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Tweezor

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Tweezor Zwellbrog cursed to himself as he stepped out of his personal teleportation chamber. His webbed feet made loud, slapping noises as he tramped into his living quarters, echoing his anger.

Government, he thought, must be run by the retarded and the inept. When the Twazillane Bureau of Transportation voted to install the personal teleportation circuits throughout the Twazil system of worlds and do away with physical travel, they should have been smart enough to foresee population explosions and continually upgrade the system. That was not so; rush hour traffic on the circuits was getting worse every solar time period. Tweezor Zwellbrog fumed at the thought of having to dial the system access code six times. It was little consolation that the trip from his office on the third moon of the Twa home system to his personal quarters on the homeworld consumed less time than walking next door to his neighbor's—an inconvenience was an inconvenience.

His attention was drawn by a flashing light on the far side of his quarters, and his anger began to ebb. The blinking signal alerted him that incoming postal communications were being held for him; Tweezor's antennae quivered in delight as he headed for the postal communication teleportation console.

Tweezor entered his personal postal retrieval code and was nearly knocked to the floor as dozens of Twazil periodicals poured from the materialization chamber.

Rapidly Tweezor Zwellbrog sorted through the myriad postal goodies. He tossed aside the daily copy of the *Twazillane Gazette*, *Better Living Quarters* and *Agricultural Systems*, and *Popular Multidimensional Engineering*. He quickly put aside the copies of *Twa Today*, *Twazillane Geographic*, *Twazil Athletics Illustrated*, and *The Twazil Inquirer*; deeper, Tweezor Zwellbrog burrowed into the mound of periodicals.

Tweezor began to toss another periodical when he noticed the title. One quick peek at the centerfold in *Playtwazil* won't hold me up too long, he thought. He rapidly spread the pages open. His eyes focused on the staples in the female Twazil's waist. One independent eyestalk wandered toward the head while the other eyestalk worked its way toward the lower extremities.

That is one excellent example of Twazil femalehood, he thought. Delicate antennae sprouted from the female's forehead, between the antennae was a lush mane of golden fur that crested the head and followed her spine, ending at the point where backbone and pelvis made contact.

Below the antennae were stalks that held the most gorgeous golden eyes Tweezor had ever seen. Her slender body was covered by delicate copper-colored scales. With

a grasping pseudotentacle extended from the main tentacle trunk, the female beckoned to Tweezor in a provocative manner. Again Tweezor Zwellbrog's antennae quivered in delight, and one great, webbed foot vibrated against the floor. When Tweezor's mate called out from the food preparation area, inquiring as to the cause of all the foot thumping going on, his reply of poor body fluid circulation in the lower leg seemed to quell her curiosity. Quickly, he closed the pages and hid the copy under a potted Zweenerdax.

Zweenerdax were a specise of carnivorous pseudoferns found primarily in the hot, humid jungles of Southern Twa. Feeding Zweenie, as the plant was affectionately called by the children, was one of their few chores; it became quite apparent to Tweezor that this chore had been neglected when the plant sampled his outstretched tentacle. With a rolled copy of *Twazillane Living*, Tweezor popped the offending pseudofern on the rear; if it was not the rear, Tweezor thought it should be. Zweenie recoiled in disgust and whimpered in complaint.

Forgetting the incident with Zweenie and impervious to the sting of the bite, Tweezor again began to dig. It had to be here, he thought; he dug deeper into the pile of Twazil magazines, frantic now.

His triple hearts stopped, there it was: the object of his determined search. Without hesitation he ripped open the outer covering and withdrew the contents. Both eyestalks centered on the heading of the page; a message this important deserved full attention. "YOU MAY ALREADY HAVE WON TWO MILLION TWAZIL CREDITS."

Amid a sea of Twazillane periodicals sat a heartbroken Twazil. In one fleeting moment, Tweezor's dreams of instant riches had been dashed on the rocks of disappointment. With head slumped forward, antennae sagging, and little gurgling noises coming from his abdomen, Tweezor stroked the long fur on his jaw while turning the *Twazillane Periodical Dispersal Center* order form over repeatedly in his tentacles.

