

# *The Town Drunk*

*Presents*

## WHEN SCIENCE-FICTION CLICHÉS GO BAD

*Jennifer Pelland*

Copyright © 2006 Jennifer Pelland

### **The Breeding Pair**

“Welcome, Earthlings, to your new home,” the disembodied voice squeaked. “Here, you will breed with one another so that we might study your reproductive habits firsthand. Begin at will.”

The woman in comfortable shoes looked across the room at the man in the ruffled shirt. “Uh...”

He rolled his eyes. “Houston, we have a problem.”

---

The room wasn’t bad, as rooms went. Half of it was straight out of *Leave it to Beaver*, complete with matching armchairs, a comfy sofa, and a coffee table covered with bric-a-brac. The other half contained a king-sized bed draped in blood-red satin sheets. It was definitely not Ward-and-June-approved.

And then there was the door.

The two of them dove for it as one. They yanked it open, and both their faces fell.

“Just a bathroom,” the woman said.

The man winced. “How long do they expect us to stay here?”

“Well, I don’t see a kitchen anywhere.”

He jerked his thumb over his shoulder. “Actually, I think I saw a room service menu on the coffee table.”

“Damn.”

Wordlessly, they made their way back to the living room area and settled down across from each other in the armchairs.

The woman ran her fingers through her close-cropped hair. “Well.”

The man straightened his leather kilt. “You can say that again.”

The woman cleared her throat and shifted in her chair. “I suspect we’ll be stuck here a while. The name’s Alix.”

The man gestured to his ruffles. “Butch.”

Alix raised her eyebrows.

“I know. I think my parents were expecting someone else.”

They passed another moment in uncomfortable silence before Alix asked, “Do you think they’ll let us go if we just do it and get it over with?”

Butch grimaced. “Oh, honey, I don’t know if I could. I mean, you’re not exactly my type, and men can’t fake it like women can.”

Alix leaned forward, planting her elbows on her spread knees, and wrinkled her brow in thought. “Are you sure you can’t? Not even just once? I mean, couldn’t you close your eyes and pretend I was Orlando Bloom?”

“Sweetie, don’t take this the wrong way, but you’re too broad to be Orlando Bloom.”

“Brad Pitt?”

Butch closed his eyes, bit his lip, and sighed. “I don’t know. I always imagined myself on the bottom with him.”

Alix shuddered. “I’m so not going there.”

“I’d rather you didn’t.”

Alix held up a finger. “Hang on. Let’s get some clarification before we do anything regrettable.” She stood and yelled, “Hey! What *exactly* do we need to do to satisfy you?”

The alien voice, a high-pitched, nasal whine that would be comical under other circumstances, said, “You need to have procreative sex.”

Alix cast a quick glance at Butch. “Guess that rules out the Brad Pitt scenario.” Looking back at the ceiling, she asked, “So, if we just get it over with, you’ll let us go?”

“First, you must become impregnated.”

“What?”

“And after you have your first child, you will be allowed time to recover before conceiving a second one.”

“*Second* one? Look, buddy, you have a lot of nerve—”

Butch rested his hands on Alix’s flannel-clad shoulders and said, “Calm down, okay? I’m sure we can work this out.”

“Not with my uterus, we won’t!”

“Absolutely not. Let me handle this.”

Alix scowled, crossed her arms tightly over her chest, and nodded.

“Right, now where were we? Ah, yes.” Butch took a deep breath, then shrieked, “*What?*”

Alix clapped Butch on the back. “Good job.”

Butch whimpered and clutched his ruffles.

Alix jabbed a finger at the ceiling. “Face it, whoever you are, we don’t want to do it. Now just put us back where you found us, okay?”

“Why do you not want to do it?” the voice asked.

“We...” She looked at Butch, who gestured wildly at her to say something, anything. “We don’t breed well under observation.”

“We have evidence to the contrary,” the voice said.

