

For the first time, being struck by lightning didn't hurt him. As he plummets through the storm clouds, he finally grasps the concept of defense. Now, there are only a handful of things on the Earth that can hurt him. The clouds whip out of his sight, like a wool blanket tugged away. He face down at the Australian skyline, glistening against the water right next to it. The lights creating streaks of color in the bay, like a giant rainbow barcode. The air tore in his ears, because he willed it. His jacket cracked viciously in the wind, because he willed it. And many would die tonight, because he willed it.

The ground hurdles towards him. He cracks a slow smile and starts to spin. With his eyes pointed at the bustling streets of Sydney, he spun at an ungodly speed. His pitch black trench coat began to stretch out, as if reaching back up for the clouds, pulsating like jellyfish tendrils. He continues to fall, spinning like a power drill running on nitrous. The end of his coat now still in the air, as if he's falling through it, stretching it, twisting it. Tightening it. He takes in a deep breath through his teeth, filling his lungs and then some. In about eight seconds he'll be head level with the tallest building in Sydney. The cloth from his jacket stretched up from his collar and engulfed his head, as if submerging him in a swamp. Now within his jacket, he exhales.

A surge of energy shoots out from him to the end of his jacket, releasing it from its frozen position. The torc he'd built up releases, and the end of his coat starts spinning out with the power of a military grade helicopter. He shoots towards the ground with his propeller coat firing him, and he arches his back. With this motion, he's sent careening upwards, and soon enough he's flying in between buildings in the night skyline. At this point, he's sure they can see him now. He can feel it. *Out in front. Five seconds*, he thinks to himself. Even though the impact won't hurt him, he uses the harden technique he'd just perfected in the clouds on his head as it slams into a bullet-proof window.

Traveling at at least 100 miles per hour, he uses his jacket to anchor into reality for a perfect instant stop. All the extra inertia is launched out of him, blowing down one of the walls of the office he'd

just broken into. As he drops out of the air and his jacket takes it's normal form again, his sense of hearing and vision come back to him. So much more inferior to that of the jacket's senses, but they're his. He hears the cocking of at least three pistols around him. *Only three?* He thinks. His vision fades back to him, bringing the sight of the CEO he'd come for. As well as the acquaintance in question, with his back towards him. He and the CEO were having a meeting, so he decided to kill two birds with one stone.

The hole in the window was right over the head of said CEO. They were on the top floor of the building. The whole city was visible below. It would have been beautiful if it weren't for the filth in his line of sight. The CEO raised his hand to tell his men not to shoot. He thought it was funny: it's early June, yet it was so cool in Sydney. A gust of ghostly chill waffed in through the window, whipping up everyone's coats, because of course they had on suits. But his thick, ankle-long, stygian jacket cracked in the wind longer than any one of their coats.

"Edgelord, is it? Have a seat." He raised an eyebrow in response. "What? Surprised we heard of ya? Well of course we have. We all have." he looks around at his men with one final gesture to holster their guns. The CEO puts his hands on his hips, as if looking at an adolescent son and saying *what are we gonna do with you?* Edgelord doesn't budge to his request.

"Fair enough. You know, I'm not sure if calling you Edgelord is fair, isn't it? The media gave that name to the first Edgelord, but you're clearly not him. "

"How so?"

Edgelord's words put the whole room on edge. As if hearing your name being called from the depths of a cave you've only seen for the first time.

"Well," the CEO puts his hand on his chin, "The first guy was more of a Robin Hood. you're more Dr. Strange." His men chuckle genuinely or out of fear. Either response would be appropriate.

“Am I right or am I right? The first guy was on a murdering spree, but you, you clearly have your sights set on something higher. Something that has more to do with your crazy abilities and the world you come from, than us humble humans down here.”

