

July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006 is the GRAND OPENING of our new website Butches Babes and Bards (BBB) at [www.butchesbabesandbards.com](http://www.butchesbabesandbards.com)  
We five authors, AnnieSA, Bliss, Cherokee Echols, Jaye Morgan and myself, welcome you to take a look. \*\*\*Sign up for weekly notifications\*\*\* Genres posted are romance, erotica, speculative fiction, westerns, drama, PWP, historical, fan fic and some poetry. There are also music videos and some a cappella singing along with a few other treats you will need to stop by to see.

OK on with the Radclyffe Forum AC #6, my little contribution.  
Enjoy and send feedback to [JLNickymaster@aol.com](mailto:JLNickymaster@aol.com)

Theme DISCOVERIES - First Times, Confessions, Secret Desires,  
Adventures In or Out of the Bedroom, What You Never Knew You Wanted - Interpret freely.

## A Space Between

The tantalizing view of distant galaxies and space nebulas and shooting stars glistened and winked in the port-side bay window of the small science spacecraft orbiting above earth. Normally, viewing the star-filled beauty would easily capture her attention; however, Colonel Beck Garrett, the lone occupant of the room, was totally engaged at looking into the blue tint glow of the onboard desktop computer. The console's much dimmer glow lit up her smiling features as she read the contents onscreen. Contrary to her normal countenance, her strong, controlled features were completely relaxed in pleasure. A lopsided smile and blinking gray eyes were the main reaction from the words she read again. Tapping her commander's flight ring slightly against the paneling of the desktop she bit her lip to hold the grin from bursting into a full fledged smile. Even after the fifth read-through she was still picking up the subtle romantic messages and clues her pen pal was giving her. She internally discussed and analyzed the meanings behind all the words. Leaning back she rubbed her warm palms over the thighs of her cotton pants. She glanced at the indoor temperature gauge and found herself grinning again. *If it isn't hot in here, then it's just me!* She wiggled her left eyebrow as she caught her faded reflection in the three inch thick double pane plastic of the bay window.

"I hope I'm right." Flipping the ship-wide intercom, she cleared her throat to speak.

“Hey guys? I got another email today, if anyone is interested?”

The colonel smiled as she listened to the instant responses from various corners of the space shuttle. Rolling her eyes toward the beautiful vista of deep space beside her, she listened to Jim Troy, the crafts engineer and statistics genius. He shouted out a muffled ‘woohoo’ from inside the small ‘head’ just next door. She also knew by the hiss and grunts of noise being generated through the passage shaft echoing from behind her, 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Brian Caldwell, the guidance officer, was maneuvering his large frame down from the upper deck. A female voice sounded out from over his head.

“Hurry up GG, get that huge bod moving.” Karen McNiemen, the science and tactician officer of their small outfit forgot any ranking when it came to waiting in line with her crewmates. She was probably going to run over the ‘gentle giant’ of the crew if he didn’t get out of her way.

“All right already,” Brian’s low pitched baritone voice growled.

Hearing the space suction flush coming from the head Beck knew she only had a few moments before being entangled with her small crew. Her three members were anything but shy. Being confined together on this NASA mission to restock and repair the orbiting station for next year’s onboard crew required a tight group with little conflict. For the last two months, repeating the same tasks daily, she was well aware how all four of them worked and played together. With less than two days to go before they began the trip home. They were all desiring some soon-to-be available home comforts. Anything remotely resembling normalcy was exponentially craved. She turned her eyes from the vista of stars back to the email, just one of many she began sharing with them shortly after receiving the first.

Her intense gray eyes returned to scan what she’d been enjoying for the last half hour. Her full lips quirked into a tiny smile as she read the familiar return email address of starmapper@yahoo.com. She felt a rush of tension running through her body as she contemplated her pen pal. Duties and security only allowed her to check her personal inbox three times weekly and she was beginning to feel almost giddy from the excitement these days. This feeling of needing to check her

email was addictive and truly fascinating. She couldn't think of one thing in her past that made her feel so many different emotions. She leaned forward to admire the art work of the background stationery. The overlay was a blush rose with tiny rose petal border and the font was a flowery cursive style bordering on techniques of calligraphy. She traced a spiral loop of the D used in Dear B with her finger, squinting closer at the screen. *I wonder if a tablet was used to create the scripted letters.*

She sighed, her chest tightening with happiness. Now that she'd read it through at least six times, she was ready to get a second, third, and fourth opinion. As with all good leaders, she relied on more input than merely her own senses. Hence, she had begun to share her virtual pen pal mail with her close companions, the motley crew of Space Shuttle Novak 18.

