

# Checkmate

## ----- Part One -----

**Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> August 1996**

### **Casa MacGyver**

“Check.” Seeley set down his bishop and sat back, picking up his coffee mug and grinning.

“Not so much!” MacGyver moved his queen and scooped up Seeley’s bishop, setting it down at the side of the board.

“Damn!” Seeley leaned forwards, frowning at the board. “I missed that!” He shook his head, disgusted.

“How long before you have to leave?” MacGyver picked up his drink and sipped it. “It’s going to be strange, you not being around.”

“Yeah, it is.” Seeley picked up a pawn and moved it. “I’ll be here until the end of the week, but I’ll be moving out at the weekend.” He sat back. “My place is already packed and ready to go.”

“You looking forward to it?” MacGyver slid his rook forwards and gave Seeley an apologetic smile. “Check.”

“Really? How?” Seeley set down his coffee. “Oh yeah, I see.” He rubbed his chin, thinking, and then moved his king away. “Yeah, I am. I’ll miss California and Phoenix, but the FBI is home for me. I’d never intended to stay here long term, you know that.” His eyebrows shot up as MacGyver moved his knight, endangering Seeley’s king once again. “And my daughter’s in New York, so...” He shrugged. “I am going to miss you guys though – it’s been fun.”

“I’m not sure how much Atlas counts as fun, but it’s never been boring!” MacGyver watched Seeley reach for his king, then pause and move his rook instead, blocking MacGyver’s knight.

“Amen to that!” Seeley shook his head. “California has a whole next level of crazy going on!” He glanced out of the window, seeing MacGyver’s neighbours conga-line down the middle of the street,

enjoying yet another block party.

“You get used to it!” MacGyver followed his gaze, grinning as Mama Lorraine twirled, her skirts flying out around her. He looked back at the board. “Checkmate, by the way...”

**Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup>  
August 1996**

**Somewhere in L.A...**

“Check.” The man moved the black queen into a new space and sat back in the dim room. He studied the board for a moment, then got up to sit in the empty chair opposite. He leaned forward, steeping his fingers.

He reached out, picking up the white knight and moving it to defend the white king. “Once again, the knight puts himself in danger to defend the weak.” The man’s speech was precise, his voice soft and his tone mocking. “But defending those who don’t deserve to survive has always been your thing, hasn’t it?”

The man got up again, sitting down in the first chair. Reaching out, he snatched up the black queen and used it to dash the white knight from the board. He slammed the queen down, breathing hard.

“Checkmate.” He licked spittle from the corner of his mouth and smoothed his beard with his fingers. He reached down, picking up the broken pieces of the knight and setting them on the board in front of the black queen.

“Checkmate, MacGyver.” The man tipped back his head, laughing in the gloom.

**Monday 12<sup>th</sup> August 1996**

**A familiar Police  
Station**

“Yeah, that’s a grade-A weirdo...” Detective Kate Murphy set aside the crime scene report, shaking her head.

“I know, right?” Detective Orlando McAllister, sitting at the desk opposite, frowned. “I don’t get it. You murder a guy, you poison him, right? You’re sick enough to watch him die and then set him out like a mortician would.” McAllister crossed his arms over his chest, looking at Kate to make sure she was watching. “Like that, yeah?”

“Yeah, McAllister.” Kate held up her copy of the report. “I got the memo too!”

“OK.” McAllister nodded, undeterred. “So, you do that thing, and then you open the guy’s mouth and you stick in, what? A chess piece? Tell me that isn’t weird?!” McAllister held his hands out, palm up.”

“It’s weird, McAllister!” Kate put down the file, frowning at it. Something about the careful nature of the murder bothered her, reminding her of previous cases involving...

She brushed the thought aside, refusing to consider the possibility that the most evil man she’d ever met was on the loose once again.

**Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup>  
August 1996**

**In a slightly shabby police car...**

“You think it’s the same guy?” McAllister chewed gum nervously and stared out of the car window. “It could be the same guy, right?”

“McAllister, how many homicides have you been to?” Kate glanced in the rear-view mirror and accelerated around a Winnebago. “Three.” McAllister caught Kate’s frown. “Including this one.”

“OK.” Kate adjusted her grip on the steering wheel. “Do me a favour, will you? Don’t get excited about the possibility of a serial killer.” She changed gear. “Trust me, that’s the last thing we want this to be.” She glanced across at the new detective. “Look at this as if you hadn’t seen the previous victim, OK?”

That way we won't start trying to make up facts to fit the theory we want them to."

"OK, Boss." McAllister nodded, looking downcast.

"I know you're stoked," Kate smiled. "But try to keep it together. This is a homicide we're going to, not a county fair." She watched him out of the corner of her eye, saw his shoulders slump. "And if it does turn out to be a career psycho, you get to say, 'I told you so'. Deal?"

"Deal!" McAllister grinned back and Kate shook her head, concentrating on the traffic.

\* "Oh." McAllister put his gloved hand over his mouth and took a step backwards as Kate folded back the sheet from the dead man's face.

In the sodium glow of the streetlight, he looked pale. His hair was cut short, matted at the sides where green froth had escaped from his mouth to pool under his head. The man's eyes were open in a frantic, frightened stare. Deprived of the tears that had tracked salt across his cheeks, they were dull.

McAllister took a deep breath, then another, willing himself not to throw up. In the classroom at the academy, they didn't tell you that death smelled of urine and sweat and fear. He looked again, seeing Kate taking the dead man's wallet out of his pocket and looking for ID.

"Malcolm David Wallace." She glanced at McAllister, who pulled out his notebook and wrote down the name. "Age 37, living in Reseda."

"He's a way from home." McAllister tried to sound calm.

"Only one bus journey from here." Kate shrugged, moving around to the other side of the body. "Not so far. Not far enough to make my radar ping, anyway." She checked Wallace's other pockets, then glanced at McAllister and tried to open the dead man's mouth. Rigor mortis prevented her from doing so, but she leaned close and squinted through the gap between the man's teeth. She took a deep breath, sat back on her heels and pulled off her gloves. She stared at the body for a moment, then looked up at McAllister.

"Get the crime scene guys back over here, McAllister. There's something in his mouth."

\* Kate turned the pawn in her fingers, then set it on her desk next to the other

one. “Forensics says they come from the same manufacturer.” McAllister closed the file he’d been reading and laced his fingers together. “O’Dell reckons they come from the same set, but she says she can’t prove it.” He shook his head.

