

“Today marks a new chapter for the SFPD. Scientists at Silicon Valley Institution of Technology have created a revolutionary android. One that is faster and stronger than any police officer. One that can process 15 yottabytes per second, so it can come up with many ways on how to take down a criminal in the safest way possible.” The round nose police chief took a moment to smirk. “If anyone is wondering how much a yottabyte is, let me say this. One hard drive of a yottabyte is almost the same size as Connecticut, so you can bet your life a yottabyte is humongous!”

He acts like he built it, Dave thought to himself as everyone around him clapped. The chief continued,

“A deal has been made with the university to purchase 3,000 units of their RHS series. They hit the streets today.” At that moment, people cheered as a blonde male RHS approached the stage next to the police chief. “Impressive isn’t he? This bad boy along with many more will save the lives of all the brave men and women working in the department. Enjoy the party folks.”

Save lives? They’re taking our jobs, and these morons are just clapping about it, Dave ranted in his mind. He just stood there in the crowd, with disgust filling his mind.

“I don’t believe this, can you?” a bald man cheered next to Dave.

“No, I can’t. Who thought it was a great idea to put the safety of the city with these mindless androids? You know what happened with the robots.

Chief Anderson is crazy just like the rest of these people.”

“Dave, this isn't 68 anymore. These are androids. They're more improved than the robots.”

Dave rolled his eyes, believing the statement was complete garbage.

“The only improvement was giving them human faces. I always knew technology was going to replace the common worker, but this is too far. Next, they'll have them fight the war on Mars for us.”

“If it saves lives, then it is a good investment. Why are you so against that?”

He turned to face Mike in order to get his point across.

“Mike, I'm not some guy stuck in the early 2000's. Technological advancement is good, but not all of it is. When the self-driving cars first came out, people loved them. They didn't have to drive anymore. That was good, but then look at the negatives that came from it. More car accidents occurred due to malfunctions. People should consider the improvements that they want rather than accept them just for the sake of the future.”

Placing his hand on Dave's shoulder, Mike smiled, showing off the gap where his two front teeth were supposed to be at.

“Cheer up, Dave. We’ve been laid off, but we get to keep our LP pistols. Don’t forget about the retirement money they’re giving us.”

Mike walked away sluggish with a drink in his hand. Remembering the retirement money, Dave knew being laid off wasn’t so bad. With the money, he would finally be able to afford that trip with his family to Hawaii. He knew how much they wanted it. It brought pleasure to him, knowing his family was going to be provided for.

As Dave was getting a glass from the table, someone bumped into him, causing the drink to escape from his fingertips. *Oh no*, he thought as a sudden gasp came across him. Right as the glass was about to hit the floor, a hand caught it in a swift move, preventing the wine from spilling out. A partial relief came over Dave, knowing he had avoided embarrassment.

“Sir, you dropped this,” the yellow-eyed man presented with a detached voice as he handed the glass to Dave.

“My god, you guys can do everything, can you?” Dave mocked.

“Why sir, not everything. My core processor allows me to do everything a human can, but at a faster rate. However, I can perform duties that humans cannot such as-.”

“Shut it, I don’t want to hear it,” Dave interrupted. “Your voice is annoying too. You sound like a robot.”

“Well sir, robot isn’t the correct term. I am an android, but to be specific, I am a Robotic. Humanoid. Synthetic.”

Dave rolled his eyes as he walked away to the door. *First day in, and I already can’t stand those things,* Dave thought.

“Dave!” a voice called out.

He turned around where he faced a man in uniform.

“Yeah chief?” Dave asked.

“The retirement party is on Saturday.”

“Thank you. Let me ask you a question. Has the entire department been fired, or are you still working?”

The chief smiled.

“Well, they still need a human around to guide these mindless soldiers, so I’m still here.”

That’s great. You get to collect our paychecks while we struggle for work. I hope they 86 you without a check, soon, Dave thought as he hid his disgust under his smile. The hatred wasn’t for the chief or anyone for that matter; it was for the system. The system that had screwed over the working-man in favor of profit. There was nothing he could do; he was just a spoke on the wheel.

“So chief, when are we going to get our retirement payment?”

“Dave, I’m sorry. We found out today that the government is cutting it.”

“What?”

“Yes, the war is costing a lot of money. They had to get the money from somewhere.”

Dave felt trapped with no options. He was being suffocated of life.

“So we have no job and no retirement money? What are we supposed to do?” Dave questioned.

Dave shook his head as the chief couldn't provide him with an answer. *What am I supposed to tell Susie? We knew I was going to get laid off, but the money was supposed to come. This is not good,* Dave contemplated as he walked away to the parking lot.

When Dave was opening his car door, a short man spotted him.

“Hey Dave, how's it going?”

Dave turned to the man.

“Not so good, Mayor Lopez.”

“I understand losing your job to an android is tough. You have to understand that I allowed the police department to take the androids to save lives.”

“You did what you thought was best.”

Dave kept moving his head around, limiting eye contact with the mayor. He was not in the mood for any chatter, especially talk that reminded him of his failure.

“That is why I will be rejecting the city’s legislation that allows androids to work anywhere in the city.” The reveal caused Dave to make strong eye contact with the mayor; his attention belonged to the mayor. “I will also reject the legislation that takes off the limit of one robot working in a store. It was supposed to be a surprise announcement at the signing two days from now, but I’m just letting you in on the secret. The only other person who knows my decision is the president of the university.”

“I thought the more machines, the better.” Dave couldn’t believe what he had heard. “Why change it now?”

“Honestly, I don’t like the idea of having a bunch of fake humans running everything. It just doesn’t feel right. How are people supposed to get by in these tough times if they are losing their jobs to robots and androids? I serve the people first. The only reason why I allowed the androids to replace the police department was because they are superior in skill, but you don’t need an android to flip patties.”

“So it stops at the police department, but there will still be robots in the stores?”

“Of course, people can still have their robots working for them, but the limit will still be 1. Other than that, androids will only be used in the police department.”

“Then I guess there will be a lot of jobs saved.” It was a consolation prize for Dave, something he could feel that was squeezed out for

the people. "That is, unless the government decides to cut them for funds."

"That reminds me, Dave." Mayor Lopez rubbed his short walrus mustache and stepped closer to Dave as if he wanted to tell him something exclusive. "Here's another secret. Listen, I know it's dangerous and not entirely legal, but I'm telling you this because I like you, and I don't want to see you and Susie struggle. With the war going on, there's companies that are paying people to go to Mars and dig up minerals for them. Basically, do what the government is fighting for, without having to put up with the fighting. These companies pay big time money. It's a contract, so you'll have to stay there for a few years. If you succeed, you will be paid a lot of money."

Dave's tongue was caught. He was too puzzled over the fact that the mayor would offer such a crazy idea. He needed money, but he wasn't that desperate to get himself killed over it.

"Just think about it, Dave. If you like what I'm saying, come by my house. I can set you up with the right people." The mayor's hand slid from Dave shoulder as he started to walk away. "See you around, Dave."

Still with negativity in his mind, Dave needed something to clear it. As long as he didn't have to think of his problems on his way home, it would be fine. As his car hovered into the air, he turned on the radio. *This will do the trick*, he thought. It was going

to be painful, telling his family he had failed. He had never enjoyed letting them down, and it was going to be harder this time. The radio station was playing.

“Let me tell you this,” the man on the radio said. “You think the war is bad? The police in my city fired the entire department and replaced them with droids! 100 years ago, they would have been great to stop police brutality. What has this world come to?”

Sean, keep telling it like it is, Dave thought as he navigated his car through the downtown area.

“Sean, you always complain about new technology,” another fellow responded on the radio. “Why do you hate it so much? Did your wife leave you for a vibrator?”

“You’re very funny, but let me tell you another thing. After that stunt those bots pulled in 68, they were supposed to be banned, but look what happened? The company just went bankrupt, and then other companies produced the home units. Now with the police department being replaced with androids, it’s obvious that the higher ups are plotting to have androids everywhere else. They want control over the people.”

When Dave arrived to his house door, he placed his eye to the red retinal scanner.

“Welcome home Mr. Lennon,” the female intelligent personal assistant welcomed.

As the door opened, his heart raced on. *What am I going to tell them?* Dave wondered.

“Daddy’s home!” a small child shrieked in joy as she ran towards Dave when he walked in.

Dave rubbed the girl’s thick brown hair as she wrapped around his legs.

“Hey, Chelsea. Did you have a good day at school today?”

“Yes! We learned about pandas!” she cheered. “Our teacher told us they were beautiful creatures, and people would travel from around the world just to see them!”

Dave looked at the imperfect smile of his little one.

“Yes, they were beautiful, just like the world is. This world is very wonderful, Chelsea.”

He had to tell his daughter that in order for her to keep her smile. There was so much evil in the world that the last thing he wanted was for her to lose her innocence. She released her hold and ran away as a blonde-haired woman came in.

“How was your last day at work?” the woman asked as she moved her lips towards Dave’s face.

“It was fine Susie.” They shared a kiss. “I have to tell you something.”

“We get to finally take that trip to Hawaii!”

Seeing his wife cheering while showing her white smile, made Dave feel worse. He could barely even

think of the words he was going to say as he wished he could just skip over the subject.

“Susie, I didn’t get it.”

Her smile slowly faded away.

“Why?”

“It’s the government. They took a lot of people’s retirement money to fund their war.” He figured by putting all the blame on the government, his wife wouldn’t look to him to blame. He knew deep down that it wasn’t his fault, but something inside of him made him feel like he could have prevented it. “Many more things are going to be cut because of the war.”

“How can they do that? That was your money.”

“It’s all a mess. To be honest, I could care less about a war somewhere else that doesn’t change our lives. When the government is screwing its own people here, you know who the enemy truly is.”

His fingers ruffled through his brown buzz cut fade. Life was crashing down on him, and he didn’t know what to do.

“It’s my fault, Susie. I should have been better at my job. I could have been the chief. That way, I would have kept my job.”

“Dave,” she began as she got closer to him, “this was all out of your control. Do not blame yourself for this.”

He gave her jade eyes a glossy look.

“I let you all down. We can’t go to Hawaii anymore.”

“Chelsea and I aren’t disappointed. I still have a job at the school, and eventually, you’ll find another job. For right now, let’s still have that celebration we planned. We’re going out.”

Dave sighed. At that moment, it was hard for him to reject the plan. He didn’t like being the contradiction to his wife’s happiness.

“Sure, we’ll go later tonight. Let me just rest.”

“Autopilot. Destination. Home,” Dave instructed the VPI in his car.

When his family stepped out of the car, it flew away. The weather felt better than the scorching temperatures during the day. A mixture of coolness and warmth during the night was all Dave needed to soothe his worries.

“Why is this place always packed?” Susie wondered.

“They do it on purpose. We think a restaurant is very good if people are waiting outside to get in,” Dave explained as his family walked into the line.

The line stretched out down the street, looking like an assembly line. People were waiting through hunger just to get a table. As the waiting went on, a

group of people were chanting with picket signs in their hands.

“Stop the war on Mars! It has gone too far!” they kept chanting as they advanced down the street, blocking traffic.

Dave didn't pay any attention to the protesters. *There's always something to protest about, I guess,* Dave thought.

“If those protesters were in my way, I'd run them straight over,” a man in front of Dave claimed as he smoked his cigar.

He kept his back facing Dave and his head facing sideways, but Dave knew the man wanted to spark a conversation.

