

# TABOO SCIENCE FICTION #2

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## Contents

ON BORROWED TIME	Page 1
WORDS FROM THE KAETHIAN PROCONSUL ON EARTH	Page 12
IN DIFFERENT LOVERS	Page 12
Part One: A.L. TEREHO: Private Investigator	
Case #269: Terria Brenner	Page 17

## ON BORROWED TIME

*I wrote this story for the first issue of the Elton Elliott-revived SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW back in early nineteen and ninety. I had to soft pedal certain Geisian proclivities in that version. Below is the story in full Taboo display.*

### If time is money, let's kill all the bankers.

After David Rolles convulsed awake, he suddenly realized the buzzing alarm clock-calendar on the bedside table wasn't his. Nor the pale yellow caller beside it.

The small, poster-cluttered bedroom wasn't his. The wall posters were sexhouse advertisements showing idealized lovegirls and patrons. His gaze was captured by a voluptuous redhead whose long hair shrouded her patron's long organ as she sucked. The poster script said, MouthHouse Offers Ecstasy 15 Cr. or More. Try Our Supreme Nancy Starre.

He had never heard of that House. He didn't decorate his bedroom with posters!

Nothing was the same as it had been last night!

He scowled, confused. Where was he? He vaguely remembered going to bed last night in his own bedroom!

He threw aside the unfamiliar blankets and scrambled naked from the hero-size bed he had never slept in before.

Queasy fear sickened his guts. He looked to the large, oval window. Gray light silhouetted a dark city skyline he didn't recognize.

The clock chimed at 6:31 a.m. and said in his voice, "Don't forget to call Gerda."

David spun and snarled, "I don't know a Gerda!"

He saw his reflection in the dresser mirror. His blond hair was a lot longer than it had been yesterday. And he appeared haggard, older! The childhood scar over his left eye seemed more vivid.

He said aloud, "What happened? What was I doing last night? What did I drink?" He couldn't remember anything but shadows of his life.

Then he saw his wallet and shaving kit on the dresser. But the kit held a tube of DepKream. He did not like DepKream! His wallet held all his ID and over three hundred credits. Where had the extra 256 c's come from? And he discovered a new credit tube. He muttered, "I never buy at Z-Center."

It hit him: How could his hair be longer by this much? It would take months...

He closely examined his reflection. "I look at least twenty-five." But he was only nineteen!

His fear intensified. He was afraid to look out of the window again. He was afraid to open either of the doors leading out of the small, messy bedroom.

But he felt drawn to the window and looked down at least thirty floors at a wide, unfamiliar street and a neighborhood playground. The dawn light revealed a tower complex to the left he didn't recognize.

David lunged to the huge bed and grabbed the clock-calendar. The smaller readout told him today was the first of Thor. But he knew yesterday had been the thirty-first of Zeus. How had he lost six months?

Had he had amnesia?

He faintly remembered his apartment, his family, his girlfriend, his job, his boss, his childhood. But he looked older. And this wasn't his apartment. This wasn't his home city!

Had he lost more than six months? What year was it now?

He lifted the caller and pressed for the Helper. When she responded, David said, "This sounds loki, but...what year is this?"

The woman didn't answer at first, then said, "Ten sixty-four."

He believed her. This couldn't be an elaborate joke. He felt nauseous. He'd lost five-and-a-half years? He asked brokenly, "What city is this?"

She said patiently, New Copenhagen, Jylland." She added, "The Federated States of Scandia," and clicked off.

David desperately looked around the strange bedroom. There was a Viewer in the corner. He found a remote control on the bedside table and clicked on what had been the news channel on wire in his home city, Anderssonica, the day before.

He couldn't accept that he'd lost five years and six months of his life. It was ridiculous!

But he had to hunt for the news channel. The pubnet channels, the red shield channels, the amateur sex channel, the revolution channel...all were in different slots. And he confirmed this city was New Copenhagen.

David again examined his wallet, and found that his driver's permit showed a different, older David Rolles in the photo, and listed an address on Alameda

Passage, Domicile 3105.

His hand shook as he opened one of the bedroom doors. He found a bathing room. The other door opened to the center room of a domicile. It was all new to him.

There was mail on the food bar addressed to him at North 1036 Alameda Pasage, Dom #3105.

He slumped, still naked, into a red fur lounge and, face in hands, moaned in anguish.

After a long period of numbed inertia, David felt anger. What had done this to him? He realized he had to do something about this new life he had wakened to.

His name was the same, but after five and a half years as a different man, he had to discover himself. Born again.

What did he do for a living? Did he have a woman?

Dry-mouthed, he reached for an extension caller and tapped in his mother's number in Anderssonica. It buzzed once---

In a blink of time he found himself back in the bedroom, naked on the bed with a big blonde woman astride him, shaking the bed as she poled him, gasping and moving with great skill. She artfully, smoothly took him and curved up in a move to slide her pleasure node along his horn. Her breath quavered and her large pale breasts danced heavily over his face.

He began to climax in spite of his instant confusion and fear. She poled him deep, smacking down, everything quivering, hot and tight jelly inside, quaking and sweaty outside, pale green eyes squinting with concentration.

David cried out. Awful dread and terror mixed with his irreversible passion.

He didn't know her! The bed was different! The blankets were different! He moaned, "Great Zeus..." He spasmed and jettied, but it was muted and incomplete and too quickly his horn softened even as she lunged on him in her need.

She felt him shrinking. "What's wrong?" She saw his expression and quickly lifted away. His horn flopped wetly, limply, to his belly. She settled next to him. "What's the matter?"

He lifted his head and saw, wildly, women's clothes in an open closet he didn't remember, a woman's make-up things on a new dresser. The bedroom was different! Desperately, he demanded, "Leave! Now! Please don't talk to me!"

"I'll leave! I've got to go to work. But what happened, David? We were going so fine." She gently touched his chest. She wore a gold marriage rune on her right thumb.

"I don't know. I---" He rolled over to avoid seeing her. He wanted to be alone, to think! To find out--- He said, "I got into a very bad memory. I'm sorry."

She asked more questions, but he refused to speak. She became very angry, dressed and went to the door, saying, "We'd better talk about this later. You can't suddenly..." She left.

David lay paralyzed by fear and disorientation. He managed to sit up.

The posters were gone from the walls. The paint was now vari-white. Brown iris drapes covered the oval window. The room was clean and neat. His clothes

were folded on a new lounge beside a larger, newer Viewer.

The same clock-calendar chimed 6:45 a.m.

He stared at it and chills shook him. The calendar said today was Demeter first. He had lost another six months... Or another five years and six months?

He bolted from the bed to the dresser. The mirror showed him definitely older, with a different hair style. "Odin save me!" He looked for his wallet and found it in his pants. The driver's permit picture was different, too, and the issuing date was 1069. He noticed a marriage rune of pale ivory on his left thumb.

David found mail in a new desk in the center room dated 29 Hera, 1069. It was addressed to David or Janelle Rolles.

He screamed, "What's happening to me?"

Only a little over a half an hour ago he had been nineteen years old! Now he was at least thirty years old! His life was being stolen!

He paced the domicile, room to unfamiliar room. Would it happen again? How long did he have? Another five minutes or so? Would he then lose yet another five years and six months of his life?

Obviously he had lived those lost years, but he couldn't remember them!

Did his other self wonder what happened to this half hour of his life every five years and six months?

Was that other self doing this to him, somehow?

He was afraid to call anyone he...anyone he used to know. Kathy? Mark? His mother? Was his mother even still alive? What could he say?

David was reduced to a dreadful monitoring of the clock. It became unbearable when 6:59 arrived. Mesmerized, sick with fear, he watched the seconds flick away.

He was in a different bed, in a different room. A cheap minim dom.

There was no clock in the room, but he wore an armwatch which read 6:30 a.m.

He didn't understand what was happening except that his life was being taken from him in segments. This couldn't be amnesia. What kind of memory loss followed a precise time schedule?

He struggled from the narrow, sway-backed bed and stumbled into the doorless bathing room. The speckled mirror showed him to be older: a slight paunch, thinning of his blond hair, but now his sideburns were long and bushy.

He was thirty-six years old. An hour and a half ago he had been nineteen years old. In his mind he was still nineteen.

David searched the cheap dom. He discovered himself to be parted from Janelle, employed as a part time laborer in a brickyard, and seven months due on child help payments. He gazed incredulously at a three-dimensional picture of his three-year old son.

He glanced at his watch and discovered he had only six minutes to "live" in this period. He knew in his guts this rape of his life would continue. He threw himself on the bed and began to sob. He was still crying when the next time shift occurred.

The change was radical. He staggered and nearly fell as he found himself in a wilderness, hiking along a faint trail through a dense forest.

He wore heavy, well-worn clothing, and felt the unexpected weight of a backpack. He realized he had a full beard.

He looked around and knew he was alone. A terrible aching loneliness overcame him as he stood in the silence, listening. He yelled, "Hello? Hello! Anybody around?"

There was no answer.

Finally he sat on a rotten log and dug into his pack. He found condensed rations, packets of something called Instant Water, and a map of New Rus.