“Same cause of death, same poison, same layout.” Kate looked at McAllister across the desk. “You were right – there’s no way these two aren’t linked.” She sighed and rubbed her eyes, looking tired. “So, how’s it feel, McAllister? Your first serial killer.” When she lowered her hands, her expression was haunted.

“Pretty creepy, actually.” McAllister picked at the edge of the file cover. “Now we have to find a link between the victims, right?”

“Right.” Kate got up, picking up her coffee mug and gesturing to McAllister to pass his. “Now we dig all the way into both of them and try to work out why the hell some psycho decided that the City of Angels was better off without them.” She crossed to the break room, pausing in the doorway. “You take Wallace, OK? I want Mendez, the first victim.” McAllister nodded and Kate went to the coffee machine, pouring the coffee with a shaking hand and trying not to picture a plump, freckle-dusted hand placing the pawn in Mendez’s mouth.

## **Monday 19th August**

### **Back in the Police Station**

“Oh, hell no!” Kate snapped her fingers loudly, beckoning to McAllister when he turned at the sound. “Yeah, gimme the address.” She clamped the phone between her ear and shoulder and scribbled in her notebook, tearing of the page. “Got it.” She put down the receiver and straightened, looking Grady in the eye. “We got another.” She reached for her jacket. “If you have a date, cancel it. You’re gonna be late home.”

\* They drove to the crime scene in silence. McAllister watched Kate in the passing glare of each streetlight, her face pale and her expression grim. As though feeling his gaze, she glanced his way and then cleared her throat.

“So, uh... McAllister. Tell me what we know about this psycho.” Her hands tightened on the steering wheel and she glanced in the rear-view mirror before turning off the freeway.

“Right. Yeah.” McAllister sat up straight in the seat. “We know we’re probably looking for a man, because the victims were both choked or strangled before being poisoned and a woman is typically not strong enough to leave bruises that deep.” He watched Kate nod, but she didn’t comment. “Uh... The poison is unusual, maybe a homebrew, so we could be looking for a man with knowledge of chemistry and toxicology. The chess pieces could indicate that we’re dealing with someone who sees himself as a master strategist or someone who sees killing as a game. Psychology profile!” he held up his hands as Kate glared at him. “You know what I think about psychology, Lando!” Kate held his gaze for a moment longer before returning her attention to the road.

“Sorry, Boss.” Grady nodded.

“It’s OK, carry on.” Kate took a deep breath, then exhaled hard.

“The two victims have no social overlap, no reason to know each other. The only common ground they share is that they were both released from mental hospitals in the last few months – not the same one, by the way. According to their neighbours and their psychologists –“ he glanced at Kate, but she was watching the traffic. “- neither of them was coping well with life in the wide world.” Kate nodded, turning into a side road and pulling in behind a police car.

They got out, badged their way past the officer at the door and ducked underneath the crime scene tape. The smell hit McAllister before he saw the body, and he tried to breathe through his mouth. He looked up to find Kate watching him.

“You think you’re gonna hurl, you take it outside, OK?” Her stern expression softened as McAllister gulped and nodded. Reaching into her pocket, she pulled out a small tin of Tiger Balm and handed it to him. “Smear a little under your nose. Masks the smell.” She watched him do it, took the tin back and smiled. “You do get used to it.” Her smile faded and she turned back to the open door. “Let’s do this.”

The victim was lying on the floor of the empty office. At first glance he looked peaceful, his eyes

closed and his hands folded neatly across his chest. Grady took another step into the room and the illusion vanished. Green froth from the victim's mouth stained the collar of his shirt and had dried on the scuffed tile underneath his head. Dark bruises mottled his throat and, close up, his hands were crooked into claws, dark bleed crusted under his fingernails. His cheek bulged and Kate checked with the criminologist before opening the victim's mouth. He'd been dead for some time and rigor mortis had relaxed, allowing her to reach in and pull out a chess piece. She held it up for McAllister to see.

"A queen? But that's..." McAllister shook his head, confused. "Why a queen? Why not a pawn?" Kate frowned, balancing the piece on her palm. Then she cocked her head to the side and handed the queen to McAllister. Reaching down to the victim's hand, she uncurled his fingers and drew out a small roll of paper, which she unrolled. At the top of the paper was written two words, but the rest of the page was blank.

"Interested yet?" Kate read the words aloud. "Psycho..." She handled the paper by the edges, trying not to touch it. "Saul, gimme an evide3nce bag, would you?" She dropped the paper in, watched McAllister bag the queen separately and stood up, brushing dust off her trousers. "We'll dust that for prints." She turned to the criminalist. "Thanks, Saul. We're done here. You can get this poor guy squared away and then call it a night." She nodded to the officer on the door and they walked back to the car, each lost in their thoughts.

**Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup>  
August**

**Still in the Police Station** Kate sat down at her desk and flipped through her in-tray, stopping at a criminalist's distinctive reporting form. Reading through the contents, she felt her pulse quicken, her heartbeat loud in her ears. Reaching out a shaking hand, she picked up the receiver and dialed.

"Mac?" She listened to the sleepy reply. "Yeah, it's Kate. I know it's early." She took a deep breath. "Can you come down to the precinct? I got something I need you to see." Her free hand clenched into a fist. "It's Zito. He's back!"

## ----- Part 2 -----

### Checkmate Part Two

Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> August 1996

### Casa MacGyver

MacGyver skated down the centre of the rink, the cheering crowd flashing past in a blur. To his left, Gretzky moved in, but MacGyver dodged around him, hurtling towards the goal. He drew back his stick, ready to smash the puck past Roy to score the win for the Calgary Flames. Just as he was about to make the winning shot, the klaxon sounded for the end of the game. MacGyver looked up in horror, finding the rink echoing and empty. The klaxon continued, louder and louder, gradually resolving into a telephone bell.

MacGyver opened one eye and groped for the receiver, knocking a hockey puck and a disassembled walkie talkie to the floor.

“Hello?” He rolled onto his back, rubbing sleep out of his eyes.

“Mac?” On the other end of the phone, Kate sounded tense.

“Murphy? What time is...?” MacGyver yawned and opened both eyes, pushing his hair out of his face.

“Yeah, it’s Kate.” She listened to him yawn, and heard the rustle of a duvet. “I know it’s early.”

“Uh.” MacGyver looked at the clock, blinking until 05:30 came into focus. He heard her take a deep breath.