“That'd be 25 years on the moon,” Dave added reluctantly as he looked around. He didn't want to get involved, but he didn't want the man to feel stupid for not getting a response. “The worst prisons are there.”

“Oh thanks, you reminded me,” the man continued. “This country enables criminals and weakens the citizens. These protesters are the ones who should be getting sent to the moon.”

“Criminals? They're just protesting.”

“Yeah, they're protesting against the men and women who fight for our freedom. Whatever happened to the good old days when people would actually stick up for their home? Nowadays, these young spoiled brats are just a bunch of anarchists

who want to see the world crumble. If they can't enjoy the values that this great planet provides them, then they can leave and go to Mars."

This guy doesn't have a clue, Dave thought.

"You know, you can love this planet and still recognize problems with it?"

"What problems?" The man took a moment to blow smoke, causing Susie to cover Chelsea's mouth from the toxin. "You look at how it is on Mars, and you'll see how good these punks have it here. Trust me, no one wants to live on Mars. Those savages on Mars live underground; they're not like us."

"They're just trying to live in peace, man."

Taking the cigar out of his mouth, the man turned around to face Dave. At that moment, something was bound to happen.

"Now you're starting to sound like those traitors. Whose side are you even on, pal?" the man questioned.

The hidden tensions were starting to rise. The man threw down a challenge, and Dave knew he had to put the man in his place. Dave rolled down his suit sleeve, revealing a tattoo of a dagger with dog tags around it that had the words *Operation Red Hail 2082-2086* on it.

"I think this answers your question," Dave confirmed as he gawked into the man's eyes.

The pressure was felt on the man; he knew he was put in his place. His smug look was replaced by a look of humility as he was speechless. He didn't take another puff of his cheap cigar. He turned around, remaining quiet for the rest of the wait.

"This steak was served fast. You guys must be very talented back there in the kitchen," Dave admired as the waiter served them their food.

The waiter smiled.

"It wasn't cooked by a human. We have a robot back there to help us. Although we can only have 1 due to city limits, it cuts down the workload by a lot."

Dave glanced at the kitchen on the other side of the restaurant. He spotted the metal clunk chopping at a speed faster than his eyes could capture. There was no denying that the machine was far superior to any human in that field. Dave felt like it was humanity against the machines, and there was no way they could possibly win. It was a battle that was already lost.

"I just hope something changes, so we can upgrade to the androids and get more than 1. It would be nice to have this place filled with only androids," the waiter continued as he placed the rest of the plates on the table.

"But then you'll be out of work," Dave reminded.

“Yes, but look at what robots and androids do for society. Man, I’m so glad I was born in this era. I get to see all these new inventions, everything is so fast.”

Dave raised his eyebrows at Susie as she smiled in pity.

“Enjoy your meal,” the waiter offered before he left the table.

“Poor young fool. He doesn’t have a clue,” Dave asserted.

The family started to eat. Dave sunk his teeth into the steak. The juicy steak touching Dave’s tongue had placed his mouth in heaven. He had steak many times before, but the way it tasted at the moment was extraordinary. For all his hate for the metal shells, he couldn’t deny that they made great steak.

“Susie,” Dave started. “We need to discuss our future-.”

“Not right now,” Susie budded in. “Let’s just enjoy what we have right now. There’s no need worry.”

“But, Susie-.”

“Dave, not in front of Chelsea.”

Dave laid back into his seat, and he looked at his daughter who was eating. Seeing her happy, made Dave focus just on the moment. *If she’s happy, then I’m happy*, Dave thought. Nevertheless, he knew no matter what, he had to think of his future and how he was going to help his family. His attention from his

daughter was quickly cut down from the loud opening of the restaurant's door where 3 men in suits and masks rushed in.

"Everyone get down!" one of the men yelled with their pistols out.

People were screaming and covering their heads as the men stormed the restaurant. *This isn't happening*, Dave thought. Adrenaline pumped into him as the only thing he cared about was his family's safety. One of the men fired a red laser, causing everyone to settle down.

"Get down," Susie whispered to Chelsea.

"Alright, just calm down," one of the men assured calmly as he walked down the middle aisle of the restaurant. His voice was muffled due to the black cloth covering his face. "Times are getting tough now, so we're just here for the money. Now, be kind and drop everything you have into our bags. Jewelry, cash, anything of any value, and no one will be hurt."

Bags were being filled as the men went around the tables. As Dave looked at Chelsea who hid under the table, he saw the confusion in her eyes. She was so innocent that she had no idea what was going on. As far as she was concerned, it was just a friendly game. She was still young, and the world wasn't perfect, but Dave didn't want her to know that just yet.

"No, my father gave me that!" a women cried as one of the men went for her ring.

“Shut up!” the thug barked as he gave her a nasty backhand across the cheek. “I don’t care about your father.”

The man proceeded to take the ring. Seeing all of this, Dave started to breathe heavily; his adrenaline kept rushing. It wasn’t just about his family anymore, everyone in the restaurant was in danger, and Dave didn’t like it.

“Dave, don’t,” Susie pled softly as she placed her hand over Dave’s hand. From looking at Dave’s rapid eye movement, Susie had seen that he was getting ready to act.

Dave watched the goons as one was getting closer to his table. *3, I can take these thugs*, he thought. The atrocities he had faced in the past made him well equipped to take on the amateurs. One of the men approached Dave’s table.

“Give me everything you have,” the man ordered with his gun in Susie’s face.

Remaining quiet, Susie stared at Dave who kept his eyes on the man’s gun. One wrong move couldn’t happen for Dave, everything had to be precise and quick.

“Did you hear me? Give me everything!” the man raged.

“Don’t talk to my wife like that,” Dave added while he stayed in his seat.

The man swiftly turned to Dave, aiming the gun towards his chest.

“Tough guy aren’t you?” the man taunted. “Won’t be so tough when your wife is crying over your dead body.” The man turned his head back to Susie, with his body still facing Dave. “Cute blonde, maybe she’ll come to me after I finish you.”

Dave saw his opening; he knew it was time to bring it. He deflected the gun with one hand and caught it with the other. When the man turned to Dave, his face burned into a bloody gash that left the remaining skin on his face melting. As Dave was getting out of his chair, a laser nearly missed his head; with swiftness, Dave faced the man who fired, and he dispatched one through the man’s heart. Before Dave could turn to the final man, he was hit in the shoulder, causing him to crash down behind the table.

The blast had torn right through Dave’s shoulder, leaving a burning sensation. The last man rushed to Dave’s table to finish him off.

“No!” Susie yelled as she got in front of the man.

Susie was flown to the ground from the man’s punch. The pain in Dave’s shoulder was excruciating; it stung like a bitch, but Dave knew he had to do something, or he wouldn’t get to see desert. Wobbling with pain, Dave picked up the nearby pistol. *Come on you bastard*, Dave thought as he waited for the man to get in sight to fire. Suddenly, the restaurant’s doors opened again, catching the last man’s eye. He was leaped on heavily, losing his grip of his gun; still dazed, he was silenced from a quick punch.

A sudden relief came over Dave. It had happened so quick that he didn't have a clue, but it was clear that the terror was over. Still on the ground, Dave was approached.

"Sir, you are wounded. My analysis says that the injury will require regeneration. I have contacted a regeneration unit. They should be here shortly," the yellow-eyed android explained. It placed its hand on Dave's shoulder. "Just relax, sir. You're going to be alright."

Susie and Chelsea ran over to Dave.

"Oh my god!" Susie cried as she hugged him.

"Watch it!" Trying to move away from his wife's grasp to avoid more pain, he didn't hug back. "My shoulder still hurts."

"Daddy! You're alright!"

"Yes, I am sweetheart."

Two men dressed in white, carrying tool boxes came into the restaurant; they approached Dave.

"We'll take care of you," one of them said.

One of the men cut Dave's sleeve with scissors, revealing the meaty chunk that was missing from his shoulder.

"Just hold still, man. This will be over soon," the other man assured as he took out a spray canister from the tool box.

The green coating that come out of the canister caused Dave to yell. *And I thought the laser stung,*

Dave thought, *this burns just as much*. The substance dissolved into Dave's flesh causing more flesh to regenerate from the gap in his shoulder.

"Good as new," one of the men assured as they helped Dave up. "You will still have some kind of pain, but it should go away by tomorrow."

"Thank you," Dave assured to the medics.

The medics walked away as the RHS turned to Dave.

"Sir, are you alright? My motion detector shows that your heart is beating rapidly. It is a symptom that commonly occurs in moments of adrenaline or extreme stress, usually during intercourse."

"Yeah, I'm alright." Dave continued to rub his shoulder to ease the pain. Thanks for the assist, but I had that guy. You didn't have to knock him out, I could have just killed him."

"You are correct, sir. If I had not intervened, you would have killed that man. However, from the distance that you would have fired your pistol, the laser would have went straight through him and hit someone in the leg. Nevertheless, the person you would have hit would have survived with minor injuries. Now if you will excuse me, I have to contact the morgue and send a report back to department."

As the android picked up the unconscious man, Dave turned to his family, ready to enjoy his delicious meal again.

“Let’s get back to eating,” he smiled.

“Are you kidding me?” Susie wondered with her arms folded.

“Is there a problem?” He knew something was wrong, it was a wonder why he even asked. “I’m serious.”

“Oh my god, I do not want to do this right now. Let’s just go home, Dave. I don’t want to be here.”

Dave sighed. His perfect night was ruined. He didn’t know if it was the thugs or him who caused it.

“Fine.”

He took out a clear plastic card and scanned it at the booth next to him.

“That is 300 dollars. Thank you for eating at Sears Fine Food. We hope you come again,” the male IPA said.

The silence in the car had made the trip back uncomfortable for Dave. He had been able to hear noises on the street below him because of the void that had filled the car. Susie had kept her head on the passenger window, trying to avoid eye contact while Chelsea had hummed happily to pass the time. *Come on, say something*, Dave thought.

“What’s the matter?” Dave asked as he glanced at Susie.

Susie didn't respond, causing more annoyance to Dave. He repeatedly sighed to show his frustration with his wife's sudden attitude.

"Daddy! That was so cool! You took down the bad guys, and then the good robot came in and helped you!" Chelsea cheered in the back of the car.

"Yes, honey. I put on a show today."

When they arrived home, Dave instructed,

"Chelsea, why don't you go inside, so mommy and I can talk. Okay?"

"Okay!"

After it was clear Chelsea got inside the house, Dave turned to Susie.

"Are you upset about what could have happened tonight? You heard the android. Someone would have got hit in the leg as well, but they would have survived, so what's the problem?"

"What's the problem? You put yourself in danger, and you're asking me what the problem is?"

"Susie, the only people who got hurt were the perps."

"What about before that? I stepped in the way to try and help, but what if he would have done someone thing worse than hitting me? You didn't have to do that, Dave. You could have just let them take what they wanted. They said they weren't going to hurt anyone," she ranted viciously. "You didn't have to be a hero."

“You didn’t know what people were giving up. That one lady’s ring had been given to her by her father. I didn’t want her to lose it.” Dave remained calm as his fingers pressed on the steering wheel to keep him that way.

“At the expense of putting you and me in danger, not to mention our daughter. Besides, anything could have happened. It was by mere luck that you didn’t get killed, Dave.”

“You have to have more faith in me.”

