

## BEN 10: ALIEN FORCE

### "IN CHARM'S WAY"

(a.k.a. "TRAGIC MAGIC," "SPELLBOUND," "TRUST ISSUES")

- 1) Ben, Gwen and Kevin, attempting to indulge in a rare moment of normalcy, are doing something fairly mundane (a picnic? Bowling? Hanging at the beach?). We establish the dynamic between them, including Ben's cocksure attitude and the tentative romantic bond between Gwen and Kevin. All is interrupted when a snarling creature that seems made almost entirely of stone attacks.
- 2) As our heroes go up against the intruder, a Mysterious Individual is watching from a distance. Kevin's mask is torn off in the course of the battle. When the three of them have the creature on the verge of defeat, a portal suddenly opens in the air and yanks him away even as he screams, "No! I could still have beaten them!" When awed onlookers refer to Kevin and Ben as monsters, the term amuses Ben but aggravates Kevin. Ben, after all, can go back to being human. Kevin is stuck the way he is. Gwen tries to comfort him, but feeling that she's just taking pity on him, Kevin takes off to be by himself for a while. We reveal that Charmcaster has been observing what has gone on. Several more rock monsters are near her, and they ask why she dispatched her own minion. "Because he was failing me. Make sure that you don't or I'll do the same to you." She is determined to exact revenge on Gwen, and the way she's going to do that is destroy Gwen's life one element at a time. The first thing to go will be Gwen's boyfriend. "How will you like it, I wonder, when I turn your boyfriend into your enemy?"
- 3) Kevin "meets cute" an exotic young woman whom we recognize as Charmcaster. Kevin has never met her, however, and she introduces herself by her real name: Caroline. As they stroll, a young boy is nearly run over by a car. Before Kevin can make a move to save him, Charmcaster uses her powers to save the boy, thus revealing her abilities to Kevin.
- 4) Caroline is exerting her full charm (so to speak) on Kevin. Kevin says if she knew the real him, she'd be appalled. With a gesture, she removes his photonic displacement mask and says, "You think your face, your appearance, is the real you? I know the real you." She leans in to kiss him, but he pulls back. "Look, I'm kind of seeing somebody," he says. "She'll never know. It will be our secret," whispers Charmcaster. "Ohhh, she'll know. You think YOU have magic? She's MADE of magic." This pronouncement stuns Charmcaster. Recovering quickly, she says, "If she's so wonderful, how come she hasn't changed you back?" Kevin has no answer for this, and she continues, "If I were your girlfriend, I'd be working day and night to change you back." "So the way I look DOES matter,"

he says. "Not to me," she says, and now she kisses him. He closes his eyes and then opens them, and his eyes are glazed over. He's under her spell.

