

INFERNAL ATTRACTORS

By Cody Goodfellow

“Turn it on,” she said.

When he didn't move, she cocked the gun. Even so, Marc hesitated, his hand over the knife switch at the heart of the sprawling machine.

“It's not safe,” he said, trying not to whine.

“I know,” she replied. The raw silk in her weary voice turning to rusted steel. “That's why I need it.” She laid down the gun, certain of his obedience, and began to unbutton her long black dress. It slithered off her angular, hungry curves to pool round her feet. Her stockings were the color of smoke. She wore nothing else. The sheen of her perspiration made her pale body glimmer in the moonlight. Her long burgundy bangs hid her eyes. “Turn it on, and open it up all the way.”

He had built it for her, with the weird old components she always seemed to find just when they were needed, and the yellowing circuit diagrams stamped PROJECT BIFROST: ABOVE TOP SECRET. Whenever

he asked her about it, she had fucked him until he forgot his questions. But this morning, he had done some digging and found out just enough about what he had built that he tried to destroy it.

Thus, the gun.

She'd told him some of it, when she had to. She didn't have to spell it out. She had to be an idiot or crazy, not to realize how far out of his league she was. When they'd met on a makers' message board thread about teledildonics and orgone generators, he'd played along with what he was sure was a joke. *Something that'll make Sex and Drugs obsolete*, was all she had to say. Meeting her in person was a shock. Her picture didn't begin to do her justice.

Like most girls who dyed their hair a new color every week and covered themselves in tattoos, there was damage behind her intriguing façade, desperation and despair between the whirlwind binges of thrill seeking. She warned him she was "a bit of a nymphomaniac," and there was a sleepy confession that she'd been to rehab, been

committed, experimented on. He didn't care about her past, any more than he cared if she really loved him, or what the hell a Tillinghast resonator was, until it was too late.



They had played with the freaky machine for a week, enjoying the crystallizing buzz it conveyed, like a half-tab of acid with a vasopressin chaser, the weird hallucinations that only got more intense when you

challenged them, the sense of the walls of the world withering away from the glowing bones of something hidden in plain sight, and more real than reality itself. Sex in the resonator's field was a mystical experience--the visible sparks of Shirley's orgasms coursing up her spine and out the top of her skull like latent lightning--but perhaps too mystical, for he always felt as if something was watching them.

He threw the switch and instantly felt the itching in the front of his brain, felt it become a tingling long before the eccentric acceleration of the activated resonator became a bowel-tickling hum. He consulted the mildew-spotted researcher's journal she'd brought him, something she "found at an estate sale." He turned the master frequency dial up until the hum became a throbbing, subsonic roar.

The moonlight outside the windows dwindled and died. The warehouse loft was enfolded in a gray void, but within, the air itself seemed to glow with a nacreous, magenta light. The resonator's hum became a sinusoidal cascade of chimes when all the

other electronics shorted out and stopped dead. Distorted by rippling currents like heat mirages in a desert, the room seemed to rot away, and a host of shadowy shapes swam through the ghostly walls. By turns, the room became like the floor of a pre-Cambrian sea, as the phantasmal shadows took on a terrible solidity.

Great whorled nautiloids floated past, regarding them with lambent spotlight eyes. Razor-winged lampreys slithered past, gulping the ionized air and groping with manifest eagerness for Shirley's white body, only to dart away as if electrified. Arachnids with far too many legs clung to each other and stalked their prey with antennae longer than their bodies. Their victims, drifting neon jellyfish that circled like moths around the resonator's tuning fork array. And still more and stranger forms swarmed into the feeding frenzy, too alien to register as more than spectral distortions of the light and momentary pulses of utterly foreign ecstasy, even to his enhanced mind.

Shirley rose from the chair and sprawled

out on the floor. “You see it, Marc? Do you feel it? How could you not want to see this?” She arched her back and threw out her arms, basking in the overwhelming rush of new perception, the otherworldly arousal that the resonator seemed to directly ignite in the human nervous system. His cock stirred and jabbed at his trousers, but he was riddled with fear--not of the eager flying eels, but of Shirley.

