

Gateway Love

by Joe Tripician

Thank you, Rector Seidner, and good day students of the Enhanced Academy of Life Suspension. I know that you're all anxious for the start of solstice vacation, but my presentation won't take long, and it's critical for your survival out in the hinterlands.

During your stay here at the Academy all of your basic needs have been provided for, including canteen sexbots for your primal urges. But outside things will be different. Take it from one who's been there and has faced the icy storms of Cerberus: women are dangerous; without question the most dangerous life forms on the planet, and once taken in you never return. I've lost many comrades to their tendrils, and it's only by random bloody chance that I'm even alive today. I guarantee that should you be ensnared you won't be so damn lucky.

What I'm about to say could mean the difference between life and certain death. And if you think it's boring, or funny, or not relevant to you because you're a fortunate son, well then, Rector Seidner and COO Halfon have a special place for you to spend the solstice. It's called the De-phaser Chamber. Yeah, you're not smirking now, are you?

These are the Seven Categories of Gateway Love. Look them over. Study them. Learn their patterns. Each one is a sure path to pain, each lead to harder and more destructive life-states.

Gateway Loves are lethal. They do not discriminate between bot or flesh, primary or clone. Every one is certain to snuff you at the climax of a debilitating affair.

Know them:

Sharon is a Category Seven Gateway Love. She affects the user with feelings of self-loathing and outbursts of eczema. She is a classic lurker, and has a variety of disguises. But the one distinguishing characteristic is her ability to reinforce the relationships that most of you think you have long forgotten: those with your primary caregivers, quaintly known as "parents". Don't

confuse the initial feelings of comfort with safety. There is nothing safe about this bitch. Before you know it, you'll soon be guilt projecting and overcome with blind hostility. And it will all feel so familiar and safe. That's your funeral.

Category Six is Claudia and her MO is to reform you, against all logic, will and the natural force of life suspension. She's manipulative and devious. She'll have you changing the way you eat, drink and shit. You'll be battered about like a nano-tube in a hurricane, but soon you'll be asking her approval to breathe. You'll feel ennobled, worthy of her love, a plush toy she's won in Circustown. In the end, all you'll have changed is your freedom.

Mary is a Category Five, the Sponsor Gateway. In this variety of co-dependency you will substitute obligation for ownership. Maybe you've earned enough doing night rounds to afford her. Or maybe she's an heiress from a long line of clone manufacturers. Regardless of whoever pays the bills, you will own each other, and in a sick and twisted way, both will depend on this mutual ownership for your daily sustenance. Rage, lies and duplicity will reign over your territory. And as your future steadily declines, eaten away slowly and surely by a duet of delusion, you will be reformed into a useless, quivering puddle. Your semen will have more backbone.

Something funny, Master Bates? Care to share it with your comrades? Want to join your soul brothers in the chamber?... Don't back-talk me, son... Fine. Have it your way. Rector, de-phase him...

All right, okay students, let's settled down. No, don't step over him. Don't lift your feet to avoid it. I want you to steep in it, until you leave here smelling of retribution: a constant reminder of the punishment for failing to be vigilant.

Category Four: Patricia, the Exotic Gateway Love. You've met someone of another species and think she's the shit. You believe it's love, but it's mere obsession. And it doesn't matter which exo-race we're talking about. Those early feelings of excitement will soon give way to isolation and insecurity. Self-doubt will flood your system. You'll feel useless and neglected, until one day you'll willingly jump into a pit of methane as part of a Pleiadian Mating Ritual. And as

thoughts of cute little mutant babies dance in your brain, your body dissolves into ether, leaving behind the noxious stench of need.

Adrienne is Category Three: the Rebel. Shack up with this one when you want to get back at your Rectors, but the blowback will be catastrophic. You'll think that you can live off the anger of your superiors, but all you'll get from us is a passing form of pity and perhaps the faded wisp of disappointment. And for her you're just another notch on her sleep pod. While her friends laugh at you behind your back, and her other lovers plot your death, you'll be pulling the stingers of regret out from your ass. Because she hates herself she will pull you down with her, where you will wither and rot, a faithful devoted sap to the end.

Category Two of Gateway Love is enslavement, and its name is Mary. You may call it friendship, but the warm feeling it initially inspires is deceptive. You may delight in a close companionship, despite its sexless and loveless nature, but soon your sense of loyalty will be replaced by betrayal. Jealously and cheating will consume the thin bonds holding you together, until the relationship explodes in a fiery ball of hurt, pain and regret. The message is clear: do not fall in love with your clone!

All consuming romantic foolish love is Category One, and you will know her by the name Beatrice. You'll willingly give yourself up to her in the belief that unconditional love will liberate you, but in fact it will chain you. Being a martyr does not -- repeat -- does not make you loveable. It's abuse of the tallest order. All the while you'll wonder how you could love someone who treats you like yesterday's cold nano-soup. It's a gateway to oblivion.

Question, Master Quigley?... No, this is not a scare campaign. If you're not learning something vitally important here, I'll take you over to Screech Row where you'll see some real examples of zombie afterlife.

You all come from hearty nano-soup stock. You think you're indestructible. You feel privileged, and that's made you weak and flabby. Remember, from soup you came and to soup you will return.

It takes just one slip -- just one. Her figure appears through the transparent dress: curvaceous, plump and alluring. She lets you touch her skin, soft and delicate like a baby clone's down. The chemistry between you is electric. Ions are pulsing back and forth, back and forth. Foam is beginning to form at the corners of your mouth. Your breath is labored; your pulse is revved. And it's not until the blood has rushed from your brain downward that you realize you've been captured: bagged and tagged and on the next ship to Kallichore. You've let down your guard and it's all too late. I hate you, Beatrice, please come back!...

...I'm fine, I'm fine. Gimme another shot...

So, students, in summation: be safe out there. And if you must have fun, stick it in a bot slot.

