



Praise for the writing of Jules Jones & Alex Woolgrave

The Syndicate: Volume 1

Jules Jones and Alex Woolgrave write a hot story in *The Syndicate: Volume 1*. Amusing characters, humor, and delicious sex are all present. For a very interesting change of pace, try *The Syndicate: Volume 1*.

-- Sinclair Reid, *Romance Reviews Today*

The Syndicate: Volume 2

This book has so many elements that make it appealing that it is hard just to pick one. The dialogue is beyond witty. I have never laughed so hard before while reading an erotic book. Jules Jones and Alex Woolgrave have a wonderful sense of humor that make the pages fly by.

-- Natalie, *Enchanted in Romance*

While the steamy sex is definitely there in plenty, the plot is beautifully developed and wound wonderfully through the sex scenes. All the supporting characters are well developed and add to the story instead of being tangents.

-- Keely Skillman, *Coffee Time Romance*

The Syndicate: Volume 3

Readers will be hard pressed to come up with a cast of characters as diverse and quite frankly bizarre as this bunch. And yet, readers will find that this group of oddballs fit together like puzzle pieces creating a picture both fascinating to see join together and fun to behold as a whole.

-- Johnna, *Fallen Angel Reviews*

The Syndicate volumes 1, 2 and 3 are now available from Loose Id.

THE SYNDICATE: FOUR-LEAF CLOVER

Jules Jones & Alex Woolgrave

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This book is rated:



For substantial explicit sexual content, graphic language, and situations that some readers may find offensive (homoerotic sex).

The Syndicate: Four-Leaf Clover

Jules Jones & Alex Woolgrave

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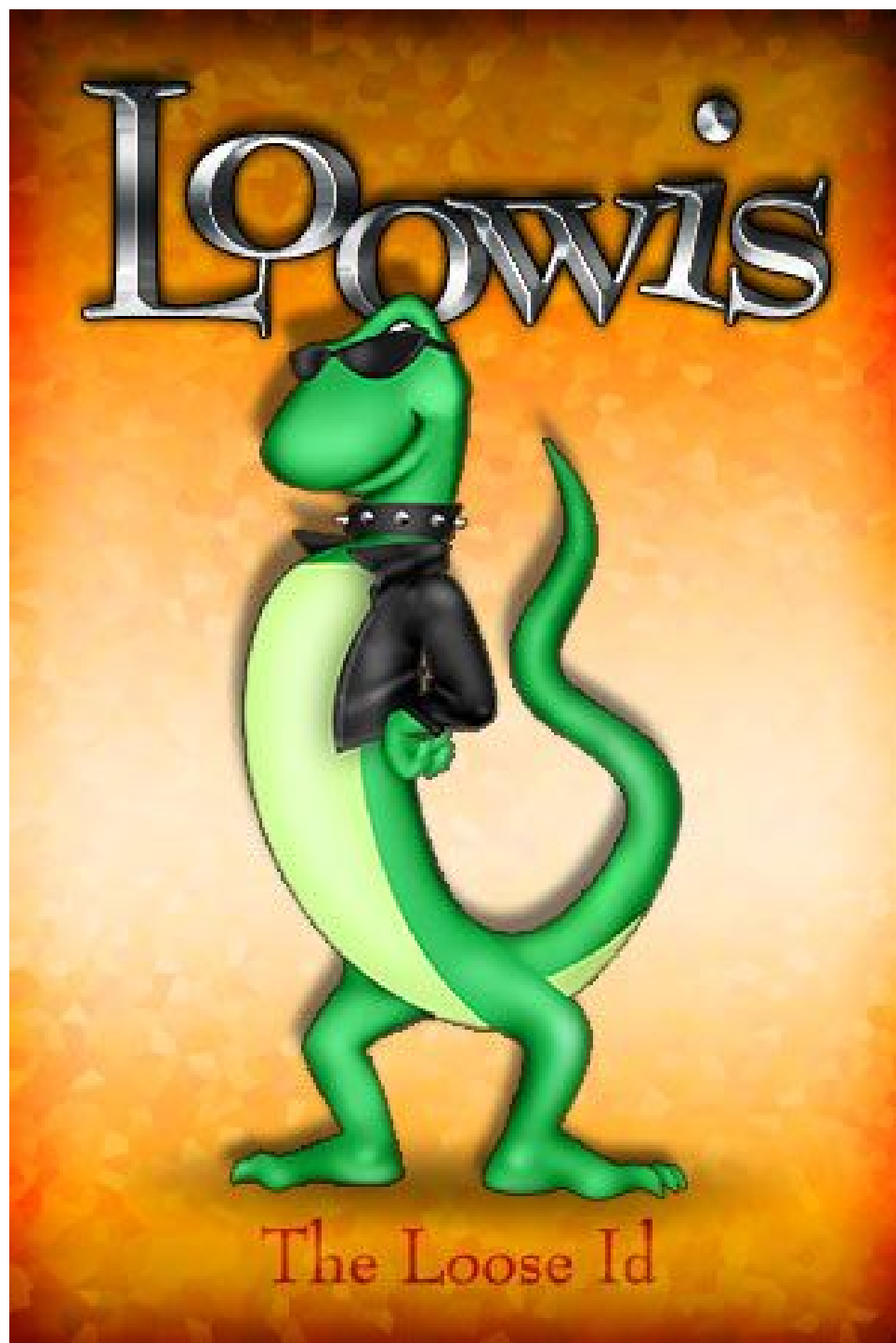
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The beer was green. Allard stared at it in disapproval.

He didn't mind beer being green, when it was *supposed* to be green, but this was a pub catering to humans, and there was no reason at all for the beer to be that colour unless he'd specifically ordered one of the more exotic real ales.

"Why is this beer green?" he asked, with disfavour. In his opinion, they should have apologised if they'd got his order wrong, or at least noticed. How difficult was 'beer' to mix up? "I ordered beer. Not one of the more exotic real ales, either. And do I look like a member of the Dendrotriffid species to you?" he went on, staring pointedly at her ample cleavage to underline his essential humanity in a way which would have had several crewmembers of the *Mary Sue* slightly bemused. Actually, probably not. By now they'd noticed he had a sex drive even if he was a geek.

She gave a one-of-*those*-customers roll of the eyes. "It's St Patrick's Day."

"What did he do, urinate in the beer? And what is he anyway?"

She looked shocked.

Actually the name was ringing faint bells in his mind. "Oh, I *see*. It's *cultural*."

"Yes. And you're not very nice. You're supposed to join in with the spirit of the day."

“I’ve tried being warm and human. It scares people.”

She looked him up and down. “I can see why.”

He wasn’t actually offended, but... “I thought you were supposed to be nice to the customers?” he asked, in a spirit of polite enquiry.

“It’s discretionary. We can make the extra effort for a *special* case.”

