

EX-KOP

TOR BOOKS BY WARREN HAMMOND

KOP
EX-KOP

EX-KOP

WARREN HAMMOND



A TOM DOHERTY ASSOCIATES BOOK
NEW YORK

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

EX-KOP

Copyright © 2008 by Warren Hammond

All rights reserved.

Edited by James Frenkel

A Tor Book
Published by Tom Doherty Associates, LLC
175 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10010

www.tor-forge.com

Tor® is a registered trademark of Tom Doherty Associates, LLC.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hammond, Warren.
Ex-kop / Warren Hammond.—1st ed.
p. cm.
“A Tom Doherty Associates Book.”
ISBN-13: 978-0-7653-1274-7
ISBN-10: 0-7653-1274-3
I. Title
PS3608.A69585 E9 2008
813'.6—dc22

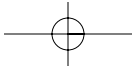
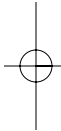
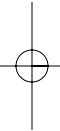
2008031023

First Edition: October 2008

Printed in the United States of America

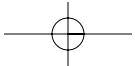
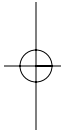
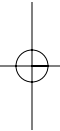
0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For Kathy

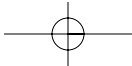
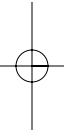


acknowledgments

My sincerest thanks to Richard Curtis, Jim Frenkel, and Shawn Stugart.



EX-KOP



one

NOVEMBER 29, 2788

I RELISHED the brandy as it burned down my throat. The knot in my stomach was acting especially hateful. I sucked down a few more gulps to dull the cramping in my gut. I didn't feel sufficiently soothed, yet I capped and pocketed the flask.

My knees were hurting so I readjusted, trying to find a comfortable position in the cramped closet. I bumped the door, knocking it slightly out of position. I pulled it back in, just short of closed, perfectly slivered for my camera.

I reached for my flask, but stopped when I heard footsteps in the hall. My heart began to race despite the alcohol's tranquilizing effect. I resisted the urge to hold my breath; I just kept breathing—nice and natural. I heard a key in the door. I pushed my eye up to the crack and saw the two of them enter. Mildew tickled my nose, and I had to hold my breath to keep from sneezing. Clothes fell to the floor—first a halter top, then a mini, and finally panties. She took a seat on the bed, wearing nothing but a strained smile. She moved her hands up her stomach, across her bare breasts, and up into her hair. She looked nervous; her movements came off stilted. What was supposed to look erotic wound up looking clumsy and silly. Her nervousness started to infect me. I was afraid that I'd misjudged her, that she wasn't ready for this. My pits prickled with sweat.

He came into view and stood in front of her. "Lay back," he said. "I want to look at you."

The hooker lay back, putting her hands behind her head.

“You like what you see?” She tried to sound playful, but the words came out forced and anxious.

He studied her like a monitor sizing up its prey. He didn’t look *at* her; he looked *through* her, just a piece of meat. “Spread,” he said with a malicious vibe.

She parted her legs for him, but kept her knees nervously angled inward, like she was about to submit to a cold-fingered gyno.

I focused on my task. I used my left hand to pull the black plastic away from the lens and immediately covered the lens back up. A short exposure was all I needed. I used my shaking right hand to turn the metal rod three times then pulled the plastic away again.

He took off his clothes, slowly, methodically, leering at her all the while. As he stripped, he flexed his sculpted offworld body. Pecs and abs rippled under baby-smooth skin. He told her to watch as he pulled out his megamember. She oohed and aahed, her voice cracking uneasily on the *ah*. I could tell she didn’t like the way he was looking at her. She wasn’t ready for this, dammit. He, on the other hand, was getting off on her discomfort, the two of them stiffening in very different ways.

I kept up my silent picture-snapping routine—my left hand acting as a shutter, and my shaky right advancing the film three twirls at a time. Uncover-cover-twirl-twirl-twirl. These pics were going to score some serious cash. A high-powered offworld lawyer doing a small-time hooker. I hoped he was married. It would only increase the value.