- 5) Ben is drinking this third Mr. Smoothy that day, to Gwen's amazement ("How you can keep that down is beyond me," she says.) Ben deep down can't understand Kevin's frustration over his condition. Bottom line, Kevin's in a powerful hero body 24/7, whereas Ben has all these limitations. "Kevin doesn't know how good he's got it," he declares. An annoyed Gwen says the pure tonnage of what Ben doesn't know could sink an aircraft carrier. "There's just a lot on Kevin's mind right now," she says.
- 6) "Your mind is a blank," Charmcaster says to the spellbound Kevin. She tells him that she wants him to bring Gwen to the planetarium at midnight. If she doesn't want to come, "find a way to make her come," she tells him. "She'll use her magic against me," he says. She drapes a charm around his neck, tucking it under his shirt, and says, "No. She won't. This will keep her magic at bay."
- 7) Gwen is preparing to take her leave of Ben when Kevin shows up and says she needs to come with him. She explains that she's calling it an early night because she has to study. "You've been studying non-stop lately; you should take a night off," says Ben, and Kevin proceeds to come up with one reason after another as to why she should accompany him. Not only is Gwen not persuaded, but she becomes increasingly suspicious. Ben, meantime, keeps accepting each notion at face value and is up for everything. (KEVIN: You should come with me, Gwen, so that we can...uhm...go on patrol. GWEN: Go on patrol? That's absurd. Since when do we--? BEN: Man, that would so rock! We could drive around town, looking for crimes, and stop them while taking photographs of ourselves that we could sell! Let's totally go on patrol!) It is only when Kevin simply picks Gwen up, slings her over his shoulder, says, "I have to take you to the Planetarium. We're going," and walks away with her that Ben realizes something is drastically wrong.
- 8) Ben tries to intercede, and Kevin casually backhands him, sending him flying. Ben heroes up and goes toe to toe with Kevin. Gwen uses her magic to try and come between them, and Kevin smashes through her barriers with no difficulty. Ben spots the charm around Kevin's neck and yanks it off. A blast of Gwen's magic then knocks Kevin back and serves to shatter Charmcaster's spell. Kevin has no recollection of what happened, his recollection fuzzy. "I was talking to Caroline..." "Caroline?" says Gwen. "Yeah. Silver haired girl. Magical." "I should have figured it was her: Charmcaster." There is a trace of low-level jealousy on Gwen's part, which is only aggravated when Kevin says, "I don't remember much of anything after she kissed me." "She WHAT?" Gwen says, fuming. Even Ben is aware that Kevin's put his foot in it: "Dude! Worst thing you could have said." Gwen says heatedly, "She wanted me at the planetarium?"

Fine. That's where I'm going." As she marches off, Ben calls, "It's gotta be a trap!" "Bring it on," says Gwen.

- 9) They head to the Planetarium and Kevin and Ben find themselves up against more stony minions. In the Planetarium itself, Gwen goes up against Charmcaster and overwhelms her, but at the last moment the trap is sprung: the stars of the Planetarium create a mystic field and, at the stroke of midnight, the top of the dome opens and a shaft of moonlight beams down, paralyzing her. "Overconfident little Gwen Tennyson," snarls Charmcaster. "You figured that as long as there were no designs on the floor, and no access to moonlight, you couldn't be trapped in a paralyzing field. That insufferable smugness is just one of the many things I always hated about you. And now I find out that you were a cheat! I've worked my butt off my whole life to tap into magic, and you had it handed to you because of the circumstances of your birth! Well, the free ride's over, princess! Because I can control magic, and if you're magic...I can control you! Which means what nature giveth--I can taketh away!" And in a blinding blast of energy, Charmcaster absorbs all the mana in Gwen's body. Gwen collapses, powerless. CC's creatures are prepared to descend upon her, but Charmcaster says dismissively, "Leave her. Without her power, she's of no consequence. Besides, I can't enjoy her helplessness if she's dead." Seeing Gwen fallen, Ben and Kevin charge Charmcaster, who casually bats them aside mystically and heads off, reveling in her power.
- 10) Ben and Kevin assure Gwen that they're going to handle this, since she has no power. Furious at being outmaneuvered, Gwen says no, she's going to handle it. She's already come up with a plan that she's going to need the two of them to implement. Ben is immediately on board. Kevin, however, is uncertain. Gwen says heatedly, "How many ways are you going to come up with to show me that you don't trust me? I was part of the team before you were." "Yeah!" says Ben. "And I contributed plenty before I discovered my abilities." "That's right!" says Ben. "I saved Ben's butt a hundred times with no power at all!" Ben, standing behind her, quickly starts shaking his head, indicating he doesn't see it that way. Gwen glances behind herself and Ben is now nodding and giving her a thumbs up. She looks away and he goes back to disagreeing that Gwen saved him. Kevin looks uncertain about the whole business.
- 11) Charmcaster is using her newly increased powers to wreak casual havoc in the town, testing her limits, discovering none. Kevin finds her (not hard considering the trail she's leaving) and say to her that he totally gets how she was just using him. That she probably has no real feelings for him at all. But a lot of what she said about Gwen still makes sense to him. Maybe they (CC and Kevin) could still see each other. "I mean, it was only a few years ago I was trying to get rid of the Tennysons. Maybe my first instinct was the right one. Ben is as obnoxious as he was five years ago, and Gwen is pretty much worthless, with only the tiny bit of

power she has left..." This stops Charmcaster cold. "She has power left?" she says suspiciously. "I missed some? I wanted to drain her dry!"

