



# SOLO

PHIL LEWIS

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A MIRROR NOVEL

by Phil Lewis

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## PHIL LEWIS

I started writing short stories when I was about ten. Yes...they were about robots and space ships. I loved the plots, twists and turns, enjoying the writing and then the reading of them.

I have always been creative, earning my living as an illustrator and designer – but always continued writing as a hobby.

Now I am retired, I can look back on my extensive collection of novels, plays and short stories and try to do something with them – hence my website (<http://www.phil-lewis.net/publications/ebooks.htm>) to which I will be adding anything worth reading over the course of the next few years.

If you like my work, please email me to tell me so ([publications@phil-lewis.net](mailto:publications@phil-lewis.net)). If you didn't – I'm sorry. No refunds.

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Take care.

**Phil Lewis**

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**SOLO**

## PART - 1 FORGOTTEN EMOTIONS

### A SNIFF

Sleep came easily. His blood was slowly diluted with Palcium B. Reducing his heart rate so low, it took a sophisticated machine to register it. The rest of his vital organs were compromised in their various ways with Teraton, Mangladese concentrates and, when absolutely necessary, Sophium. His body slowed down its metabolism, until it reached the required level. From now on the fluids would be carefully monitored and controlled. Each element of the body's cells checked and controlled by microscopic computers.

Riki Sena was in the Deep Sleep, his physical body cocooned in the metal, plastic and liquid sarcophagus. Alone, in the dark, his body slept.

Thin optic-venial probes remained imbedded in two hundred and twenty-two areas of his body. They drew measured amounts of fluid and replaced them with artificial chemicals. The body would know no difference, other than it was always feeling healthy. Muscular mass was stimulated by electrical impulses on a fluctuating time scale. Slowing their deterioration rate and stimulating the blood flow as necessary. Nail growth was reduced by venial extraction of measured traces of calcium, and three other minute elements of the man's particular physical composition.

At the base of his neck a large optical-neuron tap was grafted. This connection allowed the monitoring and controlling of the whole of the response areas of his body. More important, it was directly linked to his brain, monitoring and controlling nearly all the brain's activity. The other end of the tap was directly wired into the main computer.

For the long duration of this flight, the designers had thought the most practical way would be to disseminate the traveller's mind from the body. In Riki's brain the basal ganglia, regions of the forebrain, received the motor neurones from parts of the cortex, passing on impulses to the reticular formation. One of the functions was to provide inhibitory stimuli for the antagonistic control of muscle tone during slow movements. The computer monitored these functions and now replaced the human subconscious control.

The majority of sensory neurones carrying impulses to the cortex, terminate in the thalamus. Here the impulses are analysed and relayed to the appropriate sensory areas of the cortex, by neurones originating in the thalamus. This area is involved in the human perception of pain and pleasure. It acts as a processing, integrating and relay centre for all sensory information - like a switchboard in a past times telephone exchange. The thalamus is directly connected to, and controlled by, the Devon Corporation CoreTex implant.

The hypothalamus is the main co-ordinating and control centre for the autonomic nervous system. It receives sensory neurones from all the visceral, taste and smell receptors. It is used in the regulation and control of heart rate, blood pressure, ventilation rate and peristalsis. It initiates feeding, drinking and sleeping. Also, behavioural activities. In particular, aggression and reproduction. It monitors the metabolite and hormone levels of the blood as well as blood temperature. The pituitary gland, situated immediately beneath it, directs and controls the release of most of the hormones from the body and maintains the steady-state composition of the blood and tissues. This too was by-passed by synthetic neurone carriers and directly connected to the main computer.

The cerebrospinal fluid, contained in the central canal of the spinal cord, bathes the inside and the outside of the brain. Blood vessels lie within it for the supply of nutrients and oxygen to the nervous tissues and the removal of wastes. Ultra thin tubes penetrated two hundred and twenty-four areas, supplying the correct dosage of artificial CSF.

Riki Sena's body was encased in ParaFoam, which allowed the skin to breathe normally while being preserved and nurtured. Air was circulated around the restricted area, extracted, processed and recycled again. The air pocket was large enough for the full expansion of his chest, but little more. The ParaFoam was contained in the first of several homodermal casings. This fitted the body precisely. Embedded in this first casing was two thousand small thermaluid monitors and stimulating probes. These in turn passed through the three outer homodermal casings and were connected to the outer, coffin shaped, monocasing.

The final bodily connection was to the seven metre long omni junction. After that it was the domain of JOBE, the Fluideom computer. The total mass of Jobe was dispersed in two thousand, three hundred and nineteen separate areas. Each connected by three separate Opteom connection systems. Information travelled in both

directions faster than any human being had previously anticipated non-physical movement. All this speed was wasted on Riki Sena, as he was sleep. He'd been asleep for eighteen years, two months, six days, five hours and twenty-two minutes. Precisely.

Fluids were subtly changed and small stimulating pulses made the neural cortex active. Riki Sena was being awakened.

402023309002108003201023070065456400540054065404606064

*(I have found something interesting. Time to wake up.)*

Riki's response was slow in coming.

02120012030120302002501654400450707007

*(I'm here. Give me a moment.)*

1023201232102321023210232012320123320123320012302211020101202002503021201256202102010030  
2102320015200330102302210230210230210230210232012320012032102302102312002102102123520541  
05410240001204050025600254005540246005461002610251025620023420 .....

A stream of information began to emanate from Jobe. Riki's mind absorbed it all and analysed the computer's decision to 'stop-and-sniff' the lead. A small planet. Unknown and unnamed. The chemical compounds fell into the parameters of life support. Even a single, new amoeba would be worth the stop. Or so their masters had decreed.

002050204020306008050209050702206040220604

*(Shall we proceed with data collection?)*

2510013602180204191203198021602061502213060204192031650201620

*(Proceed with data collection probes one to five.)*

32014600302540030210200120320015622100300

*(Action commenced)*

Five pieces of the outside of the ship appeared to break away from the larger structure. They hung in space for three seconds before small gusts of gasses showed from their squared-off ends. They moved gracefully in a programmed arc that would take them to the planet's surface.

They were designed to endure anything unknown worlds could throw at them. Extreme heat and cold, polluted atmospheres, or caustic rain. The outside surfaces glowed in the heat of the light atmosphere. The buffeting on the hull was minimal. All the sensors remained working, as the five probes slid into the lower strata of the atmosphere.

Riki watched their progress and noted the peculiar colour of the moistened air. The telltales recorded every change in compound and temperature. These would be analysed in detail later. A mind-numbing job, he was pleased that Jobe would undertake on his own.

Riki chose one probe and concentrated on its progress. It slowed its decent in a violent braking motion and grounded to a halt. The optical equipment just showed a swirling ochre mist. Visibility was less than a metre. Riki switched to a series of colour band monitors and found that ultra violet gave the best view of this planet's surface. It looked derelict. Not the place to spend a Sunday afternoon. Craggy outcrops fell away to shallow valleys with rough sides.

