

Lock and Load

Part One

The driver leaned forward, squinting through the rain lashing his windshield. The wipers squealed and sloshed against the downpour but as soon as it cleared, more water sluiced down from the skies. A flash of lightning lit up the flooded road ahead.

The driver cursed, rummaging in the glove box for his map and steering one-handed through the storm. He thought he should have turned left at the last intersection, and now he was lost. Failing to find the map by touch alone, he glanced down.

The wheel wrenched out of his hands as the front axle dropped into a deep puddle, and the truck skidded.

The driver grabbed the wheel with both hands, wrestling with the heavy truck as it careered across the road.

The truck lurched into the kerb, tearing the back tyre off the rim. The driver spun the wheel but the truck continued to skid, out of control on the flooded road.

Another tyre blew out as the truck jolted over a rock, spinning the truck around. The driver threw up his arms to protect his face as the truck swerved off the road and into the trees. It skidded sideways down the wooded slope, hit a boulder and rolled, tumbling over and over before crashing down onto another road at the bottom of the hill.

The truck rolled once more, landing on its roof. The back doors burst open, shiny cylinders spilling across the wet tarmac. Inside the cab, the driver put a shaking hand to his head, his fingers coming away sticky with blood. The thunder echoed in his head as the world grew dark and echoing around him. He looked out, seeing the city lights twinkling upside down in the distance.

His last thought before he passed out was, 'I guess I found L.A. after all...'.
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Being in a gang sucked, the boy decided.

Going for a drive in this weather sucked too, the roof of the ancient convertible leaking a steady stream of water down the neck of his too-large leather jacket.

The jacket sucked as well – it was too hot to wear during a sticky, September storm and it smelled of the previous owner's sweat and stale cigarettes. But, as Jethro had pointed out, if you aren't wearing the colours, you're disrespecting the gang. And you didn't upset Jethro, because Jethro getting mad at you sucked worse than anything. The boy pulled at the jacket collar, trying to stop the rain getting in. The movement attracted the attention of the convertible's driver, something he'd been trying to avoid.

"Hey, Einstein, you having fun yet?" The driver turned to stare at him without taking his foot off the gas.

"Oh yeah, Jethro. Great." The boy forced a smile, willing Jethro to concentrate on the rain-slick roads.

"OK then." Jethro's gaze flicked back to the road and Einstein breathed a sigh of relief. He'd hoped for safety in numbers when he'd hooked up with Jethro, but Jethro frightened him almost as much as the older gangers, the proper gangers in his neighbourhood.

"Well, what do we have here?" Jethro stood on the brakes and the car squealed to a halt, the wreck of a truck lit up in the headlights. The gang crowded forwards, squashing Einstein against the door.

"You think the driver's dead?" The ganger next to Jethro opened his door, letting in the rain as he got out for a closer look.

"Most likely. Come on, let's see what we got." Jethro turned up his collar and stepped out into the rain.

Einstein followed more slowly, stepping round the puddles and walking past the spilled load to peer into the cab.

“Jethro! I think he’s still alive!” Einstein scrubbed at the cracked glass and looked in again.

“I look like I care? Get your skinny ass over here – truck’s carrying chemicals and shit.” Jethro shook his head at Einstein and turned a silver canister over with his boot.

“But Jethro! He’s hurt. We can’t just leave him here!” Einstein flinched as Jethro glared at him.

“So call 911!” He spun round, water spraying off the fringes on his jacket sleeves, “Except I don’t see no phone round here, do you?” He tipped his head back, catching a mouthful of rain. “Call ‘em when we get back, you’re so worried about some punk-ass truck driver. Idiot. Get over here and look at this.” Jethro stared at Einstein until the younger boy sighed and splashed his way to the back of the truck.

Einstein crouched next to the canister, wiping rain off the label. His lips moved as he read the formula printed there and shook his head.

“I never heard of that, Jethro. Is there anything else in there?” He rolled the canister over. “No hazard stickers, so I guess it’s not dangerous.” He watched as Jethro leaned into the truck, flicking his lighter to see inside.

“Looks like... jetpacks?” Jethro shook his head. “No idea what the hell we got here, but it looks like it’s worth money. Load her up.”

The gangers filled the trunk with three jetpacks and an armful of cylinders, piled in and drove away. Einstein twisted round to look out of the back window as they left, but there was no movement from the truck.

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Inside the truck, the driver frowned. Had he seen a pale face at the window, or was he hallucinating? He closed his eyes and slid into unconsciousness.

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Detective Kate Murphy set her coffee on her desk and picked up the folders in her in-tray. She blew on her drink and sipped as she flicked through the titles, then opened the top one. She read through the four burglary reports, the update on the gang scene in South Hollywood and the accident report on the chemical truck, crashed up in the hills. She skimmed the rest, but there was nothing new assigned to her. Nothing that sounded like Dr Zito might have been involved. She silently cursed her own paranoia and reached for her case files.

