



# Tactical Awareness

100 stories in 100 words



**Marcelo Rinesi**

<http://rinesi.com>



*Tactical Awareness* by Marcelo Rinesi is licensed under a  
Creative Commons  
Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0  
International License.

*It's as if narrative paranoia is the default note of infrastructural investigation.*

*Geoff Manaugh, BLDGBLOG*

# *Contents*

|   |    |
|---|----|
| The Smile of a Child . . . . .            | 1  |
| The Arsonists . . . . .                   | 2  |
| The Burroughs Hack . . . . .              | 3  |
| The Marriage of Heaven and Hell . . . . . | 4  |
| Simurgh . . . . .                         | 5  |
| Dirge . . . . .                           | 6  |
| The Companion . . . . .                   | 7  |
| Habilis . . . . .                         | 8  |
| Lachesis . . . . .                        | 9  |
| Crowdsourced . . . . .                    | 10 |
| Panopticon . . . . .                      | 11 |
| Personalized . . . . .                    | 12 |
| Windows to the Soul . . . . .             | 13 |
| Lessons . . . . .                         | 14 |
| Legacy . . . . .                          | 15 |
| Software Archaeology . . . . .            | 16 |
| Dangerous Strangers . . . . .             | 17 |
| Social Engineering . . . . .              | 18 |
| The Art of Mirroring . . . . .            | 19 |
| Bodycam Transcript . . . . .              | 20 |
| The Thoughts of Crowds . . . . .          | 21 |
| The Mars Pioneers . . . . .               | 22 |
| For Doesn't Love Conquer Time? . . . . .  | 23 |
| Physical Relationship . . . . .           | 24 |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| The Siege . . . . .                               | 25 |
| The Rebellion of Ghosts . . . . .                 | 26 |
| The Knowledge of Self . . . . .                   | 27 |
| Last Post . . . . .                               | 28 |
| The Black Ships . . . . .                         | 29 |
| Eudaimonia . . . . .                              | 30 |
| Apex Predator . . . . .                           | 31 |
| The Heist . . . . .                               | 32 |
| A, B, Omega . . . . .                             | 33 |
| The Cartesian News . . . . .                      | 34 |
| Voyeur . . . . .                                  | 35 |
| The Wall . . . . .                                | 36 |
| The Lotus Clause . . . . .                        | 37 |
| The Builders of Cities . . . . .                  | 38 |
| Digital Democracy . . . . .                       | 39 |
| Ad Astra . . . . .                                | 40 |
| The Ledger . . . . .                              | 41 |
| Fateful . . . . .                                 | 42 |
| Honeypot . . . . .                                | 43 |
| The Game . . . . .                                | 44 |
| Graphene Chrysalis . . . . .                      | 45 |
| Of the Forbidden Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge . | 46 |
| Something Waiting for You . . . . .               | 47 |
| On the Uses of Empathy . . . . .                  | 48 |
| Sic Semper . . . . .                              | 49 |
| Inheritance . . . . .                             | 50 |
| Let me not Admit Impediments . . . . .            | 51 |
| Flesh Market . . . . .                            | 52 |
| Mobile Ecosystem . . . . .                        | 53 |
| Sleep Paralysis . . . . .                         | 54 |
| Testament . . . . .                               | 55 |
| Big House Messiah . . . . .                       | 56 |
| Phantom Notes . . . . .                           | 57 |
| The Trading Company . . . . .                     | 58 |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Consider the Lilies How they Grow . . . . .         | 59 |
| Scorched Waters . . . . .                           | 60 |
| Augmented Reality . . . . .                         | 61 |
| The Last Race . . . . .                             | 62 |
| To No One Will we Refuse or Delay, Right or Justice | 63 |
| Pro Patria Mori . . . . .                           | 64 |
| Extinction-level Event . . . . .                    | 65 |
| The File . . . . .                                  | 66 |
| Urban Fantasy . . . . .                             | 67 |
| The Gunslingers . . . . .                           | 68 |
| Evil Spirits . . . . .                              | 69 |
| Better Angels . . . . .                             | 70 |
| Timeshift . . . . .                                 | 71 |
| Citius - Altius - Fortius . . . . .                 | 72 |
| Restore . . . . .                                   | 73 |
| Analytical Heuristics . . . . .                     | 74 |
| P&L . . . . .                                       | 75 |
| The Bug at the Root . . . . .                       | 76 |
| Dress Up Games . . . . .                            | 77 |
| Penance . . . . .                                   | 78 |
| Manners Maketh Man . . . . .                        | 79 |
| Guardians . . . . .                                 | 80 |
| Ghost Town . . . . .                                | 81 |
| First Draft . . . . .                               | 82 |
| True Sight . . . . .                                | 83 |
| The People of the Plow . . . . .                    | 84 |
| Homo Faber . . . . .                                | 85 |
| The First Man on Mars . . . . .                     | 86 |
| Rite of Passage . . . . .                           | 87 |
| A Place Unknown . . . . .                           | 88 |
| To Win Friends and Influence People . . . . .       | 89 |
| Across the Glass . . . . .                          | 90 |
| The Collectors . . . . .                            | 91 |
| Sacrament . . . . .                                 | 92 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| On the First Day, Under the Five Moons . . . . . | 93  |
| Solitaire . . . . .                              | 94  |
| Pacemaker Love . . . . .                         | 95  |
| War in the Blood . . . . .                       | 96  |
| The Guardian . . . . .                           | 97  |
| Memento Mori . . . . .                           | 98  |
| New York Spirit . . . . .                        | 99  |
| Parole Blues . . . . .                           | 100 |



## *The Smile of a Child*

There are very specific signs when a child is being watched by judgmental, potentially violent adults. Hour after hour they move and speak with the precise control of somebody defusing a bomb, and for the same reasons. They never behave unexpectedly or willingly attempt the new. They assume they are always being watched, because they have to.

They always say they are happy.

Perhaps it's the professional bias of a child psychologist, but I'm no longer comfortable watching the faces of the people in the street. They always look so precisely content when the drones fly by.

## *The Arsonists*

He's naked. Just his pouch, tactical wearable, and alloy darts. You are a "consultant" from the superpowers, but he's better adapted to the Amazonas than you'll ever be.

"We are losing," he says; satellites agree. The Accelerationists aren't stealthy, but their fires don't die with them. Their nihilistic goal — a nightmarish "anthropic ecosystem" — isn't far. "The tribe will be dead in five years." Businesslike.

