

## Walls

" Capitalism will pound down the walls  
that divide nations." -- Karl Marx

I don't know why you find so many different things inside the walls of old buildings, but you do. At least I did. I cut through a lot of walls as an electrician, replacing old, inefficient wiring with lectibar. There's hardly any of that old wiring left now, but there was enough to keep me busy until I reached retirement age a few months ago.

So now I'm too old to work. I'm home, living on my retirement assets, and I don't have to do anything anymore. Except I do, of course, because you can't just do nothing. I take walks. I play a little aeroball once a week with a couple of the guys. I watch nature shows on the infomat. I nap.

Sometimes, though, I work on my collection. You see, I sort of kept a lot of the stuff I found in the walls over the years. I know I wasn't supposed to, and that I could have been reported for

deviance, but really, it was just curiosity.

Well, maybe curiosity is deviant. The young people these days don't seem to have any. Curiosity is almost as rare as electric wiring.

If you're curious enough to read this, though, you're probably wondering what I collected from the walls, and how I "work" on it. You see, most of the stuff I found got inside those walls when the houses were first built, so it's like collecting little chunks of the past. I know it seems like a waste of time to try and understand the past by studying old junk, especially since you can access everything you need to know about history on your infomat, but I still think it's interesting. There are a lot of little things the infomat doesn't mention, but which somehow got into the walls.

I didn't keep the bones, of course. There were loads of them, mostly from small animals, but in the walls of one house I found the bones of a human infant. I don't know how it died, or why it was placed in the wall, but I think some major deviance was involved. People were different in the old days, and did some things that are hard to believe.

Violence was everywhere. I found a little drinking glass that must have been used by a child, decorated with a drawing of a dog chasing a long legged chicken. The dog is running on two legs, like a person, and trying to smash the chicken with a giant hammer. That's the kind of little detail you won't get from the infomat's history protocol.

I also found things the infomat illustrates, but which seem more real when you hold them in your hand. One time I found a metal box stuffed full of dollars, the things people traded for products before we had asset chip implants. The dollars are decorated with pictures of men's faces, not one of them smiling.

But what really thrilled me were the words, United States of America. Imagine, relics from the days when they still had nation-states, and I could hold them in my hands. Who put them in the wall? Why? Those are the kinds of questions I like to ask myself, even if I never know the answers.

I found a lot of printed things in the walls, and those are my favorites. Somewhere I learned to read and write, I guess when I was a child, but I can't remember now. Everything that happened to me before I was around eleven is a blank. Years ago, the doctors told me I probably blocked out the accident that killed my parents, and wound up blocking everything that went before it too. I was in the hospital for almost a year, and the eight years after that aren't worth remembering -- working off my medical bills at the Lectibar plant. Maybe the reason I'm curious about the past is because I don't have one of my own.

I didn't forget how to read, though, or how to write words on paper. I know a few other people who read and write a little, all older than I am. Nobody does it anymore, so there's nothing left to read. Except inside the walls.

It's not easy to understand the old written words. It's not that the language changed that much, because it didn't, but somehow the ideas changed. The same words, or the same sentences, seem to mean different things now than they did back then. It's hard to explain. Each sentence seems to make sense by itself, but when you put them all together, it's just weird. As I said, people were very different back then.

When I was still working, I didn't have much time or energy to struggle through the old printed words. Mostly, I just looked at the pictures. Some of them are a lot like pictures you access on the infomat. People smiling at you. Naked men and women copulating. Cute little animals in baskets, and babies with

pudding on their faces.

Then there are the pictures that are different. Long lines of people pushing carts or carrying small children past ruined buildings. People dead or disfigured from violence or illness. Colorful drawings of people in tight clothes, fighting each other, with long sentences coming out of their mouths. Now that I'm retired, I have time to read a little every day. A lot of it is sad, and hard to think about, but I read it just the same.

It takes a long time to write this, and I get cramps in my arm, but these are things I won't record on the infomat. Some people record for hours and hours, and nobody ever accesses their uploads because they're nobody special. I'm nobody special, but I can't take the chance of somebody actually reading this and reporting me to the psych division at AnoDyne.

I don't feel like a deviant, but I suppose I am one. Nobody in his right mind would spend his time reading the things I've read in the past few weeks, and I spend more time reading every day. I hardly turn on the infomat at all.

I didn't know where to begin, so I picked out three of the little books called magazines. Right now, it's hard for me to tell what was truth and what was fiction and what was a little of each. Maybe, to get the job done, I have to learn to think the way they did -- and that means I should stop now. If I start thinking like they did, my deviance quotient will go through the roof. The sensible thing would be to throw away my whole crazy collection and start acting normal again.

But I can't.

