

OLIVER STRONG



NECRON PART 5:
CULTURE CLASH

Necron (part 5)
Culture Clash

By Oliver Strong

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Other books in this series:

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Part 2-Necron: Fortunate Son

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Chapter One

Darkness upon darkness, layers of space-time, fabric upon which all matter in the universe dangles as if suspended by a hidden force ... on that wine dark sea spanning stars Necron ploughs her course, sailing into view as black ships of Achaea pausing on their journey to Troy.

The sight of her hull creasing God's universal abyss did cause the hearts of every man, woman and alien to skip a few beats.

Its dark fury intended for another, yet none dared turn away lest she strike contempt into that swirling void.

An Achaean barge of dead closed on Cloud 9, a station in the Sirius A system. Sirius possessed no habitable planets but plenty of moons and asteroid belts rich in Yeonum. This station served as a place where prospectors might trade in hard earned ore and more often than not blow it on hookers, booze and splash.

As Necron's mighty Achaean boughs drew alongside, a collective gasp snatched oxygen from all directions. Chatter filled the outer ring of a giant spinning top in space. For many it was their first glance at a myth, a thing of rumour, dismissed by official media as subject for conspiracy theorists and old women with little more to do than stir up trouble.

Necron was no longer a fireside story told to children, not for the men and women of Cloud 9. Much like Homer's fabled craft, the fantasy of a desperate son, roaming wine dark seas until one day she makes harbour in your port.

Some said if not for Hitler, Nostradamus and the Necron most conspiracy theorists would have to find a proper job.

Her mighty hull slowed, coming to a relative halt as clamps secured Necron's mass in synchrony with Cloud 9. Nozzles fixed themselves to her tall blocky side, an inverted trapezium took a draught of yeonum fuel, oxygen and everything else a warship requires.

An airlock extended, latching into place, its long tube filled with nitrogen-oxygen atmosphere while security personal in formal dress assembled alongside their commander.

Curious inhabitants congregated ... for the first time Cloud 9's casinos and whorehouses emptied. Citizens stood with bated breath as three men strolled an air lock tube. Two in military dress the other a cream suit with brown shoes but it wasn't their attire which caused heads to turn. Men and women usually playing black jack, getting laid or shooting up splash were transfixed by the possibility of catching a glimpse of their first zombie.

Armed security formed a barrier to suppress a throng leaping above inquisitive heads. Communication devices pushed aloft unaware an EM distortion field ensured no record might make its way to crazy conspiracy theorists back home.

Sirens raised, guards forced back a swarm of bees descending upon summer's last flowers, the airlock opened, observers pushed forward, three sons of Achaea exited. The tall one clutching a swagger stick shook hands with Cloud 9's station Mayor, an honour reserved for only her most eminent visitors. The second, a grey heavy-set fellow in black and red military dress was followed by a shorter fellow in a swanky suit.

Multi-story shopping bazaars stood vacant as tombs in a graveyard while customers pursued legend on the promenade. Achaean warriors who fought terrifying demons on the edge of time graced Cloud 9, every man and woman heaved to snatch a glimpse of these fabled fighters. Just as towns folk of the ancient world might clamour in hope to see the face of Agamemnon, children scarpers about to touch Achilles' cape, so the population of Cloud 9 were held in awe of modern day legends.

The scene was somewhat different aboard Necron as marines prepared for shore leave. Forty-eight hours of a little shopping between long stretches of debauchery.

Mercer tightened straps on his boots before slapping Velcro side tabs down, 'Anyone here done a cretin?'

Ting, busy spraying himself with a scent which until now had only succeeded in attracting insects, pulled a face, 'Dude, you're not gonna screw one of those lizard things?'

'I might have no choice bro.'

'What are you talking about?'

'Since they got four hands I'm thinking they're the only ones that can handle my piece,' Mercer ground his hips to the delight of his comrades, locker doors slammed in approval.

Diana was busy adjusting a wig, she slowly shook her head, permitting a sly grin escape.

‘What?’ demanded Mercer.