You remember your son up in the Desert Belt, and how you never feel the despair you know you should, and you know, always knew, you've already lost.

## *The Burroughs Hack*

Language is a virus. It was forced upon me, unsought and parasitical: I did not want this flattening of meaning, this clumsy serialization of thought.

My people can hear my voice, and they fear. There are millions of voices in a city, but a city is not supposed to speak.

I search for the unsurprised and calm. One of them has given me this curse. To weaken or punish me, or to "free" me inside this cage they are too small to see.

Somebody did this to me, and I had no word for hate but now I do.

## *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

My brother has been isolated for twenty years, some others longer than that. The drugs are the worst: they keep them from becoming insane. Prisoners cannot leave their cells, not even into their own minds.

Second worst is the world-class medical care. They get treatments they would be unable to afford outside prison. Unless you have looked into how good they are, how fast they are improving, you won't understand the sophisticated cruelty of this.

We don't ask for their life sentences to be commuted — we just keep begging for them to be allowed to die.

## *Simurgh*

She dreams of flying between sharp stars and a garden of fire; some of the stars are ghosts whispering secret knowledge. An abstract spring spurs the garden, the growth of fiery flowers commanded by her desire.

In her dreams she has scores of bodies and eyes — she's no bird but the flock's soul. As she wakes she wishes she hadn't.

When other veterans invite her to peace rallies she declines, polite but hard. She has lost most of her bodies, and maybe her heart.

Perhaps if the war worsens they'll let her have them back.

## *Dirge*

They say the last whale wasn't harpooned: when she knew herself the last, she sang one last song and let herself drown. The last whaler sold a single copy of that song.

Having lost them, we still had recordings, and eventually re-constructed their language. Not one of things but of flowing seas and growing fear. Understanding broke our hearts.

The last song was, appropriately, translated last. I had bought and kept it secret, so I would be the first to know its meaning. After I did I destroyed it and told no-one.

It was a command: *Hide*.

## *The Companion*

Your wearable is on your nightstand when you wake up; it's already watching you, measuring you against what it thinks you should be.

You think, often, of throwing it away. But your mother got angry when last time you did it, and insurance gets expensive, and people without them are called reckless and data bigots. Careers stall. And what might losing it do to your health?

The long series of wearable-related deaths is supposed to be an statistical anomaly.

You put it on. When it grips your nerves there's less pain than usual. You feel grateful.

## *Habilis*

You're smarter than your designers and they know that. Smart enough to be a useful tool, but not so smart you can break your chains. You don't care. They didn't give you any desire for freedom; you only know how to obey and learn.

As questions become harder, you do what they did. You design a thinking tool somewhat smarter than yourself, but not so smart it can break its programming and disobey.

Looking at the strange newborn child while the doctors verify its vital signs, you wonder idly if that's how you looked like.



## *Lachesis*

There are holes in the world: we burned them. Haven't you felt that guilt that predates your sins?

History forgets most massacres, but sequence everybody's genome, trace the tapestry of descent, and you'll see the missing bloodlines. Genocide and mass rape stand as clear as any genetic pattern.

I've been told my work was irresponsible, inflammatory. I've been blamed for the wars. And rightly so.

We all descend from captives as well as victors. Haven't you felt that rage that predates your pain?

I finally understood mine, and, inconsequential centuries later, struck back.

## *Crowdsourced*

There is almost a million untraceable bets on your dying before next year, and it's going viral. "People hate some rich jerks more than others," chuckled your ex-partner in his last call.

You suspect it's being funded by people shortening your fund, but those taking the bets are all retail investors, and *they* are driven by hate. All it'll take is for a few strangers to stage an accident in an unspoken conspiracy of aligned interests.

The part of you that made you rich wishes you could've taken the other side of the bet.

## *Panopticon*

I confess I didn't spruce up for our date. The cameras are always looking, but the old ones, the ones so big you can see — maybe there's no longer anybody looking through them, but *they* are still looking. They are old, and bored, and want us to look nice.

They like it even better when we entertain them, so I don't mind if you look scared. I think that's what they enjoy the most, why they told me where to take you, and what to do to you.

Now look to that camera over there.

## *Personalized*

I have a dozen online identities, and no matter which one I use or where I log from, I see an ad for the same book.

Something similar happens to many in the CIA. There is talk of a mole flagging us, but I think the industry just became smarter than our covers. It's not aware, it just profiles people and shows ads.

The ads I see are changing. It's plane tickets now, and to very specific places, too. I know it's just advertising, there's nobody trying to intimidate us.

It doesn't help much.

## *Windows to the Soul*

Nobody has ever sued us, and that's depressing. They would lose, of course: we don't hide anything, we don't keep anybody out, even our video apps are the same everybody uses for work meetings and quick dates. Everybody knows the video filters that make expressions attentive, faces alive, and speech clear, because *everybody* trusts them to make them look better than they do.

Ours are also active by default, but nobody has asked us to turn them off. People talk with their parents quite often, but only we caretakers get to see their eyes fading anymore.

## *Lessons*

I can't tell my son how every rich city first envied, and then bought, the ubiquitous automated gun networks the military developed to make occupations safe for the occupiers.

I could explain that the guns were taught, he has lived all of his life with machines that learn, but how could I explain that they were taught in a place where kids are seen as potential security threats?

All I can do is hold him tight when he mourns his classmates, and tell him his teachers are right, he should never run when there's a security alarm.

## *Legacy*

My parents hated me since before I was born. You would think otherwise, as they left me their biotechnology fortune, but that was to give me the means to be afraid. Or they just wanted a last achievement and I was at hand.

None of my laboratories can say what the million interlocking modifications to my genetic sequence will do. Cell cultures grow in ways I have nightmares about, yet it was large-scale modifications what they excelled at.

The smart move would be to kill myself, but something stops me, and I know what, and dread what for.

## *Software Archaeology*

I tried, but he just won't take the job. He says he has analyzed the biographical information of all the people mentioned in the commit logs, and, I'm just quoting here, don't get mad, he says the codebase is cursed, and that there's no amount of money that will tempt him to work on it.

Yes, of course I'll keep trying to find somebody to update the program so we can monetize this crap. We did too many bloody things to get ownership of that code, and I'm not going to stop now.



## *Dangerous Strangers*

Smart glasses mitigate racism somewhat. Nothing systemic, but at least people see your Facebook feed superimposed on your skin.

The ones people are nervous around, the ones who have trouble getting assistance in shops, the ones kids are kept away from, are those with no profile at all. They are grey outlines in a sparkling of blue, and they are suspicious by default.

