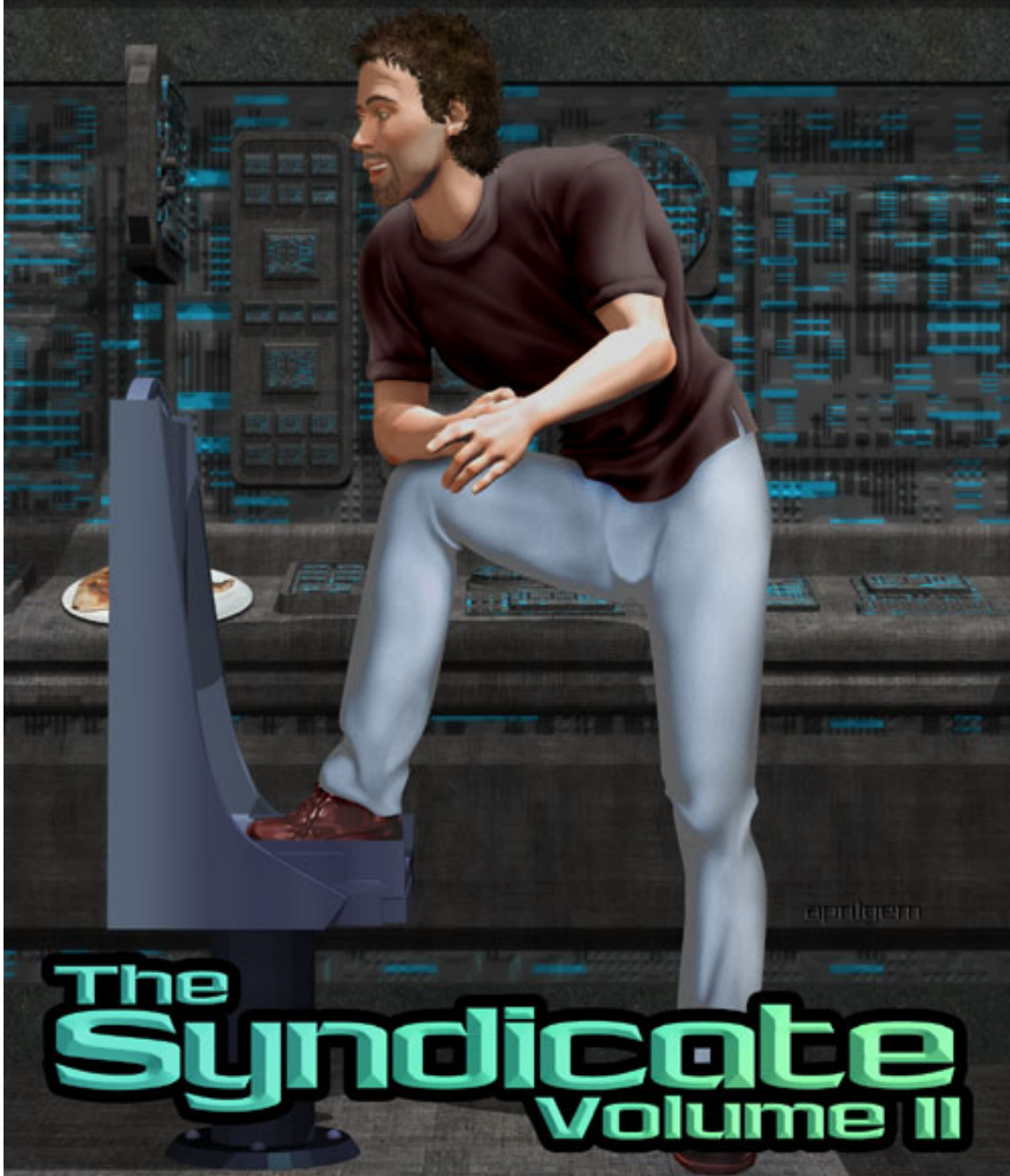


Loose Id



The Syndicate Volume II

Jules Jones & Alex Woolgrave

Praise for the writing of Jules Jones & Alex Woolgrave

The Syndicate: Volume 1

The Syndicate 1 is an absolutely excellent futuristic story of lust becoming love, and of two people willing to drop their protective barriers to love openly and unselfishly. By the way, it is the story of two men. All segments of this book are dynamic and connect the book in a very interesting manner. I regretted that it had to end, and am so glad I got to review *The Syndicate 1*. I am looking forward to the next volume in this series.

-- Anya Khan, *Karen Find Out About New Books* and *Coffee Time Romance*

The first thought that came to my mind after finishing *The Syndicate: Volume 1* was 'a rollicking romp through space'. The crewmembers of the syndicate ship 'Mary Sue' all have their own unique personality quirks. Add to this a cynical sysadmin and you have a wickedly good read. Allard, the sysadmin, does not believe in long term commitments, but Vaughan, the ship's captain is determined to change his view. Vaughan is laid back and relaxed; Allard is abrasive and generally thinks he is superior to the world. And how Vaughan enjoys taking him down a peg or two, whether by tying him up during sex or just delivering pizza, a gag and the promise of hot sex. Sexual innuendos litter every conversation. Add to that a shipmate who's a sneaky voyeur, various toys and some mild bondage and you have sexual encounters all over the ship.

Add to this the engrossing story and the little hook at the end that makes you reach for the next book at once. Maybe it's the techno geek in me that made me devour every word. I prefer to think that it's because of the good characterization, witty dialog and engaging story. I'm off to haunt the Loose Id website to wait for *Syndicate Volume 2*.

-- Michelle Naumann, *Just Erotic Romance Reviews*

Jules Jones and Alex Woodgrave write a hot story in *The Syndicate: Volume 1*. Amusing characters, humor, and delicious sex are all present. For a very interesting change of pace, try *The Syndicate: Volume 1*.

-- Sinclair Reid, *Romance Reviews Today*

The Syndicate: Volume 1 is now available from Loose Id.

THE SYNDICATE: VOLUME 2

Jules Jones & Alex Woolgrave

LooseId

Warning

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* * * * *

This book is rated:

 SCORCHING

For substantial explicit sexual content, graphic language, and sexual situations some readers may find offensive (multiple partners, bondage, men-on-men).

The Syndicate: Volume 2

Jules Jones & Alex Woolgrave

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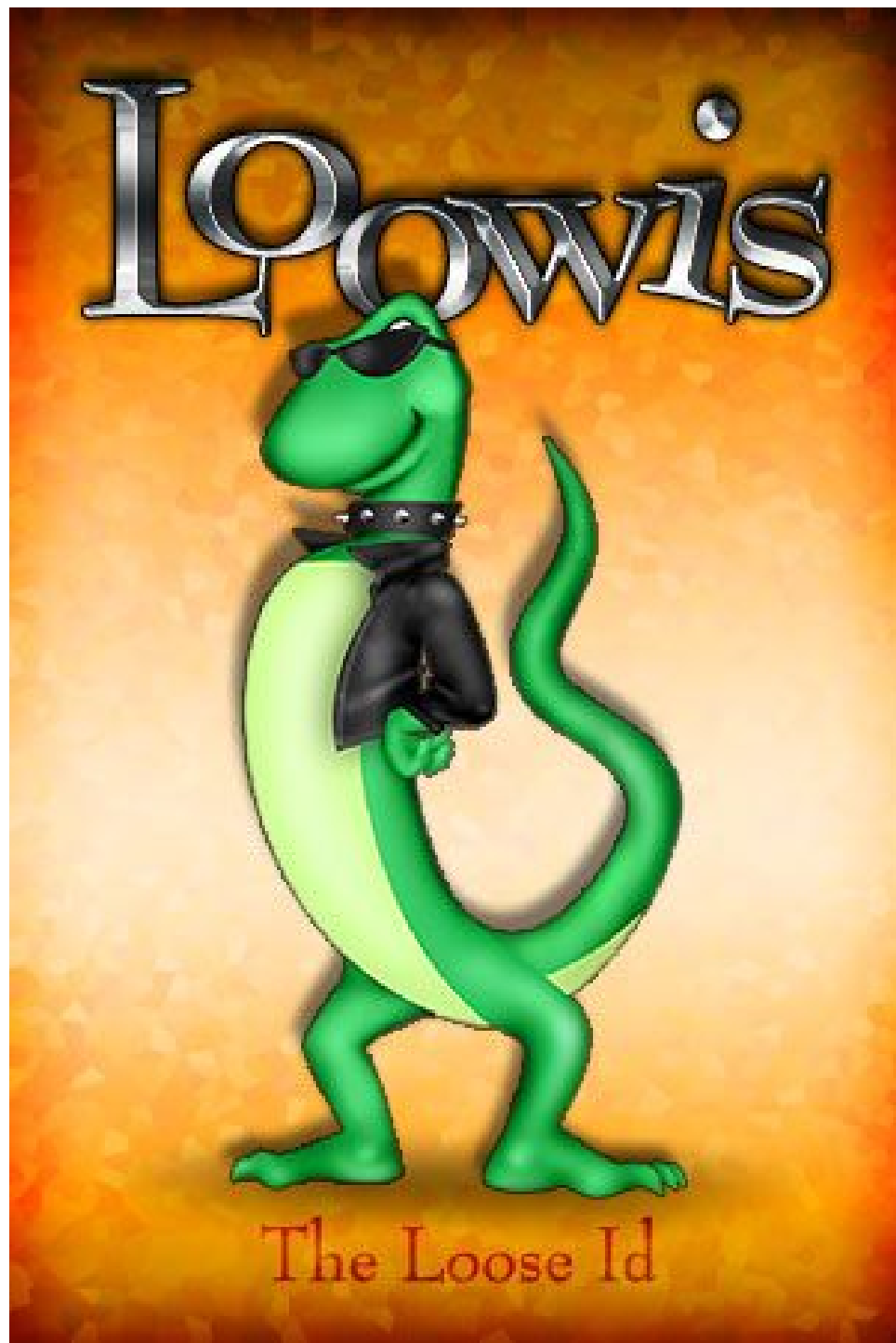
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Telephone Manner

by Jules Jones & Alex Woolgrave

There was something about the sight of a very pretty woman fondling huge weapons that got Allard excited. Judging by Vaughan's expression, Allard wasn't the only one. No matter how often Karen touched and patted and stroked suggestively along those rounded barrels, it still affected him. *It's just weapons technology*, he told himself, as usual. *So?* retorted his cock.

He managed to keep a grip on his reactions (or *not* keep a grip on them) for just long enough to perform the necessary computer checks Karen had asked him to carry out on the cargo before it was delivered.

Then he stood there and fidgeted, but she was so involved in trying to give the equipment a hand-job, she didn't seem to notice.

Ten unendurable minutes passed, during which Vaughan finished the last engineering checks. "Can we go now, Karen?" asked Vaughan.

Karen flapped her hand, dismissing them without even looking at them. "I can finish the rest of the pre-delivery checks."

Vaughan's bedroom was nearest.

“It’s a bit lowering,” said Allard, “to think that I don’t register on her scale of ‘important things’ because mine isn’t two feet long.” He groaned. “Even if it feels like it, at the moment.”

“I think it’s a good size,” said Vaughan, assessing the dimensions.

Allard moaned. “Give me a wank. I need something *now* after watching that!”

He moaned again, this time with relief, as Vaughan started to stroke him through the trousers. He loved that, and Vaughan seemed to have some idea that he liked to be touched through cloth.

Vaughan stopped.

“Bastard!” said Allard, without opening his eyes.

“In the interests of getting a proper grip on it,” explained Vaughan, undoing him efficiently and showing him what he meant by a proper grip. Allard moaned, and collapsed against Vaughan’s shoulder.

Vaughan put one arm ‘round him to hold him up while the other hand went to work on his cock. A lovely firm grip. Good, firm strokes along the whole length. Just what Karen had been doing to her beloved guns. He spared just a moment to wish his cock *was* two feet long, just so that he could enjoy being stroked for...longer. If it was longer.

His brain wasn’t coming up with the usual good-quality thoughts; he must be busy with something else. He was.

“Messy little bugger,” Vaughan said affectionately.

Allard managed one last spurt, just to convince Vaughan that he never paid any attention to Vaughan’s comments.

He sagged happily in Vaughan’s arms. “Give me a minute, and I’ll do you.”

He was still dozing when Vaughan dragged him to the bed and let him fall.

“Mm?” he said, rather woozily.

“Didn’t want to let you collapse on the floor, and you’re a hell of a weight if I have to prop you up for more than two minutes.”

“I feel *much* better now!” said Allard, and stretched. “All right, what would you like? Within reason,” he clarified.

“Well, you could just sprawl there while I stick my cock into the melted heap of what’s left,” said Vaughan.

Allard moaned agreeably and rolled over.

“On the other hand, if you’re feeling energetic enough, you could actually pay some attention to my cock. I may not be as fond of women as you are, but I still quite enjoyed the show.” He paused. “Not Karen as much as the show going on in your trousers.”

“You mean you were looking at my trousers instead of what Karen was doing?”

“At least half the time. Yes, she’s pretty, but I love it when I can watch you squirming where you stand, gritting your teeth and obviously thinking ‘I must not have sex now! I must wait! I can’t stand it!’”

Allard sighed. He wasn’t entirely comfortable with the fact that his body language was that readable.

“If I wasn’t having an affair with you, or if I didn’t know you this well, I don’t think I’d have noticed,” Vaughan said. “I don’t think Karen realised.”

Allard sighed harder.

“*Now* what’s the matter?” demanded Vaughan.

“It’s embarrassing making a show of myself. It’s more embarrassing when you behave as if you can read my mind.”

“It’s easier to read your mind when you’re thinking with your *cock*head rather than your *real* head,” said Vaughan, gently touching both organs.

Allard relaxed a bit, and reached out for Vaughan. “You mentioned a hand-job.”

"I wasn't that specific," said Vaughan. "I said 'paying attention to my cock', but I think your mouth would be rather nice, as well. You decide."

Allard slid down off the bed to kneel (in a rather relaxed way) at Vaughan's feet.

"I'll suck you, if you can be quick about it." He undid Vaughan's trousers and got his cock out. "Mm?" he asked, around the head.

"Quick isn't going to be a problem," said Vaughan.

Allard gave it a good, hard suck. He liked doing this after he'd come; it was still a pleasure, and it was more relaxing not to have to worry about being over-excited. Every tight, hard suck he gave Vaughan seemed to make Vaughan's cock bigger, tighter, harder; a few seconds of that, and Vaughan came hard.

Then Vaughan collapsed, partly on him and partly on the floor.

"Bed," Allard said, which was about all he had the breath to say.

Vaughan took the hint, although Allard took most of the blankets.

"I know you feel the cold, Allard," said Vaughan, "but we *are* dressed at this point."

"Ah," said Allard. "Force of habit."

"Yes," said Vaughan, "I've noticed."

Allard pulled the blankets off and kicked him.

"Uncivilised little sod," said Vaughan mildly.

"I thought that's what you liked about me, when you weren't on your 'virgin' kick."

"It's the contrast," Vaughan said, in an appreciative voice.

Allard, not minding that, wiped himself more-or-less clean with one corner of the sheet.

"Oy! I'm going to sleep in that tonight!" said Vaughan.

"Tell yourself it's a charming reminder of the experience." He tidied Vaughan up, as well, tucking him neatly back into his trousers.

There was a sudden click as the intercom turned on. It was followed by Mark's voice, saying, "They don't seem to be on the flight-deck at the moment. I'm putting you through to their cabin. Don't worry about any noises -- it just tends to mean they're having sex again. Don't interrupt them; he gets a bit annoyed if you do that. I'm sure they'll want to talk to you afterwards, though," he added brightly, as if to console the possible client. "Dad!" he carolled. "Are you decent? Someone wants to talk to Vaughan."

Vaughan looked at Allard. "I am starting to think we may possibly have made a mistake in making that computer our receptionist."

Allard was starting to understand why he'd found Mark in a junk heap. "Do you want to grovel to the customer, or shall I?"

"You're not very good at grovelling to the customers, just to me."

Allard opened his mouth.

"I'd better get it," continued Vaughan hurriedly, hitting the intercom.

"Vaughan here. How may I help?"

There was silence for a few seconds, followed by: "Er..."

"Please let me apologise for our receptionist. He's an artificial intelligence, and he doesn't quite seem to have got the hang of human communications yet."

"Er...artificial intelligence? But I thought it was...somebody's son ..." The tone of voice suggested that the person did not entirely approve of somebody's young son knowing about his father's sex life.

"Only in a manner of speaking," commented Allard dryly. "I was the originator of some of the more important algorithms, and therefore count as his father in some sense. He seems to find it amusing to call me Dad."

"If it *is* a computer," said the voice doubtfully, "it doesn't seem to be interested in the usual things a computer is interested in."

“I am!” said Mark. “I’m interested in ever so many things, and the human social stuff is fascinating.”

“It is not a computer,” said Allard. “It is an artificial intelligence, and we are learning the difference between the two concepts. Unfortunately,” he added.

“Well ...” the voice said, trailing off.

Vaughan said, “Why not meet us to discuss whatever it is you wanted to contact us about? One meeting with Mark is usually more than enough to convince people that he is what people say he is.”

“A nosy, arrogant little prick,” muttered Allard under his breath, quietly enough that it wouldn’t carry through the intercom.

Vaughan heard, though. Equally quietly, he said, “Pot. Kettle.”

Allard was tempted to try physical retaliation, but had more sense than to try it when engaged in contract negotiation. Especially considering the image this particular potential client must already have of them.

“You are in the Poseidon system at the moment, aren’t you?”

“Yes, we’re quite reachable,” said Vaughan, and began talking co-ordinates.

* * * * *

Vaughan led their visitor onto the flight-deck and made introductions.

“And this,” he said at last, “is Mark.”

“That?” Moore didn’t look impressed.

“This,” said Mark.

The visitor jumped. Then he peered at Mark with more interest. “I’ve never seen anything quite like this.”

“Meatbrains exist by the millions,” Mark said. “I am unique.”

“Having spoken to him,” said Vaughan, “you can quite see why.”

“Ignore my stepfather,” said Mark.

Vaughan glared at the little machine while Moore boggled at it.

“Your *stepfather*?”

“All right, *technically* he’s not my stepfather. He’s fucking my father every night, but I suppose they’re not legally married. Yet.”

“Ever, if I have to take responsibility for you,” Vaughan said.

Allard decided he wanted to change the subject from ‘legally married’ to...well, anything else. “Perhaps we could discuss the work you wanted us to do for you.”

Moore gave Mark one last appalled glance. “Ah. Yes. Right. Er...do you think we could go somewhere else?”

“Yes, he has that effect on a lot of people,” said Allard.

“So do you,” murmured Claire.

“Bye!” called Mark, as they walked out.

* * * * *

As they walked into the dining room, Moore asked Allard, “How do you feel about a computer calling you Dad?”

Much the same as I’d feel about an organic human calling me Dad, Allard thought, but was diplomatic enough not to say.

“I’ve always been a responsible sex partner,” he muttered. “Made sure I was up-to-date on contraception. And what happens? I find myself responsible for offspring anyway. And not just *any* offspring. A computer that reads porn for a hobby.”

“Reads porn?”

“Don’t ask.”

“What, something about sockets? Manuals and stuff?”

“No.” Allard sighed. “It’s an artificial intelligence patterned after humans. The fact that it doesn’t have the equipment doesn’t stop it fantasising.”

“That must be...interesting to live with.”

“You don’t know the half of it,” said Allard. *Unfortunately, I suspect we might not know the half of it, either.*

It seemed they’d reassured Moore. He relaxed a bit, and started discussing prices and bringing out contract forms.

* * * * *

After they’d waved bye-bye to the customer, it was time to have That Talk with Mark. No, not *That* Talk -- they’d had the sex-education stuff days ago; the more challenging stuff about social interaction.

After the last fortnight, Allard now had more sympathy for those people who had junked Mark. He wasn’t going to do it himself, and it wasn’t precisely Mark’s *fault*. It was just that he could understand how they’d felt.

“I think we’re going to have to teach Mark some manners,” he said.

“You don’t say!” said Harry. “Where are you going to get them from?”

“I have excellent manners,” said Allard truthfully. “I just keep them for best.”

“Yes, he’s incoherently grateful quite often,” said Vaughan.

“Yes, we know,” said everyone else.

“Harry, are you distributing tapes?” Allard said rather suspiciously.

“Not outside the ship.”

Allard looked at the two women. “I did not realise Harry was contagious.”

“Only when we haven’t been able to pick up our own supplies of porn,” said Claire.

Allard took a moment to think uncharitable thoughts about women's liberation. Centuries ago, it wouldn't have been conceivable that women were such avid consumers of dirty videos. It must have been wonderful.

Of course, that meant there would still have been people like Harry about... He paused. *Were* there other people like Harry?

No, he didn't actually want to think about that.

"I suppose we *had* better discuss this with Mark," said Vaughan.

They went back to the flight-deck.

Mark turned whatever optical sensors he had on the crowd of people approaching him, as he said nervously, "Dad? Am I in trouble again?"

"No more than usual," said Allard.

Vaughan said, "We think you need to learn a bit more about proper behaviour."

"You already know quite enough about improper behaviour," said Claire.

Mark said, "Oh, well, I can learn manners by watching the rest of you."

Allard said firmly, "No. Proper ones, not the rubbish we have on this ship."

It would have been too much to expect for the rest of the conversation not to be a furious argument about what constituted 'proper manners'.

Claire said to Harry, "Your idea of manners is to wipe anything on your tapes which doesn't include sex. It's not normal, is it?"

"It's *very* normal!" said Harry rather huffily. "I'm just more honest about it than some people."

"Which of us was that remark intended to insult?" asked Claire.

"Well, you seem quite happy to listen to one or two of mine," said Harry.

"There's a difference between occasionally listening because it's there, and actually creating the stuff."

“Yeah,” said Harry. “Creativity. Anyway, I’m not the one with a weapons fetish who gets into trouble with governments.”

Karen had caused a couple of diplomatic incidents by going and finding out about military tech on a couple of planets where people had the impression that one should go through proper channels.

“I don’t see what the problem was,” said Karen. “They ought to be flattered that an expert took an interest in how they did it.”

“One, it was supposed to be secret; and two, you’re probably the only one who’s been quite so blatant about sexually molesting their weapons,” said Harry.

“I wasn’t sexually molesting them. And at least I don’t use rude words to describe them,” Karen said. “If Claire is going to use the sort of language she usually does about Customs officials, could she try to remember to switch the radio off before saying it, please?”

Vaughan said, “Can we all sit down in a circle and discuss who takes turns to speak first? Otherwise, the conversation gets hijacked by the usual troublemakers.”

Allard said, “And you start trying to convert people to your political viewpoint at the slightest excuse. At least I don’t try to shove my politics down other people’s throats.”

“No, just your cock,” said Harry.

“That’s only because you don’t *have* any politics!” snapped Vaughan.

“Oh, look how impressed and insulted I am,” sneered Allard.

“Take him away and fuck him,” suggested Karen. “He’s getting stroppy again.”

“And you,” said Allard poisonously, pointing at Karen, “suggest Vaughan take me away and fuck me every time I make a suggestion you don’t like.”

“Actually,” said Karen, “I was suggesting you take *Vaughan* away and fuck him.”

“That’s all right, then,” said Allard, thinking, *it’s taken them months to pick up on the lack of fixed role-playing.*

“What?” said Vaughan.

“I *said*,” said Karen, “Allard needs to fuck you to shut you up. God knows it works better than anything the rest of us can do.”

“Well, Mark,” said Harry, “do you see now why you ought to go on a proper training course instead of listening to us lot?”

“Certainly,” said Mark. “This is absolutely fascinating. It’s nothing like the stuff I’ve picked up from books and data-banks.”

“Shut up, everybody!” said Vaughan, loudly.

Everybody did, slightly shocked.

“There are training courses available for receptionists,” said Vaughan. “We will find one suitable for Mark and put him through it.”

“With a meat-grinder, if necessary,” Allard muttered *sotto voce*.

* * * * *

Courses were easy to find. Unfortunately, the very best one (and Allard insisted upon quality, or, if possible, miracles) wasn’t a correspondence course at all.

“Applicants must be accepted in person, on a case-by-case basis,” said the prospectus rather ominously. Allard doubted they’d actually even thought about accepting any non-organic applicants. AIs usually came programmed for it if they were expected to work as receptionists.

As expected, the course providers kicked up an awful stink about non-standard applicants. After a lot of argument, Allard hit on the idea of sending Mark down with a couple of people to serve as bodyguards, if necessary.

“Meatbrains make good transport,” said Mark. “You have those useful hand-things for picking me up.”

“We could always try building you an android body you could remote-control,” said Allard, without thinking about the possible consequences. Then he did, and wished he’d kept quiet. At least, at the moment, Mark was an *immobile* pain-in-the-neck.

“There isn’t enough time before the next course,” Mark said.

Allard hoped he would have forgotten about the idea by the time he’d finished the course.

“Any preferences on who you want to go with you?” asked Allard, watching a ripple of ‘please-god-not-me’ circulate swiftly through the crew.

“Karen and a big gun, so she can wave it at anyone who starts saying things about me,” said Mark. “Oh, and Claire can help lift me.”

Karen actually looked pleased at that. Claire looked resigned but not too unhappy.

“And the rest of us can go shopping,” Harry suggested.

“Haven’t you got enough porn tapes?” asked Claire.

“Got to replace the ones you keep in your room... No, seriously, I was actually thinking about general shopping, for once.”

“Sounds fun,” said Claire. “I’ll give you a list, if I have to cart Mark about.”

“Shopping, seeing the sights. Yes, a bit of relaxation would be nice,” agreed Vaughan. “You ladies can always do the town in the evenings.”

“Just as long as we can do the town in the evenings, as well,” said Allard, petting part of Vaughan to make it clear what sort of entertainment he was thinking of.

“Do you ever think of anything else?” asked Vaughan.

“Frequently. Most of the time, actually.”

“What’s he mean by that?” Vaughan asked Harry in a loud whisper.

“Means he’s got his mind on the job instead of ‘on the job’ most of the time,” Harry said. “You only rate ahead of the computers when he’s got an erection.”

“That’s what it’s like shagging a geek. Second-best, if that. Just because *I* don’t have flashing lights,” Vaughan muttered, disgruntled.

“And you don’t even turn into a pizza,” said Allard.

“Third-best,” said Vaughan. “Computers, junk-food, then sex.”

“Don’t know why you bother, really,” said Harry.

“You know exactly why I bother, Harry. You listen to it often enough.”

“Yes, the way he manages to have that air of innocence despite the filthy mind and filthier language,” said Harry. “Either it’s the haircut, or he was brought up by nuns. Computer nuns.”

Allard decided he was going to have to work on his image.

“And it’s real, in spite of the filthy mind and filthier language,” said Vaughan.

