

Hurricane Smith and the Aliens

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"The whole plan depends on you, my dear," explained Hurricane Smith as he looked out at the barren, rocky surface of Henry VII. "Are you sure you can appear to be one of the aliens?"

Langtry Lily nodded her assent.

"Well, then I can't see what can go wrong. You make yourself look like one of them, you train your gun on me, and then you present me as a captive. That gets us in the front door, so to speak. Then, once you see who's in charge, you change to appear like him or her, and we see just how much confusion we can cause. I'll have a couple of pistols hidden beneath my space suit. If we play our cards right, we ought to both be able to come through this unscathed."

She stared at him questioningly.

"Unscathed," he repeated. "That means without any serious injuries."

She smiled.

"Just remember," he said, "it's not enough to look the part. You have to stay in character. That means you push me around, you act like I'm your mortal enemy, you never take your eyes off me or stop pointing your pistol at me. I'm Hurricane Smith. That makes me one hell of a feather in your cap."

Another curious stare as she reached up to her head, feeling for a nonexistent cap.

"Just an expression. It means I'm a desirable trophy, one that should get you promoted a few grades." He looked out once more, then back at his wife. "You ready? Then let's go."

She walked to the hatch.

"Wait!" he said. "You haven't changed yet. You still look like Langtry."

She turned to him, and he almost did a double-take at the alien staring at him through the transparent helmet.

"Sonuvabitch, that's perfect! I keep forgetting how fast you can do that!" He paused. "Let me go first, just in case anyone's watching. If they see us both emerging from my ship, we can make up some story about how you snuck aboard and got the drop on me -- but if you climb down first, without keeping your gun trained on me, they'll know it's bullshit."

She stood aside as he walked by her and slowly climbed down to the ground. She joined him a moment later.

"Okay, push the gun in my back as if you're urging me to speed up."

She did as he ordered, and he put his hands in the air and started marching toward the aliens' headquarters. It took him a few strides to adjust to the lighter gravity, but no one noticed either of them until they were within a few hundred yards of the huge protective dome. Then a number of alien soldiers, all heavily armed, raced out and trained their weapons on him. He ignored them, as did Langtry Lily, and continued walking.

Once they reached the dome they paused in the airlock until the readout said that they could remove their helmets. All of them did so, and then Langtry shoved the gun into his back again and he began walking

forward again.

They marched toward a small building, and as they neared it an officer emerged. He took in the situation at once, and a smile spread across his alien face.

"Hurricane Smith!" he said. "This is our lucky day! Do you know how much the Monarchy will pay to get you back?"

"They won't pay you any more than they're offering to certain select bounty hunters," answered Smith.

"Oh yes they will," said the officer. "There's a shortage of heroes these days, or hadn't you heard?"

"You must be thinking of Catastrophe Baker, or maybe the Cyborg de Milo," said Smith. "I gave up the hero business when I got married."

The alien threw back his head and laughed. "You?" he said disbelievingly. "Hurricane Smith, the most prolific deflowerer of alien females in the galaxy? What did you marry -- a gigantic horned toad, or perhaps a twenty-legged spider that ate her last husband for breakfast?"

Smith shot a quick glance at Langtry Lily. She still appeared in alien form, but her expression was anything but amused.

"I married the most wonderful female anyone's ever seen," answered Smith quickly. "A creature of rare and delicate beauty, exquisite manners, remarkable empathy -- and above all, iron-clad self-control." He emphasized the last four words for Langtry's benefit.

"Are you describing her or proffering a legal brief for her?" asked the officer.

"If I was too forceful, I beg your forgiveness," said Smith. "Write it off to love."

"Well, I'm certainly glad for your sake that you've known love, since you're about to become intimately acquainted with pain and degradation while we're waiting for the Monarchy to make an offer for what's left of you."

"If you really plan to ransom me, you'd be much better advised to feed me and treat me well," said Smith. "The Monarchy doesn't buy damaged goods."

The officer looked around. "Do you see the Monarchy anywhere?" he said with an amused laugh. "They won't know you're damaged."

"Not only won't they know I'm damaged," replied Smith. "They won't even know it's me."

"Oh, yes they will. When the time comes we'll cut off a finger or gouge out an eye and send it to them, and they can match it against your fingerprint or your retinagram."

"How very foresightful of you," said Smith dryly.

"I graduated at the top of my class in officers' school," was the reply.

"What did you study -- sadism, with maybe a minor in rape and pillaging?"

The officer laughed again. "You have a wonderful sense of humor, Hurricane Smith! I'm almost sorry that we're going to have to torture you."

"Who says you have to?"

"You capture the enemy, you torture him. Those are the rules."

"Ignore them."

"Actually, I'm not that sorry."

The officer signaled to two of his soldiers to bind Smith's hands behind his back. As they approached, Langtry Lily tensed noticeably.

"Don't worry, soldier," the officer said to her. "You'll be prominently mentioned in my report."

Smith's protective suit was quite heavy, and there wasn't much give to it. As the soldiers pulled his hands behind his back, he winced in pain.

An instant later, Langtry Lily hissed and spat at the two soldiers. She hit one in the face, the other on the chest. The liquid sizzled and began burning holes in them.

"I don't know what he is, but he's not one of us!" cried the officer. "Kill him!"

Smith dove for the officer and grabbed his weapon, but it was too late. Half a dozen laser beams and energy pulses had ripped through Langtry's body. Her outline seemed to blur for a moment, and then, as she lay dead on the ground, she was once again a Peloponne.

"You bastards!" bellowed Smith. "That was the woman I loved!"

He killed the officer, then used his corpse as a shield and turned his pistol on the others. The element of surprise was on his side, and he killed half a dozen of them in the first few seconds of battle, but the rest quickly regrouped, found cover, and began shooting back.

The corpse couldn't absorb many more beams before it fell apart, and Smith backed away, looking for some place to make a stand.

And then, before any of the enemy knew what was happening, they were mowed down from behind by a female alien carrying a laser rifle. It was doubtful that any of them ever even saw who killed them.

When it was over she stepped out of the shadows and approached Smith, stepping over the fallen bodies.

She gestured toward Langtry. "Was that your wife?"

"Yes," said Smith, not knowing whether or not to lower his weapon.

"I thought so." The alien female looked at him. "I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault."

"They make me ashamed to be a member of the same race." She walked over to him. "I know how you feel. I lost a loved one in battle."

"You did?"

She nodded. "We have that much in common."

Smith eyed her up and down. "Maybe we have even more."

"You think so?"

"Come back to my ship with me and we'll explore the possibilities."

"If they find me, they'll execute me as a deserter."

"If you don't leave with me, they'll execute you as a traitor," noted Smith.

She sighed. "I suppose you're right."

They began walking to the airlock.

"You know," said Smith after a moment, "you're really quite attractive."

"But I'm not even a member of your race."

"We have to look beyond that if there's ever going to be peace in the galaxy."

"Those are my feelings exactly!" she said. "But they sound so strange coming from a warrior like you."

"I'm no warrior."

"What are you, then?" she asked.

He put an arm around her as they continued walking, and found the texture of her alien skin oddly exciting.

"I prefer to think of myself as a peacemaker," said Hurricane Smith.