Now Edgelord chuckles genuinely, sucking the life out of the room with each shoulder shake. “Is that what you think I am? An alien? A demon? No sir, I assure you I’m human. Born and raised. Though I’m not sure what I am anymore.” he admitted out loud for the first time. The CEO looks taken aback, but quickly clears his throat, and gets back on the ball. “Good then, even better. Look, kid. Here’s the deal. You’re not like the first guy, I know it, you know it. If you were we’d all have our heads on a skewer right now!” He slams his hand on the desk, showing his cracks. Edgelord smirks. With shaking hands, the CEO pulls a cigarette from his coat and lights it with a zippo from his pocket. As he exhales, another icy breeze blows through the broken window behind him, chilling all except Edgelord. “No, no, you’re different. You’re doing some cosmic shit. And it’s clear we’re just bugs. Bugs with your primordial boot hangin’ over our heads. So, between me and my associate, we’d like to buy some peace. One billion dollars for you to allow me and my associate to go on our merry way. That should be more than enough to fund all your space shit. You-you could hire a team of scientists to help you. Buy favors from your government- the American government is always happy to be bought, ha?” There was a brief pause. Edgelord stood there, in the same spot he’d been since he’d blasted into this office. The associate facing away from him shifted in his chair. It was his first movement since Edgelord made his entrance. The guards stood there, hands crossed, sweating in the cold. Probably thinking of nothing more than making it home to their families alive.

“You said you’re human, right? Think of all the desires you can fulfill with a billion dollars. That’s a million dollars, a thousand times. No one person needs that much money! And you can have it all. Come on kid, think about it. That’s half a billion from me and my-”

“I ain’t paying you shit.” the man in the middle says, back still turned to Edgelord. The CEO’s eyes pop. “Who’s men are these!” Edgelord booms in a voice much deeper than his speaking voice earlier, as if coming from the floor beneath them. The men in question scurry towards the wall. “Mine. They’re mine.” the CEO claims.

“Then leave.” without missing a beat, they all run out of the room as if a volcano had erupted. The CEO falls back in his chair, defeated, possibly accepting his death, as Edglord takes him up on his original offer, and takes a seat. Right next to the associate in question.

“It must take a lot to run one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the world.”

“Yeah kid, it did.” he says with distant eyes, as if already experiencing his death.

“And you,” he says to the man sitting next to him, “It must have taken so much to become the head of the most powerful mafia in the United Kingdom. And as an Australian no less.” The gangster slowly turned his head to Edgelord. “The hardest trial of my life.” he turns away, his accent long gone. “Though the hardest part of it all must have been, for the both of you, being childhood friends... or was that the easy part. You know, selling drugs that people need to survive at ridiculous prices is one thing. A thing the first Edgelord would have dismembered you for. But human trafficking, assassinations, extortion, and you’ve even dipped your toe in war profiteering. That’s active evil. Immediate evil. And there’s nothing more you deserve than to watch your intestines spill in front of you, as you choke on your own blood.” The room fell silent, save for the howling from the shattered window, bringing a chill that was already there. He’d just said what he said in his own voice. The voice of a livid seventeen year old. Idealistic, determined, dejected.

“So,” the gangster turns to Edgelord, “I know you intend to kill me, a monster in your ever-so-transcendent eyes. But what about my friend here? My business partner.” They looked at the CEO. Not one to shake with fear at a moment like this, he wouldn’t have made it this far if he was, he sits back in his chair, waiting for the fate that lies a few minutes ahead of him. Still. Content.

“No. just maim him possibly. His hand being in on your business is the enabling of immediate evil. And I can’t focus on my goals while you demons continue to prey on those who can’t defend themselves.”

“And what is that greater goal?” the gangster asks.

“Nothing scum like you should concern yourself with. Seeing as all a psychopath can comprehend is it’s own desires, there’s no point in telling you about something that could help all of humanity.”

“Well, I may not care for humanity enough to grasp your lofty ideals, but I do understand manipulation. I understand that what you care about means everything to you for one reason or another. And I know that it means much more to you than killing me. And I know that you need this to accomplish your dreams.” He pulls a red amulet on a golden chain from his coat pocket.

“Huh?” a cold sweat runs down Edgelord’s cheek. The thick red stone held a smaller, triangular stone within. The stone that stood between him and his goal now dangles between him and some random gangster. He could feel the connection between his jacket and the stone within the stone. They were one and the same. Though what was in the gemstone seemed to carry more power proportionally.

“If this stone can make me immortal, I can only imagine what it would do to something like you.” the gangster smiles at Edgelord. A smile from hell. “Or is that beyond my comprehension?”

“What’s going on? What is that?” the CEO pitched in his confusion.

“So this is what’s gonna happen,” the gangster pushes forward, “-you’re gonna walk outta here, and never bother me or my associates again. Or I’ll rip your throat out... understood?”

