

The Table

By Dave Littlely

Tuy slowly regained consciousness with a slight headache. The room he was in was completely shrouded in darkness and he quickly found that he couldn't move. He was lying face up on a hard surface, stripped of his clothing and gear. There was a pressure pushing down on him with enough force to keep him mostly immobile.

"Great, there goes my bonus for being early." Tuy thought to himself. He had been hired as a courier. Everything was going so well. He lost an initial operative that was obviously following him, and there was no sign of any others. Upon making it to the destination planet, he had the nagging feeling that someone had noticed him. Rounding a corner into a less populated area he had noticed that those walking around him seemed a little too choreographed. The sudden pain in the back of his head had confirmed his uneasy feeling.

Now he was here, wherever that was. Tuy methodically tried to flex all of his muscles to see if there was any permanent damage, but as far as he could tell he was in good health. He noticed something odd about his confinement. From the faint scent of ozone and low hum, Tuy could tell that it was a standard energy force beam holding him down. But instead of one beam, it seemed that fifteen to twenty smaller beams were placed widthwise along his body. It felt like numerous ropes had tied him down. Wiggling under the beams, Tuy also observed that the surface he was on had widthwise gaps at roughly the same locations as the gaps between the force beams. Testing his confinement, Tuy exerted against the beams, but to no avail.

"Time to check the cargo", Tuy thought as he mentally accessed the tiny implanted computer contained within his skull. A quick diagnostic told him that it had not been tampered with. "Ok, whoever's got me is smart enough not to mess with it. That eliminates a few organizations." Unfortunately, Tuy was more afraid of the groups that knew better than to tamper with the tiny computer.

More checking revealed that while the computer was intact, an implanted communicator was gone. And worse, the suicide device was gone. He had it implanted two years ago when he heard of a colleague that was tortured to death. The body that was found spoke of horrors no sentient being should have to endure. The device, when activated, would have produced a lethal shock within his brain that would have ended his life in an instant.

About three hours passed before there was any activity. Then, a light came on in the room revealing Tuy's surroundings. The first thing Tuy saw were about twenty rectangular wedges of metal, about a centimeter thick, half a meter long and a quarter of a meter tall. They were attached to the adjacent wall with bars of similar metal, making the wedges look like dull oversized cleavers. They were hanging over his body positioned about ten centimeters apart lengthwise along the table. Looking to his right, he saw an identical table to the one he was on. It was empty. A single door was at the wall near his feet.

A couple of minutes after the light came on, the door opened and three Humans came

into the room. The first was a slim, muscular male, average height, one of the lighter skinned varieties. He was wearing a dark red uniform that Tuy didn't recognize, but it looked military. It could have belonged to any number of the tiny kingdoms in this area of space.

The second was taller, stockier, and covered with healed over scars. Any idiot with a medical kit could have removed the scars, so they were probably the trophies of an active combatant. He was devoid of clothing and looked rather uncomfortable about it.

The third was female, rather tall for the species, long dark hair tied in a pony tail, with a soft supple body that had obviously never seen combat. She was also lacking in clothing, though she didn't seem as uncomfortable about it. She looked over to Tuy with curiosity before scanning the rest of the room.

Tuy himself was mostly Human, with a bit of Zygoten from his great-grandmother. The only visible difference between himself and a full Human was an abnormally large amount of body hair.

"Good day Mr. Tuy", the uniformed Human said. "My name is Varus. I trust you have recovered from that nasty blow to the back of your head." Varus had one of those fake charming voices that, while seemed quite pleasant, hid whatever true motives were underneath.

"I feel fine." Tuy grumbled.

"Good. Now I suppose we could end this all without any difficulties if you just unlocked the information contained within your skull." Tuy turned his head and stared at the ceiling. "No? Pity." Varus said with a slight grin. His eyes betrayed a hint of anticipation as he turned towards the two others in the room. "You." pointing at the combatant. "Lie down on that table." The male started to hesitate, but then a compulsion within him forced him to walk to the table across from Tuy and lie down on it.

Varus went to a small control panel beside the table the combatant was on and worked some controls. Bands of depressed skin appeared along his body as force beams, identical to the ones holding Tuy, held him immobile. The female looked from the combatant, to Tuy, and back to Varus with obvious worry. Varus took a small patch out of a wall compartment and placed it on the man's forehead. The two-centimeter square patch slowly started to absorb itself into his skin as the trillions of nanoscopic robots became active.

"That should counteract the slave conditioning techniques we use." Varus commented. Walking over to Tuy's table, he grabbed a hold of Tuy's head and forced it to face the other table. Tuy relaxed his neck muscles for a moment, waiting for Varus' hand to relax. Varus switched to hold Tuy's head with one hand and moved his other hand to the control panel beside Tuy's table. Just as Tuy was about to exert his neck to try to get a finger between his teeth, Varus removed his hand and another force beam came down and held his head in place.

Varus went back to the compartment where he obtained the patch. He opened a small box and pulled out two very tiny patches and brought them over to Tuy.

"Now, I can assure you that these will not harm you." Varus said as he placed the patches on Tuy's forehead, one each above his eyes. The thin mesh slowly worked its way into the skin. Tuy felt a tingling around his eyes, but otherwise, could not determine what was happening.

"Look, even if I did unlock the chip, the information is encrypted. I don't even know what's in it. You're wasting your time."

"You let us worry about the encryption. I can assure you that we have more than enough resources at our disposal to decode it." Varus paused, and then leaned down to stare at Tuy, his face only a few centimeters away. His eyes were smiling. "You're expecting torture aren't you?" His whisper was just loud enough for Tuy to hear. "Well, let me tell you, you don't know the meaning of the word." He rose, and then as an afterthought: "At least not yet."

Varus turned toward the combatant on the other table. "Do you know why you're here?"

