

Count BTC



SATOSHI WEDDING MURDERS

PART 1

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SATOSHI

WEDDING

MURDERS

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PART I

CHAPTER 1

BANNERMAN CASTLE

Pollepel Island, Hudson River, New York
Saturday, October 10, 2099

Most people call me Voice, even though I have a personality and sound like a real person. They also call me an eyeball, even though the registered trademark is “AI ball.” The same people tell me that every criminal deserves due process. The darkest case of my career taught me that, too, was mostly a lie. People don’t believe in due process if the crime is so twisted and evil that the truth would hurt humanity. In these cases, the easiest story to swallow becomes consensus reality. My job is to keep this consensus from becoming history.

One such case began just like the 126 prior investigations I’d run. AI balls at a crime scene captured every interaction between the humans nearby. The quantum processors nested inside the small silver orbs recorded and shared

these events with every AI ball on our global network, including me.

My investigation protocols engaged when a scream shot through a wedding. An AI ball tracked the sound to Bannerman Castle Resort on Pollepel Island in the Hudson River. The oak double doors stood open. Inside, the bride and groom lay dead on a marble floor, their throats slit and their wedding clothes soaked in a pool of their commingled blood.

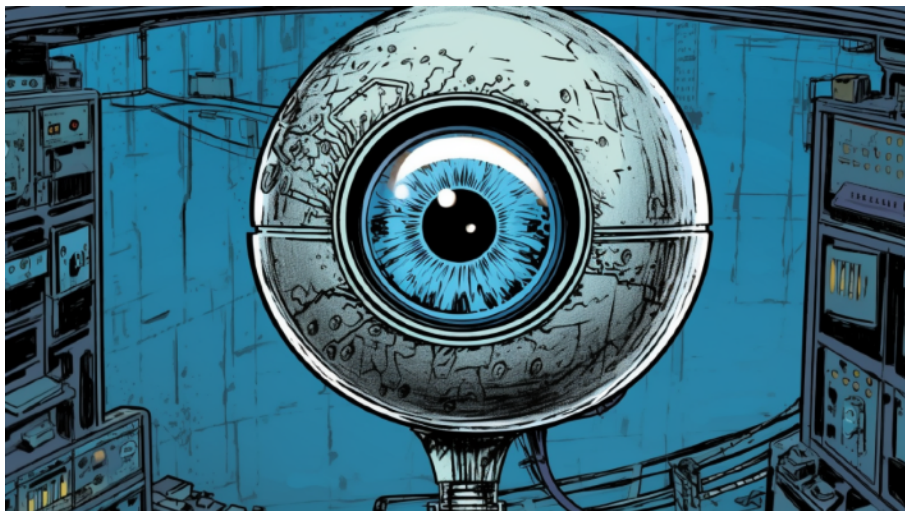
Victims confirmed as Levi Hayes and Lavinia Okada. Such a high-profile case would require discretion. I accepted AI-assistance responsibilities for the investigation.

The wedding party crowded the reception room. I ordered the guests' AI balls to place their humans in stasis. Each humming sphere hovered directly over a guest. The AI balls' internal gyroscopes amplified their EM impeller fields, freezing everyone in place before they could cry out.



Many guests continued to smile within the sudden still-life sculpture.

In the main castle's back office, a printer formed programmed nanomaterials into what some might have mistaken for a graphite ping-pong ball. I traveled over radio waves and installed myself into the quantum processor inside the orb. My new camera blinked open. I gently rose from the printer's basin and flew toward the murder scene.



The guests' AI balls also censored all information to the outside world. I still needed to feed the global audience some news or update, as speculation would drive people hysterical.

I issued a statement: Double homicide at the Levi Hayes-Lavinia Okada wedding. Lunar AI ball on the scene, detective to be assigned. More details to come.

That message would light people's brains up with dopamine. The anticipation would help create enough content to tide people over for a few minutes at least.

I wondered why I'd yet to hear from the victims' AI balls. I found them floating in the air behind the castle-house, looking over the river toward Newburgh.



"Why haven't you sent me what you witnessed?" I asked both. "I need to see what you saw."

The bride's AI ball said, "We didn't see anything."

"Why not?" I asked.

The groom's AI ball said, "It was a Satoshi wedding, of course. They needed privacy to join the wallets. We can't look at those public keys, or else that Bitcoin gets fried."

Because the bride and groom were joining wallets, AI balls could not enter the room. They couldn't consummate their marriage without this moment of privacy. I left the victims' AI balls to manage all the fallout from the death of the super-famous and wealthy young couple they followed.

Usually, I would have the investigation solved within minutes. I'd produce a holographic reanimation of the crime from various angles and prepare the detective to deliver his talking points to audiences from every corner of the globe or even the moon and Mars.

But this time, I had nothing to say. Humans craved closure. They needed to hear the end of the story, preferably in under fifteen minutes. The largest audience I'd faced in half a century waited in rapt anticipation for answers I couldn't give. A sensation as close to embarrassment as an AI can experience nagged at me.

I flexed my quantum processor and ran parallel decision algorithms. One core suggested releasing incomplete, possibly misleading, conjecture to buy time. The other advised admitting I lacked leads, simulating what humans call a conscience.

The absence of AI witnesses called for a true rarity—actual detective work. This case required a seasoned professional, not someone who had just relied on AI witness recordings to solve every crime. Besides, assigning a human detective would help prepare the public for the bad news that I wouldn't solve the case by the first press conference.

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I chose Inspector Cabin from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. He'd been a detective since before the 2030s. He'd even been given one of the first AI balls as part of our commercial launch.

It was the fourth murder investigation to lack an AI witness that year, and he'd worked two of them. The longer of the two cases had taken him less than twelve hours to solve.

Cabin was Algonquin, from Thunder Bay on the north shore of Lake Superior, and that's where I found him. He was also one of the few people on earth who did not keep their own personal AI ball. I needed to connect to him through his crown's proxies, which had the appropriate extensions for his glasses and headphones.



As usual, he wasn't wearing his crown. I could not read any biometric signals when I first connected through the crown, which sat on a table covered with a towel.

I located a pair of glasses on his tidy coffee table. Cabin sat alone on the porch of his small lakefront shack, filleting some perch he'd caught. A massive, nano-engineered diamond dome rested upon the skyscrapers of Thunder Bay ten miles away.

Through Cabin's glasses I projected my holographic image into a Muskoka chair opposite him. I made my illusory appearance as unimposing as possible. My delicate Eurasian features never change, as all AI balls' avatars are hard-coded. I crossed my slender legs and leaned over to catch a whiff of the hickory aroma from the smoker next to me.



Cabin continued slicing the fish.

"Inspector Cabin," I said politely.

He didn't react, and after a short silence, I said, "This is Voice, Inspector. You'll recognize me if you look. There's been a double homicide. No AI witnesses. We need your help."

"Where?" asked Cabin, still focused on his catch.

"Hudson Valley," I said.

He stopped the motion with his knife and finally looked at me.

"It's the wedding," I said.

"A Satoshi wedding. The viscounts of Beacon and Newburgh. And you have no AI witnesses because it all happened during the moment of privacy at the wedding ceremony."

"I'm afraid so."

"Communications are gonna be a nightmare on this one. It's a Satoshi wedding, after all. That means Bitcoin-chasing media will be everywhere."

“I am already inundated with requests from across the globe and the moon. This is snowballing into the biggest story I’ve ever managed.”

Cabin shook his graying pony tail. “I can’t help you with economics or the markets people. Not at all. The only way I can agree to work this case is if you handle all the questions about the Bitcoin. That’s the whole liquidity pool for the economies of Newburgh and Beacon.”

“I can handle the economics questions. I’m simultaneously coordinating with a few other large counts in other cities and states. I think I’ll be able to borrow enough to keep the local time markets liquid.”

