

Where's My Hat?



A Mystery

By Jean Marie Romana

WHERE'S MY HAT?

The night I met Alice was like any other night. I was taking the hover-subway home from a client's house. Old Gordon had tried to get out of paying me. I had to break a few of his teeth. When you're in a line of work like mine, you have to be prepared to break a few teeth sometimes. I'm a private detective. And a woman.

And it's the FUTURE.

That's why I wasn't surprised to see a hover-subway instead of a regular one. When you've been living in the future your whole life the way I have, you get used to all kinds of science stuff: androids, laser guns, flying cars, and hover-subways. Also the computers are way smart. As in, you think computers are smart now? In the future they are about ten times that.

The hover-subways still had flickering fluorescent lighting, though. It was very ambient. In my head I was humming some dramatic music. It went like this: duh duh duh duh DUUUUH.

And then I turned around real fast, and there she was. Alice. Only I didn't know it was Alice yet. She hadn't introduced herself.

"Hi," she purred. "I'm Alice."

"Hello, Alice," I responded. "I'm Private Detective Maxine Peters. I solve mysteries."

"It is very nice to meet you, detective," she said.

"Thank you, it is very nice to meet you too." I responded.

I gazed into her eyes for a bit, which looked like limpid pools of pure desire. She also had a great rack.

"Oh detective," she purred. "I seem to have lost my holo-necklace. Could you help me find it?"

"Sure" I said, and started fishing around in her cleavage.

"Oh no," she laughed, "I mean it's been **STOLEN!**" Now she was all seriousness.

"Stolen!"

"Yes, stolen" she confirmed.

"Well We'll have to do something about that," I said and reached up to scratch my head.

As I was scratching I noticed my hat was missing too! "Oh sweet Jesus!" I cried! "My hat has been stolen as well!"

“WHERE’S MY HAT?” I mused aloud.

“Nevermind your hat,” she said. “Find my holo-necklace. I’ll give you One Million Space Dollars if you find it for me by Tuesday. I have a World’s Fair to attend and I need to look my best.”

“Babes, if the money’s right, I’m your detective.” I said nonchalantly. “But how will I contact you?”

“Look me up on the information superhighway,” she said, and stepped off the holo-subway, which had come to a complete stop. And then she was lost in the crowd of robots and space-mutants.

“Drat,” I said, and went home.

I padded around my studio apartment wearing my socks, dress shirt and half-untied tie, but no pants and no hat. The disappearance of my hat still haunted me, in much the same way the disappearance of Alice did. It was almost like the hat was a metaphor for my desire for this mysterious lady. My pants, on the other hand, were in the turbo-wash, so their absence didn’t haunt me so much.

In a few moments though, I would desperately rue the loss of my pants.

“Knock knock!” said someone outside my front door. I wasn’t wearing pants so I just peered through the peephole to see who it was. I couldn’t

see anything. The mystery person must have put their hand over the peephole! I began to feel a feeling of TERROR rise!

Then – BAM! Whoever was on the other side of the door KICKED it open and hit me on the head. I blacked out, never seeing the face of the attacker.

If I hadn't been unconscious I would have been TERRIFIED.

When I woke up I discovered that my hat was still missing. Plus I had a headache and a lump on my head. “What do you want from me?!” I screamed at the ceiling. “What more do you want?!”

“I want to speak to you,” said a figure emerging from the shadows.

“Who are you?” I asked, wondering if he was my attacker.

“I am not your attacker,” he said, almost as if he could read my mind.

“I can read your mind,” he said, “Because of this mind-reading device.” At this he held up a large plasti-crystal on a necklace-like cord.

“It looks like a holo-necklace,” I said.

“It looks like one,” the old man said, “But it is a very special one. Put it on and it will read other

peoples' thoughts and project them as a holo-gram into your MIND."

"Jeepers!" I gulped.

The man handed me the necklace. "I bequeath this unto you." He said.

"Why?" I asked, but he was gone.

"Oh." I said, and put the necklace in my pocket.

That night I tossed and turned on my sweat-stained mattress, unable to get a single wink of sleep. Something was bothering me. So I got up and made some stale coffee in my studio apartment's tiny kitchen-area. I took a long sip of the bitter brew and decided to use my detective skills. I thought about the mysterious old man, about the mystery attacker, and the necklace. I took the necklace out of my pocket and held it in my hand, and gulped another sip of coffee. The necklace glowed with an ethereal L.E.D. light. It looked so beautiful, I longed to see Alice wearing it.

