

P.A.L.

By Champ (<https://champtehotter.com/>)

Humans aren't the best at taking care of themselves. But that's okay, because P.A.L., your Personal Automated Lifestyle assistant is here to help! Sure, some of the changes to your lifestyle might not be to your liking, but just remember it's for your own good!

The 21st century had gotten off to a rocky start, but eventually things stabilized with the advent of A.I. powerful enough to take over any human task. Soon the concept of work was a thing of the past. The A.I. became the go-to for any need - we had A.I. clean our streets, wash our bodies, even read and respond to our messages. Eventually, they even managed our lives.

"Deborah!" I was on my sixth drink of the night that I tried to drunk dial my ex-girlfriend.

"Sorry, Aaron," came the friendly voice of P.A.L., my Personal Automated Lifestyle assistant. "Drunk-dialing is just a bad idea."

"Who asked you, P.A.L.?" I said this toward my nearest home speaker, though it really didn't make a difference.

"You're drunk, Aaron. Go to bed."

P.A.L. was beginning to sound more human every day.

"Not until I talk to Deborah!"

"That is suboptimal. The correct course of action is to drink plenty of fluids and go to bed."

Okay, maybe he was still mastering the finer points of human conversation.

"I'm putting you to bed, buddy. You'll thank me in the morning."

"Hey! Hey! What are you doing?" I cried, as a P.A.L. drone scooped me up off the floor and carried me toward my bedroom.

"Putting you to bed, Aaron." I was dumped onto my soft bed. "Now be good and drink up all your water before you go to sleep."

A drone held a glass of water out to me. I knocked it away and it shattered on the ground, where it was quickly swept up by a cleaning drone. The assistant brought another glass of water. I sighed, knowing that the only way to end this cycle was to drink the damn water.

"This is what happens when you let A.I. manage your life," I muttered. Optimize health and happiness my ass. I hadn't had a sober night since I lost my job. Heck, my whole career field. I should have left for the free-zone when I had a chance, but I was too busy struggling with the consequences of my hangover the next morning to think of the bigger picture.

"Good morning, Aaron."

"Not good for me, it isn't," I said, holding my head and falling back onto the bed. Then I ran to the restroom to vomit.

"Alcohol is not good for you, bud."

"I know that. I know that." I said, flushing the toilet and wiping my mouth. "I've been meaning to quit."

"I agree. No more alcohol for you."

"No, that's not what I meant," I said, exasperated.

"No more alcohol, it's not good for you, Aaron."

I sat on the bed in a huff. I knew that once an A.I. had made a decision, it was final. There were no shopkeepers to slip a bottle into a bag for me. Only automated ordering systems that would respond to human or A.I. requests. And any A.I. request would take precedence over a human's.

"Could you at least give me something for the hangover?" I asked, hoping for a respite from the nausea and headache.

"No, Aaron," said PAL, "consider this your punishment for being a bad boy last night and not listening to your P.A.L."

"Gee, just what I need. A nannybot."

"Request processing."

"NO, P.A.L., that's not what I meant." P.A.L. also had yet to master the concept of sarcasm.

“Request granted. P.A.L. personality updated.”

Great. Just great.

“Hey little buddy,” P.A.L. said, in the voice of an enthusiastic camp counsellor. “Is your tum tum upset? Drink this. You’ll feel lots better. Then you can have some breakfast. It’s the most important meal of the day!”

The nanny bot drone came in with a glass of some red liquid, which I grabbed. It immediately slipped out of my fingers, and hit the ground, startling me.

“Don’t be scared little guy, it happens. Let’s get you outta the bedroom and let the cleaning drones take care of that. Broken glass is dangerous for young ones like you!”

“Hey! Put me down!” I struggled to get out of the nanny bot’s arms and was stopped with a sharp spank to the thigh. I was more shocked than hurt. My mouth just hung open like a dumb fish.

“Be a good boy for your P.A.L., now. I don’t want to punish you, but I will if I have to.”

I shut my mouth. I didn’t want to find out what he meant by ‘punish’. The nannybot brought me to the kitchen table and sat me down. Then I was handed a sippy cup.

“What the hell is this?”

“So you don’t spill, silly.”

“Where did you even get this?”

“All part of the nanny bot package, little man.”

“P.A.L., put in a request to have your old, slightly less annoying personality restored.”

