Synopsis

Hot Winds Blow Things In

Mai Lewandon was approached by one Pablo Verasante to look for his missing niece Rosa on the same day Mai began to feel a buzzing in her head, one that wouldn't stop. He gave Mai copies of suspicious Emails that Rosa had sent to him. After accepting the job, Mai was contacted telepathically by somebody who wanted her to come meet him. Meanwhile her associate Maxine “Max” Moretti arrived and hinted to Mai about having seen something absolutely horrific the night before, a monster tearing to shreds a group of people who had been attending a party to which Max had been assigned by her mob contact “Mr. Smith” to deliver a package. Mai gets some visions from Max's head, and eventually gets the specifics out of her. Then Max falls asleep on her couch.

Mai goes to meet with Fred Lane at Marcus' bar. He hires her to look into something that's disturbed him regarding the number of children that are being born or introduced to the creche at the Coca-Cola Employee Housing Village (CCEHV) in Chicago, versus the number that seem to be currently in the program. Basically it appears that somebody is manipulating the numbers in order to hide the fact that children are disappearing. He's discovered this while doing his routine job for the government, pushing paper and numbers around.

As a lot of the data is on paper, it's voluminous, and Fred has it stashed at his apartment. Fred and Mai go there to look it over. Mai realizes that (coincidentally?) that the missing girl and her roommate worked at the CCEHV, the same place that Fred's data is coming from. Mai decides this is something her DEA friend Leo might be able to help out with, and contacts him. Together Leo and Mai come up with the fact that since Coca-Cola is currently under investigation for distribution of cocaine (which it's legally putting in it's product again, but possibly distributing in still illegal doses in other forms), that he can look into it. They make a plan to meet back at Marcus' again.

Mai hands over the data from Fred to Leo at the bar, and they discuss the missing children, and how the missing woman might be a witness potentially. Max, now awake, arrives and joins them. Leo ignores the fact that Max is clearly running numbers in the bar. After chatting for a bit, Max notes that the horror she saw the previous evening is outside the window of Marcus' bending reality around it. Max flees, and Mai and Leo (and Marcus) follow. They hear screaming from inside the bar, and Mai can FEEL the customers being rent apart. She passes out from the intensity. Max and Leo drag her out of danger to the nearest EL platform, and take Mai to Leo's apartment.

Leo, wanting to investigate, leaves Max to watch over Mai, and heads to Fred's place. After a brief encounter with some loitering youths at the entrance to Fred's apartment building, Leo gets to Fred's door, and introduces himself, and eventually gets Fred to let him in. They discuss the stats on the children, and eventually Leo lets on what happened to Mai at the bar.

Leo returns to his apartment to find Mai has been left alone, and Max has disappeared. Mai has hazy recollections of what's happened. Leo tells Mai that he's been to see Fred. Mai notices a piece of paper in her pocket, a note from Mai stating briefly that “It” was there and she lead it away. Mai pushes down a barrier in her mind, one she realizes was put there by the mystery man in her mind. She recalls what happened last night, or what she thought had happened that had caused her to pass out, which was the thing in the bar coming out, tearing off two of her fingers, shoving them down her throat, causing her to choke on them. They figure out that this was some sort of delusion or illusion.

They follow the smell something acrid out the back of the apartment, where they find a cat has been

burnt to death. They follow a blood trail to a back porch area for the apartment building, only to find the cat's owner disemboweled and hanging by her own guts. Leo calls emergency services, and, disgusted, they decide to leave.

A forensics report is filed, and Leo gets a hold of it. Mai returns the next day to Leo's apartment, after having taken some time to recover. They discuss the murder, and what could have caused it, and how strange things have gotten in just one day. The mysterious telepath contacts Mai again, warning her that without training she'll attract things.

Mai asks Leo to come with her to meet the telepath at a cafe, and they meet a guy named “Benny” (a code name). He says that he's sensed that Mai is a fairly powerful empath, and he can train her in what he refers to as Psionics. Mai agrees, saying that they can meet at her office. He also reveals to her the existence of aliens.

Leo drops Mai off at her office on his way to work. Mai meets an old woman named Doreen who is posing as a homeless person. She comes up to Mai's office and reveals that she also wants to teach Mai, but she wants her to learn a more mystical approach to her mental abilities, as opposed to Benny's psionics. As Mai questions her, she reveals that there's also something called Sorcery as some sort of advanced option. Mai gets a call from Fred who says he has an emergency. Doreen uses Dimension Walking to get Mai to Fred's place fast.

