

“So let me get this straight—they’re plug and play... limbs? Not just replacement prosthetics, or—”

“Yes sir. We certainly provide prosthetic replacement, of course, but we use this location for consultations on the efficiency of *adding* limbs to your baseline body structure.”

Dev’s tailtip flicked back and forth lightly at his feet, the profound length of the appendage politely coiled out of the way of the *rather* busy storefront. Clean, metallic-and-white, glass and holographic displays scattered across ten magnetically levitating desks, each attended by a delightful sales associate like the one speaking to him.

Of course, *those* tables had a considerable line of excited patrons waiting their turn. Dev, however, was pointedly alone.

Besides the bodyguard and his assistant, of course, making sure he had *plenty* of space.

Stores like this had been popping up like *wildfire* across not only the city, but internationally—Dev had seen one on at least three continents, now—and though Dev had never had difficulty getting a meeting on his *own* schedule with a business interest, he’d never even been able to get a *call* in to the head of BTI.

He’d be frustrated if he wasn’t so intrigued. His own legitimate holdings were in pharmaceuticals, so he always kept a finger on the pulse of medical technology. But this—it was like it had come out of the blue.

“Sir?”

Dev looked over at sales assistant again. A tall, slender dhole hybrid in a lovely blue skirt and jacket combo, with a cheerful light-blue ascot perched on a rather profound chest. Horns curled to the heavens in a way Dev found fetching and ever-so-slightly envy-inspiring, she loomed over him in a way he wasn’t quite used to the reality of looking up to someone else—and by that nature, she gained the rare, likely unknown, privilege of prompting him to stand up straight. She had to have at least six inches on him—extraordinary. They certainly had a type for their hires, it seemed, even if she was by far the slightest of build on the visible staff. His bodyguard had been visibly trying to keep his gaze... disciplined since they entered. Dev met her gaze through the blueish visor she wore—he wondered what the glow of his own eyes looked like to her, through

it, staring up at her with some plain delight. “I’m sorry, darling—I rarely take the time to just explore curiosities nowadays. You’re magnificent. Love the horns. Very jealous.”

Dev tapped his own horns, lightly forked, curled ever-so-slightly inwards. He rarely drew attention to them and, really—truthfully, he was embarrassed by them. They didn’t grow like they ought to. Not since he was young.

The way her mind worked, though, was fascinating. He could see every neuron firing, and only read into them enough to see that her enjoyment of the conversation, and her work, was genuine. She placed her hands on her hips—and then her *actual* hands merely gestured a friendly waving away of his concern. She shifted her posture ever so slightly to the sound of delicate hooves with powerful legs perched atop them. He bet she could run him down in an instant. And then he noticed the sheer volume and length of her tail—

Now he was sure he’d been saddled with a very *carefully* chosen salesperson. *Bravo.*

“Not to worry, Mr. LeBlanc. Someone of your stature is *reasonably* distracted by thoughts of business! Multi-tasking is a crucial part of any large enterprise—our founder knows that. That’s why—”

*Here comes the sell.* Dev mused, lightly tucking his hands behind his back. He watched her go—a delightful, only semi-memorized sales pitch about the value of capacity in multi-tasking efficiency. Two of her arms juggled, another two each set to writing two *different* messages on separate displays even as she spoke. Her mind *bloomed* along neural connections to these things, even as she processed a small display of information on her heads-up-display, too. How delightfully ascendant, Dev thought—the way she acted, the way she *thought* and experienced *reflex*. Fascinating.

“Darling—I’m *quite* sold on them conceptually. I’ve always been someone concerned with *logistics*. Now—are the control ports implants, or can these function off of skin-to-contact neural interface alone...?” Dev’s tail curled in slightly.

He was more interested then he let on.

