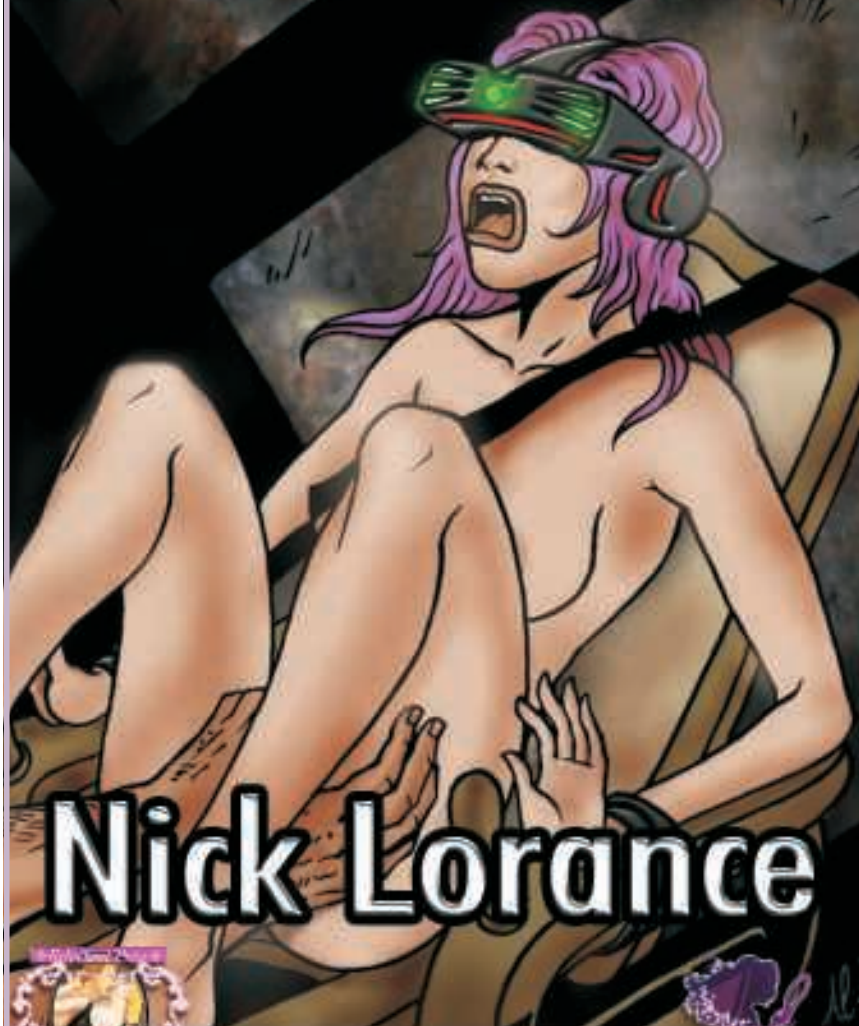


The Real Me



Nick Lorance



An "Adult Tv" Novel



Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers

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Persons seeking gender reassignment surgery, hormone therapy or any other medical and/or body-altering process should seek the counsel of a qualified therapist who follows the Benjamin Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorder. This material is intended for persons over the age of 18 only.



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The Real Me

By Nick Lorance

Quantico Virginia, 2045

I was walking down the street in the virtual world wearing my secondary female avatar, dressed in a generic little black dress, and thigh-high three-inch heeled boots. Behind me, I could hear someone coming closer. I paused, looking at a storefront. It was for a store I knew was actually in Hong Kong, but that wasn't a problem really. Even where I was in virtual Denver at the moment, I could have walked in, bought something, and it would have been delivered. But I was using the glass of the window to see down the street. The person following me looked like an Oni; a Japanese ogre.

Usually the form of your avatar doesn't mean a lot; it's just what you want to look like. I remember a guy back in the day who used Pacman for example.

Contact. The person in that Oni avatar had been reported as molesting women, always in this section

of the virtual world created by the Web. Maybe he had a thing for American women.

