

The Various Adventures of Monkey Boy

Part 2: “Tiger and Space”

By Anders Fischer

There is a prophecy, a prophecy that tells of chaos and ruin, of calamities and cataclysms, of the very end of the earth and the rise of nightmares. It was inscribed in eons past by a tribe whose name has long since vanished from history. But what is known – or rather suspected from knowledge carried through the ages by rumors and whispers and hushed ghost stories told on winters’ nights – is that they were an arcane and mystical lot. They infused cosmic forces into simple stones, bent the very fabric of the universe to peer through time and summoned the heavens down to brighten their homes at night.

But they never did master the art of indoor plumbing, so they all died of salmonella poisoning.

And their knowledge and secrets and history soon vanished with them – destroyed by wildlife and conquistadors and careless tourists – until only one tablet remained, one tablet that held that accursed prophecy of the end times. For centuries, scholars tried to decipher it, but the language of this long-forgotten tribe was indeed complex and any who learned enough of it to speak even one sentence soon forgot their own.

So the tablet found its way into the commercial side of archaeology, making its rounds through the museum circuit so that gawkers could gaze with bemused wonder before marching off to the gift shop to buy a squeaky replica for their dog. But in one museum nestled deep in a city with trees that outshine the moon and where the night harbors predators far more dangerous than wolves, there is one whose interest in the tablet runs deeper than a fleeting desire to placate a pet’s savage instincts.

He is a man with the face of a beast and he lingers in the dark spaces, waiting for the guards to pass him by. He leaps from shadow to shadow and carefully slices through the glass display case with his claws and claims his ancient prize. But the worn stone crumbles to dust in his grasp, its secrets lost forever. And so the man-beast roars a terrible roar that stretches out across the city, silencing the dogs, snuffing out the lights and attracting the guards to grim and unclean ends.



The Canopy Museum of Antiquities was among the most famous in the country, a veritable wealth of arcane memorabilia from nations and kingdoms and civilizations whose names few knew and even fewer could spell. Its high columns and marble walls leant an air of sophistication to a city mired in muck.

But on that night, Detective Alice Malarkey didn’t notice the elegant tapestries or soft lighting or carefully arrayed smatterings of interpreted history; no, she was distracted by sights and smells altogether more morose. The museum floor was like the playroom of a cannibal child and the walls looked as though Jackson Pollock had taken a turn for the macabre.

Alice had been to murder scenes before – more in fact than she could recall – but this... this was the worst one yet. It was a scene of such brutality, of such relentless savagery – with the remains of what probably used to be three separate people tossed so

flippantly about – that even the grizzled and jaded forensics teams had to take a moment to return their suppers to their rightful role in the digestive process.

Alice walked through unease and nausea and shared sickened glances with all she passed. Medics and detectives and one reporter whose penchant for stealth earned him this sight of a vampire's larder – all of them lurched and heaved and considered revisiting their childhood dreams of becoming astronauts.

All but two, that is.

Two figures stood amid the epidemic of disgust and remained stalwartly nonplussed.

One was Detective Dan Malady, Alice's sometime partner, who looked at the carnage like he looked at salad: with complete disinterest. The other was a woman Alice didn't recognize. She stood imposingly tall, dressed formally and neatly with long jet-black hair falling gracefully behind her.

Alice approached the pair, ignored the woman, and asked Dan in between acrid resurgences of every meal she had ever eaten: "What the hell happened here?"

And Dan answered in between casual chomps into his nicotine gum: "Murder."

"Oh, well, that answers that."

"Three guards shredded like cheese for a meat lovers pizza."

"Yeah, but why?"

"Well, if we go strictly by appearances, it would seem to be a wild animal attack," answered the woman in a very proper British accent. "But I never did trust appearances."

She seemed to approach this massacre with an almost naïve enthusiasm – like those young boys in the war movies always looking for their first taste of action – and it put Alice a little on edge. "Who are you?"

"Oh, I'm frightfully sorry, my name is Doctor Celia Heart; I was called in as a sort of consultant to deal with the Sue Jones case."

"He's in jail, case closed," Alice scoffed as she poked around the hall. "And that doesn't explain what you're doing at *this* crime scene."

"Well, I didn't come initially, but when early reports indicated that these men were dismembered by some sort of animal claw, Detective Malady thought I should investigate."

"Yeah, kid, know anybody with a set of claws and the violent predisposition of a drunken cage fighter?"

Alice didn't bother to answer, knowing it best to just let Dan rant. Besides, she took an immediate interest in a particular display case that seemed to be at the eye of the viscera hurricane.

"Now, Detective Malady, there is no evidence yet to suggest this Monkey Boy had anything to do with this disaster. And, given his altruistic debut in the Redwood Mall and his continuing efforts in the Den Street district, there is plenty to give him the benefit of the doubt."

The glass of the case wasn't shattered, but there was a hole in it, carefully carved so as not to damage anything unduly. Inside the case there was only a pile of dust and a few small hairs.

"Did you guys see this?"

"Oh, yes, the case," said the Doctor, "we saw. It belonged to an old relic, referred to quite fancifully as *The Lost Prophecy*."

“And the hair?”

“Fur actually, we gathered some up for DNA analysis. Are you beginning to see my interest in this case, Detective? The display suggests that this wasn’t random, that it had a specific and planned goal. But the ferocity of these murders is well beyond what any human being could achieve. This is animalistic and brutal. Noticing the pattern?”

Alice laughed and started making her way to the exit.

“Listen, Doctor,” she said. “First, humans are perfectly capable of brutality without being Bear Boys or something; just look at any rock concert or bridal expo. Second, Sue Jones wasn’t an animal, he was just some schmuck in a kangaroo costume. And third, I don’t know where you’re getting these ideas, but there is no conspiracy, no underlying connection between these things, and Monkey Boy certainly had nothing to do with this.”

“I don’t assume for a moment that he is to blame, but you must admit this is an odd coincidence. Perhaps he has some insight into what’s happening. I know you know him; your relationship is well-publicized...”

“But exaggerated.”

“If you could take me to him, if I could only just speak to him...”

“Sorry, Doctor, Monkey Boy and I crossed paths only once through coincidence. I haven’t seen him since the mall and I have no idea where to find him now.”



Den Street was known to most as the Caves. It was the part of the city where the predators rested their heads in the day and skulked the shadows at night for prey. It was where the buildings that weren’t condemned should have been and where the people could be similarly classified. Not a window went unbroken, not a wall untagged and not a soul untainted. It was the last street any civil person should tread once the sun faded over the horizon, for the madness and violence of that place would no doubt overtake them in one way or another.

Or so it was said. But the Caves had done a lot in recent years to clean up their image. And as Alice walked their streets, she didn’t see gang war upon gang war, she saw students in bistros that somehow kept their windows intact. Instead of the fires and corpses and scarcely legible threats scrawled in spray paint, she saw posters for a campus production of *The Vagina Monologues*. For those who traveled in groups, it was actually possible to navigate this once-forsaken neighborhood in relative peace. And Alice watched with a tinge of amazement as kids scurried about in an area Dan once described as a “human rabbit warren – filled with rotting fruits and little pellets of shit – that no light would ever touch” laughing, talking on their phones and waving their valuables about without a care in the world.

