

Mocha Frappe Latte is People

“Fuckin’ aliens,” Jed spat from under the red bandana wrapped around his head, the first words I’d heard from him since something like five hours ago. “Do I gotta learn Spanish to tell them how to roll a burrito?” He dropped his two-a.m.-burrito with a wet slap on his plate; its barely-folded guts spilled out in a mess of blood-red sauce and pus-white liquid cheese.

“Y’mean Mexican,” I said as I picked the onions out of my burrito with some desperate hope that a blonde (dirty in bed, not hair color) might need a close-up of my mouth before the night was out.

“Huh?” Jed grunted.

“Spaniards speak Spanish. These’re from Mexico. They speak Mexican.”

“That’s bullshit,” Terry said—dressed smart casual with slicked back hair, the “good looking one” of the bunch—and wagged his finger as he built up for the challenge. “I ain’t ever heard of that.”

“Course you didn’t, you never graduated high school.”

“Neither did you, dumbass.”

This was only a soft bite to my pride. I’d dropped out my senior year and was, therefore, the most educated of the bunch and—six beers and three shots into the night—I became a spongy intellectual. I grabbed Trin’s arm as she sat down at our table with her own tray of nachos and said, “Trin, where’s Spain?”

“What’s this, a geography class?” she said, her voice like a purse-dog’s bark.

“Just answer the question.”

“Somewhere up in Europe, I think.”

I extended a heavenward palm towards my less-schooled companions. “Now, where’s Mexico?”

“The shit-turd hanging off of Texas,” Jed growled.

“Shit-turd is the same word, Jed.”

“Get to the point, Lon,” Terry said, hanging off the edge of his seat to poke holes in my logic.

A grin curled the corners of my mouth, rearing up for my *coop-de-grâce*. Or however the hell the French say *victory*. “They’ve got a whole ocean between them. Now, how the hell are they gonna get one language all the across it? What’d they do, cup their hands and scream? Think about it.”

The table fell mostly silent, except for the sounds of Trin crunching chips with jaws so loud they must’ve been built by Caterpillar (salt, she claimed, always sobered her up, and at a very special part of the night, she’d start licking it off her sideways margarita glass).

“Fuckin’ Mexicans,” Jed grunted, putting a period on the conversation.

“Who here can drive?” Trin chirped suddenly.

All three of us boys lied with raised palms.

“I wanna go to Molly’s,” she whined, her voice untypically girly, which meant she really wanted it, or at least thought she did. “They’re doing \$3 all you can drink shots after midnight tonight.”

“I’m in,” I said quickly. I got one victory under my belt and my confidence was up.

“I dunno,” Terry wavered. “I’ve gotta get up early.”

“For what?” I said.

“Church, man.”

“Goddammit, Terry, we’ve all got church in the morning. Ball up and get shit-faced with us,” I growled, my IQ dropping suddenly like a plate of over-easy eggs, yoke side down.

“This is the golden hour,” Trin said, backing me up. “Going to church without sinning a little the night before is like going to the Laundromat without any quarters.”

“Preach it,” I said.

“Amen,” she said. I slapped my palm against Trin’s in a high five. We often passionately shared the same barely half-baked ideas, which was why she had a four-year-old son with my eyes. She never told him who his Daddy was and I never bothered to either—didn’t seem right to disappoint a kid like that. Her mother looked after the boy every now and then, and she spent those nights binge-funning with us boys.

“Goddammit,” Terry said, picking up the check.

“Hasta la vista, baby,” Jed said.

About a year ago, we had some serial killer called “Hungry Dave” eat body parts off his victims and leave them in mangled bits. The cops caught him deep-frying a thighbone and put him in line to get charred up in the chair, but it blew up in the news. Ever since then, our sleepy little town was suddenly faced with a backwash of unwanted tourism and new transplants.

My ’86 K30 Chevy (burnt-black body, orange-red hood) *ker-thunked* and stalled at the single stoplight in Springswell.

“The hell is that?” Jed grunted from the shadows of my passenger seat.

Straight ahead, coveting shadows like a shy virgin, I could see the small strip of stores across the street. Video-Rama—big, block letters on the roof—had a sign draped from one end to the other—CLOSED. Plastered on the windows was a newly painted Starbucks logo.

“That, my friend, is what an Apocalyptic horseman looks like,” I told him.

“Mocha frappe fuck that,” Trin said from the back seat right before the light flicked green on the empty street and I plugged my Chevy back into gear.

