

**How I Proposed To My Wife:**

**AN ALIEN**

**SEX STORY**



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SEX STORY**

JOHN SCALZI

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*How I Proposed to My Wife: An Alien Sex Story*

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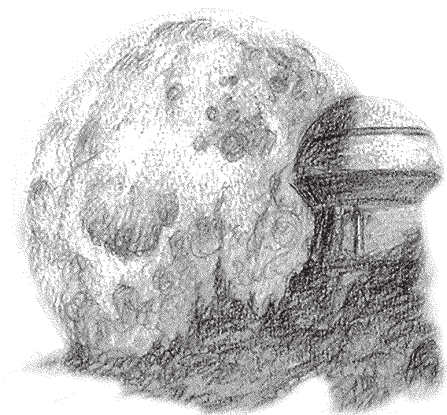
PO Box 190106

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[www.subterraneanpress.com](http://www.subterraneanpress.com)







**E**veryone wants to know how I proposed to Claire. Well, it's complicated. I have to set the scene, and the scene begins in the office of Ben Rosenwald, editor-in-chief of *New World Man* magazine, during the monthly story-planning meeting.

"All right, everyone," Rosenwald said, as the meeting lurched to its close. "Time to pick an alien story."

There was an audible groan in Rosenwald's office as the editorial staff registered what I gathered was its ritual disapproval. I was wedged into the corner of the office, taking notes on how the meetings were run and doing my best to keep a low profile while I was getting my bearings. It was my second week on the job—low man on the staff writer totem pole.

"Yes, yes, yes," Rosenwald said, mockingly, to the groan. "Poor, poor set-upon editorial staff. How *horrible* it is for you to have to write something about aliens every month. It's almost as horrible as having an actual *job*. You know, one where

you're required to *lift* something, or ask people if they want *fries* with that."

"Jesus, Ben," said Nick Venice, the music editor. "Don't you ever get sick of it? Every goddamn month, another story about aliens."

"Of course I get sick of it," Rosenwald said. "Like I give a crap about the Durangs, or the Cli, or the Sefhuans. But, look, people—"

"—'It's Our Thing,'" the editorial staff mumbled with profound lack of enthusiasm.

"It's our thing. Yes," Rosenwald said. "*Playboy* has boobies, *New Yorker* has smug little cartoons, *New World Man* magazine has its monthly goddamn story on what it's like to be an alien. If we didn't have that, Nick, we'd be out of business and you'd be back to doing whatever it was you did before I hired you." Rosenwald paused, thoughtfully. "What *were* you doing before I hired you, Nick?"

"I was writing a novel," Nick said.

"No, what were you *really* doing," Rosenwald said.

Nick squirmed in his seat and mumbled something into his neck.

"I'm sorry, Nick, I didn't quite *catch* that," Rosenwald said.

"I said I walked dogs," Nick said.

"Oh, *that's* right," Rosenwald said. "You and your shiny creative writing degree from Vassar were scooping poo from the butt of executive canines."

"I went to Sarah Lawrence," Nick said.

"It doesn't matter which small, expensive college you pissed away your parents' home equity to get a useless degree



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from, Nick,” Rosenwald said. “The point is without the monthly alien story, you’d still be walking the dogs and taking your WriteMate to the coffeeshop to convince the baristas you were all *sensitive*. So let’s have a little *respect* for the monthly alien story, if you please.”

“Not that trashing Nick isn’t fun,” said Debbie Austin, the managing editor, “But if we actually want to end the meeting, we need to pick a story and a writer.”

“We could do another sports piece,” said Jerry Sims. “I have a friend whose wife works at Parkerson. You know, where the alien kids go to school. She says the Sefhuan kids there have a sport where they throw daggers at each other.”

“Like mumblytey-peg?” Debbie asked.

“I don’t even know what that is,” Jerry said. “But Sandy said these kids chuck the daggers right at each other’s heads. There are knife gouges in the gym walls.”

“We just did a sports article two months ago,” Rosenwald said. “And it was awful.”

“It wasn’t that bad,” Jerry said. He’d written it.

“It sure *was*,” Rosenwald said. “And anyway, we need to go in an entirely new direction. How long has it been since we did an alien sex piece?”

All eyes turned to Ted Winston, Rosenwald’s assistant and NWM’s unofficial archivist. “That depends,” he said. “Are we talking same species alien sex, alien sex with aliens from different species, or alien sex with humans?”

“Alien-human sex,” Rosenwald said. “That sounds like a winner.”

“Thirteen months ago,” Winston said. “Well, sort of. It

wasn't really human-alien sex. It was more like humans with humans dressed up like aliens."

"Now I remember," Rosenwald said. "Also: *Ick*. Who wrote that?"

"I did," said Brenda Jones, directly in front of me.

"How was that for you?" Rosenwald asked.