“What evidence?”

“*Butt Babes III: The Exhibitionist’s Thong.*”

Alix threw her hands in the air. “The aliens have porn.”

“Well, it does explain the bed.” Butch flopped onto it with a theatrical sigh, his flushed skin fading to a fetching pink, and peered curiously at the headboard. With one outstretched finger, he lifted a leather cuff chained to it. “Restraints. Tasteful. Are there drinks on that room service menu? Maybe I could cuff you to the bed, get hammered, close my eyes, and think of Danny England.”

“Danny England?”

Butch grinned. “Star quarterback at my high school.”

“Why am I even asking? We’re not doing it. I am *not* getting pregnant.”

“I’m sure it’s moot. After all the recreational drugs I did in the ‘90s, I’m probably sterile.” He peeked into the bedside table’s drawer. “My god, even *I* don’t know what half of these toys are for.”

Alix glared at the ceiling. “Look, we’re not going to screw around for you. Why do you even need us anyway if you have porn?”

“Because we would like to see you breed in a controlled laboratory environment. We have never encountered a species with such complicated breeding rituals as your own. We were particularly fascinated by *Jumbo Piss Party VII*. Do you require chocolate cakes and hoses?”

Alix buried her head in her arms. “I don’t want to know. I don’t want to know. I really, really don’t want to know.”

“But why pregnancy?” Butch asked. “What’s wrong with wham, bam, thank you man... er, ma’am?”

“None of your films show the end of the procreative cycle. Perhaps some day when we are able to unscramble more of your cable channels, we will finally see a film that takes us on the full journey from mistaken pizza delivery to the argument with the over-hyped celebrity about the reality of post-partum depression. Until then, you will provide the experience for us.”

“Look,” Alix said, “that’s a lot to expect from one breeding pair.”

“You are not our only pair. We have others.”

“And are you having luck with any of them?”

“Oddly, no.”

Butch exchanged a knowing glance with Alix. “Did you by chance take all of your subjects from the same place you found us?”

“Yes. There was a very diverse sampling to be had there. We were able to select specimens in a wide variety of sizes and colors with an incredible range of gender expression and mating displays. We weren’t sure that the furry and feathery ones were human at first, but the DNA tests came back positive.”

“Great. They got the bears and the queens.”

Alix pinched the bridge of her nose and winced. “Maybe we got lucky and they grabbed the bisexuals’ float too.”

“Doesn’t sound like it.”

“We do not understand,” the voice said. “We have paired males and females together. Your species has only two physical sexes. Is that not what is required for procreation? Do you require music?”

A funky ‘70s bass line kicked in, overlaid by the telltale “wakka-wakka” of a guitar.

Deadpan, Butch said, “I must fling myself at you right now.”

“Excellent,” the alien voice said. “We are recording.”

“Cut it out!” Alix said. “Don’t you people have sarcasm?”

“No, we reproduce asexually.”

“Just stop the music. Seriously, stop it.”

The music cut off mid-wakka.

“Okay,” Alix said. “It looks like I need to do a little explaining. See, with humans, there’s procreation, and there’s sex.”

“We... we do not understand.”

“Our species doesn’t have sex just to reproduce. There’s also a social component to it.”

“That is common.”

“Yeah, well, we tend to do it more for the socializing than for the procreation. See, if you do it right, sex feels really, really good.”

“We had assumed that from your recordings,” the alien said. “Either that, or it felt really, really bad.”

“We use the same face for both,” Butch said.

“Anyway,” Alix continued, “not all of us like to have sex with people of the *opposite* gender. Some of us like to have sex with people of the *same* gender.”

“But you cannot procreate that way.”

“That’s right. Butch and I are people who like to have sex with people of our own gender, just

like everyone else you picked up at the parade, even though we can't reproduce that way."

"Then you mean that *Lesbo Lollipop Lullabies XIV* was not a film on hygiene? We could find no other explanation for all the licking."