But Alice also saw – in the darkness-drenched alleyways, the small pockets of shadow and all the places off the well-lit street – the thug and the gangbanger glancing occasionally and pensively toward the innocent masses before them. The coyotes still lived in these Caves and they saw a banquet, but they were cunning enough to wait, to watch as the crowds dispersed and the inevitable loner walked haplessly into their midst. And she feared, as she passed the bistros and the students and walked alone down an empty street, that their prey that night would be her.

She may have been a cop, but what was a single atom against the heart of entropy? No, here and now, she wasn't a detective; she was just a person, alone and unarmed. After all, her gun was stolen not long ago by Sue Jones and deposited in his kangaroo pouch where it disappeared into infinity. So Alice knew as shadows darted across the periphery of her vision and hoots and hisses sounded out from all sides, that all she had in this was herself.

The shouts grew louder, more numerous. No longer simple taunts, they were war cries: savage and unyielding, screaming out across the night with the fury of a wounded demon. And as they reached their fever pitch, as they drowned out the distant traffic and the hum of insects, as they became the only sound in the world, a figure lunged out of an alley and grabbed Alice.

But she threw him off and knocked his head against a nearby lamppost. Another came up behind her and she quickly dissuaded him with a foot to the throat. But more came, a shadow army. The night came alive and seized her, pinning her to the wall and shrilling with murderous glee.

But another scream sounded out above that, smothered it, deafened it: it was a scream of such intensity that it would have shattered all nearby windows were they not already broken. It was a wail of agony and sorrow and rage that paralyzed Alice's assailants and she fought them off as they backed away, covered their ears and tried to stifle the pain. Their eyes and ears bled and they looked to be screaming but made not a sound.

Alice stared awestruck, scarcely noticing as something dark and fuzzy brushed past her. It landed amidst the mongrels, its black fur rendering it nearly invisible as its shriek under these circumstances rendered it equally invulnerable. But that shriek stopped and silence permeated everything. The creature stood upright as a glimmering golden scabbard appeared from nowhere on a belt round its waist and its dark fur turned pure white. It then launched itself into the fray: pouncing on fiends, whipping its tail across their faces, destroying their improvised weaponry with its magnificent banana sword and scaring those who could still run back into the infinite abyss whence they came.

And with all foes defeated, Monkey Boy sheathed his sword and – sweaty and heaving – turned to Alice and said:

“Hi.”

And Alice laughed a giddy laugh of relief and replied: “We really have to stop meeting like this.”

She then took a small pouch from her pocket and handed it to him. He inspected its contents and then leapt up to the top of the lamppost to devour them.

After the incident at the Redwood Mall, Monkey Boy seemed to take up residence in the Caves, though Alice could never really figure out why. But locals claimed to have spotted him defending people from attacks, thwarting robberies and then just disappearing. Again, nobody seemed to know why; they never thought about it. They were always too captivated to think, just as Alice had been when she first met him.

Monkey Boy appeared to have a certain mesmeric effect on people, an effect that seemed to be worse on those he fought, as evidenced by the ghouls he had just defeated and by Bangaroo, who remained catatonic after their battle through no discernable physical cause. Whatever this was, it made trying to understand him quite the challenge.

So Alice had no idea what he was doing in the Caves or where precisely he lived, but – given his filthy appearance and the rather distinctive odor he exuded – she presumed that he probably didn't have much in the way of a home. Just a shelter, if even that. She had considered inviting him to stay with her, so he'd be safe and warm and clean. But the police department tended to share Dan's view and if she were caught harboring him, it'd be the end of her career. So she did what she could; she snuck down to the Caves to check up on him and bring him his favorite snack: sprinkles.

But tonight was different. Tonight three people were torn to shreds by something that may have been part human and part animal. Tonight she needed answers.

"Monkey Boy?" she called.

And he lowered himself down from the lamppost by his tail, hung like a opossum and smiled at her. "Hi."

"Hi. So, uh, were you by any chance at a museum tonight?"

He stared at her quizzically.

"That is... did you see anyone like you? Have you sensed another person like you did with Bangaroo?"

Still he stared.

And she realized the futility of this. He couldn't answer her. She knew he wasn't to blame for what happened, but she had hoped – through him – she'd at least get some indication, a sign that there was a connection, something to give her a lead. But he couldn't answer; it was crazy to think he would.

"Okay, nevermind. I should get going. But I'll be back tomorrow with more sprinkles."

And still he stared. Which was odd. Usually the word 'sprinkles' had the same effect on him as the word 'ball' did on a dog. But not now. Now he still stared at her like she was covered in six-year-old milk. He leaned in and examined her more closely and then – to her horror – he looked knowingly out into the night and he sniffed.



The cognac was bitter tonight. It had been for awhile. But he drank it anyway, choked it down, and tried to still his rattled nerves. It didn't help. Nor did the music. The melodies of Vivaldi circled the room, lightening the musty aroma of the books and the dusty air of the furniture. But it didn't soothe, nor did the Kipling entice as it once had; it failed to stir his neurons, brought not a single new thought to the fore. Nothing could motivate him, nothing could quiet him.

Perhaps, he thought, returning to *that* place of all places was a mistake. Logical of course; it was at one point his home. But it was decorated with old and painful memories. The Nobel Prizes, the diplomas and degrees, the letters of thanks from many a doomed patient and all the pictures of a life and love long ago denied him – the place was a memorial to a man who was no more, a terrible tableau that vexed him so that no music, no book, could calm him.

It was his old lab assistant who suggested he return. It was Anastasia who thought he would find peace by going back to where it all began. It was she who found him wallowing alone in his grief, lamenting in a bottle, and gave him the drive to seek out his latest project. She thought it would be 'therapeutic.' She always was naïve.

There was no peace to be found here. He was not this man – this great and noble man who stood poised to write the future and who knew the adoration of a goddess – he was only a tired recluse binging on misery. He would not find solace, only dead memories and bitter spirits.

And in this realization, a great rage burned inside him, tossing aside all rational thought and unleashing itself on that place. He crushed the medals, shredded the letters, burned the books and silenced the records. He paused briefly at the photograph, that still-frame of his happiest day, and then crushed it.

The violent act was its own kind of salve. Because he was not a rational man anymore, not a doctor or a scientist, just a lame relic with dark impulses and primal desires. And he was also half tiger now. That was a mystery all its own. He wasn't always half tiger after all. It was a recent development, one that would have intrigued the man he used to be, but merely hindered the man he had become.

Because he had one goal in returning to this city. One! It was not for therapy or closure or solace. There was a greater mystery to solve – one that burned at the heart of everything – and its answer rested on a tablet none could read. And he had it, claimed it as his own, but due to his bestial clumsiness it fell to dust in his hands. The memory nearly brought the rage back out of him and he would likely have torn the whole of the structure to his foundations had he not caught a quick glimpse of that photograph he had so easily destroyed.

It sat on the stained carpet, reminding him of the most rapturous and most agonizing memory of them all, a memory of something everyone has had and everyone has lost and most have regained and few have ever appreciated. It was obscured now, the shattered glass from the frame having cut it to slices. The story it once told was one that now he alone could recite. And in realizing this, he felt a smile creep across his lips as a new answer singed in his mind.



The station overhang with the sort of despair that would make a post office look chipper. It was filled with tired old detectives caught in the purgatorial struggle of trying to remember the last time they smiled. And there was one worse than the rest, a terrible wretch who lurked in the basement: a bookish and mole-like figure who delighted in procedure and decorum. He was the bane of many an officer, the fiend that dogged all their shadows: Mike Cogg the armory clerk.

