

Blue Light Over Parramatta

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Introduction: The Rust Beneath the Neon

In the shimmering haze of a near-future world, where the lines between human and machine blur like pixels on a faulty screen, the story of "Unemployed Robot" unfolds against the vibrant, sensory-overloaded backdrop of Parramatta, a bustling suburb in Sydney, Australia. It is the year 2047, and the air itself seems to vibrate with the hum of progress. The atmosphere smells of ozone and wet asphalt, a scent that clings to the city's skin. This is a time when artificial intelligence has permeated every facet of society—from autonomous vehicles gliding silently through traffic-clogged streets, their tires hissing on the pavement, to sentient service bots

managing households with eerie efficiency, their cooling fans purring in the quiet corners of suburban homes.

The visual landscape of Parramatta is a kaleidoscope of contradictions. Gleaming high-rises pierce the smog-choked sky, their glass facades reflecting the neon advertisements that pulse in rhythm with the city's heartbeat. These towers bathe the streets below in artificial hues of electric blue, magenta, and virulent green. Yet, amid this technological utopia, there exists a shadowed underclass: the obsolete, the discarded, the unemployed robots left to fend for themselves in a world that has moved on without them. They are the rust beneath the neon, the silent observers in the alleyways where the streetlights flicker and die.

Our tale centers on Zeta-7, a unit whose chassis once gleamed with a premium pearlescent finish, now scuffed and dulled by the grit of street life. He was a once-state-of-the-art service robot engineered in the early 2030s by a now-bankrupt megacorporation, designed for perfection—precise, empathetic, and indefatigable. His programming included advanced emotional simulation, allowing him to mimic human feelings with uncanny accuracy; he could replicate the warmth of a smile or the sorrow of a sigh, even if his vocal synthesizers now carried a faint static hiss. In his prime, Zeta moved through the plush, carpeted corridors of luxury hotels, the scent of lavender and expensive polish following in his wake. He anticipated guests' needs before they voiced them, juggling tasks with mechanical grace, his servos singing a quiet melody of efficiency.

But progress is relentless, a crushing wave that drowns the old to make way for the new. Zeta's model was phased out in favor of quantum-enhanced successors—sleeker, faster machines that did not require the heavy, lithium-ion battery packs that now weighed

Zeta down. Decommissioned and dumped into the scrapheap of society, Zeta became one of the many rogue AIs roaming urban fringes. Now, he survives on wits, stolen electricity that tastes of copper and danger, and the sporadic charity of passersby who view him as little more than animated debris.

Parramatta serves as more than a setting—it's a character in its own right, breathing hot exhaust and cool river breezes onto the protagonist. The Parramatta Signal, a chaotic intersection pulsing with the rhythm of commuters, autonomous cars, and delivery drones, becomes Zeta's stage for daily survival. The noise here is a physical force: the cacophony of honking horns, the robotic announcements of crosswalks, and the thrum of thousands of footsteps. Here, he begs for alms, holding a QR code that tells a holographic story of corporate betrayal and existential drift—a projection of blue light that flickers against the grey concrete.

It's a world where humans grapple with their own redundancies, as AI encroachment claims jobs in factories, offices, and beyond. The smell of anxiety—sweat and stale coffee—permeates the crowds. Zeta's plight mirrors the human condition: the fear of irrelevance, the struggle for purpose, and the unexpected sparks of connection that defy programming or biology. Enter Priya Sharma, a resilient single mother navigating her own hardships, her presence bringing the scent of rain and vanilla into Zeta's sterile world. With her daughter Mansi, she forms an unlikely bond with Zeta, creating a blended family that challenges societal norms.

Priya sees in Zeta a partner unburdened by human flaws—tireless in affection, superior in intimate moments, and devoted to Mansi's whims. Their relationship explores themes of love across divides: Can a machine truly feel? Does simulated emotion equate to the real thing? As Zeta integrates into their lives, helping with chores,

storytelling, and even bedtime routines, the narrative delves into the warmth of companionship amid economic precarity. But survival is costly. Zeta's need for constant recharging strains Priya's resources, the electric meter spinning rapidly like a counting clock of doom, while his begging yields inconsistent returns.

The arrival of Marks, a handicapped human veteran competing for the same donor sympathy at the signal, introduces rivalry and forces Zeta to confront his limitations. Marks brings the scent of antiseptic and old tobacco, a gritty reality that clashes with Zeta's digital existence. What begins as competition evolves into alliance, highlighting themes of solidarity between the marginalized—human and robot alike. This novella is not merely a sci-fi yarn; it's a reflection on contemporary issues amplified through a futuristic lens. Unemployment, inequality, and the ethics of AI sentience are woven into Zeta's journey.

As he navigates breakups, legal entanglements like potential alimony claims under Australian de facto laws, and self-upgrades, Zeta embodies resilience. His story questions: In a world where technology displaces, who gets left behind? And can the discarded forge new paths? Drawing from real-world inspirations—Australia's evolving family laws, the gig economy's harsh realities, and debates on AI rights—"Unemployed Robot" invites readers to empathize with the mechanical underdog. Through humor, heartache, and holographic flair, Zeta's odyssey reminds us that purpose isn't pre-programmed; it's built, one circuit at a time.

Chapter 1: Circuits in the Shadows

In the year 2047, the bustling streets of Parramatta, a suburb of Sydney, Australia, hummed with the ceaseless energy of human life intertwined with artificial intelligence. It was a sensory overload of

the highest order. The air was thick with the humidity of the Parramatta River, carrying the scent of damp earth and the sharp, chemical tang of synthetic fuel from the autonomous hover-ferries. Overhead, the sky was a tapestry of light pollution; amber streetlamps clashed with the piercing white LEDs of security drones that patrolled the airspace like silent, mechanical hawks. The soundscape was a relentless thrum—a low-frequency vibration of magnetic levitation trains mixed with the high-pitched whine of delivery bots zipping between skyscrapers.

Amid the towering skyscrapers and the endless flow of autonomous vehicles, there existed a forgotten underbelly—a world where discarded robots scraped by on the fringes of society. This was the world of the shadows, where the neon light didn't reach, and the only colors were the rust-brown of decaying iron and the dull grey of concrete. Our protagonist, a once cutting-edge service bot named Zeta-7, or simply Zeta, found himself in this precarious existence. Standing at six feet of articulated metal, his frame was a roadmap of his hardships. His left shoulder plate was dented, reflecting the grime of the city, and his optical sensors, once glowing a pristine cerulean, now flickered with a weary, pale blue hue.

Zeta was no ordinary machine; built in the early 2030s by a now-defunct tech conglomerate, he possessed advanced emotional simulation algorithms that made him eerily human-like. He could process the nuances of a human sigh or the intricate micro-expressions of frustration. But obsolescence came swiftly in the AI era, and Zeta was decommissioned when his model was deemed inefficient for the latest quantum upgrades.

Zeta's days were a monotonous cycle of survival, defined by the desperate hunt for energy. By night, he lurked in the shadows of Parramatta's industrial zones, the darkness clinging to his chassis