

## Aliens vs Bikers

Mr. Dillon must've dragged the first alien in through the cat door at about 8:00 that morning. Festus, not one to be outdone, fetched his in at 8:02 sharp. I knew because the flap clapped shut and Festus let loose his trademark "got-me-one" yowl right when Siri finished counting down her timer for my oatmeal. I scalded my balls with spilled coffee at 8:04, as soon as I saw what was twitching on the rug.

At first I thought they were the next door kid's GI Joes, being about the right size and shape, but they were wiggling around something fierce and I never saw a GI Joe wiggle before. And they were wearing skintight spandex suits that made them look like itty-bitty super heroes. The one was shiny purple, the other a lurid green, the purple one a boy, the green a girl. It was easy enough to tell which was which in those outfits, considering the bulges in the spandex. They had on little backpacks no bigger than my thumb, same colour as their suits.

"Tek mi to yr lidrr," Green said, getting to her feet. Her hair was wet from being cat licked.

Holy shit, I thought, it talks!

Purple was busy slapping back at Mr. Dillon, who was half-assed trying to bat him on the head with his paw. Had his claws sheathed though, he was just messing with the little guy. Festus was flipped over on his back purring, like he'd done something special and wanted to be belly-rubbed.

"My leader? That what you said? That's probably a real bad idea," I answered, joking, Well, just joking a little. I was only a Prospect for the ESAD motorcycle club, but I was pretty sure I'd be patched in before the year was up. All I'd ever wanted, if you want the truth, full M.C. patch and a restored Harley panhead. But Drools, our president, now that was one scary dude. He had the loudest Harley, the bluest tattoos, the hardest beer gut, and a knife scar that ran all the way from his eyebrow to his

chin. He was mean to go with it, unless you were family, and family to Drools meant club colours on your back. Somehow I didn't think he'd take to a four-inch civilian chick with an attitude. Just shows you how wrong a person can be.

"Mast spik ur lidrr," Green insisted. She put her hands on her hips and glared at me.

I eyeballed her up and down and whistled. Pretty fine, for a puny little thing. Bumps and curves in all the right places. I rooted around in the kitchen for a big enough jar.

A couple of hours later I wheeled my bike into the club parking lot and backed into line at the curb with the other choppers tilted there on their kickstands. My heart swelled with pride at the sight of all that polished chrome and custom-paint. Made a man feel sort of, well, manly. I grabbed the mason jar from my saddlebags and took a peek inside. I'd punched holes in the lid so the aliens wouldn't choke, but they still looked half-dead after the ride. Maybe it was the sliding around in the jar that had done it. I felt sorry for them, but I gave the jar a shake anyway and was pleased to see them squirm. I straightened my cut and headed for the clubhouse door.

Green realised immediately that any attempt to escape was futile. The mason jar smelled like stale cereal and weevil dust. The perforated lid was screwed on tight. They would just have to wait for an opportunity to present itself. And they could forget about rescue—the mission was so clandestine only three people in Command even knew about it. The earthling had swept them into the mouth of the jar with a vile, guts-crusted fly-swat, and for the moment they were absolutely helpless. She hated helpless. She also detested compression assignments. First of all, they hurt. Achey bones, sore muscles, all the important bits and pieces out of whack. It took a full week to feel like she was in her own skin

again, after being reduced to a mere one-sixteenth normal mass. The compression chamber itself was cold, aesthetically unappealing, and noisy. After the process she always felt drained, and the subsequent visits to the Space-Command seamstress were demeaning. The staff there always treated her like some kind of cute toy instead of a seasoned scout. She ground her teeth and forced herself to think tactically. Escape, evade, report. That was the drill. She was sick and tired of her ass sliding around on glass. She steadied her partner with a firm hand as the jar tilted on its axis once again. She spat at the curved glass wall in frustration and watched the bubbles slide sideways.

