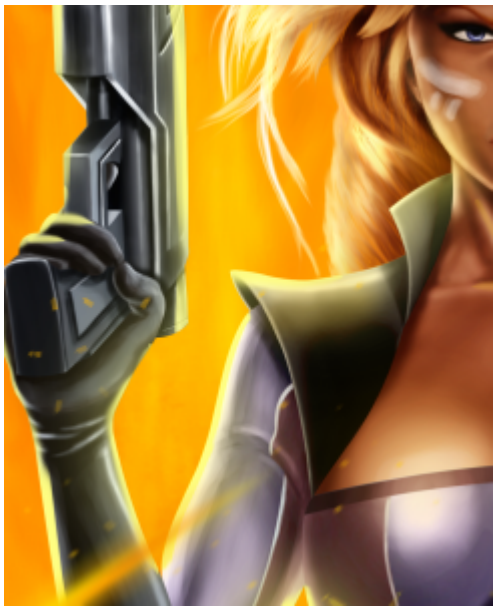
Friday Snippet: Warpaint … Cady's Back

written by Holly
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By Holly Lisle



This is the first draft intro to WARPAINT, the second Cadence Drake novel. (As with all snippets, I'm posting these as I'm writing the novel, so while this is what I have at the moment, if I come up with something in revision I like better, no snippet is guaranteed to see the light of publication.)

But right now, I like this.

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> *Crazed, starved, they clung all over my shuttle's hull, bashing at it with anything they'd been able to grab. Those crammed up against the moleibond forward port were trying to bite me, unable to understand why they could see me, but couldn't reach me. The screeching and clicking of their teeth and claws on the hull made my skin crawl.*
>
> *Insane, all of them. Staring, mindless monsters—Legends, they*

called themselves when they were functioning normally, or vampires, though in truth they were neither. They were humans who'd changed themselves into horrors.

They'd bled dry the little moon I was trapped on, and without fresh human blood to drink, hadn't been able to hang onto their sanity long enough to escape. Starvation had stripped them of their pretense of humanity, revealing their pure essence. But it didn't kill them. It couldn't kill them. Ever.

I would have destroyed them, had there been fewer of them, had there been more of me, had I had a way to shoot them with the one weapon that would have destroyed them—my blood. Only by my best guess, there were a couple thousand of them on and around my shuttle, swarming over it and me like ants on sugar. Like rats on a corpse. Like…name your own nightmare.

They blocked my sky.

My shuttle hull was moleibond. Best stuff in the universe, moleibond: light, impervious to radiation, indestructible. You can shoot massive shock waves through a moleibond hull and turn the entire contents into pudding, and a cleanup crew can come along with a big hose and a pressure sprayer and have the ship ready for resale in the time it takes to wash out the goo.

Moleibond is impenetrable unless you have moleibond cutters—but even a little resort moon will have moleibond cutters on it.

So my theoretical outside survival time was limited to the arrival on the moon of a dinner wagon—a transport full of live tourists. The second one of the Legends got fresh blood, his mind would start working, he'd realize that my survival was their destruction, because I had seen what they were, and he'd go get the damned moleibond cutter and come after me. All he had to do was cut a hole in my hull. One hole.

My real survival time was a couple of days, because I'd failed to fully stock the emergency rations. Carelessness on my part, or exhaustion, maybe. I had three days worth of water, and almost no food. It would have been enough had I been hoping for quick rescue from my home ship.

Only problem there was that my home ship belonged to me, I flew alone, and at the moment, I was on the damn shuttle.

And I couldn't call out via com-link for help from anyone else, because once I landed, I discovered that all live com to and from Tropica Petite had been cut. Tropica Petite was running a stream of programmed fake chatter through its com, making the resort seem like someplace real people would still want to go, and someone had set its autodrone handling shuttle landings.

No rescue would be coming.

Meanwhile, I was—judging from the appearance of my attackers—the last source of living blood on the verdant, terraformed moon, and at least two-thousand mindless monsters were determined to have me for lunch.

In my favor, I had myself, my shuttle, my wits and my rage.

I was, in other words, in deep shit.

And this had started with a job I took just because I had to keep my ship in the air, had to pay my docking fees and refueling, had to pursue the monsters I hunted. This was not supposed to have anything to do with the damned Legends. This was supposed to have been a milk run, a simple job of locating two women who'd extended their vacation without notice and getting them back home to their worried, waiting husband.

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