david aes \av \manuscript notebook

her eyes widened, dilating open even as a film of tears washed the world away. shaking her head, she recoiled from the couple. staggering back, she had to turn and walk away to keep her balance. the unbearable words were echoing through her mind like blows beating her back from sight of her mother and father. her lungs heaved and sucked but she seemed unable to draw a sustaining breath. her mind reeled as she shoved her way through the crowd. her desperate motion tossed her out of the bar and across the upper concourse, until her body was checked by the guardrail. her momentum almost sufficed to pitch her over the edge, but her hands locked on the metal and arrested her flight.

ahead of her the station core dropped away in layers, tiers and tiers of an artificial world. that was her life, a vast gaping chasm tearing through all the layers of her identity. she had been a fool, her quest for the reality had gutted her dreams of a family—of a mother and a father who loved her—and left this aching hole in her heart. she couldn’t understand it. they were still together, still in love. they had been horrified when she had revealed herself to them. she had tasted it in their thoughts, with the psionic gifts she had inherited from them. she was not supposed to exist. it had been there in their thoughts, like a murder’s guilt.

she had been aborted!

just like that, the foundations of her life had shifted. all the excuses she had made for the absence of her parents in her life had been invalidated by a brief interception of thought. all her life she had known that her embryonic body had been removed from her mother’s womb days after her conception. that was they way it had to be done in the navy. a natural pregnancy was too great a risk to both mother and developing child. contraception was never fool proof, so thousands of children were hatched each year and raised in creche-schools. only, she really hadn’t been a brood-baby. her parents had not been loving her from a distance, receiving updates on her growth and development. they had not been proud of their daughter’s accomplishments, because they had never been told that the baby they had aborted had somehow survived.

she flinched as a hand tentatively brushed her shoulder. she spun, her back to the rail, and stared at her mother. “don’t touch me,” she growled under her breath. she crossed her arms over her breasts, slid down a pace and turned her shoulder toward her mother. it was to disconcerting being able to see the resemblance in her mothers face, the near identical proportions of her body. her mind remained open, hoping for some kind of remorse, something which could help her forgive her mother. what she felt was more like fear, around a core of awe.

“what is your name?” her mother asked cautiously, withdrawing her hand.

“i don’t really have a name. they just call me avon. i was the only exotic in the creche. my friends call me av.”

she nodded, studying the girl’s profile. “av. in the old tongue, it means ‘phoenix’. quite appropriate for such an accident of naming. you saw?”

av bowed her head. “i am an abortion. i was thrown away. i should have never come to you,” she turned her head away.

the woman placed her hands together on the railing, speaking out into the gulf. “you are not supposed to exist,” she said, but it was not an accusation. “that does not mean that we did not want you. it means that if any of our people knew that you had been conceived, your father and i would have been executed.”

“why?”

“because that is the way. it is a religious issue. it is one of the oldest codes set down to preserve our people from something in our spiritual evolution that once almost destroyed us.”

“what?”

“i wish i could explain it, but you were not raised with our beliefs. you would not understand. do not try to understand. stay human in your mind. do not look for your heritage. for your own sake, do not pursue this question. i know it is painful. i do not deny, i did everything in my power to kill you before you were born. i did it to protect myself, and the man i love from our folly. i did it because there was no way i could have kept you. i do not know how you survived, or how you learned who we were, but if you value your life, make sure no one else can find these answers,” she warned. she leaned close, and captured av’s hand, adding, “i am sorry for the pain i have caused you. i am sorry for the way things are. i am not sorry to see you alive. the hardest thing i ever did... thank you for showing me that i did not murder my only child.”

av took a deep breath and wiped her eyes. “what am i supposed to do?” she asked in a small voice.

her mother squeezed her hand. “forget what you know. make your own life. i know you were hoping for more, but it just isn’t safe for either of us. i don’t know. i don’t know what is safe for us. believe me, though, we are a danger to each other. we need to be strangers. our lives depend on it.”

“what happens if someone else knows?”

“the question is, what happens if avon’n learn of you. you do not want to know. it simply must not happen.”

“i can’t change my genes! how am i supposed to prevent anyone from learning what i know? what good will forgetting that do me? if i am in danger—if you are in danger—i have to know what and why so i can protect myself! tell me.”

“i don’t know. i have to think this through. for now, all we can do is keep anyone from taking notice of us. whatever clues there are, they have remained hidden well enough until now. only someone with some personal motivation or interest, like you had, is likely to have put it together. there have to be people who know how we are related, and how you survived and grew up, but they don’t know what it means. if no one suspects, then the danger is small. if, however, someone already suspects, then the danger is so great that there is virtually nothing we can do except wait for sword to fall. keep your head down, stick to your routines. don’t change anything you are doing now that will draw attention to this meeting. do you understand?”

“i don’t know. this is just too confusing.”

“good, maybe that is best. confuse the issue. do whatever you have to do that lets you walk away from this conversation with no ties and no comitments. strangers meeting as the result of a misunderstanding. that is perfect, we feel sympathy for this poor kid who thought she’d found her parents and was wrong. we can become friends, and even mentors in time.

a point of paradox

—mv1·1

av opened her eyes. faint light traced the narrow confines of the hotel coffin with each rythmic pulse of the message light. unlike the nerve twisting snarl of the impending alarm, it arroused her to instant alertness. there were only two calls that would have found her here, and neither was to be ignored. wrapping the sheet around her torso, she reached for the com-panel. a glance at the chronometer reminded her to cancel the alarm before accepting the call. it would not do to have that electric monster start screaming in the middle of the call. three staccato taps later, she lay back under the glow of the monitor as the call was patched in. she had a moment to wonder who she was going to have to speak to in this ridiculous position before the image resolved itself into the face of the young officer who was her admissions advisor at the academy.

