



# THE DRUNKEN COMIC BOOK MONKEYS vs. THE CROCOGATOR

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“Florida,” Brian said.

“Florida,” Chris said.

“Florida!! WOOOOOOOOO!” both men screamed as they crossed the Georgia border in their gray Saturn. Excitement filled the car. Their long drive would come to an end and a week of binge drinking could begin. The men marveled at the palm trees lining the highway. As residents of Pennsylvania, neither had ever seen such trees in real life, nor were they accustomed to the warm climate. The windows remained up, though, because of the humidity. They were both bald, but feared the moist air would frizz their goatees.

Chris handed Brian, navigating from the passenger seat, printed directions to their motel. Brian gave the orders, Chris followed them. However, Brian couldn’t help but notice with every turn they seemed to move further from civilization and descend deeper into the wilderness. Concerned, Brian asked, “You made reservations at the cheapest place possible, didn’t you?”

“Yep,” Chris replied.

“Econo Lodge?”

“Nope.”

“Howard Johnsons?”

“Nope.”

“Dare I ask where?”

“Lucky Larry’s Luxury Log Cabins.”

“I hate you.”

Chris began to hate himself as he pulled into the motel’s driveway; bare dirt pockmarked with muddy puddles and lined with cypress, tupelo and black gum trees. The dirt path opened up to a cul-de-sac, lined with seven buildings, three log cabins on either side of the

rental office. The office was a large log cabin itself; however, half of it protruded over a vast swamp.

Chris parked the car, now evenly coated mud brown, in between four mud brown pick-up trucks. Brian and Chris exited, their feet sinking a half-inch everywhere they walked, and followed the signs to the rental office.

“Do you think they have valet?” Brian asked.

“Shut up,” Chris replied.

“Maybe they validate. You think they validate? They should *at least* validate.”

“Shut up.”

Following the sign, the men thought the next step to be impossible, a misprint at least. They each read it four times, but it was the same each time. The entrance to the office was through the part of the building hanging over the swamp with no discernable walkway to be found. Upon studying the building closer, they discovered scuffmarks around make-shift finger holes and foot holds leading from where they stood to alongside the building over the swamp. Seeing little choice, Brian and Chris hugged the mildew reeking wood and scooted along the wall. Once they turned the corner, a porch presented itself as well as a door labeled, “Come in.”

Walking across the rickety foyer, floorboards creaking and begging for mercy with every step, Chris approached the check in desk. Brian admired the wall of taxidermy animal heads: two bear, three deer, a zebra, two mountain lions, and five large alligators. All the animals shared the same expression of shock and awe. Looking closer, Brian couldn’t help but whisper to himself, “That’s some good eatin’.”

“Reservations for ‘The Drunken Comic Book Monkeys,’ please,” Chris said to the desk clerk.

The clerk, ninety-five years young, offered a polite smile, exposing more holes than teeth. His white tank top, stained a dull yellow in some spots, exposed dozens of one-inch hearts tattooed up and down both arms. “Yep. Got ‘em. Here’s your key and here are the rules.”

Confused by the unique protocol, Chris looked at the laminated sheet the clerk handed to him. “Rule number one, no bringing back

women of ill-repute, unless you get one for the desk clerk.”

“My favorite rule,” the clerk said. The enthusiasm in his smile was only surpassed by that found in his voice.

Chris chuckled, appreciating the old man’s will. “Happen often, does it?”

The clerk showed off both arms with pride. “Each heart here represents an attendee to the rocket show.”

Still chuckling, Chris asked, “Rocket show?”

Without a word, the nonagenarian lifted his shirt to expose white body hair, liver spots, and fifty more heart tattoos around the words “ROCKET SHOW” followed by a downward pointing arrow.

Chris threw up a little in the back of his throat. He pushed it down as he looked back at the laminated list of rules. “No peeing in the parking lot. Clean all stains from carpets before checkout. No Satanic rituals. No pets. Suggested curfew is 9:00.”

“Live by the rules, boy,” The old man said.

Remembering how his last line of questioning turned out, Chris asked the next question with trepidation. “Curfew? 9:00?”

“The beast, boy. The beast.”

“What ‘beast?’” Brian asked, walking over to Chris and snatching the list of rules.

“The Crocogator. Meanest creature to ever walk the planet.”

“Croco...? Are you kidding me?”

“There’s no kidding when it comes to the Crocogator. Twenty-five feet long, alligator on one end, crocodile on the other.”

“Really? If that’s the case, then how does he poo?”

“He don’t. That’s what makes him so meeeeeeeean!”

“Poo?” Chris asked Brian. “What are you? Four?”

“Hey,” Brian snapped back. “I’m a freakin’ polite guy.”