Her naked, ink-scarred skin shimmered with the heat of her arousal and seemed to shed trails that anticipated her movements, flowing backwards in time to meet her as her black fingernails dug into her flesh and drew blood. He started to rise to stop her, but the slightest motion brought wriggling predators groping towards him until he froze.

Shirley raked her back as if trying to tear off her own skin. The tattoos on her back-- eyes, feathers, scales, and more eyes--ran and reformed as she dragged a boiling black cloud out of herself and set it adrift overhead.

She beckoned for him to come and join her, but he retreated behind the control console.

His hand hovered over the kill switch.

She writhed on the floor as if embracing a phantom. “It’s not enough. Open it wider...”

He could not bear to look up from the console. It was too much, the visions and the realization that this was not a hallucination, but the truth, compared to which normal eyesight was a blessed lie.

She would never be satisfied. She was driven to push too far. If there was any hope of snapping her out of it, of getting her back, it would come from giving her more than she could handle.

He turned the oscillation cycle to 37,000, the level at which the journal’s crabbed, careful notes became looping gibberish and spiky mandalas, eclipsed by maroon stains.

The livid pink light deepened to an abyssal violet. Marc could barely see Shirley through the shadow that seemed to pin her to the floor. He rose and rushed to reach out to her, but then recoiled in shock.

Up close, it was not a shadow, but something almost too strange for his eyes to process it. It seemed to hover astride her back

like a rider on a horse, its trailing, nebulous limbs penetrating her skull and spine and lazily tugging its limbs to elicit tiny mewling sighs of pleasure.

“So,” she moaned, “you see it too?”

It was like a massive armored octopus, a billowing, vaporous body enfolded in an exoskeleton that glowed a sullen, sordid red, like molten iron underwater. Its countless branching tentacles drifted on subatomic winds like flaccid hagfish, but dozens of them were fused with Shirley’s spine, jacked into her chakras like astral spinal taps.

“Do you really want to know why I am the way I am, Marc? Well, now you know.” She twisted a translucent cord and kissed it, making it shiver. “I was never molested or abused or any of that, but I always had what Mom called a devil on my shoulder. Something in me that fed off danger and sex...”

She twisted around under the floating incubus and took hold of two thick spinal taps and lifted herself off the floor to cling to it. Seeming to become more tangible from

arousal alone, the phantom parasite enfolded her in an embrace of spiny, segmented arms, but she seized the parasitic cords connecting it to her like a leash, and brought the thing to heel.



Her legs spread wide to straddle its chitinous thorax, she gently stroked the ethereal tentacles that transfixed her spine until the armored body was suffused with an excited lava-lamp glow. With a hiss like the gutting of a fish, the armor split open.

A flurry of velvety fronds like the venomous petals of a sea anemone erupted from the phantom to enfold and impale Shirley. She rolled and wriggled on a bed of avid, adept tongues, moaning with delight at their electric touch, reveling in the trails of rainbow saliva etched from her neck to the cleft of her groin.

While it held her suspended in the air, Shirley's devil braided its tentacles together into a luridly glowing scorpion stinger that throbbed and swelled and coiled to strike.

Marc threw the kill-switch. He would have been surprised if it actually worked. The resonator was recycling power or drawing it directly from the hidden reality they had tapped into. He shuddered with rage and frustrated lust. This thing was no alien to Shirley, being something that had attached itself to her, fueled her dangerous behavior

and fed off her, for most of her life. But now, she could touch it as it had touched her. She had used him to make it possible for her to seduce her own lust.

He moved slowly out from behind the console, watching the teeming alien predators, but they seemed to have retreated for fear of Shirley's demon lover.

There was no shutting it off, no reasoning with her to make it stop. But there, forgotten on the arm of the chair, was her gun.