“In either direction.” He grinned at her. She actually grinned back. At least he wouldn’t have to worry about spit in the beer.

“Remind me again what culture this all refers to?” he asked, picking up a shamrock-shaped beer mat and putting it back down again.

“Irish. It’s an old Earth thing, I think,” she said.

He paid for the green beer, at least reassured that it would *taste* like beer.

Back at the table, Vaughan had pretty much the expression Allard thought was on his own face.

“I know, I know. They’re not even from Dendrotriffidus IV.”

“That’s not what’s bothering me.”

“Oh?”

“Bloody Irish. Everybody thinks the Irish are cute. Everybody wants to shag the *Irish*.”

“Actually I want to shag the Welsh,” said Allard. Long experience was leading him to head off one of Vaughan’s rants before it built up a full head of steam.

The gambit failed. “St Patrick’s Day. Everybody loves St Patrick’s Day. Everybody drinks green beer on St Patrick’s Day...”

“I’m only drinking green beer out of a choice of ‘green beer’ or ‘no beer,’” Allard said. “I’d have been much happier with normal beer that didn’t make me look either alien or poncy.”

“Everybody claims to be Irish even if their last Irish ancestor was two fucking millennia ago.”

Allard remembered that he’d read a book suggesting the Welsh were good at keeping chips on their shoulders. He did not think it politic to remark on this.

“Every bloody place we go they celebrate St Patrick’s Day. Even *aliens* celebrate St Patrick’s Day. And tell you they’re Oirish, really, you know. Nobody ever celebrates St David’s Day, but everybody celebrates St Patrick’s Day. Except for the real, actual Irish themselves, of course.”

Allard picked the relevant detail out of all that. “I take it St David’s Day is the Welsh equivalent.”

“Festooned with leeks and daffodils, yes.” Vaughan sulked. “Buckets of hwyl and gloomy Methodism all over the place. No wonder it isn’t sexy even if we have better singing voices.”

“I could try decorating you with a daffodil on the relevant day,” Allard suggested. “What is it, by the way?”

“And of course everybody bloody knows when St *Patrick’s* Day is,” said Vaughan.

“Actually, I didn’t. It wouldn’t have crossed my mind if somebody hadn’t handed me two pints of green beer. Would you have preferred yellow beer to match the daffodils or green beer to match the leeks?” Allard suggested pseudo-helpfully. “Or you could have Guinness -- green on the dark bit, white on top -- upside-down leek.”

“Can we just drop it now?” said Vaughan.

“I was just starting to have fun.”

“I knew I should have tried harder to find a bar that wasn’t a fake-Irish one,” said Vaughan.

“They’re probably all fake-Irish today,” Allard said. “Stop sulking and drink your beer.”

Vaughan took a long swig. "It doesn't actually taste *worse* because it's green," he admitted grudgingly.

"Close your eyes and think of England if the colour bothers you."

"No, thank you."

Allard remembered too late one of the few things the Welsh and the Irish had in common. They remembered that there had been places called Wales, and Ireland, and England, with a history between them.

"Would you feel better if I tell you I'd rather have a nice bit of Welsh rarebit any day?"

"Can't let a man work a good sulk up," Vaughan grumbled.

"Oh? You'd rather sulk than eye me up lecherously?"

"Mm. It's a close thing, but I *suppose* I could make the effort. Or I could do both at once," Vaughan suggested. "Double the fun."

"The Welsh aren't supposed to know about fun," Allard mock-hissed. "That's what all those chapels are for."

"Got at least as many pubs," said Vaughan.

"I don't think you *could* sulk when shagging," said Allard.

"Let's go and find out," said Vaughan.

That sounded like a good idea. In fact, it sounded like the best idea Vaughan had had all day. Allard said so.

"Bastard," said Vaughan.

"I thought I'd better make a remark to keep you sulking obediently on your lead while I drag my pet to the nearest hotel," said Allard, fluttering his eyelashes.

"That's a lovely accent you've got there," somebody said. 'Somebody' was not Allard, and not Vaughan, although he seemed to be eyeing Vaughan up. In fact, somebody had not been invited to sit down at their table, either.

“That’s a lovely accent you’ve got yourself,” said Vaughan.

“Is that a real Irish accent?” Allard asked. It didn’t sound like the rather stagey version that came from the bar staff when they were putting it on.

It didn’t sound like ‘Oirish’ (thank goodness, he thought), but it didn’t sound like what he remembered of the Irish accent.

“Northern Irish,” said Vaughan. “Couple of generations out. Why are you in a fake-Irish pub with green beer? You lot wouldn’t normally be seen dead in here.”

“Welsh. Couple of generations out,” the stranger replied, with a grin. “Irish is cute tonight, you realise. I’ve got a much better chance than you have of getting a leg over. Speaking of which, do you fancy a little cross-cultural...”

Vaughan looked at Allard. Allard looked at Vaughan, trying to remind him of the last time this had happened. They’d ended up married the last time Vaughan got funny ideas, and since they were already married, there was nowhere else for them to go.

“I don’t fancy being outnumbered by Celts,” Allard said diplomatically. “Particularly if one of them is going to be all Welsh and lugubrious all night.”

Vaughan made a very long, very Welsh face pointedly at Allard.

“Of course, we could always point him at Claire,” said Allard. “Or Karen, if he’s really perverted.”

“Perverted?” the stranger said, looking interested.

Allard reflected he knew about Karen’s habit of fondling big guns, but he didn’t *actually* know that much about her personal life. Partly because Harry considered his and Vaughan’s personal life more interesting, which meant that *his* was gossip and *hers* wasn’t. Why did he always get into this sort of situation where anything you said might be just that bit awkward? He let Vaughan field that.

“Weapons tech,” said Vaughan. “She likes fondling and oiling things two foot long. Gives a man an inferiority complex.”

Now, *Vaughan* could say things like that, and they sounded saucy rather than sleazy.

“And that’s before she gets onto the cannon,” Allard said. “I don’t want to think about planet-busting bombs.”

“Sounds interesting,” said the stranger, as if he was actually intrigued rather than put off. Allard looked at him. Well, if he was man enough for that particular job...

Allard reached for his com. “Karen. You’ve pulled.”

“What?” came her rather sleepy response.

“You have a conquest. Come and pick him up.”

“You know, getting off with someone before you even wake up is actually rather impressive,” came Claire’s voice.

The stranger looked even more intrigued. “*Two* lovely ladies?”

“Who’s that?” came over the com, in twin feminine tones.

“You haven’t met them yet,” said Allard.

“I have good eyesight,” said the stranger.

“We went to a fake-Irish pub and picked up a *real* Irishman; strange, isn’t it?” said *Vaughan*. “Allard’s taken already, so he very kindly offered him to you two.”

“He offered him to me first,” said Karen.

