

About Face.

a short story by

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Tellan had an uneasy feeling. It had been with him all day, as though something significant were about to happen. His job at the mine was not exactly thrilling, so in a way he was looking forward to something significant happening. The Telathite mine was the biggest employer around collos, and most of the younger men worked there. It wasn't a mine like the ones they had in the old days, where guys went underground with picks and shovels, no, this was a high tek mine.

Telathite was a dangerous ore and couldn't be handled by humans. Huge boring machines had been invented to mine it. These machines were so huge, they had to be assembled underground and could never be brought back to the surface. Once contaminated with Telathite that was it, there was no way to clean the stuff off. If a human became contaminated, he had two choices: stay underground for the rest of his life, or be incinerated. Some choice! As far as anyone could remember, it had never happened, but that didn't remove the fear the miners had of it happening to them.

Tellan had often thought about which decision he might make, but had never come to a conclusion. "Better to be dead quick than slowly rot away from Telathite sickness," he told himself, but it was hardly a decision.

The main control room was situated on the surface. Tellan worked here driving one of the huge machines. It was all done by remote over a radio link. Special scanners in the nose of the machines could sniff out the Telathite a hundred yards away and plot it on Tellan's screen. He could then guide the machine to it. In truth, the machines could guide themselves, but a serious accident fifty years earlier where two machines had gone for the same deposit had put an end to their autonomy.

Over the years, the ground beneath Collos had become honeycombed with tunnels. Talk was that one day the whole place would disappear beneath the surface, something else that didn't bear thinking about.

"Hi Tellan, anything happening?" Tellan turned to see Shuna coming through the control room door. She was a really good looking blonde which was unusual these days, as the Gene had been contaminated and bred out of the race. Somehow, Shuna had found one, and here she was blonde and beautiful. "Hi Shuna, nothing to report. Haven't had a plot at all today. I guess the Telathite is running out." "Don't say that Tellan, if it goes, so do we." She was right, any town that couldn't meet it's quota was liquidated, such was the need for Telathite. The crazy thing was, nobody knew what they used it for, it was all top secret. All they knew was that it was mined and shipped out straight away. Some had speculated that it was for weapons of some kind, but no one really knew.

The war had been going on for centuries. A warlike race from the planet Crill had

attacked Earth for no reason, and of course, Earth had replied with H bombs. The Crillans hadn't expected that Earth had such weapons and it knocked the stuff out of them, but once started they couldn't stop, so the war had dragged on these three hundred years. No one in living memory had seen a Crillan, after the first bloody nose they kept away and sent automated ships to attack. So it had been all this time. They attack, we attack. No one ever won, they just lost ships.

"Fancy some lunch?" Shuna asked. It was near the end of Tellan's shift so he agreed. Tellan parked the machine ready for the next guy and left walking behind Shuna. She looked just as good from the back in his eyes, but he was biased. The usual whistles and stares accompanied them as they walked to the eating tables set out for workers just above the mine. The sky was its usual deep purple, and the sun shone through the clouds casting dark blue shadows on the grass.

They sat at a table and opened their lunch boxes. All was quiet and rather pleasant. Talk was of their future engagement and how they were going to tell their respective parents. Some thirty minutes later there was a low rumbling sound. They felt it before they heard it, but it was there. It grew louder and stronger until the table began to shake. The lunch boxes began to vibrate across the table top, and would have dropped off the edge but for Tellan's intervention. "What is it?" Shuna asked, getting a little panicky. "I don't know," Tellan answered looking at the mine. "An earthquake?" "No," he answered, "we haven't had one of those for over a hundred years." He looked up. Something had caught his eye. "Look!" He shouted, pointing skywards. She followed his finger and there it was. A huge ship was breaking the clouds... A Crillan ship.

Tellan grabbed her arm and started to run away from the mine. There was a ravine cut in the hillside just beyond the perimeter fence. They made it just in time. A huge object left the Crillan ship and drifted slowly down. It hit the control room and exploded. The flash was brilliant white and Tellan knew it was a Magnesium bomb, it would burn its way through the surface and destroy the mine below. He also knew that it wouldn't stop there. This stuff would burn its way through the Earth's mantle to the core. "Come on Shu' we need to be away from here." She didn't argue and they set off running through the ravine.

They couldn't see it, but as they ran, the mine collapsed taking the whole of Collos with it. Nothing was left except a huge moon like crater. They also didn't see the small ship leave the mother ship to come after them. It caught up with them in a few seconds. They stopped running when the light surrounded them. The whine hurt their ears, and then they were inside the small ship. Humans hadn't invented teleporting yet, but obviously, the Crillans had. Shuna clung to Tellan for all she was worth, she was shaking quite violently now with fear. A noise came from behind them and Tellan spun round to see a Crillan standing quite close by. Shuna turned much slower, dreading what she might see.

The two of them stood open mouthed. The Crillan looked just like Shuna, even down to the blonde hair. "Sorry about that." The Crillan said, "But they've been using that stuff to poison our atmosphere, we had to put a stop to it." Tellan was spell bound. Two Shunas. He thought one was amazing, but two... Shuna was less dumb struck. "What's

going on here?" She asked. The Crillan smiled and said, "come on, I'll show you." She led them both to the flight deck of the ship. There, sitting in the pilot's seat was a young man. He stood up and turned to face them. It was Tellan... Well, another Tellan. "W... What's going on?" The first Tellan asked. "We came to rescue you," the second one answered. "You were captured a long time ago and we've been sent to rescue you." "But why do we look the same?" "All part of the plan, you were cloned from us and sent to spy on them." "Spy on who?" "Why, the Crillans of course." "Crillans! But you are the Crillans..." "No, we're humans... They were the Crillans."