

The Bigger Bang Theory is about that one very special type of bang that keeps moving humanity forward. This book is a journey of past, present, and future throughout space and time, from Ancient Rome to a Robotic future and everything in-between!

**The Bigger Bang Theory:
AKA Happy Time - The Struggle of the Ages**

By T.J. Sapp

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The Struggle of the Ages

THE
BIGGER BANG
THEORY

T.J. SAPP

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AKA The Struggle of the Ages

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Sex - Why We Do It

Adults all know what sex is and why we do it. Birds do it, bees do it, humans since the dawn of time have done it. Is it only about reproduction? But then, why is it pleasurable? Or is that only to encourage reproduction?

Humans have basically been the same anatomically for about 100,000 years—so what is safe to say is that if we enjoy it now, then so did our cave-dwelling ancestors and everyone else since, experts say.

"Just as our bodies tell us what we might like to eat, or when we should go to sleep, they lay down for us our pattern of lust," says University of Toronto psychologist Edward Shorter. "Sex has always offered pleasure."

Even for Darwin, the father of evolution, sex was confusing. He wrote in 1862: "We do not even in the least know the final cause of sexuality; why new beings should be produced by the union of the two sexual elements. The whole subject is as yet hidden in darkness."

But the bigger question is why? And why not just for humans, but for animals, fish, insects, and all sorts of life...but not all? We do have theories where sex began and why.

The Origins of Boning - Seaweed and Bony-Fish

The origins of sex go back 1.2 billion years to rocks in Arctic Canada that were deposited in marine tidal environments called *Bangiomorpha pubescens* the oldest multicellular organism that sexually reproduced, *B. pubescens* was not a fish, or even an animal.

It was a form of red algae or seaweed. It was *seaweed* that first had sex.

While the origins of sex can be traced back more than a billion years, sex as we know it can be traced back at least as far as a primitive fish!

Sexual reproduction goes back at least as far as a primitive fish called *Microbrachius dicki*. The fossil evidence for this was found in 385-million-year-old rocks in Scotland.

"*Microbrachius*" means "little arms", but it was only recently that scientists realized what these little arms were for. There are small suckers on the arms, and careful analysis of the fossils showed that the female fish's versions had little plates that locked the male versions into place, not unlike Velcro: the arms were involved in sexual reproduction.

These momentous fish have their own tale which you can read if you skip to the next chapter, or for a bit more of the science of reproduction, read on!

Before Sex - Asexual Reproduction aka Cloning!

Before sex evolved all reproduction was done asexually, which basically means by cell division – an organism literally splits in half to form two. It is a simple copy-and-divide mechanism, and it is something that all bacteria, most plants and even some animals do at least some of the time. The mechanism of asexual reproduction is much more efficient and less messy than sexual reproduction. An asexual species does not have to waste time and energy searching for and impressing a partner, they just grow and divide in two. Contrast that with the troublesome, and sometimes dangerous, process of attracting a mate for sexual reproduction. And then there are the other obvious costs of sex. Joining together chunks of two separate genomes requires a different kind of process – an egg must be

fertilized. It also means each parent only passes half of its genes to the offspring. Asexual parents, in contrast, produce offspring that are basically carbon copies of themselves, which sounds like a better approach for a world in which we are told that our genes selfishly want to guarantee their survival.

I mean, asexual reproduction sounds a great deal like cloning, so the idea of copying yourself forever and indefinitely, certainly sounds like an interesting combination between interesting and scary, doesn't it?

And with no time wasted on barhopping, swiping right/left or solo pleasuring, an asexual species doesn't have to waste time and energy searching for and impressing a partner!

But hold on a minute, there must be good reasons, or advantages for sex over a quick copy-paste, right?

The Advantages of Sexual Reproduction

Many species are totally preoccupied by sex and will go to great lengths to gain a mate. The male bowerbird builds elaborate nests to impress females; the female glow-worm's tail burns bright to lure the male; even the perfume produced by a flower is simply a clever trick to attract insects that will pick up pollen and then make a beeline to neighboring plants, fertilizing them in the process.

Even with all this mesmerizing diversity, all sexually reproducing organisms follow the same basic route to make new offspring – two members of the same species combine their DNA to produce a new genome. If it would seem like asexual production is so much simpler and easier, there must be advantages to sexual reproduction, right?

In 1886, German evolutionary biologist August Weismann proposed one such advantage. He said that sexual reproduction reshuffles genes to create "individual differences" upon which

natural selection acts. Basically, sex is an opportunity for two organisms in the same species to pool their resources.

Some of their offspring will carry a beneficial mix of good genes from both parents, meaning they will respond better to environmental stresses that would leave asexual species in grave danger. In fact, sex may even speed up the pace of evolution – an obvious advantage if the environmental conditions are changing rapidly too. So sexual reproduction is an evolutionary "learning" process – an organism "learns" new information, especially in a changing environment, and the organism passes those lessons on (in its DNA) to the next generation to help them survive.

Sex allows this to happen more efficiently, offering an easier way for species to "remember" useful information – it is coded in their genes. This is because the process involves choosing a sexual partner that has, itself, reached sexual maturity by making good choices. Sex means choosing a good partner and therefore choosing a better future for your offspring.

So Why Do We Need Males?

This element of choice helps explain another puzzle: why do we need males? If only half of your offspring – daughters – will actually produce offspring, why did evolution bother with sons? Why not have all offspring be capable of producing young?

Darwin's solution to the male mystery was to suggest that natural selection was not the only evolutionary pressure at work in sex. There was something else going on too – something Darwin called sexual selection. This is basically a preference by one sex for certain characteristics in individuals of the other sex.

A study published in 2015 found that it is vital for males to compete for reproduction and females to choose between those competing males. Sexual selection through the existence of two sexes

maintains population health and protection against extinction.

It helps maintain positive genetic variation in a population. When out-competing rivals and attracting partners in the struggle to reproduce, an individual has to be good at most things, so sexual selection provides an important and effective filter to maintain and improve population genetic health.

In a nutshell - Sex means choosing a good partner and therefore choosing a better future for your offspring - it means bettering ourselves.

Sex Myths & Reality of the Modern Age

As we enter the modern age, sex remains in many ways just as mysterious to us as for those thousands of years ago. There are many, many, many books and websites filled with questions and (supposed) answers, but here is just a small sampling below:

1. Is the 7-Year-Itch Real?

Is the 7-year itch real? And where does the phrase come from exactly? The phrase was used in the title of the play *The Seven Year Itch* by George Axelrod, and gained popularity following the 1955 film adaptation starring Marilyn Monroe and Tom Ewell. In his 1913 novel *The Eighth Year*, Philip Gibbs attributes the concept to the British judge Sir Francis Jeune. So basically, its origins are more arbitrary than scientific.