“Faith? All I have is faith in you while you don’t.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“You are so serious with everything! Why does it have to be life and death for you? You act like it was the end of the world if we would have been robbed, and you acted like that when you got laid off! Every time something bad happens, you try to go to the end of the world to fix it as if everything is going to hell if you don’t.”

“Oh, so that’s what this is about? You think I’m doing too much? Maybe it’s you. You’re the one who’s taking everything so lightly. You need to get real about things.” Starting to unleash his madness, Dave’s voice had grown louder. With the pressure he put on the steering wheel, he could have ripped it in two. He had to take out his frustration. It had been boiling up inside of him from all the mess he had gone through. Terrible business he was in, nothing seemed to work for him. “The world is in a hole right now, and I’m trying to do the best I can to keep our

lives out of the hole. You think just by smiling and saying everything is going to be alright, that the war will be over, I get my job back, and we live happily ever after? How about you get out of la la land and be a parent!"

At that moment he could tell Susie was just as angry as he was. She had got out of the car without saying anything.

"You're terrible right now, Dave."

She slammed the door and went inside the house.

"Dammit!" Dave yelled as he slammed his palm on the interior of the car. He didn't get the outcome he wanted when he had went on his rant. He had expected he would have gotten his point across to his wife through anger and force, but it only kept them more distant.

The car hovered back into the air and took off.

"Autopilot. Mayor Lopez's estate."

Feeling like he failed, Dave turned on the radio. *This day keeps getting worse.*

"If the government could kill as many people on Mars as they could jobs, then the war would have been over years ago." Sean Brookes on the radio claimed. "They already cut so many jobs this week. Who needs droids to kill jobs, when the government is doing it to fund their war? At least here in San Francisco, companies and the police department fire people and replace them with droids and robots. Everywhere else, the government cuts jobs, and that

field is completely gone. You can't drive across a bridge without worrying if it may collapse, you can't drink the water out of the faucet, and you can't go to the hospital for a routine checkup. You have to get shot in the street to go to the hospital; it's sad."

"An wat I hurd," another man added with a deep voice, "zat da government iz gonna be sending a nuke to Marz pretty soon. You know zat iz a lot of money, so expect mo cuts."

"Jesus!" Sean replied. "People wonder why Japan wants to leave the Union, and that's the answer right there. I don't blame them. You look at how much the war is costing, they better get out before it gets worse. If they do leave, they need to be prepared for the entire world to paint them as bigots just for wanting their independence back. Our government will tell us that Japan doesn't want to get with the times and evolve like the rest of the world, and how they're stuck in the olden days. It's all propaganda. I remember seeing those commercials on tv about the Union when I was younger. 'The first world union, now world peace.' We really believed the hype, and it was the only hope we had after the war. Now I see it for what it is. They promote unity and peace, but it's really just about money and control."

"Sean we needa uprising, some kind of revolution to over throw the establishment. We need somethang new."

"Well it's happening, and I'm not talking about that pointless war on Mars. I'm talking about one that involves everyone here, at our front steps. I've been

talking about it for almost 30 years. The higher ups want a war. They know that the Union is failing, and it's not enough to push their agenda, so they're going to need a war to justify putting the entire world under one government rule. It won't be a voluntary alliance like now, it'll be a police state. World War 4 is on the rise, and when it happens, it's going to be worse than the last one. They're going to use bio in this one."

"They're gonna use biology?"

"No, dude. They're going to use bio weapons, like germ warfare."

Not being able to listen anymore, Dave cut the radio off. Sean Brookes spoke the truth from time to time, but other times it was just nonsense, and Dave was in no mood for bullshit.

"You have arrived at your destination," the IPA stated.

Before Dave could get out of his car, his eyes caught Mayor Lopez walking behind a RHS. The mayor kept his head down and walked timidly with a sad face. *What is he doing with a RHS late at night?* Dave wondered as the mayor got into the back of the car. Moments after the car took off, Dave followed in his. *Keep my distance, I don't want them to see me,* he thought to himself. A few minutes had passed, and the car parked next to a blue dumpster in a secluded dark alley that was lit by only 1 light pole. Dave stopped his car on the side of the street to make his car appear like it was parked. He looked across the street into the alley where the mayor was talking. /

really wish I could hear him. Then again why is the mayor speaking to an android, especially at night?
Dave questioned.

Dave's long stare at the police car was instantly elevated to extreme fright when blood splattered on the back windshield of the police car.

"Christ!" he jumped.

The police car flew out of the back alley while Dave kept trembling. His fingers were shaking all on the steering wheel. *Snap out of it! Do something dummy!* Dave screamed in his mind. It had happened so fast, yet Dave could capture the entire scene. All that ran through his mind was the image of the mayor's cranium splitting open, like a watermelon hitting the pavement from the top floor of the Millennium Tower. He flew his car out of the alley. The option of autopilot wasn't even on Dave's mind as he flew recklessly past buildings, barely managing not to hit them. When he made it to his destination, he jumped out of his car before it touched the ground. At the house door, he kept banging.

"Mike! Let me in! Let me in!"

The door mechanically opened, allowing Dave to run inside. He had to make his way over all the trash on the floor. Beer cans, clothes, and more garbage spread all over the place. He spotted Mike on the couch watching tv.

"I saw you on the news tonight. You and your android buddy took those suckers down," Mike stated, eyes glued to the tv.

An action flick featuring a cop chasing after a suspect played on the tv. Mike loved action movies with thin plots. As long as it had explosions, Mike was up for it. Dave ran over to the tv and turned it off.

“Dave, what are you doing?”

“Listen Mike!” Dave ran towards Mike as he tried to catch his breath. “I just saw a RHS kill Mayor Lopez.”

The news prompted Mike to stand up from the couch, puzzled.

“What?”

“I saw it. He was in its car, and his brains just exploded! There was blood all over the car! The android killed him!”

“That’s impossible.” Mike scratched his head, trying to think of an explanation for the bizarre claim. “A RHS can’t kill a person who doesn’t propose a huge threat. They only kill when it’s the last option. Besides, killing someone in cold blood is murder, and the RHS do not do that.”

“I saw it with my own eyes, Mike. It shot him!”

Mike shook his head as he laughed.

“You think I would lie to you? I didn’t make it up,” Dave argued.

“I don’t know man. It’s been a long day for you, just sleep it off.”

Dave put both of his hands on Mike's shoulders, and he looked him in his eyes.

"I'm not playing, Mike."

After a few seconds of looking back into Dave's eyes, Mike's laughing tone went away. For a moment, Dave could feel that Mike was starting to listen.

"Then call the police," Mike suggested.

"Jesus, Mike. Do you listen to what I am saying?" The irritation in Dave was unbearable. "I can't call the police. They are the ones who killed him."

"Fine." It seemed like Mike was giving in to Dave's silly claims. "Tomorrow, pick me up, and we'll go by the mayor's house, to talk to his wife."

"What the hell is that going to do?"

"Well if he's there, then he's still alive, and the RHS didn't kill him."

"And when he isn't?"

"I don't know. He could be out playing golf."

"But you don't believe me, do you?"

It was pointless asking that question. Dave knew Mike hadn't believed him, but it had been a surprise that Mike was going along with the plan.

"Dave, we have been friends for a long time. I don't have anything to do right now, so I'll join your wild goose chase."

“Thank you, Mike.”

Relief came over Dave. At least he had been able to get Mike to tag along. Walking to the door, Dave stepped on a pizza box.

“Oh my bad,” Mike apologized as he continued to watch tv. “I haven’t cleaned up in months.”

Jesus, clean your place Mike. No wonder why Jaimie left you, Dave reminded himself, before leaving the house. As Dave sat in his car, his eyes focused on the night sky above him. His loving wife and beautiful daughter wasn’t in his mind. Finding a new job was the least of his worries now that he faced a bigger problem. *It’s been a long day,* Dave thought to himself, *but tomorrow will be longer.*

Heart pounding, Dave had sat uneasy in his car seat as he had waited for Mike. He had known he was going to be accompanied by his friend, but it wasn’t enough to ease his tensions about what was to come. Out of the door, came Mike jogging to the car.

“Clear skies this morning, thankfully,” Mike observed as he stepped into Dave’s car.

The car hovered in the air. It was still early in the morning, so the heat didn’t pick up yet. Nevertheless, Dave had turned the air conditioner on to combat the already rising temperatures in his car. Fresh cooling air had gusted on the skin of the two men.

“I’m telling you Mike. When we get there, Mayor Lopez won’t be there. I won’t be surprised if his wife isn’t there either.”

“Let me guess.” The smile on Mike’s face indicated sarcasm. “That would mean the RHS killed both of them?”

“There’s nothing to smile about, Mike.” The silliness in Mike continued to irritate Dave. “I know what I saw. You’ll believe me soon.”

They finally arrived to the mayor’s house. Dave had heard about it plenty of times, but he had never seen how splendid it looked. Pink pillars stood to hold the 3 story house up, making it look like a castle on a mountain. Dave dispatched the car from the air to get near the golden gate that surrounded the house. At the gate, Dave put his eye next to the retinal scanner, allowing his eye to be recognized.

“Welcome, former detective Lennon,” the API greeted as the gate opened.

“Damn, even the API knows we don’t work for the police anymore,” Mike laughed as the car drove in.

The two walked through the pathway in the rose garden. A calm feeling came over Dave as he heard the soothing sound of water running in the garden fountain. The fresh smell of rosemary enlightened Dave’s nose, reminding him of the rosemary plants his mother had planted in her garden when he was younger. Back then his troubles had been gone, and he had been a curious little boy. His mother’s garden had been the center of the

happiness in his life. It had been the place where evil had not existed. Whenever he had a terrible day at school, he had always run home to his mother's garden where she had been at. "Dear," she had said with gardener gloves on, "are you alright?" Seeing his mother contribute to the lives of the plants had reminded Dave that life had been good. There had been no war, no androids, no robots, no worries; the flowers in his mother's garden had blossomed just like his youth at the time.

Now as Dave stood in the mayor's garden, he could feel that the vision he had in his past was the truth. He could feel that the world he lived in was good, but it was just a perception, and like all perceptions, it was not reality. The beautiful image of Dave's past vanished when a woman with blue curly hair opened the door.

"Dave and Mike! How nice to see you two!" she greeted.

They greeted back as the woman hugged each of them.

"What can I do for you two?" she asked.

"It's about Mayor Lopez. We just want to speak to him real quick," Dave offered.

"Sure, of course." The white teeth in her smile showed more as her mouth widened. "Come right on in."

She led them into the house.

“I like your hair, Claire,” Mike praised. “When did you change it?”

She stopped right there and turned around with a bigger smile on her face. Mike’s words had put her in a cheering mood.

“Oh, just a few days ago.” She tried to play it off like it wasn’t such a big deal, but it was clear that it made her happy, knowing someone had noticed. “I thought it was time to change it a little.”

“Well, it looks beautiful,” Dave added, not wanting to be the rain on the parade.

She turned back around and led them down the hall.

“Honey, Dave and Mike from the police are here to speak to you.”

Dave’s eyes squinted, hinting confusion. When they entered in the room, they saw the mayor sitting behind a desk where he was reading.

“I hope they’re not here to arrest me,” the mayor joked.

Dave gasped as a heavy feeling came over his stomach. *What the hell?* Dave thought.

“I’ll leave you 3 to talk,” his wife concluded before she walked away.

Mayor Lopez placed the book on his desk, and he looked up at Dave and Mike.