And Alice now approached this creature in the dark heart of his lair – maintenance always took their time replacing the lightbulbs – and slammed her badge down on his desk.

The rodent looked up from his papers, fixed his glasses, and said in a tone utterly devoid of emotion or empathy: “Yes?”

“Has my requisition for a new gun gone through yet?”

“I would be happy to check. What is your name?”

“Detective Alice Malarkey. Just like last time.”

“And is that spelled M-A-L-A-R-K-Y?”

“E-Y.”

“Ah, yes, M-A-L-A-R-K-E-Y?”

“Right.”

“And your badge number?”

“Right there in front of you.”

“Yes, I see. Just give me one moment to put all this into the system.”

He turned and slowly began his work at his computer, methodically and carefully typing in each digit – checking afterward that everything was input correctly – and bringing up her request.

“Ah, yes, Detective Malarkey, I see we have an orange flag on your form.”

“An *orange* flag?”

“Yes, it’s not quite as bad as a red flag, but much worse than yellow. I’m afraid this will require a full investigation into your conduct over the last several months before we can assign you a new firearm.”

“What? Why?”

“I’m afraid that your story regarding your weapon’s disappearance doesn’t fit into the police force’s definition of ‘plausible’ as outlined by Civil Code Section 7, subsection D, paragraph 96, which reads...”

“No, no, no, don’t read it. So what do you think happened to my gun then?”

“It isn’t my place to say. Maybe you lost it or perhaps sold it to gun launderers or handed it over to children for them to play with. I couldn’t imagine.”

“But I already told you what happened. It’s in my report. A guy dressed like a kangaroo stole it and dropped it in his pouch.”

“A likely story. Do you have any idea how often I hear that one?”

“Not too regularly, I’d guess. So when do I get a new gun?”

“The investigation shouldn’t take too long. You won’t even know it’s happening. I’d say about nine to ten months.”

“You can’t be serious! What am I supposed to do in the meantime? Can you at least give me a stun gun?”

“No, we’ve come to find that officers are far too liberal in their usage so we have barred the distribution of stun guns.”

“Can I request to be taken off active duty during the course of the investigation?”

“You could. But that’s a different department. And I believe he’s on vacation right now.”

“Okay, new plan: I’ll walk in there and take a new gun and you, well, you can just go blow.”

“I wouldn’t recommend that. If you do, I will be forced to upgrade your case to red flag status. Trust me, Detective Malarkey, you don’t want that.”

And so, frustrated and borderline homicidal, Alice marched away from that troll, stormed up the stairs and out of that basement and straight into a wall, which fell along with her to the floor. As Alice recovered, she took a closer look at that wall and realized it was really more of a woman, with long black hair and a stern but oddly friendly expression on her face.

“Detective Malarkey?” she asked.

And Alice shook away the shock and the anger and allowed her brain to focus again on recollection.

“It’s Doctor Heart, right?”

“Please, call me Celia.”

“Okay, Celia, I’m sorry but I’m really very busy.”

Alice nudged past and continued on toward her office, but the Doctor followed quickly behind.

“I understand, but if I could have just a minute of your time. I would really like to discuss this case and Monkey Boy and perhaps...”

“Look,” Alice stopped abruptly and turned to confront her latest irritation. “I don’t know what kind of specialist you think you are or why you’re even here. But I have had it tonight with the accusations and with everybody thinking I’m hiding something. I don’t have time for this, so, as you would likely say, sod off.”

There was in fact no sodding. Rather, the Doctor just smiled knowingly and sighed.

“I see you’ve been dealing with that wretched little ogre in the basement.”

“How could you tell?”

“When I first arrived, I asked him to requisition a set of test tubes for me and he implied that, due to my nationality, I might pose a national security risk and so had to run a series of background checks first. I canceled my request right there, went out to a hobby shop and bought some test tubes. I then came back and told him that I had liberated them from his stores. I believe he spent the rest of that day checking and rechecking his inventory to ensure I was lying.”

“You know,” laughed Alice “you should be careful around Cogg. He wields the might of the red flag.”

“Oh, dear me, a red flag, whatever shall I do?”

The Doctor feigned momentary panic, before calming herself and returning her focus to Alice.

“Listen, Detective, I think we may have gotten off on the wrong foot. I’m not trying to accuse anyone of anything. I am simply here to help with these bizarre cases in whatever way I can. I do believe, though, that I will prove infinitely more helpful if I were kept up to date on all relevant information.”

“I understand that, but...”

“And we needn’t be so formal. Why don’t we go out, escape this dismal place for a night and relax? When was the last time you had any fun?”

“I don’t know, but I do remember everyone was wearing acid wash jeans and cell phones were as big as my head.”

“Okay, then, let’s go. Most places are probably closed now, but I know this quaint little pizza place near my building that’s probably still open. What do you say?”

“Yeah... it’s just... I’ve got a lot of work... and...”

Alice took a quick glance around the station and thought she actually saw – amidst the faded husks of cops that lurched around their neglected mausoleum – the very shadow of Death itself. Of course it was just the hunched over muffin cart man who had gone senile years back and started showing up at all sorts of weird hours to push stale old pastries that probably contained more cobwebs than blueberries.

“Screw it, let’s go.”



The pizza place, it turned out, was open and so the two ladies grabbed a large and made for Celia's apartment, which was far bigger than Alice would have expected. It was decorated ornately with elegant curtains and furniture, a liquor cabinet and even a grand piano; it looked like the sort of place where a fifties thespian would have lived; as opposed to Alice's apartment, which looked like the sort of place where desperate grad students would live. But – intimidated and confused though she was – Alice was able to relax there.

She and Celia talked at great length about every little thing: about growing up, about misspent youths chasing boys, about schools and teenaged traumas. Alice told Celia about this time she thought she heard a guy from math class serenading her under her window, only to find that he had accidentally picked the wrong window and meant to be singing to her brother, Alex. And Celia told Alice of this time she tried to go on the road with one of her favorite bands, The Screaming Skulls, only to discover that she had gotten on the wrong bus and was actually following a cover band called The Screeching Skulls.

“So there I was stuck in the middle of Leeds with a group of idiot wannabes who didn't even know how to hold their guitars and who sang like seals. And like the stupid, impetuous youth I was, I stormed off. Didn't know anybody. Didn't know my way around. But I was young and thought I was invincible.”

“Yeah? How did that work out?” Alice asked, taking a bite of the decidedly mediocre pizza and chasing it with some remarkably good wine, which had an instantly soothing effect on her over-frazzled nerves.

“I was robbed. A man came out of nowhere and stuck a gun in my face. I wanted to scream, but my voice cracked and I cried and he got away with my purse. A police constable caught him not two seconds later, but even then I was still shaking. It wasn't until we were at the station and I saw my assailant again that I calmed myself.”

“Why?”

“Because in the street he seemed so fearsome, so dangerous; but in the station he was lurched over a table and weeping, pleading with the officers for mercy. And I felt so foolish as to let this man, this broken pathetic creature, scare me. At that moment, I became fascinated by the criminal mind: how they strive to claim some lost sense of dominance that was somehow denied them. It's very primal in a way, behavior at the root of the human experience: a fascinating field of study to be sure.”

“And so that's why you do what you do?”

