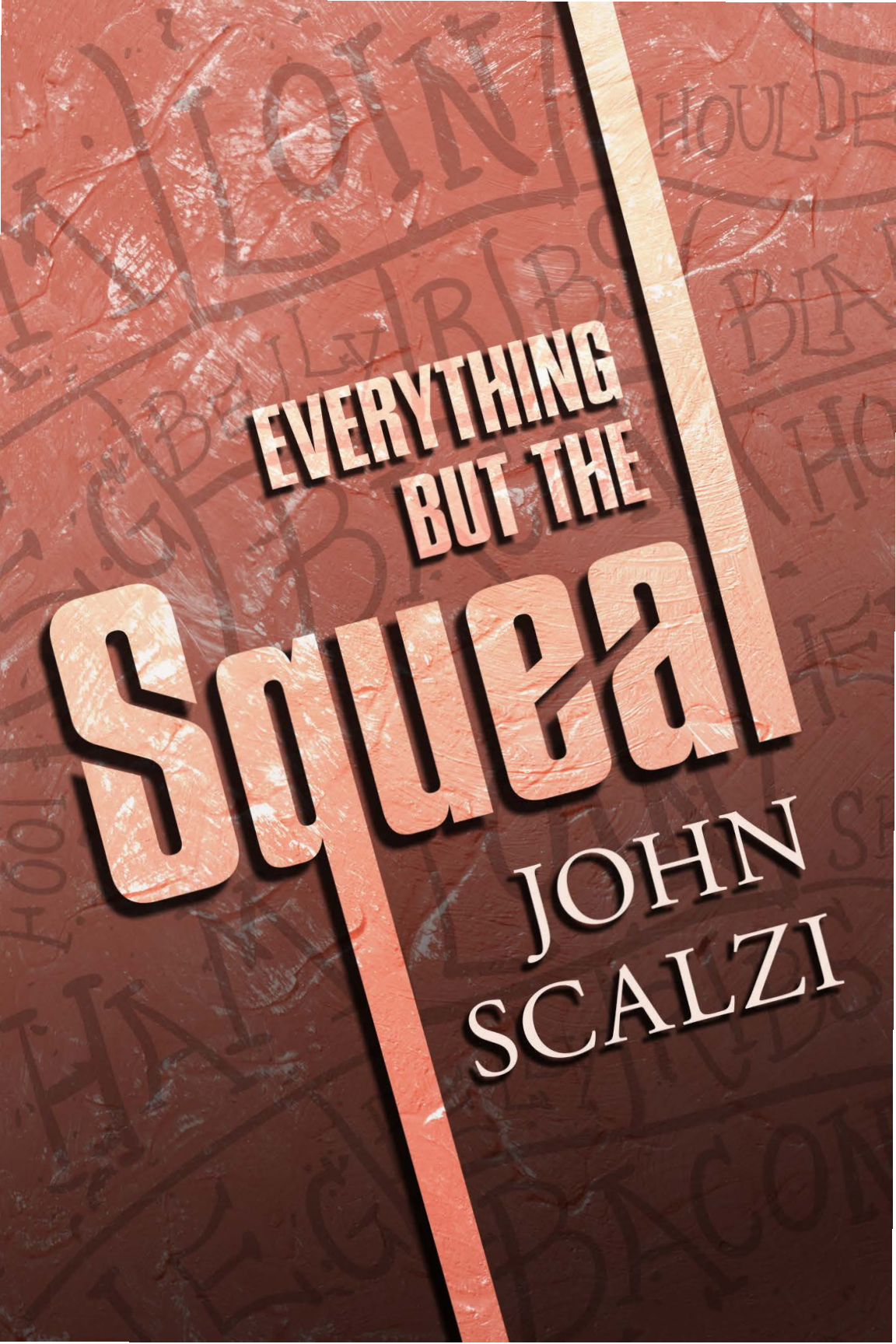
EVERYTHING BUT THE
Squeal
JOHN SCALZI

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John Scalzi

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Hey there. The story you're reading now originally appeared in the 2008 Hugo-nominated Metatropolis *anthology (edited by me) and was originally titled "Utere Nihil Non Extra Quiritationem Suis," which means, roughly, "everything but the squeal." So the story title is the same, just now it's in English.*

Metatropolis *is a shared world anthology—I along with Jay Lake, Tobias Buckell, Elizabeth Bear and Karl Schroeder built up a near-future world from scratch and then all wrote stories set in that world. This story, like the stories the other authors wrote, stands alone on its own but shares thematic and story elements with the other stories in the anthology. If you like the story—and I hope you do—the entire anthology is in print and in audio. Check it out.*

Happy reading!

When people look at my wedding photos, they often wonder what the pig is doing in the wedding party.

Well, let me tell you.

It all began, like so many things do, on a Monday.

The first thing I remember is my little sister Syndee poking me in the cheek.

"Mom says it's time to get up," she said.

I swatted at her with my eyes closed. "It's too early to get up," I said.

"It's nine thirty," Syndee said. "Says so right on your alarm clock."

"The clock lies," I said.

Syndee started poking me in the face again. "Mom told me to tell you if you missed your placement appointment that she would make you regret it."

"I'll be up in a minute," I said, and then rolled over and tried to go back to sleep. I could hear Syndee stomp off, calling for mom. A couple minutes later, I heard someone come back in the room.

"Benjamin," said a lower voice than my sister's. It was mom. "You have your placement appointment in an hour. Time to get up."

"I'm up," I said.

"There is no definition of 'up' that includes lying in bed with your eyes closed," mom said.

"Five more minutes," I said. "I swear I'll be up then."

"Oh, I know you will be," mom said, and that's when she poured a pitcher of water onto my head. I tried to jump out of bed and got tangled in my blankets, and fell head first onto the rug.

"That's better," mom said.

I rubbed my head. "That wasn't necessary," I told mom.

"No," mom agreed. "I could have poured hot coffee in your lap instead. But either way, you're out of bed. Now you get into the shower. You have five minutes for that. After that I switch the shower over to greywater, and I know how much you hate that."

I pulled myself off the floor and stomped over to the bathroom. Mom was right; greywater sucked. Technically it was filtered to be just as clean as regular water. Psychologically I didn't want to bathe in water one filtering process away from someone's kidneys.

"Five minutes," mom said again. "And don't think I'm not paying attention. You're not going to *miss* this appointment, Benji."

"I'm not going to miss it," I said, starting the water.

"I know," mom said. "Because I'll drag you there by the hair if I have to." She walked off. As she walked off I saw Syndee smirking at me.

"Should have got up when I said to," she said.

"Piss off," I said. She smirked some more and flounced off. I stripped out of my underwear and stepped into the shower and stayed in it until that sulfur smell told me mom had switched the tank over to greywater. Then I soaped up, rinsed off and got out.

Ten minutes later I was standing on the curb, waiting for at least one other person to come out of the complex and rideshare. You can take a pod by yourself if you have to, but it comes out of your overall household energy budget, and we were already splurging on the standard water for showering. If I solo'd a pod to my appointment, mom really would drop hot coffee into my lap. So I stood there for a few minutes waiting to see who would come by.

"Hey, look," someone said, behind me, stepping into the pod queue. "If it isn't Benji."

I turned and saw Will Rosen, one of my least favorite humans, and Leah Benson, who was one of my favorites. Sadly, Leah and Will were a couple, so spending time with Leah meant having to tolerate Will, and him having to tolerate me. So I didn't see Leah all that much.

"Hello, Benji," Leah said.

"Hi, Le," I said, and smiled, and then glanced over next to her. "Will," I said.

"You're up early," Will said. "It's not even noon."

On cue, a pod swung up on the track and opened the door to let us in. I considered telling them I was waiting for Syndee and taking the next pod.

"Coming, Benji?" Leah said.

I climbed in.

"Parker Tower," Will said to the destination panel. He was off to work.

"Kent Tower," Leah said. She was off to work, too.

"City Administration," I said.

"Running an errand for your mom?" Will said, as we started moving.

"No," I said, more defensively than I intended. "I've got a placement appointment."

Will feigned a heart attack. "I don't believe it," he said. "That means you actually *took* your Aptitudes."

"Yeah," I said, and looked out the window. I was trying to avoid this conversation.

"Miracles do happen," Will said.

"Will," Leah said.

"Benji knows I'm kidding," Will said, the same way he always did when he was doing some serious knife twisting work. "And anyway I think it's great. He's the last of our class to do it. He always did things on his own schedule, but I was beginning to wonder how close he was planning to cut it."

"Now you know," I said.

"Well, congratulations," Will said. "It'll be nice to know you're part of the contributing part of society now. That you're not just relying on your mom to get you through."

That was when I decided I'd had just about enough of Will. "Thanks, Will," I said, and shifted position. "So, how's your brother these days?"

Will got a look that I guessed you might get if you had something very cold and hard suddenly thrust up your ass. I treasured that look.

"He's fine," Will said. "So far as I know."

"Really," I said. "That's great. I always liked him. The next time you see him, you tell him I said hello."

Leah shot me a look that said *stop that*. I just smiled pleasantly as pie for the next couple of minutes, until the pod slowed down, came to a stop, and then opened to let Will out. He was still sitting there, glaring at me.

"Your stop," I said.

Will snapped out of it, gave Leah a quick kiss, and hustled himself out the door of the pod.

"That wasn't very nice," Leah said to me, as we started moving again.

"Well, he asked for it," I said, and motioned back to the platform where Will had gotten off. "You saw it. He was crapping all over me in that 'I'm just kidding' condescending way of his. Like he always does. Tell me he wasn't trying to push my buttons. Like he always does."

"He was trying to push your buttons," Leah said, agreeing with me. "But you don't do much to stop him, Benji."

"I think asking him about his brother stopped him pretty well," I said.

"There are better ways," Leah said.

"Are there?" I asked. "Leah, you know I love you, dearly, but the guy you're dating is kind of an asshole. Why are you still with him?"

"You mean, why am I still with him, and not you?" Leah said.

"It's crossed my mind," I said.

"I remember trying that," Leah said. "I don't remember it working out very well."

"I was young and stupid," I said, and gave her a smile. "I got over it. Really."

Leah smiled, which was something I liked to see, and looked out the pod window for a moment. "Benji, you were always very cute," she said. "But as much as you'd hate to admit it, Will has a point. You've been taking longer to grow up than the rest of us did. When the rest of us finished our studies, we took the Aptitudes and got jobs. You spent your time sleeping in and screwing around. Will's right that you're the last one in our class to take your Aptitudes and to get placement."