He crawled on top of her, his offworld-white skin looking pale as he thrustured within the clutches of her Lagartan-brown limbs. I uncover-cover-twirl-twirl-twirl to the rhythm of their sex.

I had spent half a day taking test shots until I got things just right—the lighting, the camera angle, the shutter speed, not at

all easy with this improvised camera. The lens was salvaged from a real camera, but I had everything else special-built to my specs—no motors, no flash, no zoom, no power of any kind. Back when I was a cop, my partner and I once surveilled an offworlder with a flycam. We thought the thing was undetectable. We had it flying in the shadows, but the bitch had some shit wired into her brain that detected the thing at fifteen meters. It was only the size of a coin for chrissakes. I wound up in the hospital with a fried hand that healed up nicely except for the fact that two decades later it started shaking like a fucking leaf—some kind of nerve damage.

We should've known better. Trying to match an offworlder's tech was a fool's game. Us Lagartans were so outclassed it was a joke. The only way to beat an offworlder was to go low tech. The arrogant SOBs were so caught up in their souped-up gizmos that they couldn't imagine how they could be hurt by anything that didn't have a power source. I kept uncover-cover-twirl-twirl-twirling.

He was pumping quickly now, and she was rocking her hips, earning her fee. His hands slid up her sides, across her chest, and settled threateningly around her throat. She tensed, her hips stopping their grinding. He began to caress her throat, slow and gentle. She responded with tentative hip undulations. I thought he was going to choke her out, but he didn't. He just kept the threat going as he pistoned harder and faster.

What the hell? His tech-enhanced skin shifted from offworld white to red—bright red. I watched as his feet shrunk down to hooves. Demonic cackles rang around the room as horns sprouted from his head. He completed the transition in seconds, topping it off with a pair of goat legs and a goatee. She was in a full panic now. *Shit! Calm down!* He was just getting his kicks, making her think he was the devil.

She sucked in panicky breaths, her chest heaving under his

thrusts. She turned her head, her eyes reaching for me. *Oh shit!* I wrapped my hands around the camera, ready to bolt. *Don't say it!* She tried to call my name but thankfully couldn't get out more than a fear-strangled grunt. He tickled her throat with black fingernails that were more claw than nail. He wrapped his hands around her throat. She was jerking her body, trying to get out from under him. He wasn't choking her; her squealing proved it. He just got off on the thought of it.

Get a fucking grip! She paid no heed to my unvoiced order, her mind probably freaked on the thought of giving birth to some demonic spawn. She scratched his shoulders and his back, but the wounds self-healed instantly. Her face was so panic-stricken red that it practically matched his hellfire skin. *Relax, relax, relax,* I told her in my head as I kept uncover-cover-twirl-twirl-twirling. *He's not really the devil. He's just another perverted offworlder. Just hang in there a little longer.*

He grunted through a final plunge and collapsed onto her. She coughed and wheezed through the tail end of her hyper-ventilation. She tried to wriggle out from under him.

Then I heard her scream, "Juno! Juno! Get him off me!"

SHIT! He was up in an instant, scanning the room, his face full of satanic fury. She rabbited for the door. I heard the door fly open. *Fucking hell! She calls out my name and then she ditches me.* My hands were on the camera, my shaky right out-of-control gyrating. He went for the bathroom first—lucky, very lucky. I burst out of the closet and sprinted for the hall; it was only a couple meters. . . . Lucifer spun on me; his hand went up, taking aim. Needles came firing out of his fingertips. I heard the snicks as they stuck into the wall behind me. I busted out the door, the tripod hitting the doorjamb and collapsing onto my fingers. I ignored the pain and surged for the elevator across the hall. The damn hooker was already onboard, and she had the doors closing. I paid good money to have that ele-

vator waiting for *me*. I slammed my body between the closing doors, momentarily sticking, and then falling through, only my foot still outside. I yanked my foot painfully through doors that slapped shut an instant later. I looked back, seeing needles bounce off the glass doors as the elevator began to descend.

Before I got a chance to breathe, she was all over me, slapping and scratching, nails and hair. Staying on the floor, I used the makeshift camera and tripod to fend off the worst of her adrenaline-fueled attack. The thrill of the escape made a smile break across my face. I couldn't help it. Mistaking amusement for mockery, the whore intensified her attack. I covered my face as best I could and succumbed to the beating, my smile continuing to widen.

