

Electric Skin
By Jerico Bleu

Characters

Person 1- An introvert. A planner

Person 2- A skeptic. A resistor

Therapist- A machine. A voice

A therapist office in the distant future. The room resembles a Rubik's cube. A collection of squares of various shades of gray. Clean and clinical. In the center of the room is our therapist. The latest in techonoligal genius. An impressive machine whose purpose is to diagnose and cure through a series of absurd questions. The machine's design can be as lavish or minimal as desired. Must have a center base with a keypad and green button on each side. Enter Patient 1 and Patient 2 from different sides of the stage. An interracial couple looking to "fix" thier relationship. These characters can be of any orientation or gender as long as they are contrasting racially. They have both just given blood samples for the machine. Although this information was clearly labeled in the TherapyNow brochure it has still been a jarring experience. As they converse they both analyze the machine and its complexities

PATIENT 1

Do I look pale?

PATIENT 2

No more than usual

PATIENT 1

I feel a bit faint

PATIENT 2

We can leave if you want.

PATIENT 1

No, I'll be fine. I knew they were gonna take our blood. I just...

PATIENT 2 *Finishing their sentence*

Think this is odd?

PATIENT 1 *Finishing thought*

Don't like needles. Why is this odd?

PATIENT 2

Why can't we just do this over an app or something?

PATIENT 1

We've done that.

PATIENT 2

I just don't understand why they need our blood.

PATIENT 1

It was in the brochure they gave us at our intake appointment. Didn't you read it?

PATIENT 2

Yes I read it.

PATIENT 1

Then you understand their innovative approach.

Waiting for PATIENT 2 to respond

PATIENT 1 CONT

They need our blood to access our memories

PATIENT 2

They're accessing our memories?

PATIENT 1

You didn't read it. I thought you said you were gonna try.

PATIENT 2

I AM trying

PATIENT 1

Because this is our last option

PATIENT 2

I'm here aren't I?

Beat

PATIENT 1

I really want...this...to

PATIENT 2

Me too

Beat

PATIENT 1 sits to the right of the machine in the designated chair. 1 enters a code, then a green light appears above them. A start up sound is heard followed by "Patient 1 logged on" from the machine. PATIENT 2 struggles. They enter their code but it does not appear to be working. We hear an annoying beep with each failed attempt. They try again but no success. They then pull out a piece of paper and double check that they are entering the correct number. Finally PATIENT 2 is able to figure out their login. A green light appears above them, and we hear "Patient 2 logged on." They look over at 1 as if to say "Why wouldn't you help me?"

THERAPIST

Welcome to TherapyNow. A place to diagnose and cure. You will be asked a series of questions designed to help us determine your compatibility with each other. Please answer each question as thoroughly as possible. During our simulation the act of communication with the other patient is strictly prohibited. You may not talk, touch, or consult with the other party in any way. This will ultimately affect the outcome of our test and will provide you with a false diagnosis. If at any time during the questionnaire you engage with the other patient we will politely provide you with an error message.

A loud buzzer sound is heard

THERAPIST CONT

Thank you for choosing TherapyNow. Please press the green button when you are ready to begin.

Patient 1 presses the button without hesitation. Patient 2 ponders then eventually presses the green button as if forced

THERAPIST

Thank you. You will now start the questionnaire. Please articulate your answers loud and clear.

Automated message complete. A shift is made. The next voice from the machine is still robotic but with a more personal quality to it. Although they are a machine they do seem to be listening. The voice is calm, and knowledgeable.

THERAPIST

Patient 1, tell me why you've come here today

PATIENT 1

To fix my relationship

THERAPIST

Patient 2 why have you come here today

PATIENT 2 *softy*

I have no idea

THERAPIST

Please speak with more volume

PATIENT 2

To "fix" my relationship I guess

THERAPIST

Patient 1, when was the last time you saw a tree?

PATIENT 1

Trees have been extinct for years

THERAPIST

Please provide an exact time.

PATIENT 1

I've never seen a tree. Oh wait, that's not true. I saw a preserved one at the Natural History Museum when I first started dating

Name is not heard. A loud buzzer sound his heard

THERAPIST

Please refrain from using the other party's birth name.

PATIENT 1

Right, sorry. It's been 12 years since I've seen a tree

A sound is made. The machine is up-loading their answers

THERAPIST

Patient 2, please name a type of dinosaur

PATIENT 2

What?