"That's not true," I said. "There's Taylor White."

Leah fixed me with a look. "You're really going to compare yourself with a guy who was eating crayons until he was fifteen," she said.

"That's a rumor," I said.

"It's not a rumor," Leah said. "I saw him do it. Art class. It was a green pastel. He nibbled it, Benji. And then he put it back. I had to share the pastel box with him. It was disgusting."

"Nibbling's not the same as *eating*," I said.

"Does it really matter?" Leah said. "Taylor's a sweet guy, but we both know he's going into the assisted job track. You don't have that excuse. You're two months off from being twenty, Benji. That really is cutting it close."

"I don't know what that has to do with you going out with Will and not me," I said. We were coming into Leah's stop.

"I know, Benji," she said. "That's sort of the problem."

The door slid open. Leah reached over and kissed my cheek. "Good luck today, Benji," she said.

"Thanks," I said. Leah slipped out of the pod. "Hey," I said. She turned back to look at me. "Even if you're not going to date me, you could still do better."

Leah looked like she might say something to that, but the pod door slid shut.

And so I landed in the office of Charmaine Lo, Public Assignment Officer for the city of New St. Louis.

"Ah, Mr. Washington," she said, from her desk, as I walked in. Behind her was a large monitor that took nearly the entire back wall of her office. "Why don't you come and have a seat."

"Thanks," I said, and admired the monitor. Lo followed my gaze to the monitor and then looked back at me.

"It's a monitor," she said.

"I know," I said. "It's nice. I need to get one of those for my bedroom."

"Not unless you have a special dispensation from the energy board," she said. She was looking down now at the tablet monitor that held my case file.

"I'll have to talk to my mom about that," I said, trying to make it sound like a joke.

Lo looked up at this with a look that told me I had failed, badly. "Oh, that's right," she said. "You're the son of Josephine Washington."

"I am," I said.

"Must be nice having your mother on the executive board of the city," Lo said.

"It's not too bad," I said.

"I voted for your mother in the last election," Lo said.

"I'll tell her that when I get home," I said.

"I hope you understand, Mr. Washington, that your mother's stature and influence won't help you here," Lo said. "Job assignments in the city are based on merit, not nepotism."

"I know," I said. "Sorry. About the monitor thing, I mean. I was trying to make a joke."

Lo looked at me for a moment. I decided not to make any more jokes. "Sorry," I said again.

"Well, then, let's get to it," she said, and tapped her tablet. The wall monitor sprang to life with thousands of boxes, each with text in them. She pointed at the wall, and looked back at me. "Do you know what this is?" she asked.

"No," I said.

"This is a representation of every single job that is available right now in New St. Louis," Lo said. "Everything from neurosurgeon right down to janitorial systems maintenance crew. Roughly about one thousand jobs, at the moment. This is a live feed, so you'll see some jobs disappear as they are filled, and new ones show up as they come online."

I looked up again and took a closer look. She was right about it being a live feed; while I watched, one of the text boxes winked out of existence. Somewhere in New St. Louis, someone had a new job as a crèche supervisor, watching bunches of hyperactive two-year-olds while their parents were off at their jobs.

"As your mother has no doubt told you, New St. Louis has a managed employment economy," Lo said. "Every adult who lives in NSL is required to work, and all vacancies are filled internally whenever possible. Each new entrant into the NSL workforce, whether through immigration or through graduation from the NSL school system, is required to take a series of aptitude tests that help us place that person into their initial job."

"Right," I said, and remembered the Aptitudes. How I hated them.

First off, they took two days out of your life, after you've already gotten your education certificate. In other places in other times, a high school diploma was all you needed for a job—not especially good jobs, my mom would point out, but even so—but here in New St. Louis, all your education certificate meant was that you were allowed to take your Aptitudes.

So, two days. The first day was a recap of math, science, history, literature and other school subjects. Which to me seemed a waste of time, these days. Yes, it's nice to remember all this stuff in your head. But the fact of the matter was even if you didn't, everything you had to know about anything was a database search away and had been for decades, and out in the real world the chance that you would need to know when New St. Louis was founded or the intricacies of the city's "zero-footprint" ecological and economic philosophy—and would not have a mini-terminal in your pocket—approached zero.

You know, I think of myself as a practical person, and in practice, all this the memorization just seemed like busy work to me. I know I

can find out anything with a query; worrying about stuffing things into my head seems too much.

That said, I wasn't completely stupid. I did spend a little time reviewing the basics before my Aptitudes. And because I didn't want to stress myself overly, I also made sure to have a good time the night before. I think that being relaxed is key. My mother might disagree. So might Leah.

If the first day was annoying the second day was just mystifying: a series of conversations with a rotating pack of NSL city workers about completely pointless subjects that really had nothing to do anything as far as I could tell. Sometimes I didn't understand my home town's job protocol.

"I notice you took your Aptitudes at the last possible opportunity to do so," Lo said.

"I'm sure a lot of people do it that way," I said.

"No, not really," Lo said. "Most kids do them right after their schooling is completed, so everything is still fresh in their heads. Most of them are also eager to start contributing to the well-being of NSL as soon as possible—and to start their career paths."

I shrugged. After I'd gotten my education certificate schooling, I decided to travel to some of the other cities that shared "open borders" with New St. Louis: The Portland Arcologies and other parts of Cascadia, the Malibu Enclave, Singapore and Hong Kong and the new Helsinki Collective. They kept me busy for a few months, and in a good way, I thought. Travel broadens the mind, and all that.

Mom wasn't very happy about this, but I had promised her I'd take the Aptitudes the next time they were offered once I got back. And I did try, but things kept getting in the way. I finally took them because I was coming up on my twentieth birthday, and here in New St. Louis they had a word for twenty-year-olds who hadn't taken their Aptitudes to get assigned a job: evicted. Even New Louies who went to university outside the city had to take their Aptitudes before their twentieth; they took them remotely and had their scores filed away for later. Miss them, though, and out you go.

That's what happened to Will's brother Marcus. He missed his last

chance to take the Aptitudes five years ago, and the City showed up at the door with his Document of Removal, escorted him to the city border, placed a credit card worth sixteen ounces of gold into his hands and waved goodbye. Now Marcus was living outside, in the banged-up ring of suburbs around St. Louis, new and old, that we referred to as "the wilds," doing whatever the hell it was people in The Wilds did with their time. I suspected he was scrounging and gardening, not necessarily in that order. And now you know why Will would have been happy to stab me for mentioning his brother.

Marcus could get back in one day…maybe. People who'd been booted out of NSL for missing their Aptitudes could get back in only once they'd taken a new set of tests and waited to see if there was a job that no one in the city wanted. And even then they'd have to wait in line, because the list went New Louies first, citizens of other "open border" cities next, and then finally the rest of the world. You skip your last chance at the Aptitudes, it might be years before you get your citizenship back.

Now you know why I didn't miss that last Aptitudes testing day. I try to imagine what mom would do if the City showed up at the door to boot me out and my brain just shuts down. On that path lies madness. I shivered just thinking about it.

Lo noticed. "Cold?" she asked.

"No, sorry," I said. "Just thinking about something." I motioned toward the board. "So, what now? Do I pick one of these jobs?"

"Not quite," Lo said. "I'm showing you all of these jobs so you have an idea of the scope of the city's need for labor."

"Okay, I get it," I said.

"Good," Lo said. "Now, what I'm going to do next is plug in your aptitude test results into this matrix of job openings, and see which ones they qualify you for. First, the results from your first day of testing—the recap of your knowledge from your education." Lo tapped her tablet screen.

I watched as roughly ninety percent of the job openings disappeared from the wall. I spent the next minute or so opening and closing my mouth to no real good effect.

"I think there's something wrong with your wall display," I said, finally.

"The wall display is fine," Lo said. "The problem is that overall you scored in the 35th percentile for your aptitudes. Look." She held up her tablet display and showed it to me. My test scores were on a trio of lines, showing my ranking relative to others who had taken the test the same days I did, in the same year as I had, and since the beginning of the tests, just a few years after the founding of New St. Louis.

"Actually, the 35th percentile is for the historical chart," Lo said, pointing. "You scored lower among the people who took it with you, and who have taken it in the last year. And most of the people who did worse than you were people who were taking the Aptitudes from outside the city."

"Maybe there was a mistake in the scoring," I said.

"Probably not," Lo said. "The tests are triple-scored by machine to catch errors. You're more likely to get hit by lightning than suffer an incorrect Aptitudes score."

"I can take them again," I said.

"You *could have* taken them again if you had taken them earlier," Lo said. "But the next set of Aptitudes isn't scheduled until after your twentieth birthday. So for the purposes of your first job, you're stuck with these scores, Mr. Washington."

I slumped back into the chair. Mom was going to kill me. Lo looked at me curiously. I began to resent her, or at least what I figured she thought of me. "I'm not stupid, you know," I said.

"You don't appear stupid, no," Lo said, agreeing. "But I'd be willing to bet you didn't pay very close attention in school, and taking time off before you took your Aptitudes certainly didn't help either."

Okay, that sounded exactly like something mom would say. And like with mom, I really didn't want to have that discussion right now. "Fine, whatever," I said, and pointed at the wall. "So now I pick from these jobs?"

"Not yet," Lo said. "Because now I have to plug in the results from your second day of testing: the evaluator's reviews of your attitude and psychological fitness. The good news here is that a good score can put

back on the board some of the jobs that you might have lost before. There are a lot of jobs that the city feels a motivated worker could do even if they don't have the academic Aptitude test scores."

"Okay, good," I said. I felt slightly encouraged by that; I think I'm a pretty personable guy.

"Here we go," Lo said, and tapped her tablet again.

All but three jobs disappeared from the board.

"Oh, come *on!"* I yelled. "That *can't* be right!"

"Apparently it is," Lo said. She gave her tablet to me. I took it and looked at it. "You scored even lower on the evaluator's reports than you did on the academic testing. It says there that you struck them as arrogant, bored, and defensive. One of them actually called you 'a bit of an asshole.'"

I looked up from the tablet for that one, appalled at what I was hearing. "You can't say that on an official report," I said.

"They can say whatever they want," Lo said. "They're trained to evaluate everyone's fitness as an employee and they're required by law to write their honest impressions. If one of them called you a bit of an asshole, it's because that's what you are. Or at least what you come across as."

"I'm not an asshole," I said, thrusting the tablet back at Lo.

