

TALES FROM MASHIVA
EXTRA CREDIT

BY SHETIRA ANWAE

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“Okay. This *might* work,” Sanya declared with out bothering to look up from her annoyingly temperamental laptop. “And... upload complete. Did anything change? Can you move your waist now?”

“I’ll try!” the giddy cyborg cat girl bubbled with the kind of thoroughly genuine and yet completely unjustified enthusiasm that could only come from a hopelessly naive freshman cheerleader at a school whose tabi-tabi team couldn’t win a game to save their souls. “I’m trying! Is it moving? I can’t tell. But I’m trying!”

For a few agonizingly long moments, it seemed that no amount of effort the poor jaguaress’ part could force the chunky stainless steel spine to move. Then, ever so slightly at first, the extremely hackish and homemade looking assemblage of metal, wires, and high torque micro-actuators creaked to life. Slowly, her spine began to twist.

“Is it moving?” the cyborg asked, her voice so thin and metallic that it seemed to have come straight from the crude science fiction of a monochrome age long since passed.

While one might be tempted to think that the decision to make her mechanical voice resemble something particular, in reality it had been less of a deliberate design choice and much more of a matter of what was lying around in the spare parts bins when they'd been working on that particular feature of her cyborg body. The fact that the sharp, tinny little speaker wasn't even remotely fit for its intended purpose hadn't been given even the most fleeting of second thoughts. It worked. Sort of. They could have gotten something better, but then that *would* have been missing the whole point of the project.

"I can't feel anything down there any more," the jaguaress remarked just as her spine moved enough for her to actually notice. "It's... it's moving? It's moving! It's finally moving!"

"About damned time," Sanya noted with a brief glance over the laptop screen. The inner workings of her test subject's riveted sheet metal torso were exposed, allowing her to have a clear view of the home brew main body controller module within. The status light on its front face faded from yellow to green, indicating that the unit was now ready for the next upload. "Now lets see if we can get your neck working."

"Awesome!" the jaguaress giggled. "This is so much fun! I didn't think it was going to be, but it really is! I can't thank you enough! Really! I don't know what I'd do without the extra credit this is going to get me. Why did I even sign up for that Intro to Cyborg Systems course? Was it because I absolutely had to do a technical course? I don't remember. I don't know anything about machines. I was failing so badly. But now I'm going to pass and you have no idea how awesome that is for me!"

“Well, you’re certainly earning it, aren’t you Kitsie?” Sanya replied as she started down the list of neck actuators, looking for the right component code to add to her program. Exactly which bit of code would actually work with the roughly built custom actuator that was installed in the new cyborg’s neck was a mystery but, as with the waist actuation code, there was sure to be something in the list that would be functional enough for practical purposes.

“Oh, yeah!” the jaguaress replied with a big girly grin. “I mean, forget intro to cyborg technology. I’m getting *into* cyborg technology! I’ll bet all my classmates are going to be so jealous when they see my naked metal body! And... and... uh... well, I was kind of afraid to ask earlier, but... why are you all naked?”

“Tenyu?” Sanya replied, gesturing toward the tigress who was kneeling on the floor in front of the programming workbench, gently caressing one of Kitsie’s thighs with her right hand while holding a very medical looking, pistol style device in her left. “Why don’t you tell her, hmm?”

“It’s really simple,” the sophomore laboratory assistant replied with a mischievous wink at the cyborg jaguaress. “Clothes are an impediment to the cyborgization process. And, since our job as assistants to Miss Miyumi is to make sure that her research is successful, even if that means we get turned into cyborgs ourselves, then we always have to be ready for cyborgization on a moment’s notice!”

“Oh! Wow!” Kistie sputtered with a look of complete and utter amazement on her face. “You’re all so dedicated! That’s so awesome! But... why is *she* naked too?”

“For fairness and all that,” Sanya answered without looking up from the very long neck component list. “After all, it may well prove that the only way for me to complete my research is for me to be cyborgized myself. It’s a possibility that I’ve long since taken into account. If it’s the only way to finish with success, then, well... would it be fair to you or to any of the other girls we’ve done research with if I wound up refusing to finish the project just because I was too chicken to go all the way myself? You’ve all been so wonderfully willing to give up your organic bodies that it would be absolutely unthinkable for me to turn my back on all that. It would just be... uncouth. Unthinkable, really.”