“It’s nice to see you two again.” His bushy eyebrows moved up with his smile. “How’s life treating you all so far?”

“Just enjoying the retirement!” Mike cheered as he stepped closer to the mayor with excitement.

The mayor turned to Dave.

“Dave, how are you?”

“Doing fine,” he uttered as he timidly walked towards the mayor.

“So what is this you wanted to see me about?”

Dave just stared at the mayor. He was speechless; he didn't know what to do. The mayor looked absolutely fine; he had the same smile, same reassuring attitude, same bushy eyebrows and mustache. It could have been a dream for all Dave knew.

“Mayor Lopez, you wouldn't believe the story Dave came up with last night.” Mike glanced back at Dave with a smile, causing Dave to grow anxious, knowing Mike was going to blabber. *Shut up, Mike*, Dave thought to himself, knowing he was going to be put on the spot. “He said he saw you get killed by a RHS in its car last night.”

At that moment, all rational thoughts vanished from Dave's head. He was lost, not knowing what the hell kind of response he was supposed to give in his defense.

“What?” Mayor Lopez laughed as his neck swung back from the burst of laughter. “That's hilarious!”

“I know! That's what I was thinking.”

The mayor laughed uncontrollably as if he couldn't help himself. Dave felt betrayed, seeing the two men laugh as tears filled their eyes. Seeing something that was meant to be serious and taken as a joke was humiliating for Dave, and the feeling pissed him the hell off.

What the hell, Mike? Dave thought to himself.

"Too funny," the mayor stated with left over giggles still in his voice, blood turning his face red like a tomato. He walked over to Dave and placed his hand on his shoulder, taking a moment to get a few more laughs out. *You're trying too hard, Dave thought, it wasn't even that funny.*

"You kids are funny." The mayor kept nodding his head to assure confidence into Dave, but Dave wasn't lacking any; Dave knew what he was talking about. "I'm going to miss you guys working for the department, but this was a good prank and all."

"Well, I think we've taken up enough of your time. We'll be going now," Mike mentioned.

The confusion that was inside of Dave's mind was boggling. It was as if the mayor getting his head blown off was all part of Dave's wild imagination. Still, mistrust plagued his mind.

"You have a nice day you two," the mayor smiled as they began walking away.

"Thank you, you too," Mike replied, still chuckling. He put his eyes on Dave as they walked towards the door. "I knew he was going to find it funny. You're a funny guy, Dave. You know that?"

Not a single word came from Dave's mouth. His lips remained sealed as he was holding back his thoughts, waiting to get out the door to let Mike have it. When they got outside, Dave turned to Mike.

"Mike, what the hell was that? I tell you something that was important; you just brush it off and tell the mayor about it. Are you kidding me? You're supposed to be my pal. What kind of shit was that back there?"

"Dave relax." The gap in Mike's teeth were shown again with his crooked smile. The more Mike smiled, the more his ignorance was shown, making Dave more agitated. "Everything is fine, you just have to stop worrying so much."

Dave shook his head, regretting ever getting Mike involved. *I wish you had your front teeth, so I could knock them hell out of your mouth*, Dave thought.

"Let me just take you home now," Dave sighed, feeling defeated.

When they arrived to Mike's house, Mike got out of the car and opined,

"Just relax, and go home, Dave. Forget any of this happened."

You really do have your head up your ass like everyone else, Dave thought as he rolled his eyes.

"See you around, Mike."

Mike waved as the car lifted off into the air. As Dave flew off in the car, he received a call. A holographic screen popped up when he answered.

“Dave Lennon?” a woman in a nurse outfit asked.

“Yes, that’s me.” He had been hesitant to speak at first. He was amazed at the woman’s good looks causing him to grin a little. The woman’s oval face and velvet hair was enough to make him feel in love like a little child.

“Hi, I’m calling from San Francisco General Hospital where our staff were the ones who performed your regeneration last night.”

“I remember,” he replied without even thinking.

His mind wasn’t thinking back to the night at the restaurant, all he could focus on was the woman’s perfect seeming face. It was the curls in her velvet hair that had caught his eyes. Her hair reminded him of the velvet cake that he loved to eat. The soft sweet layers of the cake covered in swirly vanilla frosting was what Dave was in the mood for at the moment. He could feel his mouth watery just at the image of the desert in his mind.

“The reason for my call is because the substance that they used to regenerate your shoulder, Kand-240, has side effects.”

“Which are?”

“You will experience hallucinations for a few days, but afterwards you will be fine.

All images of cake and the woman’s beauty were wiped out from Dave’s mind; his attention was now aimed at the medicine.

“What kind of hallucinations to be exact?”

“Things from your subconscious, like fears you never knew you had.”

“Thank you for informing me.”

“It’s our pleasure,” she grinned before the call ended.

That heavy feeling came over Dave once again as things started to get more bizarre. *Is this what this all is, just a hallucination?* Dave wondered. *Am I going crazy because of what they gave me last night? But she said it’s what you think, not what you see that gets messed up, and I saw the mayor get shot. This isn’t from my mind, it’s true, unless what I thought was true created the image of the mayor getting killed. God, is it that bad?*

“Thanks for the cockroach milk,” Dave told the bartender as a glass of milk was handed to him at the table.

The refreshing feeling that Dave had wanted was finally in his hands. With a sip of the milk, Dave tasted the rich sugars of the drink. *That hit the spot,* he thought as he continued to drink.

“Taste good, doesn’t it?” the hairy-armed bartender guess as he wiped down a glass. “If I had my medical insurance, I could afford to drink 100 of those things with the pills I would get for my diabetes. I suppose you’re one of the lucky ones.”

“Not really lucky.” Dave had kept the glass in his hands to cool down his sweaty hands. “I just don’t drink it a lot. I don’t want to get diabetes from all that added sugar in it.”

“It’s a shame.” The bartender placed the glass down and faced Dave. “Even if I did get pills for my diabetes, I would still have to live with it. They make you sick, but keep you alive just enough for you to go back to them for medicine. After all these years, we can create robots and androids, but still no cure for major diseases.”

“They care more about their profits for their businesses rather than the health of the people.”

“Now that’s something we can toast to.” The bartender raised the empty glass as Dave raised his, sharing a smile. “True American capitalism.”

When the bartender walked away, Dave looked at the holographic television monitor where a man with pointy ears and a pointy nose was speaking. Dave read on the caption, *President of Silicon Valley Institution of Technology Richard Mountford.*

“We are very confident tomorrow that Mayor Lopez will do the right thing,” Richard Mountford began on the holographic screen, “and sign the proposed legislation. We believe the deal with the police department was the 1st step, and tomorrow will

be the next step in providing an efficient workforce for the economy.”

Dave shook his head. *It's efficient unless you're a human like the rest of us*, he thought as Richard pointed out to the crowd.

“Some say, this is just a way for the institution to get rid of human workers in place of these androids,” a female reporter remarked.

Richard chuckled as one of his high arch eyebrows rose.

“There's no doubt that they are some negatives to all of this. What big invention doesn't have any drawbacks? People will lose their jobs, but look at the bigger picture. A person doesn't have to make money being a bank teller anymore, they could use that free time to do other things. Besides, look at what this will do for society. Everything you ever wanted will come to you so fast, you won't ever have to wait on anything.”

A male reporter asked,

“And what about your father? Many people believe this is just a way for you to get back at the companies that took advantage of his failure, and how are people supposed to feel safe with these androids when your father's robots malfunctioned in the past.”

The smile on Richard's face had disappeared as the pressure had been cranked on him. He looked down, placing his hand on his red chin puff goatee.

“This isn’t the 60’s anymore,” Richard assured as he faced the audience again. “What happened with my father years ago, happened because some programmer who worked for him wanted to create artificial intelligence for the robots, and we all saw how that came out. The system that runs the RHS is superior to that of the 60’s. It cannot be tampered with, so there is nothing to fear. As for the companies that sell robots, I will work with them, so we can bring the robots of the past together with the university’s androids. In the end, everyone will benefit, and no one will fall. Thank you.”

Richard strutted off the stage, showing the confidence in his mighty walk. His broad shoulders had screamed excellence to the point that even Dave had to admit that he was a walking breathing success.

“He really is playing the role,” the bartender mentioned. “There’s no way that the companies that sell robots are going to be in business after tomorrow. All those androids with their human faces are going to replace those cheap robots. Then again, that’s only if the mayor signs the legislation. Richard seems so confident that he will.”

“Yeah,” Dave figured as his eyes started to wonder off to the ceiling, “he seems too confident.”

A sudden spark ignited inside Dave’s mind, allowing him to put the pieces to the puzzle together. *I don’t believe it*, he thought as his mouth hung open. He was able to see what was in front of his face the whole time.

“Thanks for the drink, Glen,” Dave mentioned as he ran out the door.

Once the autopilot was on, Dave dialed a number on the car’s dashboard. After a couple of rings, a fat-faced man came up on the holographic screen. His eyes had been focused on Dave for a few seconds before he took off his glasses.

“Yes?” the man questioned anxiously.

“Sean Brookes, it’s really you!”

Dave had been star struck, seeing one of his favorite celebrities. The man who thought the same as Dave, was a man who he considered close, and that was Sean Brookes, even if he had no idea who Dave was.

“Yeah, that’s me man.” The stubbornness in his voice grew, but it didn’t faze through Dave’s jolly attitude. “What do you want?”

“I’m telling you this because no one would believe me, and you seem like the only one who would believe me since you are skeptical of these androids.”

Sean rolled his eyes as he sighed. It was evident that he had little interest in what Dave had to say.

“I don’t have time for this, goodbye.”

“No wait!” Dave knew he had to catch the man’s dying attention, with careful words that wouldn’t send him away. “It’s really important.”

“Then what is it?”

“Last night I saw a RHS kill the mayor. He shot him right in the head.”

“You’re already annoying me. You have just a few seconds left before I’m ending this call.”

“Listen. My name is Dave Lennon.” It was all or nothing at that moment. Dave couldn’t afford beating around the bush; he had to let it all out, or lose his only hope at getting to the bottom of the case. “I use to work for the police before we got replaced by the androids. The day that the mayor died, he told me that he was planning on rejecting the legislation about the androids tomorrow, and that nobody knew his decision expect for Richard Mountford. Now that’s funny because Richard seemed so hopeful that the mayor will sign yes on it.”

The agitated expression on Sean’s face was replace with a look of curiosity. A little smirk came across Dave’s face as he knew he had Sean.

“Now you probably think I’m crazy since there has been no reports of the mayor missing, and I saw what appeared to be him today, but that’s after I saw him get killed. I think something’s going on between the mayor, the university, and the androids.”

“Have you told anyone else this?”

“I tried telling my partner, but he wouldn’t listen.”

“Alright, I’ll send some coordinates where we can meet up tonight at 8:30 to discuss this. Do not tell anyone of this.”

The call ended as Dave arrived back to his house. He let out a huge breath of relaxation, knowing that he was finally getting somewhere.

As he was heading up the stairs in his house, Susie appeared from the bottom of the stairs.

“Mike came by,” Susie informed.

Dave turned around.

“And?”

“He told me that you been acting weird. Then the hospital called me about the side effects of the substance they used to regenerate your shoulder. What is going on with you?”

“Nothing, I’m fine.”

He continued walking upstairs, but with heavier steps from his nerves being messed with by his wife’s random questions.