I would very much like to know what happened to Africa. According to one of my magazines, it was a very big place, a

continent. A continent can't just disappear, can it? It seems that awful things happened to the Africans all the time, but if they had a giant catastrophe like getting hit by a comet or something, it ought to be on the infomat. I completed the entire history protocol, some parts more than once, and I never heard of Africa before I read about it this morning.

Naturally, the first thing I thought of was to ask the infomat, but when I turned it on there was a message waiting for me. The infomat noted that I hadn't used it in eighteen days, and asked if I wanted any special programs. It looked like a machine generated message, but I still felt afraid. Any message like that means your deviance quotient is rising.

I didn't ask for programs about Africa. I asked for a couple of nature shows I'd missed because I was reading, and then I sat and watched them. Tonight I'll meet the guys and play aeroball. If I don't spend more time doing things I'm supposed to enjoy, I could find myself in real trouble.

Africa will have to wait.

I don't get much rest. I read most of the night, and then ugly dreams interrupt my few hours of sleep. I always mean to read just for an hour or two, but it's hard to stop once I've started. I hope the infomat can't tell whether or not I'm awake when it's turned on, because I've been dozing off pretty often. Yesterday, though, I stayed awake. I accessed the history protocol again, and reviewed the changeover from nation-states to market synergy. First there were ages of war and conflict among nation-states. Then the age of international corporate combination fostered the growth of cooperation and multinational integration. People around the world rejected their governments and turned instead to the institutions that satisfied their real

needs and wants -- the cartels.

Nation-states struggled to survive, but their time was over. Infomat technology provided the truth in a way that the average person could understand. People stopped making payments called taxes to their governments, and their added wealth stimulated a golden age of innovation and productivity by the cartels.

As the destructive influence of government disappeared, people's naturally cooperative and nonviolent natures emerged. The wars that went on through the entire history of nation-states finally ended. The criminals, freeloaders, and others who were too deviant to be saved were expelled from their communities. Freed from the burden of government interference, business showered benefits on the newly liberated peoples of the world. Every household received an infomat, free of charge. Every child was inoculated against disease. Every worker was paid the real value of his or her work, and those who lived in poverty had nobody to blame but themselves.

The presentation ended with the world transformed. The evils of government were eliminated, violence and hatred disappeared, and everyone lived in peace and harmony.

I must have accessed the program a dozen times before, but suddenly, yesterday, it felt wrong to me. Can the infomat lie? I decided fatigue was clouding my judgment. The only other possible explanation is that I've become so deviant I've lost touch with reality.

I couldn't read last night. I couldn't think. All I could do was fall into bed and sleep.

Now it's morning. I'm going for a walk in the park. Maybe I'll take along some bread and feed the ducks. I'll enjoy the fresh air. And I'll decide what to do next.

I'm back, with a list of questions and no answers. Is it possible that everyone in the world, all at once, stopped giving their wealth to their governments? When the deviants were expelled, where did they go, and where are they sent today, for that matter? Africa?

Could it be that the only thing the cartels did to eliminate national governments was to set an example of cooperation? What really happened during the changeover? If human nature is naturally cooperative and nonviolent, how could human beings create governments that made them competitive and violent?

It doesn't make sense, and the infomat won't explain it to me. What I really ought to do is put it all out of my mind. I should get rid of my collection, and just live out the rest of my life. Even if I figure out the truth, what good will it do me?

I don't want to think about it anymore. It's time to access some nature shows or a comedy, and then get a good night's sleep. Tomorrow I'll pack up my collection in the trunk and shove it back in the closet. I don't have to be a deviant. I want to be normal again.

I'm still reading. I access a comedy or some music on the infomat, and I just read right there in front of it. I think it can sense whether or not I'm in the room, but I don't think it can tell what I'm doing. Maybe it can. I'm taking my chances. At least I have time to sleep.

I dream a lot lately. Dreaming is supposed to be a symptom of psychological deviance, so I'm not surprised. There's one image that comes back over and over -- a woman with an anguished look on her face, shouting something I can't quite understand. I struggle to reach her, but something holds me back. Then I wake up, drenched in sweat. I suppose it means something, but I'm not

going to ask the infomat.

I thought I had a lot of printed things, but now I see they're not nearly enough. There were so many years before the changeover to market synergy, and so much of my collection doesn't have anything to do with anything I'm trying to find out about. I separated out the magazines with words coming from the mouths of drawings, because they're pure fiction. They're good for insights into how people thought and imagined in the old days, but that's all.

I also separated out the magazines that specialize in pictures of naked women, because the writings in those make practically no sense. It's almost as if the magazine makers thought nobody ever would read them. And then there are the magazines that tell women how to dress and have better sex. And copulation picture magazines, which have almost no words at all.

Out of what's left, I'm hoping to find some clues to what really happened when nation-states disappeared. I need to find out, even though it all happened long before I was born. I don't know why, but I feel like I have to know.