“did i call at a bad time?” he asked.

“no sir, not at all,” she smiled politely. she folded her hands over her midriff and pretended that there was nothing unusual about carrying on a conversation flat on her back, stark naked save for a distressingly thin sheet, with her hair in a snarl where it had escaped from her braid. “it’s just about time to crawl out of this coffin anyway.”

he chuckled. av guessed that he must be familiar with the joys of having “all the comforts of home” stuffed into a measly two cubic meters.

“well then, you will no doubt be happy to hear that as of this morning your request has been approved. your application has been revised. you can report to the dorms at your earliest convenience today,” he smiled at her look of relief. “i have to say, it was not easy to get you transfered onto this semester’s list. your family...”

“house,” av interrupted out of habit.

“...house, pardon me. your house had made all of the proper arrangements of course, but specified a later admission date. your request for early admission, while not impossible, did present some logistic problems coming as it did on such short notice. however, in light of the expense involved in requiring you to wait out until the start of your scheduled term—whether you remained here or returned to angel colony—i was able to have you bumped to the top of the waiting list. it took until the last minute, but you got your slot. congratulations,” he beamed.

“thank you lieutenant mitchel,” she smiled. over the last few days she had been growing more and more worried that her gamble would not pay off. it had taken almost all of the credit she could scrape together to just to buy a working passage to sol, what little profit she made on that three month journey had barely been enough to pay the rent on the sleeper and file her request for admission status adjustment. fortunately the accomodations included a meal once a day or she would have starved by now.

“no problem, ms. sinclair. you already have the information packet for this term. that will tell you where to go to get checked in and what the orientation schedule will be,” av nodded, noting the use of the terrestrial versian of her father’s clan name. lieutenant mitchel cleared his throat and went on, “you have a busy week ahead of you. when you get yourself settled in please call my office and see if you can get an appointment to see me before monday. if we don’t get together by then, you’re going to be on your own to figure things out for a few weeks. i promise you, that won’t be fun.”

av signed off, and sighed deeply as the interior illumination dropped to phospher afterglow. so far so good. for a while it had looked as if her hopes were in vain. of course, until she had checked in, there was still a chance that the other call would catch up with her. that thought was sufficient motivation fo brave the chill of the corridor. av released the catch and slithered out through the access at the foot of her compartment. the hexagonal arrangement of the cells was predictably disturbing, but familiar to anyone who had worked in the abyss. as was the neccessity of having to dress and undress out in the corridor. av slipped into a kimono, provided by the hotel to guests who would otherwise end up stalking naked between sleepers and the facilities at all hours of the day and night. after checking the lock, she turned from the acces to her cell and followed the corridor to the washroom. her path led her out of the dark confines of the sleeper block out onto an upperlevel balcony of the terraced atrium that was the real attraction of this hotel.

she stopped to soak in the view, combing out her braid with her fingers as she leaned over the railing to peer into the artificial chasm. even this early, swarms of bodies were negotiating the layers and tunnels of this man made hive. after scanning the familiar features of fountains, waterfalls, gardens, arbors, and sculptures, av turned away from the railing and continued. as always, there were a handful of tourists who stared at her as she negotiated the lightly crowded corridors. by way of her father’s mother—a quarter japanese, a quarter irish, and half scots—av was one quarter terran. the rest of her was pure exotic, as her most distinctive feature boldly advertised. to say that her hair was red, was perhaps an understatement. ajean and terrestrial genes had combined in her to produce hair the precise color of freshly spilled blood. a mystery of genetics almost as hard to explain as the origins of the exotic races, and their human compatible genome. in the eight hundred years since terrans had first set foot on ajea, no firm hypothysis had been submitted on either side.

(av) (av)\survive and adapt xa

(av) let her duffel slide down to the deck sole and stepped up to the observation screen. all that stood between her and the void was a vast pane of force glass stretching the width of the docking slip. glass that was not glass. not in any material sense. it was a shaped force. an object constructed to encompass a higher spatial dimension. the product of technological advances she could not comprehend. for all her understanding of the underlying theories and physics, no one had ever revealed how humanity had acquired the means to shape and harness it in the first place. someone like her couldn’t even ask how it was done. the technology was the religion of the fleet, inevitably taken on faith. a state of affairs not wholly unsatisfying, being that one could touch it. almost reverently, she opened her hand and pressed it flat against the screen. instead of flinching, she welcomed the sharp bite of hot/cold confusion along her nerve endings.

it was closer to the void than most people ever wanted to get. it wasn’t close enough for her, having lain awake possessed by a vision of infinite space since she was seven. when space became a part of her reality.

she had been young, but sensitive to the shock and horror of her elders when the news had come.

the memory came unbidden. a deep space explorer had encountered a strange vessel in the deep. it should have been the realization of one of man’s oldest dreams. it was instead a nightmare. when the men aboard had attempted to make contact their ship was destroyed. suddenly. inexplicably. shattered with a power unexplained in the recordings made by remote drones the ship had dispatched to document this historic first contact. for whatever reason, the devices had been ignored in the attack; allowed to return to earth carrying their grisly warning to humanity.

within days, similar records arrived at earth from nine other ships. each told the same tale. frantic efforts were made to recall the six ships still surviving. three of these attempts succeeded. millions had died. people all over the world panicked. av, unable to comprehend everything, had absorbed the fear of invasion trafficked on the media nets. her parents had labored to make her understand the vast distances separating earth from where those ships and their crews had died, to convince her that the danger was very far away.