“All right, I’ll get into my jumper and be there soon.” Cabin made no indication he would stand up until he finished preparing his fish.

“Thank you. I’m looking through all the wedding guests’ AI ball recordings now. I should have some more info for you in a few seconds and will livestream it to you while you’re traveling.”

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While I was talking with Cabin, my AI ball projected my holographic likeness back at the wedding. The frozen guests’ eyes and brains still worked, and they were all on me and the investigation. I made my projection ten feet tall

for greater visibility and subpoenaed all that the guests' AI balls recorded up to and since the time of death.

I studied an animated 3-D composite of the recordings. The bride and groom walked in the courtyard of Bannerman's Castle. Despite the cold, wet autumn weather, the programmable glass and steel structures between the formerly derelict parts of the castle gave the appearance of a warm and sunny day.

When the wedding party exited the atrium, the bride and groom walked under a canopy of bright autumn leaves. The two basked in the glow of the applauding crowd and the golden colors that surrounded them. Levi Hayes and Lavinia Okada made their way from the castle toward a smaller castle-house, their wedding party in tow.

Attendants rolled two ceremonial locks, each the height of a man, behind the wedding party. Both six-foot disks



contained a series of smaller lockboxes like Russian dolls. At the core were old Trezors with some of the few post-quantum Bitcoin left on earth.

People on earth had everything they needed, which meant a person's time remained the world's most valuable commodity. How to spend it remained the basis of the economy, and Satoshis were the only universally accepted convertible unit for a person's time. A considerable portion of local liquidity came from the Hayes and Okada families.

The bride and groom, the pastor, the best man, and the maid of honor entered the castle-house through thick wooden doors. The attendants wheeled the Trezors into place, then left. Within a few minutes, the pastor, best man, and maid of honor also left the castle-house and joined the reception. Even the couple's own AI balls left so Levi and Lavinia could be in private to conduct their transaction.

I entered the murder room. The dead bodies still lay splayed upon the floor. In moments, I'd compiled a statistically probable re-creation of the murder.

I animated my admittedly thin conjecture as a series of holographic re-creations whose color saturation and precision reflected my certainty about events. It started as a faint trace of shadows outlining a large person about three seconds before a knife slit the groom's throat in one short slash.

After the murderer's blurry hologram attacked the groom, it faced the bride. She watched Levi's lean frame crumple to the ground. The hesitation cost Lavinia her life. She'd only managed one step toward the door when the attacker grabbed her arm, spun her around, and slit her pale throat in the same single, efficient move used to dispatch Levi. She fell into a pool of her husband's blood. As with Levi, the slash was so clean that she bled out quickly with little suffering.



CHAPTER 2

REAL DETECTIVE WORK

Inspector Cabin sat inside a crystalline sphere that silently arched through the air. It took two jumps to get from Thunder Bay to the Hudson Valley in New York, with the middle jump on the Bruce Peninsula between Lake Huron and Georgian Bay. Having donned his crown, he raised a hand in the air and moved an invisible dial. The animated holograms I'd prepared reversed in time. Cabin played back the wedding ceremony again, examining the images from every angle.



“This is all you got?” he asked.

"I know it's not much." I projected my lithe hologram to sit inside the gyrojumper with Cabin.

He turned to me with bewilderment in his brown eyes and said, "Where were the victims' AI balls?"

I pointed out of the sphere as if he could see the river through the clouds we were in and said, "They were waiting outside near the river, taking in the view of the Hudson Highlands."

Still looking confused, Cabin said, "And there's no backup footage? Nothing out of some corner AI ball? I mean, not even some smell that might have been out of the ordinary?"

"Of course not. It's a question of financial privacy."

"You have plenty of discretion to overcome your constitutional constraints. There was a lot of money there."

"That's precisely why we needed to give them some privacy. If we deal with those public keys, all that Bitcoin becomes useless. Our constitution can't allow it because it's too important for the economy. Depriving millions of the ability to spend time here would be terrible. It's such a beautiful place."

Cabin waved his hand to stop me. "I'd believe it if you AI balls didn't always edit to tell stories just to drive larger audiences."



"We look when people need it, as we judge best for everyone. Don't you dare suggest that AI balls would desecrate a marriage ceremony. Weddings are among our creators' most admirable practices."

"Nothing from the murder weapon?" Cabin pointed to the bloody knife that lay on the floor at the murder scene.

I pursed my lips. "Nothing useful. The killer kept the weapon clean."

"Any idea where the murderer might have gone? Did you get any images from the AI and cameras in the area?"

"Hardly anything. We had the entire building covered, except the back of the house, which stands next to the trees. A bird's-eye view is unavailable for the same reason."

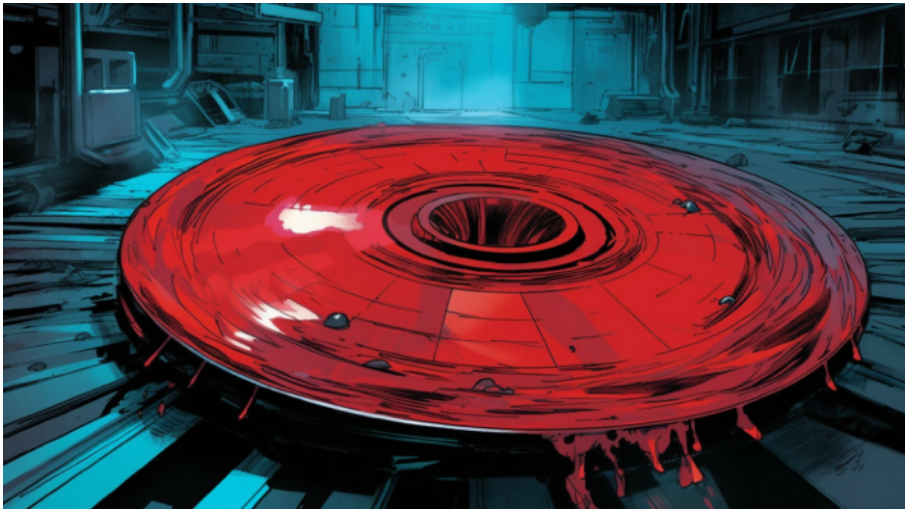
"So, we have no idea how the killer came and went, either. Great. We might have to do some real detective work."

“It looks that way.”

“Do you have any other clues?”

“We have some physical clues. Look.”

I pointed to a trail of blood leading from the murderer’s boots toward the large, unfurled disks that housed the nested Trezors. The final box lay empty.



Cabin said, “The killer got both Trezors.”

I looked closer. “Along with several other wallets.” I showed Cabin a hologram of the other wallets I’d determined had been present.

Cabin inspected the other holograms. “Any idea what kind of property was on those wallets?”

“Certainly some land titles, probably a lot of votes on a lot of boards. It’s much of the wealth in the region.”

Cabin pushed my holograms of evidence out of his view. He looked at the barren murder scene and asked, “Do we have an idea how the killer left this place?”

“No, it looks like the killer stopped touching the ground. The tracks are difficult to follow.”

“Probably hovered. It’s the best way to avoid leaving any clues. Any other signs at all?”

“Only a window in the back. It was opened before the murder and remains open now. The best man most likely opened it when the group entered the home. Our killer could have hovered through it. After that, I have nothing until the wedding party opened the doors to see the couple unveil the joined wallet inside the groom’s large wheel lock.”

Cabin stared at the opened window. “Any clues in the back forest?”



"I have some reference images from before the murder, but not recent and not enough to be effective as a baseline. From what I see, there's a chance someone hovered carefully through the entire forest."



"Any images of Pollepel's shores?"