Molly’s was a strange mixture of old and new blood. It was a relatively decent establishment during the day, with \$6 burgers and a new-and-improved “chichi” menu, whatever that meant. But at night, she dropped her panties in a bad way. A one-horse town like ours, technically,

should have never had an all-night bar, but *Molly's* never gave the impression of doing anything with a lot of intent.

Trin pounded her shot against the bar. “Hasta la vista!” Apparently, that was the phrase of the night, and we all lifted our glasses to it and tilted them back. My eyes stuck on a sloppy blonde at the other end of the bar and I followed her with my eyes first, then my feet, selling some lame line like, “I’ll be right back—”

But I didn’t get that far. Before I reached her, I felt something grab me and pull me in for a dance. A sizable feat for a raven-haired, sallow-cheeked woman, but I wasn’t walking in any straight lines anyway. Something twangy and country was blaring and I could barely hear her big, blue eyes or her Mona Lisa smile, so we danced in a tight shuffle.

“Hi,” I grinned. She wasn’t blonde, but she was a surprise and that was just as good.

“Hello.” There was dirt in her voice—something stilted and half-translated.

“Y’got nice teeth,” I said.

“Thank you.” She seemed wildly lucid, a thumbtack in a ball of cotton. I felt myself playing catch-up. She was definitely not from around here. Not even American. No skin off my nose; I wasn’t gonna marry her anyway. Her body was too small, birdy, like something you kept on the top shelf or in the box and didn’t play with.

“You having fun?” I asked. Her blues snagging on mine like a pretty sweater on a crooked nail as I swept the bar floor with the bottom of my boots.

“No,” she said.

The screen door of my trailer shuttered back on itself as we tumbled inside. I fell on my frameless mattress and her mouth clicked against mine like a ravenous rabbit. I reached up, felt a chain brush my fingertips, giving it a yank. The light bulb tinkered and flickered on, illuminating about twenty dishes in my sink, beer bottles on the floor, and the white of her skin when she tossed her shirt over her head.

“You’re a wild flower, you know that?” I told her.

She let out a noise that was half a growl, half a purr, something Mexican or Spanish or Russian, maybe. “Are you a cowboy?” she asked, sitting in my lap.

Somewhere down the line, I traded that dream for a nickel and a warm beer. But I held her tight with a crooked grin. “I’ll be whatever y’ want me to be.” Our noses touched, then our foreheads.

“You know what I want you to be?” she said.

“What’s that?”

She smiled. “Food.” Then her jaw unhinged, touched her neck, and a second mouth launched from her throat like a thick, hollow worm and attached its toothy rim to my face.

I hate to say it, but my reaction was so delayed that I just kinda stared down the thinly red, throbbing tunnel of her second mouth and tried to figure out what the hell I did wrong to deserve this. She pinned me down then, her freakishly strong hands on my shoulders, while she sucked my face, her razor-sharp needle teeth crawling up my head, swallowing me whole like a snake.

At some point, the image of my 9-gauge shotgun clicked in my head. I thrashed, twisted my arm, and blindly felt for it. My fingertips brushed gun and I quickly hunted for the base. Meanwhile, she was sucking, her throat pulling my head from my spine like last years’ too-tight Christmas sweater.

I could feel base, then trigger, and my hand wrapped around the familiar pieces, yanking it off its stand. I blindly pointed the gun in her direction and pulled the trigger with a shout.

Her weight was blown off of me, but the pink skin stayed locked around my head, falling over my face like a caul. I grabbed it, felt pink, slippery flesh in my fingers, and tried to tug it off, but the teeth were locked around my face like hooks so I rolled it back like some sick wedding veil.

Crouched over, with her back towards me, she reached down with and collected the tube of her throat and began manually stuffing it back in her mouth. My fingers shook as they made a mess of my shelf trying to find another casing. Her eyes met mine and she licked blood off the corners of her mouth.

“*Sonofabitch.*” The casing tumbled from my fingers and fell behind the bed. “What are you?”

“Our planet is dying,” she said, little chest rising and caving quickly, her voice croaking through the torn throat. “We want yours. It is not personable.”

“Y’mean personal.”

I ditched the gun, reached for an empty instead. I smashed the bottle on the ground, brandishing the neck tightly in my hand. She looked at me—smiled—and flung herself at me, mouth-first. She swallowed my beer-hand, and then began working her way up my arm, her throat contracting, twisting my arm in its socket. I tried to tug my arm out and I felt her lurch, bug eyes going wide. In the back of her neck, a line of blood dripped down from the protruding glass of the bottle.

