

Blake spit out blood, aiming to make sure it landed on Sloan's shoe. The man frowned and shook his head.

“There's no reason this has to be an uncivilized conversation,” Sloan said.

Blake smiled at him. He was tied to a chair in a corner of Sloan's third story office, his hands bound behind the back of the chair. His teeth were red with blood.

“Of course not,” Blake said.

After regarding Blake for a moment Sloan motioned to Rain Man.

“Take a break.”

Rain Man was enjoying beating up on Blake but obeyed his boss and left the room.

“See? This isn’t so unpleasant now, is it?” Sloan asked as he sat down in a chair across from Blake.

“Why are you doing this to me?” Blake asked.

Sloan smiled.

“You know why. Marty Schultz.”

“What about him?”

The smile faded from Sloan’s face.

“Somehow, young Mr. Schultz learned of my plan to destroy the abandoned factory yesterday. He showed up and tried to stop me. Clearly someone in my employ tipped him off.”

“And you just assumed that it was me?”

“I never assume. I fact find,” Sloan said, pausing to allow a sinister smile to spread across his lips. “That’s what we’re doing here. Fact finding.”

“I didn’t tell Marty anything about the factory.”

“So you say,” Sloan replied quickly.

Blake tried to struggle against his restraints. His legs were tied to the front legs of the chair and with his hands bound together behind its back he was completely immobilized. Realizing that escaping wasn’t much of an option he instead tried to talk his way out.

“I barely know Marty Schultz. I met him that one night I brought him to you. That’s it.”

Sloan sat back, unconvinced.

“And yet you helped him escape here.”

“It had nothing to do with him. You had your people open up on me! I was just trying to save myself and he happened to get out alongside me,” Blake argued.

“Hmm. How convenient.”

Blake knew his window to get out of this was closing fast and that his current tactic wasn’t working.

“I’ve been a good part of your group here, haven’t I? You know that I want to move up and play a bigger role in running

things. Why would I jeopardize that by helping your enemies?” Blake asked.

“Don’t flatter yourself kid. You’re a pissant, at best.”

After a moment of tense silence Blake spoke again.

“What can I do to prove that I wasn’t the one who told Marty about the factory?”

“Tell me where he is,” Sloan answered quickly. “I want to find him and end him.”

Blake thought about this request. He could tell Sloan where Marty was staying but didn’t see what that would accomplish. He knew he couldn’t beat Sloan without Marty’s help, so turning him over would mean an end to the whole plan. As Blake

stared at the smug look on Sloan's face his desire to take him down burned hotter than ever. No, he wasn't going to reveal Marty's location. Blake decided to take whatever punishment he had to in order to insure that he could continue with his plan to end Sloan.

“Like I said, I only met him that one night. I have no idea where he is.”

Sloan clicked his tongue.

“I find your answer disappointing.”

After staring at Blake for a moment he spoke again.

“Are you certain you don't have anything more to say to me?”

“Sorry I couldn’t be of more assistance to you, boss,” Blake answered sarcastically.

Sloan stood up and walked across the room. Blake lost sight of him and for a minute he was alone. He again tried to struggle against the chair but knew it was going to get him nowhere. Rain Man came walking up, a wicked smile on his face.

“I’m gonna enjoy this,” the man said.

An idea occurred to Blake and he started casting his ice spell. With his hands bound behind the back of the chair he couldn’t aim the spell and it shot straight down at the floor. Rain Man paused in front of him.

“How cute,” he said.

The overweight man wiped sweat from his balding head and flicked it into Blake's face. He then cracked his knuckles. Blake closed his eyes and focused all of his energy into his spell. The first hit was to his stomach and the next two were to his face. It took all of his concentration not to cry out in pain. He instead focused it into his spell, pouring a huge stream of ice onto the floor.

Rain Man paused. He was growing irritated that Blake wasn't reacting to his blows.

“I want to hear you scream,” he said.

Blake opened his eyes long enough to reply.

“Go to hell.”