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“So what is it?” Jethro leaned against the kitchen counter and poked a finger into the mass of tubes and wiring Einstein was investigating.

“I dunno.” Einstein caught Jethro’s frown. “I dunno yet, I mean.” He moved the machine out of Jethro’s reach and picked up one of the silver canisters, fitting it into a space at the side of the machine. “The gas, or whatever’s in here, hooks up to the delivery system, but what it’s for? Beats me.”

“Huh.” Jethro picked up another machine by its straps. “You can’t read that science-shit formula on the tank? Maybe you’re not so clever after all. Remind me why I let you hang with us again?” He glared at Einstein and the younger boy looked away.

“I’m trying, Jethro. I’m trying.” Einstein picked up a tube of superglue, sticking down a component that

had shaken loose in the crash. He laid the tube down next to the canister, holding the machine parts together. Then he frowned, glancing from the canister to the tube. He set the machine carefully aside.

"Jethro, I think I know what's in here." He frowned at the canister, trying to work out the formula in his head. "I think it's kinda like superglue, only it's a foam."

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"Non-lethal weapons? Isn't that a contradiction in terms?" Seeley scooted his computer chair across to MacGyver's desk, reading the New Scientist article over his shoulder.

"I don't think so." MacGyver moved the magazine so that Seeley could see too. "Imagine the situation: You know there are enemy soldiers or terrorists in a particular building, but bombing the building is out of the question because there are innocent people in there too. What if you could, say, 'neutralise -'" MacGyver made quote marks in the air, "- everyone in the building and then go in and weed out the terrorists afterwards, with no threat to your soldiers and the civilians?" He spread his hands. "Think of the lives that could be saved!"

"Sounds, good, but how would you do it?" Seeley rubbed his chin and frowned. "This John Alexander's ideas of microwave cannons and electromagnetic pulse generators sound like pure science fiction to me."

"Yeah..." MacGyver turned the page, scanning the article. "Sound waves and guns that shoot fast setting foam or anaesthetic gas sound more plausible right now, but in twenty years or so, who knows?"

"It'll never catch on." Seeley stood up. "I'm getting some coffee, you want some?"

MacGyver shook his head, still reading.

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"Damn, bro!" Jethro shrugged out of the harness and put the machine down on a dry patch of concrete. He crossed the yard and reached out to touch the sticky mess plastered across the wall. His fingers stuck, taking some skin off as he yanked his hand free. "Just like the Ghostbusters packs! We got us some unlicensed adhesive accelerators right here!" He chuckled, turning to face the assembled gangers.

"Don't cross the streams, bro!" A lanky ganger grinned, shaking his head as he poked the mess with a toothpick.

"Don't cross the streams is right. Lonnie, go get me a guinea pig. I want to test this baby on a live target!" Jethro picked up the glue cannon again, settling the straps on his shoulders and stroking the canister. "Real firepower at last..."

"Yeah, Boss." The lanky ganger signalled to the two standing nearest to him and they slouched off down the alley. Einstein watched them go, more worried than usual by the gleam in Jethro's eyes.

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Detective Murphy rubbed her eyes and blinked. Her shift was due to finish in half an hour and she was looking forward to a hot shower and a meal. She typed the last paragraph of her report and signed it. The phone rang and she tucked the receiver into her shoulder, winding the report out of the typewriter.

"Murphy. Yeah, what is it?" She listened to the agitated desk sergeant. "You're kidding me. They glued him to... How?!" She put the report down, reaching instead for a notebook and pen. "Yeah, tell me where... OK. And we've no idea how...? Right. On my way." She put down the receiver and stared at the phone, drumming her fingers on the desk. Then she picked up the phone again, dialling a number from

memory.

“Can you put me through to MacGyver, please? Detective Kate Murphy, LAPD. Yes, I’ll hold.” She grabbed her bag, fishing out her keys and gun one handed. “Mac? Yeah, it’s me. I’m OK. No, no sign of him, this is something else.” She shrugged into her jacket. “Uh-huh. Yeah, well, you know how much you love weird science? I want you to come out to a crime scene with me...”

Part Two

“What is this stuff?” MacGyver used his Swiss Army Knife to chip a piece off the wall, turning it over in his fingers.

“I was hoping you’d know.” Kate Murphy turned to scan the alley, aware of unseen eyes watching them. She turned back to find MacGyver sniffing the piece of hard foam and holding it up to the light for a closer look. “Whatever it is, it made a helluva mess of one of the Canyon Crawlers this afternoon.”

“Canyon Crawlers? That’s really a name?” MacGyver stood back, looking at the splatter of hardened slime on the wall. “Whatever it is, I’m pretty sure it was fired from a gun – the splash is the wrong shape for something that’s been thrown by hand.” He put his hands into his jacket pockets. “What’d it do to this kid?”

“Glued him to the wall.” Kate caught MacGyver’s incredulous stare. “No, really! Glued him right to the wall. We had to cut some of his clothes and a chunk of hair off him to get him loose. Also, wherever it stuck to his skin, it had burned him. Nasty stuff.” She shuddered.

