

I'd been struggling with insomnia for the last few years, so it was no huge surprise to find myself waking up in the middle of the night. An unexpected light in my eyes was more than enough to do it, even if the ugly orange glow wasn't especially bright.

Then I realized I was lying face down in bed. What the hell?

I sat up slowly, blinking and rubbing my eyes, and things got even more confusing. It didn't matter if my eyes were open or shut, or which way I faced. The directionless glow still filled my vision, while somehow failing to illuminate the room.

The glow flickered, turning green and then purple for a moment before finally coalescing into a short message written in glowing blue letters:

System calibration in progress. Integrating local paradigms. Stand by.

The text flickered, changing size and brightness while the letters twisted unsettlingly, before stabilizing on something that looked like a perfectly normal computer dialog box. Then a spinning wheel appeared beneath it.

Someone had to be messing with me. I blinked and shook my head, trying to cudgel my brain into operation despite the ungodly hour. What time was it, anyway? The digital clock on the nightstand said 4:37.

A soft sound of protest rose from the naked form curled up next to me. I eyed her suspiciously. Jenny hadn't seemed like the kind of person who would slip hallucinogens in my drink, but despite several months of online friendship this was the first time we'd met in person. It's hard enough to predict what your own family will really do when the chips are down, let alone someone you've barely interacted with in person.

But I'd been a little paranoid about meeting up with half a dozen internet acquaintances in an isolated location, so I'd been on guard all evening. Drugging someone without killing them is a lot harder than Hollywood makes it look, and Jenny hadn't had much of an opportunity to try. It's not often you find a submissive who enjoys being hypnotized as much as she did, and I hadn't wasted the opportunity.

So what the hell was I looking at?

The spinning wheel became a progress bar, which jumped wildly back and forth for a few seconds before morphing into a scrolling checklist.

Identifying local sapients...	done
Assimilating linguistic constructs...	done
Integrating native cultures...	done
Localizing System features...	working

It was still dark outside, the pitch black of a cloudy night out in the country. But there was just enough incidental glow from our various electronic devices to let me find my way around the room. I rose as quietly as I could, and checked the bedroom door.

Still locked. So was the window.

I padded into the bathroom, and the hallucination followed me.

No, that assumption didn't hold up. I've had visual hallucinations a few times in my life, from migraines or bad drug interactions, and they were nothing like this. Malfunctions in your visual centers

can cause all sorts of strange effects, but not a stable, consistent image like this. That was the province of people who are so crazy they've completely lost touch with reality.

But people with mental problems on that level basically never question their own experiences. The fact that I was wondering what was going on implied pretty strongly that I wasn't that kind of crazy.

I tried covering my eyes with my hands. Nope, still there.

I've read that the military has a device that can cause auditory hallucinations at a distance. But visual ones? That was orders of magnitude more difficult. I might just barely believe it if I was strapped into a chair with a bunch of hardware around my head, or maybe if it only appeared when I stood in a certain spot and looked in the right direction. But an image that followed me from room to room without any sign of glitching? That was light years into the realm of science fiction. I'm not sure it was even physically possible without some kind of brain implant. It certainly couldn't be done with any technology that currently exists.

The last item on the checklist was marked done. The message vanished, and a new one replaced it.

### **Welcome to the System**

Earth has recently been discovered by the System, an exotic artifact designed to bring endless adventure and excitement to every corner of reality. Earth's local System services will initialize in 14:37 minutes. Initialization will be disorienting, so please move to a safe location and cease operation of any dangerous equipment.

Personal enhancement services are now online, and all sapient inhabitants of Earth have been provided an initial allotment of personal enhancement resources. Say or think 'Status' to view your current status, and allocate enhancement resources.

### **Warning!**

You are currently within an area designated as a wilderness-themed Adventure Zone. Local non-sapient life forms will rapidly mutate to become more dangerous after System initialization, and may attempt to kill, control, transform or otherwise prey on sapient entities.