The elevator finally opened onto the lobby. I peeked through the hooker's blows and saw a tour group gawking at the naked woman beating on the old guy. A couple smacks later, she, too, noticed the onlookers and plastered her naked body against the elevator wall. Security was approaching—must've spotted us on the elevator's cams.

I stood up, grinning from ear to ear on a close-call high. My smile wilted when I spotted a set of needles embedded like darts in the sole of my shoe. *No, no, no!* Panic struck like lightning. My lungs seized. My stomach went to lead. I frantically checked my legs and ankles to see if any of the filament-sized needles had gotten through. I yanked off my shoes and looked inside them to see if any of the needles had penetrated through the leather—nope. I whirled around, using the mirrored elevator walls to search for the telltale sparkle of a needle. *Looks clear . . . calm down.* I checked again . . . And again . . . And one more time. Finally satisfied, I forced oxygen into my starving lungs and wiped my sleeve across my brow. Not wanting to touch the needles, I scraped my shoe over the gap between the elevator and the floor until they safely fell free. If one of those things

had gotten through, it would've infected me with fast-acting plague that would've brought me a medieval death inside thirty minutes.

Security had the hooker wrapped in a blanket now, and they were hurrying her out of the lobby. I made for the back exit. Security didn't try to stop me. I paid them well.

two

My pounding heart began to stabilize as I walked out into the driving rain. The nighttime streets were empty except for geckos that scurried through puddles to avoid my footsteps. I tucked the camera under my arm and rubbed my hands together, letting the rain wash the seeping blood off my cat-scratched skin. I pulled out my flask and took a couple long swigs to deaden my fritzing nerves. I couldn't believe that whore almost got me plagued. That'd be the last time I'd use her. No loss. On this planet, hookers were as plentiful as lizards.

I checked the time. It was early. The sun couldn't have been down for long. I still had two hours before I had to meet Maggie. Enough time to get home and drop off the camera? Fuck it; I didn't want to go to that place. I couldn't stand it there since Niki had been gone. I'd just show up early to our meeting.

Couldn't take a cab. Driving was impossible with all the washed-out streets and flooded intersections. Every fall, when the rains started, I'd move my car to high ground and pay some stiff a weekly rate to guard it so it wouldn't get stripped or stolen. If you wanted to get anywhere this time of year, it had to be by boat. I headed for the river, weaving around puddles so big that they just about qualified as ponds. Water seeped through the seams in my shoes. It had been fifty-two days of rain, and there was no end in sight. The Lagartan rainy season had been known to stretch to over a hundred waterlogged days. Noah had nothing on us.

It was fall despite the winterish date. On Lagarto, there's no correlation between the seasons and the months. We crawl around the sun every 680 days, making our year almost twice as long as Earth's, yet we still use a slightly modified version of the Earth calendar so our seasons are always out of sync with the date. The best thing to do is just ignore the date. Trying to figure that shit out would give you a headache.

I crossed the street, driving my feet through weeds that grabbed at my ankles. Uprooted plants caught on my feet the way river muck would catch on a branch, and I had to stop every hundred meters to kick off the clumps. This city was always a half step from turning back to jungle, and even closer during the rains when they couldn't keep the streets clean of creeping growth. Koba was the capital of this planet, a planet almost entirely covered by ocean and desert. It was only here, in the jungles near the northern pole, that human life was easily sustained. Picture a blue and brown face with green hair, and you've got Lagarto, the lizard planet.

I reached the docks and dropped into the first manned skiff I found. The pilot handed me a sopping towel that I used to wipe my face. I tossed it on the floor, next to a practically overflowing bucket positioned under a leak. I had to yell my destination to be heard over the roar of the rain hammering the rust-eaten roof.