“Burn like a chemical burn, or like it was hot?” MacGyver examined the scraps of cloth stuck to the mess.

“Hot.” Kate looked around the alley again, then touched the solidified slime. “He said it was hot.”

“OK.” MacGyver straightened up. “I’m going to take this back to Phoenix and see what I can come up with. I’ll call you, OK?”

“OK.” Kate frowned at the slime. “I’m going back to the hospital, see if I can get anything more out of this kid.” She hitched her bag up on her shoulder and walked out of the alley with MacGyver walking alongside, lost in thought.

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MacGyver added some ground-up residue to his test tube and shook the mixture, which turned blue. He made a note and reached over to the rack for another bottle of chemicals. This time, when he added it, the mixture turned green.

“Gotcha.” MacGyver wrote on the bottom of his notes and held the paper up for Seeley to see. Seeley glanced at the paper and shrugged.

“Chemistry’s not really my thing.” He handed the paper back to MacGyver, who shook his head in mock sorrow.

“Really? Nothing at all?” He held up his test tube. “It’s kind of like superglue, but with some modifications. The sample was full of air bubbles, so the glue’s been changed to make it deliver as foam.”

“Like a fire extinguisher.” Seeley leaned forwards, picking up the remaining piece of slime. “So how do you stop it sticking to the gun when you fire it?”

“I’m still working on that part.” MacGyver ran a hand through his hair and shrugged. “Maybe if you could grease the barrel, it would stop it sticking. We found no evidence of a cartridge at the scene, so I guess they didn’t get round it that way.”

“Huh.” Seeley tested the hardened edge with his thumb, finding it sharp. “A glue cannon. One of your new, non-lethal weapons, maybe?”

“Maybe.” MacGyver shook the test tube and held it up to his eyes. “Question is, what’s it doing in the hands of a two-bit gang from South Central?”

“Right.” Seeley tossed the fragment up in the air and caught it. “And also, who else has got one?”

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Jethro hooked his thumbs in the straps of the glue cannon’s harness, enjoying the weight of it and the power it represented. He squinted down the barrel and aimed it around the apartment kitchen, laughing when the gangers ducked out of his way. He spun round and bumped into Gina, the nail polish remover in her hand spilling down her front and filling the kitchen with its acrid smell.

“Hey, watch where you’re pointing that thing!” She wiped at her gang jacket with her hand and glared at Jethro. He levelled the gun at her and grinned over the barrel.

“Bang. You’re dead.” His voice was soft and she backed away, unnerved. Of all the gangers, Jethro was the only one who really scared her. Jethro grinned at her again, his eyes wide and wild. “Let’s go hunting.” He strode out of the kitchen with the gang following him, and Gina heard the door slam behind them.

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The recoil on the glue cannon was more than Einstein had thought it would be. Jethro staggered back and was caught by Lonnie, who shoved him forwards with a laugh. Jethro pulled the trigger again, the high-pressure spray tracking the figure running away from them. The glue splattered across the back of his victim’s coat, gluing the long coat tails to the ganger’s jeans instantly. The ganger tripped, sprawling against a dumpster and rebounding off into an oily puddle. He turned over, scrambling backwards as Jethro advanced.

“Not in his face!” Einstein bit his lip as Jethro rounded on him.

“Get him out of here.” Jethro gestured with the gun barrel and Einstein felt Lonnie grab him from behind, a slap rocking his head and making him see stars. Lonnie turned, dragging Einstein away by the collar. Einstein struggled, kicking and gouging. Lonnie released him with a curse and Einstein spun round, just in time to see Jethro open fire on his victim. One long blast of glue stuck him to the cracked concrete, the blast catching him across the chest and face.

Jethro mimed blowing smoke away from the barrel and stepped back into the darkness between the tenements. Einstein heard a car engine slow, then rev and speed away into the night. He ran down the alley to where the stricken ganger lay, clawing at his face. The glue had set, filling his nose and mouth and, as Einstein skidded to a halt, he saw the ganger’s eyes roll up and his frantic efforts to breathe slow and then stop.

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MacGyver checked his mirrors and leaned into the curve. The streets had dried from yesterday’s storm and traffic was light. As he rode home, his thoughts returned to the glue cannon and what it’s appearance implied. The article about non-lethal weapons had seemed like pure fantasy, like the drawings of flying cars and houses on the moon that had thrilled him as a child. But what if he was seeing the beginnings of a new age? What if he was seeing the first glimmer of a world without killing, without guns? He shook his head, concentrating again on the road. He slowed to let a delivery van pull out, dropping back as he noticed the van’s back doors weren’t secured shut. The van rocked as the driver took a corner too fast and MacGyver heard the rattle of cargo shifting inside.