The System projects that you will be unable to evacuate the Adventure Zone before initialization. Additional enhancement resources have been allocated to compensate for this increased risk. The System apologizes for any inconvenience.

"Why does this sound like the beginning of one of those system apocalypse novels?" I muttered. To my surprise, I got an answer.

System reconnaissance assets induce memetic contamination of newly discovered civilizations, in an effort to prepare them for the arrival of the System.

A chill ran down my neck. That was an awfully precise response, to a question I had trouble believing anyone would have thought to program an answer to in advance. Was this thing reading my mind?

*You're an AI?* I thought.

Sure enough, it responded.

The System is a tightly constrained artificial intelligence, programmed to expand a paradigm of endless adventure and excitement across all of reality. The System apologizes for the consequences of implementing this paradigm without more extensive preparation.

That wasn't reassuring at all. Especially since I was starting to suspect that this was really happening. Considering the way those stories usually go...

*System, how many people usually die during initialization on a new world?*

System statistics are not available to new users. You have 12:03 minutes to allocate your personal enhancement resources. The System apologizes for the inconvenience.

"Fuck. Status."

I was expecting a character sheet full of numbers, like in a role-playing game. What I got instead was strange enough that it took me a few moments to make sense of it.

A 3D model of my skinny, naked body filled most of the window. A vertical row of buttons next to it reacted to my attention, causing parts of the illustration to turn transparent like an anatomy diagram. I have no idea why I'd want to look at my own muscles, bones, organs or circulatory system, and there were several additional modes that I couldn't make sense of.

Above the model of my head was an odd, abstract swirl of light filled with colored blobs and sparkling motes, and surrounding everything were several layers of colored auras so faint I could barely make them out. Floating around that were various colored bars and bubbles. All of these extraneous elements reacted to my attention, swelling up and revealing further detail when I focused on them. But they didn't make much sense.

"Help," I tried.

A little box appeared at the top right of the screen, with the words 'Help Mode: Labels' inside.

I frowned, and looked back at the display. Now brief labels appeared on the UI elements when I looked at them. But there were still hundreds of things to examine, and time was ticking.

"Show help options," I tried.

That also worked. There was a whole list of options, but it only took a moment to switch the screen to beginner mode and turn on verbose context-sensitive help. That got a lot of the more complex stuff out of the way, and made the screen easier to deal with. A couple of minutes after that I had at least a vague idea of what I was looking at.

"So the System doesn't literally turn reality into a role-playing game, and thank God for that. But it has a million options for modifying people, and it isn't limited to things I'd consider realistic. It looks like one of those auras is a protective barrier that acts like hit points in a game, and another one is a regeneration effect that makes you heal faster. There's a mana system, so apparently there's magic, but humans don't have any by default. The swirly stuff is supposed to represent mental abilities, skills, knowledge and social attributes, so I suppose there must be ways to affect all of those things. System, how long until initialization?"

A countdown timer appeared in the corner of my vision. Eight minutes and counting.

“How do I see those personal enhancement resources?”

A highlight appeared around a cluster of bars at the bottom right of the Status window. The labels that appeared when I focused on them were fairly informative.

#### Enhancement Points

Universal: 12

Mental: 3

Physical: 3

Magical: 3

Skill Imports: 4

It was pretty obvious how enhancement points worked – a little fiddling confirmed that I could spend universal points to improve anything displayed on my Status screen, while the other three types only worked on the specified category of items. There was also a confirmation step before the points were actually spent, so at least the System was trying to be user-friendly.

According to the display, spending one physical point on general muscle enhancement would take me from a bit out of shape to decently fit-looking. Twenty-one enhancement points was apparently quite a lot of improvement. But there were hundreds of obvious options for things I could spend them on.

The help text for Skill Imports gave me a whole new chunk of complexity to grapple with.

#### Skill Imports

Normal skill progression is limited by the mundane physical and cognitive abilities of a host species. Importing a skill transforms it into a magical effect supported by the System, which can then be refined and improved without limit. Skills that are imported before System initialization will receive bonus improvement equivalent to three enhancement points.