This renewed Rain Man's anger and he came at Blake even harder now. He punched him in the stomach twice, then in the face three times. Blake's ice spell faltered but he was able to keep it going. Rain Man was breathing hard now as he stood before his bloodied victim. Blake's lip was busted and swollen, blood was running from his nose and his right eye was swelling shut. But he still hadn't cried out. Rain Man looked down at the patch of ice that continued to spread across the floor.

“What, do you think I'm going to slip or something?”

Blake opened his good eye and smiled.

“You hit like a girl,” he taunted.

Rain Man's face turned red and he pulled his fist back. He stepped forward and delivered a punishing blow directly to Blake's face. The chair rocked backwards from the impact. It teetered for a moment before tipping all the way and falling towards the floor. When it hit the frozen floor it broke through it. Rain Man watched as Blake disappeared through the floor as it shattered like the top of a frozen lake.

The break in the floor was expanding and Rain Man jumped back to avoid falling in. Once he was certain he was on solid, unfrozen floor he crept to the edge and looked down. Below, on the second floor, he could see the chair Blake had been tied

to. It had broken into pieces upon impact and Blake was nowhere to be seen.



Created and Written by A.C. Hall

EPISODE SEVEN  
αντεπίθεση  
(COUNTERATTACK)

Marty stared down at the array of spells on his bed. He had taken all of the scroll information he had from his web comic and printed it out. He was thinking of trying to

learn another spell but was unsure of how to choose one, afraid that if he did the wrong one it could have disastrous results. Still, Marty had a smile on his face and was having a good evening.

With the big game tomorrow most of the Beta Theta Pi house was quiet. Many of the members of the fraternity were football players and they had a strict no partying policy the night before a game. Most of them were downstairs playing video games.

Ken was spending the evening reading comics on his bed and Marty had busied himself gathering spell information. He chose one and picked it up. He remembered the comic he had used it in. The wizard

Jean Marco had used it to gain the ability to breathe underwater. Marty rolled the computer chair from underneath the desk into the middle of the room. He then held up his hand and aimed at it.

“Make it disappear,” Ken suggested.

Marty held the spell information up and studied it. He let his eyes rest on the runes, taking them in and memorizing them. Finally he lowered it and focused hard, recalling them in his mind. He then spoke the word.

“Bronte.”

A flash of lightning shot from his hand and hit the chair. Marty quickly ceased casting.

“Whoa!” Ken shouted.

He laid his comic book down and sat up.  
He was smiling.

“Do it again but this time say ‘And now young Skywalker, you will die’, while you cast!” Ken said.

Marty smiled but before he could respond there was a knock on the door. The two of them exchanged a nervous look.

“Sloan doesn’t know where you live does he?” Ken asked.

After a moment of thinking about it Marty shrugged.

“I don’t know. I don’t think so.”

Ken looked back at the door. He cleared his throat and then called out in a deep voice.

“Who is it?”

“It’s Annabel.”

Ken exhaled heavily, a look of relief coming over him. Marty stood up and walked over to the door. He pulled it open and smiled as he saw Annabel standing there. Her hair was pulled back in a ponytail and she was wearing a black long sleeve sweater and a pair of faded, frayed jeans with a patch on the knee.

“Hi,” Marty said.

She smiled.

“Hi.”

Marty stepped aside and pulled the door all the way open.

“Come in.”

She stepped into the room and waved when she saw Ken.

“Hi Annabel,” Ken said.

Marty closed the door and then turned to face Annabel.

“Do you want to have a seat?” he asked.

She shook her head.

“No, I actually have a lot of homework to finish. I was on my way home from work and wanted to bring you this.”

She reached into her bag and pulled out a scroll.

“I didn’t recognize the guy who traded it in, I think it was his first time in the store.”

Marty took it from her.

“Thanks,” he said.

He set the scroll on the bed and then started digging through his duffel bag.

“Let me just get the money to pay you back.”

“Oh don’t worry about that. He bought some other stuff so I just did the whole transaction in trade,” she paused and smiled slightly. “Off the books.”

Marty stood back up. He couldn’t help but smile back as he saw the small mischievous grin on her face.

“Okay. Thanks.”

Annabel turned towards Ken and reached back into her bag.

“I also got something for you.”

He sat up and smiled.

“Yeah?”

She pulled out a comic book and handed it to him. It was a volume of *Lovely Complex*, one of the comics Marty had seen hidden under his mattress.