Oh. My turn to sneer. “You’re mine.” I twisted my arm, felt her skin protest as the glass cut around her neck from the inside out. She contorted, gargled, but I grabbed her by the hair to keep her in place and sawed away manically until I felt the resistance of her body give, skin snapping back like a rubber band.

I shoved her off of me—two pieces of her (head and body) bleeding out puss and blood on my floor, a third piece of her still wrapped around my head. I sat back against my mattress and panted.

“Shit,” I said, looking at the headless, alien body on the ground. “Shit.”

I'd killed squirrels. Deer. Even an elk, once. But I ain't ever killed a pretty-eyed woman with two sets of teeth and a fly-trap throat. I buried her in the cornfield behind my trailer and stayed up staring at the sky until it turned morning pale.

I was supposed to go to church in the morning but I made a final destination pit stop at *Molly's* instead. The place was nearly empty, save a couple old dogs who probably didn't realize it was daytime. I took down one or three beers and began to peel the back of the label when I heard Chip, the bartender, snarl. "Goddamn tragedy," he spat, shaking his head like a wet dog as he rubbed a beer mug clean.

On the mounted TV, the local news station was rolling the headline: *Hungry Dave Copycat?* Cameras shook over the medic's gurney as they wheeled a bloody sheet into the ambulance. "What happened?" I asked.

"The sick fuck got another one. They found her this morning. Tore the poor girl up, ate parts of her. Still haven't figured out who did it."

"What girl?"

"Lacey-Ann. Preacher John's daughter. You know her?"

"Yeah...we used to go to school together." Lacey-Ann. Pretty. Sweet as pie. Gave me a handjob in the back pew once. No criminal history, no boyfriends out for blood. No reason anyone in town would wanna hurt her. No one human, anyway. "She's dead?"

"Yep. They found her in the trash behind the new Starbucks. They're holding a special service for her on Wednesday."

"Shit." This hit too close to home and just kept getting closer. I swallowed back another drink.

Trin's patch-job of a sofa had seen so many asses in its time that it swallowed me up like a hammock. I made myself comfortable and listened to her cuckoo clock (some heirloom from her

grandmamma) click loudly. Bryce swished his legs back and forth across from me, head hanging, hair falling in front of his eyes.

“Hey,” I said, and his eyes turned up. I extended a finger. “Pull my finger.”

He reached out, his tiny fingers wrapping around mine, and pulled. I burped, loudly. He lit up, giggling. He yanked again. I burped again. He gave it a third yank. Nothing. His tiny face crumpled in a frown.

“Sorry, bud,” I said. “Didn’t think that was gonna be a silent one. You’re gonna wanna clear out of here soon.”

“Bryce, quit bothering Mr. Lonnie.” Trin flurried in and sat down across from me, twisting pieces of tinfoil in her hair. “Didn’t see you at church.”

I motioned to her hair. “What’s that about?”

“I’m going out with Terry tonight.”

“*Terry?* Like...going *out out?*”

Her eyes narrowed. “What’s it to you?”

“I got you something.” I reached into the back of my pants and pulled out a 9mm pistol, holding it out to her. “Careful, it’s loaded.”

She blinked at me, stumped. “The hell is that?”

“A pistol.”

“I know *that*...what’re you doing giving it to me? Are you proposing?”

My face went white. “What? No—”

“No?”

Bryce blinked at us.

“Bryce, go play; the grown ups are talking.”

Bryce grabbed his water gun off the table and started shooting the walls. “Pew, pew!” he said, killing imaginary creatures. Good kid.

Trin took a swallow from a glass jar on the table and set it back down. “You can’t go bringing violence into this house,” she said.

“That moonshine?” I asked her.

“Yeah. Jed gave it to me.” Explained the wetness of her eyes, the thickness of her voice.

“Want some?”

I shook my head. “Why’re we talking about this? Take the gun.”

“Why’re you getting snippy? You asked the goddamn question. I don’t want your gun.”

“You need it. For protection. These’re dangerous times. You gotta protect you and your family.”

“*My* family?”

“Yeah. Little Bryce.”

“And who am I gonna need protection from?”

