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# seedy business

HardCell Universe: second transmission

Free Short Fiction

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# **“SEEDY BUSINESS”**

(HardCell Universe: second transmission)

by

Damon Suede

Before tonight, Beirn had never stolen a set of designer testicles.

Of course, he'd only taken the job because they were his *brother's* testicles and Beirn knew exactly where to find the damn things. Ox had been happily stashed with a sperm-pirate for three months, stabled and milked as part of a black-market hormone herd.

Beirn's gigantic body stretched on his belly in the dunes surveying a rundown beach resort west of New Baghdad. Two moons winked through the acrid smog over six acres of manmade seashore. Inside the resort walls, twenty pastel bungalows ringed a central villa covered in apricot plaster.

He had signed the organ harvest contract without blinking. He and Ox had been stranded in this backwater armpit of the galaxy and selling his brother's testes would pay for two tickets back to Epsilon Eridani and real prospects for both of them. Fetch Ox, deliver him to the surgeons, and they could catch a flight by sundown tomorrow.

HardCell's R&D division always paid large for harvesting exceptional organs. At nearly two and a third meters tall, and 140ish kilos each, Beirn knew he and his twin had singular DNA. Plus with four identical balls between them and Ox's...tendencies, he didn't actually *need* his nads. They were kinda like spares.

*Hopefully Ox'll fucking see it that way.*

Beirn snuck into the resort compound on his belly, crawling across the sand towards disaster. What kind of skeezebag stayed in these tacky shacks by an industrial ocean? Cum-smugglers, apparently.

The brothers had never shared a psychic twin-link, which seemed annoying now, when he might've remotely blissed out on his sibling's brain-vacation.

*Especially in this shithole.*

A squirt-herder named Zed had run this seaside spunkyard outside New Baghdad for the past year, harvesting seed and shipping it to corporate farms breeding employees all over the galaxy. Semen and designer hormones turned quick profits if the pimp in charge could find enough gullible donors. The racket just took clever planning: a couple security goons, a vegetative cock-flock, and a skeezy medical tech to tend the herd and harvest the gamete and endocrine drains...

Ox had no idea he was about to be rescued. After three months of having his big gonads mechanically milked every two hours, Ox wasn't worrying about too much. The bliss-coma kept him smiling twenty-three out of twenty-four hours. His only labor had been below the belt, so the last three months probably felt like three days. Forgiving Beirn would be easy.

*Right?*

Beirn should've suspected things would go batshit. He'd had a run of good luck the past month and a little bad juju was bound to backhand him.

No other mercenaries would take a job *this* sleazy. *Hit a sperm-pirate?* But he needed the thirty thousand in cash. Getting paid to save his twin was a bonus.

*Well, except for his balls.*

He waited till the moons rose and crawled under the security grid trying not to think too hard about Ox's reaction when he woke up.

*I'll just explain. He'll understand. We're twins.*

Drowsy lightweights guarded the resort's rundown central villa. Mostly they were playing drunken dice by the light of the two moons already risen.

Ox was down there somewhere. *My homo comatose brother.*

Beirn edged up the dune for a better view. Clumps of designer trees in tropical strains shaded a scatter of bungalows plastered in bright peach, blue, and violet. Beyond the buildings, the ocean groaned relentlessly while the big mercenary scanned the dirty cotton-candy cottages....only one of them was a black market semen farm.

*There.*

The snug powder-blue cottage stood *just* far enough apart that other guests wouldn't be disturbed by the noises caused by Zed harvesting man-jam from unconscious donors.

Goal in his sights, Beirn crawled along the perimeter, staying a hundred yards from the resort's main villa. The other stacked guest cubes and their lodgers were quiet, most likely criminals themselves. The ocean allowed smugglers to move illegal cargo in high volume, so a lot of these old tourist traps had...devolved.

He tried to spot Zed's security detail, sliding another few meters into the moonlight, too big to notice. Oddly enough, his massive build made him even less visible than smaller mercs. He and Ox both looked like they'd been grown rather than born. People couldn't process the sight of a humanoid almost a meter taller than the average shlub. Stretched in the sand, he probably looked like a giant driftwood log.

If another security squad did see him, they weren't likely to warn his quarry. None of these scumbags wanted cops on site. Besides, jizz-bizzers were small fry and Beirn was a big, immediate threat. No one was going to risk revenge from a pissed-off giant to save some minor-league jam-panderer.

Born big, raised wrong, he had spent most of his childhood bullying his way through life and convincing folks he didn't know better. He did, but giving a shit took too much time. *Take the shot, take your lumps.*

Merc work was all about timing, fast turnaround and skillful maneuvering, which suited him perfectly: in and out and gone before anyone figured who got fucked, exactly.

But being a prick was hard work; it took thought and planning. His entire mercenary career had sprung from his reputation as a toxic sack of shit, and maintaining that rep required real creativity. Lucky for them he had a knack for nastiness, Ox – not so much... he preferred patient strategy. So mostly he did the wetwork and Ox mopped up after.

*Now where the fuck are the guns?*

As Beirn slithered on his belly over the sand, the moons rose over the resort's pastel bungalows and hybrid palm groves. Face a few centimeters from the manmade sand, he could hear the resort guards muttering at the concierge villa and the clatter of the dice they gambled on.

Zed's blue cottage squatted close to the water. Behind those walls, Beirn's comatose brother was getting his spooge siphoned every few hours, fathering uncountable willing workers for rival companies willing to bid on his liquid DNA.

Beirn shuddered and gagged. *Stop thinking about it.*

Every time he thought he'd grasped how nasty his life could get, some corporate pinhead paid him a little more to sink a little lower. He just kept right on sliding into the slime. It was his greatest talent: screwing people stupid enough to trust him.

Stealing your sibling seemed rotten enough, but selling his fat fuzzy lowhangers to a rival company had to be worse, right?

*Well, sorta.* See, he'd already *kinda* leased his brother and those balls a couple months back. Because Ox's love life had threatened their employability and Beirn indentured him into the stable here to make a point. Not his greatest day, admittedly. After three months of punishment, a fraternal rescue seemed like a good idea. He had only wanted to teach Ox a lesson and put a stop to the dangerous homo-sex.

*Calm down.*

The HardCell suits didn't need to know about that. They'd buy the enhanced testicles and his brother would forgive him and straighten out his act.

*Not like he needs them, not like we should be having kids - either of us.* He snorted. Not like *Beirn* kept a mate or a regular sexworker.

Breathing through his mouth, he rolled into the shadow of a pool house. Sticking to the palms, he made for the blue bungalow, picking up some speed.

Born and bred in a mining camp, h *should* have spent his life harvesting ore for a mineral combine. Except he sucked at obeying orders and hated everyone but his smarter brother. Only Ox understood his anger. Only Ox gave a shit. With their superhuman proportions, they didn't *need* to argue with many people.

The twins were practically mutants. Their parents had sold them out *in utero*. As part of a breeding incentive, Beirn's family agreed to aggressive DNA sculpting which increased size and mobility of employee offspring. Their father had taken the bonus. Their mother had almost died during the premature caesarean. He learned to hate them both from his first breath.

Washed in corporate hormones for nine months, both boys had been born twice the size of normal infants, with a touch of acromegaly that gave them Cro-Magnon bones and sledgehammer strength. Beirn and Ox grew up isolated by their freakish size and outgrew their father before the age of ten. When they'd hit 14 years, both brothers stood over two meters and by the time they stopped developing they were a head taller still.

Of course Ox would have been happy to dig lithium crystals the rest of his life, but Beirn despised his parents *and* the corporate suits who'd warped them. Beirn was the elder by seven minutes and made all the decisions from that point forward. Ox always went along.

At 17, he'd convinced Ox to stow away on a freighter, and they'd not seen their family in the 13 years since. No matter what, they had each other... at least until they'd arrived in New Baghdad last year. Then three months ago, Ox had bedded a man for the first time. Beirn caught them together and almost beat his naked twin to death.

*Odd's Gods!* Beirn shook his head to clear that image and the memory of Ox begging and apologizing, trying to protect the short hairy stranger behind him.

*Ugh. For his own good.*

Only thirty yards to go now. Even with his face in the sand, Beirn felt relief he'd been too wise to trap himself in a science career as a black-market egghead skimming cream for a living. Being a professional asshole paid way better money.

Truth was, semen harvesting gave him the fucking creeps.

