

# Encounter: At a More Considered Time (Tales from the Margin)

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## At a More Considered Time

I'd signed on as ship's whore specifically to reach the planet *Naranji*.

The small crew had been civil, the sex satisfying, and I'd learned a great deal about the smuggling subculture in this part of the galaxy that would prove handy if I ever needed to change careers.

Of course, the crew was now dead and out the airlock, the ship's registration was in my name, at least my current name, and I'd at last reached my destination.

The planet was unremarkable. I'd seen dozens like it, with a few small azure seas, vast red and ochre deserts, some snow capped mountain ranges, and a few small swathes of tropical green dappled by cloud filtered sunlight.

The capital city of this margin world was less than a century old, so from the air it didn't look much. The business district hugged the coast of the small sea just to the north of a wide river delta. The river's tributaries originated in the mountains, and fed the wide sluggish highway as it meandered its way to the sea.

On a boat, on that waterway, was the purpose of my journey.

Customs check was perfunctory. I had nothing to declare. The purpose of my visit; sightseeing.

That raised an eyebrow, but I waved the scepticism away with an arrogant flick of my hand. Playing a spoiled rich bitch was easy. I could've been born to it.

At my hotel I booked a passage on the Royal Janus. The riverboat, like its Captain, had a dual personality. It doubled as a barge towing crates of ingots of rare metals from the processing plants upriver, and as a gambling boat in which miners newly flushed with cash promptly lost it at the gaming tables.

I spent the day researching and purchasing some needed items, which I packed in a small valise. I boarded the boat early the next morning.

Entertainment on the Janus was scant. Scantily clad that was. The small stage hosted a seemingly endless succession of dancers, strippers, and couples performing acrobatic fornication to the beat of drums.

The miners, in their turn, paid scant attention to the shows. Their jaded tastes were more focused on the cards the bare breasted dealers revealed. The grim faced men were eager to win back some of their losses from previous journeys.

I seated myself in the corner, a position that gave me vantage of the whole room, the two exits onto the companionway outside, and the staircase up to the wheelhouse.

I'd been nursing my drink for an hour before he made his entrance. Tall, slim hipped, with a powerful upper body that his frilled silk shirt strained to contain. As he descended, his shoulder length hair, the colour of rich mahogany, caught the light of the chandeliers giving him a golden halo. A God visiting from heaven, and his acolytes looked up adoringly.

It was his most dangerous trait, attracting the admiration of others without exerting the merest effort.

His features were as severe as I remembered -- sharp, befitting high intelligence and quickness of thought. There was a hard beauty to his face, but I detected there was something off about him. He looked tired, weary, spent. That haughtiness which had characterized him in my memories had departed. Compared to when I'd last seen him, this man was a shell.

Not that anyone here noticed. His staff fawned about him, his patrons smiled and nodded hello, expressing genuine friendship, on their part at least. He glided amongst them barely acknowledging their existence.

He appeared to have only one thing on his mind. Me. No doubt I'd popped up on his security screen and he'd come down to investigate. He

approached my table directly, looked down at me, and an unexpected expression settled on his face. Relief.

"It is you."

"It's me."

"You found me."

"Clearly."

He sat opposite. "Was it hard?" He filled my empty glass from the bottle. He slid it across the table. "I'd gone to some trouble after the last time."

"I was motivated."

"Clearly."

We stared at each other for an ice age.

I flicked my gaze quickly about the room. "You've achieved much in such a short time."

"The boat?" He gave a careless shrug. "I won it on a bluff."

I'd heard the story. "I bet the previous Captain was not happy about that."

"He drew his gun, and missed. Can you believe it? From where you are sitting now, he missed."

"You've always been lucky. What happened then?"

"I was unarmed."

"That was reckless."

"He went to shoot again but the others at the table grabbed him, and tossed him overboard. He was not well liked, you see."

"Unlike you."

He waved the comment away. "You are well?"

"Well enough."

He nodded towards the jewels on my wrist and fingers. "You've done well, too."

He was dressed simply, but expensively. The ruffled shirt and the tight black pants were expertly cut to appear simple, and would have cost a fortune on this backwater.

"You call yourself Jack Rackham."

"A small conceit, recalling the pirate in me."

We gazed at each other while glacial time passed.

Finally he said: "Did you come here to fuck me or kill me?"

"I haven't decided."

"Oh, I think you have."

"Take me to your cabin and find out."

He took my glass and drained it. Abruptly he stood up and grabbed the bottle by the neck. "Follow me."

All eyes were on us as we ascended the stairs. My eyes were on his tight butt, moving beneath the tight seat of his pants. I resisted the urge to reach out and grab it. A younger me would have, in fact, had done so.

His small cabin was austere, a double bed with rich covers the only surrender to comfort. He stretched out his arms. "Welcome to my humble abode."

He'd changed in the years since our last meeting, though not outwardly. He was still as attractive as he'd always been. But he was a different man to the one I'd known, loved, and then despised. The lack of energy in his voice and movements, his languidness, it was as if the light inside him had dimmed.

He turned his back to me. "I'm at your mercy."

I fingered the weapon I'd hidden in the folds of my dress. He stood there, waiting to die. He deserved to die. What he'd done to me deserved no reprieve, there could be no forgiveness.

Yet something was amiss.

I reached around his broad shoulders. One by one I undid the buttons of his shirt. When I had them all I slid my hands inside, felt the heat of his flesh.

He stood quite still as I undid the belt and buttons that held up his trousers. He did nothing as they dropped to the floor. I dipped my fingers inside his shorts and slid them down his hips.

His cock was hard, and heavy in my hands, its fleshy head soft and spongy inside my mouth. Memories of passionate hours lying beneath the sun flooded through my brain, exciting me, reminding me of all that I had lost, would lose.

I drew his shaft deep into my throat and was thrilled by my throat's reflex to expel him. For my own sanity, I had to expunge him completely from my life, and that was a good way to start.

He stripped me easily, and threw my clothes on the bed. I pushed him down, straddled his hips, let his cock push past my fleshy folds till he was within me, deep and hard. My inner muscles milked his cock as I moved over him like I used to, rubbing my clit against the taut flesh of his stomach till I came, and came again.

I fell upon him, and he kissed me, but there was nothing there. No hunger, no thirst, no passion.

I pinned him to the bed, my laser cutter at his throat.

He must have seen indecision in my eyes. He grasped my wrist. "Do it."

My fingers quivered, a drop of blood appeared, and sizzled when it touched the thin blue beam.

He spoke, calmly. "I loved you then. I love you now. But this madness must end. Kill me. Put me out of my misery, and yours. Let us both find peace. Do it."

His still hard cock moved within me. It filled me completely, hot and thick. I had it then. I knew what was amiss. He didn't fear it. He did not fear death. Knowing that, killing him now would give me no peace at all. Taking his life would not rob him of anything he valued.

I threw the laser across the room. "Fuck me again."

Seven days later he saw me off at the dock. His eyes held only disappointment. "Maybe you'll kill me next time," he said. "When the time is right?"

"I'll certainly consider it."

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