

Code Dead,
The intermission between 'Glenda' and 'I, The Jury'

By

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Foreword

Based upon "Code Dead: Do the encrypted writings of Ricky McCormick hold the key to his mysterious death?" By Christopher Tritto – The Riverfront Times, Saint Louis, Mo

Chapter One

“How we got to where we are.”

Where? The Area 51 police superstation Saint Louis Metropolitan Police Department, North Patrol Division – Precincts Seven, Eight, and Nine where Mondo’s aunt, Agnus B Miller, is captain.

Who? It’s just Mondo Kane and her aunt in the office of her aunt, Captain Miller.

When? Between “Glenda” and “I, The Jury.”

“Some of this happened before my time. It involves humans. And you are retired. Do you wish to listen?”

There are many options available to Mondo. But. Telling her aunt, “No,” is not one of them. Or, more precisely, it’s not the “wise” choice.

“Yes, I would be very glad to listen, auntie dearest.”

“Excellent. Such a sweet girl you are. Recall or narrative?”

“As you please.”

“Excellent. We’ll do a party mix. Recall, when possible. Narrative, when we must.”

Ricky McCormick’s remains were well on their way toward fertilizing the soil when investigators arrived to the scene in late June 1999. Filthy Lee blue jeans and a stained white T-shirt clung to his scrawny five-foot-six-inch frame. Although it had been just three days since he disappeared, the flesh on his outstretched hands was already rotted to the point that his fingertips, just below the top knuckles, had fallen off and lay next to him in the weeds.

How his corpse ended up face down in this cornfield in rural St. Charles County—twenty miles from where he worked and lived in downtown St. Louis—was anyone’s guess. But the desolate sliver of land between the Mississippi and Missouri rivers has been a criminal dumping ground for years.

In 1995 authorities discovered the bullet-ridden body of an alleged prostitute in an abandoned house along the same stretch of U.S. Route 67. Two years after McCormick’s death, state road crews mowing grass some 300 yards away from where he lay found the nude bodies of two more women.

Advanced decomposition made an autopsy of McCormick difficult. Following a thorough examination of the 72 pounds of bones and flesh that survived exposure to the elements, pathologists with the St. Charles County Medical Examiner’s Office ultimately ruled McCormick’s cause of death “undetermined.” Yet, police suspected foul play.

Homicide detectives searched the 41-year-old victim’s pockets for clues and interviewed his relatives, girlfriend, and others who knew him. Soon leads began to run dry, and a stack of other cases piled up on investigators’ desks. Before long, McCormick

appeared to join the ranks of countless other poor, indigent men whose short lives ended under suspicious circumstances only to be forgotten.

Twelve years passed, and then everything changed.

In March 2011, FBI officials made a rare and remarkable revelation, seemingly out of the blue. Dan Olson, chief of the bureau's Cryptanalysis and Racketeering Records Unit (CRRU) in Quantico, Virginia, disclosed for the first time the existence of two pages of handwritten encrypted notes found stuffed in a pocket of McCormick's jeans. Unable to decipher the tangle of letters and numbers, the FBI released copies to the public with a plea for assistance to hardcore puzzle solvers and wannabe sleuths alike.

It turns out McCormick's riddle, allegedly written by a man who could hardly write his own name, has stumped the world's foremost code breakers. They remain so baffled, in fact, that McCormick's notes now rank third on the CRRU's list of top unsolved cases, behind only an unbroken cipher authored by the self-proclaimed Zodiac killer in 1969 and a secret threat letter written to an undisclosed public agency about 25 years ago.

FBI code breakers typically unlock the meanings of ciphers they receive in a matter of hours. McCormick's notes have eluded Dan Olson for more than a decade. Although he has since been promoted to lead the bureau's cryptanalysis unit, Olson was a forensic analyst when the McCormick codes first made their way east to Quantico in late 2001. He's been puzzling over them ever since.

Olson projects a clinical approach to his job: disciplined, methodical, and emotionally detached. When the McCormick codes originally hit his desk, Olson attacked them as he always does, counting characters and looking for patterns. He attempted to break them down manually with graph paper and a pencil. He dissected the strings of letters and numbers on whiteboards amid the acrid whiff of dry-erase markers. He employed computers with state-of-the-art software to perform statistical analyses. Olson worked on the codes for two solid weeks.

He got nowhere.

He brought in other analysts to take a look and brainstorm ideas and consulted experts for clues. He compared the letters and numbers in the notes to every street address in St. Louis and vetted them against maps from across the country, but no hits rose to a level beyond coincidence.

"It doesn't happen often that we have an unsolved cipher of this length and significance," Olson says. "The characters are not random. There are many E's, for example, that could be used as a spacer. There are many characteristics that suggest it could be solved, many patterns. The problem is we don't know why it is not solvable."

Cracking a code takes four steps. First one must determine the language used, in this case, English. Then the system used—a cipher in which letters are transposed or substituted for something else, for example, or a code in which a letter such as "R" represents a person or place, or perhaps even a secret language such as a version of pig Latin. After that one must reconstruct the key that explains how the code maker changed the letters of the message, such as by shifting every character three letters to the right in the alphabet. Finally, one can apply the key and transcribe the intended text.

“We cannot get past step two,” Olson says of the McCormick case.

Some have suggested the notes are meaningless, the random scribbling of a man who by all accounts was functionally illiterate and demonstrated a low IQ. Olson is quick to argue otherwise. He is convinced the codes could contain leads about where McCormick was or with whom he met in the last hours before his corpse was abandoned to rot along with his secrets.

“This means something,” Olson says. “We look at a lot of things that are gibberish, arbitrary strikes on a keyboard. This is not that case.”

The McCormick notes eventually moved to the back burner. But a few years ago, with some new staff and capabilities in the FBI laboratory, Olson decided it was time to revisit the case and bring in some fresh eyes. Approximately fifteen of the twenty analysts on staff applied their experience and techniques to the codes. Still nothing worked, putting McCormick’s handiwork in rare company. The FBI examines hundreds of suspected codes each year. After weeding out those that are nonsense from the codes the bureau categorizes as solvable, only about 1 percent goes unbroken, Olson says.

In September 2009, Olson’s frustrated team looked outside for help. They presented the McCormick puzzle to a room of about 25 amateur code breakers gathered in Niagara Falls, Ontario, for the annual convention of the American Cryptogram Association. The challenge generated interest, but association members have been unable to make any breakthroughs.

Despite investing hundreds of hours to decipher the mystery over nearly a decade, the FBI’s elite CRRU—the same unit that cracked the codes of Nazi spies during World War II—remained foiled by the apparent craftsmanship of a high school dropout.

Olson’s rare, and some would say humbling, decision to appeal to the masses last year for help garnered immediate attention. Local newspapers and TV stations in Missouri and Illinois ran with the update. So did news organizations from as far away as New Zealand, Germany, and Ghana.

The deluge that followed prompted the FBI to establish a special Web page just to handle the more than 7,000 public comments and theories that have poured in so far. Respondents have suggested the encrypted notes could mask information about everything from vehicle identification numbers, gambling books, and drug-dealing transactions to addresses and directions, mental-health episodes, or medications. The list goes on and on. Sifting through them all has prompted seven or eight conversations about potential leads between Olson’s team and local investigators, he says. But no arrests or significant developments in the case have emerged. The secrets buried in the codes remain as mysterious as the events that precipitated McCormick’s death.

Ricky McCormick always stood out as different from his peers. His mother, Frankie Sparks, describes him as “retarded.” His cousin Charles McCormick, who shared a brotherly relationship with Ricky for most of his life, says Ricky would often talk “like he was in another world” and suspects Ricky might have suffered from schizophrenia or bipolar disorder.

“Ricky went to see a psychiatrist, and he said Ricky had a brick wall in his mind,” remembers Gloria McCormick, an aunt better known as “Cookie” in whom Ricky often

confided. “He said Ricky refused to break that wall. He didn’t like the life of living poor and had an active imagination.”

It’s unclear whether McCormick ever received formal treatment for mental illness, but family members recall Ricky’s penchant for concocting tall tales and his displays of unusual behavior. As a boy he spent so much time at recess standing off by himself that his mother would receive calls from school administrators asking if anything was wrong.

Teachers shuffled McCormick along from grade to grade, but he could hardly read or write when he dropped out of St. Louis’ former Martin Luther King High School on North Kingshighway.

McCormick subsisted on occasional odd jobs—floor mopper, dishwasher, busboy, service-station attendant—and disability checks he collected due to chronic heart problems. He preferred the graveyard shift and developed a reputation as a night owl, heading out the door at dusk and dragging himself home at dawn.

“I called him a Vampire,” Gloria McCormick says. “He slept all day, and then at night he rises.”

As a teenager and later as an adult, he frequently hitched a ride or caught a bus to distance himself from the street toughs who dealt drugs and picked fights outside his now-bulldozed home near the present-day intersection of Lindell Boulevard and North Sarah Street.

Eventually Ricky found trouble himself. In November 1992, St. Louis police arrested the 34-year-old McCormick for having fathered two children with a girl younger than fourteen years old. McCormick had been sleeping with the girl since she was eleven, according to court files, which protected the girl’s identity. McCormick’s mother and aunt knew the girl simply by her nickname, Pretty Baby.

While awaiting trial on the first-degree sexual-abuse charge, McCormick’s public defender noted she had reasonable cause to believe McCormick was “suffering from some mental disease or defect” and requested that the judge order a mental-health exam. Dr. Michael Armour, a local psychologist, evaluated McCormick at the former St. Louis State Hospital. Following Armour’s report and a hearing, however, the court certified McCormick was fit for trial. Six weeks later, on September 1, 1993, McCormick pleaded guilty to the crime. State inmate 503506 would spend thirteen months behind bars in the Farmington Correctional Center before being sent home a year early on conditional release.

McCormick’s relationship with Pretty Baby reflected an obvious lapse of good judgment. It wouldn’t be his last.

McCormick may have been regarded as something of a simpleton who, despite some street smarts and his criminal record, was generally naïve to the world. The same cannot be said for the men who ran the Amoco gas station at 1401 Chouteau Avenue south of downtown St. Louis where he worked.

Fawaz M. Hamdan, the original owner of the business, killed his neighbor with a butcher knife during a front-yard argument in May 1994. He later died in Missouri’s Potosi Correctional Center while serving a life sentence for second-degree murder.

Juma Hamdallah, a Palestinian immigrant who until 2002 used the name David Radigan, took over as president of the business. Juma employed his brother Baha “Bob” Hamdallah. Despite their familial ties, the two have had a rocky relationship. In August 1999, less than two months after McCormick’s death, police from Maryland Heights investigated an incident in which Juma allegedly shot Baha. Baha Hamdallah survived and filed no charges, but, according to police records, detectives looking into the shooting gathered information allegedly linking Baha “to black gang members in St. Louis City and narcotics use” and noted “Baha is reported to be violent and in possession of several weapons which include handguns and knives.”

Indeed, among the Hamdallah brothers another, Jameil Hamdallah, is a registered sex offender, Baha appears to be the most volatile. Police reports and witness statements spanning several years illustrate repeated episodes of violence that seemed to accompany him wherever he went.

Shortly after moving to St. Louis in 1997 from Cleveland, Ohio, then 22-year-old Baha Hamdallah was cruising the streets of St. Louis in a blue Mazda Protegé when a police detective saw him pull up alongside a man named Tarrence Clark, lean out his car window, and fire a shot at him with a .38-caliber revolver, according to the police report of the incident and witness statements. Clark escaped unharmed. Baha was arrested, but never prosecuted.

Nine months later, on the evening of March 4, 1998, Baha Hamdallah was visiting one of his older brothers, Bahjat Hamdallah, at his job at the Family Market, a small corner grocery store in the Tower Grove East neighborhood. They got into an argument, and Baha allegedly grabbed a gun and opened fire on Bahjat from across the street. A bullet tore into the left side of Bahjat’s abdomen and knocked him to the ground. Baha jumped into his car and sped off.

The eyewitness reports, including that of the manager who knew Baha from frequent visits to the store, were consistent in the police report. But a bloodied Bahjat, either out of fear or a remaining shred of fraternal loyalty, told police he had never seen his assailant before and described him as a goateed Hispanic man rather than his five-foot-ten, 225-pound Middle Eastern brother.

Six days later Baha Hamdallah turned himself in and was arrested on a felony charge of first-degree assault, but Bahjat told police he did not wish to prosecute. State court files show no record of the case.

Later the same month, while working at the family’s Amoco station, Baha Hamdallah was arrested again, this time on a felony charge of second-degree assault, for allegedly beating a man named Elroe Carr with a rusty hammer. Baha allegedly threatened to kill Carr, described by family and acquaintances as a sometimes-homeless drug addict, if he didn’t get off the property. Baha told police, “I just figured I’d take care of this myself,” according to the incident report.

On August 7, 1998, two weeks before Carr’s case against Baha Hamdallah was slated to go to court, Carr was gunned down just blocks from the Amoco station on a residential street in the neighboring housing project. The pending assault charges against Baha died that night with Carr.

Carr's murder remains unsolved, and police made no arrests. But confidential informants told police Carr was killed "at the behest of Baha Hamdallah," according to St. Louis police reports obtained through a public-records request.

There would be more violence to come.

Minutes before sunrise on June 15, 1999, about two weeks before his death, Ricky McCormick walked up to the counter at the Greyhound bus terminal downtown and purchased a one-way ticket to Orlando. It would turn out to be the last of at least two brief trips to Florida he made that year.

It's not clear whom McCormick met during his stay in Room 280 at the Econo Lodge in Orlando. But phone records show he or his girlfriend, Sandra Jones, made a flurry of calls to several people in central Florida a couple of weeks ahead of his arrival. Jones and McCormick exchanged a similar barrage of short phone calls during the two days McCormick spent in Orlando, and he made at least one call to the St. Louis gas station where he worked.

Jones would later tell police she suspected McCormick went to Florida to pick up marijuana. According to a sheriff's department investigative report, Jones' explanation went like this:

McCormick would accept offers to pick up and deliver packages for money. He made trips to Florida before and on several occasions brought marijuana into the apartment he shared with Jones in the Clinton-Peabody housing project south of downtown. The drugs would usually be sealed in zip-lock bags rolled together into bundles the size of baseballs. McCormick told Jones he was holding the stashes of weed for Baha Hamdallah, the police report states.

McCormick never liked to talk about his excursions to Orlando, but he seemed different when he got back that last time, Jones told police. He seemed scared.

Indeed, McCormick's already unsettled lifestyle seemed to become more erratic after he came back, as if he sensed trouble around the corner but didn't know where to turn. McCormick used much of his time during his last days to seek out medical care or, perhaps more accurately, a safe place to stay.

Around three o'clock the afternoon of June 22, 1999, McCormick walked alone into Barnes-Jewish Hospital's emergency room complaining of chest pains and shortness of breath. This was nothing new. McCormick had a history of ER visits and had suffered from asthma and chest pains since childhood. He told his doctors he didn't abuse drugs or alcohol, a statement friends and family back up. It didn't help, however, that he smoked at least a pack of cigarettes a day since he was about ten years old and drank coffee by the gallon. By his own estimate, he told his doctors he downed more than twenty caffeinated beverages a day.

Doctors ruled out a heart attack but admitted McCormick for observation and kept him there for two days. Ricky left the hospital on June 24 with orders to return for follow-up visits in the coming week. He would never make it to those appointments.

McCormick took a bus to his Aunt Gloria's apartment after leaving Barnes-Jewish and visited with her for about an hour. Her home had always been a sanctuary for him, and he

maintained a closer relationship with Gloria than with his own mother, who lived just around the corner.

“Everybody needs someone to talk to now and then,” Gloria says. “Ricky would come visit and talk with me.”

But he revealed little this time, chatting just a bit before getting up to leave. It was late afternoon, and Ricky waved off offers to drive him wherever he needed to go. Gloria’s last image of Ricky is him walking down the street.

Around 5 p.m. the next day, June 25, McCormick entered the emergency room at Forest Park Hospital, less than two miles from Barnes-Jewish. This time he complained that he was having trouble breathing following an afternoon of mowing grass. Doctors diagnosed his wheezing as another asthma flare-up. He was not admitted, however, and was officially released at 5:50 p.m. It’s not clear when he actually left the hospital. Gloria says she heard McCormick spent that night in the waiting room before leaving the next morning.

Jones told police that she talked with McCormick on the phone at about 11:30 a.m. on June 26. He told her he was out of the hospital and was on his way to the Amoco to get a bite to eat. At least one gas-station employee told police he last saw McCormick there the next day, on June 27.

McCormick left the gas station with at most hours left to live; medical examiners determined he was definitely dead the same day.

Looking back, Gloria McCormick suspects Ricky’s hospital visits were attempts to find a hideout where he could lay low. Sitting at an open window in her same apartment, Gloria’s voice softens between tugs on her Salem 100 cigarettes. “Maybe he knew he got into something that put his life on the line,” she says. “He knew he could have stayed here. But maybe he didn’t want to put my life on the line.”

When McCormick’s corpse turned up, his girlfriend Jones’ thoughts turned to Baha “Bob” Hamdallah. After McCormick returned from his trip south, Jones said she suspected Ricky might have done something wrong in Orlando. If anyone was going to hurt McCormick, she told investigators, it would probably be Bob Hamdallah.

On December 23, 1999, Detective Jana Walters of the St. Charles County Sheriff’s Department received a call from Sgt. Ed Kuehner of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department’s homicide division. He had information to share about Ricky McCormick’s death and wanted to arrange an inter-agency meeting.

Nine investigators gathered on the fourth floor of St. Louis’ police headquarters six days later. In addition to Walters and her partner, detective Michael Yarbrough, Kuehner’s gathering included members of St. Louis’ homicide and narcotics divisions, investigators with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and a special agent from the FBI.

Walters and Yarbrough learned St. Louis police were investigating a man named Gregory Lamar Knox, a major drug dealer who operated in and around the housing complex where McCormick had lived, as a suspect in several homicides, including “at least two murder-for-hire schemes.” According to police records, a confidential informant

also told police that Knox was responsible for the murder of a black man who worked at the gas station on Chouteau Avenue and whose body was dumped near West Alton. St. Louis police had also linked the Hamdallahs with alleged “criminal activity and the possible association with Gregory Knox.”

The St. Charles detectives came away from the meeting wanting to know more about the role Knox and the Hamdallahs may have played in McCormick’s death. Within weeks they began conducting stakeouts of the Hamdallahs’ gas station and the homes of several of its owners and employees.

No arrests ever materialized. Yarbrough says that despite ongoing suspicions, detectives never could substantiate claims from informants suggesting a connection between the Hamdallahs and Knox or prove either was responsible for McCormick’s death.

Still, both Knox and Baha Hamdallah found their way to prison, at least for a time.

Knox was arrested on July 25, 2000, and pleaded guilty in January 2001 to charges of possession with intent to distribute crack cocaine and carrying a firearm during and in relation to a drug-trafficking crime. A March 2001 HUD report to Congress noted Knox “was a suspect in at least four homicides that occurred in 1998 and 1999 in the LaSalle Park Homes and Clinton-Peabody public housing developments in St. Louis. He was also the number one supplier of narcotics to LaSalle Park Homes.” Knox is currently serving his sentence at the Federal Medical Center in Lexington, Kentucky, and is scheduled to be released in November 2013.

On October 13, 2000, Baha Hamdallah was managing another store, Charlie’s Food Market in Madison, Illinois, when he got into an argument with a customer named Robert Steptoe. Different versions of events were later presented in court, but ultimately a jury convicted Hamdallah of first-degree murder after he shot Steptoe in the face with a 9-mm Glock pistol outside the store. In September 2002 a Madison County judge sentenced Hamdallah to 38 years in prison for killing Steptoe.

Nearly four years later, however, in May 2006, an Illinois appellate court ruled Hamdallah’s lawyer erred by not calling a gunshot-residue expert to testify in person in the shooting case. The appellate court granted a retrial. In the second go-round, the jury bought Hamdallah’s claims of self-defense and his version of events in which the gun went off while he and Steptoe were struggling for control of the pistol. On May 15, 2008, Hamdallah walked out of court a free man.

Attempts to contact Baha and Juma Hamdallah for this story were unsuccessful. Brother Bahjat Hamdallah says Juma now lives in the Philippines and that Baha has married and relocated back to the Cleveland area in his attempt to start over following his Illinois murder trial.

Gregory Knox, responding by e-mail from prison to questions about McCormick and allegations he was involved in McCormick’s murder, wrote: “At this moment this is all new information to me, and I have no information that could help your case.”

With little left to go on, investigators now believe that the codes found on Ricky McCormick may offer the best hope to explain how his corpse ended up in that isolated

cornfield so many years ago. The FBI's Olson is convinced an answer to the codes is out there, though it will not appear out of thin air.

"Can it be solved? Yes, I am absolutely confident," Olson says. "But you can't just will it."

Today the field in West Alton offers no hint of its murderous history. No marker or makeshift memorial stands in the place where McCormick's body was found. The cycle of seasons erased long ago what little impression he left behind.

A few miles south, no headstone identifies McCormick's final resting place at Laurel Hill Memorial Gardens. If not for an entry in the cemetery's log book, one would never know his bones are buried beneath the grass designated as Space #2 in lot 11D. Here and there other graves are decorated with red silk flowers and plastic green wreaths, but not McCormick's. There is no sign anyone has ever visited his anonymous plot.

Back in St. Louis, McCormick's family members say they have never heard from police about the Hamdallahs, Knox, or other details of the investigation into Ricky's death. They never heard about the encrypted notes found in his pocket until the local evening news broadcast a report on the codes.

"They told us the only thing in his pockets was the emergency-room ticket," McCormick's mother, Frankie Sparks, says. "Now, twelve years later, they come back with this chicken-scratch shit."

Contradicting the FBI's statements to the media, family members say they never knew of Ricky to write in code. They say they only told investigators he sometimes jotted down nonsense he called writing, and they seriously question McCormick's capacity to craft the notes found in his pockets.

"The only thing he could write was his name," Sparks says. "He didn't write in no code." Charles McCormick recalls Ricky "couldn't spell anything, just scribble."

Don Olson stands by his assessment, however.

"I have every confidence that Ricky wrote the notes," Olson says. "They are done in more of a format of something written to oneself than something written to someone else." As an example, he points to circles drawn around some segments of code that suggest a to-do list where items are marked as tasks are completed.

Elonka Dunin, an expert amateur cryptographer who has consulted novelist Dan Brown of *The Lost Symbol* and *The Da Vinci Code* fame, agrees the McCormick notes appear to be personal. They might be a message from one person to another but do not look as if intended, as with some other famous ciphers, to be challenges to a broader audience, she says. Dunin, a computer-game developer who happens to live a short distance from where McCormick's body was found, has spent tens of hours during the past year analyzing his notes. Like Olson, she suspected McCormick might have authored them for his own private consumption. Upon learning more about McCormick's illiteracy and personal background, however, she has second thoughts. "I don't think McCormick wrote these notes," she says. "Perhaps he was a courier."

Olson insists the only reason he decided to make the notes public was to see if somebody would recognize the code or provide new information that could help decipher it.

“Sometimes tips generate a seed that generates an ultimate break,” Olson says. “The codes were released in the hope that someone would see this and suggest ideas. We can become tunnel-visioned. We know a little bit about this case, and sometimes that puts us at a disadvantage.”

At St. Charles County Sheriff’s Department headquarters, detective Yarbrough peers through eyeglasses over a salt-and-pepper mustache. A career cop since 1979, he has seen his share of murders, frauds, and other crimes. Few have generated as much exasperation as the McCormick case.

Unincorporated St. Charles County has only seen about five unsolved murders since the 1960s, Yarbrough says. The McCormick investigation remains an unfinished job, an unmet challenge, and a professional frustration. He remains unsure whether he will ever know McCormick’s true fate and be able put the mystery surrounding Ricky’s death to rest.

“I still have the same feeling that things don’t add up,” Yarbrough says. “It’s kind of like Humpty Dumpty. All the pieces are there, but how do you put them back together?”

Chapter Two

“The world not of mine own, which I go to of my own volition.”

Model Kate Upton’s va-va-voom physique has been in the news since she lit up the cover of *Sports Illustrated* in February. She isn’t your typical model—at least not your typical rail thin millennial cat walker. The voluptuous twenty-year-old is more of a throwback to the late 1980s early ‘90s when glamazons like Cindy Crawford dominated the fashion pages and Anna Nicole Smith first posed for *Guess*.

Not everyone in the world of fashion and beauty approves. “She’s like a Page 3 girl,” Sophia Neophitou, who books *Victoria’s Secret Shows*, told the *New York Times* earlier this year referring to the half-naked women featured in British tabloids. “She’s like a footballer’s wife, with the too-blonde hair and the kind of face that anyone with enough money can go out and buy.”