Shirley opened her mouth to fellate a probing anemone-tongue, eliciting a piercing blast of strobing light from the incubus. The strange lightning poured out of her, illuminating her nervous system like overloaded Xmas lights, silhouetting her skeleton and seeming to dissolve her flesh in an acid bath of light. Marc shielded his eyes, but still saw her through the thin curtain of his transparent fingers. He saw her thrust herself onto the quivering stinger, and could not look away as her glowing plasma body engulfed it down to the root.

Somehow, his fingers found the pistol. He

couldn't risk hitting Shirley. He turned and tried to shoot the tuning array, but the bullets only burst the clouds of jellyfish and pinged harmlessly off the screaming tuning forks.

"This is what you wanted, wasn't it, baby?" She purred and gyrated on the phantom parasite's monstrous organ. He could see the impossibly large thing quivering and thrashing inside of her, trying to match her violent rhythm. Ethereal clouds of vapor streamed off its glowing shell. "All those things you made me do, you didn't just want to watch and feed off the heat, did you?"

Marc reached up to pull her away, but the incubus swept him aside with a thorny limb that shredded his forearm to the bone.

"You wanted this... wanted to touch me... have me... but you never thought it would kill you, did you?"

With an agonized cry, she flexed herself against the engorged stinger and wrung it dry. Her orgasm was a wrenching seizure that tore through her in waves, splaying her lovely limbs out as if she'd been electrocuted.

Her demon lover spasmed in her embrace

and seemed almost to melt with the explosive force of its own release. Its armor was riven by cracks of ultraviolet light, and waves of iridescent energy spilled out of it seemed to flow down its shrinking stinger and up Shirley's neon spine, into the brain of its erstwhile host.

With a contemptuous sweep of her hand, she ripped away the shriveled spinal taps and kicked away from her spent lover. She hit the floor and gracefully danced away from the impact, but then swooned into the chair.

Shirley's parasite drifted across the room like a flaccid helium balloon until a swarm of lampreys descended upon it, feasting on its helpless, sex-shocked flesh like remorae devouring the remains of a shark's breakfast.

Abruptly, finally, the deep violet light and the unholy hum cut out with an anticlimactic pop. The gray void dissolved into an ugly pre-dawn industrial panorama.

Probably, they'd blown the circuit, or even the whole grid. It didn't matter. It was over, and she was alive. Wasn't she?

Shirley rolled over on the floor, over and

over, laughing and hugging her bloody knees to her chest. He thought twice before he put down the gun, but then he rushed to her and draped her in a bathrobe. “I thought you were—I tried to—“

“You did the right thing,” she said, and kissed him. On the forehead. “Thank you, Marc.”

Shaky, she got up off the floor and deftly shrugged out of the bathrobe, then picked up and stepped into her dress.

“What should we do...?”

“About what?”

“The fucking resonator...”

“You can destroy it now, if you want.” She stepped into her boots and clumped towards the door, as if she’d just finished an appointment with her masseuse.

“But Shirley... you... if you’re... cured, then... what about us?” Marc wrung his hands, only then becoming aware of the oddly bloodless wound in his forearm. “I... I love you...”

She turned and looked at him, and she started to laugh. But then she looked up into

the space above his head, and the laughter turned to a jaded gasp. “You’ve got a bad one, Marc.”

She turned and went out, closing the door behind her.

Something stretched to its limit and snapped in his chest. Stupid! He hadn’t even known how he felt until he’d spit it out.

Spinning around, looking for something to break, he found himself staring into a mirror.

He didn’t need the resonator any more, to see the thing that rode him, any more than he needed the device to feel it suckling his pain. Only a vague distortion of the air around his head and heart was visible, yet he could see it with his new organs of sight, his newly awakened mind.

All his life he’d been chasing a dream of a girl, when she was right behind him.

It was nothing like a human, nothing like a female, and yet it looked just like *her*.

“Hello, beautiful,” he said, and reached for the knife switch.

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