

Easier said than done though; Xili only had the most rudimentary awareness of the nanites inside of her body, and even then it was in the same vague sense as knowing that her reactor was somewhere where her heart used to be, or being aware that her legs were controlled by several hydraulics. The chee didn't know how exactly to *control* said miniaturized robots, nor did she expect to learn it within the timescale she had left before going back to work... but it was either try and do that anyway, or have to call in and tell her boss that she suffered an unfortunate growth incident, and then all of her cover would be blown before she was ready to show off to the world. Thus, the synth-dracat walked in front of her mirror, and began the long, arduous process of trying to will herself into a different form.

It made for a good practice run, in that Xili had no idea how to do anything and therefore had to build up a whole field of knowledge from scratch; she knew the nano-fluid was still present inside of her body, its sensors were telling her that much, but they seemed to be fully inert and lacking in any way to be remotely controlled. The nanites seemed to lack any sort of wireless received, and indeed appeared to be closed systems, leading her to think they might just have been programmed to do a very specific task and then shut down until such a point as they were either told to vent out, or called up to reboot their host again. But Xili wasn't one to give up so easily, as she knew she had something that those things didn't: a brain.

The transformation into a synth had turned her previously squishy, meaty processor into a hybrid of sorts, wetware of the highest caliber; it was the only part of herself that wasn't fully converted into a synthetic equivalent due to the concerns over the preservation of consciousness, but it *was* augmented via the use of specialized microchips and miniaturized processors. Notably, this didn't exactly make her *think* faster as much as it just synched up with her other systems; it was an auxiliary network more than anything, allowing the chee to work with her HUD in order to fully control her body without having to manually go through a menu each time she wanted to change a variable here or there. And if that was the case, she thought to herself, then surely that meant that her ability to be innately aware of every part of her extended to any foreign bodies that might be physically inside of her physical form; this held true for small grains of sand whenever she walked by the beach, or dust whenever it built up in a vent. Therefore, it stood to reason that she should be able to sense the nanites too.

Once more, this was a lot easier in theory than in practice, and Xili spent several hours trying to get her brain to "tune in" to the nanites as the first step to controlling them. It felt like a fool's errand, and many times the dracat was about to give up, only kept going out of sheer necessity more than anything else. It felt as if the more she poked at those things, the less responsive they became; they were there, she knew they were, she could even move her internals around to interact with the nano-fluid itself, and yet it did... nothing. It took a lot of lateral thinking before the chee even came up with a working hypothesis, and by that point it was the middle of the

afternoon; with dinner approaching, she began to curse her decision not to look for a clothing store.

However, not all was bleak. Given the set of circumstances surrounding her use of the nanites, as well as how her transformation took place, the synth-cat figured that their function was intrinsically tied to *intent*, for lack of a better word; after all, she wasn't rebooted as much as upgraded, which given her reaction to it, must've been what that itch was all about, what the general sense of discomfort had been trying to tell her all that time. It didn't make a lot of sense, and was far more wishy-washy psycho-nuttery than she liked, but Xili had to admit that, given her brain was still mostly the same fallible piece of organic machinery as always, it was probably still running off the same faulty software as ever. It was only then that, much to her chagrin, things began to change; once the dracat surrendered her logical, reasonable attempts at getting the nanites to start working again, subsuming it underneath her emotionally-charged wants and needs, something began to stir inside of her. It was a warmth, a rather familiar one, and for a few minutes Xili became worried that a second transformation might be headed her way!

Thankfully for both herself and her bedroom, her vents didn't overheat and her specs remained the same; instead, the nano-fluid began to *very* sluggishly move from place to place at a rhythm, almost as if it was being pumped through veins that weren't even there by a heart that had been cut out months prior. She chose to ignore this, focusing instead on a mental image of herself as she *wanted* to be: her work attire, a white button-up shirt with a tie, along with some stylish jeans. It was simple, but it got the point across without looking *too* messy, and Xili imagined herself not dressed like that, but *being* like that. It was a paintjob, nothing more, and one that she desperately needed and would be immensely grateful if her body went ahead and did that for her.

She opened her eyes. Nothing.

