

# Incident on a bus



Mel stared across the silver bar at the black panther. It was shiny and sleek and its eyes seemed to glint as it gently rolled its lithe muscles. He could almost see claws.

The bus pitched into a bus stop. The doors pulled open, as a jostle of people pressed towards the exit, eager to get off but reluctant to face the damp wintery night air.

Mel turned to the wet, exhausted street, choked with sodden traffic. It was early evening and the neon lights from the shops were making shimmering splashes of lurid colour across the shiny, black surface of the road. Black like the coat of the panther. Shimmering like the panther's eyes.

The bus pulled back into the stream of traffic.

Mel turned back to the panther. With each movement of the man's shoulder it seemed to come to life, gently flexing. Its torso seemed to swell and subside and it appeared to be climbing up his shoulder muscle as he turned the pages in the magazine he was reading.

The bus came to a sudden halt. Some fool had dashed through the slow moving traffic. There was a red burst of taillights. Standing passengers lurched forward, grabbing for rails and the backs of seats. Horns blasted as the pedestrian hit the other side of the wide street—pretending to be oblivious to the trauma he had just created. Then he was lost in the damp, clammy crowd.

The tattooed man looked around, trying to determine the cause of the sudden chaos.

The bus grunted forward.

Pressing the stop button, the man stood up. The panther was lost under the white, ragged threads of his sleeveless denim jacket. Mel watched him move towards the back exit. The bus stopped and the man stepped off, ignoring the grey drizzle. Mel's eyes trailed him as he strode to the cover of the shop awnings. Momentarily he lost him behind a swirl of umbrellas that had just crossed at the intersection. Then Mel saw him again entering one of the shop fronts. The name on the window was "Tombstone Tattoos".

*Alan Horsfield*