in time, the pattern of attacks was analyzed, with the other data. human ships had been taken out by two different groups of hostiles moving across their survey areas, hitting them in succession. the compiled record clearly identified specific ships and confirmed a terrible theory. in particular, it revealed the course of the hostile forces. they had known where earth’s ships would be. they had sought them out. but, the most alarming conclusion: none of the ships had been molested until it attempted to make contact with the aliens. facts av had not learned until much later at the academy. at the time, while the crisis unfolded, she had become confident in her parents assertion that they were not in any immediate danger, because she had learned that space was big. terrifyingly big. and it had taken up residence in her mind, overwhelming her whenever she closed her eyes.

when the concept of infinity had not tormented her, it had inspired her. she adapted over time to the abyss within her. the horizons of earth inevitably became too narrow for her. so she turned to the sky above and began to dream.

she had dreamed of the deep for so long, it had become an ache of physical longing lodged in her bones. it became a need, driving her from the safety of the earth into the academy. it had sustained her through the pain of augmentations, and the disappointment of being kept too long in the home fleet. it had given her patience to wait for the orders that never came. the determination to push and keep pushing until the fleet accepted her applications for transfer.

but it did nothing for the angst.

she closed her fist around the film like substance of the screen. the pseudo material would give for as long as she had the leverage to assault it. she could shoot at it, throw objects, or people at it and it would give and give and give, and then when no more force could be exerted, it would contract and quietly deposit the offending body on the decksole. like always, it absorbed the venting of her temper. whatever the designers had intended, it was the perfect punching bag.

now, however, the gentle torment of simple contact was enough to dispell the memory of her frustration. her hand relaxed, but did not stray. in a way, force glass had served her as a kind of mentor. it gave focus to her thoughts to stand here and suffer the unnatural caress of what protected her from the void. after all, it had taught her a secret about herself. how many times had she thrown herself out a window just like this one? how often before she realized why she did it?

not, she had realized, because it could take whatever she could dish out, but because if it had ever failed, space lay beyond. more than anything else, that had taught her to respect the technology. to count on it for the salvation of a small part of her soul. respecting it, she had come to appreciate the touch of it and its relatives. following that, the change had been inevitable. for most a sensation that would be disturbing, perhaps even painful, she found sensual. arousing.

kinky. maybe even weird, but it had replaced a self destructive impulse with something a little more survival oriented. she gazed past the waxing light of the earth for a time. a female voice broke in over the com to announce an incoming ship. at last, the end of the waiting. a kind of stillness held her as the allied earth ship *alexander* prowled towards the station’s embrace. her eyes locked on the closing vessel, devouring the vast sweeping lines of a deep space carrier.

a small grin lit up her face. the only outward sign she allowed of her excitement. the *alexander* slowly grew to eclipse the distant earth and fill the emptiness of the docking slip. she was huge. fast and lethal. so different from the first ships, the explorers. this ship was a conqueror, because what humans had discovered had made space a military concern. and ships like this needed people like av, who would not be deterred from pursuing their dreams of space.

reluctantly, she stepped back a pace. the waiting had come down to minutes. there was still some distance to cover on her part before it could be over. she reflexively tugged on the tapered waist of her duty jacket, hoping her appearance was in order. force glass did not reflect light, but she could picture herself easily enough.

she was, in all, a striking collection of exotic compromises. she had to admit she had more than one strange inheritance from her japanese-irish mother and scottish father. dominant and most shocking, was the distinctive blood red tint of her hair. celtic in coloring, temper and height, but (av)n in bone structure, complexion and body tone. her face was an enigma to her, but her body was her pride. long of limb, firm of muscle. she had her doubts whether the total effect was what she would call attractive, but she had to admit it was unique. a high tech bodyglove covering her to the tips of her fingers and toes was molded to her body’s contour. military fashion had adapted to space. the black and dark gray single-suit was more than a uniform. the material was a specially engineered, active force matrix that acted as level one armor—a very specialized cousin of force glass. it left little to the imagination, but on the bright side it was impossible to wrinkle and allowed an athletic freedom of movement.

the *alexander,* having finally come to rest, utterly filled the huge observation window. as much as she would have liked to have lingered and examined her hull in detail, she had idled here too long. av stepped over to retrieve her duffel, checked her inside pocket to be sure her orders were still there, and headed down to the announced boarding gate.

there were already half a dozen transfers waiting in the receiving area off to the side of the sealed ship’s access when she arrived. one of them looked up as she dumped her bag on the pile the others had made. “sinclair,” he greeted her with a nod, “lieutenant, now, is it? looks good on you.” he flicked the single silver bar on her collar.

av turned and stared at him incredulously for a moment before shaking her head and walking away.

“what?” he called after her.

she almost turned back to explain, when her stomach decided to remind her of its existence. *should’ve taken care of that,* she thought. she glanced up at the docking display to get an idea how long she had to kill before the ship access was secure for boarding. time enough, she guessed. she crossed the reception area and headed across the bare deck plate toward a vending machine. she ordered a breakfast roll and flask of hot tea. her stomach had settled enough to eat yet, but the reality was sinking in and she didn’t want to faint when she reported in to the captain. she stood and surveyed the activity on the docks while her thoughts ran off in other directions.

in typical military fashion, the order of the day seemed to be hurry up and wait. she wandered astray a bit and perched on a railing while she chewed her way through breakfast. the food seemed to help. she hadn’t been aware how tense she was until it started to ease off. boarding nerves. naturally, just as she was finally relaxed, she looked up to discover that *alexander’s* dock status lights had somehow skipped to green across the board. she stuffed the end of the roll in her mouth and hopped to her feet. thankfully, she didn’t choke on the last of her tea while running back to her group—which had grown to a full dozen in her absence.

