

CHAPTER-45

Thomas went over his options as quickly as he could as the woman leaned toward the man to whisper something.

Running was at the top of Thomas's list. With his power, it was simple; if he was alone. Fighting? He couldn't fight magic. So running it was.

She headed for the counter while the man walked toward him and Gilbert.

Fuck. Gilbert. Thomas could vanish, be outside on the other side of the road with a glance and thought, but he couldn't take anyone with him yet. An extra person meant utter exhaustion for him, even if it was a line-of-sight jump. San Francisco would be a better choice; guys waited there to revive him.

Fuck, that left the others and Grant at the Chamber's mercy.

"Mister Hertz," the man said in a deep and rich voice with a slight English accent. "May I and my companion sit with you and Mister Rowling? I would like us to discuss the situation you have unfortunately found yourself in." The gray furred vole was dressed in an expensive overcoat to go with the refined language.

Thomas had trouble finding his voice in surprise. He'd expected them to whip out their staff and... where was the staff? He leaned over and the woman didn't carry anything either.

"As you can see, we are unarmed," the man said, smiling. "All I am interested in is a friendly discussion."

"Ah guess," Gilbert said, "Tha if all ya want is ta talk, we betta have a drink ta go with it." He motioned to the counter, "Honey! Bring tha bottle oh the best whiskey ya got!"

Thomas stared at Gilbert. Where had that accent come from? The two Texans barely gained one even when they were drunk.

"That's alright," the vole said, "my companion is getting us

tea.”

Gilbert snorted. “If ya gonna be friends, we ain’t drinking water.”

The raccoon who’d entered with the vole joined them, holding two cups. “Are they giving you any trouble?” she asked, her accent making Thomas think she was from the east coast.

The waitress squeezed between them and placed a bottle along with four shot glasses on the table before hurrying away.

“No,” the vole said, sounding annoyed, “but it seems Mister Rowling is looking to get us drunk.”

“If all ya can take is one drink.” The armadillo took a shot glass and sneers as he looked it over. “Then ya can have just one.” He poured the brown liquor in it before sliding the glass to the man. The next full shot glass went to the woman, the third to Thomas. Gilbert down the water in the glass that came with the food and filled it to the three-quarter mark with whiskey.

He took a small sip. “What ya wanna talk about?”

The woman sipped her shot glass while the man eyed it distastefully before sipping his. Thomas felt like to odd one out, so he sipped his and did his best not to choke on the burn. How was Gilbert drinking this like it was nothing more than beer?

The vole pushed the glass away from him. “Mister Hertz. You have inadvertently found yourself in the middle of a situation that you do not belong in. I do not know what Mister Summer has told you, but I can promise you that none of it will be accurate.”

“You attacked him for no reason,” Thomas said before stopping himself. The alcohol couldn’t be affecting him already, right?

“Did he tell you that?” the man asked, while the raccoon smirked. As refined as Magnet seemed, there was something sleazy about Lullaby. “Have you considered that we might be justified in wanting to bring Mister Summer to justice?”

“So da kangaroo’s a criminal?” Gilbert asked, sounding too interested for Thomas’s comfort. Grant wasn’t a criminal. He had two independent people telling him the Chamber was bad news, so... they didn’t know he’d talked with Shila. They might not even know she existed. They thought all he had to go by was whatever Grant told him. Could he use that to get himself and Gilbert out of this? They were unarmed, after all.

Or were they? His friends could do more than just use their powers. Grant could make talismans. Could the Chamber? He couldn’t remember if Grant said anything about it. Anyway, he couldn’t take the risk.

“I hate this,” He grumbled, then sipped the whiskey and choked on it.

“Yes,” the man said, amused. “Mister Summer has put you in a bad position, but I want to reassure you that you hold no interest to us. You are merely a bystander. If you tell us where Grant is, we will take him and leave you and your friends be.”

Thomas looked in the glass, searching it for answers. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Gilbert watching him. He couldn’t believe them. He knew that. The other two were probably out there, looking for Grant or his friends, since they didn’t seem surprised to find Thomas and Gilbert here.

How weren’t they surprised? At the very least, Gilbert should have caught them by surprise. Then there was his teleportation. Something no one thought possible, according to Grant, and even if he questioned that the kangaroo was an expert on the matter, Henry was after him because of it and Shila’s reaction supported teleportation was at the very least rare.