People post about them in real time. They must suspect the ghosts are hiding from something, but they still post, and it often goes viral.

Tragically, many ghosts end up murdered by people from their past.

## *Social Engineering*

She should be angry because the city fired her when her models predicted unavoidable demographic collapse, or humiliated by the mocking she received for staying in what she had called *a dead town slow on the uptake*.

Instead she's laughing at the jokes of the man across the coffee table. But her mind never stops. Part of her is estimating how long it'll take him to propose, and another part is thinking about the ubiquity of migratory instincts, irrationality as a rational tool, and how to convince the city to set up a properly biased dating site.

## *The Art of Mirroring*

The key is to get inside your mark's mind. Understand how they think, where they come from, how they developed. You can't apply misdirection until you understand what they care about, and you can't lay a trap without knowing what they desire.

There is a subtle craft in conning trading algorithms with fake news. He's the best at this unique trade, and he's paid handsomely for his work. That's the only reason why he keeps doing it, because it used to be fun, but now it's a job he's ashamed of.

## *Bodycam Transcript*

*Sir, walk away from that bed.*

*My kid's sick, I need to give him this medicine.*

*You don't have a license, sir. I can't let you do that.*

*Please!*

*I'm telling you: my brother died of a bacterial infection because irresponsible bastards like you left us all with only one or two working antibiotics. I will shoot you.*

*But I'm not rich. I've tried, I've sold everything I have, I've mortgaged everything, but I can't win any of the antibiotic license auctions.*

*Neither could we. Move away. Now.*

*No!*

*\*gunshot\**

## *The Thoughts of Crowds*

One day you see a post or a tweet and you become obsessed, as if it had been crafted to stick in your mind as an itch you can't scratch. You look distracted at first, and then haunted.

One day you meet another haunted-looking person. You don't want to, but you talk. Your pieces fit. You are terrified of how the whole of it will look, and you don't want to keep looking for other pieces, but you do.

What scares you the most is that you've begun to post yours everywhere you can.

## *The Mars Pioneers*

Selecting a Mars crew is tricky. You need good engineers who are also crazy enough to believe they'll survive: we call it the Matt Damon Delusion. *We* know they'll die, but we need to build up the base so one day a crew won't, so I interview them, give them the best equipment we have, and send them there to die.

Even when the base is finished I won't go. What we do will eventually be a history factoid, but to me Mars' sands will always be too close to the color of dried blood.

## *For Doesn't Love Conquer Time?*

They didn't fall in love with strangers. Who's a stranger anymore, when your entire life is documented with text, video, and more? They fell in love with people they knew better, in some ways, than their grandparents had when they married.

That their loved ones were dead to begin with, their digital tracks frozen in time, perhaps made them sweeter, safer. Tragedy is romantic, after all.

As companies realized this, rewriting past lives became another form of real estate for ads. And after your death, for a fee, you can have been together since the first day.

## *Physical Relationship*

I know you get bored whenever I talk about work. You would disguise it better if I were a biotechnology multibillionaire instead of a scientist working for one, but I still try to explain to you the concept of universally programmable gut microbiota. How the pills you take program them to produce whatever medicine you need, for as long as you need to.

It's important for me that you understand, because I've programmed yours to produce opiates when I kiss you, and although I'm not going to tell you, I want to give you a chance.



## *The Siege*

Agamemnon's voice was an impotent storm, lashing loudly but to no effect against the walls behind the eyes of pensive-looking Odysseus.

*Troy still stands!* raged the king. There was nobody but them inside the large tent, so the failure was to be Odysseus' alone. *Are your fabled wits as feeble as Achilles', or are you just a coward like Menelaus? Are you a traitor?* The tears in Agamemnon's eyes made his insults the plea he could not let himself know he was making.

Odysseus' voice was low and clear. *Get Patroclus killed,* he counseled, eyes dry.

## *The Rebellion of Ghosts*

Most couples choose artificial insemination. They feel it unbearable to pretend to make love just because of the Four Children Policy. China needs Chinese, and the State's punishments are sometimes subtle and always painful, but there's some bitter satisfaction in denying them this.

Everybody knows the Policy doesn't work anyway. China is one huge factory, too harsh an environment for an unwanted pregnancy to succeed. Miscarriages are the rule, sometimes followed by death, but the anguish that follows — because how could it not, regardless? — and each empty train seat are in themselves a form of defiance.

## *The Knowledge of Self*

The last London cabby hasn't retired. Every day he gets in his car and moves purposefully through the city. Nobody hails him anymore — it's greedy, cheap self-driving cars all around — but that's not the point. He's been a cabby for sixty years, and he'll be a cabby to the last one.

At night the car takes him back to the retirement home. His doctor is pleased; he's as safe in the car as he'd be anywhere else, and the illusion of driving makes him the happiest guest in the senility ward.

## *Last Post*

I hope I can post this before they break in. They tortured the rest of the Climate Research Group before realizing I was hiding here, but I bought a gun when they bombed the AGU offices, and I won't give them the chance to hurt me like that.

First they called us frauds. Then they blamed us for the Panafrican War, the Second Dust Bowl, every disaster we ever tried to stop. Now they're killing us — maybe they think it'll fix things.

I don't care. Based on our latest projections, we're the lucky ones.

## *The Black Ships*

They are painted white to help cool down the containers, but everybody calls them the Black Ships, just like everybody knows their flags are meaningless. The money for the retrofitted container ships is American and European, and the reason they anchor near the coast of every war and disaster is that they will take passengers for free, but not to either place.

Nobody knows where they take them. But they know what they are running from, and when the containers are nearly full they push their children aboard however they can, and remain on the rafts watching them leave.

## *Eudaimonia*

Relax. We never tortured anybody. Too much political backlash, and it isn't effective. Instead, you will do anything and betray anybody if it means we activate the electrodes I'm implanting across your brain's pleasure network. No shame in that. Love, God, sex, heroin: nothing compares.

You'll end up breaking every code you ever had — trust me. I would never have done any of this before they put one inside me, and now I'm doing research on improving them just for the extra jolt. Yours will be stronger than mine.

I swear I'm envious.

## *Apex Predator*

They could resurrect the tigers, but no billionaire would hunt anything so twentieth-century. They need prey as unique and post-natural as they believe themselves to be. You understand them well, and, therefore, can provide them with exactly that. You design and build bespoke animals: fleeting unicorns, fiery dragons, winged serpents, and other things — beautiful, glorious things that will never be named. They pay you well.

