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## John

Weyen wakes us next morning as she creeps quietly out of bed before dawn. When she sees we're awake, she whispers, "I must go back to the lab early and prepare some slides and other equipment for your tests. See you in a couple of hours. I'll send Mei and Yuk to pick you up."

She seems apprehensive, and keeps glancing up, in the semi-gloom, towards the corners of the ceiling. We grunt sleepily; she leaves.

It is daylight when we next wake up. We talk about things, in particular about Weyen. We agree that it would be a very good idea indeed to maintain her in the role of friend and hanger-on. It seems she can be easily manipulated with promises of petting and spectator sex. What an ally—our Fifth Column into the enemy camp!

But her attitude this morning was so different from last night. I recall her glances. As I lie on my back I make out two little apertures at the intersection of the walls and ceiling. With a grunt, I jump out of bed and climb onto a chair to look more closely.

"Why, you sneaky voyeuristic shits! They've put bloody video lenses up there!"

This privacy thing again! I know we're on show all the time here, but this really pisses me off. It also means, rather more importantly, that they will know what Liz and I might be planning. But most important, it means that Weyen, who we have just have cast in the role of our stooge, is actually *their* stooge. Of course, what else? At least we know now that we'll have to be very careful indeed about what we tell her. I have been too naïve. I've been sucked in by a pretty face, a weakness I'm rather prone to.

I jump down to see if there is anything I can damage the lenses with. Meantime Liz strikes a classic cheesecake pose, pushing her breasts forward and leering into the lenses.

"Honey, don't you want to make dirty holograms? Might be *fun*!"

"No, I don't. Particularly when that bloody treacherous slut knew about them all the time, and was bloody careful to be out before daylight before Big Brother Rittar saw her fraternising with the enemy prisoners. Or is this a set-up? Rittar planning all along that Weyen would stay the night, leave before dawn, and give us the impression she was on our side when all the time ———."

"Hey, cool it, darling. It's probably nothing like that! Anyway, as I said originally, what's the harm? You know these people have no sense of privacy, so it probably isn't nearly as dreadful a thing for them to do as it seems to us. I don't care, anyway."

She prances off the bed, posing before one of the lenses, miming a grotesque seduction. Meantime I find my pocketknife. That will do. Despite what Liz said, I'm still angry about this, mainly because Weyen has bloody well two-timed us. I clamber up within striking distance and push hard. There is a satisfying crunch and a tinkle. I deal with the other one in a similar manner. There appear to be no others. I say in *sjenda*: "The room's probably bugged for sound as well. I can't see anything, but in future we'll talk in English in here, just to confuse the bastards. Fuck you, Rittar!" I shout at the wall.

Liz folds her arms and looks at me sideways, tapping a foot and whistling. I'm starting to feel ashamed already.

"W-e-e-ell," I say defensively.

Liz comes over and takes my face in her hands, then kisses me slowly, gently. "Hey, watch the P-meter, sweetie. Nil carborundum bastardorum."

"Okay," I sigh. "Let's get dressed, flag down a charda, and have a nice, low key heart-to-heart with friend Rittar."

A high pitched wail at the door, "L-i-i-z-bet", tells us our transport has already arrived. It cracks me up. After the ritual "Aren't you just *gorgeous*?" and pats and rubs, we're off. They drop us at the same door as yesterday. This'll be interesting, I think as we go in.

"Well, all ready for today's tests?" Rittar asks casually. He is leaning against the bench.

"No, as a matter of fact. We've had a busy morning. I haven't had time for anything to eat or drink yet," I retort.

“Yes, of course. Smashing videos is rather exhausting work, I suppose,” Rittar drawls from his bench. He is not in the least put out. But then it’s only Splitties that get angry. I feel a sudden, flaring desire to see if I can get one of these bastards really mad.

“You treacherous cunt!” I spit out. I step forward, I hope with menace. “You with all your talk about honesty, openness, caring, love. You’re no better than those poor, hopeless, bloody unwashed sjenden out there whom you so affect to despise ... ”

“*John!*” Elizabeth comes up to me and holds me, whispering in English, “Please, darling. You had it worked out so well before. You can’t beat these sods that way! You know that!”

