SCRAP

To Ruth

For always coming with me

(Especially to the emporium)

~ GB

To my Love, friends and family,

who are the source of my inspiration and motivation.

Thank you for being part of my journey

~ AT

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SCRAP

GUY BASS

ILLUSTRATED BY ALESSIA TRUNFIO

LITTLE TIGER

LONDON

Not All Robots Are Created Equal.

From* Memoir of a Mechanical Mayor *by Harmony Highshine

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SOMEWHERE

By Natalie 'Gnat' Brightside, Aged 11 ½

This isn't my story, but I'm the only human left to tell it.

I wasn't there for the first part, mainly 'cause I hadn't been born yet.

The year was Something Something. Humans had spread like peanut butter across the galaxy, looking for new planets to call Somewhere.

One of those planets was *Somewhere 513*.

That one, the little one.

I know – it doesn't look like much.

Sometimes big stories come in small packages.

With new planets, you always send in the robots first. Servants with servos, loyal to the core, programmed to prepare the planet for humanity's arrival. Give them time and they can turn an alien wasteland into Somewhere not

bad at all. And that's exactly what they did. They even built a whole city, and got it all nice for the humans' arrival.

But this time something happened that hadn't happened before. The robots sort of got to *like* the city they'd built. They got to like the little back-of-beyond world called Somewhere 513.

I guess it started to feel like home.

When the humans finally showed up, all bleary-eyed from space-sleep, they couldn't wait to make themselves at home on their world. But by then the robots had done something that robots had never done before.

They'd decided to keep it.

Keep it? said the humans. What do you mean?

It means, we've had a change of core, the robots said. The planet belongs to us now.

Uh, OK, said the humans. You'll still do everything we ask though, right? You'll do all the work – all the lifting and carrying and toiling and suchlike?

Actually, the robots said, we're not doing any of that.

Huh, said the humans. Will you still make us breakfast?

Especially not breakfast, said the robots. It's horrible watching you eat. Especially knowing how it all ends up. No, we're not doing anything for you any more.

Fair enough, said the humans. So what time are you serving breakfast?

I don't know if anyone really got what was happening until it had already happened. But pretty soon after that, being human was outlawed on Somewhere 513. The robots ordered the humans to leave the planet altogether – but Somewhere 513 was a long way from anywhere. Sometimes when you're Somewhere, you have nowhere else to go.

That was when the fighting started. The robots called it the Difference of Opinion … but you'd probably call it war. Humans vs Robots. Actually, more like one hundred humans vs one thousand robots. The humans wouldn't have stood a chance except for one thing … and that thing was K1-NG.

One robot. One single robot actually fought to protect the humans. K1-NG stood against his fellow machines, one robot against a thousand. He fought cog and nail, and he never gave up. Not even when he knew he couldn't win … not even when he sacrificed himself so that the humans could escape. Even then, even when he was battered and broken and beaten, he never gave up. Deep down, at his core, K1-NG was unstoppable.

OK, *nearly* unstoppable. See, in the end, it wasn't the

robots who defeated K1-NG. It was the humans.

They did something to K1-NG he could never forgive. They betrayed him … betrayed everything he'd fought for. On that day K1-NG finally gave up. He vowed never to fight for another human being as long as he lived.

So I suppose this is his story. The story of K1-NG.

The humans called him King of the Robots.

I called him Scrap.

EPISODE 01

THE PILE

Going Somewhere?
At the Fargone Corporation, your future is our priority.
Let Fargone take you on a journey through the stars to a brighter future –
and with over 1,000 dedicated, hard-working robots preparing the planet for your arrival, we're confident you'll feel at home from the moment you arrive.
Reach the foregone conclusion with the Fargone Corporation –
Your new Somewhere is waiting for you!

***From* Your Guide to a New Somewhere**
By the Fargone Corporation

On the Pile, the one and a half suns could never set soon enough.

Every day was the same. The robot woke with the dawn upon his small patch of junk. Among the small mountains of debris before him he saw ruined robot parts – limbs … heads … torsos … even whole bodies … decimated robot *cases*. These cases piled up in their hundreds, their chest cavities open and empty, motionless and inert without their life-giving cores.

The robot watched the Pile's other residents – junk

cases – rusting robots on their last metal legs, trying to make the best of a miserable existence. He watched them build crude houses out of cast-offs, and call them homes.

But the robot did nothing.

He just sat there and waited for his core to run out of charge.

It never did.

Even though he saw countless junk cases grind to a halt, he did not lose an ounce of power. Not a single ounce. For the robot's core had been built to last, like a battery that never ran out … a heart that never stopped beating. He was never going to fade away, as he had hoped.

So he watched the suns set again.

And again, and again.

On the eve of his tenth year on the Pile, the robot woke up with the dawn and stared out as normal. Makeshift shacks now dotted the landscape. The robot had watched dozens of junk cases build humble homes and humbler lives, before unceremoniously running out of charge. The robot looked back at his empty patch and realized something had changed. He realized he was tired of waiting to fade away.

He didn't want just to be there.

He wanted to *belong* there.

It took the robot a full month to build his house, a ramshackle cabin made from leftover parts even the junk cases didn't want. But as he chiselled the word WELCOME on to a sheet of battered tin and laid it outside his front door, he realized that he had made himself a home.

A week later, as he furnished his home with the final piece of improvised furniture, he realized he had given himself a small sense of belonging.

