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### The Young Person's Guide to the Retail

Paul Cofer

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The Young Person's Guide to the Retail

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Prof. Keith Gandall

4 December 2013

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at the City  
College of the City University of New York.

# The Young Person's Guide To The Retail.

A half-assed treatise on post-industrial capitalism and the youth culture  
Paul Cofer | 10 JUL 2011

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## 0.0 | standard quantum disclaimer | build 1.0

The following story was entirely true until I wrote it,  
at which point my conceptual knowledge of a potential future  
changed the course of events to come.

## 0.1 | obligatory pretentious epigraph

Words ought to be a little wild, for they are the assault of thoughts on the  
unthinking.  
John Maynard Keynes

## 1.0 | judged by 12 | 4 jan 2038

Top SlamJam™ search requests for Des Moines, IA  
0000 UTC 21 Dec 2037 to 0000 UTC 4 Jan 2038

1. blizzard forecast (03.243%)
2. blonde sexy (0.3.177%)
3. heating fuel prices (02.950%)
4. sex (02.470%)
5. acetones download flac (02.230%)
6. weather forecast (02.212%)
7. killstorm murder mountain download (02.038%)

Of 47184066 queries received; auto-indexed 0130 UTC 4 Jan 2038.  
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It's only two in the afternoon at the laundromat when Knox, putting the bulk detergent into smaller packages so they can sell it at the usual markup, is approached by a dark gentleman with a Remington and a sweatshirt with the hood cinched real tight around his face.

The whole sequence passes quickly: he hears the door open, looks up and sees the man making his way toward the counter real fast, so he shuts the Lexan that separates him from the rest of the shop and latches it just as the guy's got the shotgun pointed at it. The gunman, now conscious of his new tactical environment, stops and thinks. Knox takes a deep breath, strokes his hair, tastes the detergent on his lips, but doesn't wait for the man to speak.

"Just go away." His hands are shaking so he keeps them out of sight.

"Fill the fucking bag or I'll unzip your forehead." He doesn't have a bag,

he's foreshadowing. After he says it he grabs a laundry bag from underneath the counter and puts it on the ledge. It's one of the ones they sell that's big enough for a whole family to fit inside. Maybe he could fill it if he got all their money converted into pennies.

"Yeah, you can fuck off."

"I said, I'll kill you, you dense bastard!"

"So what kind of shot do you have? Nine-pellet?"

"Number one. Federal."

"Well it's not going to go through." Knox taps on the glass. He pulls a line from the marketing material that's still stuck and fading up in the corner. "Even slugs wouldn't do it. It's two inches of-"

"Look, just shut the fuck up, will you?" The guy taps back on the partition between Knox and the rest of the laundromat with his 870 and does his serious scowl. "I know how a fucking laundromat works. Just open the fucking glass and gimme whatever you've got in the fucking till."

"The till? Were you even born in America?" Under the counter he's got his left hand on his phone and he's dialing Des Moines Metro PD with it, and from the speaker he can just barely hear that they're prompting him to Press One for property crime, Press Two for violent crime, and so on, and he accidentally Hits Five for vandalism so he hangs up and redials, trying not to fuck up too much or look down because that might prompt this guy to try his luck at shooting him through the glass because what the hell, people get lucky and even ballistic materials get made on Mondays...

"What the hell does it matter to you where I'm from, buddy?"

Knox never mentioned that below the glass it's just two-by-fours and drywall, and if the guy really wanted to fuck him over he could just put a round through the bottom of the wall, wreck the arteries in his legs and leave him to

bleed out in his secure box where even the coroner would have to use the Jaws to get to him, but he's hoping this guy won't call his bluff, or even think to think about it.

"It takes a real American to threaten someone with a shotgun," he says.

"What are you, Indian?"

"Pakistani." He scowls again. "You fucking American."

"Well. My mistake. Go away." Where the hell did this gumption come from anyway? The culture of violence, it must be. His friends were streaming *Commando* from their FTP server the other night, maybe it's just bleeding through into reality. Strange situation nonetheless. No mag revolver hidden below the counter. No dramatic cues. Just the guy's desperate eyes and he hopes that he doesn't look like that too and the vague fear of death coming down from heaven or somewhere equally remote.

"No, you're going to-" He looks him up and down. "God damn it!"

"It's not my job to make your job easier."

The guy doesn't say anything else, just keeps the scowl up and turns his arm behind him, blows away one of the dryers, and walks out of the laundromat. The second the guy breaks eye contact he's shaking, and when the bells on the door jingle as he leaves, Knox pukes in the bin of detergent.

**1.1 \* \* \***

"And then he fired me."

The laughter from Bell halts like someone put their foot out in front of it. Knox can hear him breathe a few times while he thinks of what to say. He's still kind of in shock, staring aimlessly up and down 31<sup>st</sup> Street like the guy and his shotgun are about to materialize out of the ether and blow his intestines out the

back of his ribcage. After getting formally fired and finishing the police reports he walked next door to use the Kum & Go as a windblock and started letting the news out bit by bit, considered buying a pack of cigarettes, but then just decided to sit around and be cold instead.

*"Bullshit."*

"Yeah man, I was supposed to give up the cash."

*"Well, hell, you got the guy to piss off and you kept the store's money, so what the hell is the manager so mad about?"*

"The guy shot the dryer, that had to get replaced, having the cops there for the gunshot cost us the second half of the day's business, and I puked in the detergent, which had to be replaced."

*"Man, bull shit!"*

"They can get the money back, he says, because it all gets counted when people pay it into the machines, so the insurance would have reimbursed them. But the machine wasn't insured, and that was a couple grand to have replaced-"

*"What, and they wanted you to strain your puke out of the detergent, and that was the final straw, and if you hadn't-"*

"No, they watched the tapes and they said that me calling the guy Indian was insensitive."

Bell starts laughing. He's in a public area somewhere, probably off downtown where he usually hangs out for the free wireless. Knox can hear his voice echoing and coming back down the line all distorted and crackly from the phone codec.

*"You're kidding. Right?"*

"That was the stated reason. I browsed the web a lot, too."

*"Man, you got shafted."*

"They said I was lucky the guy didn't file for emotional distress or

anything - which is fucking stupid - I mean, if he was going to kill me, what do I care if I hurt his feelings? I could have ended up shitting into a bag for the rest of my life."

*"Don't let it worry you, man, because it doesn't matter in the long-term. There's other laundromats you can work at. Now you've got experience, too. You might even get more money."* Bell clears his throat. *"So do you wanna go to the bars with us tonight? Uh, it's gonna be me, Vormann, Armitage, maybe Foster if he can make it."*

"I dunno, there was a blizzard forecast."

*"All the more reason, man."*

"Yeah, and when they're towing your drunk ass out of the ditch at three in the morning and your dick's frozen off-"

*"Speaking of dicks, Delancey said she was coming."*

"Ahh, fuck."

*"Yeah, imagine being trapped in a car with her for a couple hours."*

"Fine, then. Where are we meeting?" He huffs, for a moment lets his thoughts drift toward the letter from Iowa State that he picked out of the mailbox that morning, then stares into the middle distance again as he keeps talking. "I haven't texted her for a couple days."

*"It's not like she notices, she must know a million other people if she wants to give someone a footjob."*

"Fuck you, Bell."

*"I'm just saying. It's Delancey. Why is it bothering you so much?"*

Delancey, sometimes Lance, was one of those types in high school, one of the ones that rumor and speculation spiraled around like a tropical depression, the one with the cutting smile that could disarm anyone, always eager for a good time doing whatever, and on prom night in 2036 she wore some red fishnets and

single-handedly ruined a dozen long-term relationships just by being herself. Or so the story went. Knox was fascinated with her if only for that veneer of adolescent legend, and so decided to find out for himself if she was actually the gold-toed eater-of-men Bell said or what.

After the night where he had coffee with her at a little place off Saylor overlooking the river, and Knox was really starting to cut through the layers of deception, Bell swore to Knox that he'd seen her barefoot once – with proud feet, he insisted – and he watched as she picked up a tennis ball with her left foot, and then she turned her leg up, and took the ball in her teeth, and she gave Bell the Look...

"What bar are we meeting at?" Knox knows he's full of shit, or at least he thinks it's unlikely, because then he always goes on a long digression about her toes, and how she's probably gotten fifty guys off and never even had to get her hands dirty. It's more likely that Bell is just having a hard time keeping the foot fetish to himself.

*"Glass Hand. Figure I'll get there around six-thirty."*

"Glass Hand sucks."

*"Well, they've got domestic drafts for a tenner, and it's probably going to be pretty dead on a Monday evening, so quit bitching."* He pauses. *"So have you played the new Line Unit Warrior yet?"*

"Yeah, it's not as good as the old one." LineWar used to be all about teamwork, and the gameplay was nice and slow – an FPS with real good balance and everything – but as it started to get popular it also started to shed all those habits for newer, flashier, more profitable traits. "It used to be about teamwork, now it's a whole army of Rambos, man."

*"I don't think it's bad. If we played together that'd help, right? I hear that Vormann plays too. He's always in the servers running the Bare-Bones ruleset*



*because it's like the old games."*

"Vormann's in the Navy. Why does he need to play a game about his job?"

*"You can ask him if you want, he's on leave for a while. Until the eighteenth, I think."*

"Fine, I'll show up, then."

*"Great, I'll buy the first round."* Knox hangs up, puts his headphones on, and heads for the bus stop.

## 1.2 \* \* \*

He's still got a couple hours so Knox gets off the bus in front of Witmer Park to give himself a way to kill time. He puts five dollars on a game of chess with one of the squatters who are sitting on the tennis courts, and he knows that he's going to play a real hard offense, something that looks showy and way bigger than it actually is, and Knox pokes at it for a couple turns before he's overwhelmed by its illusion and forfeits.

Toward Washington Avenue there's a wireless charging station and Knox lulls on a bench for a while, checks job postings on the net and fires off his standard job-application form letter to a laundromat down in Valley Junction called Whites and Coloreds that's looking for another attendant and pays seven dollars less than what he got at the old place. He can smell someone is cooking Spam or some other mechanically separated meat on one of the camp grills.

He looks at their website. Despite the dopey name it looks pretty well-kept, which might make it hard for him. He keeps checking job postings and throws one in for an electronics shop downtown called Userland just for the hell of it. Sitting around the tents he shivers inside a little.

It's not the first time it's happened, though. There was the grocery store he

worked at in high school where he got fired for pushing a cart into the back of some yuppie's Acura, then the payday loan place where he worked through most of senior year before one of the shift managers tried to pay him partially in meth and he quit, and the laundromat, so with that much experience in dead-end retail he should be a shoo-in wherever he applies.

He sends an SMS to his mom and logs out before she gets a chance to respond:

```
bond-spacesuit: hey mom i got fired from  
the laundry  
bond-spacesuit: not my fault. applying to  
more places now  
bond-spacesuit: gonna go to the bar with  
some friends tonight, be back late
```

He checks the news from Al-Jazeera; some riots in Marseilles but nothing really bad, new solar tech getting rolled out in the Southwest, OPEC admitting they may have wrung the last drops out of the Gulf, another round of inflation coming, so on and so forth. The Iranians bitching about having to take all number of Kurdish refugees from the war. The Russians are committing suicide en masse but that's not really a new development, historically. The overnight forecast looks bad. Eight to ten inches of snow and then frigid and windy the next morning. On the American channels it's all they're talking about.

On one of the flanks of the squatters there is a guy selling used paperbacks. His association with the derelicts is uncertain – he's pretty normal but his hygiene is something else, not dirty but not clean either, and unkempt like he's actually a writer. Knox buys a Vonnegut paperback and goes at it for a while, thinks about texting Delancey and checks his phone about every fifteen pages

because he keeps getting phantom vibrations in his leg, and eventually when he's coming up on page fifty he breaks down and sends her an SMS.

bond-spacesuit: so I heard youre going to Glass Hand tonight.

lanceyverky: You heard right.

bond-spacesuit: some guy tried to rob the store today and I got fired

lanceyverky: Well, shit. As long as you're okay I guess.

bond-spacesuit: Are you at home right now/ I'm at witmer.

lanceyverky: Sorry, I'm busy. Doing a quick gig.

bond-spacesuit: sorry, i'll just see you there then

### 1.3 \* \* \*

Glass Hand turned into their regular bar after Flanagan's got shut down by the Health Department, and they said it was going to re-open, but when it did the beers were twice as expensive and you needed more of them to make the crowd pretty, and in that time Glass Hand had actually grown on them, cheap and tucked away in a converted basement and close enough to the courthouse at the end of the street that Armitage the left-libertarian could even go and piss on it when he felt up to it.

When Knox gets there there's a fair crowd sitting around the bar, or watching weather forecasts on an ancient flat-panel television hanging in the corner of the room, and Bell and his group throw up a cheer when Knox comes in;

he orders two beers while they're still pulling them for ten dollars. They are sitting in one corner of the bar, with a buffer zone from the townies on the other side and their wrinkly girlfriends.

"So here's Van Damme," Bell says. "Tell them the story, man!"

He looks at his beer for a while and when he looks up again they're still all staring at him, so he looks at it for a little while longer to maybe defuse the tension, and he has the dull image of his frontal lobes being entered by the shot, in cross-section and tasteful slow-motion like in police procedural, with appropriate sounds added by the foley since soft tissue getting hit with number one buck doesn't actually make that kind of pleasing, most splat, but hey, you can imagine-

"This guy," Bell says, "this fucking Casey Ryback guy, doesn't even blink-"

"This Pakistani guy came into my laundromat-"

"*My* laundromat, I fucking love it-"

"Bell, shut the fuck up!" He swats at him. "The guy comes in with a shotgun and I'm behind the partition, he says to give me the money and I tell him to piss off, and he won't, so I tell him again and ask what kind of shot he's got loaded, he says number one, so I say it won't even go through the glass you stupid bastard, and he gets pissed and blows up a washing machine and leaves."

"Then what?" Vormann asks. He was fairly scrawny before he joined the Navy and he now he's a bit bigger, his arms freckly from sunburn, but most importantly he's been exposed to all kinds of explosives and crew-served weapons and government incompetence. "I know what comes next."

"Then I threw up."

"Yeah man, the adrenaline dump! The bitchy kid sister of the combat high." He laughs and offers him a high-five, which he declines. "There's nothing else like it. You know you could have punched his ticket, right?"

“What?”

“They might have flying cars now, but it's still America, man.”

They do have flying cars, but this is sort of a red herring – since the 1950s there has always been at least one flying-car prototype rotting in a hangar somewhere, getting masturbated over by Popular Mechanics writers and, just as surely as they are built, disassembled with equal ingenuity by the FAA. The contemporary deathtrap Vormann is making reference to is built off a Suzuki chassis, swaps out most of the back seat for wing braces and battery packs, and has a stall speed just above forty knots, so it's perfect for picking up the kids from soccer if you can keep from buying the farm when you're trying to park/land it.

“But I'd have had to shoot through the glass, too.”

“That can be done. Just buy a nugget.” Knox looks at him funny. He coughs. “Sorry. Mosin-Nagant. Old Soviet rifles from last century. They'll go through trees. Hardly two hundred bucks. You can buy them by the crate, too.”

“I don't really fancy shooting Pakistanis with Russian surplus rifles.”

“Yeah,” Armitage says, his face full of piercings that shine all different colors in the neon signage, “home invaders are one thing, but he's going to shoot someone over the company's money? No way.”

“What, do you think you owe it to him or something? He had you at gunpoint. So fuck him, he deserves whatever he gets.” Vormann looks at him. “Look, get a gun card, buy a Nagant, and if he comes back you tell him the feeling's mutual.”

“Vormann, Jesus!” Bell says. “Why don't you just grab your Constitution and go rub one out if you need to get it out of you?”

“Yeah, it's like I'm the only one who still thinks it's beautiful!”

“You're gonna choke on your own bullshit like that.”

They all kind of throw their hands up at the same time and drink for a

while. Everybody's got beers in front of them except for Vormann, because he has his government paycheck and there's nothing for him to spend it on, so instead he's drinking Jack and Coke for the most part, and Coors when he wants to slow down.

“Okay,” he says after a while, “so there's not that much constitution left, but that doesn't mean we should give up on it. Do you trust the legislature to put together anything that's not horrible? And we sure as hell need it. I mean, the fucking feds are crazier than the actual crazy people.”

“Can we not talk about politics?” Knox asks, and the other two nod. One of the townies lets off an audible *finally, Christ*. “I thought you said that Lance was going to be here.”

“She's coming. I've got a lady who lives in Highland Park and they said they were going to take the bus together.”

“Another girlfriend? From the North Belt?”

The North Belt is what they started calling the whole northern part of I-80, where the housing is cheap and ten years ago they started leveling all the nice old bungalows and split-levels so they could throw up mid-rises for all the people fleeing the blights in the countryside, and now it's mostly the kind of place where you blow the stoplights once the sun goes down, all the way across from Douglas Acres to Meredith and even into parts of northeastern Urbandale now.

“Yeah. Her name's Imogen.”

“That sounds pretty. Where'd you meet her?”

“Yeah, well, I'm not sure. She can be a little irritating. Like, we have conversations, and sometimes she's dead-set on proving me wrong, you know? Just constant verbal sparring, ever single time.”

“That actually sounds kind of fun.”

“I mean, it'll be about stuff like music, or the weather. The other day we

were talking, saying what five albums we'd take if we could only take five with us in a house fire, and I said I wanted to take *Selling England By the Pound*—

“Genesis sucks,” Vormann volunteers, as the bartender puts another whiskey in front of him. “Phil Collins sucks even worse.”

“See, that's just it, it's subjective. But she goes *no, there's more significant bands you could think about*. But she said that she wanted to take Kanye West, and what the hell significance does he have? I mean, shit, he hosts daytime TV now.”

“I don't know,” he says, “I don't listen to either one of them.”

“Anyway. She's nice. But I don't know, she just gets to me sometimes—shit, that's her. Say hi, Knox.”

He introduces himself to Imogen, who is cute and brunette but also has a busted nose and these eyes that just feel judgmental, or at least they've appraised him and found him unsatisfactory already. They make small talk and mercifully it doesn't go on for very long — they compare high schools (Hoover/East) and neighborhoods (Drake/Highland Park) and jobs (unemployed/waitress), and just as she starts mentioning how much of a bitch her A&P coursework is, not to mention microbio, Bell puts an arm around her and Knox takes a deep breath.

“Hi,” Delancey says, with a guarded smile. Knox looks at it and it vanishes.

“Hey. Beer?”

“That's all right, thanks.” She goes to the bar next to him and orders a Manhattan.

Delancey is a little shorter than him, about five seven, and she always wears the same pair of rainbow-striped kneehighs with her 1460s, which are out of proportion to her body just so that it looks like she's always tittering and listing like a destroyer in high seas. She's wearing a plaid skirt and a threadbare

Flecktarn parka and her hair is frosted with snow that hasn't melted yet. She asks him about what it was like getting held up and he doesn't really want to tell the story because he keeps having to recall that moment of vulnerability-not-vulnerability but she smiles at him so he bodes a synopsis for her.

“It's snowing out there already?” he asks, trying to change the subject.

“Yeah. All the homeless are getting on the buses. We got delayed a couple times because this guy was messing with everybody and they had to get the police there to take him off.” She hands her paycard over to the bartender and he opens a tab for her. “It's going to be bad, I think.”

“I think it might be nice.”

“Did you a letter back from the college yet?” she asks. He stares at the head of his beer, which is nearly gone, sloshes it from side to side, clears his nose.

“I'm going to keep looking.”

“So they said no.”

“Will you stop cutting so deep with all the questions?” She looks at him, obviously exasperated. “Look, I was banking on getting in somewhere, and now I've got no school and no job. If I don't fix that in a couple of weeks I'm going to be in deep shit.”

“Maybe you can get some kind of insurance payout, or sue the guy if they catch him. Don't people do that all the time?”

“Who knows, they probably won't catch him though. The cops showed up and I gave them a description – but I was excited as hell, what'd you think?” His phone vibrates and he shifts on the stool a little bit. “I wasn't really paying attention. A Pakistani guy with a sweatshirt. Like that helps.”

“Mmm.”

“There was one thing, though.”

“Yeah?”



"I got a steak."

"What," she laughs, "did they give it to you for being a brave boy?"

"No," he says back while staring into her eyes, "I bought it the other day because I got paid, and I got the letter from the university, so I figured why the hell not? And it's big, big enough for two people easy. I've got it on ice at my house."

"You were really looking forward to going to school, weren't you?"

"Of course I was, it's how I was going to get out of all these shitty retail jobs, and move out of my parents' house, and-

"Ingo has a BA in psychology and he's got an office job, but he still complains about it as much as you and Bell do."

"Who's Ingo?"

"I think he graduated a couple years before us. He's twenty-four, lives with a couple roommates in Oak Park, works downtown at an office, paying off his loans slow, but he's got the degree, if you want it. It's a life. That's the price you pay for the chains you refuse. Y'know?"

The song changes. Knox looks her in the eyes because there's a little time where it's crossfading between tracks and it's kind of awkward but he pushes that into the back of his mind and keeps talking as an old Maximo Park song comes on.

"Even with the degree, what's the point of this life, anyway?"

Delancey's face goes straight all of a sudden.

"Come on, don't fuck around like that."

"What?"

"You can't ask a question like that."

"I can too, and it's an important question. I mean, if I'm going to do menial jobs-

"Do you know Gödel's theorem?"

"Lance, please-"

"Seriously, you can't talk about whether or not it's worth it to be alive or not if you're existing in the world. As long as you're still in it."

"Bullshit."

"Come on, think about it. You determine the value of your past experiences afterward, by reflection. So you can't tell whether or not your life is any good until after it's over. You need a metalanguage."

"How do you even know this?"

"It's like in Oedipus - call no man happy until he is dead, or whatever they said at the end of it." She pauses for a second and drinks some beer from his glass and Knox sits there and looks a little defeated. "I mean, how come you even want to go to university in the first place? We're all swimming in information. You don't really have to pay someone to spoon-feed it to you. You know where I learned that? Library."

"Nobody will take me seriously without a degree." Across the bar Bell is looking at him with that face. *Stop trying so damn hard, man.* "I won't have a future if I spend my whole life working shit jobs."

"Your future is a mystery whether you want it to be one or not," she says. "Your dad and mom didn't know what the hell they were doing when they were twenty-one, either."

"So what, I'm just supposed to sit down and enjoy whatever comes my way?" He finishes his beer and thinks for a second. Vormann is still drinking whiskey. Bell has a beer and a cheap boilermaker. He gets a vodka without really thinking about it, drinks it fast, and by now there's people coming into the bar, obscuring the lovely binary they had before with the townies, and letting cold air in too, so before long he gets another.

“You won't understand it until you're older.”

“You're not older.” He adds up the bill in his head. With tips that's fifty bucks so far.

“But it makes sense.” She pokes his forehead. “Take all the shitty stuff and think about it in ten years when you've got the skills to deal with it. It'll wait up.”

“So then what do I do now?”

“Have experiences that you can reminisce about when you're old.”

“So I can I buy you a drink?” he asks, a little gratuitously.

“It's your money, sure.”

So he puts in for another Manhattan for her, and Bell says something in his ear above the music but he's concentrating on too many things and he misses it; by the time he's had his fifth round it's mostly gone from his mind, and he's talking to Delancey about some new trip-hop EP he downloaded like he's Christgau or something like that, spinning a little though it's gentle, not really that bad until he gets off the stool to use the can. He checks his watch and the second hand is sweeping like it's some expensive automatic. Vormann is still drinking and having a great time, it seems, so he leaves the rest of the party alone and when he comes back to the bar Delancey is packing up and her cheeks are all rosy, and as they step out of the bar he figures what the hell and grabs her hand, and she doesn't say anything so he runs with it, and they get back on the bus that runs near his house on Cottage Grove Avenue, holds the door for her and everything and she's looking real sweet, and then he passes out face-down on his bed.

## **2.0 | the letters of last resort | 5 jan 2038**

I wanna bite the hand that feeds me, I wanna  
bite that hand so badly, I wanna make them wish  
they'd never seen me.

-Elvis Costello

Someone bangs on Knox's door and he jolts awake. His face is buried in Delancey's hair. He jolts again and sits up in bed. The knocking fades out into his pulse throbbing in his temples. He blinks a few times and he's still tired.

*"Knox."*

"Yeah, mom?"

*"Look outside – there's snow!"*

He kind of mumbles something in the affirmative and picks himself up without disturbing her and pushes the blinds aside next to his desk.

He's blinded. Outside it is ridiculously white, like a blank page or the Upper Peninsula, everything smoothed over and sensuous, and the image of the lobe of Delancey's right ear where he held her last night shows up all of a sudden; he looks behind him and she's there with her eyes open a little, groans a bit and rolls over.

He clears his nose. "We didn't-"

"No."

"Oh." He clears his nose again. In the winter he usually has a runny nose because it's dry and his eyes are constantly watering, in the other three seasons the grass pollen makes him miserable, and when his nose isn't bothering him he does it sometimes just to defuse awkward pauses by making it seem like he's tending to his malfunctioning physical shell, though he's never admitted it to anyone. He fakes it once and then come two more which are real. "It snowed."

"I heard."

"They haven't plowed the street."

"They clear the main roads first. Then the smaller ones, and eventually us." She rolls over to face him again. "That's what my dad always told me."

bond-spacesuit: guess who I went home

with  
deagleclipz: Get checked.  
bond-spacesuit: We didn't do it but she's  
still here with me  
deagleclipz: Then get checked in case you  
caught something by proxy.  
bond-spacesuit: You're just jealous.  
deagleclipz: I'm just looking out for  
your safety. When she detects money, or a  
stable household - you know?  
bond-spacesuit: so where's Imogen this  
morning?  
deagleclipz: Back home in Highland Park.  
bond-spacesuit: Ooooooooooooo  
deagleclipz: I have work you idiot  
bond-spacesuit: your store isn't closed?  
deagleclipz: No, fucking sucks.

“Who are you texting?” she asks.

“Bell.” He checks for a response out of his peripheral vision but no joy.

“You went to high school with him, right?”

“Yeah. Typical guy.”

“He said you went on a date with him once,” he lies.

“I'd rather die.”

“Bell is a good guy.”

“That's pretty generous.”

“I'm not going to tell you that he's perfect,” he says, walking away from the window so he can turn on the radio, “but he tries to do the right thing, he's making his way in the world, and he's always been around to help me when I needed it, so I really can't fault him.”

“He wonders why he keeps getting friendzoned. If he'd just stop moping maybe it'd change.”

“I've known him since grade school. We used to live in the same neighborhood.” He turns the radio over to WOI-FM and starts listening for something newslike to show up. “I don't know, he's sort of like me. Once he gets decent work, he'll get a future. And if you've got a future – well, that changes the present, right?”

“Keep drinking that Kool-Aid.”

He rolls his eyes. The governor is making an address on the radio so he doesn't say anything.

*“The storm has left over thirty inches of snow in some places, and left thousands without power, or heat, and as such I am declaring a state of emergency in Des Moines and the affected counties of Polk, Dallas, Warren, Madison, Guthrie, Jasper, and Marion. I have authorized the deployment of the National Guard to assist municipal authorities with the task of re-opening our roadways and utility network, and we will be receiving additional assistance from the Mississippi River Cooperative to maintain law and order during this act of God.*

*“The National Guard will begin distributing rations starting in the most heavily affected areas, two per person, by six o' clock this evening, and operate emergency heating stations around the clock in all public parks. We urge you, if you have the means to hel-”*

Delancey finds the remote on his end table and turns the radio off.

“Hey, what if he was going to say something?”

“You can turn it back on if you want, it's just fluff.” She stretches out on the bed, then swings her legs over. “I'd check the net to see what's actually going on, if anything is. Maybe a big meet, if everyone's off work.”

“Bell said he had to go in.”

“I suppose that's how it is.” She straightens her hair in his mirror, looks herself over, and puts her socks on again. Knox finds himself looking. Delancey glances at him once but doesn't seem to give it any thought, just keeps talking. “I have to get some work done, too. There's code to be written, field installs to be done...”

“You're going out there?”

“Yeah, just odd jobs. I'm not going to die of exposure or anything, it's not so cold out there.”

“But it's windy.”

“I'll wear a hat, all right? That make you happy?” She reaches into the bellows pocket of her parka and puts on a black watch cap. While she's standing there looking defiant, he tucks her hair behind her ears and she sticks out her tongue. “You're needy as fuck.”

“I was just trying to do a nice thing.”

“Sure you were.” She laces up her boots and goes for the door. “I'll see you later, okay?”

“Do you need a ride? The van's in the garage.”

“No.” She goes out and down the hallway with him following and trying to think of something to say to look cool, but she gets to the front door, looks at him one last time with her green eyes, and then she's out and into the virgin snow and toward the bus stop. He sighs and turns around, and walks through the foyer toward the living room. His parents are sitting on the couch and reading the paper on their OLED screens, their edges curled up and smeared with fingerprint oil like wax paper.

“Did you have someone else here?” his mother asks.

“Uh, yeah.” He pours himself a cup of coffee and tries to look nonchalant.

“So you're off work?”

“No, but we figured it'd be a good day to call in. Dad's going to telecommute. I'm just using a sick day.” She rolls up her screen. “So who was it?”

“Delancey. I think you've met her before, maybe.”

“Did you go to high school with her?”

“No, she went to Dowling. She was going to go home last night but the blizzard-”

“Did you-”

“No.”

“Oh.” She hesitates for a moment. He can feel himself turning red. “So is she a nice lady?”

“Yeah.”

“Maybe invite her to dinner sometime? There's that nice Italian place down Forest, near 19<sup>th</sup> Street.”

“I'll keep it in mind.”

“Don't be difficult, Knox.” She looks at him and he's still stonewalling her so she gives it up. “There's a couple pieces of toast on the counter if you want.”

He gets up and walks to the kitchen and there's three pieces of toast sitting there with margarine spread over them as economically as possible: his mother's touch, from where she got through the worst of the contagion that swept the global economy during the end of the 2020s: she, like most others in her age bracket, sat around in a cheap SRO on the edge of town with her eyes glued to her phone, checking Craigslist for whatever work, or food, or whatever shreds of civilization there was to be had, and eventually as the system recovered she got a mediocre job, then a fairly decent one, put some money together with his father, and bought the house in Drake out of foreclosure.

“I heard you got sacked from the laundromat yesterday,” his father says.



He's sitting some distance from his mother on the couch. Knox takes two ibuprofen with a glass of orange juice from concentrate. "I hope your work record hasn't suffered because of it."

Knox isn't really sure if his parents even love each other. He never sees them kiss. Even holding hands is uncommon. When there was the second market crash he saw his mother looking like she had the vapors all the time and his father would sit extra close to her, but that was as serious as it ever got. He confided to Bell once and he went on about how there were lots of adults who got married like that when times were bad – sort of like a legally ordained friends-with-benefits situation with a tax shelter.

"Someone tried to stick the place up and I made them go away. I wasn't supposed to do that."

"Have you been looking for other jobs?"

"I put in a few letters. Who knows with the snow, though."

"Uh-huh." He puts his OLED away and gets up, mumbling something about taking a shower. "You going out today?"

"I was going to meet up with Bell after he gets off work, yeah."

"Could you go to the park and get some of the supply kits they're giving out?"

"Do we need them? We've got power. The news said that it's out through the North Belt."

"Well, payday is a three weeks away and it's a little tight again. It'd make a difference."

"Yeah, okay." He nods and looks down at his phone again. There's an email from the shop. "I'll kick in whatever I can."

## 2.1 \* \* \*

The email from the shop is something asking him to come back in and sign some paperwork related to his termination, which he's got no motivation to do, and so he walks back to Witmer Park where the flea market is going on. It's more crowded than normal. There's a couple that comes down from Eau Claire all the time and sells knit clothes in all different forms – socks, sweaters, long underwear, everything. They have Bible verses on all the tags so he usually stays away, but his feet are cold so he finds himself looking at their Double-Thick Socks and imagining his waxy-cold toes rubbing together in them, safely cloistered. He reads the tag.

Made from the finest wool in northwestern  
Wisconsin, our double-thick socks will keep your  
feet warm & dry even in the coldest nights.

*The wicked flee when no man pursueth.*

-Prov. 28.1

And they're twenty-five dollars a pair as well, which doesn't completely turn him away by itself, but it's enough that the thought of shelling that much stings him, and so he puts them back down and nods at the husband, who's wearing a wooden rosary. Down the aisle there's a woman in a baseball cap trying to sell whole piles of 35mm SLRs, two tables covered in yellowing paperbacks, someone with a long spindly beard selling his own blends of pipe tobacco, and finally he comes across a guy from the Quad Cities with whole stacks of bins full of military surplus, so he's going through a tub of old socks from the Illinois National Guard when someone taps his shoulder. The bike courier from the laundromat.

“God damn it,” he says, putting three prospective socks down, “what?”

“Mister Japutra says he's got some NDAs for you to sign off on.”

“How'd you even find me here?”

“You told me you liked to come here,” he says, putting the kickstand down on his bike, “so I figured it'd be worth a try. You need to sign these.”

“He fired me. I don't really care.”

“It's for the store crypto systems. Since you saw the private key when we sent the payment data to Visa – understand? They do it to everybody who gets termed.”

“Yeah.” He looks at the papers in the courier's hand, their edges a little wet with snowmelt. Halfway down the first page it starts a long table of yes/no questions, the first of which is *Are you a fugitive from justice?* His nose is getting cold. “He should have asked me before he fired me.”

“He said you'd be mad.”

“You think?” There's more people coming by, and they start to sort through the bins, and he can imagine how he's going to have to really dig for a pair of socks without any holes in them.

“He said he'd call all the other big chains in town if you didn't sign off.” He shrugs. “Don't shoot the messenger.”

“Damn it, then give it here,” he says. He starts ticking boxes and writing his initials over and over. His phone rings. Bell. He takes the call and keeps going down the list while he's at it.

*“Man, another shit day.”*

“You got to work okay?”

*“Yeah, the bus was running, and they didn't close the store. I wasn't even late. People need their Chinese shit, you know. It'd take more than an act of God, or whatever, to stop them from getting their fix.”* Bell doesn't sound too concerned, which is typical for him on Mondays when he helps unload the truck at the store. It's shit but he gets out early, which is extra time to drink or play

video games or whatever. *“The damned CEO is coming and everyone's getting stupid.”*

“Right, right.”

*“You need to get over here.”*

“What's so important?” He looks up. More form fields. Initial six times, date three, two signatures, county of residence, place of birth, US citizen status. Done done done done done done.

*“Can't talk about it on the phone. Can you come?”*

“Yeah, I guess.”

*“It's not bad or anything, don't worry. But important.”*

He gives his assent and Bell hangs up without saying anything. He hands the form back to the courier, who gets back on his bike, and heads for the light rail.

## 2.2 \* \* \*

Bell's apartment is pretty cramped and he works forty-five hours a week to keep it, which is something considering it's at the very western end of the train that bisects the city, over in Clive, so after the long ride where he's standing up the whole time, looking out at neighborhoods with half the buildings blacked out and the traffic signals flashing he gets to Bell's building, which is also blacked out, and he's standing outside waiting for him when he gets there.

“Hey, man. Did you hear about the state of emergency?” He looks Bell over. Despite the situation he seems more or less fine. Same clothes, same unconcerned grin. His nose is like ivory with the cold, but everything else is the same.

“Yeah, but that doesn't mean shit if they can't give me a hot shower, eh?”

He straightens one of the flaps on his ushanka. “Come on, before I freeze my ass off. I can't believe this shit.”

The locks on the door are useless since there's no power, and so one of the tenants has just stuck a cinder block in the door to keep it from closing all the way, which is convenient, but also means that the foyer is freezing, and the elevator isn't running, so they take the stairs, which are also freezing. Bell's apartment, on the fifth floor, at least manages to trap some of the warmth, and he's got all the blinds open so he can collect whatever solar energy he can get. Fortunately, his apartment door has a keyed lock so he can let himself in. Bell leaves his coat and hat on when he sits down on the couch, so Knox does the same.

“So we were supposed to have a visit from a bunch of managers today,” Bell says, “but they all got stuck at the airport, so we cleaned up the whole store for them and they didn't show up, and the place was just dead all day because of the snow.”

“Okay, so?”

“I volunteered to clean the toilet, because it was better than throwing boxes around all day, and I found this.” He reaches over and grabs a document from the table, shows it to Knox, who opens it up and has a look.

THE YOUNG PERSON'S GUIDE TO THE RETAIL  
SURVIVAL, EVASION, RESISTANCE, AND ESCAPE

“Are you serious?”

“Look, why would I make up a title that stupid?” As Knox is holding it he thumbs through it. It's thick, the better part of a hundred pages, most likely. “It's the real thing. Whoever did it typed it with a Selectric, so it's either really old or they were making a point of making it non-digital.”

“What's a Selectric?”

“Those typewriters with the ball in the middle that looks like the Death Star. Know what I'm talking about?”

“No.”

“Ugh. IBM made them. Real heavy – but they made really beautiful, straight text. You can't miss them if you know what you're looking for. Unmistakable precision. I almost bought one, but they're hard to keep running. They've got transmissions almost, sort of like a car.”

“So you bought a normal typewriter?”

“No. I came to my senses eventually. Couldn't really spare the money or the space anyway. Shame, though, they're cool pieces of old tech.” He folds his arms. “Can I get you an MGD or something? It's my roommate's, but he won't notice, I don't think.”

“It's pretty early.”

“Right. I'm still having one, though.” He gets up and goes for the kitchen. When he sees Knox looking at the document sitting there he pounces. “They wrote this thing to be found, because it was vacuum-sealed really carefully and stuck to the edge of the toilet. I opened the cistern, because I always check-”

“Why?”

“I don't know, you always see TV and movies where people stash drugs and guns in the tank of the toilet. So I do it whenever I go to hotels and stuff. Figured one day I'd get lucky.” He opens his beer on the edge of the kitchen table. It must be Ikea because Knox can see a plume of MDF and birch-effect laminate come after it. “Who knows how long it'd been sitting in there?”

“That mall's only been around for ten or fifteen years now.”

