

Aquatic Equestrianism

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Aquatic Equestrianism

by [trascendenza](#)

Summary

Merpeople AU. Wherein Gus is a modest merman, Shawn is determined to ride a dolphin, and interviewing a sperm whale isn't as easy as it sounds.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

"Gus, I don't understand why you *insist* on wearing that hideous shirt." Shawn said, casting a disdainful glance at Gus' wakame-stitched kelp top as they got into the fast-tide commuter lane towards the office. The bright green color clashed horribly with Gus' orange-scaled tail. "It's a crime against our people."

Shawn's chest, on the other hand, was quite bare except for the tiny molluscan shells he'd placed over his nipples to, as he'd put it, "leave a little something to the imagination." It was universally agreed that they did no such thing.

Gus crossed his arms over his chest, which was rather an awkward proposition while swimming, but then again, Gus had always been good at looking indignant while in motion. "I am a modest merman, Shawn. This is how I preserve my modesty. And you're one to talk. I mean, really, what kind of merman doesn't *fish*? It's a biological imperative written into our *genetic code*."

"Gus, you know how I feel about massacring innocent animals. Especially when I can talk to them."

"Shut up, Shawn. You do not speak fish."

"I'll have you know I'm fluent in not three, but *four* dialects. I also speak whale and dolphin like a native."

"So you're telling me you have little nasal airsacs underneath your blowhole which allow you to make burst-pulsed sounds, clicks and whistles?"

Shawn blinked, and it was clear that his brain had taken the words 'airsac,' 'blowhole' and 'burst-pulsed' wildly out of context and he was getting stuck in an infinity loop between "slightly aroused" and "grossed out." His expression was conflicted. "I honestly have no response for that."

Gus rolled his eyes. "It's basic physiology, Shawn. There is simply no way that you could speak any of those languages without having the complementary physical structures in place to support the communication."

"Well, I can't see how you would know that unless *you* were a dolphin, whale, or a sweet little ocellaris clownfish -- of course, if you were one of those, you'd really have to step up your game on the whole 'anemone' pronunciation thing, wouldn't you? -- but you are none of those things, therefore your argument is invalid and I automatically win."

"Whatever, Shawn. You couldn't echolocate your way out of a tidepool and we both know it."

"Or maybe it's the *tidepool* that can't echolocate its way out of *me*. Did you ever think of that?"

Gus sighed.

*

"Clicky clack clooky clook?" Shawn said, swimming up to the dolphin slowly.

"This is a terrible idea." Gus said, hanging back.

"C'mon, Gus. Look at that face. Look at how's he grinning at me."

"Their faces are stuck like that, Shawn. That's just how they look."

"Don't be such a party-pooper. Their faces are stuck like that because they're always *happy*, and secretly wish that someone would come ride them."

"You are outta your damn mind if you think that dolphin wants to be ridden."

"I don't think, Gus." Shawn said. He put a fist over his heart. "I *know*."

"And I *know* he isn't smiling at us. That's blood on his snout, Shawn, not snausages."

"Gus, don't be the tiny fish that cleans the freakishly large teeth of the bigger fish. Live a little. Clearly this guy had a great calamari lunch earlier, maybe one of those little flambéed cnidarians on the side, and a swim around the peninsula with yours truly is just what the doctor ordered."

"*Click click*," the dolphin said ominously, opening its mouth, displaying lots of shiny, white teeth. It began to swim towards them.

"Uh, Shawn," Gus said, backpedaling, fin working rapidly.

"Yes, Gus?" Shawn said, not far behind him.

"That's a young *orcinus orca*, isn't it?"

Shawn looked into the gaping mouth. "There's an eighty-eight percent chance the answer to that question is yes."

"What's the other twelve percent?"

"A bottlenose with an orthodontic fetish?"

Gus gulped. "We're going to die, aren't we?"

The orca grinned at them.

Their screams echoed out across the water like whalesong, except pretty much the opposite of melodic, harmonic or beautiful (plus, Gus had had some dairy that morning, so he was sounding a little pitchy).

"Swim like the current, Gus! Swim!" Shawn screamed, flapping his tail furiously.

"If that orca doesn't get you, Shawn, I will. Dolphin sanctuary, my ass!"

*

"You tried to ride another orca, didn't you," Juliet said, shaking her head.

"It's stupid that they're considered dolphins!" Shawn said, cringing as she applied the antibiotic to his cuts. "They give cetaceans everywhere a bad name."