But the key question is: Are relationships really more likely to get in trouble around the 7-year point and/or is one or both partners more likely to stray?

Well, according to *Psychology Today*⁶, the answer is yes, and no! After the *honeymoon phase* of most relationships, and often marriage, reality can come crashing down as things like babies and chores, and financial worries can make a relationship lose most of its fun of the early days. And at that point, at least for some, it can be a time to look for a way out.

⁶ Didonato, T. (2020, February 15). *Is the 7-Year itch a myth or reality?*
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/meet-catch-and-keep/202002/is-the-7-year-itch-myth-or-reality>

While not all couples move through their first few years in the same way (Lavner & Bradbury, 2010), most experience at least some declines in satisfaction as their relationship continues.

If declines in satisfaction reach a height at approximately seven years, maybe that would explain the common phrase, seven-year itch.

However, according to research, it seems the real peak is closer to 4 years. Divorce rates have historically peaked at around four years (Fisher, 1989). Biological anthropologist Helen Fisher argues that this four-year peak makes sense from an evolutionary perspective.

In the course of human evolution, women who changed partners after four years together (enough time to co-parent through the early hard years of having a couple of kids) may have had an adaptive advantage. By engaging in "serial pair-bonding," they could vary the genetic make-up of their offspring. The timing of today's peaks in divorce rates may reflect the ingrained drive towards variation.

More recent research (Kulu, 2014) suggests that divorce rates rise after marriage and then peak at about five years. Rates of divorce then steadily decline as years together increase. This rising-falling pattern is reminiscent of the seven-year-itch argument but occurs slightly earlier (a five-year itch?) than the phrase suggests.

The Answer - *TRUE*

But should be renamed 'The 4 Year Itch'

2. Do Women or Men Get Bored of Sex in Long-term-Relationships?

You would expect to get bored sexually in long-term relationships. But a surprising amount of data suggests just the opposite!

Women, more than men, tend to feel stultified by long-term exclusivity—despite having been taught that they were designed for it.⁷

“Moving In with Your Boyfriend Can Kill Your Sex Drive” was how Newsweek distilled a 2017 study of more than 11,500 British adults aged 16 to 74. It found that for “women only, lack of interest in sex was higher among those in a relationship of over one year in duration,” and that “women living with a partner were more likely to lack interest in sex than those in other relationship categories.”

A 2012 study of 170 men and women aged 18 to 25 who were in relationships of up to nine years similarly found that women’s sexual desire, but not men’s, “was significantly and negatively predicted by relationship duration after controlling for age, relationship satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction.” Two oft-cited German longitudinal studies, published in 2002 and 2006, show female desire dropping dramatically over 90 months, while men’s holds relatively steady. (Tellingly, women who didn’t live with their partners were spared this amusement-park-ride-like drop—perhaps because they were making an end run around overfamiliarity.) And a Finnish seven-year study of more than 2,100 women, published in 2016, revealed that women’s sexual desire varied depending on relationship status: Those in the same relationship over the study period reported

⁷ Martin, W. (2019, February 14). *The bored sex*. The Atlantic. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/02/women-get-bored-sex-long-term-relationships/582736/>

less desire, arousal, and satisfaction. Annika Gunst, one of the study's co-authors, told me that she and her colleagues initially suspected this might be related to having kids. But when the researchers controlled for that variable, it turned out to have no impact.

The Answer - TRUE

But the reasons are unexpected. It looks like women are more likely to lose sexual satisfaction than men as opposed to getting bored or wanting it less!

3. Is Virginity More Valued in Women than Men?

*In October of 2012 two virgins came to a virginity auction. A man named Alex Stepanov, and a girl named Catarina Migliorini. The man's virginity was sold for US\$ 3,000. The girl's virginity fetched \$780,000 —260 times the selling price of the man's.*⁸

If there was one thing upsetting about a good virginity auction, it was being an underpaid male. While all the girls fetched the attention and the high prices, the male virginity auctions were the forgotten event.⁹

The Answer - TRUE

A woman's virginity was literally purchased for far, far more than a man's.

⁸ *Why are male Virgins worth less than female ones? - Living news, Firstpost.* (2020, February 25). Firstpost. <https://www.firstpost.com/living/why-are-male-virgins-worth-less-than-female-ones-526664.html>

⁹ Stetz, M. (2009, February 4). *High-stakes virginity auction is perplexing.* San Diego Union-Tribune. <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/sdut-1m4stetz23396-high-stakes-virginity-auction-perple-2009feb04-story.html>

4. Does Size Really Matter?

If you're reading this, you're probably thinking one thing, the thing all men seemingly worry about. But if men often worry about their penis size, the closest female equivalent would be breast size. Do either really matter to the other sex?

As for women and their breasts? It seems the correlation is rather similar. Again, a lot of the issues come with women and their own body image. However, one key finding from a host of studies of female breast size is that men predominantly prefer medium size, not large. This bears directly on the widespread demand for cosmetic breast augmentation. The major motivation seems to be a woman's own perception of her body image rather than male preferences.

Various attempts have been made to link male preferences for female breast size to fertility indicators with some evolutionary function. But such preferences are too inconsistent across cultures to permit clear recognition of an evolutionary basis. Moreover, multiple complicating factors, such as BMI, breast firmness and shape, features of the nipple and surrounding areola, and men's marital status preclude any simple explanation.

The Answer - TRUE

Medium is ok, even small, but bigger isn't better! Both women and men focus on their body image is the real moral of this story!

5. Do Women Like Facials?

It's one of the dominant images in porn, the facial, or the woman taking semen in her mouth. Sexy? Maybe, but for who.

The data here is quite interesting. In research on ejaculation preferences, there are pretty major differences between the genders.

Men's ejaculation preferences are from Mars and women's are from Venus (not as catchy as the international bestseller but would

make a saucy sequel!). Men were 3.3 times more likely than women to select the woman's face as their preferred place to externally ejaculate (42 percent versus 12.7 percent). One-quarter of men specifically chose the lips, which was four times higher than women, who instead preferred emissions to land below the neckline. The chest was their preferred area (37.1 percent), but that preference wasn't as strong as the male penchant for a facial.