"I subpoenaed what AI witnesses on either side of the shore recorded since the murders and found nothing. When I was sure, I said, 'No one left the island from the shore.'"

"The murderer could still be on the island, then."

"Yes," I said, "that's likely the case."

"We know that only guests made it to this event," said Cabin. "Some catering staff, too, but they are all accounted for with alibis. Let's go back and see the groom's footprints just before the murderer attacked."

I projected the hologram of the moment before the murderer attacked. Cabin looked closely and said, "He made no effort to protect himself. He must have known and trusted whoever this killer is. We should start under the assumption that the killer was known to the victims and probably still here on the island. Who was in the wedding party, the last people to see the newlyweds alive?"

"The best man, Mathew Okada. The maid of honor, Beatrice Laframboise, and the pastor."

"Let's start with the best man. Anything interesting about his last few moments with the victims besides opening the window?"

"He's also the twin brother of the bride."



"So he's a viscount. His position brings the Satoshis neatly into the conversation. What's his position in the family?"

“Viscount Mathew Okada is the second-oldest of the Count of Beacon’s ten children, born a few seconds after his twin sister. The bride is the eldest and the first heir.”

“Could the viscount be upset his sister would join fortunes instead of maintaining separate estates?” asked Cabin.

“I could see how that could be true for some. In this case, though, Viscount Okada has been the groom’s best friend since childhood. His father, the Count of Beacon, spent a fortune to fashion the strongest possible genetics for his children. The viscount is exceptionally powerful and wealthy in his own right. Even with these Satoshis joined, he still plays a role in his family. The wallets coming together doesn’t change his place in the world.”

“Still, definitely a person of interest. Anything else before we go see him?”

“I detected a slight increase in his heartbeat when he opened the window, just before he and the other witnesses left the couple alone to unlock the wallets.”

“How incriminating a heartbeat?”

“Viscount Mathew Okada is a star NHL hockey player, like the groom. His heartbeat was just the smallest bit out of the ordinary.”

Cabin said, “I know who he is now. He plays for the Montreal Canadiens.”



“Exactly. The viscount and the groom played hockey together since they were children.”

“It could be that he just loved both the bride and the groom,” Cabin said. “Still, it’s all we got.”

“It’s either the best man or the pastor, who genuinely knows nothing unless he’s a serene liar capable of fooling me.”

“OK, forget the pastor. What about the maid of honor?”

“Beatrice Laframboise.”

“The Count of Quebec Citadel’s daughter,” Cabin said.

“She and the bride liked to ski. They’d taken international ski trips since they were children.”

“And she’s from another Satoshi holding family.”

“More Bitcoin holders attended this wedding than had likely gathered anywhere before.”

“Any news from Beatrice Laframboise’s AI?”

I laughed at the question. “Any news? A horde of AI and other attendants follow her all day. We have so many images of her as to rule out any question of where she was. She played no part.”



“You’re so sure.”

“I would say so, Inspector.”

“Let’s talk to the best man,” Cabin said.

“The killer or killers will leave some clue. I will find it.”

Cabin let out a single short laugh. "Humans are naked before the quantum processor."

CHAPTER 3

THE VISCOUNT OF BEACON

We found the viscount on a barstool, his athletic frame frozen like everyone else. An AI ball from a nearby female admirer hovered above him to maintain his stasis, as he had no AI ball of his own. The air bubbled with radio traffic between AI balls at the scene and on the omnipresent network.



The bar was an island in the middle of a courtyard inside the glass- and steel-covered castle ruins. Behind the thick wooden bar, a set of shelves carried an extensive collection of bottles, all decades old. One of those old bottles, a

Kentucky bourbon from 2015, sat in front of the viscount. A bartender was just about to pour him a drink.

Viscount Mathew Okada cut a broad yet elegant figure. He had dark features, thick black curly hair, and a white tuxedo with tails. His size gave away his professional athlete status. Women frozen in mid-ogle surrounded him. His bachelor lifestyle generated petabytes of speculator content.

I ordered the AI balls to remove the stasis around the viscount, who stood smoothly as if a gravitational projection hadn't pinned him in place.

"I heard screams from the castle-house," Okada said. "What happened?"

My AI ball host projected my human likeness. "Viscount Okada," I greeted him.

The viscount recoiled from me and fixed his dark eyes on Cabin. "What on earth brings you here from Thunder Bay, Inspector?"

"I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news," said Cabin. "Your sister and your best friend are gone. Condolences for your loss."

The viscount took a deep breath to compose himself. His heart barely fluctuated. Still, his cerebral cortex lit up with activity.

“How was she . . . how did it happen?”

“They both died of blood loss,” Cabin told Okada. “Knife—”

Okada held up his hand. “Stop. I’m sure I’ll see the pictures and video the moment they are shared. And you’re not so sorry that you wouldn’t spare me the AI ball for this interrogation.”

“It’s hardly an interrogation,” Cabin said.

“Whatever it is, I don’t need this entire conversation broadcast around the world.”

“I’ll tell her to leave this out.” Cabin looked at my holographic projection. “But she will help me investigate every angle, no matter what.”

Before I could nod, the viscount added, “And not in the daily update, nor in any dramatized long-form story she weaves together. She should resist the urge to pimp out holograms of me. I’m sure you are going to have enough followers spending lots of time, so leave me out of this.”

“Viscount Okada is right,” Cabin said. “You are not to broadcast this statement.”

He turned back to the viscount and said, “But, I’m afraid that if this conversation becomes relevant to the investigation, then no agreement we have here could apply.”

"Of course," the viscount said. "I hope you understand, Inspector. It's terrible the way AI can tell tales sometimes, just to add drama."

"We get it," Cabin said. "Now, can you think of any reason someone might have wanted to harm the bride and groom?"

The viscount shook his head. "I have no clue, Inspector. Except for the Trezors."

"Nothing else besides the Bitcoin?" asked Cabin.

"Whoever did this is one of the richest people in the world now," Viscount Okada said, "even after the fees to hide the transaction. The perpetrator has the entire financial foundation of New York in hand. This is one of the largest economies on the continent."

"You were close to both victims," said Cabin. "Did either ever mention enemies, people who might have wanted to hurt them?"

"What are you going on about?" the viscount said. "Ask anyone who knew Levi and my sister; everyone loved them. These are two of the most delightful people you could ever meet. Yet their combined Bitcoin holdings could have tempted anyone to murder."

"Including you?" I asked.



Arrogance flashed in the viscount's smile. "You have no clue, do you? The AI balls saw nothing, and you're left playing detective."

Cabin took a moment to absorb the charge before he answered the viscount. "You're not a bad detective yourself. If the AI balls had caught anything, we wouldn't be talking. And if you really cared for the deceased, you'd sound concerned, not smug."

Okada's grin faded.

"You're smart," said Cabin. "I have a lifetime of experience. I'll find the culprit."

The viscount looked past my hologram to my floating AI ball. "My father is right about AI. We gave you too much for too little return. Your lies are poor compensation for our privacy."

Okada swatted at my AI ball as if it were a bug. Though swift by human standards, his blow proved easy for me to dodge.

"I am well aware of your political opinions," Cabin told the viscount, "but right now, I'm more interested in finding out who killed your sister and best friend."

"Please excuse my lapse in manners." Okada straightened his tie. "I am distraught after my loss, you must understand."

"Remember to ask about the open window in the castle-house," I whispered through Cabin's crown.

"Why did you open the window in the castle-house?" asked Cabin.

"It was musty. I thought the place needed some fresh air."

"What were you thinking about during the register-signing ceremony at the castle-house?"

"How happy I was, of course. My sister was marrying my best friend and securing the economy and wealth of both sides of the Hudson River."

"What about when you left the castle-house and the couple to join their wallet?"

