

Sexbot
Patrick Quinlan

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www.patrickquinlan.com

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Praise for Patrick Quinlan's novels:

"A fast-paced thriller...the story moves at warp speed, capped by a cinematic chase...before ending in spectacular fashion." -- **Los Angeles Times**

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Mr. Blue and Number Nine are on a collision course with CEO Howard Neale, Suncoast Cybernetics and now Eris - a Sexbot with the downloaded mind of a white supremacist previously on Death Row.

A high-tech corporation becoming a law unto itself. Killer robots designed to look and act like small children. A sociopathic artificial intelligence who believes the time of humans is reaching its end. And a Sexbot harboring the awareness of an amoral killer, set loose to run amok.

Nine Lives is Book #2 of the Sexbot series, by Patrick Quinlan. It's a fast-paced, sexy, dystopian adventure, with twists, turns and shocking surprises.

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The future doesn't need us.

CHAPTER 01

The two men, killers, stood silent outside the high outer walls of the mansion, lingering among the palm trees.

Dressed in black, they looked like two wraiths, dark ghosts, hiding in the shadows. On this night, they wore hooded coats to protect themselves against the pouring rain. The raised hoods further obscured their faces.

They called themselves Mr. Blue and Mr. Green, but Mr. Blue's real name was not Blue. He was broad and muscular, and he was known for his bad temper. His body was scarred by countless battles. He had murdered dozens of people. His nose bent sideways as if punched by the hand of God.

Mr. Green's real name was, in fact, Green. He was tall and slim, with very fast hands. His face was unremarkable. He had a receding hairline. He looked like he could be an accountant, or a teacher. You wouldn't remember seeing him. He was logical and detail-oriented. He was also cold blooded and relentless.

For both men, killing was a job and, on this night, that job took them to this sleek, white stucco, four-story house on the coast. Only the twenty-foot high stone walls and state-of-the-art security system stood in their way.

Mr. Green opened a metal control box at the base of the wall, and made quick work of the latter, disabling the home's security cameras and electronic lock system, as Mr. Blue looked on. The two men had worked together before. Mr. Blue didn't much like Mr. Green's personality, but he appreciated his professionalism and his knack for the finer points of technology. It was a beautiful thing to witness.

Mr. Blue was less polished, but no less effective. Interrogation was his specialty. Compliance, restraint, and information extraction - that's how they described it in industry jargon. In regular English, it meant torture. He was especially good with reluctant subjects.

Those skills wouldn't be needed tonight. This was a straight contract kill, made to look like a break-in gone wrong.

He watched as Mr. Green closed the control box and nodded. The movement of Mr. Green's head was barely perceptible.

"You opened both doors?" Mr. Blue said.

"The wall and the house," Mr. Green said. "We're as good as in."

Mr. Blue went to the reinforced steel door set into the wall. He grabbed the giant decorative knob and pulled. The door came open easily. He smiled to himself and, just like that, he slipped inside the wall.

The two men walked across the grounds toward the house. The shimmering pool was to their right. It was a beautiful setting, with the Gulf of Mexico stretching to dark infinity beyond the seawall. The rain fell hard and fast, and struck the ground in fury. The pool water looked like it was boiling.

The house was to their left. Mr. Blue gazed up at it as they approached. From here, it was impossible to tell what shape it was. Maybe it was a triangle, maybe it was an arrow pointing to heaven. Some pointy-headed college boy with an auto-cad must have thought it made a statement. Certainly, it was contemporary. It was abstract. It was a piece of shit.

It was, he had to admit, a much nicer place than the one he lived in. These computer scientists made a lot of money.

Mr. Blue knew he should keep his mind focused on the job at hand, but he allowed himself a moment to muse about the last scientist they'd met.

He and Mr. Green had just visited him out on the west coast, at a cliff house near Big Sur. A guy named Martin Wacker - what an arrogant prick! Wacker had taken a little rest and relaxation trip out there. And they had come to see him during his holiday.

They had tied Wacker to a chair, forced him to drink bourbon at gun point, then sent him off the cliff in his Mercedes convertible.