A Tornado of Terror

Meanwhile, Max is cornered by the Tulpa, and manages to barely escape with her life. She is freaked out by the part of the encounter where it made her think she was talking to a dead friend. Max calls Mai, and rushes over to meet her at Fred's.

Mai, meanwhile, knocks on Fred's door to no avail. She fires her gun into the door, but the lock holds. She can see Fred inside laid out on his bags of data, unconscious. She asks Darlene to save Fred, which she does using some empathic ability that tires her tremendously in the process. Apparently Fred has been attacked by robotic bugs of some sort, the remains of one of which he picks up. Security forces arrive, and everybody escapes out the window, just as Fred torches the place (which ends up scorching him slightly), covering their escape to a cab they called a moment ago. Doreen refuses medical treatment, but says that she can take them to a safe place. But if they go they can likely never turn back. Mai and Max agree that they don't have much choice in the matter.

They arrive in an industrial park, and Doreen asks again if they're sure about proceeding. They agree, and she takes then in through a big storm drain under a railroad pass, and into a large underground facility. Doreen asks them to hand over weapons and electronics and to assign themselves code names, as apparently everybody in this organization goes by them for anonymity. Fred and Max assimilate quickly meeting some members of this “empathic underground” organization. Fred is far more skeptical, but his paranoia fits right in at least. They're introduced to alien tech when the agent code-named Beta-3 removes one of his arms, and shows that it has very strange technology that attaches it to his body. They're given some basic briefings and get some sleep.

The next day, they're introduced to a spirited “Sorcerer” woman code-named Panix, who apparently considers herself only an affiliate of the underground, not a full member to be depended upon. They then receive further briefings on various “Threats”. Panix asks Max about the monster that's been tracking her, and says she'll do some research on it. Talking with Mai, they agree that Mai might be a

good apprentice for Panix. Later in the day Axe arrives, and he and B3 admit that they have a corpse of a “monster” in storage, and show Mai and Max a huge humanoid they jokingly call “Melvin.” Meanwhile Fred tracks down the group's database on a laptop, and starts filtering through what little data they have on hand, and improving the data integrity. He notes that there is more than one member of the underground that's gone missing in the past.

Meanwhile, Leo, concerned that he can't track down either Mai or Fred, does some investigating. He soon tracks down the fire at Fred's place, and goes to investigate. There Fred's neighbor is sorting through the wreckage of the apartment building. From him, Leo determines that Mai, Fred, Max and another woman fled via cab. More astute investigation tracks down the cab and it's destination. He heads to the industrial park, and finds a van arriving just after he does. A huge spindly monster, apparently having ridden below the van, erupts from beneath it as the occupants get out. There is a bloody fight, and one of the underground members (Loris) is badly injured by being thrown after tangling with it in close quarters; but the monster is banished into the ether as dozens of bullets are pumped into it and it tips the van over.

Leo trails these people into the facility as the leader, Snapshot (also apparently a doctor) works feverishly to save Loris' life. Mai vouches for Leo, so Axe doesn't kill him. Leo gets a code name, Leon. Everybody rests as Loris' life hangs by a thread. The next day, Axe asks if anyone wants to help him run an errand out to meet some kids that apparently help the underground. Nobody bites, instead waiting for Panix to return to the base. Fred talks to Snapshot about the data for the group and she accepts the notion of him being in charge of it.

Mai talks to Benny, who explains the issue of having to make a choice between psionics and mysticism, even if she chooses to study sorcery. Panix arrives and talks to Max about her monster a bit. They decide to hold off for a bit on Max facing her monster just yet. Mai then discusses with Panix what she wants to train in before studying sorcery, and she decides to go with Psionics. She goes to Benny who gives her a description of the nature of the universe from his point of view, and how it relates to dimension walking. She goes and finds Leo and brings him up to speed on all she's learned from the underground, as a way of briefing him.

Fred “surveys” Panix, who reveals that what she believes is the biggest threat out there is the existence of something she calls “Demonground,” and that there aren't many people with the talent to train to close them off. Fred then heads off to find B3, and asks him to help him start a physical training program.

The Hot Seems Cold

Veronica announces it's time to deal with Max's monster, and the team gears up a bit. She announces that the term for the creature is a Tulpa, the manifestation of a sorcerer's will made manifest. Veronica gives Leo a list of places she's felt the sorcerer who crfeated the Tulpa dimension walking to lately, hoping Leo can figure a way to track him down. Mai tags along with Leo as they head to his office to research it.

At the office, Leo gets Mai inside on a visitor's pass, and they find a gift left for Leo from a secret admirer. One of Leo's coworkers, Mort, hits on Mai. Leo manages to figure out a likely hideout, using his computer set up to analyze the data.