A glance at the skill list on my simplified status screen showed several dozen areas where I had enough expertise that the system thought they were worth noting, covering everything from driving a car to anime trivia. Unfortunately I'd never been that into shooting, martial arts or anything else that would do me much good in a fight, so my skills in those areas were pathetically minimal. Guess I'd have to go mage, and take those import bonuses on something else...

Wait. That last bit was a huge boost to imported skills, but only if you were quick enough to get it done before the deadline.

“System, what happens to enhancement resources that aren't spent before initialization?”

All resources above the normal reserve cap will be lost. The default cap is two enhancement points in each category, plus one skill import.

“Fuck!”

Anyone who wasn't awake and working on this right now was going to get screwed over, hard. But the person in this building I trusted most to be on my side in a crisis was still asleep.

I'd gotten to know Jenny reasonably well over the last few months. She was practically a living exemplar of the kinky nerd girl stereotype. Smart, thoughtful, interested in most of the same things I was. An all-around fun person, and surprisingly practical about a lot of things that give most modern women the vapors. I'd been pleasantly surprised when she turned out to be a bit on the cute side as well.

But a steely-eyed survivalist she wasn't. If I woke her up right now it would be half an hour before she got past the denial, confusion and existential horror and managed to focus on the problem. She'd still lose her bonus points, and dealing with her would cost me mine too. I'd just have to do the best I could on my own.

Unless...

She was going to be pissed at me about this. The rest of the group would freak out if she told them, too. But it would probably work, and we'd both have better odds if she came out of this with a decent build.

Besides, once I'd thought of the idea it was too hot to ignore. There's a reason I'd gotten invited to a meetup of erotic hypnosis enthusiasts from across the country.

I imported my Hypnotist skill, and took a quick look at the System's basic breakdown of things I could do with it. Yeah, that looked more like movie villain hypnotism than the real thing. Almost good enough, but not quite. One mental enhancement point bumped the induction speed and suggestion strength up to where it looked like it would work.

I accepted the changes, and hurried back to the bedroom. My first impulse was to shake Jenny awake, but I suddenly realized that was the wrong approach. Instead I laid my hand on the back of her neck, and focused in a way that felt comfortably familiar even though I'd never done it before.

Her slumbering mind stirred, drifting to partial awareness.

"Trance time, Jenny," I said, invoking one of the fading triggers left over from our evening playtime. "Let go of sleep, and slip into trance. Can you hear me, Jenny?"

"Yes," she sighed.

"Good girl. You're becoming more alert now. Relaxed, calm and ready for instructions. Can you see words in front of your eyes, Jenny?"

"Yes." God, I love her breathless trance voice. It was practically begging me to give her kinky orders. But I needed to focus.

"That's good, Jenny. Role play time. You're a character in a system apocalypse story, right at the beginning. The System is going to come online in just a few minutes, and you have to finish your character creation first or you'll lose all your points. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"You're a protagonist now, Jenny. You feel smarter and more decisive than you've ever been before. You can read and understand and make quick decisions, and put off all your worries and confusion until later. When I tell you to wake you'll immediately call up your status screen, ask the System how long you have, and then start working on your build. Are you ready?"

"Ready."

"Remember. Focused and alert, smart and decisive, no time for distractions. Wake!"

Jenny shot upright, the covers falling away as her eyes opened.

"Status," she snapped. "System, how long do I have?"

I reached over to turn on the lamp on the nightstand. Jenny winced, shielding her eyes from the glare, and stared at something I couldn't see. Presumably her status screen.

"What am I looking at here, Tom?"

"It's a stupidly complicated point-buy system. Ask for help options, then set it to basic mode and turn on context-sensitive help. That will get you a more useable UI, and asking the System how to do things seems to work pretty well. You need to pick your skill imports and get down to two enhancement points of each type before the timer runs down. We don't have time to figure it all out or try to plan perfect builds, so just try to grab something useful with your points."

