

# **A Badfeller's Tale by Christina Engela**

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First Edition

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## **Foreword**

“A Badfeller's Tale” is a short story providing a glimpse into the life and background of one of the main characters of the Quantum Series – Gary Beck, a.k.a. *Beck the Badfeller* – set just before “Black Sunrise”, the first book in that series!

I sincerely hope you enjoy reading it as much as I did writing it!

Best regards,

Christina Engela

## **A Badfeller's Tale**

Imagine, if you will:

Beck the Badfeller was perhaps one of the more well-known personalities on Deanna, a small third-rate colony world on the outskirts of Human civilization – in fact, his name was known further and wider across the territories of the Terran Empire than people on Deanna who were widely considered ‘more important’, such as the Planetary Governor, for instance – whatever *his* name was. Beck the Badfeller was already a legend in law enforcement circles, despite his youth, and the fact that he wasn't dead yet.

The man who belonged to that name currently sat under a well-worn cowboy hat at a small table in the far corner of a dimly-lit, cozy little bar called “The Shock Diamond” – and his name was actually Gary. His last name *was* Beck – ‘Badfeller’ was a moniker that just sort of followed him around, like a professional handle – and one that got screwed on at the last minute.

People in his profession tended to employ professional names that added to their PR image, and made them sound intimidating and capable, and it was much the same with our friend Gary

Beck – although the *real* reasons why he was called ‘the Badfeller’ had little to do with being a bad man, or even a dangerous man. *Although*, our friend Gary philosophized while taking another sip from the neck of his third fresh, chilled cold one – an almost daily ritual, he *was* dangerous – but just to the *right* sort of people. Or, was that the *wrong* sort of people? An amused little smile played on his lips as he remembered the true origins of his professional handle, and made a habitual check with his right hand for his sidearm. The 10mm Jupina Black semi-automatic pistol was right there where it was supposed to be – in the holster on his belt. The pressure of it against his side was, as always, reassuring. Not that he’d killed many people with it, he asserted mentally – he’d *shot* some, but just those he felt deserved it. Beck the Badfeller prided himself on his clear conscience the same way some people prided themselves on their new curtains, or a shiny new hydrogen-powered sports car in the driveway... it meant he got more sleep at night.

What was Gary Beck, aka Beck the Badfeller’s profession? He was a bounty hunter – and the very best on Deanna! His hard work and his work-ethic had paid off, because at something just over thirty years old, his solid reputation said so – and it also said that he was so good at his job that he could find the missing day in a leap year!

The “Shock Diamond” was a cozy little bar in Lugaluru, a northern suburb of Atro City. It tended to be frequented by average clientele, just the average Janes and Joes who came in for an after work drink with a few mates, before heading home to make dinner. It was evening, and a few solitary, silent, private types – not too unlike him, were already there drinking alone – and would be there, probably until closing time. The place got its name from the intense little blue diamond shape that would appear in the flare of a rocket engine at lift-off. Quite interesting, he thought, taking a seat at the bar – not many people knew that. Not many people even cared, really, since the only rocket engines they still saw were in old movies or one or two surviving relics of the rocket era that might be seen still, on display at the spaceport. Anti-grav, EM-drive and warp drive were the current modes of propulsion for all things vehicular and spacified – except for jeepo’s of course.

The bar-top of the ‘Diamond, which was across the room from Gary, was a nice shiny aluminum coated with some kind of mica, which helped in keeping it nice and clean and scratch-free – which it was, except for one or two bullet holes that happened to match certain similar features in the wall behind the bar. Those had originated from that *other* incident at karaoke night a few years back. He chuckled as someone amused by flashbacks of memory, and enjoyed another sip from his bottle. The jukebox was playing something slow and depressing softly in the background. It made an excellent backdrop for his deep thoughts.

As a bounty hunter, he’d benefited no end from the name! He often thought that “Beck the Badfeller” sounded more like a highwayman than a bounty hunter and friend to law enforcement! Hell, a little poetic license didn’t hurt, and neither did the publicity. “*Okay*,” he admitted, taking another gulp from the neck of the bottle, looking back, it was kind of funny, in a weird kind of way!

Nobody bothered him there. That’s what was nice about the ‘Diamond – people left each other alone. And alone he was – and he didn’t mean at the table just then either.

Thoughts about relationships began to roam his thoughts again. Gary was single, and had been for quite some time now. His most recent romantic interest hadn't quite worked out the way he wanted it to – Peg was far too career-oriented and, well, she was a good friend and likely to remain so for the long term – which wasn't exactly a bad thing. There were no other likely candidates currently in Gary Beck's life. *Sip*. Lonely? Well, he supposed. He had no family left, after all – and he didn't mean just here on Deanna. Anywhere. Oh, there were a few second and third cousins floating around somewhere on other colonies, far away and out of touch – but no siblings, and his parents had died years ago.

He'd considered getting a pet for company, but his line of work tended to cast doubt on the wisdom of such an enterprise... a bird in a cage or a fish in an aquarium would be depended on him to feed and care for it – and he was sometimes away on business for days at a time. Aside from the obvious apprehension to coming home after several weeks to strange smells, the notion of a companion starving to death in his absence reviled him. Perhaps he should get a dog, something that could be taught to follow him everywhere – perhaps even be a comrade-in-arms, like Snowy or Rintintin? Er, *no* – considering the local crabbygrass, the unlucky pooch would probably follow him on a job and get mauled, or run away and never be seen or heard from again! *Sip*. He chuckled wryly – *yes*, never – except for strange tales appearing in local papers about a disheveled dog-like creature last spotted swinging through high tree branches, shrieking and giggling all nervous-like! Most locals – especially farmers, or those who left the cities of Deanna often – tended to wear safety shoes because of the small vicious indigenous creatures that bore a weird resemblance to clumps of grass! No. It seemed Gary Beck was going to be alone for some time yet. He may as well get used to it, and start enjoying it.

