

Art & Me

by Harris Tobias

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I told Art to scan the crime scene for evidence. He didn't need me to tell him. The D&D Autoron was a pretty refined gizmo, the latest in cyborg technology. He didn't need me for much.

The law says a human inspector must accompany every Autotron, every cyborg inspector, like Art, on a case. Sometimes I wonder if it's all a make-work program for human cops, but, then again, it's humans who commit the crimes. So who best to understand the dark alleys of the human mind than another frail, hairy, water-bag like me. Art is an artificial intelligence police inspector model 407 made by D&D Industries and used widely throughout the country. I call him Art for short. He doesn't seem to mind. He calls me Marc Thompson because that's my name.

Art was circling the corpse probing for DNA and fibers, photographing everything and storing it in his oversized memory. At the same time he was comparing face and prints with the world's vast biometric data base. A one man crime lab is old Art. He's good too, very good. Me and Art have been working together for a couple of years now and I was still in awe of his efficiency. I don't know how those old time cops ever solved a case. But this case looked like something Art was going to need old Marc Thompson's help with.

The corpse was an obese male, naked and stabbed completely through with a 2x4. Not a sharpened spear but a blunt piece of lumber from off the work site. The victim looked like an insect pinned to a board in a collection or perhaps some twisted work of art in Hell's Gallery. The amount of force it took to drive so dull an instrument completely through a body and into the block wall behind it was well beyond human capacity. No, this could have only been done by a borg. I said as much to Art.

"You know that is not possible, " he said. "Our programming will

not allow it."

He was referring to the prime directive of robotic conditioning—That a robot can never harm a human being or, through inaction, allow a human to come to harm. That law was fundamental to allowing cyborgs to exist and operate as equals according to the Supreme Court's landmark decision *Bladen vs The D&D Corporation*, the famous or infamous case that led directly to the Robot Equality Act of 2133. If a cyborg can go rogue and kill a human, then no human is safe, and robots will go back to being fancy vacuum cleaners and assembly line workers. A lot of humans would welcome that. Art and his kind instill a lot of fear and anxiety in people although things are slowly getting better.

"Cyborg soldiers kill humans all the time," I said.

"War is a special case." Art said, his analysis of the crime scene never stopping.

"I know," I said, "it's different, but it's still borgs killing humans."

Art gave the robot equivalent of a snort which I took to mean, "ignorant water bag", maybe it's just me but I often feel old Art has an attitude. That's my human nature anthropomorphizing Art's personality. The truth was that machines like Art don't have attitudes or emotions which is precisely why they don't commit crimes of passion or pre-meditation which is precisely why we can trust them. Without that trust we would be forced to shut them all down and I'm sure they wouldn't take that lightly.

What Art was saying was that the borg soldiers the government use for combat are a special kind of dumb machine weapon and nowhere near as sophisticated as he. That led me to speculate about the Army having some secret weapon that could kill a man with a piece of lumber. I asked Art about it.

"It would be against the law. There are treaties against that kind of thing. So, no, I don't think that's a viable line of inquiry."

"So what do we know about the victim?" I asked. Art was in constant communication with every data base and police agency on the planet.

"Aside from the obvious, not very much."

"Tell me the obvious, then," I asked.

Art began to rattle off the victim's physical characteristics. "Male. 240 pounds. 5' 10" tall. Blood alcohol level 1.8. Blood type O positive. Death caused by blunt force trauma. Do you want time of death and specifications on the murder weapon?" Art was always happiest when he was rattling off factoids.

"Geez, Art, I could have told you that much. Who the hell is he is what I want to know."

"I'm afraid this individual has no record in any known data base."

"You mean he's a gridder?" A gridder is a member of a cult that does its best to remain invisible to the government by staying off any data base, off the grid, get it?

"I am assuming that is the case," Art said.

The gridder cults cover a wide political spectrum from environmental lunatics to anti-abortion assassins to right wing luddites determined to gut the liberal robot equality laws. "Well that's an interesting development," I said. "It's beginning to look more and more like your kind had a motive, assuming this guy was a member of an anti-robot cult. Were there any prints on the two by four?"

"Negative."

I inspected the exposed part of the 2 by 4 myself. There were several scratch marks. "What do you make of these marks?" I asked knowing full well what they were.

"The marks are indicative of machine handling," Art replied.

"By machine you mean cyborg I assume?" Art remained silent unwilling to be drawn into a discussion on the implications of those marks.

"This is a construction site after all," Art said. "Cyborgs work here. The lumber could have been handled many times."

I let it slide. I wasn't going to argue with my partner. Instead, I changed the subject "Funny that he's naked," I observed. "What do you suppose happened to his clothes?"