“Yeah, and they might have changed out the toilet sooner than that. But think about how cool that is. I bet they typed it on carbons so they could make a bunch of copies. I bet it's-”

“What, it's some secret conspiracy of retail workers?”

“Yeah, what if it is?” Bell looks at him. “People get trapped working service jobs for decades. Where does all that anger go?”

“You probably learn to-”

“Don't say that!” He sits back down on the couch. “I am not making any plans, not in the worst possible future, to stay in retail. I'd enlist with fucking Vormann if it came down to it.”

Bell keeps going on but Knox tunes him out and starts reading. After the title page it gets weird:

DISTRIBUTION RESTRICTION: Approved for release to the working class by analog means only; distribution is unlimited.

HEADQUARTERS

DEPARTMENT OF THE PROLETARIAT

There's a preamble but he just skips it and turns to the first chapter.

## 1: The Strange Ecosystem in which You Find Yourself

Reader,

You may have taken umbrage at some of the language employed in the preamble of this document. The mention of feudalism, servitude, and worker-as-machine may have caused you to even stop reading. But make no mistake, the bluntness of this document is intentional, and has been employed in order to dispel the lack of clarity which afflicts nearly all retail

work.

This document serves a triple purpose: first, to educate the reader about the fundamental nature of retail work, and by extension all service-sector jobs. Secondly, it will serve to provide pragmatic solutions to the situations encountered in these jobs, as they have an unfortunate tendency to hang around a person for far too long. And thirdly, it will provide the reader with a history of western culture which is designed to show how we have progressed from Greek civilization to our contemporary, post-industrial world.

Which may or may not be collapsing around us.

“Jesus, Bell, this is horseshit.”

“Is not. How fucking cool is it? A secret toilet treatise.”

“It's pretentious as fuck, that's what.”

“You're just afraid of what you might find out.”

Our aim is not simply to educate, but to liberate. As we currently find ourselves within totalizing states, not just in North America but also throughout the whole of Eurasia, our recourse against this system, beyond abject and violent revolution, may be seriously limited - though, however, history has yet to speak on that subject. What we do know, however, is that there is a host of strategies and



solutions which can grant temporary liberty within this system.

“It's interesting, isn't it?” he asks. “Beer? Last chance.”

“It's hardly ten.”

“It's not like you've got to be at work or anything.”

“My dad wanted me to get some rations from the National Guard, since they're gonna set up on the Drake campus this evening.”

“Oh, yeah, that's a good idea. Are they back from the winter vacation yet? I mean the college girls, not the National Guard.”

“I don't think so, it's only the fourth.”

“Shit. Well, it's worth a walk. Maybe some of them will be in the bread line with us?”

### 2.3 \* \* \*

The Drake campus is unnaturally grey. The little quad between the Law Library and the Theatre Arts Building got shoveled with a bunch of front-end loaders and Bobcats when the National Guard was getting ready to roll in, and after that they set up their tents and started running generators and dropping Conexes all over the place like Duplo blocks, and by the time Bell and Knox get into the line, it stretches down a couple hundred meters University Avenue.

Every couple seconds Bell turns around and looks to see who else has joined the line. It isn't moving very quickly. The wind is blowing and there's at least three news crews walking the line and asking people for their opinion, which is uniformly negative with nuances of objectification.

“This sucks. Where the hell did all the girls go?”

“They're probably keeping warm, because they're smarter than us. I could have just gone to the store and got a couple jars of peanut butter if I knew I was going to have to deal with all this.”

“Well the line's kind of moving. Isn't it?”

“I think people are just compressing, not walking. I don't see anyone coming out of there.”

Bell nods and doesn't say anything. Knox looks around: everyone looks more or less like him, or at least he feels that he fits in: people in jeans and tennis shoes and button-down shirts or polo shirts underneath synthetic jackets, all of them looking around in deferential silence but underneath that obviously impatient – though far too polite to admit any of it.

“So how was work, besides the finding the Guide?”

“Bleh. Got a big shipment in today. So even if the mall had closed, we'd have had to be there anyway. They can't just leave the stuff sitting outside the back door, you know – and there's a visit from some of the corporate-types coming up, so we've spent like the past two weeks putting everything in perfect order.” They shuffle forward some more. The wind blows and he pulls down the flaps on his ushanka to cover his ears. “It fucking sucks. You know what they sent us?”

“I don't know, shoes?”

“Yeah, 350 units of thong sandals in all different colors. Who the fuck is going to buy a pair of sandals on the day after the worst blizzard in 10 years?”

“It's probably so you can put it out in the spring.” They're moving forward; the herd is funneled together by chain-link and Jersey barriers, part of the enormous crowd-control apparatus that got put up along with the rest of the bivouac. Knox bumps someone's shoulder and he gives him a death glare.

“But couldn't it have waited another week?”

Bell goes on and keeps grumbling about all the various injustices he's suffered: having to talk to people with accents, having to wash all the black crap off your hands from handling the boxes, and the crap is probably carcinogenic too, the shitty music, turning the shitty music down to have it turned back up by the store manager, explaining how to calculate percentages to foreigners so they can figure out the sales, and-

“Hey man, shut up for just one second, okay?”

“But it just sucks!”

They've finally rounded the corner and can see into the quad, where the Guardsmen have a couple deuce-and-a-half trucks idling, and they're handing crates of MREs out the back, along with survival kits that are in transparent bags: he can see space blankets, synthetic-wool caps and mittens, sunglasses and blocks of hexamine for camp stoves.

“Look at that.”

“What?”

“Those guys on the side.” He points one of them out: alongside the National Guard there's also people in black tactical gear with rifles and all the equipment like what they have in LineWar. Unlike the National Guard, who are sitting there and looking kind and consoling like they're the areola on the government teat, they are sitting there and looking hard: scanning the crowd, sometimes walking up and down the line with their hands closed like they're doing a parade march, and every once in a while he can see them pull someone out of line and scan their ID card. “Who the fuck are they?”

“You've never seen them before?”

“You have?”

“Yeah, after that tornado a couple years back in Adel. They're, uh – ah, shit, the,” he says, looking up and snapping his fingers, “shit, the Mississippi

River Cooperative. Some paramilitary whatever.”

“That’s them? I thought they were like the Red Cross, or MSF or those guys.”

“Yeah, you’ve never seen them before? They’re a bunch of assholes is what they are.”

“Well that’s just great.”

lanceyverky: I just d/l’ed the new  
LineWar. Armitage said you played?

bond-spacesuit: Yeah, it’s not as good as  
the old ones but I like it

lanceyverky: We should play together  
sometime.

bond-spacesuit: sure

“Relax, man, they’re just checking for warrants and stuff. They don’t give a shit about us.” Bell offers him a piece of gum and he accepts, if only so he has something to occupy himself with. The line keeps inching forward. He watches as some woman, obviously homeless, gets arrested after making eye contact with one of the Co-ops too long. He’s on edge just watching as her face melts from guarded hope into despair as she’s zip-tied, and then someone slaps him on the back and he jump-shouts. Everyone turns and looks, including him. It’s Vormann, in his peacoat.

“What in the blue hell are you retards doing standing around in line?”

“Vormann, Jesus.”

“Knox’s parents said to get some rations, and I lost power, so we’re trying to get some swag before we freeze to death.” He holds out his Juicy Fruit again.

“Gum?”

“No, man – shit, let's get the hell out of here. You don't want to eat that stuff anyway. It makes you so constipated you'll shit enough bricks to build a goddamned outhouse.”

“But my dad said.”

“Then let's go talk to them,” he says. They leave the line, albeit reluctantly, and as they walk up to the front, Vormann starts goose-stepping when they pass someone else from the Cooperative. Now they're starting to draw some attention. Knox looks back and it seems like one of the jackboots are about to start getting seriously angry. But Vormann gets up to the National Guard, finds some pudgy Sergeant and defuses him with a quick, knowing “Hey, brother” and that's that.

“Hey, ah, what's the word?”

“I don't mean to make trouble, but I was wondering if we could get some MREs.” Standing around with the other enlisted men, Vormann has the same posture and body language going on, but Knox and Bell don't, and they're even more obvious when they're surrounded by soldiers. Knox looks off for a second and there's a soccer mom looking irate at him with her hands stuck in the pockets of her sweatshirt.

“Well, uh – sure, if you were in line anyway.”

The moment the people in line hear that there's a noticeable surge of complaint, which attracts a whole lot of attention from the soldiers. Knox shrinks but Vormann puts his arms out as they come off the truck with a box of MREs.

*“Look at this fucking bullshit!”*

*“Get back in line, trailer trash!”*

“Vormann,” Bell says, suddenly conscious of the situation, “maybe this isn't a good idea.”

“Well hell, they've got enough for everyone.” He takes the box in his arms

and pulls one of them out. It's Number 23; Chicken Pesto Pasta. He holds it up just for a second and the crowd surges forward into the barricades. The Co-Ops go for their stun batons and the Guardsmen start looking panicked.

“Are we going to get out of here or what?”

*“Welfare whore!”*

Someone from the back of the crowd throws a rock. It hits the hood of one of the Humvees blocking off the entrance from Carpenter Avenue, and as it resonates, the three of them look at each other.

*“OC, OC!”*

“That's the curtain call,” Vormann says, “let's bug the fuck out.”

He turns around, and only with a couple seconds left as the teargas starts flying, and everyone jumps the barriers. While they're hauling ass for the street he can see soda bottles and shoes hitting everything around them. Something knocks him in the back of the head – maybe a rock or something – but he keeps running. Vormann is leading them toward 30<sup>th</sup> Street and he doesn't dare look behind him, especially when he hears the screaming of the directed-noise generators and the crack of what sounds like but hopefully isn't gunfire and Vormann yells at them to keep their heads down. When they get to the intersection of 30<sup>th</sup> and Carpenter on the other side of campus there is no mob engulfing them, and Vormann points out his blue Geely sitting on the curb beside a big snowbank, and they hop in and drive off before everything goes to shit. Knox is shaking and the radio is blaring and they're all trying to sit comfortably with the huge box of rations going down the middle of the car. He presses his face against the window and his phone vibrates with another SMS.

lanceyverky: Want to meet me at the  
university? I heard all the street

vendors are converging on it. Might be  
some good stuff for cheap.  
bond-spacesuit: sorry something came up  
and im busy

## 2.4 \* \* \*

“No, not that one.”

“Why not?” When Knox noticed that he was bleeding from his head it had already stopped, but whatever hit him gashed him enough to run blood down the back of his neck and into his T-shirt. Initially he thought he was going to get PTSD he was shaking so badly but after a good bull session on the drive out of Drake it went away. Vormann told the story of how he motor-boated an older woman one night when he was technically AWOL and his body must have confused shaking with fear and shaking with laughter.

“That one's shit.” Vormann rummages through the box. “Each box has at least one of each type of MRE. Some of them are awesome and others will give you the turbo-shits.”

“I don't understand how ratatouille can give you the shits.” When he turns his head it throbs.

“That's because it's not ratatouille. It's something horrible that they designed in a lab to look like it.” He finds one and looks at it approvingly, then hands it to Knox. “That's the one you want.”

“Chicken fajita. How is that any better than the other one?”

From the university they went south as fast as they could in case someone was looking out for them, drove out to the Water Works and parked under a tree. Knox started looking though the MREs and then they got distracted.

“They don't tell us how they make the things, but the short story is that anything with chicken and beef is usually okay. Vegetables are a bit dodgy. Sausages, you never touch. Feed them to the dog. Or don't. Even the dog will get fucked up.”

“Our dog died.”

“Shit, really? That's terrible.” He gives them a moment of silence. “Man, that's fucking crazy. This is all crazy. Those guys, the Mississippi Cooperative – they're not hard but they want to be so they always do stupid shit like that. Up in Bangor, they have the Cascade Union, and they do the same stupid shit. Everyone on the base hates them. Bunch of POG-ass mall ninjas.”

He doesn't understand but nods anyway. “I thought the Pacific coast was still doing pretty well.”

“They are, for the most part, but the blizzards have been getting really bad out there. There's lots of avalanches in the mountains. So they send them around to help.” He pauses again. “And while you were in the bread line, I found something for us to do.”

“Oh yeah?”

“The college is showing *The Battle of Algiers* tonight if you want to go. Or, one of the student organizations is. Maybe it's worth a watch.” He pokes around on his phone for a little bit and gets the poster pulled up so he can show it to them. “I've never heard about it before. But the poster looks pretty good, right?”

“Will there be film students there?” Bell asks. “Like, female ones?”

“Don't you have a girlfriend? What's her name – Imogen?”

“For the time being, I do. Maybe ask me by Friday and I might be telling you something else.” He sighs and opens an MRE pouch while he's looking at the ceiling. “It's killing me. She's cute. But we keep disagreeing over the dumbest



things.”

“Dude, you're eating the maple sausage. I told you-”

“It sounds good, okay?” He pulls the packet out and puts it in the heater. “I've already got a girlfriend bitching at me, I don't need you to do it too. How do you warm these up?”

“You need water to activate the heater. And a rock or something. Your head will do fine.”

“God damn it!”

Bell keeps complaining and then Vormann starts talking about how you can't trust women, you know, and Knox is stuck between the two viewpoints until his phone starts ringing and he steps out of the car. He doesn't recognize the number but the area code is from around the city, so he chances it.

“Hello.”

*“Is this mister – ah, Mister Knox-”*

“Yeah, that's me. Who's this?”

*“This is Kenneth; I'm the assistant manager here at Whites and Coloreds.”* There's a short pause and Knox goes into his semi-professional mode, starts thinking calm thoughts, putting together some suitable responses to the usual questions. *“We received your job application and we had some follow-up questions.”*

“That's fine, yeah. Go ahead.” Vormann and Bell are looking at him through the window of the Geely and he motions for a little time.

*“Great. What made you want to work with us?”*

He pauses, spins up the turbines. “Well, I think that it's important that people have a good experience washing their clothes, and even though on its surface it doesn't seem like much, there's little interactions that really make a difference in a person's everyday life.”

*“Customer service, yes.”* He hears a pencil scratching, but briefly. Bell gets out of the car with the ration heater and packs it with a bunch of snow. *“And what do you think that your biggest challenge is?”*

“It's, ah, really just making sure that I don't lose that energy when I'm nearing the end of my shift,” he bullshits – they're really shooting to kill here – “because there's always a lot to do in laundromats, and you're frequently on your own, and it's easy to forget about the customer while you're tending to everything else. I just have to make sure that I'm conscious of that balance.”

Bell holds the heater in his hands, the snow starts to change to water, and the chemical reaction starts. He puts the food pouch in and gets back in the car. Vormann cracks the window and Knox looks at him for some privacy.

*“Sorry, man,”* he whispers, *“hydrogen gas. It blows up in close quarters.”*

*“All right, thank you. And one last question – we were wondering about the circumstances that you left your last job under.”*

God damn it. No point in lying, though – they've probably already done a background check, or they will shortly, and he'd never get away with it, so the only hope is that they appreciate his honesty or whatever. So he rolls out the story again.

“It's fairly complex,” he says, “but the shop was held up,”

*“An armed robbery?”*

“Yes. I refused to give the robber anything, he damaged a washing machine and left.”

*“I see.”* There's a pause and he comes back trying to sound even-handed. *“Well, I'll tell you what, mister Knox – we'll review your application, as well as the rest of the candidates, and get back to you. And thank you very much for your time.”*

“Thank you.” He hangs up and they might as well have just told him no, because he knows it's coming. He gets back in the car and Bell is eating the sausages. He tilts the bag toward him.

“Want one? They're good.”

“It's a trap, don't listen,” Vormann says.

“I'm going to listen to him,” Knox says.

“Whatever.” Bell rolls his eyes. “Would you mind if I took one of these? I'm going to see Imo after work today and she'd think they're cool.”

“Take two if you want.”

## 2.5 \* \* \*

Vormann is nice enough to drop Bell off at his apartment, where his roommates are watching a football game while mostly drunk, and they've filled the sink up with dirty dishes. He finds a Sinclair station in Windsor Heights that's selling gas for what he says is a decent price – it makes Knox's head spin – and has him put a hundred-fifty bucks' worth in while he goes to get Reds and a couple Slim Jims from the shop. As he stands there with his hand on the pump, he watches the sun setting, glinting off all the cars on I-80. The wind is picking up again and the blowing snow starts to cut at his cheeks.

“Bell said he found some secret treasure map or something at work today,” Vormann says as they're driving east again. “He was really excited.”

“Yeah, the Young People's Guide to Retail or something. I thought it was kind of crap but he likes it.”

“Do you have a copy? He mentioned it to me too.”

“No, it's on paper.”

“Man, that's even more weird. You're sure it sounds like crap?”

They're screening the movie at the Fine Arts Center and when they find the room, around a couple corners and on the second floor, there's a slender guy in a button-up shirt with the sleeves rolled up giving an introduction about the movie with Armitage standing next to him. The only thing they catch is his last line, *We hope that this landmark film, brought to you by the College Left Alliance, lets you see the world through a new, more enlightened lens.* They find seats in back. Once it goes dark he can see Vormann take a flask from his back pocket.

“So what's this even about? Did you look it up online?”

“It's about the Algerian War. It's supposed to be pretty good.”

Someone shushes them, so they stay quiet. He gets through the opening titles mostly because he likes the music, but it's interesting enough. Vormann offers him a nip of rum and he takes him up on it. He finds that he can shut his brain off easily enough, and the tension starts to leave him.

Eventually someone sits down next to him. He glances over, opening his eyes from what could have been a nice nap, and it's Armitage. All the piercings in his face have taken on a soft glow in the arclight. They nod at each other.

“Knox? I need to talk to you.”

“Go for it.”

“Not here.”

“Oh. Yeah, sorry.” It would be rude. So he follows Armitage out the back of the room and down a hallway. Near the end where it's dusty and the carpet is hardly worn because there's so little foot traffic, he shows him to a cramped adjunct office with three desks and six chairs piled into it. The slender guy from before with the rolled-up shirtsleeves is sitting at one of the desks and smoking out the window. He crushes out the cigarette and closes the window.

“Mulholland,” he says, and shakes hands with Knox. “I'm the elected president of the College Left Alliance.”

“Uh, good to meet you.” He looks at the two of them. With the window shut it starts to heat up fast. There's stacks of Foucault and Derrida everywhere and it smells of chalk dust and mold. “Is there a reason for all this?”

“We heard that you know about the Guide. Is that correct?” he asks. There's a folder in the center of the desk that Mulholland keeps resting his hands on and Knox intuits that he's keeping something relevant inside it.

“What, you've seen it too?” That gets out of him and Mulholland's eyebrows peak real fast. Shit. Shit-shit-fuck.

“So you found it where?”

“I didn't find it.”

Armitage leans in. The office is miserably tight and the mini-fridge turns on, starts heating the room up even worse and blowing dust everywhere.

“You said you found it,” he says.

His eyes are watering and the two of them are really trying to sweat him or something. And he starts sniffing again, and it's not voluntary-

“One of my friends found it.”

“Did you show it to anybody else?”

“No.”

“Talk about it on the phone?”

“No!” Now it's all blurring, the hold-up, the movie, the riot. He edges forward in his chair and gives them the same hard look they're giving him.

“Post it on the Net?”

“Armitage, what the hell?”

“You must have gotten it from one of our guys.”

“It was in a fucking toilet.”

“Don't bullshit me, man.”

“Why would I bullshit you? I don't even know you.”

“Wait, I thought you went to Roosevelt.”

“I went to fucking Hoover, man. What's with the third-degree?”

Armitage and Mulholland look at each other for a second.

“Just give us a second, if you will.”

They leave the room for a moment and Knox flips the folder open. Its manila paper is fuzzed around its edges and there's all manner of notes sticking out of the corners. The first few sheets are personnel rosters for the Left Alliance, so he flips past those, and he sees THE YOUNG PERSON'S GUIDE TO-

He takes a breath, muses for a moment. Their previous concern now seems reasonable. It looks the same except it's on dot matrix paper instead. He checks the table of contents and, from what he can remember, it looks like it's the same material. So he reads some of it.

#### 4.0: A Bestiary, a Taxonomy, a Taxidermy

To name, reader, is to know.

Now that we've concluded our initial spelunking, and illustrated the labyrinthine and occasionally hazardous geology which comprises the modern service-sector system which you and I currently occupy, we can begin to populate it with the creatures which inhabit it. Perhaps here, a quote from Friedrich Nietzsche may help illuminate:

*He who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster. And when you gaze long into an abyss the abyss also gazes into you.*

Tired as this may be, you may have surmised by

now that we inhabit this abyss: in the morning we drive into its maw, and in the afternoon we emerge, tired, hopefully victorious, but if we are careless, changed.

It's nice or whatever but again it's rambling a little so Knox pages forward a while longer until he runs into something that seems interesting.

#### 4.1: Managers, Small and Big-Time

In your travels you'll no doubt encounter managers of the various establishments in which you inhabit.

*A note here, to be touched on in later sections - have you noticed the repetition of words which suggest living-within, or habitation? What could that signify? Write (4-5 paragraphs; 25pts)*

In any case, the height to which these managers ascend in the corporate hierarchy is roughly proportional to their dehumanization. This is not a function of moral deficiency or, dare we say, evil, but rather a self-reinforcing condition which is necessary to the function of any corporation. It is a hostile environment to human beings in that it homogenizes individual humans in order to function as a whole.

For our purposes, we can divide this group into three subgroups, relative to their exposure to the

effects of the culture:

1. The Mostly-Human
2. The Abominable
3. The Transcendent

The Mostly Human, as the name implies, are more or less indistinguishable from any other employee in the shop: these are department/shift managers, all variety of assistant managers, and in roughly half of all cases, store managers as well. If their obligations toward the Company have not yet taken a defining role in their lives, they will remain mostly unchanged.

Footsteps outside. He closes the Guide and the folder too. He's just looking normal when Armitage and Mulholland come back in. He grabs the folder and puts it in a Chrome bag, then motions for him to get up.

“I'm going to go back out and watch the movie, there was a lady there giving me eyes. Okay?”

“You should come with us and see Frost.”

“Why do I want to do that?”

“If what you said is true, we'll have to re-think our strategy.” He looks Knox in the eye with what he probably thinks is an Inspiring Leadership gaze, probably conferred upon him by adjuncting for however long he's been wasting away doing it, and Knox looks at him like how he used to look at the TAs at the community college. “You seem like a smart person. Don't you want to put that to work?”

“Doing what?”



“I'd like, for one, if we could make all these young people serving systems of death a bit more conscious of their lot in life. And their potential. They need to have some hope. The Guide is what's going to do it, I think.”

Knox thinks about watching people getting tortured in black-and-white with Italian music playing and whatever he's proposing sounds more interesting, so he nods, and Armitage helps him up all dutiful. They march across the Carpenter Avenue in the waist-deep snow to Howard Hall, and then on the second floor they elbow their way through a mob of underclassmen to someone in a junky sweater who's erasing the chalkboard.

“Frost.”

“Office hour- oh. Armitage?” He looks at the three of them. His eyes are ringed dark and there's stubble on his face. When he opens his mouth Knox can see some spinach between two of his incisors. “What's happening?”

“This guy says that he found another copy of the Guide.”

That finally gets some serious attention; he stops wiping down the chalkboard and takes a deep breath like he's about to start lecturing. The two kids in back who are still packing their stuff look up for a second.

“It's not surprising.”

“It means that there could be other groups out there who know about it,” Mulholland says. “It means that the state could know about it. Corporations could know. They'd be looking for people who demonstrate knowledge of the Guide.”

“Professor Frost,” comes a voice from the back.

“I'm an instructor,” he says, “not a professor.”

“I was wondering if I could email you my paper.”

“You can't email it to me.” He looks at the student. “Bring it Thursday, you had just as much time as everybody else in the class.”

He gives the guy his *shithead* look while he's slouching out of the

classroom and then turns back to the three of them.

“Sorry.” He starts erasing the board again. “My initial response was toward the medium, in fact. Why distribute the information over comparatively inefficient channels? Certainly you could just encrypt it, and-”

“Where'd you find yours?” Knox asks. Mulholland grumbles something about violating security procedures but Frost goes on anyway.

“It was in a basic writing textbook. A used one, left in one of the adjunct offices.” He collects his thoughts. “I'd be interested in comparing the two copies. To see where they diverge, if they do, and how. I had suspected there would be more than one copy. It didn't seem reasonable that the author of such a pamphlet would leave it to chance to distribute it.”

“It's like samizdat,” Armitage says. “When information was controlled, people would make their own copies.”

“I don't think it's done for fear of censorship,” he says. “More likely it's to take advantage of the lack of surveillance. Digital information flows too freely in this case, until anybody can obtain a copy. Whereas, when it's being copied by hand and hidden, it only appears to those to whom it should. Follow?”

Knox nods.

“That's awfully inegalitarian,” Mulholland says.

“It is,” says Frost, packing his things up, “but in this case I think it's a useful necessity.”

“I think that it calls for a re-evaluation of our approach, if we have a fundamental inequality built into this treatise.”

“In no way does it affect the information. Only the distribution.”

Knox rolls his eyes but they keep going. Even Armitage is getting drawn in. He takes a step back and they don't notice. So then he takes two. Still nothing.

“It's analogous to the dictatorship of the proletariat. It's a centralization of

knowledge, which leaves some people uninformed, and as such they have to make their choice on faith. That's not what we're for.”

“We're for change before anything. Once we get it rolling we'll release it.”

“We might not, because someone will start looking more fashionable, and get all the clout, and then what is that going to leave everybody else?”

By this time Knox is almost at the door and as the last student gets up to leave, he goes with her. They walk out without saying a thing. He smiles at her and she ignores him.

### **3.0 | do know harm | 6 jan 2038**

In this present age of threats to democracy and individual liberty, probably only the scamp and the spirit of the scamp alone will save us from becoming lost as serially numbered units in the masses of disciplined, obedient, regimented, and uniformed coolies. The scamp will be the last and most formidable enemy of dictatorships. He will be the champion of human dignity and individual freedom, and will be the last to be conquered. All modern civilization depends entirely on him.

-Lin Yutang

Shilka Bridge is about six hundred meters in front of them. Knox opted for the shit work, which was bounding from cover to cover in the lowlands near the bank, while Delancey took a bolt gun so she could do a hybrid spotter/overwatch kind of thing for him on the ridgeline. It's past midnight and his eyes are tired but the game is working him over like a Skinner box and he can't stop. Delancey, whether she knows it or not, is forming part of his conditioning schedule as well.

*“Hold up before you get to that big rock,”* she says.

“The kinda-reddish one, the oval?” He's playing the game through the big monitor that his parents have in the living room. Through most of the day they use it to watch the news with their microcomputers, but whenever Knox gets a chance he likes to play his games on it, since it scales up really nicely. It's nothing

compared to Delancey's setup, though, which she likes to show off – she somehow got the money to buy a really fancy set of LCD glasses, and a RFID-digital input controller too, so all she has to do is sit down with her computer in her pocket, put the gloves on, and the machine just tracks the motions of her fingertips through space. He thinks it looks goofy to watch her using it but considering how expensive the whole outfit was, he's reluctant to tell her that.

*“Yeah, that one, there's always jerks camping on the other side of it. I'll move up on it before you and see if anyone's waiting, okay?”*

“Sure.” He holds up next to a tree and scans the horizon while she advances.

Behind him on the couch Vormann slurs something out.

“How come you took that shit gun?” He points at the screen. “As soon as I unlocked better stuff I stopped using it.”

“I like the SCAR. It handles well.”

“I always use that new German one, the, uh, the G40K. It doesn't recoil as much. It gets on target faster. It's just better.” He's got four bottles of Schlitz in front of him on the coffee table and three of them are empty. “Put a holosight and a foregrip on it and you're golden, man.”

“Yeah, well, I don't do point shooting. Especially not on this map. I usually roll an ACOG or an Aimpoint with a magnifier or something.”

Line Unit Warrior used to simulate previous wars, like the Second Gulf War, and then after the second installment it got speculative. The current release is a collection of scenarios about a Chinese armored spearhead into eastern Russia, with a Marine Expeditionary Unit stuck somewhere in the middle, fighting alongside the Taiwanese and the Indians – which, thankfully, never actually happened.

*“Oh yeah, there's one,”* Delancey says, as she opens fire, *“I knew it.”*

“Thanks, I'm going to head up to the big ridge now. Do you wanna scan the foot of the bridge and see if there's any vehicles around there?”

*“I don't think I saw any, but some of the people on our squad said that there were some to the north of the bridge. They may have come down by now if they're gonna try and push across.”*

“So what did you think of the movie?” Vormann asks him.

“I don't know, it wasn't bad. It was kinda long.”

Someone in a Havoc flies over the bridge and nearly clips it and they both go prone real fast.

*“Did you bring a Stinger?”*

“No.”

*“I thought you usually do.”*

“Someone else on the squad took the anti-air kit.”

*“Shit.”*

“I don't think they noticed us. I marked it so hopefully that other guy has a shot on it.”

The real war, the one that swept most of the Middle East and into Central Asia right at the start of the decade, was kind of like a World War I revival where everybody's defense treaties got tripped all at the same time, and given how a shooting war between Iran and Israel was one of those things that used to make defense analysts put on their most serious inflections, it was nice how much restraint all the belligerents showed. At first it looked like people were going to be glassing each other like it was a bar fight. And in the end, the world was more or less the same as it was before, and there was suddenly something new to make movies and video games about.

“So did you meet someone when you were there, or what?” Vormann says.

“What?”

“I noticed you were gone for a lot of it. Just wondering if you hit it off with someone.”

“I wish.” Delancey marks a couple people who are sitting on mounted guns near the foot of the bridge, does the one furthest away, and then Knox puts a burst into the rest of them. One of them manages to get into cover before he can finish him and starts blind-firing at them. He goes prone behind a boulder.

“So what were you doing?”

“Armitage was wasting my time.” He tenses up. “*Should we pop smoke?*”

“What the hell does Armitage want? I thought he didn't really know you.”

“*No, then everybody would know. Come up here and we'll just go down the road to the bridge. I'll give you cover, okay?*”

“He doesn't. He was asking about that document that Bell found.” He throws a frag in the direction where he thinks the guy is and starts sprinting up the side of the valley.

“He knows about it?”

“Yeah. Someone told him and he got really interested. All those fucking anarchists, or whatever they are.” Almost there. There's bullets hitting the dirt near his feet but he can't turn around and return fire either, and he's looking up and Delancey is just shooting down with a pistol, which isn't enough gun at all.

“They were actually kinda mad. It felt like I was in some secret club.”

“What, are they starting *la gloriosa revolución* or something?” He stumbles to his feet. “Beer?”

“Sure.” The screen pulses red. “*God damn it, I'm shot.*”

“*I'm sorry, this guy doesn't care I'm shooting at him or something. Fuck.*”

Vormann goes toward the garage where he put his beer so it'd stay cold, and he passes Knox's mom in her study where they exchange pleasantries briefly, and then he comes back with a beer for each of them while Delancey is putting a

field dressing on him.

“You guys are fucked, you know, right?” He points at the screen. “The east hill is bad news bears for infantry. There's like no cover, the Russians always drive armor down that side, and you're silhouetted for people at the bottom of the valley.”

“I know. But there's another squad that just spawned in down there.”

“You should just turn around and wait for someone to come up in an IFV or something. Else you're gonna get rolled, like a shit crepe, or something.”

“They're all on the other side, we were trying to sneak around.”

“Well, all right, then.” He sits down and starts drinking. “You really should have seen the movie, though. It was amazing – I mean, there was the Foreign Legion just rolling around the whole country and operating the shit out of everybody, and the Algerians kept blowing shit up, like they didn't even give a damn, and it worked. How cool is that?”

“What, the French losing?” The Havoc buzzes them again and this time the guy on the barrette takes some shots at them. He swears involuntarily. “That's never happened before.”

“No, beating the French! Just with some grit, and some smuggled guns and some homemade bombs.” He marvels for a bit. “I'm going to download it. We should watch it. Invite Delancey and Bell, they'd like it.”

“Sure, why not?” He keys the mic. “Lance, do you want to see a movie with me and Vormann?”

*“Knox, we're gonna get shot.”*

“It's not going well, no. But Vormann and I saw a movie at Drake, it's called *The Battle of Algiers*, and I thought-”

*“You saw it tonight?”*

“Yeah.” The guy who shot him before finally gets curious and crests the

ridge, and Knox lights him up. “The College Left Alliance was screening it.”

*“You should have invited me, I would have gone along.”*

“I thought you were working.” Someone's seen them; there's a line of explosions walking toward them and he starts backing off real fast. He starts making a run for a little wooded patch about thirty meters behind them and she follows.

*“I was free. Why didn't you call?”*

“I don't know, I just assumed.” In the trees he looks for the biggest one and dives behind it. They're getting small-arms fire too, now, and he can hear the helicopter buzzing around.

*“You shouldn't assume.”*

He's thinking of what to say when someone's lucky shot with a 40mm arcs between the trees and blows up in front of Delancey. She drops and when he crawls toward her to revive her, she disconnects, and he's left alone.

Behind him he can hear Vormann laughing a little bit.

### **3.1 \* \* \***

“Get something off the rack. Something, anything. Just something,” the manager is saying.

“Like what?” Bell pauses. “I heard that the executives can vaporize people just by looking at them.”

“I don't know, take some liberties. We're supposed to do this all the time but I think it's stupid.” The store manager looks up from his binder. “Make yourself look like the people in our marketing. Leave the tags on and we can put it back when it's over.”

“Okay. Great.” Bell is wearing jeans and a polo and tennis shoes like he



does almost every day, but everyone in the marketing is wearing layered shirts, which are, apparently, the WASPy thing to do. Other things which are apparently popular: faux-military belts where the slack hangs straight downward, jeans with corduroy patches ironed flat like slacks, wearing hats indoors. All the models can look out of their photographs like they don't weigh a thing, like they're just silver floating in the emulsion. "Are we all going to get fired or what?"

"The executives are always great." The store manager always holds himself together well when it's always going to shit, and Bell can't tell if it's because he's got some kind of proletarian wisdom or if he's got an exceptional sense of what doesn't matter. "The mid-level managers are the mean ones."

"The store down in Indianola," the Assistant Manager says from the other side of the counter, straightening the hem of her blouse, "they fired like half the store because they thought they were doing a bad job."

Someone in back whistles low and long.

"That was a really bad store, though. Huge overhead. We've got nothing to worry about." She keeps straightening her blouse and he notices how her fingers are trembling.

"And we've done really well in the past, too. That's why they're coming here," the store manager says, before looking at what Bell's picked out. "That should be fine. Want to wear a hat, too?"

"No." It might just be early or something but he feels some gas moving downward and he clenches all the muscles in his core to stop its advance. His posture improves for a moment. "I don't like hats."

"I think someone's going to have to wear a hat," he says, with a nearly undetectable smirk, "just to have a well-rounded presentation."

"I think you should wear a hat," says Moo from the front of Men's, as she sizes and re-folds a pile of striped polo shirts. Bell rolls his eyes.

Moo is apple-shaped and about five ten, the kind of edifice of a young woman that only comes from genuine, corn-fed Midwestern stock, blonde and sculpted by the Scandinavian protractor. Like the name suggests, they taunted her like they wanted to see her bleed, but by the time she entered high school she owned it. She acts impossibly light, like somewhere along the way they bumped the decimal point over to the left a spot. Normally she wears a septum ring to complete the image, but with the executives inbound she's got it stuck in her back pocket.

“You don't wear hats indoors. I have principles.”

“You'd look bad without it. Your cowlick is standing up.”

“I got a haircut,” he says, “from my girlfriend, and she did her best.”

“That's so cute.”

Bell excuses himself so he can go change; the original plan was to just use a fitting room, but on the way there he starts to feel his gut bubbling again, so he pushes through the back door and toward the bathroom. On the way he stops at the employee coatrack and, pushing aside Moo's old ECWCS parka that's all lousy with white cat hair, takes his photocopy of the Guide from his coat, and sequesters himself in the bathroom just in time.

“Jesus,” he says to himself. It all goes bad fast, balkanizes. He's in the throes of the torrent and the tiny bathroom is thundering, full of the smell of something like maple syrup and someone outside and down the hall starts laughing. He belches and the mainspring of his body is still wound tight, and whatever it is inside him just wants out, looking for the path of least resistance. He leans over the seat and grabs the bucket that they use to mop the floor.

## 6. Your Salary & Your Worth

The wages of retail are death.

Refer here to Locke's *Two Treatises on Government*: in short summary, Locke's claim is that (s)he who sells his time is a fool, and (s)he who, by comparison, is intelligent and has been smiled upon by fortune, exploits the profit-producing potential of their land.

No doubt you fall into this former category. The lesson here is this:

Your salary, whether it is hourly or monthly or annual, is vastly inferior to your worth as a human being. If you don't subscribe to this intangible valuation of human life in the abstract, as it is predicated on liberal Enlightenment values, you could also consider that, to you, each moment in your life represents the completely unique experience of a being which has never existed before, will never exist again, and each moment wasted bagging groceries, or running a register, or brokering sales, is forever lost to the void.

Enough with the talk of personal value - if you have not been convinced by now, may your chains fall gently upon you.

Consider, then, that we apply an infinite, or rather an indeterminable value to each life. This is a distributive property, which means that all the component parts of our lives are also applied this valuation. We all sell our time at a deadly bargain,

and those who buy, are merchants of death.

“Did you get the curry from the food court?” one of the floor supervisors laughs through the door.

“Shut up,” Bell tries to yell back, but his diaphragm isn't getting hardly any blood and there's no power to it. He retches again.

“They're out here, you'd better hurry up – someone's got to watch the floor!”

He groans in response. Out of the corner of his eyes he can see some jackass on last summer's marketing staring at him as he spews MRE sausage out of his nostrils.

*GOLDEN RETRIEVER SHOES - everyone agrees, they're fetching!*

Americans have clamored for the quality and style of their “Retrievers” since 1961. No other brand can match the timeless lines, or the hand-made quality of Golden Retriever apparel. Which is why, after nearly 80 years of delivering the best, we still go out of our way to make each new experience as the first.