Speaking of Peg... He'd been round to the station late that afternoon to drop off a prisoner and to collect a bounty, and seen her there. Peg was the local Sheriff, very good at her job – sort of like him, he mused. Sheriff Peggy-Ann Muller... his "finder's fee" she called it – and then berated her *noobiest* deputy for asking Beck the Badfeller for his autograph. The slap upside the back of the young man's head had been funny though.

Beck the Badfeller had a very good working relationship with the local Sheriff's Office Department and deputies (S.O.D.'s for short) – and that was just it – a *working* relationship. *Sip*. Oh, they were friendly, and Peg had invited him along to office parties and year-end functions for the last three years running. He even accompanied their SOD bowling team, even though he really sucked at bowling! Yup, as far as Peg was concerned, Beck was definitely in the 'friend zone'! He took another hit from the bottle, and chuckled.

At least there was always work on Deanna – he'd got another job from Peg while he was downtown, lined up for the next day. Matter of fact, he already had a couple of leads on the location of his latest customer – who as it turned out, had never been the brightest bulb on the Saturnalia tree anyway, and considering what he'd been jailed for – putting the escaped con back in Lulu Pen would be a public service.

"Yeah." Gary murmured to himself, taking another deep sip from his almost-depleted cold one. "I'm a real sodding superhero!"

Gary drained the last of his drink and gently laid the carcass on the table in front of him. He pondered what he wanted to do next. His routine – if he actually *had* such a thing – was to go home after his cold one, and warm up a meal-pack. “TV-dinners” they used to be called, Gary remembered, and smiled. He hadn’t a TV – and anyway, for a number of years, “home” had been a trailer park in Lugaluru – in a self-propelled trailer with a blown drive unit. *So much for ‘self-propelled’*, he smirked. But it was *his*, along with his all-electric Jeepo and all they contained – which wasn’t terribly much. And it was home, Gary reasoned with a measured amount of bitterness – where he could stumble in whatever time he wanted, and where nobody could object if he felt like walking to the loo at 3AM, naked.

“Time to go home, Beck, you bastard!” Gary told himself, and stood up to go. He waved at the barman in passing en route to the door. “Later, Alf!”

“See yer, Gary.” The barman waved back. “Be safe!”

“Happy trails.” Gary grinned before the door swung closed behind him. His jeepo was parked right outside, facing the kerb, and he started walking towards it.

It was night outside and the surrounding street and buildings were moderately lit, not as brightly as in the center of town. Lugaluru after all, was nothing if not demure. “*At least, on the outside.*” Gary chuckled to himself, remembering that the city’s only legal red-light district wasn’t too far away from the ‘Diamond. He paused to look up – Deanna’s two moons, *Dong* and the much smaller and far shinier *Ding* were already high in the sky doing their impression of Phobos and Deimos again. Gary suddenly sensed something brushing around his feet – and looked down at the little clumps of pseudo-grass darting around them, trying viciously to ravage his lowermost appendages. Crabbygrass!

“Sod off!” Gary berated the nasty little green grass-like creatures – a peculiar local life-form that was neither wholly plant, nor entirely animal, and in a confusing sort of way unrelated to either. One paused in trying to eviscerate his left boot, and turned its little eyes on stalks to look up, snapping little pincers and shaking little seed-pods at him in a threatening manner.

Not wishing to end his otherwise pleasant day with unpleasantness, Gary took a couple of big steps away, and left the small herd of snapping-mad, vicious little vermin behind. He quickly reached his jeepo and clambered in behind the wheel. It felt cold inside, and the seat felt almost moist to the touch. “*Safe?*” He pondered, patting his keys for the pockets, frowning. He found them and started the drive, and began to head towards home – the street lights showing him the way. Safety, after all, wasn’t in his line of work! Gary had already lost count of all the times he’d been shot at or almost killed in various interesting ways just in doing his job! No, *safety* was what he gave to other people.

As Beck the Badfeller drove slowly and casually towards home, he wondered what the next day would bring. What lay on the other side of “today”? The answer, he realized, would likely be “more of the same”. Only if he were really lucky, he thought rather fatalistically. Of course, the only way to really know, was to find out the old-fashioned way – by getting there.

Read the Quantum Series to follow the story, starting with “Black Sunrise”!

###

Thank you for reading my book! If you enjoyed it, won't you please take a moment to leave me a review at your favorite retailer? I also welcome your thoughts about my book, and you may send these to me at [christinaengela@gmail.com](mailto:christinaengela@gmail.com)

Thanks!

Christina Engela

### **About the Author**



Christina Engela is one of South Africa's most unique and skilled storytellers, having written 13 novellas in three science fiction series, and also several non-fiction titles. Best known for her realistic characterization and for casting fully-fleshed-out LGBT characters in leading roles, Christina brings her wealth of personal experience to each of her stories. With several new offerings already in the pipeline, including several standalone titles, 2020 is bound to be a busy year for her fans!

You can find out more on [ChristinaEngela.net](http://ChristinaEngela.net).

If you would like to read more about Christina's life and experiences, please visit <https://christinaengela.com> or <http://christinaengela.net> for more information.

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