

Sitting Horse and Crazy Bull and the Aliens

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"This is some ship, this flagship of yours!" said Sitting Horse, obviously impressed.

"Damned thing must be a mile long," added Crazy Bull.

"It is the greatest dreadnaught ever constructed," said the captain of the alien vessel.

"The humans don't have a chance," said Crazy Bull. "Not against this thing. What kind of armaments do you carry?"

"121 nuclear warheads, 77 pulse energy warheads, 16 laser cannons, and more than 300 torpedoes," replied the captain proudly.

"You could probably win the war all by yourself," said Sitting Horse.

"It's quite possible," agreed the captain.

"I knew we made the right decision," continued Sitting Horse. "I took one look at this ship and told my friend here that we were fighting on the wrong side, that Men didn't have anything that could stand up to this."

"Besides," said Crazy Bull with a note of contempt in his voice, "what did Men ever do for us?"

"You are just one of the many races that Men have subjugated," said the captain. "I am surprised that you were willing to fight for them."

"Willing is the wrong word," said Crazy Bull. "We just didn't see any way they could lose -- and if you think Men are hard on races that submit to them, you ought to see what they do to races that try to stand against them."

"That is why we are fighting this war of liberation," said the captain.

"Oh?" said Sitting Horse. "I thought it was to conquer a few more star systems."

"That is another reason," acknowledged the captain calmly.

"And of course, it makes sense to attack Men out here at the edge of the Frontier, where all you had to defeat was a small, unprepared squadron of the Navy."

The captain stared at them for a long moment. "Are you impugning our courage?" he demanded.

"Not at all," said Sitting Horse. "We're complimenting your strategy. Why take on the main body of Man's Navy until you have to? You grow stronger every day, while their political and moral corruption makes them weaker every day."

"I've never thought of it like that," said the captain, "but, on reflection, it's absolutely true."

"Sure," said Sitting Horse. "The day will come when you advance on Deluros VIII at the heart of the Monarchy and no one can stop you."

"You have an exceptionally clear view of the situation," said the captain. "I admire your way of looking at things."

"We admire your way," said Crazy Bull. "That's why we chose to defect."

"We are delighted to have two such intelligent beings join us." The captain paused. "I will want you to address the crew later, to discuss the abuses you have suffered at the hands of Men."

"It could take hours," said Crazy Bull.

"Maybe days," agreed Sitting Horse.

"Splendid!" exclaimed the captain. "We will excerpt your descriptions of the most humiliating abuses and transmit them to our home world, so that our people will know why we must conquer this vile and odious race."

"We'll be happy to participate," said Sitting Horse. "After all, if it's Man against the galaxy, as we have so often heard their leaders say, then it is only fitting that the galaxy unites against Man."

"And if your race controls a few hundred more worlds when the fighting is done, that's a small price for the galaxy to pay for its freedom from oppression," added Crazy Bull.

"Besides, you'll have earned those worlds," said Sitting Horse. "Whereas Man simply took them."

"It is a subtle difference," admitted the captain. "I am surprised that you can grasp it so quickly."

"We've been trained by experts."

The captain didn't know quite how to respond to that statement, so he settled for summoning his steward and breaking open a bottle of his home planet's most potent beverage. They spent the next hour toasting each other's good health and swearing eternal friendship.

Then Sitting Horse stood up, swaying gently, and asked directions to the bathroom. When he returned it was Crazy Bull's turn, and finally they signed their official requests for asylum.

"Excellent!" said the captain. "I'll show you to your quarters now."

"First we've got to get our gear off our own ship," said Crazy Bull.

"You didn't bring it with you?"

"We didn't know what kind of welcome we would receive," said Sitting Horse. "We might have decided you were no better than Men."

"If you had refused to join us, I might have tortured you, or thrown you into the brig," agreed the captain.

"Why?" asked Sitting Horse. "After all, we're not the enemy. We're just another poor, innocent, downtrodden race."

"So how do we get back to our ship?" asked Crazy Bull.

The captain signaled for his steward again, and the steward showed them back to their own ship.

A moment later they were sitting at their controls, starting to break free of the huge alien flagship.

"Terrible tasting stuff, wasn't it?" remarked Crazy Bull as they sped away.

"Give me human booze every time," agreed Sitting Horse, adjusting the ship's spin. "By the way, do you think there's any chance he'll find the bomb?"

"I doubt it," said Crazy Bull. "You hid it pretty damned well. I mean, hell, it took me a couple of minutes to find it so I could activate the timer, and I knew it was there. Besides, what possible reason would he have for looking behind the toilet bowl?"

"How long until it blows?"

Crazy Bull checked his timepiece. "Maybe ten more seconds. Don't worry -- we're clear."

They both looked at the viewscreen where, nine seconds later, the alien flagship exploded. For a brief moment it seemed almost as bright as a supernova.

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Sitting Horse with his less-than-firm grasp of human history. "It's General Custard and the Big Little Horn all over again!"