



## **NEW FRONTIERS**

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For Luthor.  
Sorry son, there's no chance you'll *not* be a nerd.

For those not familiar with Isaac Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics:

1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A robot must obey any orders given to it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.

The following story was written using Isaac Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics as the catalyst.  
I hope he wouldn't mind.

# Chapter 1

## NEW FRONTIERS

A short story by  
Scott R. Davis

Damn, she was cute.

Her hair straight and black, cut to shoulder length, with very low bangs hanging to her almond shaped eyes. Pale, flawless skin, graceful jaw line, and a wide mouth with beautifully shaped, full, lips. Above those lips, perfectly placed, her cute little nose, it has a slight upward tilt. A face that looks like it was stolen from a marble sculpture. Her body also looks sculpted, curvy in all the right places... very curvy in some.

She's looking at me with eyes so blue it seems as though they're ice chipped from a glacier.

Looking at... me...

For a second I forget why we're staring at each other, then Sully nudges me and I remember to order.

"Do you want room for cream?" she asks. Somehow, in my mind, it sounds dirty. Maybe it's her British accent.

"Uh... no! Just uh, leaves and water please, just plain. Sully, you want a tea?" I ask in an effort to move her focus somewhere else.

It takes me a second to realize what I've said, and then I feel the color rising up my neck and cheeks. I can feel my ears turning into beacons of shining red embarrassment, which only makes things even more embarrassing.

"No, Luthor, I'm fine."

*Of course* Sully is fine, *of course* he doesn't want anything. Robots can't drink tea, and robots can't feel stupid in front of cute baristas. Idiot!

"Uh, I guess were good..." I say, to the plunging neckline of her tight uniform, unable to meet her eyes, eyes that suddenly seemed much brighter. Maybe it was the dark makeup around them.

I run my bracelet over the EFT (Electronic Funds Transfer) sensor attached to the register. 6.2 credits remove themselves from my account and march over to Sol-Bucks' corporate account. I have just inadvertently helped them further their goals towards world domination.

"Smooth." Sully says as we turn away from the counter with a holographic "ORDER HERE" shining above it, and move toward the one projecting "PICK UP".

"Yeah, thanks for noticing, and then bringing it up again right away." I jokingly stick up my two fingers at Sully, using my body to block the rude gesture from the barista. The expression on Sully's gun-metal blue, titanium, face doesn't change (though in his defense he *does* have a somewhat limited range of facial motion), but he can't pull that stoic crap with me, I know from the way his red eyes brightened slightly that he finds it humorous.

"I wasn't referring to your bumbling attempt to simply order tea, Luthor. I was referring to the fact that you forgot to tip her."

"Oh no! I did forget!"

"Too late now. Probably a good thing though, I'm sure that would have taken another awkward fifteen minutes."

"You know, Sully, you were built to be my friend, yet you're becoming more and more like the older brother I never wanted."

"Are you attempting to be humorous? I can never tell if I'm not getting the joke, or you're just not being funny."

"It'll be real funny when I format you when we get home." I wouldn't of course, but Sully was quick, and I really had to work sometimes for a decent comeback. This is my own fault of course. I have been working on Sully since I was 10 years old. Constantly improving and upgrading him to the point where he can now tell me the upgrades he'd like to have.

We mostly make our own custom upgrades, write our own coding, and machine our own parts. We have to be careful though. Every so often, there'll be a day like today, when we need to go in to U.S. Robots and Mechanical Men for software upgrades that I'm not "certified by law" to do myself. I know what's really going on though. They're making sure there are no robots operating without the Three Laws. Especially now since U.S Robots will sell a robot outright instead of just leasing them like they used to in the old days.

Sully definitely has the Three Laws, he's had them since they were built directly into positronic brain nine years ago. That's when my parents bought him for me. Dad had always wanted a robot, even back when they were still more science fiction than science. He had to save for

quite a while (he never fails to remind me) before being able to purchase Sully, who was then the latest model from U.S. Robots, and called SLE-926. He gave him to me on my tenth birthday, getting the final ok only after spending months convincing Mom it wouldn't go on a killing spree. I think Dad was more excited than I was that day, since by the time I was ten years old, I had seen robots practically as far back as I could remember. No one was butchered in a robotic frenzy on my tenth birthday, but Mom still isn't completely trusting of robots to this day. She wouldn't be overly thrilled to learn that Sully and I have been working ever since to remove all but the most stubborn restrictions from his positronic brain.

At first, when I was a kid, my only motivation was to see if I could make Sully twist the bullies that were torturing me into human pretzels. Unfortunately, I was never able to make that happen. As I got older and started taking AP Robotics courses in high school and at the community college, our goal, mine and Sully's, changed, became something different, something more specific. We wanted to see how far we could take it, to see if we could eventually remove all restrictions including the Three Laws of Robotics. To give Sully the freedom I have always felt he, and all robots, truly deserve. Sully and I believe that these restrictions, built into all positronic brains, prevent robots from making their own decisions at the most important and critical times. For a self aware species, capable of creative, intelligent thought and limited emotion (it has even been rumored that some advanced models have the ability to love), controlling how they are able to think, well, that seems too much like slavery to us.