“You’re as polite as a dog fart at a wedding. And you’re talking to a guy who has a steady diet of ‘women of ill-repute.’”

“So? Doesn’t mean he condones swearing. If he doesn’t swear, then I don’t swear.”

“Seriously? Since when? There’s no point to that. We all know what you mean, so just say it. Just say sh...”

“Boys,” the old clerk interrupted. “You’re missing the point. The Crocogator lives in the swamp here. In fact, all the animal heads on the wall are all that was left of them after they became the Crocogator’s snack. He usually sleeps ‘til 9:00 and wakes up hungry. So, it’s best to be indoors by then.”

Before Brian or Chris could say another word, a loud, sharp clap of quick thunder rattled the dust from the building’s rafters. “What was that?”

“Hunters determined to bring in the damnable beast. They’re the ones renting out all the other cabins. They must be warming up their guns, doing some target practice.”

Unblinking, Brian glared at Chris.

“What?” Chris asked.

“Right now we could be crashing a wedding or riding a baggage cart up and down hotel hallways. Thanks to you, we now have a curfew.”

“Quit your whinin’. Let’s go meet the neighbors. They sound ... interesting.”

“I need a beer.”

Exiting the office, Chris and Brian scooted along the make shift ledge to the dirt parking lot where their neighbors congregated. After one look, Brian and Chris became very nervous.

Milling around the four pick-up trucks were eight men, all taller, wider and hairier than Brian. Each man held a shot gun in one hand and a can of beer in the other. Despite the muggy Floridian air, they all had a penchant for flannel, and not in the Seattle grunge movement sort of way. They each wore printed t-shirts under their flannel. Eight men, eight shirts: three NASCAR shirts, two football shirts, a bull riding shirt, a shirt advertising cigarettes, and one Shania Twain concert shirt. All of them possessed thick, unkempt beards that mingled with their thick, unkempt shocks of hair. In between the tangles of hair were eyes, and all eight sets locked onto Brian and Chris.

Whooping and hollering echoed through the swamps, as well as some Skynard, until the hunters saw Brian and Chris. Silence accompanied icy glares as the hunters watched Brian and Chris stride toward their car.

“I think we’re going to have to squeal like pigs,” Brian whispered.

“Shut up,” Chris whispered back.

“The guy in the Shania shirt is looking at me.”

“Shut up.”

“If any of them even blink funny, I’m pushing you down and running.”

“Shut up.”

“I can totally outrun you, you know.”

“I have a plan. Stay calm.”

Fighting the urge to kneecap Brian and run himself, Chris opened the trunk, revealing the cooler. He retrieved two beers and handed one to Brian. They broke the graveyard silence by popping the beers.

“They like beer!!” one of the hunters yelled. Whoops and hollers once again echoed through the swamp, as well as gunshots. The hunters kicked Skynyrd back up and continued their merriment.

After downing their beers to settle their frayed nerves, Brian and Chris met the hunters. Of course, being shallow and egocentric, they forgot the names faster than they heard them. However, they did learn that the desk clerk was right – these men were here to kill the Crocogator. The hunters regaled Brian and Chris with embellished stories of the past, what they hunted, what they killed, their favorite monster trucks, their favorite NASCAR drivers, their favorite brand of chew, and which Shania song touched them in the secret cry spot of their hearts. All was going well until one of the hunters asked, “So what’re y’all doin’ down here?”

Not thinking, as he so often didn’t, Brian replied, “We’re here for a comic book convention.”

Silence. Even Skynyrd retreated.

Chris leaned close to his friend and whispered, “Dude you tell everyone else we’re dentists from Kentucky. But with eight rifle wielding psychos, you tell them the truth?”

Brian took a swig of beer, heavy glares of confusion and disgust upon him. Well, since the truth got him in this mess, maybe it would get him out? “This will be Saika’s last public appearance ever, and we

wanted to meet her.”

One hunter arched an eyebrow, intrigued and contemplating Brian’s words. “You mean the Swedish porn starlet from the late 70s, early 80s?”

“Yep. She helped me through puberty.”

The hunter looked to his friends, then back to Brian and Chris with a cigarette stained smile. He took a gulp of beer, and then shouted, “They like beer *and* porn!”

Hoots and hollers returned. Gunshots returned. Skynyrd returned. Brian and Chris returned to the hunter’s good graces. Stories that began “My favorite scene was...” and “I loved when she...” filled the air. Until the man in the Shania shirt added his thoughts.

“I always felt sorry for the girl,” he said. “I always thought she did what she did because she craved attention and found no other healthy and fulfilling alternative. I believe in the power of a simple hug – maybe a well received hug would have changed her life and set her down a more rewarding and proper career path.”