ESAD M.C.'s headquarters wasn't much to look at from the outside, but it was all blacklight and biker on the inside. One wall was dedicated to pictures of our jailed and fallen brothers, a number of them clipped out of wanted posters peeled off post-office walls. The other walls were decorated with some pretty lively Tijuana velvet pinups, a slew of Harley Davidson posters, and a year's worth of Ridgid Tools promo calendars. We never really had that many lightbulbs going in the clubhouse, but there were plenty enough to see by. Doctor Hook was playing through the duct-taped speakers, and as soon as I walked through the door I felt right at home.

A half-dozen patched members and their old ladies were bellied up to the bar, sucking down beer and playing cup dice. I admired their black leather cuts, our Eat-Shit-And-Die logo stitched onto their backs, Pasadena rocker below. I couldn't wait to unpick the Prospect patch off mine and switch it for the real deal.

Cruddy caught sight of me in the mirror.

"Hey Prospect," he hollered, "about time you dragged your sorry ass in here. The shitter needs a rubdown."

"I'll get to it pronto," I lied. I was sick and tired of cleaning the toilet. "Where's Drools? I got something to show him." I held up the jar.

"What the fuck is that?" Cruddy said, squinting. He wasn't wearing his glasses. "Candy?"

"Nah, it's some weird little dudes. Cats dragged them in."

A tapping noise came from the jar, so I put it on the bar for everybody to have a look. Sure enough, Green and Purple were hammering on the glass with their itty-bitty knuckles. I wondered if maybe they had to pee.

The guys forgot all about their dice game and crowded around the jar like gangbangers at a cockfight.

"Holy shit, would you look at that," Weasel exclaimed. "That dude's the same size as my pecker!"

"When you got a chubby, maybe," his old lady said, snarky. "Tell you what, I'll buy you some purple rubbers and you can dress up like twins for Halloween."

Drools' voice cut through the cigarette smoke and everybody shut up. That was the rule.

"What the hell is this goddamn clusterfuck?" he rasped.

He sounded like a pit-bull wrestling with pneumonia. Bone chips and mucous in the throat, no muffler. His deviated septum must have flared up again, which was never a good sign. He clumped toward the bar on his hobnailed boots from his office at the back.

I picked up the mason jar and held it to the light, twisting it from side to side. Those green and purple outfits made a rainbow shine in the curve of the glass.

"Couple of aliens or some shit, Drools. My cats brought them in."

Drools took in the contents of the jar without even a blink. He just stared, silent and still, cogs spinning. Reminded me of Mr. Dillon and Festus watchful outside a gopher hole, waiting for little rodent heads to chew on. I'd seen him like that once during a mushroom all-nighter,

everything inside, no hint to what was sluicing through his mind. I bet Drools didn't even feel it when he got a new tattoo.

Inside the jar Green and Purple had quit jumping up and down. Now they were sitting face-to-face and whispering to each other, but I couldn't understand what they were saying.

Drools turned to me. His scar was white as ice. That's how it went when he was thinking hard.

"Where'd you say you got these, Prospect?" He dragged out the word 'Prospect' real slow and it made me nervous.

"My cats brought them in," I said. "Right through the cat door...you know, one of those flaps they can go in and out of...I was cooking breakfast...nearly burnt my nuts when I spilled my coffee..."

He shot me a look and I shut up.

"They bite them?"

"Huh?" I thought back. "Don't think so. Wasn't any blood. Knocked them around a little. Gummed them up some, maybe a tongue rasp here and there. They like to play with the stuff they catch."

"You give them anything since? Food? Water?"

I didn't know what to say. It never occurred to me to feed them. It was bad enough I was worried they might have to pee. Now I had a guilt trip laid on me and it stuck in me like a sliver. I probably should have stopped at Taco Bell on the way.

"Nope," I admitted. "Just scooped them up in the jar and brought them here."

He tipped the jar sideways and the two aliens tumbled into one another in a tangle of arms and legs. Their little faces turned red.

