Big Girls Don’t Cry

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Synopsis: a man creates a synthetic human and fights the moral battle for its freedom in the year 2050.

It was a cold, dreary morning outside of the warehouse. There wasn’t much going on that day, every now and then a car would whizz by, piercing the silence with the woosh of its path. A man lived in a house to the west of that warehouse, he being James Stratlinger. He was a bit of a local legend, as in that warehouse he had developed a cure for a plague that gripped the world some thirty years before. People had often wondered what happened today in that warehouse, as he hadn’t come to town in almost 5 years.

Some people got worried enough to actually go and knock on his door. No response, but one woman said she heard the faint noise of a gas compressor last year. The amateur satellite club even flew one of their rigs over his property, but all they could see was a quaint domicile, a steel-roof warehouse, a medium-sized crop field, and a cooling tower. Of course, the local power company had suspected Mr. Stratlinger of trying to generate his own power, which was against the law for some as-to-be -known reason. Even they tried to knock on his door. At least they heard something, a harsh and loud "Nah" thundered through the hallways and out through the screen door. Seeing that something was going on that wasn’t supposed to be going on, the sheriff, Mr. Hoffman, went for his own adventure of investigation.

Now, Mike was a no-nonsense guy, and he would stand there and knock on that door till the sun set. Of course, that kind of determination would eventually make that door open up. On that crisp morning, Mike went up and, through the screen door, yelled "Mr. Stratlinger? I need to speak to you!" His voice roared through the valley, of course nobody was around to actually hear it. After about ten long minutes or so, James made his presence known. The sheriff had described him as a tall man, not fat or thin, with his disarra- -y of gray hair on his head. He was wearing the attire of a farmer, of course nobody had done any manual farming in almost twenty years. So, the sheriff flat-out asked, "Mr. Stratlinger, nobody’s seen you in five years. We got rather worried about you, and we wanted to check on you."

"Well, officer, did Annie ever get on the city c

cil?"a change that nobody expected, James replied with "Yeah, I’ve been quite busy around these parts for a while. Why don’t you come on in, it’s rather cold outside." Just like that, the sheriff was sitting in the living room of James’s house. Nobody had been in there in seven years, and when I mean nobody, I mean not even a mouse. So, the two conversed for a minute about the local happenings.

"Well, yes, eventually. It took her a few years, yes, but she got it!"

"What about Northern Pine? Did they ever lay out those fiber cables out by the highway?"

"Nope. They’ve been saying they’d do that for a decade now, and nothing’s come of it."

As the two carried on their conversation, the dust in the room became quite apparent to the sheriff. The room looked like it hadn’t been used in a decade. On the coffee table rested a book, with the interesting name of "HS Systems - Network Operations Manual."

Now, the sheriff wasn’t exactly a technical man, but he did have common sense. He figured that maybe James went to college, but not many people from around these parts even finished high school, even today. In the corner sat a table, upon the table rested an old, rather dusty terminal, connected to an unknown machine. Maybe that’s what was in that warehouse, a big computer of some sorts. Well, the two carried on their conversation.

I had originally composed this story shortly after starting my first undergrad semester of college; it contains a time capsule of my thoughts at the time, personal growth, and what I would eventually become.

"James, if you don't mind me asking, where do you get your food and water?"

"Ahh, don't worry about that. I grow everything, and I pump my water right out of the ground. I filter it, of course."

Then, in the flash of an eye, boom. The window shattered the likes of which I've never seen. Splat. All over the couch. The sheriff turned to look at the missing window, and saw nothing. Not a sight to see in the entire clearing. In a bit of a haste the sheriff ran for cover behind the rocking chair.

What had just happened?

James had been murdered. There wasn't a flying chance he would live, his head missing half of its volume now. After about half an hour of frantic realization that neither the sheriff's phone nor radio would work, Mike went looking for an answer to what just happened. He looked around on James's dead body and came up with a yellow door access card. It read "HYPERION SYSTEMS" on it. The sheriff wondered for a minute.

"Hmm, Hyperion Systems. Haven't heard of them at all!"

Without looking for anything else, the sheriff walked out the front door of the house and over to the warehouse. Over to the door he went, and he tried out his newfound door card. Well, I'd be lying if I said it didn't work, because of course it did. As the sheriff trotted into the warehouse, he walked past some strange stuff. The first thing he saw as he entered was some kind of black stone obelisk, with green glowing stripes around it. It looked like nothing he'd ever seen. As he marched forward, he saw some kind of huge purple crystal in a storage cabinet.

