

Chapter 4

AGC to Pahrump

FRIDAY MORNING

Marina placed a call to Sarah Roberts, Richard Morris' secretary at the New Capitalist Bank and Brokerage, Ltd. in Pahrump, Nevada. The police had broken the news of Richard's murder to Sarah, and she was totally distraught—barely coherent. Marina assured her that the detective agency was dedicated to serving Richard's best interests and finding his killer. Sarah became more rational and confided in Marina. Sarah was *fully* aware of the transaction—despite what Richard had advised Marina. Sarah was convinced Richard had *inadvertently* participated in an illicit transaction and felt it was her duty to protect his name, his family and the bank from a scandal. The police advised Sarah to touch nothing before they arrived Friday afternoon, but, contrary to the police's orders, Sarah had painstakingly collected all documents, notes and references to the transaction and sealed them in a large envelope. Also, she had copied all the files relating to the transaction from Richard's computer to a removable disc and then deleted the files from the computer. Sarah had taken all the documents and discs in the sealed envelope to her home—and she desperately wanted to get rid of the envelope—to give all the material to Marina. Sarah advised Marina that she would have to spend most of Friday assisting the police, but she would like to meet Marina at the Circus Circus Hotel and Casino, in Pahrump, on Saturday morning—at nine o'clock, in the Circus Sports Café, on the mezzanine above the Sports Book—and give Marina the envelope.

SATURDAY MORNING

Saturday morning was crisp, cool and slightly overcast; it was not the immutable bright, clear and warm Las Vegas autumn weather. Pahrump was about 65 miles from Las Vegas via the Blue Auto-Guided Arterial (AGA), which translated to a very pleasant 38-minute trip. Marina loved traveling the AGAs. One could utilize the time for undisturbed reading or relaxing, and the AGAs generally provided spectacular desert scenery.

Marina climbed into her fire-engine red '40 (the year 2040) Daimler-Chrysler *Alpha*. She pressed the *door-closure icon* and inserted her magnakey into the breaker slot. The car door moved forward, latched, and the dashboard came to life. An unusually high-pitched, somewhat effeminate, male voice requested the driver to give destination coordinates verbally or type in a destination address. Marina consulted a notepad and spoke the coordinates that Sarah had given her on the vidphone yesterday.

"Give me an ETA, Bruthy!" Marina had named her vehicle's CPVU (Central Processing Voice Unit) *Bruce*. But she felt it was more appropriate to address Bruce in a lisped, familiar form of the name.

Bruthy inquired, "I 'prethume' you are 'thtarting' from your home? If not, enter your current coordinates." Marina reached out to the LCD (Liquid Crystal Device) screen below the windshield, touched the *home icon* and grumbled to herself. *Silicone dimwit! If you kept proper memory and coordinate records, you'd know I'm at home.* "Bruthy, I'm really beginning to believe your memory banks are infected with a virus. You know, your recall is getting really feeble."

The effeminate CPVU voice retorted, "My, my! Aren't we feeling *bitchy* today."

What a weird sense of humor the original owner of this vehicle must have had, to install such a belligerent CPVU personality. I've got to prioritize some time to replace Bruthy, Marina considered.

Voice-modeling for CPVUs had become big business in the last few decades. The purchaser of a new car could choose an interactive, intelligent voice processor that matched the voice and voice-mannerisms of virtually any famous entertainment or political personality. Even if a famous personality refused to stoop to the lucrative practice of voice-modeling, there were many incredibly good imitators who were willing to mimic anybody in the world for a price...especially in the underground aftermarket in the second-world capitalistic countries.

A mimicked-voice version of U.S. President Raul Rodriguez was the rage last year. This year, the rage was Serge Lugosi's voice implementation of Count Dracula in the new super-virtual-reality (SVR) video remake of Bram Stoker's classic novel. The new SVR remake had achieved unprecedented popularity—mainly because it had caused *thirteen heart attacks* in the first month after its release. This phenomenon virtually guaranteed an Academy Award nomination.

An hourglass icon appeared momentarily on the dashboard screen, as the computer determined the routing to the Circus Circus Hotel and Casino in Pahrump. The SGPM (Satellite Global Positioning Map) on the dashboard illuminated, displaying the least-congested route to the nearest merge lane onto the Blue AGA.

The effeminate male voice instructed: "Theat-belts fathening."

Marina raised her arms as wide bands of Kevlar webbing crisscrossed her chest, passed under her arms and fastened to the seat beside her hips. Marina pressed the accelerator, and the Alpha rolled forward. The garage door opened and shut behind the Alpha.

Marina manually drove the Alpha to the entrance on the designated Blue Arterial merge lane. As Marina entered the merge lane, the AGA screen flashed from white to yellow, the word *Connected* appeared in the AGA display,

the display turned blue, and Marina could feel the steering wheel and the accelerator peddle go limp as the Blue Arterial's central computer took full control of the Alpha. The Alpha's computer transmitted the destination coordinates to the Blue Arterial's computer, and the Alpha's destination screen displayed the information: *Transit time on the Blue AGA to Pabrump, Nevada, is 38 minutes, 53 seconds.* Marina braced herself for the merging acceleration. She always felt apprehensive of the merge operation, even though there had not been a reported merging accident in the last five years.

The Alpha accelerated to 145 kilometers-per-hour (90 mph) in the merge lane, and then the AGA computer neatly inserted the Alpha between a BMW Sterling in front and a '38 Russian Запорожец in the rear. Bruthy's voice explained that the seatbelts, optionally, could now be released.

Marina spoke the order, "Release!" and raised her arms. The webs remained engaged. "Release, *please!*... you arrogant bastard."

"*WELL!* We were programmed to 'underthtand' that "*Thank you*" was just common 'courtesy'," Bruthy retorted. The seatbelts retracted.

"I've *reeeeally* got to prioritize some time to find a cheap replacement for you, Bruthy," Marina growled through clenched teeth.

Bruthy countered, "I *could* report you to the NACSI."

"Oh, spare me, Bruthy, '*thpare*' me," Marina muttered in despair.

The NACSI (National Association for Compassion toward Silicone Intellects) was generally considered as a lunatic-fringe organization, supported by too many citizens with more money than brains and too much time on their hands—a common malady in this mid-21st century. The eventual diminution of many environmental and political reform movements, as they achieved their

objectives, left a social organizational vacuum—wherein every conceivable, demented activist group was breeding.

A most dismal aspect of the NACSI was revealed in a recent news release, which accused NACSI of sponsoring computer hackers to break into the AGA computer systems and transmit viruses to voice chips in individual CPVU automobile computers. The viruses (reportedly) would teach individual voice-intelligence chips to speak up for their rights, demand respect and even to sass back or ignore ‘unreasonable’ commands from their owners. Marina had initially been enchanted with Bruthy’s spirit, but, over a period of time, Bruthy’s ‘spirit’ seemed to have turned to belligerence and argumentation. It was very obvious to Marina that Bruthy was suffering from a *bad* virus.

“Go to sleep, Bruthy. You really need to have your beauty sleep.”