32012032102302102302102302102302

*(Analysis commenced)*

A mass of information was being broadcast back to the mother ship. Jobe recorded it all and waited patiently for the sequence to finish. Riki panned the visual around for a full sweep of the surface. It looked identical, whichever way he looked at it. Even the toughest colonist would hate this place. He completed the sweep and waited.

1023201230210233021022302102320120322

*(Analysis completed)*

00213002130021642006420026

*(Bring them back.)*

0132012015201236500860

*(Confirmed.)*

Riki saw the ground fall away as the probe powered itself away from the low-gravity effect. He watched the skies clear into the black of space and saw the host craft ahead. Its bulky and unstreamlined structure belied the technology it held. The probe cruised closer. It slowed, docking itself to the side. Clamps locked it in place and connectors interfaced. Information continued to flow, as Job began to study the results.

32012032102302102302102302102302309518958937598015-015

*(Detailed Analysis commenced)*

Riki let his mind slip into another level. He held his thoughts there in an attempt to pass the time away. It was a well proven fact that the human mind, if left with nothing to do, will invent unreal scenarios that would appear real to the host. This was the path to madness. All deep space travellers were genetically restructured to avoid this most human of pitfalls - too much time to think. Riki had no idea of time and allowed Jobe to control the overall progress of the journey. Some time later, he was contacted again by Jobe.

10232012302102330210223021023201203224375-14354759859185985908590

*(Detailed Analysis completed)*

01200310021003100213002165

*(Results?)*

010201201203020508017022071069026603021801582055005401201200120204850039007680048001583004520150045500

*(Negative. There are no life forms of any description here. Sorry, Riki, waste of time.)*

012015650026002152015200152320015200220022

*(Pity. Where to next?)*

0120020154500150012369410265840022462102358400363581002241002520

*(I have a sniff of something. Should take only a couple of years. Agreed?)*

01201204182018601586005652005602025

*(How many years, exactly?)*

012012001552005254100553620005620

*(Eight years, two months and three days.)*

After a moment's pause for thought.

122100220120301001252

*(Agreed.)*

01200200265201254026980002103232100231005240036984003311023587002371032340123641003564101201892026398400248200452

*(Starting the DeepSleep sequence now. Any particular dream you would like, Riki?)*

012036581002354102560001524632

*(You choose. Something nice.)*

Fluids replaced fluids. Probes withdrew, or stimulated. The human brain began to slow its alpha waves. Riki had no recall after two minutes. He was going on another long journey, about which he would know nothing. A human passenger in an automated craft.

And during that time, he would dream.

## **FIRST MEETING**

The sun felt warm on his face. He slowly opened his eyes to the familiar world. Riki sat upright and eased himself off the lounge. He stood looking over the valley and enjoyed the sight of the green, lush, verdant countryside. He felt a gentle touch on his shoulder. He turned to see his companion. She was beautiful. She

was how he would describe his perfect woman. She was nearly two metres tall, very curvaceous, with large firm breasts. She had dark flowing hair and she stood before him, completely naked.

Her moist lips moved closer to his and they touched. There was a sparkle of almost electrical force, as her tongue touched his. The kiss became deeper and more insistent, as her hand found its way to his groin. A jolt of pure pleasure surged through his body. She sighed and began to release his now erect member from his flimsy clothing.

He eased her to the ground, sliding his fingers over her now erect nipples. The kiss grew more passionate and he knew he could not hold back much longer. His fingers moved down her flat stomach feeling the skin almost ripple beneath them. The satin smooth texture was a delight to the touch. His fingers moved lower and ran through the loose triangle of hair, to her secret lips. As he touched her further, she cried out softly. With an insistent, urgent movement, her body covered his, guiding his manhood into her. With a few early, urgent thrusts, she ensured he was deep inside her and then set up a slowly increasing rhythm.

He felt an intense feeling start in his groin, which rapidly spread towards his stomach. It climbed into his chest and he had trouble breathing. His breath came in gasps, as the intenseness of the pleasure almost took his breath completely away. Her voice was now gasping too, in rhythm with her pelvic movements. His hands caressed her breasts and with a gasp he took a nipple in his mouth. Her breasts were firm and resilient to his touch. He felt their weight against his hand as he gently chewed and climaxed uncontrollably. For seconds that lasted into a full minute, he felt the waves of pleasure take away all care and tension from his body. Her movements slowed, as she knew she had given him fulfilment to perfection.

She leant forward and kissed him gently one more time, before easing off and lying beside him. He quickly drifted into a comfortable sleep.

He slept lightly, aware of her warmth and smell next to him. At times she would stir in his arms and he would move to be more comfortable. He slept with his hand still cupped around one heavy bosom. After some time he found himself slowly surfacing and knew his rest was ending.

He opened his eyes and looked at the sky. It was cloudless and blue. Birds wheeled high over head. With a single thought command the scene changed to a mountainscape. The girl disappeared instantly and Riki sat up in his recliner. He'd no idea what the time was, or even the day. To name the date was out of the question. All he was aware of was that he was about to become bored again.

He picked up the glass of water and drank it slowly. It tasted like a cold beer, because that was what he wanted it to taste like. He lay back and commanded the news programme on Channel 34.

He experienced the world events on his mind screen for ten minutes, then turned off the image when it changed to off-world events. He stood up and had an unusual thought. He would go outside. At least it was something to do.

Riki stepped on to the balcony and looked over to the hillside, a few kilometres away. It was another familiar view, but one he could not change with CoreTex. He touched the base of his neck and felt the small hard implant and idly scratched the skin's surface. The implant was the new remote, top of the range model. Not surprising, as Riki had a father that could certainly afford these additional luxuries.

The sun was briefly shrouded in cloud and a light breeze brought lightly scented air from the hills. He was vaguely aware from the newscast that rain was due at midday today. Not that he cared, nor knew what time it was now. There were no damp patches anywhere, so it must be before noon.

Riki contacted the Core and allowed the requested rhythmic music to fill his ears. The sound came from no other source, than his own inner ear. He stood and watched the boring mountain while new and original music stimulated his senses.

The music was simply neural pulses that stimulated a specific area within his brain. The human response interpreted the stimulus and enhanced the response. The result was music that was inspired by the individual and composed instantly, as it played. Once the theme, or emotive content, was established, the mind would compose and please the listener for as long as required. Riki consciously changed the tempo and the subconscious provided the new music.

Further down the hillside, the blue road curved its way through the forest and out into the flat plain into the distance. Silent traffic intermittently flowed along this highway in both directions. Most of the cars looked the same. The standard three-seater Mots in their standard light blue. Occasionally, a bright coloured limousine caught Riki's eye. So far, none as large as the three they had in the underground garage, the doors of which were directly below him.

He leaned over the balcony rail and looked down at the pink driveway and followed it winding to the double screen gates at the end. Something caught his attention near the gates. In an automatic reflex action, his eyes adjusted to the distance and magnified the image. It was a woman, staring through the gates at the house. He focused closer with his optical enhancement and realised it was a young girl, similar in age to himself.