“You call running around town, believing an android killed the mayor being fine?” Those words stopped Dave at the top of the stairs. Susie knew he was getting stressed, but she didn’t care. To her, Dave was a loose cannon, and she had to put a stop to it. “You’re losing it right now. You should just lie down until the side effects wear off.”

“I can handle myself, Susie.” He had only turned half way, not facing Susie, not trying to get into another useless argument. “Where are you going?”

“I’m going to chaperon for Chelsea’s field trip to the Panda Museum.”

“That shouldn’t be long.” He started walking back down the stairs. “Let me come with you.”

“No! I don’t want you around kids right now.” Her words had stopped Dave in his tracks, destroying any attempts for reconciliation at that point. “Now go rest!”

Dave shook his head.

“Whatever,” he stated, walking away, feeling drained and too tired to debate any longer.

When he got to his bed in his room, Dave stared at the fish tank ceiling. *You fishes have it easy, don’t have anything to worry about*, he thought as he looked at the red flowerhorn fish swim through a corral.

“Mr. Lennon are you alright,” the female IPA voice called out.

“Yes, thank you for asking.”

He looked at the clock on the wall next to his Prince Nelson painting. *2:15, I have a couple hours to sleep*, he thought before he rested.

Going into the underpass in his car, Dave went into the darkness that had hid beneath the city. He saw the world that had been forgotten by the rest of society. Ripped up tents, and bums scavenging through garbage cans for their next meal were on

both sides of the filthy street. Looking through his window, Dave saw the many dirty faces of the abandon souls. Men, women, and even children who were mistreated by the machine, gazed back at Dave with desolated eyes, being drawn to the fancy automobile that was beyond their worthless lives. Dave parked his car next to a wall that had graffiti inscribed on it. The words were obviously drawn by an illiterate person, maybe one of the bums. Still even with the chicken scratch writing and misspelled words, Dave was able to form, *God must be a capitalist because only the rich are blessed with a good life.* Before Dave could even analyze the text, his focus was disrupted by a knock on his window. Turning his head, he faced a green-haired woman in an unzipped shiny red jacket, looking like a puppy with her thrilled eyes. *What do you want?* Dave thought as he rolled the window down.

“Hey sweetie! You want a go?” she offered with excitement as she quickly flash her round bust to him.

“You got to be kidding me? You can get arrested if you don’t have a license for that” The woman’s boldness had taken Dave by surprised. Never had he figured someone would risk their freedom so stupidly, even if he had no jurisdiction to make an arrest. “Did you even see the car?”

“This is a police car?” Curiosity replaced the eagerness in her voice as she placed her finger on her lip. “I couldn’t tell.”

“That’s because it’s a detective’s car, but we all drive hover cars.”

The woman seemed impressed.

“A detective? Are you solving a murder right now?”

“Don’t try to change the subject.”

Dave had no idea why he even bothered at that point, but anything to pass the dreadful time and make him feel like he was a cop again was okay for him.

“Well I do have a permit. It’s just that with many shops closing, we’re on the streets now.”

“Well it wouldn’t matter. I’m retired now.”

“So you want a go or not? It’s 500 dollars an hour.”

Dave burst in laughter.

“You’re very daring offering that kind of price on the streets. I guess times really are tough. You should lower your price though, and you might get some luck.” He eyed her from her lavender lipstick down to her tone legs. He wasn’t admiring her; the profession she was in didn’t allow Dave to take any interest, but he was curious to see if she was legit or not. “What was the most you made in one night?”

“25 thousand. It was a movie star who came into the shop I use to be at in L.A. 15 years ago.”

“15 years ago?” He was flabbergasted by the reveal, having to take a few moments to breathe. “You look no older than 25.”

“46, isn’t genetic modification a beauty?”

“If you say so.” He was so astonished, that he didn’t stop to wonder if she was telling the truth or not. It didn’t matter to him, it was evident that she knew how to play the game, and that was what he admired about her. “I’m going to need you to leave, honey. I’m meeting someone, but I’ll give you 100 to help you out.”

They placed their cards right next to each other.

“Thanks handsome,” she smiled as she began walking away. “Maybe, we’ll see each other again.”

Dave looked into his mirror where he gazed at the red skirt that held the woman’s curved tail. On the street or not, there was no denying that her rump was a sight to see, especially for a troubled man such as Dave.

Suddenly the passenger’s door opened, causing Dave to dispatch his pistol. Aiming it at the intruder inside, Dave recognized the frighten man who held his hands up.

“Boy, I could have killed you Sean.” Dave placed his gun back into his jacket, feeling glad that he didn’t blow the sucker’s head away. “Next time knock.”

“And next time, lock the door.”

This guy really is an asshole, Dave thought. I heard the stories, and now I know.

As Dave looked at Sean buckling the seat belt, he noticed that Sean wasn't wearing his glasses, and his right eye was bloodshot.

"My eye right?" Sean smiled after spotting Dave looking at him. "The neighbor's son struck a baseball, and it smacked me."

"Why didn't go to the hospital? They would have fixed it in a few seconds."

"Didn't feel like it." Looking at Dave, Sean kept his smile to reassure his point as the car hovered in the air. "I'll do it later."

He seems to happy, Dave thought as an odd feeling radiated over him. Dave had listened to Sean on the radio countless times, and after his funky attitude over the video call, it was clear that Sean wasn't a friendly person. Still and yet, the man was as happy as he could be which rubbed Dave the wrong way, but it wasn't enough for Dave to further contemplate on it.

"So where are we going?" Dave wondered.

"You can just drive while we talk about this matter."

Turning on the autopilot as the car came out of the underpass, Dave had felt the odd feeling again, hitting him straight in his gut. One time was something to ignore, but two times had been enough for Dave to start listening to the feeling. He didn't know what it was telling him, but he knew he had to remain alert at all times.

"I need to ask you something before we talk about the problem," Dave brought up, looking at the city lights through his window. "Do you really believe all that mess you be rambling about on the radio, or is it just for the show?"

"Of course it's just for the show," Sean chuckled. "All the nonsense you hear me talk about like World War 4, bio weapons, and the rest of the conspiracies is just talk show radio. I mean if I actually believed what I was saying, I would be with the rest of the dummies calling into my show."

"I figured," Dave laughed, shaking his head, knowing he had almost been duped to believing all the hype. "But why do you do it? Don't you think people are going to be afraid from actually believing you?"

"I count on people believing me and getting all scared." His voice had risen confidently with his smile. "It's what drives society."

"What do you mean?"

"Listen, the world has problems, but we always have a boogeyman that never comes out from under the bed." Sean turned his knees to face closer to Dave, as he prepared to give Dave an explanation. "What I mean is, every generation believes that their generation is going to be the last. Today, people tie the end of the world to the Union splitting apart resulting into another world war that will destroy the planet. Many years ago, people feared a nuclear World War 3 was going to end the world. Even years before that they feared many

things that they thought were going to bring an end to their society. They went ballistic over communism for so many decades back in the olden days.”

“But the war did happen.” Dave was like a child in class as he tried hard to follow along. What Sean had spoken of was intriguing for Dave, but he was struggling to put it all together. “And there were missiles being launched.”

“Exactly, but it didn’t go how those doomsday theorist preached about it. Only like 6 countries had a city that was hit, a few million people died, and we rebuild. Now, those cities are rebuilt, and the world is at peace with each other. Look, the shit was bad, but we were able to rebuild into a better world. Maybe the Union will break up, hell we might have another world war that would be with bio weapons, but it won’t be the end of civilizations as we know it. We’ll live on like we always do.”

The car was approaching near Chinatown.

“You wanted me to meet you tonight for a reason. Is there anything you can add to what I told you?” Dave asked.

“Right. Can you run by what you told me again?” Sean had scratched his head, trying to trim off the embarrassment of not remembering. “I need to refresh my memory.”

“I don’t see how you forgot something as outrageous as what I said, but okay,” Dave began sarcastically. “The mayor was killed by a RHS after he told me that he was going to reject the legislation that allowed unlimited androids to work everywhere; I

saw him at his house today, but I'm sure it really wasn't him; finally, Richard Mountmore, the president of the university, seemed like he knows the mayor will accept the legislation.

"Yeah, about you seeing the mayor." Sean had scratched his neck, causing attention from Dave. "You say you believe it wasn't him. How can that be possible?"

"I don't know. I just know it wasn't him, unless a guy can survive getting shot in the head at that close range and function normally."

"Well, President Crawford did it." The sight of the devastating shooting at the charity event a few decades ago had been remembered by the entire world. The bullets that the loon had used had split the president's head in two; it was one of the last guns produced to ever use actual bullets. It had been one of the worst moments in the country since the towers fell, yet the medics were able to regenerate the president's entire skull thanks to him still having a part of his brain. "Anyways, why did you contact me? I'm just a radio talk show host."

"No one else would believe me." Dave's voice started to grow with impatience; the irrelevant questions had startled his nerves. "I heard you on the radio, talking about how you distrust those androids."

"Stop the car."

Dave pressed a button causing the car to stop in the air.

“What?” Dave asked, not in the mood for any more games.

Sean turned to Dave, showing off the strong smile again.

“So there’s nothing else you can tell me?” Sean asked.

“No, I thought you could have helped me.”

Is this guy going to help me or what? Dave thought.

The small eyes of Sean had pierced through his lens and into Dave’s eyes.

“What?” Dave pestered.

There was no reply as Sean continued staring at Dave. A claustrophobic feeling came over Dave; feeling uncomfortable by the weird attitude of Sean.

“Nothing.” Sean removed his focused from Dave’s eyes, looking back at his passenger’s window. “Warm night, I love these summer nights. It must suck to be an android, they can’t feel the weather.”

What the hell? Dave thought, gasping quietly without alerting Sean. The words Sean had spoken, caused Dave’s toes to curl as he knew something wasn’t right by what Sean had said.

“That’s funny.” Dave turned to Sean as the adrenaline in him started to kick, preparing for an imminent conflict. His suspicions had risen, but now it lead him to the truth. “I never heard you use the word ‘android’ before, you always say droid.”

“And what’s the big deal?” Sean laughed, facing Dave. “Droid, android, it’s the same word.”

“Not for you it isn’t.”

While remaining eye contact with Sean, Dave had to make sure that reaching for his gun slowly wouldn’t bring Sean’s attention to what he was really doing. A quick glance at Dave’s slow movement towards his jacket caused Sean to smile once more.

“Well,” Sean sighed, “I guess I don’t need you anymore.”

The seatbelt around Sean was quickly unfastened, allowing him to lunge his hands around Dave’s throat. The iron grip caused Dave to lose his grasp of his pistol as he felt his oxygen being taken away from his lungs as if a vacuum was sucking it up. He tried to rip Sean’s hands off of his throat, but the hold was incredibly strong. In a panic, Dave punched a button in the car causing it to drop down. As Dave was losing air, the car was getting closer to the ground before the last thing he saw was it colliding with the ground.

When he opened his eyes, Dave found himself hanging upside down in his car seat, with a sharp pain in the center of his skull. A fresh wave of air had filled his lungs. His ears were ringing as he saw many people surrounding the crash site. *That was close*, he thought, feeling lucky he’s jugular hadn’t been ripped from his throat. He unbuckled his seat belt and crawled out from under the wreckage, discovering a tight pain in his right knee. When he got to his feet, he picked up his pistol and saw the

imposter Sean stuck between the car's windshield, hanging over the hood. Dave took a moment to rub his neck, trying to relieve it of the feeling of being choked.

