face and slowly got to his feet. He swayed at first but soon had his balance. He walked slowly over to the edge of the roof where Sloan was hanging. Blake smiled down at the man.

“Who's the pissant now?” Blake asked.

“Blake! Help me up!”

Blake laughed.

“Now why exactly would I want to do that?”

“You wanted power, you wanted to be moved up in my organization. You've got

it. We'll work hand in hand from now on!" Sloan pleaded.

Blake crouched down. Sloan's eyes were wide and he was kicking his legs.

"Think of the things you could do with my resources," Sloan said.

"That's all I've thought about since the first day I met you. The things I could do with your resources."

"No! Not alone! You need me!" Sloan yelled angrily.

"You're a dinosaur, Sloan. All of your money, all of your power, and your master plan is to blow up a city? Pathetic."

After remaining crouched for another moment, Blake stood back up.

“You’ll fail without me! You’ll wind up dead!” Sloan shouted.

Blake smiled.

“I guess that’s a risk I’m just going to have to take.”

He raised his foot high and stomped down hard on one of Sloan’s hands. Sloan cried out and jerked it away, now dangling by just one hand.

Marty couldn’t hear everything that was being said between the two of them but he had been watching. Even the thought of moving made him want to pass out but he couldn’t just sit by and let Blake murder Sloan. His arms trembled beneath him as he

pushed himself up off the ground and onto his hands and knees.

“Please, Blake!” Sloan cried. “I’ll do anything you want. I’ll give you everything.”

This time Blake didn’t smile. His face was cold and emotionless as he looked down at Sloan.

“One should die proudly when it is no longer possible to live proudly,” Blake said. “You proved yourself unworthy in life. At least shut up and face death with dignity.”

Marty was on his feet and running towards Blake. He watched as Blake raised his foot again.

“No!” Marty yelled.

Blake ignored him. He stomped as hard as he could on Sloan's hand, causing the man to let go of the edge and drop.

Marty eliminated all thought and logic from his mind. He would not allow Blake to murder Sloan, that was all he knew. He ran past Blake and dove headfirst off the side of the building. The cold air whipped at him violently as he rocketed downward. The 400 feet was going by in a hurry, the ground continually getting closer and closer. Marty stretched out, trying to grab onto Sloan. The man wasn't far below him, just a few feet, the ground and death was just seconds away. Marty reached as far as he could, grabbing a handful of the back of Sloan's shirt. He

hoped it would be enough as he called the symbols into his mind. As the ground was just milliseconds away Marty closed his eyes and spoke the word silently in his mind.

Phainomai.

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. He still had a handful of the back of Sloan's shirt and he peeked one eye open. They were lying in the grass in the middle of the wooded area at the base of the hill. The spell had worked.

Sloan began to move and Marty released his grip on the man's shirt. Slowly, Sloan

sat up. He looked around and then noticed Marty lying there. He stared at Marty for a long time, an unreadable expression on his face.

“You saved me.”

His tone was completely neutral. He sat and continued to stare, his face a mask.

“You saved my life.”

Marty didn't respond. He wasn't even sure if he could. Breathing was using up every last bit of energy he had.

“You leapt off the building and saved me.”

This time Sloan smiled. He slowly got to his feet and started to chuckle.

“You foolish, infant. You saved my life.”

“It’s over, Sloan. It’s over,” Marty croaked.

The man stopped laughing. He shook his head and took a step away.

“It’s far from over,” he said. “Thanks to you it’s anything but over.”

Marty hadn’t exactly expected a pat on the back but he was hoping for some sort of peaceful resolution out of Sloan. Instead the man was staring down at him with a frightening twinkle in his eye.

“Look at you. You had me kid. You burned yourself out to do it, but you had me.

And then you use the last of your energy to save my life.”

Sloan laughed again as he said it. He shook his head and then stepped back.

“You,” he said, pointing at Marty, “saved me,” he finished, pointing at himself.

He started climbing the grassy hill up towards the road.

“Sloan! It’s over!” Marty yelled.

After he reached the top of the hill, Sloan turned back around.

“You’re right about that. It is over,” he paused and held out his hand. “For you!”

A black sphere appeared above his outstretched palm. Marty couldn’t believe it. After everything that had happened, this

man was still about to kill him. Marty knew he couldn't cast any spells. He could barely even bring himself to move. A sick smile was on Sloan's face as the sphere grew.