“Didn’t you hear about Lacey-Ann?” Trin shook her head. “She’s dead. Some...crazy man or thing or whatever ripped her to pieces and dumped her behind the Starbucks. They think it’s a Hungry Dave copycat.”

“Shit,” Trin said, her temper dropping with her expression.

“I know,” I said, wiping my mouth. “It’s a goddamn tragedy.”

A second of silence with Trin’s eyes on me, before she said, “You fucked her, didn’t you?”

“Huh?”

“Yeah, you did. You had sex with Lacey-Ann.”

“Goddammit, Trin, what’s that got to do with—I’m trying to tell you a girl’s dead and all you can think about is whether I gave it to her or not?”

“So you *did*. You’re a pig. No—not a pig. Least when a pig dies, I get bacon. You fucked every woman in town and I’m the only one stupid enough to get knocked up, that it?”

My heart dropped in my rib cage. “Aw...hell, Trin, you know it’s not like that...I’m trying to tell you something serious...”

She jutted her hand out. “Gimme the gun.”

“What?”

“Gimme the gun. You’re on my property and I’m fully within my right to shoot you with it.”

“Just listen—”

“I’m gonna count to ten, Lon.”

Back at *Molly’s*, the TV blared more coverage of Lacey-Ann’s death. I put a cold beer up against my throbbing forehead and tried to dull it out. “Tourists, Starbucks, and now this killer,” Chip shook his head. “Springswell is going to shit.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about,” came a shaky squeak from down the bar. “Ain’t no one person who did that, no sir.”

Eustice sat in the shadows of the bar, twisting a sugar cube on a spoon. He had aged like a tree—gnarled, with plenty of knots—and covered his face with a stained-yellow beard and a wide, leather brimmed hat. Strange thing about Eustice was that looked like he’d have the voice of an ox and the growl of a lion, but instead all that came out were pitchy whistles and a cracked falsetto.

“Yeah?” I said, feeling apathetic enough to humor him. “Who did it, then?”

“Not a *who*,” Eustice croaked. “A *what*. It’s the Moon Folk.”

That got my attention. “What d’you mean? Like aliens?”

“I mean *Moon Folk*. Come down here from the moon, yes sir. They feast on the flesh of mankind...chew you up with two sets of teeth and swallow you down.”

Two sets of teeth. Eustice was crazy, but his imagination wasn't that big. He'd seen it, just like I'd seen it. I shifted closer and dropped my voice an octave. "You've seen them? These...Moon Folk."

"*Seen them!*" He squeaked frantically. "They've seen *me!* All of me. They took me up in one of their ships, poked and prodded me like goddamn cattle."

I hesitated. "Did they...?"

He squinted half-lidded eyes at me. "Did they what?"

"Y'know. In the rear."

"Son, there ain't no words to describe what they did to me."

I swallowed down my beer. He crunched his sugar cube before smacking his lips over his Old Fashioned.

"Why'd they let you go?"

"Well," he said, after a pause, "I reckon one of them took a fancy to me. Said I had the voice of an angel."

"Huh." I took a swallow from my drink. "How do you kill them?"

He stared at me—watery, yellowed eyes. And then a low smile spread across his mouth.

"You seen something, boy?"

"I—"

Jed clasped my shoulder and sat next to me. "Knew I'd find you here. What're you old men talking about?"

"Moon—"

"—shine," I finished. "He's giving me one of his recipes."

Jed leaned on the bar as Chip and squinted at Eustice. "You put lemon in it?"

"Moonshine!" Eustice squeaked like a panicked mouse. "It ain't actually from the moon. Moon Folk can't stand it. They love Starbucks. Hate moonshine."

"I need to catch up," Jed said and swallowed back a shot.

“What’re you doing here?” I asked him.

“Terry’s out with Trin tonight,” he scoffed. “Weird, if you ask me. Taking her for coffee.”

“Coffee?” That didn’t sound like Trin. Or Terry. *Unless—*

Terry shrugged. “Yeah. The new Starbucks—where’re you going?”

I jumped off my stool and made a dash for the door. “I’ll be back!”

Trin’s door swung open under my fist. “Trin?” The place was a disaster—the bookshelf overturned, the table broken in half. Cuckoo clock on the floor. *Cu-ckoo!*

“Trin!” I called out. “Bryce!” I looked in the kitchen, then her bedroom and—stopped. Her large standing closet loomed in the corner.

I flung open the closet doors. Bryce, curled up in a ball, pointed his water gun at me. Squirted.