He sighed. He had to be careful and hope Gilbert wouldn’t contradict him. “I don’t know where he is. We split not long after I took him away from you.”

“Mister Hertz, I find this difficult to believe considering you are in Red Deer at the moment.”

"I'm in hiding," he replied. "I figured that if you decided to hunt me down for helping him, you wouldn't think to look for me in his frozen place." He shuddered at the idea of having to step outside again.

"Kid," the raccoon said. "Don't play this game, okay? The roo's not worth it. He'd drop you the moment things got hard. Just tell us where he is and we're gone. You'll never even hear of us again."

"I don't know where he is," Thomas said, the frustration real.

"I am asking you, politely, to reconsider your answer, Mister Hertz," the vole said. "While I am not in a position to do any lasting damage to you, I have the ability to inflict a lot of pain on you and Mister Rowling."

"Why can't you kill him?" Gilbert asked, frowning, his accent gone.

"Part of an agreement with a third party," the vole answered with a dismissive wave of the hand.

"Like we're going to do that guy's bidding," the raccoon snorted and was glared at by the vole. "What do we care what his plans are for the kid? You plan on letting the only known teleporter go?"

"I think you just tipped your hand," Gilbert said, raising his still mostly full glass to his mouth. "Thomas, get ready to run." He took a quick drink and raised his other hand, palm up, to his face. As the vole opened his mouth, a flame appeared in the palm, a few inches in height, then the armadillo blew his mouth full of whiskey through the flame and it exploded into a fireball in front of the vole and raccoon, forcing them away. "Come on!" Gilbert yelled at a stunned Thomas as he rushed the door.

"What was that?" Thomas demanded as he caught up to the armadillo.

"Not important!" Gilbert shouldered the door open, and cold air blasted at them. Fuck. Thomas had forgotten how cold it was. "We

have to. Oh, fuck." On their right was Heat Wave, holding Magnet's staff along with one made of black metal. Only, as Thomas watched, one end began glowing red. "Other direction," Gilbert ordered, skidding as he tried to do the one-eighty.

Thomas turned. "We need another plan." Light stood there, grinning, the transparent shaft of her staff resting on her shoulder. Where could they go? Get in one of the trucks parked along the fence? Did Gilbert know how to drive a big rig? The armadillo grabbed Thomas's arm and ran away from the building toward the road.

"You are wasting your time!" the vole yelled. "You can't run from us."

"Gil?" Thomas asked.

"You might have to get us out of here."

"I can't. It's going to leave the others alone."

The armadillo looked around. "Fuck, why couldn't the switch to electric have taken another century? I can do stuff with gas." He grabbed a metal bar off the ground. It had one end broken into jagged points and Gilbert aimed it at the four Chamber agents.

Magnet took his staff from Heat Wave and gave a flick. The bar flew out of Gilbert's hands, nearly pulling him off balance.

"Do you understand how serious your predicament is, Mister Hertz? This isn't a battle you can win."

"Thomas," Gilbert said, just as a wave of hot wind struck them from the side, then warm rain fell and steamed on the cold ground.

Thomas first looked at Heat Wave, who seemed surprised by what happened.

"Grant!" the vole yelled, smiling. "I'm so glad you finally joined us."

"Get the fuck away from the kids, Kingsley!" Grant stepped

around the building, staff raised. On one side was Olavo, and on the other —

With a war cry, Limbani ran straight at Lullaby, inexplicably dodging the lances of light her staff sent his way. He jumped, kicking her in the face, then landed, grinning like a madman. He looked around in time for the flying metal bar that had been in Gilbert's hand only seconds before hitting him across the face and sending him on his back.

"Someone get the monkey!" Olavo yelled as Thomas ran toward the fallen Limbani.

"Get everyone together!" He yelled back. Could he do a group? He was going to find out soon enough.

He skidded and fell as he reached the monkey. The warm rain on the frozen ground was creating a surface where friction wasn't much of a thing. He grabbed the unconscious monkey and thanked the workout and recent sex sessions with Madoc for the added muscle mass as he pulled him up and then over a shoulder.

Pain erupted in his side and his legs buckled under him. Limbani rolled away from him as Thomas sprawled.

"Hey, it worked!" a woman said, and Thomas had a tough time turning his head to see Lullaby grinning despite her broken and bleeding muzzle. He fought to look at Limbani and reached for him, but his arm weight a ton. He willed himself next to the monkey, but nothing happened.

