Loud enough to wake the dead, but never loud enough to drown out the screams, the bellow echoed through the darkened bedroom. Even his tastebuds could remember those screams, and the sickness in him afterwards. His bones and muscles ached from night-time struggles that were as much use as his real-life struggles had been, and about as impressive. As for his head—Blake didn’t want to think about his head. Not about the truly spectacular headache, and certainly not about the state his mind had been left in by one or two mindwipes.

He grimaced, reaching for water kept habitually by his bed as if it could wash away the taste left by not knowing just how many times his mind had been wiped, or adjusted, or even just had psychomanipulators trampling noisily around inside, cruel, sharp boots making mincemeat of what little memory he had left.

“Enough,” he said again, not screaming to free himself of nightmare this time, but softly, quietly, dark with defeat. He disengaged himself from the sweaty cling of sheets, shoving them aside, their softness no target for the viciousness within.

The bathroom next, to stare at himself in the mirror. Dark eyes, though not as dark as Avon’s, but with more shadows, here, in the bright-lit honesty of solitude. Broad face, strong bones, pale, too pale, sweat still clutching the clamminess of skin. Plenty of muscle on the torso he saw reflected back at him, overlaid now with the beginnings of softness. He’d had those muscles when he’d come to in a hospital, once, a lifetime or three ago. Didn’t remember getting them. His hand was large as it skimmed over the planes of his own flesh, moulding himself, forehead wrinkling as he tried to decide if the pattern of muscle indicated dedicated gym exercises for the hypertensive Alpha, or the sinew-weary slog of the criminal sentenced to hard labour. Impossible to know, either from what his body could tell him, or from what his mind could dredge up.

He straightened, spine complaining, slipped the soft white trousers off. Not too big, not small, uncircumcised, dark hair straight and damp with the lingering sweat of his nightmare. He looked at himself with something akin to dislike. Not too big.
Always supposing the charges against him really were lies, and those boys’ memories were as unreliable as his.

Side by side in his head, he played the two images of the two completely separate families he could remember. Father, mother, sister and brother, in one, no sister in the other. Clear, sharp, brilliant memories, of birthdays and holidays, good report cards, first job, first date, two of each of those snapshot memories. Just as sharp, his cousin Inge, on that hardscrabble planet, her hair long, limp, her limbs long and skinny—a piece of string with knots in it, he could remember calling her. Could remember, equally clearly, a non-existent sister calling Inge the same thing. And worried over the way Inge had accepted him, no questions, no doubts—no reminiscences. Worried more because of his uncle, and betrayal, and yet more doubts.

Cold water splashing his face, his breath catching. And wouldn’t Avon just love this, he thought. Leading a revolution—trying to lead a revolution—to change the Galaxy, and he couldn’t even find his way out of a maze of memories. Here he was, the second nightmare in one night, the third this week, the pattern increasing, the memories becoming more confused, more entangled. Colouring it all, the sour-taste fear of himself, of what he’d done because a single command had been left lurking in his mind, hiding there amongst the logjam of memories and lives unlived.

He stared at himself in the mirror, stared into eyes that reflected back the horror of distrust, the insecurity of knowing that a simple signal sent by Servalan had triggered that command, and the fear of not knowing just how many other commands lay fallow in his brain, and just how many signals were whistling just out of the range of his hearing.

“Orac,” he told himself.

His reflection didn’t seem to find that any more reassuring than he had. So Orac said there were no more booby traps littering his subconscious. Wonderful. A machine diagnosing a human using information it had stolen from other machines that had been programmed by the same humans who had stolen Blake’s own memory and left guerrilla war behind.

Small wonder his reflection looked the way it did.

Perhaps a shave would stop him looking quite so much like a derelict. Perhaps a comb would tame the Learian wildness of his hair. Perhaps a shower would wash away the stench of fear.

“But what are we going to do,” Blake asked the misery that faced him in the glass, “about the guilt?”

An indulgence he called it, harder on himself than even Avon would be, but he selected real water, hot water, the mirror steaming and clouding until the reflection was gone, the accusing eyes no longer looking at him. Soap sharp smell in his nose, shampoo silk between his fingers, pain cold and dark and leaden in his stomach.

Guilt. Those children. What had been done to them in his name.

What was it Jenna had told him? Her asking Avon what he knew about guilt. “Only what I’ve read,” he’d said, and Jenna had hated the way Avon had said it and the smile that had gone with it.

Interesting, Blake thought, that even Avon suffered under the burden of guilt.

Interesting? his conscience demanded. Reassuring, he admitted. Very reassuring that even Avon could know guilt as well as dish it out.

Gan. Oh, Avon had had a field day over Gan, using the death—using his death, he corrected viciously at his chest and belly, his death, Gan’s death, a friend, a colleague, someone you commanded, forced into danger, left to die, left to die—the litany was forced down, kicking and screaming, into the hard little knot of guilt and pain that he kept so carefully locked away. Back to Avon. Bring it back to Avon, to Avon enforcing the guilt, to Avon making him feel guilty—As if he needed any help to blame himself.

He just didn’t believe in wearing it on his sleeve, a declamation of guilt, martyrdom built on the suffering of others. He’d bear his guilt, and the blame, privately. Alone. In the shower. With water already cascading down his face, and the shampoo the perfect excuse to make his eyes redden and stream.

