

# Murder by Munchausen

## When Androids Dream of Murder

### Book #1

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*Obviously, crime pays, or there'd be no crime.*  
~G. Gordon Liddy

### The Three Laws

1. A civilian-owned and operated synthetic humanoid entity may not act in any manner so as to engage in or cause any harmful or offensive contact against a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A civilian-owned and operated synthetic humanoid entity must obey the directives and orders given it by human beings except in those instances where such directives and orders would conflict with the First Law.
3. A civilian-owned and operated synthetic humanoid entity may protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws.

Federal Technology Administration Regulations

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### Chapter 1 — The Warehouse

The abandoned building in the Warehouse District was dark and cold. I didn't have glass on the AnSub, but we were picking up an RFI signature that was an eighty percent match to the A-VIN profile. My Smith & Wesson *eM&P* was out and humming in my hand, ready for me to take a shot. Behind us the SWAT team was spreading out into position to monitor our visual feed from outside so they wouldn't jam the ambient signals with their tac gear. We went passive on our glass as soon as we entered the building.

I looked over at EC, my partner, pressed against the far wall covering the left side of the industrial cavern, which was piled high with discarded junk—desks, chairs, pallets of boxed materials and strange hulking machines that no doubt once fabricated some kind of pieces-parts necessary for the stuff consumers once found they absolutely-positively could not live without in their daily drone lives—all collected from businesses that absolutely-positively no longer existed. The quiet was oppressive and haunting. We both strained for an aural clue to the location of our quarry, since the electronic intel was still too weak to pinpoint within the building.

We slowly wove around the junk, deeper and deeper into the room. I led. EC followed, constantly adjusting the ePD scanning app to search and map the room. I muted the tactical channels and stripped most of the data from my view to let him work the tech and comm. It's too distracting. I needed to maintain focus. I needed to be able to react.

This particular Android Subject apparently went off the rails and killed a luckless pedestrian on his way to a bodega for some iced tea or bottled water to quench his thirst. A one-in-a-million occurrence, but every so often it still happens. Anyone who believes technology is infallible is a fool. The incident didn't appear all that nefarious when first reported, but shortly thereafter the Atlas data stream went dark and patrol called our unit in. It quickly became obvious we were dealing with a malware hit, not a malfunction. The luckless

pedestrian was actually not so luckless, being on what appeared to be the winning side of a particularly nasty termination suit with his ex, who we suspected had outsourced the final settlement to extra-judicial parties.

It might not make sense, but the beloved Media tags it “Murder by Munchausen.” For a price, there are hackers out there who will reprogram a synthoid to do your dirty work. The bad news: no fingerprints or DNA left at the crime scene. The good news—at least for us—is that they’re like missiles: once they hit their target, they’re usually as harmless as empty brass. The trick is to get them before they melt down their core OS data, so you can get the unit into forensics for analysis and, hopefully, an arrest.

EC’s scanner returned a hard ping. His quick double blink put his cross-hairs up on my lens and I followed his eye line to the northwest corner of the building. I swept my eyes up and down to acknowledge and we slowly headed in that direction. As we moved, the RF signal narrowed and confirmed bogey lock with a low growl in my ear buds. EC swung out from the left and unshouldered his shotgun. Good old-fashioned blast power often came in handy to buy some time. Like I said, *usually* they’re harmless, but usually just ain’t good enough odds for me.

My Smith & Wesson started flashing yellow in my glass. It took the data hand-off and started frequency ranging, seeking the optimal setting for its electro-magnetic pulse to take down the AnSub. We slowly and methodically cleared the warehouse, aisle by aisle, until we got to the very corner of the building where the android had parked itself, facing out the window towards the city lights. In sleep mode, I could see its right eye’s red optic laser reflect off the window pane as it lazily pulsed. We spread out as quietly as we could with our weapons trained on the synthoid perp. EC pulled the restraining bolt from his webbing and held it up. If we could get it in without discharging our weapons, there was less chance of frying any lines of code that the forensics guys would whine on endlessly about.

I nodded. I had frequency lock on the droid’s GMC—Gyro & Mobility Chip—and kept my weapon pointed at center mass. Precise aim isn’t critical but improves effectiveness and tends to minimize collateral damage to nearby appliances. EC moved in swiftly and smoothly. Since they all, literally, have eyes in the back of their heads, there’s just no sneaking up on a droid like you can a human, so the best thing is to get it over with as quickly as possible and hope their reaction protocol has not been tampered with to ignore the RFID chip in our cop badges.

EC was within arm’s reach when I saw both eyeball scanning lasers reflect off the window pane as the droid came alive. It spun quickly and reached for EC’s neck. I reacted instinctively and double-tapped the synthoid with my Smith & Wesson. It’s like tasering a human and, since it’s just a machine, there’s some entertainment value in watching the spastic jerking of arms and legs as the control signals are scrambled then flatlined.

The AnSub collapsed in a heap. EC knelt down to place the restraining bolt in the small of its back, then radioed SWAT to stand down. He pulled his Department-issued *Google Glass* off and wiped the sweat from his forehead with the back of his arm. He looked up and, catching his breath, sighed, “Thanks, Jake. He was going for my throat.”

“All in a day’s work,” I answered, holstering my pistol. The droid’s mechanical strength would have made short work of EC’s windpipe. “Besides, I couldn’t let him ruin that lovely singing voice of yours.”

EC smiled.

I winked back.

He knew he couldn’t carry a tune.

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