"I don't think his nakedness has much bearing on the matter," Art said.

"Oh no? Look around." We were standing in a remote corner of a construction site. The site was surrounded by a chain link fence 8 feet high. The body was pinned to a cinder block retaining wall by the lumber. Art swiveled his sensors around for my benefit.

"So?" he asked.

"So, unlike you guys, humans seldom, if ever go anywhere naked. That means he was probably stripped of his clothing before he was killed. I was just wondering why the killer or killers would do that."

"You think they were trying to make a statement?"

"Yes. I think they were trying to say, 'look at how ugly and feeble you hairy water bags are compared to us'."

"I wish you'd stop trying to steer this investigation to the clearly impossible," Art said huffily.

"I'm just stating the obvious, Art, my good man or should I rephrase that?"

"I take your meaning. What is obvious?"

"What's obvious to me is the pains that were taken to make this appear to be a robot murder."

"I'm relieved to hear that you don't believe that is the case."

"Oh I don't believe that it can't or won't happen or even that it hasn't happened, I just don't believe that this is the case. I think that is what the killer wants us to think. I'm going to speak with the human workmen on this site. Why don't you do the same with the cyborg employees?"

I interviewed the foreman, one Vincent Bowman, and his four human subordinates including a young bricklayer named Jason Long. "So you're the one who found the body? Is the right Mr. Long?"

"That's right, I came here to pick up some tools we left here yesterday and there he was."

"Had you ever seen the victim before?"

"No, never."

"You said you had to pick up some tools. Were you working here yesterday?"

"Yes. We finished laying those blocks yesterday. Looks like we'll

have to take it down and do it again."

"What are you building here anyway?"

"Believe it or not, this is going to be some rich guy's house."

I checked with Vince Bowman, the foreman on who the client was.

"Ever hear of Darren Delacroix? That's who is going to live here."

Everyone over the age of ten knew the name Delacroix, the famous philanthropist and head of D&D industries, the world's largest maker of cyborgs and the country's leading liberal voice. If any one family was responsible for the rise of cyborg equality, it was the Delacroix. This murder was looking more political by the minute.

I met up with Art and we exchanged notes. "Delacroix must have a long list of enemies including every anti robot cult in the country. You come up with anything?"

"I interviewed all 42 cyborg employees," Art said. Imagine doing 42 interviews in the time it took me to do two partials. "One of the workers had inadvertently recorded the victim talking with Mr. Serrano two weeks ago.

"Serrano?" I queried.

"Adrain Serrano is the architect on this site." Art already knew more than me.

"You reviewed all their recordings from two weeks back?" I asked incredulous at Art's thoroughness.

"Actually I went back as far as their recordings would allow which is sixty days according to convention. The important thing is that the victim was seen speaking with Adrain Serrano, the architect on this project."

"I guess we should pay Mr. Serrano a visit, how about you?" For a second I thought I saw Art roll his eyes but I knew he wasn't programmed to do that.

Serrano had his office in a luxury building in the best part of town. The receptionist showed us in after we flashed our badges and told her it was "official police business." Actually that was me. I get a kick out of acting official and besides, she was a very attractive

woman. Art, I thought, acted annoyed. Serrano sat behind an enormous desk surrounded by models of his designs—futuristic dwellings for the rich and famous—all angles and twisted shapes.

“Yes, gentlemen, what can I do for you?”

“We're investigating a murder on one of your job sites Mr. Serrano.”

“You're talking about the Delacroix job. Yes I heard there was some trouble there, Terrible thing. How can I help?”

“Show ‘em the picture Art,” I said in my best cop voice. Art projected a ten second video of the worker's recording on Serrano's giant flat screen TV. It showed Serrano stopping to speak with a fat man in a plaid shirt.

“I don't understand,” Serrano said.

“We want to know who the fat man is and what you were talking about. Play it again, Art,” I said in my best Bogart impersonation. This time i was sure i saw art's eyes roll.

Serrano watched the video a second time and then a third time finally saying, “If I recall, the guy just stopped me to ask me about a job. I never saw him before or since.”

“And you have no idea who he is?” Art asked.

“No, none. I don't know him.”

“Do you remember what he asked about?” I wanted to know.

“I think he asked me whose house it was,” Serrano answered.

“And you told him...?”

“I probably answered it was Delacoix's new mansion. I'm pretty proud of the design. Want to see the model?”

“That's all right. Would you mind if we look around and speak with some of your employees?”

“No not at all. Feel free.”