He found a small, steel mirror and stared at his weary eyes, his weatherbeaten skin, his graying hair. He muttered, "What am I, now? Forty-one? Forty-two?"

He no longer cared. Cold, unrelieved despair claimed him. His fate seemed to be to live maybe six or eight more half-hours.

He wondered if he was insane. "Am I actually living my life in a vicious, self-induced dream? Am I strapped down in a self-cleaner bed, a tube running nutrients into my stomach, raving my years away?"

No one answered from the surrounding forest.

There was one way to find out, and he was willing to try it. What did he have to lose---three or four disjointed hours. He didn't think this existence worth living.

David unsheathed a large hunting knife and prepared to slash his left wrist.

Someone behind him said in an accented voice, "We can't let you do that. You still owe us thirty-three years."

David spun around so quickly he almost fell. He gaped at a naked, hairless young man in a skin-tight, head-to-toe coating of amber plastic. The thin covering became clear over the eyes and stretched to let the jaws move when he spoke. Somehow the material permitted breathing through the nose and mouth, and did not muffle hearing. The youth's small, hairless male genitals swung freely in spite of the amber plastic coating.

As David stared, dew appeared on the plastic "skin" and drops of water rivuleted to the ground.

A round, sealed, inch-thick, form-fitting pack clung to the youth's chest.

David trembled. "What?" His mind couldn't accept this. Was he hallucinating? Yet a self-possessed part of his mind did accept and guessed the man human, from some kind of high-science future or alternate world. He gasped, "Are you real? What are you?"

Then David reacted to the meaning of the man's words. "I owe you thirty-three years! What do you mean? Why are you taking my life?" He gripped the hunting knife with unconscious ferocity.

The strange man replied calmly, "You borrowed fifty years, plus interest, and we're simply collecting. We can't let you suicide. We have to protect our loan."

"But I didn't borrow... How can years---fifty years---be borrowed? I didn't! It's a mistake! When did I borrow? When did I spend those years?" David advanced a step.

The man touched a spot on his chest pack. His amber, seamless covering

glowed with a sparkling radiance. The man said, "In a foreign country eight hundred years ago you were a powerful king and wanted to live a very long, historical reign.

"One of our monitors learned of your desire and alerted us. We offered you fifty years, you signed, you lived the full fifty, and now we are collecting, with interest, during this, your next reincarnation."

"Reincarnation?" David couldn't think. He sat down abruptly on the forest ground. "I'm psychotic. Odin help me."

The naked, glowing, amber man waited. "I'm real."

David laughed. "Yes. I've lost my youth and you're real."

The man sighed. "Assume that is true." He said impatiently, "You had no trouble believing the first time, when you borrowed."

David looked away. He dug fingers into the leafy, twig-littered, rocky soil. An insect crawled onto his leg.

David whispered, "Reincarnation?" He managed to think coherently. Reincarnation was an absurd religious concept believed only by weird sects and stray Saulist Christians. No rational, modern person could accept it.

The amber man said, "Reincarnation is the current term for the natural process of Prime Self Immortality."

Confused, David cried, "But what about me? I'm a different person!"

"No, you're really not. You're a Prime Self in a different set of short-term memories. You will have to accept your Immortal Self's debt. I understand that your Prime Self has never shared or melded with you, in this life, and that's unfortunate. The more mature, wise Prime Selves have learned through their incarnations to at least partially enlighten succeeding selves, to live more aware, placid, serene existences. But your Prime---as are so many---is still young and greedy. I feel sorry for you-as-David Rolles, but time is extremely valuable."

David grimaced. He frowned with thought. He bit his lower lip and winced with pain.

At length David asked, "You were forced to appear and explain because I was going to kill myself?"

The glowing youth said, "I didn't have to explain. I could have gone uptime to your next incarnation and taken payments then, but it costs and it's inconvenient. Our instructions are to intervene if possible. My thinker---" He tapped his chest pack "---is keyed to you, and...I was bored. I felt sorry for you."

David rubbed his beard. He had to believe this was happening. And he had to accept this incredible supra reality as explained by this man creature.

David seethed with anger, but kept it hidden. He had to know more. "Who are you? How did this lending and borrowing of time begin?"

"Ah, you adjust very quickly. A sign of high intelligence." He studied David intently, briefly, then said, "I'm a little weak on history, but about three of our centuries ago, our timeline, after the mythological Prime Self Reality node was proved to exist, a mathematician discovered a concept in reverse Semar manifold thread theory that allowed not only travel in time and in timelines, but thread knot storing of Prime Self time."

He continued, "Our civilization had known of the Prime Self cosmos---

'reincarnation' ---for a thousand years, but couldn't do anything about it. N-space technology---

"You buy and sell and rent and lend time?"

The amber man nodded. "We sell Life Time to the wealthy of any era, in any lesser timeline. And buy it from the poor and stupid. An hour, a week, a year or more. Life Time is very valuable, and very much in demand, for instance, by those with a fatal disease who hope for a cure. Our Life Time is often used as a kind of vacation from disease.

"We lend to those who feel they have a great work to complete and who have the means to repay."

"And you buy time from the poor? What do you pay?"

"A fine money rate, in whatever coin or paper is in use in a given timeline era. The poor often leave a fortune to sons and daughters who hardly knew them-- here today, dead of old age tomorrow. Most poor simply squander their money on partying and drugs between selling another year or more."

"And your government allows this?"

The amber man smiled. "Prime-execs. and prime ministers always want to live a long, long time. One senator has been re-elected forty-three times. There has never been a law passed which infringed upon our business...except those which forbid giving our civilization's advanced technology to those in past times or in other timelines."

"I don't understand how--- What happens to my body during those periods you take? The rest of the world doesn't collapse with my loss of life time, does it?"

"No. Your body is on Automatic Life; it lives according to its memory and brain settings, but the Prime Self is missing. You might say your soul is missing during that period. Your Prime Self Time is deleted from you and put in our time accounts. During that time payment your Prime Self is in stasis."

"There is no memory of that period?"

"There is, but when our devices take your Time they also automatically block your Prime Self from the brain's memories of the gap life."

"But when a borrower or an owner of Prime Self Time uses that time, say fifty years, doesn't he age?"

"No. It's an insertion into, not an addition to, a life. It's very technical. As far as entropy is concerned, it's a free ride."

"You've thought of everything." David slowly rose to his feet. "When and Where are you from?"

"In your terms...about 5000 AO, Prime Timeline."

David lunged and attempted to stab the strange young man, but his knife veered aside, as if skidding on an invisible shield.

"I knew you'd try that. I'm invulnerable." He indicated the amber covering and sparkling glow. "An intelligent 'skin' and force field. The entire suit is alive and dedicated to protecting me. There is no conceivable way for you to harm me."

"All right." David sheathed his knife. "Tell me how I can get my life back."

"That's simple. I'm empowered to renegotiate your loan. You can borrow from your next incarnation, just as your then Prime Self borrowed from you eight hundred years ago." His fingers played on a suddenly visible chest pack keyboard.

An "Understanding" appeared in David's mind, and a clear, precise, sub-vocal voice read the text.

David stood transfixed, eyes closed, concentrating on the agreement. Abruptly, he felt a golden path open in his mind: a linkage to what he supposed to be his Prime Self, a complex of multiple lives and accumulations of knowledge denied him till now.

New realizations and perceptions were added to his present self. New, deeper understandings penetrated and melded. Now his Prime Self became David Rolles, and David Roles became his Prime Self.

To his growing surprise, David remained essentially the same. His pasts were subservient, even that of the ego-driven king who had mortgaged most of David's life. Apparently the 'leading edge' Prime Self was automatically master.

He found he didn't like the offered time contract. "No. I shouldn't have borrowed in that past life. I'm not going to compound the mistake."

The young time usurer was startled by David's refusal. "But--If you borrow only forty years plus interest, as a bonus we'll give you access to your gap life periods. You'll see your son grow to manhood, and you could make a success of your present marriage."

"And in my next incarnation I'll be in this same situation, except I'll owe...how much time?"

"At our standard ten percent interest, the total will be seventy-seven years. But don't worry about having to pay it all off in one lifetime. We have a Multiple Lifetime Payment Plan. You can pay as little as ten years per incarnation, and that way still have long, happy lives with only small inconveniences. Many of our customers prefer the MLP Plan."

"Why didn't you offer that plan to me in my last incarnation, when I first borrowed?"

"I didn't have you in my client file at that time. I understand that our loan and collection policies have changed."

"Why do you take five years and six months at a time?"

"That's ten percent of your loan plus simple interest of ten percent. And it's the limit of our machines. It takes the grid thirty minutes to scan and lock in for the next bite out of Life Time."

David shook his head in disgust. "The policy is to exploit the ignorant Self in the next incarnation, when he or she is confused and terrified, isn't it? As I was. How many Prime Selves do you time dealers have on the hook like this?"

The amber youth said smugly, "Quite a large number. Several billion, in fact."

"And I suppose you get a bonus for every loan and loan extension you arrange?"

"Well, naturally. I do have a few years in the bank, with accompanying money credits." The usurer smiled, unable to hide his self-satisfaction.