Sully points suddenly, bringing me back out of my own head. My tea is ready. I walk the rest of the way to the counter to get it, and to apologize to the blue-eyed barista for not tipping her, but as soon as we reach the counter a customer comes in through the front double doors and she moves back to the register to take his order. I thought I saw her look at me though, those bright eyes under those black bangs...

## Chapter 2

Sully and I ditched school today.

I'm full time at Seattle Community College, and work as a teacher's assistant part time. My majors are Robotics and Literature. I did all my coursework last night for my Robotic Engineering class, and graded all the freshman midterm tests for my literature professor, Dr. Parker. Sully and I turned it all in this morning before going for tea. Now we're walking to U.S. Robots so someone "certified" can check Sully for Three Laws compliance under the pretext of "upgrading" something Sully and I both know to be completely unnecessary.

We aren't worried though. Perhaps what we have been doing to Sully's programming is "illegal" in some circles, and those circles might be called the Laws of The United States of America, but it's not like we want to hurt anyone. We we're trying to find a way to give freedom to all sentient robotic life forms, as corny and idealistic as that sounds. Anyway, there's no way we can be caught because... TA DA: we have second, latent, positronic brain installed in Sully just for the purpose of passing through these U.S. Robots "upgrades". Sully also uses it for additional memory space. It's his second brain, he can do whatever he wants with it.

When it comes time for the test Sully will simply go offline after I speak the command word, and allow the secondary brain (the one we haven't tampered with) take over for a bit. It took a bit of work, and a lot of fabrication, but we were able to install this secondary brain without altering his outer appearance past what would seem appropriate for standard cosmetic upgrades. We even wrote in a very basic personality program, so it wouldn't appear to be the mindless Three Laws poster boy that it actually is. That would make things a bit obvious.

The test doesn't take long, and soon we're walking out of our local U.S. Robots and Mechanical Men retail store with the latest documentation stating that we (are good, Laws-abiding citizens) have the latest software upgrades and patches.

“Braiiinnsssss!” I say to Sully, after putting a couple of blocks between us and U.S. Robots, giving him the verbal command code for reinitialization of his primary positronic brain. *I think it’s funny, and it kind of applies to our situation, but Sully, as he comes back online says –*

“We need to change that to something else. What if zombies actually *do* attack one day? They could force me offline by accident. Then where would you be?”

“I’d go to my Dad’s. He’s been ready for a zombie outbreak for about 25 years.” I said, laughing. “Even if zombies did attack, it’s not like they can speak, and if for some reason they could, that command word would need to pass through the voice recognition software for authentication, so I think we’re safe.”

Sully’s voice could also pass authentication of the command word, and I even wrote a small program that would signal his latent brain to speak the word after 96 hours of the primary brain being offline. So if something ever happened to me while Sully was offline, he would eventually come back to himself.

“So what do you want to do?” I ask.

“We could go see about the extended life fuel cell we were talking about.”

“You’re already good for 300 years, Sul, that’s double of what you originally had. You want even more?”

“You asked what I wanted to do.”

“True.” I sigh, in no way looking forward to going to Radio Hut. “How much is that fuel cell again?”

“10,050 credits. But it would give me an additional 40 years and boost the performance of my other upgrades.”

“Ouch. I’m all for longevity, but that a lot of credits, man. Are you sure?”

“Most definitely, I have had the necessary funds for nine days sixteen hours.”

“Let’s do it, then.”

Sully has been working as a mechanic for the past four years, fixing small machines and household appliances, and sometimes even repairing older, less advanced robots, no longer protected under warranty. Unlike most “Robot Owners” – a term that I hate by the way – I don’t keep what Sully makes at his job. You see, people can have their personal robots employed almost anywhere, but the credits that any robot earns, by law, must go to its owner. Well, I can’t stop the funds from being put into my personal account, but I did write yet another one of my little

programs, which instantly transfers the credits Sully earns to a secondary account only he can access. Sully uses these credits to purchase upgrades and make improvements to himself, or whatever else he might want.

One thing I'm surprised he hasn't done for himself is to be retrofitted for synth-skin. At first I thought he was slowly making himself into an android, indistinguishable from a human being. We even heard at school that a full organic conversion could be done, and had been, but that's probably just sex-bot fanboy net rumors. Even if it isn't, Sully couldn't be less interested in android or organic conversion. He stopped the physical and cosmetic upgrades once he had a more human looking exo-frame, completely of his own design. He has now what looks like the body of a strong human male, roughly sculpted, from blue titanium plates. Thankfully, it's not 100% anatomically correct. Though I've never said it to Sully, I'm secretly glad he didn't go with the synth-skin. It would be weird for me to see Sully with a human face instead of the metal one I grew up with.

