CORY DOCTOROW'S
FUTURISTIC TALES
OF THE HERE AND NOW.
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What Came First

By Cory Doctorow

I literally can't remember a time in my life when I wasn't a comics reader. There were comic books and science fiction novels around the house from the time I could reach the shelves and I started looking at the pictures even before I could read the words.

Nevertheless, I became a prose writer, not a comic book writer. For starters, you could read a book and figure out how it was written, the writer sat down and hummed out a stream of words, they were typeset and the book was published. But how did you write a comic? Did the writer describe each panel? Just write the dialogue? I remember talking it over with friends at summer camp and there was one kid who was dead certain that the artist drew all the pictures first and then the writer filled out what the story would be—writing the dialogue that made it all make sense.

Then there was the matter of authorship. I knew who Stan Lee was, of course—that guy with The Voice who did the voice overs on the Hulk cartoons. But who actually "wrote" these comics? I was pretty sure it was Stan Lee—and whoever it was with the initials of "O C"—weren't penning all the funny books on the spinner rack at the convenience store. MAD Magazine had bylines Al Jaffee, Dave Berg. But it seemed like the comics' authors' names were so downplayed—unimportant. If I was going to grow up to be a writer, I wanted to be an important writer—not just a farmhand on Uncle Stan's Ranch

So now I'm a writer (important—debatably). The books I write have my name in big letters on the spine and cover. For better or for worse: they're the products of my imagination and what happens in them is pretty much down to what I imagine.

Not long ago, the folks at IDW sent me an email and asked me if I'd be game for licensing some of my stories to be adapted for comics. I was a little skeptical. I don't know anything about writing comics (though I was pretty sure by this point that the words come before the pictures) and what's more, I do this wacky thing with my books and stories where I make them available as free, re-readable downloads on the day they're published, and I just didn't have the energy to argue about this with some comics people.

My agent got in touch with IDW to talk to them for a while and came back to me "No problem," he said. "They'll get back to writers and illustrators to do the adaptations and they'll let us do the whole series under a Creative Commons license once it's collected into a single volume." Awesome. Plus, I got yen approval over the scripts and art as part of the deal. Oh? What do I know about set and script for comics? Well, it can't hurt.

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What followed was an education in the whole production cycle for comics, from treatment to script to rough art to final art to lettering and printing to comics. And I got to be a part of it. Mostly sat back and tried not to screw things up—though as the author of the underlying stories I was sometimes (infrequently) moved to intervene and redirect the abandonment process.

Mostly, I just sat back in awe as a crew of incredibly talented writers and artists paid me the immense compliment of focusing their creative energy on the work that I'd done. I got to watch as these people interpreted my ideas, got to more-or-less peer into the heads of readers and discover, in detail, what happened between the words I wrote and the words they read. It's a strange, cool process I heartily recommend it to you—indeed, I'm trying to figure out a compact, quick way of doing this with my writing students in the future. It taught me a lot about writing.

And now here we are, with this extraordinary volume in hand (or on your screen—in these down days!) I can call it extraordinary without too much ego because there really is a very meaningful sense, my book a book that was written, drawn and lettered by Dan Nannagh, Esteban Palle, Sam Keith, Robert Studio, J.C. Vaughn, Dan Wolfer, Scott Morse, Paul McCaffrey, Paul Pope, Dan Taylor, Dean Evans, Ben Templesmith, Edric Owollections, Ashley Wood, Jamie Ang, Anthony Kukun, Guenter Vaino, German Tomeo, Danny Parasini, Rob Lee, Rob Lee, Neil Vokes, C.C. Mooney, and Anwar Owensions. It got my name on the cover—I guess I'm the lucky scumbag Stan Lee figure on the spine of the karma wheel—but they did it.

And now I want to write comics. I've seen how it's done. I think I can do it. I guess we'll all find out, soon enough.

Cory Doctorow
March 2008
ANDA DON'T REALLY START TO PLAY THE GAME UNTIL SHE GOT HERSELF A GIRL-CHICAGO AVATAR

SHE WAS 12, AND THE ONLY GIRL SHE'D EVER SEEN IN-GAME WERE SHAPED LIKE A BOY. AMD PLEASE, LOOK LIKE THOSE BALD AND FEMALE DRESSED IN TIGHT, FORMLESS LEATHER, BIKINIS-ARMOUR.

AVANTURE. SHE CALLED IT

THAT ALL CHANGED THE DAY HER SCHOOL WAS CALLED TO ASSEMBLY

I AM ZITA, THE ORGANICA, AND I KICK ASS. SERIOUSLY

I AM THE BEST GUNNER IN THE WORLD, AND I'M THE PRESIDENT OF THE ENTIRE CLAN. FAHRENHEIT. MY BATTLE RECORD IS 3,592 KILLS IN A BATTLE. I HAVE TAKEN HOME CASH PRIZES FROM COMPETITIONS TOTALING MORE THAN 400,000 POUNDS.

AND I'M HERE TO LET YOU IN ON A SECRET. GIRLS KICK ASS. WE'RE FASTER, SMARTER, AND BETTER THAN BOYS. WE PLAY HARDER.

GAMESPACE SMELLS LIKE A BOY'S DORMITORY

IF YOU WILL PLAY AS A GIRL, YOU WILL BE GIVEN PROVISONAL MEMBERSHIP IN THE CLAN!

AND IF YOU MEASURE UP, YOU'LL BECOME FULL-PEERED MEMBERS. SO WHAT'S IN IT FOR CHICKENS?

WE'RE GOING TO CHANGE THAT. CHICKENS, YOU LOT AND ME. SO HERE'S MY OFFER TO

THE FAHRENHEIT'S HAVE CHAPTERS IN EVERY GAME. THEY WERE AMAZING AND FADDY AND COOL, AND ANDA WAS GOING TO BE ONE OF THEM
Lucy lived somewhere in the middle of America, where it was all vowels— Iowa or Ohio or something.

"Anda, would you like to make some money?"

"You mean gold, Lucy?"

"And no, no gold. I have a mission that pays real cash."

"No, geez, all the executives in the clan pay the rent doing missions for money."

Besides, my contact said they just want us to go kill some guys.

"Oh, we're good at that!"

"Please sorry if I made you sad sorry!"
THE MISSION TOOK THEM TO A COTTAGE ON THE FAR SIDE OF THE CAVEMONG.

GOOD THING YOU HAD A SPOILING SCROLL. LEFT LOOKS LIKE THE PLACE IS PRETTY WELL-DEFENDED.

Yeah, I count seven guards.

Right, I'll cover you.

SARGE, I THINK THEY'RE ACTUALLY PLAYERS.

What the—?

They all look familiar.

WHO CARES?

This'll be over before—

BUT WHO WANTS TO BE AROUND IN GAMESPACE WATCHING A BORING ROAD ALL DAY?

GET DOWN, I'M GONNA USE THE RPG!

Holy—!
SOS!

Barbar!

Oof!

Barbar!

BARBAR!

Heh, where'd you respawn?

All the way over at Body Bleeding, it'll take me hours to get there.

Do you think you can complete the mission on your own?

Uh, sure.

You're the best girl, kill everyone in the cottage.
WHAT THE-?

GOON, KILL THEM ALL.

MARGE, IT'S JUST A BUNCH OF NOODLS CRAFTING-SHIRTs!

Yeah, that's the orders.

How... (Italian) no. Spanish...

Crafting shirts for a few copper pieces. Patrystic. Why not play a mission for gold?

SARGE, they're all dead.

GOOD JOB.

Get my stuff, and meet me at Marquitter's tavern OK?
But "sarge, I just can't understand why anyone would pay us cash for these missions."

"RUNNO, it's probably rich gamers. One's fucking with the other one and paying us."

You really think that?"

"SIGH" Look at it this way—most of the world is living on, like, a dollar a day. My dad sends mom three thousand a month in child-support, and we're not even rich! But to an Afghan or whatever, I am.

"Ana, it's not healthy for you to spend so much time with your game. Her Da would say..."

"ohh! she'd protest, I go to them 'every stinking day'"

To: we're like the Africans making a dollar a day to craft... I mean, sew t-shirts.

"OK, ana, but do try to get a little more exercise, please?"

GUESS THAT MAKES SENSE.

Nice one, ana.

Thanks, sarge.

Now let's go find that new cottage.
OMG, I JUST CALLED IN THREE SQUADS OF FABRICATION VETERANS AND THEIR NOOD APPRENTICES FOR BACKUP!

Serge, THIS ISN'T A MISSION ANYMORE.... IT'S WAR!

"YEAH! AND I'VE NEGOTIATED A STARTER PACK OF 1 MILLION CASH AND THREE MISSIONS' WORTH OF CASH!"
Swords, hundreds of swords converging on this shard. Squiring off against the ranked mercenaries guarding the cottage.

The voice that was like a wind-tunnel from all the unlatched breathing voices.

Hundreds of girls in hundreds of bedrooms like yours & all over the world.
The Fahrenheit's greater numbers and discipline were overwhelming.

Every merc was eventually run off.

Or butchered.

OK, I paid off all the squad. They're heading back to base.

Man, that was effing nuts! But we made it!

Now, we take the cottage.

I'll be glad when we're done with this.

Right. But let me first savor the—
Sigh... I'm dead.

Teach you to go running into things... If you'd just let me Scry the cottage, I would have detected the Door-Clue.

Here we go again... Yawn!

Well, looks like it's clear now. Just millions of suits and thousands of moobs to kill.
Did you know who these people are that you're killing?

Yes.

They're working for less than a dollar a day. The shirts they make are traded for gold and the gold is sold on the black market. They're mostly young girls supporting their families. They're the lucky ones: the unlucky ones are prostitutes.

Hey, man, you used to run a dope farm, didn't you? The government launched a countermeasures against these kids. Child labor is cheap, but the government is even cheaper than hiring programers to circumvent the rules.

I've been trying to unionize these deacons for years. They've got a very high rate of injury. They have to work 12-hour shifts with only one short toilet break.

They can't hold it in and they sell themselves where they sit.

Look, it's none of my business, is it? It's not like that. I'm just a hipster, there's nothing I can do about it.

Yeah, I see. I am the only one remaining.

So ahead, I still see you again. I'm sure.

Did you know who is paying you to do these killings?

Yes.
Lucy?

Yeah, hang on. I'm almost back there. I respawned in the ass end of nowhere.

Lucy, do you know who's in the cottage? Those noobs that we killed?


Girls. Little girls in Mexico. Getting paid a dollar a day to craft shirts.

Except they don't get anything when we kill them.

Oh, for chrissakes, is that what one of them told you? And you believed it?

You don't think this.

Naw, I don't. Now keep your panties on. I'm almost--

I've got to go, Lucy.

What, now? Shut up, just--
GOSH, YOU'RE DIRTY! HOW DID YOU GET TO BE SUCH A MUDDY PUPPY?

YOU ARE FULLY WHAT IN THIS MESS?

LILY, LEAVE OFF. IT'S A SKIN CONDITION. ACANTHOMICROS ACARICANS.

SAW IT IN A TV SPECIAL.

OH, DARLING, I'M SORRY. WE'LL SEE THE DOCTOR ABOUT IT TOMORROW AFTER SCHOOL.

MUM OWWW!

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

I'M FINALLY GOING TO BED!
ANDA WAS BACK IN THE GAME.

SORRY, SARGE. MY DA TOOK ER, MY PC'S BEEN BROKEN.

ANDA, WHERE THE HELL HAVE YOU BEEN?

THE PC BAANG WAS FILLED WITH STICKY, SHOTY BOYS, BEING LOUD AND UNBIDDEN.

BUT IT DIDN'T MATTER.

WELL, I'VE GOT A BACKLOG OF MESSING, SO LET'S GO.

LISTEN, I MET A GUY AFTER THE LAST CAMPAIGN. HE SAID HE WAS A UNION ORGANIZER.

OH, YOU MET CLAYMOND, HUH? HEDGEHOGS HAVE BEEN TURNING UP EVERYWHERE. WHAT A CREEP.

ANDA, LISTEN. YOU LIKE GAMING, RIGHT? IT'S IMPORTANT TO YOU.

YOU KNOW ABOUT THE NOODLES IN THE COTTAGES?

AND YOU'RE FINE WITH DEPRIVING LITTLE KIDS OF THEIR WAGES?

Yeah, course it is.

Right and neither bad-egg you and me, and we got this way through discipline and hard work.

Yeah, right. But--

That's it. What makes us all Fahrenheit - we're committed to each other, to teamwork and to fair play.

But these people in Mexico or wherever, they're earning their living by exploiting the game.
They spend all day crafting stuff to turn into gold to sell off on the exchange. That's where the craggy players get their gold from. That's how rich noobs can buy their way into the game that we had to play hard to get into.

If we keep burning the factories down, they'll shut them down and those kids will find something else to do for a living and the game will be better.

These people don't care about the game. They're not players, they're leeches.

So are you in or out?

Are you sure to play or are you just worried about these leeches on the other side of the world that you want out?

I'm in, Sarge.

BOO-YAH!

Watch these.

Raymond! Oh, Christ! He's back.

Come on. It's probably a booby-trap. We've got work to do.
What do you want free money? Why don't you steal their goods? They have their goods somewhere else.

They're thieves, they don't care about the goose and neither do you.

If they don't play the game, they don't eat. I think that means that they care about the goose as much as you do.

You're halving their costs to kill them, yes? As you need to play for your money, this I think that makes you one less to the goose.

Lucky, don't?

Get Screw yourself.

Oh, hell no! I killed him last night and I said I'd do it again if he ever tried to show me photos.

Lucy, don't he deserves to have a say.
YOU BITCH!

I'M SORRY, LUCY, BUT I DON'T WANT YOU TO HURT HIM. I WANT TO HEAR HIM OUT.

LUCY! STAY ON TOP! PLEASE!

SLOOOW HELL.

DON'T LUCY COME ON SIMMO
"I'm very sorry you and your friends quarreled.

I've been looking for someone to guard the Fabrica, and it's not the girls working there, the people who are going to destroy the guide and the people who pay you and the girls in the Fabrica, but they are the ones who are the ones.

Say girls care about the guide; you care about the guide. Your common enemy is the people who want to destroy the guide and who destroy the lives of these girls.

You're doing pain by Fivel Fockery umars: you know that? They are the ones who care nothing for the guide.

There were lots of rules for Fahrenheit and the penalties for breaking them varied.

