

Changes

“NYPD IoT & AI Department...an event? Okay, throw it in my box. I’ll be right there.”

Well, it seems this report will have to wait. Outside, the barren branches sway vigorously. I grasp my hat and jog to the warmth of the squad car. Wind, cold, and snow. Guess that’s part of the charm, part of why I moved back. Driving through the streets, it looks just as it did back in 2015 when we moved away. Now, 20 years later, I’m back and working in my old man’s office. ‘Course, it’s not really the same. Glancing around, I spot two autonomous snow plows returning to home base, having completed their route. It snowed yesterday, but the streets are spotless all around the city cus of that digital mapping and subsidized LiDAR tech. To the left, Central Park is swarming with ecobots tending to the plants. Despite the cold, people scurry through the streets as always. They don’t see me, or anyone else, really. That guy, he steps with rhythm, an easy tell that he’s streaming music. Must be in his hat’s ear flaps, though you can never tell. He, and half of the people on this road, are wearing glasses and looking ahead, not down. AR glasses for sure; they must be working, maybe talking with someone. I glance at the chunky old touchscreen in the car. As a cop, we keep things pretty manual and old-fashioned. Can’t risk a security breach. I like it. Most of these people are outperformed by their glasses, and by most of the items that they own. With a prompt, they get an impeccable slideshow, report, proposal, essay, lawsuit, or work of art. With a prompt their TV makes a new movie just for them, their kitchen makes a ready-made home-cooked meal, their closet assembles a new outfit, and the smart art on their walls changes for the occasion. After those CSA laws(Connectivity Standards Alliance) came out, everything became compatible. It didn’t take long for everyone to jump on the bandwagon. Heck, I’ll bet most of these people haven’t opened a door or turned on a light in ages. Oh, on the right, that old indie film theater my Ma loved has been replaced by ‘Immersive Holodeck Films’. Being part of stunning cinematic worlds, walking around as your favorite character as you live out the adventures you used to watch on screen; it certainly has its appeal. In flashing lights, it

advertises its Feature film: “Be Luke Skywalker in the Original Trilogy”. The line is already forming outside; guess some things don’t change after all. I’ll be honest, the changes are impressive. All that sci-fi stuff is real now, and if it doesn’t exist, it just hasn’t been created ‘yet’. People are pretty pleased with their tools. Scientists, technology experts, and overall geeks are over the moon with their fantastic, futuristic feats. Things flow more smoothly, for the most part. Maybe I’m just a pessimist, or a realist. I can’t tell. Now, that’s not to say that there are more problems than before: overdependence, social isolation, privacy & security breaches, job displacement, and hacking. Same old. They just...they just take a - different - form. Pulling into the driveway of the gray, plastic-sided house, I secure my equipment and approach the door. I’m the first one to arrive on the scene. Infernal beeping sounds from inside, overpowering my knock. I try again, nothing. A glance at the smart doorbell and a flash of my badge unlock and open the door. The smart plant pots, an economical and household alternative to city ecobots, are going crazy. That would explain the beeping. They should only beep when they need water or nutrients, or suffer from pollution, bugs, or some invasive species. In the back, a smart pot boils rice. It's on its third bowl. Looks overcooked. Where is..ah, there he is, in the corner. An older man, about how old my Pa would be, sits hunched in a corner. I approach him, but he does not seem to see me. Keeping a safe distance, I scan him over for -aha- Ability Tech. This man is blind. The glasses, which should allow people with disabilities to interact with their environment through thought, are malfunctioning. Hopefully, just the external glasses; the implant would be more difficult to fix. “Sir, Officer Robert here. You called?” The man jumps, startled, with surprising agility. With that strong posture, that stern yet protective expression, he really does resemble Pa. He reaches out and touches my face. I flinch but do not step back. He seems excited to have another human being in his home, as if he has not spoken to one in a long time. I explain the problem and get to work. Soon, my colleagues arrive. Within an hour, we finished repairing and securing the devices, which sorely needed an upgrade. They are two years old, maybe three. I don’t know if Pa would have been proud of my being a cop or disappointed that I am also a technician. He was a bit of a purist, and would have

described this as ‘a robot uprising’. It isn’t, though- not really. It’s people; it’s always people. Usually, some bitter perp who lost his job to new technology, or some teen delinquent with a newfound affinity for code. Sometimes it’s a White Hat, a malware security officer, looking for the rush of deviance. This is just petty crime. Yesterday, we had a major hospital breach, affecting the 3D-printed organ machines and the biometric implants that track health metrics and detect potential issues. In some rooms, the smart pill dispensers were going haywire. Worst was the malfunction of the Individualized Comfort Machines, centrals for controlling each room’s humidity, temperature, room appearance, window view, mattress firmness, and the like. Now, the hospital attack has a different profile. Bigger teams of people hoping for monetary gain, revenge, or to prove some political agenda. Anyway, I don’t do profiling. That’s someone else’s problem.