



## **DANGER ZONE ONE**

### **— CURSED ZONE —**

“The curator of the Londo Museum has requested a police presence tonight,” Chief Hardiman sighed, rubbing his tired eyes. “They've received some new artifacts and, based on recent incidents, there's reason to believe the museum may be targeted by a known criminal.”

“I always thought museums had their own security,” Reena wondered aloud.

“They do,” Hardiman replied, exhaustion in his voice. “However, our concern is that we might not be dealing with some run-of-the-mill thief. Last month there was a break-in and robbery at the Vantor Museum. It occurred the night before a large exhibit had opened, which featured priceless art from Ankharia. Two weeks ago, the Hollow Heights Historical Center in Old Metro was broken into. More Ankharian art was stolen. Again, this happened the night *before* the grand opening of their show. Tomorrow, the Londo Museum debuts their latest exhibit to the public—”

“Let me guess,” Madison chimed in, “they're displaying stuff from Ankharia, right?”

Standing in front of Hardiman's desk, Reena turned to her white-haired partner. “Wow, a real museum heist...”

Madison glanced at the sheet of electronic paper in her hand. “According to this report, Vantor and Hollow Heights had the latest in surveillance tech and nearly a dozen security personnel on site—and they *still* couldn't identify the perp?”

“No—no one spotted any suspects,” Hardiman lamented. “I'm told both incidents happened in the early morning hours, when the museums were closed. Due to the valuable nature of these exhibits, security was tight, but we're *still* not sure how the perpetrator entered or left the museum unseen.”

“That's pretty weird,” Reena muttered.

Madison leaned over the Chief's desk. “And the department doesn't have *any* leads?”

Hardiman lifted a folder of electronic paper from his desk and handed it to the officer. “This is all we have.”

Looking over the contents, Madison's expression changed to one of surprise. “You think the White Wraith was behind these thefts?”

“The White...*who*?” Reena asked, scratching her head.

“A master thief,” Hardiman explained, “someone believed to be responsible for nearly two dozen high-profile robberies, most from museums and private collections. They seem to have a special interest in artifacts from ancient Ankharia—most of which are invaluable.”

“Sheesh,” Reena exhaled, “and this person's never been caught?”

Hardiman shook his head. “Around a year ago, security at the Midmar Museum of Art caught a glimpse of this so-called White Wraith, but claimed the suspect simply *vanished*. They likened it to seeing a ghost.”

“A g-ghost?” Reena gasped. “Seriously?”

“No, Rookie!” Madison snapped. “Don't start filling your head with childish nonsense. We're dealing with a flesh and blood criminal here—and if they show up tonight, we're going to *catch* them!”

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*This place is kind of creepy*, Reena thought to herself. She followed the museum curator, while staying close to Madison's side. The earlier mention of ghosts had stirred her imagination—and not in a pleasant way—especially when she was stuck in an old, eerie building late at night. Aside from herself, Madison, and the curator, only the security and a few staff members were supposed to be inside the museum.

Reena glanced at the various Ankharian relics. Ancient vases, papyrus paintings, and ornate sculptures depicting long deceased rulers and legendary gods were spread throughout multiple exhibit rooms. Each item had been displayed behind thick glass cases. Reena was only able to guess at how much the artifacts were actually worth, though based on the curator's description of the exhibit, she assumed *each* were valued at a small fortune. Overhead, she spotted several security cameras and wondered if there were more surveillance equipment hidden throughout the building.

Tevin Stratford, the museum curator, turned to Reena and Madison. “As you can see, this is the Ankharian wing of the museum. In the morning we'll be opening this area to the public. We have one more piece arriving tonight and then the collection will be complete.”

“Do you usually work this late?” Reena asked.

“Rarely,” Stratford replied, “but nights before big openings like this, I don't mind putting in the extra hours. This is more than simply a job to me, I truly enjoy being around such incredible pieces of history.”

Stratford led them further into the Ankharian exhibit. The man wore a dark blue suit, thick glasses, and had a head of disheveled gray hair. Reena guessed that he was in his early seventies, but seemed rather spry for his age. He certainly had no shortage of excitement when it came to the various artifacts...

“Take for instance,” Stratford motioned to a nearby display case containing ornate ceramic tiles, “these are from the Tetk River region where—”

“We're not here for a history lesson,” Madison interrupted. “How many security personnel are in the building right now?”

Stratford straightened his glasses. “Uh, at the moment, we have twelve guards patrolling the museum—two on each floor.”

