



Ragnar and Juliet

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Chapter Two:

Boun-ty (n): a reward offered to find a troublemaking man; often not worth it

Heat radiated off him from across the bar. Juliet sipped her whiskey and narrowed her eyes at her mark. She didn't bother to disguise her study of him; she wanted him to notice.

Big, very big. Two hundred pounds of long, lean muscle she guessed. And probably human, or something similar. Six-two or so, with not-too-long black hair over a rather handsome face, at least from back here. She glanced at the picture of him on her iPaidALotForThisGadget. Yup, that was him. Ragnar Manscape, the man she had been hired to bag, drag and return to King William (the Nefarious). Apparently Ragnar was a bad, bad, boy and had royally pissed off the king. William wasn't the forgiving sort, hence his self-given moniker of "the Nefarious."

Time to reel him in. Juliet swept aside the four untouched drinks sent to her from various pox-ridden bar flies and cocked her eyebrow, the thrill of the hunt coursing through her veins. She sucked in an adrenaline-fueled breath. She had done this a hundred times before. The best bounty hunter in ten galaxies, she always got her man. Or sentient creature. Or whatever. She polished off the last of her drink, the icy alcohol shivering down her throat and into her empty stomach.

After adjusting her best assets higher in her push-up bra, she took another deep breath, imbued with perhaps too much confidence. But she wasn't nicknamed Boba Fetching for nothing. She fluffed her hair and sauntered across the dim bar, red liquor signs flashing at her from all sides, illuminating her path. For a dive bar, this place, whose name she couldn't be bothered to remember, slumped grungier than most. A group of "musicians" huddled in a corner making a cacophonous racket. Hard to hear over the din of chatter, but the jarring music could be felt, as surely as the smell of the place could be seen.

Manscape sat staring at the floor, tipped back in his rickety wooden chair, long legs planted on the table. His worn black boots had kicked many an ass by the look of them. She pushed his feet off and plunked her trunk junk on the table. Startled, he stood and whipped a gun

out of nowhere, pointing it straight between her eyes. “Buy me a drink,” she purred in the Collective’s language, trying not to flinch at the muzzle inches from her face. Juliet’s blood heated at the sight of him this close—not exactly handsome, no, but rugged in an I-eat-folksingers-for-breakfast kind of way. His nose had perhaps been broken one too many times, his face needed a good razor, his mouth set crooked and hard, but all in all: dead sexy. Too bad. More like dead meat once the Nefarious was finished with him.

Juliet needed to work fast—*she’d* be dead meat if she didn’t deliver him within the next twenty-four hours. It had taken a week to track him to this hellhole planet at the corner of Nowhere and Abandon Hope, All Ye Who Enter Here.

A pair of amazing cerulean eyes fluttered across her, narrowing over 1) her crotch, almost peeking from under the shortest skirt she owned, 2) her chest, spilling out of her leather vest, and 3) her crotch again. A gratifying once over—she didn’t shop at Sluts-R-Us for nothing.

“Buy me a drink,” she was forced to repeat with a toss of her hair. Maybe he didn’t understand her? Really, by this point most men had melted into quivering pools of hormone all over her painful, yet alluring, spike-heel boots.

He smiled, revealing a good set of almost-straight teeth. A wave of pure desire flowed through Juliet’s chest, settling in the general area of her illicit miniskirt. She was a sucker for a charming smile on an inconvenient face. *Aren’t we all?* Not lowering his weapon, he sneered, “You came over here. You buy *me* a drink, Blondie.”

With one hussy-red manicured finger she pushed the gun barrel away from her. “Don’t call me Blondie and I will.”

Those dangerous blue eyes crinkled at the corners. “Then what do I call you?”

“Juliet.”

“Juliet what?”

“Just Juliet.”

“So, we’re not dealing in last names tonight?”

Juliet wiggled off the table and thumped into a chair. “Is this what you consider sexy banter? Does it sound better once I have a cocktail?”