“Real Irish? We’ll be right there,” said Claire.

“Told you about the Irish,” said the stranger smugly and *Vaughan* gloomily.

“Give the girls ten minutes to get over here, and I’ll take you away and show you how much I appreciate the Welsh, *Vaughan*,” said Allard.

“We have a quiet charm. When anyone bothers to notice,” said *Vaughan*.

“*I* noticed,” said the stranger.

Vaughan seemed to cheer up a bit. “Well, I’m a bit too married to take you up on that, but the attention’s appreciated.”

“Honeymoon couple? Oh, well. Unless you fancy an orgy?” said the stranger.

Allard might have been tempted, but the thought of being with Karen *and* Claire *and* the stranger *and* Vaughan -- and having to work with nearly all of them the next day, while listening to Harry’s commentary... If he’d been slightly more drunk, it would have seemed like a really good idea, until it didn’t. He was still sufficiently sober to realise the drawbacks in advance. “Too much of a good thing,” he said diplomatically. He’d been diplomatic twice in five minutes. Could it be a social disease he’d picked up from Vaughan? Corrupting a poor, innocent geek like himself who normally didn’t address a polite word to anyone two days in succession -- who’d have thought it?

“Well, if you’re sure I’ve pulled, I don’t need to drink this bloody awful green beer any more. Fancy a nice whisky?”

Allard found himself quite liking the man.

“Yes, thanks. But a small one. I’ve got plans for tonight. Involving leeks and daffodils.”

Vaughan looked very slightly nervous, but he said, “Yes, thanks,” and waited for the stranger to go and get the drinks before he said, “You weren’t planning on actually inserting those items anywhere, were you?”

“Well, I *wasn’t*...”

“They wouldn’t fit,” said Vaughan.

“By the way, when is St David’s Day? I’ll have to treat you to something.”

“I’ll have to wait nearly a whole year,” said Vaughan, sulking again. “It’s March the first.”

No wonder he was sulking. Nobody had noticed, and then there was all this fuss over St Patrick’s Day.

“What did St Patrick do, anyway?” asked Allard, quickly.

“Drove all the snakes out of Ireland,” said the Irishman, from behind them. “There’s a Freudian message for you.”

Allard decided to do a quick inspection. Not *all* the snakes, judging by the fine specimen in the Irishman's clothing. "Not entirely successful, in a Freudian way. Good thing, too; I'd hate to have to explain that to Karen."

Vaughan decided to do a quick inspection as well. "Yes, I think that'll come up to Claire's exacting standards." Allard wondered how much he knew about Claire's exacting sexual standards, and decided he didn't really want to know.

"And you're sure the two of you are quite content with each other?" asked the Irishman.

"Just window-shopping," said Vaughan. "We'll leave the merchandise for Claire and Karen."

"They won't be pleased if we drag them over here under false pretences," said Allard.

"If we've left nothing for them," said Vaughan.

"Ah, 'tis a poor opinion of me you have entirely," said the Irishman, in a nearly perfect bad Irish accent.

"But do leave your name and contact details," said Allard. "We'll get the full consumer report later."

"With illustrations, if Harry gets to know," said Vaughan. "Besides, if you're still interested after those two have finished with you for the night, you're probably too much of a man for one crew to satisfy."

"Unless Mark rigs up some sort of... extension," said Allard, and had to explain they had an AI crewmember with a healthy, or possibly unwholesome, interest in human sexuality.

"It's a good job I'm not the nervous type," said the Irishman, so Allard decided to tone down the innuendo a bit and go for normal conversation. Of course, that kept him fully occupied making sure it *was* a normal conversation and not a political manifesto. Vaughan was far from a boring speaker, but he did tend to assume everybody else was as endlessly fascinated by the benefits of syndicalism as *he* was.

“So it means that you’re all your own bosses. Sounds far too much like hard work to me,” said the Irishman. “The *point* of having a boss is that he can do the worrying while the rest of us get on with the job.”

Vaughan was contagious, Allard decided. This man wasn’t agreeing with Vaughan, but he was having the sort of argument Vaughan liked, taking the idea seriously.

Allard switched off his ears. It was something he’d had a lot of practice with. He didn’t switch them back on again until he heard the dulcet tones of Claire.

The Irishman looked very pleased with his bargain. “I told you I had good eyesight,” he said smugly. “I could tell they were very pretty girls that distance away.”

“I think Allard and Vaughan have good eyes for a bargain,” Claire purred. “We shall have to send them shopping more often.”

“Good-looking *and* well-spoken,” Karen said, practically stripping the man with her gaze, like a well-designed field weapon. It was quite disgusting. He and Vaughan had better get home and do something equally disgusting to each other, Allard decided. Or maybe not even as far as home.

“Is there a good bad hotel in the neighbourhood?”

“Good bad?” said the Irishman doubtfully.

“As in, gives a good impression of being sleazy enough for a dirty weekend, without the actual cockroaches and grime.”

“I’d rather be romantic than sleazy this trip,” Vaughan said.

“I knew it,” said Allard. “I blew the fuse on your filthy mind by the time of the wedding, and it’s been rosebuds all the way ever since.”

“I’ll tell the violins to stand down when we get home, shall I?” asked Vaughan.

Allard looked at him.

“Well, it’s MCU and a convincing synthesiser,” said Vaughan, “but it could probably sound like a thousand massed violins.” He paused. “But I did fancy going somewhere nice, with silk.”

Actually, that *did* sound rather nice. “Your wish is...” *when I feel like it* “... my command.”

The Irishman peered at him. “Funny. You don’t look like a leprechaun. They’re not usually that pretty.”

“I’ll have you know I’m human on both sides,” said Allard.

“Genetically, at any rate,” Claire said. “*Geek* human on both sides, unfortunately, and apparently it’s hereditary.”

“Anyway,” Allard said, manfully ignoring the interruption, “my lord and master was about to take me away from all this... Irishry; and by the way, how many leprechauns have you seen to compare me with?”

The Irishman got one out of each pocket. “I bought these at the gift shoppe, for pointing and mocking purposes.”

The leprechauns were not aesthetic.

“Lovely, aren’t they?”

Vaughan picked one up, turned it over, and looked at what was printed underneath. It was not an attractive object. Pointy boots rose inexpertly out of a sort of green plinth with the rubric ‘Made in Lectrolon’.

Lectrolon was one of the brash new planets springing up at the edges of civilised space, with cities designed on an inefficient grid principle whereby you were always equally lost everywhere, sweatshops generously and cheaply employing robots and humans alike, and a flood of cheap junk items nobody wanted but everybody sold. It was modern, go-ahead, and unbelievably irritating, as Allard knew from one ill-fated systems-security visit years ago.

“Makes Welsh tourist tat look tasteful by comparison,” said Vaughan proudly.

“It gets better.” More stuff was extracted from the Irishman’s pockets.

