

## PART TWO

"That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard in my life," said Sam when Joey finished his tale. "I've heard some wacky stories in my time, but this one takes the piss. Do you really expect me to believe that?"

They were in Sam's car, in the car park behind Mr. Patel's Cash and Carry.

Joey sighed. "You think that's wacky, you should watch pro-wrestling. As for not believing me - you are, as you've mentioned several times all ready, talking to a man with a snake for a tail." Sam had to admit that he had a point. "It's the honest truth. The world - and seventy grand - depends on us getting that chest to its final destination before midnight. We have forty-five minutes. Let's get going."

"Okay," said Sam. "I'll do it. I'll help you, but only because you're giving me a free choice - despite the fact that you have a gun. Besides, only a complete lunatic would make up something as absurd as that."

"Glad to hear it, mate, glad to hear it," grinned Joey. Tony just grumbled something incomprehensible. "Now, you got a road atlas?"

"Don't say that word," snapped Sam. "I don't want to hear that word again. Ever."

"Alright, suit yourself. You got a road map around here?"

"Yeah, it's in the back. Under all that rubbish," replied Sam, motioning with his head towards the backseat, which was covered in a mound of old newspapers, his mother's small clothes, and whole lot of other junk.

Joey took one look and said, "I'll drive, you find the map."

Sam nodded, almost sadly. As he went to the back, Joey and Tony slid over to the driver's seat with some difficulty.

"A man shouldn't have to rifle through his mother's undies," complained Sam from the back. "It's not natural. It's more disgusting than that chest of yours."

"Quit whining. And what could be worse than the contents of that chest?"

"There's used condoms back here. Used condoms. In my mother's car."

"Yeah," cackled Tony, "that's pretty nasty."

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“Sorry about Tony,” apologized Joey, “but talking from my arse is something I no longer have any control over. You’ll have to excuse the odd unsympathetic comment. It’s just who he is.”

Sam nodded that he understood. After a few more moments of absolute horror, he finally pulled clear the tea-stain scarred road atlas.

“What do we need this for anyway?” he asked as he sat back down in the passenger seat.

“We need it, fairy, to find where we’re going,” said Tony.

“If that place transports itself to somewhere new, every single day, how on Earth is it going to be on a map of Blackburn?”

“Trust me mate, it’s there. It won’t be at midnight, but for now it’s there.”

“Where do I start looking?” Sam wondered aloud.

“We know for a fact that it’s in a small town in Hyndburn,” explained Joey. “Check in-”  
“Rishton,” finished Tony. “Check in Rishton. It’ll be clearly marked.”

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Joey drove the small hatchback through the streets of Blackburn, sticking to the speed limits and stopping at the traffic lights. There was not even a hint of urgency to his driving. They blended in with the public, the night disguising Joey’s alarming appearance from the outside world.

“The bank’s about five minutes away,” said Sam, staring at its clearly marked position on the road map. “I still can’t believe it’s on the map.”

“Believe it, fairy,” replied Tony, “If you can believe it pops up in a different place everyday, you can believe it pops up on the road maps as well.”

“Shit,” put in Joey, slamming his foot on the accelerator, the tyres screeching as they momentarily lost traction.

“Shit?” repeated Tony, “What do you mean ‘shit’? You know I hate it when you say that.”

“Put a rat in it, Tony. We’ve got company.”

“The police?” said Sam, worried.

“No, this is someone far worse, mate.”

"Martha," announced Tony, looking out of the back window. He actually sounded scared. That wasn't good. Sam didn't think anything could scare Tony; he just seemed to be that kind of snake.

"Martha?" he said aloud, "Who the Hell is Martha? And why is Tony the Trouser Snake scared of someone called Martha?"

"I'm not scared," snapped Tony, "and Martha is one evil bitch, let me tell you."

"I'll bet. Where is this Martha?"

"Right behind us, take a look."

Sam twisted in his seat for a better view... and yelped. "That's her who played the monkey-girl in whatsitcalled!" He shouted, "And she's flying!"

The woman in question was hurtling towards them like some crazed angel, wrapped in flowing white silks that rippled in the wind like water and snarling like a jungle cat. Black hair whipped about a white face painted with dark makeup and her eyes burned with blue-purple fire. Her hands where curled like the talons of a bird of prey, alight with the same amethyst flames.

"It's not the monkey-activist," snapped Tony, "we wouldn't be running from a flying actress. That's Martha. And she wants the chest."

"Well she probably wants it pretty bad," deduced Sam, "cos she's gaining on us."

"If she gets that chest," snapped Joey, "she'll use it to bring the Dark One into our world. We can't let her have it."

"Or we don't get paid," Tony chimed in.

"Or we don't get paid," agreed Joey.

Something slammed into the back of the car, and the hatchback veered to the right before Joey righted it.

"What was that?" screamed Sam.

"Fireball," said Joey matter-of-factly, as another amethyst ball of fire slammed into the road metres away. "A near hit. She gets us clean with one of them, and we're serpent tika masala. Tony, take the wheel. Sam, foot on the accelerator and keep the directions coming."

"Where are you going?" asked Sam.

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“I'm going to see if I can put a hole through that bitch's brains.”