Marty's eyes fell upon a rock. It was just a foot away from him and something about it looked off, like it wasn't resting fully on the ground. He stared at it for a moment before Ken's words from the other day popped into his mind.

“There's a rock there, it was right by us when we teleported in. Next time you use the spell look under it. I bought some supplies that could come in handy and buried them under the rock.”

He had spent some of his money on the supplies and placed them there. Marty reached out. Just moving his arm was difficult. He pushed at the rock and it rolled off the top of a small red bag that was underneath. Marty worked the zipper open. He glanced up at Sloan and saw that the sphere was getting bigger. He knew that it didn't need to be much bigger than that to completely obliterate him, so he returned his attention to the bag.

Reaching inside, Marty felt a flashlight, some matches, a phone, a syringe, and finally, what felt like a gun. He pulled it out and saw that it was a flare gun.

Marty's arm shook badly as he raised the gun up and aimed it at Sloan. He knew it wasn't going to do much, but hoped it would interrupt the spell and buy him a little more time. Marty squeezed the trigger. The red flare shot up the hill and hit Sloan directly in the chest. The man stumbled backwards into the road, directly in front of an 18 wheeler that was speeding down the road. It didn't even have a chance to hit the brakes before it slammed into him. Marty cringed and the flare gun dropped from his hand. The truck's brakes squealed to life a moment too late as the driver realized what had just happened.

Marty hadn't wanted to kill Sloan. Part of him wanted to hope that the man would be okay but he knew that the impact killed him. The truck had been going at least 70 miles per hour. A numbness had begun to spread through him and just moments before it hit Marty realized he was about to have a seizure. He plunged his hand back into the bag and grabbed the syringe. He pulled the cap off just as the convulsions hit him. He plunged it into his arm, praying that it was some sort of anti-seizure drug like lorazepam. Within seconds the seizure stopped and Marty let out a long breath. Looking over at the bag he realized just how good of a friend Ken was.

He knew he needed to get up and get home, but Marty was too drained to even consider it. Too exhausted to even sleep, he just lay in the cold grass, happy to be alive.

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One Week Later

“That’s the last of it Mr. Schultz.”

Marty turned towards the towering man and nodded.

“Thanks Kurt,” he said.

The man handed him a sheet of paper and Marty signed it. The man took it back and then held out his hand.

“If you have any friends or family moving please be sure to refer them to our moving service.”

Marty shook his hand.

“Of course.”

The man left and Marty turned back around to admire their new apartment. Ken came rushing out of his room, a big smile on his face.

“This place is awesome!”

Marty took the whole place in. It was a massive loft apartment with three bedrooms. Marty was taking the master bedroom, Ken took the second largest room and the third remained vacant. The loft itself overlooked the living room area and they had turned it

into a sort of library and computer room. Marty had used some of the leftover money from Sloan to pay two years worth of rent on the place and to furnish it. He smiled and nodded.

“It is awesome.”

He turned towards his friend and held out his hand. Ken still had a bandage on his face. He looked down at Marty’s outstretched hand and shook his head. Instead he pulled Marty into a hug. Marty laughed and patted Ken on the back.

“Thank you Ken.”

Ken released him from the hug and patted him on the back hard. Looking at his face, Marty realized that Ken’s nose had a

slight crook in it now, a result of it being broken. His lip was busted open badly and would always have a scar on it. Over Ken's shoulder, Marty saw Keiko as she emerged from the restroom. The distant look in her eyes was a reminder to Marty that in one way or another they had all been scarred over the past few weeks.

“The bathroom is fully stocked. Toilet paper, soap, toothpaste, everything you guys need,” Keiko said.

“Thanks sis,” Ken said with a smile.

She nodded but didn't return his smile. They all went to the kitchen.

“How's Tammy?” Keiko asked.

Marty leaned on the counter as he answered.

“Okay, I guess. She called me this morning to tell me her plane landed safely and she’s back home in Florida. She’s still shaken up over everything that happened.”

“You’re going to have to talk to her sometime. The things she heard, the things she saw....” Keiko trailed off for a moment.

“Reach out to her, Marty. I don’t know what you should tell her, but tell her something. She deserves that much.”

He thought about it for a moment before nodding.

“You’re right. I will.”

Keiko turned and walked down the hallway. Marty looked at Ken.

“Has she said anything else about what happened that night in the house?”