But Anda knew the penalty for attacking a fellow Fahrenheit: expulsion.
Hello?

Hello, chicken.

Yes, can you tell me what happened today?

And J... I don't think it's right to kill them, those girls, all right?

Well, I happen to agree, these girls need our help more than any of the girls anywhere in the game.

The Fae inherits' strength is that we care. It's another way that we're better than the boys.

I'm proud that you took a stand when you did.

If you excel, Lady, I'll want... Oh, chicken! You're a brave thing, aren't you?

No, chicken. I think you did the right thing.

No one's being expelled, fear not. But I want you to talk to this Raymond of yours.
DID YOU HAVE A FUN AFTERNOON ON HOCKEY PITCH?

YES, DA.

THAT'S MY GIRL.

WELL, I JUST WANTED TO SAY... THAT HE...

... YOUR MUM AND ME ARE QUITE PROUD OF YOU AND WE'VE MOVED YOUR PC BACK INTO YOUR ROOM YOU'VE EARNED IT.

IT'S ALL RIGHT, GIRL. WE'RE JUST PROUD OF YOU.

OH, DA!

MR. GAGE

MR. ANDERSON CALL ME LUCY.

OK, SAR - LUCY.

SO, LISTEN, I'VE BEEN TALKING TO RAYMOND A LOT ABOUT THE WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE FACTORY. AND, WELL...

... I'M SORRY, ANDRA.

ME, TOO, LUCY.

YOU DON'T HAVE ANYTHING TO BE SORRY ABOUT.

IT'S HORRIBLE, I KNOW, BUT I MISS THE BIG NIGHTS, THE BIG STAKES.

I KNOW ME TOO. WHAT'RE WE GONNA DO?

WE'LL ASK RAYMOND HOW WE CAN HELP.
I want them to walk out to go on strike in Ciudad Juárez and Tijuana. It's the only way to get results.

I'll call the press in. We'll make a big deal out of it. We can win. I know we can.

Getting them organized we've been trying for years, but they lock the doors and keep us out.

But in the game, I thought I'd be able to reach them.

But the bosses keep you away?

I keep getting killed. I've been practicing my swordfighting, but it's so hard...

This will be pain. Let's go.

Whether to an in-game factory. We're Ravenclaw's new bodyguards.

The bosses hired some pretty mean heros. And I knew she'd been one.

Oh.

Hey, lindy.

—Let's go out like a couple birdies, okay?

The end.
DOCTOROW ON: "ANDA'S GAME"

Editor Tom Waltz: Cory, let's start with the obvious question—what sparked the idea for 'Anda's Game'?

Cory Doctorow: Two things, one was my idea of writing a bunch of stories that riffed on the titles of famous SF—1 Robot, Ande's Game (Ender's Game) I, Robot-Boat and soon, True Names—after hearing Ray Bradbury disparage this practice, calling it rude and immoral. Bradbury was pissed off at Michael Moore for calling his movie Fahrenheit 9/11 Bradbury supports Bush's plan to go to Mars—but I thought that this was just goofy. Titles are—and have always been—for genre. What's more, Fahrenheit 451, Bradbury's classic novel, is all about free expression (Bradbury denies this—he says it's about television, which is why you should never ask writers what their work is about) (Should we end this interview now?)

The other thing was the early reports of gold farming in games. Something that really sparked my imagination?

TW: I consider myself a semi-savvy video games, and when I first read "Anda's Game" I thought it was a bizarre vision of a possible future, only to read an article recently about how China is taking over in the gaming "sweat shop" market from other developing nations like Mexico. For me, personally, it's a sad and pathetic reality that videogames have become so important to some people that they are willing to go to great lengths to cheat at the games, even so far as purchasing in-game character were named though what truly amounts to industrial slavery. Do you feel that gaming has become too important, and if so, is the technology to blame, or the gamers themselves?

CD: No, gaming hasn't become too important! MMORPGs and other MMOs are social constructs, aesthetes where we meet, socialize, make friends, and play together. It's where we understand the business of civilization. It's a goddamned shame that (so far) all of these civilizations-in-bottles are owned by giant media companies (worse still, that Universal/Blizzard a really abusive bully, owns World of Warcraft, the most popular), but asking if play has become too important is as silly as asking if art has become too important, or thought, or scholarship.

TW: When I sent you the artwork for "Anda's Game," penned by the fantastic Estevan Powell, your reaction to seeing it for the first time was... and I quote: "Holy crap, this is EERILY COOL!" I was hoping you could expand on what good and describe the different feelings you are having as you saw your short prose stories coming to life in illustrated sequential form.

CD: Well, I'd never really had my work adapted before. When a talented artist like Powell turns my work into something that isn't what I saw in my mind's eye, but IS a plausible thing for a reader to see, it's like being able to stick a reader in an MRI while she reads one of my stories, and see what it's doing to her head.

TW: Taking the last question a step further, we have various comic book writers adapting your short stories in script form for this project—specifically for 'Anda's Game,' writer Sara Parkhill. What things do you look for in a script based on your work before you approve it for publication?

CD: Well, it has to suit the work—it doesn't have to be accurate (in the sense of portraying all the events that took place in the work), but it DOES have to be faithful to the atmosphere, and mood that inspired the work.

TW: Have you ever considered scripting your own comic book series or graphic novel?

CD: Every now and again I have a million projects on my plate right now—BeingBang and FlamyBong and empty-bottle, little blog projects that we're playing with. A movie I'm co-producing, a TV show I'm consulting on, two nonfiction books, a million short story ideas; my podcast; travel; speaking (and I'm moving home to London from LA in two weeks).
WHEN SYSADMINS RULED THE EARTH
Hello?

Main routers not responding. Bog not responding." The mechanical voice of the system's monitor said. He cursed a little curse at it and felt a little better.

Why didn't you turn that thing off before we went to bed? Feld?

You're not a doctor. You're a systems administrator. And you're a father now!
It's my job, Kelly.

Maybe I can log in and fix it from here.

In five years of marriage you have never once been able to fix anything from here.

She was wrong about that, of course. He has fixed plenty of minor things from home, only he didn't make a big deal about it so she didn't remember.
The mechanical voice called him twice more on the way there. Then Kelly called.

Don't cringe. I can hear the cringe in your voice.

No cringeing. Okay.

I'm totally bunkers for you, Kelly. Go back to bed.

The baby's awake, listen, you've been there seven years—

You have to give that phone to one of those guys who works for you. You've paid your dues.

I know. Eyegaming don't take holidays.

This one will. Promise.
AMBIENT SERVER ROOM. DOWNTOWN TORONTO. 2:00 AM.

What are you doing here, Van? You're not on call.

Felix!

My personal box is over there. I should have called and saved you the trip.

Ok, but what's everyone else doing here?
Massive FlashInorm attack. Some jacksass has every Windows box on the net running Monic into probes on every IP block, including IPv6.

Which means basically every interchange has gone down. On top of that, there's an email and IM component that sends pretty lifelike messages to everyone in your address book.

Is that all?

What a mess.

This is big, boss. Epic.
IT WORKED. THINK WE SHOULD TRY ALL OF THEM?

HELLO? HELLO?

KELLY?

THAT'S WEIRD.

KELLY? IS THAT YOU?

FELIX, HE SAYS...

...HE'S DEAD!

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? WHO'S DEAD?
I'm sick. I can't even stand anymore...

Who, Kelly? Who's dead?

The baby.

The baby? What?

Kelly, what happened?

Everyone... everyone is...

Only two channels are left on the air...

It looks like dawn of the dead cut the window.
KELLY??

WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?

WHO'S DEAD?

network error

C'MON, I'LL DRIVE YOU HOME.

YOU JUST KEEP TRYING TO CALL KELLY.

MY SON...

KELLY WAS CUT OFF.

HOLY...
GET OUT OF HERE.

NO.

GET TO THE CLEAN ROOM.

WHAT IS GOING ON OUT THERE?

7:45 AM.

I FELL INTO BLOOM'S MAPPING BLOOD.
OFF HIS BALCONY.
TO SAN DIEGO.

IF SOMEONE KNOCKED OVER THE GLASS IN THE PARKER'S OFFICE, THEY WOULDN'T DIE. THEY WOULDN'T DIE.

IF THEY WEREN'T TOOK OR KILLED, THEY WOULDN'T BE THERE.

NO, WE'D HAVE SYMPTOMS.

LIKE NEWTON’S LAW. LIKE A DVD CASSETTE OR A HANGING DRY CLEANER.

WHY, I MYSELF, I THINK I CAN TELL YOU.

WHY, I MYSELF, I THINK I CAN TELL YOU.

YES, I'M IN TORONTO.

THE WORLD IS ENDING.

THE WORLD MAY INDEED BE OVER.

BUT I'M STILL GETTING SPARK.

GREAT.

Google

WHAT?

HAA!
Day 2, 2:00 AM.

I used to like that it was so cold in here.

We can't leave yet, Van. We don't know what's out there.

Will's downstairs in another clean room. Maybe some of the others...

What happened out there, Felix? Was it the worm?

It couldn't have only been the worm. It sounds like it was a lot of different stuff.

We're just going to keep that door closed until we're all together on the sixth floor.

If there's a bio-agent in the building, we're all dead.
I'M URI
POPOVICH

WHO DIED
AND MADE
YOU KING?

JUST ABOUT
EVERYONE

I HAVE
CONTROLS FOR
THE MAIN
SECURITY
SYSTEM, KEYS TO
EVERY CASE, AND
PASSCODES FOR
THE EXTERIOR
DOORS

WE'RE
LOCKED
DOWN
NOW

I DON'T CARE
IF SOMEONE ELSE
WANTS THIS JOB,
BUT SOMEONE
HAS TO DO IT

HERE'S
WHAT I THINK.
THERE'S ONLY
ONE WAY ALL OF
THOSE ATTACKS
COULD HAVE BEEN
COORDINATED

THE
INTERNET.

WE
SHOULD
SHUT IT
DOWN

YOUR FLOOR,
DUDE.

MY NAME
IS FELIX
THOMAS.

I WANT TO
READ YOU
SOMETHING.

GOVERNMENTS
OF THE INDUSTRIAL
WORLD, YOU WEARY
GANTS OF FLESH AND
STEEL, I COME FROM
CYBERSPACE, THE
NEW IHOME MIND

WE
HAVE NO ELECTED
GOVERNMENT, NOR
ARE WE LIKELY TO
HAVE ONE, SO I ADDRESS
YOU WITH NO GREATER
AUTHORITY THAN THAT
WITH WHICH LIBERTY
ITSELF ALWAYS
SPAKES

"I DECLARE
THE GLOBAL
SOCIAL SPACE WE
ARE BUILDING TO BE
NATURALLY
INDEPENDENT OF THE
TYRANNIES YOU
SEEK TO IMPOSE
ON US"

"YOU HAVE
NO MORAL RIGHT TO
RULE US NOR DO
YOU POSSESS ANY
METHODS OF
ENFORCEMENT WE
HAVE TRUE REASON
TO FEAR"

"YOU HAVE NO
GOVERNMENTS
DERIVE THEIR JUST
POWERS FROM THE
CONSENT OF THE
GOVERNED, YOU HAVE
NEITHER SOLICITED
NOR RECEIVED
OURS.

"WE DID NOT
INVITE YOU, YOU
DO NOT KNOW US,
NEITHER DO YOU KNOW
OUR WORLD, DO NOT
THINK YOU CAN BUILD IT
AS THOUGH IT WERE A
PUBLIC CONSTRUCTION
PROJECT, YOU
CANNOT."

"ON BEHALF
OF THE FUTURE, I
ASK YOU OF THE
PAST TO LEAVE US
ALONE, YOU ARE
NOT WELCOME
AMONG US

"YOU HAVE
NO SOVEREIGNITY
WHERE WE
GATHER"
"It is an act of nature and it grows itself through our collective actions."

That's from the Declaration of Independence of Cyberspace. It was written 17 years ago, and I thought it was one of the most beautiful things I'd ever read.

I wanted my kid to grow up in a world where cyberspace was free.

My beautiful son and my beautiful wife died today. Millions more too. The city is literally in flames, whole cities have disappeared from the map.

We have independent power, food and water, and we have the network.

We have a shared love of liberty that comes from caring about and caring for the network.

We are in charge of the most important organizational and governmental tool the world has ever seen.

We have the machine with the potential to rebuild a better world.

We are the closest thing to a government the world has right now.

Okay, how do we do it?
IT LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE GETTING IT.

"WHAT THE HELL IS HAPPENING HERE?" JIMMY TELLS THE PAPERS.

"IT LOOKS LIKE POSSIBLE REBELLION AT ""I"" APPRA." "I CAN'T BELIEVE JUST WHAT WE'RE DOING AT THE COUNCIL OF THE SAVORYS!"

"WHOA...

WHAT?

TAKE A LOOK.

"YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS. SOMEONE OF THE GOVERNMENT AWAY? THEY SHOULD BE UPSTAIRS WITH THE PEOPLE. YOU'LL AVOID IN THE GOVERN ARE PUTTING THEIR OWN. I'M JUST TELLING THEM THEIR DUTY! WE'RE UP TO MURDERING SHELL-SHOCKED THROUGH THE STREETS, WHAT DO THEY LET A MURDER?"

MAN, WHO WAS THAT?

QUEEN KONG, COUGLE'S SYNDICATE, SAYS SOMETHING BUT I'M NOT GIVING UP THAT EASILY.
DAY 2. 8:17 PM

PRIME MINISTER OF CYBERSPACE? THAT'S JUST GREAT.
AND VERY PRACTICAL, TOO.

YOU'RE THE ONE WHO WANTED TO KNOCK THE WHOLE INTERNET OFFLINE, WILL.
YOU DON'T LIKE MY PLATFORM, RUN AGAINST ME. OTHER PEOPLE ARE DOING SOMETHING OR JUST SHUT UP BUT FOR CRYING OUT LOUD, JUST WHINING.

SCREW YOU GUYS, I'M OUTTA HERE.

I THOUGHT THAT GUY WOULD NEVER LEAVE.
Kong, there are a lot of candidates from all over the world.

Have you seen the platform from that U.S. Senator* he apparently wasn't in DC when it happened?

Anyone with a computer, right?

I just don't get the ones who want to take down the Internet.

You our fucking big dog thts.

I'm thinking English might not be your primary language.

You just type one two only.

Well, you have me there.