All of them stared, rather appalled, at the little mound of cheap plastic knick-knacks.

Claire picked up the extremely fake gold ring. It said ‘Made in Lectrolon’ on the inside.
“What’s this?”

He handed her a little box. She opened it and read: “Certificate of Authenticity. You have just purchased a 102% authentic IRISH!! golden Wishing-Ring.”

“I didn’t even know there *was* an Ireland on Lectrolon. Ah, ’tis a wonderful thing, new inventions.”

Allard took the little box off Claire and read the rest of the way through. In a spirit of enquiry, he asked, “Do the Irish have wishing-rings? And are they handcrafted by leprechauns?”

“There are tales of wishing-rings, and there are tales of leprechauns granting wishes, but maybe the tales got a little garbled on the long way to Lectrolon.”

Allard scratched around in his memory. “Aren’t leprechauns supposed to be about three feet high?”

“I don’t actually know. Why?” asked the Irishman.

“Well, I doubt it’d be a *finger*-ring for a creature that size.”

“Only you could be interested in the contents of a mythical being’s trousers,” said Vaughan.

“Oh, I’m sure you’re far more interesting from that point of view. You could hardly help being larger.”

Their new acquaintance did a quick inspection. “My, he *is* a big boy.”

“Yes,” said Allard smugly.

“Actually, Allard can give me an inch or so over,” said Vaughan, apparently for the pleasure of watching Allard’s expression as the Irishman fondled *him*.

Claire and Karen grabbed an arm each. “Right. Come on. We don’t want you getting ideas about those two. They can make their own ideas up.” They womanhandled the Irishman to his feet -- not that he was protesting.

Vaughan stared at the ring, then at the little plastic leprechaun. “Now that you made that comment about leprechauns and cock-rings, Allard, and I can see this one is green either because it’s from Lectrolon and green’s cheap this year, or because it’s St Patrick’s Day, I’m getting really disturbing ideas about glowing green cocks.”

“Sex toy with its own legs,” muttered Allard.

“Always knew technology would take over,” said Vaughan, sulking again.

“Oh, you’ve still got your very particular place in my... heart,” said Allard. “If I, for some bizarre reason, *wanted* it to glow green, I could always get the right shade of condom, which would have the advantage that it’s not permanent.”

“Hm,” said Vaughan. “There’s an intriguing marketing idea: glow-in-the-dark condoms. Plug them into your light, charge them up, then you can turn the light out and still see to put them on. And you’ve got what appears to be a self-propelled cock.” He paused. “More than usual, I mean.”

“You mean, in your *extensive* experience of sexual toys and tools, you haven’t seen a real one?” said Allard. He’d seen one in a chemist’s once, and thought ‘what will they think of next?’

Why did I open my big mouth? he wondered, as Vaughan loudly expressed his determination to find one of these marvels and play with it.

Vaughan must have been drinking more green beer than *he* had.

On the other hand, Vaughan liked to play, and he liked to play with Vaughan, and Vaughan had a remarkable natural talent for saying and doing completely *stupid* things in bed and making them work.

“All right, let’s go and find one. Silk sheets and a glowing green condom,” said Allard, hoping his voice sounded right for laughing *with* Vaughan rather than *at* him. “I’ll never be bored with you.”

“Do I have to finish this glowing green beer first?” asked Vaughan.

“The universe isn’t ready for fluorescent brewer’s droop, Vaughan, so I’ll stick with the ‘romance’ option. Big bed, silk sheets, bucket of iced champagne. It’s a while since we’ve done that, and it’s lovely, and you can even express your inner five-year-old with novelty rubber-goods if you wish,” said Allard.

“Well, it’s the best offer I’m going to get this evening,” said Vaughan, and squeezed Allard’s leg.

“You can always try being romantically Welsh in a week or two, when everyone’s forgotten about St Patrick’s Day. If you’re determined to pick up an extra for the evening.”

“It’s going to take me longer than a week or two to exhaust the list of things we can do with only the two of us,” said Vaughan.

“Oh? You did so three weeks ago,” said Allard. “I distinctly remember you saying you’d worn your *cock* out, and you’d worn your *ingenuity* out, and could I please get in touch with you in a few months when you’d got back to...” *Normal*, he would have said, if Vaughan hadn’t been kissing him.

“Although, to do you justice,” said Allard, after Vaughan had finished kissing him, “you woke up the next day completely determined to do it all again.”

“I did,” said Vaughan.

“Good,” said Allard, “the sulk’s worn off.”

“I thought you *liked* my sulking, found it sexy,” complained Vaughan.

“I do. Come on, let’s go and find a hotel room.”

They abandoned the fluorescent green beer without a backward glance, although Allard did pick up the tourist tat the Irishman had left behind, just in case the man in

question might want his possessions back the next day. He did rather expect to find him back at the *Mary Sue* the next morning, although the balance of probabilities was rather towards giving the tourist tat a decent space burial.

A leprechaun fell out of Vaughan's pocket when he went to sign the register. He sighed heavily, and said, "It's been a strange day."

"I'm Irish meself," said the reception-person. It sounded very odd considering the alien in question had purple skin and tall, jiggling antennae.

The reception-person itself seemed to feel some further explanation was in order. "Several generations back, mind. But we always remember on St Patrick's Day."

"So does everybody else," muttered Vaughan.

"No green dye in the champagne," Allard specified firmly.

The reception-person made a special note in the book.

Allard looked at it upside down.

Religious or something -- no St Pat's stuff, it said.

"Of course, you could do a late St David's Day special," said Allard. "I'm Welsh by marriage."

"Sorry, all that stuff's gone back into store 'til next year," said the reception-person.

Vaughan leaned over the desk and kissed the alien, which looked surprised.

"Sorry," said Allard. "He must be dying for a leek."

"My husband means, I'm glad that someone else remembered St David's Day."

"Sirs, we remember *anything* that'll get us more custom. Personally, I prefer St David's Day. I feel a lot less ridiculous playing up to that one."

"What *do* people do on St David's Day?"

“Half of ’em go to the pub, the other half of ’em go to chapel; both halves sing,” said Vaughan promptly.

The reception-person managed several lines of *Sospan fach* before running out of Welsh.

“Terrible accent, not bad voice,” said Vaughan. “And with any luck there’ll be a rugby match on.”

“Well, as a matter of fact, tomorrow afternoon...”

Allard discovered there was something even *more* boring than syndicalism as a spectator sport. He quickly shut his ears down again, reflecting that only Vaughan could find the sole purple alien with wobbling antennae and a genuine interest in rugby football in this entire galactic sector.

They seemed to be having fun. He was glad somebody was.

“Er, sorry,” the reception-thing eventually said. “We seem to be boring your husband.”

“Don’t worry about it,” said Allard. “I don’t fake anything, and that includes an interest in sport.”