Lassiter cruised in on a porpoise, looking smug. "Too bad you're not a real detective, Spencer. I spent three weeks in rookie training camp learning how to subdue and ride every aquatic mammal out there, up to and including Humpbacks." He leaned closer. "And let me tell you - there is nothing more satisfying than looking a Humpback in the eye and making it say 'daddy.'"

Juliet gave Lassiter her *sometimes I worry about you* look.

Shawn just gave him the *yeah, that's about the level of creepy I've come to expect from you* look. "Does this story end with you having a tiny whale-baby? I'm going to be disappointed if it doesn't."

"Joke all you want, Spencer," Lassiter said, sitting back up and grabbing the reins. "I've got a porpoise and you don't."

He grinned, giving them a cheerful wave goodbye as he cruised off.

*

"You're gonna need a bigger boat!" Shawn cried, flailing wildly. "No, little Tommy, Shamu is not your friend! No, not the bucket, don't handfeed -- oh, the humanity!"

"A boat?" Vick asked. "Does a boat have something to do with our case?"

Gus swam forward. "What Shawn is trying to say is that we believe it was an orca who committed the crime, not a merperson."

Shawn stopped flailing. "And might I add, Chief, that's quite a pair of flattering shells you're wearing today."

"Dude, are you *trying* to get us kicked off the case?" Gus hissed, elbowing him.

Vick crossed her arms over her shells (which were quite nice, a sort of mottled peach-cream pattern), raising an eyebrow. "As a matter of fact, Mr. Spencer, you may not. What you *may* do is bring me in some hard evidence to support your theories, otherwise I'm going to have to cut you loose."

"Please let me do the cutting," Lassiter said, but she glared him into silence.

"It wouldn't hurt to re-check the autopsy," Juliet said. "There were some irregularities."

"All right," Vick said. Then she leaned over the coral formation that served as her desk and pointed at Shawn. "But if I get even the slightest hint that you're doing this as part of your fruitless attempts to ride an aquatic mammal, I will slap an obstruction of justice charge on you so fast you won't know what hit you."

"Chief," Shawn said, raising a hand to his chest. "That wounds me. That would be a criminal waste of department time, resources and those little urchin snacks you spring for every Monday, which, by the way? Delicious and oh-so-crunchy. I assure you, I would never do such a thing."

"See that you don't," she said, and then waved her hand. "Dismissed."

*

"Look at that. Isn't that a beautiful sight to behold?" Shawn gestured at Buzz's back, which was devoid of any garments. He was just a long stretch of skin from his neck down to where his blue scales started mid-hips. "There's a merman who knows how to work it."

Buzz looked over his shoulder, beaming, like one of those fish that dangled a headlight from its antenna. "Gee, thanks, Shawn!"

Gus rolled his eyes. "Yeah, 'cause I wanna follow the example of the guy who always talks in exclamation marks."

"Gus, we've discussed your over-active imagination before --"

"Actually, Shawn, Gus is right! I do always talk in exclamation points!" Buzz led them to the hole above the interrogation cave. "I learned it at a seminar called Exclaim Your Way to Happiness! It really changed my life!"

"That explains a lot," Gus said under his breath.

"Of course, I realize that my way isn't for everyone!" Buzz grinned. "Though I'm going to have to go with Shawn on this one, Gus, I think you'd look really great without a shirt!"

"Uh-uh," Gus said, his scales flushing a burnt umber, which either meant he was blushing or going mottled with annoyance. The look he gave Shawn was indicating the latter. "This conversation is over."

Buzz just shrugged jauntily (even his shrugs had exclamation marks at the end of them, it was weird), moving aside the seaweed sheet that served as the door to the interrogation observation nook.

"Two against one, Gus, I'm afraid we win." Shawn said. "Time to let those glorious nips out to see the light of day."

"Go ahead, Shawn. Keep right on sexually harassing me. See how far you can push me before I revoke naptime privileges effective immediately." Gus crossed his arms, raising his eyebrow like a challenge. "Maybe indefinitely."

Shawn gasped, scales going a shocked mauve. "You wouldn't."

"Try me."

"He looks pretty serious, Shawn!" Buzz advised, clapping Shawn on the back.

"As an oxygen tank on empty," Shawn sighed. Gus, smiling triumphantly -- shirt firmly and, if you asked him, stylishly in place -- turned to watch the interrogation.