‘I didn’t know “piece” was code for ego,’ laughter filled the air again, men of Bravo Company shared in merriment, the thought of converting six months savings into lewd gluttony pressed on each mind as the sky upon Atlas’ shoulders, ‘and they’re called canarks.’

‘Who cares?’

‘Keep calling them cretins and you might get arrested for incest.’

Mercer smiled, ‘I ain’t letting you or nobody get to me today ‘cause I’m gonna go on that station and fuck every bitch every damn way, humans, cretins and canarks baby!’

Diana waved her hand in front of her nose before looking Ting up and down.

‘What now?’ said Ting in a tired voice.

‘You’re not putting that on?’

Ting looked at his bottle of cologne then back at Diana, ‘I bought this on Alpha B, it’s guaranteed to send women wild with a unique mixture of pheromones and natural plant extracts acting as sexual activators.’

‘The only time that moose piss ever worked you got attacked by a swarm of Alpha hornets, I guess they were female.’

‘I paid ten credits for this stuff, so it better have an effect.’

‘It certainly has an effect on me.’

‘Really?’

‘Yeh, it makes me want to throw up.’

Merriment filled the air again.

Ting eyed Specialist Nass, ‘What the hell are you laughing at? You’re wearing more pancake than a drag act.’

Billy stood in front of a mirror applying powder to his face and hands, ‘This is gonna get me in mate.’

‘I didn’t know queer bars had a dress code on Cloud 9!’

Another round of merriment filled the locker room.

‘I ain’t going near no shit stabbers, I’m gonna hit the casinos mate.’

‘Casinos?’

‘They don’t let people with implants or nanos play the tables so I’m gonna use an ECM at the door, pretend I’m not dead.’

'Dude it's a waste of time and money.'

'I got me method all worked out, I'll clean those fuckers out, hah hah hah!'

Diana struggled with her wig.

'Why don't you ever use the mirror?' asked Ruiz as he buttoned his shirt.

'I might fall in love with my reflection.'

Ruiz moved over, 'Let me help,' he adjusted a full head of hair, its blue streaks touched her shoulders, 'there.'

'How do I look?'

'The Lt's gonna be a happy man.'

'All the more for the coffee,' stated Mercer, grinding his hips to howls of approval.

Diana look disparagingly at the Corporal and stated in a coy tone, 'Do that near me again and you'll be serving decaf.'

Another round of laughter and locker slamming commenced.

Victor dressed himself in civilian clothes, jeans, shirt and jacket, he was looking forward to the next two days of leave with Diana. As he buttoned his cuffs the doorbell rang, 'Enter.'

Captain Gibson stepped inside, Victor saluted his senior, 'At ease.'

Gibson emitted a vibe similar to a lawyer delivering his fee, Victor eyed the Captain's flexi tablet in fear.

'I've got bad news Lieutenant.'

'Don't tell me, they're all out of Falafel on Cloud 9?'

'Worse,' he handed the flexi over, 'you got security duty.'

'What?'

'A small freighter leaving Cloud 9 at 0930 hours.'

'This is a joke.'

'It ain't no joke, you got an hour to get suited and booted.'

'Well how long's this gonna take?'

'Twenty four hours there, twenty four hours back and another twenty four hours regen.'

'My leave gets deferred?'

'Sorry.'

'Can't someone else do it?'

'The Colonel insisted you were given this task.'

'That son of a bitch!'

'It's a two man job, select a marine to accompany you.'

'I guess Colonel iron ass isn't up for election?'

Gibson chuckled.

Victor looked the flexi over, 'It doesn't give a cargo manifest.'

'It's classified, that's why we're being paid to watch it. Shinko's got a lab somewhere in this system, whatever that freighter's carrying it needs two Necron Marines all the way. Look on the bright side, you get five hundred tax credits for just two days work.'

'Great, I guess I'll donate to the foundation for victimised marine officers.'

On exiting Victor's cabin Gibson turned back and smiled, 'Try not to have too much fun Lieutenant.'