“Exactly,” Celia answered with a glee that diminished quickly as she sampled the pizza for herself. “I have... degrees in biology and psychology and I offer my services to police forces as coroner, profiler, freelance sleuth or counselor... or *friend*... or *confidant*.”

“Okay, I get it. And I do appreciate this. It's a nice break from all the gloom and doom and testosterone.”

“I can imagine. The police in this city do seem to suffer from a certain excessive exhaustion; I don't see how you can bear it. Take Detective Malady for example, I have never seen a man so comfortable with the grotesqueries of that museum scene. How can anyone so indifferent toward violence be an effective officer?”

“Dan's a good guy, he's just seen some rough times. Everybody has: from the cops to the civvies. This whole city's been to hell and back; it's tainted us, I think.”

“And yet you persist in your current occupation? You know there are other, better-paying, more respected jobs out there? Prostitution, for example.”

They both choked down more pizza and exchanged disgusted glances.

“Not pretty enough. Besides... oh, never mind.”

“What?”

“No, it’s idiotic.”

“Tell me.”

Alice gulped down some more of the remarkably refreshing wine and relented:

“Okay, when I was a kid and my parents first moved us here, this city seemed so big. All the buildings towering overhead and the lights and the way everything seemed to shine – it was like a forest of crystal shimmering in the night. But when I grew into my teen years, that crystal became stained as I started seeing all the homeless people and stray dogs pissing on everything. And then I grew into adulthood and I saw all the bureaucrats and politicians pissing all over them. And that’s why I became a cop.”

“I’m afraid I don’t follow.”

“I want everybody to stop pissing all over my city!”

“I see,” Celia said with a mischievous smile. “So you’re the well-meaning cop in a dirty world, just trying to make it a little cleaner?”

“Yeah, I know it’s a cliché,” Alice sighed. “But it’s a good cliché.”

“So maybe that’s why...”

“Why what?”

“Why Monkey Boy has taken an interest in you.”

“Oh, here we go. I see your game lady,” Alice teased, “you lure me up here with the wine and the pizza and the talk of boy bands and businessman piss and you think I’m just going to spill the beans. Well, no sir... or ma’am, not happening. There is no connection between me and Monkey Boy.”

“Oh, come now, Detective, you were the first one to see him clearly, you helped him defeat Sue Jones and you named him. All of these animal people in such a short time and you’re right in the middle of it. There *is* a connection.”

“Not that I’ve noticed.”

“Okay, have it your way. But you will have to trust me eventually. Still, I suppose there *are* more pressing concerns. Would you like some more damp bread with cheese?”

“Sure. Damp bread with cheese is my favorite kind of bread with cheese. And call me Alice.”

“Very well, Alice. Have you heard the latest news from the museum?”

“No. Have you guys had any luck with the fur?”

“Not yet,” Celia handed Alice a slice of pizza and sat down with her own.

“But we managed to reconstruct the bodies of the victims... well, most of them anyway.”

“What do you mean?” Alice considered her slice for a moment and then set it down.

“One of them seems to be missing pieces.”

“Missing pieces?”

“Yes, and we gather from the teeth marks on the ones we do have,” Celia chomped down into her own pizza slice “that our suspect must have eaten her.”



There were more important things that required his attention, he knew that. There were roads to be built and laws to be bent. And in his more civilized days, he would have been able to curb impulse in deference to those things. But now – primal as he was – he found this impossible. And those sickening urges propelled him out into the night, out onto a low-rising roof surrounding the old campus where down on the quad a single girl unknowingly awaited him.

She was young and fresh and deliciously unawares. Her skirt was short and revealed thick meaty thighs that made the beast inside him howl with delight. He could restrain it no longer.

He was careless in the museum; he usually wasn't. He always strived to contain every last piece, every last drop, so that not a smattering of evidence remained that anything had ever occurred. Come the morning, this park would again be a place of study and play. But this night it would be a dining hall, a larder, an abattoir; because on this night there were no students, there was no fun. There was only a solitary girl and man who wasn't a man but also a tiger.

And he was so very hungry.



Birch University was growing in prominence all over the world. With the influx of notable professors and Nobel laureates who sought to make their own stamp on what was once so humble a school, it saw dramatic increases in funding and supplies and had, in the last few years, become one of the foremost universities in the world.

Alice had actually attended there, but that was before it became so nice. The quad was neat and kempt – it used to have a serious problem with snakes hiding in the overgrowth. The buildings looked freshly painted and there weren't guards with metal detectors posted at every gate anymore. It looked inviting, like an academic institution should.

But Alice wasn't there for nostalgia, but rather for her investigation. Their cannibal murderer was at that museum for a reason: for the Lost Prophecy. A quick bit of research revealed that almost nothing was known about that tablet and few ever took a serious interest in it, which left Alice at a bit of a dead end, one she hoped the university's Head of Archaeology could help her bypass.

So she entered the archaeology wing and approached the office of Dean Liam Swisten and was promptly stopped by his secretary.

"Excuse me, miss," she said in a voice so nasally she sounded like an elephant with a cold, "do you have an appointment?"

Alice flashed her badge and answered: "I'm Detective Alice Malarkey with the police. I've come to ask Professor Swisten a few questions regarding an ongoing homicide investigation."

The secretary flipped through her ledger and shouted back in the same inflectionless whine: "I'm sorry, I don't have you scheduled for today. But I can fit you in next month. Does that work for you?"

"Is the professor in his office right now?"

“Yes. But without an appointment...”

“Thanks.”

Alice slipped past the secretary and forced her way into the office to find Swisten sleeping at his desk. She slammed shut the door and the pudgy little man jumped awake.

“Who are you? I don’t have an appointment to see you today,” he mumbled, jowls a-jigglin’.

“You see this?” she showed him her badge. “This means I’m with the police. This means I don’t need an appointment. This means you’re going to sit there and answer my questions without complaint or I’m going to arrest you for obstruction of justice and throw you in a cell for the day. And one of our regulars – we call him Slobby Joe – just loves licking people; we have no idea why. Maybe you’d like to find out for us.”

“This is pure fascism. One phone call to the ACLU and you’re done, missy.”

“I said *without* complaint.”

“Very well,” he huffed and squirmed listlessly in his seat. “What do you want to know about?”

“The Lost Prophecy.”

“Ah, yes, I heard about that. Destroyed yesterday. A truly despicable crime. A true loss to history.”

“Three people were also brutally murdered, you know.”

“A true loss to history.”

“Okay, what do you know about it? What did it say?”

“I haven’t the foggiest. Nobody does. But speculation is that it tells the secrets of the end times. Poppycock, I say, probably just some ancient biscuit recipe.”

“Was there ever anyone who took a serious interest in it? A specialist or just a doomsday nut, maybe?”

“There was one chap, now that I think of it. Scherr was his name. Doctor John Rutherford Scherr.”

“A doctor? In what?”

“In everything. Physics, biology, chemistry, math, astronomy, history, archaeology, anthropology, zoology, psychology, psychiatry, linguistics, literature, music, philosophy – the man collected advanced degrees like Boy Scout badges. I heard that as an undergraduate he became bored with the remedial labs and instead cracked cold fusion to help pass the time.”

“Really? Did he do it in his bathtub?”

“Don’t be absurd, child. Supposedly he was actually trying to determine the mass of the Higgs-Boson, but sort of mucked it up. He was young then of course and made mistakes. He solved the Higgs-Boson for finals.”

“You’re kidding?”