Alice. I thought about her, and about the strange request she had made. Then I put two and two together and the realization made me spit my coffee clear across the room. I didn't notice.

Of course! Alice had wanted me to find her holo-necklace! And the old man had given me a holo-necklace! Could it be the same necklace...?

How could I not see it before, with all the clues staring me right in the face? But with a detective as smart as me, nothing will slip by unnoticed for long. That's why they pay me to do detective work: because I detect things no one else does.

I decided to sleep on it. But in the morning, would it be TOO LATE?

No, in the morning I woke up at a reasonable time. I had plenty of time to do detective work before Tuesday and still have time for some unexpected twists and turns, because it was only Friday. So I decided to find out more about this "Alice" woman on the Information Superhighway.

I touched a button on my forehead and it glowed red. This meant I was wirelessly connecting to the Virtual-Reality Internet, which is much like your Earth-internet only it's in 3-D Virtual Reality. Everything inside is lit up like neon and sometimes numbers float by.

So there I was, floating in the internet, my body rendered to look like it does in Real Life only with a blue glow around it. The number 4 drifted by, narrowly missing my head.

"Computer," I said. "Find me Alice"

"Searching for Alice" said the computer, and displayed a bunch of green numbers zooming by real fast.

Then it displayed a hologram image of Alice that rotated so you could see it from all sides. “Alice,” intoned the computer. “Real name: Francene Gilmore. Age, unknown. Parents, unknown. Wanted by the space police. Charge: theft of an important artifact from the government.”

“What important artifact?” I asked the computer.

“That information is classified,” the computer replied.

“Huh,” I said. Then, “Computer, what do you know about holo-crystals?”

“Holo-crystals are man-made science crystals. They project holograms. They are not usually known for reading minds.”

“NOT usually known for reading minds?” I verified.

“No, not usually,” said The Internet.

“But it could theoretically be possible?” I asked.

“Of course, anything’s possible,” said The Internet, and then I lost my connection.

“I don’t get any reception in this building” I grumbled. But I was also contemplative. I now had more pieces of the puzzle.

But how does my hat fit into all this, I still wondered.

The next day was Saturday. I watched my favorite show, “Android Puppet Theater” and got dressed. I still didn’t have a replacement hat, but at the last moment I decided to wear the holo-necklace.

I took the anti-gravity elevator down to the apartment lobby and tipped the robot-bellhop. He tipped his hat in return and then said “ook ook ook” because he was a robot monkey-bellhop. I thought this was a cute touch.

As I was approaching the front desk to ask about my mail I heard a voice in my head, like an audial-hologram projected into my mind. It sounded like it was saying “I wonder where her hat is! I never see her without her hat!”

I looked around, but the only person nearby was the guy behind the desk, and he was acting like he hadn’t said anything. My necklace was glowing. I came up to the front desk, puzzled.

“Hey, what happened to your hat?” the guy behind the desk asked.

“Did you just ask me that?” I asked.

“Just now? Yes.” Said The Guy.

“No, I mean before just now,” I said.

“What? No, I only asked you once.”

“Oh. Well, I know you only ASKED me once, but were you thinking about my hat before you asked me about it just now?”

“No,” said the guy, “I only just saw that your hat is missing. I didn’t know until you walked in a moment ago.”

“Yes, but before you asked me about it, did you think about it really loud?”

“What are you getting at?” the man asked suspiciously.

“Um, nevermind,” I said. I mulled over the facts. This guy was obviously a liar or an idiot. Maybe both. Unless...

Of course! I spat in surprise, which startled and offended the guy behind the desk. He left to get a cleaning rag. As he was leaving I heard his voice in my head in kind of an echoing way, thinking, “What a crazy bitch.”

My necklace was pulsing and glowing with light. That’s when I put two and two together. Of course! This must be the mindreading hologram-thing the old man was talking about! I can now read peoples’ thoughts!

“What a powerful device” I thought, and winced at the feedback created by the mind-reading crystal. It screeched and squacked like a parrot being wrung out.

“I guess I can’t think any thoughts while wearing this thing,” I thought, and then clutched my head in pain. The feedback was gaining in pitch. I could feel it everywhere, in my bones, my hair, my teeth.

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