“Can you come down to the precinct? I got something I need you to see.” Tension vibrated in her

voice.

“Sure, let me just...” MacGyver frowned. “Are you OK?”

“It’s Zito.” Now Kate sound scared. “He’s back.”

**Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> August 1996**

**Slightly later on...**

“Mac!” Kate beckoned him over, pale as though she hadn’t slept well. At the far side of the room, a detective with a long, blond ponytail was pouring a cup of coffee. Shaking his head at the proffered pot, MacGyver sat on the edge of the next desk and took the evidence bag Kate handed to him.

“Mac, this is Orlando McAllister, he’s new.” Kate turned to McAllister. “This is MacGyver, from the Phoenix Foundation. He specialises in the weird stuff, and he’s also the closest we have to an expert on Dr Zito.”

“We’ve met.” MacGyver grinned. “Had enough of DC, or just visiting?” He reached out and shook McAllister’s hand.

“I couldn’t resist your California sunshine any longer.” McAllister grinned back. “Psycho serial killers weren’t exactly what I had in mind though – I was all ready for sun, sea and sand...”

“Right!” MacGyver looked down at the bag in his hand. “So, how do we know it’s Zito?” He turned the bag over, seeing a fingerprint dusted black on the other side. “Ah.” He held up the bag. “Zito’s, right?”

“Right.” Kate nodded.

“OK.” MacGyver opened the bag, then looked up at Kate. “Can I?” At her nod, he reached in and took out the slip of paper. “Interested yet...” He frowned at the words, then sniffed the paper and held it up to the light. “Why would he leave the rest of the paper blank, I wonder?” He glanced at Kate. “Got a light?”

“Didn’t figure you for a smoker.” Kate took a lighter off the desk behind hers and handed it to him.

“Me? No.” MacGyver flicked the lighter and waved it underneath the paper, warming it. “But

lighters have a lot of uses besides firing up cigarettes.”

“What are you doing?” McAllister leaned forward, interested.

“How much do you know about Zito, McAllister?” MacGyver continued warming the paper without looking up.

“I know what Detective Murphy’s told me.” McAllister shook his head. “He sounds like bad news.”

“Oh, he is.” MacGyver held up the paper, squinted at it and then went back to warming it. “So, you know that he loves playing games, leaving clues and proving he’s smarter than everyone else.” He snapped the lighter shut and looked at the paper again. “He’s also insane, kills people for fun and would love to see me dead.” He put the paper down on the desk. “How about that?”

The heat had darkened faint marks on the paper to brown, revealing a hidden message on the blank part of the paper.

“Invisible ink! Damn...” Kate reached out and picked up the note. “Let’s see.”

*Once a queen, always a queen*

*No matter how far from home*

*Proud conveyer of the gentry*

*Now still, and polished, and alone*

*One, two, three towards the sky*

*And five stars down below*

*The first, best table. There he’ll find*

*What MacGyver needs to know*

“That doesn’t make any sense.” McAllister frowned and shook his head.

“Mm.” MacGyver read the note again. “Zito always makes a twisted kind of sense. He mentions me by name, so he wants me to solve the puzzle.”

“Let me get this straight: This psycho is killing people as... as bait?! To get to you? What the hell kind of history do you have with this guy?!” McAllister stood up, taking a step away from MacGyver and staring at him, horrified.

“Stand down, Lando.” Kate’s voice was firm. “Mac isn’t the problem here.”

“It’s a fair question.” MacGyver turned to face McAllister. “Zito is insane, but he’s also clever, and he knows it. Kate and I are a thorn in his side because we’ve got the better of him not once, but twice. Because he’s proud, he can’t let that stand. Are you with me so far?” He waited until McAllister nodded. “OK. So yes, he’s killing again because he needs to beat us and prove he’s the best, but if we hadn’t happened along, he’d be killing anyway and hanging a different reason on it. Killing is what he does, McAllister. It’s what he IS.”

“Right.” McAllister sat down, looking sickened.

“So now we have to stop him. We have to do what we do best.” MacGyver smiled and picked up the paper. “We have to solve this.”

“Once a queen, always a queen.” Kate read aloud.  
“Person?”

“Proud conveyer of the gentry... Person or maybe transport.” MacGyver frowned.

“I think I know.” McAllister leaned forwards. “I’m new to L.A., so I’ve been doing the tourist thing on my days off. I think he’s talking about the Queen Mary.”

“One, two, three towards the sky. Three funnels?” Kate nodded. “You could be right.”

“And the Queen Mary has a high-class restaurant.” MacGyver drummed his fingers on the desk. “That could be the table and the five stars.”

“OK, good!” McAllister nodded. “So, what happens when we get to the Queen Mary?”

“Well,” MacGyver exchanged a glance with Kate. “Typically, what happens next is that Dr. Zito tries to kill me!”

**Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> August 1996**

### **Port of Long Beach**

The Queen Mary gleamed in the morning sunlight, caged in the dock by a retaining wall. The restaurant was quiet and empty, laid ready for a banquet. MacGyver crossed the large room, his sneakers quiet on the thick carpet. Most of the lights were off, but one table in the middle was spot-lit, the glassware sparkling in the light. MacGyver stood, hands in pockets, and stared down at the table. Next to the salt and pepper pots was a third object. MacGyver placed a hand on the table and reached across to pick the object up, then froze. Under the tablecloth, he felt something shift and heard a quiet click. Taking a deep breath, careful not to move his hand, he turned towards the door.

“Kate? McAllister?” He waited until they came into view. “You need to leave. Now.”

“Mac? What happened?” Kate started across the restaurant and MacGyver shook his head.

“Kate! Stay back!” MacGyver felt a drop of sweat roll down his face. “When I put my hand on the table, I accidentally leaned on a pressure plate and activated it.”

“Ah.” McAllister appeared at MacGyver’s other side. “That’s bad.”

“You think?!” MacGyver bit off whatever he’d been about to say. “Sorry. This isn’t your fault.” He looked up at the two detectives. “You need to go. Get the ship evacuated and call the bomb squad.”

“In a minute.” Kate ducked down to peer under the tablecloth. “Damn...” She made a low whistle. “There’s enough under here to blow the Queen Mary clean out of the water!”

“Not to mention seriously spoiling all our weekends...” McAllister lifted the cloth on his side and took a look underneath.