"Androids," Dave scorned as yellow foam oozed out of the android's mouth.

The android was twitching relentlessly with a face as blank as any robot. All sense and purpose that the android had held was gone due to the crash as it had been reduced to another broken tool. A spurt of glee came on inside of Dave as he raised his pistol, knowing the android couldn't get the jump on him. A quick laser exploded the android's cranium into bits, flying the remaining parts in all directions. With all the hate Dave kept for their kind, it brought satisfaction that he finally had the opportunity to blow one away. He limped back to the driver's seat where he pressed some buttons into the computer.

"Show me the destination of where the last call came from," he instructed as he wiped the blood from his nose.

He had to make sure he wasn't close to the fire that had been burning in the car's hood. He could feel the heat that had burned hotter than the boiling temperatures of the night. The flames had melted the remaining upper half of the android causing its synthetic skin to drip onto the ground. After getting the destination from the computer, Dave proceeded to go over to a parked taxi on the other side of the street. As he limped through the crowd of onlookers, they started to take pictures of his face. Covering himself from the phones, Dave placed his face inside

his jacket. He had never liked the spotlight at all even when he would break major cases. *People always want to record things before calling the police*, he thought as he crossed the street.

“Hey man. I need you to punch in these numbers, and take me to the destination,” Dave told the driver as he got into the car.”

“Man, what was that back there? Are you some kind of cop with that hover car?” the middle-age man questioned. He had a bumpy face with wild hair all over it.

“Just do it.”

“Alright, what’s the numbers?”

After the numbers were plugged in, the car took off. While Dave was getting buckled, he noticed a foul stench that had filled the taxicab. *Jesus Christ, what the hell is that smell?* Dave thought, putting his shirt over his mouth and nose. The taxicab reeked of a nasty odor that burned the inside of Dave’s nose, while putting a sour air into his mouth.

“It’s not that bad,” the driver smiled, looking into the mirror, revealing his teeth that were as yellow as corn.

“What is it?”

“It’s rat. I found one in my cab the other day.” He kept grinning as if he was proud of the statement like it was an accomplishment. “It was dead. I haven’t took the time to take it out, but once I do, I’m going to cook it.”

“I hate rat, and are you serious?” Dave had heard of crazy shit before, he drunk cockroach milk for that matter, but what the driver was talking about brought insanity to another level. “Just go buy one from the food market.”

“No can do.” His smile persisted. “I want it fresh, not with all that added shit they put into it at the market.”

“So you actually care about your health?” Dave laughed, looking around the cab. It was ironic to him that a man who lived like a slob, cared so much about what he eats. “Could’ve fooled me.”

The driver continued driving recklessly, cutting off each corner they had made. As the cab bobbed and weaved around cars, Dave’s bottom had kept jumping out of his seat.

“You mind slowing down?” Dave asked, anticipating for an accident to happen.

“You seem like you were in a rush; I’m doing you a favor.”

The car made its way through Lafayette Park where tents were set up at.

“Young people these days.” The driver shook his head, still smiling. “They’re lost, but they have passion. They’re protesting won’t stop the war. Anyways, are you going to tell me what happened back there?”

“It’s none of your business.” Even with the trouble Dave was in, he was still friendly enough to

chat, but the driver had killed off any possibility of a conversation the moment he had opened his grimy mouth. “Just do your job and keep driving.”

“Hey!” The joking tone in the driver’s voice started to get serious. “You better be thankful that taxi drivers are still here, or you would had been stuck trying to find a Quickie Car. Those damn online services put out the hotel business, but us taxi drivers aren’t going down without a fight.”

“Taxi drivers aren’t still here.” Dave rolled his eyes as he chuckled. “This is the only city in the world that still has taxi drivers. When this goes, you better just get a job at Quickie Car.”

“That’d be nice, all I would have to do is just sit in the front seat, and make sure the automated car system functions.” His jolly tone had returned as the car cut off another car in the lane nearby. Dave could tell that the driver didn’t care about his life from how he was driving. They must had avoided 5 accidents already. Things like that made most drivers cautious, but it was clear that the drive got a high from it. “However, if the mayor signs the legislation tomorrow, they might just replace Quick Car drivers with robots and androids. Then you’ll have robots watching robots as a human sits in the back. What has this world come to?”

Those words had settled with Dave heavily. Through all the differences he and the slob shared, they both were getting abused by the ones in charged. He may have been a dirty bastard, but the driver’s struggles had resonated with Dave to the

point where he considered him as friend. The car slowed down as it turned into a residential area.

“I’ll be out quick, just stay here,” Dave told the driver when the car arrived to a suburban house.

As Dave got out the car, he took out his pistol. Without hesitating, he barged right through the door of the house, knocking it down while remaining on his feet. The rush that had jump started Dave’s heart, came to an end when he saw what he had feared. There Sean was, neck slumped over the wooden rocking chair as his lamented eyes stared to the ceiling. Dave gazed at the carcass before leaving the house. There was no surprise that came over Dave, only disappointment. He had foreseen the fate for Sean the minute he had found out the RHS had taken his form.

“Take me to these coordinates,” Dave instructed the taxi driver as he got back into the car.

Getting out of the car, Dave was ready to run into his house, before the driver reached over and pulled on his arm.

“Don’t forget the fare,” the driver reminded.

“I already paid.”

The disgusting smile came across the driver’s face again.

“Yeah, but you haven’t paid me for keeping my mouth shut.” The driver’s cheeks risen to his

eyes. "I could still call the police about your accident."

"Fine," Dave sighed as he took out his card. Just when he was starting to like the driver, he pulled a shady move. Dave felt disrespected that the driver had tried to get over, but it was least of his worries. "Here you go."

As the car took off, Dave ran to his door.

"Susie, we need to talk," Dave announced as he entered into his house. "It's about-"

His words stopped when he saw Susie standing in the living room with tears on her face. Dave knew something was wrong by looking at the watery eyes of his wife that showed the terrible distress she was in.

"Police have now said that Dave Lennon, former San Francisco detective, is now wanted for his connection to the murder of Sean Brookes, who ran a radio show," the news anchor on the holographic screen next to Susie informed. "He is considered armed and extremely dangerous. If you see Dave Lennon, do not try to confront him, just call the police."

There were no words, just the chatter from the screen about the dangerous criminal Dave was supposed to be. He knew it was garbage, but seeing his wife believe that he had actually murdered an innocent man, making him no different than the savages he had put away, had killed his heart just as much as it did hers.

“Susie,” Dave spoke as he walked towards her. He wanted to speak softly to not wake up his daughter who he figured was sleeping. “I can explain.”

“No,” she replied, shaking her head as she backed away. Her words were weak and low from the emotional wrecking she had just been through. “What did you do?”

“I didn’t do anything. This is all a mistake.”

“A mistake? They said you killed a man!” The sadness inside her was replaced by her anger as she felt that Dave was the one who brought all the misfortunes down on them. “You can’t stay here, Dave!”

“Listen to me, Susie.” Dave rushed over to Susie and placed his hands on her shoulder. She was just a bystander to it all, and he knew she didn’t deserve to experience the turmoil that was going on. He gazed into her eyes so hard, that he could see his own reflection in her green eyes that revealed his desperate face. “Please listen to me. I didn’t kill Sean. They are trying to frame me.”

“Dave, I can’t.” The tears ran down her face again, ruining her eyeliner that rained its black liquid down her cheeks. “I just can’t.”

“You know me Susie. Just please say you believe me.” He had already hit rock bottom, close to losing everything, but he needed to know that he still had his family. With nothing, all he needed and wanted was them; they were going to be the driving force inside of him to break the adversity. “Please.”

A slow nod came from Susie, closing her eyes.

“I believe you.” Susie slowly nodded again, closing her eyes, not wanting to look at her husband. “I believe you.”

Those words had become the rally call for Dave's energy. Just when he was down, he had been given a final breath of life to help him reclaim what he had lost. He was going to take the fight to the other side with the confidence his wife had given him with those 3 comforting words.

“I'm going to take care of this.” Holding her chin up, he locked lips with her, not knowing if it was going to be the last time, but he was damn sure he was going to make the kiss last. In those brief but special moments, the love they had shared over the years flashed inside of Dave's mind. It was at that moment that he loved his wife the most. After a few seconds, they separated lips. “I love you.”

Banging on the wooden door, Dave was in a hurry. While he kept banging, he had smelled the cigarette smoke that had filled the dim lighted apartment complex. Now he was banging for another reason, to get the hell away from the toxin. He hadn't smelled that much tobacco since walking into his old colonel office back on Mars, back when he was just another young worm, not knowing how to piss. He had been optimistic in those days, believing they were fighting the good war, not knowing the hell that was up ahead for them. His colonel had been a real smoker, could have smoke an entire tree of tobacco. He had

been tough like they all were, but he had also been ruthless, showing no remorse. Thinking back, Dave knew he owed his life to the colonel, whatever red sand his body was laying in at that moment. The door finally opened, where the green-haired woman from the underpass stood at.

“I need to come in,” Dave told as he barged into the house, impatient from his long wait outside.

“What- what the hell are you doing at my house?” she confusedly questioned. She couldn’t stop him from entering into her house, but she was accepting to the uninvited entrance. “And how do you know where I live?”

“I know a lot about you now, Christine Price.” The reveal startled her as Dave smiled, knowing he knew more than her. “During our transaction, our information was also exchanged. That’s how the system works just in case of any refunds. I just ran some of your information down the police computer, and it seems like you have been arrested for soliciting without a permit. You never had one, and you’re not even 46; you’re 19.”

Christine’s eyes lowered as she felt humiliated being exposed as a fraud.

“So I assume you’re not here to arrest me, or send me to the police since you’re on the news wanted for murder.” Confidence remained in her voice; she knew the tight spot Dave was in gave her leverage. “I guess none of us are going to jail for now.”

“I didn’t kill anyone,” Dave protested as he sat in a black roller chair near a fish tank. “They framed me.”

“Framed you? Who?”

“The police department, the chief, the mayor, Richard Mountmore, hell the entire country for all I know.” He was serious. With all the madness going on, he wouldn’t had been surprised if the Union was staging a plot against him. That was how wild things had gotten, to the point where a man couldn’t feel safe anywhere; everywhere screamed danger. “I just know, I didn’t kill anyone.”

“So what are you going to do then?” She walked over to him. “You really don’t have much options.”

“The only thing I can do.” Standing up out of the chair, Dave stared at the fish tank. The goldfish swimming in the water reminded him of the fish tank back at home. Seeing the common interest the two shared, Dave smiled. “Tomorrow, before the mayor signs the legislation at 9:30 in the morning, I’m going to shoot him in his office.”

Christine’s eyes widen as she gasped.

“Are you crazy?”

“I keep asking myself that, wondering if this is all part of my imagination.” That possibility had stuck in the back of his mind as he knew it could have been true. It was like a hair that was inside of his eye. Small but annoying and worth a lot of trouble. “The doctor gave me some kind of substance to help

me regenerate. They said it causes me to hallucinate.”

“Maybe you are crazy,” she uttered quietly to herself, turning her head away to not offend him.

The toxic smell in the hallway outside had not been in Dave’s lungs anymore. A more pleasant smell of lavender from the apartment had enter into his nose. Everything was so neat and organized, allowing Dave to be relax. There weren’t that many things in the living room, just a coffee table, a few sofa chairs, a couch, and fluffy mats, but the neat scenery had made Dave comfortable. It was a surprise that a hooker or a wannabe would keep such a nice place, making Dave wonder why a girl like her would have a job like that. He figured through all that brash and boldness she displayed out in the world, that inside she was a mellow person, having her home as the only place for solace.

