

THE DARKNESS OF G b MINOR

a short story by J.R. Wudel

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## BUTTER

“It’s just like cleaning my pipe,” said Butter as he guided the white, triangular tube, about the size of a body pillow, through the airlock and out into the darkness of space, using the joystick between his fingers. A funk-disco soundtrack of his favorite vintage porn played in his head: an attempt to mask the gargle of the monitors in front of him. He wondered if the others had picked up on his euphemism. Quinoa resembled a plate of chicken and dumplings, both in behavior and appearance, and Chef had the sense of humor of black bile. Then again, as he let those funky guitar chords wash over him, maybe Chef naming the triangle the Galaxicaster, after the iconic Stratocaster, was his attempt at a pun. The Galaxicaster was a guitar of sorts.

“Just make sure you get it into the proper spot,” said Chef, seeming to scold him for not concentrating. Butter could picture Chef’s expression: as unadorned as the sets that accompanied his soundtrack, especially with those unblinking eyes that were like the long take that filmed them. Chef, whose slight frame didn’t need any help from the zero gravity, floated to Butter’s right in front of the controls, which lined the starboard side of the white walled lab. Everything was white: the Galaxicaster, the walls and compartments of the shuttle, even the two-piece jumpsuits they all wore. Good thing that he felt partial to the color white.

“What, are you gay? Stop fretting so much, you sound like a queen who’s lost his heel.” Truthfully, he had the enthusiasm of a woman who’d prefer filing her nails while in the middle of sex, a personal doubt he’d never admit to experiencing. Butter wondered if Chef’s theories on dark matter would prove correct. They would revolutionize the way that people harnessed energy. Butter imagined himself high with some chick in a Ferrari powered by Chef’s theories

and cruising on a day trip from the earth to Uranus. He imagined what he would do to that chick under the rings of Saturn while his high peaked. If this experiment succeeded, him being a part of it would certainly give him enough money to afford his Ferrari and any recreational drug he wanted. To conserve their fuel, it had taken the three of them three sober months just to slingshot to the halfway point between Earth and Uranus where the company deemed it private enough to conduct the experiment.

“I should have eaten more before we started this,” said Quinoa to Chef’s right. “I feel pooped, and we’re only just beginning.” Butter felt a little hungry too, although he often did since they started this mission. He blamed their codenames. The level of secrecy established by the company funding their mission made him feel a little like a secret agent—the type that always got the girl.

“Everyone keep your focus,” said Chef. “Follow the procedures that I have laid out and this experiment will succeed. We can all start thinking about food again in the time that it takes light to reach the Earth from the Sun.” Butter couldn’t stop thinking about using those eight minutes to clean his pipe.

## QUINOA

He thought he could use some Methylphenidate; that would give him focus and more energy. Of course, Quinoa knew that abusing that drug, like he had read about college students doing in the turn of the century literature he had studied as a student himself, indicated an addictive personality. He didn't need a gateway to worse addictions. That was the truth.

"We've hit the G-spot," said Butter, announcing the Galaxicaster's arrival in proper position for the experiment. Quinoa didn't care for Butter's constant affirmation of his masculinity—like that ridiculous pipe cleaning euphemism he had said, or talking about Chef like he was gay. So what if Chef was gay. Chef had never confirmed this. If he was, he was. This didn't threaten Quinoa's own heterosexuality, and that was the truth. Quinoa didn't care for steak either, and Butter had the physique of lean cut T-bone.

"I think all your macho innuendos are just a cover for your repressed homosexuality," said Quinoa.

"I think it's a good thing you're down on the other end of the control panel," said Butter, "I'd give you a taste of my repressed aggression." Quinoa closed his eyes and shook his head in disapproval. It felt good to close his eyes against the bright UV light of the lab, which reminded him of tofu—high in protein and other nutrients, yet its entire flavor washed out.

"Focus gentlemen," said Chef, raising his voice without a noticeable change in its decibel level. With a tone that rose in pitch along with the raising of a lever, Chef engaged the Galaxicaster's strings. Quinoa thought "strings" a much too simple way to refer to the slinky-shaped plasma rays creating the surface waves whose interaction of quarks and gluons would

generate mass and produce the gravity crucial to the success of their mission. The company had designed and created the strings in secret and guarded it closely.