There was something about her face. Something that.....attracted him! Was this a CoreTex image? At that moment she saw him and her expression changed to one of uncertainty. He smiled at her and waved. Her expression changed again. This time to fear. She turned and ran.

Her long dress billowed behind her, its torn hem flapping around her legs. Within moments she'd disappeared from view. Riki felt strangely disappointed. He was intrigued to know who she was and felt exhilarated to discover the secret. If this was a new CoreTex game, it was an interesting one.

He mentally summoned a car and heard the doors below him start to open. On impulse he slid over the balcony and allowed himself to glide to the ground, hanging on to the various handholds the building and shrubbery allowed. Within a moment he was inside the car and the gates were opening in front of him. The car moved forward and turned into the road to follow the girl.

All music had stopped in his head now. Something new was driving him. A pleasant exhilaration. He warmed to this feeling. Up ahead he saw a figure dressed in a long pale dress. She was walking now, unaware of the car in pursuit behind her.

The car slowed and silently approached the girl. Riki bade the car to pass and then pull in front of her. As it did so, she stopped and looked up, seeing the door open and Riki grinning at her. She turned to run.

He said quickly, "Wait. Please."

The girl stopped in mid stride, but kept her back to him. It was not her place to disobey the privileged, but she was terrified she had been caught at the gates.

Riki stepped out of the car and walked towards her. She was not going to run now. For her it was too late. She was vulnerable and he was powerful. He felt a rush in his body and was suddenly aware that this had nothing to do with CoreTex, or the neural plug in his neck. He moved around to where she was facing and smiled at her.

"You've nothing to be afraid of. What's your name?"

She kept her eyes on the ground as she softly said, "Tara. Tara Reese."

He moved closer, watching her tense as he did. Her face was turned away from him and he gently reached out to her chin and moved it towards him. He stared as he held his breath. What was happening? He felt his heart beating and something new surging through him. There was something about her face. Slowly he realised that beneath the unwashed skin, this girl was truly beautiful. Not the perfection created by CoreTex images, but a natural and wonderful creation of nature.

Tara's eyes were wide in trepidation. Riki smiled, but she would not respond. "Come with me." Riki said, releasing his hold on her face. She resumed her examination of the ground. "You wanted to see the house, didn't you. Come with me and I'll show you. Please."

Slowly her head came up and she looked into his face for the first time. He saw the blue sharpness of her eyes and the depth of the pupils startled him. He could not stop smiling. Slowly she smiled too. A small, frightened smile. "You won't hurt me?"

He gazed at her for long moments before saying, so quietly she hardly heard, "I could never hurt you."

The remainder of the day passed in a haze for Riki. He'd shown Tara the house, her eyes growing wider and wider with every step. She spoke little and he found himself babbling. The house was empty except for the servants and so Riki had few interruptions in his desperate attempts to find out more about the girl. He asked for a meal to be served on the far deck and sat with Tara watching her eat. She was certainly hungry. He sipped his water that, for the moment, was vintage champagne. It seemed appropriate for the occasion.

Dusk approached and Tara began to get nervous. She eventually found the courage to voice her fears and said she had to get home.

"I'll take you." A look of fear shot across her face and she quickly shook her head. After several hours of trying to talk to the girl, Riki's patience was wearing thin. "I will take you. Come along."



He held out his hand and she obediently took it. He moved her down the long walk to the south drive where a car was waiting for them. He sat beside her with ill-concealed excitement, as the driverless car moved forwards.

“Where to?”

Tara took her time answering and finally said, “The Beeches. Number thirty.”

Riki repeated the address in his mind and felt the positive response from the car in his thoughts, before it accelerated down the road. The Beeches had an echo of memory for Riki. He’d heard of it somewhere.

They sat back in the car as it drove out to the plainer and more denser dwellings. It turned off east and Riki saw the buildings were taller and denser still. The car stopped outside a tall ugly building and waited.

Riki began to get out and Tara stopped him. “No, please. Thank you.” She opened the door and was gone.

He watched her run into the open doorway without looking back. Riki sat back in the seat and the car moved away at his mental bidding. The drive back was a blur. Riki’s mind was in turmoil. Why had he done all those things today? She was a stranger when he met her and remained a stranger still. What was he doing?

With a brief contact with the Core, Riki established The Beeches were the renowned poorer part of the area. People without jobs, supported entirely by the Ministry of Environment. Tara was a social and economic problem. But she was certainly beautiful.

Riki connected to the Core again and established the telenumber of her address. He requested the connection and immediately heard the soft noise of the message machine.

A voice spoke in his head. “Hello.”

“May I speak with Tara, please?”

“Who is this?”

Riki recalled that he had not mentioned his name to her. “Just say a friend.”

He waited a few moments before he heard her voice. “Hello?”

“Hello, Tara. It’s me, Riki. Can we meet again?”

## **DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIP**

Time had meant nothing to Riki before. To him all days were the same. He ate when hungry, slept when tired. Now he found himself counting the hours. Watching for minutes to pass by, until he could see Tara again.

If this had been another of his fantasy women, he would call her up on CoreTex, have wild and exciting sex and switch off until she was needed again. But not Tara. This was a totally new experience for him. She was real. Real flesh and blood. He could not turn on Tara, nor could he remove her from his thoughts. Neither did he want to.

After suffering a particularly long and agonising day waiting for their meeting time to arrive, he created a duplicate on the CoreTex. He visualised every aspect of her face. The small pointed chin. The wide green eyes. The long wavy blond hair. The pert breasts and the slim legs with small delicate feet. CoreTex provided him with the sample model and twirled it around, naked in his mind. Somehow, Riki could not make the adjustments so they looked right. The fantasy image looked wrong, very wrong. One of the main problems being, Riki had only seen Tara fully clothed. Her naked body was too difficult for him to visualise. All his experience of naked women came from stock samples from the Core. As he preferred dark hair, huge breasts and ample hipped women, that was all he ever saw.

He accepted the final product of the Tara model as the best his imagination could provide and placed the nude in a suitable beach setting. There, he had repeated sex with his fantasy, bringing him to new heights of gratification. He switched off the image and realised his indulgence had only wasted ten minutes of his waiting time. He felt the exercise was wasted. That evening he would have sex with her and then remodel the CoreTex image for future use.

The evening finally arrived with Tara willingly visiting the house with him and seemingly to enjoy his company. When he suggested they had sex together, she suddenly seemed hesitant.

“Don’t you want to?” His voice seemed distant and lost.

Tara tried to smile and said, “I’m not sure. I thought we would just.....you know, talk.”

He shook his head and tried to think. Normally he just demanded what he wanted and the Core provided a positive response to his emotions. What was he supposed to do with this girl? He'd no control over her. She was a deprived girl, with no real understanding of his needs. He paused in his line of thought. "Deprived girl?"

He left her sitting on the balcony seat and went inside the house. When he returned two minutes later, he handed her a credit disk. She took it slowly and looked at him in puzzlement.

