

## *Owl Man Tests the Galactic Wormhole ...*

One day the two “bird-brains,” Owl Man and Heron Man, found themselves in what to most writers would be a royal fix: All of the Hasty Heisters had hastened off to parts scattered far and wide, leaving the two novelists, ostensibly, short of material.

“It’s just a temporary glitch, Heron Man, I’m sure of it,” said Owl man, full of confidence.

“Are you sure you’re sure, Owl Man?”

“Sure I’m sure I’m sure—I mean, of course, I’m sure,” replied Owl man, who hated redundancies.

Heron Man, though sorely tempted, held his tongue.

Both writers knew this much: they wanted to try grafting their two enterprises—*Fex & Co.*, on one hand, and *The Deathling Crown Lottery* on the other—into one continuing story, but they had not yet figured out how in the world they were going to accomplish such a dazzling conjugation. In this case, and for all Owl Man’s ribald humor, not even his quips about *copulative conjunctions* would serve.

No, thought Heron Man, this requires some serious re-thinking, or re-something, of the entire enterprise. Sure, he continued thinking, Owl Man had been scrupulous about warning Jasmine and him that he, Owl Man, had been having a series of *very unusual dreams* that would most likely change all their lives in the most dramatic ways.

“How will our lives change?” Heron man had asked. Well, he couldn’t exactly say, was Owl Man’s reply. And what he gave them in the end was the name of the story: *The Deathling Crown Lottery*, as previously mentioned.

In short, for the time being it seemed they were stumped.

As usual, then, Jasmine went to work at Tully’s for her evening shift (tips filling strongboxes with gold), Owl Man furiously made notes in his laptop and then just as furiously deleted them. And Heron Man, after doing who knows what during the day, showed up at Owl Man’s door at 7:12 PM with an unopened bottle of Glenfiddich.

Once settled in, the two frustrated writers got down to business.

“What have you been up to, Owl Man?”

“Nothing,” said Owl Man. “What have you been up to, Heron Man?”

“Nothing,” came the reply.

At that moment, Glenfiddich came galloping to the rescue—the ceremonial opening, the wafting fragrance, the crystalline sniffers, the golden liquid, the quivering nostrils, the first, ecstatic sip, the savoring—in short, all the ancient Gaelic rituals of fine single-malt Scotch.

Nothing was said for quite a while, both writers content to sit in silence enjoying the fruits of Highland culture.

“Shit!” said Heron Man explosively.

“You OK, Heron Man?”

“What? Oh, I’m sorry, yes, I’m fine. I just remembered something I’ve been dying to talk to you about.”

“Well, I’m glad you finally remembered,” intoned the Owl Man with his customary understated irony.

“It was an article I read this morning. Some science thing. Usually they print articles about gut bacteria and how a certain enzyme affects the immune systems of microbes—fruit flies and e. coli, probably. It’s usually microscopic stuff I just can’t get my head into.”

“Yes, that would be difficult,” said Owl Man, chuckling to himself.

“Get serious, Owl Man. This is no joke!” said Heron Man.

“Oh, I’m sure it’s not. But it might help if you would tell me what’s so cosmically exciting!”

“OK, I will,” said Heron Man, “but first, I’m calling for reinforcements,” and he splashed another finger of Glendiddich into each glass and called out, “Cheers!”

“Yes, cheers! Now, about that cosmic whatever-it-is?”

“Well put, Owl Man, well put. In fact, you don’t know *how* well put.”

“Heron Man, for St. Andrews’ sake, would you just spit it out?”

“Sorry, Owl Man. I got carried away. Here’s what happened.”

And so finally Heron Man gave Owl Man a sharp, lucid synopsis of the science articles he’d read that morning about how (1) they’ve figured out that the Milky Way

Galaxy—*our* galaxy—is basically the occasion for a *huge wormhole in space-time*, and how (2) most fossil life in the universe probably consists of microbes that couldn't get through the 'Gaian Bottleneck,' that is, they never had a chance to develop a real, homeostatic climate like earth's, and therefore never had a chance to evolve complex life-forms—from squirming vertebrates, to plodding quadrupeds, to lurching, impulsive bipeds, etc.

Unfortunately, Heron Man's detailed explanation took so long, and the effect of the Glenfiddich was so soporific, that Owl Man was drifting off to sleep while Heron Man continued talking excitedly.

