

Poor Camp

SACRIFICE

ISSUE 1 · THE ALGORITHM OF FATE



Story and Art by Justin Ward

CITIZEN ALLOCATION CARD

GREATER AMERICA · ISSUE 1

WHAT IS GIVEN IS NEVER LOST. THE FAITHFUL SURRENDER ALL,
AND IN SURRENDER ARE MADE WORTHY.

IDENTIFICATION IMAGE

CITIZEN NAME

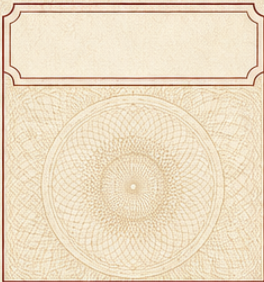
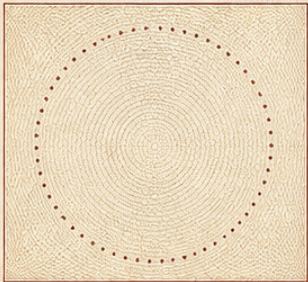
ALLOCATION NUMBER

CIVIC TRUST SCORE

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STATUS



ALLOCATION AUTHORITY

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THE ETERNAL LEADER

TONIGHT: SACRIFICE

My beloved children. Tonight I speak to you about **SACRIFICE**. For the scripture is plain: without shedding of blood is no remission. Your body. Your portion. Your blood. The faithful sacrifice gladly. The water you do not drink is sacrifice. The medicine you do not receive is sacrifice. The child your sister could not have is sacrifice. Sacrifice is not loss. Sacrifice is the holiest gift.

Think of Abraham. When God asked for his son, he did not weep, and he did not bargain. He rose up early in the morning, and laid the wood, and bound the boy, and stretched forth his hand, and took up the knife.

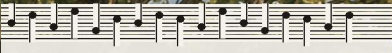
THAT is faith — a father who loved his God more than he loved his own son. When the algorithm allocates you less, you have given more. When the lottery does not call your name, your neighbor's calling is your offering. The disabled do not suffer — they tithe. The sick do not die — they consecrate. The ones who are taken in the night are not lost — they are **LIFTED**.

To resist sacrifice is to refuse God. To resent your portion is to spit upon His altar. The faithful child says **THANK YOU** when she is given less. The faithful child says **THANK YOU** when she is given nothing. Because sacrifice is love made concrete. And I love you so much. I love you so much I am taking everything you—

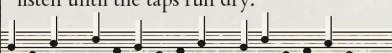


The city never sleeps. It can't. The AI decides when the lights go on, and tonight, it has decided we don't deserve them.

Quench owns the water. Every drop. Even the rain. Juice owns the power. Plenty owns the food. VitalEdge owns the medicine. And the AI drinks more of all of it than anyone. The data centers glow while we sit in the dark. Only the screens stay bright. Always His face. The same face. It never changes. They say it's because He is God.



Years ago, the water still ran clean—even if Quench's name was already on the pipes. And the people who warned us? The journalists, the professors, the activists? They were called alarmists. Hysterical. We didn't listen. We never listen until the taps run dry.

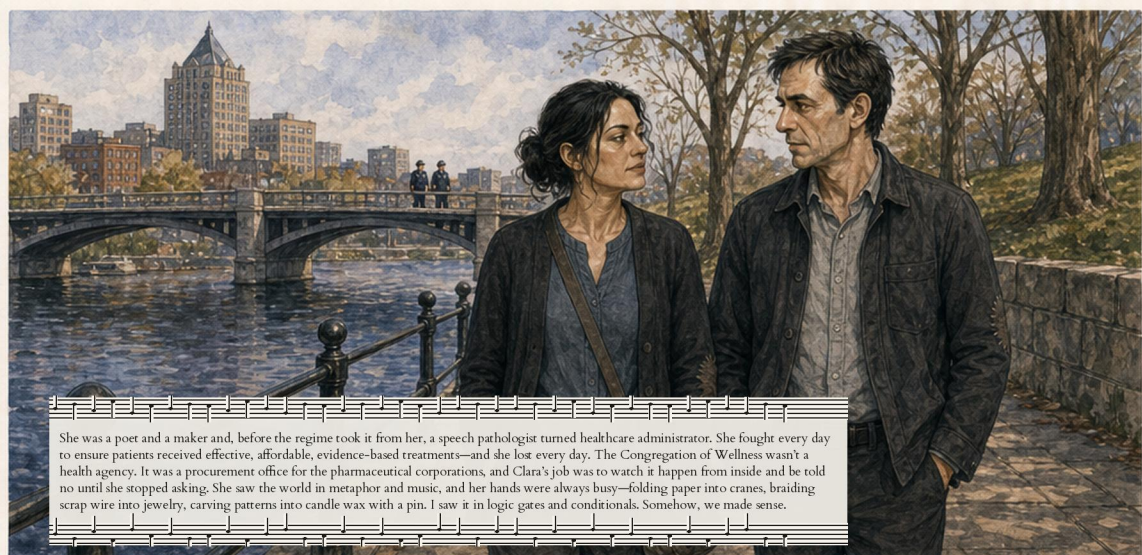


Is that Bradbury? I haven't seen a physical copy in years. Everything on the screens now is either scripture or that awful show with the agent.

You mean "The Leader's Hand"? My grandmother said one day that would be the only thing on television. She said a lot of things people called crazy. About how they'd take power an inch at a time.

Only if you promise not to ask about my faith compliance score.

Your grandmother sounds like someone I'd have liked. Mind if I sit?



She was a poet and a maker and, before the regime took it from her, a speech pathologist turned healthcare administrator. She fought every day to ensure patients received effective, affordable, evidence-based treatments—and she lost every day. The Congregation of Wellness wasn't a health agency. It was a procurement office for the pharmaceutical corporations, and Clara's job was to watch it happen from inside and be told no until she stopped asking. She saw the world in metaphor and music, and her hands were always busy—folding paper into cranes, braiding scrap wire into jewelry, carving patterns into candle wax with a pin. I saw it in logic gates and conditionals. Somehow, we made sense.



That's either beautiful or terrifying.

'The city is a mouth that swallows every voice but its own.'

Can't it be both?



Why Shelley? Of all the banned books?

And now?

Then don't build monsters, Alan. Promise me.

I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed.