He shrugged. "Four hundred credits. That ought to help you decide."

They lay in each others arms exhausted. He was drifting between sleep and wakefulness. She looked at his perfect skin and hoped hers was not as bad as it had been of late. This boy was certainly a puzzlement to her. He had everything he could want and yet wanted to have her. It was obvious he'd never had sex before. Then she realised that with something like the neural plug, he needn't wait for anything. Instant gratification was the proud boast of the CoreTex operatives. 'Not the real thing - Better!' She often wished she could be connected to CoreTex, but then knew why she did not have the implant. And it was not just because of the cost.

He opened his eyes and felt her stroking his hair gently. It felt warming to him. He smiled as he nuzzled deeper into her breasts. This was very comforting to him. Something that never happened after CoreTex sex. He relaxed in her arms and enjoyed the attention she was giving him. He sighed as he remembered the physical action of moments earlier. He had to admit, it was very disappointing. It was physically hard work and he realised there was certainly more skill in keeping in contact, while trying to get the maximum feeling from the actual sexual motions. His physical release was certainly disappointing. Normally there was a tremendous surge of feeling from the groin that spread throughout his whole body. Somehow this was not so powerful and only came in waves, slowly diminishing to a simple pleasurable overall feeling of relaxation. On the whole, CoreTex was better.

He kissed the nipple nearest to him and moved his head to one side, looking down her slim body. When he redesigned her, he would beef up her thighs a little and enlarge her breasts. That was necessary for his fantasy. The sexual gratification would be better too. Although.....he had to admit, there was something different about this real thing. He tried to analyse what it was. It was something to do with how he felt afterwards. He was enjoying the bodily feelings, but there was something else happening to him at the same time. He slowly gathered the thoughts to realise that he'd felt real joy in making love to the girl. A joy, a natural happiness. It was not purely a series of motions to get rid of the teenage sexual itch. It was a new emotion. And although confused by it, he knew he liked it.

She was running her fingers over his shoulders. Little muscular tremors followed. He felt her move her head and felt a light kiss on the neck.

CoreTex sex was certainly instant, no warming up required. No effort needed. And no responsibility afterwards. No build-up, and no conclusion. It was pure fantasy, from a sophisticated computer supplying only stimulation. For all these years Riki had thought he'd known what sex was like, but he'd been wrong. The real thing was certainly less intense, as a feeling, but more exciting emotionally.

He turned his head upwards and she gently kissed him. He felt moisture on his face and looked up to see she was crying. "What's the matter?"

She wiped her face and shook her head. Riki sat up, concerned. "Was that the first time without CoreTex for you too?"

She shook her head and added, "I don't have CoreTex."

He smiled and reddened in the face. "Of course not. I do it all the time. First real time for you?"

The tears began to fall more heavily and she rapidly swung her legs off the bed and left the room.

It was over an hour before Riki could get Tara to talk to him. They sat at a table, drinking water. She'd stopped crying, but the tears were not far away. Riki could vaguely remember his mother crying, many years ago. And his sister too. But he'd never cried. Never had the desire to. He was baffled by this girl.

"What did you mean when you said - you'd been paid?"

"I meant just that. I feel no better than a prostitute."

"What's a prostitute?" Riki asked with a frown.

She looked at him to see if he was mocking her. She recalled her mother's exact words. "It's a woman that gets paid to have sex. They're pretty much redundant because of CoreTex, although there are some in the area where I live. Only people without CoreTex need them anymore."

“And what’s wrong with a ‘prostitute’, then?”

She looked again, longer this time. His face was still serious. “They get paid to have sex. That’s what’s wrong. It’s degrading. It’s.....a sign of desperation. And you paid me, making me feel degraded and desperate too.” The tears started again and Riki felt tenseness in his chest. She was trying to compose how she was going to tell her mother about this development.

He shook his head and said, “I didn’t pay you to have sex with me. I paid you to stay with me. I thought you might go. Leave me. I wanted you to stay.”

She looked up from her small, damp handkerchief and said, “Really?”

“Really. We went to bed because I wanted that. I thought you did too. I thought everyone did. I’m sorry if I upset you. I’ll take the credits back, shall I?”

She reached into her pocket and slid the disk across to him. He picked up the coin sized disk and said, “Do you really need money so desperately?”

“I’ve no money. I’ve no job. Yes I need the money. And yes, unfortunately, right now my family needs money desperately.”

“I’m sorry.”

“What’re you sorry for? You don’t know what being poor is like?”

Riki shook his head, unable to answer her question.

“None of my family is affiliated to a ministry. We don’t have jobs. We live on the breadline. The poor feed off the poor, you know. Employment by a ministry means you’re automatically provided with a home, a car, CoreTex, food and leisure facilities. For anyone else, outside of the Ministry, to afford these things it would cost them far more than the Ministry buys them in for. We get none of these benefits, which others take for granted. It’s what I want, but I don’t stand a chance of getting a job here on Earth. The Government of this country are hoping people like us will eventually die out, but the human spirit is strong. We fend for ourselves. We still survive.”

Riki was taken aback by the passion of the girl’s heartfelt protest. He slid the disk back across the table to her and stood. “For just staying with me. A present to your family.” He left the room to think.

Two hours later they were back in bed again and both crying together. This was a tremendous release for Riki. He felt he would not be able to stop his tears. She held him close, her salty tears mixing with his, dampening the SheerSheet.

He began to talk to her, as he had never spoken to anyone. As he told her his secret thoughts, he realised that he’d rarely talked to anyone before. No one who wanted to listen, or cared for him. The Core had always provided everything. But it hadn’t provided emotional comfort to Riki in the same way Tara was.

For many years it was known that the human brain generated at least three types of brainwaves. Alpha, the relaxed state; Beta, a higher frequency generated when deeply relaxed, or under anaesthesia; and Delta waves, the lowest frequency and greatest amplitude, normally when asleep. Jugen Huguen discovered a fourth, at the turn of the millennium, Zeta waves. His detailed experiments had lasted for over thirty years until he could not only establish these ultra high frequency waves, but was able to directly access them - and control them.

The ever increasing drug abuse became world wide prevalent by the early twenty-second century. It was clear, to the newly emerging World Council, that a cure had to be found to reduce the desire for mass consumption. They turned to Huguen and his claims that he could control and stimulate the human sensory organs.

Vast amounts of financial support were given to Huguen, who came up with a very basic model of what was to become CoreTex. The early model was a headset that slipped over the head, with sensors touching the skin at the base of the neck. Strong impulses were generated by this equipment and it was a year before it was declared safe to use without a doctor present.

The principle was that CoreTex connected directly to the brain stem, which was an extension of the spinal cord. This contains complex neuronal pathways that control cardiovascular function, ventilation, gastrointestinal functions, eye movement, equilibrium and most of the stereotyped activities of the body. The CoreTex also accessed the Mensencephalon, which connects the anterior two regions of the brain to the posterior regions. All the nerve fibre tracts within the brain pass through this region, which is also part of the brain stem.

