

JOSIE GETS A JOB
By Travis Schmidt

Thick black smog covers the sky. There is no silence left in the world as the laborious machines rumble on in an autonomous symphony.

Josie shivered as a brisk wind blew through the holes in her jacket. Four months ago she turned 16, at which age one is allowed to work. She has been waiting in line since. Surrounded by anxious frightened faces of those she had grown up with in this gyre of machinery, she waited. She waited just as everyone else did— for a job.

The path of the line was filthy. The ground had been stamped to a fine dust where millions before her had stood, just as she did— waiting ... waiting to be useful.

DING DING DING DING

The line service robot was traveling down the line. It was one of the only services still provided by The Government Corporation. It had the letters TGC adhered to its plastic body, right above the compartment that would deliver water packets and hardtack portions to the queue patrons. Next to it was the bin where the patrons would dispose of their excrement.

On her 20th birthday, Josie almost had a break down. The line felt like it never ended. Would she ever find work? Many questions pounded in her head. Surrounded by buzzing motors and advanced robotics, it was difficult to imagine why was life so awful.

DING DING.

The service robot was coming down the line again.

At the age of 38, Josie had become used to the waiting. The monotony of the shuffling line became nostalgic and comforting. The people immediately in front and behind her became so close to Josie that they were like family.

She noticed that there were gravestones scattered here and there along the line. 'When did they begin to appear?' She thought.

The gravestones were organized into rows of three that would stretch out neatly into more columns than one could hope to count. These people had died in line. They never worked a day. They never owned a penny. Without any possessions to speak of, they had been driven into the dust of the path towards a dream of employment. Defeated. Josie was 56.

There were more and more automated devices. Machines carried the broken bodies away by the truckload. Mass graves lined the trail. Thin skin, arthritis, liver spots, balding heads, hearing problems, aching knees, backs, heads, and hearts — all symptoms normal.

This was life. Josie had seen loved ones pass before her eyes. And yet, she was excited. She was excited because she was next in line. At the ripe age of 87, she had waited the majority of her life for this moment— the day she got a job.

NEXT!

A PA system called out on the side of a building large and black. The walls were stone and made to shine by a number of wall-scaling machines. Large capital

letters in Roman font read “THE GOVERNMENT CORPERATION: EMPLOYMENT OFFICE” above the archway containing a set of revolving doors. Once inside, three large, suited men in large black leather seats behind a large wooden table confronted Josie. There were three golden nameplates, one in front of each man.

“CEO OF SALES” “CEO OF MANAGEMENT” “CEO OF LABOR”

They looked angry. One of them handed Josie a form to sign. She could barely hold the pen in her withered, arthritic fingers. She signed her name and then was promptly escorted into a room with a little red button that read, “Run the Economy Machine.” She pressed it.

All of a sudden, a slot appeared on the wall. Out came a note. A note and a check addressed to Josie worth a lifetime’s fortune. The note read:

“Thank you for activating the economy machine. As you may know, mankind’s brilliance has allowed the creation of thousands of automated machinery to take care of any and every last need for human labor. By pressing this button, you have set into effect more than 65 trillion machines and computers that control everything from food harvesting to goods distribution to creative direction to research actualization to movie production to movie watching to movie reviewing to thinking freely to...

For this effort, we are happy to award you with a well-deserved salary. Thank you for making this economy work and continue to enjoy your life.”

The slot closed.

The door opened.

Josie stepped outside into the lobby.

The men behind the desk gave her another form. She couldn’t see where to sign, partially because her developing cataract in her left eye, but mostly from the mass of overwhelming tears she was now forming. She looked up at the angry looking men. She squeaked, “Why?”

One of the men mumbled from under his breath, “Lazy good for nothing—,” Then more loudly, “You spent your entire life unemployed Jody, just take your pay and please exit through the door to your left.”

Josie was escorted from the room into an open space resembling a strip mall. Thick black smog covered the sky. There is no silence left in the world as the laborious machines rumble on in an autonomous symphony.