“It’s a little girly looking, I don’t know if it’s something you’d be into, but it was the only comic traded in today,” Annabel said.

“Oh, yeah, I might give it a read or something,” Ken said, trying and failing to hide his excitement.

Annabel looked over her shoulder at Marty and the two shared a knowing smile. They stared at each other for a moment, grinning, until finally she spoke.

“I guess I should get going.”

“Okay,” Marty said.

He realized that he was still smiling and tried to make himself stop. He walked with her to the door and pulled it open.

“Thanks again for bringing this stuff over,” Marty said.

“Yeah, of course,” she answered as she stepped out into the hall.

Annabel paused and turned back towards him.

“I’m looking forward to the game tomorrow,” she said.

Marty smiled and nodded.

“Me too.”

After a pause he spoke again.

“BSU football rules!” he yelled with mock enthusiasm.

A voice from inside one of the other rooms boomed out.

“BSU is number one! WHOOO!”

Marty and Annabel laughed. She waved.

“Goodnight, Marty.”

“Goodnight.”

He watched her walk away and then closed the door. When he turned around Ken was looking at him, smiling goofily.

“Don’t give me that look,” Marty said.

“If you can wipe that stupid smile off of your face right this second then I’ll stop giving you this look.”

Marty realized that Ken was right, he was still smiling. He tried but couldn’t get it to leave right away. After everything that had been going on in his life, being around Annabel was so calming to him. She made him feel normal. Realizing that Ken was still staring at him Marty kicked his bed.

“Okay, whatever. Just read your girly comic book.”

Ken pretended to look hurt but soon turned his attention to the new comic.

“I’ve been looking for this volume forever,” he paused as he flipped it open. “Annabel’s a keeper. Don’t screw things up with her.”

“Yeah yeah,” Marty said.

He moved back to his bed and unrolled the scroll Annabel had brought him. He was studying it, wondering what it might do.

“Are you going to cast it?” Ken asked.

“First I’ll have to translate the Greek word. I’ll probably wait until...”

Marty paused suddenly as there was another knock on their door. Ken sat up and looked around.

“Did Annabel leave something?” he asked.

After a quick scan of the room they realized that she hadn't. Ken looked back at the door. He cleared his throat and then called out in a deep voice.

“Who is it?”

“Keiko.”

Ken looked quickly over at Marty.

“Do you think she saw Annabel?” Ken asked.

Marty ran his hand through his hair. He didn't know why but he was suddenly very nervous.

“It's possible.”

He took a deep breath and then opened the door. Keiko looked up at him but he couldn't read her expression.

“Hey,” Marty said.

“Mind if I come in?”

“Of course not,” Marty said, stepping aside.

Keiko walked in and Marty closed the door behind her.

“So, how was Annabel doing?” she asked casually.

Marty swallowed hard, his nervousness growing. Ken had told him about his and Keiko's trip to The Seasoned Reader the day before. Still, Marty hadn't expected to have to discuss Annabel with Keiko. He cleared

his throat as he sat down on his bed. Keiko sat down in the computer chair and turned it to face him.

“She was, fine,” Marty answered hesitantly.

“She’s really pretty,” Keiko said.

Marty had no idea how to respond to that. He looked past Keiko at Ken, but he was sitting there shaking his head and shrugging.

“Don’t you think?” Keiko asked.

There was a slight edge to her tone.

“I guess,” Marty answered finally.

He noticed that she looked down the floor as soon as he answered. After a moment of tense silence she spoke again.

“You like her.”

Marty wasn't sure if she was asking a question or making a statement. He again looked past her to Ken, desperate for some help.

“Annabel was bringing Marty a new scroll from the store,” Ken said loudly.

“Oh?” Keiko asked. “Are you going to use it in The Wizard's Quest?”

This is another thing that Ken had warned him about. Marty had never wanted Keiko to learn about the comic but he was starting to discover that the things he wanted to keep secret had a way of coming out into the open.

“I don’t know. I haven’t made a new one in a while.”

Keiko nodded.

“I noticed that. I read all of them last night.”

“Oh?” Marty asked, nervous about where this conversation was heading.