The pilot eased the boat out into the swollen Koba River. Stilted shanties lined the riverbank, water sheeting off rickety roofs. We skimmed through black water, putt-putting upriver to the Phra Kaew market, only a few blocks from the Koba Office of Police, my former place of employment, where I'd spent three long decades as a cop. I'd spent some of that time investigating crime, but the majority of my thirty was spent serving as the chief's right hand. I was his enforcer, his ham-

mer, the most feared SOB the force ever saw. That was before the chief got killed, before I got bounced out of the job. . . . Before I got old.

The boat dropped me on the Phra Kaew docks. I stuck to the covered walkways as I ambled through the crowded warren of fruit stands, spice shops, and bakeries. I paid little attention to the locals who were out for an after-dinner stroll. I needed to eat something, but I wasn't hungry. Since Niki's accident, I'd almost completely lost my appetite. The knots in my stomach always made me feel full, like I'd get sick if I tried to eat anything. I thought I could probably get something sweet down, so I stopped at a street cart that had rounds of fried dough stacked up like a miser's gold coins. The kid in front of me got hers sprinkled with sugar; I got mine drizzled with honey, just the way Niki always liked. I ate as I walked, not worrying about getting my fingers sticky. Soon enough, I exited the market and received a fresh soaking that I took advantage of by rubbing my fingers together until the rain washed them clean. I walked the last couple blocks to The Beat, a cop bar behind KOP station.

A table of fresh towels sat next to the door. I dried off as best I could and dumped the towel into a sodden hamper under the table. I took in the smoke-filled surroundings: a group of vice dicks took up three tables by the window; beat cops crowded the back room, their blue unis spilling into the main; police brass stood in a closed circle by the can. I checked out the bar, thinking a stool at the end would be perfect—no luck. Badge bunnies ran the length of the bar, sitting there in their hiked-up skirts, sipping brandy with lipstick friendly straws.

People started to notice me. I could see them exchanging elbows, a few of them nodding my way. This used to be my turf. My entrance used to shake the place up. I'd walk in, and my

enemies would make a rush for the back door, fleeing like roaches when the lights come on. No shakeup tonight. Tonight, they did their best to ignore me.

I found an open table and took a seat on a wobbly chair. Water dripped off my pant legs, pooling at my feet. The tabletop was scarred and creviced, its surface blanketed by mold. A brandy showed up. At least the waiter remembered me. I slammed down half the contents and tuned the place out. . . .

“Juno, how ya doin’?”

I brought my eyes back into focus. My visitor was hommy dick Mark Josephs—thirty years of service, and he was still the force’s biggest asshole.

“Fine,” I said.

He sat across from me. “What ya doin’ here? I ain’t seen you in forever.”

“I came to meet Maggie.”

“You shittin’ me? What you want with that bitch?”

I took an annoyed sip of my drink instead of answering.

He sensed my irritation and reworded. “Seriously, Juno, why are you meeting her? Are you pokin’ her or what?”

Again, I sipped my drink, silent.

“C’mon, Juno. Why you bein’ so sensitive?”

“Don’t call her a bitch,” I hissed.

Josephs squinted at me, trying to read my expression. I hoped it said, *Pissed off*.

Josephs slapped the table, a huge grin on his face. “You are doin’ her, aren’t you? Don’t try to deny it, Juno. I can see it on your face.”

“I’m not doin’ her, Josephs.”

“Bullshit. Ha! Who’d a thought an old dog like you could land a hot young ass like hers. Shit, every guy in homicide’s been achin’ to stick their ice picks into the ice princess, and here you

are actin' all cool." He held up his glass for a toast. "Score one for the old men."

I finished off my glass, making a point not to clink glasses. "You got it wrong, Josephs. I'm married."

"Don't try to pull that I'm-a-good-husband shit. I know Niki's been in the hospital, so you ain't gettin' none at home. You gotta get yours somewhere. Am I right?"

I could feel the blood in my cheeks. My shaking hand was clutching into a shaking fist. "Shut the fuck up, Josephs. You don't know what you're talking about."

"The hell I don't. You're a man, and a man's got to get his. So what if you bone a hot thing on the side. I don't know what you're gettin' so worked up about. There's no shame in it."

It was a mistake to come here. I was tempted to walk out.

Instead, I nodded to the waiter for another.