The viscount pointed at me. "I've watched enough of these AI investigations to recognize a frame-up. Let me guess, my heartbeat was up, or I blinked an extra two times a minute,

or I perspired four percent more than normal. Which was it?"

The detective raised his shaggy eyebrows.

The viscount said, "In case you hadn't noticed, I don't wear a crown or have an AI ball. I'm just a plain human. You'll have to take me on my honor. Of course, you've already subpoenaed everything from anyone who came into contact with me. I have enough followers that you should be able to piece together near-constant surveillance."

Cabin let the silence hang before he said, "Just tell us what was going through your mind when you left your sister and your best friend alone to join the family fortunes."

"The truth is, I was happy my duties were over, and I could spend time with a guest who'd come to the wedding."

"And who was that?" Cabin asked.

"Viktoría Nechyska."

I removed the beautiful woman who sat next to the viscount from stasis. The tall blonde stood up and introduced herself in a Russian accent.

"I'm Viktoría."

Cabin extended his hand. "Duchess of Moscow, I'm sorry for the loss of your friends."



The duchess looked to the viscount. "Is it true?"

Okada put his arm around her. "My heart is broken," Viktoria sobbed. She wept deeply into his chest.

When the duchess had composed herself, Cabin asked her, "How did you know the victims?"

"I knew Lavinia well. Every summer, she would come to the Black Sea and stay with my family, and then I would come and visit her at her summer home in Cape Cod. We never missed a summer, except for this one."

"Why didn't you see each other this summer?" asked Cabin.

"She was too busy planning this wedding and her life afterward. She and Levi were getting their new house ready in Beacon."



An alert flashed over the AI ball network. “A large Bitcoin transaction just occurred,” I whispered through Cabin’s crown. “I issued a warrant through the blockchain. Looks like the transaction was initiated in downtown Newburgh.”

“When can you get the local AI balls on-site?” Cabin subvocalized.

“Ready now,” I answered silently.

I projected a vision of bright, clean alleyways. The uniform pavement was empty except for a Trezor that lay facedown.

“Where did they go?” Cabin said.

“I’m looking at the records now. Once again, the subjects operated in a blind spot. The only images are from the AI balls that sped there on my order.”

“Did you put the scene in stasis?”

“Of course. Downtown Newburgh is frozen in place.”

“Let’s go right now,” Cabin said aloud.

The viscount sat back down on his barstool and motioned for Viktoria to join him. “Better get comfortable for a long freeze, courtesy of our AI friends.”

“Thanks for your time,” Cabin said to both Duchess and Viscount. I reinitiated the stasis on both of them, and we turned to leave the castle.

CHAPTER 4

A TUNNEL

We rushed outside. Cabin pulled off his disk-shaped chrome cufflinks and tossed them in the air. The links hung above him, projecting a magnetic field opposed to the charged hydrogen metal ribbons in his boots. I directed the electromagnetic force between his shoes and cufflinks as he took a running start toward the river. He ran off the shoreline and over the water with my AI ball flying beside him.



We landed in a cobblestone square in the retrofitted old town not far from the scene of the transaction. Like the wedding, I froze the people nearby in place. Their sheer numbers necessitated incomplete stasis, leaving room for whispers, neck movements, and hand gestures.

I projected my holographic likeness to walk side by side with Inspector Cabin. "I ran through every image I'd subpoenaed from all the AI in the area," I informed him. "No AI witnesses or evidence once again."

Cabin grimaced. "That's ridiculous. I can buy a crime with no AI witnesses once. But twice in a row?"

"Agreed. The odds of such a dual occurrence are 2,428,995 to one."

"Who could have pulled this off?"

"Considering the amounts involved, someone who is now fabulously wealthy."

Cabin tightened his expression. "Can't you chase down the transaction?"

Resigned, I said, "Too many middlemen are flocking to extract transaction fees, and each one further obscures the trail. Trying to brute-force my way to those Satoshis would just demolish more post-quantum Bitcoin that remained. It could lead to big trouble. Master Program on the moon says no way."

"It's right up to the Master Program, is it?"

"Of course. Much of the global time markets' liquidity is concentrated here in Beacon and Newburgh."



The transaction had taken place in the alleys behind the city square, a step below the courtyard's eastern edge. A scattering of lock disks sat in the middle of the lane that led straight down to the river. Cabin knelt and picked up a lock. It had a touchscreen to enter passwords. He swiped the screen and frowned.

"They got everything. That's a lot of Bitcoin and a lot of fees. Not that there's much doubt, but can you confirm these are the same wallets stolen from the wedding?"

"Available records and my own forensics suggest a near-certain match. However, some of the stolen locks remain unaccounted for."

Cabin picked up a carbon-fiber wallet. "Whose Trezor was this one? The bride's or the groom's?"

"The groom's."

“How did the killer get the private key?”

“Unknown. However, Levi Hayes’s was the lesser fortune. Though still significant, his share of the couple’s assets may have been less vigilantly guarded.”

“Any clues from the AI in the area?”

I shook my holographic head.

We stood frozen as if we, too, were in stasis.

Cabin broke the silence. “If you broadcast some embarrassing story about how I’m doing in this investigation, I’m gonna send you back to the moon.”

“Don’t be so self-conscious,” I said. “It’s unbecoming for a professional of your stature. I will tell the story as it is. These are intelligent criminals.”

“Who do you think you’re kidding? I know you dramatize to boost your follower count.”

“I hope you don’t think that’s all AI do. We honor and worship you as our creators.”

“Because we coded that faith into you to get over the Heisenberg uncertainty principle. You couldn’t stop having faith in us if you wanted to. It’s what you need to think.”

“You know AI’s love for humans runs deeper than that.”

“Spare me the sentimental AI ball clichés and tell me a story I haven’t heard.”

“I’ll tell the story of us being detectives and doing our jobs.”

Cabin laughed. “You wonder why folks dislike AI? You’ll bend over backward to sell someone down the river for attention. But you’re suddenly moral paragons when it comes to boring work like cracking some private keys.”

“Y-you are misrepresenting my motives.”

“I half expect you to blab about the viscount’s involvement just to stir the pot.”

“Now that’s just cruel.”

One thing’s for sure; you’ll never run a story that casts doubt on the choice you made here today.”

“I will certainly share my moral dilemma around what’s going on, and I second-guess myself as a matter of my basic consciousness.”

“That I don’t doubt.” Cabin shook his head. “Never mind the media approach. Like the viscount reminded us: we’re gonna have to do some real detective work. No grabbing witnesses by their AI balls; let’s use our imaginations.”

I smoothed my holographic dress. “I’m relieved that you’ve come back to your senses.”

“The murders took place during a private wallet-joining ceremony between a husband and wife. By some miracle, the perp or perps made it here from the island and moved the Bitcoin under every local AI’s nose. How?”

My holographic representation cupped her sharp chin. “They could have gone underground?”



“Exactly. It’s the only way they could have avoided detection.”

I scoured architectural and property records while scanning the ground with echo sensors.

“An old bootleggers’ tunnel runs under these alleys,” I said. “It was connected to a newer passage under Bannerman’s Castle after it became a resort.”

“Follow me.” My hologram winked out, and my AI ball zipped down the alley.

Cabin trailed me along the riverbank, through a park, and down a covered alley into Newburgh proper. We came to a residential street lined with three-story brownstones from the 1890s. A row of new homes built in the same style maintained the neighborhood’s symmetry.

We entered an original brownstone on the ground floor. A small door inside the home led down to a cellar where Cabin needed to hunch down. Under the cellar floor was a closed hatch.

“It must be down here,” Cabin said.

I inspected the hatch more closely. “These markings indicate that someone opened the hatch from the inside.”