Madison nodded. “Good. Remove the two guards from this floor and have them both stationed outside—one at the front of the building and one at the rear. We'll take over patrol of this floor.”

“Excellent,” Stratford said with visible delight. “I appreciate the police's assistance tonight. I'm sure you know of the recent thefts concerning other Ankharian artifacts...”

“Yeah, we heard,” Madison confirmed. “By the way, didn't you mention something about a

*centerpiece* for this exhibit...?”

“Ah, yes,” Stratford clapped his hands together, “you're referring to the statue of Ry'sekt—one of the many Ankharian gods. Right this way.”

Reena and Madison followed the curator to a glass display stationed at the center of the room. Behind the thick, shatterproof glass was a statue of a dog-faced creature with long protruding ears, an elongated snout and diamond encrusted eyes. His body was human in appearance, wearing intricate jeweled armor that glistened beneath the overhead lighting.

“*This* is the most valuable item in your exhibit?” Madison asked, not convinced.

“It most certainly is!” Stratford claimed. “This is perhaps one of the most detailed pieces of ancient Ankharian art in existence. It's easily thousands of years old. This particular statue has a surface so hard, it's comparable to diamond. We're still not sure how the ancient Ankharian's were able to carve such a *finely* crafted figure from it.”

“A lot smaller than I would've guessed,” Madison said, sizing up the artifact. “It could easily fit inside a duffle bag or backpack.”

“I promise you, no thief can waltz in and steal this treasure in such a simple manner—not with it locked inside this *uniquely* designed display case,” Stratford chuckled. His expression quickly turned grim. “That said, I'm not foolish enough to believe that anything is *completely* theft-resistant. That's why your presence here is so necessary.”

Observing the statue's face, Reena raised an eyebrow. “He sure doesn't look too happy.”

“I would expect not,” Stratford began, “Ry'sekt was a god of calamity. He would often be invoked when one wished to place a curse on another person, usually after a grievous offense had been committed. In fact, the bottom of this very statue is inscribed with such a curse. It roughly translates to say that *any* who gaze upon this sculpture of Ry'sekt will meet with a grisly end.”

“A curse?!” Reena yelped. *First ghosts, now curses!*

“It's all tommy-rot, of course!” Stratford waved his hand in dismissal and let out a short laugh. “To be honest, we're quite fortunate. This statue was only unearthed last month in Ankharia—and the Londo Museum will now have the honor of hosting the worldwide reveal to the general public. After a week, it'll be sent to a lab so they can examine the relic before it continues on an international exhibition.”

“If this is the museum's prized showcase,” Madison said, taking a step closer to the glass display, “we can bet it'll be the prime target for—”

“Stop!” Stratford shouted, grabbing hold of the officer's wrist. “Please, don't take another step!”

“Why? What's wrong?”

Stratford pointed to floor where a line of red tape encircled the display case. “Don't step beyond that line or it'll activate the built-in theft-deterrent system. Should anyone attempt to get within three feet of the display, it'll release a mild-pepper spray *and* set off the alarms.”

Madison yanked her wrist from Stratford's grasp. “Probably something you should have told us *earlier!* I want to see specs for your entire security setup, now! If you want us to protect your precious antiques, we need to know what kind of set-up we're working with.”

Stratford nodded profusely. “Yes, no problem! I'll get you a full—”

The overhead lights flickered off, then back on in sporadic flashes.

“What's wrong, skipped out on paying your electric bill?” Madison barked, just as the lights returned to normal.

“W-we've recently been having some electrical problems in this wing,” Stratford said, his voice wavering.

A series of sharp *creaks* erupted from the network of ceiling lights.

Reena shifted with unease while gazing upwards. “Uh, now what's going on?”

A light fixture broke loose from the ceiling, plummeting towards Reena. Her eyes widened, too stunned to move in time.

“Rookie!” Madison shouted, shoving the young officer out of the way.

The light hit the floor, glass shattering.

“M-my word!” Stratford stuttered.

Shaken, Reena glanced at her partner. “It must be the curse! We looked at the statue!”

“Oh, give me a break,” Madison muttered, rolling her eyes.

“This building's very old,” Stratford said, trying to offer some reassurance. “We haven't replaced the light fixtures in years.”

Madison crossed her arms, annoyed. “Yeah, well you might want to look into that—and soon!”

“Mr. Stratford? What was that noise?”

All eyes turned to a young museum employee who had just entered the room. His shoulders sagged with exhaustion.