How could something as specialised and unusual as this have found its way onto the streets? A theft from a chemicals lab would surely have been reported... He made a mental note to ask Kate if any thefts had come to her attention recently. The intersection lights turned red and MacGyver coasted to a halt. The glue must have been fired with some force to pin the ganger to the wall, like that. That suggested it was under pressure, which in turn suggested some kind of propellant, or that the glue was stored under pressure. The light changed and he accelerated past a garden supply centre, the display of weedkiller spray packs brightly lit in the window. Could you use a similar delivery system for glue? Seeley had seemed sure it would gum up the workings, but MacGyver wasn't so sure. He turned into his driveway and parked his bike, leaving his helmet hanging on the handlebars. He went inside, pressed the blinking button on his answerphone and listened as he shrugged out of his jacket.

"Mac, it's Kate. It's uh... 5:40pm and I'm at Mercy Hospital. Can you come meet me here? There's something you need to see." Her tone was grim. MacGyver picked up his jacket again and headed back out.

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"What's happened?" Kate turned to see MacGyver approaching. Her face was pale and her expression grim.

"Mac, your hi-tech superglue just killed a kid." Kate scrubbed her hands across her face and through her hair. "Gang fight, most likely; he got a faceful and it suffocated him." She took a deep breath.

"Where is this stuff coming from?" MacGyver balled his hand into a fist, then let it drop without hitting anything. "Do we have any idea?"

"Matter of fact, yes." Kate set off down the corridor, motioning for MacGyver to follow. "A truck carrying the glue and the guns to fire it went off the road in last night's storm and spilled its load halfway down the Hollywood Hills. First though, you mind taking a look at the kid? We haven't been able to ID him so far and with your Challenger's Club connections, I wondered if he'd crossed your path." She paused, her hand on the doorknob. "I hate to ask, but..." She opened the door a crack. "It's pretty bad, Mac." MacGyver nodded and stepped past her into the room.

The body lay on a trolley, sheet drawn up to cover the face. MacGyver gently drew it back, staring at the boy beneath. So young... The glue had hardened, a clear, bubbly layer blocking his mouth and nose, sticking his shirt to his chest. MacGyver swallowed hard and replaced the sheet.

"I don't know him, Kate. I'm sorry." He pushed his hands into his pockets, hunching down inside his coat. A movement at the corner of his eye caught his attention and he turned.

"What is it?" Kate came into the room, letting the door swing shut behind her. She watched MacGyver crouch down beside the empty bed, watched him extend a hand underneath and then frowned as he helped a small ganger out from under the bed.

"What are you doing there?" It came out louder than Kate had intended and the boy took a step back, lost inside an enormous leather jacket. MacGyver stayed kneeling down, watching the boy.

"Did you know him?" MacGyver's voice was quiet. The boy sniffed, then nodded. "Do you know who did this to him?" Another nod.

"Can you tell me his name?" Kate watched as the boy's eyes grew wide and he shook his head. She opened her mouth to insist, but MacGyver shot her a warning look. He turned back to the boy.

"Can you tell me your name?" The boy replied, too quietly for Kate to catch. MacGyver nodded.

"OK, Einstein. Do you have someone at home? Someone who might be worried about where you are?" The boy shrugged, not taking his eyes off Kate. MacGyver sat back on his heels. "Kate, I'm going to call a friend of mine to come get this guy. Gloria from the Challenger's Club, OK?" he waited until she nodded,

then turned back to the boy. "We need to talk to you about what happened here. I know you're scared, but we have to stop this happening to anyone else. Do you understand?"

Einstein took a deep breath. He understood, but telling them about Jethro was going to get him good and mad. Mad enough that he might go really crazy, and take Einstein with him... He glanced across at the still form underneath the sheet and shivered. He looked up at Kate, then back at MacGyver.

"OK. I'll tell you."

Part Three

"Am I in trouble?" Einstein shifted in his seat, ready to run out of the police station.

"Probably. You didn't fire the gun, but you helped to steal it, and you surely told Jethro how to fire it." MacGyver ran a hand through his shaggy hair, turning his computer chair to face the young ganger. "But maybe less trouble if you help me out here. You think you can do that?" He watched the kid's eyes dart to Kate, working at the other side of the office, then to the door. "Don't worry, Einstein – I won't let her eat you!"

"I ain't afraid of no cop!" Einstein bristled and MacGyver hid a smile behind his hand.

"Sure you're not." He sat back in his chair. "So, tell me how you fit into all this." He gestured at the police file on the desk. Einstein glanced at the door again, decided he probably wouldn't make it if he tried to run, and sighed.

"Jethro, he's the boss. He decides what we do, who we hit, stuff like that. He mostly chooses what we get 'cause he knows someone who'll buy it. No questions, see?" Einstein waited for MacGyver to nod before continuing. "So we're out cruising, and it's late, and it's raining an' all. And I'm wishing we never went out 'cause Jethro, he's driving all kinds of mad an' I'm thinking we're coming off the road every time we hit a bend, and I'm gonna buy it in a wreck up in the hills, you know?"

"Uh huh." MacGyver reached for his notebook and pen.