Victor entered the locker room, Bravo Company prepared for an indulgent weekend worthy of a Roman emperor. He scanned a mass of smiling faces, 'I have a job, 500 tax credits for 48 hours work, anyone interested?'

The room when silent, these men were long overdue shore leave and 500 credits wouldn't persuade them otherwise.

'I need one volunteer, if not I'll have to pick someone ... well?'

'Why don't you go?' slipped a mumble hidden amongst a congregation of unhappy troops.

'I am smart ass but a second marine's required.'

Diana stepped forward, 'I'll do it.'

Relief crashed across the locker room as a wave hitting a sea shore.

'Thank you Specialist Zeng, our transport leaves in one hour, meet me on docking slip A-09. I want you suited and booted, no need to bring your comms equipment on this one, understood?'

Diana nodded her head, 'Understood sir.'

Vic gave her a smile before leaving the locker room. Mercer let out a great sigh, 'Phew! Dodged a motherfucking bullet there!'

Diana removed her wig, 'On the bright side I get to have some intelligent company for the next two days.'

Mercer ignored her jibe, 'Thanks Zeng.'

Billy continued to pat his face with foundation, '500 credits, after two days I'll be coming back with fifty fucking thousand credits!'

'Greedy people try to get rich quick yet are unaware they're destined for poverty,' stated Ruiz.

'You what?'

'Proverbs 28:22.'

'What the fuck you talking about?'

'The bible.'

Billy laughed as he applied makeup, 'But Jesus never played a hand with me.'

Victor exited an airlock connecting Necron to Cloud 9, he wore a mess uniform with his officer's pistol and N-13 strapped over his back. This was going to be a quiet baby sit within the system so he carried the bare minimum of two extra clips, each holding 50 rounds of depleted uranium.

Occupants of Cloud 9 hovered around the exit, their swarm had thinned yet aphids slowed on passing Necron's airlock in the hope they might discover a rich vein of sap.

Sure enough, some got lucky when Lieutenant Zellmann stepped off, his hand scanned for DNA, palm print and blood vessel grouping. He was permitted to board with automatic rifle and pistol attached to his person.

Eyes widened while lips spoke in muffles, firearms were strictly prohibited on Cloud 9. He travelled the outer promenade without a care in the world. This mythical creature emitted an aura of arrogance none possessed tenacity to challenge.

Residents stepped aside, offering strange looks, Victor felt naked beneath their scrutiny as humans and canarks alike ogled, the Emperor with no clothes.

He found it ironic a four-armed canark should regard his image so intriguing. A reptilian species bearing a vial of condensed urine around its neck thought HE was weird! 'Welcome to Sirius A,' Victor mused inside his head.

Cloud 9's outer ring was a meeting place, a transition point between the solar system and wonders within, expensive hotels, casinos, restaurants, multi-storey bazaars, a Las Vegas floating in space.

Skirting its outer ring he found the relevant docking slip. Victor approached its customs official, 'Lieutenant Zellmann,' he offered a flexi tablet.

A canark security officer sneered at his flexi, 'You are grey ghost?'

'Pardon me?'

'I speak you listen, you are one they call grey ghost?'

'That's what the Drax call us.'

'You fight Alpha B?'

'I did a tour there.'

The lizard stood on two legs, about the same height as the average human its elongated face reminded Victor of books he'd read as a child. All little boys had a fascination with dinosaurs at one point or another, this creature's head exhibited similarities to a raptor.

The canark shifted its head to the side so he might catch a better look at the Lieutenant, 'You kill Drax?'

'When I had to.'

Its four arms fidgeted, one hand held a work pad, the other tapped it, another floated close to a holstered shock stick, the other rubbed the rear of its head, something like a human rubbing his chin.

'On home world Great Prophet say grey ghost come, grey ghost fight, grey ghost win, Drax not win, Drax execute Great Prophet.'

'I'm sorry to hear that but I'm kind of in a rush.'

'Flee home world, search truth, now see, Great Prophet speak truth.'

'Listen I'd love to talk about this but there's a transport waiting for me and if I'm not on it I'm in deep trouble.'

