

Knowledge

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The cren was dead.

I stood up slowly, back creaking with pain. “You’re sure about that?”

Lisa shrugged. “As sure as I can be. I mean, I’ve never actually had to do this on a cren before. Maybe once we get the body back to the morgue, I can call the—They must have an ambassadorship or something, right? They must have their own doctors?”

“I guess.” Life was simpler before the aliens showed up. “Cause of death?”

Lisa leaned close to the corpse and tried to ignore the early-morning tourists who gawked from behind the police tape. True Londoners kept moving, never giving a second glance. “Their skin is so tough it’s hard to see damage. There’s a slight bit of blood on the sidewalk, but that might be normal. I’m not sure how much blood they have.” She sighed. “I need to take a course on their anatomy.”

“Accident?”

“Not likely.” She stood and pulled off her plastic gloves. “Even if he slipped on the sidewalk and fell, his skin is much too tough to cause this kind of damage.”

“Great. Just great. Can you tell what might have caused it?”

She tossed her gloves in a bag, tied it securely, and then threw that into the back seat. “No idea, Scott. Once we get a cren expert, I might be able to tell you more. Assuming we can find one.”

I scratched my nose and looked down at our victim. At least a dead cren didn’t smell like a dead human.

“Got his I.D.,” said a voice behind me. Hakim held one of the newer model pads—the kind we never get issued—and spun it around for me to see. “This pad is all he had on him.” He looked down at the screen. “Bok.”

“Bok?”

“That’s his name. Professor Bok. Taught a course in twentieth century human music at L.C.M.”

“What’s an alien doing teaching music from earth? Shouldn’t he be teaching, I dunno, cren culture or something?”

Hakim touched the screen and the kind of music my great grandparents played assaulted my ears. *“Take the last train to Clarkesville...”*

Seeing my expression, he quickly turned it off.

I stuck my hand in my jacket pocket, pulled out a cough drop, and popped it into my mouth. The cren all looked alike to me, so it was hard to feel sympathy for any individual. I cringed at that thought. It wasn’t that long ago that many of my fellow humans felt the same way about my ancestors.

“The college is miles away,” I said, mostly to myself. “What was he doing in this neighborhood in the middle of the night?”

A streetlight above sputtered on and off, trying to make up its mind whether it was needed. London never really got dark. The buildings on Savile Row only rose to a level of about five stories so it wasn’t like London’s largest canyons, blocking all evidence of the outside world, but they often prevented me from realizing how late it had gotten. Or how early, in this case.

I suddenly wanted coffee.

I looked to Hakim. “Cameras?”

“Nope.”

“Bullocks. This is Savile Row. Millionaires everyone. Come on, someone must have filmed this.”

Hakim glanced around. “I don’t see any cameras. Do you?”

“Oh, bloody fine detective work there, Hakim. Maybe you might want to do more than just scan the area for a second? It’s not like you’ve never seen how small cameras can be.”

He groaned like a kid being given a nasty homework assignment and trudged past the stately brick buildings toward Vigo Street.

“Black with sugar,” I yelled to his back, and he raised his hand without turning around.

I eyed the buildings. I didn’t see any cameras either. Hakim could be right. On the other hand, any cameras might also have been covered or destroyed by the Vipers. Those damn vigilantes think they’re protecting privacy when in reality all they do is feed right into criminal’s hands. God save us from people trying to protect us from ourselves.

I yelled down the street. “Calix, where’s that witness?”

Calix turned from the tourist he had been shooing away and nodded his head to my left. A young man spoke animatedly into a recorder held by a woman with her back to me. I headed toward them.

“‘Knowledge’, you say?”

I groaned at the sound of that voice. “Bugger all. What’re you doing here?”

Victoria met my eyes. Tall and and beautiful, she had a glowing charisma about her that was made for video—and she knew it.

“Ah, Detective Kabongo,” she said. “What a pleasure.”

“It is not, and you know it, Ms. Kwon.” She hated it when I used her real name. I did it as often as possible. “What are you doing talking to my witness?”

“Your witness?” She batted her eyes. “Why, Detective, I think this man is an independent person, able to make his own decisions.” Her pad continued to record both her smile and the befuddled face of the kid, who looked both awestruck at being interviewed by her and terrified that I appeared mad about it.

I gritted my teeth. She smiled and waited, her pad capturing everything. Her blog had more hits than the *Times* on certain days, when she wasn’t found on the “True Criminal” talk shows all over the net.

What really galled me and the other real detectives was that she had taken on this ridiculous fake persona that the public just ate up. “Victoria Holmes,” she called herself. “A direct descendant of Sherlock.” How one could descend from a fictional character was never quite explained. Mostly everyone just overlooked that part. They also ignored the fact that she was clearly of Asian descent. Or maybe everyone else just wanted to play along for the fun of it.

She had built a reputation as one who could solve any problem for anyone, but those of us in the know were aware of how she carefully chose which cases to accept and write about. Unsolved ones never seemed to make her show. The media loved her so much that they never investigated how much of her success was faked and how much she relied on the work done by real detectives.

But what angered us most was that, dammit, she was often right. Something about her mind caught things we missed. She delighted in making us look like fools, which only gathered her more hits, more ads, more press coverage and more business.

For the rest of the story, get “Dance Like a Monkey”