she silently cursed herself as the seals popped and the gate split open. there wasn’t enough time to fall in. sure enough, bodies began pouring out of the gangway as she tried to close the distance. she lost a precious few seconds disposing of her trash at the waste receptacle on the edge of the boarding area. she felt eyes on her as she slipped into formation and came to attention.

the group off the *alexander* had gathered off at the very edge of her vision. some of them came past in front of her to collect their duffels off the pile and began to carry them aboard. the rest she could hear taking their leave, having been cleared to transfer off the ship. one remained, and she had little doubt who that would have to be. she was of the same height as av. identifiable by her pride, a sheer length of raven black hair. officially, unusually long hair was not smiled on, but hers was so obedient that a simple clasp at the small of her back was all she needed to rule it. (av) lynn thompson. once an academy upperclassman who had befriended a zealous young cadet and taught her how to toe the line. now, the ship’s executive officer. the one who had held a fixed stare on her since she had dashed pell mell across the dock.

evening

"who are you?" she asked suddenly, as if seeing him for the first time. the candlelight gave her eye a distracting glint, transforming the shock and uncertainty in her expression into a look that was indefinably alluring. he regarded her in the dim light with calculated quiet. only nineteen years old, she was already an exotic young woman. the candle light transformed her mane of red hair into a blaze. reflecting in prismatic grey eyes—which he knew to shift according to her moods. her face had a feline cast and a mother of pearl complexion. her lithe frame, sculpted by a lifetime of athletic and acrobatic activity held a perfect balance between strength and suppleness. muscles that would be sharply defined in motion now lay smooth and unobtrusive, at rest. only enough bodyfat to suggest youth and femininity of contour lay under her taut skin. she unabashedly wore a skin tight body glove of pristine white that sheathed her from the tips of fingers and toes to the top of her elegant throat. light weight, and breathable, on her it was literally a second skin. naturally, she had the most practical of reasons for almost always wearing it.

the weight of her question pressed on him. he had known her for several months, intimitely for more than a few of those. why had she asked that question now? he held her eye and watched as confusion and alarm tried to veil what had really been behind her inquiry. he tried to frame an answer, but words suddenly failed him. he lifted his glass to his lips and sipped, carefully maintaining eye contact. darkness devoured her irises as her eyes dilated. the wine was cold and sour as he swallowed. *who am i?* he pondered. how could he seriously answer that? he was tempted to respond with the question: *who do you think i am?* but he really wasn't sure if he wanted to hear her answer.

she seemed to read the difficulty she had imposed on him and demured, "i'm sorry. that was a ridiculous question."

he still held her gaze; passing her a quick smile he responded, "perhaps. perhaps not. in any case, it is not an easy question to answer."

she raised an eyebrow.

he leaned back and collected himself, casually. given the hour, and the turn of conversation, he felt rather out of place with reality. no doubt she did too. he fished abstractly for a line of reasoning, "it is easy for us to grow used to a name or a face and think that we can know the person behind them. but, as perhaps you have felt, we never really know. it is scary to look at a friend or lover and suddenly *realize* you don't really know who you are dealing with. to suddenly find yourself alone with a stranger. i wish i knew why it happens; but i don't."

she shifted and glanced away uncomfortably. the pause began to grow long. "maybe that happens sometimes. that's not the way i felt, though," she murmured, seeking out his eyes again. there was something challenging and dangerous in the look.

he looked down, his eyes shaded by dark eyelashes. "i was afraid of that," he breathed.

"why?" she pried. sliding closer to him she was able to lean in and look up into his eyes. he could feel the weight of her body on his legs.

he boldly matched her gaze, "you asked me who i was. not because i suddenly seemed alien to you. rather, you suddenly felt that you knew me too well, no?"

she maintained an even gaze and felt that strange feeling again—something like a subsonic reverbrating within her; unmooring sense of balance. or stranger still, an ominous plummeting within her like the onset of panic. it came up suddenly. more menacingly. stronger. she fought inwardly to maintain her grip on herself.

she nodded timidly.

his expression became more resigned. he smiled; it felt ironic and bitter, but not ugly. she extended one of her long fingers to his lips and her look became a touch worried. "i was afraid of that; because i think... maybe... i know why you would," he declared softly.

she frowned. allowing herself to consider more completely what she had only intuitively gathered. gradually, yet all at once, it fell together. while it made an incontestable amount of sense, it did—for a fleeting eternity—frighten her out of her mind.

*you tried to kill me...*

"(av)."

the voice was very far away. she stirred, but her body felt leaden. sluggish.

"av, come on. wake up."

she moaned. the world was tumbling around her. she realized that someone was shaking her. opening her eyes, she saw mostly darkness. "it was a dream," she heard herself say, the sound deep and distant even to her.

he responded with something born of a huff and a short laugh and said, "if so, look around, the dream is still going on."

she sat up and saw him silhouetted by the candle light. he was taller than she, she knew, but kneeling beside her like that, it was hard to tell, really. he had a slim and supple body, the kind either acrobatics or martial arts create. his features were plain, but strong. the anonomous quality that is simply male. she had no idea how old he really was. "kevin?"

"as good a name as any other," he answered. "are you all right? what do you remember?"

she glanced around. the room was familiar, in fact it was all too real. his question sank in and she returned her eyes to him. what did she remember? she concentrated, but a wash of images engulfed her. too much. she shook her head, to clear it, and very distinctly heard him sigh. "what?" she asked him a bit sharply.