It finally registered he was exhausted, drained. He couldn't remember ever being this tired, not even after the end-of-year exams. He looked around and tried to cry for help, but he couldn't push the air through his throat. Even breathing was getting hard.

Thomas saw Olavo exchanging blow with someone he'd never seen before, someone without a staff. Grant was using wind and water to stop jets of heat from Heat Wave's staff while Gilbert had... how was there a fireball two feet in diameter between the armadillo and the vole? Gilbert's joke when he'd explained his power was that

he was nothing more than an ambulatory lighter.

The pain in his side reminded Thomas there was something there that didn't belong and he exerted whatever strength he had left to move his head and look. The wooden grip of a knife poked out of his overcoat, on it were symbols in red that seemed to glow.

"NO!" someone yelled and Thomas looked up as Grant brought his staff down on his knee, breaking it in to two. A wave of energy passed over Thomas as the kangaroo looked at the two pieces with utter loss. And he realized that not only had the rain stopped, but the sun now shone on them.

"That was mine!" the same person yelled, then screamed in pain.

"What did you do?" Magnet demanded.

Grant squared his shoulders. "What I had to. Now you have no reason to stay, Kingsley. Leave."

"You think you can commit this blasphemy and we'll just let you go?" the vole demanded. "Harrison, take him down, but don't kill him. He needs to be properly punished."

Heat Wave grinned, then raised his hands to block the pieces of the staff flying at him. Grant was right behind them and as the coyote brought his staff down, Grant grabbed it with both hands.

Thomas closed his eyes and waited for the crackle of energy and Grant's scream of pain as he was thrown away, but he opened them when nothing happened. Grant and Heat Wave were staring at the staff, both of them held. Then Grant pulled, and the coyote pulled back, each trying to pull it out of the other's hands.

Thomas couldn't do anything to help them, and watching the battle, he remembered that glowing and symbols probably meant magic, so what was stabbed in his side had to be the reason he was too weak to teleport.

Something cracked loudly, then metal clanged on the asphalt. Then heat spread, melting and drying the asphalt around them.

Grand and Heat Wave were now staring at the pieces of the metal staff each held. Both looked baffled.

“Kingsley, what’s happening?” Lullaby demanded.

“Help!” the vole yelled in a strained voice. The fireball was now three feet in diameter and Gilbert took another step forward, his expression one of deep focus.

A note rang out, something soothing, suggesting sleep, rest, comfort. Thomas’s eyes were closing when it stopped with a cry.

“That’s enough,” Grant said.

Thomas saw Gilbert staggering back, the fireball gone.

“No!” Lullaby yelled just before the snap of wood breaking, then a wave passed over Thomas and all sound vanished. He could see Light gesticulating behind Magnet, her mouth moving in a silent yell. Magnet was looking in Grant’s direction, fear replacing anger.

“... Before he gets his hand on our staffs too!” Light grabbed Magnet and turned him to face her. “Get us the fuck out of here, now!”

The vole looked at Grant, the broken staffs on the ground, and wrapped an arm around her waist, raising his staff over his head. Anything metal on the ground started sliding in their direction and Grant ran at them, but he only made it five long steps before the metal was flung away and the two of them took off in the air.

Thomas looked up as they shrunk until they weren’t visible, and he smiled. Wouldn’t it be amazing to be able to fly?

Then darkness claimed him.

CHAPTER 1.5-45

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She headed for the counter while the man walked toward him and Gilbert.

Fuck. Gilbert. Thomas could vanish, be outside on the other side of the road with a glance and thought, but he couldn't take anyone with him yet. An extra person meant utter exhaustion for him, even if it was a line-of-sight jump. Of course Gilbert would be with him so any of his landing spots would be-

Fuck, that would leave the others and Grant at the Chamber's mercy.

"Mister Hertz," the man said in a deep and rich voice with a slight English accent. "May I and my companion sit with you and Mister Rowling? I would like us to discuss the situation you have unfortunately found yourself in." The gray furred vole was dressed in an expensive overcoat to go with the refined language.

Thomas had trouble finding his voice in surprise. He'd expected them to whip out their staff and... where was the staff? He

leaned and the woman didn't carry anything either.

"As you can see, we are unarmed," the man said, smiling. "All I am interested in is a friendly discussion."

"Ah guess," Gilbert drawled, "Tha if all ya want is ta talk, we better have a drink ta go with it." He motioned to the counter, "Honey! Bring tha bottle oh the best whiskey ya got!"