The blogger, “Skinny Gurl,” who critiqued Upton’s curves as “lardy” last week went even farther. *Skinny Gurl’s* blog, *SkinnyGossip*, is one of many so-called “thinspiration” sites that promote extreme diets and worship the bodies of extra-lean celebrities. In her June post on Upton, *Skinny Gurl* compared her to a cow, a “piggy,” and described the young beauty as: “Huge thighs, NO waist, big fat floppy boobs, and terrible body definition—she looks like a squishy brick.”

Mondo steps out of her aunt’s office and into another world entirely. The door closes behind her with a swish and a thud. The door to her aunt’s office that she exited was ornate, carved wood, expensive, and enchanted—a work of art and magic. The door here that closed behind her is a plain metal door—ordinary, nothing special—utilitarian.

She pauses to block their thoughts—so many voices in her head. The humans are so transparent, she thinks to herself. A needless distraction, she additionally laments. This will take some getting used to.

Quiet, finally. I told auntie that I wouldn’t need to use.

That’s when, in spite of her best efforts, the “noise” returns with a vengeance. Then, the “ah ha” moment as the limiters kick in. Auntie knew best, after all.

Glorious silence. And this time it will last for the duration. No more meaningless, random chatter—that awful din. The noise was never anything akin to the glorious cacophony of the Borg Collective that she misses at times so much.

A patrolman walks into a glass partition, dropping some papers on impact. He seems unhurt. A cross between *G4’s* Morgan Webb, *WWF* Diva Miss Debra, and *Playboy’s* June Wilkinson. Here, she is more than just a little distraction.

There are civilians and uniformed police officers in the no-frills lobby. About a dozen people, all told.

To her, the civvies look way too casual—sloppy-looking by the entrenched, 1950s standards of her world and most are overweight, a couple of them are morbidly obese.

Here the 1950s is a distant memory, no longer relevant for decades where couture, personal appearance, and behavior are concerned. In her world, the 1950s is still the yardstick that dictates fashion, physique, and mores—especially when it comes to women. Bosomy peroxide blondes rule, and Marilyn Monroe still lives—young, thirty-something, and vibrant.

Some of the cops look fit and trim. Most look a little soft around the edges. None of their uniforms look crisp enough. On a wall hangs the picture of a colored man, forty-something, well-dressed, grinning like a Cheshire cat. She fixates upon the portrait and smiles which looks like a profound frown because of the shape of her large, ugly, downturned mouth, but before she can utter a single word.

“You’ve got to be kidding. So, you have a fuckin’ nigger for President. Wow. That’s got to really suck. Is that what you were going to say blood bag or do you things prefer to be called leeches?”

The voice is coming from behind her and is quite unfamiliar. She does the expected and answers in kind. Tit for tat.

“None of the above,” the blonde, blue-eyed, twenty-something dish answers very matter of fact as she turns round to confront her assailant.

The verbal barrage is being launched at her by Buggy Nova, a black patrol woman who’s a deadringer for Danai Gurira (Michonne of *Walking Dead* fame). Thanks to the prudz that the tall blonde is wearing, the girl has white, plastic-looking hands. Creepy, but Bugs is unfazed. Advantage: none.

Then Mondo adds the cruel dig that’s guaranteed to get a rise out of any self-respecting person of Bugs’ persuasion, “tar baby.”

“What did you say?!”

“You heard me. I called you a tar baby, and I didn’t stutter. Or. Would you prefer that I used Ebonics, to make it easier for you to savvy? Maybe your wetback partner can translate for you or maybe the kyte is a shade too retarded like you for a proper Christian language.”

So this leech knows about Sara and me.

Again, Mondo answers matter of fact. Again. Nothing whatsoever can be inferred from the tone and tenor of her voice; a lot can be inferred from its undiluted Politically Incorrect content, this time around.

In contrast to Mondo’s blasé. The anger and hatred coming off the Nubian is palatable and growing exponentially in response Mondo’s blatantly racist pronouncement.

The Vampire’s teeth go jagged and her tongue goes killer. Bugs takes a step back and pauses. Still angry and hating, but cautioned by the monster’s brief dental display.

Boney piece of shit, the sergeant briefed us thoroughly about your racist Nazi ass during morning call. It’s bad enough that we’ve got Werewolves, now we have to deal with Vampires too!

Sara Del Rey, the tough no-nonsense Latino, who is Bugs' partner and distaff counterpart of five years, walks in the front door. Sitting in their patrol car, waiting for her partner to beat feet, she saw the confrontation and came in to back-up her girl. She's behind Mondo. But nothing happens. Bugs waves her partner off. Sara stands down.

"I got your number, Hitler nuthugger. We'll dance again, soon, on my terms."

Here, in this universe, demons cannot resurrect. In other words, no matter how you kill them, it's as if you're beheading them. And, there are a plethora of other limitations and restrictions. So, the mortal's bravado is not misplaced.

"I look forward to it," Mondo blows her a kiss. "And to clarify, we are talking about fighting not fucking, aren't we? Because, I don't do Gorillas. If you want some stank. Better try one of those Williams sisters Venus or Serena, they're right up your alley. You know—black and ugly. Just like you, shine. In fact you could almost double for Serena. Then again, all you darkies look the same to me."

Bugs is fit to be tied, but she somehow holds it together. You can cut the tension with a knife. Then, her partner does something that breaks the moment. Defusing the situation, somewhat.

"Hey, Bugs, I hear that the fanged bitch sings and is available for weddings and bar mitzvahs."

Bugs chuckles and responds: "She looks like the kind that would. For a twenty, Lily-white and on her back, legs spread wide, as soon as Jane Doe drops her dress or John Doe unzips his pants. She'll blow you for a dollar. Cheap-ass hooker. And, a junkie to boot."

Sara fires a closing salvo at the Lost: "Hey, you dumbass blood sucker, did they fry your brains—what little you were born with—when they bleached your hair?"

Slinging hash. There's no shortage of insults, slurs, expletives, and epitaphs to go around. Dirty, low-down meanness abounds in spades.

Bugs and Sara back off, respectively. They do not exit, get into their patrol car parked out front, and drive off. Instead, they stay put. Eye-balling the creature from the nearby. Things remain edgy.

Two plainclothes detectives walk over. Eddie Dean Kent and Samantha Teri Lane. She prefers to be called Sam. They caught the tail end of the rowdiness, and they already had misgivings about their assignment as liaison to the Lost. So. What they just witnessed made them even less inclined than they already were.

In spite of all of this, Eddie eyes the dish and already wants to fuck her. One iota less of self-control, and he would be pitching a tent in his pants.

They shake hands with the girl, and are immediately taken back by the feel of her gloves. The gloves feel disturbingly like living flesh. Advantage: hers.

Eddie, expectedly, plays off his heebie-jeebies with a snappy remark.

"Are those prosthetic?" He asks, while pointing at her gloved hands. Additionally, he smiles.

Mondo's comeback is even snappier: "Something like that." Additionally, she smiles. "but, only when I'm wearing the gloves, of course."

Truth be told, when she's wearing prudz, her hands are in effect prosthetic. Some would argue that because she is Borg her hands literally are prosthetic when she's wearing prudz, and they'd be right.

Kane's dry, often sardonic sense of humor, her excellent vocabulary, and her knack for trash-talking to Food in the same sentence and with as much gravitas as Italian Renaissance art or global economics—it's as if she were something much, much older in years—ages older.

Her sometimes harsh appraisals of the gaming public the Food rub some fans of humanity the wrong way, but she is quick to back up her opinion with facts and encourage respectful dialogues among fans with differing opinions. She's just as quick to admit she's wrong when the Food in question presents a convincing argument.

"I'd like those two, that sambo and her hymie partner," Mondo points at Bugs and Del Rey, "to be there when I sit in with the McCormick task force."

"We'll see what can be done."

"No, detective. You worthless cracker will make it happen. Honky savvy or do you need a translator as well?"

A very awkward moment followed by the expected ice breaker.

"Okay. So. Where do you want to start?"

"I want to see where the body was dumped. When we come back, I will expect to see the body. You do have it exhumed?"

"Yes."

Mondo reacts as the door from the squad room opens and closes, and someone a Werewolf in his human form enters the lobby. Only the four humans two detectives and two patrol officers proximal to Mondo seem to notice Mondo's reaction. Everyone acts oblivious. Mondo tracks the movement of this "invisible" person as he traverses the room and exits via the front door—her head turning to follow his movement, her eyes fixed upon him. Again, none of the four humans near Mondo acts like they can see the person or the front door open and close. They can, of course—but cannot acknowledge it until Mondo has been formally introduced to the Lycan. The surveillance cameras cannot, of course, detect the Weren. In this universe, Lycans cannot be recorded, visually or verbally—a technical limitation that doesn't exist in Mondo's world.

In a word, although Lycans do not lack reflections in a mirror, they don't show up on video and their voices don't carry over phone lines or record on audio tapes, which makes surveillance a bitch.

Now I know why I'm really here. I wonder when they'll make formal contact.

"We can leave now."

"You saw something we couldn't see. And, that will remain the situation until you're formally introduced. Capish?"

“And I made sure that you knew it as well as the person who was allegedly imperceptible to you. Capish.”

She slips on her Edith Head sunglasses. They’re the very dark ones; the ones with the blue glass lenses. Her strait hair yanks back into a sternka. Now she looks the part—that of a well-dressed schoolmarm who’s also Borg. Think: “Miss Boston Plastic Housewares 1958.”

“Eyes light sensitive?”

“Nope, I’m just being polite.”

“Polite?”

“Now you can’t see how bored I am.” She adds sarcastically: “I wouldn’t want to hurt your feelings.”

Eddie and Sam lead their guest out to their car. Mondo gets in the back. She reacts like there’s someone in the back with her. Several times during the trip out to Saint Charles, she turns her head to face the person sitting beside her and flashes them a coy smile.

“I wonder why she didn’t ask to first be taken to the ME’s, and work her way back from there?”

You’re as stupid as the Food. I was obviously expecting too much from a dog. When we’re formally introduced, I’ll enlighten you.

“Racial slurs to spare, sufficient in volume and venom for anyone and everyone that a misanthropist like you can hurl with elitist aplomb. You really are the epitome of an arrogant blood-sucking flesh-rending two-legged promiscuous slug.”

And your point being or were you just engaging in the pointless prattle of a misogynistic dingbat as practice for the real thing?

Dwayne shifts in the seat. He’s having a dickens of a time making heads or tails out of this girl. Any preconceptions that Johnson had about the Vampire have been blown to smithereens by her bigot melodrama.

He’s annoyed that her mind’s voice called him stupid. An annoyance reflected in the tone of his mind’s voice. The dog slur is just water off a duck’s back. He could care less about that remark.

In the midst of his musing, she purses her lips and momentarily raises her shades to show her baby blues and winks at him. She flashes that infectious smile, the one that’s recognizable as a smile in spite of her mouth’s perpetual frown. Now he really is confused. That large, ugly mouth of hers makes it so easy for her to radiate loathing and disdain. Throw in some hate speech, and she comes off as a total wanker. Mondo slouches seductively in her seat and nods off. Purring like a kitten; a peroxide sex kitten.

So far, the way she’s acted, has been all performance theatre. An Oldest One’s way of feeling out what’s what, and thus it’s not a nice way to do it. But, she’s not a nice person. She’s an evil one. In spite of her youth, her behavior is increasingly become that of an Old One. Although she associates with Nazis, she is not a Nazi herself; a very “old school” affiliation, befitting someone much older.

In her world. Jews and Nazis are fast friends. In her world. Neither Jews nor Nazis are humans, they are demons the darkest, and arguably the most supernatural, of God's Children. In her world. Hitler was evil, and he was a Vampire of indeterminate age, an Old One, and a staunchest supporter of Judaism like all Nazis and all of their associates and affiliates—as aforementioned, Mondo is both a Nazi associate and an affiliate. In point of fact, Mondo's first husband was a Jew and a Hebrew blue-blood to boot.

To reiterate, where she comes from Nazis are not anti-Semitic and are in fact Judaism's closest allies. Nazis of her world sound quite upright, on the side of the Angels, so to speak?

Not to be confused in any way, shape, or form, there's no such thing as a morally upstanding Nazi. No matter the world, mortal or immortal, a "good" Nazi is always defined as "the worst genocidal prick imaginable." This is why when Nazis are demons, and thus god-like, it's best that they're on your side.

Evil harkens to evil. This is why Mondo has an affinity for Nazis of any stripe, even more so than she does for the Communist Chinese who she has also worked for in the past.

As heinous as the atrocities committed by The Reds, they're eclipsed by those committed by The Party—the Nazis with their rules of Reich do far worse than the "red" Chinese with no rules and the most genocidal flavor of Communism. Communism, especially as practiced by the 456, is a consummate all-consuming evil. Nazism, as practiced by anyone the KKK, the Neos, the Skinheads, etc., inclusive, is pure evil.

Gone is the pleasure of her classically beautiful visage. In its place is a jarring affection akin to that of Lena Heady's horribly scarred face in the last Judge Dredd reboot. In the movie, Lena's plays a character named Madeline "Ma-Ma" Madrigal, and she's every bit as ruthless as her Game of Thrones character Cersei. She's a prostitute who kills her pimp and takes over his gang. He's the one who disfigured her. In revenge, she uses her teeth to relieve him of his manhood, eating his cock and balls in front of him as he bleeds to death. In the original script, her character is described as an "obese septuagenarian with heavy scarring." In casting Heady for the role, they totally threw the whole "obese septuagenarian" bit out the window. Not that anyone really minds about that.

The real life Madeline "Ma-Ma" Madrigal is a 70-something Crone who's jig-sawed on both sides of her face, has a butchered left tit, and a right tit that looks like someone or something has hacked off its stringbean nipple after having gnawed on the boob. The mutilation is self-inflicted; affectation that this merciless psychopath is hopelessly addicted to. In addition to being a junkie and a pusher, she's horrifically tattooed and is a prostitute. Foaming at the mouth rages that could easily pass for insane. Not to mention, she is insane. A chemical lobotomy thanks to her chronic drug use. She's a particularly nasty, degenerate example of the "pure" Hag breed—homicidal on a whim. Prune-danish as huge floppy tits that have been additionally hacked up and gnawed on. Coarse, brutish features, akin to a Goon. Skinny and muscular, an anti-obesity that's akin to a low-fat flipside of a Goon's muscularity. In other words, Skinny, but still physically strong, nonetheless. Powerful—the unnatural strength of the totally deranged. Geriatric characteristics, akin to all of the Hag races. A hung-like-a-horse she-male who despises

men, although this manhater will service them as a prostitute for as little as twenty dollars. Zero personal hygiene: Filthy, infested, and smelly, akin to a Gollum. Patches of her skin are so dirty they are shiny-black. Teeth that are so filthy, they look rotten. Long dirty finger and toe nails. Serrated teeth. Killer tongue. A krazed that drapes her shoulders and breasts.

They arrive at the cornfield in a now otherwise not so rural St. Charles County along an extensively revamped stretch of U.S. Route 67.

Prophetically, the investigation begins for Mondo Kane where life's story ended for Ricky McCormick. Whether he died here or died elsewhere and was unceremoniously dumped here, this is where his story ended. She was told where his body was found, but not the exact spot. When she's let out of the car, Mondo walks directly to that spot, without any direction from anyone.

She purses her shades and assumes a deadly serious tone. No more fun and games. The Vampire becomes oblivious to the Werewolf and the two humans who are on the scene with her. She looks every which way, making arcane gestures with her hands, nodding in that odd way as if she were "communicating" with Dragons in their native tongue. All the while, she never moves an inch from the spot where she's standing. More to the point, no one with her interrupts.

Mondo can "hear" the songs of the high-voltage power lines overhead strung between the massive transmission towers, carrying electricity from the power grid to homes to appease the voracious appetites of wanton consumers.

Most transmission lines use high-voltage three-phase alternating current (AC), although single phase AC is sometimes used in railway electrification systems. High-voltage direct-current (HVDC) technology is used for greater efficiency in very long distances (typically hundreds of miles (kilometers)), or in submarine power cables (typically longer than 30 miles (50 km)). HVDC links are also used to stabilize against control problems in large power distribution networks where sudden new loads or blackouts in one part of a network can otherwise result in synchronization problems and cascading failures.

Electricity is transmitted at high voltages (110 kV or above) to reduce the energy lost in long-distance transmission. Power is usually transmitted through overhead power lines. Underground power transmission has a significantly higher cost and greater operational limitations but is sometimes used in urban areas or sensitive locations.

A key limitation in the distribution of electric power is that, with minor exceptions, electrical energy cannot be stored, and therefore must be generated as needed. A sophisticated control system is required to ensure electric generation very closely matches the demand. If the demand for power exceeds the supply, generation plants and transmission equipment can shut down which, in the worst cases, can lead to a major regional blackout, such as occurred in the US Northeast blackouts of 1965, 1977, 2003, and other regional blackouts in 1996 and 2011. To reduce the risk of such failures, electric transmission networks are interconnected into regional, national or continental wide networks thereby providing multiple redundant alternative routes for power to flow

should (weather or equipment) failures occur. Much analysis is done by transmission companies to determine the maximum reliable capacity of each line (ordinarily less than its physical or thermal limit) to ensure spare capacity is available should there be any such failure in another part of the network.

Mondo can “see” and she can “hear” the numeric cryptic transmissions of various numbers stations.

A numbers station is a type of shortwave radio station characterized by their unusual broadcasts, which consist of spoken words, but mostly numbers, often created by artificially generated voices reading streams of numbers, words, letters, tunes, or Morse code. They are transmitted in a wide variety of languages and the voices are usually female, although sometimes men’s or children’s voices are used.

Most of them operate as a simple and foolproof method for government agencies to communicate with spies working undercover. Their messages are encrypted with a one-time pad, to avoid any risk of decryption by the enemy. They change details of their broadcasts or produce special, nonscheduled broadcasts coincident with extraordinary political events, such as the August Coup of 1991 in the Soviet Union.

A minority of them are related to illegal drug smuggling operations. Unlike government stations, smugglers’ stations need to be lower powered and irregularly operated, to avoid location by triangulated direction finding. This is why the numbers stations that have transmitted with impunity for decades are the ones that are generally presumed to be operated or sponsored by governments. Additionally, numbers station transmissions in the international shortwave bands typically transmit at high power levels that might be unavailable to ranches, farms, or plantations in isolated drug-growing regions.

According to the notes of *The Conet Project*, which has compiled recordings of these transmissions on various worlds, numbers stations have been consistently reported since World War I regardless of the universe in question. If accurate, this would count numbers stations among the earliest radio broadcasts.

She can also “hear” the “conversations,” and they are legion, growing increasingly in volume and in insistence. They are flowing into and out of each other with no connection whatsoever with each other or her present predicament with the exception of one which could have been easily lost in all of the chatter if it were not for her ability to filter selectively.

“Each week on Discovery Channel’s ‘Naked & Afraid,’ a new pair of strangers must learn to survive together for 21 days with no food, no water, no tools, and no clothes.”

“It’s a bio-dread.”

“A what?”

“A bionic machine with encoded DNA, which means that it’s self-replicating, and it’s autonomous, a living thinking machine—virtually indestructible—it regenerates when damaged. You know. Someone’s second rate version of a Toy.”

“Yet don’t be fooled into thinking that World War Z is merely a stealthy political tract masquerading as a disaster movie – Forster avoids political didacticism at every turn,

offering up raw material for audiences to pick apart in any manner they please. The film also works as a machine-tooled action extravaganza, buoyed no end by Pitt's strangely soulful and non-triumphalist central turn. If you stand there and let the haters hate all over you, chances are you'll miss 2013's most genuinely thoughtful blockbuster thus far."

"Maybe he was so smart that the world, geared as it is to people of ordinary intelligence, it bored him to tears. In other words."

"He was a high-functioning savant?"

"Exactly. If so, his scribbling would be quite beyond your comprehension. Then again he could just as easily have been an idiot savant and his scribbling."

"Would just be that, rubbish."

The phenomena, both manmade and supernatural, which this spot is nexus is no less than overwhelming. Her eyes, nose, and mouth begin to bleed. The conversations come crashing in like unbridled torrents threatening to drown her.

"Crossing Lines: a police unit that works for the International Criminal Court. Initially, the powers-that-be were reluctant to sanction the team because they were worried that the team's investigations might "usurp the power of sovereign states."

"I guess the whole notion of consenting to the Court via signing the Rome Statute was thought too difficult to explain or seen as too dramatically unsatisfying."

"Scotland Yard interrogator and aristocrat Sienna Pride (Genevieve O'Reilly) killed off in the pilot for Crossing Lines. This totally sucked because this hot blonde only needed a set of the requisite double-Ds to get both of my thumbs up."

The conversations are not inconsequential. They are intent are sucking her mind, leaving the leech with a mental void instead. Emptiness: She would be as a sea shell left on the beach with the wind blowing through it.

"MILF, an acronym for 'Mother/Mom/Mum I'd Like to Fuck,' is a colloquial term common in English and generally regarded as vulgar when spelled out. It denotes a sexually attractive female, usually several years older than the person using the term."

"The Speechless god. He's got no style; he's got no flash and he's squarely in middle age. But Swedish detective Martin Beck is good at one thing: methodically catching criminals so that they can be put away, for a long time."

"His tightly-wound partner, Gunvald, is his opposite: an impulsive man, who cuts a dashing figure, is in no way politically correct and who never met a boundary he didn't leap across. He'll do anything to get information from a suspect, including enhanced interrogation techniques."

"Combine—harvester—up to an 80-foot head."

"Ten foot for the smaller ones."

"The older ones were directed by GPS."

"Pressure sensitive driver's seat—in effect a dead-man's switch."

“You need someone or something sitting in the driver’s seat to deactivate the kill switch.”

Supernaturally speaking, she’s old enough to perceive all of this and yet too old to be overcome by it and be left broken by it. As if it were thrown in the mix to appease her pugilistic soul, the last conversation to assault her has a boxing context.

“Golovkin does not plot his throws. They come automatically and ALWAYS at most opportune time. If you have watched all of his pro fights, you would see that Golovkin has what is called ‘muscle memory.’ He has a signature combination that has taken out some opponents just by a body shot.”

“After watching Golovkin make short work of Britain’s Matthew Macklin (29-5, 20 KO’s) last night in blasting him to smithereens in 3rd rounds at the MGM Grand at Foxwoods Resort, in Mashantucket, Connecticut.”

Then silence, as far as the telepathic yack-yack is concerned. The conversations are gone. The noise from the power lines and the numbers stations likewise go incognito becoming a low steady electric hum and fade inconspicuously into electromagnetic background radiation, respectively—ignorable—incommunicado. No longer enraptured. She stops signing, again aware of the Weren and the Food. Her tongue flicks out, lengthens, and cleans the spent blood off of her face.

Now she knows exactly what killed Ricky. What she doesn’t know is how mere Food, and a supposedly defective example of the species at that, could channel H.P. Lovecraft’s *From Beyond* that which should be imperceptible to him let alone be killed by things that he should not be capable of perceiving—perceptibility being key to interaction.

Then there’s the question of how her dream about Ma-Ma ties into all of this—the dream that she had while she was sleeping in the ride over in the car. Make no mistake about it; Ma-Ma is on this depraved junkie’s wish list. But. Her women’s intuition tells her that the dream was not just some whimsy unconnected with the case. And her gut is never wrong about such things.

She lets her hair down. Sternka gives way to strait, transforming her peroxide tresses into a golden shower—very straight and very blonde—bleached that bright, fake looking, acid-dipped, yellow color—the color of raw wheat. The Vampire looks up at the sun blazing down on a clear, humid day, and doesn’t blink.

The Lost Girl flicks her tongue out, impossibly long, and flashes a gash of serrated teeth—a moment that passes, all too soon. The teeth blunt. Her tongue shortens. She blinks as if she’s mundane instead of supernatural. Her severest hairdo returns, bleached tresses yanking back into a schoolmarm’s sternka—stern, harsh, tight, and unforgiving.

Dwayne would love to lick her juices, upon command. That is if Eddie doesn’t beat him to it. Sam, who is bi, gives the two alpha males a wide berth where this Vampire is concerned. The leech gives her nothing but the hee-bee-jee-bees. So, although she has a thing for natural blondes, she’ll pass on munching this flaxen rug.

The Vampire does something much more telling than changing her hairstyle back to severe long-hanging yellow drapes. She changes her shoes as well, exchanging careys for

debras. Debras: those strappy immutable “classic” opera pumps, with no heel cup. Debras look like, but aren’t, debrahs.

The girl is fit to kill. Debras, Koo, panties, purse, and bra, along with strait hair and her perls: her sexy Miss Debra. Gone is the shrew ‘do. Yet, she remains the absolute shrew. SHO, of course.

To digress:

Debrahs: those mules, with the detachable wraparound ankle straps. Debrahs: immutable “classic” opera pumps, with ankle straps and heel cups. And then there’s careys. Careys: those open-sided immutable “classic” opera pumps—heel cup and closed pointed toe, with no sides—in other words, debrahs without the ankle strap.