"So your job isn't so bad after all."

"I didn't say I wasn't well paid, just that it's usually a bore."

"Well, I'm not boring you, I hope. And I'm not going to go deeper into debt. You can take my next five years and six months and shove them up your assets."



**David wiped the alluring time loan contract from his mind. He felt proud of himself.**

**The young time dealer scowled and touched his chest. "I shouldn't have felt sorry for you. I should have waited. Maybe you wouldn't have killed yourself. Two more payments and old-man-you would have leaped at my offer." He pressed another invisible button on his chest pack and disappeared.**

**David stared at the place the man had occupied. A sick sensation claimed his guts.**

**David didn't think he had much time left before the next five years and six months vanished from his life.**

**He realized an elite population of the time bankers' era and timeline must be virtually immortal, with thousands of years of memory time in their Prime Self accounts. They lived on time interest, while the poor and unfortunate in 'lesser' timelines lived drastically shortened lives.**

**His thoughts were interrupted by a time shift. He never saw the young time usurer again.**

**Three hours later, David was 74 years old. All he could remember were his first 19 years and those fateful ten, tortured half-hours between "payments" of time.**

**But the critical fourth half hour---his encounter with the strange time dealer ---remained stark and fresh in his mind.**

**He found himself now in a small, live-alone room: a narrow bed, a chair, a closet, a bookcase, a folding bicycle hanging on a door hook. A sheet of rules tacked to the wall in the kitchen alcove told him he lived in Senior Housing Facility #741.**

**Calmly, almost joyously, David stood and looked at himself in the mirror over the sink. Gray hair, bony face, sharp eyes, a lean body. He hadn't changed much from last time.**

**He said aloud, "From now on, Prime Self, our time is all ours." He felt a deep sadness, a sense of loss, for all the years of his life his body had lived and he could not remember.**

**There also existed a 19-year-old David who still could not believe what had happened to him.**

**But during his previous half-hour between payments, he had been in a prison cell, and knew he had been serving seven to ten for burglary and social irresponsibility. He never had paid those back-due child support assessments. He was glad those prison years were missing.**

**He felt fit. He was in good health. And there was one very important thing he had promised himself he would do when he had time.**

**He had a story to write.**

**David had learned h-d Viewers now had a pull-out keyboard, could be switched to computer mode and had programs for record keeping, bill paying, and writing. He mastered the writing program, opened a file, and began.**

**The next day he put the printout into the streetlevel electronic transmission system for delivery to a publisher he found listed in ViewerServ. There were still fantasy fiction outlets, but now they took stories for Viewer dramatization only.**

Reading was for a small elite of academics and seniors.

When he returned to his room, David found a tall, beautiful, orange-surfaced woman waiting for him. She also had a chest pack. Hers was nestled between spectacular, pointed breasts. Below, the orange "skin" indented enticingly into her cleft. She glistened with dew and wet the gray tiled floor.

David became wary and angry. "I don't owe you people a single minute!"

She smiled. "We owe you, David Rolles. You are a famous man in our era, now. The story you just sent was dramatized and printed...and forgotten."

David admired her virtually naked body. But he wasn't interested in sex, now. He frowned. "You'll have to explain that. Why are you here?" He didn't trust her. Why had they sent such a lovely woman? "I'm not going to borrow any time!"

She smiled and made a complicated gesture. "Your story superbly exposed the Prime Self Time loan business in its inhuman, ruthless aspect. Two years ago, in our era, in our timeline, your story was unearthed in an OTL archive by idealistic U-versity students and brought to the attention of our antiestablishment factions. They saw its propaganda value, adapted it to our entertainment technology, and placed it in six billion homes. A movement was begun to stop the Prime Self Time loan business, and seems to be making progress in our soc-pol-gov system."

He remained puzzled. "All right. I'm glad to know I got back at those bastards. But who are you? Why are you here?"

"I'm a representative of the Return Faction. We are opposing the time loan cartel. We advocate time technology be limited to government use. It is government pressure which forced this use of the privately-owned time technology. I'm here to tell you of a gift contributed by twenty-four millions of our citizens. You're now a rich man."

"Rich?" David smiled. He gestured at his minimal domicile. "I could use some money."

"Oh, not money rich. Time rich. They all contributed one day of their Prime Self Time to you. You are now virtually an Immortal. You have over sixty-five thousand years of life in your irrevocable eternal account."

He laughed. "That sounds impossible. You mean from now on..."

The emissary didn't smile. "No. There are three Clause-22s. After your death in this incarnation, your gift years begin fifty million years back in this timeline prehistoric time...and you cannot draw interest on the sixty-five thousand years."

"After my death?"

"The time bankers insisted. They want you out of sight, out of mind and out of our known time. There is some danger that if allowed to live 65,000 years from now that you might do something or set up time stresses and warps in this civilization---just by continuing to live---which would destabilize our Prime timeline."

"Destabilize... You might disappear?"

She smiled, but just a bit weakly. "Impossible. The theory is that we cannot unravel because we have not unraveled."

"I'm confused. Tell again exactly what will happen to me."

**"An instant before you die in a few years your Prime Self---with all your current memories---will be transported at least fifty million years back into this timeline's pre-historic time and you will live there in a contemporary male body for over sixty-five thousand years."**

**David was appalled. "Even before stone-age grunt-grunt time?"**

**"Yes."**

**"What will happen to me there? What will I do?"**

**"We don't know. There is no trace of you, mythological or otherwise."**

**"I'm just supposed to live that long with pre-humans? That's some gift! You're just burying me alive."**

**She appeared insulted. "It's the best we can do."**

**David thought for a few minutes, took a deep breath and said, "I'll take it. Please extend my thanks to all those in your timeline who contributed to my future in the past."**

**"It will be my pleasure. Goodbye, David Rolles." She vanished.**

**David wondered, after a few minutes, if he had imagined the encounter. But he knew he hadn't. A small puddle of water on the tiles where she had stood proved his memory true.**

**Sixty-five thousand years of life in the age of the giant reptiles? There would be no real humans to be with, but it was said that some of the saurs had been intelligent. Maybe he'd be able to communicate with them? Maybe, given time, he could help them build a civilization, accomplish great feats.**

**Then it hit him! He would be inserted into the body of a contemporary male. The time machine would do it. Maybe it would select for intelligence, not species. Maybe he'd end up in a clever saur's body --with claws like hands which could make tools.**

**By Odin, in sixty-five thousand years maybe he could nudge them here and there into building a technological civilization to match any in the future!**

**Did those in their self-styled Prime Timeline fully realize the potential and danger-to-them of what they'd given him?**

**He lay on his bed and began to think and plan. He thought, with the smart saurs I can surely accomplish something impossible to ignore or forget.**

**The 19-year-old in him speculated: Maybe if we develop space flight...I'll be able to destroy one of the two moons! Send it crashing down to Earth! That would sure as hell 'destabilize' the future!**

**END STORY**

**WORDS FROM THE KAETHIAN PROCONSUL ON EARTH**

**YOU REMAINING HUMANS SAY 'KNOW THE TRUTH AND THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE.' NO. YOU CANNOT ENDURE IT. THE TRUTH HAS FORCED MOST OF YOU INSANE.**

**Spoken at the Human Heart Feast of the Victors, New York Island of Rubble, AKI 26 (2203 AD)**

## **IN DIFFERENT LOVERS**

*Don't shout WHOA unless you really mean it*

**Jim sipped a small mixed drink before making love to himself.**

**Apricot nectar with an ounce of rum slid nicely over his palate, and a Jay & The Lovebirds sex CD on the holo sent sweet ripples of anticipation through him. He turned the sound low; Jay was too much a grunter and moaner as he fucked the girls.**

**"Take your time," had been the prime advice given at the X-Stasy Lover seminar the other night. Jim had really been nervous. But the presence of over 500 other solitary men had helped, and the speaker's jokes and assertive self-love philosophy had built assurance and confidence.**

**Now it was time to take his own virginity, so to speak. He'd never used one of these devices before.**

**He settled into his purple velvet lounge chair and placed the drink on the end table. From the velvet hassock before him he took the new X-Stasy A-15 Lover.**

**He was again surprised at its weight and size, and eager to program it, position it and let it ravish him.**

**Jim opened the Lover's face and leisurely studied the controls and optional settings. The seminar speaker's voice came to him. "Don't worry about a deficient or incomplete experience or two at first. It took me about fifty uses to explore all the variations and to find the combinations which I liked best. There will be, I guarantee it, one or two which will blow your mind and make you wonder why you ever wanted to go to all the time and trouble and expense of fucking a woman."**

**Jim remembered the spontaneous yells and whistles and clapping from the intent, eager crowd of men. They had wanted to believe. They wanted out of The Pussy Trap. They'd chanted, "Cunt means control! Cunt means control! Cunt means control!"**

**The mass movement of male rejection of women sweeping the country had created a new industry, new professions.**

**A man had risen in the audience and asked, "What about the Feminists who want all women to turn to parthenogenesis when they want children? No men needed and no males conceived. After a hundred years there'd be no man left alive."**

**The speaker had said, "That's a two-way street, my friend. Artificial wombs are being perfected right now! Soon it will be possible for men to have babies on their own, no women needed or allowed. Then, by God, it really will be a man's world!"**

**The room had shuddered with the cheer given by the assembled men.**

**Jim had been disturbed. That artificial womb business was WHOA propaganda. It could never happen.**

He was sure there were more than enough traditionalist and naturalist men and women in the country who would go on doing it the old-fashioned way and keep mankind and society going. Even if fifty percent of all the men opted for separate, mono-sex lives...