Lo shrugged. "You came in *here* with some attitude, didn't you?" she said, taking the tablet. "That 'joke' about the monitor and your mom, for example."

"I really did mean it as a joke," I said.

"Maybe you did," Lo said. "But it comes off like you're just dropping your mom's name to hint to me that you should be given a cushy job. Whether you mean it that way or not, that's how you present. And it is more than a little annoying. I can believe you came across as an asshole in your testing. And I can believe you probably weren't even aware of it at the time."

"Can we talk about something else, please?" I said. This was not a good day so far. "Like what jobs are available?"

"Okay," Lo said. She tapped her tablet. The three tiny squares remaining on the wall disappeared, replaced by three very large job listings.

"The general feeling about you is that you're best off not working a job that requires any interaction with the public, or that requires a great deal of technical competence," Lo said. "So basically we're talking some form of back-end job with a heavy physical component. And among those types of jobs we have three openings: Assistant Greensperson at park tower number six, Composting Engineer, trainee level, at the East End waste transformation plant, and Biological Systems Interface Manger at the Arnold Tower."

"'Composting Engineer'?" I said, leaning forward in my seat.

"That's what it says," Lo said. "It's a polite way of saying you'll be shoveling shit. Although as I'm sure you remember from your studies, there's more to industrial scale composting than just shit."

"I'm not doing that," I said, recoiling a bit.

"Well, you have to do something," Lo said. "If you hit your twentieth without a job, you lose your citizenship, and not even your mom will be able to help you then."

I was beginning to get annoyed at her bringing up mom all the time. "'Assistant Greensperson' doesn't sound so bad," I said.

"That would be my choice," Lo said. "The park towers are nice. I go to the one down the street here on my lunch break sometimes. The greens keepers are always tending to the trees and flower and bees. It's physical work, but at least you'll be in pretty surroundings. And remember, this is only a first job. If it's not to your liking, you can always get more training and education, and try for a different sort of job. The important thing is you have a job."

"Fine," I said. "I'll take that one."

"Good," Lo said. We both looked up at the listing.

It disappeared.

"Whoops," Lo said.

"'Whoops?'" I said. "What 'whoops?'"

Lo accessed her tablet. "Looks like someone else just took the job. It's gone."

"That's totally not fair," I said.

"Other people are having their assignment sessions just like you are," Lo said. "If you had taken the job first, someone else would be

saying 'no fair' right now. So now we're down to two jobs: Composting Engineer, trainee level, and Biological Systems Interface Manager. Pick one. I'd suggest you pick quickly."

I looked up at the wall and my two remaining choices. Composting Engineer just sounded vile; I wanted no part of it. I had no idea what "Biological Systems Interface Management" meant, but, you know, if it was management, that probably meant a good chance that I wouldn't be hunched over with a shovel or tiller in my hard, aerating solid waste and food scraps.

"Mr. Washington," Lo said.

Oh, who cares anyway, I thought. *I'll talk to mom about this and get it all sorted out.* Because while mom was a hardass about me taking a job, I was willing to bet there was almost no chance that Josephine Washington, executive council member, would let her only son spend any significant amount of time doing menial labor. She expected better of me, and I thought she'd help me live up to her expectations.

"Biological Systems Interface Manager," I said.

Lo smiled. "Excellent choice," she said, tapping her tablet and securing the job. "I think you'll be perfect for it."

"What is the job?" I asked.

She told me, and then laughed when she saw the expression on my face.

"So, let's recap," mom said to me at dinner. I'd explained my situation without quite telling her the job that I'd gotten. "You want me, a member of New St. Louis' executive board, a highly visible public servant, to pull strings for you so you can get a better job than the one you're qualified for."

"Come on, mom," I said. "You know I'm qualified for lots of jobs."

"Do I?" mom said. "I know *you* didn't read your Aptitude scores when they came in, Benji, but *I* did. I know what you got. I know you spent most of your education screwing off and screwing up because you

didn't think any of it mattered. I told you to do better, but you were happy just to do well enough."

Oh, God, I thought. *Here we go again*.

"Look, mom," said Syndee. "Benji's got his 'I'm not listening anymore' face on."

"Shut up, Syndee," I said.

"Well, you do," Syndee said.

"Kiss ass," I said. She was sixteen and a model student, and a little too smug about it for my taste.

"Benjamin," mom said.

"Sorry," I said, shooting a look at Syndee. "And anyway, mom, I'm listening to you. Really."

"Good," mom said. "Then you'll hear me fine this time: I'm not going to lift a finger to get you another job."

"Why not?" I said. It came out more of a whine than I would have preferred.

"First off, because the last thing I need right now is for the news blogs to be talking about how I used my influence to get my son a job. Honestly, now, Benji. You think people wouldn't notice? This isn't like me asking the school to switch your class schedule around, and you remember how much crap I got for that."

I looked at her blankly.

"Or maybe you don't," mom said.

"I do," Syndee said.

"Hush, Syndee," mom said. "That was bad enough. Actually yanking you out of the assignments queue and handing you a job you don't qualify for is the sort of thing that will get me kicked off the executive board. It's an election year, Benji, and I've already got a fight on my hand because I'm for technology outreach. You know how many New Louies hate that idea."

"I don't like it either," I said. "Technology Outreach" was a plan for NSL to help the people in The Wilds by offering them some of the city's technology and support. It amounted to basically helping a bunch of people who had intentionally gone out of their way to fail in creating a sustainable civilization. "I think it's a dumb idea."

"Of course you do," mom said, acidly. "You don't want us to share technology with the folks in The Wilds because then we wouldn't have something over them. And then you wouldn't be a precious little snowflake, like all the other smug precious little snowflakes in here. Keeping technology bottled up isn't why New St. Louis was founded. Quite the opposite, in fact. And these days it's more important than ever. Cascadopolis had the right idea: Develop useful technology, send it out into the world."

"Look where it got Cascadopolis," I said. "It doesn't even exist anymore."

"You spent too much time with those idiot cousins of yours in the Portland Arcology," Mrs. Washington said.

"Whatever, mom," I said. My cousins weren't idiots, even if they were snobbish enough that even I noticed it. "I just don't see what it has to do with you helping me."

"That's my point," mom said. "You don't appreciate what the consequences of my 'helping' you like that would be. All you know is that you don't want the job you've been assigned. What job have you been assigned anyway?" Mrs. Washington reached for her iced tea.

I shrugged. No point keeping it from her now. "Biological Systems Interface Manager at Arnold Tower," he said.

Mom choked on her tea.

"Mom, tea just came out your *nose*," Syndee said.

"I'm fine, baby," mom said, and reached down into her lap for her napkin.

"See," I said, accusingly. "Now you know why I want another job."

"There's nothing wrong with the job," Mom said.

"You just spit tea everywhere when I told you what it was," I said.

"I was just a little surprised, is all," mom said.

"Come on, mom," I said. "There's got to be something else out there. Something better than this," I said.

"The job is fine," mom said, and pounded her chest to get the remaining tea out of her lungs. "In fact, I think the job will be great for you."

"Well, great," I said, throwing up my hands. "Just what I need. A learning experience."

"That's right," mom said. "You do need a learning experience. To get back to the list of reasons why I won't help you change your job, the second reason is that you need to understand the consequences of your choices, Benji," Mom said. She dropped her napkin back into her lap. "Somewhere along the way you decided that you didn't need to work all that hard for things, because you figured that I would always be there to bail you out, and that my stature would help you get the things you wanted."

"That's not true at all," I said.

"Please, Benji," mom said. "I know you like to think it's not true, but you need to be honest with yourself. Think back on all the times you've asked for my help. Think back on all the times you've given just a little less effort to things because you knew I could back you up or put in a good word for you. If you're honest about it, you'll recognize you've relied on me a lot."

I opened my mouth to complain and then flashed back to Will in the pod, telling me how "happy" he was that I wasn't going to rely on my mom to get me through things. I shut my mouth and stared down at the table.

"It's not all your fault," mom said, gently. "I've been always telling you to do things for yourself, but when it came down to it, I let you slide and I bailed you out of a lot of things. But that has to change. You're an adult now, Benji. You need to be responsible for your actions. And now you're learning that the actions and choices you made before make a difference in your life now. I kept telling you about this, and you kept not listening to me. Well, now you have to deal with it, so deal with it."

"You could have told me a little harder," I said, and poked at my dinner.

Mom sighed. "Benji, sweetheart, I told you almost every single day of your life. And you did that smile and nod thing you do when you decide you're hearing something that doesn't apply to you. You can't tell someone something if they don't want to listen."

"Uh-huh," I said.

"Look, mom," Syndee said. "He's got that face on again."

On the way to the Arnold Tower the next day, to start the first job of the rest of my life, I saw what looked like a protest at one of the entrance gates to New St. Louis.

"Do you know what that's about?" I asked my podmate, an older man.

He looked over at the protest as we glided by and then shrugged. "Some of the folks in The Wilds have been demanding we help them out with their food crisis," he said.

"There's a food crisis?" I asked.

The guy looked over to me. "It's been in the news lately," he said, pointedly.

"You got me," I said. "I haven't been watching the news."

The guy motioned out toward where the protest had been. "The drought is bad this year. Worse than usual. Outside of The Cities, there's been a run on staples and prices are up. Someone's been telling the folks in The Wild that we've got food surpluses, and technology to increase food yields, which is how we got the surpluses. So we get protests every morning."

"Do we have food surpluses?" I asked.

"No idea," the man said, and went back to his reading. I looked back in the direction of where I saw the protest and wondered what it was the protesters were doing—or not doing—that they could take time out of their work schedules to protest on a daily basis. About two seconds after that, I recognized the irony of me, who was going to his first job more than a year after most of my class had gotten their first jobs, wondering how other people could be slackers.

A minute later I was at the Arnold Tower. I walked over to the receptionist.

"Benjamin Washingon," I said. "I'm here to start work."

The receptionist eyed me up and down. "Oh, honey," she said. "You shouldn't have worn good clothes." She shooed me away to sit down and picked up her phone. Shortly thereafter a door opened and a very dirty man came out of it. He looked around until he saw me.

"You Washington?" He said.

"Yeah," I said.

"Come on, then," he said. I got up and followed him. He smelled terrible.

"Nicols," he said as we walked down the corridor, by way of introduction. He glanced at my clothes. "Tomorrow you should probably dress more casual," he said.

"I thought we might have uniforms," I said, nodding at Nicols' blue uniform. I was trying to keep my distance from Nicols. He was beginning to make me gag.