Strappy ankle wrap debrahs: The other shoe by Naughty Monkey that was made world famous by WWF Diva, Debra “Show Me Your Puppies” McMichael, that Texas beauty queen, who kums for kicks; kums—“cums with Kum.”

Whether debrahs or debras—a narrow wraparound strap, with no visible close—no buckle or any other type of close for that matter, encircles heel and ankle: very Goon, let alone very fetish, indeed. Just like the skimpy ankle straps of debrahs, the ankle straps of debrahs and debras match the shoes.

The ankle straps of debrahs, just like the ankle straps of debrahs and debras, are attached to the shoes. But, unlike debrahs and debras, debrahs are mutable the ankle strap comes off/on at the whim of the wearer. Therefore, unlike their spaghetti strap cousins which are attached to debrahs and debras, the attached spaghetti straps of debrahs which, just like debras’, crisscross in the back are not part of the shoe proper. Technically speaking, debrahs and debras have not been rendered sandals by the tweak the addition of ankle straps; they are strappy mules and strappy backless pumps, respectively—backless—no heel cup.

In encircling the heel of the wearer of debrahs and debras, the wraparound ankle strap acts like an open heel cup, a heel cup that exposes (“bares” the heel, completely). In crisscrossing in the back, you get the look of an open heel cup with an attached ankle strap. A wraparound ankle strap that crisscrosses in the back, not an open heel cup with an attached ankle strap: When viewed from the front, it takes very close inspection to reveal that deception. Wraparound straps that strangle her ankles and heels, and she loves it.

To revisit:

Debrahs, and likewise debras, with the CLAF (common look and feel) of debrahs. But. This is much more than just some trivial fashion statement that bespeaks that which is provocative and kool: Come hither and fuck me, right now. If it were just that, a lot of women would wear them.

This binding of feet using strappy ankle wrap debrahs or debras is something quite lurid – profane, an abomination. A debrah when it sports its matching wraparound ankle strap and a debra which always has a matching wraparound ankle strap, this “combination,” represent enslavement, total willful and willing enslavement to Kum; in other words, the “bound” concubine of the Kollektive. For that reason alone, Kum call

them servlets. Couture call them debras—they being the “casual” collective usage of debras—strappy debrahs and debras proper—in other words, debras inclusive—not debras proper, exclusively—not the “strict” usage of debras.

So, for quite obvious reasons, whether worn merely as a fashion statement or an admonition of grave use, debras again, casual couture usage are considered vulgar, the most vulgar expression of footwear. This is why most call them vulgars. They look like stripper shoes, and a lot of strippers like to wear them on stage.

In her case, of course, her “bound” feet advertise an arrangement which was previously known, but never publicly acknowledged. Aforementioned, Mondo is “bound” to the Kollektive, and as such is part of the Hive Mind. So. Yes, in spite of her pristine appearance. She is a cow, and she is the worst and most perverse type of cow, she is a vulgarity! Vulgar shoes for a very vulgar girl.

There are countless “hive minds” in the world, with the Borg one being the best known and most famous thanks to Star Trek. But, the one that preceded them all, the darkest, most malevolent, the vilest, the vilest, and the most vulgar by far is the Hive Mind of the Kum.

To reiterate:

A narrow strap, with no visible close—no buckle or any other type of close for that matter, encircles the wearer’s ankles: very Goon, let alone very fetish, indeed. These spaghetti straps are binding in idle, and strangulation in pain mode. The ankle straps the mules the debrahs the strappy pumps the debras the CLAF of debras, and that is quite telling.

In the case of debrahs. The shiny, black patent-leather straps are not part of the shoe proper; they are “satellite” accessories, which is what couture calls them. These detached ankle straps are known commonly as debs—tramp straps. When attached, these debs are in effect the cannibalized wraparound ankle straps of debras. Still, debrahs plus debs does not equate to wearing debras.

Deborahs are the strappy fetish variation of the “classic” pump she was, up till now, wearing. Deborahs are not, classic-style opera pumps, they are the popular D’Orsay (door-say) style. Same 6-inch razor heel (6-inch stiletto heel), vamp cut, and long (elongated), pointed, enclosed toe. Shiny, black Patent-Leather pumps. Deborahs are dykers, after all.

A deborah, unlike the previous style of dyker she wore, bespeaks “that Goonish harlot something.” A deborah has open sides: enclosed toe, enclosed heel (heel cup), and no sides. A narrow strap, with no visible close (no buckle or any other type of close for that matter), encircles the wearer’s ankle: very Goon, let alone very fetish, indeed. Open sides and a heel cup with a narrow ankle strap. The spaghetti strap is binding in idle and strangulation in pain mode: The heel cup’s spaghetti strap is binding, regardless. The fetish pump’s keen toe pinches toes in idle and vise-grips ‘em in pain mode. The fetish pump’s heel cup grips the heel in idle and vise-grips it in pain mode.

Careys: deborahs minus the ankle strap. Careys (*carries*) are those stiletto pumps by GUESS, the “classic” opera pump rethought; actually the pumps are Borg, GUESS is the

only authorized reseller. Female Borg wear carries when they are in pretense on Aways. Shiny black stilettos.

Mondo's outfit screams out: Dominatrix in the house, pussy worship me, and do it right now!!!

To elucidate:

A d'Orsay style pump is a women's shoe in which the vamp of the shoe is cut away very close to the toe box, and the sides are cut away, revealing the arch of the foot.

To resume:

Shoes, shoes, who the fuck cares about shoes? She does, therefore you should. Or maybe you shouldn't and it's all meant as distraction, and nothing else. Maybe she's just bored, and is hiding it well in spite of her pronouncement earlier about using shades to conceal her disinterest, and the change in couture signals that change in pace—get bored, change your outfit or at the very least change your accessories else you might take a nod or two.

For Eddie it's quite a bit more personal than all that. He has a deep-seated foot fetish. So, getting to see even more of her feet, and bound like that to boot, is right up his alley. Laser focused.

Sam is not distracted the least little bit by Mondo's change in footwear.

Dwayne, on the other hand, is ready to howl at the moon about it. Hands down, the Weren has to have this girl in the worst way, and right now is not soon enough.

So, in keeping with this lust filled moment, Dwayne formally introduces himself. He can't wait to jump her bones. The Lycan walks over and extends his hand. But, before he can utter a word, Mondo brushes past him and returns to the car as if he isn't there. Not only that, she's now opaque to his telepathic overtures. He's been totally cutoff!

As she reaches for the car door, she stops and whirls around in one fluid motion. He stops looking like an embarrassed puppy dog with his tail tucked between his legs and perks up.

"I'm Dwayne Johnson. My friends call me Rocky."

"And. I bet that your lovers call you The Rock, because you're so hard in bed."

After a long pause.

"I'm at a loss for words."

"I'm Mondo Kane, and I'll take that loss and raise it, Rock. Let's have some ice cream at Ted Drewes."

"Let's."

"Then we can go back to your place and fuck."

Playing a role? Dingbat serious? Or. All of the above? That's when she ceases to exist anywhere. It's as if she had never been born. She materializes in a Moment in Time there is only one.

The Moment in Time: the Place of Deities in the Afterlife, as described in *The Amduat* the most important Ancient Egyptian funerary text of the New Kingdom.

The Moment in Time: literally *Wonderland*, also translated as *Wunderlust*, *Wonderlust*, and *Wanderlust*.

Die Lust am Wandern: literally “the lust to wander,” also translated as *Wunderlust* and *Wanderlust*.

The Amduat: literally “That Which Is In the Afterworld,” also translated as “Text of the Hidden Chamber Which is in the Underworld” and “Book of What is in the Underworld.”

The Moment in Time: not to be confused with the Duat (or Dwat). In Egyptian religion regardless of the universe, Duat (also Tuat and Tuaut or Akert, Amenthes, Amenti, or Neter-khertet) is the underworld.

The Duat one would think to reside in an area under the Earth, but Egyptians often refer to the sky. The Duat is the realm of the god Osiris and the residence of other gods and supernatural beings. It is the region through which the sun god Ra travels from west to east during the night, and where he battles the evil god Apep. Apep is the deification of darkness and chaos (izft in Egyptian), and thus opponent of light and Ma’at (order/truth). Duat also is the place where a mundane (mortal) Egyptian’s soul goes after death for judgment, though it is not the full extent of the afterlife. Burial chambers form touching-points between the mundane world and the Duat, and spirits use tombs to travel back and forth from the Duat.

The Moment in Time: that unlisted destination address found nowhere within Creation, unreachable even by ROOM. This is where all of the Families of all the demon races keep their ancestral Homes in perpetuity—the oldest, and thus the most powerful, Families being Vampire by definition. Palatial homes whose unparalleled opulence puts to shame the infamous Casa Casuarina on Miami Beach’s Ocean Drive—owned by decadent fashion designer Gianni Versace himself an oldest Vampire.

Mondo is in ornate foyer facing a disdainful Hulk. The severe Goon is wearing a traditional: a black and white maid’s uniform, the maid version of a Kaye. And she is sporting a sternka, clunks, perls, prudz, and an expression of complete and utter displeasure with the girl. Her name is Ruth Penelope Ungar. She manages the house and the household, and is the matriarch of Fats Waller’s Family.

How is Ruth shod? Clunky black shoes with a mary jane strap—Clunks by Style Bard are ugly, black platform shoes. Clunky-looking uniform shoes with thick heels and soles, hence their nick. A thick ankle strap with no close whatsoever. How unflattering do they make her legs? No less unbecoming than her severe black hose—silky back-seamed support stockings.

“Correct your shoes and hair. Also, your shades, please.”

“What?”

“You are already late. Hurry. No time to be stupid. No vocal speak from now on else your vocal cords will be severed and prevented from regenerating for the duration of your residence here in The Moment. Telepathy, only with The Betters. Mouths are made

for feeding, not talking. When you communicate with the Lessers do the same or least. Kliq, of course, is not considered talking.”

The maid points emphatically at Mondo’s hair and shoes while producing a series of clicking sounds from her mouth. The clicking is the aforementioned kliq. Kilqing is the least form of communication used here in The Moment. She is being very cross and impatient with the girl.

Mondo makes a guess. When in Rome, do as the Romans. Her hair yanks back into a sternka, her careys trade places with her debras, and she slips her shades back on.

“Only speak when spoken to. The mistress awaits. Oh, one more thing. Those unmentionables you’re wearing are not allowed.”

The maid produces what looks like an open safety deposit box seemingly out of thin air. Mondo doesn’t have to guess, this time. She places her katz, holster, and phone in the box. When the maid closes its lid, the box becomes a mono-block, a block of inert nondescript plastic-looking dark grey something which disappears back to whence it came—into thin air. Additionally, she manifests knobb and klaw, for good measure.

She falls severely in step behind Ruth. They exit the antechamber and enter the house proper. Maids, butlers, and other domestic staff busy about with duties, chores, and whatnot. None seems to pay Ruth and Mondo any attention, yet all implicitly acknowledge their presence. Being the ancestral home of Vampire, all of the servants are either Goon or Hag.

Here in The Moment is the epitome of a closed, caste-based society—high society, by definition, in tone and tenor—conservative with a capital “C,” by definition, in tone and tenor, and unapologetically so—a rigid, intolerant, elitist society whose cornerstones are conformity and uniformity, domination and submission—where an individual’s freedom of choice and freedom of expression are afterthoughts which are always subordinate to how a given individual is supposed to be and how a given individual is supposed to act publicly and privately—the antithesis of Political Correctness. Needless to say, everybody is gloved and walks about stiff-backed and haughty.

Of course, being a society of supernaturals, it is also egalitarian sort of. This is most eloquently demonstrated in a discussion of a person’s role versus their caste.

Everybody here knows their place and never fails to assume it, without exception—*KNOW thy role*—and, with the notable exception of abdication, their role that role, whatever it may be, NEVER changes—the strictest pecking order—and, everybody here, in one way or the other, is ruled by societal rules and norms, no matter their station in unlife. For example, dictators the various matriarchs and patriarchs are benevolent and polite, but they are dictators, nonetheless.

A person’s caste is irrespective of their Race or the founding deity of their bloodline or their supernatural prowess or their role. It is solely based upon the chronological age of the individual in question, e.g., a Vampire who is younger than a Giant is lower in caste even though Lost belong to a much older Race.

Whether a House is determined to be major, minor, or principal is solely based upon the age of its matriarch or patriarch. For example, a Family’s ranking can plummet from

principal to minor, if a person takes over its reins who is younger than the matriarchs and patriarchs of the other principal and major Houses.

Who are they who always rule? Who are they who are always ruled? If I am older than someone, I will always rule over them. And, conversely, if I am younger than someone, I will always be ruled by them even if I am a Vampire, Vampire being The First Race, even if the founding deity of my bloodline(s) is a Deity an Oldest One and theirs is not, even if my supernatural prowess equals or exceeds theirs, even if I am a patriarch or matriarch and they are not. In principle and in practice, without exception: older always rules over younger.

Since supernatural prowess goes in in glove with age, how can a person demonstrate a supernatural prowess that equals or exceeds that of a person who is older than them? As aforementioned, the individual can do so if they are an aberration or an abomination.

Executive security? Of course. But it's discreet and tasteful, the epitome of tact. Akin to The Queen's Guard at Buckingham Palace. Bodyguards are elite—a sandman every last one of them, male and female alike—and they are mere decorations. They are status symbols that trumpet your and your House's social station, status, and stature in undeath's pecking order—you have arrived. After all, the patriarchs and matriarchs of these Families are the oldest and thus the powerful of the gods. They hardly are in need of real protection from any credible threat—because, there are no credible threats.

Ruth leads Mondo out onto a patio balcony overlooking the ocean. A perfect view of perfect waves kissing a perfect beach underneath a perfect sky of a perfect day—in comparison, the fabled Shangri-La pales into insignificance. This is conspicuous consumption, no apologies offered. This is opulence beyond measure, equal, or hedonistic approach. For as far as the eye can see, beach front house after beach front house—every house fronts the beach with a view.

The maid formally introduces Mondo to a Vampire amidst the panoramic splendor, a very old Vampire, a very old Thing, so old that she used to regularly brunch with God, just like all the Oldest did back in The Before—an Oldest One, an Oldest god. She looks seventy-something and is one of God's oldest Creatures. Prudz—those severe gloves. Sternka—that severest hairdo. Heads—the likeness of Edith Head's trademark sunglasses. Dressed in Koo, careys, and perls. Her name is Judith Klein. And she is the birth mother of Mildred Most the Old god Vampire who made Mondo.

Judith Klein the Vampire, not to be confused with the mundane of the same name who is the guest writer for About.com and Astoria's Foodista blogger.

That mortal Judith's inspiration for everything culinary comes from her deeply seeded Eastern European roots. Her home country of Slovakia has taught her to appreciate food to the fullest—especially those hearty dumplings!

A current resident of Astoria, she's known “in the hood” as the Foodista, covering Astoria's restaurants, culinary adventures, and even her own recipes through her blog by the same name. Recently joining the Joey in Astoria crew, Judith provides a new perspective on Astoria food, scoping out value finds wherever she can. In her spare time, Judith experiments with new recipes—mainly on her fiancé Dan—and is on the constant

hunt for that next foodie find. Her favorite restaurants in Astoria are Koliba, Zlata Praha, Ovelia, and Agnanti, and her latest food obsessions are dessert trucks and taco trucks.

“You will be returned back to there when we are done here. Do you know who I am?”

Again, Mondo makes a leap of faith. Going with her gut.

You are nan, nana, my mother’s mother by birth.

“Excellent. It is good to know that my granddaughter is not a complete fool. Even so, you’re an imbecile at times, and are always degenerate, evil, and insane. You have bad habits; you will lose them. I tire of you wasting your promise, killing for thrills The Lessers and the Food. Clean not dirty, that addiction shall go also. But for now I spoil you. Letting you indulge your predilections without heed.”

A stunningly handsome man, one of the House’s sandmen, steps out onto the balcony dressed to the nines from head to toe. The Darque’s business suit, an Armani of course, is at worst a half-step below a tux. His name is Charles, Charles Ransom.

Human or inhuman, whatever universe, Charles is a hunk in the classic Errol Flynn/Tyrone Power tradition of this two-legged romantic genre, minus Errol’s/Tyrone’s hard-drinking, womanizing affectations. Needless to say, Charles is a looker who easily puts modern so-called hunks like Channing Tatum to shame while leaving a trail of broken hearts in the wake of his own affairs. He has so much Golden Era Hollywood cachet that you melt in his mouth, girlfriend.

“Madame Most, Ra and his party have arrived. Shall I have Ruth seat them apart from Apep who is presently in the East sitting room or.”

“Sit them in the same drawing room and instruct them to behave while under my roof else I will be very cross with them and unmake them all for disrespecting me. Tell them so in this tone and manner that I’m presently using. Also remind them that if I have to punish them for such errant behavior on their part that it will be eons before they can reconstitute themselves from such oblivion to resume that petty, eternal squabble of theirs.”

“Yes.”

Mondo never gets the chance to hear the rest of the conversation. Judith abruptly turns her attention back to her granddaughter as if Charles is an afterthought.

“Injustice, the gods among us.” She voices the release. Both of Judith and Ruth hoping beyond hope that their wishes will come true. The relapse that Judith has dared to politely invoke will tell the tale—*Skin deep or to the bone where it really matters, is the girl ours (Vampire) or theirs (Goon)?*

For the briefest moment, Judith’s voiced release causes Mondo to revert to another type—an exact likeness of Ruth’s now deceased, sorely missed, Neanderthal niece, Rachel “Roxy” Gunn aka Kuji yes, Rachel was that god. She becomes big-boned and muscular. Her features coarsen and eyebrow ridges protrude. Double-Ds give way to twins that are much bigger, too big for her usual body, proportional for this new brutish curvy full-figured cavegirl one—an oversized cavegirl body that her wardrobe, clothes and shoes, strain to accommodate, let alone contain. Likewise, she acquires the large feet

and hands, as well as the big, horrid teeth and knitted brushy eyebrows of a Neanderthal female. Her makeup harshens. But, tellingly, her Borg remains intact. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and to any Goon worth their saltines, this girl is ravishing and fit to be ravaged.

Dark has given way to Goon—a Brute-derived-from-Vampire known formally as a Neanderthal Roc and colloquially known as a Neanderthal the demon, not the human, version, of course. The moment of transfiguration passes. Her guise of Neanderthal-looking Roc gives way to homo sapient appearing Dark. Homo Sapiens—A pitiful mortal race that will most likely cause its own extinction before its technologies fully develop.

“We are done here with you, for now.” With that said, Judith both banishes the girl and, for now at least, formally relinquishes all claims on the girl. That revocation on Judith’s part is guaranteed to change. But. For the time being no pun intended it is no longer Judith’s and Ruth’s plans for the girl; it’s now only Ruth’s.

Mondo is returned back without fanfare. Once more, she exists in Creation in all of her iterations wherever/whenever/however they may be.

In this where and this now. Hair down. No shades. Debras. No knobb or klaw. Katz, holster, and phone. All is as and where it should be. And no one is the wiser that she was gone, least of all her. It will be sometime hence before she remembers this: her very first encounter with her grandmother the matriarch and the origin of her Lost bloodline and her grandmother’s principal maid Ruth.

To know so much too soon would spoil the plans that Judith and Ruth have for the girl—*We have plans for you pretty girl, plans that cannot be allowed to be derailed by anything or anyone least of all by ourselves.* Having waited so patiently, the girl is almost ready to be of some real use to Judith and Ruth. Too close to the prize with the finish line in sight to mess up things with such an amateurish maneuver as premature revelation.

Megan Fox an aberration, with a most promising future, has already been ruined because of the needless haste of another Oldest god, Guillermo del Toro of *Pacific Rim* fame among others, Megan’s grandfather. There is no cause to compound that error by ruining an equally promising abomination because of a similar lapse in judgment.

Mondo resumes her witty banter with Dwayne—outwardly giving all the right impressions that he’s the recipient of her undivided attention in her overt attempt to woo him. But, in an example of the obvious masking the subtle, she’s also preoccupied with something she discerned when the trap got sprung on her. That something is a side effect that she presumes was unforeseen by the trap’s originator. She detected fragmentation, actually two distinct fragments—not splinters from a single given source. This means that the fragmentation is serialized, and that gives her pause to reconsider. Because that duality begs for caution and a much deeper consideration on her part.

She was sent here to judge whether Weren, in violation of their long standing treaty with the humans, had murdered Ricky McCormick. Not which Weren did it, just if Weren had done it. A murder, not a series. A murderer, not two.

The cause of McCormick’s death was ruled “undetermined” by the ME, Weren are the most subtle murderers in Creation, and he died during a cycle of a full moon when the

supernatural powers of Weren are at their zenith, all of which strongly implied a Weren murderer and thus the need for her investigative expertise in matters of Weren homicide.

Not only did the fragments imply indigenous involvement in this murder premeditated or otherwise, by supernatural or mundane commission masquerading as death by unknown cause or causes, the dual nature of the fragments implicates that two people working in league committed the murder. So, while sitting in the back seat of the car chatting up Dwayne on the way over to Ted Drewes, she immerses herself in these fragments—both of them ripe with misdirection about the true identities of the perps in question, but seemingly true about everything else in their narration.

The last one first. It begins in the past tense. It abruptly transitions into present tense. Then the narrative seesaws between the two tenses—a grammatical faux pas, to say the least, albeit still from a dissociative point of view that bespeaks third-person, regardless of the tense.

Mooshu, a smooth-talking native of the Lower East Side, decisively crushed his cigarette before disappearing through a rusty black gate and into an unassuming townhouse on St. Mark's Place. On a Sunday night, he entered the basement door after descending a crumbling staircase and faced a camera attached to the door of the ground-floor apartment. A few seconds later, the door peeped open and a brawny man decked in leather greeted Mooshu with a fist pound.

As he walked in, two felt-covered tables flanked his left, one of them full of men belonging to every creed, all eyeing the growing pot in the middle of the table. Farther down the corridor there was a makeshift wall with a hole carved in it. This served as a kitchen, where players exchanged chips for money through the window.

“This is where I work,” said Mooshu.

Mooshu, a nickname given him by his fellow poker dealers, has worked at illegal underground poker clubs for the last three years. Raids, robberies, high stakes, and drunken players are all part of his job description, and his last place of employment—the digs on St. Marks—was shut down only two weeks ago by police. He is a 19-year-old part-time college student and a full-time card dealer.

And for the past year, he was a scheduled dealer for cash poker games at this ground-floor apartment in a grimy townhouse on St. Mark's Place.

Two types of poker are played in this world: tournaments and ring games, or cash games. Tournaments have anywhere from two to 1,000 people playing, and the winner is the person who ends up with all the chips. Others place bets based on the time they are eliminated. There is typically an entry fee, but the chips cannot be exchanged for money.

In a cash game, like the ones on St. Mark's, real funds are at stake and the session can go on indefinitely. On a typical weekend night, there could be up to \$10,000 in the pot. Employees take rake, what is generally a five to 10 percent portion of the pot for each hand, and this is how the lights are kept on and the bouncers, dealers, and cocktail waitresses continue to get paid.

To enter this illicit establishment, patrons have to go through the basement apartment door and face a glowing red security camera posted on its frame. Regulars at the poker

club are usually let right in, but newcomers have to present their IDs to the bouncer and get a brief pat-down for weapons before they are allowed to enter.

According to a bouncer working the door at St. Mark's, stringency of security depends on where the poker is taking place and what type of game is going on.

"Cash games in the LES usually have bouncers that pat you down for weapons—sometimes you can't even have your cell phone. Some places have gun checks, where you have to give them your gun to put away while you play and then reclaim it before you leave," described Julio, the leather-clad bouncer who greeted Mooshu at the door.

"It's all about the type of game going on, too," he continued. "Tourneys are not too much cash, but the cash games get big and they need more security on deck."

Besides the security at the door, there is a screening process for every new player, all of whom are there on an invitation-only basis, usually extended by a frequent player. Another way poker clubs are promoted is through websites such as theactionfinder.com. The catch to some of these sites, however, is that they either require passwords or other security measures, and each player has to post his employment history to weed out any undercover cops.

"The first place—that was on Avenue C—got robbed and then the cops showed up. Made that place too hot, so we moved here," Mooshu explained of an earlier bust. Security cameras, background checks of players and burly, menacing-looking bouncers are necessary precautions used to prevent robberies or raids by undercover cops.

New York gambling laws state that commercial lotteries and any type of gambling not sponsored by the city or state are illegal. Living in the city, the closest legal gambling fix is in places like Foxwoods or Atlantic City, but they require a lot of travel.

Compare that to the slot machines found in many grocery stores in Las Vegas, and New York City's gambling scene seems nonexistent.

Back in 2005, during what poker players call the "dark days" of underground poker, the NYPD vice squad reportedly raided two popular clubs in New York City, PlayStation and the New York Players Club, arresting 39 employees and snatching nearly \$100,000 in cash in total. The Broadway Club, Ace Point Backgammon, and Chest Studio were also among the clubs busted that year. The office of the deputy commissioner of public information could not provide citywide statistics on the number of gambling related arrests in recent years.