I found something interesting, but I don't really understand it yet. It's a story about something called privatization, which was United States of America handing things over to something called the private sector. I'm not sure, but I think the private sector is what they called the cartels in those days. If I had a better idea of what nation-states did, besides fighting each other, I might have a better idea of what United States of America was giving away.

There was a lot of disagreement, especially over something called "criminal justice." I haven't figured out exactly what they meant by "justice," but it was causing a lot of conflict.



One group kept saying that privatizing police powers was too dangerous. They also went on about something called the "Constitution," but I didn't get that at all.

The other group wanted private companies to have a try at it, because government never was very good at dealing with crime. Those people also said it would cost fewer dollars, and that private companies always did things better. The funny thing is that the leaders of the privatization group were all members of the government. Instead of governments trying to keep their powers, it seems they were trying to give them away. I can't find anything in my collection to tell me how it ended, but I'm pretty sure it's important.

The dreams are getting worse, though, darkness penetrated by stabbing white lights and the taste of blood in my mouth. There are whistles and screams and angry men, all dressed in white, with metal clubs in their hands. Smoke burns my eyes, and it's hard to breathe.

The woman is there, still shouting the words I can't hear as something drags her away from me. I want to follow her, but I'm in the crushing grasp of something immensely strong. The ground drops out from under my feet, and I wake up.

There's a connection between my reading and my dreams, of course. Only I don't know what it is, and there's nobody I can go to for help. When your early years were like mine, you're not much good at relationships.

Today I read something called Class Warrior. It's like a magazine, but it's printed on yellowed, crumbly paper, and it's just folded together instead of fastened with glue or wire. I remember when I found it I almost left it behind because it was in such poor condition. I'm glad now that I took it.

Which is not to say I particularly understand it. Whoever wrote it was angry and upset, and used a lot of words that aren't used anymore. For example, the word "monolithic." I know enough about words to know it ought to mean "like one rock," but it was difficult to visualize what "the monolithic major media" meant. I could tell that "major media" meant the ways people got information and entertainment before infomat service, but it was hard to see how major media could be like one rock.

What I finally figured out is that the major media were monolithic because they all agreed with each other, and not with Class Warrior. That meant that people only got to see what the rich and powerful wanted them to see, never anything different. The writers called it "mind control."

The new infomat technology, they said, would only make things worse. The free infomat terminals being given away offered nothing but "reactionary rhetoric and insipid bourgeois pap," designed to "delude and manipulate the masses." I didn't even try to figure out what that meant.

Just the same, I learned one important fact. The cartels were giving away infomat terminals before the fall of the nation-states. Even if Class Warrior lied when it claimed that United States of America and most other countries really were run by the cartels, it couldn't lie about free infomat terminals. Either they were free or they weren't, and people would know the truth about that.

I woke up this morning and remembered to go shopping. Except for some groceries and household supplies, I hadn't used my asset chip in weeks. I hope it wasn't too late. Nothing is as deviant as not buying things, because it shows you've given up the search for happiness. The truth is that I gave up on happiness years

ago, but I still don't want whatever they do to deviants done to me. If I'm investigated, and they find my collection, I'm done for.

A major purchase was called for, big enough so it would seem I'd been accumulating assets to have it. I accessed the infomat, and tried to decide what to buy myself. Since I didn't especially want anything, it wasn't easy.

On impulse, I booked a seven-day/six-night trip to New York City. It certainly is expensive enough. Air and ground transport, a first class hotel, an entry visa to a drug club patronized by the rich and famous, a fishing trip on Lake Harlem, a tour of the abandoned subway tunnels, and a lot more. I hesitated for a second before I keyed the infomat to access my asset chip, a fragment of dream imagery flickering behind my eyes. Then I slapped down my hand and completed the purchase.

Last night I remembered my name. It's almost unbelievable. The only name I've had for the past fifty years was the one they gave me in the hospital, after my parents were killed. But last night I remembered the name I had as a child.

It was the same dream, with smoke and darkness and men dressed in white. My feet are kicking in the air. I hear the woman calling me, calling "James!" My name was James once, I'm sure of it. I still can't understand the rest of what she says.

I made another discovery last night, and maybe that has something to do with the dream. It was in a magazine I'd read already, but it was labeled "advertisement," so I skipped it the first time through. This time I read it because of the title, "Healthy Children for a Better World." It was an open letter from Anodyne, the health services cartel, congratulating itself on what a good job it was doing managing the public health.

All but a few thousand American children, it said, were inoculated with multipurpose serum, plus more than ninety percent of children in other parts of the world. Now the remaining unprotected children had to be inoculated so that resistant strains of disease would not evolve. The letter says everybody should report "recalcitrant" parents, to make sure their children would be inoculated too.