“Ah, Krenis,” Stratford said, motioning to the shards of glass on the floor, “just a slight accident. Would you mind cleaning this up?”

“Sure, but I'm heading home afterwards,” Krenis yawned. “This was a sixteen-hour shift for me. That coffin just arrived too. Where should I put it?”

“Coffin?” Stratford looked confused for a brief moment before raising a finger to the air. “Oh, you must mean the *sarcophagus*. Wonderful—I was worried we weren't going to receive it before the opening tomorrow. Bring it into the next room where the funerary artifacts are. We already have an open spot for it beside the ceremonial urns.”

“Hope I'm still getting overtime for this,” Krenis grumbled.

Reena leaned in close to Madison, whispering into her ear, “I think I'll skip the room with the mummy.”

“Oh, brother...” Madison groaned.

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Hours had passed and Reena's feet hurt. Even the flashlight in her hand seemed to have grown unbearably heavy. She had lost track of time while patrolling the museum's Ankharian wing. The plan was for her to stay in the same room as the Ry'sekt statue while Madison patrolled the other rooms on their assigned floor. Stratford and Krenis had left the building an hour ago, leaving the security guards as the only remaining museum employees.

Reena held up her wrist and tapped a button on her I.DAC bracelet. A holographic display flashed out from the device, revealing the current time: *3 a.m.*

*So late!* Reena thought. *I'm ready to fall asleep.*

The time display flickered, causing the holographic image to distort and ripple. Reena shook her wrist, hoping to jolt any loose wiring back into place. An error message flashed out from the bracelet: *malfunction*.

“That's odd,” Reena whispered, holding down the reset button on the I.DAC. A second later, the communication bracelet went dead.

“ROOKIE!”

“Aahh!” Reena leapt off her feet, startled. She dropped her flashlight.

“Are you keeping guard, or playing around with your I.DAC?” Madison sighed, watching as the flashlight clattered to the floor and rolled next to her feet. She picked it up, then handed it back to her partner. “Here.”

“Th-thanks,” Reena said, taking hold of the flashlight. “But my I.DAC just died.”

“Probably 'cause you didn't recharge it.”

“No way,” Reena protested. “I charged it last night.”

“You know the tech they give us at the PCPD's mostly crap. Maybe the thing's just ready for the trash?”

“Madison,” Reena gulped, “you don't think there's *really* anything to all those ghost and curse rumors, do you?”

“First off,” the white-haired officer sighed, “curses are a bunch of superstitious nonsense. Second, I don't believe in ghosts. Third—let's just say ghosts *did* exist—what would one want with some old junk in a museum?”

“Good point.”

“I just looked over the room with the sarcophagus for the *fourth* time,” Madison said, running her fingers through her hair. “Nothing's in that room. Nothing *alive* anyway. If something *does* come out of there, then maybe it'll be one of your ghosts...”

Reena perked up. “Aw, c'mon, don't say that!”

“I'm heading over to the mural room,” Madison said. “If you see anything, yell.”

*Yell?* Reena thought as she watched her partner leave the room. *You can count on that!*

*Beep.*

*Beep.*

*Beep.*

Reena's posture stiffened. She aimed her flashlight around the room for the source of the strange sound. *Now what?*

She took a few steps in one direction, then in another. She didn't seem to be getting any closer to the noise's origin. A stray step to the right brought her foot near the red tape encircling the Ry'sekt statue's display case.

“Eek!” Reena shrieked, a cold sweat enveloping her body. An inch closer and she would have crossed the line—setting off the alarm and tear gas! She took in a long breath, relieved that she had narrowly avoided a major crisis.

*Beep.*

*Beep.*

*Beep.*

Reena tilted her head, listening. She was now certain—the noise was coming from Ry'sekt's display case. *That's odd, Mr. Stratford didn't mention anything about the case making any weird sounds...*

After taking a step back, Reena froze again. Lights began flashing on the display. Pepper spray discharged from a small vent on the front of the case, spitting directly into Reena's face.

“Aaahh!” Reena shrieked, toppling backwards. She fell to the floor, gasping for air. Only a few droplets had reached her eyes, but the burning was still more intense than she expected. “Ow, ow, ow! Th-that really s-stings!”

“What's all the commotion?!” Madison shouted, running into the room.

“Th-the pepper s-spray th-thing went off,” Reena blurted, rubbing her face as she rolled on the floor.

“You stepped over the line?” Madison asked, dumbfounded.

“N-no! It just went off!”