“OK.” Kate took a deep breath. “I don’t see a timer, so I hope that means you’re safe as long as you don’t move. McAllister, go and get the ship cleared. Try not to cause a panic.” She turned back to MacGyver. “You know he’s going to be here somewhere, right?”

“I know.” MacGyver nodded. “Even if failing means he goes up with me, I reckon he’s close by.”

“Uh-huh.” Kate looked around the room, as if expecting to see Zito hiding behind a curtain. “Just wait here. OK?” She drew her gun and followed McAllister out of the restaurant.

“I’m not going anywhere!” MacGyver shifted his weight to his other foot and looked around the room. Zito wasn’t known for his patience, and he wouldn’t stand for the bomb squad coming in and dealing with his trap either. He’d probably blow the bomb remotely as soon as he saw them arrive... MacGyver scanned the room again. If he could find something to rest on the pressure plate instead of his hand... But how much weight was he resting on the plate? How could he work it out?

“My, my, my, my, my.” A quiet, cultured voice made MacGyver look up. “You do look uncomfortable, MacGyver!” A chuckle bubbled up from the table, and MacGyver looked closer, seeing a small microphone hidden in a vase of flowers.

“Zito!” MacGyver shook his head. “Why, for goodness sakes? This is insane!”

“Oh, come now.” Zito sounded amused. “Insane is such a strong word, I always think. I prefer... motivated.” He chuckled again.

“I knew you’d be here somewhere.” MacGyver shook the hair out of his eyes.

“In a manner of speaking.” Zito’s disembodied voice was smug. “Modern technology grants us so many possibilities, doesn’t it?” “Uh-huh.” MacGyver looked around, seeing a miniature camera taped to the spotlight. “It sure does.” He reached into his pocket with his free hand, pulling out a stick of chewing gum.

“You Americans...” Zito’s voice was gently chiding. “You always have to be eating something.”

“Oh, I dunno. Chewing gum has a lot of uses.” MacGyver took the chewed gum out of his mouth and, reaching up carefully without moving his other hand, stuck it over the camera lens.

“Disgusting.” Zito sighed. “Never mind, you still have to work out a way to let go of the table without... Well.” He chuckled again. “Or not. Feel free to die horribly instead. Your demise is long overdue, after all!”

“Right...” MacGyver reached into his pocket, pulling out the evidence bag. Opening it with his teeth, he put the condiments in alongside the queen chess piece.

“What are you doing, MacGyver?” Zito’s voice was suspicious.

“Nothing much.” MacGyver reached out and picked up the flower vase. “Excuse me!” He tipped out flowers, water and Zito’s microphone along with a heap of decorative pebbles from the bottom of the vase. He added pebbles to the bag and picked it up, weighing it in his hand and casting a doubtful glance at the pressure plate.

“Well, it worked for Indiana Jones!” Taking a deep breath, MacGyver moved his hand, laying the evidence bag quickly on the pressure plate in its place. He watched the tablecloth for signs of movement, letting out his breath in a sigh of relief when it remained still.

“Ignoring Zito’s continuing questions, MacGyver kneeled down, looking at the device under the table. Without touching, he followed the wires down from the pressure plate to the bomb underneath. Pulling out his Swiss Army Knife, he used the screwdriver to detach the wires and sat back on his heels. Looking at his hands, he noticed for the first time that they were shaking.

“You’ll have to do better than that, Zito!” MacGyver stood up, feeling lightheaded with relief.

“Oh, I intend to!” Zito didn’t sound surprised. “This was just a warm up, MacGyver. And it got your two little friends out of the picture. Dear Kate will be tied up with the bomb squad for hours, which gives me lots of time to concentrate on you!” Zito sighed in anticipation. “This is going to be such fun. Look on the table there, MacGyver. You’ll find the next clue under the chessman. Don’t take too long, will you? This time, the clock really is ticking...” Zito’s voice faded away and somehow, MacGyver knew that he had gone.

MacGyver reached out for the chess piece, a king, and picked up the note underneath. Shoving them in his pocket, he ran for the door. “Kate? Kate!” MacGyver pressed the phone close to his head and stuck a finger in his other ear. “Can you hear me?”

“Mac?” Kate frowned as the line hissed and crackled. “Mac?” She frowned, catching only the odd word in the static.

“ZITO...BOMB IS... SQUAD...OK...” The phone let out a screech and she yanked it away from her ear with a curse. She walked away from the bomb squad, reasoning that the radios and equipment might be interfering with the signal. “Mac? Try again now!” “Kate?” MacGyver sounded tinny and far away. “He left another clue! I’m following the lead to-” The phone hissed and squealed before dropping the signal altogether.

“Detective?” Kate turned to see a bomb technician beckoning to her. “Detective, the Chief wants you.”

“OK.” Kate stared at her phone, then shoved it into her pocket. “Be safe, Mac...”! She turned and followed the bomb tech back to the ship.

The man lowered his binoculars, satisfied that Dr Zito had got away from the ship. He nodded to himself, scribbled some notes in a small book, and returned to his car...

**Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> August 1996**

**In the Jeep**

*Six kings on an icy throne*

*Amidst an adoring crowd*

*The enemy, vanquished, slinks away*

*Our kings do circle, proud*

*In peace, the blades hang silent*

*In war, they flash and spin*

*MacGyver loves to play the game*

*But today he will not win.*

MacGyver folded the piece of paper, tapping it against the Jeep’s steering wheel. The Kings, blades and game reference were easy for an ice hockey fan to figure out, but why would Zito want him to go to the The Forum? He frowned, then his eyes grew wide. Saturday would be practice day for the junior teams. The Forum could be full of kids!

MacGyver put the Jeep in gear and screeched away.

**Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> August**

**1996 The Forum, Los Angeles**

MacGyver turned in a circle. The stadium was massive, with a maze of back rooms and corridors as well as the rink. It was also, thankfully, empty. Maybe even Dr Zito drew the line at killing children. He unfolded Zito's riddle, reading it again. Where would Zito have left a bomb this time?

"In peace the blades hang silent." MacGyver read aloud. "Locker room, maybe?" He turned left and headed towards the changing rooms, stopping outside the door and looking in through the glass. "Oh, that's not even a little bit subtle!"

Sitting on a table in the centre of the room was a bomb. A large, clichéd bomb, complete with clock face, curling wires and two tanks of purple liquid at the back.

MacGyver studied the bomb, and as much of the room as he could see through the door glass. Not seeing any obvious traps, he opened the door, waited for a moment and then stepped into the room.