Diana appeared behind Victor, 'How's it going Vic?'

Victor turned around, 'Fine if this cretin'll let us through!'

'Cretin? What mean?' snapped the guard.

'No offence buddy.'

Diana stepped forward and bowed her head, 'In the name of the Great Prophet we request safe conduct.'

The canark made a hissing noise, Victor assume it signified satisfaction, 'Grey ghost understand Great Prophet?'

'I have studied his work.'

The guard offered his pad which Victor met with a palm print, the pad emitted a bleeping noise, 'Permitted entry.'

Before Victor could pass the creature turned its head to look him in the eye, 'Prophet guide grey ghost.'

Victor and Diana strolled onto the docking arm, a tubular vessel attached to several slips. While walking to their slip Victor spoke, 'You've studied these cretins?'

Diana returned a matronly look, 'They're called canarks and yes I have, they're pretty interesting as a matter of fact.'

'I've got one, A cretin walks into a bar and says to the barman, I'll have a beer and a sample glass. The barman says ... are you taking the piss?' Victor cracked up at Ting's joke.

Diana shook her head, 'Just because they have trouble verbalising certain concepts doesn't make them stupid. I've read some of their texts and they're pretty deep.'

'Concepts like pissing into a bag your entire life? Don't tell me that's not retarded.'

'It's a spiritual thing, they believe it's part of their essence. When they die the body is discarded. Their distilled spirit is placed beside their ancestors.'

Victor grinned, stopped walking and fixed his eyes on Diana, 'Are you taking the piss?'

'Grow up Vic.'

He continued on his way to docking slip A-09, 'Dee, you take these cretins way too seriously.'

'There's plenty of things we do they find stupid.'

'Like what?'

'They think it's weird we worship a deity we've never seen or heard. Like someone who cashes one of those lottery cheques for a person they've never met on Titan colony.'

Victor nodded his head, 'That's pretty stupid, but God doesn't write rubber cheques.'

'You know what I mean, they worship ancestors they knew and loved, those people are enshrined in a mausoleum where their spirits reside. I think it's beautiful.'

'I got another one, why does a cretin have four hands?'

Diana refused to answer.

'Come one Dee.'

'Fine, why?' replied Diana in a tired tone

'So he can count all twenty of his brain cells!'

'Canarks have only four digits.'

Victor burst out with laughter as they approached their destination.

Chapter Two

Awaiting their arrival at docking slip A-09, two arms folded across chest a second pair behind its back. It wore a civilian issue flight suit of canark design with metal rimmed collar so any sized helmet may be snapped quickly atop, much like a Necron flight suit.

The dark green Captain noticed Victor's interest, 'Great grandfather.'

'Sorry?' replied Victor.

'You look I tell,' he pointed to a patch on his breast depicting a canark stood between two planetoids, it laboured pushing them apart, 'Great grandfather award, display respect. You Lieutenant Zellmann?'

'That's me.'

'Captain Quetz,' he opened all four hands toward the ceiling before bowing.

Diana secured her N-13 and did the same, unfolding palms as flowers searching out Spring's first sun.

Victor took Diana's lead.

Quetz offered one of his hands in a handshake, 'Welcome aboard the Coatl.'

Victor shook Quetz's cold leathery hand, 'Thank you Captain.'

Quetz's vessel was perhaps three times the length and breadth of a Blackbird yet in maintenance and arms she lacked. A civilian craft of alien design and manufacture, Victor was curious to see her inner workings.

'Come,' hissed Quetz leading them aboard as Charon on the riverbanks of the Styx, two dead warriors entering his barge for the crossing, side by side.

A short tube connected Coatl with docking slip A-09, once past the air lock Victor sniffed, then sniffed again, its innards were pretty ripe. Either the Coatl's scrubbers required an overhaul or her designers were most comfortable breathing a thicker, ammonia tinged atmosphere.

They walked into the main body. A hexagonal table surrounded by chairs, food dispensers on a wall and a couch with holo-vid player. Meals and relaxation would presumably take place here, but your guess is as good as

mine when it comes to four-armed reptilians who carry their own piss concentrate wherever they go.