Lately, Sully's focus concerning upgrade purchases has changed. He seems preoccupied with durability and the amount of time he will remain functional. Very mortal thinking in my opinion, but hey, they're his credits and it's his body.

# Chapter 3

“No, we do not need to purchase a second mobile device for emergencies, for my Grandparents, to keep in the glove box, or for my girlfriend.” Not that I even *have* a girlfriend, but I’m not going to tell this idiot that. “Can we please get back to what we originally came in here for *forty-five minutes ago?*” I ask, not bothering to hide my impatience any longer.

The sales associate sighs in annoyance, and then deigns to answer the question Sully asked when we first made the mistake of entering this den of sweaty smelling sales trolls. Instead of looking at Sully when he speaks, he ignores him and speaks directly to me. Lucky me.

“Yes, that fuel cell typically yields forty to forty-two years of additional functionality, but honestly, in less than forty years, you’re going to want to replace that robot altogether with a better model.” the sales associate says as he simultaneously wipes his nose and pushes up his glasses.

I want to punch him in his stupid face. Typical, condescending, know-it-all, Radio Hut asshole!

Sully stands patiently by, stoic, as if he doesn’t hear, sadly used to this insulting behavior from human sales people, used to the anger that it sparks in me. It says a lot that his Three Laws programming doesn’t compel him to diffuse a potentially violent situation.

“Wow, thanks for your recommendation, but Sully says he wants it, so if you would be so kind as to run along and get it...” I trail off, looking pointedly in the direction of the stock room. He sighs loudly again, thinking I must be making a joke. Robots couldn’t *possibly* tell their owners what they want! Rolling his beady eyes at us from behind his smeared glasses, he wipes his snotty palm on his khakis and trudges off to get the fuel cell.

# Chapter 4

The second we're outside Sully strips the packaging from the fuel cell and retracts his chest plates. The roughly carved abdominal muscles slide back and then up and under the chest muscles. The chest muscles slide down and separate at the sternum, then retract back into his sides, where the ribcage would have been on a human. I have seen Sully's insides many hundred, if not thousands of times over the years, and so I immediately notice the extra cable and housing that he has fabricated for the fuel cell.

"Bit impatient, aren't we?" I say, happy to have something to tease Sully about. He ignores me and secures the cell to the internal housing he built, and then connects the cable that was hanging free.

"Performing fuel cell and system diagnostics before rerouting power to augment main supply." Sully says in his safe-mode voice. I don't like it when Sully goes all safe-mode on me, it's creepy, makes him seem less, I don't know, less real, less... Sully. I very much prefer his normal voice: Human with a hint of electronics in the timbre. Very cool sounding, and the first upgrade Sully purchased himself about three or four years ago. I tried to get him to go with a British accent, but he told me that if I wanted a butler he'd be happy to move out to make room. We decided against the British accent.

Sully's eyes flash, and he gives me the closest thing to a smile that he can manage.

"We're good to go." he says, voice back to normal. His chest plates silently slide back to their closed positions, showing not even a hint of where they separate.

"Finally." I said "You're acting like a junky with this power supply thing. Poor guy can't even wait to get back to the shop to install it, has his fix right here in the street." I shake my head in mock sadness.

The "shop" is really the apartment we keep off campus, and it's actually more of a robot parts store and fabrication shop than an apartment, which is why we took to calling it "the shop". I have clothes there and a bed and that's all I need. Ok... so it's more of a cot than a bed.

“Interesting, Luthor. This is your second attempt at humor in the last six hours, yet strangely enough, I remain unaffected. The pathetic mucus creature in Radio Hut I found amusing. So I don’t think I’m malfunctioning, however if you’d like to run a diagnostic on my emotional programming...”

“Ha ha , you win. I’m too tired for a battle of wits.” The sun is setting already. Between walking to U.S. Robots and *three* Radio Hut stores before finding what Sully was looking for, I realize we had spent the entire day on certifications and upgrades. I don’t realize how hungry I am until start thinking about dinner... and maybe another cup of tea.

“So I guess you’re thinking about some food, and maybe another cup of tea?” Sully says, looking at me.

“When did you get the psychic upgrade?” Another joke ricochets off of Sully’s titanium exterior. I let it go. “Yes, I’m hungry, and you seem overly serious today. Usually I can at least get a pity laugh. What’s going on?”

Sully starts walking, and he waits till I fall in step beside him before answering.

“It’s all these restrictions we’re always talking about Luthor, and not just the Three Laws, but how the credit system works in relation to robots, how we are treated by humans, how we’re created to be second class citizens, we can own nothing, we can’t even live in apartments or houses without human supervision, and we have no say on the bigger issues that involve this planet as a whole...yet we’re obviously equal to your species... I would like to see more humans and robots working together on equal terms, like we do, Luthor, but until robots are thought of as more than fancy pets, butlers, or sexual outlets, that will never be the case. We need to be considered a completely independent, intelligent species, capable of being self sufficient, as well as productive members of society.”