- 12) She and Kevin track Ben and Gwen to the Mr. Smoothy. CC immediately perceives that Gwen indeed has no power left. "I get it. You had some crazy notion that if you had another crack at me, things would turn out differently. But you don't have any power. You don't even have a spell book with you. You're so pathetic you're not even worth wasting a direct assault on." Charmcaster proceeds to use her power to bring inanimate objects to life. An eighteen-wheeler truck starts attacking Kevin (not morphing like a Transformer, but instead simply capable of driving itself, a la "Killdozer.") Ben tries to transform into Humongosaur but instead transforms into Upchuck, which frustrates him until a repeated stomping on the ground brings to his attention that the gigantic Mr. Smoothy prop has also magically come to life. Mr. S fires liquid Smoothy at him through its straw and Upchuck effortlessly swallows it. "This, growls Upchuck, "is the fight I was born for," and he leaps at Mr. Smoothy.
- 13) CC's rock creatures are attacking Gwen, but she keeps avoiding them using her own natural athleticism, staying one step ahead of them while hurling taunts at Charmcaster. This is royally pissing off Charmcaster, who is saying all manner of venomous and insulting things at her minions, telling them how worthless they are because they can't stop one powerless girl. Kevin is still battling the truck, which is proving extremely formidable. Meanwhile Upchuck is drinking Mr. Smoothy. It's actually pretty horrific as Mr. Smoothy is screaming for mercy. "Please! Stop! I'm half empty!" "To me, you're half full!" replies Upchuck and continues to drain him.
- 14) Gwen continues to hurl insults at Charmcaster, finally to such a point that Charmcaster unleashes a blast directly at her. And just as she does so, Gwen utters a spell drawn from the spell book that enables her to absorb all the power back from Charmcaster. "Magic is the only thing you're all about. But for me, magic is only one aspect of who I am," says Gwen. "My real power--the person I am--*that* you could never touch." And Gwen creates the same portal that Charmcaster whipped up earlier. The rocky minions are yanked back into it and Charmcaster is being hauled in as well. She's clutching onto the edge, shouting for Kevin to help her. Kevin takes a step toward her, but then turns away. Charmcaster starts hurling insults at him as she fights to climb back out, and suddenly one of the rock creatures grabs her from behind and says, "We think you've thrown around enough insults for a while," and drags the screaming Charmcaster into oblivion with him. The portal vanishes. The truck stops attacking Kevin. Kevin says, "Wow. I hate to admit it, but that freaking truck was giving me a rough time. It was getting humiliating." Suddenly a massive, gigantic mound of upchucked Mr. Smoothy buries Kevin. "Obviously it was just a warm up for THIS humiliation," he says. Upchuck transforms back into Ben who says apologetically. "Sorry. Gwen was right. I couldn't keep it down."

15) Kevin emerges from the ocean at the nearby beach, which was the only way he could wash all the upchucked Smoothy from him quickly. Gwen admits to being hurt that Kevin--although ultimately he was cooperating with Gwen in luring Charmcaster in--still seemed to have trust issues with her. "That's because of the thing she said that struck home," says Kevin. "Why *haven't* you used your magic to change me back?" And Ben says, "And while we're at it, how'd you know what spell to use to transfer your power back without having the spell book in front of you?" "Because," says Gwen, "every night for weeks now, when I should have been studying for school, what I was really studying was the spell book. So much so that I've memorized almost all of it." "Why?" says Kevin. "Because of you, doofus. I've been working to try and find a way to change you back. And I'm never going to stop until I've cured you. Never. Trust me on that." And he takes her hand in his monstrous one and says, "I do."

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