"No. I was supposed to be debriefed today by my commander. Then I was to get some time off." The large man's face was growing fearful as he struggled against the beams holding him.

"Well, your commander wasn't too impressed with your performance recently, so you were given to me."

"Why did you remove the slave conditioning?"

A smile crept along Varus' lips. "Let's just say I wanted you to be in complete control of your senses. While our techniques ensure that you follow our orders without question, a sad side effect is that they tend to dull a person's mind." Turning he said, "Do you see this man. His name is Tuy. He's a courier who has something we want buried inside his head. You're going to help us get it."

The combatant glanced at Tuy. "Couldn't you just use the 'slave juice' on him?"

Varus smiled at the slang term for their conditioning techniques. "Unfortunately, that would take too much time. The process takes a number of days to be fully effective. And I'm guessing Tuy's internal computer has the capability of detecting such a drastic change to his mind. It would destroy the information we seek before we could force him to give it up."

"Have you figured out what these are for yet?" Varus had turned and was again talking to Tuy. He started running his fingers along the metal wedges above the table. "Simple ship armour, molded into these shapes." Pride was obvious in his voice. "They're attached to a modified docking clamp and when I activate it, the wedges will come down through these gaps." Varus ran a knuckle along Tuy's table making knocking sounds as it went from surface to gap to surface to gap. "I can make it quick" a snap of his fingers demonstrating "or I can make it excruciatingly slow."

Again, Varus leaned down to be face to face with Tuy. "Listen, whatever it is in your head can't be worth more than your life. Give it to me and this ends now."

"I told you I can't. It's encrypted. I can't even unlock the information without a key code." Tuy was lying, but figured it was worth a shot. He wasn't exactly sure what information he was carrying, but figured it had something to do with the plague.

About four months ago, the main planet of the Lomali Imperium contracted the plague. It seemed to affect all species all over the planet simultaneously. Within a week, everyone was dead. It was determined that a frigate, which was orbiting the planet a few days before, spread the infecting agent. Weapons of mass biological death usually were easily detected, or easily protected against. But this plague was different. It was undetectable and, so far, no one had developed the nanoscopic robots needed to prevent the disease. The first symptoms of the disease are a breakdown in mental faculty and an immense boost in testosterone and adrenaline-like hormones. The result of the plague is violent madness and an eventual breakdown of internal systems. In the last four months, the plague had been used at least a dozen times in various kingdoms. No one thus far had taken credit and there seemed to be no specific target.

If Tuy did contain information about a cure or even a way to detect the plague, he knew he couldn't let it fall into anyone's hands except the person he was delivering it to. If the people responsible for the plague did get a hold of the information, they would be able to alter the plague to avoid whatever countermeasure was developed. Tuy knew that he wasn't the only courier hired for this job, so if he didn't make it, hopefully others would.

"I doubt that." Varus was saying. "We actually intercepted another courier whom we think was carrying the same cargo. Unfortunately, she destroyed the data before we could extract it from her. Nonetheless, she described in detail the system that was used in transport and didn't mention anything about an unlock code at your destination." Varus turned back and went to a control panel by the combatant's table. "Ah well. Actually, I'm kind of glad you haven't broken yet. For now I get to show you my creation."

Pressing a button on the panel, the table across from Tuy shuddered slightly. Then the metallic wedges above its occupant started to slowly come down.

"WAIT!" the combatant screamed. "WHAT ARE YOU DOING? HE'S THE ONE YOU'RE SUPPOSE TO TORTURE!"

"Ah, but we have to demonstrate what will happen to him if he doesn't comply." Varus said calmly. Varus' eyes were completely focused on the combatant as the wedges came down. They were going slow, about a centimeter a second. It would be a couple of minutes before they would make contact with the man's skin. Varus' stare was intense, as if he were trying to record as much detail in his mind as possible.

"Look, Tuy, that's your name isn't it?" The combatant's head was frantically turning from looking at Tuy to looking at the metal above him. Bruises were starting to appear on his skin as he used all his strength to push himself against the force beams. "Give him your cargo! He'll let me go then! PLEASE! I've got friends outside. I can get you money. Anything!"

"I'm sorry." Tuy said flatly. He closed his eyes and tried to block out his senses. This was

something he didn't want to watch. But a moment after closing his eyes, they snapped open again. Confused, Tuy tried to close them again, but found that he couldn't. The tingling around his eyes got stronger every time he tried.

"OK Tuy, think. How the hell are you going to get out of this one?" Tuy thought to himself as he watched his counterpart's impending fate. "Can't move, can't even shut my eyes, and I doubt anyone's going to come to my rescue. I could try to talk my way out, but from the look of this asshole, he would be disappointed if he had to cut this sick little demo short. I guess the main question is whether he would let you go if you gave him the cargo. So what are a few more planetary genocides? Someone else will find a cure eventually." But even as he thought it, he knew he couldn't give up his information. "Damn morals, always getting in the way of my life." For some reason the image of Tuy's mother popped into his mind.

Tuy's train of thought was promptly derailed as the combatant let out a sobbing yell. His eyes were locked with the bars of metal which were now directly over him. Veins were visible on his skull as he struggled against the force beams. The first bar to make contact was on the bridge of his nose. He quickly turned his head towards Tuy to avoid contact a few seconds more.

The wedges were distributed along the entire length of the table, so the one above the man's head and two below his feet wouldn't touch him. The rest were placed along his body from his forehead to the bridges of his feet. As they came down the bars at his head, thighs and chest made contact first and slowly started to press downward. At first contact, he let out a high piercing scream that ripped through the room.

A few moments later most of the bars were in contact with his skin. The ones pressing against his body weren't doing much damage yet, but the three wedges now pressing against his head were. His contorted face let out a "Unnnnggg" sound as the wedges started to slowly misshape his skull.

