

## The Deadly Species

by [Atk. Butterfly](#)

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*Atk. Butterfly works as a Computer Programmer/Systems Analyst, most often as a contractor. An avid science fiction reader, Atk. has written a number of science fiction stories. Some have actually been published in Aphelion, The Blue Lady, Dragon Dreaming, The Dragon's Lair, Dream Forge, Electronic Writers Group Presents, Eternity Magazine, Exodus, Hugo Gernsback's Forecast, Fusion, Just Because, Keen Science Fiction!, The Little Read Writer's Hood, McCann's Planet, [Nuketown](#), Professional Writers Forum, The Rock, The Tales' Realm, TimeWinder, Titan Webzine, and Veils Magazine. As well, he wrote a few technical computer articles which were published in computer magazines. His novel, Washout, is available online from [HyperBooks](#).*

*Atk. is an Event Host on Prodigy in the Books and Writing Area where he moderates a writing workshop for science fiction, fantasy, horror, and humor. He is presently the editor of [Preditors & Editors](#), a web resource for writers, composers, and artists. He also has a [personal web site](#), which he hopes people will visit and enjoy.*

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Fred "Top Sales' Gun" Peko said, "Ma'am, robo-pet is sweeping the nation. Why have a real pet that grows up out of its cuteness or has to be cleaned up after all the time? With a robo- pet, you know that you'll always have the pet you selected. Just take a look at what we have on hand now."

"Never clean up after them?" Cheryl asked.

"Not once."

"That does sound interesting. I liked having a pet as a little girl, but I didn't like having to clean the litter box when my mother told me to," Cheryl mused.

"Just think, not only do you not have to clean up after a robo-cat, but you won't have to buy litter, either. Think of the savings!"

"Hmmm, yes, it would be cheaper than having a real cat. But . . . it just wouldn't be the same thing. I mean, real cats are . . . Well, every cat I've ever seen was completely individualistic. How about these robo-cats? Are they all different?"

"Absolutely. We use the Asimov-Clarke poly-relational logarithm for cats. For dogs, we only use the quad-relational logarithm developed by Saberhagen. So, if you're a cat fancier, you can rest assured that your cat will be unique in its character and behavior."

"Guaranteed?" Cheryl asked.

"Absolutely!"

"Okay, I'll take one," Cheryl said.

Cheryl opened the package as soon as she reached home. To her surprise, the inside of the box was half-clawed apart as if the robo- cat was afraid to be shut inside. As soon as she had the box open enough, the robo-cat leaped out past her and disappeared into the apartment.

"Huh? Uh, hey cat, come back here! I haven't even named you yet!" Cheryl shouted.

For the next half-hour, Cheryl searched her apartment until she finally found the robo-cat under her bed. Try as she did, Cheryl couldn't coax the robo-cat from under. She finally reached under to grab the robo-cat only to be growled at and clawed. Cheryl yanked her hand back, blood dripping from the elongated slashes given her.

"Ow! You bad kitty!" Cheryl hollered.

Fred answered the phone. "This is Bill McGuire of Robo-Pet. We have a problem."

"What kind of problem?" asked Fred.

"We're trying to find one of our robo-cats. Serial number X00101. Our records indicate it went to your store. You still have it?"

"I'll check. What's the problem, though?" asked Fred.

"Just a mixup at the factory. Find out if you still have it. This is important," Bill answered.

Fred replied, "I'm checking through the books now. X00101. . . Hmmm, nope. We sold that one today. Why is this important?"

"Oh god, you sold it to a customer?"

"Who the hell else would we sell it to? Of course to a customer. Why is this so important?"

Bill answered, "You better get it back in a hurry. If you don't we're probably going to be sued."

"Okay, but that doesn't tell me why this is so important."

Bill said, "We fell behind in analysing the spec sheets on each model before they were shipped. We only reached the personality charts this morning on the batch it was in and just now discovered that we had a lion personality in it based on what the poly- relational logarithm gave it."

"A lion?" Fred asked.

"Yes, now get hold of your customer and get that robo-cat back before it hurts anyone! You're just as liable as we are now that you know what the problem is," Bill said.

Fred slapped the phone back on the cradle without bothering to say goodbye. He searched through his records to find out who bought the robo-cat that shouldn't have been sent from the factory.

Fred raced to the elevator. He fidgetted the entire time it took for the elevator to reach the right floor. He practically ran down the hallway once the elevator disgorged him. Almost out of breath, Fred pounded on the apartment door. "Open up! It's an emergency!"

Cheryl peered through the peep hole. She recognized Fred as the salesman who sold her the robo-cat. She opened the door to see what he wanted.

Fred caught sight of Cheryl's bandaged hand. He said, "Oh god, I'm sorry you got hurt. We'll take care of any doctor bills for that. I have to take the robo-cat back. I'll even refund you double your purchase price."

"I'm sorry, but you can't have the robo-cat back."

"What? Why not?" Fred asked.

"Because it's . . . well, it's . . ."

"It's what?" Fred asked impatiently.

"It's broke. I kind of broke it," Cheryl said.

"You broke it? I don't understand. Where is it? Do you still have it or did you throw it away?"

"I still have it. Makes a nice trophy on the wall, don't you think? My boyfriend is handy with tools and mounted the head for me. He'll be back in a moment. He went to his apartment to put his tools away," Cheryl said as she pointed to the wall by the door behind Fred.

Fred turned and stared at the disembodied head of the robo-cat mounted on a wooden plaque.

"Then the cat didn't harm you?" Fred asked.

"Oh, he gave me this, alright," Cheryl said, holding her bandaged hand up, "but it's the last he'll give anyone. I was so hoping that I'd get over my anxiety over cats with a robo-cat. My doctor even said I should think about getting one before I bought that one from you."

"Doctor? What doctor?" asked Fred.

"My shrink. He said I should try getting a robo-cat so I'd get over my psychosis. Otherwise, I would have bought a robo-dog."

"You have a phobia against cats?"

"Uh, no. More like homicidal tendencies against them. Only my doctor and I both thought that it was because of the litter problem. Guess I know better now. I just hate cats. However, if you want, I'll give you back the robo-cat body in exchange for a robo-dog," Cheryl said.

"Um, I don't know. Something tells me that I better talk to my company management about this before I say anything more. However, I would like to see the robo-cat, um, body so I can check the serial number just to be sure that this is the one we're after," Fred said.

Cheryl said, "Sure, I'll get it for you, though it's a bit mangled."

"Mangled? How'd you kill, er, destroy it?" Fred asked.

Cheryl answered, as she went into the next room, "Oh, that was easy. I took the rubber mouse that came with the robo-cat and placed it just outside the edge of the bed to entice the robo-cat out. Then I clobbered it with a baseball bat when it came out. You were right about the robo-cat being like a real cat. It was just as dumb, too. That was how I got Fluffy years ago. Too bad I didn't have a boyfriend then who could mount heads or I'd have Fluffy's up there too."

"Um, yeah. Uh, too bad, I guess," Fred stated numbly as he accepted the battered robo-cat body from Cheryl when she returned with it.

"Uh, you wouldn't happen to have a broken robo-cat that I can have the head from, would you? Then I could have it mounted to take Fluffy's place."

Fred replied, "No, but I'll keep a lookout for one if you want," as he verified the serial number.

***The End***