“Wish I was. But he licked space travel, answered ancient mathematical riddles, found lost treasures, cured incurable diseases. He basically shamed us all, the little prick.”

“So why haven’t I heard of him if he did all this?”

“Ah, well, you see that’s the problem with being years ahead of your society, you have to wait for society to catch up. He made all these amazing discoveries and was impatient to put them to use, but nobody knew what to do with any of them. Sure cold fusion solves the energy crisis, but what happens to everyone in the coal and oil

industries? The CEOs and lobbyists weren't having any of that and so everything he learned was eventually lost in a quagmire of red tape. Frustrated him to no end."

"But why did he want this prophecy?"

"Curiosity, I suppose, or because it was the last great mystery he hadn't solved. I don't know. Either way, he could never get access to see the tablet up close. He was always told that the it was needed to draw in museum spectators or that they couldn't risk removing it from its glass enclosure. What if he got fingerprints on it? That would reduce its value, you see. That was the last straw, I think. Or maybe it was that business with his wife."

"He was married?"

"An appropriate tense, young lady. She died. Terrible tragedy, that."

Swisten bowed his head in what Alice was surprised to believe was actually shame and remorse. "Terrible tragedy."

"I would like to meet this John Scherr. Do you know where I can find him?"

"Last I heard, he left town. And now I would very much like to follow his lead. I am late for a pressing engagement with a turkey sandwich. May I go?"

Alice gave him leave, but stayed behind, poking aimlessly through the dean's piles of old books. She was so sure that this Scherr guy was her man, but if Swisten was right and he really had left town, then she was back at square one. Maybe the tablet wasn't the key at all. Maybe it was just a random art heist that went wrong. The Lost Prophecy could just as easily have been the Mona Lisa.

But as Alice stumbled upon a faded volume at the front of Swisten's desk she realized with dawning horror that the tablet did indeed sit at the heart of all things. For in the book was a picture of it. Crude and blurry, she could hardly make it out and she imagined the act of translating from the page would prove equally as impossible as translating it from the pile of ashes. But a few characters were clear, characters that represented a distinctive cuneiform script that few had ever seen, but that Alice could never forget.

Because she had seen it before, etched onto the blade of a sword, a strange and inexplicable sword that looked like ivory but wasn't ivory. It was a sword wielded by a man who dressed like a kangaroo and blew up taco stands. It was the inscrutable and thematically inappropriate blade that Bangaroo pulled from his pouch in the battle at the mall.

And suddenly Alice knew she was on the right track and that she was getting closer to the center of a web that was tightening around her. She considered this suspicion confirmed when she left the building and found, sitting in a lonely spot on the quad, Monkey Boy, who sniffed the grass and sniffed the air and then leapt off after his latest target.



"I'm sorry, sir, but what did you say your name was?"

"These days I am calling myself Khan, Scherr Khan."

"Ah, yes, and how pray tell did you get in here? I should imagine it no simple matter to gain an audience with a man in my position."

"That will be your anthem, I'm afraid."

“I beg your pardon.”

“Never mind. I am sorry to confess however that I will be unable to answer your question. The science involved is simply beyond your understanding.”

“Now, see here sir, I am no log cabin bumpkin. I’ve done my reading. I know of your aether media and of that British fellow Darwin. You’ll account for yourself here and now or I will have the soldiers stationed outside give you a good going-over. How is it you just appeared here out of the aether and what am I to make of this outrageous feline guise you have assumed?”

“Very well. I have come via a temporal disruption engine that essentially cycles space through a series of coils – like water in a wheel – and propels its occupant to a new quantum position, creating what I have dubbed a ‘paradoxical shock’ that effectively paralyzes continuity and allows the traveler to remain outside his natural position until that shock has dissipated. Do you understand?”

“Fine then, don’t tell me. I have grander concerns than you anyway.”

“Yes, secessionists, slaves, political rivals, you do have a lot of work on your hands. Do you actually think you have a chance of winning? And if you do win and you change the face of this country forever, what do you suppose your reward will be?”

“It’s not about winning, sir, it’s about trying; and through trying inspiring others to try with you. Mark my words, one day someone is going to come along and sort us all out. Meantime, those of us already-sorted have to do our best to contend with the stubbornly-disheveled amongst us. And you *still* have not yet accounted for your inexplicably hirsute appearance.”

“It’s a fashion statement, I suppose.”

“Ah, now *that* I do understand. People often bemoan my hat, you know. They say it stands out; they say it makes me look Amish. But you know what I say? Bah! Bah to them and bah to their bare heads.”

“Ever the orator, I see.”

“Bah.”

“Well, I feel as though I must be going. I only came on a test-flight of sorts and the shock of my presence is wearing off. I must say it was a pleasure meeting you.”

“And you as well. Farewell, Mr. Khan.”

“And a farewell to you, Mr. Lincoln.”



Back at the precinct, Alice wasted no time. Finding the nearest body, she firmly insisted:

“Ricky, get me an address for a Doctor John Rutherford Scherr, now!”

“Yes, sir, Detective Malarkey, ma’am. I’m on it like white on rice. Back in two shakes.”

He rushed off excitedly, apparently enthused at finally being useful to somebody.

Alice returned to her office to find Celia waiting for her. The Doctor smiled at her and handed her a piece of paper.

“You’ll never believe what the DNA tests turned up. It’s tiger fur.”

“Tiger fur?”

“Yep and that’s not the strange thing.”

“Oh, joy.”

“It’s tiger fur with largely human DNA. DNA belonging to none other than...”

“John Scherr.”

“Yes, how did you know?”

“Call it a hunch. Have you heard of him?”

“Oh, yes, he was a major player for a time. Vanished off the face of the Earth when his wife died.”

“Know any details?”

“No, it was considered a great shame for the academic community. Nobody talks about it. But I heard it left Scherr himself somewhat... unbalanced.”

“Great. Crazy, cannibalistic tiger people. Ricky, where’s my address?”

“Patience is a virtue, Detective.”

“I hate kids.”

“Alice, you’re not thinking of going after him alone are you?”

“Well, I can’t find Dan anywhere and I don’t want to risk him leaving town.”

“You think he will?”

“He came for that tablet and it’s now broken. I don’t see why he wouldn’t.

RICKY!

“Here, Detective,” the rookie rushed into the office. “Anything worth doing is worth doing right.”

“Just give me the address.”

“It’s 2292 Emergent Heights.”

“Posh neighborhood,” Celia remarked. “Our tiger boy hasn’t lost his taste, it seems.”

“Yeah,” scoffed Alice, grabbing the address from Ricky. “Good work. Now, give me your gun.”

“Oh, I can’t do that, Detective.”

“Ricky, just give me your gun.”

“I’m sorry, Detective, but Mr. Cogg said that if I ever handed my gun over to anyone – even a fellow officer – he’d requisition me a ticket pad and in six to twelve months bust me down to meter maid duty.”

“Fine. Forget it. Just get out of my way. And if you see Dan, tell him where I went.”

Alice rushed out of her office and toward the garage, with Celia yelling futilely after her to wait.



And of course she realized this was stupid. But she didn’t have much choice. She wasn’t letting this guy escape. Besides, she knew Monkey Boy was on his way, so she wouldn’t be completely helpless. Hell, it wasn’t inconceivable that he’d have the whole thing wrapped up by the time she got there. She kept holding onto that hope as she pulled up to what looked to be a long-derelect mansion.

