

Giving The Devil Her Due – by Rob Steele

I have to admit, I hadn't planned on going to the new Ice Palace until next week. I got hockey tickets and, frankly, I'm looking forward to the game. But I got called there earlier tonight – and not for a pleasure visit. Not that I'd have voluntarily come here for a figure skating event.

I'm not a big figure skating fan. I mean, I know a little bit about it. I watch some of it when the Olympics are on. Granted, that's because my wife makes me. I don't understand a lot of it. They've got something called a triple-sow-cow as a maneuver, which I could have sworn was what they put in my coffee this morning.

Hockey, I understand... usually. I still get a bit crossed up by the whole blue line rule that whenever I finally understand what's going on, they change the rule. But my job is something that I do understand all too well. I work homicide. My job today, is to find out who killed a figure skating judge – Bran Hamilton.

I meet Doctor Seong-Ho Young in the dressing room area where he is still going over the body at the scene. When I heard that a figure skating judge had been killed, in my head I'd pictured a rather cartoonish body with a figure skate stuck in the middle of his forehead. In my head, it's a little comical. In reality, it's rather gruesome. "I guess you've figured out cause of death."

"Oh, that's funny, Cooper," replied Doc Young. "But the trick with this one is not cause of death. Baring the full autopsy, I'm willing to bet that it was this figure skate embedded in his head that killed him. The problem is time of death. Because this building was built to house not just the main skating rink downstairs for events like figure skating and hockey, but the two practice rinks in the sub levels, the temperature in here is lower than normal. I'm trying to compensate but it may take a while to have an exact time of death.

"We do know that he was last seen alive last night around ten o'clock, after the competition had finished. Very controversial finish. The Russian skater, Borsk Chaykovsky was cheated. He performed brilliantly, but one judge, I'm going to assume this one, gave him a low score, and he lost the gold medal. I guess that means I have a suspect for you."

"I wouldn't have pegged you for a figure skating fan, doc."

"My wife bought tickets," he says with a sly smile. "And because most of the time it is very quiet and they play soft, classical music, I can get in a few naps. But keep that between us, okay? If she finds out..."

"No problem doc," I reply with a laugh. Borsk Chaykovsky sounds like a good person to start with. I check with facility security and find out where the skaters are staying, and, I should have known, the hotel next door has a *secret passage* for performers to get back and forth without having to deal with fans or media. That's not a bad idea. I can see it being a boon to security if they don't have to deal with overzealous autograph seekers and/or stalkers.

After flashing my credentials to what felt like half the hotel staff, I finally get a room number for Mr. Chaykovsky. But when I reach his room and knock on the door, there is no answer. I hear a television playing inside but no voices. I'm hoping we don't have a double homicide on our hands. I make a call

to Officer Tim Fey, who I left downstairs to watch the lobby, and have him bring up the manager on duty with a key.

Fey and the manager, Doris Leacham, arrive in less than five minutes. I explain the situation and ask Ms. Leacham to open the door and get out of the way – a killer may actually be inside. She complies and unlocks the door with a card key and quickly backs down the hallway. Weapons drawn, Officer Fey and I enter the room. At first glance, it looks like almost any other hotel room I've ever been in, only bigger. The television is on and showing a rerun of *Family Feud* – not the kind of thing I would have expected from a Russian figure skater. The room is tidy, both queen-size beds made. Fey checks the bathroom and signals clear. As we enter the main section of the room, we notice two figures sitting on the couch, not facing the television. Each has a suitcase at his feet.

“You are here,” the older man exclaims. “Excellent! Come Borsk! It is time to go!” I look at Officer Fey, who shrugs and we both holster our weapons.

“Hang on a minute,” I say, holding up my hands. “Who exactly are you? And who do you think we are?”

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