This close to Zed's lair a hovering testosterone pong made Beirn's cock itch in protest. *Some bullshit primate instinct probably.* He hated men in general at the best of times, but the alkaline stench of rutting coma patients made him gag.

*Sperm-pirates.* Did it get any lower? *Oh yeah, me.*

Beirn had felt a twinge of guilt for abandoning his brother here for ninety-plus days, but chided himself. *Ox needed a warning. Same-sex orientation is a liability for merc work.* Their job was to screw women and screw men over. They were a team, a bulky united front.

*Idiot.* In the shadowy palms, he shook his head, not sure which one of them he meant.

Up until three months ago, Ox had always tried to be diplomatic and tried to keep him on a leash, but Beirn wasn't wired that way. Even hurting people for a living, Ox had never grown cruel.

*Maybe now he's learned his lesson.*

Beirn finally reached the blue bungalow, which sat suspiciously quiet. There were no guards. *Weird.* Security inside probably, maybe even auto-turrets. He'd just proceed with caution. Could a small time seed smuggler really be that inept?

*Yeah.*

As he jacked the door and slid inside, the bleachy reek made his eyes sting and his scrotum retract. Big conglomerates were always trying to breed more durable workers for their planetary combines: the city-sized farms, mines, and mills that supplied the galaxy. He thought about the kiloliters of ejaculate that flowed out of this whack-shack every month. *Nasty.* He didn't like touching his own gunk; the thought of another man's made him queasy. *More ape bullshit.* He knew what was right.

In the foyer, the air sat stale and still; the rooms beyond echoed with eerie quiet except for a low buzzing from upstairs. Zed only visited to make weekly collections from his man-milking machines. But there were several comatose donors stabled here, right? Beirn had expected human sounds.

*I left my brother in this place.*

For a microsecond guilt flickered over him, but then he wondered how many times a day Ox had popped here lazing by the sea. Beirn's personal record was seven with a droid-whore in Alcyon; both twins had oversized parts and appetites. Plus Zed's med-bots pumped his dozing donors full of chemicals to keep their sap flowing while the mechanical throat suckled and swallowed at their dorks.

*A three-month blowjob?! Lucky bastard.* Hell, Ox might thank him. Losing his share of the family jewels might seem like nothing after draining them that often.

Beirn's cock chubbed against his thigh. He hadn't thought about that. And he hadn't been able to get laid in ages. Even local *whores* turned him down because some places 41 centimeters just couldn't fit. Hell, for all he knew

maybe these three milked months had been like a cathouse vacation for his uptight sibling. Ox probably wanted to *give* his balls away at this point.

Checking the ground floor for nonexistent guards, Beirn relaxed a bit. He'd expected more trouble, a little brawling at least. Now he felt stupid for carrying so many weapons. Looked like he had plenty of time to collect his brother (*with nuts, thanks*) and strip the padded beige rooms of valuables and equipment. *Everything is worth something, son.* Maybe one of the local brothels would be interested in auto-fellatio gear or the hormone tanks. Three payouts for one fucking job? *Good business, that.*

Beirn had gotten compensated twice already: Zed had rented his brother and this morning HardCell had paid for those magical clangers. Beirn might be able to manage a triplecross and bleed a few more drops of profit. *Sign me up!* He could pawn the jizz-gear to another laboratory. *Win-win-win.* Plenty of money could be made from triple-dipping on a single gig.

*Ox will understand.*

As he climbed the stairs, the scuffed walls should have been a clue, and the buzzing. He barely noticed; he was thinking about the way he could spin the past three months so Ox didn't kill him the first time he scratched his empty scrotum.

The problem with being an oversized sociopath was having an oversized *twin* who wasn't.

Even masochists and whores avoided Beirn these days. His temper kept everyone but the bravest or dumbest from sidling up to him. Even with the bulldog face and big build, his reputation was like empathy repellent. Plus, he didn't want the encumbrance of giving a shit about any piece of ass who could be used against him in negotiations. Good thing too that he never stayed in the same territory long enough to form attachments to females.

He paused on the last tread. Now he could make out dull rhythmic bleeps from Zed's souped-up coma-stations.

The whirring sound filled the big open living-space at the top of the stairs. The entire second floor of the bungalow featured enough life support for a spaceport burn ward. Medical slings hung from every meter of ceiling space under a large skylight. The bare beige walls sported wall-to-wall nursing-panels. But his boots crunched on shattered plexicrete and plastic. For the first time, he noticed the signs of a nasty fight.

*Bad. This is bad.*

A long table flipped at a crazy angle barred his view until he shifted it to step inside. Then he found out how fucked he was.

The men being milked were gone, and gone in a hurry. Bags of nutrient slime squelched underfoot.

The high whirring dropped in pitch for a moment and then resumed.

*Uhhh. The fuck?*

In the moonlight pouring from the ceiling dome, He crept forward through rows of empty slings and bent racks and scorched life support panels. A canister of tangy semen concentrate was smashed against one wall. The moons shone mauve through a shatterproof privacy window. Someone had thrown a crate of dehydrated soy, scattering custardy protein lumps and spider-webbing its view of the tropical beach below.

*Someone got mad.* He had a feeling he knew who.

The stinking spunkyard was deserted. Beirn felt stupid and blind trying to puzzle the scene together into something like an explanation. *What happened here?* Had someone stolen his brother and the other spooge-stooges? Every coma sling in the stable hung empty, save one.

He gasped and closed his mouth in shock.

Zed lay strapped into his own harvesting equipment, flexing and shivering in a chemical coma. Tight straps bruised his chest, which rose and fell evenly. One eye was burgundy and swollen shut under his cropped dark hair. He wasn't brain-dead, because his naked body hunched and twitched around the hose where his cock was planted. His nuts churned below. His unwashed skin glistened with sweat.

*Oh shit.*

His donors had mutinied and escaped. Ox was gone... *with his prized testes.*

Beirn grimaced in embarrassment. *Stupid bastard.* Zed was lucky Ox hadn't killed him.

*No. Ox wants to kill...me.*

Zed groaned in idiot pleasure, unconscious and smiling. His sinewy hips jerked as he pumped a load into the tube. He was almost a meter shorter, sturdy and compact and smooth skinned. His flexing legs were braced in stirrups and a long probe pushed into the fuzzy crack of his hard pale ass, probably drilling his prostate to squeeze out every drop.

Beirn shut his eyes so he didn't have to watch.

*Sure. Looks real fun, asshole.*

Suddenly Ox's three months in the jam-ranch didn't seem like a vacation anymore and the night looked a lot less lucrative. *Odd's gods!* HardCell would never take "no testes" for an answer. He'd signed a contract. If he couldn't produce Ox's rocks, he'd have to—

*Harvest my own.*

He gulped. His stomach flipped. The testes in question retreated, burrowing into his pelvis. His mouth filled with metallic saliva and he tried not to retch.

*What did I do to deserve—?*

*Oh. Yeah.*

Umm...cheated every one of his employers, beaten strangers out of boredom, and sold his brother into hormonal servitude. He stopped himself there. Tough to bitch about bad luck when your job is being bad luck for other people.

Watching the cum-smuggler getting plundered by his own equipment, Beirn rubbed his hands over his face. His heart felt cold and hollow. He realized that if he didn't want to die, he had to find Ox first. He had to explain the betrayal. He'd have to talk his way out of an execution he probably deserved.

In the sling, Zed's throat worked as he swallowed around the feed tube. Being strapped into an electronic blowjob was great for skintone apparently. UV maintenance lamps had broiled his body to a glossy bronze except for a narrow strip of pale crotch. His eyes tracked under the lids and stubby lashes. So Zed dreamed while the nozzle drained him. He ejaculated in drowsy slow motion with an extended hiss that sounded like gratitude. His orgasm stretched to inhuman span by the pumps and probes.

*Snick!*

A fine spray floated onto Zed's lewd stupor and Beirn's horrified face. The big mercenary's foreskin rolled back and his nuts shifted as his body betrayed him.

*Pheromones!*

The idea made his gorge rise, but the pungent dose crushed any sexual scruples and wrung a response from his stupid body. Unnatural chemical switches flicked in his groin and his blunt cock rose into a towering spike. He swatted at it in disgust.

*Time to go.*

In the sling, the stocky seed-dealer's extended twitching bliss continued in sighs and spasms until Beirn felt embarrassed for both of them. The air smelled like sweat.