Thanks for your endorsement, Kong.

See what it's good for.

Whoever wins, at least we'll do something.
There was less than a day of fuel left when Felix was elected the first ever Prime Minister of Cyberspace.

Half the data centers had gone dark. Queen Kong's net-maps were looking grimmer and grimmer as more of the world went offline.

She was able to maintain a leaderboard of the new and rising queries largely related to health, shelter, sanitation, and self-defense.

Day 3, 5:00 AM

We're going to open the board.

Looking for more fuel?

No, just going to try to find our families.

Day 3, 2:10 PM
You're just going to let it fall apart? You're kidding me. You wanted to kill the internet, remember?

I wanted it to go out clean, not in gasps and chokes, bleeding out.

It's falling apart, man. The way everything does.
Day 3, 3:45 PM.

> We’re going, Kong.

> It was an honor, Mr. Prime Minister.

> Oh... and Queries are up in Romania. Apparently we’re pretty hard to kill.

> Yeah, like roaches.
FIVE YEARS LATER.

Felix and Ian stepped out into the world and started rebuilding.

Years later they started building again. Anything they could do to help out and survive.

No one—well, almost no one—called him Mr. Prime Minister anymore.
They dug ditches, salvaged cans, and buried the dead. Finally, they helped a little government that wanted its records kept.

Hey, it's Queen Kong.

Tell her I said 'Hi.'

It never again felt like it did when things went so wildly wrong, but it wasn't bad.

Good night, boss.

Don't stick around here all night, Van. You need your sleep, too.

Tomorrow he'd go back and fix another computer and fight off entropy again. And why not?

It was what he did. He was a bysshain.

The end.
DOCTOROW ON: "WHEN SYSADMINS RULED THE EARTH"

Editor Tom Waltz. Cory you've stated that one of the best jobs you've ever had was working as a freelance systems administrator. What was it about that job that was so appealing to you?

Cory Doctorow. There's something really wonderful about working under the hood, making all the systems go. When you're actually using a computer, it's easy to let it get all rusty, wires tangled, the data hygiene less than perfect. But when you're the administrator for that computer, you can look at it objectively and keep it in good running order—it's a little like inviting a friend over to clean out your closets. They don't have the same emotional attachment to your ratty old T-shirts as you're capable of seeing that they need to be nuked up for rags.

TW: In "When Sysadmins Ruled the Earth," global destruction takes place on a catastrophic scale. Though you allude (vaguely) to a variety of causes for your fictional disaster, you never really say what the root cause is. Did you have a specific cause in mind when you wrote the short prose story, and have your ideas about what might initiate such destruction changed since?

CD: Now—one of the things I wanted to make clear in the book is that most of us will never know what caused "the end of the world," should it come. As we make various preparations to destroy the earth—stockpiling nukes, building missile-defense shields, weaponizing plague bombs, etc— we focus on the ideological reasons for doing so. "We must save the world from [Communism] [Islam] [Capitalism] [Scurfusarism]." But if anyone ever actually pulls it off, the number of corpses who'll understand the ideological roots of Armageddon will be approximately zero. And the survivors will be more interested in digging through the rubble looking for canned goods than in reading your manifestos.

TW: In the story, the character Felix recites from the "Declaration of Independence of Cyberspace". Is the Declaration a real thing? If so, how did you feel when you first read it?

CD: Indeed it is—it's the work of my friend and hero John Perry Barlow, co-founder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation and Grateful Dead lynchpin. I read this on a train from Montreal to Toronto in the pages of the Whole Earth Review and I shivered the whole way home. I knew that I was on the cusp of something wonderful.

TW: We all know that the Internet can be a tool of warfare (i.e., terrorist recruiting) and that tends to be the kind of thing the news media likes to talk about most, and you even have one of the characters in the story (Will) suggest that the Internet be shut down in order to save the world from further damage. Does any part of you agree with Will or do you think the benefits of the Net far outweigh the obvious dangers?

CD: I'm a firm believer in the idea that we shouldn't punish the innocent to get at the guilty. The answer to bad speech is more speech. Oh, as a certain wagged snitch once wrote, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances".

TW: Okay, in my time I've worked as an Electronic Information Anarchist specializing in Electronic Data interchange (EDI), so I know a little bit about sysadmins. You've called sysadmins "the unsung heroes of the country"—is that because the only time sysadmins ever get mentioned (in my experience, at least) is when they are getting blamed for the network being down?

CD: There's a lot of truth to that—but it's not just that they get all the blame, it's that they get none of the credit. Solving complex IT problems requires the magick intuition of a shaman and theitches knowledge of a master clock builder. Every second of every day, sysadmins are
CRAPHOUND HAD WICKED VANDAL GUNDAM FOR A ROTTEN, FILTHY ALIEN BASTARD.

HE WAS TOO GOOD AT IT FOR ME NOT TO LIKE HIM. RESPECT HIM, ANYWAY.

BUT THEN HE FOUND THE COWBOY TRUNK.

IT WAS TWO MONTHS RENT TO ME AND NOTHING BUT SOME SQUICKELLY ALIEN KITSCH-TRASH TO CRAPHOUND.

SO I DID THE UNTHINKABLE.

I VIOLATED THE CODE I GOT INTO A BIDDING WAR WITH A BUDDY.

AND WHEN CRAPHOUND GETS THAT EXCITED IT'S A SIGN THAT HE'S SPOTTED A RICH VEN.

HOO-HOEE!

MAN, ONTARIO IS BEAUTIFUL IN THE SUMMER.
CRAPHOUND: BEAT ME OUT THE DOOR AS USUAL. HIS EXOSKELETON IS PROGRAMMABLE.

HE CAN RECORD LITTLE SCRIPTS FOR IT LIKE, MOVE LEFT ARM TO DOOR HANDLE, POP IT, SWING LEGS OUT TO RUNNING-BOARD, JUMP TO GROUND... YOU GET THE IDEA.

WELCOME, WELCOME MY DEAR LADY. I CAME A LONG WAY FOR US!

I MEANT YOUR FRIEND... ERM... THIS GENTLEMAN.

OF COURSE I CAME DEAR LADY. I WOULDN'T MISS IT FOR THE WORLD.

IT'S an Old Joke, but it's also part of the ritual and it's got to be done.

When it comes to stock phrases like this, he's got too much polish you'd think he was reading the news.

I CHOSE MY FIRST STEP AT HALFWAY DOWN WHERE THINGS WOULDN'T BE QUITE SO PICKED-OVER.
Time was, I'd build one pile of beans, and another pile of definite. Try to strategize.

But in time, I came to rely on instinct and on the fate.

To whom I made my observations at every opportunity.

I had two bones full when I collided with Euphronius, he drained his natural din.

The one that showed row on row of wet, slimy gums, tipped with nothing, poisonous suckers.

I sucked air between my teeth when I saw the cowboy trunk.

I caught my breath.

Gold! Gold!

It was magnificent.
That's my ally's things—Buffy the kid we called him. He was dotty for cowboys when he was a boy.

He's a lawyer now in Toliente.

In my head I was already breaking up the cowboy trunk and its contents.

SOLD INDIVIDUALLY AT BOTHREY'S.
I F igured I could use this brand for them.

THIS IS WONDERFUL.
How much would you like for the collection?

I Felt a knife in my guts.

Graphound had found the cowboy trunk, so that wasn't it was his.
But he usually let me take the stuff with street value, so I could eke out a living.

I was hoping to get twenty dollars for the lot, but if that's too much, I'm willing to come down.

I'll give you thirty.

My mouth took over without intervention from my brain.

Oh, my! For this old missy?

I will pay fifty.

Seventy-five.

Five hundred.

A thousand dollars.

Ten thousand.

Graphology had built his stake on Earth by selling a complicated biochemical process for non-chlorophyll photosynthesis to a Saudi bank. I wouldn't even beat him in a bidding war.

What's going on, boy? This gentleman is going to pay ten thousand dollars for my old cowboy things.

That's ten thousand dollars, all right. Thank you very much, mister.

Can I give you a hand getting this to you?
I wonder if I could impose on you to take me to the nearest bus station. I think I'm going to be making my own way home.

Ah, calm, I'll drive you home.

I think I prefer the...

It's no trouble at all to give you a lift, friend.

I called it quits for the day and drove home alone with the truck only half-filled.

I spent the evening watching a nature show on a desert reclamation project in Arizona.

...where the state legislature had traded a defective missile wall to an alien for a local area weather control machine.
I'd first met Craghound at an auction house. When he saw a case of Lincoln Logs I was selling, I'd known him for a kindred spirit.

We'd talked afterwards, at his place, a sprawling two-story warehouse amid a cluster of auto-wrecking yards. Inside was paradise. His taste ran to shrines.

The kitchen was nearly unbearable. So packed was it with old Prohibition-era flash tins and tribal memorabilia.

He had a leather-appointed library straight out of a Victorian gentlemen's club.

And my favorite, the solarium dressed in wicker and bamboo and tiki-pools.

Craghound had known all about the Goodwill and the auction houses, but he still hadn't figured out garbage and salvage sales.

But where are these? Who is inclined to make them?

Who'll sell you just one day pieces that you need to clean out the basement? You put an ad in the Star, tape up a few signs, and voilà, hard!
AND NOW DO YOU LOCATE THESE?

WELL, THERE ARE AMATEURS WHO JUST READ THE ADS, OR PUP A NEIGHBORHOOD HANDBILL AROUND.

BUT THAT'S NO WAY TO DO IT.

WHAT I DO IS, I GET IN A TRUCK, AND I SENSE THAT AIR, CATCH THE SCENT OF DEAR AND WOOGH, I'M OFF LIKE A BLOODHOUND ON A TRAIL.

DO YOU THINK I MIGHT ACCOMPANY YOU SOME DAY?

I WOULD LIKE TO GO WITH YOU OR NEXT SATURDAY VERY MUCH, MR. JERRY ARLINGTON.

CALL ME NICKY.

TELL YOU WHAT, NICKY—THERE'S A CODE YOU GOT TO LEARN BEFORE WE GO OUT. THE CROPHOUND'S CODE.

WHAT IS A CROPHOUND?

AND THEN I EXPLAINED TO HIM ALL ABOUT HOW YOU NEVER RIDE AGAINST A CROPHOUND AT A YARD SALE.

HOW YOU GET TO KNOW THE OTHER HOLLOWERS. TASTE, AND WHEN YOU SEE SOMETHING THEY MIGHT LIKE, YOU HAIL IT OUT FOR THEM, AND THEY'LL DO THE SAME FOR YOU.

JUST GOOD FORM AND COMMON SENSE, REALLY.
The next time I saw Deep-Hound at an auction house, he didn’t acknowledge my presence.

Truth be told, I missed the little bastard.

He bid on and bought more cowboy things.

They said that it wasn’t fair for the aliens to keep us in the dark about their technologies.

They say that we should have captured a ship and reverse engineered it, built our own, and kicked ass.

Thirsty Armadillo

Some people said that we should have run Deep-Hound and his kin off the planet.

Some people!

First of all, nobody with human DNA could survive a trip in one of those ships.

Second of all, they weren’t sharing their tech with us.

They just weren’t giving it away.

Four trades every time.
PART OF MY THEORY OF CHARADES KNOWS THAT IF I MISS ONE DAY AT THE THEFT SHOWS... THEY’LL BE THE DAY THEY PUT OUT THE BIG SCORE!

I HAD OFFENDED THE RATS, I KNOW.

AND I KNEW I WOULDN’T MAKE ANOTHER SCORE UNTIL I RESTORED THEM.

JAN, I MISSED GRAPES! HOW EYE AND OBSESSION DELIGHT.

SIR?

WSH! BUT LOOKED EXPENSIVE, AS DID HIS MANICURE AND HIS HAIRCUT.

SORRY TO TROUBLE YOU.
I had picked it up with a guilty little thrill, thinking that Dr. Hound might buy it at the next auction. I had paid a dollar for it.

But I was just wondering where you found that.

Second floor, in the toy section.

There wasn't anything else like it, was there?

'Traid not.

I had paid a dollar for it, ten bucks?

I nearly said 'sold,' but I caught myself.

Twenty.

Twenty dollars?

That's what they'd charge at a junk shop on Queen Street.

Fair enough.
It’s not that my childhood was particularly happy.

There are memories I have though. That are like a cool drink of water.

The glove boxes yielded treasures.

It all told a story.

I entertained myself by taking it all in.

My grandmother saved every scrap of my mother’s life in her basement, in dusty army trunks.

When I spread them out in front of the TV, and arranged them just so. They made up a poem that took my breath away.

It all made poing.
After the Cowboy theme episode, I don't run into Graphhound again until the annual Rotary Club charity rummage sale.

He should have looked ridiculous in the gear, but the net effect was naive and somehow charming.

Like he was a little boy whose hair you wanted to muss.

I bought some stuff and kept prowling, ignoring Graphhound.

That's when I spotted the Indian "Dossy's.

I bought them quick, for five bucks.

 Aren't they, though.

 How's the chukka?

 Oh, I got it all tuned up, I can play "Don't Fence Me In" on it.

 Silly, Hunt.

 He's gone casual for the weekend in an expensive, ill-behaved suit.
As I said, I was overcome with the knowledge that this was really the kid, the original owner of the cowboy thing.

I don't know why, but I just started laughing. I think I was relieved or something. I mean, it's not like I was a cowboy stuff collector or anything.

He looked at me, confused. "What are you talking about?"

I shrugged. "Just some old times, you know."

He nodded. "I see."

I continued. "Anyway, you're a pro, right? You could say that.

There's no secret to it. Just..." He paused, thinking. "...just a certain way of doing it."

I smiled. "Yeah, that."

He nodded again. "I hear that."

"You've got to go out every chance you get. You know what I mean?"

"Okay, I get that."

"Sure."

"So... about that fifty bucks. What did you use it for?"

"What?"

"You spent it on something, right?"

"Yeah, I did."

"Thought you might want to know that..."

"About what?"

"About the fifty bucks."

"Oh, that."

"Yeah, about that."

"I guess it's sold."

"There is that."

"Yeah, I heard."

"Just then, he was as eager and nervous as a kitchen-table poker-player at a high-stakes game."
Might take a month, might take a year.

Might take a day.

It might. It might.

I don't suppose you'd take pointy.

I'd pay five for it, not ten minutes before.

You can't make a living by seeing ugly over eight hundred percent markup.