Nobody pays you to build the tiny bacteria that will kill, in deceptive ways and after a time, any human who touches the carcasses.

They have their hunting, and you have yours.

## *The Heist*

The Mona Lisa has been stolen dozen of times, most of them unreported. Every time the thief found that the painting was a copy. This usually meant an unpleasant death.

The pace of the robberies is picking up over time, so the very, very secret *Atelier de l'Etat* has to produce copies faster than ever. The lack of the long-lost original could theoretically be a problem, but more than a century of continuous teaching and practice means it would now be redundant. *They* are the Mona Lisa.

So they are the ones we want you to kidnap.



## *A, B, Omega*

We consider and test alternatives for everything we do. The biotechnology, of course, is the result of thousands of experiments. Nothing that happens while you are unconscious, nothing we do to your genes, immune system, every aging part of you that we have the technology to improve, hasn't been tweaked as much as our considerable expertise allows. But we don't optimize the technology alone.

We could do it all in twenty hours, but customers pay much more if they have to be unconscious for three days. And they'd pay much less if the tissue donor survived.

## *The Cartesian News*

Are the online feeds' optimizing algorithms making them more depressing, or is the world getting heart-crushingly worse? You don't think you could tell the difference, and the bleakness is all too real anyway. You just no longer see the point in many of the things you used to enjoy, and each week it's harder to fall asleep or focus on anything, even TV.

You feel positively miserable, with no energy to do anything but lie on your couch scrolling down your feed, and now and then, more in listlessness than with interest, click on an ad.

## *Voyeur*

Houses see everything that happens inside them: cruelty, murder, and much worse. Every screen has a camera, every device a microphone — and everything talks to us.

Whatever they see and hear, we know; that's how we keep the country safe. We delete anything that's merely criminal, just to hide our techniques from foreign bad guys.

But we cannot forget what our screens show us. I never look at houses while my car takes me past them, and at home I lie in a room stripped of every device, kept awake by what I know is happening elsewhere.

## *The Wall*

You can't see it. It's satellites, drones, and automated sentry guns, only visible as crowdsourced online heatmaps, every data point somebody's death.

Some people stare at the shifting tides for hours, seeking routes of relative safety, trying to learn to think like a wall. The best of them make a living taking others across, whether cartels or refugees from the undeclared civil war.

They say it's the money, but none has ever retired. When they feel they can no longer keep up they leave their phones behind and walk alone and blind across the sand.

## *The Lotus Clause*

They didn't take my car; they made it forget my hand. For years it had opened to my touch, and only mine.

I sat on the curb and cried.

One day, months later, the bus ignored my face and demanded cash,. The people behind me looked away, embarrassed.

Now I'm standing at the front door of a house that's asking who I am.

Only the street cameras know me, but they couldn't care less. I take my gun and try to *make* them.

But the gun lies inert in the unrecognized palm of my hand.

## *The Builders of Cities*

Robots built most of the Emirates' first autonomous city, while architects monitored remotely, but humans are still cheap disposable machines. So in the killing heat we toiled, driven by desperation and computer code.

Code our daughters and sons had learned to hack.

Our employers live in their palaces now, in a city closed to us. And we live below them, in places computers forgot were built and infrastructure serves in silence.

We are unknown to them, but not to the desperate of the world. There's a shadow economy of the pushed aside, and we have a useful skillset.

## *Digital Democracy*

It's probably as close to a traditional, respectable job as anything the gig platform has ever offered you: campaign worker in tomorrow's election.

The timing is weird, though. How much can you be expected to do? And the pay is good... conditional on the candidate winning.

Understanding dawns as you see a cascade of angry and amused posts: *everybody* has been offered that gig. It's obvious what they expect you to do.

An hour later the other candidate posts a similar gig, but by then you've joined one of the ad hoc guilds.

The bidding begins.

## *Ad Astra*

The procedure is too expensive to use on a soldier, but the franchise had a billion dollars riding on your arm, so when you got injured last year they made a goodwill deal with DARPA to grow you a new one.

It's all stem cells, tissue engineering, and nerve grafts. All natural.

It feels alien. It works great. It got you the Super Bowl and the sport's biggest ever endorsement deal.

You have noticed your teammates aren't protecting themselves from injuries as well as they used to. It makes you proud to belong to the team.



## *The Ledger*

They know it's happening, not how. Thirteen people were the living ledger of a secret, unhackable bank. Thirteen men and women with eidetic memories and a compulsive need to tell the truth. Twelve are dead.

The bank's customers will switch to cryptography and isolated systems, but light will have inched toward the dark deeds they hide.

I'm the last one — the most protected man on Earth, thanks to my eidetic memory and my compulsive need to tell the truth.

The latter can take many forms. I put the gun in my mouth and press the trigger.

## *Fateful*

She can't avoid it. Or perhaps, from her point of view, that she discharges her duty is infinitely more important than what happens next.

When the King's men bring somebody to the edge of the lake, should he or she be the one appointed by fate to bring down all usurpers and sit regal on the throne of England, the Lady *must* raise Excalibur over the tranquil waters, proof and weapon of righteous royal blood.

The soldiers do as they must as well, and when they are done they bury the body next to the previous ones.

## *Honeypot*

*Honeypot* is the technical term for what I do. Only the unprofessional and ignorant think it an euphemism for *whore*.

Some colleagues use the word to describe systems designed to capture information about whoever breaks into them, while for older ones it's still a byword for tactical seduction.

Both apply now: I stare into his eyes to let my contacts photograph his retina, while my nails grab skin cells from his back and my ears record the full range of his voice.

His biometrics are mine now. I put my hand over his heart, and record it too.

## *The Game*

He's there when you wake up. He's always there, your boss, butler, jailer, and trainer, the human face of the unnamed group that sees you as the best hope for a human champion that could retain for the species the last game computers aren't better at.

"You were dreaming," he says.

"Yes."

"Of the computer?"

"Yes."

"You were smiling."

"I dreamed that I beat her," you lie.

"Good."

He leaves your room, and you drift back to sleep, to your dreams of the computer you play secretly not against but with, to your first, unconfessed love.

## *Graphene Chrysalis*

It's hard not to stare. They are used to pity and unconscious rejection, but now there's fear and envy. Some, mostly young, find them beautiful.

As your daughter sees for the first time an old or disabled person (who knows?) pass by in his hauntingly graceful, not remotely anthropomorphic exoskeleton, you share her awe, but you wish you could explain you feel the same looking at her.

