

Bird man

Snake Season

“Mingo Drum Vercingetorix walked with Boudicca, he had no remorse, events were past history, life demanded he struggle one.

And Boudicca saw him as a bat with its wings folded around itself.

Later she would learn more truths about the Bird men from talkative Little Drum that those wings were a shield against the suns hot rays.

Now Boudicca was confused for when he had killed the Rock Dwellers he was a savage beast.

Now he was a civilized being; close association was having an effect upon her; he intrigued her.

“That is my house,” he said pointing to the top of a mountain in the distance.

Boudicca reckoned it would take a day to reach it then without asking he hauled her off Old Rag’s back. Her heart beat faster; was he was making a play for her?

But the lion beast understood and went and stood beside Nostradamus who assumed the worst until Mingo Drum told him to mount.

“Climb onto my back, there are riding straps,” Mingo said showing her leather stirrups.

She was one relived and confused woman.

The part that was relieved was called DECENT.

The part that was confused was called WOMAN.

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Boudicca shook her head.

Mingo's face was blank, void of emotion.

"There are many poisonous snakes in this area," he finally spoke.

"I will take my chances," she replied not mounting.

He nodded, smiled, ran and jumped into the air. At first he skimmed the ground, tilted his rudder tail, gained height, then was away soaring travelling back to the city.

"He's right you know, this place is bad for reptiles. Remember that birds evolved from dinosaurs?" Nostradamus told her.

"This is the way to his house, continual road usage would drive the snakes away," Boudicca replied hoping.

"Look about you," and she did and noticed this wadi had been merging into a sloping hill where virgin plants were becoming more numerous and there was no sign of a road.

Why should there be? Bird men fly.....

And they walked on.

"Don't worry snakes fear me," Little Drum boasted.

And Boudicca looked into the round bright eyes and didn't believe a word.

"Just wait and see," Little Drum which implied they would meet snakes soon.

Also Boudicca also noted that Little Drum had edged closer and seemed real nervous.

"Mingo should never have left us, just wait till we see him again. I will pull his ears and chaff them too," Little Drum, "I hate snakes, they don't have legs."

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And many shadows began to darken the land.

Looking up they saw Bird men and women, many float beds, warriors and refugees seeking new homes to live and die in.

“What is that clicking nose?” Boudicca asked.

“Ants.” Little Drum.

Both humans looked about.

And five hundred feet below the land was covered in black and red ants.

“Mingo will lead them soon against the Madrawts. The ants have been good to us, breeding many warriors for this moment,” Little Drum informed freely.

Again the humans looked at each other.

“What about humans?” Nostradamus asked meaning the settlers.

“We do not hate them as much as we hate Madrawts,” Little Drum, “Bird people don’t hate anything, there is room for all here except Madrawts.” She didn’t say humans as she knew how to be polite.

“And snakes,” she added.

PAUSE.

“Tzu Strath as well, he’s a bad human. If he doesn’t pull his settlers out of Mingo’s lands the ants will sort them out too,” Little Drum couldn’t help her mouth at times for she was a little gossip.

So Boudicca and Nostradamus looked at each other, Tzu must be told so bombers would come *and that would be that sorted out.*

And the circle of hate would keep going round.

Anyway:

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Boudicca hated snakes, cold things with dead eyes, like sharks ready to bite you. Suddenly, just like that they came upon you.

And one did too.

It was a dull yellow sixteen footer. Where it all came from Boudicca didn't know except that the grass was void of life except for a party of Bird men and two red ants who had dug in just in front of them.

THEM.

And a Bird man NCO seeing them coming stood up, hailed them, recognizing Little Drum, relaxed and approached.

"I will tell Castle Artebrate that you are on your way up. Just in case some eager young one lasers you," he said about twelve feet away when the yellow snake reared up from nowhere.

And bit him in the neck.

