

TERMINAL BLISS

Like most men, Stefan Arnglim had a fantasy of what life with his girlfriend should be like. When reality wasn't enough, he set out to create his dream lover—a computer-age, female Frankenstein.

Alan Rifkin journeys to the heart of one man's singular passion.

When Dawn and I were in bed together, I would watch my hands on her breasts. I'd see exactly what the dexterity and the pliability of her skin was, what kind of pressure caused what indentation, how the shape of her breast changed, what part of her breast, and so on.

Then I had to try to create that. In three dimensions. That was absolutely grueling. Trying to get the other man's hand to fold over her breast, the nipple enclosed between thumb and forefinger, the forefinger enclosing on, as I recall, her left breast, and to very gently apply pressure and to shift the hand in a massaging motion. Laterally. That was a very slow, almost kneading gesture that would've had to have a repeat run in it; I could stretch it for maybe seven to ten seconds without seeing the loop in the action. After that you'd see the loop and it would break continuity; it would break reality. I never ran a ten-second loop.

STEFAN ARNGRIM CAN STRIKE PEOPLE AS dynamic and frail at the same time, his right hand jumping with a cigarette and his words coming very fast, and a rapid morbid laugh that demolishes every sentence as soon as he voices it. He styles himself an ironic vampire—black topcoat, weird poetry, demonic vocals with assorted bands (most recently, the Knights of the Living Dead). He winks about his look: All The Wrong Stuff. In his apartment clouded with incense and cat fur, his running joke is about the impossibility of self-escape. You think *you've* got problems, is the gist of his humor.

He's a gifted talker behind cigarettes, one piece of brilliance pulling up another and keeping him in the air with the gods for the duration of a drag, close to knowing everything before the sun dissolves his wings.

Music and screenwriting are the ground switch to his mania. All his life, art rounded him off. It was his reassuring blueprint, a way to be imperfect while knowing what perfect was. He was flawed, scurrying at his depth beneath his dreams, including the dream he resisted for ages until the spring of '91, when he tried to possess it.

He dreamed of creating a pornographic, three-dimensional, digitized, virtual-reality replica of his girlfriend, Dawn. And for a full year he labored in secret to do so.

It was going to be kinky, exquisite, and interactive. A video scrapbook of Dawn wouldn't do. He meant to give her life. But he meant to define life's limits.

SHE WAS AN UNDERGROUND BEAUTY IN FADED black jeans, as striking as Stefan but more poised. They fell in love in 1988 and rented a guest house behind a Victorian mansion in L.A.'s Echo Park. She had dark eyes to drown in, troubadour eyes, and made no sound when she walked, though she might temperamentally kick a boot across the floor. Her ears were a marvel to him; they were perfect. Pasta shells.

She was both more than his fantasy and less. Less powerful, more unpredictable.

With his invention, in fact, he hoped to program unpredictability, too, and enough mystery to scare him. He was following the outlines of his erotic intuition, trying to capture magic with science—like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, a book Stefan had read when he was twelve.

Stefan's childhood planted seeds for some funniness with reality. He'd been a