Futures

Rebody

Fighting fit. **By Eric Fomley**

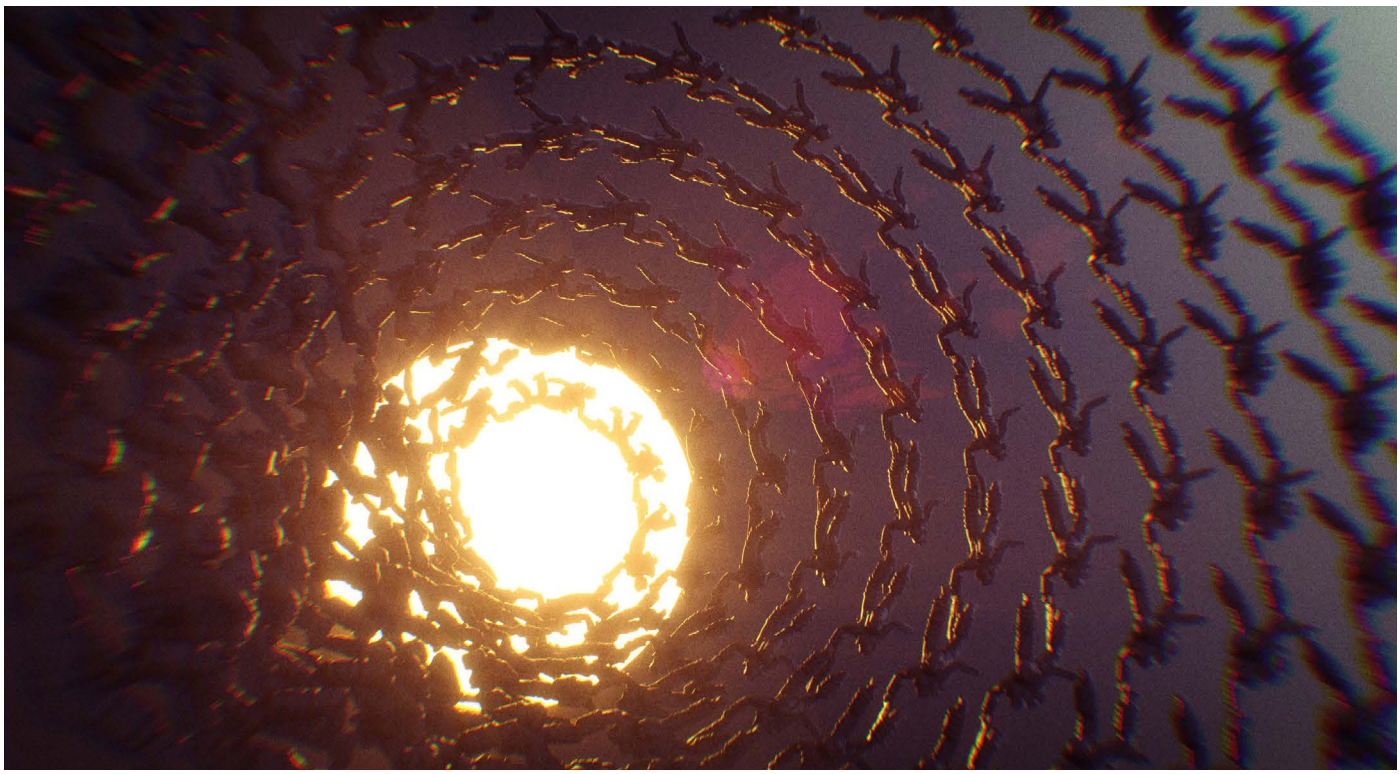


ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY

Day 34

Tell your loved one where you are.
I'm in an Obelisk Corporation jump ship, strapped into a drop pod. The harness is tight across my chest and the metal walls rattle as we skirt across the atmosphere of some planet.

Tell your loved one about the war.
Command wants us to keep these logs. They say it will keep our minds sharp before each drop, and help us remember what we're fighting for. The other soldiers don't think the war will last long. I hope they're right so I can get back home to you.