*

"All right, Shawn," Gus said, gesturing broadly at the Sperm whale that according to Buzz had been present at the crime scene when the body was discovered. "Time to do your thing."

Shawn cleared his throat. A lot. He followed that up with a few gargling noises, some yodeling, and a few Yak mating calls. Finally, he settled on singing under his breath, *oh, I do like to be beside the seaside, oh, I do like to be beside the sea.*

"Shawn!" Gus said, smacking him on the shoulder.

"Gus!" Shawn said, smacking him back. "Dude, it's a process. A little breathing room, please."

Gus rolled his eyes, but floated back a bit. Shawn was about halfway through the *Greatest Album* hits when Gus hit him again and he said, "fine, fine."

He floated closer to the whale's face which, from their perspective, wasn't so much a face as an enormous marshmallow-y expanse. And a giant, unblinking eye staring at them.

Shawn raised his hands, hovering his index fingers over his temples.

"DooOOooO yooooOooOOooou knoOOOooow aaaaaAAaanythiiiiing aaaaAAAabout theEEee maaaAAan whoOOo waAAaas kiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiIIIIiiiiilled?" Shawn asked.

The whale looked at them, ponderously.

"You have got to me joking me. All you're doing is elongating your vowels and modulating your volume." Gus raised a judgmental eyebrow (a Burton Guster specialty). "And not very consistently, I might add."

"I'm in the zone, man, stop hating on my flow." Shawn said, shooting Gus a glare over his shoulder.

"Pff."

Shawn looked back at the whale. "CaaaaAAAn yooooOooOOooou teEEeel uuuUUUuUus aaaaaAAaanythiiiiing aaaaAAAabout theEEee kiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiIIIIiiiiiller?"

The whale just sat there, in its giant non-responsive marshmallow way.

Shawn tilted his head. "I see that it's time to bring out the big guns."

"Do I even want to know what that means?" Gus said, looking on skeptically.

"MEEEEEEOOOOOOOOUUUUUGGGGGGGGGHHHHHHHEAAAAAAAAAAIIIIIIIEEE EEEEEEUOOOOOOOOOOGHA," Shawn honked.

"Okay, now you're just speaking dyspeptic goose. Can we go interview something that'll actually talk back now, please?"

Shawn pointed at the whale's eye, and then back at his eyes, fingers in a "v" shape. "You and me, buddy, we're far from done." He repeated the gesture, more dramatically this time. "*Far* from done."

*

"Jules, I'm going to need to requisition --"

"No."

"But you don't even know what --"

"It doesn't take a psychic to figure out, Shawn."

"All right, well how about a --"

"Chief already turned you down, remember? I was there."

"At least let me have a --"

"Not gonna happen."

Shawn's eyes narrowed. "Fine, you wanna be a meanie-pants thunder stealer? Is that how we're playing it today?" He crossed his arms over his chest. "If you're so psychic, what am I thinking about right now?"

Juliet glanced up from the tablets she'd been reading, considering. "Cupcakes."

"That was a freebie, doesn't count." He crossed his arms higher, raising his chin. "How about now?"

She went back to reading. "What's underneath my seashells."

"Okay, but what about *now* --"

"What's underneath Gus' seaweed." She arched a brow. "Are we done here?"

"Okay, that?" Shawn held up both his hands, index fingers pointed upwards, and swirled them around indignantly. "Totally not how this is supposed to work."

Juliet smiled a secretive smile as she flipped the tablet over. "Was there anything else?"

"If I just ordered *half* --"

"Goodbye, Shawn."

He sighed, seeing that she was immovable. He threw a reproachful look at her over his shoulder and swam off, in search of a cupcake.

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"Duuuuuuude," Shawn said. "Paydirt."

"Let me guess," Gus said, giving him a look. "The police have been working on this case all week, and you look in one evidence box for two seconds and figure it out?"

"Pretty much, yeah." Shawn held up the pamphlet he'd just found. Then he let it go in Gus' general direction and it floated over, slowly.

Gus snatched it out of the water, reading it. "Hey, this is the same thing you used to get me out to that dolphin sanctuary place last --" He frowned, "oh, *hell* no." He shook his head vehemently. "No. I don't care if Triton himself comes down here and tells me to do it, I'm not going back there."

"Are we calling him Triton now? I was always partial to Neptune, myself. Gutsy, naming yourself after a planet, but I'll give it to him. I think it's the trident that really sells it."

"Uh, no, they named the planet after *him*." Gus said.

