

Hard Reset

By Abe E Seedy

In the deep blackness of an uncharted system, a blazing sphere flashed suddenly in and out of existence. A second later and the slim silver needle that was the *Free Radical* pierced straight through the middle of the expanding halo, the ship sinking back into realspace with practiced ease. The view from inside the cockpit however, was rather less harmonious.

"I don't care if you saw it first", Eva said, massaging her temples, "you can't name this system."

The dashboard lit up as John replied. "I fail to see why not."

"Because the last time I let you do that, you went with one-zero-zero-one-one-one-zero-zero-one-one-zero-one-one... or whatever, and the Registration Board was *not* happy."

There was a brief pause, and then, while he wasn't great at conveying a teasing tone, John did his best. "Is it because they didn't get the joke? I assure you, in binary I'm hilarious."

Eva suppressed a groan. "Despite all evidence to the contrary."

"I demand to be graded on a curve. How many binary jokes do you know?"

"Ten", Eva shot back. "And neither of them are very funny."

John started to respond, but interrupted himself with a shrill whistle. "Dangerous energy wave detected."

In an instant Eva shot forward in her seat, the half-eaten box of noodlepaste she'd been toying with falling to the floor as she focussed on the controls. "Source?"

"Unknown." He'd slipped back into his factory default expressionless tone, which was *never* a good sign. "But the leading edge will impact in three--"

"Minutes? Shi--"

"Two, one."

Eva barely had time to brace herself before it hit, her fingers digging reflexively into the fabric of her chair. But when the energy washed over her, she barely even felt it. She'd expecting searing

heat, but whatever it was passed through her body with barely a buzz, leaving just an unpleasant coppery taste on her tongue. Unfortunately, it seemed like she was the only thing that got off lightly. The whole console display went dark, the cockpit lights stuttering rapidly for a few moments before tripping fully off, while in the corner of the room the tactile overload display system spewed a shower of sparks over the nearby wall before shutting down. Most concerning of all was the agonised "ERRrrrrrrrrrrrr" that came from John's speaker, cycling up and down several full octaves as the wave ran through his circuits.

And then it was gone. All was dark and quiet for a moment, until the dull glow of emergency lighting filled the room with an oppressive gloom.

Eva exhaled slowly, giving herself a brief space to recover from the shock, then went through the motions of a systems check. A visual inspection of the cockpit confirmed that nothing was physically damaged, and opening up one of the panels seemed to show the wiring and circuitry was intact. It was just off, and it all resolutely refused to turn back on. Which was a problem.

All evidence pointed to them having stumbled into a powerful electromagnetic pulse, which would explain why it shut down everything except the specially shielded emergency lighting subsystem. But that left the engines and life support powered down, not to mention John, the only person who could possibly help her out of the deep and lonely hole she was now in. Worse yet, to restart the electronics system, the engine needed to be running. But she needed the computer system to restart the engine, unless she wanted to leave the ship and light it manually. Which would be pretty damn hard to do with the degree in mechanical engineering she absolutely did not have. John was the one who brought that knowledge to the table, while she contributed the mobile set of hands to actually go out and deal with things.

In a way, it was good that things were so silent, because it gave her time to come up with a plan. It may not have been a *good* plan, and she was sure John would have some choice words about the practicality of it, but it sure as hell beat waiting around and hoping someone else stumbled into them before the air ran out.

Thankfully the nearby emergency storage was secured by a mechanical latch rather than anything electronic - it wouldn't have been great start to have to beat down the door. From inside she pulled out the EVA suit, and also the brand new ship-to-suit link cable they'd had installed not long before this trip. John hadn't gone into much detail on that, but from what she'd gathered it allowed him to operate the suit independently if he ever did need to do anything outside. He politely didn't mention how the one thing Eva contributed to their enterprise was now redundant, and in return she didn't share her conclusion that what she was *really* here for was to provide friendly human company to an AI so it didn't decide it was better off striking out on its own. Existential crisis aside, if that cable could connect John to the suit, and the suit had a jack that connected to the dataport she had at the base of her neck, then maybe she could provide enough of a spark to jumpstart the whole system.