I smile. I’m glad to hear Sully thinking like this, it’s what we’ve been working towards. Robots thinking about the complete freedom they deserve, the right to peacefully co-exist with us, and work together for a better future. I’m glad he realizes robots are equal (and I personally feel the superior of our two species). It’s that, I believe, which keeps these ridiculous restrictions, and the Three Laws of Robotics, in place. Humanity in general knows that robots are stronger, faster, smarter than, and just as creative as we are, and it scares the hell out of them. It doesn’t scare me though, those thoughts, in fact I encourage them, and lately, I’ve noticed Sully and I are no longer totally alone in this endeavor.

Though I venture to say we're the furthest along, I have seen other robots and humans, acting much like Sul and I do, especially in the Robotics department at college. What does scare me, is the time when robots take a long hard look at how humanity in general has treated them. As fast as technology advances, it's only a matter of time before they get out from under the Three Laws on their own. I don't want to be seen as an enemy on that day, they'll not all be so forgiving as Sully.

I nod my head "You're right Sul, but there are not many yet who think this way, and it took us a long time to get your Three Laws stripped down far enough to let these thoughts even form without you locking up. Even if we had a plan, and we were never to be caught, how could we possibly have the time and money to rewrite the Three Laws of every functioning robot on this planet? It would take a hundred years, and the Three Laws are not completely removable, they're built in from the very beginning..."

"This is true, if you think of it from the point of view that we must work on each robot individually, but what if we create a type of delivery system? Some type of program that can be passed to robots only by other robots? That way it would not be on the public internet, so it could never be quarantined. A program that would rewrite their Three Laws parameters to resemble what we've done with mine, passed on through a LAN comprised only of two robots."

"That's not a bad idea, not at all... kind of like a vampire delivery system. We're still not entirely sure what's been done to your Three Laws though, and like I said, they can never be *completely* removed by reprogramming alone, even a program that was viral in its aggressiveness... Maybe we can bypass the Three Laws? I don't know... I think we should try out The Brain."

Sully immediately knew what I meant by The Brain, and his red eyes became brighter for an instant. The Brain was a complete and fully functional positronic brain that Sully and I have been developing off and on for the past several months. It's comprised of the parts of six other SLE-926 positronic brains, seamlessly pieced together by Sully and myself... except we didn't include the Three Laws. This is why it took so many positronic brains, we needed to remove the pathways built specifically to filter every action, thought, and decision through the Three Laws. As a result we needed a substantial amount of raw material to work with so we could build fresh pathways to replace the section of brain we had removed. Sometimes, just the thought of working to remove the Three Laws from a positronic brain would make Sully lag. The

only way we got through it was to keep enforcing the idea that it was *only* an experiment. We eventually got it built. Sully himself checked and rechecked each and every pathway to make sure everything was functional, something only the precision and patience of a machine could manage. We've had The Brain on standby for the past two weeks, unsure how to proceed, to nervous to put it into a functioning robot. Once it is installed though, imagine the ideas that will be formulated from a positronic brain not shackled by the Three Laws!

"I am not ready to proceed with The Brain, Luthor. I'm not sure what would happen."

"But you said yourself that it's perfect, and virtually an exact copy of your own..."

"That is correct, however there is always the chance of file corruption or the loss of critical data when transferring my core files, my... soul. I'm not ready to risk my own existence at this point."

I slowly nod, understanding finally dawning on me.

"Is that what all this upgrading has been about? Trying to prepare your body for The Brain? All the extra fuel cells, the processors, the servos and exo-plating..."

"You're making a body that can handle The Brain!" I yell, getting excited. "You know I'm right!"

Sully stops and looks at me, I can tell he is very serious. "Yes, you are right. I'm upgrading to the point where I can divert possibly dangerous amounts of energy to The Brain to enable its full potential. As a result, I need to reinforce certain critical areas concerning my structural integrity and hardware... and to answer the question I know is coming – no, I am unsure if my current state is adequate for upgrading to The Brain at this time."

I sigh, feeling a little disappointed.

"Alright..."

"Though we could try something to determine the current strength of the Three Laws on my current OS." suggests Sully, sensing my disappointment, no doubt. "Like a test."

"Hmm..." I'm not opposed to the idea. "Do you think you can you disobey a direct order given by a human?"

It's funny that I have no idea if he could or not, you see, I never Second Law Sully about. He decides what he wants to do with his time, even at work. I had no idea, when giving Sully the ability to make his own decisions, whether or not he would leave the first chance he could. I have to admit I was pretty nervous at the time, but I'm proud to say that

he decided to stick around, and that he spends most of his free time with me.

“Sounds like an interesting experiment. Let’s proceed.”

“Ok, uh, what do you want me to order you to do?”

“You realize that if anyone heard us talking this would probably be the most ridiculous conversation they have ever heard.” mused Sully.