"We have coveralls," he said, "but the smell still gets into everything. You don't want to be wearing anything nice around here." He glanced down. "You'll probably want to get boots, too."

"Boots, casual clothes, got it," I said. We approached a pair of doors. "Anything else?"

"Yeah," Nichols said. "Noseplugs."

He opened the doors and a wave of stink rolled over me and I very nearly threw up my breakfast. Instead of retching, I looked out into the vast room to doors opened on to. There were pigs on almost every square inch of it. Pigs eating. Pigs sleeping. Pigs milling about. Pigs farting. Pigs pooping. Pigs generally making astounding amounts of stink.

And my job was to look after them. That's what Biological Systems Integration Manager meant: Pig farmer.

"Welcome to your new job, kid," Nichols said to me. "You're going to love it here."

"I kind of doubt that," I said.

"You're stuck here," Nichols said. "You might as well learn to enjoy it. Now come on. It's time to get you set up, and to take you to meet the boss."

Lou Barnes, my new boss, pointed at a carved plaque on his wall. "Do you know what means?" he asked me.

I looked at the sign, which read *Utere nihil non extra quiritationem suis*. "I don't know Spanish," I said.

"It's Latin," Barnes said. "It means 'use everything but the squeal.' People used to say about pigs that you could eat every part of them but the squeal." He waved toward the plate glass window that overlooked an entire different floor of pigs than I saw earlier; Arnold Tower had twenty stories, and every story had thousands of pigs in it, or so Nichols told me on the way up to Barnes' office. "The pigs you see here are a fundamental part of the zero-footprint ecological ethos of New St. Louis. When you toss your dinner leftovers into the food recycling chute, they're sterilized, fortified and brought here as part of the pigs' diet. In return, we get manure, which we send to the agricultural towers and to the test gardens on the top of the tower. We get methane, which we collect and use for fuel. We get urea from the pig's urine, which we use to make plastics. We recycle the plastics when we're done with them. Around and around it goes."

"We make plastic from pig pee?" I said. I knew about manure and methane, but this was a new one on me.

"Urea's a bulking agent," Barnes said, and when I gave him a look that indicated I hadn't the slightest idea what he was talking about, changed tracks. "Yes. Plastic from pig pee. You got it."

"I suppose we get pork chops from them as well," I said.

Barnes made a face. "No," he said. "Not these pigs." He waved out at the floor again. "These pigs are genetically engineered to maximize output of end products."

I tried not to go to the next logical place and just couldn't avoid it. "You've produced prodigiously pooptastic pigs," I said, with as straight a face as possible.

Barnes gave me a tight-lipped smile. "Laugh it up, Washington," he said. "And while you're laughing it up remember that all this pig shit and pig piss is part of the reason New St. Louis isn't on the verge of economic collapse or starvation, like most of what's left of our suburbs. And Missouri. And Illinois."

I thought back on the protest I saw outside my pod window on the way in and sobered up a little.

Barnes seemed to approve. "Look, Washington, I know why you're here," he said. "You screwed around in school, got crappy Aptitude

scores and this wound up being the only job you could get. Am I right about that?"

"Sort of," I said.

"'Sort of,'" Barnes repeated. "I know you think this is a dead-end job, below your dignity. But what you need to understand, Washington, is that if anything, it's *you* who have to step up." He jerked a thumb back to the pigs. "I don't suppose you know that those pigs are part of the Technology Outreach program your mother and some others on the council are trying to push through."

"Pigs count as technology?" I said.

"*These* pigs do," Barnes said. "The same genetic improvements you are joking about are what make them valuable. They're *exceptionally* efficient processors of urea and other valuable elements, and we've improved their already considerable intelligence enough that they actually know where to go to get rid of their waste."

It took me a minute to process this. "You mean they're potty trained?"

Barnes motioned to the window. "Look for yourself," he said.

I walked over to the window and stared out at the pigs. At first I had no idea what I was looking at, except for lots of pigs wandering around. But then I started to see it: trickles of pigs flowing into marked-off areas with grated floors. When they got there, they would let fly, and then wander back out when they were done.

"Does someone have to teach them to do that?" I asked.

"At first someone did," Barnes said. "But these days they teach each other."

I looked back at him. "They've teaching each other things?" I looked back at the pigs. "And you're not worried about a piggy revolution or anything."

"It's not *Animal Farm*," Barnes said. "And it's not like they're teaching each other calculus. But now you understand why these pigs are valuable."

"What do you think of my mom's Technology Outreach thing?" I asked Barnes. I know you're not supposed to talk politics with your boss, much less on your first day on the job, but I was curious.

Barnes shrugged. "I'm sympathetic," he said. "People out there aren't starving yet, but they're getting close. No one's going to eat these

pigs—they shouldn't, at least—but they can help with crop production and the production of biodegradable plastics. *But,"* And here Barnes looked at me significantly, "the reason it works here in NSL is that we actively manage it. It's a closed loop. Zero-footprint. Everything gets recycled, nothing gets wasted."

"We use everything but the squeal," I said.

"That's right," Barnes said, approvingly. "Not just here but all over New St. Louis. Now, you give the same technology to people who aren't managing their system—who don't believe in that sort of zero-footprint philosophy—and all you're going to do is make things worse." He nodded out to the pigs again. "These guys are great for us, but they're like any crop or animal that humans have messed with, either by old-fashioned domestication or modern genetic-engineering. They have to be managed. Put a bunch of pigs designed for high outputs of urea and nitrates into an open system, with their waste flowing into streams and seeping into groundwater, and you'll have a goddamn mess on your hands. Your mother is right, Washington: We need to help the people outside of the city. But we have to do it right, because they've already messed things up badly enough that they can't afford another screw-up. And neither can we. That's why we haven't given the technology to anyone else yet. The genetics of these pigs is still a state secret. Which is another thing you need to know."

"And here I thought I was just going to be a high-tech pig farmer," I said.

"Well, you are," Barnes said. "Make no mistake about that, Washington. It's just that pig farming is a lot more important than you thought it was. And that's why I'm hoping your shitty Aptitude scores are more of a reflection of you farting around than you actually being stupid. If you're an idiot, I can find jobs for you to do. But if you're not an idiot, I can actually use you."

"I'm not an idiot," I said.

"I'd like to believe that," Barnes said. "We'll see. In the meantime, we'll start you on vacuum detail."

"It's simple," said Lucius Jeffers, who was the head of the four man work detail I was assigned to, on the fifth floor of Arnold Tower. "Whenever you see some shit or piss on the floor, you suck it up with this." He waved the business end of a vacuum tube at me. "The mess goes into the tub here, and when the tub is full, you drag it over to a waste port at either end of the floor." He motioned to one of the waste ports, which looked a little like the fire hydrants I saw in old children's books. "Attach the tube to the waste port, switch the unit from the 'vacuum' to the 'expel' setting and let it empty out. Lather, rinse, repeat."

I looked at the vacuum unit doubtfully. "I thought these pigs were toilet-trained," I said.

"They are," Jeffers said. "But they're also *pigs*, you know? Sometimes they just let fly. We've tried training them to use the vacuum to pick up after themselves. It didn't work."

"You really tried that?" I said.

Jeffers smiled. "You're going to be a lot of fun, Washington. I can tell that already. All right, off to work with you. You can start with that pile of crap over there." He pointed to a fresh leaving on the floor. "Try to get to them before the other pigs start walking through them," he said, and left. And then off I went, sucking up crap.

After an hour or so of doing this, I noticed that one of the pigs was following me around, usually about five feet behind me wherever I went. The porker was on the smallish side, and seemed to be grinning at me whenever I looked at it. I asked Jeffers about it at lunch time.

"Yeah, they do that sometimes," Jeffers said. "The biologists made them smarter than the average pig, so now they're a little curious about us. Pinter here," Jeffers pointed at one of the other guys on the crew, "he had a sow follow him around for months. I think she was in love."

"It wasn't love," Pinter said, between sandwich bites. "We were just good friends."

"Yeah, right," Jeffers laughed, and turned back to me. "The sow was probably just looking for a little action. They don't let these pigs breed normally."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"You'll find out after lunch," Jeffers said.

After lunch I was taken to the Love Lounge, filled with silicone pig-sized objects.

I looked at Pinter, who had taken me to the Lounge. "Tell me these aren't what I think they are."

"They are *exactly* what you think they are," Pinter said. "We bring in a bunch of male pigs, fill the air with Scent of a Sow—" he pointed at what looked like a fire sprinkler on the ceiling "—and then the boys go to town. After they're done we suck out the leavings, send them down to cryo for storage, and then clean out the love toys with an injection of soap and hot water."

"You have got to be kidding," I said. "I just ate."

"It's not so bad," Pinter said. "Come on, get into the control booth. You don't want to be in here when the boys come in. Once they get the sow scent into their nose, they're not exactly discriminating."

I got into the control booth as quickly as I could. "Okay," Pinter said. "Ready?" He pressed a button, and the sprinkler fizzed to life, coating the love dolls. Then the far door slid open, and a small pack of randy pigs trotted in.

"Oh, God," I said, a minute later. "That is so *not* right."

"Makin' bacon," Pinter said, and looked at me. "Well, half of it, anyway. What would that be? 'Bac'? Or 'con'?"

"I think there's something wrong with you," I said.

Pinter shrugged. "You get used this place after a while. And it's not so bad working here once you do. I listen to my husband complain about his work day every single damn night. He complains about work, about his co-workers, and about his boss. I'm about ready to strangle him." Pinter pointed out to the pigs, who were now winding down; they were not the long-lasting sort, apparently. "I wouldn't say this job is glamorous—"

"That's a good thing," I said.

"—But on the other hand I don't have to go home and whine to him about my day at work, either. Pigs are easy. People are hard. You learn to appreciate it after a while."

"I'm not entirely sure about that," I said.

"Well, if you don't like it, you can always take your Aptitudes again and do something else with your time," Pinter said, as the door to the Love Lounge opened and the pigs trotted out. "I like it fine. Now come on. We've got to collect this stuff while it's still hot."

I swear to you, I never thought I would be so glad to get back to vacuuming up pig crap. And sure enough, once I started up again, there was the little pig again, trotting behind me.

"Hello," I said, finally, when I stopped to drain the vacuum, and the pig parked itself to watch. "I think I'll call you Hammy. Or how about Pork Chop? Or maybe Mr. Bacon. Or just plain Lunch. What do you think about that?"