Alix struggled not to burst out laughing and failed, leaving Butch to shrug at the ceiling and say, "I don't get lesbians either."

"Your mating rituals are even more complex than we'd imagined. But we still do not understand how sex can work with someone of your own gender."

Butch perked up. "Well, for instance, if I get down on all fours..." he used his hands to illustrate "...and the leather daddy whips out his—"

Alix slapped her hand over his mouth. "I don't think they need the gory details." She could feel him pouting against her hand.

"Sex for pure recreation?" the alien voice asked. "This is novel."

Alix shrugged. "That's just how we are."

"Perhaps we should change the experiment."

---

"Is this better?"

Alix gazed at the cool brunette, who gazed back at her with a come-hither stare. "Much."

"Then you will have non-procreative sex for us now."

"But... I thought you..."

"We have found new specimens to perform procreative sex for us. We were careful to monitor them for cross-gender courting rituals before selecting them. The residents of Shady Oaks are not as diverse as your group. Their hair, what they have of it, is uniformly white, and their skin uniformly baggy. But I am sure they will make fine babies for our experiment. Now, show us non-procreative sex."

Alix spluttered and flung her hands up. "I don't care what your porn says, we're not going to do it if we know you're watching!"

One dusty blue wall suddenly dissolved into a giant display of Butch doing just that, in the position he'd been trying to illustrate earlier, with a leather daddy.

"My eyes!" Alix cried, and clapped her hands over her face.

The sounds of panting and moaning cut off, and she tentatively peeked between her fingers to make sure it was safe to look again.

Nothing but the cool brunette, and this time, she was standing much, much closer.

Alix gaped at her with sudden recognition. “Oh my god, aren’t you Claudia—”

The brunette put her hand over Alix’s mouth. “I think our situation is science fictional enough. Let’s leave my day job out of this.”

Alix could practically hear the wakka-wakkas swelling in the background. Suddenly, the porn bed looked mighty inviting. “So,” she said. “Want to go where no man has gone before?”

The brunette rolled her eyes. “Like I’ve never heard that one.”

---

## **The Last Man and Woman on Earth**

“Finally! Another person!” The Last Man on Earth ran up the front stairs of the Boston Public Library and flung himself at the woman who was attempting to unload a full book truck into the back of her already-packed SUV.

“Ew! No touching!” she yelped, prying him loose.

“But we’re the last people anywhere.”

“Are we? That’s interesting.” She lifted another pile of books from the truck and deposited it between cases of ravioli and diet smoothies.

The Last Man on Earth pushed his thick spectacles up with one stubby finger. “There’s no one on the radio, no one on shortwave, no one picking up the phone when I dial random numbers, no one on the streets.” He wiped his sweaty hands on his Radio Shack polo shirt. “They’re all gone.”

“Maybe they’ve just all left the Boston area.”

“But I’m from Providence.”

“That’s a pretty small sampling.”

“There’s no one on TV, no one—”

“Fine, I believe you.” She closed and locked the SUV’s hatch, which proudly displayed an “Ask Me About Mary Kay!” bumper sticker, then headed back into the library.

The Last Man on Earth followed. “What are you doing?”

“Getting stuff to read.” She pushed the cart through the propped-open door. “I figure the electricity won’t be working much longer, so I’m looting reading material for the rest of my life while I can.”

“So you believe me!”

She shrugged and pressed the elevator button. “I’m being proactive.”

He stood between the book truck and the elevator doors. “Then you know what we have to do.”

“Oh, trust me, I’ve also been stocking up on food, candles, matches, tampons, moisturizer, bandages—”

“And baby books?”

She stared at him blankly. Behind him, the elevator doors opened.

“We need to breed,” he solemnly intoned.

She rammed him with the book cart, and he doubled over, clutching his solar plexus. “You need to keep dreaming,” she said. “Now if you’ll excuse me, I still haven’t raided the Victorian pornography section.”