Relief hit me like a runaway bull. I lifted him up and he hung limply from my arms. “Aw, shit...you okay?”

A little nod.

“Where’s your mama?”

“The alien man took her.”

Confirmed: *Terry was one of them.*

“Where’re they going?” I asked.

“Stars,” he said. Then pointed up to the ceiling.

“C’mon,” I said. “Let’s go rescue Mama.”

My truck clunked and rattled and lurched to a stop at the blinking red traffic light. The daylight had burned out of the sky, but I still scanned the side of the road, trying to find traces of Terry and Trin.

“Stars,” Bryce said, and my gaze followed his pointed finger to the Starbucks. It was dark inside the coffee shop, but every now and then, a burst of light shot through the windows like lightening.

I jerked the truck into park. “Listen,” I told Bryce. “You stay. Okay? I’m gonna go in, get mommy, and get back. I’ll be back before you can say Jumping Jack Flash.”

“Jumping—”

“Don’t say it.” With that, I pushed out the truck door and shut it behind me.

The Starbucks was locked, and the large glass walls were dark. I cupped my hands over the glass and could see chairs stacked on tables, emptiness. Something was humming, though, loudly, and then—

Another flash. Illuminating the closed Employees Only door. And then all went dark again.

One brick and a million shards of glass later, I was in. The Employees Only door was unlocked and I quietly, slowly pulled it open and stepped through just as another flash of light blinded me.

I blinked as the light dimmed. A spacecraft the size of a monster truck hummed. A line of lights pulsed around the head of it, building for another flash.

The whole room smelled strongly of coffee beans. And something else, mustier. Alongside the walls were huge vats of coffee beans. I quickly slipped behind one so I could glance around it and try to spot any other life. As I peaked around, my hand gripped an opening in the vat and felt something mushy. I pulled back and found another hand reaching out for mine. Only this one stopped at the wrist—dead. Bits and pieces of human flesh mixed in with black coffee grinds.

“It’s people,” I heard myself say. “Mocha frappe latte is people.”

And then a shadow spilled over me and everything went black.

The humming flash woke me up and I squinted, blinking at the spaceship looming in front of me. My arms felt numb and it took a second of struggling to realize they were tied behind me.

“You’re a goddammit idiot, Lon,” Trin growled. I glanced over my shoulder to see tufts of her hair, back-to-back.

“I was rescuing you,” I told her.

“Some good that did. Can’t you do anything right?”

“I’m working on it.”

“Incoming,” she muttered.

A shadow fell over me right before the spaceship emitted another flash of light. I blinked away spots and a man came into view, leaning over me.

“I’m sorry about this,” Terry said.

“No you ain’t,” I spat. I could see the “Long Island” couple lingering in the spaceship’s shadow, watching with disinterest.

He gazed longingly at the thudding spaceship. “It’s a long journey home,” he said, wistfully. “We’ll need something to eat on the trip.”

Trin’s a snack. I’m leftovers. Another flash of light—they were coming faster, like the ship was counting down, charging itself up for liftoff. I shifted against the blinds, straining the elasticity of my shoulders.

“So you’re leaving Earth?” Trin said.

“To deliver a message that Earth is ready for a new order.” Terry sighed. “You humans are weak. Compliant. You’ll accept our changes without any real resistance as long as we give the colonization effort a catchy jingle and call it *green friendly*.”

“We’ll put up a little fuss,” I said.

He smiled. “On second thought,” Terry said, “Two of you would be too much trouble. We only need one of you alive.” He jerked his chin and the Long Island couple approached, opening their mouths, jaws unhinging. I could see a second pair of teeth preparing to strike.

Trin swore and we both fought against the unyielding ropes.

“Trin?” I said, breaking into a bad sweat.

“Yeah?”

“I’m sorry for fooling around with Lacey-Ann. And other things.”

“Don’t worry about it,” she said, voice sharp with panic.

“Also I love you.”

“Lon?”

“Yeah?”

“I ain’t gonna die in fucking Starbucks.”

The aliens retracted, their heads snapping up to attention. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw—

“*Pew! Pew!*” Bryce. Cowboy hat lopsided on his head. Shooting his water gun at the two aliens. Water gun filled with moonshine.

I remembered Eustice’s words: *They love Starbucks. Hate moonshine.*

“That’s my boy!” I hollered at Bryce. “Keep shooting them!”

The aliens screeched as steam hissed from their skin and they wrinkled, drying up.