And a week after that, as he tended the flower bed in his tiny front garden, the robot realized that for the first time since he had arrived on the Pile, he had not thought about humans. It seemed he had finally found a way to leave the past behind.

For that he was eternally grateful.

"It's him," said a voice. The robot dropped his trowel and spun round. Silhouetted in the glare of one and a half setting suns stood two figures. They were no more than a metre away – one slightly taller than he was, the other a little shorter. Their bodies were covered by thick, pocket-ridden ponchos. Hoods pulled over their heads cast dark shadows over their faces. One had a large satchel strung across their chest. A small power battery poked out of the top.

Junk cases, thought the robot.

"This is -zk- my patch," he said, gesturing back at his house. "Get lost."

"It's not him," said tall.

"Is too," short replied.

"Can't be."

"Can too."

"But *look* at him."

"Exactly, we finded him."

"Found."

The short one turned back to the robot. "You *are* him, aren't you?"

"Who are -zk- *you*?" the robot stuttered. Short lowered her hood.

The tall one shouted, "Wait!" but the robot had already seen her face. He stumbled backwards, suddenly weak at the knees, and fell, rump first, into his flower bed. He stared up in horror, hardly able to believe his eyes.

Human.

A human child.

Which was impossible.

Because there were no humans on Somewhere 513.

Tall lowered her hood then too.

Another human.

"How…?" he gasped. "What -zk- who are—"

"I'm Gnat and that's Paige," interrupted short. "Gnat". Brownish skin. Reddish hair. 5.7 years old. Grubby. Missing central incisor. 60% water. "We came to find you," Gnat continued. She prodded at the gap in her teeth. "We had a little moon-buggy but we crashed it on the first day and my tooth fell out but it was loose anyway and we walked the rest of the way on our feet and now is now, and we've find – founded you."

"I'm telling you, this isn't him," said tall. "Paige". Much the same as short, but older. 10.3? No, 10.4. Less grubby, no less scruffy. Strangely familiar. 100% impossible. She pulled her poncho off her arm and inspected a metallic armguard fixed to her left wrist. "Tracer must've conked out," she added with a tut.

The robot shook with disbelief. He had hoped never to see another human face again … hoped never to be reminded of the life he had lost – of the robot he once was.

Yet here were two of them, watching him expectantly.

"You -zk- can't be…" the robot whispered, staring up at them. The light from his left eye flickered slightly and he wondered if faulty wiring could be causing him to

hallucinate. “No -zk- way,” he added. “You can’t be real.”

“Can too,” replied Gnat, her gap-toothed smile wide and delighted. “Paige, tell him we’re real.”

“Let’s go,” said Paige, peering at the robot. “It *can’t* be him.”

“Him who?” asked the robot.

“It’s *so* him,” insisted Gnat with a gleeful grin.

“But look at him,” said Paige. “He’s *junk*.”

“Hey!” snapped the robot. “That’s -zk- *our* word. You don’t get to say that word.”

“No offence,” said Paige with a shake of her head. “But also, seriously, look at you.”

The robot looked down at his hands. They were spindly and dull and creaked with rust. He ran his fingers across his simple approximation of a face, little more than a pair of eyes and a small, hinged mouth, and then regarded his body, a battered, grey cylinder covered in rust, dings and dents. His legs didn’t seem to belong to his body, nor to each other. His right was yellowish, with two pistons and a wide, flat foot, while the left was spindly and dull and had no foot at all, ending in a simple metal rod. There was no doubt he was the most downgraded robot on the Pile. Even among the junk cases, he was an unimposing sight.

"I know what I look like," he huffed.

"Don't listen to her – *I* think you look nifty. You're all bits and pieces," said Gnat. She nodded to herself and added, "I'm going to call you 'Scrap'."

"No, you're not," insisted the robot. With a tinny whirr, he managed to get to his feet, tottering unsteadily like a newborn calf.

"What's it *like* being a robot, actually?" asked Gnat, peering at him. "Do you get hot and cold 'cause I'm *always* hot, and does your brain think one thing or one million things because I think one thing or two things but that is *it* and I'd *definitely* like to be an actual robot. I'd be like you –" she leaned in and added, as if to remind the robot what she had done for him – "but not called Scrap 'cause that's *your* name."

"That is *not* my -zk- name," insisted the robot.

"So what *is* your name?" asked Paige bluntly.

The robot paused. He hadn't spoken his name in ten years. Indeed, he had vowed never again to speak it aloud.

"Doesn't matter what my name is," the robot grunted, jabbing his rusty chest with a rustier finger. "You can't just go around namin' folk."

"Why not?" asked Gnat.

"'Cause you can't."

"Why not?"

"Because you can't!" Scrap snapped. "Names are -zk- important."

"Sorry," said Gnat. Then she turned to Paige and added in a loud whisper, "*I bet he's called Scrap*."

The robot let out a grunt and looked around.

"Might as -zk- well be…" he sighed, unaware that, from that moment, he would forever be known as Scrap. "Just a good-for-nothin' junk case…"

"Junk case?" Paige repeated.

"This *body* – if I was any more downgraded, I'd be nothin' but rust and dust," the robot replied. "There's nothin' on the Pile that's in a worst state than me. Trust me, I'm not the 'bot you're looking— Wait, *who are you*? You're… Humans are outlawed on Somewhere 513. What are you gubs even doin' here?"

"Founding you," replied Gnat. "We need your help."

"Me? Why?"

"Why do you think?" said Gnat as if the answer was obvious. "You're King of the Robots."