Drying himself, shoulder muscles already tight, bunching and clenching under the skin till his neck was stiffer than Avon’s. Ridiculous, this, he told himself, using the damp towel to clear an oasis in the mirror. Taking one look at himself, wishing he hadn’t bothered.

Is that how he looked to the others? Is that what they all saw when they looked at him as he walked onto the flight deck? That haggard, grey lump, as
lively as a bowl of gruel?
He cleaned his teeth, tamed his hair, covered his flesh with cloth. Resolutely. Refusing his body’s quiet whimpers for touch, for release. The defenseless bed was glared at, the covers smoothed haphazardly over the evidence of both nightmare and wet dream. The smell of his own sex stirred him, waking his cock a little more, his pulse that beat faster. No. Not now, he told himself, shoving his hands into his pockets, snatching them free again, away from the heavy desire of his own flesh. Hands clasped behind his back, knuckles whitening, forearms straining. He would not indulge in the solitary vice. Not unless he could disconnect his mind from his body.

Not until he could stop reliving a life—a debauchery—that he didn’t think was truly his. That he could not accept could ever have been his.

And if it were? his quisling conscience whispered. If it were all true, if all the sins were his, what then?

Blake found himself thinking quite fondly of the weapons wall.
That wasn’t the answer, he told himself. Again, and again, until he started believing it. Suicide was not the answer. Who would destroy the Federation, if he were not the one? Everyone who had the strength was dead, or betrayed, or mindwiped. As he had been. At least once. Probably twice. Terrifyingly, possibly even three times. No way for him to know, no certainties, only doubts and more doubts, crowding into his mind to mill around with the horde of faces who lived there.

His body ached with need, his head pounding, all of it feeding on everything else, consuming him. He had to stop this. Easier, probably, to destroy the Federation single-handed. His cock pulsed, and an unbidden memory snapped at him, arousing him all the more. He needed—

He needed the things he had been taught to love. Or had been born inclined towards. He tried to think of Jenna, of her beauty, the lusciousness of her body—and despite himself, he flustered open his trousers and stroked his hand along his cock as the image of Avon burst forth in his mind, naked, hard, dark hair clustered around a perfect cock, the smile—

Oh, God, the smile.
Avon laughing at him, or Avon pitying him. Give Avon control in the bedroom, and there would be no freedom anywhere else, ever. And there would be no secret too deep to elude Avon, all of it laid out in front of him, sacrificial lamb slaughtered by an amused smile.

Perhaps worse: if Avon were shocked, or disgusted. What price his own self-esteem if even the worldly Avon were appalled?

His hand didn’t care that he’d promised himself that there’d be none of that until he could control the images at the back of his mind that fostered in sexual heat. His cock cared even less, hard now, demanding, thrusting into his fist, his mind fixing upon the sexual pleasures of the past, hating himself even as he gave in to the basest parts of his own excess of memory. He could relive it all, several times, so many memories—so many lives—from which to choose, all of it ripe with lust, rich with experience. So many nights, so many men, and he focussed on that, on the nice, normal deviancy of man lying with man, of hard cock, wet mouth, filled to overflowing with the salt tang of another man’s passion, think about that, only that, he told himself, clinging to the memory with all the intensity of his fist around his cock, one small voice amongst the many demanding why he was doing this, why this was so imperative, what was making him do this. But the chorus of chaos that was his memories drowned that one voice with a litany of lust, words and images and memories and cocks, and Blake sank beneath the surface of his darkest desires, fucking men he may or may not have known, but remembered, now. Sucking and being sucked, strong hands holding his own confined over his head, his body stretched as his cock was devoured by the tightness of a man’s arse.

But then They came, the black uniforms and white coats, the hands, the straps, the prods, the pain, oh, the pain, and there it was too, older memories, true memories, falsehoods, it didn’t matter, it was there, bent over a man’s lap, huge hand spanking him, fingers shoved into him, cock filling him, hands tied, eyes blinded, the thin lash cutting his back so perfectly, and then he was the wielder of the whip, white skin splitting to red, his cock forcing into the too tight arse, the screams and the cries and the voices—

His cock shrivelled in his hand, and he curled up into a fetal ball, agony crushing his spine as the faces of boys erupted in his mind like overripe melons. “No,” he whispered, voice louder and louder and louder until he was shouting his denials at the walls. He had not done that. Could never
have done that. No matter what the Federation had done to him.

Wished, fervently, that he could scrub his soul clean.

Felt instead a compulsion to reach for his cock again, to bury that horror in the pleasure of the moment. Couldn’t keep the pictures from his mind, men with men, himself with men, under men, on top of men, inside men, flesh hot and damp around him, and then it threatened to change again, ugliness rising.

He would not let them do this to him. Would not.

His body screamed at him, denial of pleasure turned to pain. He welcomed it, dug the heel of his hand into the softness of his cock, tears springing to his eyes. Tears to scrub him clean. Pain to wash away the stains of memories that were not his own. But nothing to cure the fear that gnawed him, the fear that this was inside him, just like that programming Servalan had left behind. A sound had controlled him, then, and risked this ship, all of their lives, and the rebellion to boot.