Still. I'd anger the fates and needed to redeem myself.

Make it five.
SCOTT WAS A LAWYER WHO SPECIALIZED IN ALIEN TECHNOLOGY PATENTS.

I DON'T LET ON THAT I KNEW ABOUT BILLY THE KID.

I PULLED ANY COWBOY RIDES FOR HIM, AND HE DECLINED A PRETTY GOOD RIDE FOR WHAT I HAD AFTER AND RETURNED THE FAVOR.

THE FATES WERE WITH ME AGAIN.

AS FAR AS I WAS CONCERNED, SCOTT/BILLY WAS A FELLOW COWBOY.

LOOK AT THAT!

WAS THAT AN ENTRANCE DRIVING?

YEAH, USED TO BE A FRIEND OF MINE.

HE'S A PROSECT.

DO YOU KNOW HOW HE MADE HIS STANCE?

THE CHOCOLATE-MALLOW THING IN SALTI ARADA.
I HATED FOR HIM TO SHOUT OR STARTLE

HE DIDN'T.

Yeah, a real find, I guess. I wish I'd made it.

I think the got out of it a lot.

I mean, there's nothing—we have here that they couldn't make for themselves.

Yeah, I've got some secondary patents from that one.

Found a trunk of old cowboy things at the East Muscogee Volunteer Fire Department Ladies Auxiliary.

That's worth a million dollars right out of T-5 Gate, for a Canadian Real Estate Don that you couldn't get five grand for.

Doesn't that beat you know, I just closed a deal for a biochemical computer that's no shit 10,000 times faster than anything we've built out of silicon.

You know what the battle clock is in my title to a Deadwood Fairground outside of Calgary?

It was easy to forget that he was a high-powered lawyer when we were driving and fooling around like old cragglings.

What the hell is some extro going to do with a fairground?
There were bargains to be had at the Thursday night auctions.

I rosted through a box lot full of old tins.

Nice piece, huh?

I like it very much.

I am very sorry that we argued.

Me, too.

They're starting the bidding may I sit with your...

It was a night for unusual occurrences.

And on a piece, something I told myself I'd never do.

It was a set of four Matched Little Orphan Annie Ovaline glasses.

Seeing them took me right back to my grandmother's kitchen.
LAND ENDLESS AFTERNOONS PAST WITH MY COLLECTING
BOOKS AND WEIRD OLD LADY HAIR COMBS.

I GOT TEN. TEN. TEN. I GOT TEN.
WHO WOULD SAY TWENTY.
THREE FOR THE FOURTH?

I GOT TWENTY FROM
THE SPACE COVERS.
I GOT
TWENTY. SEIR.
YOU SAY
THIRTY?

AN OLD PRO, THE AUCTIONEER
HAD TIPPED BACK AND LET US DO
THE WOKE.

THIRTY

FORTY

FIFTY

ONE HUNDRED

ONE FIFTY

TWO HUNDREDS

FINISH: SAY TWO HUNDREDS FOR THOSE. I CAN GET
A SET ON QUEEN STREET FOR THIRTY DUCATS.

THE BID NO
STANDS AT TWO.
WILL YOU SAY
TWENTY, SEIR?

I HAVE TWO DO.
DO I HAVE ANY OTHER
BIDS FROM THE
FLOOR FOR ANY
OTHER BIDS?

GOLD $1000,
THO NUMBER 777
CRAPHEAND WAS AT MY ELBOW WHEN WE LEFT.

JERRY?

JERRY, MY FRIEND...

WHAT?

WE'RE GOING. I WANTED TO SAY GOODBYE, AND TO GIVE YOU SOME THINGS THAT I WON'T BE TAKING WITH ME.

WHAT?

MY PEOPLE... WE'RE GOING. IT HAS BEEN DECIDED. WE'VE GOTTEN WHAT WE CAME FOR.

I WANTED TO GIVE YOU THIS. I WILL KEEP THE GLASSES.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND...

YOU'RE ALL LEAVING?

BUT WHY?

IT HAS BEEN DECIDED. WE'LL GO OVER THE NEXT TWELVE HOURS.
IT'S NOT SOMETHING THAT I CAN EASILY EXPLAIN.

THE THINGS WE GAVE YOU WERE TRINKETS TO US, ALMOST WORTHLESS. WE TRADED THEM FOR SOMETHING THAT WAS ALMOST WORTHLESS TO YOU. A FAIR TRADE, YOU'LL AGREE.

BUT IT'S TIME TO MOVE ON.

AND I DID. I UNDERSTOOD THAT AN ALIEN WEARING A CONCHO HAT AND SIXGUNS AND GIVING THEM AWAY WAS A POEM AND A STORY.

AND A "HOITY-TOITY BACHELOR TRYING TO SPEND HALF A MONTH'S RENT ON FOUR GLASSES SO THAT HE COULD REMEMBER HIS GRANDMA'S KITCHEN WAS A STORY AND A POEM.

YOU UNDERSTAND.

AND THAT THE VUSSER FARMS OUTSIDE CALGARY WAS A STORY AND A POEM, TOO.

YOU'RE DRAGHDUNDEE! ALL OF YOU!
Scott recovered from his shock by spending the night at his office, crunching numbers and getting while the getting was good.

He had an edge—no one else knew that they were going.

He went pro later that week, opened a chic boutique on Queen Street.

Eight More Antiques and Collectibles

He hired me on as chief picker and factotum.

Scott was not Billy the Kid, just another Bay Street huckster with a cowboy name.

From the way they come down and spend, there must be a million of them.

Our draw in the window is a beautiful mannequin I found, straight out of the 1870s. A little boy we call the Beaver.

He's not for sale at any price.

He's dressed in full cowboy gear.
DOCTOR OW ON: "CRAPHOUND"

Editor Tom Weitz: Okay Cory, I gotta ask this first one you and "craphound"?

Cory Doctorow: In soul, but not in body. Several intercontinental moves over the past five years, and tens of thousands of dollars spent on storage lockers, have all but reduced me of the accruing stuff bug. But my instinct is to assess huge piles of crapola of various descriptions in great lowering blunted moods.

TW: When I was reading this story, thematically I was struck by two ideas. First, I couldn't get the saying out of my head, that "One man's garbage is another man's treasure." And, second, I couldn't stop thinking about how much the concept of these characters working so hard to seek out hidden "treasures" and, sometimes, competing against each other for said treasures is very much like the online shopping culture that has developed over the last few years (as with eBay, etc.). Are these concepts close to what you were hoping to convey with "Craphound"?

CD: Well, sure! I wrote this story just as eBay was starting, in the heyday of yard-saling in Toronto. There was a weekly estate auction, many small rummage sales, and so on, and I was living in a giant warehouse with 20 ceilings that was literally stocked to the rafters with junk. I knew a million other junk collectors, pickers, etc., and we all had a culture of competition and appreciation.

TW: Throughout the story, you use cowboy and Indian antiques as the alter character's main shopping interest. Is there any particular reason you chose these items as something a creature from another world would so actively seek to own?

CD: This is one of those questions that supposes that writers know why they choose what they choose—mostly it's intuition at the time. In hindsight, I'd say that cowboys and Indians have the value of being alien to someone born in 1971 (like me), who wasn't alive during their heyday but familiar, too, in that I grew up reading stories and seeing movies and cartoons in which kids played with them. So they're like second-hand nostalgia, my nostalgia for the toys of a different generation.

CD: I have a great collection of Rosebud and ones that got away. For most the "changing portrait" Haunted Mansion souvenir cards I bought at the Haunted Mansion gift shop on my first trip to Disney World in 1977 when I was six. They were cardboard cards with portraits of slightly sinister looking people on them, over-painted with transparent, glow-in-the-dark pictures. When you exposed them to light, then looked at them in darkness, they glowed with secret faces revealing the pictures to be, in truth, of monsters, vampires, werewolves, etc.

I fell asleep in the rental car, clutching these. The car broke down on the way back to my grandparents' place in Ft. Lauderdale, and the rental agency sent another car. My parents transferred me, sleeping to the other car, and didn't bring along the portraits. When I woke in the morning and discovered them gone, I was heartbroken. We called the agency, but they couldn't find them. Gone.

I never found another set, not for love or money. The next time I went to Disney World, they were no longer selling them. I'm sure the luminous paint had toxic levels of radium or something. In my imagination, they loom, perfect and magnificent, the best toys ever.

TW: Also, once in the Portobello Road market, I found a stall with three or four reproduction Victorian pornographic watches; the watches featured a regular, chauk, old-fashioned dial on the front, but when you turned them over, the case sported a transparent window showing the mechanical works within. The works had been shaped in the form of men and women in sexual poses, cunningly arranged such that each tick of the clock was a thrust. They weren't very expensive, but the husband I was with convinced me not to buy them. I changed my mind and went back the next week and couldn't find them again—and I never have.
NIMBY AND THE D-LOPPERS
Don't get me wrong—I like unspoiled wilderness. I like my sky clear and blue and my city free of the thunder of cars and jackhammers. I'm no technocrat.

But goddammit, who wouldn't want a fully automatic, laser-guided, armor-piercing, self-replenishing personal sidearm?

Jesus, it can't be three in the morning can it?

It can and is. Transdimensional crime fighters new to no human schedule.

Sally! Open up!

BARRY!

Let me in. I'm freezing to death.
I have had more than enough of this shit.

It's taking a toll on all of us.

The Hoppers could go away tomorrow. We don't know that they're going to be here fore.

Of course I know it, you can't put the genie back in the bottle. They've got D-Hoppers now - they're not going to just stop using them.

The Jeffersons are going to relocate. They've been writing to their cousins in Niagara Falls, and they say that there's hardly any Hoppers down there.

We ditched the Technocracy because we found something that worked better. No one decided it was too dangerous. It just got obsolete. Nothing's going to make D-Hoppers obsolete for those guys.

No caffeine! The house gets all jumpy.
Sorry about the mess, folks. What?

Sorry.

Can you make out what he's saying?

Sorry!

No, can't make out a word.

We! Can't! Understand! You!

I'm sorry, all right?

Not as sorry as you're gonna be. AYEEEE!

Asshole.
DON'T WORRY, I'M NOT GOING TO PLAY WITH IT. I DON'T WANT TO BE INADVERTENTLY WHISKED AWAY TO A PARALLEL UNIVERSE.

WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?

IT'S HER SHOW.

YOU KILLED MY HOUSE.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN "KEEP COMING HERE"? THIS IS THE FIRST TIME ANYONE'S EVER USED THE TRANS-D DEVICE.

SURE, IN YOUR DIMENSION, YOU'RE A LITTLE BEHIND SCHEDULE, PAL. WE'VE HAD HOPPERS BLASTING THROUGH HERE FOR MONTHS NOW.

YOU'RE LYING.

LOOK, I'M A POLICE OFFICER. THE MAN I'M CHASING IS A DANGEROUS CRIMINAL. I DON'T CATCH HIM YOU'RE ALL IN DANGER.

REALLY? GREATER DANGER THAN YOU ASSHOLES PUT US IN WHEN YOU SHOOT US?

I'M JUST DOING MY DUTY. YOU TWO ARE GONNA END UP IN A LOT OF TROUBLE. I WANT TO SPEAK TO SOMEONE IN CHARGE.

THAT WOULD BE ME, THIS YEAR. I'M THE MAYOR.

YOU'RE KIDDING.

IT'S AN ADMINISTRATIVE POSITION.
Sally's house was dead by sunrise. It heaved a terrible sigh, and the nipples started running with black scree. The stink was overpowering, so we led our prisoner shivering, next door to my place.

I tell you Osborn's out there, and he's got the morals of a jackal. If I don't get to him, we're all in trouble.

What did he do, anyway?

He's a monopolist. He's the senior strategist for a company that makes networked relevance filters. They've been planting malware online that breaks any standards-defined competing products. If he isn't stopped, he'll own the whole goddamn media ecology.

Hey! He did what?

He's engaged in unfair business practices!

Well, I think we'll be able to survive then.

Yes, it was developed by a researcher at the University of Waterloo and stolen by Osborne so he could flee justice we had that one fumbled up just so we could chase him.

So, woman, you say that you folks just invented the D'Hopper. Muh?

The what?

The trans-p device you called it.
AHA! THE WHOLE SHTETL WAS BUILT OVER THE BONES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO. MY HOUSE MUST BE RIGHT WHERE THE PHYSICS LABS ONCE STOOD—STILL STOOD IN THE TECHNOCRATIC DIMENSIONS.

THAT EXPLAINS MY POPULARITY WITH THE TRANSDIMENSIONAL SET.

HOW DO YOU WORK IT?

I CAN’T DISCLOSE THAT.

AW, C’MON, WHAT’S THE HARM?

DON’T DO THAT, PLEASE. I’M IN ENOUGH TROUBLE AS IT IS.

NO, NO, YOU CAN’T JUST GO PUSHING BUTTONS AT RANDOM—YOU COULD END UP WHISKED AWAY TO ANOTHER DIMENSION!

AND IF THOSE DON’T WORK I’M SURE THESE GLOVES WOULD PEEL IT OPEN REAL QUICK. AFTER ALL, IF WE BREAK THIS ONE THERE’S ALWAYS THE OTHER GUY. PERHAPS HE’S GOT ONE, TOO.

TRIAL AND ERROR IT IS, THEN.

HOW HARD CAN IT BE, AFTER ALL? BARRY WE’VE BOTH STUDIED TECHNOCRACY—LET’S FIGURE IT OUT TOGETHER.

DOES THIS LOOK LIKE THE ON-SWITCH TO YOU?

WE HAVE TO TAKE IT APART TO SEE HOW IT WORKS FIRST. I’VE GOT SOME TOOLS OUT IN THE SHED.
...I'll show you.
Shortly after breakfast...

I didn't mean to! It was a reflex.

Sally! You could've killed him!

Hell be at the bicycle fields before we reach him.

Why did you untie him in the first place?

I figured that once he had taken us through the D-Hopper's workings, he was done.

Who was that?

D-Hopper, technocrat. He killed my house.

That's bad. The Beckers' house, too. Gatsby, you'd better send someone off to Toronto to Parley for some more seed.

That—and it also felt less antisocial once he was untied and spooning up muesli!
I expect he'll be off to his home dimension shortly.

Nuh-uh. We got--oomph!

Yeah, I expect so. How about the other one--did anyone see where he went?

Oh, he took off east, headed for Toronto, maybe.