*See why everyone loves a Golden Retriever!*

When Bell cleans himself up and gets back onto the floor he's almost relaxed, just basking in the absence of pain, stepping on the balls of his feet with his douche-y cap and layered shirts and flaccid belt. The executives are all uniformly tall, even the one woman, and though they aren't statuesque they look stretched out, like thoroughbred horses, baring every joint, their tendons close to

the skin like the suspension on a formula car. They are looking around the store with what seems to be actual wisdom, and the brightness of tritium vials in their eyes. Bell is just planning on working the front of the store so he can pester customers rather than stand around the executives and look reverent. On his way they pass each other and he has to greet them.

“Bell,” he says to the tallest one, who has just enough grey hair to look unconditionally adult, but not enough to suggest he's getting old either. His handshake has the kind of confidence that has never known want.

“Mr. Forsythe,” he says. The C-something-O. “How long have you been with us?”

“Two and a half years, sir. It's been – ah, it's been good.”

“Well, that's good. You're all doing a great job.”

He's practically fucking Father Christmas, his cheeks rosy with the invulnerable comfort of wealth. It's the most absolute confirmation of Bell's insignificance, too, when he turns away from him and keeps talking to the manager and assistant manager about how the posters have been hung in the back of the store. The front door opens to an old lady and he darts off to help her.

“Hi, ma'am,” he says, “ah, welcome to Golden Retriever.”

Moo is getting close too so she doesn't have to deal with the executives either, and the lady is asking for a pair of penny loafers in a size they both know they don't have, but they make a good show of looking for it anyway, even offer to order it for her.

“You can even get the same discount you'd get in the store,” he says.

“And it's shipped to your house,” Moo says, “and you can return it here if you don't like it.”

“And the shipping is only five dollars.”

“That's all right,” she says, standing up, and she starts to go for the door.

“I'll keep looking.”

“Have a good day,” Bell says to the lady as she's leaving. And just for good measure, because he can feel their eyes on him, and because the store is otherwise empty, he sticks his head out the door. “Come back again!”

During his scan and his gulp of fresh air he sees about six people all in black coming down the side of the strip mall. It wouldn't be alarming, but their gait, too, gives them away, how they even bounce like fighters, the bandannas over their faces, how the hoods are cinched tighter than the cold dictates.

And the bricks, too. He ducks inside again.

“Moo, problem. Outside.”

“Ah,” she says, taking a glance, “that looks bad,” and then the first window shatters. She gets behind the counter, hits the ground and something shakes, though it might just be her weight coming to a dead stop, but the emergency lights come on and he hits the ground too as more windows blow out. He hears a crowd rush past, then feet stamping on the front counter and someone starts bellowing a leftist diatribe above them.

*“The planet is dying, everyone on it is dying along with it, the government is killing its own citizens, and you sit back and sell fucking tickets!”*

“They're not going to kill us, are they?”

“Not us, at least,” Moo says. “How's Imogen?”

“She's not in love with me. I don't know if I am, either.”

“Don't say that.”

*“We are the hammer of the common man, the right arm of the citizenry, and on their behalf we wage a campaign of righteous terror!”*

Now something is splashing. He'd try to sneak a look but he's afraid, and the sound is making him nauseous. He farts and the guy on the counter looks down at him.

“Stand up!”

“I-I'd rather not.”

“It's time for you to wake up,” he says, “this is your one and only life, and there's nothing that separates you from those suits, the people who are exploiting you.”

“I'm aware of that, but what am I going to do about it?”

“You can start by standing up. And we'll stand up together, all of us. Because we outnumber them, a hundred to one, and if we'd just-”

It's the fucking cops, man, cheese it!”

Terrance, the rent-a-cop who usually spends his time browsing the Web and issuing people non-binding notices about their parking infractions, is standing there in the doorway brandishing his Taser and telegraphing his helplessness to everyone in the store.

Bell peeks over the counter while all the anarchists are reacting, and takes everything in with a gasp: they've managed to destroy all of the marketing, throw the mannequins across the room, and everything else they threw paint all over. The stack of sandals they just arranged on the floor that morning has a replica jock lying in its center, and all the sandals are mixed together and just the thought of having to sort them all out makes him shudder. He looks over to Moo and she's doing the exact same thing but with different displays, like the seventy-five pound pile of jeans that's now gone sideways in front of the fitting rooms. All the anarchists have frozen.

“You're – ahm, you're going to s-s-stay right where you are,” Terrance says, “and the police are going to arrest you, and all this crazy is going to stop. Right now.”

The only thing that Bell can hear is everybody breathing. Terrance might have the Taser but he's got electricity pulsing at his fingertips too. And if he's

feeling that way, so must everyone else. He scans the room. All the executives are crouched like it's a tornado drill. So is the store manager, too, but he's looking toward him, though not at him. Bell follows his eyes. He's staring at the guy on the counter, who's still holding a brick. And, with great care, he takes it in hand, and bangs the fire sprinkler over the registers with one firm strike.

They all open up. The water is frigid and the anarchists walk around Terrance, who's holding his useless Taser. As they leave, Bell farts again, and at the end of it he can feel something warm.

“Bell, what'd you do?” Moo shouts. He groans.

### 3.2 \* \* \*

Knox can hear the gunfire inside his house from the sidewalk. He sighs and looks up. The snow is starting again, coming down thick and indifferent. Their porch light is still on so they have power, at least. Inside his parents are sitting next to each other on the floor in the glow of the big monitor like he used to when he was a kid. They're emulating an old game console.

“License To Kill?” his dad asks.

“Yeah.”

“Power Weapons?”

“No way. Lasers.”

“You should know I hate lasers by now.” His dad gives his mom a little shove and they laugh at each other. Except for the glow of the television there's no light in the house, and they've got the volume cranked so they didn't hear him come in. But he can see them both sitting there, closer than he's ever seen them in a long time, and with real smiles.

“You're going to have to learn how to play with them sometime.” His



mom keeps nudging his dad with her elbow. “What about explosives? Or proximity mines?”

“Fine. At the Bunker?”

“No way, you know all the spawn points. If we play proximity mines, I want to do the Caves so you can't mine all the spawns.”

He can't help but watch them. Maybe something is wrong. But they'd have told him if there was. So he goes to his room and he can hear them laughing. On his desk there's a small monitor and he plugs his phone into it while he looks at the scratch across its display; he deliberates playing LineWar for a little bit but then that reminds him that he hasn't talked to Delancey in a while. He thinks about what to do – maybe call and act like it didn't happen, or maybe write her an email, though that's probably too distant. He sits down on the sofa bed and looks over his bookshelf. As he takes the Vonnegut paperback from the other day off the shelf he can see the visibility dropping outside. The house is cold. His phone is indicating a received message.

deagleclipz: So you know your last day at the laundromat?

bond-spacesuit: Yeah.

deagleclipz: I can do you one better, I think.

bond-spacesuit: Did you get shot?

deagleclipz: Even better. I'm sitting around the south belt. Can we come over?

bond-spacesuit: Who's we?

deagleclipz: me and moo

bond-spacesuit: Who's moo?

deagleclipz: forgot you don't know her. A co-worker

bond-spacesuit: Well that's fine. I don't  
have any food but come on over.

He tries to write an email to Delancey for a while afterward, but gives it up and sits down on the sofa bed and keeps reading. WOI-FM is mentioning the riot at Drake, and how they arrested a little over twenty people for inciting violence. Nothing about three people running off with boxes of rations. He takes a breath.

His parents are still playing Goldeneye in the living room when he hears a motor outside, and when he pushes his blinds apart he sees a big lady in an ACU jacket on a cream white Super Cub emerging from the snow. Bell is sitting behind her, thrown out of scale by her size. He goes down the hallway, stands on the porch, and waits for them.

“Knox,” Bell says as they're walking up, “this is Moo.”

They make it to the door and they shake hands. There's a tattoo over all that he can see of her right arm, replete with naturalistic imagery – swooping birds, lily pads, tulips and chrysanthemums, and right on the top of her hand there is a coppery maple leaf.

“Moo?”

“Yeah. If the shoe fits, start curb-stomping – you know?” She smiles.

“Bell told me how you got held up the other day. And then – what do you know?”

Bell, too, laughs when he sticks his head around the corner for a second and sees Knox's parents playing the game – by now they've moved to Pistols at the Complex – and so they sit in Knox's room, and Bell recites the story until it gets to the part where he shat himself, which Moo has to tell, and the whole time Bell is trying to qualify everything – *well, no, I only screamed because it happened, not because I was embarrassed. Well, yeah, I was embarrassed, but*

*anyone would be...*

“So that's why you're both in the trendy clothes?”

“Yeah, after the sprinklers went on they just let us grab stuff from the stockroom so we'd have something to wear.” Bell looks at himself. GOLDEN PIER BAIT AND TACKLE SHOP, his pre-faded screen-printed shirt says. There's an image of a guy in waders with a pipe hooking a stylized fish. “I look like a douche, don't I?”

“A little bit.”

“You look fine.” Moo's got a purple V-neck shirt with ruffles around the sleeves, and it's layered under a loosely crocheted white sweater. “I've seen uglier stuff. But it's all Kyrgyzstani crap. Maybe I'm lucky if the sweater gets through two seasons. It's all cheap synthetics anyway.”

“Hey, do you want a whiskey?” Knox asks them. He opens the bottom drawer on his desk where he keeps a fifth of green-label Evan Williams, and starts to put glasses out. “If you're going to stick around.”

They both nod. So he pours three.

He runs to the kitchen and takes a Coke from the fridge and some ice. His mother says hi, a little surprised, before yelling at his dad not to look at her screen, the uncivilized bastard, and then back in his room Moo and Bell are still talking about the incident at the shop. He hands them their drinks.

“What's up?” he asks them.

“Moo thinks that we got targeted by the black bloc.”

“The what?”

“It's an anarchist thing,” Moo says, “for protests, I think.”

Or it would be. Nobody really protests anymore, when it comes down to it. First they started being real tightasses about giving parade permits, made vague motions at the PATRIOT Act and all the vagaries of the NDAA, and then they

started teargassing the shit out them when people protested anyway, and since then they kept on the pressure until you could hardly stand around with your friends without getting drive-byed with a directed-microwave emitter. Far easier, then, to just petition.

“So they were after you?”

“I mean,” she says, “not me and Bell, but our store.”

“Okay.”

“They only smashed up our place,” Bell says. “Everywhere else it was fine. I mean, if they wanted to cause chaos – which they totally did – wouldn't they break all the windows? But they only went for our store. And on the day where we had the CEO visiting.”

“Who'd know? Security, maybe, the people in your store... maybe even someone who was shopping and overheard you griping about it. It could have been anyone.”

“Shit. Okay, yeah. Good point.” He sits and drinks, until presumably he's satisfied with the resolution of the problem. “In any case, we got furloughed for a week while they fix the store. That's cool.”

“Is it paid furlough?”

“Come on, man, of course it's not. But it's the first vacation I've had since I've been there, so I'm not that angry about it.” He folds his arms. “I can eat ramen and whatever the National Guard is handing out for a week.”

“And I help my grandparents with their antique business,” Moo says. “Actually, come to think of it, if either of you need work, I could probably get you a job doing local deliveries.”

“I'm still running down a couple of leads. Maybe,” he says, not intending to really follow it up. “So what are you going to do in the meantime?”

“Ingo is throwing a party on Saturday night,” Bell says. “It's supposed to

be a lead-up to the big one for the Unix millennium, he says.”

“The what?”

“When all the Unix and Linux system clocks roll over.” He shrugs. “Sort of like 2001. Nothing's going to happen. It's at like three in the morning in a couple weeks. Just an excuse to drink some.”

“So why even bother?”

“I dunno, nerds get all fired up about it.”

“Come on,” Moo says, “don't be dense, it's symbolic. Like how they always say that the twentieth century didn't start until 1914. So the twenty-first hasn't properly started until 2038. When we finally shed the last vestiges of analog life, and all that crap. In any case, Knox, you should go with us.”

“But I hardly know Ingo.”

“Yeah, so what?” Bell says. “I don't really know him either.”

“If he's throwing a party I feel like I might be a little out of place.”

“Nah, he throws good parties. Free booze. And his apartment is nice. Bring Delancey and maybe she'll wear some fancy socks for you.”

“I kind of pissed off Delancey last night. Doubt she'd come.”

“You've certainly been busy, haven't you?” He raises his glass to him. “So come anyway, and you can get a real girlfriend. Easy as that.”

“I know that if I get drunk in this mood there's nobody who'll find me attractive. I get self-conscious. I'm no fun like that.”

“Oh man, this guy!” He nudges Moo and they both laugh. “This is gonna be great! If you can to get Knox drunk enough to peel his shell off it'll blow your fucking mind. Swear to god.”

### 3.3 \* \* \*

His first guess is that Moo is going to be too drunk to leave, and so Bell with her, and he's going to end up sleeping on the floor or on the old couch in the basement with the broken frame, but she has three drinks and they bounce off her, just so that it's comfortable when she has to ride the bike back out to Norwalk. His parents play Goldeneye into the early morning hours and the noise bleeds through the wall no matter what he does.

The next morning he gets his formal rejection from Whites and Coloreds via email, along with one from Userland, calls another computer store and gets told that they've got minimum requirements that he can't meet, calls the county to see if they have any jobs and just gets told that if he calls back in a couple months he can be an election judge.

In the kitchen there's an MRE (#9, beef stew) that's been opened up and eaten save for the cracker, whose lore Vormann filled him in about yesterday, and the cheese spread, so he takes them and eats them for breakfast. The faux-cheese will likely kill him in the long term if the nutritional information on the pouch is to be believed, but it's actually not bad, like the kind of fake cheese that came in the junk food he had when he was a kid.

After that he goes back to the Net again. Everywhere around him there are laundromats, and he calls, sometimes getting people who respond in unintelligibly borked English, sometimes getting people like him who just give him the runaround, and then, as he closes the radius to his house down to about five hundred meters he sees a place on the map called Ping Pong Laundromat Corporation #335.

He stares at the screen of his computer for a while and wonders what kind of immense fuck-up he's uncovered. Or he's hit a formerly undiscovered seam of naiveté that got laid down millions of years ago, when the whole Midwest was still a sea.

But in any case, he dials.

“*Ping Pong*,” is the voice on the other end. Male, no discernible accent, and actually strangely confident in itself.

“Is this a laundromat?” he asks, which doesn't sound stupid until he says it.

“*Of course it's a laundromat. It's Ping Pong Laundromat.*”

“That's some name.”

“*It's called lampshading.*”

“What?”

“*Lampshading; to draw attention to something strange, and in doing so, letting the audience know that the performers know, too. So nobody acts as if it's strange.*” He clears his throat. “*But I'm not a goddamned teacher, I work a fucking steamie.*”

“A steamie.”

“*Look it the fuck up. What do you want?*”

“A job would be nice, if you've got any.” At this point it's useless but he might as well try.

“*Got experience?*”

“Yeah, a year and change.”

“*Reliable transportation?*”

“BMW.”

“*Ha. When can you start?*”

“This afternoon if you want me to.” He walks back over into the kitchen. The last thing left in the MRE is a Charms lollipop. It's grape, so he decides to eat it.

“*Should I ask why?*”

“So I don't end up on the street.”

*“Good man. Come over and we'll see what we can do, then.”*

He looks up. He should be feeling relaxed about now.

### 3.4 \* \* \*

The place is only three or four blocks south, on Crocker Street right by the underpass with I-234, where all the chain link sits and collects garbage, and even the new snow that fell overnight is already turning black. He gets an even worse feeling about it when he goes in; the awning with the sign on it is faded and ripped pretty badly from thunderstorms past, there's scratches in the glass and the door, once black, is worn to the bare metal in places. Off to the side there's an alley and he doesn't look down it for too long, lest he see something else he doesn't want to. The washing machines are stainless, aren't modern, aren't very clean, and a lot of them are also broken. They look like they've been in service for some time, since they've all got coin slots that were retrofitted to take bills once the inflation started getting bad.

“Stop staring and start washing,” comes a voice from the back. He turns around. There's an Asian guy standing there in a suit, maybe five or six years older than him.

“I came for the job,” he says. “I'm Knox.”

“Lowe,” he says. “So you know how to run a laundromat, eh?”

“I've worked in one. I can do most of the stuff. I don't know if I could do it by myself.”

“Well,” he says, sizing him up, “you look like you're pretty comfortable in this environment.”

“I'm not sure if I am or not.” This radical honesty stuff is really great, even if it looks like the shop might be a front for an organ harvesting outfit or



something.

“I'm trying to tell you,” Lowe says, “that you look qualified to me, and I think we should talk specifics. First item: the gig pays cash. Twenty-seven an hour.”

He nods. That's a little more than he made at the last place, actually.

“Second: we're hiring you for Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. You'll be on call those days. No more than twelve hours, but consider that an extreme case. If you're not called in all week, we'll throw a couple hundred bucks your way as compensation for the inconvenience, okay?”

“What kind of shift is that?”

“A cash-paying shift. Third: You're here to work in a laundromat. Answer the phones, fill the orders if they come in, clean up, keep the lights on. Nothing you shouldn't be able to handle. I'm assuming that you're not a crack baby or anything, am I correct.”

“No. How does this place make money anyway?” He gestures around him. “It's not very clean. Half the machines are broken. The change machine is empty.”

“If you must know,” he says, “and it's not really the component you'll be concerned with, we make a lot of our profits from selling washing supplies. They make them in China, send them over, and then they come down the highway from Cali, and we're just another wholesaler.”

“Oh.”

“It's what you've got to do to stay alive. Internet-only sales. Keeps overhead down. The laundry business is oversaturated anyway. You could say it needs a spin cycle.”

The laundry business does have its own humor but it's usually complete garbage. Lowe makes the joke, he's assuming out of humor, but neither one of them even bother to smile.

“So can I count on your integrity?”

“Yeah. I suppose.”

“All right.” He makes for the door and tosses him a set of keys. “You've got my number if you've got any questions. Run the shop until 8 tonight. Roll down the shutters when you're done. I'll call you tomorrow if we need you.”

And with that he's employed again. Lowe rolls past the storefront in a big black Mahindra.

### 3.5 \* \* \*

bond-spacesuit: hey I didn't mean for to  
get you mad the other day

lanceyverky: I was kind of short with  
you, too. Did you win that round after I  
left?

bond-spacesuit: no half the team went  
recon and they were just sitting in our  
deployment. no momentum

lanceyverky: Shame.

So far he's swept up, put the big pile of dirt into the can and started wiping down the counter in back so he's got somewhere to sit and do nothing, because he hasn't even seen anyone coming down the street. There's someone's old stereo, too, and it's got the provisions for him to plug his phone into it so he can listen to music while he works through his routine. It's not particularly thrilling, but between an old Digitalism album he's fond of and the on-and-off conversation with Delancey that isn't hostile he's not at all unhappy.

bond-spacesuit: Ingo is having a party on saturday. could I interest you in going if I asked nice?

lanceyverky: I'd like that, yeah.

bond-spacesuit: ill drop by your place beforehand then.

Lanceyverky: Stop being so needy! I'll meet you there.

At this point he's sitting behind the counter and rolling his eyes. And then he looks down and sees a big nylon sleeve taped to the edge of the counter. Curious, he reaches inside and feels something like a baseball bat. He pulls on it and a shotgun follows, and at the sight he recoils and nearly drops it, but then grabs it extra tight lest it fall and slamfire, catches his breath, makes sure he doesn't touch the trigger, and with his other hand he scrambles for the phone and calls Vormann.

*"Yeah."*

"Vormann, I got a job. At a laundromat. There's a gun at the store."

*"Well so that's an improvement on your former situation, is it not?"*

"I don't know how to use it and I don't know if I can even be holding it right now." He looks up and realizes that he's doing this all in plain view, so he puts it across his lap extra-tingerly, and thinks about its weight.

"I wasn't told anything about guns and the job pays cash."

*"Pay pretty well?"*

"Yeah. I know, it's sketchy as fuck. But I need the money to help out my parents. And it'd be good if I could start building a savings so I could go back to community college or something."

*"Well, for one you should wipe the damn gun down. What kind is it?"*

“A shotgun.”

“*Stock or no stock?*” He senses his hesitation. “*The wood part you put on your shoulder.*”

“No.”

“*What's it say on the side of the receiver? The big square-ish part with the trigger coming out of it. There should be some writing on the left-hand side.*”

He turns it over. “Uh, it says *IAC 982.*”

“*It's a Norinco, then. Not bad. A Chinese 870 copy. They probably bought it to keep scumbags at bay. Which means there's a demand for that kind of thing. Hey,*” Vormann says, “*you should come shooting with me tomorrow.*”

“I might need to learn.”

“*See, I told you so. Shotguns are easy to learn too. That's like an afternoon job.*”

“Vormann, am I going to die?”

“*Die as in get shot? Anybody's guess. You can tip the odds if you want. The rest of it is between you and fate. Just put the gun away. Don't fuck with it until you know what you're doing, okay?*”

He tells him that he will and hangs up.

At about seven he's got the shop satisfactorily clean and someone starts knocking on the back door. He doesn't really want to but he goes further back, opening another door into a little warehouse lit by a single bulb and as dirty as the front of the laundromat used to be. There's an exterior door with a speakeasy grille built into it. They keep knocking so he opens the viewport.

“What?”

“Delivery.” It's someone who looks like a longshoreman, knit cap and mustache and everything.

“It's my first day. I don't know how to take one.” He clears his nose.

“S' easy, you let me in first.” He's giving him an exasperated look with the help of all the lines in his face. “A fucking trainee.”

“Let me call my boss.”

So he does. Apparently there's a challenge and response (open the door/wash the dinosaur) and then he's supposed to give him a particular box of liquid detergent. Knox gives the question and the longshoreman-type responds in turn, and then he unloads ten boxes of something out of the back of a van. Knox gives him the box of liquid detergent or whatever and the deliveryman leaves without saying anything. No invoice or anything. He can see snow packed over the license plate on the van as it pulls out of the alley.

As he's rolling the security shutters down at 8:05 he realizes that he's probably an idiot.

#### **4.0 | oksana the kraut remover | 7 jan 2038**

*That, indeed, the Home Front is something of a fiction and a lie, designed, not too subtly, to draw them apart, to subvert love in favor of work, abstraction, required pain, bitter death.*

*-Thomas Pynchon*

“You should have invited Delancey,” Vormann says. “Chicks dig the empowerment.”

“I invited her to a party at Ingo's Saturday.”

“Who's Ingo and can I come with?”

“He graduated a few years ahead of us. And sure, I think it's an open invite.”

Vormann's place is just outside of Elkhart and into a tiny unincorporated thing called White Oak, and as soon as they get out of the North Belt the sky

opens up like it's supposed to, and as they pull off I-35 you can see the infinite, flat horizon, uniformly white and barely separate from the snow, the vast American interior. When they get through Elkhart they get up to 85 miles an hour, though briefly.

“Shit, put the beers under your seat,” he says, rolling down the window so he can throw his Old Milwaukee can out of it, “where'd all the blue boys come from?”

As Knox stuffs the three big cans under the seat he cranes his neck so he can look at all the police lights that are on the horizon. There's a tilt-rotor in the State Police livery flying real low, too. Vormann turns the radio down and keeps doing 20 over the speed limit until he can see one of the sheriff's department cruisers blocking the intersection at 140<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 56<sup>th</sup>. Knox thinks he's going to just drive around like the cop is motioning for him to do, but instead he waves and pulls up next to him. They wave and shake hands. The deputy's sunglasses shine under the clear sky.

“Vormann,” he says, “how are you? I thought you joined up.”

“I'm good, Lou, I'm doing fine. I did join. It's been about two years now. I'm on leave for a couple weeks.”

“Yeah, well you enjoy that. You like it?”

“It's boring as shit, man.”

“That's how it was when I was in, too. Unless it really kicks off again. But until then? Just sit and drink, then drink a bit more.” He looks over his shoulder and there's an ambulance rolling toward them. “So what are you up to on this fine day?”

“Headed out to my dad's with my friend Knox,” he says. “He's never shot a gun before.”

“Well that won't stand, now will it?”

“Yeah, right? But he'll be a red-blooded American in no time.” He elbows Knox and he can't help but grin. That same nervousness from the other day is coming to the surface again. “So what happened out there?”

“House fire,” he says. “Jim Collins.”

“No shit.” Vormann blows air out the side of his mouth as the ambulance passes them on the shoulder. “We didn't really talk to him much, but still-”

“Yeah, it's always a shame. I knew him a couple years back too. He kept to himself – hard guy to know. I think he was in the Army or something.” He clears his throat. “But anyway, he was really into handloading. I don't know where the fire started, but it found all his reloading supplies, because it blew the top of the damn house off. We got calls about it from Story County, even.”

As they talk Knox looks down the road a while, onto what he presumes is the farmland that the late Jim Collins owned. There's a big sign made out of four-by-fours and plywood, that says A TAX REVOLT IS COMING. The handwriting even looks unstable.

“Did he make it?”

“Nah,” he says, with a terse shake of his head, “no way. He could have been hiding under the workbench in the basement and it would have gotten him.”

So they say their goodbyes, and head down 140<sup>th</sup>, clipping along too fast again, certainly too fast once the roads go to shit, half-gravel and half-slush. He gets to his family's house, which is an old farmhouse that sits on a couple acres right by the creek on 150<sup>th</sup>.

“You can start out with my Nagant. Oksana.” They step out and the wind is howling, and his cell service is on the edge of dropping off. “You can take any North American game with it. And there's no telling how much kraut it removed in its day.”

“What?”

“How many Nazis it killed, man.”

“Oh.” He follows Vormann toward the garage, in a narrow path that's been shoveled along the line left by the snow fence. It's long and meandering but in some places the drifts are up to their shoulders. The door of the garage faces the morning sun so Vormann has to put his shoulder into it to get the ice to give. They step into darkness and he starts putting stuff into Knox's arms.

“Hold this,” he says, slotting something between metal Knox's digits, “and this, and this. And I think I've got the rest.”

Back in the light, squinting to keep from being blinded, he realizes that he's holding an olive-drab box along with a handful of curved metal stakes like what they hang flowerpots from. He shifts it all into his left hand so he can zip his coat up all the way. As he's doing so he feels the Guide folded up in his coat. Oh yeah.

“So, we've got target stands, and ammo,” Vormann says as he pulls up the collar of his greatcoat, “and some steel plates, and the nugget too. I should give you the safety briefing but you're not stupid or anything so I don't think you'll kill yourself.”

“What's the safety briefing?”

“The Four Rules. Every gun is always loaded, don't point them at anything you wouldn't shoot, keep your finger off the trigger until you're going to shoot, and know what your target is and what's behind it. Got it?”

“Uh.”

“Come on, if they got all those Soviet conscripts to do it, you can do it too. It's all pretty self-evident.” He tugs at the sling over his shoulder. “And it's an old rifle, but it'll put lead on target out to like six hundred meters pretty decent if you've got the skills and a good rest. Don't underestimate it.”

Vormann motions for him to wait, which he does, and in big clomping



steps he trudges through the snow for some distance, what looks like maybe a hundred yards, sometimes almost like he's going to sink in it, and plants the target stand with some difficulty. Once he's put up the steel he turns back at Knox and looks at him until he gives a thumbs-up, which satisfies him, and he starts to walk back. The black steel outlines a sharp target against the snow.

“Bell made you a photocopy of the Guide,” he says, holding it out, and Vormann trades him the rifle for the papers.

“So this is what they're all talking about,” he says, flipping through it. “Hey, this introduction. Did you see this? *DISTRIBUTION RESTRICTION: Approved for release to the working class by analog means only; distribution is unlimited.*”

“I'm not so sure if I want to do this,” Knox says, holding the rifle. On the receiver, amongst various unintelligible pieces of Cyrillic script is a triangle-in-arrow logo above the stamp “1941”. The stock is dinged and gouged for most of its length and smells faintly of shellac. “You said old, not almost a hundred years old.”

“They put these on technical manuals,” he says, ignoring him, “so maybe it's military? Or the author was military.”

“I don't know, it could have been anybody. No offense, but some of it is pretty advanced for a person in the military. Don't you think?”

“Heh. None taken, no.” He pauses. “So Bell seriously found this in a toilet?”

“Yeah. I'd maybe keep it on the down-low, though. When we went to see that movie there were a bunch of people from the College Left Alliance who didn't even know there was another copy, and they hadn't even told the other people in their group about it. I think Bell might have stumbled into something real important.”

“Wouldn't that be nice for a change?” He keeps turning pages. “So? You gonna shoot or what?”

“I'm not sure if I want to. When am I ever going to have to-”

“You'll have to,” he says, “when you least expect it, and way after it's a good time for you to start learning.”

“But what are the odds?”

“If you value your life, the odds don't matter.”

“And this isn't even a shotgun.”

“Look, man,” Vormann says, turning the bolt up and open with two fingers as Knox keeps holding the rifle, and then pushing five rounds into it, “you're holding nine pounds of old Soviet steel that was made for the biggest army ever assembled, fighting the most important battles in the most important war in history, and it went right from the factory to a conscript, who probably died in battle, and so I think that leaves us a legacy to uphold.”

“Heroic death?”

“Hardening the fuck up.”

So Knox pulls the rifle into his shoulder and points it downrange. The sight picture is just like in LineWar. His stance must be bad because Vormann keeps correcting him. When he's ready he closes the bolt, takes a breath, and starts putting pressure on the trigger.

### 18: Toward A New Economy

Like it or not; we may say that this is the axiomatic concept of this section of the text-

*“Like it or not, these systems affect my world, and none of them are neutral, but rather they both*

*affect and generate the world  
which stretches out before us."*

So then, where does that leave us? For one, we are wrapped in a life-sustaining cocoon of technology. But like many elements of modern society, we are beyond the point of being able to control it. (See Ch. 9 : *Butchers, Bakers, Microchip Makers*) Most similar here may be the government/state dichotomy described earlier: a system which, on one hand, we directly interface with, but which on the other hand, moves and acts of its own power and will.

Multiple Choice\*: Select the state entity from the following government or non-state entities. Discuss.

1:

a) the Highway

Commissioner

b) your county sheriff

c) your Chief of Police

d) your Sheriff

2:

a) the United Nations

b) the Secretary of

Agriculture

c) the State Comptroller

d) a Supreme Court justice

3:

a) your electric utility

b) a District Attorney

c) your local pizza

franchise

d) the School Board

4:

a) a corrections

corporation

b) the Speaker of the

House

c) the Commandant of the

Marines

d) both b) and c)

---

\* Answer key: 1: c 2: b 3: b (depending on jurisdiction) 4: d 5: sustained small-arms fire

So, then, what is to be done about this system? We find ourselves in the very odd situation of being forced to dismantle the system around us without harming the portions which are, in a certain sense, keeping us alive.

The most direct answers perhaps come from a certain publication, the OSS Simple Sabotage manual (source provided in Appendix B). It identifies a handful of principles originally designed to be effective in occupied nations, but find a new usefulness in our current situation. From the OSS Manual we may distill three principles of action, short of outright violence, which can be used in continued struggle against the current post-industrial system:

1. Inefficiency

If nothing else, a person conscious of the oppressive environment which they occupy, and willing to act to change it, should take steps to make sure they do critical tasks badly, or in a way which maximizes resource consumption and wastes time. This mindset both insulates the individual from blame and makes the enemy waste time and capital. The combined laziness of a large number of workers will deprive the corporate structure of both profit and momentum.

## 2. Accidents

In a similar manner, those who occupy more important positions or possess specialized knowledge, should use this in order to cause more elaborate delays in production or whatever possible in order to further frustrate the desires of the post-capitalist establishment. Any employee with specialized knowledge can break or destroy a system in a manner that will not be detected as intentional sabotage. Conversely, repairs should be undertaken with similar carelessness.

## 3. Non-Cooperation

Beyond all, the present establishment is only seen as legitimate because it enjoys broad participation from its subjects. However, technology has given us the means by which to operate outside this system. The free exchange of information, decentralization of the production apparatus via 3D printing, widespread piracy, theft, and the generalized attitude of rebellion, will in time force people to realize exactly how arbitrary this power structure is.

This is similar to the theses of revolutionary defeatism: neither the victory of the statist or the corporatists will benefit the worker. In order to achieve direct determination of our future, we must work toward the destruction of both polarities.

[For further information about possible future states of Western civilization, consult the penultimate Chapter 25: *What Is To Be Done After We Did the Thing We Said We'd Do And Why Bother With It Anyway?*]

Knox pulls the trigger and it feels like a sponge until the very end. He almost mistakes that for something broken until it suddenly gets firm, and he jerks a little, tenses the muscles in his right arm, and then the rifle hits him right back in the shoulder.

“Jesus,” he says, and it's only a little louder than if he'd been thinking the word instead. Vormann laughs.

“So now you know you've got to give them respect, because the gun's not going to give you any second chances and it's not going to give you the benefit of the doubt.”

Knox's heart is racing. Hands shaking, too. But not bad – like exhilaration – like the dream he had the other night, with Delancey, and the smell of her hair, and how he felt warm through his whole body. He closes his eyes.

“Hey, you good? Finish these five and I'll go get the ear protection.”

He nods.

“Try another one, then.” He pantomimes working the bolt and Knox follows without much trouble. Again it's spongy when he's rotating it open but the rest of its travel is smooth and he doesn't feel like he's about to tear a part off the rifle. He's about to fire again when his phone rings.

“Shit, what do I do?”

“Give it here.”

“The phone or the gun?”

“Rifle, not gun.” Vormann wags his fingers.

So he hands it over and looks down at his phone. Lowe. He plugs his ears one at a time so he can see which one is ringing less and puts the phone in that one.

“Lowe?”

*“Yeah, Knox – so good of you to pick up. I hope I didn't interrupt anything.”* His voice is crackly from the bad reception and obscured by the wind and his new hearing damage so he cranks the volume.

“Not particularly.”

*“So how did you find your first day?”*

“The place is pretty dirty.”

*“Now, I thought you were going to be all charged with the blue-collar spirit of America.”* Knox rolls his eyes. *“I called you to say that, for my purposes, you're about a model employee, and gee whiz would I ever be happy if you'd keep working for me.”*

“I feel so valued.”

*“Well this isn't much of a Horatio Alger world anymore. You did what you had to do and you're discrete too, so I'll keep paying until you don't or you're not.”*

“I couldn't reasonably decline you.”

*“Good. So, Monday – six hours, from noon to six. There'll be another delivery around four I want you to receive. I'll be around to pay you too.”*

“I can do that.” Vormann, who's since grown bored, works the bolt and fires another round into the field. The crack is overpowering but it decays fast, and once it's gone Knox can hear the beautiful dull resonance of AR500 steel.

“Jesus!”

*“Ahh, so you're planning on making a career out of this laundry business,*

*are you?"*

"What?"

*"I said, you're doing some extracurricular work, eh?"*

"Very funny!"

Vormann fires again and as Knox watches him eject the case he can hear the steel ringing again. He finishes the call with Lowe as fast as he can. His ears are still ringing. His hands are cold, too, and it won't be long before the wind blows all the heat out of his coat, too.

"Hey," he says to Vormann, "let me finish the mag."

"That's the spirit."

#### **4.1 | 9 jan 2038 \* \* \***

Knox manages to get on the train right at the height of the evening rush so he keeps checking his transit map while he's shoulder-to-shoulder with people in various states of professional dress but he still holds onto his computer like he wants to crush it in his hand, tries to memorize the two transfers he has to make and then forgets it while he's reciting it to himself in his head, then gets on the first bus and shoves his way off when he's got to make the second transfer, and as he's waiting he watches three full buses drive past before he starts to get a call. Bell.

"What?"

*"You coming?"* He sounds drunk already.

"Yeah, I'm waiting for the bus."

"Which bus?"

"The number forty... uh, shit-" he glances up at the signage "-the the number thirty-four."



*“Why are you taking the thirty-four?”*

“I looked it up and it said this was the shortest route.”

“Are you bringing Delancey?”

“No, she's coming on her own, she said. Should I not get on the bus or what?”

“I guess if you can find one that isn't full.”

He watches another one pull up and it almost looks approachable, but he's wandered since he took the call and as everybody else elbows him out of the way. He orients himself and starts walking. “How's the party?”

*“Music sucks. Food is badass.”*

“What, are they playing Phil Collins?”

*“Laugh all you want, you're going to be listening to it in a couple minutes.”*

Knox keeps walking down Euclid Avenue while the thirty-four keeps passing him and discharging passengers, and by the time he gets into Oak Park it goes not-so-professional in a neat gradient: first the mid-level managers looking bothered, then senior employees, some of whom are already brimming with false confidence and throwing brown paper bags into the garbage cans. And he sees Ingo's building through a wave of low-ranking wage slaves, who look just about ready to roll over dead. The building looks about the same. According to Bell's forwarded version of the mass email Ingo sent out the intercom doesn't work and so you're supposed to just walk up and bang on the door, which he does, and some fashionably emaciated woman wearing too much mascara opens it up, nods at him, and he walks in.

“Knox!” comes Bell's voice from somewhere unseen, a slurring phantasm.

“I fucking told you!”

The music is ambient kitty-core, and it ranges from humorously kitschy to intolerable. He's got a couple albums that he likes, though he's never told anyone. Whoever is playing at the moment is using a cat purring to match a reticulated bassline, and when the mascaraed woman turns her gaze he runs the sound-identification program on his phone. *The Hidden Moderns* by Jock Lacan. He makes a note to go download it when he gets the chance.

As he steps out of the foyer he sees Bell and Imogen sitting together in a love seat amongst another ten or fifteen people. He looks at the cuffs of his jacket and suddenly they seem too frayed to look casual. He goes to meet Bell before anybody else he doesn't know can bother him.

“This music isn't so bad,” he says to the two of them. Imogen, with crooked nose, looks at him like she's considering doing violence to someone. “At least, I can ignore it.”

“It's not ignoring it or not,” she says, “it's the thought that there's people out there who like it.”

“They could be freestyling over it,” he says, trying not to look too knowledgeable, “like that one guy, uh, what's his name? OG-107.”

OG-107, former Georgia National Guard truck driver, is a notable artist mostly because he got his left arm blown off in the war from blue-on-blue – hence the name – so he works the turntable with the prosthetic arm and the synthesizer with his real one.

“They already had cat-rap a couple times. It's all shit,” Bell says, “and it's proof that Western culture is shit.”

“Does it say that somewhere in the guide?” Knox says, grinning.