Besides the police, the players themselves pose a threat.

"There is really no good way to say it, but it happens. Games will get robbed and people will get shot. Sometimes it's not even a robbery, just an irate player. As long as there is money in a room, someone is going to try and take it," said Travis C., who frequents these underground clubs.

But this tucked-away crevice in St. Mark's is more laid back, giving it a casual, relaxed environment.

Out of the two poker tables set up, one was full that night with 10 players plus the dealer. Salt-and-pepper-haired businessmen, beer-bellied middle-agers, and lanky college

students, plus enough ethnicities to satisfy a U.N. General Assembly meeting, all congregated in this one small room.

“I meet all kinds of people; teachers, stockbrokers, rich Jewish widows, club promoters—everybody is here. Some of the chilliest people I know are the people I’ve worked with and dealt for,” said Mooshu.

College students also regularly play at these underground poker clubs. Jason C., an acne-ridden sophomore from Fordham University, used to spend two nights a week at St. Mark’s.

“I have a legit job,” he said. “But usually I spent my salary there, playing for six or seven hours every night I’m there. I make some money, enough to feed myself for the week and to cash in again, and sometimes I make more money from one flop than I do at work. But it’s not about how much money I win, though; it’s more about the thrill of playing. And it’s about the skill that goes into it.”

While many at St. Mark’s enjoy the strategy and skill that go into playing a good game, some are there for the money and others are so hooked on the thrill of big bets they become addicted.

“You get your gambling addicts here,” said Mooshu, over a smoke and a quick dice toss in the backyard. “A guy comes in here drunk, drops a stack of money, stumbles out of here a few bills richer or not and comes back the next day still smelling like last night. Win or lose, they’re back.”

A green tent covers the enclave where dealers and players took their breaks under plumes of smoke, discussing strategy and swapping stories. A middle-aged Chinese man sits despondently in a dark corner, taking heavy drags from his cigarette as the clack of dice continued on the pavement.

“He tilted. He just lost a lot of money tonight,” Mooshu continued. “Yo, Jim!” he called out. But there is no response from this unhappy gambler, merely a look of utter loss.

“Tilt is when a player loses a lot of his stack then does something really desperate, like go all in even if he has a bad hand. After that, they come out here looking like Jim,” explained Mooshu.

Another story he shared was about a woman who took money from her husband’s hidden safe to play poker. The dealers realized this when she paid \$700 for chips with old \$20 notes. “The husband came and saw that she had the money. But he didn’t say anything; he was drunk and just let her play. She comes in a lot and stays for hours and for the most part she doesn’t make money. She just bets with her husband’s bread and then they leave together and do it all over again some other night.”

A resurgence of poker parlors in New York City has seen many open up all over the city. Of course, there are online poker websites that may sate the thirst of poker players, but the experience of playing a live-action game is, for the most part, incomparable for the patrons.

“Yeah, you play online,” said one player who wished to remain anonymous. “But this is the real deal, you know? I don’t have to haul ass to Atlantic City or Vegas. And

anyway, this is way better. The underground life of poker in New York City is better than any fancy table at the Bellagio.”

This surge of poker parlors has also caused more raids by the cops, according to a floor manager working at St Mark’s. “But it’s a legitimate business,” he continued. “The rent is paid, the employees are paid, the players are kept happy, and fire codes are followed.”

At 9 p.m., Mooshu ended his Sunday shift and headed to another spot in Midtown, another part of the St. Mark’s rooms, where they hold tournament games.

Exiting the spot, one has to be just as discreet when entering, if not more.

“We’re gonna take the VIP exit,” he said, indicating a peeling white door across the card tables. It creaked open, revealing a dingy, badly lit staircase that leads to the front entrance of the building. One has to crouch low to get up the crooked stairs and exit through the front entrance of the townhouse, allowing patrons the utmost discretion.

And for a poker dealer, that is their best bet.

Now, the other one. It’s also begins in the third-person. But. It quickly shifts to the first-person perspective, without rhyme or reason—a jarring transition, to say the least. Either way, the narrative mixes tenses, just like the previous edition. It also involves the city of New York and illegal poker. This time the lead is a woman.

Illegal New York Poker Clubs: A former waitress reveals what goes on inside. Scarfing down chicken wings, losing thousands in a night at the table, men—and the occasional woman—flock to the Big Apple’s illegal poker parlors. A former waitress reveals what goes down there.

They take place in apartments, tenement basements in the East Village, luxury high-rise condos on Lexington Avenue, and lofts in the Meatpacking District. You can go at almost any hour of the day. As long as you know the right name to give at the door and have the right amount to buy in, you’ll be able to find a game. The true players rarely leave the tables. They don’t have to—the beauty of these apartment poker clubs is that the kitchens function as fully stocked bars, and they have a “waitress” there to order in whatever else is needed.

That was my role.

The waitress is usually but not always the only woman present. She fetches beer, orders delivery, cleans up, and if she so chooses gives back massages for a dollar a minute. She gets tipped in poker chips, and then trades them in for cash at the end of her “shift.”

About a year ago, I had just left my bartending job at a strip club and needed some fast cash. I had a friend who worked and played in these rooms, and he offered to hook me up with some work.

Thus I became a waitress in one of New York’s many underground and illegal poker clubs. It is not illegal to play in these clubs, but it is against the law to run one or work there. I figured it couldn’t be any “rapier” than the strip club—a place where I thought I’d be safe since I was one of the only ones actually wearing clothes. Little did I know that strip club patrons subscribed to the Groucho Marx school of thought when it came to boobs: they didn’t care to be part of a club that would have them as members, so they

wanted the boobs that were not available for purchase. The poker players couldn't be any worse. I'd already dated one, anyway.

I was the only girl in the room and they could not have cared less.

He was much older than me—in his 40s—and used to play in a room on 14th street that he was sure was rigged. He'd call me up griping that he had lost \$1,000 in one evening, and that never would have happened at the other club he went to in Park Slope. Looking back, that strikes me as highly unlikely since: all rooms are “rigged,” as these are miniature casinos and the house always wins; and the players in Manhattan were probably just a lot better than the ones in baby-carriage Brooklyn. They probably had a lot less to lose, so they wouldn't have the obvious “tells” of a husband and father who would be in deep trouble for gambling and losing his family's money.

That old guy and I had long since parted ways the first time I walked into one of these poker rooms. It was nothing like I had pictured. The lights were overhead and fluorescent, the walls were bare save for flat-screen TVs playing a constant loop of ESPN's Sports Center, the furniture was sparse and cheap—minimal except for the large green poker table that took up nearly the entire room.

The players, too, were far from what I expected. As opposed to a bunch of Draper clones in bespoke suits, they were mostly middle aged, often overweight, and dressed in cargo shorts and flip flops. They even had paper towels tucked into their shirts so they could turn away intermittently from the game to quickly gorge on chicken wings or burritos before returning to the task at hand. The players who smoked stepped outside to the balcony out of politeness, but smoking can also be a tell, so I don't think the room regulated the smoking. It was an undeniably masculine environment, yet almost entirely devoid of sexual energy.

The first room my friend took me to was on the lower end of the spectrum with just a \$200 buy-in. The guys were a little younger, dressed in more street gear than suburban dad attire. This was probably the bottom tier of games in the city. The waitress there was a pretty Russian girl who also sold cigarettes, which she would periodically announce to remind the players. As we were leaving, one of the guys yelled, “I'll give you 200 dollars to leave your sexy friend here.” And that was the most any of them had acknowledged me. Note: that he offered my friend \$200 for me, but did not offer me the \$200 directly. Wonder what that says about women being objectified and commodified as props.

The second club was nicer, a converted two-bedroom apartment in a luxury high rise. On the way over he informed me that it was poor etiquette to ever mention another one of these rooms. At the second room, if anyone asked us where we'd been previously, our answer was, “You know, around.” He told me that they had spotters on the streets, who had already informed the higher-ups of where we were coming from, our appearance, and our arrival. This part at least seemed exciting. I hoped we would get to use a password like “fishwife” or “bouillabaisse,” but we just had to announce ourselves and who had invited us at the door.

Upon entry to the second club, I could see it was a much more moneyed operation, though with the same fluorescent lighting and casual attire. They had two rooms with poker tables so multiple games could go on at once, and more flat screens. To my delight,

one room was entirely empty minus an ATM machine. I wondered if it charged an eight-dollar fee like the strip club.

This was the one where I would work.

Once I got hired, my friend told me not to wear what I would normally wear to bartend—in other words, tone down the cleavage. Other rooms required girls to wear lingerie or bikinis, but this room had a lot of serious players who didn't want any distractions. It was the opposite of the strip club.

My job consisted mostly of sitting quietly and watching them play Texas Hold 'Em poker—a game that I didn't understand. Occasionally one of them would ask me to fetch him a beer and tip me in poker chips. I was basically to be a quiet, subservient Rent-a-Housewife.

I was amassing a rather large pile when one of the dealers took a break and sat down beside me. I imagined myself becoming a card shark, but the dealer quickly discouraged me. He explained that the players I had thought were doing well actually were losing big and that most of those chips weren't won but had been purchased at the buy-in. He told me who was a hired gun—a player with skills who was brought into spice up the game, and he pointed out a “Whale”—a guy who continually loses a lot of money but can't seem to stop himself. This particular “Whale” was a large, slovenly Asian guy. I realized he'd been at the first room I had visited. Apparently when he showed up at a game, the word got out around town very quickly that a lot of money was about to be put on the table and lost. So other players showed up hoping to profit off his failures. Rumor has it he had blown through his sizable inheritance in about six weeks.

I ran into a former boss of mine from a nightclub I had bartended in. I had never seen him out of a suit before and used to be terrified of him, but here he was with sour cream on his t-shirt slinking out after losing thousands of dollars on a Sunday afternoon.

The dealer also explained to me that the players' positioning at the poker table was very indicative of their skills and status. The player sitting directly next to the dealer on the right side was responsible for the lead off. He was a skilled player who was effectively an employee of the house and raised the stakes in order to keep the other players in the game, but they didn't know that.

Then the dealer said, “Do you give back massages? Most of the girls do. It's a dollar a minute.” With some trepidation I agreed, and he brought me back to the room with the second poker table, which at the time was serving as a break room. I mentally ran through all the scenarios of what I would do if shit got rape-y, eyeing my different escape routes. My forethought was uncalled for. My “client” just had really tight shoulder muscles.

I had taken a shiatsu class my freshman year in college I guess I did learn something useful at NYU and put my skills to work. After about 20 minutes, he announced to the room that I had the greatest massage skills of any poker waitress to date. A star was born. I was booked solid for the rest of the evening in 15 and 20-minute increments. My hands started to hurt, but I was surprised how few lascivious remarks were directed my way during all of this. The conversation at the table consisted of three things: Poker, Sports, and Steak, particularly the best steakhouses in the city and who specialized in each cut of meat.

I was the only girl in the room and they could not have cared less. I think they really only have waitresses as a prop, or symbol, to lessen the homoerotic undertones of this male bonding ritual.

They could also show no emotion, no celebrations of victory, no pangs of disappointment. After one young player left, another sent me to go get him a sandwich at Quiznos health and an active lifestyle are not high priorities in these rooms. The first guy had left quietly but seemingly in good spirits, but in the street I saw him on the phone crying to his significant other that he had just lost \$3,000.

Over the course of a “business day,” which would start in the afternoon and sometimes not end until 7 a.m., about \$200,000 would exchange hands in this room with the house always taking home at least \$25,000.

Female dealers were also very highly paid and sought after within the community, but rarely the recipients of much attention. A friend of mine was one of these highly paid female dealers. She could make about \$6,000 working one tournament. She told me a lot of rooms were getting busted this was fairly soon after one was shut down where Yankees star Alex Rodriguez had been playing and as the waitress, I was considered an employee and thus a co-conspirator, and could receive considerable jail time. This was another verboten topic within the rooms. No one openly acknowledged that what was going on was highly illegal. I realized that this is why they made me answer the door—it bought them time and made me appear to be the one in charge. Most of the busts took place on the weekends, where the most money was exchanged.

I only lasted a few weeks in the poker rooms. Then I decided I preferred my criminal activity on my television set and quit poker waitressing to go home and watch *The Sopranos*.

Mondo runs the episodes over and over in the background, marveling at the reveals contained within them and marveling equally at what they refuse to divulge about their subject matter.

The murderers in question, whoever and whatever they might be, are a seamless tandem: Two perps working in concert—killing as if they are one—each murderer looking out for any clues that the other might have missed—forensics that would aid in their eventual identification and capture—clues that must be eradicated. But, from a detective’s point of view, it gets worse. It’s one thing for someone to counter known forensics. That takes knowledge of police investigative procedure, an unwavering attention to detail, and an innate talent, a propensity, for homicide—which is a feat in its own right. What takes this scenario into the realm of murderous genius is the countering of forensics that doesn’t even exist on this world. Indigenous killing at a level that would easily stymie police in Mondo’s world, and, on top of that, her usually reliable and infallible gut is unable to tell her whether these perps are mortal or supernatural, to boot. Part of her wants the perps to be mortal, because if they are supernatural, and in this world that means Weren, she can’t pursue the case and solve it.

In lieu of women’s intuition, she employs a cheat—one that is dirty and lowdown and very backdoor—cloak and dagger, by definition. She has Phone tap into a fly-by, a

keyhole “spy” satellite belonging to the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency. The keyhole is “leased” by the National Security Agency.

Upon gaining access by “burrowing” through its firewall, Phone takes control, employs a reverse proxy to upload the desired intel from the secure subterranean NSA mainframe at Fort Meade onto the keyhole’s obfuscated server, and then begins the slow and arduous process of decrypting the onboard database of the eye-in-the-sky without leaving any electronic fingerprints and all the while eluding her world’s assigned oversight.

Located on the grounds of Fort Meade, the headquarters for the nation’s premier covert intelligence gathering organization are housed in two high-rise office structures, built and dedicated by Ronald Reagan in 1986, and in other structures on the base, including an estimated 10 acres of which are underground. At least 20,000 employees work for the NSA at Fort Meade, making it the largest employer in the county, one of the largest employers in Maryland, and the largest employer of mathematicians in the country. While the extent of NSA’s technical facilities is guarded as a national security measure, the NSA’s headquarters is believed to house the second most powerful supercomputer in the world. The NSA operates other computer labs, offices, and satellite interception posts around the world.

Officially, surveillance by the NSA via NGIA didn’t start in this area until a day after Ricky McCormick’s remains were discovered, as a result of court order involving suspected “domestic” terrorists. She’s seen the redacted footage—saw it during her briefing with her Aunt Agnus. The girl would like to compare what she’s been shown with what, if any, has been withheld in the interest of “national security.”

Of course. She doesn’t miss the opportunity to have Phone stream footage of the crime scene in particular and the area in general that the satellite has taken today. Of course, Dwayne doesn’t show up in the keyhole’s recordings, but everybody else does.

The data is streamed by Phone directly into her brain for later digestion and discourse, at her leisure. It’s also streamed for storage into Phone by Phone for its later digestion and discourse, at its discretion. The plan is for her and Phone to compare notes on what they’ve found.

Dwayne fancies her loads, and he can’t wait to fondle those over-ripe melons while he’s earnestly fucking her. At this given moment in time, that’s all he’s contemplating.

Of no concern of Dwayne’s is the formulation of a contingency in the event that things go “tits up” as the British would say. In his mind, nothing can go wrong, he will not be denied by her. In other words, he’s already wooed and won her. Be careful what you wish for, sometimes you get it.

A tryst with *The Vampire* could just as easily be akin to *From Beyond* – that B-movie gore fest from the same team of Stuart Gordon and Brian Yuzna that brought horror movie goers the gloriously perverse *Re-Animator*. Like *Re-Animator*, *From Beyond* proved to be a sterling H.P. Lovecraft adaptation and an equally surreal horror classic, also starring Barbara Crampton and Jeffrey Combs.

In this contemporary adaption of *From Beyond*. Obsessive scientist Dr. Pretorius and his assistant Crawford Tillinghast have invented “The Resonator,” a device intended to stimulate the brain’s pineal gland and expand the powers of the mind. The machine gives

them more than they bargained for however when a parallel universe inhabited by slimy creatures ready to prey on humans reveals itself. Pretorius meets a sticky end, returns as a grotesque, deformed being and all manner of depravity ensues.

At Ted Drewes, Dwayne acts like a proverbial puppy dog—figuratively lapping at her heels. He even insists on someone snapping a polaroid of he and Mondo as if they're the antithesis of a forlorn couple haplessly schlepping about on their honeymoon gone bad. Mondo wonders why, since he won't appear in the photo, but she goes along with the gag anyway.

Then, it's on to his digs. With the police waiting outside he takes her up to his apartment. His bachelor flat is above *Keegan's* Golden Grocer an organic grocery store on Euclid Avenue near Maryland Plaza—Maryland being a short exclusive street just north of the ultra-ritzy Chase Park Plaza hotel.

For Weren, sex is rough and ready, with an emphasis on randy—turning to the Wolf when getting their ranch on. Then again Lycans predictably turn to Their Wolf when things heat up, whether the situation is sexual or not. Instinctually feeling that as Their Wolf they're more supernaturally potent.

Vampires, in contrast, instinctually harbor no such delusion. Correctly they ascertain that in whatever guise they choose to wear, they are equally supernatural in their potency.

As soon as he slams his apartment door shut, he shoves her into a wall and is all hands. The Lycan speed dial version of wooing and winning. Her response isn't rough. It's indistinguishable from rape, in its most vile and violent expression. In other words, she figuratively puts her Goon face on, and catches Dwayne completely off-guard. He's never been raped before, let alone by a girl—he used to being the one in control, during a tryst, by Lycan social convention.

Dwayne backs off, creating needed space between them. Stunned by the ferocity of her counterattack, he's nevertheless undaunted.

Mondo kicks off her shoes and removes her gloves, eyes bloodshot, foaming at the mouth, insanity disfiguring her face, her mouth a rage distorted maw, hands balled into fists.

What ensues is not prizefighting. It's boxing with no rules in an apartment between two people who have no intention of giving up an inch, while intending to do great bodily harm to the other person.

In a nut shell, Dwayne throws scoring shots with calculated violence on his mind while "Lost Girl" throws brutal punches that travel a little further through the target and she spends more effort and energy with each shot. Dwayne retracts the hand as soon as it lands while Mondo "pushes" a little longer. Dwayne is the surf beating against rocks when the tide comes in. Mondo is the tsunami. Either way, a whooping is administered.

For a prizefighting analogy, think: Floyd Mayweather vs. Saul Alvarez, with Dwayne being Mayweather and Mondo being Alvarez. Mayweather punches from his wide stance and he does not put a lot of weight behind his shots, basically he uses arm punches. He maintains balance and mobility and does not rely on one punch power. It is not clear whether he "punches his weight" at 152 lbs. The effect of his shots is maximized because

of sharp timing, precise range, and his ability to “intercept” the opponent’s direction of movement. He doesn’t load up with a big shot. Even the “check hook” is a defensive shot, he throws it against opponents who rush forward, he pivots and spears them matador style. Two examples of that shot were the knock down punch vs. Juan Manuel Marquez and the KO of Ricky Hatton. In both cases opponents were going towards Mayweather, Hatton was almost running forward when he got hit. Hatton wasn’t picky; at this stage he would have taken any shot as his defenses were thrown to the wind. It’s Floyd who was choosy; he would only throw safety-first punches with minimum risk. The impact of these shots comes from the momentum of the pivot but also from the opponent’s forward movement.

Alvarez has more variety in his punch power. He can throw scoring and disruptive shots but he cares more about power punches. He is not a concussive “sledgehammer” hitter but he hits hard enough for his weight. He commits with punches and spends more energy than Floyd. This is the reason he appears to fight in spurts or for one minute of a round. No matter how athletic you are, he is average, you can’t be fast and powerful every minute of every round over 12 rounds. Big shots consume a lot of energy especially when you miss. Even though Mayweather does not use so much effort in punching, he does not appear to fight more actively or for longer intervals. Boxing happens at intervals.

Of course in the case of Dwayne and Mondo, they’re supernatural combatants who can fight continuously and be literally relentless. In the end, Mondo gets the better of him. Sending him sprawling to the floor, he ends up prone on his back with her straddling his waist mounting him. Her fingernails go daggerous, and she buries them in his torso. She sinks her serrated teeth into his neck and feeds. Unable to buck her off he changes into his Wolf, as if that’s going to make a difference—it doesn’t. She remains more or less human looking, and has her way with him.

When he transforms his clothes shred, which deprives her of the opportunity of ripping off his clothes herself. She takes out her disappointment on him—escalating the sheer violence and brutality of his rape by her.

There is etiquette involved here, but she has thrown that out the window. It doesn’t matter that she’s the guest and this is his domicile on his world. In her depraved state of mind, even if he were chronologically older, which he isn’t, they’re the same age, it’s highly doubtful that would constrain her from doing him lowdown, dirty, and hurtful like she is. The limiters in place give way and the violence of her attack exceeds raped-ape.

She hears things and sees things as she drags him across the room and body slams him through the bed. All the while he continues to struggle and fight back, and all the while she dishes it out not in kind but exponentially worse.

The Voices. The Sights and Sounds.

Two men are talking in an otherwise abandoned boathouse in the Everglades. One has a small caliber pistol in his hand, and is using it like a sap—he’s standing. The other man is the worse for wear, and is tied to a chair—his face beaten to a pulp and the rest of him is an equally bloody mess. His interrogator leans over him.

“Had enough? Or do you want to dance some more?”

“Okay, wait, wait, what do you want?”

“The tall guy that killed Louis.”

“Tall guy, it’s Jason Momoa. He goes by Keegan, these days.”

“Yeah? What’s his deal?”

“He’s FFL. Ex-mercenary, Central Africa, West Lebanon. He contracts out.”

The hush of two silenced rounds to the coerced speaker’s head and to his coercer’s head is why their conversation comes to an abrupt end. Someone else, a tall guy who’s in the midst of his change between man and Wolf, bursts through the front door and does the shooting.

More. Voices. More. Sights and Sounds.

Two well-dressed men in a very old house: one is a corrupt cop and the other is his corrupter the man he’s on the take from.

“I’d like to talk to you about our Mr. Keegan.”

“I just talked to him. I gave him some information I came up with. Turns out the guy we’re looking for has a daughter. Only child. All the family he’s got.”

“Well that sounds promising. We’ll let our Mr. Keegan mobilize, as he would say. But after things calm down, I need our Mr. Keegan terminated.”

“These psychotic paramilitaries that he uses, they have huge respect for him. They see him as a hero. He’s got that perverted sense of honor, that reckless sense of confrontation. They love that.”

“Well that’s very impressive, detective, but I don’t trust him.”

“May I ask why?”

“Because. He does what he does for reasons other than money.”

“Sir, I’d think very hard about this idea of his termination. He’s a unique asset.”

“Never trust anyone who doesn’t care enough about money. You see our Mr. Keegan fancies himself as a hero, specifically someone akin to a reincarnation of the Norse god Thor. Well, guess what? In classical literature, the hero dies.”

Fade to black. And then fade back.

In Dwayne’s world, Lycans are not only at the top of the supernatural food chain. They are the supernatural food chain. Supernaturally speaking, in all of God’s Creation, this is the only universe that is so exclusively Weren inclined. So it comes as no surprise that for Dwayne there is no precedent for he or for his indigenous Wolf kind for how he feels toward the Vampire after her brutal, violent, degrading rape of him. Nor would any human understand it either. Dwayne is conflicted and confused about how he feels toward The Vampire. Neither shame nor rage is part of the equation, though. Nor is revenge, and for a Wolf, that in itself is beyond strange—considering the vengeful, unforgiving nature of Wolves.

In worlds where the supernatural order of things is as it should be, the relationship between Vampires and their Wolves is akin to that of humans who are unabashed aficionados of American Pit Bull Terriers (APBTs)—albeit analogous, not equivalent. This explains the “what” and the “why” of Dwayne’s emotional state.

Dwayne moves in behind Mondo as she freshens up in the bathroom. He is in the middle of the change between man and Wolf. She is looking oh so human; limiters back in place. He threatens to wrap his transforming clawed hands around her neck, wringing that oh so pretty neck of hers. Then at the last minute he drops down to his hunches, growling and sniffing territorially and aggressively, fully transformed. She is the boss and he is the dog.

But it transcends even Vampire and Lycan, and the pecking order, so to speak. It’s about her who’s acting out as if she is a Very Old Thing an Oldest god and he is the younger thing who exists to please her every carnal whim. The older They are, the more degenerate and all-consuming their needs. And, this is very much about her being and doing such very old things.

From Lycan point of view, it’s even stranger hence, by a human’s way of thinking that is. His relationship to her is akin to Gollum’s obsessive-compulsive, self-destructive relationship to The Ring in J. R. R. Tolkien’s legendarium *Lord of the Rings*; an artifact which Gollum refers to as “my *precious*” or “*precious*.”