I deflate suddenly. Rittar is utterly unmoved; he doesn’t care what I say. Christ, you can’t fight that. I suddenly realise that I feel exactly like a sjenden must. Why bother to talk to one of these cosmic Pharisees, Whollier than thou? The sjenden are right. Send the bastards to Coventry.

“We need to observe you, and so we shall be installing a new set of lenses in the near future. You will simply have to accept it.”

Silence. Fuck them.

“Well, shall we move to the psych lab, or would you like to have something to eat first?”

Although I’m bloody starving, I maintain my dignified silence. But Liz is still holding me; she has twigged my strategy of aloof dignity, and seen it for the childish sulk it is.

“Dumb! Do you *want* them to treat you like a sjenden? So don’t act like one! Yum, yum, I’m hungry.” She licks my ear.

I collapse at that. I squeeze her hand, smile a crooked little smile at her, and swallow a large chestnut that has somehow lodged in my throat. Dear Liz. Wonderful Liz.

“Food. Now,” she orders splendidly. “There’ll be more lenses to go, I’ll bet.”

Rittar laughs at that, as if he’s trying to kid us that Whollies have a sense of humour, claps her on the biceps and suggests we sit down. I feel relieved, like a sulky little boy who’s been forgiven by large-minded parents for his egocentric carry-on.

Weyen comes in with a large tray of food. She smiles at us warmly and sits down with us. I feel further relief at the sight of her. Then I remember that the last time I saw her she was sneaking out, knowing the room was bugged, the treacherous slut. *Bloody well shut up!* one half of me shouts at the other half. I draw down my inner blind and just eat.

I have the grace to realise that while it is inevitable we shall each have our paranoid outbursts from time to time, at least Liz has steered me through my first one. I only hope that when she freaks out, as she in turn inevitably will, I will be as strong a support for her.

I give her a big grin to let her know that I’m okay now.

I’m flat on my back. They’ve just taken blood, saliva and tissue samples, and now Weyen is massaging my penis. Wicked. She’d earn a fortune in Soho.

“We need a semen sample. I know you won’t mind.”

How can I mind after all the invasions of privacy we’ve experienced in the last few days? Not that I have much choice. Anyway, as I say, she’s very skilful and—oh, excuse me a moment—*ugh! aaah!* Sorry about that. Ah yes, as I was saying, I suppose they’re interested in my semen to work out our chromosomal structure. Kalen did say something about genetic engineering.

Rittar sits silently while my juices are being extracted. I’m sure he’s not here to get voyeuristic kicks.

“Rittar, I’ve worked all the others out by now. You puzzle me. What’s your work?”

“I studied what you would call I think political science and physiological psychology. My role uses both those disciplines.”

So, political science. Plants a beautiful spy, Mata Hari style, installs hidden cameras and bugs rooms. Simple.

“You’re a security agent of some kind.”

“Not bad. We’ll make a Wholly out of you yet.” His eyes flicker amusement as he registers how much I don’t like the way he puts this. “No, I’m the coordinator of our most important current project.” He pauses, looking at me.

“What’s the project?”

He weighs me up speculatively. “Project Integrens. I believe that’s your term, even. We are searching across the universe for other cultures of the *homo* genus, but there are very few that are sufficiently advanced to interest us. Most are either too primitive, or they have destroyed themselves already, or like yours, they are in the process of doing so as I speak. As indeed our distant ancestors did here on Kozlar fifteen million years ago. That cataclysm made the continents unrecognisable, most animal species died. A few species managed to survive essentially unchanged, but most mutated adversely. Only one species actually mutated adaptively—and that of course was us.”

He waits, as if for applause. “Take the sjenden, for example,” he continues. “Those brutes you see out there are a regressed version of a species identical, I would guess, with *homo sapiens*. We’re related to the sjenden to the same degree that *homo sapiens* is related to *homo habilis*.” He pauses. “No, the gap is probably wider than that. *Australopithecus robustus* would, I think, be nearer the mark.”

“Shit,” I say as an expression of distaste at his arrogance, but he seems to take it as approval at what he is saying.

“Oh yes, we now know from the tests yesterday that the cranial capacity of the sjenden is about 80% that of your own. I willingly admit that. Further, they have lost functions that you still possess: creativity, planning, and in general the ability to process parallel streams of information simultaneously. Weyen, set up the holograms. John, you come here.”