He went over to touch it, and when he laid his hand on it, he immediately fell back onto the floor. He took out his phone to take a picture of this mysterious mineral, but it was dead. No power on it at all. He looked up towards the ceiling. Hanging from the roof supports was some kind of large antenna object, a sign reading "Hyperion Wireless Power Quantum Delivery System" hanging from it.

"Well, I suppose that's why nothing here works, then."

As he ventured on throughout the maze of rooms in the warehouse, he encountered some kind of large tank. It was just big enough for him to walk into, but he became disturbed and quickly jumped out. A few seconds later, a pale blue three-dimensional object appeared. It looked exactly like him. Terrified, the sheriff bolted out of that room and slammed the door shut.

Being a set of double doors, the sheriff got a copper pipe and used it to secure the door in case anything, probably himself, came to pursue him. Terrified and confused by what he had just saw, he thought to himself. "What in the world was that? Was it going to steal my soul?" He thought back to a legend he heard from his parents some fifty years ago. "Indians thought cameras would steal their soul." Either way, the sheriff had to find the murderer. He trotted on, until he came to the end of the hall.

On the left was a room labelled "COPY ROOM" and on the right was a room labelled "FAB ROOM." In front of him was "COMPUTER ROOM." He figured he'd venture in there first. He opened the door, and he felt the heat and noise. As he walked in, a printer to his left started up and spat out a few feet of paper. Now, you'd have to believe me that the old printer James had in that room was the loudest sound you'd ever hear. Absolutely ear-splitting. After getting terrified for a brief moment, the sheriff took to reading the printout.

Nothing much, most of it he couldn't understand. Something about network links being established to a place called Partial. The line read "ACTIVATING LINK PRVAX TCPNJE LINE=0000" or something like that. The sheriff wasn't a computer man, so he didn't half know what that meant.

I knew what that meant, I used to be a computer operator in the 80s.

The sheriff continued his look around the room, and there was a very large computer comprised of several fridge-sized boxes spanning from floor to ceiling. There were a few tables, upon them several terminals. He looked around some more, but he could hardly see for all the noise he was hearing. Tired of almost going deaf, he left the room. He figured he would go into the "COPY ROOM" now. He figured, "well, it's just a photocopier I suppose."

He entered, and there was a machine that looked like an MRI machine, but it was missing some parts and this one was much larger. There was a chair situated in front of the machine, and it appeared that this machine was some kind of neurology apparatus. The sheriff was about ready for a break, so he figured he would take a seat. It wasn't too noisy in this room, just the noise of some cooling fans on the machine. He took a seat in the chair. As he rested, he picked up a printout and had a read.

"Hyperion Systems NeuroMap-II. A way to live longer. A chance to live forever.

It hurts about as much as getting your picture taken! Come see a demo session at 541 Rakesh St, Partali City, Partali!"

The sheriff had no clue what he'd just laid his eyes on. What was a NeuroMap? It looked much like the machine he was sitting in front of, and that name. Partali. Where was that? The sheriff pondered for a minute, and figured it was in Asia. Sure sounded like it. As he glared at the image on the paper, he heard some kind of computerized voice say "Duplication complete." Again, but at a much lower volume, he heard the printer fire up. Not having anything else to do, he went back into the computer room and tore off the paper. He stood there and actually read it. There it was, he couldn't believe it. There it was, his name and a description of his appearance. A list of every disease he'd ever had, and an almost one-to-one image of him.

He, terrified, looked around and made the sudden realization that the machine he was sitting at actually just made a digital copy of him. He busted out of the room, and took a look around. "FAB ROOM" it was. He slammed the door open, and it was another one of those machines. This time, there was a full color, perfect size, and perfect detail hologram being drawn on it. There was a terminal sitting by the machine on a table, and it read "Missing materials: Carbon (76 LB), Oxygen (54 LB), Hydrogen (21 LB)."

It finally clicked in the sheriff's head. He was about to get cloned. Phew, he thought, as the machine was out of resources. So, he wouldn't have to meet himself. He figured he would go back to his car to drive back to town, maybe to get the city police to come back with him. As he was walking down the hall, he noticed a closed door to another room labeled "TRANS ROOM." He, as you could imagine, couldn't help but go in. As he went in, some kind of automatic locking mechanism shut the door behind him and a barrier came down. A sign that read "FT IN OPERATION - DO NOT ENTER OR EXIT" dropped down and lit up. The sheriff turned around, and he saw some kind of apparatus that was round, and had a variety of super bright channels around it. A tinted glass window dropped from the floor in front of him, blocking his way to the machine.