I turned away from the store front and I felt the monster closing on me. My hands clutched, and as it grabbed me and spun me into the wall, ripping my blouse, I went with the pull, the cuffs locking on it's wrists as it said, "Hey babe!"

It stopped, looking down, then the user tried to log out. But I had nailed it well. The avatar was driven to its knees as the feedback stopped it. It looked up, and said one word. "Bitch!" I could understand why it was upset, and what must have seemed wrong. I looked like a woman 157 cm tall; as the old saying goes, 'five foot two, eyes of blue'. Whoever it was, they had not seen the real me.

"Neil Reese, FBI." I said. I brought up the virtual keyboard, typing. Ah, Yokohama. I tapped into the Japanese net, contacting the authorities. Yokohama reported receipt; it was someone in Yamato-Minami.

"A decoy. I got caught by a fucking decoy!" The Oni whined. "You can't be that good!"

"I must be. I caught you, didn't I?" Then the Oni vanished. I caught the cuffs, pocketing them. At the moment his suit or wraps had locked down, and he was unable to move away from the computer the Japanese were tracking. In the next hour or so he'd be charged for attempted virtual rape. I sighed and tapped the keyboard one last time.

I was looking at the inside of my virtual reality helmet. It isn't the clunky thing you see in the HD these days. It fit snugly like the old fashioned toboggan caps they still wear in the northernmost part of the United States of North America with the folding fleece-lined ear protectors for bad weather. If you

can't visualize that, picture the hats they always show in those old Foreign Legion HDs with the sunflap hanging down the back. My clothes were of the new design that worked as VR wraps; sending sensations to every part of the body so when you picked up something, you could feel it, even taste something if you sat in a virtual cafe and had a snack; though those cafes only charge pennies for access. After all, what you have done is eat a pastry and drink a drink that is virtual and has no real substance.

I lifted up the visor that covered my eyes to see the newest recruits to the FBI's Behavioral Analysis Unit Section 5 who had already lifted their visors. "That was one of the simplest of my missions for the Agency," I told them. "There have been some that were much, much, worse. I used it to show you how it should go down if you do everything right. Now, questions?"

"So we're trolling like hookers?" a woman said. Jessica Tate, fresh out of the Academy. She was the youngest person in the room and had blown the top off the testing for this position. But her attitude...

"In that case, yes. But this Unit was created because ever since the VR revolution of 2020, crimes in cyberspace have grown beyond merely hijacking someone's identity or funds. They have become physical attacks."

"But you can't physically harm someone in VR," another agent, Lloyd Webster, said.

"Oh, that's what the schools and popular media would have you think, but it isn't really true, and hasn't been for twenty years." I looked across the faces of all ten. "You all know how the VR wraps work; you put on the jumpsuit that has them inside,

make the plumbing connections, and you are there in the virtual world. You can take any form you wish, from an antique Pac-Man to a modern HD movie star. Be anyone you want to be, go anywhere you want to go. And if you meet someone you think is attractive, you can get down and dirty with them, whether they are real or simply a girl from a stable of hookers in the Virtual Mustang Ranch.

“But think. You don’t know if that person is real, or just a program mimicking humanity. Thanks to the invention of limited AIs in 2007, you have some of those programs passing the Turing Test.”

“The what?” Paul Stanhope. I didn’t expect him to finish the course. You had to pass it to work in the Unit.

“The Turing Test was suggested in 1950 by a British mathematician and computer scientist named Alan Turing. His theory was that the way to test the capabilities of an AI is to put it in one computer, linked to another, where you have a human operator. It wasn’t tried for over a decade after Turing’s article, and was challenged immediately because all the computer was doing was using keywords and prewritten responses. But in 1991 Hugh Loebner of Cambridge University created the Loebner Prize, intending to spark more and more interest in the phenomenon. The first crude AIs called ‘chatterbots’ were created in 1994,” I told them pedantically.