"I may never be clean again," Brenda said.

"Hmmm," Rosenwald said. "Maybe something a little less squick-inducing. What do we have on alien courtship?"

"Courtship?" Winston said. "Actual rituals, or just dating?"

"Either," Rosenwald said. "Or actually, just the dating part."

"You know, I don't think we've got anything on that," Winston said.

"We could do that," Debbie said. "I have an old college roommate who's high up in the Xenology department at Columbia. She'd probably know all about that."

Rosenwald waved his hand irritably. "No academics. Our readers like models and tech toys. They don't give a crap about what some PhD has to say about anything and you know it. I have a better idea. One of you should date some aliens."

"Excuse me?" Nick said. "Date an alien?"

"Why not?" Rosenwald said.

"Is it legal?" Nick said.

"Ted?" Rosenwald said.

"Legal in every state but Alabama," Winston said. "There it'll get you 15 months."

"For dating?" Rosenwald said.

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“Well, no,” Winston said. “For sexual relations. The state legislature refuses to recognize aliens as sentient, so consorting with one of them is technically bestiality.”

“Alabama,” Rosenwald said, and snorted. “What a shit hole. Look, I don’t want anyone to *screw* an alien, I just want one of you to go on a date with one. You know, dinner and a show. Or whatever their version of dinner and a show is.”

“How would you suggest we go about setting up a date?” Debbie said. “I don’t think any of us want to put up a personal ad looking for an alien partner. That sort of thing follows you around.”

“I have friends at the embassies,” Rosenwald said. “I’m sure we can get some staffer from at least a couple of them to go out on a date. Alien interns. Whatever. So. Who wants this one?” There was a distinct lack of raised hands. “What about it, Brenda?” Rosenwald asked.

“Hell, no,” Brenda said. “I did my time on the alien sex beat.”

“It’s the alien courtship beat,” Rosenwald said.

“Close enough,” Brenda said. “No way. You can fire me.”

“Nick?” Rosenwald said.

“I don’t think my wife would appreciate it,” Nick said.

“You’re married?” Rosenwald asked.

“To a barista,” Nick said.

“Well, that’s an awkward conversational nugget,” Rosenwald said.

“Give it to the new guy,” Jerry said, and pointed over to me. “He hasn’t done an alien story yet.”

And here’s where I enter the story.

Rosenwald turned to me. “Charlie. Yes. The second week’s not too early to take on something like this. You’re not married.”

“Well, no,” I said. “I do have a girlfriend.” That would be Claire.

“Is it serious?” Rosenwald said.

“We live together,” I said.

“I lived with my first wife for six years, and according to her, I wasn’t serious about it the whole time,” Rosenwald said.

“I think we’re pretty serious,” I said. In fact, I’d been trying to figure out a memorable way to propose. “I don’t know how she’d feel about me dating an alien.”

“Hmmm,” Rosenwald said. “Do you like Italian?”

“What?” I asked. “Sure. Why?”

“I’m going to get you a reservation tonight at Little Gino’s,” Rosenwald said. “Take your girlfriend, have a nice dinner on the magazine, and convince her that you’re not going to leave her for an alien. Fair enough?”

Little Gino’s wasn’t just some Italian place; it was the trendiest restaurant in a city of trendy restaurants. If I called to get a reservation on my own, I would get a hearty chuckle out of the Maitre d’ before he hung up on me. I wasn’t entirely sure I even had clothes that would be appropriate. “That would be fine,” I said.

“Great,” Rosenwald said. “7:30. I’ll call Gino and take care of it.”

“Hey,” Nick said. “I’ve done an alien story before. How come *I* didn’t get a reservation at Little Gino’s?”

“Christ, Nick,” Rosenwald said. “I saved you from a life of

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shoveling dog shit. I think I'm all paid up, don't you? Now all of you, get out of my office. I've got calls to make."



"They want you to do what now?" Claire asked.

We were sitting at a table at Little Gino's. The food was perfect. Claire looked perfect. I had managed to find a sports jacket that was marginally acceptable. It would have been the perfect place to propose, except for the little fact that I was asking Claire for permission to date other creatures.

"They want me to go on a date with some aliens," I said. "For a story."

"A date," Claire said. "With a bunch of aliens at once, or one at a time?"

"I think they want me to do the dates sequentially, one alien at a time," I said.

Claire spun her linguini on her fork. "I told you you should have taken that PR job with the hospital." Claire was an internist at St. Joe's downtown. "The pay was better. And you'd have health insurance."

"I'm dating a doctor," I said, and smiled. "I think I'm covered. Anyway, I don't want to do hospital PR for a living."

"Oh, and dating aliens is so much *better*," Claire said. She was teasing but she was also slightly annoyed. "That's a story every boy dreams of writing."

"I'm not going to run off with one, you know," I said, spearing one of my eggplant ravioli.