Beck, was still staring at the screen, her hand absently checking to make sure her dog tags were still tucked inside her black t-shirt and not floating upward in the half gravity. The nickel sized gram weight she'd attached was keeping them down in the light atmosphere. They would have to begin regulating to full gravity for their return to earth. That 24 hour period was going to be chock-full of clumsiness. Once again she contemplated the variables for reentry in her head. Piloting was her specialty.

Suddenly she was mauled from both sides with a short 'oomph' as her 5'5 frame was bumped then yanked. She spun floating, the half gravity carrying her upward around the room exaggeratedly, until she shot a hand upward and grabbed a stability bar running the length of the room.

"Mine!" Karen squealed, planting herself into the now empty chair. Her 5'9 full-figured body had pushed Beck to the right with her weight. Jim Troy, just arriving, was not about to lose his reading rights. He had used the easily displaced woman and his short, stocky, hard body to simply pull Beck the rest of the way out of the chair, quickly jumping into the three inches of seat remaining. He and Karen silently agreed to share as they both began to avidly read the email. When Beck stopped her floating, she saw Brian give her a look of commiseration, concerning the other two misfits. Then he grinned

and floated over to the greedy bastards of her co-workers. With his large hands, he inserted them between the two heads, pushing them apart. He held them firmly separated until they both moved apart on their own, allowing Brian to see over their shoulders.

“Woah Ishmael,” Jim reached out to point at the art work. Beck rolled her eyes at his implied obsession by calling her the lead character from Moby Dick. “This T person is definitely showing signs of deeper interest. Look at the rose background and the petals. Our little colonel is definitely saying something right.” He paused to wink at Beck. “What do you think oh guru of love?” Jim grinned over his shoulder at Brian.

Brian was the biggest tank of a black man ever accepted into the space program. His bios claimed belt after belt of weightlifting championship awards. He had a beautifully sculptured body from continuous weight training and the women ate it up. All that and he had brains too? His well-earned reputation with the ladies was not exaggerated. He slowly nodded in agreement with Jim’s assessment.

“I think this relationship is deepening. I’m not sure, but I’d say definite signs of at least a crush. What do you think Karen?”

Karen shook her head, her lips slightly moving as she read through the letter a second time. She leaned back and sighed. A soft smile on her chap-stick covered lips.

“It’s totally sweet. T sounds really nice, Colonel. I think she has a crush on you.”

Beck perked up at that.

“How do you know this person is a she?” Beck tried to sound casual in her question, but the three teammates turned to give her their varied expressions of an ‘are you stupid’ look. Beck cleared her throat and glanced downward for a moment to accept the fact her entire crew knew and accepted she was gay.

“It’s not like you’ve ever even looked at my body when I’m working out.” Brian commented, his rumbling voice low and even. Beck looked

up and caught his twinkling brown eyes. She relaxed a little with the friendly jab.

“And it’s not like I haven’t caught you checking out mine, when you thought I wasn’t looking.” Karen exclaimed with a dryness that had all four of them laughing.

Jim just gave a little snort and snapped his fingers three times, showing his flaming gay nature. “I have professional gaydar, sister. It picked up on you when I saw you stroll by the nurse’s station back in ’04. Your walk and talk are legendary for those women over there. My man,” he dramatically clutched at his chest and fanned himself, “the doctor, thinks he should bottle you up and give you as premenstrual buffer tablets for his crew.”

Beck felt a blush rise to her cheeks at Jim’s fearless response. She didn’t know whether to bust him to private or high-five him for the inside info. She’d have to pay closer attention when she walked by that wing again. She was once again ignored as all three turned back to the email to check it out again.

