

"Flat Out"

Excerpted from *The Seven-Year Mirror*

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Flat Out

The wrinkly-frigate scupped low in the water under Pollux to the starboard and Cock passed it nary a glance. He kept his blades low so the spray aft was scalloped across the sea's surface, not fanning upward in spectacular cock-tails of whitefoam arc that would wow the steerage rightward ho and betray their position and intent to watchful warders aboard'er. Aft lar and star were danjis, also flattening foam, inducting wide and howling.

Meetward.

The foils bucked on the waves, pah pah pah and spray slapping them all a-sting at speed. Off his smart hand Fan sailed across and over his wake, gamboling, and off his dumb Blade showed her singletrack mind in single track. Aft her and watching the round lure of her straddling ass was Rip. Cock reckoned he stayed behind only partly for the view; the spray washed the drool off too. Aft Fan was Tube. Linear and bright as Blade.

Cock had heard that kids were half each parent. Imagine how stupid Tube's brat with Blade would be, were they ever to. Half of either would be one quarter of both and that would be ... uh quarter and half and half, take away a quarter and add a half after, and, uh, well pretty fuckin stupid anyway.

Pah pah pah. And lup lup lup in his chest and throat. Jizzed and primed. Meetward, meetward, and Rip, Tube and Blade had voted a swap meet. Three of five.

Only Cock had refused to wager Fan. He was putting up Tube instead, who even Rip had to admit they could afford to lose. Rip didn't like it but they could not lose their greaseboy, and his dick kept him well stuck to Blade. Blade didn't have enough in her head to give a shit or even understand what the fuck Cock was doing to stop what Rip had tried, which she also had no chance in spacetime of understanding, but destabilizing that shitty little trio would make his cocking easier. And Tube looked fuckassed already over Rip's vote, proolly wouldn't agree to anything the danji said for the rest of the season. Wouldn't go with Cock either, but he wouldn't have anyway, so it wasn't a loss.

That was good, yeah it was. Even without the meet's conclusion Cock'd scored himself a little notch.

Allies. Fan was an ally but he'd been for the fuck ever. Shoulda been nicer to the danji before. But with Rip trying to draw lines now Cock had to make it clear how good danjis were rewarded. So he would be treating Fan differently in front of everyone. It had started with the phalanx they rode now; where Fan was Rip could more ordinarily be found on a meetward course. Fan would be in Blade's place. By putting Blade where she was he'd got her horny and back on his side, thinking more of Fan and Cock and Blade threesomeness than Rip and Tube and her sweet tight slitty self. It wouldn't last, prolly, but that was maybe not something he'd have to worry about anyway. One way or the other this meet would change something. Anything. Everything.

Off distant a flickyflicker. Suns on ecmite. Their destination and opposition, fanners from Urbis Os'ka. Cock glanced back and saw the thoughtful on Rip. He smiled to himself, grim. Good. Let the fuckstick squirm a while thinking how he'd fucked up.

Edge, the girl the Urbis Os'ka fanners were wagering, eyed Tube moodily. He returned the mood. They were out of the meet as prizes, couldn't run. Their respective groups idled in the low chop; a wind was mounting. That could make things more interesting.

In the distance but heaving nearer, the wrinkly-frigate churned the sea. Old sacks loved to get out on the ocean, but Cock never understood why. From what he could tell once they were at sea they spent most of the time playing cards-and-dice or drinking (well, that made sense), lounging on hammocks or dancing and shit. They hardly actually looked at the water, never *ever* swam in it. Maybe they were afraid of toothers or Fisherfolk, but the tubs hauled them into the waters that treaty had assigned to drysiders, and toothers were afraid of motor noise. Maybe they were like little kids and hated getting their faces wet.

And it wasn't like the ocean was boring. It changed all the time, like right now for instance. The peaks on the wavelets were beginning to skim off with little dropletty crests of bubbles as the breeze stiffened, and the colors were just *rip*. Deep soulful blue in the wells to sky-tint partway up and then greeny at the top like old suncatcher glass. And that was just one mood. The ocean had more. More than he could count, more than anyone could. But still the wrinklies seemed to think otherwise.

So in a way he and the others were about to do the tourism industry a little favor.

He levered his blades vertical past the safety limits, hearing thunks and slaps around as the others did the same. His ports were already opened and his modification (not illegal, just a fun surprise) was siphoning in sea like Blade's

mouth on spunk. The foil's ass end slopped heavy in the swells. The aux tank was near full. Good.