"So anyways, we come round this bend doing a million miles per hour, and right in front of us there's this truck. And it's upside down and there's trees and mud and sh... stuff around it." Einstein caught MacGyver's warning glance. "And Jethro and Lonnie and all, they go to see what the truck's carrying but me, I go and see if the driver's dead."

"Was he?" MacGyver turned to a fresh page.

"Nuh-uh. He was moving around and stuff, but like he hit his head. All slow. You know what I mean?" MacGyver, veteran of many concussions, nodded. "So Jethro, he tells me to come look at the tanks all spilling out the back of the truck, and we take some, and a couple of the jetpacks and we get the hell out of there." Einstein scratched his nose and waited for MacGyver to finish writing.

"What about the driver?" MacGyver watched Einstein shift in his seat and shrug.

"I dunno. I wanted to... something. Call 911 maybe or get him outta the truck, take him back with us. But Jethro, he said we're leaving, so we left." He kicked at the table leg, scowling.

"But you didn't want to leave him, did you?" MacGyver's voice was gentle.

"No way!" Einstein's face flushed. "But you gotta do what Jethro says, or he gets mad, and then he..." He tailed off, burrowing deeper into his jacket.

"So what happened when you got the stuff back here?"

"We got the stuff out and Lonnie, he took it all up to his place and I figured out what it was, how it worked and stuff." Einstein glanced up and frowned at MacGyver's expression. "Don't look at me like that - I ain't

called Einstein 'cause I'm dumb!" MacGyver grinned and pushed the notebook and pen across the desk.

"Show me what you figured out." He watched Einstein fill the page with formulae and diagrams, his writing neat and his explanation clear. When he'd finished, Einstein looked up, his expression challenging. MacGyver held up his hands.

"You're right, you're not dumb. This is pretty advanced stuff. How old are you?" Einstein shrugged. "You don't know?"

"I'm twelve. Like it matters..." Einstein kicked the table leg again, his sneaker making a dull thump against the heavy wood.

"OK." MacGyver looked at Einstein, waiting until the kicking stopped and the boy looked up at him. "You're smart. You're really smart. So what happens when you fire it?"

"Once it hits, it sticks. It sticks real fast and sets on pretty much anything it touches. And it gets real hot too. It's an ex-o-thermic reaction." Einstein was careful with the word, making sure he got it right. He looked down, picking at his fingernails. "I told him not to aim at his face." He sniffed.

"You knew what would happen?" MacGyver frowned, recalling that Einstein had found the young ganger's body, that it had been Einstein who had called it in and then gone back to wait with his dead rival.

"I knew it could. It's obvious, man – that shit sticks to everything!" Tears glimmered, but Einstein blinked them away. "He wouldn't listen to me. He don't listen to nobody."

"Can you tell me where I can find him?" MacGyver met Einstein's scared, angry glare calmly. "Before this happens to someone else?" Einstein started kicking the table again, thinking. MacGyver waited, seeing fear and frustration and anger chase across the boy's face. Eventually, Einstein looked up.

"You're gonna put me away." His voice came out smaller than he'd have liked.

"No, no I'm not." MacGyver sighed, wishing that kids like Einstein didn't have to grow up in cities like this. "Einstein, please help us. You're the only one who can stop this from happening again. Help us and I'll do my best to get you another chance. Deal?" He met Einstein's suspicious gaze calmly, willing the boy to agree. Einstein sniffed, wiped his nose on his sleeve and then nodded.

"OK."

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MacGyver unrolled the map of L.A. and weighed one end down with his knife. He put his keys on the other end and leaned on the table, studying the labyrinth of streets that made up Einstein's neighbourhood. A shadow fell across the map.

"South side." Seeley set down his coffee and a roll of paper. "Anything else is too easy to spot from a distance."

MacGyver nodded. The city, with its tight packed buildings and invisible territory boundaries was very different from where he'd grown up. Mission City was so much smaller, and friendlier, and... easier. Kids like Einstein had a hard time growing up here in the shadows of gang culture. He sighed and shook his head, reaching for the roll of paper Seeley had brought.

"Blueprints?"

"Blueprints." Seeley moved his coffee and MacGyver unrolled the plans on top of the map.

"This is where Jethro and the gang all live?" He traced the outline of the housing project with his finger.

"Yep. Urban jungle. Kind of reminds me of Kowloon." Seeley stared at the map, working out the entry points, bottlenecks and places they might end up having a fire fight with the gang. "Now there really is a

wretched hive of scum and villainy!”

“So I’m told.” MacGyver grinned and nodded. “What were you doing in Kowloon?”

“Long story.” Seeley grinned back. “So, I reckon we come in on the South side, LAPD secure the area and then we retrieve the equipment, with minimal casualties. Sound good to you?”

MacGyver blinked hard, staring at Seeley in disbelief.

“I... NO! No, that does not sound good to me! If we go in all guns blazing people will get hurt, they will retaliate and before you know it, your ‘minimum casualties’ have turned into maximum carnage! No way!”

