

Sea Raven
by Zachary Ross

To the new Convention Chairs: welcome aboard! I hope you have better luck than the last ones, poor bastards. You know, it's dawning on me more and more, the longer I peruse your letter, that my response will be both too long and not detailed enough if I try to answer all four of your questions. Given, however, that I am the only remaining member of Staff, this is the best you're going to get. I'll tell you everything I saw and heard myself, as well as everything I heard secondhand (I make no claims to the veracity of the latter). Read it all, in any case: there's a treat for you at the end.

In order to answer your first question, I'm going to briefly recount everything I personally saw on the night of December 31st, 2028. We had been getting alerts all evening, I think since 9 o'clock: Severe Thunderstorm Warnings, Flash Flood Warnings, River Flood Warnings. It was the first time I had ever seen a River Flood Warning, come to think of it – we really don't get them where I'm from. Regardless, the old Chairs were telling us to ignore them. I could speculate as to why; but since it would make them sound petty, and they aren't here to defend themselves, I won't do that. Certainly Mami wasn't petty, even if she wasn't very bright: that girl would have bled for anyone at this convention.

But I'm getting off the topic. I was at Pulque Hare's room party that night, in the big penthouse suite on the top floor. The convention was over, technically; a lot of folks had left already, but there were still too many damn furies around. I didn't care about that, however. I didn't care about the weather, either. My job was done, I was exhausted, and by the time the alerts started shaking the screws out of my phone I was laser-focused on making out with some twink stranger in one of those high-tech, super-realistic fur-over-silicone jaguar masks. We were upstairs on one of the beds, on top of those sweaty-as-hell hotel bedsheets, but I was already too sweaty to care. I'd shuffled in drunk from Closing Ceremonies – so late that it almost cut into the Dead Dog Dance – and Pulque Hare always breaks out the best bottles after the con's over, so when I finally checked my phone to find that the old Chairs were telling us not to worry about the rain, I took that as a sign to turn the damn thing off and throw myself into the dissolution. Headless suiters as sweaty as I were chain smoking on the outer balcony: some cigarettes, some joints. The hotel would have thrown a fucking clot if they'd ever found out, so I can't imagine Pulque liked that very much, but he was too drunk himself to do much about it when I talked to him. They were playing some loud mix from that dance artist who changes her identity every two years – not my thing, but it all sounds pretty good when you're in a fishbowl.

All of that together is why I didn't learn about the flood until it hit the hotel. The smokers out on the balcony started screaming over the music. I ran down to check on them, figuring that I was Staff (which I still am, by the way), and what do I find but a lake where the front concourse used to be. The rain was pelting and ice cold, barely helped by the overhang, but we were leaning over the railing anyways, watching the rising black water sweep away the cars and shuttles. I've never seen anything quite like it.

That's when I started hearing screaming from inside. One of Pulque's roommates, soaked to the skin and shivering, had thrown open the door to the suite, and the sounds I heard from the other side sobered me up better than the rain. Pulque's roommate was screaming himself, so pusillanimous and incoherent that I got tired of waiting for him to make sense and ran out to look for myself.

The hotel has that big open space in the middle, as you all know, so that you can see every floor from the lobby and the lobby from every floor. From the penthouse, that lobby is so far down that you can hardly make out the people; at peak hours during the convention it looks like a carpet of colorful beetles skittering around.

But the lobby was gone. Now I've never been afraid of water, not even now, but the sight of that hotel will haunt me until I croak. The water was already up to the third floor, rising so fast that I fully expected it to reach the penthouse. It was brackish and churning, full of filth and furniture and the

bodies of attendees both in suit and out. Small islands of bodies, man and beast, would form in the upsurge, only to be dragged under again by the eddies. Some of the screams were from them, struggling against the deluge for a minute or two before vanishing, then reappearing silent and still on the other side of the hotel. I've since heard that most of the dead were in line for the elevators when the water came in, but that the queue was so packed that they all went under together. Some of the elevators were busted, I know; I wonder sometimes if that made much of a difference.