I lingered over the word "recalcitrant." It's such an odd word, one I never encountered before. I suppose it's another way of saying "deviant." More important, the article was evidence that not just the free infomat program, but the inoculation program as well began while nation-states still ruled the world. I can't imagine why the infomat puts it the other way around.

Frustration. The problem with my collection is that it's too random, as if everything I found inside the old walls got there by accident. Well, I suppose most of it did get there by accident, dropped or discarded by builders and contractors, which probably means it's not random. It's worse than random. How many construction workers brought along magazines about government or business to read on their lunch breaks?

Over the past two weeks, I finished reading everything in my collection that features real events. I read a lot faster now, and I understand more of what I read because I've seen a lot of the unfamiliar words and ideas in different contexts. I found information about several wars, some medical discoveries, a lot of criminal activity, an assortment of bizarre sporting events, and a lot more. I found two more references to privatization, one a nostalgic farewell to the last public school in a nation-state called Canada, and the other about the sale of an orbiting space platform by a nation-state called China. There was nothing else

even remotely related to the changeover to market synergy.

Now I've gone back to the magazines with the pictures of naked women, and I'm struggling through the text. There are some stories that probably are supposed to be funny, interviews with actors, and an occasional essay on why naked women are necessary for "freedom of speech." Maybe I'll find something in the actor interviews. It seems the opinions of actors were greatly respected in the old days, and they were asked questions about practically everything.

I almost forgot my trip to New York City, but the airline left a confirmation request on my infomat. I bought some traveling clothes and a suitcase, and now here I am. Believe it or not, I'm excited. The first thing I noticed as the van brought me in from the airport was that the signs still have text on them here. The driver told me that almost half of all New Yorkers still read and write, many because they work for the information cartel, and others because "they think they're intellectuals." That has to mean that there are still things to read here, but I didn't want to ask the driver.

Then, when I checked into my room, I found a pen and paper in one of the drawers, and a printed list of the food items that could be delivered to my room. I don't feel nearly as anxious now about having this notebook along, but I still keep it hidden. I wouldn't want anybody to read it.

I don't have any tours scheduled for tonight, so I'll just go exploring for a while, and get a taste of the city. That's breaking the rules, of course -- tourists are supposed to stay with their guides, and not wander off on their own. Supposedly, that's because there are lots more hidden deviants here than out in the townships. Well, tonight there'll be one more.

The woman in my dream says, "James, don't forget." The dream was very intense last night, I think because I'm here in New York, where everything seems more intense. My walk through the night streets of Manhattan felt like an adventure, although nothing adventurous happened. I went up Third Avenue to 72nd Street, across to Second, then back down to 49th. There were plenty of other people in the streets, some going someplace, others just standing around. A lot of them looked poor, something you never notice out in the townships.

I looked into the wide front windows of little marts that sell tiny selections of merchandise, something else you never see in the townships. Some sold things you can't find at the panamart, probably because nobody sane would want them. There was a place that sold very old furniture for very high prices, for example, and another that sold dried herbs and tea from big bins, unwrapped and unsterilized. One little mart sold the most bizarre women's clothing you can imagine. I can't think of anyplace a woman could wear those things, but there they were for sale.

When I got back here to the room, I didn't think I could sleep. I did, though, and I had the dream. It means something, of course, something from the part of my life I can't remember. Don't forget, she said, but I forgot everything. I forgot it all.

This morning I had a ride around Manhattan island in a power boat, along with a dozen other visitors and a guide. The northern end is all wooded, peaceful and beautiful. The south end is a strange, hybrid landscape. We could see trees growing from the roofs of buildings, vines dangling from broken windows, and streets choked with all sorts of vegetation. Only the middle of the island, which used to be called midtown, still looks like the pictures in my old magazines.

Now I'm just waiting to go to lunch in the hotel dining room. After that, I'll be picked up by another guide for a shopping trip. I'm curious to go inside some of those little marts I saw last night, but I can't imagine that I'll buy anything. What could they have that I might want?

I can't believe it. I just bought eleven books -- and they're real books, not magazines. They're here in front of me on this table, still wrapped with brown paper and string. They were expensive, and buying them probably will kick my deviance rating way up, but I had to have them.

My five companions on the shopping trip were all women, including the guide, and I suppose that had a lot to do with the selection of little marts we visited. Three out of five sold that weird women's clothing, one sold little pottery statuettes, and the last one sold an assortment of very old items the proprietor called antiques.

To my surprise, the tourist women bought things in every store. They all were very wealthy, it seems, and they didn't mind using their asset chips at all. I learned that the odd looking women's clothing is what very wealthy women wear to important social gatherings. Also, their homes are supposed to display examples of that frail, uncomfortable furniture made long ago. Naturally, I never had much to do with the wealthy before, so I was unaware of their customs. One of the women told me that she and her friends come to New York just to shop, and it's something they do three or four times a year.