Madison glanced at the display case. “Strange—it doesn't look like the alarm went off, just the spray. According to Stratford, the deterrent system's supposed to activate all at once.”

“It's the statue's curse!”

“More like faulty equipment and bad wiring,” Madison replied, helping Reena to her feet. “C'mon, let's get you to the bathroom, I'll help you rinse your eyes out.”

“F-feels like I can't breath...”

“You'll be fine, trust me.”

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Even in the darkness, the ornate gold, crimson, and turquoise décor gleamed from the hand-carved exterior of the sarcophagus. The room was nearly silent and devoid of life—save for a low, muffled scrapping noise.

Ever-so-slightly, the lid of the sarcophagus shifted, as if on its own volition. The lid jerked sideways a bit more. Then again. And again...

White gloved fingers probed out from the darkened confines. They clutched the side of the lid and pushed it off further.

*Finally!* Etricia Fantos emerged from the sarcophagus, taking a deep breath of fresh air. The stagnant odor within the ancient death casket was foul and enough to induce nausea—especially after spending hours within—but it had served its purpose. Thanks to the aid of Krenis, she had been able to infiltrate the Londo Museum right from under security's nose.

Etricia spotted the wall-mounted surveillance camera across the room and grinned. Clad from head to toe in the white experimental Geist-M29 stealth suit, she was invisible to the camera's electric eye. If need be, she could even evade human sight by engaging her optical camouflage. The skin-tight outfit was far from comfortable, but its uses had earned her untold riches over the last year. It had also garnered her the *White Wraith* moniker from the media. She found the name amusing. With her white balaclava covering the entirety of her face, and the augmented-reality goggles she wore, it didn't come as any surprise that her outlandish costume and its tech would be comparable to a ghost. She had only been spotted—*barely*—on a few occasions, but it was enough to spark all sort of wild rumors and speculation.

Etricia struck a series of buttons on her control belt. Thanks to help from Krenis, she had both the security and lockdown codes for the museum. She ran through a mental checklist of what needed to be done. Phase One entailed deactivating the surveillance system. A coordinated series of inputs on her belt's control device sent out the signal. She watched as the red light on the wall-mounted camera blinked off.

Phase Two consisted of locking every entrance, exit, stairwell, door, and window in the entire building. The last thing she wanted was any unwanted guests—namely security—to interfere once she got down to business. Another series of taps on her control belt did the trick. She could hear the automated locks *clicking* and *clanking* into place. Like most of the museums she stole from, Londo was fully-automated in every way, making a simple system infiltration a walk in the park, especially when all of the access codes were given to her by a disgruntled employee. Etricia had to admit, Krenis's cut of the profit would be well worth it...

With Phase One and Two fully enacted, most common thieves would have been satisfied—but Etricia always liked to have an *extra* layer of insurance. That's why she had Krenis drop gas capsules in the ventilation system. She pressed one last button on her belt, sending out a subsonic frequency that shattered each of the gas capsules in the building. Within minutes, every security guard in the museum would be unconscious—except for anyone in the bathroom. That was the one area Krenis said wouldn't be affected, due to the restrooms having a separate ventilation system. Not that it mattered, anyone in the bathroom would be trapped inside, thanks to the lockdown.

Confident that all had gone according to plan, Etricia exited the room. The Ry'sekt statue would soon be hers...

Reena stood over the bathroom sink, splashing a handful of cold water into her eyes. The stinging persisted, but she was starting to feel some relief.

“Any better?” Madison asked, leaning against the wall.

“Well,” Reena whimpered, “at least I can see again...”

“Good.” Madison turned and walked over to the bathroom door. “I’m going back on patrol. When you’re ready, just—”

*Klik.*

Madison twisted the doorknob to no avail. She paused, then tried again. “Damn door’s locked!”

“Locked?” Reena asked, surprised. “How?”

“Automatic lockdown system must have kicked in—Stratford mentioned the building had one.” Madison raised her wrist, speaking into the I.DAC bracelet’s miniaturized microphone. “All security personnel, do you read? Give me a status report.”

Silence.

Reena looked nervous. “Do you think something happened to the security guards?”

“Doesn’t seem to be anything wrong with the I.DAC’s signal, so I’m guessing they’re out of action.”

“But weren’t there *twelve* guards?”

“We need to find out what’s going on.” Madison took a closer look at the door.

“Are you going to shoot the lock off?”

“You watch too many movies,” Madison replied. “This door’s made of steel—we’re *not* getting out this way.”