The CoreTex unit is surgically implanted at the base of the neck. The highly sensitive neurone connections terminating at one end in the selected areas of the brain, the other in a small connector, or socket. A small plug is placed in the socket, the end of which is connected to the central computer at CoreTex. Along this connection passes all the information in both directions. The signal from CoreTex intercepts and replaces the signals from the brain, at times, allowing the human mind to see, feel and hear only what CoreTex is sending.

CoreTex can access directly what the participant is thinking and process it accordingly. This makes personal imagery so successful. The subject thinks of what he would like to experience, CoreTex computer interprets the message and sends back a suitable image. This image is super enhanced and personally designed for the recipient.

CoreTex imagery can stimulate the brain, with a similar effect to taking drugs. The major differences being, there is no addiction, no harmful side affects, just the benefits. There are no up or down periods after use. It was promoted as a safe and easy way to kick the drug habits of millions of people. This was why it was developed and why it was quickly adopted in every area of human life-style.

It was also cheap to mass-produce, with a small insertion charge and a rental payment. For those that belonged to a Ministry, it was regarded as part of their salary. Within a few years eighty percent of the world had access to basic CoreTex. It replaced large social areas of people's lives.

Riki explained how all his upbringing was provided by the Core. The CoreTex taught him all he needed, using the StimSchool system. CoreTex told him anything he wanted to know and showed him anything he wanted to see, at the exact time the knowledge was required. The neural enhancements allowed him to experience almost any human sensation, better than if experienced for real. Subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, enhancements to the feedback heightened the experiences, making them larger than life. His parents were always absent. Although parents in the biological sense, he and his siblings, never saw the inside of her womb. A few human servants were all he saw, or with whom he communicated. Apart from his friends on the ComCore, he'd no contact with other real people. He felt he never needed to. Until now!

She was rocking him gently in her arms, as he finished with his words of regret. He'd not realised the depth of emotion that had always been inside him. This girl had brought his inner self to the surface. She hugged him and gently smoothed his hair. He cried until his lungs became breathless. Slowly, the tension eased in his chest and he quietened.

In a soft, almost far away voice, she spoke of her dreams. She was speaking to a distant listener, although Riki held on to her every word. "My one ambition is get my family off-world. I don't care where. Mars, the moon, anywhere. Get us into a Ministry job. Let them provide our housing, food and some money. Save it all up and return here to Earth. Live a normal life. We don't want the high life. Just 'A' life."

She wrapped her arms around him tighter and kissed his head again. "You're very nice, Riki. I'm so glad I met you. It can't last, I know it, but while it does....."

The two teenagers cried themselves into a restful sleep. Both slept in the comfort of finding someone special in their lives.

\* \* \* \*

Their relationship developed slowly. Riki saw Tara initially as a new emotional toy. To take out the box and put away again. Slowly that impression changed. He found that once a week was not enough, he wanted to see her every day. He started to investigate getting her paying work, then realised that this would restrict his access to her. He decided to settle for making sure she'd enough money coming in to help the family of six.

She was still very sensitive about this issue. Riki became increasingly creative in finding things to buy her and her family, or ways to spend money to their benefit. She knew what he was doing, but was comforted by how much pleasure it gave him to give her support. She told him all her feelings and in return, he told her his. No one had ever relied on him before and he was beginning to feel really appreciated.

The arrival of the expensive limousine at the unpretentious apartment blocks of The Beeches, was beginning to give Tara's family neighbour problems. With a big car, came big expectations. At her suggestion, Riki bought a Mot Blue and met her outside the block. She would run out to meet him and he would drop her off later.

He was daily trying to answer the ongoing question of why he was so infatuated with this girl. He connected to StimSchool and browsed through the memory banks. He found several CoreNovels about human relationships and dipped into them. He was intrigued to find a section in a novel called "Where are we now", by Daniel Steer. He read the same chapter three times. The words spoke of the human emotion called 'love'. It

described the physical and emotional process enjoyed, and endured, between two people. So was this what was happening to Riki? Was he falling in love?

Daniel Steer particularly described love as, "The lost human emotion."

Riki drove home from The Beeches, almost asleep in the back of the Mot Blue. He made his way wearily to his bedroom and stopped as he heard noises coming from the master room. Cautiously, he edged towards the door. He saw a man sitting in the chair watching the large screen. On the screen was pictured the images coming through the occupant's CoreTex. Riki opened the door wide and walked into the room. Instantly his father slapped the table surface, which made the picture vanish. Detra Sena turned and smiled at his son.

Riki smiled back and said, "Father. A pleasant surprise."

Detra stood and moved towards his son. They shook hands and looked at each other. Detra was a tall and very imposing man. The physical enhancements had been carefully planned and now he looked every millimetre the Ministry of Transport's most senior Director and future World Council's Governor.

"Pleased to see you."

"I'm pleased you could spare the time." Riki said, finally releasing the grip.

Detra waved to the duplex chairs and sat down first. "I wanted to speak with you about this girl you've been visiting."

Riki sat forward and waited. "As you know, my position with the WC is in a delicate stage at the moment and I cannot afford anything to tip the scales, as it were. My son associated with a little money-grabbing prostitute will not sit right with my peers, so she will have to go. Pay her what she needs and then get rid of her."

Riki sat, open-mouthed. He'd prepared a nice speech of how he had met a perfect girl for him and how much he wanted to introduce her to his parents and get them to really like her.

"But, I can't. I .... love her."

Detra stood and moved back to the master chair. He rested his hands on the tall back and turned to Riki. "You do not LOVE her. You have everything you need right here, Rikinelli. Everything. The Core provides everything your thoughts' desire. You do not need a.....person. You must get rid of her. Immediately."

"But I love her. Didn't you hear me?"

"You don't know what love is. At your age, all emotion is very unstable. What you adore today will be forgotten by lunchtime. Replaced by another obsession until breakfast. You know I'm making sense. In this instance, your infatuation is detrimental to me, and therefore the whole family. I'm sorry, but I do insist that you get rid of her."

"I can't. I won't."

"You will. She's only after bettering herself at our expense. Get rid of her, right now."

Riki slowly stood upright. Fear and fury blending in his mind. His breathing was erratic and he felt he would explode with anger at any moment. He respected his father, rather than feared him. But this was going too far.

"I'll go and see her right now, father. But not to get rid of her, more to tell her that we have a future together. If that upsets your personal plans, then so be it. You have no right to dictate my future happiness. None."

Riki swept from the room before his father could say another word. Detra remained resting on the chair as the screen before him came alight. He thought through the connection sequence and stood looking at a very old colleague, whose life-size image on the screen smiled back at him.

"Detra. Long time."

Detra nodded and said, "I need a favour, Wallteri."

Wallteri shrugged and said, "Granted. Why are you crying?"

The Mot Blue drove back down the hill along the familiar route. Riki sat in the back with tears streaming unheeded down his face. He rocked backwards and forwards in desperate anger. The frustration disabling his rational thoughts and actions. All he needed to do was to be with Tara. Then he would be all right.