"Yes," mumbled Owl Man, "Gaian"—snort, humph—"Bottleneck—" mmmm. And soon Owl Man was dreaming, at least he *thought he was*, and maybe so. But also he was shooting through the Galactic Wormhole like Keir Dullea in *2001*, lights flashing, all the acid-graphic effects the 1960s Hollywood hipsters could produce, except that these effects were *real!*

Heron Man was barely a distant memory when Owl Man crashed into a heap on a polished metallic floor. His unceremonious landing resembled one of those 1950s canvas mail-bags that were off-loaded into the basement-level sorting-room chute of the Bronx post office.

Though stunned and disoriented at first, Owl Man soon began to take in his surroundings—lots of metal tubes and large diameter pipes, blinking lights, levers and dials, all the standard 1950s sci-fi hardware of B-grade Flash Gordon production sets.

"I heard that, earthling!" said an angry voice.

Owl Man lifted his head a little and looked up.

"Put your head down, fool!" cried the still angrier voice.

"Xhactu? Is that you?" managed Owl Man, affecting a tone of contrition, though in truth *he too* was starting to get *pissed off*, a colloquialism his fellow earthlings were quite fond of—though perhaps it should have been *pissed on*.

"I heard that too," said Xhactu. It had to be Xhactu. Who else in the galaxy would have recognized Owl Man as he shot out of the wormhole?

Xhactu continued.

“It amuses me, earthling, that you had the ... the *effrontery*”—Xhactu checked the Universal Translator on his belt for accuracy and tone—“yes, the *effrontery* to insult me with your presence so soon after your last failed endeavor”—another glance at the Translator, then Xhactu lost his thread.

“What was I saying?”

“You were saying,” said Owl Man, “that you were amused by my *effrontery*.”

“Silence!” shouted Xhactu, in another fit of anger. He seemed to have recovered himself after that momentary lapse. These frequent fits of rage were apparently welcomed by Xhactu, who obviously took delight in *righteous intergalactic indignation*.

But by this time Owl Man’s ire was rising as well, his Gaelic temples were throbbing, and *he* was the one getting *royally pissed off*. He was beginning to wonder if perhaps Xhactu, despite his Universal Translator, really had just a limited vocabulary, consisting mostly of expletives and insults. Maybe Xhactu was just a glorified nerd with three legs!

“So much for Galactic evolution,” muttered Owl Man under his breath and just barely audible.

“What was that? I didn’t quite catch that.” Xhactu was actually getting flustered, and Owl Man saw his chance.

“Come, come, my dear Xhactu,” he said warmly, as he got off the gleaming floor. “Don’t you find the *burden of command* to be a lonely one? Wouldn’t you prefer to have a real conversation with someone who doesn’t need to consult a”—and here Owl Man paused, then took the plunge—“*stupid Universal Translator?*”

Xhactu was shocked at first, but quickly realized that Owl Man was right—he *had been carrying a cosmic load of loneliness and grief*. And when he checked the *stupid* Universal Translator this time, and saw how his words were expressed in his native language, he began to emit the most chilling, strangled howl of grief Owl Man had ever heard—even in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, starring Basil Rathbone as Holmes!

Owl Man was shocked not only by the howling sound but also by the volume of viscous tears—he assumed they were viscous tears—pouring from Xhactu’s rather amphibian-looking eyes. Buckets, from the looks of it, Owl Man said to himself.

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Most observers would have assumed that Owl Man, in this scene at least, was just another fictional character in another fictional work, whereas in fact he was dreaming lucidly. In other words, he was dreaming, and he knew it. He had also fallen into a wormhole during the lucid dream, which only served to increase the relativistic impact of the dream, powerful enough under normal circumstances but multiplied many times over, due to quantum effects.

Thus, he lucidly knew that he had a rare opportunity: to take advantage of the dream-state while in a cosmic wormhole, under quantum conditions, by interviewing a *native informant* wearing a Universal Translator on his belt!

Furthermore, by this time Xhactu was more tractable than seemed possible. In fact, Owl Man was beginning to discern a *positive transference effect* emanating from Xhactu.

“I do so love our conversations, Owlie. They mean the world to me! You can ask me anything!” gushed Xhactu.

Strike while the iron is hot, Owl Man was thinking, though not without a twinge of guilt.