Blood started to stream out of his nose and his eyes were bulging out of their sockets. Massive bruising could be seen where the wedges were pressing down along his body. A dull crack could be heard as a rib broke, then another. Blood started pouring out of his eye-sockets and a soft crunching sound could be heard as his skull started to cave-in on itself. By now the combatant had to be dead, but the lifeless body held a death stare with Tuy.

The bars over his pelvis were crushing their way down through the thick bones. The large chest muscles of the once powerful man started to rupture and blood poured out of the ripped flesh. The skull had splintered and bone fragments could be seen through the blood. All along his body there were ruptures in the skin and muscle and an unbelievable amount of dark red blood was streaming onto the floor.

About ten seconds later the wedges were half way through the man's body. Crushed and splintered ribs could be seen all along his chest. Arm and leg bones had not broken yet as the softer flesh was being forced through the gaps between the bars or gaps along the table. Tuy stole his eyes away from the gruesome scene for a moment to look at Varus. He had an intense look of anticipation that seemed like hunger, as if he couldn't get enough of the carnage before him. A

glance at the female in the room found her lying in a corner in the fetal position with her eyes shut tight and her hands pressed firmly on her ears.

Two loud cracks in rapid succession echoed through the room. The combatant's femurs had shattered and that was quickly followed by a series of other sharp cracking sounds. It was if all the bones in the man's arms, legs, and spine were breaking at once, as the metal wedges were now only a few centimeters away from the surface of the table. The crunching sound ceased as the wedges reached the level of the table and continued through, past the mutilated remains of the human.

A loud exhale could be heard from Varus. He had been holding his breath.

"Wasn't...that...fun?" he said in a slow deliberate voice.

It was a few moments before Tuy could pull his eyes away from the remains on the second table. Varus was smiling down on him, obviously amused by the whole situation. Tuy could feel the beginnings of hatred for this man form in his belly.

Varus turned towards the female still huddled on the floor.

"Degra dana." He said in a language unfamiliar to Tuy. The female didn't respond.

"DEGRA DANA!" Varus yelled while giving the female a swift kick to the small of her back. After a sharp cry, she snapped out of whatever grief stricken trance she was in and rose to her feet. Her eyes widened in horror as she looked at the remains of the other slave. A moment later she doubled over and threw up.

Movement caught Tuy's eye across from him and suddenly there was another woman sitting on the other table, smiling down at him. As the recognition registered in Tuy's mind, he jumped involuntarily. His muscles strained against the energy beams holding him down. Varus noticed and turned to him.

"Problem?" A curious grin was on his face.

Tuy moved his eyes to Varus, then back to the table. The woman was gone.

"Ok Tuy, now you're losing it." Tuy thought. "When you start seeing apparitions of your dead mother, you know you're going nuts."

Varus turned back towards the female human. "Nov yina a resa, kolupa. Nipo vanarek dazha." Varus told her. Upon hearing the command, the woman walked over to the wall by Tuy's head and opened a compartment. A hose was behind the compartment door and the female started to unwrap it. Then, holding the end of the hose, she touched a control on the wall and a stream of water shot out of the hose. She started to use the water pressure to clear the remains of the dead human off of the table and onto the floor.

Varus turned to Tuy again. "So Mr. Tuy. What do you think of my little creation?"

"You don't honestly expect an answer do you?"

"Perhaps not. But the look of disgust on your face is answer enough. But let's get down to business." He paused, apparently for dramatic effect. "Give me your cargo."

Tuy looked him in the eyes. Decision time. Tuy tried to ascertain what the pathetic excuse for a sentient being would do if he got the information. Would he let Tuy go, or would he kill Tuy anyway, just for his amusement. Tuy probed the other man's eyes trying to get a clue of his psyche. The answer came to him without too much effort.

"Shit." Tuy thought. He then accessed the controls of his implanted computer and ordered it to scramble the data. That way when the bars were millimeters from his body he wouldn't have the option of changing his mind.

"Well?" Varus said.

"May a thousand leeches infest your underwear."

An eyebrow raised. "What's a leech?"

"No zarking idea, but it I know a good curse when I hear it." Tuy glanced at the woman, still hosing down the opposite table. "Well, looks like you're going to be the last pretty face I see." he thought. "I really hope you're just the cleaning staff."

Varus stuck his head close, blocking his view of the woman. "So I guess you need some more convincing. Did you think that you were going to get the same treatment as him?" He nodded behind him to the various bits of carnage now on the floor. "That man was dead within a minute. I can assure you that your suffering will be a lifetime in comparison."

Varus went back to the control panel by the other table. He pressed a control and the metal wedges shot back up to their original position. Standing straight, Varus turned towards the human female that was finishing spraying off of the table.

"Vo reka a zenda"

Although Tuy didn't know what the words meant, the effect of them was obvious. The female instantly became quite pale, her eyes widened and the hand holding the end of the hose started to shake.

"Vo reka a zenda" Varus calmly said again, a smile on his face.

The female's legs started to shake and she dropped the hose. She took a very rigid step forward, as if her leg was fighting against itself as it moved. Another step, then another. It was obvious she was fighting the command that was given, but was losing the battle. Another couple of steps and she reached the table the male human had been on. She turned slowly around and sat down on the edge of the table. Her lips were quivering as she tried to speak, but the words couldn't come out. She pivoted and put her legs up on the table. As she started to lie back her torso started to shake violently as she used all of her will power to try to fight what her body was

doing. But a moment later, her back made contact with the table. Tuy could see tears welling up in her eyes.

"My, my. She fought that command vigorously, didn't she Mr. Tuy?" Varus said as he went to the control panel. Part of the table the female was on started to rise. The side her head was on started to incline upward until her torso was at about a forty-five degree angle to the rest of her body. Then the force beams came down and held her in place, the bands of depressed skin appearing along her flesh. Varus then went back to the cabinet that he had obtained the patches he used previously.