“I’ll wait for you here,” he wheezed.

---

As threatened, he was standing by her car when she came out with her next load of books. “The future of the human race depends upon us.”

“Too bad for the human race.” She unlocked the car with a chirp and piled more books in. “I don’t care if you really are the last man on Earth. We’re not having sex.”

“If we don’t, the human race will die out!”

She dumped the last stack of books into the back of the SUV, then closed and locked it. “Even if we *do*, the human race will still die out, so I say there’s no point in bothering. Just like there’s no point in me ever bothering to shave my pits again.” She lifted her arms high to show off the twin brown patches. “It’s awfully freeing, don’t you think?”

He blinked behind his thick lenses. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, if you’re really the last man on Earth, I don’t see any reason to get razor burn for you.”

“No... before that.”

“About the human race dying out even if we have sex?”

He nodded.

“Because we’re a genetic bottleneck.”

“Uh...”

She rolled her eyes. “There’s nothing more pathetic than a stupid nerd. Look, it’s very simple. The two of us don’t have enough variation in our genes to continue the species. Our descendants will become dangerously inbred and everyone will die horribly and painfully within a few generations.”

“Nonsense. I’m healthy, and you’re healthy.”

“I was born with a tail, you know.”

He blinked again. “A tail?”

“Mmm hmm. And those are some mighty thick glasses you’re wearing. Do you really want our offspring to be inbred myopic monkey babies?”

As he stood there gaping, she drove off.

---

The Last Woman on Earth woke to the sound of breaking glass and a muffled, yet mild, curse. She lit one of the many scented candles in her basement apartment and waited.

In skulked The Last Man on Earth with a turkey baster.

“That isn’t what I think it is, is it?” she asked.

“My sperm? Of course. Don’t look at me like that! It’s not like I was going to rape you.”

“And how is squirting me with a turkey baster of sperm while I’m sleeping any better than rape?”

“I don’t care if our children *are* inbred!” he cried. “It’s better than giving up and letting the human race die out without a fight!”

“Well, it was a valiant attempt,” she said. “I’m sure if you’d succeeded, those little buggers would have found a way to swim past my tampon.”

“Tampon?”

She nodded.

The Last Man on Earth sat down with an audible sigh. “So I should come back in fourteen days?”

“In fourteen days, I’ll have found a new place to live,” she said. “Plus, I’ll probably start being irregular real soon now that my birth control pills have run out. I was on the pill for eleven years straight, you know. Just imagine, mutant myopic monkey babies!”

“I think you’re lying about that tail.”

“Do yourself a favor and let yourself out.”

---

He found her again three years later in Baltimore as she was raiding an upscale candle shop.

“So, lonely yet?” he asked.

“Ooh, yes.” She sat down on a wrought-iron chair and spread her knees. “Come get me, big boy.”

When he got close enough, she kicked him in the balls.

She continued methodically collecting scented candles while she waited for him to be able to speak again. Finally, he groaned, “Why?”

“I still owed you for that turkey baster trick. Besides, I really liked Boston. But Baltimore’s nice. Too bad I can’t stay. Dare I ask how you found me?”

“I’ve been hitting cities all along the eastern seaboard. We’re still the only people out there. You’re my Eve!”

“I’ll be your Lorena Bobbitt if you keep this up.”

He followed her to the counter, where she was tossing fistfuls of matchboxes into her shopping basket. “I solved the bottleneck problem,” he said. “I raided a sperm bank.”

“Wouldn’t the little buggers have all thawed and rotted away by now or something?”

“You’d be amazed at the backup systems sperm banks have in place. So, shall we start?”

She shot him an incredulous glare. “Oh, you have got to be kidding me.”

“The human race has done so many incredible things. How can you just let it vanish like this?”

“Easy,” she said. “I’m not about to pump out brats in a world without medical care, or schools, or civilization, or babysitters, or—”

“You’re just being selfish.”

