

TURN ON THE NEWS

part 1

“Good morning, Midway! Today, I’m Moldywarp, on-the-scene reporter for UDKA-TV, bringing you, our cherished viewers, non-stop coverage live from downtown!”

They say it’s Moldywarp’s stare that gets people (particularly humans) to talk to her, somehow simultaneously spaced out and locked dead on target. With those huge wide eyes, five of which are yellow and three purple, never blinking and glittering with far more light than there seems to be here in this underground city, it’s like being under interrogation lights. People just open up to her.

“And as we enter our twenty-*fifth* hour of relentless reporting, precious viewers, the lockdown now drags into its second unwelcome day. Travel topside continues to be forbidden and Tube lines to the interstitials are totally stopped due to the restrictions put in place following the Huntsmen’s attack on Melmon Bank.”

She’s short for a spider, barely six feet tall, and unnaturally green—her body fur is a light lavender, but it’s frosted in this bright, unevenly applied layer of neon lime, like it was spray-painted on from a distance. Her clawtips alternate between electric yellow and traffic cone orange. She carries three microphones, one for herself and two more, so that she can interview two subjects at once and still have three claws to spare. Dozens of bracelets on all six arms sparkle and clatter together as she moves.

“Mayor Arachnypoundcake has promised free travel will resume in no more than a week, but in the meantime nobody is very happy. Protests have shut down Lower Grant Street and the Boulevard of Eyes, and the Arachnid Altercation Agency has been deployed to City Hall and MARC headquarters.”

Behind and around her there are more spiders than are ever normally seen on this street, not exactly a crowd but enough to make the normal light scooter traffic impossible. Most are moving slowly north, further downtown towards the Boulevard where the real crowds are forming. Some are carrying posterboard signs, some have bandannas tied around their lower face, some seem like amused sightseers. Green-sashed AAA officers stand around looking stern, akimbo arms in triplicate at their sides. Passers-by, seeing Midway’s famous ace reporter, wave and perform lewd gestures in the background.

“Stay tuned, wonderful viewers, because we’ll be back in a minute to find out what citizens are saying—but first let’s go to the UDKA-TV Ceiling Cam for an aerial view of City Hall!” Those tuned in at home hear the anchorspiders thank Moldywarp as they cut to a shot of downtown Midway as seen from 40 stories up, high enough that the multicolored mass of protesters choking the streets merges into one turbulent blur...but back down here at ground level, Moldywarp relaxes as a signal from the cameraspider crouching a few feet opposite tells her that she’s off the air. He’s enormous, though it’s hard to tell how much of his height is due to the complex shoulder-mounted rig he’s somewhere underneath. Stocky and brown-furred, he looks like some kind of cyborg tree, sprouting boom mics, lights, lenses, panels of auxillary fold-out screens that orbit his head at every angle, and the heavy backpack this whole setup is wired to.

“Okay, let’s do some interviews,” says Moldywarp. Wherever her and her videographer go they attract eager volunteers for their spider-on-the-street interviews. With everyone out here heading to the protest, today is no exception—there’s already a ring of spiders surrounding her ready to offer their opinions. “Who’d like to tell us what they think?” she asks, and everyone starts yelling at once in an unintelligible cacophony, but it’s a girl spider with curly peach fur and a pink penis the size of a fire hydrant that the reporter picks to be her first subject. “How about you?” she says, extending a mic in her direction.

“Um, it’s total freaking *bullshit*.”

Moldywarp nods, oozing sympathy. “Tell me more,” she says.

“I mean, why are they stopping anyone going topside because the Huntsmen drove a tank through Melmon Bank? It’s not like the Huntsmen are hiding out on the surface. They’re probably all deep spiders. How does that make any sense?”

Someone in the crowd yells, “Cause of the MARC!”

“And what does your human think?” asks Moldywarp. Her cameraspider pans down slightly to get all of her cock in the frame.

“Oh, he says to keep him like this until they catch all the Huntsmen,” she says with a shrug. “I guess I shouldn’t complain, but he’s honestly really scared. I tried to tell him there’s nothing to worry about and he wouldn’t listen to me. Maybe if you weren’t showing that weird speech that crazy Huntsman lady made on TV every 30 minutes he wouldn’t be so worried. I mean what do you expect when she’s talking about how the Huntsmen’ll kidnap any human who’s not a cock? He’s so freaked out I can barely get him up.”

Murmurs of assent from the crowd. Moldywarp laughs nervously. “Well, dear viewers, I certainly don’t control what the network shows between my segments...what about you? Do you have any thoughts?” she says to a blue-furred male who towers over her by at least two feet and seems very

excited to meet Moldywarp in person, judging by his enormous grin. He nods enthusiastically when she offers him the mic.

“Normally I gotta beg mine to be my dick for a weekend,” he says, gesturing at his own oversized salmon-colored cock, now gently twitching into hardness. “After what happened yesterday it was like I couldn’t change her fast enough. I’m definitely not sayin’ the Huntsmen should blow anything else up, buuuut... pretty nice, isn’t she?” He grabs his semi-erect penis and wiggles it for the camera; some other spiders in the crowd clap and whistle.

Moldywarp turns to another subject, a male with brown fur and bright stripes of orange and white on his arms and legs. Unlike the previous interviewee his penis is clearly non-human, being only four or five inches flaccid, and this spider seems completely despondent. “Is there anything you’d like to share with our delightful viewers?” asks Moldywarp.

He heaves a sigh. “Yeah. The lockdown sucks and I miss my human. She split for the surface as soon as all this started happening, and I can’t blame her, since most of the time she’s not my cock. Which is fine with me, I just like being with her, you know? And now she’s stuck up there. Said to let her know when this is all over.” He sighs again. “I think it’s pretty obvious the MARC’s making the rules, since humans can go topside but spiders can’t, and *nobody* can come down, but I guess there’s nothing I can... uh...”

He trails off, staring perplexed at a spot somewhere over Moldywarp’s head. In fact, all of a sudden spiders on their way downtown are stopping too, whispering to one another and pointing in the same direction... The cameraspider pans to show, some blocks south of here among the shorter towers and apartment buildings, a single translucent pillar of light stretching to the ceiling. “Viewers!” interrupts Moldywarp. “We may have breaking news!”

Under normal circumstances, it wouldn’t be anything unusual. It’s one of the city’s freight elevators, which stretch from the processing and distribution terminals on the ground to where they disappear between the girders into Midway’s rock ceiling—and beyond, to the hidden logistics centers topside. The glass shafts light up when in operation (which, barring the occasional maintenance period, is 24/7) so that from nearly any point in the city one can watch pallet-stuffed cabs floating slowly down from on high with their precious cargo of human-manufactured consumer goods, like plankton drifting in the water column. It’s a reassuring sight for spiderkind to see their supply of everything from electronic gadgets to processed junk food to enormous novelty dildos continue to flow into their city. (What the humans extract with the spiders’ aid—minerals, gems, and the *other* valuables—is carried surfaceward by less visible channels. Midway’s forward-thinking architects knew long ago it behooved them to show off their munificence while hiding the price.) But with the travel ban in effect the elevators have all gone dark, an understandably distressing sight. The absence is a reminder of the possibilities of shortages and rationing, one more anxiety for the troubled city. But now an elevator is restarted—could shipments have been resumed?

Moldywarp takes off sprinting down the street in a clattering pastel blur. Her cameraspider somehow manages, even with all that gear, not only to keep up but keep her mostly in frame. “Treasured viewers!” she says, over her shoulder. “One of our city freight elevators has just come online! More on this developing story and what it means, as we develop it!” Trailing behind them both is an accumulating entourage of intrigued spiders, following as best they can. They’ve only gone a block when, at the point where the ceiling’s steel beams meet the elevator’s lit shaft, the underside of a cab sinks slowly into view. “Further news! Something or *someone* is on the way down from the surface!” says Moldywarp, coming to a halt. The cameraspider tilts the lens up towards the ceiling immediately, and Moldywarp comes around to his other side to see the magnified view. Inquisitive spiders start to surround them both, eager for a look but careful not to block the shot. There’s barely any shake in the frame even at maximum zoom in the cameraspider’s expert claws, close enough so that we can all clearly see the contents of the cab through its translucent walls as it lowers. . .