"There's really no point to this." Tuy said, trying to sound calm. "You've proved your point. I can expect a grisly death if I don't hand over the cargo. You don't need to show me again."

"My dear Mr. Tuy," Varus said as he put a patch on the female's forehead and two tiny ones above her eyes. "As I said before, that man's fate will not be yours. Now I need to show you exactly what will happen to you if you don't comply with our wishes." Varus' mock polite and charming voice was really started to grate on Tuy's nerves.

Taking a deep breath, Tuy said, "The cargo has been destroyed."

Varus took a step towards Tuy and stared him in the eyes. "I do hope that you are lying Mr. Tuy." He paused, trying to gauge the truthfulness in Tuy's words. Seeing truth in Tuy's eyes he said, "And I can assure you that once my second demonstration is over, you will wish that you were lying as well."

A sobbing sound could be heard from behind Varus and he stood up to give Tuy a view of the woman. She was weeping, muttering something between sobs.

"She's asking what she did wrong." Varus said. Varus went over to the female and bent to her ear and spoke to her softly for a few minutes. The sobbing grew louder and soon she was crying intensely, tears streaming down her face.

Varus stood up and walked back to Tuy. "I told her that she did absolutely nothing wrong. She was property. We owned her and we could do whatever we wanted with her. I told her that when I described my new torture device to the men, they suggested that I try it out on her. It's not true of course, and actually many of them will be quite disturbed to find out what happened. They were quite fond of her. I guess she's quite good at what she does, if you get my meaning. I told her that a camera was showing this entire event to everyone in the base, and that all those she had serviced and befriended were going to enjoy watching her be slowly tortured to death."

Tuy said nothing, as his mind was deep in a fantasy of what it would be like to have his hands around Varus' throat. Varus bent down to retrieve something from under the female's table. When he rose, he was holding a small device. It consisted of what looked like a round cap connected by a hose to a cylindrical device. He placed the device against the wall next to the wedge directly above the female's head at the end of the table. It stuck there and Varus then

placed the cap that was attached to it against the top of the female's head. Immediately the cap pressed down against the female's head and the sound of mechanisms could be heard. The female let out a slight cry of pain that shocked her out of her weeping. The look of pain was obvious for a couple of seconds, but soon she partially relaxed.

"This is a very sophisticated device." Varus was explaining to Tuy. "It's a portable life supporter, designed for use in the field by our military. It attaches directly to the brain and is designed to keep it alive, no matter what happens to the body. I've had my men modify the device to ensure that it keeps the wearer conscious as well as alive. We've used it numerous times to bring back mortally wounded combatants that we wish to save. This device keeps the brain alive and healthy, and gives us time to grow a new body. Very useful. In addition, I have treated this woman with a large dose of blood clotting nanoscopic robots. We use them for our combatants in the field as well. I'll show you."

Varus then produced a small blade that was hidden in his uniform somewhere and went to the female's arm. Putting it between two of the indentations in her skin, he made a large cut on the female's wrist. She cried out as blood spurted out of the wound. But very quickly, the blood flow slowed and then stopped. The female started sobbing again.

"You see Mr. Tuy. The wound was closed up almost immediately." Varus went back to the control panel by the female's table. "Last chance?" he said to Tuy.

"Do you believe in reincarnation Varus?" Tuy said.

"No, why?"

"Because somehow, someday, I'm going to come back. And when I do, you're going to regret your soul ever came into existence."

"A threat from a dying man." Varus chuckled. "How pathetic." Varus' hand came up and pressed a control. The female's table shook momentarily and then a wedge started to come down. But instead of all of the wedges coming down at once, only the last wedge above the female's feet was lowering. It was moving at the same speed as before, taking an excruciating long time to come down.

"JI!" the female yelled out. She started to frantically talk to Varus, obviously begging for him to stop.

"Zark." Tuy thought as he watched the wedge come down, wishing there was something he could do to stop it. Tuy's eyes then focused on something he had not seen previously. On a small ledge near the foot of the room, there appeared to be a small toy. It looked like a miniature version of an old Confederation G1 Carrier.

"Now, that wasn't there before." Tuy thought. "What the..." Suddenly the room around Tuy evaporated and then coalesced into a different room. Tuy was no longer bound to a death machine but was sitting in the center of a room on the floor. He looked down at his somewhat smaller hands to find he was holding a remote control device. Looking up, he could see the G1

toy, hovering in the air above him. He could also see the shattered remains of a light fixture on the opposite side of the room.

"Tuy!" someone yelled from behind him. As Tuy turned his head, he stopped abruptly at the reflection in a mirror. He was a child. He looked to be about six years old. "Tuy", the stern voice commanded again. Tuy looked at the man and saw that it was his father.

"I'm sorry dad." He suddenly found himself saying. "It was an accident." Tuy's father snorted and walked over to the G1, hovering motionless in the air. Snatching it out of the air, the large man turned it upside-down and removed its portable power source. Without power, the toy shut off. The man tossed the tiny ship to the ground and left the room.

Tuy's perspective abruptly changed and now he was looking down at his child self from near the ceiling of the room. The child was staring at his toy, while still fiddling with the remote control. Abruptly, the toy came alive again and rose into the air. The child smiled and started to fly the ship around the room, careful to avoid anything breakable this time. The door Tuy's father had exited out of opened again and this time a woman entered the room. It was Tuy's mother.

"Tuy, I thought your father deactivated that thing." she said.

"He did mommy, but look, it still works!" the child said with obvious glee. A look of confusion on his mother's face was soon replaced with a look of understanding.

"Tuy, how about we go get some ice cream?"