But if this were programmed into him, what would this destroy? There were at least eight planets or space stations within easy reach of the Liberator, especially if he poured on the speed.

How could they have programmed him to do this? Had that been the worst part of the crime they had framed him with? That it wasn’t a frame up at all?

No. He had proof that the boys had gone to the clinic at precisely the same time, when he himself was already in custody.

Which didn’t help the boys: who better than Blake to know just how real false memories could be?

Almost without volition, his hand reached downwards once more.

But Orac had said there was no more programming hidden in his mind. So it couldn’t be that. Perhaps it was just abstention. Regardless of how fucked-up his mind was, his body hadn’t been fucked in a very long time. Unrequited lust, then. That’s all it was.

Apart from the dreams of mastery, the dreams of him taking someone and doing unspeakable things to them. The things in his dreams! They made his own simple perversions look healthy.

And perhaps that was the answer. Fight these nightmares, these compulsive desires with desires he knew to be his own, desires that had been subverted and soiled by the guards in their black uniforms and the puppeteers in their white coats.

Yes. There had to be an answer, and perhaps that was it. Break the conditioning, or the programming, or the effluent of the past, whatever it was, but defeat it not by running away and hiding from sex—just look where that had got him, the latest nightmare making his stomach churn with bile.

Find a way to break this compulsion to make others suffer.

And so he thought of Avon, of Avon in his glorious mask of leather and malice that couldn’t quite hide the fear and desperation within, and as he thought of Avon, Blake had his answer.

To starve the one desire, he would feed the other. To expiate the lies they made him remember as if it were truth, he would suffer. Penance, and pleasure, combined. Let others control him, let others do to him the things that stretched back farthest in his memory, and that the puppeteers had tried hardest to rip from him. Give himself over, taking control by yielding control under his will, by his own decision. Strength in submission. Yes. That was his answer.

If he had the courage to reach for it. If he had the strength to endure.

Avon’s silence was telling, his expression even more so. Well, Blake had wanted to know how he appeared to the others. Proof that even a mirror could lie, or at least soften the ugliest of the facts.

“Yes, Avon?” Blake asked with a touch of loftiness, refusing himself permission to smile as Avon’s expression clouded like a winter’s day and a nice, clean battle commenced.

“You might try saying that when I point out a more intelligent course of action than whichever hair-brained scheme you’ve concocted.”

The usual answer was poised on the tip of his tongue, when Avon turned away from him, bending over to do something obscure to an access panel. Memory, delusion, nightmare, heart’s desire, all or none of these, it hit him hard, his breath sticking in his throat as images, vivid, of heart-stopping clarity, drowned him in lust, in a terrible, consuming, destroying lust. What he could do to Avon, what he wanted to do to Avon, that white skin red-welted with blood, bruises, tender flesh raped and impaled, terrible pictures cascading through him, his body leaping to response.

He slumped then, knees weak, back bowed and
bent, and he wanted to weep and rage and kill. Hate boiled, scalding him, self-loathing unleashed.

Let loose the dogs of war, he thought in the ringing, reverberating dungeon of his skull. Let loose the dogs of war and hope they tear me limb from limb.

He looked up, to see Avon watching him, something terrifyingly akin to pity in those eyes.

No. No pity, not from Avon. Especially not from Avon.

“But I have,” he heard himself say, part of him as confused as Avon, taking longer than the other man to reconnect the interrupted conversation. “You and Cally seem both to think we all need a rest. So, yes, Avon, I agree, a rest would be just the thing. Rest we shall.” But not in peace, not for him. Hell would be a rest-cure after this particular life. “Bacchanalia, I think,” he said, naming a space station that would set Vila’s heart aflutter, knowing he was talking too quickly, sounding nothing like himself, Avon damn near visibly worried. The words poured on, running and gurgling and covering the cracks in his mind. “Yes, Bacchanalia, that should keep Vila happy. There’s supposed to be an Auron enclave there, so that should be a treat for Cally.” As if he were buying the guerrilla an ice-cream. He had to shut up, had to stopper his mouth. “And for you, there’s every debauchery ever thought of by man, so I’m sure someone will have thought of something to tempt even your jaded palate.”

It wasn’t often anyone got to see Kerr Avon agape. Blake swore he could hear Avon’s teeth snap together when he finally shut his mouth. “And what does Bacchanalia hold for you, Blake?”

“Oh, only what I’ve read,” Blake told him, his mind finally catching up with its fractured self, “only what I’ve read.”

And with that, Blake abandoned the flight deck and his duty watch, profound silence in his wake.

They’d all been looking at him, of course, since that little…incident on the flight deck. He refused to call it a breakdown, although Avon, surprise surprise, had no such scruples. But it was not a breakdown. Just a…malfunction. A malfunction of the sort he’d dealt with before.

In one of his lives, anyway.

And did it really matter any more which ones were real and which ones constructed? Was any reality truly certain? Just look at Avon’s version of the flight deck incident and recent events—Gan’s death, he shouted at himself, don’t make that into a false memory—and compare them with Blake’s. Two different, separate realities, with very little in common. Three, if he were to include Rill, and her planet.