Zed's ass clenched around the greasy probe, and his plump stones flexed in their pouch, bunched firmly against the sucking nozzle. His mouth was open and there was drool on his chin.

Death or castration? Beirn had no choice. He had to run. He had to find his twin. He had to find Ox and make things right. What if they weren't brothers anymore? What if Ox refused?

*What did I do to my brother?*

His hard-on jutted and jerked in his trousers. The glans pushed free of his fleshy foreskin, and rubbed maddeningly against his undergear. He spat in disgust. To have his body double-cross him like this, to feel so manipulated and powerless.... Patient and pitiless, Ox had planned his revenge for months. Typical.

*Fuck this.*

Unable to take another second of the sleazy spectacle, Beirn killed the power on the equipment. The whirring died and the sling's stasis alarm chittered in irritation.

*Wakey-wakey.*

Zed arched, gasping and gulping one long swallow of air. His eyes stared wildly at something under his lids.

Quadrant by quadrant on the sperm-pirate's compact body, the tubes and leads pulled free of his flexing muscle. A robotic needle slid free from the meat above his sternum, leaving a purple blemish the size of a fingerprint. *Endocrine feed, probably.* The flexible probe slithered free of his rectum and snaked suddenly and silently into the rack panel like a slingshot tentacle. The segmented hose stuffed with his privates broke suction and thudded against the rack.

The small man took shallow breaths, not opening his eyes. His hips hunched forward and the wet, ruddy cock rolled to rest against his tan thigh.

Beirn stepped back, staying clear in case of thrashing or vomit or lube spatter, any of which seemed likely and equally appealing.

With a slobbery hiss, the bio-mesh sling loosed its grip and shifted Zed into a reclining, then sitting position. The smuggler flinched and squinted in pain before blinking and opening his eyes to the artificial lights and the wrecked beige room. Panic crossed his face, making him look younger and kinder than he could possibly be. A whisper escaped his swollen mouth. "Help."

"Help yourself," Beirn growled.

"A fight..." Zed coughed and squirmed, trying to shift his weight forward. "I'm not dead! I thought I was dead."

"Not yet, anyways." Beirn didn't move a centimeter closer to the man or his drooling erection.

"Dark...I can't see you...anything. Eyes." Zed raised a hand to the puncture wound at his sternum. He dropped a hand to his privates, stopping just short. "My dick hurts. Gods."

*Better him than me.*

Again Beirn thought about his twin, about how miserable and angry Ox would have been to wake up in this dump, realizing the betrayal. Beirn's breath caught a moment. If their roles were reversed, he would have hunted Ox down and torn him limb from limb.

*But Ox isn't like me.*

The sling finished tipping Zed onto his feet, and he landed on them with a deep whimper. He rocked from side to side like it hurt to hold up his own weight. Maybe it did. "I know your voice." He turned. "Beirn?"

Beirn cocked his head like a disappointed nursery rhyme character. "Yeah, squirt. Sure. I'm here to save you."

Zed seemed to have forgotten he was naked, seemed unaware of his shaft jerking back to life in the thatch of dark hair at its base till another semi-boner waggled there. Water was leaking from his blind brown eyes that he didn't wipe. "We...you and me...we have a problem."

Beirn snorted. "Understatement of the century, cock-dock. You're late to the party."

Zed grunted and whimpered again at something. His mouth was open and a thick strand of spittle stretched towards the floor. Mirroring it at the head of his cock, a thread of seminal fluid beaded and fell slowly-slowly to the floor between his broad feet. His unfocussed, hungry stare looked insane. "I can't see."

"Have you gone bughouse?" *Time to be gone.* Beirn cracked his neck in frustration. "Hey! Oi, Zed!"

The short man turned at the sound like a dog. "My eyes won't see."

"You're looking right at me."

Zed rubbed at the reddish needle puncture at his collarbone and grimaced. The abdomen bunched into squares of stocky muscle. "Fuck...fuck! I can feel it... Wuh-wait! Inside...they gave me an overdose."

*Poor bastard.* "Ox poisoned you?"

"Hormone... feed." Zed grunted and his cock flexed, hurting so much he didn't even seem embarrassed by his rampant flesh. By this point, he probably wasn't.

"They're gone. Your, I dunno, sperm herd?" Beirn's mind raced as he tried to find a path of attack. "My brother, too."

Zed grunted and nodded, curled to keep his rod from so much as brushing a surface. After a few days of mechanical abuse, the glossy stalk looked grouchy bobbing in the air. "He did it. Ox woke up. I misjudged the sedative levels...."

*Cause he's too big.* Beirn completed the thought in his own mind. Their extraordinary size often presented medical challenges, so he was unsurprised this dumb runt botched the dose.

“I came back, y’know, to make a collection and—“

“The hormones! Ow-ow.” Zed chewed his lips. Tears ran down his grimy face while he tugged at his raw, swollen penis unable to stop his own hands. He shouted and fell to his knees. “It’s killing me. Prostate! The fucking seminal pressure—”

“Zip it, shitwit.” Beirn considered punching the smaller man hard enough to knock him out.

“Ah-ha-ah-ha-ah-ah....” Zed arched and twisted in the plastic shards covering the floor, wailing. He hands scrabbled for purchase and his abdominals tensed in agony. His two hands jerked by the base of his cock but didn’t touch the raw straining skin. “Agh! Aughh! Help me!”

“Boo hoo.” Beirn waved a hand at the demolished lab. “You’re lucky he didn’t debone you. You’re lucky he’s not the murdering type.”

Zed began panting hard at some inner itch Beirn didn’t want to imagine. “All of them. They patched all the IVs into me and I took all of it. Enough for nine!”

“How long?”

Zed squinted at the digital panel. “Three days? Four? Ugh-agh! Like being in heat—” He squealed sharply. Another strand of cream welled and fell from cockhead to the floor in front of the little smuggler. He was crying again, tears and snot running down his face that he didn’t even bother to wipe.

Beirn fought the urge to bolt. *My cock shouldn’t still be hard.*

“Hey! Hey!” Zed looked down at his own crotch in either dread or delight. *Hard to say.* The veiny rod rose again in short heartbeat jerks. “Agh. That feels so fucking—”

“I don’t wanna know. I need to find Ox.”

But Zed couldn’t hear anything now, paralyzed by orgasmic seizures. He bared his teeth; his weeping eyes rolled back to the whites. Some hormonal horror roamed his body and tore his control to ribbons. He stood shivering and moaning, one leg dog-jerking involuntarily while he hugged his solid torso, holding himself together. His brownish cock looked sore and wet jutting and drooling there. Musky slickness puddled on the floor between his feet.

*This is my punishment: a dwarf in heat chucking his muck on me—* Beirn stepped back and wiped his mouth— *at least until HardCell retires me with a suppository grenade for defaulting on our contract.* He chuckled at his brother's inventive vengeance. "If you're gonna be a scumbag at least be good at it."

*Snap!* Zed's eyes opened and suddenly he seemed to be able to see the room again. Words tumbled out of him. "My semen production is too —uhh!— rapid; my prostate will rupture. AUGH!" The little outlaw convulsed again, his blunt horn stabbing the air, his nuts pulled up into his pelvis, and the scrotum so tight it seemed more like a dark, wrinkled base to his erection. "Don't touch it. Don't touch it. It's killing me."

"Fuck off. Why the hell would I touch anything?!" Beirn glared at the stocky body twitching on the floor. "Skeezy sawed-off dong-monger."

"I didn't know it was like this."

*Fucking hell. This is Ox punishing us.*

Beirn held his own shaft against his hip so it didn't tent his crotch and tried to feel righteous. "Serves you right, squirt."

*Morality? What morality?* A joke really, since he tended to treat morals like toilet paper.

Zed agreed. "Yeah, and you're a fucking saint, Beirn. This dosage is ten times what they got." His legs buckled and his knees slammed into the floor. He didn't flinch, just knelt there hyperventilating.

"Well... I think maybe your bone donors might have been a little irritated with you for high-jacking them and pimping their spew all over the Milky Way. Huh?"

But Zed couldn't answer. He rocked back on his heels, twitching, and then reached under his rigid spike, scratching himself hard with his short fingers. He groaned in relief.

*Nasty.* "Get it together, skeezebag."

No response.