“Well I just need to stay here for the night seeing how I don’t have anywhere else to go.” Eyes turning away from the fish tank, he faced her again. “I figured since I had something on you, you wouldn’t call the police on me.”

“You can sleep on the couch for tonight.” She pointed at the grey futon. “I’ll be up early in the morning for work, so I might not be here when you wake up.”

He was amazed that she had been accepting to the idea of him staying the night. When he had asserted the option, it had been with little hopes that she would actually say yes. Still and yet, she either liked

him enough, or cared about his troubles to let him stay.

“Work?” He chuckled, shaking his head.
“You’re still going to try it out.”

“I have no other choice.” Her eyes lowered to the ground, showing her shame, but her tone was filled with her resolve. “It’s what I must do.”

“Why did you lie about your age and everything else?”

Her eyes came back up, looking at Dave. She wanted to show she wasn’t ashamed of her actions, even though Dave could see through it. ____

“I thought if people believed I was much older, they would assume I had a license. If I had told people I was 19, they would know I didn’t have a license since it takes a few years to get one; 19 is way too early for someone to go through all that training.” Shame emitted from her voice once again. Hearing herself explain her schemes, made her realize just how stupid and pathetic it really was. “No one wants to risk getting caught with someone without a license; they’ll go to jail for it.”

“Enjoy your youth kid. Grow up so fast, and you’ll go right past many years of your life.” Smiling, he didn’t want her to feel bad; she had potential, and it didn’t deserve to be wasted. “Are you really that desperate for money?”

“I am not desperate.” Her voice grew louder. She felt disrespected, putting herself on the

defensive like any other young woman. "I'm just trying to get by that's all."

"What about school and your parents?"

Dave leaned back into the chair, trying to get more comfortable for the story to come. He knew she was going to give him a long explanation, and he wanted to be as relax as possible when hearing it. The smooth leather of the chair had cooled his neck, wiping away his sweat.

"While I was attending UCLA off of my parents' money, they had taken a trip to Europa and had passed by Mars on their way there." She paused as if the words were hard to get out. "A Union ship mistaken their cruise liner for a ship that was aiding the enemy..... so they blew them out of space." Her eyes wondered off to the open window where wind had been blowing the curtains back softly. She just kept staring at the open window with her arms folded, as if she wanted to jump and end it all. Even remembering the moments of her parents' death had been too painful for her. "Once the money stopped coming in, I tried to find a job, but I couldn't, so I dropped out. Now, I live off of what's left of my parents' money while I try to work my job on the streets."

Damn, it's really that tough for her, Dave thought as Christine walked over to the window where she stuck her head out to get more of the breeze. The prostitute that Dave saw in Christine was no longer there as he finally realized who she really was. All the suffering she had put herself through, making herself eat dirt, was for her to live a better life one

day. He could have appreciated something like that from someone like her, the capacity to go through hell just for a better tomorrow was something all people should have. It was the quality that took people out of the grave, and led them to glory, it was what kept Dave going all those years; that was what him and Christine shared.

Moving away from the window, Christine sat down on a chair next to Dave.

“Can I be honest with you?” She looked at him with eyes of a lost soul. Everything she had said, made her realize that she had nothing, so at that moment she had nothing else to lose. “I’m a virgin. I been working this job for almost a year, but not once have I ever received a customer because no one will pay for the ones on the streets. It’s very hard to get a license, and the genetic modification trick never works.” She turned to the kitchen. “Are you hungry? I’m going to make dinner; you can have some.”

He had no idea what she was making, but he had not had any food for hours, so anything would have done the trick.

“Sure why not?” Dave happily replied.

Her kindness resonated with Dave as he felt her generosity. He was just a stranger, but she was so caring to him as if she knew him for years. As she went to the kitchen, Dave sat back down and turned on the tv. *She won't mind*, he thought, eyes overdue for leisure. Through all that he had been through, he remembered that the game was still on. Usually he would watch it under better circumstances, but a

game was still a game, and he wasn't going to miss one, especially his favorite team.

"You watch football?" Christine asked, eyes looking at the food she was preparing while the game played on tv. "What's your favorite team?"

"The Sacramento Patriots. I'm glad I was able to catch them playing. There are a few minutes left, but they're leading by 14 points, so they have this one." He loved his Patriots; they were the best team in the league, winning the last 8 championships. Many people didn't like them because of their winning streak, but as a fellow Californian, he backed his team like they were his brothers in arms. "Their quarterback is the best. He won his team gold medals in the Olympics last year against the Australians."

"I never understood the idea of football." She was putting a plate in the stove. "It's just a bunch of men in metal suits bashing into each other. At least in the olden days, they didn't have the suits to jump 20 feet in the air, or hit someone harder than a truck. Now, a child could play with a 300 pound man with the technology we have. "

Her ignorance of the sport irritated Dave a little bit. He was never bothered whenever someone would downplay the sport he loved, everyone had different opinions. It was still a pet peeve to him, seeing people disregard something of importance.

"It's more than just that." He smiled, not letting his emotions get the best of him as he wasn't bothered all too much. "There's technique and

strategy involved that takes years to get. Besides, a child cannot get into one of those suits because it would be too hard on their body. A person has to go through a lot of training just to be able to withstand being inside the suit. They train in harsh conditions such as in space, underwater, the heat, and the cold. If a person's body hasn't been adjusted to the suit, they can die from it."

"Has that every happened?" She watched the tv from the kitchen, starting to be interested. "It would be crazy if it did."

"Of course." He knew he had her interest, and it was satisfying to him. "A few years ago, some high school kid stole a suit from one of the player's house. He thought it was a good idea to try it on, what an idiot. After a few hours of trying out the suit, his head exploded." He took a moment to focus on the screen where a player blindsided another player with his helmet, sending him 15 yards across the field on his back. His helmet shattered from impact of the turf. Even with all the metal protection, some hits hurt like hell, and that hit sure did. Still for Dave, the metal smacking into metal was a great source of entertainment just like it was for the millions of people around the world who would watch. "Another player's little son, accidently got into the helmet. Luckily it was just the helmet and not the entire suit, but the baby received brain damage. All that pressure inside the suit is deadly which is why they train in certain areas of the water where pressure is high; it gets them used to it."

“Damn, that’s very dangerous.” Her eyes appalled by the image of the player being carted off of the field, looking like a half dead carcass as his eyes were shut. “I never knew how much went into the sport.”

“Oh believe me, it takes a lot. Many people don’t see all the hard work that goes into something; they never have the patience for it.”

The game was coming to an end as an interception at the 20 yard line by the Patriots sealed the deal. All that was left was for the clock to run out.

“And for the 10th year in a row,” the commentator on the screen informed, “the Sacramento Patriots have defeated the Las Vegas Raiders.”

Turning off the tv, Dave laid back in the chair as Christine came back into the living room.

“I hope you like beef stew,” she offered with a huge grin as she brought him a bowl of the soup.

“I’m not picky.” His growling stomach made him acceptable to any food including rat. “Anything will do the trick right now.”

His hunger rose at the smell of the savory steam coming from the stew. Warm soup and chunks of beef and carrots entered into his mouth, making him delighted that he had come over to her house.

“Now this is good,” he mumbled, looking at Christine who stood by, waiting for his verdict on the delicious dinner. _____

Sitting down on the chair next to Dave, Christine smiled as she watched him eat the splendid meal. Seeing his eyes rise up as the food entered his mouth, gave Christine the confirmation that someone else enjoyed her food.

“So what trouble are you in?” Christine asked.

“It’s with the new androids the city replaced us with.” He took a break from the soup and placed it on the table. “It’s actually very complicated, but that’s just the basics.”

“You don’t like the androids.”

“Absolutely not.” Folding his arms, the question seemed almost rhetorical to him. “I hate them along with the robots, especially the robots.”

“Why do you hate them so much?” She scooted the chair closer to him. “How can you hate something that does so much good for the world?”

A little part of him died inside from the ridiculous statement. She was just as lost as the waiter from the restaurant, to Dave. Young people were always lost, always trying to find their way through their youth, but the new culture was indoctrinating the masses. People, young and old, were now being turned into mindless slaves who worshipped the superior machines. In a way, the machines were becoming more human, and the humans were becoming more like the machines.

“You know about the uprising in 68?” Dave assumed, eyes staring down at the floor. “I was 6. I don’t even know why they call it an uprising when it

was a mass malfunction because of some jerkoff. Well, my family had a robot who helped around the house.” Already the memories were filling his mind. He had years to cope with them, so it wasn’t difficult to explain, but still the images stuck with him. “The robot we had was effected by the malfunction, so for a few moments it went haywire. My father was out, and my mother was in her garden. That was when…… it killed her. Strangled her to death while I watched.” The sight of his mother’s void eyes as metal hands had wrapped around her neck was still haunting, no matter how old he was. “And I didn’t do anything. She died because I didn’t act.”

“There was nothing you could have done.” She placed her hand on his shoulder, feeling the need to comfort him. “You were just a young child.”

“There were many things I could have done.” He faced her again with glum eyes. This time, he wanted to make his point heard. “And even if it would not had made a difference, I still had the choice of acting, but I didn’t have the will.”

Her hand moved off of his shoulder as she felt that she couldn’t convince him anymore. He was stuck in his own way of thinking, and she wanted to know why.

“Is that why you became a cop?” she wondered. “To use your will to act and not be a bystander?”

“That’s why I joined the military. I thought by going to Mars, I was going to make a difference, but the years went by, and the war was getting us

nowhere, so I joined the police here. I wanted to make a difference where it would have really mattered, but sometimes I feel like it won't matter, that what I'm doing is just overreacting like my wife would tell me. I'm stuck between doing what I feel needs to be done, and not doing anything at all because it may hurt people." He never thought about the feeling inside of him, always hiding it, but it tore him apart not knowing. "But I don't have the luxury of knowing what my actions will lead to before I do them which is why I'm just going to have to go with it. Lay it all on the line tomorrow, and see where it gets me."

He got up, and he walked slowly over to the sofa where he rested his head on the pillow. Finally, he was off of his feet which were sore. A good meal had to be capped off with a good night sleep which was what he needed.

"If that's what you want to do," he stated as he looked up at the ceiling, shoes still on, "then do it. Go out and do your job on the streets, only you know what you should do."

"Are you serious?" She was astonished by his conviction to let her pursue her life the way she wanted. Her job was questionable even she doubted it, but Dave had given her the confidence she had wanted someone to give her for years. It was as if she needed someone to tell her what she was doing was okay to do, in order for her to continue. "Do you really mean it?"

"Of course. Who am I to judge you? There are way too many problems to be worrying about

other than people having sex.” He glanced at her as a smirk came across his face. “Thank you for what you have done for me, getting me ready for tomorrow. Speaking of which, I should be going to bed now. I’m going to need the sleep, so goodnight.”

Feeling satisfied, she jumped to her feet and walked over to the light switch.

“Good night,” she spoke.