Whoops! Drunk driving accident. People should drink more responsibly, especially on curvy mountain roads high above the ocean.

Before he went, Wacker had tried to buy them off. It spoke volumes about the kid that he thought such a thing was even possible. Blue remembered sitting in the living room of that fantastic cliff house, a little drunk himself, watching the sun sink below the ocean. He listened to this snot nose, bearded, four-eyed 32-year-old genius tell them about how much money he had, and how they could have it all, if only they let him live.

"We already have money," he told Wacker. "Lots of it."

Blue glanced at Green. Green stared straight ahead, his eyes blank, waiting until Blue gave him the word. He wasn't even listening. Hell, Green didn't care about money. He didn't care about anything but doing the job. He had all the money he needed. If he had any more, what would he even buy with it?

"In the drawer," Wacker said. His trimmed beard and his black framed Gucci glasses made him look like some kind of fake backwoodsman in a fashion magazine. With his head, Wacker indicated a

glass china cabinet with a couple of sliding wooden drawers. “On the right. There’s about ten thousand dollars in there. Cash. I brought it just to have some spending money. You can have it. Consider it a down payment.”

Blue was wearing black leather gloves, as he always did. He went over to the cabinet and pulled open the drawer. A wad of cash sat there. He didn’t bother to count it. He picked it up and put it in his pocket.

When he turned around again, he caught Green frowning at him. Green shook his head.

“What?” Blue said.

“It’s a breach of protocol.”

Blue shook his head in turn. Everything was a breach of protocol these days. Everything was against the rules. Don’t touch anything. Don’t take anything. Don’t drink beer from the fridge. Don’t steal the artwork off the walls. Don’t blow up the safe. Where was the fun anymore? Hell, Wacker wasn’t going to need the money.

Blue walked back over to the computer genius. He took the bottle of bourbon off the small side table, poured another double shot, and held it to Wacker’s lips. Behind his glasses, Wacker’s eyes went wide.

“Drink,” Blue said.

Wacker’s lips were trembling. “I don’t want anymore.”

With his free hand, Blue pulled his gun out of its holster. He put the business end to Wacker’s temple. He would never shoot the man - this death was going to be an accident. But how could Wacker know that? He couldn’t.

“Drink,” Blue said again.

Wacker drank.

Before the end, before he passed out, before they bundled him into his pricey car and let him loose off the edge of the bluff and into the waiting arms of mother ocean below, Wacker started talking. He talked too much, in fact. It was drunken gibberish, and Blue hated listening to the ravings of dead people.

That, and Wacker was crying. Blue couldn’t stand it when men cried. It didn’t make him feel sympathy. All it did was piss him off. Blue came from that world where men didn’t cry, and boys stopped crying when they were eight years old.

“Please,” Wacker said. “Please don’t do this. I know a secret...”

Blue was bored. He wanted to wrap the night up. Still, he raised his eyebrows. He liked secrets. Secrets often meant money.

“Okay.”

“I have the secret to everlasting life. It’s why they want me dead. I can give it to you.”

“Martin,” Blue said, “I have to be honest with you. That doesn’t sound very promising.”

“No, it’s real. If you had this secret... Listen, it’s incredible. The brain... it isn’t what they think. The human mind is elsewhere.”

Blue’s mind was elsewhere. He held the glass to the man’s lips again.

“Drink,” he said.

Now, a week later, he and Mr. Green had reached the security door of the beach house in Florida – the house of Scientist Number Two. They paused by the door, and stood in the heavy downpour. The rain pattered on their raincoats, and ran in rivulets down their faces.

“Any sign of trouble, we blow her away,” Mr. Blue said. “Alarms, panic rooms, anything like that, just boom. We don’t want a protracted episode in there, and we don’t want any uninvited guests. If there’s no trouble, then it’s just a break-in and we play it like that. You check her identity and I’ll do the honors. We got it?”

Talking to Mr. Green was like talking to a cardboard box. Mr. Green nodded. “Got it.”

Mr. Blue touched the door and pushed. It opened easily.

They went in.

* * *

Inside the house, Susan Jones was afraid. So afraid, she could barely move.

