

## **“Canada 2049” by Paolo Jaylo Caruso**

Nora Saint-Saens was holding the hand of her five-year-old daughter, Clara. Trailing just behind them was Dota, a Digitizing – Optokinetic – Truistic – Automaton, the latest creation from Adaptive Robotics. Dota stood less than two feet tall and had a mind like an encyclopedia. Clara had wanted a Dota ever since she saw the commercials on the holoscreen at home. “Hurry up, Dota” Clara called back to robot, whose shorter legs had her walking three times as fast just to keep up.

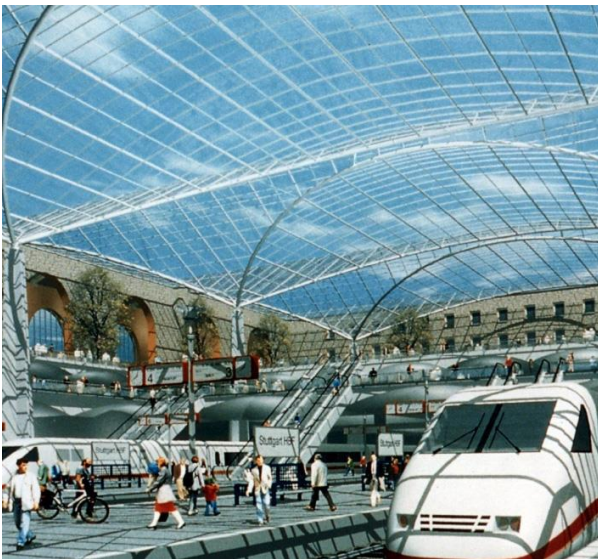


“I will be right there, but there is no need to worry. I’ve received a signal from the city’s Interconnection and have determined that the Vincent LaCrocq will be late by at least seven minutes,” Dota informed them. The Vincent LaCrocq was the be most recent addition to the city’s transit system, which sored high above the lower roadways, slipping around the skyscrapers like a giant serpent, it was a valued achievement to the surrounding metropolis and

for the engineers who built it.



“How is this possible,” Nora said. “Karl told me last Monday that the Vincent LaCrocq was running at peak efficiency.” Karl was Nora’s husband and he was the director of the transit system.



Jeanne was standing in the transportation hub that had connected the waiting area to the entrance of the train station. She had walked twice as fast as her mother and sister and made it there first to witness the brilliance of the new constructional designs. Jeanne was four years older than her

sister, Clara. When Clara saw her older sister she broke free of her mother and ran to Jeanne. As Clara approached Jeanne, Jeanne couldn't stop herself from giving Clara a big hug. Jeanne had to bend down because Clara was much smaller than she was. With a smile on her face their mother caught up with them. The way the illumination from eco-friendly lights hit the hub's waiting area was like a tropical beach under the midday sun. Nearby there were shops and robotic powered vending machines where you could enjoy quickly delivered panini sandwiches and freshly prepared beverages, ninjutsu style, in a blaze of razor sharp knives; smoothies were blended with just the right items and juices were juiced with your selection of fruits and vegetables. Clara saw the colorful arrangement of pictured fruits on a machine and became intrigued. Jeanne followed her sister to explain how the machine worked. She pointed out how you had to select your item and press your hand to the screen. Clara selected a dark cherry smoothie, mixed with green apples, honey and fresh lemon juice, but when she pressed her hand to the screen nothing happened. Jeanne couldn't help but giggle at her. "You have to have an account on the Interconnection for that to work," Dota said. She had finally caught up with them. "Jeanne you know better than tease your sister."



"I was only having a little fun," Jeanne protested. "Besides I did explain to her how the machine worked. Now she will know what to do if she does get an account on the Interconnection."