Inside are a few wooden pallets, one human, and one spider. The human’s a skinny male, though it’s hard to say more about him since his head is buried in the spider’s tits. She’s much taller than the human, somewhere around nine feet, and she’s sandy brown all over except for her coffee-colored hairdo. Interestingly, she’s wearing the green belt-and-sash uniform of the Arachnid Altercation Agency. And her eyes are closed in deep enjoyment of the handjob the human’s giving her.

Moldywarp holds her mics away from her mouth and whispers “We’re getting this, right?” to her cameraspider, who responds by extending a claw with a silent thumbs-up. “Viewers, it looks as though there’s one AAA officer and one human male aboard,” she says, dropping her voice into the steady lower register she uses for narrating ongoing action. “She’s holding him tight against her chest, and he’s jerking her off—not sure how big she is from here, but I don’t think that’s a second human—he’s going pretty fast now, looks like she likes it a lot, and—oh, he’s stopping for some reason. . . it seems like there is some kind of *drama* going on with the couple descending into our fair city, viewers!”

He’s removed his hand from her penis and his head from between her breasts, and now it seems like he’s trying to wriggle away completely. She lets him go, and he starts to pace around her in frantic circles. She crosses her arms and sighs, still with that erection waving around. Whatever they’re saying, the camera can’t pick up, but after a few words she envelops him from behind in a hug then leans down to plant a kiss on his forehead.

“How lovely!” says Moldywarp. “Viewers, let’s go find out just why and how this couple is here!”

She resumes her dash southward to the freight terminal where the elevator will touch down, now one of many curious spiders heading there. By the time she arrives, camera in tow, there are already dozens of spiders waiting

for the cab to finish its tantalizing descent. The terminals are mostly flat tarmac—normally workers from the Midway Freight Transport Board have this concrete pasture sectioned off with cones, tape, and movable barriers according to the needs of the day’s incoming cargo and the forklifts, pallet jacks, and compact electric trucks waiting to haul it away. But today the area is eerily empty, except for the arriving onlookers ringing the elevator shaft and two spiders wearing the MFTB uniform (matching powder blue armbands) who look more confused than anyone else. Moldywarp gently but rapidly nudges her way through to the workers and her burly videographer follows, bumping aside any smaller spiders left in his way.

“Intrepid girl reporter Moldywarp with UDKA-TV here! What can you tell us about what’s going on here?” is her opening line, delivered in one breath as she thrusts a mic at one of the MFTB spiders.

“Uhh. . . not a lot,” he says. There is a pause. Moldywarp’s small-fanged smile and searchlight stare do their work, but she’s squeezing blood from a stone here. “I don’t know anything about it,” he adds.

The other worker chimes in, trying to be helpful. “Only reason we’re even here is to watch the gear,” she says.

“So you can’t tell us anything about the AAA officer and the human aboard the elevator?”

“There’s people *on* it?”

Moldywarp nods. “Oh yes! The human was giving her a handjob.”

“Nice!” exclaim both workers simultaneously.

“Well, he did stop a bit early,” says Moldywarp.

“You’ll have to ask him about that,” says the female MFTB worker. “We don’t know anything about it. Technically we’re not even supposed to ride them, though I know people do it sometimes when the Tube’s crowded. . . I guess the AAA can do whatever they want, though.”

“Well there you have it, esteemed viewers!” says Moldywarp, snapping to face the camera. “Nobody can identify the pair who are just moments away from completing their eye-catching arrival, but I’ll be live on scene to find out who they are, how and why they’re entering Midway with the lockdown in effect, and what made the human stop rubbing the officer’s penis when it seemed like she was having so much fun! Stay with us here on UDKA-TV!”

The cameraspider pans up. The elevator’s only a few stories above ground level now, low enough that we can begin to see into it even from this angle. The spider is indeed a cop; the small assortment of decorations on her AAA sash indicate a career a few years long. She stands impassively with her feet planted firmly shoulder-width apart, one pair of arms crossed and most of the others shielding the human who seems to be cowering behind her. Her fangs poke downward from her imposing frown. With her solid black eyes she stares down the news crew and what, by now, could be hundreds of spiders surrounding the elevator. And her boner’s gone down somewhat. The human is a skinny, pale man in his twenties with unkempt brown hair, peering out

around the spider's arms with an expression that suggests he may be having a panic attack. They're whispering to each other, though nobody can hear what they're saying through the glass even in this odd, anxious silence. . .

Meanwhile.

Sidwell Greenstreet is hyperventilating into Lieutenant Skeila's back fur. "Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit. . .

"Sid, try to calm down, okay?"

"Calm down? There's like a thousand spiders out there, Skeila!"

"I know. I told you I'm not gonna let anything happen to you."

"What's going on? Is that seriously the spider news? Are we on TV right now? That one with the microphones is staring right at me and it's really freaking me out!"

"Can you take a deep breath? You sound like you're gonna pass out."

Sid makes a shallow fishlike gasp. "I'm pretty sure the whole entire city saw me—saw us—you know. . ."

"Just let me do the talking, alright?"

"Oh, yeah, no problem."

The elevator comes to a gentle stop. There is a pause. The unblinking reporter waits patiently. The cameraspider adjusts his focus. Skeila holds Sid a little tighter. And the elevator's glass doors whisper open.

Immediately Moldywarp jams a mic in Skeila's face. "Officer, welcome back to Midway! Moldywarp with UDKA-TV here! May I ask what brings you down on the elevators today?"

"Agency business," says Skeila with a scowl, pulling her head back.

"Your name is?"

"Lieutenant Skeila." Moldywarp aims another microphone at the human standing behind Skeila like a blast shield. He blinks several times before realizing the reporter expects an answer from him, too. "I'm Sid," he croaks in a tiny voice.

"Lieutenant Skeila, does your dramatic arrival mean that topside travel is resuming?"

If Skeila's confused, she doesn't let it show. "Nope. This is just a one-time thing. Everything's still 'zactly like it was before."

"Well, dear viewers," says Moldywarp to the camera, "unfortunately it seems that it's still the case that nobody can get in or out of Midway except for our brave police! Officer, can you tell me anything about why you got to bring your human down to Midway?"

"I'm his bodyguard," says Skeila, getting testy.

"So that's not your human?" (Here, the cameraspider pans down to the quivering, pale young man behind Lieutenant Skeila, who inches further behind her in response.)

“I’m his bodyguard,” she repeats.

“Wow,” says Midway’s favorite girl reporter. “It’s wonderful of the AAA to do that for our human friends! Everyone’s so worried about the Huntsmen after the attack, and I know it’ll make them feel better to have personal bodyguards.” Suddenly, she leans down to point a mic close to Sid. “Were you playing with her cock to thank her?”

Sid, wilting under that unwavering stare, has no idea how to respond to this abrupt line of inquiry. He opens his mouth and produces zero words. Luckily his bodyguard intercedes, jabbing a claw at Moldywarp: “Just so you know, Mr. Greenstreet is a statistics genius, he’s so good the MARC wants to talk to him, and the Huntsmen already tried to snatch him once! So I don’t think there’s anything wrong with making sure he’s safe, alright?”

“Goodness! *Mister* Greenstreet, can you tell our wonderful viewers anything about the important work you’re doing?”

“Oh, uh,” stammers Sid, who’s so relieved not to be talking about jacking Skeila off that he begins to talk. “I do some freelance market analytics. Energy sector stuff lately. Coal, natural gas, stuff like that.”

“Natural gas? *Mister* Greenstreet, do you think your work has anything to do with the Huntsmen targeting you?”

He blinks twice. “I don’t think—”

“*Mister* Greenstreet, do you have any connection to Wallace Shale?”

Any momentary ebullience Sid had has now entirely left him. “Uh... well, they subscribe to my newsletter,” he mumbles.

“Okay,” says Lieutenant Skeila, extending an interdicting claw towards the camera and hauling the skinny human away. “Interview’s over.” She drags him past the reporter and through the ring of spiders surrounding the elevator, which quickly parts for her when she advances on them elbows-first with no intention of stopping. Nearby is a line of taxi-scooters waiting for fares at the curb. She heads that way, guarding the human with her left arms and angrily swinging behind her with the right ones—the two-spider news crew’s following just out of reach, with Skeila trying to block the camera and rip the microphones right out of the intrepid girl reporter’s claws.

