

CLONING FREEDOM

STEPHEN B. PEARL

SAMPLE

“This is not a good plan.” Carl crouched behind some bushes at the edge of the ruined laboratory’s grounds. His skin and hair blended with the background. A gutted building stood in front of him.

“You should have said that before,” said Rowan.

“He did say that before,” remarked Fran.



Ryan pressed a button on his console. The big screen in the control room for the *Angel Black* entertainment series shifted to Carl’s perspective. Through Carl’s eyes, Ryan could see Rowan’s lean, muscular body clad in black jeans and a sweater. She carried a red fire extinguisher. Carl’s eyes fell to her medium-sized breasts.

“Carl, you’re staring at my chest again.” Rowan’s voice issued from the speaker.

“Was not!” Carl’s perspective shifted to Rowan’s pretty, fair-skinned face.

“Carl, honestly!” The view shifted to Fran, who also carried a fire extinguisher and had plastic packets taped to her belt. “Even when you camouflage, some things stand out. My boyfriend could show some control.”

The empathic monitors beside the secondary screen dedicated to Carl jumped.

“Good boy, always count on you to eye up the ladies. This will go great for the PG version.” Ryan stared into the screen, which showed Fran’s generous cleavage then shifted to her perfect American First Peoples face.

The visual screen went blank. Ryan checked his other inputs. “Going into battle and still in heat.”



“Will you two focus?” hissed a well-proportioned, middle-aged man who knelt beside Rowan. He’d put his fire extinguisher on the ground and was fiddling with its valve.

Fran broke the kiss. “Sorry, Gunther.”

“I wish Angel were here,” whispered a muscular, Japanese-looking man of about twenty, who waited beside Gunther.

“Why is that, Farley? You want to cheat on me with her again?” Rowan sounded sarcastic.



Ryan shifted to Gunther’s perspective. Rowan looked hurt. Gunther’s emotional readings showed a mix of anger toward the younger man and affection toward his daughter.

“Emotions are too conflicted to sort the empathic input. We’ll have to dub them before going to market. Have to keep it simple for the featherbrains in the audience.” Ryan placed an editing marker on the timeline.

“I meant we could use some aerial surveillance. How often do I have to say I’m sorry?” Farley’s voice was strained.

Willa looked up from inspecting her own fire extinguisher. "You slept with her best friend, Farley. What do you expect?"

Ryan shifted to Carl's view. His eyes traced over a red-haired woman with a lean, small-breasted body and a pretty face.

"Willa is old enough to be your mother, and you still got it bad." Ryan smirked.



"Mom, it's all right. I should have stayed focused." Rowan brushed a strand of her short, dark hair away from her eyes.

"Your father and I hate to see you so—"

"Shhh," hissed Rowan. "Do you hear—?"

"Well, what have we here?" said a voice from behind the group. Everyone turned. A k-no-in, its canine features pulled into a snarl, stared down at them. "Snacks!" The alien bunched its pony-like body and extended the gutting claws on its six, muscular legs.

Fran's hands locked into a claw shape and her nails extended. She raked her claws against a plastic packet on her belt. A cream-coloured grease oozed out of the packet onto her claws. Snarling, she leapt, driving her fingers against the alien pirate's throat. The k-no-in howled as the lithium in the grease catalysed a reaction that turned its blood into a corrosive poison.



Ryan watched as the screen labelled "K-no-in 2" went blank. He pressed a button, and it lit up again. It now bore the caption "Otterzoid Female 1."



"Wow!" gasped Carl.

Fran pulled a handkerchief from her pocket and wiped

her claws. "Felinezoid powers have their advantages."

A whistle sounded.

"Time to go," said Gunther. They all raced toward the building.



Ryan watched Rowan on his screen. "Better cut to the other team; see what they're up to." He pressed a button on his console. The main screen shifted to an overview of a large, scorched room. A coffin-like device stood in the corner. A portable methane heater flamed in the room's centre.

A chameleonzoid huddled beside the heater. The alien had an eight-limbed, cylindrical body, ending in a head like a crocodile's at one end and a long muscular tail at the other. Its hide had shifted colour to blend with the soot-blackened, concrete floor.

A felinezoid, which looked like a two-metre-tall, humanoid cat, with short, thick fur and grey-tabby markings, moved toward the heater.



Valaseau groomed the back of her hand, then used it to smooth the fur beside her pointed ears. "Are you comfortable, Captain Hussut?"

The chameleonzoid moved its head slowly. "This world is cold. How long until the time-lock on the rescue pod opens? The sooner we summon our ship, the sooner I can return to Death Valley."

"Not long. I'll be so happy when we kill the upstart humans. They'll pay for corrupting my Toronk. We'll make them pay, make them bleed, make them suffer. We'll rule this world and make them all pay!" Valaseau's voice rose to an insane fervour.

"Yes, felinezoid. We will rule this world. Turn up this heater. I am growing sluggish."