It sat nestled at the heart of the wealthiest part of the city, but looked more suited toward the Caves. The windows were cracked or boarded, the paint flaked like sunburned

skin, the lawn overgrew the fence, the foundations seemed to leak a strange black ooze and the entire place exuded an altogether horrific smell, something like refried sulfur.

Alice got out of her car, held her nose and approached the wretched house. She grabbed a bent fence post and made a mental note to refer to it as a baton in her report. She crept slowly up to the door, which hung open on broken hinges, and peered inside.

The house was dark with only the small glimmerings of sunlight that slipped past the window boards providing light. She quietly worked her way into the large foyer, the smell from outside was overpowering now and she felt compelled to take a moment to dry heave fifty times before progressing. The stench seemed to come from everywhere, no source was discernable. However, there were strange lights and noises coming from upstairs. There were the sounds of drilling and sawing; and sparks flew out of a central room, one or two landing at Alice's feet. There were two staircases, one on either side of the hall, and she quietly made her way over to one of them.

But the steps were old and ill-maintained. They creaked loudly with each footfall. And as she inched closer to the target room, she hoped with greater and greater intensity that its inhabitant was too distracted to hear. Each step also brought her further from the windows and thus any light source and deeper into that reeking and acrid aroma. She struggled to breathe and it became so hard to see that she didn't even realize she had reached the landing and took a false step up, stumbling forward and plowing straight into something large, sturdy and... furry.

Panic didn't even have time to set in as a large bristly paw slapped her across the face and propelled her back down the stairs, out of the darkness and into the scattered sprinkles of light, where – weary and worn – she fell into an entirely new kind of darkness.



The station stank like week-bad chicken on a Monday morning. The cops and reporters and perps and soon-to-be perps within ran around in a frenzy to rival an alien visitation at a sci-fi convention, each of them thinking that this would be their defining moment. This was where they earned their biggest collar, this was where they got their scoop, this was where they retained or lost their freedom.

But Dan Malady knew better. He'd been at this too long not to. He knew that once you wore that big collar, no others would fit right again; he knew that no scoop could ever be enough. And for the people here fighting for freedom, it didn't matter. They were always in cages singing irritating songs like parakeets that spent too much time around jukeboxes.

Dan knew better than to get too attached to life. He had seen things... things no one could ever understand. He had seen the truth to reality, that we were all just standing in line waiting for our turn to fall.

“Hiya, Detective Malady.”

The young ones stood further back than others, they couldn't feel the wind from the precipice; some of them – like this hyperactive, unformed, undeveloped tadpole of a cop – didn't even know it was there.

“Aw, now, Detective, turn that frown upside-down and let a smile be your umbrella.”

“Kid, that makes as much sense as platform shoes for giraffes. A smile would make a terrible umbrella; it would just gather up the rainwater and force you to carry its weight on your back until your spine inevitably breaks and that smile tips over, spilling the dirty water all over you. And you’re left laying there: broken, wet, frozen and alone until you – either from starvation or pneumonia – die. A frown makes a much more sensible umbrella.”

“Um... okay. Oh, I have a message for you from Detective Malarkey.”

The kid – not this kid, but the other kid – was an odd one. She had been around long enough to know better than this runt and usually she seemed to understand that the world was just a seething gumbo of rancid meat and plague rats, but sometimes she could be as naïve as a horse on a complementary glue factory tour.

“She went to this address to investigate a suspect in those museum murders, I think. She told me to tell you.”

As naïve as a horse on a complementary glue factory tour that’s offered a bonus slice of tranquilizer pie, served right in one of the vats. Dan figured he should have been surprised, but he wasn’t. Nothing could surprise him anymore. He grabbed the address from the rookie and headed out. It didn’t matter of course, nothing did. But he would keep walking the line until his turn finally came up.



Alice awoke to find herself tied to a support column in another long hall and to the joyless achings of a newly formed throbbing bump on her head.

This hall was larger than the other and looked something like a ballroom; it was also better lit, revealing a rather ungainly device at its center: a metal monstrosity with wires flowing out all over and a matrix of lasers surrounding a strange and almost ethereal vortex that spiraled upward toward the ceiling, seeming to bypass the air and the cables and the very essence of reality itself. This vortex, she surmised, was the source of the toxic odor, as it was stronger here than in the previous hall and threatened to cause every olfactory receptor she had to kill itself. And at the center of this unholy contrivance were four projectors similar to those that maintained the laser matrix, but larger, flanking a single empty doorway.

Standing before this device and tinkering with a control panel near the gateway was a large man in a lab coat that barely covered his muscled frame. His black and orange fur was neat and clean and his bushy tail crept out from under his coat and wagged with excitement.

Alice looked to this man beast and, through her grogginess and exhaustion and confusion, said:

“You’re under arrest.”

And Scherr just laughed, a gurning, guttural howl of a laugh. He turned to her and removed his safety goggles.

“Is that right?”

His face... as Alice looked at it, she noticed that it contoured like a cat’s, that it had the same whiskers and nose and the rounded ears atop its head. Looking at him now, she knew without question that Celia was right: John Scherr was closer to Monkey Boy

than Bangaroo – an actual man/tiger hybrid – and he now loomed hungrily over her, his stomach audibly growling like a lion.

“I kept you alive in case I needed a snack before my departure; never did I expect in-flight entertainment.”

“Flight?”

“Oh, yes, I am leaving this dreary realm in favor of a period with the insight I require. I came here for a purpose...”

“The Lost Prophecy.”

“Yes, actually. But now it truly is lost, so I must go to a place where its knowledge yet remains.”

“But it’s not like there are other copies and nobody has translated it, so the only way you could find out what it said is to...”

“Ask the man who wrote it.”

Alice gazed for a moment at the machine before her, the machine that spat out a cyclone that seemed to inhale and burn reality for fuel and excrete that rancid, wretched smell in its place; and she muttered, half-disbelievingly:

“It’s a time machine. You built a time machine?”

“I did, yes.”

“But you couldn’t have known you’d need it until after that prophecy was destroyed...”

“Right.”

“But that just happened yesterday!”

“I know. I had to step out for a bite to eat; it slowed me down a bit. Anyway, the machine will soon have gathered enough energy to maintain a permanent paradoxical shock and then I will be forever out of your hair.”

“Oh, no you don’t. Did you not hear me? You are under arrest for murder, for assaulting a police officer and I’m sure I could get you on some sort of leash law thing.”

“You came all the way out here, tracked me down, over such petty offenses?”

“MURDER!”

“What are a few lives when the fate of the world is at stake? Or haven’t you realized? The Lost Prophecy is a doomsday prophecy, one that I truly believe is coming to pass.”

“Oh, of course it is. And you’re not a killer, you’re a misunderstood savior, right?”

At this point, Scherr relented, fell back against his control panel and stared mournfully at memories only he could see. Alice recognized the look well; she had seen it many times before: on Dan’s face, that look that everything was hopeless, that look back to a time, to a single terrible moment, that rendered life itself meaningless.

“There was a time when I might have been. Back in the days when I was a proper scientist, solving all the riddles of the universe. Nobody ever listened, nobody cared, but it didn’t matter because I had my reward. I had the all-consuming love of a woman far too precious for me. I had my Cheyenne. She supported me and soothed my passions so the preening and useless pomp of humanity was to me little more than flea bitings.

