

## **Robot Story: Chapter 1**

### **By Luka Lawford**

The sun had been shining bright all day in the District of Sun's Passage. The crowd was mainly wearing sunglasses, although some of the more prominent members in the plaza had simply flicked on the shade implants in their contact lenses. Although it was sweltering everywhere else in the city, the plaza's cooling system blew a gentle breeze through the cooled air. The crowd excitedly buzzed as a man took the stage. He introduced himself, but everyone knew who he was. It was just a formality. He cleared his throat and paused for effect.

“And now I would like to introduce our newest product.”

The crowd was silent, but the air hummed with anticipation. The man slowly walked to the centre of the stage. He stopped and a clock was projected onto the curtain behind him. It read 11:58. The sun cast a small shadow to the man's right, even though the building to his left obstructed the full view. The building to the right was bathed in light as the clock clicked on second by second.

“First, we brought you the Clarity voice recognition software - the world's first such software with over ninety-eight percent accuracy. Then the Linktop, the computers that instantly connect with physical contact. The Gesture, the computer navigation interface that made the mouse history. And now we come to another milestone with Axiom Technologies.”

The clock read 11:59. The crowd leaned forward as a unit and tried to see through the curtain. The man on the stage stepped back a few steps and slowly raised his hand.

The clock switched to 12:00 as the man pulled his hand through the air. The curtain followed and the sun burst into sight between the two skyscrapers, lighting up the whole plaza. The crowd blinked a few times and craned their necks to look at the device that was on the newly exposed table.

It was a cell phone.

The crowd broke into a sea of muttering, and a few at the edges of the plaza got up to leave. The man on the stage picked up the phone and turned it on. The phone's screen was projected onto the stage behind him.

“The phone has all the normal features that you’ve come to expect from Axiom products. The Clarity system is utilized for verification. Gordon Slate,” the man said to the phone, which unlocked after hearing the name.

Slate then proceed to run through a list of features, none of which were new. The crowd was about to disperse.

“And now to make a test call. But first, I’d like to make sure everyone is listening.” Slate waved his hand and the crowd’s phones emitted a series of sounds as the service was cut.

“The cell towers in Sun’s Passage have all just been deactivated temporarily. Don’t worry, emergency services can still get through. That’s because they have this phone too.”

The crowd’s muttering grew louder as they wondered what Slate meant. He spoke into the phone once more.

“Call Jen.” The phone’s dial tone was projected into the crowd as they checked that their phones indeed were not working. The person on the other end picked up.

“Hello Gordon,” sounded the voice. “Aren’t you supposed to be at the big unveiling?”

“I am,” replied Gordon. “Say hello.”

“Hello everyone, and you’re hearing me live on the new Axiom Beacon. This phone will never fail you. The Beacon can connect to any other Beacon within two hundred miles, anywhere in this world... or even out of it.”

The crowd went wild, shouting questions at the stage.

“Gordon, I really have to go now,” said Jen, her voice nearly drowned out by the crowd. There was a click as she hung up.

“One at a time, please,” Gordon yelled. “You first.”

“Mr. Slate, how does this technology work? Is it harmful in any way?”

Gordon chuckled politely. “You know as well as I do that Axiom won’t divulge its secrets. However, I can assure you that no harmful radio waves, or indeed any types of radiation, are projected anywhere in the Earth’s atmosphere, if that’s what you’re worried about. Next please.”

“Mr. Slate, will the battery last shorter than previous models?”

“Due to the new transmission technology, the battery is ten percent less efficient during usage of the towerless calls. However, existing cell towers will be used whenever they are still active. By the way, your phones should work now.”

“Sir, after this, what could be next for Axiom? How many more hurdles can you leap?”

Gordon smiled. “With all due respect, mister, this is nothing compared to the future.”

Gordon stepped through the press of news reporters that were waiting to ambush him at the punch bowl and made a beeline for a black suit on the other side of the plaza. He had to brush off people’s questions left and right and remind them to enjoy the refreshments. After spilling someone’s cocktail and almost tripping a waiter with a plate of shrimp, Gordon reached the suit. The suit belonged to a tall man.

“Hey Rick,” said Gordon. Rick turned around and nearly knocked over a patio table. Standing a good foot taller than Gordon’s five-and-a-half foot frame, Rick had always been quite massive.

“Oh hello Gordon! I must say, that was some excellent work. You really had ‘em there!” Rick let out a booming laugh. “But you can tell me what it does for real, right? Did you bury towers somewhere? Underground? With the moles?” Rick leaned in and grabbed Gordon’s shoulder, sweeping his arm in a panorama across what was mid-height for him and chest height for Gordon. He then drew Gordon’s gaze upwards. “Or maybe... in the sky?”

“I’m sorry, bro, but I really can’t tell you. It’s not just for this... we’re working on something else.”

“Oh well. You know it as well as I do, right?” Rick was the chief of police in Sun’s Passage, and was used to information crime, the most dominant type of crime in the high-tech area. “You just better relax now that you’ve done the impossible for the fiftieth time.”

“No can do, Rick, I actually have to go soon. We have a few things going. These take a lot of time, you know.”

Rick looked disappointed. “Well, Gord, you better take breaks every so often. Have some fun! Or else you’re going to get sucked in. Sucked right in. Be careful.”

Gordon’s leg shook as his Beacon received a text. He pulled it from his pocket and glanced down, and then back up to Rick, who was consuming five shrimp at once.

“I take it you have to go. By the way, these are amazing,” he crunched, flagging down another nearby waiter.

“Sorry to leave, it’s just-”

“I understand.”

Gordon was already gone, walking toward the building on the right as fast as he could.