“Thank you, my dear Xhactu. I’ve been looking forward to seeing you again for, oh, I don’t know, it just seems like an eternity!” gushed Owl Man in return.

“Ask away, Owlie,” giggled Xhactu.

“Well, there’s one thing my colleague and I have been wondering—”

“Oh, him,” said Xhactu.

“Well, it’s really my question, Xhactu. Just mine, you see?”

“OK, then, I guess it’s OK, Owlie, but only ‘cause it’s you, and this is our time together.”

Sensing the fragility, the lability, of Xhactu’s transference mood, Owl pressed forward.

“We’re—I mean, I’m—wondering, my dear Xhactu, just how exactly you and your people managed to by-pass the so-called *Gaian Bottleneck*?”

“You mean that old wife’s tale? Nobody believes that anymore, Owlie. Oh, sure, in the beginning there were just a few squirmy, buggy planets that never did diddly-squat—is that how you say it?”

“Yes, Xhactu. ‘Diddly-squat’ is how we say it. That’s perfect.”

Xhactu beamed, then continued.

“The answer is so silly, Owlie. There must be *billions of planets* that did an ‘end-run’ around the Gaian Bottleneck”—Xhactu glanced at Owl Man to make sure of his usage, and Owl Man nodded—“all you have to do is find the microbial planets and *teach the microbes to breathe!* ‘Course that takes a while. That’s why we call it ‘colonizing.’ You, see, we teach *colonies of microbes* to breathe like all hell’s breaking loose, and—bingo!—there’s your atmosphere! A few billion years later you have spaceships like this, Commanders like me, and, of course, the Probing Protocols—although they’re dying out.”

With this thought, Xhactu put on a sad face, but Owl Man tried to cheer him.

“But you’ve still got Truffington and Compton in the Probing Rooms, don’t you?”

Xhactu did cheer up and started to reply in a bubbly manner, when he suddenly began to fade, blur and diminish.

Owl Man realized he was both waking up and zooming back through the wormhole.

“Xhactu!” he cried, but it was too late.

The next thing he knew Heron Man was pouring another shot of Glenfiddich into his glass. The bottle was half-empty, or was it half-full? Those quantum effects again! Now Heron Man was saying something about how “... there should be, according to Fermi’s paradox, with all the wet, rocky planets in the universe, with adequate temperatures and homeostatic atmospheres—”

“Thanks to the microbe colonies that were *taught to breathe,*” interjected Owl Man, yawning.

“Owl Man!” said Heron Man. “Were you listening to me, or were you sleeping?”

“Oh, I might have drifted off for a moment, Heron, but I believe I heard every word you said!”

## *Jolene in Trouble ...*

Jolene balanced her books, gathered her spreadsheets, and started out of the bank. She was the last one to leave.

“G’night, Miss Baker-Tomlins.”

“Good night, Joe.”

The loyal watchman had been with this branch of Ling Bank for fifteen years, and he was due to retire in six months. He had seen Jolene out the door most nights during those years, had watched her rise through the ranks to the level of Branch Supervisor. Joe addressed her as *Miss* Baker-Tomlins, because he was old-school. Chivalrous, in his hillbilly way. He didn’t approve of the title *Ms.* “Don’t seem right,” he muttered to himself often enough not to forget his “rules.” He would have called them called principles, had the word been in his active vocabulary.

Joe saw that Jolene did her job and knew the business, but he thought she was too nervous lately. He did not have much education, but he had watched people his whole life. Had there been an honorary degree in people-watching, Joe would have been ranked as *Summa Cum Laude*.

Over the years he had worked every possible shift, and had developed a keen sense of the intentions people carried into and out of the bank, along with their purses, briefcases, wallets and backpacks. That was Joe’s job—reading intentions.

Tonight, Joe was troubled, but he knew better than to show it. When he looked at Jolene lately, he didn’t like what he saw.

For her part, Jolene walked to the parking garage entrance and took the elevator to her car. She opened the trunk, put the briefcase inside, and closed it again.

The one-way spikes at the exit clanked metallically as Jolene’s tires rolled over them. Once clear of the spikes, she turned right into sparse traffic and drove northward. Avoiding the freeway, Jolene took a series of boulevards and side streets until she reached a small neighborhood, a commercial block stuffed with mom-and-pop convenience stores, tire shops, dry cleaners and several sushi shops.