Three successive tones announced that the Galaxicaster's strings had achieved the proper frequencies as they spun in circles like jump ropes, while also being compressed and pulled apart.

"Gentlemen," said Chef, "now is the moment we write history." Quinoa, looking at the energy readouts of the Galaxicaster's capacitor, could picture Chef's appearance just then: a man's face in a tintype portrait prior to the fashion of saying cheese. Quinoa felt a tinge of excitement. His pride bubbled knowing he played a part in the experiment that could lead to the truth of how to release the energy of dark matter—having a way to harness the usable power of 85% of the universe's matter rivaled mankind's lighting its first fire. His job to monitor the capacitor that would collect the energy doubled his excitement; this would make him like the first person to witness the fire.

"This is the moment we conceive," said Butter. "If we're as fertile as I am."

"The experiment will succeed," said Chef with confidence, "but we really need to monitor how its outcome differs from what is expected." For the first time Quinoa felt a sense of unease.

## BUTTER

The presence of silence unnerved him—Butter liked the dirty talk. Chef played the “chord” that would unlock the energy of dark matter, but its notes, F #29, A #29, and C #30, exceeded the range for human ears to register—not that they could hear it through the vacuum of space.

“Quinoa, what is the capacitor’s accumulation of energy?” said Chef as cold as the Galaxicaster: the coldest object in space at that moment.

“That’s a proper job for you, Quinoa,” said Butter. “Taking the piss test to see if we’ve conceived.”

“I’m getting no energy readings,” said Quinoa. “I guess you’re not as fertile as you think, Butter.” Butter assumed the chicken contained a little gristle. The dig made Butter smile; he liked hearing a little sass from Quinoa.

“It’s probably just too soon after your missed period,” said Butter. “You should give it more time.” He’d hate to have spent three months in space with these queers just to have the mission fail.

“Come on girl,” said Chef. “We didn’t just spend three months in space to have the mission fail.” Chef’s words unnerved Butter more than the silence had. Not only did it seem out of character, it felt like Chef had just read his mind. Even worse, it sounded like Chef referred to *him* as the girl.

“Does it seem hot to anyone else in here?” said Butter.

“It’s the manna from heaven,” said Quinoa, sounding amazed at a sudden revelation. To Butter, Quinoa’s comment had the timing of a man’s attempt to solve a woman’s problem when I just needed listening to. *Did I just think, “I just needed listening to”? I meant ‘she’ damnit!*

“Yes,” said Chef. Was he agreeing with him that it was hot in here, responding to Quinoa, or answering his thought? “Quinoa,” continued Chef, “do you know for sure the capacitor shows no signs of accumulated energy?”

“Yes,” said Quinoa. “The capacitor’s level reads zero. The experiment failed.”

“I assure you that I calculated correctly,” said Chef. “Your sensors are failing.” Butter didn’t know about the capacitor’s sensors, but he definitely sensed a change.

## QUINOA

“The experiment succeeded,” said Chef. “You missed something in your analysis.” Quinoa thought that he had read the instruments right, but maybe he *had* missed something. Held in place by the gravity created by the thrust of the shuttle’s voyage towards Earth, the three sat around a table under the UV spotlight located on the ceiling of the shuttle’s galley, which smelled like a swimming pool. Quinoa felt unease at the thought that their discovery could one day provide the power for greater thrust, shortening their journey. He didn’t just feel unease by this thought; he hadn’t felt right since the failed experiment.

Not really hungry, Quinoa sucked on a packet of channa masala—even with the galley’s limited options, Quinoa followed his vegan diet. He remembered his vision while the experiment failed. *It isn’t possible*. What if seminal fluid had the effect of a stimulant? What if it gave you energy like a meal? *It isn’t possible*.

“It is possible,” said Chef, himself working on a packet of tofu pudding, “that the energy manifested in a different way.” Then that kept happening, it seemed like Chef answered his thought. Or, did he talk about the failed experiment?

“I swear this shuttle is getting hotter,” said Butter, speaking for the first time since the experiment. Quinoa admitted that it did seem like the temperature had been rising, but he saw a chance to show Butter his own reflection.

“Maybe it’s a hot flash,” said Quinoa.

“I’m no girl!” said Butter, bringing his fists down on the table. Quinoa thought that Butter tried to convince himself more than them.