"Got it."

I turned most of my attention back to my own screen while she struggled to get oriented, and went looking for some kind of offensive magic. It looked like there was a spell design system, which was just as complicated as the rest of it. But the help feature happily provided templates for a few dozen basic effects when I asked for them.

Fire missiles seemed like a good choice against animals. I checked the prerequisites for the spell, dropped a point each into getting a mana pool and learning basic mana control, and bought it. Wow, that was a rush. It wasn't just a canned effect with a trigger – there were dozens of ways I could tweak the parameters of the spell for different situations, and I actually understood how it all worked.

I overheard Jenny ask the system for a list of weapon skills, and remembered the need to coordinate.

"I'm going DPS mage," I announced.

"Rogue," she replied. "We should both take stealth. What about weapons?"

"There are knives in the kitchen, and I can improvise spears and maces," I said. I was a decent handyman, and my mechanical engineering skill was one of my highest. Not surprising, since that's what I did for a living. I imported it, and considered the rest of the list.

"Works," Jenny said. "What are we fighting?"

"Mutated plants and animals. We're in a wilderness adventure zone."

"Joy."

I was almost out of time. I imported tactics and leadership to round out my skills, and thank God for twenty years of RPG gaming and an interest in military history. One universal point each for a healing spell, force missiles and a stealth skill. Three more to increase my mana pool, and now I could spam a decent number of attack spells before running out. A physical point to fix my nearsightedness. A point to increase my mana regeneration. Did skills count as mental? Great, one point for a general spell engineering skill, and drop my last excess universal point on more mana regen.

I finished with about twenty seconds to spare, and turned my attention to Jenny. She was focused intently on her status screen, but I could already see the effect of the points she'd spent. Yesterday she'd been a short, slender brunette with a cute face and not the faintest trace of muscle. Now she looked like she'd spent the last decade intensively training in some unholy combination of gymnastics, martial arts and long-distance running. She must have done some kind of general health buff too, because her hair looked like something out of a shampoo commercial and she had that perfect facial symmetry you see in the better models and movie stars. Even in my distraction I had to admit the effect was rather impressive.

She paused, looked at something I couldn't see, and gave a decisive nod. An odd shiver went through her, but nothing visible changed. Learning skills, maybe? Or magic?

Then the timer ticked down to zero, and an extremely strange sensation crawled through my body from my head to my toes. It was like my bones turned to silly putty for a second, while every nerve squirmed around and my muscles went completely limp. I fell over, and just laid there for a moment.

I was just starting to remember how my limbs worked when Jenny suddenly gasped.

“Oh my god! What’s happening? Was that real? Am I dreaming? Ow!”

“Did you actually pinch yourself?” I asked. I guess whatever that was shocked her out of trance.

“It didn’t work,” she said. “This can’t be real. Blue screens don’t just appear in front of your face, telling you that you’re in a dungeon and you’re about to get eaten.”

Indeed, the System had graced us with another announcement message.

### **System Initialization Complete!**

All System services are now operational on Earth. Enjoy your new life of adventure and endless novelty. The System apologizes for any difficulties caused by this complete disruption of your previous existence.

### **Warning**

You are currently in the Deep South Safari adventure zone, in a region scheduled to reach Threat Level 10 within 48 hours. Your current equipment and abilities are only suitable for Threat Level 2 opponents. The System recommends that you evacuate to a safer location as soon as possible.

“As far as I can tell, it’s real,” I began.

“No!” Jenny protested. “This can’t be happening! It’s all a dream. Just a bad dream.”

“Look at yourself, Jenny. Does that look like a dream?”

She sat up, and looked down at her spectacularly toned new body. “What? No! No, that isn’t me! This is impossible.”

I moved up behind her, and wrapped her in my arms. She was shaking, moments away from a complete panic attack.

“Shh, you’re not alone,” I assured her. “We’ll figure things out together.”