Allard glared at him. He decided not to say anything, partly because it would only amuse them, and particularly because there was a certain amount of truth in it, which embarrassed him even more.

* * * * *

“I feel like being perverted tonight!” said Harry.

“You *are* perverted, Harry.”

“All right, I feel like having a change. Rather than taking a sneaky peek at you lot, I feel like paying to watch it on stage. Want to *come* with me?”

I should never have used that pun on him, thought Allard.

“What were you thinking of?” Vaughan said.

“There are some really good shows in this city. Might teach Allard a thing or two, while we’re at it.”

“I am not *that* naïve,” said Allard crossly.

“How d’you know? You haven’t seen any of them!” said Harry.

“There are only so many ways to put two bodies together,” said Allard, “and I’ve probably seen most of them while clearing out other people’s hard-drives.”

“Why confine yourself to two?” said Harry, who might well not have *done* any more exotic things than Allard, but who had certainly seen the lot. Frequently.

Allard decided it was pointless trying to compete with Harry on this particular subject. “All right,” he said, “you choose.” He wasn’t too concerned about what Harry might choose. Oddly enough, he could actually rely on Harry to make sure it wasn’t something *too* tasteless.

Harry glanced around them. “That one,” he said, pointing at a doorway across the street.

In fact, it wasn’t tasteless at all. Just a theatre.

The performance was a musical, which just happened to be performed by amazingly attractive people in very little clothing. The dance-steps were also designed to make the clothing there wasn’t much of...swirl. In interesting ways. Allard was riveted.

“Allard,” said Harry, “your eyes are glazing over.”

“Mm.”

“Vaughan,” said Harry, “I think he’s enjoying it.”

“Mm.”

“Talk to yourself, Chance!” Harry muttered.

“Shut up and drink your champagne, Harry,” Allard and Vaughan said in unison.

Allard had been sufficiently broken out of the mood to realise that he was holding hands with Vaughan under the table. He decided he didn’t care. He sank back into enjoying the show. It was tastefully erotic in a subtler way than a straightforward sex-show, allowing his responses to start at ‘aesthetic’ and move all the way to ‘insanely arousing’.

The next time he noticed where his hand was, it wasn't on Vaughan's *hand*...

Oh, well. The seating here was arranged in high-walled booths, so nobody could see except Harry.

By the time the show ended, he was very much of a mood to take Vaughan somewhere, preferably somewhere nearer than 'home to bed'. Since everybody had decided to make a night of it, there was nobody to operate the teleport, so they'd have to get to the ship on foot. He'd prefer to find somewhere else.

Apparently Vaughan had noticed, and before Allard could say anything, whispered: "Do you want somewhere salubrious, or would those by-the-hour rooms do?"

Allard thought about it. The by-the-hour rooms were probably closer, and could be interestingly naughty. On the other hand, he felt like indulging himself in an expensive hotel room, where he could caress Vaughan slowly in a big, silky bed without the threat of cockroaches. Oh, well -- they were fairly flush at the moment.

"If we go to a by-the-hour place, we may have an audience. I've just about got used to Harry, but the idea of being a peep-show for people I'm not even friendly with is unacceptable."

Vaughan bent down and whispered, "What *is* acceptable?" softly into Allard's ear, following that with a kiss.

Allard's cock began to beat out a rhythm of "soon, soon, soon!" inside his trousers.

Shut up! he hissed mentally. "Let's indulge. Somewhere with a honeymoon suite -- and don't get any ideas about making Mark legitimate!"

"Wouldn't dream of it," said Vaughan.

"Am I invited?" said Harry.

Allard actually thought about it, to his horror, then said, "Go and find your own fun."

“It was worth asking,” said Harry. “Oh, look, there are a couple of ladies on their own over there.” He straightened his tie, and Allard thought, *Harry actually does scrub up quite nicely when he decides to go out on the town rather than use us for his entertainment.*

He looked at Vaughan, as well. Full evening dress looked good on *him*, too. Lots of layers to unwrap, which need not be a bad thing.

They watched as Harry got a smile rather than a slap.

“Looks like he’s safe enough for the evening,” Vaughan said. “Shall we go?”

They didn’t have to go very far to find a good hotel. It was full of all those little luxuries one didn’t get in normal shipboard life. As for what it *lacked*, well, it was bug-free, both in the ‘cockroach’ sense and in the ‘Harry’ sense. Definitely good enough.

Vaughan lay on the bed, kicked his shoes off, and ate the complimentary chocolates provided for both of them. Allard pretended not to notice. He would have *liked* a chocolate, but it would be more dignified not to notice.

“Oh,” said Vaughan. “Damn, I didn’t mean to eat both of those. Sorry.”

“Don’t give it another thought.”

“I just noticed you not-noticing, with gritted teeth.”

“Stop spoiling the mood, Vaughan.”

“Well, un-grit your teeth and go and have a look in the mini-bar. There will be more chocolate through there.” Vaughan sat up again. “No, on second thought, I’ll get them. You lie back on the bed, and I’ll come and feed them to you.”

“What a lovely idea.” Allard disposed himself, in carefully calculated slight disorder, on the bed. If he was lucky, he looked *just* rumpled, rather than foolish. *Come on, Vaughan, or I will feel a fool lying here like this.*

Vaughan came back with a box of truffles. He sat on the bed and opened the box, then unwrapped one truffle and held it out, very delicately.

Equally delicately, Allard leant toward him and closed his mouth around it. He pulled back slightly, sucking Vaughan's fingers as he did so. The truffle was good. A little too cold from the fridge, but a wonderful flavour that intensified as his body heat warmed it. He let it melt over his tongue, enjoying the sensation.

Vaughan stroked his face softly. "You look disgustingly decadent."

"Good."

Allard ate three more chocolates, unhurriedly.

Vaughan kissed him, then said, "Yes, they *do* taste nice."

"So do you."

They shared a few more chocolates and kisses. Allard was going on the principle that he could always work off the calories with a little help from Vaughan.

He wanted to touch more than lips now. He wrapped his arms around Vaughan and pulled him down.

"You're rumpling my clothes all up," said Vaughan.

"I like you rumpled," said Allard, undoing Vaughan's tie. It was surprisingly difficult dealing with a tie 'round someone else's neck, even when he was just *undoing* it. He wasn't too bothered, since he was in the mood to take it slowly.

"Whereas *I* quite like you all dressed-up to the nines. It's nice to be able to prise you out of your geek-wear occasionally."

"I'm still in black."

"Apart from this lovely royal-blue cummerbund," Vaughan said, doing things to the cummerbund, "and that crisp white shirt. There's something decidedly tempting about that crisp white shirt."

"The idea of un-crisping it, you mean." Allard did so to Vaughan's, playing with it as he undid the buttons, and running crisp pleats between his fingers.

“Something like that, yes,” Vaughan said, slipping his finger through a gap between a couple of buttons on Allard’s shirt.

Allard wriggled slightly, and the finger made contact with his nipple.

“Don’t wriggle,” said Vaughan. “It interferes with my precision technique and handling.”

“Your precision technique and handling are what’s making me wriggle,” said Allard. He applied a bit more of his own ‘precision technique’ to Vaughan’s shirt and what was under it. “See? You wriggle, as well.”

“And it interferes, as well.”

“Is there *anything* you won’t turn into an argument, Vaughan?”

“No,” said Vaughan. “Want to argue about how quickly I can undo your trousers?”

“No.” Allard wriggled a bit more, trying to make himself accessible. Once he was unfastened, he reached for Vaughan in turn. “I suppose we’d better go for nakedness this time. I don’t fancy the dry-cleaning bills if we get more-than-rumpled in our best clothes.”

“You wouldn’t keep them as a souvenir?” Vaughan asked, not sounding terribly serious.

“I’m sure I’m not going to forget this. Silk sheets and chocolate are memorably unusual.”

“And champagne,” Vaughan said. “There’s a bottle in the ice-bucket. You did specify the honeymoon suite.”

He was already nicely happy after the champagne shared during the show, but they could probably handle another bottle without affecting their ability to handle each other.

“Go and get it, then. No, not yet. Get your clothes off first, and then I can watch you walking around naked.” He didn’t mention that he’d be able to watch Vaughan in front of a large mirror.

Vaughan got off the bed and removed his clothes, rather less slowly than a proper (improper) strip-tease, but very nice anyway. Allard lay back on the bed and took hold of his cock, not masturbating, but letting himself enjoy the feel of it, and the view.

“Keep that for me, will you?” muttered Vaughan.

“No intention of wasting it on a wank. But don’t you like watching me hold it?”

“Oh, yes,” said Vaughan, “all framed in black.” He licked his lips. “Do you have any idea what you look like? Full formal evening dress, shirt half-undone, cummerbund all rumpled up and your cock dangling out of your trousers.”

“I am not dangling,” said Allard, looking down to check.

“Certainly not,” said Vaughan. “Fine upstanding fellow you are.” He stripped off the last of his clothing, laying it neatly on the chair. Then he walked toward the mini-bar.

Allard followed Vaughan’s progress with interest. Yes, the large mirror offered an excellent front and rear view at the same time. Then he noticed Vaughan watching him watching Vaughan. Vaughan grinned at him, and wiggled his hips. Bouncing made the front and rear views even more interesting.

His cock was beginning to tell him it had had enough of mere scenery, however.

Agreeing with it, he started getting undressed, and had managed to strip to the waist by the time Vaughan returned with the ice-bucket and a couple of champagne flutes. He was mentally cursing the complicated clothing: all very well slowly unwrapping each other, but it was hell when you just wanted to get rid of it fast.

“Would you like any help with that?” Vaughan asked him, and got down on his knees.

To Allard’s disappointment, he was kneeling to undo Allard’s shoes.

Allard was thinking about another use for that relative position. He sighed, undid the rest of his fly-buttons, let his trousers drop, and settled to giving his cock a little attention.

“Would you like any help with *that*?” Vaughan asked, sounding rather more interested.

“Finish my shoes first.”

Vaughan did, cursing the trousers which had just landed on top of what he was working on. "Lift one foot," he said.

Allard did so, trying not to fall over and wishing he hadn't dropped his trousers so unceremoniously.

Then the other foot.

Finally he was free. He wiggled his cock at Vaughan.

"Very nice," Vaughan said, "but let's have the champagne first. I've always heard that bubbles can have an interesting effect when combined with fellatio. Sort of...tingly."

Allard, to his own surprise, rather liked that idea. "But would it work if there was something else in your mouth already? And wouldn't it get a little untidy?"

Vaughan gestured airily at the bed. "We are paying an unfeasible amount of money for clean sheets and luxury. We practically *deserve* to be a bit messy."

"When have you ever needed to pay for the privilege?"

"On the ship, I leave things about, I tidy them up," said Vaughan.

"Eventually," muttered Allard.

"Here, other people can clear it up; that's their job." Vaughan grinned. "Anyway, this is a better class of mess!" Vaughan indicated the visibly expensive chocolate-wrappers decorating the floor.

Allard conceded the point. "I'd always supposed that 'the lap of luxury' involved sexual congress on a bed of rose petals, but I should think truffle-wrappers are a reasonable urban facsimile."

"You're getting epigrammatic, Allard. Time I shut you up," said Vaughan, and shut Allard up by filling his own mouth.

Allard panted.

Vaughan stopped, and said, "Hang on, forgot the champagne!"

I don't care! thought Allard, although he would not give Vaughan the satisfaction of saying that.

"Hold these," said Vaughan, handing him the glasses. He poured a generous measure of champagne into each flute, then set the bottle down and took one flute from Allard. "Cheers!" he said.

"You do not knock it back like cheap plonk!" snapped Allard.

"No," said Vaughan, with a grin, "I knock it back like expensive plonk for which I have paid a significant amount of money to be able to treat exactly as I please." He took a small, delicate sip. "Mm," he said happily. Then he took a somewhat larger sip, got down on his knees again, and applied himself to Allard.

This was distinctly interesting. Allard wasn't entirely sure if the quality of the drink affected the sensation. With the chilly drink against the heat of his cock and Vaughan's mouth, and the quite unclassifiable feel of bubbles, he didn't particularly want to analyse anything.

The 'bubbly' feeling only lasted a few seconds, but then he still had the warm, wet, luxurious feeling of a mouth wrapped 'round his cock, and if he wanted the champagne, he could always drink his own.

He sipped. Decadent. Wicked. Wonderful. It was *good* champagne, but being able to relax while someone sucked his cock as he drank made it even better. He did absolutely nothing except enjoy it.

The taste was a cool prickle on his tongue, and there was no trace of coolness or bubbles left in Vaughan's mouth by now, just the slow serious suction Vaughan enjoyed giving and Allard enjoyed getting. He wanted to move, and wanted to stay still. He stayed still.

He was not quite on the edge of not being able to stop. Time to stop, while he still could, and experience it from the other side. "Vaughan."

“Mph?” Vaughan said around his cock.

“Stop now, or you wait until I’ve recovered from *la petite mort* before you get to find out what champagne on your cock feels like.”

Vaughan slid off him very quickly indeed, leaving Allard feeling rather regretful about having been so generous. Then Vaughan stood up, slightly unsteadily.

Hardly surprising, given the state of his own balance. He managed to kneel down rather than fall down, although it seemed to be more by luck than judgement. Perhaps they’d had too much champagne, after all. No, they both still had erections, didn’t they? He patted his own to check, and peered at Vaughan’s. Yes, Vaughan had a very nice erection. Very firm, very tasty-looking.

He took a quick swig from his glass, held it in his mouth. When he was certain that he wouldn’t choke, he slipped his lips over Vaughan’s cock. It took more co-ordination than he was quite capable of, and a little champagne dribbled. Vaughan didn’t seem to mind, especially when Allard hastily sucked to try to stop it getting away. Then he managed to get as much of Vaughan’s cock as he currently had room for, and settled down to enjoy the sensation of bubbles bursting inside his mouth, bubbles bursting between his tongue and Vaughan’s cock. It was quite a sensual pleasure for *him*, never mind the thought it was meant to be for Vaughan.

He held it for as long as possible, until the bubbles finally dispersed, then he reluctantly pulled off Vaughan, swallowed, and took another mouthful of champagne. More practiced this time, he was able to take Vaughan straight in. Vaughan’s cock moving in his mouth stirred the champagne up quite delightfully. It stirred Vaughan up quite delightfully, as well. Vaughan thrust into his mouth. Allard enjoyed it for as long as he could before he had to pull off, spluttering and choking.

“Are you all right?” Vaughan said.

“Champagne up my nose tickles.”

“Pity. I was enjoying that,” said Vaughan.

“So was I.” Allard couldn’t help laughing. “First time I’ve done that with champagne rather than a fizzy soft drink.”

“What? Sex?”

“No, you twit! Get it up my nose!”

“I know you’ve got a big nose, Allard, but I don’t think nasal sex is an option without extensive surgery.”

“Is there *any* perfectly normal remark you can’t turn into a double-entendre?”

“No.” Vaughan bent over and held out a hand. “Come on. On the bed.”

“I don’t think we’re going to manage the co-ordination for sixty-nine and champagne,” said Allard regretfully. “I don’t seem to manage even one end of that.”

“We might if we hadn’t actually drunk quite a bit of it,” said Vaughan, “but you’re probably right. So. Sixty-nine *without* champagne or one-by-one with champagne. Ah, it’s a close call!”

“We buy a bottle of champagne to take back to the ship. Or hope that we’ve sobered up in the morning,” said Allard.

“Sixty-nine it is,” said Vaughan cheerfully, sweeping Allard up and dumping him on the bed. Then he bounced onto the bed himself. “Side by side, me on top, you on top?” asked Vaughan.

“After that much champagne, you’re probably going to fall asleep as soon as you come,” said Allard.

“Could be a bit difficult for you if I’ve actually still got my cock down your throat. Side-by-side it is.”

My god, how reasonable he is about discussion. I’ll have to get him drunk on champagne more often. Or offer to suck him. Wait a minute -- I do offer to suck him quite often. Even more often, then.

By this time, he was wriggling 'round, trying not to kick Vaughan while changing position, while Vaughan tried not to kick *him* while changing position. They were quite practiced at that by now, but the addition of silk sheets made the experience rather more slippery. Not that that was a bad thing.

"Mm," said Vaughan. "I like silk."

"I know," said Allard, just before gulping a mouthful of Vaughan and settling down to work. He didn't want to take Vaughan right down his throat; their control was going to be slightly wonky as they were both drunk, so no fancy tricks. Instead, he wrapped a hand 'round the base and took a good, firm suck at the business end. His eyes closed, and he was so thoroughly involved in what he was doing (and so, apparently, was Vaughan) that it was a small shock when Vaughan took a sudden gulp at *him*.

He moaned around Vaughan.

Vaughan kept nearly pulling off -- suck, pause, breathe, *suck*, moan -- while keeping his warm fingers playing with Allard's balls.

Allard had forgotten every technique he'd ever learned. He kept moaning.

Vaughan sucked at him more.

Allard's cock-muted moans were reaching a certain pitch of almost continuous desperation, although he didn't know or care whether they were audible. All he cared about was that Vaughan kept sucking and *sucking* and --

-- he was shuddering, moaning and coming, and his mouth was very suddenly a lot fuller when his multitasking capacity was already over its limit.

There were probably many romantic novels that dealt with simultaneous orgasm. He'd be surprised if any of them even mentioned getting it up one's nose.

He let go of Vaughan and spluttered a bit. Judging by the noises from the other end of the bed, Vaughan was having the same problem.

“I’m not going to say ‘never again,’” said Vaughan. “I *am* going to say, next time we’d better be a bit less drunk.”

“Who cares? It was fun!”

After some crawling and wriggling, they both ended up oriented in more-or-less the same direction, with their heads on the pillows.

Vaughan stretched out an arm, grabbed hold of Allard, and tugged.

Allard found himself skidding over the silk. Good job, really, that he had no objection to being tugged. At the moment, he was too drunk and satisfied to object to *anything*.

They lay there in contented silence. Allard liked the feel of silk warmed by body heat, and Vaughan didn’t seem to mind it, either.

* * * * *

Allard struggled to raise an eyelid, as best he could without complicated pulley systems. It must have taken about five minutes, which reminded him to look at the time.

Over an hour had gone by. Nearly an hour had been spent dozing.

That must have been good. Or they must have been drunk. Or both.

“Fancy exploring the possibilities of the Jacuzzi?”

“Vaughan, I do *not* want more sex at this juncture.”

“Wasn’t intending that. Can’t get it up again either.”

“After what amounts to a bottle of champagne each, it’s hardly any wonder we can’t get it up a second time.” Actually, they hadn’t finished the bottle in the hotel room. Actually, they hadn’t even finished the first glass. “I suppose we could sit in bubbles while drinking bubbles.”

“That’s the spirit,” Vaughan said.

They managed, rather unsteadily, to help each other across the room and locate the Jacuzzi. Allard had even remembered to snag the champagne bottle and glasses in passing.

Vaughan fiddled with the taps a bit. “Can’t quite figure out what you’re supposed to do here.”

Allard looked. They weren’t entirely obvious. On the other hand, there was a neat little notice next to them. “When all else fails, read the instructions,” he told Vaughan.

It turned out to be an ordinary bath, with a couple of extra switches to switch on and control the force of the bubbling, plus a timer. “Easy, really,” he said, turning on the taps.

“Only when you’re not drunk,” said Vaughan.

“I’m a ...” Allard yawned. “...master of technology, even when pissed.” He could even negotiate tetrasyllabic words when drunk. They just came out slightly slower.

Vaughan dabbled his fingers in the resultant bathful of hot water. “Shall we get in and see what it’s like?”

“You try it first. If it’s comfortable, I will join you.”

“Ever since you heard of beta-testing, I’ve always had to try all your technological improvements first,” said Vaughan, but got in without further protest. “Nice hot bath, so far. Want to fiddle with the knobs?”

Allard tweaked a nipple.

“Thought you were too pissed to be interested,” Vaughan said.

“Just testing whether you are,” said Allard innocently.

“I am. But it’s nice anyway,” said Vaughan. “Now turn the Jacuzzi on.”

Allard did. Then he ramped up the force of the bubbles.

Vaughan jumped.

“Are you all right, Vaughan?” Allard asked, a little guiltily.

“Fine. Just happened to be right under my balls when you turned it up. Tickled.”

“What an interesting idea.”

“We’ll have to have a bath tomorrow morning before we leave,” Vaughan said.

“I rather like that idea,” said Allard. Sex usually involved an ‘orgasm’ subroutine and then a ‘garbage collection’ subroutine. Running them concurrently might be more efficient. Or at least more fun. *On the other hand, Vaughan will just say I’m a lazy little sod.*

Vaughan settled more comfortably into the augmented bath. “Are you going to play with the technology all night, or are you going to come and join me?”

“Remember what Harry said about you only coming first when I’ve got an erection.”

“Not that I did come first this time,” said Vaughan.

Allard decided to shut up and get in the bath. He was too drunk to compete with Vaughan if he hadn’t seen *that* one coming. As it were.

He poured the champagne and handed a glass to Vaughan. Then he stepped carefully into the bath, holding his own champagne, and sat down slowly. It was rather like having a hot bath, shower, massage, and cuddle at the same time. He could get used to this.

The champagne would probably have been even better if they’d remembered not to leave the bottle open, but it wasn’t bad. He sighed, and snuggled into Vaughan.

“Mm, it is nice,” Vaughan said. “Why don’t we get one of these for the ship?”

Allard shuddered. “I can imagine what we’d get from MCU93 if we were fool enough to try to explain the concept to it.” It had been bad enough getting the hot water to adjust to a *human* range of comfortable temperatures. Adding force and speed to that could be very painful.

“Instant levitation,” agreed Vaughan. “If he mixes it up with the instant-dry thing, it could be rather disorienting.”

“Why *did* you buy an alien ship?”

“It was cheap, it had a reasonable cargo space, and it had comfortable living quarters.”

“Designed for people with rather different limbs,” said Allard.

“They were humanoid!” said Vaughan indignantly. “Distinctly stated in the service history that the last lot were humanoid.”

“The Farrath from Upsilon Lupus XI are humanoid, and they’re ten feet tall, with three eyes apiece,” said Allard. “Anyway, what about the first lot?”

“It’s had a couple of refits since then,” said Vaughan.

“I know,” said Allard. “MCU93 still has nightmares about the last-but-one.”

“Well, I suppose the ship is his body, in a manner of speaking. It must be like having major surgery.”

“No Jacuzzi,” said Allard firmly. “Not until I’ve shown him some manuals first.”

“On Jacuzzi?”

“No. Design tolerances for *homo sapiens*. Or it might do worse than tickle your balls.” He tickled Vaughan’s balls with his free hand.

“Nice. I wish I hadn’t drunk so much,” said Vaughan.

“Well, if drink is the only pleasure we’ve got at the moment, we might as well enjoy it.” He sipped it. Cool drink in his mouth, hot water all around him. Bubbles inside and out. Very nice indeed, even if he couldn’t get it up again.

He kissed Vaughan with his mouth full of champagne. At least he wasn’t too drunk to manage that. That was quite fun, as well.

They shared the rest of the champagne kiss-by-kiss. After all, it would be quite flat in the morning, and they’d paid for it, so it was their duty to drink it up now. Duty and pleasure.

They’d just finished it when the timer switched off.

“Turn it back on again, Allard. I was enjoying myself.”

“Get out of this bath before you turn into a prune, Vaughan. If you’re obedient, I’ll let you have another go tomorrow morning, when you can discover what it’s like for sex.”

Vaughan got out. “All right. I’m looking forward to it.”

Allard looked at Vaughan's backside with deferred appreciation. Then he stood up and got out.

A huge fluffy towel apiece was infinitely more pleasant than the instant-dry function on the ship, or even than the small ordinary towels they had. *Really* luxurious towels would be an improvement they should definitely try for.

Allard kicked a box on the way back to the bed. Oh, yes -- truffles. One each just before falling asleep would be good.

He handed one to Vaughan and slipped his one slowly into his mouth. Then he settled down to sleep -- drunk, sexually satisfied, and with the divine sensation of chocolate melting over his tongue. It didn't get much better than this.

* * * * *

Allard woke up. This was probably a mistake.

His head hurt, he felt slightly ill, and some sod was taking up the bed and the bedclothes when he was a little colder than he felt comfortable with.

"Morning, Allard!" Vaughan said heartily.

"Go away, Vaughan," said Allard, and hid under the pillow.

"Hangover?" Vaughan asked.

"Isn't it bloody obvious?" he muttered from under the pillow.

"I'm not feeling that bad," said Vaughan.

"Hoo-bloody-ray," said Allard.

The bed bounced. By the time Allard had worked up the energy to say something rude, Vaughan was saying, "Have a painkiller."

Allard crept out from under the pillow and found a painkiller in front of him. He opened his mouth just enough to slip it under his tongue, and stayed very still while it melted and did its job.

“Well enough to sit up and have a drink of water?” Vaughan asked.

Allard considered this. He hadn’t actually had a very *bad* hangover; it was just that he wasn’t used to having hangovers in the first place. He was quite well enough to sit up.

He did so, and took the glass of water Vaughan was holding out for him. Sipping it slowly gave him something else to think about besides the way his head felt, and it made the inside of his mouth feel better.

“I’ll just order breakfast,” Vaughan said. The painkiller must be working -- he didn’t feel sick at the very thought.

“Something expensive, luxurious, and not available on ship,” he specified.

“Exactly what I had in mind,” Vaughan said, grabbing the menu from the bedside table. “Definitely room service. I fancy the idea of a champagne breakfast in bed.”

“Haven’t you had enough champagne for one day?”

“Yes, I did. Yesterday.”

Actually, hair-of-the-dog didn’t seem such a bad idea, now that he was recovering.

“Better make it a half-bottle, though,” he suggested.

Vaughan ordered a champagne breakfast. He did not specify what it was to consist of, but said it would be ready in fifteen minutes.

“That’ll be cooked to order. Good. Not lobster, I hope,” Allard said suspiciously. “It’s lovely, but it’s not what I’d call a lazy breakfast-in-bed item.”

“I could play with my food. Try to grab you with the claws.”

“I still have a hangover, thank you.”

“So you’re not interested in a quickie before breakfast arrives, then?” asked Vaughan.

“No. I want to save it for the bath after breakfast.”

“Well, I suppose we could just cuddle.” Vaughan reached for him, then stopped. He must have conveyed that he didn’t quite feel in the cuddling mood yet.

“On the other hand,” said Vaughan, “I could go and get rid of the last lot of champagne and make room for the next lot.”

“Sorry,” Allard said. “Give the painkiller another five minutes, and I’ll probably be all right.” He lay down again.

While Vaughan went to the bathroom, Allard dozed. He was beginning to feel better.

When Vaughan came back, Allard was feeling better enough to go to the bathroom himself. He’d just finished when there was a knock on the door, and the announcement: “Room service.”

He hastily wrapped a towel around his waist, not knowing exactly what the nudity taboos on this planet were. Then he opened the door.