Not shown above are the internal options men and women said they find most appealing. Men were four times more likely to say they most prefer ejaculating inside the woman's mouth (43.9 percent versus 11.9 percent), whereas 38.9 percent of women said in their mouth was their least preferable 38.9 percent of women said in their mouth was their least preferred place, being even less desirable than in the butt after anal sex (37.7 percent).

A few more stats on facials:

- 40 men and women revealed where they most and least like to give or receive ejaculations.
- 64% of men and 42% of women said their preferences have been influenced by porn.
- 4 in 10 have never given or received a facial come shot, while 1 in 4 do it "sometimes or often."
- Men prefer giving facials 3.3 times more than women enjoy receiving them.
- The more people watch porn, the more they choose facials as their favorite finishing style.
- 26% said facial come shots are degrading – feminists were less likely than non-feminists to think so.

The Answer - FALSE

Surprise, surprise, most women find facials degrading. Moral of the story? Guys, it may be appealing, but she's probably not into it!

6. Can You Get Pregnant During Your Period?

It's very uncommon, but it is possible since having your period doesn't predict when you will release an egg which has to be present for sperm to begin the process of conception. Additionally, since sperm can live inside your uterus for up to 5 days, if you release an egg during these 5 days you run the risk of getting pregnant. Due to the unpredictability of your cycle, if you want to avoid pregnancy it's important to use contraception even when you are menstruating.

The Answer - FACT

Maybe unlikely, but very much possible! So be careful...

7. Does a woman's vagina get looser depending on how much sex she's had?

This is one of the famous stereotypes, that a virgin or inexperienced girl is 'tight' while a 'slut' is 'loose'. Certainly, it's easy to imagine the vagina can get wear and tear with time, much like a t-shirt or a pair of shoes. But its roots are likely historically more connected to the value placed on female virginity in many cultures. This "tight vs. loose" idea is fairly common, but it is purely false. The vagina is a muscle that expands and contracts. When a person is aroused, the walls of the vagina soften and lengthen, making insertion easier. If they are nervous, the walls of the vagina will naturally contract, making insertion difficult.

The Answer - *MYTH*

Pure slut shaming!

8. *Is Popping Her Cherry Real?*

This is the age-old belief that a woman's hymen is a good place to look to if you desire to know whether she's still a virgin — or, at least, if she has engaged in vaginal intercourse. But although much significance is attached to the hymen as an alleged marker of virginity in many cultures, the truth is that more often than not, it can't tell us much about a woman's sexual history. The hymen is a membrane that lines the opening of the vagina, and its actual shape and size varies from person to person. Normally, it does not cover the vaginal opening entirely — which makes absolute sense, since otherwise menstrual and other discharge would not be able to leave the vagina.

In fact, some of us are even born without a hymen.

In the rare cases where the hymen does cover the entire vaginal opening — this is a congenital condition called imperforate hymen — surgery is carried out to perforate it and allow vaginal discharge to pass out of the body.

While vaginal intercourse or some more strenuous physical activities could cause minor hymen tearing, many women do not experience any tearing or bleeding during sex, as the hymen can stretch to accommodate the penis.

The Answer - *MYTH*

Not all women bleed after their first intercourse, and not all even have a hymen!

9. Do Straight Women Orgasm More Than Lesbians?

The idea that women orgasm less than men is a no-brainer. Men seemingly have orgasms every time they have sex, while women have them...sometimes? There are books entirely on this subject all by itself. But logically, women with a male partner (penis) are going to orgasm more often, right?

Not so fast!

Recent studies have found that while men have more orgasms, when it comes to women, there are dramatic variations in orgasm rate depending on their sexual orientation.

Researchers from the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction at Indiana University found that people of different genders and sexual orientations experience orgasm during sex with a familiar partner at different frequencies. While there are slight differences in orgasm rate for men across sexual orientation, for women the variation is more significant. Straight women are less likely to reach orgasm than lesbian women, and bisexual women experience orgasm the least frequently of all.

In a survey of 2,850 single men and women, women were found to experience orgasm with a familiar partner at an average rate of 63 percent, while men reached orgasm more than 85 percent of the time.

“Men and women experience different things, and some are very intense, and some are not. Some women claim to encounter different types of orgasms dependent on what is aroused and the type of genital stimulation,” said study co-author Justin Garcia, Ph.D., an assistant professor of gender studies at Indiana University and a researcher at the Kinsey Institute.

The study found that:

- heterosexual men and gay men both experience orgasm about 85 percent of the time.
- Heterosexual women reach orgasm at a rate of almost 62 percent,
- while for lesbian women, orgasm occurs nearly 75 percent of the time.
- Bisexual people reach orgasm at the lowest rate for each gender, at
- 58 percent for bisexual women and about
- 78 percent for bisexual men.

So, in a somewhat depressing development for men, it seems lesbians generally satisfy each other better than those of us in a heterosexual relationship. But if we think deeper, really what that means is that lesbians are communicating with each other better, so maybe hetero men just need to open up!

The Answer - *TRUE*

Yes, women in general orgasm less than men, but sexual orientation makes a surprising difference!

10. Is Everyone Having More Sex than Me?

Everyone seems to think everyone else is having sex, but is it true? Men in the US think women are having a lot more sex, with a lot more people, than they actually are.

Men think women have nearly four times as much sex as they actually do, according to a survey looking at sexual misperceptions in the US and UK. In the survey, researchers asked men and women how often they thought people aged 18 to 29 had had sex within the

last four weeks. Men guessed that women had sex 23 times, but the actual number was an average of 5 to 6 times.

Women were slightly more accurate, guessing that women had sex an average of 12 times a month — but that was still double the reality.

But overall, everyone thinks everyone else is having more sex than they actually are. Those polled thought men had sex 13 to 15 times over the last month, while the actual number was around 4 to 5 times.

The survey was conducted by Ipsos, a research and marketing firm based in Paris. The findings are to be released in a book called *The Perils of Perception* in September.

Men also greatly overestimated how many sexual partners women had had by the time they reached middle age. The researchers polled people in three countries for this one, including the US, the UK, and Australia.

Men guessed that women had slept with 27 people by the time they were aged 45 to 54, but the actual average number is 12. (Women were better at guessing, estimating 13 partners by middle age.)

Both sexes were more accurate with their guesses for men, estimating they'd slept with an average of 20 people by middle age. The actual number is 19.

People in the UK and Australia answered the same questions, but the gender disparity was most pronounced among US respondents.

"It's interesting that this misperception is so profound. It really illustrates the extent to which men really don't understand female sexuality," Chris Jackson, a spokesperson for Ipsos, told BuzzFeed News.

