



-- For Immediate Release --

Virtual Terror
A psychological thriller by Dr. Jeri Fink

Reviewed by Michael W. Freeny, LCSW, Author, Terminal Consent

A therapist's worst nightmare. An insatiable client enters the office, pulls a knife and threatens to take your life for all the pain you've caused him. But you didn't cause the pain, it was from his childhood, at the hands of a cruel parent. Yet the psychological transference has taken control of the patient's actions. You must talk him down to save your life. What would you do? What would you say?

There are two ways to answer this question: play a game or read a book. Virtual Terror is both an online game and a fascinating novel by Jeri Fink, DSW. The dark, animated game can be played at Dr. Fink's website, www.psychotechology.com.

The book is an illuminating tour of cyber-relationships and virtual reality. Although fiction, Dr. Fink uses her clinical insight and techno-savvy to demonstrate the power and community of cyberspace. If you're scratching your head trying to figure out what all the excitement is about with online chatting and cyber-sexual affairs, you'll get a quick education from this story.

Although titled Virtual Terror, there is a wide range of feelings that are communicated between the real and virtual characters. There is a warm, chocolate-covered sensuality that pervades the plot, envelopes the characters, and will please the reader. There is even a chocolate mystery.

Melanie Wylie, a prominent New York psychologist, sees patients face-to-face(f2f) by day and text-to-text by night, i.e. she quietly does cyber-counseling via email and online chats. There is ample demonstration of the promise and power for clinical good that the Internet offers, but the story focuses on the terrible things that can go wrong with such a powerful medium. Raven, an anonymous e-mail pseudonym, seeks counsel even as he threatens to kill someone to ease and avenge his pain. Melanie tries to help, but quickly ends up the focus of the client's rage. But no one knows who or what Raven is. How do you fight a digital phantom?

The police are no help, for there's been no crime. Melanie enlists the assistance of a colleague, Nate, a social worker who is envious of her notoriety and status. He offers to help, but is also interested in the sexual conquest of this alpha female. The stalker's threats become more personal, more precise, more vicious, and Melanie begins to crumble under the strain.

This book is written with rich context and provides almost a subliminal education about information technology that clinicians will enjoy. There's a good amount of sex, actual and virtual. I should warn the reader that Dr. Fink takes you to some very dark places. There are some intense descriptions of the stalker's personal hell that might cause some squirming. Nate, an important character, seems a little dense a loutish for a psychotherapist. Yet there is a rich collection of characters who experience love, adventure, very clever twists and turn as Dr. Fink weaves through the cutting edge of virtual relationships. The read is fascinating, velvety rich, and an important addition to the discussion of online relationships and therapy.