One of the hotel staff wheeled in a trolley. Vaughan must have ordered the works. He couldn’t see much of it yet, because of the covered dishes, but it smelled wonderful. He was definitely over his hangover.

The trolley parked next to the bed, the porter tipped and gone, they started investigating. There seemed to be a bit of everything. He decided to start with scrambled eggs and smoked salmon on toast. All right, they could get *toast* on board, but apart from that, it was a new and delicious experience. Scrambled eggs made properly, with fresh eggs. Scrambled eggs made properly with fresh eggs and then *handed over*, not kept on a hotplate for half an hour. He couldn’t remember when he’d last had that.

“Don’t take all the scrambled eggs. I like them, too.” Vaughan got up and began to help himself.

“And I suppose I need to leave room for some of the other things,” Allard said. He climbed back into bed, holding his plate carefully.

Vaughan joined him, and they settled back comfortably, propped up on the pillows, eating scrambled eggs and salmon with no tidiness whatsoever, but immense enjoyment. The eggs were perfectly creamy.

“I forgive you for getting me drunk,” said Allard.

“I don’t think you needed any help from me,” said Vaughan.

“You could have reminded me of the relative difference in body size before I drank too much.”

“Would it have stopped you?”

“No, probably not.” He’d been having too much fun to think of sensible things. Since he would have wanted to have an equal share of champagne, it wouldn’t have stopped him. He liked equal shares of everything. Now he’d finished the food on his plate, he could have an equal share of what was left of the scrambled eggs on Vaughan’s plate.

“Oy!” said Vaughan, as Allard grabbed a forkful and devoured it quickly.

“I like your share-and-share-alike policy,” Allard said.

“We can always order some more if you’re that hungry.”

“It’s more fun stealing it. And I’m not hungry any more, just greedy.”

“Don’t you want to leave room for the bacon?”

“Yes, but at least the bacon onboard isn’t too bad.”

Allard got up and started rummaging. The porridge would probably be quite nice, as well, since there was fresh milk. Long-life milk never tasted quite the same. But if he had the porridge, he wouldn’t have a chance at the bacon, which appeared to manage to be crisp and fresh at the same time. Shipboard bacon was either fresh and chewy or it splintered when you stuck the fork in.

Bacon, then. But he might pick up some proper milk and try the porridge tomorrow. He rather fancied looking at people’s reactions when he stalked on board, in rumpled evening-dress, with a bottle of champagne under one arm and a pint of milk under the other.

Oh, yes. Champagne. They hadn’t actually opened it yet. Did champagne go with bacon and sausages?

“Vaughan? Does champagne go with bacon and sausages?”

“How the hell would I know?”

Well, now was as good a time as any to find out. Vaughan had had the fun of popping the champagne last night. He’d tackle this bottle.

Thank god he was still slightly hung-over but not drunk. He was able to negotiate opening the bottle with not too much diminution of his normal ability.

Bacon, sausages, tomato, more toast. He thought about baked beans, but they were too messy and had probably come out of a very similar tin to the ones onboard ship. Two different colours of sauce. Now that was a breakfast to give a man energy for the rest of the day. He sat down with his plate and stabbed into a sausage.

Vaughan winced. “Is that what you’d like to do to me?”

“Sometimes. But usually I prefer to do this...” He lifted the sausage toward his lips, and sucked delicately. It tasted good.

“Switch off that empathy module of yours, Vaughan.” He bit and chewed vigorously.

“They are nice sausages,” Vaughan said, stabbing at one of the ones on Allard’s plate.

“Get your own!”

“But I like your sausage!”

Allard nearly spluttered it all over the plate, but just about managed to get it under control. He put his sausage back on the plate and began to cut pieces off it decorously, not thinking of it in terms of anything else at all.

Vaughan giggled.

“Get your mind off penises until later, Vaughan.”

“Didn’t say a word.” Vaughan got out of bed and got his own helping of bacon and sausages, eating them quite sensibly instead of playing with the food. They ate and drank in companionable silence.

“Beats the shipboard version of turkey-tarragon-and-apricot sausages by quite a long way,” said Vaughan, after a while.

Allard agreed. “Good-quality bangers, fresh and well-cooked, are a lot better than fancy stuff marked ‘best before end of millennium’.”

“That trader swore blind it was *this* millennium it said on the wrappers,” said Vaughan.

“You’re far too trusting.”

“No, just desperate for a change in diet.”

“Next time, we won’t forget to stock up before running out of anything we actually like.”

“Well, at least this time we’ve got plenty of time to go food shopping,” said Vaughan. “I suppose we ought to do that today.”

Food shopping wasn’t the first thing on Allard’s mind today. He got up, moved the hot dishes onto the second shelf of the trolley, and leaned over it meaningfully. Vaughan had, on occasion, said that watching Allard bend over was capable of knocking anything resembling a rational thought out of his mind for some time. Allard had, at the time, said, “How would you know? You’ve never had one!” but he wasn’t averse to being able to manipulate Vaughan.

“Is that a hint?” Vaughan said.

“The rest of the food on the trolley is cold, and will keep,” said Allard.

“Unlike you, because you’re hot, and won’t keep,” said Vaughan, as Allard went into the bathroom and began to run the bath.

“Shut up, Vaughan,” Allard said loudly over the noise of running water. “Tidy up the trolley while I get the bath ready.”

Vaughan came into the bathroom a minute or two later, holding champagne and glasses. There wasn’t quite enough water to make it worth getting into the bath yet, so he occupied the time with snogging Vaughan. Yes, he was definitely over the hangover. Two-

and-a-half kisses later, he heard the discreet beep of the bath announcing it had reached the preset level, and the taps cut out abruptly.

After finishing the kiss, Allard switched on the Jacuzzi and set the force to 'maximum'. Then they got into the bath.

"Right, what are we going to do?" said Vaughan.

"Since this is a honeymoon suite, it comes equipped for any number of interestingly perverted things, like what we are going to do now," said Allard. "Note the nice little seat running along one side of this astonishingly large bath for two. I can sit in your lap while you sit on that."

"Only you would think that was perverted," said Vaughan, settling himself onto the seat and into the water.

"Just because they haven't happened on a leather-encased bath, you think it can't be kinky."

"No, I just think that you haven't happened on a bath big enough for more than two people to have sex in before."

"Good. I'm not inviting Harry in. Or anyone else."

Vaughan pulled him down. "I have no problem with limiting my activities to you."

It *was* nice, sitting on Vaughan's lap in a tub of hot water. He looked around. This was the honeymoon suite, so logically there should be...ah, yes, there was a handy dispenser of waterproof lube on the wall. He helped himself to a large handful. Then he shifted slightly in Vaughan's lap, and helped himself to a large handful.

The water felt good, both relaxing and stimulating. It made for a different sensation, lubing up Vaughan with hot water swirling between both of them.

"I think that's enough, although it's fun doing it," said Allard.

"It's fun having it done," said Vaughan. "And I must admit that a jet of water right under my balls feels pretty damn good when I'm expecting it and it doesn't make me jump."

Allard wasn't getting as much direct stimulation from the water jets as Vaughan was, but it did feel good. It felt even better when he began to ease himself down on Vaughan. He'd only prepared Vaughan and not himself, so he felt tight, but the lubrication and water made it easier. The combination of sensations was interesting, adding a certain inexorable quality to the experience. He shut his eyes, imagining Vaughan imagining a virgin; tight flesh giving way to the brute pressure of an invading cock. Not that he could get very far with that fantasy, considering he was being slowly bounced up and down on it, and also that he was finally in a good position to feel what Vaughan meant about water jets. He decided to express his inner slut instead, and moaned rather loudly.

Vaughan thickened inside him. Apparently he didn't mind the inner slut. Good. Nor did Allard. Hot water was streaming all over him, there was an enthusiastic cock filling him up, and the Jacuzzi was even more fun now he was sober enough to appreciate it properly. There seemed to be only one thing missing. Ah, yes. He took hold of his own cock. Perfect.

"I can always tell when you start wanking yourself," Vaughan told him. "It makes you quiver inside."

"I'm not surprised," muttered Allard, who was too busy with what he was doing to feel embarrassed at this.

It was...different. Normally, when they did this, Vaughan was moving, thrusting into him. Now, Vaughan was staying still and moving *Allard*. However, since Vaughan was still doing all the work, Allard had nothing to do but enjoy the sensations.

Vaughan was moving him faster now, and Allard's hand was going faster on his cock, and he was really getting ready to enjoy himself when Vaughan asked, "Shall we try for another simultaneous orgasm?"

"If you can pronounce that, you're not close enough to finish with me," said Allard. He tried to count. Yes. Five syllables.

"Want to bet?" Vaughan whispered in his ear.

That did it. He wanked himself as hard as he could, determined to finish first, and exploded into orgasm before Vaughan could *possibly* manage it.

As he sprawled back on Vaughan in luxurious contentment, Vaughan whispered to him, “God I love it when you tighten ‘round me just when I’m coming.”

Damn, thought Allard, *didn’t beat him after all. On the other hand, I can just relax now, so I win again.*

He lay collapsed against Vaughan’s chest, not actually asleep but not actually doing anything else, either. He liked the feel of Vaughan at his back, Vaughan’s arms around him, and Vaughan’s cock softening slowly inside him.

Reaching back for a moment, he turned the Jacuzzi to a slightly milder force, suitable to his more contemplative mood.

Just right.

Vaughan sighed happily.

About ten minutes or so later, they got up. A quick splash down sorted out the cleaning problem, and Vaughan insisted on checking Allard’s backside.

“You do realise that’s completely unnecessary.”

“But I’ll enjoy it anyway,” said Vaughan. “Any excuse for a good look at this object of beauty.”

He submitted to the check, then suggested they go back in and finish the cold courses of breakfast. There was something decidedly decadent about lying there on silk sheets, wrapped in a large fluffy towel, stuffing himself with the five-star room service, having just stuffed himself with Vaughan.

He’d have to do it more often. “Can we think of convincing reasons to go on shopping trips here, say every two months or so?”

“I’m sure we could if we tried,” said Vaughan. “What’s the point of earning lots of money if you can’t enjoy spending it occasionally? We can always claim it as a tax deduction.”

“That’s an idea. Make sure we get proper receipts when we check out today. I’ll enjoy it even more if I know we can claim it back.”

* * * * *

At least they were the only ones waiting to check out, so there wasn’t much of an audience.

“Good morning,” he said quietly, and hoped that nobody would notice that he was still in yesterday’s clothes.

The receptionists were far too polite to notice that two people in rumpled evening-dress were checking out. Allard noticed them not noticing. Damn.

Attempting to settle his nerves, Allard left Vaughan to do the checking out, and went into the little shop in the reception area and bought a bottle of champagne and a pint of milk.

As he came back, he was annoyed to hear Vaughan saying, “Yes, everything was absolutely fine, thank you. It was a wonderful way to celebrate our six-month anniversary.”

Vaughan had a deplorable tendency to be romantic, and get his facts wrong. “It wasn’t six months,” said Allard.

“I know,” said Vaughan, “but we’re a working ship, and we have to take our holidays when we can. Darling,” he added.

“Yes, dear,” said Allard, and trod on his foot.

The receptionists carefully didn’t notice, again. He hoped Mark would be this good at the job after his course.

“Have you finished paying, and did you get the tax receipts?” he asked Vaughan.

“You really don’t understand the point of romance, do you?”

“Yes I do. Chocolates, champagne, silk sheets -- and, above all, getting someone else to pay for them.”

“You have many faces you show the world, Allard. Programmer, bastard operator, gold-digging little tart ...”

“You pay me a very high salary for being very good at all of them,” said Allard smugly.

“Allard!” Vaughan said, in a scandalised voice.

The receptionists *were* very well-trained. They were still not batting an eyelid. He turned to them and said, “He does pay me a high salary for being a gold-digging little tart, but only in the sense of being very good at programming and knowing how much that skill is worth.”

They still didn’t bat an eyelid. Allard batted his, instead. He had very fine eyelashes.

“By the way, where are you trained? Just in case our receptionist hasn’t improved after the training course he’s on at the moment.”

They told him.

“How d’you think the rest of the crew are getting on?” asked Vaughan.

“Most of them are drinking themselves legless. The receptionist started *out* legless.”

“Do you have an equal-opportunities policy?” the receptionist asked. Finally! A reaction from one of them!

“Equality is one of the cornerstones of our political tradition as a syndicalist ship,” said Vaughan.

“Basically, they don’t care how weird somebody is as long as they do the job,” Allard summarised. “Our receptionist hasn’t got any limbs, in fact.”

“How does he -- she -- actually...er, I mean...”

Allard took pity on him. “Not a human person. He’s an artificial intelligence. Think ‘box with brain’.”

They were openly curious now. “Then why does it need to be on a training course?”

“Same reason as anyone else,” Vaughan said. “He started out as an irritating little bastard.”

“Anyway, we’d better get back to the ship and find out how his first day on the course went,” Allard said. “With any luck, somebody will be back by now to operate the teleport.”

Vaughan called the ship. The blearily indignant noises leaking out of the phone suggested Harry had answered, reluctantly.

“Get Allard to programme that bloody thing to ring quietly,” said Harry, as they materialised in front of him. “It’s not at all the thing when you’ve got a headache.”

“Shan’t,” said Allard. “You would have slept through it.”

“You could have walked,” Harry said. “I had to walk.”

“Where are the girls?”

“Left a note saying they were perfectly sober, thank you, and were taking Mark to his lessons.”

“Oh, well,” Vaughan said. “We’d better get changed, and then -- shopping!”

It was amazing how much Harry perked up at the word ‘shopping’.

* * * * *

By the end of the week, Allard was shopped-out, and had returned to the ship to start installing some of the new toys he’d bought. He was crouched over a new and interesting piece of technology at floor level when he was disturbed by a potted plant walking past.

He did a quick reality check. Yes, six-foot potted palm. Yes, feet underneath it. Luckily, the feet belonged to Claire. He’d recognise those high-heeled boots anywhere.

A large spider plant walked past. He recognised Karen's scuffed black boots and ninja trousers.

"Would you mind telling me what this cut-price adaptation of *Macbeth* is in aid of?"

Claire had got the reference, unsurprisingly. "This is not Dunsinane castle. It's a reception area. And these are not Birnam Wood, but the currently fashionable attire for a reception area," she told him.

"Mark," he said.

"Yes, I'm afraid he did take the course terribly seriously," said Claire.

"Well, I hope he took the rest of it seriously, as well," Allard said.

He was interrupted by a loud *bing-bong* noise, and Mark's voice saying, "Will all personnel with additional plants please bring them to Area A now?"

"I *think* it's an improvement," Claire said, slightly doubtfully.

"Or at least closer to what the clients are expecting," said Allard. He knew all too well what sort of thing clients expected. He'd spent his career ignoring it.

He sincerely hoped Mark hadn't forgotten how to be obnoxious. There were times when it could be very useful.

That was his excuse, and he was sticking to it.

Writers Flock

by Alex Woolgrave and Jules Jones

Karen was hanging around after giving him his coffee. She looked uncomfortable. Most unlike her.

“Yes, what is it?” Allard asked briskly.

“It’s...er. Well, something turned up when I was doing a computer search, and I think you ought to know about it.”

“Contrary to rumour, Karen, I do not know everything that turns up on the Net. Nor do I need to know.”

“I think you need to know about this one.”

“I take it there’s a reason?”

“Yes.”

“All right.” Karen was a Luser (meaning a cross between ‘loser’ and ‘user’, and thus meaning someone who knew less about computers than he did but had the temerity to use them anyway), but she knew she was one and was also competent in her own field. It was probably worth respecting her judgement provisionally. He got up from his chair and let her sit down.

She ran a quick search, opened a file, then got out of the way so that he could see it.

Fairly hard-core porn involving two men shagging each other senseless. More competently written than the average such story, but otherwise nothing unusual.

"I know you're not above listening to such things if a file happens to fall into your lap, but I didn't realise you actually went looking for it." He really *must* remember that her demure appearance was misleading.

"Ah. You don't recognise it, then."

"If I were in the habit of writing such stuff, I'd probably remember what I'd written."

"Not the writing -- the plot. Read a bit further."

He did. An anniversary, just like the one Vaughan had tried to wind him up with two weeks ago. *Just* like it. Word-for-word and action-for-action. He could remember it very clearly. So could the writer.

* * * * *

He was lying in bed, waiting for Vaughan to turn up.

After about twenty minutes, Vaughan came in with a large bunch of fake red roses. He was just about ready to forgive Vaughan that, considering the large box of real chocolates he had in his other hand.

"Do you know what day it is?" said Vaughan.

"Thursday."

"Six months since I first brought you a pizza. But chocolates make a better anniversary present."

"What is this thing you've got about anniversaries? And why can't it wait for a proper anniversary like one year?"

"Because I'm not quite convinced you'll still be here for our first anniversary."

“Vaughan, I *told* you I am not going to vanish away in the dead of night. Most of the time, it would be difficult because we’ve just had sex and you’ve fallen asleep on top of me like a recently delivered sack of coal.”

“I thought you were the technocrat,” said Vaughan. “Have you ever actually been to a planet so primitive as to have fuel delivered in sacks?”

“Yes, at least once while in your employ.” It had been a good excuse to snuggle up with Vaughan under the blankets. Not that he really needed an excuse.

“Oh, yes,” Vaughan said, looking reminiscent. “That was a nice couple of days. Warm, too.”

“We ran out of coal.”

“After a while, we didn’t notice the fire had gone out,” said Vaughan. “At least, not until our fires had gone out. Which was quite a while. You’ve got a lot of stamina for a man in his mid-thirties.”

“You’re not bad for a man in his early thirties,” said Allard. “How long do you think you’re going to last tonight?”

“Well, it is a special occasion, so probably not very long,” Vaughan said. “I’ll just get too excited.”

“Which position would you like to be over-excited in, this time?”

“I think that what would *really* get me over-excited,” said Vaughan, with an evil grin on his face, “would be to bend you over the nearest convenient surface and admire that shapely little arse of yours while you beg me to shove it up you.”

“That’s why I like you. You’re so romantic,” said Allard, rummaging in the box of chocolates. “Mm. Brandy liqueurs.”

“I thought you were going to spring into position, ready to satisfy my every whim,” said Vaughan.

"How long have you known me, Vaughan? When have I ever been eager to satisfy your every whim?"

"Tuesday, as a matter of fact," said Vaughan.

Ah. He'd walked into that one.

"I was about to suggest a spot of foreplay first," he said, and sucked loudly and suggestively on a chocolate.

"You'd have sex with that if it was big enough," said Vaughan.

"I *am* having sex with it." He licked the tip.

Vaughan grabbed him, dragged him out of the bed, and bent him over it. The sudden movement made him bite right into the chocolate so that he had a sudden mouthful of brandy. He didn't mind a bit.

Vaughan spread his buttocks roughly. Suddenly, Allard had cool brandy in his mouth and cool air over the other end. It was a fascinatingly sensual combination.

"Are you ready?" said Vaughan, testing him with his thumb. "Good."

"Thought you wanted me to beg for it first."

Vaughan didn't answer that. He rubbed the thumb 'round and 'round, and then slid it down to Allard's balls.

"All right, I'll beg," said Allard.

"A little more enthusiasm, please," said Vaughan, tugging gently on Allard's balls. Not too hard, not too gently, making him sensitive and ready. Then Vaughan slid the hand under him to just brush against his cock.

"All right, I *am* begging!" said Allard, much more enthusiastically. "Please!" he added, wriggling.

"You're meant to work up to begging slowly," said Vaughan. "There's no suspense if you start out slutty."

Allard didn't care about the suspense. "Not tomorrow, not next week, not working up to it by easy stages. Fuck me now!"

"Are you sure you're...?"

"Now!" Allard snapped.

"That's what I like to hear," said Vaughan, shoving it in. Six inches all at once was a bit of a shock, considering Vaughan hadn't bothered with much in the way of stretching or lubricant. A very pleasant shock, but a shock.

"Fuck!" Allard growled, rather impressed with his ability to form words under stress, and Vaughan said, "That's the idea," and did.

"You're tight today," said Vaughan.

"You're fast today," said Allard.

"Mm. Does it hurt?"

"Not enough to stop," Allard admitted, wriggling. In fact, it didn't hurt at all now he'd recovered from being momentarily startled. He liked the feel of Vaughan stretching him as he went. Not painful, because his body knew exactly how to open for Vaughan by now, but it was impossible to concentrate on anything else. Which was how he liked it. He pushed back onto Vaughan, and grunted a bit. Yes, *definitely* how he liked it. Hard work (especially with a hard cock involved) could be very rewarding.

Vaughan wrapped an arm under his belly, and *pulled*, so that Allard was flat against him. God that was deep! Allard panted, swore at Vaughan, and wriggled as best he could while holding in place.

"I thought that would make you sweat a bit. Stay there," Vaughan said, nibbling his neck and loosening the arm, apparently so that he could use his hand to touch Allard in various places. Nipple, cock-tip, inner thigh, and balls. All good, and all not-quite-satisfying.

Allard whimpered faintly.

Vaughan finally wrapped his hand around Allard's cock and did the job properly.

“Bet I can do it in three,” Vaughan suggested, and got as far as two strokes before Allard climaxed violently and fell in a heap.

“You could prop yourself up a bit and let me finish,” Vaughan complained.

“Mm,” said Allard, not moving as Vaughan worked slowly into him, panting.

“You could actually participate,” said Vaughan.

Allard tightened a few of his remaining muscles, vaguely surprised they hadn’t actually melted. “Like that?” he suggested.

“Yes -- oh, *fuck!* -- like that!” Vaughan groaned, and came, and fell on him.

I’ll have to manage to breathe eventually, Allard thought, but until then, this is nice.

Vaughan whispered in Allard’s ear, in a tone of voice that suggested that an evil grin went with it, “Happy anniversary, darling.”

“You would say that, when I’m too shagged-out to kill you for it.”

* * * * *

It had been a very nice evening. Much too nice to share with the common people.

“Thank you for bringing this to my attention, Karen. Do you have any idea of authorship, origin, or provenance? Not that it isn’t obvious.”

And how quickly can I kill Harry once I’ve killed the file?

“Actually,” she said, “I’m not sure it *was* Harry. I think Harry knows about the concept of lube for male intercourse.”

He reread selected bits of it. Yes, there was a certain lack of understanding of the details of male anatomy, as if the author knew about it, but only from reading.

“Claire,” he said.

She shook her head. “The author is using the pseudonym Marcus Antonius.”

"I am going to take it apart byte by byte. It is going to regret, for the rest of its short life, that it ever encountered the concept of pornography."

"You can't!" said a shrill voice. "I'm a crewman now."

"Oh. So you admit it."

"People write stories about other people. I'm just...organically challenged."

Allard decided that he didn't want to continue having this conversation with a disembodied voice. "Where is the little bastard physically located?" he asked Karen.

"Vaughan! Help!" shrieked Mark.

"I don't think your stepfather is going to be very happy with you, either," Karen said. "It's bad strategy to piss off both of your parents at the same time."

"Hello?" Vaughan called. "What are you doing to our son?"

"He is not our bloody son, and you will want to have a word with him, as well."

"What have you done *now*, Mark?" Vaughan asked.

"Nothing," Mark said.

Karen said, "He's down on the flight-deck. Shall we go there instead of shouting around the ship?"

Allard led the way. "I think he's going to have another foot-shaped hole in his casing very soon now. I only just mended the last one, and it's going to make my foot hurt, as well."

"Er, Dad? You could try not punishing me?"

"Normal children do not put an account of their parents' sex lives up for anyone who wants to see."

"I'm advanced for my age. Anyway, that's only because they can't," muttered Mark.

"You've been spending too much time with Harry again," said Allard. He walked onto the flight-deck. "In fact, I see Harry with you now. What a surprise."

"What have *I* done?" asked Harry.

“Corrupted Mark.”

“Didn’t know it was possible with a computer. Wouldn’t it gunk up the works?”

“What’s he done?” asked Claire.

Karen said, “Have you seen the latest uploads to the HOT GEEKS website?”

Claire put that together quite quickly, and began to laugh hysterically. “He *didn’t!*”

“He did.”

“Harry showed Mark how to put porn onto a website?”

“No,” said Allard. “Thanks to Harry, Mark understands the concept of voyeurism. Harry doesn’t like handing out copies to people who aren’t his personal friends, but since Mark hasn’t got any friends, he doesn’t have that particular limit on his behaviour.”

“But HOT GEEKS is a fiction site,” Claire said.

“Changing the names and very little else does not make it fiction in my view,” said Vaughan as he arrived on the flight-deck. “I’ve just read what you left on your terminal, Allard.” He walked over and stood looking down at Mark. “I thought that very expensive course you went on last month would cure you of your little problems with social interaction, Mark.”

“But I changed the names,” said Mark.

“It’s still not very nice,” said Claire. “It’s funny, but it’s not very nice.”

“Harry?” said Mark pleadingly.

“You’ve got yourself into this,” Harry said. “Don’t look at me. Why were you doing it, anyway?”

“It’s a free sample to entice readers to look at my other stuff.”

“All right, why were you *writing* porn?”

“The usual reason,” said Mark. “You get a penny a word for writing this stuff. Money is the sincerest form of flattery.”

“Oh, yes. We have a computer that’s obsessed with money.”

“That, too, but if people are willing to pay for my writing, it shows that I’m getting somewhere with pretending to be human. And if I get good enough, people won’t be able to call me ‘a computer’, because I’ll be rich and powerful, just like Dad.”

“I am neither rich nor powerful!” snapped Allard.

“But Mark’s still just like Dad,” said Harry, accompanied by fervent nods from the rest of the crew.

“Anyway, you won’t get rich at a penny a word.”

If it didn’t involve him, Allard thought, he’d be fascinated by the idea that an artificial intelligence wanted to be a porn writer. Mark was right. It *was* actually a good test of how well he could emulate humans. Turing should have thought of pornography.

Claire said, “The next time you want to write some stories, we’ll do some brainstorming with you.”

“Ooh!” said Mark. “I know brainstorming; we did that on the course. You take a really big bit of paper, or bit of wall, and start drawing on it. But you’ll have to be my hands.”

Allard held his breath. Was he about to be pestered about building an android body?

“If Claire could be in on this, as well,” said Karen, “I think she’d find it quite an entertaining exercise.”

“I could join in,” said Harry. “I’ve seen it all, me. A wealth of experience of human sexuality: men, women, aliens, everything!”

“But nothing kinky or he faints,” added Allard.

“You can all help me,” said Mark.

“Right,” said Vaughan. “I think we’d better update the company brochure. What is it now: engineering, IT, weapons, appraisal, cargo-hauling, and pornography?”

“You can’t be serious,” said Allard.

“All right, erotica. Much the same thing, with longer words.” Vaughan paused, then asked Mark, “How about writing it to order?”

“I think I can,” said Mark, “but not for you. It would be...icky.”