There was always hope in Tweezor's hearts that one day a two million credit slip would arrive in the mail. Dreamers like Tweezor purchase many periodicals; wishing to feel guiltless about entering their contest without buying anything, he would purchase again. He would offer his wife some excuse for needing more publications. Already Tweezor could feel a great need coming on for *Twazillane Consumer Dynamics*, *Twa World Report*, and maybe even *Twazillane Botanical Digest*. Tweezor momentarily eyed the Zweenerdax pseudofern; the latter choice might come in handy, he thought, the next time that darn plant tried to make a meal out of him.

Tweezor raised his head upon hearing the approach of

webbed feet slapping across the tile floor. Standing over him, tentacles crossed and tapping one webbed foot on the floor tiles, was Tellidor Zwellbrog, his mate. She first eyed the disheveled pile of publications, then Tweezor.

"Just look at the mess you've made."

"Yes, dear," he answered.

"Tweezor, what am I to do with you? No wonder we have trouble making ends meet. Between your subscriptions to every magazine on Twa and your laboratory in sublevel one, it's a miracle we have food to put on the table. Mother warned me about marrying a Twazil whose antennae were in the clouds."

"Yes, dear."

"You do intend to clean up this mess, don't you?"

"I thought there might be time for me to do some work in the lab before evening meal."

"That's just like you, Tweezor Zwellbrog. Leave a mess for me to put away, and you spend the rest of the night in

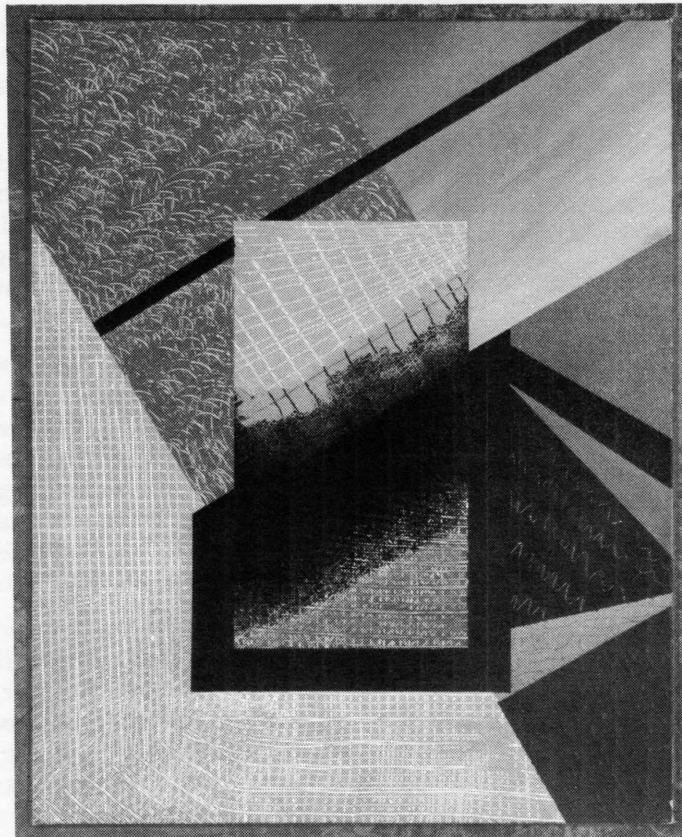
sublevel one playing with your machines. You spend more time with that computer than you do with me."

"I'll get this cleaned up."

"Well, don't take too long; I've a nice fungoid salad growing in the incubator."

"Yes, dear," he said, his mate turned and stomped back toward the food preparation area. Tweezor looked around him at the disarray of Twazil periodicals and spotted the torn envelope of the Twazillane Periodical Dispersal Center. A sigh escaped his throat.

