



*Illustration 34: Mcer was tiny compared to Augustus*

“I am delighted to meet you,” Slow Horse the boy emperor said very politely.

But Wilhelmina was no fool, this was a secret meeting, obviously this boy was afraid of someone but whom? It was the creeps behind her, Posidonius and Aelfric who were not taking the slightest efforts to conceal themselves?

So who was the boy afraid of?

“Come up here with me,” Slow Horse said and she knew it was a command by the way he held out his hand down to her, so with a shrug she took the hand and mounted his disc.

“Kneel,” Wilhelmina directed this towards the creeps who startled looked at the emperor.

“Kneel,” the emperor said, Wilhelmina knew now what the boy wanted of her, and asked the same question Nesta had, “He is only a boy?”

Aelfric shrugged backed and knelled, he knew what was going on, the emperor’s new toy would be discarded soon and he wouldn’t need to kneel again until another toy was required.

Quickly Aelfric tugged the evil Posidonus down, too much was at stake.

“I met The Man the other day,” and Wilhelmina didn’t know what prompted her too say this but the effect was immediate, the boy seemed to shrink, so this was whom he was afraid?

Was The Man that powerful even this alien trembled at his name, why? And Wilhelmina remembered 'The Man' the book and saddened her emperor was not like The Man and in her heart knew he would never be.

Suddenly she straightened, a hand was under her kilt, it was the boy; ‘He is only a boy’ she told herself.

But unlike Nesta did not have a bionic general to rescue her.

“We are rich,” Aelfric muttered and Posidonus knew he meant ‘I am rich.’

“I am poor,” and Aelfric knew Posidonus meant there goes my paymaster.

“Better do everything I tell you to at double time hadn’t we?” Aelfric and Posidonus groaned hating himself for handing Wilhelmina over to this boy emperor who would get to play instead of him.

“You are sick,” Aelfric further down the audience hall and slapped the back of his servant’s head so Posidonus stumbled.

Together the two evil men watched Wilhelmina disappear with Slow Horse and together they exited the Rhegid ship, one a very rich robot man and the other wondering why he was still poor.

“Be lucky you still breathe,” Aelfric answered for the ears Posidonus.

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#### Nesta’s diary

“What ails your son?” I asked The Man fearing he was not my man any the more the more.

“Takes after me,” The Man providing a poor joke and Nesta was silent.

“He is certainly incorrigible,” Tintagel meaning the exact opposite.

“Aelfric has offered Wilhelmina to the highest bidder?” The Man.

“If any one can save her it would be the likes of him?” Myself really feeling sorry for my opponent in love for I had been with Slow Horse remember, “One thing he certainly isn’t is a boy, might look like one, squeak like one, think like one yes, but those Rhegids are like rabbits and rats,” I added and watched my man for a reaction.

“Sweet heart, I will bid for her because she will make one of my finest generals,” my man The Man and I cursed longevity for it meant an individual could seek many partners; parting in death no longer existed; never did, we all meet again in the ion fields were a soul can be reassembled in the Earth physical plane, so what the hell, if

he wanted the farm girl for a while, let him, I did be here when he came back with Tintagel; servants of the dictator. See I wasn't that stupid not to realise I could not put a ball and chain about a soul like The Man. For one he had lived longer than me and was a dictator, absolute.

"Sweet heart, listen, Augustus will abandon her; already he has appointed some useless cousin of Po Wei General in Chief. Soon I will be standing on the marbled Appian way into Augusta the emperor's capital, You and Tintagel will ride in my chariot as we go up that cedar lined avenue and put an end to corruption," The Man.

"An admirable dream master," Tintagel.

'Yes an admirable dream and he could dream on about Wilhelmina,' and felt bad, she needed help, but she was our enemy; but The Man respected worthy opponents and had made it clear he wanted her on his side and I had not caught The Man thinking about Wilhelmina but had seen the look in her eyes.

There was more to uncharted space than the Rhegids as Tintagel has pointed out to me heaps, plenty of room to send Wilhelmina too if The Man wanted her as a general and then why not leave her with Slow Horse, what was all this concern about an enemy general for anyway?

"What happens if she refuses to give up this stupid oath to Augustus" I asked defensively.

"Sweetie, she will, she is so full of vanity, valour and honour she would have to commit suicide to escape taking an oath to me," The Man replied.

