

*From the Notebook of
Aurora Jones*

*In the Emerald Burrito.
Creepoid Interlude.*

Dear me,

Something deeply weird just happened. Lemme get it down quick.

About an hour before dinnertime rush, and I'm back in the kitchen with Señor Poogli. We are discussing tonight's specials: a nice Rump O' Goomer with mole sauce, and Poogli's new innovation: the Mexican Goomer Weave. It's this elaborate process, which he's trying to explain — something about making threads of shredded goomer meat, then weaving them into sculptures — and it's really fascinating, but then the kitchen door blows open.

And in walks this character I've never seen before. A kind of icky man-weasel, slightly taller than me. He's got slicked-down salt and pepper fur with a musky, slightly-oily sheen. Up on his hind legs, slinking into the room, there's something oddly prim about him. Maybe it's his pantaloons. But the vibe gets unnerving, the second he enters. And I don't like his eyes.

In the background, Dead Can Dance are playing, and I can tell that he doesn't much care for it.

"Hello," he says, with his long skinny snout, and I notice he loves to show his teeth. They are many and pointed; and without hesitation, I

imagine them taking a chunk out of me.

He enjoys my reaction. It's the one he had in mind. That pisses me off, and I summon up steel. To my right, Señor Poogli looks equally tense. He's got one hand on a cleaver, and the other five are fists.

"Excuse me. Miss Aurora Jones?" the weasel continues.

"That's me."

"I am here to discuss the ... dinner reservations."

"Okay. And just who might you be?"

He pulls himself up to his full height, draws his thin black lips into a condescending sneer. "Perhaps you've heard of me," he says, still showing teeth. "My name is ... Rokoko."

I laugh. "As in Rocky Rokoko?"

"Er, no." Displeased. I'm guessing he's heard the joke before.

"Ah, well. So how can I help you, Mr. Rokoko?"

He takes a couple steps closer, and now I can see Pim and Pinky in the doorway, with their big worried eyes. It's so clear that they're already blaming themselves for this little confrontation. I flash them reassurance, and hold my ground.

Rokoko is confident, self-absorbed, but his danger radar isn't bad. Or maybe he knows a little something about me. Either way, he stops. Flashes ugly teeth. And makes a quite bogus conciliatory gesture.

"Miss Aurora," he says. "I beg your pardon. I am merely attempting to confirm reservations which were already made ..."

"By whom?"

"By your partner. He was given instructions to reserve all twenty-three of your tables for a very special dinner, after your regular working hours, five nights from this evening."

"What *kind* of 'special dinner'?" I ask him.

He looks slightly annoyed. "You weren't informed?"

"No, I wasn't. Nobody mentioned this to me." Glancing at Poogli, who adamantly shakes his head. "Who is this reservation for?"

Rokoko smiles. "A good friend of Mr. Gutierrez."

"That sure narrows it down. Anybody I know?"

"I sincerely don't think so. But that's unimportant. The point is that there are certain ... dietary requirements that would have to be met."

“I’m listening.”

“In particular,” and now Rokoko can’t restrain his evil grin, “there are certain ... meats which we would want to see prepared in your restaurant’s singular fashion.”

Now my hackles are up, and my temper is climbing. I can see Fonzie’s hand in this, and it’s the hand that I don’t like. My partner is a fairly remarkable man, and his charm is only heightened by his hunger for authenticity. But meat is a serious issue in Oz, and not only just for me.

“I’m sorry,” I say, “but as I’m certain you know, we only serve goomer meat ...”

Rokoko rolls his eyes. “That’s not what Mr. Gutierrez said.”

“Well, Mr. Gutierrez isn’t here. I have no idea what he told you. And you know what? I don’t care. If he has some sneaky meat deal going on with you guys — whoever you guys are — you might as well forget it. Nobody here will cook it, and nobody here will serve it.”

“Oh, be *reasonable*,” he insinuates slyly, leaning into the word with his entire body. “After all, you’ve lived on Earth. You know what these recipes actually call for ...”

“Excuse me. I was a vegetarian for ten years before I even got to Oz. For what it’s worth, I stopped eating cows and chickens and pigs long before they started throwing me birthday parties.

“But why am I explaining this to you? The simple fact is that it’s wrong, and you know it.”

“*Wrong*.” He snorts dismissively.

“Yeah. *Wrong*. Look it up.” I take a step forward now. “And while you’re at it, why don’t you take a fuckin’ hike?”

He tenses, insulted. I like that a lot. If there’s a battle to wage, let’s get it over with now. I can feel the air contract, preparing for the scent of blood to drench it.

He doesn’t take the bait, but hatred simmers in his veins.

“You are not welcome here, Mr. Rokoko,” I tell him. “And neither are your mysterious ‘friends.’ Which means your special dinner reservation doesn’t exist, and never will.

“I suggest you spend the evening sitting on a tack.”

Rokoko sighs and licks his chops, black rodent-eyes locked on mine. “Too bad,” he says, sneering and turning to go. He flashes his fangs. Just on impulse, I show him mine.



All this went down ten minutes ago, give or take. And the more I think about it, the more pissed-off I get.

Maybe I shouldn't get too mad at Fonzie just yet. It's entirely possible — well, at least *remotely* possible — that he didn't have anything to do with it. In the early days, god knows, he was insanely indiscreet; that this restaurant survived at all is a recombinant miracle of charm, yum and vision. I mean, you can't go telling chickens how much better some *chicken* would taste with this sauce. It's insulting as hell.

He's gotten a whole lot better, and more sensitive to the issues, but the simple fact remains that he is jonesing for beef. I know the feeling, vaguely, but I know too many cows. And, goddamit, so does he! I mean, I've *seen* him flirt with Bessie!

And I don't care how good his mama's recipes are.

When Rokoko left, I watched him broadcast his charms at Pinky and Pim. They responded with predictable terror. It seems fairly clear to me that there's no one Rokoko *wouldn't* eat.

Oh, Fonzie ... what have you gotten us into now?