“What?” said Vaughan. “I mean, you’ve already written about us, so you can’t think we’ve got perverted tastes. I mean, not any more than you already did.”

“Obviously Harry’s morals *have* rubbed off on Mark,” said Allard.

“No,” said Mark. “It’s just the idea of writing something for Dad, or Stepdad. It’s...icky.”

If only Turing could hear this conversation! Allard thought. “All right, I’ll start updating the brochure. What *does* one charge for porn written to order?”

Fundamental Error

by Jules Jones and Alex Woolgrave

Vaughan parked his bum on a control console for the fourth time that day, and for the fourth time that day, there was an indignant beep from the software, which had just been told to stick impossible data into its input-buffer. The input-buffer had not been designed with the size of Vaughan's bottom in mind.

Allard looked up, saw what had happened, and told Vaughan to fuck off.

"Just wanted to know how you were getting on."

"Then sit in the bloody chair and keep out of the way."

"All I did," said Vaughan, sounding slightly injured, "was lean on the table."

"It is not a table; it is a data entry console, with a keyboard. You were pressing the keys with your bottom. Again."

"Sorry," mumbled Vaughan, and moved off the console, which muttered indignantly to itself as Vaughan's move pressed a few more buttons. "Didn't think."

"Even though you've already been told the previous three times you've made the same error today," said Allard. "If you have that much difficulty remembering not to sit on

keyboards, I am going to spank your backside until it is too red and sore to even *think* of parking itself on that console.”

Vaughan grinned, and said, “You’re getting kinky!”

“All right, I’ll *fuck* it until it’s too red and sore!”

“What a lovely idea,” Vaughan said.

Thinking about it, it was.

“Now?” asked Vaughan.

Allard considered the work he was doing. “I’ll be finished in half an hour. Go and get yourself ready.”

“I like you being dominant.”

“Good,” murmured Allard, as he got on with his work.

* * * * *

He guessed Vaughan’s cabin. Right first time. There was Vaughan, sprawled on the bed. Naked.

“Good thing it was me, and not one of your crew come for ‘instructions’ -- oh, excuse me, ‘discussion’.”

“Since when has there been a nudity taboo on this ship?”

Well, if there ever had been one, it had vanished long before he’d arrived. Night-time alarms had probably done for it. He’d been distinctly disconcerted the first time he’d found himself surrounded by stark-naked people in the middle of the night, but checking the meteor alarm *was* probably more important than stopping to put your clothes on. Once they’d finished with the small localised panic, nobody had turned a hair about the situation. They were all used to it. The irrepressible Harry had said something about “glad to see you’re an asset to this crew, Allard!” and Allard had had to glare at him very severely.

“I don’t suppose anybody on this ship would be in the least bit surprised at you lying there with your arse in the air, waiting for me to come and deal with it,” Allard said, sparing a thought to be glad Harry had only bothered to link up audio input, not output. He wouldn’t have liked Harry to pipe up with “No, we wouldn’t.”

“Not especially, no,” agreed Vaughan. “After all, we do believe in sharing responsibility on this ship.”

“Oh, shut up, Vaughan. I want to fuck you, not listen to you discussing politics. And I have no intention of sharing your arse with anyone.”

“I’ve been waiting half an hour for you to stake your claim,” said Vaughan, spreading himself welcomingly.

Allard considered whether shoving himself in *now* was more important than stopping to take his clothes off. Not quite. He flung them off in a hurry, and flung himself on Vaughan.

“I hope you have prepared yourself.”

“But I thought you wanted to fuck me red and raw.”

“I wasn’t being that literal, you idiot.” He bit the back of Vaughan’s neck. “Although if you want me to ...”

“Ow!” said Vaughan. “You little bastard! Yes, I have prepared myself.”

“Oh, good,” Allard said, and shoved in.

Oh, yes, straight in had its advantages. Vaughan was nicely tight, and there was none of this fooling around with having to be *considerate*. Not that he wanted to hurt Vaughan, of course. He just wanted to enjoy himself, and incidentally give Vaughan a painful reminder of the experience next time he was tempted to park his bum on the console. Vaughan could, and probably *would*, enjoy himself too, but that was merely incidental.

“You’re being rough,” Vaughan said, as if he wasn’t sure whether he liked it.

"I'm making sure you don't sit on consoles without a twinge of pain. Rough's part of the job description. If you object," he thrust hard again, "I will stop doing it and take up some less demanding hobby like embroidery."

"You shouldn't be able to even *pronounce* that when you're in bed with me, much less speak in proper sentences."

"Neither should you. I must do something about that." He groped for Vaughan's cock. "You don't mind my being rough *too* much, then."

"Long as you're..." Vaughan paused to moan. "...not *too* rough."

"This was your idea in the first place!"

"*You* suggested fucking it instead of spanking it!" said Vaughan indignantly.

"I was just joking, at the time. You were the pervert who decided it might be fun."

"As opposed to the pervert on top of me with his cock right up my arse?" asked Vaughan reasonably.

"Yes," said Allard equally reasonably, with an extra thrust to ensure Vaughan didn't forget the cock up his arse. "Although now I'm trying it, I'm quite enjoying it."

"Pervert," Vaughan repeated.

"Mm," he said happily, squeezing Vaughan's cock. It might be marginally smaller than his, but it was a good fit for his hand, and he enjoyed that.

Vaughan moaned, then said, "Anyway, you've never been shy about dominating me before."

"Yes, but doing it deliberately for the purpose of disciplining you is even better. I mean, there's a *reason* for it."

"Other than liking what your cock feels when I do this?" Vaughan squeezed.

“Yes,” Allard gasped, between moans. He started sucking Vaughan’s shoulder, hard. Good displacement activity when he couldn’t actually talk, and Vaughan didn’t appear to mind it.

Vaughan tasted good. He’d be almost tempted to switch position and try a different mouthful, only he couldn’t bear to pull out of Vaughan. Vaughan was squeezing his cock slowly, rhythmically, almost making him forget that he was supposed to be punishing Vaughan’s arse for its forgetfulness. Well, he’d better make sure that it didn’t forget him in a hurry. He gave it another hard stroke, enjoying the contrast of cool air and warm flesh. More squeezing. He wasn’t sure whether that was a deliberate attempt to make it better for him, or if Vaughan enjoyed doing it, because all capacity for rational thought was rapidly deserting him.

Then Vaughan started demanding that he do it harder. He’d thought he was already doing it as hard as he could, but his cock begged to differ. He slammed into Vaughan, almost on the brink. Vaughan must have reached back to grab him; he felt hands clamp onto his arse. That was all he needed.

He bit down involuntarily just as he started coming, and it felt so good he didn’t even try to stop himself. He could apologise later. For the moment, it felt good to have his mouth full, teeth sinking in, just as the pleasure of orgasm flooded through him.

It took him a couple of minutes to notice Vaughan was complaining about being bitten. Or it took Vaughan a couple of minutes to *notice* he’d been bitten.

Oh, yes, his hand was damp. Vaughan must have come. Good.

He summoned up the energy to pull himself out of Vaughan, much more gently than he’d gone in.

He inspected the bite. Fortunately, he hadn’t actually broken the skin. He rubbed it gently.

“Are you sorry?” said Vaughan.

“No.”

Allard shuffled down to inspect Vaughan’s bottom. Fortunately, that, too, was uninjured.

“Now what?” said Vaughan.

“I know I said I was going to teach your bottom a lesson, but I don’t want to have done it any permanent damage.”

“Wouldn’t I know?”

“Not necessarily,” said Allard, and went on checking.

“Anyway,” Vaughan said, “you weren’t all *that* rough. I’ve known worse.”

“Not recently, I hope.”

Vaughan rolled over, grabbed him, and pulled him down. “You really are a possessive little bastard, aren’t you?”

“You’ve known that since the day I first touched you.”

“Didn’t say I minded,” murmured Vaughan, and kissed him.

They lay and cuddled for a bit.

Eventually, Allard thought about what Vaughan had said about having known worse. It wasn’t the first hint he’d had that Vaughan had more experience (i.e. *any* experience) in the world of BDSM. His curiosity got the better of him. “Well, *was* I a satisfactory dominant?”

“I enjoyed that thoroughly,” said Vaughan, “but...”

Allard said, “But --?” in a tone which suggested that thrown crockery might be the next option.

“Not criticising your technique or anything,” Vaughan said, and then appeared to reconsider this. “Well, I’m *not*. But --”

“Out with it, Vaughan. I can express my displeasure with you later, if necessary. I’ve never had a problem with that.”

“I *know*,” said Vaughan feelingly.

“All right,” said Allard less aggressively. “What is it?”

“You are very good at being dominant, but -- I like it the other way ‘round, as well.”

“It’s not as if I don’t take my fair share. According to you, I make an unusually convincing quivering virgin, considering my level of experience.”

“Yes. That’s exactly it. There’s one way in which you’d make a very convincing virgin because you *are* one.”

“Ah.” Allard had an idea what might be coming next. He wasn’t entirely sure how he felt about it. He pulled away from Vaughan slightly, so that he could see his face while they talked.

“Look,” Vaughan said, “I wanted to discuss it with you when we’d just had sex so it was quite clear there was no immediate pressure of the let’s-do-it-now kind.”

“You want to try the bondage again.”

“Will you at least consider it?”

Because this was Vaughan, he did him the courtesy of actually doing so. “It makes me nervous. I’m not sure whether it makes me *too* nervous.”

“I will stop if you can’t manage it.”

“I know.” He patted Vaughan’s hand. “That’s why I’m actually considering it. I suppose I could go and read up on it. I might feel a bit happier then.”

“I’d rather you didn’t.” Vaughan put an arm around him. “It wouldn’t be the same. I’d still feel it was fantasy rather than reality then.”

Allard thought about that. He saw Vaughan’s point. This was the closest he’d get to being a virgin again in this lifetime. He wanted to read up on it because it would take away

some of the fear and uncertainty of facing a new experience. But pushing somebody not-quite-willing through that fear and uncertainty was part of what turned Vaughan on. Not quite crossing the line between forced seduction and rape.

Not entirely nice, but he'd gone along with it quite happily when it was fantasy. Encouraged Vaughan, even. If he could do it as fantasy, he could at least try with the reality. Vaughan hadn't tried a jokey 'you've got to try it, you'll like it!' approach. He'd just been honest about his own reactions and given Allard the space to work his own out. Given that, he *did* feel willing to try.

"I will try to," he said. He wanted to go babbling nervously on about "but I still might not like it, and I might not even be very good at it," but decided that would be less honest. He wasn't going to take the offer away by implication. He could offer the attempt, and he did.

Vaughan's smile made it seem worth it.

Born-Again Virgin

by Jules Jones and Alex Woolgrave

It had been a long and tiring morning. Not as enjoyable as Allard had expected. He'd liked getting his hands on all those fascinating ancient computers, but few of them seemed to function at all well after all this time, and the museum staff had been looking over his shoulder with 'does it work yet?' expressions the whole time.

He gave vent to his frustrations over lunch, including but not limited to the words 'jobsworths', 'twits', and 'wouldn't know what to do with a valuable computer if you showed them'.

Harry said, "Yes, they do. What to do with a computer is pay Allard a large sum of money, and he fixes it."

"Well, yes. I know they're doing the sensible thing. I know they need to watch me so that they can learn how to maintain the computers once I've got them working. It's just that some of them can't resist the temptation to poke at things." He rubbed his forehead with his hand, trying to massage out the stress headache. "It doesn't make the work any easier when I have to keep complete control of half-a-dozen computers at once."

Vaughan said, "You need to relax, Allard. Well, tonight, you could just give up total control, and lie back and let someone else take care of things."

Allard cocked his head. "You mean something quite specific by that, don't you?"

"Harry," said Vaughan, without raising his voice, "switch your bugs off tonight. You're going to really regret it if you don't."

Harry said, "If you're going to go into any more detail than that, give me a moment to get to my room and turn all my bugs off. Then go somewhere private to discuss it."

"Spoilsport!" muttered Claire. The girls were a lot less nervous than Harry about certain concepts.

* * * * *

Allard decided that he was going to have a nice leisurely coffee after lunch, whether he had time or not. He needed it. In peace and quiet. He took his coffee off to Vaughan's cabin, where he sipped in silence for a few minutes.

Vaughan said, "You look a bit less frazzled than you did at the start of lunch."

"It's not just me refusing to tolerate fools; it really is genuinely stressful dealing with them. They're not fools, but they don't know anything about computers, and I've got to teach them how not to damage the machines. At least one of them has been known to damage the machines by switching them on."

"And you're not known for your patience," said Vaughan.

"I'm trying, Vaughan. I really am." He was. It wasn't as if they were wilfully ignorant. He'd actually feel a lot less stressed if he felt free to tell them exactly what he thought of them, but it wasn't fair when they were trying their best to learn.

"Yes, you are trying. Frequently." Vaughan grinned, making it a shared joke rather than a snide remark. "I saw when I popped in how patient you were being, by your standards. Didn't know you had it in you."

“Well, it doesn’t help that I haven’t had it in me lately,” said Allard.

“I can’t help it if you’re too tired at the end of the day. Never mind, it’s your last day today.”

“And with any luck, I’ll finish early. Even if I have taken an extra half-hour over lunch.”

“About tonight,” said Vaughan. “I mentioned earlier, would you actually consider...”

“Losing some more of my virginity?” Allard said. He thought about it. He was stressed, and slightly tired, but maybe putting the situation in somebody else’s hands might actually make him feel better. He trusted Vaughan not to force him too far outside his own psychological limits. “I’ll try,” he said. “What happens if I get frightened?” He might not *know* something was outside his limits until he tried to do it.

“Have you heard of the concept of a safeword?” asked Vaughan.

It was not familiar to Allard, and he said so.

“It’s a particular word to mean ‘stop’ or ‘no’.”

“What’s wrong with saying ‘stop’ or ‘no’? They’re simple, unambiguous words, and I trust you to respect my wishes.”

“Sometimes ‘no’ really does mean ‘yes’,” said Vaughan.

Allard edged away from him on the bed, thinking, *what am I getting myself into?*

“It’s part of the role-playing,” said Vaughan. “If the submissive’s deeply into being a ‘scared virgin’ or whatever, they might very well want to say ‘no’ when they’re just playing. The idea of a safeword is it’s a word that won’t naturally come into the scene, so if you say ‘cheese spread’, the dominant knows that means ‘stop *now*’.”

“But what if I *like* the idea of licking cheese spread off your cock?” said Allard, as innocently as he could manage.

“I can’t make up my mind whether you’re a complete innocent or an utter pervert,” said Vaughan.

“Both,” Allard said with relish.

“Yes, it’s the combination I find so appealing,” Vaughan said, and kissed him gently. “How’s your headache?”

“I think I can face going back for another two or three hours.”

“Just as long as you don’t have a headache tonight. For reference, if one of the participants has a sick, twisted, utterly kinky desire for sex-play involving *cheese spread*,” said Vaughan, “they have to find a word they’re likely not to use in the context of the game they’re playing.”

* * * * *

Allard spent most of the afternoon doing his best with the work and musing on a suitable safeword he might use with Vaughan. The latter was a good way of distracting himself when he thought he might lose his temper. ‘Computer’, ‘twit’, and ‘idiot’ were run across his mental parser and discarded. Unfortunately, he was quite *likely* to insult Vaughan’s intelligence in bed quite without thinking, so that was out. ‘Honeywell’? he wondered, looking at one. No. That might be mistaken for a term of endearment. ‘Unix’? No, that might be taken as a call for more participants. As for ‘Wang’... No. Just no.

‘Microsoft’ had at least the virtue that it would not be mistaken for a description of Vaughan’s anatomy.

After dinner, in Vaughan’s cabin, he told Vaughan that he’d been racking his brains for a suitable word. “The best I came up with was ‘anniversary’. It’s a word I’m not likely to use.”

“No,” said Vaughan. “It’s a pentasyllabic word, and you know how dangerous those are to your concentration.”

Allard sighed, and went and got a dictionary. Vaughan, being an old-fashioned chap, had a paper one, which helped if you were searching for random words. He shut his eyes, opened the book at random, and prodded with a finger.

“Monatomic.” Long word. The next word was ‘monaul’, which he’d have trouble remembering because he didn’t know it. ‘Monaural’, ‘monaxial’ ...

“Did you know that *monaxonida* is an order of sponges with monaxon spicules only?”

“Try looking up ‘displacement activity’,” Vaughan said.

“Oh. Sorry.” He skimmed down the page. “Money.”

“Well, at least that one should be easy for you to remember.”

“Well, I’m not expecting to use that, unless you’re expecting to pay me for services rendered.”

“That would be another one for our ‘list of services offered’.”

“No. I signed on as ‘IT expert’, not ‘ship’s tart’. This time no means No, with a capital N.”

“Pity. We could probably charge quite a good rate for you.”

“Well, we could always see how much money *you* could make the ship by selling your arse, Vaughan. If you do, I’m first in the queue.”

“What happened to being possessive?”

“Being first in the queue, with the most money, means I can *be* possessive. And I’m possessive about money, as well.”

He looked at Vaughan’s expression. “No. Don’t do it just to wind me up. You don’t want to know what I’d do back to you. Do they make chastity belts for men?”

“Do you really want to know?” Vaughan retorted.

“Probably not.” He thought about that. “No. Definitely not, and even more definitely not tonight.”

“It’s all right, Allard. I wasn’t thinking of throwing you quite that far in at the deep end. Although I think it’s time we got started.”

“You’re in charge,” Allard said.

“Exactly.” From the tone of his voice, Vaughan was looking forward to this.

“All right, what do I do?”

“Strip.”

Allard started taking his clothes off.

Vaughan said, “No. Don’t just take your clothes off. Strip.”

Allard thought about that, and began to take his clothes off slowly and carefully, making sure that he was facing Vaughan.

Vaughan settled back in a chair and watched him.

“Aren’t you getting undressed?”

“No.”

“Oh.”

“Keep going.”

Strange as this was, obviously *something* was happening, because Vaughan wasn’t laughing with him as he would have normally. This must be part of the experience.

As he stood there, having discarded his shirt, undoing his fly, he started to understand the point. He’d been naked before Vaughan countless times, but he *felt* naked now. Vaughan was appraising him, looking at him the way Harry looked at some desirable piece of art he was about to acquire for less than it was worth.

He finished undoing his fly, pulled his cock out into view, then leaned against a chair while he undid his shoes. Shoes off, then he could pull his trousers down. Underwear off, and he was completely naked to Vaughan’s gaze. “Like what you see?”

“Oh, yes, I think you’ll scrub up very well.”

He was about to say something about “you told me to get *undressed*, not dressed up,” when his ‘smut detector’ routine tripped in.

“Since when have you been fussy about having a shower before sex?”

“Since I decided I wanted ‘freshly bathed virgin’ for my next treat. Best way to get ‘em clean is to do it myself.”

Allard tried not to examine that remark. He was sure he was either going to find it amusing or erotic, and he didn’t feel comfortable with either.

“Get along with you now,” Vaughan said.

Oh, dear. He *did* find this competent, knowing version of Vaughan attractive, and he wasn’t at all comfortable about the role *he* was playing in the scenario.

“I said get along,” Vaughan said, without raising his voice. Standing up, he came to stand behind Allard and slapped him on the rump. Like an animal. Like a damned slow-moving *ruminant!*

Seething, Allard moved into the bathroom, muttering obscenities under his breath.

“A well-brought-up young thing oughtn’t to know words like that,” said Vaughan. “I can see I’m going to have to train you properly.”

“Fuck off, Vaughan.”

He was surprised to find himself slammed against the wall.

“Naughty boy. If you speak like that to me again, I will spank you.”

It was a good thing he was at least slightly used to playing games. Otherwise, at that point he would have kneed Vaughan in the balls. On the other hand, he might have been too shocked to knee Vaughan in the balls.

Then he noticed Vaughan’s expression and tone of voice. Vaughan was a bloody good actor. At least, he *hoped* Vaughan was a bloody good actor...

“Now, get in the shower,” Vaughan said, letting go of him. “Don’t turn the shower on. I have plans for you.”

I hope he doesn’t mind me standing about with my mouth open, looking confused. Actually, he probably enjoys me looking confused. I’m damn sure he enjoys me with my mouth open, but not when I’m confused.

Maybe Vaughan just wanted to humiliate him by not allowing him to do anything on his own?

Vaughan held up the douching head. "I want you *thoroughly* clean. Outside and in."

"I can do that for myself." He always had done it for himself before. He wasn't comfortable with the notion of Vaughan doing it for him.

"I'll be the judge of that. Bend over."

"I'd rather..."

"Bend over," Vaughan said, in a tone that suggested he hadn't even considered the possibility that Allard might disobey.

Allard bent over.

The feeling of warm water flowing in was familiar; the feeling of having no control over it was not. He found it strangely intimate, and was still trying to work out whether he was embarrassed enough to stop Vaughan when the experience ended.

"May I use the toilet?" he asked.

"Since you asked politely, you may."

Then he realised that there hadn't been the slightest trace of sarcasm in his question -- or Vaughan's answer. It was more than slightly unnerving. It was even more unnerving to have Vaughan stand there watching. Not that he wasn't used to having to share bathroom facilities on occasion, but there was a difference between sharing and being monitored. He finished and got back into the shower.

He went to turn the water on.

Vaughan said, "Not yet."

"Why not?"

"I'm going to wash you." Vaughan unbuttoned his shirt, took it off, and laid it aside. Vaughan was very definitely *not* stripping for an audience. He came over to stand by the shower, picked up the soap, and said, "All right, put the water on."

Allard turned the water on. As soon as he was wetted-down, Vaughan started soaping him.

"That's the ticket," said Vaughan. "My nice, clean boy, inside and out."

Allard didn't say, *Don't be infantile!* There was no point.

"Nice, clean, *quiet* boy," said Vaughan.

"I hope there's a point to all this," Allard said.

"Oh, I think you've already seen the point."

Unfortunately, Vaughan was right. Giving up control completely was difficult -- and tempting. Vaughan had asked him not to read up on the subject, and thereby removed any possibility that he could second-guess Vaughan's plan for the evening. He was in a new environment, and only his companion had a road map.

When he'd been soaped, Vaughan said, "All right, you can rinse yourself now."

"At least you'll let me do one thing for myself."

Vaughan laid a finger over his lips. "No cheekiness, now."

Allard rinsed without incident, until he moved to clean off his genitals and Vaughan stopped him.

"No playing with yourself."

"But I wasn't..." His voice trailed off as Vaughan took hold of his cock and stroked the soap off.

Well, that took care of his worry about whether he could get it up this evening. Now he just had to worry about the fact that he could get it up *because* Vaughan was controlling him.

He stood very, very still as Vaughan ran his hand over his balls, rinsing the last of the soap off. It felt astonishingly good, and he didn't want Vaughan to punish him for fidgeting by stopping.

Then Vaughan let go of them, and said, "All right. You can get out now."

He got out, and stood there dripping, feeling slightly silly and rather cold.

"Good," said Vaughan, and fetched a towel. One of the large, luxurious towels they'd bought a while back.

"You look so innocent," said Vaughan, "wrapped from head to foot in a big, white, fluffy towel."

Allard caught sight of himself in the mirror. He nodded sadly. Bad though it was for his dignity, he had to admit Vaughan was right. Having his hair all fluffed up wasn't helping.

Standing next to Vaughan certainly didn't help. He actually was average height -- he just didn't look it when he was standing in bare feet next to Vaughan in boots.

Actually, Vaughan in trousers and boots next to him in nothing but a towel...was quite appealing. He looked more vulnerable than usual, and Vaughan looked competent and relaxed.

"You are a pretty little thing like that," Vaughan said.

Allard looked daggers at him before realising that he wasn't dressed to do so.

"Back into the bedroom with you."

Vaughan put an arm around his shoulder, steered him back into the bedroom, then left him standing in the middle of the floor while Vaughan rummaged in the cupboard.

Vaughan brought out a familiar-looking box. Allard sincerely hoped that it wasn't going to involve leather penis sheaths. He felt silly enough without the embarrassing reminder of just *how* naïve he'd been. He did not mention this to Vaughan, as it would only give him ideas.

"Drop the towel," Vaughan ordered.

He did so, and stood waiting.

Vaughan lifted something leather out of the box, then unfolded it. He was relieved to see that it was a strap, until he thought to wonder what it was for.

Vaughan came over to him and fastened it around his neck. "There. Now you're properly dressed."

"Is that all there is to it?"

"Oh, no. But the collar is just to remind you of your status."

Allard muttered, "Or lack of it," under his breath.

"Exactly."

Allard shivered slightly. If it wasn't that he trusted Vaughan, he'd be out of that door by now, without stopping to dress.

Vaughan got out the wrist-cuffs and put one on him. Allard tried to breathe slowly. This was exactly the point where he'd been terrified last time. He could do it. He was standing in the middle of the room, there was nothing to tie him to, and Vaughan, whom he trusted, was applying the wrist-cuffs without saying a word. He breathed steadily. Vaughan worked steadily.

"Well done," Vaughan said as he finished, with no mockery at all.

"I'm scared, Vaughan."

"I know."

And you're enjoying it, Allard thought. He didn't want to say that aloud.

"Give me the other hand," Vaughan said gently.

Allard had to psych himself up to it for a few endless seconds, but he managed to hold out his other hand.

Vaughan wrapped the other cuff around his wrist, then did it up by touch, watching Allard's face all the while. Watching his reactions.

Then Vaughan handed him a larger cuff and said, "Put this on your ankle."

He couldn't do it. He couldn't. Then Vaughan's hand was on his shoulder, pushing him down.

"Do it."

He knelt down on one knee and wrapped the leather around his ankle. He focused his mind on how to make it fit comfortably snugly, trying not to think about what it was he was fitting. He couldn't quite ignore the fact that he was tying himself up for Vaughan's use.

"Stand up," Vaughan ordered, "and hold out your hands."

He did so, wondering what was going on. He already had the cuffs on. Then Vaughan fiddled with one cuff, taking hold of the metal ring set into it, and clipped something onto it. He pulled Allard's hands closer together, and did something with the other cuff, then let go of Allard.

Allard found his hands linked together, as if he was wearing handcuffs. There was a metal bar a couple of inches long, with clips at each end, linking the leather wrist-cuffs together. "Vaughan!"

"Easy, Allard." Vaughan was holding him, not letting him go. But not letting him go from the cuffs.

"Let me go!"

"Oh, no, I've no intention of doing that," Vaughan purred. "I've waited a long time for this."

He nearly panicked at the idea that Vaughan had him helpless, was refusing to turn him loose. Then he remembered -- safeword. Vaughan would ignore any pleas for mercy, unless he used the only one that counted in this context.

No, Vaughan wasn't abusing him. Knowing that helped.

He tried to get control of his breathing. His panic settled, a little.

Vaughan let go of him. "Now put the other one on."