I'm nervous about the reprinting, though. I don't like the idea of body switching, no matter how much they guarantee the transfers are perfect. But as nervous as facing the NC soldiers makes me, there is some comfort knowing that if I'm killed I'll be reprinted. It takes a lot of the fear out of those pre-battle nerves. It's also nice knowing I'll come home to you in the same condition I left you.

Tell your loved one a favourite memory.
As I'm sitting here waiting for the drop, I keep thinking about our last moments together on the tarmac. The way you smelled when we hugged. The way you kissed me like you didn't want to let go.

Space is a cold place, but today that memory of you makes me warm.

Day 67

Tell your loved one where you are.
I'm in an Obelisk jump ship, strapped into a drop pod. Same type as before. This ship shakes a little more than the last one.

Tell your loved one about the war.
It's gone on longer than anyone here thought it would. Fighting a war across this many planets and moons has dragged it out. What was supposed to be a quick operation has turned into a slugfest.

I've been reprinted a few times now and it isn't as scary as I thought it would be. It's hard to shake the final moments before my 'deaths', though. Those stay with me. I still remember the feeling of the plasma round that got me last time. The heat, the sudden quiet as I slipped into darkness. My last thoughts of you.

It's still traumatic, even when I wake up in the printing bay fresh and uninjured. Sometimes at night I replay those moments in my mind whether I want to or not.

Tell your loved one a favourite memory.
There's a place we used to eat. I forget the name of it now, but that steakhouse in your hometown was always such a nice place to take you. It became ours. I loved those long hours we spent there talking over dinner while the place emptied around us.

Day 103

Tell your loved one where you are.
I'm in the jump ship, strapped into a drop pod. I think it's the same type as before. Hard to tell any more.

Tell your loved one about the war.

I have no idea how many times I've dropped now. This war feels like it will never end and I want to get out of here so bad. I'm tired of the killing. I'm tired of the dying.

Something is wrong with the transfers. I can't quite pin down what it is. Our bodies seem perfect every time, but something is … *off* in the mind. Details that shouldn't be fuzzy are starting to blur. A few of us raised concerns with our CO, but it didn't go anywhere.

Tell your loved one a favourite memory.
I was thinking about our wedding day earlier. I don't know quite how to say this, but I'm having trouble remembering some of the smaller details. The colours we chose. The music the DJ played. I know it was beautiful, I remember that much.

I need to get out of this cycle. For the war to be over. I want to see you. So you can help me fill in some of the gaps I feel.

Day 241

Tell your loved one where you are.
I'm in the jump ship, strapped into a pod.

Tell your loved one about the war.
One of my closest friends reprinted yesterday and he acted like he didn't know me. I told him about the time we got drunk after that drop on Rebulyan II. He just stared at me with empty eyes. Like I was a stranger.

So much of my mind feels like it hasn't transferred. Silly things I should know are slipping away. Words get stuck sometimes. Names, too. We've been asked not to bring it up to our COs anymore. Which tells me they know it's a problem.

I'm scared.

Tell your loved one a favourite memory.
I tried to remember your face today. The way you look at me, your eyes, your hair and the way you smile. I feel you slipping away from me and I don't want to lose you.

I'd rather die.

Day 313

Tell your loved one where you are.
I'm in the ship, strapped into a pod.

Tell your loved one about the war.
This war will never end. We are tools to the army. Disposable. They throw us down to a planet, let us die, print us again and send us back. They don't care that pieces of us stay behind every time. They just want us to keep killing.

Tell your loved one a favourite memory.
I can't remember your name. But I know I love you.

Day 621

Tell your loved one where you are.
I'm on a ship.

Tell your loved one about the war.
I'm not sure.

Tell your loved one a favourite memory.
I don't remember.

Eric Fomley's stories have appeared in *Clarkesworld*, *Flash Fiction Online* and *Daily Science Fiction*.

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

Eric Fomley reveals the inspiration behind *Rebody*.

The dark potential of different futuristic technologies has always been a thread to my short stories. In this case, I was fascinated by the potential science behind the transference of consciousness. No matter how grounded in truth the technology might become, I've always wondered about what 'data' might be lost with each transfer. How many times could someone jump from one body to the next until they're someone else altogether? It's unsettling, to say the least.

