

The Magician

by Skylar Gruys

It blinks on. Every morning at 7 o'clock exactly, the M101 would blink on. It was the usual routine, and every single person across Atlantis would answer to it. They would sit up, move over to the left of their bed, unplug the device and start following the instructions. It was a simple and easy task that every person followed.

It tells me how many steps to my closet, and what outfit will be appropriate for the weather. It leads me downstairs, where a healthy breakfast is waiting and after directs me to school where I ride the lift—a long moving road that you simply step on and it took you places.

I stare at my M101 while on the lift, I see there was a hold up, a malfunction. The M101 directs me to stop, and I listen, stopping before the person in front of me. But something odd happens, my device starts showing weird colour lines.

I arch my eyebrows and shake my device, never having seen this before.

I wait for instructions to show up on the M101, but it doesn't say anything. The person behind me keeps walking and makes me lose my grip on the M101. It drops on the lift and the person behind me steps on it. "Hey." I cry, as I use my voice for the first time since I'd gotten the M101 when I was five.

The person who stepped on my M101, doesn't seem to hear me, none of the people passing by on the lift do.

I grab my device and I step off on to the grass, the mud from last night's rain shower getting in my shoes. The M101 was supposed to warn me when there was mud so I could avoid it.

I examine the M101, but the screen is now cracked, and I know that there's nothing left of it, and no hope for its revival. I knew now I'd simply have to wait for a drone. Once my M101 went offline, a drone would be notified to find my location and replace it with a new one. But until then, I was stuck.

I blink my eyes, the sun being bright when I'm actually looking up. It was weird seeing the world without an M101; usually it would show me everything I needed.

Everyone passing by on the lift doesn't even move their heads; they were all mindlessly staring at their M101's.

Was I like that?

It was normal though, how else were we supposed to live without the M101 telling us how.

I walk towards a virtual tree. No trees were real here, because if we had real trees we'd be a risk of infectious bugs. The grass was real, but nanobots were constantly running through the dirt and eliminating any signs of organisms underground.

I put my hand on the virtual tree, the bark underneath vibrating to my fingertips. "Alert, object to not be touched. Please follow your M101's instructions back to the lift," it instructs. I frown. I touch it again, and it repeats the same message.

A barking noise pitches in my ear, and I look over at a group of virtual trees. A boy, about the same age as me—sixteen, is running into virtual trees without alert signs. He was throwing around a red ball for a dog.

Without the M101 telling me to, I start walking over towards the dog and this boy, with my feet moving faster than normal, I didn't know what it was called, but I wasn't walking anymore, I was going fast.

"Oh Fitz." The boy cries out, hugging the golden dog as it licks his face. "Hey Fitz, stop that." The dog bangs him into a virtual tree. I wait for an alert sign, but nothing appears.

"Why isn't it warning you?" I demand, in my small unused voice.

The boy falls back further; having not seen me he seems shocked. He pushes up against the tree, looking me up and down. His expression turns from perplexed to intrigued. "Well that's because I'm a magician." He explains, getting off, and dusting off the dog fur on his shorts.

"A magician?" I repeat. "What is that?" I examine the boy, seeing from head to toe that he wasn't dressed for the mildly cool weather, since he wore shorts, a sports t-shirt, and was in bare feet. "And where's your M101?"

The boy simply smirks, walking over with his dog towards me. "I don't need one."

I hear the sound of a drone buzzing towards me. I look up, seeing the small plane fly over. "I'll ask the drone to bring you an M101." I offer, as the drone flies down towards me. It passes off the M101 to me. It was bigger than my old one, and smelt different. M101's were replaced every month, but never once had I gotten one early.

Holding the M101, I'm compelled not to look back up from it as it turns on, but I know I have to ask the drone for another before it leaves. "Excuse me," I ask the drone, as it's flying away.

"Alert, vocal command inactive, please take all requests through M101 or other device." I frown, as the air craft continues flying away. I turn back to the boy with the golden haired dog. I type in my message on the M101 to ask him his name, but I realize he doesn't have one.

"What's your name?" I ask him, intending to search him.

"Eli the great Magician."

I frown, looking up from the M101, even though I have it back now. "That can't be your name." I reply to him. "Everyone is given a first name, a number and the name of the day you were born on," I

explain as if he didn't know. "Mine's Trina, 1192 Alpha. Since I was born on the 1st day of the month, Alpha."

