

A Vortex of Ecstasy

By SRM

The bartender looked up as the doors slammed open, a precursor to the mob of spacefaring folk that flooded through the doorway of The Coeval Moment Bar & Hotel. He sighed as he reached under the counter to activate the humanoid server bots, their motors whirring and beeping to indicate their activation behind the bar and throughout the rest of the multi-layered bar. He had hoped for a calm few nights before the start of the Day of Avarice, but the person at the head of the rowdy mob drew his eyes and announced her presence with a color unmatched almost anywhere in the in universe. A color that marked the leader of this particular crew with an unmistakable flair.

“Savannah Flare...” he muttered under his breath, his eyes narrowing. Her real name was Savannah Chang, but had obtained the title of Flare upon achieving Pirate Admiral Rank Nine. A dubious distinction based on numerous deadly factors. Everything from personal kills, amount plundered, crew size, distance traveled, and other considerations all went into determining her ranking in the outlaw hierarchy. Her promotion ceremony had been broadcast to every station within the known universe, a development that merely added to her growing fame as it involved her hijacking a universe wide channel (something only to be used in case of emergencies across the galaxy). She was known to most to be a master tactician, a ruthless leader, and a brilliant artist. A combination of talents that allowed her a vicious advantage during a fight, but it wasn’t only her skills that she was known for.

It was also the red clothing she adorned herself in. A color that seemed to swirl and move along her body, ever shifting along the red color scheme and it changed almost like liquid as she strode across the floor. The material of her clothes was unknown, and those lucky (or unlucky) enough to have had it brush against them struggled to describe its texture. The most common word uttered about it was soft, the second was the word tough, leading most experts to believe that it was magical or unexplainable by currently accepted scientific standards and thus, described as an unknown fabric.

As she approached the bar, flanked by her commanders and their seconds, the bartender wiped the sweat from his brow and stomped his peg leg over to meet her, grabbing a mug as he went. He watched her approach, trying to gauge her mood but her face betrayed no emotions.

Her neutral expression unnerved him as they met at the bar, slamming her gloves against the rail as her men let out a roar of approval. She stared into his eyes as she ordered all her men be served with the finest drink, dropping 10 rainbow metallic bars of Ven styled money into his palm. The bartender stared at the small fortune in his palm for a second before tucking it under his apron and signaled the bots with a switch on his belt to start serving the small army that had just invaded the multi-level star bar.

As the party began to accelerate towards becoming a rowdy affair, three broad-but rather non-conspicuous figures strode in the doorway craning their necks to see what was causing the

ruckus that could be heard up and down the promenade. Two were dressed in engineer green uniforms, but the third was dressed plainly in a tannish-green jacket with brown sleeves and black pants. A captain's pendant peaked out from around the buttons of his shirt, but he quickly tucked it back against his chest as the trio started to push their way towards the bar.

Shoving and cursing as they struggled through the throng of mostly humanoid crowd, the men finally made it to the edge of one end of the bar, the captain claiming the only available seat while his two men stood flanking him to either side. He ordered three grogs from the robot bartender then handed two of the amber filled beer glass to his men before the three toasted and drank, downing half the mug before grinning and shaking hands. A second toast, and the three were soon joyously enjoying themselves, having to almost shout over the din of the room.

It was the second sip of the second mug when he first caught a glimpse of her through the crowd. It was just a flash, a brief swirl of deep red, but it was enough to stop the medallion possessing captain in mid-sentence of his excellent 'Journey between the Quasar and Me' rendition. The two standing men turned to look, also spotting glimpses of the deep red farther down the bar across the sea of swarthy crewmen dressed in an array of colors and styles. There was no red that came anywhere close to drawing the eye such as this, like a lone red flower in a field of every other color.

"What do you think Cap'n?" asked one of the men. "I don't think I've ever seen anything like that."

The Captain didn't answer right away. He sat transfixed on the spot where he had first glimpsed it, but too many bodies were between them now. He stood, draining his grog mug and trading it with the half-full one that his compatriot was still sipping. He grinned at them both.

"Gentlemen, please save my seat so I can return... just in case this doesn't work." He winked as he turned away from the debate over who was going to get the newly empty seat began.

He moved slowly through the crowded bar jostling humans, non-humans, and artificial life as he went in the direction of where the flashes of red had caught his attention. He caught frustratingly brief glimpses of a shifting red further down the bar, but an Eclastion had wrapped her tail around his waist, slurring her drunken words as she brushed her whiskers against his neck. She had dark brown smooth fur, and her tail was tipped with a piercing that showed she was a private on a local pirate vessel. Any other night he would have stopped and talked to her, but this night had already promised to be anything but typical if he could reach the woman in scarlet red.

The Captain gently disengaged himself from within the Eclastion's grasp while whispering a few words of affirmation and rejection in her large mouse-like ears. She blushed a little pink in her cheeks before winking at him and turning away towards more amiable prey.