“Now let’s see how the diversion’s going.” Ryan set the terminal to record the other feeds as he shifted the big screen’s perspective.



Toronk threw himself at three k-no-ins. Two-point-one metres of felinezoid fury, clawing and biting.

A petite, black girl launched herself from the branches of a nearby tree, bat-like wings folded out from her back. She hovered above the battle as she took aim with an air-rifle and fired into one of the k-no-ins. In moments, the pirate was convulsing. The others were too busy with Toronk to notice.

The girl scanned the grounds, seeing three k-no-ins, a felinezoid and an alien that resembled an oversized, green otter, with an elongated head, racing toward them. The otter-like creature looked up. Angel’s gun jerked out of her hands. “Toronk, they’re coming. They have an otterzoid with them. It’s a female.” Angel swooped away as the otterzoid aimed the air-rifle at her telekinetically.

Toronk snarled as he threw one of his attackers into the other.

“ANGEL, NOW!” he bellowed.

Angel swooped through the side door of a van on the lab’s parking lot. Toronk dove into the driver’s seat and burnt rubber toward the street. The alien guards chased them.



“Back to the A-team.” Ryan reset the feeds on his console to an overview of the laboratory’s main hall.



Gunther leapt back as the k-no-in rushed him. A hypodermic needle floated into the air behind it and drove down, injecting its payload of lithium grease. The k-no-in

barely had time for the pain to register before it died.

"That is so cool," remarked Fran.

"I like it," agreed Rowan. "You okay, Dad?"

"None the worse for wear," said Gunther.

Carl passed Fran his fire extinguisher, then crept along the hall, blending with the walls. He paused at the doors to a ruined workroom and glanced through the window. Ducking down, he willed his body to flesh tones, then motioned his companions forward.



"Good, now a little pre-game banter. Unrealistic as that is for this stage of an engagement. Have to keep the audience happy." Ryan adjusted the level of endorphins to Rowan's group, calming them and inducing a light euphoria.



"You sure this will work?" asked Willa.

"Are we ever?" Gunther cupped his wife's cheek.

"We're all insane. You do realize this?" remarked Fran.

"Nothing's been sane since Amitose grafted alien DNA to us and told us we had to keep the space pirates a secret while we fought them," replied Farley.

Gunther closed his eyes. "I hear them. Valaseau is on some mental babble about getting Toronk back. The chameleonzoid has the activate codes. If they reach that pod's FTL telegraph, we're doomed."

"Right then, let's stop them," said Rowan.

"With ya. Wish we had an AK-47." Carl grinned as he shifted colour to match the walls.

"With the gun control laws in this country, we were lucky to get Angel's air rifle," said Gunther.

"I can dream. One, two, three, NOW!" Carl dove through the charred door, hit the dirt and rolled. A beam of light blasted through the wall above him. He leapt up and ran.

"Particle weapons! You didn't say anything about

particle weapons!” griped Farley.

“It wasn’t thinking about them. Move anyway,” snapped Gunther.

The chameleonzoid stood on four of its legs, holding a rifle-like weapon in one of its three-fingered hands. Its slit-pupiled, reptilian eyes tracked Carl, despite his camouflage, so it didn’t notice Farley enter and run at its back. Gunther followed, then Willa and Fran.

Rowan stepped through the door and yelled. “HEY YOU, LIZARD BREATH.”

The chameleonzoid jerked around to face her. Rowan threw the fire extinguisher she carried, adding a telekinetic push. It slammed into the heater, smashing it, then venting CO₂ over the sparks. A jet of methane rose from the tank.

“That’s not nice, human tramp!” Valaseau lunged at Rowan, covering three metres in a single bound.

“Eep!” Rowan felt a furry hand close on her throat. Claw tips pricked her skin.



“Stardust!” Ignoring the memo on the control room’s wall, Ryan let his hands race over his console. Valaseau’s endorphin levels increased as her estrogen equivalent jumped.

“That should make her hot and playful. I hope it’s enough.”



“I’ll do it slow. I love it when they suffer,” said Valaseau. Something slammed into her side. Gunther landed on top of the felinezoid. His knee smashed into the floor. Biting down on his pain, he rolled clear.

Farley rushed the chameleonzoid. Firing his extinguisher at the alien, he coated the reptile with frozen CO₂.

“NOOOO!” Hussut fired its weapon, igniting the gas jetting from the methane tank before the cold could force him into inactivity.

The explosion threw Farley against the wall. He

crumpled to the floor.

The chameleonzoid roared as fire singed its hide, then receded. A jet of flame rose from the methane cylinder, igniting the ceiling.

“Chill out, hothead.” Fran directed her extinguisher’s spray against Hussut.

“Chill out, hothead?” Carl sounded incredulous as he came at the beast from the other side, coating it with CO₂ snow.

“Everybody else does it,” countered Fran as Willa added her extinguisher to the assault.