The other half of the dead clogged the stairwells, drowned as they were fleeing to higher ground. I didn't know that at the time, however. I could see them running back and forth along the inner balconies, pressing in my direction, but what could I have done? I pulled out my phone; it was dead, waterlogged by the rain. Pulque's room was abuzz again, but not with screaming this time. Slurred voices were calling out to someone, only to be eaten by the storm. Panicking and helpless, I ran back into the penthouse to investigate, only to find everyone crowded around the outer balcony. To settle the rumor, yes, I was the one who started the fight shoving through the party to get to the balcony; but nobody died from it, which is more than I can say for the rest of the convention.

Regardless, what I saw from the balcony shuttles me neatly into your next question. That whole part of the city was underwater. It was too dark to see very far, but between the lightning flashes we could make out one thing unmistakably: the port and starboard lights of a big river pontoon. That old greymuzzle sailor was driving it, and there must have been a hundred furies packed on board with him, all shivering in the rain. Hand to God, that son of a bitch was wearing his head, a bighorn ram that would have had trouble fitting through my front door. I think he was looking at us as they were sailing away from the hotel, although I can't say for sure. To answer your question, no, I don't know where they went. As far as I know, nobody ever saw them again, so good luck squeezing interviews out of them.

To add to that, yes he was an attendee. I don't know where you get off trying to paint him as an interloper, but he had a badge. He'd shown up on Thursday, before Opening Ceremonies, and started screaming his throat raw that the river was going to jump and that we should all get to safety, whenever and wherever he could get away with it the longest: the lobby, the Dealer's Den, the fursuit parade – indoors, mind you, since it had already been pouring non-stop for three days. They sent me personally to tell him to stop the third time, on Saturday, but it was Security that eventually threw him out. After that, so I'm told, he moved down to the river and started selling boat tours to some of the attendees. He lived in the area, I guess, and the pontoon was his. How he knew that the river was going to jump, your guesses are as good as mine. A flash flood wasn't so far-fetched, given the rain, but that? The whole fucking river just standing up from its bed and running straight at the hotel? It really makes you wonder, or at least it does me.

And there is a lot to wonder about, given your last question. Be as subtle as suits about it if you want, I'm not playing your puerile, passive-aggressive game after I had to watch a thousand furies drown to death in a hotel lobby. Not one of you has ever been to this convention. None of you are even from this state. You're not getting a denial. Yes, that whole convention was haunted. I've been working furry conventions for years, and I'd never seen anything like it. Pulque's room party was the tamest of them, to hear tell. The cops were banging on doors about overdoses from dusk until dawn every night. Assaults, both violent and sexual. According to my buddy in A.V., the dances were so bad – fights, orgies, bleeding bites and scratches from both – that the old Chairs debated canceling the Dead Dog Dance. I wish they had now, of course, but on what pretense? An abundance of caution? Insane rumors? What could they have done? Like I always tell people, a bag policy and a handful of runners at a loud, dark rave isn't going to do very much if people are determined to misbehave. I once saw a fursuiter pull a second fursuit out of his own oversized tail: once you've seen that, all bets are off.

And now that you're all begging me to get to the good part, yes, there were reports of animals all weekend long. No, they were not service animals. They were at the dances, at the room parties, at the Dealer's Den. Some of them even presented panels. They had badges. They were among the

attendees – hell, they *were* attendees. I thought it was the stupidest rumor I'd ever heard, at first, and I heard it a round million times. But then I heard it again from that old greymuzzle sailor, in his shaggy head and his slick marina polo shirt. He told me exactly what to look for, and then I couldn't stop seeing them no matter how hard I tried. I was plastered throughout Closing Ceremonies because so many of them were on Staff. Even at Pulque's party, when I was trying my damndest to turn my brain off, something was still niggling at me. That twink jaguar's soft, velvet face was too supple, too warm to be fur and silicone, his eyes too lurid to be mere contacts, his tongue too rough.

Threaten me all you want, you're not getting a denial. If you intend to blackball me, just know that I know every single one of your names. Does that surprise you? My buddy Skeeter works for your firm, and when he told me who you were and what you were doing, I couldn't help but think of all the other Chairs of all the other conventions who would be grateful to learn about you. They will learn about you, if I hear even a whisper about wild animals roaming another convention. Rest assured, I will be making my own circuit, teaching the attendees how to pick them out. Stick to your waterlogged hotel if you like: you haven't acquired a furry convention, just a bunch of drowned animals.

- Nock the Sea Raven

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