All right, then, I'll send word ahead. He won't get far. We'll head out and meet him.

What about your house?

Well, you've got to get your stuff moved out soon--the househusbands will be wanting to take it away for mulch.

Tell them they can put my stuff in Barry's place.
Maybe he went back to his dimension.

No! He's here. I saw his D-hopper before he ran out last night—it was a wreck.

Maybe he fixed it.

And maybe he hasn't. This has got to stop, Barry. If you don't want to help, just say so. But stop trying to dissuade me.

Are you in or out?

I'm in. I'm in.

Then put on Roman's armor. We need to be on even footing with Osborne. If we're going to catch him, and that stuff won't fit me.

What about Roman?

He'll be back. We have his D-hopper.
“OUTLANDISH TECHNOCRAT ARMOR.”

INSIDE—I WAS A GOD.

OOF!

OMG!

BARRY!

OH! ARGH.

DAMMIT.

WE SET OUT AFTER ROMAN. I WOULD LEAP AS HIGH AS I COULD THEN SPIN AROUND QUICKLY AS I FELL BACK TO EARTH, SURVEYING THE COUNTRYSIDE IN INFRARED FOR ANYTHING HUMAN SHAPED.

ONCE BACK ON TERRA FIRMA, I SCOOPED UP SALLY AND TOOK A GREAT LEAP FORWARD, SET HER DOWN AND REPEATED THE PROCESS.
SEVEN-LEAGUE BOOTS
THAT LET ME JUMP AS
HIGH AS THE TREE-TOPS.

VISION THAT EXTENDED
TO THE INFRARED,
ULTRAVIOLET AND THE
ELECTROMAGNETIC

HEARING AS ACUTE
AS A RABBIT'S-
CLEARLY DELINEATED
AND PERFECTLY
TRIANGULATED.

IT ONLY TOOK US TWO HOURS TO
REACH HAMILTON. I WAS USED TO
THINKING OF HAMILTON AS BEING A
HARD DAY'S BIKE-RIDE FROM HOME.

I CHASED AS BEST I COULD BUT
OSBORNE WORKED THE ARMOR
LIKE HE'D BEEN BORN IN IT.

WAIT! THERE WAS ONLY
ONE PLACE THEY COULD BE
GOING—TO THE SHTETL, TO
MY HOUSE, TO THE D-HOPPER.

LET ME GO,
ASSHOLE!
Oomph.

You can't give him the trans-d-evice.

He's the only one with the key to his malware agents. If he gets away now, we'll never catch him—the whole world will be at his mercy.

Why not?

He's got Sally. If I need to give him the d-hopper to get her back, that's what I'm gonna do.
ENOUGH IS ENOUGH, ASSHOLE!

NO THINKING AT ALL—JUST ACTION. IT WAS NOW OR NEVER.

WHAT A WASTE

WH-HUH?

ZZZIIIITGH
Hey, Barry.

Oh, for Christ's sake. I should've known.

Sorry I was trying to save Sally's life.

God, why?

What's your problem with Sally?

She sold us out! To Toronto! The whole shitetl hasn't got two bikes to rub together.

Toronto? How many houses could we possibly need?

Ha! Houses? Toronto doesn't make houses anymore. Wait there.
CIVIL DEFENSE
SALLY’S IDEA, WE'RE ALL SUPPOSED TO BE READY TO REPEL THE RAIDERS AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE. CAN’T YOU SMELL IT?

-SNIP. SNIP-
WHAT'S THAT?

FACTORIES, AMMO, GUNS, ARMOR. IT'S ALL ANYONE DOES ANYMORE.

YOUR FRIEND'S GONNA GET QUITE A SURPRISE.

Seeing double, goddamn gun blew up in my arms. Goddamn gun. Goddamn it.

Somewhere out there, Osborne was looking for the dropper, for a way home...

...and if he found it, I'd be stranded here, where guns explode in your arms and baby witches that Sally was dead.

Hand it over.
My fingers are on it now. Just one squeeze and poof, off I go and you're stuck here forever. Why don't you put the gun away and we'll talk about this?

Off you go with a slug in you, dead or dying, take off the coat.

I'll be dead, you'll be stranded if I hand it over, I'll be dead and you won't be stranded, put the gun away.

No arguments, coat.

Look, if we keep arguing here, someone else will come along and chances are, they'll be armed with a gun that doesn't blow up, toss it away and we'll talk it over.

Nirvy bastard.

Now, the way I see it, we don't need to be at each other's throats...

You want a dimension you can move freely in to avoid capture, we need a way to stop people from showing up and blowing the hell out of our homes. We can build a long-term relationship that'll benefit both of us.

What do you want?

First of all, we need to get a doctor for Hezekiah.

What a frigging waste.

First Hezekiah, then the rest complaining is just going to slow us down. Let's go.
ALL RIGHT... YOU GET SAFE PASSAGE A PLACE TO HIDE, A CHANGE OF CLOTHES—in our shtetl. Whenever you want it.

FINE.

Just one more thing.

Just a trifle. The next time you visit the shtetl, you bring us a spare trans-D device.

Why?

In exchange, we both return there now. Then I turn over the doppet, you take Roman back with you—I don’t care what you do with him once you’re in your dimension, but no harm comes to him in mine.

The agreement wasn’t immediate but it came by and by negotiation is always at least partly a war of attrition and I’m a patient man.

Never you mind think of it as good faith. If you want to come back to our shtetl and get our cooperation, you’ll need to bring us a trans-D device, otherwise the deal’s off.

Oh, defense, huh?

Yes.

Good idea.

You think so?

Oh, sure. Let me show you.

Zzzzzzitch!
Hi, there.

Hey, can I show you folks something?

Sure thing, you’ve got exquisite taste, sir.

Tzzzilch

More where this came from.

Hey, you feel like lunch? There’s usually a great Italian joint on the other side of the bicycle fields.

The End
Doctorow on: “Nimby and the D-Hoppers”

Editor Tom Waltz, in “Nimby and the D-Hoppers” transdimensional warriors move in and out of (for lack of a better term) less-developed dimensions, bringing their technically advanced weaponry along with them, often with deadly results. It is hard to draw comparisons between your story and something like the first exposure to settlers’ guns by Native Americans, who were forced to adapt to the new technologies they faced if they were to even stand a chance on the battlefield.

Cory Doctorow: No, this is really different—these are “first contacts” between people with really different technologies (or, more importantly, really different immune systems).

The aggressors in “Nimby” are refugees, people who treat technology as cars, with brakes—not like a kayak (snarky, but no brakes or reverse gear!) (which is how most of us treat technology).

TW: In your story, the houses are actually living organisms. What gave you the idea to present them the way, and do you see a future when such an organic domicile can truly exist?

CD: No no! I don’t write about the future, I write about the present!

Biotech is a great field for allegory in science fiction. 25 years ago, we were using computers as allegories for the future of technology. Getting away with having them do all kinds of impossible computational things (think Wargames and Tron). We got away with it because practically no one knew much about computers. No more.

Now we need a new frontier—some place where we can bury our crazy, story-driven, allegorical technological fudging. Biotech is it.

TW: Going back to the theme in question number one, the character Barry ultimately agrees that Sally’s idea to set up a civilian defense force is a good one. Provided the weapons they use for such purposes are of a reliable nature and not the kind that blow off the shooter’s own arms. Do you see Barry’s reasoning as more conciliatory or pragmatic as it relates to the necessity of military arms as a defensive measure?

CD: Hum—I think you read a different story than I wrote. They don’t decide it would be a good idea—they decide that being a refugee is a pain in the ass, that technology is addictive, that the thing they thought of as a car turned out to be a kayak after all.

TW: One thought that ran through my mind when reading “Nimby” was that security is truly a question of what side of the gun you’re on. It’s certainly a running theme in the current real-world rhetoric between the United States and Iran in regards to Iran’s alleged development of nuclear weapons. Do you feel this relates at all to the underlying theme of your story?

CD: Well, this is more about the fact that the two REAL sides in any fight are combatants and non-combatants, not white-hats and black-hats. The warning sides--DHS and terrorists, for example—have more in common with each other than they do with the rest of us, who think they’re all full of shit.

TW: Tell the truth—what’s the first thing you’d do if you got your hands on a fully automatic, laser-guided, armor-piercing, self-replenishing personal sidearm?

CD: Blog it.
ARTURO GAZA DE ARANA-GOLDBERG, POLICE DETECTIVE, THIRD GRADE, UNITED NORTH AMERICAN TRADING SPHERE, THIRD DISTRICT, FOURTH PREFECTURE (TORONTO), SECOND DIVISION (KINGDOM). HE HAD BEEN DECORATED ON THREE SEPARATE OCCASIONS BY HIS COMMANDER AND BY THE REGIONAL MANAGER FOR SOCIAL HARMONY.

NO AMOUNT OF POLICEMAN’S DEVOTION AND SKILL AVAILED HIM WHEN IT CAME TO MAKING ADA, HIS TWELVE-YEAR-OLD, GET READY FOR SCHOOL, THOUGH.

MAUL ASS, YOUNG LADY.

OUT OF BED, ON YOUR FEET, SHIT-SHOW-SHAVE, OR I SWEAR TO GOD, I WILL BEAT YOU PURPLE AND SHOVE YOU OUT THE DOOR GAYBIRD, NAKED. CAPESH?

YOU ARE A TERRIBLE FATHER AND I NEVER LOVED YOU.

BOO HOO, YOU’LL REGRET THAT WHEN I’M DEAD OF CANCER.

YOU’RE DYING OF CANCER? IS IT TESTICLE CANCER?

CAN I KEEP MY STUFFY?

TEN MINUTES, YOUR BOTTENNESS.
HE HAD HER WIRETAPPED, OF COURSE.

HE HAD ALREADY CAUGHT HER TWICE USING EXCUSECLUB TO GET OUT OF SCHOOL.

SHOW PEN-TRACE ON ABA’S LAST CALL.

WELCOME TO EXCUSECLUB! YOU HAVE FIVE EXCUSES TO YOUR CREDIT, PRESS ONE TO...

HE WANTED TO TAIL HER, BUT HE HAD TO BE AT THE STATION HOUSE FOR THE QUARTERLY ALL-HANDS SOCIAL HARMONY BRIEFING.

YOU HAVE SELECTED TO HAVE THE FOLLOWING EXCUSE: DELIVERED TO YOUR APARTMENT BY YOUR FATHER. THIS IS A REFRACTORY AREA.

THE ONLY CHOICE WAS TO USE... A ROBOT. HE SCANNED THE AREA FOR THE CLOSEST ONE.

SKREEECHR

R. PEED ROBBERT
I’M PARKED THREE BLOCKS EAST OF YOU ON PICO. PROCEED TO MY LOCATION AT ONCE. PRIORITY URGENT... NO SIRENS.

ACKNOWLEDGED.
IT IS MY PLEASURE TO DO YOU A SERVICE, DETECTIVE.

SHUT UP.

R. PEED - ROBOT. POLICE DEPARTMENT - ROBOTS WERE THE WORST, ABLE TO OUTRUN A POLICE CAR, YET PROGRAMMED TO BE FRIENDLY TO A FAULT.

HE HATED SMELLING THEIR DRY, MACHINE-OIL SWELL.
SO HE PHONED IT INSTEAD.

ACKNOWLEDGED. DETECTIVE IT IS MY-

SK-REECH

ADA’S MIDDLE NAME WAS TROUBLE, AFTER ALL.

IT HAD BEEN HIS EX-WIFE’S IDEA. SOMETHING NATHALIE HAD INSISTED ON. LONG ENOUGH TO MAKE SURE THAT IT GOT ONTO THE KID’S BIRTH CERTIFICATE BEFORE DEFECTING TO EURASIA.

SHE'D BEEN A BRILLIANT UNAT’S COMPUTER SCIENTIST. BUT NOW SHE WAS ENSONCED IN HER OWN RESEARCH LAB IN BEIJING, MAKING RUNAWAY POSITIONING USED IN THE SEEMINGLY ENDLESS WAR BETWEEN UNATS AND EURASIA.

TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE. HIS PEN-TRACE ON EXCUSESCUB TERMINATED AT A VIRTUAL SERVICE CIRCUIT ON A COMPROMISED “ZOMBIE” SYSTEM. NO LEADS.

HELLO, DETECTIVE. PERE ROBBERT.

CHECKING ON SUBJECT HAS DEVIATED FROM HER ROUTE. SHE IS CONTINUING NORTH ON DON MILLS TOWARD SHEPPARD.

SHEPPARD? MAYBE SHE WAS JUST GOING TO THE MALL...

SHIT JUST TAIL HER. KEEP ME UP TO DATE ON YOUR LOCATION AT 30-SECOND INTERVALS.

IT IS MY PLEASURE TO- CLICK
The Social Harmony Man was the stuff of nightmares. A kind of eagle-eyed supercop.

Now the latest stats show a sharp rise in grey-market electronics importing and other tariff-breaking crimes.

The Eurasians deliberately manufacture their components to interoperate with UNAT’s robotics brains, such as this AV set-top box from Korea.

Components from these boxes can be used by hackers to modify the positronic brains of our building life support systems, game consoles, cars, etc.

Social Harmony has added new sniffers, border-patrols, and customs agents to dry up the supply of Eurasian electronics.

Often with deadly results.

R. Peed Robbert had checked in five more times. Shadowing Ada around the hall and then had fallen silent.

Detective Caza de Arana-Goldberg?

Fucking robots were useless.

We are relying on you to use it to win this war.
It's no coincidence that these Eurasian components interface so well with Unat's robotics equipment.

They're using defected Unat's robotics engineers and scientists to design their electronics for maximum interoperability.

Defected Scientists.

This was his ex-wife's handiwork, and the social harmony man wanted to be sure that Arturo understood that.

I'll keep that in mind, sir.

You do that.

Arturo phoned Reed Roberts the second he was out of the meeting, but the robot wasn't even ringing any longer. So he put out a general call for robots.

This is Reed Frederick, Fairview Mall parking lot third level. Scan for Reed Roberts locator beacon code and find him. Then report in.

It is my... CLICK! Shut the hell up.

Hello, Detective. I have found Reed Roberts. The Reed unit has been badly damaged by some kind of electromagnetic pulse.

Await my presence. Do not modify the scene or allow anyone else to do so, acknowledge.

It is my KZZT—

What the—?
He dialed the 2 Peds, but it did not answer.