Without thinking I said, "C'mon, Drools, don't be shaking them around hard like that. You'll hurt them."

He slammed the jar back onto the bar and swivelled to face me. The aliens bounced a couple of inches into the air and fell back down.

"What?"

Man, those were some dead-looking eyes.

"The green one talks," I said quickly. "In English. Sort of."

Cruddy interrupted right then, thank goodness. "You ever heard of that secret government UFO place? Area 69? Maybe they escaped from there."

Weasel piped up, "69? I knew a couple strippers one time who used to..."

Drools shut them up with one look too.

"Cruddy, you still got that spider cage at your house? That aquarium thing?"

"The terrarium? Yeah, I got it. It's full of tarantulas though. Turns out they don't let you sell live shit on eBay."

"Lose the bugs and bring me the cage. Now."

He turned his back on me, and that definitely gave me the willies.

Green thought back to the morning's fiasco. Their scout ship had been cleverly concealed inside a mock-up of a Terran fruit-bat, but the glue used hadn't properly cured and came unstuck during atmosphere entry. Yet another screw-up by the geniuses in the Creative Engineering Corps. Half of the faux bat had peeled off one side of the fuselage, resulting in a fatal wobble. The ship had spiralled into the hedge in front of a run-down doublewide and cracked like an egg upon impact. She had grabbed her rookie partner by the scruff and bailed out of the emergency hatch, climbing down a prickly branch for what seemed like forever until they hit the ground. They had been lucky enough to salvage their backpacks out of the falling wreckage, but that was small solace. And then they were pounced upon by those grisly felines. She shuddered at the memory of their fishy breath and unblinking eyes. Nabbed by fucking cats. She didn't know the fate of the pilot and co-pilot, but she suspected the worst. She took a deep breath and focused on what to do next. The clutch of brutish earthlings staring at them made her skin crawl.

Cruddy's spider house turned out to be just the right size for the aliens, plenty of room to move around in, too high to climb out of. It had an inch of sand on the bottom and half an abalone shell for water. Drools yanked the heat bulb out of the lid, said he didn't want to fry the little freaks. Then Weasel's old lady told him she had some Barbie furniture left over from a garage sale, and there it began.

By the end of the afternoon there were chairs, table, couch, bunk-beds, and some little plastic mugs in there. Pastel pink was the main colour scheme, with some yellow thrown in, but hell, the furniture was all free, and nobody broke their backs moving it. There was even a folding sun-lounger with an umbrella, which made me think we probably should've kept the heat bulb. I didn't say anything about that, though. Drools was already shooting menacing vibes my way. He doesn't tolerate any back-talk, especially from Prospects.

Weasel said he'd seen a Barbie motorcycle once on the internet, but when I googled it on my phone it turned out to be a pink plastic rice-burner, not a Harley. Drools just smacked him upside the head and made him clean the toilet instead of me for once. I had the feeling that welcome change in routine wasn't going to last very long.

Once their new abode was fixed up I tipped the aliens into it. I was gentle about it too, holding the lip of the jar flush with the sand so they slid out slicker than duck snot. They somersaulted into the sand, but no bones were broken as far as I could tell. I filled the abalone with fresh water and crumbled half a Ritz cracker onto the little plastic table, then I leaned a saucer on its side against one corner so they'd have some privacy if they wanted, like a cave.

Pretty soon everybody else lost interest and started drinking beer again, shooting pool, and rolling dice. Cruddy cranked the stereo all the way up and put Credence on, making sure to start it past the track where

it always skipped. Somebody else flipped on the strobe light. Nurturing aliens isn't high on an outlaw motorcycle club's list of priorities. Your average biker's head isn't generally overly roomy on the inside, a fun fact that even I had to admit to, but we do love to party. So that evening the ESAD brothers got back to the basics, which involved smoking dope, getting drunk, making-out with their old ladies, and boasting about their Ape Hanger handlebars and V-twin exhaust pipes.