It was a big office. There must have been 25 or 30 employees most of them cyborg. I went over to one of the few humans while Art took on the robots. I got to flirt with the cute receptionist a little more but learned nothing from the human contingent. “How about you?” I asked Art.

“One of the cyborgs caught a glimpse of our victim in the lobby

on its way to work a few weeks ago. He was talking to a security guard. The guard was a borg so we'll at least get a good look at our boy when he was alive."

The guard played back the encounter. The fat man asked the guard what floor Serrano & Associates were on and the guard responded, "The 16th floor, sir." and that was it. The man looked calm and relaxed. He wore a different shirt but there was no doubt it was our man.

"You notice anything unusual about that?" I asked Art.

"No. Seems like a routine encounter."

"Exactly," I said, "but I'm wondering why he would ask a borg something he could easily learn for himself by looking on the directory in the lobby. I thought he hated borgs. Did you notice his arm was in a sling? And did you catch the accent? Russian or Slavic I thought." If Art was embarrassed for missing that stuff, he didn't show it. Maybe he did notice the sling and the accent and didn't think they were relevant.

"Maybe he can't read," Art theorized.

"Or maybe he wanted us to find this clip."

"Why would he want that?" Art was confused. The depths of human deviousness was a hard thing for a machine to fathom.

"So that we can trace him to some virulent anti-robot cult and conclude that the murderer was committed by a killer borg."

"I thought you gave up on that theory," Art said.

"I did." I said. "It wasn't a borg, someone is trying to make it look like it was."

"But...", I left Art to try and puzzle it out. "This is one of your 'hunches' right?," Art asked making air quotes with his fingers.

I'd tried to explain hunches to Art once or twice before. He understands the concept but he's never had one himself. Hunches are what makes human cops a valuable part of the team except for the embarrassing fact that most of them are wrong.

"Why don't you run the victim's photo against a list of recent Russian or Eastern European arrivals and see what comes up. And see if he got that arm treated at a hospital in the city." Art's eyes

glazed over for a second as he accessed the internet part of himself. After maybe 30 seconds he snapped back to our shared reality and said,

“Nothing in immigration but I found something in the medical data base— A public hospital admittance form. Our victim was admitted to a city hospital for a broken arm six months ago using an ID card in the name of Philip Prokov. Here's his hospital admittance form. Art found a fax machine and printed everything out for me. It's so cool the way he can commandeer any piece of electronic equipment he wants. Mr. Prokov's identification card gave his address as 158 Rinko Street in our fair city. Rinko Street was in a declining part of town where immigrants can find cheap housing. It listed his occupation as cabdriver.

“Doesn't look like him,” I noticed. “Must be a stolen card.”

Art ran the name and photo through the various data bases but came up dry. No match on the face but the name scared up a few hits. there were four Philip Prokovs in the city. One of them even had a Rinko Street address.

We got lucky and hit pay dirt on the first try. Philip Popov was a wasted, foul smelling junkie who'd have sold his left nut for a few dollars. He said he recognized the photograph of our fat man and for fifty bucks he gave us the name— Demitri “Tubby” Alescu. Demitri purchased Popov's ID for \$150 and used it to get medical treatment. Being a gridder, he had no ID of his own.

Once we had his name, the rest was easy. Mr. Alescu was a Romanian immigrant and, as expected, virulently anti-cyborg. He was a member of the radical HFH (Humans For Humanity), a nasty gridder cult implicated in violent acts against robots. Identifying the victim was a victory of sorts but it didn't get us any closer to finding out who killed him or why.

“I have an idea,” said Art in a rare show of creativity. Art's idea was to go back to Serrano's office building and scan through the security camera tapes for the last three months. I didn't see how this could hurt so I agreed. I didn't have any better ideas.

There were 9 cameras in the lobby recording 24 hours a day so

there was a considerable amount of data to scan. It would have taken me and a team of humans a week to sift through it all, but Art got a hit after a few minutes. The image was grainy and at the limit of the camera's resolution. Art enhanced it and we watched as our overweight victim accepted an envelope from some male figure whose head was out of the frame. The encounter only lasted a few seconds. It was a marvel of processing power and an example of good police work on Art's part. I was impressed.

"I'd like to know who that guy was," I said stating the obvious. "Is there any way we could get a better angle on who's handing that envelope to Tubby?"

"I processed it to the limit of my ability," Art replied. "But knowing the exact location and time of the handoff, maybe there is another camera recording the scene." One good feature of modern life, at least from a policeman's perspective, is the near ubiquity of security cameras. Every public space is watched by a camera and recorded. It hasn't made the privacy advocates happy but it has made my job a lot easier.