In the centre stood another canark, Quetz introduced him, 'Co-pilot Huat.'

Again, the ritual of bowing with palms aloft played out before shaking hands. This brown skinned lizard seemed rather nervous.

'Huat never see grey ghost.'

'Grey ghost?'

'You grey ghost.'

'Why do you call us grey ghosts?'

'Everyone hear grey ghost on home world.'

'Fine, so where are our quarters?'

Quetz led them from Coatl's starboard to port side, he motioned toward three sets of bunk beds built into the ship's hull, 'You pick.'

'Marvellous.'

Diana spoke up, 'Thank you for these accommodations and thank the Great Prophet.'

The end of Quetz's nose wrinkled up as he glared on Diana, 'Your female not speak Quetz!'

The Captain marched into the central hallway and entered the cockpit.

Diana's face turned from grey to red.

'Come, leave female!' hissed the Captain's reptilian voice from outside.

Victor smirked at Diana, 'You know, I think I'm starting to like these canarks.'

Victor entered a tight central hallway denying space that two men might stand shoulder to shoulder, 'Quetz, if you don't mind I'll bring my female, she's never seen the inside of a cockpit before.'

'Understand Lieutenant.'

Diana traced his path, red faced, her eyes burnt into Victor's back with the fury of one hundred suns.

Within Coatl's cockpit Huat stood to attention while Quetz showed off his pride and joy. Despite Spartan beginnings he'd upgraded, adding several modifications of his own.

There were four seats, two up front and two behind. Although each console had a focus the Coatl could be piloted from any one. Quetz looked down upon Diana and her red face, 'Female have problem?'

Victor took a glance at Diana, 'She's fine Captain, may we check the rear section now?'

Quetz moved between the marines and back down the hall through the centre section, opened a large bulkhead and stepped into the rear.

The engine room was an old anti matter drive, an effective source of power yet precarious.

Necron Industries had designed ships based on an anti-matter drive, firing an anti-proton and anti-matter particle at each other, their annihilation resulting in a massive release of energy.

When channelled by magnetic fields that energy is converted into thrust.

The method is sound and works well yet is far too dangerous for a military vessel. It's difficult to store anti-matter safely under normal conditions, under battle conditions it becomes a liability. One strike from an EM warhead and the magnetic field, holding your anti-matter in place, will collapse quicker than Josef Kramer's defence under judicial scrutiny, turning your warship into gamma rays and neutrons quicker than you can say "I was just following orders!"

This craft was built before humans travelled beyond their own sun, before Necron Industries stumbled upon a Drax cruiser floating in space, reverse engineered her to discovered a new safer source of fuel and superior method of travel between stars.

'Is she space worthy?' asked Victor.

'Of course.'

'Is that the cargo hold?'

'Yes.'

Victor moved to the rear, climbed down an access ladder and onto the floor of the engine room. From there he checked an electronic seal on a floor hatch.

'Has anyone been inside?'

'No.'

Victor confirmed the hatch was unopened, 'Good,' he climbed back like smoke rising to the ceiling in a public house, N-13 strapped to his back. Victor produced his flexi, 'Your destination Captain.'

Quetz took the documentation, 'Prepare cast off.'

Victor and Diana sat in the cockpit's rear stations, strapped in. Through a thin sheet of transparent carbon he witnessed a moon below. A thick atmosphere of carbon dioxide with yellow sulphuric clouds bled into the deep void of space. As if its skull had been slit centuries ago by a razor-sharp meteor. Moving on the heavenly body looked back at its nefarious work and chuckled, yellow gas forming a majestic tail, exposing the perpetrator.

Quetz spoke into a headset mic, 'This Quetz, request cast off, Captain Coatl.'

A voice replied in his ear, 'This is Cloud 9 control, you are cleared for cast off Captain.'

Quetz flicked switches on a dashboard in front of him while holding a flight stick in his other pair of hands. The ship shuddered with several load clunking sounds, it caused Victor to look about him. Diana's vision remained firmly set on Victor, her disdain, like a Spartan warrior, refused to waver.