"Sure!" the child exclaimed, dropping the remote control and running out of the room. Tuy's mother stayed in the room for a moment, waiting, until the G1 lost its power and crashed to the floor. She smiled at it, but there was a look of sadness in her face. Her eyes then rose and looked towards the ceiling towards Tuy. She smiled at Tuy, though he had no form. Tuy felt a sense of warmth, as if his mother was projecting her love to him.

An inhuman scream startled Tuy and suddenly he was back on the table. The wedge has reached the human female's feet. She was struggling against the force beams holding her and crying loudly.

"Ji..." she exclaimed as the wedge started to press down against her feet just below her ankles. The wedge pressed relentlessly downward and the bones in her feet started to distend. With each breath, the female made a high pitched wail.

The female's voice then seemed to catch in her throat as she felt her foot bones stretching to their limits. Her body was shaking and her eyes could not tear themselves away from her feet. Finally, the tortured bones gave way as two abrupt cracking sounds filled the room.

"Gaaaaaaeeeeeee!" the woman screamed as the bones shattered. Tuy could see the shattered bone fragments where the bridge of her foot was, but they were soon covered in copious amounts of blood. The wedge continued downward and more of the woman's feet and anklebones gave way, slicing through skin. The lower halves of her feet were starting to bend

backwards as the force beam pushed them down.

Tuy tried again to close his eyes to the horror before him, but whatever Varus did to his eyes prevented it. A dull pain was starting to throb in Tuy's temples. Soon it was over as the wedge pushed its way through the remainder of the female's feet, and stopped just below the table. Blood that had been oozing out of her ankles slowed and then stopped. The severed feet were pushed flat against the table. The only sound in the room was of the female's screaming.

But there was little reprieve, as the second wedge started to slowly descend. It would make contact with the female's lower shin.

"Ji...Ji...Ji..." the female muttered between cries as she watched the wedge start its descent.

"In case you haven't guessed," Varus said slowly, "'Ji' means 'No'." But Tuy wasn't listening. He was completely mesmerized by the floating blocks of plastic that had suddenly appeared in his field of vision.

"Tuy, if you're going to die, you're damn well going die with your sanity intact" Tuy thought to himself as he stared at the blocks. "Ok, we've got hallucinations and very vivid flashbacks. That must be fairly normal considering the situation I'm in. My brain is trying to protect itself by distracting me from all this." But there was still a nagging feeling of doubt, as Tuy didn't remember the flashback as his past. In fact much of his childhood was lost in his memory. "Must have been that bar fight when I was seventeen" he had always thought when thinking about the memory gaps. But somehow today he thought differently.

The floating blocks then started to spin in an elliptical orbit around themselves. "Great. Spinning. Just what I need. Ok Tuy, this is your hallucination, so you can make it stop." Tuy took a deep breath. "STOP!" he thought loudly to himself. With that, the floating blocks disappeared. "That's better." he thought, but his momentary feeling of triumph was quickly gone as he saw the second wedge start to press against the female's lower shin.

As the thin leg bones started to crack under the pressure of the wedge, Tuy looked up towards Varus. The man was standing before the table, looking at the female's face. He had his head tilted forward and a sick grin covered his face. He was breathing in short quick breaths.

"You're really getting off on this aren't you?" Tuy asked. Varus turned his head to Tuy, gave him a condescending smile and then turned back to the female, not wanting to miss anything. The wedge forced its way through the female's leg and the next one started its descent.

The dull throbbing pain was slowly building in Tuy's head as he watched the gruesome scene before him. The female would alternate between wild screaming as each wedge forced its way through her legs, to sobbing as she watched new wedges come down. The wedge that came down onto her knees was particularly bad as the thicker joint bones made a sickening, cracking, popping sound. Throughout it all, Tuy was trying desperately to keep his fear under control. He could feel it there, in his stomach. It was trying hard to get free, to make Tuy do anything to get

out of there. It wanted him to beg, plead with Varus to let him go, to do whatever it took to get off of this table and out of this room.

But Tuy kept a tenuous control on his fear. Instead, he focused on hatred. He tried to image Varus' death in as many ways as possible. He imagined Varus on the table instead of the female with Tuy at the controls. Part of his mind thought that if that were the case, he would be no better than Varus, but at the moment he didn't care.

As the eighth wedge was approaching the female's thighs, Tuy thought he caught movement out of the corner of his eye. As he turned to look, he again saw the image of his mother smiling down on him.

"Not another hallu..."

"Shhhhhh." Tuy heard his mother say. He looked up to see his mother standing next to him in the closet. After a moment of confusion, Tuy realized that they were both standing in the hallway closet of the home where he grew up. He was again looking through a child's eye. He could see through a crack in the door in front of him to the hall outside. His father was there, heading towards the front door.

"Remember, Tuy. Remain absolutely silent." Tuy's mother commanded. Tuy's father opened the door and a droid stepped inside. It was a very large humanoid droid, around two and a half meters tall and looked to mass half a tonne. It had the letters VOK emblazoned across its chest. A second droid followed the first. It was a small hovering ball, about twenty centimeters in diameter.

"Sorry to disturb you sir." The large droid said in its synthesized voice. "We're doing random checks in this area to ensure there has been no Trupepol coercion of our citizens."

"Not a problem. Anything I can do to help?" Tuy's father said.

"No sir. Just stand still." The droid replied. The small hovering droid came and floated a small distance away from Tuy's father.

"You sound annoyed." Tuy's father said to the large droid as he eyed the smaller one.

The droid shrugged its shoulders. "This is our eight hundred and thirty second residence. This is a pointless task. We haven't found anything yet and I doubt we will. The Trupepol wouldn't dare try anything this far away from their area of space."

"He's clean" the smaller droid interrupted. It floated back to a comfortable distance from Tuy's father.

"Is there anyone else in the house sir?" the large droid asked.

"No. My mate and son are out getting some supplies. They should be back anytime now. Want to wait?"