Weyen places several slides under a whitish flat plate and dims the main light. A three dimensional image of a human brain appears, suspended just above the plate. It looks so real, but as I touch it my fingers only reflect the light of the projection.

“Look, can I get Liz in on this before you go any further?”

“Yes, of course. Weyen, you know where she is.”

While we wait, I ask him about Kalen and Franji’s roles.

“Kalen is a field agent, engaged chiefly in reconnaissance and reporting field action. Franji is also a field agent, and her task is to recompute data and reprioritise tactics and strategies on the basis of ongoing data collection. I’m the planner and coordinator. I selected those two because both had colouring that was not conspicuous among European Earthlings.”

The door opens. Weyen and Liz enter.

“Ah, come in, Elizabeth, and look at these.” Rittar beckons them closer.

“This is a view of a *homo sapiens* brain. Er, it’s yours, actually, Elizabeth. Now, I’m sure you’re familiar with the general characteristics. Here,” Weyen flicks a switch, and Liz’s brain is replaced by another hologram, “we have a sjenden brain. Overall, it is smaller, but more particularly here,” he touches the prefrontal area, “and the connecting fibres are looser here.” He indicates the corpus callosum linking the two hemispheres.

“Now here,” he continues as a third image is projected, “is an *integrens* brain. It is clearly larger overall, but especially prefrontally and in the corpus callosum. You are clearly evolving in our direction, but as you can see, structurally you are closer to the sjenden than to us.”

The limbic system and brain stem areas of the *integrens* brain are quite different from ours. The balance is sort of up and out, with a lot of interconnecting structures and fibres that we do not possess. In particular, the cingulate gyrus, which is the cortical part of the limbic system, is larger, and connected to more extensive areas, many of which are unfamiliar to me.

“There, you see, is why you are more closely related to the sjenden than to us; as indeed are all other *homo* species we have come across. No other race has yet to make this mutation which is so adaptive. It links the highest cortical levels to our every functioning, from basic autonomic, to sensory-motor responses, to feeling. Most important of all, to feeling.”

He pauses. “What are emotions?” he asks rhetorically. “They are mechanisms that program the individual to take appropriate action in an emergency. But so primitive! Look at John this morning—an

excellent example of split-brain behaviour! He knew how he *should* react to me. He had even talked it over before he came—I heard him do so. But instead of acting as he knew he rationally should, his emotions took over, demolishing any chances of success he might have had.

“The trouble is that your emotions were evolved to handle danger in a physical context: a primitive fight-or-flight reaction. Emotions were not wired into your cortical structures. Your meso-cortex, containing most of the limbic system and the emotional controls, is scarcely different from that of a lower mammal. While it will handle primitive hunting contexts, it is impossibly simplistic in a civilised context.

“Under stress, what do you do? Secrete adrenalin, which slows down maintenance processes, such as digestion, charging up your striped muscles for action. But in civilised society there is little *direct* action to take. So your heart rate stays up, your adrenalin level stays up, and your digestion stays down. And you die of stomach ulcers and heart failure.

“Now with *us*, we integrate emotional responses with the cortex. We analyse the nature of the stress situation, decide what we should do, then we do it. If it requires fight-or-flight, then we secrete more adrenalin, just as you would. But if it does not, and in civilised contexts it almost always does not, we make the decision with the cortex, the organ best equipped for decision making, not a relic of a rabbit’s brain.”

Rabbits. He’s obviously picked that up from his roving reporter too. Rittar is clearly as pleased as punch with *homo integrens* in general, and himself in particular. What a prick!

“But what about other emotions, such as love?” Liz asks.

“Your ‘love’ is individual. And it is linked to the sexual act. Our ‘love’ includes the whole group, as does our sexual behaviour. Jealousy and possessiveness are unknown to us.”

“Hang on,” Liz butts in, “I thought integrated brains superseded group loyalty: following the flag, death to nonbelievers, evil empires, jihads and God Bless America.”

That’s what I thought too.

“Precisely. They do. But by ‘group’ you seem to mean the old we-them distinction. ‘Who is not with us—is against us’ I recently heard one of your Splitty coordinators say. By ‘group’ I mean a participation in the generality of humanness; not just your group-home or those you know personally. We do not call the sjenden ‘them’. We do not feel enmity towards them, although they do to us.”

“You don’t call the sjenden anything. You ignore them.”