“Yes. You’ll probably be able to hear when Allard gets *really* interested in a physical activity,” said Vaughan.

Allard glared at him.

“Our rooms are very well soundproofed,” said the reception-thing. “Would you like anything sent up, or will it be self-catering only?”

“Do you have any fluorescent green condoms?”

“We have a choice of fine glowing colours in the hotel shop over there. You’ll be all right if you stick to the human range of products. No Welsh dragons printed on them, though.”

Allard decided he quite liked this receptionist. Most receptionists managed to do a good imitation of an AI with no personality whatsoever, or were horribly sleazy. This one was actually quite -- well, 'human' probably wasn't quite the right word, but...

"Chocolate truffles?" Allard asked. He'd quite liked those ever since the first time he'd been to a hotel room with Vaughan.

"Not standard in this class of room, but available on room service or from the shop."

Allard decided they'd visit the shop. He'd prefer to carry his own things and not be interrupted by room service.

The receptionist handed over the keys, and they wandered towards the shop.

"Some other colour than green, please," said Vaughan, so they visited the area of the shop that was mercifully free from green-coloured tat.

Actually, the most common fluorescent colour was a sort of pale green, but Vaughan decided that was probably just coincidence. "Pale green or pale orange," he said. "Neither of them are that appealing as colours."

"No purple?" said Allard, slightly disappointed.

"I'm not sure I'd *like* it to look purple," said Vaughan. He went for the pale orange. He said it was the only one that didn't look like a disease.

Allard picked up a nice box of truffles.

"I could put them around the room and see if you could scent them out," said Vaughan.

"You *could*. If you didn't mind having a rather boring evening."

"Allard, the sight of you bending over and looking for things is quite the opposite of dull." He stroked Allard's cheek. *Damn. I must be blushing again*, thought Allard, determined to kick that particular habit as soon as possible.

The shop had other intriguing toys, like the battery-powered feather-boia that sort of crawled over the user, and Allard *almost* felt tempted, but decided to go for simplicity. Apart from the whole 'glowing disembodied cock' idea, that was.

They emerged from the shop not particularly lighter of purse, apart from the truffles; and Allard had checked the ingredients list on the truffles and decided the expensiveness came from good ingredients, so they actually came out as quite reasonably priced for what they were. Good chocolate was one of his few indulgences apart from Vaughan. Good chocolate *and* Vaughan seemed pretty much indecent. He couldn't wait.

Vaughan noticed that, and made a nuisance of himself feeding Allard truffles by hand in the lift.

Allard decided not to complain. He wasn't sure if he *could* complain convincingly while sucking Vaughan's fingers and moaning.

"Almost there," said Vaughan.

Allard quite agreed.

"Seven floors to go."

Allard kept his eyes shut, kept sucking.

"Six," Vaughan said, a little breathlessly, "you little trollop."

Allard kept going. Chocolate, and Vaughan, were two of his very favourite things to put inside his mouth.

"Five." Allard got a mental image of how he must look to Vaughan, leaning against the wall and panting, his wet mouth stretched and smeared around chocolate and Vaughan's fingers.

"Four." He could imagine the look on Vaughan's face, between proud and shocked.

"Three." He panted and growled, nearly chewing at Vaughan's fingers, just for something to do.

Vaughan removed his fingers from Allard's mouth and pushed his thigh between Allard's legs. "Two." Which meant the door was about to open, which meant that the one thing he *mustn't* do was...

"One."

He did it anyway, sucking ferociously at Vaughan's tongue and rocking shamelessly against Vaughan's firm thigh, because everyone was going to see, everyone was going to *know*, and he didn't *care* -- just for now he didn't care about *anything* but this.

"Oh, did I say seven? I should have said seventeen," remarked Vaughan, far too innocently, at about the point when Allard was starting to wonder why no-one had arrested him yet.

"You..." Allard opened one eye. "... bastard. Somebody might easily have decided to use the lift from one of the intervening floors."

"Lift's out of order," said Vaughan, deftly mopping up the evidence.

Allard looked. It wasn't.

"Not from in here, of course, but I asked that alien at the front desk, the one we were getting on so well with, what were the chances of getting the lift out of order for just five minutes, and he just threw a switch and said, "Rather good, actually."

Allard sighed. "All right, *why* did this occur to you?"

"I happened to remember that you rather like countdowns, and I thought it'd be worth trying."

"What a pity you've worn me out before you got to your turn."

"I have plans," said Vaughan. "I'm sure you could manage another go. With a rest first. Well, not so much a rest as concentrating on me rather than you."

"Selfish bastard."

"How you could call the last few minutes *selfish*, exactly?"

"Yes, but you were doing it because you *like* driving me demented."

"So?"

"All right, it's nice when our interests coincide. But I'm too tired to do anything for the next few minutes, so I'm going to sleep." Allard curled up on the floor of the lift.

“Allard?”

“Mm.”

“This *is* our floor now.”

“Mm,” said Allard, too tired to do anything.

Vaughan picked him up and began to carry him down the corridor. Allard was not entirely sure whether he hoped they *didn't* get seen by somebody or they *did*. On the one hand, they must look like complete pillocks; but on the other hand, they must look like complete pillocks in a very romantic way.

Vaughan must have taken the key out of his pocket before picking Allard up, because he managed to wave it in the general direction of the door rather gracefully, without any unseemly fumbling. The door opened politely for them, and closed behind them with a distinct *snick*.

“Good lock,” said Vaughan. “Usually you have to wave the damn thing about three or four times before it catches on the sensor.”

“Not a bad room,” said Allard, opening his eyes. There was slightly more salmon pink and sky blue around the place than he generally approved of, and the wallpaper had sort of furry leaves on it, in a pattern, but on the other hand it looked clean and cared for and generally appealing. The bed was large by human standards, but not so large they'd lose each other in it, which was a good thing -- he couldn't imagine anything more disappointing than looking for Vaughan between the folds all night.

There was a control panel on the wall above the bed, which could prove interesting later on, but he wanted to be simple for now. So did Vaughan, who was undressing in a hurry.

“Socks as well,” said Allard, who had few but determined standards.

When Vaughan had undressed completely, he started undressing Allard. “You don’t need to undress me,” said Allard. “We’ve settled my part of it already. Oh, all right, if you insist.”

Vaughan insisted. It was, Allard thought, nice to get out of the slightly sticky trousers. It was also nice to be admired by somebody who’d seen him at his most rumpled and didn’t seem to care.

‘Rumpled’ suited Vaughan rather well. Vaughan could look rumpled even when completely naked. It was the mane of curls that did it. That and the little smudges of oil and dirt Vaughan seemed to accumulate even when doing perfectly *clean* engineering jobs. Allard reached out and brushed a smudge off with a thumb. He looked at it. It didn’t look as nice on him, so he reached out again and tucked the smudge into one of Vaughan’s spare curls.