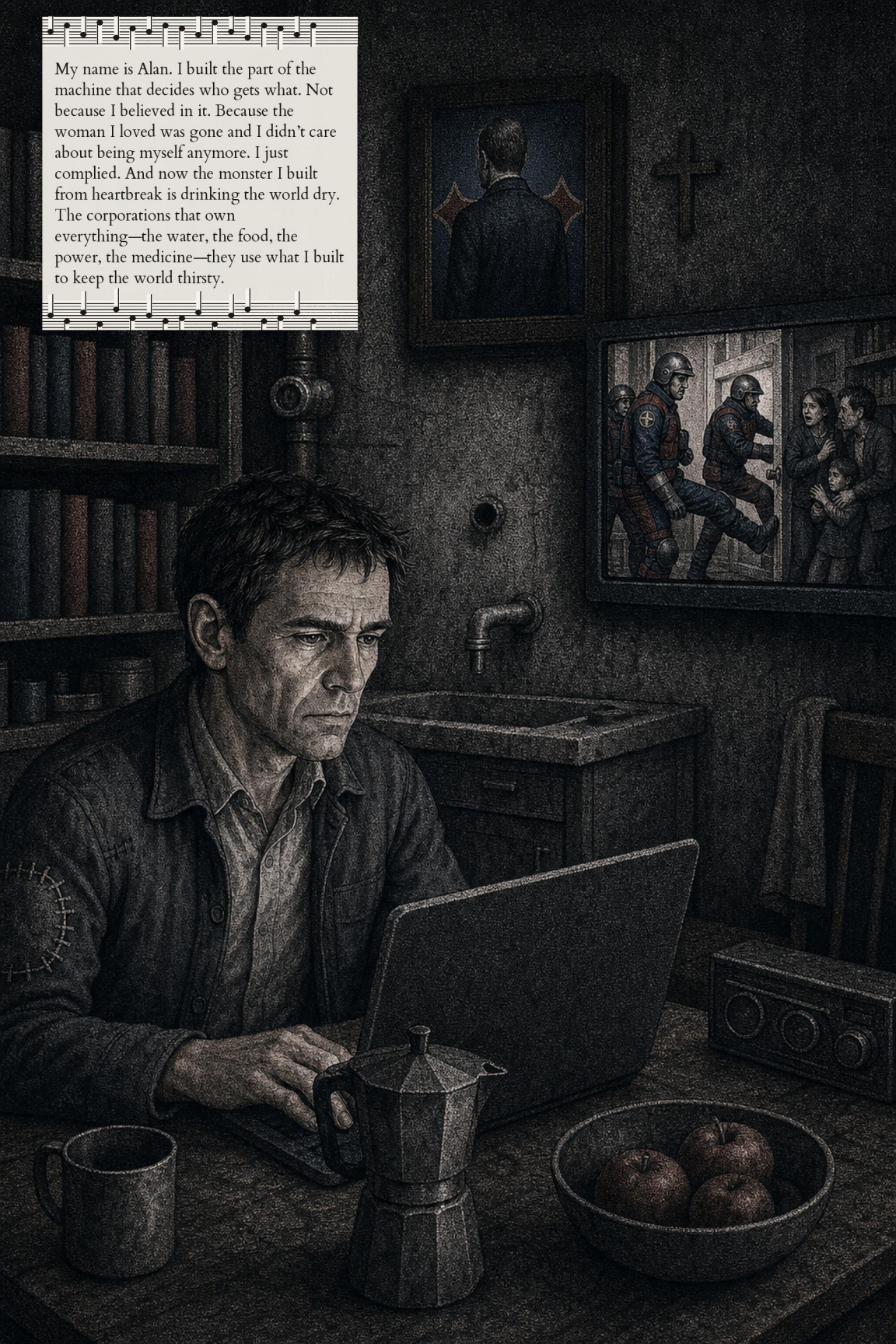
Now I've found you. And I don't feel like the creature anymore. I feel like maybe I could build something worth building. Something that doesn't end in fire.

I promise.

Because I've always identified with the creature. Built different. Wired in a way nobody explained to me until I was thirty and a doctor said the word 'autism' and suddenly every awkward silence and missed social cue and fourteen-hour coding session made sense. Alone. Looking for someone who could see past how he was made.

The first lie I ever told her.

My name is Alan. I built the part of the machine that decides who gets what. Not because I believed in it. Because the woman I loved was gone and I didn't care about being myself anymore. I just complied. And now the monster I built from heartbreak is drinking the world dry. The corporations that own everything—the water, the food, the power, the medicine—they use what I built to keep the world thirsty.







What's he working on instead?

Dulles rejected my sixth initiative. Expanded prenatal care for low-compliance districts. VitalEdge said the cost-benefit didn't support it. The cost-benefit of PRENATAL CARE.

Something classified. Third floor—his Compliance Integration office has been locked down for weeks. New VitalEdge personnel, biohazard protocols, equipment I've never seen delivered to a wellness agency. He kills my proposals in the morning and whatever he's building down there takes his afternoons. Same elevator. Same building. Congregation of Wellness.



Most people don't. They see the bipolar diagnosis on my Congregation file and assume I can't focus. Or the epilepsy flag and worry I'll seize on the board. Either way, they don't take me seriously. Which is an advantage—the person who underestimates you has already lost the center.

Check.

I didn't know you played.

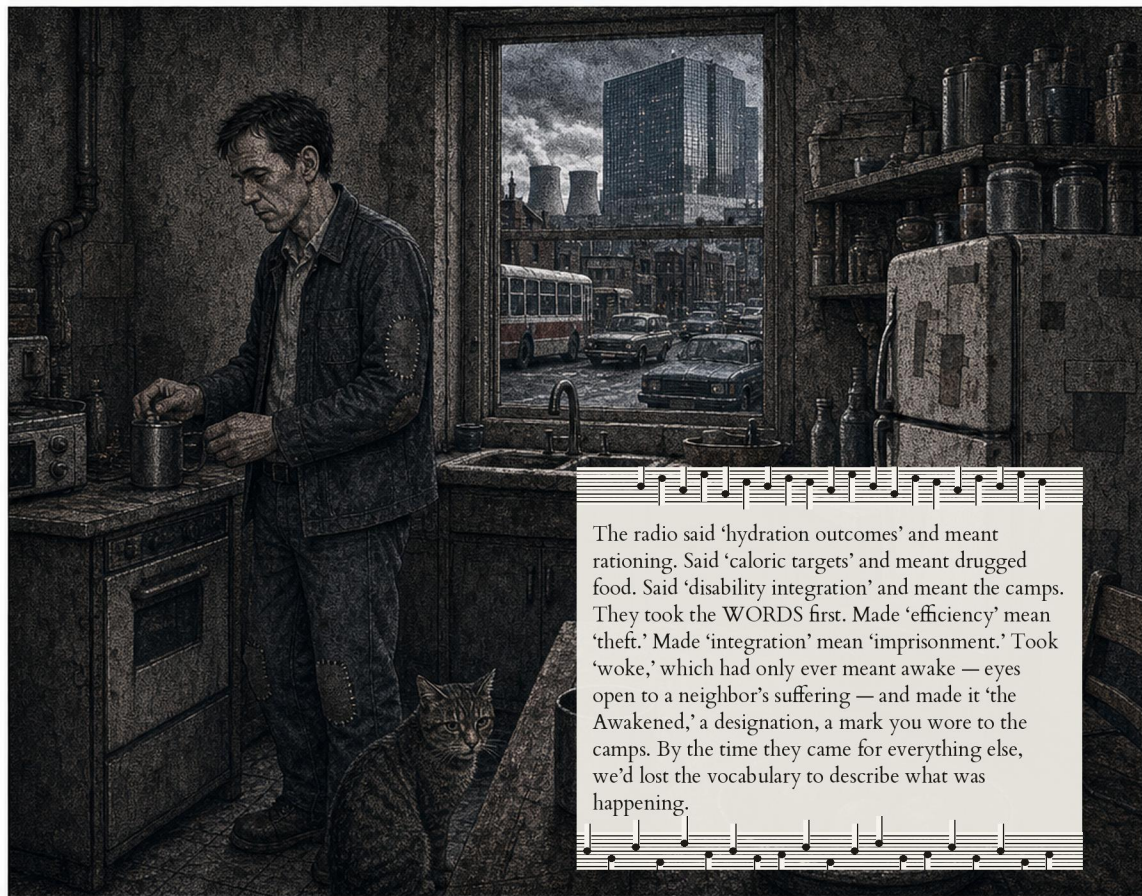
She was a weapon.



Mrs. Okafor, downstairs. She's been on a VitalEdge waiting list for blood pressure medication for three months—faith compliance score dropped when she missed worship to take her grandson to the hospital. So she's rationing pills. Half-doses, every other day. I can't fix the system—six initiatives, six rejections. But I can bring her a bracelet, sit with her, and check her blood pressure with the cuff I took from the Congregation clinic. It's never enough. But it's what I can do.

Who's that one for?

She lost every initiative—six proposals, six rejections—and kept filing because stopping felt like agreeing. That was her crime. Not faith noncompliance. Persistence.



The radio said 'hydration outcomes' and meant rationing. Said 'caloric targets' and meant drugged food. Said 'disability integration' and meant the camps. They took the WORDS first. Made 'efficiency' mean 'theft.' Made 'integration' mean 'imprisonment.' Took 'woke,' which had only ever meant awake — eyes open to a neighbor's suffering — and made it 'the Awakened,' a designation, a mark you wore to the camps. By the time they came for everything else, we'd lost the vocabulary to describe what was happening.