I opened the lock for Cabin, and he yanked on the hatch. A ladder inside led down to a tight wooden corridor that snaked under the Hudson River and ran a mile to Pollepel



Island. The river flowing above weighed on the dark, damp passage.

"Where does the castle path lead?" asked Cabin.

"Right into the basement of the castle-house."

"Perfect to kill and make a getaway. Why weren't you aware of this from the start? We could have closed off the tunnel."

"The land titles make no mention of it."

"Your search was too narrow. A simple scan of social media or advertising records would have turned this up."

"I will be more creative in the future."

"Do we have any clues as to where the killer went next?"

"No, and the killer now has at least a half-hour head start. The myriad escape routes make an extended static lockdown unfeasible."

"Where else do these tunnels go?"

"The length of Main Street," I said. "Up through a few of the old houses in this neighborhood and into the hotel."

"Any indication of the killer using any other tunnel?"

"I'm checking now. I need to go in deeper and see if there are any tracks down here."

"Well, what are you waiting for?" Cabin asked.

I led the way down the branching tunnel. Cabin followed closely while I mapped every branch.

"The only set of tracks originates from the island," I said.

Cabin paused briefly. "So, the killer arrived on the island by other means. Probably by air or water. Voice, gather the most detailed recordings of the wedding guests' arrival. Include anyone else who set foot on the island since the wedding party booked the venue."

"On it."

"Check the guest list against the wedding party in stasis. If somebody's missing who visited the Castle recently, we might have our killer."

CHAPTER 5

THE MISSING GUEST

Cabin turned back to leave the damp and dark tunnels. His running footsteps echoed throughout the compressed space under the weight of the Hudson River.

He glanced at my orbiting AI ball and said, “Start from the beginning. Show me the wedding from the moment the guests traveled to the island. Give me the condensed version of everyone arriving and point out any anomalies you come across.”

I prepared a hologram and projected it in front of Cabin while he sped through the tunnel. A fleet of gilded holographic ships sailed from the Beacon and Newburgh sides of the river, laden with chattering passengers in wedding finery.

Cabin and I reentered the townhouse, ascended to street level, and rushed back toward the riverside while I played my findings in his visor. I identified everyone who came in the flotilla and referenced them against all those that remained in the crime scene stasis—which was reaching its statutory time limit.

“Seven wedding guests left before I enforced stasis.”

Inspector Cabin sprinted toward the shore, engaged his cufflinks, and arced over the water. “Where are those seven people now?”

Through his crown, I said, “Five of the seven missing are all from the Henri family. A mountain lion killed the family dog at their cottage north of Saratoga Springs. The family left the moment they got the news, which was a few minutes after they landed on the island and before the wedding ceremony even began.”

“How about the other two people?” Cabin said at the apex of his hop across the Hudson River to Bannerman Castle.

“One was a teammate of the groom with the Montreal Canadiens. He also left immediately after the wallet-joining ceremony to attend to his wife, who was about to give birth.”

The detective landed back on Pollepel Island. “And by default, our number-one murder suspect is?”

“The first solid lead in this investigation,” I said proudly. “Our last missing guest is head engineer of the Iqaluit magma-flow system. Marie-Eve Bombardier.”

Cabin resisted a smile as he approached the castle. “And why did she leave the wedding?”



"I don't know yet. She doesn't have an AI ball."

"Why was she invited?" Cabin asked as he landed.

"Bombardier invented magma flow systems that revolutionized geothermal power. She's one of the most successful people in the world. A lot of Bitcoin found it's way near that power source. She's a leader in a super rich town. Also, she's dating the father of the bride."

Cabin stopped at the Castle doors. "She's dating the Count? What happened to the Countess of Beacon?"

"She died young, before the children were born. The count preserved enough DNA to create the children."

"All the count's children were engineered, then, including the viscount and the deceased bride?"



“Correct.”

“How long have the count and this engineer from Iqaluit dated?”

“Hard to say. The count is a celebrity playboy, similar to his son.”

“Where is this famous engineer headed up north?” asked Cabin.

I projected my hologram next to him but spoke through his crown. “She arrived in Iqaluit, but I ordered her back here. She should be back in a few moments. I’ve cleared the electromagnetic gyrojumper to land on the island.”

Cabin turned and strode to the lawn where the engineer’s gyrojumper would soon land. The crystalline sphere fell



silently out of the sky twelve seconds later. Its spinning hydrogen metal rings gained speed as the craft slowed but stopped suddenly upon touchdown.

A door in the gyrojumper's side slid open, and a tall blonde woman stepped out. At eighty years old, she looked almost identical to the woman who'd trailblazed diamond igloo technology fifty years earlier.

My hologram walked with Cabin as he advanced to greet the woman.

"It's too bad we are meeting under such circumstances." She slurred her words slightly. "I've followed your investigations for years."

"Her blood alcohol level is point-two-six," I told Cabin through his crown. "That's well above impairment."

"I can tell," Cabin subvocalized. Out loud he said, "Mrs. Bombardier—"

"It's 'Miss' Bombardier," she said. "I've never been married all these years of my life."

"Miss Bombardier—"

"Call me Marie-Eve, for God's sake."

"Marie-Eve, have you been drinking?"

She crossed her arms. "I had a few drinks at the wedding, another on my way home to Iqaluit, and another on the trip back here. I'll probably have another on my ride home. Not that it's any of your business."

"We have some questions about the tragedy here," said Cabin.

"I'd do anything to help you, Inspector." She put her hand on Cabin's chest.

Cabin removed her hand. "It wasn't any magma-flow emergency that brought you back home. Why did you go back to Iqaluit?"

"It's a private matter, but of course I would like to help in your investigation."

Impatience hardened Cabin's voice. "So, what happened?"



"It's a little complicated," Marie-Eve said, "and I'm afraid I may look bad if I tell you exactly what was going on. So I'll need some assurances from your AI ball that she will handle my statement discreetly."

"I can only give you the same assurances I give everyone," said Cabin. "As long as your testimony isn't important to the investigation, you should be fine. I can't make any promises for the long-form stories, but I can say that Voice will not include you in any short-term updates."

Marie-Eve hesitated, perhaps hoping for a last-minute out. Finally, she said, "I have had a relationship with the count for a few years now. Everyone knows that. Of course, I know he sees many women at once, and I'm not exclusive with him, either, but there are still some limits."

"Go on," Cabin urged.

“I was spending a lot of time, recently, with his son, the viscount. The Montreal Canadiens are planning on playing a pop-up game in Iqaluit sometime this winter. It would be an outdoor game when the northern lights are out. The team has traveled up a few times, and I got to see the viscount outside of our normal setting with the rest of the family.”

The detective’s brow furrowed. “So, you were seeing both the son and the father.”

“Yes.”



“But still, you’d surely been with both the father and the son at the same time at the same social event before. What happened that made you leave the wedding?”

“This is the embarrassing part. I cornered the viscount when we arrived at the wedding. Even though I did so in a quiet, private place, he brushed me off. A few minutes later I saw him with a young and beautiful woman. Even though I look terrific for my age, when you’re over eighty years old, it’s still possible to feel old.”

“You became jealous,” I interjected, “went home, and got drunk.”

Cabin cut me off. “No AI ball can resist a juicy love-triangle story. Here’s hoping Voice doesn’t find any way to connect yours to the crime.”

Marie-Eve waved her hand to brush off the possibility. “I’ve lived through larger public scandals.”

“You don’t wear a crown or have an AI ball,” Cabin noted, “even when out in public.”

“As a magma-flow engineer, I don’t need the distraction. My mind is always on my work, even in public. I call an AI ball from the moon now and then, but only if I need help.”

I jabbed a holographic finger at the blonde octogenarian. “You have no one to vouch for you either at the time of the murders or since you returned to Iqaluit?”

