

A Breederax for Dalia

All play and no work is a recipe for disaster.

Janett L. Grady

Suddenly awake, Dalia opened her eyes into a spin of light. The light was blinding, so she closed her eyes again and lay in the soft shadows behind her lids. She remembered the night, the wine and Odok's wail. In the shadowy spin, fixed in despair, Dalia held on to the slender hope that she had remembered a dream.

Needing to know, she opened her eyes, crawled from her bed and staggered across the room. Sure enough, Odok was on his bunk. She had put him there, after crushing his skull with the empty bottle of wine. It was not a dream. She had killed him, and there on the floor was the bottle. She glared at it and then back at the lifeless body, and took a deep breath to slow the spin and focus her eyes. She was now faced with requesting a replacement.

She gazed down at the Breederax now without purpose. She glanced at the tell-screen, at the pigs on deck two, and shuddered at the thought of doing Odok's job.

Minutes later, feeling more in control of her balance, Dalia hurried into the cockpit and slumped into her seat. She sat there for a moment, listening to the hum, staring out at the endless void. She reached for the Ceres cell, then changed her mind. Cerulia was closer than Klausstron, but the Klausstrons were more likely to have a replacement. At the dawn of time, these religious beings had created the first Breederax, and through the eons the Breederax had been reinvented throughout the Universe. She grabbed the Klaus cell, waited for the yellow light and then hit the translate button. The yellow light blinked once. When the green light came on, a voice boomed, coming as if from an iron vault: "Identification?" Dalia cringed.

"Don't shout," she said. "I'm not hard of hearing." No response. "Freighter 666T3," she said, "from Earth. Mission, pigs to the fourth quadrant, coordinates 42C3-fix-84K2. Power, telesun 6, two reactors and one cobalt booster."

"Oh, thou wretched mucilid!" boomed the voice, louder than before. "What is it this time, thou mucilaginous monstrosity?"

"Up yours," Dalia replied. "Turn it down, will you?"

"Oh, very well," said the voice in a lower tone. "What is it the excrescent humanoid would like this time around?"

"I need a new Breederax," she said. "I'll even settle for one of yours."

"Hearken to Klausstron power, thou

puling coagulium, thou snivellous emulsion! In the magnificence of illuminating currents, the gods bestow mercy on thee."

"Get a life," Dalia shot back. "Do you have a Breederax, or not?"

"Thou..."

"Stuff it," she said.

"Can you have one ready?"

"Oh, I suppose so, but you'll have to give a report as to what happened to the one assigned. Trade requirements, you know."

"What do you mean, *trade requirements*?"

"New rule. K-Council wants a report."

"Fine. What do you want to know?"

"I want to know what happened."

"He wouldn't do what I wanted, so I stopped his clock."

"I see. Male or female?"

"I said 'he', damn it, and 'he' means male. What else?"

"Chemical or genetic?"

"Chemical."

"Of Earth construction, I suppose."

"Not exactly. I picked him up on Europa, an icy rock not all that far from Earth."

"I know Europa," said the voice with an air of disgust. "They're evil, lecherous fools."

"Fine. What else do you want to know?"

"Was it... was he compatible?"

The thought of how compatible Odok had been caused Dalia to shift in her seat. She recalled how satisfied she had been. "Yes," she answered after the pause. "At least most of the time."

"I see," said the voice. "Was he changeable or fixed?"

"Changeable."

"Duties?"

"Servant, maintenance and companion."

"Companion is understood, thou vicious vermin. Thy sinful existence is well known."

"Fine," she said. "What else do you want to know?"

"That'll do it," said the voice. "When are you going to get here?"

"I ought to be there in about..." Dalia paused and glanced up at the time charts. "... 18 months," she said. "One quick stay in the Chamber of Life, then 17 months."

"Why the Chamber?" asked the voice. "You sound young."

"Trying to stay that way," Dalia replied.



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"I drank some alcohol and there's an organ or two that might wear out. You know, the liver and so forth. I want to make sure I'm healthy enough to handle a Klausstron Breederax... so make sure it's new and working right."

"Blasphemous!" boomed the voice. "They all work right!"

"Let's hope so," said Dalia. "Oh, and make sure he'll do what he's told."

"Genetic, or do you want it chemical?"

"Gen takes too long," she said. "You'd never have him ready. Make it chemical."

"Is that all, or does the lusty humanoid want more?"

Dalia thought about it. Odok's alterability had worked fairly well, chemical implants had modified bone structure, muscle tone, body weight and the contours of his face every 24 hours or so. Europa's scientists had failed, however, even after it became known that human females functioned most efficiently when companioned with a quiet, subservient Breederax.

"Make sure he'll do what I tell him," said Dalia, "no matter what."

"Ours," said the voice, "are more obedient than Europa's."

"Fine. Have him ready. I'll be there as soon as I can."

"Thou..."

Dalia put the cell in its cradle and hit the off switch. She got up and walked into the cabin.

She glared down at the mess. Odok, his head a shambles, was no longer able to satisfy her natural cravings. She gathered his lifeless form into her arms, carried it across the room, and heaved 185 pounds through a vent marked TRASH.

"Chips and circuits," she said aloud, and she watched as Odok sailed away. "Drunk or not," she said, "slopping hogs was part of your job." ■

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