“You think we can crawl through that?” Reena pointed to a ceiling vent.

Madison grunted, eyeing the vent. “Museum security specs revealed large air ducts throughout the building. It’s the only option we have.”

“I sure hope we fit,” Reena said. “It wouldn’t be fun to get stuck in there.”

Madison climbed onto the sink and reached up for the vent cover. With one firm pull, she wrenched it loose from the ceiling. Tossing the cover aside, Madison climbed up into the vent. “C’mon, Rookie.”

After a brief moment’s hesitation, Reena followed after her partner.

Etricia entered the main exhibit room, eyes locked on the Ry’sekt display. She held up a customized EMP grenade and flicked the activation switch. It discharged a quick, harmless flash of light in her hand.

*Any second now...*

The lights surrounding the display case blinked off.

*Gotcha!*

Etricia reached into one of her belt pouches and pulled out a KB-R7 portable laser, no larger than a pen. The device fired a crimson beam, striking the front of the display case. Within seconds, a fist-sized hole had been melted into the glass. She reached in, grabbed the Ry’sekt statue, and pulled it out of the opening. It was heavier than she had expected, but the weight only amplified her sense of satisfaction.

*It’s mine...*

On her hands and knees, Madison crawled through the ventilation duct. She wasn’t a fan of small, confined spaces—and the duct barely afforded even a spare inch of elbow room. On a few occasions she had expected to get stuck but, fortunately, was able to wiggle herself free. Having been crawling for over five minutes through ceiling vents, she began to wonder where they were leading to.

“Hold up,” Reena pleaded, crawling after her partner. “How can you move so fast through these vents?”

“The sooner we’re out of here, the better,” Madison replied.

*Krik. Krik. Krik.*

Madison's heart froze. Her body followed.

Reena plowed her face into the white-haired officer's rear. "Ow!"

Feeling the Rookie's face pushing into her behind, Madison blushed. "Wa-watch what you're doing back there!"

"Why'd you stop?"

*Krik. Krik. Krik.*

"Don't you hear that?" Madison asked, concerned.

"Yeah, what is it?"

"I think the vent's starting to colla—"

Etricia nearly dropped the Ry'sekt statue as a section of ceiling gave way, collapsing across the floor. Portions of metal piping, ventilation tubes, and ductwork crashed into the exhibit area, smashing down around the display glass.

*A trap?!*

Etricia then noticed that something *else* had come through the ceiling. Two women were sprawled out on the floor, both dressed in familiar dark blue attire.

*Are they security? No—not with those uniforms...*

Her fingers tightened on the Ry'sekt statue.

*Shit, they're not security—they're with the PCPD!*

Etricia activated her outfit's optical camouflage. It was time to make her escape. Patches of her costume randomly blinked and flickered, the stealth camo initiating. Within seconds her left arm was cloaked to the human eye, then her right leg. Portions of her torso were disappearing, half of her masked face faded—

—and then, all at once, the optical camouflage deactivated.

*What the—? Etricia fumbled with her belt controls. Reactivate!*

Nothing happened.

Etricia was meticulous when it came to her suit's maintenance. She had a difficult time believing that any malfunction was due to an oversight on her part.

*Wait...* Etricia looked down to the statue, observing the Ankharian text at the bottom of the base. Though unable to read the ancient language, she was familiar with the curse's inscription.

*No way—I'm not getting suckered into some dumb superstition!*

It was clear that escape via optical camouflage was no longer an option. The White Wraith would have to use a different, more direct method to exit the building...

Writhing on the floor, Madison let out a pained groan. "You okay, Rookie?"

"Yeah," Reena lay among the pieces of ceiling and ductwork around her, "but I think I'm going to be sore for a while..."

"You and me both," Madison muttered, an instant before spotting the white figure standing only feet away. "Son of a—!"

Reena gasped. "It's a ghost!"

"No," Madison countered, "that's the White Wraith!" She rose to her feet, already pulling out her Halvok-99 firearm.

The White Wraith leapt forward, swinging her arm out. She swatted the weapon from Madison's hand.

"Freeze!" Reena, still on her knees, reached for her holstered gun. "You're busted!"

The White Wraith kicked a portion of the fallen ventilation duct into the air.



“Oww,” Reena cried as the metal duct slammed into her. She landed on her back, the firearm escaping her grip and sliding across the floor.

Madison threw a punch at the thief, but her target evaded the blow. A follow-up strike managed to dislodge the Ry'sekt statue from the criminal's grasp.