He looked into his lap. For the second time during his stint as Edgelord, Ethan felt like a kid. A confused, shallow, scatter-brained kid. *Of course the mafia with occult ties would have knowledge of the stone. Of course they’d double down after the first Edgelord. I should’ve wiped them out a long time ago. And now it’s too late.* He began to sink into the jacket, into the pocket dimension inside, through

the frothy muck that separates the realities. *That's it. I can't pry it from his hands. I'm not strong enough... it's over.*

The beeping rose out of his subconscious into his now. The sickness that claimed his grandmother and uncle now has his mother in its vice. The EKG beeps endlessly in his dreams and his memories, and the line in between the two. The mother he loved faded away as she was eroded from the inside out. And Ethan could do nothing but watch. *But.. but, I can do something. I'm the Edgelord now. I can make a change. I'm the Edgelord now... I'm.* "I'm the Edgelord!" he flew out of the coat slicing through the gangster's hand with his own. As the hand flies into the air, he pounces upward, snatching at it.

*FWHIP!* The severed hand and the amulet are pulled back to the wrist they came from through the veins that stretched out of each end of the wound. Both Edgelord and the gangster bounce back to opposite ends of the room, both on the balls of their heels. Though one of them was giggling.

The CEO finally registered what had happened and took his hands from over his head. Reasonable, seeing as that little skirmish took place in less than two seconds. *He's fast. Shit.* "You know, I could tell that that was a serious swing from you earlier. But if that's all the great Edgelord has to offer, I'm afraid I'm gonna have to kill you my boy." *He's not bluffing. I gave that swing all I had and he pulled himself together like it was a minor inconvenience. But I have a few aces for you!*

He lunges at the gangster with enough force to tip the desk over, sending the CEO stumbling, catching himself on the glass below the hole. With one hundred percent arrogance, the gangster swings his forehead into Edgelord's, sending him wobbling backwards, with a furious tingle in his nose and tears in his eyes, but giving him just enough time to harden his fists with the technique he'd learned on the way here. The gangster crawled forward madly, hands in pockets, raised a knee to his chest, and sent the bottom of his shoe careening towards Edgelord's chest.

Instead, his foot is met with a hand hardened and covered in pure black armor- a hand that was one with the coat. “Hm.” the gangster said, amused, before having his ankle crushed in Edgelord’s palm. “Hey!” he managed to get out before being hurled through the wall behind him.

Before he could reconfigure himself after bouncing off the floor once, Edgelord was over him, eyes full of youthful determination. Those eyes were met with a worldly, unshaken, distinguished gaze. Tendrils from his coat reached out to hold down his opponent’s arms as he took multiple swings. Three connecting, one being blocked by a skillfully maneuvered elbow, followed by a vicious hook to the throat from an easily freed hand. Edgelord clapped against the ceiling, gasping for air, while using thousands of micro tendrils to cling to it.

The gangster below, without saying a word, pops up from the ground, and leaps head-first towards Edgelord, who, by the skin of his teeth, use tendrils to pull himself out of the way. As he takes in his first solid breath of air, the gangster comes smashing back through the ceiling, feet first right where Edgelord’s back was, drilling him through at least six floors of the office building. And though each floor hurt as much as a flu shot, the concussive effects were clearly the goal.

A desk breaks their fall and knocks a little more wind out of him. But that combined with the swirling vortex of dust, Edgelord is forced to sink his mouth and nose into his jacket, breathing in his pocket dimension. *KAK!* A perfectly landed sidekick introduced his temple to a dusty church shoe, sending him spiraling out of the dust up.

As soon as he wobbled to his feet, he did what he thought he should’ve done from the beginning. Harden his entire body, starting with the head, allowing him to fully use the senses of the coat. As the incomprehensible material stretched up from his nose to over the top of his head, the pure black energy it was comprised of flooded his eyeballs like soda fizzing out at the brim of its cup. He saw nothing, and felt everything. The gangster, still hidden in a dissipating cloud of asbestos infused dust, longed towards him, closing the considerable distance with three steps. He could feel and taste the air molecules

compressing right where his nose was as the gangster sailed through the air with a superman punch. And with that same fluidity, Edgelord grabbed his foe's arm from the wrist while twisting in the opposite direction swinging him downwards with all the hardened energy he could muster, bashing him through the floor, and in one motion, back up through it, and out the window.