The pig snorted at me, as if acknowledging my choices.

"Great," I said. "The first day on the job and I'm already talking to the pigs. Shoot me now."

Lunch snorted again.

The vacuum suddenly chugged to a stop.

"What the hell?" I said. The vacuum was still half full. I pulled my phone from my coverall pocket and called the Arnold Tower number for Jeffers. "Something's wrong with my vacuum unit," I said. "It stopped working and it's half full."

"Let me check on this end," Jeffers said. "It's not your vacuum unit," he said after a minute. "You've got an embargo situation."

"What the hell is an embargo situation?" I said.

"It means there's some sort of clog in the piping," Jeffers said. "Your vacuum unit shut down because if it didn't, you'd be spilling pig shit all over yourself right about now."

"What do I do now?" I asked.

"I'm going to need you to do a diagnostic on that particular drainage tube," Jeffers said. "There's a diagnostic panel for the tube hardwired into its terminus, which is in the Tower sub-basement C."

"Why can't I access the panel on my phone?" I said. "Why can't you?"

"This is an old building, kid," Jeffers said. "One of the first built in New St. Louis. The diagnostic system is a legacy system from back in the day. Just go down there and check it out, okay? Go to the lobby

and switch elevators. You have to take a special elevator down to the sublevels."

Five minutes and one elevator transfer later, I was in sub-basement C. Even after a full day of walking around pigs and their smell, the fumes down there were something special. On a shelf facing the elevator were a set of breathing masks. YOU NEED THIS, said a weathered sign, followed by another equally weathered sign with the fine print about why the masks were needed. I didn't need the fine print; I was getting near woozy from the fumes even before I slipped the mask over my head.

After a couple of deep breaths my head cleared and I walked into the sub-basement, which seemed to be the top floor for several massive conduits, into which the drainage tubes from all the various floors of the Arnold Tower drained.

"You're going to want to open the access port to conduit 2," Jeffers said. "Don't worry, it's automatic. No heavy lifting. Just walk on top of the conduit and hit the 'open' switch."

"There's going to be a river of crap in there," I said.

"No there's not," Jeffers said. "Whenever there's an embargo situation all the other drainage tubes freeze and the conduit empties out, because they know someone has to go and check out the diagnostic panel. It's going to smell like hell, but you have your mask on right?"

I got to the access port, and lugged the switch over to "open." "I want to talk to whoever designed this system."

"It's been decades, kid," Jeffers said. "The person who designed it is probably dead by now. Come on, Washington. Crap is piling up. We don't have all day."

I carefully put myself on the access ladder coming down from the port and stepped down. There was recessed, sealed-off lighting at the top of the conduit, so at least I could see. The conduit itself wasn't exactly clean, but it was drained as promised. Despite that, the residue on the curved floor of the consuit made me be careful how I placed my steps.

"Where am I going?" I asked.

"You're looking for the third…no, wait, fourth tube junction on your left," Jeffers said.

I counted off the tube junctions and then stood in front of the fourth one on the left. "Where's this diagnostic panel?" I asked.

"It should be there," Jeffers said. "They're small. It might be covered in gunk. Stand closer."

"I am closer," I said. "I'm standing right in front of the tube, and I'm not seeing anything."

"You're sure you're in front of the right tube?" Jeffers asked.

"I can count," I said.

"Hey, Washington," Jeffers said.

"What?" I said.

"Embargo lifted," he said.

Then I heard the rumbling. And the laughter from the other end of the phone.

I looked at the tube and had just enough time to think *oh, shit* before what I thought became a reality.

Ten minutes later I was in the Arnold Tower locker room, standing under a shower head, fully clothed, glowering at Jeffers, Pinter, and the other members of my work detail, who were mostly on the floor, laughing so hard that they couldn't breathe.

"I will remember this," I said.

"We know!" Jeffers said, and hooted so long he fell off the locker room bench.

Around this time Lou Barnes strolled through the locker room and stopped to get a look at me.

"Don't tell me," he said. "You fell for the embargo trick."

"Oh, God, Oh, God," Pinter said. "Please don't make me laugh anymore. Please, God, no." And then he laughed some more.

"You know they do this to everyone the first day," Barnes said. "Think of it like a baptism."

"Praise the Lord!" Jeffers said, from the floor.

"It just means you're one of us now," Barnes said.

"Great," I said.

"It's an honor, if you think about it," Barnes said. "Really." And then he busted out laughing, too. Which made all the rest of them laugh some more.

"I *will* remember this," I said to Jeffers, once he finally managed to peel himself off the floor.

"Oh, kid," Jeffers said, wiping a laugh tear from his eye. "We wouldn't have it any other way."

I noticed a funny thing on the pod ride back home, which was that someone would get in the pod I with me, and then get off a stop later. This happened three times before the door slid open and Leah popped her head in.

"Trust me, Leah, you want to take the next pod," I said.

"What's that smell?" she said.

"It's my job," I said. "It stinks."

"Hey, you have a job!" she said, and came in to give me a hug. The door slid closed behind her.

"Now you're in for it," I said.

"I think I can handle the smell of an honest day's work," she said, and then gave her destination to the pod. We started off. "I mean, I hope you won't smell like this at the end of every day. But first days are always stressful. What's the new job?"

"Pig farmer," I said.

"Normally I'd tell you to stop kidding around, but given how you smell at the moment, I'm willing to believe it," Leah said.

"Oh, believe it," I said. I told her about my day.

"It could be a positive," Leah said. "It's like an initiation rite into the tribe. If they didn't like you, they would have just said good night to you at the end of your shift."

"So, when you started your job, did your co-workers do something like this?" I said.

"No," Leah admitted. "They took me out for a drink. But they don't have access to pig droppings, either."

"I'm not sure I agree 100% with your tribe initiation theory," I said.

"In that case, stick with it and get them back," Leah said. We

were coming up to our stop. "Because you now have access to pig droppings, too."

"That's a very good point," I said. "And here all this time I was thinking you were a nice girl, Leah."

"I *am* a nice girl," Leah said. "I'm just not a pushover."

Later at home, mom opened the door a crack while I was in the shower. I was using the graywater because I was wanting a real long soak and after my day, whining about graywater just seemed kind of stupid.

"Syndee told me about your day at work," mom said, through the door.

"Did she tell you I rubbed her face in my shirt after she called me a 'stinkpig'?" I asked.

"That was how I found out," mom said. "I told her I was going to let it slide this time. Do you want to have me talk to your supervisor about it?"

"Since my supervisor was one of the people laughing his ass off about it, I don't think it would do much good," I said.

"Well, then, his supervisor," mom said.

"I thought you said you weren't going to fight my battle for me anymore," I said.

"Having your kid drenched in pig shit changes things," mom said, and I realized she must really be pissed, because she hardly ever swore in front of me or Syndee. I laughed. "What's so funny?" mom asked.

"Never mind," I said. I turned off the shower and grabbed a towel and wrapped it around my waist. Then I opened the door all the way and have my mom a big sloppy hug.

"Damn it, Benji, my blouse," mom said.

"Sorry," I said. "And thanks for wanting to stick up for me. But you said it yourself. I'm an adult now. I can handle this on my own. Okay?"

"You sure?" mom said.

"Oh, I'm sure," I said.

And so the days and weeks started to go by.

At work, I still did menial vacuuming and Love Lounge duties, as did everyone else. But slowly I was shown the other parts of the pig trade, from handling feed and water trade to helping the Arnold Tower vets with the vaccinations and their medical rounds. I also learned how to handle Arnold Towers securities and diagnostic systems—which, in fact, could be handled remotely by phone once I was given my access codes. I proved to be a quick study with the computer systems, and because of it I was put in the rotation for late night shifts, when it was just me, a couple of members of the administrative area janitorial staff, and thousands upon thousands of sleeping pigs. Late night shift workers were exempt from the solo surcharge on the pod system and sometimes I took advantage of that to take the long way around New St. Louis, cruising over the streets at night, watching my hometown slide by silently.

Outside the city, the drought that threatened in the early months of the year delivered with a vengeance, drying up croplands all over the American Midwest and in the lower part of the Canadian corn belt. Mom was having a difficult time selling the rest of the NSL council on Technology Outreach but managed to convince them to make an emergency release of food surpluses to the surrounding suburbs and The Wilds. The generosity of the gesture seemed to be lost on the people in The Wilds, since NSL was accused of holding back on what it could have given, and the protests on our doorsteps got bigger and louder. This frustrated mom and enraged a fair share of New Louies. I was annoyed myself.

About ten weeks after I had my "embargo" event, Jeffers and Pinter were preparing to herd their boys into another session in the Love Lounge when an apparently random computer glitch locked them out of the control room and then cycled through the session, spraying them with swine-tuned aphrodisiac just as the door slid open to admit a fine selection of very horny pigs. If the door to the control room hadn't randomly unlatched a couple of minutes in to the session, Jeffers and Pinter might have found themselves porked into oblivion. A routine check of the systems after the event found no tampering and no reason why

the system would have behaved like that. Barnes ordered the software reloaded and everyone was given new security codes into the system.

A week after that, protests at the city border finally turned bloody, as a small group of Wilds folks attacked the NSL police force, seriously wounding one of them when a rock dented his skull. I saw this particular protest from above as I slid into work; if it wasn't an actual riot it was practicing to become one. The NSLPD told the executive council it didn't have enough officers to handle the growing crowds. The council, over the strenuous objections of my mother, contracted with Edgewater for border control. After that the protest crowds got larger but they also stayed mostly under control. The rumor was that the Eddies got paid bonuses on a quota basis, and were just looking for someone—anyone—to get out of line. I asked my mom if the quota bonus rumor was true. She looked at me and told me that now would be a great time to change the subject.

Shortly thereafter Syndee completed all her education requirements, got her certificate, and took her Aptitudes. She scored high enough on them that she qualified for New St. Louis' executive training, which meant she was now on a fast track to be an administrator either here or in another city we shared "open borders" with. Despite myself, I was really proud of her.

As for me, I got a promotion, of sorts: Arnold Tower had a lorry it used to transfer pigs or other things from our tower to Wilber Tower or Pippo Tower, the other two non-meat pig towers in New St. Louis, and the driver of the lorry had slipped while stepping out of the cab and broken his leg. While he was on desk duty, I was assigned temporary driver. I spent part of my day on the actual roads of the city, which beat vacuuming up shit. One day as I was driving along I saw Leah and Will standing on the street corner, waiting to cross. I honked as I went past, which delighted Leah and confused Will, which seemed about right in both cases. Sometimes I took Lunch with me on the trips; he sat up front with me. He seemed to enjoy the ride.