A display flickered to life and read *"TARGET DESTINATION: CONTINENTAL HOTEL - PARTALI."* The sheriff realized what he had gotten himself into—he might not make it back from this one! A very bright blue light appeared in a ring around an empty space in the middle of the machine. The tinted glass began to glow. The sheriff smelt the harsh smell of ozone. A bright flash of light, a loud bang, and a weird ripple effect flew through the room. The glass raised, and there in the machine was some kind of three-dimensional orb that had the image of a hotel lobby visible on it.

He knew exactly what it was. It was literally a portal. He thought how this could be possible, then he realized that James hadn't left the house in five years. He guessed this was what he was working on all of those years.

The door to the room was locked tight. The walls, floor, and ceiling were made of thick metal. The only way out of this was forward. In a terrified last-ditch effort, the sheriff walked through the portal.

Well, he didn't die at all, but here was in an empty hotel he thought was somewhere in Asia. He walked down a hallway and turned around to look at the machine. HYP. SYSTEMS FASTTRAVEL STATION is what it read. Well, the sheriff supposed he had just fast travelled somewhere in Asia. He turned back around, and walked into the hotel lobby. It must have been late at night, and he remembered that time on the other side of the world was opposite. The sheriff wandered to the front door, which was tinted and couldn't be seen out of, and waited for it to open. As the outside door opened, he saw something the likes of which he thought was only in movies.

The sun, or what he thought was a sun, was setting. The sky was dark purple on the horizon, and the sky above him was black. He could breathe just fine, so he didn't believe it at first. He looked behind him and saw the surface of another object in the sky. It was large, round, and full of craters. He remembered from his time in school that this object looked kind of like another planet. It then dawned on him. The sheriff wasn't on Earth anymore.

The other planet in the sky. The purple sunset. The objects flying through the sky. The blue plants growing out of the ground.

In the background, he saw a massive cityscape. Was this Partali? Was this the place he read about earlier? He figured it was, so he started walking. None of the electronic devices he'd bought with him had much battery left. As he walked down the concourse paved with shimmering bricks, he realized that it looked like it was made of the same material that large purple crystal was made of. He looked at the businesses around him. All the signs were in English, thank goodness. There was a "Taste of Earth Fine Dining", "Fenz Quantum Supply", "Hyperion Systems" (one that was familiar to him), "QuadOptimum Space Company", "BC's Computers", "Galactic Business Systems", "Arcturus Steakhouse", and a "Rigel Brothers SC Dealership".

He figured he'd go into that restaurant, and see what they had. He walked in, and he saw something quite strange. There were people, normal people mind you, and there were people who had strange things like green hair, red eyes, and gray skin. He also saw something even stranger, people that looked like a cross between a young girl and a cat. They had the normal height you'd expect, and they had hair, but what made them stand out to him was the fact that they had feline ears and a large bushy tail. He heard some talking, they sounded like normal people. They spoke English, albeit with an eastern accent. He saw a group of people go to the checkout counter, presumably to pay for their dinner, and the cashier said "five people, five hunkered credits. Here you go."

The cashier extended some kind of device to the man who was at the counter, his family standing behind him. The man put his finger on this device, and the cashier said "thank you, have a good night!" Mike then realized that this place had done away with currency. There and then, one of these cat-human hybrids came up to him. It was clearly a man, with a nice suit. What stood out more was the man's hairstyle. He had those cat ears, and they were clearly affixed to his head and were actually his ears. He had a facial hairstyle the sheriff could only describe as a mane, and the man spoke with a deep voice. "Hi sir, for here or to go?"

The sheriff clobbered over his words and stumbled out "Uhh, for here I guess." Then, the feline-man started walking over to an empty table and the sheriff followed. He sat down at a table and a menu appeared on the surface of it. They had familiar foods, things you'd expect at say a McDonalds, but a bit fancier. The sheriff ordered a hamburger, and the waiter-cat asked if he wanted it real or synthetic. Not knowing what the question meant, the sheriff replied with "Either is fine." He looked at the prices for the food, 50 credits for a hamburger. He didn't have any credits at all.

He interrupted the waiter with "hey, I don't have any credits. I'm actually kind of new here, so could I cancel my order?" The waiter replied with "Well, if you're new here you automatically get 50,000 credits when you try to pay. The government set aside money for new people, since we've had a lot of new citizens lately." The sheriff replied with an OK, and realized that he just got free money somehow.