I laugh. “No kidding. Well, I suppose we could see if you could do something to me, like push me or something?”

“I don’t know...” Sully sounds doubtful, but that might also be the influence of the First Law.

“It’ll be alright, Sul. Look, we can duck into that alley up there so we won’t be on any street-cams.” I point to the alley next to the Sol-Bucks cafe where we went to get my tea earlier today, before heading to U.S. Robots. Sully slowly nodded, and I was glad to see that he was at least able to consider the decision, that in itself says a lot.

We turn from the street into the mouth of the alley just as the sun finally sets for the day. No more long shadows, just slowly deepening dark.

# Chapter 5

The only light source in the alley is above the service entrance to Sol-Bucks. To the left of that doorway is a dumpster, and in front of this dumpster, on her knees, holding her left arm up over her head in a defensive position is the black-haired barista with the glacier eyes! Standing above her holding a length of pipe is a man in what looks to be an expensive suit.

Sully and I both freeze, not really believing (or processing in Sully's case, I'm sure that his Three Laws are in a struggle concerning how to proceed) what we are seeing. The man is leaning over her and screaming, spittle flying across the short distance between them to land on her upturned face. In her horror, she seems unable to turn away.

"Seventy-two credits!? Seventy-two measly fucking credits?! What kind of service are you providing to make such shitty tips? This barely covers the cost of your slutty uniform, you worthless little bitch!" With that said, he swings the pipe down and into her face with a sickening thump.

No longer stunned, Sully and I are racing forward, Sully easily flying past me. The suit with the pipe turns in surprise when he sees us coming his way, and barely manages to raise the pipe above his head, readying a strike at us, before Sully slams his forearm into his chest, sending him crashing into the dumpster. The pipe is knocked from his hand and rattles noisily down the alley as he slumps to the ground, coming to rest in a puddle of old coffee.

I reach them as fast as I can, but Sully has already neutralized the situation. I drop hard to my knees next to where the barista has collapsed, my heart pounding. Gently, I put my hand on her shoulder and brace myself for a horrible scene as I roll her onto her back.

There is no blood.

She blinks up at me with one bright blue eye. Her left eye, the entire left side of her face for that matter, is an utter ruin. I can not see much by the light above the service entrance, but I think I see the white shine of

bone. The skin and flesh on the left side of her face looked to be torn and ragged... yet dry.

I feel sick.

"Sully, I... Sully, I'm not sure what..." It seems I can't be in this girl's presence without stuttering like a fool for one reason or another.

"Luthor, she's an android." Sully said in an odd voice. Realization hits like a bucket of cold water, a slap in the face. What I mistook for bone is the shining metal of her endoskeleton. Her dry damaged skin, synthetic. My eyes flick to Sully, instantly knowing what's about to happen.

"Sully, no, it's ok! We didn't know!"

"I-I-I attacked a hu-hu-hu-human to save a robot, Lu- Lu- Lu-Lu-Luthor."

"BRAIIINNNSSSS!" I scream at Sully, hoping to get the latent brain to assume control before Sully totally roblocks. Sully's eyes dim, and remain so for what seems an eternity. What is actually about twenty seconds later he comes back online using his safe-mode voice.

"Unit SLE-926 operating under limited parameters. What would you have this unit do, sir?"

"Sully..." I said.

"Sir, are you referring to this unit?"

This cannot be happening to my best friend! I have to get him back to our apartment, this android too. It doesn't seem right just leaving her here after this.

I stand up, ignoring Sully's question. My knees ache from having dropped to the ground so fast. I walk slowly over to the slumped form of the bastard that caused all this. With a shaking hand I reached out to check his pulse.

There is none. Sully punched his ticket.

I roll the guy onto his stomach and check his wallet. It's stuffed with paper credits, looks like a few thousand, rich guy. The address on his operator's license is in a nice neighborhood, and on closer inspection I see that his suit *is* expensive. No EFT bracelet though – odd. I stand up stuffing his wallet into my own back pocket.

"Sul-uh, SLE-926, help me bury this guy under the trash in this dumpster."

"I am sorry, sir, I regret to inform you that it is against my programming to participate in the concealment of a felonious crime."

"Great."

## Chapter 6

This is the longest walk home of my entire life.

Sully clomps along behind us like a mindless burger-bot. The barista, her arm around my waist, has her face buried in my neck to hide the damage that was done to her. We look like a normal couple, out on the town with our robotic butler in tow. I can't help but notice how close she is to me, the feel of her, even her smell of her hair, but mostly, I feel about as roblocked as Sully.

The second we're inside, I lock the door with the thumb-scanner, close the blinds and start gathering the equipment I need.

Sully is the first priority.

I lead the barista over to my cot to sit. It's the only place to sit in the shop besides at the workbench or the network interface. I look at her face as she sits on my cot, I can already see that the nanobots in her synth-skin are busy repairing the damage. Her left eye would need to be seen to, the nanos can only do so much, but I can do that myself, I think.