As bad as the protests where we lived were, they were worse in other places. In California, the Malibu Enclave was nearly burned to ground when protestors there started fires in the canyons and pushed

the fire line right to the border of the enclave. A lucky shift of the wind let firefighters save the enclave; other parts of Malibu were not as lucky. When the protestors came back, they put the blame for the fires on the Enclave. Edgewater, which had a contract with Malibu just like it did with New St. Louis, saw a lot of its people get bonuses that night. The protesters saw their people go into the Eddies holding cells or the hospital.

Despite the rising tensions, mom kept hammering away at her Technology Outreach program, trying to convince the other executive board members that time was running out. It was already too late to have the outreach be any use for this year, she said, but next year we're going to see the same thing happen again, and the year after that, and the year after that. But it wasn't doing her any good. Opinions were hardening against The Wilds, which looked more like anarchy than anything else these days.

Eventually even mom gave up and tabled the outreach program until after the elections. Her opponent, who as it turned out was distantly related to Will's dad, had been gaining ground on her, mostly by hammering on her for wanting to do outreach to the same people who were rioting on our borders. He didn't seem to have any other platform, but at the moment he really didn't need any other platform. Mom looked at what her support for Technology Outreach was costing her and had to dump it. And even though I'd been opposed to it, I was sorry for my mother that something she cared so much about couldn't get a fair hearing.

At the end of summer, my work group had a classic cinema movie night, which included *Babe*, *Deliverance* and *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*. When I saw the latter, I finally got the "embargo" reference.

On the first day of autumn, as I pulled a night shift, I invited Leah to the experimental gardens on the roof. We brought Lunch along for security purposes.

"It's beautiful up here," Leah said.

"I'm glad you like it," I said. "I thought you might want to see it before all the leaves fell off."

"Why are they called the experimental gardens?"she asked.

"The plants up here are genetically engineered," I said. "The botanists share the genetics lab with the geneticists who work on the pigs. The lab takes up the whole twentieth floor, actually. Common rabble like us aren't allowed in there, but they let us come up here on our breaks and during lunch. I come up here with Lunch all the time. Lunch, the pig, I mean. For lunch. You know. I think I'll stop talking now."

Leah smiled, which was a pretty thing in the moonlight. "I think it's adorable you have a pet pig," she said.

"I wouldn't use the word 'pet' around him," I said. "He's his own pig. We just happen to be friends."

"Well, fine," Leah said. "I think it's adorable you have a pig for a friend. Are you happy now?"

"I'm getting there," I said, and even in the moonlight, I could sense her blushing a little. Leah was still with Will, and she wasn't the sort of girl would let something like that slide, even for a minute. But it wasn't a secret to her that I still wished she was with me. And I didn't see much point in pretending that I felt any other than I did. You can let people know how you feel about them without seeming desperate, or at least, that was what I was hoping.

"I like where you work, Benji," Leah said, after a minute.

"You're only saying that because I haven't taken you to sub-basement C," I said. "Let me give you the embargo treatment and we'll see what you think then."

Leah laughed. "I think I'll pass on that," she said.

"Chicken," I said. She smiled again and reached down to pet Lunch. He snuffled at her.

One of our phones rang. It was Leah. She stepped away and took the call. A minute later, she came back, holding the phone in front of her. "Here," she said. "It's for you."

I took the phone. "Hello?" I said.

"Benji," Will said, on the other end of the line. "I have a favor to ask of you. A real big favor."

"It's Marcus," Will said, when I met him and Leah for lunch the next day. "I haven't seen him in nearly three years. We email a little, and talk about what's going on, but he's always somewhere that's nowhere near here. Then he calls yesterday—actually calls—and tells me he's in St. Charles and he wants to see me. He said there's a rave he'll be at out there tomorrow and gave me directions and the time. So I know where he'll be and when he'll be there. I just don't have a way to get there."

I squirmed in my seat. Will asking me to take the Arnold Tower lorry to drive him to see his brother out in The Wilds was bad enough, but asking me to take it to a rave edged on the insane. "I don't understand," I said. "Just requisition a car from the city. It'll put a hole in your energy budget for the month, but it's your brother. He's worth it."

"I *tried* that," Will said, and he let his irritation creep into his voice. "Maybe you're not keeping up with current events, Benji, but we've got a daily near-riot right outside the city. The city's not letting people take their ground cars out into that; they'd get stripped before they got to the Interstate. Jesus, you're clueless sometimes."

"Will," Leah said.

Will held a hand up. "I know. I'm sorry, Benji. It's just that I haven't seen Marcus in so long, and I have no idea when I'm going to get to see him again. You know how important he is to me."

The hell of it was, I did know. Long ago, before we decided we actually really didn't like each other, Will and I were friends, and I hung out with his family. Will idolized his older brother. He was crushed when Marcus blew off his Aptitudes and ended up out of the City. It was why I knew how to poke him in that particular soft spot whenever I felt like he had gone too far with his belittling of me.

"Look, Benji," Will said. "I know we haven't been friends in a long time. I know we don't get along. I know you resent me—," he stopped before he could actually say *for being with Leah*, and chose something else instead, "I know you resent me for a lot of things. And I know I've treated you like crap. If you said no to this, no one would say I didn't deserve it. But I'm asking you, just this once, for a favor. I can't get a car to get out to St. Charles. But you can. Your

lorry can get through the gates and get back. You don't even have to stop at the gates like regular cars do because the lorry has a signature transponder in it, right?"

"You've thought this through, Will," I said.

"It's my *brother*, Benji," Will said. "I want to see him. Help me. Please."

I looked at Will and then I looked over at Leah, who was keeping a very carefully neutral expression on her face. But I knew what she wanted me to say, and I know what I was going to say because I knew what Leah would want.

It takes a special kind of pathetic loser to help someone you hate just to make his girlfriend happy, I thought. There was more to it than that, I knew. But at the moment that's exactly what it felt like.

"Let me see what I can do," I said. "I can't promise anything. The same restrictions that are out there for groundcars might be there for city lorries, too. And if there are, I'm not stretching my neck out for you, Will. It's not like I have a whole lot of job options available to me at this point. Okay?"

"Okay," Will said, and looked like he was going to cry. "Thank you, Benji. Really. I'm not going to forget this."

"Thank you, Benji," Leah said.

"You're welcome," I said, looking at her, and then looking at him. "You're both welcome."

"Here's the deal with the lorry," Barnes said, to me. "I'm not saying yes, but I'm not officially saying no. All of us have unofficially 'borrowed' that truck from time to time. As far as I'm concerned it's one of the perks of the job; a little something to make up for having to work in pig crap all day long. That said, if you take it out and something happens to it, then officially you're screwed and there's nothing I'm going to be able to do to dig you out of that hole. So don't run it into a tree or hit a deer or let anyone set fire to it. Got it?"

"I got it," I said.

"What do you need it for, anyway?" Barnes asked.

"I'm taking someone to see his long lost brother in St. Charles," I said.

"That's not a trip I'd want to take these days," Barnes said. "That must be some friend."

"It's not a friend, actually," I said.

"I'm confused," Barnes said.

"His girlfriend," I said. "My ex. Still hold a candle. And so on."

"Ah," Barnes. "Well, and I hope you don't mind me saying this, but that's got to suck for you."

"It really sort of does," I said. Barnes clapped me on my back and headed off.

The next night, late, Will and Leah and I rolled out of New St. Louis and took the bumpy city streets of old St. Louis until we found a suitable onramp to Interstate 70, heading west. The Interstate was not exactly in what you would call brilliant condition these days—the US federal government's list of priorities was getting smaller and smaller, and the Interstate system had clearly not made the most recent cut—but it was workable as long as you didn't go too fast, and the traffic out to St. Charles from NSL was pretty much non-existent.

"So you actually have directions to where we're going, right, Will?" I said. I had gotten to the I-70 on my own, and Will had been silent for all of the ride so far.

Will pulled something out of his coat pocket and handed it to me. "Here," he said.

I took it. It was a pair of goofy-looking glasses. "What the hell are these?" I said.

"Marcus had them sent to me," Will said. "He had me stand at one of the gates where there wasn't a protest, and someone came up and gave them to me."

"Who gave them to you?" I asked.

"It was just some guy," Will said. "He said he'd been paid to turk

the package. Put them on."

I put them on; the lenses were clear and non-correcting. "Do these do anything but make me look stupid?" I asked

"You have to turn them on," Will said. "There's a power switch on the rim of the lens."

I fumbled with the glasses with one hand until I found a slightly raised ridge. I pressed it.

There was suddenly a bright orange three-dimensional arrow in my field of view, pointing down the Interstate.

"Whoa," I said.

"The lenses are supposed to superimpose images over the real world," Will said.

"Well, it works," I said.

"Marcus said they're from company out of Switzerland. He said they're going to be huge in a few years," Will said.

"That's great," I said. "But am I supposed to follow this arrow or what?"

I was. When the arrow turned, I turned. 45 minutes later, we rolled up to what looked like it used to be a city park, which had gone to pot sometime in the not-too-distant past. In the middle of the park lights flashed and music pulsed. We were at our rave.

"What now?" I asked, once we'd gotten out of the lorry and I'd clicked on the security settings.

"Do you still have an arrow in your glasses?" Will asked.

"Yeah," I said.

"Let's follow it," Will said.

We wandered through the crowd for a few minutes, pushing our way through clots of dancers. From time to time I saw faces I recognized; there were a lot of New Louies at this particular rave in The Wilds. I wondered how they found out about it, and how they got there, but before I got to spend any real amount of time on it, the arrow in my glasses suddenly changed orientation and hovered directly over someone.

"I think I found Marcus," I said to Will, but he was already pushing past me to hug his brother. Leah trailed behind him. I stood in the

middle of a bunch of dancers with a pair of incredibly dorky glasses on my head.

"So, okay, then," I said, to no one in particular. "You're welcome. No, no. Happy to help. No thanks necessary." I sighed and took off the glasses.

When I looked up again Leah was standing in front of me. "Come on," she said. "Marcus is asking for you." She held out her hand. I took it.

As a kid, I remember Marcus towering over both me and Will. He was still as imposing as I remembered him.

"Benjamin Washington," Marcus said, and extended his hand. I shook it and compared my grip to his, despite myself. "I remember you very well. You were not quite so tall the last time I saw you."

