

"The Drop"  
First two pages  
by Alan Gordon

The van pulled up and parked three blocks up and one over from the club. The side door opened, and a young man jumped down to the curb and immediately started walking, never even acknowledging his ride. He wore a black blazer-hoodie combo over a burnt orange tee with "SHALOM BITCHES" emblazoned on the front. Rocco jeans, skinny tight but broken in. Wouldn't stop him from dancing. Wouldn't do his balls any favors when he did.

He looked like a bastard child of Uniqlo and Express.

And then there were the LeBrons. Vintage, from his sneakerhead teens and the Cavalier days, but he busted them out again when LeBron re-signed with Cleveland. Air Zoom LeBron II's, mix of oranges and black, "FO SHIZZLE" on the back. Bought with money he made from dealing X in high school, hidden deep in his closet so his mom wouldn't ask how he could afford them. They were worth more now than most of his clothes put together, but no way he would ever sell them.

The club was on Steinway, converted from a long-gone factory. There was a line to get in. He pulled his ticket out along with his ID when he got to the door. The bouncer, a refugee from the Gold's Gym down the street, gave a long look at the ticket, which was legit, and a perfunctory one at the ID, which was not.

"Cool Lebrons," said the bouncer, tearing the adhesive off a wristband and wrapping it on him.

"Thanks," he said, and he went inside.

He guessed, no, he knew he wasn't the only one in there with a fake ID, but he also guessed he was the only one in there using it to make him seem younger. Twenty-three, it said. Twenty-three. Wasn't so long ago. Seemed like forever,

He paid too much for a plastic tumbler with too much ice and not enough Grey Goose, then wandered over by the dance floor, checking out the girls. The club owners had torn out most of the flooring, punching a jagged two-story pit into the basement, the stage at the lowest level. Smoke machines belched clouds which floated over the bouncing and writhing ravers. Lasers pierced the fog, changing colors and criss-crossing, strobes pulsed in sync with the synthesized bass drum. The DJ, a local guy on the rise, danced behind his fortress of consoles, headphones around his neck, conjuring forced euphoria with his index finger.

He sipped his drink slowly, watching the DJ and the crowd bouncing in the pit, then scanned the perimeter, looking for a likely target. There. Leaning against a column, also watching. She glanced at him, then looked away, then back again. The eyes he was searching for. Bright, and a little glazed.

He tossed back the rest of his drink, then walked straight at her, his eyes never leaving hers.

"You need to dance with me," he said, keeping the accent slight.

She gave him the once-over, lingering on the Roccas.

"Does that line work on other girls?" she asked.

"There are no other girls," he said, holding out his hand.

She cocked her head and held for a beat, playing the delay, pretending that her decision hadn't already been made, then placed her hand in his and allowed him to lead her into the pit.

Green fishnet top. All but the biggest fish would have escaped with ease. Underneath, the main event -- a brightly colored bra with a field of stars emerging from orange, yellow and red clouds of cosmic dust, the whole affair trimmed incongruously with lavender roses. Slight, soft bulge in the stomach, not helped by the tight, black high-waisted shorts that made his Roccas seem roomy in comparison. Day-Glo pink wig. And the inevitable Camel gogo boots.

"Like the outfit," he said.

"Thanks," she said. "Found the top online. The picture's from the Hubble."

"The what?"

"The big telescope in space?"

"Oh, the Hubble. So that's what?"

"It's stars being born. Get it?"

"You're a star being born."

"Gonna be," she said. "Rachel."

Maybe, he thought.

"Avi," he replied. That was a lie.

"Israeli?" she asked.

"Yah." That was true. Once. "How about you?"

The day job: Public defender in Queens. When Ken Wishnia contacted me about Jewish Noir, I knew he mainly knew my medieval fiction, so I decided to switch it up and go as contemporary as I could. Queens is the most demographically diverse county in the world, and I've met, and represented, every nationality found here. When I thought what would be a crime within a local Jewish milieu, my mind turned immediately to the Israeli connections to the NYC club drug world.

I had had a number of those cases, so I was familiar with them, but the research required me to dive into the electronic music scene, with which I was not so familiar. Fortunately, I had a resource: My son.

Robert was one of the first six employees of a start-up website called elitedaily.com, which was pitched to the Gen Y browsers. He came in as a photographer and videographer with a massive knowledge of the New York music scene, particularly rap. Elitedaily covered what their readers listened to, so Robert was off, cameras in hand, covering raves at Madison Square Garden, festivals at Roosevelt Island, and so on. What attracted me in part to this story was the chance to pick his brains on what to listen to, and how the participants dressed.

Avi's clothes are a uniform in one sense, a disguise in another. What we think we are hiding when we are disguised can be a revelation of who we are, once you invert it. By establishing the outfit, I established that Avi was making a conscious effort to blend in, but also that his ability to blend in the scene was in part because he had been, and might still be, a part of it. The sneakers (also a shout-out to my sneakerhead son) were

the part from his adolescence, a time of non-innocence, a taste of which is given here, with hints of more to come.

The club's design is an invention, as was the "Shalom Bitches" tee-shirt [or so I thought -- it turns out that they exist, of course]. Something subterranean was needed to conjure your basic descent into Hell. A club on a rooftop would have given it a different and inappropriate feel.

And then there's Rachel. My e-mail to Robert was, "Forest Hills girl, born here but Russian Jewish parents, in college, goes to electronic music clubs. Where does she shop?" He knew the type. He sent me the websites. I went through them, got an idea of the outfit, then invented the design for the bra. I should probably trademark it.

Finally, the opening conversational gambit. All lies, but for what purpose? Is Avi going after Rachel? Is he going to use her to get something else or someone else? Could the false flirtation lead to something real?

Well, it's noir. Something's gonna go wrong. But you have to pick up the rest on page 3.



Alan Gordon is the author of the eight books in the Fools' Guild Mysteries, published by St. Martin's Press. His short stories and essays have been in numerous magazines and anthologies, including Jewish Noir, Queens Noir, Wolfsbane and Mistletoe, Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine, Ellery Queen, and Asimov's Science Fiction. Also a lyricist and librettist. 2013 Kleban Prize for his book to THE USUAL, which premiered at the Williamston Theater in Michigan. With composer Joy Son: BETTER THAN DREAMING [Selection of the 2015 Santa Fe Musical Theatre Festival; Staged reading, 2015 WINKS Program, Wide-Eyed Productions, NYC; Outstanding Original Score and nominated for Outstanding Book, 2014 IMEA awards]; THE UNITED STATES OF US [2014 American Harmony Prize, concert reading at Curtain Call, Inc., Stamford, CT]. With composer Mark Sutton-Smith: THE USUAL; GIRL DETECTIVE, Citation for Special Merit, Academy for New Musical Theater; "Best of Broadway," Western Kentucky University; and the one-act musical BAD RECEPTION, Well-Noted Shorts program, Emerging Artists Theatre. He is a graduate of Swarthmore College, where he received the Potter Award for Fiction, and the University of Chicago School of Law. "The Drop" appears in *Jewish Noir*, edited by Kenneth Wishnia and published by PM Press.

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