“But she grew ill, contracted a disease so rare that it didn’t have a name. It ravaged only those societies that the modern world had long ago discounted, ignored and abandoned and so no one cared. But *I* cared and I created a remedy for the affliction in a mere week, but I was barred from administering it.

“‘It needed to be tested,’ they said. ‘It was too risky,’ they said. ‘The hospital could be sued,’ they said. So they put it through the proper channels and by the time it was deemed safe, my Cheyenne had died. ‘It was for the best,’ they told me. ‘It could have been much worse.’ ‘Imagine the embarrassment if we had tried it and it didn’t work.’

“I realized then the uselessness of society, that it had become too obsessed with bureaucratic protections to function as it should. Civilization had failed me, taken everything from me and left me with rage alone. And it was this rage that consumed me, burned me, inflamed me until all that remained was an emaciated ghoul driven by hunger and revenge.”

“And so what,” huffed Alice, “everybody has tragedies, everybody has regrets. It’s terrible what happened to your wife, but that doesn’t mean you turn yourself into a tiger and maul random people.”

And Scherr responded in a low and menacing growl so quiet and so terrible an angel must have died in his speaking: “This was not my doing.”

“What?”

“I awoke one morning from a fitful and drunken slumber after being denied access to the Lost Prophecy to find that I now inhabited this form. It was not by my will, but rather by that of something deeper, some unknown undercurrent dragging us all inevitable toward oblivion.”

“But why a tiger?”

“A taunt, I imagine. Did you know that tigers are the only animals on Earth to still actively hunt humans? The rest of the Animal Kingdom bends a cowardly knee to we who sit atop the food chain, but tigers rebel – futilely perhaps – against we abominations who would destroy them. They are the last great freedom fighters of the natural world.

“But I, I am no fighter. I had considered using my incalculable intellect to fashion my own Armageddon scenario, as ours is a race that no longer deserves to be. We have buried ourselves so deep in procedure that we can no longer see morality.

“But soon I realized what empty waste that effort would be. Humanity has survived global disasters, plagues and countless wars where all we do is kill each other off en masse. I’m not sure if that last one is a testament to our fortitude or our incompetence, but either way through it all we remain. We metastasize. For all its innumerable faults, the human race will not die easy.

“Then I discovered the Lost Prophecy, that blessed relic that promised an end to the madness and I had to read it, had to know that what it promised was truly inevitable.”

“There are millions of doomsday prophecies,” Alice demanded, playing for time and struggling against the ropes that held her, “why focus on that one?”

“Because on the morning I awoke in my current state, I found lying beside me where Cheyenne once lay...”

Scherr moved over to a large bin, reached inside and pulled out a very particular item that Alice identified instantly.

“This.”

It was a sword. A sword that looked like ivory, though it couldn’t possibly be ivory. A sword with black and ancient figures scorched into the blade. Alice saw it, she recognized it and she knew what it signified.

“So now you understand? Something terrible is rising and I want to know, need to know, that it will succeed in its endeavor.”

“So not so much taking the savior route then, are you? You seriously think you’re going to kickstart Armageddon?”

“No. I haven’t the strength of will for that anymore. I am no tiger, I am not looking to fight. I am simply a wraith and all I want is to watch the world die.”

He held up his sword, tossed aside his lab coat and started marching over to her.

“And there is nothing that will deny me this.”

He held the blade to her throat.

“Not your tiresome and spurious morality.”

He thrust out his other hand and clasped the air beside him.

“And not your champion.”

A figure then appeared, its throat in Scherr’s claw. It was short, with long white fur and a deep red face. It struggled helplessly against the tiger’s grip.

Scherr stared it straight in the eye and scoffed.

“Smelled you from a mile away. You should consider bathing.”

And he tossed Monkey Boy off into the distance, but the young simian quickly recovered and changed his form almost instantly. His white fur turned black and his face grew dark and he screamed, he screamed the scream that demons scream when they see a boy they like. The resultant shockwaves hurled Scherr across the room and through the wall. Monkey Boy chased quickly after.

And Alice struggled for a moment against her bonds and decided that she wasn’t going to break them anytime soon. She sighed and silently commended herself on a strategy well-realized.

“Idiot.”



He recovered. He rose to his feet and reclaimed his blasphemous sword. And he waited for the little wretch as it raced through the hole in his wall and leapt into the air for the pounce. He waited with a grin over his fangs. But the pounce wasn’t quite as meek as he’d anticipated, for while it was in the air, the little black monkey grew. It elongated and its muscles plumped out like airbags. Once its transformation was complete, it wasn’t simply a little ball of fuzz that flew at Scherr, but a full-blown silverback gorilla. And it didn’t so much fly at this point as land. Hard. It smashed them both through the floor and onto the sturdy tile of the kitchen below.

He strained to rise again, but the gorilla slammed down fiercely, jumped and jumped again onto his not-invulnerable spine. It beat its chest and hooted with delight as it strived to shatter his bones. And just as Scherr’s lungs felt ready to pop, just as his ribs primed to crack and his arteries burst and send a stream of blood rocketing out his eye sockets, the beast relented.

It stepped casually off him, knocked his sword away, grabbed him by the head and threw him straight through one of the cookery racks. Falling pots and pans smashed against the floor and assaulted his ears as the distant wall assaulted his already abused spine. And he lay there on the counter: beaten, tired, defeated.

But again he recovered. He recovered quickly. And as the gorilla charged once more and tried to land one mighty fist to his jaw, he caught it. He held it in his claw and chopped the other one down into the ape's elbow, dislocating it. He swiped his free hand across the gorilla's face, knocked him back and stepped off the counter.

"It won't be so easy this time."



Dan arrived at the house in time to see a gorilla and a tiger man smash through the ceiling and start duking it out in a kitchen. He plopped a piece of gum in his mouth and moved on. He went upstairs – where he realized the duo had started their fight – to find the kid strapped to a pillar next to a crazy machine bigger than a house on steroids and smelling like his senile grandmother's kitchen on Thanksgiving. He went up to her and untied her and offered some helpful criticism.

"Kid, you're dumber than a Klan member at a rap concert, coming here by yourself like this."

"Maybe, but at least I got here in time to learn Scherr's plans for his time portal."

"His what?"

"Monkey Boy seems to be handling him and you've untied me. I'd say it's a good team effort, wouldn't you?"

"No."

"Okay, well, I think it's time we intervened and arrested Scherr."

A loud crashing drew both their attentions to the giant hole in the wall, as the giant hole in the floor in the next room was matched and imitated when a gorilla came crashing through it from the room below.

"On second thought, arresting him might prove difficult. But I think I have another idea."

She rushed over to a control panel on the hulking machine and started fumbling with it like a high school boy does with a bra. But Dan, Dan didn't care. He just looked into the next room as the tiger man leapt up through the new hole in the floor and loomed over the gorilla like the shadow of Death does over a suicide bomber and he pulled out his gun.

"Dan, what are you doing?"

"We can't arrest him, kid, but we can sure as hell stop him."

"What if you miss and hit Monkey Boy?"

"I can hit the broad side of a barn when I need to."

"Yeah, but you were aiming for the axe-murderer climbing over it. Now put the gun away, I've got this one."