The hair behind Zed nutsack *scritch-scratched* as he rubbed furiously at the maddening tickle, scouring his anus. "There. Oh! There..." He moaned and his

eyelids drifted shut, as if he could almost see relief on some internal horizon. He fell back, his shoulder blades against the floor, his knees akimbo.

*Why the fuck does scratching his ass help his blueballs?*

—Which was exactly when Beirn realized the smaller man wasn’t scratching.

—Because Zed hitched a leg to push his hand closer and revealed that he had pushed three stubby fingers inside his butt, digging hard at something that itched just out of reach inside him. He yelped like a spaceport whore.

Beirn stared, unable to look away from the freaky spectacle of it and knowing he should be grossed out. *This is gross, right? Stop watching.* But his unruly shaft ground the back of his fly.

Whatever the little squirt-herder used here was hell on the male reproductive system. And *he* was breathing it too. “Zed! Pull your fucking digits out—”

*Of your overslicked ass!*

“So close.” The smuggler’s hand was jammed so far into him that the stout thumb was flexed against his round glute. Zed raised his legs higher, heels off the floor. His hand flexed and curled as he strained further. “Ah! There’s—I can’t get—”

“For fuck’s sake.” He had seen more than enough. Next thing this freak would be humping his leg. *And I’d let him.* “I’m going downstairs.

“I can’t reach it. Please, big guy!” Zed rolled onto his belly suddenly, frantic. He pushed up into a horny crouch. Plastic chips were stuck to his sweaty skin. His voice rasped with urgency. “Right there. Your hands are bigger. It’s too far—”

Beirn growled over his shoulder without turning as he clumped down the stairs. “So yank your pud like a normal perv.”

*Last thing I fucking need.*

And then somewhere upstairs, Zed stopped talking, stopped grunting, stopped choking, stopped breathing. Perfect strained silence filled the wrecked lab.

*Is he dead?*

No such luck. As he descended he knew that behind him Zed was pumping an agonizing, perfect load into the air. Beirn knew it would happen again, soon.

What he didn't know was why all forty-plus centimeters of his own branch still leaked on his thigh.

*Pheromones. That's it.*

A lone security beacon blinked on the wall over the front door. *A trap.* He'd been played by his own brother and he deserved it.

Beirn weighed his situation: stuck with a goo-peddler, hiding out from a corporate assault team just waiting to snatch his jewels as easily as he'd hoped to snatch his brother's.

*Fair's fair.*

For all he knew, tonight's whole harvest deal had been a setup. Fuck!

Most likely, Ox had called HardCell and told them a way to trick Beirn into signing away his own testicles. With Ox headed off-planet, they'd known they could get their hands on Beirn's. *Worse! He made me do it to myself.*

Ox hadn't even waited around to watch his revenge. He'd known Beirn would take the bait, that Beirn would sign away his twin's organs and come collect them.

*I should have charged more.*

Ox had abandoned him in every way. He was probably shacked up with some hairy playmate on the other side of the galaxy.

For once, Beirn thanked Odd's Gods that they lacked a psychic link. How do you explain betrayal? How was he even supposed to find his brother to try? Did he want to?

*He'd tear off my cock and beat me to death with it.*

Beirn found the cook-space sink and tried to vomit.

*I'd let him.*

Finally, he gave up and washed his face in cold water.

*Death... Castration... Death... Castration...*

\* \* \*

By the time Zed tiptoed downstairs still naked, Beirn had almost regained control of his chemical lust.

Standing in the moons' light from the window, the smuggler's body seemed stockier and sturdier than it had upstairs. His torso was smeared with half-wiped semen. He looked healthier standing, with his seal-dark buzzcut and thick muscle wrapping his small frame.

*You hate men.*

Panicking at the proximity, Beirn shook his head and looked at the barely-furnished live-space. "C'mon squirt. Gotta go."

"Where?!"

*This man especially. A sperm-pirate?*

Beirn had scrounged up disposable paper clothing from the resort dispenser. He just pointed at the pile by way of an order.

"I can't." The smaller man looked down at his insistent erection. "No way can I have that crap against my skin."

*I should retire him and bury him in the dunes.*

"Wrong answer, cockdock!" Glaring at the little crook, Beirn's cock plumped again, unaccountably. "This is a fucking trap, see? And I'm not going to take your outside leaving a trail of jism for them to follow. Get ahold of yourself."

*Get ahold of yourself. Gah!*

Killing Zed now would have simplified a lot, but Ox would need someone to blame. Beirn flicked through the scenarios and contingencies *flick-flick-flick* in his brain. Not many options.

*Take the shot, take your lumps.*

"Who is following you?" Zed narrowed his eyes and seemed to notice Beirn, to question his presence, for the first time. "Wait- Why're you here?"

"To visit my brother." Beirn felt himself frown at his own lie.

*He smells like sex.*

"You are some piece of shitty work." Zed rolled his eyes and kept his distance. "Sure. Yeah. How did you get inside? Never mind."

*Think.* If Beirn wanted to stay alive and keep his bits, if he wanted to find Ox and make peace, he would have to hide the little man-rancher from the corporate goons and anyone else who might come looking. They'd have to stick together. For one weird moment, Beirn raised a hand to touch that—

*Neck. Soft.*

Beirn dropped his fingers and broke the silence. "HardCell paid me to fetch something. Something my brother took with him, and if I don't make delivery by sunrise, we're gonna have company."

"The donors aren't prisoners. Most of them just need cash. They're only indentured for a month at a time."

"Not Ox."

"No. But you said Ox signed up voluntarily.... A vacation, a break!" Zed's words grew barbs.

"I lied."

Zed goggled.

"We can't stay here." Beirn pointed at the blinking security beacon. "Ox set us up."

The stubby pirate stood stock-still and just watched the larger man pace like a caged animal. "So you— Well I think you might need to apologize to Ox so we don't get retired or harvested."

Beirn snorted. He had never apologized in his life. "You fucking apologize, squirt."

"Stop fucking-well calling me that." Zed smacked him—*hard*—totally unafraid of the near-meter difference in their heights. "You stashed your mutant twin here against his will."

"He's not a mutant."

"Fuck you. You're both mutants. He woke up unhappy and the others didn't stick around to—"

"He's *not* a mutant." Beirn put himself in his brother's shoes, chewing Ox's options. "But he's vanished and he's pissed.... I'd bet an Algolian whore he's

posted a bounty on us both *and* all our data in every shithole from here to Antares.”

“You need to talk to him. Explain it was a joke.”

Beirn leveled a look at him. “He doesn’t want me to find him. He doesn’t want to change his mind, and he knows I’ll *make* him.” Zed would take the blame in front of Ox, and this would all end happily.

*Find Ox. Make peace. Kill Zed.*

Zed mulled and paced naked, the pistons churning in his skull.

Beirn pretended to look at the holo-vid setup covering the east wall.

*I should want to kill him. But I need—*

“HardCell owns New Baghdad and he hasn’t got papers or credit or clothes. He would have to stow away. Transport ship, maybe. One of the remote combines. No immigration. No customs.”

Beirn turned at that, stunned. He nodded, just once.

*He knows Ox better than I do.*

Zed kept on taking charge of the situation. Confidence rolled from his compact body in waves. “Perfect place to hole up. Currently HardCell has about nine planetoids under terraformation for agriculture and seafarming. When I finished school, I almost signed—What? Oi! What?!”

“Nothing.” Beirn realized he was staring and nodded to himself. *School.* “That’s right. You’re right.”

The cum-smuggler squinted at him, waiting for something... Anything. He rolled his eyes in frustration.

“So we find him. We change his mind.”

Zed’s confusion was real, even naked, even hard. “Wait! This isn’t *my* problem, bonejob.” *Translation: your fuckup, your funeral.* “I’m not going anywhere with you.”

“Then I’m afraid I have to trank you and stash you in my luggage to prove to Ox that I’ve done right by him.”

“Fuck you, trog! I run a clean ranch. Nothing raunchy. Nothing shady. I can’t believe I trusted you. Your own brother?” He poked Beirn’s chest.

Both of them breathed hard. The room felt smaller and damper around them.

Again Beirn grew hyperaware of the shorter man’s body heat, the roll of naked muscle under that bronze skin, the shaft swelling at his dark pubes. *Enough!* He had never been able to control the fat beast between his legs, but these airborne hormones reduced his IQ to flatworm levels. “Oi! We need to get out of this place. Somewhere safe.”