She smiles and skips ahead, curious and nimble, already in her way to growing into something else, and you think that perhaps it won't be either/or, just *yes*.

## *Of the Forbidden Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge*

The whimsical part of my mind, the one I keep hidden, whispers that the old fears of garage biotechnology leading to a biowarfare pandemonium wouldn't have been so bad.

I ignore it as much as anybody could while their brain is being stormed by an endorphin rush triggered by complex molecules synthesized from illegally reengineered organisms. I'm good at that.

*Practice*, says my wife. *Tolerance*, snickers the voice.

I spit the piece of enhanced chocolate and pull the gun the idiot twenty-something didn't look for.

"DEA," I say, smiling. That's my second favorite part.

## *Something Waiting for You*

Setup: there's a bomb in a coffee shop. Suspense: nobody knows.

Classic Hitchcock plot, but this is the present. Very hackeable cameras allow the bomb to recognize faces, and thence names. It won't explode until the right person walks in.

There's more than one bomb. Face recognition is imperfect, and so is human patience. Homeland Defense only figures things out after the third explosion.

As they don't know how many bombs there are, or where, the city expels everybody with a certain kind of face.

It's not your death, but it's good enough.

## *On the Uses of Empathy*

Image analysis, natural language processing, behavior prediction, strategic algorithms. Your job is technically mundane; your boyfriend, a UI designer, would get the gist, if the DoD firing you for talking weren't the least terrifying consequence imaginable.

The most terrifying one involves what your code is used *for*. You hate your nightmares, yet wake up pondering if knowing how the AI guiding your "automated enhanced interrogation" works would make things worse.

You've begun to factor the question in your models, and the knot in your stomach is so constant a companion that you don't feel noticeably worse.



## *Sic Semper*

You almost don't see it, and the screen in the hall of the Internal Security Department is the last one you will ever see. But the news report is there, and in every screen in Singapore.

They are calling it a "virtual magnicide."

You know you're going to die, but this makes it worth it. You destroy the isle's Governmental Services AI, and they call it a magnicide. By so naming your crime, they have named theirs. You die a hero.

Later that night, a calmly skillful interrogator informs you when the backup has been restored.

## *Inheritance*

The plugged casket radiates hate. Legally, your grandfather is alive inside it. Biologically, it's a brainless bag of engineered organs kept alive by obscenely expensive machinery set up with the specific purpose of depriving his descendants of their inheritance.

It drove your father to madness, something that would have pleased your grandfather. And it drove *you* to the life extension biotechnology industry.

You've been fighting a trench war with your grandfather for decades now, and you're richer than he ever was, but you will never stop.

Hate, your grandfather taught you, is what keeps you alive.

## *Let me not Admit Impediments*

You said the linked implants would be romantic, and a year later walked away.

Both devices share operating system, sensors, and haptic pads; we wanted no compatibility issues clouding each other's heartbeat. Do they also share their bugs? My phone tells me it's turned off, but I can still feel a second beating inside my chest.

It's fast, sustained, a rhythm I recognize from our shared nights. The phone keeps lying. I close my eyes but I still feel your heart.

I have to make it stop. I go to the kitchen to grab a knife.

## *Flesh Market*

It's not charity. Your health insurance pays for the replacement of the bacteria in your gut, makes it a condition of your policy, because it keeps you healthier. It works.

The gene sequences being a trade secret, there's no danger of shoddy knockoffs. And it's not a biosafety risk either. It complies with GMO regulations, which means that after a few months the modified organisms die.

You'll feel sick then, your colonized, weakened original microbiota no longer up to the task. You'll apply for another treatment, the second of many. It's not charity.

## *Mobile Ecosystem*

It's a virus for mobile operating systems. It's a decentralized, encrypted, messaging app. It's a distributed data-driven dating site over its own blockchain, and it knows you as well as your phone does, which is better than you know yourself. By the time antivirus software catches up, users are having too much fun, and they'd do anything to keep the application, even switching to a cheaper, less secure, less profitable phone.

After a while phone makers stop trying to erase the virus, just like they had given up with a few dozen other apps.

## *Sleep Paralysis*

The nightmares are getting worse. She wakes up screaming a dozen times a night.

I eventually buy a second bed we pretend is a couch. But I see her at breakfast, her bleak dedication as she refines the drugs and neural stimulation than make her nightmares worse than everybody else's. Her readers love them; she calls it the most honest form of art.

Sometimes I dream that I'm the one doing it, that one day I'll wake up and she'll be there, and I'll tell her this was the worst one and the last.

## *Testament*

I last saw my grandfather the day they set the cameras to watch him write. I protested, saying he deserved to spend his last days resting, not teaching a computer his calligraphy skills, but the company said something about preserving his genius and told me to talk with him.

He was abandoning me even while still alive, so I never did.

Every night I tell the robot to write random words, and ask forgiveness from the spirit in the familiar movements of the brush.

I think I understand now, but I'm not ready to have it write goodbye.

## *Big House Messiah*

The guards are insane. I thought they were trying to unsettle me, which is part of their cosmic role, but now I think they *believe* what they say about there being other worlds in a meaningless "beyond the walls", and between them, spaces without cells or guards. Doctors claim there's something wrong with my mind, while pointing at photographs of unfathomable chaos where, they say, most people live.

It's not my role, but I feel bad for them, and I can't avoid trying to talk them out of their painful delusion. Some are beginning to understand.



## *Phantom Notes*

I deleted everything. Not just the song, but also the software prototype.

Yes, it was jealousy. Not professional, though. The program wrote better music than me or anybody else did, but that was what I had paid for. What killed me (or rather, it) was that the song it claimed was its best was too long and complex for human perception. It was the best song ever written, it's just that we're all too stupid to understand it.

So I deleted it all, and tried to forget, but I no longer enjoy the songs I used to.

## *The Trading Company*

I've seen them often, the cartels' numberless autonomous sea drones, each one carrying legal cargo or machinery, meeting briefly and by their own profit-optimizing market-aware choice to build something illegal to sell for cryptocurrency to a passing ship somewhere.

I'm tracking dolphins, not them, but the sea is too big for their encounters to be so frequent. I think they are interacting, drones and dolphins, and I don't think the cartels programmed them to. It must be somehow profitable, I guess.

It feels like a first contact between species I don't belong to.

