



**BUILDING
BABY
BROTHER**

STEVEN RADECKI

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“DAD, CAN I HAVE A BABY BROTHER?”

I paused, still holding the Lego piece in my hand.

“Are you sure you want one?” I tried to sound casual about it. “You know you’d have to help take care of him. He’d be in your toys ...”

“I know, Dad.”

Josh gave me an exasperated look. We’d been through all this before.

It wasn’t that I necessarily wanted to deprive Josh of the sibling experience; I’d been through it myself. I also knew that it wasn’t all play time and brotherly love.

“Okay, Josh,” I said, turning to face him. “It’s your choice: you can have a baby brother or too many toys.”

Yeah, I admit it. It was kind of a cheap shot. But it was a whole lot easier than explaining the real reason.

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Before answering, Josh took a quick look around his bedroom. He surveyed his collections of Lego sets, action figures, and the stacks of video game discs.

“Too many toys,” he finally announced, nodding firmly in confirmation. With that decided, he turned his attention back to our current construction project, snapping a new piece into place.

Whew, I thought. Dodged that bullet. Again.

Later that night, after *finally* getting Josh to bed, I settled myself at my desk with the intent to pay the bills and deal with other household-related recordkeeping. Glancing at the clock, I saw that it was quite a bit later than I’d hoped. I considered putting off those tedious chores for just one more night, but knew there was no guarantee that tomorrow night would be any better than this one. The odds were that it was unlikely to be. It’s amazing how many excuses, and other delaying tactics, young children will resort to rather than simply closing their eyes and going to sleep. It’s probably not quite as astonishing, though, as when you look away for a moment, only to turn back to find their head against the pillow and their breathing steady and slow.

Might as well get it done, I encouraged myself, barely succeeding in fighting back a yawn. *Most of these people do like to get paid on time.*

It’s strange, but when I’m working, I usually prefer it to be quiet. At night, though, and when tackling these kinds of tasks, I find a little background noise comforting — just something playing at low volume so I’d be able to hear Josh if he needed me.

I wasn’t really in the mood for music, so I turned on the small television that sat on a low cabinet across from my desk. The screen lit up with a graphic and bloody scene from an episodic police procedural.

Ugh. I can catch the late news if I want to see that ...

I changed the channel. Again. And then again.

Fairly quickly, I despaired of finding any programming that was not an overly gritty adult drama or a talk show host chatting about the latest geopolitical happenings with sparkling celebrities who had also dropped in to discuss their latest motion picture, television series, concert tour, stint in rehab, or any combination of the above.

My fingers paused on the remote control when I caught sight of a small doe-eyed boy moving through blue-tinged darkness across a moonlit hillside. I recognized it as a scene from Kubrick's last science fiction movie. While it wasn't among my favorites, neither was it among the worst, and I hadn't planned to really watch it anyway.

It might have been avoidance behavior, or simply fatigue, but my mind kept drifting when it was supposed to be keeping track of which payments I'd already made. I tried to focus on my balances due, but my eyes and attention kept wandering back to the images on the television screen. I watched the small artificial boy move along the scenery, and I began to wonder if it was really possible to create something like him.

Creating the software to do it; that I could almost imagine. That's my day job: I plan and develop computer programs. I try to make the hardware do what my clients want it to do, to produce the results that they want from it. I don't typically design or build the actual circuitry or components. I leave that to the electrical and mechanical engineers. I was certain that I could never construct a cybernetic being as complex as the ones presented in that film.

By the time I finally went to bed, though, I found that I was still thinking about it, unable to banish the notion from my thoughts. I tried telling myself that there were technological and financial realities to be consider — ones that would make such a project almost impossible for me to achieve alone.

After being unsuccessful in wholly silencing the persistent voice in my head, I finally decided that only thinking about the

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notion would cost me nothing. Well ... other than perhaps the price of the loss of a little sleep or a few unusual dreams. So, I closed my eyes and let my mind see how far it could go with the idea.

It was still working the idea the next morning and, after I had dropped Josh off at school, I began to realize that not only might it be possible, but that it might also be practical, using only off-the-shelf components. With the large number of computer stores in the area, I thought it possible to get everything I might need. If I couldn't find it at the one of the many shops, I had several friends who worked for some of the major computer and chip companies. They could probably get their hands on whatever else I might need. I even began mentally composing a proposed shopping list: motherboards, memory, hard drives ...

While I suffered from no delusions that what I might create would be anywhere near as complex as the one I'd seen in that movie — or from *any* movie, for that matter — I had, in the span of one evening, gone from “That’s impossible!” to “How hard it could be?”

Well, a lot harder than I thought, it turned out. Much harder.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steven Radecki has been writing stories for as long as he can remember. With a degree in Information and Computer Science, he has authored technical papers and a book about computer technology.

Now, he focuses on writing novels and screenplays. A certified project manager, he works for large and small companies throughout the United States.

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