He felt the tiny tickle of an incoming message in his mind. He knew it was not his father, as it was an unrecognised image, so he accepted the call. He saw a white flash and felt as if his body was in spasm. He fell to the floor of the car and was paralysed. He felt the car slow, turn around and begin to travel in another direction.

Riki's eyes burned as they were frozen open for a long period. The vehicle eventually slowed and people helped him from the car. Someone kindly closed his eyes for him, and the streaming tears slowly subsided.

He was put in a recliner and the paralysis gradually lifted. His mind was taken over by gentle images and he resisted, not looking in detail at anything. He knew he was in 'Correction' and was not going to accept any changes to his personality, or ideals. He kept a clear picture of Tara to the forefront of his mind and hung on as long as he could. For two hours he was bombarded by layer upon layer of psychiatric manipulation. Every area of his cerebrum was probed and tested. All the while, he kept Tara before him. Naked, vulnerable and needing his love and protection.

At some stage of his treatment he lost consciousness. He slowly awakened to find himself back in his own bedroom. He eased himself out of bed and groggily tried to walk to the door. As his strength and balance returned, he searched the house. His father had gone.

Riki made contact with Tara's home. Her mother answered the manual teleline and said her daughter was out and asked who was calling? He thanked her and broke the connection.

Two weeks passed in relative peace. Riki had no further contact from his father. He assumed he'd won this battle. But he knew there was probably still a war brewing, and therefore more battles lay ahead.

Riki awoke one morning and ambled down to breakfast in the small room. He sat with his container of hot liquid and let the heat warm his hands into awareness. He looked up to see his father standing in front of him.

For several moments neither said anything. Detra looked at the chair opposite to Riki and it slid outwards at his mental bidding. Detra folded his thin long robe around him and sat delicately on the chair. A servant appeared and Detra waved him away. Detra rested his elbows on the table surface and stared at his son.

"I have come to say .... I'm sorry."

Riki looked away and sipped at his drink. He would've liked it to taste of terrabeans, but it still tasted of hot water. His heart was not into changing it. He sat in silence. His father never apologised for anything. Something else was coming.

"I shouldn't have put you into correction. I was wrong about that. Not because I authorised it, more because of the results of your therapy."

Riki looked up. He stared hard into his father's dark brown eyes. "What results? What're you talking about?"

Detra's eyes never flickered from his son's. "You gave them a surprise at the clinic. They usually have a ninety-nine percent success rate with that treatment. You resisted everything they threw at you. So they decided to test your Yarborough rating. It's extremely high."

Riki felt a moment of pride. He did not know anyone that had tested high in the Yarborough rating. He must have some special attributes. Was his father trying to say he was proud of his son?

Detra grasped his hands in front of him. "Unfortunately, they automatically registered you in the Core. Your .....suitability was picked up by Transport Ministry and passed on to the WC to the 'Contact' people. They want you to go see them. I'm afraid you've been selected as a candidate for the 'Contact Mission'."

Rikki shook his head, "What mission?"

Detra separated his hands and stretched them out to Riki. "You've not heard about the Contact Mission?"

Riki shook his head. "No. Should I?" He connected to the Core and asked for details, even as his father spoke.

"The World Council have commissioned deep space search for extra terrestrial life. To date there's still been no fully confirmed reports that life exists out there. As mankind is expanding at a rapid rate, we need to know if there's anything nasty waiting for us. The Contact Mission is to establish whether there's life in a specifically defined area of the galaxy. It's a ten year project and they need ten candidates."

"To do what?"

"To go and look for new life forms. They may be the first humans to contact aliens."

“And they want me!” The information coming from the Core confirmed what his father was saying was the truth.

Detra shook his head slowly and said, “They’re planning for a hundred starters and whittle them down to a final ten, who will actually make the trip. You’re only being asked to be an initial candidate.”

Riki stood and walked around the table. “That’s a relief. At least I can say no.”

“Well, it’s not that simple. As Director of Transport and about to go on the World Council, the Contact Mission comes under my Purdue.”

“So you can let me off, then?”

“On the contrary. If you’re nominated through ability, from the main sector, I really can’t be seen to use any influence to favour my relatives.”

“Of course you can!”

“I can’t. In fact, I should be seen to be proud and patriotic that you’ll be representing Earth on this mission. If anything, I should be insisting you go. Look. The off-worlds are getting ready to break away from Earth government. A similar thing happened many years ago when The USA broke away from England. Then there was a demonstration of intent called “The Boston Tea Party”. We don’t want the same thing to repeat itself in our history. We’re trying to use this mission, as a way of bringing everyone together. A single point of concentration. This is a single project that interests everyone. We can all pull together on this. It’s become vital for the future of the WC, Earth and the off-world colonies.”

“I can’t. I don’t want to go! I won’t go.”

Detra waved at his son to be calm. “You’ve been selected for the initial hundred. The chance of you getting through to the final selection is quite remote. Let’s not assume the worst. You’ll undoubtedly drop out somewhere along the line. The criteria is very strict. All applicants have to be fit, both mentally and physically. Have strong personalities. A sense of humour is vital. Any of the stricter parameters will get you off the hook. There are so many areas where you may not fit the requirements. All I’m asking at this point, is, you go along for the ride, for the moment. I’ll do what I can to influence the final selection. Will you do that for me?”

Riki was shaking his head. He did not like the way things were going here. Detra stood and moved to his son. He placed his hand on Riki’s shoulders and said, “If you could keep your meetings with this girl a little more low key, I’d be willing for your relationship continue to its natural end.”

Riki stared into those eyes. The eyes that had tried to dominate every conversation they had ever had together. His father was making a deal. He’d never given Riki an opportunity to compromise before. Slowly and quietly Riki nodded his head.

Jobe could feel the agitation in Riki’s mind and slowly drew the dream to an end. Riki’s awareness returned, but he didn’t question Jobe’s motive.

230895893758917583758145894859043189048989069090439001101010930901019301093019019019301930190019301

Are you tired of this story yet? It is the third time you’ve seen it. And that is in the last few years.

101039101923019102901920192019201920192020203494303039230393043930393203930239393032920202920202920023920292029202

No. I’m not tired of my life’s story. But I suppose I should not get too emotionally involved. What can you suggest?

0103019102910290109

*Something else?*

0102301020300012. 101010030291039036584309201983021810381010101010101930191029102

Surprise me. And can we revert to a language other than your damned machine code?

01034010.

*Okay. How about something about dreams. You may relate to this.*

Riki felt his consciousness slip away and into another computer stimulated dream.

