

Inspector Pepper

By Patric Peake



MANGA MURDER

Shirakawa, Japan

Billy Oyama and The Black Glove

On the surface, Gerald Pepper, former police investigator, seemed the least likely man to be involved with murder, yet murder followed him like his loyal pooch, Othello, the black lab, and never failed to land him right in the middle of some gruesome investigation.

He was a medium man, medium build, medium length brown hair, medium brown eyes, a medium age of 45 and a medium life which included one dog, and a quaint little cottage on the outskirts of Crookfield, California. His only distinctive feature was a deep scar below his right eye that continued as a distinct dent in the bridge of his nose.

Just as he had sat at his favorite table at the Pizza Palace, toasting himself for getting out of the game of investigating murders, Eloise, the police chief's fifteen-year-old daughter, came in gleaming at him in the reflection of the computer tablet screen shining on her face as she marched to his table. "Inspector Gerald Pepper, we are about to embark on an entirely new career. We're going worldwide."

The fourth case in this series turned out to be not a murder at all, but rather, as reported to Pepper by an Iguana from the island of Aruba, merely a teen romance. Pepper began creating his list of reasons for terminating any more of these fiascos:

- 1) The impersonality of the internet

- 2) The ease by which everything can be falsified
- 3) The not even knowing if a case was truly resolved or mere fantasy in the mind of the victim.

All of these spoke to the cessation of these investigations and were laid upon his table so to speak, in front of Eloise. Her response:

“Right.” She slid her tablet over to him. “This is from a little mountain village in Japan, Shiragawa. This young man is determined to prove that the Black Glove is systematically murdering his family because of his connection to the writer of a comic murder mystery series. Gerald. It’s right up your alley.”

“There are no alleys in Crookfield, Eloise. Have you heard nothing I presented?” Pepper mumbled something about being heard as much as PBS is in a bar.

A teen boy stood in front of them on the screen, decked in American clothing, a wool scarf, sweatshirt, jeans, brand-name boots. Behind him was a six-foot snow drift created by a snowplow.

“Hi, Billy.”

“Greetings, Eloise. Is he there?”

“Yes. Inspector Pepper, meet Detective Billy Oyama.”

“Excuse me?” Pepper looked into the tablet’s camera.

“Ah, I see you recognize me from Manga Comics, and the murder mysteries of my namesake.

“Billy Busted,” Pepper said.

“Yes! The American version.”

Pepper glared at Eloise. “This is what I was talking about. Here’s a young man who has assumed the identity of a comic book character, for God’s sake. Billy Oyama is a fictional character.”

“This was my mother.” The boy held up a photo of a woman lying prone with a sword buried into her chest. “This was my uncle.” A photo of a man with his head cracked open. “And this was my big brother.” A teen boy, with a dagger lying beside his slit throat.

“And your father?” Pepper found himself being sucked in like his pooch, Othello being drawn into the bushes by a bunny rabbit.

“He left us when I was three.”

“So,” Eloise glared back at him. “Are you going to help this young man or not?”

Pepper rubbed the crease created by the frown on his forehead like he was applying salve to a wound. “I assume there is an episode in the comics for each one of these.”

“Exactly,” Billy replied.

“The Black Glove”

“Treacherous heartless villains! People think they’re fictional, that I am not right in the head.”

“Who is?” Pepper smirked at Eloise.

“Always at two AM, every murder. Never a witness. Every time I stake out a possible murder site, it happens somewhere else. It’s as if they’re inside my head. They know my strategies before I do.

“What do the authorities say?”

“Authorities? I’m the only one who even knows about all of this.” The boy pulled out a curved dagger. “This is the authority.”

“Clues?”

“Just one. Very curious. At every scene, one of these is left.” He held up a tiny pewter race car and a tiny pewter taxicab. He put one down and picked up another. A tiny jeep.

“Gerald. Are you okay?” Eloise looked at his face with alarm.

“Billy?” Pepper spoke to the screen.

“Yes, Inspector Pepper, sir.”

Pepper bowed respectfully. “I am no match for your skills in this investigation. I wish you all the best in your endeavors to bring your part of the world to justice. Feel free to email me with updates. I will continue to offer you words of encouragement. Oh, and I look forward to the next episode.”

“Thank you, Inspector Pepper. That means a lot to me. Lonely business. as I’m sure you well know.” The image of the young detective clicked off.

“What is going on, Gerald? I didn’t even know you had tear ducts.” She gathered three napkins from other tables and handed them to her friend. He needed all of them to clean his face and blow his nose.

“Those cars were all given to him by his father when he was three, just before his entire family was brutally murdered by a band of anarchists. They never found his father’s body.” Pepper paused to stare at the neon beer sign in the window of Pizza Castle, pondering the propensity of neon he’d seen when he visited Tokyo.

“That young man is not Billy Oyama. He’s Hashimoto Osaki, the writer of the Billy Busted series. As he grew up, he began projecting his grief into his writing and his drawing. The “boy” you saw on the screen is twenty-four years old, wishing he was three and that could rewrite the past.”

“You read about this?” Eloise put a hand on her friend’s arm. “On the internet.”

Pepper nodded. “I had a set of cars just like those.”

Pepper sat at the little bench behind his cottage examining the tiny pewter taxicab Eloise had purchased for him on Ebay. He tossed a stick for Othello remembering Fritz, the wire-haired terrier that his father had given him when he was three, his first dog. Because his father was a psychologist, Dad named his dog after one of his mentors, Gestalt therapist, Fritz Perls. Pepper had learned more about psychology than he cared to know. Especially today.