

## Dolly

By Michele Dutcher

“It's just the eyes, Bal – that's what gets me – the eyes.” Gerree sighed and then squashed back into his seat, watching the planet C-421 grow in size until it filled the viewing screen.

“Come on, Ger, this run is almost over. We dock, herd the product into the holding pen, collect our credits and leave. One more trip after this and we have enough in our accounts to retire for good. Not too bad for two guys in their 30s.”

“But why must the product have faces? - faces with eyes? I've been having nightmares.”

“The pigs have faces because the Efians prefer their meat to be fresh. As long as there is Ottic matter in this planet, and the Efians can bring it to the surface – the Efians will get whatever they want. Period.”

Gerree let the idea settle in. Both men felt the outdated starship shimmy a little as it landed on the planet's frozen surface. They both relaxed a little.

Bal looked over at the small man sitting beside him. “Gerree, think of it like this: a man plants a tree and waters it as it grows. Doesn't that man have the right to cut it down eventually and use its wood? This is the same thing – these pigs were cloned by the Cindize Company. The company has the right to use them however they want.” Bal looked at his partner as if what he was saying was a no-duh statement. “Remember Dolly – the first cloned sheep? She was studied for a while and then what happened to her?”

Gerree shrugged.

“No one knows because no one cares what happens to clones.”

“But the nightmares...”

“Have you been taking your pills?” Bal reached over Gerree, grabbing the green and gold tablet sitting on the console in front of him. “What the hell is this? We have a schedule for taking these things.”

“I'll take it, Bal. Just give it back.” The pill changed hands. “It is amazing that there are 50,000 Efians living in a city under this ice.”

Bal nodded yes – happy to change the subject. “At one time this planet was as green as any in the galaxy. C-421 got hit by an asteroid and thrown off its orbit...just a little. Now the inhabitants live below ground, sleep in boxes, and have their meals shipped in.”

A comforting female voice broke in, giving instructions.

“They're ready to receive the product, Jer. Time for you to go downstairs and herd those suckers out.”

Ger started to balk.

Bal looked straight at him. “Just go downstairs and do your freaking job. I can't leave the controls. Do your freaking job.”

Three minutes later, the little man in overalls was on the cargo deck, looking at the pigs from behind an unbreakable window. A hologram of the holding room shone before him. On his left a door opened and swine began to back away. He took his right hand and “pressed” on the hologram and the back wall of the deck began moving forward. Pigs started falling out the open door. The ones in front seemed to scream as their pink bodies were shoved into the Efians underground compound. The holding pen kept getting smaller and smaller as Gerree's hands got closer together.

Suddenly a pig jumped up on the window, his hands leaving streaks of blood as he fell back into the rest of the swine. And then another pig jumped up, and another.

“Gerree! What is going on down there?! Get that back wall moving again before the Efians come into the pen and get the product themselves!”

Then, almost as if the inhabitants had heard him, the Efians were flying through the door – grabbing the product, ripping their throats out with bared teeth. Everywhere there was blood. It was squirting onto the window until the scene inside the pen was hidden behind a thick cover of red.”

“Damn it, you idiot! I'm coming down there myself!”

“Bal. Bal. They're not pigs,” whispered Gerree in shocked revelation. He felt his knees give out two seconds before his head hit the floor.

Six hours later

The office of the Efian diplomat was luxuriant. The couch seats were deep and soft. The tables were made of thick, rich oak. From this location, Bal could see the city's high-rises out the window, shuttles rising and falling from the streets 12 stories below. The city was alive with life, even this late at night – even 200 feet below the ice-covered surface.

The ambassador who entered was tall and welcoming. “I trust your partner will fully recover.” He smiled broadly before handing the human a stemmed glass filled with a chilled, white beverage.

“He'll be fine. I do apologize for any inconvenience, your grace.”

“Please, please – call me Logi – no reason for such formality.” The diplomat took a seat behind the large, box-shaped desk, and motioned for Bal to take the chair across from him.

The Efiian shrugged his shoulders and gave out an embarrassed chuckle. “It had been a long time between deliveries and I'm afraid some of my people were overcome with hunger. We apologize for our lack of dining manners. My higher-ups have always been impressed by your company's commitment to excellence. We appreciate your continued service.”

“No harm done, I assure you. I'll be sure Gerree takes his pills next time out.”

“I suppose it's only a matter of the credits then,” said the diplomat, giving a little bow before leading the human out of his office.

Six weeks later

The planet C-421 hung in the viewing screen, growing larger by the second. Captain Bal looked over to his 2nd in command. “Have you taken your pill, Gerree?”

“I will, Bal – I will.”

“I'll get you a glass of water,” said Bal – getting up from his seat.

The End