The mass of bodies and limbs and various stretchy alien parts made it exasperatingly difficult to get his bearings. He put a hand on the bar and used the side of a towering darker Volox's knee to vault himself up onto the bar, knocking over various colored liquids that sizzled and steamed against the smooth metal and wood inlay of the bar top.

He deftly dodged appendages from the other patrons, some swung in his direction and those laid atop the bar as he glanced up to get his bearings. His eyes were filled with the shifting red hue as he looked out over the main floor. He sighted her near the end of the bar, leaning against the back wall, her head rising and falling in time with the music that barely rose above the symphony of a hundred different dialects being conveyed at once.

His momentary pause allowed a robo bartender to catch his ankle. Without warning, the robot lifted his foot straight up in the air lurching the Captain forward, his flailing arms causing his drink to shower down upon the crowd. The bartender released his foot at the top of his throw and began scrubbing the boot scuff off the bar before he hit the ground.

The captain attempted to roll forward to break his fall but landed instead on various heads and appendages that slowed his fall but angered their party-drunk owners. He quickly found himself hoisted up in the air and traveling towards his destination at a speed that he was surprisingly nonchalant about. In truth, it wasn't his first trip through localized space at flying speed. He did manage to get his bearings as he twisted to see his land spot... which was unfortunately more various shaped heads and appendages. He repeated his ungraceful landing twice more before finally landing behind the bar, shattering a few containers as various colored liquids rained down on him. He sat for a second to gather his thoughts as he checked for his own shattered parts and took stock of his situation and how it didn't seem like anything was going the way he had planned.

As the liquids rained down, he watched a shattered bottle slowly dripping a deep scarlet red as he focused on each small droplet falling in seemingly slow motion. The color refocused his thoughts and he stood to continue his search, and was astonished to find the scarlet pirate leaning nonchalantly against the bar directly in front of him, staring directly into the captain's eyes.

The Captain inadvertently took a step back without meaning too, the surprise evident on his face as the pirate leader merely smiled and stared back at him. His eyes attempted to take in every aspect of her face in that small moment. The lighter shade of brown eyes, hair a shiny jet-black like the color of an Earth Raven, and not-quite pouty and reddish-pink full lips that called to his own with a fire that was quickly spreading through his body and mind as they gazed at each other.

She merely leaned against the bar while looking at him... a small devilish grin playing across her lips causing first one side to curl up in a smirk and then somehow moving to the other corner without disturbing the rest of her face.

It was then that he noticed many more sets of eyes peering directly at him as her commanders, bodyguards, and the human bartender himself all stood surrounding them both. Some stood looking on with amusement or an interest in what was going to happen next, while the eyes of others held much more fiendish thoughts. He felt the weight of the various gazes settling on his shoulders like an actual physical weight and tried to shrug them off, as he brought his winning smile to bear towards the dread pirate Flare.

Savannah gazed quietly at him, only shifting her weight slightly as she folded her red clad arms and met his look with her own piercing gaze as she studied his face. He wasn't the most handsome man she had ever gazed upon, and watching him fly across the bar certainly meant he wasn't the strongest or smartest being she'd come across in her travels.

But there was something about him that drew her attention... something she noticed as she had watched him fly through the air several times over the last few minutes. Savannah had observed a small, almost mischievous smile play across his lips every time he had reached the apex of his flight before changing into a universal 'brace for impact' face. It struck a chord deep within her that now hummed against her chest. This was a man that faced his fear with a smile. Not that he didn't get scared... but her gut was telling her that he was someone who wouldn't hesitate to act when faced with deadly and insurmountable odds.

Up close, she realized her first assessment of him was slightly off, and he was mildly attractive by most human standards. She figured him to be older than her, a little broader in the shoulders than she was usually into, and just cresting past six feet tall. He had hazel eyes, the green mixing with the bluish brown that gave off an almost impish aura that she wanted to ogle for a much longer length of time. The random liquids from the broken bar dripped off his salt and pepper colored hair... streaks of white that admixed with the dark brown strands that were separated between being slicked back and partly stuck to the sides of his face and around head.

She didn't think too much of his playboy lean, and his larger than average, hawkish nose didn't feed the fire she was feeling in the pit of her stomach. But the smile she had briefly glimpsed as he flew gazed at her now and was causing the flame to burn hotter the longer they regarded each other.

Savannah briefly studies his clothes, noting the captain pendant hanging around his neck set snugly inbetween the opening of his wet, faded-brown bomber jacket. It was a style that some ancient earth families had adopted as friendly ground wear instead of the standard jumpsuits. It was slightly too large for him and bunched a little at his wrists, but it was a style she didn't know she was kind of into... until the moment she was actually presented with a person wearing it. A man she was having a hard time looking away from.

"Admiral Flare," he greeted her with a slightly forward bow, saluting her with a slightly awkward standard pirate salute. Savannah knew immediately that he wasn't a member of her crew, which immediately sent her thoughts in a naughty direction. She had learned early on in her career that hook-ups and inter-crew relations were NOT headaches she needed while she was enveloped in her captain duties.