The blue flower lights turned off, leaving Dave in the dark to rest. _____

Eyes opened, still heavy and feeling tired from last night’s ruckus, Dave blinked many times to fully be awake. The sunlight filled into his eyes, allowing him to get up. It was going to take a while for him to be at full capacity, but he had enough energy to make it through the day. He noticed a white piece of paper on the table with almost perfect handwriting, small and neat letters. It read:

I thought a lot about what you said to me last night, only I know what’s best for me. And you’re right, which is why I am heading down to the mall to get a job, a real job. It may not pay a lot, but it’s something better than being on the streets. Your talk also made me realize that maybe you aren’t crazy. If you think the mayor is up to something, well like you said, go for it. I know it sounds foolish for me to suggest you commit murder especially on a politician, but shit, the world has a lot of problems anyways. Good luck.

The letter ended with a heart and Christine's name. A warm feeling dawned over Dave as he smiled, placing the letter back on the table. Whether he was right or wrong, he was going to commit a heinous act, and for Christine to make light of it, proved nothing was meant to be taken so seriously. Even with the dangers that faced Dave ahead, it was never too late to sit back and enjoy life, just smile at it all. The clock showed that it was 8:30. *1 hour left*, Dave thought. *I need to get going*. The brief relaxation was swept away and replaced by an urge. He knew what he had to do.

The mayor's office was filled with reporters who were flashing their cameras at him at his desk. Richard Mountmore and other members of the mayor's staff stood proudly behind him as the day seemed bright for them all.

"On this day, August 20, 2097, history will be made," the mayor spoke looking into the cameras. The repeated flashes and clicks of the cameras didn't disturb him. Each flash captured the increasing width of his smile as if he was happy about what was to come. "There has been talk that I was going to reject this legislation, but I have come to a realization. From this legislation, all businesses including public entities of the government can be employed by robots and androids. That is the goal of technological progress, for humans to receive whatever they want at a faster rate than before. Everything you want will always come to you fast. You will never have to wait. Speed will be in

everything which is why I am going to sign yes on this legislation. It's what's best for society."

Richard Mountmore's devilish grin appeared, eyebrows heightening as the mayor reached for the pen. All it took was a few letters, and the world was going to be Mountmore's. The pen was going to be the key, the transition of the people's welfare over to him. It didn't bother him how many people were going to lose their jobs because of it. He loved the money and control that came with it. It was why he got into the business in the first place, for the dominance over the ants that crawled at his feet.

"This is going to be good." The mayor chuckled as the pen moved closer to the paper. "I can't wait."

Immediately, a laser fired out, blasting the pen out of the mayor's hand. The pen, now a molten piece of plastic smacked onto the wall, as the mayor's hand had been left untouched by the blast. From the precision of the laser, it was clear it was shot by a professional who had accuracy in their skills.

When the mayor looked up, Dave stood at the front door of the office, pistol pointing dead on the mayor's chest. The mayor could almost feel the heat as the menacing look in Dave's eyes meant he was serious; it was enough to cause many of the people in the room to back away from Dave in fright. Only Richard and the mayor kept their composure as Dave kept walking with the pistol in his hand.

“Everyone,” Dave began, eyes focused on the mayor, “expect for the mayor and Richard, get the hell out of here now!”

Not looking back twice, the crowd rushed outside the door, looking like sheep flocking. Still with his gun out, Dave stood a few feet from the mayor’s desk.

“I know what happened,” Dave clamed. His teeth were grinding against each other; he was heavily stressed. “I saw it all.”

“Dave just put the gun down,” the mayor calmly pled with his hands out. “You’re making a mistake.”

“No, you are. The real mayor told me that he was going to reject the legislation. I saw him get killed by a RHS.” As he explained himself, his confidence grew. The entire plot became believable. It had to make sense; it was credible. There was no way anyone could doubt it now that all the pieces came together. “Sean Brookes was killed and impersonated by one.” A smirk came across the distraught face of Dave, seeing that he couldn’t be tricked anymore. “I’m assuming you’re one as well, and this is all Richard’s plan to get his units sold everywhere.”

“Dave, I know all about the Kand-240 from Susie. You’re not thinking straight.” The mayor took a deep breath. “Think about it Dave. You lost your job to an android which increased your anxiety over them. Once you were given the Kand-240 which is known to create hallucinations, you saw what appeared to be me get murder by a RHS. After that,

your mind ran wild with crazy imaginations.” Getting out of his seat, the mayor slowly walked over to Dave, smiling as if it was wise to tick off the hostile man in front of him. “Put the gun down, and we’ll sort out what happened with Sean Brookes. It’s time to wake up, Dave.”

Lowering his gun, Dave began to think. *Maybe, I am tripping. This could all be the side effects that I am experiencing. Come to think about it, it makes a lot of sense. There’s no way that there’s a conspiracy for the androids to take over. I have to be out of my mind to want to shoot the mayor. What the hell was I thinking?*

“See Dave, there’s nothing you have to worry about.” The mayor smiled. “You’re overreacting.”

The suspicious smile on the mayor’s face ended at the entry of a laser through his chest, knocking him off of his feet with his arms and legs moving outward. His body, seeming weightless from the force of the blast, crashed through his desk as a gaping hole in his chest left smoke coming out. The mayor or whatever it claimed to be, was no longer as its eyes stopped moving. Noticing Richard Mountmore pull out a gun with panic in his eyes, Dave quickly fired at the bastard, right in his heart, or whatever lump of coal laid there. The laser pierced right through Richard’s flesh, shattering the window behind him, which left an opening for his body to fly out of from the hit.

Sure the megalomaniac was finished, Dave dropped his gun as he felt exhausted from the battle, knowing he won. His methods were controversial, but it was

necessary. Certain actions had to be taken to stop the corruption and evil of the world, and Dave had become as ruthless as them for a moment in order to stop them. He didn't stop and wonder if it was all in his mind, or if there really was a conspiracy. He could have gave a shit less about being sent to prison. What was done was done, and he had to live with the outcome of his actions, whatever they were going to be.

As Dave continued to breathe heavily from the adrenaline pumping inside of him, a sudden blunt force bashed onto the center of his neck, sending him cheek first to the floor. He felt paralyzed as the images of shoes grew dimmer, and the sounds of talk became stifled.

Eyes opening, head jolting back, Dave blinked rapidly as he tried to make sense of his new surroundings. The stuffy heat that made his nose feel clog was familiar to him as he had felt it before, but not in the chair he presently sat in. Taking his arms off of the metal rectangular table that felt cold, Dave looked around the cubical empty room. It wasn't until he spotted the 2 way window that he realized where he was. Looking at the single light fixture above, Dave sat back down in the chair. *Them bastards, Dave thought, they have me in an interrogation room with no handcuffs.*

It was clear what his fate was after the shooting. He wasn't going to fight it; he had done enough fighting. There was going to be no trip to Hawaii, but at least he could finally relaxed. The only sad part was his

family. He would leave them behind, Susie would have to raise Chelsea on her own, and Chelsea would have no father to grow up with. It was the price not only he had to pay, but his love ones. His actions impacted their lives as well, making him realize, that in the end he lost. The door suddenly opened, interrupting Dave's hard gaze on the table, but not enough to get him up from the seat.

"Chief," Dave blurted out as the chief walked in. "What happened? Is the mayor I shot dead? Where is Susie and Chelsea?"

Sitting down, the chief managed to show a weak smile towards Dave as if he knew something Dave didn't.

"Dave," the chief began, "how can I put this?" He didn't have to finish the words. By seeing the chief's regretful look, Dave knew he was doomed. "You saved the day!" The excitement in the chief cheered him up as Dave seemed confused. Dave's eyes were moving up and down as he was shocked. "After you were knocked out by one of the staff members, the RHS took you down here while I was called down to the mayor's office. While you were here, yellow gel was found coming out of the mayor's mouth. That was when we knew he was a RHS. With the help of technicians, we plugged the cpu up to the computer and found out everything. The now dead Richard Mountmore had the mayor killed and replaced, so the legislation could be signed. He also had Sean Brookes handled in order to prevent interference. They wanted you dead as well, but you pulled through."

“What about Richard’s death?” Curiosity in his voice; he wasn’t out the clear yet, knowing it was too soon to celebrate. “Will I be charged?”

“No, the cameras showed that he pulled a gun out on you. Everything you did was okay expect for dispatching a gun in a government building, but they won’t charge you after all you have done.” The chief leaned over the table, smiling uncontrollably as if he couldn’t hold it in. “The new mayor will reject the legislation, and all RHS units will be disbanded and off of the streets. You guys are going to get your jobs back.”

Dave’s back slumped into the chair as he released a huge breath of relief. The hard feeling on his stomach vanished, allowing him to find peace. It was over, and in the end he did the right thing. Nothing felt better, knowing the right thing had been done.

“I’ll tell you,” the chief began shaking his head, “these corporations have too much power. People always keep their eye on the government, but it’s the big businesses that need to be watched. Those evil bastards.”

“It’s not just the businesses chief.” Dave looked the chief straight in his eyes. “The people are the ones who keep them in power. We always have an obsession with the fast which was the main idea for the RHS. Live fast, make money fast, even fuck fast; we don’t want to wait for anything, or we’ll get bored and quit. As long as people are addicted to speed, the world will always have Richard Mountmores.”

“Not for anytime soon.” Standing up out of the seat, the chief grinned. “As for you, take as much time as you want off. You deserve it which is why the new mayor is paying for your trip to Hawaii.”

Yes, Dave thought, looking up at the ceiling as if he wanted to thank the creator for all the good he had been given.

“One more thing chief.” He had so much luck going for him, he wanted to see if he could push it. Maybe the universe would be that good to him. “There’s this girl named Christine Price. Do you think the city and the mayor could help her out with tuition at UCLA?”

“We’ll see what can be done.”

“Thanks.” *It’s what’s best*, Dave thought. Christine deserved the good fortunes just as much as he did for what she had done for him. Showing the kindness of her heart, had revealed the goodness in the world that Dave had once forgotten about. “Thanks for everything, chief.”

As the chief opened the door to leave, Susie and Chelsea entered into the room.

“Daddy! You saved the day again!” Chelsea cheered as she ran the fastest to get to him.

Getting up out of his seat, with excitement of seeing his daughter’s beautiful face again, Dave welcomed her hug.

“Yeah, that’s what they keep telling me.”
Dave smiled as he felt the warmth of his daughter’s body.

Letting go of his daughter, Dave looked at Susie who stood with sorrow in her eyes.

“I’m sorry, for what I put you all in,” Dave apologized with regret.

“No, Dave.” Susie declared, placing her hands on Dave’s cheeks. The remorse tore through her face. “I’m sorry that I never believed you. You were right for being the way you are. You are a man of action, and never feel like that’s a bad thing.”

“It’s alright Susie.” He wrapped his hands around hers, taking them off of his face. Feeling onto her hands, to embrace their feelings, Dave kissed the soft lips of his wife. “None of us are perfect, we all make mistakes. Mine was believing I could fix everything. Even before this incident, I was a man who tried to save the world, but I can’t be that man anymore, or I will miss what is in front of me.” He took a moment to appreciate his family as he looked at both of his loved ones. “We’re going to have fun now. It’s like you said, we’re going to celebrate. It’s going to be in Hawaii.” He turned to his daughter. “Did you hear that Chelsea? We’re going to Hawaii.”

“Great!” Chelsea yelled in joy.

As they were walking out of the station, Chief Anderson stood from the door.

“Dave!”

Hearing the call, Dave turned around.

“About what you said. It’s funny how we want everything in the present.” The chief stood there smiling as usual. “Everything expect death.”

Minutes later, the 3 were in the car, driving off into the San Francisco sunset.