Immediately the door slammed behind him, and MacGyver heard the lock click. He heard a scrape and creak as someone moved a chair across the floor and then sat down.

"Well, MacGyver – how do you like my next puzzle?" Zito's voice was cheerful, conversational.

"What's to like?" MacGyver squatted down next to the table, studying the bomb. "This is completely mad, Zito. Your 'mask of sanity' really has slipped all the way off this time!" He reached out and touched a wire, then thought better of cutting it and withdrew his hand. In the background he could hear Zito talking, but he chose not to listen, concentrating on the device in front of him.

For all its cartoonish appearance, the bomb had been expertly constructed. There was no obvious

way to disarm it without setting it off, and no way to guess what would happen when the timer ticked down to zero. MacGyver frowned at the tanks, unable to guess whether the brilliant purple liquid was an explosive, a poison or something else entirely. He ran a hand through his hair and scowled at Zito, still talking on the other side of the door. Was he mad enough to sit, calmly monologuing, while an explosive ticked down to zero?

Possibly, but MacGyver decided probably not.

A poison, then. Zito was an expert chemist after all...

MacGyver looked at the device again, seeing a small nozzle nestling in the maze of wires. He felt in his pockets for more chewing gum, but came up empty.

“Hey, Zito?” MacGyver cut across Zito’s rambling speech.

“What is it?” Zito sounded annoyed at being interrupted and MacGyver grinned.

“Why those people? What did they do to you, that they deserved to die like that?” MacGyver looked around for something else to jam into the nozzle.

“Do?” MacGyver heard Zito shift on the chair. “They didn’t DO anything, that’s precisely the problem. They were deemed fit to be released from psychiatric incarceration, returned to lead full, productive lives, and what did they do with that precious gift?” Zito’s voice grew louder, his studied calm slipping.

“Tell me.” MacGyver looked at the timer on the bomb, swearing silently as he saw how little time was left. “Nothing!” Zito spat the word. “Nothing at all! They wasted their opportunity when so many deserving others were denied the chance.” His tone was bitter.

“People like you; you mean?” MacGyver took hold of a bunch of wires, figuring that he had little to lose by simply yanking them all.

“People like me.” Zito was quiet for a moment. When he spoke again, all his suave bonhomie was back in place. “Well, MacGyver. I think it’s almost time for you to die!”

MacGyver watched the timer tick down the last few seconds and closed his eyes. The device made a clicking noise and purple smoke started billowing out of the tanks, pouring itself down the sides of the device to curl, heavy and cold, around MacGyver’s feet.

“Uh-oh...” He pulled his handkerchief out of his pocket and tied it around his nose and mouth. He stared around the room, looking for inspiration, catching a glimpse of Zito studying him through the door glass as he turned. He coughed, the gas catching in his throat. “I am definitely in trouble

here!"

### ----- Part 3 -----

**Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> August 1996**

#### **A locked room full of gas in the Los Angeles Forum...**

“Uh-oh...” MacGyver pulled his handkerchief out of his pocket and tied it around his nose and mouth. He stared around the room, looking for inspiration, catching a glimpse of Zito studying him through the door glass as he turned. He coughed, the thick, purple gas catching in his throat. “I am definitely in trouble here!”

He spun around, cataloguing everything in the room, thinking of ideas and discarding them just as quickly.

The purple gas was rising fast, freezing his legs up to the knees. MacGyver frowned up at the small window, set out of reach against the ceiling. If he could reach it, he might just be able to

fit through it... He coughed again, the gas making him wheeze. Stars danced at the edges of his vision and he shook his head to clear it. There had to be a way...

He turned again, grabbing a pair of skates from their hook. Walking across the room, he stared up at the window, then down at the wall below it.

And then he saw it. He jammed the end of the skate blade into the gap between the edge of the lockers and the wall, kicking it in hard to wedge it into the narrow space. The skate held, and he repeated the process a little higher up.

He waded back across the room through the heavy gas, now above his waist and making his legs numb with cold. He grabbed an armful of skates and staggered back, unable to feel his feet on the floor. Kicking the ones he could reach, and using as second skate to hammer the higher ones in, MacGyver climbed up his makeshift ladder.

Reaching the top, he used the last skate's blade to break the window catch and wriggled out through the narrow gap. Pushing the window shut behind him and balancing on the narrow ledge outside, MacGyver's last view of the room before the purple gas filled it completely, was Zito's snarling face

outlined in the circle of door glass.

MacGyver made his way down the drainpipe beside the window, wheezing, coughing and trying not to look down. When he reached ground level he stood, hanging onto the drainpipe as the world spun around him.

He wobbled his way back to the Jeep ads sat, gripping the steering wheel and trying to get his breathing back under control. When his vision cleared, he looked up. Across the windscreen were the words 'THIS ISN'T OVER YET' scrawled in red marker pen. On the hood of the Jeep was a note, weighted down with a chess piece.

MacGyver rested his head against the steering wheel and groaned.

Sitting in a car across the street, the man watched Zito leave the stadium. He noted the anger, the frustration and the determination in Zito's movements and expression. He nodded to himself, made another note in his book, and then drove away.

**Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> August 1996**

**What a day this is turning out to be...**

"I am getting really tiered of riddles..." MacGyver set the bishop chess piece on the dash and opened the note. He coughed again, feeling the after-effects of the gas rasp in his chest. Clearing his throat, he read aloud:

"A holy man, tall and stately seems

The ground beneath him  
shakes

His house is ruined, cracked and torn

The wrath of God awakes

Now he wanders, homeless, lone

His altar thick with dust

MacGyver must pray for salvation

Before his chance is lost”

“OK.” He looked at the bishop on the dash. “So, I’m looking for a church.” He read the riddle again. “A ruined church.” He frowned. “But this is Zito, so it won’t be just any church.” He snapped his fingers. “Cathedral of St Vibiana!” He put the Jeep into gear and pulled out of the stadium and into the traffic, feeling his stomach turn over at the thought of another bomb.

Traffic in Los Angeles was building, and MacGyver found himself inching along the roads with the rest of the commuters. Keeping one eye on the traffic, MacGyver pulled out his phone and dialled Kate’s number.

“Mac!” This time the line was clear, and MacGyver could hear cars and talking in the background. “Where are you? What happened?”