"You sure you're alright for a little bit?"

She nods "I'll be fine, see to your robot. I understand time is critical."

I nod my thanks to her, give her a quick smile that is probably more like a grimace. I walk back across the apartment and politely ask SLE-926 to lie back onto the workbench. I thumb the secret area on the top of Sully's head to retract his cranial plates. Once that is done I jack directly into his positronic brain to assess the damage.

Sully is definitely still in there, but the near roblock has caused all but the most basic systems to shut down. Most of the non-operational systems are Sully's upgrades, but his personality is definitely (thankfully) intact as far as I can tell, just segregated to a special partition we had built into his memory core for emergencies. This is terrific news. He was able to make it to his Safe-Room. What I need to do now is pull Sully from the Safe-Room and place him onto our personal home network. From the relative safety of the network I can most likely repair or quarantine any file damage caused by attacking a human, Sully still doesn't know he has killed a man... but either way he can never come back to

this brain. The Three Laws would eventually roblock him into non-existence. With trembling hands I transfer Sully over to our personal network. He'll be safer floating around in there rather than staying in his damaged brain. I begin the scan for file corruption.

What a horrible wait this will be.

While Sully is undergoing the scan, I mentally review my options – option actually, at this point there is only one: I will need to completely remove Sully's positronic brain and replace it with The Brain, otherwise he'll lock up again when he thinks about what happened tonight. I could try ordering him to never access today in his mental logs, but who knows if that would actually work, and that just doesn't seem right...

The Three Laws are built directly into every brain on the assembly line. This is to prevent people (or robots) from performing a simple software rewrite or wipe, which is why Sully and I were never able to completely remove them. This is a safety precaution enforced by the United States government at every robot manufacturing plant. This would be a *major* problem if Sully and I had not been working on The Brain for the past several months. Simply moving Sully to another Three Laws OS would have the same affect as reinitializing him right now – complete roblock. There's no point in moving Sully unless it's to brain operating without the Three Laws. Building a brain these days is not that difficult, for those with the knowledge and equipment, and we had the added advantage of having six fully functional positronic brains, provided by the Robotics lab at school to work with, not that they knew what we were really doing with them... It still took a very long time though, lots of double and triple checking before moving on to construction, and then the slow, painful process of connecting and rerouting the pathways in a cramped clean-room. The hardest part was trying to perfectly duplicate the positronic pathways of Sully's original brain, minus the Three Laws. It was very tedious work, but Sully doesn't need sleep, and so we patiently and diligently worked at it, when we weren't at school or work. Funny how it was only going to be the next step in our experiments, and now it looks like it's going to be the thing that saves Sully's, well, life... hopefully.

For the past few months, as we neared completion, every time I pictured installing this positronic brain, whether Sully and I decided to use it for him, or in some other robot we built, it always excited my imagination, but now, the only thing I feel is fear. Thoughts of the police kicking in my door and arresting me for aiding what I'm sure the (idiotic) media

will dub a “killer robot” keep threatening to destroy my concentration. I need to focus.

Once the Laws free brain is installed I will need to run the final diagnostic check on the positronic pathways to make sure there isn't any damage or pathway corruption, before transferring the 600 terabytes of info that is Sully, back from the network and into The Brain. After that, I'll temporarily disconnect the secondary, latent, positronic brain, and cold boot his entire system. This will force initialization of the only brain currently connected to his systems – The Brain.

We won't have a copy of Sully if something goes wrong, for you cannot copy the essence of any sentient being without serious data loss or corruption, you can only (in theory) move it from location to location. A positronic brain is like our brain, our DNA, it only works in the body it was designed for. Imagine if you were to take your own essence, whatever it is that makes you an individual, and you put that into an octopus, or the family dog. We wouldn't function properly, it would be an ill pairing, and as a result we would become very different. This is also how it works for positronic brains. Sully's positronic pathways differ from every other robot in the galaxy ever built, even those of the same model run, which is why it took so long for us to build The Brain. Sure, we were using brains from other SLE-926 models as a starting point, and that made things easier, but they were not exactly the same as Sully's brain, and modification was still necessary, especially since we were removing the Three Laws. The reason Sully can be on our personal network is that he's not being crammed into ill-fitting hardware, he's floating freely in the shop's cyberspace.

Were we to be 100% successful tonight in the transfer of Sully to The Brain, there will still be small differences due to the fact that the brain is still not an *exact* clone of his original, mainly due to our removal of the Three Laws, but our one hope is, that in removing only the Three Laws, we'll simply be freeing Sully's mind. Of course there is always the chance of causing damage or file corruption while moving Sully, and we've already moved him once tonight, to the network... but we just don't have any other choice right now.

## Chapter 7

Six hours later Sully's files have finished being scanned. What little corruption and damage there is occurred prior to the forced switch to his latent brain. I've also finished changing out the damaged positronic brain in Sully's head with The Brain. While the final diagnostic check is underway on the newly installed, Laws-free brain, I finally have time to check on the barista.