Beck absorbed their chattering as they dissected every word and letter. Easily she let part of her mind distance itself as she thought of her online mystery writer T. For two months they had been corresponding. Beck clearly began to pick up on the romantic tones her pen pal was writing. She tried to analyze the emotions she was feeling but only realized she felt nervous. That wasn’t like her.

When she had received the first email, two months ago, from some stranger, she’d almost deleted it as SPAM. Her private Yahoo account was always getting junk mail. But, since she was feeling a bit out of sorts, just freshly into orbit, the subject of the letter caught her attention. “I know you’re watching over me,” the email exclaimed. She was jaded enough to think it had to be an ad; still, she hesitated to delete as she looked away from the screen toward the full window side of the shuttle and viewed the entire earth below her. The blues and whites and grays of the beautiful sphere were incredible. She felt a sudden urge to know just what the writer meant by that statement. Hook, line, and sinker she fell for it and opened the email. It was a letter addressed to Dear Someone. After reading the one-page email

and then rereading it, Beck was wearing a frown. She closed the letter and without deleting she logged out of the Yahoo account.

The next three days she pondered the email. Signed from the stranger named simply "T", Beck had read the letter that spoke of long days of hard work and a life full of satisfaction. As the writer continued to explain the reason for the letter, Beck read of a need for T to share a part of their self with another. The essence of the email was to engage someone to write back. With all that her life had to offer her, Beck related to the email in more than one way. She was still single and on some nights looking over the stars she felt the pull of loneliness well up. Sometimes she needed to talk to someone too. The writer was clearly seeking a pen pal to talk to. From the moment she read the email, Beck began to write a response in her mind. She went through the motions of performing her duties and was without a doubt totally clueless to the strange looks she was receiving from her crew. Of course, she should have known to expect the outcome of her strange behavior. On the third day of her rumination, the four of them were sitting down to dinner of a roast beef casserole hydrated with a clump of watery potatoes on the side. Beck suddenly felt the weight of stares from all three of her crew members. She woke from her musing spell and looked around the table slowly.

"What?" she spoke in her most innocent tone. All three remained staring. Beck felt the slight tickle from a bead of nervous sweat running between her breasts and she did something she'd rarely done before. She blushed. All three crew members stared in fascinated wonder as their fearless colonel, the one and only Beck Saints-Preserve-Us Garrett and Beck Tall-Dark-and-Dangerous Garrett, and most certainly Beck I'm-In-Complete-Control Garrett, who never let you see her sweat, cool-handed pilot of the Novak 18 turned brilliant pink.

Brian cleared his throat, the first to recover at the sight and looked down at his meal. Never one to let his roast beef get cold he took a huge bite and looked back at her then back down at his food. She focused on his natural movement and was able to recover somewhat. Jim and Karen sat staring until Beck turned her glaring gaze on them. Their own plates suddenly required their attention.

She may only be 5'5 and a true blonde, but her gray eyes held a fire within that knew when to blaze. The power of her stare was her personal calling card. She could and did make others feel the weight of it if needed. That intense glare making her target feel her strength along with her high standards of professionalism, also one of her well known traits, made her the perfect leader. She was the fifth child of senatorial parents; her four younger brothers, towering above her in height, obeyed her every rule.

Beck Garrett let the unaccustomed warmth cool off of her cheeks before she responded to the obvious curiosity of her crew. Her throat-clearing was the signal as they all looked back over at her again.

"I guess I've been...slightly distracted, lately." She sought the usually flowing words that would convey her thoughts. Somehow they were not easily forthcoming. She cleared her throat again. "I received an email in my personal mail and, although I do not know who sent it to me, I am fairly sure this person is lonely." Beck let her gaze drop to the spork she held in her hand. She twirled it a bit. Looking up quickly, she caught all three sets of eyes still watching her. Setting the spork down she gave a little shrug.

"I guess I've just been composing a letter in my head to write back." Beck raised a blonde eyebrow at the chattering that erupted.

"Is that all? God, I thought it was something serious."

"Gheesh, why didn't you just say so?"

"Lonely? How do you know?" Brian had a quick way of cutting to the chase. Sometimes Beck admired that in him. She frowned at his question. Sometimes she did not admire that trait.

"I don't know. The writer sounded lacking or maybe searching for something. I think I want to write and ask. That way I will know once and for all if it's just a garbage email or not. I mean, what can it hurt; right?"