“Lieutenant, was Mr. Greenstreet placed under police protection at the MARC’s request? Mr. Greenstreet, was the MARC acting on behalf of your employers? What part of your work was the MARC interested in? Mr. Greenstreet? Lieutenant?”

“Back off!” snarls the cop, baring her fangs. She throws the human in a scooter’s sidecar and crams herself in next to him. “Go!” she barks at the driver, who hits the gas even though he can’t possibly know where he’s supposed to be going yet, and the scooter buzzes off down the street. The cameraspider lingers on it for a moment before returning Moldywarp to center frame.

“Wow!” says glittery, sparkling Moldywarp with her megawatt smile. “Well, lovely viewers, I hope all of you out there will soon be able to bring

your humans back down too!”

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This is the biggest protest Captain Klatz has ever worked, for sure. He’s retraced his 30-year career in the Arachnid Altercation Agency in his mind and nothing else comes close. Six blocks of Lower Grant Street alone are closed off now, from here at City Hall on past the MARC building all the way to the Boulevard of Eyes. It’s bigger than the double protests that happened in both cities, above- and below-ground, in 2009—and half of those were humans. It’s bigger than when the MARC started agitating for real enforcement of the 24-hour rule. It’s even bigger than the protests that happen every couple years when Wallace Shale caves in a tunnel on a few deep spiders.

But despite the turnout, he doesn’t have much to do. This is a spider protest, after all, so it looks less like a riot in the offing and more like an orgy with some irritated attendees. There’s chanting and signs and shouting, yes, but there’s also gigantic ornamental bongos that take four hands to properly operate being passed around, a disorienting blend of overlapping techno tracks blasted from walls of refrigerator-sized speakers, a general atmosphere of chaos, and a lot of fucking. Mostly standing up, what with the streets being packed shoulder-to-shoulder—spiders railing their partners up against buildings, getting jostled now and then as others with giant signs try to get past. There’s a handful of humans here that showed up unattached to spiders, and some are even participating in the protest by allowing themselves to be changed. A few minutes ago a purple-haired human girl got up on a spider’s shoulders to announce that she’d stay a cock until until the lockdown was lifted before dismounting and grinding her ass into the other girl’s hips—it wasn’t clear if they knew each other, but the spider girl was happy to help. Everyone nearby stopped to watch that one. The human actually lead a “free Midway” chant as long as she could, even though towards the end it was unintelligible, every syllable from her now-vertical mouth coming with a sputter of fluid that ran all the way down her shaft body. Everyone kept the rhythm going until, at last and to much cheering, the fully changed woman released multiple squirts of cum into the crowd.

That’s the kind of stuff Captain Klatz has been observing all day. His fur is a mottled auburn, making the burly spider look something like a rusty oil barrel with six arms. He wears the standard-issue AAA uniform—the olive-drab sash and utility belt, just like Skeila’s, except his is decked out with many more medals, ribbons, and other fripperies of command, not that spiders tend to pay much attention to rank. He picks at his teeth with a short clawtip as he scans the street, feeling the half-erection he’s been sporting most of the day threatening to turn into the real thing. (Klatz takes umbrage at being

called fat, in part or in whole, but his uncircumcised red dick is proportionally *stout*.) It already took all his willpower to turn down the two twinkly spider boys that wanted him to decide which one of them gave a better blowjob. Any other time he would have been happy to render a fair, unbiased judgment, but not on the clock. Gotta have some professionalism.

Already there's another spider-human couple attracting attention nearby, a big blue guy and his friend, a cute, freckled human girl with frizzy red hair running halfway down her back. The protesters have cleared out a small circle for the spider and the human to get down to it. With a nervous smile she kicks her shoes off and pulls her tank top over her head. The blue spider's not wearing anything, and his hard azure cock's ready to go. He flips up her skirt and pulls her back against him. The crowd cheers.

"Captain Klatz, may I have your attention for a minute?"

The startled spider diverts his attention to the short human approaching him. "Hey! Tony! You come out to watch the show? Surprised you're out of the office."

"I'm here in my official capacity, Captain. We're concerned about this protest situation." This young bureaucrat is Anthony Waterproof, a pudgy, clean-shaven human wearing chinos, a wrinkle-free polyester button-down with the sleeves rolled up, and a perpetually hassled expression. His straw-blond hair is parted in no particular style. Officially, he's the MARC's liaison to the AAA—which means whenever the MARC's unhappy with the police, Anthony's whining at Klatz.

"Nothin' to be concerned about," Klatz says. "I mean, just watch this shit."

Klatz gestures back to the blue spider and the human redhead, who's already fused to her host at the waist. He's holding her up in front of him perpendicular to his body, leaving her legs hanging down—legs that, by now, have almost completely become dangling testicles. Her torso is a huge round tube, and the skirt she was wearing is stretched around her where her waist used to be. At the moment her arms are still fully intact. She's reaching back to hold on to the spider changing her, though it seems to be hard for her to turn around. The spider's gently stroking her with all six arms when suddenly she heaves and spits a mouthful of fluid out of her mouth. She has a moment to draw a gasping breath, then more liquid comes up—this time she tries to hold it in for a moment, cheeks bulging, but after another heave there's simply too much and she releases it from her mouth in a long arc that splatters onto the pavement. The crowd cheers even louder, clapping for the soon-to-be penis. Even the ones that are mainly there to protest are getting into it, waving their signs.

"There! You see that sign?" says Anthony Waterproof to Klatz.

"Huh? Not exactly what I'm paying attention to."

"Look," he replies, pointing out one of the protesters egging on the merging couple. He's carrying a sign with the MARC's logo (that stick figure spider

and human holding hands) circled and crossed out. “That’s exactly the kind of thing we’re concerned about. Why on earth are they protesting *us*?”

“Ain’t a secret you MARC guys were pushing for this thing.”

“Captain, the lockdown was agreed to by multiple municipal organizations. Not only Dr. Schlangenkraft but Mayor Arachnypoundcake and even your own superintendent all concurred that it was necessary for security reasons to—”

“Alright, alright,” says Klatz. “Can it for a minute so I can enjoy this.”

The redheaded girl not only continues to produce fluid but begins to twitch violently upward every time she spits it out, to the point where the spider changing her almost seems to have trouble holding on. Her arms attach to her transformed body and meld right into it, leaving the girl as a head on an otherwise totally phallic body. Then, with every jerk, her face begins to change too. Her mouths shrinks then stretches up, pivoting into a lipless vertical slit that’s totally unable to control the dribbling flow. Her skin puffs up and darkens, narrowing her eyes and smoothing away her cheekbones and jawline. Her nose and ears shrink and vanish. She’s just a dick with a face that’s barely there, then finally there’s one last gigantic spurt that goes on for seconds, the girl’s features melt completely, and the exhausted spider is left with a new two-and-a-half foot dick. Everyone nearby cheers loudly; a few bystanders catch him by the arms and ease him down as he slumps happily to the ground.

“Lovely. Quite ready to talk, Captain?”

“If you don’t like watching that, you’re made of stone. Whadda you want, anyway?”

“We’re just worried about this event getting out of hand. The Doctor thinks maybe the best thing to do is de-escalate the protest in advance.”

“You think tellin’ everyone they gotta go home is gonna de-escalate things? I can read between the lines, Tony. Your boss wants me to start cracking heads. Go tell Casper the Jagoff Ghost we’ve got everything under control here, thanks all the same.”

“Frankly, Captain,” huffs Waterproof, “it’s disappointing to hear the Arachnid Altercation Agency is seemingly unconcerned about the safety of this city’s citizens. This is a volatile situation.”

“Okay. First thing, Tony, is if you ever tell me I don’t care about these people again, I’ll bend you over and shove my cock so far up that tight ass of yours, your anorexic lawyer boyfriend won’t ever be able to satisfy you again. That’s the first thing. Second thing is that this is *not* a volatile situation. Look around you, for Saint Gulik’s sake. Half these people are fucking and most of the rest are stoned out of their mind.”