Jim opened his robe and was pleased at his nearly total erection. Jolly Roger wanted this experience, that was obvious.

His gaze was attracted to the 3-D high-definition holo. Jay and the Lovebirds were really going at it. Of course the women's groans and moans were faked, but it was equally obvious that Jay's grunts and moans were real. He was really smacking that big, long roger into the blonde Lovebird! He was having a hell of a good time.

I'd have a good time, too, Jim thought, with nine inches and two beautiful, eager women. Never mind being paid a million or so to do it.

But he knew, too, that there was a lot of video magic involved in pornvids, especially since the Supreme Court had extended the so-called 'penumbra of privacy' to include the production and distribution of pornvids which included only the normal sex acts. 'Normal' had come to be anything but child porn.

But even 'normal' sex acts, with computer-created special effects, were extraordinary. The illusion of easy, total deep-throating of a foot-long roger, for instance...and a man with a ten-inch tongue ravishing a woman... Tom Tongue was now a superstar. And California Throat was a Best Seller on national satellite pay-per-view. It had earned \$300 million in one week!

Jim enjoyed such fantasy once in a while, but it was becoming standard imagery, now. Everything in life was becoming so artificial and absurd!

There was still a huge controversy about 'normal' homosexual sex. Extreme anal penetration did seem somehow abnormal and unnatural to Jim. Yet the lesbian use of life-like rogers was officially okay. And surgically enhanced clits was an accepted therapeutic operation.

He had rented a comedy pornvid last month which followed the desperate search for fulfillment by a woman with a two foot long vagina whose clitoris was positioned at the end of her tunnel. Most of her lovers had to reach in... It was all computer trickery, of course. But legal. Showing vaginal and oral and manual sex was legal.

Jim sipped his drink and turned his full attention to the Lover's control settings. Lotion tank--full. Warmth level--normal. Voice--There were five famous erotic voices, but he chose Norma Z.

Norma Z's voice had always attracted him. The internationally famous Channel Sexcapade superstar also sold everything from cars to soap in seductive commercials. A hot honey voice like hers...

Now she'd speak to him, call him by name, and seduce him every way possible. Her program was thirty five minutes long. Jim didn't think he'd last five minutes...but there were always seconds...and thirds.

Now the action mix. Caressing first, then sucking, and finally fucking. He chose a normal speed for all three, and normal tightness. The machine had very sensitive feedback sensors and very aware chips and would go into its climax program when he reached that no-holding-back time.

He set the repeat program for three, with appropriate voice content and automatic physical adjustments. He would fine tune these afterward, of course.

He'd read the owner's manual thoroughly and was sure this first experience would be very nice indeed.

Jim drank the last of his drink. Heaven, he thought, here I come...in more ways than one.

As he positioned the device and placed its clinging arms and legs on his body, his homecube door chimed and showed a flatcam picture of the person downshaft at the cube complex's main entrance.

It was his "girl friend", Nancy. He experienced a mixture of anxiety, anger and sadness. It really wasn't her fault.

She asked, "Jim? I'd like to visit."

He picked up the remote and pressed Voice Only. "I'm into something right now..." He stifled a guilty laugh. "Could you call me a couple hours from now?"

"No, this is really important. I have to--- I really have to see you now."

He wondered what could be so important? Only their relationship, which had been dying for months. Talking seriously about it could surely wait a few hours.

But there she stood looking miserable and cold and lonely and even desperate. Behind her, the street was wet with rain. He couldn't say no. That was his main problem with women.

Jim made a face and said, "All right. Come on up." He pressed Main Door Open.

He began to disengage from the X-Stasy Lover, but then stopped. He muttered, "No! Damn it!" Now was the time, finally, to be honest with her. God damn it, let her walk in and see the thing bulging over his naked middle! He wasn't ashamed of it. She was the one who had insisted on coming up and interrupting!

But when Nancy knocked on his cube door he almost chickened out. He backflashed to the self-love seminar: "To be a man is to be in command!"

True! And wasn't this his homecube? The New Constitution said this was his home and in his home he commanded absolute privacy and mastery. The government could have 'no interest' in his behavior in his home so long as no one was physically harmed and no diseases transmitted.

Why should he be afraid of Nancy's opinion? Let her see! If she didn't like it she could go fuck herself! Which would probably happen.

He used the remote to unlock the door and signal green.

As Nancy entered, he leaned back in his chair and locked his fingers under his neck. He tried to smile. "Hi. What's bothering you?" He had started the 'caress' cycle in the Lover. It felt wonderful. The Lover moved and undulated as if alive.

She stared at him. She slowly shut the door and put her carryall purse on a nearby chair. "That's one of those masturbation machines, isn't it?"

"Yes." He waited, prickly sweat breaking out on his skin. For some reason her seeing him this way made his Jolly Roger super hard as a rock in the soft, warm, clinging, moving channel of the Lover.

She took off her wet, glistening raincoat and draped it over the chair. She unzipped and stepped from pink knee-high boots. She wore her pink, skin-tight

zylon jumper, the one he liked best because it displayed her spectacular breasts so nicely. To his certain knowledge she hadn't had a tit job, which made touching and caressing and kissing these natural beauties a special treat.

She gestured at the Lover. "I guess that's what's bothering me. I knew I was losing you. It's happening to more and more women."

Jim said, "Twenty-six percent of all single men, so far, and growing."

"Are you a member of WHOA, too?"

"I'm not a Woman Hater of America. That's for extremists. Like NOSEX is for women who hate men."

She said, "No Sexual Exploitation isn't a hate-men organization. You know that. We've been over and over that."

Jim shrugged and recited a prime reality quote of WHOA: "'Love me, love my roger.'" He didn't subscribe to the revenge-power-deny-hate message of WHOA, but this fit him and Nancy.

Nancy scowled, began to reply, stopped herself, and finally said, "You're such a parrot."

"And you're such a hypocrite."

She sighed. "Just because I don't like fucking and do like oral--"

He almost shouted, "I don't see why I should go down on you for God knows how long if I can't fuck you in return!"

"Because I hate being fucked! You've always known that!"

"And you've always known I hate all that licking and slobbering I have to do between your thighs. All I get for it is you sucking on a condom you make me put on. You know I've always been D:Free! That and being jerked off. And jerked is the word. You grip too tight and you pull like you're trying to uproot a tree."

He glared at her, all his frustrations and anger in the look.

Nancy clenched her fists. "I know. I just can't get the hang of it. Maybe down deep I don't want to."

He looked away. "That's why I bought this thing. So I won't need you for sex anymore. You or any other woman."

His roger had softened slightly. But the Lover continued its delicious stroking and touching.

"Jim, we have more in common than bad sex." She knelt on the faux grass carpet and touched his arm. "We had so much fun together before we ruined it all by going to bed."

He scowled. It was true. Nancy was a great companion, a fine conversationalist... He searched for arguments. He recalled a sequence from the seminar.

But she leaned forward and kissed him briefly on the cheek. Her thinly covered breasts pressed warm and soft against his bare arm. "Most women--"

He shifted his arm. "You all use sex to get your way. You're trying it now. Cunt control. What do you want? Why are you here?"

Nancy drew back. "I wanted to keep you as a friend. I didn't want us to be gender enemies. But if you're going to talk like that to me..." Her voice broke slightly.

Jim felt instantly guilty. He was being shitty. Trying to drive her away. But

he resented the guilt. He said, "I never tried to rape you, did I?"

"No. You have very good self-control. Why?"

"Because so many women are crying rape, that's why. It's getting to be a badge of honor among you. You have no status unless you've been raped." A point made by the seminar spokesman came to mind. He said, "Nowdays if a man gets an erection that's considered 'imminent rape' and a woman runs to a woman district attorney and gets her status enhanced as a woman attractive enough to be rapable."

"I would never do that and you know it." Nancy stood up and walked quickly, tensely away, toward the door. She picked up her raincoat and large purse. "I'm sorry I interrupted your...your honeymoon. I hope you and it will be very happy."

Jim was suddenly sorry as hell. The Lover abruptly seemed an alien thing, unnatural and inhuman. His Roger shrank in the device's continuing, undulating grasp.

If Nancy walked out now... "No, don't go. I don't want to lose you. I'd be crazy to let you go."

She paused. She suddenly relaxed and smiled. "We'd both be crazy. But..."

He nodded, on her wavelength. "But what do we do about our sex lives?"

She said, "You won't believe me, but I'm glad you got that thing. I was going to suggest you get one." She came to him and kissed him sweetly, yet passionately on the mouth. Nancy was a very good kisser.

Jim couldn't help kissing back. After a moment of growing passion, he broke the kiss and whispered, "Where is this leading?"

