

Encounter: Worm Tamer (A Tale from the Margin)
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Worm Tamer (A Tale from the Margin)

I don't frequent saloons. Being the great-great-grandson of one of the founding colonists means I'd been born on the northern banks of the river, as they say, and those of my ilk rarely venture to this part of the capital. So this was a new experience for me, the first of many.

The Assend Bar & Grill was a clapboard establishment just outside the spaceport's perimeter fence. The premises owed its name not to a misspelling, but to the simple fact that it was the outermost port of call for most spacers, at the ass-end of the galaxy as it were.

As I approached the building the swing doors burst open sending a shaft of pale cream light into the gravel street. A drunk, supported by a seemingly inebriated woman in a skimpy red dress, stumbled out. I gave them a wide berth as they staggered round the side of the building into the darkness. They didn't see me, involved as they were; he groping her breasts and smothering her face with noisy kisses, and she intent on going through his pockets -- not so drunk apparently.

It was a salutary reminder of where I was. I'd read about such establishments, and the frustrated spacers who frequented them. Denied sexual release for months as they traversed the emptiness of q-space they fluttered to the Assend like helpless moths.

I knew their plight intimately. Having a relatively sheltered upbringing I was yet to discover the pleasure of a women's company. Though this fundamental need constantly permeated my thoughts and dreams, sexual congress was not my purpose tonight.

I paused to take a deep breath before entering. This was the start of my big adventure, an endeavour which would either make me, or break me. My heart thudded in anticipation.

The saloon was dimly lit. Half of the dozen or so tables had occupants; spacer men and women in colourful flight suits. From what I could see they were drinking from bottles and playing cards. Scantly clad women and a couple of shirtless men delivered drinks to the tables.

The long bar was deserted, and so I weaved my way to it and addressed the barman who was polishing a glass with a suspiciously grey cloth. "What will it be?" he asked before I could open my mouth.

"I'm sorry?"

"What's your poison?"

"Oh, I see. Actually, I'm looking for a Captain Bonny. I've arranged to meet her here."

He gazed at me with a peculiarly dead expression as he continued polishing the glass. I gazed back at him unsure as to how to proceed. Had he not heard me? Perhaps he did not know her. I was about to repeat my request when a woman's voice beat me to it.

"He'll have a stellar. Make it two."

The appearance of the woman who sat beside me took my breath away. I stared at her in dumbstruck awe. Her face was ethereally pale, with high cheekbones and intelligent blue eyes which shone as if from some inner light. I've read about shapely and inviting lips, now I knew what the authors meant. She took off her battered slouch hat and shook out her lustrous jet black hair.

The bartender popped the caps off a couple of amber bottles and slid them towards us. She took a long deep swig before turning to glare at me. She took another without breaking her gaze, and then slowly licked her top lip.

"You have two minutes."

"I'm sorry?"

"To explain why you want to charter my ship."

"Oh. You must be Captain Bonny. I'm very pleased to meet you." I held out my hand which she ignored.

"I've almost finished my beer. If you haven't explained yourself by the time its empty I'm leaving."

Her abrupt and commanding manner unsettled me and I began to stammer, an irritating idiosyncrasy. "Um, I'm a research graduate of the university. Neurobiology. I study the brain function of life forms indigenous to our planet. My thesis was on sandworms, or known to some as grit worms."

She took another swig and then held the bottle up to the light. Sweat was suddenly dribbling down my back. "Um, I have a theory that by implanting a neural-synthesizer into the brains of juvenile worms I can prevent them from attacking human beings."

She took a final swig and put the empty bottle on the bar. She returned her gaze to my face for a long moment before holding up two fingers to the barman.

"You remind me of someone," she said, in a much softer tone. "There's something about your eyes. Are you from Halcyon by any chance?"

"Um, no. I'm sorry. Born and bred right here. My ancestors were among the original settlers."

She clinked one of my bottles with hers. "Don't you drink?"

"Oh, sorry. I forgot it was there." I took a hurried sip. It was my first taste of beer. I found it a little bitter. I took another sip.

"Just so I'm clear about this. You intend to lure a juvenile away from its mama, a twenty meter carnivore I might add, catch it, and perform brain surgery on it before returning it to its distraught predator parent."

I couldn't have summarized it more succinctly. I said as much.

"Who else will be coming on this crazy expedition?"

"I'm sorry?"

"How many passengers can I expect?"

"Oh. Only me. This is a solo expedition."

She gazed at me for a long while and then burst out laughing. "Let me guess. You called for volunteers and not one of your puny university pals put their hand up."

I felt my face redden with embarrassment. "Something like that."

"Exactly like that, I bet." She took a swig of beer. "So, tell me, research graduate, how you plan on doing this heroic deed."

I enjoy talking about my theory. By the time I'd finished there were ten empty bottles in front of us.

Captain Bonny stood up and took my arm. "Come on. I'll show you my ship."

I must admit to being very much affected by her closeness. She was remarkably attractive, and also a little terrifying. Not just because of the guns holstered on her hips, but mostly in the predatory way she looked at me.

I know nothing of aeronautics, but her ship had the look of a sturdy vessel, used to violent encounters if the scorch marks and dints on the hull were anything to go by.

"And finally, this will be your cabin," she said concluding the tour. "If I decide to fly you on this harebrained scheme, and I emphasize the 'if,' I need to know you can take orders. Understand?"

"Of course. We'll be in the wilderness undertaking a potentially dangerous task, and you need to know you can rely on me."

"Whatever. Now, take off your shirt."

"I'm sorry?"

"Stop saying 'I'm sorry.' It's annoying. Just take off the damned shirt."

I obeyed, though when it came to buttons I seemed to have lost control of my dexterity. In frustration Captain Bonny finished undoing them for me. I struggled out of the sleeves. "I'm sorry, Captain. I think I'm a little inebriated."

"You said it again."

"Sorry."

“What did you say after you said you were sorry?”

“I’m inebriated,” I repeated slowly, so she could comprehend me.

“You think? Now, get out of those pants.”

I was bewildered by her request but not even ten beers could make me forget my mission. “Will you fly me?”

“We’ll see how this ends, then I’ll decide.”

The cabin swam before my eyes as I fell backwards onto a narrow bed. Her hands were suddenly all over me, and the sensations she was creating were beyond my wildest imaginings.

“Damn, you remind me of someone. His cock was as heavy as yours, though not as long.”

“Thank you, I think.”

She stroked me into hardness. Her voice was soft and wistful when she said, “You remind me of him so very much.”

Having no actual carnal experience I was at a loss at what to do next. My beer marinated brain eventually came up with something. “What did he do that you liked?”

She released my cock and grabbed my hair. “Eat me,” she said, directing my face between her naked legs. Strange how I hadn’t noticed her undressing. I’d seen enough perverse holograms to know what she wanted. Her privates were hot and wet, and I busied myself stroking her inner flesh industriously till she clipped me across the ear.

“My clit, damn it!”

I slid my tongue upwards till I found the hard button of flesh.

“That’s it! Don’t stop.”

I didn’t. Later, with an aching tongue I asked with tremulous voice, “So you’ll fly me?”

She laughed. “Consider yourself airborne.” She locked her ankles behind my head forcing my face once more into her privates. “Again,” she commanded.

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