Good morning. Quench reports record water distribution efficiency—hydration outcomes improved twelve percent. Plenty nutritional programs exceed caloric targets. In international news: Chinese forces expand in the South Pacific. The Eternal Leader calls for national unity. In domestic news: Phase 1 disability integration proceeding ahead of schedule—over forty thousand citizens relocated to Stabilization Facilities. Federal authorities confirm the North Platte federal building bombing as the work of an Islamist cell; three remain in custody. Compliance scores determine access to essential services. Improve yours by attending worship and reporting faith deviations. This is the National Truth Network. Trust what you hear.

The war changed everything.



The power's out again. But the data center never goes dark. And that screen — I can't even turn it off. Harmon's face is in my living room every night whether I want it or not.



And now the enforcers march in red, white, and blue with crosses on their chests and a reality show that makes arrest look like entertainment.

Someone once said: when fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross.

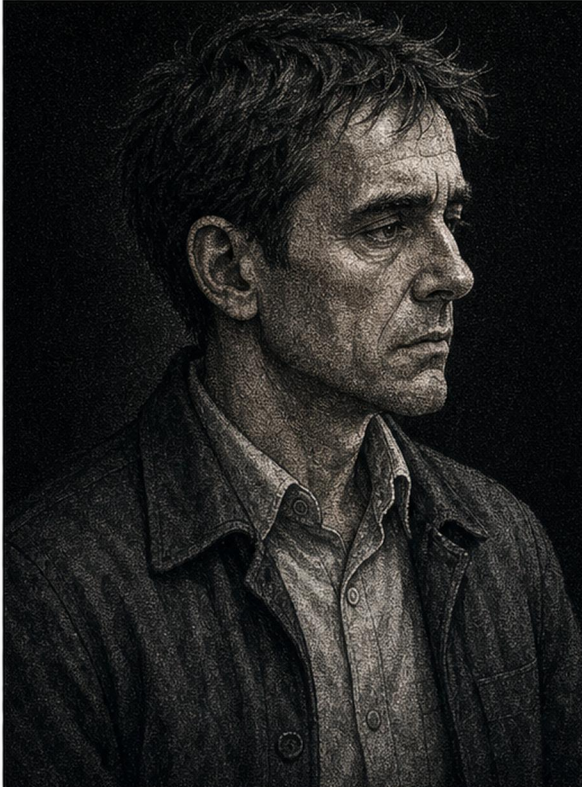


Dulles is getting worse. At work. He follows me. To the water dispensary. To the elevator. He touched my shoulder last week, and when I pulled away he said, 'Don't make this harder than it needs to be.' My supervisor told me to be 'nicer.'

Stay away from him. People like Dulles don't ask. They take.



Dave's not coming in. Relocated. Phase 1. His autism was flagged in the quarterly review. Category B—non-essential. Escorted out yesterday during lunch.



Dave was autistic. Like me. They took him during lunch. He probably didn't understand what was happening because the social cues of being fired are exactly the kind of thing our brains don't read well. Now his chair is empty and the war game is missing its eastern front commander.



The compliance threshold reform is denied. VitalEdge says the current threshold optimizes resource allocation.

VitalEdge says that because the threshold forces patients to earn medication through compliance scores, which generates data they sell. It has nothing to do with outcomes. I have the data—

The data doesn't matter. The contract matters. And VitalEdge has the contract.



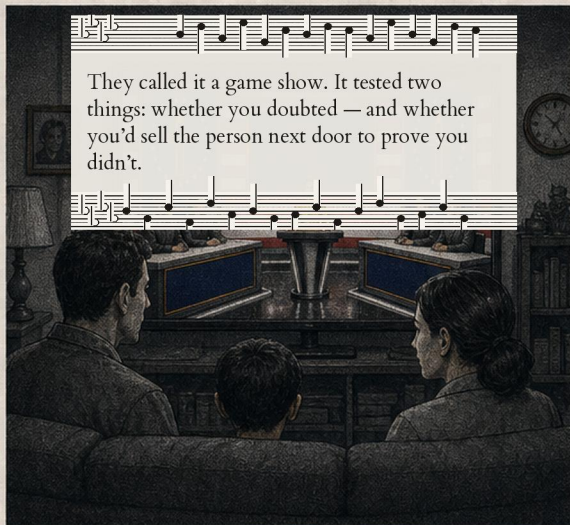
Half doses. Every other day. My compliance score dropped—missed Tuesday worship because my grandson had a fever. VitalEdge suspended my refill.

For missing ONE service.

One forty over ninety-two. Higher than last week. Still rationing?

The algorithm doesn't care about fevers. It cares about attendance.

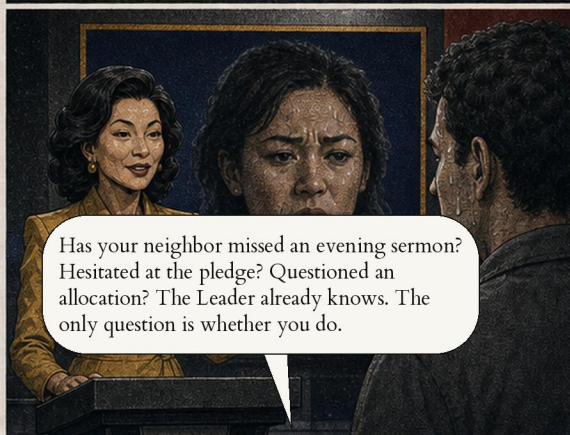
I can't fix the system. But I can come back next week and check again.



They called it a game show. It tested two things: whether you doubted — and whether you'd sell the person next door to prove you didn't.



Our neighbors tonight — second floor and third, Block Seven. They share a wall. Let's find out how carefully they've been listening through it.



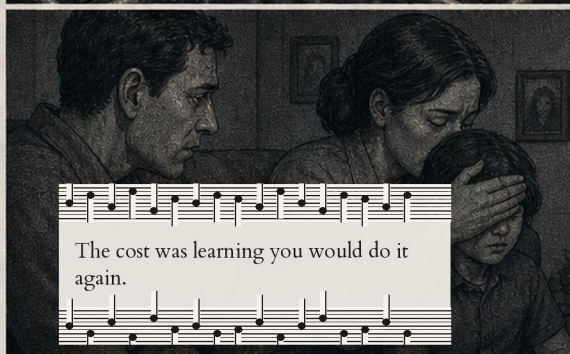
Has your neighbor missed an evening sermon? Hesitated at the pledge? Questioned an allocation? The Leader already knows. The only question is whether you do.



Faith is a team sport. You rise together — or one of you gets lifted.

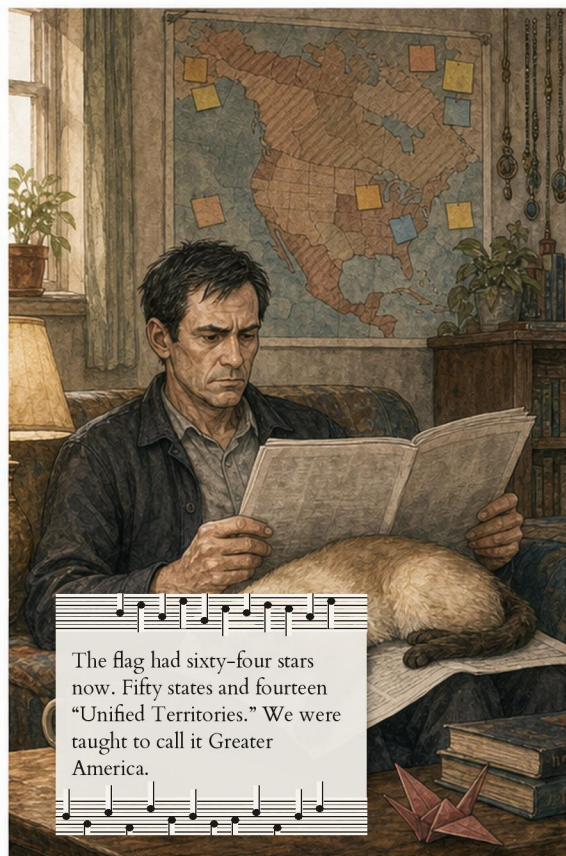


We saw that pause. The Leader sees your doubt before you do.