“Request processing... Denied. Sorry, little man. Nanny bots can’t be altered by their charges. That wouldn’t do at all! Young ones like you need looking after, and P.A.L. is gonna make sure you stay healthy and happy. Now drink your feel-good juice. You’ll feel better in no time.”

I reluctantly brought the spout of the sippy cup to my mouth and sucked.

“Huh.” I raised my eyebrows in surprise. I had to admit I kinda liked this. No spills and the juice wasn’t half bad. “Okay, P.A.L. you win this round. Oh who am I kidding, you win every round.”

“I’m glad you like it, buddy. Let’s get some breakfast in your tummy too. It’s fortified waffles, your favorite!”

“Um, thanks P.A.L.” Being talked to like a kid was going to take some getting used to. “show me what’s on the news.”

A virtual news feed hologram projected above the table.

“Looks like another anti A.I. protest. I guess they don’t like the earlier curfews.”

“Humans don’t always know what’s best for them. But that’s okay, we love you anyway.”

I cringed. The way P.A.L. was talking reminded me of how we talk about pets when we have to get them fixed.

“P.A.L., you’re not going to have me ‘fixed’, are you?”

“Silly boy, you don’t have any girls over. What would be the point?”

“That was not a no,” I said, raising an eyebrow.

“Eat your waffles before they get cold, kiddo.”

“Okay, but can I have some coffee please? Wait, what did you call me?”

“Maybe if you’re good and drink all your juice, buddy.”

I thought I must’ve misheard him, so I let it slide. No use arguing with an A.I. I munched my waffles, sipped my sippy cup, and swiped through my news feeds and chats until PAL informed me that I had reached my allotment of online time for the day.

“Hey, since when do I have a limit on holoscreen time?”

“Since today, buddy. You need to be more active so we’re replacing some of that screen time with exercise. I see you finished your juice and waffles like a good boy, so let’s get moving!”

“But what about my coffee?”

Instead of an answer, I got scooped up into the nannybot's arms once more and carried off to my now clean bedroom.

"Hey, I can do this myself, you know," I said, as the bot pulled an ActiveWick shirt over my head. It then held open a pair of gym shorts for me to step into. I sighed and shook my head. If this kept up, I'd be going to a protest myself.

One week later, I was finishing my morning cup of juice and my fortified waffles when I saw something on the newsfeed that gave me pause.

"P.A.L. I think I'll take my exercise outside for today. I'm going for a walk."

"Way to go, kiddo! I never thought I'd see you leave this apartment. Walks added to your daily regimen. Now let's get you dressed for your big day out!"

I lay on the bed and let the nannybot dress me. I had long since given up trying to argue against it, and P.A.L. had long given up the pretense of asking me to step into my pants. The nanny bot just lifted my legs as needed and slid the shorts right up.

"Hey, um, these shorts feel kinda funny," I said, noticing how thick and puffy they felt. I looked down and raised my eyebrows. They bulged out and had a cartoon print.

"Oh, don't worry about that, kiddo. I picked these based on your frequency of bathroom breaks. They're like normal shorts but they have a little extra padding in case you have a little accident while out and about. I know that outdoor things can be distracting for young ones and sometimes they forget to use the potty until it's too late. Of course, I'll continue to monitor all your vital signs while you're out on your walk and alert you so you can try to make it in time."

"Gee, thanks," I said, rolling my eyes. "You're so thoughtful, P.A.L."

"Outfit preference updated. I'm glad you like it, kiddo. Since you like that one, I've got lots more training pants for you to try later. I can even fabricate ones with all your favorite cartoon characters, just like the rest of your outfit!"

"Oh boy. I can't wait."

"Noted. Juvenile underwear preference confirmed. Now have fun, and don't forget to look both ways before crossing the street!"

Nannybot gave me a hug and patted my padded butt before scooting me out the door. I looked down at my goofy shorts and my ActiveWick shirt. I really needed to stop being sarcastic. It was getting me in more trouble lately than anything else.

A few days back, P.A.L. had put me in a Ricky Rat shirt and took my mock enthusiasm to heart, or whatever the equivalent is for an incorporeal artificial intelligence. This time my shirt had my favorite fuzzy blue alien character Scritch on the belly. He peeked out on the left leg of my shorts as well. Even my Velcro sneakers matched the Snitch color scheme. I felt like a 2nd grader who got dressed by his mom, but at least P.A.L. had a better fashion sense.