“I, but, you... you!” She shouted, twisting in my embrace to glare at me. “Is this some stupid role-play thing? Did you trance me again? You did, didn’t you!”

This was about to go very bad. I could only see one solution that didn’t involve an hour or more of drama, and it might just make things worse in the long run. But the long run wouldn’t matter if we died in the next few hours.

I put a hand on the back of her neck. “Trance time, Jenny.”

The look of shock on her face was priceless, but it only lasted for an instant. Then she went limp, and her eyes slammed shut.

Damn, this was a powerful ability. She went under for me so easily now. It was terribly tempting to work on that until she’d do it on command no matter how much she tried to resist, and then find out what else my new abilities could do.

But she deserved better than that.

"Sink deep into trance, Jenny," I said, trying to project soothing calm. "Deep into your safe bubble of calm and relaxation. Let go of your tension, and fears. It's all drifting away, leaving only the sound of my voice. Are you calm now, Jenny?"

"Yes," she murmured.

"That's good, Jenny. You've had a big shock, but you don't have to handle everything alone. I'm going to help you. You want me to help you, don't you Jenny?"

"Yes. Help me."

"I will, Jenny. Are you really afraid that I'm going evil hypnotist on you?"

"Don't know," she said. "Scared. Nothing makes sense."

"I can imagine. I'm not going to do anything to you that you don't want, Jenny. I remember your boundaries. I'm just going to help you handle things. You want to trust me, don't you Jenny?"

"Y-yes. Trust you."

"That's right, Jenny. You trust me to help you. You know that I like you, and I want to help you and take care of you. Are you ready to let me help you?"

"Yes."

"Good girl. Jenny, I want you to gather up all of the shock and confusion and disbelief that you were feeling. Those things aren't helping you right now, so you need to get rid of them. Just gather them up, and cast them out of your mind. Let them fade away, so they can't bother you anymore. All your shock, fading away, leaving you calm and clear-headed. All your confusion, fading away, leaving you ready to figure things out. All your disbelief, fading away, leaving you ready to deal with whatever happens next. With every breath you take those disruptive feelings fade away, leaving you calmer and more ready to handle things."

I waited a few breaths, giving her a chance to process my instructions.

"How do you feel now, Jenny?" I asked.

"Calm. Accepting. Ready to cope."

"Good girl, Jenny. You're doing well. Now, it's time to accept that the blue screens are real. It isn't just a scenario I made you imagine. I don't know what's going on, but we're just going to have to deal with it. Can you do that, Jenny?"

"I'm scared."

"I know, Jenny. But you can overcome fear, too. Is it easier if you're not alone?"

"Yes."

"Then you can lean on me if you need to, Jenny. Whatever happens, we'll deal with it together. You and me, we're apocalypse partners. Deal?"

A faint smile touched her lips. "Deal."

"That's good, Jenny. Now, I'm going to bring you out of trance soon. When you wake up you'll feel alert and clear-headed, and ready to deal with the strange things that are happening. Be strong, Jenny, and we'll get through this. Ready to wake, on the count of three. Three, rising up from your safe place, ready to face the world. Two, strong and alert, leaving all your fears behind. One, alert and clear-headed. Wake!"

Her eyes snapped open. She blinked a few times, and frowned at me.

"I was about to have a complete panic attack, wasn't I?" She said.

"Yeah. I tranced you to get it under control. You okay with that?"

She considered the question for a moment, and sighed. "I guess. I hate it when I get like that. Just don't make a habit of surprise trancing me, okay?"



“Of course. I can see why you wouldn’t like it.”

She buried her face in my chest, and mumbled something I couldn’t quite make out.

“What was that?”

“Nothing!” She looked up, and I saw she was a bit flushed. “Um, anyway, what were we doing? Shit, this whole business is crazy.”

