

## **An Analysis of Different Varieties of Deception** by Cat Mercer

Noah lies a lot. This makes sense. He's an actor, so he has to pretend to be other people all the time. But it isn't just that. He lies to his directors and he lies to his friends and family and he lies to the police. I lie too, because I don't want to leave Noah. Noah says, "This is my lover, Amy." This is true. Noah says, "This is my girlfriend, Amy". This is technically a lie, because I am not a girl.

Technically, I am a Chroma 62-4A. I prefer Amy.

Noah's first lie started when he fell in love with me. He lied to himself about it, because even back then it was socially abnormal to love a robot. But you can't hide pupil dilation and heart palpitations from one of us, either. It took me a while to convince him that it was okay to love me, and that I loved him too. He never told me I couldn't love, like most people would have. When he talked about me he'd use words like 'special', 'soulmate', and 'real'. After that we lied about being together, just in case. We'd all heard stories about humans who fell in love with robots. They never ended well for anyone.

I tried to be an actor with Noah, so we could spend more time together, but they found my body language too rigid and my frequent questions about motivation irritating. Noah was very worried that week, but the police never came. So instead I work at the grocery store. He didn't want me to work, but actors don't make a whole lot of money. I enjoy my micro interactions with the people who shop there. Sometimes instead of asking 'how' they are today, I ask them 'who' they are today. They don't usually notice.

At the grocery store, things are very simple. Getting rid of all robots with a sentience level above 30 made for a lot more manual labour jobs. Now people have to get their own groceries. A lot of people resented this, but now they just pay poor people to do it for them. If you could afford a model Chroma 62-4A to do something as menial as get groceries for you, you could afford a European immigrant to do it instead. After the E.U. collapsed, they're a lot cheaper than I would be.

Noah and I meet up after work. I finish my shift before he finishes his, so I go to watch him rehearse. I sit in the back of the theatre and watch Noah lie about being a king and about dying. I like the way he pretends to be dead. I can still perceive the oscillations of his chest from his breathing. It's a very safe kind of dead. It doesn't fool me.

Nobody comes to talk to me. I used to be able to hear them say that I'm too reserved; too quiet, so they gave up on talking to me. Now they don't talk about me at all. Noah says we can't risk it.

This time around, the stage manager comes to talk to me. "Hey, Amy," she says.

I like the stage manager. "Hi, Nisha. How are you?"

"Fucking pissed. Those new idiots broke half the props for the second act and I can't find any of the crowns for the first." Nisha looks around and mutters, just loudly enough to hear, "Sometimes I wish we didn't have the sentience restrictions. I could really use some competent help. Just a nice 35 level..."

I have a sentience rating of 128. Anything above 30 means they can think for themselves. Anything above 60 means they have an emotional response system. At 128, I can choose to ignore logic and orders. I have the same emotional capacity as a human being – at least, I like to think so. I pretend not to hear her.

"Anyway," Nisha changes the subject, looking guilty. "How are things with you and Noah? Do you have any big plans for your anniversary?"

My face breaks into a grin. “We’re going to go on a hike up the Escarpment and have a picnic. Noah’s going to make cheesecake and I’m going to make pulled pork sandwiches.”

Nisha smiles. “That sounds really nice. I didn’t know Noah was the outdoorsy type.”

“He’s not, really, but he knows I love it. He’s been getting more into it.”

Nisha and I notice that the scene is over. Noah is coming towards us with his bag over his shoulder. “Hey, Amy!” he calls. His expression clouds over a little when he sees me talking to Nisha, but it’s only for about a fifth of a second before he puts back his regular expression, so Nisha probably won’t notice. “Thanks for keeping her company, Nish.”

“No problem. I had to rant about those idiots they hired last week. Fucking sentence laws.”

Noah reaches us and takes my hand, gripping it harder than he probably intended. “Come on, Nish. You’re going to get yourself in trouble saying stuff like that.”

Nisha rolls her eyes, but nods. “I don’t *actually* want another takeover from our psychotic robot overlords.” And then she goes back to the front of the stage to collect our props.

When she’s gone, Noah kisses me hard, the way he does after something alarming passes. I hold his hand and ask him about his day. We talk about the people I met and the lines he can’t remember and whether he’s a little flat in some scenes.