“Mac, this is a gang warfare situation.” Seeley folded his arms and watched MacGyver pace the room. “You know they’re armed, right? Probably better than we are! There is no way we are going into that without a little firepower of our own. To do otherwise would be suicide. You do get that, right?”

“I get that it’s a dangerous situation, yes.” MacGyver placed his hands flat on the desk, choosing his words carefully. “But I am not about to make it any more dangerous by taking a small army in there, loaded for bear and expecting ‘minimum casualties’ to be the best possible outcome.” He shook his head. “There has to be a better way.”

“Sometimes there isn’t a better way, Mac.” Seeley sighed, straightening the penknife so that it lined up with the edge of the map. “No matter how much we want there to be one, sometimes there just isn’t. Sometimes the only answer is to shoot first, before they shoot you.” He watched MacGyver shake his head. “These are gangers, Mac. Gangers who’ve already worked out that non-lethal weaponry can be anything but, if you use it just right.”

“That was an accident.” Seeley spun round to see a kid in a beat-up leather jacket sitting under a table at the far side of the room.

“Who’re you? What are you doing in here?” Seeley frowned as the kid shrugged and looked away. MacGyver scrubbed his hands over his face and raked his fingers through his hair, the movement jerky and frustrated.

“Seeley, meet Einstein. Einstein, this is Seeley, we work together. What’re you still doing here?” He beckoned and Einstein crawled out from under the table.

“The detective sent me to sit in the break room, but nobody came for me and I got bored, so I came looking for you.” Einstein turned to look at Seeley. “Jethro, he don’t go round killing people. He’s mean and crazy, but he ain’t no murderer. He just wanted to shake up the Canyon Crawlers, y’know? Make ‘em have a little respect for us. But he’s no murderer. Got no guns, even. Except now.” Einstein frowned, the memory of waiting with the dead ganger fresh.

Seeley folded his arms, watching Einstein and trying to decide if he was telling the truth.

“Gangers without guns. Seriously?” He watched Einstein flush, anger and embarrassment colouring his face.

“Gotta have money to have guns. You wouldn’t get it.” The boy turned away from Seeley to study the blueprint. He picked at the edge of the paper, looking sideways at MacGyver. “You gonna shoot Jethro?” MacGyver sighed, picking up his knife and letting the blueprint roll up.

“No, I’m not. But he’s in big trouble, Einstein. He killed that boy whether he meant to or not, and he has to answer for that.”

“Is he gonna shoot him?” Einstein shot a glance at Seeley, then looked back at MacGyver.

“I will if he shoots at me!” Seeley snorted and got to his feet. “That gun’s deadly and you know it.” He picked up the blueprint and strode out. MacGyver watched him go.

“Einstein, we have to bring Jethro in. It’s not up to me or up to Seeley how we do that, it’s up to Detective

Murphy. We'll be there to help her, but I can't promise you Jethro won't get hurt. If he shoots at the police, they're going to shoot back." He folded his map and tucked it into his pocket. When he looked up again, Einstein had gone.

MacGyver crossed the room, looked up and down the corridor and found it empty. He poked his head around the main office door and Kate beckoned to him.

"There you are. Come on, we're going in now." She turned away, picking up a bullet proof vest and following a small group of police officers out of the building. MacGyver turned to the desk sergeant.

"A kid. Did you see a kid come through here?" The sergeant shook her head and, with a last glance around the room, MacGyver hurried after Kate.

Part Four

Kate glanced in her mirror and pulled out into the traffic. In the back seat, MacGyver watched Seeley checking his gun and frowned.

"Seeley, these are kids. You heard Einstein, the only gun they have is the glue cannon."

Which has killed one kid already." Seeley twisted round in his seat to glare at MacGyver. "What is it with you and guns, anyway? You were a soldier, you know the score."

"I was in bomb disposal." Mac glared back. "I served my country by stopping people from getting killed, not by adding to the body count!"

"Can it, the pair of you." Kate's voice cut across the argument. "We're here." She stopped the car and turned to face both men. "Save it for after we arrest Jethro and get the weapon. After that you can fight about guns as much as you want, but you do not do it during my operation! Are we clear?" She waited until they both nodded. "OK. You two are on retrieval, you leave Jethro to us. Go in the South door and up to apartment 3B, southwest corner." She turned to Seeley. "You do not fire unless fired upon, understand? And you," She turned to MacGyver, "I'm not happy about you going in unarmed, but I don't have time to argue about it. So you stay out of trouble, you hear?" With a final warning glance, she opened the car door and went to join the group of officers outside the building.

MacGyver and Seeley waked round the building to the south door. The building was dirty ad neglected, with rubbish piled up in the hallway and the dank smell of old urine strong on the concrete stairs. They climbed the stairs in silence, watching the corridors and doorways for movement. The quiet unnerved Seeley, so different from the cheerful buzz of people going about their business that he'd grown used to in his own apartment block. Beside him, MacGyver padded silently up the stairs, his sneakers making no sound.