"I've heard it --"

"I am not discussing the Grecian pantheon with you right now, Shawn." Gus waved the pamphlet, his expression dripping disapproval. "We are not going back here."

"But Guuuuus --"

"Uh-uh. No. No way, no how. Not gonna happen, Shawn."

*

"I cannot believe I let you talk me into this," Gus said, swimming behind Shawn and looking at the darkened waters with suspicious eyes. He had covered himself from head to fin in seaweed in an effort to blend in.

("Dude, you look like the swamp thing. That is the least subtle thing ever.")

"Yeah, but orcas don't like seaweed, now do they? We'll see who's laughing when he eats your non-camouflaged ass up.")

"And I can't believe *you're* scared of a little dolphin."

"Please. You were swimming away just as fast as I was."

"Gus. I am ninety-nine point two six five four percent sure that my joke theory is the answer to solving this case, if not the actual answer, and we're never going to figure out why our victim came here if we don't snoop around."

"Snoop all you want, Shawn. The second I see a bloodthirsty smiling cetacean face I'm outta here."

A shadow fell over Gus' face and the ambient temperature dropped forebodingly.

"Shawn?" Gus said, gulping.

"Yeah, buddy?"

"It's hovering right over me, isn't it?"

Shawn's voice was small. "Don't be mad."

"Tell my mom I love her," Gus said.

In tandem, they cautiously looked up.

The orca, with a glint of hungry recognition, looked back at them. Grinning.

*

"You guys!" Juliet swam over quickly, her hair flowing out behind her like a giant blond ribbon. "What happened?"

"I solved the case," Shawn croaked.

"And nearly got us killed in the process!" Gus said, and then he went back to doubling over from swimming-at-the-speed-of-light-induced asthma.

"But I *solved* it," Shawn ground out. Both of them were covered in scratches, and Shawn's hair was even more of a wild mess than usual.

Juliet blinked, taking another look at his head. "Oh my God, Shawn, your hair --"

Shawn held up a hand. "Please. Don't."

"Shamu didn't like his haircut," Gus laugh-wheezed. "That's what you get, Shawn. Hope it was worth it."

Shawn brought his hand up to cover the large bald spot on the left side of his head. His frown was completely non-ironic and his eyes were a little haunted. "Honestly, Gus? I'm not entirely sure that it was."

*

"...and he was training killer orcas so he could, I don't know," Shawn waved his hand listlessly. "Take over the oceans and rule them with an iron-fist, or something."

"I want my lawyer!" The bad-guy mastermind said, trying to get out of Lassiter's grip. His hideous puke-green scales only became more hideous with his continued struggling.

Lassiter hauled him off with a positively gleeful grin.

"Good work, Mr. Spencer," Vick said, giving him an approving nod.

"Yeah, thanks," Shawn said, but his smile was wan.

"Is there a problem?" She asked, giving them a quizzical look.

"Shawn's..." Gus waved his hand in the direction of Shawn's head. He was wearing a kelp beanie. "Having a bad hair month."

Shawn sighed, and opened his mouth like he was going to deliver some sort of volley, but then he shut it, not even bothering.

"I'm sorry to hear that," Vick said. Her lips curled a little like she was trying to suppress a smile. "Well, as a small token of our appreciation, the department has decided to include the two of you in our newest training seminar, led by our very own Detective Lassiter."

"That's nice," Shawn said lacklusterly.

Gus elbowed him. "Shawn! Show a little appreciation." He looked at Vick. "What, exactly, should he be showing appreciation for? This isn't going to be like that 'subduing a perp' seminar where Lassiter used us as punching bags, is it?"

"Most certainly not," Vick said, looking affronted. "And I'll be having a little chat with him about that as soon as we're done here. No, this seminar," she took out a pamphlet, loosing it in their direction, and Gus grabbed it when it had floated over, "is called 'The Basics of Aquatic Equestrianism.'" She smiled. "And, I promise. You will not be used as the mounts."

Shawn leaned towards Gus, whispering. "Equestrianism?"

"Riding aquatic mammals, Shawn," Gus whispered back.

"Like dolphins?"

"And *more*."

"Oh, Chief," Shawn clasped his hands together reverentially, his eyes shining like giant, sparkling marbles. He bumbled out some noises that sounded like a mix between his attempts at speaking whale and his attempts at speaking Croatian, with a little bit of "Gus just found that sweet spot underneath my scales" thrown in for good measure.

"What he means is, thank you very much."