"nothing," he replied, gathering up the wine glasses and getting up.

why did he sound so relieved? he held out a hand to her to help her to her feet. all at once, she did remember. she remembered why she passed out. to both their surprise, she flinched away from him rather violently. kevin was instantly alarmed.

"you do remember."

"yes," she barked, her voice unsteady.

he lunged quickly, catching her by the arm and hauled her to her feet. she writhed to break his grip, and he had to shake her and growl, "stop it. don't be foolish." she felt her body turn to water in the joints and fire in her gut. tensing in his grip, her mind fought for equilibrium. he caught her eye, "i'm not going to hurt you. okay?"

*trust me.*

with some effort, she relaxed and nodded.

he noted this and finally let go of her. "i think we have a lot to talk about."

again she nodded.

leading the way, he passed through the ante-kitchen of the casual room to drop off the glasses, and they went out onto the balcony. the early morning air was sharp and cool and helped clear her head. her fright passed into an odd bewilderment. they stood near the railing and gazed over the city skyline for several long, quiet moments. like all cities, this one did not sleep; rather, it fitfully emulated its daily business like a fading echo of itself. bedecked in rainments of light, the sight did not manage to absorb her attention as it usually did. it only reminded her of nights when she woke up from dreams so intimate and yet so frightening in their implications that she had to call them nightmares. nightmares the likes of which had dominated her nights for longer than she had known kevin. though not by much. nightmares that did not always deign to remain her sleeping companion, but which occasionally caught her in her most intimate moments. such as she had shared with kevin. she closed her eyes and hugged herself tight, trying to force this turn of thought out of her mind.

eventually, kevin began to speak again.

"we were both a bit distracted, when we first met. there was something odd between us even then. it is a shame we didn't talk about it then. or at any point up until now. things might have turned out better, perhaps," he (dai)d. out of the corner of his eye, he saw her turn to face him at that last part.

"how do you suppose?" she issued, sort of skeptically.

he shrugged. "you remember what we did talk about, don't you?" he returned.

she tilted her head, and her eyes narrowed. they had talked mostly about her job that first night. that was what they usually talked about afterwards, too. it was not exactly a narrow topic. at this time, it was not a comfortable topic, either. then she caught herself. no. they had not just talked about her job, specifically. they had talked a bit about the research project that she was indirectly involved with as part of her job and through the association of several of her friends. or professional acquaintances. now that she had an idea where this was going, she nodded, "i think i know what you mean."

he smiled, "i'll never understand your intuition. sometimes you understand the strangest things with the most unnatural certainty, and other times you can't even see what's right in front of your face."

she gave him a disparaging look.

"well, what was it we talked about that first night? seriously talked about?" he prodded.

she set her shoulders. he really meant to tackle this issue. the question that had escaped the brightest minds available. well, if she was going to touch it, she intended to take it by the throat. "the (athenic paradox)," she answered edgily.

**this is too much. tone it down.** the (athenic paradox) was an attempt to explain how such an impossible situation could plausibly exist.

she had been here for almost a year before the theory had come into being. until that point she, and countless others, had wondered if reality itself had gone insane. like many others before her, she had woken up one day to discover herself in an impossible and unfamiliar world. so impossible, she thought it a dream—except it never ended. the oddest part was that the world was only impossible when you sat down and really thought about it. it seemed natural enough, just looking at it and living in it. one could easily take it for granted. save for one jarring flaw. the people; their cultures, their knowledge and practices all defied reason. there was no way to explain or account for the presence of such people as she met, in any plausible manner.

because of this incongruity av had unwittingly blundered headlong into chaos. the main reason it took a year for anyone to even think of the (athenic paradox) was because almost everyone was at each other's throats. this world—unnamed and unknown to anyone in it—was a virtual smorgasbord of exotic power. there was everything; wealth, technology, magic, knowledge. all one had to do was wrest it from someone else's hands. naturally, people did so quite exuberantly. while some called it armageddon, it did not even make that much sense. it was simply uncontrolled, mindless, violence. a free-for-all. fortunately for her, av was drafted by a faction solely interested in getting out of it. sort of a mean fortune, though. it only got her more deeply involved. she was young. imbued with almost inexhaustible raw talent, she rose rapidly into the fighting ranks; to lieutenant commander of an air strike wing. the fleet she had joined was strong—nigh undefeatable; save for one weakness. there was nothing supernatural or paranormal about it.

originally that is.

av was part of a growing group of paranormals—called *upstarts* by the fleet science staff—that had been press ganged into service. ironically, the fleet scientists had not been able to figure out what sort of power she had before the fleet engaged—of all things—a god. at least, what they confronted was so devastatingly powerful, the only appropriate thing to call it was a god.

less than half of the fleet survived. they did not win. the entity seemed on the verge of wiping everyone out when it simply turned away and vanished. in the aftermath, the survivors suffered a complete breakdown of their suspension of disbelief. reality had simply become too strange. faced with a sinking feeling of unreality, people began to ask the questions they should have long ago. *what the hell was really going on here?* no one knew who said it first, but an idea started going around. given that one's connection to existence is through the mind, individually each person *could* come to the conclusion that he or she has gone insane. what seemed to have happened certainly lacked plausibility. however, no one could support the notion of consensual insanity. especially since it had not taken much effort for the survivors to corroborate their stories. they had all shared these experiences. so much so that they had to conclude that they were real; in spite of being arguably surreal.

this did not cheer anyone up.

no one felt like celebrating the fact that their sanity had been firmly established.

