

“The design --- Do you not suppose that it’s a little anti-modern?”

Both the Dutchman and the Scot eyed up the vessel. The planks of its exterior masked its brass and glass insides. Even more illusory, the ship’s Aerolyth jet engines pooled towards its sails, shaping the deception of a schooner in the breeze.

“I’m an anti-modern man, Mr. van der Bijl.”

The Dutchman rarely questioned his clientele, especially ones with pocketbooks as deep as Sir MacGill’s, but that statement pricked his mind.

“Surely you remember my excitement when I told you that my hometown now has ten electric streetlights,” he argued politely. “And, of course, cleaner streets and indoor plumbing---”

“And a thousand new and bloody battles that your people’ve boiled in. This, of course, is hardly unique to the North Sea, but look at yourself, Lucas. You’ve no legs any longer! What could be so great for you to give them up? A splotch of islands that the bugs and the Americans will soon just carve between themselves?”

Lucas van der Bijl released a sigh. “Well, I hope you find some happiness among the savages and jungles. Venutian life can hardly be hospitable, you know.”

“You know my trip is by no means a permanent migration,” MacGill retorted, smiling. “Nothing more than a vacation and a hunt.”

“Have you ever been to Venus?”

“Never, but I’ve read about the game.”

“And the cultures?”

“Such things hardly interest me.”

The two former soldiers shook each other’s hands and finished their transaction. As soon

as she was loaded up with elephants and black powder and fuel, MacGill's airship *Rousseau* floated towards Earth's exosphere.



Sir MacGill was unsurprised by Naxlii's sweltering heat. Even at the city's port, its shallow lagoons offered little respite from the magnitude of the Venutian sun. After paying the dock lord sufficient coin to keep the *Rousseau* safe while he was gone, MacGill headed inland with his bags and gun atop his favorite bull.

MacGill cared little for the world he left behind, but his least painful memories of war had always featured jungle expeditions. He'd fought against the French deep in the Congo, and then against the Hive for ten months in Peru. The elephant he rode now, "Caledon," had been with him both times.

He preferred the company of Caledon to any man or beast.

Unlike other creatures, Caledon had never displayed capacity for savagery.

He had always been as gentle as a lamb.

And, unlike most men, Caledon cared little that his master's face was horribly disfigured.

Napoleon-class rocket blasts are known to leave a scar.

MacGill embraced his pachyderm and pet him gently. "How're you holding up, Caddy? I figured you might like the warmth here."

As the city disappeared behind them, their entire world became encased in fronds and foliage. The sky was swallowed by a canopy of megaflora. "Fortunately, Caddy, you and all your girls can eat most Venus food. If you get hungry, just tap m'shoulder with your trunk, alright?" he laughed.

As soon as Sir MacGill's small herd had crossed the Vli'ixa Estuary, he let his elephants be free to forage while he rested underneath a cydrough branch. It seemed like the hottest part of afternoon, and both he and the tuskers were struck sunbaked into drowsiness. MacGill knew that they'd remain together as a herd, and he laid beside his Caledon on beds of turquoise wildflowers, drifting into pretty little dreams...



He woke facedown, the rifle still strapped to him.

All alone.

They had vanished.

All four elephants, including Caledon, were missing.

Caledon was missing.

MacGill swore, his head flooded with Vulcan and Poseidon: earthquakes and volcanoes.

MacGill was fuming, enraged by fears of loneliness again.

Then he forced himself to slow his breathing to a crawl.

“MacGill, you're slow to panic. You remember, right? Y'and Caledon've been through far, far worse.” He repeated that as he decided he should scale the tallest tree he found. “Far, far, far, far, far worse,” he hummed, knowing that even a small group of them would carve the rainforest with trails. He could track them, one by one, before Venus's brutal fauna did.

He noticed how brilliantly gold the sky was, and the fresh fog swirling into valleys and low places of the jungle and the shore. “Thank You, God, for making this planet spin so wonderfully slow.” By his estimate, it wouldn't get dark for 17 more days, leaving half an Earth month of perpetual dusk to search.