Actually, it was the curls that he’d noticed first, even before realising he fancied Vaughan enough to get involved. He’d started noticing he wanted to tidy them up, and feel them move against his fingers, and then he’d realised he’d like to run his hands through them while kissing Vaughan. It had been a relief to realise he actually *liked* Vaughan, after that. He’d had the impulse to fondle people he couldn’t stand, occasionally, and it was always rather confusing.

“Vaughan?” he asked, meaning, *Let’s get on with it.*

“You’re a nice view,” said Vaughan. Allard thought that meant, *I am Welsh, and I am drunk. You haven’t got a chance.*

Vaughan’s eyes were deep, and dark, and admiring, lingering on his more appealing features. Maybe he’d just meant that Allard was a nice view.

Vaughan was a nice view, too. Allard could get lost in those eyes, wandering in gleaming darkness... Allard wondered if the Celtic bit was somehow contagious, and then decided he wasn’t going to worry about it. There were much more interesting things to be

thinking about, such as how good Vaughan's body felt against his even though he'd come only a few minutes ago. He wriggled a little, just to test. Yes, Vaughan's hard cock felt very good indeed against his soft cock, which was getting less soft by the second. Funny, he didn't remember seeing anything likely to have that effect in the truffle ingredients list. Must be just the setting. And Vaughan, of course.

He'd been with Vaughan for well over a year now, and Vaughan could still have that effect on him. It was nice to know he really had married the right man for him, rather than just taking the first person who'd put up with him.

He pulled Vaughan's head down so that he could kiss him. When he let go, he remarked, "Have I mentioned recently that I love you?"

"Sometimes even when you're sober."

"Ah. I *must* love you, then."

"I'd got that impression, yes," said Vaughan, rolling off Allard and groping in the bedside table before dropping the packet of condoms between them. "Now, is either of us sober enough to handle this condom?"

Tricky question. They were well out of practice on the use of condoms. On the other hand, it didn't much matter if this one got torn. It wasn't being used for anything other than recreational purposes. "We've got a whole boxful; who cares if we shred the first one?"

"I care when it's my cock that might get shredded along with it."

"I'll be very, very careful. Your cock is of great value to me."

"It's of great value to me, as well."

"Yes, you're very attached to it." Allard stroked the attachment point with his hand. "That's definitely not going to come off in a hurry."

Vaughan moaned. "Sadist."

"I meant it was very firmly attached. What did you think I meant?"

"I meant, get on with it. It's all right for you -- you've already had one."

“You should have thought of that when you were *teasing*...” Allard stroked a finger the length of Vaughan’s cock. “... and *taunting*...” Allard caressed Vaughan’s thighs gently. “I mean, it made me want to tease you.”

Actually, it was quite nice stroking Vaughan’s thighs, never mind trying to tease Vaughan. Allard had a slightly bigger cock, not that he really minded, but apart from not being small in that area, Vaughan had a somewhat monumental quality, what with generous lines and muscular thighs.

Allard shuffled down a bit, so that he could kiss the entire area, just to show how much he appreciated it. There was a loud groan from the vocal end of Vaughan.

“I *wasn’t* teasing you that time,” said Allard. “I was just showing my appreciation.”

He remembered Vaughan’s wish to be appreciated earlier. “I was just appreciating a fine bit of Welsh rarebit. How does one do that?”

“You are *not* grilling my cock, even if you do have some bizarre thing about cheese spread,” said Vaughan indignantly.

Allard remembered that scenario. “We never got round to the cheese spread bit.”

“We’ll have to try it sometime,” said Vaughan. “Preferably in a hotel where we don’t have to do our own sheets.”

“Your friend the rugby fan did ask if we wanted anything else sent up.”

“Mm,” said Vaughan. “Apres-sex snacks laid on. I wonder if they have Welsh rarebit on the menu?”

“Well, they do cater to St David’s Day.”

“Laver bread,” said Vaughan.

“What’s that made of?”

“Seaweed.”

Allard made a face. “How very... medicinal.”

“Tastes nice. Though not as nice as you.”

Allard decided that Vaughan was getting far too Welsh. He really needed to lower the tone. Glow-in-the-dark condoms would do nicely. Out of the box and out of the fiddly and irritating packet one came.

He wasn't even too drunk to manage putting it on Vaughan, although it did take longer than strictly necessary, which was fine, apart from Vaughan complaining about it.

When he'd finished putting the condom on Vaughan, Vaughan said, “Come up here and let me put one on you.”

“I thought *you* were going to be the tailor's dummy. And I need to be hard to get one on,” said Allard, who wasn't, quite.

“That's no problem,” said Vaughan. “Come here.”

Allard wriggled his way up the bed, and Vaughan took him in hand.

Allard was rather disappointed when Vaughan stopped. “You don't need to stop now.”

“Yes, I do. I don't want to waste it,” said Vaughan, in his most irritatingly reasonable tone.

Vaughan put the condom on Allard, a process that Allard enjoyed quite a lot. “I might think they're annoying when they're on,” said Allard, “but the process can be quite a lot of fun.” He could feel the warmth of Vaughan's fingers through the condom, up and down and all over, tugging at it and tracing the edges every time he moved.

“French ticklers next time,” Vaughan suggested.

“For when we're feeling silly.”

“Like now,” Vaughan said, giving the condom, and Allard's cock, one last pat. “Now to get these things charged up... and then turn out the lights,” he said with relish.

Fortunately the bed was equipped with reading lamps that could be swung out or up or down to give the best illumination for whoever was in the bed. Allard suspected that they were not there purely for the benefit of those who wished to read a book without disturbing

a sleeping partner. Especially as it was possible to adjust them so as to give a bright light directly over the groin area of the typical human male without any contortions being required on the part of anyone other than the lamp.

“How long do you think we need for a good bright glow?” Allard asked.

“A few seconds should be enough, but just to be on the safe side...” Vaughan said.

They gave it a full minute, then pushed the lamps out of the way and switched all the lights off.

Two gently glowing cocks, and not a lot else visible. It was impressive. It was faintly creepy. Allard was glad they’d gone for a nice cheerful colour.

A glowing cock jiggled at him.

“Vaughan,” said Allard, “you’re glowing at me.”

“So I am. Makes an interesting peepshow, this. Something, presumably Vaughan’s hand, covered Vaughan’s cock. Definitely Vaughan’s hand. Allard could see the very, very faint glow of the condom glowing from behind it, as his eyes adjusted to the dark.

“Now you see it; now you don’t,” Vaughan said.

He took his hand away from his own cock and put it over Allard’s. “Oh, look -- you’ve lost it! No -- there it is again!”

Allard decided that Vaughan must have had at least one extra beer when he wasn’t looking. It hadn’t affected his libido, obviously. Must have gone straight to his brain, bypassing points south.