“The thermometer shows no deviation from the mean,” said Chef, looking at his wrist-mounted workstation. Quinoa checked his own and noticed the same, but one doubt he didn’t have—it *was* feeling hotter.

## BUTTER

Butter felt the sweat slide down his temple. The back and armpits of his shirt showed his sweat. He strolled the shuttle's children's maze of white passageways. This level of exertion shouldn't be causing him to sweat so much. *I'm just sick* passed a fleeting thought. His mind focused on a greater problem; why had the others called him a woman—he was most certainly a man.

Butter stepped into the lab and Quinoa looked up at him from where he worked behind a terminal. The beads of sweat on Quinoa's brow let Butter know that he didn't suffer the heat alone.

"I've been running a data analysis on the experiment to check the possibility that I missed something when monitoring the energy accumulation," said Quinoa.

"You screwed up?" said Butter

"That analysis produced no conclusion," said Quinoa, "but I did notice an anomaly in the data. The frequencies of the string's longitudinal waves might have been incorrect, resulting in the wrong chord being played— G  $\flat$  minor."

"Chef couldn't have played the wrong chord, they're miles apart." Butter knew the surface details of the experiment from their mission briefings, but, admittedly, his knowledge of music theory equaled a howler monkey's.

"The longitudinal motion of the offending string should have had a frequency of 160.2GHz, just like its transverse motion. Dark matter affects the cosmic microwave background by its gravitational potential and by its effects on the density and velocity of ordinary matter. The cosmic microwave background spectrum peaks at a frequency of 160.2GHz. Chef's genius lay in

his theory that the interaction of the gravity created by the centripetal forces of the strings moving at the frequencies of the F #29, A #29, and C #30 notes of the F # major chord would make dark matter's energy available. A #29 wasn't the note played. It was A29. That made the chord G b minor."

"What does that mean?" said Butter.

"I don't know," said Quinoa, "but I do know that strange things have been happening to me since the experiment."

"I've been having thoughts that you two have been referring to me as a woman," sputtered Butter.

"I've been thinking that male ejaculate is like a drug." That seemed as crazy as Butter's thought. "Now that I think about it, maybe you call a man using ejaculate for this reason a woman. It would certainly give a different justification to being a homosexual man and calling yourself girl."

"I'd rather kill myself than be gay," said Butter. "I'd never suck a man's dick." The thought of that act made him feel like he had just listened to a howler monkey—but if it was like a drug...

## QUINOA

“I hope you see by the data that the experiment succeeded,” said Chef, entering the lab to look over Quinoa’s shoulder at the terminal. Butter took towards the port window and stared off into the darkness. Quinoa turned to face Chef, finding his forehead and shirt as dry as his sense of humor.

“I see no evidence of energy accumulation,” said Quinoa, “but I did notice that G b minor might have been played. I want to know what this means.”

“It means that the experiment as you expected it failed,” said Chef. “Possibly, the F# major you expected didn’t play.” To Quinoa, this sounded like an admission of guilt, although Chef’s expression remained neutral—he didn’t even blink his eyes, but Chef’s type always would win a staring contest. “Further outcomes of the experiment need observation.”

“I want to know how you could let this happen,” said Quinoa, frustrated and scared. “I want to know these other outcomes. I want to know why you aren’t sweating!” He noticed it then. He had watched for Chef to blink his eyes at telling a lie, but now Chef had blinked his eyes every time Quinoa had said the word “I”. He felt dizzy; he felt a strange sense of intimacy with Chef.

In Quinoa’s mind, it felt like Chef asked him, *Do you trust me?* Quinoa answered, *No I don’t.* Chef turned his head, not able to look Quinoa in the eye. *I want to know if man can live off of the consumption of male seminal fluid,* thought Quinoa. He only received mental static. Then, Chef turned his gaze back on Quinoa and blinked again—an affirmation that Quinoa thought correctly? *I want to know why I feel so hot.* With this last thought, Quinoa had focused on his

body, reaching within and feeling the heat emanating from it. Slowly, a bead of sweat ran down Chef's temple.

Chef had reacted to Quinoa's feelings! If this level of mental telepathy was possible, Quinoa's thoughts about male ejaculate having the ability to provide energy must be true. If this level of telepathy was possible, what in the universe wasn't possible?