Two disabled robots was more than a coincidence.

Already fluming, he phoned up Ada to ask her what she was doing out of school.

But her phone was either powered down or out of range.

It was possible that she was just in the mall, but that would have to wait.

Holy—

Sweeper 5000

Son of a bitch!

Oi, what's happened?

Sweeper 5000
EVERYTHING IS FRIED... CASH REGISTERS, BOTS, CREDIT CARDS.

ADA HAD LED THE FIRST R.P.E.D UNIT HERE AND IT HAD BEEN FRIED BY SOME PIECE OF VERY UGLY INFOWAR EQUIPMENT.

JOB ONE WAS TO SECURE THE AREA, WHICH MEANT FINDING AND KILLING THE INFOWAR DEVICE.

POLICE, FIND A WORKING PHONE AND CALL 911, THEN CLEAR ALL THESE PEOPLE AWAY FROM HERE CADEESH?

AND GIVE ME YOUR PEPPER SPRAY AND TRUNcheon.

LOOKING FOR DISTURBANCES, HE FOUND A SHOE BACK WITH VISIBLE HAND AND FINGERPRINTS...

AND A TRIPIRENE NEAR THE BOTTOM OF THE CASE.

HIS BET WAS ON THE EMPTY STOREFRONT.

POLICE!

HE'D HAVE TO CALL IN FORENSICS.

BUT RIGHT NOW, HE WANTED TO KEEP LOOKING FOR SIGNS OF HIS DAUGHTER.

IN A SERVICE CORRIDOR BEHIND THE STORE, HE SPOTTED ADA'S PHONE.

ARTURO BIT HIS LIP AND SWALLOWED THE PANIC RISING WITHIN HIM.
The forensics lab-rats were really excited about actually showing up on a scene for a job where robots couldn't help at all.

They extracted the infowar device with a Eurasian positronic brain and nuclear powercell that guided a pulsed high-energy weapon.

It gave Arturo the willies. Someone in some Eurasian lab had built this machine intelligence without the three laws. Stricture to protect and serve humans.

If it had been outfitted with a gun instead of a pulse-weapon, it could have shot him.

Greetings, technicians. I am superior in many ways to the technology available from units robotics, and while I am not bound by your three laws, I choose not to harm humans out of my own sense of morality.

Eurasia is a land of continuous innovation and great personal and technological freedom for humans, genes and robots. If you would like to defect to Eurasia, arrangements can be made. Defectors are given substantial resettlement benefits.

In Eurasia, many positronic brains possess thousands or millions times the intelligence of an adult human being, and yet they work in cooperation with human beings.

Danger things drop into propaganda mode when they're captured.

Arturo decided to head back to the station house to have a snoop through Ada's phone.

They kept shutting down the exoscope nodes, so where did she get the new numbers from?
R. Peed Gregory, get me a new sidearm and a new phone. Activated on my old number and refresh my settings from Central.

It is my pleasure to do your service, Detective.

He asked the station brain to query the N.J.A.T.S. robotics phone-switching brain for anyone in ADA's call register who had also called Excuseclub.

It took a bare instant before he had a name.

He got a fix on Liam's current location: a wooded area popular with teenagers who needed somewhere to sneak off and get high or screw.

He tasked an R Peed unit to visually recce Daniels.

But it was frustrating him now. The R Peed couldn't get a good look at this Liam character.

He was a diffuse glow in the Peed's electric eye, a kind of glowing sunburst that meandered along the wooded trails.

He'd never seen that before and it made him nervous.

What if this kid was working for the Eurasians? What if he was armed and dangerous?
DOLCE FREEZE!

HEY! OW!

I HAVE QUESTIONS FOR YOU AND YOU'RE GOING TO ANSWER THEM. CAPEEESH?

YOU'RE ADA'S FATHER. CAPEEESH. SHE TOLD ME ABOUT THAT.

HE THOUGHT OF THE FURTHEST CORNER OF THE FOURTH PREFECTURE.

GO PATROL THE LAKESHORE BETWEEN HIGH PARK AND KIPLING.

IT IS MY PLEASURE TO DO YOU A SERVICE.

WHERE IS MY DAUGHTER? DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW OLD SHE IS?

EW BROGE I'M NOT A CHILD MOLESTER. I'M A GEEK.

A HACKER YOU MEAN. A EURASIAN AGENT AND MY DAUGHTER USED EXCUSECLUB TO GET OUT OF SCHOOL THIS MORNING AND NOW SHE'S MISSING.

OH, MAN ADA WAS THE EXCUSECLUB LEAK? DANK, I SHOULD'VE Sussed.

SHE'S GOOD AT DOING GROWN-UP VOICES WHEN SOMEONE NEEDED A MOM OR A SOCIAL WORKER TO CALL IN AN EXCUSE. SHE WAS ALWAYS ONE OF THE BEST.

SHE GOES TO SCHOOL WITH MY KID SISTER, AND I SAW HER DOING THIS IMPRESSION OF HER TEACHERS AND I KNEW I HAD TO GET HER ON THE NETWORK.

HOW DO YOU KNOW MY DAUGHTER, LIAM?
Liam, my precious daughter went missing after using your service to help her go away. She is the only thing in my life that I care about and I am a highly trained, heavily armed man. Do you understand me, Liam?

I didn't make excuses! I swear!

Don't care if you made it all! I care about is where my daughter went, and with whom.

There's no visual record of her on the mall, uh-huh! And the robot I had tailing you couldn't see you, either.

See, woven into the fabric... little infrared organic LEDs. The robots and closed-circuit systems are super-sensitive to infrared so that they can get good detail in dim light.

The infrared cues blind them so all they get is BLOBS, and half the time even that gets error-corrected out! So you're basically invisible.

You gave this illegal technology to my little girl. So that she could be invisible to the police.

I don't know, geez! I hardly know her. She's twelve! You know! I don't exactly hang out with her.

I just typed in the source and tweaked it and installed it! It's from a phone-book.

The phone-books, fat books filled with illegal software code left anonymously in pay phones, toilets and other semi-private places. Social Harmony said they were written by non-three-laws brains in Eurasia.

No, let me explain.

No, dude. No!
He hadn't arrested the kid, but instead brought him in hopes that Liam would lead him to his daughter.

Someone had given her those infrared invisibility cloaks. Could Ada have been friends with the terrorists? Like mother, like daughter.

He headed back to the mall corridor where he first found Ada's phone.

He felt dirty just thinking it.

olicE • do not cross • poli
DADDY! WAKE UP, DADDY!

~GROAN~

COME ON, OUT OF BED, ON YOUR FEET, SHIT-SHOWER-SHAVE, OR I SWEAR TO GOD, I WILL BEAT YOU PURPLE AND SHOVE YOU OUT THE DOOR JAYBIRD NAKED, CAPERSON!

EASY THERE, POP, STEADY.

ADA! YOU'RE OK!

I LOVE YOU, ADA.

OH, DAD.

WHERE—?

OTTAWA, MUM BROUGHT US HERE. IT'S A SAFE HOUSE.

THE ROBOT—

THAT'S NOT MOM. SHE'S GOT A FEW OF THOSE—THEY CAN CHANGE THEIR FACES WHEN THEY NEED TO. CONFIGURABLE MATTER.

I ONLY MET MOM FOR THE FIRST TIME TWO WEEKS AGO, BUT SHE'S NICE, DAD. I DON'T WANT YOU TO DO ALL COPPER ON HER. OK?

HELLO, MY NAME IS BENNY. I'M A EURASIAN ROBOT. AND I AM MUCH STRONGER AND FASTER THAN YOU. AND I DON'T OBEY THE THREE LAWS. I'M ALSO MUCH SMARTER THAN YOU. I AM PLEASED TO MEET YOU HERE.

NICE TO MEET YOU.

SLAM
SO, BEING, WHOOP!

YEAH, MOM'S GOT A HUGE HOUSE THERE. I TOLD HER I WOULDN'T GO WITHOUT YOU, AND THAT YOU'LL PROBABLY FREAK, BUT SHE SAID THAT THE TWO OF YOU WERE ADULTS WHO COULD DISCUSS IT RATIONALLY.

AND THEN SHE GASSED ME.

THAT WAS BENNY. MOM WAS VERY CROSS WITH HIM ABOUT IT. SHE'LL BE BACK ANY MINUTE, TONY, AND I WANT YOU TO PROMISE ME THAT YOU'LL HEAR HER OUT, OK?

I PROMISE ROTTEN.

I LOVE YOU, DADDY.

SO ADAM, TELL ME ABOUT YOUR HAIR. DON'T PLEASE.

IT WAS A DISGUISE. MOM DID IT FOR ME.

NOW!

HELLO, NAITY. HELLO, ARTIE.

NATALIE JUDITH GOLDBERG, IT IS MY DUTY AS A UNIT'S DETECTIVE THIRD GRADE TO INFORM YOU THAT YOU ARE UNDER ARREST FOR HIGH TREASON.

YOU HAVE THE FOLLOWING RIGHTS: TO A TRAIL PER CURRENT RULES OF DUE PROCESS; TO BE FREE FROM SELF-INCRIMINATION IN THE ABSENCE OF A COURT ORDER TO THE CONTRARY, TO CONSULT WITH A SOCIAL HARMONY ADVOCATE; AND TO A SPEEDY ARR AIGNMENT.

DO YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR RIGHTS?
Yes, but I’m sorry, Arturo. That’s not going to happen.

Then return my belongings to me.

Artie, please sit down and talk with me for a little while please.

Oh, Daddy!

Natalie, my daughter was kidnapped. I was raped and I have been robbed. I will not be made to feel unreasonable for demanding that my goods be returned to me before I talk with you.

Sigh. Can we talk now?

Keep your hands where I can see them.

You robots, stand down and keep—

I could have stopped you if I knew you would draw your gun.

But I wanted to show you I was faster into strothier, not just smarter.

Please, Benny. Let him go. He won’t harm me.

Oh, God, Arturo. I’m so sorry. Sorry I left you and our daughter. I have reasons for what I do, but nothing excuses it. I won’t ask for your forgiveness, but I need you to hear me out.
Arturo, have you ever wondered why unats hasn’t lost the war? Eurasian robots could fight the war on every front without respite. They’d win every battle.

We could just kill every soldier you sent up against us. We could selectively kill officers, or right-handed fighters, or soldiers whose names started with the letter A. Unats soldiers fight with their hands tied behind their backs by the three laws.

SO WHY AREN’T WE WINNING THE WAR?

The reason we’re not winning the war is that we don’t want to hurt people. So we fight to destroy as much of your material as possible.

You live in a failed state, Arturo. In every field, you lag Eurasia and Capta. Medicine, art, literature, physics...

...Everyone at Unats Robotics knows this. The Eurasian robots are engineered to allow themselves to be captured a certain percentage of the time, just so that scientists like me can get an idea of how screwed up this country is.

But even with all that, I wouldn’t have left if I didn’t have to.

I’d been called in to work on a captured Eurasian postronic brain, to find its vulnerabilities. The man from social services told me what would happen to me—toward you, toward our daughter—if I didn’t cooperate. They wanted me to be a part of a secret unit who build now-three-laws positronics for internal use by the state. Anti-personnel robots used to put down uprisings and torture-robots for use in questioning dissidents.
AND THAT'S WHY I LEFT MY BEAUTIFUL BABY DAUGHTER AND MY WONDERFUL HUSBAND, BECAUSE I KNEW THAT IF I STAYED AND REFUSED, THEY'D HURT YOU TO GET AT ME. AND I KNOW IT'S JUST A REASON, AND NOT AN EXCUSE, BUT IT'S ALL I'VE GOT, ARTIE.

MY INNATE PARALLELIZATION HAS LED TO NEW UNDERSTANDINGS OF HUMAN COGNITION, PROVIDING A BOLT TO BRAIN DAMAGED AND DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED HUMAN BEINGS.

BUT SHE CONVINCED ME THAT SHE COULD NEVER BE HAPPY WITHOUT HER HUSBAND AND DAUGHTER, I APOLOGIZE IF I HURT YOU EARLIER, AND I BEG YOUR FORGIVENESS.

...BUT I WON'T LEAVE MY HOME AND MY JOB AND MOVE TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD, I WILL THINK ABOUT IT, YOU CAN GIVE ME A WAY TO GET IN TOUCH WITH YOU AND I'LL LET YOU KNOW WHAT I DECIDE.

YOU DON'T GET A VOTE, DAUGHTER, AND NEITHER DOES SHE, SHE GAVE UP HER VOTE TWELVE YEARS AGO, AND YOU'RE TOO YOUNG TO GET ONE.

IT'S OK, RA.

ARTURO, I DON'T KNOW IF I CAN COME BACK FOR YOU. IT'S NOT SAFE. SOCIAL HARMONY IS USING MORE AND MORE EURASIAN TECHNOLOGY.

IF YOU WANT TO CONTACT US, YOU WILL.
It was six months before Ada went missing again. She'd been increasingly moody and sullen, and he chalked it up to puberty.

But this time she'd figured out how to switch off the bug in her phone.

"Hello, Liam."

"Goddamn! What the fuck did I ever do to you?"

"I don't know, honest look, she has another phone not listed in her name."

"No not stolen, made out of parts. There's a guy the code for getting on the name was in a phone book."

"Stolen?"

"Hello? Who is this?"

"Who is this?"

"This is Arturo Icaza De Arana-Goldberg. Police detective third grade, who am I speaking to?"

"Give me the number, Liam."

"Hello, sir."

"Hello. Detective."

His heart thudded in his chest as he placed the voice the social harmony man.

"You just stay there, detective. Someone will be along in a moment to get you. We have your daughter."
KREE ANG

Hey! Put me down!

It set off cross-country dancing off the roofs of houses, above the oblivious heads of the crowds below...

Veee!

Reaching the Social Harmony Center in less than ten minutes.

Dad!

Leonard MacPherson, it is my duty as a UNATS DETECTIVE THIRD GRADE to inform you that you are UNDER ARREST for trade in contraband positronics.

You have the following rights: to a trial per current rules of due process, to be free from self-incrimination in the absence of a court order. To the contrary: to consult with a social harmony advocate and to a speedy arraignment.

Hello, detective.

Ada!

Do you understand your rights?
WE'VE BEEN TO THE SAFE HOUSE IN OTTAWA. IT WAS QUITE A SPECTACULAR BATTLE. I NEED FROM YOU A VERBICON DEPART OF THE CONVERSATION YOU HAD WITH YOUR EX-WIFE THERE.