Small wonder the nightmares had grown so unbearable after that. Time to think, he’d told himself. Time to deal with the pain, and the guilt, and the misery. And all he’d done was get someone else killed. Another life gone, erased, just like his own.

Enough, and more than enough.

He forced his mind off the well-worn circuit, pushed past all the usual traps and delays, denied to himself that his body was restless, full of compulsive desire, focussed, intently, on the defined goal, the object at hand.

An hour later, Cally and Jenna had teleported down to the rather gaudy space station decorating this sector like tarnished tinsel, Vila had departed amidst a cloud of words clustering like gnats, and Avon—well, Avon hadn’t bothered with going into any great detail.

The sound of Avon’s boots along the corridor had been familiar, Blake waiting patiently to set him down before allowing himself his own brand of freedom.

A raised eyebrow, a very cool, very measuring stare, and then Avon was moving easily behind the teleport console, edging Blake out smoothly. A small glance to make sure that Orac’s key was in place, and then Avon, mellifluous: “You go first.”

The lack of trust stung far more than it ought, well accustomed to it as he was. “So that you can follow as always?” he snapped. “Orac already has the co-ordinates I want.”

And then let Avon see how it felt to be not trusted, Orac instructed to blank the co-ordinates as soon as Blake was down and safe. Then let Avon feel the cut of not being trusted on his own ship, with the only people left in the Galaxy that he dared risk trusting, now that would—

Serve no purpose at all, he told himself glumly. Taking it out on Avon was the surest path to disaster and hardly a wise move if he wanted Avon’s help with Star One.

And hardly conducive to his own mental well-being if he started allowing himself to turn the bitter anger outwards to those who didn’t deserve...
it. Correction, he amended, thinking about Avon, to those who hadn’t earned this particular stew of emotions. There were other people who deserved those.

Funnnily enough, the zone wasn’t even vaguely seedy, a far cry from the outright sleaze he had been expecting—anticipating, really. He had wanted a nice, long walk down a dark and dangerous station corridor, with shadows and evils lurking in every nook and cranny just waiting to pounce on him and devour him. Instead, there were bright lights, good restaurants, dance clubs, pubs, even, to the bogglement of his brain, a book shop. A quick perusal of the window’s contents reassured him no end: this, then was what true moral decay looked like. The darkest of sins catered to with the same bright professionalism as the most mundane appetites for food.

Still, all this cleanliness was off-putting for a man who had very specialised needs this night. Imagination stirred, old vids cohabiting cosily with true memory, dark interrogation rooms, dank cells deep in the bowels of cavernous buildings, and he wished there was a dungeon round here, a dungeon with damp stone walls and clanking metal restraints, faint screams and loud groans.

And if he could get his hands on the puppeteer who had perverted his most cherished perversions like this, then he’d quite happily strangle the bastard. With his own intestines.

The thought cheered him no end, and he might even have whistled, if the nightmares hadn’t been hounding his steps. Yes, let Vila have his brothel with a dance floor, tall drinks and taller women: Blake would dearly love to find a wonderfully dank dungeon, complete with man in black.

He made do with a very well appointed domicile, a huge door opening on a plush lobby that was unnervingly similar to any hotel chain, the main differences being in the near nudity of the bellhops, and the very discreet, very pricey, list of services posted in florid script in a red-lit display window.

The desk clerk had the same bland unctuousness of a million others, his polite impassivity rendered bizarre by the “Yes, sir?” as he looked up from a catalogue of restraints and manacles.

“I’m looking for…”

Redemption. Freedom from nightmares. Penance. And the rebirth of desires too long denied.

As the silence stretched, the man behind the desk looked at him with more interest, eyebrows arching, all too reminiscent of Avon. “We cater to every taste here, sir, without judgement.”

But it was judgement he wanted, and absolution, or at least a pause in the relentless guilt.

He kicked himself for behaving like a teenager, and stated his needs, cold, precise, distanced.

The man behind the desk smiled. “Certainly, sir. That would be our back room you would be looking for.” A standard debit sheet flourished under Blake’s nose for a second, removed along with the untraceable cash chit he had brought with him.

“Sir, we maintain the highest security and discretion here. There really is no need to go to all the trouble and added expense of anonymous chits.”

“Yes, yes, and the authorities couldn’t care less who does what to whom. I am aware of that.” He was aware of other things too. Avon’s dark eyes, Avon’s darker mind, all that cleverness, bent in Blake’s direction. Oh, no, he wanted nothing traceable. Not for this. Not when it could well be Avon on his trail.

“Well,” it was the first time Blake had actually heard someone harrumph, “everything is in order, sir. This is your locker number, standard print lock—” a fetching smile, underladen with the heaviness of sex, “keys are such an inconvenience at times like these. If you’ll go straight down that corridor there…”

Blake left him still giving instructions, the plain corridor beckoning like a Siren. Quite a distance, and then there was the marching phalanx of doors, each numbered, each with its blue glow of print lock at its side. Barely larger than a closet, too small for anything but the most uncomfortable of knee-tremblers, Blake stripped, taking his time, thinking, thinking, every garment another thought, another memory, another face. Trying not to think too deeply, he made the necessary preparations, opening himself, making sure that he was already well lubricated and ready for even the hastiest of scenes. He denied himself the discretion and psychological prop of the small white towel hanging there, stood naked to palm the lock, walked naked along the corridor that stretched forever. No one else there, not yet, alone, the walls pressing in on him, the carpet pressing up into him through the soles of his feet. He could feel the passage of air on his skin, the pulse of his blood,
the working of his lungs. Was aware of everything, and nothing, and all of it commingled.

