

BRICK CITY

A new life.

BY ROBERT S. WILSON

You are obsolete.

It's not like it's any surprise. You've known all your artificial life that sooner or later the day would come — and now it has. The clerk walks you over to a seat in the corner and motions for you to sit. You sit. He walks over to Carol and rambles on about the latest convenience features of the new Nebula 2100 series.

Her eyes meet yours. They're apprehensive. And for a moment, just a moment, you think it won't matter. She'll tell this smug little man what he can do with his photosynthetic power, his gardening upgrades and his ten-year warranty. But then something he leans in and whispers to her — something you should be able to hear but your long-range microphone went snap crackle pop more than two years ago — gets her attention good.

Carol stares at the clerk as he continues, a small hint of a smile arching at the corners of her lips. You can make out only a few vague, garbled phrases. Something about climate reclamation and palm trees. Is he seriously promising her palm trees? The last species of palm tree went extinct 37 years ago.

And even though Carol turned on your emotional inhibitor before you left the house, something inside you is sinking amid a vast lonely ocean. You won't be going back home when Carol leaves. It's not just a hunch. Your CPU's probability calculator is one of the few things that still runs as well as the day you came off the assembly line. The clerk glances back at you and then turns and whispers some more and now Carol won't make eye contact with you. She turns and stands there waiting as the clerk starts in your direction. He reaches out a hand towards your lock switch and before you can raise a single syllable of objection, everything melts away in a dripping shower of red, blue and amber.

You are never going home.

Deep in the dark and desolate recesses of your back-up memory, the seconds, minutes, hours and days tick by as your GPS location changes drastically. And although some part of you knows this is true, that part isn't conscious, isn't able to process information at all.



ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY

You are in Brick City.

Electric light cracks and branches across a field of vision that you realize can only be yours. Shapes appear. Colours. All behind that same pattern of shattered glass. Some semblance of reality unfolds around you and suddenly a face takes up residence in close proximity to your own. A young boy's face. His skin is light brown and his eyes are black. His face is scarred across his cheek and his hair is unevenly cut close to his scalp. His smile extends nearly up to the corners of his ears.

"Holy shit! This one still works!"

"You've gotta be shitting me. I can't believe you found a live one, Kofi!"

You try to move but the boy named Kofi motions for you to stop. "Uh, you might not want to do that, Andy. Your arms are half melted and your legs..." He looks down. "You don't really have legs anymore. But that's okay. If there's anywhere where we can find some replacement parts, it's Brick City." When the boy stands up and moves away, a mountain of silicon and metal stands in his place, and behind it many more sit in the distance. In that pile of scrap you can see legs and arms and torsos and heads of other

Andys of all makes and models from well before your time right up to... you're not really sure. Newer

than you. You check your internal clock, but its last reported cycle halted at 5:59 p.m. Eastern Time on 26 July 2086, about two years after you were decommissioned.

You open your mouth to speak but nothing comes out. The boy returns, grin still lighting up his face, and puts his index finger up to his lips. "Shhh. I'll get you up and running in no time." Then he leans down and turns off the world.

You are reborn.

The light erupts in one big blotch now, no cracks or forks this time. Kofi and the other boy stand before you and it's immediately obvious that you're standing too. You look down at your legs. Their mismatched size and colour is unfortunate but something you're willing to overlook. You open your hands out before you and stare into the black-gloved

palms. These at least match, but they're both covered in gashes. You look back up to your new companions and smile. "Thank you for your service. How can I be of service to you?"

The boys look at each other and grin. Then Kofi steps forward.

You are home.

Up to your knees in broken Andy legs and faces, you smile as you survey a hundred hills of obsolete android parts. Raising a mostly intact torso up to eye level, you rip it open and pull out the mainboard from inside. Just then, a blast of sparks and fire comes up from a large barrel of wiring in front of the two boys. They jump and run around the fire, shouting with excitement. When the smoke cools they will have enough copper to buy a day's meal. A moment later, you drop the mainboard down upon what's left of its body. Every ounce of metal from within its circuits has been pulled free and now clatters in the satchel around your waist. You grab another torso, this one bearing your familiar model name and production year. Sunlight glints off your metal teeth as you smile.

You are complete. ■

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