Joey rolled down the window whilst Sam struggled to stretch his foot to the right pedal, accidentally brushing the brakes as he did so. The car jerked savagely, Tony's curses muffled as he bit down on the steering wheel and tried to keep the car straight, venom dripping from his bared fangs. Reaching the accelerator, Sam continued to read out the directions for Tony, the car screeching around corners without slowing down. They were in Rishton now, mere minutes from the bank.

Meanwhile, Joey was leaning out of the window, his golden revolver drawn. He took aim and squeezed off round after round. Sam heard seven shots, then eight. Then nine.

By the fifteenth he glanced up at Tony, “Doesn't he need to reload?”

Tony shot him a quick glance; saying without saying that he was a little pre-occupied, seeing as he was driving a car using only his mouth. Joey came back inside and took the wheel. Sam breathed a sigh of relief.

“What happened?” he asked.

“I've slowed her down. Being hit by a score of bullets will slow anyone down.”

“You shot her? And she's still alive?”

“Twenty times. Mostly in the head. But she had some kind of defensive spell going, so the bullets never pierced flesh. I don't-”

The back of the car exploded, the front half flipping forward like a plaything, trailing tails of fire as it twisted and twirled through the air. Tony wrapped himself around Sam during the ensuing chaos and Joey leaped free through the gaping hole in the back of what was left of the car, just as Sam blacked out.

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Sam came to with his face on the tarmac, and for a while he just lay there. Someone was talking, but he couldn't tell what they were saying, it was just a buzzing drawl in his ears. He reached a hand up to his throbbing temple and it came away bloody. Groaning, he pushed himself up to his knees and shook his head to clear it, instantly regretting it.

Glancing up, he saw Joey standing not far away. He was talking to Martha, the chest between them, against the backdrop of his mother's burning car. Martha was tossing a ball of flame from one hand to another as she spoke. Tony hissed at her from behind Joey, his hood fanned wide.

Sam glanced around, trying to take everything in. His eyes came to rest on Joey's golden revolver. It was within reach. He lifted it and discovered the gun's six chambers were empty.

"I want the chest, that's all," cooed Martha, the words finally beginning to make sense. "Give me the chest, and you can go, honey."

"That chest is worth a lot to us," was Joey's reply.

"Yes, yes, how much did the bank offer you? Fifty grand?"

"Seventy," riposted Tony, somewhat defensively.

"Seventy grand," laughed Martha, her voice almost musical. "Sugar, I'll give you a hundred in cash right here, plus guaranteed protection for when the Dark One is reborn. Deals like that don't come everyday."

Joey seemed to weigh his options. Tony conferred with him in harsh whispers that even Sam could hear. Tony wanted to take the money. Sam had to admit it made sense - he would too.

"I've got a better idea," said Joey finally. "How about we take your one hundred, their seventy and save the world."

"You're willing to die for this world?" asked Martha, visibly shocked at Joey's reply.

"And the money," replied Tony, he may not have agreed to Joey's plan, but to his credit he was backing his friend to the end.

"For seventy grand?" Martha still couldn't believe it. Neither could Sam. Or Tony for that matter.

"One hundred and seventy," corrected Joey, his hand snaking down to claw at his hip. It came up empty. He stared at his empty hand as Sam cried out, "It's here!"

Too late.

A fireball hit him square in the chest. He fell to the floor several metres away, his chest smoking.

"You and your big mouth," muttered Tony.

The witch strolled towards them, all swishing hips, her hands cupping a gradually swelling blue ball of flame. Circling the chest, she looked across at Sam who was desperately looking for bullets on the floor. Ignoring him, she made her way over to Joey. As she came within reach of him, Tony tried to protect his host and friend, darting forward in an attempt to sink his fangs into

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a bare ankle. She danced back and paralysed him with a look. Raising her hands into the air, still clutching a basketball sized flame, she flashed a dazzling smile. "And now it ends," she cooed.

"Not on your life," mumbled Joey, defiant to the last.

Sam raised the empty gun. "Twisted bitch!" he screamed.

Her hands flashed down and the ball of flame exploded on impact, sending huge chunks of tarmac in all directions like shrapnel and momentarily turning the world blue. Sam pulled the trigger at the same time.

The back of Martha's head opened up like a rose and she fell forward, her arms slumped to her sides. She landed where Joey had been. Sam stood up, too shocked to speak. The gun was still empty. Stumbling over to where Martha lay, he found she was the only one there. Nothing was left of Joey Chimera or Tony. Martha tried to get up. Even with a hole in her head, she tried to rise. Sam shot her again. Another nineteen times for Joey.

As he lowered the smoking barrel to his side, he realised it was over.

He looked around in amazement. The ruins of his mother's car, Martha's now headless corpse, the mixture of amethyst and yellow flames, and the iron chest, still bound in chains.

And to think, mused Sam to himself, all this death and violence over Atlas's spunk.

The charred road map flew over, carried to him by the light breeze. He snatched it from the air with his free hand, and looked at it.

The visibly marked sperm bank slowly faded from the map. Midnight.

He looked up at the chest again. What am I supposed to do with the sperm of titans?

Many a woman died in childbirth over the next year.

Fin.