Not. Dominatrix and her submissive. Not. A relationship between unequals. Not. A relationships between equals, either. It is something that translates into nothing a normal human could ever fathom.

Voices through the wall, as if they are coming from the apartment, next door.

“You must be FBI.”

“That’s right.”

“So. What’s an eighteen-year-old girl doing parking her car here in the middle of the night?”

“She got pulled over?”

“And who pulls people over?”

“Law enforcement.”

“Oh. Exactly.”

“We always knew that the Cusp had medical experience, considering his success in resuscitating his victims. Personally. I think it’s a cop. You know, he knows our procedure too well. He knows what we look for. Hell. He even leaves things behind for us to find to throw us off. To me, that says law enforcement.”

“That’s a pretty good theory there, agent.”

“Yeah. I think so. That’s why I’m considering all local law enforcement as suspects.”

“But. Who says that it’s just one man? Could be a woman in the mix.”

“More than one killer, working together?”

“I like that theory even better.”

The Voices go bye-bye. The Sights and Sounds are psychic manifestations of her insatiable Vampiric Id, of course. They are also sleuthing resources that nonpareil detectives of the caliber of a Perry Mason or Sherlock Holmes would literally kill for.

Id, ego, and super-ego are the three parts of the psychic apparatus defined in Sigmund Freud’s structural model of the psyche; they are the three theoretical constructs in terms of whose activity and interaction mental life is described. According to this model of the psyche, the id is the set of uncoordinated instinctual trends; the super-ego plays the critical and moralizing role; and the ego is the organized, realistic part that mediates between the desires of the id and the super-ego. The super-ego can stop you from doing certain things that your id may want you to do.

Even though the model is structural and makes reference to an apparatus, the id, ego, and super-ego are functions of the mind rather than parts of the brain and do not correspond one-to-one with actual somatic structures of the kind dealt with by neuroscience.

The concepts themselves arose at a late stage in the development of Freud’s thought: the “structural model,” which succeeded his “economic model” and “topographical model,” was first discussed in his 1920 essay “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” and was formalized and elaborated upon three years later in his “The Ego and the Id.” Freud’s proposal was influenced by the ambiguity of the term “unconscious” and its many conflicting uses.

As such, with great power comes great responsibility. And for one such as her, one so very, very young, she is much too supernaturally powerful to also be so adept in the ways of the Machine, magic, arcane, technology, The Borg, and, science in general and physics in particular, that glorious invention of mortals which remains the bane of all supernaturals. She has been fettered from the git-go; since the day that she was made. But here, on this world, so far from home, limiters in place, she is paradoxically unfettered and thus incalculably dangerous.

All hot and bothered, her now feral dog clings to her needy. POW. The discussion changes course and subject matter, abruptly.

She’s in another place. But, knows intrinsically, that in spite of what her mind tells her, she’s still physically there—in the bathroom with Dwayne.

“How very cosmopolis you are, dearie. Are all the women where you come from as stiff-backed, haughty, and haute couture as you?”

The other women seated at the dinner table giggle at the obvious dig meant to be at Mondo’s expense.

“Only the grown-ups. The off ones seem unable to master even the basics of good posture and well-dressed,” Mondo delivers with a disarming smile.

She’s back again. Her mind is, once more, in tune with her body. And, then, everything just stops. Birds frozen in midflight. Nothing moving whatsoever. Not a sound can be heard. No smells and no taste, either.

There's a displacement she invokes which allows Mondo to free herself of Dwayne. He is as frozen as everything else in his world—both the natural and the supernatural, alike. The Vampire is able to exit the bathroom because the door is open. If she tried to move it she would discover that she couldn't bulge it an inch. The door to the apartment is closed. No egress there. So she heads for the open windows and looks out upon a universe come to a halt.

Shadowy, hovering figures move down Euclid Avenue toward Delmar. There are three of them. None bothers to look up and acknowledge her. But she instinctively knows that they are aware of her presence in their transient. They Live, We Sleep. When they are gone, this world will go about its business again, none the wiser to their traversal of it. Only the abomination, Mondo Kane, will know. And she will tell no one, least of all anyone here.

Shadowy because you can't quite focus upon them for any length of time that entertains recognition, let alone comprehension. But it's this very elusiveness which tells you exactly what they are. They are Nameless Ones. There are things they can do that only God can do.

If there is a reason for the consideration she's giving them, you will have no luck extracting it from her. Suffice it to say that it's a given. They hover out of sight. Mondo "feels" that the moment is about to end. She invokes the displacement again, reversing to her exact position when the interlude all started. Time resumes. None the wiser, except of course for anyone who happens to be watching from somewhere else. But.

"What just happened?" Dwayne asks as he stands up and transitions from Wolf to man. Maybe it was the displacement. Maybe it was his proximity to her. Maybe it was a combination of the two. Whatever the case may be, he should have no awareness whatsoever of the event. But he obviously does.

"Nothing that should concern you," Mondo replies, looking dead into his eyes. If he pushes the point or even if he doesn't and she doesn't believe in his discretion, she'll destroy him, and that would complicate things immensely.

"Well then, I guess it's a wrap."

His eyes are no longer questioning. And, she believes him. Détente remains intact. That's when it happens again. Only this time, it's not Them that are the culprits. She's not supposed to notice the deception, but she does.

Ancient Mia and another Dragon, who she has never met before, both of them in their human form, ingress the apartment via a front door that's supposedly locked, walking right past the two police officers who are stationed outside in the hallway. The cops Buggy Nova and Sara Del Rey are immobile—frozen in time—just like they were when the Nameless Ones passed through.

Mondo is supposed to see one shadowy, hovering figure, a barely perceptible individual who she accepts as a One. She does not. Nor does Dwayne, who this time is mobile but he wisely chooses to appear not to be.

Dwayne is knows better than to inject himself in any way, shape, or form into this matter. So, he doesn't. He stays put and keeps his trap shut; making himself as inconspicuous as possible—make like wet paint and dry quietly.

Mondo is supposed to see him as immobile as he was before. She does not. The girl sees the Wolf as keeping his nose out of other people's business, as he should. Good doggy.

"Ask her. Ask her now, before the moment passes," commands the other Dragon of Ancient Mia.

"Tell me where the other Ones went?" Ancient Mia asks, "I've lost track of them and need to catch up."

Mondo smiles and points at the other Dragon.

"Now that's something you don't see every day. A Norse god, Ragnar Lothbrok, masquerading as a Dragon in human form in the company of an also pretending Ancient Mia, she herself a god, both gods in the guise of Ones. Funny, I guess I'm only supposed to see one of you, and here I am seeing both of you and seeing both of you as Ones. And, my doggy shouldn't have the hoots to be in this moment at all. Then again, it's not a moment, is it? It's a lie posing as an event."

"Not possible!" Ragnar screeches as he fades to black—gone just like that—disappearing into thin air.

Ancient Mia's eyes blink rapidly as if a glamor has just been lifted—which it has. When the rapidity of her blinking subsides, an expression is craved across her face. She is not amused the least little bit. No one likes being used against their will, least of all a god.

"Thank you. I owe you one."

"Anytime."

Ancient Mia fades to black—gone just like that—disappearing into thin air. Time resumes.

Again, Dwayne knows better than to ask what that was all about, not that Mondo could tell him anyways.

**"Find a job you love and you'll never work a day in your life."
Confucius**

The same could be said of Mondo Kane. She so does love her job. And it could be added: find a job you were born to do and you'll never be displaced—to borrow a quote from *Drive Angry*, you can beat a dead man, you can stab a dead man, you can shoot a dead man, you can even stop a dead man, but you can't kill a dead man—or to put it in even more succinct terms, she is her job. No matter the veneer, albeit sidelined from time to time by having to intermeditate the gods for example, Ragnar and Ancient Mia or by Death whether it be contracted or à la carte, her job always has been and always will be Tallis literally translated: Solver also Problem Solver and sometimes incorrectly translated as Solution. Hers is Tallis. And Tallis is her job and her title, because Tallis is both a job and a title. That's what makes her such an extraordinary sandman. That's what

makes her such a preeminent librarian, schlock, contract killer, serial killer, assassin, etc.—homicide related. There’s no person, place, or thing that she can’t cipher how to do away with—the sole exception being God, of course. But, knowing how to takedown is not the same as being able to accomplish it. Nor is she herself invincible.

She cocks her head at an odd angle. The Wolf sniffs the air and growls as if warning off some potential suitor of hers. As if to say: “She’s mine. Possess her at the expense of my life or yours!”

This anticipation of Mondo and her Wolf is followed by the sickening sweet smoky smell of damnation. Brimstone. For want of a better word. Then. That prickly feeling as your hairs stand on end, literally in the case of The Wolf. Something pierces The Veil and crosses over from The Fade. He crosses over from the metaphysical world into the physical world, additionally taking corporeal form in grievous violation of ROE.

The Wolf begins to foam at the mouth profusely, saliva dripping liberally upon the floor. Humans have many names for Him, especially those possessed by Him as well as His legion of seduced mortal followers.

The Wolf only sees Him as a rival for her affections. The Vampire only sees food. He looks upon her and she looks upon Him, covetously. As if evil is begetting evil via this wordless exchange. One evil is an evil, while the other is The First Evil, and it’s quite obvious who is which.

The biowear the skin He chooses to clothe Himself in has been stolen from another person whose soul He possesses through sin. It’s as if He is a wendigo.

Wendigos are people humans that crave human flesh, but they can survive on any live flesh. They are also skinwalkers—the mortal equivalents of Puppet Masters. Skinwalkers have the ability to wear the skin of other people, to take their place after murdering them.

But, skinwalkers are not just content to obtain complete skin with the end goal of assuming the identities of “real” people. They are also about collecting and matching skin “parts” taken from various people male as well as female to make different masks for their face and body with the intent to create and pose as fictitious people, to affect false identities.

The accompanying whispers bespeak of many unwilling contributors to His suit. Frankie, Amelia, and Sophie Benton aka Leah Ostry, Alexandria Benoit, and Julia Hines. Hadley Chambers aka Niamh Wilson. Arla Cogan aka The Colorado Kid aka Laura Vandervoort.

Hadley had a most insidious Talent. She could convert a portion of the world into a toy she loved. A side-effect was that all people in the affected area were made to “never exist.”

But a Him affecting a Hadley aka a wendigo with darbee is hardly going to disaffect demons, since demons by definition are immutable.

Mondo inches closer to Him, with only ravenous Hunger in her now bloodshot eyes. Additionally, she flashes that toothy grin, literally from ear to ear—long crooked needle teeth and that insanely-long facile snake tongue of hers swarming out of her mouth for

effect. The Hunger and The Thirst drive her craving to consume Him. Her dog, The Wolf, follows at the heels of his mistress.

“You are not God. You are _____,” she hisses, using His true name in her serpent’s utterance. He is taken back by the usage. Besides God, only the oldest gods are supposed to know His true name. Yet, here she is, neither God nor an oldest god, and she knows it too. It’s obvious that her dog has heard what she called Him but the dog cannot “comprehend” His name.

The Vampire’s fingernails lengthen into daggers. Hands klaw. Knobb pulses and bleeds. As if she were Adam and Eve, He tempts her. The temptation He chooses is a premonition—either what will be or what can possibly be.

Now becomes will be/might be.

Mondo glimmers the corpse. Much to the shock and utter disbelief of those present the mortals, that is. Ricky McCormick arises from the metal table, the corruption of death from being interned vanquished, before his feet touch the floor. Looking just like he did years ago when he was first brought in here to be autopsied.

She turns her attention to the two detectives present: Eddie Dean Kent and Samantha Teri Lane.

“Henceforth, you are the ones who will directly converse with him.”

“So, you will ask your questions through us?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“That’s, need to know. And you don’t need to know.”

Ricky McCormick’s dead gaze fixates upon Mondo. She reflexively steps back, as does the one who the mortals cannot see. Ricky McCormick makes a move toward her, arms outstretched wanting.

“Instruct him to stop.”

“Why?”

Again, tiresome gamesmanship, she thinks.

“Don’t let him touch me. There can be no physical contact between us.”

“Why?” Eddie asks, excitedly. Thinking that she has inadvertently revealed a weakness that he can exploit to her detriment. Mondo “sees” this need in him for advantage, and smiles.

Sorry to disappoint, she thinks.

“Because I am undead and he is dead animated, on a world with no recourse. Such diatribe is not allowed, since I am prohibited from discerning how he met his untimely end via nefarious means. I must detect the cause without any unfair advantage. Those are the rules.”

“But, there’s more to it than that, isn’t it?” Sam interjects.

“Yes.”

“What?”

“Suffice it to say that an event is likely to happen if such came to pass.”

“Event?”

“End times. The dead would walk as The Dead.”

Eddie and Sam look into her eyes and see the truth in what she says.

“Ricky, stop.”

The corpse obeys.

Will be/might be becomes now.

_____ is again reminded of why His fallen are terrified of going up against God’s darkest children in close combat, because they’re so supernaturally huge, have big serrated teeth, and claws, long daggerous fingernails, when they transform into their true self.

There is again a momentary shift, but this time it’s not of His doing. Nor is there any indication, whose doing that it is.

“I crave the life of extreme isolation. And, so do you, Vampire.”

“Oh, really?”

Sue Aikens smiles at Mondo’s quip. Mondo finds the Weren star of National Geographic Channel’s “Life Below Zero” quite fetching, indeed. It’s interesting that this is who the Lycan Council has paired the Darque with.

“Traditional subsistence living is a lifestyle, a way of life, where you are wealthy without having money. It’s what I’m when I’m not down here pretending, doing Council business. It’s what you do when you go dark, binging: no ID, no phone, no money, no credit card, etc. I. You. We hobo.”

In turn, the rugged stocky-built broad shoulders buxom outdoorswoman finds the Las Vegas showgirl look-alike to be quite fetching, indeed.

Then there’s Donatella Versace to throw into the mix. Being a Snapdragon, she’s one of those semi-pro girls of café society.

Whatever that was, from whomever, gives way to now.

_____ looks into her eyes. From His perspective they become bottomless black pools of absolute nothingness—windows into The Abyss. He loses Himself in their darkness. Only once before has He found Himself consumed thusly, willfully and willingly. It was when He lost Himself in the eyes of Death, Herself, and it only happened once. But, He knows Death, oh so well, and this girl is no Death. He shivers momentarily with delight, He who seduced Lucifer into becoming His very first fallen by tempting he the Angel who was God’s righthand at the time by daring him to “supersede your God.” Surprised? Yes. Lucifer is not The First Evil, as so many of you mortals believe; _____ is, and, obviously, _____ is not Lucifer.

_____ is distracted by melancholia. There are times like this when He misses His Lucifer so much. Lucifer is such a pretty boy, so sweet, so succulent, so. There have been so many others since, countless beyond legion, but none compares to His very first fallen.

Then there is perhaps the scariest aspect of this unique creature: irrespective of the emotional inflection both the tone and the tenor of her voice, her face wears a calm, ice cold, emotionless expression; it is as though she's standing in line at the bank waiting, instead of stalking _____.

To use a boxing analogy:

Golovkin vs. Ward – The Middleweight and Super Middleweight ranks do not possess fighters who can beat either of these guys so the only option for them in all honesty is to fight each other. I know this is hopeful thinking but if the fight could happen it would be a victory for boxing. Styles make fights and very few fighters have the ability to put Ward under the type of pressure that makes it worth watching.

Golovkin is the master of closing down the ring and his power and offense against Ward's ring smarts and defense would make for compelling viewing. It would also provide both fighters with a genuine challenge and the fact that neither has ever suffered a defeat would mean they both have something to lose.

The Outcome - Who would win? Well you never know how a fight will turn out! It could end up being a boring fight which Ward dominates with defense and counter punching, negating the threat that Golovkin brings. It could end up being a short fight with Golovkin putting Ward under heavy pressure, closing down the ring, and forcing Ward into a dog-fight, eventually ending in the early rounds with a devastating KO, inflicting Ward with his first ever defeat. It could just end up going the distance and the judges robbing the better fighter on the night as so often happens these days. I end this muse with a simple question: The unstoppable force versus the unmovable object—who do you think would win?

In a mortal world, in a mortal body, _____, of course, is no less invincible. And, yet instinctively knowing this does not deter she or her dog. This course of action, of course, is suicidal.

Unable to contain herself, she shows not just her hand, but her actual self as well. In a far corner of the room, suddenly standing behind _____ is Julianne Hough. Ms. Hough is wearing pearls, a Moschino tuxedo dress, and Stuart Weitzman pumps. There's bleed thru from the world that she's "broadcasting" from, clearly visible behind her—an amateur's mistake, and she's a pro. It looks to be the "Paradise" premiere in Hollywood.

That's when Mondo looks right at Julianna and flashes that big shit eating grin of hers. Ms. Hough has been made.

"Impossible!"

Not for abomination. You've been had. Careless of you not to have noticed, that I had noticed that I was being used.

_____ begins to laugh. Of course He "noticed" their wordless exchange. And He also realizes that the girl and her dog have stopped advancing on Him.

Mondo blunts her teeth and nails. Dwayne assumes his human form, blindly following the Vampire's lead. He, of course, is privy to much less of what's going on. For example, he has no awareness of Ms. Hough and only a basic perception of _____.

_____ fades from here back to there where He came from. Ms. Hough likewise departs the scene, though not as stealthy.

Mondo takes in Dwayne's au naturel, and licks her chops more than once.

"Affazy two-button side vent suit, solid tan. With classic style and a timeless design, this suit by Affazy will quickly become one of your favorites! The Affazy Two-Button Solid Side Vent Suit is made of polyester and rayon. It features an impressive notch lapel and flap pockets. The two-button side vent design makes this suit an ideal wardrobe centerpiece for work or any formal occasion."

"What?"

"I saw it in your closet. Put it on. I prefer you dressed up."

"So, we're back to the business at hand?"

"You got it. No more playthings for us."

Chapter Three

“Full moon on Monday, 28 June 1999, 11:37:30 pm, Central European Time (CET) or Summer Time (CEST).”

Love him or hate him, Sessler is one of the most well-known and experienced games journalists in the business right now, and we almost certainly haven't seen the last of him. Wherever he goes next, we wish him the best and sincerely hope that G4 fans have stopped giving him a hard time about *Killzone 2*. If you want evidence that Sessler is out to improve both games journalism and gaming forums, look no further than that video.

St. Louis City Medical Examiner, Clark Avenue, Saint Louis, MO is an unassuming building on the west side of police headquarters. Doctor Michelle Rodriguez, the new ME, is a firecracker. A badass bitch, with a commanding presence on a crime scene and a no-nonsense attitude in her lab, she's nobody's wallflower.

Yet, here she is, all fuddles and noodles about this Undead bitch strutting around nonchalantly in her meat locker doing a quickie with that stiff they exhumed. Michelle had half-expected something, mystical, about the girl's inspection; instead she got a Vampire who knows its way around a post-op.

No magic, no arcane, just roll up your sleeves and go elbows deep revisiting the findings the official ones and the off the record ones of Doctor Rodriguez's predecessor, the autopsy report, miscellaneous conclusions from the ME and the lead detectives on the case, casual and detailed observations from any law enforcement connected with the case, crime scene forensics and photos, investigators notes, etc. the whole shebang.

Mondo meticulously compares all of the above with the cadaver of Ricky McCormick, leaving no stone unturned. At a respectful distance stands four of SLMPD's finest: Eddie Kent and Samantha Lane, Buggy Nova and Sara Del Rey. Conspicuous by his absence is Dwayne Johnson.

Interested in the full range of human faults, foibles, dysfunction, and self-delusion? You could spend your evening re-reading the DSM-IV Manual. You could opt to spend some time with an even more entertaining catalog of idiosyncrasies: *Charmer*, the latest album from Aimee Mann, as fine a chronicler of the human comedy as popular music has ever produced. Names have been obscured to protect the guilty, but you will almost certainly recognize yourself in its the album's short narratives, along with the fellow travelers who have conned, enabled, victimized, or yes charmed you.

Or. You could consider the two people in the room who everyone else seems to be oblivious to. Two well-dressed elitist snobs, stiff-backed and haughty—ripe to be hoisted by their own petards, although none of their kind would ever believe that were possible.

Both are male. Both are human. Both are extraterrestrials. Both are wearing penny-loafers with no socks. The older looking of the two is wearing a Michael Kors men's solid black camelhair sport coat jacket and non-descript khaki pants. The younger looking man is wearing a Tommy Hilfiger men's black beige plaid trim fit wool suit.

Kenneth Cole Reaction charcoal gray black scarf scarves. The needed DKNY accessories, of course, are worn by both. No fashion faux pas here. The two erudite men are Transient Observers.

Transient Observers, or simply TO's, are the most technologically advanced beings in Creation. They are so advanced that their tech makes them virtually indistinguishable from gods, and they are humans, mere mortals. And there in lays the rub. Salt in the wound which they exacerbate with their unbridled arrogance and aloofness.

Transients are quite simply put what Doctor Who and the other Time Lords of Gallifrey can only wish they could be.

Other humans watch the TOs covetously from afar. But in the course of time, jealousy always turns to envy. And envy begets the downfall of many. Even ones so high as The Observers who dare thread the path of gods. For whom their hands are much too good to be soiled by direct interaction with Lessers. And, human nature being what it is, by their way of thinking, everyone who is not them is a Lesser. That includes God—I am who am!

Worse: The Observers have no use, whatsoever, for God. So full of themselves. While other humans envy them from afar ad nauseum as if they were the ultimate X and plot their downfall, demons consider them the “best sushi.” Food is as Food does—it's meant to be eaten, not envied.

Besides, demonic nature being what it is, by the demons' way of thinking, who of their kind in their right mind would envy anyone who has no use for God, let alone anyone who thought they to be God's better? None, would be their resounding answer.

In life, there's always that exception. And such is the case in this situation, in point of fact, there are two. There are two notable exceptions to the throngs of humans who envy The Observers because they covet The Observers' status and wish to supplant The Observers. Two sets of humans envy The Observers out of sheer pettiness, nothing more—they want nothing the Observers have nor do they want to be The Observers. Those are the humans indigenous to our Miss Kane's universe and the humans indigenous to this one. Such pettiness, and those motivated by it, are to be the most feared, always.

There are many ways that Mondo could deal with this unwanted intrusion. She chooses none of them. Instead, she pretends that the Observers are not present in the room. But, she does note something else. In spite of what should be impossible at this stage in their development, it's obvious from their body language that the indigenous humans in the room are also “aware” of the Observers. And if the Observers weren't so full of themselves, they would notice that too. Never say impossible, stick to improbable, else you might get caught short in your assessment of others and that could prove to be your undoing by their hand.

The Nameless Ones, etc., now The Transient Observers, is there more afoot? This is not about ulterior motives, and Mondo has decided as such also. She was sent here to solve a possible murder, nothing more and nothing else. In spite of what rabid conspiracy theorists might think. Instead, think: shades of Emanuel “Manny” Steward and his

legendary “Kronk Gym” located in the basement of a rundown recreation center in the heart of the “Motor City” Detroit Michigan.

She is a retired librarian, which in itself makes her a most tasty morsel; guaranteed to entice many a supernatural to come with their tongue hanging out knocking at her front door. Put the cherry on top: she’s a grimm reaper and a sandman to boot. And you can shut the barn door for good. That’s why there’s some many extracurricular distractions coming to court her attention obtusely and otherwise. Even The Observers, who are human and total snobs, had to come and see the local attraction Mondo Kane passing through town.

Then. There are those random thoughts which she does entertain. But she has decided, for now, to pursue none of them to fruition.

Cooking ingredients include: formally-trained chef Phillip Lee, his self-trained colleague Natalie Pereira, radishes, and foie gras.

Things changed only when Bill Clinton, basking in the prosperity of his second term, embraced a balanced budget partly as a way to eliminate GOP attacks on profligate Democrats.

Kounterfeit – activated Simon Krocker with his blood.

Therriault and Matysio do a credible job of acting terrified and discombobulated.

On a personal note, this is the best damn website for AV ever and I am very glad to have come over from HTF many moons ago. Even the prickly nature of some of the discussions mea culpa, as well, of course would never deter me from this great home on the web.

I think it likely therefore that we might have seen the last of him. Marquez was never able to get to grips with the fast-raiding style of Bradley and, to use an old cliché, was hoist by his own petard. The counter-puncher was out countered by the younger, quicker, fresher man.

Although, maybe she thinks, the kounterfeit one might merit further scrutiny sooner than later. A kounterfeit has a short, fixed lifespan and their demise leaves no traces whatsoever of cause. Early termination is coded into their genes—shades of Ridley Scott’s dystopian science fiction thriller *Blade Runner*. But, that code disappears from their DNA upon their untimely demise. Death, cause unknown: sounds a lot like Ricky McCormick’s death. Coincidence or not?

In all this contemplation there is something decidedly different about Mondo that comes about. It’s as if a switch got flicked in her head, and she’s turned all cold-bloodied methodical as well as darkly funny and innuendo-laden about the entire situation.