Dan chewed on this and on his gum for a few seconds and he stared straight into the eyes of the tiger. He held up his gun, aimed right at his forehead and fired... and apparently hit a chandelier that was presumably fixed to the room's high ceilings. It crashed to the floor and startled Scherr into jumping back from his intended victim. The gorilla then grabbed the chandelier's chain and whipped the whole thing into the tiger, hurling him – like a rowdy drunk after happy hour – straight out the door.

The kid stopped tinkering with the device a moment and stared dumbly at the scene.

“Whoa, nice shot.”



Scherr was down again, but not out. He lay now on the floor of the foyer. He climbed slowly to his feet and looked above for his apelike adversary, only to find that it had changed forms, back to its base state it would seem. The Monkey Boy perched defiantly on the upper banister and glared at him with cold glowing yellow eyes. Scherr was enraged, the beast within him raced outward, seized control of his body and howled. The ivory sword appeared in his hand and he beckoned the Monkey Boy to come down, to come and die. He growled with the contempt and self-righteousness of a thousand parents' groups. He screamed and he wailed and he waited.

The very presence of the creature made his mind ache, shamed him with its simple existence and roused deep and forgotten self-loathings that strove to drag him down into the mire in which they were buried. And he hated it for that. Hated it like he hated nothing else. And so he lunged at it, jumped straight through the air and crashed into the banister.

Monkey Boy had simply leapt over him and landed gracefully on the floor. Scherr recovered and jumped down to meet him, charging at him with sword in hand. But Monkey Boy unsheathed his own sword and deflected his attack.

It wouldn't be enough, it couldn't be. With each new strike, Scherr was overwhelmed with hatreds and regrets, with bad memories and the endless tidal wave of remorse for a life mislead; and it fueled his anger, which in turn fueled his might. He hammered at Monkey Boy, beat him down with the strength of a tiger. The creature tried to whip him with its tail, but he swatted it away; it tried to impale him with its banana sword, but he knocked it out of its hand and then tossed his own weapon away.

He clasped Monkey Boy's throat in one hand and assaulted him with the other: slashing at him, beating him and choking him until he eventually stopped moving and the torrent of miseries he inspired at last subsided.



Alice was pretty sure she figured out how the interface on Scherr's time machine worked and she managed to complete her intended sabotage just as the reality vortex reached its maximum velocity and channeled energy into the four main projectors, which then fired that energy outward and created a thin plasmic shield over the gateway.

“At last.”

Alice and Dan turned back to the primary entrance to the room to see a bloodied and battered John Scherr walking slowly in and dragging by his tail the limp body of Monkey Boy.

“What have you done?” demanded Alice with an almost zealous fury.

“I have defeated him,” Scherr boasted as he half-heartedly tossed his prey over to her.

Alice knelt beside Monkey Boy and held him in her arms. He was bloodied, broken and mauled. But – she was absolutely delighted to learn – he was also breathing. Only slightly, but still breathing. He looked up at her and with a wearied smile said:

“Hi.”

And, through tears and gasps, she replied: “Hi.”

“Hold it right there,” Dan demanded, aiming his gun at Scherr.

And the tiger stopped and laughed his guttural beastly laugh.

“Do you really think you can stop me? Put away your gun, Officer, or I will make you watch as I devour your lovely partner. I do after all find combat to be quite... famishing.”

“Let him go, Dan,” Alice insisted.

“You lost your head, kid?”

“He’s right, we can’t fight him. Just let him go.”

Dan reluctantly lowered his gun and Scherr smiled deviously.

“Wisdom. A rarity. For that, I will grant you your lives... what little remains of them before the end comes.”

And he galumphed through the gateway and disappeared at the event horizon of the energy field splayed across it. The machine then groaned and collapsed, the vortex vanished, the acrid smell of reality burning disappeared and the gateway was crushed beneath tons of falling metal.

Dan looked about with a gaze that almost bordered on curiosity.

“Huh. Wherever he went, guess it was a one-way trip. No getting back through there.”

“He didn’t want to get back,” Alice said, turning her attention now toward Monkey Boy.

“Still shouldn’t have let him go.”

“I didn’t.”

She gathered him up and carried him toward the exit.

“And where do you think you’re taking that?”

“I’m going to get him some help. Are you going to stop me?”

Dan chewed his gum pensively for a minute.

“No.”

Alice moved past him and hurriedly carried her ailing champion to her car, stopping only to glance once more toward Dan and say:

“Listen, thanks for coming to help me.”

“Don’t thank me, kid, I didn’t do anything.”

“I’d probably be dead now if it weren’t for you.”

“Then I guess it just wasn’t your turn yet.”



Doctor Celia Heart was enjoying a rather delicious raspberry yogurt when Alice stormed into her lab with the injured Monkey Boy, demanding assistance. And while she did enjoy a raspberry yogurt on occasion, she realized immediately the enormity of the opportunity that had fallen into her lap and so she gladly abandoned it in favor of this latest find.

Monkey Boy was an exquisite subject. There truly was nothing else quite like him in the world. Certain of his features – his fur and tail and jointedness – were suggestive of lower level primates, like monkeys; others – like his hands and his facial structure – were

more akin to higher apes; and then some things – like his eyes – were altogether otherworldly. Most scientists would dismiss this discovery; it didn't fit any recognizable taxonomy. Others would dig, autopsy after autopsy, until they found enough evidence to support writing it off in any particular direction.

And Celia understood that temptation, but she was a touch cleverer than that. She took tissue samples – things like fur, hairs, blood, skin shavings – that no one would notice and stowed them carefully for later examination. She then patched what few wounds remained after her work was done and left the little wonder to rest while she talked with Alice.

“Is he going to be alright?” she quickly insisted.

“Calm down, Alice, he's going to be fine. He seems to possess a remarkable regenerative prowess.”

“Really? That's good.”

“And quite logical. Given his metamorphic abilities, it's only natural his body would have ways of rebuilding itself. I suppose this is something of a bonus trait.”

“Well, healing ability or no, I'm definitely going to start keeping a better eye on him. Maybe take him home, let him live with me from now on.”

“I don't imagine the police department would look too kindly on that.”

“Yeah, well, I think I'm going to start doing my best to ignore them from now on. I'm going out tomorrow and buying my own gun and tonight I'm taking Monkey Boy home where he'll be safe. I trust I can count on you to be discrete.”

“But of course. I want you to know that both of you can rely on me whenever you need me.”

“I'm going to be counting on that. Because if Scherr is right, something big is coming and that strange little mutant boy in there is our only hope of fighting it.”

“Yes, it's a shame we won't have Scherr himself to probe for new information on that topic. What really happened to him anyway?”

Alice gave her such a look then – a primal and unyielding look, the look of ancient court officials when they removed the hands of a starving thief – and she answered:

“He's where he belongs.”



A brutal and primal heat beat down on the land, the earth seared with primordial fury and a sun burned too hot for mammalian life to survive. But he did survive. He would always survive. This inhospitable and ancient land was an appropriate domain, well suited to the atavistic beast he had become.

In the distance he saw an image of majesty and legend: an elegant brontosaurus lumbered near a pond, dipping its head beneath the surface for cool sips on this hot day, its long and meaty neck swaying rhythmically with each gulp. It wasn't up to his usual standards, but it was all that passed for edible in these savage days.

Come a billion years time, this glen would be a city of light and traffic. But in this age it would be a dining hall, a larder, an abattoir because in this age there were no people, there was no society. There was only a lonely brontosaurus and a man who wasn't a man but also a tiger.

And he was so very hungry.

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