

“Uuugh, my head...”

The words so often spoken within the confines of her well-traveled Punworcca-class sloop vanished into the sea of discarded light beer cans. A throbbing headache, rising like a tropical thunderstorm, bore down on the Mirialan’s mind with its oppressive weight. Curled up in a medley of blankets, clothes, and a tarp she’d hung up to dry from a previous adventure, the Mirialan was severely regretting her life choices.

Yesterday night was a blur. Selen truly had a lively nightlife when it wasn’t being invaded by alien threats beyond mortal ken or assailed by vengeful gods of the planet’s primordial past. Of course, it might have been a mistake to start drinking with a sports team where everyone including the waterboy were thrice her size. Even worse when she found out they competed in the tribal *changa*-drinking competitions.

That had been her first mistake.

The second had not been far removed. Seeing as she had known about their prowess when she accepted the challenge to a drinking competition. To her credit, the waterboy had stood no chance, but that was where her luck—and memory—ran out.

Now she lay in her bunk, skin clammy and eyes blistering from the faint light filtering in through the sloop’s bronzed cockpit canopy. She could *taste* the world upon her tongue and had no desire to. If only she had the strength to reach a bottle of water and wash the rancid regret from her gullet.

“Uuuugh!”

Her groan of despair sung on empty walls, reverberating within the cavernous throats of depleted beverage containers.

She stretched out her hand, reaching hungry, desperate digits towards the crumpled plastek that glittered coquettishly in a sunbeam with cooling temptation. It was just beyond reach. Fickle fate transpiring, nay *conspiring* against her. Why must she always pay for her jollies? Why could she not be like those insufferable Arconans who waltzed through their posh parties and downed their vintage wines with careless abandon, never feeling the caress of a hangover’s sledgehammer.

*The Force.*

Of course.

Some were just born under luckier stars. Able to wield fantastical cosmic powers with their mind, bend others’ to theirs, or simply project technicolor lightning from their fingertips. Or maybe there was something in the water. Water. Her lips yearned for its touch and the bile rising in her mouth needed dousing. She reached once more, stretching like a feline until she heard a joint pop.

No, not a joint. The plastek bottle. She instinctively curled her hand closed, crunching the flimsy plastek that suddenly caressed her palm.

“That’s not supposed to happen...” she whispered to herself, staring at the dregs of clear liquid sloshing within the crumpled container. It tasted sweeter than any nectar. More refreshing than any mountain stream. More welcome than a lover’s... well, perhaps not that great.

As the lukewarm water coaxed the rising bile to return to her stomach, she swore she could hear a faint whisper. It was like a million voices had just spoken up from a lifetime of silence.

Vicxa Varis stared at the drained plastek bottle in her hand and mused.

Perhaps there *was* something in the water.