Using coat tendrils, Edgelord animalistically threw himself out of the window following his enemy. He used his hardening technique to sharpen his fingertips to the point of a singular atom, as the rage boiling in him mixed with the madness of the jacket. The gangster arches his back to dodge the claws that only gently drag across the surface of his neck. As they plummet, he flips around to throw a flurry of punches and kicks at Edgelord, some being blocked, but most landing brutally. But it was all calculated. He took more than he blocked to get his opponent to stay open long enough for him to throw a haymaker. And that he did.

*BOOOM!* A thunderous punch sent the gangster back into the building. A millisecond after splashing through the glass, he was caught by tendrils that used perfect stop to hold him right where the glass was, as they sink through the frosty air. The gangster only causing shallow damage to the structure of the building with the added bonus of having his skin constantly shredded off of his body. As he fought to free himself, Edgelord put everything into keeping him in that latitude and longitude, allowing glass and metal to grind his opponent to a mush of blood and bones, trying desperately to expel shrapnel and piece his body together.

More than halfway down the building and he could sense that pieces of his opponent were getting clipped off. Every floor he'd lose another patch of skin, a piece of an artery, a chunk of lung. All things that would take more energy to regenerate from scratch. As the trail of blood and body parts grew, he felt the fight in his opponent subsiding. The thrashing easing, allowing him to focus on the sensation of falling... *there's something about the inevitability of a fall from this height that always gets me thinking, -thinking always draws him out of the bloodlust he sometimes feels when he fights as Edgelord.*



Something the first Edgelord was either better at controlling or accepting. *There are so many ways I can stop myself from hitting the ground with these powers, but there's something to be said about the purity of moments like this. Like, we're all in this never ending stream of life, crashing into each other, clinging to each other losing each other. Sometimes, I feel like all this boils down to trying to understand ourselves and trying to learn to ride the rapids before we get yeeted out the current down the waterfall... anyways, I should finish this up.*

A few feet from the floor, Edgelord takes the near limp gangster away from the building, towards himself, for the piece de resistance. With his tendrils firmly twisted around his opponents bones, he spins him about eight times with himself as the axis before using him to break the nearly seven hundred feet fall. A PLOP and a DOOOOOOM sound off at the same time, sending off car alarms and cracking the pavement beneath them. He let go of the darkness clinging to his skin, allowing the black material to seep back into the jacket. A thin haze hung in the air as the sight of what happened hit him. He was in the center of a pile of blood and organs. Quite notably, a length of small intestine had wrapped itself around his left arm. *Cool.* the sight of gore not phasing him in the slightest is a side effect of wearing the jacket. Or at least that's what he tells himself. He props himself up to his knees and looks up at the trail of person he'd just left on the side of one of the tallest buildings in Sydney. The higher up he looks the more winding he sees. But as the singular hole in the glass stretches towards the bottom, it's more of a straight path dotted with blood. *Cccsshat.*

His eyes drop down. The amulet, still being clung to by a partially filleted hand, glows with a soul-sucking violet. The intestine wrapping around his arm begins to pulsate as the massive blotch of blood begins to reverse spill towards the center- towards the amulet. He grips the stone and winces as it sizzles his flesh, trying to pry it from the hand, but the grip is absolute. *No, it all makes sense. He put all his energy into holding onto it! It's too-* violet light fills his eye sockets like an upward facing cup being dunked in a river. There was no sound he could hear, no wind he could feel. Only spectacular rope burn

against his soul. A pain he'd only felt once before. A pain so vivid it etched the fear of God into his very essence.

When he came to his senses, he was twice as high in the air as the building he jumped out of a minute ago. That building, now far below him, helped him grasp his place in space. But he groaned, as the slightest of movements sent pains and shivers throughout his entire body. Something that the cold air alone was doing. *Where is he!* While trying to stay still as long as possible to heal, his eyes swiveled in his head trying to find the gangster. His plan all along was to blast Edgelord with as much energy he could harness from the stone. If it weren't for the jacket, he'd be completely eviscerated. And even with the jacket, another two hits like that could easily leave him in a coma for the rest of his life. *There!*

The sound of a jet engine cutting through the air below him caught his attention in time for him to at least mentally prepare himself. An uppercut with the power of a bullet train cracked into his jaw and broke his neck like a twig. The being that just hit him used perfect stop, sending his remaining inertia into Edgelord, sending him flying further into the air.