But there wouldn't be nothing. She refused that, she denied it, she *needed* for something to be there, nay, *demand*ed for it to be. It was a necessity now, something that was either going to happen now or later when the dracat wrangled her body into submission, and if it knew what was best for it, then it was going to give her exactly what she wanted right there where she could enjoy it happening in real time. And like clockwork, as soon as the demand was made clear in her mind, the synthetic skin and fur began to shimmer, as if lit internally by a million tiny LED lights, her whole body glowing so brightly that it nearly overloaded Xili's optical sensors. In a few seconds, it was all gone, leaving behind her bare, metallic form.

The chee got a few moments to appreciate how this was at least *some* progress before another change kicked in, this time starting at the bottom of her feet and moving upwards. Much like the coating of synthskin had been spread over her body beforehand, so too did this new one consume

her like she was having a costume printed onto her physical form in real time. First came a pair of shoes, much like the ones she enjoyed wearing, then dark-blue denim hugging her armour plating as it painted its way upwards, the faintest hint of underwear forming before being hidden from sight by the completed pair of jeans; then finally a shirt, cast from nothing and woven from bottom to top, covering her bare chest and ending a respectful distance down from her collar bone. Finally, to cap it all off, a tie unfurled from nothing, undone and ready to be put back in place whenever she needed to get down to business.

It was such a sudden change that Xili didn't know how to react. One moment she was "naked", the next there were clothes on her that felt like... they weren't there. Bringing her fingers to any part of her body revealed that, while the texture appeared to be identical to what one might expect, what she had there weren't clothes so much as a very realistic form of body paint, expertly crafted to give the impression of volume and depth; even the chee had issues telling whether or not that shirt was even there, and she *knew* it wasn't! Xili could barely contain her excitement after the finishing touches were complete, and ended up jumping in place again, giggling about as much as the first time she ever saw her synthetic self in the mirror; there was the next step, the proof of concept, the evidence that her body was malleable. It may be simple, but it meant it could happen, and now everything else was just a matter of scale and time.

The dracat was so excited she didn't even sleep that night, instead spending most of her time trying to come up with new and more outrageous outfits for herself. It quickly became clear that they were all limited in the same way: colouring and texture was fine, but the nanites didn't seem capable of producing anything separate from her own body; Xili could only hope no one bumped into her and ruined the illusion, because otherwise there'd be a lot of uncomfortable questions she didn't want to answer at that stage. By the time the sun rose, the synth-chee was back in her original get-up, the collar now prim and proper and without the tie to ruin the illusion; it always ended up unnaturally stiff, and given its inability to move away from her body, would give up the fact that she wasn't actually wearing anything in the conventional sense. It was only then that Xili remembered she was about two feet taller and several feet wider at the wingspan, and realized they had no excuse for that.

Panic set in.

The synth-chee ran through a dozen different stories in her mind, each more unlikely than the last, before finally settling on a second puberty that dracats like her went through at that stage in their life. Didn't explain why it happened over the course of a couple of days, nor why it had no effect on anything but her weight and wing size, but it was... well, it really *wasn't* a proper excuse, just serving to deepen the pit she dug for herself. It took a lot of time and convoluted reasoning before Xili stopped herself and thought of something: why *should* she try and explain anything?

The whole purpose of injecting the nano-fluid had been to get rid of her limits and become something greater. The whole purpose of even *becoming* a synthetic lifeform in the first place was to elevate herself beyond the bounds of mortal existence. So why *was* she worrying about such silly things as embarrassing herself in front of her coworkers or making a scene? She was better than that, *above* those concerns, so why even bother thinking about them? She found herself nodding along to her own thoughts, a wide, toothy grin spreading on her lips as the chee came to understand that which she had failed to before: that she, and she alone, was the one who could dictate what she could or couldn't do. Not some unwritten etiquette, not societal expectations, but *herself*; and it wouldn't be a stuffy office environment that told her otherwise.