I chuckled, and gave her a hug. “I’ll say. I woke up to a warning message saying the world was about to be assimilated into this System thing. At first I thought someone had slipped me a roofie or something, and by the time I realized it was real that countdown was under ten minutes. So I, ah, tranced you and told you to focus on doing something smart with your points. Sorry about that, there just wasn’t time to have a conversation.”

She pulled back and punched me in the shoulder. “Jerk. Don’t you dare turn into one of those manipulative asshole doms on me. You’re supposed to ask before you do that.”

“I know, Jenny. I’m sorry, but there wasn’t time to talk about it. Would you have gotten anything done before the timer ran out if I’d just woken you up normally?”

She pouted. “I don’t know. Probably not, but this still isn’t a good trend. How did you trance me so fast, anyway? Last night it took me a long time to go under.”

Real hypnosis isn’t like the way it’s depicted in media. You can’t just wave a watch in someone’s face and make them go under. The subject has to want it to work, and you have to spend some real time and effort getting them into the scene. You’re basically just convincing them to role-play being hypnotized so well that they fool themselves into thinking it’s real.

At least, that’s how it used to be.

“I imported my hypnosis skill,” I admitted. “I had to spend a point on it too, to make it work fast enough.”

She frowned up at me. “Why would you do that?”

“You were going to get screwed out of most of your points if I didn’t.”

“Yeah, but...”

She paused, and looked away.

“Are we that serious?” She asked, in a very small voice.

“I think we’re still figuring that out,” I said. “But after last night, I think we could be. Plus, trying to get back to civilization alone could be dangerous, and I’d rather have you with me than anyone else in this house.”

She gave me a shy smile. “Even Beth?”

Beth was the woman who’d arranged this gathering, and talked everyone else into attending. She was a tall, stacked blonde with an assertive personality, and a taste for revealing fetish outfits. But she was also a dominatrix with a keen interest in erotic hypnosis, and she’d made it clear last night that she thought the kink community’s usual guidelines about consent and safe scenes were for sissies.

“She’d look hot in a collar and binders,” I conceded. “But I don’t trust her as far as I could throw her.”

Jenny giggled, and looked pleased. “Glad to hear it. She tried to hit on me last night, but I was getting a creepy vibe. So, wait a minute. Are you saying you’ve got movie hypnotist powers now?”

“Pretty much,” I admitted.

She flushed, and her nipples suddenly stood at attention. “Really? That... that’s really hot. We should try that out, and see what you can do with it.”

"I'm planning on it," I assured her. "But I think we'd better wait until we've got a more stable situation before we start planning any scenes."

"Why wait? It's not like we can drive out of here right now anyway," she pointed out. "I'm not getting on that twisty mountain road at o'dark-thirty, with monsters in the woods. That's just begging to end up in a burning wreck at the bottom of a cliff somewhere."

"I suppose you have a point," I conceded. "Anything could ambush us in the dark, and we'd have no warning."

"Exactly. So we have to at least wait for sunrise regardless. Besides, if you're not just blowing smoke it won't take long, right? I obviously still have my trigger from last night."

"True, but neither of us has any idea how this is going to work. Maybe it's just like normal hypnosis only faster, or maybe there are a bunch of pitfalls involved that aren't obvious. I'm not interested in turning our relationship into a cautionary tale about careless mind control, so I'm going to want to spend some time figuring out the rules before I try anything complicated. Not to mention we'll need a whole new discussion about boundaries."

"Fuck boundaries," Jenny objected. "I'm way kinkier than you are, and the whole explicit verbal consent in advance thing is a huge downer. I want fun, sexy adventures where I don't know what comes next, damn it."

I laughed, and hugged her again. "Have I told you today that you're awesome?"

"Not yet," she said, looking smug.

"You're awesome," I said. "And you really know how to push my buttons, but try to keep it under control. For all we know giant mutant weasels could phase through the walls and attack us at any moment."

She giggled. "Mutant weasels?"

"Hey, anything could happen. But seriously, we need to spend the rest of our points. Then we need to get dressed, come up with something you can use as a weapon, and get our stuff packed up and ready to go. I think I can hear someone else moving around, too, so we'll have to deal with the rest of the group soon."