"That won't be necessary sir. Have a nice day." After the droids left and the door was closed, Tuy's mother opened the closet door.

"Do you think they suspected anything?" she asked.

"If they did, they wouldn't have left."

"Mommy, what's a Trupepol?" Tuy felt himself asking. Tuy's parents looked at each other with an expression of parent that was just asked a difficult question from their child.

"They're nobody you have to worry about Tuy. They're very far away." Tuy's mother replied.

"Why did daddy lie to the big robot? I thought lying was bad."

"It is Tuy. But sometimes it's unavoidable."

"But..."

"No more." Tuys father interrupted. "Tuy, go get ready for dinner. Forget this ever happened."

The world abruptly spun around Tuy and he was back in the room with Varus and the female he was torturing.

"This is getting too weird." Tuy thought. Somehow, Tuy knew this was a memory but it didn't make any sense. "Why would my mother hide us from a Vok droid? They were after Trupepol, not us. If we were being influenced, then dad would have been as well and the droids would have detected it."

Tuy cast his mind back to his childhood to try and remember the events of the time. He remembered hearing about the first Trupepol attack. Or more accurately, the first attacks of the Confederation's own forces against itself. The Trupepol quickly took credit for the massacre and it was soon learned that they were a large group of mentalists who were extreme technophobes. They wanted to eradicate all of the advanced technology from the galaxy and enlighten everyone to the ways of the mind. They had mentally controlled hundreds of high-ranking officials in the Confederation navy and then instructed them to attack their own bases and ships. And to make matters worse, the Trupepol were all Human. As if the species didn't have a bad reputation as it was, this just made them even more distrusted.

"Doesn't make sense." Tuy thought again as he watched the female's thighbones crack and splinter apart. The female has stopped screaming and was just staring blankly down at the remains of her legs. Two more wedges had come down during Tuy's last hallucination and the wedge currently forcing its way through the female's body was right below her hips. The remains of her legs were a gruesome sight. Tuy had seen mutilated bodies before, but this amount of gore was making him nauseous. On the table below the female's hips, it looked like a butcher's table.

Before the next wedge started it's decent, Varus went over and adjusted a control near the female's table. The half of the table that had been inclined to give the female a good view of her legs fell down to a horizontal position. The female, now lying flat, seemed to be startled out of whatever trance her traumatized brain had tried to put her in. She started to sob again and let out a fearful cry as she saw the next wedge start it's decent.

"So Mr. Tuy." Varus turned and said. "How does it feel to know that you could have prevented this woman's pain if you had just given me your cargo at the beginning?"

"Go to hell."

"I'm sure I will. But you see Mr. Tuy, I've been blessed with a psyche that's quite lacking in the emotion of guilt. I just don't feel it. Never have, and probably never will. And despite the obvious advantages, I still am curious from time to time what it feels like." Varus was smiling down at Tuy with laughter in his eyes.

"You are the most pathetic, sick,-"

Tuy was interrupted by a scream from the female. The next wedge had started to press down against her pelvis. Varus turned to watch as her hipbones distended, cracked, and then shattered under the onslaught of the wedge. The female had screamed until the bones shattered. The destruction of her pelvis shocked her into silence. She cried out again as the wedge broke apart her fingers that had been lying flat by her side.

Varus turned back to Tuy. "You were saying something about me being sick?" He then started to chuckle, then laugh with increasing volume until the room was filled with a madman's cackling. The next wedge started to come down and Varus turned again to watch.

Tuy stared at Varus for a moment, trying again to focus on his hatred rather than his fear. Then he couldn't help but shift his eyes to the woman. The next wedge was slowly descending above her navel. Her skin had gone deathly white as the blood drained out of her body with each wedge.

Suddenly, Tuy experienced a sharp pain in his skull. It had been throbbing before, but this shot through his head like a bullet. Some part of his mind forced himself not to make a sound as he endured the pain. It felt like a bolt of electricity was ricocheting around the inside of his skull. When it finally subsided, he couldn't help but let out a loud exhale. This attracted Varus' attention. He turned to look at Tuy with an expression of concern.

"Is there something wrong Mr. Tuy?"

"No." Tuy replied. "I'm perfectly happy waiting for my turn at the chopping block, you dim-witted shit-head." Tuy tried to regain his composure after the pain he endured. He was a little startled to notice that two more wedges had come down and there was one currently pressing down on the female's breasts. The pain had lasted longer than he thought.

Varus stepped over to Tuy's table and looked at a panel above his head.

"Well, I'm no medic, but your vital signs seem to be normal." He stepped to the front of the table and stared down at Tuy. "Perhaps we're starting to lose our grip on reality, eh? Well, don't worry. Once that first wedge rips off your feet, you'll come back to reality quick."

Turning his back to Tuy, Varus continued watching the female. Tuy also cast his eyes to the other occupant in the room. She had stopped screaming, as her lungs had been torn apart. The device attached to her head was obviously keeping her alive, since most of her internal organs had been destroyed. The wedge currently pressing through her chest was squeezing her heart, which was still trying to pump blood though the tattered remains beneath it.

The female's head had turned and she was looking at Tuy. She let out a silent scream as her ribs shattered under the pressure of the current wedge. It continued down, destroying her heart and breaking her upper arm bones. Tuy watched the female's eyes as her pain partially subsided.

"I'm sorry." Tuy thought, trying to project his remorse to the female. As he looked in the female's eyes, he sensed something different, as if there was a tangible presence that had not been there before. Tuy concentrated a little harder on the sensation and suddenly his mind contacted with the female. It was like a wave of feeling that washed over Tuy. All of her pain, fear, and hopelessness became a part of Tuy in a surge that seemed never-ending.