Josephs gestured at the door. "There's Ian," he said.

I followed Josephs' gaze to a couple who had just entered. Ian Davies, Maggie's newest partner, was toweling off. It'd probably been a year since I'd seen him. He was second-generation cop. I never liked his father. He was one of those big talkers, always talking like he was going to kick so-and-so's ass but never doing it. He retired a few years ago, but not before he found a spot for his kid. Not that it did the old man much good with his son. Word was Ian didn't even talk to his pop anymore.

Ian's face looked fuller than it used to. I'd always thought he was too scrawny to be a cop, but now it looked like he'd firmed himself up. His neck finally looked thick enough to hold up his baby face. His wet shirt was suctioned over bulky muscles that stretched around what used to be a skeletal frame. He must've started shooting 'roids. No doubt about it.

With Ian was a woman I'd never seen before. There was no way I would've forgotten her if I had. She was wearing a black open-backed dress. Its wet fabric clung to her hips and her

braless breasts. Her black hair hung straight down her bare back. I watched her pull her hair over her shoulder and wring it out with a towel, tossing it back over her shoulder when she was done.

“Who’s that with Ian?” I asked.

“That’s Liz. She and Ian go together.”

She took Ian’s elbow, and they walked past our table, taking up posts near the bar. Her hair stuck to her back, water beading down into her waistline. Josephs noticed me watching her. “You want me to introduce you?”

“No,” I said.

“You afraid Maggie’ll walk in and see you talkin’ to her?”

Holy shit, he was pissing me off. Maggie was like a daughter. “How many times do I have to fucking tell you? There’s nothing between me and Maggie.”

“You serious?”

“Yes, you dumb shit. What have I been saying?”

“Then why are you meeting her?”

“I don’t know. She says she has a job for me.”

“What’s the job?”

“Didn’t I just say I don’t know?”

“Yeah, I guess you did. Shit, it’s good to see you, Juno. There aren’t many guys that’ve been around as long as you and me. The force has changed since you and Paul been gone. Now they got all these political types that don’t know shit runnin’ things.”

I gave a disinterested “Uh-huh.” Everybody knew the Koba Office of Police had gone to hell. Cops were calling their own shots these days. They were all working solo, taking kickbacks from drug dealers, bookmakers, slavers, gene traders—you name it. They were all out for themselves. It wasn’t the bribes I objected to. Cops took bribes back when Chief Chang and I ran the force, too. Hell, we encouraged it. The difference was

that when we were in charge, the bribes were for the force as a whole, not for the individual. In our day, cops were just the collection agents. The money was pooled and divvied up fair. KOP was unified, and as such, it was a political force in this city. The pimps, the dealers, the mayor, the crime lords, they all had to negotiate with us. Chief Chang was a power broker of the highest order.

And I was his enforcer. I tore a path of shattered bones through KOP's rank and file. Through fear, I brought stability. With violence, I brought order. Chief Paul Chang's control over KOP was absolute.

Our reign came to an end when KOP's then chief of detectives, Diego Banks, made a power grab. That was almost a year ago, or a year and a half going by the Earth calendar. He plotted the murder of Chief Chang and forced me into retirement. KOP was his and his alone. But the new chief had a problem keeping the dirty money flowing into cop pockets the way Paul Chang did. Paul was in tight with organized crime. Paul took a percentage of their profits in exchange for freedom from prosecution. Banks didn't have the same standing with the cartels that Chief Chang did. He couldn't negotiate anything close to the same rates. When cops realized the money wasn't flowing down from the top like it used to, they started keeping their bribes for themselves.

It didn't take long for KOP's chain of command to fracture. Entire squads went rogue. Chief Banks couldn't maintain order. Corruption and dysfunction ruled the day. And when the new mayor rode the resulting wave of public dissatisfaction into office, he sent Chief Banks packing and replaced him with Chief Karella, a political type who looked good for the cameras, but knew next to nothing about running a police force. The police empire Paul and I built was crumbling away. KOP was turning into jungle, just like the rest of this city.