Nancy smiled and ruffled his hair. "Not into the same old dreary routine. I want us to go into the bedroom. I want you to use that Lover. We can kiss and hold hands."

"That leaves you out in the cold."

"No..." She drew her carryall purse to her and unzipped the cargo pocket. "We should have thought of this before." Smiling, she took out a Fem-O X-Stasy Lover box. "I just bought this today...an hour ago. It's the latest female model. Now we're equal."

Jim laughed. "You're a genius."

"No, the genius is the people who perfected these things. They're the answer to overpopulation, gender wars, and boredom."

He reached for the box and scanned the features listed on its side. Multiple tongues, Multi-depth Phallus, Nipple suckers... He asked, "'Simultaneous orgasms'?"

"Your Lover and mine can be linked to operate in conjunction, so we both climax at the same time."

Jim kissed Nancy. He couldn't help fondling her magnificent breasts. "Let's go into the bedroom and hook up."

"All right, but I'd like some real man kissing and touching before the machines take over. I'm sure these Suckers are fine, but I love your mouth and tongue on my nipples."

He nodded, smiling. "I can live with that."

As she delicately and sensuously helped him temporarily disengage from his



Lover, he thought, there's really no substitute for a revolutionary high-tech civilization.

Then he wondered, how many problems will this solution create?

END STORY

## **A.L. TREGO: Private Investigator CASE #269: TERRIA BRENNER**

I woke up next to the bed on the puke green carpet of my new studio apartment.

I had a drop forge headache, the taste of sinus snot in my mouth and the feeling of rigor mortis in my bones.

I must have fallen off the bed. Nothing new. I get so fucking drunk....

Morning streamed in through the old-style Venetian blinds, covering me with slabs of blinding sunlight. I groaned and turned my face away.

I didn't like the fresh-paint smell of the bare, cream-colored walls, the sight of the open, empty refrigerator in the tiny kitchen, or that the rumpled, queen-size bed was the only real furniture in the place.

You can't count the four antique wooden file cabinets and the antique roll-top desk, carted over from my former one-room office. Or the computer setup next to the desk.

I realized finally that my boxer shorts were on the carpet near the bed. My cock was scummy. That meant I'd probably gotten laid.

My pants were inside out on the kitchen tiles. My jacket and shirt lay crumpled nearby on the carpet. And half under the low bed rested my legal and moral Colt .65 Tamer in its shoulder holster and leather harness.

A Tamer--fast-acting tranks and 100,000 volts in the same fragile little missile---was all a Private Investigator could legally carry as of 2012.

Illegally, I could carry anything, and have. And will. You have to, in this year of our Crime Horde 2016.

Then I remembered the woman.

I had a fuzzy memory of great perfume, abundant dark blonde hair, a perfect face, serious blue eyes and a succulent mouth. Most of it, I knew, had come from a plasurgeon's kit.

She'd told me her name was Mary when we met at the bar.

I had a few further memories of a perfect body, warm white flesh, big, soft breasts, hot honeyed pleasure from a deep vaj augmented by extra muscles and

**lubrication ducts. Cunt heaven.**

**And, yeah...the way she jerked her sweet, hot cunt up for more of my cock, squealing and gasping with delight. How could I forget that?**

**There are damned few women who can take every inch of me...as she had.**

**There was a lot more to remember, but I didn't want to put mental fingers on it. Not yet.**

**I checked the round medpatch on my upper right arm. All its concentric bands were still green. A small worry dissolved; she'd had no sex diseases.**

**I said a mental Thank God for this revolutionary product of micro-biology: the medpatch, designed to micro-test your blood continuously for one year, was accurate, tamper-proof, and pure social grease. All Green means Go Ahead And Fuck.**

**I sighed and managed to stand up. Too bad she was gone.**

**The flushing of the toilet in the closed bathroom told me she wasn't gone.**

**I was hung-over sober---the worst condition in the universe---and wanted to be alone in my misery.**

**But I also wanted her real name and the real reason she'd come so willingly into my life.**

**I pulled on my shorts to cover my dead horse cock. Big, ugly thing; I never understood why so many women let me stuff it inside them.**

**I reached for my shirt and found my wallet still in the breast pocket.**

**Surprise---it still held two hundred and forty-three purple cash dollars.**

**I wasn't sure how much should have been there. I had a vague memory of three hundred before I hit Old Jarret's Grill & Drinkery.**

**I'd sold my holo and a spare pc to get the rent and move-in money.**

**The three hundred was living-till-the-next-job money.**

**The wallet still displayed my gold-edged P.I. license, my driver's license, and my near-the-limit UCard.**

**All this told me the woman was probably honest. How had I gotten so lucky?**

**I noticed that the phone company had turned on my new phone line. The red telltale on my computer blinked a recorded call. Fuck it.**

**I slipped my wallet back into the shirt pocket and put on the shirt. When I stooped to put on my pants dizziness hit me and I swayed, blinking, feeling nauseous. The damned headache kept slamming me between the eyes with a John Henry sledge.**

**When I could see straight I strapped on the Colt's holster and carefully slipped on my coat. I feel more comfortable with a Tamer hanging under my armpit. But I feel totally at ease with an old-fashioned Colt .45.**

**I lurched into the kitchen, remembering a new bottle of cheap scotch in the cupboard. I clawed and twisted it open and glugged down two mouthfuls. I hate hair-of-the-dog drinking, but some of my hangovers are not to be endured.**

**I hung onto the counter and breathed hard.**

**I heard the toilet flush again and decided I definitely had to use the pot.**

**I took the bottle with me, moved carefully to the bathroom door and was surprised to find it unlocked. I flung it open and stared at the half naked young woman standing at the wash basin, bent slightly forward, smiling at herself in the**

mirror, in the act of applying lavender-pink stripe lipstick.

She was a dream of old-fashioned long, dark blonde hair and porcelain skin. Her breasts hung out like huge white pears with dark red nipples for stems. I couldn't see even a faint implant scar.

She was breathtakingly slender, with long, perfect legs. She wore only purple lace, diamond knit pantyhose with the V open. Her depped center gleamed ivory and pink.

I did automatically note her left arm medpatch. All the circles were green...but the small bulls-eye glowed white. She was pregnant!

She had gasped as I pushed the bathroom door open. She turned toward me for a second, and I gaped, a cynic dazzled, by wide, electric blue eyes and her amazing, swaying, rounded flesh.

She said, "Oh!" and turned away and grabbed up her hand-tooled leather purse with gold initials TB on the flap, and her folded purple and yellow cling jumper.

She flushed. "I've really got to go now." But a satisfied smile lurked at the corners of her perfect mouth.

I needed to piss and shit, gargle, and take a handful of painkills, mostly in that order. I said stupidly, "Yeah. Okay," and stepped aside.

Then I finally got a brain cell working and moved to block the bathroom doorway.

Her incredible blue eyes widened further. Had to be contacts or imps. "Please," she said, all purr and appeal. "I have a job. I have to go to work." She struggled to quell that smile.

Work? Her? She was a million dollars of alterations on the hoof. Somebody very wealthy kept her.

Up close she smelled fantastic. She'd done her perfect face to make-up perfection. I couldn't detect the slightest flaw. I resented that.

I stepped closer and loomed over her, scowling. Hell, at six-four I loom over damn near everybody, an advantage in my so-called profession. A good scowl and an impressive loom are worth an extra fifty per day.

I asked, "What's your name? Do we have any more business to take care of?"

She answered, "I'm Francine, and we've finished our business. Don't you remember?"

Last night she'd said Mary. I remembered that much. I said, "All you wanted was to get fucked?"

She didn't want to deal with that. She looked pointedly at my bottle and said, "You're really an alky, aren't you?"

I deliberately swigged from the bottle, grimaced, and said, "I'm just changing my blood chemistry. My head is killing me."

"You wouldn't have a hangover if you didn't drink like---"

I didn't need a moral lecture from her. "I drink to forget, okay? And it works; I can't remember what I want to forget."

"That old joke! A man of your intelligence shouldn't resort to old wise cracks to evade---"

"Shut up!" That 'intelligence' crack had told me why she'd picked me up in the drinkery and come to my apartment. I pushed past her into the bathroom. "Wait for me, Mary Francine. We'll talk about payment. And don't think you can get away clean. I know you're a client of the Future Perfect Agency. They'll remember you." I shut the door.

I emptied myself---a three sigh piss and a dump---swallowed six buffered Taspirin from a bottle in the medicine cabinet, slathered on some KreemShave and washed my cock in the basin. You never know. It was pretty well dead, but she was a woman who could raise the dead.

I was happy to see her waiting when I emerged ten minutes later. She was sitting on the bed, incredibly beautiful in her second-skin jumper.

God, she'd made the bed while waiting!

I said, "You don't want to fuck again?"

"No. Last night did it." She patted her medpatch. "I conceived!" She looked at me with a kind of disgusted, grateful awe, and smiled that glorious smile. "You came seven times! Talk about making sure! You are an amazing... an amazing male."

I said, "And you're an amazing female. You never had that much meat for that long before, huh?"