I bought the books in the antique mart, along with the little bookshelf that held them. The martkeeper wouldn't sell just the books, so I had to buy the shelf too. Maybe I can resell it before I leave, and get some assets credited back to my chip.

The books are all fiction, with nothing about the history of the changeover, but I still had to have them. I love the way they feel in my hands. I love the way the sheets of thin, delicate paper stack together to make such hard, heavy, substantial objects. I love the smell of them, and the sound the pages make when I turn them.

My companions complimented me on my taste. They admired the little bird carvings on the end panels of the shelf, and observed that the books, thick and handsomely bound, would surely enhance the "ambience" of my "study." I smiled, and thanked them.

Tonight's the drug club visit, and I wish I could skip it so I could stay here with my books. I won't though, because it would look funny, and because I need something to steady my nerves and help me sleep. If I eat a few silkies, I won't have to dream tonight.

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." That's how one of my new books begins, and the words give me a funny feeling. For one thing, I feel like I've heard them before, although I don't know where. Also, I keep thinking they have some meaning I should understand, something personal.

The drug club turned out to be just a fancy AnoDyne Happyshack, and the few actual New Yorkers who were there were exactly like the people who spend their time at Happyshacks out in the townships. The only thing new to me was the woman who sang and played a real acoustic piano. She encouraged some customers, all tourists, to sing along with her on some popular songs.

I didn't join in. I bought my silkies and a glass of black beer, then sat by myself at a small table until the guide told me it was time to leave. Back here at the hotel, I opened A Tale of Two Cities and read late into the night. None of the writing in



any of my magazines can compare with the care and precision of the writing in this book, which I expect I'll read over and over again. If my other books are anything like this one, I bought a treasure at that little mart. I think I'll keep the bookshelf after all.

Nothing was scheduled for me this morning except a fancy brunch in the hotel dining room, so I had more time to read. Now I have to get ready for my tour of the old subway tunnels.

I think I'm about to do something stupid.

It's evening now. The group that met for the subway tour this afternoon was large, probably around thirty people. It must have been every tourist in town, not including those rich women who came just for the shopping. Instead of being polite and attentive, our guide was behaving like a product demonstrator at the panamart, speaking in a loud voice and waving his arms around. Nobody noticed when I fell behind the group.

I didn't fall behind on purpose. I think the old subway is fascinating, and I honestly wanted to hear what the guide was shouting at us, but I kept being distracted by all the writing. There were lots of advertisements on the walls, many for products that don't exist anymore. There also were signs telling you what to do in case of a chemical or biological attack, and it was one of those I was reading when my group turned a corner and left me on my own. I still heard the guide's voice, though, so I wasn't concerned.

I finished reading the sign and was hurrying to catch up with the group when I noticed the paper pasted to one of the steel beams that held up the ceiling. The printing was almost faded away, but when I saw the words at the top, I had to stop and read it. It said "INNOCULATION MEANS SUBJUGATION!" in large capital

letters. Under that, in even larger letters, it said "RESIST!"

A lot of the smaller text was illegible, and part of the paper was scraped away, but I was able to figure out the general message. It was telling parents not to have their children inoculated because the multi-purpose serum would turn them into slaves. There was something about the cartels and a secret plan, but those parts were too faint to read all the way through.

The word popped straight into my head: recalcitrants. There were people in the old days who were against the inoculation program, and who thought it was dangerous. They must have printed the paper and put it up in the subway station. Was there any truth to their claims, or was it all just the confused thinking of deviants? What else had they done, besides putting papers around? Now I was sure that the transition to market synergy must have involved some struggle, and that the story told by the infomat was untrue.

When I turned my attention away from the paper, my tour group was gone. I couldn't hear the guide bellowing information, so they had to be far away. I decided they must have left the underground station, and that the tour was over. I was alone in the abandoned subway, or so I thought.

The guide had taken us through a long passageway and two levels down, but I still felt I could manage to find my way up to the single unsealed entryway. I decided to do some exploration on my own before I left, and see if there was anything else useful. I continued along the platform next to the sunken area where the train tracks still could be seen. At the end of the platform, there was a narrow walkway leading into a tunnel that once connected this station to others, further downtown. It was pitch black in there, and I didn't see much reason to explore the darkness, so I turned around to retrace my steps.

And I saw the girl. She was about fifty feet down the platform, standing silently and watching me. I stopped walking, and returned her gaze, not sure what to do. She was dark-skinned and thin, only about fourteen or fifteen years old, and clearly was nobody in authority. Nevertheless, I was too frightened to move.

"Are you lost?" she asked, keeping her distance.

I forced myself to speak. "Not exactly. I'm pretty sure I can find my way out."

"Well, if you really want to find your way out, that's the exit," she said, gesturing toward the dark tunnel.