THERAPIST

The question was/ name a type

PATIENT 2

I heard the question. I just don't understand its relevance.

THERAPIST

Elaborate

PATIENT 2

How is my knowledge of prehistoric life going to save our marriage?

THERAPIST

As a part of your compatibility examination we are interested in seeing what interests you have in common. Please name a/ type of

PATIENT 2 *Cutting them off*

Fine! T-Rex

A brief pause

THERAPIST

Name another?

PATIENT 2

Jesus. Um the winged ones.....You know, the ones that fly. It's on the tip of my tongue. They're in that movie. Where they're all looking for their moms. What's the name of that old film?

1 is mused that 2 is trying to make a Land Before Time reference and failing at it.

PATIENT 2 CONT

Why am I doing this?....Ptero....ah...Ptero...you're a computer you should know.... Pterodac.....Ducky, what was Ducky?

THERAPIST

A Saurolophus

PATIENT 2

Fine, that. One of those

A montage. The passing of time. The characters go through a series of moves/ motions depicting their increasing frustration and exhaustion. They've been questioned for hours. Tension is growing. The next bit of dialogue are brief interjections interrupting the montage. The music played in between these snips should sound like a take on Jeopardy's classic theme song

THERAPIST

Patient 2 have you ever lusted over a co-worker?

1 looks over intrigued. Continue montage

THERAPIST CONT

Patient 1, do the racial differences in this relationship make you uneasy?

Continue montage

THERAPIST CONT

Patient 2, does your financial instability affect you negatively?

Continue montage

THERAPIST CONT

Patient 1, why did you vote independent?

Continue montague

THERAPIST CONT

Patient 2, do you believe Patient 1 is actually gluten intolerant?

Final montague

THERAPIST CONY

Patient 2, who was “right” in the family argument?

PATIENT 2 *Testing*

What family argument?

THERAPIST

The argument that occurred five years ago on your trip abroad

PATIENT 2

How do you know about that?

2 totally didn't read the brochure

PATIENT 1

From. The. Blood

Buzzer sound

THERAPIST

Please don't communicate with the other patients. Patient 2 who was “right” in the family argument?

PATIENT 2

Me obviously

PATIENT 1

That's not fair.

Buzzer sound

THERAPIST

Please don't /communicate with the other patients

PATIENT 2

Communicate with the other patients. We get it!

THERAPIST

Patient 1 do you agree with Patient 2?

PATIENT 1

No

PATIENT 2 *Muttering*

Of course not. It didn't happen to you

THERAPIST

Elaborate

PATIENT 1

They're my family. I'm very protective of my them

2 annoyed, hits no on their keypad

THERAPIST

Patient 2 you have hit "No" on your keypad. Why?

PATIENT 2

Because I call bullshit on that answer

THERAPIST

We detect that your heart rate has accelerated and recommend you take a moment to stabilize yourself

PATIENT 2

I'm aloud to feel like this if I want

THERAPIST

What feelings would those be?

PATIENT 2 to *PATIENT 1*

Rage. Try being left alone in a foreign country, and we'll see how understanding you are

The machine beeps and flash red as 2 speaks

PATIENT 2 *CONT*

Stop beeping over me. I need to speak

THERAPIST

Talking to the other party is not a part of TherapyNow's program, and is prohibited.

2 submits. A brief pause

THERAPIST

Patient 1, do you love patient 2?

PATIENT 2

What?

THERAPIST

Please enter your answer on the keypad

Patient 1 does so

PATIENT 2

Why are you having us a keypad for that question? Shouldn't this question in particular be said out loud?

THERAPIST

We don't want the honesty of the answer to affect your mood during the rest of the test

PATIENT 2

Affect my mood?

THERAPIST

We find that patients who are feeling surprised or hurt from the honesty of their partners are less likely to engage in the rest of the questionnaire. Patient 2, do you love Patient 1?

PATIENT 2

This is ridiculous

THERAPIST

Please enter your/answer on the keypad

PATIENT 2

Yes, of course I love them. I'm not entering that into a keypad as if it's some secret. Why else would I agree to shell out thousands of dollars for this "Innovative" treatment if I didn't love them. Why, what was their answer?