“Implants provide the best interface and fastest acclimation and adaption of reaction time.” The dhole explained. “If you are uncomfortable with minor surgical—”

“No, no. The cutting isn’t the problem. My biology is... uniquely unwelcoming to foreign implants. Piercings, RFID chips—any of it, my body will... expel. *Quickly.*” Dev explained. “If implants were necessary for the best experience, though, I have ways of making them work. It would probably just... require extra maintenance. And that the surgery was done in-house, of course. I don’t like letting others put me under the knife. Immune to anesthetic and all.”

“I see.” The sales associate didn’t miss a beat. “We’ve dealt with uniquely regenerative individuals before, sir. We would be happy to set up a trial period—something we don’t usually do with implants on new customers, but since the risk of prolonged damage is non-existent to you should you want them removed, it won’t be a problem.”

Dev watched her arms just *work* even as they talked. Efficiency was one thing, novel experience was another—but there was something that itched in the back of his mind while watching her nerves sing with so many signals. It was so *self-defined*.

Something he was incapable of doing with his body. *What the hell, what’s a few surgical wounds for a good time...*

Dev held out a hand and was promptly given a small, blue-papered notepad by his assistant. Even at a few feet away, it was apparent the paper was scented with a fine perfume as he wrote some notes on it. “Custom orders?”

“Of course, sir.”

“Excellent. I’ll start with something basic, though.” The dragon’s tail curled up alongside him as his assistant held out a phone, which it coiled around lightly. “And I know you’re likely not from that department, but *please* put a note on my file that I’ve quite wanted to talk to your R&D department about their anti-rejection drug protocol. I’ve got the pharmaceutical manufacturing capability to help them not have to go through the hassle of importing from... where, exactly, are these produced?”

She didn’t miss a beat. “Sorry sir—the mystique of a trade secret.”

“Of course. Good girl.” Dev handed her a note. “Contact that number and provide that number. Funds will be transferred to cover the costs. And this...”

He handed over another note, which she quirked an eyebrow at. “A... tailor?”

“For my measurements, darling. She’s without peer. I’ve used her for fifty years, and her father before her. She’ll also do custom work—I can’t imagine it’s easy to get *other* gorgeous business outfits with space for four arms.”

“Six, actually.” She replied politely. “I’ve got two in for service this week.”

Dev let out an incredulous chuckle. “Six, then, you lovely little Shiva. When can I expect delivery? Next week, or—”

“Tonight, actually.” She held up one of the papers she’d been scribbling on the entire time—it was *full* of information about him. Even a little sketch of his face. “At this home address?”

The dragon let out a quiet rumble. “Cheeky. Certainly.” He didn’t like feeling *predictable*. “Thank you, darling. With luck, I’ll be back.”

“I’m certain you will, Mr. LeBlanc. I haven’t had a one-time customer yet.”

That line stuck with him on his way out the door, and throughout the day—and if it had come from anyone less *earnest* in their thoughts, it would’ve worried him.

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The delivery time hadn’t been an exaggeration—when Dev returned from dinner, there was someone waiting at his front door, a long, glossy blue box in one set of her hands, and another pair of smaller ones in the other, upper pair. “Sir.” She greeted him, polite but curt—her visor lightly misted with the warm evening air.

Dev’s attendant’s accepted the boxes and after a brief inventory of their contents, they were taken inside.

For this, though—Dev wanted privacy. He excused his staff for the night, lit an opium cigarette, poured himself a Pernod...

And laid his surgical tools out on the table, across a blue velvet case. He'd had these scalpels since the forties—and he never let anyone else cut with them. Or let them cut anyone that wasn't of import to him. This wouldn't be the first time he'd used them on *himself* either.

One long drag of his cigarette later, and he removed his clothing, spread a white sheet on his couch—and opened the first box. Inside placed in a position where they were 'holding hands' along the length of the foam-lined box, were two black, carbon-fiber limbs with highlights that matched his mane.

*Cheeky, again. Hmm.*

He stared at them a long while—the hands looked much like his, if not notably not scaled. They had claws, were the same size, length... the ends of them, bare of their mounting implants, sported fiber optics, wires—artificial neurons. He recognized some of the technology, but the rest was beyond him.