"Men just don't seem to have a good understanding of the reality for women. I guess that's not actually news." *Touché*.

T.J. Sapp

The Answer - MYTH

Everyone is having a lot less sex than you think they are. So calm down!

The Wellness Center

When people are well, productivity and health are increased. Just as we learned the lessons many decades ago of how lowering the hours in a workday to 8 increases productivity, even the corporate greed of today is realizing that well employees produce a better bottom line. Wellness can be encouraged through any variety of means.

Here's one more: According to researchers from the University of Oregon "*having sex before work — either the night before or the morning of — was strongly correlated with being happier and more engaged in the office: Employees reported happiness levels that were about 5% higher each day after they did the deed, to be exact. Post-coital employees also reported being more engaged on the job as well.*"³⁰

#

It had to happen when she was already running late.

She had stopped using the subway recently; it helped to avoid getting picked. Usually she was on time, even though it didn't really matter. Her "important" tasks were so trivial. She could do her typical coffee/tea serving, saying good morning, making copies, and most importantly, smiling and sitting in the background during meetings. She was (un)luckily cursed with being too(!) beautiful; the

³⁰ Dennin, J. (2017, March 9). *Sex makes people better at work, according to science. Mic.* <https://www.mic.com/articles/170691/sex-makes-people-better-at-work-according-to-science>

natural position at all of her previous jobs had been ornamental. She never got the chance to show how much she could contribute, other than the aforementioned nodding and smiling.

Except for today. Today was the first time she was actually being asked for an opinion. An opinion! "Check them out and let us know what you think." It was the first time at work she had her name and "think" used in the same sentence. It was a comparison of brands of lipstick. She had tried all the samples given, the different shades, different tastes, and in her Hermes shoulder bag was her detailed report. She had spent hours on it, meticulously focusing on all the details. The printed report was accompanied by an Excel spreadsheet and her first stab at PowerPoint. She thought they probably didn't expect her to know how to do either. They were going to be blown away. She had been so excited, anxious, nervous, to present her strong, complex, nuanced opinion.

And then she had decided to risk the subway. In her smart power-suit and hosiery. Such clothing was reported to stir up more interest than skimpier or sluttier choices. Something she had heard about "leaving more to the imagination." The same was supposedly true of schoolgirls and nurses' uniforms as well. A voice in the back of her head told her that riding the train in her work clothes was more dangerous than in her yoga pants on the weekend. But she had ignored the little voice, too caught up in the thoughts of impressing her boss and her moronic coworkers. So, when she heard the beep, she laughed. Of course, it had to happen today!

"Excuse me, miss..." he was a middle-aged man, hand on her shoulder. His face looked square, sad, but otherwise normal. His hair was solid grey, but at least he had hair. He was wearing a crisp gray suit with a white shirt and burgundy tie. It could have been his regular work getup, but something told her it was planned. He was

just a bit too tidy, too prepared. Not for her, but for some girl today, and wasn't she the lucky one!

The man's hand was still on her shoulder as she looked down at her recorder. What had to be his number flashed on her screen. A21132. He must be even older than he looks, she thought. She removed his hand from her shoulder and touched the bracelet with her left hand. It buzzed quietly in confirmation.

Inside they stepped into the lobby. As usual it was a small room decorated in the same yellow-and-red mixture of cheerfulness and sleaze. Door to the counseling room to the left, she was well past those days now. She could never imagine this was what everyone thought were the best colors, a daycare/bordello. Supposedly it was based on the two environments men and women both wanted. The smiling suns stood out on the red wallpaper, while the typical Ken and Barbie types dotted the yellow side, looking like advertisements in a 50s diner.

At the front of the room two were already at the counter. The woman was older, looking well past retirement. The young man with her in his smart suit looked the Wall Street type. He was jittering perhaps from nervousness or frustration. It was the rarer thing to see so it made her feel a bit better that she wasn't the only one having important things interrupt her morning.

She would have considered turning him down, such an important day and all, but she had the mistake of being too picky and using up all her passes in the first four months of the year. It was only august now; she would have to get used to the inconvenience for a while. Especially if she kept being stupid enough to use the train.

"Let's go," she said. The man smiled but a look of concern crossed his face.

"Is this a bad day for you?" his concern almost seemed real.

"No more any other" she lied. If you really gave a shit, you might have asked before you picked me. She was already thinking ahead, wondering how much sympathy Mr. Carson would show. It was him who had told her to always avoid the subway, so she guessed the answer to that would be, "Not much".

"I know where to go" he started walking and she begrudgingly followed. Of course, he did. Like all these lonely/horny old men they seemed to have a favorite spot.

Up the stairs there was of course a WELL. The unmistakable red door and white awning, smiling suns on it ever inviting.

He held the door for her. What chivalry. God, she wasn't in the mood for this, but she did her best to remain at least cordial. "A smile always gets you further than a frown," that's what her mom always said.

"I think it's really going to be hot today," the man offered, trying modestly to break the ice.

"That's August for you." She went for a pack of cigarettes in her purse, but as she took them out the man was shaking his head. She sighed and put them back.

#

The two in front went off and they stepped up. The Judge looked at them and smiled. "Getting hot out there yet?"

"That's august for ya." the man responded, stealing her line. The two of them placed their bracelets arms on the scanner, extending their index fingers into the blood tester. She winced at the prick. They waited for a moment until the ID scanners flashed green.

"Have a nice day," the Judge said. "Room 12 on the left"

To the left was a narrow hallway with rooms on both sides; at the end of the hallway they stopped at Room 12, beyond them the room forked. The man held up his hand to the scanner on the door and a

single line changed from red to green. She followed suit and the second line changed, the door clicking open slowly.

They entered and closed the door behind them. The room was no better or worse than most of the places she'd been. She'd been to a Luxury Center once before, but it had been so nice she had tried to block it out, as it would otherwise make the otherwise innocuous rooms of most wellness centers seem too depressing.

Off to the left of the room was a door leading to the toilet and shower. Straight ahead the square room had a single double bed with nightstands on each side. Against the wall there was a cabinet with the minibar as well as a small table and two chairs.

"Do you want a drink?" the man asked. "It's on me."

"Please." She said. "Anything is fine. I'm gonna take a quick jump in the shower."

The man sat on the bed and smiled shyly. He seemed to be drawing strength. "That's fine. Just wanted to let you know I won't be taking one, already took one this morning. Unless you would have a problem giving me full marks..."