*Somewhere my shank doesn’t react like this to a fucking guy.*

“You’re such a goon. Where is that gonna be?”

“Hey: Ox sold both of us out, but good! When HardCell gets finished with us, getting smoked and poked by your mechanical pussyhole manjam-boree will look like paradise. You’ll be able to piss out of your chest and blink your kneecaps.”

Zed spun. “That’s illegal.”

“It is?! Golly, we better call the authorities.” Beirn poked Zed’s chest, punctuating his words with one blunt finger as long and thick as the smuggler’s erection bobbing between them. “*You’re* fucking illegal. This whole milk shack is illegal. Hell, now my twin brother is illegal and so am I. Welcome to the gangbang, squirt!”

Beirn bit down on his impotent rage and looked at the ceiling. A streak of movement made him turn—

Diving and rolling, Zed hooked his shoulder into Beirn’s oversized pelvis, grabbed his big paw in a bonecracking grip and positioned his compact frame for a solid judo throw.

—*Thwamp*—

Before he could take a breath, Beirn found himself flipping ass over teakettle, shocked and upended by someone half his size. *How did he—?* By the time Beirn stood and got his bearings, the naked smuggler had sprinted upstairs and was pounding across the floor overhead.

*Prick.*

Beirn threw a table out of his way as he gave chase, following the smaller man up the stairs like an angry tyrannosaurus. Upstairs, Zed's was pulling himself through the hole in the splintered window, trying to stretch the storm-plastic enough to slither through and drop to the ground.

*Nude. With a slick whopper.*

"The hell do you think you're going, squirt?" Beirn strode across the shards of equipment and grabbed a firm, tan ankle. "HardCell's coming for both of us."

*He's crazier than I am!*

"Let go!" Zed kicked at him, narrowly missing his big face.

"If you break my nose, that'll annoy me." The big merc tugged once hard, yanking Zed into the room so he could scoop the seed-dealer up in one enormous arm.

"Yeah, look at us: David and Go-Fuck-Yourself—" Zed rolled against Beirn and pushed back, his oiled flesh sliding against the bigger man's clothes and body. His muscles bunched with surprising power, straining to get loose and away. Zed hadn't cut himself on the window, but the plastic had scraped his torso.

They grappled, breathing hard. The only sound in the room, the friction between Zed's skin and Beirn's clothes and the guttural rasp as they tussled - unable to get the upper hand.

*Oh.*

Beirn stopped breathing. His arms full of squirming jam-bandit. 170 naked, tan centimeters of Zed grappled with him until the club in his trousers bucked into readiness. He turned and tossed the short crook to the floor. "Quit."

Zed crouched tense on all fours. Pupils dilated and glassy, he looked up at Beirn in angry surrender.

Overhead the mist kicked back on, fogging the room with illegal, inexorable pheromones.

*Run.*

Moons above the skylight...medical rubble across the floor...the cobwebbed window behind Zed...the wrecked extraction facility seemed too quiet, too still for a minute.

*Pheromones.* The sharp hormonal tang pushed buttons in Beirn he didn't need pushed, ever. His balls flexed in their heavy sack. His heartbeat pumped blood to his unruly crotch. His mouth pooled with saliva so quickly he had to swallow. Heat washed his face.

*Ox knew what would happen. Canny bastard.*

The pirate's arms were crossed over his smooth chest, and one thumb rubbed at a stiff nipple. His erection rose in short hungry jerks before him.

*Stop it.*

Beirn tried to find a way to the stairs but his brain had frozen and the wrecked room became a maze, every turn leading to Zed. "Put something on. You can't go outside like this. We're gonna have to—"

Zed sat back on his heels, panting like an animal in rut. "We are gonna have to."

"No." Beirn made himself sound angry and thumped his chest like an ape. "This is ladies-only, squirt."

The smaller man muttered, "My name is Zed."

*Why can't I kill him again? Why do I want to?*

Beirn's bass sounded like fuzzy, drunken gravel in his own ears. "Don't get any funny ideas. I'll crack your fucking eggs."

"Ha-ha." But Zed stopped with the nipple, and looked down at his urgent stiffness.

*I should have let him escape.*

Beirn felt a tickle of terror spread from his gut. "What?"

"Nothing." The seed thief licked his plump lower lip. "Nothing is funny."

*Plump lower lip?* Beirn clamped down on that thought. The air between them bristled, blurry with testosterone. Everything suddenly felt like a great idea. His lips felt wet before he licked them.

*Now I'm trapped.*

Zed stared at Beirn's heavy hands, the thick digits. Somewhere inside of him that itch had again started to burn his shame to cinders. He bent and scooped four fingers of clear jelly from a cracked jar.

*No one will know.*

"No one will know." Zed whimpered and looked wild-eyed at Beirn, standing there and begging for mercy with that palmful of grease.

"I will. You will." *Ox will.* Beirn sounded like a stranger to his own ears. Heat spiraled from his groin like chains, dragging him towards his punishment. He knew the answer without asking.

"I need—" Zed's butt flexed, the muscles grinding. His shaft stood wet before him. "—milking."

*Me too.*

Beirn nodded like this was a normal conversation, then caught himself and shook his head. "No. Stop."

Zed's eyes drifted up to the synthetic animal-heat misting over them, "No stopping."

"I don't want this." But he did. His whole body wanted it. His wet mouth, his rough hands, his own hard meat hidden under his clothes all wanted it. Beirn couldn't find a way out of the maze that wasn't a naked crook with whiskey eyes.

"Help me." Zed touched his glossy purple-brown cockhead, and they both shivered. "Help yourself."

*It's so hot in here.*

Beirn split the closure on his clothes, exposing his broad hairy chest and the stiff nipples.

"Emergency situation." Zed licked the short mustache on his upper lip, tasting it slowly.

*Hypnotic.*

Beirn knew it was hormones, that libidinal triggers had robbed his reason. It didn't matter. He'd become a willing captive to his beast brain. He stood and

flexed his high buttcheeks, pushing his urgency closer to the smaller man's face.

*Help.*

As if he heard the thought, Zed did exactly that. He peeled the big suit off Beirn's hulking shoulders and down his tense thighs. "Both in heat."

Beirn knelt, their heads almost the same height for once.

Zed ran the back of a hand over the big pectorals, the whorls of hair on his abdomen, catching a stiff nubbin.

Down below, Beirn's wet knob nudged the smaller man, who stepped forward to press close. The air was cool, but their slick skin slid between them. The languor and lust coiled around them till both men belonged to the ugliest, most primitive instincts.

*Thirsty. Hungry.*

Beirn raised one of Zed's arms and licked beneath it. His thick tongue devoured the amazing flavor of the beefy pirate's armpit, ribs, hip, groin. Sinking lower and lower, he mapped the stocky body with his huge mouth until his cheek was against the tight scrotal sack.

*Sweet sweat.*

Zed whimpered and held his breath. The column of his stiff cock brushed Beirn's stubbled jaw.

Beirn felt his awareness collapse to that one piercing point, where the soft heat jerked against the side of his face.

*I'm insane. This is fucking insane.*

Beirn rolled his craggy brow on the sturdy thigh, opening his mouth and leaning forward. He only meant to suck the pirate's balls, but he misjudged the difference in their sizes. The wet cavern of his big mouth closed over the entire shaft and pouch. He pushed his nose straight towards the dark pubes and took a breath of the musk there and he swallowed hard around Zed.

Zed squealed through his nose. The buried crown dribbled a salty, sweet stream right at Beirn's warm gullet.

Beirn swallowed again, feeling the slippery muscle slip over Zed, squeezing yelps and juice out of him. Jealousy flared in him a moment. No one had ever been able to suck his oversized bone. Weirdly, sucking the other man's made his own groin tighten as though Zed were returning the favor. He could nut just from giving head.

*I am sucking a cock. I'm a cocksucker.*

Beirn's body didn't care. As he slurped gently and thoroughly, his ruddy club nudged Zed's braced forearm, nearly the same length. He raised his head to apologize, then didn't.

Zed was staring at the giant shaft with his mouth loose. Reaching out, he petted the tip gingerly with one finger, playing with the sensitive hole. He looked up.

Beirn nodded, once, giving him permission to play.

*Oh.*

The outlaw rubbed his pinky over the tip and then— *Odd's Gods!* — slid the knuckle inside.

Merc and bandit both froze at the impossible sensation, the stinging insertion, the marauding heat between them.