Tweezor rose to his feet and headed toward the gravity lift that would lower him to his laboratory on sublevel one of his living quarters. As he passed the children's room, Tweezor noticed a new sign posted on their door; the sign read "UP THE UNIVERSE." Tweezor guessed the sign had been put there by the older of the pair; he wondered where the youngster was picking up such deviant behavior. Tweezor rapped his tentacle against the doorway frame.



"Nobody's home," yelled the oldest.

"Whoooooooooo is it?" asked the youngest.

"It's your father. Your mother wants you to clean up the mess in the family living area."

"Right now?" they asked in unison.

"Right now. You know how your mother is when she gets mad. I wouldn't want to be in your scales if you don't get that mess cleaned up by evening meal."

"Yes, sir," answered the youngest.

"You got it, Dad," answered the oldest.

Tweezor continued his way to the gravity lift. He chortled in delight, satisfied with the knowledge that he could still bluff someone in this household.

As Tweezor neared the gravity lift, he could hear the children arguing in the family living area.

"Mom wants you to clean up this mess," said the oldest.

"Dad said," the youngest started, but was interrupted.

"Dad said Mom wants you to clean up this mess by evening meal."

"But..."

"I wouldn't want to be in your scales if you don't get it done."

"But..."

"You better get to work now, or I'll call Mom."

"Oh, all right." The flag of surrender had been hoisted. "It's not fair," mumbled the youngest. "I didn't make the mess." Tweezor had known what the outcome of the children's parrying would be; like they say, "Organic waste products gravitate to the lowest level."

He stepped into the open well of the lift and descended slowly to sublevel one. Antigravity generators adjusted his weight to a fraction of normal, allowing him just enough weight to be neutrally buoyant.

It was rumored that soon there would be a much less costly version of the personal teleportation device that would make the gravity lift obsolete. With the new teleportation doorways you could just step instantly between levels. Tweezor thought this a great idea and wished it were his project, but Multidimensional Communications and Teleportation Corporation had assigned him to deep space communications.

Tweezor stepped from the gravity lift into his laboratory. Sensors monitoring his entrance automatically adjusted lighting and climate control to his personal preference. His computer, sensing the presence of its user, began opening files and returning the system to where Tweezor's work had been terminated the night before.

Much of Tweezor's equipment belonged to Multidimensional Communication and Teleportation Corporation. The firm granted him use at home, enabling Tweezor to link with the company's more powerful

machines and allowing him to continue his company projects in a less stressful atmosphere.

This arrangement suited Tweezor; in his spare time he could work on personal projects with the backing of the firm's computers and their huge data banks. This suited Multidimensional Communication and Teleportation Corporation; Tweezor was an employee of high intelligence, and the firm knew if Tweezor did come up with some outstanding breakthrough in his field, there would be tremendous monetary fallout in their favor.

Tweezor pulled up a chair and sat in front of the computer work station. Piles of data sheets and system schematics covered the console. Tweezor shoved the heap of print-outs aside, many falling to the floor where they probably would stay, in an effort to gain access to the data entry panel. After running preliminary diagnostics on the system, he felt ready to begin.

"Computer?"

"Yes?"

"Interface with Dimensional Computing Section, main annex, corporate terminal Twazillane."

"Interface requires class Zed three clearance. Tongue scan identification required."

"Computer?"

"Yes?"

"Computer, who am I?"

"Voice print analysis indicates you are Tweezor Zwellbrog, management grade level four, and currently assigned to research and development on deep space communications."

"Do I possess Zed three clearance?"

"Yes."

"Then why must I run a tongue scan?"

"Multidimensional Communication and Teleportation Corporation operation manuals specify under paragraph four thousand thirty-six, article seven, subparagraph forty-six, all employees wishing to gain..."

"Stop."

"Aborted."

"I hate this part."

Tweezor leaned forward and flicked out his long greenish tongue. Splat! The tongue wetly came in contact with the screen and began to tingle as the sensors checked the taste bud patterns against those in Tweezor Zwellbrog's security file.

The scan ended, and Tweezor sputtered and fumed as he spat small dirtballs. "Next time I do that, remind me to wipe the dust off the screen."

"Filing for future reference."