THERAPIST

That information is confidential

PATIENT 2

They're my partner. Nothing is confidential

THERAPIST

Once we confirm you're a compatible match we will make the results accessible to you

PATIENT 2 gets up and starts to move towards PATIENT 1

PATIENT 2

Can we please/ GO

Loud buzzer again

THERAPIST

Speaking to the other party during the simulation is strictly prohibited. Please return to your station

PATIENT 2 to the machine then to PATIENT 1

No. Let's go

PATIENT 1

We need this

THERAPIST

Return to your station

PATIENT 1

We shouldn't be talking to each other

PATIENT 2

Yes we should

PATIENT 1

It isn't how things are done

THERAPIST

If you do not return to your station it will result in an automatic failure

PATIENT 2

Talk to me

PATIENT 1

We are talking

PATIENT 2

No we're not. We've been letting this thing police our speech

A loud buzzer sound goes off, and red lights appear above their two chairs

THERAPIST

We're sorry, but your inability to cooperate has resulted in an automatic failure. You are not a compatible couple. You are not a compatible couple

The machine repeats this until destroyed

PATIENT 2

Shut up! Shut up, you stupid machine

PATIENT 1 is deeply affected by the machine's words

PATIENT 1

Stop! This was supposed to help us!

PATIENT 2

This isn't real

PATIENT 2 walks over to the machine and starts kicking the control panel. The machine starts to malfunction.

PATIENT 1

What are you doing?

PATIENT 2

Saving us

PATIENT 1

How?

PATIENT 2

It's a machine. It doesn't have any answers

PATIENT 1

Why can't you ever just follow the rules

PATIENT 2

Because this is my life, and I refuse to live it by someone else's guidelines.

PATIENT 2 waits for response, but PATIENT 1 does not speak. PATIENT 2 returns to the machine and continues to dismantle it. PATIENT 1 waits a moment, then decides to join. PATIENT 1 is sheepish at first but then finds a rhythm. The destruction becomes joyous. They eventually let loose and have fun in the destruction. They reach a climax, and back away from what's left of the machine. They are short of breath and physically exhausted. They come down stage and take each other in. They don't know what the next step should be or the next step in their lives together.

PATIENT 2

You were right....In the "family argument." They're your family, and I understand you're close to them. I never meant to make you feel like you had to choose between your life

with them and your life with me. I felt pushed aside. Being alone in another country, and not knowing the language. I just needed to know I was as important.

PATIENT 2 waits for PATIENT 1 to respond

PATIENT 2 CONT

Please say anything

PATIENT 1

I don't know what I'm supposed to do

PATIENT 2

Talk to me. Tell me what you're thinking

PATIENT 1 *an overwhelming realization*

I sit at a desk all day. I take conference calls for someone I've never met. I order lunch online, and pick it up wearing headphones. I don't know how to tell you what I'm thinking

PATIENT 2

Say what you think is obvious. Tell me honestly. When... it... asked if you loved me what was your answer?

PATIENT 1

Of course I do

PATIENT 2 *Helpfully*

Do what?

PATIENT 1

Love you. I love you

PATIENT 2

We've been at each other's throats so long, I've been too afraid to ask

PATIENT 1

Do you love me?

PATIENT 2

I could never stop. There is so much mystery that surrounds you, but I enjoy the task of peeling back your layers.

PATIENT 1

Promise you'll never give up on me. Even when I'm quiet, and withdrawn

PATIENT 2

If you promise to stay when I'm scattered, and lost

PATIENT 1

Always

An achievement sound is heard.. A pop of confetti, and strobing colors fill the room. The machine comes back to life. This time with a voice resembling a 1980s car salesman

THERAPIST

Congratulations! You've completed your session with flying colors. You rock! You are now one step closer to a completely habilitated relationship.

The machine continues to talk as they articulate their confusion)

PATIENT 2

I thought we destroyed the machine

THERAPIST

As a thank you for choosing TherapyNow we would like to congratulate you with this complimentary hat and tote bag.

A bag and cap are thrown on stage

PATIENT 1

What's going on?

PATIENT 2

I have no idea. This wasn't in the brochure

THERAPIST

Warning flash may be bright

A bright flash and the sound of an old camera. PATIENT 1 and 2 are disoriented from the flash

THERAPIST CONT

To celebrate your progress we hope you enjoy this commemorative photo. You may retrieve your shot in the photo lab of our gift shop. Thanks again for choosing TherapyNow. Have a wonderful day

The two stand in confusion. Black out

End of Play