“Wow, OK.” MacGyver let go of the steering wheel, stuck in the traffic queue, and picked up the bishop. “Let’s see: Zito’s next riddle led me to The Forum, where he’d left me a gas bomb. It went off, Kate – I don’t know what was in it, but I’ve definitely felt better than I do right now!” He coughed and took a deep breath, feeling his chest tight.

“I’ll get someone down there.” MacGyver heard Kate put her hand over the phone and have a muffled conversation with someone nearby. “Done. Where are you now?”

“Stuck on the freeway, on the way to St Vibiana’s Cathedral. I don’t know what Zito has waiting for me, but I have to assume it’s another bomb.” MacGyver sighed, then coughed.

“I’m on my way.” The phone picked up a rustling sound and then MacGyver could hear Kate’s boot heels on the sidewalk. “How’s McAllister holding up?”

“McAllister?” MacGyver shook his head, even though Kate wouldn’t see. “I thought he was with you!”

**Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> August 1996**

**Cathedral of St Vibiana**

St Vibiana had been a beautiful building before the Northridge earthquake two years earlier had damaged it beyond repair. Even now, it had a tattered dignity, despite the boarded-up windows and massive cracks in its façade.

MacGyver found the front door unlocked, shoving it back on twisted hinges across the rubble-strewn floor. Milky evening light filtered in through those windows still intact, striping the tiled floor and highlighting the damage the dignified old church had suffered.

The altar was undamaged, though thick with dust and stripped of its cross and chalices. MacGyver glanced up at the crucifix hanging askew on the wall, thinking that of all the places Zito could have chosen to set a bomb, he should have left this one alone.

He took out Zito's latest and unfolded it.

"I must pray for salvation..." He refolded the note and looked around, seeing nothing out of place. He walked up the centre aisle, stopping just short of the rail. The strip of matting and water-stained hassocks were still there, waiting for the prayers of a congregation long gone.

"This is stupid." MacGyver took a step forward, resting his hand on the cracked rail. As he stepped, the floor gave way, dropping him down into an earthquake crack hidden underneath the mat. He landed hard at the bottom and wrapped his arms over his head as a shower of rubble, wood and carpet rained down on him.

When the deluge of debris slowed, he uncurled, pushing hassocks, lumps of concrete and floor tiles off himself. Moving cautiously, he discovered that although he was filthy and shaken up, he was basically unhurt.

The light above him dimmed as the round silhouette of a familiar head filled the hole.

"Ah, MacGyver." Zito sounded like the cat who'd found the cream. "Good of you to drop in!"

"Just cut to the chase and show me the bomb!" MacGyver shifted carefully, aware that he and some of the debris were wedged over a long, dark drop.

"No bomb." MacGyver heard Zito shift, and the light returned. "No need. Mother Nature seems to have done an admirable job without my help." There was the unmistakable creak of a deckchair being unfolded, and a creak as Zito sat down. "No, all I need to do now is wait. I calculate that it will take you around ten days to starve to death down there and, in the meantime, we can enjoy some intellectual conversation." Zito sighed. "It's so difficult to find a worthy adversary..." "Great." MacGyver looked around in the dim light, deciding that the crack in the foundations was too wide to rock-chimney up and too smooth to climb. He looked down between his feet, his breath quickening as

vertigo clawed at the edges of his consciousness. A terrible smell rose up from the depths, and MacGyver covered his nose and mouth with his hand.

“One question Zito: Why?” MacGyver picked up a lump of rubble, dropped it and listened, trying to gauge the depth of the dark hole.

“Why?” Zito sounded delighted at the question. “Why you? Why do I do it? Why your detective friend? You need to be much more specific than that MacGyver.”

“Uh-huh.” MacGyver reached into his pocket, freezing for a moment as the debris underneath him shifted, and took out a box of matches. He struck one, hoping that the smell rising up didn’t contain anything flammable, let go and watched it fall.

“Let’s start with why I do it.” The chair creaked as Zito settled back. “I see my purpose as ridding the world of people it’s better off without. People who don’t add to the sum total of the intelligence of the human race. Think of me as the hand of Darwin in the modern world, helping to ensure that only the best survive.” He sighed, basking in the image. “And of course, I enjoy my work.”

“Right.” Having judged the drop, MacGyver reached up and gathered the floor matting onto his lap. He took out his knife and opened the blade, using it to slice the mat into narrow strips. Dust flew up and he coughed.

“And what did you think of my gas?” Zito leaned forward, but the fallen debris and swirling dust hid MacGyver from view.

“Lovely.” The answer echoed up, followed by another fit of coughing. Zito leaned back, satisfied.

“It’s just a shame you didn’t stay to enjoy it a little longer.” Zito shook his head. “You would have passed out from oxygen deprivation and then been deep frozen where you lay. Fascinating stuff, my own recipe of course. And such a beautiful colour, don’t you think?”

“Stunning.” MacGyver’s voice sounded strained.

“As to why your detective friend? I find the police as an organisation inefficient, their methods of detection both crude and ineffective. Thinning the herd of mediocre detectives will allow the best to rise out of the bureaucratic mire and enhance the whole. Do you see?”

“Hand of Darwin, right.” MacGyver, spinning slowly as he climbed down his makeshift rope towards the earthquake-cracked sewer pipe below, rolled his eyes. His foot touched the pipe and he let go, balancing on the smooth surface with one hand on the rough side of the fissure. Sitting on the edge of the hole, MacGyver pulled a face, took a deep breath and dropped into the pipe.

Far above him, he heard shouting as Zito worked out that he’d gone. One phrase floated down to him:

"I'll kill again, MacGyver! After all, I have your flaxen flatfoot stowed away for just such an eventuality!"

## **Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> August 1996 Above ground, thankfully...**

"Kate!" She turned as MacGyver called her name, taking an involuntary step back at the smell that arrived with him.

"Mac! Are you OK? What happened?" She took in his appearance and shook her head.

"Zito happened." MacGyver looked down at himself. He was covered in dust and dirt, and his jeans were soaked to the knees with sewage. "And then there was a sewer. I don't want to talk about that part!"

"No problem!" Kate fanned the air with her hand. "When we went in, the place was empty. That's some hole you dropped down, by the way!"

"You have no idea!" MacGyver moved to run a hand through his dishevelled hair, looked at his hand and changed his mind.

"We'll get him next time, don't worry." Kate's voice was grim.

"He said he was going to kill again, and then something about having a 'flaxen flatfoot' captive. I thought he meant you – "MacGyver indicated Kate's blonde hair, "- but here you are, so I don't know." His eyes widened with sudden understanding as Kate twirled her finger near her head, indicating long, curly hair.