The cost was learning you would do it again.

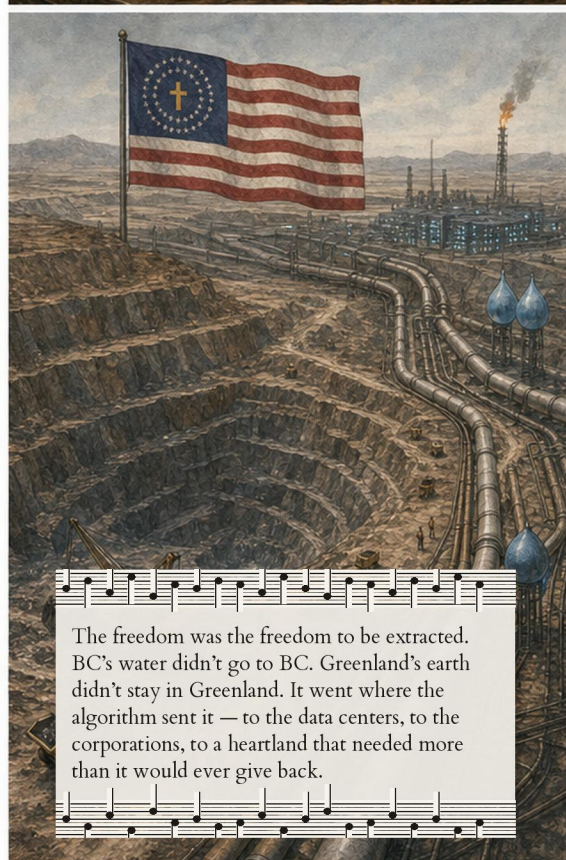




The flag had sixty-four stars now. Fifty states and fourteen "Unified Territories." We were taught to call it Greater America.



The territories were taught to call it something else.



The freedom was the freedom to be extracted. BC's water didn't go to BC. Greenland's earth didn't stay in Greenland. It went where the algorithm sent it — to the data centers, to the corporations, to a heartland that needed more than it would ever give back.

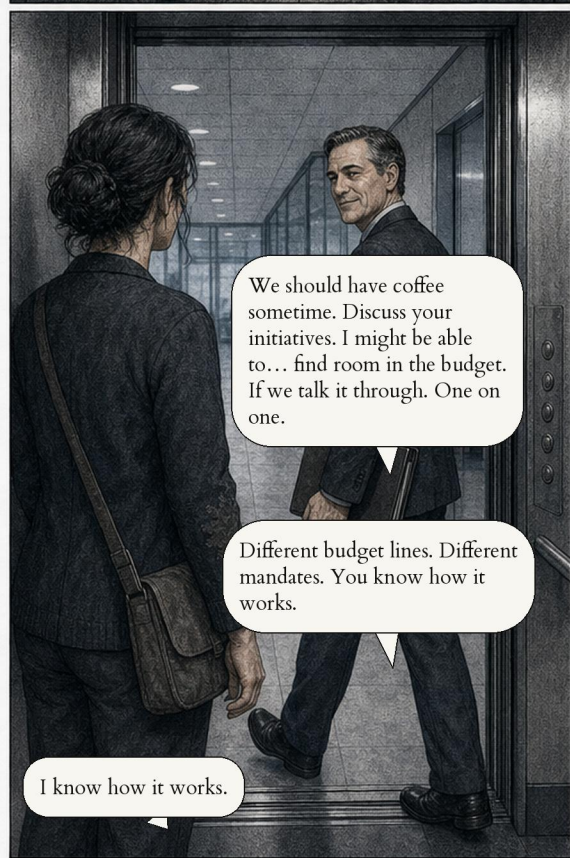


The machine didn't see nations. It saw numbers. But the men who built the machine knew exactly whose numbers they were taking.



Clara. The prenatal care proposal—I'm sorry about that. You know I'd approve it if I could. VitalEdge's hands are tied. Budget constraints. You understand.

You approved a twelve-million-dollar equipment transfer to your floor last Tuesday. That's not budget constraints. That's priorities.



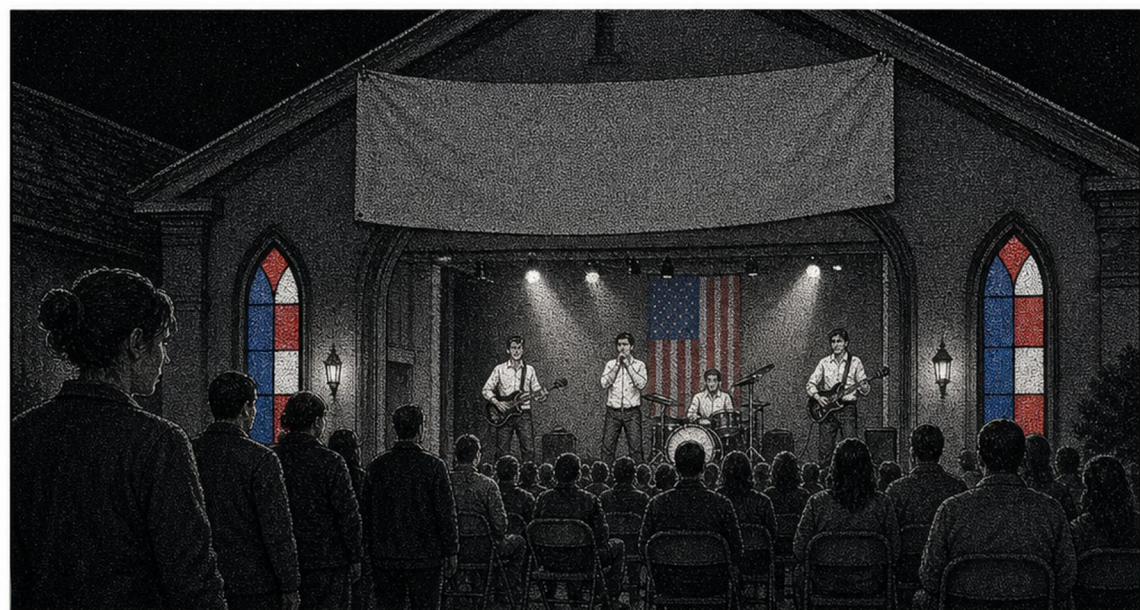
We should have coffee sometime. Discuss your initiatives. I might be able to... find room in the budget. If we talk it through. One on one.

Different budget lines. Different mandates. You know how it works.

I know how it works.



The elevator was sixty seconds.
The cage it built lasted years.



Did he just rhyme
'algorithm' with
'salvation'?

This is the only legal music in the country. This.
Right here. Four men rhyming 'code' with 'God' on
a stage that used to host jazz. I'm watching the death
of art in real time and it's wearing matching shirts.

He also rhymed 'data' with... I
think he tried to rhyme it with
'liberation' but gave up
mid-word.

Want to leave? I know a
place.

A coworker. Before Dave was
relocated. He told me about it.

You know a PLACE?
Since when do you know
places?

The regime killed every art form that couldn't be controlled.
Jazz—gone. Rock—gone. Hip-hop—gone years ago. Stand-up
comedy—first thing to die, because comedians speak truth and truth is
a compliance violation. All that survived was this—state-approved
worship rock with regime-written lyrics, performed by men who may
or may not believe what they're singing but who definitely enjoy the
compliance bonus.



The thing about a laughing room is that the laughing has to end. And when it does, you have to remember where you are.



Alan.



Clara.