When the food finally arrived and he had finished eating, he went by the restroom. It was about what you'd expect from any other public restroom, but beside the hand dryer was an Augmentation Charging Station and a recessed slot for a hand. He put his hand in there, and it beeped at him. A man that had just finished drying his hands told the sheriff "you sure are lucky to not have to put up with those augs. Those things are stupid unreliable. Might as well cut my arm off, it'd be about the same." Mike then noticed that the man's right arm had some kind of blue metal components on the side of it, and that it just fell to his side when he released it with the other hand; the sheriff realized that this was the augmentation the machine was meant to charge.

Seeing that the sheriff was done here, he headed back out to the street. There wasn't anyone else around, well, except for one. Just as he thought he would go back to the hotel and probably spend the night, a group of thugs ran up to him and shouted "Give me your print, old cowboy man!" The sheriff, absolutely terrified, asked "What the heck is a print?!" to which one of the thugs pulled out a gun and threatened to shoot him if he didn't give up his "print."

Right there and then, some kind of large, blue, glowing fist thing burst from the ground and grasped the thug holding the gun. The others scattered like bugs in the light. A family of cat-people ran past, filming the situation with their phones. The fist retracted to the ground, and the robber man bolted. He was gone in an instant. The sheriff sat on the ground, looking up at the sky, trying to comprehend what he had just seen. Then, a woman of average proportions, but quite muscular for some reason, approached the sheriff and helped him up.

Now, this person is none like any Earth-dweller had ever seen. She looked like someone from India, but she had blue eyes. Her hair was predominately black, except for the frayed ends of her ponytail, which were blue. Along her arm and around her chest (she wore a leather jacket open, wearing half of a shirt underneath it that exposed the lower half of her chest) was a pattern of glowing blue filamentous shapes. They spanned her, went up even to her neck. They were about as bright as a candle, and they experienced changes of brightness over time. She helped the sheriff get off of the ground, and she spoke with an Indian accent.

"You clearly aren't from around here. Look, love, never walk the streets at night unless you're a hybrid." The sheriff responded with "no... what you did. How did you do that?" The woman responded with "Well, I suppose it wouldn't hurt if I told you the truth. Do you know a James by any chance?"

The sheriff realized she was talking about the man that he was sent to investigate.

"Yeah, I do. Well, I did because he's dead now."

"Oh, so you actually saw him?! Don't worry about him being dead. There are at least 50 copies of him walking around. As a matter of fact, I am one of his creations. I am the first non-clone artificial human."

Mike was bewildered by that statement, was the James that died a clone? And who was this woman?!

He asked her, "so, were you made in one of those people-maker machines?"

"Yes, I was. Five years ago. When I came out, I was 24, and here I am today. Now, I'm a bit of a local legend. When James made me, he added a variety of augmentations, one of which is a remote quantum manipulation implant. That's how I was able to psionically devastate those bandits."

"Wow. You are a man-made... god?"

"I suppose so. I am considered 99th percentile in intelligence, fitness, I mean look at these arms, and of course, fame somehow. Ever since I started taking action against those gangs, I have been known as the Tiger of Partali. Come on, let's go somewhere safe."

Just like that, the two were walking to a shed beside the hotel. As the two entered the shed, the mysterious woman waved her hand over some kind of wall-mounted sensor, just above the elevator button. Ding. The elevator came up and the door opened. The sheriff had made the connection that a good bit of Earth technology had made its way to this place somehow. As the two descended into the depths, Mike asked the woman a few questions. The elevator descended at the slowest pace you could imagine, so he figured he'd pass the time.

"So, why are you glowing blue again?"

"Well, I presume you saw the iridium-nanostructure crystals at James's old place?"

"Did they look purple?"

"Yep. So, basically, James figured out a few years ago that you could use that material to do all sorts of magical things. Augment people to insane power levels, open portals to places you only had the light from, and make things repair themselves. It is the founding ingredient in something we call 'structure gel.'"

"Structure gel? Made of that purple crystal stuff?"

"Yeah. It's a strange bunch, I know, but you have to believe me on this one. You hit iridium-nanostructure deposits with X-Rays, and it turns into a blue goo and you can apply it to surfaces. Once it's on whatever, you can hit it with various different frequencies of photons to turn it into the material of your choosing. So, basically, you can make anything out of structure gel. It experiences some kind of quantum phenomenon that literally makes it change what it is, without any huge outbursts of energy."

"That's... incredible. I assume you're made of it?"

"Exactly, sir. I was never a real person, I was constructed atom by atom by structure gel. As such, well, have you ever read Frankenstein?"

"How do you know about that book?!"

