

Prototype A-44B

By Rufus Hand and Shayon Majumdar

“Unity, to be real, must stand the severest strain without breaking,” were the first words on the Climate Resolution Act. These were the 11 words that cycled through every global citizen’s head when all governments, corporations, and nations were rendered obsolete and were dissolved into one. The series of tsunamis wiped out over half the planet’s population along with any sense that the climate situation would resolve itself. We realised the futility of our petty grievances and frustrations, and clamoured for what was left of the governments to live up to the expectations for which they were created. We sought to wash away our past fallacies and like a phoenix from the ashes, we rose to become one nation, one mindset, devoted to changing humanity’s course.

That was 200 years ago.

Now we are one collective force, altering the society we live in. The burdens we carry throughout our life finally have a greater meaning. Now that our past discrepancies have been washed away, our minds have been filtered for our cumulative survival. Everyone has a place, be it feeding the population, engineering the future, or organising and developing the complex framework of our newborn society. The All Hands on Deck Initiative provides everyone with a prerogative to help our community. At least it should.

My eyes strain and my fingers blister as I type the final few words of my prototype report. ‘...Prototype A-44B demonstrated success in achieving our goals of accomplishing an efficient waste management system as hypothesised by Dr. Michael Freeman.’ I give my model a pat on the head, and think ‘A-44B, you’ll be the one who fixes the world.’ I stand up, take one last look at my model in the containment unit and wearily prepare to head home from the laboratory. For the past four tireless months, I have been designing, developing, and constructing the AI technology that will manage the waste-disposal system once the Ocean Sectors are complete. The robots I am making and improving will ensure prosperity on our planet. Projects like mine are what we call the Ocean Inhabitation Project. Our homes are now on the five oceans as well as the few that remain on land, in self-sustainable sectors, with housing, a hospital, farm and school provided to each, as well as government representation. These buildings will be where we live, eat, breathe and toil for the glorious betterment of humanity.

The government might think we are on the road to a perfect world, with our new technology and almost unlimited renewable resources, but I have my doubts. I know that we as humans have seen the error of our ways, but deep down, I truly believe that we can never achieve perfection. We have conquered nationalism and corrupt organisations by uniting all countries and abolishing political boundaries, but in order for that to have happened, it all had to become

meaningless, we had to be on the brink of destruction to see the light. And that scares me. We were like a clueless child wandering too close to traffic, chasing a ball into the road, and in a matter of seconds, the laughs became screams. We have split an atom, reached the moon, but the only thing we can and never will accomplish is societal perfection, because in a perfect world we would never have existed. I am one of few that think it is foolish to believe we have conquered life and it worries me that the rest of us, the supposedly “best” of us, might be chasing another ball on the same road.

I have just finished work and I am entering my living quarters when I hear the telltale “ping” of my laptop receiving a message. I plop myself down on my mattress and listen to the following message from my mother back in Ocean Sector P-65793:

“Michael, I don’t know how to tell you this, because I know we haven’t spoken in a while, but I need you to come home. Your grandma Julia has passed away. I know you two were very close. I’m sorry but please ... come home, we all miss you. I love you. Send me a V-mail when you can.”

I feel numb. I don’t cry for about five minutes, just listening and re-listening to the message holding it all in. Memories flash through my head, rattle around my skull, and fade away. Me and grandma going on walks around the little pocket-forests in between the strips of buildings and houses. Looking at the algae-covered roofs and little gardens, sprawled on top of the high-rise buildings. She’s telling me about before the Tsunamis when there were things called cities, countries, and companies. When people were paid differently for the different jobs they did, and there was no AI to do the dirty work. How lucky we are to have standardised income and no poisonous fumes polluting the air, making you choke. What is now called Land Sector A-38962 was once called Kingston, Ontario. Before that, it was called Cataraqui by the first people who lived here. Many, in fact most, still call it that, she said, even non-Indigenous people. All these memories, all the things she taught me, go flitting around my head, and I try to remember every last thing like a mental puzzle piece of her life that I will carry.

I don’t get any sleep. I can’t focus the next day, my head is constantly elsewhere. I haven’t asked for time off work yet, I can’t bring myself to say the words “she’s gone”. I just muddle my way through the day, but then my manager corners me as I lock up the laboratory.

“Michael, are you feeling alright?” he says, but his cold, beady eyes show how little he actually cares. “I noticed you were a bit off task today”.

“Just feeling a little tired today, thanks, Jim,” I say, in a hearty voice that doesn’t sound like me at all. I also hope I got his name right.

“It’s, uh, Joel, actually,” is all he says.

I decide I cannot put off visiting my family any longer. After I head out of the spire, the central building of my sector, I go to the nearest drone port. I hop in the drone, insert my coin, and type in the coordinates for sector P-65793. A drone can take me to any sector in a matter of hours. Due to our massive population decrease when the Tsunamis and earthquakes hit, our planet is now recovering from the disastrous effects of climate change rather swiftly. Many couples choose not to have children, more so than ever before, so we will not have to worry about building new sectors anytime soon.

When I arrive, my family greets me warmly, but my reason for coming makes the air thick with sadness. I can see my parent's red and puffy eyes that have no life in them. My family was never close, never really good with feelings, so we just sort of sit in silence with my father half-heartedly asking about my work.

My mother chimes in with, "Mike, you always work too much. You could use a break once in a while."

"Everyone has to put extra hours in, Mom. Boss needs everybody working faster, and it's not just our department."

That's about all the conversation we have, and it ticks me off a bit, because I get the feeling that I was invited down here out of obligation, not because my parents care about me. I want to scream at them, make them feel some of the strain and expectation that has been placed on me. But then I think about how close me and Mom were to Grandma, and it makes me choke up that I am putting the blame on them. Whenever Mom sent me a V-mail, she would always say something like, 'Grandma is missing you, hope to see you home at the holidays.' And I could never come home, because we always had to finish the next prototype, write a report, and have it spit back out of the machine that is the government with a big red stamp that basically said, "You're not good enough". We all had to keep working hard, everyone on the planet, to erase the mistakes made by our predecessors, and build up our planet to keep it from the brink of destruction once again.

Grandma is gone, but the things she accomplished will always be with me in my heart. She was head of a governmental organisation that built the indoor vertical farms that now sustain our entire planet. She started an initiative to bring back extinct species by growing them genetically in labs and releasing them into the wild. She believed that we, as humans, were meant to be the guardians and keepers of the Earth, and always hoped I would follow in her footsteps, and bring nature back into the world, to find harmony and coexistence with the animals and plants.

Suddenly, I get a V-mail:

"Dr. Micheal Johannes Freeman,

Your prototype has been accepted as our final model for the new Waste Disposal Initiative. Your pay cheque for 500 UC (Union Currency) will arrive shortly. Congratulations. Your prototype will make the world a better place.

-Mario Lopez, Government Representative”

My heart skips a beat. The government’s ruthless pushes at our limits have not been in vain. My work paved the way to our sculpted world! My design will preserve the land grandma sought to restore. I fall to the ground among the leaves of fall, looking up at the sky. I look up at our imperfectly perfect, beautiful world, the urban forests, the spires surrounded by houses in a ring that make up our sector, the deep blue sky, and I sigh.

This is where we belong. Not on Mars, not in the clouds in some high-tech simulation. Right here, on the grass, with the pure blue sky above our heads and deep rich soil beneath our feet.

The End