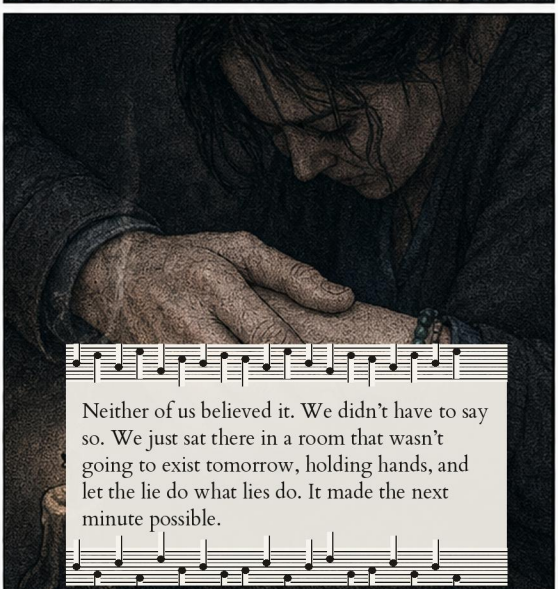
It's just Dulles. I was imagining having to endure him tomorrow.



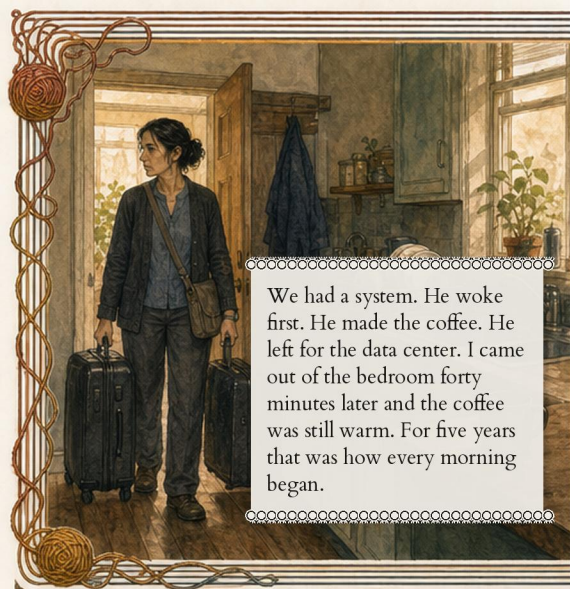
You should inform on him.

I can't. He'll find a way to hurt my father.

Everything will be fine.



Neither of us believed it. We didn't have to say so. We just sat there in a room that wasn't going to exist tomorrow, holding hands, and let the lie do what lies do. It made the next minute possible.



We had a system. He woke first. He made the coffee. He left for the data center. I came out of the bedroom forty minutes later and the coffee was still warm. For five years that was how every morning began.

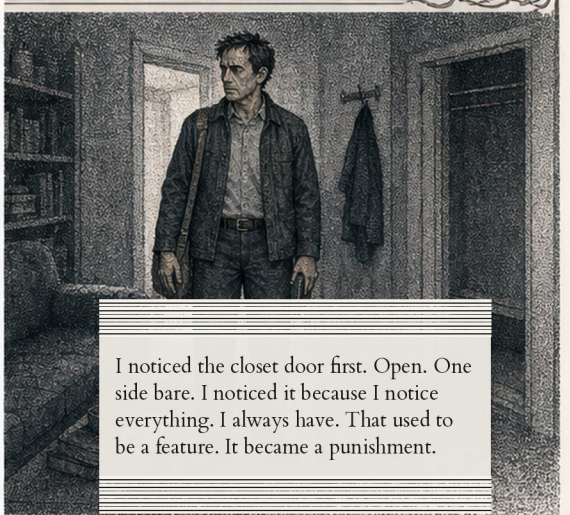


I washed the cup before I left. He would have been hurt if I hadn't. He notices things like that. He notices everything.

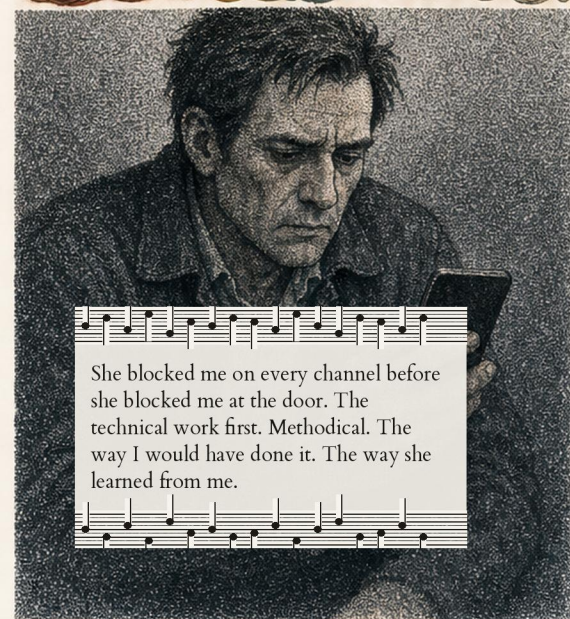


She didn't leave a note.

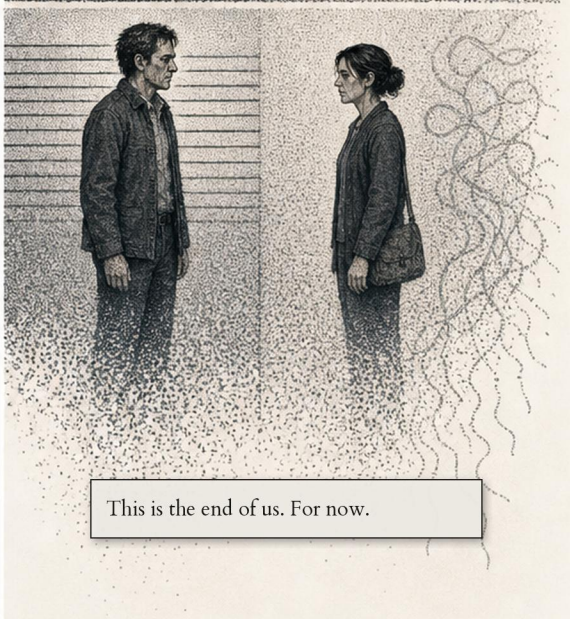
I didn't leave a note. He would have read it as data. He would have looked for what I meant. There was nothing I meant. There was only what I had to do.



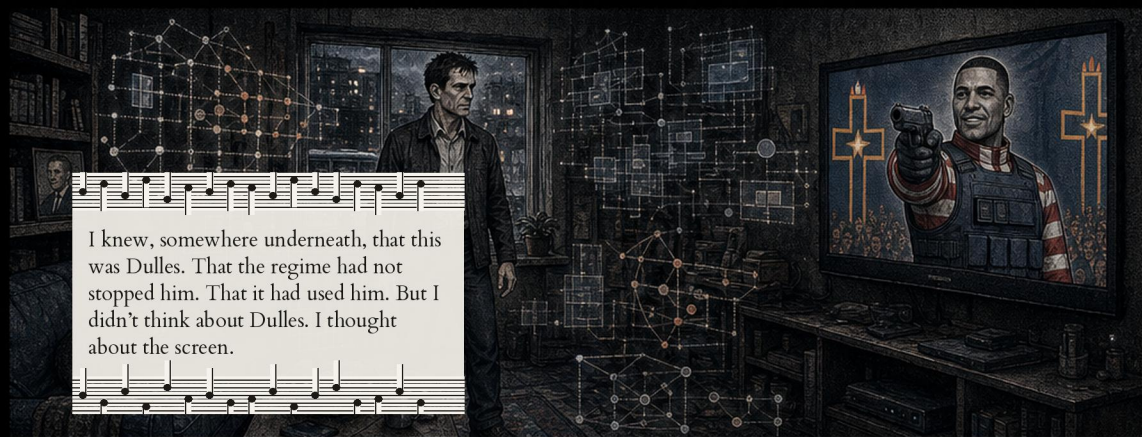
I noticed the closet door first. Open. One side bare. I noticed it because I notice everything. I always have. That used to be a feature. It became a punishment.