"I was fourteen the last time you saw me," I said.

"True enough," Marcus said. We were standing in a rest area at the rave, with card tables and folding chairs around us. He motioned for the three of us to sit. We did. I could tell that Will was a little puzzled why his brother wanted to talk to me when he was around. I was wondering that myself.

"Will tells me you waited until the last minute to take your Aptitudes," Marcus said.

I glanced over at Will. "That sounds like something Will would tell you," I said.

"I was curious why you waited," Marcus asked.

I shrugged. "I wanted to see some of the rest of the world first," I said.

Marcus smiled. "And did you? See the rest of the world?"

"Some of it," I said, and listed the places I had traveled.

"Ah," Marcus said. "I see. You did see the world—but just the safe parts."

"I don't know what you mean," I said.

"You went to all the other hermetically sealed places on the map," Marcus said. "All the other cities like New St. Louis. The zero-footprint, low-impact, archipelago of new-age city states that dot the globe. The ones that have cut themselves off from the rest of the world and think themselves virtuous for doing so. Do you think they are virtuous?"

"I don't know about virtuous," I said. I had no idea where Marcus was going with any of this. "I think right about now we're trying not to starve like everyone else is about to."

Marcus tilted his head at this. "You New Louies could help everyone not starve, if you wanted to," he said. "If I hear correctly, your mother tried to get New St. Louis to share some its technology, but no one else was buying the argument. Why was that?"

"I think all the protests began to piss people off," I said. "My mom got the city to give up some of its food surplus and no one seemed grateful. I think that pissed people off, too."

"It pissed *me* off," Will said, trying to get into the conversation. Leah was silent, watching the three of us.

Marcus smiled over at his brother but kept talking to me. "I think what bothered people about that was the New St. Louis was giving The Wilds a fish, rather than teaching them how to fish."

"I don't follow you," I said.

"'Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day,'" Marcus intoned. "'Teach a man how to fish, and you feed him for life.' Surely you've heard this saying. I'm saying that the people in The Wilds know the difference between a fish and being taught how to fish. They resent being given the one, when they need the other."

"But the city didn't have to give them a fish at all," I said.

"Of course not," Marcus said. "That's the advantage of being a zero-footprint paradise, isn't it? You're whole unto yourselves. You can keep your own clockwork ticking while all the world is running down around you. But it's a lie. John Donne had the right of it when he said that no man is an island. No city is, either, Benjamin. Your mother recognizes this, at the very least; it's why she's trying to pass that outreach of hers. Or tried, anyway, until she realized she had an election she needed to win. I recognized it. It's why I never bothered to take my Aptitudes. It's why I let them come to my family's apartment, serve me that silly court order, walk me to the city gate and shove that ridiculous credit card in my hand. They thought I was being expelled from paradise; I knew I was gaining my freedom. I wondered if you might have recognized it, too, Benjamin." Marcus

cocked his head again. "But now I'm not so sure. And I wonder if that's not a pity."

I sat there for a second and then stood up. "I think I'm keeping you from catching up with your brother," I said, and then nodded to both Marcus and Will, and walked off.

Leah followed behind me a few seconds later. "What was that all about?" she asked.

"I swear to you I have no earthly idea," I said.

"I think Marcus was trying to tell you something," Leah said.

"I know he was trying to tell me something," I said. "I just don't know what it is. And I think it's pissing me off."

Leah looked like she was about to say something else, but then both she and I heard screaming coming from the dance area of the rave. She and I both looked over and saw what looked to be a really active mosh pit in the middle of it. Then a girl came weaving out into the light, holding her head while blood was gushing from a scalp wound, and I realized it wasn't a mosh pit after all.

I pushed Leah back toward Will and Marcus. "Go get Will," I said. "Tell him we're leaving now." Leah stumbled back toward her boyfriend and I turned back just in time to see two very large and scary looking dudes coming right for me. I tried to wheel back and run, but one of them grabbed me and pushed me down. I cracked my skull on the ground.

Things went real fuzzy after that. At some point I felt someone turn me over and take out of my back pocket the case I had my ID in. If they were looking for money they were going to be disappointed. I didn't have cash, I had an energy budget. I tried laughing at that and it hurt so much I passed out.

Some indeterminate time later someone hauled me up from the ground. "Name," they said.

I looked around for who was talking to me. "What?" I said.

"Your name," they said—he said, actually, since now I could tell it was a man.

"Benji Washington," I said.

"You're fine," he said. "If you can remember your name, you're

gonna live. Are you missing anything? You have your wallet?"

I fished in my back pocket and found the case I carried my NSL ID in. It was still there. Start fob to the lorry was still there too. I must have hallucinated the theft. I looked over to who was talking to me and realized that he was an Eddie—an Edgewater guard. One of the guys who the city was hiring to keep the protestors out. "What happened?" I said.

The guard snorted. "You got beat on is what happened. You New Louies are dumb as hell, you know that? Go out to a rave in the middle of The Wilds, and then you're surprised when the kids out here start taking a crowbar to your heads. Let me give you a little tip, townie: The kids out here in The Wilds, they don't like you. If you give them a chance to crack open your skull, they're going to do it. You got it?"

"I got it," I said. I felt like I was going to throw up.

"Good," the guard said. "You're lucky we got tipped off to this thing or you'd probably be in the hospital by now. How old are you?"

"Twenty," I said.

"Then you're an adult and I don't have to drag your ass back into NSL," he said. "Go home, kid. Stay home." He wandered off. I bent over at the waist and threw up. Then I went looking for Will and Leah.

I found them by the lorry. Leah came running up to me to check my head; I tried to wave her off.

"You look like hell," Will said.

"Thanks, Will," I said. "I can always count on you for a good word. How's the lorry?"

"What do you mean?" Will said.

"I mean did anyone smash it during the riot?" I said.

Will checked. "It looks fine," he said.

"Great," I said, hobbling over to it. "Then we're going."

"I still have to look for Marcus," Will said.

"Will, he's gone," Leah said. "He disappeared as soon as the Eddies showed up."

"He's still around here somewhere," Will said. "I'm not going anywhere without him."

"You can stay, Will," I said. "But I'm leaving now and I'm taking

the lorry with me. If you don't want to walk all the way back to town, you better get in the truck."

"Come on, Will," Leah said. "It's time to go."

Will looked extremely unhappy but got into the truck cab. Leah followed. I hauled myself up into the cab and nearly threw up again doing so. I drove twenty-five miles an hour on the Interstate all the way back.

The battle of New St. Louis took place a week later.

The protestors at the gates of the city had a problem: They couldn't get into New St. Louis. The city was sealed in like a medieval fortress, with only a few entrances, all guarded. Try to get through a gate without an ID with a transponder chip, and you weren't going to go anywhere. Lose your ID, you were in a world of pain. I lost my ID once and I had to sit through a battery of identification tests even though my mother was on the executive board. The instant the city knew the ID was missing, they voided the transponder signal, so if anyone tried to sneak into NSL using that ID, they'd be immediately tagged as a criminal. It was a problem: if you weren't a New Louie, you couldn't get into the city without an ID. And if you stole an ID and tried to sneak in, they'd catch you. So if you wanted to sneak into New St. Louis, how would you do it?

It turned out, by not stealing the IDs—just the information in them.

The rave had been the honeytrap, an attractive place for bored young New Louies to be lured to, out beyond the safe walls of the city. The rave allowed the conspirators close contacts with the city kids—close enough contact that the recording devices they carried could read and clone the New Louie's ID transponder signals. The riot afterward was an opportunity to crack heads…but also to snatch the ID information from a few extra people, like me. Since no physical IDs were stolen, no one reported any stolen identities.

This made it easy for several dozen unauthorized people to walk

right through the gates of New St. Louis. The conspirators were chosen to more or less resemble the people whose identities they had stolen, so if the gate guards were to glance down at their screens, they wouldn't notice anything out of the usual. But since the gate guards were busy dealing with the exceptionally heavy crowds of protestors that day, apparently no one really bothered to look. The IDs checked out as the people walked through; what else was needed?

After the First World War (I learned this later, after the Battle of NSL) the French, fearing another attack by the Germans, built a massive set of fortifications called the Maginot Line, which would form an impenetrable line which the Germans would not be able to cross. The French were so confident in the Maginot Line that when they placed their big guns into it facing out toward Germany, they never considered the idea that at some point, those guns might need to face in the other direction, toward France. This became a problem when the Germans invaded France by pouring through a gap in the Maginot Line and then were suddenly behind it, and on their way to Paris.

New St. Louis was built the same way: It was focused on keeping people out, not dealing with what happened when they got in anyway. This was why the city was not prepared when the attack came, from behind, inside the city walls.

The attackers were smart; they didn't bother to attack the city's main gates, the ones with the biggest number of protestors, NSL cops and Edgewater guards. Instead they picked one of the small, quiet entrances, one small enough to be quickly closed and sealed at the first sign of unrest by just a couple of guards—and therefore only covered by a couple of guards, who are easily dealt with by a couple dozen determined conspirators. With the guards taken care of, it was simply a matter of opening the doors and letting in the hundreds of people hiding outside.

These hundreds were on the scene to do one thing and one thing only: Trash New St. Louis as hard and as fast as they could, in order to draw the police and the Edgewater guards to them as quickly and as brutally as possible. They set to this work with a will, armed with bats, sledgehammers and Molotov cocktails, setting fires and causing

the sort of property damage that's not easily fixed. It worked; within minutes of the destruction beginning, the police and Edgewater were swinging clubs and firing electric bolts and trying—and failing—to close the open gate that hundreds more were now pouring through.

This was a feint, a distraction to keep the authorities occupied away from the real goal of the riot. And that was the agricultural towers, which by their very nature were open to the elements and undefended. Into these towers went dozens of invaders, intent not on filling their stomachs but their gene samplers and seed bags, detailing a whole Eden of genetically improved, quick-growing, high-yield fruits and vegetables.

Once these invaders had breached the agricultural towers, they were under no impression, even with the help of the staged riot, that they would make it out of the towers with their seeds and samples. Instead they moved their way up the towers, sampling as they went, until they stood in the roof gardens of the towers. There, they welded the access doors shut, pulled open their backpacks, and clicked together the tiny remote controlled airplanes they carried with them. Then they shoved their samples into the even tinier cargo holds and tossed the planes into the sky, carrying their trove of genes out past the city walls and into the waiting hands and sequencers of their compatriots on the other side.