“It’s good. Eye opening, even,” Keiko said.

“You know another comic that’s good?” Ken asked, trying to rescue his friend.

“Batman. That guy’s just crazy for justice, am I right?”

Keiko ignored him.

“I especially like Jean Marco’s feelings on leaving his wife behind in the virus

ravaged town. It's heartbreaking," Keiko said, staring hard at Marty.

He struggled to find the right words.

"Leaving someone you love is hard," Marty said finally.

She shifted in her chair and swallowed before responding.

"Yeah? Jean Marco didn't tell her that, did he?"

She paused and took a deep breath.

"He just left."

Marty was having trouble breathing. He hadn't expected the conversation to take this turn and was fighting hard to figure out how to respond. He stared at Keiko. He hated to see her upset. Still not certain what to say

he went with the safest thing that came to mind.

“It’s supposed to be anonymous. I didn’t want people to know I was the one creating it.”

She laughed bitterly as she wiped her eyes.

“That’s comforting, Marty.”

He sighed as he realized his comment had just made her feel worse.

“Listen, I just...”

Keiko stood up suddenly and held up her hand.

“Maybe this isn’t the best night for this conversation,” she said. “Tomorrow’s a big day for Brian.”

Marty hadn't thought about her boyfriend until this moment.

“Right. Brian.”

“It's his first game as the starting quarterback,” Keiko said as she stepped towards the door.

Even though it hadn't helped him yet Marty again looked over at Ken. Ken just shook his head. Keiko opened the door but paused.

“Have a good time with Annabel tomorrow,” she said.

She stepped out into the hall but then turned back around.

“Are your tickets good?”

Marty shook his head.

“I don’t know. They’re decent I guess, I’ve never been to the stadium.”

“Brian gets a lot of extras since he’s the quarterback. Give your current tickets away, I’ll have some reserved for you at will call.”

“Um, thanks?” Marty said, completely confused.

Keiko turned and walked away. Marty just sat and stared out into the empty hallway. He felt like he had just been beaten up.

“Oh man, that was brutal,” Ken said with a chuckle.

Marty couldn’t bring himself to laugh. He lay on the bed, wondering if it was

possible for his life to get any more complicated.

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Tammy sat alone in the campus Laundromat, waiting impatiently for her clothes to finish drying. She hadn't packed much when she made the trip out to confront her brother and had quickly run out of clean clothes to wear. With most of the students on campus either at pre-game parties or already home resting up for the big game, the Laundromat had remained empty and she had only seen one person walk by outside.

After checking her clothes and finding them still damp, Tammy wandered outside. The cool night air felt good after the stuffy atmosphere of the Laundromat. She stretched, then leaned against a nearby rail. She noticed a figure walking down the sidewalk and watched closely as they approached. They wore a black hoodie and had the hood pulled up. It was dark but as they passed Tammy thought she recognized them.

“Blake?”

Blake waved meekly but kept walking. Tammy jogged a few steps to catch up with him.

“Did you hear anything about the cure yet?” Tammy asked.

“We’re working on it.”

He picked up his pace a little but Tammy didn’t even notice.

“Good. I’m so excited for Marty. He’s such a special person,” Tammy said.

Blake let out a bitter laugh but Tammy didn’t pick up on it. There wasn’t anyone for her to talk to about her brother and it felt good talking to Blake about it.

“People underestimate Marty, but he’s so strong. He’s always been that way. There’s something there, beneath the surface, that makes him one of the strongest people I’ve ever known.”

Blake again picked up his pace.

“Listen, I was just heading home,” Blake said.

“Oh it’s okay, my last load is taking forever to dry,” Tammy said.

They walked in silence for a moment before she spoke again.

“Things didn’t look good the first time Marty was sick, but he fought through it. The doctors were amazed at his will power and endurance through all of the treatments. That’s one reason I encourage him to fight this time. He’s stronger than any disease.”

Even though he was fighting it Blake found himself getting dangerously close to losing his temper. He was sick and tired of

hearing about how great Marty Schultz was. He had just gotten the hell beat out of him protecting Marty's whereabouts and was far from being in the mood to listen to someone drone on and on about how great the guy was.

