



## CREDITS

Publisher: Simon Rogers

Written By: Robin D Laws

Layout and Art Direction: Jérôme Huguenin

Front Cover: Jérôme Huguenin

Artwork: Jérôme Huguenin and Mathieu Gasperin

Proof Editing: Adrian Bott

Playtesters: Troy Duffy, Lynn Hardy, Richard Hardy, Chris Huth, Paul Jackson, Alex Johnson, Rob Lim, Justin Mohareb, Jesse Scoble, Anthony Sweeting, Lee Hickman, Mike Grace, Simon Stroud, Aaron Cattle, Matthew Radings, Peter Tracy, Peter Macejka, Graham Walmesley, Dave, Steve Dempey, Wai Kien, Paolo Bongiovanni, Alex Fradera, Zane Goodin, Gordon Wilson, Chuk Goodwin, Robert Mill, Benjamin B

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Sample file

## THE FISH

Lomax lifted the white plastic top on his coffee cup to take a sip. That perforated tab you were supposed to peel up and stick to the other tab—he could never get that stupid thing to work. So here he was exposing his whole cup of bodega coffee, three creams, three packets of sweetener, to the cold air of early spring. Steam swirled from the hot liquid and wafted in the general direction of his partner, Cecilia Chu. Cece was already kneeling over the body.

This morning's customer was laid out on the gray concrete of Pier 86. A dark puddle surrounded the body, and his clothes were soaked through; he'd been in the water. No signs of decom, but given the near-freezing temperature of the river at this time of year, that didn't mean he hadn't been deceased for a good long while.

Chu nodded to him. "What? No coffee for me?"

"Hey, I didn't have time to wait in line for a double-double soy latte orange fantasia cream whatever," he replied.

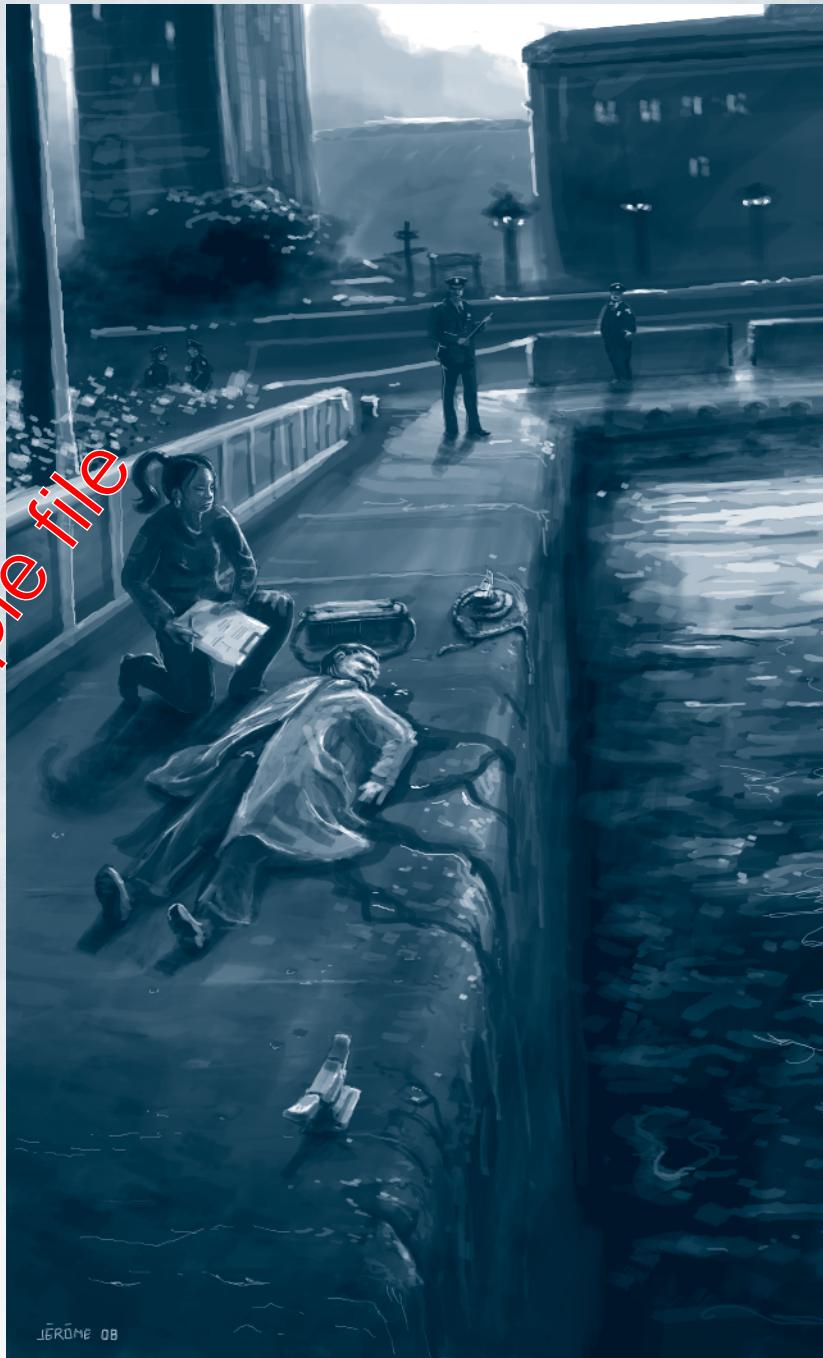
Lomax inspected the vic. Caucasian, late twenty or early thirties. Five feet eleven inches and slightly pudgy around the edges. Thinning dark hair, close-cropped goatee. Fully dressed, in a beige nylon shell jacket, dark jeans... forest green T-shirt (no logo), most likely from the GAP or some other purveyor of moderately expensive casual wear. White jogging sneakers, white tube socks. No watch, no rings—nor any tan lines or skin depressions indicating the recent presence of same.