"No! Delete that file: some Twazil at Corporate might see that, and I'd be the laughing stock of the company."

"File erased."

"Can we continue now?"

"Interface complete."

"Run program Zwellbrog six."

"Running."

"Calculate probability of successfully opening rift in timespace continuum stellar coordinates four seven eight point six one."

"Ninety-six percent probability of success."

"Generate rift."

"Warning! Program aborted. Experimentation chamber air lock door not sealed. Opening rift in space-time continuum at this time will cause rapid decompression of Twa's atmospheric envelope, leading to a possible fatal error."

Tweezor looked across the room to the zero atmosphere chamber and saw that the airlock door was ajar.

"Computer?"

"Yes?"

"Seal the chamber door, please."

"Complying."

Machinery whirled and air hissed from the chamber as the door sealed tightly. The computer was right. Opening a rift in the airless void of intergalactic space would have been a disaster had the chamber door been open. Tweezor cringed at the thought of being sucked through a hole in space and having his dead body orbit some uncharted star for eternity.

"Door seal in place. Systems ready for test."

Across the laboratory a bell softly chimed, and Tweezor rose from his chair. He walked rapidly to the wall where the door opened into the well of the gravity lift. Next to the doorway was the screen of an intercom. With a tentacle tip, Tweezor tapped the reply sensor and said, "Yes."

"In case you're interested, evening meal is nearly ready, and the family is hopeful that you might grace us with your presence." As Telli spoke, Tweezor could almost see the frost forming on the face of the intercom.

"Yes, dear. I'll be up in a few moments. Thank you for calling." Tweezor did not understand why Telli did had been so irritable of late. He tapped the intercom and closed the circuit. "Females. It's a lot easier understanding dimensional warp theory."

Tweezor ambled back to the monitor.

"Computer, be thankful that you're a machine. Run program."

"Complying."

Again machinery began to whirl and hum as tremendous physical forces were applied to the fabric of space within the chamber. Tweezor could feel the fur on his face tingle but knew that this was only a mental phenomenon of anticipation; he was well shielded from the forces that tore apart and then rebuilt a small section of the cosmos.

"Rift complete," reported the computer.

"Status?"

"Rift holding stable at this time."

Crossing the room, he stood outside the zero atmosphere chamber. With eager, golden eyes Tweezor peered into the inner depths of the vault. Floating in the center of the chamber, a black shapeless form hung suspended and undulating in mid air. The inside of the amorphous black mass was sprinkled with many pinpoints of sparkling white light, each dollop of light marking the location of the blazing nuclear furnace of a living star. Momentarily, Tweezor felt as if he were an all

powerful deity, looking out upon his creation.

"Begin sensor search of target area."

"Complying."

Time passed slowly as Tweezor, chewing on a tentacle tip, waited for the computer's sensor sweep to finish. Tweezor could only hope that his first try would be a success. If his experiment worked it would be the first time a dimensional rift between two points had been created without a doorway device in the target area. With such a device any point in the universe would become no more distant than one Twazil step.

"Sensor scan complete," reported the computer.

"Well?"

"Sensors indicate rift not in target area."

Tweezor's antennae fell limply to the sides of his head.

"Where did the rift open?"

"Unknown."

"Speculate."

"Insufficient data for speculation. Solar bodies in area of

*"No intelligent being
could possibly perpetrate
an act of violence against
another; such an act of
aggression would be
totally uncivilized."*



Print by Wendy Cramer

Substance of Life

rift match no known star charts. Possibility exists that rift is not in this dimension."

"Oh well. Anything of interest out there before we close the hole?"

"Sensors picking up strange pattern in background electromagnetic radiation."

"Is EM radiation natural phenomena or Twazil made?"

"No."

"No it is not natural? or no it is not Twazil made? Be more specific in answers."

"Inquiry made as either/or; 'no' satisfies both cases."

"Speculate on origin of EM radiation."

"Signal too weak. Unable to formulate hypothesis at this time."

"Shut down sensors except for EM detectors; boost power to that system."

"Complying."