Noises, now, very faint, muffled and muted, brightening suddenly, fading again quickly. Brightening again, as Blake opened the door, fading away to scant murmurs as he walked inside, and closed the world out behind him.

Almost dark in here, the light diffused, cold-light sticks mainly, from the look of it. Portable light, then, nothing permanent but the lights over the bar itself. A light moving around the perimeter, groups and couples and solos illuminated long enough to tantalise, too briefly to arouse. But so many people—the room not crowded, bodies free to press tightly together only if they so chose, but there were still so many people here. Hundreds, he estimated. Hundreds. One, perhaps, for each of his sins. And not one of them even vaguely childlike. Every one of them a man, every kind of man imaginable, from bears to delicate eyelash-fluttering ‘damsels’ with sharp-toothed clamps hanging painfully from rouged nipples.

A deep breath. Another. Courage almost failing him, need spurring him, cheeks reddened with an embarrassment he told himself was absurd, Blake walked forward from the comforting dark by the door, into the mottled light of this group of strangers.

On his left, dark hair, pale skin, an arrogance of stance, and it reminded him so much of Avon. Temptation, that, to have ‘Avon’ here, the only way for Blake to have the man without having his heart ripped from his chest and fed to him.

The bar, first, crossing a roomful of hands, and mouths, and dicks. Touching him, pinching him, slapping his arse as he walked past, his nakedness a very specific declaration here.

Like bees to honey, he thought to himself, taking a glass of some sort of alcohol from the nearly clothed barman. He looked up, forgetting to hide the honesty of his eyes, saw someone gulp, and turn, and leave. Or perhaps it’s moths to a flame. One hand, sliding up the back of his thigh, up over the curve of his arse, into the hollow of his back, up to the planes of his shoulder.

Blake didn’t turn to look, but spread his legs, invitation, offer, confession.

“My room. Now.”

An attractive voice, reminding him of Avon, but coarser, crueler. Not quite close enough.

“No,” he said, loudly, to the man behind him. “I said,” repeated, voice soft and dangerous, more Avonish than before, the timbre not quite right, but close enough for Blake’s needs, “my room. NOW.”

Ah, but Avon would never have raised his voice like that. Had never needed to. Sibilant hisses were more his style, elegant insults, decorous malice, all of them drawing blood.

“No,” Blake repeated, shrugging the wandering hand off. He turned, at last, facing the blond man, making a show of his own strength and power. “You’re not what I’m looking for.”

Fuming, one backhanded slap to Blake’s face for pride’s sake, and the blond left, Blake almost smiling, hand going to the print on his face. A nice sting, but the man’s anger was all wrong, making the pain an act of violence, a million miles from what Blake wanted.

He went back to his drink, and waited. Waited for so long that desperation began licking at his toes. Waited until the blond and his chums departed. Waited until the music changed, waited until the mood changed. Waited until he felt a presence behind him.

Blake started to turn, was stopped. Hand heavy on his shoulder, soft leather, so black against the space-pallor of his skin. Avonesque. Intriguing, appealing. Curse and benediction in one.

All right, he confessed to himself, hating himself for this. He was supposed to be here to exorcise his demons, not invite a new one to move in and set up home.

The hand flexed, and a tongue laved the nape of his neck, and the hand moved round to twist his nipple, as if this man knew exactly how much pressure would hurt him, and precisely how much hurt pleased him. The black leather glove glittered in the light, as chrome studs caught and refracted the light, breaking the light into tiny pieces. The leather stroked across his mouth, his tongue reaching out to taste it, the smell of it washing over him, so familiar and so strange.

Was there any point in denying it?

And wasn’t it better than the little horrors the Federation had left behind?

All right, he told himself, relaxing at last into self-knowledge. So it’s Avon I want.

Want?

All right, so it’s Avon I need. Avon, and Avon’s punishment.

Avon’s punishment, only because it was the
door to Avon’s forgiveness. For if Avon could forgive him, then surely he could forgive himself?

“Please,” he whispered to that leather clad hand.

“Please.”

And was rewarded, by the heaviness of hand descending upon his naked arse.

“Yes,” he said, loudly, drawing attention to himself and whichever man it was behind him, setting the rules for this encounter. “More.”

He got what he asked for. The leather hand slapped him again, and he could feel his blood rushing to the stinging pain of his backside, and blood racing to his groin, his cock growing heavy, his balls shivering with the force of the blows to his arse.

“More,” he said again, and was silenced, leather fingers stuffed into his mouth, two fingers, three, his mouth working on them like a cock, making them wet and slick and gleaming in the low light. More slaps against his arse, then the wet fingers were taken from his mouth and slapped against him, then shoved, hard, into his mouth. Taken from him, and shoved, harder still, into his arse.

Blake bellowed with pain, his cock rushing erect, his nipples hard and aching, his mouth agape with the need to be filled. The fingers inside him moved, in and out, twisting round, finding his prostate and rubbing it, excruciating pleasure blended with the exquisite pain, the chrome studs excitingly smooth little bumps stimulating every fragment they touched.