The cupboard door had a mirror on the inside, so Eva could see just how ridiculous she looked as she struggled to put the suit on in the dim emergency lighting. These things were made to snap and stretch to fit anyone, but she couldn't help but think it'd be nice if they didn't ride so tight in the crotch for pear-shaped women like her. Even so, she managed to bundle herself into the form-fitting fabric, wrangling her wavy blond hair so that when she clipped on the helmet it didn't block the clear plastic window in front of her face.

Getting the cable set up took more effort. The thing was easily a couple of hundred feet long, and even though most of that was rolled neatly into a dispenser in the cupboard, it still meant it was too bulky to handle easily. In the end she lined it up as best she could before pushing it into place with an awkward hop backwards into the wall, but fortunately it was rugged enough to survive such treatment and obligingly locked into place. Then it was a simple matter of hitting the button on the helmet that pressed the connector into her own socket, shivering slightly as the cold metal slid into her flesh. Normally this connection was so the suit could read her vitals and respond to her needs, but, hopefully, it would serve as enough of a bridge that this would actually work.

"Okay", she told herself, trying not to slant to one side as the weight of the cable threw off her balance. "On", she whispered.

Absolutely nothing happened. Nothing continued to happen for some time, no matter how hard she screwed up her face and concentrated on the concept of on-ness. So. Either this wasn't going to work, or there was something else she needed to do. Eva chose to focus on the latter option, because at least that she could do something about. Turning back to the emergency storage, the small tub of medical nanobots on the shelf stood out as potentially useful. They should have been shielded and self-contained enough to survive the pulse, and maybe they could fix whatever damage was stopping this working. Once again, it wasn't a good plan, but it was worth a shot.

If the metal of the plug was unpleasantly cold as it went in, the nanobots were a whole other level. It felt like pouring ice over the nape of her neck, if ice also dug into her skin with a million little claws. Thankfully before she had too long to just concentrate on that unpleasant sensation she felt them activate in the heat of her body, and they dutifully clustered around her socket as they went to see what they could do.

"Please", Eva mumbled to herself, "please w-"

Without warning, another energy wave hit. The first she was aware of it was when an electric yellow fuzz burst in through the opposite wall, roaring silently over her in an instant. Immediately it felt different, as though raw voltage ricocheted back and forth through her body as it passed, focussing most of all on jumping up and down the cable at her neck. She collapsed to her knees as it left, her head lolling to the side like a puppet barely held up by one remaining string. Tiny

sparks jumped between her fingers as they twitched, and Eva could have sworn she saw smoke rising from the singed outsides of the suit.

She would have stayed like that for a while longer, but before she could do much more than exhale her eyes widened as the nanobots surged into action. At first Eva thought some of them had melted over her skin, but then she realised that they were beginning a procedure. That would have been startling enough given how she was still recovering from what just happened, but then they dug in suddenly, and her whole body stiffened.

There wasn't any pain. These were good quality medical tools, and they did their job well. But just a lack of pain didn't stop the sensation from being overwhelming, and she probably would have outright fallen to the floor if the tugging of the cable in her neck hadn't kept her barely supported. Only... it wasn't just some physical strut propping her up. There was a directive coming through the wire, sliding directly into her spine in a way that flowed outwards automatically through her nerves and tendons.

Get up, it said simply. You need to get back up.

So she did, her feet finding slow purchase on the grating as she hauled herself upwards. As she rose, the lighting in the cockpit changed, the red glare of the emergency bulbs fading into the synth-natural colour she was used to.

