

## PAL by Travis Gresham

He awoke to the familiar ping of the settlement.

A faint ring that meant that he had lost the suit put forth by his PAL (personal automated litigator). His ledger was charged and his filing was completed and logged against him even before he had opened his eyes. He knew that this was just the start. The rings would come more frequently when the system had identified his state as 'awake'. As of right now there was, improbably, a queue of hundreds of suits and settlements issued on his behalf and against him that were only waiting in line inside the system to come at him once he had been definitively brought out of his unconscious state. He had set it up that way. Some people allowed the notifications to happen in real time but he found that sleep was nearly impossible with the deluge of late night legal actions taken during server down time when more advanced PAL systems had discerned traffic to be light enough to give them more favorable outcomes. That's how it worked now. No one thought anything of being sued for walking across the street or looking in someone else's direction - even if that person was in the operator's seat of a pseudo or true auto mobile transit that was inches from running you over. Suits and filings were less of a procedural burden since the passing of the federal law known as the Robo Sue Act of 2018. It happened quickly and had little impact other than the increased spending on sever precedent packages and the newest most advanced PAL systems. Each person was now issued a PAL due to a law stipulating that every person should have the ability to issue suits against those issuing suits against them. This stipulation was made as an extension of the existing law requiring representation for defendants. The arguments for and against this extension were both issued by PAL systems and it was

widely speculated that there was computational collusion between the two sides. Nothing was proven since the systems both relied on a hobbled AI system that no one truly understood.

All that mattered now was the big filing issued against him after he had chanced to look at a sign advertising 'Cold Beer' and had, as the suit alleged, looked longingly enough to tempt passing non-legal minors into looking at the advertisement longer than they would have under normal circumstances. The law he had apparently broken was an extension of the 'tempting nuisance' law that had made it legally dicey to have a pool or a trampoline in the late 90's. If he lost this suit he would probably lose the other filings against him surrounding his 'longing gaze' at a vacation advertisement that had, allegedly, momentarily decreased 'eye traffic' since his visage was, allegedly, not in fitting with the advertised destination's desired travelers. This decrease in 'potential consumer impressions' was his fault, he knew. He often had lost moments at the flip board advertisements or the holo shop windows. 'Just browsing' was no longer part of the collective lexicon, it was a lawsuit.

He shifted forward and checked the rolling notifications for the decision. He lost. He almost always lost. But he had never really met anyone that won either so losing had become a kind of background noise that he and rest of the human population had come to ignore. Sure there were those cases that had become the new prime time fodder used to sell advertisements, but those that won were only mentioned. They were never shown on the viz-screens since that invariably brought suits from those that claimed to have become jealous or enraged or depressed after seeing a successful litigant in front of their eyes. One's vision and those things put in front of it had become the most valuable and therefore the most litigated against things in the modern world. 'Feelings' came a close second but those suits took just a bit longer to process, settle and log and had fallen out of favor after every PAL system had rated their potential as less than favorable. Since the implementation of the PAL system each person had done a sort of auto-correct and had become more calculated, more precise, more anxious

and far less concerned with anything outside themselves. The PAL system had made it easier to think only of what you were doing, what you were looking at and where you were trying to go. It 'moved things along' just as the newest slew of PAL advertisements had loudly pronounced. "Moving things along!" was the way the major brand ThienX had pushed its brand of PAL systems in the past few advert cycles. Previous to that it was "Correct course, correct compensation" which was likely deemed too alliterative and too verbose.

The juice he poured was sold to him by an automated retail system that had filed suit after he had made an attempt at conversation. The retail outlet had claimed that his 'reflexive quip' had slowed the check out proceedings and had impacted continued transactional efficiencies resulting in a claimed loss of several thousand dollars and had further required that the retail system be retro fitted with an outdated expedited response system used to confound any future attempts at levity. The juice was bitter and he was trying not to be so he glanced toward the blank wall to signal to the drop cams that he wished to activate the viz-screen. The chatter and smiles of the morning hosts did little to hamper the nagging disgust or the bitter taste in his mouth. He won't take a shower this early in the morning. He had been sued by several neighbors claiming lost wages after waking to the sound of water through the wall. He hadn't bought coffee since the several lawsuits issued against him after his series of questions regarding different roasts had confused the cafe's retail software.

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He left the ground with a feeling of solace since he won't have to hear another notification ring or lose another bit of his sanity to the worry about his ledger balance. Right as he was about to nose into the dusty basin a notification ring pinged and, as if already out of his body, his hand reflexively

brought the phone up to his face. He'd lost.