"I am a girl!" shouted Butter.

## BUTTER

Butter sat at the dining table in the galley, staring at the packet of chicken and dumplings in front of him. He didn't feel hungry and figured it a waste his time to eat. He couldn't face the others after his admission in the lab and had left them behind, but now he wanted to talk to Quinoa. They had to speak about their changing since the experiment.

Chef hummed the theme to the latest space opera as he entered the galley and sat down in front of Butter with a packet of devil's food cake. Chef twisted the lid off and began sucking it down. Butter never saw Chef eat anything but sweets, yet this failed to ever add any pounds. He had to hit the gym to keep his physique.

"Have you seen Quinoa?" said Butter.

"He's using the shower," Chef returned to his cake.

"So, do you think she really did provide some energy?" said Butter.

"She?" Again, the devil's food cake.

"The Galaxicaster," said Butter, truthfully referring to himself and his recent changes.

"I believe she gathered some energy. I think it can be concluded that the experiment with her successfully created change." Chef flattened the packet with one final suck.

"What type of change?" said Butter, each of Chef's answers increasing his anxiety.

"That remains unseen," said Chef as he rose and threw the packet away in the waste receptacle, "but I have a hypothesis."

"What's that?"

“I need more proof before elaborating on its details.” Chef moved towards the exit.

“Perhaps you should have this conversation with Quinoa.”

## QUINOA

“Chef did something to us!” Quinoa and Butter say in unison as Butter entered the cramped sleeping quarters: three pill shaped bunks stacked like pancakes and recessed into the white wall. Quinoa lay down on his bottom bunk reflecting on his failures. He felt like going to the library where he did his best thinking until Butter arrived in this surprise visit.

“Then we agree for a change,” said Butter, climbing into to his bunk above Quinoa’s. Chef had the top bunk, because he never seemed to need it.

“Yes,” said Quinoa. “He keeps saying that the mission succeeded. I believe that the point of this experiment didn’t mean to change the energy of dark matter into a consumable energy, but to change us. He possesses an awareness of a different type of energy, which I am beginning to understand, and he knows this. He reads our minds. He understands our change.”

“But I don’t understand what is happening to us.”

“We have achieved awareness, Butter. I am aware now that male ejaculate is energy. Humans sharing this create the true perpetual motion machine—energy in a constant loop.”

“Can you imagine the money you’d save by not having to buy food?” said Butter. “Some of the richest families must have this capability.”

“Maybe this relates to the myth of vampires. The blood of vampires gives eternal life.”

“But I have been thinking I’m a girl,” said Butter. “How does that fit in?”

“I didn’t know for sure until I tried it myself. I experimented with my own ejaculate while in the shower.”

“You swallowed your own come?” said Butter like biting a lemon.



“Yes.” Quinoa had no fear admitting he had tested his hypothesis.

“And?” said Butter.

“Nothing,” said Quinoa. “It must not work on oneself. That is where you come in.”

“Me?”

“You’re a man but think of yourself as a woman. Either the woman consumes like they need semen to make a baby, or they produce like giving birth to life. I need you to test this out.”

“You need me to what?”

## BUTTER

“Bottoms up,” said Butter, holding the sport water bottle out in a toast. They had taken their turns in the toilet and done the deed into the bottles, capping its contents in place with the nipple-like valve lids. During, Butter had tried to think of the woman he had last made love to, but she kept turning into Quinoa and Chef. He finished eventually, and now the two crowded together in the passageway outside of the toilet.

“If it is effective, I don’t know how long it will take before we know it,” said Quinoa. The two hadn’t eaten or slept in two days in order to test the hypothesis.

“What will it feel like?” said Butter.

“I don’t know,” said Quinoa. “I expect a rush of energy, or maybe it’ll build slowly. It could have the effect of an amphetamine. Or, it could create a sense of fullness and satiation, like you just ate a cheeseburger.” Butter couldn’t help but feel he’d rather be eating eat an actual cheeseburger—but women did this, right? Granted, Butter thought on his past disappointments, not all women.

“Wait,” said Butter. “I can’t do this.”

“Why can’t you?” said Quinoa.

“I’m not gay. I’m not a woman.” He still couldn’t accept this.