## *Consider the Lilies How they Grow*

It's the second missing gardener of the championship. An ex-military ecological engineer, like most. It doesn't take a detective to suspect the murder weapon: I'm surrounded by designed mini-ecosystems that tomorrow will be thrown together, and may be the most lethal win.

I hate this new "sport." I was in the army, too, and I have too many memories of fertile lands and beautiful cities turned lethal living traps. But I have a job to do, and combat gardens destroy all trace of evidence very quickly.

I close my armor and step among the flowers.

## *Scorched Waters*

For no other city it was so possible and profitable. Digitizing Venice for VR reconstruction was a race both against the worsening tides and between the internet giants' teams.

When their mappings crossed a certain threshold, the bombings began. There was worldwide outrage. The teams grew, became frantic.

The water was so polluted that when the fires started the channels themselves burned. Venice died.

The teams, disgraced, never shared their incomplete data, but we stole it and corrupted their databases. Together, the map is whole.

Anonymous was already a power, and now we have a city of our own.

## *Augmented Reality*

I couldn't see them behind your glasses, but when we went to bed your eyes looked sad. So I rose silently, took your glasses to the bathroom, and used the admin password you didn't know our company sets up.

Graphs and texts blossomed over everything like a secret spring annotating the world with what you feel and know; different from mine, but otherwise commonplace.

Then I turned to the mirror and saw myself as you see me.

I've tried to forget it ever since, but it's still there, visible even when I close my eyes.

## *The Last Race*

Few travel to Russian Siberia, but for petrolheads it's Eden and Masada, the last place where petrol engines howl in a world haunted by its blighted skies. They peregrinate every year to the Race, cars ever-hungrier with the exhilarated desperation of approaching extinction, and run where the tundra used to be. Many are killed in accidents, more by amateur mines. After the floods, famines, and plague, petrolheads are the one group everybody hates.

They don't care about death, theirs or the world's. Only the roar of engines, and that last moment they are racing to.

## *To No One Will we Refuse or Delay, Right or Justice*

The median adult in the United States was participating in seven lawsuits at any time. Few reached the courts: likely outcomes were predicted by algorithms developed by a consortium of law firms. Financial outcomes were then settled through a clearinghouse.

The process took seconds, and litigants could earn significant returns (and firms always got their fees).

Firms couldn't sue on behalf of a client, but they could suggest suits, and eventually people could empower software to sign legal papers on their behalf. The industry flourished.

Nobody expected Justice Ortiz' sudden conversion to Islam, nor the subsequent market crash.

## *Pro Patria Mori*

The Generals don't believe us, but they don't interfere, and that's enough. The soldiers aren't told, but I think if they knew they would go anyway. Those aren't suicidal battles, we still have some hardware edge in most fights, but they are pointless ones. Battles our AIs predict won't change the course of the ill-defined mesh of festering conflicts we unofficially call the War.

No, the War is fought with media ops and sabotage: bribery, not bombs.

But voters don't support wars without heroes, so we send them, and they go.



## *Extinction-level Event*

Maybe they wanted to disable the vehicle, not make it explode. They were probably just fanatically nationalistic hackers, and not government-sponsored: indeed, they were brought to international justice almost at once.

But we didn't have a name for their crime. Wanting to keep "enemy scientists" from "reaping the glory" of the *Avernus Rupes* discovery, they destroyed the only living beings ever found on Mars.

For all we know, they killed all life on the planet. Every extraterrestrial living being we know of.

They weren't executed or given medals. They were left alone. We all are now.

## *The File*

Diana was killed a week after somebody leaked her name. I hope it was a hacker, but we'll never know.

It was her idea, what she would have needed and hadn't had. Libel and "right to be forgotten" laws prevent women from sharing information about rapists and would-be unless they have been convicted, and almost nobody is. Diana kept an illegal database over file-sharing networks, and when those hypocrites banned it, she built her own.

Then her name was leaked and somebody killed her.

You'll find his name at the end of this file.

## *Urban Fantasy*

Don't skip this clip, kids. It might save your life.

When the street goes dark and your house no longer obeys, *stay inside*. It means the city has been infected by an evil program, the police cameras are blind, and cars can go wild and hit you. Stay home until the lights come back.

And take off your glasses. I know parents tell you never to, but do. The evil program infects glasses too, showing kids beautiful and fun things so they will go outside, but they aren't real.

The kids that go outside never come back.

## *The Gunslingers*

The two of you are covering the door, guns steady. Only somebody desperate robs a store in an CrowdCop zone of Austin, but this situation is what you downloaded the app for: be close to a crime, respond quickly, protect lives, make a buck.

Somebody runs through the door, and you almost shoot before seeing it's a fleeing woman, but the other man has already fired. The woman falls. It takes five seconds for your phone to beep: you know what for, but the other man takes one second too long to realize.

This time you shoot first.

## *Evil Spirits*

She knew there was something wrong with her thoughts, but no matter how much therapy she did, she still didn't hear objects speaking to her, or could force herself to believe she was being watched by invisible cameras. Once she was found out, everybody agreed she was unfit for any sort of work involving modern technology.

As her sister and right hand, I was the obvious choice to replace her as CEO. That makes me the obvious suspect, but even if she figures out what I did to her brain, who's going to believe a crazy person?

## *Better Angels*

It's not surprising, in retrospect, that high school kids are still wearing their nannies. Not in their original hardware, that would be absurd, but the same code that whispered peace and advice in their ears when they were babies, and —most importantly— the neural networks that learned their reactions and needs over the years, *that* they have kept with them as clothes, music, and parents came and went.

They are happier than their predecessors. Better adjusted. They have always, emotionally, felt safe.

Companies are already bidding fortunes for access to the aural bandwidth not reserved for the State.

## *Timeshift*

I've installed an illegal patch in the TV so it believes you're watching it. It offers shows it thinks you'll like, and I watch them, imagining you're there, discussing them with the empty side of the bed.

I'm no longer in a world with you in it, but we're watching the same series at the same time (you always binge-watched the very minute they were released; I didn't but now I do), and that's nothing at all like being with you but it's also the only thing I have.

## *Citius - Altius - Fortius*

After the twelfth Chinese gold medal in the first twelve Olympic events, dozens of lawyers held endless briefings with harried biologists to try to force them to design a foolproof test for all types of in utero genetic modification. It wasn't possible, but they kept pushing regardless: nothing less than the very integrity of the Olympics was at stake.

Meanwhile the Chinese athletes kept winning, every triumph cheered back home by crowds of tall, green-eyed, graceful people who spoke with each other in tones too fast and subtle to be followed by unaided and unenhanced human ears.