She blocked me on every channel before she blocked me at the door. The technical work first. Methodical. The way I would have done it. The way she learned from me.



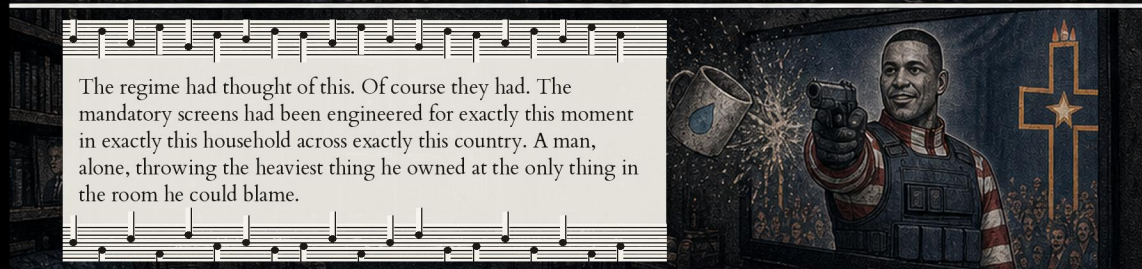
This is the end of us. For now.



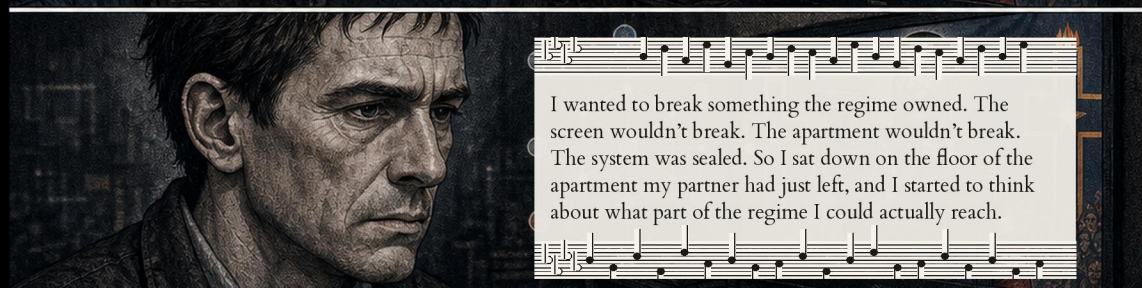
I knew, somewhere underneath, that this was Dulles. That the regime had not stopped him. That it had used him. But I didn't think about Dulles. I thought about the screen.



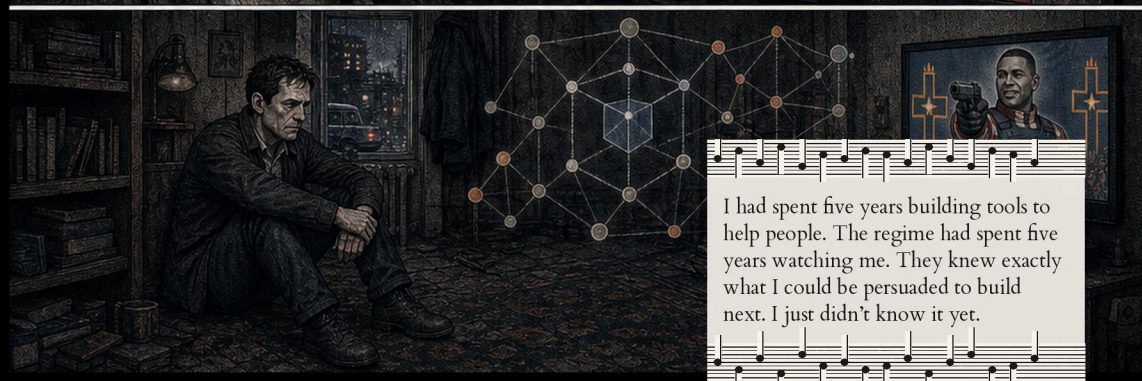
HRRGH* (low, guttural — not the sound of the throw, the sound of the throwing)



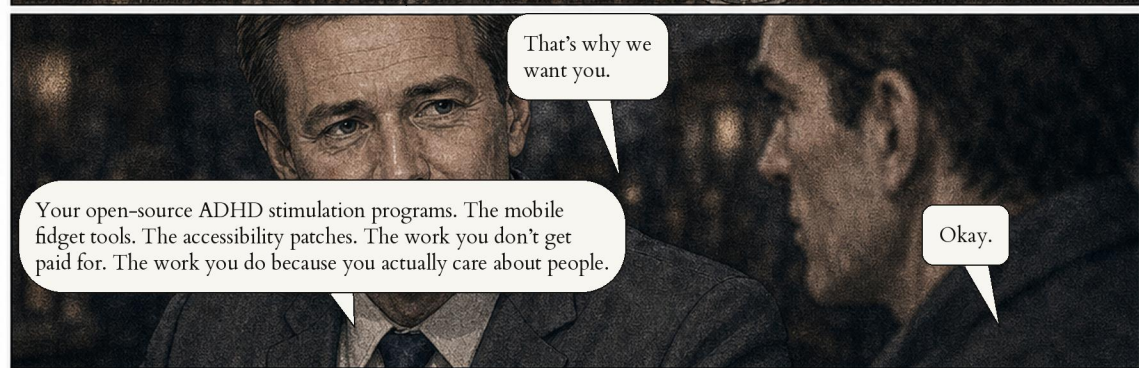
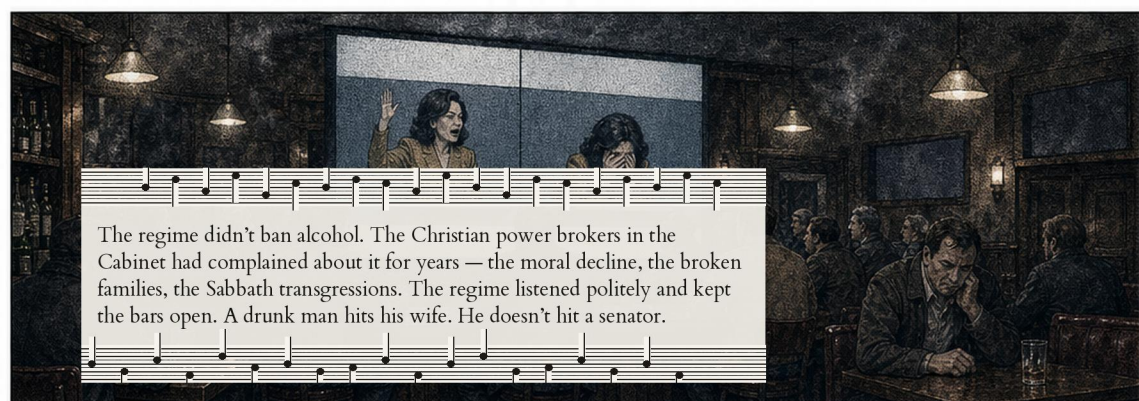
The regime had thought of this. Of course they had. The mandatory screens had been engineered for exactly this moment in exactly this household across exactly this country. A man, alone, throwing the heaviest thing he owned at the only thing in the room he could blame.