“I guess it would, wouldn’t it?” Kistie responded.

“It would,” Sanya answered with an affirmative nod. “That’s why, as part of the approval covenant for my dissertation research, absolute instructions were included that, if I so much as intimate that my own cyborgization might be necessary for the completion of my doctorate, I am to be cyborgized. No ifs. No ands. No buts. Only with some flexibility on the timing to ensure that my cyborgization actually serves its intended purpose. But it’ll happen. And I’m not allowed to do anything at all to get out of it.”

“Wow,” Kistie responded with bright sparkly wonder in her deep brown eyes. “But what if it turns out you actually don’t need to be cyborgized?”

“They’ll still do it anyway,” Sanya answered with a smirk. “The rules are the rules. If I have to be the first home brew cyborg with a doctorate, then that’s what I’ll have to be, and I’ll have to just learn to like it.”

“Goddess that is *soooooo* awesome!” Kistie exclaimed with a giddy bounce in her well padded seat. “I’ve never met anyone willing to do anything like that to succeed in school! It’s just so incredible to be able to help you! If I’d known that I’d have offered to help you even without the extra credit! It’s just that wonderful! Really! You’re going to be the bestest doctor of cyborgizing there ever was!”

The laboratory door slid open with a low hiss.

“I think I finally got this thing fixed,” a somewhat tomboyish looking cougaress asked as she stepped inside with a pair of illuminated goggles on her forehead, a modified game controller in one hand, and an empty MMU Cyborg Lab mug in the other. “So, what did I miss? Anything good?”

“It’s been almost three hours, Massie,” Sanya replied with a deep sigh. “You missed just about everything. What the hell took you so long?”

“Oh, you know how it is with this second hand crap,” the cougaress replied, waving the controller in the air. “I cleaned up the contacts on the analog stick that was giving so much trouble, but then the solder connections for the cable started to crack while I was brushing out the gunk, so I tried to fix that, but that lifted the pads off the circuit board, so then I had to get a bit creative. Getting creative resulted in more needing to get creative, and then I had to steal some parts from the electronic engineering department, and... yeah. You know how it is.”

“Oh!” Kistie chirped as the cougaress plugged the controller into an empty port on the back of Sanya’s laptop. Is

that the thing that she said could do things to my brain to make me feel stuff and think stuff and all that kind of stuff?”

“This one’s a lot more talkative than the espresso machine was when we were turning her into a kitchen appliance,” Massie remarked as she put her mug beneath the dispenser of the aforementioned espresso machine. “Did the brain cans bore too deep through her skull or was she like that the whole time?”

“Well, I was kind of quiet to begin with, I guess,” Kitsie responded with as much of a shrug as she could manage with both of her hands tied to back supports of her seat. “I mean, it’s pretty scary seeing all these girls with their heads mounted on cyborg-y things, right? The things they stuck in my ears and on the back of my head didn’t feel too good at first, but then there all these bright little sparkles and they said that was like, thousands of filaments digging into my brain and it was kind of cool. And then they started to make my body disappear and it kind of tickled and I couldn’t help but start laughing and it was really kind of weird and fun to feel my boobs just go away. Just like... go away! It was kind of scary when they lifted my head all the way off while they replaced my bones with the machine thing! I mean, like, it was so crazy! They actually took my head off! All the way off!”

“Nuts, isn’t it?” Massie chuckled as looked over the cyborg’s shoulder and down at the sheet metal bikini bottom whose only real purpose was to keep things from getting caught in her hip motors. “So... what did you think when they did between your legs?”

“Oh! That was just so freaking cool!” Kitsie bubbled. “It was all like tickle, tickle, tickle down my tummy and as it got

down there I kind of started to feel a little horny and it was like tickle, tickle, then... poof! It was all just gone! Just... like... gone! Like I'm not even a girl anymore! It's that crazy? I'm not really a girl anymore. It's so... so weird! So weird and... you know what's even weirder? I actually kind of like it!"

"Interesting," Massie responded with a shake of her head and a turn toward the cyborg espresso machine that was waiting patiently with its blank, thousand-bean stare. "Speaking of disembodied heads, how about you brew me up a double shot with that some of that fresh from the tin-canned-glands milk I love so much, hmm?"