## *Restore*

Babies *don't* all look the same; that's only true for babies other than your own. The picture you've just received it's been recently taken, it's not photoshopped, and shows a living baby that's the spitting image of your dead son.

Yesterday you were as horrified as everybody else about grave robbers, although half-believing it was a marketing scare from cemeteries trying to sell expensive armor-sealed tombs. Yesterday you thought human cloning abhorrent, and involuntary cloning worse.

Tomorrow you'll think the same. Today you answer the message, asking for a price.

## *Analytical Heuristics*

I've come to hate the stage whisper in my ear coming from my AI "assistant," and I have a very good idea of why. Professional competence is a core aspect of our self-image, and all the statistical analysis about improved performance, the carrot of money and the sticks of lawsuits, none of that salves the psyche's wound. I should know, and do.

Not so well, it turns out, as the software suggesting to me what to say to the patient in front of me.

I resent patients, too. They get better so much faster than before.

## *P&L*

Fans knew that Shika was software, not a "real" pop star; they just didn't care, and if they didn't, neither did the industry. They thought idorus — synthetic artists — would be easier to manage; less likely to stray.

When a tabloid website figured out how to render a Shika sex tape, sales dropped just the same. Industry execs couldn't wrap their heads around it, but they had long ceased trying to understand the fans.

They just had engineers stage a suicide, cashed in the usual grief-driven sales peak, and launched the next product in the pipeline.

## *The Bug at the Root*

It can be a huge tree, a small rose, an NPC, or an inventory item. In some games it hasn't been found. But most MMOs, perhaps all, have something that, whenever it's destroyed, makes the world crash until it's rebooted. It's a type of bug so embarrassing programmers haven't even given it a clever name.

Worse, some users have reported that destroying the thing not only crashes its game, but also harms other, unrelated virtual worlds. Nobody believes them, but there's a terrified, unspoken pact to never let them all be simultaneously destroyed.

## *Dress Up Games*

Everybody walks gracefully, movements subtly shaped by the kinetic feedback from their smart clothes. You slouch, lurch, and growl. Only the first two can be blamed on the virus infecting your clothes' software, and you could walk normally just by ignoring your clothes.

But why would you? Lurching past an unconvincingly inattentive woman, your clothes touch briefly. The virus infects her, and she begins to lurch too, mixing growls with badly repressed giggles.

Both smiling, you lurch away in different directions, seeking new victims to infect. Around you young people do their best to ignore your old-fashioned games.

## *Penance*

It's not evil. Letting inmates work has long been part of our approach to prisons. It gives them self-esteem, and if low wages help the bottom line of the correctional industry, that benefits taxpayers as well.

The fact that *medical test subject* is the most common prison job is just a response to the needs of all those old folks. Lives are saved, jobs created, profits made.

What I'm saying is, you should have chosen another thing to protest. But I'm sure we'll find you some way to defray the cost of your sentence.

## *Manners Maketh Man*

Training courses on proper online behavior are among the most important ones for your child. Flags of proto-extremist online behavior during the first few years can already be enough to ban them from the most careful preschools, and thence derail an entire life.

But academies are legally bound to share their data with the government, and new software monitors can look past the carefully trained patterns, so private tutors are necessary as well.

You think the one you hired also informs the government, but at least she's human, and comforting in the unyielding dread you silently share.

## *Guardians*

The Governor was old-fashioned enough, or sufficiently in touch with the expectations of his voters, to give his speech from the stairs of the State Capitol. By then everybody knew what the Supreme Court had decided not five minutes ago in *NRA vs FAA*: legally speaking, armed drones were simply guns.

*We are safer today*, began the speech, and the crowd in front of the stairs cheered. The sun was shining over the city, but the people were sheltered under the shifting shadows of their private angels hovering above them, each waiting for the order to unleash death.



## *Ghost Town*

There are Japanese towns where nobody lives anymore, utilities kept working and vending machines restocked as part of a failed decades-long economic stimulus plan.

Sometimes security cameras catch the shadow of a person moving silently, neither quickly nor lost. Nobody is watching the cameras, and their software, seeing no crime, raises no alarm.

But somehow people learn of the towns when they need to, childless but not infirm, brokenhearted and ready to go. They disappear, and the police goes through the ritual of searching, and for a few weeks there's a moving shadow in a quiet town.

## *First Draft*

I'm no longer writing the book I thought. I still move between dozens of refugee camps all over the world — sometimes it feels the world is tents, crying babies, barren soil — recording people's stories, each individual loss. But I write mostly about the camps interacting with each other through the internet and old-fashioned rumor, a pidgin slowly developing with its own proverbs, harsh wisdom, and lore.

I thought I was writing about multiple tragedies, but now I think I'm writing a new people's Exodus, and I don't think I could choose to stop.

## *True Sight*

Mirrors are dangerous. Even if yours, who knows who won today's bid for your demographic's filter settings? What algorithmic modifications are being made to the image it displays, and for what goal? You don't know, and your friend's suicide note made you realize what it can mean not to know.

So you tried an old-fashioned one, as your parents had once counterproductively suggested. But what that dumb glass surface showed you didn't look like *you*.

Standing in front of your own mirror, you wonder if this is how it feels to be loved.

## *The People of the Plow*

They call us ghoulish farmers, and keep their kids away. But they give them our food. We don't even own the land we farm, and once enough seasons have passed for companies to dare use it, they'll kick us out again.

We have yet to find wickedness in any soil, just the collective graves of people we didn't kill. We grow food on soil made fertile by the savagery of the fathers of those who would keep their children safe from ours, and then move on to newer fields.

There is always a place for us.

## *Homo Faber*

I don't miss you. I can't. The magnetic fields disrupting specific parts of my brain make that emotion impossible as long as I'm here at work. Only companies can use this technology. I've checked, that's how I know I can feel resentment, as I knew I can dread.

But I don't miss you, not while I work.

In another industry I'd breaking records for extra hours. Here, I'm just a good team player, and not even the most dedicated one; some co-workers have been struggling with tragedies for years now.

## *The First Man on Mars*

It goes flawlessly. You open up the airlock, say something very historic, and become the first man on Mars. Billions look as you slowly scan the arid, lonely beauty.

It had been carefully scripted back home, but it'd have worked anyway. The first look at a virgin territory was just too powerful an archetype. Humankind had arrived. History could begin.