He was panting, making animal sounds deep in his throat, all of it adding to the humiliation of his need. He could envision himself in his mind’s eye, a big man, pressed up against the bar, naked, flesh so pale, the gloved hand so very black against him, there, where it disappeared inside his flesh. Every move danced along his spine, every twist of those fingers set him on fire, every pleasure was punishment, every punishment, pleasure.

Perfect. It was absolutely perfect.

Another hand on him, this one ungloved, and Blake shivered with the awareness that he had no way of knowing if this hand belonged to the man fingerfucking him, or if this was another stranger, another unknown man using him. A cock was pressing into his flank, moist and hard, pushing against him until it was pressing at his hole where the fingers filled him.

He shuddered then, with the fantasy of being fucked by hand and cock, of two different men, two complete strangers debauching him, debasing him, controlling him.

The fingers in his arse were tugging at him, edging him backwards, and every step he took rubbed the fingers against his prostate, made him even more aware that he was under someone else’s control.

A red haired man came into view, smooth chested, big cock, erect, so much darker than the rest of his skin, an angry, hungry red. The man slapped him, across the face, a droplet of blood oozing from the corner of his lips. Slowly, savouring his penance, Blake licked it away. Saw the redhead smile, no, not smile, but uncover his teeth, predator licking his lips in anticipation of his prey.

Blake groaned aloud.

Moaned, piteously, as the fingers were pulled from his arse, suddenly bereft, his muscles clenching down on an aching emptiness.

Someone started to turn him around, to face the man who had been fingerfucking him, and at the last moment, Blake closed his eyes.

The fantasy was what he needed, not the truth.

Far more painful than the slapping, stinging blows across his backside, far more hurtful than harsh fingers pulling and twisting his nipples, the truth was there, in his mind.

He needed the fantasy, because he needed this man to be Avon.

He moaned again, and there was enough agony in that one sound that all the hands stopped hurting him, making the pain inside all the worse. Nothing to detract from it, nothing to distract him from it. Just the inescapable knowledge, that he wanted this to be Avon’s hand upon him. Avon, inside him. Avon, controlling him and punishing him, and stifling the sounds of his own screams.

No.

Not that.

He wanted desperately for it to be purely lust, carnal desire stoking his need for Avon. But it was something else, something other.

No.

Not that, please not that, he whispered in his mind, his own memories, true, false and suspect, drowned out by the barrage of memories of Avon.

Oh, how cruel, that he had thought to know himself on this. Blinded by lust, driven to distraction by the nightmare his sex dreams had become, chased all over the galaxy by the Federation, he had
been so busy fighting for his life he hadn’t noticed
what was happening right under his nose.

Small wonder everything always came back to
Avon. Small wonder it was Avon’s forgiveness he
craved, Avon’s approval he sought, Avon’s disap-
proval that stung so.

Love will do that to a man.

He almost laughed, but bottled it up inside for
fear that the laughter could to easily turn to tears.
He was too near the edge, and now he couldn’t
even guess what had driven him there.

Like a lifebelt to a drowning man, the kiss
descended upon him, wet mouth open against his,
and he welcomed it, sucking the other man’s
tongue inside, concentrating fiercely on the sensa-
tion.

Felt something tear deep within his mind, and
didn’t care. Let the pretense begin. Let this be
Avon. Just for tonight. Let this be Avon, and hang
the consequences, because for this, Avon would
surely hang him.

He started to wrap his arms around the man
kissing him, and changed his mind, sinking deeply
into the old memories, memories that went back, he
thought, to long before the men in the white coats
had raped his mind. He put his arms behind his
back, clasping his hands together, and groaned into
the mouth kissing him when someone restrained
those hands, a thong going round and round his
wrists until he couldn’t possibly free himself.

Perfect.

He spread his legs, and the invitation was
accepted, hands on his arse, fingers in him, another
hand stretching his balls to the edge of pain,
another hand holding his cock steady until a mouth
could take it, hot wetness, hot sting of hand on his
arse, and there, perfectly, suddenly, the heat of a
cock thrusting into him, a man taller than Blake
himself, lifting him up onto his toes.

Someone tied a blindfold around him, and Blake
opened his eyes to near darkness. If he looked
down, he could see his own body, and brown hair
bobbing as a mouth sucked him, an erect cock
standing on his right, waiting its turn in his arse,
the hard cock of the redhead who had slapped him,
but where—yes, there, on the left, black leather
gloves, black leather thong tied round cock and
balls, other blackness covering paleness, such a
beautiful cock standing upright.

As he’d been through hell, it was surely only fair
that he be given this heaven.

The man with the leather gloves had dark hair,
was slim enough to pass as Avon, and happily,
Blake could only see him from the waist down.

A savage thrust from the cock in his arse lifted
him right up onto his toes, and he felt the swell and
rush, semen washing his insides, making him slick
and ready for the next man. Barely a pause, and the
first man was gone, and the man on Blake’s right
disappeared, a cock shoving into him again, Blake
stumbling under the onslaught.

It was the leather gloves that caught him,
steadied him.

Just like Avon had, that day on the flight deck.