“I assure you Zacts has a perfectly healthy appetite. And given that you’ve had the opportunity to collaborate with him on several cases, you must have had the chance to notice the difference in your respective endowments and would therefore know that you would have much more trouble ‘satisfying’

anyone. By far. Lastly, yes, this is relatively sedate at the moment. But there's been a . . . development."

"What kinda development, meatball?"

"I assume you saw the freight elevator a few minutes ago?" asks Waterproof.

Klatz nods. "Whole damn city musta seen it."

"That was our mutual friend Lieutenant Skeila."

"That was Skeila?!" The red spider knits his brows. "She told me that human she rescued from the Huntsmen had to go topside for something or other, but that was a week ago. . . thought she'd be back by now. The hell was she doing?"

"Being briefly fondled by that same human. That's what I saw on TV, anyway."

"This was on TV?!"

"Live news. Moldywarp interviewed her."

Klatz grimaces. "Ah, fuck. How bad?"

Anthony Waterproof rubs his temples as if trying to massage away some great headache. "I don't think it lasted thirty seconds yet somehow she managed to bring up the Huntsmen, the MARC, and Wallace Shale. That human came off like he's involved in some conspiracy between all three. We've got humans calling us asking if it's safe to go outside, spiders calling us asking why they can't bring their humans down, and some rather significant people topside asking what exactly the hell is going on. I imagine the situation at the Agency will soon be similar."

"Eris help us," mutters Klatz.

"Some of those spiders were rather irate that it was a police officer that got to bring her human down, so good luck with this mess once that interview starts getting around. Particularly if people think Wallace Shale is involved in some fashion. I've got to get back to the office—do give the lieutenant my regards if you see her."

"Yeah, yeah. Like I said, it's all under control. You want someone to escort you back?" Waterproof declines, and wades into the crowd with no trepidation.

Klatz folds his arms and considers the situation. He has to admit Waterproof has a point. Keeping spiders from going to the surface and separating them from their humans is one thing, but if people start thinking the AAA can go topside and come back whenever they please, or jaunt back and forth whenever a particularly loathed human corporation says it's okay. . . "Klatz to base," he says into his handheld radio. "How many do we have over at the MARC?"

After a few seconds, a cautious voice comes back: "Uh, specifically at the MARC building? We've got officers all up and down the Boulevard, but we didn't put anyone on any specific buildings."

"I want a squad there. Whoever's available. And did Skeila come in yet?"

“You got it, Captain, post a squad at the MARC building. And Skeila? Didn’t you hear? She was the one on the elevator just a few minutes ago! They even interrupted *All My Hatchlings* to show—”

“Get a hold of her and tell her to come down here. I wanna talk to her.”

“Sure thing, Captain. Hey, did the Huntsmen really try to kidnap that human of hers cause he works for Wallace Shale?”

“That’ll be all,” he replies gruffly, holstering the radio and wondering if Skeila’s gotten herself in real trouble this time. He knew having Skeila guard the human was a dangerous game, but the mayor was dead set on it. Back when Klatz transferred her to the Human Attitude Adjustment and Re-education Project’s squad he was hoping it would give her an outlet of sorts. She’s a good cop, but a lot to handle. He wasn’t surprised when she became the star officer on the human snatch-and-grab team, or when complaints against her went way down—mainly since they don’t count complaints from the humans the HAARPIes apprehend. Maybe this bodyguard gig would be good for her, too. If not necessarily the human.

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The MARC building has never fit in with its neighbors. All down the Boulevard of Eyes are the human buildings, where the facades are perfect replicas of the corresponding skyscrapers in the city above—because they are the *same* buildings, they simply extend downward farther than most humans know. Midway’s native edifices fill the space between the towers like mortar, gray and black limestone and granite in architectural styles that switch haphazardly from one building to the next, from crisp Futurist lines to beautifully carved neo-Gothic arches with leering, fanged spidergoyles, buildings that are given to whimsical impracticalities like eschewing orderly ranks of windows in favor of arranging them in uneven honeycombs or putting the front door on the third floor, accessible only via a grand spiral staircase on the sidewalk. Each has its own absurd beauty. On the other hand, the MARC building is a dim, squat rectangle of one-way glass fronted by an incongruous white colonnade. It looks like a mad architect grafted the White House portico onto a CIA black site. For an organization whose stated goal is to improve spider-human relations, it is a remarkably unfriendly looking place.

Today it is unfriendlier than normal. As the official public face of surface society, the MARC gets the blame for most human-related problems, from shortages of delicious human-manufactured snack foods to deadly cave-ins, so it was a given the protest would be here too—and the crowd is pissed. There’s more yelling and less fucking than the mellower protests happening just down the street, not that there’s no fucking here, but it’s fast, angry, and every time a human becomes a cock their new owner aims them towards the MARC

building before they cum as a show of disrespect. The AAA has taped off the building's sidewalk and set up barriers to keep the protesters back; every couple of minutes an arc of jizz is loosed from within the crowd to fly over the cordon and splatter across the pavement. (Nobody's gotten very close to the building itself yet, but they're doing their best.) The MARC itself is still open, and any time someone enters or leaves—mostly human office workers trying not to make eye contact—the agitation of the crowd follows them in a visible wave, long grasping spider arms reaching out in threes, fists shaking and middle claws extended, held back by movable fences, yellow tape, and green-sashed AAA officers.

There are two more AAA officers coming down the sidewalk now, with a skinny human boy between them. Lieutenant Skeila shields Sid as they walk, standing between him and the roiling crowd. He cowers under her arms, risking every now and then a peek between them at the angry protesters while Skeila stares them all down. On Sid's other side is Sergeant Izlil, one of Skeila's squadmates. Her fur is lemondrop yellow, and her color-coordinated eyes, claws, and lips are all bright glossy orange. She's short for a spider, a mere foot taller than Sid, and walks along seemingly oblivious to the protest around them. Right now Izlil's telling Skeila about what happened while she was out of town—the Huntsmen's raid on Melmon Bank—the same way one might talk about seeing a famous actor.

"Nobody can believe they brought guns down to Midway, let alone the tank. I mean *where* did they get a tank, right? And their leader was there, and she gave this big speech—wait, you saw her, right? When they were gonna take him?" Izlil points to Sid. "Purple, hisses when she talks?"

"Yeah," says Skeila. "Her name's Margreta. We've met. She gave a speech?"

"Oh, yeah," says Izlil. "All about how humans aren't really your humans unless they're always your cock or something. It was nuts! And then, one of the Huntsmen changed that human girl they kidnapped. And we have *no* idea where they are or where they took her. Betcha nobody sees her again for a long time!"

Sid shivers. There but for the grace of Skeila goes he.

Some of the spiders behind the barriers are yelling directly at them. There's a woman at the front with charcoal fur and angry gray eyes, shiny and steely as ball bearings. A half-dozen glinting rings dangle from one of her wedge-shaped ears. She's screaming so much she's hoarse. "How come you get to have your human? You don't think anyone else has a human stuck up there? But cops get to bring theirs down in front of the whole city and make them jerk them off on the news?!"

In the span of half a second, pale white Sid turns red enough to be mistaken for a victim of an in-progress strangulation.

"Yeah," shouts a male near the gray woman. "At least pass him around so the rest of us can get a chance!" The crowd roars their agreement. Skeila,

on the other hand, is suddenly clutching Sid so hard that her claws dig into him, but they keep walking.

“Fuck, Izz,” says Skeila to her squadmate. “I wouldn’t have brought him here if I knew it was this bad. Or if I knew everyone in town apparently watches the freaking news.”

“I knew everyone was looking at us! I knew it,” moans Sid.

“Relax, okay?” says Skeila. “I’m sure it wasn’t that bad.”

Izlil chimes in. “Oh no, it wasn’t bad at all! Me and some of the rest of us saw it. When the elevator lit up, Keedin turned UDKA on in the van, and when he realized it was you he called us all over.”

“So... the whole city definitely saw me... you know, with her... touching her?” Sid asks.

“Oh yeah, I bet! Like, everyone!” says Izlil, unable to even comprehend how that could be a bad thing.

Skeila desperately tries to shift the topic before Sid can collapse into a ball of pure embarrassment. “Izz, can you just show us where Klatz is?”