Gunther grappled with Valaseau; the felinezoid’s mouth descended toward his throat.

“Leave him alone!” snapped Rowan. A scorched lab table slammed into Valaseau, sending her careening through one of the room’s shattered windows.

“Rowan,” breathed Gunther.

She smiled, then fell to her knees, clutching her head.



“Stardust! Keep overreaching like that, you won’t get a chance to see if you can survive with a No Intervention Order on you.” Ryan checked Rowan’s readouts.



“GUYS, NEED HELP HERE!” Carl’s fire extinguisher had petered out, and the chameleonzoid was bringing its weapon to bear on him.

Gunther leapt up and fell groaning.



Ryan shifted to Gunther’s panel, increasing adrenalin levels and muting his pain.



Gunther fought to his feet, yelled, "CATCH," then threw his fire extinguisher at Carl.

Carl lunged for Gunther's extinguisher, catching it after it slammed into the floor. He rolled, bringing its nozzle to bear. A chunk of flaming ceiling fell on his back. He hissed in pain as he shook it off.



"Stardust, why are you always so careless?" Ryan blocked Carl's pain and dispatched the nano-bots to seal the artery a nail had punctured.



Rowan crawled to Gunther's side.

"I'm out." Fran stepped away from the alien. The ceiling creaked. Flaming pieces began to fall on all sides.



Ryan triggered an adrenaline surge in Farley. "Wake up, prince of fools; you can at least be laser fodder."



Farley slowly came to his feet and moved to take Fran's place. Captain Hussut was frosted with carbon dioxide snow. He moved sluggishly.

The time-lock on the escape pod buzzed.

"Fools. Your human technology is less than a child's toy to me!" Hussut lunged at Willa. She stepped back, losing her target. The alien stumbled toward the escape pod as its hatch swung open.

"NO!" Rowan's brow wrinkled. Her mind clutched Hussut. The sheer mass of the creature defeated her. She felt a hand slip into hers. Her universe expanded. The minds that surrounded her were an open book. She felt her own power increase.

Gunther wanted to help, needed to comfort. He took Rowan's hand in his; the universe opened. He knew the ways of matter, sensed the flux and flows of subatomic particles, saw how the forces of time and space interplayed.

The chameleonzoid slammed into a cinder-block wall with bone-shattering force.

Farley, Carl and Willa directed their extinguishers against their foe, who trembled on the floor. Rowan and Gunther seemed entranced. The air grew smoky; each breath became a battle. Fran stumbled to the escape pod. Willa's extinguisher died.

"Willa, help me here." Fran activated the pod's transmitter.

Willa moved to help. Farley began smashing his empty fire extinguisher into the alien's head. Grey blood spilt onto the floor.

Willa flicked her hand open. An interface extended from her forefinger. She jacked into the pod's data port, sending a binary message. *'Orbital incursion not secured, maintain status. Standard contact protocols.'*

"That should do it for another three months." Willa grabbed Fran's hand. They rushed from the escape pod. Its hatch closed and the time-lock reset.



"I wonder what you'd do if you knew there wasn't any ship orbiting Jupiter to be afraid of? I wonder what you'd do if you knew you weren't even in the Sol system, let alone on Earth? Stardust, I wonder what you'd do if you knew it was the seventh century after contact? That's show biz." Ryan sounded bitter and tired.



Carl's extinguisher went dead.

"Let's make like a tree and leaf." Carl coughed as he heaved the empty cylinder at the alien.

"Come on," called Farley.

They all moved to Gunther and Rowan. The kinetic and the telepath seemed entranced.



"Come on, hurry it up before one of them strokes out," hissed Ryan as he watched father and daughter through Willa's eyes. He spared her empathic readouts a glance. They showed such pride in, and concern for, her family it was mind-boggling.

"Like mother, like daughter. Both of them, hearts big as a planet. Why does John have to wreck it?"



"How?" asked Willa.

Farley pulled Gunther into a fireman's carry.

"Right." Carl took Rowan.



"About nova blasted time! Better slow things down on the fire trucks. Give the team a chance to get clear." Ryan pressed several buttons. A screen labelled 'Series Cross Over' filled with a view of a fire truck's dashboard and the street beyond, under the caption of 'THE STATION HOUSE' and 'Fire Officer Willow Hennessy.' An icon in the corner was green, indicating that Ryan could take action without overly affecting the other series. He hit a key. The speedometer dropped as the audio feed gave the sound of an engine stalling.

"Computer, reset primes to defaults with notification protocols."



Rowan's team piled into Gunther's SUV. Rowan felt herself sag. It was always the same after battle, utter exhaustion. She glanced at her parents in the back seat beside her.

They were holding each other, so obviously in love despite their years together. Rowan's gaze shifted to Farley, who sat in the front seat. Tears welled in her blue eyes.



Ryan watched the Rowan monitors.

“Bad enough they made him cheat on you, now a No Intervention Order. Why do they always want to ruin the best characters?”

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