“But one of them created in 2007 was called Cyberlover, a malware that pretended to be just another web surfer in a chat room. Using your responses, it would morph to match what your ideal partner was, be it a demure little woman or a hedonist. It would then lure you to a ‘personal site’ where you could be alone, and once there, download the

malware onto your computer, where it would upload personal information.

“Have you all watched the episode ‘The Phantom Woman’ from the old Japanese Series AD Police as instructed?” They nodded. “What we have in VR is mimicked there, because of the casual abuse of the users. In that episode, you have a waitress robot go berserk because the owner isn’t allowing it the necessary downtime. Then there’s the robot hooker that was so badly abused it started killing her clients, because some of them before had thought, ‘Hey, it’s a machine, so if I do this abusive thing, I won’t get arrested’ but it develops a reaction loop that if that’s all right for the *client*, it’s all right for her as well to try to elicit that response.

“VR has made this worse because you *don’t know who or what* you are with on line. To paraphrase Bruce Willis from a movie named Surrogates, the other party could be an AI but it could also be some fat old man pretending to be a nubile young woman. Or someone who gained access illegally; say a young teenager who thinks about sex, but isn’t old enough to indulge.

“That case.” I waved toward my helmet, “was just that; a repressed teenaged boy who dreamed of sex and found his way onto the Net through an unprotected back door. He would try to convince women to go off with him and failed because he hadn’t had the experience in simple conversations. He found a bootleg copy of an old Police program that would allow you to find and lock a perpetrator down until capture. But in his frustration, he used it to trap women who were on the net, and sexually abuse them. You see, the entire VR rig can give you every sensation your body is capable of, so you can torture their avatar, or rape them, and they will feel it as long as it is something they have actually experienced. The only

way to escape is to lose consciousness, which automatically shuts your system down and frees you.”

“But unless you have actually been tortured, or raped...” Jeffery Toller commented.

“You have experienced pain. Sometimes blinding pain like a really bad toothache. The system just transplants it to the area where you are being abused. As for being raped, if the person you are with is careless, you have felt some pain during sex. Add the actual remembered pain to it, along with the emotional shock of being unable to resist, and you have almost all of the trauma a real rape can cause.”

I looked from one face to another. “He had one woman trapped there for two hours, subjectively two *days*. Using his own system, we found I was the fifteenth person to be attacked. That grab to rip my clothes was supposed to lock me into the system, just as I locked him into it with my own updated version. Our more modern programs cannot be circumvented, yet. But every year, hell, every *week* someone comes up with another way around the software, and every week the industry has people discovering them, and neutralizing that avenue of attack.”

There was a buzzer, and I clapped my hands. “On to lunch, then your next class. In that one, you will attempt to match my capture. If you fail, all you have to do is lift your visor, which is better than the option I had when it really happened.”

I picked up my tablet, shut it off, then stopped. Jessica was standing there still. “What, aren’t you hungry? I am.”

“What would have happened if you hadn’t made the bust the right way?”

I motioned and she walked alongside me toward the elevator bank. “The woman I mentioned was the last of his victims and like any repetitive pattern personality, be it kleptomaniac, super jewel thief, serial rapist or serial killer, they have an MO. In the last two cases, the time line between usually becomes shorter and shorter. You go from maybe weeks or months between to sometimes days.” I shrugged. “If I had missed I would have been able to get out in a few minutes; the monitoring system we use is more comprehensive than a standard home unit.”

“That’s not always true about pattern criminals,” she demurred. “Jack the Ripper comes to mind, or the BTK strangler.”

I chuckled. “Two excellent choices. In the first one a conspiracy theory suggests that Prince Edward ‘Eddie Victor’ was the perpetrator, with his own security detachment creating copycats, since he went into a coma around the time of the last ‘verified’ victim and died not long after. It’s been too long since then for us to make a determination today as to who actually did it. In the case of the BTK strangler, he found something else to focus on for over a decade which threw the investigators for a loop. But he started sending taunting letters again, which led to his arrest. That was why I said ‘usually’.”