Beck eyed the three crew members and got varied nods of agreement. So for the next hour the four of them discussed the original email and who it might possibly be.

The email address was very important according to Jim. He explained his was rocketboy15. The others rolled their eyes, but he continued. Most of the spam email addresses were garbage. Karen revealed her personal email as whiskeywoman233, Brian sighed and stated his was just Bcaldwell. Jim and Karen smiled at him. The three of them looked over at Beck with curious expressions. Beck tried to fight the sudden heat she felt rising to her face. She didn't want to have to explain her yahoo email address, but they would only pester her for the rest of the mission if not. Bravely she glanced at her fingernail finding it suspiciously interesting as she stated her email address. Her hard glare silenced the snickers. After all AmazonLvGodess was her PERSONAL mail. She twisted her neck slightly and let the crack of the tension be released. The silence ended when Karen asked what the writer's email address was. Beck spoke the email address of Starmapper with a slight smile. Jim and Karen exchanged a quick glance. Brian cleared his throat and just rumbled, "Nice."

With the full approval of her crew, Beck grabbed a small flip notepad and jotted down a few notes that she thought she should write to a reply email. Somehow she knew it was a real person on the other end and what she said to them might be very important.

Later that night she got additional clearance from NASA to log into the active web. Since she had never asked before, they were quite amicable. She did not give any reason and they did not ask. Novack18 was approved for 20 minutes.

Beck sat down and wrote out her reply to the lone email residing in her box and she continued to reply over the next two months as she received multiple letters weekly. Although they never shared the personal details of their full names or went in depth about their careers, Beck felt intimately aware of their growing online friendship. For the first time in her life, she let her thoughts have free reign to write what was in her heart. The initial letters began to develop into a person that Beck was growing to know and like. She received long stirring letters that made her smile, frown, laugh out loud, and wince

in commiseration over something slipping away. The hardcore military woman inside her seemed to struggle writing a detailed and colorful reply that would match the charming personality of her pen pal. So she didn't even try. She gave the briefest explanation about being brought up 'in uniform' and then explained that she would need a little practice on her writing.

Her crew, however, had alternate ideas. Beck discussed some of the email contents with Karen at one point and Karen brought it up with the others. Before Beck knew it, the entire group wanted in on the pen pal relationship. Beck still remembered feeling slightly nervous thinking someone out there, a complete stranger, was willing to throw their thoughts down and send them to her without reservation. She finally agreed to let the crew read the incoming emails, but not what she wrote back. They agreed to the plan and began giving her reports about each email.

Beck began to learn to accept the idea that an email exchange constituted having to envision a real person. She still fought with her own sensible pragmatic self after coming to realize this stranger, someone she'd never even met, could become someone she would hold in her heart and mind. *And that, my friend, is the problem. You have grown in my heart, maybe too much.*

Frowning at her emotions being strangely off kilter from a pen pal, she regained her focus of her crew still discussing her most recent letter.

The entire group was wrapping up their verbal take on the email emphasizing the romantic nature through the concise analysis only military training can provide. In a totally unusual and non-military fashion, Beck was feeling 'out of sorts'. The email made her feel things she was beginning to recognize as romantic and passionate. She felt a spark of arousal whenever she imagined a romance existing between herself and this T woman. *But, how can I feel these feelings? I've never even met the girl! Maybe I'm losing it?*

She spent the next two hours wondering over her emotional response to T. Up until the moment she sat down to reply, she didn't have any idea what to say. It seemed the minute she started typing she had the

words she needed. She typed forever. When she stopped she was amazed to discover she had written four pages. *I guess my writing skills have improved.*

Her mind was starting to swirl with excitement and fear as she realized she was totally leaving any future between the two of them in T's hands. Beck had relayed her hopes and desires into that letter and T now held all the cards. Additionally, Beck gave the arrival date of her flight landing at White Sands, New Mexico. If T was in any way interested she was going to find out plenty of details about Beck when she arrived at the landing zone.

Beck glanced at the console, worried, and then gathered her paperwork to head toward final checklists for packing the craft up to reenter. She wouldn't get another chance online.