She flushed. "Do you have to say such---"

I asked, "So why did you wait?"

Her beautiful face abandoned happiness and twisted through self-pity, anger, confusion and despair. "Please, Mister Terego, it has to be a secret. If my...if he knew what I'd done..."

Suspicion and curiosity got the best of me. "Maybe he already does." A man who owns a dream on legs like her would try to keep track of her.

I told her to stay put, got into my closet and came out with a trace detector. Basic equipment and basic procedure. I turned it on and the blinker came on. I zeroed in on her big leather purse.

She divined what that meant. Her big blues got huge and watery. "Oh, no..."

I said, "He's got you placed here from one a.m. on." I took her purse and rummaged through the junk. A little false-bottomed perfume sprayer held the trace bug.

I dropped the sprayer into my pocket. "Want to tell me what's going on?"

"Can't you just let me go?"

"He's got this place and me nailed by now. I'll probably get some unwanted visits. Who are you and what am I going to be dealing with?" I loomed menacingly.

She whimpered, "I wish I'd never..."

"But you did. You wanted to have a superior baby." I made some educated guesses. "You look twenty-five but you're really forty or so and your bioclock is close to zero. You got my name and number from Future Perfect's donor files and decided to avoid an official record and notice and keep things secret and anonymous by seducing me."

She paled and didn't deny any of it. She said, "But I used a false name with Future Perfect." Then she said accusingly, "I thought you'd be nice and clean and successful."

I laughed. "And you got a nasty, drunken, nearly bankrupt private investigator. Why did you go through with it?"

"Even drunk you talk like a very intelligent man. And you look a lot like---"

"I'm flattered." I wasn't. She chose me because of the resemblance and because I only do fuck inseminations. To hell with office call no-fun semen deposits in a quick freeze bottle. I said, "Now tell me who you are and who he is."

"No, I'm going to leave."

"He'll come here and I'll have no reason to deny or lie. Maybe I can help if you'll tell the truth."

She finally saw the logic. "I'm... I'm Terria Brenner. He's my husband. Marcus Nelson Brenner."

Shit! The guy was a fucking trillionaire. He owned CASNet! I flashed on the article I'd skimmed about his service a month ago: CASNet stood for Create A Story Network. He's got a zillion computer images and story elements available---no adult censorship, no adult limits---and the net user for a fee can create his own adventure using any of thousands of damn-near-perfect computer-stored fictional people in thousands of past or present locales on Earth or in fictional space. Any action, however gross, bizarre or erotic or 'impossible' was possible. Then sit back in front of the hd3d screen...or wear a criminally expensive VR3 Helmet and enjoy, enjoy, enjoy.

Terria Brenner was his wife and I was the guy who'd spent two or three drunken hours fucking her into pure white conception. And she had intended to pass off the hoped for pregnancy as his doing.

I asked, "Why couldn't he get you pregnant?"

"I won't tell you."

But she thought she could convince him he did it.

I asked her, "How are you going to explain where you were last night?"

"I have a friend, a woman friend, who will swear I was with her. And he's in Kinshasa for two days on business....and we had sex night before last."

At least she had planned that far.

"That doesn't mean anything; he'll believe his instruments. He's an electronics wizard and he's probably got telefeed to anywhere he is on the planet."

She looked stricken.

I sighed and thought for two seconds and said, "You went to Old Jarret's Grill & Drinkery for a few minutes and accidentally left your perfume tube there. We never met. I'll say I found it on the bar and kept it. It's been in my coat pocket ever since."

She brightened. "You're a genius!" She became heart-stoppingly, gut-twistingly beautiful when she smiled. Beauty like that should be illegal.

"My genius will cost you five thousand." I cut through her sudden frown by saying, "Send it in cash when you can."

That was it. She scooted out. She left feeling happy, but I knew she didn't have a Clinton's of getting away with it.

I had another swig of whiskey. It was really cheap whiskey, but it suddenly tasted good.

I grinned. Terria Brenner! I'd royally fucked the wife of the third richest man in the world! And with any luck I'd be the real father of his kid.

But I had a bad feeling about it.

I remembered an old saying: 'Lead with your cock and you'll land on your ass.' That explained why my ass was so sore all the time.

I went to my computer and noticed again the message-waiting signal. It could wait a little longer.

I clicked into a newsnet. Seconds later I was staring at a picture of Marcus Brenner.

Yeah, okay, he was tall, but skinny as sticks, with wild dark hair and tired gray eyes.

I'm tall and solid, but with dark hair and gray eyes.

The bio said he was 27, but he looked 40. Didn't look like being a trillionaire was much fun.

I could see enough similarities to convince Brenner that Terria's child could be his. I've got a high IQ, but he's supposed to be a genius. Yet genius tends to be a narrow, intense talent. I'm more all around smart and experienced, like a street-wise junk-yard dog.

But a faint sick feeling grew in my guts. What if Marcus Brenner didn't believe his wife just happened to lose his trace in a bar? And that it just happened to be picked up and kept by a down-and-out P.I.?

What if her woman friend talked? What if Brenner smelled a stranger cock and set a high-powered team of snoopers onto me and Terria and made the Future Perfect connection?

I shrugged. What the hell, I'd find out, one way or the other.

I switched over to the message waiting. The readout said it had been placed at 6:09 a.m. It had vid. I played it. A fiftyish woman, with those bulging eyes some people have, blinked at me and said, "Mister Terego, I'm Mirgo Hopkins, the housekeeper for Marcus Brenner and Terria Brenner. I'm trying to locate Mrs. Brenner on an urgent matter. I have reason to believe she may be with you. Please ask her to call me at the house. Thank you."

How did she know to call here? Was it a trap? Was she a friend trying to warn Terria?

I wiped the message. Wrong number as far as I was concerned. But I had a feeling it was a beginning, not an end.

My sixth sense told me to be careful. I always took its advice.

I set some silent prox alarms on the apartment door and windows. Then I flopped into bed for more sleep, in spite of the daylight.

The sharp buzzing in my ear woke me hard and fast. I ripped the prox signaler from my ear and rolled out of bed.

I crouched, Tamer in my hands, ready. It was fully loaded with six fat little missiles.

The apartment door had been opened about three seconds ago. And I could see it being eased open further.

The studio apartment was suffused with warm sun. The only sounds were my quick breathing and soft traffic below.

A big, balding man in a blue suit peered in and saw me. His eyes widened and he said, "Hey, P and L, brother. I come with no evil intent."

He eased in further, but kept his left arm hidden behind the door. His gaze jittered around the apartment, seeking.

'P and L' stood for Peace and Love, a Mankind First catch-phrase.

I said, "B and E, brother," and shot him. He wasn't a cop. Breaking and Entering is a felony and according to California Revised Statutes, 1999, 2001, and 03, any owner or renter of any domicile or vehicle may disable any perpetrator of such acts in any reasonable manner to protect self, others or property.

'Disable' had been defined by the Supreme Court to include 'kill' if it is inadvertent and not by direct, premeditated intent. In thirteen years and after 3400 fatality defenses of life and property, nobody had ever been successfully charged with planned intent to kill an intruder.

This guy jerked and went spastic when the Tamer cartridge hit square in his belly, just above the belt. That super-loaded capacitor discharged 100,000 volts into him the instant it hit, and the needle nose jetted a powerful dose of Stopit as the missile flattened.

Neat. In theory the Stopit had time to take effect while he was twitching and jangling from the electrical shock.

This time the Tamer hit unshielded cloth and flesh. He hadn't worn a K-Undervest. He became an instant spastic and dropped hard and heavy. His big balding head bounced on the thin carpet. His left hand held a Colt Tamer, too! It clattered forward halfway to the far wall.

I waited to see if there was a partner out there. But no sound, no movement.

I still waited. The guy was grunting and convulsing and peeing his pants. But no shit stink...yet.

Finally, I kicked my door shut and dragged the moaning, now stinking slob into the kitchen. He could leak onto the tiles.

As he began to puke and curse---but with slow-motion lethargy---I went through his pockets.

I found his wallet and a Pocketpad with a recorder chip. I glanced at them and put them aside for a moment.

I had Frank Yandro on the floor, an employee of CASNet Security. He had on him a C-phone, a trace finder and a sniffer. He also carried a pair of old-fashioned steel handcuffs. And a Veritas injection kit.

I handcuffed him to the built-in aluminum kitchen table. Then I stomped the sniffer and put it back in his suit coat pocket. It had registered a lot of Terria's perfume in the apartment air and I

didn't want Brenner to know that.

Yandro might think his fall had broken the little device.

I kept the t-finder and C-phone, and slipped his Tamer into my holster. My Tamer I kept in my right hand, aimed at him. Most of his stuff was mine by right of conquest.

Winner keeps, loser weeps.

I turned on the air conditioner's air purifier. He had shit in his pants during convulsions and that extra stink was getting gross.

As I waited for him to be able to talk coherently I studied his electronic Pocketpad and his wallet.

He was legal, had a company car, did a lot of snoop work on Brenner's business rivals and competition. This was not his first assignment of a personal nature for Brenner.