The starters and judges, respected fanners from Urbis T'oh-K'o and Urbis Os'ka, trolled around the competitors in a tight group, keeping them in line, eyes lasers for cheats. Wouldn't be above many of them to toss a bolt (or even a few strands of nÿlo) into an induction port just before the start. Cock's eyes flicked over to Fan as he thought how pissed the danji would be if someone did that to one of the missiles he looked after. Fan caught the glance and nodded, his face paled and cheeks darted with red like geisha rouge. He looked more nervous than Cock felt, which was all right with Cock, since he needed to look — well, like a cock. Erect, firm, spunky and cetera.

The starters got in a line and pointed their ports inward and Cock gripped the yoke, leaning forward. Around him the others did the same, hunching. There was a growl from the foils ahead and spray spumed across the waves and Cock punched it, digging in tight and flying nosefirst and grinning through the tails, knowing by the screams of machinery he was not alone, had not broken free yet. He wouldn't until he'd dumped the extra ocean he was toting, and that wouldn't happen until they got close enough to the wrinklies to count their wizened grey pubes.

The foils jostled and feinted against each other but Cock held firm. Rip leaned over hard toward one of the baddies and nearly spooked him drinkside but he kept his saddle, rocking. Lost some distance and looked pissed, but he was still in. Cock nodded at Rip, who had forgotten their feud long enough to keep his shit in one coil. Rip nodded back and then lay his missile half on its side, the turbines howling in air, and sprayed a fucking no-shit *wall* of sheetwater across the baddy he'd goosed. The danji ducked and bucked and waited for the deluge to end but was due to be long disappointed; Rip held his cant for a quarter klick before dropping flat again and when Cock next saw the baddy, he was sopped and slogging well in last position. The soaking had choked his air slats and his pumps were tripletiming to spout the extra water away, the turbs lugging like a fat man up a hill. Not too fuckin bad.

Rip goosed around on Cock's fan and emerged sidewise, running straight at another baddy who was also being belabored by a very capable Fan. The boy kept dodging back and forth on the baddy's tail, not tipping, just taunting, keeping him distracted. It worked. He didn't see Rip until the danji had crossed his bow and let another sheet fly, and slammed into the water and then the groove of the wake with a *spep-thup* that everyone felt right through. Fan sheared off as the foil went flipping and the baddy flew asprawl, landing facedown feetfirst on the sea and skipping along twice before bobbing to a halt, spewing about half the ocean back out of his nostrils. They had dragged going in and his sinuses, filled, must be burning like they were packed with fusing reactor cores.

Well aft, Blade was playing dodge-me with one of the other boys, flashing her tits to distract him, then spraying past, dropping her briefs, anything to keep his mind on his dick and thus off the race. From the way his ride wobbled it

was working.

Cock was well pleased. When there wasn't a bunch of bedfucking *political* shit in the air they were a pretty tight little clicky group, all right. Yessir they were.

One was out, and another was way behind, but Fan was getting dogged now by the third danji. He was pretty committed too. Musta been the one slapping it to Edge. Or maybe he was their cock.

Both, proolly.

He slammed hard against Fan's larb rearquarter, cracking the turb housing, and the foil nosed against the ecmite with a grind and a shriek. He yanked his yoke over hard and the foils shuddered, then jerked separate, and Cock saw metal shards aflight. Fan glanced down and back and scowled, rocked sideways and rammed into the baddy. It totaled his bow but it also bent the shit out of the starboard aft blade on the baddy's ride. Fan's foil fell back, losing speed against drag, but the baddy's missile wasn't handling like it used to any more. Sloppy.

Not bad, Fan, Cock thought at the danji. *You get something good tonight.* He grinned over at Rip, who grinned back, the air whipping across them, and they leaned way in and gunned it hot for the boatload of wrinklies.

So far their run had lasted about fifteen seconds, and it was already one-third over.

Jel Ouzo was the monitor awatch when the contest began in the distance, about two kilometers off the tour frigate's larboard bows. He had recently been promoted to senior midshipman and wanted to comport himself with honor, giving the position and responsibility all the attention he knew it was due. It was the cool season, a time when the least amount of things could go wrong, an ideal window for him to learn his duties and earn his higher pay.

He intended to use it, and his status, as soon as this evening. He had plans that involved okane crossing palms and a whitefaced geisha leaving red lipmarks on several of his most sensitive parts. Geisha were not cheap. But the price was more than worth it; their skills were highly sought after. He was certain he could anticipate an evening of unmatched delectation.

His eyes widened in horror and his parts deflated rapidly as the anticipation fantasy broke when he saw the first arcs of spray rise from the low-chop sea as the starters let their turbines go. He didn't have to watch the skittering progress of the cock-tails across the ocean to know that this frigate, *his* frigate, was the ultimate target of the hydrofoil riders. He sounded the discreet trouble siren, a triple chirp that the elder folks seemed to think was pleasantly like a bird's call, and spoke quietly. "Deploy the catchnets," he murmured, "and raise the spray shields."