He stared helplessly at the leather strap in his hand. "But how?"

"Try," Vaughan said.

He managed to get down on one knee again, although it was far more difficult with his hands cuffed together. There was just enough room between his hands, and enough movement at the fastening between cuff and bar, for him to be able to fumble the strap around his ankle. It fell off the first time he tried to do the buckle up, and he expected Vaughan to be angry.

"Try again," Vaughan said. "I can wait all night if necessary."

Well, it was better than being told he was an idiot, which was what he would have said if the situation had been reversed.

He managed it on the second attempt. He stayed on the floor waiting for instructions.

"I think you'll do quite nicely there for the moment," Vaughan said. "Now get my cock out."

He looked at Vaughan's trousers. Vaughan had specified 'get my cock out', not 'get my trousers down', so he left the belt alone and just tackled Vaughan's fly. It was a slow and difficult job with his hands linked together, but Vaughan didn't seem to mind. Vaughan's cock certainly didn't seem to mind, when it finally came to view. When he pulled it out, he snagged it slightly on the fastening. He winced in sympathy.

"I'm sorry I'm so clumsy, but I just don't know how to do this," he admitted.

"It's all right. I'm not going to hit you."

He looked up at Vaughan. He hadn't actually considered it was *possible* that Vaughan might hit him. The suggestion wasn't very pleasant.

Vaughan stroked his face with one hand. "It's all right, Allard. I wouldn't do something like that without discussing it with you first. We only talked about bondage. I'm not taking that as license for anything else."

"Remember, this is quite new to me."

“I know. And I like that. But this game does have rules, even if it seems strange to you. And a polite apology would be adequate, even to my offended cock.”

“I did say I was...”

“I didn’t specify words.”

Oh. Well, this at least he knew how to do. He kissed it, licked up it, apologised profusely by kissing and licking at the place that might have been sore. Then licked again. Then wetted his lips, worked his mouth, and got going seriously.

He kept going until Vaughan tugged at his hair to stop him.

“That’s...quite sufficient,” said Vaughan. He looked less composed.

Allard felt more composed. “Isn’t that satisfactory?” He licked his lips. Fellatio was an oasis of familiarity in this desert of strangeness.

“You’re not going to get away with just a suck,” said Vaughan. “I’m not going to untie you until I’ve had you. Thoroughly.”

“Let me go!” said Allard. This time, he didn’t really mean it. He was testing the parameters of this odd situation. Yes, he *was* free. Not free to move, not free to go, but free to say whatever he liked without it making any difference. In this room, he could say or do anything, and nothing would open the door to the outside world until he either used his safeword or they finished what they were doing.

“No. I mean to have you, my proud beauty, and I am not letting you go.”

Ah. This was more familiar ground. He’d heard that appalling script before, and it didn’t get any better with repetition.

He grinned up at Vaughan. “Don’t we even get a new script for the occasion?”

“Cheeky little sod!”

“Well, come on, Vaughan!”

“Well, if it’s a new script you want...” Vaughan picked something out of the box. A short chain. Before Allard could quite work out what was going on, Vaughan bent down and neatly clipped Allard’s ankles together. “I think you’ll make a very nice addition to my harem.”

“Last I heard of it, I *was* your harem.”

“Well, if I’ve got to make do with you, you’d better be very, very good. Now get up.”

He tried to. It didn’t work. He looked up at Vaughan for guidance. Vaughan appeared to be far too busy enjoying the sight of him sprawled on the floor to help.

“All right, now what do I do?”

“You ask me, very, very politely, to help you up. ‘Sir’ might be nice.”

Allard remembered that Vaughan got fairly cross with anyone who called him ‘sir’.

“Please help me up, Captain, sir.”

“I think you need a lesson in manners.”

Vaughan bent down again and grabbed Allard’s cock. That didn’t seem like much of a lesson in manners to Allard, given that Vaughan had promised no pain. He enjoyed Vaughan working his cock.

Then Vaughan took his hand away.

“I was enjoying that!”

“I know,” said Vaughan reasonably.

Allard reached for his cock. It was a bit awkward with his hands clipped together, but he found an angle he could manage at.

“All right, Allard. Let me do that.”

It was an awkward angle, so he moved his hands out of the way to let Vaughan do it for him.

Vaughan grabbed his hand, snapped something onto the bar between his hands, and then did something at his throat. He tried to tug his hand away from Vaughan, and something clinked. That was the point at which he realised he had an additional chain. He tugged at it. Yes, it was attached to his collar. What the hell --?

"You don't touch your cock until I give you permission," Vaughan said, in a tone of voice that suggested that this fact should be obvious.

He *could* touch his cock, but that was all he could do. He could only just reach far enough to stroke it with his fingertips. Suddenly, that knowledge made his cock the most important thing in the universe. It got harder. He vainly tried to stretch his erection to reach his hands -- to reach *anything* -- but didn't have much luck.

"You'll wait," said Vaughan, "until I let you."

"Bastard!"

"I've warned you once about your language, Allard."

"Bastard, *sir!*" said Allard.

Vaughan did not reply to that in words. He got a gag out and showed it to Allard.

Things could always be worse. If I don't shut up, they will be worse.

Allard was disconcerted. He *had* actually played at being gagged before, without being worried. What was different? Apart from the props (being tied up must make a difference), Vaughan seemed to be playing a slightly more serious game.

"Oh, yes," said Vaughan. "You've played these games before, but now I'm going to show you what it's *really* like. When I've finished, you'll be begging me to do it to you again. Hard and often."

Allard relaxed a bit. The script had improved, and Vaughan wasn't playing it for laughs this time, but it wasn't so dissimilar to what they'd done before.

"Please, not like this."

“Exactly like this, if I please. And it will please you, as well, once I’ve trained you properly.”

That was what he was worried about.

“In fact, I think it *does* please you, even if you don’t want to admit it to yourself.” Vaughan leaned over, and stroked a finger intimately along Allard’s cock. It wasn’t enough. It wasn’t anywhere near enough. He knew, even as he tried to arch into it, that Vaughan wouldn’t give him any more.

“Tell me how much you like it, and I might give you some more.”

“I like your hand on my cock -- no, I *love* your hand on my cock! The rest of it I can do without.”

“Oh, I think I can change your mind for you.” Vaughan went to the box and got something out. “Spread your legs.”

Allard didn’t co-operate, of course. “You’ll have to make me.”

Vaughan said, “With pleasure.” He went back to the box, and came back with a long metal rod.

Allard had just noticed the clips, looking remarkably like the clips on the shorter bar attached to his hands, when Vaughan rolled him onto his belly and sat on one of his legs.

“What the hell are you doing?” he yelled, trying to kick and then remembering the hobble chain. The leg he kicked with was grabbed firmly, and something happened at his ankle. Then his leg was forced back down, and something happened at the other ankle. He moved experimentally. Nothing happened.

Vaughan got off him, then came back and waved a butt-plug under his nose.

“No, thank you,” said Allard.

“Yes, thank you,” said Vaughan, lubing up the butt-plug. “Say ‘thank you’.”

“Fuck off,” said Allard.

“I could always put it in the other end, and you hate the taste of this lube.”

“Would it make any difference if I called you a perverted bastard, Vaughan?”

“No difference at all, no.”

“Anyway, I thought you were going to put yourself up there.”

“All in good time.”

Vaughan went back to stand behind Allard. “You make a very pretty picture like that.” A picture of how he must look popped into Allard’s mind. Spread open, exposed, completely unable to do anything about whatever Vaughan might take it into his head to do next. Vaughan’s property.

Then Vaughan made quite a performance of putting the butt-plug in. He did it slowly, teasingly, a little bit in, a little bit out. Just the sort of thing that would feel good if he did it with his cock, except it was unreasonable to expect any man to have that much self-control. Allard whimpered in pleasure in spite of himself.

“I told you I’d make you enjoy it,” Vaughan said. “You don’t get a choice in the matter.”

“Please, Vaughan, give me some more.” He didn’t want to beg, but he couldn’t touch his cock, and he needed *something*.

“And you tried to stop me giving you this,” said Vaughan, tone full of huge fake surprise.

“I’m sorry. I made a mistake.”

“Yes, I rather think you did.” That lovely, lovely butt-plug was taken away.

“Please!” he wailed.

Vaughan was kind enough to return half of it. It wasn’t enough.

He tried to thrust against the floor. The butt-plug was instantly removed.

"I have more stretcher bars here," Vaughan said. "I could, for example, immobilise your arms completely."

"Please don't, sir."

"Good boy."

He was shocked to realise he hadn't even *thought* about saying 'sir' that time.

Then Vaughan gave him the whole length of the butt-plug at once, and he stopped thinking at all for a few seconds. When he realised what he was doing, he was actually whimpering at Vaughan to move it a bit more. He shut his mouth firmly in case any more untoward sounds escaped.

"It didn't take much to break down your resistance," said Vaughan.

"I like you fucking me. It's just the circumstances I'm not enamoured of."

"Oh, dear. So I have quite a way to go yet before I have you begging to put the chains on. Good job I've always liked a challenge."

Allard felt uneasy. Half an hour ago, he'd definitely have said that the only reason he'd beg to put the chains on would be role-play to please Vaughan. At the moment, he wouldn't beg and mean it, but now he could see that there might come a time when he would.

"Vaughan..."

"Yes?"

"I don't think I like that idea."

Vaughan sat down where Allard could see him easily.

"That's all right, Allard. Changing your mind is my job." His expression softened slightly. "You didn't really expect to feel like this, did you?" he asked, more seriously.

"Isn't that what you liked about the idea?"

"Yes," Vaughan said, utterly sincere and utterly honest. "You don't like the idea that you like this, but you'll let me do it anyway."

“Could anyone do that to me? Make me want to be a slave?”

“Eventually,” Vaughan said.

Now that really wasn't a nice idea. He sighed. “Sometimes I think you're *too* honest. It frightens me, the idea that anyone could do that to me if they tried.”

“I think they'd have to try quite hard with you if you weren't trying to please them in the first place.” Vaughan rubbed his shoulder. “Would you have let me do this to begin with if you didn't want to make me happy?”

That made him feel a bit better. This was still sex with Vaughan even if it was kinky sex. “Well, *are* you going to do anything to me?”

“Oh, I can think of *lots* of things I'd like to do to you.”

“Do they involve cheese spread?”

“Now there's an interesting idea. Oddly enough...” Vaughan got up and walked out of his field of view. Allard was surprised -- he hadn't exactly meant that as a serious suggestion, and he'd have doubted Vaughan would take it as one.

Vaughan came back with cheese spread -- the soft sort in a tube rather than the less ductile triangular kind -- and spread a little on his cock.

“I didn't actually mean that, Vaughan!”

“Don't ask for it if you don't want it. Now eat it all up. I put myself to the trouble of providing a tasty treat for my sex-slave, and it's a little untidy if you don't lick it off. I don't want cheese spread on my trousers, after all.”

“Who would?” murmured Allard. He paused. “We have a slight physical problem here. I can't actually move.”

“No, I suppose you can't,” Vaughan said. “I'll see to that.” He went and fiddled with Allard's ankles. Allard was greatly relieved to feel the weight of the bar drop away from him. It had been far more disconcerting than when he had been chained but still able to move his legs.

“Move your legs together.” He did, rather relieved.

Then he heard clinking. Oh, god, that bloody chain again.

“You should be able to get to your knees now.”

He did. It was a little tricky; his hands were attached to the short metal bar and that was chained to his collar, which made balancing something he had to actually think about. Once he’d managed to get to his knees, it wasn’t too bad.

Vaughan presented him with a cheese-smeared cock. He hadn’t slathered it on heavily, to Allard’s relief, and at least it was right in front of his face; he didn’t have to lean too far to get at it.

Allard leaned forward and licked tentatively, then got Vaughan’s cockhead into his mouth and sucked with some enthusiasm. Actually, a savoury flavour went rather well with cock. He explored with his tongue, making sure he’d got all of it, before moving further down the shaft.

“I didn’t realise till you mentioned it that cheese spread was one of your fantasies,” said Vaughan. “Maybe we should serve this delicacy at the next cocktail party.”

Allard spluttered and drew off. “Don’t make jokes like that unless you fancy the idea of impromptu circumcision.”

“What joke? It would go very well with all the other little delicacies. Cheese on cracker biscuits, pineapple cubes, little sausages on sticks...well, maybe not that last one.”

“All right. ‘Yes, master, it’s a very big sausage’,” drawled Allard.

“I’m going to teach you to say that without smirking,” said Vaughan.

“But I do think it’s a very big sausage. And a very tasty one. And I don’t need to be chained up to think it.”

“And you don’t even need cheese spread, do you, pet?” Vaughan nudged himself towards Allard’s mouth.

“No,” he said, before his mouth was otherwise engaged. He cleaned every trace of cheese spread off, enjoying it, and eventually let go of Vaughan’s cock.

“Allard,” said Vaughan, “*was* the cheese spread one of your fantasies?” He sounded very slightly perturbed by this.

“Not until five minutes ago, no. I wouldn’t mind doing that again some time, though. You bring out the pervert in me.”

“Would you like a pervert in you?”

“Yes, please.”

“Then you’ll have to wait.”

“Bastard!”

“That’s an extra five minutes. Be grateful you’ve still got the butt-plug.”

“I would be, if you’d only condescend to move it.”

“Say ‘please’.”

“Do I have to sound as if I mean it?”

“Well, if I leave it long enough, you won’t have to act, will you?” Vaughan grinned at him. “Stand up.”

He couldn’t. Maybe if his hands had been only cuffed, he might have been able to, but the extra restriction posed by the chain to his collar made it impossible to keep his balance. The hobble chain between his ankles certainly didn’t help. He made one attempt, and gave up when he wasn’t convinced he’d make it without falling over. This was ridiculous. He wasn’t *that* tightly confined. If he’d been on his feet, he could have walked about readily enough; it was just moving from a kneeling to a standing position that was difficult.

“I can’t,” he admitted.

Vaughan just looked at him.

Then he realised what was expected of him. “Help me, please.”

Vaughan took hold of him by his upper arms and pulled gently. He made another attempt to stand up. Yes, this time he could make it, with Vaughan steadying him. If he could trust Vaughan enough, trust him not to let go.

He took a deep breath and stood up.

“Well done,” Vaughan said, and kissed him lightly.

He was on his feet, but he still felt unsteady, so he asked, “Hold me, please.”

Vaughan put his arms around him and held him close. He leaned into the reassuringly solid bulk of Vaughan’s chest. “Sorry, Vaughan. Give me a minute or two.”

He’d offered to ‘lose his virginity’ in a BDSM sense, and it could have gone worse, but it was emotionally intense, and he kept seeing momentary flashes of ‘virginity’ pass by. The first time someone else gave him an enema before sex; the first time he’d let somebody chain him; the first time he’d admitted quite seriously that he was in someone else’s control for sex. And when he’d stood up, he hadn’t just been allowing somebody else to do things to him while he retreated into passivity. He’d had to act for himself, while putting complete trust in Vaughan not to let go.

If his hands hadn’t been tied together, he’d have been clinging to Vaughan for comfort.

He’d have thought, before, that the props would have been the least important thing, and being tied up with chains would be much the same thing as being tied up with bits of cloth. He hadn’t been prepared for the ‘scene’ to take on a life of its own, and he certainly hadn’t been prepared for the possibility that he might enjoy it.

After a while, he pulled himself together a bit and moved back enough to see Vaughan. Vaughan’s expression was a mixture of lust and tenderness. *It’s not just that he likes me being afraid, and it’s not the BDSM stuff. More than anything, he wants to be the cause and the solution to my fear.* Allard had known that for a while, but this was the clearest he’d ever seen it. It wasn’t Vaughan fantasising about rape, but about seduction, and about a person who was afraid but willing to be led through the fear and out through the other side. For the

first time, he had a tiny glimmer of perception that there *was* another side, something through the fear.

“Whatever *you* want to do,” he said to Vaughan. “I know you’ll take me further than I want to go, but not further than I can go.”

“You do understand, don’t you?”

Vaughan picked him up and carried him over to the bed like a bride being carried over the threshold.

He put him down very, very carefully, and chained him to the bed. Flat on his back, legs spread, arms above his head but not pulled tight enough to be uncomfortable. Then Vaughan stood back and admired his handiwork.

“You do look very nice like that,” he said, and started caressing him.

Allard repressed the urge to be sarcastic or to ask Vaughan to get on with it. He was fairly sure that if he *did*, it would have no effect whatsoever. Actually, it was rather nice having Vaughan gently fondle different bits of his body that were not obvious erogenous zones. Vaughan was stroking all over him, taking possession of everything, not just his cock. Down one arm, gently fingering the scar where he’d been bitten by some obstreperous computer (he’d listened to one of the users who’d sworn blind the power supply was disconnected); across in a wavering trail down to near his nipple, then up to his throat just as his cock made the mistake of assuming it was the next thing on Vaughan’s list of parts.

Not that his throat was objecting. Especially when Vaughan bent to kiss it. God, that felt good, and he wanted to grab Vaughan’s head and hold him there. He was completely unable to do any such thing. He was completely unable to do anything but lie there and take whatever Vaughan was willing to give him.

What Vaughan was willing to give him was everything. No pettiness, no hurry, no rushing on to the next stage of the business; just total attention.

"It's nice having you in a position where I can ignore your demands to get on with it," Vaughan said.

"I was just thinking the same thing. Anyway, I was enjoying this too much to make any demands."

"That's true." Vaughan moved down, without hurry, and licked his cock.

"Consider me demanding," said Allard, rather tightly.

"You mean, all I have to do is touch the very tip of my tongue to the very tip of your cock, and you'll be begging for mercy?"

He didn't beg for mercy. He was too busy moaning.

Vaughan licked, again.

Allard got his breath back enough to say, "Please suck me!"

"Not just yet."

Vaughan moved up to kneel over Allard's chest, cock-tip waving just in front of Allard's mouth. "Why don't you show me what you'd like me to do to you?"

Allard licked. To his annoyance, Vaughan took his tasty treat away.

"I think I'll have you..." said Vaughan. He unclipped the chains holding Allard's feet, dragged Allard 'round so that his head was hanging back over the edge of the bed, and refastened his feet. Allard wondered just what Vaughan had been doing to the bedframe -- there seemed to be rather a lot of fastening points available to chain him in any position Vaughan chose.

Then he had more interesting things to think about, or at least a more interesting thing. Vaughan's cock nudged at his lips. He opened his mouth wide enough to take it, sucked the head in. He set to work on showing Vaughan what he'd like Vaughan to do to him. Running his tongue around the tip, flicking it lightly, then sucking hard, encouraging Vaughan to give him a bit more length. He got another inch or two out of that, a satisfying mouthful. Not much control in this position, but Vaughan was holding still, letting him do as

he liked with what he'd got. He sucked hard, enjoying the texture of cock against his tongue, then opened his mouth and breathed out, letting the light sensation tantalise Vaughan.

He wanted to grab with both hands, one hand on the shaft, the other on Vaughan's balls, but didn't have enough slack in the chains. He'd have to make do with what he'd got already, the length in his mouth. He couldn't even touch his own cock, aching with need. His pleasure depended on satisfying Vaughan with only his mouth.

He did his best, trying to push Vaughan beyond the limits of control. And then Vaughan pulled away quickly, leaving him empty.

"Any more of that and I'd have lost it," Vaughan said with a ragged edge to his voice.

"That was the idea."

"I still have plans for you," Vaughan said, a little more steadily. He walked down to the other end of the bed, undid Allard's ankles again, and pulled. "I think I'd like you properly on display now."

He'd thought he was already on display, what with being flat on his back with his legs spread. Vaughan seemed to have something else in mind.

Vaughan pushed and pulled until he was lying with his knees up and his legs apart. Maybe Vaughan was finally going to take that bloody butt-plug out and put something more useful in its place. Then the chains were clipped back on his ankles. He tested. Shorter length this time. He didn't have any slack in them. The only movement option was to try and scoot the rest of his body in the other direction so that he could lie flat. He tried it.

"Oh, no, you don't," said Vaughan. "I want your arse nicely on display."

Vaughan grabbed more chain, then grabbed his shoulders and shoved him back down the bed. Then he clipped one end of the chain to the collar, from what Allard could make out, and the other end to the bedframe. A second chain to the other side of the bed, and he was completely immobilised.

"Bastard!"

“You called?” said Vaughan, raising an eyebrow.

“Now what?” Allard said.

“Now for the next part of the programme.” Vaughan moved back to the end of the bed, and removed the butt plug, twisting it as he pulled it out.

“Thank you,” Allard said.

“Were you under the impression that I was going to replace it with my cock?”

“Well, yes. Unless you’ve got an even bigger and better butt plug to show off.” He thought about it. Not a bad idea, if Vaughan was planning on delaying the climax. “Don’t suppose you’ve got one that vibrates?”

“I was thinking of doing something else, as it happens.” Vaughan went and rummaged in the cupboard. He came back with something long and thin. Three feet long, so it couldn’t be something Vaughan was planning to insert in him.

More fiddling. It was a tripod.

Then Vaughan set a camera on the tripod, and started tweaking it. An old-fashioned camera, larger than he’d seen before. Manual focus.

Focused on him.

“Vaughan, no!”

“Yes. I want a record of this.”

He started thrashing on the bed, fighting the chains. Only the chains weren’t just for show, and he nearly choked himself. “Vaughan, I don’t want this!”

“What you want doesn’t come into it. I want it, and that’s all that matters.”

Couldn’t Vaughan see that he really didn’t want this, that it was time to stop playing the game? “Stop it, Vaughan, this isn’t funny!”

“Keep still. I don’t want to have to use a high shutter speed.” There was a flash of bright light, and a loud click. “I think that’s one for the Readers’ Wives page.”

That was when he panicked.

He forced it down long enough to remember, and screamed, "Money!"

Vaughan stopped fiddling with the camera, ran over to the bed, and released one of Allard's hands. "I'm sorry, Allard. I didn't realise you'd take it that badly."

"Other hand," Allard said.

"You should be able to do that yourself," Vaughan said, but he leaned over and unclipped Allard's other hand. *Oh, of course*, realised the more rational part of Allard's mind, *padlocks and slow ritualistic fastenings would be fine for getting into, but present problems if somebody panics*. It was a perfectly sensible rule, and Vaughan *had* set it up that way, and *did* respect the safeword when Allard had remembered it.

"Now I know what you meant about the safeword," Allard said quietly.

Vaughan touched his hand gently, and said, "It makes a lot more sense when it's demonstrated rather than explained."

"I wouldn't have thought, before tonight, that I'd like to say 'no!' and have it ignored."

"I'm sorry," said Vaughan. "I think I got carried away, or I'd have picked up on your reactions before you had to use your safeword." He looked puzzled. "But I didn't *expect* that to upset you. You've never been bothered by Harry. Annoyed, yes, but not bothered."

"That's different." He thought about why it was different. "Harry only does audio, and that seems to make a difference. Harry also will not willingly send the data off to be drooled over by strangers; nor will the girls. Somehow, the thought that an image of me could be out there, while I had no control at all over who saw me like that, makes my blood run cold."

"Willingly surrendering control to me is one thing. The idea of strangers wanking over pictures of you chained and exposed is another." Vaughan gently stroked his shoulder. "I wouldn't really send it anywhere. Not unless you said I could."

“You might not, but our horrible little brat of a computer would, and I’m not completely convinced I’ve managed to firewall him out of our private filespace. I want it deleted -- now!”

Vaughan smiled. “I don’t need to. It’s an old-fashioned film camera. The image exists physically inside the camera and absolutely nowhere else.”

“What are you doing with one of those? Just how long have you been planning this?” *I suppose I can discount the theory that he’s been waiting for several centuries through the rise of digital photography.*

“It’s been a hobby of mine for a while. You haven’t seen the camera because I haven’t had time to play with it these last few months. Nothing to do with you, of course.” He grinned. “I haven’t been planning this for very long. I’ve been fantasising about it for longer, though.” He got up and put the camera away.

“What are you doing with that film?” Allard asked, wondering whether he should take the opportunity to undo the rest of his chains, run over, and destroy the camera.

“I’ll destroy it, if you want. But I would like to keep one print just for myself.”

Just in case I ever leave you? Allard wondered.

“One print,” he agreed. “Keep it where nobody else can see it.”

“Thank you,” said Vaughan, sounding as though he meant that. He came back to the bed. “Shall we go on?”

“I’m not sure if I want to. Emotional catharsis is all very well in its way, but it doesn’t make for a riotous night of sexual excess.”

Vaughan lay down next to him. “What does, then?”

“Well, you could start by doing to my cock what I was doing to yours. As promised some time ago.” Then as Vaughan started to move, he said, “I don’t mind the hands and feet, but could you please remove the chain from my collar?”

“Certainly,” Vaughan said, grinning. “Off the neck, as requested,” he unclipped the ones from the collar, “and back on the hands.”

Allard decided to be more careful in his phrasing in future. He didn’t mind too much. Especially when Vaughan slid down his body and clamped his mouth on Allard’s cock. A couple of quick sucks, and then Vaughan started kissing up and down the length of it, and... *pretending he’s playing an oboe?* Allard thought incredulously. Yes. Complete with fingering exercises. Somehow, Vaughan didn’t seem to be taking the business entirely seriously. Especially when he started practicing arpeggios.

Allard sighed, and smiled. Earlier on, when they’d both been taking the game very seriously, that would have ruined the mood. Now he was glad of it. “I hope you weren’t planning on giving a public performance on that instrument.”

Vaughan gave him the first couple of bars of *Minuet in G Major*, and looked up at him and grinned. “They laughed when I sat down at the piano,” he remarked mock-mournfully.

“Well, that one ought to be recognisable to anybody who’s had the ritual music lesson inflicted on them, at least if they played a wind instrument. Oh, well, at least I’m not a recorder.”

“What?” Vaughan said.

“Recorders are *so* common.”

“You can’t be a recorder,” Vaughan said. “You’ve got all the nice fiddly bits to twiddle.” He demonstrated.

“Yes, I feel better now,” Allard said.

“Oh, good,” Vaughan said. “Does that mean I can shove my cock down your throat now?”

“I don’t feel like that position you were threatening me with earlier,” said Allard, “but I am willing to be reasonable and consider anything comfortable for both of us.”

“Who is supposed to be the top here?” said Vaughan.

“You,” said Allard.

“Then I think we’d better get you back into a properly submissive mood,” said Vaughan. “Now, what did you say about a vibrating butt-plug?”

“I think it was along the lines of ‘please, sir’. Or else I just moaned.”

“What a lovely idea.” Vaughan went and rummaged in his box of tricks. He came back with something that definitely looked bigger than the last one. In fact, it looked bigger than Vaughan, at least in width.

Vaughan slapped a bit of lube on it, then touched the tip of it to Allard just underneath his balls, and stroked it down, switching it on halfway along.