Claire coughed behind her linguini at that. "I'm not

*jealous*, Charlie,” she said. “I figure if you didn’t sleep with Chuani back in college you don’t have a xenophile thing going.”

I looked up at that. “How do you know Chuani made a pass at me?” I asked.

Claire crossed her eyes, fetchingly. “Please,” she said. “Chuani told me about it after it happened. After you turned her down she had three Long Island ice teas and then banged on my door, wailing and apologetic and swearing she’d never do it again. Then she threw up the ice teas and passed out on my floor. A classic moment all around. Chuani was a sordid little thing, you know. She slept with Alison once.”

“Your roommate?” I asked, surprised. Alison was *very* conservative.

“Oh yeah,” Claire said. “Another Long Island ice tea-related incident, I suspect.”

“Wow,” I said. “Lesbian xenophilia.”

“I don’t think they got very far,” Claire said. “I came back to the room and they were both semi-naked and comatose. I’d guess they got as far as nipple play before the lights went out. Well. Nipples for Alison. Not really sure what you call those things on Chuani.” She fed herself the linguini on her fork.

“Still,” I said. “Not something Alison would want to get around. Experimentation like that wouldn’t be looked on very positively where she works.” Alison was currently working as a congressional staffer for a Republican representative from Provo.

Claire shrugged and swallowed. “It was college,” she said. “That’s what college is *for*. Which brings us back to *your* current thing.”

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“What about it?” I said.

“Well, what are they going to want you to do on these dates?” Claire asked. “If all you’re going to do is go out and get coffee, that’s one thing. But there’s not much of a story in that, is there?”

“Ben said he doesn’t expect me to attempt sex with any of them, if that’s what you’re getting at,” I said.

“That’s what he *says*,” Claire said, and pointed her fork at me. “But you know he wouldn’t *mind*. It makes good copy.”

“I don’t care if it won me the Pulitzer,” I said. “I’m not going to have sex with an alien. For one thing, I wouldn’t know where to start. That was part of the problem with Chuani.”

“Ah ha,” Claire said. “*Now* the truth comes out.”

“Seriously, Claire,” I said. “No alien sex.”

“No sex,” Claire said.

“No sex,” I said.



“Are we to have sex?” Ttan asked me, as we headed for dinner.

“Uh,” I said. “Why do you ask?”

“My boss suggested that was to be expected with you,” Ttan said. “And I am ready to do my part for the Sefhuan delegation.”

*Lie back and think of England*, I thought. “It won’t be necessary,” I said.

“Are you sure?” Ttan said. “I lubricated my under-cara-pace just in case.”

I thought of all the many ways I so did not want to follow that comment to its logical conclusion. “I’m sure,” I said. “But I thank you for your willingness.”

“Okay, good,” Ttan said, and visibly appeared to relax. “Because, no offense, but you’re really not my type.”

“Because I’m human,” I suggested.

“Because you’re a guy,” Ttan said. “I’m not gay.”

“You’re a guy?” I asked.

“I’m a dominant,” Ttan said. “Sefhuan don’t have sexes like humans do. But we have positions.” He held up a segmented claw to tick off the categories. “There’s dominant, sub-dominant, passive and neutral. We don’t usually have sex with other Sefhuans of the same position. Our diplomatic protocol tells us to treat human males as dominant. So we’d have the same position. That would make having sex with you gay sex. And I’m not gay.”

“So it’s okay to have sex with me because I’m human, but not because I’m a guy,” I said.

“Basically,” Ttan said. “I mean, I *could* still do it. I can go sub-dominant if I have to. Or you could play a passive role. But I don’t think you’d really want that. I studied your people’s anatomy before our date. It doesn’t really work. Not without trauma.”

“I’d like to avoid trauma,” I said.

“Right,” Ttan said, and then his antennae shot up. “Hey, how hungry are you? Because I’m not really hungry at all, and at the Sefhuan Athletic Club they’re having a jard competition tonight. If we hurry, we can get there before it starts.”

“Is that something you’d do on a normal date?” I asked.



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“Sure,” Ttan said. “We all love a good game of jard. You and I might even get a chance to play.”

“I don’t know about that,” I said. “I’ve never played jard before.”

“You’ve played darts before, right?” Ttan said.

“Sure,” I said.

“Same concept,” Ttan said.



Claire pulled back the curtain of the emergency room station where I was being stitched up. “Your date *stabbed* you?” She said.

I winced as the intern working on my shoulder plunged the needle back into the skin. “I think you have to be holding the knife for it to be considered an actual stabbing,” I said. “The knife that did this was thrown at me.”

“Your date *threw a knife* at you?” Claire amended.

“We were playing a game,” I said.

“That involved *knives*?” Claire said.