"Almost everyone on Partali's read it. So, you know the monster? Yeah, that's me. As strange as it sounds. I am a mis-matched arrangement of parts from both genders, for instance, I have male arm muscles, abdominal muscles, back muscles, and leg muscles. Everything else is female. You're probably wondering about this blue glowing mess on me, well, that's structure gel. When James first released me, from this very lab we are approaching, a UV flashtube used to harden resin went off, and some of the non-cured structure gel on my arm went from cholesterol to phosphor. Just so happens to be the same color as my psionic projections I can summon."

"Psionic projections? I thought that was just in the movies. Oh, wait, that hand thing. Is that one?"

"Sure is. I actually figured that one out on my own. Structure gel has a bit of a propensity to quantum-entangle with matter nearby, and since my entire nervous system is made of the stuff, I can remotely manipulate the air to ionize, and densify together to be somewhat solid. Therefore, I am quite deadly in a fight."

"Yeah, I saw. Was that your first fight? Don't worry, I won't arrest you!"

"Arrest me? Like one of those old-time police officers?"

"Old-time?"

"We haven't had cops in decades, I've been told. I figured I would fill their shoes and do my best to keep the gangs at bay."

"Is there a military?"

"No, what's that?"

"I take that as a no."

"Okay. Alright, back to you. Has anyone told you that you look like someone straight out of a sci-fi video game?"

"Haven't heard that one before. Either way, this slow elevator is almost at its stop."

And just like that, the two were walking through the threshold of somewhere absolutely cutting-edge. All around it looked like a computer center out of the 1980s crossed with a facility owned by the Space Force. High tech every- where. The sheriff, being an older man, finally asked the woman if computers had progressed since the 80s.

"What do you mean, the 80s? The computer here is absolutely cutting-edge! It can handle 1000 users and has 32 megabytes of memory! Absolutely massive!"

"32 megabytes? That sounds pathetically small. My phone has 8 gigabytes!"

"Your what?"

The sheriff reached into his pocket and took out his phone. For some reason, it worked when he turned it on. The screen flickered to life, and the logo of the fruit we all know and use to keep the doctor away appeared. A few seconds later, the device was ready to go. He showed the woman the features of the device over the course of five minutes or so, and the woman was clearly amazed.

"Well, do you want to check out our new computer?"

The sheriff was rather perplexed by this question. One computer? There were monitors and keyboards on every desk. Of course, he thought they were terminals and they were. He remembered seeing them at the library in the 1990s. It then clicked that she was talking about some kind of mainframe.

"Yeah, sure. Where is it?"

"Right down this hallway."

As the two entered the machine room, he saw a massive room full of white and blue computer equipment cabinets. He looked around, and saw a corner filled with those old-style printers. He looked and saw a shelf full of small boxes adorned with blinking lights all over them, those of which gave off some kind of beeping tones every now and then. He turned around, and saw someone sitting in the chair. He thought he looked familiar, until the woman said,

"Come talk to this man. He's the one that created me, and he's the one that runs this computer."

Mike approached the man, typing away on one of those terminals. He turned around, and noticed who it was. It was James.

"Are you James by any chance?" the sheriff bluntly asked.

"Yep. You must be the sheriff. I'm sorry you had to see my counterpart die in such a gruesome way. The United States military was onto him, and they sniped him right through the living room window! I saw the whole ordeal on the security camera system, as I've got several network links quantum-entangled back to Earth. Yeah, you're also probably wondering, I'm the original. I duplicated myself so I would have at least some presence on Earth, but I screwed up the neural copy and my clone was too anxious to leave the house. That was five years ago, so here I am. Oh yeah, I did vote for you, sir."

"Wow. I don't know what to say. And you are here, and alive!"

"Yep. You're probably wondering how exactly I got here. Well, I don't suppose it would hurt if I told you. Well, I was taking a vacation out West and I was driving through Nevada when I picked up some kind of gravity fluctuations."

The sheriff interrupted James, with "Yeah, let me guess. You were at Area 51."

"Yup. And of course I went. Just outside the secure perimeter, there was a quarry and they were digging up some kind of purple minerals. It was rather late at night, and there wasn't anybody around, so you can guess what I did, I got me a sample. That very sample is still sitting in my old home. To be as big as me, it is deceptively lightweight. So, one day, I was testing out this new material's reactions to light, and noticed that the light from the light bulb on my desk was reflected and shined back to where it came from when it hit the mineral. I then realized that this material was interacting with photons to force their trajectory to change back to their origin."

"Keep going, I understand."