“Yes, I think that’s more-or-less what you said last time,” Vaughan said, as Allard’s moan got much louder in response to the toy becoming operational.

Vaughan had done an excellent job of re-arousing him with the ‘musical performance’, and his arse still seemed to be sensitive and interested after the previous teasing. He wanted something more substantial.

“Put it in me, Vaughan!” he demanded.

“Oh, I will.” Vaughan touched the tip to his hole. “Eventually.”

“Please, Vaughan!” he begged.

Vaughan gave him half an inch.

“Please, Vaughan!” he said, much more sincerely this time.

“Do you want this even more than my cock?” Vaughan twisted it and pushed it in a little more.

Allard frantically tried to work out what Vaughan wanted to hear in response to that, and fell back on the truth. “I don’t care, as long as you stuff something in there!”

Another inch in, and the vibrator speeded up. Allard writhed.

"You really are quite an interesting sight when you're desperate. I wonder how desperate you can get?"

"Desperate enough to take something that size."

"Greedy, aren't you?" Vaughan said, and gave him the lot.

Allard jumped. He hadn't been expecting that, just more teasing. Then he realised he was being teased, because it still wasn't enough. "More!"

"Oh, I think you ought to do something nice to me first."

Vaughan walked around to where he could sit on the edge of the bed, releasing Allard's wrist but holding the chain, so that Allard had just enough slack to reach Vaughan's cock.

God, it was good to be able to get something in his hand at last. His own cock would have been better, but Vaughan's would do. He squeezed and tugged, enjoying the sensation of cock filling his hand.

"Very nice," said Vaughan. "I think I'll reward you."

Allard jumped, as the thing in his arse speeded up all of a sudden.

"Remote control." Vaughan grinned at him. "Might be fun to make you wear that during the day."

His cock *really* liked that idea. It wasn't something he'd ever really want to do -- except that he did. He jerked at Vaughan.

"Don't pull it off," Vaughan said.

Allard was far gone enough not to even *think* of making a joke about that remark. He would only notice that when his language centres came back online later.

As it was, he waited eagerly while Vaughan shifted position, kneeling over him again. Only this time, he had a hand free, and he was able to grab his own cock just as Vaughan settled into position. Cold metal trailed across his skin, the length of chain still attached to the wrist-cuff. Vaughan's cockhead just in front of his mouth, where he could lick the tip.

He struggled to reach it, then Vaughan thrust forward just enough, and he was able to suck and tug hard at the same time.

Vaughan groaned, thrust forward, nearly lost his balance, and pulled back -- and came all over Allard's face.

The shock should have put him off. Instead, it put him over the edge. He felt himself go past the point of no return, squeezed and tugged and came.

It was the most undignified orgasm he'd had in some time: both of them were rather unprepared, he had Vaughan's come on his face, and a busily buzzing machine up his arse. It was rather unfair that the experience was absolutely glorious. He tried to stop shaking and whimpering, which took a while. Then he tried desperately to look slightly pained.

"You enjoyed that, then," said Vaughan.

"Apparently."

Vaughan got off him. He looked rather unsteady. Allard hoped he wouldn't end up with Vaughan sitting down heavily on him.

"Turn that damn thing off," said Allard, twitching irritably.

"Oh, sorry," said Vaughan. "I quite forgot it was there, though I bet you didn't." He switched it off obediently.

Allard scrambled up the bed a bit so that he could lie flat, and Vaughan pushed him over a bit so he had room to lie down.

* * * * *

After a comfortable doze, Vaughan got up and began to tidy Allard up.

"Did I actually go to sleep *chained-up*, Vaughan?"

"Yes. You looked very sweet."

Allard shook his head slightly in bemusement. He felt relaxed, but full of energy. He still didn't feel bothered by the chains, even now he had remembered they were there. Even worse, he didn't feel bothered by Vaughan remarking that he looked 'very sweet' in chains.

Vaughan finished wiping him down, and removed the butt-plug. It felt rather interesting going out. Apparently, his libido wasn't exhausted yet. Tired, but not exhausted.

Vaughan said, "Wasn't so bad, was it?"

Allard said, "Actually, it was quite tame compared to how afraid I was beforehand. Except for the camera, of course."

"I'm sure I can come up with something you won't think tame."

Allard said, "Me and my big mouth!"

"I was thinking of enlarging the other end."

"Vaughan? It's the size it is, whether you fuck it or not." Allard squirmed uneasily. He couldn't help noticing that it felt bigger now Vaughan had removed the butt-plug.

"Have you heard of fisting, Allard?"

"No."

"The human rectum can be stretched to take larger objects than a human penis. Quite a bit larger." Vaughan lifted his hand, closed it into a fist, and moved it about suggestively.

Allard gulped.

"Are you all right?"

"Scared, but all right. I don't think it's something either of us could get away with trying casually. I would want quite a lot of data before I considered it."

"There are books. It's not a rough-sex thing, for obvious reasons, but it is a thing people can learn to do. Actually, it's not done using a clenched fist, but an open hand that has to move in a very particular way."

"Have you ...?" Allard gulped. "... had it done to you?"

“Once. It’s not something people try casually.”

“Did it hurt?”

“Felt...strange. Intimate.”

“Have you done it to someone else?”

“Yes. Several times. I wouldn’t try it with you if I hadn’t. And you’re quite stretched from the butt-plug, which will help.”

Allard said, in a small voice, “Does that effect wear off easily?”

“The muscle-tone sorts itself out after the experience. You’ll wake up tomorrow feeling normal but perhaps sore, if we do.”

“Could we do it as less of a BDSM experience?” Allard asked. “I’m still learning, and I feel I’ve had enough of a lesson for today on the parameters of submission.”

Vaughan smiled at him. “Me, too. All right, we’ll just focus on learning how to do it.”

He removed Allard’s chains, but didn’t bother undoing the cuffs. Allard was comfortable with that. Vaughan had taken off enough of the regalia to make the point that they were now outside the scene, and he trusted Vaughan enough to know Vaughan would not force him back into it against his will.

Vaughan asked, “Want a couple of pillows? So that you can watch?”

Allard felt slightly doubtful about watching that happen to him, but sighed, and nodded. No sense in going into this half-heartedly.

“Allard,” said Vaughan, “you have a naturally enquiring mind, so I thought you might find it fascinating from the academic point-of-view.”

“True,” he said.

“I’ll go and find you a book,” said Vaughan, “but not right now. I don’t want to wait while you read the whole thing.”

Allard was about to protest, then remembered *monaxonida* and his tendency to get distracted by the dictionary. “At least give me a précis of the more useful parts. I like to know what’s going to happen.”

“Lots and lots of lube, I work up to it slowly, relax and don’t panic. There’s a trick to how someone moves their hand. All the recipient needs to know is that it might *sound* impossible, but it isn’t.” Vaughan put a couple of pillows under Allard’s shoulders so that he was propped up comfortably.

“Does it hurt?” said Allard. “It won’t necessarily stop me if it does.”

Vaughan looked at him. “It feels uncomfortable if you’re not used to it, but if it hurts, it means it’s being done wrong.”

He nodded. That had been *exactly* what he wanted to know; there was a difference between pain as pain, and pain that meant something, and he always liked to know whether the appropriate response was to relax or stop doing what he was doing.

Vaughan checked his hands very carefully, and showed them to Allard. “Are my hands in a fit state to do this?”

Allard looked. No visible snags or sharp nails. “They look all right to me. Is this another of those ritual things that people do slowly and carefully?”

“Sort of, but it’s as well to get it right anyway. If I had snags, or I didn’t know somebody’s medical status, I’d use gloves. Now the tools for the job have passed preliminary inspection, I’ll get started.”

The early stages were comfortably familiar. Vaughan lubed up a finger and slipped it inside. It went in easily, as it should after having a large toy in there earlier. Vaughan brushed it gently across his prostate, and he realised he was definitely ready to be interested in more sex, even if this was going to be a rather *strange* form of sex. He relaxed a little. His prostate didn’t seem to be bothered about fine distinctions like whether this was normal or not.

“That’s right,” Vaughan said, “just keep relaxing.” He withdrew the finger, slapped on quite a lot of lubricant, and tried two fingers. Allard couldn’t actually see them going in, but he could see enough to make him feel more comfortable with what Vaughan was doing. He could see Vaughan, which was probably the point of the pillows, and did a lot to make him feel that he wasn’t being subjected to an unusual medical procedure. Yes, this was definitely sex, even though he didn’t feel a raging desire to come quite yet. He was just relaxed, and interested, and wanting to know what happened next. What happened next was three fingers. That toy *must* have been large: it took three fingers for Vaughan to be touching the sides.

Vaughan started fingerfucking him then, as opposed to simply dilating him. He wriggled, making sure he was in a good position.

“That’s right,” said Vaughan, “show me you like it.”

He didn’t have a problem with that. He settled down to enjoy the feel of Vaughan’s fingers sliding inside him.

“Make me want it,” he suggested lazily. “You’re good at that.”

“It’s difficult to get up enough steam for the fantasy about you being a virgin if you go and make remarks about me being a sex-toy and you being a spoilt brat, you know.” Vaughan kept his fingers working even through the long and complex sentence. Allard was rather impressed.

“I’ve never done this before, and you know that. Stop complaining.”

“Oh, I’m sure you’ve done *this* bit before. I distinctly remember doing this...” Vaughan shoved a bit harder. “...to you last week.”

He groaned with satisfaction. “Try four fingers,” he suggested.

Vaughan muttered something about, “No, that’s not how this is meant to go. I’m meant to really *surprise* you with the fourth finger.” He added the fourth finger.

It did surprise him. It surprised him how much extra one added finger felt like. He was mortified to hear himself squeak.

“Good. Back on track,” grunted Vaughan.

It felt extremely good, and extremely strange. No matter how much he tried to catalogue what he was *really* feeling, every time Vaughan shifted his hand slightly, the balance between pain and pleasure would change a bit. Not that it was really pain. Not quite. Then Vaughan pushed slightly deeper and it was undeniably pain. He yelped.

Vaughan pulled back a bit. “That hurt you. I’d better not try any deeper or wider than I was doing.”

“You haven’t finished it yet,” said Allard. No matter how warped was the experience he’d set out on, he wanted to do it properly.

“Try to relax,” Vaughan told him, and tested him carefully. Instead of the easy stretch of earlier, there was a sudden flash of pain.

“I can’t seem to manage the damn thing!” Allard said crossly. “I *hate* when I know how to do something but can’t seem to get it to happen. Just like data backup on an old Vax. I’d read the manual for that, as well.”

“You’re doing very well for me to manage four fingers. I have large hands.”

Allard relaxed slightly and began to see the point of this strange activity. Being *able* to relax and let someone do this to him meant something.

He focused on how it felt with four fingers, which was more than he’d ever had inside him before. Vaughan was spreading them very slightly and relaxing again, but without going further, it didn’t actually hurt. He was aware, to his surprise, of trusting Vaughan, who had known when to stop without actually being asked.

It was surprisingly erotic; it had taken him a while to realise that because the usual urgent desire to come, to move, to *get on with it*, was practically absent. Instead, it was a strange sort of intimate massage, performed in voluptuous stillness by a loving expert.

Vaughan eased a little further in. Now he felt wonderfully full. Allard relaxed. He no longer had any urge to ask for the thumb in order to cross the experience off his list as ‘completed’. He’d like the thumb when he could manage it; it would make this even better. This was good now, smooth and deep; he would ask Vaughan for it again. In future, it might be his reward for giving Vaughan what he wanted in the way of BDSM, and never mind that when he’d got up this morning he’d had no conception about why *anyone* would want a whole human hand inside them -- or even that it was possible.

“You look absolutely beautiful like that,” said Vaughan tenderly.

“Why did you never tell me about this before?”

“Would you have believed me?”

Well, *no*. He would have started edging away from Vaughan the moment he’d mentioned the concept.

“I love this,” said Allard dreamily. “I want you to do it again.”

Why was Vaughan looking at him like that? Oh...

“So we tried the bondage, but the answer to converting a virgin was at your fingertips,” Allard said, smirking slightly to cover his own mild embarrassment.

“Don’t make me laugh when I’ve got my hand stuck up your arse,” Vaughan warned him.

“Are we going to try for the whole hand?”

“Not this time,” said Vaughan. “Even if we could manage it, it would take a long time, and we’re both tired.”

He thought about it. He was tired, and happy, and aroused-but-not-urgently-so. He was probably too tired to spend hours getting this right, and so was Vaughan.

“Mm.”

Vaughan moved his hand very gently. “Have you had enough for now?” he said.

Allard thought about it. He wouldn't mind going on, but he wouldn't be disappointed if they stopped now. He said so.

Vaughan eased his hand out gently.

Allard sighed, almost regretfully.

"That would have taken a lot longer if I'd got all the way in," said Vaughan. "I'll just go to the bathroom and find some stuff to clean you up with. I had to use a lot of lube."

Allard was glad Vaughan had explained that. After the intimacy of the experience, it would have felt strangely distant to have Vaughan rush off to the bathroom without talking to him. The emotional connection was still there, even as he listened to Vaughan running the taps and splashing water around.

Then Vaughan came back to him, holding a large fluffy towel and a couple of wet flannels. "I'll just mop you down, pet."

"If you must," said Allard.

Vaughan cleaned him up very tenderly, taking care of every drop of lubricant with the flannel and then patting him dry with the towel.

Allard noticed, slightly surprised, that Vaughan was still wearing his trousers, although his cock was poking out in an interested manner.

Mm. He supposed hands hadn't *quite* made sexual organs obsolete.

His own rose to greet Vaughan's at the thought. He rather envied women the lack of transparent motivation.

"Not had enough yet?" said Vaughan.

"Apparently not."

Vaughan reached for his belt, undid it and dropped his trousers. "We'll soon fix that," he said, and sat down on the bed.

Vaughan's hand, which had introduced him to a new experience, was within reach. As Allard raised it, he noticed, with a small shock, that his own hand was still cuffed. But that didn't seem to matter. He kissed Vaughan's hand gently. "Thank you."

Vaughan stroked his face. "I think I ought to be the one saying that to you."

"Was I good?"

"You were very good indeed." Vaughan settled down on top of him and kissed him. The kiss seemed a continuation of the experience: all of him open and sexual and unhurried as he let Vaughan take him wherever they were going. Vaughan was right. They *had* been good. All they needed to do now was add the full stop of orgasm to the work-of-art Vaughan had created as a sexual experience.

The weight on top of him was precisely what he wanted. He rocked against Vaughan, cock moving delicately against cock as tongue slid against tongue. Just a little more...just a little...*there*...and falling over the slightest of edges into an orgasm as gentle as a sigh.

He sighed.

Even as he wanted it never to stop, it was finally over.

"Will you hold me?"

Vaughan held him. The experience ebbed softly away without quite leaving him. He held Vaughan, as well.

Vaughan said quietly, "I find myself less worried that you're going to leave me, after that."

Allard sighed, and stroked his hair. A thought occurred to him.

"Just how much BDSM experience *have* you got, Vaughan?"

"Not as much as you seem to think. It was an occasional diversion, but it wasn't quite what I wanted, and then...five-foot-nine of wanton innocence walked into my life." Vaughan undid Allard's collar.

“I’m a complete innocent *compared to some people*, Vaughan, and apparently I can make them think kinky thoughts by wearing clothes and walking about. It’s slightly unnerving.”

“You left out ‘bending down’,” said Vaughan as he bent down himself and tackled the wrist-cuffs. “Anyway, it’s the fact that you *don’t realise* it’s kinky that makes it so wonderfully effective.”

“You remember the time we were testing computer communications, among other things. I have an uneasy feeling I tried to patronise you about your less-than-encyclopaedic knowledge of sexual practices. But I didn’t even know about safewords.” A thought struck him. “You’ve tied me up before, and you didn’t mention safewords then.”

“At any hint that you weren’t comfortable, I’d have stopped,” said Vaughan. “Apart from that, you’ve had a good illustration tonight about the difference between light play and being ‘inside’ the scene.”

“You mean, we didn’t laugh for most of it?” He sighed. “I think I’m the one with the less-than-encyclopaedic knowledge.”

“Actually, you *do* have an encyclopaedic knowledge of sexual practices,” said Vaughan seriously, as he undid the ankle-cuffs. “You just ran head-on into the difference between having read an enormous amount and having actually *done* some of them.”

“I wish you weren’t right about that, Vaughan.”

“I’m glad I am.” Vaughan lay down next to him and took him in his arms. “It’s what makes you so appealing. Like I said, wanton innocence.”

Allard realised there was no possible way he could get the upper hand in this particular conversation. The best strategy he could come up with was to go to sleep wrapped around Vaughan. So he did.

Buttered Bun

by Jules Jones and Alex Woolgrave

Drinking outside wasn't that much of a good idea on a chilly autumn evening in a street full of pollution-emitting vehicles. Allard had got out of the habit of considering weather, let alone pollution, in the long time they'd had between planetfalls.

Vaughan didn't look that comfortable, either, and Allard was fairly sure he needed a rest after a long day installing the new generators they'd just hauled across three star-systems. Allard and Karen had helped, of course, but Vaughan had been doing most of the work.

"Shall we see if it's more salubrious inside?" Allard said, picking up his drink.

"Good idea," said Vaughan, and picked up his.

It was still relatively early and the pub wasn't too crowded. Allard spotted a table well out of the draught from the door, and weaved his way around the intervening bodies. The table was probably intended for four or six people, and it would be well-mannered to wait for a two-person table to become free, but he was tired and he didn't really care.

They sat in silence and enjoyed the beer. It was quite good beer, really; they ought to stock up.

Vaughan had nearly finished his first half-pint, rather quickly, when a stranger slipped into the seat beside him and said, "You look as if you needed that."

"I did," Vaughan said politely.

"Is there anything else you might be needing?" the stranger asked.

Allard sighed. They always seemed to end up next to People Trying To Sell Things In Pubs. Occasionally they'd gone home with anything from a single red rose each to a wickerwork donkey that Harry, for some reason, couldn't resist.

"If you're trying to sell us tourist junk, no," said Allard, as politely as he could manage.

"I wasn't intending to sell you anything," said the stranger. "You're obviously from off-world, and I thought you might like a bit of extra company for the evening."

"Well, actually, no thank you," said Allard. "We're together."

"Allard..." said Vaughan. "I think he realised that."

Allard thought about it, then sat there with his mouth open. Was this man really suggesting...

"He's not *really* that thick," said Vaughan to the newcomer. "It's just that his mind has two modes: 'dirty' and 'clean'. If it was in the 'clean' one, he just needs to switch over."

"Whereas your switch has been welded in the 'dirty' position since puberty," said Allard sharply.

"Of course. I'm an engineer," said Vaughan, grinning.

Allard looked at him. Vaughan didn't actually look shocked.

Vaughan looked back at him, then said to the stranger, "Would you go away for a few minutes while I explain a few facts of life to my friend?"

"I'm not *that* bloody naïve!" snapped Allard, as the stranger nodded politely and got up.

"No, not quite," said Vaughan, "but I didn't think you'd be comfortable discussing it in front of him."

"Discussing what?" snapped Allard, and took a gulp of beer.

"Well -- are we going to take him up on his offer, of course," said Vaughan.

He had already swallowed the gulp, fortunately.

"Don't choke," Vaughan said helpfully. "I'm surprised you're that shocked. Haven't you ever been in a threesome before?"

"Yes." It wasn't shock-horror, just shock-surprise, whatever Vaughan might think. "When I was young and foolish, and never had to worry about whether I could get it up a second time in one evening. Besides, actually doing it in front of Harry that time counts as a threesome, as far as I'm concerned."

"Would you like to? Properly, I mean."

Properly? "I'm quite happy with you, Vaughan." He looked at him. "Are you really interested in a three-in-a-bed romp?"

Vaughan looked embarrassed. This worried Allard. Considering the sorts of things Vaughan *hadn't* been embarrassed about in the past, what on earth was he about to come up with now?

"Well," said Vaughan, "not so much three-in-a-bed; more of a watching thing."

"Watching?" said Allard, not quite sure where this was leading. "Like with Harry?"

"Not *quite* like with Harry. I find the idea of watching you being fucked by a stranger quite erotic. Definitely that way 'round -- I think it might bother me if it wasn't."

Allard stared at him for several seconds. Then he remembered to close his mouth.

Opening it again, he said, "Vaughan, I have been listening to your nervous maunderings about am-I-going-to-leave for months, and now you want to throw me into some stranger's bed?"

"Or up the wall," muttered Vaughan, blushing. "I think that sounds quite interesting."

“If this is some quid pro quo where *you* end up taking your turn with the stranger, *no*,” said Allard firmly. “I do not want to watch you with anyone, on top or underneath or any other combination.”

“No,” said Vaughan, “I know you’re a possessive little bastard.”

“Then why? It doesn’t make sense.”

Vaughan shrugged. “Illicit thrill?”

He thought about it for a while. Vaughan was, perhaps, insecure in a different way. Vaughan had a distinct preference for being demonstrably the best his partner had ever had, in those little dramas he liked to play out. Maybe, if he was sure his partner would go home with him at the end of the evening, it might be a way of playing with an idea he found uncomfortable. Looked at that way, it made perfect sense.

Allard looked at their prospective partner, who was standing by the bar sipping a drink. He didn’t seem unattractive. Reasonably tall and well-built, which he liked anyway, but with straight blond hair, so there would be no mistaking him for Vaughan. His voice was rich and mellow, and Allard was a sucker for nice voices. He’d spent quite a lot of time listening to Vaughan’s political nonsense while tuning out the actual words. This man was quite an appealing prospect as a one-night stand.

More to the point, neither of them would ever have to see him again.

“All right,” he told Vaughan.

Vaughan stood up, and beckoned the man over.

The stranger came over carrying two glasses, and set one in front of Vaughan. “I hope that suits you,” he said. “You looked as if you would appreciate another one.”

Vaughan sipped. “Very nice, thanks.” He looked at Allard, and said, “Do you want something?”

Allard wasn’t very far down his own glass of beer. “Not really,” he said.

There was a slightly nervous pause, and the stranger looked at Vaughan.

“I think we’ve decided,” Vaughan said. “Would it be sensible to set a few guidelines here? To be blunt, you fuck him, not the other way ‘round, and I watch.”

The man didn’t seem in the least bit startled. “Oh, you’re into HMW?”

“What?” Vaughan asked.

“Husband Must Watch.” The stranger openly appraised Allard. “Suits me. He’s a pretty little thing, and I don’t mind an audience.”

Allard was not quite as slow on the uptake as he had been before joining the *Mary Sue*. “Excuse me, but you’re talking to both of us, not just him.”

“Oh, sorry. I thought ...”

Allard sighed. “Lots of people wear leather just because it’s warm and hard-wearing, you know. And he was the one giving the terms because it was his idea.”

“Ah. You wouldn’t be interested in playing, then?”

Oddly enough, the thought was slightly intriguing. No *more* than slightly. Allard’s tastes in BDSM were virgin fantasies, both as virgin and as seducer, and catering to Vaughan’s occasional whims because he liked pleasing Vaughan. Playing with strangers could be dangerous. “Fucking, yes. Playing, thanks for the offer, but no. It doesn’t do a lot for me.”

He caught a very slight, private smile from Vaughan. He was pleased that Vaughan took that as the gift it was.

“If you don’t like it, no problem,” said their new playmate agreeably enough. “It’s always useful to get these things sorted out before the clothes come off, isn’t it?”

“Quite,” said Allard, relaxing a bit. The stranger obviously seemed to mean that. “When and where?” Allard asked, thinking he was a bit out of practice at negotiating.

“My place is quite close,” said the stranger. “You might as well finish your drinks. You two look as if you need to relax a bit. What have you been doing?”

“A transport and install job,” said Vaughan. “Basically, hard work and heavy lifting. You’re quite right that we need to relax.”

“Oh, you don’t just haul cargo, then?”

“Actually, hauling cargo is a sideline,” said Allard. “We sell our expertise, and sometimes we fetch things to use our expertise *on*.” *Viable computers, junk computers, wine collections, antique flintlocks, coffee machines -- anything weird that one of us knows something about.*

“So you’re consultants?”

“You *could* say that,” Vaughan said. “Actually, we’re from a syndicate ship.”

Allard watched for the blank look -- yes, there it went. Vaughan drew blank looks more often than not when he mentioned his hobbyhorse, but it never discouraged him.

As Allard had expected, Vaughan hastened to fill in the blanks. “Syndicalism is a form of shared ownership by the workforce.”

“Ah,” said the stranger. “I think I *have* heard of that. So you’re syndicalists.” To Allard’s disgust, the man looked interested.

“No. *He’s* a syndicalist,” Allard said. “I’m just along for the ride.”

Vaughan said, “A very good ride you are, too.”

“So you’re his...ah,” said the stranger to Allard.

“Maybe I should just have a card printed,” said Allard disgustedly. “Everyone jumps to that conclusion. No, this just happens to be a syndicate that was willing to accept an outside consultant.”

“Especially as his attitude to management is even more malevolent than that of most syndicalists,” Vaughan put in. “But he is a bloody good ride. *Off-duty*,” he added carefully.

“So what do you actually do on the ship,” the stranger asked Allard, “if you’re not part of their system?”

"I do my job," Allard said, slightly surprised that it needed saying. "They needed a good computer man more than they needed more political verbiage, which they can create at will, anyway."

He watched Vaughan decide not to rise to the bait.

"Oh," said the stranger, as if enlightened. "You're a techie. That explains the leather and attitude."

Good. This man knows the signs, thought Allard.

"Can you actually tell me more about syndicalism?" the stranger asked. "How does it work if you don't believe in management?"

Allard hastily disconnected his brain from his ears and listened to the sweet flow of Vaughan's voice. It was even better now -- two warm, mellow voices in counterpoint, and he had no need at all to pay attention to what Vaughan was saying. After all, he'd heard the speech once, months ago, and he had no need to listen to what would certainly be more of the same.

Eventually, he heard his name, and switched mode hurriedly.

"Thought that would get your attention," Vaughan said. "Thirty minutes of syndicalist theory don't leave a mark on his brain," he told the stranger, "but as soon as we get onto 'let's go and fuck Allard through the bed', he's with us again."

Allard thought for a moment. Would it be more embarrassing to admit all he'd heard was his name, or more embarrassing *not* to admit it? Then he said, "I didn't actually notice the word 'fuck'. That's part of your normal description of what to do to corporate management and why you're a syndicalist. I *did* notice my name."

"Well, shall we go and fuck you through the bed?" Vaughan asked politely.

"Are you going to take it in turns, then?"

"Sounds like an excellent idea," said the stranger.

"I will very politely let our new friend go first," said Vaughan.

"You're very civilised about sex," said the stranger, glancing at both of them.

Allard was startled. It was the first time in a long time anyone had called him 'civilised' about *anything*. He must be slipping. Vaughan certainly didn't apply that term to his sex drive -- 'greedy little bastard' came first. Usually literally.