“We were playing jard,” I said. “It’s a game where the Sefhuans throw daggers at each other and get points for how they throw and where on their opponent’s carapace the dagger lands.”

Claire pointed to my shoulder. “I think you might have noticed that you don’t have a hard carapace *before* someone started flinging knives at you.”

“Should I give you guys a moment?” the intern said, to me and Claire. “I don’t really want to get in the middle of this.”

“Hi, Carl,” Claire said. “You’re fine. Sorry. How is his shoulder?”

“It’ll be fine,” Carl said. “It’s a flesh wound. The knife missed the artery. If you want to you can take over.”

“I’d better not,” Claire said. “There’d likely be another stabbing.”

“For the record, I won the jard game,” I said. “Ttan was disqualified because he injured his opponent.”

“Oh, well, that’s just great,” Claire said. “You’re in the hospital with a knife wound, but at least you’re a *winner*.”

“Ttan felt really bad about it,” I said. “Although I think he was more worried about how much trouble he’d get in with his boss for suggesting we play the game.”

“Are you going to have him charged for assault, at least?” Claire asked.

“Come on, Claire,” I said. “That’d be like charging someone for assault because they knocked you down while playing basketball.”

“You can’t get *stabbed* with a basketball,” Claire said. “Look at you. You go out for a date and you come back with trauma.”

“It would have been worse if I slept with him,” I said.

“Yeah, okay, I think I *am* going to leave now,” Carl said.

“Relax, Carl,” Claire and I both said. We were both quiet for a minute while Carl industriously worked on my shoulder and tried his best not to hear anything more.

“When’s your next stupid date thing?” Claire said, finally.

“I have one tomorrow,” I said. “With a Cli.”

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“What’s the chance of grievous bodily harm with that one?” Claire said.

“Pretty low,” I said. “They’re pacifists.”



“It’s not that we’re pacifists, actually,” Deputy Ambassador Fad Ronen said to me as I recounted my previous date and Claire’s reaction. “It’s just that as a people we’re not very excitable. All the violence and wars and passion you other intelligent species have. We’re just not much for it.” Ronen led me from the foyer of the Cli embassy into the main portion of the building.

“Why is that?” I asked.

“Well, I think at least some of it relates to the reason you’re here,” Ronen said. “We’re not a sexually competitive species. We don’t fight over mates or do reproductive displays or things like that. Don’t get me wrong. It’s all very interesting to us to watch the rest of you perform them and to see how it integrates with your psychology. Back on Clitar a native-language staging of *Romeo and Juliet* has been running continually for 20 years. And we’re the biggest consumer of human romantic comedies outside of Earth. That’s why we were all very excited that you’re doing this story.” It led me into its office.

“If you don’t do reproductive displays, how do you date?” I asked.

“We don’t,” Ronen said, and walked over to a cabinet and opened it. “At least, not like you do. What we do is more of a communal thing. And as coincidence has it, this evening is our monthly get-together here at the embassy. So that’s good

timing for you. Ah, here we are.” Ronen came out of the cabinet with two bowling ball-sized dirt-colored spheres. It gave one to me. “You’re going to need this.”

I took it; it was light and sticky. “What is it?” I asked.

“It’s a milt ball,” Ronen said. “From one of our junior diplomats who had to go to Geneva for a conference. Shaa will be pleased you’ll be able to stand in. Come on, we don’t want to be late, and everyone is waiting on us.” It headed toward the door; I followed.

A few minutes later we were in a small circular room with at least twenty other Cli. The room was blindingly white and tiled; in the center was a low table and along the wall was a contoured groove. My suspicion it was a bench of some sort was confirmed when some of the Cli began to unfold themselves into it.

Ronen introduced me to a few of the other Cli and then pointed at the center table, where several of the milt balls were resting. “We need to put our balls there and take a seat,” it said. We dropped our balls and then settled in against the wall.

As we took our seat I pointed back to the table with the milt balls. “Do those balls have some sort of ritual significance?” I asked.

“Ritual? No,” Ronen said. “It’s purely reproductive.”

“Pardon me?” I said.

“They’re *milt* balls,” Ronen said. “We Cli are hermaphrodites. We produce sperm and eggs. The eggs stay in our bodies and stored here in a spicule belt”— it pointed to a stippled region across its abdomen— “and the sperm get excreted in a milt jelly. We can either provide the sperm fresh to a mating

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partner, who applies it to its spicules, or store it for some time in a milt ball. The milt in the ball dehydrates over time and that causes the sperm to become inactive. It can stay for years that way before it goes bad.”

My brain was still trying to get around the fact I’d been touching alien sperm. “So what’s going on here, exactly?” I asked.

“It’s a fertilization party,” Ronen said. “As I mentioned, we Cli don’t really have any sort of reproductive competition; we prefer to do our fertilization communally. That assures a good mix of genetics for our people as a whole. So everyone here at the embassy collects their sperm for a month, and then at the fertilization party we distribute the sperm equally. That’s why everyone’s put a milt ball on the table.”