‘Now that sounded well, maybe I could bribe Aelfric to do the job? Wicked, try a stronger word, JEALOUSY.

And after the oath she did be his willing servant, how sickening,’ I thought.

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“So that is where she ended up?” Augustus mused.

“We can get her back master?” Aelfric thought and since thoughts were alive the proton reassembler descrambled his and Augustus read them; it was the new message sender, fast and you could see who you were thinking about also; it as all the FAB.

Now the emperor wasn’t as much a fool as the robot thought!

“It seems this cyborg has learned nothing from The Man, so I will teach him what my name means,” and he scanned his court and a little man, not ugly or deformed, but a courtier, no higher than a foot, a third of a metre is whom the emperor’s eyes settled upon.

“You, you will deal with this problem,” and there was no protests, just obey, plenty of empty crucifixes on the roads into the capital Augusta.

And the little person was called Mcer of Old Pluto.

‘Christ he would pick me, what have I done for this job, I was only sent here to court by my mother to be rid of me, to advance and pay my own bills. Well, my bills have never been high, I hang glide, sometimes drink, like a girl when I am in the mood, and definitely hate this assignment. Just pronounce my name as Mcer, OK and who knows maybe The Man will ask me to join him?’

And Mcer picked up his emperor’s thoughts thus:

“Your mother advanced you into the ESP classes for she told me you were gifted and I know you are reading my thoughts now, so listen, use your gifts against my enemies and that is why I choose you. Are you big like The Man, cunning as Aelfric, evil like Posidonus, who knows, you work for me now?” Augustus.

“Do your job and be advanced at court and know fame, wine women and song and fortunes,” and Augustus then imagined he was pulling down a shutter in front of his mind, so shutting Mcer’s mind out, and went to seek the little man’s mother who was gifted in other ways for the empire was corrupt.

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From the memory banks of Posidonus.

‘I looked into my piggy bank that I kept hidden from that monster Aelfric for I had am extracted much from the citizens of New Saturn 12 where Wilhelmina had sent me.

Yes eureka, I had a billion silver imperial dollars.

So secretively thought up a name for myself. Pony, Star Gazer, Bafular oh bugger no name seemed suitable so just sent my bid for Wilhelmina as ANOYMOUS.

Was I coming to rescue my paymaster? Certainly not, I was very indignant that the boy should get to play with my toy first.

So you know how long I have spent cringing and crawling at Wilhelmina's feet to draw her into my way of thinking to tell me her ills? Then I can be her doctor, yes?

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“They say Aelfric dreams, dam them both, Posidonus is crazy, never do I dream of his evil ways, he is filth, damned to hell. Is the man nuts, obviously so, a smile from me means I want to play doctors; can no one smile for the smile is mistaken for an invitation? He can go to hell, he is there any way so can go to a deeper hell.”

Wilhelmina when she heard Posidonus’s thoughts played back from the proton assembler.

But what listening to Posidonus has meant to me is that I believe more strongly in The Man with the hope the dictator sees the likes of Posidonus as ill and not for the bath? The Man is too much like Augustus and his crucifixes!

Ill enough to be sent away out of society for even a thousand years till they are able to be part of society.

The Man’s ways are good enough for the beginning of a new age, but once things settle down and all the drug barons and child molesters are bathed, then when there is time and stability you must cure them instead of playing God.

A trooper once said to me he saw the enemy in his sights so shot him in the ankle, then the leg when he tried to get up and again in the other leg because if he stood he did be shot by another.

“Why did I not kill him, he was made in the image of God.”

I have never forgotten his reply and that is why I carry the generals cross on my back with responsibility and my oaths are strong.

But The Man is The Man and Augustus, Augustus and I am just Wilhelmina a prisoner.

Bugger Posidonus to hell, I am the victim not him.'

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"Do you believe these messages from Posidonus, one giving the terms for Aelfric to deliver Wilhelmina to The Man and the other want terms what would The Man give for Aelfric?" Tintagel amused.

"When thief's fall out?" Nesta.

"We will bid for both, the imperial forces are reverting to their old types, easy to bash?" The Man grinning.

Nesta saw him as a boy, and wished he did never grow up and lose his aura of innocence that was his secret appeal to women.

"Cannot you just ask Slow Horse to hand her over before Augustus gets her back?"

"Might pay him to keep her you mean until Augustus is no more," was The Man's reply and that suited Nesta.