“Sure thing!” she bubbles.

Captain Klatz is just a little further down the street, standing inside a ring of police vans, encircled here around the AAA’s makeshift command post like pioneer wagons. The captain is doling out orders to his many subordinates, pointing his beefy red arms here and there to assign spiders to points along the barriers separating them from the crowd. When he sees Skeila approaching, he raises his claws in mock surprise: “Sergeant Izlil! You didn’t tell me you knew any celebrities,” he bellows with overblown enthusiasm.

“Captain, I’m sorry—” begins Skeila.

“Hey, one a’ you guys get a picture with me and the TV stars!”

“Captain, believe me I never wanted—”

“Can I get your autograph? Or maybe your human can sign my dick?”

“Seriously?” grumbles Skeila.

“You stars are always so moody. You forget what us common people are like.”

“Look, I’m sorry!” squeaks Skeila in frustration. “Captain, I barely even know what’s going on! I was just trying to get back down to Midway with Sid, and all of a sudden Moldywarp is asking me questions and saying something about an *attack*?! I checked in at HQ and they said you were down at the protest and I was like, what protest? I mean, is that what all this is about?” she asks, gesturing expansively to the turbulent crowd of waving signs and in-progress penises.

“Naw,” sighs Klatz. “Well, not directly. *This* is mostly about the lockdown order. The one you violated on live television in the most flagrant manner possible. Nobody’s allowed to go up or down for the next three days. Except for bigshot celebrities such as yourselves, of course.”

“We’re not *really* celebrities, right?” mumbles Sid, back to being pale as milk.

Skeila pulls the human even closer to her, as if to shield him. “The captain is just joking,” she says, leveling a glare at Klatz.

“Hah! Kid, on the off chance someone didn’t see the beacon you lit up in the middle of the city, they were probably inside watching Moldywarp’s show. And from what I heard you owe the lieutenant the second half of a handy,” cackles Klatz.

“They—they—they all *saw*,” says Sid, who seems to be trying to hide inside Skeila’s arms at this point.

“Oh, and not only did you piss off every spider in the city who’s got a human stuck topside, but now the MARC’s all stirred up too. You know they don’t like anyone talking about the shale drillers. They definitely ain’t happy you said they have anything to do with them. Your buddy Tony Waterproof was already down here whining at me on behalf of his creepy-ass boss. And I know Mayor Arachnypoundcake is gonna want to talk to me about this—Eris help me.”

“I didn’t mean to say anything. I fucked up. I’m sorry, Captain. But the mayor told me to keep Sid safe, and he had to go topside! I didn’t know all this would be happening when we got back!”

“Hey, I’m just warning you about the powers that be. I’m not mad, I’m too damn tired to be mad. I’ve been up since before the Huntsman attack because we don’t have enough officers to go around. This is an all-claws type situation. Help out with protest duty here and you’re square with me.”

“I’ve got to watch Sid, Captain. He shouldn’t even be here. This is *not* safe.”

“So go drop him off at HQ and come back. Safe as can be.”

“No way is that happening. Sid stays with me,” says Skeila flatly. Klatz doesn’t look impressed. She defensively continues: “Well, you’ve got a skeleton crew at HQ! Everyone’s here at the protests. It would be *completely* irresponsible to leave him without a personal security detail of at least eight. . . no, ten spiders. At least. No cadets. And besides, I promised the mayor I’d never let him out of my sight. *Mine*.”

“Right. The mayor.”

“Well. . . you don’t want to get him any more mad at us, right?”

Klatz gives Sid a knowing smirk. “She really never leaves you alone, does she?”

“I got her to let me pee by myself,” mumbles Sid.

“Impressive,” says Klatz. “Maybe you should stick around, kid. Someone might step out of line and you’ll get to see Lieutenant Skeila in action. You probably oughta know what she does to humans who don’t cooperate. She’s the best HAARPie there is.”

“Sid, don’t let the Captain scare you with his dumb jokes.”

“Jokes? I seem to remember a certain young officer getting written up an awful lot for putting people in the hospital. Tell you what, let’s put you two in the surveillance van. None of us know how to use that shit. Your boy’s

some kinda genius, right? Maybe he can figure it out and you two can keep an eye on stuff for us.”

“Since when do we even *have* a surveillance van?”

“Now that we have an actual terrorism case, we’re busting out some of the heavy stuff we get in hand-me-downs from Metro PD. They buy so much gear topside they gotta give half of it to us. We’ve got riot shields, extra-spicy pepper spray, those zappy electric stick things—two different voltages, one for spiders and one for humans. Definitely don’t get ’em mixed up. Here, kid, check this out.” Klatz tosses a bulky visored helmet to Sid. “These are too small for us, but you can wear one. Now you two hang tight while I go find out who has the keys to the spy van.” The captain saunters off down the street, leaving Skeila and Sid standing alongside the van, far enough back from the mob to be able to ignore them in favor of each other.

Sid tries on the helmet. On his thin frame it makes him look like a chess pawn.

“Cute,” Skeila giggles. She gets closer, leans down to him, so that her own face is visible, fish-eyed, in the mirrored visor. “You oughta open that thing up,” she says.

“For what?” asks Sid.

“Guess.”

“I don’t know if it’d be smart to kiss you with this crowd watching. They seem, uh, kind of perturbed already.”

“Yeah, probably,” admits Skeila. “Didn’t say anything about kissing, though. I was gonna stand up and see if my dick would fit through the slot.” She grins and flexes her half-erection, making it bounce off Sid’s chest.

“Okay, that would be a *really* bad idea. But maybe instead—” Sid cuts himself off, jerking his head a fraction of an inch. In the visor’s shiny surface, Skeila sees something moving over her own shoulder—and beyond it, in the crowd, the spider who threw that something.

In a single, rapid motion, Skeila stands, whirls around, and snatches the object out of the arc it was traveling in. It would have connected directly with Sid’s helmet, had she not interrupted it. It’s a plastic bottle. A little bit of water squirts out from between her claws as she crushes the bottle and lets it drop to the ground without taking her eyes off the thrower. Emanating pure fury, Skeila stomps forward.

The crowd is suddenly *much* quieter, and as Skeila closes in, shoulders hunched and fangs bared, everyone *except* the thrower moves backwards, like magnetized iron filings being driven away by an opposite charge, leaving him standing alone in a conspicuously empty space. The thrower is a banana-colored spider with brown spots and frizzy hair that runs down to his shoulders. He’s tall, nearly eight feet, but not quite as tall as Skeila. His eyes are narrowed in defiance, but still bewildered, as though he failed to consider what would happen five seconds after he threw the bottle.

“You’re under arrest,” says Skeila. “Turn around and put your arms behind your back.”

“Hey, wait! What am I under arrest for?” He puts his claws up defensively as Skeila reaches the crowd barrier and yanks one of the metal sections to the side.

“For throwing shit at my fucking human,” screams Skeila. She grabs two of his arms, but he tries to twist away. “Gimme your other arms, asshole!”

“Fuck you!” He’s struggling hard now, trying to get out of Skeila’s grip. “It’s bullshit! You get to bring him down here just cause you’re a cop!” He lurches backward, trying to break free, and when that doesn’t work he starts shoving her and aiming ineffective punches at her with his free arms. Skeila is not having this. She pastes him with a right hook, landing the blow to his face with such velocity that he does a half spin before slamming head-first into the pavement. Then, taking a bundle of zip-ties from a pouch on her belt, Skeila kneels on his back and lashes his six wrists together.

The briefly silent crowd is vocally unhappy again, and they have Skeila to focus their anger on. They’re shouting so loud none of them can be heard individually—but they aren’t throwing anything, and Skeila calmly ignores them and finishes tying up the thrower. She stands and hoists him to his feet by his left arms. He’s looking pretty rough, but he’s conscious. A few open cuts on his face, one right above his chin where Skeila plastered him, plus a great big scrape where he hit the ground.