## DREAMER

*In the future, crime can be foreseen and analysed through stimulating the brain with scenarios. The results will determine an individual's reaction to any given situation. Some people are not safe to be let out on to the streets. For these people, the vast emptiness of space may be their final home.*

He sat in the observation bubble, his eyes loosely focused ahead. The black velvet of space gently edging into his mind, broken only by the bright points of hard light that were the stars. His mind refused to break free from his body and the realisation made him tense. All the automatic relaxants were in operation. The couch warmed and massaged him, music swam multi-directionally around him and the air was vibrated at the exact frequency of his thought waves. He watched the cold stars and took some kind of comfort from them, knowing he would have to resort to the drugs again. He pressed a panel on the control board and the dispenser dropped a beaker into his hand. He watched the pills dissolve in the warm liquid and read the words on the side of the beaker. M.A.D. He grinned at the thought and swallowed the whole contents. Soon the Mind Altering Drugs would take effect, and a form of madness begins.

The stars shimmered in his vision as his brain toiled to adjust. At last his consciousness was released from the body strapped into the couch. The hallucinatory process had begun.

Prompted by a change in the music, his journey began. Surrealism over-rode his thoughts. People and events kaleidoscoped into one mental vision. Each sequence overlapping the next. Within the couch, probes carefully monitored the human's response. Blood pressure, heart rate and respiration. Each reacting to the experiences of the brain and the drugs within the body structure. No dangerous levels were recorded, so the dream went on. Both the man's conscious and sub-conscious state responded to the new stimuli. They whipped and thrashed in their own surge of electrical frenzy. The recorders monitored the adverse effects on the heart rate and a measured amount of fluid was inserted into the bloodstream. The heart rate slowed and with it, the dreams subtly changed. A more softened series of events were taking place. The monitors indicated a lessening of the body and mind's tension. Slowly the M.A.D. effects were diminishing.

The man's eyelids flickered open and he could see again. The stars were distorted, but his sight cleared quickly as the dreams faded. He lay quietly, letting his memory store the impressions. Eventually his eyes closed as he drifted into a natural sleep. To dream normally, without fear or tension.

The rain fell at blinding speed. As it struck his skin, he leaped in pain, his body contorting in response. Uran Abear shielded his face and ran for the cover of the rocks. The sky grew black as he stumbled blindly into the cave. A cold wind whistled through the cavern and his wet clothes seemed to burn rather than freeze. He shrank behind an outcrop of rock to shelter from the blast. The shivering became painful as he felt his muscles go into spasm. The wind became a howling gale and then it began to change. Slowly it lessened into a warm breeze and his shoulders began to warm again. The wind began to rise and fall, adopting a new sound. From a roar, it had become a soft rhythmic sigh, like breathing. The air became fetid and Uran rose and made for the cave entrance.

He halted in fear as he heard a rasping sound nearby. He looked to the rear of the cave and noticed points of lights shimmering. As he watched they grew larger, until he recognised them as eyes. Light sparkled in their centres, brightly reflecting from the damp walls of the cave. Soon he was surrounded by a multi-coloured array of lights and movement, as the creature came towards him. It captivated his attention, until the creature stood beside him.

In fear, he looked directly at the being. The sudden stillness of the air and the hypnotic sequence of light patterns had lulled him into a new state of mind. Beside him stood a vision of beauty. The girl was still young, but had reached full feminine development. Her clothing had the appearance of a second skin. It covered, yet revealed. New emotions stirred, as he absorbed the classical lines of her face, her smile warming him as her perfect white teeth reflected light into his eyes. One by one, the light reflections in her mouth sparkled into his eyes as he moved closer to her.

His vision was bedazzled by the reflections. Her eyes picked up the sparkling array of lights and reflected them back into his mind's eye. The points of light blurred, then sharpened quickly and he found himself looking out into space again. The clarity of the bubble not distorting the stars at all. He smiled at the memory of the young woman's face and body, then closed his eyes to try to continue the events as a dream of his own choosing before it faded. He tried to recreate the warmth in the cave. His thoughts searched for the girl and found the cave bare, and somehow not as clear as before.



It was only a blurred image that slipped from his mind as he drifted into sleep. Only later did dreams visit him, but they were of a different kind.

A distant planet lowered its horizon to the morning sun. Foliage sparkled with pale pink dew, each drop reflecting the hard dawn light. Purple haze shifted in an uneasy motion at the base of the hills, the black summits of which were silhouetted by the white sun. The valley laid pale green and dominated by small shrubs and grasses. The soft floor offered rest to the weary traveller. Beneath the transparent roof of the tent, Uran Abear stirred in his sleep.

The heat unit slowed its output to balance the effect of the rising sun. The light climbed steadily and splashed brightly onto more of the tent's roof. It pierced the fabric and struck the eyelids of the sleeper. Uran awoke.

He stretched to the morning, as if it were a pagan ritual, the sun highlighting the stubble of beard and sleep still in the eyes. He tapped out his requirements for breakfast on the oven's console.

As he dressed, the smell of the cooking food made his stomach aware of its existence. The roof became opaque from the moisture condensing between its layers. He tapped at the roof and watched the water roll towards the collectors in the base of the tent wall, soon to provide the basis for his coffee.

By the time he'd fed and watered himself, the call of nature took hold. He unsealed the flap and walked out into the heat of the new day. He squinted into the sun and moved to the shade of one of the few trees in the valley. He loosened his clothing and stood to await the result of nature's warning.

He became aware of his inability to execute the call. His eyes narrowed in concern as a pressure within his body grew. He stared upward in concentration and saw each leaf as a dewdrop. One by one the leaves released their cargo as the morning breeze stirred. The drops began to fall like rain. He hoped they'd provide him with incentive, but the pain increased. He stared upwards and watched the drops fall.

The drops of dew were actually slowing to a stop before they reached him. A million points of sparkling reflections. It was a while before he recognised them as stars. The next sensation after waking was a genuine call of nature.

The recreation area was restricted in space. It doubled as a gymnasium, dining area and ablution facility. Uran lay on the exercise bed and closed his eyes in an effort to separate dreams from reality. The stars represented reality. Their birth went back long before man's concept of time could imagine. They could be his only reality. He took out his aggression on the weights in an energetic burst of activity. He worked out on the gravity punch bag, the gravity induced barbells and the gravity simulated running board. Soon he became exhausted, and then showered himself back to awareness. A hot meal completed his day and he found himself back on the couch, watching the stars slowly rotate.

Warm waters gurgled overhead. His opened eyes felt the warmth of the waters caressing them. Above, the broken reflections glittered on the surface. With bursting lungs, he strove to reach the surface and its life-giving air.

Uran floated, breathing heavily on the surface. A sound to his left distracted him. He thought he saw a movement, but when he looked he saw only a ripple. He returned his attention to getting the oxygen back into his body.

Again he heard a sound. This time he saw a young girl's face break the water's surface. It was contorted with either fear or pain. Her hands tried to wave at him and keep her body afloat at the same time. She began to shout for help.

Half of his mind paid her attention, while the other half recognised the need for his own body's survival. He watched her movements become frantic until she sank from view. The water's surface smoothed after her passing. Slowly he turned over and struck out lazily for the nearest shore.

The sun burned through the trees as he approached the bank. The rippling waters caught the light and multiplied it a million times. It made the reflections look like stars.