“And it says a lot about his character when you see how Keiko is around him. Even though he hurt her so badly she still cares for him.”

He couldn't take any more. Even though he wouldn't admit it to himself, Blake was jealous of Marty. Not only did he possess one of kind powers, but he was surrounded by people who cared about him. He was lucky and didn't even know it. Blake spent

a lot of time thinking about what he would do with Marty's abilities and how much better he could utilize them.

“Another thing that impresses me about him...”

“I have to go,” Blake said sharply, interrupting.

He jogged away quickly. Tammy stopped, confused.

“Is everything okay?” she asked.

Blake turned back around just as he passed under a streetlight. For the first time Tammy got a clear look at his face. He looked like he had been on the losing end of a brutal boxing match. One of his eyes was

swollen shut and the other was blackened heavily.

“I just want to get home,” Blake said.

“Blake, what happened?” Tammy called out. “Who did this to you?”

He ran faster now, either not hearing her or not caring to answer.

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The atmosphere was electric in the football stadium. The first game of the season was a big deal at Barker State University and they were always sold out. The contest was well into the second quarter now but Marty had no clue what the score was. This was partially because he didn't

really care and was instead just enjoying Annabel's company. It was also partially because the tickets Keiko had gotten them were as high and far away from the field as possible. Marty wasn't even sure which team currently had the ball.

“Are you having a good time?” Marty asked.

He had been afraid Annabel was going to be let down by the bad seats but she hadn't mentioned it and seemed to be enjoying herself.

“Of course. That one team keeps running the one way, and the other runs the other way, and I think they may've even

kicked the ball too, I couldn't really tell," she answered with a smile.

Marty sat back and covered his face with his hands.

"Oh I know, these seats are so terrible," he groaned.

She punched him in the arm.

"I'm just messing with you. The seats are fine."

He peeked out from behind his hands.

"Seriously?"

"Of course. Although you did make them sound way more impressive when you told me about them," she laughed.

Marty tried to smile but was a little upset about the situation.

“Yeah, their quality was oversold to me too.”

He had been doing a good job of not thinking about Keiko and what she had done by getting them such bad seats but now that they were on the subject his mood darkened. He knew that things were complicated between them but didn't feel like she had the right to be jealous of Annabel. Marty squinted down at the field, trying to find Brian, Keiko's boyfriend. He didn't know much about their relationship but it was serious enough that she had transferred to a school all the way across the country for the guy.

Annabel punched him in the arm again, pulling him out of his thoughts.

“You okay?”

He looked over at her and nodded.

“Yeah.”

Annabel looped her arm through his and slid closer to him.

“Good. Because I’m having fun being here with you,” she said.

Marty smiled. He liked the feeling of having her near him.

“Me too.”

They sat like that for many minutes. As the game continued on the fans cheered and then they booed and then they cheered again, but Marty and Annabel barely

noticed. His usually troubled mind was completely at peace. He felt as happy and as normal as he had in the past several weeks. It was like he could finally breathe again.

And then he saw Blake coming up the stairs towards them.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” Marty said.

“What is it?” Annabel asked.

“A guy I know.”

“A friend?”

“Someone I don’t want to talk to today,” Marty answered.

He slouched down in his seat but it was too late, Blake had already spotted him. It took him just a few moments to reach them.

“Whatever you have to tell me can wait until tomorrow,” Marty said.

For the first time he looked fully at Blake’s face and saw how bad it looked. Marty’s mood softened.

“Who did that?”

“Who do you think?” Blake shot back. “We need to talk.”

“Is everything okay Marty?” Annabel asked.

“Now,” Blake said, motioning towards the aisle.

Marty hesitated. He didn’t want to interrupt his day with Annabel but couldn’t risk having Blake reveal too much in front of her. He turned toward her.

“Give me just a second to talk to him and then I’ll be right back.”

She nodded. Marty stood up and followed Blake back to the aisle.

“Sloan’s got his guys here looking for us,” Blake said.

Marty’s heart sank. There went his normal afternoon.

“Are you sure?”

Blake nodded and started pointing to different areas of the stadium. Marty spotted them all, Sloan’s henchmen methodically working their way around, looking for them.