“Don’t think of it like being a gay man calling himself a woman,” said Quinoa. “Think of it like the difference between a man who possesses superpowers and a man that doesn’t.” Butter pictured himself standing strong, with his cape flapping in the wind. Then his stance

changed to accentuate the curve of his hips, and the cape became a shawl. Butter couldn't beat this.

"Alright, let's do it," he said. In unison, the two tilted the bottles back and gave them a squeeze. With the shape of the bottle and its valve top, Butter couldn't help but think he gave a man a blowjob. Butter swallowed quickly to avoid having to taste it, and the white goo slid down his throat. He didn't care so much for the color white this time. Butter gave it a minute, expecting to feel a sudden rush of focus and energy. He knew how an amphetamine made you feel.

"Nothing," he said.

"Yeah, me neither," said Quinoa. "Maybe we just need to give it some time."

"Yeah, maybe," Butter looked at the clock on the wall and wondered how long it would take. To the right of the clock a lens trained its eye on them. A red dot glowed indicating that it operated. Had Chef been watching them?

## QUINOA

*It's not working. It was all just a crazy notion.* Quinoa lay on his bunk, head resting on his hands, staring at the monitor on the wall of his bunk. It played the latest hospital drama. He waited for an affirmation like he waited for news of the success of a surgery with a high mortality rate performed on a loved one. It had been three hours since he had swallowed Butter's slime. He could still smell it. Or, did he smell the dried energy remaining on some of the socks that Butter had stashed under his covers?

"Anything?" he asked Butter. No reply sounded from Butter's bunk. He asked again, louder. "Butter, anything yet?"

"Huh? Wha?" stammered Butter. "I'm sorry, I must have been sleeping." Quinoa sighed as his heart dropped into his stomach, and for a second he finally felt full. "I'm kidding, I wasn't sleeping. I just don't feel any different—I'm still hungry."

"Our experiment failed then," he said. He felt the same way he did when the girl he asked to the prom turned him down.

"Obviously," said Butter like a knife cut. "The woman does not have the superpower."

"But I haven't been thinking of myself as a woman," their failure had reminded Quinoa of how hot he felt, "but maybe I failed to recognize this. We are women! Do you notice that Chef doesn't sweat like us? Maybe this hot flash we seem to have makes us both women."

"That makes Chef the only man on this shuttle." Butter sounded like a child who had just discovered that he lacked the proper height to ride the rollercoaster.

"He must be," said Quinoa.

“You know he spies on us,” said Butter. “He saw us swallow each other’s...” He didn’t need to finish his statement. Quinoa thought of his telepathy with Chef and remembered how Chef had averted his gaze when he said he had no trust in the other.

“Chef did this to us on purpose,” he said. “He intentionally played the wrong chord. He wanted to observe how the experiment would change us. But why? I don’t understand that.”

“Maybe he didn’t do it on purpose,” said Butter. “Maybe our changes are accidental, and he just wants to know why we’ve been acting so different.” *Maybe*. Quinoa didn’t know what to think anymore.

## BUTTER

Seeing Chef caused Butter's heart to flutter. Quinoa had fallen into a silent depression, so Butter filled his stomach on a steak and mashed potatoes packet just to eat something. He thought this was a waste. He really needed Chef, however insane this seemed—he couldn't believe that he had gone insane. This debate raged while he began laps around the shuttle, dragging his feet like he wore leg irons. He stumbled upon Chef in the Cargo hold: a relief since, despite being crammed with a suffocating amount of crates filled with supplies and equipment, the cargo hold made Butter feel empty more than any other compartment of the shuttle. Chef, with his sleeves rolled up, tinkered with the Galaxicaster.

“You look like you're questioning your lucidity.” Chef put his tools down and looked up at Butter. For the first time Butter noticed the definition of Chef's arm muscles.

“You're completely sane, you know. You wouldn't have been chosen for this mission had it been otherwise.” Butter knew how thorough the company had been in their selection process. They had even tested his DNA. He found comfort in Chef's words.

“The Galaxicaster seemed to have some faulty wires. It might have resulted in inconsistencies of the offsets of the notes. I just finished replacing them.” Butter at first thought that Chef referred to him as the Galaxicaster, but that was all right. Chef had fixed him. He didn't perform an experiment on him and Quinoa.