Awkward silence befell the parking lot as seven hunters turned to their friend, wondering how to respond to his comments. Brian and Chris knew exactly what to do. They jumped in their car with a “Well, gotta go.”

Once they drove off the dirt roads and onto a labeled highway, Brian procured the directions to the convention center. Of course, the trip there consisted of persnickety comments like, “Oh, look, a Ramada right there,” and “How about that, there’s a Hyatt right across the street from the convention center. Who woulda thunk it?” Brian’s comments were then followed by profanity laced tirades from Chris and a punch to the shoulder. However, once they got to the convention center, all was well.

They arrived half an hour before the doors opened, which gave them enough time to get ready. After they parked, they popped the trunk. Next to the cooler was a safe, just as large as the cooler. Both men reached into their shirts and pulled out a single key attached to a long chain around each of their necks. They had to enter their keys into the safe and turn them simultaneously, lest the safe explode. Each man

placed their right hand on the palm scanners. Then one at a time, they allowed the retinal scanner to scan their eyes. The DNA scanner was next, which meant they had to breathe into the breath analyzer, drip a drop of blood onto the collector, and offer up a hair, Chris from his goatee, Brian from the thick growth on his back. Finally after receiving a text message from a NASA uplink with a unique access code, they opened the safe to retrieve their treasure – two 8 x 10 glossy photos of Saika.

They looked at the ticket line and chuckled; it overflowed outside and streamed along two walls of the building. Cracking open two beers, Brian laughed, “Look at those poor fools, waiting to get tickets. Should have ordered ahead like we did.”

“Smartest thing we ever did,” Chris replied.

After finishing their beers, they locked the car and headed into the convention center, strutting past the people in line. They were still strutting as they entered the lobby and headed for the exhibition hall. They made it in with no problems. And between the two of them they obtained a program and figured out where Saika was located. That was when the problem occurred. The line outside the building wasn't the line to get into the convention - it was the line to get Saika's autograph. Back outside they went.

Pouting like children, they took a seat on the sidewalk, leaning against the building's wall. Not even caring if Florida had an open container law or not, each reached into their respective pants pocket, pulled out a bottle of beer and popped the top. Brian sighed and looked at his watch. 10:04 a.m. “Well, at least we're not with the hunters.”

Brian didn't know how true his words were. At the same time, the hunters readied their supplies in four fan-boats; a case of beer for each boat and enough guns and explosives to overthrow a small South American country. Each boat carried two hunters as they hunkered down and kept their eyes peeled for their prey. One hunter remained extra wary after he learned his Shania shirt wearing friend had a penchant for hugs.

The hunters went over their game plan and double-checked to

make sure their walkie-talkies worked. They raced through the swamps and found a tiny island, only large enough to host a lone willow. Each boat had a recently killed piglet. With a few well-placed slashes of hunting knives, the hunters gutted the bait and soaked the entrails in the water. As quickly as possible they draped the four piglet carcasses over branches of the willow. The final step was to rig each carcass with an explosive.

Coasting to four different areas of the swamp, the hunters knew that the blood soaked waters would be too tantalizing to allow the Crocogator to remain asleep. Hours of waiting didn't faze the hunters, patiently watching the waters around them with their fingers on triggers. The men all breathed slowly through their mouths, the moist air too thick to breathe through their noses and the smells of rotting foliage, hinted with methane, too much to take for long periods. Chirping crickets and croaking frogs accompanied the whispered walkie-talkie check-ins every half-hour as well as one hunter's nervous humming of, "Man, I Feel Like a Woman," - but it all stopped with an explosion.

The fans growled to life on all four boats as the hunters raced to see if their trap had been successful. It had not. Scattered remains of a deer showed the hunters their prey still eluded them. Disappointment filled their hearts as they discussed their options. Finally, one hunter thought to question why a deer would traipse through a swamp to a secluded island to set off a trap rigged with piglet corpses. It took little discussion to determine there was only one reason – it had been *thrown* into the trap.

As they came to that conclusion, they also realized they had let their guard down - too late. With a volcanic splash and an explosive roar, the Crocogator attacked. Its thrashing entrance froze the hunters where they stood. They had never been the prey before. Two hunters regretted their lack of preparedness as the Crocogator latched one set of teeth to the port side of the boat, near the bow as it sank its other set of teeth into the starboard side, near the stern. With a twist faster than a lightning strike, the beast cracked the boat into slivers of tinder. The two men disappeared into the monster's jaws as soon as they hit the water.

Self-preservation kicked in for the remaining six hunters. Reflex dictated that flight was a better option than fight since the engines were running and the guns lay at their feet. At full throttle, the three fan boats fled the scene of carnage.

**TO BE CONTINUED**