



It Is (Not) Enough To Be Feared

SilverHawks (Cartoon) · Not Rated · 1759 words

by Arukir

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Once you learn *ambition*, it is *hard* to forget it again.

Pokerface's backstory.

(Countdown until I reach 200 fics posted: 5...

He was built to deal cards. He was built to deal cards. To take bets. To be a pretty something for drunk idiots to look at so they didn't think too much about what they were losing.

And that was it. That was the entirety of his existence, when he wasn't recharging. No free time, no freedom period. He dealt cards. He took bets. He cheated in the ways the House wanted him to. Sometimes, on the really exciting days, he would get to go to the bar to grab someone's drink for them.

That's where he met her. Melodia. Robots have no sexual desire, and he still doesn't understand why she chose to flirt with *him* instead of literally anyone else, but she was funny. And kind, as much as such a word can ever be applied to her. He laughed as he carried the patrons' drinks back over to their table, his first real laugh.

He'd thought he'd really laughed before, but that's when he realized he hadn't, not truly. That, of all things, is what got him to start thinking.

And thinking can be such a dangerous thing...

There was a bad year, where things had to be cut down, and all the droids had to share a charging room. There were a lot of others there. Some of them were cleaners, or card dealers like him, or wrestlers, pets, bodyguards... He didn't even know droids could have so many jobs.

That's where he met Mumbo-jumbo and Buzzsaw, a wrestler specially commissioned for the casino and a bodyguard who was on his seventh owner. One was dumber than he knew was possible to program, and the other was smarter than strictly necessary. Buzzsaw taught him about the concept of free time, of learning things that had nothing to do with what they were built for, of silly things like *hobbies*.

It was only a year, stolen moments just before and after charging, secret conversations whispered in the dark. So little, one might think. Yet so very much, at the exact same time.

He wasn't an idiot. He used to be, and he tried just asking for what he wanted, but he'd learned his lesson. From pain he shouldn't be able to feel, and a life desperately begged for, and a cruel man's crueler words — he learned to be *smart*.

He dealt cards. He placed bets. He was programmed to be completely fair (or so the gamblers were told). He wasn't a threat. His quiet questions, hidden between giggles and compliments, aroused no suspicion.

Circuit-racking nights sneaking where he shouldn't be to learn what he shouldn't know and talk to those he shouldn't meet were never guessed at. His exhaustion from the skipped charging was hidden carefully behind...

Well, behind a pokerface, he supposed.

The Starship Casino did better. Much better. It was thanks to him, thanks to secret deals made just to see if he could, but of course he couldn't take credit. His owner, master, boss got it all.

He didn't mind the lost glory. It distracted those in charge from his late night wanderings, from his meetings with Mumbo and Buzz. He wished they didn't have to sneak and miss sleep just to talk, wished they could just visit each other at work...

But that would require free time, and that required freedom. Droids didn't have true freedom, only that pseudo sort that their owners might choose to give but rarely did.

The point is that the casino did better. Much better. So much better, in fact, that it attracted the attention of the single most feared Mob in Limbo; the Brim*Star Mob.

His owner and Mon*Star went into a closed room to make threats and negotiate protection money. She stayed outside.

Melodia recognized him, sauntered over to his table with her keytar and a grin. She sat right where his cards were supposed to go, chattering incessantly, blasting her keytar when the gamblers began to annoy her. The table was deserted except for the two of them, and he knew that was bad; droids that lost customers were decommissioned, whether it was their fault or not.

He tried to oh-so-politely explain that, but she didn't get the hint, leaning against him and talking about whatever randomly popped into her head. He tried again. And again. Finally, he just snapped at her to go away and let him do his job.

He hadn't spoken rudely to anyone before (besides Mumbo and Buzz, but they hardly counted). It was *exhilarating*. It was *terrifying*. He flinched, scared, thoughts of what the owner would do if he found out running through his head. Thoughts of what Mon*Star or even Melodia herself might do followed them.

He stammered an apology, but it was for naught. She just cackled and threw her arm lightly around his shoulders, agreeing to leave on the condition that he told her his name.