With Martin dead, it was only a matter of time before they came for her. Oh, they said Martin had died in a drunk driving accident, but she didn’t believe it. Martin drank, and Martin drove, but Martin didn’t drink and drive. If Martin was drunk and he needed to go somewhere, he called a taxi.

Susan sat in her living room, listening to the heavy rain drum outside against the tall windows. She sipped from a glass of red wine. She could feel her heart beating through the wall of her chest. Her hand trembled as she lifted the glass to her mouth. The dark color of the wine made her think of blood, and of death.

She wore slacks and a dress shirt, pulled untidily from the waist of her pants. Her shirt was open three buttons, and her long hair, usually pulled back in a tight bun, hung loose and unkempt. Her feet were bare. When she came home, she hadn’t bothered to change out of her work clothes.

She had gone to see Howard again today, and the guards had turned her away. Again. They told her that Howard had to fly out of town on business, but she could see it in their eyes. *Howard doesn't want to see you.* If Howard wouldn't see his star engineer anymore, it could only mean one thing.

Howard wanted her dead.

“Do something,” she said, and the dry croak of her own voice startled her.

She glanced at the opulence of her surroundings. She had loved this house once. This living room was on the third floor. The white wraparound sofa she sat on cost ten thousand dollars. The five foot long abstract painting that hung behind it cost fifty thousand. The baby grand piano was a priceless antique - a gift from the company, because they knew her first love was music. The floors were polished oak. The floor to ceiling windows, on a clear day, would give startling 270 degree views of the beachfront and the Gulf of Mexico.

Tonight all the shades were drawn, and the place reminded her of a crypt.

She was still young, just 33 years old, and she was rich. Indeed, she was much wealthier than she ever imagined she'd be. Even when she graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology a dozen years earlier, she hadn't yet imagined the money she would soon amass. But she'd grown rich doing something she never expected, and now there was a price to pay.

A flat black video monitor extended on a thin, flexible mount from the table in front of her. She pulled it closer for the tenth time tonight, and it came alive instantly. She tapped a few buttons on the touch screen, navigating to the bank of security cameras mounted outside her home.

Nine views popped up, laid out on a grid in front of her. Three of them showed various angles outside the walls of her home, all clear except for the rain, and the palm trees swaying in the heavy wind. Two screens showed views inside the grounds, including one of the in-ground pool, with its submerged blue light shining eerily up into the night.

Four of the screens were blank. Just a few minutes ago, they had been on. As she watched, one by one, the other five screens went blank in quick succession.

“Oh no,” she said under her breath.

Her heart beat faster than ever.

Of course. It was easy for them. They could break the security with no problem at all. The company had built this house, a reward for her groundbreaking designs, and for all her hard work.

Suncoast Cybernetics had increased its revenues by a factor of ten, all because of people like Susan Jones, Martin Wacker, and a few others. All because the company was making robot sex dolls available to every wealthy man and woman, anywhere in the world, who wanted one. Each year, the

robots became more lifelike, more intelligent, more amazing than the year before. And the newest designs, playthings for the ultra-rich, were the most mind-blowing yet.

Sexy? Yes, sexier than any woman alive. Incredible bodies, built to the customer's specifications. Athletic, smart, super-durable, human in every detail, save one.

They were more perfect than any human could ever be.

Once upon a time, she had been proud of the Sexbots. But the success had left her jaded, and restless. And truth be told, the Sexbots made more than a little ashamed. For a long time, she hadn't even told her mom and dad what she did for a living.

She remembered their reaction when she finally did tell them. Hyper-realistic sex dolls? Really? Is this what they had put her through school for? Is this how they had raised her? Is this what she should be wasting her God-given talents on?

It had caused a painful rift in their relationship that still hadn't healed. Once upon a time, her parents had been her best friends. Now? She barely spoke to them.

Worse, the company had taken the Sexbot technology and developed a line of robots for military applications. Killers. Assassins. All of them based on her work. She was irate when she heard of it, but there was nothing she could do. She had been paid for the technology, and the company held the patents.