“You know it's funny, I couldn't see the wires I replaced, and, at first, I tried to connect the male end of the replacement wire's terminal into another male terminal. It took me a moment

of fumbling around until I found the correct female terminal to join the two wires.” Butter had just been making a mistake about males and females too.

For the first time since he’d piloted the Galaxicaster out into space, Butter felt like a man. He wanted to stay with Chef. Maybe after they reached earth they could work together to get the Galaxicaster fixed so it could give birth to the usable energy of dark matter. Butter froze. *Give birth... Stay with Chef... Comfort... The definition of Chef’s muscles.* The hair on the back of Butter’s neck rose. Women looked for these things in a relationship. He wanted to flee the cargo hold. He couldn’t remain with Chef any longer. Chef *was* the man and he *was* the woman. He thought of having to put his mouth around Chef’s penis.

## QUINOA

“Ooof!” Quinoa entered the cargo hold looking for Chef and ran into Butter attempting a quick exit. He grabbed Butter around the wrist putting a stop to Butter’s flight.

“All three of us need to talk,” said Quinoa. Butter gave a tug to pull away, but Quinoa didn’t relent, so Butter worked his way over to the airlock door and stared through its observation window. He gazed beyond the window to the second door within the airlock: the final barrier between the interior of the shuttle and space beyond. Butter hugged his arms in tightly. Quinoa guessed that Butter gave up on their quest for the truth.

“I don’t know what we have to talk about,” said Chef. “We will straighten out the experiment during our trip home.” Quinoa took this to mean that they didn’t have to talk, they could communicate mentally, and he would learn the truth from Chef. Quinoa thought, *You have to tell me if you have done this to us. Are Butter and I women, or just imagining this in our minds?* Chef closed his eyes and shook his head. *Which question did you answer no to?* Quinoa waited in anticipation, but no thought came in reply.

Instead, Chef said, “Alright then, let’s use our words.” Quinoa suddenly felt like a child. He anticipated the lesson to come. “What do you hope to learn by talking?”

“You played the wrong chord on purpose. The real experiment focused on how Butter and I would react to this,” said Quinoa.

“What makes you think these things?” said Chef.



“The data implies that G ♭ minor played, not F # major, and ever since Butter and I have been experiencing odd delusions.”

“Do you think they are delusions?” said Chef.

“I don’t know what to think.” Quinoa grew tired of this Socratic method. “Tell me straight, dammit!”

“I did purposefully play G ♭ minor and not F # major. I performed the experiment to test the hypothesis that it would cause you to see the truth.”

“But, what is the truth?” This question dominated Quinoa’s thoughts.

“Am I a woman?” shouted Butter from his position by the airlock, not turning his gaze from the outer door.

“I know that I am a man,” said Chef. “Whether you identify as a man or a woman, you have to decide.”

“Then we do the consuming,” said Quinoa, he thought of Chef, then he thought of his failed experiment with Butter outside of the toilet.

“You do the consuming,” said Chef, closing his eyes and hanging his head—*he’s hiding his amusement.*

“I can’t be a woman!” Butter slapped the button that slid the inner door to the airlock open with a hiss of air and jumped inside. Quinoa dodged crates as fast as he could towards the airlock before Butter could do anything foolish, but the inner door slid shut before he reached it. Quinoa made it just in time to watch Butter open the outer door and eject himself into the darkness of space.

## QUINOA

For the first time since the experiment with the Galaxicaster, Quinoa felt cold. He had turned up the heat in the library, but it did little good. He felt like he had been blown out of the airlock along with Butter and now drifted in the coldness of space. He felt like he had died too. Chef said the performance of the experiment had intentions other than what Butter and he expected. Chef performed it to see if it could make them see the truth. Quinoa always came to the shuttle's library, a compartment much like a home theater, with one long couch facing a large screen, when he wanted answers. He stared at the blank screen in front of him, and thought about the truth he felt Butter had given up on discovering. What was the truth?

Ever since the experiment with the Galaxicaster, Butter and he had been sweating profusely. Chef didn't show signs of these prolonged hot flashes.

The experiment inspired him to think of manna from heaven: *manna*. He believed seminal fluid acted as a stimulant, energy. Butter believed the others referred to him as a woman. He eventually called himself a woman.

There existed a difference between a man that could provide this energy and a man that couldn't.