"Speculate on origin of signal."

"Origin unknown. Signal strength and frequency indicative of primitive communications as used on Twa in pre-colonization period: primarily used in video transmission."

"Computer, boost power to maximum and adjust system to interpret unknown EM frequency."

"Complying."

"Open commercial video channel and display on main monitor."

"Complying."

The monitor buzzed to life and on the screen was the current Twazil President, Jeorz Shrub. The president sat behind his desk in the Twazillane Government Center; behind him were the flags of state. He was a very distinguished-looking Twazil with a warm smile; too bad he was a crook, Tweezor thought.

"My fellow Twazillanians. I come here tonight with three very heavy hearts. The state of Twazil is..."

"Cut sound," commanded Tweezor.

"Complying."

President Shrub's lips continued to move, but no sound came forth. That was alright with Tweezor; as far as he was concerned everything that Shrub said was a lie.

"Computer, feed unknown EM signal through main monitor."

"Complying."

President's Shrub's warm smile was replaced by static. A picture was clearly trying to form, and Tweezor strained

his eyestalks trying to comprehend the forms in the flickering screen.

"Computer, try running the signal through the video synthesizer and enhancing."

"Complying."

Those aren't Twazil, he thought. Tweezor stared, mesmerized by the monitor, as the picture slowly began to clear.

A strange Twazinoid creature stood leaning against a long table. On the table was a container from which the being repeatedly poured, into a small crystalline cup, a liquid that it swallowed in rapid gulps. Funny, thought Tweezor, how the creature's face contorted with each swallow, almost as if the liquid caused some great internal pain. He speculated that it must be some form of ritualistic, spiritual cleansing.

Tweezor studied the being's body closely. It was bipedal, like a Twazil, it had one head, like a Twazil, it had fur on its face, not as beautiful as a Twazil's, and it had two eyes minus the Twazil eyestalks. The strangest body parts were the creature's tentacles. Each tentacle was jointed halfway from the shoulder to the tips and jointed again a short distance from the tips. Sprouting from the end of the tentacles were smaller tentacles that were also jointed in several places.

On the being's head rested some form of covering. It had wide brims which Tweezor concluded must be protection for the eyes from solar glare. The covering had no slits to allow the being's antennae freedom of movement; Tweezor winced at the thought of having his sensitive antennae crushed down under such a restrictive head covering. Tweezor thought that only some kind of strict modesty taboo would cause a being to undergo that kind of discomfort.

Entering the room was a new being; it took three short steps and halted. It was much the same as the other and clothed approximately the same way. Tweezor speculated that these beings must be engineers; around their waists each wore an equipment belt. However, the equipment they carried was unrecognizable.

The creature that had entered the room removed a smoking object from its mouth. Tweezor recognized this object from his youth. It was a narcotic stick, and this new being was obviously a drug addict. Both creatures stood for a short time staring at each other. Their mouths began to move, and Tweezor realized they were engaged in conversation. From their body postures he read their discomfort at being in the same room. Tweezor also would have been uncomfortable in the same room with a narcojunkie.

"Computer?"

"Yes?"

"Analyze signal. Possibility of audio reproduction."

"Analyzing," the computer reported; a short time elapsed

and the computer continued, "audio reproduction capable at this time."

Tweezor watched in fascination as the creatures suddenly pulled odd looking pieces of equipment from their utility belts.

"Computer, try sound."

"Complying."

Bang!

"Whooa!"

Crash!

Tweezor's chair catapulted over backwards dumping him on his posterior. Raising himself off the floor high enough for his eyestalks to view the monitor, Tweezor watched as one being clutched its thorax and fell backward through what he judged to be a silicon-based view port. Tweezor jumped to his feet shouting, "Telli, Telli come quick!" and ran toward the gravity lift.

Up the gravity lift he flew, crashing headfirst into the top of the well; then he bolted down the hall, across the living area, and into the food preparation area. But Telli was not to be found.

"Telli! Telli!" he cried.

"Tweezor, settle down," she said.