“They are like chardas, but not as pleasant or frequently as useful.”

“I think you’re wrong about that. I think the sjenden are hiding something from you.”

I’m thinking of the man on the spaceship who first served me a drink. He had winked, as if to say, “Right, old cock. We understand each other; we’ll get them bastards. All in due course”. I don’t mention that to Rittar.

“Takes a sjenden to catch a sjenden.” He is oozing cunning. “Look, I have a proposition for you to consider. I will select the most intelligent sjenden, a man and a woman—and I mean it when I say the most intelligent—and they can show you their culture. You interact with them and see what you think. We would be interested to know.”

I’d be fascinated to see these so-called throwbacks at close quarters. Liz also nods, a little doubtfully.

“Good. Now back to Project Integrens. We were talking about the mutations. The positive result was us. But there’s only a few hundred thousand Whollies.”

“That many?” I’m surprised, there seems to be only a few thousand in Centre 2. “Where are the others, then?”

“Scattered around in other communities roughly the size of Centre 2. Kozlar is a large planet. Five thousand is the optimal size for a Centre, except for one thing—the gene pool is not large enough. So periodically, about every three generations, we have fertility exchanges with other Centres. But that has been happening now for 200,000 generations, and the lack of diversity is now becoming critical. We need to go outside the Kozlar gene pool.

“So, Project Integrens is an attempt to collect specimens—er, examples—of others of the *homo* species. We need to find their limits, and to relate their capabilities to their brain structure. We hope to discover how we can, well, increase communication amongst promising species and eventually to cross-breed, if the indications are favourable. We may of course have to intervene with genetic engineering to make that possible. At the moment, I very much doubt if our species and your species could fertilise each other successfully.” He looks speculatively at Liz. “But it would be motivating to try. Well, what do you think? Do you think that *sapiens* could cross-breed with *robustus*?”

I’m too teed off to even attempt to answer this arrogance. No matter, the question was rhetorical. He’s off again.

“Of course,” he adds grandly, “we have had fifteen million years not only of biological evolution—which incidentally has virtually ceased, since survival is no longer an issue—but of cultural evolution, building and inventing on the basis of all the discoveries of those 600,000 generations that preceded us.”

Liz snorts. “What you have said makes you exactly like any other culture with a message. The missionary syndrome: ‘We are all right, thank you very much. If only all those poor misguided creatures out there were like us, then they’d be okay’. But what makes you think you’re the answer to creation? Isn’t that ethnocentrism run wild?”

“I admit that, of course. It happens to be true. We *are* the answer to creation! You seem not to understand that we have history on our side. We have not changed, essentially, for a million years or so. You, on the other hand, are still evolving; slowly, to be sure, but basically in our direction. We are the logical end of human evolution.”

I can’t let this go. “Maybe you haven’t changed because you have an impoverished environment. It reminds me of our sharks. Give them a stable and simple environment and they don’t evolve either. Maybe even you would have troubles in as richly complex and as challenging an environment as Earth.” Perhaps I should have recalled how well Kalen and Franji seemed to be coping before I said that.

Like a tag wrestler, Liz picks up the cue. “Also, the whole thing is so relative, Rittar. You seem to be forgetting that the rest of the universe doesn’t live on Kozlar. Perhaps other variants of the species *homo* have indeed worked out as good a relationship with their environment as you have with yours. Perhaps even better.”

Rittar smiles. “A good argument, but have you forgotten that I said that we have found every other *homo* species had come to a violent end, or was about to? Yours included. We were in your solar system last September. We could observe directly the events in New York and, subsequently, in Afghanistan. That doesn’t seem to me to indicate a very good relationship with the environment.”

I can’t answer that, but a practical question occurs to me. “You said you wanted other *homo* species to develop an integrated brain. How do you propose to do that? By drugs? Surgery? Genetic engineering?”

“That, my friends, is *precisely* the question. How indeed? That is the purpose of Project Integrens.”

The hologram of the *homo sapiens* brain is now projected. As Rittar talks, his long, slim fingers play delicately in the depths of Liz’s brain.

With a wild cry, Liz leaps across the room and sweeps the apparatus off the bench. It bounces off the wall and comes to rest upright on the floor. The image of her brain, as real as the horror in her eyes, is suspended, quivering.