Shades of, Honey West, the nerviest, curviest P.I. in Los Angeles, or anywhere else for that matter. Honey is a cross between James Bond and The Avengers’ Emma Peel—a girl detective with the sleuthmanship of Mike Hammer and the measurements of Marilyn Monroe.

This Girl for Hire is the first in a series of darkly funny and innuendo-laden crime novels originally published in the 1950s and 1960s. In this one, Honey finds herself playing strip poker with four murder suspects, and a deck that's as stacked as she is!

So. It's time to further foster, enhance, and amplify, and stop trying to implicitly ditch, all of the distractions and get down to brass tacks even more so. She starts with her stuff. After all, the entire buzz is really about her gear her gizmos not so much the girl herself. In other words. What she does and therefore what she must be packing is what everybody is really after and makes them so gaga about. The girl is just the cherry on the cake, so to speak.

Mondo will keep her purse, of course. It's a "device" of magic, and therefore studying it would be of no interest let alone use to the humans. Why? Because, the tech of the indigenous humans, like that of the visiting Observers, is based entirely on science. Besides, even though she feed her purse before she left, it's become a glutton of late and would likely eat any Food that gave it too close a look see. Her phone, her universal, and the contents of said holster should suffice to hold any intended's interest.

She'll set the universal to default for other users to demo. Place your palm upon the universal and say *open*, and the contents of the holster will "unload" beside the holster. And, conversely, place your palm upon the universal and say *close*, and the contents of the holster will "load" back into the holster. The vujcic and pistols within cannot be used against her. Plus, in this universe, the holster has an unlimited range; therefore, she will have the same access to her weapons as if she were still carrying them on her person.

Of course, the true testament of her prowess and well-founded self confidence in her own abilities is that she had instructed her devices beforehand that if she were to surrender them in this type of situation, for example, for further study by the indigenous population, that the devices were to limit themselves in this world as if the usual ranges applicable in her world and other worlds applied.

To her, her tools the uses, so to speak of a sandman, are just that, tools. Nothing more and nothing less. She carries them out of respect for the mother who made her and gave her the vujcic and the aunt who sent her here who gave her the pistols. She doesn't need them to be the homicidal abomination that she is everywhere she goes.

When Mondo leaves the morgue, she has herself escorted over to the police armory by Eddie Kent, Samantha Lane, Buggy Nova, and Sara Del Rey. It's there that our buxom Miss Kane surrenders her universal and her phone over to a lab tech named Jensen, Riley Jensen. The leering geek is in the posture of being with the police. Mondo guesses that it's a pose and that he's really with the OSI. He's much too nerdy to be NSA, let alone CIA.

"I've shown you mine, so now it's time for you to show me yours," Mondo teases, winking mischievously.

"Not so fast. What's the gig?" Jensen gamely asks, showing that he's also quick on his feet as quick as our Miss Kane.

"They're set to default for demo purposes. The phone is a phone, no instruction needed with it—intuitive using it and you'll easily figure out the rest. Place your palm upon the universal and say *open*, and the contents of the holster will "unload" beside the holster.

And, conversely, place your palm upon the universal and say *close*, and the contents of the holster will “load” back into the holster. The vujcic and pistols within cannot be used against me, and in this universe, they have unlimited range – those are your warnings, which you no doubt are already aware of. But, there is a carrot.”

“As in?”

“They have been instructed to limit themselves, nonetheless, as if they were in our home world and other worlds.”

“Their range, as such, then?”

“You’ll figure it out.” Mondo purses her lips, seductively. “Now, tit for tat.”

“Department issue for detectives is a Fobus Standard Holster RH Paddle for HP2 Ruger P94, 95, 97 with or without rails, Hi-Point 9MM, or Beretta M92. I also have its twin LH Paddle holster for lefties and that also is department issue for detectives.”

“I would like a left-hand and a right-hand paddle holster. Also department issue paddles for spare magazines. Ammunition needs to be department issue also. Nothing exotic.”

Riley complies. Mondo disassembles the two M92’s and reassembles them like she owns them.

“Now, I’m familiar with my tools.”

“Where did you learn how to do that?”

“Parochial school.”

“You Catholic schools are sure different than ours.”

“Obviously.”

She clips the paddles to the waistband of her skirt. With her suitcoat buttoned, she reaches through her jacket as if it isn’t there and holsters her department-issue Berettas.

“So your suit is alive?”

“Something like that.”

“Magic?”

“Nothing that you could comprehend at this point in time. But. Maybe after you’ve studied my sandman gizmos, you will. Then again, maybe you still won’t.”

“I assume they talk. I’ll just ask them, instead.”

“Smart boy.”

She sends Eddie Kent and Samantha Lane on an undisclosed errand—undisclosed to Buggy Nova and Sara Del Rey. She has Buggy Nova and Sara Del Rey escort her to the indoor firing range. Dwayne has still yet to make his appearance. Plans within plans.

This is not a straightforward slice of heroics but a more nuanced espionage slanted caper with some moral ambivalence to it. So, for very good reason, she anticipates that the shooting range is the extent of her gunplay on this one. Much to her chagrin, she’s

resigned to all likelihood that she won't get to kill anyone on this one, but, she's still hoping for at least one homicide by commission her act if not by omission letting someone die, Batman style.

Mondo puts on a clinic putting the two firearms through their paces. Then she borrows the pistols of Nova and Del Rey, and does the same with theirs. In the end, she returns the M92's, the paddles, and the extra magazines to Riley Jensen. She doesn't ask for her universal or phone; instead, she heads back to the morgue with Nova and Del Rey—resigned to her fate.

Doctor Michelle Rodriguez is doing a work up on a new arrival, a six year old child killed in a drive-by shooting near the palatial mansion of Mayor Michael Roberts in the fashionable Central West End. The little girl wasn't an innocent bystander caught in the crossfire. She and her TEC-9 were willing participants.

The Intratec TEC-9 or TEC-DC9 or AB-10 is a blowback-operated semi-automatic handgun, chambered in 9×19mm Parabellum that was designed by Intratec, an American offshoot of Interdynamic AB. The TEC-9 is made of inexpensive molded polymers and a mixture of stamped and milled steel parts.

Mondo walks over to the metal table upon which still lays the cadaver of Ricky McCormick, bends over it, whispers something in its ear, and French kisses the corpse. Nova gags. Del Rey swallows hard, wrenches, and as she starts to turn her head away Ricky is suddenly standing before her its empty, wasted eye sockets staring into her eyes. The dead has become The Dead at the behest of a Lost One. Call it street cop instinct, call it street smarts, call it what you will, but neither cop makes another sound or moves another inch. Doctor Rodriguez, M-Rod, does the same.

That's when Dwayne struts into the room and makes his grand entrance. Like the others he also does the right thing and makes like wet paint. The morgue is equipped with CCTV, but whoever is watching is wise enough to not mount an assault on the Dead thing. Best to stay on surveillance.

The Dead, like all Dead, is overdrive capable, of course. And it uses this "talent" to "flitter" about the morgue. It makes the rounds staring down each of the room's other occupants before returning to face its maker, the Vampire. From the perspective of the non-supernatural the mundane present, it seems to just be here, there, etc., as if it's using teleportation—no blur of movement, whatsoever.

"DC should be gone."

Ricky opens its mouth and speaks, responding in kind to the Vampire's seemingly flippant remark, with a somewhat incoherent, equally inappropriate one of its own that nonetheless finishes her train of thought for her.

"When Darksied completely destroys everything in the DC universe with the Anti-Life equation. He is owed that much for all the jobbing they had him doing to Superman."

"For Marvel I just wish that it has nothing to do with a Mutant destroying everything."

"Change of subject? What's my line?"

"PCAS – Proprietary Common Aggressor Suite?"

“No.”

Mondo’s next utterance is designed to further force the fiend The Dead Thing into versioning (revealing) itself.

“Kurosawa and Shakespeare are a winning combination. With *Throne of Blood*, Kurosawa strips Macbeth to the bare bones of plot, and then packs on new flesh in the form of scheming ambition in feudal Japan. In this version, Washizu (Macbeth) is somewhat simple, and content with what comes his way, be it castle or fort, honor or deceit. His wife, the infamous Lady Macbeth, is chillingly calm and dangerous. She has no interest in her husband’s contentment, and knows that the only way to advance her position is to advance the position of her husband, by whatever means necessary. Her role as the spider is particularly suited to the halls of the Cobweb Castle. The acting and filming are up to the quality that one expects from Kurosawa and Mifune. The pacing of the film is full of dynamic contrasts, going from heart-pounding action to patient silence. This film is not spoon-fed to you, but demands your concentration. The visuals are particularly stunning in *Throne of Blood*. The cobweb forest is haunting, and the single weird sister, all in white spinning in a white cage, maintains the same chilling calmness of Washizu’s wife. One of the many nice touches of *Throne of Blood* is the chance to see that Samurai at the height of their power. These are not the poor, struggling warriors of *Seven Samurai* or *Yojimbo*. Washizu is decked out in full armor for the bulk of the film, and his castle is defended and attacked by well-dressed armies. Each lord is powerful and wields mighty forces. Oh, and of course, the big finish. All I can say is wow.”

It wails, a bone-chilling acoustic, to say the least. Then it shudders. Lastly, it produces with great effort its own review.

“A great deal has been made of the fact that THRONE OF BLOOD also known as SPIDER’S WEB CASTLE is drawn from one of Shakespeare’s most celebrated plays. This is both a blessing and a curse, for while it gives western audiences a point of reference, it also invites all sorts of comparisons that viewers familiar with the Shakespeare play feel honor-bound to make—and that can get in the way of seeing the film as it is rather than what we expect it to be. And that would be a great pity, because what it is in and of itself is quite fine indeed. The cast is a very strong ensemble, with frequent Kurosawa star Torshiro Mifune leading the film with a remarkably fine performance as the ambitious warrior Taketori Washizu. To my mind, however, the most memorable performance is offered by Isuzu Yamada as Lady Washizu—who plays the role with a demonic stillness that cracks into physical action only when she is completely sure of herself or in utter desperation. It is one of the most disturbing characterizations I have ever encountered. As usual in any Kurosawa film, the imagery involved is extremely powerful, and the moody tone of the film quickly draws viewers in—and once ensnared there is no escape; the film holds your attention with considerable ease throughout. Even so, I would not recommend THRONE OF BLOOD to Western audiences who have never seen a Kurosawa film, for it is so completely Japanese in aesthetic that some may find it hard to grasp. It is best seen after you are already familiar with both Kurosawa’s work and Japanese cinema in general. The Criterion DVD is quite good, with a nicely restored transfer and bonus features that include the original trailer, a choice of subtitle translations (I prefer the Hoagland translation), and a somewhat awkward but ultimately rewarding commentary track by Michael Jeck. If you’re a

Kurosawa fan and you've never seen THRONES OF BLOOD, this is your opportunity; if you're looking to replace an existing video with a DVD, this one is likely as good as it gets. Strongly recommended."

With that said, Ricky climbs back onto the table, lays down, and becomes dead again.

"Damn. And I was so sure that I was onto something. I guess I'm back to square one. Anyone in the mood for a banana split or a chocolate malt made with French vanilla ice cream?"

That's when M-Rod, Nova, and Del Rey lose it all over their clothes and the floor. Dwayne is unfazed, then again, he is a dog.

Speaker for the Dead (The Ender Quintet) Mass Market Paperback

by [Orson Scott Card](#)

In the aftermath of his terrible war, Ender Wiggin disappeared, and a powerful voice arose: The Speaker for the Dead, who told the true story of the Bugger War.

Now, long years later, a second alien race has been discovered, but again the aliens' ways are strange and frightening. Again, humans die. And it is only the Speaker for the Dead, who is also Ender Wiggin the Xenocide, who has the courage to confront the mystery and the truth.

Speaker for the Dead, the second novel in Orson Scott Card's Ender Quintet, is the winner of the 1986 Nebula Award for Best Novel and the 1987 Hugo Award for Best Novel.

Dwayne and Mondo are sitting at a streetside table, cafe style, just outside the posh Coffee Cartel on the corner of North Euclid and Maryland Plaza. Dwayne has a banana split and Mondo has an Oreo in this situation, a chocolate malt made with French vanilla ice cream. Bugs and Sara are across the street standing in front of their assigned black-n-white police car sipping on some custom brewed coffee concoctions also from the Cartel.

"CLONED: The Recreator Chronicles Official Trailer #1 (2013) - Sci-Fi Movie HD?"

"Too obvious. Besides, that's really reaching. Both versions of that movie in both worlds have no significant deviations. And we're quite familiar with our respective version of that flick."

"So true, ergo: art often times imitates life, but not in this case. That movie in no way can be construed as for blueprint for what we're investigating."

"Agreed."

"Lock of Anubis?"

"Same problem as the Recreator movie. Not to mention the fact that Ricky's corpse would have reacted quite differently in the morgue."

"Back to square one."

“Indeed.”

“There is always you, of course.”

“There’s always that possibility when an unsolvable murder is afoot and I’m tasked with its investigation. Although there’s no proof that this is a murder, unsolvable or otherwise.”

“But if it were, you’d be the prime suspect, not us Licantropos.”

“By your way of thinking?”

“By my way of thinking.”

“Go on.”

“All you’d have to do is excise any knowledge of the crime from your mind. Therefore, no chance of passive self-incrimination, for example, via a scan. No conscience, therefore no pangs of conscience to subconsciously conspire to actively incriminate yourself. Even you could not solve a murder that you had committed such as this. And no Weren could prove otherwise that this is not our handiwork.”

Mondo yawns, tosses her head back, and lets her long, silky, golden locks blow in the wind. There’s a gentle breeze, nothing obtrusive.

“Man, as much as I love drinking blood, it would be a major bummer if that’s all I had for sustenance for eternity. I love my Oreo malts.”

Dwayne doesn’t assume that Mondo has changed subjects to deflect any potential culpability on her part for Ricky’s death. He correctly assumes that’s she’s just bored.

Then, out of nowhere she hits him with the biggest whammer of all—blindsiding completely. Up until now, she has never displayed what anyone would consider as sustained reproducible jaw-dropping conventional detective skills. She has had and still sporadically does have her moments, those flashes of brilliance. But, the conventional stuff, she’s never been a day in and day out fountainhead of that. She’s never shown it to be her interest or her forte. Her inclinations have always proven to be that polar opposite. An unrepentant, unredeemable murderer, she uses her considerable experience at that out and out killing, her guile, lugubrious trickery of all facets and persuasions, violence beating clues out of people à la the detective Mike Hammer, and she is not at all shy about cheating by using the occult and all other means at her disposals.

Now, out of the blue, she decides to put on a clinic that would put the likes of Perry Mason, Nero Wolfe, Sherlock Holmes, Batman, et al., to shame. Their conventional detective genius, methods, and methodologies, coupled with the guile of a woman who is immortal.

And, the cherry on the cake is that she does her own legwork. No need for Perry Mason’s Paul Drake, Nero Wolfe’s Archie Goodwin, Sherlock Holmes’ Doctor Watson, or Batman’s Robin.

The whodunit. What captivates us so much about this timeless genre? Is it the growing excitement, our building anticipation, as clues are discovered and carefully scrutinized, and the mystery is unraveled piece by piece culminating in that eureka moment? POW!!!

The identity of the vile transgressor is revealed and they get their just comeuppance, carted off to the hoosegow by the police. Everything that happens after that is anticlimactic, the expected let down after the exponentially progressive, evanescent high, that thrill ride we've been on during this well-crafted storytelling. The thing is, there's always that exception, and with some protagonists, it's always like that – the anticlimactic part is indistinguishable from the climactic portion that preceded it. Hell, it's the best part of their stories.

You see, the thing, the event back in the morgue was just Thaumatology. It was an exercise in the power of the Undead in particular, a Vampire's, any Vampire's dominion over the dead and their initiated Dead, and a very trivial demonstration at that. It was not done to make a point or move Mondo closer to solving the puzzle she's been tasked with. It was done simply for her amusement. Something to temporarily stave off the mounting boredom which threatens to become insufferable if not vanquish or at least appeased for the moment from time to time.

The two detectives were sent on what amounts to a wild goose chase. Because. They'll return with Ricky's original note from the FBI, she'll compare it to the copy that the SLPD has in its possession, and in all likelihood have confirmation for what she already knows or more succinctly, believes beyond a reasonable doubt to be true. The original and the Xerox copy are identical in the ordinary sense of the word. Therefore, the original is not magical, it's mundane. You can't make an ordinary copy of a magical document. Ergo, Ricky's note is not what it appears to be on face value. It's just a note, the illiterate scribbling of an imbecile, nothing more.

Yes, she can read the note. The facility with languages any language, even a person's, any person's, private, singular, one-off language she was born with as a human being has followed her unabated into Undeath.

Upon further reflection, coupled with the reveals from the classified spy satellite photos that Mondo surreptitiously "obtained," she now sees the supernatural incident at the crime scene as her completely misinterpreting the clues at hand. A simple intersection of ley lines caused her misunderstanding, nothing more. Pure coincidence that it the intersection coincided with the spot of Ricky's demise. Ergo: no relation whatsoever to Ricky's demise.

"Beegie Leslee Thomas-Adair. My dog girlfriend. Or is it, my girl dog friend? Who's to know? Ricky had such an inconsistent use of grammar."

"You can read the note!!!" Exclaims Dwayne, before he realizes what he's let slip. He quickly regains his normally stoic composure and he closes his yap, chiding himself harshly for his reveal in response to her reveal. Even a fish can't get caught if it doesn't open its mouth.

"Of course I can read the note, same as you can, same as any Were can. I've always had this uncanny facility with language, any language, even someone's or something's made-up language. A talent which obviously followed me into Undeath. And since I could savvy Goon when I was mundane, obviously a facility which far exceeds that of any Were."

Of course Goon believe that Mondo was Goon in a past life and that explains why she can savvy Goon in this incarnation. It also might explain why none of Goon has eaten her for the grievous transgress of being able to savvy Goon and not be Goon.

It is very likely that Were can savvy Goon, but for their race's own well-being and continued existence, they know better than to admit to being able to do so in mixed company. There are rules about such things and they must be obeyed, else there are dire consequences. Such is ROE.

There's nothing about Mondo's voice or manner from which Dwayne can remotely infer that she knows otherwise about Were being unable to savvy Goon. And he wisely decides not to take that bait and broach the subject any further with her. She freely admits that she can savvy Goon and contends that in doing so she can savvy what no Were can, and he'll leave it at that. Although he has this sense that something is trying to compel him to say more about the subject or any subject for that matter. He's being worked and more than just her working him is afoot, he decides.

Dwayne is able to push back that which is pushing him. Although he's unable to push it aside. Having created some space, metaphysically speaking, between him and it he exercises his options.

His vision momentary shifts. Mondo is no rat, but he needs to confirm her integrity of purpose nonetheless. Now, he sees it. A glamor is in place, likely of her doing. Nothing of this matter of a most personal nature is being revealed to the humans in earshot. They have no need to know.

Every supernatural race has its "special" talent, for which they have supposedly no equal, and normally they do not. For example, Were and their facility with languages—universal translation, so to speak. Of course even Were are not supposed to be able to savvy Goon. Then again, as aforementioned, except for Goon reincarnation, no non-Goon is supposed to be able to savvy Goon.

"The indigenous humans have no knowledge of our special."

"And they will not learn of it from me."

"I've confirmed that you've taken the proper precautions."

"I noticed." Mondo smiles coyly, and nimbly changes back to the current talking points. "I assume from Ricky's references to her, that this Beegie Leslee Thomas-Adair is a dog."

"Yes, she is Were."

"She is known to you?"

"Yes."

"And you are close?"

"Yes."

"Hence your outburst when I recited passages, fragments from Ricky's tome which indicate that he was somehow involved with her, a connection that if known to the humans would implicate a Were that you obviously care deeply for in Ricky's death."

“She is my.”

“For now, I have no need to know what her relation is to you.”

“She did not kill him.”

“She swears to you?”

“Yes.”

“And you believe her?”

“Yes.”

“Don’t be so hard on yourself. The glamor I’ve worked has many other uses besides mere deception.”

“I’d figured as much. You’ve loosened my tongue.”

“Crudely put. Yes.”

“And not so crudely put?”

“Before he realizes what he’s let slip, let his tongue be loose.”

“Deceitful bitch.”

“Guilty as charged.”

“Why haven’t you told the humans?”

“I’ve haven’t yet determined if it’s germane to the case that Ricky and your Beegie knew each other.”

“Even now you’re working me with complete disregard. And me. Guarded. Warned. I’m still trusting you way too much with my speech.”

“If you’re weren’t so forthcoming under duress, I would assume.”

“Guilt, conspiracy, cover-up? Some aspect of culpability on my part? Jealous, possessive lover lashes out and murders.”

“Something like that.” Then she drops the bombshell. “I wonder why the authorities believe that he died elsewhere and was unceremoniously dumped in that field after the fact? I bet you dogs have sniffed it out better. You just can’t sniff it out well enough to cipher whodunit.”

Dwayne feints, but it takes all of his muster to keep his poker face and, figuratively speaking, not let his jaw drop and hit the table.

“I like being your dog. I like fucking you. I like you.”

“Now, who’s working whom?” With a slight gesture she dispels the glamor. “You’d gut me in a heartbeat if you thought that you could get away with it. You’re convinced that I’m guilty and, since my reveal, you’re sure that I intend to pin this on your girl Beegie when it best suits me.”

Dwayne no longer feels compelled. He no longer sees the glamor. His vision shifts to the mundane. He feels violated, and he has been, magically speaking, that is.

“I’d ring you neck for this one, if I had the papers.”

It’s a weak retort on his part. But he had to say something. And yes, he’s convinced, now more than ever, that she’s guilty and that she will find a way to pin this on Beegie when it best serves her purposes.

“Using Beegie as a scapegoat must be your end game. Or at the very least, it’s one of them. Your kind usually have several contingency plans.”

The Vampire leans back in her white wrought-iron chair and gloats. She’s in the cat bird seat, and both of the Vampire and the Were know it. The blood bag pretends to not notice the “casual” movement behind her, and continues her stroke in earnest unabated by what looms. “Now we’re going to have a conversation that anyone can be privy to if they choose to listen.”

“You say that like I don’t have a choice in the matter.”

“I’m being polite. You’re being childish. And I know you know better. Now behave.”

“What if I don’t?”

Mondo could say and do a lot of things, and would be well within her rights in doing so. Vampire versus Were. She is quite capable of walking the walk as well as talking the talk. And so is he.

“I know you don’t like discussing Family (supernatural) business in the presence of mundane, but you dogs brought this on yourselves. This is ROE, and I discovered your pack’s involvement via ordinary means. What was revealed by you under my glamour.”

“Your calculated sneak attack. That’s what your magical violation of me was. It was plain and simple a.”

“What was revealed by you under my glamour was mere confirmation of what I had already surmised from deduction, inference, and implication as applied to clues readily available to anyone using conventional detective means and all well within the applicable laws here. Ergo: your coerced testimony under my glamour is of course not admissible in a court of law here, but what it confirmed, my surmise, is admissible.”

“My pack’s involvement?”

“You’re such an accomplished liar, have an awesome poker face, second to none that I’ve seen and I’ve seen the very best, but, I have irrefutable proof of your pack’s involvement which escalates this matter to the very highest echelons. Nope, I’m not just throwing shit up against the wall and seeing what sticks. I’ve been tasked with determining if Ricky’s death was murder and figuring out who did it if it was murder, and seeing to it that the responsible party is tried and convicted in a court of law, whoever that person is, even if that person turns out to be me. And. I intend to do just that, or get destroyed trying.”

“Civility and tact, she doesn’t miss a beat. The road to Hell is paved with good intentions, and she has none.”

“Bold words from a lying bitch”

“Straight talk from your accuser.”

“Accuser?”

“Maybe you yourself are the culprit. Maybe your outburst was a smokescreen, and you don’t care about this Beegie, her implication in this matter, or her ultimate fate. And if so, my glamour made you reveal nothing but the falsehoods you meant to conspire, and the frame job you concocted to ensure this Beegie dog of yours. And furthermore.”

That’s when Dwayne totally loses it. He lunges across the table and slugs Mondo, knocking her out cold. Then he rears back as if he’s about to respite before teeing off on her and his clothes shred as he changes into his Wolf.

Sara and Bugs don’t move a muscle to intervene. They know that she’ll enjoy getting her ass whooped, but they want to see her get her comeuppance, nonetheless. But, it never comes to this or that. Dwayne’s Wolf goes bye-bye and he changes back, naked and embarrassed. He’s not embarrassed because of his public nudity. After all, what Were would be? None worth their saltines, of course. He’s embarrassed because she got the better of him.

Mondo comes to herself and picks herself off the sidewalk. She’s chinning and grinning. The Vampire got a rise out of him, and by doing that crosses him off her list of suspects. Although she’s sure her actions have firmly entrenched her as the number one culprit in his mind. Further reason to confirm his innocence by her way of thinking.