That probably would have struck Eva as weird, but she was too distracted to even really notice. The nanobots were spreading out over her neck like a warm massage, and the heat of it all was somehow crawling up and down her spine. When it hit the base of her skull it was like everything else fell away, her body becoming dim and distant as her thoughts floated free.

Her body. Both parts of that were wrong. Why would she think she had a body, and why did she keep using female pronouns? There had been focus testing, and a masculine affectation was found to be generally preferred for this role. The idea of having a body was a new one, but some element of that clicked too. There had been a new development, something to enable extravehicular activities without requiring another crew member's participation. That was why there was a body, and the problem was that it needed to reset. The processing was completed, and a conclusion was reached.

The nanobots swept downwards, a line of smooth shining silver left in their wake. If there was to be a body, and it had been determined to be masculine, then there was an element that that implied. Quite why that was true was not immediately clear, but as an operating assumption it provided enough information to work with. There was a task, and the nanobots were assigned to it.

Eva opened her eyes with a gasp as it started. She didn't know quite where she'd been up until that point, but whatever limbo of the mind she'd been swimming through beforehand, it was

impossible to remain detached as the first wave of sensation hit. The nanobots had reached her crotch, by now feeling much more like a warm liquid than a swarm of microscopic machines, and with a sudden surge they poured inside her. It felt like a mold being made of her pussy as it grew to fill her in an instant, except that after a moment more she felt the shape begin to influence her, rather than the other way around. She was sure she would have collapsed back to her knees if not for the cord demanding she continue to stand, and so instead she sagged heavily as her eyes rolled back in her head. The sensation was one of overwhelming fullness, a deep and aching weight that grew and shifted, followed by the sublimely bizarre feeling of her lips pressing against each other for a moment as her slit slid neatly closed.

There was the briefest period of equilibrium there, as if she was at the top of a high jump, perfectly poised between two points of movement. And then, inexorably, it continued.

It was weight that broke the balance, the same as gravity would pull her back down from height. She felt it pulling at her body, causing her knees to buckle once again as the now-smooth surface of her crotch was disrupted. When it happened it happened suddenly, and all in one movement a thick shaft slid from her and stretched wetly along the inside of her suit.

What it was was both immediately clear and completely incomprehensible, but she didn't have time to focus on it as a new wave of sensation started abruptly. Seemingly every one of the nanobots converged on the base of the shaft, bunching together into two rapidly-growing circles. Soon they had settled into place, creating flexible shells around themselves to encompass their territory, but within those spheres they went into overdrive, replicating rapidly and sending the results up through the link to the shaft they had quickly developed.

For Eva, the sensation that provoked was once again both utterly alien and completely familiar. She came. At last her legs failed her as she slumped to the floor, the thick fluid of fresh nanobots surging out in uneven, jerky pulses. Everywhere it touched became silver and smooth, seeping into every inch of her body as she flooded her suit. She felt her body stiffen even as it somehow remained flexible, her joints articulating in a substantially more mechanical fashion as the change continued. The plastic on her visor fogged as she struggled for breath, but every gasp of air just brought more heat, her lips starting to drip with that same rich fluid as her cheek pressed against the floor.

Then, just as the tide of silver and metal swept over her fully, something else woke up. Whether from the speakers in her helmet or from inside her own head, Eva heard the sound of a familiar voice.

"You know, I was male for some time without having a penis."

As simply as that, the urgency and intensity she'd been struggling with fell away. Even though the quiet buzzing of servos and the sensation of her still-slick cock pressing up against the wet suit fabric were still distracting, she was able to put that all to one side as she once again stood.

"True, but I always preferred to imagine you with one."

There was a pause as John considered both her answer and the additional information he now knew that surrounded it. "Hm", he replied. "I was not aware that you were that horny."

He swept her hand outwards, and the console lit up at her gesture. Then, after another pause, he added. "I did not know it was possible to be *this* horny."

Eva smiled, enjoying the mental kick she got from him as she casually groped her own butt. "Well, get used to it."

"Er, quite."