A movement caught his attention and he turned to see a young woman pull a toddler back into an apartment. Her face was pale and worried, and she didn't meet Seeley's gaze, retreating inside and shutting her door. Seeley turned again at the quiet sound of a footstep, but the corridor was empty.

They paused at the edge of the third floor stairwell. MacGyver glanced round the corner, then motioned Seeley to follow him. They flattened themselves against the wall outside 3B's door and Seeley drew his gun, ignoring MacGyver's angry stare. MacGyver turned the door handle, finding it locked. Seeley gestured for him to move, miming kicking the door, but MacGyver shook his head. He pulled a paper clip out of his pocket and slid the toothpick out of his penknife. Kneeling in front of the door, he poked both into the lock and bent close, listening. Seeley bit back a curse and turned to scan the corridor, gun in hand. Surely they didn't have time for this...

The lock clicked open and MacGyver smiled. He tapped Seeley on the shoulder and eased open the door. The smell of cigarettes and nail polish rolled out of the apartment. Somewhere inside, a television was tuned to a game show. They crept down the narrow hallway, past a bedroom and a bathroom to a yellow-

lit living room beyond. Seeley peered through the half open door, seeing a pair of gangers slumped on a stained couch. Against the couch leaned a machine, which he recognised from Kate's description as the glue cannon. He turned to tell MacGyver he'd found it, but the hallway behind him was empty. His free hand balled into a fist, frustration whitening his knuckles. Why could the man not follow standard operating procedures?! With a glance at the gangers, he slipped past the door and into the kitchen beyond.

MacGyver crouched down on the kitchen floor, counting canisters. He looked up as Seeley came in and nodded as Seeley whispered that he's found the cannon.

"Did it have a harness? Like a backpack?" Seeley nodded, then his face fell as MacGyver held up another, identical harness. MacGyver frowned. "I guess they have more than one!"

Seeley mouthed a silent curse, then spun round as he heard movement, gun raised. A blowsy teenager slouched in, blowing on her freshly painted nails. She stopped, mouth open.

"HEY! What are you doing here? LONNIE!" She yelled over her shoulder and picked up the nearest object, throwing it at Seeley as hard as she could, "LONNIE!"

Seeley ducked the thrown mug and grabbed the girl, wrapping his free arm around her shoulders and dragging her into the room. Behind her, the ganger skidded in through the doorway. MacGyver grabbed a rusty fire extinguisher off the wall and sprayed it at the ganger. The water drove him back, but the stream spluttered and failed, and the ganger lunged forwards, swinging a wild punch at MacGyver's head. MacGyver dodged and stepped forward, slamming the fire extinguisher into the ganger's forehead. The ganger reeled back, hitting his head on the doorframe and slumping down to the floor.

"LONNIE!" The girl shrieked and fought against Seeley's hold, kicking at his shins and digging her elbows in. Seeley grimaced and hung on, clamping his hand around the girl's mouth as her struggles loosened his grip. The girl grabbed his hand and sank her teeth into his thumb. Seeley yelled and let go, bringing the gun butt down on the side of her head. Her eyes rolled up and she went limp. MacGyver started to protest, but Seeley cut him off.

"What? I didn't shoot her!" Seeley dropped her next to her boyfriend and looked up at MacGyver, shaking his bleeding hand.

"Come on." MacGyver stooped to scoop up the canisters. "Let's get out of here."

"Right." Seeley ducked into the living room and picked up the glue cannon, threading his arm through one strap.

MacGyver opened the door and checked the corridor, tightened his grip on the glue canisters and stepped aside to let Seeley past. Just as they reached the stairwell, a shot echoed through the building.

MacGyver and Seeley exchanged a grim glance and turned around, running back down dank corridors towards the sound of yelling and gunfire.

Unnoticed, a small figure slipped in through the apartment door. A moment later, it slipped out again, the pockets of its oversized jacket bulging.

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"Put down the weapon and raise your hands above your head!" Kate's voice echoed in the concrete corridor. "We have you surrounded!" Jethro spun, trying to work out which direction the voice was coming from. His finger tightened on the trigger as he listened for movement. The only sound was the crunch of hardened glue underneath his boots, the blast having missed its target. He knew he was surrounded, knew there was no way out and that made him even more reckless than usual.

"COME ON!" His yell was harsh, sounding crazed and angry to Kate as she crouched behind the wall. A flicker of movement caught her eye and she saw MacGyver and Seeley creeping up behind Jethro. She

glared and motioned them back, hoping Jethro wouldn't see her. MacGyver saw her gesture and ducked back into a doorway, pulling Seeley in after him. Kate nodded to the officer behind her.

"OK, on three." She signalled to the officers at the other end of the corridor, and this time Jethro saw her and raised the gun barrel, snarling.

"One!" The officer behind Jethro cocked his gun and banged on the wall beside him to attract the ganger's attention.

