

The Adventures of B.J. Craft

By Michael J. Allen

Episode Two: Imaginary Frenemies

Soft leather and strategic feathers almost covered dark skin easily Spanish, Native American or Mayan. Thick hair fell across her bare chest, hung with gold and silver trinkets that matched biceps cuffs and bracelets.

“Very unprofessional, BJ,” She repositioned the fold of her arms for maximum coverage. A mixed accent slid from amused lips like exotic silk. “Dressing me in nothing and hoping my hair might expose even more? It’s adolescent.”

“Who are you?” BJ asked.

“Don’t you know?” She canted her head. “Didn’t you create me?”

He let the word ‘create’ run laps around his brain. He looked at the odd burn on his forearm. The woman before him was and was not the antagonist that had been forming in his mind, growing into a life of her own behind a tapping cursor.

“I created you?”

She smirked. “More or less.”

“You’re the antagonist from my new book.”

“Much more.”

She sashayed toward him, but he backed away until his shoulders pressed against the stone wall he’d kissed just before the hallucination appeared.

“You’ve got a very...,” she licked her lips, insinuating herself closer and closer, “...fertile imagination.”

“This doesn’t make sense, I mean I’ve called my characters imaginary friends, but—”

“Oh, darling, I’m not quite imaginary.” Her hand slid down across the front of his short.

BJ’s eyes widened. He sidestepped before her hand descended too far down. “You’re real. I can feel you.”

She shrugged. “Isn’t that what you’ve always wanted? For your characters to *feel* real?”

Okay, hold on. I kissed the priest. I got a shock. I’m in shock. This isn’t real. It’s some sort of sleep deprivation dream, kind of like Delirious meets Weird Science.

“If you’re done trying to make sense of this plot twist, I’d like to wear something a little less likely to draw attention,” she said.

“You’re imaginary or a dream, no one else can see you,” BJ said.

She smirked. “If you say so.”

She flourished her arms like some old episode of I Dream of Genie. Tight shorts and sandals replaced feathers and leather. A light floppy hat and cotton blouse shielded her bikini-clad torso from too much sun.

She slid a pair of sunglasses onto her nose. “We should go to the gift shop. You need to run that burn under some cool water, unless you want me to kiss it to make it feel better.”

“No, don’t touch me right now.” He glanced at the quill. *That makes sense. Coconut butter or some aloe might help too.*

“Maybe later?”

Heat flashed up from his gut. “What is it with you? I wanted a competent villain, not some oversexed tart.”

“You don’t know what you wanted, BJ. That’s why it took so long for me to come into focus. You wanted a competent antagonist capable of almost besting your hero. Here I am: smart, resourceful and cunning enough to use everything in my arsenal to win.”

“No, I did not picture you this beautiful.”

“BJ, all your female characters are beautiful. It’s one of your shortcomings—just like Last Action Hero.” She patted his cheek.

He jerked away.

“You’d rather I was one of those women? A California Blond?” She pouted. A flip of her hair later she wore a Baywatch outfit barely restraining her newly expanded attributes. She cocked her head, rippling the thick waves of golden blond hair and popped her gum. “Like, Oh. My. God. Will you be happy with your miracle already and decide who I’m, like, supposed to be so we can tend that arm?”

She flounced out of the ruin toward the gift shop. BJ followed not quite sure when the dream would end. She led him into the gift shop, slipping in through a closing door. He found her standing beside the men’s room. “Shall I come in and help?”

“No!” Heads turned toward him. He lowered his voice. “No, stay out here and, well, maybe go away.”

She flipped her hair. “Oh my God, just like a man. You finally do what he wants, and he doesn’t appreciate it.”

BJ watched her flounce back into the gift shop. He eyed the men she passed, but none seemed interested in her. *As if they can’t see her. She has to be in my head. I mean, if they could see her, they’d look. Damn that is one fine made to order—*

He glanced up to find her eyes fixed on his. A small smile curled her lips. “You’re not so bad yourself.”

BJ went into the bathroom and ran the cold water over his arm. It wasn’t very cold, more barely cooler than lukewarm, but it eased the stinging a bit. He patted it dry and returned to the gift shop. His antagonist, whatever her name, wasn’t visible. He picked up a quadruple price tube of aloe sunburn cream and went outside to find Toni. He rubbed the aloe into his arm, meandering around the ruin, but he didn’t see the little tour guide anywhere.

Crap. At least my horse is still here.

BJ reacquainted himself with his mare and pulled out the tour brochure Toni’d given him. The tour route map wasn’t very detailed, but he oriented it to the ruins and nudged his horse forward. A slow trot took them along the tour path through more islands of exotic wildlife and old stones—some too weather worn to be more than rocks atop one another. He’d barely reached one of the tour guide alcoves when the sound of men arguing about something brought his attention back up the trail.

“You should probably gallop, BJ.”

He found his antagonist atop a grey sorrel once more an exotic Central American beauty, but in British riding attire. Gold and opal earrings hung like overripe fruit from her ears.

“I thought you were gone.”

“Gone shopping,” she gestured to her ears. Her sorrel slid up beside his, but his mare didn’t seem to notice. “Like them?”

“So what. Another costume change.”

She slipped a hand into the pocket of his shirt, bringing out a matching bracelet. “Not exactly. You really should consider galloping up the trail now.”

BJ patted his pockets finding more jewelry and various souvenirs in his cargo shorts. “What the hell?”

She shrugged. “Antagonist.”

“Imaginary antagonist.”

She licked her lips. “Guess they’re not going to have anyone but you to blame then, heeyah!”

She galloped up the trail. BJ wheeled his mare, glancing after her and back toward the approaching men.