“How did they know we’d be here?”  
Marty asked.

“It’s the first game. Everyone goes to the first game.”

Marty looked back at Annabel, then back at the thugs who were inching closer to their section.

“We need to get out of here,” Blake said.

“I can’t just leave Annabel here alone.”

The first half of the game ended and fans began shuffling down the aisles to go get concessions and use the restrooms. Marty and Blake had to step further out of the way as they continued to talk.

“If you take her with you and get spotted her life will be in danger,” Blake said.

One thing Marty had come to hate was when Blake actually had a good point. He

again looked back at Annabel. She was staring at him and looked to be growing a bit anxious. Some shrieks and howls down further towards the field grabbed his attention and Marty turned that way.

“This is not good,” Marty said.

Stalking out onto the field was Crosby’s twenty foot tall stone golem.

“We’ve got to get out of here now!”

Blake said, pulling on Marty’s arm.

“No! We have to go confront that thing before it hurts someone,” Marty responded.

Blake stepped back and shook his head.

“That’s exactly what they want, Marty! Sloan’s trying to draw us out. We need to get the hell out of here!”

As the golem neared the center of the field people were beginning to cheer. Marty realized that they all thought it was part of the halftime festivities.

“I’m not going to let innocent people get hurt because of us,” Marty said.

“It’s not because of us, Sloan’s the one doing this.”

“He’s doing it to get at us. If we let that thing hurt people then we’re no better than he is,” Marty said.

Blake shook his head.

“You do what you want, Marty, but I’m leaving.”

“No!” Marty shouted.

Blake stopped and turned around. Marty stepped closer to him.

“Help me do this.”

After looking nervously down at the field, Blake looked back at Marty.

“Do you have a plan?”

“Yes. You start looking for Crosby. He seemed to have to go into some sort of a trance to keep the golem summoned. Find him and stop him from casting.”

“What are you going to do?” Blake asked.

Marty stared down at the field for a long moment before responding.

“Apparently I’m going to fight a golem.”

Blake nodded his understanding and then ran down the stairs. Marty turned back and quickly approached Annabel.

“What’s happening, Marty?”

He hadn’t even said the words yet but he already felt awful.

“Something’s come up. I’m really sorry but I’m going to have to take off.”

She smiled for a second but when his serious expression didn’t change the smile faded away quickly.

“You’re serious?”

“Yeah. I’m so sorry about this.”

Marty wanted to say more, wanted to help her understand, but couldn’t risk taking too much time. He turned away quickly and

rushed down the stairs. He exited underneath the stands and had to fight his way through the throngs of people as he looked for the tunnel that gave access to the field. It took him several minutes but finally he found it. A burly security guard was standing there, keeping people out. Marty tried to dart around him but the man was faster than he looked. His arm shot out and grabbed Marty by the shoulders.

“Where do you think you’re going little man?”

“I need to get onto the field,” Marty said as he tried to squirm out of the man’s massive grip.

“The only place you’re going is to the campus jail.”

“Hey! Get your hands off my friend!”

Marty exhaled heavily. Ken came running up the tunnel. The burly guard looked at him.

“You know this guy?”

Ken nodded.

“Yeah, let him go. He’s coming out on the field with me,” Ken said.

The man released Marty.

“Whatever.”

Marty and Ken moved quickly down the tunnel. He had known Ken was working security at the game but wasn’t sure in what

section. Marty reached over and patted his friend on the back.

“Thanks.”

“Anytime,” Ken answered. “So what’s the plan?”

“Blake’s looking for the guy casting the golem. While he does that I’m going to try to keep it from hurting anyone.”

Ken grabbed his arm and stopped him.

“Take this.”

Ken pulled his hooded security jacket off and tossed it to Marty.

“So no one can see that it’s you out there.”

Marty quickly pulled it on. He hadn’t even thought about keeping his identity

hidden but was thankful Ken had. He got it on and pulled the hood up, concealing his face.

“You ready for this?” Ken asked.

Marty let out a nervous sigh and then shook his head as he answered.

“Not in the slightest.”

He then ran out of the tunnel and onto the field to confront the golem.

END OF EPISODE 7

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