

Robots

By Charles O'Keefe

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As usual, Steve was late for work at Biebertech, International. He supposed his lack of promptness was caused by refusing to let robots do everything, but he hated robots with a passion. Relying so much on robots grated on Steve.

Most cars on the Airway flew themselves, but not Steve's. His 2099 Chevy Luffe looked more like a plane than a car. Since it didn't fly itself, Steve had to pay attention in traffic. The law required all robocars now to take flight, but Steve would have just as happily driven to work on streets. He supposed it was for the best. People used that idle time on the way to work to nap, catch up on school work or business calls, even getting inflight manicures.

Steve refused to upgrade his robocar. He could afford a payment plan, but figured the Disney Corporation was rich enough, he's contribute no more to that Merry Mad Rodent. At first flying robocars seemed like a good idea. There would be no more horrendous Airway traffic accidents. People can barely handle two dimensions, let alone going 3D. All that unused pavements left below could be given back to Mother Nature, making Earth greener. It was always a sunny day in Bepin City, orbiting high above the clouds. The God's eye view was awesome. What was there not to love? Progress marches on.

Steve scratched his head and beard. Something of a Luddite, he hadn't opted for the permanent hair removal all that was so much the rage now with young people. Embedded holo-hair emitters were not for him. Sure it was hot to change hair color on a whim, he enjoyed familiarity of haircuts and shaving. Personal grooming was a connection to the past not to be abandoned.

As Steve arrived for work, a robot waited patiently to park the car in underground storage. For reasons of insurance liability, employees are not trusted to such complicated tasks.

"Good morning, Steve," greeted the car parking robot. "Good job. You were almost on time. Was traffic heavy this morning?"

“Whatever.”

“Have a Bieberlicious day, Steve.”

“Kiss my ass, robot.”

Steve was especially creeped out by this particular robot. Its female voice was pleasant enough, friendly, even almost sensual, but its pale skin covering its face clashed with its gleaming silver metallic torso, shades of the Borg. Steve was determined to resist.

Steve hated his job. Through sheer force of will Steve seated himself at his office of clear force-field walls, arranged by the hundreds like rats in some clear maze experimental lab. He faced another day of calling people about whether they would like to sign up for a deluxe Bieber, or for just an abbreviated Biebercast. Either way, the customer was just helping amass more fortune for Justine Bieber Emertus the XII.

Logging in his computer, Steve submitted to a retinal scan. He was prompted to repeat out loud the corporate mantra, “I am a true Blieber.”

“And?” asked the computer.

“And . . . if Anne Frank were alive she would also be a true Blieber,” added Steve, his shoulders slumping in defeat to the machines.

He had no idea who Anne was, all trace of her existence had been purged from Disney records. Somehow that seemed even more degrading. Steve took solace in that the computer could not detect sarcasm in his voice, lest he be reported for lack of corporate zeal.

The mourning progressed as usual. Steve lamented about what went wrong with his wasted life. At 45, he'd never been promoted, had only accrued basic benefits, and did not even have a steady girlfriend. At least he no longer lived in his parents' basement.

The average human lifespan had been extended to 124, so there was still time, but damn it, there had to be a better way. Steve took his first allowed 15 minute break, eating his usual carrot cookie and Soylent Green shake, yum, yum. He day dreamed about getting off work. Tonight would be different. Tonight he had a date!

Steve had met Angela at the gym. She asked him out, such an unexpected surprise. Angela liked his retro 'Battlestar Galactica' T-shirt, appreciating his taste in a show that aired over a century ago. Steve smiled to himself as he got back to work. He could hardly wait for his shift to end. Maybe things were looking up. It couldn't get much worse.

At lunch time Steve dug into his meal of sushi. Meat had long disappeared from the world's menu, a result of the McDonald's / Wendy's planetary wars. Seafood was the only choice that survived. Steve had to admit he love cloned salmon. Finished, he gazed leisurely at his co-workers about the lunchroom. Most had phones glued to their ears. To be more precise, the phones were implanted into their heads with holographic displays. You'd think employees would have had enough of being wired into the grid from work, but no, that virtual madness extended into their off-duty time, too. Steve would have none of it. Soon, he would be enjoying an evening with Angela, a good old fashion retro girl.