As he rag dolled in all directions, blood leaked from his nose as his jacket struggled to heal him in time. And his mindset was only making it worse. *This is it. I knew I couldn't win. I'm not like the first Edgelord. I'm not a fighter. Now it's done. It's all lost. I lost the day I put this jacket on. I was always out of my depth. I was always a failure.* A firm hand gripped his lapel as he opened his eyes.

Excruciating pain rung in his head, but the overwhelming presence of the man in front of him overrides that. As they reach the apex of the flight, his words are heard clearly.

"I seen it all." the gangster says, cleaner than when they'd first met, stronger than ever. "When I hit you with that light, I saw it all. Your whole life. Your dead grandma, your dream to be a doctor, getting this jacket. You really are a human like us. An awfully pathetic one at that. Someone as uninspiring as you could never achieve that goal of yours. The one that means more than being a doctor,

right?” *He knows.* “So give me the jacket! With this stone and this jacket, I’ll be a god! With the world as my ottoman! Now get out of this jacket before I turn you inside out.”

“... Okay.” he replies. The gangster raises an eyebrow as the frigid air hurdles past them. He breathes it in- his pain- as he falls out of the jacket. Everything slows as the reality of being truly mortal sinks into his injuries. The pain goes from unfathomable to unimaginable. Bliss of the purest degree lights the gangster’s face as he reaches towards the jacket like a baby to a tit. His nigh orgasmic pleasure at the defeat of Ethan, who sinks like a rock before him, about to breath out his final ace- his pain.

From his lungs through his broken neck and out his bleeding mouth, Ethan spews out pure hellfire he’d imbued with all his pain straight at the man reaching for his jacket. The flames burned a brilliant white as they cinched his insides as well as the man above. Though he made the fire while wearing the jacket, breathing it out without it was absolutely a death sentence. A worthy death sentence to him. As the white flame shot at least a hundred feet into the sky, it lit up the surrounding area so much that it looked like daytime to himself and anyone in the surrounding area.

As the flames sputtered out, a curl of smoke rose from his throat, followed by a weaze, followed by it being burnt shut. His broken body tumbled, at the mercy of the wind. Ungodly agony now stapled to his reality, he smiled. As the pain began to drive him mad, and the lack of oxygen accentuated it, the irony dawned on him in the last few seconds he’d be conscious enough to understand it. *My biggest fear with being Edgelord was that I’d go crazy from wearing the jacket. Now I’m on the brink of death and insanity for taking it off. Ahaha. What- what a rich way to go... I’m rich. Rich in the stream of life...*

... He plummets, consciousness gone with the wind. His life force going dormant within his body. But not completely. His soul does something analogous to tightening it’s fist. His subconscious- his essence refuses to give up. His goal is bigger than him and he refuses to give up on it. He never intended to. Even though he gave his life up. *Nnn-nn.* The back of his mind tingles. A gravity different from the one slinging him towards certain death pulls at his center. A gravity he wasn’t aware was

accumulating. But it was there. Flailing through the icy winds, the jacket and the boy pull towards each other. Both halves, flopping masses without the other, pull at each other's core, with the attraction getting stronger as the distance shortens. If Ethan was conscious he may have heard the coat gasp as its sleeves wrap around him, bleeding into his wounds, completely engulfing him.

FLAP! The jacket uses itself as a parachute to glide Edgelord's body above the beautiful, shaken Sydney skyline. The jacket knows that police helicopters are inbound, and that the floor will be lined with policemen and possibly even the military. But it needs to wait a moment. It almost has it. *PEP.* the ancient gemstone and its golden chain drop on the top of the parachute, followed by a mist of ash that used to be the head of the largest mafia in the United Kingdom. The jacket made sure not to let a single speck of ash get on the stone, to protect from the sliver of the possibility of him returning. It drops it, and Ethan into its pocket dimension and dives towards the harbor.

As it touches down into the water, it focuses in on its three goals: Move towards the nearest ocean current. Stay buoyant enough to float on the surface. Keep Ethan alive. It knows that he won't be able to harness any power from the stone in his current state, and it may be a few days before Ethan will be well enough to even move, but it's hedging its bets that it'll wash up on a shore somewhere where no one will put it on so that it can focus on healing Ethan. It knows that once Ethan is alive and well, with the stone carrying a dragon scale, he'll have an actual chance at achieving his goal: he'll have a shot at killing Sickness itself.