"You're very welcome," she said. "Now, please, get him out of here before he starts drooling on the furniture."

*

PSYCH OUT.

3 months later.

Tony leaned over the ship's railing, looking out at the ocean with a sigh. This was the assignment from hell. Every single moment he could get up here, he did, fantasizing about

jumping into the water and just swimming his way back to shore.

He fell into a semi-meditative state after about ten minutes, thinking about home, the team, whether he'd ever see them again.

Then he saw dolphin jump out of the water and there was a -- a --

He blinked, and it was gone. The impression of purple scales, arms thrown high in victory and a great head of hair lingered.

"Losing it, DiNozzo," he muttered. Though he couldn't help thinking that had to be some really powerful hair gel to work underwater.

*

And, because I'm in this weird mood where I like including deleted scenes:

Naptime privileges.

"Gus."

"Mmm," Gus mumbled back sleepily. They were spooning on a bed of coral, Shawn propped up on his elbow and looking down at the drowsy Gus.

"Seriously, man, what did you just do to me? I think I saw dead people."

"Maybe if you'd paid more attention in anatomy class you'd be able to figure it out." Gus said. He held up his hand, wiggling his fingers. "That's why they call me Magic Fingers Guster."

"No one calls you that."

Gus turned, sliding his hand up Shawn's scales with a smug smile. "You will."

Exaggeration.

"Okay, so maybe I exaggerated about the speaking-all-aquatic-languages-fluently thing."

"Maybe?" Gus said, because they'd just promised the Chief they'd get something from "psychically communing" with the whale. "*Maybe?*"

"Okay, completely exaggerated. I'm sorry! I got caught up in the moment."

"That's great, Shawn, just great. You just had to go and say it in front of the entire department, didn't you? Now they're going to call us every time a *fish* witnesses a crime. Do you have any idea how much stuff you're going to have to pull out of your ass?"

Shawn thought about it for a moment. "And that's different from the other cases we work how, exactly?"

"You --" Gus stopped. "Huh. You have a point."

"See? Win-win. I get to practice my fish, we get more cases." Shawn smiled, patting Gus on the shoulder. "You're welcome."

Gus slapped his hand away. "Let's just get the damn interview."

Far from over.

"HelloooooOooooOoooOOOOooooooooOOOOOooooooooOOOoo. Oo. Ooo." Shawn said, his head craned back to look at the Sperm whale.

"Shawn," Gus said. "Give it up."

"Gus, I don't care how long it takes -- days, years, months, *lifetimes*, I am going to figure out some way to communicate with this giant marshmallowian --"

"IS THERE A REASON THAT YOU'RE SPEAKING LIKE AN IMBECILE?" A voice boomed, rolling like thunder. It vibrated the water so much that everything went blurry for a second and their teeth jangled.

Shawn -- after his ears stopped ringing, which took approximately ten minutes -- said, "Gus. I didn't just imagine that, did I?"

Gus' face was frozen in an expression of absolute and total horror. "I wish you had, Shawn."

"I'm sorry," Shawn screamed, his hands pressed against his ears. "But you speak *English*? Really?"

The whale sighed, which rippled the water all around them. "MY BRAIN WEIGHS EIGHT KILOGRAMS. OF COURSE I SPEAK ENGLISH." He seemed to preen for second. "NO ONE BOTHERED TO ASK."

"Oh, man, this is so awesome!" Shawn tail-shimmied. "First merperson to communicate with a whale, *what*."

Gus fist-bumped him, nodding and looking very pleased with himself. "We're gonna get plaques, Shawn, I know it. I'm gonna put mine up at the office right next to my honorary penguin certificate."

"Wow, so many questions, where to start," Shawn said. He placed his hands, clasped together, against his chin. "Well, here's one that's been burning at me for a long time --"

"Oh, no," Gus said, just now remembering the conversation they'd had last month wherein Shawn had regaled him for two hours with "if I could talk to x animal, this is

the first question I'd ask." None of them were good.

"-- where, exactly, does a sperm like you find an egg to impregnate? Really, what do you do, fertilize *planets*?"

Unfortunately for them, the whale began to chuckle like an earthquake. It threw them back about a hundred feet, wildly tumbling head over tail through the water.

"I hate you," Gus said, floating upside down. Bits of his completely-destroyed shirt were scattered around his face.

"Totally worth it," Shawn croaked.

End Notes

Just because, the whale's name is Barnelius Worthington III.

Works inspired by this one

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