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They hit the reentry window perfectly. The heat and roar of the G-forces made thinking of anything else impossible. Beck battled the guidance control in front of her knowing she had less than a 2% ability at this stage. But, she could just never let it go. Fifteen more seconds and they broke through the atmospheric layer to reach the clear skies above Texas. The Lone Star state never looked so good. "Cowboy UP!" the four crew members all shouted out as they released a little of the tension from descending through the affectionately known "Dead Zone" of reentry. Beck quickly flipped the controls over to the jet portion of the craft and prepared to turn on the fuel tanks to fly the now free-falling craft home.

They landed in daylight hours of 15:30. Beck touched down the craft right on the money. The four members were hard-pressed to stay within the capsule knowing the med crews were clamoring to get to them first to check their stats. Beck slid the small metal panels back and looked out squinting at the brightness of their landing site. Even in full daylight, the glaring lighting the NASA crews brought out to aid the evening's shift was burning brilliantly. She bit the inside of her cheek. Somewhere out there was a woman she was falling in love with. Suddenly air was needed. She began to unbuckle the thirteen

straps and clips to prepare to disembark. Without mercy she commanded all to be prepared. "Houston, we are secure. Disembarkment will take place in ETA 2 minutes." Her crew began to holler in happiness. They all grinned at the mad woman, their leader. Houston had no options.

"Copy that Novak. Med teams will be standing by shortly."

Beck ignored the subtle hint and released the last buckle. She unclipped and carefully twisted the helmet from her head. Her ankle clamps were depressed and she was virtually a free woman to leave the ship. Jim and Karen were right behind her. Brian growled slightly and was up after a few moments.

Beck moved to the side door of the craft and looked out the small porthole. The outside layer of dirt and burn decay from reentry denied any visuals. She practically growled in frustration. A touch on her sleeve and she instantly calmed.

"She is out there Beck. You know it. So calm down and let's go meet her. We are all with you on this." Karen spoke softly but completely confidently. Beck nodded and found her smile again.

"Thank you, guys. You're three of the best. I wouldn't have flown this mission without any of you." Then she paused and looked over at Jim's beaming face. "Well maybe you, Jim, but..." The other three burst into laughter at his rolling eyes and pouting features. He was truly a queen in that macho space suit.

"Back at you, Colonel." Brian's low voice spoke volumes of friendship toward their fearless leader.

The door released making all four turn toward the unsealed pressure-lock as it hissed, being opened from outside. A thin tech dressed in a NASA suit appeared and grinned at them.

"Welcome home, Colonel and crew." His sunglasses protecting from the overhead glare, he briefly saluted and pushed open the door, then stepped back to allow them out of their home of the last 2.2 months.

Beck took a deep breath and tried to smooth the frown line running across her forehead. She stepped out to the small platform. Hesitating at the brightness, she turned to the tech and leaned toward him.

“My stars for your sunglasses, trooper?” He just laughed and handed over the shades.

“Thanks” Beck slid them on with a sigh of relief. She heard Karen asking him for his spare and his return chuckle.

She looked down three steps toward the tarmac and then followed the roped off area of the path that would lead her to the medic van. Her gaze swung sharply toward the small group of reporters taking shots. She stood on the platform searching as her gaze swung toward an even smaller group of family and relatives that were present to meet them. She saw two of her brothers and her mom were there and she smiled. Jim’s boyfriend was jumping and waving. *So much for the smooth and sophisticated doctor image.* She moved down to see Karen’s boyfriend and his six year old daughter. A black woman stood off to the side, her grin blatant as Beck watched her call out Brian’s name. The only other female was a tall olive skinned woman who stood looking back at her. Beck took the three steps off the platform and moved closer. Yes, she was definitely following her movements.

Beck felt her family’s eyes on her as she somewhat hesitantly moved down the walkway. They would pass beyond the interference of the reporters, but the roping allowed close enough contact to almost touch the family members. The Med Van could wait. She moved closer and waved to the reporters. They snapped shots of her and the others for a few minutes then asked a few questions. Karen, thankfully, took over commenting on the success of the mission. Beck moved further along to give her brothers and mom a hearty hello from a distance. She kept glancing down the way toward the lone woman and felt the hair on her nape standing on end as she watched the woman reach up and tuck a stray strand of hair behind her ear. Thick and heavy, the brown hair was filled with red highlights. Beck told her family she would catch up to them in less than an hour if they came

over to the med center. She blew her mom a kiss and moved down the line.