The elevator opened, and we dropped toward the cafeteria floor. “But that kid was caught in that repetitive cycle. The first attack two years before the last was a simple rape but the timeline was counting down rapidly, with him holding them longer and longer, finding more and more ways to torment his victims. I would have probably spent several minutes before they brought me out here, because when we go online on a hunt, you’re always monitored. The instant your body starts reacting to the violence; addi-

tional adrenaline, that kind of thing, they see it and break the link.”

“How long could you stay down?”

“Theoretically, you could never come back.” I replied. “But thanks to VR addiction, you are limited to four hours a day now.”

“VR Addiction?”

“There were reruns of an old television show named *Star Trek: The Next Generation* when I was a kid,” I replied. “They had an episode entitled ‘Hollow Pursuits’. In that show they had what were called holodecks; places where you could create every possible world and adventure. One character in that episode didn’t make friends easily so he spent too much time in them, even creating programs where he could interact with the crew of his own ship. He made changes in their personalities to match what he could successfully deal with. Not all of them nice.” I stepped off the elevator, walked far enough to clear the door.

“Now look at VR. You think you’re ugly? Too short? Overweight? No problem! You create an avatar that makes you look better, maybe perfect. Do you know how many out there use old movie stars like Salma Hayek, Thandi Newton, or Rita Coleman from today? Do you know how many *Marilyn Monroe* avatars there are? I don’t and I have been in this division off and on for fifteen years of my 30.”

“So they make themselves look better. How does that cause VR Addiction?”

“Because as the system was set up until 2025, you could go in and never come back. There was a rather nasty case in Denver back in ‘23 where they didn’t

find the body for a week after death. It was before the automatic monitoring systems were invented. The man was a diabetic and spent his time in VR pigging out on all of the foods he couldn't eat. When he went into coma, the system merely logged him as being asleep, and put his avatar in bed. That's why they designed the auto monitor system, which will bring you out if you become unconscious with no REM state, because the VR works as a dream inducer, not a sleep inducer." I grinned. "You ain't dreaming, you're sleeping, and you get logged off."

We walked into the cafeteria and I got just some coffee. "That's lunch?" She motioned toward her tray. She had picked meatloaf, mashed potatoes and gravy, peas and carrots.

I looked at her trim figure. "Damn, woman, where do you put it?"

She started to answer, but my phone beeped. I pulled it out. "I'll have to wait on the answer. Donneker just sent me a text," I paused, reading it. "Interesting."

"Why?" Jessica tried to look, but I moved it.

"I've been pulled off teaching. They've got a new case. VR murders."

"Wait, they've had first person shooters since before VR! How could anyone get killed?"

"That's the question." I picked up the coffee, switching it to a to-go cup, and walked out. This sounded interesting.

The only clue

Evan Donneker, the recently appointed head of BAU Section 5, nodded to me when I came in. He was an older agent, working on the last of his thirty years before retiring like I was. We had never liked each other, and I expected to retire before that changed. “Special Agent Reese.” He took a tablet, sliding it across the desk. “Check this out.”

I picked it up. “A Secret Service Agent committed suicide?”

“Yes. John Logan, graduate of the Naval Academy, three years as a SEAL, three years on the Presidential Security Detail. He ate his sidearm last week.” They had put Donneker here for a reason; he was about as subtle as a heart attack.

I checked the file. Logan started having memory problems two months earlier. He was found by his wife two weeks earlier in a VR session for over eight hours; but the system claimed he had made all of the alterations himself. He was judged a VR Addict, and locked out of the VR Net permanently. Since any addictive behavior is not allowed within the Presidential Security Detail, he was removed and reassigned to Identity Theft. He tried seventeen times to go back online, but a lock out can only be removed after a consultation with a psychologist.

Then, last week, he went home while his wife was out, tried three more times, and killed himself.

“I know any death of a Fed has to be investigated by the Agency. But why did this get kicked to us?” I asked, sliding it back.

He looked at me. “Did you read his suicide note?”