"So, I got a vacuum chamber and blasted the mineral with electrons. Sure enough, against all willpower of the electromagnet ic force, they reflected and struck the phosphor-coated cathode. That was the most remarkable thing. Of course, I realized something even crazier when I put up a glass barrier. This mineral was making matter pass through solid matter to reach its trajectory. I still have no flying clue how that exactly works. Then again, I am not a quantum physicist by any means."

"So, you used this mineral to create a portal to this planet?"

"Exactly right. I was dialing in my telescope, when I put a piece of this material under the eyepiece so that photons from this planet would strike it. Apparently the time gap of 41 lightyears didn't matter to this material. I took out my handgun, and fired a bullet at it. Gone. Disappeared without a trace. I

suppose someone on this planet eventually found a .44 bullet somewhere."

"How did you fit yourself through this?"

"Well, it was only a matter of storing photons in a gravity trap, which you can make by immersing this mineral in some kind of thick liquid, and then releasing them when you were ready to go somewhere. Then, use a gravity well to funnel down the object of your choice to the spot where the crystal is. Remember, space-time is flexible and you can funnel space down to the head of a needle and fit perfectly in it. Now, it does make light look weird, and it looks like some kind of black hole gravitational lensing effect."

"Well I don't know what you mean on that last part, but everything makes sense for the most part even to an old guy like me."

"Now that you understand my fast-travel technology, I might as well tell you about my adventures making artificial people and hybrids. Now, you might not know this about me, but when I was but a teenager, I had a friend who really wanted to see what he called 'catgirls' in real life. After tons of long nights debating their rights, I eventually started on a genetic modification project. I isolated some structural genes from felines and spliced them into the human genome. After a rather difficult implantation of a fertilized human egg into my loving wife, she had the first cat-human hybrid ever. Rinse and repeat about fifteen times, and you've got a sizeable population of genetically distinct cat-human hybrids of both genders. That original population featured different breeds so-to-speak. Mainly consisted of different skin colors, eye colors, and hair types. Some tails had bushy hair, some had short hair. Some ears had hair in them, some didn't. Now, I'm 68 and getting old, but raising my children was the best time of my life."

"I see, yeah, I saw a few outside."

"Yeah, we moved here some 45 years ago and I let them run loose. They had offspring of their own, and now there are some 400 catgirls and some 500 catboys. Not too sure about that ratio, but that's just what I've counted. It was a fun project."

"I hate to cut you off, but how does this planet have people on it?"

"Few million."

"Hmm... makes sense."

"Yeah, so this place is pretty cool. A bit behind the times on tech though, this new mainframe set us back a few million credits and isn't anything compared to your phone but it's the standard around here. I guess, if it ain't broke, don't fix it."

"Yeah, seemed kind of old to me."

"For sure, definitely behind the power curve. Well, I suppose I can tell you about her, and how I made her. Well, it all started in 2021. They sent us home from college because of a pandemic, so I got busy on trying to improve humanity. Keep in mind, I hadn't discovered the iridium-nanoscale material yet and much less its strange quantum properties. Some 10 years later when I actually got that first sample, I started blasting chunks of it with different wavelengths of light in the UV and X-Ray department. After about five minutes or so of baking in the light, it became something else. Seriously. This purple mineral had managed to transform itself into copper, silicon, zinc, lead, whatever. After doing some spectrometery at a minerals analysis company's spectrometer, I managed to produce a table of input wavelength and output element. After spending a few years working on a molecular simulation program, I constructed an apparatus that had all 50 wavelength photon emitters mounted on a movable gantry, the photons from which were focused down to a minuscule point of about an atom wide. It was about as difficult as it sounded. After taking the output from the simulator and using it to drive my nanofabricator, I made a few objects. I fabricated a lot of old computer parts, to get my old 390 back into operation after I blew it out running that simulator program. After I got that back into action, and getting the simulator program running on it again, I took on my biggest challenge yet. Sure, I've made hybrids, but a whole person as an adult? Yeah, it was a daunting task indeed. Either way, I took it on and told myself it would work. I set the machine to run, and I set out on a vacation to New York. As I got back a week later, the machine was on the last few layers of the top of her head. When I finally got back up, she was 'done' so-to-speak. Now, she wasn't born dumb or naked by any means, as a matter of fact, she looks the same now as she did when she walked out of the fabricator machine. So, there she is, 'in the flesh' as the world's first synthetic and augmented human."

"Also, she mentioned that she was made of structure gel."

"Yeah, so that's an intermediary in the process. You can't just leave purple dust sitting on a table and blast it with X-Rays and get a person. You have to liquify it first through a long and drawn-out process. I won't go through since it is getting boring enough, and actually you need to get back to the surface. Something's going on up there."