“Now it’s time for you to formally introduce me to Ms. Beegie Leslee Thomas-Adair of yours.”

Beegie steps into view. She was the one lurking in the background, so to speak. From the badge on her uniform, she’s the manager of the Coffee Cartel.

Mondo can sense something different about the girl. Then after much contemplation, she realizes what it is. She’s a Vegan!

“Mondo Kane. This is Beegie Leslee Thomas-Adair. Beegie. This is Mondo Kane.”

“I’m pleased to meet you.”

“Likewise, I’m sure.”

Both are twenty-something, but they are ages apart experience-wise and chronologically. The two young women shake hands; palm touches palm—intimate, physical contact, flesh on flesh. That proves to be a colossal mistake on Beegie’s part. There’s no sure thing as the perfect crime or the perfect undercover or the perfect deception or the, in other words, there’s no such thing as the perfect lie. It’s something that Beegie has obviously forgotten, or maybe she has not and she’s just too much hankering for that confrontation to caution anymore. No matter. It’s a slipup, nonetheless. And. Because of that one slipup of this Beegie, all of the pieces now fall neatly into place for our Miss Kane.

Why send me? That's the question that has bothered me from the git-go. Now I know why. Because you need a young one, who can pass for what she is, young, and yet have the supernatural faculties and facilities of an Oldest Thing, an Eldest god. To do else would risk putting your most formidable prey on their guard, or worse, spooking them altogether.

Now, I know everything!!!

Chapter Four

“Hamlet meets Kill Bill, The Dragon version of.”

Once upon a time, in temples across the land far and wide, the name of this supernatural being was incessantly chanted day and night. It would start as an incomprehensible murmur and crescendo in one very discernible word, that word was her name, spoken over and over again—then the cycle, the worship, would repeat itself, or rather her worshipers would repeat themselves, always the incomprehensible murmur becoming a crescendo. So popular was she that thereafter female gods were titled her name. Her name was Goddess!!!

All Chinese restaurants in Creation are somehow connected with Dragons, and where there are Dragons, there are always 456. Either the connection is explicit; Dragons own the restaurant, outright. Or, the connection is implicit; Dragons are somehow affiliated with the restaurant, usually as patrons.

It is said that the Motel has a Chinese restaurant. That’s not urban legend, that’s a fact. Being part of the Motel, the restaurant must be atemporal. Some argue that it is Guo Bin, while others argue that it is Lu Lu. While it might be Lu Lu, since Lu Lu is atemporal and it is standalone. It cannot be Guo Bin. Guo Bin is atemporal, but it is always affixed to a temporal structure in whatever universe that it is manifest – ergo, it’s not standalone and the Motel’s restaurant is standalone.

Although there is only one physical restaurant one Guo Bin and one Lu Lu, there are as many iterations of each restaurant as there are universes that each can be accessed from. Not to mention, there are countless versions and sub-versions of each restaurant, as best suits the culinary situation at hand that needs addressing.

In this universe:

Guo Bin Chinese Restaurant, 8600 Delmar Boulevard, University City, MO, is affixed to the first floor of an upscale retirement hi-rise that acts as the fixture of an equally upper-end retirement community, gated and select – for the “discerning” set. Only the restaurant is open to the general public.

In contrast, Lu Lu Seafood & Dim Sum Chinese Restaurant, 8224 Olive Boulevard, University City, Saint Louis, MO, is right there on the main thoroughfare of U-City. It’s in that nice, “general” part of town which can hardly be described as upscale. Lu Lu is located in an area populated by many Asian restaurants, many of which are said to be “authentic.”

Guo Bin versus Lu Lu is Beijing chic versus Hong Kong popularist with some Taiwanese twang thrown in for good measure. In spite of that divergence in culinary style, in the case of both restaurants, their Dim Sum is to die for, and when Dragons or 456 are being served, that literally is true – someone has been killed to be made into the meal’s meat ingredients.

Guo Bin is owned by a Dragon. Her name is Guo Bin Wu. Lu Lu is owned by Mr. Fan, also a Dragon. To his family, friends, and regular customers, he's affectionately known as Andy. In sharp contrast, and quite expectedly, no one, not even her beloved husband, calls Madame Wu, by her first name.

Mondo and Dwayne materialize in the small, austere foyer of Guo Bin. Out of place is an ornate clothes butler with a duplicate of the outfit—shirt, pants, shoes, sox, etc.—that Dwayne shredded when he lost his cool and went Wolf. The butler looks vaguely Ming Dynasty with some tasteful Tang Dynasty touches.

While Mondo openly leers at him, he quickly dresses and they enter the ornate bowels of the restaurant proper. There are two dining areas. Sara and Bugs are seated and eating in the “other” dining space, the slightly narrower one segregated for mundane. At their table is ADA Xenia Onatopp, who's a deadringer for actress Famke Janssen. The assistant district attorney has a plain manila envelope on the table beside her.

Although Mondo and Dwayne can see the humans, the humans are unaware of the supernaturals.

The butler fades away, no longer needed. In its place, Detectives Eddie Dean Kent and Samantha Teri Lane appear. The Guo Bin that they enter has no Mondo or Dwayne, but has Sara, Bugs, and Onatopp. A young Chinese girl, who looks like, and is, a teenager, seats Eddie and Sam at a table in the main dining area, the slightly wider one where supernaturals and humans eat. Their teen hostess hands them each a menu and waits patiently for them to order. Eddie hates Chinese food with a passion, but he knows better than to refuse service here. Not ordering is not an option.

The teenager is a Dragon in human form. She's one of Madame Wu's great, great, great granddaughters. Her name is Jade Yang.

Their hostess, a sixty-something Chinese woman, Madame Wu, seats Mondo and Dwayne at a table where Beegie is already sitting.

Madame Wu claps her hands, seemingly directed at no one in particular, and seats herself at the table. A forty-something Chinese man, a 456 in human form dressed formally like a waiter, hands menus to everyone at the table including Madame Wu. His name is Fong. He was not there and then he was just there, as if in response to Madame Wu's clap.

“There is plenty for you to choose from, Vegan,” Madame Wu says, dryly.

Beegie starts to say something, but then showing great wisdom for her age decides better and keeps her mouth shut.

Madame Wu then turns her attention to Mondo. She acts as if Dwayne is not there. And. From what he has heard about Madame Wu, he decides that maybe it's better that way.

“That Vampire used to bring you here quite often.”

“Dame Julia, back when I was human.”

Madame Wu frowns. Like a double exposed piece of film. Momentarily, her true face her Dragon face overlays her “false” one her human one. Fortunately, for all concerned, the moment passes.

“I wasn’t aware that I had bade you to speak, Vampire.”

Mondo closes her generous mouth and makes sure to not crack a smile, let alone crack wise again.

“Better. Much better. Else you and the other members of your party will end up in the pot.”

Madame Wu continues to hold court, unabated.

“Who killed this Food, Ricky?”

“No one,” Mondo answers, deciding that Madame Wu has implicitly given her permission to speak.

This time, Madame Wu smiles generously.

“Now, tell me in detail, how you know this to be true. I’m curious. Delineate to me as if you are being cross-examined in a human courtroom as a hostile witness by some zealot prosecuting attorney, for example.”

That’s when ADA Onatopp is in the room with them, standing at the table beside Madame Wu holding that plain manila envelope.

“Oh, there I go forgetting my manners. First, we order, and then we cross. Since ADA Onatopp has already partaken, somewhat, she will not need to repast with us. She can just stand there and wait.”

Supermodel Marisa Miller embodies Jeff Bridges in the movie R.I.P.D. She’s his avatar. Likewise, here. ADA Onatopp is the avatar of Madame Wu. Mondo finds this forced servitude of Onatopp by Wu to be quite the sexual turn-on, on par with any clothed lesbian mutual masturbation scene straight out of one of those trashy provocative 1950’s WIP movies that the Vampire so loves to watch on lazy Sunday afternoons.

The boxing analogy, and there’s always one where Mondo is concerned, involves one of her all-time favorite pugilists, Paulie “The Magic Man” Malignaggi. Paulie Malignaggi: Almost Great. Paulie has limited power, but he is undeniably an elite boxer. And, statistically speaking, Paulie has the best jab in boxing: he throws it more than anyone else, and he lands it more than anyone else. In the 6th round of his fight against Zab Judah, Showtime’s stats had Paulie throwing 32 jabs and landing half of them. This is unheard of. Totally absurd, is an even better way to describe it.

He doesn’t have the “best” jab in boxing, but he understands the importance of it and he uses it to his advantage better than almost anyone else. Particularly in the Adrien Broner and Vyacheslav Senchenko fights, Malignaggi was keen to lead with the jab and throw a large arsenal of punches behind it in beautiful combinations.

Paulie looked uncharacteristically old in his first defense against Pablo Cesar Cano, but then came out against Adrien Broner as a heavy underdog and once more did what he always does. Although he dropped a split, critics and armchair fans alike ignorantly

called it “the performance of his lifetime.” Not really – it was just standard Paulie. He most recently went into the Judah fight as a slight underdog, because for some reason people still didn’t understand that, unless you’re a relentless come-forward fighter like Hatton or Cotto, or a lightning-fast, voluminous puncher like Amir Khan, Paulie Malignaggi will outbox you. And, yes, Broner did deservedly win, but Broner does “seem” to be a special talent as much as that pains many to say, because he’s also a terrible human being and Paulie did outbox Broner for most of the fight. So Paulie outboxed Judah for every minute of the twelve rounds and has maybe finally got some credit.

It’s kind of interesting to think that if Paulie was able to add a little sting to his shots, then very few people at Welterweight would be able to mess with him. However, whilst it may be interesting it’s also pointless to speculate, so instead let’s proceed to assess the reality of Paulie’s situation, and look at his options. 147 is probably boxing’s most dangerous division, right now. He’s said he wants the winner of the Broner-Maidana fight, but this is a big risk. He would easily outbox Maidana, because although Maidana is a come-forward fighter like Hatton and Cotto, Maidana falls a few steps short of their greatness: Maidana doesn’t have Hatton’s footwork or Cotto’s clinical accuracy. On the other hand, if Broner beats Maidana then Broner would beat Malignaggi too, only more decisively this second time around. Why, decisively? Because. Broner would be properly settled into the division, would have more 12 round experiences, and probably wouldn’t so foolishly underestimate Malignaggi again.

Humans have pit bulls, Vampires have Werewolves, and Dragons have their 456. Plus, Madame Wu is the Vampire’s elder and this venue is totally the Dragon’s. There is nothing in the Lost’s favor. She has her back to the wall, and is between the proverbial rock and a hard place. So, Mondo is the one with the limited power who must make expert use of her jab, so to speak. And her jab has to be characterized by high quality as well as high volume.

What’s a girl to do? The lazy-suzan in the center of the table manifests itself with mouthwatering appetizers—finger Food so fresh that it’s still moving. The Vampire’s response is? A smile that always bespeaks of loathing and disdain even though that is not its wearer’s intent paints the face of this evil harpy – a large, ugly, curved mouth, with downturned corners, is now even more unbecoming. The Dragon has offered an olive branch of sorts. All is not lost—forward into the breach. Mondo audibly crosses and uncrosses her flawless legs underneath the table. The Madame Wu smiles in response to the salaciously sound of bare, creamy-white flesh sliding across bare, creamy-white flesh.

Even with blonde hair, very blonde hair, very yellow blonde hair, bright electric acid-dipped blonde hair, Mondo’s ultra-flaxen tresses fail to soften her “hard” features one iota. This of course makes our favorite bloodsucker so comely and captivating to Madame Wu. Such a harsh feminine countenance this girl has, a hard “pretty” face framed by straight severe hair the color of raw wheat—a diehard bulldyke’s wet dream, in undead flesh—the complete and utter antithesis of the wholesome looking girl next door—the unliving embodiment, the epitome of a dyed-in-the-wool misandrist’s all-encompassing two-legged erotic fantasy—a typical leading lady in “roughies,” especially those of noted sexploitation directors Doris Wishman and Russ Meyer, *Lorna* (1964) by Russ Meyer is widely considered to be the first roughie.

Of course, Madame Wu is neither a bulldyke nor is she a practitioner of misandry in any way, shape, or form; misandry being that hatred or intense dislike of males of any persuasion. Misandry can be manifested in numerous ways that have their parallel in misogyny including sexual discrimination, denigration of males, violence against males, and sexual objectification of males. Ms. Warrentta Farrell has written of how males are uniquely marginalized in what this leading feminist and out of the closet lesbian calls their “disposability,” the manner in which the most dangerous of societies’ jobs throughout history, particularly soldiering, have been left for males to perform. Of course, the male counterpart of misandry is misogyny: the hatred or intense dislike of females of any persuasion. The antonym of misandry is philandry: the love or fondness of males of any persuasion.

Sexploitation, or “sex-exploitation,” describes a class of independently produced, low-budget feature films generally associated with the 1960s, and serving largely as a vehicle for the exhibition of non-explicit sexual situations and gratuitous nudity. The genre is a subgenre of exploitation films. Sexploitation films were generally exhibited in urban grindhouse theatres, the precursor to the adult movie theatres of the ‘70s and ‘80s that featured hardcore content. The term soft-core is often used to designate non-explicit sexploitation films after the general legalization of hardcore content. Nudist films are often considered to be subgenres of the sex-exploitation genre as well. “Nudie” films and “Nudie-cuties” are associated genres. Nudie cuties have been largely supplanted by “roughies,” which commonly feature male or female violence against women or men, including kidnapping, rape, and murder.

And considering Madame Wu’s well-known proclivities, it’s no wonder that things are playing out more and more like a vintage roughie. Mondo’s hair yanks up and back into a sternka, baring her knobb. Prudz glove her hands; hands which klaw when idle. Akin to the very unbecoming way that Madame Wu always wears makeup, her makeup becomes appropriately stilted and heavily applied. The finishing touch is when Mondo slips on those dowdy sternns of hers. Madame Wu audibly sighs!

Madame Wu leans forward ever so little, quite subtly in fact, and the two girls lock glances for a very long time, and no one dares interrupt their prolonged stare. When they do break their look lock, the food has been served and everybody else seated at the table is already eating. ADA Onatopp is still just standing there waiting for the proceedings to begin at Madame Wu’s behest.

Just standing there, Madame Wu’s avatar, ADA Onatopp is no hapless woman-in-peril, though. Nor should she ever be mistaken for one in any situation.

There is more than a hint of cold-calculation on the part of the three female principals involved—they exude it in spades. Madame Wu, ADA Onatopp, and Mondo Kane are “thinking” women—the “slide rule” jockey type who you never want to cross swords with. Never underestimate them because of their looks—mere sexual objectification, at your own risk. None are harmless harpies. All are capable of populating a given situation with evil intent, as well as murderous intent in the case of Madame Wu and Mondo.

And above and beyond that. Never underestimate the guile of any female, most especially that of a full-grown woman. Women are not called the deadliest of the species any species frivolously or lightly or without due cause. Mortal males have the distinct

advantage of being physically stronger than their female counterparts—it's their saving grace, their ace in the hole, in many ways their sole defense against a competing female's superior cunning. Alas. Supernatural males have no such advantage.

Then Mondo kicks it up several notches, with the intent of fine-tuning the appeal of her look. As if to punctuate her own well-deserved reputation for perversion and penchant for inspired fetishism, the shrew lets her hair back down—inspired no doubt by the severe hairdo of female members, e.g., Talia Winters of the PSI Corps of Earth Alliance in the Babylon 5 universe. Think: Lorna Maitland's measurements were 42D-22-36; she was three months pregnant during the two-week *Lorna* shoot, which augmented her already very large breasts. Sternka giving way to strait hair has a similar effect on augmenting the severity of a face that's already pegging the dominatrix scale. Employing a coy usage of head movement, of which she's quite adept; Mondo gives teasing glimpses of her creepy knob to keep the hook well baited. ADA Onatopp's nethers moisten; likewise for Madame Wu. Give them a taste of shrew à la spinster: strait gives way sternka, and add sternns for good measure. Then kick them in the balls for effect: sternka abdicates, strait returns, makeup stays put stilted and heavy. It's the often razor-thin distinction between a confidential secretary and a private one, although the titles are used interchangeably—there is a difference, as Mondo has so aptly demonstrated, although that was not her primary intent.

What about sternns delete? She's still toying with the idea. They don't get pursed, for now. Nor do her prudz. To reiterate: private vs. confidential secretary. Besides, she's made note of the fact that Madame Wu is wearing old-fashioned nose pinchers for eye glasses and gloved with prudz.

“You have stated to me that no one killed Ricky in your opinion, Vampire. But before we start in earnest with your what-if. Let's make this ‘exercise’ official, and dispense with even the appearance of impropriety. Ergo, this is no longer an obvious sham, for my benefit. I hereby ‘permit’ the humans to have what they wish, a proper legal proceeding. I declare myself, my family, my restaurant staff, my House, and my associations to be impartial non-indigenous supernatural parties in this matter. And, furthermore, I am the ‘neutral,’ if that's agreeable to all parties concerned.”

A CCTV feed materializes near the table. It broadcasts the proceedings into the chambers of Judge Cahill the associated human judge. Present in the judge's chambers are Judge Cahill a human and his court clerk who is likewise mundane. Obviously, Madame Wu as neutral is agreeable to all parties concerned.

As the various dishes are partaken, by Madame Wu and our Miss Kane, ADA Onatopp's part of the cross begins upon a seemingly casual gesture from Madame Wu.

“Discuss why you, Miss Kane, dismissed Ricky McCormick's criminal associates as responsible for his death.”

Madame Wu smiles at ADA Onatopp's reference to the Vampire as Miss Kane. She likes that usage. It fits her intended use of the Dead girl.

“They're much too direct for such a methodology.”

“Don't you mean stupid, Miss Kane?” asks Madame Wu, no longer referring to Mondo as Vampire.

“I meant what I said. Direct is not the same as stupid. For example, Goons are very direct in their murderous intent. In their Business, you murder someone to make an example out of them for purely business reasons. There is nothing stupid about their methodology; it’s quite sophisticated, in fact.”

“Please continue, Miss Kane.”

Madame Wu and ADA Onatopp will continue to tag team Mondo. But whoever is executing the cross, Mondo is always careful to look ADA Onatopp dead in the eyes when she’s giving her answer. After all, this is a human proceeding, albeit in a Dragon context. And, as such, there was no need for Mondo to swear in before giving her testimony, because she is supernatural and therefore “bound” to tell the truth.

“I don’t know if Ricky McCormick’s associates are stupid in their usage, but their usage is quite direct. If this death was murder, it was anything but direct. It speaks of circumvention of forensics on par with that of how Were murder.”

“Are you capable of murdering in this way; this Were way of misdirection?”

“Yes.”

“Continue. And. Give us your expert opinion on the murderous IQ of Ricky’s associates based upon your study in connection with this case of their past known crimes. Not conjecture on your part, just your expert opinion.”

“Their murder IQ is very low, to non-existent.”

“Now let’s discuss the involvement of Werewolves in Ricky McCormick’s death.”

“No.”

“Why, Miss Kane?”

“It’s immaterial.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“How so?”

“I believe in that manila envelope you’re holding is irrefutable proof of why any Were involvement is immaterial.”

It’s ADA Onatopp’s turn to smile broadly. And she does so. Skillfully, she’s steered Mondo’s testimony in such a way that she can now introduce evidence that would otherwise be prohibited. With supernaturals involved and national security at stake, and this being a closed door proceeding and all, ADA Onatopp must serve as council for the defense and the prosecution. This is not the first time that ADA Onatopp has been pressed into special service.

“Before we discuss that, let’s discuss Ricky McCormick’s cryptic note. Is it a code dead?”

“No.”

“Proof?”

“I need detectives Eddie Dean Kent and Samantha Teri Lane for that.”

All of the goings-on in the restaurant are suddenly apparent to detectives Eddie Dean Kent and Samantha Teri Lane. The same can now be said of officers Buggy Nova and Sara Del Rey.

“Continue.”

“They will confirm my suspicion that under expert scrutiny back at the police lab Ricky McCormick’s original note, which was borrowed from the FBI, and the copy in police possession are identical in the ordinary sense of the word.”

“The court acknowledges this conformation of ordinariness, and accepts the notarized statements of Detective Eddie Dean Kent and his partner Detective Samantha Teri Lane into evidence, after said detectives are sworn in and they testify to the same.”

The detectives are sworn in and testify that the two notes are identical in the ordinary sense of the word, and that they were present when the test was done by the lab tech, Riley Jensen. In Judge Cahill’s chambers, Riley enters, is sworn in, and confirms the results of the tests. Of course the government official, with legit credentials from an agency that the judge has never heard of before, who’s also present in the judge’s chambers has no challenge to Riley’s expertise, nor does he ask for Riley to leave the room after his testimony is given. Neither the judge nor his clerk wonders why—they can fill in the blanks on their own—in the interest of protecting national security and under the threat of being charged with treason if they don’t, both of them have signed confidentiality agreements supplied by the aforementioned government official. Of course, all of the notes the clerk is taking will be confiscated, marked Top Secret, and sealed.

Once the detectives finished testifying, they disappeared, materializing downtown at police headquarters.

ADA Onatopp removes the two notes from her envelope, allows Mondo to compare, and then returns the copy to said envelope.

“Your conclusion is?”

“The two notes are identical in the ordinary sense of the word, as I suspected.”

She allows Mondo the original.

“Please read the note from here, that line, to, there.”

“I’m dying. I can feel it. I hope Beegie makes it there in time. I don’t want to die alone, there. There is where I want to die.”

“As you can see, the copy is abridged. The lines you just read are only in original. Nevertheless, they the original and the copy are identical in the ordinary sense of the word. In the interest of national security, all copies of Ricky McCormick’s note are deletions—obfuscation would have proved, at the very least, ‘indelicate,’ I dare say even indiscreet.”

ADA Onatopp returns the original to said envelope.

“Miss Kane, what is a code dead?”

“It’s an anti-life equation. If that’s what Ricky McCormick had stumbled on accidentally in the course of writing his note, he had written an anti-life; then he would have died. But because you can make an identical copy of his note, his note cannot be a code dead.”

The fact that the two police officers Bugs and Sara have not been removed, speaks volumes of who they have connections with. Like Riley, they too must be with some government intelligence agency, secret or otherwise.

Idiot savants have been known to stumble on “profound” things by pure chance—secrets of Creation kind of things. For that reason, governments watch them closely; carefully and surreptitiously scrutinizing their output. Obviously, Ricky McCormick stumbled on such a thing or maybe even things, which explains why certain portions of the original are not in the copies and why Mondo was allowed to read only a certain portion of the original. That doesn’t explain why the lines that Mondo read in “court” were deleted.

“So far. None of this, Miss Kane, proves that Miss Beegie Leslee Thomas-Adair is innocent of wrongdoing or that Ricky was not murdered. What else in that manila envelope provides that proof? And how did you legally obtain said evidence?”

Not to quibble about details, but it was ADA Onatopp’s code dead tangent that delayed Mondo’s discussion about said proof. Mondo doesn’t take Madame Wu to task about this; discretion being the better part of valor in this situation.

Beegie prefers to be called “Ms.,” but she knows better than to correct Madame Wu; once again, discretion being the better part of valor in this situation.

“The proof is footage of Ricky McCormick’s death taken by a spy satellite.”

A triumphant ADA Onatopp is finally allowed by Mondo’s disclosure to produce detailed photos of that fateful night and introduce them as evidence. She allows Mondo to inspect the photos. Then she hands them to Dwayne and Beegie for their inspection, before finally returning them to Mondo’s hands. Both Dwayne and Beegie gasp at what is revealed in the Polaroids, and realize why they were allowed to see them.

“My phone, Phone, obtained raw footage for me. It maps to the ‘processed’ photos that you are showing me.”

“What do you mean by processed? Do you mean doctored?”

“No, I mean processed. The snaps are legit. They are obviously the result of some type of top secret, hi-tech photographic process. Unclassified tech indigenous to your world cannot record Were, either visually or audibly. But, as you can see in the photos, you can clearly see Miss Thomas-Adair with Ricky McCormick, both in her human form and later as her Wolf. At no time is she shown doing anything nefarious to Ricky McCormick. He appears to have just died. There is no evidence of anyone killing him.”

“In your expert opinion as an experienced murderer, not speculating. People do just die, don’t they?”

“It happens. Not common. But, it does happen.”

“Describe this process, used in the footage supplied by the government, from what your research has uncovered.”

“I cannot. I don’t know what the process entails. Nor did I have any foreknowledge of the process’ existence. This is my first time seeing the processed snaps. As I have stated before, I previously had access to raw footage only to formulate my conclusions. I had surmised from careful scrutiny of those raw snaps, using some predictive modeling algorithms and discrete extrapolation techniques, that someone else and later someone’s Wolf were also in the company of Ricky McCormick while he died. The processed footage shows Miss Thomas-Adair as being one in the same: that unknown person the someone else and that unidentified Wolf the someone’s Wolf, which I had deduced from the raw footage.”