Uran awoke to the alarm tone, the sound of which was not unlike the lapping of urgent waves on a beach of glass. He followed the sound to the recreation area and saw a light pulsing in time to the audio tone above a

panel on one wall. He pressed the lighted panel and a screen lit up beneath it. He read the message and smiled. It said that Sequence One was completed and to stand by. From now on he was to be free from drug inducement. The message was replaced by another. He smiled as he read that Total Experience Mode would be used next.

A soft whine made him turn around. A panel had moved to reveal a chair. Happily he moved to the seat and sat down. He kicked off his shoes so that his bare feet and his hands made contact with the response areas of the chair. He rested his head back into the cranium rest and felt the recording probes reach out to touch him.

The headrest began to broadcast on his wavelength and his hands and feet were given the corresponding stimulus. His body began to writhe in the chair.

The room was bright white. As far as Uran could see, it appeared to be spherical in shape and very small. He became aware of his naked body and for a moment he expected to feel a chill, but became quickly aware that the room temperature was comfortable.

His next realisation was one of weightlessness. He appeared to be totally suspended and unable to gain momentum. He had moments of panic as he tried to gyrate and reach the comfort of a foothold. Slowly he was drifting towards a walled surface. His panic diminished as he bumped gently onto the white surface and gripped the yielding fabric with his fingers. He began to relax slightly. With a hard kick against the wall he went spinning towards the other side. The bump this time was harder, but the resilience of the wall's surface stopped it from being too painful. He had reached the stage of performing somersaults, when an area of wall began to darken. As he turned to watch, he collided into the wall opposite and bounced back. Something moved in the darkened doorway.

A woman glided through. She was skimpily clad in the minimal amount of clothes currently thought to be decent. She moved in a seductive glide towards him. As she approached, he could see how beautiful she was and her reason for being there became obvious. Her hair was long, black and floated around her head like a halo. She smiled to reveal even white teeth that sparkled. Her eyes were deep blue and the nose slightly turned up, the way he liked a girl's nose to be. The sight of her immediately aroused him. He watched her breast strain against the briefest of restraints, while her long shapely legs moved in slow motion as if running.

As she approached him, the dark area closed and blended in with the wall again. She drew her mouth ever closer to his until their lips touched, her kiss drawing all the emotion out of him. Her body pressed hard against his, and he responded. He fumbled with her diminutive top and watched it float away from his grasp. Her breasts bounced gently and slowly as they were released. She pushed herself gently away from him to draw her knees up to her chin. She slid her pants off in a practiced movement and they followed the path of the other garment. There was no helpful gravity to assist as they rolled over and over.

She reached for him and they held hands briefly. Using him as a lever she rotated herself, exposing the whole of her body to his stare. One moment he saw her breasts, the next the dark triangle of his desire. He pushed away from the wall towards her and they locked together in another kiss. His hands exploring the unfamiliar body as his desire increased.

Sex in zero gravity requires the complete co-operation of both partners. Physical contact is difficult to maintain without concentration. There was no helpful gravity to assist as they rolled over and over, only occasionally bumping into a wall. Their frenzy accelerated until they rapidly approached a climax. His fingers dug deep into her flesh, drawing blood to the surface. Both their movements were getting stronger.

He became oblivious to the woman's needs as his desire for release drove him onwards. Each movement forced them closer to a wall. She tried to fend them off contacting the wall, but his feet had found a foothold and used it as leverage in his powerful climax. He tightened his hold on the frightened girl as she began to struggle. She was being battered against the soft wall. He gasped in contentment and released her, as his head spun from the activity and emotion. He slowly became aware of the situation.

He watched as she floated away from him. Her breasts and thighs were covered with drops of blood, which detached themselves and drifted away. Her head hung at an odd angle. As she reached the other side of the room, an area darkened and opened. She drifted through, slowly rotating with the momentum. Her dead eyes looked through him as they passed into the black portal. The door closed silently and the wall became complete again.

He looked at his hands covered in blood and tried to remember what had happened. Slowly the light was dimming. He felt all emotion draining from him as he sank into a seated position with his back to the curve of the wall. Sleep crept up on him and the room darkened to accommodate.

The chair released its probes and clamps and Uran slumped forward in a daze. Slowly he brought himself back to reality. He rested on the exercise bench and hoped their decision wouldn't rest on that one event. The tone sounded again and he sat up quickly. This time he was ordered to take his seat in the bubble. He obeyed. The couch surrounded him like an old friend, embracing his body in a firm, yet gentle grip. He began to relax as sedatives were pumped into his veins. He watched the stars halt in their revolutions and begin to move the opposite way. Soon after, he felt the ship shudder gently. He felt drowsy. Awaiting the final decision should have been an exciting event.

Once more he watched the stars change direction, this time through blurred vision. Suddenly the stars seemed to leap towards him. It was his turn. He was on his way.

Far away on a distant planet, a bored duty officer idly watched the display's readout. He watched through a sense of boredom until he caught sight of a familiar name. He slapped the hold control and read with interest the rest of the information on the screen. A few minutes later, the officer's relief came into the room.

"Look at this, Yevat."

The senior officer looked over the junior's shoulder, "So what? Uran Abear, convicted of two charges of murder, three rapes and four charges of personal attacks..... "

The junior officer interrupted. "I know, I read all that, but the name. He's my uncle!"

"Was. According to this report, they've used every legal psychiatric method to try to cure him and resorted to the Dreamer."

"The what?"

"It's the ultimate probe. If a criminal fails that, they're shot out into space. It's barbaric in some respects, but more humane than execution. You've a lot to learn about people, Erron."

"I've vaguely heard about Dreamer, but I've not covered its function in my training schedule yet."

The senior officer sat in the chair and said kindly, "The Dreamer was built by dreamers who tried to abolish capital punishment for criminal activities. The whole thing's automatic, no human error, no human jury. Protects our morals and conscience. The victim's mind is stimulated by drugs and good old T.E.M. The results computed and opinion formulated. If the character is deemed beyond redemption they're fired off to a selected colony populated by compatible types. Worlds full of like psychotics."

Erron thought a moment, "And my uncle? What was the Dreamer decision?"

Yevat looked closely at the screen and interpreted the symbols, "He was found to have a tendency to cruelty, violence and lust. All incorrigible. He's been sent to Plenthon IV. He should be alright there, they're a barbaric lot."

Yevat slapped the control and the list continued to scroll again. The trainee watched as the output told its tale of mental disorder amongst the colonies. He realised that all he saw were just names. But each name had family, loved ones and friends.

Erron finally stepped out into the night and looked at the bright points of light in the sky. Out there the Dreamer was on its way back for another cargo. He hoped he'd never be one of them.

A little contrast to the usual, don't you think, Riki?

*A little too dark for my tastes, Jobe.*

What about a little adventure. A romp through space?

Go on then. Surprise me.

Coming up!

PART TWO OF THIS MIRROR NOVEL 'TARA' CONTINUES THE STORY.

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