"It's not the way I came in," I replied.

"Do what you like," she answered. "I guess I mistook you for someone else."

I turned and looked back down the tunnel. All I could see was darkness. When I turned around again, the girl was gone. I made my way up the stairs and out of the station, then found my way back to the hotel. On the way, I stopped at a mart and bought a large flashlight

I'm supposed to be going to a theater tonight, to see a play. I don't know why some people like to sit in a theater and watch a play from just one angle and from far away when they could watch it on the infomat instead. Anyway, I won't be seeing this play. After the guide gets me to the theater, I'll just turn around and go out on my own.

It's funny that they don't bother to enforce the rule about staying with a guide at all times. They just assume you'll obey.

The south end of Manhattan is even stranger when you're there than when you see it from the river. The intermingling of the city and the wilderness is like a dream landscape. Some of the

buildings are partly collapsed and some are intact, but the vegetation is everywhere. Wild grapevines with immense leaves cover entire walls, and stands of sumac erupt from crumbled asphalt. Oaks and maples twist their trunks to get their leaves in the sun, and wildflowers blanket piles of rubble. It's disturbing in a way, but also beautiful.

I found the open subway entrance at 42nd street, and retraced my steps from the afternoon tour. When I reached the tunnel the girl said was the way "out," I stopped and just looked for ten or fifteen minutes. It made no sense to go off exploring an abandoned tunnel, but something was urging me to enter, something I couldn't understand but which still held me in its grip. The beam of my flashlight penetrated about fifty feet into the tunnel, then was lost in the darkness.

I heard a voice say, "James, don't forget." The darkness beckoned. I entered the tunnel and started walking. The track bed was mostly under water, but the raised walkway along the side was still passable. I came out at a station marked 34th Street, and looked for a stairwell leading up to the street, but all of them were blocked with huge piles of rubble. I went back to the tunnel.

Further on, the walkway had crumbled, and I had to go down to the trackbed and wade through the water to continue. I waded half a mile and came to a place where the ceiling had fallen in. It looked like I would have to turn back, but then I saw an opening off to my left. I shone my light in, and saw a muddy, man-sized tunnel with a bunch of cables hanging from the ceiling.

I stepped in, ducking to avoid the cables. Suddenly I felt the weight of all the brick and steel and concrete over my head. I would have backed right out if I hadn't seen the footprints. Others had gone through before me, and not long before. I kept

going, and soon found myself wading down the tracks again.

The 23rd Street station looked a lot like 34th Street, with stairwells full of rubble and mold growing on the tile walls. Just the same, I climbed up onto the platform to get out of the water. My feet were soaked, of course, and so were the legs of my trousers. There were cobwebs in my hair, and big black stains where my clothing had rubbed against the walls. I checked to make sure this notebook was still dry inside my shirt, and wondered what people would think when I got back to my hotel. I rested myself and my flashlight batteries for a little while before I went on.

14th Street was the end of the line, as far as I could tell. The roof at the south end of the station was collapsed, blocking off any tunnels that might have led further downtown. I looked up and saw clouds passing in front of the moon, but I didn't see a way out of the hole I was in, except for climbing up one or another pile of rubble. I shone my light around to see if I could find one that didn't look too dangerous.

My light picked out a well-worn path through the rubble, so I followed it. It led upward, and ended at a ladder which took me up to street level. There was enough moonlight to see my surroundings, and the first thing I saw was the wall. That's when I knew I was in the forbidden sector, the south end of Manhattan.

My first thought was to climb back down into the tunnel and return to the hotel, but I was too tired. Also, I wasn't sure what would happen if I walked into the hotel lobby in the predawn hours, dirty and wet. I decided to find a place to rest for a few hours.

All the buildings around the station were flattened, probably when the wall was built, but I could see some still standing a little way to the south. I picked my way through chunks of brick

and concrete to reach them. They weren't tall, like the buildings around my hotel, just two and three stories high. Most were covered top to bottom with climbing vines, but my flashlight picked out one door that wasn't blocked. I climbed a short set of steps, turned the doorknob, and pushed. It swung open easily. and I pointed my light inside.

Another flashlight shone back at me, and a voice said, "Who the hell is it at this hour?"

An old man with a big bush of white hair springing from his head was looking at me from across a large room. I'm not young, but he looked to have twenty-five years on me.

"Carlos?" he questioned, "that you?"

The old man put a match to the wick of an ancient oil lamp and lit an astonishingly beautiful room. The ceiling was high, and made of metal squares stamped with an intricate design. There was an immense leather sofa, two large armchairs, and a fireplace. There were rugs scattered on the floor, and an odd, hourglass shaped musical instrument on the mantelpiece. And there were books, hundreds of books, on shelves, tables, and even stacked on the floor. The eleven books I had back in my hotel room, which seemed miraculous the day before, suddenly seemed insignificant.