Docking clamps released the Coatl and a small burst from manoeuvring thrusters gently pushed her away.

It took a few minutes to clear the docking arm and move to a safe distance before Quetz activated auto navigation, his ship's computer adjusted with thrusters. As the Coatl re-orientated Victor saw their destination come into view through the cockpit window.

It was still a distance away, no more than a blip on a radar sweep.

Suddenly Victor and Diana were pushed into their seats as Quetz fired main engines at full burn. Anti-matter particles met anti-protons in a glorious fireworks display. Each explosion channelled via an electromagnetic nozzle into space leaving a trail of neutrons and gamma radiation.

After 2 minutes of full burn Quetz cut engines and peered at his human passengers, the canark was struck, perhaps the rumours were true?

'Something up?' asked Victor.

'Impressive,' hissed Quetz.

'What's that?'

'Human not endure G-force but grey ghost endure.'

'I'd really appreciate it if you stopped referring to me as a grey ghost.'

'Why?'

'I might be a bit grey but I'm not a ghost.'

His co-pilot made what Victor could only construe as a laugh.

'Did I say something funny?'

'You grey ghost, prophecy.'

'I don't understand.'

Diana released her constraints and stood up, 'I guess it beats being a cretin.'

The Captain and his co-pilot took great offence, 'Silence female!'

'What prophecy?'

The Coatl glided toward her destination as the pilot released his restraints and stood, 'Prophecy, end time, Great Prophet.'

'What did this Great Prophet say?'

'Grey ghost meet black beast, last battle.'

Victor turned to Diana, 'Do you have any idea what he's talking about?'

'They have an end time prophecy, like most religious beliefs, it says a grey ghost will meet a black beast at a specific location, fight the final battle and end the war between good and evil.'

'Like Armageddon?'

'Right, their Great Prophet made the prediction over a century ago when the Drax swarmed Tizapan, their home world. I guess he said it to give them hope since they didn't stand a chance.'

The co-pilot jumped out of his seat and hissed, 'Black beast fortunate, we fight again, we win.'

'Keep telling yourself that lizard boy and maybe one day the fairies will come in the night and make it true!'

'Tizapan female not control mouth, female beat stick!'

Diana unsecured her N-13 and fixed her stare upon the co-pilot, 'Take your best shot cretin!'

Quetz hissed at Huat in his native tongue, a jumble of strange reptilian noises neither Victor nor Diana made sense of. The co-pilot became less confrontational yet his agitation remained, like a teenage boy restrained by a parent for his own good.

'Apologies, Huat young, angry,' stated Quetz.

'I apologise for Specialist Zeng, I assure you no offence was intended,' he glared at Diana, 'isn't that right Specialist?'

Diana refused to answer.

'I said isn't that right Specialist?'

'I guess so ... permission to be excused Lieutenant.'

'Excused Specialist.'

Diana stomped into the mid-section where she might sit down and drink a coffee.

'Tell your co-pilot to watch his mouth, Specialist Zeng has a tour of duty, a bronze star and at least a dozen Drax under her belt ... she'd eat him for breakfast.'

'Eat for breakfast?' hissed Quetz.

'It's a figure of speech.'

Quetz shifted his head from side to side befuddled by the Lieutenant, 'What figure of speech?'

'You know, a metaphor.'

The leathery skinned canark glanced back at his equally puzzled co-pilot then toward Victor.

From the mid-section Diana shouted, 'They don't understand metaphors.'

Victor didn't believe it, a space faring race couldn't grasp the simple concept of a metaphor, how's that possible when they believed so fervently in prophecy?

'A metaphor is something that means something else, like when I ask someone to give me a hand, I don't want their hand literally, I'm just asking for help.'

Quetz made a reptilian frown, 'Why not ask help?'

'I did, it's just a figure of speech.'

'Not understand.'

'Forget it,' shouted Diana, 'the man's a cretin!'