He couldn't make out any trails from where he perched until the spyglass was uncoiled. Then he found them: four drunk paths strung clumsily together. Around that way, MacGill spotted a couple Humboldt's rubicors chewing a grey carcass.

His heart stopped for a moment.

Then MacGill dismissed the possibility of rubicors being able to take down any elephant stronger than a calf. "Little devils couldn't hardly fell a boar. Claws too short, scales not enough protection from the tusks, slime membrane and bubble eyes damaged far too easily --- no hope for repair."

Still, when he climbed down, he took little time loading his weapon.



Sir MacGill slashed his path through the infinite Venutian space of summer greens. Despite his terror, this rainforest had its pearls: tiny avians and soft-shelled, hand-like crabs. There was more than enough humidity in the air here to support gilled creatures on the land beyond crustaceans, too. MacGill marveled at the sunshine pulsing ovetop the emerald, sensational lagoon, stood there witnessing the daily migration of Ei'o'yaws: luminescent streams of pink and turquoise cnidarian flesh. Holographic, mercurial whiskers rippled beside them, creating a captivating dance of marine ribbons up above the soil and the waves.

He politely sidestepped around the paths of these air-sailors, made calm again --- for a moment --- in this place. MacGill whispered, "It should come as no surprise that nature, even on another sphere, should have such abundant splendors to be enjoyed."

Something by the ocean caught his eye --- a pretty shell. He stooped down to the water, catching his reflection in the act. That nose was just a stump, the lips serrated, mutilated. One

eye cragged with scar tissue; one ear obviously vanished.

An inch-thick bullet ripped the Ei'o'yaw apart.

Those remaining pulsed a little faster, panicking at gunfire but unable to accelerate beyond their normal speed.

MacGill plucked the spines out of the jelly, begun a fire with his fuel, and cooked the Ei'o'yaw as others trickled past him. "The taste," he said to no one, "is dreadful, actually." It was against his pride to throw the beast away, and he finished his repulsive meal without complaint.

MacGill reloaded his gun. Then, finding the trail again, he pushed deeper into green.



Nobody remembered just what day this was, but ask any Venutian and they'll tell you they remember hearing about MacGill's voyage. The story spread beyond just Venus to the Earth, as well, and the United Kingdom will forever be impacted by his actions.

Sir MacGill continued as the sun dipped lower every day, fueled by fear and isolation. He shot a dozen species, tasting some and wishing he could stuff the others. He cursed his trip to Venus for his loss of elephants, but savored every second he was without human beings.

In a daze of solitude he squelched through muck and drank rainwater and cut rubicors and zleechahs into slabs of meat.

Most unusually, MacGill had found a peculiar knob beside the shore: a drip castle of mud-reinforced sand. Inspecting the construction, he jumped when he saw movement inside.

MacGill fired his gun.

The creature made a painful little noise, then fell to rest.

MacGill dragged the animal into the twilight. Inspecting it, he smirked in admiration of

its beautiful fur. It was as red as his own hair, and finer than the women of the glens back home in Scotland. Its eyes were icy blue, just barely glazing over; its body muscular; its clawed hands and feet spread wide with webbing. Beyond the eyes, the face could not be examined. The fur was far too thick to try without a razor.

Regardless, MacGill's stomach rumbled, and he severed the creature's leg, plucked it free of hair, and roasted it over a spitfire. "Very good," he mused to the jungle. "It's really quite like pork." He'd tasted chimpanzee while in the Congo. Subconsciously, that's what it reminded him of.

Further down the shoreline, he could spot more sand dwellings. Once he'd finished, he reloaded his weapon, left the creature's body, and moved forward towards them.

On his way, he saw another fuzzy biped slumped dead on the beach. It sported a huge bore wound in its chest, like something had run a massive spear clean through it.

Then he saw the other corpse.

Nibbled by flies and their offspring, one tusk curved towards the sun, the other nowhere to be found. MacGill was livid and in tears. A friend of his had died.

Then he heard one call.

It was unmistakably one of his babies.

Frantically, he sprinted further in between the mounds.

He saw more furry creatures, live, and struggling with Caledon.

"Caledon!" MacGill bellowed. "Caledon!"