We circled the building and found an old traffic surveillance camera on a pole across the street from the lobby. It had a good view of the street and, with any luck might have caught the hand off through the window across the street. We repaired to a coffee shop in the neighborhood while Art went into deep retrieval mode, no doubt accessing the traffic department archives and querying that particular camera's log. The process was maddeningly slow thanks to the city's ancient equipment but by the time I finished my sandwich, Art had a grainy photograph for me to examine.

"Is that who I think it is?" The resolution was poor but it was clear to us both that the man handing the envelope to our victim was our friend the architect, Adrain Serrano.

Confronted with yet more evidence that he'd been lying to us combined with a few threats of prosecution, Mr. Serrano told us his story. He was acting on behalf of his client, Darren Delacroix. Mr Delacroix was being extorted by HFH. He was paying money to the organization to avoid terrorist-like attacks on his factories and his

people.

"How much was he paying?" Art asked.

"A half a million dollars every month. I know that sounds like a lot of money to you but to a billionaire like Mr. Delacroix, it's small potatoes."

Small potatoes indeed. One or two potatoes like that and I could retire to a condo in Florida and kiss this stupid job goodbye.

"You think Darren Delacroix killed Mr. Alescu?" I asked the architect.

"I don't think so...I don't know."

"Alescu had a broken arm. You know anything about that?"

"I asked him about that last payoff. He said a borg did it."

Now that was interesting. A borg couldn't have done it intentionally. It must have been an accident. The result of saving Alescu's life. "Did he tell you how it happened?"

"He said he was about to walk in front of a truck and a borg grabbed him and pulled him back with such force it broke his arm. He said it was making him second think his political views."

Now that was interesting. Suddenly my hunch meter was blinking on and off like a Vegas slot machine.

"I suppose we should speak with Mr. Delacroix," Art said when we were alone again.

"Waste of time," I said. "He's not our man. Sure he had motive, but why would he kill someone on his own property and then try and make it look like a borg did it? When you're as rich as he is you just hire a professional. It doesn't make sense. There's something else going on here."

"I see your point," Art said. "We should ask ourselves who benefits by trying to ruin Delacroix and cast suspicion on cyborgs?"

"Exactly," I said, "and there's only one party that fills the bill."

"The HFH," we both said simultaneously.

Police don't have much of a handle on these fringe gridded cults. Snitches are few and far between and they don't last very long in that paranoid world, but as fate would have it, Art remembered a guy we busted a couple of years back for felony assault on a cyborg.

He was connected with HFH and agreed to turn state's evidence for a lighter sentence. His name was Eldon Mooks, and, if he was still alive, he might be able to give us some insight into our murder investigation.

Mooks was not only still alive, but was recently arrested in Savannah, Georgia, for drunk driving. He had struck and severely injured a pedestrian and was facing a ten year mandatory sentence. When we caught up with him, he was actually happy to see us.

"Hey, I remember you guys. You helped me out once. Maybe we can make another deal."

"Maybe," I said. "It just so happens you're in a position to help us with a case we're working on."

"Oh that's great. Thank you Jesus. What do you guys need to know?"

Art took out the photographs of Dimitri Alescu, Adrian Serrano and Darren Delacroix and laid them out before him. "You recognize any of these faces?"

Mooks pointed to the photo of Alescu. "I know plenty about Tubby," he said. After that tantalizing statement, Mooks clammed up until he extracted a pledge of immunity from us and a reduction of his sentence on the DUI charge. Mooks knew how to play the game. When everything was agreed to and put in writing, only then did Mooks begin to talk. And what a story he told.

"Tubby was a bag man for the HFH. He'd pick up and deliver things, money mostly. The higher ups trusted him completely. A lot of people in the cyborg industry paid us protection money to keep us away from their facilities. Anyways, one day Tubby is crossing the street and a borg pulls his ass out of the way of truck or a bus or something. The upshot of it is that Tubby has a religious conversion. He says he saw God and understood the error of his ways. He no longer wanted anything to do with harming borgs, in short he wanted out of the organization. All of a sudden, he was considered a risk. He knew too much. So the word came down to get rid of him and as long as they were paying to take him out, they thought they would score some political points by making it look like a borg did it.

It was my idea to do it on the Delacroix property. A nice touch, don't you think?"

The story was pretty much what I expected but one question still remained, "How did you do it? I mean kill him like that?"

"Ah now that was a stroke of genius. We wanted it to look like a borg did it. So a couple of guys held him against the wall while one of us drove that big stake through his heart with a fork lift. We felt pretty sure it would fool anyone. How did you guys figure it out?"

"Simple," I said, "borgs don't kill people."

Art gave me one of his looks and I could swear his eyes rolled.