The Ankharian artifact landed on the floor, undamaged.

Seizing Madison's wrist, the White Wraith spun the officer around and launched her across the room into a display case. Crashing to the floor, surrounded by shards of glass, Madison grunted. An ancient Ankharian shield fell from the display, its round, dented shape *clanging* onto the ground.

Madison took in a deep breath, noticing a strange smell in the room. It was the residual scent of gas. Familiar with various incapacitating agents, Madison deduced that the gas must have been responsible for the sudden loss of contact with museum security. From the corner of her eye, she could see the White Wraith reach down for the Ry'sekt statue.

“Wanna play, scumbag?” Madison grabbed the nearby shield and, with all her strength, threw it at the thief.

The White Wraith's fingers were less than an inch from the fallen statue when she noticed the incoming projectile. She leapt back, fast enough so that the shield glided harmlessly by.

The flying relic collided off a wall, ricocheted into a nearby pillar, then rebounded back through the air.

*Damn it!* Etricia cursed to herself, her gaze returning to the cop. It seemed she would have to get her hands dirty and dispatch the officers *prior* to stealing the statue. *So much for the White Wraith's reputation of leaving unseen—*

Before Etricia could process her next thought, something slammed into the back of her neck. “Gah!”

Mind racing, Etricia staggered forward—her entire skull searing with pain. *What hit me?!* The Ankharian shield clattered to the floor, giving her an answer. She could hardly believe the projectile had bounced back around and struck her. *What were the chances?*

The pain had made Etricia's eyes water, causing her to blindly miss the collapsed section of ceiling duct near her feet. One shaky step forward sent her careening to the floor. She could only watch helplessly as she plummeted towards the fallen Ry'sekt statue. Her forehead smashed into the hefty relic and everything went dark.

Madison and Reena rose to their feet and advanced upon the sprawled out, immobilized thief.

“What happened?” Reena asked.

“Her head hit the statue.” Madison crouched down, checking the White Wraith's pulse. “Looks like she's out cold.”

“Whoa,” Reena gawked, “I guess that statue really *was* cursed after all! What bad luck...”

“Not for us,” Madison said, correcting her partner, “we caught the White Wraith.”

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“The curator of the Londo Museum wished to extend his gratitude,” Chief Hardiman said, offering a firm nod. “Apprehending the White Wraith last week was exemplary police work.”

“And thanks to the White Wraith's plea deal, we've been able to track down all of the other stolen museum pieces,” Madison added. “She's even identified her accomplice at the museum.”

Reena frowned. “It's just too bad the museum had to close down for the week while they repaired the exhibit room.”

“Well, due to the exhibit's delay,” Hardiman motioned to a case file on his desk, “the museum had that Ry'sekt statue analyzed. The curator sent the results, which may explain some of the electrical issues the museum had, along with your I.DAC's malfunction, Officer Saffron.”

“Really?” Reena perked up.

“It seems that the Ry'sekt statue was carved from azurestone,” Hardiman explained, “a sedimentary rock that—due to containing certain rare mineral particles—can cause disturbances in nearby electronics. They say only certain devices are affected. The report's filled with scientific jargon, but you can read it if you'd like.”

“That solves why the White Wraith's optical camouflage failed too,” Madison said. “So much for all your ghosts and curses, Rookie.”

“I guess there *was* a scientific explanation for everything, huh?” Reena replied, blushing. “You have to admit, that curse stuff did seem pretty real at the time...”

Madison rolled her eyes. “Not to *me*.”

“All right, moving on to your next case, there have been reports of property damage in the Alka District,” Hardiman said, voice trailing off as he leaned over the desk. “Eyewitnesses have described a...well, a rather *large* suspect. I, uh...”

Madison and Reena waited as Hardiman searched for the words.

“...reports have been somewhat inconsistent, aside from select details, but...um...”

“Well, Chief?” Madison snapped. “Let's hear it already.”

Hardiman sighed before blurting the words out as fast as possible. “They claim they've seen a very large bipedal wolf—the size of a man—wandering the streets at night.”

“A werewolf?!” Reena gasped.

“Give me a break!” Madison shouted, turning to her partner. “Just a week ago you were convinced ghosts and curses were real—now werewolves? Didn't you learn anything?”

“Werewolves are different,” Reena argued, “they might actually exist!”

“Ugh,” Madison groaned, “of all the partners in this city to get stuck with—I get *you!*”

\_end