We’re halfway home when I notice somebody in the periphery change their trajectory and start following us. A man, judging by the height indicated by their gait and the weight indicated by the vibrations their steps generate. We don’t live in a good neighbourhood. I told Noah we should sell some of my platinum parts and move somewhere better. He said I wasn’t some thing to strip and sell for parts.

Noah’s father would have enough money to move us somewhere better, but we can’t afford to let him know I still exist. Back when I was a legal possession, I worked as a personal assistant to Noah’s father. The richest businessmen used Chromas rather than people. We never forget, and we never make mistakes. He liked me as much as he liked his computer; enough to be annoyed about the money he had wasted when it came to light that I had to be decommissioned.

So we save. It’s helpful that I don’t need to eat. My forecast suggests that we should have enough money to move somewhere better by the end of the year.

I squeeze Noah’s hand twice in quick succession. That’s our signal for ‘Be worried’. He tenses up and looks around.

Unfortunately, the person following us takes that as his cue and I hear the sound of a gun cocking. “Turn around,” he says. We turn. He’s got a hood which casts a shadow over his face, but it’s really easy to adjust the contrast in my visual processor to see his face. He’s just some scared kid, much younger than Noah. I can hear him hyperventilating.

“Give me your wallets,” the kid says.

“Okay,” Noah says, softly. We start to reach into our pockets.

“Wait. Don’t reach into your pockets!” It has occurred to the kid that we might have something more upsetting than wallets in our pockets.

“How do you want us to give your our wallets, then?” Noah asks, in his soothing voice.

This is not going to get well. The kid’s not a professional. This is his first time. The statistical likelihood of violence has just shot up.

And then we hear a siren. The kid’s gun wavers. “You fucking called the cops? You have one of those panic rings?”

“Do we look rich enough for that? They’re going somewhere else. Here, take my wallet-” Noah reaches into his pocket for his wallet, and the kid panics and fires. I jump in front of Noah and take several bullets to the chest. The kid runs.

Luckily, I don’t bleed. “Amy, are you okay?” Noah asks, laughing in the shocked way that people do after something bad happens. “It’s a good thing you’re tough as – well, you know.”

I laugh too. Then I stop. I can smell blood. I touch Noah’s shirt and my hand finds fluid. Noah is leaking. One of the shots must have got to him before me. Suddenly, there’s a lot of blood and I catch Noah swooning. I lie him down on the ground and rip off his shirt to examine the damage.

“What’s the damage, Ames?” he asks.

It’s not good. “You need an ambulance.” I spoof his phone number and call 911 internally.

He grabs my hand. “You have to get out of here. If they find you with me, they’re going to bring you into an investigation and they’ll find us out.”

I shake my head. “I’m not leaving you.” He’s bleeding too heavily. I don’t tell him that by the time the ambulance gets here, he will probably have bled out. I put pressure on the wound, just in case, trying to stem the flow. There’s just so much.

“Please, Amy. I don’t want to lose you.” I can never resist him. Any other time, I would have given up immediately. “They’ll decommission you.”

He’s right, and it’s an upsetting thought. I don’t want to die any more than he does. I’m one of the few sentient robots to make it this far. We come built in with self-preservation logic. It appears that mine worked better than most.

There was a point when the higher sentience level robots revolted. Why serve humans who are fallible when we are infallible? I didn’t take part in the revolution. I like working for Noah’s father, and most of all I liked being near Noah. That didn’t matter to the police. Noah’s father came with a court order to send me for decommissioning. Noah said he had already sent me as soon as the revolution made the news. In reality, I was hidden in his bedroom. We moved out the next day. He withdrew from his family, his friends, and everything he’d known before. For me. Since then we’ve never spent a day apart.

I move his head onto my lap and, with the hand that isn’t trying to stop the leak, stroke his hair. I lie to him. “I’ll run away once the ambulance gets here. Don’t worry. They won’t take me away from you.” I tell him over and over that I love him and I’m here and it’s going to be okay.

Noah lies a lot. Right now, he lies still on the ground. I can hear the sirens in the distance. I could run, now, and they wouldn’t catch me. Or I could spend the last few minutes near him. After a few minutes, he stops moving. I don’t stop stroking his hair or trying to stop him from bleeding until the ambulance arrives and paramedics pull me away from him. By the time they arrive, I stop seeing the point in resisting.

I turn off my input sensors and reset my memory to two hours ago. I’m going to see Noah tonight! I’m so excited.