Her goal for the moment was one of the latter—the Too Long Noodle Factory and Sushi Bar, which offered an eclectic hodge-podge of Chinese and Japanese cooking. The

décor was as confused as the menu: plastic palace lanterns with red tassels hung next to cheap, moon-like paper lanterns. Serene, wheat-colored *shoji* screens were jammed against busy, angular Chinese lattices, stained bright crimson and black; tables sprouted plastic bamboo leaves, small jars of hot mustard, packets of soy sauce and—for some reason—bottles of rice wine vinegar. Stringy, operatic Chinese vocal music warbled from the speakers.

Joy Ling, the owner, recognized Jolene immediately, since Jolene came here frequently. They enjoyed a degree of friendship, since their names were similar, and Joy Ling bore the same name as the bank where Jolene worked. Many times they had gone over Joy Ling's family tree, but each time had decided that Joy Ling was not related, in any way but the name, to Old Man Ling, the inscrutable owner of Ling Bank.

After a trip to the rest room to “freshen up,” Jolene ordered her usual—a sushi plate of avocado and eel, with sweet-and-sour pork rolls and egg fried rice.

She washed the meal down with several cups of hot green tea and asked for two extra fortune cookies. Jolene believed in alternate destinies.

In fact, alternate destinies are what drove Jolene to this neighborhood so often. She didn't live in this area. This is where she ate sushi, then gambled. The reasons for her gambling were complex. First, the sheer thrill of not knowing the outcome in advance acted like a tonic after the controlled tedium of the bank, where the sums always balanced at the end of the day. Gambling was different. The wild swings in her fortunes seemed to match some corresponding wildness buried deep within, like explosive gas trapped under a mile of shale. Friday night “paycheck” gambling was Jolene's way of drilling a tiny, pinpoint hole into that gas dome, allowing the volatile gases to escape harmlessly, or so it seemed to her.

Second, there was the matter of her salary, even including bonuses, incentives and such. There was certainly enough money for her immediate needs, and enough for a comfortable retirement, given careful investments in annuities, mutual funds or mid-term Treasuries. But there was a significant shortfall in this planned and prudent life, one great oversight. It did not account for the wild streak, which took the form of an outsized, even maniacal, creature that stalked Jolene's sleeping dreams and even broke into her waking fantasy life at times. The appetite of this beastly aspect of her personality was boundless,



hence her constant nibbling at snacks while at her desk. Of course, she kept the beast chained and within bounds, as if the creature were nothing more than a little mouse in her side drawer, busily working on the “bite-sized” chocolates tucked away there. Once in a while the beast would reveal its true dimensions, however, in a week-end eating binge, say, or a buying spree—shoes, for example, à la Imelda Marcos.

And then there was paycheck gambling.

The strange surroundings of the Too Long Noodle Factory, the exotic taste of eel, the volatile oils from all that hot mustard wafting through her sinuses—all these sensory stimuli seemed to whip the beast into a frenzy. By the time she unlocked the cage, then, there would be hell to pay, as Jolene’s Inner Godzilla broke through the hated constraints, running free at last.

One slight wrinkle in her routine—easily overcome—required a change of clothes. The business suit she wore at work wouldn’t do at all in the gambling den where she was a regular, and she didn’t want to waste time running home to her apartment. With a change of clothes in the trunk, next to the precious briefcase, all she needed was a private stall in which to change.

She found one to her liking in the store next to Too Long Noodle Factory. It was a cramped but public restroom at the back of the You Buy Now novelty shop. There, amidst the dust pans and brooms, the stacks of boxed rice candies, toys and rubber masks, Jolene carefully extracted herself from her red, or black, or navy suit, folding it carefully and putting it away in a clean plastic bag. Then she proceeded to wriggle her way into tight black leather leggings—let out two sizes by a leather-worker at the Flying Eyeballs biker store one block over—a black leotard and a black biker jacket with lots of straps and buckles.

Normally she would also load up her lashes with heavy mascara and sweep her hair back and clip it with a Harley-Davidson barrette. She had never ridden a Harley, but the experience was on her wish list. For some reason Jolene kept a pair of shiny black patent leather spiked heels as the final compliment to her costume.