"Geeeeaaaaahhhh". This time it was Tuy who screamed. The fear that had formally remained an uncomfortable feeling in his stomach exploded to fill every molecule in Tuy's body. Some instinct within him broke the connection to the female before he was overwhelmed completely. However the aftereffects of the contact were still present.

"What are you looking at?" Tuy said in a raspy voice. He was breathing in quick gasps and could feel his heart pounding. The pain that his head had experienced before was gone and Tuy could feel a large amount of adrenaline flowing through his bloodstream. His muscles were sore, as he had used all his strength to fight against the force beams during his brief contact with the female.

"Just wondering what all the screaming is about." Varus said. He had turned towards Tuy when he had screamed. "Did you suddenly realize the full extent of what is waiting for you?"

Tuy ignored him, and turned to watch one of the remaining wedges descending towards the female's shoulders. Two things surprised him. Initially, it was the vision of his mother, again appearing by the female's table, looking down at him. She smiled and Tuy's reality started to waver again. As the room darkened, the second surprising thing that he noticed was that the normally invisible force beams that were holding the female down now glimmered in quite visible energy.

Tuy's world spun around and then settled into his childhood room again. He was sitting on the floor, in his adult form, surrounded by a mess of toys. This felt more real than the other hallucinations. It seemed like he was really here. Tuy stood up.

"I'm getting a little tired of this!" he spoke, to no one in particular. A shimmering form appeared before him, slowly coalescing into the image of his mother. She smiled for a moment and then spoke.

"Hello Tuy."

"Hi mom. What's goi-"

"If you are reliving this memory than you are in great danger and need my help. I only hope that you have enough time to finish this process." She spoke as if it were a recording. The image of his mother turned to look at the other side of the room. Tuy looked as well and saw his child self sitting on the floor. Suddenly a duplicate apparition of his mother appeared before the child and started to speak.

"Hello Tuy." The image said. The child jumped to his feet.

"Mom! Where have you been? Dad's been looking for you for days."

"I know Tuy. Now listen, I don't have much time. You're going to have to be very brave for me. I'm afraid I'm not going to see you again."

"Why!? What's going on?"

"Just listen, Tuy. You and your father are going to be moving very soon. You'll move far away from here. I can't go with you." She paused for a moment. "Do you remember us telling you about the war?"

"Yeah." Tuy said in a sheepish voice. "The Trupepol were advancing again. There was talk on the news of them possible reaching here."

"That's right Tuy. A lot of people are very scared. And when people are scared, they attack whatever frightens them." She paused. "Do you remember when I caught you lifting your blocks without using your hands?"

"Yeah. I couldn't do it again after that."

"That's because I suppressed your ability. You see, the Trupepol have this power too. They can lift things in the air without their hands. And they can do lot's of other things too. But they use their power to do bad things. That's why I had to make sure nobody thought you were a Trupepol. People might hurt you."

"But I'm not a Trupepol!"

"I know, but when people are scared, they will attack anyone who even resembles a Trupepol. And in this case that means you. Or me." She sounded sad.

"Now I'm going to help you fool them into believing you are not a Trupepol. So you will never have to worry about it. Ok?"

"Ok mommy. But why can't I see you again?"

"Shhhhh Tuy. Now you're going to go to sleep. Ok?" A dazed look came over the child's eyes as he was about to reply. He then slumped to the floor. Both the child and the mother then faded.

Tuy's mind was racing. He was a mentalist? It couldn't be. And what happened to mom? All he remembered was his father saying that she had gone away. He wouldn't tell Tuy what had happened to her.

"I suppressed your memory and your power that day." The image standing next to Tuy said. "But before I suppressed your power, I gave you most of mine. The Confederation classifies a mentalist's power on a scale of stages. I am a fourth stage mentalist, which is one of the more powerful ones. I gave most of that power to you, and then I suppressed it so deep that not even a Vok droid will detect it. I hope you will never have to use it, but if you are ever convinced that your life is in immediate danger of ending, the seal will be broken and your power will come to the surface. I can only hope that it saves your life." She looked away for a moment. When she looked back, she had tears in her eyes.

"The reason I had to go, so long ago is that I was captured by the Confederation. When I appeared before you as a child, I was actually bound in a holding cell. I don't know where they are going to take me, or if I'll see you again. I'm so sorry I had to leave, but people are so afraid of what I can do. I fear that I'll never be let go."

"Mom..." Tuy started to say as his mother paused.

"I've got to go now. Just know that I love you." She said finally and her image faded and then vanished.

Tuy just stood there. Various emotions were churning throughout his mind, causing numbness in his senses. Soon, the room vanished and he found himself on the table again. The force beams holding him glittered with shimmering energy.

The wedge over the female's shoulders was still coming down. Apparently, the last hallucination had been instantaneous in real time. As he watched the female's shoulder break apart, he tried to absorb all that happened.

"Ok. Mom was a mentalist. I'm a mentalist. Dad wasn't. Fourth stage, wow, that's powerful. Now how the hell is that going to help me? Well, let's try something simple."

"Hey Varus, why don't you let me go?" he said, concentrating on Varus. It seemed as if there was some kind of barrier in the other's mind. Tuy could feel himself being blocked.

"Now why would I want to do that Mr. Tuy. The fun's barely started."

"Ok that didn't work." Tuy thought. A wedge was about to make contact with the female's neck. She stared blankly at Tuy. Tuy closed his eyes and thought for a moment. He

suddenly realized that he *could* close his eyes. Whatever power he now had allowed him to bypass whatever the nanoscopic robots were doing to him. He quickly glanced at Varus to make sure he hadn't noticed. Varus was too busy watching the female.

The wedge snapped through the female's spine and continued to the base of the table. As the next wedge started to descend towards the female's jaw, Varus went to the control panel and shut the machine down.

"Well, I think that's enough of a demonstration." Varus said. "And we don't want to damage her brain now do we? If we did that, she wouldn't be able to enjoy watching you get the same treatment."