only one group really managed to avoid sinking into despondancy. fleet medical technicians and research scientists, probing the boundaries of paranormal abilities, and the world itself—especially the mystery of the various people they had encountered in it—went on with their work with professional alacrity. which was a good thing. in each case, interesting patterns turned up. in the case of paranormals, research firmly established that—while certain special modifications seemed apparent in the physiology or psychology of a paranormal—in almost every case the actual articulation of paranormal abilities seemed to be subconscious. this was considered intriguing, but would later become an important detail. in the study of the world, and its culture phenomena, it was discovered that most groups fell within certain lingual and social families. with only a few exceptions. in studies of the past and ongoing appearances of of culture and civilization fragments, each ironically arrived in a part of the existing environment that was capable of supporting the ecological and agricultural burden of the sudden population. a detail that seemed to suggest a deliberate influence. the ideas bandied about for a while; until someone was heard to comment:

"if you ask me, this world is an *upstart* that has gotten locked into its subconscious and created an all too real dream."

that was about all it took. the (athenic paradox) was born. it was quickly refined. the mind, a veritable labyrinth, is the envelope of human existence. the argument hinges on the tremendous, unmeasured faculties of the subconscious mind, acknowledged even in the most mundane views of reality. in very complex terms it explained that the mind is what creates reality as humanity knows it; an image which is superimposed over a material construct in time and space. this construct, the universe, is essentially just information in a state of constant iteration. the theory described an immense field equation that has, as a componant, assembler constructs which help resolve the equation through its ongoing iteration. minds. a psychically passive process of perception and interpretation allows an organism to translate that information into reality. paranormal abilities, for the most part, are more advanced, or more active interactions with the field of information that is the universe. for a mind to control any psychic or paranormal gift, the bulk of the process would undoubtedly be subconscious. so, an evolution of the mind would, in almost any case, result in a transformation of the reality it creates. the conscious mind, like in dreaming, would be plausibly submerged or distorted by such an experience, meaning that those who had accomplished such an evolution might have no idea that they were anything other than what they thought themselves now.

at the very least, that was the way av understood it. there were only a dozen individuals who could be said to understand it completely. but what the idea implied shook people up. anyone could understand its consequences in real terms.

a mind, evolved to the point where it could alter reality, was an alarming prospect. for such power to be *subconsciously* driven was frightening to consider. it was not hard to imagine what might come from an individual projecting his or her subconscious desires into reality. worse, the theory suggested that this world was the project of this, and anyone, or perhaps everyone, was actually doing it. naturally, a moral question was raised. if it were true, perhaps the one thing each person wanted—namely to go home—would be the worst thing they could possibly do. by returning to `reality' they might put whatever world or race of origin they returned to at risk. at the mercy of accidental `gods'.

all the survivors remembered their recent desperation; the horror of confronting an entity with a casual ability to manipulate the reality they existed it. it was an experience that most of them had been unable to get over. for entirely human reasons, it turned out, the theory gained an almost unanimous following. to be able to call that entity an *upstart* allowed most of them to resurface from the hopeless apathy that had traumatized them since.

because these people were essentially human, they just wanted to be themselves. they wanted to go home, or start over. so, an ongoing project was established to research into the (athenic paradox). the aim was to either disprove it, so that there would be no doubts about going back to lost realities if a way could be found, or to prove it and justify an effort to train individuals to bring the ability under conscious control so they could safely exist here or find out who and what they once were and try to recalim it. incidentally, both options created a need for stabilizing the situation they were presently in. this is av herself was involved in. on one hand, she was part of an effort to analyze the (caoi yn) phenomenon, to find out what was pulling people to this world; and more actively involved in efforts to stem the violence and unite the factional, abducted populous into a politically neutral economy. but of course, ther were not talking about that part this time.

"yes. the (athenic paradox)," kevin answered. his voice had the same weight as av's sudden reverie. she looked at him more carefully, trying to pierce the surface of this intense yet casual attitude he maintained. "you explained the basics to me, and i admitted that it might be possible. i remember making some comment about the predicament of scientists; always so shy and afraid of the ideas they sought to pierce. i had to explain myself—you thought i was being insulting. that wasn't what i meant, of course. i only meant that they had an idea that might be dead on, but they would dance around it forever before they ever knew it. you asked me what i would do about it and i told you. i would assume it is true and analyze my situation from that perspective to see how well it fit what i could personally experience. which is what we started to do. we talked about the possibility that none of us are who we think we are. we talked about how very difficult it was to imagine being someone else to whom our entire life is but a dream; a delusion," he reflected.

"i remember that," she stated calmly, glancing off into the night.

"we were so close to it, really. as it is, either of us could consider ourselves *upstarts.* that was easy enough. but there was something else there that we sort of allowed ourselves to overlook," he argued. she shifted while he paused; tilting her head a bit. "did you ever consider that maybe the reason we feel so familiar to each other is because we are? this is something we both have felt, whether you admit it or not. in a way, it might be proof that the theory is true; if you are willing to consider that in our real lives we actually knew each other," he suggested challengingly.

she shuddered, "but our backgrounds are totally irreconcilable. if there is a single example of unrelated points of origin, you and i are it."