And just like that, the three bolted back to the elevator. As the elevator slowly rose, the lady ripped the panel off and bypassed the manual operation keyswitch and actually got the motor running at four times its normal speed. The three flew up the elevator shaft and sprang out the door. Now, I didn't hardly believe what happened myself to be honest. There they were, the good old U S of A military was trying to break into the Hyperion Systems building on the opposite side of the concourse. Seeing that they mustn't be here, the fiery woman took to the armed men. She went over to them, and apparently they took that as some sign of aggression. Boy, did those men not know what they were getting into. And just like that, the woman grasped them with her holographic hands, and... well... let's just say they were converted to charcoal. None of those men survived at all.

The sheriff was astounded, as you could expect. He asked the woman, "Why on Earth did you do that?"

"They're after me. At least one of James's associates is an Earthly spy that managed to figure out how to use the fast-travel apparatus. Wait, you! What are you doing here, who sent you!?"

"No, it isn't that! I was genuinely concerned about the man, maybe he was needing food or something!"

"Well, my telepathic psi mod indicates that you're telling the truth. Don't worry, I wouldn't hurt an innocent person like you. So, let's get back to Earth. If they send more, we have to stop them."

The three went back into the hotel, and over to the fast-travel machine. It read "PARTALI - CONTINENTAL HOTEL" and alternated with "HYPERION SYSTEMS - FAST TRAVEL STATION" in bright green text. James pushed a few buttons on a keypad, and the portal back to the lab opened. After a short step of a few lightyears, they were back on Earth. Now, I should probably mention that the woman had never seen Earth in reality. As they bolted out the warehouse door, the trio saw a few camo-painted trucks drive up. Discontent on having all of this great research fall to the hands of a now very corrupt government, James blasted back into the warehouse and did something. When he came back, and the sheriff and the woman were hiding behind a concrete retaining wall,

James mentioned that the place was "rigged to blow at the drop of a hat." The sheriff was clearly mortified, that James would just destroy so much hard work just because the military wanted to to have a word with him. We had a brief conversation, and decided that if things went south that she would run to town, equip a disguise, and lay low for a while. The sheriff would just go on with his life, and not speak a word with it.

James though? He just got up from behind the retaining wall and took a walk over to the military vehicles parked outside his house. James had slipped the detonator in his pocket as he he approached. For some reason, none of the soldiers were armed at all. As James approached the uniformed men, a presumably high-ranking officer approached and spoke to him. Apparently, in 2050, the military could arrest people somehow.

They promptly went to hand-cuff James, to which he jerked back, hollered at the sheriff and the woman to make a run for it, and he did the unthinkable. He hit the button for the remote detonator, and boom. The whole facility went up to the sky and exploded in a disarray of parts. Of course, the sheriff and woman had retreated to a safe distance just before James hit the key.

The sheriff then saw James, as he was running from the colonel, pull out his handgun and kill himself. In the heat of the moment, he screamed "you won't have a chance!"

Appalled by what he had just seen, he turned to the woman and made the realization that James had clones of himself ready to replace him. The woman gave some wise words of wisdom to the sheriff.

"You know, these days, people really do live forever. That is James's second death in a day. Kind of high if you ask me! Hah, don't feel sad about it now that all of this work is gone. Let's get out of here quick though. Here, grab my hand."

As the two interlocked fingers, the sheriff described to me what he could only tell was a black and gray mixing haze as he felt the ground disappear beneath his feet. A few seconds later, and the two were standing outside of the sheriff's house.

"*How* did you do that, ma'am?"

"Quantum entanglement and tunnelling, remember. I'm pretty sure this is your house, right?"

"Yeah. Want to come in? It's getting rather dark."

"Sure."

The two entered, and she sat down in the dining room. The two entered into a rather deep conversation.

She started out with "You know, Mark, some things just aren't meant to be. Are you familiar with the concept of an anti-goal, something you try so hard to do only to realize you will never do it? Well, I've got a good anti-goal. Existing. I just can't walk the face of this universe and be the person I am. Sure, I'm in top physical shape, perfect mental shape, but I just can't bring myself to exist. I feel as if I'm just not supposed to be here. I remember when James was talking about his friend who wanted catgirls, how he always said he wanted them as servants and that James wouldn't create a race of slaves. I think that he took it a bit too far when he created me. He was completely hands-off in my creation, and I entered this world as just a person, not a true human being."

"Hmm, okay, keep going."

"Yeah, I am here but I have no goals in life. Only anti-goals that I know I can't fulfill. So, it's time to bid farewell to this universe. James made his clones with the limit that they couldn't create copies of themselves or create other synthetics or genetically engineered life, so I know I won't be a plague on the world."