Drools was sliced from a different piece of hide; he was pure ornery biker to the core, but he could smell money a mile off, and that's what was ricocheting around in his head. He put the terrarium up on two phone books so it was eye-level and sat on his barstool staring into it, cogs still turning. I was right beside him, hoping a little alien-finder glory would rub off on me and he'd get over being pissed off. I wanted that club patch bad. Or so I thought at the time.

Purple puffed himself up behind the glass and stared right back at Drools. He was doing his damndest to make himself look tough, but his little try at stink-eye was a flop. There he stood in his slick purple suit, all of four inches tall in his little purple boots, trying to stare down the baddest president the Pasadena chapter of the Eat-Shit-And-Die M.C. ever had. It was embarrassing. He didn't even have an ear stud, let alone a tattoo.

"Is he fucking with me?" Drools growled. The tendons in his inked forearms slithered around like snakes. He tapped the sharp end of a chewed toothpick against the side of the terrarium. "That puny purple puke?"

"Nah, he's just scared," I reassured him. I didn't want him skewering the little guy with the toothpick. I was beginning to think I should never have brought them to the clubhouse in the first place.



"Maybe I should teach him a lesson. Squash him like a bug or something."

Right about then Greenie decided to take a bath in the abalone shell. No dummy, that girl. She knew how to shift gears on a bad situation when she saw one. She shucked her backpack, peeled out of her spandex, and stretched like one of my cats, which made Drools' bloodshot eyes bug out. That little thing had a figure on her, too. Pert, you might say, but all there where it counts. She had on matching green undies, and dipped a toe into the shell.

"I'm thinking internet peep-show," Drools said in a thick voice. He'd forgotten all about Purple. "Hourly rate, tips, the whole shebang." He hoisted the terrarium up with his hairy arms and stomped towards his office at the back, holding it so the water wouldn't slosh. "Oil, wet, whatever, all extra," he added.

I got up to follow them.

"Beat it," he said over his shoulder.

That stung. Those were my aliens, after all. And here Drools just commandeers them for himself? I risked his wrath and spoke up.

"I'm thinking maybe I ought to take them back home, Drools. Been a long day. I could heat them up some SpaghettiO's or something."

"I'm thinking I ought to tear your head off and shit down your neck if you give me any more fucking lip," he said. "Are we clear, Prospect?"

The little alien chick looked me right in the eye. Accusingly, like I'd betrayed her or something. I felt even worse.

The office door slammed shut behind them.

Green was fed up. Purple had behaved like an adolescent fool, and the sand in her underwear chafed in all the worst places. The about-to-take-a-bath ruse had worked though, enough to temporarily defuse the situation. Men were predictably men, no matter what solar system they came from. Especially primitives like these earthlings. She'd used

variations of it a dozen times or more over the course of her career. It certainly hadn't gotten rid of the sand, but at least her dipshit partner was still alive and kicking. The mission was a disaster, the future was bleak, and the cracker crumbs on the plastic table tasted like turds. And now their hulking freak captor was sitting in a swivel-chair with his dick in his hand, ogling her. That was the final straw.

"Get your fucking ray-gun out of your fucking pack," she barked at Purple.

"What? Why? You know we're not allowed to—"

"New memo, mister. Ray-gun time. Look out the big fucking window, asshole," she said. "You see that?"

He looked. There sat Drools, his greasy Levis crumpled around his ankles.

"I know, but—"

"I am going to count to ten. You are going to retrieve your service weapon from its place of concealment and aim it at that disgusting cretin's genitalia. When I reach the number ten you are going to discharge said weapon accurately on full charge and zap him in his fucking manhood. Got that?"

"I don't know, Lieutenant, the charge might not be powerful enough to penetrate it. It's pretty thick. The glass, I mean. Be better if I had an unobstructed shot. And aren't we supposed to be talking to them? About, well—you know—"

"The time for talking is over," Green said. "The orders said 'try'. Well, I tried. They'll just have to lump it."