As thoughts of our fallen empire dissipated, I found myself studying Ian's woman, Liz. I watched her entertain the group of men gathered around her, the whole lot of them competing for her attention.

"Maggie should be along any minute," said Josephs. "She always stays a little later than Ian, like she's tryin' to prove she's a better cop than he is."

"She is better," I stated.

Josephs made an exaggerated smirk as he mock jerked off. "Fuck that. There's no way she's a better cop than Ian."

"Who has the higher case-solved percentage?"

Josephs threw his hands in the air. "Who gives a shit about numbers? Everybody knows the brass throws her the easy cases."

"You actually believe that?"

"You know how rich she is, Juno. How else can you explain the fact that she made detective in under six months? She's got those kiss-asses wrapped around her finger. Now I hear the brass likes her for squad leader. Can you believe that?"

"She'd be better than Ian. The guy's a pussy," I said.

"Not anymore he's not." Josephs insisted. "If you told me that a couple years ago, I would've agreed. Shit, I don't know how he survived those first couple years on the street. Remember how his pop used to talk about him? He built him up like he was some tough-as-nails bruiser. Said he was the baddest guard at the Zoo. I remember thinkin' that we could use a guy like that, and then the kid shows up lookin' like the gun on his belt was goin' to tip him over. But I'm tellin' you, that wussy boy you knew is long gone. He's toughened up, turned into a real ass-kicker. I wouldn't have a second thought goin' on a drug raid with him backin' me up. That's how much I think of him. You know me, Juno, I wouldn't say that if I didn't mean it. All the young guys look up to him."

Josephs popped a pill and swallowed it dry. "I don't know why you're stickin' up for Maggie, but you gotta know where she stands. Everybody wants Ian as squad leader. Nobody respects Maggie. She's just a rich girl playin' detective. If the brass gets their way, and she ends up squad leader, nobody's gonna do a goddamn thing she says. She ain't got the balls for it."

Josephs ranted on. I could care less what he thought of Maggie. Half of it could be true, and I still wouldn't care. Maggie and I had worked together before. She'd earned my respect. She was a smart cop and a tough cop. And she was something I never was—a *clean* cop.

Like marbles finding the low point of a floor, I found that my eyes had gravitated over to Liz. Around her, I counted six guys, all puppy-eyed. Even the passed-over badge bunnies were staring at her, except they were all dagger-eyed.

"Are you gonna stare at her all night or are you gonna let me introduce you?"

I unhooked my eyes from Liz and turned them back on Josephs. "What good would that do?" I was fully aware of the fact that I'd left the door open by not just saying no.

"You have to let me introduce you, Juno. I mean, do you *see* that body of hers? You wanna know the best part?" Josephs got a sparkle in his eye as he answered his own question. "She's into cops, Juno. I'm telling you, she can't resist 'em."

"I'm not a cop anymore. Besides, I thought she was with Ian."

"Sure, she and Ian are an item, but a woman like that's not exclusive." Josephs leaned in close, like he was telling a secret. "Couple months ago, I came down here and tied one on. I mean I got ripped, wound up closin' the place. So then I walked down to the corner to wait for a cab. I was standin' in front of that seafood place; you know the one with the fishnet over the door?"

I nodded.

“So I was just standin’ there waitin’ for a cab to come along. I flagged one down, except it turned out that it wasn’t empty. Liz got out, and we got to chattin’, you know about cops and shit. Next thing I knew, she brought me upstairs. She’s got a place right above the restaurant. She brought me in and poured us a couple. I was sippin’ mine slow, but she was suckin’ the shit down like there’s no tomorrow. Before I knew it, she was all over me. She started doin’ things to me, Juno. Things I never seen before. You wouldn’t believe the shit she’s into. I’m tellin’ you, that was a night to remember—fuckin’ A! You gotta meet her. You won’t regret it.”

I looked over at Liz as Ian suddenly stepped out from her circle of admirers. A holo appeared in front of him, Lieutenant Rusedski of homicide.

“Somethin’s up,” said Josephs.

My phone rang. A holographic Maggie materialized in an empty chair. “I can’t make it,” she said. “I have to go down to the South Docks. There’s been a murder.”