Tweezor spun around and found his mate walking toward him, carrying a tentacle load of Twazil periodicals. "You know," she continued, "getting the children to clean up your mess was a dirty trick. I am ashamed of you, dear." She put the magazines down and crossed to the incubator, where her fungoid salad was growing. She opened the door to the incubator and removed the tray of tasty pseudofungus treats.

"Listen to me, Telli!" Tweezor grabbed his mate's tentacle and yanked her toward the door. The tray of freshly grown pseudofungi flew from her grasp and covered the tile floor with bits and pieces of what was to have been the evening meal. "Telli! My laboratory! Quick!" he stammered.

"Tweezor, let go of me!"

Tweezor dragged his mate to the gravity lift, pushed her in, and together they descended to sublevel one.

"Tweezor, what is wrong? Have you totally lost your mind? I've never seen you so excited. Your antennae are vibrating as if a six-legged Zimbet had run up your trousers."

"Look at the screen," he stammered.

Tellidor looked. "All right. So what? All I see is President Shrub; probably lying through his teeth again. I don't really see that it's enough to get so excited over."

"And to conclude, my fellow Twazillanians..."

"They're gone."

"No matter what the press might say of this great political party..."

"Who are gone, dear?"

"We have faithfully looked after the state of Twa..."

"The beings on the monitor."

"And furthermore my fellow Twazillanians..."

"I don't see anyone but Shrub, dear."

"In the future of Twa..."

"Computer, sound off."

"Complying."

"Computer, tell Mrs. Zwellbrog what has occurred."

"Time reference."

"Before I left the lab."

"My sensors recorded Mr. Zwellbrog rapidly adjusting his center of gravity just before his body impacted with the lower surface of his room."

"No, no. Before that."

"My records show Mr. Zwellbrog's body at rest in the console chair."

"What about the beings?"

"That's what I would like to know," added Tellidor Zwellbrog.

"The ones on the monitor."

"Unable to comply. Programming for this experiment does not include recording low-level electromagnetic radiation. I have no record of beings in primary storage."

"I'm worried about you, dear. Maybe tomorrow you should see a Psychotech. Now, since evening meal is ruined, why don't you get cleaned up, and we will go out to eat."

"Telli, listen to me. I opened a rift in the space-time continuum, although it didn't open where I had planned. The computer's sensor array picked up some unknown electromagnetic radiation emissions. I fed these through a video synthesizer, and there they were: alien beings on the monitor. Telli, do you realize how important this is?"

"Tweezor, don't be ridiculous. The Twazil have colonized over three-hundred solar systems. We have been in space for thousands of time periods and never have we come across any alien life forms. They don't exist; there are no other beings...only Twazil."

"Telli, by the seven moons of Twa I swear they were there."

"Then where are they now?"

"Computer, reestablish link with unknown EM transmissions."

"Unable to comply."

"Cause?"

"Fluctuations in main power grid caused loss of rift integrity."

"Can rift be reestablished in same stellar location?"

"Probability infinitesimal."

"Tweezor, for our sake, please don't mention alien beings again."

"Telli, I saw them. One of the beings injured the other with some form of equipment that spouted fire and smoke. The sound it made scared me, and I fell to the floor."

"Tweezor, listen to what you are saying. No intelligent being could possibly perpetrate an act of violence against another; such an act of aggression would be totally uncivilized. You fell asleep at the console and had a bad dream."

Tellidor Zwellbrog embraced Tweezor within her tentacles and continued. "What you need is a long rest. You've worked much too hard on this project."

"Telli, you think I dreamed this?"

"Yes, Tweezor...I do. You have always been a dreamer. I guess that's what attracted me to you: you always had the ability to look at something and see a thousand possibilities for change. Look at this project; you dreamed that the fabric of space could be split with only a door generator at the origin point, and you've done it. Your dreams led to a feat that no other Twazil might have accomplished. I would say that makes you a great success."

"I guess you're right. Besides, without proof, who would believe my story of aliens?"