Brenner was still in Kinshasa, and Yandro was supposed to check my place for proofs of Terria's presence here last night. If necessary he had permission to drop me and short-cut questioning with Veritas.

While he was still thrashing and vomiting I copied his Pocketpad files into my computer. Like a good agent he had noted times and date and recorded a fruitless conversation with my next-apartment neighbor. Like a stupid agent he had not bothered with a lock-out code to protect his notes and recordings.

I returned his wallet and Pocketpad. He sort of "came to" and realized my hand was in his breast pocket. He slurred, "...fuckin' 'way from me."

"Just checking to see who you are, Frank." I shifted out of his possible reach and squatted on my heels.

He felt his shit and piss in his pants and made a face. "Let me loose. I've gotta use your bathroom."

I laughed. "You were going to use this Tamer on me, weren't you?"

"Come on, Terego! Time out. We're both professionals. I've got to clean up."

"Yandro, you were going to Tame me, weren't you?"

"If I had to. Shit, I hate this scene. Let me ---"

"And then you were going to cuff me and shoot Veritas into me and get the real truth out of me."

"Fuck you."

"Even if Veritas does screw up the mind for a week or more."

"You going to let me clean up?"

"No. See, Frank, I have this weird philosophy I follow: I deal with people on their terms."

"What's that mean?"

"It's a corollary of the Golden Rule, Do unto others...you know...that idealistic shit."

"You're a nut."

"Yup. A nut who deals with people on their terms. I'm dealing with you as you'd deal with me. You gave me that permission."

He thought about it for a few seconds. "I didn't come here to kill you."

"Only to tame me, Q me, and scramble my mind."



**"Just doing my job."**

**"Fine. Ask your questions, then get your shitty pants out of here."**

**He stared at me. He finally asked, "Who was the beautiful woman who spent last night with you?"**

**"No woman. I was drunk but not that drunk. I don't remember any beautiful woman."**

**He had lied to me, so I had permission to lie to him.**

**"You didn't pick up a stunner at a drinkery last night?"**

**"No." I frowned and said, "All I picked up was this." I fished the perfume sprayer from my jacket pocket and tossed it to him. "It was in the bar trough."**

**"Oh, sure. Why did you keep it?"**

**"I've got a gash who likes little gifts like that."**

**"You're fucking lying to me."**

**"No, I'm not. And that's all your questions." I got some rubber bands from a drawer in my desk and put them on over his shoes to close his pantslegs at his ankles. I didn't want him dribbling shit and piss on the rug when he left.**

**I fished the handcuff key from my same jacket pocket and tossed it to him.**

**He asked, "What about my Tamer? That's mine, not company equipment."**

**"It's mine, now. Spoils of war. You lost the battle."**

**"You fucking nut! Tamers cost three thousand each!"**

**"I need a spare. And Frank, if you come back here with evil in your heart, expect to be a B and E fatality."**

**He left, walking gingerly, cursing.**

**It was music to my ears.**

**Two days later I was sitting at my favorite little booth in the back of Old Jarret's, eating a fat-loaded breakfast, when a short, boyish girl in a green ripple dress came over and said, "Arthur Lane Terego? I'm Rilla Fontina. Can I sit down for a minute? Thank you."**

**I stopped eating, a forkful of hashbrowns almost to my mouth. She was a pixie, brimming with energy and confidence and presumption. She slid into the booth and went on, "I'm a friend of Marcus, and he'd like to see you. Today. Now."**

**I stuffed the hashbrowns into my mouth and reached into my left breast pocket. I pressed two buttons on my C-phone. I asked, "Who are you again?"**

**"Rilla Fontina. I work for Marcus Nelson Brenner."**

**The thin, green metalon fabric of her dress was perfectly suited to her; it shimmered and rippled and mini-folded and creased and shifted endlessly in response to her slightest movement.**

**She was dazzling and hypnotizing. Especially intriguing were her tiny breasts and excited, stick-out nipples. No bra; the slick fabric had to be keeping her in constant heat.**

**I took a good look at her face and wise eyes as I said, "So what?"**

**"Oh, you know. He wants to see you out at his home. I'm to take**

you there, and bring you back."

"The vidwiz. The trillionaire? Why?"

I estimated her age at 26 or so, and sensed her tight little body was the product of ten thousand hours of exercises. She was coiled stainless steel.

"I don't know. I'm his gofer. You're it today. He just got back from Africa. Can I make it quick by letting him ask you to come?"

"Sure." I forked in some eggs.

She took a C-phone from her little ripple purse and stabbed a number. "Sir, he needs convincing." She handed it to me.

It was a super-new See-phone. I found myself looking at a two-inch square realtime view of Marcus Nelson Brenner. He looked like a starving, used-up teen-age scarecrow. He had significant bags under his eyes. He smiled a rictus and said, "I have an important matter to discuss with you, Terego. It'll pay you to visit."

I nodded. "You said the magic word."

"Fine. Give the phone to Rilla."

She took it and switched on a newer feature; a privacy field. She said words I couldn't hear, listened, glanced at me with a quirky smile, and signed off. The state-of-the-art phone went back into her purse.

I made her wait while I finished my eggs, bacon, sausages, hash-browns and coffee. I knew she'd say it and she did: "That stuff will kill you."

"Maybe. What do you think will kill you?"

She blinked and said after a beat, "Too much sex."

"A form of suicide."

She laughed. "I like you."

Five minutes later she towed me out to her car. Car? It was a rolling apartment in limo form.

I found myself in deep, cushioned seats which could be lowered and extended to beds. There were small fridges and cabinets, micro-bars, even a small microwave and a wash basin with running water. There was a digital TV, stereo, a computer, phones... Everything but a toilet.

Rilla said to the driver, "The house," and opaqued the glass between us and him. She also dimmed the side windows.

I assumed that what Rilla and I said would be recorded, but that the driver wouldn't be able to hear.

As the limo pulled away into traffic I checked out the right-side bar. Yeah! A decanter of good whiskey. I took a glass and poured about four shots.

Rilla snuggled close. "We've got a thirty minute ride." She pressed her small right breast against my left arm. Nice warmth and a nice little prod from her hard nipple. Her fingers walked onto my thigh.

I began asking myself questions. Why the seduction? Was it me, her, or orders? No good answers came to mind. I slugged down the whiskey and decided I had nothing to lose. I turned in the wallow cushions and kissed her.

Rilla was instant lust, all tongue and squirming body and passionate breathing. And curiosity. She had my pants open and my cock out with very practiced ease during that first long wet kiss.

She made appreciative sounds as her fingers discovered a very live horse. She tore her mouth from mine and said, "I don't fuck. I'm still a virgin."

"What's this about, then?"

"It's about head games." She smiled and licked my finger. "The kind of head men love."

"Why?"

"I love tongue, so I give to get." She cocked her pixie face and said mischievously, "The golden rule."

She filled her left hand with my cock and stroked slowly. "Come on, Arthur, deal with me on my terms."

So she had heard Frank Yandro's no-doubt embarrassing report of his failed mission.

Rilla was intelligent and clever. I had no doubt she was Brenner's Plan B.

I said, "Show me your green."

She touched her ripple dress here and there and the fabric fell away from her perfect little body in a waterfall of shimmering green. Her revealed arm medpatch showed all green circles.

I slipped out of my jacket and pulled up my shirt sleeve. I was wearing my Tamer, and the harness and holster were a bit in the way.

Rilla said, "Oooo, Arthur, what big, green muscles you have!"

I smiled and lifted her, naked, up from the pool of her dress and set her on my lap, facing me. Maybe she weighed ninety-five pounds. My cock prodded up between her lean thighs. She tensed.

I said, "Don't worry, your hymen is safe with me." And that was true. I believed her virginity---the world is full of crazy women, some very smart, very aware, very anxious about health and fitness and control of their lives---and I didn't want to bother with deflowering a virgin. Messy, traumatic, time-consuming, full of relationship traps, and not fun at all!

I worked my hands under her taut little buttocks and lifted her up so I could get my mouth easily onto her red, rigid nipples.

Rilla giggled, then squirmed and hummed to herself as I suckled.

It was fun; I like giving a woman pleasure and this way as usual evoked a few infantile nursing memories. Pity the man whose mother didn't give him the teat. A rubber nipple is no real substitute.

After a few minutes I heard her whispering, "Now, do me. The main course, Arthur. Eat me. Eat me..."

I slumped lower in the deep cushions and raised my knees and rested her back and head on my thighs.

She opened for me like a scented pink flower and I used the old Clit-22 technique. It's only old-men's tales that you have to have a double-jointed tongue to do it. And with her it was easy; her clit was the size of a swollen pencil eraser.

Rilla certainly appreciated my technique. She squirmed like an eel and spasmed into orgasms at least three times in ten minutes.

But then her wrist watch alarm tinkled off and she seemed to shift gears, revive, and remember her mission.

She quivered with pleasure, but pushed my head back. "Stop it, you wonderful sonofabitch. We don't have that much time left."

"It's only been twenty minutes."

"Put me down. I've got to... I want to drain your brain out through your cock."

I deliberately held her up, her wet pussy still inches from my mouth. "I'll pass. You can owe me." I kissed those pink, engorged lips...