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At the Toy Story Eatery, the robo-valet took Steve's car keys, holding out its scanner for a tip. Steve sighed as he swiped his card. Angela arrived minutes later. Angela had long natural blond hair and blue eyes. She wore a refreshingly modest Futurama T-shirt and silver diamond pants, spurning the Star Trek jumpsuits so popular nowadays. Angela smiled and waved.

"Hi Steve. Let's go in, I'm starved."

"You look great," commented Steve, placing his hand casually at the small of her back as they entered. "I love this place. The holodoors faded as they passed. "You can get a real drink, not that synthehol crap."

Once seated, Steve tried to be smooth by keeping up the conversation. "Have you seen that new 'Man of Steel 33?' I thought it was pretty good, though I wonder how many times they can re-launch Superman."

Angela only smiled as she ordered from the inlaid program on the table. "When was the last time you were really happy?" she asked.

"I'm happy this very moment, with you," answered Steve, caught off-guard. "Happier than I have been in years. I used to teach school on Mars for a small school district that actually wanted me present to teach the class, not this cyber-virtual packaged nonsense we have now. Back then, we had choices. I only had three students, but we had a connection that's hard to describe. It was real. Then I sold out to Biebertech for more money."

Angela nodded, reaching across the table to take Steve's hand, while pushing buttons with the other to order an appetizer. "It's okay," replied Angela. "We all have our regrets. I never planned on being a door-to-door anti-matter salesperson, but that's just how things worked out."

"Ambidextrous," noted Steve of her multitasking abilities. "I love that. I love everything about you."

"I love everything about you, too," said Angela, smiling seductively as she ordered another drink.

Steve's heart pounded. This night was going to end well, he could tell.

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Sure enough, after dinner, Angela suggested they go to Steve's place. He was more than a little drunk, and certainly not inclined to argue. Angela drove his car. She was a natural. At home Steve led a now submissive Angela to his bedroom. He was glad he had cleaned up his apartment, hiding the childish collector Transformers he still played with.

Steve smoothly took out the Mind Sex hookup device from his nightstand. Mind Sex was the one technological advance Steve fully appreciated, and got much use. The popularity of Mind Sex made sexually transmitted diseases practically nonexistent, although there were still some viruses if you open the wrong windows. And of course, unplanned pregnancies were a thing of the past. Excited, Steve gave Angela her 3D glasses as he hooked up.

"That's not the connection I want," panted Angela, pulling off her shirt. "My health scan is clean, and I took my pill only six months ago."

Steve quickly checked her health card, not really caring what it stated. Actual sex was so rare he had never known anyone to do it. Even his parents back in the day used clunky R2-DO-Me technology for sex. Hell with it. They stripped off their clothes at the speed of light.

Sex with Angela was incredible. Steve could not believe his good fortune. He felt like a million credits. Steve had lots of hands on experience, but technically he was losing his virginity. That was a big deal. He hadn't even had Mind Sex with another person in six months. This was just incredible. Angela was definitely a keeper. She was so talented, insisting on many varied positions Steve had never even contemplated existed.

As Steve exploded inside her from behind, he noticed a red glow to her spine. WTF. Steve was too stunned to speak. The red glow faded as he dismounted. Angela kissed his neck, snuggling beside, not noticing his dismay or wide open mouth. Finally he summoned the courage to speak.

“Your spine glowed red. Is there something I need to know about you?”

“Oh come now, you didn't know? Why do you think I loved your Battlestar shirt so much. Didn't you notice I look just like Cyclon Number Six? Sure you did. Disney wanted to test me out on one of its tech geeks. You got lucky. So, I was good?”

“You're a Cylon? Does that mean we're starting a whole new race?”

“No silly,” answered Angela, slapping Steve playfully. “It means the bosses finally granted you a promotion. You'll be featured as the main exhibit at the new Disney theme park. It's quite an honor being bestowed upon you. I hope you fully appreciate the confidence Disney has in your work. “

Realizing the full extent of his situation, Steve made a break for the door. Too late. Angela was on him, wielding handcuffs as she slammed him to the floor.

“This is kinky,” commented Angela as she slapped on the bracelets.

Angela dragged Steve by his hair, still naked, to a waiting van outside, where Daffy Duck and Pluto robots drove him away to his new Disney adventure.