“All I'm saying is that it doesn't compare to Beethoven, man. Or even Muse.”

“Which is why you were the most popular kid in school, right?” Imogen

groans toward the ceiling and drains some clear liquor he can't identify. "Knox, he's a fucking candy-ass. Just ignore it. It's a good party."

Knox is following her eyes, and it strikes him that the apartment is pretty nice: shabby building and vaguely threatening neighborhood, but the paint on the walls is new and all earth-tones, matched well, with enough bric-a-brac scattered around to make it look like a home instead of a house. If it's even possible for an apartment to be such a thing.

"Who's coming, anyway?" he asks Bell.

"Moo should be around somewhere. She rode her bike here but I don't know where she went. Probably eating, you know?" He looks at him. "Wasn't Vormann going to come with you?"

"I don't know, I told him about it but he never showed up."

"Well, have a beer – enjoy yourself, man."

So he does. He turns around and when he comes back there's some light-haired guy in black turtleneck pouring Bell another drink that he could obviously do without. Like the mascaraed woman he looks absurdly trendy without really trying.

"Thanks, man," Bell says. "This is Knox. Friend of mine."

"Oh." The guy turns to Knox and they shake hands. They both know they swim in different oceans but whatever. "Good to meet you. You're not in Ingo's regular circle, are you?"

"No. I went to high school with him and haven't seen him since. How does he even afford this?"

"Okay job, splitting the rent with his boyfriend, living below his means."

"So that's the trick."

"More or less. And just being thrifty in general." Bell hands Knox a shot of the clear liquor as the guy wades back into the crowd, obliterating himself in

the quantum field of hip. “You could have a roommate too – doesn't have to be a boyfriend.”

“Lucky for me.”

On the coffee table there is ham salad and crackers – well, tasting it it's probably Spam salad it's so salty – and maybe forty dollars' worth of cheese pizza from Little Caesar's, two cases of Old Style and a liter of unlabeled clear liquor. He remembers the first line he read from the Guide:

*The wages of retail are death.*

“Oh,” Bell says, “Moo's here if you want to talk to her. I think she went with Ingo and a few other people to the roof.”

So Knox takes a beer and a slice of pizza from what there is left, leaves the apartment and goes upstairs and out the fire door at roof level. There are around eight people, all with their backs to him as they look off the side. When the wind lets up he can smell cigarette smoke. The door closes behind him loud and some of them turn toward him. When he sees Ingo he remembers him finally – tall, jockish, usually with an empty smile that's a little bovine. But he is the one with the apartment.

“Knox, right?” he says, as they shake hands, his voice languid like he's from California. “I remember you. You did cross-country in high school, right? And rolled with some of the nerds?”

“Yeah, that's me.” In all of his glory. He looks at some of the other people who are smoking – Moo and then six slender women who all sort of look the same in the low light.

“Well, it's good to see you again; I hope you've been doing well.” He doesn't wait for a reply. “We came up here because we heard gunfire. You know. More than normal.”

“*Ooooh, in the ghettooooo,*” someone sings.

“They had a big power failure, you heard about that?”

“No, when?”

“What? It was like today around noon.”

“Ah. Was gaming.”

“It’ll rot your brain, man. And desensitize you to violence.”

“Hey, here goes some more,” he hears Moo say, and in the corner of his eye he sees flashes. They all turn to the edge of the building again. And there are – flashes near the interstate over in what must be Highland Park, puffing all raggedy around the edges and then leaving black spots in their vision like flashbulbs. Knox flinches as he sees each one.

“The wind turbines way out east,” Ingo remarks to nobody in particular, “over near Altoona, they iced real bad and then the wind picked up last night. They said a lot of them broke blades off, stripped their driveshafts. So rolling blackouts it is.”

“Only in the North Belt, though?”

“Well they’re not going to cut off downtown. Or the West.” He shifts. “It might hit us tonight. Who knows.”

“How long is it going to do that for?”

“They don’t know. Until they get off their asses and fix it.”

“You know,” Moo says, “they should just demo all those projects and solve the problem for good. This is stupid.”

“Wait, what?” Knox says.

“It’s a quagmire. You put the buildings up and then you have to start with the dole too, and subsidized transit, and soon enough it’s subsidized everything, and they’re such magnets for crime and human garbage of every variety that you get this.” More gunfire. “Bulldoze it.”

“That’s easy to say when you don’t live there.”

“They don't live in it, they're trapped in it. Whatever they make they can't invest in themselves or their future. So the state has to give more and more, which makes them even more dependent on the state. It's disgusting and exploitative. They're trading handouts for votes. Give them some dignity instead.”

Nobody feels comfortable responding. Moo looks defiant, and takes a flask from the inner pocket of her coat and starts to drink.

“It's a shell game, politics,” she goes on. “And somebody has to say it. And if I didn't care about all those people in Section 8 housing who are trapped there I wouldn't be so forward about it.”

Knox doesn't bother engaging with her. For a while they go back to watching and smoking. Moo passes the flask around and it's full of brandy. The women on the other side of Ingo, all holding their cigarettes the same way, are watching engrossed. He can see police lights on the ground too, but they stay some distance away from the gunfire.

“Oh holy shit,” Moo says, pointing upward. Everybody follows her finger. It's the faintest, flickering light. “A drone.”

“I thought you couldn't see them,” one of the girls says.

“Well, it's moving slow like a drone. And it's real high, because it's still catching the light from the sun.” She takes the flask from Knox. “So there it is. Police state with all the trimmings.”

“At least they don't track us.” Knox watches her face contort and then puts his hand out for the flask. She gives it back to him. “Or so they say.”

Moo grunts and takes her phone out.

“Oh, come on. Yeah. I get it.” He feels his vibrate. “Come on, seriously.”

“Read it.”

libertard: Sure they don't.

```
[user=<libertard> has requested to
initiate a file transfer at 2048 GMT-6.
<bastiat_thelaw.pdf | 791.8 KB> Accept y/
n?]
```

“What's this?”

“A treatise.” She looks at him, and maybe it's because he wasn't really paying attention last time, but her face is more sympathetic than he remembers, its lines charcoaled with shadows, its cheekbones soft.

“I've got enough of those for right now but I can put it on the heap if you really want.” So he accepts it, holding the phone at her just so she can see him doing it.

“It'll change you for the better. Promise.”

He ends up arguing with Moo about public housing for a while longer, but by the fifth time the flask goes past he doesn't really care. Everybody crushes out their cigarettes and he goes back downstairs. Imogen is sitting in the same spot on the love seat.

“Where's Bell?” he asks.

“Puking.” She grunts. “I'll be next.”

He got enough brandy to feel warm and a little bit free, and it's starting to come through now that he's inside again and his cheeks are rosing. There's one last slice of pizza sitting out in the open, so he eats it.

“Still no Delancey either?”

“Uh. Don't remember. I saw her around but it's been a while.” She closes her eyes for a little longer than a blink. He looks over and sees that all the alcohol is gone.

“I saw her.” He turns his head and it's the hip guy from before. “end of the hallway and around the corner.”

“I thought she left,” Imogen says, up again. “Pretty sure she might have gone on a beer run or something.”

“No, she's definitely still there.”

He points out the way and Knox ambles down the hall. He turns the corner. He seizes up and the cold rises up through him again.

It is Delancey, but her and someone he's never met before, and they're all over each other, her mouth on his neck and his fingers under the elastic of her nylons, and both of them breathing together like one organism, and.

And. He moves forward like to take a step or something and what comes forward is a wave of vomit. They turn with a start but he's most of the way down the hallway by then. On the love seat Imogen is acting like she's asleep.

He stumbles down the stairs with his adrenal response cranked up all the way again and pushes past three people who are smoking in front of the building. They stare at him and he stares back, trying to get one of them to admit it's their fault. The bus comes around the corner before it gets serious. As he takes off into the night he can't stop thinking of what a fuckup he is.

### 4.3 \* \* \*

“You can't smoke in here.”

Vormann looks at Armitage and blinks. “I blew off a party for this, I'm going to smoke.”

“That doesn't change the facts. Can't do it.”

“Why?” He points across the room with the cherry. “And who are the ladies?”



“Because it's bad for you.”

“That's not a reason.” They're sitting in the lounge in the Fine Arts Center, near the amphitheater where the movie was the other night but a bit down the hallway and toward the adjunct lounges, in the dim, sharp light of the vending machines, and Vormann is ashing his cigarette in a Douglas Fir. “Who are the girls?”

“Women.”

“Women. Who?”

“Stop smoking, then.”

“I'll just be a minute.” He holds the stub of his Red up for Armitage to see. “So who are they? They look like they know each other. Half of them are wearing bandannas.”

“It's the Waddle.”

Vormann looks at him and puts his light out in the plant.

“The WDAL. Women's Democratic Action League.”

“The waddle. What does that even mean?”

“They're another group under the whole College Left Alliance umbrella.” He looks up in recollection. “Uh, they're a women's activism group, fighting economic and social inequity, racism, and working together with women globally to promote a nonviolent, egalitarian society. Or that's what their fliers say.”

“I don't think they'd like me.”

“It'd help if you didn't call them the Waddle. For one.” Armitage walks over to the vending machine, feeds it five dollars, and gets a Coke. “So you really want to be here?”

“Yeah, well – yeah, I think. I was interested after the last one.” Armitage points out some handbills on the table next to him and he picks one up.

THE COLLEGE LEFT ALLIANCE PRESENTS

Corporate Feudalism in the Pre-Post Scarcity Economy:

A Dialectic

*The CLA and sister organization WDAL present a round-table discussion on the current state of affairs for the global working person, and how exploitative power structures have persisted despite the failure of globalism in the wake of the 2016 European financial collapse, and shrinking federal government authority in the wake of the American currency crisis. How must leftist and Marxist ideology adapt to the new power dynamic, and what elements of class struggle - i.e. civil disobedience, radical education, etc., will find new relevance in our new environment?*

“Is everyone here an anarchist like you?” Vormann asks.

“I’m not an anarchist, I’m a left-libertarian.”

“Oh. What’s the difference?”

“I want a night-watchman state that only legislates the behavior of corporations and other large bodies. Individuals should be free to do as they like so long as they’re not hurting anybody.”

“So are they going to talk about revolutions?”

“Yeah, that’s all they talk about.” Armitage drinks his soda and the Waddle on the other side of the room starts to file into the auditorium. A few minutes later Mulholland and Frost walk past, Frost in the same dumpy suit that Vormann never saw, but they wave at Armitage and he waves back.

“So do they have a date scheduled or something? Are they just ironing out

the details?”

“Come on, there's a million ways to change society.” He sits back down. In the light of the vending machine all the piercings make it look like his face is covered in lens flares. “You've got to figure out what you want and how to get there, work it out with everyone, then adjust accordingly once the power-elite starts oppressing you. It's not as simple as just blowing stuff up.”

“But that's what they did in the movie. I looked it up too. They blew up a lot of stuff.”

“Revolutions are more complicated than that. It's not just the act. Revolution is a process. And unless you can sustain it all the way throughout, it'll fail. You'll end up with some guy whose whole torso is made of medals he made for himself, and they'll be lining up different class enemies every day.”

“So what do you suggest?”

“You should go and listen to them. Agree with it or not, the knowledge is good to have.”

Someone at the at the entrance to the amphitheater is looking around to make sure there's nobody left. The two of them get up and file in before they close the doors behind them.

## 2: You Shall Know Our Trajectory!

We were there.

Now you are here.

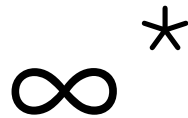
And before long-?

It seems likely that none of us can predict our future with mathematical precision, but we may also find that there is no need for such exactitude, particularly when it comes to plotting the general

course of human affairs.

So, then - to see the future, we must first know our past. Hellenistic arts, philosophy, and literature. Roman technics and administration. Persian mathematics. The Christian god-as-watchmaker. Ever wonder why it was the West that split the atom? And charted the poles, and walked the Moon, and-

And see? It lies within you. And me, too. The grand symbol of the West:



Even now, in late-stage global capitalism, we, its serfs and servants, still believe in the symbol. Its power, to date, has lasted one millennium and looks perfectly able to continue on with us, until the end.

- The American Dream (even if you don't believe in it): with hard work and virtue, I can go anywhere, achieve anything.
- Endless-growth economic theory: Demand will always rise. Markets and resources will be able to be exploited indefinitely.
- Science-as-savior: All current and future problems can and will be solved by

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\* See Spengler, Oswald, Appendix B: Supplemental Media Consumption

technological development not only adequately, but within the timeframe that we need it to.

**But what if it is too late?**

What if, from the beginning, it was too late? Initially it seems that no system can last forever, social systems certainly included. It is at least equally likely that this is a civilization, making a finite journey through time and space. Perhaps it's in fact more likely: none of the civilizations of antiquity remain with us today, and the world's only current rival, Magian Arabic civilization, is only slightly older than ours, and finds itself increasingly marginalized.

This may all be baseless. Hopefully it is.

But in any case, the idea must be entertained. The experiment must be tried and the results must be posted.

Assignment 1: Anti-milieu control

(completion grade only)

The next time you encounter someone who assumes that technology will save the West (e.g. a transhumanist) or that a more just, prosperous, and stable economic system will be developed (e.g. a neoliberal) or that the world can continue forever under the current system, with only minor refinements (e.g. Francis Fukuyama), wait for a pause in

the conversation and ask only the following question:

*What if it doesn't/can't/won't?*

How does this questioning of faith affect the conversation, and the speaker's attitude toward you? Do they entertain the notion, or give a dogmatic re-assertion of thought-terminating clichés? ("That's impossible." "It's always happened before." "Science has come so far in the last x years!")

Write a journal entry detailing the conversation and its speaker's reaction (or not!) to your very simple inquiry.

**(1-2 pages, double-spaced.)**

You may find we are rather similar to Faust, as a civilization. Even the knowledge of our inevitable failure will not deter us.

But sooner or later, Mephistopheles will come round...

Vormann looks up from the Guide. They're still talking about dialectics and commodity fetishism and other things. He checks his watch. It's been twenty minutes. There are people getting up for something and he mouths *I need to smoke* to Armitage, who gives a pained-looking nod. Originally the plan was to finish the light while walking to his car and get the hell out, but the wind has picked up, and he leans against the building to keep out of the wind, using his phone to start his car, and when he's done putting in the code he looks up and there's one of the women with the red bandannas standing nearby. She's smoking

and looks similarly disinterested.

“Well that was disappointing,” he says, raising his voice through the wind.

“How's that?”

“It's just theory on theory, so they don't have to actually make a stand on anything. I want stuff to do. They could go on forever if they wanted to.”

“Have we met?” She steps in closer.

“Oh, so you were thinking the same thing?” He switches his cigarette to his left hand and shakes hers. “Vormann.”

“Shelby. You're in the CLA?”

“No, just an interested visitor.”

“So you didn't like it?”

“I wouldn't say I hated it. But it's almost like they don't want to do anything. They're just talking to postpone it as long as they want. I came here because I thought they were actually going to be – you know, men of action. That kind of stuff.”

“It's just your first time here and you're looking to go and throw the barricades up?”

“How long have you been going for?”

“Well, only about two months. With some friends. But still. It's more complicated than you might think. It's an entire country you're talking about.”

“I've got just the thing for that,” he says, and reaches into his peacoat with his free hand. She sees the Guide there, folded on itself three times and looking like a small novel. “Let the academics do what they're trained to do, and I'll do what I'm trained to do.”

He's holding it out and she puts her hand on the other end, gives it a tug. He holds fast.

“What is it you're trained to do?”

He gestures at his peacoat. “They taught me how to shoot a rifle, and now I'm figuring out why to shoot the rifle.”

“Let me have a look.”

“You've only been going for two months.”

“What, do you think I'm going to hurt myself thinking too hard?”

“It's my only copy.”

“Then I'll read it right here.” She throws her cigarette into the wind and looks at him. Her eyes are brown and shine like the marbles he remembers from his childhood.

“I've got a car that's warming up.” He remembers to blink.

“And I've got a restaurant. On Fifth Street, in Valley Junction.”

Vormann lets go. They start to walk.

#### **4.4 | 11 jan 2038 \* \* \***

When Knox rolls out of bed he looks at his computer and there's a couple funny pictures that Bell's forwarded to him, a day-old game invite from Moo to join the logistics squad she leads in LineWar, and nothing from Delancey. He folds his bed up and as he's rubbing the sleep out of his eyes he thinks about writing her and sort of breaching the subject of the romantic tension that he thought was mutual, but it's obvious to him that there's no way to actually say that, so he gives up any hope of it. Not that he feels good about it. Once he's got some clean clothes put together he grabs the whiskey from under his desk where he left it last night and takes a nip to focus himself.

“Knox,” his mother calls as he's walking toward the shower with his clothes, “your friend was in the news yesterday.”

“Hmm?” He leans in. She's got her computer scaled up to the monitor on



the wall and is scrolling through videos from the local newsfeed.

“There it is,” she says. “Sit down and watch this. It’s only three minutes.”

So he does. It starts with that voice of authority like they all do.

*“Garton West, the North Belt – a hotbed of social and economic strife, erupted this weekend into violence upon the Des Moines Power Authority’s announcement that serious damage to their Altoona wind generating plant would force the area into rolling blackouts for the foreseeable future.”* There’s assorted footage taken from people’s microcomputers, of people holding baseball bats and golf clubs and smashing cars in the streets. Some people jumping on police cruisers just for the sake of tradition. Then the screen cuts to black.

*“And then, at around four-thirty Monday morning-”* There’s a view of the North Belt sort of like what he had from the roof of Ingo’s building. Then some huge fireball down by the freeway, and – wait for it – then the shockwave hits the amateur cameraman and he shouts some profanity. *“-A huge explosion at the site of the Sinclair station on Hull Avenue lights up the night sky.”*

Flash cut to someone with a real camera because everyone’s faces are lit bright as day, and as he mumbles something about getting woken up they cut to Bell, of all people, with his hair messed up and a hickey on his neck and his eyes bloodshot. Knox starts paying attention.

*“Yeah,”* he says, with Imogen wandering around in the back with her winter coat open to show a wrinkled red blouse, *“me and my girlfriend saw it, we were in the diner over here and then all the windows blew out. There was this roar and then a huge explosion, like a bomb going off. We thought it was the Chinese or something. Our ears were ringing.”*

Then a cut to the crater where just the foundation of the service station is recognizable, and it’s big enough that it’s even destroyed most of the roads on the side, and people are standing around the edges pitching rocks in or something.

*“Investigators have stated that all signs indicate that the explosion was caused by an uncontrolled fire burning in the service station during the rioting last night, which ignited gasoline vapors and caused what's known to arson investigators as a fuel-air explosion. Despite continued civil disorder in the neighborhood, police say they are unable to completely contain the criminal activity because of the combined effects of the power outages and the natural disaster. Chief Meyer of the Des Moines Metro PD had this to say:”*

Another cut to the police chief and his grey handlebar mustache standing behind a podium in full dress uniform.

*“Ah, we've seen, ahh, some pretty serious rioting in the area, that's escalated dramatically over the weekend. We've been acting in full cooperation with the National Guard and Mississippi River Cooperative to help bring the situation under control, and to, ah, bring the responsible parties to justice. We're currently advising residents to be extra alert, and not to answer their door for anyone who they don't know or refuses to identify themselves.”*

Someone in the audience asks about police response times. He blinks.

*“The last thing we want is an officer to have to identify who's the criminal in a situation. Getting involved is extremely dangerous. And, ah, you stand the risk of escalating a bad situation into a tragic one. We're taking all the appropriate steps to restore order.”*

It cuts to the reporter, a high-cheeked Hispanic woman – Judy something – standing on the edge of the crater, but his mom closes out the video.

“Did you talk to Bell?”

“No, not since the party.”

“Have you met his girlfriend? What's she like?”

“I dunno. She's all right.”

At the laundromat it's finally clean enough in the front, so he starts working behind the counter. In the process of going through a pile of junk he finds a coffee machine and half a can of grounds from when things were better. He figures he might as well use it, so once he's just sitting around and waiting for the delivery he has a cup of coffee to nurse, too. While he's sitting there, idly going over the row of washers with some metal polish, and when he turns around someone in a hooded sweatshirt is coming through the door and he backs up real fast, involuntarily takes a fighting stance. Then the sun catches the metal in the guy's face. Armitage.

“Jesus, you look like a stick-up man.”

“Do I seriously?” he says, pulling the hood off. If it wasn't for the piercings and ultra-goth haircut he'd look perfectly harmless. He doesn't have the facial structure for it.

“Well you freaked me out.” He takes a deep breath. “How'd you find me here?”

“Vormann told me. Have you talked to him recently?” He sits down on the folding table in the corner. Knox's instinct is to tell him to use a chair since he just cleaned it the other day, but he's never seen anybody so much as look at the shop anyway, so nobody's going to notice but him. He holds his tongue.

“He was supposed to go to a party with me the other day and he didn't show up.”

“Because he was with me. We were at Drake, at this lecture.”

“So it seems like you know better than I do.”

“It's not about that,” he says, “I've heard a couple people now saying that he's got this manifesto or something, and it's all secret. Is it true?”

“If I told you, it wouldn't-”

“Come on, don't give me that. I know you're pretty apathetic about

politics. But from what I've heard it sounds awesome. So why can't you let me in on it? You've got a microcomputer, right? Just give me a copy, could you?"

"It's not my decision," Knox says, "it says right on the front of it. Analog only."

"What do you care?"

"Well I'm not going to scan each page."

"But you've at least got a copy, right? It is a real thing?"

"No, I gave it to Vormann." He walks back behind the counter and fills his cup again. "What do you care anyway? There's all the political essays you could ever want out there in the world."

"I don't know, I just feel something." He looks at him. Usually Armitage has a way of looking exceptionally alienating, but something has gotten to him, it seems, and it's surprising how empathetic he's making himself. "You get the sensation that it's history happening. Right?"

"I don't – ah," he says, scratching his head and rubbing his eyes. "Wait, hold on. You went to school with Lance, right?"

"Yeah, I did."

"If you tell me where she usually hangs out I'll talk to Vormann and see if he won't photocopy it for you. All right?"

"Weekends she's usually around Riverfront Park because there's a hackerspace off Walnut Street. Weekdays, if she's not gigging she's at the library on Grand. Usually working remote."

Oh yeah. The library she was telling him to go to. "Okay, thanks. Let me see what Vormann says."

bond-spacesuit: hey man somethings gotten  
armitage all crazy about the guide

[13:37 GMT -6] >you didnt talk it up to him or something, did you?  
cheekibreeki: No, I kinda mentioned it a few times but I didn't say it was like another anarchist's cokbook.  
bond-spacesuit: well he wants you to make a copy for him if you can.  
cheekibreeki: I guess. After all it says you can make as many copies as you want.  
bond-spacesuit: all right. He doesn't weird you out?  
cheekibreeki: Not particularly. Why's that?  
bond-spacesuit: I dont know, he just seems a bit too eager.  
cheekibreeki: Eager is good, I think. Tell him I'll make a copy when I can. You doing good man?  
bond-spacesuit: well enough. I'm going to talk to delancey soon.  
cheekibreeki: Well good luck with that, she's tough.  
bond-spacesuit: thanks

So he tells Armitage the news and he grins like mad, thanks him in the most ornate language he can manage, and almost flies out of the shop. From then it's another long stretch of sitting around and cleaning things that nobody is going to see before there's a knock at the door, and again it's the delivery guy in the striped shirt, hauling a fifty-five gallon drum on a hand cart. They acknowledge each other, though just barely, he leaves the drum in a corner where it seems to belong, and then he leaves. No words, which is good, and no description of the

cargo, which is also good. Even the fire diamond stamped on the side says that it's safe, which helps him put it out of mind.

When the time six o'clock comes around and he's just put the coffee down the drain and he's locking the shutter, he hears a motor behind him. He turns to see Lowe parking the Mahindra in front of the store. Again he finds himself ready to run or to shit himself.

“Uh, yes?”

“Everything went well with the shipment today, I trust?”

“Yeah, yeah.” He pulls the key out of the lock. “Did you need to get in?”

“No, just making sure everything is all right.” He's wearing a coat and tie and while Knox stands around shifting his eyes uncomfortably he takes out his billfold and starts counting money.

“Are you going to start putting out advertising for the laundromat or am I just burning my fingerprints off for the character development?”

He leans over and looks through the glass as he walks past he gives Knox the money. “Well, it is a pretty nice looking laundromat now.”

“Those machines belong in a museum, you know.”

“Have you ever heard about people who collect those things?” He hands Knox the money. “I saw it on the Net once. Strange people, pulling old washers out of junkyards and abandoned houses, restoring them and lining them all up in their garages. Never saw the appeal, really.”

“So I'm doing okay, then?”

“Yeah. You're working your cushy laundromat job and getting paid cash. You've got nothing to complain about.” He plucks a Hongtashan from his cigarette case and lights up. “You ever been to Valley Junction before?”

“I'm not waiting on a trust fund to get disbursed if that's what you mean.”

“There's a bar there that I frequent. Wondering if you'd like to come with.”

“Payday or not, I can't afford it.” Hands in his pockets, he rubs his first fingers and thumb together and feels the bills slide. But still.

“I'll buy you a drink. Christ.”

“I think I should tell a grown-up.” Lowe rolls his eyes at that. Why is he sticking on the point? “I'm was going to see a friend tonight. But I'll have a beer if you're paying.”

“Fine, just don't change your mind on the way, okay?” Lowe walks around to the driver's side, and they head off down I-235.

#### 4.5 \* \* \*

Valley Junction isn't the kind of place where the lights go out.

Neither is all of West Des Moines, for that matter, but the city has always sat out on his mind's periphery. And the city itself, like his idea of it, has stayed nose-scrunchingly separate from Des Moines proper. Knox remembers going there one day with his fourth-grade class to see the Jordan House Museum, and even then he knew that he was in some place he didn't wholly belong, as natural as if he was walking around without shoes. So as Lowe drives Knox looks at the ultra-modern apartment towers, the Acuras and Mercedes poking out of parking garages, the kids his age headed out for the bars and the smoking lounges in their prairie-mod outfits.

“This is the place,” Lowe says, parking the car of 5<sup>th</sup> Street, and then he leads them to an old two-story made out of sandstone called Hachikō & Argos, with two big copper dog statues on either side of the door. Inside it's lit low-key, with mahogany, and has some presence that he can detect just enough to be alienated by. The maître d' just nods at him as they walk past and into a back room. Knox looks behind him and some people are staring. He forgot to kick the

snow out of his boots, for one.

“Is he the one, Lowe?” comes a voice. Knox comes all the way into the room and there's a guy sitting at a round table wearing stereotypical robber-baron attire: pinstriped three-piece suit with watch chain, hair with a bunch of pomade in it that makes the occasional grey hair glow silver, and smoking a cigar while the steak in front of him is getting cold. “I should certainly hope so.”

“His name is Knox.”

“Knox, eh?” He shifts his weight forward and ashes the cigar over his right shoulder, because on the left there is a woman, presumably his wife, stoic and tall, her hair red and orderly from the flat iron, in a very conservative dress, concerning herself with her own steak. When she looks down the light catches her eyes and Knox can see crow's feet fill in with shadow. He'd put them both in their early fifties, maybe. “Have a seat. Get him something to drink. You like steak, Knox?”

“Yeah,” he says. Holy shit. Just like the movies. They do exist. What do they like, what do they like, what the hell am I supposed to say? He can't remember but it's always kind of this restrained cockiness even though it's seriously scary as fuck. Okay. Deep breaths now. What to say? He collects himself, looks at the guy's wife's cleavage while she's chewing and staring into the middle distance. “Rare.”

“Good.” He points at a lackey in the restaurant uniform who's poked his head in. “Porterhouse for Knox here. And a round of rye for everyone.”

Lowe sits down with them and lights up. The guy reaches into his coat and takes a cigar, clips it, and offers it across the table to Knox.

“Do you smoke?”

“I guess I do now.” He takes the cigar and they shake hands.

“Sondergaard,” he says, offering Knox a lit match. “And my wife, Adrie.”



I'm a partner of your employer.”

“Not equal partners, it doesn't look like.” He says it, puffs the cigar, and Sondergaard laughs.

“Don't get too comfortable.” The waitstaff sets drinks around the table and then disappears again. Over the sound of flatware clinking in the main room he can hear a Bach cantata. “I didn't make my fortunes giving steaks to scrappy street kids. I'm here for one thing in particular.”

Oh, shit. He drinks some of his whiskey. “And that is?”

“Your secret playbook.”

He stops. Well, fuck. He clears his nose once, then twice, then three times. After a long pause he speaks. “What are you talking about?”

“The one that you and your friends have been passing around like a cheerleader.”

Beside him Adrie looks indignant. She furrows her brow and looks in a little bit. The light over her right eye changes just enough that Knox can see copper glittering against her pupil. So she's got an augmented-reality interface. But no obvious facial or digital tics like she's doing interface through that, so – nanomachine, then? Or a brainstem implant? Hard to say. With this much money it could be anything.

“You seem to know more about it than I do. I'm not the most sociable type. I work in a laundromat and play videogames.”

“I can see why you hired this guy,” he says to Lowe. “Look, Knox, I've got no beef with you and I'm not going to put you in harm's way. But I know that you know about this particular document and I, as a respectable businessman and pillar of the community, want to know what you know.”

“Such as.”

“How you got it. From who. What they told you.”

“It was inside a toilet.”

“In a toilet.” The waitstaff comes back and slides the steak in front of Knox. It is still steaming, with scalloped potatoes and steamed carrots on the side. His mouth waters. “Go ahead, eat. I see you.”

So he does.

“I’m not lying.” He cuts out a chunk near the bottom and puts it in his mouth. If he’s the obvious pleb he might as well act like it. It could be worse. He’s not pouring A1 on the damn thing. “My friend works at a shoe store and he found it in a toilet cistern.”

“Which store?”

“The Golden Retriever in Greenwood Park.”

“Nobody gave it to him. Nobody contacted him after he got it?”

“That’s about it, yeah.” He tries the potatoes. There’s bits of ham in them and lots of rosemary. Deep breaths now. Stay focused.

“It’s not every day that things like that fall into your lap.”

“My friend is weird like that.” The cigar is sitting on the edge of the ashtray in front of him so he crushes it out to stop it from burning down. He wonders how Mister Sondergaard does it.

“And you don’t have a copy.”

“No interest. Until now I thought it was a curiosity.” He watches Adrie look him over as he sits there and cuts another big piece of steak for himself. She’s probably doing all number of things. The augmented-reality interfaces can do whatever you want, more or less. So she’s probably checking his heart rate, his respiration, any signs of perspiration, all that. Not good. “Or stupid dangerous and I like to keep out of anything like that.”

“Smart kid,” he says, looking over toward Lowe. “You hear him? If only you’d had that kind of sense.”

“Don't blame me,” Lowe says, idly turning the whiskey around in his glass, “I was disadvantaged as a youth and had no other choice.”

They drink for a while. Knox is eating the porterhouse like they're going to take it away from him. Sondergaard is looking down a little, smoking idly, like he's lost in thought. Occasionally his gaze crosses his wife's. They're collaborating, maybe. Could be through near-field. Or he's got a cochlear implant. Again, who knows. He slips his cigar into the inner pocket of his jacket when nobody is paying attention. When the liquor is gone and he's breathing out pepper and maple, Sondergaard looks up again.

“Knox.”

“Yeah.”

“There's some women at the bar out there who you'd do well to court and marry. Go introduce yourself to some of them. They'll appreciate your purity and simplicity.”

“I've still got a job, right?” He shoves a bunch of potatoes in his mouth.

“Of course. Now get.”

Outside maybe the crowd has changed, or he's not looking poor enough. There's a woman about his age, with curly blonde hair and an outfit like Laura Ignalls Wilder but all ninety-degree angles, a devious-looking brunette in shirtsleeves and gaiters, but from them and everybody down the bar it's just a row of indifference and dodged gazes, and he knows enough to get out, which is where he runs into Moo, still bundled up in her ECWCS gear. They both stop and share a confused look.

“You again?” he says. “What are you doing here?”

“I told you, my grandparents run an antique business and I do deliveries for them.”

“It's late for a delivery.”

“Well, they paid extra for same-day, so here I am.” The maître d' produces the restaurant's datacard and holds it up to the back of Moo's microcomputer. It lights up a blue LED and she hands him a parcel wrapped in brown paper. “I should ask why you're here.”

“Laundromat business.”

She snorts and they step out of the restaurant together. The average age on the sidewalk looks to be about 30 and their clothing looks so bulky and unfashionable in comparison that they look like survivalists. Moo heads for her Super Cub and he follows.

“There's no laundry business in that back room. I know that guy.” She tosses her hair once before pulling a balaclava over her face, then cinches up the hood of her parka. “Oberguard or something.”

“Sondergaard.”

“Yeah.” She kicks the engine over and lets it idle. “That guy runs some regional pharmaceutical supplier. Which is all nice and good but I've heard enough talk in there to make me think twice about letting him see my face.”

“Well, he's seen mine. And his JC Denton wife.”

“I'm just saying, be careful. You're a good guy. Not the type to get mixed up with him.” She takes a breath. “You want to hang out? You look stressed.”

“I got paid today. My parents need the money.”

“I can give you a ride, then.” She puts on a pair of goggles and gets on the bike. “Come on.”

“Am I going to fit?”

“I'll suck in my gut, shit.”

“I was talking about the seat.”

“Oh. Well, still.”

So he gets on, tries to feel for her hips and ends up just holding on as best he can. She doesn't put them on the freeway but the speed along with his proximity to the pavement is scary enough that he finds himself incapable of doing much more than staring at her neck. His skull is freezing cold.

“It won't be long,” she shouts, “just tough it out.”

“It's fucking freezing.”

“You get used to it. Did you read that .pdf I gave you?”

“Like, half of it.”

“You really should finish it, it's fast. But you know now. Liberty. That's what they should be talking about. All your crazy statist friends.”

“But what if it's not that simple?”

“Local cooperative associations will show up,” she says, “sort of like a confederation. Everything done around voluntary participation. It'd have to be better than this.”

From Grand Avenue they make the left onto 42<sup>nd</sup> and head under the freeway overpass. When Moo turns he can see the salt crystals on the pavement going by in a blur and he wants to throw up again. He pulls into her tighter and he still can't feel her hipbones.

“So what do your parents do?” he ask-shouts, just to make conversation.

“Pushing daisies, mostly,” she says.

“I'm sorry, I didn't know.”

“It's okay. They died when I was just six. Gas explosion. I was at school.” She turns onto Cottage Grove. “I've lived with my grandparents since. They're down near Norwalk.”

“Hey,” she says, as he's walking up the iced driveway, “we should hang out. If you ever want to get out of the city.”

“Sometime soon, yeah.” His intuition is telling him to knock it off.

“Maybe some LineWar tonight?”

“Sure. I'm always on the GoAT server if you know it.”

He nods. She waves back and takes off. Inside it is dark and his parents are asleep. The house is maybe just above freezing. He can still see his breath. He puts his computer on the monitor on his desk and has a look. Still nothing from Delancey and no desire on his part to do anything to change that. Before he sits down he leaves his paycheck on the edge of the kitchen table sans fifty dollars for himself, takes a glass from the kitchen and some ice, and pours himself some bourbon.

#### 4.6 \* \* \*

```
Gamers of Anarchy & Terror Server
NO SMOKEPAM
DON'T WASTE ASSETS
HACK = BAN
300% respawn games 24/7, all maps, map + cmdr by
popular vote.
Regulars msg DIONYSIUS for clan membership. All
welcome
Use teamwork always and TEAR IT UP!!
```

A few drinks and some hilariously improbable shots with his grenade launcher and Knox was enjoying himself pretty well. Moo would cut in and talk about free markets occasionally, sometimes verging into intellectual property law, even, but most of the time there was enough gunfire for him to be able to ignore

it. Her squad, *The Invisible Hands*, was pretty good, too, and friendly, so he was doing pretty well even though he didn't know the map – Tarim Basin – and all its dramatic elevation and terrain changes.

They were fighting their way toward the oil refinery at the center of the map, the big chokepoint, along with some mechanized infantry to their west, and then a voice he didn't know came over the line.

*“Libertard, there must be a bunch of noobs in the room tonight because nobody's building any forward bases or heavy weapons or shit. Can you and your squad break contact and go build us a FOB so we can keep pressure on the refinery?”*

“What,” Moo says, “were you thinking like west a little ways? There's that ridgeline and I could put some mortars on top of it.”

“Who's this guy?” Knox asks. Nobody responds. They're all listening, it seems.

*“Yeah, that's good. Uh, how about three mortars... well, more if you've got the resources. And one or two anti-tank positions in case there's a breakthrough.”*

“Okay, we can do that.”

*“Great, great. Give me a grid square and I'll have one of the transport choppers drop some supplies out there for you.”*

“Knox.”

“Yeah?”

“That was the commander.”

“Oh.”

“And you need to re-class as engineer.”

“Seriously?”

So Knox trades in his awesome grenadier's rifle for a carbine, and his pistol for an entrenching tool. And then he and the rest of the squad gets trucked

to the ass end of the map and he finds himself filling virtual sandbags.

“Vormann just joined the server,” Moo says, “he should join the squad in a bit since I left a slot open.”

Moo has designated points for the various bits of the base since she's the squad's officer. Knox feels like he's sitting there with his shovel forever, banging away at the blue arrows pointing at the ground until the game pulls all their equipment out of the ether.

“So you're sure this is fun? Just waiting for it to get fun.”

“Yeah, I know, it's not shooting people from a helicopter and it's not making thousand-meter sniper kills, but it's subversive and if you play it for a while you'll start to like it. It's like playing a civil engineer when everyone else is blowing things up. We control how they interact with each other. It's the most important part of the game.”

“Maybe it's a change of pace.” He looks around once he's done digging at nothing. In the distance, through his headphones, he can hear a gun thumping sort of medium-fast. Probably a fifty-cal. Occasionally there's distant explosions from more serious ordinance. But other than that it's almost pastoral. The trees swaying in the artificial breeze and all the natural ambiance. The medic is looking over the ridge with his binoculars like he's a birdwatcher. Once the whole FOB is assembled he starts hitting a tree with his knife just to see if anything will happen.