Squinting, he examined me. "Oh, my," he said, "Oh my!" He gave me a curious look, tilting his head to one side, and told me to call him Harry. Then he crossed the room, shook my hand, and offered me a glass of goat's milk. I declined. On impulse, I said he should call me James. I don't know why I gave him the name from my dream, and not the name I used all my life, but that's what I did. It sounded strange when he said it, but familiar at the same time.

Then he led me to an adjacent room, where he lit another oil lamp and gestured towards a small bed. Without a thought for

where I was, or who my host might be, I pulled off my filthy clothes, lay down, and slept.

Now I'm awake, and Harry's gone off somewhere. He left me some bread and jam, and a glass of foul smelling blueish-white stuff that must be goat's milk. I never made it back to my hotel, and I'm supposed to meet a guide this morning to tour Infomat Center and watch a show in production. I might be in serious trouble.

Where should I begin?

I've had a lesson on the time Carlos calls the "withering away" of nation-states. If what I learned is all true, I've been wasting my time, because history doesn't matter anymore. We've reached a dead end, and if there's no place to go, I can't see any need to know where you've been. History might as well be over.

Anyway, Harry came back with a set of clean clothes for me to wear, and I bathed as well as I could in the cold, rusty water that dribbled out of his shower. Then we walked further south down a wide avenue to a place where there was a big archway opening into a wooded area. The buildings near that archway are choked with even more vegetation than the buildings near Harry's place, but that's where Carlos and Miriam live.

Carlos is a tall, bearded man about my age, and he was the first to greet me. Miriam is small and compact, and seems to be in her early fifties. Unlike most women her age, she's kept her wrinkles. It was Miriam, along with Harry and Carlos, who gave me the history lesson I'd wanted for so long. Also present was Jenny, the girl who spoke to me in the subway station.

Carlos said, "Welcome home."

Most people believe nation-states ended a long time ago, but

that's not so. There still were people trying to govern only fifty years ago, within my own lifetime. There wasn't much left for them to do, actually, but the cartels let them go through the motions. Most things governments did were privatized well before I was born. I was right about privatization being important.

According to Miriam and Carlos, governments once had to force people to pay for bridges and roads and other useful things. They forced people to pay them for making rules called laws, and pay them to punish people who disobeyed. They also forced people to pay for fighting wars, which were very costly.

Governments existed because people needed certain things that businesses couldn't produce profitably. As soon as it became possible for a business to earn more selling a product directly to the people instead of to the government, the government stepped aside and let business take over. That's privatization.

When everyone had an asset chip implanted, it became easy to charge people individually for things like driving on a road or walking in a park. Private companies started taking over more than ever before. Then, around fifty years ago, even the wars were handed over to private contractors. As far as anybody knows, they're still fighting over in Africa.

Miriam showed me a map of the world that looks almost exactly like the ones you get from the infomat, but instead of a crescent of desert south of the Mediterranean Sea, there's a whole continent. That's Africa. Miriam says the psych division at AnoDyne decided that people would be healthier if they just forgot Africa entirely, so Infomatics deleted it from the infomat. Carlos thinks Africa was handed over to the war cartel, to make up for the business they were about to lose in the rest of the world.

What was about to happen in the rest of the world also started at AnoDyne. It was the mass inoculation program.



It's hard to believe Miriam's version of the inoculation program, but it fits with everything I know about the old days from my magazines. The cartels wanted to eliminate certain diseases and other health problems that interfered with business productivity. Anodyne demanded an enormous price. A big chunk of its profits depended on treating diseases without curing them, and the other cartels wanted to eliminate some of the most profitable. Eventually, though, the program began. The new serum wasn't a traditional vaccine, which protects against specific diseases, but a product that strengthens a child's developing immune system. The earlier the child is inoculated, the more powerful the action of the serum. It has no effect at all on adults.

The serum has a second purpose, though. No matter what the infomat says, human beings aren't born peaceful and non-violent. Crime and violence were the most serious health problems of all in the old days, and warfare was worse because it interfered with markets and trade as well as production. The cartels wanted something done about it, and Anodyne complied. A second component of the serum works on the developing child's limbic system, the parts of the brain that set off emotional responses. It stunts the growth of brain centers that control aggression, producing mild mannered, obedient adults. The cartels wanted employees who were happy to work hard for their assets, and just as happy to spend them on all sorts of consumer goods. If some minor qualities like curiosity and creativity were impaired as well, it was a small price to pay.

I asked Miriam how she knew all these things. After all, the cartels hardly would advertise what they were doing. Miriam looked over at Harry.

"It was going to be utopia," Harry said. "A world with no disease, no violence, no hunger, no refugees. I was fresh out of

school, ready to save the world. I worked for Anodyne for six years before I noticed our humanity was disappearing along with our aggression."