"No, that's ok." she went into the small bathroom. Sink, toilet, shower stall, and no tub. She turned it on and jumped in. The water came strong, fast, and hot. That was one of the good things about Wellness Centers. They always had great showers. She thought about her job again. Was it possible she could get fired? Mr. Carson would be pissed if he knew how she got picked, but how could he know? She could tell him it was right outside the office. Lucky for her the Wellness Centers always made their notifications anonymous, which certainly helped in times like this!

She got out and grabbed a yellow towel. She almost found the colored theme cute. She looked in the mirror and studied herself. Dark hair, fair skin. She'd always been that way. When she was younger often confused as Goth. Her fair skin was what set men off

and she still had it. Looking in the mirror, fluffing her hair, trying to look her best, she couldn't help it. There was something to be said for being appreciated. The ugly girls boasted about it, proud of how their homeliness gave them security. And sometimes she did feel jealous, should feel jealous. Especially when wrinkly old businessmen preyed like vultures.

Speaking of, she checked the clock in the restroom. 48 minutes left. She better get it, the last thing she wanted was another bad evaluation.

#

They both lie on the bed. The man was sitting on top of the covers, legs spread, hands behind his head. He seemed at ease. She was curled up in the covers, facing away.

"Does it bother you?" the man said with the minimum of concern.

"I'm just a bit cold." She replied.

"You deserve full marks. That was the best ever. Seriously!"

"Really?" That's what they always said, and then the 1-star review said things like "like a cold undead zombie".

"You take the same train line every day?"

"Why, there's no need to recommend me to your friends!"

The timer was at five minutes. More than enough to get dressed and ready for work.

#

That evening when she got home Nate was watching TV, doing his best to be interested in whatever was on, wondering why Jenny was running late.

Office party? Impromptu celebration? She hadn't texted him. His instinct told him things weren't looking good. If there was one thing Jenny never missed it was a chance to toot her own horn.

He had taken the afternoon off, used a coupon on a blonde at the park. It had been a bit of a waste, she hadn't been anything special, but he was in a funky mood.

#

The sounds of children screaming wafted like noxious fumes from upstairs. Jenny's brother had insisted on being there to congratulate. Along with a lemon cake frosted in pink with "Congrats Jen!" He had brought along his two little monsters. Nate had also received the pleasure of an hour plus lecture on why the two of them should get married. The points were always the same. He was lucky to be with her, biological clock, temporary indemnity from WELL, he didn't have to do anything except pretend to listen and nod.

"5 years isn't time enough?" Rick had said it as if by some mystical circumstances Nate wasn't aware. But Rick didn't have to ask, and Nate didn't have to answer, because the truth was obvious.

"Jealous prick just wants to torpedo my fun!" Nate grumbled to himself as he heard the door, and turning, his beautiful girlfriend, entering slowly, with a listlessness that didn't seem to indicate good news.

Nate stood up and decided to let her speak first.

Jenny pointed, "You got a cake?"

"Your brother is upstairs with the monsters. He insisted on showing up."

On cue, monster boy and monster girl charged into the room going straight for the cake. "Aunt Jenny's here, let's eat the cake!!" they both grabbed a plate.

Rick entered, smiling. "Hey sis! They keep you late? You must be so important!"

"Rick..." Nate intervened, snatching the cutting knife from the grasp of the boy monster and cutting two slices of cake, shouts of "bigger!" as he served each of them huge slices.

"I didn't get it!"

"Why not?" Rick was shaking his head.

Jenny looked at Nate. "Can you guess?"

He was sure he could, the fire in her eyes meant one thing.

Rick sensed what was going on, grabbing his two monsters, as they consumed the remnants of their cake with their fingers.

"Maybe we should..." he didn't even seem to finish the sentence before they had finished, leaving Nate behind to weather the storm.

#

"You got picked *again*?" Nate was almost incredulous. A part of him was also proud. "You must be setting some sort of record!"

"Is that what you think I'm trying to do?" she replied curtly.

"Where did it happen?"

"Near the stop on Salmon and 2nd." off his look "I was running late; I didn't have a choice."

#

Neither of them spoke; Nate cut two slices of cake. He handed one to her and dug in.

"That prick fired me! Is that fair?"

"That's illegal!" escaped mangled through his cake-filled mouth.

"Do you think he gives a shit? I can't believe I didn't slap him, or at least tell him off. After all the shit he put me through." A glimmer of sunshine caught her eye from his laptop's screensaver, sitting on the kitchen table.

"Well, at least I don't have to wear pantyhose anymore!"

Nate swallowed his cake and put a reassuring hand on her shoulder, "It's for the best honey, and you'll find something better."

"I want to get married." She stared him straight in the eyes with her infamous Scorpio intensity. He recoiled from the gaze as he always did.

"Now?" He paused, letting silence fill the time as his thoughts scrambled, searching for the right defense.

"Yes, I can't put up with this crap anymore!"

Her emotions were at a near boiling point, and despite his instinct to use logic, he knew better what he needed to say.

"Do you think that's the best reason for getting married? Don't you think it should be because we love each other? We should wait until the time is right for us.

Jenny laughed dismissively, "You're such a romantic, you asshole."

Nate stuck the rest of the cake into his mouth in an attempt to buy time. Jenny gazed at him again and waited him out.

"Why are you angry at me?" He said innocently.

"All the random women! Aren't I enough? Don't you care that any man out there on the street can take me, any time he wants? Doesn't that bother you at all?"

"Yes," he answered. But it was a worthy tradeoff. He had been thinking about that young singer, Brianna Jennings was her name. Questionable musical talent. 18 as of 2 days ago. Every man with a heartbeat wanted a piece of that. That's what he meant to be savings his tickets for, rather than some one-and-done in the park. Stars had insulation, but Nate had the money and knowledge to circumvent that, and it didn't mean camping out in her driveway.

"Why do things only have to be one way? Is it the only option? Can't you trust that I love you, it's just a physical thing. For example, you love fettuccine alfredo. I know if you could choose only one

food to eat forever you would probably eat that, but would you really WANT to eat it every day?"

"So, what are you saying? You want me to do compensated dating?"

Nate laughed loudly and abruptly. "I wish! I wish you would and that you could enjoy it. I know you can't do it; you can't tell the difference at all between sex and love, and because of that, you think I should suffer. Well that's not fair."

"So, I take that as a challenge? Fine, but don't be upset if you don't like how this turns out!"

"Great! I hope you have a lot of fun!" He was gone, upstairs. Then down, "I'm going to the gym, you might want to do some exercise if you don't want guys noticing your fat ass." And he was out the door.