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"That's alright," the vole said, "my companion is getting us tea."

Gilbert snorted. "If ya gonna be friends, we ain't drinking water."

The raccoon who'd entered with the vole joined them, holding two cups. "Are they giving you any trouble?" she asked, her accent making Thomas think she was from the east coast.

The waitress squeezed between them and placed a bottle along with four shot glasses on the table before hurring away.

"No," the vole said, sounding annoyed, "but it seems Mister Rowling is looking to get us drunk."

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“If all ya can take is one drink,” the armadillo took a shot glass and sneered as he looked it over. “They ya can have just one.” He poured the brown liquor in it before sliding the glass to the man. The next full shot glass went to the woman, the third to Thomas. Gilbert downed the water in the glass that came with the food and filled it to the three quarter mark with whiskey.

He took a small sip. “What ya wanna talk about?”

The woman sipped her shot glass while the man eyed it distastefully before sipping his. Thomas felt like the odd one out, so he sipped his and did his best not to choke on the burn. How was Gilbert drinking this like it was nothing more than beer?

The vole pushed the glass away from him. “Mister Hertz. You have inadvertently found yourself in the middle of a situation that you do not belong in. I do not know what Mister Summer has told you, but I can promise you that none of it will be accurate.

“You attacked him for no reason,” Thomas said before stopping himself. The alcohol couldn’t be affecting him already, right?

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Or were they? His friends could do more than use their powers, and Grant could make talismans. Could the Chamber? He couldn't remember if Grant said anything about it. Anyway, he couldn't take the risk.

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How weren't they surprised? At the very least, Gilbert should have caught them by surprise. Then there was his teleportation. Something no one thought possible, according to Grant, and even if he questioned that the kangaroo was an expert on the matter, Henry was

after him because of it and both Shila and Rapheal were impressed by it. If someone else had teleportation, they were hiding it a lot better than Thomas was.

He sighed. He had to be careful and hope Gilbert wouldn't contradict him. "I don't know where he is. We split not long after I took him away from you."

"Mister Hertz," the vole said, "I find this difficult to believe considering you are in Red Deer at the moment."

"I'm on the run," he replied. "First from this guy," he hiked a thumb towards Gilbert, "And then with this guy from the person who sent him after me. We thought no sane person would chase us into these frozen wastelands." He shuddered at the idea of having to step outside again.

"Kid," the raccoon said. "Don't play this game, okay? The roo's not worth it. He'd drop you the moment things got hard. Just tell us where he is and we're gone. You'll never ever hear of us again."

"I don't know where he is," Thomas said, the frustration real.

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accent gone.

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“Like we’re going to do that guy’s bidding,” the raccoon snorted and was glared at by the vole. “What do we care what his plans are for the kid? You plan on letting the only known teleporter go?”

“I think you just tipped your hand,” Gilbert said, raising his still mostly full glass to his mouth. “Thomas, get ready to run.” He took a quick drink and raised his other hand, palm up, to his face. As the vole opened his mouth, a flame appeared in the palm, a few inches in height, then the armadillo blew his mouth full of whiskey through the flame and it exploded into a fireball in front of the vole and raccoon, forcing them away.

“Come on!” Gilbert yelled at a stunned Thomas as he rushed the door.

“What is the plan?” Thomas demanded as he caught up to the armadillo.

“Improvise!” Gilbert shouldered the door open, and cold air blasted at them. Fuck. Thomas had forgotten how cold it was. “We have to- Oh, fuck.” On their right was Heat Wave, holding Magnets staff along with one made of black metal. Only, as Thomas watched, one end began glowing red. “Other direction,” Gilbert ordered, skidding as he tried to do the one-eighty.

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Thomas turned. "We need another plan." Light stood there, grinning, the transparent shaft of her staff resting on her shoulder. Where could they go? Get in one of the trucks parked along the fence? Did Gilbert know how to drive a big rig? The armadillo grabbed Thomas's arm and ran away from the building towards the road.

"You are wasting your time!" the vole yelled. "You can't run from us."

"Gil?" Thomas asked.

The armadillo's brief pause may have been an eternity. "You might have to get us out of here."

"I can't," the rat responded, "It's going to leave the others trapped."

The armadillo looked around. "Fuck, why couldn't the switch to electric have taken another century? I can do stuff with gas." He grabbed a metal bar off the ground. It had one end broken into a jagged point and Gilbert aimed it at one of the four Chamber agents.