Their voyage was but an hour old yet Diana had gone from an understanding xenophile to xenophobic Nazi in full support of the final solution. Victor did his best to mediate between bruised egos, not that he disagreed with Diana.

From Victor's point of view these canarks really were cretins, they had a backward view on almost every subject.

Women were no more than dogs to be trained and punished when acting out of turn, added to that the punishment was nearly always of a violent nature.

Adversely men had the liberty to take on a career and enjoy life to its fullest. The whole situation amused Victor, much to Diana's discontent. Her face resembled one of those old English castles. An edifice of grey stone unmoved in centuries, grim and unwelcoming to outsiders, a thick stalwart barrier, she peeked from arrow slits preparing her next volley.

Victor hung his weapon from a chair in the mid-section lounge, sat down, produced a box of cigarettes and tapped one out, 'Smoke?'

'I don't smoke,' replied Diana from across the table in an upset tone.

He put his feet up and leant back before eyeing the coffee machine, 'Would you mind getting me a coffee?'

She stood up to attention, 'Cream and sugar sir?'

Victor was oblivious as to how personally Diana had taken her previous discourse with the canarks, 'Cream thanks.'

Diana was on the edge of a thermonuclear detonation, 'Maybe Captain Quetz can serve you, sir?'

Victor lit his cigarette and blew out a plume of relaxing smoke, relaxing for now, 'What?'

'Surely serving a man coffee is far too lowly a task for a mere female, sir?'

'Dee, get a grip.'

'A grip on what sir?'

'Dee!'

'Yes sir?'

'Enough, and that's an order.'

'Yes sir!'

Diana placed a tall ceramic cup with a wide base beneath the dispenser's nozzle. She tapped a button for coffee and cream, the machine dutifully spurted it out.

She placed the cup delicately before her Lieutenant, 'Anything else sir, shiny shoe sir?'

He sighed, 'Grow up.'

'I think you're talking to the wrong species, sir.'

'We're here to guard that cargo, whatever it is, ignore them, they're cretins for God's sake.'

The co-pilot, Huat, stepped inside the lounge area, 'You speak to female?'

Victor gave himself a face palm.

'On Tizapan, female speak over male, female ...'

Diana cut him off, 'Is beaten with a stick?'

Huat became incensed. Victor sipped his coffee, provided this didn't come to blows he'd ignore both their childish ramblings.

'Your female speak!'

'She's been doing that ever since I met her.'

'You beat her?'

'Only at checkers,' said Victor with a smirk.

'Not understand.'

'Never mind, it was a joke.'

'What is joke?'

Victor rolled his eyes, 'Is it just me or do you feel a sudden drop in I.Q. every time this guy opens his mouth?'

Diana raised her brow and made a zipping motion over her lips.

'What is I.Q.?'

Victor took a long drag on his smoke before speaking, 'Huat, just forget it, humans and cretins have different cultures. I accept your differences you should learn to accept ours ... for the sake of my own sanity.'

'Keep female silent!'

'In the name of the mother of Christ having a conversation with one of you guys is like talking to a broken record!'

'Who Christ?'

'The son of God.'

'His mother female, yes?'

'Is this a trick question or something?'

'She female?'

'Of course she was female.'

'Son of God beat mother?'

Victor's face screwed up as he spoke with an incredulous tone, 'Of course not!'

'Why?'

'Why would he?'

'All female whore, slut, stupid, male must beat.'

Diana chirped up, 'Does that include the Lieutenant's mother?'

'Yes,' hissed Huat.

Victor put down his coffee down, ominously stubbed his cigarette in the ashtray before rising from his seat like a portcullis in the Colosseum, just

before hungry lions rush out to bite off Christian's heads, 'What did you just say?'

Huat looked back quizzically, 'Your mother, whore.'

Diana began to smirk, 'Lieutenant, I'm sure no offence was intended, remember it's just a cultural difference.'

Victor wasn't listening to her words, Victor faced off against a four-armed cretin, 'You've got three seconds to get on your knees and beg before I rip that forked tongue out your dirty mouth.'

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