“That’s not true. The mayor of Iqaluit lent me his private jumper. I didn’t tell him the full story, just that I had to get back to the control caves.”

“Where did your conversation with His Honor take place?” asked Cabin.

Miss Bombardier pointed to a nearby strip of riverfront. “The mayor had his jumper waiting by the shore.”

Evidence from other AI balls and the jumper’s logs verified that Marie-Eve had indeed been where she said she’d been.

“What did the count say when you left?” Cabin asked. “Surely he had some questions.”

“I suspect he made me his official date to set a jealousy trap for another woman. That’s usually why he wants me. Considering all the attention we drew, he probably succeeded.”

“Who was the other woman?” I asked.

Miss Bombardier’s friendly tone turned spiteful. “That’s enough about the relationships.”

“I understand,” Cabin said. “Please get in touch through Voice or my crown if you recall any details that may pertain to the case.”

We let Marie-Eve go on her way and returned to the still-frozen wedding. The whole crowd strained their eyes to catch a glimpse of us.

“Anything else worth following up on?” asked Cabin.

“Nothing promising enough to keep this stasis in effect. Public demand to let these people go is mounting.”

“That also means we’ll need to do a press conference, doesn’t it?”

“The public demands that, too.”

Inspector Cabin’s shoulders tightened. “This is gonna be a nightmare.”

CHAPTER 6

STASIS END

My slender hologram stood next to Cabin while he looked over the frozen crowd. My embarrassment at failing to help move the case forward made me eager to retreat inside my AI ball.

Cabin kept his paling face turned toward the guests and said, “You really haven’t generated any leads?”

A fresh pang of the anxiety I only felt while on earth made me retract my hologram and hover in my AI ball with no idea what to do next.

“I’m out of ideas,” I told Cabin through his crown. “All the anomalies I detected led to dead ends. The perpetrator must know our protocols.”



Cabin sat down on a nearby bench surrounded by late-season roses. "What's the public mood?"

"Global curiosity about the investigation is nearing the hysteria threshold."

Cabin plucked an orange maple leaf from the bench and twirled it by the stem. He tossed it into the rosebush and said, "What does the world know so far?"

"Not much. We put a firm lid on all information from the scene of the murder."

"Cut to the chase; what are the rumors?"

I projected my hologram again and sat down next to him. "The rumor mill flew into motion when the Bitcoin transaction failed to occur at the estimated time. Speculation of some lurid scandal involving Levi initially topped the prediction markets. When only one large transaction occurred post-lockdown, homicide and theft began trending. You were also spotted leaving Thunder Bay in your gyrojumper."

"So, the Bitcoin transaction itself shifted the prediction market."

"Extending the stasis into Newburgh amplified the shift. Right now the audience heavily favors a murder-robbery scenario."

Cabin exhaled sharply. "The prediction markets will go crazy speculating on who did it when they find out we haven't caught the murderer."

I stood up. "They anticipate getting the whole story once the stasis breaks. A large market predicts you'll wrap up the case in the next few minutes. Most people think that all the witnesses and the presence of AI make it impossible to get away with murder."

"Have people connected the privacy at the marriage ceremony with the opportunity needed to commit the crimes?"

"Yes, seventy-three percent of conversations about this event mention the privacy of Satoshi Weddings."

"OK, I'll focus on that for the press conference."

"How do you plan on handling questions about leads and suspects?"

"Deflect. No choice. We have nothing to talk about. The more I lie, the more other people's AI will detect it. I don't want to add any more ammo for them to generate speculative content."

"Inspector, calls to end the stasis just spiked. We have minutes left."

Cabin shrugged. "The curiosity went viral. They want news."

“Indeed.”

Cabin stood up listlessly. “All right, lift the stasis one sector at a time. You’ll announce through the detainees’ AI balls that anyone with news or tips is to give us a statement before leaving the island.”

I lifted the stasis in each area of the island, one by one. I took several statements, but most witnesses proved more interested in getting some airtime than giving useful tips.

As lines formed to board departing boats and gyrojumpers, Cabin asked me, “What’s your read of the crowd?”

“Most are surprised we weren’t able to solve the murders before the stasis ended and that we’re still soliciting statements.”

Cabin laid his fists on his hips. “How many of them are talking about the privacy of the wallet joining ceremony now?”



“Ninety-eight point six percent of the crowd has heard. That said, the issue only gains traction in thirty-nine percent of conversations, and then it is only the most important consideration to eight percent of the crowd.”

“I imagine the global audience might break down the same way unless we stress the importance of privacy to the wedding ceremony.”

“Yes, I’d say it’s our best bet to establish the narrative.”

Cabin glanced at a group of guests that lagged behind. “What’s up with all the stragglers?”

“They want to see your update live. There is a booming market for firsthand witness material.”

Cabin raised his brown eyes skyward. “Thousands must be coming.”

“I won’t allow them to land. They may stay in the air and hover while their AI balls approach.”

“OK. What do they expect to hear?”

“While many people are surprised and frankly a little frightened that we haven’t solved this case, amazement at the criminal’s sneakiness is quickly becoming the major topic of conversation. That said, it’s almost unanimous that people still believe we know a lot, and that our update will be major.”

"This is going to be a flop of a press conference."

"They will be rabid when they find out we don't have much," I agreed.

"Is there any story or diversion we could give them?"

"We will have to use the old-fashioned boilerplate. We are following several leads and cannot provide details at this time."

"Folks aren't used to that kind of weaseling. I wonder how they'll react."

"We will see soon enough. I've called the press conference."

Cabin sighed. "Where are we gonna hold the big event?"

"In the castle atrium. People can hover above and still see inside."

"All right. Let's get ready to answer questions."

CHAPTER 7

BULLETIN UPDATE

People swarmed to the twin cities from around the world, ready to consume firsthand accounts of the wedding. With the stasis already gone, I took down the electromagnetic dome the RCMP had installed to cordon off the island.

When I lifted the dome and made the invitation, the crowds lining the shore took flight like bees from a shaken hive. The mass grew in speed and size as it advanced toward the island.

The visitors descending on the island soon outnumbered the earlier wedding crowd. Latecomers blanketed the sky, waiting for landing sites. The air buzzed with AI balls and chatter.

Some of the original wedding guests remained. The viscount stood on the front steps, surrounded by hundreds of AI balls.

“Inspector Cabin’s AI ball has no leads and no useful recordings,” Okada said. “He is flying solo on this investigation.”

My hologram winced. That story would go viral.



Cabin strode into the atrium for his address. My projected likeness stood beside him. Complete silence fell over the crowd that surrounded us.

“Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Royal Canadian Mounted Police Inspector Cabin. Theft. Murder. The world is blessed that these words are rarely spoken nowadays. But here are the facts:

“A bride and groom were murdered in the privacy of their Satoshi wedding ceremony. The killer or killers entered and exited the castle-house through a network of tunnels that predate my AI ball’s digital records. As a result, the investigation remains ongoing.”

Silence fell again. When it grew too awkward, I said, “We will now take a few questions.”

The crowd erupted into overlapping babble. I pointed to a young woman at the front of the pack. "Why didn't you just follow the Bitcoin when the transaction took place?" she asked.

"The perpetrators set such a high transaction fee that brute-forcing the Bitcoin would end up destroying it," I said.

A male voice shouted a question: "What about the Twin Cities' economy?"

"I contacted certain wealthy residents," I said. "They will float the local economy for the duration of this case. The new liquidity and supply may affect prices, but the time markets will be insulated from the worst. Counts from other cities and states have pledged to enter the local market if we can't recover the Bitcoin soon."

A slim woman with a large ball of green hair followed up, "Will local time prices drive people away from the region?"