After some last-minute fussing, she strode boldly out the door, waving at the bored Vietnamese owner who knew her habits well. He had long since given up checking her bag for stolen rice candy or jars of Kim Chee—on the verge of exploding—and he had no

interest at all in her dramatic transformation, nor in her destination. Within the parameters of the violent life he had lived, Jolene was a cupcake. As she stilted out the door, heels clicking, he seemed more interested in the lottery numbers displayed on the wall-mounted TV monitor, than in the beast Jolene was about to let loose.

The gambling den was located across the street in a blacked-out storefront with tattered “clearance sale” posters flapping from sheets of plywood covering the windows. A greasy dumpster sat near the entrance, half in an alley, half on the sidewalk. Jolene knocked on the boarded-up door, and a slot opened at eye-level. The door opened. Here too, Jolene was a well-recognized regular.

Smoke-dimmed light flared briefly from within as Jolene passed through the opening. Some of the bluish smoke puffed out the door before it closed again, swallowing Jolene and her beast.

The interior was surprisingly ample considering the small, stove-black face the building presented to the world. Tables were distributed down the middle of the room and a small bar was set to one side. A cashier’s booth with a steel cage and a safe had been installed in back, to provide protection from casual, hit-and-run thugs as much as from imprudent customers, of whom there had been a few. A loaded .45 handgun lay on a shelf beneath the counter. The barrel pointed outward.

The bar was doing a brisk business, though the bartender, Phuoc—also known as “Lucky”—somehow found time to unload a fresh case of bourbon and stock his shelves, even as he whipped up a drink for Jolene—bourbon on the rocks, double.

Jolene was what hand-wringing, bleeding heart liberals would call a “compulsive gambler.” But she avoided such denigrating terms. In her own mind she was a “career girl” seeking to “empower” herself by “getting a leg up” on others in order to pave the way for a “quality” life in the “fast lane” of opulence. The salary at Ling Bank wouldn’t cut it. But here, at the Phuoc Binh Blue Chip Players’ Club—though you wouldn’t find any sign bearing the name—here, is where Jolene believed she stood a chance.

Unfortunately, she had been skating along the edge of an abyss for several weeks now, running up a tab of debt that Ming, the owner, only allowed because Jolene always paid up eventually, and because he knew she worked at Ling Bank. He figured that her indebtedness to the house, and therefore to him, Ming, was “as good money in bank.”

But tonight was going to be different—Jolene could feel it. Tonight she would not only recoup her losses, but also start making those big gains that her secret retirement plan required. She was positive.

Great poker players will tell you that anyone can win at poker, and anyone can lose. The secret, they all agree, is to intersperse inevitable losses with consistent wins over time, eventually reaching a place of confidence based on the real likelihood of success, not mere wishing. A distillation of this wisdom could be found in the lyrics of popular honky-tonk songs: “Know when to hold ‘em, know when to fold ‘em.”

Jolene’s problem, this one Friday night more than others, was that popular wisdom had escaped her. Instead, the beast, the hunger within, had truly gotten the best of her. Gone was the chain. Gone was her self-control. She had entered a feverish, manic state that she herself would have warned against, had she only held one small portion of self-awareness in reserve. Instead, she allowed herself to become *fused* with her mood. *I feel good*, she told herself exuberantly, *I feel lucky*. In the process, the needle on her “wish dial” had risen steadily until it was pinned against the stop, well into the red zone where catastrophic outcomes lurk.

The annals of poker history must be littered with stories similar to Jolene’s, in which bright, studious, even gifted players gradually succumb to their personal beast, ending up as broken down, simpering wrecks, on their knees, begging for favors.

Jolene lost that night— gloriously, colossally, magnificently, like she never had lost before. Ming sat on the sidelines watching, expressionless. But the calculator in his head was nearly smoking as the numbers ran up and up and up. He allowed himself one shot-glass of the finest whiskey, in mute celebration.

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On Monday morning, Sal opened up his cash drawer as usual, not long before the doors were to open. Jolene was not in her office, which was unusual, since she usually oversaw every opening on every Monday. It’s a real thing with Jolene, Sal thought as he polished his area. Well, no problem. Trish has it covered. Sal forgot about Jolene and was in the process of dusting between the keys on his keyboard when his cell phone rang. He

looked around before answering—that old, twitchy habit again. Besides, cell phones made Sal nervous—too many prank calls from Pete had turned Sal into Pavlov’s dog.

