

A Night in Electric Squidland

by Sarah Monette

Some days, Mick Sharpton was almost normal. Those were the good days, the days when he did his job and went dancing after work, days when he enjoyed eating and slept well and sang in the shower. Days when flirting with a good-looking man was fun, even if it didn't lead to sex, and he didn't lose his temper with anyone unless they deserved it. Those were the days when he liked himself and liked his life, and some months there were more of them than others.

The bad days were when the world wouldn't stay out of his head, when everyone he looked at wore a swirling crown of color, and everything he touched carried the charge of someone else's life. Those days were all about maintaining his increasingly precarious control, snarling and snapping to keep anyone from getting too close. Trying not to drown. Sometimes he succeeded; sometimes he didn't.

Today was a good day. He could almost pretend he wasn't clairvoyant. His head was clear, and he felt light, balanced. He had not remembered his dreams when he woke up, and that was always a positive sign.

Mick and his partner were wading through a backlog of paperwork that afternoon. The sheer monumental bureaucracy was the downside of working for a government agency like the Bureau of Paranormal Investigations; left to his own devices, Mick would have let it slide, as he had always done with schoolwork, but Jamie had a stern, Puritan attitude toward unfinished reports, and it was useless to argue with him.

It was always useless to argue with Jamie Keller.

But the perpetually renewed struggle to find the right words--where 'right' was a peculiar combination of 'accurate' and 'decorous' as applied to descriptions of interrupted Black Masses and the remains left on the subway lines by ghoul packs--was both tedious and frustrating, and Mick was positively grateful when the phone rang, summoning them to Jespersion's office. Jespersion would have something for them to *do*.

"It'll just be more paperwork later," Jamie warned.

"Oh, bite me, Keller."

"Not my thing," Jamie said placidly.

When they came into his office, Jespersion was leaning over a ley line map, spread out on the big table and weighted down with a fist-sized chunk of the Tunguska meteorite, two volumes of the *Directory of American Magic-Users*, and a lumpish pottery bowl with a deep green glaze, made for him by his daughter Ada and used for keeping paperclips and sticks of red chalk in. Ada lived with her mother in Seattle; Jespersion saw her for one week each year, at the Winter Solstice, and nothing was more sacred in the office than Jespersion's annual week of vacation, even if most of his employees politely pretended they had no idea why.

Jespersion looked up and said, "*There* you are," as if they should have known to be somewhere else, and waved at them impatiently to sit down.

They sat; Jespersion stalked over to stand between them and glowered at them both impartially. "What do you know about Electric Squidland?"

"It's a nightclub," Mick offered. "Goth scene. Lots of slumming yuppies."

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