“But how does the sperm get distributed from the table to you?” I asked.

“We just add water,” Ronen said.

“Water?” I asked, alarmed.

Ronen looked over at me. “Oh dear,” it said. “I may have made a faux pas. We Cli don’t wear clothes. I should have told you it would be advisable to bring a swimsuit.”



“Oh, come on!” Jaaanta said. “You can’t *stop* the story there. I have to hear the rest of it.”

“I don’t think so,” I said, and ran my finger over the top of the beer glass. “I don’t think I’ve had nearly enough to drink to spill the rest of the story.”

“This is just a shameless attempt to get me to buy you a beer,” Jaaanta said.

“Maybe,” I allowed.

“Outrageous,” she said. “*Outrageous*. I’ll remind you, Charlie, that it is *you* who asked *me* out on a date. Where I come from— and where you come from, I know that much about earth customs— the person who asks the other person out on a date pays. And, I happen to know for a fact you’re on expense account.”

“I am not! I am not,” I said. “I get reimbursed after I file the story. So that Mai Tai you’ve got going there, my fair tentacled friend, is coming straight out of my pocket.”

“Scandalous,” Jaaanta said. “And yet, clearly, I have no choice here, because I have to know what happened. Therefore! I will buy you one beer, but only after you tell me what happens next. If you tell it well, you can get a Guinness. Tell it poorly, and you get Bud Light.”

“I like Bud Light,” I said.

“Oh, don’t tell me that,” Jaaanta said. “I’ve had such a high opinion of you so far.”

“Snob,” I said. “All right. So Ronen says ‘oh dear, I may have made a faux pas,’ and the second he’s done saying that, the ceiling of the room *splits open*, and like an entire swimming pool worth of water of comes pouring down right on top of that table. The milt balls disintegrate like... like *bullion cubes*, and I’m suddenly coated from head to toe in milt broth.”

Jaaanta is laughing so hard she can barely stay on her bar stool. I know how she feels.

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“But that’s not the worst part,” I said.

“Good lord,” Jaaanta said. “How can that *not* be the worst part?”

“Here’s how,” I said. “The worst part is that for the next two days, I smelled like *gravy*.”

Jaaanta whooped and smacked out a tattoo on the bar in delight. “You, my friend, are getting an entire keg of Guinness for that.”

“Why, thank you,” I said. “I’d bow, but I think the vertigo would make me vomit.”

“What, you’re not actually drunk yet, are you?” Jaaanta asked, signaling the bartender for another round.

“No,” I said. “Well maybe. Just a little. But, come *on*. I’ve had a rough week. You don’t know how difficult it is to date aliens.”

“Gee, thanks,” Jaaanta said. “And here I thought I was doing well.”

“You are!” I said. “You’re fabulous. You’re funny and nice and you’re paying for my beer—”

“A whole keg!” Jaaanta said.

“— but you’re the *first*,” I said. “As for the the rest I’ve been stabbed, covered in sperm and covertly baptised.”

“Who tried to baptise you?” Jaaanta asked.

“My date from the Fruden embassy,” I said. “I knew they took their religion seriously, but that one started talking about the Slaving Godhead before we got orderes and was still at it when dessert came. Did you know I am slated to be digested for all eternity?”

“Luckily, you already smell like gravy,” Jaaanta said.

“Well, yes,” I admitted. “But you’re slated to be digested too, let me point out, and you hardly smell of gravy at all. We’re *all* going to be digested, even the saved, which makes you wonder what the point of being saved is, then, doesn’t it?”

“Did you mention this to your date?” Jaaanta asked.

“God, no,” I said. “I just wanted to go home. Anyway, as we walked back to the embassy after dinner, I felt some sprinkles at the back of my neck, and as I turned around I saw her put this little shaker back into her purse. It was a drive-by baptism.”

“It must have been a good date,” Jaaanta said. “Otherwise she would have left you to be digested with the rest of us slobs in the cheap seats. Now you’ll get first-class seating in God’s digestive sac.”

“I’m just worried that now I’m obliged to get digested for all eternity,” I said. “I’m thinking of converting to Catholicism just to hedge my bets.”

Jaaanta snerked. “You’re funny, Charlie,” she said. “I don’t mind telling you I was sort of dreading this date. But I’m actually having fun.”

“It’s the alcohol talking,” I said.

“Sure,” Jaaanta said. “But my alcohol or yours?”

“I don’t know,” I said. “Let’s have some more drinks and ask them.”



“So this is what an alien apartment looks like,” I said.

“The apartment’s not alien,” Jaaanta said. “Just the person



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who lives in it.” She dropped her keys on the coffee table and came over to me, wobbling just a little on her tentacles. “You want a drink?”