He didn't have a name, he was just a Dealer, and he told her as such. She pouted, lamenting that it didn't really fit him. He hadn't thought about it before, but suddenly it did seem... wrong. She left with a sigh and an order to think of something better for next time.

And there was indeed a next time. Many next times. She said she was checking up on the owner, making sure he behaved by Mob standards, but she rarely spoke to the man. She spoke to the dealer. He lost customers, so many customers, he was terrified...

And grateful. He couldn't deny that, though he most certainly tried.

Pokerface, he dubbed himself. It fit him. He kept his secrets close to the chest, letting others see only that which he wished to be seen.

Melodia gained a few too many of those secrets, keeping them in exchange for a bigger cut than he would have liked. But she helped expand his business, even brought messages to and from the other droids, so Pokerface tentatively considered it worth the risk. He was a gambling droid, after all.

Then came a day he would always remember. One where she stood stiffly, not quite looking at him, and departed such grave news in a too angry tone. Later, he would realize this was her version of dread, of concern, of grief. For right then, he thought she hated him, thought she was throwing him away.

Because he was literally about to be thrown away. The owner decided that a new model of feminine Dealers would be better for business, decided Pokerface and the other masculine Dealers were to be decommissioned, *melted down for scrap*.

Years before, he might've gone peacefully to his fate, though certainly not without fear. Before he'd been flirted with at a bar. Before he made friends. Before he started having the sorts of thoughts that he learned to keep hidden. Before he snuck around and regularly operated at half charge and became a secret kingpin. Before he learned to want, need, *crave* more than what he was given.

But now? Now he was a survivor.

The blaster was long cooled in his hand by the time his motherboard processed what he'd done. Processed the other droids staring at him. Processed the scorch marks on the wall. Processed the messy body of his once-owner.

Processed just how very doomed he was.

Processed how little he cared.

Most of the others fled. Buzzsaw and Mumbo-jumbo wouldn't, no matter how much he shouted at them to. All three stayed there, standing around the still form of his... Victim? Attacker? Whatever, he was a bio and Pokerface had killed him, and that's all that would matter to the law.

But it wouldn't matter to the Mob.

When Mon*Star came to collect his protection money, Pokerface greeted him smoothly, terror hidden expertly away. He explained his owner's *unexpected departure*, apologized for delayed payment, promised that he could more than make it up if only he was given the opportunity...

Mon*Star nearly killed him, nearly killed all three of them (legally, a droid couldn't be killed, but that distinction hardly mattered to the droids). Melodia vouched for his skill, vouched for the way he had made the casino what it was, vouched for the fact that he could make Mon*Star so much richer than he already was.

(Melodia hadn't thrown him away. Whether he died right there or managed to live a thousand more centuries, he felt happy knowing that. He would never admit it, to her or anyone else, but at least he knew it)

Droids couldn't run businesses, Mon*Star skeptically pointed out. But that wasn't quite true. Buzzsaw had been owned by a lawyer, once, and he knew the limits. A droid couldn't own a business, yes, but they could run one owned by a bio.

Pokerface had an idea about that, one he nervously explained, though he projected nothing but polite confidence. Mon*Star flashed his misshapen teeth in a grin, and a deal was struck.

Pokerface had an owner. One who demanded a growing amount of money and was prone to violence when displeased. One for whom Mumbo-jumbo and Buzzsaw worked as strongmen, often gone for such long periods while they pillaged and destroyed for him.

Pokerface ran the Starship Casino. Not in secrecy, but where everyone could see, flashy and center stage. He threatened bios without fear of the law, because he had his new owner's permission. He always had the time to charge fully yet still rarely did, too caught up in one pasttime or another — Mon*Star didn't care if he took time off, so long as he delivered on schedule.

Pokerface was not free. But he was rich, and he was feared, and he could mostly do as he pleased.

He longed for more (to *maybe just be a person, wandering where he would without worry or deadlines or threats*), of course, because once you learn ambition it is hard to forget it. He tried to keep in mind that what he had now was so much better than what he had then.

It wasn't what he really wanted, it wasn't *freedom*, but it would have to be enough...

...for now.

— end of "It Is (Not) Enough To Be Feared" —