“It’s a rocketship,” said Vaughan. “It’s proud and tall and *heading for a destination.*”

Allard thought this was slightly unnerving. He’d got used to Vaughan’s inner child, but he didn’t entirely fancy something glowing trying to dock in his mouth, especially when he couldn’t actually focus on it properly. When there was nothing but an amorphous glow in the dark, it was difficult to tell exactly how far away it was.

“Take it away,” he said. “I love *you*, Vaughan, not some random glowing appendage.”

Vaughan took it away. Vaughan took it right off the bed.

"I'm sulking," said Vaughan. "I'm not sure you can see that from... ouch!"

Vaughan, presumably, walked into something, although Allard was not sure whether that was from drink or poor night vision.

Vaughan jiggled at him again from a standing position.

The effect was actually quite interesting. "Mm. Come here."

"*Now* he wants it back," Vaughan muttered, sotto voce.

"Try not to stub the other nine on the way back. I want you in working order."

"I thought as long as I don't stub the one long thick one, you wouldn't mind."

"I don't, but the cries of distress would put me off a bit."

"I'll sulk."

"As long as you sulk within easy reach, I don't mind. *Come here.*"

Vaughan said, "Keep talking; I've lost my bearings. It's dark in here."

"We did specify everything including the nightlight to be switched off," Allard patiently reminded Vaughan. "Anyway, there are two lights still available. Just aim for the one you're not actually wearing." He jiggled back at Vaughan.

"That *is* a rather interesting effect," Vaughan said. "When you see only the forced pendulum motion, and not the body doing the forcing."

"Now is not the time for you to remember you're an engineer. Just bring your forced pendulum over here, preferably not tripping over anything on the way."

Vaughan, or at least a cock-shaped glow in the darkness, came back to bed. Allard followed it with his eyes. It did seem such a strange thing to take up so much of Allard's time and energy, that little tower of light. Not that he'd ever say so, because he *didn't* think that Vaughan was small In That Way, but most of the time Vaughan's cock came with a Vaughan attached to it, which rather overshadowed it.

“Now, which way are we going to do this?”

Vaughan leered cheerfully and reached for him. At least, Allard assumed that Vaughan was leering cheerfully, going by the comment that Vaughan made about “since you’re already lying there, I can just climb on and fuck away.” Allard didn’t like being taken for granted. He tried to look unwelcoming, then gave up when he realised that the effect would be lost on a man in the dark. “Don’t you think we’ve got into a bit of a rut lately?”

“But I *like* your rut. I spend many happy hours in it.”

“Yes, Vaughan, I know. I’m happy to indulge the odd virgin-fantasy thing, but I don’t like thinking it’s all one-way traffic. Anyway, it seems a bit of a waste buying a consumer novelty lighting artefact and immediately pointing it where the sun doesn’t shine.”

“I can’t actually think of a way we could use them and look at them at the same time.”

“Well, I suppose, now I have had time to get used to the idea, and now it’s being thought of with sex in mind rather than a five-year-old with a toy rocketship, I don’t have so much of an objection to putting it in my mouth,” said Allard.

“I suppose I started trying to play around with it before having worked out how to aim it,” said Vaughan.

“Do those things taste all right?”

“Dunno.” Vaughan apparently had a reasonably adequate target-finding mechanism. He aimed his mouth at Allard, and licked.

Allard, with fascinated horror, watched his cock disappear. Even when he was fairly sure it was being attacked from benign motivation, and he knew he’d get it back afterwards, he was still not used to seeing it vanish into the shadows.

His rational mind reminded him that his cock did an awful lot of disappearing into shadowy crevices. *Yes, but I can normally see where it’s going*, he told it.

“It doesn’t taste so bad,” said Vaughan. “I can’t say I’d go into a restaurant and order it, but it’s bearable.”

“How does it compare to me?”

“You taste *much* better,” Vaughan reassured him. “After this little adventure, I may have to lick you specially just to catch up on what I’ve missed.”

Allard, and his cock, liked that idea. Vaughan had an uninhibited approach to licking that was a pleasure to indulge.

“Well, I suppose if it’s not *too* foul, I can try it on you. Arrange yourself so that we can get a full view of what we’re doing.”

Allard’s eyes were getting properly dark-adjusted. He could now see Vaughan’s cock, and a little part of Vaughan’s groin area lit by a fluorescent orange glow. “On the whole, I preferred the disembodied cock to the disembodied-cock-plus-a-little-bit-of-groin-area-lit-by-an-unhealthy-orange-glow,” he murmured.

“After all the trouble I went to, picking out a colour that wouldn’t make my parts look diseased!” exclaimed Vaughan. “But I can *feel* you even if I can’t see you.” Allard could feel Vaughan’s big fingers groping away between his legs.

“You missed,” said Allard, as Vaughan touched thighs and balls and hair and skin and... not his cock.

“I’m letting you show it off in all its fluorescent glory.”

He might have come once already this evening, but he rather wanted to do so again. To encourage Vaughan, he took a big gulp of Vaughan’s cock.

As Vaughan said, you wouldn’t go into a restaurant and order it, but it wasn’t bad.

He briefly wondered if you could get Welsh-rarebit-flavoured condoms, before getting down to the serious business of sucking Vaughan.

He could still appreciate the way Vaughan moved, even if he rather missed the feel of soft skin on his tongue. He liked being able to tell when Vaughan was desperate, and the way Vaughan was desperately trying to move without hurting him. It was strange, as if Vaughan had dressed up and disguised his cock, while leaving every other aspect of his person exactly

the same. He could feel, on his tongue, the edge where Vaughan ended and Vaughan's cock began. Was this how people felt years ago, with that little plastic skin the only thing between them and hundreds of horrible diseases? Did it make them conscious of all the warm human skin *under* the condom? He really wanted Vaughan where he could get at him properly.

Vaughan was working away at *him* now. Allard was a little bit shocked at the way that, although he really wanted to stop and tug those silly glowing things away, he was still shoving into Vaughan's mouth and not stopping, because somehow he wasn't going to wait for perfect or tidy or prepared or anything other than real.

His own mouth was making undignified noises around Vaughan, and Vaughan's... wrapper, and he was breathing noisily through his nose, and his mouth was drying out a bit, and he wanted to stop so there was nothing but him and Vaughan, but he couldn't think of anything farther away from him than the next thrust, because his balls were tightening up now, and he was imagining a mighty river of come thundering out of the shattered condom into Vaughan's wet, gulping mouth.

He groaned, feeling Vaughan's cock jump and pulse inside the condom in his mouth as if it, too, was trying to get away. He sighed his way through the aftershocks, feeling that a tiny ignoble part of himself was rather pleased that Vaughan's orgasm seemed slightly less cataclysmic than his own, and then merely feeling slightly embarrassed as he realised he'd had a perfectly normal orgasm and not punched a hole through the condom.