He didn't come back the rest of the night. As Jenny lay in bed, half-asleep, him slinking into bed, a peck on the cheek "Jenny?" She didn't answer, but instead felt resolve. She was going to prove him wrong. She most definitely was.

#

The next day, Jenny had woken up at 6, a full hour and a half before Nate would be up. That would give her enough time to get ready.

After taking a shower she went wild on the makeup, applying rouge and eyeshadow liberally. Curlers in, her locks came out full of verve and curve. She searched her closet for the most provocative clothing she could find and after briefly considering her school-girl costume from two years ago, she settled on a skimpy black dress she had gotten more than a year ago but had been too afraid to wear.

She had hosiery and a pair of high heels, then accessorized with hoop earrings and a matching silver necklace/bracelet set.

Standing in front of the mirror in the bathroom, she was quite impressed with herself. She looked sexy, without veering off into whorish or too-desperate territory. It was exactly enough to get Nate's attention and force him to take her seriously.

After getting ready, she started getting breakfast ready. Eggs, bacon, Toast, coffee. They were ready the moment Nate came down the stairs, dressed in a white shirt and red tie, clean but still groggy at precisely 744 AM.

"You made breakfast?" He said sleepily as he walked to the table and sat at his place and started digging in.

Casually, Jenny sat down next to him and started eating her own breakfast.

Nate looked up at her and choked on his scrambled eggs. He grabbed for his coffee and frantically washed it down.

"So, you're really serious about this?"

"You don't like it?"

"Jenny." He took a deep gulp of coffee. "I know you didn't do that for me. Did you?" His voice veered from confused to terrified to hopeful in only a few seconds.

Jenny leaned back in her chair and put her arms behind her head. "Well, now that I'm jobless, I thought I'd relax today, you know, maybe do a bit of CD, I really enjoyed yesterday actually and maybe if I make the same train-."

"Are you sure about that?"

"So, you can go out and have fun, but I can't? Didn't you dare me to do this?"

"You think acting like this is going to make me want to marry you?"

He stood up and left the unfinished half of his breakfast.

"You do what you want." He said as he left.

Jenny sat in silence, thinking. Her bluff had been called.

Or had it?

#

So, there she was, the same place, same time as yesterday. Waiting to get on the train near 2nd St.

Except this time she wasn't dressed for the office, but instead in a way that asked for attention, that clearly advertised that she was scouting.

"What the hell am I doing?" An elderly lady next to her gave a sign of the cross "Going to hell that's where you're going."

She smiled at the lady. "I appreciate your opinion, and I hope you're wrong." The old woman sneered at her and walked away down the platform, away from her.

The dinging sound of the approaching train. Jenny bit her lip and thought of turning right around and walking home. Just what is it that I'm doing? How does this prove anything? The only loser will be me. She spun around and was face-to-face with a young short-haired kid grinning at her with a creepy expression.

Her bracelet started blinking.

#

An hour later she and Travis had parted ways, he allegedly went to an economics class at his University. Although a bit of a creep, he could have been worse, she decided. He hadn't talked much but she had correctly been able to guess he was a virgin outside of the program. He had been shy and nervous, which had done a lot to motivate her. He had trembled the entire time from their walk to the nearest Wellness Center until when they were inside, at the ready.

"You don't have to, if you don't want to..." He had trailed off, standing there in the corner of the room, sink on, washing his hands for the third time.

“Then why didn’t you say anything earlier?” She said crossly. He spun around with fright.

“I’m, I’m sorry!”

She smiled. “It’s ok kid, I was just kidding you. There’s nothing to worry about, let’s just get this over with.”

He looked down again, nodding, moping.

She walked over to him and picked his chin off the ground. “Don’t take so hard, kid. What’s your name, by the way?”

“Trevor.” He answered. “I know I’m not good looking. Or cool. I bet you have a really cool boyfriend. It must be pretty lame for you to be with someone like me.”

Jenny shook her head. “My boyfriend is a jerk. We’d be married already if he had any respect for me, but he doesn’t. I’m not enough for him.”

Trevor opened his mouth with shock. “Really? You’d be enough for me!”

She laughed, the honesty of his words moving her. “That’s really sweet of you to say, Trevor. But you just don’t know any better yet.” At that moment she decided to give this shy, sad little kid something to remember.

On the walk home she noticed she was getting dangerous looks and ducked into a department store and bought the most unflattering pajamas she could find.

Back on the street, make-up washed off, looking dressed-down enough to avoid attention, her thoughts went back to that afternoon’s event. Part of her thought she should feel horrible. She had gone out scouting and actually been picked up, like some kind of OP, the type of girls who welcomed it. While she knew she should feel embarrassed and ashamed, when she thought of how sad and miserable poor Trevor had seemed meeting her, and then his happy, radiant smile afterward, she felt a strange sense of pride. It had been

so long since she had felt like she had made someone feel like that. Nate, had he ever looked at her that way? The older ones who had picked her always had that obnoxious sort-of obliviousness, as if they just didn't give a shit. But Trevor had been so worried, so nervous, and so cute in his innocence.

So, what was she going to tell Nate?

Dinner was ready when Nate walked through the door, his wife dressed demurely in a pair of downright ugly white-and-green-striped pajamas.

"I don't remember seeing those before," he said with mildly disguised revulsion. She stood at the stove, stirring a pot of beef stew.

"That's because I bought them today."

He walked up behind her, giving her a soft but somehow empty hug. "I bet you had a great time with a fat, old guy."

"No, actually he was a University student. A physics major."

Nate laughed. "Yeah, right."

She turned around and stared at him deadily. There was no question with that look in her eyes. Nate looked at her a moment then slammed his fist on the counter.

"Jesus, Jenny. What the hell were you thinking!"

She smiled. "Not so funny now, is it? He was a really nice kid. Smart, sweet, it was his first time. He was no nervous before, but after I think he- "

"That's enough!" Nate yelled.

Jenny glared at him, but coward that he was, he was only staring at his food. Though he didn't say anything, she could feel the fuming, the waves of rage behind her.

#

It wasn't until they were half-finished with dinner that he finally spoke.

"You know what? This still doesn't change anything."

"I might go visit his University tomorrow."

"Do it. I'm not giving up yet."

The next day she found herself planted on a bench, waiting for him. Questioning herself, but not ready to give up. And when she saw him, that shyness, that sweetness, it made everything somehow easier again. Soon enough they were back at a WELL again and this time she was impressed with the progress he was making. A man was blossoming before her eyes and it gave her an odd feeling of pride. Nate wasn't even around that evening when she got back.