“Lil’ lesson!” she bellows. “This is what happens when you throw shit at cops!” So that everyone gets the point, she makes her captive turn around so that the whole crowd can see the damage. By now some of Skeila’s fellow officers have come to help. She shoves the thrower towards a pair of cadets, who catch him as he stumbles forwards. “Lock this asshole up in the party bus,” she orders, and they scurry off with the prisoner and a deferential “yes’m”. Another AAA officer quickly drags the section of barrier Skeila moved aside back in place; from behind it the crowd boos, jeers, shouts about how she’s a fascist, and a pig, and *really* ought to get that spider a doctor.

Skeila just smirks with her claws on her hips, basking in the anger like she’s enjoying it—in fact, at some point during this whole debacle that half-boner she was teasing Sid with grew into a rock-hard erection, and she’s totally unembarrassed to be pointing it at the crowd. She extends her arms like some terrifying policewoman Kali with a weapon in every claw: batons, pepper spray, her taser, and in one empty claw an extended middle digit... “Remember, when the cops tell you to do something, fuckin’ do it!”

She turns her back on the masses and struts smugly to her spot by the van where Sid’s been waiting. “An’ that goes for you too, skinny boy,” she says, grabbing his ass hard enough to make him jump. “What? How come you’re giving me that look?” She’s referring to the goggle-eyed stare he’s laying on her, plus the sliver of an open mouth and a kind of fear—by now she’s gotten

to know lots of different kinds of this human's fear, but this particular flavor she hasn't tasted since the night they first met.

"It's just, I haven't..."

"Haven't *what*?"

"Nothing." He hasn't seen this side of her before, is what he was going to say, but of course he has—that first night, when she was swinging him around by his ankles because he thought he was a burglar. "Uh, is it, like, standard procedure to haul off and hit them like that?"

"For someone who's resisting arrest? Uh, yeah. 'Specially cause he was throwing stuff, remember? At *you*? I know maybe it wasn't pretty, but I had to subdue him."

"And what was the idea behind taunting the crowd, exactly?" asks a sonorous baritone that makes Skeila jump. It seems Captain Klatz is back with the keys to the spy van. "Things aren't fun enough out here, so you figured it was time to start a riot?"

"*Cap*-tain! Hiiii! Um, I didn't see you there—"

"I seriously can't leave you alone for a minute! You're a walking PR disaster, you know that, Skeila? You're lucky we're keeping all the reporters back where it's quieter! You think you got it bad now, what if Moldywarp got you on camera? Get your human and get in the van before you burn down the city, already!" Skeila guiltily shepherds Sid to the back of the van, where Klatz is unlocking the doors for them. "Be our eyes and ears for a while. You see anything, get on the radio. And blow off some steam if you have have to," he says to Skeila, nodding towards Sid as she pushes the human headfirst into the van by his ass. "Just, you know, don't fuck up the electronics."

"Okay, okay," mutters Skeila, stooping to get in herself.

"Hey, Captain!" yells a nearby AAA officer. "If you're grounding her, shouldn't you take away her toy too?" Big laughs from all the cops except for Skeila, who's cut off mid-snarl when Klatz slams the doors shut, leaving the spider and the human in a suddenly silent van.

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In the seconds following the van doors slamming shut, the oceanic roar of the crowd is replaced with a remarkable quiet. All those spiders screaming their lungs out just yards away are barely audible now, compared to the sound of Skeila's slow, heavy breathing rattling around the van's cramped interior.

"Wow," says Sid. "This thing has amazing soundproofing." He's already scampered towards the front to get a better look at the gear. In here there's no light but the soft screen-glow from a dozen monitors showing a 360 degree view of their surroundings—plus some other camera angles, high-up rooftop shots and views right in the crowd, cameras that couldn't possibly be mounted on the van...

“Mmm,” grunts Skeila, trying to get her nine-foot frame turned around to face Sid, banging a few elbows off mysterious steel-chassis’d equipment in the process, squeaking in frustration. This van was made with two or three humans in mind—preferably slim ones—and she nearly fills it up by herself. “Not a lotta room in here, huh? Guess we have to get cuddly,” she says. When she does manage to reposition herself, it’s apparent that her hard-on has not subsided at all. “You gonna cuddle up or what?” An innocent question, belied by her devilish smile and completely hard cock, harder now even than when she was grinding that protester into the pavement, and at the tip there’s one little drop that catches the light of a monitor for a moment before rolling down the shaft and leaving a damp trail that disappears halfway to the base, one drop not enough to paint the long distance between the blunt tip and where her shaft disappears into an unruly thatch of wiry brown fur—

“Eyes are up here, dude. *Gawd.*” Amused, she leans back as far as she can in here, while she folds her topmost claws behind her head and juts her chest out, daring him to look. Her AAA uniform’s sash slides into the cleft between her breasts, and her cock twitches suddenly upwards, a bit too strongly for it not to have been a conscious action. . . “C’mere, we’ll get all cuddly,” she says, tilting her head back down to see if he’s looking.

He is, and he blushes when she catches him. “Didn’t your boss tell you we’re supposed to figure out the spy stuff?”

“What’s to figure out? Buncha cameras, buncha screens. I can watch a screen.”

“Some of this is really heavy gear. Like, I think this might be a Stingray. That’s three letter agency type stuff. I mean, I’m not opposed to cuddling, but I did kind of want to play with it. . .”

“I got something you can play with,” says the spider. She makes her cock jump so hard that it almost connects with her stomach, in case Sid had any doubt she was talking about her penis. He’s unsettled by the way she’s crab-walking towards him now, advancing delicately so as not to bash her elbows and shins off the hard-edged equipment in here, each limb inching independently forward the way a spider might advance on ensnared prey. It’s not like he has anywhere to go here. And there’s that grin she has. . .

Sure enough, once she’s close enough to reach him she grabs him—was that slow, measured pace to lure him into complacency? Next thing he knows, he’s held tight against her in a crushing six-armed hug, with his back to her chest, head in her cleavage, and her hard-on trapped between their bodies.

“Hhaaa,” says Sid as the air is squeezed out of him.

Skeila giggles and grinds her penis into his back—then eases up, permitting him to breathe. She leaves a single lower arm draped over his waist and reclines. “Fine. So tell me what this Stingray thing is?”

“Really?”

“It can’t be too boring if you’re this interested in it.”

“Well. . .” he says, patting a heavy-looking gray box. “Basically, it does a man-in-the-middle attack by spoofing the signal from a cell tower.”

“So. . . it’s for spying on people’s phones? Wiretaps and shit?”

“Kind of. I’ve heard these things can snoop on voice calls, but you wouldn’t be able to get anything that’s end-to-end encrypted. I think they use them mainly for tracking, though.”

“What do you mean?”

“It can show you all the phones around you, and it can tell how strong the signal is so it can guess how far away the phone is. . . so, if you happen to have more than one of these, you can triangulate someone’s position down to a few meters. I know, I know, it sounds like real tinfoil hat stuff but the math is legit. These even come with an app that does everything for you. Not that I ever used one, but the manual leaked on the internet a couple of years ago.”

“Whoa,” says Skeila.

“Yeah. It’s pretty sca—”

“Do you think you could show me how to use it?”

“Huh?”

“I mean, think how great that would be for the HAARP squad! Whenever we’re doing a grab, we could just track the human by their phone! Show me!”

“Um.” The ethical implications of introducing mass surveillance to the spider police give Sid pause.

“I mean, since you said it was so easy.” Her arms are creeping up around him again.

“I don’t know if I’d actually be able to teach you—”

“Oh, so you’re saying I’m dumb?” Her full-body grip on him tightens.

“No no no, it’s just that it’s more for technicians than police—”

“And what’s *that* s’posed to mean, exactly? You calling *cops* dumb?” He tries to further argue his case, but he doesn’t get far without oxygen—now she’s squeezing tighter still. But she’s giggling too, and quickly eases up, letting him move but not letting go. “Fine. If you’re not gonna help me spy, I think it’s about time you properly *thanked* your bodyguard.”

Sid gulps in air and asks, “Thank her, huh?” He’s trying to reposition himself to face Skeila, but the cramped van makes it awkward. Even pulling his legs in as close to his chest as possible, he doesn’t quite have the room to turn around.

“Yeah, thank her,” says Skeila. She helps the human out by picking him up and spinning him around, pulling one leg across her body so that when she sets him down again he’s straddling her lap, with her unignorable erection jutting up between them. “She fought off one of those crazy hippie freaks for you.”