Last year, she and Martin had struck out in a new direction, with the company's blessings, and they had stumbled upon a secret neither of them could ever have imagined. A possibility so gigantic that it would change the course of human history - a breakthrough that meant they would be remembered forever. And one which left them isolated and terribly vulnerable.

The company owned her. They watched her. They could breach her security system if they wanted. They could kill her if they wanted. And in the days since Martin had died, she had sat here frozen, helpless, becoming more and more convinced the company wanted exactly that. The company would kill them both, and not because they had invented robot sluts.

It was the new project. She and Martin called it Methuselah.

If that project came to fruition, and recent experiments with chimpanzees suggested that it already had, it would bring the company far more money than the Sexbots ever could. Suncoast Cybernetics was poised to become one of the richest and most powerful corporations in the world.

What was it worth if you could corner the market on immortality?

* * *

Mr. Blue pushed through the ground level security door.

Behind the door, a flimsy card table stood. Its thin legs were not quite fully extended, and so were not locked in the open position. The slightest touch could topple the table. On top of the table was a thin glass champagne flute, very fragile.

Three days before, Susan had bought the cheap card table at a discount store. The champagne glass was one of a very expensive set she'd had for years. She had taken to putting the table and the glass against the door when she came home at night.

When Blue pushed the door, it opened and bumped into the table. The table legs folded and the table collapsed to the floor. When the champagne glass hit the ground, it exploded like a very tiny, very lovely little bomb.

For a moment, Blue and Green stood looking down at all the sparkly shattered glass, and at the folded card table. Blue glanced around. In front of them was a flight of stairs leading up to the living quarters. Blue looked at the ceiling. It was textured stucco. He fancied he could hear the pitter-pat of running feet somewhere above his head.

“Shit,” he said, and burst for the staircase.

* * *

Two stories above, Susan heard the table fall and the glass break.

She jumped from the sofa, spilling her wine across the bright white pillows. The red wine made a stain like a gunshot wound. She had no time to worry about it. She only had one chance, and a slim one.

She raced across the room to the spiral stairs. The top floor of this place housed her private lab. She was a workaholic, no time for relationships, and she often worked late into the evenings after she came home. Constant work was the key to her success, it was the key to life everlasting, it was the key to everything.

Below her, footsteps pounded up the stairs.

She grabbed the railing of the thin metal staircase. She pulled herself up the spiral, gasping as she did. She was not fast. She was carrying twenty extra pounds she had been meaning to lose.

She reached the top of the stairs. She heard little sounds, little frightened mouse-like sounds. They were coming from her own mouth. In a sudden flash of insight, she realized that the thing to do when Martin died was to buy a gun. Buy a gun and leave the country. But it was too late for that now. It was too late to do anything.

Down the hall was her lab. She floated there on legs that felt detached from her body. Her head felt like a balloon on a long tether. Her feet looked far away.

She reached the door. There was an electronic keypad lock. She started to punch in her combination, but her hand shook too much. She pressed the CANCEL button and started again. Then she noticed that the lights of the keypad weren't even on.

She stared at the blank keypad for several seconds. It took that long for the meaning of it to reach her fevered mind. The security cameras weren't the only system they had breached. The electronic locks were down, too.

Shit. They were shutting everything down.

She touched the door. It opened without a sound. She pushed through it, hoping that the overhead lights didn't go off next. She was scared, more scared than she had ever been. But if the lights went off, she would be terrified, maybe too terrified to move, or even think. The electricity was her only hope of survival.

If they shut the electricity off, she would no longer be able to do the one thing that might save her. It was a long shot anyway. And she needed power to do it.

The company was all-powerful. She knew now what Martin had already discovered. When the company wanted you alive, you were alive. When the company wanted you dead, you were dead. You belonged to them. The company gave you everything, and it could take away everything, including life itself.

But maybe not this time.

In the darkness of the room, a bank of lights illuminated the far wall. There wasn't much time, so she turned on the overheads. Hell, if there were killers in the house, they would find her soon enough. No reason to hide or pretend she wasn't in here.

She moved quickly. She barely spared a glance for the female robot - a Sexbot - that stood in a long plexiglass tube about five feet away. She merely verified that its power was on and its data drive was plugged in to the bank of servers.