She exchanged emails with Trevor, and they began writing to each other daily. "I miss you." Trevor wrote. And so, she asked him if she could come visit him again at school.

But that next time, it wasn't just Trevor who was waiting for her.

"I want you to meet my friends." There were 3 of them: a tall one with glasses, an Asian kid with a wide grin, and the outlier, with jet-black hair slicked back and a black leather jacket with ripped jeans.

She shook hands and had met with them all privately soon after that.

Jenny began hanging out daily near the University Physics Building, where Trevor, his friends, and most of the other like-minded nerds spent most of their time. She would sit on a bench, dressed provocatively, reading a book. Trevor had the details, so it was easy as a boy walking up and saying "Jenny?"

She would smile, he would nervously press his bracelet, and then the two would go off.

#

She always wanted to know about their backgrounds. Where they had grown up, if they'd ever even kissed a girl, what they hoped to do in the future. They were always so fragile, so shy, so sweet.

The first two days, it had only been Trevor who had visited her once, he told her he'd blogged the info, but it wasn't easy for them.

"How did you do it then?" She asked coquettishly, as they lay in bed after their second time.

"I really don't know." He responded. "I didn't plan it or anything. I just saw you and... reacted, I guess. I didn't know what I was doing."

#

The first new boy that approached her made Trevor look like a playboy by comparison. His name was Lewis, and he wore thick dark glasses with a white dress shirt tucked in and khakis. He was paler than snow when she first saw him, though she wasn't sure if part of that could be because he was so nervous.

"J-J-Jenny?" He stammered, the words barely escaping his lips as he stood next to her, staring at the biology textbook in his hand.

"It's ok honey." She smiled at him warmly, but he kept staring at his book.

"If you want to, you know what to do." She said.

He stood there for five minutes, fretting, looking around. When all around them was still and his courage momentarily gathered, he pointed at her and held down his bracelet.

Unlike Trevor, she had a hard time getting much out of Lewis, other than his name. And because he seemed so stiff, it was a little bit more difficult for her to muster the same sympathy that she had felt for Trevor.

Which only got worse when they finally got to her room, and she realized just what she had gotten herself into. For being such a nerd, Trevor had been reasonably easy to warm-up to.

Until she saw the tattoo.

On his right shoulder there was some kind of small monster, armored, holding a long blade. Lewis had tried to cover it with his hand, but Jenny insisted.

“Is that real?”

He nodded.

“Is that a monster?”

“It’s an Orc.” He answered. “It’s my character from WOF.”

She stared at him. “It’s an MMORPG.” She continued staring. “It’s a genre of computer game.”

Etched in small type below was the word “Blizzard.”

“That’s my name. My character, I was really into StarCraft back in the day...”

He continued; his tongue finally loosened going into great detail. He talked and talked about questing, the hours he spent training, annoyances with NPCs, a potential romance with an elven character that turned out to be a man, and how he had once played for 85 hours straight without stopping, longer than some guy in South Korea who had died doing the same.

As he talked, his voice gained authority and confidence, and his trembling stopped. So preoccupied was Lewis in telling her about his game that he barely noticed him rubbing his shoulders, kissing him on the back, still responded with interest with the occasional “Really?” or “that’s interesting.” By the time she finally planted one on his lips he had stopped shaking entirely and, to her surprise, Lewis proved to be even more adept at the dirty business than Trevor.

#

And so the pattern continued. Trevor and Lewis used all the tickets they could on her, growing and blossoming with the time they spent together. And, thanks to Travis and Lewis's blog, among others, Jenny started getting more attention than she could handle sitting on that bench. So much that she hadn't gotten past page 10 in her book.

Her only requirement, which Lewis had posted on his blog, was the young men had to be virgins on their first meeting. She saw what she was doing as nurturing, helpful, a type of community service. Most importantly, it was beautiful to see these young men with so little confidence, with stammers, and hunches, bad skin, fantasy/anime/video game character t-shirts, but underneath their facades were passions just like anyone else. And every time she saw one of these young men again, they walked just a little more upright, looked at her with more authority, and let the energy and passion that she had only seen beyond closed doors radiate and shine brighter and brighter.

#

In order to explain to Nate, she said she had gotten an administrative job at the University. Since she usually was in charge of the finances, he never bothered to check any information or paychecks. But the paychecks did come, courtesy of the Government. They started at \$200 but grew to \$300 once she had exceeded the yearly limit. She had heard the stories of women who made their living like this, but with such a lifestyle came risks, as well as the title of OP.

While Jenny was technically an OP now, making a quite reasonable living off her proceeds, she had found a niche that she felt put her outside of such conventional titles.

And the money she made was more than she'd ever had before, too much to spend on herself, so she started buying the boys little gifts as well. Sometimes it was little things like some candy, other times nicer things like a nice shirt or belt. And then there were the occasional necessities, such as cologne or deodorant. She realized hygiene was the one most-challenged area for many of her new friends, and she did as much as possible to preach to them that meeting a nice girl would require more effort in this area.

One day a balding man with glasses sat down next to her. He introduced himself as one of the Professors of the University.

"I've seen you here before, it really brightens my day." He said.

She knew where this was going.

"I'm sorry but I prefer to only be with virgins. I hope you understand."

Her beeping bracelet told her that he didn't.

Compared with the students, being with the teacher brought back tired memories of before. After their time was up and the Professor told her that he was eagerly anticipating meeting again, she resolved to move somewhere else to keep that from happening.

She told Trevor about the situation and he agreed. They needed to find somewhere where she could wait without calling too much attention. It had already been decided by now for her to tone down her appearance, although she still wanted to look stylish for the boys, the remedy she'd discovered was to either carry additional clothing or accessories with her or use some of the costumes available at the Center's.

Trevor eventually decided to put her in one of the study rooms in the library. This gave her the advantage of privacy, and something of an official position. Through a friend they devised to get her a student ID and a key as a permanent "office" in Study room #7.

Trevor even went to the trouble to hook up a small monitor inside the study room so that she could see who was approaching.

While it was nice to have her own room, it was dark, with only a single thick window above eye-level yielding light. And now Jenny was no longer able to watch the movement of students passing by between classes, where it was always something of a thrill to catch all the looks.

But another big positive was that what she did was no longer nearly as public, and as a result, she started getting many new, especially shy students. Although the times she spent were getting even more rewarding, the trips to and from the Wellness Centers were becoming frequent and time-consuming, and all the more likely to arouse suspicion as she walked in and out of the University, eager-but-nervous young man in tow.