"McAllister!" Kate pulled out her phone and tried calling the new detective. "Nada. Just rings until it goes to voicemail."

"OK." MacGyver took a deep breath. "Zito knows I'm alive, so he'll come after me again. He's probably using McAllister as bait the same way he used you, so he's likely safe for now."

"So now we wait for another sick clue." Kate glared at St Vibianas as though Zito might still be there. "Come back to the station and get cleaned up. Then we'll work out where McAllister could be."

Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> August 1996

Decent diner, near the Police Station

“He must have grabbed McAllister while we were dealing with the Queen Mary.” Kate took another bite of her burger. “What a mess.”

“I know.” MacGyver swallowed milkshake. “First Murdoc, then Dr Zito. What an introduction to detective work!” He shook his head. “I don’t think Zito will take long – McAllister’s no slouch, so Zito’s going to have trouble hanging onto him for too long.” He looked around the diner, as if expecting Zito to appear.

“I’ve got a BOLO out for McAllister just in case.” Kate slurped the last of her soda and stood up. “I’m heading back to the station in case Zito makes contact there. Coming?”

“No.” MacGyver ate the last of his fries and wiped his mouth. “I’m going to swing by my house and McAllister’s place first.” He shrugged. “You never know.” “OK.” Kate smiled, but her eyes were worried. Fishing her keys out of her purse, she turned and headed for the parking lot.

MacGyver finished his drink and watched Kate leave, wondering what Zito’s next move would be. He got up and paid his bill, then went through the doors and out to his Jeep. He got in, turned the key and then looked up at the windshield, seeing red writing on the glass.

“Oh, come on – not the car again!” Thumping the steering wheel in frustration as he noticed the gear-shift knob had been replaced with a chess piece, MacGyver got out to read Zito’s latest riddle.

----- Part 4 -----

**Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> August 1996, still...**

**Diner parking lot**

MacGyver finished his drink and watched Kate leave, wondering what Zito's next move would be. He got up and paid his bill, then went through the doors and out to his Jeep. He got in, turned the key and then looked up at the windshield, seeing red writing on the glass.

"Oh, come on – not the car again!" Thumping the steering wheel in frustration as he noticed the gear-shift knob had been replaced with a chess piece, MacGyver got out to read Zito's latest riddle.

Now you see me, now I'm gone

My house is full of lies

The magic and illusion here

Take everyone by surprise

The box is always empty

No matter how often filled

The marks step in again and again

Like MacGyver, soon to be killed

"Magic? Illusion?" MacGyver read the riddle, frowning. "What does that have to do with a rook?" He scratched his head. "Maybe a theatre or a magic show?" He stared at the chess piece fixed to his gear stick and frowned, then read the riddle again. "House of magic and illusion... House of.... And another name for a rook is a castle! The Magic Castle!" Scrubbing the marker pen off his windshield with his sleeve, MacGyver jumped into the Jeep and roared away.

McAllister woke up in pine-smelling darkness. He tried to put a hand to his aching head, but his hand

hit the ceiling just above his face. He took a deep breath, smelling the cloying sweetness of the chloroform that had been used to knock him out.

His memory returned a piece at a time.

He'd left the Grand Salon in the Queen Mary and cleared the ship of visitors with the help of the restaurant staff.

He'd gone back to help MacGyver and then...

He had a snatch of memory of being dragged down some stairs by the back of his collar, the heels of his boots bumping against every step, but he had no idea where he was.

He was lying down, he realised.

He blinked several times, but wherever he was, it was totally dark. He reached out both hands, testing the boundaries of his prison. He was in a wooden box and, for a terrible, panicked moment, he thought he was buried in a coffin. But through the wooden walls he could hear faint sounds – someone shouting, a bump and then a rattling sound. Applause?

Maybe he was in a theatre?

Abruptly, the box lid was pulled open, and McAllister looked up to see a bearded face looking down at him.

"Awake already?" The man tutted. "Too soon, detective." He reached in to the box, slapping a chloroform-soaked cloth over McAllister's mouth and nose.

McAllister tried to hold his breath, turning his face away and struggling as much as he could inside the box. But the man was strong, and eventually McAllister had to breathe.

The last thing he heard before the darkness swallowed him again, was a kindly, avuncular chuckle.

**Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> August 2996**

**The Magic Castle, Los Angeles**

"I'm sorry Sir, our dress code is non-negotiable." The cloakroom attendant looked at MacGyver and shook his head.

"Yeah." MacGyver looked down at himself. The ancient khakis he'd found in the Jeep and borrowed LAPD t-shirt were a massive improvement on his sewage-soaked jeans, but they wouldn't get him into

the Magic Castle. "OK." He turned and walked away, ducking down the side of the building.

Climbing onto a trash can and then up a drainpipe, he used the blade of his knife to pop the catch on a window and slithered inside, stopping his fall just in time to avoid going head-first into a toilet. Righting himself, he strode out of the bathroom and into the corridor, leaving a shocked old gentleman in evening dress open-mouthed behind him.

He discovered quickly that the backstage corridors of the Magic Castle were a maze.

MacGyver could hear a performance happening somewhere nearby, and the audience reacting with shock, then applause.

He looked in through every door he could, seeing performers practising tricks or touching up their makeup. Other rooms were used as offices, or storage for costumes and props. MacGyver stared at the props, recalling the second part of Zito's riddle:

The box is always empty

No matter how often filled

The marks step in again and again

Like MacGyver, soon to be killed It would be just like Zito to imprison McAllister in a magic disappearing box, or one of those cabinets the magicians thrust swords through...

He tried the next door, finding the room in darkness. He felt alongside the door for the light switch, and jumped as light flooded the room and he was suddenly face to face with himself!

The room was filled with freestanding mirrors, part of a performer's stage dressing. MacGyver took a step into the room, then whirled round as the door closed quietly behind him.

"I can't believe you fell for that twice!" Zito's voice was amused. "I'm disappointed in you, MacGyver."

MacGyver called Zito several names he didn't usually use in polite company, and Zito's chuckle echoed through the room.

"My, my, my, my, my!" Zito's voice sounded from a different direction. "Such language!"

"Where's McAllister?" MacGyver's angry shout filled the room.

"Oh, he's quite safe. For now." Zito was quiet for a moment. "I wouldn't take too long to find him, though. He's not very interesting, and I get bored so easily..."