Beirn groaned and stared. He'd sounded himself before, but never found a partner kinky enough to explore the feelings. It seemed jizz-bizzers were not squeamish.

Zed pulled the fingertip out and sucked, licked the big head again, and dipped his tongue inside for a moment.

*Who are you?*

Beirn just grunted and dropped his face again. slobbering on Zed's whole package and staring at the stripe of hair on the hard abs a few centimeters in front of him. He rubbed the pad of his thumb over the tiny, slick hole behind. He remembered Zed's itch earlier where the probe had been buried the past three days. He lifted off to look up.

Zed groaned. Without preamble he pushed back onto Beirn's hand so that it slid right where it could rub him into mush.

“That the spot? Huh?” Beirn wiggled his stout thumb in the perfect slippery warmth, wishing he could fit more inside, wondering what was possible.

*What am I allowed to want?*

“Good.” The larger man pushed his face back onto Zed’s hardness and swollen nuts, reaching beneath the sack with his tongue to lick the hard perianal ridge behind. Swallowing and licking and snuffling as if starved. The dark pubic hair scoured his lips which, and exactly *nothing* like eating pussy.

*Delicious.*

“Ahh!” The smuggler’s leg quivered. “Careful. You’ll— You’re gonna make me—”

Beirn nodded, not stopping. He knew exactly what he was gonna do. Grunting against the smaller man’s pubic bone, he swallowed and gulped, polishing the crown with his soft palate. He lifted his head to ask something—

At that moment, Zed drilled his slick pinky all the way inside Beirn’s oversized urethra.

Beirn’s vision whited out and his fat cannon burned at the shocking intrusion. *Odd’s Gods.* He rolled onto his back and bowed. He needed more and he put his hand over Zed’s to push the finger deep again, to get at his own itch, then let go. *Not long now.*

“Not long now.” Zed’s voice was hoarse as he slid his littlest finger slowly in and out of Beirn. He was crouched between the big shivering quads. “Beautiful, Bear. You’re beautiful.”

Seminal fluid leaked and lubed it, easing the way. *Agh! That’s his joint stretching me.* Pleasure and pain melted together along the meaty length.

“You okay, big guy?” Zed kissed the enormous thigh and rubbed it in reassuring circles. “Your Cyclops cock. You should see. I’m fucking— I’m inside you. You feel that?”

Beirn couldn’t even grunt or breathe. *Anything that satisfying has gotta be illegal.* His balls rolled in their pouch. His anus tightened into a firm knot between his cheeks. His legs shook with some alien effort. His eyes opened, wide, wider as the pleasure tore its way out of him.

*I have to warn—*

“Zed!” Beirn roared and his heavy branch snapped into full rigidity, the veins standing out as hot seed rose-rose-rose from somewhere in his fundament. His butthole clamped and then he exploded.

—*take it out put it in take it out put it in take*—

Beirn’s blast buckled around that little finger, scorching his synapses, pulling his pleasure inside out and back and up and around.

Zed knew exactly what to do and did. Grinning, he kept the finger buried to the knuckle, pushing against the climax erupting from the stretched hole, over Zed’s hand, over his cheek and brow, because he was so close and not going anywhere.

*Anywhere.*

Beirn’s breath hissed through his teeth as he wrestled with the unfamiliar feelings. His IQ had fallen to single digits.

*Ungh. Good.* Troglodyte discovers fire.

Only at the end did Zed slide the digit out, and the sperm slicked its warm, quick path.

*What about him?*

As Beirn’s heart stabilized, his rod softened into a thick sloppy trunk, the head brushing the floor. He managed to roll his huge skull to see what was happening between his legs, at the other end of his happy body.

*Selfish asshole.*

Zed didn’t rise, but stayed hunched over his hand on all fours, rutting rapidly against the thick spunk there. His foreskin caught behind the red-brown head as it punched the heavenly mess. His prayers were grunts. “Good. Good. Gods! Good.”

Beirn smiled. *Good.*

Zed ground his pole into his palm and sprayed himself navel to nipple, pelting his smooth chest, dripping onto the floor. “Thank you. Thank you, Bear! Gods thank you.” Zed collapsed against the floor in a sodden heap of satisfaction.

*Bear....*

Smiling, Beirn couldn't move his boneless, brainless bulk. His pisshole felt stretched and sore. He chuckled at the air. "Those fucking chemicals should be illegal, Zed."

"Uhh. They are." Zed stood.

Beirn still couldn't. He settled for rolling onto his knees; the pleasure receded and knives took its place in the hollow of his stomach.

"Oh." Beirn could feel the sweat cooling on him. He remembered where, and who and what he was. "Right."

Zed seemed to be shutting down as post-fuck scruples overcame his overclocked libido.

Beirn forced himself to his feet, not looking at the small smuggler. He plucked his clothes from the clutter and went to rinse himself. "One sec, yeah?"

Zed murmured noncommittally. He looked embarrassed.

*Duh. We are embarrassed.*

"Oi! We should be ready to leave in five. Yeah?"

Zed nodded, but stood staring out at the ocean through the window.

Again, Beirn felt his meat shift in his shorts. *Homo pheromones*. Ox's revenge. He walked away, keeping the room between them. "And cover your... all of you, before I hammer your ugly peg back into you."

Zed blanched and nodded again, but didn't move.

But the terrible pleasure spiraled still behind his balls. Beirn almost punched the wall to stop it racing under his skin, trying to break loose. He and his double-crossing cock stood, stewing in everyone's juices.

Zed didn't say anything, just picked up the clothing and went, leaving Beirn mad at everyone, but most of all himself.

*Ox would know what to do now.*

Beirn hadn't the foggiest. At the sink, he tried to rinse the taste of Zed's seed out of his mouth and nostrils, but something stayed... a scent of salty skin and hair. He stopped trying. Without Ox to give voice to reason, he simply scrounged through the cabinets for anything valuable and anything usable for

two criminals with crappy odds. He wanted to put a couple lightyears between himself and this beachside skeezebox where he'd gone off the rails.

He found a fresh medkit, expired mealpacks, and a few changes of disposable clothes. Suddenly he was a teenager and Ox's phantom double seemed to be standing beside him asking questions he couldn't answer. This was exactly how they'd left his parents' habitat nearly ten years ago.

*Stop that.*

After a few minutes, the only thing Beirn hadn't packed was standing naked and pecker-tracked overhead, so he went looking...

He found the sheepish smuggler standing upstairs beside the wall staring at the medical sensors and feeds beside the sling-racks. Beirn was relieved to find him clothed. "Zed?"

No response.

"Leave it. You can't carry it and you can't spend money if you're dead. We gotta find Ox."

Zed didn't move, even to look at him.

"We gotta go. C'mon." Beirn jerked his head in impatience. "What's your damage?"

The outlaw shook his head at the row of canisters feeding his equipment. He seemed scared of something. "It doesn't matter. Never mind."

Beirn looked at the shredded slings and the spunk on the wall.

"You're right. C'mon." Zed shook his head and shrugged, pushing Beirn towards the stairs.

"The fuck are you hiding, squirt?" Beirn stepped around him and understood.

*Empty.*

The tanks were empty.

The pheromone feeds throughout the bungalow were dead.

Zed's spooge-stooges had smashed them during their escape and disabled the hormone drizzle.

*Then what made us—*

Desire. Without the endocrines available, the misters had only been dosing the rooms with stale seawater to maintain the humidity. No pheromones. Salt water, the planet's perspiration, and nothing else. They'd done what came —uh-naturally.

Zed looked as shamed as Beirn felt.

*Fucking embarrassing. Nothing to say. Nothing to do. Forget it.*

Beirn stood stock still beside short pirate, conscious of the gap between their heights and the sweet soreness inside his floppy foreskin. He choked on a breath. For a strange moment, he wondered if Zed would have told him about the tanks if he hadn't pressed. Probably not.

*At least he had an excuse. He was dosed intravenously. I wanted him.*

Moving like a bonsai zombie, Zed went downstairs avoiding eye contact.

Beirn would have done the same if he'd had anything to pack before he walked away from his whole shitty life. Instead, he just watched Zed leave and remembered what he'd done for reasons that had nothing to do with artificial hormones and everything to do with desire. Homo oriented.