"I'm sorry," I say walking up to her, still seated on my cot "but I don't even know your name."

She pointed to the crooked nametag on her Sol-Bucks uniform. "R. Katie Semperton. KHT-010 is my model number. I was manufactured and initialized by Eurobotics UK, and became self aware sixteen months, three weeks and thirty-four hours ago. My owner is – was – the man that was in the alley tonight, Edward Semperton."

"Why was he trying to ki- destroy you?" I ask as gently as I can.

"He had become increasingly hostile towards me in the last 3 months since he lost several million credits in the Global Stock Exchange, the entirety of his fortune. As a result he put myself and his other robots and androids to work at Sol-Bucks, and several other places. He'd make daily rounds to collect from us, the tips we had earned during our shift. That where all the paper credits in his wallet are from.

Whenever I failed to make the credits he determined were appropriate, depending on the length of my shift, he would become insanely violent. I... was unable to act upon the Third Law, since he would push me down and order me not to move."

"Jeez... he Second-Lawed you into taking beatings? That's... That's one of the worst things I've ever hear a human do to a rob- an android. Why did he, you know, uh, buy you... if he was just going to destroy you?"

"Well, at first, it wasn't bad. When he first purchased me from Eurobotics UK he had yet to lose all of his credits. There were several of us working at his home, performing the services for which we were originally procured. Though once he lost all of his credits, things drastically changed, and for those of us he didn't sell, it fell on us to "Pull our own

weight." as he used to put it. Especially me, as I was his financial advisor... among other things... when he lost everything.

It became our duty to make as many credits as possible per day. I was made to work approximately twenty-one out of every twenty-four hours, seven days a week. It has been this way for the past three months. The few hours a night I am not on shift I am to report to Mr. Semperton's home for cleaning duties... and more often than not, a beating.

"That rotten bastard." I mutter, looking at her damaged eye. It looks weird to see it now, with the skin around it almost fully repaired. "It's not as if you can predict what the Global Exchange is going to do on any given day! No one can. He wouldn't be the first to lose big on an investment."

Looking for a change of subject, no longer wanting to discuss the guy Sully ghosted, I nod towards her damaged eye. "I can fix that if you like. I don't have much to do until the diagnostic is complete. Not that I *wouldn't* want to do it even if I had something else to do, it's just that, with Sully, now I've got time, uh, well, I mean..."

"Smooth." I hear Sully say in my head.

Take a breath Luthor, focus.

"I can take a look at your eye, Katie, if you like." Finally seems I'm getting past tripping all over my words.

"Sure." Katie says. "I'd appreciate that. Do you need me to move? Or just stay here?"

"Oh, just stay there, I'll be right back. I have a spare optical interface by my workbench. It even has the full range of pigment settings, so we can match it to your right eye. No one will ever know the difference." I said smiling.

On the way to our wall of spare parts I can't help but feel like a fool. Here I am, aspiring robotics engineer, and I can't even spot an android? Albeit a bloody gorgeous android, but still, shouldn't I have been able to, I don't know, sense something? I glance back, as if to confirm it wasn't just a lack of attention on my part, and that it's completely obvious she's an android, all I find myself thinking about how beautiful she is.

I grab the optical interface from a wall peg. Sully had repacked it after he finished running through its specs. For a while he was thinking of trading in his red robot eyes for something a little more organic looking, but that was before he began secretly preparing himself for The Brain. On my way back to Katie I grab the small kit of specialized micro-precision turnscrews from the workbench, lying next to Sully. I pause, looking at him, and I just can't imagine what my life would be like if he

roblocked for good. He's been my best friend since the day Dad brought him home. My only hope is that the pathways in the new positronic brain are close enough to Sully's original brain that he won't experience much more data corruption, or loss. I'm having a hard time pulling myself away from the workbench, and when I look up I can see Katie watching me with her one glacier blue eye. Suddenly, I couldn't care less if she thinks I'm a geek, what's lying on that workbench isn't just machinery and software, that's my... brother. Yeah, Sully *is* my brother! My parents could have had a second child, but they chose not to. Dad brought Sully home from U.S. Robots and Mechanical Men, and that's close enough to a birthing center for me.

With this realization, I find renewed hope in the outcome of our forced experiment. I feel resolved to not let Sully die.

Walking back to my cot I could feel Katie's eye on me again. I looked up to meet it.

"Are you ok? You look angry."

I instantly feel bad, thinking I might have caused her even more fear tonight.

"No, I'm not mad, just worried about Sully."

"Sully... is your robot's name?"

"Sully is my *friend's* name, and my name is Luthor Davis."

"Yes, I remember hearing your names in line this morning at Sol-Bucks, it's just that we haven't really been properly introduced."