There were others, though, who defected before Harry did. They tried to warn parents about the inoculation program, but Infomatics controlled the flow of information. The anti-inoculationists made the news, but only as a bunch of lunatic fanatics. Practically nobody heard their message.

Now I can guess what happened in my early childhood. I was one of the kids rounded up in the final push for universal inoculation. The woman in my dream must have been my mother, and she must have been one of the holdouts, what the advertisement in my magazine called a "recalcitrant." I was taken away, along with a lot of other children, and saved from "deviance" by a combination of drugs and conditioning. Not many escaped. My mother must have known what the Anodyne technicians were going to do to me. "Don't forget," she said. Not much chance of that.

Since they didn't get me until I was nine or ten, my limbic system was pretty well formed by the time I was inoculated. They did their best to stamp out my individuality, but didn't get my curiosity, at least. I don't know if that was a blessing or a curse. I needed some air, so I'm writing this out on the front steps. There's a lot more to write, but Jenny is waiting for me over by the arch. Jenny is Carlos and Miriam's daughter, born here in the ruins of the old city, and she wants to show me a mysterious place called "the Strand."

I don't know how many hours of my life I spent trying not to look deviant, but it must have added up to years. According to Harry, I was wasting my time. Of everything I've been told since I got here, that's the hardest to believe.

This whole day was one shock to my system after another. The Strand is an old, abandoned mart, left with most of its stock intact. Back in the old days, it sold used books. There must be a million books there, piled on wooden shelves and stacked on the floor. A lot of them are damaged, either by water or insects or just old age, but there are enough of them intact so that you could spend your whole life reading and never finish more than a fraction. I left with an armful of books, selected almost at random except for a fat one with a hard cover called American Government. The explanation I got from Miriam and Carlos just isn't enough. Government is a difficult concept.

Jenny chattered all the way there and back, and I learned some things that Harry and Jenny's parents hadn't mentioned. She told me there are almost fifty people living in the south end of the city, including a few hermits who have nothing to do with their neighbors. Then there are more people who live outside, either in the central city or in the townships, but come to visit for a week or a month at a time. I asked how that was possible. She shrugged her shoulders and said, "Just like you did. Through the tunnel."

What I really wanted to know, of course, was how somebody could disappear for a month and not be tagged a deviant. Harry stunned me with his answer back at Carlos and Miriam's place. "Nobody's checking. A few deviants like you and me don't matter, because we're no danger to the system. Everyone else conforms."

That was too much for me. I came back out here to the front steps to try and write it all down, and the more I think about it the harder it is to believe. What am I doing here? They all admit to being deviants. Maybe they're lying. Maybe they're insane. Or maybe it's me.

Harry says my mother might still be alive somewhere, if she hasn't died of natural causes. He says the cartels only wanted the children, and left the anti-innoculationists behind. Nobody wanted to listen to their stories of corporate plots and abducted children. They were just cranks, easily ignored. The real problems were the violent deviants, who had to be removed entirely. Harry isn't sure what was done with them, but they're gone.

In the end, there still were some children who went without inoculation. Miriam's mother was homeless when Miriam was born, and when she signed an indenture with Panamart, nobody asked to see Miriam's inoculation certificate. Carlos is the son of migrant workers. He says he wasn't inoculated because "nobody ever paid much attention to migrants." Jenny, their daughter, was born in lower Manhattan after the wall went up.

I thought there had to be others who went uninoculated as well -- the children of the officers, board members, and major stockholders of the cartels. It didn't make sense to me that anyone would create a world filled with willing slaves unless there were some masters as well. According to Harry, I was wrong.

"You have to remember," he said, "the whole idea was to make a perfect world." A perfect world for the cartels means steady growth in production and consumption with no counterproductive competition. Aggression may have been a good thing when businesses had to compete against each other, but cartels don't have competitors. It's especially important for people with real power to cooperate, because they're the ones who can start wars. The children of the rich and powerful were inoculated along with all the others.

As I said, history is over. Life will go along predictably and uneventfully forever. History is over because there's nobody

left to make it.

I won't go searching for my mother, or any other remnants of my lost youth. The dreams may continue, or they may be over, but it doesn't matter. All I want to do is go back to my house in the townships, with all my books in a cardboard box. If Harry is right about nobody checking on deviance anymore, I'll come back to New York every so often and get more books from the Strand. Mostly fiction, I think, or poetry. There's more than enough to last me the rest of my life.

If Harry is wrong, and somebody is still hunting down deviants like me, there's not much I can do about it. Maybe I'll get to see Africa. Maybe I'll just quietly disappear. If I get the chance, though, I'll slip this notebook into the wall of some building under construction. I'm on the last page now, and there's nothing more to write.

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