*I'm like Ox. What have I done?*

If they wanted to live, they had to find his brother and undo the damage. Else they were dead men, both of them. He scowled at the wrecked room and shook his head. It didn't matter. No one would ever know, except Zed and in the great scheme, this runt simply... didn't matter.

His fingers gripped the pistol which seemed to have materialized in his calloused palm.

*But what if he does matter? What if I don't?*

Was it better to be dead here than retired in the street by executives like a fucking *employee*? Or maybe it was better to terminate Zed now before things got worse? *Better me than them, right?* But could he make Ox understand without the smuggler as a scapegoat? Would he want to? Did he actually believe he could stand in front of Ox and Zed and lie about both of them? The panic mauling his insides seemed like the one thing he couldn't kill.

The venom-pistol felt so light in his loose fingers; it practically floated closer to his face so he could admire the engraved plastic on the barrel. His bodyheat activated the laser-sight so that its red pinpoint swept one stained wall seeking a target. His index finger teased the trigger a little as he flicked through the scenarios in his head. *Take the shot, take the shot.*

From the minute he had left home, he'd aimed with ruthless certainty. He'd dragged his brother into abattoirs and slept in sewers because he knew their future waited just out of sight. He had tunneled blind into hell to carve out a spot for Ox and himself. Grain by grain, he had buried them alive.

*No different than the fucking mines.*

Staring at nothing, Beirn thought of his father's face the night they ran. He thought of HardCell strapping Ox down and sawing pieces off his twin. He thought of trying to shoot Zed in the back... in the heart... in the face. *To be kind.* He thought of putting the gun in his own cocksucking, backstabbing mouth to let the light—

*Tat-Thwiit!*

His finger had squeezed the trigger one millimeter too far and the blast scorched a life support deck and melted a circle of plasticrete into runny sludge. His heart pounded at his own stupidity. *Fucking wetneck.*

“Beirn?!” Footsteps and a shout from downstairs.

He didn’t answer. He looked down at the venom-pistol again, wishing he knew where he was supposed to aim.

“Hey....” Zed’s concern came from the base of the stairs, and then he moved away muttering.

*Take your lumps.* Rather than answer, Beirn holstered his scalding weapon and got the hell out of there.

Downstairs, he didn’t say a word. He stood and watched the silent smuggler throw clothes and disks and drugs in a bag without paying any attention to the junk as it passed through his hands.

*His hands.*

Beirn checked the back door and the patio before he gave Zed the all-clear, the half-light would last till they reached the road. As they left the demolished juice

farm, Beirn wondered idly if a corporate assault team would retire them as they exited.

*Maybe HardCell will bury us together.* He snorted at the thought.

Zed looked up at the sound, but dropped his eyes quickly in shame or disgust. Neither said anything. No need.

But HardCell hadn't sent death that quickly. They had a chance still.

The hangdog merc and dealer left the resort just before sunup trudging over the dunes and then hailing an illegal taxi headed into New Baghdad. Steering through the predawn metropolis, Beirn's mind flipped and rolled like an eel tank but he kept his eyes on his massive scarred knuckles.

*Maybe Zed was in on it with Ox. Maybe he prefers homo-sex.*

All the way back into the city, the two mismatched fugitives didn't discuss it. They didn't actually look at each other even sitting leg to leg.

*Maybe he conned me.*

Even as they drew close to the cargo terminal, they said nothing. Beirn kept all his eyes peeled for fellow mercs and picked a path through the sleepy spaceport. They had to walk close but not *too* close.

*Maybe I don't care.*

Avoiding each other's eyes, they hustled passage on a freighter that would get them to the right star system at least. They'd have to track Ox from there.

*Maybe Ox knew.*

The ship's captain recognized crooks when he saw them and didn't care what names they used. On the other hand, they were travelling cargo and the trip looked to take forty Terran days minimum.

*Long time to share a room. Long time to share a secret. Long time to share.*

They boarded with minimum gear and forged ID; he kept an eye out for cops or HardCell operatives. *Nope.* Their odds looked better by the minute. They needed to find Ox and lift the bounty.

Beirn would have a lot of explaining to do, and hopefully Zed would help. The two of them would make restitution. If nothing else, Ox would hear the truth.

*Truth seems like a good place to start. For once.*

Below deck, they found the shipping container which would serve as their berth for the next month-plus. Beirn checked the gear and grub. It was close quarters and filthy, but sported stasis racks for up to four passengers. Another good sign. This captain had smuggled plenty of interstellar felons before them. Even the crew wouldn't know this crate contained live cargo.

Inside their plasticrete cage, Zed dropped his bag and whimpered. Looking at his feet, he paced and whimpered low again in the back of his throat like a wild animal. He flinched like he'd been threatened and backed towards one molded wall.

Beirn glanced to see the tent in the smaller man's pants, his round ass. *Hormones riding him again.* "You okay, squirt?"

"That's not—" Zed stared at a corner of the floor and wiped his nose roughly. "I'm fine." He panted hard a few seconds, his face a rictus of panic.

"Does it hurt still? Maybe—"

"Maybe I fucking deserve it! Sperm piracy?! Maybe it's my penance. Such a scumbag."

*Which one of us?*

Beirn took a step towards him. Part of merc work was a sense of timing, but he just kept on fumbling and faltering. "Just asking, Zed."

The smaller man's voice bounced off the plasticrete walls and he held out his hands in frustration. "Don't!"

Beirn didn't.

"Stop."

Beirn stopped.

Somewhere high overhead on the other side of the freighter, metal ground against metal making a sound like angry mechanical whales fucking. If the crew was closing the bay, the ship would liftoff soon.

"It's bad enough like this, but I can't take your smile and your size near me when I'm like this. I'm not fucking strong enough." Zed stalked to the far wall and slid to the floor, hugging his knees. He stared at nothing. "It's not safe."

“Hey! Hey. Life isn’t safe.” Beirn took another step, a hand held out like he was approaching a rabid dog. “I didn’t know. Miserable and crooked. I...um...I....”

“What!?!?”

Beirn blinked. “Apologize.”

Zed rubbed his eyes as if they hurt. “Yeah.”

“Can you see?” No response. “Your eyes, I mean. I’ve never—”

The seed-dealer snorted. “Yeah. Thanks. Great. Forty days sounds bad enough already without you—”

“Ox is so open and true but I sold him. I betrayed my *brother* because he was, y’know, like that. With men. Like this.” Beirn slapped his own chest in explanation. *Say it, chickenshit.* “Homo.”

Zed looked up at that. “Fuck you.”

*Pheromones, my ass.*

“Why?! I’m just saying you’ve got a dose of hormones wrecking you, so you have an excuse. I don’t have anything, squirt. I made a fuck-awful mistake because I didn’t know it was possible.”

*My ass....*

Beirn glanced at Zed then, the filthy possibilities refracting in his mind’s eye; he might have been ashamed at what he imagined right then but his *prick* wasn’t. *A month plus, caged together.* He tried not to dwell on the possibilities presented by the difference in size and the similarity of appetite. Heat bloomed in his crotch and his tongue snuck out to moisten his raw lips.

*He’ll have to teach me.*

Zed stood up suddenly and spat at the floor. “I can’t do this. I’d rather let customs catch me. I’d rather be retired with a submachete.” He strode to the container opening and raised a hand to slam the door shut, but didn’t. He stood just outside, face carved in shadows that made him look boyish. The cavernous freight hold loomed behind him.

*Belly of the beast.*

“No.” Beirn called after him. “C’mon.”

Framed by the doorway, Zed grunted at something. He stepped out and the dark swallowed him.

Beirn followed slowly, keeping his voice level. “You take the stasis rack. I’m big enough I don’t need the life support anyway. I’ll be fine out here.” He stepped through the door to shout. “Zed!”

The name bounced off the mountain of cargo around and above them.

Beirn stood dwarfed under crates piled a quarter-kilometer high. The evac halogens threw orange-pink trapezoids across the jumbled columns of containers, striping the gloomy, echoing blackness. The smaller man was already a lit stripe away and the blackness divided them.

Beirn walked straight across it, keeping his eyes where they needed to be. “Zed?” Even he felt small out here, too strong and too weak both.

*Take the shot, take your lumps.*

“Go back inside.”

*Now!*

“Hey.” As Beirn reached the dull coral light, he gripped a firm shoulder that fit perfectly against his brutal hand. “I like you.” He couldn’t remember saying that ever.

Zed jerked his shoulder to shake the touch off. He walked towards the next stripe of deep shadow.