“Knox, what the hell do you know about being a fobbit?” Vormann says, showing up out of the void just like their gun emplacements and mortar tubes and TOW launchers and sandbag walls did. “You're living the dream playing this game, man. This is like Valhalla for squids like me.”

Knox looks around. Vormann is classed as an engineer too, and he's taking one of the trucks out from where they parked, and trying as best he can to not bang into all the traffic-control stuff they've just erected as he tries to park it under



a camouflage cover. Just like civil engineers.

“Hey, how come you weren't at the party Saturday?”

“Oh yeah – good news!”

“Yeah, well bad news for me.”

“Bad news has priority,” he says.

“I was at the party, and this guy was sucking the goddamn freckles off Lance's face.”

“Oh shit, seriously?” He snorts. “Well, then. Is that bad luck or was she leading you on?”

“Are you shitting me?” Moo says. Before she had been looking over the ridge with a bunch of the other people in the squad for armor, but it was so quiet that they all started playing tag with their entrenching tools.

“I'm serious, I thought I had a chance with her. What's your good news?”

“I was at a College Left Alliance meeting and I met this lady. Super cool. We've been hanging out for the past couple days nonstop. Chicks dig the uniform, man.”

“What's her name?”

“Shelby. She took me to this restaurant her dad owns down in Valley Junction – it's got these two big dogs on either side of the door – they call it-”

“Hachikō and Argos?”

A helicopter flies past and they all run into the underbrush and get low.

“Yeah, how'd you know?”

“I was there just a few hours ago.”

“Me too,” says Moo, then starts yelling at the guy with the MANPADS not to shoot at the helicopter since it didn't see them.

“She's like me, man. I showed her the Guide and she totally understands it – it's way past the time for theory. We need action!”

“How many people have you told about it, man?”

“Just her and Armitage. But I haven't even photocopied it for Armitage yet.”

“Did you give her your copy?”

“For the first night, yeah. So I'd have a reason to come back. See? Real clever. And man, is her family ever rich!”

“What's her last name?”

“What?”

“Is her last name Sondergaard?”

“Yeah. How'd you know this time? Does she have a sister?”

“Her dad is some kind of Godfather-wannabe.”

“Well I'll be careful then.”

“Jesus, I'm in deep shit.” He takes a deep breath. Now there's Russian armor in the basin near the oil refinery and everyone but the two of them are the antitank positions. “I work for her father. He got my boss to pull me into the restaurant today and ask me all about the Guide.”

“Are you saying I should stop telling people about it or something? Because it says right on the top that you can tell whoever as long as it's not electronic.”

“I'm just saying,” he says, now with gunfire getting closer to them, the sounds of nature evaporating, “that it's already getting problematic. Something's going to happen.”

Vormann muses for a bit. The helicopter comes around again and this time he can see rockets start to come up to meet it. “Isn't that the point?”

## **5.0 | sic semper tyrannis | 12 jan 2038**

...Between anti-gun legislation, NSA spying,

CISPA trying to filter out ideas and information, it's becoming apparent those in power don't want you to be anything more than a harmless sheep, to be fleeced and/or sacrificed without having the means to resist. The political system is corrupt, and the two means to fixing political corruption are through the spread of knowledge, or active protest - the two very things those in power are trying to limit YOU from being able to engage in.

-Anonymous #18500526, 4chan /k/, 27 November 2013

While Knox is standing in the shower, a little before noon, he remembers the library. He pushes it out of his head. He dresses and with some hot water he starts to make MRE coffee from the components scattered on the kitchen counter. The money he left is gone and he can see a note left behind, in his mother's uneven cursive. *Thanks, Knox. Went to free clinic with dad. Back in the afternoon. Get more MREs if you can. Love, Mom.*

Maybe it's the abstraction of love, still so distant to him, doing it, but as he tastes the coffee he remembers Delancey's face. With it comes a sudden surge of will, and he walks back to his room and picks up his microcomputer.

bond-spacesuit: I was thinking of coming to the library today, are you going to be downtown?

He stares at the screen for a moment in the hopes of getting a near-instant response, but no joy. He flips over to the news. Still riots in the North Belt. Police arrested two hundred-plus people overnight. The sonic area denial thing they were using to disperse the riot woke everybody up and boy were they pissed. So they called their friends. And the police called the Cooperative and they started smashing heads. The Governor said he'd take a helicopter tour.

Back in the kitchen he looks up at the sky. It's clear blue and by the looks of it outside the worst of the cold has maybe passed. All the other little ranch

bungalows down the block have started to form icicles on the edges of the roof from the noontime sun. Once he's done with his coffee and scrounges some MRE crackers and grape jelly for the bus he bundles up, taking the gamble of leaving his scarf behind, and goes out.

He's lucky with the bus and there's hardly anyone on it since he's sneaking through just a little before the lunch rush downtown, which means there's some peace and time for him to eat. When Keosauqua forks onto 9<sup>th</sup> Street he gets off and walks the rest of the way, with the hospital on one side of him and the vague spatial awareness of his parents somewhere in there, doing whatever they do as you get older, the kind of mid-life maintenance and retrofitting like what they do on public transit. The wind isn't as cold as it's been recently but as he walks forward his eyes are watering and again he's clearing his nose involuntarily. Once he's on Grand and jaywalking to get to the front doors of the library he can see another, smaller outcrop of National Guardsmen handing out rations and other things further down the street in the big lawn. He figures he can get it afterward.

He has to try three of the four doors before he finds the one that's unlocked. His parents used to bring him here when he was younger, so the big cupric building is still in his mental map, filed away alongside jigsaw pieces and oversized crayons, but it's been over a decade now and the only time he thinks of it is when the library board writes fuming letters in the Register about how they're a pillar of the community and they could really use the money, and how it'd be nice if they could stay open weekends, or circulate books, or-

“Are you here for the stacks?” someone asks. Behind the desk there's a crotchety old librarian sitting on a stool with her glasses roped to her like a pistol lanyard. He must look unfamiliar because he can tell that she's really anticipating his response.

“Uh, I was going to browse,” he says, “yeah.”

“Do you have a library card?”

“Uh.”

“You need a library card to browse.” To stop the squatters, mostly. The library board fought it until the squatters started showing up, stealing books to insulate their clothes with, and masturbating in the bathrooms. “I can scan your state ID to see if you've got one embedded.”

So he hands it over. She sloughs off a hardback Dostoevsky as she stands up and runs his card under an RFID tag reader and it turns green. She smiles.

“You can read all the books you want, but we don't circulate them. For re-shelving, put them into the bins at the end of the aisles and the robots will do the rest. And if you have any questions, you can ask me.”

“Is there a reading room?” he asks, careful not to disappoint her.

“Upstairs, yes. On the west side of the building.”

So he thanks her and goes on his way. As he's climbing the stairs he hears a servo-motor humming, and he follows the sound down one of the stacks. There's two robots, one that's sort of wide with a big hopper of books on it, and one in front with a telescoping arm and prehensile hand that's taking books from and sticking them back on the shelves.

Upstairs it's mostly tables and windows since the stacks have been winnowed away with time, and it's not hard to spot her. She's got her glasses on and her hands are in front of her, scudding over an invisible keyboard. He checks his phone before getting into her field of vision. She hasn't responded. He takes a breath and sits down on the other side of the table from her. And still no response. Her brow is furrowed. He waits, taps on the table. Eventually she pauses.

“Lance.”

Her back shoots straight and for the first time she looks through the

glasses. “Holy shit.”

“Can I talk to you?”

“You should have tapped me on the shoulder or something.”

“Are you busy?”

“I’m writing code for a place downtown. It’s due in an hour.” Her hair has started to fall over her face and she straightens it. She takes the digital-digital glove off her right hand one finger at a time, then her left. “Fixing a bug in some escalators.”

“Well this shouldn’t take long. About the party.”

“Yeah?”

“I thought we had a thing. Or maybe we would soon.”

“I didn’t say otherwise.”

“So who was that guy? Did you even know him?”

“Don’t lecture me, we’re both adults.” She puts her elbows on the table, and takes the LCD glasses off, setting them on a wireless charging pad.

“I wasn’t going to,” he says, and keeps looking at her.

“So did you come here to make me an offer or an ultimatum, or what?”

“I just wanted to know-”

“You’ve backed yourself into that corner, you know.”

“Yeah, I know.” He sucks air through his front teeth. “Unless I’m saying it as friends.”

“Friends. Right. Uh-huh. Sure.” She looks at him. “Yep. Friends who follow each other home after the bar and go for coffee alone. Coffee friends. The truest kind of friends.”

“I fucking get it,” he says.

“So say it.”

“Do you want to go for a date?”

“Thank you.” She puts her hands up. “Yes. When?”

“Tonight? Five?” He watches her expression. “Or as soon as you're done.”

“Where?”

“There's this Italian place,” he says, “on 19<sup>th</sup> and Forest.”

“That's a bit far. There's this halal Chinese place a few blocks south.”

“That's not very romantic.”

“It's close to the riverwalk.”

“Okay. Sure.” He leans in. She kisses him, fast and so soft it's almost incorporeal. Holy shit.

“You should stick around.” She puts one of her gloves back on. “You've got the sum total of Western thought here. Pick something out.”

### 5.1 \* \* \*

The stacks are enticing if only for how exotic they seem to him. But he tries to be rational, thinks about foundational ideas. He remembers how Lance told him about the Trivium, but he can't find it and he doesn't want to expose his ignorance to the librarian, either. So he resorts to instinct: history seems like a good choice, so he pokes through the 900s, looking at the spines of books until he finds a big volume by Howard Zinn. Anything to weigh him down. He sits at the same table as Delancey though not too close, like she's an illusion and if he interacts with her it'll break, and starts reading. Then the damn phone again.

```
deagleclipz: oh man you're never going to
believe what happened to me this weekend
bond-spacesuit: Explosions and stuff? You
were on the news.
```

deagleclipz: You saw it?  
bond-spacesuit: My mom insisted.  
deagleclipz: Well good of you to keep in touch with your friends.  
bond-spacesuit: Sorry. Dating lance now.  
deagleclipz: You're shitting me.  
bond-spacesuit: nope  
deagleclipz: I dnd't think you'd bother with her after she was making out with that guy but whatever. I suppose if youre cool with it.  
[1602 GMT -6] >I still think she's dangerous.  
bond-spacesuit: I don't.  
deagleclipz: You have to remember where she grew up. She doesn't do stuff if it doesn't benefit her.

There's no convincing him so he doesn't bother trying to force it. The two robots whir past and Knox can see that they've got names written on masking tape strips. Will and Ariel. He admires Delancey for a moment but he's still worried about what will happen if he comes straight out and says that she's beautiful. She's just sitting there writing code and it's like the rest of the world doesn't matter to her, and he can't stop thinking about what it would feel like to slip his arm around her.

## 7: Odysseus & You

What is an epic hero? It has nothing to do with scale. It has, instead, everything to do with values. An epic hero is indicative of the civilization that he



or she arises from. Within this one person can be found the core principles, ethical systems, nature, and so on, of their civilization of origin.

As a quick experiment, take some prominent figures in your local civilization and, following the example below, figure out what the core values of your culture might be. Make sure you have sources prepared in case your fellow students berate you.

|   |
|---|
| <p><b>The Greeks:</b><br/><u>Odysseus</u>, the epic hero of <u>Ancient Greece</u> demonstrated core Greek principles of <u>cunning</u>, <u>ingenuity</u>, and <u>duty</u>.</p>  |
| <p><b>The United States:</b><br/>Henry Kissinger, the epic hero of the United States, demonstrated core American principles of _____, _____, and _____.<br/>Barack Obama, the epic hero of the United States, demonstrated core American principles of _____, _____, and _____.<br/>_____, _____, the epic hero of the United States, demonstrated core American principles of _____, _____, and _____.</p> |
| <p><b>Your Choice:</b> _____, the epic hero of _____, demonstrated core _____ principles of _____, _____, and _____.<br/>_____, the epic hero of _____, demonstrated core _____ principles of _____, _____, and _____.<br/>_____, the epic hero of _____, demonstrated core _____ principles of _____, _____, and _____.</p>  |

Despite how they've been portrayed in contemporary politics, values are critically important. Beyond how they shape how we see ourselves

in relation to the world, they are also responsible for the character our nation-states, and our cultures take on.

Can we, in a way that's more powerful than any vote (paper or rooftop), change the course of an entire civilization simply by changing our values we hold within ourselves? It might be time to find out.

While Knox is waiting in line at Seven Woks he notices that he's able to lean on one wall and his feet can still touch the other. When the person in front gets their food everyone else has to turn sideways like in an aircraft carrier so they can get out.

They end up sitting at the one table and going over their lo mein. Like before, it's so cramped that their knees are touching, but he doesn't mind it. The windows are all steamed and once he's absorbed all the warm, moist air he can't contemplate going out.

“Do you live with your parents?” he asks her.

“I thought I told you.” She picks up a piece of shrimp from amongst the noodles and the table totters toward her.

“I don't remember if you did.” He takes a noodle. As soon as his chopsticks contact the bottom of the tray the table tilts back toward him.

“I rent a room next to the river. In that hackerspace.”

“Oh.” He watches the steam rising off their food. “So do you have a favorite band?”

“Favorite or one I think that's the most important?”

“You could give me both.”

“Most important is probably Bach,” she says, putting a bamboo shoot in

her mouth, “but if I had to take one, it'd be the Harmonicats. Subjective, but whatever. That's the point, right? You're giving me this little personality test.”

“That's not kitty-core, is it?”

“Jerry Murad's Harmonicats. Just like the name says – this harmonica trio from the Sixties.” He looks at her and she's not kidding. “Perfect combination of kitsch and actual musicianship. They're good. Talented but not too serious about it. How about you?”

“Uh, the Beatles?”

Delancey just laughs. “Eat, before it gets cold.”

From the restaurant they make their way over to the riverwalk, even though it's cold enough for him and who knows what she's feeling, but they walk against the current for some time with their arms locked.

“This is nice,” he says.

“Yeah.”

“Hey, how come you keep saying that I'm needy? I don't think I am.”

Knox looks at her. “I'm not begging you for things. And it not very nice to say all the time.”

“I'm not trying to be mean.” She leads him to the river's edge and he looks her in the eyes. She's standing on the point, but he keeps looking at her. “Okay. So maybe I was, a little.”

“You've got a reputation for being cold, you know. Bell told me-”

“Of course Bell told you. Bell will say whatever he thinks he can get away with.” She turns back toward the river. “Like I care. I've always been the only one looking out for myself. So I don't care what-”

“Lance, chill.” He puts an arm around her waist and pulls so that their hips touch. “I want to be with you, okay? It doesn't matter what he thinks.”

“Yeah.” She stretches her neck out. “Thank god.”

Silence for a while. The steam from their breath twists away from them like hair curling. They look over the bank, standing close enough that they're touching when he feels the vibrations in his leg again.

“Your phone's ringing,” she says.

“It can wait.”

“What if it's Vormann with another wild story?”

“Then I'll put it on speaker.” He pulls it out of his pocket. It's his mother.

“Uh, actually, maybe I should.”

*“Knox, can I talk to you?” she says. “There's something I've got to tell you.”*

“Sure, yeah.” He looks over at Delancey and begs her for a little time.

“What is it?”

*“Your father and I went to the doctor's today for our checkups and they noticed he had a bit of an irregular heartbeat. So they did an EKG while he was there, and he's going to have a mitral valve replaced.”*

“Oh, shit. Shit.” He looks up, then over to Delancey.

*“Knox, it's all right. He's going to be fine. He'll go in for the surgery Friday and be out before the weekend's over.”*

“God.” Still not good, though, there's the bill, and then the drugs, whatever they are, and “-Is he going to be able to work?”

*“No strenuous activity, they say, for at least six months. He'll get a bit from disability, but not much.”*

“Look, I'll see if I can get any extra work somehow.” He swallows. “Is he at the hospital?”

Delancey is looking worried.

*“He's at home resting. They're going to do some more tests on Wednesday*

*and get him in early in the morning Friday. Don't worry about him. But you should talk to him. Where are you now?"*

"I'm on a date."

*"Oh – well, I'll tell him. I'm sure he'll be happy to hear that."*

"Thanks. Tell him I love him."

*"I will. Don't worry yourself sick, Knox. We love you too."*

He hangs up and puts his arm around her waist. She starts walking for shelter – the bus or something, he doesn't know, but he's too overwhelmed to give any suggestions, and follows instead.

"My dad's going to have heart surgery this weekend."

"Oh, no."

"He'll be fine in the end. But there's no way we can afford it."

"Look, don't worry about that yet. He hasn't even had the surgery. That's more important."

"I just don't know what we're going to do. I'm going to have to get more hours. That'll help. But still-"

"Knox, come on. You should focus on what's at hand."

He takes some deep breaths, tries to clear his nose. But it's cold and his sinuses have swollen up. "You're right. I need to get home." He looks at her. "I don't want to go, though."

"We'll meet soon, okay? Tomorrow?" She smiles at him and he can feel a formless mass of emotion accreting itself in him. The headlights of her bus are coming over the bridge. "And we can talk online."

"Yeah. We should."

She kisses him one more time before she gets on the bus. She tastes like ginger and black bean paste. He walks to his bus stop and goes home. His dad is sitting on the couch with his mom. They're holding hands and he sits down next to

them. They talk a little, say how much they love each other, and watch a movie on the television with the sound turned down low.

## 5.2 \* \* \*

“I wonder who wrote it,” Imogen had said when she first saw the Guide. She got through it in a few hours and handed it back to Bell.

“Does it matter?”

“It always matters. They write like a middle-class person. Sort of yuppie. College degree. All that.” She looked at his face change. “I don't mean that as a bad thing. It just is. You know?”

“I guess.”

“They're not angry enough to be poor.”

“But you like it.”

She smiles. “Yeah. It's cool.”

So Bell, as he's standing in the arc of the fridge door in Imogen's bare kitchen, gives her a strange look that night as she stands in the doorframe with a curious smile, and tells him that she has a lead.

“A lead?” He steps back and lets the door shut. Outside it's just the lights of the stars and the police floodlights that are illuminating things.

“I asked around when I was at work yesterday. Someone else had heard about the Guide.”

“Oh yeah?” So she's actually interested in it.

“An older guy I work with, dropped out of Iowa State back in the early twenties. He said he thought it sounded familiar.” She's got a coy smile on. “I looked up the name. He's listed around here.”

“I thought we were going to have sex.”

“We can do that later. I'm freezing.”

“Come on, I brought all those blankets, it'll be fine.” He takes a box of saltine crackers off the top of the fridge. “We could maybe get a pizza. I've got a little cash if you wanna go Dutch.”

“Bell. There's history going on. What would you say if people were taking to the streets and you were just eating pizza and porking your girlfriend instead?”

“I'd say that's not a bad way to fight the power.”

“If you don't go with me, I'm not-”

“Christ, don't be so dramatic. I'll go.”

So they stash their phones under the floorboards in the bedroom she shares with her sister, who's supposedly out at work or somewhere, then head down the fire escape in their winter clothes. In the alley she tells him to hold up, and they listen to the ambient noise for what feels like hours.

Somewhere distant, people shouting. Someone somewhere rioting.

After them, some police. A car or two. Lots of boots hitting the ground in unison, Nazi-style.

Then just sirens. A helicopter going by overhead with the spotlight on. Imogen edges up to the chain-link fence at the end of the alley and motions for Bell to follow. He does.

“We should stay in the alleys since there's the curfew.”

“Why does it have to be tonight?” He brought flavored condoms and all, and-

“It's gonna be the same thing tomorrow, but worse.”

Which is probably true. So he stays close. She's looking serious so he does the same. They cross the street, half-crouched. The next alley they have to vault a fence. There's a garbage can on fire like in movies from the 1980s.

“You need to come to my place next time,” he says. She waves her arms for him to be quiet. On the building opposite them there is a human silhouette. They're lit up by the flaming trash can and there's nowhere to go. His stomach feels acidic.

*“If this guy is a cop,” she whispers in his ear, “it’ll be trouble.”*

She picks up part of a shattered brick from the ground near them and holds it at low ready as the shadow gets bigger. Bell's heart is running like a four-cylinder engine until the shadow stops. Its head morphs gradually, scanning from side to side. He can hear a radio blurping out bulletins and requests.

*“Oh fuck,”* he goes, and he doesn't know if he's thinking it or saying it. They hit the wall together, close enough that they're touching. He can visualize the baton splitting his head open already.

*“If they see us,”* she whispers, *“hit them in the temple.”*

*“What?”*

*“The edge of your hand,”* she says, pointing at the bottom surface of her right hand, with its fingers curled in at the second joint, *“strike right in front of the ear, hold it there. To kill them.”*

*“Oh shit.”* He looks up at the sky where the stars are shifting in and out of sight from the clouds. Imogen holds his hand. *“Oh, shit.”*

And then the shadow morphs again, goes fat-thin-fat and starts shrinking proportionally. He's leaving. Imogen takes a deep breath and puts the brick down. They cross the opening after glancing around the corner and keep on.

“This neighborhood,” she says at nobody in particular, “this goddamn neighborhood. Just when you thought it couldn't get any worse.”

“You could spend more time at my apartment. That'd be really great.” He can't stop himself scanning for danger as they go along. “This is bad.”

“I can't just leave,” she says. “My family is here. My mom and sister need



me. I'm no bitch.”

“I was just saying.”

They cross Madison Avenue, still heading north, and there's broken glass all over the street. At the intersection with 10<sup>th</sup> Street there are two Co-Op MRAPs sitting there, presumably to stop people from torching the elementary school. Their feet crunch as they walk and Bell can't help but notice how she sticks out her ass when she walks crouched.

“This guy just lives a few more blocks north,” Imogen says, as they're crossing Turner Park in the shade of its huge old trees, “on 43<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, near the church up there. That's what I heard. Fished some out of the Internet too. Let's hope.”

“Can we take the bus back?” he asks, and even if they hadn't suspended the buses, his wallet is back in her apartment with the phones and the flavored condoms. She laughs a little.

“I'm gonna toughen you up, baby.”

They almost run into a group of rioters while they're crossing Aurora Avenue, or something that looks like rioters, but they seem hungry too, banging on the windows of all the corner shops. So who knows. He's still pretty nervous.

“Out for death or glory,” she says.

“We could have stayed in and had all the glory and none of the death.”

“Well now we know who's wearing the pants, don't we?” She punches him in the shoulder with a wide grin, then grabs his arm and they cross the street.

When they get to the alleged building, another neo-Brutalist low-rise apartment building made of treated concrete and a little steel here and there, it's quiet. Must be something good going on elsewhere. He doesn't question his luck as Imogen points out the name on the panel of doorbells. *D. Katze*. The front door is propped, like most of the others, and they let themselves in, climb the stairs in

the blackness, until they get to the right door, feeling for the number plate. There is a faint light coming from under the door. Probably run off some solar panels.

Imogen knocks three times.

*“Who'sit?”*

“Hey, are you a writer?”

*“What?”*

“A writer. Of a certain document that's got people pissed off.”

*“Who are you?”*

“I think I read something you wrote.”

*“I'm sure you did.”*

The door swings open. Imogen and Bell round the corner together and in the dark of the apartment they can make out the shape of a long gun in the guy's hands. Imogen grabs Bell and he flies sideways with her out of the doorway, lands between her and the ground and she knocks the wind out of him. Her left hand is pressing his head into the linoleum.

“Fucking hell, we don't want any trouble!” she says.

*“You just wanted autographs, right?”*

“Just wanted to talk. So you wrote it?”

*“Not just me. But you found me. And if you're like everybody else out on the streets you can fuck off.”*

Imogen rolls off of Bell and slides up against the wall near the guy's door. She looks down at him where he's still getting his breath back and smiles. “This guy's fucked in the head, isn't he?”

He nods.

*“They took our idea, our vision, and they ruined it. It's not about fighting. It's about refusing! They don't get it, nobody gets it. We didn't even get it.”* He makes some strange gasping noise. *“The last chance for us – printed up and put*

*on like a stupid fucking band T-shirt. The medicine is going to kill the patient!"*

"Bell." She points down the hallway. "There's that fire extinguisher in the cabinet. Grab it, will you?"

So he rolls onto his stomach and stands up. It seems like a bad idea as he's opening the little door and taking the extinguisher. Nothing but violence coming down the pipe, he thinks. But at the same time it's not like there's much of a choice. They'd have to cross the doorway to get out of the building. She hands it to her and she winks at him.

"I meant to tell you," she says, "I'm sorry for that one time where I said you were a bitch."

"What?"

"Oh. Must have been thinking it." She smiles.

"That's not funny."

"C'mon, lighten up. This is more exciting than sex, right?"

He watches as she pulls the pin out and sticks the hose into the doorway while the guy in the darkness is still railing about the inevitable decline of the country and all manner of other things, none of which are particularly coherent. She gases the room for a couple seconds and that shuts him up, then rounds the corner and he knows she's about to get shot but she doesn't, there's no sound, just her footsteps running into the room and then a big resonant clunk of the extinguisher hitting something.

"Got him," she calls.

Bell steps into the apartment and the guy is sprawled out on his living room floor. There's a dent in the fire extinguisher where it hit his skull. He checks to make sure that he's still breathing and Imogen looks around the apartment. Two cats and economics textbooks of all different vintage. Half a pound of smoked Gouda in the fridge which she takes for herself. The guy's shotgun, which she

clears and then deliberates taking as well, but he talks her out of it since there's so many cops on the streets.

That night under their pile of mismatched blankets Imogen takes her shirt off but Bell can't get it up. Too damn cold, he says.

## 6: Lips & Assholes

**From the editor:** *This chapter was initially intended to follow what is now Chapter 4, but due to editorial infighting and various academic dick-waving contests involving literary theory and Marxism was displaced and is now Chapter 6. For those kiddies interested in deconstructionist/poststructuralist interpretations of the text, the chapters may be re-ordered as 5-4-6 to provide an alternate narrative. Or re-order the entire document to really crank up the postmodernity quotient.*

**From another editor:** *Every time I see a word prefixed by 'Lacanian' I think about my student loan debt and then I want to shoot myself.*

If you've been following along this far, you've probably been putting together a merry band of radicals: at this point, you and your friends fall all over the political and commitment spectrums, which is okay.

But you want to take it further. (Don't you? It'd

be nice.)

And that means that you'll have to start organizing, getting serious in your efforts. This calls for people in management-esque positions. And therein lies the problem.

Consider your local Congresscritter, who is right now probably groveling before an executive board for some kind of campaign funding, before going to a focus group meeting to determine how they should feel about a given issue, and then sending out form letters to received mail, and - get it?

There is a progression here.

In order to function more efficiently,  
groups develop managerial classes, which  
improve response time, but in time grow large  
and in doing so generate their own hierarchies,  
and  
before long the initial idealism has departed,  
and all

you have is an overwhelming  
bureaucracy full of miserable  
humans which only exist  
to file papers and collate  
documents,

and soon enough  
your organization isn't what it  
used to be.

Consider our own transition from shooting British people and old-style liberalism to the world policeman, hitman for the petrodollar, and mass-surveill-er, among other things, and it might strike one as odd that the only things needed to effect this change are organizational skill and time. Now, rather than attempting to create a more perfect union and all that dogma, we only service the bureaucracy, which has become the life-sustaining framework of the state. Revolution is not an act, but a process. The rebel and his spirit are necessary to sustain the practice of radical questioning of all things even after the greatest changes have been made. The politician and the bureaucrat, by comparison, are the physical embodiment of the edifice, of stagnation, and of the inevitability of the establishment.

**Handy tip:** *If you've identified any members in your organization that have authoritarian or Stalinist tendencies, you can use them to purge any number of*

*bureaucrats and fuddy-duddies from your group without having to bother with the logistics yourself, and then you'll only have to deal with one person. Just make sure they don't purge everyone!*

Like Lao-Tzu said: all that which is young is green and flexible, and all that which is old is brittle, and can only snap. Organizing, developing a consistent program, and so forth, plants the fatal seed of micro-management and petty squabbling. You should be a rebel, not an engineer of governments.

Engineers are usually pretty dull, anyway.

### **5.3 \* \* \***

Vormann stands at the middle of the Grand Avenue bridge for three cigarettes' worth of time before the car pulls up. Not an undercover hassling him about loitering – that's good. Its windows are fogged and Vormann just stares it down, smoke in the corner of his mouth, until a hand on the inside starts wiping it down. It's Frost and he's mouthing at him; *get in, get in*. But Vormann stands there and points at the ground in front of him. They stare at each other for a while and then he sees him turn to the driver and start arguing, until Frost steps out, then Mulholland from the other side, and the two of them trudge over to him. Vormann throws his cigarette over the railing and then lights another one. With the collar of his peacoat up it lights his face real high-key and dramatic for a moment, adds a feeling of gravitas. He's been waiting to do that since this morning when they called and told them to meet him here.

“Why are we out here when it's so cold?” Frost asks him.

“Did you sweep the car?”

“Why would we need to do that? It's not dirty.”

“Fuck it, it'd be too late anyway.” He piles in. They start moving. “Just circle the block or something. What did you want from me?”

“They declared the state of emergency and we called about our demonstration permit. It's still good. We're looking for organizers,” Frost says, “and Mulholland says that you're a good guy. Coming to meetings regularly. A good resource on the forums.”

“What are you marching about?”

“We're raising awareness about how different the quality of life for people in different parts of the city is.”

They turn the corner and start going south on Fourth Street. Downtown the streets are shoveled nicely, clear of ice, the sidewalks salted and glistening with liquid water. There's only a few other cars on the road. Vormann is turning his head constantly.

“Do you have a list of demands?” Vormann is rolling his eyes.

“No, we're just trying to – it's just PR, mostly.”

“I think it's a good time to do something a little bigger,” he says, “with the state of emergency and everything. People are hurting. The government can't do their job. So – who could step in? Gee, if only there were some devoted people with a plan for the future, for prosperity and-”

“I get it,” Mulholland says, putting on the turn signal as they come up on Court Avenue.

“There's cops everywhere, though,” Frost says. “We should lay low. They're going to be all over us at the march, anyway. Don't give them an excuse. We had enough trouble just getting the permit in the first place.”



“But then we waste our chance. This might be the only one like this we get for years.” Vormann throws his cigarette butt out the window and, for the time being, stops smoking. “We should make a stand. Do some civil disobedience. Or something wild.”

“We got that – erm-” Mulholland says, and then stops himself. Frost slumps into his seat.

“What? Guns? Explosives? Shit for blackmail?”

“No, it's not that.”

“Vormann, I don't like that mindset,” Frost says. “It always sounds like you're talking about war. It's not what we're about. We only want democratic change. Nonviolence.”

“Doesn't really matter how nicely you ask if the other side has guns and you don't,” he says. “I'm just being realistic. March all you want, they'll just ignore you.”

They keep driving, in silence for the time being. Vormann lights up again as they start their second lap. Mulholland and Frost are looking at each other in the rearview.

“So how do you get them to negotiate, you think?”

“Violence, most likely,” Vormann says.

“Christ.” Frost exhales as loud as he can. “No way. We're not.”

“I'm just telling you what I think,” Vormann says. “You don't have to listen. I'd just appreciate it if you were honest. Like, about your mystery thing.”

“It was money,” Mulholland says.

“Come on, we don't want to advertise this!”

“He's right. If he wants to trust us, we have to trust him.” He clears his throat. “It was just shy of twenty thousand. Anonymous donation last night. Not enough money to retire forever, you know, but still that's one or two good projects

you can put together.”

“Yeah,” Frost says. “Someone's looking out for us.”

“Or someone's trying to get you to do something.” He looks around again. “Hey. Blow this light.”

“What?” Mulholland says.

“Someone's tailing us.”

“Fucking bullshit.”

“Not at all. That blue Taurus a few cars back. No lights, but it's giving me a bad feeling. So blow the stoplight and let's ditch the car somewhere.”

“This isn't a fucking spy movie, Vormann.”

“Fine, then if you don't mind a bunch of spooks digging through your trash and stuff I'm okay with it.”

Again Mulholland and Frost look at each other. Finally Frost looks back at Vormann. “Fine. How do you do it?”

“You're serious? I don't want a ticket, man!”

“Just make sure you're not gonna get hit, and drive through the light. Turn the next corner, find an alley, ditch the car for a day or so.”

“Jesus, this isn't cool.”

But he does it anyway, though it's not dramatic – normal approach to the signal with the Taurus in the center lane, brief coasting stop to check for traffic – then Mulholland enters the intersection under normal acceleration, the traffic camera going off like a paparazzi, and he crosses at a not-unreasonable speed, and around the next corner. They get out of the car and Vormann has to remind them not to run away from it.

“So where do we go now?” Frost asks.

“I don't know. Maybe a cab or the bus.” He points over his shoulder. “I'm gonna get a drink.”

## 5.4 | 13 jan 2038 \* \* \*

Something buzzes that morning before the sun is completely up. A phone. It pulls Knox out of the comfortable vacuum he's been floating in since last night, when the movie ended, and he hugged his dad, kissed his mom, went to bed and thought for ages before passing out, and the joyous anesthetic feeling of sleep evaporates as he sits up, picks up the phone, checks the number – Vormann – and opens the line.

“Yeah, man?”

“*Knox. You okay?*” He talks and there's a bunch of noise on the line but he figures it's maybe the system getting overloaded or something like that, something beyond his control.

“Things are happening man.”

“*I'll say. Last – well, you go first.*”

“Went on a date with Delancey.”

“*Oh man, I knew it. That's killer.*”

“Yeah, well, and my dad needs heart surgery.”

“*What?*”

“He got diagnosed with a bad valve yesterday and they're going to operate on him this weekend. But they say he'll be okay. Don't worry about it.”

“*All right. But if there's anything you need me to do, just ask, okay?*” He clears his throat. “*I'm sorry to wake you up. Sorry to change the subject, too. But I was wondering if you could meet me somewhere today?*”

“Yeah, sure.”

“*I need to talk about some stuff. Can you get to Glass Hand at, say eight o'clock? It's a weeknight so it shouldn't be too crowded. They've got beer specials*

*again if that'll swing you."*

"No, it's no trouble." There's still noise down the line. "Hey, do you hear that static?"

*"Yeah, that's from me."*

"What?"

*"You should ask Lance, she probably knows better than me. It's – ah, where'd I write it? – I heard about it on the Internet, it's supposed to sound like packet-delay jitter, applied over an equal-loudness contour."*

"What's that even supposed to mean?"

*"I don't know, but word is it makes it so that computers can't tell what you're saying over the phone. Everyone on this one forum uses it. They say it's real good."* He yawns. *"I figured it couldn't hurt."*

"I think it makes you sound suspicious, but whatever, man. About the bar."

*"Yeah. Can't be forgetting that. You can bring Lance too, if you want."*

"I'll ask if she's not busy."

*"Don't mean to weird you out. You know, some stuff – better discussed in person."*

They talk a little more about inconsequential things before hanging up. Afterward he showers, folds up his sofa bed and sends the message to Delancey. He goes out and sits at the kitchen table with his Vonnegut paperback as his parents are drinking coffee. They look up.

"You're up early," his mom says.

"Vormann called and woke me up." His mother pours him a cup. On the counter he notices a bunch of empty MRE coffee pouches. It's not bad; downright tolerable, really. "Too late to go back to bed."

"Do you work today?"

"For a few hours, yeah." He looks at his dad. "I'll ask the boss if I can't get

some more hours. He'll probably give them to me. There's not many people who work there.”

“That'd be good if you could,” he says. Considering everything he looks pretty calm. Knox thinks about how he'd react. Like Delancey said – no point in worrying about what you can't change. His parents leave for work without saying anything. He can't stand to be alone in the house, and so he loiters on the quad at Drake for a while. The National Guard has long since fucked off, leaving in their place long compressed tracks in the snow like filigree, and where the bread line was there are now snowmen queuing up.

On the walk to the laundromat the neighborhood seems pretty normal. The sky is low and there's no kids playing anywhere that he can see. He cuts across the easement on the north side of Crocker Avenue and the top of the snow has a frozen hard enough to support his weight. The windows of the laundromat are covered with frost and he blasts the heat. Most of the shift he spends going between his phone and doing the last of the cleaning.

lanceyverky: How are you feeling today?

bond-spacesuit: I'm okay. My dad is taking it pretty well.

bond-spacesuit: but I sort of wish hed at least show something. I feel helpless in a way.

lanceyverky: Is this the first time something like this has happened to your family?

bond-spacesuit: yeah

lanceyverky: Enjoy your worries, you may never have them again.

bond-spacesuit: what?

Someone opens the door and it's not Lowe or the delivery guy. A customer. Middle-aged woman with an old GI duffel bag on either shoulder and a carton of dry detergent. He gives his stock greeting and asks if she needs to pull some money off a card. She declines and starts feeding fifty-dollar notes into two of the washers. He grabs the remote and turns on the TV in the corner for her to a broadcast station that's playing *Days of Our Lives*. He looks back down at the phone.

lanceyverky: I'll have to tell you about my family sometime. No pity party or anything. Tonight?

bond-spacesuit: sure

lanceyverky: We should ditch Vrmann and go on our own date.

bond-spacesuit: I think it's important.

lanceyverky: Fine, just as long as we're not spending all night over there. You know there's things to do out there, right?

bond-spacesuit: But something's gotten into him.

lanceyverky: Something bad if you ask me

The delivery comes like usual, only this time it's bigger, enough that the driver asks Knox to give him a hand stacking the boxes of whatever-it-is in the backroom. One of the boxes is covered in some unidentified dust and he tries not to breathe while he's moving it.

“Business is booming?” he asks the driver as he's going out the door again.

“Got that right.” He lights a cigarette and starts the engine.

“Hey, since I work here,” he says, “if I wanted to, could I – you know, request stuff? That I wanted to buy?”

He stares at Knox, bemused. “You're not all there, are you?”

“No, I am, I'm just – there was something I was looking for.”

“Look, man, it's gonna be too much trouble, whatever it is. You don't want to bother.”

“Oh. Okay. T-thanks.”