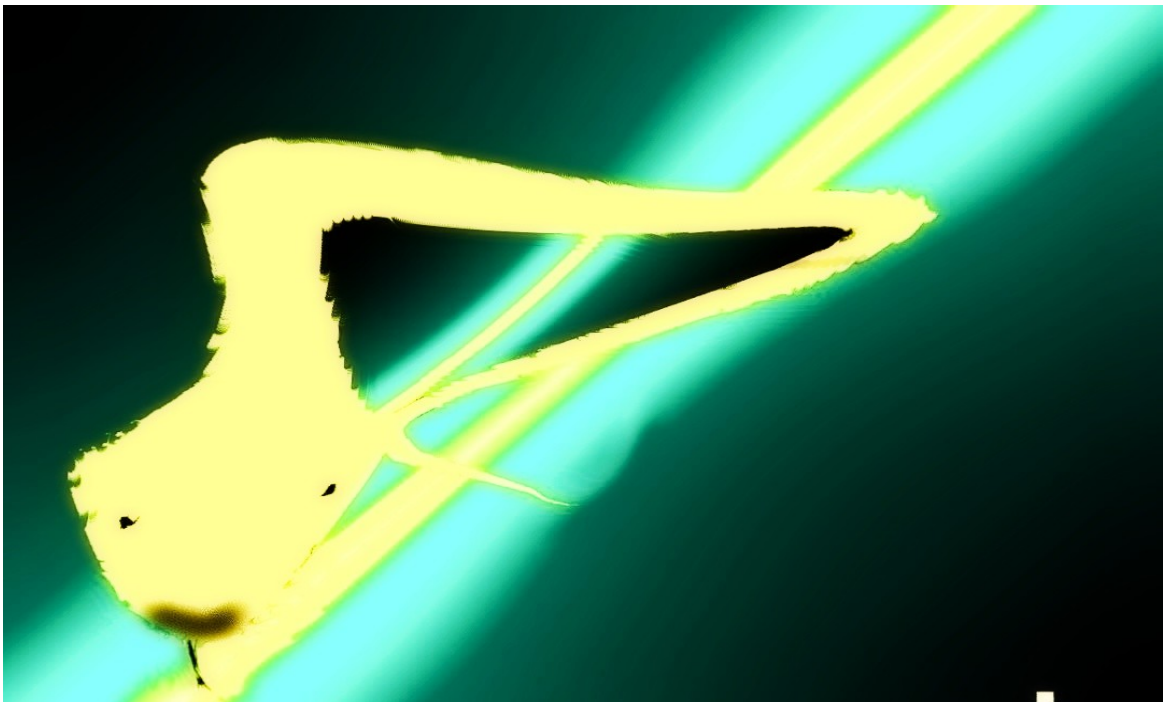


Illustration 46: Perhaps a Boomerang snake relative

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The poor Bird man clutched his throat staggering backwards.

Then the yellow snake bit his stomach.

It was some nasty snake this one.

Anyway the Bird man was rolling on the grass now.

And Boudicca froze; the snake was watching her with cold eyes.

“I want to bite you too,” they spoke to her.

But her eyes picked up a hazy vision of bird men and ants running to them.

And the NCO had stopped vomiting.

He was dead, only bubbles of foam around his mouth popped as air slowly escaped his lungs.

His face black, eyes puffed shut, his back arched wickedly, limbs stiff at odd angles.

Boudicca couldn't move, she was terrified of snakes.

It was those snake eyes, they held you like a dumb rat waiting to be eaten.

But a vibration of approaching help reached the snake and was obvious the snake wanted to look both ways.

And Little Drum fainted and slid between Boudicca's legs; she was terrified of snakes too.

Now the two red ants with the original NCO had blundered into at least six more yellow snakes coupling.

It was mating season so were understandably annoyed at being interrupted.

And the red ants were quick but so were the snakes.

A shadow raced across the ground.

None noticed it.

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A disturbance of air and a blur of vision as something large got the original snake in front of Boudicca.

Which unfroze Boudicca who knew she was free to move so picked up Little Drum and hurried away backwards where Baldy stopped her. In her mind she could feel the Maonosian elephant trying to send her pictures to tell her what *he* wanted.

And she understood and allowed Baldy to use its two proboscises to set both upon its back; she wasn't arguing, the elephant was huge.

Here her bare ankles and legs now safe from snake bite, so relaxed and felt her muscles shake and knew if she talked her voice would tremble.

She hated snakes.

She had a phobia about them.

Some people hate spiders.

Poor Boudicca for they had stumbled upon a group of Yellow Dust snakes the most deadly on Planet Maonos.

Then all the snakes were dead except for one that had slithered up the back legs of a red ant and was biting its left eye.

Now the other red seeing what was going on attacked and snipped the snake into six portions with its mandibles.

But the bitten ant began to shake violently.

Boudicca was afraid it would go nuts and kill everyone with its mandibles.

But a soldier approached and communicated with the insects.

Then shot the bitten ant in the back of the head sparing it the effects of the poison.

And the remaining ant attacked the dead snakes that littered the ground shredding them into wafers.

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“They were the best of mates,” the soldier explained.

Boudicca understood and was amazed, more in disbelief that ants could be mates.

And looked at the purple sun above her, hating this planet of beastly wonders. She wanted home to her own worlds and father’s ship where a human artificial sunlight was maintained.

And made the mistake of judging all planets by Earth standards.

Forgot all about earth muggers.

She longed for carpeted corridors to walk down.

And forgot about Earth drug barons.

She wanted air conditioning.

And forgot about climatic change.

She wanted shopping malls.

And forgot about economic wars and poverty.

She wanted good male company.

As she momentarily forgot Mingo Drum Vercingetorix.

A good hot bath after a night out, a dinner with food she could trust, a dance then male company.

And could get that on the moon too!

She wanted home to civilisation.

Then the air was rent with a coughing grunt and the head of the first snake thudded to the ground.

And Mingo Drum landed with the headless snake coiled about him in its death throe.

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Nostradamus squeezed Boudicca's right hand reassuringly as he had read her mind.

And agreed with them.

"He is not human,

He has made a kill," he whispered softly.

And Mingo unwound the snake and threw its body to the remaining red ant to mutilate in hate.

After the red calmed down, the bird man soldier gathered up the snake tissue, snake was high up on Bird men menus.

Boudicca didn't want dinner that night.

And Mingo hugged the remaining red ant sending it mental pictures of sympathy.