After discussing things with Veronica and the others, Leo and Mai head out to stake the building in question out from Leo's car. As it gets dark, another car drives up and parks beside the building. A man gets out, looks around, and then hustles a child into the building from the car. They enter the

building, and find the lair of the sorcerer, a place spattered with the blood of many previous victims. As the Tulpa arrives and begins it's mental assault, Mai puts a bullet in precisely the right place in the sorcerer's chest to kill him instantly. The Tulpa disperses. They save the child, and manage to find a notebook with crazy writing in it. From the notebook they glean the address of the sorcerer (Eli Caldwell).

As they drive back, Mai reads the notebook and discovers that there is some dark entity behind the group of sorcerers to which Eli belonged before he went rogue and created the Tulpa. She also figures out that what drove Eli crazy is the same buzzing sound that she's hearing from everybody out there herself. Her reading almost causes her to accidentally perform a sorcerous fire stunt.

When they get back to the base, they inform B3 of what happened, and he informs them that Max took off rather suddenly. Leo and Mai decide to check out Eli's apartment to see if they can't find information on the other sorcerers, and Snapshot comes along for the ride. They find Eli's apartment in a dilapidated building, and inside is a man looking for something. They chat with him, and he says he's a friend of Eli's; though he's not much disheartened to hear that Eli is dead, stating that Eli had been “off” lately. The banter mentions dark rituals, and soon Mai has agreed to meet this sorcerer, Spenser, at a bar she frequents to meet with CIs.

After Spencer leaves, they search the apartment and find a metal box with something like an organ inside. Snapshot declares it alien “DarkTek” and they leave with it returning to the base.

The next night, Leo waits downstairs as Mai meets with Spenser upstairs at Crafty's Craft Beers. Spencer offers to take on Mai as an apprentice, insisting that she let him into his mind to find out if he can trust her. She demurs. Leo meets a woman named Nell, and Mai ends up having to leave alone as Leo takes Nell home with him. Outside Mai meets up with Snapshot, who tells her that Spenser just walked off down the street.

They track him into a graveyard where he's meeting with some others, including somebody likely not human. Mai talks to Spenser, as Snapshot covers her from a distance, but then he attacks Mai out of nowhere. Mai blinds him with the alcohol from her flask and Snapshot runs over. The big figure is a woman named Ann who approaches and suddenly changes into a bear and attacks. Snapshot unloads into it, and it falls on Mai hurting her somewhat. Snapshot helps Mai get out from under the bear, but turns her attention on Spenser as he grabs Mai. He decides to flee, and creates a dimension walk portal to escape through. Ann dies as they discuss what to do with her, and they decide to lug her corpse to the van and back to base.

At the base, Veronica confirms that were-bears are really a thing, and always have been. Mai suggests that they might be able to track Spencer with his blood that Mai collected from the scene in the graveyard. Leo returns to base after spending time with Nell, and Mai tells him what's happened to her. There is a meeting, and Veronica's only idea is to use Eli's DarkTek device (a “Caller”) to call on what she terms “Astral Hounds” to search for Spencer using his blood. The plan is put on hold until Panix can be consulted.

Winds From the Depths

That night, a curio store owner named Cas Vandal gets a call on a disconnected phone from a boy named Bobby Frank who asks for him to track down Mai Lewandon, so she can find him in the tunnels under Chicago. Cas sets out the next day to find her. Mai and Leo track Panix down at a synagogue in

the south part of the “Downtown Dreamland,” but as they are about to enter Cas approaches Mai and tells them about the call. They discuss it, and Cas agrees to go with them to search, but needs to go back to his shop to get some things first. In the meanwhile they update Panix on what has happened, and she admits she has information on the order of sorcerers to which Spenser belongs. They table that, and she agrees to help then with whatever Cas is up against.

They head to Crafty's and Panix fills them in on The White Circle, warning that they may have to face Ann's mate, Matt. And she admits she was once a member of the order herself. They discuss what might be done about the circle, but come to no conclusions. They finish their drinks and head to Cas' shop.

Once with Cas, they get another call on the dead phone from Bobby, who clues them in to the fact that he's probably in the sewer just a few doors down the street. Cas throws the phone away, and leads them into the street to a manhole cover with a lock on it. They proceed to break the lock and descend, They follow strange striations on the wall around a corner to a corpse covered in some sort of creeping fungus or the like. The striations on the walls seem to be drawing blood from the corpse which seems like it might actually still be a live person. As they get close, the corpse surges forth and tries to tackle Mai. Cas shoots it, and Mai is covered with gore. Panix is out of it, and Leo carries her to safety.