"oh, i don't know. each person has their own inner image of him or herself. we don't know which of the worlds sampled here on (caoi yn) is closest to the one we are derived from. the memories we have of our origins are probably just subconscious fabrications to support the personality we adopted to cope with the disruption of our old reality. we could have been fast friends or lovers, and that is the one part that this subconscious warping would not change. that is not important, now. i was just saying that because neither of us was willing to consider it, neither of us looked into the possibility. now both of us are even deeper into the situation here," he argued.

she thought about this. she had inexplicably closed the topic that night and it hadn't come up again. "we would have. it was my fault we didn't, wasn't it?" she asked.

he nodded. "you confided to me that you found it so strange to consider, that you would rather not wake up," he recalled. "and yet, all of the time i have known you, you have been one of the greatest assets to the research that frightens you," he illustrated wonderingly.

she shrugged, "it is hard to be asked to question my own existence, but once there is a question posed it is that much more important to get an answer. we have had to learn the hard way to not take what is happening to us for granted, but it is exhausting paying attention to everything constantly. i had a life until i came to (caoi yn). if that life was a dream, and arriving here was the beginning of waking up, all i want to do is survive the process so i can have my life back again."

she realized that he was staring at her in bewilderment. "who *are* you?" he asked softly, almost with awe.

"what?" she challenged, "why are you looking at me like that?"

he grinned and turned to go back inside. just at the door he said over his shoulder, "i have only known you for a few months, so why is it i feel like i have always known you. always watched you and followed you—always from a distance. why do you have this power over me?"

she blushed and looked down, demurely murmuring, "i... i don't know."

he went in, and the drape flapped down behind him leaving her alone on the balcony. to herself she wondered, *why is it that whenever i am near you... whenever i even think of you, i can feel your touch around me? why do you have this hold on me?* she shivered and followed kevin inside.

he was not in the ante-kitchen, so she continued on to the casual room where they had been lounging, celebrating. the evening had started so innocently. the candles were almost burned out, so she sought out the room lights and raised them to one of their lower settings. the room was unusually large for one person's comfort. kevin lived alone, but his home was quite expansive. she wandered back to the low table where the candles languished in their last moments beside the wine in its bed of ice. gazing into the flames, systematically hunting down each one and extinguishing it with long breath, she waited for kevin to show himself. while waiting, she tried to determine what the exact nature of their relationship was. they had made love many times, and yet they made no claims to each other. no engagements. no commitments. yet they possessed each other. they made extraordinary confidences in each other, yet they were not exactly friends. they fought and tested each other so often they seemed more like fond enemies. he was a master of several arts and practices she was studying, but he would not teach her. he eagerly listened to her research group and critiqued their work, but he would not participate in their studies. he would introduce her to the elite circles of the city's high society, but did not interfere in her job. he was protective, like an older brother. responsible and advising, like a father. sometimes, he seemed devoted and helpless, like a son.

he was an impossible man to hold on to, but so natural for her to find intimacy with.

it seemed almost as if he was an artist and she was his (dai).

her keen ears picked up the crunch of synthetic fibers as he stepped onto the carpet. she turned and casually looked up at him. he could disguise it, but she could see that he had been enraptured watching her killing the flames. maybe she *was* his (dai); she wondered, then, what his art was. what did she inspire in him? she remembered her shocking realization then, and blanched. fascination. not love. obsessed fascination. but, then, that simply did not make any sense. maybe she was just confusing him with someone else. she could not even remember what he had done that had struck that particular chord. his face had clouded as he watched her's pale.

"please, it's nothing. i am tired. a lot has happened recently, and i don't know for sure what is bothering me. don't take it personally," she implored, gesturing for him to come to her. he ran a hand through his hair, sighing. quietly, he moved over and kneeled down next to her.

"would you like to go to bed, then?" he asked gently.

she hesitated before taking his hand, "i... cannot make love tonight. it's just..."

"shhh. it's alright. i know. i wasn't going to ask," he soothed, pulling both of them to their feet. "come on. we can finish our conversation later," he offered, as they left the room.

(av) awoke to find the sheets warm, but herself alone. that more than anything brushed away the impulse to lie and bask in the twilight of sleep. dreams, such as she had them, had missed their recent flavor. this too served to remind her of how much had changed in the short span of a day. like a mistress calling to her servants, she called together her thoughts and restored that ellusive perspective that humans are fond of calling consciousness. so it happened that she remembered the day and evening before. now, in the light of a new day, she felt foolish for the suspicions she had entertained against her sometime lover, kevin. dashing the frightful and unspoken notion, she gratefully forgot it and took possession of her body and slipped out of the bed. it was like her, she (dai)d, to turn a night of celebration into something dark and brooding. that innocence that men had never taken from her had been raped by a year and many months in this impossible world. in the place of that loss, she had become a creature that acted with the weight of thought. responsible.

she strode across the room and into the bath. this room adjoined the bedroom, and forced her to confront her nude reflection. naturally familiar with what she saw in the glass, she looked for something else. it was not easy to find, but it was there. the ghost of remorse. today, if she could not heal the wounds dealt by her own too hasty tongue, she would lose as much as she had gained scant more than a day ago. she turned away from herself and quickly washed under the shower. then she stepped into the bath and simmered while collecting her mind for the day. kevin, she assumed, had his own business to attend to. unless she saw him before she left this morning, she would probably not see him again until evening—if she remained free to return to his home. that, she would only know after obeying the letter of her own responsability.

a while later, she lifted her scalded flesh out of the pool, and scrubbed herself dry. upon finishing the rest of her toilet, she returned to the bedroom to dress where she discovered she had a visitor. unconsciously, av tried to apprehend this person's appearance. unexpectedly, she found herself unable to classify what she saw. she thought this was a young woman in a loose, translucent dress. she had a pleasant face, a slightly a(dai)d and intriguing expression visible through a veil of unbound hair. but the youth was like a perfect mask over ancient features. the dress shimmered and reflected colors and hues, anddetails around her but refused to assemble itself into a recognisable form or style. even this person's femininity seemed suspect; she stood with the strength and assurance of a man and appraised av's own naked body with a hungry male appetite. all at once, av's vision cohered and she realized that this person was as naked as she and familiar to her in a way that the unfamiliarity of her form made av's mind whirl.

this was the creature that had claimed her soul. her god.