Beirn nodded his head, just once, to a question no one had asked. “I *like* you.”

“Well, I don’t like you! So fuck right off.” Zed stood pissed and serious looking at the vast, stacked dark.

*A meter shorter, cock on fire, and he won’t give a centimeter. He’s braver than me.* Beirn shook his head in admiration, but no one could see. “Wait.”

Zed did, as if listening with his broad back. His hands flexed in irritation at his sides.

*That’s a start, huh*

“Okay? I’m not saying—” Beirn walked to the smaller man to face him, to give the truth to him. *I swear.*

As he did, Zed finally-finally turned to see for himself, his crossed forearms bulged where they crossed over his chest. He seemed to be thinking hard enough to cause a nosebleed.

Beirn shook his head gently. “I’m sorry. I know I’m a crook, but maybe you can straighten—”

The words died in his big dumb mouth as Zed raised a hand to ward off the rest of the sentence and stamped back the way he’d come, muttering and spitting in the dark. His boots rang on the plasticrete.

Beirn spun to watch as he passed out of the coral glow of the halogens. “Will you fucking talk to me, squirt?!”

*Don’t think. Be smart.*

Again the dark divided them like a river. This far away, standing in pink-orange islands of light it seemed like they stood exactly the same size.

*Ox would know and I don’t. My fucking twin knows.*

Around them, the main engines slammed into readiness shaking the molded floor. The lights dimmed to half. The star freighter would be departing in a few minutes and they needed to be strapped in or they’d be mangled.

*What would Ox do?* Again Beirn wished he had a link to his twin. *Help me.*

“I’m not very good at being human, huh? I didn’t know I could be...” Beirn frowned and shrugged. “...good...at it, I mean.”

*I don’t have any practice being a person.*

Zed stood at the door of their container, not entering. He punched the frame. “Fucking goon! I’d rather, I dunno, *freeze* to death out here than be trapped in that cube with... all of your superhuman grizzly-sized *everything*, going out of my mind every half hour, rubbing my wood into a bloody nub.” He squeezed his crotch into a harsh, unsexy wad in one angry claw.

*Be human.* “Then what do you want?”

Zed grimaced with whatever he wasn’t saying. “Not— Nothing.”

*Be Ox.*

Without thinking, Beirn went down on a knee like a knight at vigil. It felt stupid and right.

Zed rolled his eyes, then glared down at him. “Don’t gimme shit.”

Beirn held his skeptical gaze, not blinking. “I’ll prove it to you. Fuck. At least let me try.”

Standing on the threshold, Zed squinted and scanned him with wet brown eyes, taking in the battered bulldog face, the scarred hands, the colossal physique wrapped in military-grade muscle. Still...still... he kept not shutting that damn door.

*C’mom, squirt.*

The pitch of the engines was climbing now. *Tunk-theuunkk*. Outside, the ceramic towlines had retracted; the floor rolled as the freighter floated free and the auto-gravity kicked in. Around them, the piled cargo rattled with the subsonic vibration of the propulsion system lifting from the ocean into the sky.

Finally Zed raised his voice over the rumble and cocked his head. “Thing is, I’m not too trusting or honest when you come to it.” He waved a hand as if tracing invisible cables linking them. “See? There’s the catch. Because I’m a rotten crook. And you’re a rotten crook.”

“I am.” Beirn didn’t take the bait, just held that gaze. *I don’t care.*

Zed drummed his fingers on the doorframe. “Could take a long fucking while to learn different.”

“But maybe we’re rotten because we’re good at something else. Huh? Maybe we’re just so twisted we fit together.”

Zed searched his eyes for something. He shrugged. “May be.” A quicksilver smile flicked over his face for a split second and died.

Beirn raised his face to look up at the little smuggler directly, choking on the crazy feelings pushing towards words, trying to surge out of him. “How long do you reckon?”

*Please.*

Zed turned slowly, walking towards the stasis rack. “Need to buckle up before the jump.”

Beirn didn't move. "How long?"

Zed pulled himself into the straps and attached the sensors to the flightsuit. Only then did he finally turn to stare at the kneeling giant. "Long as we need, maybe." He tilted his head, puzzled, and chewed his mustache a moment. "You think too much."

"Okay." Beirn felt stupid, but stupid was a start. He didn't want to move till he knew something, anything, one thing even. "Zed?"

*Please.*

"Bear—" His handsome pirate prince shook his dark-stubbled head, widening his eyes in comic irritation. "—I know you're huge and all, but unless you plan on developing your own gravitational field or being pounded into chowder out there, you wanna maybe join me?"

"I do." Beirn felt himself stand. He felt his legs carry his brawny body through the door to this sweet, smart, sturdy squirt who had undone him so totally in a single night. He paused.

*Thank you, Ox. I swear—*

"Well?" Zed licked his bristled upper lip, his eyes thoughtful. "We have a long way to go. You coming?"

Nodding, Beirn closed the door and began to shrug out of his gear.

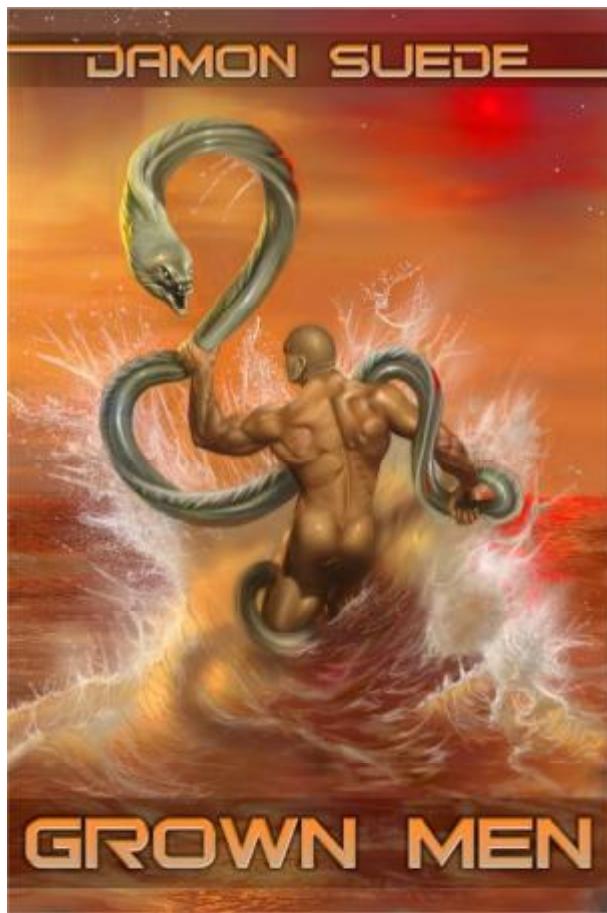
"So...if you're doing it—" Zed smiled at him then, like a shared secret. "—do it."

Beirn did.

**AUTHOR BIO:** Damon Suede grew up out-n-proud deep in the anus of right-wing America, and escaped as soon as it was legal. Though new to M/M, Damon has been writing for print, stage, and screen for two decades. He's won some awards, but counts his blessings more often: his amazing friends, his demented family, his beautiful husband, his loyal fans, and his silly, stern, seductive Muse who keeps whispering in his ear, year after year. Get in touch with him at:

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Interested in Ox's story? Also check out *Grown Men*, the "first transmission" from the HardCell Universe. Available 30 October 2011 from [Riptide Publishing](#),



#### **EVERY FUTURE HAS DIRTY ROOTS.**

Marooned in the galactic backwaters of the HardCell company, colonist Runt struggles to eke out an existence on a newly-terraformed tropical planetoid. Since his clone-wife died on entry, he's been doing the work of two on his failing protein farm. Overworked and undersized, Runt's dwindling hope of earning corporate citizenship has turned to fear of violent "retirement."

When an overdue crate of provisions crashes on his beach, Runt searches frantically for a replacement wife among the tools and food. Instead he gets Ox, a mute hulk who seems more like a corporate assassin than a simple offworld farmer. Shackwacky and near-starving, Runt has no choice but to work with his silent partner despite his mounting paranoia and the unsettling

appeal of Ox's genetically altered pheromones. Ox plays the part of the gentle giant well, but Runt's still not convinced he hasn't arrived with murder in mind.

Between brutal desire and the seeds of a relationship, Runt's fears and Ox's inhuman past collide on a fertile world where hope and love just might have room to grow.