And that's when the biggest shock came. After a long weekend in which she'd taken 4 days off to refresh herself, Trevor was waiting for her outside her office on that Tuesday morning.

"I have a surprise for you." He was rubbing his palms together excitedly. "You won't believe the support you've got!"

She entered her room and was shocked to find it completely remodeled. Instead of a single desk, there was now a large, circular bed with a red-velvet bedspread. The entire room was now decorated tastefully, with forest green paintjob and hanging candles. There was also a leather armchair in the corner, as well as a fridge, sink, and small cubicle shower.

"Is the room bigger?" Was the only thing that Jenny could express in her shock. The small square room was now more rectangular in shape and looked twice as big.

"Yes," Trevor was beaming at her, evidently enjoying her reaction. "The wall to room 8 was knocked down and its door has been sealed up.

“There’s a shower! And a fridge!”

“Luckily, that was easy, it appears the plumbing for the bathroom down the hall ran right below so it was now problem for the plumber.”

“Trevor, how in the world did you do all this?”

“Jenny, this is a thank you from all of us. And you don’t have to worry, this is a legal annex. This room is even being monitored from one of the Center’s nearby, it turns out that one of my friends' parents found out what you were doing and were very impressed. The word got around, and the right people pulled some strings. The only thing I really did was try to make sure you stayed away so it would be a surprise!”

“But Trevor, what if people find out about this?”

Trevor shrugged. “So, what if they do? Annexes like this exist at other places, I am sure there are ones at other Universities too, you hear about it, rumors, sort of like this. But you won’t have to go out as much because of this, so it should actually be easier to keep things quiet.”

Jenny was pacing around the room, touching the freshly painted walls, the soft enormous bed.

“If you don’t like it, we can always think of something else. And you know, I never asked how long you want to keep doing this. I’m sure you’ve made a lot of money already- “

“I don’t care about money!” She interrupted. “You of all people I think understand why I like doing this, like helping you sweet boys. This is the most romantic thing anyone has ever done for me!”

She walked over and kissed him, Trevor helping her break in the bed as her first customer was her very own WELL.”

#

One day Jenny came home to find Nate seated at the kitchen table, staring intensely at a document.

“Hi honey.” She said, as she went to the fridge and got a bottle of vitamin water, in desperate need to replenish fluids.

“Were you working?” Nate asked without turning around.

After guzzling half a bottle of vitamin water, she responded. “I was.” She pointed “what is that you're staring at so seriously.”

“Oh, it's nothing.” He laughed, a thin, hollow laugh. “Just our tax return.”

She froze. Until now she had been careful to intercept, but it seemed she'd finally gotten careless.

She maintained her composure. “Oh.” She said.

“I think there might be some mistake. We got credited for \$17,000. Or, should I say, you did.” He laughed again, the same laugh. “But that's impossible, isn't it?”

“Yeah, that's crazy!”

He turned around. “Jenny, I called the University. There's no record of you working there.”

Jenny took a deep breath and chugged the rest of her Vitamin Water. “I'm not going to play any games Nate. I am working at the University...I have my own WELL set up there. It's safe though, I only meet with science geeks, and all of them have to be virgins.”

Nate looked at her coldly. She cut him off as he started to speak. “Before you get mad, I will promise you I will quit if you stop doing it too.”

As he started to speak, she cut him off again. “Think about it Nate, before you say something stupid. Doesn't this work out for both of us? I am helping these kids, you can continue what you're doing, and we can make a lot of money as a bonus!”

She winced as she prepared for the attack, but Nate only sighed. “You’re right. I was angry Jenny, but I see your point. But does this mean you’re going to be too tired to do it with me?”

#

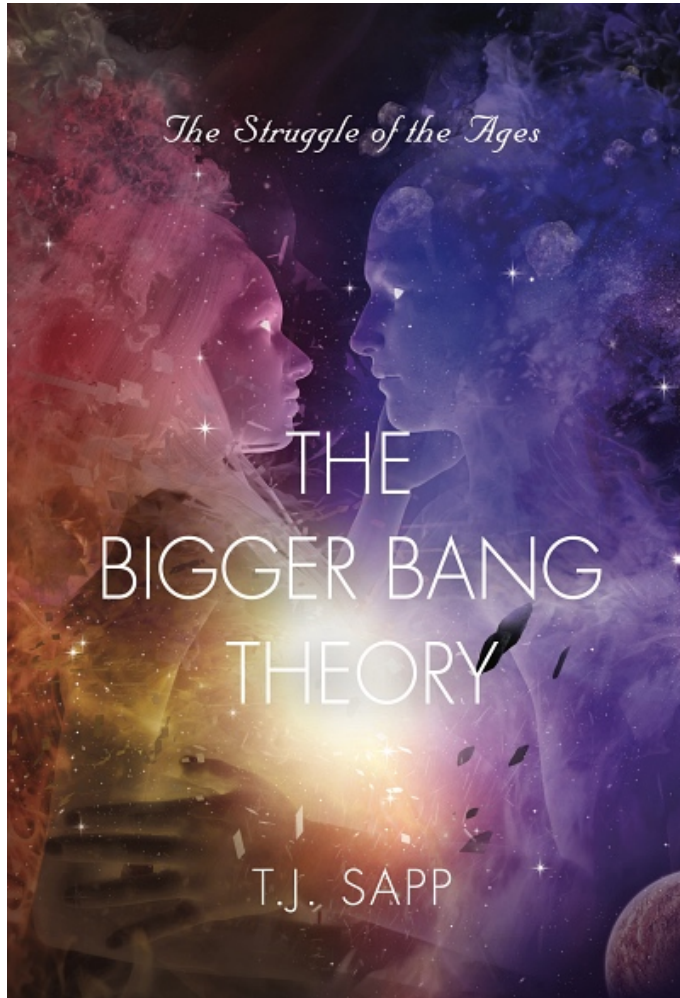
With Nate’s blessing, Jenny no longer had anything to worry about. With the secret out, they now seemed closer together. That night in bed Nate asked for her to tell him about some of the boys. When she told him stories about Trevor, and Lewis, and about a young man named Charlie with Asperger’s who liked counting things, he couldn’t help from laughing.

“Why don’t you tell me some stories about your sluts then?” She said playfully, poking him in the ribs.

He told her about a trash brunette he met outside a convenience store, who turned out to be tattooed and pierced – everywhere.

“I couldn’t decide if it was hot, or gross.”

She laughed. “Gross.”



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