Eli starts laughing, and it's an odd yet beautiful sound I've never heard from anyone other than a child. "I like you Trina; you're not a mindless robot like the rest." He leans back against the virtual tree. I frown embarrassed and annoyed he'd accuse me of being a robot, I looked nothing like a robot. "Tell you what, if you are even able to remember this meeting and the joys of seeing the world, come back here, and I'll free you. Trina the free" He pets his dog Fitz as he waves and walks off in between the virtual trees. I go to follow after, but my M101 alerts me. It's giving me directions of how to get back to the lift, and get to school.

Before going, I press my hand on the virtual tree the magician had been touching. "Alert, object to not be touched. Please follow your M101's instructions back to the lift." I frown, still looking up at the tree instead of through my device. I look down at the M101. Seeing the picture of the tree I was touching, along with the directions back to the lift.

I continue to look at the M101, as I find the lift again and it carries me towards school. It goes over my school schedule, but I begin looking up Eli the magician. He doesn't exist as a person in Atlantis.

I blink my eyes, now the M101 is hard to look at. I look up for a second to see other people on this lift. No one was really on it, everyone had already been taken to school, and the only stragglers were people who had later jobs.

"Alert, you have missed your scheduled stop by four seconds, please step on the opposite lift, and follow the directions given." I look down at the M101, and realize that looking out at the world has taken me away from the real one in the M101.

Following the directions given by the M101, I come inside to my classroom, and put on the oculus glasses and watch the lecture. My head hurts though, as the teacher tells me about the previous world and everything they'd done wrong, and everything we'd done to improve it. I take off the oculus as the lecture ends, and shake my head to try and get rid of the headache.

A lunch is passed out and people continue to stare at their M101, as they eat. For the first time ever, though, I look up. I knew I sat in a desk, but I had no idea there were a hundred more desks in the same room, with boys and girls alike all of my same age. I'd talked to plenty of them, on our school chat—was even friends with most. Natasha 4502 Sierra was my best friend even. Yet as I looked around the class I had no idea who she was.

I pull back my chair, and an alert sounds. "Alert, Trina, 1192 Alpha, class is still in progress, please file illness reports with your M101." I sit back down, embarrassed to be caught. I look at the person in front of me, starring at their M101, while eating the prescribed meal of the day.

I lean over and I reach out to see if I can touch him. I can, and I begin poking his shoulder. "Hey?" I say, hoping for a reply. But as I obsessively poke his shoulder he doesn't even flinch. "Can anyone in this class hear me?" I shout out. No one answers, as everyone was glued to their M101.

No one was willing to look away, and clear their vision, to see the world. Eli, he'd been telling me this. He'd said that without the M101, you got to see the world. He was right. This new vision without the M101 was like a drug.

I leave the M101 on my desk and walk out of the classroom. Things were beeping at me, but I wanted to leave.

It was confusing seeing the school without the M101, and I didn't know where to go, or which way, or how many steps, but it felt free.

Somehow I'm able to make it outside. I step on the wet grass and it soaks into my socks. I pull off my shoes and jacket, showing the skin of my arms.

I feel something inside my chest beating. It was strange; I'd never experienced this. Maybe I was sick. But I kind of liked the feeling. 'Thump, thump' it was exhilarating.

I could see the world now.

I hear the sound of the golden dog Fitz. I move faster as I run over to the puppy. I bend down, and take the dog in my arms as it licks my face. Eli the magician is behind him, a smile perched on his lips.

"So you were different." He says. "Different from the rest."

I stand up, and look him in the eyes. Eli had blue eyes; I wonder what colour eyes I had? I never had looked at myself, nor had reason to care about my appearance. But now, I'm biting my lip unsure of what to do.

"Trina the Free," he says like a poem. "Do you want to truly become free like me, do you want to come with me and see real trees, instead of just touching the virtual ones."

I stand there, my bare feet feeling the grass for the first time. My smile is so wide; I can barely contain all my happiness in the one word answer. He holds out his hand and reminds me of some sort of prince, I'd been told the world shouldn't have.

Eli the magician, the one who was free from the control of the M101— I wanted to be like that, and see the world as he said.

I take his hand, my eyes focusing on his.

"Yes."