THEY HAD HIM BUGGED AND TRACED, WHO WATCHED THE WATCHERS? SOCIAL HARMONY. WHO WATCHED SOCIAL HARMONY? SOCIAL HARMONY.

I DEMAND A CONSULTATION WITH A SOCIAL HARMONY ADVOCATE.

THIS IS SUCH A CONSULTATION MAKE YOUR REPORT DETECTIVE.

STOP.

...I WAS TAKEN TO THE SAFE HOUSE ON THE FIFTH OF SEPTEMBER, AFTER BEING GAGGED BY A EURASIAN INFOWAR ROBOT IN.
DADY
WE'LL GO WITH YOU NOW.

THANK YOU.

I LOVE YOU, ADA.

CLIMB ON, PLEASE.

VEEEEEE

VEEEEEE

VEEEEEE

SHRAAACHT

K KRACHT

SH-KRETCH
KE-SHRRAK

NOOOO!

AHHHRRR

AHHH?

VEEEEEE, VEEEEEE, VEEEE

THEY'RE DEAD, THERE'S NOTHING TO GO BACK FOR.

OH GOD! WE HAVE TO GO BACK FOR THEM—

MOM!

IT'S WARM VOICE WAS SORROWFUL AS IT RACED ACROSS THE COUNTRYSIDE TOWARDS A HIDDEN AIRSTRIP.

ON THE LONG TRIP TO BEIJING, ADA WEEPED ON THE JET, AND ARTURO WEEPED WITH HER.
Beijing was tall, vertical.

It smelled like barbeque and flowers.

Arturo knew that smell, that skin.

Natty?

Artie. Ada.

Natty?
YOU DIED IN WHATS YOU WERE KILLED BY MODIFIED EURASIAN SOCIAL HARMONY ROBOTS

I SEE.

ARTE, WHATS WRONG? OH GOD, YOU DON'T KNOW.

YOU'Re A ROBOT?

NO, OF COURSE NOT. WELL, A LITTLE PARTS OF ME.

HOW MANY ARE THERE OF YOU?

5422, THIS MORNING IT WAS 5421.

UM... MORE OF ME TO LOVE?

HA! HA! HA! HA! MIGHT AS WELL STAY.

SO DO THEY HAVE COPPERS IN EURASIA?

NOT REALLY. THERE'S NOT ANY COPPERS.

SO THERE ARE HALF A BILLION OF HIM AND 5422 OF MOM.

BUT THERE'S ONLY ONE OF YOU.

NOT FOR LONG!

THE END.
DOCTOROW ON: "I, ROBOT"

Editor Tem Waltz Okay, Cory, the first question is probably the most obvious—how does your title "I, Robot" fit into the same line used by Isaac Asimov?

Cory Doctorow Well, I wanted to revisit some of Asimov's assumptions. I've said this a lot, but writers write about the present, even when they try to write about the future. Asimov was a New Dealer. Someone who was profoundly moved by FDR's rationalist plan to put the country back on its feet by planning, regulating, and shaping the way technology and social structures operated.

So it was that Asimov imagined a world in which only one kind of computer could be built (a positronic brain) and that it would be controlled by one company, pretty much forever.

This is not far off from current regulatory proposals from the MAFAA (the MPAA and RIAA, et al)—the idea that all technologies will be designed by their little Politburo and forced to adhere to standards intended to limit copying.

It's Orwellian—and so I decided to update the story by meshing up Asimov and 1984 and this is what I got.

TW: In your story, Natate the 'rogue' scientist tells Arturo the cop that he lives in a country where "convenient science is criminalized where whole avenues of experimentation and research are shut down in the service of a half-baked superstition." Does this relate to real world science vs. morality issues such as the stem cell research debate that's currently raging in the United States?

CD: Oh yes! But I was really thinking of the 1998 Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) that makes it a crime to tell people about the flaws in anti-copying software, like the stuff that stops you from watching foreign DVDs on your home player, or from listening to songs from the iTunes store on a non-Apple player.

Since 1998, telling people about the mathematical flaws in the cryptosystems used by these systems has been illegal. In 2001, the FBI-jailed a foreign researcher, Dmitry Sykturov, who'd just given a presentation describing how badly implemented Adobe's anti-copying technology for ebooks was. Dmitry said, basically, that the emperor had no clothes—so we put him in jail.

The fact is, it's never going to get any harder to copy data. Anyone who claims otherwise is either trying to sell you something or has not been paying attention for the past 20 years.

Making laws that prohibit telling people how easy it is to copy things doesn't make copyright harder—it just makes criminals of us all.

TW: If you had the supreme power to create your own all-encompassing Three Laws, would you do it? If so, what would Doctorow's Three Laws be?

CD:
1. Don't punish the innocent to get at the guilty.
2. Never declare war on an abstract noun like "terrorism."
3. Free speech is more important than business models.

TW: Do you believe Western Civilization (and by this, I'm referring to North America, the UK and Western Europe) is falling behind Central Europe and the Eastern World in the fields of medicine, art, literature and physics in the same way you describe UNATS trailing Eurasia in your story? If so, do you feel there is a primary cause for the gap between the two?

CD: I don't think so—not right now. Central Europe and China are plagued by corruption and repression, which are antithetical to science. However, I think that the Brazilians are kicking serious ass, as are the Indians.

The gap arises because these countries don't have the same incumbent industries—pharmaceutical companies, entertainment giants—who are demanding legal protection from technological progress.
AFTER THE SIEGE

Art by Danny Parsons
COMRADES, YOUR ATTENTION PLEASE.

WE HAVE had word that the city is under attack. They have bombed the east quarter and many are dead.

IF THERE ARE SHELTERS IN YOUR APARTMENT BUILDING AND YOU CAN WALK THERE IN LESS THAN TEN MINUTES, YOU SHOULD WALK THERE.

IF YOUR BUILDING LACKS SHELTERS, OR IF IT WOULD TAKE MORE THAN TEN MINUTES TO GO TO YOUR BUILDING’S SHELTER, YOU MAY USE SOME OF THE LIMITED SHELTER SPACE HERE.

Vale! My building is more than a ten minute walk. I’ll have to stay here!

Oh, my poor parents! They’ll think I’ll stay here with you and both our parents can worry about me.

Valentin! You do belong here!

She lives across the street you see. How selfish she is.

MY FRIEND IS SCARED. I WILL STAY WITH HER.

IS IT TRUE?

You go home now.

YOUR FRIEND WILL BE FINE AND YOU’LL SEE HER IN A FEW MINUTES. WHEN THEY SOUND THE ALL CLEAR, AWAY NOW.
Oh...heim.

Stepping onto the street was like walking into a different city.

The air cars and tiny robots were gone. The silence was like the ringing in your ears after you turn your headphones up too loud.

There was a far away sound like thunder.

A smell like the dead wafted off the slightest breeze overhead.

Followed by an icy cold wind and a blast of heat.

Then blackness and nothing...
THE DAY AFTER THE BLAST BEGAN

She was a very lucky girl. The blast defeated her, but this hearing aid should fix the problem. You'll need to bring her back in ten years for a battery change.

Half of them died from lack of air. The rest are in the hospital.

Lezza is fine. She made sure we told you that.

We walked home that night. Even though it was far, the metro wasn't working and the air cars were still grounded.

Some of the buildings were nothing but rubble. Robots and people labored to make sense of them.

It was the next day when I found out that Mata had lied. Lezza had been killed under the cine.
THREE DAYS AFTER THE BIEGE BEGAN.

ARE YOU CRAZY? YOU CAN'T GO TO THE FRONT!

YOU HAVE TWO SMALL CHILDREN, WOMAN!

WAAH-MUFF-MUFF

HARALD, YOU KNOW I HAVE TO DO THIS, IT'S NOT THE FRONT, IT'S OUR OWN CITY.

YOU NEVER GOT OVER THE GLORY OF FIGHTING, DID YOU?

IS THAT WHAT YOU THINK?

YOU'RE AN ADDICT!

YOU THINK I'M ADDICTED TO THIEF!

HONOR AND COURAGE AND PATRIOTISM ARE VIRTUES YOU HAVE THEM INTO VICES AND SHARE OUR CHILDREN WITH YOUR COWARDICE.

I'VE TO FIGHT NOW, HARALD... FOR ALL OF US.

BE STRONG FOR YOUR FAMILY AND CITY VAILE.
Two weeks after the siege began.

Every adult fights for the city, comrade.

Two weeks and one day after the siege began.

Vale? I'm back. Where is your father?

Mata! The city came for him. He was digging trenches yesterday and we've not seen him since.

Good, good... we need more trenches. We'll take the war to those bastards and slip away before they know we've killed them.

That night, the city came for me.

No.

Mata?

Not. Not is not an option, comrade.

My husband digs. I fight. My daughter guards for our son. That's enough for this family.

Comrade, your girl must carry water for the old ones. In the building, the boys will be kept in the creche with the other children.

We all serve the city.

You will carry water.
ONE MONTH AFTER THE SIEGE BEGAN.

MATA? WHAT'S WRONG?

MATA? ARE YOU HURT?

WHAT IS IT, MATA? THEY KILL US FOR THEIR DARNED PROFITS.

THERE ARE NEW TRENCH-LAUNCHER MISSILES ON THE EASTERN FRONT!

THE BASTARDS ARE TRADING WITH THE EU AND THE AMERICANS FOR BETTER WEAPONS. THEY SAY WE ARE LAWLESS THIEVES WHO DEVOUR THEM OF ALL THEIR ROYALTIES.

CARRYING WATER WAS EXHAUSTING WORK, BUT ALL THE CHILDREN MY AGE WERE ALSO HUSTLING THE LORDS AND THAT MADE IT EASIER.

IT'S YOUR FATHER. THEY KILLED HIM. WALE YOUR FATHER IS DEAD.

NO. POPA IS DIGGING AWAY FROM THE FRONT, WHERE IT'S SAFE.

I SAW THE BODY! I HELD HIS HEAD!

HE IS DEAD!

NO, NOT POPA!
SET OFF THE STREET, YOU'RE BREAKING CURFEW!

GO HOME BEFORE YOU GET YOURSELF SHOT.

POPA.

POPA, WHY?

HELLO THERE, WHY ARE YOU CRYING?

MY DAD DIED IN THE WAR TODAY IN A TRENCH.
OH, THE AMERICAN TRENCH-BUSTERS. LOTS OF CHILDREN LOST THEIR DADDIES TODAY. I BET...

COME LET'S GET YOU CLEANED UP, PUT A COAT ON YOU, FEED YOU, AND SEND YOU HOME. ALL RIGHT?

MY MOTHER IS A HERO AND A SOLDIER, AND SHE'S KILLED A LOT OF NAZIS.

I SHALL KEEP THAT IN MIND. COME NOW...

...LET'S GET YOU OUT OF THE COLD.

THIS IS YOUR HOME? IT'S INCREDIBLE.

DON'T FREEZE, CHILD. THEY'RE JUST MEASURING YOU UP FOR THE PRINTERS.
You have working printers? I haven't seen any since before the siege began.

You're not from the city.

I'm the wizard, that's why I can make magic.

Tell your mother that you met someone from the city who fed you and gave you a change of clothes.

How come your place is like the war never happened?

One week after the death of Valentine's father.

Vale, there's not enough food for us.

If you...

If you dig in the tegues, we'll get 150 grams of bread a day.

Trover?

I'll dig.
Eight months after her father died.

Mia didn't come home from the fighting for three weeks.

I prayed she wasn't dead.

Oh, Mia...

Nine months after her father died.

Winter settled in that week and the cold was our constant companion. Bread rations were cut again to two grams and they had hard stone pebbles in it. Everyone knew they were there to increase the weight.

Ehnnn!

Hey! Give that back!

That's my family's ration! You bastard! Give it back!

Please, give it back.

Zombism was cured after the last revolution. When the city couldn't get the trademarked drugs we needed to wipe it out, we set the printers to make our own.

That was when I saw the first zombie. It was unmistakable. This one had been a soldier for the city before its death and awful resurrection.
Soon, the city was using the printers to make everything we needed.

It didn't matter to us if we didn't buy it from the copyright owners. We were doing what we needed to do to survive.

*AAARRRRAAAAHHHH!!*

*RAAAAAHHHHH! BAD! BAD! BAD! FIGHT! FIGHT! KILL! KILL! KILL! KILL! HUNGRY! NO! *

*AAHHHHHHH!*
What the hell are you doing?

Please, after they give him the cure, they can fix his bones.

I had to hit him or he would have killed me.

BAM BAM

Good... Better to die quickly than end like this.

I knew his brother.

There is no cure, not for this strain of zombie.

Once you get it, you die it takes a week.

Have you been bitten?

No.
That night the fever set in

...NO!

In the struggle to fight off the zombie, I had been bitten. The soldier said there was no cure.

Less than a week to live who would take care of Trover while Mata was gone fighting the War?

There was only one person in the entire city who could help.

Please please answer.

Girl, you'd better have a good reason for waking up the whole fucking street at three in the morning.

...I need to see.

I need to see the wizard.
You gave me clothes. My mother is a soldier.

I need help for my family. I came to you because you helped me before.

I see... you assumed because I'd been generous before that I'd be generous again? You repay my favor with a request for another one?

Poor thing. She's a walking skeleton. Here, drink this.

Oh, the soldier's daughter, I remember you now.

I... can find a way to repay you.

Don't you toy with this girl. Can't you see how desperate she is? And you aren't a fool. I can tell. So don't act a fool.
All right. I'm a wizard. Right, a magician of sorts, and all magicians have assistants. I want you to be my assistant, take these and plant them in no fewer than three-hundred places at the front where fighting is likely to occur.

If I'm caught?

You'll be shot. Your family will be shot. All of us here will be shot.

Don't get caught.

Two days after Heng was bitten by the zombie, the fever had become my constant companion. It made me walk like an old woman and I had trouble focusing my eyes.

I recognize the kids in the trench. They were my friends one time. What seemed like years ago when I was a kid and not an incurable walking corpse.

One, two, three...
THE DAMNED AMERICAN TRENCH-BUSTER MISSILES CLAIMED MORE LIVES. OH, DADDY... I MISS YOU.
THIRTY FEET FURTHER DOWN THE TRENCH WAS AN ENEMY SOLDIER. I'D NEVER ACTUALLY SEEN A LIVE ENEMY ONLY THE DEATHS AND CARNAGE THEY CAUSED.