It was a surprisingly refreshing and liberating realization, especially given that it wrapped everything up nicely while giving her the upper hand; it was still up in the air how anyone would react to seeing the new, giant her, but Xili knew that, regardless of how people decided to behave around her, she was just going to go about her day like nothing was out of ordinary. Because nothing *was* out of the ordinary; *this* was the new ordinary, for her and everyone else... at least until the dracat figured out a way to make an even better "normal" for her to experience. In fact, the synth-chee was so certain of this that she opted to forgo her usual commuting entirely, instead climbing the stairs up to her apartment building's roof and emerging onto the cold, bitter winds. It had been years since she tried doing this, and in fact even her new, confident self had some doubts as to whether or not she was too rusty for it (a thought that led her to chuckle far more than she deserved to), but if she was serious about her new existence, then now was the time to affirm it.

Xili unfurled her wings, letting the breeze flow into, above and below them. She felt the wind currents travelling along their surface, her internal sensors producing a series of calculations based on elevation and wind speed to let her know the optimal take-off path. The synth brushed them off completely; she was going to do this by feel. Bending her legs, she closed her eyes and emptied her mind, visualizing the edge of the building in front of her: a simple ledge, followed by a several dozen foot drop, with hard concrete and tarmac at the bottom. If she failed, there would be a large crater and a scrap heap inside of it in just a few seconds.

But she wouldn't fail.

The dracat broke out into a spring, effortlessly clearing the distance between herself and certain doom, before hopping onto the ledge and jumping off of it, allowing her wings to open as widely as they could. Still with her eyes closed, Xili formed a mental map of her environment, allowing instinct to kick in; there would be no calculations, only an innate knowledge of when to tell her body to do what it needed to do. And without fail, without a moment's hesitation, just as

she began to hear people around her screaming about someone throwing themselves off the building, the dracat flapped her wings.

In an instant, her body flipped back around as the gust of wind she created pushed several people below onto the ground and nearly tipped over a car, right before it sent it careening back upwards, the sounds of it filling her ears and giving way to an ever larger smile to stamp itself onto her face. Xili opened her eyes, finding herself somewhere in between the ground and the roof, about to descend once again; she flapped her wings again, feeling the lift push her upwards, seeing the world run away from her the more she kept moving her appendages, finally allowing herself to make use of the calculations projected onto her eyes. She was flying again, after so many years, and it felt as divine as she looked.

The flight to her office didn't take too long, even if Xili deliberately took a long, circular route just so she could show off to everyone on the way there. Even after arriving at the building proper the dracat took her sweet time flying a few laps around it, just to make sure that her coworkers were fully aware of the new her; a few even went so far as to glue their face onto the windows, perhaps wondering if they were, indeed, seeing what they were seeing. The synth-chee was so happy she couldn't avoid smiling like an idiot, and even on landing kept that expression of pure, child-like joy when a crowd began to form around her.

As she expected, everyone wanted to know what happened to her. Most of her friends demanded an explanation for the sudden increase in height, while others expressed amazement at her wings even being functional, having convinced themselves they were just there for show somehow. Xili, knowing that spending any amount of time answering those questions would break the promise she made herself, simply told them she had no idea what they were talking about, and sashayed into the lobby... taking care to bend down so she wouldn't knock her head on the doorframe.

The first couple of hours were the best, with the whole office desperate for an explanation, even if it was a bad one; they couldn't just be shown something like Xili and not be given anything else, the transformation was just too drastic! Even her boss seemed intent in squeezing an answer out of her, which just made it all that much sweeter when the chee gave them nothing but a smile, a quizzical head tilt, and a "Whatever do you mean~?" in her most innocent tone possible. It was a play, theatrics really, and yet the only person in on the joke was Xili herself; everyone else was so confused by her refusal to provide explanations that they eventually just gave up, hoping perhaps that the synth-dracat would slip up later in the day and give them what they wanted.

Little did they know that, far from trying to cover up the reality of her situation, the chee was in fact thinking up new and inventive ways of breaking through it again. Now that she had

proven the nanites could work in her favour, assuming she could muster up enough willpower to make them do so, then the sky was the limit when it came to her next transformation; it was a given this would take place, since, well... she still wasn't satisfied. Her new body was gorgeous, yes, and a perfect piece of machinery, but it could always be *better*; and if it *could* be better, than it stood to reason that it *should* be, as that was the whole point of going synthetic in the first place. The only questions that remained were the "how" and "when", with the "why" no longer being relevant and the "where" going down much the same path; Xili no longer cared whether or not anyone saw what she had to offer, because by the time she was done, *everyone* would be forced to gaze upon her.