Her crew met up with their family members even as she moved down to stand before the silent woman at the end.

“T?” Beck grinned, she knew she looked goofy. Her hopes were riding high that this pretty woman would be the one she had spent months getting to know. A brief shy nod and those pretty lips widened to a smile. Beck drew in a breath as the pretty suddenly became beautiful. T had expressive eyes and shoulder length hair and a killer smile. Beck was totally enamored.

“Teresa Chanton, GS12, Assistant Director of NASA Cartography Department.” Her voice was melodic. Beck repeated the name over and over. She finally let the information sink in and began to chuckle. Starmapper was more than T’s, no Teresa’s yahoo nickname. The woman actually worked for NASA. This was funny. *Why hadn’t they ever met?*

Beck realized Teresa was waiting for something. Running a hand through her messed hair, she blurted out her own introduction. “Hello, Teresa. My name is Colonel Beck Garrett, NASA astronaut and pilot.” She watched as Teresa silently mouthed her first name. They smiled at one another across the three foot gap between them.

A slight clearing of a voice from behind startled Beck back from wherever she had just floated off to.

“Colonel? We need to get you on the Med Van and do a checkup,” a young tech prompted. Beck nodded slowly never taking her eyes from Teresa. “I’ll be right there.” Teresa dropped her silent regard and blushed as Beck’s eyes took a long leisurely stroll down her body and back up.

Around five-eight she stood taller than Beck, a trim form with the hint of a slightly athletic build in her arms and legs. Brown hair and eyes, high cheek bones, and a wide smile created a beautiful face. Beck’s eyes moved down her neckline to find broad shoulders, full breasts and a flat waist. Teresa wore a blouse of light blue with a pair of

tailored black pants and loafers. She looked casual and sharp. Beck approved as her own smile widened.

Realizing she was on a timeline, she met those brown eyes once more and winked flirtatiously.

“I need to take care of some things and won’t be able to get back with you for about three hours. Can we meet? Can we go somewhere and talk? I would really like to spend some time with you.”

Beck looked over at the Med Van and noticed Karen was motioning to Beck to come on. Teresa’s slight shifting caught the corner of her eye. She looked back.

“I’ll meet you at the Oceanside Café. It’s at the north gate exit about 1 mile down on the left.” Beck nodded and smiled again.

“Can’t wait!” She backed away from the ropes and grinning like an idiot, she turned to make her way to the van. She could feel those brown eyes watching her walk away.

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A cup of coffee turned into a three-hour talk to catch up between the long distant friends. Beck and Teresa began to fill in the spaces in their backgrounds. They spoke to each other about things they had both left out and now wanted to expand on. If Beck realized nothing else that night, she realized Teresa was interesting enough to want to know more. Before the evening ended they had set up another time and place to continue where they left off.

One week later, after spending four evenings together, Teresa stepped into Beck’s space and kissed her cheek to say goodnight. Beck stood still, knowing she wanted more, but suddenly afraid to ask. Teresa leaned back and looked at Beck quizzically. Their eyes met and the message from one to the other was clear. Teresa gave a small smile as she caressed Beck’s cheek with her index finger. Taking advantage of their shared intimacy, Beck leaned forward and kissed Teresa on the lips. At first a light kiss, it soon lengthened as they both held on to the moment. Hands reached out to touch each

other as they moved closer. Teresa and Beck shared soft kisses, which were followed by a long deep kiss that had them both tingling with arousal. Beck found her hands moved of their own accord to wrap themselves around Teresa to pull her closer. The full press of their bodies together had Beck floating in a cloud of passion. Feeling on the edge of being out of control, she stepped back away from their embrace to take in a few deep breaths. Teresa was doing the same.

“I love your touch,” Teresa murmured as she watched intently. Beck gathered her senses. As soon as she felt a little more in control she stepped closer to the other woman.

“I could get used to touching you.” Beck smiled and leaned in to gently kiss Teresa once more. They shared the soft kiss, recognizing it for what it meant. It was a promise to share the space between their hearts.