Unlike the jaguaress, with her small skull-burrowing cylinders embedded one each in both of her ears and two behind the lower portion of her head, the espresso machine had a trio of giant brain cans, one in the back and one taking up the entirety of each side of her head. Only the leopardess' face and forehead were left intact which, along with her thoroughly reprogrammed brain, served no other real purpose than to act as a convenient voice activated interface.

"Come on! Wake up!" Massie huffed, tapping impatiently on the machine's crudely constructed torso, with its coffee bean bin mounted on the back, and a pair of fully encased mammary glands riveted onto the front. "I need my caffeine!"

The espresso machine blinked. "Welcome, miss Massie. Two shots, strong. Milk, not steamed. Is this correct?"

"Yes," Massie replied.

"Commencing brew," the espresso machine replied.

“Hmm,” Sanya murmured as the code she was searching for continued to defy her. “Does anyone remember which component code it was for those cheap ass camera actuators that were kind of similar to our custom job?”

“One, zero, one, zero, three, two, eight, mod twenty-nine,” Tenyu replied. “But uh... isn’t that cycle... cycloidal... uh... analog gyrosense thing supposed to be running before you activate that?”

“It isn’t?” Sanya questioned. The tigress had only been with the lab for the past couple of months. She could barely find her way around a toy robot, let alone a fully custom home brew cyborg.

“Nope,” Tenyu replied before looking at her handheld device with a thoughtful expression on her face. It was the sole reason that the nursing student been included in Sanya’s dissertation research. “Maybe there’s too much organic matter causing problems again? Do you think it would help if I skeletonized her legs? Remove the extra variables and that kind of thing?”

“Not yet!” Sanya sighed. Technically, there was no real reason that they couldn’t just remove her legs at this stage of the cyborgization process. Her core body had already been replaced. Keeping her organic legs for the time being was mainly just for convenience’s sake. “She may still need them if we can’t finish her in just this one session.”

“Aww!” Tenyu laughed as she put the device down on the floor beside her. “But it’s so much fun to zap her and take her bones. They’re all just so... pretty.”

Sanya shook her head. Only medical department students were allowed to use the devices on campus, even though it didn't really require much in the way of training and even though they could be purchased on the open market by anyone with enough money. If that hadn't been the case, she never would have asked for a nursing student to be assigned to the project. I was the same thing with every cross-department research assignment. They only sent the dumb ones, or the chronically late ones, or the ones who couldn't get along with anyone else, or, like the tigress seemed to be, the absolutely crazy ones. Rumor had it she'd been coaxing freshman to come to the anatomy lab to donate their skeletons for science, living souls still quite firmly attached.

Transdimensional science had always been well outside the leopardess' comfort zone. It didn't make sense. The skeletonizer was a perfect case in point. Somehow, any body part its beam touched was instantly stripped of all flesh, leaving only bone and a shimmering rainbow surface where the stripping had stopped. There was no pain. No blood. No nothing. And now matter what part of the subject's body had been stripped, or how much, it absolutely had no effect whatsoever on their state of life.

It was like the stripped bits were somehow still there, despite being definitely gone. One could remove all the bones and even move the detached pieces left behind and nothing would happen. And, of course, you could replace the removed pieces with things like cyborg parts, all without needing surgeons or surgery robots, or any of that. In other words, you could probably do it all at home if you really wanted to, and no real harm would come to your new cyborg. Well, not unless you

took weeks to finish up. That was when the life sustaining effects of the skeletonizer began to fade. Unless you went all the way with it. Then the subject soul would be trapped in the skull itself. But that was well outside the subject of Sanya's research and, quite frankly, it kind of skeeved her out.

“You must like my bones if you want to see more of them,” the jaguaress observed without losing even one ounce of her bouncy enthusiasm, despite the rather morbid nature of the subject at hand. “Are they really that pretty? I wouldn't know. I've never seen real naked bones before. I mean, I saw my own bones when you were taking them out of my chest, but I've never seen anyone else's bones so I really don't have anything to compare them too, right?”

“They're really pretty,” Tenyu answered with a low feline mrowl. “And I really do want to see more of them. All of them, really. Except your skull. You get to keep that. Shame, really, but I guess you still need it for this kind of thing.”

The jaguaress giggled.

“Are you sure it's really not working?” Sanya asked as she stood up from the laptop to get a better look. The component question was a round device that was held in place within the cyborg's completely open belly by a collection of steel armored cables. The indicator light at its center should have been lit green, while the translucent ring around it should have been flickering with little branching streams of green light. “What... it was working fine a few minutes ago!”