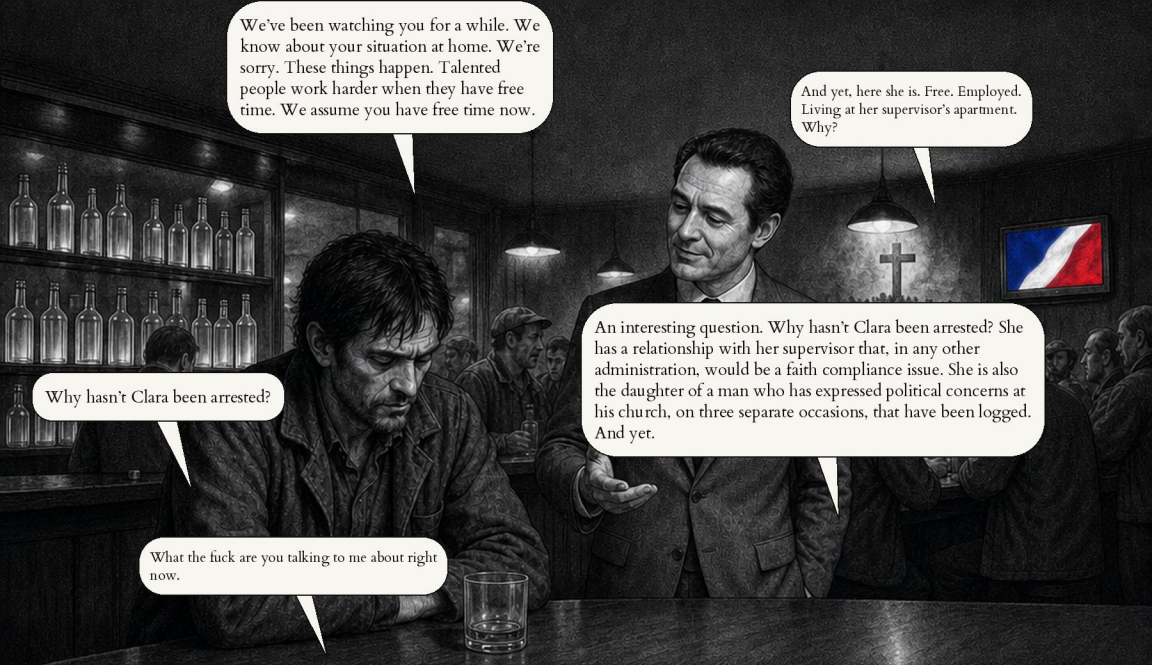


I wanted to break something the regime owned. The screen wouldn't break. The apartment wouldn't break. The system was sealed. So I sat down on the floor of the apartment my partner had just left, and I started to think about what part of the regime I could actually reach.



I had spent five years building tools to help people. The regime had spent five years watching me. They knew exactly what I could be persuaded to build next. I just didn't know it yet.





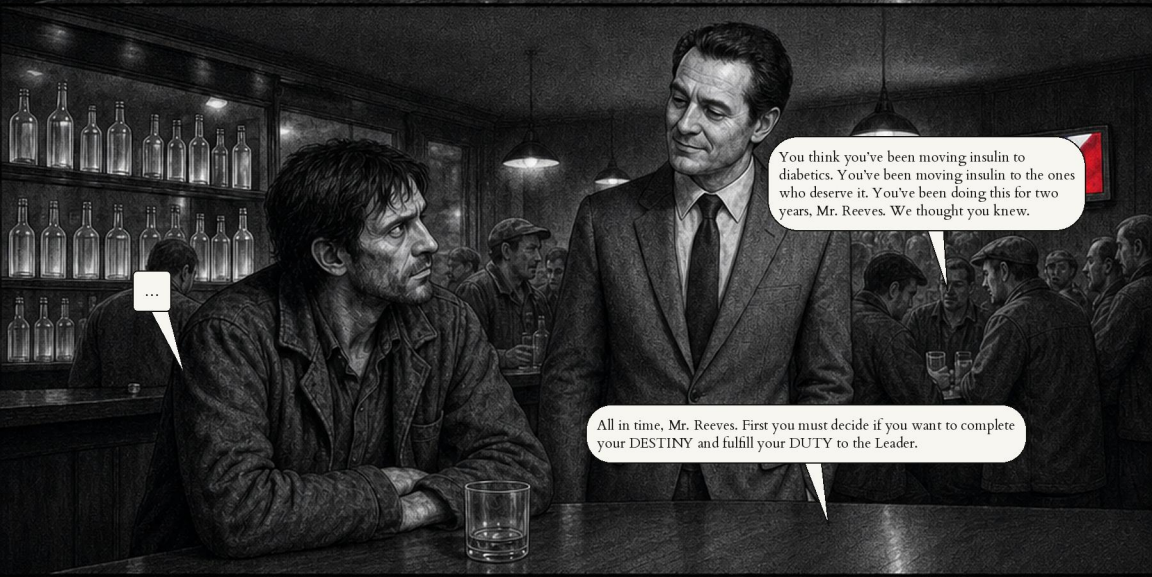
We've been watching you for a while. We know about your situation at home. We're sorry. These things happen. Talented people work harder when they have free time. We assume you have free time now.

And yet, here she is. Free. Employed. Living at her supervisor's apartment. Why?

Why hasn't Clara been arrested?

What the fuck are you talking to me about right now.

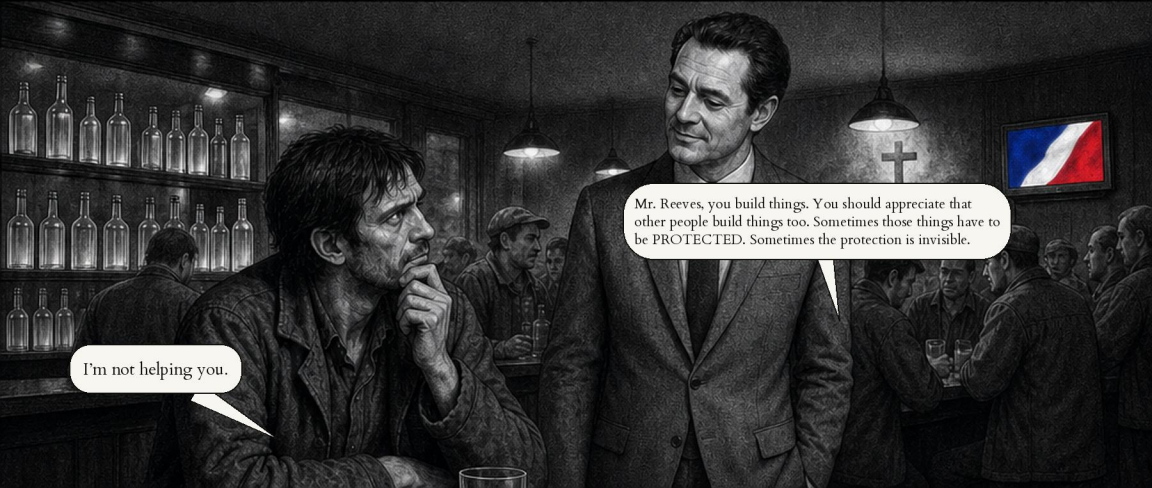
An interesting question. Why hasn't Clara been arrested? She has a relationship with her supervisor that, in any other administration, would be a faith compliance issue. She is also the daughter of a man who has expressed political concerns at his church, on three separate occasions, that have been logged. And yet.



...

You think you've been moving insulin to diabetics. You've been moving insulin to the ones who deserve it. You've been doing this for two years, Mr. Reeves. We thought you knew.

All in time, Mr. Reeves. First you must decide if you want to complete your DESTINY and fulfill your DUTY to the Leader.



I'm not helping you.

Mr. Reeves, you build things. You should appreciate that other people build things too. Sometimes those things have to be PROTECTED. Sometimes the protection is invisible.



If you don't help, we have plans for Lindsey.

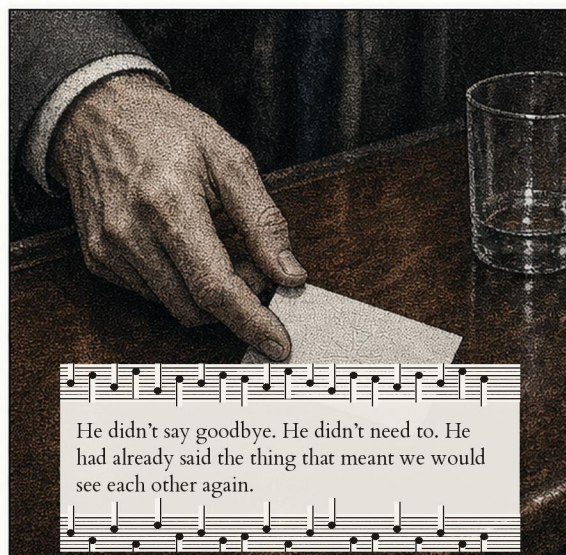
Alan might be okay with us farming her. After all, she is only your, what, half-sister? And you only knew each other from about fifteen and thirteen years old. Personally, that's not enough time together for me to not take this deal I'm giving you. But I thought you might have more heart than me.