Magnet took his staff from Heat Wave and gave a flick. The bar flew out of Gilbert's hands, nearly pulling him off balance.

"Do you understand how serious your predicament is, Mister Hertz?" the vole stated. "This isn't a battle you can win."

* * *

“Thomas,” Gilbert started to say, only to be interrupted as a wave of hot wind struck them from the side, followed by warm rain falling and steaming on the cold ground.

“Grant!” the vole yelled, smiling. “I’m so glad you finally joined us.”

“Get the fuck away from the kids, Kingsley!” Grant stepped around the building, staff raised. On one side was Olavo, and on the other-

With a war cry, Limbani ran straight at Lullaby, inexplicably dodging the lances of light her staff sent his way. He jumped, kicking her in the face, then landing, grinning like a madman... only to turn his head and get hit on the face with the metal bar that had been in Gilbert’s hands just moments before. The monkey fell backwards.

“Someone get the monkey!” Olavo yelled as Thomas ran towards the fallen Limbani.

“Get everyone together!” He yelled back. Could he do a group? He was going to find out soon enough.

He skidded and fell as he reached the monkey. The warm rain on the frozen ground was creating a surface where friction wasn’t much of a thing. He grabbed the unconscious monkey and heaved, mentally thanking Madoc for the training and all the boosts as he was able to pull Limbani up and get him-

* * *

Pain erupted in Thomas's side and his legs buckled under him. Limbani rolled away from him as Thomas sprawled.

"It worked!" a woman shouted, and Thomas had a tough time turning his head enough to see Lullaby grinning despite her broken and bleeding muzzle. He fought to look at Limbani and reached for him, but his arm weighed a ton. He willed himself to the monkey... but nothing happened.

It was then the familiar exhaustion registered for Thomas; this was the feeling he always felt right after doing a teleport difficult enough he passed out... only here he was wide awake but weak as a lamb. What did they stab-

The sound of battle drew him back out of his head. Olavo was scuffling with someone he'd never seen before, someone without a staff. Grant was using wind and water to stop jets of heat from Heat Wave's staff while Gilbert had-

How was there a fireball two feet in diameter between the armadillo and the vole? When they were telling him their powers, Gilbert had joked his power was almost as useless as Felix's, only able to create flames so brief it was only good as a lighter.

A pulse from the pain in his side reminded Thomas he was injured. He forced himself to look at it, and he saw the wooden grip of a knife poking out of his overcoat. On it were symbols in red that seemed to glow.

* * *

“NO!” Someone yelled, yanking Thomas’s attention back up in time to watch as Grant brought his staff down on his knee, breaking it in two. A wave of energy passed over Thomas as the kangaroo looked at the two pieces with utter loss. The rat also realized that not only had the rain stopped, but the sun now shone down on them.

“That was mine!” the same person yelled, then screamed in pain.

“What did you do?” Magnet demanded.

“Keeping a promise,” Grant said before squaring his shoulders and looking the vole in the eye. “There’s nothing more here for you, Kingsley. Leave.”

“You think you can commit this blasphemy and we’ll just let you go?” the vole demanded. “Harrison, take him down, but don’t kill him. He needs to be properly punished.”

Heat Wave grinned, then raised his hands to block the pieces of staff flying at him. Grant was right behind them and as the coyote brought his staff down, Grant grabbed it with both hands.

Thomas closed his eyes and waited for the crackle of energy and Grant’s scream of pain as he was thrown away, but he opened them when nothing happened. Grant and Heat Wave were staring at the staff, which both of them held. Then Grant pulled, and the coyote pulled back, each trying to pull it out of the other’s hands.

* * *

Thomas couldn't do anything to help, being weak as a kit with a dagger in his side. Was it magic? Glowing symbols had to mean magic? Would he bleed out if he pulled it out? Was he bleeding out-

Something cracked loudly, then metal clanged on the asphalt. Then heat spread, melting and drying the asphalt around them. Grant and Heat Wave were now staring at the pieces of the metal staff each held. Both looked baffled.

"Kingsley, what's happening?" Lullaby demanded.

"Help!" the vole yelled in a strained voice. The fireball was now three feet in diameter and Gilbert took another step forward, his expression one of deep focus.

A note rang out, something soothing, suggesting sleep, rest, comfort. Thomas's eyes were closing when it stopped with a cry.

"That's enough," Grant said.

Thomas saw Gilbert staggering back, the fireball gone.