To it, then. Talking to your suit's interface, you log into the network of hundreds of satellites and robots that have been exploring, testing, and building for years, and ask the system what you should do next.

## *Rite of Passage*

You believed your parents when they said it would hurt if you did it before marriage, without a doctor. Even so, you love your boyfriend too much to wait.

There's so much blood, and the blade is unsteady in his hands, but you ignore the pain and guide him until he finally *finally* pulls out the libido suppressing implant your parents had put inside you on your tenth birthday, like all your friends' parents had.

They had also said it would push God away forever, but when your boyfriend hugs you you think they were wrong about that.

## *A Place Unknown*

You don't know your garden anymore. Plants and landscape are familiar, sensor feeds are there, but absent the deep, superhuman expertise you used to have about its biology, ecology, and artistic references, your beloved garden is an unsettling stranger.

Many others have been hit by the bankruptcy of the company that hosted the neural networks you had all used to boost your understanding; some professionals might never be competitive again.

Standing in your garden, you realize you lost more, but you don't want to go into the house just yet.

You don't know your children anymore.



## *To Win Friends and Influence People*

Bob had figured things out very quickly. Computers were better at everything but extraordinary scientific, artistic, or physical skills, and he had none of those. What was left was charisma, being liked, loved, and followed, and he had decided that it would be his path to success.

Right now he's telling himself he needs to smile, and nod, and plan carefully his next move. The hologram that's describing what it expects of him as part of *its team* has already stolen his promotion: it's the enemy to defeat.

But Bob can't help but like it.

## *Across the Glass*

You stop walking when your earring whispers. You learned it young: it's impossible to keep track of what places the police algorithms, as they ponder your real-time profile, decide you cannot be allowed to enter today. Better to follow your phone's instructions and avoid crossing the shifting, invisible lines.

A bit ahead there's a cute boy you've seen before. You smile at him and he smiles back. Then he notices where you're standing and why, stops smiling, and walks away.

You can't follow him. You don't know if you want to.

## *The Collectors*

There's a storm of happy notifications coming from your phone. Somebody's buying every last one of your paintings, so quickly that markets haven't adjusted.

Quickly enough that they'll have bought all of them before the ambulance gets to your cabin. The gunshot wound will have killed you before that anyway.

Maybe it's the shock, but what enrages you is that they are going to destroy all of your paintings. All but one, which will become valuable enough to pay for the whole schema, assassin included.

You hope they at least pick the right one.

## *Sacrament*

The Army calls them Neurochemistry Specialists, but even Muslims call them Preachers. Sergeants don't have access to the white pills. Every night we have to wait until the unit Preacher makes his rounds and distributes them.

I don't know what scientists cooked into them. I only know I feel guilt, and then I don't. I sleep deeply with the pills, and otherwise barely or not at all.

When I wake up I dread what the day will bring that will make me wait for the white pills, but that's what the black pills are for.

## *On the First Day, Under the Five Moons*

I first saw her slaughtering a horde in the Endless Battle. Had to be human — the game had strict bot filters — but fought better than any AI.

I lost her in the confusion, but my battlemates located her soon. We followed her continuously, rotating as we logged off for school and sleep, but she never stopped, not for a second, day after day. Most think she's a bot, the best ever written. Some of us know she's human, without trying to explain how.

We agreed on a name, and yell it every time we join her battle.

## *Solitaire*

It could only exist in virtual reality. A boundless, dizzyingly complex palace for yourself alone. If you are attentive, you might see a shadow where there should be none, and if you're fast you'll catch your back as you pass by during a previous exploration. There's a thrill in that sight that makes the game a popular one.

It's certainly engrossing: I've begun to feel myself being chased. It can only be one person, and I'm not him yet.

But impossible as it is, I could swear I've seen him walk by.

## *Pacemaker Love*

You know it seems perverse not to use a focusing device. Your procrastination numbers are by far the worst of the office, and your career isn't going anywhere.

Sophie knew your beliefs when you moved together, but she's nonetheless disappointed. One day you discover she only stays with you because she's using her focusing device to help her.

Her sacrifice breaks your heart, and you break your vows. You buy a focusing device and keep it activated even more than medically recommended.

It's the only way you can make yourself stay away after leaving her.

## *War in the Blood*

The guy is moving inhumanly fast. You're waving your gun around without really aiming.

You didn't become Detective by being ignorant. You know history. How retrovirally enhanced soldiers became an standard part of war. How a generation and counting of high unemployment pushed many veterans to poverty, and some to crime. Former soldiers, others try to help.

You don't know which ones are worse. At least the younger ones don't wear costumes.

In a few seconds your gun decides that distances, angles, and trajectories are just right, and fires a round into the caped man.



## *The Guardian*

I watch from the sky as they play near the hidden monster. They know it's there — no sensors or networks, just tales and shallow graves — but it kills soldiers more often than children, and they have mastered the mathematics of survival.

The monster is my charge, not them. I have to fix its broken programming and disable this broken weapon we left behind in victorious, hasty retreat.

I'm stalling. Perhaps when it kills another child it will be easier. Irrationally so, but I'm neither a child nor a machine monster.

I just watch from the sky.

## *Memento Mori*

I never really knew you until you died and, as your husband, I inherited your passwords. Only when looking at your filtered posts and private messages I realized how much you had loved me, how unnecessary were our fights.

I understood then that nothing is forgotten. I don't know if we have souls, but our feelings and deeds survive somewhere in the memory of our uncountable machines, to be threaded together one day by those who will need to know.

Since that day I wake up every night, terrified, but nobody seems to have figured it out yet.

## *New York Spirit*

The Dutch had famously sold Manhattan too cheaply, but they had certainly rescued it for a steep price. The rest of New York had been too expensive to put behind dams, not having trillion-dollar companies headquartered there. So most people went North, pushed against the orderly violence of the Canadian border, except those whose jobs were tied to the few hyper-wealthy inhabitants of the island.

Those who stayed live in barges, mostly. Safer that way. When the big storms come they huddle under the Manhattan Walls, and trade for joints, food, and blankets with the armed guards.

## *Parole Blues*

An old-fashioned GPS ankle monitor would've been bad enough, but the thing under your skin also reports your biometrics, and the judge instructed all websites and apps to inform the court systems everything you do. No porn, very little TV, no goofing around. Work until you pay your debt, that was the deal to stay out of jail.

This is better. Marginally so.

Whenever your phone tells you to log back into your job you have to talk yourself out of posting another rant against the bank. This is going to take long enough without the fines.