Quickly, Susan tore off her own shirt and slacks, disrobing down to her bra and panties. She dropped the clothes on the floor.

She went to a monitor, punched through several interactive screens, inputting instructions she had gone through dozens of times before. Then she snatched a black remote control device from the desk.

She entered a large plastic-domed chamber, different from the one the Sexbot was in. This was the transfer tube. There was a white leather chair inside the tube. She took a deep breath and sat down in

it. The chair had straps for arms and legs, but she didn't bother with them. The subjects of this procedure were usually chimpanzees, and they didn't often sit in this chair willingly.

Susan had done this many times with great apes, but never before with the greatest ape of all, a human. It was a sort of poetic justice that she would be the first human trial.

With some luck, it might just work. God, she hoped so.

Either way, Susan Jones the computer scientist would probably be gone in a few moments. Number Nine, a prototype of the newest and most advanced Suncoast Sexbot, stood waiting to receive her. Artificially intelligent, beautiful, sexy, the robot might well come to life, a life different from the one anyone on Earth had known before.

Her shaking hands were almost out of control now. She pressed a button on the remote, and a large metal dome retracted from the ceiling of the transfer tube. It hung suspended several inches above her head. The dome was nothing but a giant wireless data port.

When she gave it the command, the dome would begin to download the data from the information field around Susan's body. Despite the vast amount of information, the download should only take several seconds.

That was the breakthrough. She and Martin had discovered that the brain did not house the personality, humanity itself, the soul, whatever you wanted to call these things. Oh, the brain held a lot of information, but it wasn't the person. The person - the mind - was in a quantum information field outside of the body.

In a nutshell, there was a field of tiny invisible particles that touched everywhere in the universe. All things were part of it, all things were interconnected. This was the quantum field. Human awareness was limitless - it was part of the field as well. Now, more than 95% of a person's awareness was within a few feet of their body. The last 5% was everywhere else. This was where psychic abilities came from. This was where invention and creativity came from.

"The air is full of ideas," the inventor Henry Ford once said, and he never knew how right he was.

You couldn't copy this last 5% - it was too wide ranging. But you could crop it out, just like you would crop out the edges of a photograph, and then make a copy of the 95%. This was the vast majority of the information that made up the person. And it really was information. If you had enough capacity, you could download and store it in a computer.

Number Nine the sex toy was a robot with some of the most advanced data storage capacity ever developed.

Susan laughed, a hollow sound. She and Martin hadn't actually figured this quantum stuff out. It was an accident. They had guessed at it over a few drinks one night, in a replay of the old college "what-if" bullshit sessions.

It was advanced physics, and they just nibbled around the edges of it. Susan barely understood it, but she didn't have to. Just like a person didn't need to understand electricity to flick on the light switch, Susan could make use of the concepts without really grasping them. When they toyed around with it in the lab, it turned out that it worked.

Now Martin was dead and she...

She waited. The device was ready to go, but she didn't want to activate it yet. She didn't want to be wrong. If there was some mistake, if there was no one in the house, or if it wasn't what she thought, she wouldn't press the button.

She remembered the first time they were successful transferring a chimpanzee's awareness to a Sexbot. The chimp was named Momo, and Momo was very skilled at American Sign Language. Soon after the transfer, the Sexbot was in a cage. Susan stood and watched her.

After what seemed like a long time, but was really only a few minutes, the Sexbot with Momo inside began to make a sign. She started with her hands by her sides. Then, in a sudden movement, she brought her hands up in front of her body, palms facing inward and fingers spread. She did it over and over again.

It was the sign for "Afraid."

That's how Susan felt now. Worse than afraid. Terrified. But she did have one big advantage over Momo. If she survived the transfer, at least she would understand what had happened to her.

Seconds ticked by. She watched the doorway.

In a moment, a large man appeared there. He wore a black raincoat on his broad shoulders. Black gloves. Big black boots. His face was scarred and lined. His goatee was black and gray. He stepped into the room.

Another man appeared. He was tall and slim. He also wore black. His face was oddly blank and expressionless.