“I’ve had way too many,” I said.

“Some coffee, then?” Jaaanta said.

“You drink coffee?” I asked.

“Sure,” Jaaanta said, retreating into the kitchen. “I worship the god Caffeine like any good young sentient being does.”

“Isn’t that weird?” I said. “All the different types of sentient species in the universe, and we’re all different, but we all drink coffee.” I turned and was surprised by a very large abstract painting on wall. “Whoa,” I said.

“We all do a lot of the same things,” Jaaanta said, coming up behind me and putting a tentacle across my shoulder. “We all breathe. We all live. We all die.”

“You’re going pretty deep for me,” I said. “I was just talking about coffee.”

“Sorry, I get philosophical when I’m tipsy,” Jaaanta said. “I also get a little horny.”

“I’d help you with that if I could, but,” I began.

“Okay,” Jaaanta said, and before I could say anything else, my pants were unzipped and a tentacle was wrapped around my penis, massaging it.

“Uh,” I said, and turned somewhat awkwardly toward Jaaanta.

“I’m being forward, aren’t I,” Jaaanta said.

“A bit,” I said.

“You know what’s interesting?” Jaaanta said. “The human penis is actually very close in shape and size to our males’ sexual

organ. It even grows the same way when stimulated.” Jaaanta stimulated, as if to accentuate the point. “The tentacle you have on you now is actually designed to accommodate our males’ organ inside of it. It’s our version of the vagina. How does it feel to you?”

“Uh,” I said.

“You feel good to me,” Jaaanta said.

“Look, Jaaanta,” I said. “I’ve had a really great time with you tonight, but I don’t think I can do this.”

“You *are* doing it,” Jaaanta said. “And from what I can feel, it seems at least part of you isn’t objecting.”

“I mean I *shouldn’t* do this,” I said. “I think we should just stop and call it a night.”

“There’s a small problem,” Jaaanta said.

“What?” I asked.

“My physiology,” Jaaanta said. “Once we’ve gripped on with our receiving tentacle, it doesn’t come off until the act is complete.”

“You’re kidding,” I said.

“Try getting out,” Jaaanta said.

Two minutes later I gave up. “Okay,” I said. “What do I have to do now?”

Jaaanta shrugged off her blouse and led my hand to a tight, flat surface on her chest. “Feel that?” she said. I nodded. “Hit it. Hard.”

“Excuse me?” I said.

“We need the vibration to begin the ovulation process,” Jaaanta said. “Our men use their tentacles to beat on the tympanum here. You can use your hands.”

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“This is so *not* right,” I said. “If I hit a human during sex, they’d cart me off.”

“I’m not human, Charlie,” Jaaanta said. “And I can guarantee that you can’t hit the tympanum as hard as one of our males can. It doesn’t even have nerve endings that receive pain. You literally can’t hurt me. So hit me, Charlie. Bang on that drum.”

I reached my arm back and brought my hand down with a hard smack, feeling the hit resonate in her chest. Jaaanta’s chest made a sound like a bongo; her tentacle squeezed in time.

“Yes,” she said. “More.”



I straggled in at 4:30 am. Claire was up. She looked at my face.

“Oh, Charlie,” she said, sighed, and then went to bed.

I thought that would be the worst of it, until I saw the rash.



Carl pulled back the curtain of the examination room, stopped, and then appeared to look around to see if he could get another intern to take me. Then he came in anyway.

“So, what’s the problem?” he asked.

“I have a rash,” I said.

“Do you know what you got it from?” he asked.

“From fucking an alien,” Claire said, from the other side of the examination room.

Carl paused, glanced over to Claire, who was staring at a wall, arms folded. “Okay,” he said, all business-like. “let’s take a look.” I lowered my sweat pants. Carl stared. “Hmmm,” he said, after a minute. “I think I need a consult.” He moved out of the examination room at speed.

I turned to Claire, who was still resolutely staring at a wall. “I said I was sorry,” I said. “I’ll keep saying it until you believe me. I honestly didn’t intend to have sex with Jaaanta. It just happened.”

“Aaaagh,” Claire said, shaking her arms in frustration. She turned to me. “You are such an idiot. It’s not about you *fucking an alien*, Charlie. Okay? It’s about you not thinking. In a week, you’ve been stabbed, covered in *goo*, baptized and tricked into sex. For what? For a *story*. Where are your *brains*, Charlie? Because a smart person probably would have stopped writing this story after the *first* time he was sent to the hospital.”

“I said I was sorry,” I said.

“I don’t want you to be *sorry*, Charlie,” Claire said. “I want you to *think*. One of the things I love about you is that you’re smart. But for this whole thing it’s like someone took your brain and hid it in the trash can. I know you’re trying to make a good impression at your new job. But I don’t think this really is the way to do that. Do you? Look at you. The rash has moved up your neck, you know.”