“Yeah? This is Sal.”

A frantic whisper darted out of the tiny speaker like a dark, hot needle. Sal jumped.

“What? I can’t hear you. Who is this?” Instinctively Sal ducked his head and whispered into his shoulder. He didn’t want people listening in.

“Sal. It’s Jolene. I’m in trouble. Big trouble. I need your help.”

Jolene had never talked or sounded like this before, at least not in front of Sal. She was the Ice Queen personified, which explained her nickname, “The Bitch.” But this was a completely different person, crying, pleading for Sal’s help.

And a different side of Sal responded in turn, not the cynical Sal, quick to anger or take offense, but an almost gallant side, helpful, sympathetic, and resourceful.

“Sure, Jolene. What’s goin’ on?”

As Sal walked casually to the men’s room where he could talk more freely, Jolene unburdened herself in a torrent.

She told Sal all about the gambling debts, the staggering losses on Friday. Then she described the threats, the slapping around, the pressure that was applied after the club had closed, as Ming sat and grilled her about her work. He seemed less interested in Jolene’s making good on the debts, she felt, than on getting his hand into the cash flow at the bank.

“Why don’t you just pay him off, Jolene?” Sal knew nothing about Jolene’s finances, only that she made a lot more than he did.

“I can’t, Sal, that’s the problem. I lost really, really big on Friday. I mean you wouldn’t believe how much I owe Ming now. I haven’t got it.”

“Ming? You mean like Ming the Merciless?”

“Come on, Sal, don’t joke with me now. It’s not funny. They beat me up, Sal. I’ve got a black eye. They kept me there all night. They’ve got my car, my keys, my ID, my credit cards, everything. ‘Collateral,’ they call it. I’m so stupid, Sal. They’re going to hurt me if I don’t come up with a big bundle of cash by the end of this week. I know they’re keeping an eye on me, following me.”

“Where are you now, Jolene?”

“I’m at home.”

“How’d you get in?”

“They dropped me off in my own car and let me in. Can you believe that? Then they took the car and the keys. They even made me write a check. Cleaned out all my accounts.”

“OK, Jolene, what do you want me to do?”

“Thanks, Sal. I knew I could count on you.” Jolene choked up a bit.

“Sure, sure.” Sal was getting embarrassed.

“OK. First, tell Trish I’ll be in tomorrow. Tell her I was in a car accident. I’m going to have to explain this black eye.”

“Check. What else?”

“Maybe you could rent a car for me?”

“Sure, what kind do you want? A Caddie?”

“No, no, Sal. Just a little sedan. I don’t care. I don’t want to be noticed, any more than I already am. Can you put it on your credit card for now?”

“Sure, Jolene. Anything else?”

There was a pause. Sal noticed how hot his cell phone was getting. He’d read articles about people frying their brains with cell phones, so he held it away from his ear.

“Jolene? You still there?”

“Yeah, I’m still here, Sal.”

“Whatsa matter, Jolene?”

“This is big, Sal. I hate to ask.”

“Go ahead, Jolene. My brain is fryin’ here.”

“Oh, sorry, Sal. I don’t have any money, and they got all my cards, and they cleaned out my accounts. Can you bring me some ... some ... ”

“Some cash?” Sal finished the painful sentence for her.

“Yeah. I need a few hundred dollars. Just for a week or so, Sal, until I figure out what to do.”

“How much do you need?”

“I need a thousand, at least, just in case.”

“I don’t have that much on me, Jolene, and I’m waitin’ for my next paycheck.”

“I know, Sal. Just ... just take it out of your cash drawer and I’ll cover it somehow.”

“You know that’s illegal, Jolene.”

“I know. But I’m in a real jam here. I’d rather make up a temporary shortfall, one way or another, than end up as crab meat. You know what I mean?”

“Yeah, I know.”

They made their arrangements, ended the call, and Sal put the plan into motion. Within fifteen minutes he was out the door. Trish and the others looked at one another with raised eyebrows and smirks.

“There goes, Sal, off on another escapade,” snickered Trish. As far as they knew, it was just a normal day, except that Jolene had been in a fender-bender.

So. There it is, Sal thought as he drove off to the rescue. Jolene’s in trouble, she bends the rules. Just like Fex. Just like Coe. Just like me.