"Two!" Kate sprang up as Jethro whirled round.

"Three!" She broke cover at the same time as both of her officers, and Jethro yelled, spraying glue from the cannon in all directions. One officer fired, missing by inches, and Jethro rounded on him, letting loose another blast of hot glue. Kate ducked back just a moment too late to avoid the blast and was knocked back against the wall as the glue splashed onto her bullet proof vest and up across her face.

"NO!" MacGyver yelled and threw his armful of canisters along the floor as Jethro aimed the cannon, ready to blast Kate again. He took a step back, stepping on a rolling canister and losing his balance. He slipped as he pulled the trigger, glue spraying harmlessly across the ceiling, his body jerking as Seeley's bullet slammed into the back of his shoulder.

Ignoring the downed ganger, MacGyver jumped over the rolling canisters and crouched down next to Kate. The glue had almost sealed her mouth and nose, and her face was red as she fought for breath. MacGyver tried to pull the glue off, but it had already set.

"Kate, it's OK. I'll think of something, you just hang in there!" He racked his brains, trying to work out what he could use to dissolve the glue. Behind him, the officers shoved Jethro down to the floor and handcuffed him, called for an ambulance and reassured the few people who had come out of their apartments to see what was happening.

"Use this." A small hand proffered a bottle and MacGyver turned to see Einstein kneeling behind him, his face pale. He took the bottle and turned it over.

"Nail polish remover?" He frowned. "Of course!" He turned back to Kate. "Close your eyes, OK?" He poured the liquid over the glue, rubbing and scraping to free Kate's mouth and nose as the glue dissolved away. "Try not to swallow any!" Kate clawed at the glue too, pulling in a deep, wailing breath as it dissolved away from her mouth. Around the glue, her skin was red and hot. She drew another breath, and another, swearing and pulling away from MacGyver and sending Einstein scurrying into a corner. She wrenched her arm away from the wall, leaving part of her shirt sleeve behind, and let MacGyver pour the rest of the nail polish remover down her back, easing the back of her vest away from the wall.

From his corner, Einstein watched. He jumped violently as a shadow fell across him.

"How did you know?" Seeley picked up the empty bottle. "How did you know this would dissolve the glue?"

"I worked it out." Einstein shrugged, not taking his eyes off Kate. "It's got acetone in it, acetone dissolves superglue, I figured it might work." He watched the officers lead Jethro away to the ambulance, then turned to Seeley. "Am I gonna get arrested?"

"Dunno kid. Either way, you sure earned your nickname today!" Seeley looked down. "What is your real name, anyway?"

"Nuh-uh." Einstein took a step back, ready to flee. "I ain't telling you that!" He frowned as Seeley chuckled. "What's so funny?"

"Nothing, kid. That was a brave thing you did there." Seeley glanced across to MacGyver, still kneeling beside Kate. "You won't take off before he gets a chance to talk to you, will you? He and I don't always see eye to eye but he's right about the Challenger's Club – it would be perfect for you."

"Yeah, maybe I'll check it out." Einstein's expression brightened and he watched MacGyver a moment longer. "Cop comes near me before he gets done though, and I'm gone!" He glanced at the remaining officer, now holstering his gun and talking on his radio, then back to MacGyver. "Why's he hate guns so much, anyway?"

"I truly don't know." Seeley followed Einstein's gaze to where MacGyver was standing up and brushing glue shards off his jeans. He watched the officer pick up the fallen canisters and take a step closer to them. He looked down at Einstein, but the boy had already disappeared. Seeley sighed, shook his head and went to join MacGyver.

"Hey." MacGyver didn't look pleased to see him, and Seeley followed his gaze to the gun in its holster.

"I had to do it, Mac. They'd have killed him for firing at Kate, you know it. This way he's alive, he stands trial and, if he's really lucky, he gets a second chance to make something of his life. Minimum casualties." Seeley watched MacGyver start to shake his head, then think again and nod.

"I guess. I just... MacGyver gestured helplessly, "I didn't want anyone to get hurt, you know?" He sighed. "Where's Einstein, anyway? He must have followed us here, but I don't see him now..."

"He took off. He was convinced he was going to get arrested, so he just disappeared. Kid's got some pretty stealthy moves, I'll give him that!" Seeley shoved his hands in his pockets and started walking towards the stairwell. "I think he may show up at your Challenger's Club, he seemed to like the idea." He waited while MacGyver caught up with him. "Can I buy you a drink? I definitely want one after today, and I'd also like to know why you hate guns as much as you do. There's a story there, right?"

"There is." MacGyver stooped to pick up the last canister, hearing the shot and seeing Jesse fall once again in his head. "Let's go and get the rest of this stuff from the apartment, and I'll tell you on the way back. I guess I do owe you an explanation." His expression was haunted and Seeley shivered despite the warmth of the evening.

"You sure?" he watched MacGyver tuck the canister under his arm and take a deep breath. MacGyver turned away, walking down the corridor.

"Yeah, I'm sure."