Cece waited for the thumbs up from Davison, the photog from crime scene. Then Lomax helped her flip him. She found a wallet in his back pocket, revealing a billfold containing at least a hundred and twenty bucks.

It was part of Lomax's job to state the obvious. "Not a robbery, then."

Cecilia handed him the vic's driver's license. Name: Andy Stagg. Address: the outer boroughs.

Sample file



"Tell me this was accidental," Lomax said. Wet stiffs were a bitch. All the trace evidence washed off when they hit the drink.

"No can do." She pointed to a purple mark on the periphery of Stagg's bald spot.

"Looks modest for a death blow."

She nodded. "We'll have to slab him first, but I figure this for pre-mortem. He's got airway froth and sediment."

"A drownner, then."

A uniform hailed them. They'd found something washed up on the shore half a mile down: a vinyl sports bag. Lomax trotted over to grab it, and he and Cece pawed through its contents. He found a cell phone, a suit jacket, tie, dress shoes, and dark socks. She sorted through a soaked copy of that morning's free subway paper, an unopened bag of potato chips, and a clear plastic shell housing a serving of California rolls from Krober's Market. Underneath them was a colorful publication taped into a mylar bag, backed with a sheet of white cardboard. The bag had provided little protection against submersion; the comic book inside was thoroughly waterlogged.

Cece pulled off the tape and leafed as best she could through its soggy pages. She stopped on one image, kept reading for a bit, then flipped back to it. "Hey," she said, holding the comic page next to the stiff's face. It was a large panel showing a guy in a hero costume, with the mask pulled down to provide a good look at his face. The drawing in the comic book was a dead ringer for the guy laid out on the pier.

"He was a goob," Lomax intoned.

"And a pretty high-profile one, if he had his own comic book." She checked out the trade dress on the cover. "Big Time Comics. That's one of the major publishers."

Lomax rolled his eyes. He had no time for goobs. "Whatever you say, Captain Moonbeam."

Cece clucked in mock annoyance. "My kid brother collects them."

"So did this guy have himself a handle?"

She showed him the comic's title: *The Fish*.

"*The Fish?*" Lomax snorted. "Why not just call yourself Lame-Ass?"

"The good names are all trademarked." Cece walked back over to the corpse, pulling his soaked windbreaker back from his neck. She ran her latex-clad fingers along its sides, finding two flaps of skin, each about six centimeters long. Tugging them loose, she exposed the pink filaments inside. "But how he picked his stupid name doesn't interest me. What I want to know is: how do you drown a man with gills?"

Sample file