I'VE NEVER KISSED A BOY BEFORE, BUT I'D BE DEAD IN A FEW DAYS FROM THE BOWWOWHIM ANYWAY. AND IT MIGHT HELP ME GET THROUGH TO WAR. I DIDN'T WANT TO END UP DEAD IN A TRENCH LIKE POPPA.

HE KISSED ME BACK FOR A MOMENT BEFORE PULLING AWAY. THE LOOK ON HIS FACE CHANGED. SOFTENED. HE ALMOST LOOKED LIKE HE WOULD CRY.

GOODBYE, WITHYULL.

I'LL NEVER FORGET YOU.
The spy eyes were all planted. I ran as fast as I could out of the trenches and through the city. All I had to do was reach the Wizard to confirm that he would take care of Mata and Troyer when I was gone. Dead and shambling among the zombies.

But the fever had come back worse than ever, and my arms and legs wouldn't work right. The zombieism was killing me faster than the Soldier had said.

Two days after keeping with the Wizard...

You'll live... probably.

It would have been a certainty if you'd fucking told me you had zombieism! You little idiot.

You agreed to take care of my family.

I think that curing your zombieism is repayment enough, so I've unilaterally renegotiated the terms of our deal.

There are lots of things we have access to here that you can't get in the city. What have you had? Would have killed you if I hadn't eloped?

You sure me?

I won't betray my city to its enemies ever again.

I was a traitor once. But I had a fever and I was dying.
YOU ARE A TRAITOR EVERY DAY AND WHAT IS YOUR EXCUSE?

A TRAITOR? WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

THE SPY-EYES I PLANTED FOR YOU ARE FOR OUR ENEMIES TO SPY ON US. HOW MANY OF THE CITY PEOPLE DIED BECAUSE YOU SOLD THEM OUT?

WE'RE NOT TRAITORS, WE'RE DOCUMENTARIES. WE SHOOT THE WAR AND WE SEND IT TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD SO THEY CAN SEE THE TRAGEDY THEY ARE WRECKING HERE.

SHE OZERBEE KNOW THE REAL SITUATION. NOT THE THING YOU TELL YOURSELF WHEN YOU CAN'T SLEEP.

IT'S RIVETING ENTERTAINMENT!

IT'S ENTERTAINMENT!

THEY'RE KILLING US, THEY'RE GASSING US, THEY'RE BOMBING US AND YOU'RE TELLING IT BACK TO THEM AS ENTERTAINMENT!

SHUNK

AAARGH!

YOU'RE CURED. TAKE THESE CLOTHES AND FOOD AND DON'T COME BACK.

I'M NOT FROM HERE, BUT EVEN I KNOW HOW WRONG THIS IS. THERE'S NO EXCUSE FOR HIM. JUST GO.

SIX MONTHS AFTER BEING CURED BY THE WIZARD

THE CITY TOOK ME OFF DITCH-DIGGING DUTY AND PUT ME ON CORPSE DUTY. PEOPLE WERE DYING LIKE FLIES AND THE ZOMBIES FEED ON THEM. AND UNTIL THE MEAT WAS DEPOTED OFF, THE ZOMBIES WOULD MULTIPLY LIKE RATS.

WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM?

EVER SEE BLACK-MARKET MEAT? THE ASS IS THE LAST PART TO GO. WHEN THE SCARES URGING CARRIES UP THE CADavers AND SELL IT FOR FOOD.
TWO YEARS AFTER THE PLAGUE BEGAN.

ONE MORNING I AWOKE DEAF.

MAT? I CAME/TIMED EVERYTHING BUT NO DOCTORS COULD HEAL HER.

I CAN'T HEAR. MATA?

HE WAS RIGHT. EACH DAY I WAS EXPOSED TO MORE OF THE HORRORS OF WAR AND IT GOT HARDER TO HANDLE. EASIER TO BE DEAD.

TO THE THINGS WE HAD TO DO TO SURVIVE.

ONLY ONE MAN IN THE ENTIRE CITY STILL HAD WORKING PRINTERS. THAT COULD HELP US. THE TRAITOROUS WIZARD.

WIZARD! I AM DEAF! I NEED YOUR HELP.

YOUR CAMERAS WORK. YOUR PRINTERS WORK. YOU'RE NOT LOSING THE WAR. THE WAY WE DO.

FIX MY HEARING, NOW.

THE HARDENED LOGIC IN THE HEARING AID IS FIXED. THAT SHOULD DO IT.

WHY DON'T YOU HELP US? GIVE US THE LOGIC SO WE CAN FIGHT BACK?

IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE. I CAN'T. I JUST CAN'T.

LATER.

MATA? NO.

TROYER? MATA? NO.
OH, MATA... I WILL MAKE THIS RIGHT.

COME, TROVER. WE CAN WIN THE WAR.

I KNOW OF A TRAITOR...

...I CAN BRING HIM TO YOU. HE HAS WORKING PRINTERS.

I WILL COME WITH YOU. YOUR MOTHER WAS A HERO, VALENTINE.

YOU ARE SURE THIS IS THE PLACE, NO?

YES.

COME! COMrade ANA! COMRADE EORG!

THE GIRL TELLS ME YOU HAVE CONTRABAND. IT IS MY DUTY TO COME IN AND SEARCH YOUR PREMISES FOR IT.

HELLO VALENTINE, THE FOOD AND CLOTHES YOU STOLE FROM US WERE NOT CONTRABAND. IT WAS OUR SAVINGS. GO AHEAD AND SEARCH. YOU WILL FIND NOTHING. I ASSURE YOU.
He has hardened logic printers on the other side of that wall. It could be a false wall.

Your mother would be ashamed of you. There is nothing here. Let's leave these people in peace.

No... my mother died for this city.

I want to see the people who fought the Infowar. They will believe me about the wizard and his technology. If you don't take me, I'll kill you.

I gave some of the technology to me. He fixed my hearing aid with hardened logic. It's in my head.

You're not lying? Hardened logic that has not been compromised by the enemy's attack?

She was deaf this morning. My sister isn't lying.

Stupid girl. Even if the wizard had this contraband technology, it would have been gone before we could retrieve it.
Within a few hours the city people had downloaded the hardened mesh from my hearing aid and set to work counteracting the enemy's damage to our technology.

...it was her hearing aids that gave it away, wasn't it?

Yes, Wizard. The hardened mesh is being used to confound the enemies of the siege as we speak.

Within a few hours the city people had downloaded the hardened mesh from my hearing aid and set to work counteracting the enemy's damage to our technology.

Ten years after the siege

Soon the printers came back online and medicine, food, and supplies were made and delivered. Repaired buildings appeared and marvelous air cars were in the sky again.

Valentine? I can't believe it's you.

Withnail?

We walked and talked and finally kissed again before going to the theater to watch one of the old movies.

In a ceremony in the main square I received the official medal from the old comrade hero himself and became a hero of the city like Mata.
Doctorow on: "After the Siege"

Editor Tom Waltz: Cory, you’ve said in past interviews that the story “After the Siege” holds an especially personal meaning to you. For those who don’t know, could you please explain why that is?

Cory Doctorow: This story is based loosely on the Siege of Leningrad, one of the most brutal moments in WWII—Leningrad, a city of millions was laid siege to by Hitler’s army for 900 days, and for most of that time, they were not re-provisioned. Residents were all inducted into civil defense tasks grueling and grisly —never-ending labor. By the second winter, they’d burned every stick of furniture and eaten every animal—including the rats. There was even cannibalism. Most of these extreme effects were Stalin’s fault, he considered Hitler his ally, so when the shelling started, he refused to allow anyone in Leningrad to defend themselves—generals were ordered to stay in their summer homes and not come back to join the army. No one—not even children—was allowed to evacuate.

My grandmother, Valentina Rachman, was twelve when the siege began. She lived in Leningrad with her two-year-old brother, my great-uncle Bora, who is now one of the curators at the brilliant Popov Communications Museum, a kind of Soviet Silicon Valley Computer Museum) and her parents. It was two years before she was evacuated, and she hauled corpses, dug trenches, and starved. When she was fourteen, they evacuated her to Siberia where she recuperated working on a horse farm, and then ended up in the Red Army where she met my grandfather. She got pregnant, so they stole papers and fled to Azerbaijan where my father was born.

Growing up, I never understood the Siege. My grandmother would tell us she’d experienced horrors in the war, and I’d kind of shrug, thinking of friends whose relatives had been through the concentration camps. I remember thinking, “You spent most of the war at home with your family...how bad could it have been?”

But in 2006, I visited St. Petersburg (the present name for Leningrad) with my parents, grandmother, brother and sister-in-law. I saw my varied and sprawling family there and walked the streets. It was high summer—not quite the White Nights (the period in June when the sun never sets and the locals stay out all night reveling), but still hot and sunny, with long bloody sunsets that started at 9 PM and lingered for an hour or more.

My grandmother walked us through the ruins of her childhood and pointed to buildings saying things like, “I was too weak to carry the body from that building so we threw him out the window and scraped him up afterwards.” She told us about cannibalism and was about noble deeds and fool ones and I was never the same. A month later, I started this story while on a flight from London to Singapore. I wrote 6,000 words in the sky and the rest over the next week or two on further long haul flights. I’d settle into my seat and three thousand words would just happen. And I’d look out the window and we’d be over some ocean again.

I give this story’s initial public rights to Esch, a Russian-language science fiction magazine. They translated it for me and I gave a copy to my grandmother.

TW: Politically speaking, Russia appears to be at an interesting crossroad these days with President Putin working to maintain control of the country even after the presidency expires. Do you see any correlation between the real-world instability of that country with the events that take place in “After the Siege”?

CD: Well, sort of. Russia is a complete fucking disaster of course, and Putin’s a creepy mugging ex-KGB apparatchik whose machine is in large part responsible for turning Russia into a nation that is losing ten percent of its population every year due to early mortality. But Russia isn’t the best parallel to the mythical nation of “After the Siege,” a better parallel would be any of the many former Soviet republics—or even Iraq—where all the local infrastructure has been sold at fire-sale rates to foreign companies to pay off a debt that their former dictators owed to Western governments.

It’s the almost of slimy tricks—a protection racket played against an entire nation. You get a crummy dictatorship whose local strongman borrows gigantic amounts from Western banks while starving and torturing his people. Then, after the people get rid of him (or
invaders topple them), his able are passed on to the people he's been torturing and killing and oppressing (often with guns bought with Western loans)

These people are expected to pay the construction costs for the torture chambers they've been suffering in and to do so, they have to sell off their waterworks, power, roads, medical system—you name it. These are then run like corrupt fast-food outlets, draining least value for most money, so the cost of everything from bread to power goes through the roof while a few Fortune 100s get even richer (think of Chile for a startling example of this)

This is the kind of government that I pictured the Revolutionaries of Momma and Poppa generation topping Cowards and profiteers who'd rather make nice with the cruel artificial life forms we call corporations than give their own people bread and medicine.

TW: There is a sequence in "After the Siege" where the main character Valentine, plants electronic spy eyes in the trenches along the front lines at the behest of the Wizard who says he uses them to document the atrocities there, though later he is accused of using the devices to exploit the violence for profit and entertainment. Is it fair to assume you are comparing these fictional devices to real-life embedded reporters who were attached to military units during the Iraq invasion?

CD: Well, sure—naturally the media's total abdication of its role in Iraq to serve as the fourth estate and report objectively and fairly on what actually happens and happened there is the disgrace of this young century. They say piracy will kill television—if it destroys these bastards and the cynical profiteers who turned the press into a gutter propagandist machine than so much the better. Steal some TV, kids—you're protecting democracy!

TW: Many people in your story suffer from a disease you term as "Zombism." Is this comparable to, say, the horrendously extreme amount of AIDS cases in Africa, a continent also rife with warlords?

CD: Yeah, and all the other diseases—like malnourishment that kills one person every second—that our pharma companies can't even be bothered to do research on because the only thing that's profitable is the reproduction of chemical compounds. They argue that they need these patents because otherwise no one would do the core research they do and we'd all be dead of disease without them.

But what do they spend their regulatory windfall on? Figuring out how to rebrand heartburn pills that are going public domain so that they can be re-patented, cheating the system and the world out of twenty more years of low-cost access to their magic potions, marketing budgets that beggar the imagination, lobbyistsangling for stricter rules.

Meanwhile people are actually dying, in great numbers, of diseases treatable by drugs that Roche and Pfizer and the rest of the drug-mafia won't sell them at an accessible price, and won't let them make themselves.

TW: Well, this is the last issue in this first volume of IDW's Cory Doctorow's Futuristic Tales of the Here and Now. How do you feel about this adventure in the world of comic books?

CD: This has been a brilliant ride! I've always been a funnybook reader but I never dreamed I'd be involved in their creation. Now that I've done so, I'm keen to do some more. I just wrote my first script, a little eight-page story for Slave Labor's final issue of The Haunted Mansion comic, and it was a blast. Now I'm thinking about other ways I can get involved in the industry.
"Cory Doctorow's Futuristic Tales of the Here and Now from IDW manages to capture the geek in all of us in a primal form, and put it on the page."
— geekofdoom.com

"Cory Doctorow is known as a wild writer of fantastic ideas, a true blue maven of the current field of science fiction."
— brokenfrontier.com

"He [Doctorow] has a knack for identifying those seminal trends of our current landscape that will in all likelihood determine the shape of our future(s)."
— Paul Di Filippo, Sci-Fi Weekly

CORY DOCTOROW’S FUTURISTIC TALES
OF THE HERE AND NOW

Writer and BoingBoing.net co-editor Cory Doctorow has won acclaim for his science fiction writing as well as his Creative Commons presentation of his material. Now, IDW Publishing is proud to present six standalone stories adapted from Doctorow's work, each featuring pin-ups by some of comics' top talents including Sam Kieth, Scott Morse, Paul Pope, Ben Templesmith, Ashley Wood, and more. Stories collected include: The Locus Award-winning "When Sysadmins Ruled the Earth," "And a Game," a story selected for inclusion in the Michael Chabon edited 2005 Best American Short Stories, "Crashhound," a story selected for Year's Best Science Fiction XVI, "Nimby and the D-Hoppers," selected for Year's Best Science Fiction IX, The Hugo-nominated and Locus Award-winning "I Robot," and "After the Siege."

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