"No!" Lullaby yelled just before the snap of wood breaking, then a wave passed over Thomas and all sound vanished. He could see Light gesticulating behind Magnet, her mouth moving in a silent yell. Magnet was looking in Grant's direction, fear replacing anger.

"...before he gets his hands on our staves too!" Light yelled as

sound returned, the [species] grabbing Magnet and turning him to face her. "Get us the fuck out of here, now!"

The vole looked at Grant, the broken staves on the ground, and then wrapped an arm around her waist, raising his staff over his head. Anything metal on the ground started sliding in their direction and Grant ran at them, but he only made it five long steps before the metal was flung away and the two of them took off in the air.

Thomas looked up as they shrunk until they weren't visible, and he smiled. Wouldn't it be amazing to be able to fly?

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OUTLINE-45

Chapter 45

###

Red Deer Unlucky Gas Station, Thomas, Gilbert, Chamber: Mood:

Thomas can run... really, he's good at it. But there is also Gilbert, and Thomas still hasn't reached a point where he can carry other people with him without exhausting himself to the point of blackout. Which might need to happen, because the Chamber isn't attacking... they're walking into the diner and talking.

Thomas needs to think quick in his answers as he wonders if he can defuse the situations. No, he doesn't know where Grant is. Not just right now, but in general. He and Grant parted ways awhile ago. He's just here in Red Deer hiding. Apparently it's a popular destination for that.

The Chamber aren't happy with Thomas's answers, but there's also a question of what to do with him. Apparently someone wants him alive. Who? Three guesses. But they haven't exactly gotten what they want out of the bargain, so why spare an ally of Grant? Key word, teleporter. Grant's isn't the only staff they are after.

During all this, Gilbert just puts another order for a cold beer with the very worried waitress. It arrives just about when the Chamber seem ready to attempt to get more hostile... and you know that trick where you create a flamethrower with your mouth and a lighter? Well Gilbert is his own walking lighter[is the beer just a cover for the flame trower action? or is it intended to be the actual fuel? Beer was intended as fuel. Why? You have something to mythbust on the beer flamethrower?the main issue with beer as fuel, is that beer is only 4%

to 8% alcohol. especially in stuff that would be available in a restaurant. if his goal is dragon breath, he should go for hard liquor.].

Mind you, aside from the surprised, the Chamber basically have overwhelming odds against them. Thomas could runaway hard, and even take Gilbert with him, but he'd be leaving both Grant and the others behind... so a fight ensues... we haven't yet established the powers of one of the staves, so the play by play needs work. Gilbert [and this is where I'm really annoyed that the story isn't in Gilbert's POV, because I could make this so cool]in a gas station diner isn't something to scoff at, though. From gasoline to flour, he has a lot of material to work with.

Still, it's not a winning battle. They try to regroup to get a second wind, but the Chamber isn't having any of that... and then it starts to rain[Is that season dependent, or does grant make it rain no matter what?Not something I've thought of before. I've always pictured it as rain. But you are correct, a lot of these scenes are in the winter and northern climates.]

[As a counterpoint to saying "Yes, all these scenes should really be snowy instead of rainy", Grant's staff was constructed from the pieces of hurricane debris... so we might have wiggle room to say it only does rain, or possibly can do rain no matter what the temperature calls for.]

[Ultimately it's a choice that should be made and stuck with, but the staff's weather alternating abilities have importance in like... three scenes and is destroyed in the third. So the choice won't spill out into the future.]. Like a stormcrow, Grant is here with Limbani and Olavo. The real battle starts now.

###

Wreckage of Gas Station[What do you have against this gas station? Against the Flying J? Nothing, it just happens to be a truck stop I know that is there :)], Thomas, Grant, Search Squad: Mood:

The second Thomas sees Grant, his heart is filled with both hope and dread. Keeping him away from the Chamber was the entire entire point of this mission. But now he's here, and with the others... so if they can get Gilbert over to them, he can extract the entire team to San Francisco.

So for Thomas that becomes the new goal of the battle, and Olavo had the same idea because he yells at Limbani to no charge into the fray... but monkey see monkey do... or in this case monkey precog monkey do. He saw the battle, saw himself do something really cool, and of course he follows through with it. And it is cool, whatever it is... until he reaches the end of the vision and he gets his ass handed to him.