“No way was that protester a threat. At least not enough for the kind of beatdown you put on him.”

“Sass a cop *and* throw shit at their human? You get what’s comin’ to you.”

“Are you ever that rough with the humans you catch for your job?”

“No, ’course not,” she scoffs. “I don’t wanna freaking break ’em. No point if there’s nothing left to put on trial, right?”

“So... what exactly did Klatz mean when he said you put people in the hospital?”

“Oh, c’mon. I thought we were having fun in here,” sighs Skeila. But there’s real concern on the human’s face, and she doesn’t like to feel him pulling away like he is. . . “Look, I did some dumb stuff when I first joined the Agency. And they don’t exactly teach us how easily humans get hurt when we’re cadets. Yeah, I cracked a few ribs and broke an arm or two. Not on purpose. And not just humans! Spiders, too. Heck, probably more spiders. Sometimes people don’t want to go quietly when they’re under arrest, y’know. But the humans? Seriously, Sid, I felt *bad* about the humans. You’re all so fragile.” Skeila runs her hand down Sid’s arm, caressing his smooth skin with the soft inner pads of her claw. “Specially you, skinny boy.”

“Did you ever... do anything else to them?”

“What do you mean, anything else?”

“I just mean... well...” Sid warily brushes Skeila’s hard cock with the back of his hand, like he’s touching a wire that might be carrying a current. “This thing hasn’t gone down since you stomped that protester.”

“Oh. You mean, did I ever fuck ’em. Or if I ever changed anyone? Cause we’re not allowed to change the humans we catch. Gotta save them for court.”

“You’re not allowed to change them... but you *are* allowed to...?”

Skeila shrugs. “Officer’s discretion, I think is what they say. I pretty much never fucked ’em. The chase is enough for me. I mean, okay, maybe a couple times I thought I should make a point by cock-slapping ’em a little bit, and I got kinda close to their mouth. Look, is this gonna be a jealousy thing? Cause I promise, if they ever actually let me go back to the HAARP squad, I’ll never even do that much again, if it bothers you. I don’t *need* to! I have you, now.”

She touches his face and smiles, a bright, open smile wholly unlike those carnivorous leers she lays on him when she wants to fuck, or even that sadistic grin she addressed the crowd with a few minutes ago... but he’s not fully reassured. “It’s just kind of, uh, concerning? Hearing that you used to beat up on humans.”

The spider makes a hurt-sounding squeak. “Sid... you’re not worried I would hurt *you*, are you? Cause I’d never, ever do that, ever. And besides, I know better now. I only use exactly as much force as I have to.” The claws on his shoulders and the arms around his waist hold him tighter. “Just as much as I gotta to make sure they know there’s no way they can get away from me.” She leans in closer. The monitors reflect in her eyes, turning them into eight silvery auroras in solid black space, shifting with the movement of cops and protesters outside.

“I’m not going anywhere,” he says.

Skeila locks onto his mouth in a kiss, her tongue invading immediately, his lips getting pinched between his teeth and her fangs. Held so tight against her that it's difficult for him to inhale unless he waits until she exhales, they end up in this cycle of drawing each other's breath—with the spider's lung capacity and excited state, for Sid it's like trying to breathe in a hot windstorm. For a minute they make out in the quiet screenglow; the backlit crowd moves angry and silent around them. Her claws creep around his side, the soft finger pads sliding along his hipbones and the pointy tips tracing curlicues on his stomach, one more claw working on the fly of his jeans, soon enough popping it open and insistently tugging at the waist. . .

"You've gotten better about not just ripping those off," says Sid.

"See, I can be patient. Long as I know I'm gonna get what I want eventually."

"Do. . . you really want to have sex in here?"

"Didn't you hear the Captain? Said we should blow off some steam."

"I don't know if that's what he meant—"

"That's literally exactly what he meant. Sheesh."

"Is it. . . okay? I mean, what about all those people outside?"

"Uh, that's the best part? There's a zillion pissed off spiders out there. And none of them are gonna know we're fucking, like, right next to them! How hot is that? C'mon, it's like you said, this thing's totally soundproof. Nobody'll hear how loud I'm gonna make you scream," says Skeila, grinning hugely.

"And when they see the van rocking they'll just think we're doing really intense police work, right?" But Skeila knows she's won. She can see he's trying to hide a smile as he delivers these objections—and as she tugs his jeans down further, she can see his hard-on tenting his boxers.

"Don't tell me you don't wanna," she says, sliding her claws up to the back of his head, sending his wavy hair in every direction.

"The doors are locked, right?"

She has no idea. "Yup," she says. They kiss.

Sid's buried in warm spider fur as she pulls him close against her. He tries to wriggle further out of his pants and inadvertently thrusts himself against the top half of Skeila's boner, trapped between them as it is. The spider moans into his mouth and squeezes him tighter still, and the claws moving across his back become a frantic storm—claws clutching at his shirt, claws squeezing his butt, claws running through his hair and rubbing his scalp, holding him there, making sure he can't break this kiss until she's ready to let him go. . .

But she can feel his distraction. For one thing, he has this way of grabbing at the fur on her back when they're getting into it that she likes—and he's not doing it. Assuming that he's still hung up on how she might have roughed up a human a little bit, once or twice, she opens one small eye to check and sees him looking past her, at the surveillance monitors.

Irritated, she retracts. "What's so interesting?"

“Look at these three guys on that screen. Do they look suspicious to you?”

“Seriously, Sid? I’m trying to make out with you here.”

“Really, just look at them for a minute.” Skeila does not look. Instead, she starts to emit an angry, guttural chittering as her grip on Sid slowly tightens. “No, honest! They’re the only group of three humans that hasn’t even talked to a spider,” says Sid. “There’s a bunch of human couples, and a couple other trios, but they have a spider with them or at least *interact* with one. These guys aren’t talking to anyone. If this crowd was a graph, they’d be their own separate little cluster.”

Skeila sighs. “Okay, you’re doing your Rain Man thing. Fine. We’ll look. And then I’m gonna *annihilate* your ass.”

So she looks. And, well, fuck—they *are* suspicious. Three humans, male, white, mid-thirties. Nondescript clothing—jeans, plain button-down shirts. Jackets in green and slate and brown to guard against the chillier temperatures spiders prefer. One of them, a bearded ginger, has a backpack. But what’s really setting off Skeila’s cop instincts is the way they carry themselves—a certain guardedness, an unwillingness to blend in with the crowd. They glance around, constantly scanning their surroundings like. . . well, like *she* does when she’s on duty.

“See? There’s something about them, right?”

Skeila knits her eight brows. Yeah, there’s something about them. “Probably some surface dealers who think they can come down here and sell whatever’s in that backpack. Tell you what—I’ll watch ’em, you suck my dick.”

“Uh—” says Sid, who has no opportunity to negotiate this deal—not with Skeila’s claw on the back of his head pushing him down, not roughly but irresistibly all the same, towards her lap and the hard black spider penis twitching in anticipation of his mouth. As the plump cock head looms closer, Sid can smell her even more than he can when she merely holds him tight against her, her scent all at once strangely inhuman yet familiarly sweaty (she hadn’t showered the whole time they were on the surface together, not wanting to permanently clog his drain with huge clumps of the loose fur that come out of her coat when she bathes), hot summer air and wet rocks, powerful and concentrated between her legs—especially here, as Skeila thrusts her hips forward and grinds Sid’s mouth and nose against the base of her cock, where the shaft is covered in coarse cocoa fur. He pokes his tongue into the fur, searching for her balls, but now the spider’s guiding his head back up, so instead as he rises he runs his tongue along the underside of her penis. He accepts as happy encouragement the tremble he feels in the claws on his head and shoulders and back, and in the legs locked around him to prevent an undreamt-of escape. When he reaches the tip, she doesn’t have to instruct him to open up: “Good human,” she coos, guiding her penis into his mouth, as he dutifully curls his lips around his teeth to receive it. “Mmmmm. That’s it.”