She feigned another kick, smiled as he collapsed to the floor in a fetal position, and moved on to the earring rack. “Do you know how many women die in childbirth?”

He peered up at her, and since it seemed safe, sat up and hugged his knees to his chest, just in case. “Isn’t it worth the risk when the future of the species is at stake?”

She selected a pair of delicate red-beaded earrings and examined them in the dying sunlight. “You’re right, I must be selfish. Oh, the happy little monkey babies I could have begat. My own private *Planet of the Apes*. What woman wouldn’t want that?”

“I still don’t believe you.”

She set down her shopping basket, turned her back to him, and pushed down her pants, exposing the scar.

“Ew!”

She pulled her pants up and emptied the entire earring rack into her basket.

“I... I have some thinking to do.”

“Good, I have some driving to do.”

---

Seventeen years later, The Last Man on Earth staggered into The Last Woman on Earth’s living room and collapsed. “Looking...for...years... Never...thought...I’d...find...you...” He let out a long, rattling wheeze.

The Last Woman on Earth put down her book, lit another candle, and tucked her now-salt-and-pepper hair behind her ears. “Are you kidding? I’m surprised you didn’t make it to Salt Lake City sooner. Goddess bless the Mormons! I’ve got enough canned goods to last me a hundred lifetimes.” She tossed him a bottle of water from the stash by her chair. “Drink up.”

When he’d drunk enough that his throat no longer felt like sandpaper, The Last Man on Earth said, “That’s enough to feed a family for several generations.”

“What about the tail problem?”

“I’ve had some time to get used to the idea. Maybe tails will give our children a unique evolutionary advantage. They could be like a third hand or something. What do you say? Are you willing to give the human race one last chance?”

“Too late. I’m post-menopausal.”

“Dammit!”

“However...” The Last Woman on Earth rose sensuously from the sofa, ran her fingers through her long hair, and smoothed her hands down her clingy silk dress. “Now that I don’t have to worry about getting pregnant, wanna have sex? It’s been decades, and you’re actually starting to look good.”

The Last Man on Earth looked at her in horror. “Have sex with someone who used to have a tail? Ugh! What kind of a sicko do you think I am?”

She boggled at him. “But... you just said...”

“I might be willing to make some sacrifices for the future of the species, but not for you. No offense, lady, but a tail? That’s nasty.”

The Last Woman on Earth picked up a baseball bat and chased The Last Man on Earth through the streets of Salt Lake City, screaming, “Get back here, you bastard! I ran out of batteries last week!”



## **The Planet of the Amazon Women**

Zack Braveheart whipped off his spacesuit with a flourish, revealing his tanned, athletic, and completely naked physique to the Amazon Women of Planet Medea III. “And *I* am what you call a *man*.” He put his hands on his hips and waited triumphantly for their awe.

The redhead in the leopard-print muumuu cocked her head to the side and stared at the strange new sight. “Well, we’ve certainly never seen one of those before.”

The throng of muscular woman murmured their assent, and Zack flushed with pride, waiting for the inevitable orgy to begin.

The redhead nodded to the tall brunette in the zebra-striped sarong. “It’ll have to go.”

Zack watched the brunette grip her sword in a way that he normally would have found invigorating, and as he was pinned down by the mob of scantily-clad women, he screamed in bitter outrage that this scenario was going to have a wildly different ending than it did in his dreams.

---

**Jennifer Pelland** lives just outside Boston with three cats and an Andy. Her fiction has appeared in *Strange Horizons*, *Apex Digest*, *Escape Pod*, and *Abyss and Apex*, among others. She’s a Viable Paradise graduate, does volunteer web work for SFWA, and is the webmistress for her brother’s band. To satisfy her dramatic urges, she makes silly voices in local radio plays, and she was recently cast in a small role in a local independent film. Visit her website at <http://www.jenniferpelland.com>.