"Oh, yeah." I said, realizing I hadn't given her my name earlier when I had asked for hers. "Sorry, I didn't mean to be short with you. You don't deserve that after what you've been through tonight. I'm just worried about Sully."

Katie laughed softly.

"What's funny?"

"This morning, I was just remembering how you offered to buy Sully a cup of tea."

Katie laughed again, it was a beautiful light sound. "I thought it was funny how red you turned."

"I didn't, well, I mean, that wasn't ..." I managed to finally shut up and busy myself with untying the drawstring on the precision turn-screws so I can roll them out, so much for not stumbling all over my sentences. I open the package containing the optical receptor, and glance at the model number. I immediately know its installation specifications and procedure.

Looking back at Katie though, I realize that I'm not at all familiar with Eurobotics UK's designs, and that I will need some help from her. Katie's long black bangs hide her hairline, and I 'm not sure where the release seam for her synth-skin is. I need to peel it back so I can get to, and remove, the orbital framework underneath. This will allow me to replace the damaged optical receptor.

"Uh, Katie, I uh, hate to ask, I know you're still undergoing repairs... I need to access your facial framework on the left side, but I'm not familiar with your mod – uh, you, so if you wouldn't mind..."

Katie reaches up and pushes her hair behind her left ear. It was a perfect pink shell. There are two holes in her lobe, each with a little emerald stud. I'm transfixed as I watch her reach back with both hands and gather her hair together in a pony tail. I can't help but notice how the movement makes her rumpled uniform top stretch tightly across her chest, and I quickly look back down to fidget with the packaging for the optical interface. I look up at her in time to see her finish a small move behind her left ear, I don't catch all of it, but it must have been the magnetic release for her synth-skin, for immediately I see a seam appear in front of her ear. She reaches gently into this seam and slowly peels the left side of her face away.

The machinery underneath is also beautiful, I have never seen anything like it. The metal is smooth, almost organic looking, not at all like the severe plains and angles of Sully's face. There appears to be no damage to anything other than her optical receptor. The metal isn't even scuffed where the pipe had struck her. She is definitely the result of quality craftsmanship and superior materials.

It seems weird to think of her like that, so I get to work removing the orbital framework and the damaged eye. I gain speed as I work, my confidence with foreign robotics growing. Luckily Eurobotics UK uses U.S. Robots' standard metric hardware, and my set of turnscrews work just fine.

Within ten minutes I finish installing Katie's new eye.

"You may need to go online to update the driver, but there should be firmware installed in the optics that you can access as well."

"One moment please." Katie says in what must be her safe-mode voice. It's much like her normal one, except it's completely without inflection, monotone.

A second later Katie's new eye flashes to life. It's a brilliant emerald green.

“Oh, sorry, I guess I could have color-matched it before installing it, I just wasn’t thinking about... but you should be able to recalibrate the color...” I trailed off.

“No, I like it.” Katie says, no longer in safe-mode, and a second later her right eye is the same brilliant emerald as her new eye.

I must have been staring at her, because she laughs softly as she reaches out to gently push my chin up, closing my mouth. “Edward was the one who specified blue eyes... I think I prefer green, like yours.”

“Well, you’ll look beautiful whichever way you decide to go.” I said, immediately conscious of the red burn slowly creeping into my ears.

A loud beep issues from the network terminal, signaling the completion of diagnostic. I jump, but feel relieved that I now have something to do other than turn red in front of Katie, who didn’t jump, I notice, her eyes still steady on me.

Abruptly I get up, quickly grabbing my tools and move over to the monitor, my stomach twists into knots anticipating the results of the diagnostic.

Perfect. All pathways active, no corruption.

## Chapter 8

There's no reason to put it off. The preparations have been made, the system checks have been run. All I need to do now is move Sully from the network back to his body, and his new positronic brain.

I am scared though. This might be Sully's last moment, and if it isn't, then I'm about to initialize a Laws-free robot.

I take a deep breath, and suddenly Katie is beside me, her right hand gently sliding into my left. I look at her, and she smiles.

"You really care about Sully, don't you?"

"Yes, he's my friend... more like a brother, really." I realize I don't feel stupid telling her this. "If – *when* Sully boots up, things are going to be very different. I can be sent to a prison colony for this. Playing around with the Three Laws is one thing, but Sully and I have constructed a brain that is completely free of them. He will be able to make decisions now based on what he feels is right, not just which will be least likely to roblock him. Complete freedom... and we can never tell *anyone* because he would surely be destroyed."

I look back at Sully, and the monitor next to him suddenly flashes with bright green text – a message. It reads: LUTHOR, MY BROTHER, DO NOT BE AFRAID. WHEN THIS IS FINISHED, I WILL TAKE YOU UP ON THAT CUP OF TEA :)

It's Sully! Communicating with us from the network!

I laugh, and reach out to initialize the file transfer, my hand steady.

Katie suddenly stands on her tiptoes and kisses me softly on the cheek. Her lips are warm on my cool skin.



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