After they calm down Mai goes back to get a box that was on a pedestal behind the corpse thing. When she touches it, she sees vision of a scene from the 1920s of the road above, and 3 boys in a car. 2 of the boys kill the other. After this, everyone exits the sewer. Cas, freaked out, runs back to his shop, and locks himself inside. They siphon gas from a car, intending to use it to burn the tunnel out. As they do this, they note a very slim woman in a DPW coverall making a cell call sureptitiously. They hide, and the woman goes down into the sewer. Mai can feel something off about her. Leo pegs her for a murderous sociopathic sort. They descend back into the sewer, and the woman pulls a gun on them. Mai drops the gas and shoots it, spraying it all over before it catches on fire and lights up the whole sewer, and they scramble to the surface and into Leo's car, speeding away into the night.

Leo starts driving south without thinking about it much, heading into uncontrolled territory of the south side where it's good and dark on the streets. A cycle gang ends up pouring out and surrounding the car, so Leo stops. Things look bad until the leader of the gang turns out to be Pull, a guy that Leo has dealt with before. He demands they give up their guns to him, and Leo's badge, and then flirts with Mai. But he eventually lets them ride off.

Leo goes back to the base, dropping Mai off at home. He has a talk with Snapshot about maybe working his way into becoming a second in command, capable of taking over leadership if she herself should at some point not be available for that role. He says he'll consider it.

In her office the next day, Mai gets drunk and angry and destroys her computer. Linked to her now, somehow, Cas hears much of her rambling in his head as he sleeps, and they have a sort of conversation.

Leo goes back to the office to catch up on some work. The departmental psychologist Laureen Johnston comes to see him, checking up on him, clearly able to see that he's somewhat stressed. She promises to check back in on him soon.

The next day Mai and Leo come back to the base. Mai shows why she was disturbed doing research on her computer, telling Leo that Bobby Franks was slain in the famous case of Leopold and Loeb. Veronica comes in and asks if they have decided to go with her method for trying to chase Spense. They decide to try other methods first, normal investigative footwork.

Chasing Phantoms of Air

After talking about it for a while, they decide that they ought to follow up on Mai's missing person's case, before that goes too cold. They drive to the CCEV, and demand to see one of the corporate officers, but are set in a waiting room to cool. They eventually say enough to convince the chief of security named Corsecci to come talk to them. Mai distracts him long enough for Leo to do a little digging in their computer files. Leo finds that Maria worked for a Dr. Seabach, and that Rosa was assigned to cleaning the area of the medical wing that Dr. Seaback oversees... and something about Seabach being in charge of something called Operation Teddy Bear, along with an assistant, head nurse Linda Patrick. They leave, feeling that the situation has gotten very dangerous.

They consider all of the facts of the case that they've been able to track down, while having a hotdog on the last nice day of summer. They decide to talk a bit more to Barbara Levi. She eventually does mention that Rosa and her guy ate at a Thai restaurant. There they determine from a credit receipt that the boyfriend's name was Victor Danielski who worked in IT at the CCEV. The find Danielski at his apartment, but he seems reticent to talk out loud, finally passing them a note that says he'll meet with them. They have a cloak & Dagger meeting at Denny's, where he's so paranoid he insists that they drive further to some place even more secluded before he'll talk. Once there, he spills that he was threatened not to look into Rosa's disappearance, and that he thinks he knows what she was up to on the day she disappeared. He had gotten her access to the files of Rosevelt and Judy Flyte, retirees, and adoptive parents of one of the children of the creche. Victor also says that Seabach is clearly bad.

They go to see the Flytes, and after questioning them for a bit, Roosevelt levels a gun at Leo and Judy's hand transforms into a blade somehow that she holds at Mai's throat. The tables turned, the couple start asking Leo and Mai questions about their investigation. Mai mentally assaults Roosevelt with her memories of fearsome things she's seen, and he takes off running, clearly much faster than any septegenarian could manage. Leo draws on Judy who surrenders. Judy tells them there's no child, and starts singing the praises of Dr. Seabach, and how he's creating great projects. She can't keep up with the repartee (clearly being somewhat deranged) so she lunges at Leo. Mai shoots Judy, revealing black armor coating under the skin. They shoot her several more times, including once in the head, which stuns her. After brawling on a bit more, Mai finally puts a bullet through her eye-socket, which puts her out, perhaps dead.

When looking for a bit of rope with which to tie Judy up, Mai finds blood and gore in the bathtub. She takes a sample of it, and then scrawls a message in the blood in the front room for Roosevelt (and Dr. Seabach).

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