I reached a hand up. Claire reached over and stopped me. “For God’s sake, Charlie,” she said. “Don’t touch it.”

The curtain opened again. Carl had returned, with a stumpy man. “This is Dr. Schafer,” he said. “He’s our allergist.”

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Schafer looked at me. “Let me guess,” he said. “She was a Durang.”

“She was,” I said.

“Oh, good,” Dr. Schafer said, and left, Carl trailing behind.

Claire looked at her watch. “My rotation starts in 25 minutes,” she said. “I’m going to catch a shower upstairs before I begin.” She got up. I took her hand.

“I *am* sorry,” I said. “For making you angry with me.”

Claire kissed the top of my head. “Well, I *am* angry,” she said. “But I’ll get over it. But after all this is done, you damn well better not take another story like this. Because then I’ll have to kill you. And then who will I marry? Which is another thing. I think this whole adventure proves I’m with you for better or for worse. You’d better step up on that.”

“I could propose to you now,” I said.

“While you’re covered in a rash from fucking an alien?” Claire said. “I don’t think so, Charlie.” She gave me an affectionate tap aside the head and stepped out of the examining room as Carl and Dr. Schafer came in, Carl bearing a tray loaded down with syringes.

“The good news is that the rash is harmless and we can get rid of it easily with a series of injections,” Dr. Schafer said. “The bad news is that you’re really not going to like where the injections go.”



“Make sure you give us the receipt for your injections,” Debbie Austin said. “Your health insurance won’t

kick in for another three months, but since this was a story-related expense I'll see if I can get Ben to pay out. Same with the stitches."

"Thanks," I said. "Where is Ben, anyway? I wanted to talk to him about the story."

"He's been out all day," Debbie said. "Anyway, you don't talk to him about stories, you talk to me. Are you worried about something?"

"I don't think I can do any more research on this story," I said.

"Because of the hospital visits?" Debbie said. "Those are par for the course. Nick Venice did a story on alien desserts, and ate one that caused him to hallucinate. He thought cars were made out of marshmallow. Actually walked out in front of a bus."

"Nick got hit by a bus?" I asked.

"No, the bus stopped in time," Debbie said. "But then he passed out and broke three teeth on the bumper as he fell. We all have stories like that. Now you know why everyone hates doing the alien stories. But Ben's right: It's our thing. We stopped running them once for two issues and the circulation dropped 40%. We all hate the alien stories, but we hate being unemployed more."

"It's not just the hospital visits," I said. "My girlfriend's tolerance for the story is all used up. Another wacky adventure and I'm going to be unwillingly single."

"Well, you *did* have sex with an alien," Debbie said. "Even for these stories, that's sort of above and beyond."

"You're not helping me," I said.

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Debbie was about to say something but paused when her desk phone rang. Four “uh-huhs” and a glance in my direction later she put the receiver back down. “So, that was Ben,” she said. “Looks like you’re going to talk to him about your story after all. He’s waiting for you.”

“Where is he?” I asked.

“At your apartment,” Debbie said.



I opened the door and there they all were in the living room: My boss, my girlfriend and my alien lover. I stared.

“It’s too late to run,” Ben Rosenwald said. “We’ve already seen you. You might as well come in and close the door.”

“Okay,” I said, closing the door. “I give up. Someone tell me what this is about.”

“I’m killing the story,” Rosenwald said.

“What?” I said. “Why? I got myself sent to the hospital twice for this story, and now you’re going to kill it?”

“It was never going to run,” Rosenwald said. “Sorry, Charlie. It was a cover all along.”

“A cover? A cover for what?” I asked.

“For her,” Claire said, pointing at Jaaanta.

I stared at Claire. “You know what’s going on?” I asked.

“Not until about an hour ago,” she said. “I came home for lunch and they were waiting here for me.”

“To explain what was going on,” Jaaanta said. “And to show my appreciation.”

“For what?” I asked.

“For making my pregnancy possible,” Jaaanta said.

I gaped.

“Relax, Charlie,” Claire said. “You’re not the father.”

“To begin, my name isn’t Jaaanta,” Jaaanta said. “My real name is Ruthant Gornst Ud.”

“And since you’re probably not keeping up with Durang politics,” Rosenwald said, “It helps to know that Ruthant is heir-designate to the Durang crown. Indeed, as is custom, she’ll ascend to the throne after she produces her own heir.”

“And there was the problem,” Jaaanta who was now Ruthant said. “Some time ago my consort had an accident while playing sports. He fell badly and injured his nerve cord. Outwardly he looks fine, but it left his tentacles *very* weak. He was too weak to drum on me. Artificial fertilization is out of the question for various reasons. And I couldn’t have another Durang drum on me to begin the fertilization process; to work his organ would have to be in my receiving tentacle, and that’s adultery.”