“I see your point,” Dota conceded to Jeanne. Dota had a tendency to be over protective of Clara. She was programmed that way, but Clara had already moved on and had taken a seat near the entranceway. Dota also had a desire to always to be close to Clara, which was part of her protection protocol. Dota would follow Clara to the ends of the earth or least until her energy cells were depleted, a considerable distance in her power-saver mode. The seat next to Clara looked comfortable, yet, perhaps a little too difficult to climb onto so Dota took a running leap and somersaulted like a gymnast in the Olympics, “Ten points score,” Dota cheered with both feet planted on the seat cushion next to Clara. Dota continued to jump around with her arms reaching to the sky in victory, but her companion had not noticed any of it.



“What was that?” Clara asked without turning her head. She was playing an educational game on her wrist projector. Letters were projected into the air and she selected the ones she needed to win the game; sort of a variation on the classic hangman game.

“Here’s the train,” Jeanne said. “I get the window seat.”

“We’ll see about that,” her mother said. “You should give Clara a chance if she wants to sit by the window.”



All four of them got on board the Vincent LaCrocq and were swished away across the city. Dota felt like they were moving at lightspeed from the view, but she was locked into the Interconnection and knew exactly how fast they were traveling and it wasn't near the speed of light, yet the fathom displays of ghostly advertisements projected over the city was quite a show for those moving slightly less than the speed of light. Jeanne wondered how people could stand to travel in those slow vehicles down below at street level, in bumper to bumper traffic and Clara was amazed by the spears of building tops poking through the billowing of white clouds, from her window seat, she thought that they looked like sticks of licorice poking through barrows of cotton candy.

“We’re at our destination, ladies,” Nora said. They had stopped at the Grand Goulet Multiplex, a mishmash of some of the nicest shops and stores in the city. One could always find something extra special here that you couldn't hope to order from an online warehouse. Jeanne, Clara and Dota followed Mrs. Saint-Saens across the even more splendid Multiplex Hub from the train station into the spectacle of the twirling shops that spun on turning floors like giant carousels. They stepped on a lift and were elevated to a pastry shop called The Iginio Massari, that made

some of the most cherished cakes in all of Canada. “You know today is your father’s birthday,” Mrs. Saint-Saens told her children. “We’re here to get a cake, only you two are going to decorate it.”

“That’s great,” Dota said. “You better get busy because the next train will be here soon.”



Mrs. Saint-Saens pressed her hand against the panel of the huge kiosk and the machine replied with a friendly greeting. She told the kids to get started. Jeanne selected a lemon cake and cut it into two layers. Clara squirted the insides with strawberry syrup and Dota suggested filling the layers with vanilla pastry cream. But they couldn’t decide what frosting to use so they used a bit of everything they could think of. First they crossed it with a chocolate ganache, one quarter they used French Meringue Buttercream, another quarter they used cream cheese frosting, the third

quarter they used pink royal icing and the last section they used a raspberry glaze.



“Are you done?” Mrs. Saint-Saens asked. Everyone smiled gleefully while nodding their heads and Dota did a little backflip to show her enthusiasm, which she is accustomed to do from time to time.



Mrs. Saint-Saens pressed the panel again and inside she heard all sorts of noises as dozens of metal arms worked fanatically and with purpose and then a voice starting counting down from one minute, once it reached zero there was a whirling sound and then a whooshing sound as the finished cake rolled down the rack.

An hour later the lights were suspiciously off in the Saint-Saens’ apartment. There was hardly a sound and everybody was hiding behind the furniture, except for Dota who stood in the middle

of the action behind a large floor lamp, she was almost completely concealed there because she was so skinny. The front door cracked open and the light outside casts a beam of brightness across the dark. The girls started to chatter and Dota whispered, “Wait for it”. Finally, the door springs open the rest of way. Nora calls out to the apartment’s computer system to turn the lights on. Dota springs into action reminding the girls this is their cue and all four of them yell out together, “Happy Birthday”, with their birthday cake creation on display on top of the coffee table. The look on Mr. Saint-Saens’ face gave everyone a warm glow, even Dota experienced a type of robotic joy that lasted a few nanoseconds in the encoding of her files, she was sure to flag this day, as a day well done.