"Arthur!" She twisted and grabbed and leveraged with her legs to get free.

I put her down beside me and started to zip my pants. Just to see what she'd do.

"No! Let me do what I promised! Please!" She fought my hands with surprising strength. She was really desperate! "I've got to suck you off! Let me! Please! Please!"

"Why is it so important?"

"It just is! You're insulting me this way! Refusing! I don't want to owe any man! Now, let me! Please, Arthur."

One amazing situation. I couldn't figure a Brenner reason for having her do it. Was it really a point of honor for her?

I finally let her have her way. I lay back and let her gobble away as if her life depended on it. And I'll give Rilla this: she knew all there was to know about sucking cock.

After two minutes of fighting it I gave up and let the lava erupt. My mind turned inside out. She had tongue tricks that had my guts clenching and trembling. Powerful inner spasms shook me.

Even in the throes of my passion, so to speak, I watched her. Rilla took all my semen into her mouth and then spat it into a white cloth she took from a drawer below the limo's microwave. She ignored me as she put the cloth into a plastic bag, and slipped the sealed bag into her purse.

That was enough. I figured out Plan B.

Out of curiosity I asked her, "You suck Brenner, too?" She smiled and didn't answer.

The Brenner house was a fucking hundred million dollar mansion set on a prime Santa Monica hilltop north of San Vicente, with a view of L.A. on one side and the valley on the other.

But it was like no other mansion in the world. The portico was made of fake Stonehenge columns and was big enough to cover six cars. The ten-car garage off to the left looked like a series of caves in an artificial rock face in a manmade 300-foot pile of broken marble.

The main house had the outside appearance of giant slabs of black, red, and purple marble, all tilted and canted and odd-angled, with a 3-story-high mounded-earth roof linking the slabs.

I couldn't see any windows or sat dishes.

I said to Rilla as we got out of the limo and walked toward the huge door made of a slab of translucent quartz crystal, "Marcus Benner lives in a homemade cave?"

"He has a great feel for the origins of mankind."

**"Does he shit in a hole in the ground, too?"**

**"There are limits to his Neolithicism."**

**Maximum limits. Close up, the quartz crystal slab was made of hollow plastic and pivoted with servomotor assists.**

**I could see the interior was cave-motif, but the furniture was sleek modern teak, the lighting state of the art, and the floors polished marble under hand-made wool carpets.**

**I spotted hidden and camouflaged microcams, weapon scans, and prox alarms.**

**Just inside the entranceway two security men intercepted us and insisted I leave my Tamer with them. Fair enough.**

**Rilla led me into a "study", and there was Marcus Nelson Brenner, a dark haired scarecrow with a brain, sitting in jeans and black collarless shirt behind a crowded computer work station that wrapped around his swivel chair like a huge techno fist.**

**He made a face that I figured was a smile, for him, and said to Rilla, "They're waiting for you in the lab."**

**She nodded and was gone.**

**He looked me up and down as if inspecting a repulsive monster. But he admitted, "You could be worse. Actually, you have a very impressive police detective history of murders solved and cases closed. I've scanned many of them."**

**"That's ancient history." I hated to be reminded. Memories of my LAPD years always led to memories of ...**

**He smile-grimaced again. "I understand. We all have tender spots in our pasts." He touched computer keys and glanced at several monitors whose faces I couldn't see. He folded his stick arms on his chest---prime defense posture---and said, "Your semen is being broken down and your DNA recorded for comparison with the fetus in my wife's womb."**

**"I figured. What happens when you know scientifically I'm the father?" There was no point denying it, now. Individual DNA mapping was now old hat, quickly, routinely used to ID fathers, and routinely accepted by courts and juries.**

**There had only been a very slim chance Terria Brenner could get away with her deception.**

**"Would you like some whiskey?" He pointed to a small bar cabinet behind me. I was expected to get my own drink. He continued, as I poured two fingers and belted it down, "That could be poisoned."**

**"No. You know I'm C-phoning this conversation to my computer."**

**"Blocked from the moment you entered my limo."**

**"Friends at Old Jarret's saw me leave with Rilla. She's impossible to forget."**

**"Alas, true. There is no poison. I'm simply furious at Terria and jealous of you. I would like to kill you, but I'm still human enough to have moral compunctions, and still afraid of getting caught."**

**I thanked God for our fairly honest police state government. Even trillionaires were subject to most felony laws. "I appreciate your honesty."**

**"I admire your philosophy...as demonstrated with Frank...and Rilla."**

I shrugged. Of course the limo had microcams and of course they fed it all to his computers. He could be rerunning it now, watching me eat Rilla and watching her suck me off, from the corner of an eye.

He said, "You really made an enemy of Frank. He'd love to kill you."

"He'd end up dead trying."

Brenner grimaced.

I asked, "Where is your wife?"

"N.O.Y.B." He spun around in his executive office chair, took a deep breath, and said, "Terego, for personal and business reasons I need your total and future silence on this matter. I will pay you for your silence, with the promise that if you do not keep our agreement I will have you killed. Is that acceptable?"

"What about Terria and the baby?"

"It's not a 'baby', it's a fetus. That will depend in part on the readouts I get from your DNA analysis, which are due in a few more minutes, by the way. If you measure up I will probably accept it as my own...and the world will rejoice. If not... Suction city." He grimaced and shook with silent laughter, pleased at having made a sick joke.

I poured myself more whiskey. "Why do you use those old-fashioned terms -- N.O.Y.B., for instance. None Of Your Business went out thirty years ago...before you were born. And 'suction city'! Christ!"

"I read a lot and I found those expressions to my liking. I don't need semantic opinions from ilk like you. Now, is a silence agreement possible?"

"How much money?"

"We'll sign a contract with you for the use of your body image in CASNet. A hundred thousand advance, plus royalties."

"Why not bribe me with cash?"

"I have to account for every cent. The government is a jealous and greedy partner in everything I do. They watch me like a hawk."

There was another out-of-date expression; hawks were endangered, watching now from zoos or special guarded sanctuaries.

I strolled around the big "study". There were a few bookcases filled with obsolete computer manuals and such. Collector's items.

I asked, "What do I have to do to get this advance?"

"Just stand naked on a turntable and go through various movements. Speak a few hundred words. Takes ten minutes." He was distracted by a monitor. He shifted and focused full attention.

I drifted over to get a look, too. But I kept my distance from the computer nest; I thought it was probably loaded with prox defenses.

Brenner confirmed that by saying, without looking away from the monitor, "Keep at least twenty feet away from me."

"Yeah." All I could see was a lot of text and math symbols on the screen. I turned away and strolled to the fake marble back wall. It was plastic, naturally, but a fine imitation of marble surface, complete with tiny cracks and chipped edges.

"Terego!"

I turned. He was standing, with that damned grimace smile on his

face.

He said, "Your fetus looks very good, DNA-wise. Surprisingly high intelligence potential. It will live. I'll keep it as my son."

"You're all heart."

"Which makes your discretion more important than ever. You'll get a two hundred thousand advance. I've decided your body image will be very popular in the Net."

He sat down and turned his attention to another monitor. "Leave now. Rilla will meet you in the entranceway. She will arrange your contract and your imaging."

Yeah, he was only barely human. But my life-long silence was worth far more than two hundred thousand. I should be taken into the corporation and made dependent upon it, seduced by it, with a lot to lose if I fucked up and told somebody The Secret.

Two hundred thousand wasn't real. That told me he was going to try to have me killed. I sensed he liked to play games and then resort to final solutions.

I asked, not moving, "Why can't you father a son with Terria?" I used her first name to goad him, if possible.

He swiveled and said with sudden ferocity, "N.O.Y.B.! Now, get your big cock out of my house before I have it cut off and served to you diced and fried, with Sargotto mustard and Sava leaves."

"Brenner---"

"You'd find it very tasty, in spite of the pain." He jerked his bony arm and pointed to the doorway. He was trembling. He meant it.

I put on my discretion hat and left valor behind. But I also had confirmed my idea he'd try to have me killed. That last 'cock' outburst had told me a lot.

Rilla was waiting in the rock mansion's entranceway. "You two have a nice chat?"

"Sure. I sold him my Image for two hundred thousand plus the right to fuck you any time I want."

She paled, tensed, then smiled. "Joke."

I carried it a little further. "Ask him."

"No. I thought you didn't lie."

"I don't--to people who don't lie to me."

She took my hand. "Come on. I'll take you back to Old Jarret's."

"You going to suck me off again?"

"If you'll eat me again. It passes the time, and it's pointless to spend all that time lying to each other."

I decided she hadn't been ordered to try to kill me. I thought he'd hire it done by 'outside' professionals who would not ask questions.

Ordering any of his personal staff to try to kill me would signal to them that he had a really terrible secret to bury. That would make him very vulnerable.

They were loyal...but that loyal?

And he must know an amateur wouldn't get the job done...even Frank Yandro...and might screw up so badly the police might be involved.

**END OF PART ONE OF A.L. TEREHO: Private Investigator  
CASE #269: TERRIA BRENNER**

**END OF TABOO SCIENCE FICTION #2**