“Come over here and help Mommy up,” Trin said once they fell, twitching.

Bryce lowered his weapon and scurried over to us. Trin turned her back to him so he could tug her arms free. Only he didn’t get far. Terry, suddenly, reared up behind him.

“*Bryce! Move!*” I barked, but not quickly enough. Terry scooped him up, and his cowboy hat tumbled to the ground—

A shot rang out, followed quickly by a flash of light. When the spots in front of my eyes faded, I could see the red dot between Terry’s eyes before he crumpled.

“Asshole,” Trin said, lowering her gun.

“Help me up,” I said.

She got my binds free and I could feel the blood rushing back to my fingers. I lifted up Bryce's cowboy hat, fixed it back on his head, and looked him in the eyes. "You did good, kid. Listen, you're my son and I'm proud of you. Y'got that?"

Bryce just nodded.

"That supposed to happen?" Trin said, eyes on the spaceship. It hummed loudly now, lights blinked on and off. The small, open door at the bottom began to close. Preparing for take off. Not good. If it got to where it was going, then what? Then the next wave of aliens would be a hell of a lot harder to clear.

"I'll be right back," I said, launching forward.

"What're you doing?" Trin asked.

"Something stupid."

And, with that, I raced to the ship and dove into the entrance, right before it snapped shut.

The ship itself was *small*, and I had to belly-crawl my way through the narrow tunnel, surrounded by open wires and pipes, wishing my beer gut were a little tighter. A sudden rising feeling came over me, like in an elevator. I got the sinking feeling I was airborne.

I followed the lights to a console of some sort, lighting up in places. "Alright..." I shifted on my elbows to find some rhyme or reason. I didn't own a computer, could barely text. And now I had to land a spacecraft. No big deal.

"Y'gotta have an off button here somewhere," I muttered as I jabbed a couple buttons. The ship shook and jerked to the side. The lopsidedness made me queasy and I swore under my breath as I tried another button. I felt myself even out and jerk forward, a vibration ringing through me as the ship hit something. Maybe broke through. It was hard to tell much of anything from inside—all I could feel was myself turning, twisting, rising.

"*Down*. Where's the down button?" I slammed the console. How high was I? Above the building? Above the clouds? This thing ran a lot smoother than my truck and I couldn't get my bearings in it. I was sweating, hot lights beating down on me.

“*Fuck it.*” I wasn’t good at negotiations anyhow. I twisted in my spot, grabbed wires, pipes, whatever I could reach, and started ripping. A cold jet of purple liquid sprung out at me and I coughed, reaching for another one, yanking. The lights flickered, powering down, a good sign. I grabbed another wire, ripping it and—

The ship sputtered, then went quiet. I felt it careening in a fast spin. I was rolling, diving, and finally—

Hitting dirt.

Smoke billowed up around me. I pushed upwards where the top of the ship was loose and busted out. Lights blinked and died around me; one of the open pipes hissed as I pushed out of the damaged ship, finding open sky.

I dragged myself out of the wreckage, coughing smoke, my shirt soaked wet. My boots met black asphalt as I bent over my knees, wheezing, pain and adrenaline vibrating through me. I could see the wrecked ship behind me—a mess of metal that finally gave its last, spinning whirl and shut down completely. *Mission accomplished.*

I spat on the ground and looked up. A sign flickered and buzzed above me.

Molly’s. I’d somehow managed to park the spaceship in *Molly’s* parking lot.

Not a bad parking job, either. Better than I did with my truck.

Well. Why not.

The bell above the door chimed. I dragged myself into the bar with one shoe-squelching wet, leaving purple marks against the wooden floors. I spotted Eustice asleep at the end of the bar, Jed in his usual spot, watching at the football game overhead. I slid onto the barstool beside him—nodded, grunted, “Hey.”

“What’s that?” Jed said, poking at the purple ooze on my jacket.

“Alien jizz,” I responded. Chip slid me a beer. I thanked him and put it to my lips. Tasted cold and crisp and went down like Heaven.

“Smells like shit,” Jed spat, eyes back on the game.

A few minutes later, the bell rang again. Trin slipped into the bar stool beside me, Bryce in her lap.

I turned to her. “Can I get you a drink?”

“You gotta ask?”

The bartender tossed two beers more our way. Bryce chewed on the end of his moonshine-laced water gun.

“Fuckin’ aliens,” I said.

“Fuckin’ aliens,” Trin said and we clinked beers.