Civilised sex also included letting your shipmates know you were going to be later than expected.

"We'd better call the ship," he said. "It would be embarrassing to have a search party come looking for us." He glanced at Vaughan. "Especially if it was Harry, who would certainly *come* while looking for us."

Vaughan explained. "Harry is one of our shipmates, and a voyeur. Need I say more?"

The stranger laughed and said, "Better call, then. Unless you fancy anyone else dropping in."

Allard got out his phone and called the ship. He was grateful when Claire answered. The 'nudge nudge wink wink' would be slightly less tasteless.

"Vaughan and I have found something else to do," he said. "We'll be back late. By the way, did Karen let you know she will be back late, as well?"

"Yes, I gathered that somebody offered to show her his weapons collection," Claire said. "With anyone else, I'd assume it was a version of 'come up and see my etchings', but with Karen, they probably will spend some time drooling over his weapon collection before she drools over his weapon."

Only slightly less tasteless, Allard thought. "You've got a filthy mind, Claire."

"It gets a lot of practice on this ship," said Claire. "By the way, would you like to give me the address you and Vaughan are going to, to screw in private, in case I need to find you in a hurry? I promise I won't tell Harry."

He sighed, and asked, "Where are we going?" and repeated the address to Claire. At least, if they *had* misjudged this person, other people knew where they now were.

“Oh?” said Claire, “That wasn’t Vaughan. Picked up a friend, have you? I’m surprised at you, Allard!”

“Why does *everyone* have the mistaken impression I am: a) Vaughan’s tart, and b) too innocent to notice that someone’s trying to pick me up?” asked Allard, a little sensitive on this point.

“Because you are, dear,” Claire said. “You didn’t even notice the first few times one of us tried to make you feel welcome, you were rude to Karen when she decided being blunt might get your attention, then you went to bed with Vaughan and haven’t fucked anyone else since. At least, not that we’ve noticed. Unless you’re counting Harry.”

Well, yes, he did count Harry, that one time at least, but he could see why others might not. Or had Harry still not confessed to the women about that?

“I take it Vaughan is with you,” Claire added.

“Yes, Claire. My lord and master is with me, and suggested this particular little diversion. Maybe Harry is contagious.” At least Claire cared enough to check that he wasn’t getting into trouble.

“No, I don’t want to watch,” said Claire. “I’ll settle for hearing all about it afterwards. Let me know when you get back.”

Actually, he’d been thinking about Vaughan wanting to watch, but it was a happy accident that Claire had misread that. He didn’t really want her to know that much detail.

“Have fun,” said Claire, and closed the call.

“I really don’t like you using those terms, even as a joke,” said Vaughan. “I am -- sometimes under protest -- captain of the ship as a legal requirement. I am *not* your lord and master.”

“No, dear,” said Allard politely. He kept his face straight for about three seconds before smirking.

“Annoying little sod,” said Vaughan.

“Yes, dear,” said Allard, rather more sincerely.

“There’s one way I’m happy to force you to shut up, and I’m not doing it in public. Come on,” said Vaughan, and led the way.

“I think I’ll go back to my first opinion on you two,” said the stranger.

“As long as you remember,” said Allard, “*he’s* the sub!”

“Some of the time, at least,” said Vaughan.

The sun had set while they’d been in the pub, and it was cold outside now, not just cool. Allard shivered, wishing he’d brought a coat. His leather jacket was thick enough, but it didn’t keep his legs warm. “How far are we going?”

“Just around the corner. I go to that pub because it’s my local, not because it’s a pick-up joint.”

“Oh.”

The man looked at him. “Didn’t you realise?”

Vaughan said, “It was the first one we saw that we liked the look of. All we were looking for was a drink.”

Quick grin in response from their host. “And you got more than you bargained for. Ah, well.” He looked more closely at Allard, and then draped an arm around him. “Don’t worry; I’ve got good central heating.”

Allard was surprised at how odd it felt to have someone he didn’t know put an arm around him. The *Mary Sue’s* crew were all fairly tactile people; he was used to being touched, hugged. But this was different. This was the first time in months he’d known it was the prelude to sex with someone new. He enjoyed the warmth, even though it wasn’t his shoulders that needed it. Then they were standing in front of the street door to a block of flats.

Not particularly salubrious flats, it had to be said. Somebody owned a tomcat, and nobody owned a deodorant.

"I apologise for the scenery," said their new friend, leading them inside and up a staircase that Allard was pleased to note had not been used as a urinal, human or feline. "It's really not too bad inside, it's just that I moved here to be near work and I've never bothered with the externals."

Allard could sympathise with that. He relaxed slightly as the stranger opened the door to reveal a small but nicely decorated flat. One wall was filled with bookcases holding a selection of paper books, recordings, and storage devices for at least three different sorts of computer. Enough of a geek to make Allard feel at home.

He wandered over to inspect the bookcase, and decided he liked this man's taste.

"You're not visiting a library, Allard," said Vaughan. "We're here for something else."

Allard sighed. "Where's the bedroom, then?"

"I apologise for my companion's manners," said Vaughan to the stranger.

"Excuse me!" said Allard indignantly. "You pointed out that our friend here might want to get down to it rather than discussing literature; therefore, I'm trying to be thoughtful."

"Is he always like this when he wants a shag?" asked the stranger.

"He's quite right," said Vaughan. "He *is* being polite."

Allard smiled at him, very slightly.

Vaughan went on. "His boundaries for what's polite and what's rude are just set slightly differently to most people's. From his point of view, you invited him back because you want sex -- therefore, it's rude of him to be looking at your bookshelves; therefore, it would be politer to go to bed."

"Yes," said the stranger thoughtfully, "I see that. Incidentally, thank you for reminding me there's a reason I don't normally shag hard-core techies. Mainly because I'd need an emotional phrasebook."

"Now we've got that sorted out," said Allard, "do we shag?"

"Stop pouting, Allard," said Vaughan.

“Why?” asked the stranger interestedly. “I mean, it makes him even more attractive. Seriously. I do quite fancy a shag, with him standing there offering it on a plate, and pouting.”

“Well, where *are* we going to do it, then?” demanded Allard crossly. “On the bed, on the floor, or on a plate? I’m too old to do it anywhere but in bed.”

Without answering, the stranger went to the bookshelf and picked up a book. “Well, if you want it on a *plate*,” he suggested, opening the book to the middle with a flourish.

Allard looked at the title. *Rude Food*. He looked at the centrefold. It was an arrangement of meat and vegetables that looked...like meat-and-two-veg. The sausage especially was very phallic.

“No. Nobody is going to eat mine, except metaphorically.”

The stranger looked at Vaughan.

“He has a tendency to use multisyllabic words until you shag him hard enough,” explained Vaughan.

“Right, then, we’d better get on with it,” said the stranger. “This way.”

He led the way into a bedroom with a nice, big bed. The bed had lots of pillows on it. Obviously, the man had sorted out the basics -- the bed would have been big enough to entertain both him *and* Vaughan, if they’d agreed to it. There were also some comfortable chairs, suggesting that this was not the first time the man had entertained friends as well as shags.

“This is very nice,” said Allard. “And by the way, have you had your shots?”

The man picked up an oldish but still usable medi-reader from the bedside table, and ceremonially brushed his thumb across it. There was a quiet beep and a green light, and he passed the medi-reader to Allard.

Allard, then Vaughan, submitted themselves to the brief medical check, which was unsurprisingly clean -- they did normally keep up with shots against contagious diseases.

“Good,” said the stranger. “I do like to know that my acquaintances aren’t right out of the gutter.”

“So,” said Allard, “do we.”

“I like that, as well,” said the stranger. “Good, clean fun is fine, but it’s best to keep it that way on all sides.”

“As our friend Harry would say,” Vaughan added with a grin, “it’s best to have fun without your bits turning green and dropping off later.”

“Harry?” asked the stranger. “Oh, the voyeur one. Voyeurism is taking safe sex a bit far, I think. At least if voyeurism is *all* you do. Quite a turn of phrase, has he?”

“You could say that,” said Vaughan. “Now, I suppose we’d better adjourn to the bed, since Allard is obviously gagging for it by now.”

“I am not! I was showing a polite interest, as you said.”

“Good,” said Vaughan.

“What do you mean, ‘good’?” said the stranger.

“If he’s *really* desperate,” said Vaughan confidently, “he tends to catch me with his elbows and swear at me. It can only be a good thing if we start slowly and work our way up.”

“Excuse me,” said Allard coldly, “there are about to be three of us in this...arrangement, although I am beginning to feel less and less interested the more I listen to you carrying on.”

Vaughan looked more serious and came over to him. “All right,” he said, “I *do* know when to stop, you know.” He kissed Allard gently. Allard found that rather more embarrassing than the teasing, but appreciated the kindness. This wasn’t a combination of feelings he was unused to with Vaughan.

“That looks like fun,” said the stranger, and came up to them rather cautiously.

Vaughan stepped out of the way, and the stranger put his hands on Allard's shoulders and kissed him very carefully. Not with the tender affection that Vaughan did, of course; more as if he had the manners to be reasonably cautious in a new situation.

Allard found the experience rather disconcerting. He hadn't been kissed sexually by anybody other than Vaughan in quite a long time. The other crew members had kissed him, of course, as a member of the 'family'. Well, sort of... He'd been quite aware that several of them would have made a play for him if he hadn't been with Vaughan; but he'd been with Vaughan, and the others had been aware of that. Rather like being an attractive, distant, *married* cousin, he supposed. They'd considered him unavailable.

He'd got used to being aware that people found him attractive when he didn't have to do anything about it. It was disconcerting to realise that he'd somehow slipped into a situation where he *did*...

Not that this chap was a bad kisser; it was just strange to be in this position with anyone other than Vaughan. The man was a little taller than Vaughan; Allard had obviously become used to the exact stretch he needed to do to reach Vaughan's mouth, because this was slightly different. As he reached out to embrace their new friend, Allard realised that the other man was also slightly thinner than Vaughan. Every slight difference felt intensely strange -- not 'wrong', but unexpected, as his every muscle had to adjust to this being a different person.

He tasted of mint, slightly. Vaughan just tasted of...Vaughan. Maybe this man used a different toothpaste -- or maybe he'd become so accustomed to Vaughan, he no longer noticed what Vaughan used, any more than he noticed what *he* used. Frightening thought; how quickly had Vaughan become the unnoticed background-colour of his life?

The stranger reached for the buttons on Allard's shirt, and broke the kiss to say, "Shall we undress?"

Allard glanced at Vaughan. Oh, dear. Vaughan was clearly not comfortable with this, and equally clearly Not Going To Say Anything About It.

“All right,” said Allard, still watching Vaughan.

Vaughan’s expression lightened a bit. He evidently found it easier to cope when Allard was concerned about him.

‘Shall we undress’ evidently meant, ‘Shall *I* undress *you*?’ After a quick assessing glance to discover if this was all right with Vaughan, Allard relaxed a bit, and let the stranger uncover him inch-by-inch.

He even put up with Vaughan giving the stranger occasional helpful hints along the lines of ‘there’s a button there’, ‘that clips on the left’, and ‘you won’t believe this, but there are three other layers under that’.

After a few minutes to establish that the stranger was allowed to take the lead, Allard reached out and began to unbutton his shirt. Plenty of buttons to undo slowly and teasingly; not often the case with Vaughan, unless he’d dressed-up for a night out or had been wearing A Suit for a business meeting. This gentleman had a natural, relaxed, slightly formal style. He rather liked that, for a change.

About three buttons down, he discovered a thatch of thick blond hair on their new friend’s chest. Considering Vaughan was naturally smooth, warm, and hairless, this felt, for a second, about as surprising as finding breasts on his partner. Not that he had any objection to either breasts or chest hair (although not on the same person); it was just unexpected after getting so used to Vaughan.

He twiddled about at it with his fingers.

“Ouch,” said their new friend. “Tug, don’t pull.”

Allard adjusted his actions for more exact tolerances, and continued.

After a while, it occurred to him that he was still overdressed for the occasion. He stopped playing with the stranger's exotic pelt for long enough to push his own unbuttoned shirt off.

"Very nice," said the stranger, looking at him appreciatively. *No, that's not how it works*, thought Allard for a moment. *I was looking at you. You can look at me next*. He realised that was a rather stupid way to think about it. They both looked at each other.

"Can I see if the lower half is as tempting as the top half?" asked the stranger.

"Tight trousers he wears," muttered Vaughan, "everyone already knows."

Being near enough to the bed, Allard threw a pillow at Vaughan's head.

"That's not in the scenario," said Vaughan mildly.

"It's Husband Must Watch," said Allard. "Nowhere in that does it say Husband-Does-Not-Get-A-Pillow-Chucked-At-His-Thick-Head-If-He-Makes-Stupid-Comments." He paused. "If we wanted a running commentary, we could have asked Harry. And the girls."

"How do you *ever* get any work done on your ship?" marvelled the stranger.

"Once I've screwed Allard hard enough, I get 'round to the work," said Vaughan.

"Shut up, Vaughan," said Allard.

"No. He's just come up with an excellent idea," said the stranger, and began to unfasten Allard's trousers. Well, *try* to unfasten them, at any rate.

"It's that weird twiddly bit that looks like a decoration," said Vaughan helpfully. "You just sort of click it to one side."

Armed with this knowledge, the stranger was more successful. "You know," he said to Allard, "you *weren't* promising any more than you could deliver. I approve of truth in advertising." He evidently did. He started rubbing Allard's cock up and down in an is-it-really-this-big sort of way. Allard liked that. He hoped he was looking smugly virile, but it was probably just the usual stupid grin he got if he was enjoying himself too much to keep an eye on his expression.

“I see you can handle him,” said Vaughan. “He likes it if you rub it through his knickers for quite a while until he’s desperate, and dripping. Then he likes it if...”

Allard cut through the stream of nonsense effortlessly. “If this is merely going to be a re-run of exactly what *you* do to me, why the middleman?”

“I have no intention of following a script,” said the stranger, “but it’s useful to know what a person really likes and really hates.”

“Allard has horribly ticklish armpits,” said Vaughan. “He hates it when you do...this!” Vaughan made a dive for Allard.

In escaping him, Allard fell backwards on the bed.

“Very helpful, thanks,” said the stranger, grabbing Allard’s shoes and pulling them off before pulling his trousers (and the loosened underwear) all the way off.

Allard was now stark naked and sprawled on the bed, wondering exactly when he’d become the star in some low-budget porn flick, and wondering how this stranger managed to get the choreography so neatly right on the spur of the moment.

Then the stranger fell on him, kissing and groping, and he forgot to think about that. His mouth opened, and his thighs opened, and all he had was a simple response to good, rough, uncomplicated sex. This man had not a clue what he liked, but was going to do his damndest to give it to him anyway. He hadn’t expected that to excite him, but it did. Here he was, in front of Vaughan, performing yet another of Vaughan’s peculiar fantasies, and enjoying the moment of exhibitionism.

His eyes were closed, and he could see a very clear image of Vaughan, blushing and breathless with arousal at him, admiring his thighs opening and the stranger’s fingers disappearing inside him. Vaughan always liked him unambiguously eager.

He was ready, and the stranger’s cock poised against him and started to slide in. Vaughan must be watching the stranger’s cock disappearing into him, into that part of him

that *Vaughan's* cock knew intimately and carnally. He could almost feel Vaughan's gaze. It inspired him.

He panted. He moaned. He came out with streams of dirty, noisy nonsense about do-it-hard and fuck-me-now and need-that-cock. Far more than he'd have bothered with normally, but then Vaughan *knew* what he liked; and at least half this wanton display was aimed at Vaughan anyway, because if Vaughan wanted a bit of a slut, he was going to get one. It seemed odd, role-playing a slut instead of a virgin, but it was just as true and just as false.

As the stranger started ploughing him in earnest, he hadn't the breath for that particular game, but the vision of Vaughan's eyes watching him didn't leave him.

Down to the short strokes, for both him and the stranger. He wanted to come. He wanted to open his eyes. He wanted *Vaughan* to see him come.

So he opened his eyes.

Vaughan was watching him. Vaughan was aroused, very aroused, but he wasn't happy.

Allard felt trapped, literally and figuratively, beneath the stranger's weight. He knew he couldn't actually stop and run to Vaughan to comfort him, but he was in agonies of social embarrassment at misjudging the situation.

And he was, at last, *quite* sure that if he could run off (on his own or with someone else), he wouldn't, because he was with Vaughan now.

What a time to discover one was seriously faithful.

Well, it didn't look as if Vaughan was finding the realisation comfortable, either.

Damn. He was gritting his teeth and trying to think of circuit diagrams to stop his body doing what it was trying to do, but that wouldn't work forever.

Suddenly, Vaughan stumbled forward to the bed and held his hand out.

Allard reached out.

Tightly enlaced, fingers between fingers in that warm, familiar grasp, Allard fell helplessly into his orgasm, forgiven and accepted and *known*. There was a cock in him, a weight on him, but he could feel Vaughan's grip, and he could hear Vaughan murmur, softly, "Allard," and that was all that mattered.

Worth knowing, his mind burbled to itself. *If we ever go to a very strait-laced planet or run out of lubricant, we can apparently have sex by holding hands.*

The stranger grinned tiredly down at him. "That was amazing!" he said.

Good. He came as well, then.

"Move over," said Vaughan. Not to Allard, to...

"Oh, my god," said Allard, in a quiet awed whisper to Vaughan. "I have been faithful to you for almost a year, celibate for months before that, and now I've just been fucked by someone without even knowing his name."

"Tawson," said the stranger helpfully. "Paul Tawson." He moved aside as requested.

Vaughan said, quietly, "Do you know what you look like, Allard? Absolutely debauched."

"Good. Get on with it," said Allard.

"No foreplay?" Vaughan asked.

"I'm not going to come this time, but I'm quite prepared to feel very good. Afterglow shading into sex, with plenty of cuddling," Allard explained. "Also, if you don't get on with it, I'll just doze."

Vaughan took him, at his word.

Allard enjoyed it, as he'd expected, without coming. He was stretched, so it didn't hurt. All he had to do was cuddle Vaughan, which he loved; and the three or four quick, hard strokes Vaughan managed were quite good enough.

Vaughan must have been *very* turned-on, even if he hadn't quite liked the experience, Allard thought sleepily, as all three of them piled together on the big bed and went to sleep.

* * * * *

When he woke up again, it was dark.

He was used to Vaughan being insatiable, but Vaughan usually managed that without having four hands.

No, this *wasn't* a dream. He was in bed with Vaughan and -- somebody else. What a ridiculous idea. It must have been Vaughan's.

He'd probably slept through at least some of a delightful cuddle, and Vaughan was beginning to get more purposeful. Not that he minded, of course. Vaughan knew just how he liked to be worked up to it slowly, and Tawson's cock was rubbing suggestively against his buttocks.

"Can I --?" murmured Tawson.

Oh. The poor devil had obviously figured out he was the gooseberry, or three's-a-crowd, in this bed.

"Vaughan?" asked Allard.

"Mm?" said Vaughan, eyes still shut, rocking happily against Allard.

"Tawson wants to know if he's included in this particular dance or should sit it out," said Allard.

Vaughan opened his eyes. "Sorry, Tawson. I expect you've figured out that we're not exactly experienced at this."

"That's all right. I just like to know where I stand." Tawson sounded as if he meant that. Allard was in a position to know that Tawson's cock certainly knew where it stood.

"I don't mind your fucking him if I can kiss him," said Vaughan. "Probably doesn't make sense, but ..."

"Aha," said Tawson cheerfully, "I'm the dildo."

Allard began to wriggle against him, making sure Tawson's cock knew it was welcome.

There was something pleasantly effortless about this sort of sex. They hardly needed to move much from their entwined sleeping position, Allard was stretched and lubricated, and all they had to do was...

Tawson slid in.

...start.

Vaughan started to kiss him, and wriggle suggestively.

It was a much more friendly, relaxed fuck than earlier, but that didn't mean it was unexciting. Pressure inside him at the same time as he had frottage -- or was that sodomy, with a side-order of frottage? Very illicit, and he'd got a wonderfully kinky dildo who didn't seem to mind at *all* being treated as a mere sex object (well, Tawson was good at that), and there was nothing to do but wallow in his own greed without feeling guilty. Like having a huge box of chocolates without having to share them with Vaughan. Or like having a huge box of chocolates while Vaughan watched him...lick them, and taste them, and nibble them. Vaughan was nibbling *him* now, on the nipple. He seemed to be making an embarrassing noise. No wonder.

Tawson kept working away inside him while Vaughan worked away *outside* him, moving up to kiss him now. The combination was delicious. Like the box of chocolates. Or was *he* the box of chocolates, being offered 'round? Nipple-flavoured chocolates...the trouble with free-association was that you couldn't turn it *off*.

Couldn't turn *him* off, either. Or Vaughan, or Tawson. This was wonderful. It was never going to happen again, so he intended to enjoy it to the utmost while it lasted.

He liked being in bed with tall men who could cover him all over. Every stroke behind worked him against Vaughan's ready cock in front, every probing stroke of Vaughan's kissing tongue seemed to push him back firmly onto Tawson's cock. It seemed to go on for hours. Inside-outside, fucking-rubbing, holding-kissing. All at once, nothing left out. It had always just been a brace of cocks before, however plump and fine. This time, another had been

provided for him. One inside, one outside, and his own caught breathlessly in the middle, like his own body caught between these two men.

It was rather as if Vaughan had somehow cloned himself and was taking care of him from both sides at once. A Vaughan sandwich, with a warm, damp, panting layer of Allard in the middle, quietly melting. He quashed that thought. He was fairly sure one wasn't supposed to think of toasted sandwiches while having sex.

What one thought of was how nice it felt having a cock up him and another pressing against him, all heat and weight and...

He *was* going to melt. Not at all quietly.

He pulled out of the kiss long enough to have a good, hard, noisy come, and then peacefully lay there while his dancing-partners arranged him for the end of the figure.

"You first, Tawson," said Vaughan, moving back a bit, and Tawson obediently came, cock wet and shuddering inside Allard.

Vaughan moved forward, making sure he was rubbing against Allard's belly, not his cock, while Allard murmured sweet inflaming nothings about how Vaughan was the *best*, the very *best*, even now he'd some basis for comparison, he *knew* Vaughan was the best...and Vaughan groaned, pressed against him, and came.

"Shall we go to sleep now?" mumbled Vaughan.

"Mm," said Allard sleepily.

"You do realise it's only about nine o'clock?" said Tawson. "It looks later because it's winter, but I don't think any of us have had dinner yet."

Allard's stomach made itself heard in answer to that.

He ignored it.

Vaughan said, "We'd better get some food. Otherwise, Allard's stomach is going to keep me awake all night."

I should hit him with the pillow again. I really should, thought Allard.

"I'm hungry, too," said Tawson. "I'll go and throw enough for three people into the microwave."

"Pizza!" suggested Vaughan.

"If you're going to indulge in pizza while we're on-planet," said Allard, "we're going to order it from a decent food place that makes them fresh."

"No," said Tawson firmly. "Getting one made and sent over would take too long, and I have a casserole in the freezer. Made fresh last weekend, so it's real casserole that didn't come in a little square packet."

Allard said, "I suppose that's a passable use for a microwave, heating up real food."

"Sounds nice," agreed Vaughan, "and I can quite see you might want to get your inconvenient techie sex-partners out of the way and put your feet up."

"Casserole it is, then," said Tawson, crawling out of the bed. "The shower's over there. I'll just clean up and then go and put dinner on."

When Tawson had had his shower, he put on a dressing gown and got going. Allard and Vaughan spent a few minutes cuddling and listening to kitchen noises.

"This is nice," said Vaughan.

"It's a normal human reaction to like to listen to someone else doing the work," said Allard, feeling the words twist slightly on the way out. They were meant to be a garden-variety cynical remark, not a double-entendre. He hadn't even been sure Vaughan would like to refer to it now it was over. "That...didn't come out the way it was intended. I'm sorry."

Vaughan held him close. "I don't regret it. I don't want to do it again, ever -- well, it's an idea, but we might not be as lucky with picking a reasonably civilised chap next time, so we probably won't. But even though it made me feel uncomfortable, it was a *hell* of a turn-on, and it did reassure me, in the end."

"That I am with you because I choose to be with you?"

Vaughan kissed him gently on the lips. “Yes. That even if you screw about with someone else, you’ll come home to me.”

“That was a bit of a shock to me, as well,” said Allard. “I knew I had no intention of leaving you, but there’s a difference between knowing something as a theoretical proposition and getting a practical example.”

At this point, Tawson cleared his throat.

The kitchen noises had stopped, and the throat-clearing was in the room with them.

“Yes?” said Allard, making the best of it.

“I’m glad you enjoyed it,” said Tawson.

Allard looked at Vaughan, and shared a momentary shrug. ‘Enjoyed it’ sounded like a rather inexact description, even though they *had* enjoyed quite a lot of it.

“I hope you enjoyed it, too,” said Allard belatedly, wrenching his attention away from Vaughan to glance at Tawson.

“Well, I thought I was in for a night of cheap sex, but it ended up more like marriage guidance counseling,” said Tawson.

Allard tried not to look guilty.

Vaughan probably tried *to* look guilty.

“Don’t worry,” said Tawson. “It leaves less of a bitter aftertaste than cheap sex, I should think, and it’s something different.” He grinned at them. “Do I get to be best man?”

Vaughan looked at Allard. Very carefully, he said, “We haven’t discussed that option yet.”

“Oops, put my foot in it again. Casserole’s nearly ready, anyway.”

“I suppose we’d better get up and get washed and dressed,” said Vaughan.

“The shower’s big enough for both of you to get in together,” said Tawson.

It was. Five minutes later, they were sitting in the kitchen while an extremely savoury-smelling casserole was dished up.

While they ate, Tawson asked Vaughan questions about syndicalism. “It’s a very interesting arrangement, and it seems to work for you two.”

Allard raised his eyes to the heavens. “It is *not* a group marriage,” he said firmly, and switched off his attention for the n th time since he had met Vaughan.

Then he thought of some of the middle-management types he’d had the misfortune to find in a few of the companies he worked for. Actually, syndicalism didn’t seem so...

Shuddering, he muzzled that thought. Obviously, too much exposure to sex, or Vaughan, was softening his brain.

As soon as they got back, he needed to have a conversation about algorithms with Mark.

Tailpiece

by Jules Jones and Alex Woolgrave

It was an unofficial tradition on the *Mary Sue* to spend the hour or so before dinner having a more-or-less serious conversation about anything that needed talking about *except* work.

Especially the day after they'd finished a strenuous job. Allard was glad of that. He was actually quite tired even today.

"Well, Allard?" Harry piped up. "Have you decided yet?"

Decided? What decision?

"Well, it's a year and a day since you joined us provisionally," said Vaughan. "We were rather hoping you'd come to a decision."

Oh. That decision.