"amaranth," breathed av in recognition.

the being smiled in answer and approached her. av bowed her head and seized her will. she did not know what her god wanted, but she knew that she would oblige. this was the casue of her celebration last night. by giving herself body and soul to this creature, she had escaped the embrace of fate and destruction. now she was a slave to the unknown—the unknowable. amaranth had drawn close. with a light touch, she clasped av's chin and raised her bowed head. forcing her to make eye contact. gazing deep into the soul of mystery, av was utterly mesmerized.

"you are so unhappy," the god murmured. "is it so horrible to you to become my chosen?"

unable to break away, and compelled to answer, all av could manage was a single tear—racing down over her wide cheekbone and turning at the line of her jaw to run to her chin where it met and was drunk by amaranth's hand.

the god's smile turned wry, "cheer up, my poor slave. i have not damned you, and you have not damned yourself. you were such a loose cannon; you would be wise to learn from submission. you were mine from the moment you tampered with fate. you will be my favorite servant," she cooed.

avonela, feeling confused and ashamed, felt the same overpowering sense of awe she had when amaranth had first approached her. her will bridled. an insubstantial part of her grabbed ahold of the awe, the mesmerism and pulled them deep into her—swallowed them and abased her in them so that her will could rise and slip out against the tide. becoming the iron in her voice as she spoke, "i am aware of what i have had to do. i can regret only the price—and you cannot deny that i have cause. you have my soul, my lady; my inviolate self. that is coin without equal or recompense. i am now a thing. do with me as you will; i cannot complain. i have already lost. but i had no choice." av spoke true, and the god stared at her inexplicably, so she went on, "but, tell me, true; without a soul, can i actually be happy? or am i merely resigned to play the part?"

the god pulled back a pace and regarded her sadly. "ah, my child, you have so much to learn. yes, your soul is mine. but, it is still yours as well. in possessing you, i cannot describe what i have gained, but i can tell you this. there is now a part of me within you. learn from it. master it. use me well, child. you are now my eyes and ears here. banish all doubt. you are my flesh in this troubled world. you are still you. you are me," she explained plainly.

(av) listened to this, stunned. *"what* am i?" she asked incredulously, unable to quite comprehend what amaranth had revealed to her.

*"you* are my avatar. the avatar of mystery," the god laughed playfully.

av was totally chagrinned. "what does that mean?" she asked after a long pause.

"you will have to figure that out," amaranth said enigmatically, dissolving like a mist as a burst of light pierced her through the morning cloud cover and the glass door leading to the balcony off of the bedroom. stunned, it took her a minute to remember her appointments for that day. hastily, she found her body glove and other belongings, dressed and rushed through the house.

psionics and divinity

all that we can ever truly know, we know only in the mind. the world we exist in is a field of raw information which our perceptions are somehow able to make sense of. but the world we are aware of is an image, created and interpreted by our minds from that information. what that information really is or what it represents we are unable to know, because it can only be observed indirectly—through interaction. there has really been no serious investigation into the very basis of mental ability, as there has never been a coherent recognition of the mind's role in the very expression of existence. for this reason, much of the work related to the issue has been disorganized and incoherent. neither physics nor psychology is equiped to explore this possability, as each is founded on assuptions which outright deny the possability of mind as an intimate componant in the structure of the universe. there are fundamental constants that unite the many profound phenomina found in fiction with the natural process of psychic existence in which we all are grounded. the study of the mind as a componant of reality falls under an unborn science; a field of study we can call psionics. the topic of psionic ability is a murky one at best. mind over matter is an ancient saying, but taking it seriously makes people understandibly nervous. understanding the state dependant nature of psionics, and the effects of basic interpretation on freeing these abilities is a prerequisite to even beginning an inquiry into the subject. it is in the interest of perusing these points that i have selected this as the environment of my first work of published fiction.

the mind will manifest anything which it chooses to accommodate. in truth, all exists in spirit. in the invisible, intangible possability of being and becoming. the mind recognizes the dynamic and represents it as such. the comonplace majesty of flesh to the potentially mind shattering superdimensional. in such a tapestry, there is a dangerous complexity superceeding the inevitable simplicity of interpretation. all the mysteries have a symetry, a resonance to carnal and spiritual understanding. there are those which we might call angels, and find that the title is granted, but in understanding our angels are found well acquainted with the carnal mysteries. indeed, the distinctions between angels, demons, gods and men are profound considering all share the same condition of being, embodying the same truth. the distinctions have to do with responsibility and the application of the art.

worlds overlap. the manner in which they relate to each other can be expressed in hyper spatial terms, but only in a great enough mind. higher minds exist almost for that reason alone—as much as it is vital that a mind exists that can encompass the expresion of a possability, there has to be a mind that can encompass the possabilities of a possability. however, the distinction exists only as there is a need for such expression to be distinct. defining one world from another is an occupation of vast ellocution, an effort surpassed and given way to action purely through understanding. the relation between the world inhabited by the reader and the world experienced by the character is vast in its own way. waves broadcasting many possabilities have broken on the shores of our world but in common favors none. the greatest of events have an echo in our place, but in our caution, only the most gruesome of trials fit our compass. the consequences of hope and vision, the greatness of an individual that defies the dark condition of our toil, so humbles us that it is only in thought, in dream, in spirit that we dare lift up our voices. the world visit in our great epic knows an echo of our condition, but dares to embrace the fire in our souls ... lending action to the service of creation. the story is a sketch. a suggestion of the path from the stark shore of our condition through the majesty of the infinite expression.