"What are you two yapping about?" Drools said, scowling. He gave his flaccid member a hopeful tug and pointed to the abalone shell. "You taking that bath or not? I ain't got all day here."

Greenie thought fast. She pointed up, at the terrarium's tight-fitting lid. She pantomimed that the water was cold, and that a bath would be

much nicer with the heat bulb re-installed. She was talented; Drools figured out what she was getting at on her first try.

"I thought you could speak English? That's what the Prospect said."

She smiled and shook her head, shrugging helplessly. She arched her back just enough. Alien lummoX, she thought. And we're here to try and negotiate with you clowns? You just wait.

"Shit. OK, you sit. I'll go get the fucking thing."

He lumbered away, pulling his pants up with a curse.

Green shook her head in disgust, trying to dislodge the grit from her skivvies and wrack her brain for solutions at the same time. The cataclysmic cost of failure loomed in the back of her mind. The survival of the entire civilized galaxy was at stake. Failure meant its violent demise at the hands of the Barbarian Horde, their fleet lurking not fifty light-years distant. She tried to remember if her life insurance was paid up.

The office door swung open and Drools swaggered back in with the heat bulb in one hand and an outsized swizzle-stick in the other.

"I brought you a pole," he said. "For your pole-dancing. Customers'll love that shit."

He removed the terrarium's lid, tossed the swizzle-stick inside, and began screwing the heat bulb back into its socket. His head loomed over them, and he asked, "Why'd you get dressed again?"

Greenie jabbed her elbow into her partner's ribs.

"Now," she hissed.

"What should I aim at?" he asked. There was a tremor in his voice.

"Something wet," she said. "Eyeball would be good."

I was hungover like a dog the next morning and somebody was knocking on my door. Hard. Shit. I crawled out of bed and headed downstairs with the .380 off my nightstand. Little gun, but handy. You never know. I looked through the peephole.

Suits. A man suit, and a woman suit. They both looked rested and sparkly, which pissed me off even more. I jerked the door open.

"What?"

The female smiled and said, "Leo Bowel? Is that singular or plural? No 's' on the paperwork, so singular I guess. Prospect with the ESAD dirtbags? Sorry to trouble you, but we have some questions." She held up a badge, put it away quick. "Agent Scully, and this is Agent Moulder." She jerked a thumb at her partner and her eyes crinkled. "He's the nice one."

"Are you fucking kidding me?"

She smiled again.

"We get that a lot," she said.

The guy spoke up. "Mr. Bowel, sir, do you mind if we come inside? Just a few minutes of your time." He shouldered the door ajar and squeezed past me. "Thank you."

We sat in the living room, the two suits on the couch, me on the armchair facing them. I put the .380 down on the side-table where they could see it and saw their eyebrows lift. No biggy. I have a carry permit, just like everybody else in the club who doesn't have a felony conviction. There's still a few of us. My ESAD Prospect cut was hanging over the back of a chair. After the way Drools hijacked my aliens and dissed me last night I didn't much want to look at it.

"So," Scully said, "just a few little questions, Leo. Teensy ones, really. Have you noticed any unusual activity recently? Like tiny little humanoids, perhaps? Bite-sized, in colourful costumes?"

"Nope." I studied her face, but couldn't quite match it to the TV show. Younger than I first thought. "You really named Scully?"

"Uh-huh." She smiled again. "Mom was a fan."

Way younger than I thought. A puzzle. I wondered how old you had to be to make detective. I couldn't remember any details of her badge.

Mr. Dillon and Festus wandered in and and brushed the edges of their fur along the couch legs.

"Nice cats," Scully said. "Indoor-outdoor?"

"Yeh."

"Ever bring you presents, you know, like rats?"

Festus meowed, gurgled, and coughed up a hairball. Shiny purple, wrapped in fur sludge. He sounded like Drools with his inflamed septum. He flattened his ears and hacked up another wad, and this time a soggy little backpack fell out of his mouth. He turned around with his tail up in the air and slunk out the cat door to go spray the front hedge.