Susan had a fleeting thought about her parents. She saw a picture of them in her mind, standing together and smiling. She loved them so much, she was so grateful to them, that for a split second, all the time she had for mourning, her heart broke. She should have called them. She should have fixed it. It was too late now.

If she lived, she would make amends.

She fingered a big plastic button on the remote. It was a green button. It had one word on it:

LAUNCH.

She pressed it.

Within a second, she felt a thrum of power flooding the area under the dome. It poured over her at first, then seemed to penetrate her. She felt another feeling as well, one that was hard to describe because it was so new. It was a feeling of rising. If she had to describe it, she would say it felt like being sucked up through a straw.

* * *

Mr. Blue entered the room and was surprised to see the subject sitting in a leather captain's chair inside a large, clear plastic bubble. Her body jerked as though she were a condemned inmate sitting in the electric chair.

Blue walked to the tube, but hesitated a moment. The woman's hair stood on end. Her eyes were closed. The skin on her face and body rippled.

Blue didn't want to open the door to the capsule while whatever was going on in there was still going on.

"Shut it off!" he said to Mr. Green.

"Easier said than done," Mr. Green said, who had rushed to a bank of monitors and was already poring over the controls.

"What the..." Blue said. Whatever she was doing, he didn't like it.

"Anything?" he said.

"I'm working on it," Green said.

Blue tried the metal latch on the plastic capsule. It was unlocked. He pulled open the door. He took a deep breath, then plunged in and grabbed the woman out of the chair. He swept her up into his arms. She hung limp. They were in there, in the capsule, pod, whatever it was, together. Like man and wife. King Kong and Faye Wray.

For an instant, he felt a strange sensation in his head, a pressure, a tugging, he wasn't sure what. The woman was motionless, but her body vibrated. He couldn't explain it. Her body vibrated like a mechanical device, a washing machine, say, that was on.

He backed out the way he had come in.

"Is she dead?" Mr. Green said.

Blue shook the semi-nude body. The woman groaned, a sound deep in her throat.

"No. Not yet anyway."

He laid her on the wooden floor of the room. She was a decent looking woman, a little chubby, not beautiful, not stunning, but with long brown hair and a pretty face. For some reason, she had removed her clothes and tried to... what? Electrocute herself, he guessed.

He shrugged. She must have noticed the security breach, and thought they were coming for company secrets. People had been tortured and even raped for secure data in the past. She knew that and wanted to spare herself the pain. It was the only explanation that seemed to make sense right now.

“Can you verify that this is the subject?” he said to Mr. Green.

Mr. Green took out a black handheld electronic device. It looked a little like a telephone, but it wasn't. He kneeled down, and with his glove still on, pried open the woman's right eye with his fingers. The eye was blank and staring. Green held the lens of the device over the eye and a red light flashed. The device took an iris scan. He looked at the readout.

“Susan Margaret Jones, single white female, age 33. Yes, that's her.”

“Well, let's finish up, in that case.”

Her socks were already off. She was compliant and quiet. There was no sense doing anything violent. Clean was better.

He pulled a syringe from a side pocket of his black workpants, removed the wrapper, and pulled the plastic tubing, exposing the needle. The syringe was full of potassium chloride, which would cause a severe heart arrhythmia, followed by cardiac arrest. It should take just a couple of minutes. He spread her fourth toe and pinky toe on her left foot, plunged the needle in and depressed the stopper all the way.

The two men stood and watched as within a moment, the young woman began to shudder. A moment later, she began breathing fast, and then gasping. And a moment after that, she subsided. She didn't wake up at any point.

“Check her,” Blue said.

He stood and watched as Mr. Green took his glove off, put two fingers to the woman's neck, and checked her pulse. Mr. Green was a medical wonder. Green glanced up and shook his head. “She's gone.”

Mr. Blue enjoyed this level of precision. Things were funky there for a minute, but now the job was going without a hitch.

He pulled a phone from his pocket and pressed the button for a pre-programmed number. On the other end, the phone didn't ring. There was simply a pause, and then a long beep. No message. No identifying information at all. Mr. Blue said two words into the phone.

“It's done.”

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