That done, the invaders sat down in the roof gardens and waited to see how long it would take for the few police and Edgewater guards who could be spared to deal with them to figure out they weren't actually planning to come down and make an escape.

It took them a long time. More than enough time for the mastermind of the entire attack to get what he came for, completely unnoticed by law enforcement.

I was working the night shift in Arnold Tower when my phone rang and Lou Barnes was on the other end, telling me to lock everything down because New St. Louis was under attack. I did what I was told and threw the switched that closed up the Tower to everyone but

qualified personnel and vehicles. If Barnes wanted to come in and take over, that would have been all right by me. I called the NSL police and reported the lockdown; the dispatcher on the other end asked me if anyone was attacking the building. I said no; she said I was on my own for the evening and hung up.

Thirty minutes later the security system pinged me that the garage entrance was opening to let in the Arnold Tower lorry. I stared at this for a moment because I knew exactly where the Lorry was parked. I flipped the security monitor over to the garage camera and saw no lorry, but instead four people walking down the parking garage ramp. Two were carrying bags; one was dragging another along. I looked at the two of them for a minute before I recognized who both of them were.

I got very upset. And started thinking very fast, as fast as I ever had in my life.

My phone rang. I picked it up.

"I know by this time you can see me in your security cameras," Marcus Rosen said. "And so you know by this time who I have with me."

"I can see her," I said, looking at Leah.

"Good," Marcus said. "Will told me that you still had a thing for her, and I suspect he was right. So I thought she might be a useful motivator. Now listen to me, Benjamin. I'm sorry you're the one I'm having to deal with right now, but that's just the way things are. If you cooperate, we can get through this quickly. I'm coming for some genetic samples of your pigs. That's all I want. We don't have to hurt them, all we have to do is take skin samples. It'll be simple, quick, painless, and at the end of it you'll have your friend Leah back. Does this sound like a good deal to you?"

"It does," I said.

"Good," Marcus said, again. "Then here's the plan. I'm going to stay down here in the garage while my two friends here come up to where you are. You're going to take them to where they can get some samples. And then they're going to come back down. When they come back down, I'm going to let go of Leah. Do you think you can handle that?"

"I can," I said.

"I'm glad we're handling this rationally," Marcus said. "All right. I'm sending my friends up."

"I'm unlocking the garage door," I said. "Have them give me a couple of minutes, and then they can take the elevator to the fifth floor. I'll meet them in the floor lobby."

"They're going in now," Marcus said.

Five minutes later the elevator doors opened and two men got out.

"Hi," I said.

"Take us to the pig floor," one of them said.

"No," I said. The two looked at each other and then at me, unamused. I held up a hand. "There's an entire floor of sleeping pigs in there," I said. "If you startle or surprise them, they're going to come out of sleep freaked out, and then every pig around them is going to freak out, and then that's a few thousand pigs in a frenzy. I don't want to be responsible for you getting trampled." I pointed to a door at the far end of the lobby. "We have an examination room over there. I've already got some pigs for you. They're already awake. Fewer pigs means less hassle for all of us. All right?"

The two of them looked at each other.

"Come on, guys," I said. "I just want to get my friend back."

"Fine," one of them said, and walked with me into the room.

"What are these things?" one of them asked, pointing at the pig-shaped forms.

"And where are the pigs?" the other asked.

"Those are the examination tables," I said, moving into the control room. "Pigs hate to get picked up, so we just have them lean up against these instead. And they're behind that door there because before they come in, I want to spray some disinfectant in the room. Helps keep infection down. No, you two stay in there. You need to be disinfected, too."

"We just need skin samples," one of them said.

"I understand," I said. "But you break the skin while getting the samples, these pigs are highly susceptible to infection, and then that will catch to the other pigs. I'm already in enough trouble. This will only take a couple of seconds." I pressed a button, and liquid spritzed

out of a sprinkler-like attachment in the ceiling.

"Okay," I said. "Here come the pigs." The two started unzipping their bags to take samples as I slid open the door to let the pigs in.

Two minutes (or so) later, I called Marcus. "We have a problem," I said.

"What is it?" Marcus said.

"I don't know how you told these guys to take samples, but however you told them, the pigs didn't like it," I said, and then held up the phone so Marcus could hear the screams and squeals. After a minute of that I got back on the phone. "I could open up the video feed," I said. "But I don't think you'd like that."

There was silence on the other end of the phone. Then, "I don't think you appreciate the seriousness of the situation," Marcus said.

"It's not my fault," I said. "You asked me to help them get genetic samples. I did exactly what you asked. It's *your* guys who are fucking around here."

"Get them out of there," Marcus said to me.

"It's not safe," I said, truthfully. "I think the pigs will eventually wear themselves out, but I'm not going anywhere near them until then."

"I still need a sample," Marcus said, after a minute. His ability to write off his two assistants was almost admirable, in its way.

"I can get you a sample," I said.

"I need it from more than one pig," Marcus said.

"I can give you samples from as many pigs as you need," I said.

"You need to come to me," Marcus said.

"I can't do that," I said. "The pigs won't exactly follow me."

"Considering what just happened, I'm not going to come up to you," Marcus said. "And let me remind you your friend Leah is still with me. And I still have a gun on her."

"Okay," I said. "I will come to you, but then you'll need to come with me. Give me a minute. I know where we can go to get your samples."

"Here," I said, handing them both gas masks and taking one for

myself. "It's like the sign says. You're going to need this." I fit mine on myself and waited for the other two to fit theirs on. "Come on." I started walking toward conduit 2.

"Where are we?" Marcus said, through his mask.

"Why are you doing this, Marcus?" I asked him, as we walked out over conduit 2. "Last week you talked to me about the problems of a zero-footprint paradise and how we're cutting ourselves off from the rest of the world, but I get the feeling you're not doing this for the good of humanity."

"No," Marcus said.

"Then why all the talk?" I asked.

"I needed to see what was going to work on you," Marcus said. "Will told me in email that you got a job here in the Arnold Tower. I had a client who has been very interested in getting the genetics of these pigs for a while now. I saw an opportunity. I knew your mother was pushing for technology outreach, so if you were of the same mind as her, I might have been able to get you to play along. But it doesn't seem like your thing, so I went with your friend here."

"I'll have to thank Will for that," I said.

"He doesn't know," Marcus said. "You can't blame him."

"Nice of you to treat your brother that way," I said.

I could see Marcus shrug, briefly. "It's the real world out there, Benjamin. Some places still use money, not energy budgets. I have a living to make."

"So all of this—attacking New St. Louis—is just another day on the job," I said. We'd reached the access port. I bent down to open it up.

"That was going to happen anyway," Marcus said. "New St. Louis and the other cities are too closed off from everything around them. The people in The Wilds were already planning something. I don't care about it one way or the other, really, but it was useful cover for what I needed to do. So I provided the logistics. I borrowed the basic battle plan from a similar action in Detroit a couple years back. They used a fake riot to build an agricultural tower. We're using a real riot to steal from one."

"And they signed off on this, too, I suppose," I said.

"They don't know anything about this," Marcus said. "As far as they're concerned, the big event is gathering seeds from the agricultural towers. They're going to sequence those genomes and put them out for everyone to use. That's admirable, in its way, but my client has other plans for the pig genes."

The access port was fully opened. "After you," I said.

"I don't think so," Marcus said. "After *you*." I shrugged and went into the conduit. Marcus kept a bead on Leah as they she stepped down the ladder. Finally he stepped down.

"Where the hell are we?" Marcus said again.

"What does your client want with the pig genes?" I asked.

"I'm paid not to ask," Marcus said. "But I think he wants what the people in The Wilds want: the benefit of someone else's work. Having this genome means he has to do lot less work to make the next set of improvements."

"My mom was planning to make this part of the Technology Outreach," I said. "He could have just waited. *He* didn't have to start all this. *You* didn't have to start all this."

"I don't think my client believes having this genome be open source technology is in anyone's best interest," Marcus said. "And personally, I just want to get paid. Now. Enough. Give me the samples."

I looked over at Leah. "You remember when we were on the roof, and I talked about being here," I said.

"I do," she said.

"I'm sorry you're getting the embargo treatment," I said.

"It's all right," Leah said.

"Benjamin," Marcus said.

I reached down and flipped open my phone.

"My samples, please," Marcus said.

"'Embargo lifted,'" I said into the phone. I looked at Marcus as the rumbling started. "Here they come now," I said.

Leah reached up and pulled the gas mask off Marcus' face just as the first of the samples blew out of the pipes. He caught a load in the face and went down sputtering. Leah and I bolted for the ladder, her first, me following. As I cycled the access port shut, I could see Marcus

trying to get a grip on the ladder. I think he might have gotten up the first step before the port sealed shut.

"The human body is simply not designed to swallow that much pig shit," is what Lou Barnes told me the next day. Nevertheless Marcus Rosen survived, although not well, and faced with the prospect of a life watching the world go by in a cell, lawyered up, cut a deal and brought down some industrialist from the Portland Ecologies—or, well, would have, if the fellow hadn't permanently relocated to Turkey. It's my understanding that he's not going to be very happy if he ever steps onto North America again.

Will took the fall of his brother badly, and the fact that his brother had betrayed his emails and idol worship even worse. Leah never blamed Will for any of it, but Will blamed himself and eventually that was the excuse he needed to break up with Leah and leave New St. Louis entirely. He settled in Vancouver eventually and is doing quite well. He and his wife send holiday cards.

The Technology Outreach program took a hell of a hit in the aftermath of the Battle of New St. Louis, not in the least because so much of the biotechnology that mom would have used for outreach flew over the wall in tiny planes. But mom, who won her election, rolled with the changes, and rather than trying to prosecute those who stole from the agricultural towers, the executive council gave them amnesty and open sourced the genome maps of the plants that were taken, making everyone's lives easier. And after a few decades of sitting behind its wall, New St. Louis is beginning to open up to The Wilds and the people there. They're nowhere close to being zero-footprint beyond the border, but they're starting, and that's something.

After the Battle of New St. Louis, my mother offered to find me a new job if I wanted it; her thinking was the man who caught the mastermind behind the attack should be able to get any damn job he wanted, even if he was her son.

I thanked her but I told her no. I still work at Arnold Tower. And

more than that: Leah and I were married there, up on the experimental rooftop garden, with Barnes, Jeffers and Pinter as my groomsmen, Syndee as my "Best Sis," and Lunch as ring bearer. He seemed quite pleased with the job. We were quite pleased to have him.

And that's how a pig got into our wedding party.

It's a good story, right?