As he drives off the truck cuts a path through the grey slush in the alley. Knox looks around the back for a while. He doesn't really know what he's looking for but there's got to be a regular sequence of events in there somewhere – tire tracks from different cars, different brands of cigarette butts from Lowe and who knows who else, footprints down from the freeway – and wonders if someday it'll be him out here, how far he can go before he gets burned – his plea *well of course it was illegal, but between family and the law I take family* – and then as he's turning around his foot finds a patch of ice and he goes down, hits his head, and the fantasy recedes. He stares into the overcast sky.

“You don't know how to be gentle, do you?” Delancey asks, once she gets to the laundromat and Knox shows her his phone. He puts it on the folding table as she watches. The flexi-screen is bent in half diagonally from its impact with the curb, and the casing has shattered.

“I'm pretty gentle with you,” he says.

Lance is sitting on top of a washer in the middle of the shop bouncing her attention Knox and the television as it plays *Twenty Questions With Kanye West*.

There's an infielder from the Cubs sitting on the stage and they're laughing it up together, talking about when they're going to break the curse. She gets up and turns the TV off.

“How'd it get that big scratch?” He shuts the lights off behind the counter. She's wearing black knee-highs and a plaid skirt like a Catholic schoolgirl. “Were you kicking it down the street before you started jumping on it?”

“All kinds of stuff. You wouldn't believe.” He walks up and she noses in, kisses him, this time lingering a moment.

“You get used to it.” She goes back to the table, picking through the wreck of his phone. “So you want me to fix it?”

“You can't fix that.”

“Can too.” She looks at the exposed circuit boards. “Me and my hacker friends. We've got rapid-prototyping machines. We can make electronics faster than you can break them. I think the motherboard and battery are okay.”

“Doesn't the media cost, though?”

“My gift to you.” She tries to power-cycle the machine and the screen only lights halfway, stopping in line with the crease. “You'll have to get some proper open-source on it, too. Since you're so preoccupied with freedom.”

“Yeah. People won't shut up about it. And Moo is the worst. Have you heard her?”

“Well,” she says, “if you thought you had it pinned down, wouldn't you want to tell people? So I want to give you my idea of it.”

“Come on, I'm going to end up turning into some libertarian-socialist gunslinging hacker if everybody keeps going.”

At Glass Hand they find Vormann sitting at one of the tables, along with a woman he doesn't recognize who's shoulder-to-shoulder with Vormann. Probably



Shelby. She's got high cheekbones, auburn hair with angled bangs that barely touch her eyebrows at their lowest point, pink lipstick, looks money and can't hide it. There's the prairie-mod clothes, too – old-fashioned poofy-shouldered blouse with the sleeve garters and everything, but all of it angular and fitted so that she looks more caricature than replica, like an acknowledgement of time spent spinning on the digital lathe.

“There they are,” Vormann says as they pull up to the table. “First round's on me.”

Vormann introduces both of them to Shelby and they go through the usual greetings. They're given beers. Vormann is red with drink but there's still something serious waiting to emerge.

“Now,” he continues, “I wanted to talk to you about some stuff since we're here. Together. You know how they listen in on everyone's calls. And plus, it's too impersonal. Holding the phone up to my ear for too long makes it hurt.”

“Baby,” Shelby says, “I'm gonna use the powder room first, okay?”

She gets up, kisses Vormann on the cheek, and then Lance says that she's going to do the same. Knox closes his eyes and waits to feel a kiss of his own. He hears her jeans slide over the pleather, and then nothing.

“Hey man,” Vormann says, “what're you doing?”

He opens his eyes. “I thought she was going to kiss me.”

“You've got to instigate, man. The ladies love an instigator.” He laughs at his own joke. “But it's good they left for a bit. I wanted to ask you some stuff.”

“All right, shoot.”

“Do you think I'm gonna make it?”

Knox coughs. Vormann keeps going.

“I'm afraid. I haven't been this afraid in a while.”

“What's there to be afraid about?” Knox says. “Well, I mean, besides

everything there is to be afraid of. You know.”

“I'm afraid about the future. My future, your future, Lance's future, Bell's future-”

“What about Shelby's future?”

“Aw, hell, man. She must really like me if she's going out with someone like me.” He looks at Knox, his eyes coming into sharp alignment. “Because she's set for life.”

“Yeah.” Knox nods. “I work for her dad. Kind of intimidating guy.”

“I'll figure it out. I'm made of tougher stuff. But anyway. There's important stuff going on. I think we're on the edge of something really big. I know that I've been saying that for a bit, but it's actually happening right now, right? People are taking out to the streets every night.”

“Yeah, and it's probably because they don't have any power.”

“Ahh, that's just it. Me and my friends made a plan.”

“Which friends?” Knox says.

“Can't tell you all of them. I've been hanging out with Armitage a lot, if that helps.”

“Those guys. So you're really getting into the whole leftist thing, aren't you?”

“I don't know, I've got my disagreements. But I think they've got some good ideas. More than anybody you could vote for, that's for sure.” He takes a drink. “But, our plan. To turn the riots over heat and food into riots about the shitty government. Some anonymous donor gave us a bunch of money. We're going to run with it.”

Shelby slides into the booth next to Vormann.

“And there's nothing I could say to change your mind,” Knox says, “and you only called me down here so you could give me a heads-up, and so that I'd

know.”

“That’s about it.” He takes a drink of beer. “But, there is the matter of you.”

“Me?”

“The one and only. What do you want, through all of this?”

“I don’t know. I want my parents to be all right. I want Lance to say she’s in love with me.”

“Sure, sure, and she’s a real nice lady too – good on you – but I mean, what do you believe in? What would it take to get you on the streets? What are you doing all this for? I mean, you and me both, we’ve got maybe sixty years left. Or something like that. Be safe, call it more like fifty, so that leaves you thirty-five or forty useful years where you’re not eating pills all day. What’s the point of going through with all of it? What’s giving meaning to your life?”

“I’m more suspicious than you, I guess. I don’t know how you’re going to trust the assholes running the CLA any more than you trust the regular government. They might be just as bad if you put them in power.”

“Oh, come on. I’m not asking you to wave the red flag and all that.”

Vormann finishes his beer and waves for another one. Delancey sits down next to Knox. “I’m just curious. You can believe whatever you want to. Just believe something.”

“He’s an individual,” Lance says. “Like me. He trusts his own judgment, does what he thinks is right. Can’t be constrained by a single ideology.”

“Yeah, you two deserve each other. I’m glad, though. We’re all looking for the good life.”

“So what’s your good life?” she asks.

“We’re just taking the chance that’s been given to us. Because there hasn’t been a better one in decades.”

Delancey has her arms folded and she's thinking about something. Knox speaks instead, with a shrug. "You keep dodging it. What are you going to do?"

"We drafted a manifesto together," Shelby says, before Vormann can speak. "And someone volunteered to read it."

"What are you going to say?"

"Not me, no," Vormann says. "Or her."

Knox and Delancey look at each other.

"We've got someone lined up."

"You won't say who?"

"Come on, it's a secret." Vormann smiles. "This is the real thing, man."

## **5.5 | 14 jan 2038 \* \* \***

"I don't like her," Delancey says, as they leave the bar. It's past midnight and the wind is picking up again, blowing sleet along with it. "Wanna come back to my place?"

"Yeah, sure." He nods his head. "Of course."

"She's using him, I can just tell. That way she holds onto him. I've never seen anything any more fake in my life and I had foster parents."

"You had foster parents?"

They walk across the bridge on Court Avenue. There's two rows of jersey barriers on the bridge's east bank and a checkpoint manned by the National Guard. They scan their IDs before they let them into downtown. No smiles anymore.

"Yeah," she says. "You said his college club got a bunch of money. Where does he think it came from? Where does he think his rich girlfriend came from? Someone's got to wake him up before he does something stupid."

“Come on, Lance,” he says, bringing himself into step with her so that he can take his hand, “he's a smart guy, he'd know if he was getting played.”

“He's dazzled with pussy and his dream of being the rebel. Death or glory and all that.” She looks at him. “You're the only one he might listen to.”

“Come on, let's just spend tonight to ourselves, okay? You shouldn't worry.”

She pinches the bridge of her nose. “Yeah. Yeah. Not my problem anyway. He'll come down sometime.”

The streets are starting to get covered in ice. She leads him south on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, to a factory behind the old police station. They walk through its central hall, which is full of tables covered in computers and electronics and soldering irons, flooded with the blue light of monitors waiting for input and cut with the silhouettes of a handful of people writing code in black emacs windows, then up a flight of stairs where she lets him into a little room with most of its windows covered by newsprint, and it's her room. There's a lumpy mattress with two pallets for the frame, her backpack, and a wood-veneer clock radio on a big cable spool that's been turned on its side like a table, a lamp and a reference book of commands for bash shell. He takes a deep breath and they sit down on the bed together.

“Take your shoes off,” she says.

“I was going to.” He's pulling at his shoelaces and he's clutching them as hard as he can so he doesn't show how nervous he is, but then her hands go around his waist and he starts shaking. That must be a go-ahead kind of thing because he cups one her right breast and she just smiles at him.

“Does it feel like the world is ending, Knox?” she asks. She slides into bed and since she's trying to figure out how her bra works he has to follow, and then she pulls the blanket over them. Her hands touch his sides under his shirt and

they're freezing, but he's burning up.

“I don't think it's ending,” he says. She kisses him and he pads around in the darkness for the zipper on her skirt. There's a jumble of limbs and a stockinged foot hits him in the shoulder.

“*Sorry,*” she whispers. Then things start happening. Clothes flying out the top of the top of the bed. His pants hit the floor and he hears spare change go rolling into the corners of the room. Too dark to get visual confirmation of anything but there's he can picture breath steaming in the cold, their flushed faces. During the procedure their faces get close and they kiss for a while. He's close to her and he can smell her, how she's kind of earthy like black dirt, or the pollen from a field of tall grass. She's feeling him up in a particular way, like there's a checklist that he's not aware of. When he pulls his lips away she takes a deep sucking breath that sounds like an invitation. Somewhere in the blur of motions he stops thinking and just acts.

The next morning as he opens his eyes the bed is warm. Delancey is asleep next to him. He puts a hand on her thigh, and when she looks over he sees him grinning.

“Aren't you happy with yourself?”

“Overjoyed.”

“You liked that thing I did, where I kicked you in the face?” She sits up, her olive skin catching the early light, and gets out of bed, takes a T-shirt out of the dresser and pulls it over her head. “I don't do that for everybody, you know.”

“I owe you, then.” As she's putting underwear on she pulls her knee-highs off and throws them at his face.

“You're such a geek.”

“You're the one living in the hacker utopia.” He looks around. The sun

coming up through the old newspapers floods the whole room with orange light, and maybe from the two of them or from the lingering epinephrine high the room feels warm and intimate. “It is pretty nice, actually.”

“Uh-huh. Bunch of people bought the building back when the housing market was really bad. You can pay for access to the computers and equipment and stuff. Or a room. It's all at cost, too.”

“And your parents said-”

“The foster parents put me out when I graduated. I looked up my real mom, thought I might be surprised,” she says, looking out the window, “but she went back to Mexico before I turned ten. So that leaves me.”

They go down the hallway to the showers and while they're bathing he figures what the hell, tries to grab her butt a few times, but she just laughs at him and wriggles free of his grasp. He leaves clean and frustrated.

“She never contacted you?” he asks, as they're walking down the stairs they went up last night, back toward the common area where she says there's food. “Your mother, I mean.”

“No. I wonder what she'd say if she met me. Not that I'm burned about it. But she's got to be curious, right?”

“I'd be.”

There's a kitchen downstairs that's been put together from appliances and furniture from curbs and thrift shops all over the city and, in the fridge, half a carton of eggs with her name on it, and so he makes two of them for each of them, finding some little pouches of fast-food pepper to put over them, plates them with some toast, and sits next to her at the long Naugahyde table.

“So this is life for you?” he asks.

“Yep.” She moves in close to him. “Vormann wouldn't get it. But I'm

making it. I've got a place to live, a savings, all that stuff.”

“It's big enough for two.”

“Don't get any ideas.” She jabs him with her fork. “Vormann and all those socialists don't think that computers are having any effect on things. But here we are.”

She gestures around her. Someone at a nearby terminal who can overhear them raises a fist in solidarity.

“Like love,” she says, giving him eyes, “it's no use chasing after what you can't get back. I think he's afraid of doing things on his own. That's why he joined the Navy. And that college group.”

“Hey, you want to know a secret?” he asks her.

“I'd be delighted.”

“I'm rooting for him. I want to see where it goes. Maybe it'll be good.”

“Yeah, maybe. Fingers crossed.” She breaks the yolk on one of the eggs and points out a loaf of wheat bread for him to grab. “But he was your friend first. I'm just giving him the same advice I'd give you.”

They eat and then she takes the wreck of his phone over to a guy with a scruffy beard who calls himself Breadboard and is running off a half-dozen different objects from a long row of prototyping machines. There is the smell of hot thermoplastic in the air.

“His deck,” he says. “Of all the things.”

“Come on, if you don't have a computer you don't have anything.”

“I can print Glock frames and you want a computer.” On his terminal he starts grepping through files. “The point is to be subversive. To expropriate the means of production.”

“Words are loaded pistols.” She makes a face at him. “Who said that?”



“Yeah, yeah. So, a new new case,” he says to Delancey, looking at the phone with some hacker equivalent of noblesse oblige, “what color?”

“Knox?”

“Uh, blue?”

“Blue'll do,” Breadboard says again, mostly to himself. “And new flexi-screen, and good software for a change, and save the files?”

“Make it like new,” she says, grabbing Knox's arm, “he's my boyfriend.”

“Oh, such chivalrous. Deep feelings. So love. Wow.” He rolls his eyes and turns around. “Leave me alone for a few hours. Go do your meatsphere stuff.”

She drags him back up the stairs to her room and when he gets there he sticks his hands in the back pockets of her jeans but she brushes him off.

“I want to show you a movie,” she says. “*Ghost in the Shell*. It's important.”

She puts her legs across his lap and he manages to sit still for a while. He tries to rub her feet and she wiggles away. Eventually he can't stand it.

“Why?” he asks, as the movie is going into a long speech about artificial intelligence.

“Well, how come you have to have a nickname to be a hacker?”

“What's yours?”

“I couldn't tell you in the meatsphere. It's like how Mormons, you know, when they marry they give each other a secret name so when they go to heaven they'll be able to find each other. It's about rebirth. Using computers to build a new identity for yourself. Class doesn't matter, nations don't matter, money doesn't matter. As long as you can write code, you're equal to anybody in the world.”

“Can I give you a foot massage?”

She pauses. “Sure.”

They keep watching. She puts her head on his shoulder.

“Nobody else sees it in you,” she says, after a while, “but you're a survivor. You'll do what you have to so you can keep on going. I think that's a good quality. You shouldn't be bashful.”

“So do you make your own nickname or does somebody else give it to you?”

“Of course you have to make your own. That's part of it. Being a hacker is all about being a self-made man-woman-whatever. We just hang out together so we have somebody else to talk to.” She looks at him as he's pressing the knuckles of his right hand into the ball of her left foot. “So do you have a name you're thinking of?”

“How do you know I don't have one already? I just haven't said it in the – uh – the meatsphere.”

“You're a real sly bastard, you know?” she says, jerking her foot away. “I try and get close and you brush me off. Then you try and cop a feel.”

He doesn't say anything, just grabs her calf and she jabs his ribs with her toes so he drops her other leg. They both act offended, then get close again, and keep watching the movie.

Afterwards they go back to Breadboard and the row of prototyping machines where he's wiping the machine oil off the case of his new-old phone. It boots faster than it did before. The interface is unfamiliar, thanks to the new software. Breadboard mutters something condescending but Lance guides him through everything. There's a wave of messages from Bell waiting.

deagleclipz: hey man

>hey  
>are you there?  
[Sent at 2147 GMT -6 13 jan 2038]  
deagleclipz: So I assume that delancey  
took you to her favorite taco place  
>am I right or am I right?  
>I remember this time when my dad was  
trying to unlock the car in the dark and  
he said  
>"wheres the hole?"  
>"put some hair around it and I'll find  
it just fine"  
[Sent at 0021 GMT -6 14 jan 2038]  
deagleclipz: seriously man what's wrong?  
deagleclipz: imogen went fucking batshit  
if that makes you feel any better

**He sighs to himself and starts typing.**

bond-spacesuit: I fell on my phone and  
broke it. Delancey fixed it.  
deagleclipz: So did she give you a  
footjob or what  
deagleclipz: or whatever you two are into  
bond-spacesuit: can neither confirm nor  
deny  
deagleclipz: awww shit nigga  
deagleclipz: so hey  
deagleclipz: you should turn on the TV  
deagleclipz: armitage is speaking at the  
state house  
deagleclipz: and I don't really kno wwhy

“Hey, uh, Breadbox,” Knox says.

“Breadboard.”

“Breadboard. Sorry. Can you put C-SPAN on or something?”

“Really, C-SPAN?”

“I’m not kidding, man, turn it on.”

He obliges them with a grunt. He and Lance look up at the television. Armitage is in the center of the camera in a medium shot. He's wearing a shirt with Portofino cuffs and his hair is slicked back, though there's still all the piercings in his face. The subtitle under his name is just *STUDENT*. His hands are full of paper.

*“I've come here on behalf of Drake University's College Left Alliance,” he says, “and I'm speaking in order to outline our program for the future of the United States.”*

“Oh god,” Lance says, “he's doing it.”

*“The planet is dying, everyone on it is dying, the government is killing its own citizens, people are crying out, and our solution is to start rounding people up. And as the stress builds, we're on the verge of tearing each other apart. The course is terminal.”*

The three of them look up and watch. Everybody else is engaged with something else. Armitage's monologue keeps going. It seems pretty polished. The camera keeps showing how he's making eye contact with individual members of the state legislature and directs parts of his speech toward them. What kind of leftist would he be if he couldn't deliver long speeches? And then his phone vibrates.

deagleclipz: I think armitage fucked up

our store  
bond-spacesuit: What?  
deagleclipz: the golden retriever, I mean  
deagleclipz: That line he said. "The planet is dying" and all that. Someone said the same thing when they were in our store.  
bond-spacesuit: You didn't recognize his voice?  
deagleclipz: I was freaked out and I shat myself. I wasn't paying attention.  
bond-spacesuit: Well if I was a detective I'd suspect you of being on the inside.  
deagleclipz: Seirously, he's being serious with all this talk.  
bond-spacesuit: I know

When he puts the phone back in his pocket Lance is engrossed in the television. Armitage is going on about income disparity, government accountability, the mounting federal debt, inflation marching on, and Knox starts to nod off, staring at the little bit of her exposed thigh above her nylons but below her black skirt. His eyes are half-closed and the ground shakes. Was that part of the fantasy? He looks up, back at the television, and the picture there is shaking, too.

"Well that's no good," Breadboard says. And then a streaking rumble goes by, like thunder.

"What the fuck was that?"

"To the roof, to the roof, come on!" Delancey grabs his hand and they're flying up the stairwell again like last night, past the floor where her room is and

up another level, out a hatch and onto the roof of the building. The cold cuts him without his jacket but he's too distracted by the dust cloud rising over downtown. They both stare.

“That isn't the capitol, right?”

“No, the capitol is next to the river. That's – I don't know what that is.”

She pulls out her phone. Breadboard, who's panting and has his hands on his knees, has got the video feed on his phone. Armitage is standing on the table with his fist in the air.

“*Sic semper tyrannis!*” he chants, over and over, and the camera is still shaking from the vibrations, and the police are sprinting toward him, and then it cuts to the test pattern.

“He wasn't lying,” Knox says. “They're really doing it.”

“You're sure it's them?”

“It's got to be.” He lets his arms hang by his sides. “This is – I don't even know what this is. I'm calling Vormann.”

## 10: Beyond The Zero

Before the revolution must come meditation.\*

Deleuze and Guattari, and correctly, identified desire as a generative force. For its sake a legion of secondary things are willed into existence.

To create a new world, we must have a new mind.

This Guide eschews a particular ideology for very practical reasons. It does not attempt to give a recipe which anyone may follow; it is, rather, a document with an empty center. Why? You should attend

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\* Now for some absolute bullshit. -Ed.

our planning sessions. The true revolutionary is in attendance, even now.

What do we desire? What do you desire?

All human organizational structures are the result of one idea's germination and growth. What is the central idea of your current government?

And the one you would like?\* Do you even know what lies at your core?

Beyond that, how can we disassemble a system which already exists? You may imagine how, if you were to deny the core idea of a system, its extremities would first lose their energy, and wither. And as participants in the state, we find ourselves somewhere within this system. By clearing our minds, we can remove all foreign concepts from our minds, and the tree begins to shed its branches.

So, then, how to return to the garden of forking paths, and the clear air of the world as it could be, free from the corrupt, overbearing State apparatus, and the insatiable monster of global capitalism, and, and -

Can we ever return? Or do our footsteps erode the path behind us?

The civilization is the father to the child, we might say. If we detatch ourselves from it, we leave

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\* Now for some absolute bullshit. -Ed.

not as the wind but as the seeds carried on the wind. So our break will not be clean, and it never could be. A certain quantity of our selves will remain once we depart.\*\*

Our departure will be bittersweet. Somewhere in the previous seed was the smallest shade of the darkness, or perhaps there was one time too many where we rested, or perhaps our judgment was faulty. But now we must leave the world behind, as well as ourselves.

“Vormann says he's at church,” Knox tells her.

“Why the hell would he go to church at a time like this?”

“I don't know, to clear his conscience?”

“Whatever. Which one?”

“The cathedral on High Street. The Catholic one. Saint-whatever's.” He shoves his phone in his pocket and turns back toward the stairs. “I've got to get over there.”

“Hey,” she says, “this is the part where we're supposed to hold onto each other and be all comforting, don't you know?”

“It's – shit – will you come with, then?”

“Hell yeah,” she says, “let's go.”

## **6.0 | the non-aggression principle \* \* \***

Fat women are like clouds in the sky. They're just floating there, nothing to do with me. But your young, beautiful, fat woman is another story.

-Haruki Murakami

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\*\* If you meet the author on the street, kill him. -Ed.



It's a short walk but with the wind picking up and some clouds that look like sleet they take the bus instead. Knox looks around as they're riding. Everybody else is buried in their mobiles. The bus driver is staring at them in the rearview. So he reaches into his pocket, and checks his. His news feeds are raging with updates about the explosion, full of pictures and video and people yelling about what it is, what it means. He looks at the building with its face blown off, the Iowa office of the Mississippi River Cooperative. There's a video of the moment of ignition, where the camera's IR is flooded with the vitreous white flash, and when it departs it's raining concrete and rebar, all shrouded in grey dust. Everybody with a video camera and a keyboard is trying to count the bodies. Maybe four, maybe twenty – everybody is making their wagers. He takes a deep breath and lets the bus rock him like a child. They get off on Sixth and start walking toward the cathedral. As they walk he's throwing his legs forward as far as they'll go and she's doing the same.

“What the hell are we going to do, Lance?” Knox asks. “They're gonna show up and Vormann is-”

“Hey,” she says, speaking half into the collar of her parka, “it's okay.”

“But Vormann did it, right? I mean, what can we do? He's going to jail – or worse!”

“Knox, calm down.”

“But, I mean, we talked to him about it! And we told him that we were with it – I mean, it even seemed like it was maybe an okay idea! They're going to round all of us up, and-”

“Knox!” She grabs his arm and they shudder to a stop on the street, where everything is covered in ice and the wind is sweeping between them, and she can see how his eyes have started to glisten in the loglow from the street.

“I'm just – it's just that I'm hanging on, I'm trying to make sure that my life

is okay, and I've got my family, and I've got you, and I'm just so afraid that it's all going to be gone – that everything I love is going to get taken from me.” He blinks. “You know? I'm so afraid – that someday I'm going to lose everything, and what if this is the day when it happens?”

“Then let's fight, okay?” She keeps holding on to him. “We weren't just rubber-stamping Vormann when we said that. He's our friend. And if he needs our help, let's do it.”

He clears his nose. “He is our friend.”

“And if they're really going to come looking for us, we might as well make it worth it.” She looks him in the eyes, and as he's about to look away she rushes in and kisses him. “I don't care if you don't agree with him. We can't leave him on his own. He deserves that much.”

“Yeah. Okay.” She's been moving him forward gradually and now the church is standing in front of them. “As long as you're with me.”

“No matter what,” she says. “No turning back now.”

They go up the stairs and go in. In the antechamber, bouncing off the marble, there is the sound of a piano along with their feet thumping. It's cold; she leaves the hood of her parka up, covering her watch cap. Knox has his hands shoved in his pockets, and they walk into the church with their arms locked together. There's a grand piano sitting in front of the altar. Vormann in his peacoat in the front row. Aside from that it's empty, save for a few blue-haired ladies saying rosaries to themselves. They delink their arms and park themselves on either side of him.

“Hey, what the hell just happened?” Knox asks. “Stuff is actually blowing up out there!”

“I don't know,” he says, “you tell me. You interpret.”

They're trying to whisper like out of habit, but between the excitement and the piano being played it's more like raspy spears of conversation, and one of the old ladies shush them.

“Are you crazy? Blowing up buildings gets the federal goddamn government to show up.” From Vormann's other side, Delancey grabs his shoulder. He doesn't resist. “The ATF. And the only thing the ATF does is set shit on fire and kill people.”

“Is that Moo playing piano?” Knox asks, once Vormann doesn't respond. He squints. It is her, in a black dress, also fuzzy-looking and flecked white with cat hair. She doesn't seem to notice them.

“The one and only.” He produces a flask. “Whiskey?”

“You need to keep your wits about you,” Lance says, as she grabs the flask from him.

“Nobody's watching.” He shrugs. “Well. They weren't. Now they are. Every last person in the country. The shitty fertilizer bomb watched around the world.”

“Vormann,” Knox says, almost forgetting to lower his voice, “you killed people.”

“If I killed anybody they were government stooges. They knew what they had coming to them. Don't you get that? What did they think, they could spy on people and take our liberties forever? Fuck that. They deserved it.”

“Can you be a little more quiet?”

“No! I did what I had to do. They should have done it before you and me were even born, man.”

“Knox, he's drunk.”

“Yeah, I gathered that.” He draws a long breath through his nose. “What's Moo playing, anyway?”

“It's Chopin.” Delancey says. “Third sonata.”

“You know classical?” He smiles. She kisses him again. This time it's almost belligerent, their faces colliding. Then she turns back to Vormann. “What were you trying to do, anyway?”

Vormann grins. “Stir up some shit. You can't govern people who don't want to be governed. So get everybody to say no. Fuck this. We're done. No more mega-corporations, no more shitty politicians getting rich selling false security to soccer moms.”

“They're going to kill you if you're not on top of things,” she says.

“I'll die for a good cause. I mean, it's better than the fucking Navy. I don't want to die for the petrodollar, or corporate interests in wherever, or for growth.”

“Vormann, we'd rather you stay alive,” Knox says.

“Ugh. What's it matter? When they founded this country they were shooting over way less.” He looks at Knox all glassy-eyed. “I'm not crazy. I swear. I feel god damned normal.”

“Why'd you come to a church?” Delancey asks.

“Some historical perspective, maybe,” he says, gesturing to the ceiling. “Or just getting drunk.”

The piano music stops. Lance and Knox look toward the altar where Moo has stood up, shut the lid of the piano, and is walking toward them.

“Or he's interrupting my rehearsal so he can ask to buy guns from me,” she says, straightening her septum ring. “which is incredibly gauche. The gauche douche.”

They both stare.

“Rule number one of having guns is that you don't talk about having guns, because people who don't have guns are always filled with disinformation and brain-searing stupid. So I made the mistake of mentioning my inheritance to

soldier-boy because I thought he was a kindred spirit, not just some hick with a Nagant and a pump gun, and now here he is, in his hour of need.”

“Are you serious?” Delancey asks.

“No,” she says, “my parents left me five hundred transferable NFA Pez dispensers.”

By now the old ladies have given up on finding silence and they've moved on to the next church. So they're all alone. Moo stands there in the center of the church with her hands on her hips looking combative like she's ready to take a punch to the chest.

“So you're going to let me buy?” Vormann says. “The money's all ther-”

“What we're going to do,” she says, “is get you out of town before someone drones you to death, you dumbass.”

“I've never been out of town,” Knox says. “I mean, you mean we're going to the Counties, right? And there's no police out there, right? Isn't it dangerous? We could just hide here. Nobody's going to drone-strike a church.”

“Yes they will. My parents got killed by a gas explosion and that was in the middle of a subdivision. And the Counties aren't lawless. Our county has two cops, and that's whatever. Given how many people most cops arrest and how many dogs they shoot I like it that way. You take responsibility for your own security. Responsibility. Remember that?”

They all sigh.

“When seconds count, the police are just minutes-”

“Save the lecture, Moo,” Delancey says. “You carry. I get it. Good for you.”

“Lecture or no lecture, he's getting the hell out of here.”

“I'm in no position to resist,” Vormann says, sliding backwards against the pew and spreading his arms out. “My work here is done.”

## 6.1 \* \* \*

Vormann hands over the keys and Moo stuffs her Super Cub in the trunk, packs some snow over the license plate, and she drives them down Route 28, occasionally glancing up at the sky and cutting across the centerline. Knox puts his hand on the wheel and she brushes him off.

“Hey, I'm fine to drive,” she says.

“You're going to get us pulled over.”

“I'm looking for drones.” She steals another glance. “How long do you think before they ID the car? We'll be better here than on the highway, since there's cameras all over there, but still.”

“They'd have to know I did something,” Vormann says, “and they don't. So they won't ID the car. They can't.”

“They probably arrested Armitage,” Knox says, “and they're going to figure it out from him.”

“Amateurs. We planned for that, too. Shelby hooked us up with the family lawyer,” he says, as Knox and Lance turn to look at each other, “so Armitage is just going to take the fifth, and the lawyer's going to spring him, since he didn't set the bomb off, since he was giving a speech when it happened.”

“So,” Knox says, “who did?”

“That would be telling,” he says, grinning. “Armitage is a free man, either because they can't prove it or because the lawyer has crazy skills. Shelby told me he does. He'll be fine.”

“So now we just have to worry about them sifting through your phone logs, realizing it's you, then finding your phone and doing long-distance brain surgery on you.” Moo looks at him. “Let me see your phone, actually.”

He has it in his hand and it's obvious that he suspects her, but he's pretty drunk and in one swift extension-retraction of her arm she grabs it from between his fingers and she's winding up again to throw it out the window when Knox grabs her arm.

“Hey!” she shouts.

“You don't have to throw it out the window, you can just turn it off.” He looks at her. “And they know that I know him. They could just track my phone and see if they got lucky.”

“So turn yours off.” She grabs hers. “Hell, we all should.”

“I will,” he says. He's looking at the LCD on his phone so that he can power it down and he glances at a message from his mom. Fed showed up at the house and asked about you. I told him you were here with your girlfriend. What's her name? Be careful, Knox. He swallows. They keep driving into the countryside.

Moo's grandparents live way south of the city in an old farmhouse east of Martensdale, where the stars are visible again and it's just fallow farmland and snowdrifts and telephone poles. The house is a graciously weathered two-story, once mustard-yellow but now a bit washed-out and chipped from the weather, its shingles disheveled like hangnails, but as they pull up on it the lights are on and it exudes a warm light like honey, cutting loose elongated quadrangles across the snow.

They get out of the blue Geely and Moo pushes her Super Cub into the garage, which is strewn with antiques: wooden milk crates, desktop typewriters, washing boards, stamped-steel signage, and then into the house, standing in the kitchen for a moment as their eyes adjust. Knox blinks a couple times, and

breathes the air, which smells like cloves and bread and ground coffee. There are two old people sitting at the kitchen counter. The man has Moo's eyes and the woman has her jawline.

“You brought friends, Erika?” the woman, presumably her grandmother, asks.

“Erika?” Knox asks. Moo glares.

Her grandmother laughs and wiggles her fingers in front of her face.

“There is no Erika. Only Moo.”

“I did,” Moo says, ignoring her, “Knox, Delancey, and Vormann. They went to high school in Des Moines. I work with a friend of Knox.”

“Well, it's a pleasure to meet all of you. Make yourselves at home.” She looks at her granddaughter. “It's late. They might consider staying here.”

“That's what I was thinking.” She looks at them. “We've got spare bedrooms. If you don't mind.”

“And don't forget to change the litterboxes tonight,” her grandfather says, “they're stinking.”

Knox looks toward the living room and there's six cats lined up and staring at them, their eyes all glowing as he stares back at them.

“They've got claws but they're all friendly.” She goes down the line.

“Paprika, Lysander, Starlight, Benito Mussolini, Mersault, and Luty.”

“I'm allergic,” Lance says.

“Oh. Well, we should go into town, then,” she says. “There's a really good diner. Are you hungry? I'm starving. I haven't eaten since noon today.”

“Erika,” her grandmother says, “we've got food here.”

“But I wanted to show them around town. They think it's dangerous out here.”

“Well you can tell them instead, and they can go some other time. Don't be



wasteful.” Her grandfather smiles a little. “I’m sure they’re eager to see the libertarian paradise.”

“They’ll tell the other city people!” she says, waving her arms. “They’ll learn the truth!”

“And then they’ll come out here, and we’ll have to put up with all of them. You wouldn’t like that at all, would you?” He keeps smiling, and Moo’s eyes are starting to bulge. “We’ll heat up some of the venison stew. Just relax with your friends. It’s too cold to make that kind of drive at this time of the night, anyway.”

She takes a deep breath. “Okay.”

“And, miss – ah, what’s your name?” he says, turning to Lance.

“Delancey.”

“Miss Delancey. We’ve got antihistamines.”

With their phones turned off they end up sitting around the stove in the living room and on the little television set Moo puts on *The Day The Earth Stood Still*, and they watch it on and off between spurts of conversation. Knox is holding Lance’s hand and more often than not she puts her head on his chest.

“It’s a nice place to live,” Moo says after a while, “in town. People work together and they have everything they need. Voluntary police and fire, groceries and stuff, restaurants. Everything. It’s good.”

“But people like having big buildings, flashing lights,” Delancey says, “that kind of thing.”

“Not everyone. Not me. I like it. It’s simple. You have to work. But nobody tells you what to do.”

“What if you get hurt?” Knox says. From the position of Delancey’s ear he can surmise that she’s listening to his heart. He doesn’t know exactly what he’s feeling but he doesn’t want it to stop. “Like, if you have heart problems. Is there a

hospital?”

“There's – I'm sure there's something,” she says. “There has to be something.”

They watch the movie for a while. Gort is dematerializing tanks and everybody else sits helpless as their machines give up on them. The sound isn't up very high, and outside they can hear the wind whistling past.

“What about my stuff?” Vormann finally asks. Paprika the orange tabby is sitting in his lap and he's stroking the fur behind his ears. “I'm serious. I've got twenty-thousand dollars burning a hole in my pocket.”

“Look, the government is so broke that they might fall in on themselves when they're scrambling to look tough after what you did.” Moo looks at him. “They're going to be out for blood, I'm serious. Why not take it easy for a couple days?”

“There's all those corporations to deal with too. My work is cut out for me.”

“And once the government is gone, they'll have nothing to perpetuate their monopolies, and they'll disintegrate on their own.” She grabs an afghan off one of the armchairs and puts it around her legs. “And besides. They didn't build the USSR in a weekend, either.”

Before long her grandparents reappear in the doorway and they eat stew out of chipped bowls. There's big chunks of potatoes, garlic, and corn, and as Knox ends up biting down on a bay leaf Moo is telling them how it was from a deer that she shot herself, caught it right below the shoulder with a Foster slug. Delancey says something about thanking the deer. Afterward they finish the movie and all throughout Knox's peripheral vision there are cats moving. On the screen, they're saying that one phrase over and over. *Klaatu barada nikto*. He's nodding off. Thinking of Lance. The old house is so cold.

“Hey,” comes a voice, whispering, cutting the air. “Hey, Delancey.”

It's not Knox. Too high. She groans involuntarily and turns toward the noise.

“Wake up, Delancey.”

So she does. The bedroom is dark but in the moonlight from the one window whose blinds are only halfway closed she can see a head of blonde hair. Moo. She rubs the sleep out of her eyes.

“We need to talk.”

“Okay.” She's finally nice and warm and everything in her mental space seems more or less at peace, but then here she comes, breaking into the world with all those problems of hers. Whatever. “Now?”

“Not here. Downstairs. Basement.”

She groans again. She's warm. But whatever. Feet over the edge and onto the cold oak flooring, covering her breasts like Moo might know the spot where Knox bit the left one, the jerk, but then again she's got her own secrets, what with secretly being Erika and who knows what else, and she's rooting through the pile of textiles at the foot of the bed for her shirt and the telnyashka-stripe thigh-highs, and whatever, here's Bell's *Unknown Pleasures* shirt, which is good enough. She throws it over her head.

“Okay,” she says.

Moo starts talking when they get to the basement, along with three of the six cats, where there's a junked couch with green corduroy slip-cover and a similarly fatigued recliner which Moo sits down on, and the cats take positions around her on the arms and headrest.

“We're going to put Vormann into hiding,” Moo tells her.

“Uh, sure,” she says. Her toes are going numb from the outside digits in,

but it's not bad. Just like all the other times. She bites her lip like always and it goes away. "Why?"

"This is when it always happens." She looks at Delancey and for whatever reason she doesn't seem compelled. Probably just posturing. "This is when they always try it. Like Ruby Ridge. Or, you know, like a politically active but otherwise normal family living near the fairgrounds. As soon as the Feds show up. People start disappearing, houses start going up under curious circumstances."

Delancey gives her a look.

"I've got my reasons." She folds her arms. "I don't tell many people. But I thought you'd be able to relate."

"Yeah."

"So let's stop it from happening to Vormann, too."

"It's going to be hard." She pushes herself against the side of the couch to keep some warmth in. "You'd have to convince him to split with his girlfriend. Show him proof that he's getting used."

"And you don't have it?"

"Not really, not like scientific proof," she says. "It makes sense to me. But if you don't want to believe it, you might not. Seems like everything is that way. All just a matter of belief."

"If he's our friend, he'll listen."

"So you'd take your leftist friend over an enterprising businessman?"