That, too, was a rarity he was finding himself enjoying. It was triple-insulated against electric discharge, too. Good: he didn't want to *fry* them if he jumped from a particularly painful incision while installing.

He moved next to the smaller boxes, each having an identical, but mirrored, implant—kept in a bio-gel sac. The free-floating ends of the things were loose filaments that swayed when he picked up their fluid packaging. More neurons. Carbon filaments. A few ports, he could guess, were for administering anti-rejection medication.

Speaking of...

Dev lightly placed the port back in its box and moved over to his desk, pulling open a drawer, and removing a vial of some metallic, fluid compound. He *hated* this—powderized and made into a suspension, the medication was made of the same metal that had once encased his heart, prevented him from reaching out with his connection to the storm.

But—his body *wouldn't* reject it. Small, regular doses had even helped him keep a piercing somewhere unmentionable for nearly two years on his last test. This would be as good a final trail as anything.

He moved back to the couch and placed the vial next to the ports, fetching up his scalpel. “Under the fifth rib. Two inches deep...” He muttered, bringing the scalpel around to his tailtip, coiling around it—and then right to the incision point.

As with every time he’d cut into his flesh, it bloomed with luminescent blood. He let out a hiss, then a shudder—but pressed on once he heard the sizzle of his flesh trying to heal already. He stopped drawing breath to ease the pain, and instead reached for the right-side port, twisting it in its encasing—and popping it free with a wet *squelch* as the gel-sack depressurized and released it. He looked to the box—and like it was telling him how to put together cheap furniture, it had easy little pictographs for how to prepare the implant for insertion. He cut himself again—to keep the wound open.

Another hiss of discomfort. He twisted the arm-port on the implant and watched it retract all its dangling artificial neurons and fibers, leaving it a dull, sort of rounded, few-inch-long lump.

“Place implant in incision...”

And he did. The dragon pressed it into his *very tender* wound. He only offered a light grunt as it slid in, pressing flesh apart, blue blood running down his side, down his thigh. The flesh was still sizzling with regeneration, starting to press tightly on it...

“Twist to re-engage...”

Another twist and he almost bolted upright where he sat—the neurons pressed into his flesh, finding purchase in muscles, weaving into existing nerves. Those carbon filaments curled out, wrapping around bone, also ingraining themselves in the muscles of his chest and back... anchoring the port in place. He could feel it *moving* at first, but then it found anchor.

“Fuck me, I wish I could go under sometimes...”

Dev reached for his cigarette and let it hang from his lips after another drag, turning his attention to the metallic fluid. He loaded it into a provided cartridge-syringe, gingerly put it up to the small input port on the implant, and clicked it into place. The wet rush of medicine flowing into it—and the steady quieting of sizzling flesh, and pressure and pain, at the edges of the implant helped calm in from a heart rate he hadn’t realized he’d hit.

He *never* lost track of his own pulse. He chastised himself for being too engrossed in the experience, but once he was satisfied, and the bleeding slowed as his scales shored up to the edges of the implant, he began the repeat of the procedure on the other side.

His tail and hands worked through the motions with practiced steadiness, and he found purchase even as the neurons extended from the second implant in focusing on the dull throb around the first. It was holding, though—his body wasn't aggressively trying to force it out. A start. Pain could be managed, turned off, diverted... distracted from.

By the time he was injecting himself with the second dose of the anti-rejection medication, he was breathing easily again. The sheet he sat on was soaked through with glowing blue blood, and his feet were in a small puddle of it.

Dev reached for a rag and felt a novel twitch in the muscles along his back—and even when he touched the rag, it felt... *off*. Like he was reaching into a space *above* where it should be. He started to wipe himself off, and would have gone to rinse off fully, first...

But he just stared at the arms in the box. He didn't care if he was bloody with the remnants of what he'd just done to himself. Part of him even preferred the thought, on some level. Proof the change to himself was *his* work. It was *visceral*.