Thomas focuses on getting Limbani back to the others, while Gilbert tries to actually join the others... but that task is complicated for Thomas as he gets a wooden dagger in the side... and suddenly feels weak... he tries to teleport away... but, yeah... nope, that isn't an option for some reason... which is about six kinds of scary, not least of which that now he can't get everyone out of there.

So Grant may as well be on his own, with only Olavo to watch his back as the Chamber closes in and Thomas is just forced to watch... then Grant closes his eyes, says he's sorry[I know why he's doing it, and the challenge will be to convey the important of the act from Thomas' PoV]... and then breaks his staff over his knee. In a sudden burst of wind, the clouds clear and let the light in... but despite the imagery this isn't a hopeful moment as the Chamber is still here and they are pissed.

* * *

The initiate who was supposed to get Grant's staff wails on him, until the guy with the wind staff pull them off... and in that moment of closeness Grant grabs at the guy's staff[Can practitioners borrow and use each other's staves?No. In fact that is part of the difference between a Practitioner and a Chamber member.]

[Practitioners craft the staves and are perfectly attuned to their own staff, but can't use the staves of others. They can handle them, though. Otherwise they'd never be able to transport fallen staves to their sanctuaries.]

[Chamber members, on the other hand, can wield any staff that isn't currently claimed by a living Practitioner. They will have a varying degree of attunement, which is why they still specialize, but that only determines strength.]

[If this question is asked because "Why did he grab for the staff if he didn't know he could break it?" It is because as stated he could handle it without backlash, and the staff does need to be held to use. Besides, Grant considers all the staves held by the Chamber to be property stolen from the dead.I think we will need to work out the rules as to when a staf does and doesn't backlash. we have Yating being backlashed at one point. is there enough 'magical presence' for the staff to know intent? is it the practitioner's decision as to when it will blacklashe?Hmm... correct. I forgot about the scene you commented on down below when I wrote all that.]

[Which, to be clear, while some of that was in my head already, a lot of it is being produced on the fly to answer your question, so please keep asking questions.]

[I would definitely say staves reject members of other factions... and

would tentatively say they also reject normal people IF they aren't an unclaimed staff and the normal person has a high potential to attune to it.]

[And yes, this is the high author point of view, since at least the Practitioners don't realize/believe they serve the same god as the Chamber.]... and when it doesn't backlash [this is why we need to work out the rules, so the reader can understand if this is unusual or not] Grant off it right away, the Chamber members tries to pull it out of his grasp... and in the struggle the staff breaks [will the break happen because of the scuffle or is it obvious it was a magical occurrence? There is obviously something up because staves don't break. At least not from normal kinetic forces. Meaning Fred/Frank might be able to break one, but Colby would exhaust himself trying.]

[So it might be from the scuffle, but the fact that a scuffle was able to break it is signs that something magical is afoot. this is something we will need to establish in the previous scuffles. or get Grant to use his staff in a way that should break it, but doesn't (maybe as a lever to get something out of a hole?) Will be easy enough, given that Grant's staff is a mixture of driftwood and wreckage timber held together by loose nails and twine. The fact that it doesn't fall apart when you look at it hard is a miracle.]. This is certainly freaking the chamber out, and even Grant looks a bit shell shocked, but the kangaroo is rolling with it as he looks towards whoever had the offensive staff of the group.

They go on the offensive hard, and calls for the magnetism staff guy to back him up, but he's busy with Gilbert who... is somehow slowly advancing on the guy with a literal ball of fire [you describe Gilbert as only being able to do flames, and small ones. did something happen to his ability? or is he using an accelerant? This is him tapping into his plasma potential due to the presence of a powerful magnetic field. We won't see this again until... Chapter 49, actually.]

* * *

[Technically he should be seen in the background trying to replicate this, but mention of it got lost in the shuffle. These are some dense chapters, after all.] held right in front of him? OK, Thomas is getting worse tunnel vision than his dad. Of course so is the offensive staff guy as Limbani distracts him from behind, giving Grant a moment get close and... snap, another staff destroyed[With thomas being so weak and loosing blood, this fight scene might not be as descriptive as you're hoping.Hmm... true. Also going to be playing that up with the final battle. There is a lot going on, and Thomas is only front line for some of it.].

At this point, the wind guy recovers, grabs the magnetism guy from behind and tells him to launch now. There is some question about this, but the order is followed, and the two of them launch into the air using the earth's magnetic field as a springboard... where they land... Thomas doesn't care right now... he didn't just lose his powers with the stabbing, he's losing blood and passing out now.