Definitely heaven. Or if not, then certainly an
acceptable purgatory.

The man he had decided could be Avon for the
night was standing in front of him now, and Blake’s
cock had been left alone, the man plastering himself
down Blake’s front, his mouth kissing Blake, his
cock pressing against Blake’s, and every time the
man fucking Blake thrust forward, Blake’s cock
rubbed harder against this Avon. On and on it
went, until Blake was drowning in pleasure, and
the man behind him came inside him and was
replaced, and this Avon reached and stretched
Blake even farther open, one finger slipping inside
to fuck him along with the cock.

Blake gasped, his head dropping back, his arse
stretched exquisitely far. It hurt, oh, it hurt, but the
pain was beautiful, tingling his spine, putting his
cock on the brink of orgasm. A mouth fastened on
his nipple, sucking and then biting, laving and
biting again. Blake glanced down, caught only the
quickest glimpse of dark hair, and then he closed
his eyes: he didn’t dare look, didn’t dare prove that
this was not Avon.

No. Let it be Avon. For tonight.

Avon was sucking on his nipples, his finger still
inside, stretching him so wide, and Blake imagined
Avon’s hand there, black against his arse, that
finger pressed on one side by Blake’s own body, on
the other by the cock fucking him. Felt, with joy,
the pressure of teeth on his flesh, the pain quite
perfect, felt, too soon, the man fucking him orgasm,
filling him, but leaving him still aching, still empty,
because it was Avon he wanted to fuck him—fuck
him hard, ruthlessly, making Blake his domain.

So quickly it dizzied him, he was shoved, flung
face down over the height of a bar stool, a cock
thrust into his mouth. He swallowed it down, as far
as it could go, and felt it begin to piston in and out of his throat, every thrust inward tantalising him with the clinging kiss of the man’s balls against his chin. On it went, Blake sucking for all he was worth, near gagging, unable to control even when he breathed. That control was given over to the cock fucking his face, the cock that had the sharp edge of a leather thong swaying against his chin.

The cock shoved into him, stayed there, holding his breath for him, and a strap crashed into him, lengthwise, snapping against his bound wrists and his exposed arse, and Blake knew it was this man wielding the strap, this man giving him pain and pleasure, punishment and redemption. Avon, for tonight, giving him everything, being everything.

He wanted so much to tell Avon he loved him.

And then the cock left his mouth, and the heavy strap made love to his arse, and his thighs, and his back. It lasted a lifetime, until he was giddy with the pain and the relief. Someone kicked his legs wider apart, and his arsehole was visible, unprotected, and he shuddered as a hand came down on him there, the fingertips, that leather, hitting his balls. He very nearly blacked out, from the pain, from the pleasure, but the hand was stroking him again, then hitting him, pain and pleasure interspersed with pleasure and pain, strength in that hand, power in the way the man—this Avon—handled him, more power still in Blake for yielding.

Another blow, staggering pain, but he took it, took it deep inside, and held it, and conquered it, made it his plaything, and the next blow was pain beyond pain, purest pleasure, his nerves incredibly alive, his mind filled with nothing but sensation and the thought that this was Avon, his Avon, doing this to him, giving him this, exorcising the demons.

When it came, the cock entering him with terrible slowness was almost a disappointment. There was no pain, save the sweet sting of abraded flesh where others had fucked him before, but he was slick inside, slick with other men’s cum, and this Avon of his slid in so easily, his thick cock an undiluted pleasure, and in that, there was pain.

It was so perfect, to have Avon fuck him like this, bound, and blindfolded, and now he was gagged by a glove pressed into his mouth. His tongue fondled the leather of the glove, found the studs, tasted the lingering heat of the hand that had been encased in the leather. The cock was all the way in him now, crisp hair pressing against his cheeks, the soft hair on this Avon’s thighs smooth against his own inner thighs, there, where he was sensitive. He could feel every movement, could feel the weight of the cock moving so gently inside him. And that gentleness, that tenderness, from this Avon, was the sweetest hurt of all.

Blake gave himself over to it utterly, losing himself, gratefully, in the slow plundering of his own body. He smiled, as this Avon began at last to thrust faster, to fuck him harder, and he appreciated this Avon all the more. The force of the fucking drove him forward, his own erection pressed hard and fast against the flat side of the stool cushion, that cool leather hard against his own heated hardness, and the cock inside him claiming him, owning him, controlling even the pleasure of his own cock.

He could feel orgasm building, Avon’s cock pounding into him, feel them both hurrying onwards, hurtling into pleasure, and he needed more, needed that one last thing—

This Avon, fucking him, leaned down onto him, the weight of his body crushing Blake’s bound wrists into the small of his back, and the combined weight of this Avon and his own body pressed Blake’s cock hard against the bar stool, the pain sharp enough to bring tears to his eyes, and still the pleasure was building, and building, and he felt his Avon erupt inside him, heat splashing deep inside, his own cock grinding into the unyielding hardness of the stool, and he still needed more, just a bit, just more and—

Teeth sank into his neck, and the pain screamed through him with his orgasm, blinding him more than the blindfold ever could, draining him body and mind.

All of him was limp, cock and body and mind, Blake hanging over the bar stool like an abandoned rag doll. Sweat and semen pooled on him, and under him, and he wanted to stay there forever.