Dev lifted both arms from their foam case delicately, and upon being freed, they released their hands, letting him hold them both separately. He passed the left one into a waiting coil of his tail, and examined the right. Delicate, light, sleek. It was a *wonderful* model of his own arm's shape. He hefted it in his left arm, turned it slightly, and used both arms to shift it backwards towards the port on the implant.

It slid in with a satisfying click, and with a light twist he *felt* it. He didn't just feel it in his grasp—he could feel it *being held*.

He let out an incredulous little laugh. "First time I've ever been *happy* to see someone get a one-up on me. *Amazing*..."

Dev noticed a small splatter of blood on the arm in his tailcoil and went to reach for a rag to wipe it clean.

Or rather, the very *instinct* to do so crossed his mind, and his new arm had already taken up the rag, and precisely wiped the spot away with a delicate rub of its thumb along the carbon fiber of the other arm's forearm. Reflexive, instinctual action already?

*Who* was making these things?

Dev lightly moved his tail around and, with the help of *three* arms now, positioned the other arm. Insert, click, turn—the port let out a cheerful little *chime* with this one, and a display hidden under the forearm of his left prosthetic lit up a small message.

System online. Welcome, Mr. LeBlanc.

Dev sat there for a moment, looking down at four sets of hands. He rolled the fingers of his right hand, turned it over to look at his nails—and the prosthetic on that side mirrored it. He repeated the motion a little faster with his left, and saw the same.

“How bizarre. Now how do I use you separately...”

Dev tried for a few moments to get the arms to work on their own, to try multiple gestures all at once—but all they did was mirror.

Disappointing. He'd have to try more once he'd cleaned up—he reached for the vial, and the boxes, and his knives—but his new hands were ahead of him. The left closed up the implant boxes, the right was rolling his knife satchel back up in the way he always did. Dev hesitated—but then set his natural arms to closing up the other boxes, balling up rags.

It wasn't about commanding them. It was reflexive—the body following the mind. He could work with that.

He stood, balling up the blood-soaked sheet and taking it to the bathroom with him, stopping to dispose of it. He clicked on the light in the sterile, white, tile-and-glass space of his restroom and stared at him in the wall-width mirror across from the door, the counter and cabinet blocking out his legs.

But that wasn't what Dev was looking at. No, he was looking at a version of himself he'd never seen before. A new silhouette. On cue, his new arms spread out, giving him a good look at himself. He stepped forward, turning slightly, even as he left glowing, bloody footprints on the floor as he went, dripping all over the tile. His natural hands slid along the smoothness of his new limbs, crossing back to his middle, to those implants. They were ice-cool with his body temperature, but they were *there*.

He let out another slight laugh. He steeled himself—he hadn't expected this to be *emotional*, but he understood why it was, now. As a clone, he'd always struggled with the idea of being *real*. Of self-differentiation, self-determination. After his father's machinations, that had only gotten worse—he remembered, vividly, piles of corpses that all looked *identical* to him.

He'd never met his genetic progenitor, Shen-Long. He hoped to, someday, but he knew what he'd look like. They'd be *identical*. A different mind in the same shell.

And now, for the first time in his *entire life*, Dev had *altered* that shell. Even if it wasn't necessarily permanent. It was holding—it was longer than *any* real change. It wasn't just ornamental, either—the reflexes, all of it. It was a *fundamental* shift in how his body would work, even just for the time he could.

Dev met his own gaze in the mirror, all four arms now roaming slightly over his form. All the tactile presence of his body was novel again—that alone was a gift. He was looking at himself in a way he never had before.

For this moment, however long he could make these last, he was squarely, undeniably, *unique*. He hadn't realized how much he'd wanted that in a very long time.

There was a light chime from the room outside, and his tail curled around to the small valet table and snatched his phone off of it. He passed it flawlessly into his new right hand and held it up.

A meeting, tomorrow afternoon, with the head of BTI. He smirked. *Cheekier and cheekier. I like this one already.*

As he stepped up to his shower and turned on the water, he hummed lightly to himself—something else he'd not done in years.

He'd need to find a thank you gift.

Something in blue.