They had less than half a minute to get everything in place from the moment he'd seen the first signs of the

fanners. He'd lost part of that time in recognition of the threat, sounding the alarm and giving orders. Now he could see three of the watercraft had made half the distance and he swallowed. They might not have time.

Cock saw the splash guards going up and smirked. Wrinklies and wet faces, yeah, had to be it. Behind the clear shields he saw boom-arms heaving over the sea. Nets. Not while he was running at this speed, oh no, no way. His eyes flicked to Rip and they shared a moment.

Cock gunned harder and slipped alongside the larboard, rocking his foil and spewing a wall like Rip had done earlier to shake the first baddy. He tripped the lever under his yoke and the aux tank opened and pressurized, shooting a crest in addition that must have made it half to Pollux, riding well over the spray shields on the frigate and sluicing across the decks and dousing the aged audience, most of whom scuttled for cover but a few of which stayed above, gesturing at him, generally rudely. He waved and one or two waved back, yeah by fuck actually laughing, enjoying. Those he blew a kiss and settled the foil back, then scooted around the stern of the frigate and up along its starboard gunnel, cock-tailing the other half of the deck, so close in places he could have reached out and felt the hull directly. He got clear of the bow and rocked his tight hard ass against his saddle, letting the frigate's monitors get the clear message: Kiss this. He ported and inducted, leaning way back, digging a trench right in the sea and spouting huge salty frothy streamers of it over the focs's sheet windows like the biggest fucking cum-shot ever. He settled the foil into the waves and opened it up, gliding fast and triumphant back to the gathered group of fanners, knowing he had taken the day.

And then he glanced back.

The first hydrofoil had been an unmitigated catastrophe. Dozens of passengers had been soaked through by the disrespectful actions of the boy on the sea. Midshipman Ouzo was furious and unable to do anything to prevent it, watching with rage and horror as the arcs of water surged along the larboard side, astern, and — to drive the dishonor home entirely, he judged — back along the starboard to the bows. But even that was not enough for the youth astride the hateful machine; once he was in full view of the focs he idled back and swaggered, actually *swaggered*, and then unleashed a spray of sea that coursed over the ports, making a forward view impossible for several moments. By the time the water had run off the hydrofoil was half of the way back to where it had begun.

The second hydrofoil had done the same, though the water it sprayed did not rise nearly so high. It simply splattered against the sheets of clear ecmite, causing the few remaining passengers on deck to step back in alarm. One man clutched at his chest briefly and Midshipman Ouzo fervently wished he could die right then. To lose one of the

passengers in his charge would scuttle him forever, leave him working in the turbine room with the former Barque brats.

He was preparing to unleash a torrent of profanity when he saw the yardarm starboard sway and swing wildly. The nets, deployed at last, had caught something.

Blade saw it along with the rest, still far enough off the frigate to have time, and they all sheared away from the webbing, but there was one fan that wasn't cutting the sea any longer.

Cock hurriedly took stock. Fan was struggling back on his own and okay. Rip was just clearing the bows. Blade had turned aside with her boy-toy. So it was one of the other two baddies.

The leader, his starboard foils still slopping him askew, came around the bow as well, and even at that distance Cock could see his face was glacier-pale.

Midshipman Ouzo bustled to the crane, shoving the lower crew aside imperiously. "Make way, make way," he said. "Let us see what sort of fish we have caught." He rubbed his hands together and smiled at the crane's operator.

"I bet it wriggles," the crewman said with a wink.

"Yes," Ouzo laughed. "Bring our wriggling little fish aboard!"

The bundle in the net cleared the gunnel and everyone fell silent. Behind him, one of the passengers gave a little shriek and slumped to the deck.

"Caught his — around his..." The baddy cock swallowed, though Cock thought it wasn't necessary any more. By the look of his foil he'd already yarked everything in him up to sometime last week. "Fuckin monofilaments," he said.

"Yeah," Cock nodded. All around the others listened in silent shock.

"Movin fast. Wide open. Gunned it. Couldn't see the fringe, I guess, too much spray. Windy. And the fuckin monofilaments. In the wind, you know, the wind. Caught him. I saw it. He looked up, leaned back a little to see how his fan was doing. And when he leaned back, his chin, in the net, he..."

"What shall we do, honorable sir?" said the crane operator, his hands slack on his controls.

It was a foolish exercise, Ouzo knew, but Castoran maritime law required them to attempt to render assistance to all those injured at sea.

"Bring him aboard and help how you can," Ouzo grated, turning to begin filing his report, all thoughts of geisha and red lipmarks dashed utterly from him. "Perhaps you can start by sewing his head back on."