"Sssh," Telli softly hissed as she placed a tentacle tip over Tweezor's lips. "No more talk of alien beings. Would you rather go down in history as a 'Great Inventor' or be remembered for all time as 'Tweezor the Crackpot'?"

"But, Telli..."

Tweezor started to respond and then fell suddenly silent. What his mate had said was slowly beginning to sink in. Tweezor had accomplished a tremendous feat. This would mean a vice presidency at Multidimensional Communication and Teleportation and financial rewards. Royalties. Licensing fees. "Great Inventor," that is what Tellidor called him. Yes, sir, "Great Inventor." Tweezor's antennae stood erect, and he no longer seemed to slump.

"You're right." Gently he kissed her tentacle tip, then continued. "Telli, I thought your mother warned you against marrying a Twazil whose antennae were always in the clouds."

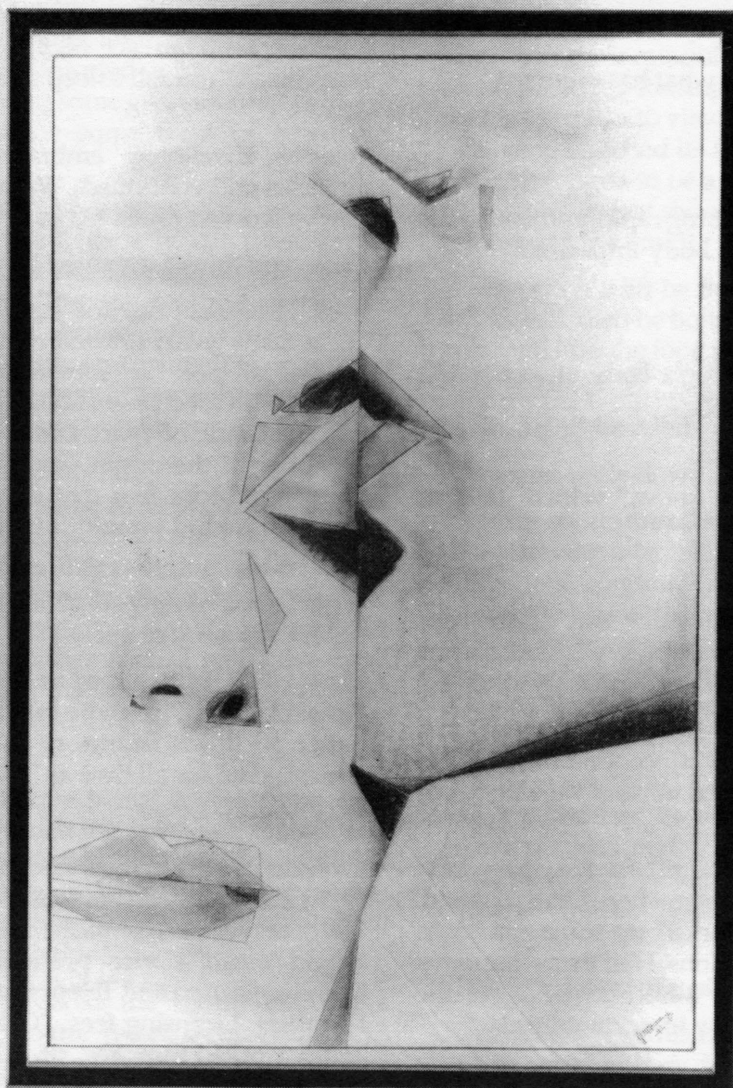
"She did," Telli answered, looking up at Tweezor with her beautiful golden eyes. "But Daddy always told me, 'A Twazil who never looks beyond his next footstep goes through life bumping into a lot of walls.'"

"Telli, I love you."

"I love you, Tweezor. Now, let's take the children and go out for evening meal."

Tweezor began picking up data sheets and system configuration charts, and neatly stacked them on the work console. "First," he said, "I must clean up this mess."

"Leave it for tomorrow, Tweezor," Telli said, taking his tentacle in hers; together they walked toward the doorway.



The Kiss

Drawing by Jennifer McKinney