“By what legal means did you obtain your classified raw footage?”

“A clause in the off-world treaty between your universe and mine, allows me to obtain state secrets by any means necessary as long as it’s ‘for just cause,’ said discoveries are not subsequently used against the legitimate government in question, I refrain from unauthorized disclosure of said secrets, and I detail to said government the means by which I obtained those secrets so that the aggrieved government can prevent their future violation by those means.”

Under oath, the government official in Judge Cahill’s chambers affirms that Mondo did just that.

“Neither Ms. Thomas-Adair nor the other Weres involved are found to be culpable nor are they found libel. The state drops its motion against them, waves any further criminal action, and injuncts any future civil action by any party against them.”

“Ricky McCormick’s death remains unsolved.”

“Court is adjourned.”

The CCTV fades away, along with ADA Onatopp and officers Buggy Nova and Sara Del Rey. ADA Onatopp materializes at the DA’s office. Officers Buggy Nova and Sara Del Rey materialize by their police cruiser.

“Shaking my hand, that was your only mistake—you’re not supposed to make any unnecessary physical contact with ‘another.’ But you had to, for some unknown reason that completely escapes me.”

Dwayne starts to say something, but Madame Wu waves him off. This is between Mondo and Beegie, and it’s Mondo who has fired the first salvo.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“You’re me in this universe. You’re one of my alternates.”

Too late, Dwayne realizes that he’s been used. You can see it in his eyes. He believed in her Beegie’s innocence; so did the others. He was so sold on Mondo’s guilt.

Beegie decides to stop playing dumb. Why not? She got away with cold-blooded murder, scot-free.

“And I think of you as one of mine. I just had to touch you, flesh on flesh. You obviously don’t understand why; doubt I could explain it to you.”

“I can cipher how to kill any person, place, or thing. Yours, on the other hand, appears to be the more ‘closet’ talent.”

“Closet, what?” Beegie smiles, as she asks mockingly.

“That style to kill someone and, even under the closet scrutiny, make it look like they just died. I don’t know how you did it; I just know you did it.”

“You said no one killed Ricky McCormick.”

“And ‘no one’ did.”

“Who is ‘no one?’”

Finally someone has asked the right question, albeit the guilty party, asking it rhetorically.

“You are ‘no one.’”

“You got all this from merely touching me?”

“Yep. But, since I divined it via supernatural means, it was not of course admissible in a human courtroom; hence, my response of ‘no one.’ Judicially speaking, I expressed myself truthfully, per the letter of the law, which was all that was required of me. If the court didn’t pay enough attention to my dictation and confused ‘no one’ with *no one*, that’s clearly not my fault. I never lied in my testimony; I just choose my words carefully. If ADA Onatopp had been as slick a prosecutor as she was a defense attorney, she might have noticed that, and that might have been enough of a tipoff and things might have gone differently for you.”

“Thanks. I’ll know to wear gloves next time, when I shake the hands of my other alternates. Better yet, as you so well advised, I’ll avoid all unnecessary physical contact with them. Of course, I’m quite familiar with the ‘no unnecessary physical contact’ caveat, but what I was unaware of was just how much you can reveal of yourself to the ‘other’ when you violate it—heavy duty ramifications, indeed. What’s most interesting about that though is that it seems to have been a one-way street, as I learned nothing of you. There must be some trick to it, that I don’t know and you do?”

Mondo continues to display her prowess, revealing even more of what was revealed to her via a mere handshake. Her casual use of such virtuosity “disturbs” Beegie somewhat—maybe this one will not prove to be the soft touch that Beegie initially thought that she would be. “*Maybe this one is an abomination like I am, if so that would explain an awful lot*”: Beegie thinks.

“As for killing all the others, that won’t make you The One. It’s been tried before—proved to be nothing more than an urban legend. It doesn’t work.”

“Thanks for the advice, I’m well aware of that past failure, but I’d rather try for myself anyways. Cause you never know; I might prove to be the exception.”

“I hope whatever they’re promising you is worth it.”

“*Impossible!!! She grafted about our deal, as well!!! Worse, she’s implying that the dog is also in cahoots with the humans!!!*” That stray thought is Madame Wu’s.

“Maybe you should worry more about your own well-being, just saying.”

“I’ve never been one to worry.”

“You’re looking a little peaked, these days. Coming down with something? Cold? Flu? Nervous condition? Lost your nerve? Maybe I should look you up and see how you’re doing.”

“I’m in the phone book. I’m not hard to find.”

Mondo purses her sternns. Beegie totally misses the significance of the gesture. Mondo is discreetly asking Madame Wu to decide: me or her, you have to choose.

“You might be biting off more than you can chew?”

“I was just thinking the same thing, about you, in passing. Too bad for you that petite doesn’t work on protected humans or supernaturals. So, you’d have to do me the old-fashioned way.”

Maybe it’s what she’s been saying such in-depth information plumbed from a single handshake or how she’s been saying it in the cavalier manner that one killer speaks to another killer who they perceive as their lesser in the “art” of murder or maybe it’s both.

But, whichever it is. Mondo finally hits a nerve.

“Stuck up, bitch!!! My talent is nothing so trivial as that!!! I can kill in any style, indistinguishable from even its most virtuoso practitioners, just like you can!!! I can kill protected humans!!! I can kill supernaturals!!! I can kill you!!!”

Thanks for confirming what I had already guessed. I just needed you to say it out loud mouth in front of Madame Wu.

Madame Wu raises an eyebrow: just the reaction that Mondo was looking for.

“Anyone can be killed, no matter the precautions employed, if someone is determined to kill them.”

That’s when Beegie realizes that she’s been had. Even a fish can’t be caught, if it doesn’t open its mouth.

“Please put your glasses on, Miss Kane. I find you much more attractive, that way.”

Mondo obeys Madame Wu, and does as she is told. She slips her sternns back on.

“Miss Thomas-Adair, your services will henceforth be no longer needed. Consider all agreements with us null and void. Good luck in your future endeavors with the humans.”

Before Beegie can get in the last word, Madame Wu gestures and Beegie fades away.

“Hopefully, Miss Kane, you will be more discreet than your predecessor, Miss Thomas-Adair. You will begin in the morning with your *hostess* training. Sue-Ling and Jung-Li the Taiwan Amazons will do their best to ensure that your services should prove adequate, for my needs. You will speak only when you are told to and you will dress the way you are now, while you are in my service. How you are off-duty is not of my concern.”

Madame Wu gestures. Mondo and Dwayne fade away.

They materialize in his apartment.

Here's a double dose of drive-in depravity with two kinky classics from producer David F. Friedman! "Scum of the Earth!" (1963, 68 min.) - Trying to earn money for college, wholesome cutie Kim (Vickie Miles) is sucked into the degenerate world of the dirty picture racket when she agrees to model for the "Scum of the Earth" in this film from cult director Herschell Gordon Lewis. Under the tutelage of a sleazy photographer, Kim is soon posing topless before being blackmailed into appearing in raunchier shots, which led to a police raid, two murders, and suicide. "The Defilers" (1965, 63 min.) are two hedonistic young men who, just for kicks, abduct a sexy blonde (Mai Jansson) as their own personal sex toy. Directed by R. Lee Frost (Love Camp 7), this shattering story of the shameless is downright nasty but you can't look away.

Dwayne is more than a little put out by the whole affair. The way Beegie acted, it's as if she were human. All he can do is mope around, instead of giving Beegie her just kudos. He and Mondo living together as bohemians in the posh Central west End, daily fucking Mondo that hedonistic bloodsucker of his, have not put a dent in his sour demeanor.

Mondo being Mondo just accepts things for what they are, and has moved on with her life as Madame Wu's newest hostess. Her days are spent lazy seated outside the Coffee Cartel sipping chocolate malts made from French vanilla ice cream—Beegie no longer works there; that dog has disappeared off the map, no one seems to know where Beegie has gone. Seven days a week, her nights of course are spent working at Guo Bin. Off-duty or on, Mondo does her schoolmarm look, the uber harsh one that Madame Wu gets so very wet over.

A month into playing house with Dwayne, she drops by ADA Onatopp's office downtown late one night after her shift is over at Guo Bin. Except for the cleaning crew and the night watchman, she and Onatopp are the only ones in the building.

"You've been drinking."

"You ought to see me in an hour. I'll be really plastered by then."

"You're worse than Dwayne, still out of sorts over Beegie."

"That bitch got away with murder, and that doesn't bother you a bit, does it?"

"Nope."

"Fuck you!"

"I'd love for you to."

"I helped her get acquitted."

"Unwittingly, yes."

"And, for you, your duplicity is just water off a duck back?! Unfeeling harlot!!!"

"Look, you keep this up and you're going to lose your job. Or worse. You'll get deemed a security risk and get a Jimmy Hoffa done on you."

Onatopp lunges at Mondo, scratching wildly at the air like a crazed alley cat. She ends up on the floor of her office in a slobbering heap. Onatopp was far more drunk than she knew.

She wakes up in her apartment, undressed, in her bra and panties. Mondo made sure that she got home in a cab, and that no one saw them leave the office building with her in such an inebriated condition. Thanks to the Vampire, they entered Onatopp's apartment building just as surreptitiously. Onatopp promptly passed out once they entered her apartment.

Onatopp's stomach begins to churn and twist violently. She reaches the toilet just in time, and pukes her gut out.

"Very good. Worshipping your porcelain goddess. Get used to it."

Onatopp wipes her vomit smeared mouth with the back of her hand. She's red-faced, enraged.

"Bitch! What did you do to me?!"

"I gave you something. For the next year, maybe more, when you try to do your guilt trip in a bottle routine, you'll end up on your knees, puking your guts out."

For a fleeting moment, Onatopp thinks about belting the Vampire. Reason takes hold and she thinks better of it. Onatopp calms down and stands up on very shaky legs. Mondo hands her a clean, wet towel and she cleans herself up. Onatopp steadies herself—the shakes finally pass.

"You got balls; I'll give you that."

"Don't worry; you can still drink socially, but no more drowning your sorrows in a bottle."

"Why do you care what I do with my life?"

"I like you."

Onatopp chuckles. The mood lightens, appropriately.

"Is this your sly way of playing up to me by showing me your sensitive side? One of your sneaky lesbian tricks to get me in your bed?"

"I don't have a sensitive side."

"Why does that not surprise me?"

"Also. I'm not a lesbian, I'm omnisexual, and you're straight. I'm willing, you're not. Never the twain shall meet. Your loss."

"I'll survive."

While Onatopp changes into something clean and more comfortable, Mondo fixes them a late-night snack of cold cuts. They retire to the dining room and eat. They get cozy over a bottle of wine, after the meal on the sofa. Onatopp doesn't get sick. Mondo is a woman of her word, Onatopp can still engage in social drinking.

“In my world, my universe as you humans would call it, you are an Elf named Perry Mason. Actually. Her name is Felicity Mason. Friends of the Elf nick her Perry—Perry Mason the famous Gotham City lawyer. When the Corps isn’t yanking the reservist’s chain, Fel is a junior partner with the prestigious law firm of Cohn, Wesley, Ross, & Finkle.”

“My alternate is Attorney Felicity Mason, an Elf, correct?”

“Yes.”

“Which Corps?”

“USCMC.”

“Which stands for, what?”

“United States Colonial Marine Corps.”

“I’m in the military?!”

“She is.”

“Wow! That’s a hoot.”

“As you can guess, she’s a defense attorney, and a damn good one.”

“Was she born human and made?”

“I don’t know.”

“Translation: you know, but you won’t tell me.”

Mondo sidesteps the conversation and steers into another conversation entirely.

“You’re a good kid. You just had a stumble and needed a nudge. You felt sorry for Ricky; poor fated imbecile got duped into thinking that Beegie really cared about him. And she probably did have some feelings for him, but Food is Food, nonetheless.”

“Your kind can never be trusted.”

“No we can’t. It always comes back to that cautionary about the scorpion and the frog. We are predatory, by nature.”

“You always betray us in the end. You’ll betray me.”

“Yes I will, just not in the way that you’re expecting.”

Onatopp doesn’t push her to elaborate. A wise move since Mondo wouldn’t if she was foolish enough to ask. Instead she chooses to not squander this very golden opportunity. Looks and brains, a formidable combination indeed, especially when possessed by a woman like Onatopp.

“You didn’t look surprised when I asked you to read the note in court. Poker face or had you’d assumed that we had been fully briefed about your considerable linguistic capabilities.”

“The latter. But, why ask what you’ve already surmised?”

“Because I just had to hear you say it, which I’m sure you don’t understand. We’re so much alike, to be so different. I look the other way, try to be smart and not wear my crusading heart on my sleeve, but then those cases come along from time to time like Ricky’s and I get suckered in again. I know that Justice is blind. I’m a big girl, all grown up, a consummate professional.”

“But you’re still human and you have feelings, and deep down you felt sorry for Ricky, and because of that you wanted his killer brought to justice and pay for what they had done even more than your usual advocacy on behalf of a victim – and that speaks volumes because you’re quite the zealot about such things—that’s what makes you such a crackerjack prosecutor. Deep down, partiality aside, you felt that Beegie was getting a raw deal and was getting railroaded, and truth be told, she was. And you wanted justice for her too. You wanted her guilt or innocence determined by due process based on the evidence—that’s what makes you such a star defense attorney. But. The fix was in.”

“Because someone knew that she was guilty, but couldn’t prove it by ordinary means. I see that now, but couldn’t then. If I had, I would have used you differently on the stand.”

Mondo shrugs her shoulders, which drives Onatopp peanuts to no end.

“Truth be told, being the kind of person that you are, had you known you still would have tried the case the same way, you would have just had different emotions about Beegie being acquitted.”

“Are you that pragmatic, that practical, that unfeeling, that totally devoid of empathy, that?!!!”

“I’m that cold. And, no, I won’t facilitate your fall from grace by killing Beegie for you. I can’t be bribed, even if you offered me your body as hard currency.”

“I wish I could kill her myself.”

“That’s self-righteous foolishness talking, fueled by anger; your anger at yourself for being instrumental in aiding and abetting a clod-blooded murderer. Then again you don’t have the skills to kill her anyways.”

Onatopp stands up, steps around the coffee table, and begins to nervously pace the room—nervous agitation, not a case of nerves. This broad is tough.

“What else?”

“Like all heroes. You’ve got a conscious, and it wouldn’t let you live with yourself if you avenged yourself on Beegie that way, whether you contracted the job or you were able to somehow accomplish it yourself. But like I said, the latter is out of the question, because you don’t have the skills; you’ve got the balls, though.”

“So I just learn to live with it?”

“You will, in the end. Like I said, you just needed a nudge in the right direction.”

“Because you like me?”

“Yes.”

“But given you dithers; you’d still eat me in a New York minute?”

“Bon appetite.”

“Because as you’ve so aptly stated: Food is Food.”

“Correct.”

“Did you feel me up while I was unconscious?”

“Nope.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“Well, I find that hard to believe considering.”

“I did not fondle, feel you up, sodomize you, take any liberties with you in any way, shape, or form. Nor would I ever rape you, no matter how much I know I would enjoy doing just that—violent, sick, nasty rape.”

“But you’re not a nice person. You’re far worse than bad—Beegie was bad. You’re fucking evil.”

“Yes, but even evil people do nice things. I’m not some one-dimensional villain in a movie or a comic book. I’m a real person. I rape, torture, murder, etc. for pure sexual gratification, I’ve just not chosen to do any of those things to you nor will I.”

“And then there is ROE, those rules of yours, you supernaturals have, that y’all are supposed to follow.”

Mondo smiles at Onatopp’s deft usage. The girl is milking her like a dairy farm.

“Which I follow.”

“But. Only when it suits you?”

“Now, that would be telling. I won’t make it that easy for you. You prove otherwise.”

“Okay, hypothetically speaking, you follow ROE only when it suits you, and even then you only do the letter of the law, never the spirit. And, if you were ever caught engaging in divergent behavior for which the penalty was death, you would just accept your fate feeling no remorse whatsoever. And I’m talking real gone—death you wouldn’t resurrect from.”

“Hypothetically speaking. Yes.”

Mondo’s smile grows even broader.

“You know your way around my apartment. Yet, I’ve never had you over.”

“I keep tabs on you.”

“You didn’t answer my question.”

“You didn’t ask one.”

Onatopp sits back on the sofa, this time comfortably close—it’s a ploy, not a play, nothing else—as aforementioned, she digs guys, not chicks. She’s decided to throw her hat in the deep end.

“I’ll bet you’ve snuck into my apartment at night without my knowledge, stood over my bed, and stared at me while I was asleep, fantasizing about fucking me. Knowing what’s in your dossier, the redacted version that my security clearance allows me access to, I can only shudder merely speculating about the degenerative things that you must have done to me in your head. Those sick fantasies you entertained of me being with you—twisted bitch that you are. Violent rape, torture, degradation, disfigurement, maiming, and death, over and over again. You doing me and me doing you.”

Mondo stands up, yawns, and casually stretches her arms. Game over, for now. It’s been fun. Time to go.

“Mind Games 101. To be continued another time. At least you’re acting like your old self again. The drinking makes you look weak. And I don’t like weak women; I just use them, which is NEVER good for their continued good health or well-being.”

“I can say without a doubt that there are an infinite number of universes. Some are just like ours, but for one or two significant events, exactly the same.” - Lex Luthor

“I deeply regret my actions of the last month. They have reflected badly upon not only me as a professional but upon this most august office and my cherished colleagues. Y’all desire better. This lapse in judgment on my part, which falls squarely on my shoulders, will NEVER happen again.”

She’s surrounded by a small group of people composed of the person she works for her boss, The Iron Lady: Margaret Thatcher, the DA and the people she works with her co-workers that are her peers which, by definition, excludes her boss, in the main briefing room. When she called this impromptu early morning meeting, her boss had feared the worst, based upon her recent erratic totally out of character behavior: a resignation from ADA Onatopp. Instead, much to DA Thatcher’s glee, what the prosecutor’s office was greeted by was the Xenia Onatopp that they all have come to know, love, and respect; an Onatopp with a heartfelt apology. For the past month, since the Ricky McCormick case, Onatopp had not been herself. People in the office had covered for her best that they could, but if her deviant behavior had continued much longer unabated, the integrity of the current cases that she was working would have been threatened. Something had to be done, and it looked like DA Margaret Thatcher was going to have to fire and have disbarred the rising star of the prosecutor’s office, then overnight seemingly out of the blue, Onatopp’s despair over the outcome of the Ricky McCormick case was gone.

Yes. It was the ipecac-based nanomachine concoction that Mondo administered to Onatopp last night that did sober her up toot sweet yes, again that corrupt American usage of the French “tout de suite” and left her with a prohibition for nothing more than social drinking for at least a year. But, it was Onatopp herself, her sheer force of will, the strength of her own “iron” character that pulled her literally up by the bootstraps from the verge of professional and personal self-destruction, and self-imposed oblivion. No one else can save you from yourself; only you can do that—strength of character—the mentally tough prevail whilst the weak willed fail. You just have to be strong willed, your own person, to succeed in life no matter the universe.

The liquor in the desk drawer in her office: gone. The liquor at home: gone, except for the fine wine for social drinking. No matter how much she empathized with Ricky McCormick and no matter how much she regrets being an unwitting assistant to that pitiful young man's murderer, what's done is done. And, to that end she must, and has, moved on with her life.

Yes, she was awash in celebration when the case had been decided the way that she thought it should have been. Caulk another one in the win column. The good guys, truth and justice, had prevailed again under her watch. Then the tragic aftermath: the truth came out and as a result of the revelation that she'd been duped into letting the guilty get off scot-free, her descent into self-flagellation, that plummet into the madness of blame.

When Onatopp looks into Mondo's eyes, she sees pure evil. Yet what that evil bitch did for her, snapping her back to her senses with a much needed wakeup call, was anything but evil. Wisely, Onatopp does not see this as a contradiction nor does she see the Vampire as no less evil, because of this.

She does notice the fundamental change in herself, though. Subsequent to her close brush with evil the Vampire, Mondo Kane, Onatopp now views Ricky McCormick differently. She sees him as a pathetic wretch whose end was partly his own fault. We make our own choices and ultimately we pay our own prices for them. She no longer sees him as someone to be pitied. She no longer sees his tragic life as to have been fated to end in some way like it did irrespective of the choices that he made most especially the person that he choose to turn to for solace that he NEVER should have trusted the least little bit. Maybe it's just a coping mechanism. Maybe it's something more telling and much darker. When you touch evil, it never leaves you cleanly. Some of it always remains. The stain that hardens you to the plight of others, more or less, depending upon your natural inclination toward callousness. The stronger the person, the more callous you become. The strong even in their most sympathetic moments are always hard toward the weak somewhat, more or less, from the git-go.

Exploitation Meister David Friedman was an expert at churning out low-budget skin-flicks and drive-in masterpieces. "She Freak," a classic roughie, has been restored in clear detail and colors and you can see for yourself that Friedman blatantly ripped off Tod Browning's 1931 masterpiece, "Freaks." The movie starts out with promise, giving us glimpses of a real-life carnival, circa 1967. After a very short while, it delivers on that promise in spades, becoming vile, plummeting the movie goer into much anticipated trashy B-movie degeneracy, degradation, and lunacy. There's plenty of skin shown, tons of soft-core sex, and lots of violence and suspense. Claire Brennen stars as a discontent waitress working in a small-town greasy diner, and looking for something more. When the circus comes to town, she finds herself attracted to its excitement - and secures a job with the traveling show. In a scene taken literally from the ending of "Freaks," the devious heroine Claire is transformed into a monster—bad makeup and all.

Dwayne and Mondo are seated at their favorite streetside table at the Coffee Cartel. Their usual lazy, when Beegie comes into sight, dressed in her uniform. Dwayne's hopes are shattered that she had quit or better yet had been done away with somehow by

someone or something. Such is obviously not the case. Beegie is alive and well, and she's begins to smile smugly upon seeing them.

"We need to leave," Dwayne mumbles underneath his breath.

"Why?" Mondo asks, and then she turns around and sees the source of his discontent.

Beegie walks over to their table, order pad in hand.

"Your usual or something special for a change?"

Dwayne says nothing. He's overtly in a huff because of this encounter.

"Our usual."

"Scared I might poison you to get closer to my goal of being The One?"

"Nope."

"It bothers him, your fella, that I'm acting so human, as he would call it, correct?"

"One. He's not my fella. He's my dog. Two. he'll get over it, you acting so human, that is. And three. What he feels about it is his problem, not mine. I on the other hand have no feeling whatsoever about the entire affair."

"Curious, about where I've been?"

"No."

"He has, I'll bet. And if he thought that I was off consolidating my power by killing my dups in other universes, he would be correct."

"We've given you our order. We came here for our usual lazy, not unwanted and your quite boring I might add, chit chat. For humans, as for you, power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

"Don't worry about today being your last. I've decided to save you for last. I'm going to enjoy doing you."

"Like I've previously stated, I'm not worried about you or anyone else killing me. If someone is determined to destroy me, I'm gone. Anyone and anything can be destroyed. Your insurmountable problem is that you'll never get past the others to get to me, not the ones that I know about. Least of all. Not the other, a guy, what's his name, who is even more obsessed than you are about becoming The One. You know how men can be about those kinds of things."

That's when the smile painting Beegie's face gets erased and it's as if it transfers to Dwayne, becoming his. Something else paints her face now.

"My bad, I thought that you knew about him. But from the expression on your face, or more precisely its shock and "extreme" displeasure maybe even worry, it's obvious that you didn't and it's also obvious that you didn't realize that not all of the alternates are female. In the interest of fairness and thus insuring that the playing field is a level one. I think that it's good that you now know about him, since he is aware of your existence—he didn't initially, but I told him about you under the misconception that you knew about him already. That you now know that at least one of the alts is of the male persuasion, and thus the obvious ramifications of this vis-à-vis your shared ambition with him, and

theoretically other like-minded male dups. And, that because he knows of your existence, but not your identity, that he will hitherto remain 'nameless' as far as my lips are concerned."

Mondo's hands stay gloved but her hair lets down into strait hair, her glasses get pursed, and her harsh becoming makeup goes bye-bye.

Beegie walks away in a huff with their order, never to return with their service. Another waiter, Clark Kent, brings them their order, after many lengthy complaints made to the owner Lois Lane by Dwayne. Lois apologizes profusely, and comps their meal.

"Duh. And to think that I wasted my time stewing over the misguided cravings of that divergent Beegie. Why didn't you tell me about?"

"Those others, and that other divergent, the guy you mentioned, in particular? You didn't ask. Besides you should've ever bothered to stew."

"About her, anyways. Yes. You're correct."

"Learned your lesson?"

"Yes."

"Now, dig in. You know the hamburgers here are positively to die for; on par with those at the Goody Goody Diner."

"Pass the Heinz?"

"Of course, silly dog."

They share a laugh and a kiss. After, the Heinz gets passed, of course.

The End