MacGyver walked through the maze of mirrors, stopping as a flash of yellow caught his attention. Backing up a step, he saw it again: The corner of a yellow box, mounted on a trolley. He took a step

towards the image, then shook his head and turned around, looking for the source of the reflection. Taking a few steps forward and turning a corner showed him the box in a different mirror. MacGyver frowned at the reflection, seeing a shadowy figure behind the box.

“Zito!” MacGyver clenched his fists.

“Very much so!” Zito’s reflection held up a sword, watching a shaft of light gleam on the edge of the blade. “Do you know, I’ve always wanted to try this.” He stared at the mirror, and his reflection stared at MacGyver. “Of course, one has to know the trick of it.” He inserted the point of the sword into a slot in the top of the box, then looked back at the mirror. His reflection smiled at MacGyver, excited and not at all sane. “Do you know the trick, MacGyver?”

“Don’t do it, Zito!” MacGyver reached out to the reflection. “It’s me you want – why hurt him?”

“Well, he’s made perfectly good bait for my trap, because here you are.” Zito paused, the sword still held high. “And since he’s here, it seems a pity not to get full use out of him!” Zito shrugged and placed his other hand on top of the sword, ready to push it into the box.

“Well, I’m disappointed in you too, Zito!” MacGyver moved closer, glancing around a mirror and seeing Zito to his right.

“Disappointed? How, pray tell?” Zito frowned, lowering the sword.

“The quality of your riddles.” MacGyver toed off his sneakers and padded behind the row of mirrors, his stocking feet silent on the smooth floor. “Definitely sub-standard!”

“What?! Sub-st –“ Zito caught his breath, smiled and shook his head. “Good try, MacGyver, but you won’t distract me that easily!” He spun around, sword in hand. “Now, where are you...”

MacGyver froze, standing still until he heard Zito turn around. He sprang out from behind the mirror, punching Zito on the side of the head and grabbing his sword arm. Zito snarled and spun, faster and stronger than MacGyver had anticipated. He drove his elbow back, knocking the wind out of MacGyver, who doubled up wheezing and coughing. Zito followed up with a punch that left MacGyver’s head ringing, then turned back to the box.

MacGyver blinked hard, shook his head to clear it and launched himself at Zito’s back.

He saw the scene as if in slow motion: He leaped, reaching his hands out to grasp Zito as the madman stabbed the sword down towards the box. MacGyver landed on Zito’s back, pulling his head back towards him and toppling him to one side. He thought he’d been quick enough but, as they crashed to the ground, he saw the sword, thrust hilt-deep through the slot in the top of the box.

For a moment time seemed to stop. Then MacGyver felt strong fingers close around his throat, as Zito grabbed him from behind and started strangling!

MacGyver scrabbled at Zito’s fingers, thrashing and trying to hit Zito with his elbows or headbutt him in the face. In desperation, he reached over the top of his shoulders, grabbing handfuls of Zito’s shirt

and pulling hard. He rolled forwards, flipping Zito over his head to crash down in front of MacGyver. Zito's head cracked solidly on the floor and his eyes rolled up in his head.

MacGyver scrambled up, stepped over Zito and then hesitated before touching the sword, steeling himself to face the grisly sight within. He took hold of the sword with both hands, closed his eyes and pulled. The sword slid out of the box and MacGyver dropped it on the floor. He fumbled with the catches and lifted the lid. The sides of the box immediately collapsed, leaving McAllister, groggy and frightened but very much alive, sprawling on the trolley.

"Wha' happen'?" McAllister blinked up at MacGyver, who grinned and started patting him down. "Hey! Get off, willya!"

"You're alive!" MacGyver pushed McAllister's hands away. "Are you hurt? That sword went right through the box!"

"Sword? Wha'..." McAllister pushed back long strands of hair that had come loose from his ponytail. "What are you talking about?" He swung his legs round and sat up, clutching his head. "Ow."

"Zito! He stuck a sword right through the box!" MacGyver watched McAllister nod, still drugged, then process the information and look down at himself.

"I guess he missed. OH! Ah..." McAllister stuck his fingers through a tear in his shirt and his face paled. "An inch to the left there, and I'd have been... Well." He shivered.

"Right!" MacGyver stood back, letting out a sigh of relief.

"So, where is he?" McAllister accepted a hand up and looked around MacGyver.

"Oh, you're kidding me!" MacGyver spun round, seeing the empty floor behind him. "I don't believe this! He was out cold, and —" He broke off, shaking his head.

"Let's get after him!" McAllister started for the door, swayed and grabbed the wall to keep from falling. "Maybe you should go..." He pulled out his phone. "I'll call it in."

Right." Even as he raced through the corridors and backstage areas of the Magic Castle, MacGyver knew he wouldn't find Zito. Once again, he'd vanished into thin air.

One man saw Zito leave. He fell into step with him as Zito walked briskly towards the bus stop.

"Dr Zito, I believe?" His voice held a trace of a German accent, and Zito turned, intrigued.

"Perhaps. You have the advantage of me..." Zito raised his eyebrows and waited.

"I've been admiring your work." The man gave a thin smile. "You have great determination, no matter how... slippery your quarry."

“Thank you.” Zito continued walking, watching the man out of the corner of his eye.

“I have a proposition for you, Dr.” The man turned away from Zito, walking alongside. “One which might allow you to use your considerable talents for getting rid of this thorn in your side. For good.” His gaze slid sideways to Zito. “Would you be interested?”

“I might.” Zito nodded. “But I never do business with people whose names I don’t know.”

“My name?” The man smiled, streetlight gleaming on his blond hair. “My name is Von Leer.”

**Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> August 1996**

**Casa MacGyver**

“You play?” McAllister, looking around MacGyver’s living room while MacGyver made coffee in the kitchen. He touched the top of the white knight of MacGyver’s chess set, still laid out on the table.

“I’ve kind of gone off it, you want to know!” MacGyver set the pot and mugs on the table next to the board. “Too dangerous! How about table hockey instead?”

“I’m good with that.” McAllister smiled, accepting a mug of coffee.

Zito sat down at his table, a tube of glue in his hand. He picked up the broken knight from the feet of the black queen and spread glue on the edges, holding them together until they dried. He set the mended piece down on the board, the black queen still towering over it.

“Next time, MacGyver,” he hissed through clenched teeth. “Next time...”

The End