“And what we did isn’t?” I asked.

“Not *legally*,” Ruthant said. “Durang law doesn’t recognize cross-species sex as valid.”

“Just like Alabama,” Rosenwald said.

“Performing the mating ritual with you allowed me to prime the physical pump, as it were,” Ruthant said. “Once you started the ovulatory process by drumming on me, I was able to mate with my consort. I’m happy to say I was fertilized almost immediately after you left my apartment. Which, actually, wasn’t my apartment at all. It was just a time-share Ben borrowed for me.”

I turned to Rosenwald. “And you know *her* how?”



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“Actually, I didn’t,” Rosenwald said. “But I know the Secretary of State. Skull and Crossbones, back at Yale. The Durang court needed this done and asked Bill for help, and he wanted it done outside the usual channels in order to keep it quiet. And he knew I had contacts with other embassies because of our monthly alien story. I could make it look like one of my staff was doing another alien story; Ruthant could be snuck on-planet, the deed could be done, and she could sneak off-planet and pregnant with no one the wiser.”

“You’re not worried that someone will figure it out?” I asked.

“Oh, I’m sure someone might,” Ruthant said. “But accusing the heir-designate of adultery is one thing. Accusing her of mating with a human is quite another. There would be riots. And no one would believe the accusation. That is, as long as the humans involved were to keep quiet.”

“And now you know why I’m killing the story,” Rosenwald said.

“You know, you could have just asked me to go along,” I said. “If I knew what was going on I would have said yes.”

“No, you wouldn’t have,” Claire said. “Because you’re involved with me. Your boss was telling me how he had to bribe you with a dinner at Little Gino’s in order to get you to take the story at all. You didn’t tell me he paid for our dinner, incidentally.”

“Sorry,” I said. Claire waved it off.

“We thought it would be best to keep you in the dark as long as possible,” Rosenwald said. “It wasn’t exactly fair to you, but we figured we’d worry about that later.”

“Then I don’t know why you’re telling me at all,” I said. “I know I would have never made the connection.”

“Because I felt guilty,” Ruthant said. “You really are a nice guy, Charlie. And I feel really bad about the strain all of this has put on your relationship with Claire.”

“Not to mention the whole thing with the rash,” Claire said.

“Yes, there’s that, too.” Ruthant allowed. “Also, to be blunt, you’ve made it possible for me to ascend the throne. That needs to be rewarded in some way. And you can’t be rewarded if you don’t know what the reason is.”

“A reward,” I said.

“Well, a combination reward and hush-up money,” Rosenwald said.

“How much?” I asked.

“We were just discussing that with Claire before you came in,” Ruthant said.

I turned to Claire, who had a small smile on her face. “She’s bought a lot of hush-up, Charlie,” Claire said. “Enough for the next two lifetimes.”

“So now you’re okay with this,” I asked Claire.

“‘Okay with it,’ is not the phrase I’d use,” Claire said. “‘Relieved,’ is a little more accurate. If two planetary governments and your boss were actively conspiring to mess with your head, I feel a little better about the fact you were taken in. It says to me that it’s all right that I still think you’re usually a smart guy.”

“Thanks, Claire,” I said. “I love you, too.”

“So we have a deal,” Ruthant said.

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“Not yet,” I said. “I have a condition of my own.”

“What’s that?” Ruthant asked.

“I want to finish the story,” I said.

“I already said I was killing it,” Rosenwald said.

“Don’t kill it,” I said. “People will want to know why you spiked it, and it makes me look bad as the new guy. I’ve visited three other embassies and went on three other dates. We can run with those and just leave out her part of the story.”

“I don’t know,” Rosenwald said. “Only three dates will make for a slim story.”

“So we’ll set up one more date,” I said. “There are lots of alien embassies. Someone will say yes.”

“I don’t know how *I* feel about this,” Claire said.

I turned to Claire. “And I’ll make *you* a deal, Claire. Let me finish this story, and then do me the honor of marrying me and being my wife. And then I swear to you I will never date another alien again, so long as we both shall live.”

Claire put a hand to her mouth. I thought it might be because she was overcome with emotion, but then I heard her laugh behind her hand. “Charlie, you moron,” she said. “You just proposed to me in a way we can never tell anyone about. My mother is going to kill you. *Your* mother is going to kill you.”

And this is why when anyone asks, I tell them that I proposed to my wife Claire on the Eiffel Tower, in Paris, on the trip that we took to celebrate my very first published story in NWM magazine. It’s not true, but it sounds romantic, and at least when we got to the Eiffel Tower I remembered to bring the ring. So it’s true enough.

So why am I telling *you* the truth? Because I think our child should know how it actually happened. It's too soon to tell you, of course. We've only just seen you on the ultrasound. But one day you'll want to know the real story. Here it is.

Don't tell.