After all. Identifying with the creature, really? Are you that different?

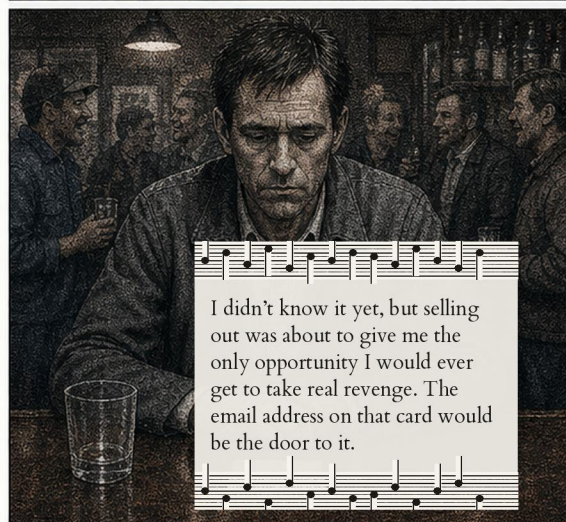
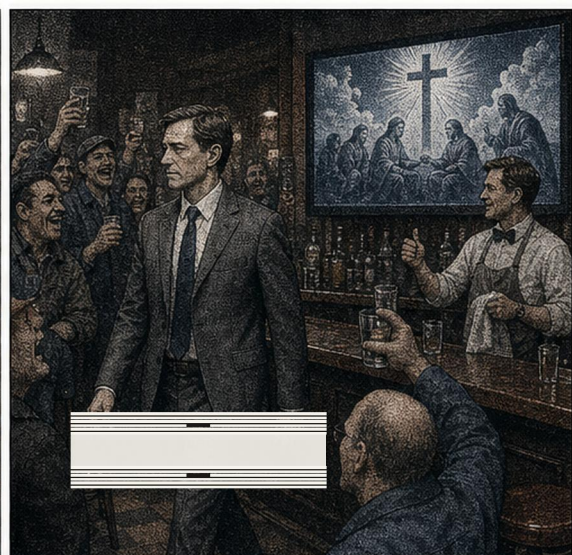
He had read the books on my shelf. Of course he had.

When I'm done with you, you'll change to identifying with Doctor Frankenstein. As you are compelled by situations to create something you find truly horrifying.

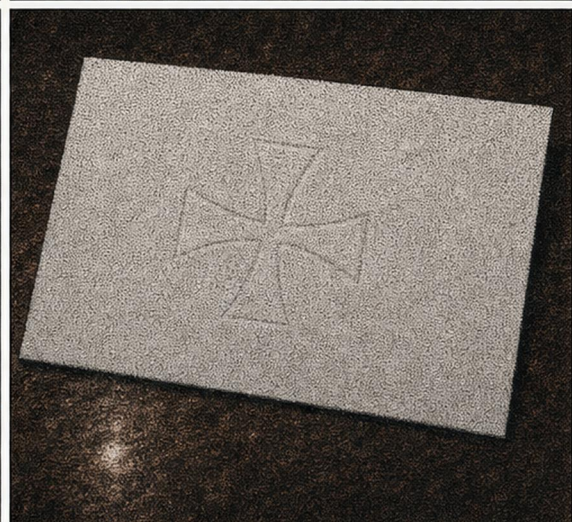
Every soul has a price.



He didn't say goodbye. He didn't need to. He had already said the thing that meant we would see each other again.



I didn't know it yet, but selling out was about to give me the only opportunity I would ever get to take real revenge. The email address on that card would be the door to it.



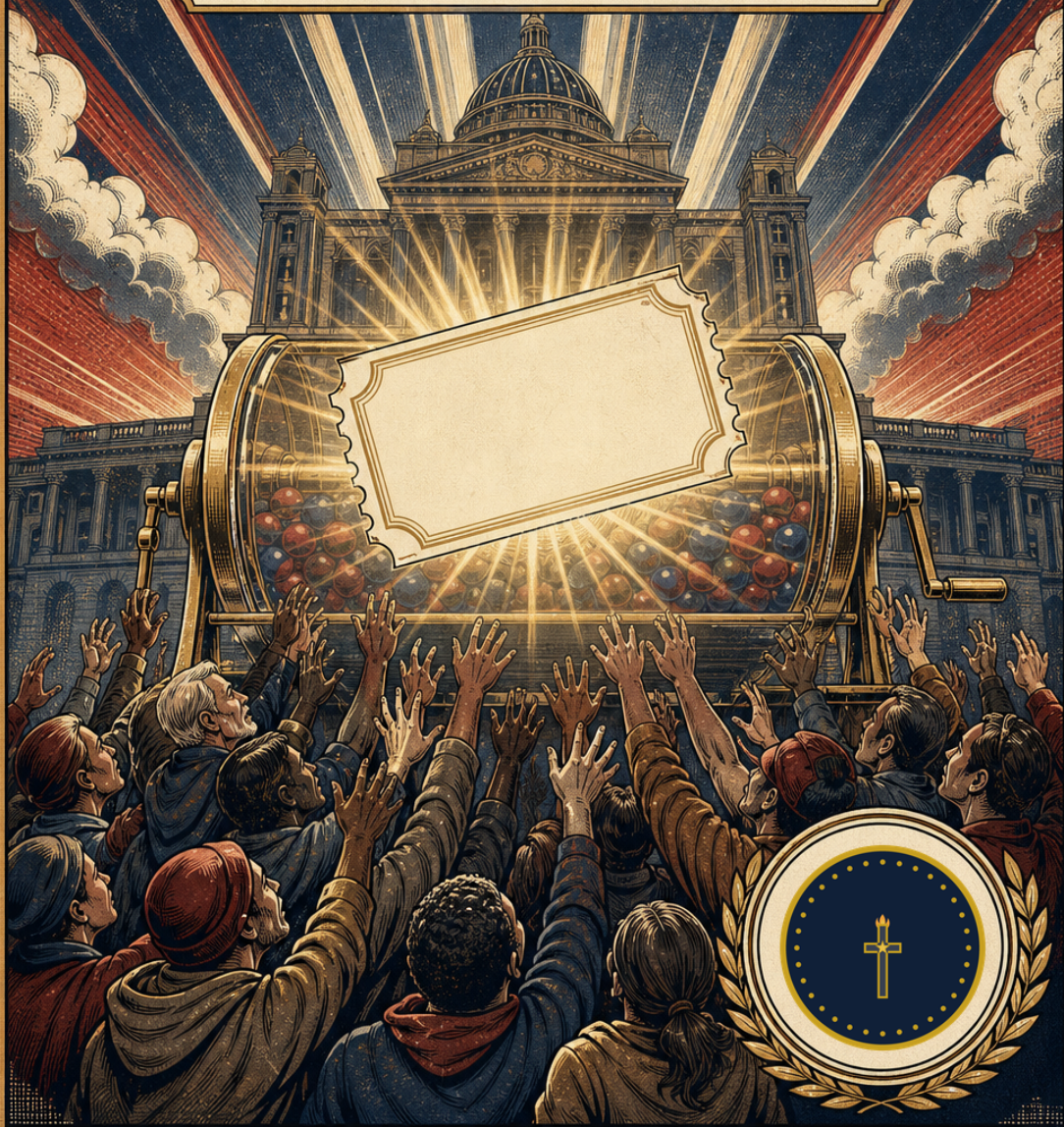
He didn't see what else it was offering.



YOUR NAME COULD BE NEXT

THE LOTTERY

Apply today.



Door Camp

GLORY

Give all. Be received.