Tuy looked at the woman, the only part still living being a severed head. Her mouth twitched as if trying to speak, and her bloodshot eyes stared ever forward towards Tuy. Varus stepped towards the control panel beside Tuy's table and the table started to rise. The force beams holding his head turned off and Tuy soon found his torso inclined upward allowing him to see his feet.

"Aren't you even going to ask me for my cargo again?"

"No. I realize that you have destroyed it. This entire session is being recorded and will be shown to the next courier we capture. Hopefully, it will help convince them to comply with our wishes."

Tuy felt Varus grab his head and hold it still as another life support unit was placed on his skull. The cap pressed down against Tuy's scalp and Tuy felt a sharp pain as filaments burrowed into his skull to make contact with his brain.

"C'mon Tuy, think! You've got to get out of here. Ok, I'm supposed to have telekinetic power right? Let's try that."

Tuy concentrated on the force beams holding him down. He could feel them against his skin, forever pushing downward. Using his mind he started to push back. He could feel the pressure he was putting on the beams, but they were too powerful. But as he pushed, he could sense that the entire system - wedges and force beams were all powered from a single source.

"Here we go!" Varus said in a gleeful voice. The first wedge above Tuy's feet started to descend.

Panic started to grip Tuy. "No! Don't panic. You don't have time." He thought. He tried to use his mind to push on the wedge, but again, it was just too powerful. "Maybe the control panel." He thought, but then realized that he couldn't even see the panel. Varus, unfortunately was out of sight at the moment too.

The wedge was now horizontal to the floor and continued downward. Tuy stared at it as it came down.

"Wait a second." He thought suddenly. "The beams and the wedges are powered by the same power source. Maybe I can get this thing to work against itself." He stared upward towards where the force beams were generated. He couldn't see the one above his feet, but yet could still feel its presence with his mind. He wrapped his mind around the generator, analyzing it, determining its capabilities.

"Yes." He thought as he realized it was a multi-vectored beam, able to change its direction without movement of the generator. Varus came into view, watching Tuy closely. A look of curious concern was on his face as Tuy was neither starting at the wedge nor his own feet, but at an unknown spot on the ceiling. Tuy wrapped his mind around the force beam generator and slowly started to manipulate the aiming mechanism.

Painful seconds later, the wedge was centimeters from Tuy's feet. Then, finally, Tuy managed to get a firm grip on the generator's aiming mechanism and moved it to push with all its power on the wedge. The wedge strained against the beam, but started to descend at an angle. It narrowly missed Tuy's feet and started to press against the table.

"What the hell?" Varus exclaimed as he went to Tuy's feet. He turned to look at Tuy and some kind of realization of what was happening hit him. He started moving towards the control panel by Tuy's head.

Tuy was ignoring him. Now that he knew how, he was adjusting the aim of all of the force beams. Each beam left his skin and started to press against a wedge. The wedges started to creak and strain against the onslaught. Each one started to bend sideways. To Tuy, everything seemed to be moving in slow motion. When Varus had started to run he was on the sixth force beam. As Varus ran along the table, the beams were being removed from Tuy's body almost as fast as Varus was running. Varus reached the control panel just as the last beam was removed from Tuy's throat. With a burst of strength, both physical and telekinetic, Tuy flung himself off the table, as all of the wedges suddenly came crashing down at once. He felt a sharp pain on his scalp as the cap portion of the life supporter was pulled for a moment, and then ripped apart from the section attached to the wall. The wedges were bent and misaligned with the gaps in the table, so when they came down, the force destroyed the table and many of the weakened wedges.

Tuy got up to see Varus again reaching for the control panel.

"STOP!" he yelled. The command was both verbal and telepathic. Though Tuy could still feel the barrier in Varus' mind that had stopped his command before, this time the barrier shattered under Tuy's strength and Varus was held motionless.

"Lower you hand." Tuy commanded. Varus lowered the hand that had been reaching for an alarm.

"Go to sleep."

"No..." Varus started to say before he slumped and lost consciousness.

Tuy allowed himself a brief moment to relax. Reaching up to his head, he found a control on the cap portion of the life supporter that released the grip mechanism. After carefully removing the cap he turned towards the still living head of the female. Tuy squatted so he could be eye to eye with her.

"I'm really sorry this had to happen to you." He said in soothing tones. "I can assure you that Varus will pay for this." Tuy then placed a hand on the female's head. Again, he felt the wave of suffering and fear, but this time he pushed it back. He forced his own mind into hers and started to invoke feelings of warmth, love, and caring. Then pride, euphoria, hope, and every other positive emotion he could produce.

With her pain gone, the female relaxed the strained muscles in her face. Her eyes lost their fearful look and she smiled up at Tuy. She mouthed some words that Tuy couldn't understand, but his mind got the impression of her saying "Thank you."

Tuy then stared at the life supporter that was keeping her alive and crushed it with a telekinetic shove. She died abruptly, a relaxed smile still on her face. Tuy, removed the head and put it on the remains of the table he was formally on. He felt exhausted.

"This mentalist stuff sure takes a lot out of you." He thought. "But I think I'm going to like it." He picked up the hose and quickly removed the remains of the female off of the table. Then, using the control panel, he raised the wedges to their original position. Varus was then picked up and placed on the table. Tuy stripped him of his uniform and put it on. He then leaned down to be only centimeters from Varus' face.

"My dear friend Mr. Varus." Tuy spoke to the sleeping form. "You are now going to fully understand the fear that goes through your victims. I'm going to leave now. And exactly one minute after I leave you are going to wake up."

Tuy went to the control panel, activated the force beams, and started all of the wedges slowly coming down. He opened the door, checked for anyone in the hallway, and slipped quietly out.

Varus woke up exactly one minute later... and screamed.