Ken shook his head.

“Not a word. Whatever it was, it’s changed her.”

Marty had noticed this too. There was a constant sense of gloom and darkness with her now. Whatever she had seen, or done, that night was haunting her.

Keiko came walking back into the kitchen. In her hands was a scroll and as she set it on the counter Marty realized what it was. It was the healing scroll.

“It’s time, Marty,” she said softly.

He tensed up as he looked down at it. He used the move into the new apartment as an excuse to delay casting the spell, but now that they had moved he couldn't think of a good reason not to use it and heal himself. The thought of it caused his breathing to go ragged. Cancer free, no longer living with a bomb inside his head, slowly killing him. It sounded amazing but for some reason he felt frozen in place and couldn't bring himself to pick it up.

Keiko reached over and rubbed his back. Her touch calmed him.

“I know you're nervous, but just think about it Marty. You'll have your life back. For good this time,” she said.

He nodded, glad to have her there with him. He slowly reached out towards the scroll. Just as his fingers touched it they heard the front door open.

“Wait.”

They turned to see Blake standing there.

“You’ve got some nerve showing up here,” Ken said as he stepped forward.

Blake ignored him.

“Don’t cast the spell yet, Marty.”

He was holding a large manila folder in his hand. Marty eyed him suspiciously.

“Why not?”

“Because if you heal yourself then you lose most of your spells, maybe all of them.”

Keiko stepped in front of Marty.

“So what? He did his part, he doesn’t need those spells any more.”

Blake pulled a picture out of the folder and held it up. It was a pile of dead bodies.

“Because a man ten times worse than Sloan is killing hundreds of thousands of innocent people every year,” Blake said.

Ken laughed loudly.

“You’ve got to be kidding me.”

Blake ignored him and took a step towards Marty. He pulled out another picture, this one showing a village on fire.

“It’s a 500 square mile region that runs along the Croatia Bosnia border. It’s a lawless zone, ruled by this man,” he paused

as he pulled out another picture. “Nikola Petar.”

The man looked exactly as Marty thought a Croatian warlord would. His face was scarred and hardened.

“The locals call the area Prostor Smrt. The region of death. And Petar uses a group of Europeans with spells to make sure the region earns its name. This guy makes Sloan look like a boyscout.”

Ken looked over at Marty.

“You’re not seriously considering this, are you?”

Marty was focused on Blake and didn’t answer.

“Why would I trust you? You expect me to believe that you’re suddenly interested in saving innocent people on the other side of the world?” Marty asked.

Blake shook his head.

“Of course not.”

“Then what’s in it for you?” Marty asked.

“Nikola has a vast collection of treasures. He has an item I need. I’ll help you stop his massacre of the innocent people over there, you help me get the item I want. No lies this time, no false pretenses, just a mutually beneficial partnership.”

Keiko shook her head angrily and pointed at Blake.

“You have no right to be here! Marty did his part, he saved those people in Olympia with his powers. Now it’s time for him to be healed and have some peace in his life.”

Blake spread his arms.

“He saved one hundred thousand innocent people. This is his chance to save one million.”

He took another step forward as he continued.

“I’m not telling you not to use the scroll, I’m just telling not to use it yet. Do this one last thing, make the most out of this gift you’ve been given. How many people can

say they've directly saved the lives of one million people?"

"No," Keiko said angrily. "Use the scroll Marty, use it right now. Don't go waste any more of your life chasing bad guys with this snake."

"Winter break starts in two weeks," Blake said. "We go then. Two weeks overseas and then we're back in time for the new semester. One month from now you'll use that scroll and cure yourself, knowing that you've saved over a million people from death at the hands of madmen."

Marty looked at the scroll on the counter, then back to Blake.

"No way, Marty," Ken said.

“Just give me five minutes to show you all of this information. If you still don’t want to go with me after seeing all of the atrocities that Nikola is committing over there then that’s fine, I’ll leave.”

Keiko turned around towards Marty, her eyes filling with tears.

“I don’t trust him Marty. There’s no guarantee that you’ll come back alive if you do this.”

Marty looked back at the scroll on the counter. Blake was right, once he used it his powers would be all but gone. He might still have his teleportation spell, but beyond that his ability to help anyone in this world

would be gone. Finally he looked back to
Blake.

“Okay, you’ve got five minutes.”

END OF SEASON ONE

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