

Ignis

By Alysia Luethje

The accident happened a little over 12 years ago. I had just turned 13 and was starting my 4th year working at the Ignito Factory. It happened so fast and it hit hard. The explosion nearly took my life along with Sam's, my closest human friend. Hundreds had died in the devastating heat. I had lost my arm and leg. Sam had lost her hand as she pulled me out of the blistering inferno. I glanced over to her work station and remembered fondly how she caressed my half charred face as tears ran down hers.

It's amazing how far technology had progressed back then. BioWear, a company that produces bionic appendages, had suspiciously bought the almost bankrupt Ignito Factory a few days before the accident had occurred. BioWear put Sam, the rest of the survivors and I into some new gear for the high price of complete and utter obedience. When I was conscripted at nine years of age I was told that I would only have to work for 5 years. I did not know I was getting caught up in some form of slavery.

Sam looked up from her station. Sweat poured down her forehead and made her brown hair stick to her face. Her green eyes burned with the fire she kindled every day.

Our job was to make sure the fire never went out. Day after day we threw coal into the furnace that powered the city. The fumes kill us from the inside while the heat bums our skin and makes our BioGear heavy, difficult to work with. The pay is minimal, the overseers are ruder and the toilets are almost never clean. Let's just say the work conditions are less than desirable. It used to be better. Before BioWear bought the factory, the toilets were at least semi-clean. Since the accident the union got demolished and all equality got flushed down the unsanitary latrine.

"Ryder! Get back to work!" The overseer's shout brought me out of my flashback of hatred. I angrily shoveled coal from my designated pile into the flames. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Sam smiling in my direction. I gave her a quick smirking nod and got back to work.

Before long the bell for the shift change rang. I wiped the sweat off my brow and packed my belongings. Waving to the poor soul who took my place, I sauntered over to the door where Sam and I usually met. She was waiting for me. Even covered in soot she was beautiful. Our journey home consisted of the usual conversation. "How are your BioParts feeling?", "Gonna go home and charge up?" You know the regular chit chat. As we rounded the corner into our housing division I realized the smog from the factory had reached our unit.

"Great," I said distastefully "Now I'm being poisoned in my own home." Sam came around behind me. "I know what you mean." She put her arms around my neck and kissed me gently. "But we are just going to have to make the best of it." She smiled and turned away. As she walked down the street to her home I smiled to myself. Maybe life here isn't as bad as it had been for the past 12 years. I still thought to myself, there has to be a better way to produce energy.

I walked into my little one bedroom, one bathroom, dingy apartment. Dakota, my enormous wolf companion, ran down the stairs from the bedroom. I squatted in front of him and rubbed his head. As I squatted my BioWear creaked. Dakota's BioWear seemed to creak in response. He had lost his leg in an accident just like me ... the perfect match.

"I guess it's time for you and me to charge up, hey buddy?" Dakota wagged his tail and allowed his tongue to loll out of his mouth. I smiled and stood up. Going into the kitchen I dropped my pack on the table and grabbed something to eat from the fridge. Dakota, my sandwich and I climbed up the stairs to the bedroom. I walked to the corner where my BioOutlet was. I plugged Dakota in, sat down, and plugged myself in. While munching on my meal I contemplated different energy plans in my head. Again thinking to myself, there has to be a better way. I fell asleep while thinking about how photosynthesis worked.

I awoke to the same internal alarm that had awoken me for years. Unplugging, I got up and stretched my forever sore muscles. Dakota had already unplugged himself and was downstairs waiting for food. I waddled over to the bathroom and realized, as I looked into the mirror, I had forgotten to clean up last night. I ran the water until it was moderately warm. Sadly, that is the highest it will ever go. I washed my hair until the soot was gone and the blonde was showing again. I stared into the blue eyes that looked back at me. There has to be a better way. I walked downstairs, fed Dakota and myself. While eating my breakfast I realized I wasn't going to see Sam until later that day. She worked an earlier shift than I. After I finished my morning ration I headed outside. The smoke from the factory filled my lungs again. Smoke? Maybe smog but never smoke. Oh no! The factory! I dropped my bag and ran. The smoke was intense. I burst into the factory and saw body bags and gas fighters. I ran through the smoke to Sam's station only to be greeted by a body bag. I crashed to my knees. The tears ran freely down my face. I wasn't here. I wasn't here to save her.

This stupid factory killed her. This stupid factory and its stupid energy source. There had to be a better way. And so my journey for cleaner, safer energy began.