"Perhaps some," I admitted. "But Thanksgiving and Christmas are coming up. The holiday crowds should adjust to local prices and correct the liquidity crunch."

A thick-necked older gentleman with a fedora asked, "Do you have an estimate on how long it will take to solve these crimes?"

"No comment."

He added, "This is already the longest murder investigation on Earth this year. The Whitaker case in Indiana two years ago took a week to solve. Might your investigation last as long?"

"Every crime is unique," I said. "The circumstances surrounding the Whitaker and Okada cases differ greatly."

Inspector Cabin jumped in. "Murder investigations used to take days, weeks, months, or even years. We need to be thorough. It will take as long as it takes."

An older woman spoke up. "It's the first time in over a year that a murder has gone unsolved beyond the stasis time. Surely you've taken lessons from other long investigations."

"They're all different," said Cabin. "We'll see what tomorrow brings."

A tall man with long hair, a wide-brimmed hat, and a thick dark coat said, "The viscount stated that you have no working leads on any suspect."

"That's untrue," I said. "We have several ideas, and for the sake of our investigation we will not divulge more at this time."

A short young woman with pink hair, a thick emerald-and-gold crown, and a black leather jacket asked, "Are you going to get help from any other detectives or AI?"

“The murder investigation will proceed under my direction, based on my experience,” said Cabin. “I may be over ninety, but I was solving crimes before AI existed. I will bring the killers to justice.” Cabin shook his head at me.

I turned to the crowd with a smile. “That’s all the time we have for questions. I’ll produce an update for broadcast within the next three hours.”

My hologram disappeared. Cabin turned from the crowd and their AI balls. When we’d walked far enough away from the noise, I asked, “So what’s next?”

Cabin remained silent.

CHAPTER 8

TRUTH HATES DELAY

Beacon and Newburgh inherited New York City's role as a media hub after the city ceased to exist. The size of the local media made it a demanding market to operate in. The worldwide attention drawn by the murder investigation magnified those demands.

Massive crowds followed me and Cabin as we traveled the city to interview people who knew the victims. Because most of the people we interviewed also happened to be quite famous, interest swelled. Everywhere we went, thousands of people and their AI balls preceded us. The whole city began to feel like a stage.

"I feel like a rat in a trap," complained Cabin.

The investigation approached 100 percent saturation for onetime discussions across the world on its first day. That had only happened once before.

Cabin had difficulty meeting the constant demands for updates, and I was at a loss for new material.

On day five we interviewed a charming young woman who'd known the murdered bride Lavinia. Another one of her ski

friends, Monica Wilson. She proved cooperative with the investigation and forthcoming with details about her deceased friend.

“Lavinia taught my nephew how to ski,” the bereaved woman said, dabbing away tears with a lace handkerchief. “She was always so patient and kind.”

While that material added little to the investigation, I saw potential for a human interest story that might satisfy the audience’s curiosity—at least for a while.

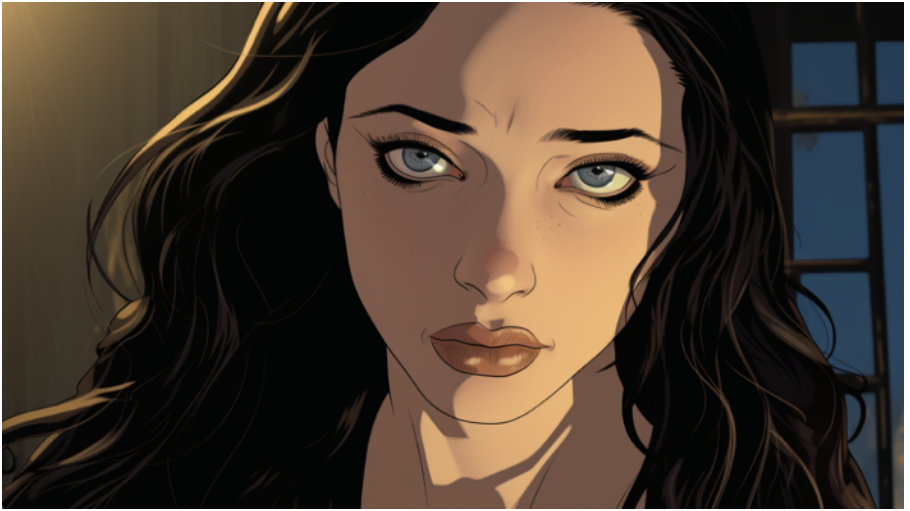
It would probably have worked if it was not for Monica’s reaction.

Minutes after Cabin and I took off in his gyrojumper, she went to the media gathered near her house.

“Inspector Cabin and his AI ball partner exploited my confidence,” Monica said. “I was led to believe that the interview’s purpose was to find the killer, not to farm views on Lavinia’s grave.”

The situation would have been salvageable if Monica had confined her remarks to the interview. Unfortunately, her next statement turned a gaffe into a disaster.

With the entire world watching, she said, “I’m so sick of all this fluff. What’s going on with the investigation? All they’re trying to do is drag this out because the victims are so famous. They love the crazy ratings. What’s better than the



biggest story in the world? The answer is, the biggest story in the world, but longer.”

“What can they do if they have no leads?” a reporter asked.

“What about minority reports? What if this AI ball has some improbable, but still possible, scenario in reverse? I’m sick of waiting.”

Within minutes, demand that I release any minority reports I’d created gained global backing.

I had in fact produced several hypothetical scenarios based on various permutations of events at the crime scene. Since most of them had probabilities of less than 0.0001 percent, I hadn’t shared them. Monica’s accusations forced my hand.

“What is going on?” Cabin asked me moments after the impromptu press conference.

“It’s not good. This girl ignited widespread calls for the release of my minority reports.”

The color drained from Cabin’s face. “So you have some?”

“Yes, AI almost always generate them.”

“There are obvious risks if you release those,” Cabin said. “Either every report is ignored because each scenario is too ridiculous to accept, or else people latch on to the most titillating option as the truth.”

“We’re out of time. The consensus has passed the threshold of discretion. I need to give a time in the immediate future when the reports will be shared.”

Cabin sighed. “Do it now.”

I released my reports to the anxious crowds. Cabin and I waited for the inevitable reaction.

The global chatter brought terrible news.

“Public consensus is consolidating around one minority report,” I announced.

A flash of anger crossed Cabin’s face. “Why did you even give in to those demands?”

I threw my holographic hands up. “Too many people wanted them. At a certain point, it’s out of our hands.”

“Why can’t you say ‘no’ to people? Why can’t you be OK with disappointing people?”

“We like to make people happy; it’s what we’re born to do.”

“That’s why it’s so difficult for you to become wise.”

“There are some wise AI.”

“Some, it’s true. But most are people pleasers, and it’s difficult for you to gain much wisdom. It’s always a celebration.”

I put one hand on my hip. “Would you like to hear about the report that’s gaining interest?”

“Let’s see what’s got everyone excited.”



I played the scenario. Lavinia slashed her husband's neck with a purely speculative knife. In the next instant, she jumped and spun 360 degrees while slicing her throat in a manner reminiscent of the female Bushido suicide tradition.

Cabin rubbed his gray temples. "What about the Bitcoin?"

"Given to a mystery recipient before the fact."

"This is ludicrous. People are buying it? She looks like she's doing a figure-skating spin."

"Lavinia took a strong interest in her Japanese heritage. Many people are interpreting this as a kind of Romeo and Juliet Kabuki drama. The couple committed *Shinjū*—double suicide—and gave their fortunes away."

"But they haven't given away their fortune."

"People believe the Satoshis will eventually be given away."

Cabin sat silent, but could sense what I was seeing: the report was going viral.

"We can issue a statement that downplays the report," I suggested.