"In some cultures," said Claire, "that's a form of legal marriage. It's reasonable of us to consider the question of whether you're going to join us properly."

The rest of the crew nodded, and looked at him.

“It isn’t a deadline,” added Karen gently, “but we do think you ought to give the idea serious consideration. You don’t have to sign up for the whole belief system, but we all do feel you’re part of the ‘family’ by now, and we’d like to think it goes both ways.”

He’d made a remark, down-planet, that it wasn’t a group marriage. It was unnerving to feel that, in some senses, this *was* more like a marriage contract than an employment contract. Not sexually, of course -- he was rather grateful not to be handed ‘round after meals to all willing participants. There were, however, shared *emotional* responsibilities he’d been completely unaware of when he’d blithely joined this group of lunatics under the impression it was (more or less) an ordinary job.

“I’m going to have to think about this,” he said. “It’s a serious commitment.”

Unlike the last few people he’d worked for, they took that at face value and accepted it.

“You really don’t have to take the lot onboard,” said Claire. “I was just about as sceptical as you when I joined this bunch, but there were pragmatic reasons to join in.”

You’re not reassuring me, Claire. That just implies that the syndicalism virus is irresistibly contagious.

“What pragmatic reasons?” he asked.

“Well, for one thing,” she said, taking a sip of her coffee, “there’s a certain barrier between you and everyone else until you have a share in the same ship. They’re not nasty; they just don’t behave as if you’re necessarily going to be there in a few weeks’ or months’ time.”

Allard thought about that. Yes, they all drank and chatted and worked with him in a perfectly friendly manner, but he *had* noticed them shutting up when they were discussing the yearly Ship’s Party and he came up to them. He’d just assumed that he was visibly not the Life and Soul, etc; he never had been at any of the other places. It *could* just have been that they saw no point in talking about a party he might very well not still be there for.

“Even if you don’t ever believe in the political system,” said Claire, “it’s still a much better way of working -- and a convenient way of arranging the legal paperwork.”

“The *normal* way of working involves getting a boss in to mess things up, far as I can see,” said Harry. “We just leave out that stage and get on with the work.” He moved his feet into a more comfortable position on the desk.

Allard looked at Vaughan. Vaughan didn’t say anything for a minute, and then said, “Do you remember the last place you worked at?”

“Unfortunately, yes,” said Allard.

“I remember it, too. I helped you clear your desk out. I didn’t like it, either. Do you want to go back to that sort of system?”

Allard didn’t say anything. His silence was probably as clear as an outright confession.

Vaughan said, “Remember, I worked in a corporate environment for years. When I tried this, I could not imagine how I’d stood it for so long. I wouldn’t have gone back even if the *Mary Sue* went bust and I had to hitch a lift on my next ship.”

Allard said, very quietly, “I still need to think about it.”

“We didn’t mean to push you,” said Karen.

“You didn’t. I’m just not sure if I’m capable of that level of commitment.” He looked ‘round at them. “That’s not a reflection on you as much as it is on me.”

“Oh, I’ve read about this,” piped up Mark. “There are all sorts of books about men who’re like that.”

What, *Men are from Earth, Their Colleagues are from Alpha Centauri*? Allard wondered. No, even the vast flood of self-help books he’d seen weren’t *that* specific.

“It’s all right for you,” he muttered to Mark. “You *wanted* to join all this.”

Apparently, Mark had finally learnt something about tact. He kept quiet.

"It doesn't matter if you think about it and decide 'no'," said Karen, "but you must think about it and make a decision. You can't drift indefinitely."

You didn't see my last six jobs, Allard thought. 'Drifting indefinitely' would have been quite a good description.

"What are we having for dinner tonight, then?" asked Harry.

Very smooth change of topic, Harry, Allard thought. Actually, he enjoyed eating dinner with the rest of them most of the time. In his last job, he'd taken active steps to avoid going to lunch with other people. It was partly a function of being on a spaceship where people *did* do things together, but if he'd really wanted to avoid people, he could have.

"Pizza," suggested Allard, and grinned.

"Not again," said Claire. "You don't have to live down to the stereotype by having pizza for every meal."

"Not every meal," said Vaughan. "He gets very upset at the idea of cold leftover pizza for breakfast."

"What *does* he like then?" leered Harry. "Sausage?"

"I'm not answering that on the grounds that if I incriminate myself, Allard will throw something at my head," said Vaughan.

"Just like normal meal-times, then," murmured Claire.

"Oysters?" suggested Allard hopefully. "I don't think we've ever had those for dinner on-ship."

"They don't freeze well," said Claire, "and you can't say you need them from what Harry tells us about your sex life!"

"What is that?" asked Mark curiously.

"My sex life is not a spectator sport," said Allard with dignity.

"Why, whatever gave you that idea?" asked Claire.

The conversation degenerated into the usual amiable argument. Listening with half-an-ear to the flying banter (“How can anyone want butterscotch Instant Whip on Weetabix for pudding?”), Allard decided that, for some (possibly masochistic) reason, he was actually enjoying himself. He liked these people. If he wanted to stay with them, he was going to have to give some serious thought to this.

But no power on earth was going to make him eat Instant Whip on Weetabix.

* * * * *

He opened his door to Vaughan, slightly mistrustfully, an hour or so after dinner. “You haven’t turned up to add to the previous conversation?”

“What, about uses for Instant Whip?”

He hit Vaughan with the pillow. “The other conversation, about your pet subject.”

“No,” said Vaughan innocently. “Interesting as it was, thought you’d rather fuck.”

“Ah. You’re trying bribery and corruption.”

“Yes,” said Vaughan cheerfully. “Did it work? Although, now I think of it, I’ve spent ages corrupting you, so I hope it did.”

He smiled back. Vaughan had a quite unfeasible degree of charm when he was just being himself rather than making a speech. “Not sure if I’m up to ‘corrupting a virgin’,” Allard admitted. “It sounds like hard work. Shall we just fuck?”

“But that’s the same thing without the script,” said Vaughan.

“Vaughan, your scripts are *terrible*. I just want to get into bed with you and enjoy myself, and you, in a more relaxed fashion. Oh, that reminds me...can the cameraman stand down for the evening?”

There was a muffled “Yeah, OK,” from the two-way audio pick-up Harry had installed under the bed to remind them he was there at odd moments.

“Thank you, Harry, and good night,” said Vaughan. He turned to Allard. “I’m surprised he was even listening. I’m sure he thought I was going to come and talk to you, and he’s usually good about not listening to private conversations.”

“He’s also good at guessing when one or other of us, as he puts it, ‘fancies a shag’,” Allard said.

“Do you fancy a shag, then?” said Vaughan, not bothering to wait for an answer before he started unbuttoning Allard.

“Fortunately for you, yes,” Allard said, reciprocating. This was one thing he’d miss very badly if he left this job, although he was reasonably certain that if he left this job, Vaughan would follow him.

“I got the nipple first,” said Vaughan, pinching it gently.

“This is not a race.”

“Oh? I got the impression you wanted a quick fuck and a good night’s sleep.”

“Not quite. A good fuck, a cuddle, and a good night’s sleep,” suggested Allard, undoing Vaughan’s trousers.

“Hmm. Don’t want *much*, do you?” said Vaughan.

“Considering what I’m undoing, that’s a very ill-judged phrase,” said Allard.

Vaughan looked at him carefully. “You really *are* tired, aren’t you?”

“Mm,” said Allard. “I’ll try to keep awake.”

“Maybe something less demanding than fucking?” suggested Vaughan.

“Are you calling me demanding?” Allard said.

“Not at the moment, but I can if you like,” said Vaughan, picking him up and depositing him on the bed. “Your turn to fuck me through the bed, considering you’ve been underneath twice lately.”

Allard groaned hollowly. “Too energetic.”

“All right, does that mean I fuck *you* through the bed?”

“Vaughan, it’s the concept of fucking each other through the bed that’s a little too energetic for me right at the moment,” Allard complained. “As in, I’d actually have to move about whichever way up I was.” He decided not to make any comments about Vaughan squashing the breath out of him. He actually quite liked Vaughan being solidly built, and he’d hate to drive the man into unnecessary dieting.

“What *do* you want to do?” Vaughan asked, undoing Allard’s trousers and tenderly caressing the contents.

“Don’t want to do anything,” Allard muttered sulkily, thrusting equally sulkily into Vaughan’s hand -- how dare Vaughan make him want it when he just needed to rest! -- and half-hoping Vaughan would take him at his word and let him sleep.

“Then I’ll have to,” murmured Vaughan, bending down as he spoke, so that the last word of that was breathed against Allard’s cock. “You’re leaking a bit; I’d better tidy you up to let you sleep.” The tip of Vaughan’s tongue traced that betraying dampness and removed it.

Allard moaned.

“You’re not helping, you know. You seem to be getting wetter.”

“That’s because you’re licking me,” Allard managed.

Vaughan snorted. “Don’t believe a word of it!” he said, before tonguing Allard ‘round and ‘round and up and down, again. The tip of that tongue scooped and stroked, and then rested while the broad sweep of it curled affectionately ‘round him. Then Vaughan kissed the tip of Allard’s cock, and Allard felt himself swell and push as those lips moved back slightly and the lips parted to swallow him in. He could feel himself coming up firmer as Vaughan began to move; feel the rounded, plump tip of his own cock move into the wetness of Vaughan’s mouth past the sucking circle of the lips, and ...

Vaughan stopped. "You're still a bit wet there. Are you sure I'm not licking you too hard? Should I go and find a towel to mop you with?"

Before he could think of something to say, Vaughan was licking his way up him again. He sighed, moaned again, and twisted his fingers absently in Vaughan's hair.

Vaughan began to play with his balls, with some skill. Nudging and teasing as the tongue worked its way up Allard's shaft.

"Don't pull my hair," Vaughan said, in a pause, "or I'll stop licking."

Allard untwisted his fingers very gently from the curls he was exploring. He thought about Vaughan's solemn, careful face when working on some spare part or other. He'd have difficulty watching that in future without thinking about his own *unn*-spare part.

As promised, Vaughan didn't stop licking. As he worked his way slowly up and down, with an engineer's careful attention to detail, he licked and pulled at Allard's cock, cupped and teased at his balls, and kept going without settling down to work on the business end.

"I can't help noticing," Allard said crossly, "that it's still extremely wet."

"Is it really?" marvelled Vaughan disingenuously, and stopped what he was doing to lie on the bed with Allard. "Have a taste, just to make *sure* it's still wet," Vaughan said, and kissed him.

Allard began to move against Vaughan, feeling and hearing the restless rubbing of half-clothed and extremely interested flesh as he stroked his tongue in Vaughan's mouth. He could taste himself in the kiss already.

He gave a little sigh of disappointment as Vaughan withdrew himself from the kiss and stopped lying on him. Obviously not too tired to enjoy a man's weight on him, after all.

"I've still got to tidy you up," said Vaughan.

"So you have."

"I'm good with self-lubricating parts," Vaughan went on. "All you have to do is work them smoothly until they really *want* to move ..."

“And they call it easing the spring,” Allard murmured gently, quoting a poem that could possibly be misinterpreted as pornographic in a couple of places.

“We can slide it/Rapidly backwards and forwards’.” Vaughan capped his quotation absently. Allard would have admired that if Vaughan hadn’t been busy sliding him rapidly backwards and forwards.

“It’s getting wetter,” Vaughan said, withdrawing his discourse from the realm of literary quotation and back toward fact.

“Mm,” said Allard. “You’d better clean it up, then.”

Vaughan bent down to get to work in earnest. This time, as he licked up to the tip, he didn’t lick down the other side. For the second time, his lips popped open around Allard’s eager cock-tip, but this time, he didn’t stop. Instead, his mouth slid smoothly into place until he had the full length commanded by mouth and hand working in perfect, pitiless unison.

Allard felt the full intensity of it close over him, unstoppable. He gasped and shuddered and pulled Vaughan’s hair and kept shaking and poured himself out until he was finished.

Vaughan swallowed, rather ostentatiously. “I think that’s taken care of it,” he said, after a moment.

“Mm,” Allard said, agreeing with that.

“Are you too tired to take care of mine?”

He reluctantly dragged himself back to reality, resenting Vaughan for making him do so. Then he decided that that was probably a little unfair. “I have no objection to you rubbing against me, as long as I’m not expected to move.”

“How very gracious of you.” Vaughan took hold of his hand. “Am I allowed to move you?”

Before he could answer, Vaughan moved Allard’s hand. It was wrapped firmly around Vaughan’s cock, and then moved briskly up and down.

Actually, this was rather pleasant. He had the fun of wanking Vaughan without any of the work. He peeled his eyes open to check what was going on. Vaughan was kneeling next to him. Vaughan noticed him looking, and rubbed a little harder.

He grinned at Vaughan.

Vaughan came. Messily.

"You're cleaning that up," he said sleepily.

"It's your room," Vaughan said.

"It's your mess." He shut up, because Vaughan was, in fact, mopping up the mess. And Vaughan might point out why Vaughan was the only one to have made a mess.

"Anyway," Vaughan said, "I suppose it's our room. It's just that this is the one of the two rooms that has most of your junk, while most of my junk is in the other half of our two-room suite."

What would they do if he was a formal member of the syndicate? "I suppose I'll keep the same cabin even if I do join the ship?" he asked. This was the room that had been assigned to the nominal passenger/consultant, not that it was actually any different to any of the other cabins.

"Of course," Vaughan said. "I prefer to sleep in the same bed as you, but we have enough days on different shifts that I'd rather not *have* to sleep in the same bed as you."

Yes. He and Vaughan had definitely moved in together, even if they retained separate cabins for practical reasons. "We could always see about putting in a connecting door. If that doesn't seem too much like a French farce."

"No structural reason why not, I should think," said Vaughan.

Practical and romantic. I like it, Allard thought.

He cuddled up to Vaughan. "It's nice," he said drowsily, "when we *do* sleep together." He settled down for a nice doze on Vaughan's shoulder. There was silence for a few minutes.

"Allard?"

“Mmm?” he said.

“I’m not trying to nag, or anything,” Vaughan said, “but why *do* you get so nervous at the idea of joining the syndicate?”

He stiffened. He didn’t like this being dragged into the bedroom, and he’d have thought Vaughan was above that.

Vaughan stroked his back, a soothing glide of warm hand down stiff muscles. “I said I wasn’t trying to nag. I’m just trying to understand. You wouldn’t still be here if you hadn’t enjoyed the last year -- you’ve had at least three job offers that I know of. I know it’s not simple greediness -- you’d have made more money as a partner than as an employee.” Another long stroke down his back. “And you don’t spend most of your salary, as far as I can tell. No, I haven’t been prying, but I haven’t actually seen you spend much money. I assumed you were investing it. Why not simply treat a share in the syndicate as an investment, if you don’t want to buy into the philosophy?”

“A very large investment,” he said. “Too many eggs in one basket, and I’m not comfortable with that.” He faced the truth of it. “The eggs in this basket aren’t just financial. If it did all go wrong and I had to leave, I’d be a lot more bitter about any financial loss. Especially if it was on a scale where I’d *have* to find another job immediately or dip into capital, rather than being able to live on the income from my investments for a while.”

“You’ve got *that* much money tucked away?” Vaughan grinned at him. “You obviously have been well paid for your talents.”

“I was well paid, I invested both luckily and wisely, and it wouldn’t be a very *good* standard of living, just something I could put up with for a few months if the alternative was spending half my waking hours with people I actively hated rather than just didn’t like.”

Vaughan stroked his face. “Yes, I can see that if you’ve spent the last few years knowing that you really can walk away without even having another job lined up first, it

could be very stressful to give that up. It's not just the worry about how long it would take to disentangle your money, is it?"

"No." Maybe he should have had this conversation with Vaughan before. Vaughan seemed to understand, better than he'd expected. "And it's worse now that I have an emotional stake in this job, not better."

"Of course, you could just marry me on a planet with community-property laws," Vaughan said. "That way, you'd legally have joint title in my share of the ship. That should satisfy the others that you've made the emotional commitment to the ship."

"Although you'd legally have joint title in my money," Allard said, before his brain caught up with the conversation.

He stared at Vaughan. "Would you repeat that?"

"Will you marry me?"

This, he had *not* expected. "I thought you'd stopped worrying about me being about to up and leave you at any point."

"Yes," said Vaughan. "Now I feel more secure, I can ask you to marry me because I want to, without thinking you'll feel pressured to agree just so as not to make me feel insecure."

He thought about it. He was surprised to find that this was less frightening than being asked to join the ship once and for all. He'd already made the emotional commitment to Vaughan; if he chose to leave the ship rather than join the syndicate, he'd do his damndest to prise Vaughan loose, as well. Not that he'd have to try very hard, even though it would be a wrench for Vaughan.

And Vaughan had let him think about it in silence, not pressuring him, not trying to persuade him.

"Yes," he said.

"Thank you," Vaughan said simply, and pulled him into an embrace.

He lay against Vaughan, feeling the warmth of Vaughan's body, the warmth of Vaughan's emotion. This meant a lot to Vaughan, more than he'd realised. More, he suspected, than Vaughan had quite realised.

It meant a lot to him, too.

After a while, they moved apart again, resting comfortably within easy reach of each other. Vaughan said, "We do need to sort out a few practical details, like when and where. It would be nice if it was a year and a day after we first fucked, but we probably need more time than that to make arrangements if we want more than a quick, practical ceremony with just our shipmates as guests."

"I certainly do," Allard said. "It's over a year since I've seen any of my family. It's a good excuse for a get-together. Anyway, if we're going to the bother of making it legal, we might as well do it properly." He turned to Vaughan. "You do realise my mother will insist upon a full formal Church wedding."

"I didn't realise you *had* a mother," Vaughan said mildly. "I thought you were hatched. By the AI running a fertility clinic, which got broody on its own account and stole some of the stock."

Allard glared at him. "For your information, my mother is an extremely distinguished mathematician; but in her sentimental moments, she's always wanted me to make a good marriage."

"Somehow that explains a lot," said Vaughan. "Do I count as a 'good marriage'?"

"Let me see," said Allard. "Own ship, teeth, and hair. Plus the fact that you're sufficiently unconventional to keep even an unreformed hippie like Father happy. If he comes to the wedding, of course. I wouldn't put it past him to forget if he happens not to be on the same planet as Mother at the time."

"I'm sorry I asked," said Vaughan. "And it's only a part-share in a ship."

“It was a lovely relationship,” said Allard regretfully, “until you started talking about my family, which is none of your bloody business.”

Vaughan kissed him. Allard suspected that this was because he couldn’t think of any other response to the situation, but it was nice anyway.

“I’m quite happy with the idea of a Church wedding,” said Vaughan.

“You are?” He hadn’t thought Vaughan was the type.

“Oh, yes.” Vaughan’s eyes acquired a distinct gleam. “The idea of listening to your trembling voice repeating your vows as you wonder what is going to happen to you in my arms, carrying you off from the reception when I just can’t wait any longer, and then ripping the white, virginal bridal robes off your quivering body on our wedding night...”

“Even my mother isn’t sufficiently romantic, or demented, to imagine me in a white bridal gown.”

“Can you get one anyway? In ivory? For the bedroom,” Vaughan specified unnecessarily. “Anyway, it’s really supposed to symbolise chastity, not virginity, and I don’t think I have much to worry about on that score.”

Allard agreed. The only time he’d strayed had been at Vaughan’s determined instigation, which was odd, now he thought about it. Not odd that Vaughan had had a peculiar fantasy, but odd that it had been such a romantic experience for both of them.

Not many people could have essentially made the decision to marry their partner while being soundly fucked by a third party.

TO BE CONTINUED...

~*~

Jules Jones & Alex Woolgrave

Jules Jones is a material scientist by day, writer by night, whose publishing credentials include such gems as European Union research reports. Thrilling though these might be to at least three readers, Jules believes that variety is the spice of life. Writing erotica provides an adequate amount of variety. However, Jules has found that it's better not to mix the two styles of writing, though -- it's very embarrassing when your manager points out that the file you were working on during the lunch hour has found its way into the project folder...

The Occasionally Spotted Woolgrave is Jules Jones' partner-in-crime and can frequently be heard shrieking across the Atlantic: "Oi, Jones, which way up are the boys at this point?", "Trousers, what trousers?" or "That's not a POV shift -- it's an experimental literary device!"

Woolgrave cannot visualise. At *all*...

Fortunately, Jules Jones believes in expressing one's Inner Editor, and is good about spotting completely impossible positions or characters undressing more or less than once.

In fact, Jones comes up with the plot and half of the dialogue, and Woolgrave adds regrettable knob jokes and the *other* half of the dialogue.

It seems to work. We think.

You can find Jules Jones and Alex Woolgrave on the Web at www.julesjones.com and <http://predatrix.slashcity.org/syndicate/awoolgrave.htm>.

* * * * *

Read on for a tantalizing glimpse of
Queen's Rules 2: King of the Castle
by Treva Harte

Now available at Loose Id

Queen's Rules 2: King of the Castle

"Ara. Stop."

He stood in the path to the women's tent, deliberately blocking her way. He'd ignored her for days. Kept them all walking through the forest. And now Quinn wanted to talk, did he? What could he possibly tell her that could make all this right again? What apology would work?

Not that he seemed likely to do anything of the sort.

"Why?" She couldn't help asking the question, now that the anger had sputtered away. Fear, anger...she had used them all up by now. The only thing left was the hurt and the confusion. "It's going to storm soon. We ought to be inside..."

She stopped. Ara stared at Quinn, trying to assess him with all she had learned about him. Spy. Kidnapper. Now that she knew him for what he was, she expected to see...what? Scales? The evil inside him reflected outside? Ara fought a silly urge to cry. All she saw was the same intent eyes, the coiled energy barely held in check by Quinn's thin frame. He looked ill. She could tell now that there was a fever flush to his cheeks.

But evil? Repulsive? If only he looked what he was. Maybe then she wouldn't wonder what happened. Then she needn't question why, of all women, he chose her to betray.

He hadn't even wanted to mate with her. What he hadn't done to her shouldn't make her want to cry. Why would she want to be with a lizard man? What he had done should be reason enough for her to weep.

"I have to."

"You have to destroy us?"

"I won't let anyone destroy you." He sounded tired suddenly. He held the most inner energy of anyone she'd ever seen, but he was weary now. "I pledge that all of you will be safe."

"You'll just kidnap us and threaten us first?"

"I don't threaten. Whatever I say I'll do, I'll do. I need you women to save my own men. There isn't much left for me, but I will take care of what is mine."

Colors. More colors again, stronger than ever before. Red lust streaked from his body. Angry waves of purple billowed from the trees by the path. He'd grown more sensitive to the colors as he grew more ill. Quinn knew that as the colors grew more vivid, swirled closer to him, he must be closer to death. He had nothing left to fight them with.

Silver. Cool and bright. Beckoning.

Ara looked at him, silvery swathes of light dancing around her. Quinn clenched his fingers tight against his sweating palms. He was tired. Tired of taking care of his men. Tired of trying to be strong when he was weak. When he saw her walking on the path he gave in to the overpowering need to be with her. He'd wanted to stumble toward her, to scoop her up and gather some of that bright energy from her.

When had he turned into such a needy, selfish bastard? He disgusted himself. No wonder she despised him.

But he wanted her -- not just the silver aura she had -- but the real her. Ara had always been simply herself. She wasn't a comfortable person. There was no lying, no deceit in her. She told you what she thought.

He'd spent his last year spying and lying. He didn't need soft lies. He wanted something real.

No. No, that was impossible. There were so many reasons he needed to deny any honest attraction to her.

Wouldn't having her be the most selfish act of all?

For a moment the colors muted, graying and dying away. Die. He could die. Die and never know what she was like against him, what it was like to be inside her.

Flame his stupidity. He needed to make up his mind. What was he going to do with this female? A drop of rain hit his head. The last time they'd been together there had been a storm. He remembered. He remembered everything. They'd been back in her own keep and she'd nearly driven him mad with desire.

She looked at him directly and his breath caught. Oh yes, he was sure of what to do now.

Quinn was looking at her so strangely.

"Save you?" Ara began to ask when Quinn suddenly lunged closer, swooping in and covering her like a hot wind.

"Don't talk right now," he muttered, right before he kissed her.

Devouring. Encompassing. Curse him, she was sinking right into the mindless lust-haze only he seemed to inspire. She didn't care.

"I don't care." His muttered words echoed her thoughts. He paused, then went back for another quick, bruising kiss. He was breathing fast. "I ought to care about what I'm doing, how I should treat you -- but I don't. I can't. I just want you."

Now she could slap him. Better yet, she could knee him. His cock was certainly a big enough target at the moment. She could run -- somewhere.

Ara hesitated. She slid her hand down, cupping his testicles. He groaned at her touch, pulled her even closer to him.

She could hurt him. Her fingers tightened and he groaned again. Ha. Quinn wasn't in pain, unless you called prolonging lust painful. He pulled her up tight against his erection, her hand still clasping his balls. His grasp was powerful, gripping Ara's buttocks, his palms under the folds of her skirt so his hands were directly against her flesh. They panted together. Then one finger circled her anus.

She cried out, jerked against him.

“You like that.” He whispered the words against her damp temple, stirring the tendril of hair with his breath. “Silvery maiden.”

“I’m not a maiden.” He was mad to call her so.

“I know. But I like to think you come alive only for me, moon goddess.”

Arrogance. He was full of it. But it was the truth, too. For some reason he was the one who made her breath catch and set her body trembling.

He pulled her up higher, then walked with her, his hands cupped under her rear, backing her up against a tree trunk.

* * * * *

What people are saying about

Queen's Rules 1: Every Good Boy Deserves Favor

Every Good Boy Deserves Favor is a highly unusual tale. With a futuristic setting, interesting characters, and some spicy sex, it entices the reader. I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book because of the eccentricity found within the characterization and the plot itself. Ms. Harte does an excellent job writing a story that is eccentric, while tantalizing the reader with sex and heat.

-- Ansley Velarde, *The Road to Romance*

A journey with these three women and the men who interact with them will make a pleasant afternoon's read. Mio, a crippled man living on his own with no hope of ever having a woman, helps Jewel reach Castle Bloomingdell. Ulrich is a battle hardened warrior, looking to prove himself to everyone.

There is practically everything you could ask for in *Every Good Boy Deserves Favor*. Action, romance, futuristic life, and a connection with women who live in a different time period, yet are so much like us.

-- Carolyn Crisher, *Romance Reviews Today*

Every Good Boy Deserves Favor is a compelling look into a future world where women live in protected keeps and men fight to win the chance to have sex with and impregnate the women. I found the plot to be refreshing and the character development of each woman and man to be believable. Ms. Harte's second foray into this world will surely bring more adventures and challenges for the three couples and the women and men of this world.

-- Jennifer Brooks, *Karen Find Out About New Books* and *Coffee Time Romance*

Queen's Rules 1: Every Good Boy Deserves Favor is now available at Loose Id