They just lay there, on the bed, on their backs, gasping slightly. Eventually, Vaughan realised that he was the wrong way round from Allard, and then he wriggled up and kissed him on the shoulder.

"Do we turn the light on yet?" asked Vaughan.

Well, it would probably take them both a moment to adjust to the light. On the other hand, Allard didn't especially want to be carrying a glowing little bag of his own semen to

the waste disposal, lit only by the squelchy-but-luminous evidence. He thought Vaughan would be annoyed if he mentioned that, so he just put the light on.

On the minus side, he had to figure out how to peel the damn thing off with as little annoyance as possible. On the plus side, no wet spot.

“Thank you,” said Allard, icily.

“Well, you were going over to the waste disposal, weren’t you?”

“If my beloved did not have the necessary gentlemanly qualities to deal with these small annoyances for his husband, I suppose so,” said Allard, and did.

“Well, if we ever do it again with condoms, I’ll do the picking up next time,” said Vaughan airily, like a person who has no particular intention of taking his turn.

“On the other hand,” said Vaughan, “your lover did have the necessary gentlemanly qualities to give you two orgasms to his one.”

Allard slipped an arm round him. “Would sir like his second orgasm now or later?”

“Give me ten minutes; then I’ll take you up on it.”

Ten minutes later, Vaughan nudged him and suggested that now might be a good time. Since Vaughan didn’t specify anything particularly complicated, Allard just reached out and gave him as good a hand-job as he could manage under the circumstances.

Vaughan came, sighed, rolled over, and went to sleep.

One of the nice things about being married was that you didn’t have to show off or go for erotic gymnastics unless both of you wanted to, and nobody would take it as an insult if you didn’t.

Allard stayed awake just long enough to shake the cover out over both of them and snuggle up behind Vaughan.

They signed out the next morning without any further incident than Vaughan leaving contact details for his fellow rugby fan.

They stopped outside the flight-deck to listen to the conversation going on, and caught their own names, or at least references to themselves.

Apparently Claire and Karen hadn't *quite* managed to wear the Irishman out yet.

"Yer man was last seen reassuring the boyo that he prefers the Welsh to the Irish. I don't think you'll be having competition for my charms," the Irishman said to Claire and Karen.

"Allard," said Claire. "And the boyo's..."

"The captain."

"Eavesdroppers never hear any good of themselves," Allard whispered.

Claire's voice suggested she was rolling her eyes. "Everyone calls him that. Once. He *hates* it."

"He's *not* the captain?" asked the Irishman doubtfully.

"Well, he has the casting vote in crew affairs, if he wants to be bothered with it, but he doesn't like people thinking he's running us."

The Irishman probably consigned Vaughan's affectation about being captain to the same weird mental pigeonhole as syndicalism.

"His name's Vaughan."

"Ah, now couldn't either of them be after affordin' a first name?"

"Stop putting on that stupid accent," said Karen. "The real one's fine."

"I started putting it on for St Patrick's Day," said the Irishman sadly. "Sometimes it goes like it when I'm not really thinking about it. Some of the people I meet in pubs don't realise my accent *is* Irish."

"And 'Oirish' gets you laid?" asked Karen.

“Vaughan and Allard do have first names,” said Claire, “they just never use them.”

“Talking of names,” Vaughan said, coming in, “I believe you have the advantage of us.”

The Irishman said, “Well, actually, my name is Sebastian.” Apparently, he seemed to feel that it needed further explanation. “Me ma and da thought it sounded nice. Did get one person trying to use me as a dartboard at university, because of tradition...”

“Used as a dartboard?” Vaughan said, puzzled.

“Oh, don’t worry, just rubber-tipped. There used to be all these pictures of St Sebastian looking naked and gorgeous just before he was shot by lots and lots of arrows. But, saints aside, it’s a good, well-wearing name, on the whole.”

“Got any presents?” asked Harry, who had done one of his amazing unobtrusive entrances when nobody was actually looking. “I’m not just asking for myself, but I normally have to price anything up if anyone asks.”

Vaughan solemnly presented him with a green plastic leprechaun.

“You have the face to complain about me always coming back with stupid wickerwork donkeys!”

“No. We always complain about the bugging equipment stuck in the stupid wickerwork donkeys.”

“Oh, god, it’s not, is it?” said Harry, looking mildly panicked.

“You’d know if you put it there.”

“One, you wouldn’t have seen it if it was mine, because I work with class. And two, I only bug people I know...”

“Little bugger,” muttered Allard, sotto voce.

“I mean, there are a lot of secret web-cam things and so on that *seriously* dodgy people are putting in stuff, so if you ever find any, just tell your Uncle Harry, and I’ll clean it up properly.”

Allard decided that if he ever found bugging equipment that *didn't* belong to a voyeur he knew and trusted, the people who were running it would get a nasty surprise. Possibly a lethal one, at least to their bank account, when he'd traced them.

"No," said Harry.

Allard looked at Harry.

"Don't kill them," Harry elaborated. "At least, not in any way which can be traced back to us."

"Of course I wouldn't. I know how to cover my tracks." Allard did his best sharklike grin in Harry's direction. It worked properly on Harry. It tended to make Vaughan want to jump on him.

"Allard, behave," said Claire.

"You know, I'm very glad you jumped on me first, not Claire," he whispered to Vaughan.

"I know," said Vaughan. "I'm far too soft, and I haven't got a chance of making you behave."

"Nothing soft about you," said Allard, groping to make sure. He was relieved to discover he was correct.

 THE END 

Jules Jones & Alex Woolgrave

Jules Jones is a material scientist by day, writer by night, whose publishing credentials include such gems as European Union research reports. Thrilling though these might be to at least three readers, Jules believes that variety is the spice of life. Writing erotica provides an adequate amount of variety. However, Jules has found that it's better not to mix the two styles of writing, though -- it's very embarrassing when your manager points out that the file you were working on during the lunch hour has found its way into the project folder...

The Occasionally Spotted Woolgrave is Jules Jones' partner-in-crime and can frequently be heard shrieking across the Atlantic: "Oi, Jones, which way up are the boys at this point?", "Trousers, what trousers?" or "That's not a POV shift -- it's an experimental literary device!"

Woolgrave cannot visualise. At all...

Fortunately, Jules Jones believes in expressing one's Inner Editor, and is good about spotting completely impossible positions or characters undressing more or less than once.

In fact, Jones comes up with the plot and half of the dialogue, and Woolgrave adds regrettable knob jokes and the other half of the dialogue.

It seems to work. We think.

You can find Jules Jones and Alex Woolgrave on the Web at www.julesjones.com and <http://predatrix.slashcity.org/syndicate/awoolgrave.htm>.

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