The elephant looked towards him, trumpeted a blast, and sent one of the fur things flying.

Caledon charged, trampling the animal with brutal ferocity.

MacGill had never seen his Caledon so violent, but he didn't care.

MacGill took the shot immediately.

One shaggy being was torn to pieces.

The others looked towards MacGill, then back at the elephant. Caledon bore claw marks on his back and legs.

The Scotsman boiled.

He reloaded.

Another creature shot and killed.

More came as they erupted from their miserable sand dens. They attempted to rush MacGill at first, but once he fired into them, they backed away.

When another died, they ran.

He reloaded.

Another creature shot and killed.

Again.

MacGill put in the black powder.

MacGill put in the inch-thick cartridge.

And MacGill shot again.

Then again.

He reloaded.

Another creature shot and killed.

Caledon was unafraid of gun blasts, and he gored the furry things beside his master.

This continued on until no creature seen was living.



MacGill took Caledon and his two remaining elephants back to Naxlii with him one week later. The *Rousseau* floated between the dock's thick fingers. Much to Sir MacGill's dismay, the outside had been battered by a tropical storm. A few planks remained, but it was mostly brass and glass.

The dock-lord offered Sir MacGill his money back, but MacGill insisted that he should keep it.

"It's not your fault," MacGill promised. "I'm sure you did the best you could. Pretty things like wood just can't survive this place for long."

As MacGill watched dock-hands fill the *Rousseau*'s cargo hold, he sat at a cafe and read the paper.

*Extermination!* it exclaimed. *Village of Xuilliwu Wiped Out by Invaders!*

"Now that's a damned shame," MacGill mumbled to himself, prying more into the article.

*The bodies of forty-three citizens of Xuilliwu were found horribly disfigured. One, whose family from Naxlii identifies as Julian Tooruuga, pictured below, even had his leg cut off. The location of the missing leg remains unknown. Regardless, they are merely one of the poor families affected by this tragedy.*

The picture clearly displayed a furry biped with webbed hands and feet.

"Isn't that disgusting?" the dock-lord scorched over Sir MacGill's shoulder. "I swear.

And to think the monster that did that hasn't been found, either. I'll have to bust my own gun out of storage. You think I can sleep at night with someone like that walking free?"

MacGill asked where the family of the victim was living.

"Oh, just around the corner. It's a pink house, I believe. Mostly sand, but reinforced with seashell."



MacGill saw the shaggy couple sobbing on the floor inside.

MacGill found out from the dock-lord that many Venutian humans had evolved to be aquatic, furry, but that the only differences between them and MacGill were physical.

MacGill told them who he was, that he had been an officer for the United Kingdom, and he asked that they pardon his face, explaining that it was won in what he had lyingly referred to as, "noble combat."

They responded in perfect English.

Then he told them what he'd done to their sweet boy. And, saying this, he brandished a machete.

MacGill sliced off his leg and gave it to them.

Then he climbed up onto Caledon and boarded the *Rosseau*.



When he had gotten back to van der Bijl's shipyard, and Lucas van der Bijl asked him what had happened to his leg, MacGill didn't lie.

Lucas threw up. He had read about this in the paper, too.

“Sir MacGill, that’s... Oh, sweet God.”

“Indeed...”

“You... You didn’t know?” the Dutchman wheezed.

“Lucas, I’m not living here much longer, so I want you to take care of Caledon for me.

I’ve left you instructions for feeding him and housing him. If you don’t want him, fine, but make sure he’s in good hands no matter what. No circuses or anything. And take my ship, too. You can have it. I don’t want it anymore.”

“I --- MacGill, I don’t understand. I --- Have you gone insane?”

“Perhaps.”

“And what’s this talk about you giving me your Caledon? You’ve loved that animal since he was a calf.”

“You have to take good care of him. That’s all there is to it.”

“Are these the fruits of your vacation to Venus? Insanity? Massacre? And one less leg? Are these the spoils of your game?”

“It’s not a game once the anger piles up. It’s war.”

“That wasn’t war, my friend. That was small-time genocide.”

“Only when the guilt begins. When it’s happening, it’s impossible to spot the difference.”