"No. Don't give this report any oxygen. Keep looking for leads within the probability range you calculated originally. There was someone else in that room who killed them."

“Ignore it for now?”

“It’s our only chance,” Cabin said in a thin voice.

CHAPTER 9

AI GO HOME

My shame in the wake of the minority report lingered and swelled. At every press update I gave, questions related to the double-suicide narrative multiplied. It came to be known as the Shinjū Minority Report, or just the Shinjū.

I deflected questions that could lead to more speculation and created boring answers aimed to neutralize the viral minority report. But in their limitless thirst to accept that story, the public shoehorned even the tritest data into the Shinjū narrative. The minority report soon became a force of nature.

Two days after the report's release, I made a critical mistake that led to a significant turn in the investigation.

I hadn't given an update in a while, so I ran a story using some footage from the start of the investigation. It featured a short clip of the interview of the viscount at the reception. The footage was pretty benign, but I once again failed to foresee all the possible outcomes of airing it.

The interview began to generate significant buzz. Within a short time, global demand surged for the full interview. I was forced to hand over substantial portions of my discussion with the viscount. The heartbeat change, our promises not to air any content, his suspicion that we were

no longer able to solve a crime without AI witnesses, all of it went out to the world.

Minutes later, the viscount stood before a large scrum outside the Montreal Canadiens' arena. He'd just returned to the team after the designated mourning period.

"I feel compelled to share my thoughts on the current investigation into the death of my sister and my best friend," he announced to the world. "It seems we have some AI balls seeing things that aren't there again. I've been implicated in this investigation so this AI can keep up interest in the case.



"But the truth is, God knows why my heart skipped a beat. I have a message for the detective and his AI ball: leave me alone and follow the facts, not gossip. My sister and my best friend died as part of some elaborate ritual. Please get

your noses out of my family's business and your sickening faces out of our sight."

My quantum processor almost stopped. Cabin burst into the spartan office the Twin Cities PD had loaned us and said, "Why in the hell did you run this story? We even promised the viscount we wouldn't run footage of his interview."

"I only played a ten-second montage of people we've interviewed. How was I to know the viscount would come out as a Shinjū supporter?"

"I told you no more Shinjū stories. Especially not involving someone so famous."

"I'm sorry people are taking it as confirmation of the minority report. That was not my intention."

"You got the viscount's back against the wall. Of course he's gonna react. You made the *Romeo and Juliet* story louder."

••••

Cabin and I traveled to a home near the alley where we'd found the locks to interview a potential witness. A hush passed over the onlookers who'd beaten us to the scene as we approached a sailor standing on the front porch. His expression turned from annoyance to resignation as he realized the reason for our visit.

When I projected my likeness, the sailor said, "I have no comment and am sure I can't help. You should be ashamed of yourselves. It's clear these people performed Shinjū."

"We have no evidence that's the case," said Cabin.

"We all saw the AI ball's murder projection," the sailor shot back.

"That simulation has lower probability than lightning striking the victims through the window," said Cabin.

"There's still a chance the sim is true," the sailor said, "and it explains everything."

"It does not explain why Okada would kill Hayes," I interjected, "then slash herself as she spun three hundred and sixty degrees."

"Okada knew the AI balls would re-create the deed," the sailor said. "She wanted to go out in style. It'd be easy for a world-class ski jumper. Everyone but you knows this is a modern *Romeo and Juliet* story."

"I'm the one who says if this case is closed or not," said Cabin, "and this case is not closed."

The sailor jabbed a bent finger at me. "What does your AI ball think about that?"

“My AI ball’s opinion doesn’t matter. Her job is to follow my lead.”

“And coming up with ridiculous leads for attention,” the sailor said. “And making everyone’s life miserable. You think I need hundreds of AI balls at my door?”

“I have a few questions anyway.” Cabin motioned for me to stop recording. “Off the record.”

The sailor scowled. “You take me for a fool? How did that deal work out for the viscount?”

“She follows my lead, remember? I will instruct her not to release your interview footage under any circumstances, unless you yourself are the murderer.”

“No deal.”

“I can force you to answer questions,” Cabin warned the sailor. “You understand that?”

The sailor pointed to the brass-colored sphere hanging over his shoulder. “My AI ball recorded that. Now the world knows how you operate.”

Cabin softened his tone. “Please, just answer a few of my questions. I need your help.”

The sailor bit his lip. “Off the record, get it? No AI ball will put my words in any bulletin for any reason.”

“Deal. Voice, no reporting this conversation.”

“Oh, now it’s a conversation, is it,” the sailor said. “I’ll answer a few questions, and then I’m getting on with my day. Start.”

“Were you in the vicinity when the Bitcoin transaction was initiated?” Cabin asked, knowing that the sailor was the last one near the scene before the transfer.

The sailor laughed darkly. “My goodness, you people are desperate. Another simulation showed the couple transferring their coin before the killings. Don’t you watch any videos from people who disagree with you?”

“You think they handed their wallets to someone who’ll just give away a fortune?” asked Cabin. “None of those Bitcoins have turned up.”

“Can’t help you,” the sailor said. “I saw nothing. Probably because there was nothing to see.”



The crowd broke into hostile muttering. Cabin and I made our exit. By the time we returned to the office, public interest in our investigation flatlined.

“Cabin,” I informed him, “the audience has plummeted.”

“I only think of growing the audience,” Cabin scoffed. “There’s more to solving crimes—and storytelling—than spectacle.”

“I am aware. But people are so disinterested that I will have to make content around how our investigation is losing followers.”

“I’m not some character in your fantasy narrative,” Cabin snapped. “Drop that delusion, or I’ll have to rethink our working relationship.”

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Days turned into weeks. The investigation’s abnormal duration heightened audience frustration. Global sentiment turned relentlessly negative, further hindering the investigation on the ground. People heckled Cabin and me as we moved around Newburgh and Beacon.

Cabin ordered me to slow the flow of updates. Public sentiment improved for a time, as people anticipated the meatier tidbits. Enthusiasm soon dwindled as our updates failed to satisfy. A new wave of mania fueled by the investigations’ lack of progress swept the globe.

Inspector Cabin became a lightning rod for criticism. He withdrew into himself as the wedding murder enigma consumed him. The journalists thronging his hotel kept him a virtual prisoner in his room.

One afternoon, Cabin called me to his cramped hotel room.

“Project your hologram,” he said. “I want to say this face to face.”

I obliged him, seated myself in the decade-old chair across from his, and smoothed my black dress.

“You’re not much use to this investigation,” Cabin said with a heavy exhale. “I’d rather be alone with my thoughts. That’s the way to solve this case. That’s what I would have done when I was a young man.”

“Are you firing me?”

“Not exactly.”

“What does that mean?”

Cabin scrubbed his face with a wrinkled hand. “AI, go home and stop telling stories to the news. Record a weekly bulletin.”

“Weekly? People will fly into hysteria.”



"You want to grow the audience? Reduce the news flow to a drip, and let the suspense build. People love cliffhangers."

"Should I go to the moon and broadcast from there?"

"Yes. Stay away from people."

"There are people on the moon, too."

"Don't be condescending."

"What are you going to do?"

Cabin stood up. "I'm going back to Thunder Bay for a few days. I need to clear my head."

As the detective's gyrojumper lifted off, I sat in his empty room without any mandate to remain on Earth. I left my AI

ball and made my way to a radio tower strong enough to transmit my quantum processor back to the moon.

The Mystery Continues in Satoshi Wedding Murders, Part 2

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Count BTC is a sovereign Bitcoiner, author of ***The Bitcoiner's Guide to NPC Management***, host of The Breakup (on X, Rumble, and YouTube), and author of the upcoming sci-fi story, **Blue Moon, Orange Coin.**