If getting the coding for the waist right had been an annoyingly time consuming problem, the potential that the

CAG had failed was a catastrophe that threatened to turn the already long, all-day cyborgizing session into an all-night ordeal. The device was absolutely critical to the cyborg's functionality. It's sole purpose was to sense the position of each moving component of the cyborg's body and convert that information into a form that its organic brain could use to create a sense of own-body spatial and positional awareness in the complete absence of any physical sensation. If it wasn't working, the cyborg would either flop into a heap on the floor like a limp wet rag, or be frozen in place like a low budget cyber-punk statue.

Given the highly questionable quality of the junk bin and hobby grade components the team had been using, the limp rag option seemed the most likely. This was a direct consequence of the nature of Sanya's research. She wasn't just researching how to make cyborgs. She wasn't even just researching how to make fully custom cyborgs from off the shelf components. No. What she was actually researching was how to make fully mechanical cyborgs as a hobbyist, at home, with only components available to and appropriately priced for the market, in a reasonably safe and effective manner.

This new cyborg was Sanya's second to last bit of research before finalizing her dissertation. It was her first attempt at a full cyborg using the chosen materials and methods, and it was to be her only attempt. If she couldn't show that it could be done in a single attempt, and preferably in a single session, then she couldn't demonstrate that it was currently viable, safe, and doable for a hobbyist working at home.

Being so close to finishing her work made the possibility of her new cyborg falling and injuring herself due to a faulty

component completely unacceptable. That was why she'd tied the jaguaress' arms to the chair, to help support her upright until she was sure the core body was complete and fully functional. These could become sources of painful injury that might require medical attention, thus delaying the completion of her dissertation should she fall, though that unfortunate possibility paled in comparison to the potential for a serious head injury.

"Are all the cables connected?" Sanya asked, hoping the solution was as simple as a loose connection.

"Let's see," Tenyu hummed as she leaned in for a closer look, placing both hands on the jaguaress' thighs. "Everything looks connected to me."

"Dammit!" Sanya hissed. "Why isn't it working? Did I do something to mess with it when I got the spine fixed?"

"You do realize that those things are meant for use on the little bots they use in parks to gather litter, right?" Massie quipped as she picked up her fresh brewed coffee. "Well, they would be if they were actually name brand. These things are maybe good for a freshman robotics course camera bot with only one actuated component to keep track of. Maybe."

"We're operating well within spec," Sanya replied, eyeing the cougaress as she leaned on the programming workbench, placing her coffee down dangerously close to the brain interface hub and picking up the game controller. "Be careful with that, will you? I don't think she needs any more endorphins running around in that pretty little head of hers."

"What's endorphins?" Kitsie asked.

Massie chuckled and jiggled the controller's analog stick.

"Aaaaaah!" Kitsie responded with wide open eyes as the interface started to directly stimulate her brain. "That feels so good!"

"Massie!" Sanya scolded. "Quit messing around! Reward threshold testing comes at the end of the process!"

"But she wanted to know what endorphins were," Massie retorted sarcastically as she put the controller back down. "So I showed her."

"Oh... ah.... Oh..." Kitsie huffed as she came down from the momentary high. "That was so much fun! Can you do it again?"

"Not right now," Sanya answered with a sharp glance at the mischievous cougaress. "We need to get your CAG working again. Or replaced. And then we need to get you new limbs and your final programming. Then we'll see about playing with your brain again."

"Oh! Okay," Kitsie replied with a giggle and a grin.

"So, have you thought about what program we're going to load on that impressively enthusiastic little brain of hers?" Massie inquired, taking a long sip of her coffee.

"Not really," Sanya replied. "But we're going to have to be a lot more... ehm... *rational* about this one. It's the final research project, after all. We had our fun, but now we really need to stick the landing. She has to have an application that most would consider genuinely practical, and I don't mean the kitchen appliance kind of practical."

“Pft!” Massie responded, rolling her eyes.

Sanya sighed and shook her head. “You just worry about the interfacing. We have lots to do before I have to decide. If you can come up with an appropriate suggestion before then, I’m all ears. But for now, we have to figure out what’s wrong with this damned CAG. If we can’t get that sorted quickly, then... dammit. It’s going to be a really long night!”