

Avatar B.98

"I know you kids think it's funny for Kim Soo to bring me to school for career day, but I really enjoy my disconnect-time, so I'll tell you about my life as an Avatar, and I hope you'll enjoy my presentation."

I pointed at young Kim Soo, sitting in the back of the room, kind of nervous. "Look at Kim Soo: the LED pattern on his *AvaCap* signals my temporary freedom from command mode." The class all whipped their bodies around as one and stared at Kim's helmet. I knew that he was gloating and feeling that he was a really big man, since he controlled an Avatar, though he was only in the 6th grade. I'm proud of my job. I'm not his pet – I'm a man who chose life "in the link," of my own free will. In fact, some days I chuckle when I think of how much I get paid just to let Kim do whatever he wants to do with my body, within the limits of *The Mandate*, of course.

"My name is Min-jun Deje. I am a Google (India) (beta) Version 0.98 Avatar," I began. The class rotated, as one, and stared at me.

"While my software is technically obsolete, I'll be upgraded to the version 0.99 firmware next week – that firmware is almost in 'ready to release' status, so I'll be a very, very advanced Avatar. Kim and I are controlled by some laws that the U.N. mandated about Avatar research. Let me explain: 20 years ago, lots of people were scared that Avatars would replace humans in the job-market and in the military, so production-grade Avatars are under tight restrictions. I'll be the first 'version 01 (release)' Avatar."

The class was buzzing, trying to figure that one out so I took a break. I decided to give them a little history of the *Avatar Project*.

"Our families brought us to New India after the brief North Korean Atomic War that you know about. As you know, North Korea launched 2 atomic bombs, both of which exploded on the launch pad, but left huge areas of the North Korean peninsula uninhabitable. The 'Insane Leader,' as he is now called, was terminated as a result."

I could tell they were enjoying the story, so I continued. "One of the leading industrialists in South Korea approached one of his University buddies in New India, who agreed to build a working human/machine interface. Their goal was to build Avatars that would do difficult or dangerous work. But that didn't work out 100% because the news media spread a lot of misinformation about the project, implying the creation of a slave race or a robotic army. That forced countries to look at the effects of having this new thing called Avatars. After some laws were passed in several countries, the U.N. got involved, and *The Mandate* was created."

I guess they were bored with that information because one of the girls raised her hand and blurted out "Tell us about you."

"I'm a cyberneticist with a PhD in artificial intelligence. I used an NVIDIA high-performance board with 512 GPU cores and an octa-core CPU. I wrote the firmware for the *AvaCap* interface that Kim is wearing. I developed the algorithms for self-correcting Avatar behavior."

I let them absorb that for a moment and then I continued. "But my real goal is to go on Jupiter Mission One. When my software is validated, I will be the commander of the mission that will study Jupiter from the surface of Callisto, one of the moons of Jupiter. I'll be under control of the India-Korea Space Consortium, who will use me and my team of Avatars to study Jupiter in great detail. You see, even though I'm a very smart person, I can't learn everything. The team of scientists that will control me from Earth need my intelligence, but also need me to have their intelligence, or else they can't learn enough

to make the very expensive trip worthwhile. My team will be suited up in rad-hard gear and sent on a one-way trip – there is no way to return to Earth in one lifetime." I let them ponder that. "I'll be in control of, and inside of a computer-aided science station that will analyze Jupiter. I'll be a mobile Avatar – I won't look like a human at all. My speed and strength will be augmented, and I'll be a sophisticated science lab that will last hundreds of years. Kim will be in charge of communicating with me." The children were all silent, but looking (open-mouthed) at Kim.

"Will Kim go?" asked the little girl, in a shaky voice.

"No, dear, Kim will be here in the IKSC Command Facility in Hyderabad, controlling me, on Callisto. We're almost done with the interface-bonding, and when we are done, I'll be there, and Kim will be here."

The classroom whipped around as one and let out a collective "oohh." Kim sensed their respect and awe.

Then they slowly rotated back towards me. "Yes, children, I'll die on Callisto," I replied to their unasked question. "In the name of science and of my own free will."

Kim and I looked at each other – yes, we had a very special bond, which could not be described in words alone. I got my PhD when I was 16, and Kim was on track to get his PhD in Exo-geology at age 15. Together, we would answer many questions about Jupiter, and about life itself. Kim and I are the new Korea. Kim and I are the new world – how can I explain our 'Korean pride' to anyone?

"So, children, please study hard. I hope you choose being an Avatar as a career. It is rewarding beyond your wildest expectations. *Any questions?*"

A bell rang somewhere. The smell of spicy food wafted through the room. And then I saw Kim tilt his head to the left, and I felt the Avatar software take control.