



The limousine backed up far enough to smash into the cart full of seafood. Fish, and ice, and broken crates tumbled across the trunk. Baskets of crabs poured onto the street.

CJ rolled across the pavement and came to rest on his stomach. He gripped the Hayson and crawled to his tool bag, and he'd barely had it by the strap when someone stepped on his hand, then someone grabbed his hair and shoved his face into the street. He tried to get up, but a foot stomped his spine and pushed him back down. He hugged the cylinder to his chest and struggled, trying to break free.

“Get offa' me!” CJ yelled, flinging his arm behind his back, trying to strike his opponent. At the same time, an arm was reaching under his chest, trying to take the Hayson. Then he felt the amulet press against his throat as the string was pulled from behind. It only took a few tries to realize he couldn't reach behind, so he rocked his body back and forth, trying to roll over.

A rock-solid thump hit his head, though, pressing him to the pavement. Someone started jumping on his back with even more fury, bouncing the wind from his lungs, scoring the Hayson into his chest.

As if it couldn't get worse, he heard laughing, a big-winded snarl that sounded happy about causing him pain.

He turned his head just enough to see *Zwie* as her true self. No fleeting fly-by's, no glowing eyes from a dark corner, just *Zwie*—a mean and mighty black woman weighing in around two hundred fifty pounds. She was mad, and she wanted the Hayson.

Should *Eartha Kitt* ever speak with a demonic twist, *Zwie* nailed it. Her incantation was downright creepy, and with an undertone that made his skin crawl she said, “It doesssn't belong to you. I will take it to themmm and trade yourrrr life ... for miiine.”

“Not a chance in hell, Zwie,” said CJ—his cheek mashed to the pavement. “You won’t get the—”

“*Today you die!*” Zwie shouted, then grabbed CJ by the heels and drug him to the back of the limousine, and there she handled him like a rag doll. She seized a fistful of CJ’s hair and thrust his head into the rear bumper. Then she straddled his neck and pinned his face behind the exhaust pipe.

Twenty men couldn’t break her grip, much less one CJ. She was much tougher and her moves came too fast. Sheer strength on her part kept him from moving a muscle. Exhaust from the tailpipe began to burn, first his eyes, then his nose. He squeezed his eyes and puffed his cheeks, holding his breath.

Zwie roared with laughter as she bent over and snapped the amulet from CJ’s neck, but her smile became a scowl when she saw his ballooned cheeks. Her sledgehammer fist came down on his back, forcing him to gasp for air. As she repositioned her grip, he broke away.

CJ spun around and slammed her in the head with the cylinder. Zwie took a few lopsided steps and waggled her head, then she rocked back and forth and dropped the amulet.