Quinoa's experiments with his seminal fluid, and his shared experiment with Butter, proved unsuccessful. This made both Butter and he women.

Chef called himself a man.

Quinoa had developed some form of telepathy with Chef. The existence of this telepathy proved his intuition about the sexual nature of energy transmission.

He had to confront Chef. He had to know if Chef would provide him with the energy that he now knew the truth of.

He didn't even have to leave his seat to go searching for Chef. The door to the library slid open and Chef stood just outside.

"May I come inside?" Quinoa took this as an innuendo.

"You certainly may," said Quinoa, returning the gesture. Chef sat beside him, and also stared at the blank screen. Chef sat with his legs slightly spread and arms to his sides. Quinoa didn't know how to proceed. He had never anticipated the act of performing fellatio. How do you ask a man something like that for the first time? Since Chef could read his mind, he would expect it. *Well, there's only one way to find out.* He made a move to the drawstring at Chef's waist and began to pull it loose. Chef quickly slid back on his seat and brought his arms up, knocking Quinoa's hands out of the way.

"That's not for you," said Chef. *What?* Quinoa thought incorrectly after all? Then, a sudden wave of relief washed over him. How could he have been so blind? Their codenames said it all. Butter and his experiment with one another failed because they both provided energy. Quinoa incorrectly thought watching their foolish experimentation had amused Chef, but Chef consumed their energy. Quinoa stood with a smile—after all, the thought of receiving fellatio gave more pleasure than the thought of giving it. He reached for his own drawstring and began to untie it.

"No, Quinoa," said Chef. He stood and made for the door. With a slide of it open and shut, he left Quinoa behind. Quinoa heard the door's magnetic lock engage. Chef had locked him in, but he didn't worry about this. Confusion once again engulfed him. Then he thought that Chef

had someone else back on Earth. That explained his rejection of Quinoa's offer. Chef performed the experiment just for Quinoa to learn the truth about sexual energy transmission. He felt elated that he now understood this truth.

The screen switched on with a flash. Quinoa turned his attention to towards it. It played a film he had seen during his sexual education in school. The shot looked down a long cavern within the human body. Suddenly a geyser of ejaculate strikes the camera. In the next shot, squirming spermatozoon compete to enter the ovum first. This eventually leads to a fetus growing within a womb.

## CHEF

Two minutes remained before his presentation to the board. He settled into the pilot's chair in the shuttle's cockpit and looked the flashing settings over to assure that they indicated the correct course for Earth. He felt glad that the experiment had concluded. Watching Butter and Quinoa flutter between proving the hypothesis correct, and their eventual failure, had been disappointing.

He reclined the pilot's chair, closed his eyes, placed one hand over his heart and the other on his diaphragm, and began to envision the corporation's board room on Earth. The long, oval table took shape. The board members, wearing their tailored suits, reclined in leather bound chairs around it. Their hand positions copied his own. At the head of the table reclined his father. His father opened the board meeting.

*Jonathan, I understand that the experiment has reached its conclusion and that you will make your final report,* thought his father.

*Yes Father,* Jonathan thought from his seat in the shuttle's pilot's chair. *Experiment Lightwave 1.9.84 resulted in a failure to prove the hypothesis. Evidence reveals successful activation of the subjects' recessive gene, but they failed to conclude the alternative nature of human energy. They ultimately failed to make the transition from food to light as their lone source for nutrition. I believe that the subjects' insecurities interfered with this transition.*

*And on the nature of our communication?* thought his father.

*Subject Q showed a positive reaction, thought Jonathan, providing the main evidence that the recessive gene had been activated. In the end, however, they misused it to ascertain the true origin of our energy. Interference with thoughts of subject B a possible reason for this.*

*Final state of subjects?*

*Subject B neutralized himself, thought Jonathan. Subject Q remains isolated, and I have begun their re-education conditioning. I am uncertain about the long-term effects of the experiment on the subject's cognitive function. This will need further monitoring.*

*Very good work, Jonathan, thought his father. We will begin the selection process of new subjects for experiment 1.9.85, and re-evaluate the data, paying special attention to the recorded video, for adjustments to the selection criteria. We'll make this available for your evaluation upon your arrival back home. Jonathan, have a safe voyage through the darkness.*