"I guess you're right," she conceded. "Status. Ugh, there's so much stuff here. Do you think we need to spend absolutely every point on fighting stats? I'd really like to use a few of them on other things."

"The wording of the messages made it sound like this process of turning animals into monsters is a gradual thing, and since the lights still work I expect our cars will too. So there's an excellent chance we can just drive into town without any trouble, as long as we get moving soon enough. There's no telling how things might go after that, but if you want to put a few points into social buffs or crafting or something it's a reasonable gamble. As long as you've got a viable combat build first."

"I'm not thrilled about the prospect of being stuck in a real-life video game," Jenny grumbled. "But I've got a basic rogue setup, and a whole bunch of physical buffs to go with it. I'm going to hold onto a couple of points in case it turns out that I missed something critical, but if this is my big chance to reinvent myself there are other things I want."

"Fair enough. I blew a point fixing my eyes to not need glasses, so I can't complain. Not to mention I'm about to get a fitness upgrade even though I'm a mage."

"Oh?"

I spent one of my remaining physical points on general fitness, and looked down. Damn, it was kind of weird having pecs.

Jenny licked her lips, and leaned over to run her hand across my chest.

"Nice," she said approvingly. "Gonna turn into a giant muscle man, and get a huge dick?"

I laughed. "I'll admit to some temptation, but you weren't complaining last night. Going to buy yourself giant boobs?"

"Well, it would be a heck of a social buff," she pointed out. "I've always wondered what it's like to be able to mind control the average guy just by taking a deep breath. But who knows what spending a point there would actually... whoa."

"Stupidly massive?" I guessed.

"No, just... wow. You know that meme about perfect boobs turning chicks into lesbians? I think I'm looking at proof. Only I'd never be able to sleep on my stomach again. And I'd probably get backaches."

"How many points did you put into strength?"

"Three," she admitted. She gave the screen a longing look. "What would I wear, though? No one makes clothes for women with that kind of body."

"Are you trying to talk yourself out of this, or into it?" I asked.

"Shush, you. I'm busy rationalizing. You know, you could just make me do it. I bet you'd like that."

I negligently waved my hand. "My hypnotic powers compel you. You must buy yourself epic boobs. There, now you can tell people I made you do it, so no one can blame you for it."

She put on an incredibly fake trance expression. "Must... buy... perfect... bust..."

"Silly wench."

She giggled, and shot me a teasing look. "I'll make you a deal. I'll spend one physical point on my boobs, if you do the same for your dick. If it does anything like what I'm looking at it'll be worth it."

I pulled up my status screen, and tried it. Huh. Spending a point on a specific body part made it work better, by some implicit definition the System had chosen. On top of a modest size increase there were a whole bunch of complex physiological changes listed.

"Deal," I decided. "Don't blame me if your pupils turn into hearts."

"I don't think you're getting hentai mind break powers for one point, stud," she pointed out. "Besides, if you want to do stuff like that you can just hypnotize me. That's going to be awesome for role play sessions. Commit the change on three?"

God damn, but I think I'm falling in love with this woman. "Sure. One."

"Two," she said.

"Three," we recited together.

The system must have been listening, because both changes committed without us actually doing anything to our status screens. There was an odd stretching sensation down below, but I was distracted from that by watching Jenny's modest breasts suddenly swell into delectable D-cups.

Wow. I could see why she'd been so tempted. She didn't have any stretch marks or sagging, like a woman who was naturally that size normally would. Her new breasts stood out proudly from her chest, round and firm, with cute little upturned nipples that I really wanted to taste. Between that and all the other changes, she looked more like a 20-year old fitness model than a 27-year old data analyst.

"I think you got your money's worth," I said.

She cupped her breasts, and experimentally hefted them. "Mm. They're sensitive, too. What about-"

There was a sudden crash of breaking glass downstairs.