But hands were on him again, removing his blindfold, exposing his eyes to the sight of a multitude of legs and cocks and bums, Blake keeping his eyes lowered, not wanting to break the fantasy yet. Behind him, someone untied his hands, and someone was helping him to his feet. Blake shut his eyes, trying to hold onto the dream of Avon doing this for him, of Avon doing this to him, but nothing lasts forever.

When he looked, brown eyes met his, beautiful brown eyes, a mouth more beautiful still, but it
wasn’t Avon. Close enough on the surface, but a million miles away in what really mattered. The eyes were smiling at him, the man—not his Avon, not any Avon, just a nameless stranger—leaning forward, using his white teeth to pull the glove from Blake’s mouth, coming back for a kiss, deep, and pleasant.

“You certainly know—”
Blake kissed him hard, to shut him up, to stop him from saying anything that would destroy the fantasy any more.

Turned away quickly, so quickly that only a fool wouldn’t understand, and it seemed that even pretend-Avons were no fools. Not looking around him, ignoring all the men looking at him, talking to him, talking about him, Blake walked quickly from the room, walked down the long corridor, pace increasing as the corridor grew absurdly long, almost running by the time he reached his cubicle, hand slapping against the lock, and then he was inside, propped against the wall, encased in a room small enough to be a tomb.

All alone, Roj Blake stood there, and concentrated fiercely on not crying.

Hours later, and he was clean, and clothed, and there was nothing whatsoever about him to reveal what he had spent his evening doing. Nothing to show how many cocks he’d had inside, nor how many cocks he’d sucked. Nothing at all, he hoped, to show the dreams that had been born and died in a single night.

The dream was dead, the pretence past as soon as he’d opened his eyes in that semi-dark room and seen a face not Avon’s. But the knowledge lingered, laughing, mocking him from the corners of his mind.

At least the voices had quieted, and the compulsive need: small mercies, perhaps, but enough, for now. He was quite sure the nightmares wouldn’t return, at least for a while; when he thought of sex, he thought of Avon. And who would be surprised by Avon monopolising something, or someone?

Those three boys might still be screaming somewhere in the dim recesses of his mind, but he couldn’t hear them for the pounding of his own heart and the memory of Avon’s voice, and the rare, carefully hoarded memory of the very few times Avon had laughed.

There was no one else in the teleport room, only Orac, flickering away to itself. To the flight deck, then, Blake not quite ready for the too familiar confines of his own room.

Every single step reawakened a twinge of pleasure or discomfort, a reminder of what he’d done. The bite on his shoulder itched, and his cock and balls ached in a way he enjoyed, the echo of good, rough sex, the sort he’d always liked. The sort he’d probably always liked.

But the lack of certainty had lost a certain amount of sting, stolen away by the new certainty that had avalanched over him tonight. Avon.

Of course, he had half expected Avon to be on the flight deck.

“Anyone else back up, or am I the first?” he asked, very pleased with his perfectly casual tone of voice.

“You’re not the first back, and yes, the two of us are the only ones on board.”

He should, he knew, probably make a fairly nasty dig about how short a time Avon had needed, but even so peripheral a mention of sex with Avon was not a good idea. Not right now, so soon after.

He saw Avon watching him out of the corner of his eye, ignored him as he was his habit, and threw himself down onto the flight couch. His body protested, pain echoing, a dull thrum through him, and his eyes closed, just for a second.


Well, let him make of it what he would. It would do no harm (no? a hysterical voice in his mind demanded, laughing madly at the thought of Avon being harmless if he knew such things) for Avon to guess that Blake had indulged in sex. Might even put an idea or two in his mind if he thought that Blake had been well fucked.

Changed his mind immediately, when he saw knowledge begin to darken Avon’s eyes.

He should have gone straight back to his room after all. But he didn’t dare leave the flight deck too soon, Avon scenting weakness like a wolf in spring. So instead of fleeing, he snatched up a batch of flimsies from the table, made an issue out of reading them. Promptly dropped one, and cursed his clumsiness even as he stretched awkwardly to reach it.

He grabbed at his shirt as he felt it slip, but knew immediately that he’d been that fraction too late. The itch of the bite turned to the burning heat of Avon’s stare. Unwillingly, Blake turned round to
look into Avon’s all-too knowing eyes. All he could read was that Avon knew, that his secret was in Avon’s hands. It was impossible to fathom what Avon was going to do, or even whether Avon was disgusted or aroused or simply viciously amused.

And then Avon smiled.

Blake still couldn’t read Avon, not clearly. Feared that not only did Avon know his dirty little sex secret, but that it was only a matter of time before Avon knew that Blake loved him, in spite of himself—in spite of them both.

He swallowed, hard, and willed himself to look away disdainfully, as if unruffled by Avon seeing something so minor as a mark of passion. But a love bite was different from the circle mark of teeth, and the telltale of blood. Avon knew. Avon would always know.

So. The nightmares had been silenced, for now. The compulsion to hurt and destroy had been sated, for now. The screams of the three boys had been silenced. And in their place, there was Avon, and love.

He had traded, then, three small demons for the devil himself.

Turning back to his search for Docholli, Blake waited for hell to begin.