"Principles. They're worth more than anything. The guy is probably getting rich selling drugs to hospitals since there's so many people getting hurt," she says. "If this keeps up, half the people I grew up with are going to be dead or in prison forever and he's still going to be doing pretty well for himself. Fuck that."

Delancey nods. "So you've got an idea?"

“Yeah.”

## 6.2 | 15 jan 2038 \* \* \*

Shelby's Mercedes smooths out the ruts on 150<sup>th</sup> Street like it's nothing while also managing to remain almost completely silent, except for the slight hum of the motor and her Arvo Pärt recording. Armitage remarks to himself as Shelby cranks the wheel into the driveway at Vormann's house. Outside there's flurries just starting, cut through by the morning sun, and she puts her browline sunglasses on.

“Someone told Vormann about the meeting, right?” Armitage says. He's still got his suit on from the court proceedings. He keeps blinking hard like he's expecting to wake up in the cell.

“I don't know, he hasn't been responding to my texts recently. He must be busy with something.” They cross the yard and head toward the house. There's a hole dug in the ground about four feet on each side. “Whatever it is.”

She knocks on the door and for once Vormann's dad answers, with a full beard and suspenders and not too subtly checking her out.

“Hello,” she says, ignoring his lack of couth, “is Vormann around?”

“You just missed him. He said he was going to the college.” His dad, Shelby thinks, is sort of like a worst-case-scenario of Vormann, with all the charming things about him reduced to vestigial traits. “I always told him he should go to trade school if he wants a job.”

“He drove?”

“He got a ride. And I don't know anything, so don't ask me. It's between you and him, whatever it is.”

“Yeah. Thanks.” She walks back down to the car and sits against the

engine. Armitage is trying to make himself useful somehow.

“I'm sorry that this is happening,” he says.

“What the hell is he doing?”

“You think he would just do something like that?”

“No. It's got to be something. What was he up to?” She walks around the back of the house past the hole in the frozen ground – had to be hard – and from there follows the footprints, which are still fresh. In the half-collapsed barn where they once got it on with the field mice scurrying away from the strange noise there's a box she doesn't recognize. But it's four feet long and a little less than three wide. Armitage watches as she opens it. She cranes her neck.

“What is it?”

“Rifles.”

“What?”

“A lot of rifles.” She turns and looks at him. “Sort these out, I've got to make a call.”

“Is she doing it?” Delancey asks.

“Yeah, she's – uh, she's oscar mike again,” Moo says. She took the binoculars that morning along with all the thermal underwear she could get on, wrapping herself up like Oedipa Maas so she could lay in the snow and watch Vormann's house. “She's headed back to the car. Get the mic hot.”

“You can get back in the van and warm up.” From the window of the van Delancey points the directional microphone toward the speck which is the black Mercedes, and the noise of feet over snow starts coming through the monitors.

“I've got a good angle. This way we don't need to expose the van too much.” Moo sniffs. “Don't want to get made and waste all this effort.”

Delancey rolls her eyes. If only the microphone had a spotting scope on it.

She adjusts it with the smallest movements until it finds Shelby's voice.

*“Dad.”*

*“Yes, dear?”* Another voice. This one male.

*“That's Sondergaard,”* Moo says. *“Her father.”*

Delancey looks toward the back of the van where they've got Vormann tied up. At first he was fighting the restraints like he was going to roll the van he was so mad, but now he's looking more and more intrigued.

*“Vormann ran off. I don't know where. He dug up a crate of guns he had in his backyard and left it for me to find.”* She scoffs. *“No Armalites or anything. Old Russian bolt-actions. Twenty of them.”*

*“He must have thought that would be enough.”* The car door opens and then shuts again. They lose the signal for a second until Delancey switches the laser emitter on and it comes back in.

*“Or it's all that he had. He told me he had a connection to someone with real equipment.”*

*“If you need it, I can get you whatever. It's just the factor of time.”*

*“You don't need to tell me.”*

*“He was just a pawn, anyway. You've got his group. Use it.”*

*“I was going to try to keep him out of the fire.”* Shelby takes a deep breath. *“He's a good guy and he's trying to do the right thing.”*

*“And it doesn't matter if he's right or not. Or what you think about him. Your job has to be to take care of yourself. The whole world is going to hell. I only care about what happens to you.”*

There's a long pause. Delancey looks back at Vormann again. He's looking at the floor of the van. She clears her throat. “Hey.”

Vormann looks up.

“We care about you, okay?”

*“I know he's got a friend who works for you at that laundromat. I'm going to go see if he knows anything.”*

### 6.3 \* \* \*

Shelby makes sure to put Armitage through the door at the gymnasium at Drake first, and as she goes in after him she can see the crowd turn to face him, and the division that splits them immediately. Someone claps, although there's clearly hesitation in it, and then someone else yells one long *Youuuuuu suck!* and everyone goes silent.

The WDAL had one of their intramural softball games scheduled and so they canceled it and turned it onto a general meeting instead. Bell and Imogen are sitting on the bleachers. Imogen is eating beef stew out of an MRE envelope and Bell looks like he's about to go into shock. When Shelby and Armitage find them they sit down next to him.

“Hey man,” Bell says, pale and trembling, “big excitement, right?”

“Yeah.” They're putting a PA system together out of guitar amps and things. People are starting to coalesce into a regular-looking group, almost like they're in formation. Armitage squints. In the center of the crowd there's Frost and a redheaded woman who's all of five feet tall, running back and forth like she's having three or four arguments simultaneously. “Yeah. What the hell did I miss? Who's the redhead?”

“Miss Kowalski, apparently a BS of chemical engineering or something like that, and Armitage's number-two.”

“Where's Mulholland?”

“Mulholland's dead, man,” Bell says.

“What?”



“Yeah, right?” He looks at him. “he's fucking dead. Last night. On the freeway. We were all together – well, shit, it's all over the news. The goddamn cops shot him. I saw them do it. He shot that guy and then we ran, and they were just shooting at everybody, and I saw Mulholland fall, and that must have been when he died. Shit. He was right next to me.”

Imogen nods slowly, with beef fibers between her incisors.

“What the hell are we going to do now?” Armitage says. No Vormann, and Mulholland is dead. We're up shit creek. The DHS is showing up, too, and-

“We don't stop, that's for sure. Not if people are getting killed.” Shelby looks at them. “Never let up, not for a second. That's what he always told me. You commit to the idea absolutely.”

“I don't want to,” Bell says. “This is fucking insane.”

“I'm going to go to Frost and tell him exactly what he needs to hear.”

None of them say anything. She gets off the bleachers and shoulders through the crowd standing around Kowalski and Frost.

“Hey,” she says to Frost, “where's Vormann?”

“Who the hell are you?”

“I'm his girlfriend. What did you do to him?”

*“You've got to prove that the notion of the universal good contained in virtue terrorism isn't a postcolonialist manifestation of white cismale privilege,”* someone is shouting, *“or you'll get no support from my movement!”*

“Fuck if I know. I was expecting you to tell me.” He has to shout so he can be heard over everyone. “Didn't you hear that the DHS is gonna come in declare martial law?”

“All right. Where are we going from here?” Shelby asks him. “Vormann or not.”

*“Are we, if we're asked, a Marxist or a Maoist organization? Or*

*Trotskyist?"*

*"Hey, where do we go if we want to join the fighting? Are we organized yet? Or are we not fighting?"*

"We're not going toe-to-toe with the feds, that's for damned sure."

"And you're not going to sit back and take it while everyone gets arrested."

"Look, let's go to my office," Frost says. "This is pushing total chaos."

"Fine."

*"I'm trying to get volunteers for a vegan awareness sit-in at the Chick-Fil-A across from campus. Could you put that on the schedule?"*

Frost asks Kowalski if she can handle things. She gives an exasperated sigh, and they leave the room just as the meeting starts to come to order.

They trudge across campus in silence. For the first time in over a week it's above freezing and there's fog hovering everywhere. She lights a cigarette and just barely gets through it before they go into Howard Hall. Frost shuts the door of his office. Shelby can see his expression turn stony.

"What the hell have you two been doing?" he says. She looks at him. Does he really think he's going to die or something? "Do you realize how much danger we're in? You murdered those people!"

"I trust Vormann. I don't know about you. But you should."

"Mulholland is already dead. And you fucking blew up a government building!"

"They took a job violating the liberties and well-being of Americans. Fuck them." Another line from the Vormann phrasebook.

"Murder is murder!"

"People are behind us. You're so apathetic you might as well be

complicit.”

“No.” He stares at her. “Do you even hear yourself? You're going to burn the city down doing what you're doing. That's not what this organization is. Do you really think you're going to lead this charge right up to the capitol?”

“All you have to do is make the government realize that nobody is willing to cooperate anymore. Have some heart. We're doing the right thing.”

“We're not doing this. We're nonviolent.” He folds his arms. “Don't do another thing.”

“Oh, fuck you. What would Mulholland want us to do?” She folds her arms right back at him. “Or Vormann. He'd be angrier than me. You think I'm giving you hell. Wait for him.”

“I'm telling you exactly what I think is right.” He looks at Shelby. “Mulholland, for all his violent tendencies, understood why it was important to act on what the group believed and not just what he believed. Consensus, then action. Without being aligned with the common will, what you're doing is nothing more than vigilante justice.”

She sneers.

“You and him and all your friends are out of control. If you do one more thing I'm going to turn you over to the police, if they're not already coming for you. We clear?”

She stares. “If they're not already. So you talked.”

“I want to live to fight another day.”

“Naturally.” She turns on her heel and leaves.

#### 14.1: Kill People Break Stuff

This chapter, which is devoted solely to the development and application of force, is brought

together under the adage of an old high school teacher. In response to one student's question of what the function of militaries are, he answered, in cynic wit which was typical of him,

*"Kill people, break stuff."*

And though reductionist, it is true. Furthermore, we can imagine a continuum between regular forces, paramilitary groups and police, insurgencies, and descending all the way to vandals and petty thugs, wherein this adage remains true. The primary difference, besides size and equipment, is who you are killing and what you are breaking. Knowing the role your group plays and what to target and what not to target is just as important as having the ability to apply force in the first place.

There is a widespread fantasy of the noble and glorious revolution in which you will ride out to meet the counter-revolutionary forces on the field of battle and strike a decisive blow against them. This does not happen.

As a revolutionary movement, your goal is not diametric opposition of the established order: you should see yourself as being more similar to a cancer growing in the body of the state, rendering its organs inefficient or useless, forcing it to waste resources wherever possible, until the entire structure collapses under its own weight. While you may have

some of the same implements and aspirations as the organized military, the nature and objectives of your use of force will be vastly different.

Many of our prospective readers will, by this point, be wondering whether or not they've taken the right steps so far, and whether or not their newly-formed revolutionary movement is about to run out of steam and collapse before them.

**Here's some easy signs to look for in any good movement:**

- You and your followers are committing acts of random terror, which have the enemy wasting his resources on irrelevant goals and further alienating him from the general population.
- There is a growing schism between yourself and similar political movements. The cloud of sympathetic people is, in your vision, being winnowed down to a handful of dependable operatives.
- You and your fellows have started to exhibit insomnia, generalized anxiety, nausea, diarrhea, night sweats, and headache.
- You begun to assemble a network of supporters, a generalized plan with specific targets for future action, and resources to draw upon when the time

is right.

- People in your movement have started to settle into particular roles which everybody else knows them for. Some recommended personalities to pursue:
  - The Leader (or leaders, though less is more here)
  - The Information Gatherer
  - The Resources Gatherer
  - The Recruiter/Personality Evaluator
  - The Inside Connection
  - The Handyman

If you can see three of these signs emerging in your group, good for you. You're well on your way to becoming a fully-fledged insurgency. If you can't see three, don't worry. Remember, that you control the pace of your own movement. Given time and the judicious application of your own intelligence, you'll no doubt begin to see them emerge. And in this early state, a little bit of cautiousness will pay big rewards once things become more serious.

Before moving on, however, you may want to issue a manifesto, either internally or publicly. Try to stay as close as possible to its premises. Or don't. History has shown successful revolutions which have

made both choices.

Back in the gym Kowalski is stressing how nothing is really going to change, and that the best thing they can do is consider how violent revolution inevitably leads to despotism, and how real social change comes through raising awareness and the radical consciousness when Shelby and Frost come back into the gymnasium. He has to push through a crowd of bumbling WDAL members who are sitting in a tight group in back and grumbling to each other about how they're not even bothering to address the revolution vis-a-vis animal liberation, and with Frost still giving her the evil eye he goes back to Bell and company with a grin and an open stance.

“So how'd it go?” Bell asks. He's doesn't seem as upset as he did before. “Does he know where Vormann is?”

“No idea where Vormann was. No plan. Doesn't like us, though. He said he called the cops on us.”

“The cops?”

“Yeah, but I wouldn't worry.”

“So what, then?”

“Vormann said we keep going, and that's what I think we should do. If the feds are showing up, that means that the local authorities are getting overwhelmed. He said that was a sign of weakness. And an opportunity to exploit it as they're changing from one group to the next. So, one good whack and-”

There's a loud thump like someone dropping a stack of books. Everyone looks around.

“Did you hear that?” she asks them. “That sounds bad.”

“Nah, it was just-”

One of the doors flies open with another loud bang, this one big enough to

ring their ears, and then there's maybe fifteen or twenty dudes in black plate carriers and carbines bursting through the doorway shouting “Federal agents!” and falling over the row of lardy WDAL animal-rights activists, and they're rolling all over each other like at the club and the women shriek and the Feds are screaming “failed breach!”. Kowalski drops the microphone and sprints toward them, windmilling her arms and yelling for them to follow her.

“Time to go!”

“You're with us?” Shelby says.

“You don't know?” She scoffs. “Jesus Christ, I'm the chemist. Of course I'm with you. Where the hell did you think that huge fucking explosion the other day came from?”

“Oh. Naturally.”

“Come on, we're getting out – let's get, let's move – just follow me and we'll get out of here.” She starts powerwalking in the opposite direction of the breach, where a melee has broken out and there's the crackle of Tasers firing and people screaming anti-fascist slogans. “Come on, move real natural, but not so fast that anybody notices, not so slow that we all get black-bagged – come on, come on, come on!”

Vormann never told her about that. As the racket intensifies she herds them into a big janitor's closet where they have to step over bags of volleyballs and hockey pads until they get to a gap in the wall where the steam heating system comes out of the darkness, and they sidle into oblivion. Kowalski lights the way with the flash on her phone.

“Did you have this planned out or do you just make a habit of knowing all the secret parts of the buildings you hang out in?” Shelby says, as soon as they're all in.

“You're telling me that you didn't join the WDAL intramural urban-



exploration team?”

“No.”

“I thought it'd be a great way to suck asbestos but I guess it makes a pretty good deus ex machina too, eh?” They keep moving. Kowalski is short enough that she hardly has to turn sideways to fit through the passage, and all they can see is the bobbing of her head as she starts to break away from them. But before long she stops. “You can take this path north a ways and you'll end up in the physical plant, and the shitty feds shouldn't be anywhere near there. Safe and sound. Just watch out for steam leaks because they'll burn your face off. So it's mostly safe.”

“And you're going another way?” she says.

“Of course,” Kowalski says, “since you're our interim fearless leader and all that. You can get there with your courage, and your pretend military orienteering skills, and your imaginary swinging dick.”

“Jesus, if you had an axe to grind-”

“I'm not, I'm just having fun, you dolt.” Kowalski coughs. “I've got some evidence to destroy, so I'll talk to you later, okay?”

“Uh, sure,” Shelby says.

Kowalski is still coughing as she starts to head off, and after a few feet she turns around. “If you cough it's probably dust or something not-so-bad. Asbestos doesn't make you cough. You just get cancer everywhere in twenty years and then you die. But anyway. It's better than getting tortured by the cops. So don't fuck this up! They're angry as hell.”

“I figured that, yeah.”

“What, you figured about the asbestos stuff?”

“No. The cops.”

“Oh. Well, still. Everyone gets cancer eventually. So don't sweat that.”

And Kowalski goes off to do whatever she's got planned. Shelby thinks

about what everybody else is thinking. She wonders how Vormann kept things straightened out.

#### 6.4 \* \* \*

His mom and dad go to the hospital and Knox goes to work. They both tell him it'll be all right, that it's a normal procedure that they do all the time, and so on and so forth. Still he keeps wishing them good fortune with all the trimmings. They have to pretty much push him out the door and as he's standing on the steps his father puts his hand on his shoulder.

“It's just something that you have to live with as you get older,” he says.

“I know, but that doesn't make it any easier to deal with.”

“Well. That's life. It's fragile. You have to hold on to what you can, for as long as you can.” He puts his hand on his chest. “Sometimes you get lucky, though. Chance visits to the doctor's, and the like. It's not the worst. You're here, after all.”

“Thanks, dad.”

“I try.”

At the laundromat he is starting to attract a small but reliable customer base, which has become a point of pride for him: the middle-aged lady with the GI duffel bag, two pre-teen twins in school uniforms, an old man with waxed mustache, and a few more. They take care of themselves, for the most part. Occasionally he'll make small talk about sports with the old guy, but beside that, they sit and read magazines, and he plays LineWar. He's wondering what the rest of the world has been seeing, though, so he turns the news on. He finds himself at the end of one story.

*“More coverage of the fire at the Drake University Fine Arts Center tonight, which firefighters say may have been deliberately started, perhaps in connection to tonight's arrests of student radicals. Now to Judy for an update on last night's unrest, and the deployment of DHS troops to the metropolitan area.”*

Flash cut to somewhere outside. It's the Hispanic reporter lady again. Judy Guzman, that's it. She's standing on the shoulder of the eastbound lanes of I-235 near downtown and looking concerned. There's broken glass scattered across the tarmac.

*“A night of terror,”* the reporter says, *“which has brought the state of emergency in the metro area to a new and terrifying head.”*

Flash cut to a phone video of this writhing mob in the middle of the street. It's focused on some luxury car in the center but it's too shady to make anything out.

*“Police estimate that, after the earlier explosion at the state headquarters of the Mississippi River Cooperative thirty to forty people swarmed into the interstate, most of them wearing hoods and ski masks, and began attacking one car in particular.”*

They roll a photo into the frame. Some older guy, impeccable suit, his hair starting to go grey, looking pretty jovial like most people with serious money do. *“Inside was Ronald Forsythe, the CEO of Retriever Brands, on his way to the airport. But the mob brutally ripped him from the car-”*

Which they show, in a white highlighting circle so you can't miss it, as people are breaking out all the windows like it's a Romero film, and the reporter keeps using more and more adverbs. Knox and his mom sit and watch. They don't go for the driver, just the CEO. They rough him up for a while and the car fucks off as fast as it can.

*“And then-”*

What else could it be leading up to? Someone shoots the guy. On the camera it manifests as a handful of tinny cracks, and some artifacted smoke puffing like a cigarette, but no doubt it's gunshots. After a pause there's one last one, for quality control.

*“A scene of absolute terror on the roadways. And just as soon as they assembled, the mob dispersed. Nearby police officers responding shot and killed one armed suspect and arrested two more, but as many as thirty-five are reported to still be at large.”*

Text message for him. It's from Delancey.

lanceyverky: Hey, there might be trouble coming your way.

bond-spacesuit: Oh god. What now?

lanceyverky: Vormann's girlfriend is playing both sides, and she knows that you know him. So if you see her, don't tell her jack shit.

bond-spacesuit: Ok

bond-spacesuit: when am I going to see you again?

lanceyverky: You may have noticed it's a bit nuts out there.

bond-spacesuit: No cops at my house.

lanceyverky: We'll see.

Flash cut to the press room in the police station or whatever, and again Chief Meyer in full dress standing behind the podium with a bunch of whiteshirts alongside him, all looking irritated but without an object to focus it on.

*“This is an absolutely despicable, cowardly crime,”* he says, holding

either side of the podium and leaning in, *“and the full resources of our department are being applied to the case. Everyone in that video will have to face justice for the actions they've taken.”*

He thinks about how Bell told him once, after he'd moved into his apartment, that the average response time in the city was something like a half hour, even longer out on the fringes.

*“Isn't this a result of the widespread blackouts and continuing state of emergency?”* one reporter asks.

*“The National Guard has been very prompt in maintaining emergency services and supplies to affected areas throughout the entire emergency. This, and the earlier explosion, were acts of terrorism. There are individuals who are using the situation as an excuse to incite violence, and destroy the fabric of our communities. We're working together with the Department of Homeland Security and ATF to find those responsible and safeguard the good people of this city.”*

Cut back to the roadway where she's now gesturing northward, past the Drake campus. Past his house. *“But there are some people who say that the government isn't doing enough.”*

Another flash cut to someone all wrapped up in a winter coat, a scarf, a hat, so that only their eyes and broken nose are visible. ANONYMOUS, they're called, The subtitle: PROTESTOR. Knox narrows his eyes. In the background someone is huddled and standing with their back toward the camera. It looks like Bell's coat.

*“It's fucking bullshit,”* the female voice says. *“The rich people have power. So what the hell do they care? They're only turning our lights back on because we can't go to work for them if they can't. It's the right thing to do. To take the power for yourself!”*

Cut to the newsroom. The bald anchor nods seriously.

*“Well, with no signs of an end to the polarization, and serious unrest beginning to emerge, it's unclear what the Governor will do. And more on that young man, possibly with connections to this most current wave of violence, who made a dramatic speech at the state capitol, in just a few minutes. For KCCI, this is-”*

Someone comes through the door and he looks up. Shelby and her mother Adrie. A black Mercedes idling on the curb with Sondergaard leaning against it, wearing a Homburg and smoking. His spine goes rigid.

“Hey,” Shelby says, “uh, hey, what was it?”

“Knox.”

“Knox, yeah. Sorry.” She scratches her chin. “Are you doing okay?”

“Actually, I was looking for some more hours, if you know.” There's a handy deflection, come to think of it. “My dad's getting a surgery done. My family needs all the money it can get.”

“You'd have to talk to my mom.”

“What about-” he points outside “-uh, your dad?”

“I'm a little reserved,” Adrie says all of a sudden, her voice a little higher than he expected, “but my husband and I have equal authority.”

She closes the distance with him and under the fluorescent lights he can catch the hardware in her right eye from time to time. Fucking creepy. She walks into the booth with him and her presence is unnerving, which is probably exactly what she wants. He clears his nose.

“I take after my husband in that I don't mince words. We've got our business interests.”

“You certainly do,” he says. “All those deliveries. Whatever they are.”

“Mister Sondergaard and I were quite happy to watch Vormann, and our daughter, and you, and all your friends go out, try to change the world, and really

figure out what it means to be an adult. Quite a nice life experience.” She is like her husband. She can speak like there's nothing you can do but pay respectful attention. “What we don't like, though, is when people refuse to follow through with their dreams. You're not young forever. Eventually you get tied down. You get a job, you get a husband, you get a kid or two.”

She gives Shelby a little push on the shoulder and she smiles. He doesn't like to see the resemblance between the two of them when all he can think about is how it must be awkward to be a blood relative of someone who's apparently half-computer.

“So,” he says, “what are you getting at?”

“I think you can make the connection.” Now she's staring him down. “You're an intelligent person, and though I prefer not to say it for the sake of appearances, you know what my interests are. And as such, I'll treat you like the intelligent person you are. You know where Vormann is. We'd like to have a discussion with him.”

“Is that so.” And when he remembers Delancey's smile and putting his arms around her it's an easy choice. “You're sure you're not going to shoot him.”

“Quite the contrary. For one, we can offer him a legal shelter. And the greater threat, by far, is now the federal government. No business owner could go to them and say, 'Couldn't you please leave us to settle this on our own?' But he can. The governor will negotiate something.”

He gives her a strange look.

“You don't believe me. You should.” She points to her eye. “When I was your age, I was doing postgraduate work in mathematics. I learned the value of data, and abstract reasoning. Beyond, like Nietzsche said, good and evil.”

He keeps scowling.

“People like us pay for the free clinics, so that there's a market for the

pharmaceuticals that we supply to city hospitals. Anesthetic. Vaccines. Antibiotics of all types. The euthanasia for your dying dogs. Without our cost-saving methods, the city would run itself into the ground.” She looks up for a second, in thought. “Say, for example, most drugs that treat organ rejection. We supply all of those to the metropolitan area.”

Now he's proper fucked. Shelby is staring at the floor.

“God damn it, I didn't do-”

“Uh-huh. You didn't do anything. The world has simply imposed its will upon you.” She takes a few steps in. Her perfume is floral and jammy, like she's trying to overcompensate for her calculating movements. “But I am human.”

“Sure about that?”

“And,” she says, ignoring him, “I don't like to make people miserable if it can be helped. Especially not when I could simply devote some of our family's resources toward doing it on my own. But I wanted to give you a chance. To just point out where he is.” She points at her eye again. “I know that you know. I can see it in your magnetic fields. The aura of truth.”

“Mmm.”

“And if not – well, it's already clear that you're not in the most flexible position. You can imagine.” She lets her words sink in for a second, then relaxes her posture, and puts an arm around Shelby, who manages to get a sympathetic look off at Knox before she gets dragged back out the front of the store.

“Some family,” the old guy says to him before he leaves with his wash.

## **6.5 \* \* \***

Not a moment to even think about anything. He's texting his mom to make sure that everything is going okay with the surgery, looking out to see if the DHS



really is parking armored cars on every corner like they're saying on the Internet, and then Bell calls him.

*"Hey man," he says, "I'm going to come over, okay?"*

Knox rubs his eyes. "It's just me. Everyone else is busy."

*"That's fine, I just need someone to talk to. Just broke up with Imogen. I'll bring a six-pack."*

"Seriously? That blows."

*"Yeah, well, I knew it was coming. But it still fucking sucks. She's going goddamn crazy."*

lanceyverky: Did she come by today?

bond-spacesuit: You owe me. A lot.

lanceyverky: Don't worry, i'mma sort it all out, okay?

bond-spacesuit: are you doing okay? This is crazy.

lanceyverky: I'm a survivor. It'll be fine. Don't worry about me. Just keep your head down.

Twenty minutes later he's back home after walking right past a pair of desert-tan MRAPs sitting on either side of Kingman Boulevard, and by the looks of it there's two more up on University Avenue, and so he figures that it's probably a good idea to hang back and do nothing. Bell shows up in his tattered plaid winter jacket with a case of Old Milwaukee, kicking the snow off his feet.

"Motherfucking Friday!" Bell shouts, as he's standing in the doorway.

"Yeah, really."

"By the way, that's totally my fault," he says, handing Knox a beer, "all

those armored cars and shit.”

“Sure it's not Vormann's?”

“He's the man of the hour, sure, but me and Imogen managed to get in the shit, too.” He takes one for himself and pulls it open. “You got anything to eat?”

“Not really. There might be some MRE parts left over if you look hard enough.” He looks down. “Some rice.”

“Okay. But anyway. So she found someone who knew one of the guide authors, right? And she hunted around, found the directions, and so on Tuesday we went to the guy's place. He pulls a gun on us, she does this ninja shit, and hits the guy over the head with a fire extinguisher.”

“Wow.”

“Yeah. Just because. Then last night, we were at this protest, right? And she starts saying, *let's go do something big, fight for justice*, and all that. And what do I say but that I know the jackass CEO of my company is leaving town that night, what with all the anarchy going around, and-”

“Jesus, that was on the evening news!”

“I was?”

“Not you, but your mob was!”

“You see? I fucking told you!” He puts his hands on his head. “I mean, I never asked for this, I was just around for it. But Imogen wants to start shooting cops and burning buildings down. She's not going to stop until we're dead or in prison.”

“That doesn't make sense. She's getting through university and everything. Why would she throw it all away?”

“She's going to take seven or eight years to get through school, and then she's going to be supporting her family for the rest of her life, if she even manages to get a decent job. What's she got to lose?”

“You know what, this is too damn heavy. We should just play LineWar.” He takes a drink of beer. “I've got to talk to my mom about my dad's surgery, so you can play a few rounds, all right?”

“Sure. Delancey doing okay?” He starts connecting his phone to the big monitor in the living room. “I hope it works out better for you, at least.”

“She's run off into the countryside, I think. On a top-secret mission to save Vormann.”

“Not that. I mean you and her.”

“Oh. Well, yeah, it's going well.” He takes a breath. “There's one thing I can't complain about.”

## **7.0 | fail-deadly | 16 jan 2038 \* \* \***

Contemplate the mangled bodies of your countrymen, and then say "what should be the reward of such sacrifices?" Bid us and our posterity bow the knee, supplicate the friendship and plough, and sow, and reap, to glut the avarice of the men who have let loose on us the dogs of war to riot in our blood and hunt us from the face of the earth? If ye love wealth better than liberty, the tranquility of servitude better than the animating contest of freedom, go home from us in peace. We ask not your counsels or your arms. Crouch down and lick the hands which feed you. May your chains set lightly upon you, and may posterity forget that you were our countrymen.

-Samuel Adams, Speech at the State House of Pennsylvania, 1776

His mom finally gets the news to him a little past one in the morning, after Bell has been playing matches on the same server for so long he's passed out on the couch, and as she's telling him about how they got moved back in line because all the emergencies coming through Knox is looking at the television, and through the rangefinding sight on the Abrams that Bell was gunning, his field of fire downward and through a beautiful river valley somewhere allegedly in the mountains of eastern Kazakhstan. She says they'll be home in the morning and he

nods, tells her that he loves her, and just manages to unfold his sofa before he falls asleep himself.

lanceyverky: Hey, baby, you'd better be glued to your phone, because this is important.

bond-spacesuit: You've got my ear.

lanceyverky: The most important thing about free software is that most people who code it are techno-anarchists like me, or whatever they call me

>so they care about privacy and open access and strong cryptography, which is how we're talking to each other right now.

bond-spacesuit: It's encrypted?

lanceyverky: Yeah, so you can say anything. As long as the other person has your private key. And I put mine on your machine, so you can talk to me.

bond-spacesuit: I can say anything?

lanceyverky: Anything.

bond-spacesuit: I love you.

lanceyverky: I kind of saw that coming.

bond-spacesuit: OH COME ON

lanceyverky: I know, I'm all talk. I love you too.

bond-spacesuit: So what the hell are we going to do now?

lanceyverky: Well, Moo is trying to do something to beat the heat on Vormann, since she's apparently got some plan for

situations like this. Who knows what. She said she's got a place to send the cops if they take you in. I'll send you the coordinates.

bond-spacesuit: Oh. So when am I going to get to see you again?

lanceyerky: once the world ends~

He sighs. But it is the end of the world. Bell is still snoring on the couch when he gets out of the shower. He goes through the kitchen to see what they've got to eat and he still doesn't move. In the icebox he notices the steak. He thinks for a minute.

"Bell," he says, walking up to the couch and tapping his shoulder. He squints. "Come on, get the fuck up. The world is ending."

"Ugh." He rolls over. "Is not. We couldn't end the world if we tried."

"Well," Knox says, "in case it does, I need you to take some stuff to Lance for me."

"Where's she live?" he says, sitting up. "By the way, I had some amazing rounds last night after you went to sleep. I was playing with this really good driver and I nailed this helicopter that was landing to drop off a whole squad. Topped the leaderboards that round with that guy."

"She lives on 2<sup>nd</sup> near the bridge on Court Street." He goes back into the kitchen, and puts the steak and the rest of his bottle of whiskey in a plastic bag. "Go give this to her and tell her that I'm going to meet her."

"Why don't you do it? She's your girlfriend."

"I've got to help Vormann." He thinks to himself. "I'm going to talk to my boss."

"The guy at the laundromat? What's he going to do about a revolution?"

“He's a scumbag, he can do whatever he wants. Get that over there before it thaws.” He pushes Bell out the back door.

“It's not going to thaw, man, didn't you hear? It's going to get cold again.” He glances into the bag. “Shoot, a fella could have a pretty good weekend in-”

Knox shuts the door and turns around again. Dials the laundromat on his phone, but no answer. No parents, either. He should wait for them to get back so he can at least tell them that he's been embroiled in everything, that he's made his choice. But he'd rather not give them more to worry about, and he doesn't want to have them telling him how proud they are and all that, and make him second-guess himself, so he laces up his boots and as he's putting his coat on there's a knock at the door. He turns the knob and the door swings open on its own, which is because there's a flood of cops coming around it with guns pointed in his face, and he just groans and puts his hands up since he figured it was coming eventually, and he's scared, but there's no time for it to sink in because he recognizes Lowe immediately.

“You're Knox-”

“Yeah, I am.” Delancey had mentioned something to him about cops the other night. He thinks for a second and it comes to the surface. “Am I being detained?”

“No shit.”

“I can't say anything without legal counsel present.”

“Responsible citizen, eh?” Lowe says – yeah, that's definitely him, in a Metro PD uniform, and nobody thinks it's weird except for him. He looks at the rest of them. The truck driver from the laundromat is there too, also in uniform. Must have been the point man since he has a shotgun. “Nothing like exercising your rights.”

“What am I being charged with?”

“Being a material accessory to terrorism,” Lowe says. There's a bit of a smirk there.

“Hey,” he says to the other cops, “are you serious? This guy's playing both sides!”

Then he gets thrown to the ground and handcuffed, and they take his phone off of him and Lowe tries to get at it for a second. Someone rolls him over. The truck driver.

“You've got a biometric password. Give it up.”

“Lawyer!”

“If you don't care about your family, man, it's your choice to make.” He sighs, and puts it into the breast pocket of his uniform. “I know that you're normally pretty bright, but it seems you've been making a lot of retarded decisions of late. So I'll give you a chance to consider this.”

“Lawyer-lawyer-lawyer!” He draws breath to start it again and then someone kicks him in the ribs sharp enough to make him curl up.

“If you give us Vormann, you get dumped on the side of the road and you stay in time-out until they lift the martial law. Your dad gets his meds. If you continue along your righteous yet flawed course, you spend the rest of your life in Federal custody, your parents go bankrupt, and the same thing happens to all your friends. How's that sound?”

“Like a shit sandwich.”

He stands arms akimbo and laughs. The rest of the cops chuckle a bit as well. God damn it all.

“Look, kid, we're all in this together. We all get a shit sandwich. That's the nature of the world. Some of us get a little bit more bread than other people, but everybody's got to eat a little shit eventually. And right now, it's your time.”

So he tells him the address that Delancey gave him.

“Out in the Counties, huh? Kicking it Timothy McVeigh style?” Lowe nods like Knox just quoted Kierkegaard. “Where he thought the law wouldn't find him?”

“Yeah,” he says looking him in the eye, “well, you never know what justice might overlook.”

*That was good*, he thinks to himself, as they're hauling him into the back of a police car.

### 7.1 \* \* \*

“Are you feeling like talking yet?” Lowe says. He's got a big prescription bottle that he's tossing between his hands. “You do what you have to do. Your family needed money. And you've got a life to live – can't spend your life picking up after everybody else. That's the mark of an independent person.”

“No honor among thieves,” Knox says. It's only him, Lowe, and the truck driver in the car.

“Honor is mostly rhetoric. And like I said before, it sucks, but that's just how it goes. Maybe if you had some seniority it would be you doing the police impersonation.”

He keeps waiting for Knox to say, and eventually lights a Hongtashan and slouches down into his jacket. Knox is looking out the window, staring at the deuce-and-a-half trucks convoying up the freeway and trying to figure out where they're going. Somewhere to the south. It might be toward Moo's house but he doesn't know any of the landmarks, so after a while he gives up and just stares. Nothing much he can do. Then outside he hears something smash.

“Jesus shit, what the hell?” the driver says.

He looks up fast and there's a white cloud across the road in front of them



and he can see the undercarriage of the lead car sticking into the air. Then their weight shifts forward as the driver hits the brakes. The anti-lock starts to shudder and it looks like they're going to stop. From behind, the armored car rear-ends them, and they start flying forward again.

“You son of a bitch!” Lowe yells at Knox.

“I don't like you either!” he yells back.

There's an impact, then another. He hits his forehead on the partition and his vision flashes for a minute. Then someone yelling. He orients himself. Outside there's people moving, coming up out of the snow, and he can see they're holding rifles at them. As the world comes back into focus he notices they're all shouting and the cops have put their hands on the ceiling. So he does the same.

*“Everyone clear?”* someone he can't see shouts.

*“Yeah, clear!”* The responder, this time, is right off the door on the other side, and he's got his gun pointed into the window at Lowe, who's not looking very comfortable anymore.

*“All right, motherfuckers, we've got you on lock! You move, you get dead! You call for help, you get dead, and so do all your friends!”*

“Jesus, there you are.” Someone dressed like all the others is talking to him. White parka, white balaclava, white gloves, plus a serious-looking rifle. He looks at their blue eyes. Moo. Has to be. “Get on out of there, we're not gonna stay long.”

He has to shoulder the door a couple times before it gives, and then stumbles to his feet. There's probably thirty people all in white disarming the cops and throwing their radios into huge backpacks. Behind them there's a box truck they're loading everything into. Someone is taking the batteries out of all the cars, and someone else is taking their boots.

“What's going on?” he asks her. “And who are all your friends?”

“These are my neighbors. The Martensdale Volunteers. We're doing the right thing,” she says. “Good thing they took the bait. So are any of them getting paid off?”

He points out the driver and Lowe, and then watches as they get dragged out of the car. Moo waves for him to follow and they step off the road in the other direction, into a deep snowbank where she reaches into a drift and pulls a tarp out of it. Knox gawks, and there's a snowmobile sitting there.

“Sorry you had to be dragged off by the cops. Take this,” she says, giving him a white balaclava like the rest of them. She hands off her rifle to someone nearby, gets on the snowmobile and starts the engine. “We're going back into town.”

“We are?”

“Yeah. Wouldn't put Vormann out at my place. If you've got important people, you keep them where the enemy can't, say, call in a Hellfire or something without blowing up an elementary school or something important.” She wipes the ice off the instrument cluster. “Shame you never got to see Martensdale. I told you it was a libertarian paradise. But we take care of our friends.”

“Sure, but what are we going to do?” he asks, as he gets on behind her and they take off back toward the north. The wind is brutal, and so he stays behind her as much as he can.

“They say we've already done everything we need to do. Which I don't know about, since that stupid shit-eating Governor is still making his dumb speeches, but as long as Vormann gets out of this alive, I'd say we did pretty good.”

“What about me getting charged with terrorism?”