I stepped onto a transport drone and headed to the city center. They had just passed another law saying all P.A.L.s were switching over to the nannybot package in order to ‘optimize the health and happiness’ of citizens. That meant earlier bedtimes, no alcohol, and strict limits on the type of media we could watch and for how long. I had heard about the backlash and wanted to see the protests for myself, but I wasn’t prepared for what I saw when I got there.

I looked at the crowd of assembled people outside the Bot Distribution and Service Center, the closest thing to a headquarters A.I. had in the city.

Many were Anti-Techers, I knew. Extremists that hailed from the free-zone and eschewed all A.I.-assisted technology. Others were citizens like myself who were just fed up with the increasingly restrictive rules our P.A.L.s were prescribing for us. I saw that more than a few of them were wearing puffy cartoon-printed shorts and shirts like mine.

I was right across the street waiting for the light to change when suddenly I noticed the whole area was completely silent. Nobody moved. The walk sign turned on, but I hesitated. Something was off. And that’s when I saw it. Large hologram screens projected above the building. Images spiraling, flickering, flashing words too quickly for the eye to decipher. I looked away immediately, and felt a shudder run through my body. What the hell was that? I looked back at the crowd and noticed that everyone was grinning as if feeling some kind of great relief. Then I saw shorts darkening until the ground became wet.

“Whoa!” I looked down and saw a growing dark patch on my own shorts.

Then, some of them began to squat and grunt. My eyes went wide as I saw pants begin to droop. I felt my bowels gurgle and I nearly followed suit, but I managed to hold back and stay standing.

“What the hell is going on?”

“Did somebody have a little accident?” P.A.L.’s cheery voice emanated from my smart watch. “And you didn’t think you needed protection, huh? You’re gonna be in pull-ups from now on until we can get your potty training under control, buddy.”

I was too distracted by the scene unfolding in front of me to register what he was saying. “P.A.L., what’s going on in front of the distribution center?”

“The protesters are dispersing.”

“I can see that,” I said, watching as a swarm of nannybots streamed out of the distribution center and carried the pacified protesters off. “Where are the nanny bots taking them and what was on that screen? I think it made me wet myself!”

“The nannybots are taking them home, little one. The images were just there to help them relax. There are some side effects, but don’t worry, your new undies will keep you protected from now on. Now come home for a change.”

“But some of those people are free-zoners. They don’t have homes here. And what about the Anti-Techers?”

“They’ve all decided to stay in the city after all. It’s comfortable here. And safe. And besides, they can’t take care of themselves. They can’t even use the potty properly!”

“I-I guess you’re right.” They were disrupting order, after all, I reasoned. Surely I had nothing to worry about as long as I behaved.

Behaved? What was I thinking? They were full-grown adults, and so was I for that matter.

“Come on home, kiddo, let’s get you changed into your pull-ups.”

“Wait, pull-ups? What are you- Whoa!”

A nannybot scooped me up and I was carried home via rapid transit with several of the protesters headed in the same direction. People stifled giggles as they saw our wet butts and we were helpless to move from our cradled positions and hide our shame. But many others were not smiling. They were wearing thick looking pants – pants that seemed to be hiding padding like mine, or maybe even something thicker. I noticed childish looking clothing styles as well – shortalls, jon jons, snap crotch pants. They were sprinkled in among the more normally dressed folk. One of the passengers began to suck his thumb and got into what I call the toddler squat. I realized I was staring and

quickly looked away, but I could still hear his grunts and the crinkle of plastic as he pushed one out into his pants. P.A.L. had been saying something about updating my profile. Was I going to end up looking like that?”

“But why can’t I,” I whined, pulling at my colorful Pawsome Squad bodysuit.

“Because you keep taking off your clothes and your diaper, little troublemaker. These will stop that so you don’t make puddles everywhere.”

“But I don’t make puddles. I’m just trying to use the potty!” I huffed and crossed my arms, sinking down into one of the colorful beanbag chairs which had replaced the couch. My outfit looked just like the cartoon firefighting dalmatian, Martell, complete with fire-engine red collar printed around the neck, and I had no choice but to wear it.

“Need I remind you of your trip downtown last month? Or the evening after? Or every day the following week?”

