

Sahara del Rio and the Aliens

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Sahara del Rio's ship settled into orbit around Henry VII, and she ordered her computer to scan for life forms.

It had been a long time since she'd seen any military action, and in the past she'd usually been a spectator. When Earth was attacked by the Sett Empire, all aliens -- Sett and non-Sett alike -- had been rounded up and placed in camps until the brief battle was over.

In fact, she'd spent a lot of time in places she didn't much like. Bigotry was outlawed within the Monarchy, but there were always "legal exceptions" and "extraordinary situations". Like the fact that she couldn't purchase a first-class spaceliner fare anywhere in the spiral arm. Or that she had to stay in the Alien Quarter on Spica II. Or that she was not allowed to dine in The Fatted Calf, Deluros VIII's finest restaurant.

Oh, it wasn't bigotry, she was assured. Take the spaceliner, for instance. The seats were created for humans, not humanoids such as herself. The company had received so many complaints that humanoid aliens found the seats uncomfortable that they no longer offered them to any race but Man, since they constantly had to refund the price of the ticket.

("Does that mean if I'm uncomfortable in the economy class seats, I can get a refund?" she had asked. The ticket agent stifled a guffaw and explained why it was impossible.)

As for Spica II, the Governor had received numerous death threats. Since there were no human fingerprints on any of the missives, it was assumed that they came from an alien. And while no one in the government was a bigot, surely she understood the necessity of keeping all aliens under observation until they could capture the one who was causing all the trouble.

("How long is this situation likely to last?" she asked as she was directed to the Alien Quarter. No one knew ... but she finally got them to admit that it had already existed for 34 years with the end not yet in sight.)

The Fatted Calf's _maitre de_ explained the menu was prepared for the human palate, and that it could cause serious digestive problems for aliens.

("But I've lived on Earth for six years, and eaten human food the whole time," she explained.)

("I've no reason to doubt you," answered the _maitre de_ smoothly, "but if we make an exception in your case, then we must admit every alien who is certain he can metabolize human food, and since most of them are not as truthful as your are, we could be legally liable.")

She thought about these and other abuses, all the private insults and public humiliations, and deactivated her ship's scanner. She'd been too long at The Outpost; she had forgotten what normal humans were like.

She took one last look at the scanner, saw that it had picked up alien life forms near the equator, shrugged, and instructed her navigational computer to lay in a course back to her home planet.

She'd lived among savages too long, and she was damned if she'd go to war on their behalf.