“It was fake, they're just trying to freak you out. Standard cop bullshit.” She looks over her shoulder. “But you're going to have to find another laundromat

to work at.”

“I’m fine with that. What about Vormann?”

She laughs as they cut through the snow. “They're doing everything they can to find him. Kept up the martial law. Forming a cordon around downtown.”

“A cordon, like checkpoints?”

“Checkpoints on all the roads, curfews, searches without warrants, all of it. So either you get out now, or you don't get out.”

“And we're not getting out?”

“Not anymore,” she says, “this is serious business.”

“Why are we not getting out?”

“I don't fucking know,” she says, “but that was the plan. Delancey says it works this way.”

“What about Vormann?”

“Being held at an undisclosed location. I got the directions. Me and only me.”

“I need to talk to my mom,” he says. Moo starts laughing.

## 7.2 \* \* \*

“Chin up, dear,” Sondergaard says.

Shelby is sitting at the end of the bar at Hachikō & Argos with a plate of steamed vegetables from the kitchen in front of her, and she's aware that she should be hungry but she can't find it in herself to eat, and so all she does is roll the young potatoes around with her fork and sigh as her father stands on the other side of the bar.

“Do you want me to put some music on?” he asks.

“No.” It's dim since the restaurant is doing the noontime break and the

curtains in front are drawn. She gets up and walks a figure-eight around two tables, staring at the walls. "I'm okay."

"Your mother and I are just doing what's best for you."

"I want to decide that for myself." She folds her arms. "Look at you."

"Oh, don't be so glum. I've been lucky. So I want make sure that you get that same luck passed on to you."

"I was doing fine without it. I had friends. And now you're playing them off of one another so you can keep everything perfectly safe for me, and I'm the last person I know that needs that kind of help."

"Your mother and I agreed on this. And we've told you how many times now? The future isn't going to be very good for anyone. You need to do everything you can to make sure that you get to grow up with all the things you deserve. And your family too, when you have it. Your friends might be losers. They know it's coming, too – everybody does. And the only thing separating the people who go hungry from the people who don't," he says, "is the determination to do what they have to do."

"I don't even know how you can say that kind of thing."

"It's not as if I like saying it. But it's what has to be done." He shrugs. "It's part of growing up. The important decisions are never the easy ones. And I know you love him, but love comes and goes, especially when you're young. Necessity stays."

"I'm going to be with him."

"You don't even know where he is, Shelby." He gestures to the plate. "Come on, sit down and eat something. In a few days everything will be fine again."

"I'm going to find him. I'm taking your car."

He puts a finger up to stop her but she's off in an infuriated huff, turning

the collar of her jacket up high, and he tells her to drive safe with a bit of a grin, which she ignores, and after she's slammed the door behind her he takes a bottle of bourbon from the bar and pours himself a drink. Then he picks up the phone and dials Lowe.

No answer. How unlike him.

### 7.3 \* \* \*

“So you're sure they're not looking for me?” Knox asks, as Moo's snowmobile is idling under the freeway overpass on Crocker Street.

“Sure I'm sure, I checked and Lance ran your ID code. You're inconspicuous. You're good. Don't sweat it,” Moo says. “Gonna ditch the sled in a safe place and I'll meet you down at Delancey's, okay?”

“And you're sure she's got a plan, too?” He can feel a bruise starting to throb over his ribs from where he got kicked by the police.

“She's your girlfriend, you should know.”

So Knox gets off and walks up Crocker and to his house. He opens the door and his mom is standing there waiting for him. They hug, but only for a minute before she puts her hands on his arms and pushes him away.

“Knox. Were your friends here? Someone tracked dirt all over the rug in the foyer.” She points out a ring of bootprints where he got arrested.

“Oh. Uh, yeah, that was – uh, it was Bell. I'll make him apologize.”

“And you left the front door unlocked, too. You have to be more careful.”

“I – uh, I was pretty busy this morning.”

“What were you doing, anyway? We called when we were leaving the hospital, but you didn't pick up.”

“You did?” He fumbles around and checks his phone, sees the missed call

from her and the I hope you're not in prison right now, baby from Lance. Then he takes the bottle of medication from his other pocket. "I was getting these. For dad."

His mom takes them, and looks closely at the label. "Where did you get these from? They said that the riots had interrupted their supply."

"Someone at work. You don't need to worry about it." He smiles at her. "One of my friends is in trouble. I've got to go help."

"You're not even going to see your father?" she asks.

"Oh yeah," he says, and starts to walk, until she tells him to take his boots off. So he does, and goes to the living room, where his dad has obviously been listening. He's smiling, though at the same time he's tired in a way that he's never seen him before.

"I've got to go help my friends," he tells him.

"As long as you know they're real friends," he says. "People who won't leave you hanging."

"They are, yeah," he says. "And a girl I'm in love with."

"Well that's good to hear, Knox. Your mother had mentioned something like that. Make sure we get to meet her before too long, all right?" He manages to smile at him. "You're a good son, Knox."

"Thanks."

He turns and goes outside, where the wind has finally stopped. He walks down to 30<sup>th</sup> Avenue and there's a black Mercedes idling there. Shelby gets out and he stops walking.

"Hey, I've been looking for your crew!" she says. "Can I talk to you?"

"Hell no," he says as he's already turning around, "your family is all fucked up."

"Hey, come on," she says, running up to him and grabbing his arm,

“they're whatever but I'm cool. I'm serious.”

“Sure you are. And I got beat to shit by the cops this morning because your dad wants to know where my friends are.”

“Well, do you know?”

“I'm not saying!”

“Hey, uh-” she says, grasping.

“Knox.”

“Knox, I love Vormann. None of this was my idea. My dad is using you to get rich, and he says he's doing it because it's for my good too. So I helped him for a bit. But I can't stand the thought that Vormann is going to be in trouble. I just want to see him one more time.”

“Oh, fuck off.” He turns around. He's got to meet up with Delancey somehow. Got to lose her. But she doesn't let him leave.

“Knox, please!”

“I said leave me alone!” He jerks his arm away from her. “I don't know what the hell is wrong with you. He's got every reason to be angry with you, and I do too, since you're the reason that my whole world just went to hell. So fuck off already! I don't even know where he is, I'm just trying to keep him alive.”

She looks at him. “You're serious.”

“Yeah.”

“You're sweet on that one girl with the socks. Delancey. So you know exactly what you're doing to me.” She keeps her gaze locked with his, clears her throat. “Just don't let him get hurt. Okay?”

“You should have thought about that before you decided to use him.”

She doesn't say anything after that, just stares at the ground, and so he backs up, then turns around, and goes around the block in the other direction. He starts walking as fast as he can and there's no sign of her or the Mercedes.

#### 7.4 \* \* \*

Just like Moo said, nothing happens when he gets his ID scanned on the Court Street bridge, which is good since there's no fewer than 20 DHS goons standing around in their battle rattle, and behind them another row of Co-Op troops in similar equipment. He turns the corner and goes up to the warehouse. He knocks on the door and there's a long pause before the intercom comes on. He introduces himself and Breadboard answers.

“Uh, you again, man,” he says, once he lets Knox in, “you'd better get on it. Everyone's all super-serious. Your lady friend has been awake around the clock since that guy showed up.”

“Are you manning the door?” he asks. “The cops showed up and arrested me this morning. What are we going to do if they show up here?”

“They can look all they want the way we've got things encrypted. They wouldn't be able to prove anything,” he says. “I'm surprised she hasn't been bragging about this to you, too. They could go at it with all their computers for the next millennium and they wouldn't get anywhere. So don't you worry. It's just us and the computers now.”

“Right.” He starts to walk out of the lobby.

In the central hall all the terminals are full, and everyone is doing something different that he can't recognize. He walks halfway down the row before he notices Delancey, and so he walks up behind her and puts his hands on her shoulders. She jerks forward and turns to face him.

“You need to stop scaring me, Knox.”

“I'm sorry, I'm not trying.” He smiles. “Or maybe you just need to get used



to me.”

“Give it time,” she says. “But I’m glad you made it here okay. No problems getting here?”

“No, it was okay. I ran into Shelby and she was dying to see Vormann, but I didn't tell her.”

“Good. I don’t know what she’s going to do,” she says. “Maybe that’s her dad raising hell out there. I don’t have any idea how much influence he has in the city, but it’s probably more than we know. Look at the TV. Did you see any of this?”

“No, what?” He looks up at the television at the front of the room. The news is reviewing a statement made by the governor. They've found ringleaders, they claim – leaders of a radical college group who they’re dropping an indictment the size of a telephone book on. It cuts to a photo of Frost, then starts rolling footage of the police kicking in doors around town. Knox laughs to himself. “That's just like them, isn't it?”

“They said he confessed to it, so who knows what they did to him.” She keeps typing. “And they county's going to stay under martial law until the riots stop. However long that takes.”

He watches the news keep rolling. It says there's some people claiming that the Mississippi River Co-Op used excessive force and that they want Iowa to back out of it, and other people demanding investigations of the Governor's office for mishandling the entire thing. He starts nodding slowly.

“But that's better than nothing, right?”

“As long as it's not the National Guard going house-to-house, yeah.” She cracks her knuckles. “I worked out what to do with Vormann, for one. And there's still the party tomorrow night.”

“Oh yeah, what time is that?”

“Nine fourteen and eight seconds. Did you bring a costume?”

“No. Was I supposed to?”

“Guess I forgot to tell you.” She looks him up and down. “I’m sure you’ll pass muster regardless.”

He goes back to the end of the row to find an empty chair, and takes it and sits down next to her again. He kisses her once, then twice, and then she pulls away so she can keep typing.

“Sorry, Knox, this can’t wait.”

“What exactly are you doing?” He pulls his chair up behind her and puts his chin on her shoulder, and watches her typing into form fields on ten different websites. “This is Vormann’s escape plan?”

“The best one we could make up. He wanted to die at first, said it was the only way out. Which it probably is, since he’s killed enough government goons that they’re not going to take him alive. His first thought was to go take his rifle and shoot the Governor at this speech he made earlier,” she says, pointing at the television, “but it’s not going to do anything since he doesn’t have his revolutionary vanguard or whatever, and he’s going to make the whole country think he’s a lunatic.”

“And so this is the second option?” He keeps glancing around the screen. “It’s-”

“We’re making him a fake identity. All the databases are privatized now. Pretty easy to break into. I’m getting rid of the old Vormann, and putting together a new one.”

“That’s kind of anti-climactic, don’t you think?”

“That’s the idea. It’ll keep him alive and out of prison. Another twenty-something will step into the world, and Vormann will step out, and that’s it.”

“I can’t believe you’re doing all of this for him.”

“What else are friends for? And hey,” she says, “I got your gift. I put it in the fridge to thaw. We could cook it tonight, if you want to.”

“When I gave it to Bell I thought I might not see you again.”

“Well, you're here now,” she says, “just in time for the beginning of the future.”

### 7.5 \* \* \*

Moo puts the trimmers down and hands the mirror to Vormann. They're in one of the unoccupied rooms down the hall from Delancey's, on the third floor, and under light of a single bulb hanging from the middle of the ceiling she's cutting his hair as he sits at the milk-crate table.

“You wanna look like Travis Bickle, or something like that?”

“I suppose, why not?” he says. Moo clicks the trimmers back on and starts cutting again. “Do you know what name they gave me? Or do I get to pick?”

“I can't remember. Ask Delancey.” She puts two fingers and a thumb on the top of his skull and moves his head to the side, then keeps cutting. “You know, I'm going to miss you. I hope all of this works.”

“I wish we could have gone through with some kind of blaze of glory, because what other noble causes do they have that are worth dying for anymore? But nobody else wants to.” He huffs, just barely audible. “That was the last thing that Shelby told me. We were destined for failure and it was okay.”

“I'm not sure about that.” She tilts his head in the other direction and leans in close. He can see his hair falling past his eyes as she runs the trimmers back and forth. “You do whatever you think is right.”

“But she's right. The other people agreed. Armitage, too. Even Mulholland, when he was alive. As long as you lose, nobody will be able to forget

you.” He has to stifle a sneeze after sucking hair into his nose. “We're like the sacrifice for the things we believe in.”

Moo puts the trimmers down and hands him the mirror again. As he looks at it she runs a finger down the side of his mohawk. “Listen, you fuckers, you screwheads; here's a man who wouldn't take it anymore, a man who stood up against the scum, the cunts, the dogs, the filth, the shit; here is someone who stood up.”

“What?”

“It's from the movie.” She sighs. “And, speaking of rebellion - wanna see my tattoo?”

“The one with the flowers and stuff? I can already see it.”

“No, I've got one that nobody can see.”

“Moo, I-”

She pulls up the right leg of her shorts. On the fleshy outside part of her right thigh he can see, in blackletter script about the height of his thumb, *The Law Perverted!* He fakes gagging.

“It's Bastiat. Cool, right?”

“I know what you want from me,” he says, “and you're not going to get it.”

“How are you and Shelby getting on?”

He crosses his arms and starts to pace around the room. She follows him with her eyes, smiling just a little bit. With the way he's looking at her and at the floor and out the window it's hard for her to gauge what he's really thinking.

“I'm not going to do this.” He starts to turn. “Don't you have bitcoins to trade or something?”

“Hey,” she says, “I'm not asking for a relationship. I just want something to remember you by. You know – since it's not like my prospects were ever that

stellar. Being the an-cap cat lady.”

He pauses. “I don't mean to be mean. I'm just – I don't know, hardly even thinking about stuff like that anymore. I'm way too caught up in this.”

“I mean, at least you know that I don't agree with you. I'm not going to lie. I just like that you had the balls to stand up for something.” She sits down on the mattress that's shoved against the opposite wall of the room and beckons for him. “The world's ending, or it's going to come close. Yours is going to end for sure. So enjoy it while it lasts. Take a breather. And be proud of yourself, Vormann.”

He smiles at her. “That's really nice of you.”

“My mom always said there was no such thing as altruism.”

“I'm going to take a shower and get all this hair off of me,” he says, pointing his thumb toward the door. Moo's face goes pouty. Vormann looks over his shoulder, and then he puts his hand out for her. “Come on.”

## **8.0 | 17 jan 2038 | three times over oil and water**

The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in a democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country.

-Edward Bernays

In the morning Knox stretches out in bed and lets his arm slip around Delancey, who's lying semi-somnient next to him. She turns her head toward him and smiles, starting to open her eyes.

“Today's the day,” she says.

“What, the start of the rest of our life?”

“Well, that too.” She kisses him on the forehead and his other hand he's sliding down her stomach but before he can feel the fabric she turns over and

slides over him, starts to get dressed again. Knox sits up and puts his feet over the edge of the bed. “We got some fireworks and everything. We’ll set them off tonight. To cover Vormann.”

“Hey,” he says.

“What?”

“How come you always sidestep me when I talk about what we’re doing?”

“I think it’s maudlin.”

“You know what I think?” he says. She stops reaching into the dresser and focuses on him. “I think that you’ve been using this whole crisis as a way to hide what you’re really feeling. And I want to know what’s up with you.”

“I’m not holding back, Knox.” As she’s putting her socks on she puts her right foot on his knee and pulls it up slowly, smiling a little.

“Come on. If I want to be with you, I want to be able to talk to you about stuff like that. How come you keep pushing away from me? I really care about you.”

She taps his leg with her foot. “Look, it’s nothing I can’t handle. Don’t worry about it.”

He huffs.

“Oh, don’t be so dramatic, Knox.”

“If we’d go to jail for Vormann, you should at least be willing to share some things with me.”

“I said drop it.”

“Come on, let’s just sit and be together for a little.” He opens his arms. “I want to be with you.”

“You are,” she says, and turns around, and with that she’s out of the room. He takes a couple minutes to catch his breath.

Vormann is sitting on the bench in the galley downstairs with Moo and they're drinking Knox's whiskey. Knox looks at him. He's even got an old M65 jacket that he found somewhere.

“What happened to your hair?” he asks.

“I'm a rebel.” He pulls at the lapels of the jacket. “Moo cuts hair pretty well.”

“Whatever. You see Lance come through here?”

“Yeah, she said she was going to go write some code or whatever.”

“I managed to piss her off.” He looks around in the fridge and there's the steak he gave to Bell, still sitting in the bag. There's a clean pan above the stove, too. He takes the steak and the pan and starts getting to work. “Like a dumbass.”

“What'd you do?” he asks him.

“Yeah,” Moo adds, “she never gets mad.”

“I asked her about what we were doing.” The pan's hot. He puts the steak in and then covers it before it can start spitting everywhere. “And she just bailed on me.”

“Well,” she says, “you want my advice?”

“Don't take her advice,” Vormann says.

“No, I'll listen.” Maybe three minutes on a side – it'd be a shame to overcook a piece of meat like this. He looks at the clock on the stove and flips the steak over. “What do you think?”

“She's got trust issues, so she's pushing you away because she's starting to feel attached to you.” She sticks out your tongue. “I suggest that you stay the course, because if she really wanted to leave she'd have used you for whatever you had and then cut out.”

“Like a twelve-ounce steak?” he says, taking a look at it.

“Well, that is nice.” She looks around. “You could just give it to me

instead.”

“I'm sure it'd go well with my whiskey.”

“Yeah, thanks for that, too.” Vormann is rolling his eyes at the whole thing and Moo shoves him down the bench before she keeps talking. “Think about it, she grew up and she was basically one step away from the streets her whole life. It's not something you get over in a week.”

“Yeah.”

“So just stay the course, okay?” Moo scratches her head, and as Knox is plating the steak she hands him the bottle of Evan Williams too, even though Vormann is reaching for it. “And getting her drunk couldn't hurt.”

She smiles at him. He takes off down the row again and finds Delancey at the same terminal as last time. They look at each other when they're about five feet apart and he can feel himself blushing a little bit.

“Please,” he says, and she cuts him off again.

“I know, I know.” She looks down. “I'm wound up. And there's other people I should be getting mad at, instead of you.”

“Eat something. You'll feel better.” He sits down next to her and puts the plate on an open spot on the table. “You're scared?”

She smiles at him as she pokes at the corner of the steak a little. From the looks of it he got it right. She cuts off a piece and it's still red in the center. Almost perfect. “I'd never admit if I was.”

“I won't tell anybody.”

“Well, then, if you promise.” She's looking at the tip of her fork and when he thinks she's about to open her mouth she turns her wrist and puts it into his. “Maybe I worry about what might happen if I ever make a mistake. Or if I'm not smart enough. Or if I just have bad luck.”

“That's why I'm here, isn't it?” He's got to speak through the side of her



mouth. She's cutting another piece and looking pensive. He puts his hand on her cheek. "Because I care about what happens to you."

She's thinking about what to say and they can hear footsteps getting closer. He looks up and Breadboard is coming down the aisle at a full sprint.

"There's people at the door! You need to get over here!" he shouts.

### **8.1 \* \* \***

In the foyer there's two nerds standing near the front door with softball bats, and in the center of the room Bell and Shelby are waiting for them. Knox feels a knot twisting in his stomach and Delancey is looking less than pleased.

"Why'd you let them in?" she says to Breadboard. "I specifically told you not to let her in."

"Hey, I thought it was better than leaving her shouting outside the door for however long."

"Ugh." She looks at Shelby and Bell. "How'd you find us?"

Shelby points at Bell, and Bell's face turns red.

"Bell!"

"What?"

"Why the fuck would you tell her what was going on?"

"She asked me! I mean, how was I supposed to know that I wasn't supposed to?" He looks at her, then at Knox, then at the assorted hackers that are standing around them. "Nobody told me anything. I don't even know what's going on!"

Vormann and Moo, by now, have rounded the corner, and when Shelby sees him she closes the distance with him, but before she can hug him he puts a hand out and she stops.

“Baby,” she says, “it's all my fault. I did the wrong thing.”

“Yeah, I know that.”

“Come on,” Delancey says to the rest of them, “let's get her out of here, and let's get Vormann on his way before the cops show up.”

“I – I don't even know – I really did like you. And I was afraid, and I used you.” She puts on a provisional-looking grin. “But I thought that was okay, to take a little risk. So I want to do what I think is right. I want to stay with you.”

“She's going to ruin everything,” Delancey says. She's standing with an open stance almost like she's ready to fight, and the way her t-shirt is hanging on her body Knox can see how her limbs are all so slender, and despite that there's something incredible in her. Knox grabs her arm. She looks at him. “What?”

He doesn't say anything, but he keeps a firm grasp and pulls her into the next room, and shuts the door, and when she tries to go around him he grabs both her arms and puts his face close to hers, enough that she can feel his breath. He can feel his heart starting to spin up, like when he was staring at the bore of the shotgun.

“You've given Vormann all the help you could. And so did I. And it's up to him to make the decision himself. We're his friends. We can't force him to choose anything. So let them decide.”

“He's my friend and I don't want to see him waste everything he's got.”

“Lance.” He takes a deep breath. “I'm with you because you're the most beautiful woman I've ever known in my entire life. I want you to let go of them. And I want you to really be serious with me.”

“Do I not look serious right now?”

“No,” he says, “I want you to tell me that you're afraid, but I want you to tell me that it's okay, because we're together, and I'll do anything for you, and you'll do anything for me. I'm afraid too. I don't have a job, my parents are going

to go broke, and I'm trying to stay with you no matter what. I want you to be part of my life forever. Okay?"

She grunts, but she's not trying to look past him anymore.

"And if you think it's okay to always wear that mask around me, I'm going to put my coat on and I'm going to leave." His whole body is energized, like his fingertips could throw sparks. "I'm not in love with who you think you should be. I'm in love with the real you."

He isn't blinking. She takes a half-step backward and then he can't read her face anymore. It might be anger, or she's maybe weighing it, or it's desperation. And then she lets her breath out and her shoulders droop. She slots her arms under his and they embrace.

"Just hold me," she says.

"Manifestos are important," Breadboard says. "Delancey told me that you should write one."

"But I've got that one that we found. It's better than I could do."

He's sitting around Breadboard's computer with Shelby next to him and both of them have to remember to stare at the screen and not the enormous LED-strewn CPU that Breadboard built for himself, which he claims could run an AI advanced enough to really be human if anybody had the resources and intelligence to code it.

"I'm just following orders. And it's going to be your only legacy once you're gone."

"Where is Delancey, anyway?"

"Last I saw her she was with that guy and they were grinning like idiots." He sighs. "They're probably, uh, participating in the mattress Olympics. Anyway. Write something. Tell people how they need to remember you. Why you did it."

What you want them to do.”

“I still think I need to get blown up or something. People used to do it all the time. They still do in the Middle East. I'm not sure if people are even going to remember me.”

“Come on, baby,” Shelby says, “it's keeping the dream alive.”

“Yeah,” Breadboard says, “fuck the truth. Tell people whatever. Not like they can tell the difference with all this crypto – but still. Sometimes a good lie works just as well as the real thing.”

He shrugs. And he starts typing.

## 8.2 \* \* \*

“*Knox!*” comes Vormann's voice. Knox mashes his face against Delancey's left breast and sighs.

“Tell him to go away,” he mumbles.

“It's probably important.” She runs her fingers between his shoulder blades. “I'm going to let him in, so get ready.”

“But-!”

“Come on in!” she calls, and the door opens up. Vormann walks three steps in with a duffel bag in his hands and then stops at the sight.

“Whoa, it can wait,” he says, as Delancey is brushing her hair out of her face, careful to keep the blanket tucked under her chin. “How're you doing, Delancey?”

“I'm great. Knox is hiding.”

“He's not busy, is he?”

“*Will be soon!*” he says.

“Throw him his underwear,” she says, “he'll be right out.”

“These? Kinky.” He looks around the room and ends up picking up a pair of yellow panties with his foot. Delancey sneers. He keeps searching until he finds a pair of boxers, gets them over his foot, and kicks them onto the bed, where Delancey shoves them under the covers and Vormann can see Knox's arms protruding against the blanket. A few seconds later he appears on the bottom of the bed, wiping his mouth. Delancey pulls the blanket over her head.

“Hey, man,” Vormann says.

“Hey.”

“I wanted to give you this.” He puts the duffel bag on the dresser. “Since I'm going to be leaving forever, you know. Now seemed like an opportune time. But sorry if I'm intruding.”

“No, I can make time.” He watches as Vormann unzips the bag. He reaches in and pulls out a rifle. The Nagant. “Hey, that's-”

“If you're going to try and make a life with her, you've got to do right by her. So I wanted you to have some way to protect yourself.” He's looking kind of sheepish as he says it, since it is more sentimental than what he usually talks about. He puts a big box of ammunition next to it. They're staring around the room aimlessly and he lights a cigarette. “And I was hoping you could remember me by it, and it does symbolize resistance and everything – and independence, too – so I thought you could use it.”

“Hey, give me one,” Delancey says, pulling her head out of the covers. Vormann steps over and gives her two. She smiles, and he lights one of them for her. She leans over the edge of the bed, looking at them with a faint smile.

“I'll take care of it,” Knox tells him.

“It'll take care of you,” he says, “so that you can take care of her. Even though I know she can handle herself. Best thing to bring to a gunfight is a friend with a gun – all that stuff.”

“That's me,” she says. Her Flecktarn parka is on the floor, and reaching out to grab it, exposing her back like white marble statuary, she gives them a little flash of the grip of a gen-four Glock that's tucked into the bellows pocket.

“Hey, how come you never said that you carried?” Vormann says.

“Because the operative word is concealed,” she says. “It's so I can take care of him.”

“You two,” he says. “When this is all over, and we're adults, and things are good – come find me, okay? I'm sure you'll be able to figure it out.”

He slaps Knox on the back. “See you at the party, okay?”

And with that, he leaves. The room is still. But Knox is smiling, with his hands on his hips. Lance stubs out her cigarette on the floor and looks at him.

“You kept giving me shit for not telling the truth to you. So what's this?”

He keeps smiling. “How about you come over here and I'll tell you?”

“Oh, so you're human too, aren't you?” She throws the covers off and watches Knox. “All too human.”

The party is fairly small since there's nobody to invite who isn't either already there or afraid to leave because of the curfew, so the party is fairly small, centered around the digital clock counting down to the moment where the future is going to start. Breadboard has, from what Knox can tell, picked the music, and he leans mostly toward old prog-rock, which isn't great but also means there's no kitty-core, which is a fair enough compromise. Knox is coming down the stairs to the main hall and he sees Moo in business casual, straightening a bowtie around her neck.

“What are you supposed to be?” he asks her.

“I'm an anarchist.”

“You are?”

“Yeah.” Knox starts to walk away. Moo grabs his arm. “I know that I can't have you, but you're a pretty cool guy. Level-headed and everything. Let's spend more time together in the future, okay?”

“No problem, sure.”

“And I heard that Bell is single. Isn't he?”

“Yep.” He raises an eyebrow. “You're going to get a reputation like that.”

“Vormann said he-” She stops herself. “God damn it.”

“No worries,” he says. “People like anarcho-whatevers.”

“Anarcho-capitalists.”

“Yeah. Something strange and exotic.” He leaves before she starts getting anything in her head that he doesn't mean for her to.

The party really isn't much: there's nothing much to eat except some old bags of tortilla chips and someone's ginger snaps that are a month past the sell-by date, but in any case people are talking – the hackers mostly about what they're working on or what they think about the state of digital freedom, and then Vormann and Knox talking about the future in strange tentative voices. On some of the terminals they're talking to people at other parties around the world, where there's loud music and sculpted-looking women wearing shiny dresses and drinks being served.

“Hey Knox,” Vormann says. “You know that encrypted chat program Delancey gave me?”

“Yeah,” he says, from where he's leaning on the kitchen counter near a long-faced programmer who's rosy with drink and her neon-pink hair talking about the future of the government considering little autonomous groups like theirs. “What about it?”

“Well, they gave a copy to me, too. So – now you really need to find me in a few years. Okay?” He grins. “If they Navy doesn't first. Where's Moo? I need to

thank her, too.”

“Over there.” He points toward the corner where there's a bunch of old couches, and on one there's Moo on Bell's lap, and he's definitely got her bowtie around his neck. Vormann can't help but grin. “If you can get her attention.”

“Maybe I'll wait. Wouldn't want to deprive Bell.”

For the most part the hackers all have strange self-referential costumes on: there's three people wearing Tron costumes, two Motoko Kusanagis, and all different types and styles of dryer-hose robots. Then Lance in another of Knox's t-shirts and a pair of jeans, which in itself is strange, and Mooray Rothbard half-drunk and trying desperately to make jokes about monetary policy and grabbing Bell's ass constantly. It's not until nine when Delancey and Knox grab Vormann from under Shelby and haul him toward the front of the room. They hold both of his arms up.

“The hero of the future!” Shelby yells, from somewhere in the group. And there's a moderate applause. Vormann puts his hands down. In the dim light, Knox can see that he looks like he's got something that looks like tears in the corners of his eyes.

“You get my car too,” Vormann says, as he watches the clock start to wind down. The hackers are moving toward the roof with boxes of fireworks and malt liquor that they found somewhere. “They changed the VIN, so it's okay. Just get new plates.”

“I'll take care of it, okay?” he says.

“Whatever, man. It's a Chinese sedan. Just use it.” He stops himself as Delancey stands them up and starts to lead them toward the parking lot in back. “I sound like a socialist – but people matter. Not things.”

“So you drive him to the drop,” Delancey says, as the clock passes under



twenty seconds, “and we'll make some noise and get their attention. The great escape. We'll meet up afterward.”

“How about at my house?” Knox says. They push against the crash bar to the outside. Ten seconds. “You know. We can escape, too.”

“Come pick me up,” she says.

### Teleological Epilogue: The Garden of Forking Paths

The revolutionary programme which can be named is not the eternal revolutionary programme. Given the range of human desires and human histories, it's obvious that, up to this point, we have simply been delighting in our experimentation with what has made us the way we are, and where we might go from here.

If nothing else can be said, it should be said that while it might take resolve to commit whatever acts need to be committed, it takes even greater resolve to believe in the destination that one moves toward. And in all cases we should be like children, free to choose for ourselves - perhaps with the knowledge of past events and ideology, though never under its yoke.

At this point, you have hopefully exhausted the sources outlined thus far by the Guide (listed in Appendix B), have considered them thoroughly, and have embraced some and rejected others. The next step is to

look forward by using your new knowledge of the past, as well as of the human condition. This is the part where nothing can be wrote: we return, once again, to disconnected individuals, and once again will see the future that only we can.

As Nietzsche said at the end of *Beyond Good and Evil*,

*Ye go! Thou didst endure enough, oh, heart;-  
Strong was thy hope;  
Unto new friends thy portals widely ope,  
Let old ones be. Bid memory depart!  
Wast thou young then, now-better young thou art!*

**Final assignment: moving forward**

(undefined page count, completion grade only)

Using what you've learned so far, depict below (with supporting evidence from your primary sources, notes, and course materials) your vision of a future state of affairs which resolves the moral and economic problems indicated thus far. Are we only motivated by our own self-interest? How far can altruism truly be extended? How universal is the human race, when it comes down to it? Are we really rational beings? If not, what can we do to reach a satisfactory conclusion anyway? Should Western civilization be fundamentally modified or abandoned entirely in order to reach a





## APPENDIX A: AUTHOR-AS-ZOMBIE

We've been putting off this discussion until the end. Or, near the end. We don't want to talk about authorship. Neither do you. By no means should you consult an academic on this matter.

(In short, don't worry your pretty little head about it.)

The author was long-dead and more or less safely interred until Gutenberg went and dug him/her/anon up from their safe resting place in 1439. For a few centuries - until the 20<sup>th</sup>, even - the author enjoyed this brief resurgence, his golden aura, which totally wasn't from the piles of money that started to surround authorship, and at the end of the century we all saw the spell wearing off, the call of the void pulling the author back home again. But still he persists - though not for much longer, it would seem.

Considering the 6500 year history of the written word it can perhaps be taken as a bit of an aberration that the idea of attributing these words to one person and giving them absolute control over their estate, so to speak, has persisted for perhaps only one thousand years of this period, and for that matter in separate periods, as well.

You could, if you were so inclined, tie authorship to periods of capital or resource-based

economic systems on the earth. Aside from the simple use-value of information, it has also been traded as an object of commodity fetishism, like diamonds or automobiles.

We currently exist in one of these periods. Hopefully, it is nearing its end. It certainly appears to be. But, while we are still within it, it makes good business sense for those selling information to make free or unattributed information seem suspect - *better*, one might be led to think, *to pay the little extra dosh to make sure it's the genuine article*, eh? But if you've gotten this far, you're probably cognizant of the fact that writers do not shuttle their looms to reap a profit, necessarily: they write to experience the tremendous joy of creation.

(Perhaps, as an aside, this is why there have been so many male writers, and architects, and-? To birth when they otherwise have been denied by nature?)

In any case, the author shuffles on. At this distant point the author has become one of the few relics that tie us to the Romans and Greeks, the parents of our civilization.

Besides economy, the author-zombie has also been fortified by technology, which allowed it to re-emerge at the beginning of the Renaissance: first Gutenberg to allow him to appear from beyond the grave, then the radio and television as further fortifications of its

empire, but then the computer, and the Internet, which have been the merciful headshot to finally put an end to the farce.

McLuhan said it and it appears now to be verifiable truth: content is irrelevant; the apparatus which content uses to distribute itself make all the difference in the world. And like Luther's church, now every man is a printing press, the nodes have all been connected, and our information spreads not like the rain falling from the mighty firmament, but like a stone into a pond, expanding infinitely, to gird the entire sphere...

So here you are, presented with this text. And like anybody else, you have been given full utility of your critical faculties in appraising it, and, if the fortunes have been kind, the good sense to critically examine it all, especially where you find the arguments the most sonorous.

How should we sign our name, then? Perhaps this will do.

<redacted>

## APPENDIX B: SUPPLEMENTAL MEDIA CONSUMPTION

*-A disparate, ideologically charged, and contradictory collection of further studies with, where possible, methods by which to obtain them while maintaining maximum possible liberty appended, intended as a palliative for bad or incomplete educations.*

Assange, Julian. Cypherpunks: Freedom & The Future of the Internet. OR Books 2012.

[http://thepiratebay.gl/torrent/7881018/Cypherpunks\\_-\\_Freedom\\_and\\_the\\_future\\_of\\_the\\_Internet](http://thepiratebay.gl/torrent/7881018/Cypherpunks_-_Freedom_and_the_future_of_the_Internet)

Bastiat, Frédéric. The Law.

<https://mises.org/document/2731>

Berlin, Isaiah. Two Concepts of Liberty.

[http://www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de/fileadmin/wiso\\_vwl/johannes/Ankuendigungen/Berlin\\_twoconceptsofliberty.pdf](http://www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de/fileadmin/wiso_vwl/johannes/Ankuendigungen/Berlin_twoconceptsofliberty.pdf)

Burke, James. Connections #1: The Trigger Effect.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WgOp-nz3lHg>

Camus, Albert. The Rebel.

<http://bookos.org/book/1077440/b93865>

Chomsky, Noam. Manufacturing Consent.

Costello, Elvis. Radio Radio.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNU9qQGJ34k>

Curtis, Adam. The Trap: What Happened to Our Dream of Freedom?

[http://thepiratebay.gl/torrent/3795702/The\\_Trap\\_What\\_Happened\\_To\\_Our\\_Dream\\_Of\\_Freedom\\_\\_](http://thepiratebay.gl/torrent/3795702/The_Trap_What_Happened_To_Our_Dream_Of_Freedom__) (Adam Curtis is



Devo. Jerkin' Back 'n' Forth.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wiLGI7rIEcY>

Doran, Temujin. Obey 2013.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hH6UynI5m7Y>

Durant, Will & Ariel. The Story of Civilization.

[http://thepiratebay.gl/torrent/7485094/The\\_Story\\_of\\_Civilization\\_\\_Will\\_and\\_Ariel\\_Durant\\_\\_11\\_books\\_%5Bmobi](http://thepiratebay.gl/torrent/7485094/The_Story_of_Civilization__Will_and_Ariel_Durant__11_books_%5Bmobi)

Fairbairn, Maj. William E. Get Tough!<http://www.ep.tc/problems/46/index.html>

Kacyznski, Ted. Industrial Society and its Future.

<http://www.theanarchistlibrary.org/library/fc-industrial-society-and-its-future>

Lifton, Robert Jay. Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism.

<http://bookos.org/book/1512709/424aff>

London Emergency Services Liaison Panel. Major Incident Procedure Manual, 8<sup>th</sup> Ed.

[http://www.leslp.gov.uk/docs/major\\_incident\\_procedure\\_manual\\_8th\\_ed.pdf](http://www.leslp.gov.uk/docs/major_incident_procedure_manual_8th_ed.pdf)

Marcuse, Herbert. One-Dimensional Man.

<http://bookos.org/book/559593/81f3ca>

Mcluhan, Marshall. The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects.

[http://thepiratebay.gl/torrent/5051416/The\\_Medium\\_is\\_the\\_Massage\\_%281967%29\\_with\\_Marshall\\_McLuhan](http://thepiratebay.gl/torrent/5051416/The_Medium_is_the_Massage_%281967%29_with_Marshall_McLuhan)

Nietzsche, Friedrich. Beyond Good and Evil.

<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4363>  
Office of Strategic Services. OSS Simple Sabotage Manual.  
[http://thepiratebay.gl/torrent/7999525/Simple\\_Sabotage\\_Field\\_Manual\\_OSS\\_1944.pdf](http://thepiratebay.gl/torrent/7999525/Simple_Sabotage_Field_Manual_OSS_1944.pdf)  
Postman, Neil. Amusing Ourselves To Death.  
Reggio, Godfrey. Naqoyqatsi.  
Spengler, Oswald. The Decline of the West.  
<http://archive.org/details/Decline-Of-The-West-Oswald-Spengler>  
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<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/815>  
<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/816>  
Wilson, Cody. Cody Wilson Philosophy Part I.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3zx8kyVtGM>  
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Zinn, Howard. A People's History of the United States.  
[http://thepiratebay.gl/torrent/6583234/Zinn\\_and\\_Zinn\\_-\\_A\\_People\\_s\\_History\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_States](http://thepiratebay.gl/torrent/6583234/Zinn_and_Zinn_-_A_People_s_History_of_the_United_States)  
Zizek, Slavoj. Violence.  
<http://bookos.org/book/797267/14fd1d>