The ant responded by touching his body with its antennae.

Boudicca wanted home.

Poor human girl stuck on an alien world Maonos, but wait a moment, wasn't it Tara 6, a human world?



Illustration 47: Tara 6 had modern extreme sporting facilities.

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And a missile zoomed overhead turning a Madrawt fighter into a ball of flame.

A reminder she was an imperial Praetorian Comet Squadron Officer.

Now if she allowed herself the pleasure of sentiment and homesickness she would prove her father Tzu Strath correct in not allowing her into close combat.

She had much to live up to.

She could not afford to be a woman.

“That is why we don’t walk, now we fly space fighter woman to Castle Artebrate my home,” Mingo Drum challenged.

And she accepted the challenge a bit off balance because he knew who she was, didn’t he?

And finally noticed he wasn’t alone, he had a cohort of his famed Manticore Legion with him.

Later she would ask herself if she had seen correctly that the entrenched Bird men she had met hadn’t had membranous wings.

They were flightless.

And without chemical warfare suits, why?

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Nostradamus watched his master’s daughter eyes go wide with fright as Mingo ran jumped and sprang, as if leaving a poolside diving board into the air.

“The man has power and light bones,” he told himself.

And Mingo Drum headed down hill because of her extra weight.

So the ground skimmed by Boudicca and she had a worm’s eye view of the grass.

So flies and bees knocked against her face. A large rodent creature like a gopher zoomed underneath them.

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Frightened.

Past over some green snake slithering down the hill and she was glad she wasn't walking.

To her the hillside was alive with snakes.

The Bird man knew otherwise.

His kitchen staff hunted here regularly like other Bird men.

Only the most stupid snakes and the most venomous cared to come out in daylight hours.

Most Maonosian snakes were now very smart and dangerous, cunning like foxes and they knew a war of survival was at hand with the Bird men who wanted them in the pot.

Rather like the Bird man against the Madrawts and human/alien imperialists.

Except that the Bird man under Mingo Drum would allow the snakes to survive as long as they didn't come into their homes, which they did often as they slithered everywhere.

Anyway the cohort was soon flying beside Mingo Drum.

And Boudicca felt a strange beastly pride she was part of the formation. They wore tight bronze body armour for show, as it was useless against modern weaponry. On their heads plumed helmets and about them an assortment of personal choice weapons of all types.

About Mingo they carried their standards and carnyex horns and drums.

It was all about show.

War was so horrid some sort of glamor and valour must be added.

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And human dreams to fly like birds and now she was doing it. She wondered when peace came would Bird men hire themselves out throughout the empire as transport.

Her imagination went wild.

Saw herself flying through the streets of the empire's capital, New York, Earth where the old United Nations building was now the Electoral College of Senators of the Planets, refurbished of course.

Making a real stir flying about on the back of *her* Bird man.

The Bird woman Boudicca Tzu, Planetary Times magazine would print on the front page.

See the anguish on her father's face as she tuned up to a military ball on the back of the Bird man.

"That's my daughter," he would have to admit or she did never speak to him again.

Just then a lone Madrawt fighter appeared that broke the Bird men formation.

Only its first surprise swoop caused casualties and when it came back the Bird men were swarming all around it easily avoiding the cannon fire, and filled the cockpit with laser and the fighter flew into the ground and exploded, one less Madrawt.

Them Madrawts don't have a chance, Boudicca admiring the Bird men tactics; she would remember them in case she had too fight.

Then she saw a parachute, it was the Madrawt navigator.

So several members of the cohort went wild and flew near him/her; Boudicca wasn't sure. They played a horrid cruel game, they stuck lances into the Madrawt, then cut the lines so the navigator began to fall gathering speed to the ground below.

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“This is murder,” Boudicca loudly as she remembered what she had been told about Bird men, that they rarely took prisoners in battle and when they did, sacrificed them to their gods of war and kept the heads as trophies.

And King Mingo Drum Vercingetorix heard her.

So sent a mental picture to his carnyex blowers and the air was rent with strange high pitched moans.

“Stop,” he coughed and it was like a sonic boom.

His men hovered about the navigator wanting to take a trophy.

“We have a human guest,” he reminded them.

Why his men flew over to him but Boudicca saw Bird men ground troops approach and knew when she was gone, would take a trophy.

A Madrawt head.

She had seen troops die, and knew a direct hit to her comet would end her life just like that, but this was barbaric, Tzu Strath was right, they were savages.

This was against civilized convention.

“But we are not on Tara 6, but Maponos, and these are beasts with wings,” Nostradamus had said to her.

She shivered wishing she was back on the back of Old Rag. Whom or what she rode now was a matter of conjuncture?

“My people hate Madrawts, Madrawts nail our children to their walls and give us no quarter,” Mingo told her.

“Does that mean you have to behave like Madrawts?” She felt her disgust out of

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control. In reality she was hoping to make her Bird man civilized and knew she couldn't so was furious deep down.

“You haven’t seen the news yet, wait till you do?” he replied and she did not know he was referring too the impalements of her imperialist brother-in-arms; one thousand of them.”

Vern Lukas