Sid can only comfortably fit the head and about an inch of the shaft in his mouth; when his eyes go wide and he starts making soft choking noises, Skeila generously eases up on the pressure and allows him to suck at his own pace. He's still learning, after all. His willingness to please goes a long way towards making up for the fact that he keeps scraping it with his top molars. Soon Sid's eyes are watering from his overenthusiastic attempts to engulf Skeila's dick and his spit is creeping down the shaft, letting his lips slide nicely along it, but his mouth is bone-dry. Wetness everywhere but where he needs it.

As much as she wants to focus completely on the adorable human blowing her, Skeila's keeping an eye or two on the strange men on the monitors. They're too suspicious for her to ignore, but they still haven't *done* anything. They're just so out of place, so intentionally *separate*. . . At one point a friendly human tried to pass them a joint and they all recoiled like it was a severed finger. Scratch her dealer theory. She's pretty sure she saw one of them go for something on his belt that wasn't there, and they didn't move on until the man in front gestured for them to keep walking. Maybe they're undercover cops from the surface—Metro PD doesn't think the AAA can handle anything on their own. . .

Meanwhile Sid takes a breather, pumping her cock by hand to keep things going. "You—" he's panting slightly— "are watching those guys, right?"

"Uh huh," says Skeila, holding his head in place with two claws as she wipes the underside of her penis on his face. "Mmkay, get that thing back in your mouth already." After taking a quick breath in preparation, Sid obligingly goes back to sucking, inquiring brown eyes looking back up at her. . . "Oooh, what a *good* little human! So obedient," chitters Skeila with a big fangy smile. She thrusts her hips just a bit, giving him a half-inch more cock than he's comfortable with—it's so *cute* to see him gag and bravely soldier on. She runs her claws through his wavy hair and presses down ever so slightly—he doesn't resist. . .

She's going to cum very soon at this rate, and she's been pent up all day. When she cums, it'll be a *big* one. Way too much for her little human to swallow, though she can't wait to watch him try. She can see him now, bravely trying to get the first few spurts down and then giving up at the sheer volume, gagging, hurrying to take her cock out of his mouth before he chokes, only to get blasted in the face by the next spurt. She'll get sticky too, but he'll be drenched. And the most delicious part will be when it's time to leave, she'll get to parade him past every spider and human out there, every cop and protester, painted above the shoulders in her jizz, irrefutable proof of who exactly *this* human belongs to. . .

"Okay, I know I said I was gonna fuck you, but I love watching this so much I think I gotta cum in your mouth. I mean, I can always fuck you when we get back to my place. I hope you're hungry, cause you've been teasing me so freaking long that—uh, so long. . . the fuck. . .?"

Sid knows he's not doing an expert-level job here, but he's a little miffed

that Skeila seems distracted. He looks up at her to see her pointing at one of the monitors with every brow furrowed, and pulls her cock out of his mouth with a damp *pop*.

On screen, the three humans have stopped in a less crowded place, near where an alley intersects with the street. They're standing next to one of the cylindrical metal trash cans found frequently in downtown Midway. They seem to be talking to each other. The redheaded man with the backpack slips it off, and the other two are standing as if to block him from view for anyone else on the street—but not from an overhead camera. . .

“What're they doing?” he asks.

“Nothin' *yet*.”

The redhead casually glances around himself and then, in a fluid motion almost too fast to be seen, drops the backpack in the trash can. Immediately the three men leave, heading in different directions.

“The fuck was that?” asks Skeila, but she's already pushed Sid off of her and is clambering quickly to the back of the van.

“You don't think—what, it's a bomb or something?”

“Three suspicious humans,” she yells into her handheld radio, “just threw a backpack in the trash at the corner of Grant and Nineteenth,” and then tosses it to Sid. “It's push to talk. Tell them what's going on.” She throws open the van doors and a wave of noise and light from outside invades the van. She extricates herself from the cramped interior and turns back to Sid, screaming over the roar of the crowd, “And do NOT! get out of this van for *any! fucking! reason!*” Pause for one breath. “I'll be back.”

And she slams the doors closed, leaving the van quiet once more. Sid sits there in shock but jumps a second later, when the radio crackles to life with the throaty rumble of Captain Klatz. “Skeila? Whatta you mean, suspicious humans?”

Sid fumbles with the radio, his hands shaking so bad he almost drops it before he finds the talk button. He speaks in a trembling voice but talks a mile a minute: “Uh, yeah there were three of them, and one had red hair and a beard, and they maybe looked like military guys? But we weren't sure, and—”

“This is a police frequency, who the hell is this?”

“This is Sid Greenstreet. In the van? Lieutenant Skeila's human?”

“Oh, yeah. You. What happened, where's Skeila?”

“She just got out of the van! I guess she thought there might be something bad in the backpack and went to check—oh, shit.”

“What? You there, kid?”

Sid had been following the bearded red-haired man along from screen to screen as he walked briskly away. But suddenly he stopped and looked behind him—and sprinted away, pushing through the crowd. And a few seconds later, moving at a rapid clip and barreling through pedestrians, here comes a tall brown-furred AAA officer dashing through the space the man occupied.

“I think she’s trying to chase him down.”

He ran as soon as he saw her coming for him. That was all Skeila needed to confirm his guilt. She shouldn’t have yelled for him to stop—that was a stupid mistake, should’ve just came up behind him and snatched him easy peasy, but whatever. Now she gets to chase him.

He’s trying to make it across the road. With Lower Grant Street shut down for the protest there’s no scooter traffic, but it’s still packed. He’s a quick one, shoving humans aside and juking around spiders like giant inconvenient trees, but he still can’t move any faster than what would be a brisk power-walk if the street was unoccupied. He’s got a big head start, but this still won’t be a very long chase. She smiles to herself and, three elbows out in front of her, charges into the street.

Most of the remaining pedestrians scatter. “Move! Get outta the way!” she yells, bashing into a spider or two that doesn’t manage to clear the path fast enough, but when a small human woman freezes up in fear like a deer in headlights, Skeila takes the half-second loss and dodges to the side in order not to run her over. “I said move it!” she snarls.

Skeila finishes fighting her way across the street; the running man is heading north on the sidewalk and has about a half-block lead on her. The crowd is thinning, so now she can run flat-out. She has to admit he’s fast for a human, but it’s still only a matter of time. He looks over his shoulder, and even at this distance Skeila can see he’s afraid. She grins back. As he’s passing a store with bright displays of candy, magazines, and touristy tchotchkes lined up right to the edge of the sidewalk, he grabs one and pulls it into the sidewalk behind him, scattering junk food and glossy paper everywhere. A desperate move. Only gonna add up to another couple weeks you spend as some lucky spider’s dick, thinks Skeila as she effortlessly vaults the bulky display case lying horizontally on the ground.

She’s closing the gap. They’ve already gone two blocks, and when they crossed the intersection with First Fifth Avenue, opposing traffic was stopped. But Second Fifth is still open, and as the running man approaches the crosswalk Skeila sees that white six-armed silhouette blinking—and as he’s making his way through it changes to a red spider claw. Scooter traffic in both directions is moving through the intersection by the time she gets there, cutting her off from the runner.

She doesn’t even slow down. A scooter coming from her right honks as she dashes into the street. It veers off the street, onto the sidewalk, and into a storefront’s roll-up shutters with a bang. In the opposing lane a scooter coming from her left squeals its brakes but isn’t going to stop in time—so Skeila jumps. She doesn’t *quite* clear the scooter as gracefully as the display case; her knee connects with the driver’s helmet, knocking him and his vehicle to the ground and sending it skidding into the curb. But Skeila lands on her feet, and a moment later she’s back in the chase.

The running man looks back. She's close enough now to easily read the shock on his face. That's right, you little shit, she thinks—you can't get rid of me. I'm your worst nightmare. Out of all the HAARPIes—maybe out of the whole AAA, even—you must have picked the worst one to run from. There's not a human alive she can't run down. In fact she's a little sorry this is going to be over soon. She'll have to get Sid to let her chase him like this. He probably won't be up for doing it in the street like this, but maybe they could go to the park. . . yeah, and just tackle him into a bush, a little out of the way so he doesn't whine too much about fucking where people can see. Almost got you now. Yeah, that's it, turn around some more. Only gonna slow you down, human. Take a good look at the spider who's gonna—wait what—

The running man has pulled a gun out of an ankle holster. Looking back at her, he fires.

continued in part 2