"No, you can't just do this... I barely even know you!"

"I know. That's how it should be. So, I guess it's time to say goodbye."

The two walked out and stood on the front porch as the sun set off in the distance.

"Goodbye, unknown lady."

"Goodbye, Mark. Keep up the fine work. See you."

And just like that, she fell to the ground as a pile of dust. There was at least one remaining object, a cylindrical thing with two chain segments around the circumference and a crystal segment at the top and bottom. The sheriff picked it up, and sure enough, it disintegrated too. She was gone, and every earthly trace of that foreign world was gone.

Now, I don't think that the sheriff took too kindly to that day. When he recalled to me the story of that day some thirty years later, I was keen to observe on every detail. Yes, it was about as true as it got, everything made perfect sense. Now, I was glad I met the sheriff at that gas station that day, because that next year, he passed away at the age of 93. I sometimes wonder about Partali, that far-off world and their outdated everything, and if the government had figured out the properties of iridium-nanos cale deposit like James had that one time. From what I've heard, they haven't, thank goodness.

I don't plan on them ever finding out, as I paid some insurgents to blow up the crystal mine a few years ago. I never asked that woman what her name was. How would I know, why would I care. Either way, that's what happened on that cold March morning.

Author's note:

Yes, I know this will never happen. However, I outline a few distinct possibilities in this short story and discuss their relevance to this story and future stories like this.

The first is one of technological progression. Partali is described as being cutting-edge and 40 years behind current technological advancements. If there are other simultaneous earths out there, this could probably be the case.

The second is of the hybrids. I fully believe that humanity will create a sub-species of human-animal hybrids that will be treated like slaves and sold as such. While I don't want this to happen, I believe that it, unfortunately, will someday. The fourth is the dilemma of the woman (who is actually based on a video game character, all of the characters are in this story) and her search for a reason to live. She was bought into the world in a "lassiez-faire" style, just entering the world cold-turkey and not having a real goalset in life to work towards. While such a thing probably wouldn't happen in real life, this reaction would probably be common if it did.

The third is the "government conspiracy" of the military sending in spies to work for James and then trying to steal the technology for themselves. Keep in mind, I swapped the US military for an adverserial military force, one that makes due with espionage all of the time.

The fourth is the insurgency destroying the supply of INS material, so that these events couldn't possibly happen again. I could have set up a sequel, but chose not to!

The fifth and final motif I wrote in was that of societal pressure to not be "that guy" that was trying to take over the world. While James wasn't one to take over the world, he found himself in a position that he could do so with ease. Instead, he chose to bridge two worlds, although his dreams of humanity being an interplanetary species was immediately foiled by a corrupt government. This highlights a big issue, as with the current state of things, humanity will not survive an alien invasion in the slightest. We will be too busy arguing with each other to really care, which will result in our immediate takeover.

Of course, I believe that if there were really aliens out there, they would not make their presence known somehow and just sit there and float around in space.

Well, that about does it. Until next story!

Author's note, January 2026:

I have just re-read this story as I reformatted it for publishing; I have to say, this was a great read (and I know I had a *ton* of fun writing it back in 2020! I had written this as a bit of a monographical composition consisting of a ton of stories I had read up to that point; Deus Ex, Borderlands, System Shock... it's all here!

When I wrote this story, I was undergoing a pretty major change in my personal life. My parents didn't think I was capable of anything (comes with that whole post-9/11 stranger danger thing certain parents fell into), but it was ultimately my dad that convinced me to go to a college that was not only faraway, but academically rigorous. When I got down there, I was thrown right into a self-discovery process; it would take about three years for that ordeal to run its course.

When I look back onto this story, I can see my own self-insert stick out to me; the character who gives the most exposition (Amara, i.e. the magic girl) was the stand-in for me. Note that when I wrote this, I was... to put it in eloquent terms, *not who I am today* (those who know know; one of the room names in James's place is even very on-the-nose about it). Upon proofreading this story for reformatting (and to shoot out one tiny plot hole), I find that Amara is not only very transfem-coded, but is also in the process of overcoming some kind of identity issue—unlike most stories, Aradia had yet to fully accept herself for who she was, and wallowed around in an imperfect body she was powerless to enhance.

I find stories like this (that is, stories synthesized from my favorite "literary corpus texts" and video games) to be not only great moments of self-reflection, but great things to read aloud to my friends! Back in 2020 when I wrote this, I didn't really have any friends per se; I would not read this story to my friends for nearly 6 years after its original composition.