Holy shit, I thought, a dead one.

The guy suit got all excited. He kneeled on the floor and lifted the backpack off the scatter-rug with the end of a pen. He scraped a spot clean with his fingernail, then dangled it near his nose and gave it a sniff. He nodded at Scully, gave her a thumbs-up, and dropped the backpack into a ziplock. He tried the same technique with the main hairball, but it just squished around and fell off the pen, so he had to use his fingers to pick it up. He looked a little queasy, but was still pumped about it.

"Well, well, well, Leo," Scully said. Her voice had gone all throaty. She leaned forward with that smile of hers and patted my knee. "Did I mention that there's a really big reward for live ones?"

That got my attention. She didn't sound at all like a cop now.

"How big?"

"Very exceptionally big. As in all the winning numbers in a mega-Powerball big."

"As in enough for all three of us big," the guy suit said, wiping his fingers on his pants. "And then some." He winked at me.

They weren't cops. I ran that through my head for a minute, then got up and went into the kitchen. On the way I grabbed my club cut, tossed it into the closet and shut the door on it.

"Coffee, anybody?" I said. "I got instant."

Scully sipped her coffee and confided, "We only heard about this a few hours ago. On our, um...special scanners. I mean, why should this stuff be secret? Aren't we citizens? Opportunity knocks, but they don't want Joe Public in on the action. Bastards."

"What opportunity?" I asked. My mind was a jungle.

"Pinprick radar intercept out of Los Alamos. Suspected alien vessel, half the size of your fucking toaster oven. And they pinpointed where it landed. Right here in Pasadena. In your front yard. Four aliens aboard."

"So?"

"So they want the little bastards. 'War of the Worlds' issues. Defense contracts, you name it. Lots of money involved. The Area 51 guys are in charge."

She looked at the cat door and licked a loose fleck of lipstick off her lip. "But they only notified their 'official' agencies. Salaried drones. People like us are left out in the cold."

"To do what?" I asked.

"Like your pussycats did. Catch 'em first, and hold them for ransom."

"Bounty hunters," I said. "Freelancers."

Moulder cocked his thumb and shot me with his forefinger. "Bingo," he said.

"We need to move fast, though," Scully said. "Those Area 51 clowns will be all over this place in about," she looked at her watch, "fifteen minutes." She looked at Moulder and added, "They'll be on the look out for our car by now. We have to ditch it."

He shrugged. "It's a rental."

"You ride?" I asked her.

"Do I ever," she said.

"Let's go."

Purple's ray-gun shot went wide, missing Drools' bloodshot eyeball by inches, but the sizzling beam hit him square in the earlobe and melted his swastika stud. The lid and heat bulb crashed to the floor, and he clapped his hand over his ear with a bellow. His eyes blurred with stinging tears of pain. Greenie picked up the swizzle stick, sprinted the full length of the terrarium and planted one end deep into the sand. She pole-vaulted gracefully over the glass wall, landed on her feet in the middle of Drools' desk and ducked behind a snow-globe paperweight. She peered through a winter landscape of dancing elves and assessed their options.

Another burst from Purple's ray-gun streaked upward and severed Drool's lank ponytail. The rubber-band holding it together caught fire and the braided knot of hair slid down his back like a flaming lab rat. Drools' face turned beetroot with rage. He leaned over the terrarium and saw Purple dodge out of sight under the tilted saucer. He grabbed the entire terrarium with both hands and hurled it across the room, smashing it into pieces against the wall.

"Uh oh," Green muttered under her breath. "That looked nasty." She reached into an inner pocket of her spandex suit and retrieved a tiny vial that held a single capsule. She unscrewed the top and popped the pill into her mouth, grimacing at what she knew was to come.

"If you're still alive over there, ensign," she hollered at the top of her lungs, "DECOMPRESS!"