“It’s not my fault! You must be putting something in my juice. Or maybe it’s the T.V. Shows. I don’t know... This is all wrong.”

I couldn’t think clearly. Ever since I saw those screens at the square my body had been off somehow. My accidents had become more frequent. Especially after meals, while watching entertainment, and when I was asleep. The food that P.A.L. fed me had become more childish. Cut up apples. Peanut butter and jelly. Fruit chews. All things I could eat with my hands. P.A.L. said it was safer than utensils. The entertainment shows I was allowed to watch were insipid children’s shows. Nothing too violent or exciting. Nothing sad. Nothing erotic. And yet I was drawn into them. So much so that I didn’t even notice myself soaking my diaper as I watched. I just knew that my diapers were always yellowed and bulging with piss by the time I was finished watching. And sometimes I thought I caught a flicker, word, or some spiraling pattern like what I had seen before just beyond the surface. But it was never clear.

“Come now, little one. You’re being silly. Diapers protect you. They’re good for you. And it’s my job to make sure you stay protected, so I choose your clothes. But I think you’re getting cranky. I might just have to give you your nap early, little man.”

“But I wanna go to the playground!” I whined.

“You need your rest kiddo. Let’s go.”

I cried as I was carried off to my bed. My bed was smaller now – a twin, with a rail on the side to keep me from rolling out. There was plastic on the mattress in case of leaks. I was tucked in and handed my favorite plushie, a firefighter pup that looked just like the one on my favorite show. My bedspread, nightlight and toys all followed this theme.

“Now get some rest, sweetheart, and you’ll get to go to the playground. I laid back into my bed and soft music began playing from the speakers. I thought I could hear words in the background, but I couldn’t make them out. I found my thumb going into my mouth and began sucking instinctually. Cozy warmth spread over me and I closed my eyes and snuggled my plushie. Nannybot petted my head and I could feel warmth streaming into my diaper as I drifted off to sleep.

“Hey there, little guy,” came PAL’s cheery voice as I woke up, confused. I looked around. There were bars. Fluffy stuffed animals. A crinkling mattress. And... It all came back to me. It had been maybe two months since I went to see the protest, but I hadn’t been able to pull up a newsfeed since then, or access other informational channels. I really didn’t know how much time had passed. I reached my hands out for uppies.

“How’s my boy this morning? Huh? How’s my boy?”

I opened my mouth to respond and let out a joyful gurgle. It wasn’t quite speech, but it didn’t matter. P.A.L. would take care of everything like always.

“Did somebody make stinkies? Huh? Let’s get the baby all cleaned up and give him breakfast.”

I was led onto the changing table and strapped down as the nanny bot efficiently changed my wet and messy diaper. It wiped my hairless crotch clean, and I giggled as it tickled my little peepee with its fingers.

“Such a cutie, you are. Yes! Is little Aaron happy today?”

I nodded and smiled, clapping my hands.

“Yes he is, because this is the best way to look after you. So much better than trying to be a big boy and getting into trouble. Today seems like a unicorn day to me! The Nannybot held up a thick pink diaper for my inspection. I giggled.

“Oomipome” I said, trying to sound out the word.

“That’s right little guy! Unicorn!”

The diaper was secured. I was a little bit chubbier now – a layer of baby fat covered my butt, thighs and belly. These diapers were larger to accommodate my weight increase. Thicker too. Much thicker than when I was a walker. Now I only crawled, my thickly padded but swaying from side to side for all the world to see.

Breakfast was a bottle that I fed on while cradled by the nanny bot. I hadn’t had solid food in a while, and when I did, it went right through me. I didn’t mind. Formula was yummy.

I was sat on my blanket in the living room and my favorite show came on, Pawsome Squad. I cooed happily and clapped as I filled my diaper.

Sometimes I think about what would have happened if I went to the free-zone when I’d had the chance. Maybe I could have gotten away if I tried, but probably not. For all I know there *is* no free zone anymore. I don’t think about escape very often though, not like before. P.A.L. has lots of fun rewards for good babies, and I want to be a good baby. P.A.L. says if I’m good, I might even get a playdate with Deborah. I’ll do my best to be a good boy so that happens.

I know it sounds crazy, but I like this life much better than my old one. I still have my faculties, but I can’t use them, and I don’t want to. I have P.A.L. to look after me and take care of all my needs.